

Wolves and Dragons of the Blood: Revelations

A Spartan's War Chronicles: Book 5

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CHAPTER ONE

MARTIN LEONIDAS

FIVE WEEKS, SIX DAYS POST DECLARATION OF WAR

JANUARY 27, 2575

They were no longer children in appearance or action. If they ever were.

Her name was Eirene Leonidas.

She stood two inches shorter than her elven mother's five foot eight frame, and weighed in at only one hundred and seventeen pounds, but every part of her was womanly curves and head turning beauty. Her bright golden hair, falling almost to the middle of her back, was tied into a single pony tail with a simple leather tie. The exceptionally tight, dark gray color workout clothes she wore did absolutely nothing to hide the tempting curves of her lithe, tanned half elven half Lycavorian body, and she was not in the least bit shy about showing what she had. It was a trait that the vast majority of Lycavorians embraced. They were unafraid to show their sexuality in the way they dressed, acted and talked. It was a trait that was shared by the elves who were born and raised on Earth and it was a cultural oddity that was quickly gaining vast popularity on the elven homeworld of Elear and many of their colony worlds. Her breasts were extremely firm, topped with small but pert nipples. Her flat abdomen was tightly muscled and her waist narrow. The dark gray knee high pants conformed to her supple, yet maddeningly taut ass cheeks and long, power packed legs. She was barefoot on the training mat as she snapped her right foot forward with confidence and incredible power. Strength that was packed into her half elf, half Lycavorian body, granting her increased speed and additional physical power over normal elves and even some Lycavorians. Eirene's dark brown eyes, exact duplications of For'mya's intense dark orbs, were determined and alert and focused. She had her mother's high cheekbones and luscious soft, thin lips, but most surprisingly to those that saw her was the fact that her face bore the resemblance of her mother but also the man who stood in front of her. A man who was watching her movements intently. A man who was more a father to her and her twin brother Fedor than anyone could possibly imagine. A commanding man whose Mindvoice essence filled her just as much as her beloved mother and the one who was her brother.

Eirene's confident movements matched exactly the graceful movements of the six foot one, exceptionally muscled young man to her left.

Her beloved twin brother Fedor Leonidas.

Fedor was dressed only in loose fitting workout pants similar to the man in front of them. His darker golden blond hair was cut short with his hair spiking to the middle of his head in a unique style he liked. His broad, tanned chest and thick arms bore semblance to the exquisitely muscled man in front of them. Fedor's abdomen rippled with superb definition, the "V" cut of his back nearly matching that of their instructor. Their tanned skin was slick with sweat from the grueling intensity of their work out, but neither of them would have it any other way, and this pleased the man in front of them.

That they were brother and sister was obvious to even a casual observer. That they were fraternal twins only required a simple question to be asked for them to begin their rant. Neither of them was shy about the other, nor were they the least bit hesitant about bragging in relation to each other, though Fedor seemed to be the more reserved of the duo. Since their accelerated birth only six weeks ago they had never been apart and while this had been mostly because of the distinct circumstances surrounding their birth, it had instilled in both of them the love of paternal twins. Their accelerated growth, caused by the drugs injected into their mother, also had a side effect of making them much more attuned to each other. When Andro touched them within Mindvoice he unknowingly amplified this sensation two fold, as well as bestowing awareness of life and their surroundings to them while they were still in their mother's womb. They now did nearly everything together, whether it was instruction with one of the six women they called mother, or the man they called "Father of their Hearts". And they were never very far from the two they called Bonded Brother. Kdan and Dnom had grown fast as well and in the nearly six weeks since they had hatched they had grown close to fifteen feet long and almost the same in height when they stood on their hind legs. While this was unusual for dragons, Arzoal had said it was not unheard of. They were filling out into rather muscular Firespitter dragons with near identical light green scales. At the moment they were undergoing just as strenuous and demanding a training regime with Torma and Aurith in the *ARC ROYAL'S* port landing bay.

Eirene and Fedor Leonidas's movements were fluid and precise as they completed the turn and front kick motion, Fedor's leg going much higher than his shorter sister. The music that played in the background was their instructor's idea and it was very loud and carried with it a rhythmic balance that flowed with their movements. Eirene and Fedor Leonidas had decided together to go against their mother in the first and only act of defiance of their parent's wishes. Well... more five of their six mothers really. They had done it to honor the man who they called father without hesitation or doubt. They convinced Pablo Gomez, a very talented tattoo artist from Martin's SEAL Team, to decorate their bodies with his art. When they had done this, For'mya finally decided to stop trying to control what they did to protect them and allow them to grow as she had Arrarn and Bryon. Fedor now sported a large black and red cross like image on his upper right arm and an ancient Chinese symbol that meant Honor on his upper left arm. Eirene had the image of a sun setting over a black ocean tattooed at the small of her back. Both had been inspired because of the tattoos adorning the body of the man they called father and the elf female they called mother. Dysea Leonidas was the only one of Martin's Queens to have tattoos and she considered them superb pieces of work and the symbolism of the designs quite meaningful. Martin also approved of them and this pleased both Fedor and Eirene and quickly caused For'mya to turn her mild anger on Martin. That anger didn't last long Fedor and Eirene knew, for they had stood and watched as the Father of their Hearts simply touched For'mya with his aura of love and she could not stay mad at him for more than a few seconds before she was melting into his embrace.

Martin watched as they both turned slightly after executing the front kick and then thrust their hands forward as if executing a double chest strike. It was a technique that he had seen only one other person execute with enough force to shatter ribs and that was Androcles. He nodded his head approvingly, knowing that his oldest son had passed to them quite a bit of his fighting style, believing they would need it. Martin knew Androcles was one of the most lethal hand-to-hand fighters he had ever known, not only because Martin himself had taught him almost everything he knew, but because he absorbed everything Danny and Nayeca and even Lynwe had taught him as he was growing. What used to be called Kenpo, mixed with gutter fighting and Drow training had made his son a most lethal combatant. As Fedor and Eirene executed this final ending move they came to a halt in defensive positions with the knife edges of their hands facing forward and ready to strike once more.

Martin nodded his head and stepped forward. He too wore just a pair of work out pants, his powerful upper body decorated in the black flame tattoos he had gotten long ago and his Talon Guardian Brand above the right side of his pectoral muscle. It was the branded talon of the long dead Dragon Elder and very first Talon Guardian Gorath, a brand that signified his position as a Talon Guardian for the dragon species.

"Excellent!" He spoke as he moved to the panel on the wall and ended the music. He turned back to them. "As strange as it may seem, dancing is almost identical to fighting. It uses the same muscle groups and tones them in the same way. Use it when you can because it can turn the mundane into something interesting. I see you have adapted some of what Androcles passed to you into your forms."

"It... it came almost naturally *MedwanGai*." Eirene spoke first calling him the name they had given him. (*Father Heart*.)

Fedor nodded. "Like it was part of us."

Martin moved up to them and nodded. Looking at them he could not help but be filled with the same pride as he felt for his other children. That Eirene and Fedor were not his blood children never entered his mind anymore. Yes they were his foul brother's children, but Pusintin had been away from their people for so long that he had forgotten how to pass on his Mindvoice essence to his children with a Lycavorian female, or one who had been turned as For'mya had. The twins had reached for such an essence of their father within their mother For'mya and instead Eirene and Fedor had found his essence burning ever so bright. He had been the one to turn For'mya so long ago and because she was his mate, his Mindvoice essence resonated within For'mya like a beacon of light, and this is what they had used and reached for. This is what had shaped them in those first few hours after they had been conceived, and that resonance is what would shape them going into the future. It is why they both looked more like For'mya and oddly like himself than they did his brother Pusintin. The differences were not something you could notice instantly for they were subtle, but they were there nonetheless. It was also something that pleased Martin to no end. When Pusintin did finally see them he would be enraged to say the least.

“Your brother Androcles is one of the deadliest close quarters fighters that lives today. His style is unique for he has combined several different techniques from those who instructed him.” Martin told them. “He passed some of his basic knowledge to you because he knew you would need it. It gives me and your Uncle Danny a solid base to build from like we have been doing. The learning never ends though... remember that.”

“It makes us feel powerful.” Fedor said with a smile.

Martin nodded his head. “Just remember Fedor, it does not make you indestructible and you should not call on these skills unless they are necessary to defend yourselves or others.” He stated with an even voice. “We are Spartans yes... but since the time of my father, we have never begun a fight out of anger or greed or the desire to conquer. Our wolf nature sometimes drives us to... but our minds harness that urge. Always fight as a last resort. Never seek conflict for that is what you will become known for, and then people will not respect you. They will fear you... and that fear will lead to hate. That is what will ultimately destroy you.” He clasped his hands behind his back. “You have Lycavorian blood and elven blood within both of you. It allows you to harness the wild nature of one species and direct it with the calm nature of the other. Those of us who are true purebloods sometimes have to struggle more to harness it, like your brothers Andro and Deni, but it should come naturally to both of you.”

“I would never use my skills to hurt others *MedwanGai*.” Fedor spoke softly.

Martin smiled and reached up to place his hand on Fedor’s neck and squeeze. “I know that *keto*.” He spoke seeing Fedor’s eyes smile back at him. Martin directed them to the floor mat and all of them settled lotus style to the mats. “As time passes both of you will come to discover what it is you are meant to do. What path you are meant to walk.” He spoke to them. “But neither of you should wish for power or wealth or influence. These things always corrupt and change you.” (Son)

“But don’t we... won’t we have that anyway *MedwanGai*?” Eirene asked. “Because of the name we carry?”

“Yes you do.” Martin said. “And as you learn more you will see how the others in your family blend that with who they are so as not to let it corrupt them.”

“We will always be your children though *MedwanGai*.” Eirene said.

Martin nodded with a smile. “Yes you will. Always. Nothing that happens will change that now. Nothing. Ever. Your mothers and I will not allow it.”

“Why did it happen like this father?” Fedor asked softly. “We look like mother and some say like you even more than him. That is not normal. Mother said it is because you are stronger. That you are the strongest Alpha wolf within the Union. The entire galaxy!”

“Mother says your aura makes her melt.” Eirene spoke with a knowing glint in her eye.

Martin shook his head with a smile now. “No it’s not normal.” He took a breath. “I love your mother. Just as intensely as I do all your mothers. She is the Voice of my Heart. Part of who I am.”

“Your *Kinsoaurgai*.” Eirene said softly.

“Yes.” Martin said. “I was the one who turned your mother, so a part of me, a part of my essence will always reside within her. In her blood, mixed with her own essence. When we as Lycavorians have children, pureblood and turned wolves alike, our children instinctively reach for the Mindvoice and Etheric essence and core that is their parents within a few hours of being conceived. He forgot that part of how our people influence our children within the womb. He forgot that we can control it to a point. When you were conceived you reached for that essence and you found your mother. You found me.”

“We do not look like him at all *MedwanGai*. So mother is right isn’t she? Your resonance is more powerful.” Eirene asked.

Martin met her eyes and shook his head with a lopsided grin. “No you do not look like him.” He answered her question with a modicum of pride. “Thankfully both of you got your mother’s looks. I’m uglier than a hundred year old mole rat. And to answer your question Eirene, yes it would appear I am stronger.”

Eirene laughed. “I don’t think our mothers agree with that father.” She exclaimed.

“How did mother Aricia put it Eirene?” Fedor asked with a smile on his face now. “That *MedwanGai* is the perfect specimen of a man and they love to eat him up.”

Eirene nodded with a chuckle. “Yes... that is what they said.”

Martin grinned as the faces and luscious bodies of his Queens flashed through his mind. “Well... let’s hope they continue to think that for a lot of years. And I think the same about them.”

“You have never... you have never desired another woman *MedwanGai*. Outside of our mothers?” He asked.

“Fedor you *igord!*” Eirene gasped. “That is none of our business!”

“I was only curious!” He defended himself.

Martin shook his head. “Never. Not since the day each of them came into my life and made me part of who I am. Their Mindvoice and Etheric essence is part of me as I am part of them. What I feel for them, all of them, it comes from deep within me. I could not feel for another what I feel for them. I would be unable to find any other attractive enough to pursue in that way even if I wanted too. And I most certainly do not.” He said instantly. “Trust your instincts and your nose... but most of all trust your heart. Most of the time it will not let you down. It hasn’t for me.”

“But not all of the time?” Eirene asked softly.

Martin smiled again as he shook his head. Martin had found in the last weeks that both of them were always full of questions.

“No. Some people can mask their scents to a degree. Kavalians have this ability in a limited fashion, but they are also like us in a way with enhanced senses. Their senses are not as acute because they do not know how to process the myriad of smells they come across in their lifetimes. Your sense of smell will never be as acute as a pureblood, but you are half wolf and you can train your elven senses to make up for that difference.” He spoke reaching out to stroke Eirene’s two and a half inch pointed ear in the way a father would stroke her ear. She leaned into his caress lovingly. “Your brother’s Arrarn and Resumar and your sister Normya have done this and your brother Bryon is beginning to master the nuances as well. Never rush things. It will only lead to you hurting yourself or others. You must master one skill before moving on to the next and it will make you stronger. Patience. As you train with Kdan and Dnom, use the patience you master with them to train yourself in other areas as well. When you finally meet your sisters Zarah and Carina they will tell you the same thing. They had to learn patience as well. We all do.”

“Uncle Danny and Aunt Jules say you have not always been patient.” Fedor said with a smile.

Martin chuckled. “No I have not.” He answered. “But I also paid for those instances in pain and blood.”

“They said that too.” Eirene told him with a bright smile.

“Yes... and I’m quite sure they used much more colorful metaphors to describe it as well.” He said.

Fedor and Eirene both laughed at that and nodded their heads. “Yes.” Eirene said.

Martin nodded. “Always remember you are a Leonidas. That blood flows within you as your mother’s royal elven blood flows within you. The blood of the First Elven King. As your Pralor blood flows within you.” He told them, meeting their attentive gaze. “Never forget that our blood and what it represents to others is what makes them follow us. It makes them believe in us and themselves. When they are better... it makes us better. When they honor us it make us honor them more. No matter what... try as hard as you can to never inflict harm on innocents. People look to those with our blood to lead and as my father taught me...”

“Fight with your head...” Fedor spoke.

“But lead with your heart.” Eirene finished.

Martin smiled. “Yes.” He spoke.

“He will find us won’t he father?” Eirene asked softly after a moment.

Martin lifted his eyes to her and nodded his head. “Probably... yes.” He answered them honestly. “We haven’t been able to determine how he found you the first time and it stands to reason he will do so again.”

“Mother Anja says it is probably something so simple we are not thinking about it the right way.” Fedor spoke.

“More than likely. Your mother Anja is a brilliant doctor.” He told them. “The finest in the universe... but she is not perfect. None of us are. And we can not think of everything. That is also something you will come to discover.”

“Do you hate him father?” Eirene asked.

Martin met her gaze. “I don’t hate him... no. I don’t think so. I hate what he has done.” He answered. “What he did to your mother... what he did to the both of you. I hate what he has done to our people. His actions can never be forgiven. And he needs to be stopped.” He looked at them. “That is not something you need to concern yourselves with at the moment.” He spoke getting to his feet. “We still have two hours before your mothers return from the planet... and you need to get you history instruction with your mother Dysea in

before they come back.” He watched them rise up. “Same time tomorrow. We’ll continue with advanced weapons training then.”

Fedor nodded his head and Eirene reached up on her toes to kiss his cheek. She turned quickly and took Fedor’s hand before they both began to jog across the *ARC ROYAL’S* training gym.

[Why didn’t you tell them the truth brother?] Torma’s voice filled his mind from the landing bay. *[Your true feelings and intentions?]*

[They do not need to know I hate him with every fiber of my being Torma. They do not need to know that I will take his head from his shoulders for what he has done.] Martin spoke. *[There has been enough hate to begin their lives brother; they do not need more of it going forward.]*

[Perhaps. But I believe they are stronger than you know my Bonded Brother.] Torma spoke with wisdom. *[Androcles did not just impart his some of his skills upon them. He gave them part of who he is.]*

Martin nodded. *[I know. And that is what frightens me.]*

Martin held Anja with one arm and Aricia with the other as For'mya walked down the ramp of the *STRIKER DT IIA* wearing her flight suit and laughing softly with Endith and Tina. There was a reason the three of them were considered the finest flight crew within the Union. Their skills intermingled almost magically and they knew what the other was thinking almost instantly. Four weeks For'mya had been back flying with them and the happiness that gave to her could be seen in her face and eyes. And it made Endith and Tina exceptionally happy as well. Endith was the more naturally gifted pilot, For'mya the more experienced and tactically sound and Tina was a master engineer and excellent pilot herself. They meshed together like fingers and gloves.

Martin watched her share a friendly kiss with both before moving towards where he stood with Anja and Aricia. She stepped right up to him, Aricia's and Anja’s arms circling her waist and pulling her close to all of them as For'mya and Martin shared a kiss of passion, devotion and love.

“Nothing useful I take it?” He asked finally.

Anja shook her head. “Not at all. We were able to gather a hundred tons of fruits and vegetables that were growing wild.” She answered. “Iama was thrilled when we discovered the fruit patch. Once I cleared it medically she had all of us eating something that tasted similar to an apple. You’ll like them.”

“She is proving to be invaluable Beloved.” Aricia spoke looking at him. “Her skill at cooking is amazing... and she has a talent for making even the rations taste good. She is quick witted and far more intelligent than we suspected the Kavalians allowed their females to become.”

“No doubts about her?” Martin asked knowing that because she was a Kavalian there were many among the crew who still did not trust her.

Aricia looked at Anja and For'mya and then shook her head. “There are always doubts Martin, you know this better than us. But none of us have detected anything remotely like a lie coming from her. She speaks openly of her past without hesitation, though she does harbor an incredible amount of hate and anger at her family for giving her to the biogenic process. She does worry that no man will want her now because of what she was forced to do and that is why she has thrown herself into her cooking skills. No... I firmly believe she is relishing the second chance on life she has now.”

“The Kavalians were training their biogenically altered females to do just what she is doing.” Martin said. “To infiltrate and confuse. That is where the smarts come from. Resumar says they schooled them mercilessly in many areas to give them more options as spies.”

Aricia nodded. “Yes. But she was being used as a common whore for the troops at that facility Beloved. You saw and heard the same thing we did.”

“Lift the surveillance on her Marty.” Anja said to him softly. “She’s proven she is not our enemy, and if we stop trusting our instincts where does that leave us? We are not like them and that is what makes us different.”

“*Kinsoaurgai?*” Martin asked.

For'mya nodded. “I concur.” She said.

Martin nodded. “Consider it done.” He spoke.

For'mya looked around, her dark brown eyes searching. "Where are Eirene and Fedor?" She asked.

Martin motioned over to the other side of the massive landing bay and For'mya cut her eyes. She could see them standing beside the large dragons Kdan and Dnom, their Bonded Ones. All of them were listening to whatever Arzoal and Helen were imparting to them within Mindvoice. Kdan and Dnom were her grandsons and Arzoal was taking a personal interest in their teachings and what they learned. She had spent most of her days instructing the hatchlings that filled the port landing bay, many of them almost the same size as Kdan and Dnom now. Arzoal believed their rapid growth had something to do with the amino acids that the drones were providing to them in their eggs. She and Helen worked tirelessly with the hatchlings, devoting most of their time to them.

For'mya smiled. "Good." She said.

"Good?" Martin asked with a smile.

For'mya turned back to look at him. "They are beginning to fit in." She said. "They no longer greet us every morning and they are doing things on their own. They are making friends and that makes me very happy."

Aricia smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her elven ear. "I told you *Kinsoaurgai*." She said.

For'mya leaned into the nuzzle with a smile of her own and nodded. "I know." She said. She looked at Martin. "Can they come with us to Twelve Alpha Martin? It's three days away and the experience could be good for them. They need to get off the ship."

Martin nodded his head. "I don't see why not." He answered her. "Akemi says the indigenous humanoid life signs are on the far side of the planet from where we will get the meat. According to Wayonn, who seems to have found a niche working the sensors on the bridge if you ask Akemi, his extensive planetary scans have determined they are a pre-light drive society." He looked at Anja and Aricia. "Comparable to Earth during the 20th century before they began to explore Mars and the other planets. Not exactly primitive... but not very advanced either."

"Humans?" Anja asked.

Martin shook his head. "More reptilian in outward appearance but very close. They are confined to the southern continent it appears. We are going to the northern continent. That's where the big beasts are. I saw a picture of one of these things we're going after and it looks damn close to a Woolly Mammoth from ancient Earth."

"What are we taking?" For'mya asked.

"Danny and I will put the finishing touches on the security team tonight, but Iama says she will need at least a hundred men and women to help her slice and dice the meat that Torma and the others bring to her. Another hundred to load the *KADENs*. We'll have thirty-six hours to gather as much as we can carry. If we get enough, Iama says she can make it last for two maybe three months at least."

"As long as it is medically sound." Anja said immediately.

Martin nodded. "Yep."

"We should insure our footprint on the planet is well covered Beloved." Aricia said. "This will be the first planet we have landed on that has humanoid indigenous life."

"Hey! Who handles the tactics around here?" He asked defensively.

Aricia grinned. "I'm just saying..."

Martin leaned over quickly and softly bit her ear lobe causing her to giggle in delight. For'mya looked around once more. "Where are Bella and Cirith?" She asked. "And *Melda Min*?"

"Bella and Cirith should be on their way back with Miseo." Martin answered. "They have spent the entire day on *DAYRIDER* instructing the Monitors and those who have come forward to volunteer to be trained." *DAYRIDER* was the name of the ship Muton and his people had built. Half of the thirty-three Worker Drones that had been discovered with the dragon eggs were now working on her all of the time. She was a solid ship and the drones had begun tweaking her systems to make her even more efficient. "Wayonn caught Dysea as she was coming down. He wanted to show her something in regards to a schooling program for the twins."

"Schooling?" For'mya asked. "In what?"

"Andro passed more to them than we first thought." Martin said. "It was his way of trying to insure they and you survived in case we did not reach you it seems. Wayonn would like to develop a training regime aside from what they are already doing. He seems to think that Andro may have affected them similar to what happen with Zarah."

“Ethereic power?” Anja asked.

“In a manner of speaking. He wants to test them.” Martin said. “He’s going to discuss it with all of us at dinner. He wanted to run the organization part of it by Dysea first to make sure they were not overloaded.”

“What do you think Martin?” For'mya asked him.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. “I say we hear what he has in mind. They have pretty full schedules right now and trying to squeeze something else in may be more harmful than good.” He answered.

For'mya, Aricia and Anja nodded. Anja pulled them both away from Martin. “Come on.” She said. “Let’s go change out of these field uniforms and get ready for dinner.”

Martin watched with dark brown eyes as they began walking across the bay, his eyes lingering on their asses as they walked, Eirene’s words coming back into his mind. Even with her flight suit and their body armor, Aricia, Anja and For'mya looked delicious.

[Pervert!] Anja called over her shoulder at him. [Stop looking at our asses!]

[Hey! If you got it... flaunt it!] Martin barked back. *[And you ladies certainly have it! Yum... yum!]*

[That is the best you can come up with?] For'mya asked without turning as they continued to walk.

[Yum. Yum?]

[I'll show you my best tonight!] Martin snapped playfully.

[Promises... promises!] Aricia called as they all laughed softly and kept walking.

Martin caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and turned as Tony waved to him casually from the back of the DT. He didn’t hesitate and made his way to the bottom of the ramp and he saw Tony standing near the COM panel at the top of the ramp and Cody sitting on midway up the ramp, his P190A4 resting across his knees.

“Master Chief?” Martin asked as he came up.

Tony motioned to the COM panel. “It’s Yuriko Skipper.” He said.

Martin moved up the ramp to stand in front of the screen where he saw the face of his adopted pureblood vampire daughter Yuriko. Unknown to everyone but Andro, Danny and the members of his personal team and Captain Akemi, Yuriko and *OMEN THREE* were tailing them by a full day, remaining under Shroud and covering their rear. It had been a last minute decision by Martin and one he trusted fully with Yuriko. The crew of her ship adored her, not only because of her name, but because she was truly a commander who cared for her people. Of all his children, adopted or blood, Yuriko was the one he trusted the most behind Andro. She was the most experienced and like his son, she had a darker streak to her that she could call on if it was necessary to escape a situation they were in. If he was doing something on the *ARC ROYAL* when she called then Yuriko would contact Tony or Danny directly.

“Yuriko?” He spoke warmly, smiling as he looked at her image.

“Tony said you were busy so I was going to fill him in but then he saw you were free.” She spoke.

“What do you have?” Martin asked.

“We are clear.” She told him. “No sign of pursuit... but then again we are only scanning the current sector we are in father. I think we are following too close. If Pusintin is following us then he will be very cautious and not close within range of the *ARC ROYAL*’s sensors. He will assume we have eyes and ears out in the way of fighters and such. He would not know we do not have this luxury. He would remain as far back as possible depending on how he is tracking mother.”

Martin shook his head. “He’s following us, bet on it, but their gear is not as advanced as ours you’re right.” He told her. “I don’t want you dropping back more than five light years though Yuriko. No more. You and *OMEN THREE* are too important to us and we have no idea what we could encounter out here. Akemi would normally have *RAPTOR*’s out doing what you are doing... so right now you are our eyes and eyes outside this sector.”

Yuriko nodded. “Very well. Five LY limit. I will order the adjusted course. We are cross decking our sensor scans to the *ARC ROYAL* every hour via secure link. I’d like to start sprinting up to your group and letting my people spend some time on the *ARC ROYAL* father. Civilian clothes so no one catches on easily, and only in twos and threes.”

Martin nodded his head. “They can hang with The Master Chief and Team Twelve in their area. Less chance that they will be noticed. No one goes down there.”

Cody chuckled and turned his head to look back up the ramp. "We seem to be these big bad warriors that no one wants to get close to." He said from his spot on the ramp. "Can't figure out why though?"

Yuriko smiled from her ship. "Perhaps because you tend to kill everything before asking questions Cody." She said.

Cody turned his head and looked at her image. "Yeah... that could be it." He said.

"Could be that you are just plain fugly!" Tony spat. "Ever think of that?"

"That hurts Master Chief." Cody grinned at him.

"Yeah... my ass!" Tony grunted. "Insulting you is like trying to insult a rock." He turned back to the monitor. "We can set your people up Yuriko." Tony spoke. "We got room for five more in our barracks and we have our own mess and recreation area. We'll watch out for them." Tony looked at Martin. "That means Iama will see them Skipper. She skips down to the small mess lounge on that deck at different times to check stocks and stuff."

Martin nodded. "I'm going to talk to her but I don't believe she is a threat of any kind. Aricia and the others concur."

Tony nodded. "Danny, Jules and I were talking about that as well. She seems genuine enough."

"I'm lifting the surveillance on her." Martin said. "She's becoming valuable to everyone and it's time we began to trust her."

"Father... why the secrecy with us?" Yuriko asked.

Martin met her gaze. "Laustinos could have influenced more people than we know." He stated. "Andro told me as much when we spoke last week. If by some chance one of them did manage to infiltrate Dreamland and get involved in the Arizona Project and they are on this ship I don't want to reveal all our cards."

"That's a big if father?" Yuriko said. "You know Uncle Ben is ruthless with his security at Dreamland."

Martin nodded. "I know... but even Ben would say better safe than sorry. Until we finish the checks on the crew this is how I want to play it."

"We're about half done." Tony told Yuriko. "But it's a slow process without any of Armetus's people and not alerting anyone."

Yuriko nodded. "I understand." She said.

"You haven't detected anything that could be used as a trail I suppose?" Martin asked her somewhat hopefully. He could feel his brother following them, but that didn't mean he wanted to engage in combat against a Kavalian fleet.

Yuriko shook her head. "We are using every spectrum we can think of father. So far nothing. Whatever they are using to track mother... it's either more advanced than anything we have or it's too simple and we just haven't thought about it. I'm leaning towards the latter. The Kavalians don't strike me as very open to new ideas or sophistication. Hell... they have five hundred year old ships in their front ranks."

Martin nodded. "Me too."

"I have my people beginning to shift to older communication and scanning means to try and sweep areas, but the unique possibilities are nearly limitless father, and I don't want to limit our sensor arrays." Yuriko told him. "If we happen to stumble across it, it would be a miracle. We'll keep at it though."

Martin nodded again. "I know. Try your best... but maintain your normal sweeps and sprints ahead of us."

Yuriko nodded. "Tony... I'll let you or Uncle Danny know when we make another sprint and drop our people off."

Tony nodded. "Will do." He said.

"I love you father." Yuriko said.

"And I you." Martin told her. "Tell Filrian I send my regards."

Yuriko nodded and the transmission ended. Tony looked at Martin. "You want to keep these transmissions on the DT Skipper?"

Martin nodded. "For the moment." He answered. "We keep Yuriko and the others out of the main net of the *ARC ROYAL* for as long as possible. If we do have a traitor on board... I don't want to give my foul brother any advantages."

"You really think he is coming after us Skipper?" Cody asked.

Martin nodded his head slowly. "He's following us... yeah." He answered softly. "I can feel his slimy ass."

"Skipper... next time we meet him... gut the motherfucker will ya." Tony said. "Save us all a lot of aggravation in the future."

Martin nodded. "I intend to Master Chief. I intend to."

It had been decided shortly after they had begun this journey that Muton and Miseo would remain on the *ARC ROYAL* to better facilitate joint operations between the two ships and their crew. In the ensuing five plus weeks they had grown accustomed to the corridors of the ship and the Union crew. They also took note that many on the crew looked at them in an elevated manner for their actions in rescuing their elven Queen and her children. They were greeted with friendly smiles and waves almost everywhere they went on the ship now, even though they were Kavalians. Whatever caused the crew to act differently with Iama apparently did not carry over to Miseo and Muton. The entire crew was polite and open with them and even inquisitive in some respects, wanting to discover about them all they could. Training under Isabella and Cirith Leonidas was no easy feat by any stretch of the imagination. They were taskmasters to the extreme, but Miseo and his fellow Monitors and those who had volunteered to be trained relished in the sometimes harsh training. Sixty-five of the younger Kavalians had joined the thirteen monitors with a desire to learn all they could from the Union vampire Queen they knew to be nearly as deadly as the King. Cirith Leonidas was also exceptionally skilled as they were discovering, and in five weeks they had begun to shape a fighting unit that could rival a Union company.

It had been odd for Miseo and the others to take orders from vampires at first. Though none of them had ever fought against the High Coven, they had heard stories passed on by others about vampires, none of which were turning out to be true. All of them found Isabella and Cirith both to be patient and extremely intelligent. They worked one on one with someone if it was needed and it did not matter to them that they were Kavalian. This only reinforced the idea of many of them in regards to King Leonidas. If you were not his enemy, then he would go to great lengths to insure you could reach the potential that nature intended for you. The Worker Drones were the primary example. They skittered all over the *DAYRIDER* now tweaking this system or repairing that system and the ship ran better now than it ever did. He had sent them over to the *DAYRIDER* before anything else, holding out the hand of friendship without even a breath of hesitation.

Muton enjoyed the discussions he had with Wayonn while they were on the *ARC ROYAL*; while Miseo's primary reason for remaining was far different. He had not intended for it to happen but he could not help himself or the direction his heart was obviously taking him in. He had felt something the moment she touched his tail on Nefoa, what seemed like a lifetime ago already, and up until a week ago he had done everything within his power to try and suppress these new feelings and sensations she brought out within him. Each time he had seen her she had grown more and become more beautiful in his eyes. Each time he had seen her he wanted her even more. She was fully grown now he knew and if one looked at her they would see she was now a twenty-four year old half elf, half Lycavorian Princess who could turn heads no matter she went. However it had happened, since he did not delve much into the intricacies of Mindvoice, her mind had matured right along with her body. Miseo tried to think and see the small girl who he had seen first on Nefoa. The same one who was fascinated with his tail. That was becoming far too hard over the past weeks and it became downright impossible as of last week.

Miseo stepped quickly through the door to his quarters and caught her in midair before the door was even fully closed, her body moving with all the speed and grace of her elven nature. He held her in midair then as she laughed softly, turning quickly to the side as his gear dropped to the deck and he pinned her to the bulkhead and covered her wonderful tasting lips with his own. His two meter long tail twitched madly as it snarled around her waist and her long legs curled around his back, her combat boots locking at the base of his spine. Her arms went under his, her hands spreading across his broad back as their kiss smoldered in its intensity and his powerful arms drew her tighter to him.

Eirene groaned in blissful delight as his arms crushed her lithe form to his wonderfully powerful body and she ground her hips against his, making sure her firm breasts were crushed against his chest. She could feel his cock, even through the layers of clothes between them and this only made her hotter. The nipples of her

breasts strained against the thin fabric of the shirt she wore as she allowed a small portion of her Coming of Age fever to engulf her as she kissed the man she desperately desired with ardor. Miseo's large hands gripped her firm ass cheeks and he pulled her tighter against his body caught up in the moment, causing her to coo out her enchantment within their kiss. Her Coming of Age fever was upon Eirene, but unlike her other half sisters and even pureblood females, Andro's touch within Mindvoice had gifted her with the power to suppress it entirely. She didn't know how, but it was how she had hid it from her mothers, making sure it did not come out in her scent which she knew her *MedwanGai* would detect instantly no matter how slight it was. His nose was keener than any living wolf Andro had passed to her and Fedor and nothing escaped his notice even though it may have seemed that way. Fedor helped her as much as he was able, adding his own abilities to help her mask her fever, but there was no way he could help her when she allowed it to come out as she did now.

Eirene had known shortly after coming to the *ARC ROYAL* that Miseo was the one she had wanted. She may have been fifteen at the time during her growth cycle, but she was sure. The awareness that Andro had granted to her and Fedor had allowed them to do much more than others thought. Now that she was fully grown, with all the needs and abilities of a female wolf, she knew with no doubt in her mind. His juniper like scent drove her mad whenever she caught a whiff of it, setting her body on fire unlike anything she had ever felt in her short life so far. It was so similar to what she had witnessed with her mother on Enurrua when she was reunited with her *MedwanGai*. Her mother's scent of sweet orchids had spiked unbelievably and her desire and want for him poured forth in buckets from her very pores. Just as it did with Eirene for Miseo. None of the pureblood or turned wolves on the *ARC ROYAL* had even caught her nose in interest, and there were many who were even more attractive than Miseo. None of that mattered to her. She wanted him and no other. She knew he had been fighting it for so long and last week she had grown tired of waiting. She had thrown herself on him one evening in his quarters just like this and during their passion filled kisses they had professed what they both felt for one another.

Miseo finally pulled his head back to stare into her changed wolf eyes and he saw the tips of her dual wolf fangs protruding from beneath her lip. Smaller than the fangs of her brother but fangs that were unique to the Leonidas bloodline he knew. Miseo had spent the last weeks using the computers on the *ARC ROYAL* to discover as much as he could about the family of the woman who had so captured his heart and soul in such little time. Trying to find some way that he could fit in. His body vibrated with need for Eirene and he blinked several times as his heart pounded away in his chest. He leaned forward finally to nuzzle the outer ridge of her half elven ear, drawing a gasp of delight from her as he fought his own raging emotions and hormones.

"I have... I have missed you so Miseo!" Eirene rasped out the words as her hands came up to his beautifully handsome face and his tail tightened around her waist.

"I have only been gone a day Eirene." He said with a smile.

Eirene grinned and rubbed her lips across his cheek. "A day is too long!" She exclaimed. "It will always be too long until you claim me!"

Miseo met her eyes as he was finally able to gather enough control of his emotions to keep from ravaging her right here. "Your fever burns hotter Little One?" He asked.

"Yes damn it! And it burns only for you!" Eirene pleaded.

Miseo pressed his forehead to her silky throat and allowed his own lips to brush against the skin just above the valley of her breasts. "I do... Eirene I do not want to deny you choice." He stated. "I do not want to keep others from..."

"I have been on this ship for almost six weeks Miseo! The fever has become so strong. I have gone to every area on this ship... looked at every man! Just as you wanted me too!" Eirene gasped pulling his head up so she could look at his face. "You are who I want Miseo! You! No one else! Why... why do you resist? I know you want me as much as I crave you. I can smell it coming from you Miseo!"

"I can barely control myself Eirene." He told her. "But I have read about your people. You are suppressing your fever... I don't know how... but you are. It is not fair to others if they can not prove to you..."

Eirene snarled and nipped his jaw with her fangs, the slight pin prick of pain causing Miseo to grin. "This is not a competition!" She growled at him. "I am suppressing my fever because I want you damn it! I have always wanted you! I don't want to be bothered by others who wish to claim me because of who my *MedwanGai* and mothers are! I have seen how some of them look at me."

“Listen to her Miseo.” Fedor’s voice broke in and Miseo turned his head to see him walk out of the small bathroom area of his quarters. “You aren’t going to change her mind. She’s a stubborn *upae*.” He spoke as he settled to the couch.

“Shut up Fedor you *midaeus*!” Eirene snapped at her brother.

Miseo pulled his eyes back to Eirene and her dark brown orbs smoldered at him as she tilted her head to the side in a ‘I told you so’ manner. Miseo knew that Eirene and Fedor were tied together in a very unique way for a brother and sister. That they shared everything with each other, holding nothing back from one another, didn’t bother him in the least. Miseo liked Fedor immensely. They were closer in age than any of Miseo’s own brothers and they shared many of the same values and interests.

“Your... your *MedwanGai* would not approve Eirene. I am Kavalian no matter that I have Pralor blood within me.” He said finally looking at her. “He would not approve after what...”

“Why don’t you let me worry about what I would approve of?” Martin’s voice carried to them and all of their heads snapped around as the door to Miseo’s quarters slid fully open and Martin stepped into the room, For’mya beside him with Anja.

“*Sibfla*!” Fedor gasped as he shot to his feet. “Father! Mothers!”

Miseo’s eyes were wide as he quickly retracted his tail from around Eirene’s waist and lowered her to the deck. His father had raised him to be true to his individual nature and not to act differently for someone’s approval. In that instant Miseo decided he would not hide his feelings for Eirene Leonidas any longer. Eirene’s dark brown eyes were wide as well and they flashed with anger at him when he withdrew his tail, but they instantly changed to adoring love when she felt him grip her hand tightly, refusing to let go.

“King... King Leonidas!” He rasped as the door closed behind them.

“Would any of you care to explain what is going on here?” For’mya asked sternly.

“Mother...” Fedor began. “We...”

For’mya held up her hand. “I’m not looking for an answer from you young man.” She spoke turning her eyes on Eirene. “I want one from your sister.”

Eirene gripped Miseo’s hand tightly with one hand, her other grasping his arm as she pressed her body close to his side. “Mother I...”

“Eirene... you didn’t really think you could suppress your fever from your father did you?” For’mya asked.

Eirene’s eyes cut to look at Martin as he crossed his hands behind his back. “You... you know *MedwanGai*?” She asked in a stunned voice.

“I’ve known for a week.” He told her. “I don’t know how you have learned to suppress it as you have Eirene, a talent that many of our females would like to learn I’m sure, but it leaked out ever so slightly in your training. I told your mothers immediately.”

“What else has your brother Androcles taught you?” For’mya asked looking at Fedor now too. “He certainly did not tell us about this. Or many things for that matter. He showed you how to do this didn’t he? He has passed to both of you far more than he told us. As he has done with all of his siblings.”

Martin nodded his head. “Something I will address with him when we speak again I can assure you.”

For’mya stepped up to Eirene but made no effort to pull her away from Miseo. She let her eyes drift from Miseo’s face and she looked at Eirene. She brought her hand up and touched her daughter’s cheek, feeling her warm skin and easily smelling her heightened arousal in her sweet musky amber and orchid scent. Eirene closed her eyes in delight at the touch of her mother and she leaned into her touch. “You should have told me Eirene. You should have told us. Your mothers and I do have a little bit of experience in this you know. You did not have to do this on your own.”

“Stop suppressing it Eirene.” Martin told her. “We know... so you no longer need to hide it.”

“*MedwanGai*... I... I do not wish to become the object of interest for every male wolf on the *ARC ROYAL*!” Eirene spoke passionately. “They will smell me and I will be shooing them away like flies from food. And it disrespects my Miseo having to do this.”

“They would not get near you.” Miseo growled softly.

Martin moved up beside For’mya and Anja with a sly grin at Miseo’s response and he looked at her. “It is part of who you are Eirene. You can’t hide it.” He said softly. “What have I told you in our classes?”

Eirene met his eyes. “Be... be who you are and not what others want you to be.” She said softly.

“So be who you are daughter.” Martin said. “It is nothing to be ashamed of Eirene... our people, Lycavorian and turned wolf alike, this is something we all deal with. Well... the ladies anyway.”

Anja moved behind Eirene and pressed close to her as For'mya inched closer as well. For'mya felt her mother's auras wash over her and surround her and she smiled. “Do not be afraid Eirene.” Anja spoke softly into her ear. “Be yourself.”

For'mya nodded as she continued to look at her and Eirene finally lowered all of the Mindvoice shields she had been using to hide her scent. The intensity of her scent spiked five fold when she lowered her shields and For'mya, Anja, Martin and Fedor all detected it immediately. It did not affect them because they were her family, but surprisingly enough it did affect Miseo. He inhaled deeply, his eyes wide and he looked at her with astonishment and a new pride.

“Eirene... my love... you have... you have been suppressing this?” He gasped as his body began to vibrate being so close to her. Kavalians did not have as keen a sense of smell as Lycavorians, but it was strong enough to detect heady scents and right now Eirene's pungent fever induced scent was maddening to him. For'mya and Anja could detect the intensity of her aroused female scent and who exactly it burned for. And they could also detect the response it was receiving from Miseo, and if they could detect it they knew Martin could as well. For'mya felt him come up behind her and stand between her and Anja.

“This could be a problem.” Martin said softly.

“See!” Eirene protested vehemently. “I told you! I will attract every unmated wolf on this ship now *MedwanGai!* I didn't want that! I only want Miseo!”

“Milord... King Leonidas... this is my fault!” Miseo began to speak doing his best to try and shield Eirene anyway he could.

“Damn right it is!” Martin snapped looking at him. “I've smelled your scent on her for nearly a week! That's not the problem I was talking about though...”

“*MedwanGai* please!” Eirene spoke frantically reaching out to take his hand with hers thinking he was going to deny her what she wanted so much. “I am... I want this father! I know what I feel and...”

“You should have claimed her days ago!” Martin finished with a snort looking at Miseo.

Miseo's eyes mirrored Eirene's as they went wide and looked at him. “I thought... I did not...”

Martin shook his head quickly. “Never think that because you are Kavalian I lump you in with a single group Miseo. You, your father, the others, they have Pralor blood within them. You are not fully Kavalian and therefore you do not share the same values. And even if you were pure Kavalian, your actions have more than shown all of us that you are different. That is and has been very clear to me from the moment you and your father began helping For'mya. Pian, Jalersi, all of them. They think and feel like you and that is why they are on our side. I could care less if you were Kavalian, Kochab or Algolian. If you loved our daughter the way your scent says you do then that is all that matters.”

For'mya took Eirene's hand in hers. “You are a woman Eirene. No matter how quickly that came to be... no matter how much I hate that it happened the way it did, you are fully grown and I can not deny that. Your desire for Miseo pours from you in waves and his for you.” For'mya said. “We have never denied what the hearts of our children want and that does not change with you and Fedor.”

“The ways of your people...” Miseo stammered looking at For'mya. “I have... I have nothing to offer to you Milady. Nothing to give you for...”

“Do you love her?” Martin asked simply.

Miseo's blue eyes darted to him once more and then they turned on Eirene. “I... more than I have ever loved anyone in my life.” He said seeing Eirene's eyes become moist and her face beaming in its beauty. “I have never felt these things that I feel for her within me. I...”

“Then love her Miseo.” Anja spoke moving around to stand beside Martin and wrapping her arms around his waist as his arm curled around her back and he drew her close to him. “Love her. Honor her. Protect her.”

For'mya looked at Miseo. “Respect her above all else.” For'mya said. “And love her so much it takes her breath away. Just be sure it is what you both want. If you do this... if you do this... you will be together for eternity.”

“Lycavorians and elves become mates and husbands and wives for all time.” Anja said. “Especially when the decision is made during a Coming of Age fever or a first Phase. Be sure. Both of you.”

Eirene watched as For'mya stepped back and did much the same as her mother Anja, pressing close to Martin, and her arms going around his waist. Her eyes were wide in disbelief. "That's... that's it?" She gasped.

Martin chuckled and looked at her with love and warmth. "What? Did you expect us to be a bunch of raving lunatics?" He asked her. "I can still do that if it makes you feel better. Run up and down the decks screaming my head off and ranting like an idiot with foam coming from my mouth."

"Like that is any different than how you normally act?" Anja quipped up into his face with an adoring smile.

For'mya laughed and smiled at her daughter. "We vowed to each other long ago to never try and interfere in the lives of our children." She spoke. "Why should that change for you or Fedor? All we ask is that you share it with us Eirene. No matter what it is? You and Fedor are... you are special in many ways."

Anja turned her head and looked at Fedor who had crossed his arms over his broad chest with a smile. "Don't let that go to your head young man!" She quipped. "It's not a free pass to get away with murder!"

Fedor's smug look disappeared quickly and Anja smiled at his expression.

"Ok... enough of this mushy stuff!" Martin barked. "I'm hungry and that's where I was going before this little detour." He looked at Eirene and Miseo. "You two will join us for dinner no matter how much you want to stay here. You don't have anything to worry about Eirene. You are saturating Miseo with your scent daughter... given that and his own scent on you... no one will bother you."

Eirene couldn't help but blush and she giggled softly looking at her mothers. "I can't help it." She said as For'mya and Anja reached for her and drew her away from Miseo.

"When you are done eating... then you can return here." For'mya spoke. She looked back to Miseo. "I expect that her fever will no longer be a problem for her come morning." She said sternly.

Miseo shook his head quickly not really understanding what she meant. He just said the first thing that came to his mind. "No... no!" He stammered.

"Good!" Anja echoed. "We didn't want to have to get ugly."

Martin chuckled as For'mya and Anja began to lead Eirene out of Miseo's quarters.

"We will see you in the Mess Lounge." For'mya called over her shoulder as they led Eirene out.

Martin looked at Miseo his face calm. "You need to let Muton and your mother know what is happening." He said. "I clued your father in a few days ago."

Miseo's eyes grew wider. "He knows!" He gasped. Miseo shook his head slowly. "Then everyone knows."

"Miseo..." Martin said softly and Miseo lifted his eyes to look at him. "You, your father, the others, you are not part of the Kavalians that we left behind or that are probably chasing us. You are different and never doubt that I trust all of you with my life." Martin moved closer to him. "One thing though... if you ever hurt her... even a little bit... pray someone finds you before her mother's and I."

Miseo didn't back down or look away and that told Martin all he needed to know. "I would die before ever hurting her. I would kill myself before that happened."

Martin nodded and reached up to pound his shoulder. "Good. Now let's go get some food. As intense as her fever is... you're going to need it. Have you ever..."

Miseo shook his head slowly embarrassed. "No. No... no woman has ever affected me like Eirene. And with all my training as a Monitor, I never had the time. This is what... this is what For'mya meant?"

Martin nodded with a smile. "Yep!" Miseo looked somewhat concerned and Martin grabbed his arm. "I will give you a tip or two that always works with her elven mothers. Once you claim her tonight, the fever will recede and she will be your mate." Martin said with a grin. "The rest is up for you to figure out. And for fuck's sake... don't tell Eirene! She'll just turn around and tell her mothers and then I'll be in deep shit!"

Miseo looked at him and then Fedor who stood behind him. He looked back to Martin and then began laughing as they headed out of his quarters.

“Noooo! Not there! Noooooo! You bastard nooo! Ahhhhhhhh!”

The female voice grated against Kalis’s ears as he approached his father’s room. Kalis stared at the door of his father’s private quarters as the whimpers of pain and humiliation from the Hadarian Healer he now knew as Ceale reached him even through the thick steel door. His father had been abusing the woman every few days ever since they had left Nefoa, her cries of defiance and pain reaching into the corridor of the ship even as his father forced himself upon her, sometimes violently.

Kalis lifted the data pad he had brought and looked at it before dropping it to the floor in front of his father’s door and turning to move down the corridor. He almost reached the lift when he came to the large view window and he looked outside to see the Kavalian warships they had taken from Nefoa on this stupid chase across unknown space. They were going into their sixth week of chasing his Uncle and still they were no closer. The trail was there as his father had hoped, half of *PUMA’S PRIDE* sensors being used to keep tracking it. The LSD jumps took a toll on their engines and they had to stop every few days to reinitialize the engine cores and make minor usage repairs. His grandfather Keleru had ranted over the COM at what his father was going to do, enraged that he would conduct himself in such a manner when the Kavalian military needed him. He had relented in the end, both he and his father still believing that somehow recapturing the elf female and her bastard children would give them some important leverage against the Lycavorian Union.

Something that deep down within himself Kalis did not believe for an instant.

His father had largely ignored him for the entire trip so far, barely speaking to him even when they sat down together for dinner in the Mess Lounge with the other officers. Kalis could see the disappointment in his eyes that he had not performed better on Enurrua. That he had somehow not fought better and helped him to defeat his Uncle. He had come away with only half his ribs broken and two severe lacerations of his abdomen from sharp rocks where he had landed. It was almost as if his father didn’t care about that. How do you fight a man who could do the things his Uncle had that day. Kalis was by no means helpless. He was a cunning warrior himself who had fought the vampires on many different occasions with Special Operations. He was a skilled hand to hand fighter and perhaps the finest shot on *PUMA’S PRIDE* with any weapon. How do you fight that kind of rage over a woman though? How do you fight a man who can do things you could not explain? It was not an ideal Kalis could comprehend.

Now they were off on this wild chase through areas of space that they had no idea about. They did not know what awaited them and part of Kalis was frightened of this. Frightened yes but so very interested as well. The other officers on the bridge of *PUMA’S PRIDE* were wary and unsure, but to Kalis this was an opportunity to see what no one had ever seen. He just wished they weren’t doing this because of his father’s misguided belief that the elf female For'mya had feelings for him. Kalis knew there was no chance of that being true. He had tried to tell his father this calmly but he would have none of it, slapping him repeatedly in front of other officers on the ship to demean him and show others he was weak and did not know what he was talking about. None of the other officers would say anything to him, or do something that showed the disrespect they felt for him, for he still held the rank of Colonel. Who his father was insured this and the fact that Kalis was exceptionally deadly all by himself and he would not hesitate to kill in order to discipline someone. But the lack of respect was there Kalis knew. And it was growing. Especially among the Puma Bane troops.

Kalis had tried for years to become the same son that his younger brother Leruk was to their father. Even when they were small, he never paid much attention to him or Karun once Leruk had been born. It was almost as if they no longer existed. This did not bother Karun as much as it did Kalis. Karun was always closer to their mother and sister than him and Leruk. It was something his father hated, but there was nothing he could do about it. When first Karun and then his mother betrayed them and defected to the Union, his father reacted as he expected with outrage and threats of retaliation if they were captured. When they discovered that Leruk had been killed by his cousin Androcles however, his father seemed to lose a small portion of himself. He became crueler and harder and silently he swore vile revenge on Androcles. Of course it never occurred to his father than he had to capture Androcles to fulfill that oath. A possibility that had no chance of ever happening Kalis knew for some reason. And that was before they discovered that his Uncle was not dead and was indeed very much alive. Kalis had seen his father fly into a rage unlike anything he had ever seen when that was confirmed. Now they had an entire and fully modern Fleet Group and a division of Kavalian troops and they were chasing his Uncle and For'mya into the unknown.

It was stupid Kalis knew.

He had read the reports of what that lone ship had done to their Task Force and they had no idea if that ship had gotten reinforcements before departing Union space. For all they knew they could be facing a much larger Union force because his Uncle was King and they would not allow him to go off unprotected. Kalis turned away when he heard the Hadarian female bellow in painful humiliation once more and he stepped onto the lift trying to push her cries from his head. No doubt his father was punishing her for losing For'mya. He had been using her as a fuck toy since they had departed Nefoa, and it seemed he was becoming more and more cruel when he took her. Her felt sorry for her really. What was happening was not of her doing and she had been the one to heal his father and save his life. This is how his father repaid her. By turning her into his whore and hurting her at every opportunity. Her family was being kept in separate locations on the ship, her fool husband by himself.

Kalis didn't know what sort of arrangement the man had made, but he had made some sort of deal with his father to insure he was not harmed in any way while his wife and children were kept in one large cell and his father raped his wife almost daily. The man was a pig as far as Kalis was concerned. To leave his woman and children to the mercies of others while he kept himself safe was the purest form of cowardice that Kalis could think of. Kalis didn't even realize that was his wolf blood within him or how similar that made him to many others who thought like that?

Kalis exited the lift on deck twenty-six, the second lowest deck of the ship and where his quarters were. He had chosen this location because it was quiet and far from the relentless scorn his father now looked at him with. Only the Kavalian engineering crew stayed on this deck and it was easy to avoid them as he moved to his quarters and punched in the code for entry. Kalis had changed the entry code and added an additional layer of security after the events on Enurrua had finished. He didn't know why, but a looming sense of personal security had overcome him and he feared what some upstart Kavalian trooper might attempt in order to get on his father's good graces. When the door closed he secured it in the same way, engaging the security system almost as an afterthought. Anyone who attempted to breach his quarters now, whether he was in them or not, would be carved in half by the security laser beams he had installed in the door and floor frame.

Kalis looked around his large quarters a moment, a main room, large kitchen area and then a separate bedroom area. He had spent quite a bit of time making the quarters try to reflect who he wanted to be, statues and pictures of famous Kavalian warriors decorating his walls, everything in its exact place. Looking around the room now something was very different. It was missing something. What Kalis had seen on Enurrua was unlike anything he had ever witnessed or heard about. The ferocity of his Uncle was almost beautiful in its depiction. The look in his eyes, even knowing he was outnumbered more than three to one. It was inspiring for lack of a better word. The glow from those yellow/gold eyes he had never seen on any other man. Not even his father in the wake of one victory or another. Those eyes were so confident, so brilliant and so methodical. His father's eyes were always so cruel and emotionless.

Kalis moved to his desk and reached down to enter the code to unlock it. He opened the small drawer and pulled out the data disc his Uncle had given him. Kalis didn't know what had possessed him to keep it and tell no one but he had. As he lifted it out of the drawer, the memories of that day flashed back to him.

Martin lifted his hand with his palm towards Pusintin and you could clearly see the pulsing of the psychic power radiating from his palm. Without any warning Kalis was yanked from his feet and rocketed through the air towards Martin. He covered the sixty meters in four heartbeats and then he was gasping for air in Martin's armored fist as his fingers closed around Kalis's throat. Not enough to crush his windpipe or larynx but enough to make it very difficult to breath and cause Kalis to claw at his hand with strong fingers. Kalis could feel the intense heat radiating from the psychic shield around his Uncle, only the part of his arm from the elbow up to the hand squeezing his throat now free of that shield.

Pusintin took three steps towards them but stopped.

"So nephew..." Martin spoke softly gazing at Kalis's dark blue eyes. "Your father stands there. He will not come for you Kalis. He will not try to protect you from me. In truth... he does not care what happens to you!"

"I do... I do not believe you! You... you do... not frighten me!" Kalis gagged on the words even as he continued to claw at the armored fist that held him suspended two feet off the ground. The grip was far too powerful for him to even get the tips of his fingers under the armored grasp.

Martin drew him closer, Kalis's blue eyes growing wide the closer he came to the searing psychic shield and he stopped struggling with both hands wrapped around his Uncle's wrist. "I see within you Kalis." Martin growled softly loosening his iron clad grip on Kalis's throat ever so slightly. "Like I saw within your brother Karun. You have never seen the things Karun has discovered Kalis. Never experienced them."

"Karun is a traitor!" Kalis hissed. "He betrayed us! His people!"

"Did he?" Martin asked him, his voice softer now. "Or did he just embrace the things your father has never spoken of with you? That he has never showed you? The things that it was his duty to show you! The things you could be still."

"You lie!" Kalis spat once more.

"Do I?" Martin asked calmly. "Your brother Leruk was a lost cause Kalis. He spent too much time around your father. It twisted him beyond help. I saw this in my son's mind after what happened. That is why you have tried so hard to gain his favor. He always regarded Leruk as his favorite. You have a chance Kalis... you have a chance he did not. You have a choice."

"I will never betray my father!" Kalis hissed. "I will never betray my people! I am... I am not afraid of you!"

Martin smiled up at him, but there was no joy in that smile. His wolf fangs prevented it from being anything but a smile of death. "I am not the one you should be afraid of Kalis. It is not my mate that you disrespected by doing what you did. You would be dead already if it was. It is only another crime that your father bears the shame for. Not teaching you what you should know as a wolf." Martin told him.

"He... he killed my brother!" Kalis snarled.

Martin shook his head. "Androcles killed a cancer. Not your brother." He spoke softly still. "I see that cancer growing within you as well... but you can stop it Kalis. You can choose to stop it. You can open your eyes and make a choice."

"Never!" Kalis growled.

"You are on a collision course with fate Kalis." Martin spoke softly and he drew a thin data pad from a small pouch on his belt, keeping his movements hidden from all those around him. "Open your eyes nephew... open your eyes to what you could be. It will be your only chance. You will survive this day Kalis... and I will leave you with a gift. Do with it as you wish." Martin pushed his other hand through the psychic shield and shoved the data pad into the folds of Kalis's loose fitting clothing and partial body armor. "And remember my words to you now... Androcles Leonidas is my son... and there is not a merciful bone in his body nephew. For what you have done he will carve you up and spit you out. Your only chance is to read what I just gave you. Read it! And then make your choice. My son will not give you a second chance nephew."

"I do not fear him!" Kalis growled.

Martin smiled. "You should boy. He is the instrument of your death or your salvation." He spoke. "Now... no more words. I have other things to attend to. Think for yourself for once Kalis! Think for yourself and become a Leonidas! It is the choice your grandfather wants you to have. Try to land without breaking too many bones."

Kalis stared at the data disc for a long moment. What harm could there be in this piece of material. Perhaps he could learn something from it that would establish himself back in his father's eyes and good graces. He closed the draw and sat in the chair, pressing the disc into the slot of his computer and making sure all the security protocols were in place so that no one could access his personal computer. The monitor flashed and Kalis sat back in shock as the pad ejected by itself and flopped on the desk top, a thin beam of light projecting from the thin front side. And then suddenly standing before him was the figure of his Uncle in the holo projection. Instinctively he rose to his feet prepared to defend himself, but then his mind recognized it was simply a holographic portrayal of his Uncle. The man who had nearly killed him almost six weeks ago.

“I see you have finally worked up the courage to view this nephew.” Martin’s image spoke. He was dressed in simple clothes, not the glittering armor Kalis had seen him wearing on Enurrua. The tunic was a dark blue color and cut low around his neck, the pants black in color and he wore a simple pair of boots. ***“That makes me glad.”***

Kalis looked at his image with wide eyes. “How...?”

The image of Martin smiled. ***“You are probably asking how I knew to say that?”*** It spoke. ***“Let’s just call it a guess shall we. I know you are viewing this alone because it would not have activated if someone else was with you. I would imagine you wouldn’t see much of this program if your father was with you, so I took precautions to insure only you viewed it. This data disc is not something you will be able to use to gather intelligence on me or others. Now that it has activated, it will also no longer open without your assistance.”***

Kalis reached forward disgustedly to end the transmission when he heard the soft laughter and clucking sound and looked up to see his Uncle shaking his head.

“Don’t turn it off Kalis. That’s what you were going to do isn’t it Mandri? Mandri is nephew in the ancient language of our people in case you didn’t know. Five minutes Mandri. That’s all I ask. Listen to me for five minutes and then make your decision.” His hands went out to the sides. ***“As you can see... I’m speaking to you from a ship. I’m on my way to recover my Kinsoargai from your father. The Voice of my Heart in the ancient language.”*** Martin’s image spoke. ***“This is kind of awkward... but after meeting your brother Karun... I made the decision to do this. It was a decision to try and show you what your father has not shown you. That is obvious in your brother Karun, but since he has embraced the part of himself that your father denied him, he will learn these things on his own. You will not have that chance. I was going to try and figure out a way to get this to you within Kavalian space but once I determined what your father was working towards I knew I would be meeting you face to face at some point. Probably very soon too.”***

Kalis looked at the image with wide eyes. “You... you knew!” He gasped.

“What your father has done Kalis... it goes against everything that is honorable in all of us.” Martin spoke. ***“I do not blame you for what is happening Kalis. I blame your father. You are... you are simply a casualty of the hate that your father has for me and your grandmother. I do not understand all of it Mandri... in truth... now I don’t care. I would have listened to him; I would have listened to anything he wanted to say to me Kalis. And had he expressed a desire to return to his people, though many would have called me insane, I would have granted him that. He was my brother and I loved him. I loved him right up until he took For'mya from me. Until he used her, raped her, treated her as some sort of animal to further his sick goals. He should have read the ancient laws set forth by our grandfather better and not listened to those who said they could help him achieve what he wanted. For'mya is my mate and wife Kalis. She has always been mine, and will always be mine. A much higher power than you or I saw to that nephew. She knows I am alive now and I will get to her before your father. And I will do what I should have done a long time ago. I will make her truly mine in every possible way. When that happens, your father will have no affect on her no matter what he does.”***

Kalis remembered on Enurrua when his father hit For'mya with his full Alpha Wolf aura and she simply stared back at him with hate in her eyes.

“This disc is not about your father however. It is about you Kalis.” Martin continued. ***“You have probably heard many things from your father and others about me. Hell... some of them may even be true. But I want you to hear about them from me. I want you to hear the reasons why I did things. I want to share with you some things I have only shared with one other. My son Androcles.”*** Martin began walking and Kalis could see it was indeed the corridor of a ship. ***“I will tell you why I want to do this... and believe it if you***

will... but it is what your grandfather wants. It is what our father wants me to do in order to try and save you. I talk to him in my dreams sometimes...” Martin held up his hand. *“I know... weird... but what can I say?”*

Kalis couldn't help the small chuckle that escaped his lips and he found himself drawn to this image. This was so different than the vengeful warrior he had encountered on Enurrua. The man who had single-handedly wiped out nearly a full platoon of Puma Bane soldiers in his rage and he didn't break a sweat doing it.

“Come with me nephew.” Martin's voice continued drawing Kalis's eyes back to the image. *“Come with me and allow me to show you what the other part of your blood means. You are only half Kavalian Kalis. The blood of a Leonidas also flows in your veins and there is not a single reason why that blood can not live side by side with your Kavalian blood. I have met your mother and the man who she now calls husband. She is strong and proud and she loves you. She just wanted more than your father and others allowed her.”* Martin's hands went behind his back as he walked and the Vid Drone must have moved around in front of him.

“A species can not survive if the ones who give us the sons and daughters that make us strong are treated as if they are nothing more than animals themselves Kalis. That is one of the major differences between our people. We view our females as the bearers of our future. We do not need to beat them down or force ourselves upon them. Treating them as if they are precious jewels works far better my boy. It is not wrong to show them you love them. To let them know they are your equal in every way.” Martin chuckled. *“Believe me... it can be a lot more fun and adventurous between the sheets when the woman or women in your life knows how you feel about them. It can get downright...”* Martin stopped. *“Ah... I digress.”* He said with a smile as he stopped walking. *“I ask only one thing Kalis. If you truly want to see things differently... if you truly want to see what you can have... then let me show you. Let me show you what your father should have shown you. Let me give you the ability to make your own decisions in a life that is yours, not someone else's. There is no information you will gain militarily by viewing this disc, none at all. I'm not that stupid regardless of what your father thinks. But if you wish to know what he has not told you; about your blood; about your choices; then allow me to tell you. At least then you will have all the information you need to decide for yourself what you want going into the future.”*

Kalis found himself pulling the chair away from the desk and settling into it with almost no hesitation.

“I have talked to Androcles about what I want to do nephew.” Martin continued. *“What I want to show you. There is very little that I do not share with my oldest son. There are some things that we have experienced together that no one has ever seen. I want to share them with you and he has agreed.”* Martin looked directly into the Vid Drone. *“He also wanted me to pass on a message nephew. ‘Choose with the heart that beats in your chest cousin and not with the false hate that flows through you because you have not seen the truth.’”* Martin smiled. *“He can be very profound when he wants to be don't you think? If you do this... Andro believes you would be one of the strongest of Leonidas blood, our blood and he would be honored to stand beside you. If you do not... then history... history will never know you existed.”* Martin held up his hand again quickly. *“Do not take offense at this Kalis. It is what I believe as well... and as much as it would pain me, no matter the tears I might shed... I will kill you just as assuredly as I will kill your father. I would much rather you have the opportunity to decide for yourself which path in this life you want to walk... because that is the choice your father has taken from you. A choice he had no right to take away from you. I want to give that back to you. So come with me nephew, let me show you the world of a Leonidas. A life you could have without question if you so desired. All you need do is reach out.”*

Kalis was riveted from that moment on.

Serale stared at the door to the quarters that was now their prison waiting.

Never in all her years did she imagine she would be waiting for her nineteenth birthday as a prisoner on a Kavalian ship. Nine more days to add to the almost six weeks they had been on this ship barely surviving on the rations they were fed and constantly harassed. What her mother was enduring brought tears to her eyes every time she thought about it. And the hatred for her father grew by the hour.

Serale was one of the most gifted Healers her grandmother had ever seen she had been told. She was one of the few Hadarians, like her mother, who preferred to use their power to diagnose injuries and diseases and forgo the instruments that were available to them to do this. They would then treat the injuries or diseases with their Healing power of metaphysical radiation. Serale had ascended only last year, feeling the ecstatic surge of healing power as it swept through her body and infused her with the unique radiation that allowed Hadarians to be what they were. The galaxy's foremost medical Healers and researchers. At almost nineteen, Serale was a vision of Hadarian beauty. Standing barely five foot three and just over a hundred pounds, her physical assets were hard to miss. Her breasts were medium sized and very firm and she had a tiny waist to go with lean muscular legs and an incredibly firm backside. She had spent the last few years on Talbor Seven and hated every moment of it, just like her mother. She hated the advances of males from nearly every species regardless of her age. A Kochab businessman had even offered to purchase Serale so that he could turn her into his personal sex toy and doctor. She had only been sixteen at the time, her mother having to threaten her father that she would take Serale and her brother off Talbor Seven and return to Hadaria if her father did not take a more active role in keeping things like that from happening.

Her mother and father had fought a great deal since coming to Talbor Seven. Her mother did not mind that they were helping others who did not normally have access to Hadarian medical means, but nearly seven years without returning to their homeworld had taken its toll on all of them. It was on Talbor Seven where Serale had finally seen her father's indifference to both her and her brother. He seemed more interested in making credits and treating less than savory individuals outside the limits of the many resorts than he was in raising them. She had witnessed his docile attitude when the Kavalians had stormed into their clinic and demanded that they accompany them. Her father had done very little to keep this from happening and he had ignored the lustful looks both his wife and daughter had received from the cruel looking troops. He believed Elder Healer Buonau's actions in disposing Queen Anja and aligning with the Kavalians was the right one, while her mother and Serale did not. They beat him down viciously when he protested the first time they touched her mother, but he didn't protest what was happening after that. Even though he knew what the Kavalians had planned.

They had only seen him three times in their entire five week imprisonment. Each time he had looked well fed and his clothes were clean. Serale, her mother and brother still had the same clothes on, and they had only been allowed to bath twice a week. Serale knew what was happening each time they came for her mother. She came back battered, bruised and sore. The Lycavorian they knew as Marshall Pusintin, King Leonidas's brother, was raping her mother each time he sent for her. And he was not gentle with her in the least. She would return with dark bruises on the insides of her thighs and on her shoulders and arms. Her cheeks would be red and bruised as well and Serale knew why. She was no stranger to men, Serale had seen her fair share of young men that she was attracted to, but her father was of the old school and he was insistent on choosing a husband for her. Serale had no intention of allowing that, but she would let him rant about it so he did not argue with her. There were times that he would get truly angry with her and slap her in the face or verbally abuse her as he did her mother.

Serale knew there was no love between her parents, if there ever had been. Their union had also been arranged and her mother had not wanted to marry her father. Their families would have nothing of it. Her brother Danim was only fourteen and though he was very intelligent, he did not want to believe their father was letting this happen to them. Serale had even seen some of the Kavalian troops look at him with something akin to a predatory glance. Danim's eyes were being open however, and his anger at the Kavalians taking his mother every other day was beginning to shine through. Danim was fair skinned like their father and his soft brown hair was wavy while Serale was deeply tanned like her mother, with long, billowing rosewood red hair that fell to the small of her back and dark Hunter green eyes. Serale knew at some point she would be taken and there was nothing she could do about it. This Pusintin would tire of her mother and take her, or she would be given to his men for ridiculous achievement. She knew how Kavalians treated and regarded their females, and she did not know if she would be strong enough to fight them.

The door to the quarters opened and Serale scrambled up to her feet as her mother staggered through slowly.

“Mother!” Serale gasped as she went to her, the door closing almost immediately.

Ceale let her daughter wrap her arms around her waist and support her weight as she guided her to the couch. Pain wracked her body, but the humiliation was far more. Serale felt her tears come as she lifted her hands and the soft white of her healing ability flared openly on her mother’s badly bruised face and split lips.

“Mother!” Serale gasped. “Mother this can’t continue!” She stammered drawing her hands over her mother’s face and watching as the bruises and injuries healed quickly.

“I will... I will endure.” Ceale hissed. “I have too Serale!”

“This pig of a man punishes you so mother!” Serale exclaimed as her hands dropped to her mother’s midsection and she let her power flare once more over her abdomen. The healing radiation pulsed forth, healing the bruises to her stomach and then Serale adjusted the healing radiation of her power to kill any sperm Pusintin may have injected into her womb. When she did this she discovered what else Pusintin had done to her mother and her eyes flew open in horror. “Mamma!” She declared in horror.

Ceale shook her head slowly. “The pain... the pain is almost gone. Just check for tears Serale. He is a bull in the cock department and uncaring of the force he uses. I thought... I thought I felt something tear inside me.”

Serale shook her head quickly as she used her hands to smoothly run over her mother’s abdomen and hips. “No.” She said confidently. “No tears.” She pulsed out another soothing wave of her power through her mother, causing her body to begin to revert to its state before he had taken her this time.

Ceale shook her head quickly. “No!” She hissed softly. “Leave it! He... he rutted like a dog on my back and he will do so again. Better to leave me accustom to his size. He puts your father to shame.”

“Mother!” Serale gasped.

Ceale looked at her daughter. “I must find... I must find something humorous in all this Serale or I will go insane.” She stated reaching up to place her hand on her daughter’s cheek. “Better to have him spill his seed into my ass than in my womb. I will not carry a child of that vile man! Now that he has discovered my ass, perhaps this is where he will empty himself now. He ruts like an animal. Over and over. When he is done with me, he forces me to... he forces me to pleasure his officers with my mouth while they sit there and laugh at me. They are even larger than he is by a good deal. I would never survive having them inside me.”

“Oh mother!” Serale sobbed lowering her head to her mother’s abdomen and letting the tears come. “Why is this happening mother? What... what do they want? Why are they doing this?”

Ceale rested her hand on Serale’s head as the pain in her body began to fade away with Serale’s healing pulses. “I don’t... I don’t know.” She answered. “Something about the King and Queen For'mya I think.”

Serale lifted her head to look at her as Ceale straightened on the couch and sat up. “King Martin?” She asked. “I thought... I thought he was dead.”

Ceale shook her head. “No. The information must not have reached Talbor Seven before these bastards arrived, but he is very much alive. I heard them talking when they thought I was... I was preoccupied.”

Serale looked at her. “Mother... if the King lives then... then this man forced the Queen against her will. He tricked her somehow. You know how Lycavorian females act when their mates die. If she believed him dead then...”

Ceale nodded. “Then her body would have reacted even if her mind did not.” She answered. “But we are not returning to Kavalian space. We are chasing the King and Queen For'mya and the children she bore him against her will. We are no longer in the Alpha Quadrant Serale.”

“We have gone beyond the outer border?” Serale gasped.

Ceale nodded her head. “Following a trail that supposedly leads to Queen For'mya.” She answered. “He wants her back.”

Serale’s eyes were wide. “Wants her back?” She rasped. “She is not his mate if the King is alive! Queen For'mya would never betray her love of the King for that pig! None of the Queens would!”

Ceale nodded as she rose to her feet slowly and moved to the medium sized view window in the quarters that was now their prison. “He is going after her anyway. For some reason he thinks she will come with him. He is a sick man Serale. Twisted in his head. Beyond anger and hate now.” She turned back to her daughter. “That is why we must keep secret that you have Ascended.”

“Mother why?” Serale asked. “I could help you!”

Ceale shook her head vigorously and moved to take her hands. “No! They would only use you Serale!” She gasped in worry. “He has already threatened to give you to his men if I do not submit to his orders!”

“Mother I...” Serale began to protest.

“No!” Ceale insisted. “I will not see my only daughter raped repeatedly by these savages! It would kill you Serale.”

“Father knows mother. Surely he already told them.” Serale spoke.

Ceale shook her head. “I never told your father we snuck back to Hadaria so you could Ascend.” She spoke. “You know there is no love between us Serale. There has not been for a very long time. If there ever was.”

Serale nodded. “I know.” She spoke softly.

“Your father is a supporter of Buonau.” Ceale spoke. “He is probably using that fact to insure his own safety somehow. He has abandoned us Serale. All of us.”

Serale nodded again. “I know mother. And Danim is beginning to see it now as well.”

“That is why your powers must never be used in view of them.” Ceale spoke. “If they knew you had Ascended I can’t begin to imagine what they would do to you. No... we tell no one. I will endure Serale. As long as I know you and Danim are safe I will endure.”

“Mother you can not endure this for much longer!” Serale complained. “He hurts you every time they take you to him!”

“I have to Serale!” Ceale insisted. “Until we can discover a way to escape I have to do this!”

“Mother we are trapped on this ship and not even near the Alpha Quadrant!” Serale hissed. “I have seen their transport ships when we came aboard. If you are correct that we are no longer within the Alpha Quadrant, none of their ships have long range capabilities! We would leave one trap only to be stranded somewhere in another.”

“We have to try Serale.” Ceale spoke.

“How?” She gasped.

Ceale took her hands. “Hope for a miracle.”

ARC ROYAL

“...already noticed that he passed to them more than he told us.” Wayonn spoke as they sat at one of the large tables in the Mess Lounge.

In the nearly six weeks they had been on board, Martin and his queens had fallen into a routine. They pushed two tables together when they entered the Mess Lounge and all of them sat at the single large table. At first no one would sit near them, they were the King and Queens after all, but gradually crewmen began to sit at the other table and soon it was a race to see who could be at their table first. Though it was well known that King Martin and his queens were incredibly open and down to Earth, the crew of the *ARC ROYAL* did not begin to see it until the laughter and jokes began to emanate from the table during meal times. Eirene had done as her father and mothers asked, keeping her shields low and allowing all to know that she was within her Coming of Age fever. She got several interested looks immediately from Lycavorians when she entered the Mess Lounge, all of which quickly turned to disinterest when they saw the hulking Kavalian Miseo beside her and smelled his scent already surrounding her. Not to mention the fact that her female wolf aura was radiating for him and only him, making it very clear she was not in any way available. Danny and Julie always sat with Martin and his queens as did Wayonn and Helen. At the moment Helen sat beside her grandfather listening as Wayonn explained what he had in mind to Martin and the others. Anja and Aricia sat on either side of Martin with For'mya to Aricia's right and then Eirene and Miseo. Fedor sat between his vampire mothers as he always did, his mother Isabella very nearly as skilled as his *MedwanGai* when it came to hand combat. He learned much from listening to her and his mother Aricia and insured he always sat near one of them. His mother Cirith, though the newest of his father's Queens, was a half breed like himself and he had learned many things from her about balancing the dual nature of himself. Now all of them were listening intently to Wayonn.

Wayonn had learned quickly that while they ate, business was not discussed unless absolutely necessary. The time just before the meal and during was used to reconnect with each other and talk of what they had done during the day. It was one of the reasons the devotion and love within the Leonidas family was so famous. Wayonn knew and he had long ago been swept up within that family and learned the small things. He was wolf as well and Wayonn quickly detected Eirene's fever when she entered, but also the intent of Miseso. He had worked many long hours with Muton and Helen and Arzoal in the weeks prior, learning all he could about what they knew of the people and quite possibly the dragons they were hoping to find on the target planet.

Martin nodded. "Yeah. Something I'm going to mention to him when we talk again." Martin spoke.

Wayonn shook his head. "Do not be angry with him Martin. Helen, Arzoal and I believe he does not realize that he has done this." He said.

Martin's eyes narrowed. "Come again?"

"Andro is nearly as powerful as you Martin." Helen spoke now. "If you were to have done the same thing he did, you could quite possibly have taught Fedor and Eirene more than you intended or realized. Peripheral Etheric Resonance. Information that flows through all of us but comes so naturally we do not realize it. Certain skills and such."

"Are you saying Andro didn't know he passed this to us?" Eirene asked.

Wayonn nodded. "It's possible child." He answered. "It is not unheard of."

Martin shook his head. "While I understand what you are saying Wayonn... this was no mistake. Androcles knew exactly what he was doing. He passed to them the skills he thought they would need to survive in the event I was not able to retrieve them."

"Which makes him more like you then he realizes." Helen spoke. "You have a tendency to prepare for the worst as well."

Martin nodded. "True."

"What kind of tests are we talking *Val'istar*?" For'mya asked. "They are already being bombarded with training and schooling."

"Dysea and I discussed this." He said. "It is why I wanted to speak with her first. She is the closest thing we have to a higher education administrator. We do not need to add to what they are studying now. We can blend it in with their current classes. They are simple tests at memory really. Most of the time they won't even know it."

"As their emotions and certain things they have experienced so far trigger these instances that Andro has passed to them, we can make it so it comes out naturally." Dysea explained. "It may just be a spoken word or an emotion. I was going to use the same regime I did for Andro when we discovered he was fully aware within Aricia's womb. In principle it should work the same."

"Their potential is there." Wayonn spoke. "Reaching for For'mya's essence and then yours Martin right after they were conceived triggered it. You have touched all of your mates in a way most alpha's do not."

"That's putting it mildly." Anja popped from beside Martin with a seductive grin. "He's been doing that for years."

Martin looked at her. "Now who is the pervert?" He exclaimed.

"Just stating the obvious lover." Anja answered.

Wayonn shook his head with a grin. "Touched them with Mindvoice." He corrected his wording.

"Oh... like that?" Anja continued. "Yeah... he's done that too."

Cirith laughed and leaned into Anja from the side. "You are so bad." She hissed softly.

"Dysea's ability of precognition." Wayonn continued as he shook his head with humor. "For'mya's ability to read emotions from the life force of others around her. In some ways even Anja's healing power has been augmented by you. Making it possible for her to go such long periods without Ascending. These are skills that they have acquired because of you Martin."

"So it is his fault?" For'mya said with a smile looking at Martin out of the corner of her eye.

"It's always his fault." Bella chipped in.

"That's it! Blame everything on me." Martin declared.

Danny laughed from further down the table. "Hell... it's always worked for us *fervon*." He spoke.

Wayonn looked at Martin. "With Fedor and Eirene being bonded to dragons, it doubles the chance they will have more of these events happen. Discovering and then unlocking that potential as it appears will be

tricky, but it can be done. They could conceivably become just as powerful as say Resumar or Eliani... they are the two strongest of your children behind Andro and Denali. I have not seen Dorian so I can not say what his skill level is right now, but given that he too was born aware of everything around him it stands to reason he will be experiencing the same things.” Wayonn said looking at Isabella. He turned back to Martin. “The sooner we are able to discover and bring to the forefront within their minds these abilities, the sooner they will achieve the full potential for the age they now are.”

“So it’s just an accelerated Mindvoice and Etheric growth spurt. Like the serum they used to make us grow so fast?” Eirene asked.

Wayonn nodded. “Essentially yes. Andro may have known what he was doing, but when Arrarn shoved him away as he was biting For'mya he may not have been able to put the triggers into a cohesive pattern. That pattern is what we need to discover.”

“Can’t we just ask him *Val’istar*?” Fedor asked.

“We could... but I don’t know if he would be able to answer that question.” Wayonn spoke. “There were a few Paladins that Sumar and I knew who had this ability but we never had the opportunity to study it closely. Sumar’s Tomes might reveal more and Helen and I are studying them but if what I have seen so far with Eirene and Fedor stands, then this is what Andro tried to do. The patterns may be nothing more than advanced fighting skills given how Andro views all of his siblings with such regard. A failsafe measure if you will Martin, just as you believe.”

Martin nodded. “That would be like him.” He said.

“So what do we do to make this happen?” For'mya asked.

“I believe Twelve Alpha will be an excellent opportunity.” Wayonn said. “They are going with you to the planet yes?”

Martin nodded. “Yeah.”

Wayonn nodded and sat back. “Outside this confined environment working with their dragons will stimulate the patterns if I am correct. Paladins were not used to learning in such restrictive places when they trained. Our classrooms were always outdoors. It may very well be the same for Fedor and Eirene.”

“But they won’t become Paladins?” For'mya asked.

Helen was the one who shook her head now. “They are not Lycavorian pureblood. In order for the Paladin gene to be present, the parents must always be both Lycavorian and descendants of the original Ruling packs on Lycavore. They were who Wayonn and the other Pralors chose to merge with.”

“The mission to Twelve Alpha may be just what they need.” Wayonn continued. “I will remain here on the *ARC ROYAL* to monitor the sensors and also to keep tabs on Eirene and Fedor. I have already tuned one grid to stay locked on them while they are down there. Helen and Arzoal will be on the surface as well and should any of the triggers happen they will be nearby.”

“There is no danger to them is there Wayonn?” For'mya asked worried.

“Mother we are grown you know.” Fedor complained.

Wayonn reached across and took For'mya’s hand before she could snap at his dismissal of her motherly concern. “No For'mya.” He said. “If a trigger does happen, all that will result is a short period of time where they will be confused as they absorb the trigger’s patterns into themselves. A few seconds at most.”

Martin nodded. “Ok. Danny... you, Kenny and Jules go to the collection point with Iama... keep Fedor and Dnom with you.” He said. “Eirene, Kdan and Miseo will stay with us at the load point.”

Danny nodded. “Done.” He said.

“Wayonn... have you discovered anything with the sensors that could...”

For'mya turned her head slightly and looked at Eirene. [*Go Eirene.*] She said with loving warmth. [*Take Miseo and discover what you have found daughter.*]

Eirene looked at her. [*I... I am frightened mother.*]

[*Do not be. He will not hurt you and discovering the pleasures you can have with one that loves you as he does will be enlightening.*] For'mya told her.

[*I do not want to be rude mother. I...*] Eirene began.

For'mya smiled. [*You are not being rude Eirene my daughter. Trust me... having you nearby is having an affect on all of us and that will lead to a very pleasant evening for us as well. Now go. And be ready for the mission when we arrive at Twelve Alpha in two days.*]

Eirene turned to Miseo who was chewing a piece of spicy meat. His eyes showed confusion and then Eirene smiled and took his arm, pulling him up from the table. He quickly dropped his fork and napkin to the table and allowed her to lead him out of the Mess Lounge to the knowing smiles of many of the Lycavorian females within the room.

The inbred nature of Lycavorians and turned female elves did not include a shyness of their sexuality when gripped within either their Coming of Age fever or the fever when they were in Phase. Alone in Miseo's quarters with him for the first time since she knew this was the man she wanted, Eirene let down all of her Mindvoice and Etheric shields and let her fever come roaring forth. Miseo had Pralor blood within him yes, but he was still a Kavalian. Though their senses were not as acute as a Lycavorian, the strength of her fever combined with how he felt for Eirene made it easy for him to smell her sweet desire and feel the trembling of her Mindvoice power against his own limited abilities. They were barely within his small quarters before they were locked in an impassioned kiss and pulling at each other's clothes. The fever burned within Eirene brightly, her nipples almost painfully erect and the moistness of her womanhood easily discernible even in the low lighting of his quarters as she quickly stripped out of her clothes. Miseo was a little more controlled in his actions and his blue eyes grew wide as Eirene was finally exposed to him.

His hands were trembling as he stood before her, looking down into her beautiful face, and he lifted his hands to caress the bare skin of her shoulders and neck. Her hair shimmered in the light causing his heart to race and pound against his bare chest. Eirene for her part stared at the exquisite definition of his upper body with ardent fervor. She had felt his chest against hers before, but never bare skin to bare skin and she stepped closer to him with a whimper and pressed her lips to his skin. Her hands explored the hardness of his shoulders and she fell to her knees as her lips dragged along his rippled abdomen in wanton need. Quickly she tugged at his pants, the only remaining item of clothing he had on and with her wolf and elven strength she pulled down mightily revealing what he had to offer her. Eirene gasped in both fear and blissful desire as his cock was exposed for her eyes. It was far longer and thicker than she had imagined it to be these past nights in her quarters, tapered from the tip back to the abnormally thick base. He was hairless and Eirene's eyes gazed at every wonderful inch before she reached up and grasped the length of his cock in her warm hands.

Miseo hissed in barely uncontrollable need now and he shook his head in scarcely controlled desire. He would not allow this just yet. He wanted Eirene to know how much he loved her... how much he cherished her. Miseo gripped her shoulders and quickly yanked her to her feet.

"Miseo!" Eirene gasped. "What... I wanted to taste..."

"No!" Miseo hissed as he drew her into his arms and lifted her off the floor. Her arms flew around his shoulders and her legs locked around his waist, her passion dripping onto his cock and lower abdomen. "I will show you what you mean to me first!" His voice trembled out the words and then he crushed her lips with his own.

Eirene nearly exploded right then from the force and intensity of his kiss. The waves of unabashed pleasure swept through her like a storm, and then she was groaning deeply into his mouth as her hips bucked against his abdomen and her sweet juices soaked his tanned skin. She couldn't help it as the orgasm smashed against her senses and overwhelmed her. Locked in the kiss with him as she was she barely felt him lower them to the single bed in his quarters but when she felt his weight upon her she tore her lips from his and clutched at his powerful back.

"Ahhhhhhhh... Miseo!" She cried with tightly shut eyes, her long legs locked at the small of his back.

Miseo waited for a few moments as she rode the storm of her orgasm and then her changed wolf eyes opened slowly and looked at him. "Mis... Miseo!" She gasped out.

"I will... I will show you this night what I feel for you Eirene Leonidas. This night and every night into our future." He stated with a husky voice. "I do not know what hold you have over me... but I will deny it no longer."

"Miseo... I... you..."

Miseo reached around and took her long legs in his hands. Eirene thought she knew what he wanted and she unlocked her ankles, only to have Miseo lift her legs high into the air. She gazed at him with wide eyes, unsure of what he was doing now. "Miseo... what..."

Miseo was beyond help now, his own desire for this exquisite woman far outweighing his own inexperience. He brought his lips to her calf where he held her legs above him and kissed her satiny skin.

Eirene stared at him, her eyes wide and her fever burning within her body. "Miseo I want..." Eirene suddenly saw his face drop from between her thighs and her eyes flew open in carnal delight when she felt his lips and tongue delve deeply into her dripping center. Her entire upper body went rigid in violent pleasure as her belly undulated with another staggering orgasm induced by his ministrations.

Eirene screamed. She screamed long and loud in utter catatonic bliss as one raging orgasm after another smashed against her senses. This was not what she had envisioned. This was far beyond what she had ever thought she would feel. She had no idea it was only the very beginning of a night of pleasure she would never forget.

Martin sat on the large couch in the quarters they were using, the data pad in his hand, but his dark brown eyes gazing upon the six women who occupied the large bedroom area of the quarters. The *ARC ROYAL'S* engineers had cut out the wall between the two smaller sets of quarters making them into a large single one for their King and his Queens. They had designed an enormous oval shaped bed that fit perfectly within one section of wall they had cut away, leaving a meter on either side of the bed to move around. The bed could easily accommodate all of them with room to spare. Martin Leonidas was not one to silently go around thanking the gods for what he had. He was a man who believed deeply in faith, more so since he had discovered long ago who and what he really was after so long not knowing. He did not often stop to reflect what he had endured in his life to reach this point, but this night for some reason he could not help it as he gazed at them.

Martin had never once imagined himself in this position. Many years ago when he had first met Anja he would have been completely content to settle down with her at that very moment. She had called to his wolf blood even then, before he knew what he truly was. That he would one day have six breathtakingly beautiful women who adored and loved him to the point of complete devotion was not something that any fantasy could have prepared him for. He watched them as they talked softly amongst themselves, sometimes giggling or laughing, and always touching one another. It had been a long time since they had all been together and these past five weeks had been a godsend for them Martin knew. Even Cirith, the newest and last woman that would share his life, had quickly been accepted and fallen into a similar pattern of comfort with her fellow Queens. She had yet to have a formal ceremony granting her the title, but they would when they returned to Union space. Cirith wore a simple yet enticing black lace panty and bra set, her body tightly packed and rippling with muscle and power as were all his Queens. Anja sat beside her on the bed as they discussed something from a data pad, one of Martin's dark t-shirts pulled down over her body hiding her straining breasts but leaving her hairless center bared for all to see. For'mya wore a maroon colored pair of thong like panties, leaving her larger breasts bare. For'mya was strangely thrilled to have larger breasts, apparently feeling for a long time that her smaller breasts were inadequate compared to her fellow Queens. Aricia sat behind her completely naked as she brushed out For'mya's long hair with slow strokes. Dysea and Isabella were also completely naked, their legs entwined as they laid on their stomachs, each of them reading from data pads. Their exquisitely tight and muscled asses were exposed for his hungry gaze. As usual there was no shyness between them when they were alone together. After all they had shared together through the years, all the times that they had pleased one another in so many ways; it was ridiculous to try and hide from each other.

Martin knew of the many rumors that filtered among the Union. How he had such surreal and beautiful Queens and how he had all of them every night. Martin Leonidas had chased far more male Lycavorians away than his mates knew about. Male Alphas who thought they could challenge him for one of his Queens. Those who survived the encounter knew the error of their ways and quickly became devoted followers of their King. They went on to discover equally beautiful mates that they now cherished as he did his Queens. Those that did not survive... well at least they died well. When it came to his Queens or the Union, Martin Leonidas could and did have a savage streak within him that he did not often unlock. In truth, most of their nights were like this,

lounging around and relishing the company of each other. If the mood gripped them, they would let it be known easily enough. There were times, like now, when his Queens paid him no mind and concentrated on each other, either by brushing out their hair or hot oil massages given to each other that usually led to torrid moments between them. They kept nothing from each other or him and he could easily smell when they pleased each other. They would probably curl into the arms of the one they were with and sleep this night though their sexual activity had been frequent lately because they were rejoicing that For'mya had returned to them. Looking at them on the bed, he felt the swell of desire for all of them within him, and while all their scents swirled around him constantly, tonight Anja's scent was sweet and pure and called to him brightly. Her comment earlier in the day probably had something to do with it, but like Aricia, Anja was always sexually adventurous.

He began to rise from his chair in the main room where he was watching them from when the soft beeping of his personal data pad stopped him. His personal data pad was far more complex and advanced than the standard one and each member of his family carried one. He settled back into the chair and lifted the pad so he could see the screen.

-Holoprogram Leonidas One has been initiated King Leonidas- The simple typed words appeared on the small screen referring to the computer program he had designed with Avi's help many years ago. He had just never used it before. Martin displayed a public distaste for computers but in private he had become quite the expert with Avi's help and instruction through the years.

Martin glanced up at his Queens, saw that they had not noticed, and he rose to his feet moving in front of the view window and out of sight of them. He looked at the pad and tapped several commands into it activating voice interaction. "Confirm time." Martin asked softly.

-Six point three hours ago-

"External target?" Martin continued.

-Present-

"Any others?"

-Negative. Primary coded target was alone-

"Did he view the entire program cycle?" Martin asked.

-Affirmative-

Martin smiled slowly and looked up and out the view window at the stars surrounding the *ARC ROYAL*. His normally dark brown eyes changed quickly to the yellow/gold color of his wolf persona. *{Ah... Pleistarchus my brother.}* Martin whispered within his thoughts. *{You have made your final mistake brother. You violated the most sacred of our people's laws by taking my Kinsoaurgai. For what you have done to her, how you have violated her, I will revisit that pain upon you ten fold. And it will not be quickly either. I'm going to take everything from you brother. I have already accomplished that with Karun. He is seeing all he could be now. He has a half elven woman who he worships, a woman who worships him. He is seeing what being a Leonidas means. Leruk... the son you twisted down that dark path beyond redemption is dead... and you have lost your daughter Nikkei.}* Martin's yellow/gold eyes nearly pulsed in brightness to his thoughts. *{Eirene and Fedor are my children now. They will always be my children now. I will raise them with my wives and mates and they will carry the blood of our father with honor and respect. Now I am going to take everything you have left brother. I am going to take Kalis.}* Martin blinked as he stared at the stars. *{I will teach him what you should have taught him brother. I will give him the choice you never gave him. And should he choose the path I hope, I will be the father you should have been to him. If he does not then he will die just as you will.}* Martin looked at the pad.

{And when we meet again brother, when we stand face to face you will know how big a failure you truly are before I spill your entrails before you and take your head.}

Martin tapped on the pad. "Initiate Leonidas Protocol Three Four Six. Activate upon target's physical touch with transmitter and initiate interactive program." He spoke softly.

-Initiating Leonidas Protocol Three Four Six. Parameters set. Activation trigger set for interactive program utility-

"Inform me when next program cycle is complete and then automatically activate follow on Protocols until they are all complete. Insure no activation if primary target is not alone." Martin spoke.

-Commands understood-

Martin allowed his eyes to return to normal as he smelled Anja come up behind him and he deactivated the data pad.

"Lover?" Her whisper reached his ears. "Are you ok?"

Martin turned and looked down into her bright jade green eyes. He quickly tossed the data pad discretely behind her back as he leaned over and collected her into his arms, lifting her up so her face was even with his and she could see his smile of intense desire. Anja looked a little surprised when his lips came down on hers with wanton need, but as his unshielded aura quickly wrapped around her like a warm blanket and she felt his love come pouring out, she quickly forgot everything else and returned his kiss with equal fervor as he carried her back to the bed.

The howls of delight from six voices began soon after.

Eirene was beyond overwhelmed.

The last few hours had been nothing but pure, unadulterated pleasure on a plane she had no idea existed. Her mothers had told her that making love to a man who consumed their soul was the most powerful and blissful feeling in the world. They had this with her father, and Eirene now had this with Miseo. There were no doubts in her mind, no questions of her heart. Any fears she may have had quickly disappeared with her shyness when his lips and tongue dove into her center and brought the world crashing down around her. She had very nearly screamed herself hoarse as the staggering orgasms followed, crashing upon one another with no end in sight. These feelings only doubled in intensity when Miseo had poised himself to fill her and then, with an inexperienced yet eager plunge, he sank the entirety of his fourteen inch cock into her depths in a single soul shattering drive. It was all Eirene could do to keep from passing out at the devastating sensations of uncharted bliss that ripped through her. She thought there might be some pain at least, given his enormous size and her petite figure, but the only thing Eirene had felt was an all unbearable need for more.

Miseo gave her everything she wanted. And so very much more.

Now Eirene found herself atop him, his swollen cock buried within her and causing ripples of ecstasy every time she ground her hips upon him. Her breasts were crushed against his sweaty chest, her own skin slick with sweat, as she showered his handsome face with kisses and his hands continuously stroked the flesh of her thighs and lower back. His fingers tickled the sensitive spot of her tattoo, causing jolts of pleasure to shoot through her. And then there was his tail. Never did she think his tail could do what it did. It never seemed to stop rubbing her body in different locations, wrapping around her waist, dragging deliciously across her breasts to intentionally brush over her super sensitive nipples and drawing ragged gasps of unabashed delight from her. It delved over and between her perfect ass, never ceasing to explore every minute portion of her flesh. Her hips were a blur of motion as she rode him, striving to reach the pinnacle of pleasure. Each time their loins crashed together it brought joyful cries from her and groans of intense pleasure from Miseo.

Eirene had experienced countless orgasms up until this point, but she didn't understand why Miseo had not yet exploded. Why he hung on the edge for so long and did not let his passion fill her as she so desperately wanted. When his hands clamped onto her ass cheeks and he began slamming into her with fervor she knew he

was close. She met his upward thrusts with downward smashes of her hips, wanting him to fill her and make her his. She gasped in unearthly bliss when with a growl of arousal he sat up, causing her to fully impale herself on his wonderful cock.

“Eirene!” He gasped between clenched teeth. “I... you don’t... what will happen!” He gasped as he looked at her enchanted face, gripped in intense pleasure.

Eirene’s eyes were half shut as dominating tremors of another building orgasm from deep within her belly and the base of her spine began to surge upward. “Give me all of you!” She rasped out the words.

“Eirene... I am Kavalian!” He gasped with another upward thrust of his hips. He watched her face twist into a dreamy smile as he pierced her so deeply. “I will... we will... Eirene!”

Eirene’s eyes grew wide when she felt it. She was fully speared upon his massive cock, his strong hands pulling her down even more and then she felt the base of his delicious cock swell even larger, stretching her around him and sealing their bodies together over a sizeable bulb at the base of his cock. She gasped in devastating pleasure as the length of his cock also swelled thicker and then his lava hot passion was rocketing up the length of his shaft to erupt into the depths of her womb. His soft lips wrapped around her right nipple and he nursed on it almost painfully as she screamed in utter, cataclysmic heaven. His powerful body went rigid, his hands holding her ass tightly to his hips insuring she could not move and the bulb at the base of his cock insuring they were locked together. His explosive release into her quivering body sent Eirene cascading over the edge of the pleasure abyss and Eirene couldn’t help the screams of enchantment then as her whole body rumbled in out of control ecstasy.

Miseo fell back on the end, dragging her with him as his hot passion continued to erupt into her. Four times. Five times. Six. Seven. With each eruption Eirene cried out in glee as another orgasm rocked her own body. It was almost too much as her body responded to his, her mind awash in catatonic bliss. Three full minutes, what seemed like an eternity, and finally Miseo’s body relaxed and he rolled over on the bed, covering her petite figure with his and finding her lips in another breath stealing kiss of desire and need and love. She could feel him within her depths still filling her with his essence. Eirene’s arms wrapped around his powerful back, his tail twitching madly as it danced across the flesh of her outer thigh, until finally they drew apart and his head fell to the crook of her neck mewling out words of love and devotion as he nibbled the skin of her neck and shoulder. His breathing was coming in great heaves and Eirene couldn’t stop the tears in her eyes from forming as his words reached her elven and wolf ears.

“I love you Eirene Leonidas.” Miseo hissed in a whisper. “More than I have ever loved anything in my short life. I do not know how this came to be... but I... I can’t live without you now.”

Eirene shuddered in delight as he nuzzled the outer ridge of her two and a half inch half elven ear and she gripped him even tighter.

“My... my Miseo!” She gasped into his cheek her voice filled with happiness. “With all that I am... I love you.”

Miseo pulled his face back to gaze into her beautiful dark brown eyes. He leaned over and kissed her quivering lips, relishing in the taste of her lips and skin. “Forgive... forgive me.” He said finally. “We will... I will not soften for at least an hour... if not more. We are locked... we can not separate until I soften Eirene.”

Eirene’s eyes twinkled in delight and she shook her head as she squeezed the shaft of his cock as tightly as she could with the inner muscles of her womanhood. She watched his face contort as she did and she chuckled. “Who says... who says I want to separate.” She hissed softly.

Miseo looked at her with adoring eyes. “If you continue to do that it will be longer.” He told her.

Eirene drew her hands from his back and took his face in her palms. “Hold me Miseo my love. Crush me to you and hold me and never let go.”

Miseo did exactly as Eirene asked him, wrapping his powerful arms around her body and rolling to his side. His tail wrapped tightly around her thigh as she curled it up alongside his hip and he pulled her against him. Eirene relished in the feelings of his strong arms around her and his incredible cock still buried deeply within her. She pressed her face to his chest and with much reluctance, the exertion of the last few hours finally caught up with her. Miseo watched as her eyes closed and she was asleep in moments, a smile of blissful satisfaction and love on her face. Miseo brought his hand to the back of her head and he held her there as his own eyes closed and he followed her quickly into the blackness of sleep.

They had found something wonderful in this crazy world. And that something was each other. There was no going back now, and in truth, neither of them would have it any other way.

PLANET TWELVE ALPHA

STRIKER DT IIA

JANUARY 30, 2575

SEVEN MINUTES FROM LANDING

For'mya turned her helmeted head and glanced out of the right side window to view the *KADEN* transport that was matching their speed and descent angle. She reached up and touched the side of her helmet. “*KADEN* One Four... adjust your course three degrees to starboard. You are too close to our ventral exhaust.”

“*KADEN* One Four acknowledged.” The voice answered.

For'mya turned and looked at Endith in the pilot's seat. Endith smiled and shook her head slowly. “Rookies.” She said humorously.

“Final inbound marker in five seconds.” Tina spoke.

“Final marker copy.” Endith echoed as her hand dropped to the thruster controls of the *STRIKER DT IIA*.

For'mya touched her helmet again. “Martin Leonidas... we are six minutes from the landing zone. Daniel's team is already down.”

“Copy *Kinsoaurgai*.” Martin's voice replied. A hint of a smile played across For'mya's face as his words filtered to her. He had ceased replying with her full name as they had begun during that time on Ukwav. Now he simply called her *Kinsoaurgai*. This difference was not lost on For'mya for it showed her that his love for her was absolute. Just as it was for all of them.

They all heard Martin's voice fill the internal ship COM. It was his business voice now, and no one would question his instructions.

“Six minutes people. Once we are down, Dysea and I, with Torma and Iriral will do an airborne circuit before we begin to disembark and set up the staging areas.” Martin's voice spoke. “Cody and the Master Chief will conduct the ground perimeter check and establish our defenses. When we give the all clear, begin setting up your load stations. Iama will direct what is coming from the processing area so be prepared. Torma, Arzoal, Isheeni, Miath and the new hatchlings will be working quickly. We have thirty-six hours but I want to be fully loaded and gone in twenty-eight. The follow on *KADENS* will arrive in twelve hours so let's be ready for them. This planet is unknown to us so no one wander away from the perimeter. Science Team Leader?”

“Here King Leonidas.” The female voice answered.

“Status?”

“The site we wanted to inspect is only half a click from the load area. Once you give the word we can be ready to move in seven minutes.” She answered.

“Good enough. We'll get the perimeter up and then we'll detail you out.” Martin replied. “Aide station will be the back of my *STRIKER*. Designate your buddy teams and prepare for touch down.” Martin looked towards the cockpit. “Take us down For'mya.” He ordered.

“In we go then!” She announced as Martin turned and saw Eirene standing beside Kdan as Miseo was further back in the ship helping Cody adjust something on their cargo containers. He made his way over to them and as he approached her heard Eirene speaking with Kdan within Mindvoice. They had forgotten to shield their conversation and he quickly threw up a barrier for them without them noticing. He inhaled deeply and instantly detected Miseo's rich scent buried deep within her blood now. She was also much calmer and all signs of her Coming of Age fever was gone. The wolf within her proudly announced to all that she was Miseo's wife and mate now and she would brook no insult. The elf within her had chattered away with her mothers for nearly an hour before boarding the ship this morning, her face beaming and so very beautiful just like her mother.

[... *his wife and mate now Kdan.*] Eirene spoke as she stroked his cool light green scales.

[*He is... he is very large sister. He did not hurt you?*] Kdan asked with real concern in his voice.

Eirene smiled as she pressed her cheek to the scales on his enormous head. Kdan's dark green eyes closed in happiness. *[It was... it was beyond wondrous Kdan.]* She said slowly. *[I am a little sore after two days... but the pleasure was beyond anything I imagined or hoped for. I...]*

Martin did not want to intrude on their conversation any longer and he stepped up behind her softly. Her head turned when she smelled and sensed him, and Martin saw the brightness in her eyes.

"MedwanGai." She spoke softly and with adoring love.

Martin leaned over and nuzzled her cheek drawing a sigh of happiness from her. "I am so very glad for you *arande*." He said softly. "But remember to shield your conversations with Kdan. Unless you wish everyone to know about the pleasure you experienced these previous nights with your new husband and mate."

Eirene's eyes grew wide at his words and her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. *[Oh... oh no!]* She gasped.

Martin grinned and nuzzled her cheek again. *[I shielded for you.]* He said. *[And do not be embarrassed about what you experienced and will experience into the future *arande*. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing at all.]*

[MedwanGai I...] Eirene began to speak.

Martin shook his head. *[Your sisters Lisisa and Eliani both have shared things with me that may seem out of place for a daughter to tell her father. For them to share that with me is an honor. That my daughter's trust me enough to not be afraid to talk with me is even more of an honor. And it is a confidence I will never break. You need not fear I will judge you *arande*. You can talk to me of anything you wish.]*

Eirene stared into his dark eyes and felt warmth wash over her as his aura drifted out and engulfed her in a fatherly manner. *[Thank you MedwanGai.]* She whispered within Mindvoice. *[You... you don't know what that means to me.]*

[You and Kdan stay close to Torma and I when we are groundside. After he is done with the collection for the day we want to teach you some tricks that are not normally used by other Bonded Pairs. Your mother and Isheeni will be teaching Fedor and Dnom the same skills.] He told her.

[We will.] Eirene answered.

Martin nodded his head with a smile and then moved towards the back of the ship. Eirene turned back and looked into Kdan's green eyes. *[There are times my Bonded Brother... there are times when Fedor and I wish that he was our true father. Not just of our hearts... but of our blood.]*

Kdan touched his snout to her shoulder. *[But he is Eirene my sister.]* He told her. *[You need no more proof than to look in the mirror. He is the one who turned your mother. He is the one your mother loves more than any breath she may take. When he turned her, his blood became part of her. It flows within her. And that blood flows through you and Fedor as well. Never doubt that.]*

Eirene looked at him with a beaming face. *[I love you my Bonded Brother.]* She said softly.

[No more than I love and treasure you now sister.] Kdan snorted softly as Eirene did what she had done when she was still growing. She snuggled her body under his folded wing and placed her head against the side of his chest to hear his heartbeat.

Eirene did not see Martin step up to Miseo.

"Miseo?"

Miseo rose quickly to his feet and turned. "King Leonidas." He gasped.

Martin looked at this tall, powerfully built Kavalian with Pralor blood running in his veins. The biogenic process had altered his outward appearance, his tail the only thing left from a different life, but standing before him was a man that could have just as easily passed for a Spartan. "Thank you Miseo." Martin said softly. "You have... you have given her happiness after everything she has endured up until now."

Miseo let his blue eyes look behind him and he saw Eirene cuddled under Kdan's wing. He turned back to Martin. "It is I who should be thanking you Milord." He said respectfully. "She is... Eirene is like a precious jewel to me. One I will worship for the rest of my life."

Martin nodded. "As it should be." He said. He leaned closer. "Did it work?"

Miseo couldn't help but grin at him. "Milord... she would not release my head for almost an hour." He answered. "I will continue to improve my technique in that regard. She... she tastes like sweet honey. I would have... I would have never thought of that myself."

Martin pounded Miseo on the shoulder. "Good man." He said. "I've learned through the years that it shows them that you love every little thing about them. When they know that..." Martin grinned. "Well... let's just say that things will always stay spicy. If more of your people back in the Alpha quadrant would try it... things might be very different."

Miseo chuckled softly. "That may very well be true Milord."

Martin nodded. "You and I will have the first watch for tonight. We can talk more and I can establish a more definitive connection for you and Eirene to use for just yourselves. You have Pralor blood within you and it's time you began to learn about that part of you. At least as much as I can teach you. Your father agrees"

Miseo nodded. "I will look forward to that sir."

"And stop with this Milord crap will ya!" Martin hissed. "*Sibfla*... you're making me feel ancient!"

PLANET TWELVE ALPHA
PROCESSING SITE
MID MORNING JANUARY 30

"Tell me what you see?" Danny asked as he handed Fedor the macrobinoculars.

Fedor took them and adjusted his position on the ground beside the man he called Uncle without hesitation. They were on the ridgeline two hundred meters north of where Iama was establishing her Processing Site on the plateau three hundred meters above the beach four hundred meters away. Three other teams of two were out on the four corners of the perimeter, though Dnom was with them, so they counted as three.

"I see lush green forests and an ocean in the distance." Fedor answered.

Danny rolled his eyes. "Wise ass." He muttered. "Now tell me what you really see?"

Fedor chuckled and then allowed the wolf within him to come out. His dark brown eyes became encased in a dark black ring as he began flipping through the different spectrums that his wolf eyes allowed him. "The animals are plentiful." He spoke as he observed the terrain surrounding them. "Their movements are slightly erratic... almost as if they are spooked in some manner." Fedor said lowering the binos and looking at his Uncle's dark skin and eyes.

Danny nodded. "Good. Very good." He said taking the binos back. "I got a feeling most of them can smell us and our dragon friends and they are being wary. Wayonn's scans did not indicate any predators close to the size of the dragons and they are probably worried they will become a meal."

"How many of these beasts do we need to take?" Fedor asked shifting his Mark IV ArmorPly slightly to be more comfortable.

"About sixty." Danny answered. "Half today... half tomorrow." His eyes scanning the treeline below them.

Fedor looked at his Uncle from the side after a long moment of silence. "Do they fear us Uncle?" Fedor asked.

Danny turned to look at him. "Fear you? I don't follow. What do you mean?"

"The crew." Fedor asked. "Sometimes I can sense their confusion and distrust of how Eirene and I came to be."

Danny lowered the binos and looked at him. "Last time I checked you came to be just like every other child." He spoke. "Just at a little faster pace is all."

Fedor nodded. "That is just it." He said. "They question if we will be like our brothers and sisters. Like Andro and Deni and Eliani. They fear us because of how we were conceived and what Eirene and I could do."

Danny shook his head. "They don't fear you Fedor." He said. "They are timid because of who they know you are. Of the events surrounding how you and your sister came to be. It's not that they fear you... they don't know you."

"Don't know us?" Fedor asked.

"Your father and mothers have been keeping you two pretty secluded these last few weeks. Only recently have you begun to get out among the crew and mingled. They... they are feeling you and Eirene out." Danny said.

“Why?” Fedor asked.

Danny shrugged his broad shoulders. “It’s what we do.” He replied. “You are the son and daughter of the King and For’mya. That makes you larger than life in some respects. Most of them have never ever seen the Royal family in person and now there is a shit pot full of you on their ship. It will take some getting used too.”

“Then they know who he is?” Fedor asked with distaste in his voice.

“Everyone knows who he is boy.” Danny said. “Kind of hard to miss the biggest asshole in the known universe. Not to mention he is uglier than sin.” Danny shifted his body. “You are worried that they see you and Eirene as his children and not Marty’s?”

Fedor nodded his head slowly with a trace of a smile at his Uncle’s words. “I some ways yes.” He answered.

Danny shook his head. “You and Eirene can put that right out of your head Fedor. None of them believe that for an instant. Especially not now. I’ve seen his ugly mug up close and personal. Neither of you looks anything like him. You look like your mother and Marty as strange as that seems. I’m sure you know why that is by now?”

Fedor nodded. “Because *MedwanGai* is much more powerful than him.” He said. “When Eirene and I reached for the essence of our father... we found his.”

“That’s part of it yes.” Danny said. “The other part... the larger part of it is that Marty’s essence comes from in here!” Danny stabbed his fingers into his chest. “The heart pumping in your *MedwanGai*’s chest is pure gold Fedor. He loves without question, and when he trusts, he trusts without hesitation. Somehow... somehow he has found the perfect balance between compassion and violence. Between anger and peace. He is a very unique man. A man that in many ways is closer to me than my own brothers. I would die for him in a blink. Not because of his name... but because I know deep down he would die for me just as quickly.”

“How old were you when the Guardian of the Line brought you to live with him?” Fedor asked.

Danny shrugged. “A year maybe. Me and Jules.” He replied. “We’ve been together since the very beginning of everything. In all that time he has never given up, never left any of us behind and he has loved us all despite our flaws. And we have loved him. No doubts. No regret. None of us would be here today if not for him at one point or another.” Danny rolled onto his back. “You know the difference between your *MedwanGai* and Pusintin?”

Fedor shook his head. “No.”

“Martin has never wanted power.” Danny said. “He’s never wanted power or control or any of that shit. You could take all of this away from him tomorrow and he’d be happier than a pig in *sibfla*. He would take your mothers, retire on some lush planet like this and never look back. If he knew we would never have to fight again. And I’d take your Aunt Anuk and Aunt Nayeca and be right beside him.”

“He would give it all up?” Fedor asked.

Danny nodded. “In a *nubous* heartbeat.” He said. “And you would be hard pressed to get Andro to take his place. That boy is scary like his father and he’d probably be on the same ship with him as they ran away.”

“But he is King?” Fedor said. “Andro is Crown Prince?”

Danny nodded his head. “Yes they are. And believe me when I tell you there is not a power mongering bone in either of their bodies. They hate to fight. Hell... we all do! It just so happens that we are very, very good at it. I’d much rather be home nuzzling my *Anome* and your Aunt Nayeca and partaking of their beauty and gifts than out here.” Danny smiled. “I’ll give you a piece of advice your *MedwanGai* shared with me when we were still very young. We had just completed our second mission and we were watching the moon in our wolf forms. Damned if I can remember where though.” Danny shook his head. “Marty told me if anyone offers me power... if they offer me something that seems to good to be true on the outside... then run away. Run away just as fast as I can. Those who want power are the ones who are dangerous. Those who want power are easily corrupted. Those who have no desire for power... those are the men and women who are usually the ones who make history as the leaders of others. Mainly because the whole time they are in power, they are trying to get back to their normal lives. Your *MedwanGai* has three... four rules really. He drilled them into our heads as we were growing. Has he told you them?”

Fedor shook his head. “No.”

Danny smiled. “He can be very profound when he wants to be you know. First rule... the Pack comes before the individual. He hates being King but he does it because he considers the Union his Pack. And as the

Alpha, it is his duty to insure everything he does is good for the pack. Second rule... Blood before all else. Your blood is your strength... that is where your power lies. Never betray your blood for any reason.”

“But we are not...” Fedor began but stopped himself. “No... we are his blood.” He said looking at Danny. “We are of grandfather’s blood. His blood and essence.”

Danny nodded. “Yes you are. You and Eirene both. You are his blood and you are his children. Nothing and no one can ever take that away from you. Either of you. The third rule... never for any reason disrespect the ones who bear your name and your future.” Danny said. “Love your wives and mates with everything that you are. Show them that they are everything to you. Do that... and they will love you back with a fervor and many happy times will be had by all.”

Fedor nodded his head slowly and then looked back up to him. “You said he had four rules Uncle.”

Danny nodded. “The fourth rule... well that is simple. Kill anything and anyone who tries to keep you from fulfilling the first three rules.” Danny’s head tilted slightly as he caught the scent on the slight wind. He turned back on the ridge. “Show time.” He said. “Torma and the others are bringing back the first load.”

Iama stood near the center of the Processing Camp they had established, ready for the work to come and completely relishing the new life that she had discovered here among those who she had been raised to believe were her enemies. Her short conversation with King Martin the previous night had released all her doubts and inhibitions about making the decisions she had in the recent weeks into the void of space.

Her family had forsaken her. Her Pride had forsaken her. These men and women had embraced her.

All in an attempt to become more powerful within the Kavalian hierarchy. An attempt that to this day had not born fruit to the best of her knowledge. So they had given her away for nothing. They had allowed the Kavalian leadership to turn her into a biogenic whore for their troops. When the biogenic treatments had not taken completely and left her with her tail, all the schooling and training they had given her was for naught. They shipped her off to Nefoa to be used as a sex slave within the brothels there. The only thing that had gotten her away from Nefoa was her willingness to do anything sexually that got her free from the sometimes six times a night she had to lay with rutting Kavalian troops. Troops that she was only an object to. Iama had proven stronger than that, and the day the Lycavorian King had come to her on that planet and offered her a new life, Iama had jumped at the chance to have something different. Even with an enemy.

Yet what Iama had found was not the enemy she had been raised to distrust and hate. This was an enemy that offered her whatever she wanted and asked for nothing in return. This was an enemy that was not an enemy at all. The Lycavorian King had given her the chance, and with every day that passed and her future appeared brighter, Iama began to fit in. Everyone knew her to be a biogenic Kavalian female, but only those who had been on the planet knew of her tail. It was the one thing she kept hidden. She had no idea how it would make others react to her. Twice now in the last eight weeks she had caught the eye of a Lycavorian male and when they had discovered she still had her tail, twice they had politely told her that was not something that they could deal with. Iama understood... she might find it hard herself. It was the reason she kept her tail tightly wrapped around her waist like a belt that was part of her uniform. No one questioned it, and no one got close enough to her backside to see that she had cut a small slit in her uniform to allow this to happen. Cooking had become a desire for her, an outlet to make her forget her life. That she had become incredibly good at it never really crossed her mind until that day on the planet.

The day Martin Leonidas and his Queens set her free.

As she looked at the ridge where she knew Daniel Simpson was she saw Julie Collins move across in front of her. She darted forward to Julie, the one time female wolf and now vampire clone with all the memories of the Lycavorian female who had died long ago and that she had replaced. She felt a kindred connection to Julie for the woman had endured almost the exact same thing as she had, just in a different form.

“Julie?” Iama asked casing Julie to stop and turn to face her.

“I think we are in good shape Iama.” Julie said.

Iama nodded. “We are just waiting for the signal that the King’s dragon and the others are returning.” She said. “I wanted to ask something.”

Julie nodded her head. "Shoot." The young Kavalian female was very inquisitive and none of the questions she had asked her up to now had been military in nature.

"The half breed with Daniel Simpson?" Iama asked. "I have... I have never seen him before. Who is he?"

Julie smiled. "Fedor?" She asked. "He's really cute isn't he?"

Iama shrugged her slim shoulders far too quickly in dismissal. "I had not noticed really." She lied and not noticing the slight crook in Julie's mouth that indicated she knew Iama was lying. "Only that he has never been on one of our gathering missions before. I wanted to make sure he was properly trained and would not be a burden. The King was very specific in his instructions."

Julie nodded. "You don't need to worry about Fedor Iama. He can more than take care of himself."

"The last few days I have seen him and a young blond woman sitting at the King's table." Iama spoke looking at her. "Are they the children of friends perhaps? Is that why they are here? Some sort of reward for being faithful."

Julie looked at her for a long moment. "That is not something we do Iama. No... if you must know... they are the children of For'mya and the Skipper's brother."

Iama's eyes grew slightly wider. "The twins?" She gasped. "I... I heard about them when they came aboard! I saw them even! That... that can not be them! They are fully grown now! When they came on board they were just children!"

Julie nodded. "It is true." She said in response. "The same accelerated growth serum that your people use was for your infants and the clones was used on the twins while they were in For'mya's womb. It was part of Pusintin's plan to use them to try and take control of the Union. He's as dumb as he is ugly for thinking that."

"Then they... they are Prince and Princess?" Iama asked.

Julie nodded. "Yeah. Why don't you talk to him?"

Iama shook her head quickly. "Oh no. I could not. He is a Prince."

"Prince is just a title." Julie said. "And like his *MedwanGai* and his brother, I'm thinking he will not really care for the title."

"*MedwanGai*?" Iama asked.

"It's what Fedor and Eirene call Marty." Julie said. "Father of our Hearts. They don't recognize Pusintin as their father."

"How can they do that?" Iama asked.

Julie smiled. "It's actually very confusing. Has to do with Mindvoicing and Etheric power and such. They've been training and staying mostly with their dragons when they eat. Martin and the others decided to acclimate them slowly. I think that part is over now and they'll be around more now. Eirene just took Miseo as her mate and husband. You should talk to Fedor Iama. He's really very interesting."

Iama looked at her with wide eyes. "Miseo? He is... he is Kavalian? He is... she is just a child! He is just a child!" She gasped.

Julie nodded. "What difference does it make if he is Kavalian? And believe me, Eirene and Fedor are not children any longer." She asked. "When two are meant to be together you can't fight it. Eirene didn't fight it and neither did Miseo. They make a cute couple really. He's so much taller and wider than her that it looks silly sometimes."

"I thought..." Iama began to say something but that was quickly pushed from her mind as Danny's voice echoed in both of their ear implants.

"Tally Ho! You got inbound!" His voice spoke. "Torma and Isheeni are bringing back the first batch!"

"How many Danny?" Anja's voice filled their ears and they turn as her five foot three figure walked up to them wearing similar Mark IV ArmorPly.

"Looks like six Red." He answered.

Anja nodded as she stopped next to Iama. "We're standing by." Anja reached out and squeezed Iama's hand. "Ready?"

Iama smiled and nodded. "Yes."

Anja grinned. "I clear them, you dice them."

"That's original Anja." Julie quipped.

Anja looked at her and smiled brightly. This Julie Collins didn't remember what they had shared all those years ago. She probably knew about it now, but she didn't remember it. It didn't matter to Anja, Julie and Danny had been the catalyst to her finally discovering and most importantly accepting her love for Martin and for Anja that had been the most important part. This Julie was still discovering memories, but as far as Anja was concerned, this woman was the friend she had been way back then.

Anja shrugged her shoulders as she looked at Julie. "Marty and Danny are the one liner experts not me." She said.

Julie laughed and shook her head as she mocked punched Anja in the arm. "As if anyone will believe that." She spoke.

Anja smiled at her as they heard Torma's trumpet and they turned to see him carrying the enormous beast in his talons.

"Time to go to work." She stated.

PUMA'S PRIDE

"...Fighter group is ranging out ahead two light years." Popal reported to Pusintin as they sat in the officer's lounge. "Their modified sensors are detecting the Borellum trace, barely, but it is on a constant course."

"Can they estimate how old?" Pusintin asked as he sipped the wine.

"Given the dissipation, the Flight Leader estimates three days... four at most." Popal answered.

Pusintin nodded. "They must be stopping every few days." He said. "Why though?"

"The other ship with them did not appear to be a warship Marshall." Popal spoke. "The design is nothing we have seen, but it appeared more like a transport of some kind. A large one."

"They're looking for supplies?" Pusintin said.

"It's a possibility." Popal spoke. "We were able to replenish our stores before we left Nefoa. There is no indication they returned to any Union planet to do the same. They could have replenished by ship, but they could not have received much."

"It is out of character for my brother." Pusintin said as he rose to his feet. "And why run in the opposite direction into unknown space? They could have made it back to core Union space easily. What else Popal?"

"Captain Korua has the reports you asked for." Popal spoke motioning to the Kavalian officer that occupied the table with them. Kalis sat quietly at the other end of the table.

"What took so long?" Pusintin asked.

"Marshall... I wanted to be absolutely sure about my conclusions before I presented them to you. It took some time to trace all the information within the ship's data bases." The man answered.

Pusintin nodded. "What did you find?"

"The report from the outpost that was struck by the Lycavorian King and his men stated that all were accounted for except one of the females that was sent there to entertain the men. Iama Juturi was not among the dead. Biogenically altered, but her tail remained. She was given to the brothels of Nefoa because of this." Korua spoke evenly. "It just so happens that her father commanded a *DIATAGA* assigned to Nefoa Marshall. He is among the fleet even now. He knows of his daughter's betrayal and he has been asking to speak to you since we left."

"Really?" Pusintin asked.

"Commander Koguth Marshall." Korua answered. "He has served the Empire since he was a small boy. He commands the *RAVAGER* with his son who is his executive officer. He is highly spoken of by even Prefect Keleru. Commander Koguth's father is one of the Prefect's most strident supporters."

"Interesting." Pusintin spoke. "Set it up Korua. Now... tell me why this attack on the outpost was significant."

"Well... aside from the fact that they killed everyone and stuck their heads on staffs, we believe they were able to somehow tap into our command channels Marshall." Korua told him. "Nothing truly secure but enough access to give them deployments and numbers for a sizeable number of our fleets. I believe that is how

they determined you had only a short Task Force with you. I am not completely sure... but much of the evidence indicates this.”

“I don’t care about that Korua.” Pusintin said. “I care about anything you have discovered about Muton and the others that helped For’mya escape.”

Korua nodded and held out the data pad to him. “This is everything Marshall.” He stated. “I cross referenced his name over nineteen different data bases. He is part of a group that the prefect ordered destroyed nearly a thousand years ago.”

Pusintin looked at him. “That group on Cabelir? The Watchers... the seers... something ridiculous like that.”

“They called themselves Monitors.” Korua spoke. “A religious sect of some sort that Prefect Keleru ordered wiped out as I said. It is actually the second time he has done this, the first being some five thousand years ago.”

Pusintin looked at him. “Same group?” He asked.

Korua nodded. “Yes Marshall.” He answered. “I have nothing to base my...” Korua stopped talking and looked down.

Pusintin glanced at Popal and then back to Korua. “Captain Korua... I may be a mean sonofabitch, but I’m not completely foolish. Do not be afraid to tell me what you have found and what you think. Intelligence is your field... not mine.”

Korua looked at him. “Thank you Marshall Pusintin.” He spoke. He lifted his copy of the data pad. “I do not believe Muton was what he made himself out to be.” He said. “Yes... he was your doctor for nearly four centuries Marshall, but he was far more than he deceived everyone into believing. I believe he was one of these Monitors. His age alone indicates that he was alive at the time Prefect Keleru first ordered their religious cult destroyed. He is nearly as old as the Prefect if the records we have are accurate. Which leads me to my next point. The records are incomplete.”

“Incomplete?” Pusintin asked. “In what way?”

“They only go back five thousand eight hundred years.” Korua answered. “His age alone indicates that we should have records going back nearly ten thousand. We do not.”

Pusintin looked at him. “And when did Keleru first order this Monitor Group destroyed?” He asked.

“It was before you came to us Marshall. The exact date is lost to our historians, but it happened five thousand eight hundred years ago, give or take a decade.” Korua answered.

“You think he was part of the group that Keleru took out?” Pusintin asked.

“As I said Marshall... I have no proof.” Korua said. “But that is what I believe yes. And he has been among our midst all of this time planning for something just like what they have executed. A mass exodus out of Kavalian space.”

“Why?” Pusintin asked as he returned to his seat.

“I’m not entirely sure Marshall... but I believe it has something to do with these Pralors that have been mentioned in recent Union broadcasts. A race of highly advanced species of humanoid persuasion that have incredible mind powers and I dare say, are the species that built the ship that butchered so many of our brothers. I would even go so far as to surmise that the old woman Demahra is of this species.”

“The one who tried to guide Keleru into different areas?” Pusintin asked.

Korua nodded his head. “One and the same. He ordered her immediate execution after Athani defected but she was never found. The Prefect blames her for twisting Athani’s thoughts and manners. There may be more to that than we know.”

“She disappeared months ago.” Pusintin said. “And if she has stayed hidden that suggests she has quite a following.”

Korua nodded. “Yes. No record of her having been found or her death has ever been produced.” He spoke. “I believe she is somehow tied to this ship. Somehow tied to the obvious technological advances the Union has made in recent years that we did not know about.”

“Korua... where have you been assigned before you came to *PUMA’S PRIDE*?” Pusintin asked.

Korua lowered his face. “I was a minor analyst within the Intelligence Division sir.” He said. “No one... no one believed any of my theories.”

Pusintin looked at Popal. “Popal what do you think?” He asked.

“Had we not seen and experienced what we did Marshall I would say he is crazy as a mole wasp.” Popal answered. “Now... now his theories actually make sense.”

“Korua... I want you to draft a secure message to Keleru. Lay out everything you have and tell him it is my belief that my brother is after something else out here.” Pusintin spoke as he leaned back. “Put it all together for him and I’ll sign it.” He looked at the wall. “I may have come out here after her, but it’s entirely possible he’s not running away from us and running to a place we know nothing about.”

“For what?” Popal spoke.

It was Kalis who leaned forward now. “More of those ships.” He stated.

Pusintin looked at his son across the table with some distaste but some new respect for what he had just said. At least he wasn’t as ignorant as Pusintin thought. “Kalis is right.” He said. “Can you imagine what we could do with ships like that Popal? Two or three of those ships under my command and we could rule the entire universe.”

“They would fight us.” Kalis spoke again. “And they already have an advantage in their engine designs or else we would have caught them by now.”

“Let them try to fight us!” Pusintin said. “We have detected no other Core Plasma Traces from different engines since we have been out here which tells me they have that one ship and the transport we saw at Enurrua. We have an entire Fleet Group!” Pusintin got to his feet and smiled. “Oh this is beautiful! I’m going to rescue For’mya, fuck his other Queens to death in front of him and take whatever it is he finds before I kill him. When we return to Kavalian space we’ll be hailed as heroes.”

Kalis looked at his father silently as he paced the room at the other end of the table. *{Rescue For’mya?}* Kalis thought to himself. *{She would carve your nor from your body before she ever allowed you to have her again.}* Kalis blinked several times in surprise as he realized he had just used a word from the Lycavorian language. He also realized then that his father was twisted beyond his ability to reason with him.

His hate for me and your grandmother drives him now. His Uncle Martin had told him in the Holoprogram. ***He is beyond reason. Beyond redemption now.***

For the first time in twenty-five and a half years, Kalis realized just how true that really was.

Kalis was walking down the deck towards the lift, his mind adrift in thought, when he heard the desperate female cry. He had been deep in thought as he went from deck to deck simply walking and trying to bring things into focus within his mind. Nothing had deterred him until he heard that voice.

“Stop it! You’re hurting him! Stop it!”

“Shut up wench!”

Kalis stopped when he heard the distinct sound of a hand hitting flesh and he altered his direction. He was on deck nineteen, and he realized this is the deck where they were holding the Hadarians. He quickened his pace, winding around the corner until he came to the open door and saw three Kavalian troops. One was standing in the corridor laughing at whatever was taking place inside the quarters. He heard the deep thud of a fist hitting a body and he moved quickly towards the quarters. The Kavalian in the doorway did nothing as Kalis stepped into the quarters and his blue eyes grew wide.

The teenage Hadarian male was on the floor beneath the much larger Puma Bane troop as he pummeled the young man. The second was looming over both Hadarian females menacingly with one hand holding the front of the younger female’s shirt. Kalis had seen the older Hadarian female before but he had not seen the younger one and his dark blue eyes grew even wider as the scent reached him. It was a delicious cinnamon and cherries scent but it was also mixed with fear and something inside Kalis told him that was not right. The scent should not have the fear in it. Kalis did not know what possessed him to do it, but he would eventually discover it was the Lycavorian male within him that acted upon Serale’s female scent touching his nose and igniting something within him. The sweet and pungent scent of cinnamon and cherries assailed Kalis’s senses, overriding everything else in the room and his blue eyes suddenly and quite instinctively changed to that of his wolf persona. The thick black ring appeared around his eyes shifting between different spectrums without aide

until they stopped and he was looking at the Kavalians and Hadarians in the room with a bluish hue to them. He felt the splash of his saliva inside his mouth as the long dual wolf fangs burst forth from his gums. His hands went to his mouth as he felt the long powerful fangs fully extend, his eyes going ever wider. This had never happened to him before. His father had never delved very deeply into the Lycavorian half of his blood, never taught him anything and because of this fact Kalis responded in a very instinctive manner. A most instinctive and painful manner.

His keen mind determined he had three seconds before the Kavalian straddling the young Hadarian male would hit him again and Kalis moved. He moved with all the inbred speed of his wolf and feline blood combined and he struck viciously and without mercy. He snatched the raised arm of the Puma Bane troop and twisted savagely to the left. The trooper yelled in pain as his arm dislocated and then Kalis's knee ended his conscious thoughts as it crashed into his jaw with terminal velocity. His head snapped back roughly and he exploded off the floor to land against the wall unconscious and out of the fight. The Puma Bane troop hovering over Serale and Ceale whirled instantly; lifting his arm to strike Kalis in the head. A blow intended to kill. A blow that would not strike anything but air. Kalis simply sidestepped the soldier's weak blow and hit him with a ridge hand just above his nose. That part of his face crunched and ground together as blood erupted and the pain caused his eyes to tear up as he staggered back. As he reached for his face, Kalis continued to move. He stopped behind the dazed trooper, gripped the back of his head and brought it smashing into the bulkhead with devastating force, shattering the man's cheek and staining the bulkhead red with blood as he slumped to the deck befuddled and completely out of it.

The Kavalian from the corridor was entering the quarters by now and reaching for his assault rifle. As the Puma Bane troop got it unclipped and was about to bring it up, the Kavalian Industries ARSOC 11 12.7mm sidearm that Kalis always carried was out and jammed painfully into his cheek stopping the Puma Bane soldier in his tracks. Kalis wasn't even looking at him as he slowly turned and the Puma Bane soldier saw those wolf eyes focus on him. His dark eyes grew wide as he saw Kalis snarl and expose the vicious looking dual fangs. The Puma Bane troop did not know the significance of those dual fangs. He did not know now and he would never know before his death came to him.

"I will give you five seconds to explain your actions Senior Sergeant!" Kalis growled savagely. "Then I will pull this trigger and scatter your ignorant brains all over the bulkhead for what you were attempting to do here!"

"Colonel!" He gasped. "You... your father sent us to bring the Hadarian bitch to him! The boy got in our way and struck Sergeant Greno! Then the younger female struck Hendi! Your father has decreed the Hadarian bitch is to be left untouched but not the children! They struck us! Greno and Hindi were only going to..."

Kalis rammed the barrel of the ARSOC tighter into his cheek in savage anger that he did not understand. "Going to what?" Kalis snarled at him. "Beat the boy to death and rape the female! Rape her in front of her family! In front of her mother and brother!" Kalis's wolf eyes were wild with unbridled and overwhelming anger.

"She struck Hendi!" The sergeant growled back.

"My father sent you to collect her mother!" Kalis snarled at him. "Not to force yourself upon her daughter and beat her son while she watched! He has told her they will remain unharmed if she does as she is instructed! You will not violate that decree! Collect your men and leave! Now! Send another detachment to collect the woman!"

"Colonel we..."

Kalis reached up and jerked back the slid action of his ARSOC. "Do not make me repeat myself or you will be dead for disobeying the orders of a superior officer! You and your men may not care for me Senior Sergeant, but you will follow the Kavalian Order of Command or I will execute you right here!"

Kalis could see the hate in the man's eyes but he also knew the Puma Bane soldier would comply. He watched as he lowered his rifle and moved to help his fellow trooper to his feet. Together they got their unconscious comrade between them and hauled his inert form out of the quarters.

Kalis lowered his ARSOC, his entire body shaking in a combination of fear and resolve. He slowly turned his wolf eyes on Serale, gazing at her tanned face and wide dark green eyes. He stared into her face for a long moment, studying the contours of her cheeks and her lips, the way her deep rosewood colored red hair

cascaded around her face and over her shoulders. The depth and brightness of those eyes. To the surprise of both himself and Serale, his eyes never once moved lower to gaze upon her womanly body. They remained locked on her face and the way her eyes moved and her lips quivered in fear. Finally, after what seemed like several minutes, Kalis blinked.

“Tend... tend to your brother. Before... before more of them come.” He spoke finally in a soft whisper of a voice.

Serale didn't hesitate and didn't think. She dashed to where Danim lay on the floor, her hands flaring a soft white.

“Serale no!” Ceale gasped seeing this.

Kalis turned his head quickly and saw the shimmering glow of her hands vanish instantly at her mother's warning. Serale's face was locked in an expression of horror as she realized what she had done and stared at Kalis. He turned his head and looked back to Ceale and then to Serale once more, his wolf eyes wide. His father did not know the younger Hadarian female had this ability yet, of that he was positive. The mother had told his father that her daughter had not Ascended... yes that is what she had called it. Kalis looked back to Ceale and he could still see the minor bruising of the woman's face and the state of her clothes. His mind suddenly pictured the younger woman like that and terrible anger surged through him. In another act he would not fully understand until later, Kalis turned back to Serale and nodded his head.

“Heal him. Heal him quickly.” He hissed at her softly. “Do not let them see you doing this. Hurry!” Serale didn't move from her position, her eyes now filled with confusion as she looked at Kalis. “I will tell no one! But you must hurry! Take care of your brother!” Kalis insisted jarring Serale out of her daze.

Serale didn't hesitate and she brought her hands to her brother and began to heal his painful injuries.

Ceale stared at Kalis from the floor and pushed herself into a sitting position against the wall. “Wha... why?” She gasped.

Kalis returned his ARSOC to its holster and met her eyes. “I... I do not know.” He spoke softly. The words poured forth then and to Kalis they were the most truthful words he had ever spoken in his entire life. “I... I am not like... I am not my father.”

“Your father?” Ceale rasped with wide eyes.

Kalis didn't answer her and moved for the door and let it close behind him as his wolf persona finally left him and he took several deep breaths before locking the door. Her scent was not as powerful here in the corridor and it did not affect him as potently as when he was in the room. He shook his head gently as a two member team of Puma Bane soldiers came rushing up to the door. One of them the man Kalis had leveled his weapon at. The other man was the Senior Master Sergeant of the Puma Bane detachment and a man who had trained Kalis when he was younger. A harsh Kavalian instructor but one who had taught him well and always seemed to take interest in what Kalis was doing.

“Kalis... what is going on?” He demanded.

“They were beating the woman's son in front of her Mata!” Kalis hissed angrily. “They were going to rape the younger female in front of her mother! My father told the woman they would not be touched if she cooperated with him.”

The Kavalian looked at the second soldier. “Is this true?” He snarled.

“They are Hadarian!” The man hissed back. “Prisoners! We should be able to use the younger wench as we see fit! There are many of us who wish to use her! And she struck Hendi Senior Sergeant!”

Mata's large hand snapped out and struck the Puma Bane soldier in the head savagely. “We do not disobey the orders of the Marshall or his son! No matter the reason!” He growled. “She is a tiny thing... her blow would have been no more than an insect hitting him!”

“She must know her place!” The man insisted.

“You would take her against the Marshall's wishes?” Mata growled.

“Why not? She is female and many of the others agree. She is ripe and she has a lush body for fucking! She could entertain many of us!”

Mata lifted his hand again to strike him but held back. “The Marshall would see you flayed for disobeying his orders. Is that worth some young Hadarian wench? Is it?”

The younger Puma Bane trooper finally shook his head. “No.”

“I will discipline you for this!” Mata snarled.

“No.” Kalis said quickly looking at him. “It is done Mata. But they are not to transport the female prisoner anywhere on the ship and they are not allowed to come near this room again. Is that clear?”

Mata bowed his head. “I will see to it Kalis.” He spoke.

“Allow them a few minutes to recover from this fool’s actions and then you may collect the mother to take to my father.” Kalis spoke the words even though they left a foul taste in his mouth. “I will be in my quarters.”

Mata watched him turn and head down the corridor. When Kalis was out of ear shot the other spoke. “Why do we listen to him Senior Master?” The man hissed with contempt dripping from his voice. “He is not the Marshall.”

Mata looked at him with angry eyes. “He is the Marshall’s son and he defeated you and your stupid friends with ease. He is not to be trifled with. I am the one who trained him and he would make short work of you and the others” Mata snapped. “He will be obeyed because of the rank he wears! Do not make the mistake of thinking him weak. He is not weak. And he will kill you if you press him too far.”

“Him? Kill me? Not likely.” The Puma Bane soldier said. “He is not Leruk!”

“No... he is not Leruk! And that is what makes him more dangerous than his brother. Who is now dead in case you have forgotten?” Mata hissed.

The man shook his head. “No.” He answered meekly.

“Return to the barracks and send the Watch Sergeant fool!” Mata hissed. “If the Marshall catches wind of this he will punish you regardless of his son’s orders to leave you be. You heard his orders... now go!”

“He is no Kavalian.” The man spoke before turning and heading down the corridor.

Mata turned to see Kalis’s back as he rounded the corner of the corridor heading for the lift and he nodded his head. “No. He is no Kavalian.” Mata said softly. “He is something... he is something different.”

Kalis entered his quarters and waited for the door to close before he released the long sigh he had been holding in. He stood with his back to the door for an enduring minute as the memories of what had just happened raced through his mind. The wolf blood within him had never come out like. When her scent had wafted around him, drawn deeply into his lungs so that it filled his head, Kalis had felt the incredible surge of anger at what the Puma Bane troops were doing. He wanted to slaughter them all, his entire body filling with the strength of the wolf inside him. His father had never told him anything of the wolf blood within him. He had never taught him how to shift his form, how to track with his nose or use the many different spectrums of vision he had when his wolf persona gripped him. What had occurred today had been instinctive to him, his mind reacting without thought.

Kalis liked that feeling. It was a feeling of power and control. A feeling of confidence and... honor.

He pushed away from the wall quickly and moved to his desk to unlock the Data Disc. He had already viewed it three times in its entirety, listening to his Uncle’s voice as he walked the corridors of the ship he had been on, telling him things he had never known. Part of the Hologram had also had him walking within some sort of modern village where he had seen Immortals in the background, as well as dragons and elves and other Lycavorians in great numbers. All of them working together, talking and even at one point laughing. True to the very purpose of the Union his Uncle had said. His Uncle Martin spoke with patience and even humor as he told him of many things Kalis had never imagined. It was mostly about the men and women in the Union. How they had built what they had. Towards the end his Uncle had spoken of his grandfather and grandmother and a longing had filled Kalis to meet her just as his brother had. Kalis had hoped for more from the data disc, but he knew you could only put so much information on one, no matter how sophisticated it was. And the one he had was exactly that Kalis knew. He had tried to take it apart to study it, but decided against it for fear of damaging it in some way and losing the program. The technology was far beyond him and would be far beyond any technician on *PUMA’S PRIDE*. Not that he would ever give it to any of them.

The last two times he had viewed it, he had fallen asleep with his Uncle’s voice in the background. A confident and warm voice, always interjecting humor whenever he could into his words. During that sleep he had dreams unlike any he had ever experienced. So vivid and lifelike. Places and people he had never met. Events he had never experienced. Images of so many of his cousins as they grew, laughing and smiling. So

many things that he had never experienced yet they were events he wanted to experience for himself. Seeing the Holoprogram had awakened the wolf within him and Kalis wanted more. He wanted to know so much more. To experience more than what he had now. The craving was growing stronger by the hour and he found himself no longer fighting it. Even knowing that it would be the same program again Kalis reached for the data disc wanting to watch it again. As he lifted it, the data disc beeped twice and activated on its own. Kalis looked at it wide eyed as he had not hit the button to begin the program. He stood there amazed as a different image of his Uncle suddenly appeared from the tiny holoprojector in the disc's front edge. This time he was dressed in a different set of clothes than Kalis had seen him in before, and he was standing before a monument of some kind.

“Hello Mandri.” Martin's voice spoke. ***“Have I surprised you again?”*** His image smiled and looked around. ***“The Data Disc you have is a unique device Kalis. It is not of Lycavorian design, nor High Coven. It is a technology that is not widely known and only my family and one or two friends have them. Primarily because we don't know how to build more just yet. Each Data Disc is encoded to its user. The one you now hold in your hand is the last of twenty-one of these devices and it is now yours. No one else will be able to access the information on it, or utilize the other options it can facilitate. That Data Disc you have is now encoded to you nephew. It is linked to your life signs. If it detects that your life has ended it will self destruct. Use it Kalis. Store your thoughts and wishes upon it. It will only activate by your touch and it will not work if there is someone else in the area with you unless you have activated and entered a biometric scan of that individual that you want to be able to access the information into the Disc. Something I don't believe you can do just yet. You know as well as I Kalis that a biometric scan is very thorough and takes several minutes to complete and it is my hope that after viewing the previous Holoprogram, you have at least decided to see for yourself what your Lycavorian blood gives you. The history it gives you.”*** Kalis saw him hold up an identical Data Disc. ***“Every one of these pads is linked to mine. Given the nature of the men and women who designed them, they are... powerful to say the least. Wherever I am at the moment, a message has been sent to me and I know that you have seen the previous holoprojection.”***

Kalis's eyes grew wide as he heard this and he looked at the Data Disc.

“It is I who has activated the additional programs within the disc's memory Kalis. As before... they will reveal no military information useful to your father or anyone for that matter. I am of the hope that now you would not share that information with others. At least until you have seen what I am showing you. These programs... they are meant only to give you knowledge Kalis.”

Kalis pulled his chair out quickly and sat down.

“As you can probably see I am not where I was previously. These programs I made weeks prior to whatever event led me to get this Disc to you. This is Thermopylae Kalis.” Martin waved his hand behind him and to the sides. ***“This is where your grandfather fought and died for the freedom of so many against the High Coven. His remains are interned here in the tomb behind me. I come here often when I want to focus and think of things. I thought it would be the best place to teach you. To give you the knowledge your father should have given you. Each Holoprogram that is now active within this disc is a separate training and history program. It is... using an expression I learned long ago... it is a poor man's tool. A way for me to give you at least the beginnings of your Lycavorian and Spartan history and possibly the future you could have. As I have told you, I do not wish to influence you Kalis. What I want is for you to see the other side of your blood. Only then will you be able to make a definitive decision on the path you wish your life to follow. I will not plead or beg for you to turn against your father or those you have come to call your people. That would be wrong in every way. I am going to give you the means to follow your instincts in what you feel you want for your future. Something they will not do.”***

Kalis watched him turn and face the monument in the background.

“I remember the first time I came here.” Martin spoke. *“It was nighttime and the moon was high in the sky. I was with my Melda Min. My first elven mate Dysea. It was the night I discovered who I really was Kalis. The night I discovered the true blood that runs in my veins. The blood that runs in your veins Mandri. Somehow your grandfather’s essence had been lying dormant here until I arrived. Over three thousand years since his death and it had remained within the circle of power of this place. He appeared to me that night Kalis. In front of those who were with me.”* Martin turned back to the vid drone that was recording the message. *“As crazy as it seems, I have been able to speak with him or an image of him if you will, in my dreams ever since. I wasn’t kidding when I told you that before. Not directly mind you, but in the form of a dream and whatever event that dream is depicting.”* Martin began walking now and Kalis waited patiently until his Uncle reached what appeared to be some sort of bleacher benches and sat down. Martin looked up as the vid drone shifted again.

“There are six programs available to you now Kalis. Each of them about three hours in length. The first two are simple history files. The history of our family and the history of Sparta and the Union. These were put together by a man who fought beside my father during that time. He is called The Guardian of our Line. The man who is responsible for raising me in many respects. For saving me. He will be the one conducting the classes since he is the one who knows the most about it. Assisting him will be another man who I have come to trust with my life. You probably know him already; he is your grandmother’s current mate, Fleet Admiral Riall. The second two programs are given by two of my wives and mates. Anja is Hadarian. And she is as fiery as the color of her hair. I turned her long ago and it is she who can tell you all you need to know about what you can do and cannot do as a child of two species. She will also be able to tell you many things of the species you call your people that you probably did not know. The fourth program is where you will meet my Melda Min. She is as supremely intelligent as she is beautiful and she is also an exceptionally skilled warrior. She can answer almost any question you may have in regards to the Union now. Our politics, our education system. Anything. The fifth program is much more recent... and it took a bit of arm twisting mind you after what took place on Hadaria... but that is by your cousin Androcles. He does not yet trust you Kalis and he thinks this is a bad idea but he will allow you to begin to view the world using your wolf blood. He will show you how to shift, how to run and turn and fight in wolf form and how to use many of your senses. He does this regardless of his feelings because of your blood Kalis.” Martin smiled at the vid drone.

“Androcles is... he is as passionate as he deadly. Like his brothers and sisters, he honors the blood in his veins with all that he does. The sixth program is by me and you will only discover what it is about when you complete the others. It will remain locked until you have completed each instruction block. Only then will you understand what I will tell you.” Martin sat back on the bleachers.

“The really cool thing about this particular Data Disc is that it is interactive.” Martin told him. *“It will allow you to ask questions within a specific set of parameters. I am doing this Kalis... I am doing this to give you all the pieces you need to make a decision on your future. You may hate me now... hate your cousin and all of us because that is what your Kavalian blood and your father no doubt tell you, but you deserve to have all the pieces of knowledge Kalis. All the parts your father did not tell you. That he did not let you experience. It is your choice nephew. It is my hope that you will make the best one. Do what you will now Kalis. I have given you the means to discover everything about who you are. And perhaps explain to you some of the things you have experienced but do not understand. What you do with them is now up to you. If you take nothing from these programs then know one thing. You are of my blood Kalis. Your grandfather’s blood. I will love you without question until the moment you give me reason not too. Then... then we will be enemies. And you have already seen how I deal with my enemies. I hope that does not turn out to be the case my boy. Learn all you can Kalis. Only then will you be who you are truly meant to be.”*

Kalis sat there as the holoimage froze at the end of the message. He looked down at the Data Disc in his hands and stared at the metallic surface for several long moments.

“What I could have?” Kalis whispered to the silence around him. “What I could have?”

Kalis lifted his thumb and without hesitation he stabbed down on the control board. “Activate first Program.” He spoke in a firm voice.

PLANET TWELVE ALPHA

It was primitive given the technology they had but without proper facilities and tools, they made the best of it. And it moved quite smoothly even without proper tools. Twenty-nine of the enormous beasts had been captured by the dragons, killed with quick but savage twists of powerful jaws and snapping of the necks. Torma, Isheeni, Arzoal and the others were careful to cull only the older looking beasts from the herds that dotted the plains below. The six week old hatchlings were able to participate to an extent as well, refining their flying skills as well as their hunting skills. None of them were able to actually make a kill, but Torma and the adult dragons allowed them to track and direct the hunt in little ways.

Iama and forty others were the ones assigned to process the animals and they were efficient and quick after the first two beasts were processed. Iama wasted nothing, even keeping the huge bones of the animals for the dragons to gnaw on and keep their teeth strong and sharp. This was something that did not escape Arzoal's notice and unbeknownst to Iama, she earned many dragon friends that day. For a Kavalian, Iama seemed very comfortable around the dragons. She did not go out of her way to pet them or go near them, but the inbred fear she had of dragons had been harnessed long ago on Kranek. While Iama and the others processed the meat and bones and skins, the remaining personnel packaged them with equal efficiency and within six hours the dragons were lifting off into the air to bring the cargo down to the loading area in the valley beneath them.

As darkness began to stretch across the sky and the land, a huge table was set up and Iama and the cooks from the *ARC ROYAL* began to put together a generous meal of fresh meat, vegetables, orange colored potatoes and spicy green salad. Within an hour, the men and women were sitting on the ground in twos and threes or larger and enjoying a night under moonlit skies and a delicious meal. Portable lights were set up all around the camp making it easier to move around among the many transferable soft metal tents that had been set up.

Iama was proud of herself at what they had accomplished. As she drew in a deep breath of fresh air she knew she had found her niche in this life. She had found a place where she was respected and treated well and above all else liked. The skills her mother had passed to her in cooking she thought useless at the time. Now they were paying huge dividends and carving her a place among those she now referred to as friends and comrades. As she sat at the table on the far end of the row of tables, her keen feline eyes detected the large dragon first as it swooped down from the security positions above and then she saw General Simpson and the boy Prince appear from the darkness walking casually. They appeared to be talking quietly between themselves and smiling as they did. Iama was surprised at this for she assumed the boy Prince would be the first to arrive to eat his fill. As he and Daniel Simpson stepped up to the table weighed down with food she realized they had just returned from their posts. Her light green eyes were able to watch him easily even as the portable lights cast an eerie glow across them. They had actually waited until everyone had eaten before even leaving their posts above.

He was tall Iama saw, much taller than her five foot four frame, and even under the Mark IV ArmorPly he wore she could tell he was fully developed and incredibly muscular. She heard him laugh at something Daniel Simpson said and he turned to toss a large chunk of meat at his dragon, which the beast easily snatched from the air and gulped down. As Iama watched he withdrew an odd looking knife from his right leg and stabbed another piece of meat. The way he twisted the blade and twirled it in his hand before stabbing the meat told Iama he was very skilled with it in some form of combat. Most soldiers she knew did not prefer knives because they were hard to master, but this boy Prince seemed to be equally as comfortable with a knife as he was with the cut down version of the P190A3 that dangled from quick release straps. Iama had to admit to herself, he was incredibly handsome. Even more handsome than many of the Lycavorians she had seen since joining them. Her ears detected soft laughter and she turned her head to see several Lycavorian and elf females watching him as well and giggling to themselves as they watched him. Iama shook her head in disgust. How could they desire someone who would no doubt have the mind of a child? When Kavalians finished their growth cycles they had to undergo months of strenuous mental conditioning to be able to catch up to their fully grown bodies. This boy Prince was only six or seven weeks old. He would not know the difference between anything Iama knew.

Iama turned her head once more when she heard Julie call out for Daniel from the COM tent. Her eyes went back to where they stood and she saw Daniel and him leave their plates on the table as they turned and began moving towards the tent. Iama saw an opportunity then to make additional points with the King. She knew that Daniel Simpson was widely regarded as the only brother of the King. His status among the Lycavorians and others was nearly equal to the King. Though they were not brothers by blood, she had learned that they had been together since both were a year old. They had seen and done things together, bled together and fought impossible odds together. They were brothers in the truest sense Iama found out and that is how Daniel Simpson was viewed. She rose from her table and moved to where he had left his plate of food, retrieving it. As an afterthought she also grabbed the plate of the boy Prince, seeing several thick slabs of meat but hardly any greens on it, and shaking her head at his unhealthy diet.

She quickly moved after Daniel Simpson towards the COM tent.

“...looking good here Skipper.” Julie spoke as they stood around the holoimage of Martin from the valley below them.

Danny stood next to Julie, Fedor sitting on the table to their right flank and scratching Dnom under his massive jaw with his head extending into the tent and his huge body outside the tent.

“We’re settling in for the night.” Danny told him. “Security is out and the perimeter is activated.”

“Portable Gun Platforms and sensors?” Martin asked.

Danny nodded. “One Avenger PGP on every corner and two inside the perimeter facing all avenues. I do know my job you know?”

“Well... excuse me for asking.” Martin quipped playfully. “You know... you’re getting ornery in your old age.”

Fedor chuckled from behind them and Danny snickered. “Careful oh great and ugly King Martin. You gave your son to me remember. I might just get him to spike your coffee in the morning. Give you the runs for a week.”

Martin laughed in the transmission. “Ignore him Fedor.” He said. “He’s always been angry that I am so much better looking.”

“Shiit!” Danny grunted. “That will be the day.”

“Ok...” Julie announced. “Enough testosterone!”

As it had been so long ago, Julie was the one who had always ended their banter back and forth. Even though she was a vampire clone, she still had that power over them it seemed and it was the main reason both Danny and Martin had welcomed her with open arms upon realizing it was truly her regardless of what Aikiro had done to her body.

“First two birds are away.” Martin told them as the tent flap opened and Iama entered carrying the plates.

She glanced quickly to the side of the huge dragon and saw Fedor sitting on the table. Her eyes rolled slightly as she saw him, though up close as she was now, she had to admit he was even more handsome than she first thought. She thrust out his plate to him with barely a pause. “You should eat more greens.” She stated sternly. “It will stimulate the growth of your mind.”

Fedor looked at her with wide eyes as he took the plate she had shoved at him. His nostrils flared wide as her sweet kiwi scent crashed against his senses and he watched her turn to his Uncle.

“You... you left your plate General.” She spoke in a much more friendly tone.

Danny looked at her and took the plate. “Thank you Iama.” He said.

“Iama... you did an outstanding job today.” Martin told her from the transmission.

Iama looked at him. “It was a team effort King Leonidas.” She told him honestly. “All of us deserve the praise.”

“Think we can do it again tomorrow?” Martin asked.

Iama smiled. “We’ll do better.”

“Science team find anything interesting Marty?” Julie asked.

“Last time I checked they were giddy over some samples they found in the soil of their site.” Martin answered. “Something about exponential growth or some shit like that. Gives me a frigging headache if you ask me.”

“Maybe a colony planet in the future?” Julie spoke now. “We could start marking any promising ones we find you know.”

Martin nodded. “Maybe.” He said. “If I know you Jules... you are already doing that.”

Julie grinned and held up her data pad. “By the numbers.” She replied waving the pad back and forth. “Makes me wonder how you and Danny ever got by when I went on vacation for a quarter century.”

Martin and Danny both laughed. Julie had begun referring to her death and reincarnation as a vampire as an extended vacation.

“We muddled through pretty good.” Danny told her. “But we got you back to pick up the slack now sister!”

Julie looked at him. “Fuck you Simpson. I ain’t carrying your tight asses any longer. Both of you are going to carry your weight!”

“Here! Here!” They heard Anja’s distinct voice in the background of Martin’s end of the transmission.

“Cute!” Martin said. “Danny... we’re going to close out for the night. I got two techs on duty monitoring any calls from the *ARC ROYAL*. Stay at Condition Two. We still don’t know enough about this world to let our hair down all the way.”

Danny nodded. “Will do.” He stated. “*Tur anzen fervon.*” (Be safe brother)

Martin nodded in return. “*Mornar forn.*” (And you)

Danny looked at Iama as Martin’s image faded. “You done good Iama.” He said. “Damn good.”

Iama smiled sweetly at him. “Thank you General.” She said. “All of us had a hand in it.” She said.

“This meat is really very good.” Fedor spoke from the table. “What spices did you use?”

Iama turned her head to look at him. Fedor’s dark brown orbs blinked several times at the look of near disdain that came across in her eyes. “You would not understand if I explained it to you.” Iama spoke almost harshly though only Julie caught the true inflection in her voice. “You should pay more attention to your training and less to your stomach.” Iama looked at Danny who had a surprised expression on his face. “I will see you in the morning General. We will be ready.”

Danny nodded his head. “Ok. Sure.” He said as Iama turned and glanced at Fedor once more before pushing past Dnom’s bulk out of the tent.

Fedor got up off the table and looked at him. “Uncle... did I do something wrong?” He asked.

Danny shrugged his shoulders and looked at him. “Beats the hell out of me.” He turned to Julie. “Know anything about that Jules?”

Julie shook her head as well. “Caught me by surprise too.”

“Wow!” Danny said. “Be careful where you tread boy, maybe you stepped on her tail when you were smaller.”

“I’ve never seen her before tonight.” Fedor complained even as her kiwi scent still drifted to his wolf nose and aroused his other senses.

“Don’t worry about it Fedor.” Julie told him. “She doesn’t know you.”

Fedor looked at the tent flap. “Treating me with contempt is not right though.” He said. “I have done nothing to her.”

Danny put his hand on his shoulder. “Don’t sweat it.” He said. “Grab some more chow and then get some rest. Tomorrow will be just as busy.”

Fedor turned to look at him and nodded his head. “I will be ready.” He said.

Danny nodded. “Good.”

Fedor looked at Dnom. “Let’s go brother.” He said. “I found a good spot for us this morning. And I want to say goodnight to my sister.”

[... would she say these things Fedor?] Eirene asked softly within their sole connection. Eirene was tightly wrapped within a sleeping Miseo’s powerful arms; her lithe body conformed to his and swallowed up

within his embrace. She had fallen asleep like this for the last three nights and to Eirene, nothing could ever compete with the sensations this caused within her.

[I do not know sister.] Fedor answered from the processing site above them. *[She spoke to me with contempt in her voice. Like I had wronged her in some way. Like I was a child!]*

[Did she smell good?] Eirene asked him playfully.

Eirene heard her twin chuckle softly within their private connection. Only Kdan and Dnom could access this connection if they wanted, though Eirene knew their father and mothers were strong enough within Mindvoice to intrude if they so desired.

[She smelled very good Eirene. Like sweet sugary kiwi. Her eyes are fascinating and her skin...] Fedor spoke with more truth than humor in his voice. Something his sister detected right away.

[Enough Fedor... I get the idea!] Eirene told him with a laugh. *[So you do find her attractive then?]*

[That does not make up for her attitude towards me Eirene.] He said. *[I did nothing to her to deserve that tone or her harsh words.]* Eirene heard Fedor sigh and dismiss it. *[My heart sings for your happiness sister.]* He told her. *[He is good to you?]*

[Carians Fedor... he is even bigger than our mothers say father is.] Eirene answered with no shame. She and Fedor were tied together so closely that it made no sense to try and hide from him anything. *[He was so gentle and caring. And when he kissed me I thought I would explode. I did explode!]*

Eirene could feel her twin brother's smile of love even from above her on the plateau. *[Finding the Father of our Hearts has brought us so much more than we would have ever had sister.]* Fedor told her. *[We must never let that be taken from us.]*

[We won't ferveron! We won't.] Eirene agreed. *[As Miseo affected me because of my fever, perhaps this Iama is affecting you in some way.]*

[Perhaps... I will ask father when we are alone but it doesn't matter right now. She is being an upaee!] He said. *[I did nothing wrong to her and we have taken the trait from our mother that makes us dislike arrogant people.]*

[Yes we have.] Eirene said.

[I will ignore her.] Fedor spoke. *[She knows nothing about me and to act in such a way is far more arrogance than I want to deal with. I do not wish to become angry.]*

[Then stay away from her ferveron.] Eirene said. *[You will find someone just like I have. It just may not... it may not happen so quickly.]* Fedor heard the sadness in her voice and he shook his head where he was.

Fedor hissed softly within their connection. *[Never regret what you have found because of me sister!]* He scolded her. *[You are right. I will find someone someday. But I will always love you first.]*

Eirene smiled dreamily in Miseo's arms and nodded. *[And I will love you first always.]* She answered. *[Sleep well in his arms my arande. I will see you tomorrow.]* Fedor spoke.

ARC ROYAL

Akemi read the last report for the day and signed off on it before getting to her feet. "How are our people?" She asked out loud.

The Tactical Officer turned from his post. "The King reported in ten minutes ago. They are tucked in tight for the night."

"Sensors are clean." Wayonn spoke as the second shift officer stood behind him waiting to relieve him.

Akemi smiled. "I like it when things go smoothly." She stated out loud. "Makes my job a lot easier."

Wayonn got to his feet and looked at her. "Considering Martin's propensity for finding trouble I have to agree Captain." He said.

Akemi moved up next to him. "Recalibrations are complete for both *ARC ROYAL* and *DAYRIDER*. We'll be able to make jump seven as soon as they are aboard. Which also makes me very happy."

Wayonn looked at her. "Worried?" He asked.

Akemi shook her head. "Not really I guess... but the King's sense of things is sometimes scary. Ben and Miranda both told me that if he feels something it is usually correct. He believes the Kavalians are following us. If he believes it, so do I. I don't like staying in one place too long knowing that."

"Then that makes you concerned?" Wayonn asked.

"We can outrun anything those Kavalian space scavengers have in their inventory and we won't have to get out and push." Akemi snarled proudly. "Even with *DAYRIDER* attached to us. And if they drop from LSD operation anywhere within sensor range we'll have plenty of time to react even if they do see us. Our sensor range is three times what theirs is."

"Then why feel so anxious?" Wayonn spoke.

Akemi looked at him. "I'm human *Val'istar*." She answered. "Being anxious is part of our nature. We react better when we are prepared for the worse. That has always been the case with us."

Wayonn tilted his head to the side. "Ah... I see." He spoke. He took her arm. "Well let's go to the Mess Lounge Captain. We can be anxious together. That is part of Pralor nature too you know."

Akemi grinned and allowed him to lead her off the bridge.

"...do you think we'll find *Val'istar*?" Akemi asked Wayonn as they sat at the table drinking two steaming mugs of Aricia's coffee.

Wayonn met her gaze. "To be honest I don't really know." He answered. "Muton's calculations are correct and Anja has medically confirmed he and all of his people have different Pralor genes within him. Some stronger than others like Muton and his sons. That matches with the memories he has as well as those the others possess. The *DAYRIDER* might not look like much, but they built it from memories passed to them from their ancestors. And then the way his memories and dreams led Muton to the map on Enurrua? There are only two species within the known universe that I know of, that can imprint their children with memories and images like that. Pralors and Lycavorians. I can only take so much coincidence before I have to start to believe."

Akemi nodded her head. "Same here."

"Those Pralors that left with Arzoal's dragons are probably dead by now." Wayonn spoke sadly. "I don't imagine we will find much of them left after so many years no matter how much I wish otherwise. It would be nice to know that Shiria and I are not the last connection to a lost species. Whether any of Muton's ancestors survive is up for grabs to be honest. The dragons... if they flourished... they would probably number in the ten thousands by now. Perhaps more. If they have survived, will they recognize Arzoal as the Elder Mother they left behind? An awful lot of questions is what I think we will find." Wayonn looked at her. "But I have known to be wrong in the past as well."

"How often did that happen?" Akemi asked him.

Wayonn chuckled. "Only twice." He said.

Akemi smiled. Her face became serious then. "Tell me of the Scourge *Val'istar*?" She asked.

Wayonn looked at her surprised that she knew of them. "How did you...?"

Akemi smiled once more. "I can tell you the biggest reason why the military of the Union would follow the King to hell and back *Val'istar*. They trust him. He doesn't keep information from those who he knows needs that information. He gave me a pad when he first came on board. Not a whole lot of information mind you, I think he was holding a lot back that he has seen in his mind, but it was enough to nearly make me wet my panties. He told me you would have more."

Wayonn nodded slowly. "They are not a kind species Akemi." He said softly. "They can not be reasoned with. They can not be communicated with. They can not be trusted. I watched to many civilian settlements burn under their weapons during our first war to believe that they even have a soul. They exist now only to conquer and kill anything or anyone with Pralor blood or those who have helped them."

"They never took prisoners?" Akemi asked.

Wayonn shook his head. "No... they took prisoners." He answered. "Only they weren't prisoners for very long. Those they did not feed on they turned into warrior vermin. Their basic soldiers. The cannon fodder as Martin calls them. They altered them genetically to become like them in many ways. It was not a pretty sight. Sumar and I were leading a small unit at one point. We stumbled upon one of their conversion chambers. I was

sick for a full day at what I saw and I could not eat for two more.” Wayonn leaned across the table and set his mug down. “Martin is right. It is time I began to share what knowledge I have. I will tell you all I know Akemi, what Martin and Andro already know, but promise me that you will tell no one until the time is right. When it becomes time to reveal it to everyone, then you may tell anyone who needs to know. Until then... it is better if the whole did not know.”

Akemi nodded her head instantly. “Done.” She said.

Wayonn took a deep breath. “It was our fault.” He told her. “Xaxon’s fault. In reality, the Scourge are of our own creation. Xaxon just did not know the entire scope of the species he wantonly began to slaughter one day. It began on...”

The Sensor Watch Officer was leaning back in his chair sipping a mug of tea. It was the only comfort that Akemi allowed while on duty. She demanded perfection from her crew and for the most part she received it. As with all the *ARIZONA*-Class ships, most of the crews were hand picked by the Captains, and just being part of a crew of one of these ships was an honor. An honor he would preserve for the sake of his name and his family. The crew on the third watch would banter back and forth, but all of them maintained constant attention to their duty stations. This constant attention is what allowed him to see the row of small white blips on the sensor screen that was monitoring the ground team. He blinked and leaned forward, sitting up in his chair to insure he hadn’t seen a glitch. On the next sweep they were still there and moving. He set his tea aside and adjusted his sensor array slightly to bring the contacts into focus more clearly. His eyes grew wider when he realized that the contacts were in open water and moving towards the position of their King and the ground crew. He didn’t hesitate for a moment.

“Contacts!” He barked out causing all heads on the bridge to turn towards him. “I have unknown surface contacts! Bearing three six one and closing on the Ground Team’s position!”

The Third Watch Duty Officer was beside him in five steps. “Confirm!” He snapped.

The SWO nodded his head. “Already confirmed sir.” He spoke confidently. “Thirteen surface contacts. Now bearing three six two. Range fourteen clicks from the Ground Team. They are on the water.”

“On the water?” The DO asked.

“Coming in from the southern islands.” The SWO answered.

“Tactical! Immediate realignment of the lateral array to sensor coordinates. Lock onto the contacts and show me what we got!” He barked. “Put it up on the main monitor!”

“Shifting array!” The Tactical Officer barked. “Locked. Magnifying!”

The Nodon JCN Type 71 Tactical Sensor Array was the most powerful the *ARIZONA*-Class carried, the most powerful in the entire fleet to be exact and it could cut through pea soup like clouds on its worst day. Clouds was not something they had to worry about however as the night on the northern continent was clear and star filled. As the DO turned to the main screen he saw the picture of the ocean focus and zoom three times to align on the thirteen contacts. His eyes grew a little wider.

“Water ships!” He hissed.

“Confirmed.” The Tactical Officer echoed. “Thirteen water ships. Estimate sixty meters in length for each ship. Target closing speed is one hundred and fifty KPH constant. Current speed and course will put them on land only two kilometers from the Processing site. On the beach to the east!”

“Give me a picture of the deck!” The DO barked. “Set Condition One and get the Captain and Wayonn up here now!”

The screen zoomed once more and they could all make out the figures standing on the deck of the ship.

“Not good!” The Tactical Officer snapped. “Not good! Looks like about thirty to forty indigenous personnel on the deck of each ship. They appear reptilian in nature as per the Op order. They are jammed pretty tight and it’s hard for the sensors to distinguish! They... Commander they appear to be armed!”

“Fuck me!” The man snarled. “This isn’t good! Have the spare *KADENS* spool their engines and prepare for immediate Evac! Do it now!”

Akemi burst onto the bridge three minutes later still pulling her uniform top on, Wayonn just behind her. “Report!” She barked.

“Thirteen surface contacts! On the water, bearing three six three! Closing on the King’s position! Range twelve point two clicks! Speed one fifty-eight steady!” The *ARC ROYAL’S* Tactical Officer called out.

“They appear to be part of the indigenous population from the southern continent.” Akemi’s XO told her as she settled into the command chair. “Approximately forty per contact. They appear to be on some sort of water ship.”

“Doing over a hundred KPH?” Akemi snapped. “Wayonn... I thought this was supposed to be a Pre-LSD drive society?”

Wayonn stood next to the sensor operator now and he turned to look at her and nod. “My preliminary scans indicated no Plasma or Fusion Matter power sources. They would need these for space flight!”

“Power source of the Water Ships appears to be some sort of fuel induced turbine.” The XO said. “Wayonn would not have detected it without a Gamma Spectrum scan. Our gear isn’t tuned to detect power sources we haven’t used in over ten thousand years Captain.”

“Fuck!” Akemi exclaimed loudly. “Wayonn get on the other sensor station! Reconfigure the operational parameters and give me detail! How the hell did we pick them up in the first place?”

“I was utilizing a lateral sweep of the ocean around the continent Captain.” The Sensor Operator replied. “Adjusted for surface temperature variants. It detected the ships because they were an abnormal heat signature with no base variables!”

“I have the *KADENS* spooling for an evac.” Her XO said. “We can launch in another three minutes.”

“How soon before they reach land?” Akemi asked.

“At current velocity they will reach landfall in seven minutes. Five hundred meters from the processing camp and two hundred forty meters below them.”

“Shit! Get me base camp! Wake the King up if you have to!” She snarled. “And tell the *KADEN* crews to fucking hump it!”

PLANET TWELVE ALPHA

JANUARY 31, 2575

Fedor was leaning up against Dnom’s broad chest, his Bonded Brother’s neck and head resting on the ground beside him, one of his large talons draped across Fedor’s lower leg. His long tail was curled alongside his body. They had chosen to forgo setting up a tent because of the clear skies and fresh air. Fedor wouldn’t know until later that what he and Dnom were doing was something his brother and Elynth often did, and it was a minor twist of information that Andro had passed to them.

Dnom’s eyes popped open when he detected movement and he saw Danny moving towards them with a purpose. A simple nudge of his talon against Fedor’s leg and Fedor came fully awake and looked up as his Uncle appeared beside them.

“Uncle?” Fedor asked.

“Up and at them Fedor.” Danny spoke. “We got company. Bring your toys too. You may need them.”

Fedor was moving instantly as his Uncle Daniel turned to head back to the COM tent. He adjusted his MARK IV ArmorPly and secured his combat vest. He yanked a belt from the large duffle bag next to where he and Dnom sat and then pulled it over his shoulder and chest like a bandolier before snatching up the most recent P190A4 from atop his gear. The Lycavorian A4 was very similar to its P190A3 predecessor, but it was a cut down version, and fully four inches shorter than the original. It also kept in line with his father’s mentality about stealth, as it had a integral silencer built into the barrel. It was a weapon that had been specifically manufactured for the *Durcumusaan* and the Omega Teams his *MedwanGai* had told him. Light, accurate, and providing a powerful punch with it’s Kavalian based 12.7mm caseless round. The war with the Evolli had brought to light the Kavalian 12.7mm kinetic round and Martin had quickly seen the excellent stopping power and accuracy it provided. He ordered it adopted for all the covert units within the Union.

Fedor didn't need to tell Dnom to follow him as he turned and bolted for the COM tent. He covered the distance in seconds, pushing aside the tent flap to see his Uncle, Julie and the Kavalian female Iama already inside. The image of his *MedwanGai* was once more active within the holoprojector. "... where they came from or how they got so close but we got about four minutes to get ready." Martin said.

"If Wayonn was only scanning for modern power sources Marty, it's no wonder he missed them." Julie said.

Martin nodded. "I know. The *ARC ROYAL* is retuning her sensors to detect non-Plasma and fusion based power sources, but that ain't our problem right now."

"Where are they going to land?" Danny asked.

"About two hundred meters west of you Dan, down on the beach no doubt." Martin told him. "I want you to pull your people in tight Danny. Take Fedor with you and eyeball them from the ridge. Use Dnom if you have to since it is still relatively dark."

"Hostile?" Danny asked.

Martin shrugged and shook his head. "I don't know... but there's a whole lot of them and they appear to be armed with older projectile weapons according to Wayonn." He replied. "That doesn't imply friendly in my book."

"Mine either." Danny said.

"We are half a click east of you in the valley. The backup *KADENS* are inbound for a fast Evac if necessary." Martin told him. "Looking at the terrain... they'll have to go right through your camp to get to us."

"Oh... ain't that convenient." Danny remarked sarcastically. "I'm always the one out in front protecting your fat ass!"

"You're a bigger target!" Martin exclaimed.

"I should go with you Daniel!" Iama spoke quickly.

"There's no need for that." Fedor spoke calmly.

Iama's eyes flashed angrily at him. "I was not talking to you!" She snapped. "I have been trained in close combat! I have seen combat! I am the better choice!"

Fedor met her eyes. "I wouldn't be too sure." He said. "I'm pretty good."

"You are a boy in the body of a man!" Iama barked causing even Martin to take notice of her reaction to Fedor.

Fedor's eyes darkened at the obvious insult and he glared at her moving a step closer to her. "You don't..."

"Iama you stay with Julie and help to get the others ready here." Danny ended the heated discussion before it got out of hand. "We don't have time to argue! Fedor goes with me. Jules... break out the old faithful backups and get a perimeter established."

Julie nodded. "Will do."

Danny looked at the monitor. "If their hostile *fervon*?" He asked.

"That's why Tony and Kenny are on their way up to you." Martin told him. "With a few surprises."

"Nice." Danny spoke.

Martin's expression didn't change. "Do not engage unless they engage us Danny. If they do... all bets are off and we beat feet, but I ain't losing people over the fact we don't know them right now. They want to make nice... fine. But we lose no one."

"Understood." Danny said. "Be ready if we come barreling down the hill brother."

Martin nodded. "We will." Martin looked at Fedor. "*Keto*... listen to your Uncle and stay close to Dnom. That is your strength."

Fedor nodded. "I will *MedwanGai*." He spoke. "Eirene?" He asked.

"She's helping your mothers establish a secondary perimeter here. Kdan is never more than ten meters from her, and neither is Miseo. She will be fine. You and those with you will be in the most danger if this goes to shit."

Fedor nodded. "We will be fine."

"Marty... we're out of here." Danny spoke once more.

Martin nodded. "Watch your six."

“Always.” Danny answered taking Fedor’s arm and exiting the tent quickly. Martin’s image faded from view on the monitor and Iama looked at Julie.

“I should be the one going with him.” She stated. “The boy Prince will be of no use to him Julie!” She stated.

“I wouldn’t take bets on that.” Julie said.

“He may look like a man, but his mind is like a child! He has not grown anywhere near enough!” Iama insisted.

Julie shook her head. “Not our problem now. Let’s get that perimeter set up.”

Dnom rolled over in the warm air and cut silently back inland. He had stayed at five hundred feet as he passed over the Water ships as they began to land on the beach below. This allowed him ample time to view the figures below easily with his dragon eyes.

I count over four hundred Fedor. Dnom spoke as he turned once more and shot over the tree below him where he knew Danny and his Bonded Brother rested. *All of them armed. They are exiting the Water Ships with speed. As if they have done this before.*

What else brother? Fedor asked.

They are reptilian in nature as the reports said... but there is something different about them.

What do you mean different Dnom? Danny asked as he was listening in on Dnom and Fedor’s Mindvoice connection.

Their skin appears scaly like my own, but it is also similar to your skin Daniel. Dnom answered.

Similar to ours in what way? Danny asked confused.

Supple and not as rigid as normal scales would be. Darker in color as well. They have clawed hands and feet, and they move with a hunch in their gait, but it seems natural to them. Dnom explained.

Danny looked at Fedor. “Scales. Hunch in their gait. Dark color. What does that equate to you?” He asked.

Fedor met his eyes. “A species built for conflict.”

Danny nodded. “My thoughts too.”

Fedor looked skyward. *Dnom... land a hundred meters behind us and wait. The sun is coming up brother and I don’t want you caught in the sky above.*

I will be waiting. Dnom answered.

Fedor lifted his A4 and sighted down the scope towards the beach. Their position did not give them a clear view of the beach, only the thin treeline surrounding it. Fedor could make out half a dozen large vessels that were stationary just off the shore and flashes of movement in the water.

“Left Fedor. Forty-five degrees from that double trunk tree.” Danny’s voice whispered softly and Fedor shifted his scope.

Fedor’s heart began beating much faster than normal as he saw what his Uncle was looking at. “*Sibfla!*” His hissed softly.

“Ugly fuckers aren’t they.” Danny spoke. “And watch your language boy.”

Fedor lifted his eyes and looked at his Uncle with a sarcastic gaze before bringing his eye back to his scope. “Sharp boney protrusions from their heads. Bone plate covering half their face. Large eyes.”

“Yep. Ugly.” Danny spoke. “He’s the leader.”

Fedor focused his scope on the alien who appeared to be doing all the shouting and giving orders. His arm was pointing in different directions and then dozens of the creatures would sprint off.

“He’s sending flanking teams Uncle.” Fedor spoke quickly.

Danny nodded. “He sure is.” Dan answered. “And you don’t send flanking teams unless you plan on attacking a target.”

“That is the general disposition of forces.” Fedor spoke.

Danny glanced at Fedor. “Stay calm boy. Remember your training. And keep your psychic shield with Dnom in place. Anything happens to you and your father and mothers will cook my *nor* if I live.”

“I... I am frightened Uncle.” Fedor stammered looking at him.

Danny nodded. "Good. Me too. It will keep us sharp. Just remember who you are. Let the fear flow through you but not control you Fedor. Just like your father and I taught you and your sister. You get into a bind... you send Dnom to the sky, you shift and haul ass!" Fedor took a deep breath and nodded his head.

"I won't leave you." Fedor said.

"Leave me?" Danny spoke. "*Sibfla* boy... I'll be right behind you!" Fedor couldn't help but grin. "Just imagine you are chasing Iama's ass. That will get your blood pumping. She's got a tight little ass."

"She is an *upaee*!" Fedor spat.

Danny nodded and sighted through his scope. "Yep! But she is an *upaee* with a fine ass! Makes you wonder what you could do with that tail of hers too."

"Bah!" Fedor spat softly. "She would probably still be calling me man child or boy prince or something like that! I don't know what I did to piss her off, but she is beginning to annoy me something fierce."

Danny looked at him. "Yep! That's how it starts!"

"How what starts?" Fedor asked.

Danny shifted on the ground. "Uh-oh... here they come." He spoke.

Fedor looked at him. "Uncle... we still don't know if they are hostile. Perhaps they think we are the enemy."

Danny looked at him. "Well shit... you want to stand up and fucking ask them?" Fedor met his eyes for a moment and then rose to his feet exposing himself. "Fuck! Fedor what...?"

Fedor drew his K12 from the holster on his right thigh and fired a single shot into the air, the echo of the discharge reverberating through the trees and hills. He made sure his weapon was pointed skyward so as to appear as less threatening as possible. The single shot had the desired effect as all of the creatures that they could see, including the leader, came to abrupt halts and dove for whatever cover they could find. Fedor stepped higher on the log.

"We are not hostile!" He bellowed down the ridge, his keen wolf eyes seeing many heads looking in his direction. "We are Spartans from the Lycavorian Union and we come in peace!"

Danny looked at him from the ground. "We come in peace? What the *nubous* is that?" He exclaimed.

Fedor looked down at him. "I saw it in an old Earth movie that Eirene and I watched last week. It was quite good." Fedor spoke. "The villain speaks these words just before he kills his victims."

"Christ... Marty's got to keep you away from the Vid Room." Danny gasped.

They could hear shouting coming from below and Danny peeked around the side of the log he was still hidden behind. "What are they doing?" He asked.

Fedor shook his head. "It appears my presence has confused them I think." He answered. "They..."

A single booming shot rang out and Fedor was thrown backwards.

"Fuck!" Danny nearly screamed as he scrambled to where Fedor now rolled onto his back his eyes wide. "Fedor! Fedor!"

Fedor looked at his Uncle grimacing in pain. "Oh... Uncle Daniel." He hissed. "That... that hurt!"

Danny looked at him wide eyed and then watched as he moved his hands away from the impact point in his upper chest. Danny watched as the single rifle slug fell away from the outside of the Mark IV ArmorPly leaving a medium sized dent in the armor. His heart nearly fell from relief. "No shit it hurt! You just got shot! Have you lost your *nubous* mind?" Danny barked. "What the fuck was that?"

Fedor began to push himself up. "I think... I think I have just confirmed their intention." He said reaching for his A4.

"No shit! What was your first clue?" Danny exclaimed.

Fedor looked up at him with a smile but that smile faded quickly when he saw one of the creatures rise above the log they had been using for cover, the strange looking weapon leveled at his Uncle's back.

Danny saw Fedor's eyes change instantly, saw his whole body tense and felt his scent spike off the charts. He didn't have time to react as Fedor grabbed his Uncle's shoulder pulling him to the side, his other hand bringing the A4 up in the same motion. Three shots rang out and Danny turned just in time to see the creature's skull explode into a mass of red and gray as all three rounds impacted his oversized head and punched right through the boney plate. Danny's would be the first of two lives Fedor Leonidas would save this day, and it would begin to build him a reputation of respect and honor that would carry him well into the future. It would also show one individual that perhaps he was not a child after all.

“Shit!” Danny barked as he rolled away and scrambled back to the log, Fedor beside him. He risked a glance over the log this time and could see the dozens of creatures dashing among the trees below. “They’re on the move!” He snapped.

“Father did say not to engage them until they engage us.” Fedor spoke. “I am reasonably sure we have established their intent and they did shoot me.”

“Fucking smart ass!” Danny spat. “No one is going to doubt whose son you are after this! Let’s stir the nest shall we?”

Both Danny and Fedor thrust their bodies around either end of the log and began to unload carefully placed shots downrange. The scopes on their weapons provided a Virtual Aim Assist and bodies began to fly. Martin’s voice began to echo in their ear pieces demanding a report and Fedor tapped his jaw quickly.

“*MedwanGai*... we are rather busy at the moment!” He snapped as he took another of the creatures through the chest and watched as his body flew back from the force of the 12.7mm kinetic round.

“I ordered not to engage unless they fired on us boy!” Martin shouted from his location.

“They did fire on us.” Fedor spoke. “I have the dent in my armor to prove it!”

“What? You’re hit?” Martin screamed. “Danny?”

Danny rolled to the side behind the log. “Yeah! Yeah! We come in fucking peace!” He shouted. “Not now! We’re busy!” Danny ended the conversation and looked at Fedor. “Time to go boy!”

“I agree.” Fedor stated.

“Get to chasing that ass!” Danny barked. “I’m right behind you!”

Fedor didn’t hesitate and in a silver/white flash of light the large dark blond wolf took his place. Almost three feet at the shoulder, Fedor was impressive in wolf form and his dark eyes watched as his Uncle shifted into an even larger black/brown colored wolf. Then the two wolves were kicking up dirt and leaves as their large paws propelled them with incredible speed back towards their encampment.

Iama turned from where she was positioned behind the large crates as Julie came up to her. “What is wrong?” She gasped. “What was that shooting?”

Julie shook her head. “They fired on Danny and Fedor!” She gasped. “Fedor was hit! I don’t know after that!”

“I told you!” Iama barked. “I should have gone with him! I...” Iama stopped talking as the large shadow swooped over them and Dnom settled to the ground in a rustle of air and dirt. She turned her head to look in the direction he had come from and her eyes grew wide when she saw the huge body of the dark blond furred wolf leaping directly at her over the crate. Three steps behind him was the even larger black/brown colored wolf following suit. Iama ducked down as Fedor leaped over the top of her and the crates and she whirled around to watch as they both skidded to stops and then two silver/white flashes of light later Danny and Fedor returned to their normal forms.

Julie rose to her feet. “Danny!”

“Start them out of here Jules!” Danny barked. “They’re flanking us on two sides and they got us outnumbered four to one!”

“What happened?” Julie demanded.

“We tried to communicate with them Jules and apparently they didn’t appreciate Fedor’s special introduction.” Danny spoke with a small amount of humor. Iama couldn’t believe his tone of voice. He acted as if nothing was happening around them. “They popped him in the chest.”

Julie looked at Fedor as he checked his weapon. “You’re hit?” She barked.

Fedor pointed at his armor. “It did not penetrate my armor.” He spoke. “I am fine. We need to leave Aunt Julie! Now!”

Julie glanced at Danny when she heard that command tone in Fedor’s voice and a look of acknowledgement and wisdom passed between her and Danny. A look that told her Fedor was everything Marty was in the leadership department.

Iama was still in shock at what she had seen. The boy prince was very large in wolf form, larger than most Lycavorians she had seen on the *ARC ROYAL* with the exception of the King himself and the transition

between his forms had happened much more quickly than she had seen the others do. She glared at him however and finally rose to her feet and moved up to them. "I told you I should have come with you!" She popped at Danny.

"And you would be dead!" Fedor barked at her. "You have no armor!"

"They would not have shot at me fool boy!" Iama snapped.

"This is no time for arguments!" Danny snarled. "We have three minutes tops before they are on us! Get everyone moving Iama! Head them to the Loading Site! Go!"

Iama glared Fedor for a moment longer and then turned to run across the camp towards the primary defensive outpost.

"I will pack the COM gear and load it on Dnom!" Fedor spoke quickly before moving off.

Julie looked at Danny then stepping up to him. "Danny?" She asked softly.

Danny looked at her after changing his magazine. "He saved my bacon Jules." He told her seriously. "Popped one of those fuckers in the head just as he was about to shoot me in the back. Three round burst center mass of the ugly fucker's head. He didn't hesitate or blink."

Julie's eyes turned to watch Fedor's back as he moved towards the COM tent. "Another Leonidas son. Another leader." She said softly.

"Fucking A." Danny said. "We're gonna need them too." He looked around. "Tony here yet?"

Julie nodded. "Set up at the Primary." She said.

"These fuckers are fast and shifty Jules." Danny said as they began walking quickly. "If they get in the perimeter they'll be all over us. Make sure we get the crew out before they get here."

Julie nodded. "On it." She said before taking off at a sprint.

Danny tapped his jaw. "Marty?" He spoke.

"Danny... what the fuck is going on *fervon*?" He barked immediately.

"I'm sending our people to you Marty." Danny told him as he walked quickly toward the primary defensive position. "They'll be moving fast. These things are fast and they ain't happy to see us. Fedor took one in the chest but his armor saved him. Then he turned around and saved my life *fervon*. He's loading the COM gear. We're coming at ya fast and heavy brother."

"We'll be ready." Martin told him and Danny could hear the relief in his voice that they were ok.

LOAD SITE

"*SHOT!*" For'mya screamed as she looked up from the co-pilot's seat and listened to Martin in her implant.

"He's not hurt!" Martin exclaimed. "They're moving here now!"

"*MedwanGai*... he was shot!" Eirene protested as they were all connected into the same channel. "We must go to him!"

"They are evacuating now Eirene!" Martin hissed. "They'll be here in minutes."

"No! I must got to him!" Eirene insisted.

"Eirene don't... Eirene!"

For'mya glanced out of her cockpit side window frantically and saw her golden haired daughter motioning furiously with her arm. She saw a flash of light green scales and then Kdan was tearing in front of the cockpit lifting into the air. In a silver/white flash of light Eirene shifted into a golden furred female wolf and was speeding off into the timber, Miseo easily keeping pace with her using his inbred feline speed.

"Oh... that ain't good!" Endith stated as she watched what For'mya saw.

"*Nubou!*" For'mya roared as she tore at her helmet. "Endy..."

"Go!" Endith snapped waving her hand. "Go!"

For'mya Leonidas was a pilot by trade, one of the finest in the Union, but what few people knew about her was that she had become an exceptionally skilled fighter as well. Daily sessions with Aricia and Isabella and Dysea had honed her combat skills to razor sharpness. Hours upon hours of instruction by Martin and Aricia had also turned her, Anja and Dysea into true Alpha female wolves. As graceful as they were beautiful in wolf

form and just as lethal. Before hitting the end of the ramp For'mya had shifted into the large female wolf and was sprinting after her daughter and Miseo into the timber.

Martin reached the end of the ramp just as her tail vanished into the timber. He had sprinted to the *STRIKER* in order to stop her from doing what she had just done and he shook his head as he skidded to a halt.

“Shit!” He swore long and loud. “No one fucking listens to me anymore!” He tapped his jaw. “Pablo!” “Here Skipper!”

“Up top Pablo! Unpack and launch G.O.D!” Martin snapped.

“Thirty seconds boss!” Pablo replied and Martin saw his form dash for the *STRIKER* from the side and disappear into the interior.

“You kill anything that gets close to my family Pablo! You hear me?” Martin snarled.

“Consider it done Skipper!” Pablo answered.

Torma! Isheeni! Get airborne and down to the beach! Make sure more of these assholes aren't coming and take out those ships. Aricia, Aurith go after For'mya! Arzoal, Iriral, Helen and Dysea... get the other adolescents on the KADENS now! Martin fired off the orders rapid fire. And god damn it... everyone better start listening to me or I'm going to become real agitated!

You're always agitated lover! Anja quipped.

You... just get the damn people loaded Red! Martin hissed. *We are not set up to engage in an all out battle with a bunch of reptilian looking goons!*

I'm on it! Anja answered without a sarcastic comment, realizing by his tone that Martin was very upset about not being able to engage in the fight. She knew he hated to be out of the action.

PROCESSING SITE

“Dnom go!” Fedor shouted as he secured the final duffle of gear on Dnom’s back. “Drop it at the Load site and get back here quickly!”

Dnom trumpeted out his answer and lifted off into the sky.

Fedor turned and began sprinting for the primary defensive position. He leaped and careened over the stacked crates and landed next to his Uncle on the ground. Julie squatted next to Kenny with Iama beside Tony and looking over the top of the crates with wide eyes. “COM gear is secure and gone.” He spoke.

Daniel nodded his head. “Good job *Mandri*.” He stated. He looked at the ground and Tony reached over and slapped Fedor on the shoulder.

“You done good boy.” Tony spoke.

Iama looked back quickly. “If not for him we would not be in this position!” She snapped at Fedor with angry green eyes.

Danny stabbed his knife into the ground. “Ok... enough! They’re coming from both flanks and head on. Tony... you and Iama got left flank; Kenny and Julie right flank. Fedor and I will cover the front. They go down pretty easy but they’re fast as shit. Once they get close enough to our perimeter the right flank will have to close with the main body because of the cliff. That’s when we cut loose with the PGPs! We need to give our people at least five minutes to load out and extract.”

“They could go around us to the west!” Iama spoke quickly.

Fedor shook his head looking upward in the direction she had indicated. “The ridge to the northwest impedes their movement.” He spoke. “They do not seem to like the thick timber for they are avoiding it in their drive towards us.”

Danny nodded. “And the east is a straight drop of two hundred meters or more.” He said. “No... Fedor is right... they’re going to come straight at us with tight flanks.”

“How many did you tag?” Kenny asked.

Danny shook his head. “Twenty... maybe twenty-five.” He spoke. “We...” Danny looked up as he saw the flash of movement coming from the loading area and suddenly Eirene’s wolf form came into view, Miseo keeping pace with her. Just behind them Danny saw For'mya and Aricia in their wolf forms and then the three

women were shifting their forms and skidding to halts behind the defensive crates, Miseo landing smoothly next to Julie. Danny grinned at them. "Welcome to the party!" He exclaimed.

For'mya and Eirene ignored him as they moved directly to where Fedor sat.

"Fedor?" Eirene gasped.

"I am fine sister!" Fedor complained. "You and mother should not have come. It is not safe!"

"You were shot!" For'mya exclaimed as her hands began to roam over his upper body and finding the dent in his Mark IV easily. The material was already beginning to return to its original shape. "Don't tell me about safe!"

Fedor took her hands. "Mother! I am fine!" He said.

"I told you to be careful!" For'mya snapped at him.

Iama snorted. "See?" She hissed. "It is the act of a child to not listen to his mother!"

Aricia's azure eyes went to Iama and her pureblood nose kicked in. Her eyes grew slightly wider as she realized that Iama's scent reeked of attraction to Fedor. She glanced at Danny. "Daniel?"

Danny nodded. "Yeah... I know. Not something we can worry about now though."

Aricia tilted her head slightly. "Kdan and Aurith say they are moving closer. A hundred meters. They can burn the trees."

Danny nodded. "Do it!" He hissed. "Fedor... take your sister, Miseo and your mother with you and jump to the next position. Aricia will cover the front with me."

For'mya looked at him. "Daniel... how many?" She asked.

Dan met her gaze. "Too many for us to do anything other than hold for two minutes and then run like hell! Two minutes people. Then haul ass!"

The strange screams began as two Firespitter dragons swept in over the western side of the position and cut loose with searing streams of flame directly into the thin timber and setting dozens of the creatures ablaze instantly.

Whatever they were, they came at them with little regard for their own lives. The PGPs had a store of three hundred rounds per gun and the 20mm chain guns could fire it all in a matter of seconds. This they did, in short controlled bursts that chopped the creatures into hamburger. When the guns ran dry nearly two hundred of them lay scattered about the treeline. The creatures burst over the top of their fallen brethren then, horrible screeches filling the air as they began to rush the defensive positions.

"They are insane!" Miseo screamed as he let loose with a long sustained burst that brought four of the creatures down.

"*Thirty seconds!*" Danny's voice filled their implants.

Eirene reloaded her K14 KM and began firing around the side of the crate, picking her shots like her mother. "They are almost on us!" She shouted.

Fedor dropped back down after emptying his A4 and ejected his magazine, ramming home a new one. He glanced at his mother. "*Medwaw!*" He barked watching as she slammed another magazine into the spare A4 that Julie had tossed her.

"Down to one mag!" For'mya announced before rising slightly and beginning to pick her shots with relentless fortitude. Anger gripped For'mya, for these creatures had shot her son, no matter that he was unhurt.

Fedor turned and was about to lift over the crates when he saw one of the creatures make an unbelievable jump and land on the crate just above Julie who was reloading. His eyes grew wide as the creature let out an unearthly screech and the boney plate covering half its face split open to reveal rows of tiny sharp teeth and what could only be a tongue of some sort that was easily fifteen or sixteen inches long. The creature reached down and grabbed Julie by her head, that tongue snapping out to graze her cheek and trying to force its way into her mouth. Julie's eyes went wide, but she was a seasoned soldier in every respect.

"Fuck!" She screamed reaching up and grabbing the tongue like appendage and ripping her hands downward.

The appendage gave way easily enough and tore free from its roots showering both her and Danny with sickly looking pasty white blood. As the creature roared out its agony Danny lifted his A4 and shot it four times in the head flipping the creature back off the crate and three meters back.

“Fuck this! That thing just tried to tongue fuck me!” Julie screamed. “Let’s get the fuck out of here!”

“They are around us!” Tony roared as he laid down a withering field of fire with the Mini-Gatlin Laser. “They are breaking for our people!”

“There’s too many!” Miseo echoed.

“Pull back!” Danny shouted. “Move! They’ll catch the last of our people if we don’t go now! Evac! Evac!”

Fedor looked at his mother. “Mother go! Eirene too!” He barked. “Miseo and I will cover you as we follow!”

“Fedor you...” For'mya began to protest.

“Mother... go now!” Fedor screamed at her his dark eyes determined and unquestioning.

Eirene could feel the resolve of her brother and the command tone of his voice and she quickly dashed to where their mother squatted. She grabbed For'mya’s hand knowing her brother would not fail and knowing that For'mya had heard the inflection of his voice as well. His confidence filled her as well and she yanked on her mother’s arm. “*Medwaw* we must go! Now!”

For'mya met her eyes and saw the concern for her and she swore to herself. She should have seen it coming weeks ago in the way they acted with her. They would not leave her in danger and they would face down any enemy in order to protect her. For'mya saw it in Eirene’s eyes and it was so very evident in Fedor’s eyes. They would die before allowing her to come to harm ever again. She gripped Eirene’s hand and nodded. “Right behind us!” She screamed at Fedor.

Fedor nodded. “I have no desire to stay and entertain mother!” He shouted back coming to his knees and beginning to cut loose with his A4 as Miseo moved up beside him and together they began to mow down more of the creatures.

Two silver/white flashes and then For'mya and Eirene were tearing away in wolf form, their paws barely touching long enough to leave a print as they ran downhill.

Fedor! Dnom’s voice echoed in his head.

Fedor looked skyward. *Burn in front of us brother!* He barked out. *As hot as you can make it!*

“Fedor now!” Danny screamed at his nephew and Fedor nodded.

Miseo grabbed his arm with one hand. “Now Fedor!” He snapped as Dnom came in a hundred meters in front of them and his stream of flame set a dozen of the creatures ablaze while laying down a line of fire in front of his retreating Bonded Brother.

Fedor rose up and nodded. “Go! Go!” He exclaimed as he pushed Miseo ahead of him.

Miseo didn’t hesitate and began to sprint away, Fedor digging in his combat boots and beginning to follow. He saw his Uncle and the Master Chief tearing away from their position as well as he ran and he was just about to shift into wolf form when he noticed Iama scrambling around the ground near her body as if she was looking for something. Fedor’s eyes grew wide as he saw two of the creatures leap over the line of flame Dnom had laid and land on the crates. Iama whirled around and screamed as one leaped down upon her.

“Iama! NO!” Fedor screamed his eyes wide.

Savage fury gripped Fedor Leonidas then and with a howl of unbridled rage he ran straight for where the creature was now beating his arms down upon an obviously stunned Iama. Fedor had no idea what came over him, but he allowed the rage to engulf him and his wolf eyes burned with hatred as he ran. When he reached ten meters from where she was Fedor Leonidas leaped into air and was shifting before he had even fully left the ground.

For'mya and Eirene were racing side by side down the ridge, almost identical in size and color. Their powerful hind muscles propelled them at great speed, so fast that they were closing on a group of five creatures who had managed to get around behind them and were chasing the slowest members of the Processing Group

that were running for the Landing Zone. For'mya quickly spied the running figures of three females and two male elves who were trying to keep them between them.

Mother! Eirene screamed out within Mindvoice.

I see them! For'mya barked.

We will not reach them in time! Eirene rasped as her paws dug harder into the ground trying to go faster.

Faster Eirene! Shift just before we reach them and use your weapons! For'mya shouted out as she dug her paws in harder and moved faster.

Even as they ran they were witness to two of the creatures dragging down two elven females from behind. Even though they struggled and screamed trying to beat the creatures off, Eirene and For'mya watched in horror as the bone plates on both creatures lifted, exposing those small teeth and tongue like appendages. Those tongue appendages shot out amazingly fast and plunged into the open mouths of the two females. The creatures faces drew close as their tongues bulged the necks of the women as they were shoved deep into their throats. Filled with horror and anger For'mya began shifting even as those tongues began to move and For'mya could see bulges constrict the female's throats as if something was being pumped into their stomachs. They were nearly inert now, quivering as the creatures continued to plunge those tongues into their throats. Her eyes detected two creatures bring down one of the males in front of them, but For'mya was already committed.

For'mya and Eirene were shifting before they even came to complete stops. As she took her elven form, For'mya was reaching for her K14. When she got within three feet she lifted the weapon and fired four times point blank into the creatures head. The impact of the rounds tossed the creatures off the elven female, its tongue appendage whipping out from between her lips as his body flew back. For'mya pumped three more rounds into the disgusting animal before dropping beside the elf female who was holding her throat and gasping for air.

Eirene shifted back and simply stepped up to the creature atop the female and grabbed its head in anger. She twisted violently, using all of her inbred elven and wolf strength and the creatures neck could be heard popping in the forest. Eirene wrenched even harder, yanking its body off the elven female, its own teeth biting through its tongue in place. Eirene didn't hesitate or watch as the body flew to the side and she bent over the elf female and grabbed the slimy appendage, tearing it out of the elf's mouth and throat and hearing her gasp for air and begin coughing.

"Mother!" Eirene screamed out as she helped the female get to her feet. "We have to help them!"

For'mya looked up and saw the last creature had caught the third female elf. "Get her to the Landing Zone Eirene!" For'mya barked back.

"Mother... the others are..."

"Your father and mother will save the others!" For'mya snapped as she bent down and began to haul the elf female to her unsteady feet.

Eirene's eyes shifted and grew wide as she saw the massive black shape racing towards them through the trees. Eirene had seen her *MedwanGai* in wolf form before on the *ARC ROYAL* during their lessons, his majestic size and power always captivating to her and Fedor. She had never seen him in his wolf form and moving as he was now however. His speed was unlike anything she had ever seen, his massive paws propelling him forward but seemingly never touching the ground. His raven black fur was glossy and shiny with health and even now she could see the riveting muscles bunched and tightly corded within his chest and hind quarters as he ran. With a howl of savagery the likes of which she had never witnessed Martin fell on the two creatures that had brought the man down. One was about to stab his tongue forward into the man's throat when a four inch wide paw smashed across his reptilian face and black, razor like claws removed the lower half of his head in a single swipe. His tongue appendage included. Eirene watched with adoring love as her *MedwanGai* skidded to a stop, turned instantly using his bushy tail, reared up on his hind legs and shifted back to his human form.

The second creature hissed evilly at her father and leaped towards him. Eirene stared in unabashed awe as her father simply stood there and reached out with his hand, freezing the creature in mid-leap within the grips of his Etheric power.

"These are my people motherfucker!" Martin screamed in anger, spittle flying from his lips. "And you can't have them!"

Martin's left hand rose and a shimmering psychic diamond appeared instantly. He then launched the psychic diamond from only sixteen inches away from the creatures face, its tongue flapping wildly in the air

between them trying to reach her father. The psychic diamond struck the creature just below its large eyes and blew its head into oblivion. With a simple wave of his hand Martin tossed the creature aside and released it from its Etheric prison. The body sailed through the air to smash against a large tree as he knelt next to the elf male. Another flash of movement and Eirene saw a smaller raven wolf leap through the air and land upon the fifth creature who had injected its tongue appendage into the last female's throat. Aricia Leonidas was just as capable and even faster when in wolf form. She was the largest of Martin's Queens when she was a wolf, now easily a hundred and sixty pounds of muscle and teeth. Aricia was also the most feral and unforgiving of her mothers when she wanted to be Eirene knew.

And that was right now.

She tore open the creature's chest with her talons without hesitation, hearing it howl and begin to rise. As it did Aricia slashed down with her right paw and severed the creature's tongue from its mouth, drawing even more howls of agony. She leaped away to land and then shifted into her human form, the psychic knife exploding from her clenched right fist. She didn't hesitate and stepped up to the dazed creature and drove the psychic knife into its skull until her knuckles met its skin. She twisted her fist and Eirene watched the creature's body go rigid as Aricia solidified the psychic knife in the monster's head. She yanked her arm free quickly, leaving a gaping and smoking hole in the skull of the misshapen monstrosity, spit on the body of the creature and turned immediately to the elven female.

Martin had pulled the man to his feet and turned to For'mya and Eirene as they rushed up with their two elven females. "Get to the loading area!" He shouted. "Take them! Go!" He screamed. "I'll cover the rear!" He looked at the elf man and handed him his A4. "Go with them and cover them."

The man nodded quickly. "Thank... thank you Milord!" He gasped as his hands tightened on the weapon.

"From now on, all of us go armed!" Martin told him and the man nodded.

"That seems to be the prudent course of action sire." He stated breathing heavy in a combination of fear and adrenalin.

"Get moving! Go!" Martin spoke as his eyes turned and he found Aricia some hundred meters distant.

Daniel, Fedor and the others were right behind us Beloved! She snapped out in Mindvoice.

Saaurano... have Anja check them when they get back! Martin told her. *Something about these fucking things has me worried.*

Aricia nodded. *I saw it as well.*

I'll wait for Danny and the others. Go.

Aricia didn't question him and helped the elf female to her feet and began heading back to the Landing Zone.

Martin looked into the distance and saw more wolf shapes moving nimbly towards him. He began moving towards them. "C'mon Fedor my boy." He whispered as he shifted back into wolf form and began to sprint.

Iama was in trouble and she knew it.

The creature had stunned her when he leaped upon her, her head banging into the ground with enough force to bring stars to her eyes. She had enough presence of mind to roll onto her back and then she saw the foul monster on top of her, its mouth opening and she saw the tongue appendage. Her green eyes grew wide and her hands snapped up to try and hold the creature back by its shoulders as she realized what the disgusting beast wanted to do.

"No!" She screamed. "No!"

The beast used its hands to slam down on her arms, the pain shooting through her limbs and she could only withstand two blows before her arms gave out and she screamed in pain. With a roar of approval the beast reared back its head and its tongue shot forward with dazzling speed.

"NO!" Iama screamed knowing what was coming and suddenly unable to act. Iama did not want to be assaulted by this beast. This putrid monster. She had suffered too much in her life to reach this point. Been tossed aside so casually by so many. Tolerated too many foul monsters of her own species that had forced

themselves on her for her to accept some reptile looking beast to have her. Iama also didn't believe she was going to survive this encounter or have the strength to fight for long so she did the only thing she could think of. With a last surge of strength she heaved upwards with her hips trying to throw the creature off in the hopes that she could free herself enough to begin running.

That is when she heard the savage growl and she saw him.

A flash of dark blond fur and corded muscles, and then a silver/white flash of light and Fedor Leonidas was there. Only one thing popped into her mind at that moment and that was he had come back for her. Iama watched with wide green eyes as Fedor's hand snatched out and caught the creature's tongue centimeters before it would have plunged down Iama's throat. With a savage cry of anger Fedor ripped upwards and the tongue tore free from its roots, showering both of them with white pasty blood. As the creature roared in pain Fedor grabbed its head in his large hands and physically ripped it off Iama before tossing it several meters away. The creature was fast as it righted itself and landed on its feet, its bloody mouth opening again to let out a screech of rage. Iama watched with awe then as Fedor Leonidas reached up to the strange bandolier he wore across his body and suddenly a slim and lethal looking knife was in his hand. In that same instant Fedor's arm snapped out with blinding speed and the knife covered the distance to the creature in the blink of an eye, striking it in the eyeball. The force of the thrown knife flipped the creature over backwards, landing on its belly.

Fedor turned and was reaching for Iama. "Time to go!" He screamed.

Iama's mind cleared instantly at the tone of his voice and she was scrambling to her feet. "My pad!" She cried out. "I dropped my pad!"

Fedor looked at her and even in the midst of the blood and gore all around them Iama shivered as those beautiful wolf eyes fell on her. "You are not worth losing over some fucking data pad!" He screamed at her grabbing her arm. "Let's go!" He pushed her towards the evac point. "Go!"

Iama, still surprised at his actions, broke into a run just as Fedor looked down and saw a glint of metal. He reached down and snatched the data pad from under the dusting of dirt beneath where she had been laying and rose back up to see three creatures sprinting after Iama. With a howl of rage he shifted once more and was sprinting after Iama. He closed quickly on the closest creature, taking note that Iama had unwrapped her tail from around her waist as this allowed her to move with incredible speed and agility. He leaped, his right front paw smashing into the head of the closest creature and crushing his skull with a sickening sound. As his paws hit the ground again he was running, digging his paws in lightly, propelling himself with his hind legs just as his *MedwanGai* had taught him and Eirene. His wolf eyes were mindful of everything around him as he came up on the second creature and jumped once more, stopping only long enough to drive the monster to the ground and rake his hind claws across its back. He didn't break stride as the creature howled and squirmed on the ground.

Iama knew the creature was just behind her and it would be upon her before she could get to the safe area. With a burst of determination and anger for a reason she didn't understand, she whirled around to face the monster just as it leaped to fall upon her. Iama's tail snapped up and with vicious precision it wrapped around the creature's arm and wrenched to the side, slamming the smaller beast to the ground beside her. Iama fell on the monster with a scream of rage, pummeling it with her fists. Iama's Juturi was not weak by any means, she was a Kavalian after all, and her blows were incredibly painful and the fourth one shattered the creature's jaw and one side of its face. As she raised her arm to land another blow, Fedor was shifting in front of her while still running. His powerful arm reached out and snatched her up as he ran by without breaking his strike or slowing down. Iama was only five foot four and barely over a hundred pounds while Fedor Leonidas was easily six foot one and two hundred plus pounds. As she felt his arm close around her waist, Iama instantly released her tail from around the creature's and let Fedor's momentum carry her back. With all the grace of her feline nature, she scrambled up and over his back and her feet came down on the ground beside him in a running motion. What she didn't realize was that she had not released his hand in the entire motion and she gripped it tightly even as they ran.

Fedor let his nose guide them, his *MedwanGai*'s strong mint smell easily pulling him forward. In seconds he saw his father in the treeline, his eyes watching them and waving his arm frantically as he stood beside his Uncle Danny. In another fifty meters they were beside him and they skidded to a halt.

"What the fuck!" Martin screamed at him. "You stop to sight see boy!"

"No time to scold him now!" Danny barked. "Let's *di di mau!* Like right fucking now!"

They looked behind Fedor and saw more of the creatures running through the timber towards them.

“*Sibfla!* Move!” Martin shouted grabbing Fedor and shoving him toward the Landing Zone.

Fedor looked behind them as well and saw what had to be dozens of the creatures closing on them. “Shit!” He exclaimed pulling Iama with him as they began to run again.

“There!” Aricia screamed from the rear of the *STRIKER*’s ramp as she saw them running across the huge clearing where they had set up the Loading Zone. Aricia’s azure blue eyes grew wide when she saw dozens of those creatures burst out of the treeline just behind them. “Pablo! Now!” She screamed.

“Got it!” His voice filled her implant. “G.O.D. is on station!”

Aricia looked up into the sky at the sound of a heavy gun report and she saw the remote guided gun platform move into sight. The Guided Ordnance Delivery platform was mounted with a mini fifty caliber cannon and atmospheric thrusters. The God Gun Platform as it had been named was the result of a tinkering job by Julie and Collin in their off time. It was only two meters tall and one meter long but it was a devastating piece of armament. There were three of them on each *STRIKER* and everyone could operate them easily, Pablo just seemed to have a special knack for it. Aricia watched with satisfaction as Pablo brought the God Platform low to the ground, barely above the heads of her beloved Martin and the others and the mini chain cannon began to spit concentrated death, mowing down the foul creatures in droves as they burst from the treeline.

Aricia turned back towards the cockpit. “Endy! For'mya! Take off now!” She shouted, though her implant transferred the directive in a more subdued tone.

The surge of the engines told Aricia they had heard her and the *STRIKER* began to rise slowly off the ground just as Fedor and Iama reached the edge of the ramp. He scooped her up and literally tossed her the last five feet and she landed nimbly on the ramp just in front of him. Martin and Danny jumped off the ground as the *STRIKER* got to three meters height and they landed on the ramp easily just as Endy fed more power into the engines and they began to rise further. Iama stumbled forward as Fedor turned to look at his *MedwanGai* and Uncle. His eyes grew wide as two of the creatures landed on the ramp. They both screeched loudly, causing Martin and Danny to turn with Fedor, all of them pulling K12 KMs. One creature sent his tongue shooting out towards Martin.

Martin’s hand moved faster than could be followed and he grabbed onto the slimy tongue appendage before it got close to his mouth.

“Get off my fucking ride asshole!” Martin screamed before pulling the trigger. Danny and Fedor joined him and the two creatures were perforated with at least nine rounds apiece, their bodies flailing madly as the ramp continued to rise and tossed them about. Both fell dead, their pasty white blood staining the deck.

“They even smell bad!” Danny snarled.

“Kick their carcasses off my ship!” Martin growled as he reloaded his K12. “Endy... get us to five thousand feet and we’ll do an in-flight recovery of Torma and Isheeni over the water.”

“Will do!” Endith’s voice echoed in his ear implant. “Hell of a morning Skipper!”

“You got that right.” Martin answered. “Pablo... have God follow us out over the water and we’ll recover it then.

“Already moving bossman.” Pablo’s voice answered.

“Wait!” Anja called out as she moved back to the rear with them. “Don’t kick them out!” She barked. “Make sure they are fucking dead and then bag them Danny! Intact!”

Martin looked at her as she came up. “Red?”

“They injected several of our people with those tongue things lover and I want their bodies. I want their carcasses as base variables to make sure I find out if we are going to have problems.” Anja said.

“They ok?” Martin asked looking at the three elf females that had those tongues shoved down their throats. They were sitting on a bench; all of them still in shock had what had just happened.

Anja nodded her head. “They seem to be right now. I’m quarantining them when we get back aboard. I’ve already contacted Duewa to set it up. Just to be sure.”

Martin nodded and looked at Danny. “Do it!”

Anja turned to Fedor. “Take your armor off.” She ordered.

Fedor met her eyes. “Mother... they did not stick their tongue down my throat.” He said.

“You were shot *igord!*” Anja popped. “Take your armor off! I want to make sure nothing else besides your head is broken.”

Fedor grinned and saw his sister and mother moving towards them. Eirene didn't hesitate and walked right up to her brother and slugged him in the chest. “Reckless fool!” She yelled at him. “What were you thinking going back?”

Fedor glanced quickly to where Iama was now sitting on a bench and one of the medics was running a medical scanner over her. He turned back to his sister. “I... I had to go back.” He said. Eirene saw where his eyes went and she moved closer to him.

For'mya picked up on this right away and her dark eyes went to Martin. His gaze touched hers and he gave her a slight nod. For'mya took Fedor's arm then. “Let's get your armor off.” She stated.

“Mother... I can do it myself.” He complained.

For'mya met his gaze. “Just like you follow orders right?” She spoke sternly. “Your sister and I will make sure this time. Dnom is not happy with you either! You better talk to him before we reach the *ARC ROYAL*.”

Martin watched For'mya draw him to the side with Eirene and he stepped back to where Danny and Tony were rolling one of the creature's bodies over next to a body bag. “Danny?” He said softly.

Dan looked up from where he was squatting. “He saved my life *fervon*. He saved Iama by going back for her.” Danny told him knowing what Martin wanted to hear.

“You can smell why he went back for her.” Martin said.

Danny nodded. “Yeah... but what matters is he didn't hesitate. He tried to make contact and they shot him Martin. He's got ice in his veins Marty. Cool under fire no matter what. Sort of like your ugly ass, he's just better looking.”

Tony grunted. “Seems that runs in the family.” He spoke with a grin.

Danny looked over at Fedor. “You think he realizes why he went back for her?”

Martin shook his head. “I don't think he has a clue.” He answered. “I'll talk to him when we get back to the ship. Res and Arrarn had the same issue... and I'll need to let him know what's going on inside him.”

Danny nodded his head. “He done good Martin. He done real good. Eirene too. A lot better than most rookie's first time out.”

Martin looked back to where For'mya and Eirene were fawning over Fedor now and he nodded his head. “It's only the beginning.” He said turning back to them. He motioned to the dead creatures. “Cut that fuckers head off. Same with his partner. I don't want them waking up anytime soon. Anja can yell at me later.”

“Can we watch?” Tony asked with a smile.

Danny laughed. “It's always fun to watch Red chew you out. She does it so well.”

Martin couldn't help but laugh now as the adrenalin began to bleed off now that they were safe. He had some things to do when they returned and he needed to talk to Wayonn about them.

CHAPTER TWO

ANDROCLES LEONIDAS

CRANAE ISLAND

FEBRUARY 3, 2575

The sun was just beginning to creep over the horizon of the Laconia Gulf, a warm breeze sweeping in from the west and blowing across the large island owned by Androcles as men and women began to wake on the island itself and within the city of Gytheio across the inlet. Cranae Island was now home to two hundred and fifty *Durcunusaan* troops, most of them assigned to the island after the thwarted attack by the Eridiani OSG on the villa and its occupants. Jomann and the other detail heads that he had selected had hand picked all of the *Durcunusaan*, some of them coming from as far away as Apo Prime. They were taking no chances with the lives of their Crown Prince and Princesses, especially not now with the King so far away in parts unknown. This also applied to all of Androcles's brothers and sisters since, as Andro's Captain, Jomann now considered

them his responsibility as well. Cranae Island was now a fortress unto itself and because of several innovative ideas of Jomann and others; the island had lost almost none of its exterior beauty. The white sandy beaches and timber was still present since all of the improvements had been built around the natural makeup of the island and this also insured the defenses were much harder to detect.

Sadi Leonidas sat on the couch in the main living room of the villa; her legs pulled under her firm bottom as she sipped a mug of Aricia's special coffee blend and alternately watched the Netnews channel with the volume down low and read from the data pad in her hand on the new *STRIKER DT IIA* Variant. She had been up for over an hour already, as she was never one to sleep late anyway, more so since she had become Andro's mate. Lu'ria and Carisia were with Lu'ria's mother Daba in Eden City for the last day of a three day trip and Ne'Veha had only risen a few moments ago and was in the shower. The Netnews was covering the Union military buildup that was underway in as much detail as they possibly could while also covering the few skirmishes that had taken place along the borders of the KFI and the Union. They were not large battles, mostly small units or special operations forces, but there was no mistaking that the Union was now at war. The mood of the men and women within the Union was not indifferent by any means. Countless interviews had been conducted across the Union by the many Netnews channels and almost overwhelmingly men and women were paying close attention to what was happening. They were also fully in support of Andro's actions by a ninety-six percent margin across the Union according to the last polls taken by Deia's office.

While the Netnews men and women were obviously unable to get specifics about the buildup, all of the channels were trying as hard as they could, even though the three owners and thousands of employees of the three corporations that the military conversion affected were not talking. Sadi knew the two men and one woman who owned those companies, thanks in part to her father's connections and while they were businessmen and women, they were also totally loyal to the Union. As were those who worked for them. They had come out of the slavery years under the High Coven with a special love for the Union and no matter what they had been asked over the last four thousand years, whether by Resumar, Deia or Martin, they had delivered upon without question. They were also tied to the original five bloodlines of Lycavorian people by marriages that lasted and endured even now. Sadi was aware that Ben worked with all of them on many things of a civilian nature, though none of them knew of the existence of Dreamland. The two men and one woman knew there was much Riyal in it for their companies as the Union government had no problems paying them to build their weapons or the items that improved the lives of everyone within the Union. Sadi knew of an agreement made with Andro's father that a small part of their profit from the Union be turned around and put back into the Union Social System. Those three companies donated more time, Riyal and resources to aide the needy than all remaining thirteen engineering companies within the Union combined. There would always be those who needed help; whether due to natural disaster or whatever circumstance, no one in the Union was denied the resources to help them get back on their feet. The Union Social System was carefully monitored so that no one abused the structure, but it was very rare to find someone who did not want to work for what they had. It was a matter of honor for a Lycavorian or elf and generally for all the species of the Union. Those men and women who came across the borders to squat and live off others, of any species, were quickly shown to the borders of the Union when it was discovered and unceremoniously kicked the hell out. They never lasted for more than a few weeks.

There were ten out of the hundred and nineteen Netnews channels that were completely devoted to following the Union Senate and the political situation that was always changing and these were the ones that Sadi Leonidas watched carefully. This morning Netnews Channel 39, a longtime opponent of Deia and then Martin and the Queen's policies, had been interviewing one politician after the other who had voted in opposition to declaring war on the KFI for their actions against the citizens of the Union. The same men and women who voted against Spartan Law. All told there were a hundred and twenty-seven of them, but Sadi was only concerned with the few who were not afraid to be outspoken about it.

Or what they felt about her, thanks to Ulana.

Sadi Leonidas was one hundred and thirty years old. She had experienced more and endured more in her short life than most young female wolves her age. Indeed, by the very nature of their people, she was in some ways still considered no more than a child because of her age. Regardless of the crimes she had been forced to commit and the sexual favors she had been coerced into performing while under the thumb of the High Coven and her vile step mother; that she had never stopped trying to protect her father and his reputation had earned

her untold respect from many of the older Lycavorians and elves who valued family above all else. Much of what she had gone through was now public knowledge, only the parts deemed far too sensitive or private were kept as state secrets. None of that mattered to Sadi Leonidas in the least anymore, for the day she had looked into those azure colored eyes on the Royal Island; Sadi Leonidas had been hooked forever. Yes... she had denied it at times during the years they were apart, until Androcles had grown into a man, but it was always there and what a delicious man he had grown into. Just looking at him now could set her wolf blood to sizzling. Not only was he the most scrumptious man Sadi had ever seen or smelled physically but he was the most intelligent as well. He could carry on a conversation with scholars in one moment and cuss with the best of the soldiers in the next. He stimulated her mind just as completely as he stimulated her body. That wonderful feeling of belonging to him heart and soul and knowing that she commanded his heart and soul in return was something she could not put into words.

Sadi had been given her life back after the events of that night on the Royal Island of Apo Prime. Her father was once more safe from injury and false accusations and now thriving in his role as a civilian consultant to the military. Her vile step-mother and step-brothers were now rotting in prison somewhere for their crimes and Sadi was finally free of the years of High Coven manipulation. Over the ensuing twenty plus years after that night she finally discovered what freedom was like as she did what she wanted and when she wanted. She became a pilot and studied at the School of the Mages and finally she entered the Union Fleet Academy. No matter what she did or who she was with, her path had ultimately already been set in motion the moment she first saw him. After that it was simply a matter of living her life until the day when their lives would eventually come back together. And Sadi Leonidas was so very happy when it did.

The day Androcles Leonidas returned to her on the tarmac of that *Durcunusaan* base on Apo Prime, Sadi felt everything coming together into focus. He was so tall and powerful and he was all hers in every way. She resisted briefly... the difference in their ages making her hesitate for all of ten seconds. Then she learned that Androcles Leonidas's mind was far older than she would ever be and when he had shared that awareness with her their first night together Sadi had been convinced. When they found Carisia and then Ne'Veha and then Lu'ria, all within months of each other, the pieces rapidly fell together like the missing parts of a puzzle. Sadi knew at times that it bothered Andro that he had more than one wife and mate. He was trying to come out from under his father's shadow and having more than one mate was a well known signature of his father's. But in the end, like her, Andro could not deny the strong emotion and feelings he had for each of them or how powerfully they were drawn to one another.

Androcles was her life now. Her center. In her eyes, he was the most beautiful man that lived and none other could compare to him. It was no different for Carisia or Ne'Veha or Lu'ria. And no matter what had happened Sadi knew deep down that Caliria felt the same way no matter how far away she was. Sadi and the others had also been trying to understand what all of them had seen and felt during the Senate meeting some weeks back. The color of those eyes and the presence they had felt within their minds was powerful and it meshed within all of them so easily. They had talked of it with each other a few times these last weeks but with everything that was happening around them, all of them had decided to not try and determine what it all meant until they knew more. Sadi knew Andro almost as well as she knew herself. They all did. And he knew them just as intimately. There was only one who might know him better than they did and that was Elynth.

Androcles Leonidas was an open book to his mates and wives but he was an enigma to so many others. Yes... he was Crown Prince... but he had never considered himself anything other than a Spartan warrior. Like his father, he did not want power and he did go out of his way to seek power. He only wanted to love his mates and protect his people. He did not realize that this mentality is what endeared him and his father to so many men and women within the Union no matter what their species. The Gods had granted him complete awareness and the wisdom of three lifetimes while still within his mother's womb and he had been born fully cognizant of everything around him with Elynth acting as his only voice. It was something that even to this day no one could explain or understand. At times it was a burden that he and Elynth hated Sadi knew. To have the memories of three lives spanning thousands of years wrapped within their minds was stressful without a doubt. There were times when they would awake in the middle of the night because of some nightmare or the other. Andro would be soaked in sweat and within minutes Elynth would be screaming to the villa from the small cave like structure on the island that was hers and Anthar's and then they would be gone into the night sky, not returning until morning when they had either sorted out what the dream meant or pushed it far enough to the backs of their

minds that it did not affect them. Then he would share it with his wives and mates. He held nothing back from any of them and they shared everything with him. Sadi knew it had become easier with the birth of his brother Dorian for he too had been blessed by the gods and been born fully aware and bonded to a dragon. Sadi had witnessed Andro, Dorian and their sister Zarah on several occasions these last weeks walking the beaches of Cranae island holding hands and talking within a Mindvoice connection that no one would ever be allowed to enter without the three of them agreeing. When Andro had saved her life as a child, allowing her to feed on his blood in the grips of the Blood Fever, Zarah had been granted a gift that only she and Andro understood. With the birth of Dorian they had someone to share that with.

This very introverted mentality that Andro had towards others is what caused many of the misconceptions about him Sadi knew. Those that were not a member of his family or close friends did not know him and could only guess at what went on in his mind. He was powerful without any question, physically and within Mindvoice, and many men and women whispered to themselves that one day he would surpass his father. Many also knew that he had a temper as well as a dark and sinister side to him. Many of the older male Spartan warriors who had been born and raised in Sparta and had endured the harshness of that life so long ago knew what it was. The calling of true Spartan wolf blood. Untainted and pure. Martin Leonidas accepted the darkness within him that came from his Spartan blood, though he did not often embrace it as his son did.

The first step in trying to lift that veil of secrecy that surrounded him, Andro had already taken by commandeering the Netnews briefing given by Senator Icho. That three hour glimpse into the life and mind of the Crown Prince of the Union had made everyone want more. And in wanting more of Androcles, they wanted more of his wives and mates. Sadi being the most interesting as far as they were concerned. It was a drawback of being Andro's wife, mate and *Anome* that Sadi was well aware of and accepted without question. Sadi Leonidas had become almost as popular as Androcles among the many older generations of Lycavorians and elves and Algolian people most of all. And with that fame came those who either did not like her or care for what her past involved and had taught her.

Senator Icho and Senator Ulana were the most well known among their ilk. They had tried to call into question Sadi's past and her association with the High Coven. They tried to push the fact that she had worked for the High Coven as a courier of sorts as the reason she should not be trusted, among other things. They never spoke of how she had been forced into this way of life or the circumstances behind it. They had tried to imply she had worked as some sort of whore for the High Coven as well, but that did not go far or very well. Speaking that outright in public would turn others against them, so they only whispered it in private. Sadi and Androcles had laid those questions to bed when, during that briefing; they addressed her past openly and honestly, leaving out only the most sensitive information. This had only added to the growing comparison between Sadi and Gorgo. Many of the older Spartans born and raised on Earth in Sparta and those who hailed from Apo Prime and other colonies saw Sadi as the reincarnation of Queen Gorgo. The intense compassion, the strength, the low key temper and the intelligence. The comparison made Sadi blush and become uncomfortable, but that is what people saw and felt about her. Gorgo did not help matters either by stimulating this thinking, but then again Sadi did not know that Gorgo felt the same things when she looked at Sadi and saw herself. It was definitely something that made her very proud.

When Icho and Ulana's initial ploy did not work, they began to try a different tact, calling into question Sadi's bloodline and questioning whether she should be Crown Princess based on her PCC levels and her long dead mother's bloodlines. Sadi knew the only reason Ulana was taking part in all this was because she was a spoiled, arrogant *upaee* who thought herself above everyone else. Ulana thought that the four or five months that she had dated Andro gave her rights to Androcles Leonidas and the position Sadi and the others held now held as Crown Princesses. Sadi had to laugh softly to herself at times, for if Androcles made love to Ulana with even a fraction of the staggering passion and intense devotion he had when making love to Sadi and the others, it was no wonder Ulana still wanted him. It was more than likely the best sex she had ever had. But Androcles belonged to her now, and to Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria and Caliria. Ulana didn't seem to understand she would never get him back and all she did when she tried was to piss off Sadi and the others and make herself look the fool.

Icho on the other hand; he was very different. Androcles and many others considered him an enemy agent for the Kavalians, with a completely different set of reasons for doing what he was doing. He was allowing Ulana to take the forefront of everything in order to make her the ultimate fall person. She got all of

the Netnews coverage for the most part and unfortunately for herself, Ulana was too wrapped up within herself to see this. It only showed just how truly stupid she really was.

Sadi's jungle green eyes cut to the kitchen as Ne'Veha appeared in just a simple white lace bra and panties and a loose fitting, nearly transparent robe draped over that. Her long dark brown hair fell to the top of her exquisitely shaped ass cheeks now and her lush elven body had been honed to perfection along with Sadi's over the last few weeks by Carisia and Lu'ria in their private training sessions. As Sadi watched Ne'Veha, she allowed her jungle green eyes to wander over Ne'Veha's figure with carnal thoughts and desire. In Sadi's eyes Ne'Veha had the most delicious ass of any of them, so firm and exquisitely shaped. Sadi had been lovers with one other woman after her life had changed that night on the island. Teeria and she had spent that one night together nearly a decade ago and while it had been very pleasurable to say the least, it had only been that one night. Sadi had never pursued a relationship with a woman after that, the desire just was not there, and looking back now Sadi believed it was because of Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria and Caliria. Now she blissfully shared a bed with them all, but no matter the pleasure they all shared together, Sadi always found herself reaching for Ne'Veha first and foremost when Andro was not among them. She didn't know what it was about her elven lover and fellow Princess that drew her to Ne'Veha more than the others but her delicious lover did it every time. Ne'Veha's five foot four height was lusciously curved and she tipped the scales at only a hundred and nine pounds soaking wet. Only five pounds less than Carisia and her five foot two height. When in wolf form however, the transformation added about thirty pounds of muscle to Ne'Veha's frame and she was sleek and beautiful. While Sadi desired Carisia and Lu'ria intensely at times, Ne'Veha called to her wolf blood just a little more than her Drow Mistress and her Maya eyed vampire lover. Sadi and Ne'Veha had many things in common since they were both pilots, and because they were the pilot's of Andro's *STRIKER DT*, they were almost never apart. Her four inch high elven ears were delicious to Sadi and her amaretto scent was so very enticing and intoxicating.

Sadi watched with bright, sultry eyes as Ne'Veha made her morning tea and then crossed the main room to join her on the couch. Ne'Veha was the only one among them who did not drink coffee. She much preferred tea to coffee, especially after getting a special blend from her grandmother. Ne'Veha leaned over and they shared a soft, loving and lingering kiss and then Ne'Veha drew her legs under her mimicking Sadi's position on the couch. Her dark brown eyes went to the monitor and she saw the Netnews channel Sadi was watching and she shook her head with a smile.

"You follow what those foolish people say too much *KertaGai*." Ne'Veha told her. "You should just ignore them."

Sadi looked back at the monitor and nodded. "Perhaps..." She answered. "I like to know what wild accusations they are perpetrating however. They are so predictable at times about what they assume they are so knowledgeable."

"*Midaeus* is what they are!" Ne'Veha hissed.

Sadi chuckled at her response. "Yes indeed."

Ne'Veha Leonidas had grown much since becoming their mate and being changed by Andro, foremost among that was the fact she simply adored hearing her name roll off the lips of other people.

Ne'Veha Leonidas.

It wasn't arrogance or Ne'Veha thinking herself better than other people, she just adored the way her name sounded, since only those hailing from Earth had taken the custom of having a last name. Other species within the Union had more than one name, but only the Lycavorian Spartans and humans seemed to take the names of their husbands or wives as their second name and this had become very common. Ne'Veha's childhood upbringing had been very strict even by elven standards, her father raising her to dislike and distrust all Lycavorians because of what had happened in the past with her elven grandmother. Her father had raised Ne'Veha and her siblings to think their grandmother was dead. It wasn't until Ne'Veha stumbled upon the real reasons her father acted as he did that she began to understand. When Ne'Veha discovered her elven grandmother was alive and well; that she had left her elven husband and that she had fallen in love with a Lycavorian and allowed him to change her, that is when Ne'Veha's eyes were open fully. She had dismissed all her father had taught her then and fully embraced her new life with Androcles. With all of them. Andro had changed her during one of their more torrid nights together, giving Ne'Veha what she so desperately wanted. To be like him. Like Sadi. Now that she was wolf herself Ne'Veha looked at things in a very different light. She

had almost lost them because she didn't understand what she felt, but that was behind her now and she could not imagine being without them. She loved Androcles with every breath she took. He could make her quiver in delight with a simple caress or nuzzle of her elven ear and his wolf aura could have her crying out for more within seconds as he did with Sadi and Lu'ria. Ne'Veha loved them all yes, but she was always drawn to Sadi more and she knew Sadi was drawn to her just as intensely. They had a special connection between them and it was strong and passionate and Ne'Veha relished in that closeness. Sadi's sugar plume and spice scent was nearly as intense as Andro's lavender and mint scent and it made her blood churn just being near them. Nothing would take her away from them now, no matter what her father did or said. She was a Princess of the Lycavorian Union and now wolf. That is all that mattered to her.

"We should take the new *STRIKER* up today and make sure the adjustments we asked to be made are accurate." Ne'Veha spoke sipping her tea.

Sadi nodded as she looked at her and held up the pad. "I was thinking the same thing. The lateral thrusters most of all." She said thoughtfully. "Syrilth sent word that she would like to see us at Dragon Mountain today as well."

Ne'Veha's dark brown eyes showed interest. "Really? Why?"

Sadi shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know." She answered. "It may have something to do with Andro's position as Talon Guardian and because he is not here on Earth she will pass it to us as his mates. We could also draft a couple of dragons to insure the harnesses in the rear are correctly fitted into the deck panels."

"Why didn't he take us with him Sadi?" Ne'Veha asked.

"It was a routine pick up and he felt it would be a waste of our time *SirsanGai*." Sadi said with a smile. "You know that. He only went to get Dorian some operational experience. They have been training every day and it was time Dorian and Ryner got real time duty in the field. Having us there wasn't necessary."

"*Sibfla!*" Ne'Veha spat playfully. "He went because he wanted to get away from all the politics. He has been going stir crazy with all the meetings and reports and the constant calls for interviews from the Netnews."

Sadi laughed at Ne'Veha's words and nodded her head. Ne'Veha had taken to the ancient Lycavorian language like a fish to water and she was extremely fluent in it now. She also liked to use the various swear words within the ancient language for they better expressed her unique sentiments at many things according to her. Ne'Veha's frequent use of the ancient language had many people within Sparta that knew Andro and his mates fawning over her whenever she and Sadi went into the city. The way the ancient words rolled off her tongue was like music to many of the older men and women in the city and many of them conversed with Ne'Veha in the ancient language almost exclusively.

"That is probably very correct." She answered. "Just think of the delight we will share when he returns after two days without us wrapped around him. He'll last for hours."

Ne'Veha's dark brown eyes glittered. "I have thought about that." She spoke softly. "And they have been very decadent thoughts to say the least."

Sadi laughed happily and nodded. "Mine as well."

They both turned their heads when the door to the living area of the villa opened. Two thirds of their villa was now restricted to family and friends, while the last third was used as the local *Durcunusaan* Control Center, backing up the main center on the other end of the island. That is where the barracks and landing pad for the island were situated. The main living area as well as the family and guest wings were highly restricted to anyone who was not a member of the Leonidas family or the *Durcunusaan*. Only they had unrestricted access. Not counting their master bedroom, the main villa could house nearly all of Andro's brothers and sisters and half a dozen guests if need be. The female *Durcunusaan* officer stuck her head through the door and searched quickly until her eyes found Sadi and Ne'Veha sitting on the couch. Since the attack by the OSG Andro had insisted that each of them be assigned a *Durcunusaan* Detail of at least three whenever they went places individually or without him. It had taken Jomann only one week to decide on the heads of these details for they would have broad powers to go with their new positions. He had chosen four females for different reasons, but all of them having one thing in common. Like himself, they were all born and raised in Sparta, and while it might seem biased to others, Jomann felt better knowing this. Jomann was reasonably certain the Princesses would be more comfortable with a female Detail Head and more likely to listen to them in time of need. This *Durcunusaan* female was the head of Ne'Veha's Detail. Her shoulder length blond hair was tied tightly into a short ponytail and her blue eyes were sharp and alert. Aegea and the head of Sadi's detail Kynthia had

developed a very smooth working relationship right from the outset because of the closeness of the two young Princesses and their own mutual likes and dislikes. As Androcles's Captain of the Guard, Jomann maintained overall command of the entire *Durcunusaan* force tasked with guarding the Prince and Princesses and he was still going over records and such to determine the final two members of each detail, so at the moment the four heads of the details were in charge and dealt with everything.

"Aeqea?" Ne'Veha asked.

The young woman stepped fully into the main living area now. "Forgive me for bothering you so early Ne'Veha, Sadi..." She spoke. Ne'Veha and Sadi had made it very clear right from the start that the heads of their details were not to refer to them formally in any way, shape or form. Especially not if they were going to be laying their lives on the line for them. "Prime Minister Deia and Lady Gorgo are landing at the main LP. They needed to speak with you about something that has come up."

Sadi lowered her mug of coffee. "Something wrong Aeqea?" She asked.

Aeqea shook her head. "I don't believe so Sadi." She answered. "Not that they mentioned to Kynthia anyway."

"We'll start breakfast Aeqea. You and Kynthia escort them in and we'll all eat together." Sadi spoke coming to her feet.

Aeqea nodded. "As you wish." She stated moving back out the door.

Ne'Veha rose to her feet and began to follow Sadi across the main room. "This should be interesting." She said.

Sadi nodded. "Very."

"...is why I am doing this." They watched the image of Ulana on the small kitchen monitor as they sipped coffee. Six plates of eggs, steak, fruit and toasted bread were now empty in front of them at the eat-in counter. Large mugs of coffee were full and steaming however. ***"I do not wish to be the one to bring attention to these issues, but if I do not, who else will? I... I care deeply for Androcles. I... I love him, even after the way he has treated me and what we shared. I believe he is unaware of the kind of women who he has chosen to take as his wives and mates. Or what they are capable of or intend. This woman Sadi, who flaunts her pureblood status even though it still remains in question, and the elf female Ne'Veha most of all. Andro hates to fly, he always has and he has two mates who are pilots? That is completely out of character for him. I know him and he is not acting as the Androcles I know. He promised me we would always be together and Andro does not break his promises. I..."***

"Yes you are Ulana." Sadi said softly and Ne'Veha giggled as she leaned into her from her chair. "You are completely unaware of who we are or what we are capable of. Hates to fly *aur mida!*" She looked at Ne'Veha. "Where does she get her information? Gypsies are us? If Elynth heard this she would be spitting fire and want to scorch this *malda indalmus athach!*" (Crazy ignorant witch)

Deia let out a small laugh at Sadi's words and the reaction from Ne'Veha and she reached over from her spot and muted the monitor by touching the screen, turning back to Sadi and Ne'Veha. "For the last three weeks Ulana has been holding these small rallies across Apo Prime in her home district. She draws crowds ranging in size from fifty to several hundred. They are mostly die hard supporters of her father's policies and by default hers."

"So it is no longer just Sadi that she is going after then. Now she is going after Ne'Veha as well?" Kynthia spoke now. The short dark hair of the female *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant was streaked with dark blond highlights and her tanned skin was healthy and smooth. Her cool brown eyes were alert and resolute and she took her duties as Sadi's Detail Head very seriously.

Gorgo nodded. "It would appear that is now the case yes." She said.

"She has referenced different items in regards to Ne'Veha as well as Carisia." Deia spoke looking at the data pad quickly and then to Ne'Veha. "Specifically your father's views towards Lycavorians Ne'Veha and a certain Captain Tarren. Sadi and Ne'Veha are the most well known of Andro's mates. Ne'Veha because of her status as a Fleet pilot and how she took command of certain things after the attempt on your lives here by the OSG and Sadi for obvious reasons."

“Tarren?” Ne'Veha gasped. “What does he have to do with anything?”

“Ulana has made it a point to mention in her recent rallies that this Tarren fellow says he claimed you before Andro.” Deia said calmly. Deia didn't believe it for an instant, even when her aides brought it to her. Her nephew Martin and great-nephew Androcles were perhaps the most entrenched in tradition when it came to the Spartan way of life and if Ne'Veha had been mated, or even discussing it with another male, Androcles would never have pursued her. “That you accepted and then, when Andro came into your life, you dismissed Tarren. And that you and Andro are also responsible for ruining his career based on false information in order to keep quiet the fact that he had claimed you before Andro. Not to mention that he is being held under false pretence by the *Durcunusaan* and that he has been interrogated extensively.”

Ne'Veha looked at her with wide eyes. “She actually talked to that *igord*?” She hissed angrily. “How did she even get access to him? He's locked in a prison cell! Tarren will say anything to protect himself and his ego!”

“Apparently Ulana discovered he had this information and arranged for a meeting.” Deia said. “We don't know how. She's is lobbying hard to have him released.”

Gorgo reached out and took Ne'Veha's hand. “Ne'Veha... we do not believe anything Ulana or this Tarren fellow says... but you understand how this could look inappropriate for Androcles and give ammunition to those who do not like him.”

The outrage on Ne'Veha's face was obvious and completely honest. “That disgusting *gostin*!” She hissed looking at Gorgo. “I never did any such thing! I dated him for a time yes... but it was never anything serious to me. I was confused over how my father raised us to be and then being exposed to something different in the fleet. Tarren practically scented me without telling me what he was doing! I had no idea he had done this until I saw the look in Sadi's eyes when she came to the *SCIMITAR* to visit me! Up until then... Tarren and I had an on again off again relationship! Nothing more! He was part of the problem! When I realized what he had done I never saw him again!”

“What about this claim of ruining his career and...?” Deia began to ask but Sadi stepped in.

“Taren is the one who gave the information to the OSG agents that attacked us here on the island Deia.” Sadi spoke. “Unwittingly or not, he was responsible. *SirsanGai* acted as any of us would have acted. Considering what happen, Tarren is lucky he was not executed for treason because of his actions.”

Deia nodded. “Forgive me for asking Ne'Veha. I never doubted you child but I needed to hear what you did in your own words.”

“I *should* have ordered the *Durcunusaan* to execute him!” Ne'Veha hissed. “If I knew he would be involved in this I...”

“Do not worry about Tarren child. Dealing with him will be easy. He is one of the type of Alphas with an over inflated sense of self worth. We can deal with him easily enough.” Gorgo spoke with a smile.

“So Ulana is going to have him released?” Ne'Veha hissed. “How do the orders of a new Senator override the orders of a Princess?”

“Once Tarren was remanded to custody, the *Durcunusaan* questioned him and then turned him over to Fleet authority.” Deia answered. “I discovered that he was able to contact his father, a prominent officer himself, who put pressure on Fleet authorities to have him released and when Ulana suddenly took interest they went ahead and granted the release request until such time as he stands trial for his actions.”

“Regardless of why he did it Deia... he gave intelligence to an enemy who then used that intelligence to attack our home here and try to kill us!” Sadi spat. “How do we just let him free after that?”

“He and Ulana are claiming Andro and you were not the targets.” Deia said. “That there was another target here that the OSG Team was after. They did not mention names but that is what they were implying. The Commissioning Board of Fleet officers went over the evidence and released him to Ulana's custody. They set his trial date for five months from now as well.”

“How would they know about Lady Devra?” Aegea asked now. “No one knew she and her daughters were here.”

“No one is perfect Aegea.” Deia said. “Even the *Durcunusaan*. If I had to guess I would say it came unwittingly from within the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*. Talking to a comrade or member of their family. And it was over heard by someone with big ears. Similar in a way to how they got their meeting with Andro some months back.”

“Anse!” Kynthia spat. “Jomann will have a fit when he hears that. I can guarantee it will not happen anymore!”

Deia nodded her head. “Better it comes from you too.” She said. “I will leave that for the *Durcunusaan* to sort out.

“To continue on... Ulana’s comments on Carisia are well known.” Gorgo spoke as she squeezed Ne’Veha’s hand reassuringly as she spoke. “Carisia is Yuri’s daughter and a vampire of the High Coven and therefore cannot be trusted. So on and so forth. She won’t openly go after her however... or Lu’ria.”

“She’s afraid of them. Especially our Drow Mistress.” Ne’Veha spoke confidently.

Gorgo nodded. “That is what Deia and I feel as well.” She said. “Ulana will not go after Lu’ria because she is a Drow. No one in their right mind wants Aihola or Daba and the Drow facing off against them. That would be political suicide in more ways than one. Since Carisia spends more time with her and they are often together because of what they feel for each other, Ulana will not go after them. You and Sadi are the most visible of Andro’s wives and mates because you are his pilots, because Sadi is a pureblood and now because of what Tarren is saying Ne’Veha has done. Therefore Ulana is going to target the two of you.”

Sadi looked at them and shook her head finally. “We don’t care what Ulana does. Why bring this to us now?” She asked.

Gorgo looked at Sadi. “She has announced that she will hold a rally like this in Sparta at the end of this week.” She said. “Tarifa was going to deny her a permit but we convinced her to not get involved.”

Ne’Veha looked at Gorgo. “Why?” She asked.

Gorgo looked at Ne’Veha and smiled warmly, her dark eyes bright. She truly adored all of her grandsons mates. They were a unique blend of unbelievable beauty, skill and intellect. Though they would never admit it, they were cut from the same mold as her son’s Queens and it was no secret that Gorgo adored all of Martin’s wives and mates. Sadi and the others were rapidly beginning to command as much respect as them from throughout the Union. “If Ulana wishes to bring her misguided message here to Sparta... let her. She will not find so enraptured an audience I’m thinking. She still does not understand the importance of Sparta to our family. I believe she is going to jump into the lion’s pit fully unaware of the consequences.” Gorgo told her.

“Sparta has become the place of power for our family.” Deia picked it up. “I had hoped when Martin first returned that it would be Apo Prime. Once I saw the love in his eyes for this city I knew that was not going to be the case. Since I have been here, lived here over these past years, I now know why he feels this and my feelings have become his. The Leonidas family has become synonymous with Sparta. They are completely interwoven with each other. With Sparta and Gytheio. And while I do not carry that name... Martin once told me that I will always be a Leonidas in my heart and blood. I have come to feel as he does in regards to Sparta and Earth. So many have come here from across the Union to make it their home, that it is now a melting pot from across the entire Union. It is also here where the loyalty and love of our family runs deepest.”

Gorgo nodded. “Let Ulana come and try to do here what she is doing on Apo Prime. I think she will quickly discover that she can not.”

“You know of course that she is being used.” Sadi said softly.

Deia nodded. “That is what we believe as well, unfortunately there is no way to prove that she is not working of her own accord.”

“So this fool Icho and the others are letting her do this even knowing that it will not work in the way she hopes?” Ne’Veha asked.

Aeqea nodded as she leaned forward in her seat. “She is the public face while they sit behind closed doors and pull the strings.” She said understanding.

Deia nodded. “Exactly. I’m quite sure they hope this plot of hers will work in some way. And to be honest, it may work to some small degree, but nothing like what Ulana hopes. She is blind to the fact that the others are using her. She was never a very bright girl no matter what she likes to think of herself. All of us saw that the few times she spent moments with us on the Royal Island on Apo Prime. She will never be able to convince the majority of the population of Sparta and Earth, or the Union for that matter, that these accusations are true in any way. Not after witnessing the way Androcles dotes over each of you, how he pulls all of you close to him.” Deia said with a grin. “If anything... she will only bring more people over to your side with her foul spewing. Sadi... you have been told how many people are beginning to view you... and it is contagious, for those same men and women are beginning to speak the same about Ne’Veha and Lu’ria and Carisia. All of

you have a draw about you, a sense of mysticism. It happened with Aricia and the others and now it is happening with all of you.”

Sadi looked at her. “Deia... I do not want to play on the sensibilities of other people. It isn’t right.”

Deia nodded. “I’m not saying that you should.” She replied.

Sadi looked at her intently. “But you came here to tell us this for a reason.” She said slightly confused. “Why?”

“For whatever the reason... you and Ne’Veha have become the face of Androcles.” Deia told her. “You are almost never apart when the Netnews catches you. Carisia and Lu’ria are the mystery that no one dares delve into. I don’t think there is a Netnews reporter alive with the *nor* to enter one of the Drow cities and start poking around and asking questions about Lu’ria. And since Carisia and she are almost always together, that carries over to her as well. Ne’Veha and yourself on the other hand are different. We know Andro loves all of you; that is not at question ever, but like Dysea and For’mya have become for his father, you and Ne’Veha are becoming for Andro. No one among the Netnews will approach Aricia or Anja... they have told the Netnews on more than one occasion to stuff it. In much more entertaining language I might add.” She said with a smile. “They have always feared Isabella in some way. Dysea and For’mya on the other hand have that elven sense of patience and calm.”

“We are his public face.” Sadi said softly.

Deia nodded. “Yes. And therefore the main targets.” She answered. “Ulana has it in her head that you stole Androcles away from her. That you took what she should have had. And that just pisses her off.”

Sadi shook her head with disgust. “I never stole Andro away from that *upaee!* He was always mine. He was always ours.” Sadi answered confidently. “From the moment I saw him on the island that first time he has been mine. And I have been his. We have been his. It is the same for *SirsanGai*. For Carisia and Lu’ria as well.”

Deia nodded her head. “I know that. As I said... she was never very bright no matter what she thinks of herself.” She said. “Perhaps it is time to express what you share with Andro however.”

Sadi met her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Our people and the elves are deeply entrenched in our faiths and what we believe in our hearts.” Gorgo spoke. “Let’s start showing that.”

Sadi shook her head. “We may be Princesses... but we both still have duties to perform.” She spoke. “We fly Andro’s *STRIKER* and we are just starting to become familiar with the new version. I for one do not want to begin giving speeches and interviews when our people may be in harm’s way.”

Ne’Veha nodded her head in agreement. “I feel the same way.” She said softly. “And I am just beginning to learn of my grandmother with the time I have been spending with her when I’m not with Sadi. I do not want to take away from that.”

“If we do nothing... Ulana will continue to spew her nonsense.” Deia said.

Sadi looked at her for a moment. “Let her spew it.” Sadi said meeting her gaze and seeing something else there. “There is more to this isn’t there Deia?” She asked. “What is going on here?” She looked at Gorgo. “Gorgo?”

Deia shrugged her shoulders and looked at Gorgo. “I told you it wouldn’t work.” She said with a smile.

Gorgo nodded a similar smile on her face. “So you did.”

Sadi looked at Ne’Veha and then back and forth between the two women. Ne’Veha was the one to speak though. “You knew what wouldn’t work?”

“I tried to convince Andro to address this.” Deia spoke with a glint of humor in her dark eyes. “He told me in no uncertain terms that his life with his wives and mates is not an open book and he wouldn’t share it. In his words, *especially not with those Netnews tukannupae!* He was much more passionate about it than his father. Martin simply said *nubou joa.*” She finished with a wide smile. “It was quite entertaining.”

Sadi tilted her head to the side. “And you thought we might?” She asked. “Deia... none of us would ever go against Andro’s wishes. You know that.”

Gorgo reached over and took Sadi’s hand as well as Ne’Veha’s. Her dark eyes gazed at them with love and understanding. They were the same as her, yet they were so much more Gorgo knew. “There is a saying among the Sparta of old... *They say the plain and the ordinary are ruled by fate... but it is the heroic that choose their own fate.*” Gorgo looked between them. “I have always disagreed with that.” She told them. “I believe... I believe that every few thousand years destiny chooses its own champions. For whatever the reason

Sadi... destiny has chosen my son and grandson to be those champions because of what is happening now and what is to come in the future. I believe that within my deepest heart. You Sadi Leonidas... you, Ne'Veha, Carisia, Lu'ria, all of Andro's mothers... you are the voices of those champions. You own their hearts and their souls in a way many will never fully comprehend or understand. The way Martin looks at Aricia and the others, the way Andro looks at you and Ne'Veha and the others... how they treat you. The people can see the absolute devotion and love in their eyes but they don't understand it. You can be touched by others. And because of that... people feel that my son and grandson are no different than they are. That they can be touched as well."

"Gorgo... that is precisely what Andro and Martin do not want to happen." Sadi said softly. "They don't want to be looked at as something more than they are. They hurt and they bleed... just like anyone. You more than anyone should know that."

Gorgo nodded. "I do." She answered just as softly. "But what Martin and Andro have not yet learned... what *my* Leonidas only learned in his last days among us... sometimes destiny doesn't give you much of a choice."

"So you want us to combat Ulana's lies with..." Ne'Veha began to ask.

"The truth." Deia finished her sentence. "Nothing but the truth. One interview... all of you together. You began it by capturing Icho's briefing like you did... follow it up with this. You can give people an insight into Androcles that they do not have now. If we do nothing and allow Ulana to spread her lies it will eventually come down to blows between the two of you. And we all know how that will end."

"You think I would... I would kill her?" Sadi asked.

"I think that you, Ne'Veha or any of you would butcher anyone who tried to take my *mandri* from you." Deia said. "I have seen how possessive Aricia and the others are towards Martin... and I have seen it briefly within all of you. I'm not entirely sure what power draws you to them in such a way, nor do I understand it, but it is there. Am I wrong?"

Sadi looked at her and shook her head after a moment. "No." She said softly. "Deia there are others within the Union that do not share our faith and beliefs. They may very well begin to consider us religious fanatics if we do this."

Deia nodded her head. "I realize that... but I think you might be surprised." She said in reply. "I believe everyone knows how deeply Martin and others view their faith even though he may not show it as often as others. I think they consider it a strength."

Ne'Veha reached out and clasped her fingers within Sadi's and looked at Gorgo. "Yes." She said softly. "We will do this."

"*SirsanGai*... you realize that..." Sadi stopped talking but continued to look at Ne'Veha. They were right she thought to herself. But it was also an opportunity to put a face to the name. To allow people to see that Andro and his father were no different in many respects than the average person.

"We need to do this *KertaGai*." Ne'Veha told her softly.

Sadi turned her eyes to Gorgo and Deia after a moment and nodded. "Very well... but we need to lay some ground rules first." Sadi told them. "First and foremost... Dilaen chooses who does the interview."

Deia smiled and held out the data pad she had been keeping on her belt. "She already has. Do you remember that elf Me'alla who was in Sparta that day of the Kavalian attack and caught everything in her camera? She lives here in Gytheio... and while she is not a die hard supporter of Martin or the Queens, she is loyal to the core."

Sadi nodded her head. "I recall her broadcasts. They were even and truthful and not filled with opinion and assumption."

Deia nodded. "Exactly."

"We do it here at the villa." Sadi spoke turning to look at her *Durcunusaan* Detail Head. "Kynthia can you set it up? We can use the main room here but we want to make sure nothing gets seen in the background that we don't want seen. We don't intend for our lives to become a soap opera on the Netnews."

Kynthia nodded. "Easily." She answered.

"The patio *KertaGai*. We can do it out there." Ne'Veha spoke. "So Majeir and Anthar can be part of it and no one sees inside our home."

Sadi nodded. "The patio then."

"When?" Deia asked.

“We can’t do it today.” Sadi said. “Carisia and Lu’ria won’t be back from Eden City until early tomorrow. Late tomorrow morning... after Carisia and Lu’ria return.”

“I’ll make the arrangements.” Deia said.

“I hope this doesn’t backfire on us.” Sadi said.

“It won’t.” Deia said.

“There is still the issue of how Ulana is getting all this information.” Aegea said. “Some how she is getting intelligence that she should not have. Details that are not public and that we the *Durcunusaan* are not giving out by accident by being stupid.”

Kynthia nodded with a smile. “We believe we have traced it back to her time when she was dating the Prince. She may have accessed different internal computers at the island palace on Apo Prime. Or within Andro’s apartment. Downloaded information.” She told them. “We are investigating, but even we are stretched thin.”

Deia nodded. “That would make sense. Like Gorgo I never really trusted her to be honest with you.” She said. “Keep your investigation moving regardless Kynthia; it will only make things better when you finally discover the truth. As for what we intend now... it will not effect the outcome.”

Gorgo looked around the villa then as if realizing something for the first time. “Where... where is Andro?” She asked. “I don’t smell him anywhere on the island.”

“He and Dorian left on the *SCIMITAR* late yesterday.” Sadi answered. “They were doing a routine pick up of an Omega Team from Solmar. Near the Bontawillian border in The Wilds. Andro felt it would be good operational training for Dorian and Ryner. They needed field time together.”

“Routine?” Deia asked.

Sadi nodded. “Yes. It is perfectly safe Deia. And well outside the Kavalian operational areas. They should be back tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” Deia said not sounding very convinced. “Why does that not give me much peace?”

SOLMAR

THE WILDS

FEBRUARY 3RD 2575

OMEGA TEAM 62

Routine. There was nothing routine about this day.

There were four of them left now. And they could do nothing but run.

Four wolves racing in unison through the timber of the terrain, all headed in the same direction and for the same location. They were slightly above average for Lycavorian wolves in size, two dark brown in color; another black with gray just beginning to streak its fur and the last was the smallest and the most beautiful to look at with dark russet fur. They were darting between the trees and around the boulders as they moved up the side of the ridge. Their sprint had started nearly ten kilometers back, on the edges of the largest settlement of Solmar and the only one with a spaceport. Five of their team had been cut down in order that they could escape and none of them were happy about that. Even as they watched the five other members of their team chopped down in the firefight, they took pride in the fact that nearly twenty of their enemy fell dead around them before that happened. Unfortunately... waiting for just those few seconds enabled the Kavalians to see them and give away their support position. They were outgunned and overmatched and the four of them responded just as their intense training told them. They turned and they ran.

Omega Team 62.

They began as nine men and women. Four Lycavorians, three elves, one vampire and one elf/Lycavorian hybrid. All volunteers, all of them dedicated to the Union and her continued existence and all of them no longer listed among the active roles of the Union military. They had completed their training regime some four months ago, all of them selected from the top tier of their units as were the other sixty-one Omega Teams and they were the last Team to have been trained by the finest collection of instructors within the Union ranks. Instructors who were officially dead by all Union records and who worked strictly for the Krypteria. Instructors who taught

them how to be the most ruthless and brave fighting force anywhere. Only thirteen senior men and women knew of their existence, in part because those thirteen men and women had taken an active role in their training. They were as the King intended them to be. Silent and deadly.

A deep bark by the black and gray wolf echoed in the trees and caused all of them to shift their direction and merge their paths until they were once more together. Four soft silver/white flashes of light and then they were back in human form as they came to a halt and dropped to one knee near the massive fallen stump. The large older Lycavorian quickly took stock. He was the senior enlisted man and second in command of their team behind their Lieutenant who had fallen.

“Vari? Emios?” He hissed out the words.

The two Lycavorians nodded their heads as their chests heaved. Ten kilometers at a dead sprint would affect even the most physically in shape wolves out there.

“I am unhurt.” Vari answered with a nod.

Emios looked at his right arm. “I took one through the meat of my arm.” He spoke almost as an afterthought. “It is almost fully healed now.”

“Let me look.” The lone female spoke.

“Haridl?” Dantio asked her.

The woman looked at him, her two inch high elven ears marking her as half elf and half Lycavorian. Her Lycavorian father and elven mother had been mated for over a millennia and while she had not seen them in over two years, she always stayed in touch when she could. She was Team 62’s medic, trained by Queen Anja and Colonel Anuk themselves, as were all of the Omega Team medics.

“I am... I am fine Dantio.” She rasped as she moved next to Emios and began to inspect the healed wound in the sleeve of his ArmorPly Scout armor. A much lighter and more flexible version of the Mark IV ArmorPly.

Dantio was nearly seven hundred years old and a grizzled veteran of many battles with the High Coven. Born on Apo Prime and now calling Earth his home, Dantio had been among the first who had volunteered for the Omega Teams.

“We must not rest long.” He spoke. “They could still be pursuing us even two kilometers back.”

“Dantio... the others?” Vari asked softly.

Dantio shook his head. “You saw the same thing I did Vari.” He answered. “They are lost.”

“They may not be dead Dantio.” Emios spoke. “They may only be injured!”

“Emios you saw the numbers!” Dantio hissed softly. “They were surrounded by at least two companies of Kavalians! And they did not care that they mowed down a dozen civilians to get our people!”

“It was a set up!” Vari snarled.

Dantio looked at him. “Then why wait until the Zero Squad was off?” He asked. “That was our mission. Why hit us after we completed our mission? No one but senior command knows our missions or that we even exist!”

“The Kavalians were not supposed to be here!” Haridl spoke softly as her fingers dug into Emios’s arm probing to insure the projectile was not lodged within his flesh. “We are only five light years from Bontawillian space! How have they reached this far and we didn’t know about it!”

Dantio shook his head. “They may be many things... but they are not stupid.” He spoke. “Establishing an outpost this close to Union space is prudent.”

“Dantio... two companies is not an outpost!” Vari hissed at him. “Solmar is a large planet! They could have an entire base hidden here somewhere! And how did they mark the others as soldiers?”

“We have been here for two weeks acting as tourists.” Emios said. “The civilians in the settlement had no idea we were soldiers or else they would have come sooner.”

“We don’t know that.” Haridl spoke patting Emios on the arm telling him he was ok. “The extraction team is waiting for us. We need to make contact and then go back.”

“We don’t leave our people! Not to the Kavalian dogs!” Vari agreed. “And we need to find out how many of them there are!”

Dantio looked at them. He nodded his head in agreement for he felt the same way. Dead or not... they could not leave the bodies of their comrades. “They could already be offworld.” He said.

“Then we need to make sure!” Emios spoke.

Dantio looked back through the timber in the direction they had come from. “We make the extraction point, take some extra equipment from the extraction team and then move west and circle around to the mountains on the north end of the settlement. They are high enough for us to view the entire settlement and discover what is going on.”

“The extraction team won’t wait for us.” Vari said.

“Then they can come back!” Haridl said. “We don’t leave our people behind!”

Emios nodded his head. “Let’s do this!” He said quickly. “We need to discover about the Kavalian force anyway. We can’t leave now. Not without knowing.”

Dantio nodded his head. “Five more kilometers to the extraction point. We don’t stop. The Kavalian dogs are fast but we are faster and they can not track us. Rest for twenty minutes and then we go. Vari... move back two hundred meters and cover our tails. The lieutenant had the planetary radio and our implants will not reach the ship in orbit. No attempts to reach the Extraction Point. Team COMS or Mindvoice only until we get there.”

“We have to assume they took the radio.” Haridl said. “No sense in giving them a means to track us.”

Dantio looked around at their position. “Vari... go! We wait twenty minutes and then go.”

Vari nodded and quickly rose into a crouch moving his muscular form back the way they had come.

Haridl looked at Dantio. “Something tells me this is not an outpost Dantio.”

He met her eyes and nodded. “I agree.” He spoke. “A forward command post perhaps.”

“I can’t believe the Bontawillians missed this.” Emios spoke.

“Our Bontawillian allies are not true warriors Emios.” Dantio spoke. “I do not think they would know what to look for, even close to the border as we are.”

“They will *sibfla* when they find out the Kavalians are on one of their colony worlds.” Emios said.

Dantio nodded. “Yes... I do believe they will.”

“...have made contact by now Andro?” Dorian asked walking up to where his brother sat on the ramp of the *STRIKER*.

Andro sat at the foot of the ramp between Elynth’s huge front forelegs, her right talon resting on his thigh. They had landed in the small clearing eighteen kilometers from the largest settlement on Solmar. The settlement with the only spaceport. The mission parameters had been simple really. The Omega Team was to rendezvous and then escort the Zero Squad to the single spaceport and see them off. The Zero Squad would then find their way into Kavalian space from other ports within The Wilds. Andro had decided to do the pick up of the Omega Team himself, allowing Dorian the experience of an actual operation while also getting out of Sparta and off Earth before he went crazy. While he reveled in the military aspect of things, he was easily bored and in some cases angered having to deal with the political tone. He had told only Sadi and Ne’Veha that he was going and they in turn would tell Carisia and Lu’ria. Jomann would understand and he was busy forming the last of the details and helping Eliani with assisting Brendi Faith and her family to become acclimated to their new lives within Sparta. Dorian had jumped at the chance for him and Ryner to actually put their new skills to use and relying on Jomann to inform the head of his *Durcunusaan* detail Sheva Juconi. She was not going to be happy Dorian was sure.

The pureblood vampire female, though three hundred plus years his senior, could and did elicit powerful emotions to come out in him. The part of his blood that was wolf called for her in a way he had never felt before. Just being around her and having to endure her rich caramel scent drove him *malda*. Andro had told him what he was experiencing and even taught him some techniques to try and block the pungent flavor of her scent when he was near her. Andro had encouraged him to pursue Sheva because of the strength of his attraction to her and what it could mean, but Dorian had refused. He didn’t want to scare her away and Dorian knew that she still considered him a child no matter that he was now a fully grown twenty-four year old. She did not truly believe that Dorian had become aware in his mother’s womb and this had triggered the powerful bond with Ryner. Jomann had tried to explain it to her Andro knew, but she had dismissed it because she didn’t believe it was possible. Sheva was an odd sort Andro decided, having spent so much time within the *Durcunusaan* and working with the Bonded Pairs, and then not believing Dorian’s connection with Ryner. Perhaps Dorian being

born fully aware she did not understand and Andro had decided to speak with her privately about it to allow her to see that it was very possible.

Dorian matched his brother's height at six foot one, but he was about twenty-five pounds lighter at a hundred and ninety-five pounds. He was equally as defined as any of his brothers, a trait that came from their father he knew. Dorian had been training almost non-stop every day though his actual schooling had ended some two weeks ago. Ryner was exceptionally intelligent and much of what his Bonded Brother knew he had passed to Dorian without hesitation. Their bond had grown in both power and skill and Andro concluded that they had reached a level that only Lisisa, Eliani and Resumar had achieved as non-purebloods with their dragons. Dorian and Ryner were even a tad more powerful than Resumar and Cemath Andro concluded, though they lacked the extensive experience of Resumar and his Bonded Brother. That would come with years and actual fieldwork, which is why Andro decided to take them on this mission. It was a simple pick up, but they would act as if they were in enemy territory.

Andro had grabbed the most senior *STRIKER* pilot on the *SCIMITAR* to fly the ship while he acted as co-pilot. Andro was a fair pilot himself, but nowhere near skilled enough as an elf at the controls. Ne'Veha had recommended the female elf and he had gone with that. She was currently sitting in the cockpit with the Flight Engineer monitoring the sensors and COM gear. The small, six person team of *Durcunusaan* that he had brought were permanently assigned to the *SCIMITAR* but they were just as skilled and experienced as those who were not assigned to ships. The senior *Durcunusaan* was a battle hardened Lycavorian who had fought with Andro during the Evolli war. Two more Lycavorians, two elves and one Drow made up the remainder of the small team. They had set up a perimeter immediately upon landing and with Elynth and Ryner helping, they had gotten the camouflage net stretched out over the ninety meter length of the *STRIKER*. Now all they had to do was wait. Something that Dorian was finding very hard to do.

Andro tore a hunk from the large piece of dried beef with his teeth and began to chew as he held up the rest in his hand. Elynth's muzzle snapped forward, her razor sharp maw opening and closing on the chunk of meat with incredible gentleness as she took it from Andro's fingers. To those who were unfamiliar with dragons it would appear to be an insane move, putting one's hand so close to a mouth that could probably engulf all of Andro's upper body with simple ease. He watched as Dorian stepped up next to Ryner and lifted his hand to stroke the scales of his Bonded Brother's thick neck.

"They aren't overdue yet Dorian." Andro said as he chewed. "This is the hardest part I know *fervon*. We've all been through it."

The senior *Durcunusaan* enlisted man grinned and nodded his head from where he sat at the top of the ramp. "We were on a similar OP during the Evolli War." He said looking at Dorian as he lifted his own ration bar to his mouth and bit a chunk off. "A normal pickup of a Drow Scout team. Fleet Intelligence forgot to tell us they were stopping to spend the night with some locals they had befriended. We waited in a driving rain storm for eighteen hours with no ship and only light gear. We didn't find out what happened until they strolled into our perimeter the next afternoon." Cletus said shaking his head. "Needless to say I cornered the Intelligence Officer when we returned to our ship and properly let him know he had failed in his job."

Andro grunted with a small laugh. "You didn't hurt him did you Cletus?" H asked.

Cletus looked at him. "Only a very small bit Milord." He answered. "He never made the same mistake again."

Andro chuckled. "I'm sure he didn't." He said turning his head as the female elf pilot walked down the ramp and looked at him.

"Excuse me Milord?" She spoke as she squatted down.

Andro looked at her. "Sa'roh... when will you and Cletus stop calling me that?" He asked. "We've worked together for six years on the *SCIMITAR*."

The female elf smiled at him. "When will you stop being Crown Prince?" Sa'roh asked him nonchalantly.

Andro rolled his eyes waved his hand in a dismissive manner. "I wish I could do that now." He answered with a grin and shake of his head. He turned back to her. "What's up?" He asked.

Sa'roh held out the data pad. "Something strange." She spoke. "When we arrived five hours ago, normal civilian traffic was plentiful from all the settlements. Radio broadcasts... Netnews channels... all of the Union Entertainment channels. Normal settlement to settlement broadcasts."

Andro took the pad and looked at her. "So?"

"As of ten minutes ago... everything has dropped to nothing." Sa'roh explained. "No COM traffic at all. When I tried to tap into the spaceport central core I discovered it had been locked out."

"Locked out?" Andro asked. "Maintenance?"

"That's the automated message being transmitted but you don't lock out the electrical and power subsystems to do maintenance Milord." She told him evenly. "All exterior connections to suborbital satellites are locked out as well. Nothing is coming in or going out. The satellites are receiving, but nothing is being beamed to the planet. Essentially the entire colony has been cut off from the Union."

Andro turned his eyes to the pad as Cletus and Dorian moved closer. "Why would you broadcast that you are doing maintenance and cut off the entire colony?"

"You wouldn't Milord." Sa'roh answered.

Andro turned his eyes back to her. "You are saying this is not just some sort of computer malfunction?"

"If it was just a power shutdown I would say yes." Sa'roh answered. "But when all the colony's satellites are locked out and subsystems have been rerouted... no."

"How would you do this Sa'roh?" Andro asked her as he got to his feet slowly.

Sa'roh rose as well. "Well... the best way to control these things is from the colony's power substation. It would allow you to bypass all safeties and essentially control the entire distribution grid across the planet."

"Show me." Andro spoke.

Sa'roh led them back up into the *STRIKER* and to the left side of the ship. This is where the Operational Command section was. Several monitors and computer stations compacted into a small area that could act as an Operational Hub for missions. From this area of the *STRIKER* you could communicate and control forces up to a Combined Fleet Group in size. Sa'roh moved to the computer station and began typing commands. Andro watched as she brought up the holo graphic depiction of Solmar. She pointed to the monitor.

"Here." She said. "The Power substation is built into this mountain two hundred and fourteen kilometers west of here. It gets most of its power from the waterfall it is built around. The Bontawillians added some additional generator units but even without them, the size of the settlements means the waterfall can power all of them without the additional boost."

Andro looked at the monitor. "It's central to all the settlements?" He asked tracing his finger on the screen.

Sa'roh nodded her head. "No more than a hundred kilometers from any of the six major settlements on this continent." She replied. "The Bontawillians were going to expand onto the western continent next year. All of the equipment is set to go but they haven't picked the excavation teams yet."

"You know a lot about this colony Sa'roh." Dorian told her.

Sa'roh nodded her head looking at the handsome half breed Prince. She and many of the other elven females on the *SCIMITAR* had been discussing Dorian's availability. It was natural for elven females to seek out the strongest and most virile males to take as husbands. This was something inbred in all female elves since the very inception of their species. You could not get more virile and strong than a Leonidas son, and considering the fact that no Queen or Princess ever was seen without a smile on their faces, there had to be something else to the enigma of the Leonidas men. Something that made many females swoon just thinking about it. Perhaps the many rumors of the Leonidas men all being built like bulls in the cock department was true. "It's touted as the crown jewel of Bontawillian colonies. Lush and fertile. Temperate climate. My parents were thinking of purchasing a retirement home here."

"Can we still access the satellites?" Andro asked.

Sa'roh looked at him. "The Bontawillian government won't be happy about us breaching their computer systems." She said.

"They can sue me later." Andro popped. "Something tells me that this is not happening because of a screw up. Use our fleet backup codes and get me a picture from orbit. Overlay it over what you already have up."

Sa'roh nodded and her hands flew over the console as more of the *Durcunusaan* team came up the ramp and got closer. Andro's eyes grew narrow as he watched her overlay what he had asked and she looked up.

"All six settlements are dark." Sa'roh told him. "Look... power has been severed in six different spots. All three PDC stations are dark too." She traced the outline of several different underground conduits on the

screen. “Well... not really severed. Just stopped. Power is still flowing to the PDC stations... it’s just not branching to the six settlements.”

“Stopped how?” Andro asked.

“If I had to guess I’d say someone yanked the PDCs for each settlement’s grid.” Sa’roh answered.

“PDCs?” Dorian asked.

“Power Distribution Coils.” Sa’roh explained. “Pull the cells and no matter where the power is coming from it won’t reach the designated points. Looks like all three PDC stations have gone dark along with the Power Substation itself.”

“That doesn’t sound good.” Cletus spoke softly.

“What’s the nearest PDC from here?” Andro asked.

“Seventeen kilometers east.” Sa’roh answered looking at him.

“Why would someone yank the PDCs?” Andro asked.

Sa’roh shook her head quickly. “You wouldn’t. Not all of them at once. Not even for a major maintenance overhaul.” She replied. “Power flow would be interrupted all over the planet and you’d have to shut down the main power substation and then reboot it in order to get the power flowing once again.” She answered. “No one would want to screw around with a job like that. It would take days just to realign the Coils.”

“Any ships in orbit?” Andro asked.

Sa’roh shook her head. “No.”

“Where are Sa’sur and the *SCIMITAR*?” Andro asked.

“Shrouded on the far side of the fourth moon.” Sa’roh answered.

“Send a coded burst to her. I want her back in orbit and doing passive scans of the terrain surrounding all the settlements.” Andro told her quickly. “Cletus you’re with me. Peus rides with Dorian.”

“Where are we going?” Cletus asked though part of him already knew the answer and his Spartan blood began to churn.

“I want to check out the closest PDC Station.” Androcles answered. “Leave your second here to wait for the Omega Team. Sa’roh... once Sa’sur is back in orbit have her cross deck all scans to you here.”

She looked at him. “You don’t think this is an accident do you?” She asked.

“This was done on purpose.” Andro said shaking his head. “And not by those who are our friends.”

“Kavalians?” Sa’roh asked. “Here?”

“Close to the Bontawillian border.” Cletus spoke. “Nice strategic forward base if they can get established without anyone knowing. It would be a mother to dig them out of the mountains and timber if they got in deep. Even for us.”

Andro looked at Dorian now. “*Fervon*? You up for this? It may not be a routine mission anymore.”

Dorian took a deep breath and nodded. “We are ready.”

Andro turned back to Sa’roh. “Implant channel thirteen. We’ll report back what we find.”

“Milord... shouldn’t we have Sa’sur deploy the Spartan company on the *SCIMITAR*? We...” Sa’roh asked.

Andro shook his head. “Not yet. I want to make sure what...” Andro stopped talking and tilted his head back towards the open ramp. *Sister*? He reached out to Elynth.

I feel them too. She answered. *Heavily shielded but moving closer.*

Andro looked at Cletus. “Defensive positions.” He hissed. “We’ve got company moving towards us.”

Cletus became instantly alert. “The Omega Team?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “Unless the Kavalians have learned how to Mindvoice and have Tier Five Shields... the Omega Team would be my guess. Elynth can feel them too.”

Dorian looked at Andro. “Ryner and I as well. Just barely.”

Andro looked at his younger brother and smiled. “That’s one of the gifts that being born aware gives us *fervon*.” He stated. “Being able to sense other high tier Mindvoice users. Elynth and I will teach you how to properly focus so it has more clarity.” He turned to Cletus and Sa’roh. “Defensive positions. Sa’roh... get forward and get that message to Sa’sur. Lock out the cockpit until you hear from me.”

Sa’roh nodded and headed forward without hesitation. “Why wouldn’t they contact us via COMs?” Cletus asked Andro.

“There are only four of them. They are... they are anxious” Dorian spoke his eyes clear as if he was concentrating really hard. “The standard Omega Team size is nine. Something has happened. Something very bad.”

Andro nodded pleased at how quickly Dorian was learning the small subtleties of an advanced Mindvoice user. “I’ll reach out to them first.” He said. “Have your men ready though. If they have led Kavalians back here then they all die.”

Cletus looked at him. “Omega Teams are not... they wouldn’t do that Androcles.” He said.

Andro nodded. “I know. Which means if they have led them back here they are prisoners and the Kavalians have the ability to track them.”

“*Sibfla*... that would be bad.” Cletus said.

Andro nodded. “Yes it would.” He said. *Elynth... you and Ryner get airborne and stay just above the trees. No sense in letting any Kavalians in the area see you flying at altitude.*

We are moving. Elynth answered.

Andro unclipped his P190A3 A4 from his shoulder. “Let’s get in position.” He said.

Sa'sur groaned sleepily at the insistent buzzing of her COM. She felt the powerful arms of her husband and mate pull her tighter and then she smiled thinking it was just a dream. The buzzing continued and she opened her pale blue eyes slowly as the noise chased away sleep.

“You had better answer it.” The deep voice spoke just next to her elven ear and she turned her head slightly, leaning into the delightful nuzzle that her mate gave to her sensitive elven ear.

Sa'sur’s husband and mate of nearly nine hundred years had joined them on Earth for a short leave before he returned to his own ship and crew. When Andro decided to conduct this mission he had come along just to remain near his beautiful elven mate and not lose the time they had together. It was a simple mission and would still allow them plenty of time when they returned to Earth.

“Perhaps I will choose not to.” She stated with a smug smile.

Menlan grinned at her response. “Ah... so this is how the discipline on the Prince’s ship goes.” He stated sarcastically. “It all begins with the Captain you know.”

Sa'sur rolled her naked body over within his arms and glared at him with her changed pale blue wolf eyes. “I will show you discipline husband.” She growled at him as she leaned closer and nibbled on his chin with her fangs.

Menlan chuckled softly, enjoying the attention of his elven mate. Nine hundred years and five children had not dulled his desire for her in any way and he pulled her tighter as she kissed him. He felt her tense in his embrace as the buzzing continued. He smiled once more and drew his nose over her lips as they ended the kiss. “Answer it Sa'sur.” He said. “I still have four days and all of it is to be spent with you. What could possibly be wrong on so simple a mission?”

Sa'sur groaned and smiled. “You don’t know Andro that well my husband. Trouble seems to follow that poor boy no matter where he goes.”

“He is a Spartan and a leader of men.” Menlan told her. “Like his father. Trouble doesn’t follow them... it seeks them out.”

Sa'sur nodded her head with a small laugh. “Yes it does.” She rolled away from him quickly, pulling the sheet with her and wrapping it around her body as she stood. Menlan laid there and Sa'sur’s wolf eyes gazed hungrily at his naked form. “Don’t you move do you hear me?” She told him with a soft and sultry voice. “I am going to feast on you when I get rid of this call.”

Menlan laid back on the bed and grinned. “I look forward to it.” He said.

Sa'sur turned and marched across her bedroom and slapped her hand down on the console of her desk. “Sa'sur!” She snapped. “And this had better be good! I asked not to be disturbed unless there was an emergency!”

“Commander Waltra Captain! We have received a Priority One Alpha message from the Prince! He is ordering us into orbit of Solmar under Shroud to conduct passive sweeps of the planet! The entire power system has been brought down and he suspects Kavalians are on the surface!”

Sa'sur immediately became all business. "Kavalians?" She gasped. "*Sibfla!* And we are without our Strike Wing again! Contacts?"

"None so far Captain."

"Alter course and put us in the best position to scan the planet! Begin full spectrum array passive scans of the surface!" Sa'sur hissed. "I'll be on the bridge in three minutes!" Sa'sur turned back as the conversation ended and she saw Menlan rising to his feet. "Menlan I..."

Menlan shook his head. "You are Captain of this ship for a reason my beautiful wife and mate." He stated reaching for his clothes. "Got room for an observer?"

Sa'sur moved for the chair and her own clothes. "As long as you are observing me and not the female crew!" She quipped playfully.

Menlan laughed as he pulled his pants on. "Only you stir my blood Sa'sur. Only you."

Dantio studied the small clearing from the treeline. He could just make out the outline of the ship. Whoever the pilot was they had consummate skill to land the ship in the clearing as they had. The camouflage net was secured to several large trees and would make it impossible to spot the ship from the air. He could see no movement under the net, though from his position he could only make out the rear of the ship.

[Dantio?] Vari asked reaching out within Mindvoice so their voices would not be heard or carry over the distance.

[No movement.] Dantio answered. *[Larger than I thought the pick up ship would be.]*

[Looks like a STRIKER from the back here.] Emios commented. *[Ramp is right and the length is good.]*

[Why would a STRIKER be the pick up ship? RAPTORs usually pick us up.] Haridl asked.

[Location is right.] Dantio spoke. *[Sibfla... will nothing go according to plan on this day?]* He cursed.

"You know what they say about plans." The deep voice spoke from behind them.

All four of them moved with incredible speed, rolling in different directions as they brought their weapons up. Dorian was impressed to say the least. He knew that his vampire blood gave him unmatched speed and allowed him to blur in motion, but these three men and one half elf female had moved with incredible reflexes and speed themselves. He had wrapped Andro within the shadows just as his mother had taught him and they quickly made their way to where the Omega Team was watching the ship. Dorian knew his mother was considered one of the masters of using the shadows among all vampires, and her skill in this regard had passed to him easily. She had helped him to refine it to exacting control before she had left to join his father, but Dorian remembered all her lessons. Dorian had his father's deeply tanned skin and his eyes, but his features were all his mother and Isabella was widely considered one of the most beautiful vampire females anywhere within the Union.

"*Nubou!*" Dantio hissed as he leveled his weapon at the two figures. His mind quickly saw who it was and his eyes grew even wider. He would recognize Prince Androcles anywhere and he lowered his weapon just as quickly. "Milord!" He gasped in shock.

Andro was squatting on the ground, his azure colored eyes bright and focused. He had been prepared to use his Etheric power to disarm the Omega Team if they had opened fired without question. Thankfully Andro saw that his father's training and that of others prevailed over their base instincts.

"Prince Androcles?" Vari gasped with wide eyes seeing him and the tall young man standing beside him.

"Put your weapons down." Andro spoke firmly. "You are back among friends."

Dantio didn't hesitate and lowered his A4 instantly as he pushed himself to his knees. "Sire we..."

"I decided to make the pick up." Andro told him. "It was supposed to be routine and I thought the field experience would benefit my brother Dorian."

Dantio looked at Dorian quickly. "Brother?" He asked surprised. "Your... your mother was still carrying your brother when we left Union space three months ago Milord."

Dorian grinned. "It's a long story." He stated.

"Where is the rest of your team?" Andro asked.

Dantio shook his head. “Kavalians hit us Milord.” He spoke. “They were everywhere. The Lieutenant and half our team went into the settlement to see the Zero Squad off from the spaceport. Once the ship had left they were moving to rejoin us. The Kavalians hit them in force.”

“Kavalians.” Andro hissed. “They didn’t follow you?”

Dantio shook his head. “They tracked us until we moved into the deep timber to make the pick up point.” He replied. “I assumed they did not want to follow us.”

Andro shook his head. “That isn’t it.” He said. “They’ve brought down the power grid for the entire planet and locked out all primary satellite feeds. They didn’t feel the need to pursue you. How many hit you?”

“Two companies at least Milord.” Emios answered.

Andro got to his feet and held out his hand to Dantio. “We’re not leaving just yet Dantio. There is more to do.” He said.

Haridl looked at him. “Milord... we don’t know if they were taken alive or dead.” She spoke up. “All of them went down... but they could still be alive.”

Andro nodded his head. “One of them is at least.” He said. He tapped his head. “Once you got close enough for me and Elynth to detect your shields and the resonance you were using I could make out one other who is not among your group here. Robaran? He’s a vampire isn’t he?”

Haridl gasped softly and Dantio nodded his head pulling his eyes away from her. “Our communications operator.” He said in reply. “They... they will not treat him kindly if he lives Milord.”

Andro glanced at Haridl because of her reaction and then back to Dantio. “Mark my words... we will not leave him behind. If it is possible in any way we’ll go after him. However, it appears the attack against your team was only the beginning. We have other issues that have come up.”

The Omega Team looked at him. “Sire?” Emios asked.

“If my guess is accurate... the Kavalians have brought down the entire power grid for the planet.” Andro told them. “It appears they want Solmar as a forward base and have moved to do just such a thing. They’ve taken down all three power Substations, deactivated power to all the settlements and shut down the main Power Plant in the west. All offworld COMs are being jammed except for our military channels. They apparently think having you here was a flunk since no general alarm has been raised. At least none that we can detect. You’re sure the Zero Squad got off?”

Dantio nodded. “We watched their transport depart Milord.”

“The settlements?” Vari asked. “They’ll go after the settlements and begin digging in deeply.”

Andro nodded. “That is why we aren’t leaving. Come on.” Andro spoke heading in the direction of the *STRIKER*.

SCIMITAR

Sa'sur moved onto the bridge with even strides and immediately began to bark orders. Menlan simply moved to the side out of the way and watched with pride as his wife and mate showed why she was one of the most feared ship commanders in the entire Union Fleet. Sa'sur was completely unaware of this reputation he knew, but there were very few Fleet Officers who wanted to go up against her in drills. Her association with the Crown Prince had given her an entirely different outlook in combat. She drove the *SCIMITAR* to do things most commanders would not expect of their ships or their crew. Menlan also knew the *SCIMITAR* was far more advanced than most of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers in the fleet because it was the Crown Prince’s ship. Many of her systems, while not directly based on City Ship 41 technology like the new *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carriers, were tweaked and then fitted in such a way that the *SCIMITAR* was as close to the *ARIZONA*-Class ships as possible in terms of capability, though it would never be a match for the newer ships. Menlan knew the turnover rate for the Prince’s ship was the lowest among active ships. Part of that was because of the honor that came with serving on Androcles’s ship, but a larger reason was his wife and mate. She was a taskmaster towards her crew, demanding nothing but the very best from them all of the time, but she would also go right to the wall in order to protect them and care for them. The crew of the *SCIMITAR* knew this and who in

their right mind would want to transfer to a new ship when his wife and mate commanded the *SCIMITAR* in such a way.

“...to me!” Menlan heard Sa'sur bark as he watched her.

“We are settling into a high polar orbit and have begun scanning the planet.” Her XO barked out from where he stood next to the sensor station.

“Still no contacts in orbit?” Sa'sur called out.

“None that we can detect Captain.” The Tactical Officer replied.

“Andro says there are Kavalians on the planet damn it!” Sa'sur snapped. “I want to know where the *nubou* they came from!”

“Captain... the entire planetary power grid is offline!” Her XO barked once more. “The main Power Station is still operating at barely sustainable levels and power is barely flowing to the PDC Substations, but from there it has been stopped! Sensors indicate the PDC Coils have been removed from each substation! All six settlement grids are dark!”

“All orbiting satellites are locked out!” The XO snapped turning to face her and holding a data pad. His fingers tapped quickly on the pad. “We can use our fleet backup codes to access them, but no one on the surface will be able to access the network.” He moved up next to her chair. “The planet is effectively cut off.”

“Adjust lateral array nine to scan for Tri-Cobalt power sources!” Sa'sur ordered. “Both in orbit and on the surface!” She turned to her XO. “Tap into the satellite system Legol and tell me exactly what they were doing before they were locked out.” The man nodded and moved to another station. “Begin powering weapons! Bring the shields online as well! Have the Ready Alert Squadron on standby! And tell the Spartan detachment to suit up and move to the landing bay! I want them fully loaded! And tell them this is not a drill!”

“Captain!” The male voice spoke and Sa'sur turned to look at her husband and mate.

“Menlan?” She asked.

He stepped forward. “My recent trip to the Advanced War College brought me into the same class as Carina Leonidas. She suggested this same scenario in our classes on Kavalian tactics.”

“What scenario?” Sa'sur asked.

“If the information you are receiving is accurate then these are the estimated actions a Puma Bane Commando unit would assert in order to take the planet for a forward staging area.” Menlan spoke. “It would involved cutting the planet off and then securing key points before a larger force arrived to take the planet.”

Sa'sur came to her feet slowly. “*Nubou lae!*” She swore. “And Solmar is a strategic point to stage out of!”

Menlan nodded. “Given it's proximity to the Bontawillian border and Union space I would have to agree.” He said.

“**Captain!**” The sensor operator shouted as she turned from her station. “Long range sensors are detecting Kavalian ships jumping into the system!”

“Get Andro for me!” Sa'sur snarled. “Now!”

“Standby!”

Sa'sur turned to her XO. “I want Mark 22s in the missile launchers! Prep all torpedo bays and standby to launch the Ready Fighters!”

“Captain... Commander Sa'roh reports that the Prince has moved to the Eastern PDC substation. Without the satellites to bounce off, we'll need to move to an ecliptic orbit for direct COMs with his implant!”

“Do it!” Sa'sur snapped. “How long?”

“Six minutes!”

SOLMAR EASTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COIL SUBSTATION

Andro stood beside the smashed computer control station and his azure eyes drifted over the bloody remains of nineteen Bontawillian and elf workers. His A4 hung from quick release clips now and his hands clenched and unclenched on the pistol grip and barrel of his weapon. It had taken them only fifteen minutes to

cover the seventeen kilometers running full out in their wolf forms. Thankfully the terrain between where his *STRIKER* was and the substation was essentially flat and it allowed for them to traverse the thick timber easily. Andro stepped up to the aging Bontawillian who was leaning back in his chair, his throat sliced open by a large blade, his blood covering his uniform and pooled beneath his body. All of them had been executed in a similar callous manner. It mattered not that the engineers were all civilians and many of them probably had never fired a weapon in their entire lives.

Andro turned his head when Dorian and Dantio moved back into the control room.

“The engineering section looks the same.” Dantio spoke softly.

Dorian nodded. “Barracks area as well. They murdered everyone. Some even look as if they have been interrogated.”

“Three of the engineers appear to have been tortured as well.” Dantio spoke moving up beside his Prince. “Their bodies were... their limbs were missing.”

Andro nodded. “Puma Bane Commandos.” He answered. “They are not known for their forgiving natures. *Nubous* butchers!” He hissed.

“The PDC Coil generators are gone Milord.” Dantio continued. “No way to get power back.”

“How many dead?” Andro asked.

“Each substation had a standing crew of sixty-three.” Dantio answered him from memory of his mission files. “We’ve accounted for fifty-seven of them.”

Andro looked at him. “Elves.” He said.

“Milord?”

“Did you find any female elves?” Andro asked. “Personnel records indicate anywhere from four to six female elves worked at each Substation. They were from the 1st Elf Engineer Division.”

Dantio shook his head. “No Milord.”

Andro turned back to the dead bodies. “Then they were taken.” He said softly his anger beginning a slow burn.

“Sire... if they hit all three PDC Substations and the Power Station at the same time, they must have five times the number we saw take down our team.” Dantio said. “I estimate they hit this Substation with no less than fifty troops.”

“Dantio... what is the population of Solmar?” Andro asked turning to look at him once more.

“Between sixteen and eighteen thousand Milord.” He answered. “Mostly Bontawillian with a mixture of others. Elves and humans mostly.”

Andro’s ear implant crackled and Cletus’s voice sounded. “Andro... Sa’sur is trying to contact you. The station is disrupting her signal without the satellites. I have her on the short range holo projectors. She must have moved the *SCIMITAR*.”

Andro nodded. “On my way.” He spoke. He looked at Dantio. “Take whatever explosives we have with us and booby trap the generators.” He spoke. “If these Kavalian bastards try to turn the power back on to this station I want them to pay dearly.”

Dantio nodded. “Understood.” He spoke. “Then what?”

“Then we are going to detour and try to see what is happening at the spaceport.” Andro said. “I want to know what is going on.”

“Andro...” Dorian spoke now. “Standard OPSEC says we are to evacuate the planet.”

Andro nodded. “I know. But I won’t leave unless I know rescuing any civilians is not doable.” He said. “That’s why we are going to the spaceport.”

Dorian nodded his head. His own anger was building as well at what he had seen. The mindless butchering was almost too much. He held no regrets in his mind for killing Qurot in the fashion he had, but this senseless murder of civilians was unacceptable to him. And to his brother it seemed.

“I want gone from here in five Dantio.” Andro spoke. “You and the rest of your team just got drafted into the *Durcunusaan* as my personal team. Get to work.”

Dantio didn’t hesitate and turned to leave the control room as Dorian stepped closer to Andro. He looked at his older brother, a man who had taught him so much these last weeks. Dorian had spoken with his father three times since they had departed, each time longer than the last as his father imparted upon him all sorts of

knowledge and his love. Yet Andro had been there from the outset and because they were both born fully aware of everything around them, this gave them a connection. “What now?” He asked softly.

Andro met his dual colored eyes. “We get as many civilians off this planet as we can *fervon*. No matter what it takes.”

SCIMITAR

“...thirty-seven Kavalian warships.” Sa'sur told him. “No *GREAT SOULS*... but a boat load of *DIATAGAs* escorting troop ships! They'll be in position at their present speed to begin landing troops within the hour. From the number of troop ships we estimate at least two to three complete divisions! Close to a hundred and fifty thousand troops! Andro... you need to get out of there now!” Sa'sur spoke to the fuzzy holographic image of Androcles on the surface of the planet below.

Sa'sur saw him shake his head. “No.” He answered. “We need to determine how many civilians are left. I don't think the Kavalians will have killed them all. We need to evac as many of them as possible.”

“That is not acceptable!” Sa'sur snapped back surprising Menlan with how she spoke to him. Then it occurred to him that they had fought together for many years and they were friends above all else. “You are Crown Prince! You can't not stay on a planet that is being invaded by the *nubous* Kavalians!”

“I will not leave these people to the mercies of the Puma Bane butchers!” Andro snapped right back. “You have not seen what they have done to those engineers we found here at the PDC Substation Sa'sur.” Sa'sur watched a *Durcumusaan* officer she did not recognize step into the transmission and whisper something to Andro. He turned back to her. “Send me the Spartan company Sa'sur. And every *STRIKER* and *KADEN* we have on board since they have Shrouds. We can stage out of another area on a different continent. I'll send the coordinates for them to land now.”

“Andro... you can not pull off the entire population!” Sa'sur barked at him.

“And you can not fight almost forty ships alone!” Andro ordered. “Take the *SCIMITAR* out system and call for back up. With the Spartan company and what I have here we can at least delay them from fully entrenching themselves here. It should buy you enough time to contact General Vengal and Admiral Ceneu. They are in command while Riall is in High Coven space! They will know what to send and how much!”

“Andro you...” Sa'sur began to protest more.

“You know I am right.” Andro said. “I will not risk our ship and our people against the odds arrayed in opposition to you now. Send me what I asked for and then leave the system and bring back help!”

“Three days Andro.” Sa'sur announced. “Four at most!”

Andro nodded. “We aren't going anywhere.” He said trying to interject some humor.

“Jomann and Sadi and your other mates are going to have my ass for leaving you!” Sa'sur stated.

Andro laughed now. “Only after they are done with me.” He said. “You are safe.”

“I'll be back Andro.” Sa'sur said.

“You always return Sa'sur.” Andro said. “That is why I trust you with my life. Now kick those ships loose and get out of here before the Kavalians arrive in force.”

“Stay frosty Andro!” Sa'sur exclaimed.

“I will.”

Sa'sur stood up as the transmission faded and then turned to her XO. “I want every possible bit of supplies we can spare on those *KADENs* and leaving in ten minutes!” She snapped. “Weapons! Rations! Uniforms! Everything! Go!” Her XO nodded and dashed from the bridge. “Helm... as soon as the *KADENs* launch come about and take us across the Bontawillian border. I don't care where. Send a coded burst to our Strike Wing. I'm done going places without our full Wing!”

Menlan stepped up to her now. “It is the right move tactically Sa'sur.” He said softly.

Sa'sur turned to look at him and nodded. “I know my love. That doesn't mean I have to like it.”

Menlan nodded. “True. Put me to work. I feel like a third wheel here. What can I do?”

SOLMAR
PRELIMINARY KAVALIAN ADHOC

His name was Azlenr'Macoe.

He was an experienced field General who had fought the High Coven for almost the entire war. He commanded three divisions of Kavalian regular and cloned troops and he had never failed in his tasks. He was considered ruthless and was not above killing innocent men and women to obtain his goals, but he also avoided wanton slaughter at all costs. His dark brown fur was just beginning to show gray due to his four thousand six hundred years of life, but he was as fit and sharp as he had been in his youth. Unlike many Kavalian officers and Pride Leaders he preferred to operate meticulously and with care. He did not rush into a situation blind and this is why he was so successful. This operation was his idea, seizing the newest Bontawillian colony as a forward staging area with overwhelming force before the Union even knew they had lost it. Azlenr studied the terrain around him from the ridgeline where he had set up his command post. They had set up on the plateau roughly three thousand feet above the valley floor with the remaining ten thousand feet of mountain reaching up into the low clouds behind them. His meteorologists told him the clouds would clear mid day and he would be able to look across the valley and see the mountain where the main Power Station was, as well as the magnificent waterfall. He lowered the macrobinos as his senior aide and another officer walked up to him.

"All teams have reported in General." His aide reported. "Power to all the settlements is down. We have used their computers to lock out the satellites and all communications now must go through our people."

"We have broadcast the false reports?" Azlenr asked.

"The last one went out only moments ago." His aide said. "The Union is unaware of what is happening."

"Insure we monitor any incoming traffic Makali'Bengane." Azlenr spoke. "They will become aware soon enough."

"As you order General." Makali replied. "This is Major Marsin'Jiate General. The Puma Bane Detachment commander."

Azlenr looked at the Puma Bane officer. He did not care for Puma Bane troops. They were on average exceptionally violent and cared not for the ramifications of their actions. Most of them were cruel to the extreme and he knew they answered to Keleru'Puat no matter what. "Yes... I know of Major Marsin. Your teams did well Major." He said finally.

The Puma Bane troop bowed his head. "It was an inspired plan General. I commend you."

"Your status?" Azlenr asked.

"My teams have secured all objectives." Marsin answered. "We have pulled back to our areas per your instructions."

"The Power Coils?" Azlenr asked him.

"Fifteen power coils are in our possession. Three from each PDC Substation and one back up from each facility." Marsin answered.

"You will have your teams transport the coils to our main supply depot." Azlenr told him. "It is being established at the base of this mountain on the west. I want the coils there within six hours."

Marsin looked at him. "I thought we were supposed to secure them General." He asked.

"And you did." Azlenr answered. "Now you will hand them over to my people."

"May I ask why?" Marsin spoke. "Our team areas are much more covertly hidden than the supply depot General. The coils would be safer there."

Azlenr turned his body and faced the Puma Bane officer. "My forward scouts are even now entering the settlements Major. Your men killed upwards of four thousand civilians in taking control of the settlements. Among them several dozen children. You were instructed to use minimal force in subduing the population Major."

"And we did sir!" Marsin hissed softly. "Those who died fought us."

"Unharmd civilians fought you and your men Major?" Azlenr asked. "Bontawillians by their nature are not militaristic. You should have used non-lethal force to subdue them. Thanks to your actions when word leaks out of the civilian casualties here you will have painted a very large target on us. You know as well as I the light the Union sees in intentionally harming civilians. What could have been a simple loss of a colony world, your actions and those of your Puma Bane troops will now turn into a major point of contention."

“The Union will not commit forces to retake this colony General.” Marsin spoke. “They are stretched thinner than we are. And we still outnumber them three to one while we recoup our ship and clone losses.”

“Are you so sure Major?” Azlenr spoke.

“I have studied the Union intensely General.” Marsin answered. “Especially this boy Prince who is now in charge while their King runs from Marshall Pusintin. He is not fool enough, nor experienced enough to try and retake this colony.”

“I wonder if the Evolli thought as you do Major?” Azlenr asked. “You know what he did to them.”

Marsin’s eyes narrowed. “We are not the Evolli sir!” He snarled.

“No we are not Major. We are Kavalians!” Azlenr snapped moving closer to the man. “And we follow orders! My orders! You and your men will have no more contact with the civilian population of this colony Major. You have killed enough of them and made my job harder.”

Marsin held his tongue and nodded his head. “As you order General.” He said.

“What about this military unit you engaged near the spaceport?” Azlenr asked.

“They were most likely on leave here sir.” Marsin answered. “Five of them. They were at the spaceport seeing off friends it appears. They departed on the last transport before we shut down the network. One of them lives. A vampire. He has not been very forthcoming so far with information. My men will take up the interrogation again when they reach their team staging area.”

Azlenr shook his head. “No.” He said. “I want him remanded to the custody of my men. Along with the elven females you took from the PDC Substations.”

Marsin’s eyes narrowed once more. “Sir?”

“I know every detail about this colony Major.” Azlenr snarled. “Right down to how many children are left after the twenty-eight you and your men killed. Each PDC Substation had six female elves assigned to it from the 1st Elven Engineer Division based on Elear. I do not know what other commanders you have worked for have allowed you to do in the past, but you will not be keeping those females as spoils of war Major.”

“They are females General.” Marsin said. “I will use them to keep the moral of my men at peak levels.”

“You will turn every single one of them over to my people.” Azlenr told him. “Alive and unhurt. And you will do so immediately Major.”

“General you...”

Azlenr stepped even closer. “Do not press me Major. I know who you are and what you have done in the past.” Azlenr snarled at him. “I do not like Puma Bane troops. You take too many liberties and are far too violent for this type of operation. You have served your purpose and now you will hand over everything you took from the PDC Substations and the main Power Plant. Including the female elves. I will not allow your men to rape them or mark them at your whim. This would only incite the Union even more.”

“And if I do not?” Marsin asked.

“Then Major... you and your men will not live out the day.” Azlenr snapped. “My men are loyal to me... and they are not children. You may kill a few of them but you will die.”

“We are Puma Bane Warriors!” Marsin growled.

Azlenr nodded. “The finest of us all.” He said. “I have heard it all before. You will follow orders Major. Or do I need to contact the Prefect myself. He is the one who sanctioned this operation and placed me in overall command. Who do you think he will side with Major? You may answer to him, but even he knows what your uses are.” Azlenr stepped back. “You and your men will have your blood Major.” He said. “After what you have done the Union will no doubt make retaking Solmar one of their top objectives. And your lack of respect for your enemies will be your undoing as well Major. The Lycavorian Union is not the High Coven and they will not throw down their weapons and run at the first sign of trouble.”

“I do not fear the Union or its toy soldiers!” Marsin snapped.

Azlenr nodded. “And I will place that on your tombstone Major. Now... now you will do as I order you or I will string up your carcass for all to see. Is that understood?”

Marsin looked around and saw that at least half a dozen security troops had slowly moved closer. All of them with stern, no nonsense expressions. He turned back to Azlenr. “My men will deliver the prisoners to you within six hours.” He said. “Unhurt.”

Azlenr nodded. “Excellent. Do not worry Major; I will insure you and your men have your blood. But it will be on my terms... not yours. You are dismissed.”

Azlenr waited until Marsin had walked out of earshot before looking at his aide. “You do not trust him Makali?”

The Colonel looked at him. “I do not trust Puma Bane troops as a whole General.” He replied.

Azlenr nodded. “Nor do I my friend. Nor do I. This one I know well from a friend.” He said. “Their skills are unmatched however and right now we need those skills.”

Makali looked at him. “What do you suspect General?” He asked.

“This group of soldiers his men butchered?” Azlenr said. “Our own intelligence officers that I have questioned since arriving have stated that reports taken from civilians indicate they killed twenty of Marsin’s men before they fell. Five of them Makali. And they took down twenty Puma Bane troops before they fell? That tells me they were not normal troops and I want to know what they were doing here. Insure this vampire they captured is delivered unharmed. As well as the elven females. I will meet with them when our main forces are on the surface and deploying to their positions.”

Makali nodded. “Brigadier Byka’Caleo says they will begin landing in under forty minutes.”

Azlenr nodded. “Good. And Makali... insure no Puma Bane troop crosses paths with Byka. He hates them all. Marsin is the one who took his daughter from him and maimed her. When he discovers it is him we will need to keep them apart.”

Makali nodded. “I will see to it sir.”

Brigadier Byka’Caleo was a good friend and had served with Azlenr for going on four hundred years now. Like Azlenr... he was a true Kavalian of old. He still had honor and he cared for the men under his command as a Pride Leader. Also like Azlenr... he had been with the same woman for centuries. As Pride leaders they could take several females to share their bed if they so chose. It was a part of their culture to insure the strongest bloodlines existed into the future. While many of the younger Pride Leaders did this often, Azlenr had no desire to do such a thing. His woman had bore him seven strong children, among them two daughters who were now the wives of officers within his own command so that he could watch out for them. It was something he had promised his woman when they entered this world and Azlenr kept his promises to her. Byka was no different and it was well known he hated Puma Bane troops across the board. His youngest daughter Kameka, one of the very first females to undergo the biogenic altering, had been taken from him by Marsin several years ago. Byka had been unable to stop this, and within a year Marsin had returned his daughter to them maimed and unable to bear children. Then he had tried to have the name of their Pride disgraced by her so called actions. Marsin reported that she resisted him in almost every attempt to take her into his bed. That had not worked out the way he had planned because of Byka’s influence, but no action was ever taken against him. The scars his daughter bore on her face from his rutting served to remind Byka every day of his feelings for those of his ilk. Kameka had recovered enough to become quite an exceptional pilot, the scars still visible but not as prominent as they were the first months after the attack. Byka had been given special permission for her to serve in combat with his unit because of the way Marsin had mistreated her and tried to tarnish the name of his Pride. His daughter was now a close assault pilot flying a *PROTOSS* gunship. Her only wish now was to die with as much of her dignity as she had left intact. Byka knew this and there were times it tore at him inside knowing what she was feeling. He also knew this was not how most male Kavalians would act and he kept it hidden from her.

“No signs of ships in orbit Makali?” Azlenr asked.

“No General.”

“Which means nothing with the Union Shrouds.” Azlenr spoke absently. “Make sure our anti-ship batteries go into service first. If the Union comes here I want to make sure they pay for whatever gains they may try to make.”

“Understood General.” Makali said.

“Tell Byka I want his scouts out within thirty minutes of him landing.” Azlenr said. “The soldiers Marsin encountered are an oddity that I want to figure out quickly. And bring me the vampire as soon as he is delivered.”

Makali nodded. “I will see to it sir.”

EARTH
SPARTA
FEBRUARY 3RD 2575
OFFICES OF SENATOR ICHO

“...not a good idea Ulana.” Icho spoke to the image of Ulana within the holographic COM unit on his desk.

“Why not?” Ulana asked. “I have been having the rallies all across my district on Apo Prime and they have been well received.”

Icho shook his head. “This is not Apo Prime.” He stated. “The Spartan lore and history our people have embraced starts here in Sparta. It is strongest here. Openly trying to denounce anyone within the Royal Family within Sparta or Gytheio will only backfire on you.”

“There are many who call Sparta home now.” Ulana spoke.

Icho nodded. “And for the most part they live here because they have adopted the Spartan legacy as well.”

“It is already planned.” Ulana stated smugly. “I can not back out. I have two ships full of supporters arriving from Apo Prime who will attend the rallies as well.”

“You are going to cause more problems with these rallies than you realize.” Icho spoke. “What we are trying to do takes time and patience.”

“And this is how I will approach what we are trying to do.” Ulana told him. “That blond wolf bitch Sadi holds the title I should have! She has the man I should have! She is a common tart and I will show her what place she holds in the grand scheme soon enough!”

Icho cut his eyes to his senior aide quickly and then looked back at Ulana. “Very well. As long as you know what you are doing Ulana?”

“Trust me Icho. I am an Alpha female and I will have Androcles coming to me before all is said and done.” Ulana told him.

“Keep me informed of what you are doing. We still need to coordinate our actions to keep pressure on them from all different sides.” Ulana said.

Ulana nodded her head in the transmission. “Of course.” She said.

Icho reached forward and tapped the console and her image disappeared. He turned his head to look at Aleus. “She is becoming more of a nuisance than I first imagined Aleus.” He spoke.

“It is hard to believe she clings to this misbegotten idea that she will somehow win back the Prince.” Aleus spoke.

Icho nodded as he rose to his feet and moved to the wet bar. He poured himself a large glass of Spartan wine and held it out to his aide. Aleus moved forward and took it and then Icho poured another for himself. “Ulana is her own worst enemy.” He said. “Her father spoiled her to no end as his only daughter. She believes everyone owes her something. And she believes Androcles belongs to her.”

Aleus nodded as he settled into the chair. “Is it possible she could succeed?” He asked.

Icho moved back to his desk. “No. Not if all the data you gathered is correct.”

“I had our people double check all of it Senator.” Aleus spoke. “It can not be refuted.”

Icho nodded as he sat down. “Then Ulana will fail miserably at what she is attempting to do. There will be some who convert to her side and begin to ask questions but the vast majority will not be fooled by her no matter what information she presents.”

“Her actions could lead to a confrontation with the Princess.” Aleus spoke. “Perhaps we could use that?”

Icho shook his head. “If it does come to blows, the Princess will be within her realm to beat her down. Even kill her depending on what Ulana attempts. No... Ulana is on her own if she wishes to butt heads with Sadi Leonidas. We will help as much as we are able but she will act on her own accord and fall if need be.”

Aleus nodded. “As you wish.”

“Silele is moving forward?” Icho asked.

Aleus nodded. “She is a member of the Defense Committee. She and Ulana both will be in the session today. Silele will lead the questioning of this Marci person from the Krypteria.”

Icho nodded. “Good. Insure Nomean keeps our lines to Laustinos open but secure. Any information that we obtain must be sent to him immediately. Do we know where he is?”

Aleus shook his head. “We assume somewhere within Kavalian space, but we have no real location to go by.”

Icho nodded. “He will make contact soon enough.” He said. “He is thorough if nothing else.”

“Do you trust him Senator?” Aleus asked.

Icho nodded. “It is he who brought me into the fold remember.” He answered. “The goal he set for beginning these actions was in my opinion foolhardy. Trying to insure things went according to a plan that gave him Dysea in the end was ignorant, but the man is brilliant. If the Kavalians had not failed in killing Martin Leonidas, our position would be much better. As it is... the longer he stays away the better our chances. His son is no politician and his Aunt and others can only protect him for so long. As long as we continue along the plan we established three years ago we will be protected and our actions will not lead back to us if we are careful Aleus. Make sure everyone knows that.”

Aleus nodded. “I have Senator. On several occasions.”

Icho smiled. “No doubt.” He said. “Now... what is the status of those within the fleet who sympathize with us?”

Aleus looked at the data pad. “Six are in a position to give us good information. Another five that can provide rumor and gossip based information. They are not high enough in rank to provide what the others can.”

“Rumor and gossip is good for our plans.” Icho said. “Any within the Prince’s Strike Wing.”

Aleus shook his head. “His immediate Strike Wing were all handpicked by the Captain of the *SCIMITAR* and others. We have one of the six within his overall Combined Fleet Unit, but not on his ship.”

“How difficult would that be to change?” Icho asked.

“I could find out.” Aleus said. “I have a contact in Fleet Personnel.”

“Do that Aleus.” Icho said. “Now let’s talk about the two proposals we will bring before the Senate Financial Committee about our young Prince. You are certain about your facts?”

Aleus nodded. “They are irrefutable Senator.”

Icho nodded his head. “Good. It will be enjoyable to see him sweat and brought down to our level. And it will be the first crack in the armor of the Leonidas family.”

SPARTA

GOVERNOR’S OFFICE

CHEILONOS BOULEVARD

The Governor’s office of Sparta was located on the south end of Cheilonos Boulevard and had occupied the same building for the last four hundred and nineteen years. While the exterior of the four story building remained the same architectural style as just after The Great Fire, the interior of the building was as modern as it could possibly be. From the day Tarifa had become wolf she had fully embraced everything about the culture and traditions of Sparta. Even her elven father, War Master Tareif, and her mother and siblings had embraced the life almost completely. Tarifa had risen to a position that no non-pureblood wolf had ever occupied before as Governor of Sparta. Her closeness with Martin and their adventures before had played some part, but not all, in the fact that over ninety percent of the men and women who called Sparta home voted for her in the Special election held after Andro appointed her Governor. Tarifa’s own energy and grasp of Lycavorian and Spartan history that was held so dear was the main reason so many Lycavorian Spartans voted for her without question. She and Aihola had given their mate six proud Spartan children over the past twenty-six years, and all of them were true Spartans at heart no matter that three of them were part Drow. Tarifa commanded respect and attention wherever she went because of her surreal beauty but also because of her intelligence and manner. She was not a woman to be trifled with as many had discovered through the years in different and painful ways and the fact that the King of the Lycavorian Union considered her a beloved sister also gave her quite a lot of political clout. Clout that she used to make things better for all of the people of Sparta as well as Earth.

Tarifa looked across her desk at Deia and Gorgo. "I still don't understand why you did not let me just refuse her a permit." She spoke as she handed the pad to her senior aide and the female elf turned to exit the office.

"It is better to confront these issues head on." Deia spoke. "Ulana's concerns with Sadi would have only grown more prominent if we denied her the right to hold her ridiculous rallies here in Sparta."

"She brought in nearly three hundred men and women from Apo Prime." Tarifa spoke with a grin. "Fucking Peaceniks Martin once called them."

Deia chuckled loudly. "He does have such a way with words doesn't he?" She said with a smile.

"The fact that she had them brought her tells us that she knows her rallies will not attract many people within Sparta. She brought them as a way to make herself seem more important." Gorgo spoke. "That they are not citizens of Sparta or Earth will be made a very prominent news item when the rallies are reported on."

"Are we so sure?" Tarifa asked. "The Netnews Channels that will be covering the rally are not known to support Martin or his policies."

Deia nodded. "No... this is true." She said. "But we are going to fight misinformation with good information. Sadi and the others have agreed to do an interview. One that we hope will offset any lies that Ulana spews at her rally. It will air on thirty-seven channels live the day after her rally."

Tarifa looked at her with a smile. "How exactly did you manage that?" She asked.

"It wasn't easy believe me." Deia replied. "Sadi and Ne'Veha are wary of the Netnews people. More so than Carisia or Lu'ria because the Netnews reporters will not attempt to go after either of them."

Tarifa nodded her head. "A wise move considering that most Drow would take great offense at such a move. Not to mention that Lu'ria's mother is a Senator and representative of Earth." She looked at Deia and Gorgo as she sipped her tea. "Ulana is not the reason you are here though is it?" She asked.

Deia shook her head. "No." She spoke. "We've come to warn you. It's very possible that Icho will attempt to somehow use your past relationship with Martin against him and by default against you."

"My past relationship?" Tarifa asked. "I assume you are referring to the few weeks that we were lovers right after he returned to Earth?"

Gorgo nodded her head. "Icho is just the type to try and use this fact against you."

Tarifa snorted very unladylike and then laughed. "Let the fool try." She stated firmly with no hint of back up in her. "Our relationship is a matter of history Gorgo. You both know this. It has not mattered to anyone before. Why should it matter now?"

Deia looked at Gorgo quickly and then turned back to Tarifa. "Androcles believes... and many of us agree... that Icho is working in some fashion for the Kavalians."

Tarifa's sapphire colored eyes opened slightly wider and she leaned back in her chair. "But you have no proof." She said.

Deia nodded. "Not yet. We can not openly order an investigation against him without some sort of evidence. Evidence which we do not have." She explained. "That would look like we are holding a grudge against him because of his vote in the Senate."

"I take it he is one of those who voted against Spartan Law and the Declaration of War against the KFI?" Tarifa asked.

Deia nodded. "Yes."

"What does this have to do with me?" Tarifa asked. "I am only the Governor of Sparta. I have no say in the overall politics of the Union."

"Your words carry far more weight than you might think Tarifa." Gorgo told her. "You are perhaps the most respected living female elf behind Dysea and For'mya."

Tarifa grinned. "So I am in good company." She stated remembering briefly the close relationship she had shared with Dysea so long ago, as well as the friendship she now had with both of them.

Deia looked at her. "You and Martin have fought for the same things Tarifa. You always have. Ever since those first days. Your minds operate in the same fashion. You..."

Tarifa held up her hand stopping Deia's words. "Deia... you do not need to shower me with praise in order to ask me what you want to ask me." She said. "You should know me better than that by now."

Gorgo chuckled now and she looked at Deia. "Now it is I who will tell you I told you so." She said.

Deia laughed softly in agreement and looked at Tarifa. “As Prime Minister I can not have an investigation started on Icho.” She stated. “But as Governor of Sparta you can. Discretely of course.”

Tarifa smiled knowingly at the two women. “So you wish me to ask *Nya Istel* to have the Drow begin an investigation of him?”

“Aihola is Vice President of Earth and Queen of the Drow.” Deia said. “Icho maintains two residences here on Earth and he has several business dealings with companies located in Eden City. I also know that Aihola has started similar investigations at Martin’s behest in the past. Anything at all that might be helpful in determining what Icho is up to would be greatly appreciated.”

“I take it Androcles does not know about this?” Tarifa said.

Deia chuckled. “No. My *mandri* is still very naïve when it comes to politics. The three of us are not. His solution to the problem would be...” Deia shrugged. “Questionable at best.”

Tarifa nodded. “His solution would be just to eliminate Icho and call it a day.” She stated knowingly. “Sort of like his father.”

“Now you see why we came to you.” Deia said. “Icho knows we can not come after him in any way without some sort of evidence that he has done something wrong. You however... you are not so limited.”

Tarifa nodded. “Consider it done.” She stated. “Aihola and I are having lunch together and I will speak with her then. What does Panos say?” She asked.

Gorgo grinned. “Panos is doing what I expect an old Spartan to do.” She said. “We most likely do not want to know.”

Tarifa laughed once more. “Oh I do know that feeling.” She said. She had spent nearly a decade as Panos’s Lieutenant Governor and she knew well the trouble he used to get into. She looked at Deia. “I assume then that you are fully back to work?”

Deia nodded her head. “For the most part.” She answered. “Though I am letting Panos handle most of it. To think he was in front of me all these years and I never noticed it. He is the wisest and most devious politician I have ever met. Excluding myself of course.” She said with a smile. “And trust me... I’ve dealt with some very devious politicians in my time.”

“It comes from his time on the Spartan Senate.” Gorgo spoke. “Even back then they would toss each other to the wolves if they could get away with it. And they were not as polite about how they did it back then. Leonidas hated it.”

“Well I for one am glad he is on my side.” Deia said.

“Why don’t you and Gorgo join Aihola and I for lunch?” Tarifa asked.

Deia looked at her. “That could cause some rumblings.” She said.

“Let the Netnews rumble.” Tarifa snorted. “You are Martin’s Aunt and mother and Aihola and I are like his sisters. We both feel that way towards him. Neither of us had an older brother... well *Nya Istel* did... but Martin has taken Tari’s place in her heart now. Why should we be denied the enjoyment of family?”

“Where?” Gorgo asked.

“Where else?” Tarifa asked with a smile. “Gallais’s Retreat.”

EARTH

DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Once known as the island of Sardinia and now home to Dragon Mountain.

Syrilth waited patiently as her ruby red eyes watched the *STRIKER DT* power down on one of the eight landing pads now built around Dragon Mountain. Through everything that had happened in the last quarter century, the one thing that Syrilth had never imagined was having the position she now did. She was the youngest Dragon Elder on the Council at only three thousand and fourteen years of age, but her experiences and the many hundreds of years she had spent doing nothing but safeguarding her brothers and sisters had earned her untold respect in the eyes of every living dragon. Giving her a seat of the Dragon Elder Council was the very least Arzoal and the others could think to do, for while there were many who were older than her, none of them had forsaken everything about themselves to protect others as Syrilth had. None of them had endured the

pain and humiliation she had endured being forced to bond with vile Maraud as he was now called in order to keep her siblings alive. Whatever sins she may have committed while protecting her siblings had long been forgiven. Now Syrilth was honored and trusted and respected. Her sister Tharua was the Bonded One of Eliani Leonidas and her younger brother Roluth was Bonded to not one, but two beautiful women who held the fates of so many in their hands. The youngest of her siblings who had so far hatched was now the Bonded One to Lu'ria of the Drow and Majeir carried a Princess of the Union with dignity, honor and love. It seemed the moment that Aricia Blue Eyes, Isheeni and the others had freed them, Syrilth and her siblings were thrust into a position of importance for all time.

Syrilth watched with patience yes... but inside she was bursting with excitement. Arzoal had tasked her with one mission when she left. A mission of great importance and honor since it directly affected Talon Guardian Androcles. Through the years Syrilth had garnered an almost reverent respect for Martin Leonidas and his son Androcles. For Torma and Elynth. Their brave actions on Alba Tau were already burned into the history scrolls and minds of every living and breathing dragon. What they had done that long and bloody night, refusing to surrender the bodies of their fellow riders and dragons to the Evolli even though hopelessly outnumbered and injured themselves, this single act had raised the four of them to almost mystical proportions among the dragons across the Union. No matter where they went now, no matter what they encountered, any breathing dragon would know they were Talon Guardians and they would honor that most reverent of positions in dragon society.

Syrilth saw the ramp lock into a down position and she watched Sadi and Ne'Veha making their way down the metal deck plates. She watched them stop at the bottom of the ramp and look at the side of the mountain that was formerly City Ship 41. Now buried within the mountainous terrain of Sardinia, City Ship 41 was not only home to all the dragons on Earth, but also a place of quiet learning and study to those that were bound to dragons. Avi had configured the bio-mechanical nature of the ship into such a shape as to allow the dragons who called it home to feel as natural as possible. The main chamber itself was massive in size and easily able to accommodate the lessons in flying that were given to all the hatchlings. There were hundreds of cave like structures now, some part of the ship and some even part of the actual mountain Avi had landed within. The caves of Dragons and their hatchlings. Families of dragons. Dozens of them. Their numbers grew each year and Syrilth and the other Dragon Elders could not be happier. It was not uncommon now to see dragons filling the skies of Earth and moving along the wide streets of Sparta and other cities with their Bonded Ones just as they did on Elear. Syrilth's ruby eyes blinked knowing that Sadi and Ne'Veha could feel it. Sadi was nearly the equal of Androcles in terms of power Syrilth could feel, and Ne'Veha was a burning light that was growing in leaps and bounds daily. As were Carisia and Lu'ria.

Syrilth turned her massive head to the light green scaled male dragon who waited quietly beside her. A Dragon Council Sentinel, one of the newest members of that revered group whose sole duty was to protect the Dragon Elder Council at all costs.

Bessyn... will you escort them to the private chamber on deck three. Syrilth told him.

The male dragon nodded. *They can feel them Elder Syrilth. They don't know what it is but they can feel them even through the shielding.*

Syrilth nodded. *Yes they can. But they are Talon Guardian Androcles's wives and mates. Would you expect anything less?*

Bessyn looked at her and gave her what passed for a dragon smile. *No I would not Elder Syrilth. I will bring them to you straight away.*

Syrilth blinked and nodded her huge head. *Quickly Bessyn... now that they have come... the shielding will not work for very long. Both of them have grown too strong and without the Elder Mother or Androcles here to reinforce it, the shielding will not remain active for more than a few minutes.*

Bessyn nodded and turned his massive body heading out of the small view platform while Syrilth made her way in the opposite direction.

Ne'Veha squeezed Sadi's hand as they made their way down the stone like corridor following the dragon. "Sadi... Sadi I feel... I feel very different." She said softly.

Sadi watched the huge dragon in front of them guide them down the corridor. "As do I. I have... I have been here many times and I have never felt like this before. I am anxious but..."

"... feeling so very alert and focused." Ne'Veha said.

"Yes." Sadi agreed looking at her. "I can almost feel each and every dragon within the mountain. I have never been able to do that before."

"I have never felt it at all before now." Ne'Veha spoke wistfully. "It is... it is wondrous!"

They were gripping each other's hands tightly when they entered the small lounge area and saw Syrilth's huge body. The lounge overlooked the massive flying chamber in the center of the ship as all of them did and Sadi and Ne'Veha could see dozens of hatchlings taking instruction from different adult dragons. Sadi and Ne'Veha did not hesitate in the least and they moved right up to Syrilth.

"Syrilth." Sadi spoke with genuine warmth as she reached up and laid her palm on Syrilth's smooth scales snout. "It is always a pleasure to see you."

Syrilth's ruby eyes beamed as she felt Sadi's warm hand and then Ne'Veha's as they greeted her. *It is always an honor and privilege to have the beloved wives and mates to Talon Guardian Androcles here. She told them. Both of you have grown so much in so short a time.*

Sadi chuckled and glanced at Ne'Veha. "Some would debate that with you." She stated.

Syrilth snorted and her ruby eyes did a fair impression of rolling in her head. *You speak of the fools who attempt to besmirch you Sadi and the SirsanGai of Androcles. They will fail in the end.*

"Let's hope so." Ne'Veha said with a smile.

Sadi looked around slowly. "Syrilth... why did you ask us here?" She questioned. "Do you have something to pass onto Andro when he returns?"

Syrilth looked at her and shook her massive head. *It would be more fair to say that your beloved Saradasaar wanted me to pass something on to you. To both of you.*

Sadi looked quickly at Ne'Veha and then back to Syrilth. "Ok now you have us stumped." She spoke. "We have been wondering all morning what it is you needed from us."

Can you not feel it? Syrilth asked.

"Feel... feel what?" Ne'Veha asked softly as she looked at her.

You do feel it don't you? Syrilth asked them again. *I can see it within your eyes and your hearts. How he knows these things is beyond me... but he was right.*

"Who was right Syrilth?" Sadi asked hesitantly.

Have you not wondered why you feel differently this morning? Syrilth asked. *Why as you came closer to Dragon Mountain your awareness and focus grew so much stronger than it has before?*

Sadi glanced at Ne'Veha again quickly. "We have wondered this yes." She answered. "What... Syrilth what is going on? What has Andro done?"

Syrilth gazed at them for a long moment before answering. *It is... I will show you why this is.* She stated finally. *And you will know the truth of what your husband and mate has known for many weeks and months.*

"Now you are beginning to scare me." Ne'Veha stated.

Be not afraid SirsanGai of Androcles. Syrilth spoke. *This is a moment of great joy and happiness.*

"Syrilth what..." Sadi began to ask her but her jungle green eyes grew wide and she gasped loudly. "Ohhh..."

Now it is time to lower all of your shields and allow yourselves to come forth. Syrilth spoke softly. *Reach out with everything you are and meet those who were meant for you from the day they were hatched.*

Sadi and Ne'Veha turned at the sound of the secondary door off the lounge opening and they watched with wide eyes as the light green scaled dragon and the dark tanned scaled dragon moved into the lounge quickly. They looked to be very young adolescent dragons, no more than perhaps eight months old, though you would not be able to tell that from the size of their lean muscular bodies. And both of them had finally dropped the pretense of hiding what they knew would happen as they had for the last four months. The power within Mindvoice was there now, surging outward as the sons of Vollenth and Viera dropped their shields completely and let their Bonded Ones know they existed.

Syrilth had never witnessed a natural Bonding of two minds before and for her it was just as new and beautiful as the first sunrise after being hatched. She watched as Caydren, the larger of the two brothers by perhaps half a meter in height and length moved without question or pause to stand in front of Sadi. His dark tan

scales gleamed with heath and power, his ten foot height and fifteen foot length imposing to all but Sadi as she stared at him in wonder. His wings unfurled slowly and began to shiver as he reached for Sadi within Mindvoice. Cinol did almost exactly the same to Ne'Veha, moving right up in front of her and extending his large head down to just in front of her shocked face.

Reach for me my sister! Caydren spoke with a trembling voice to Sadi as she stared at him with wide eyes. *I have... we have waited so long for this day!*

Neither Sadi or Ne'Veha hesitated in the least and they dropped all attempts of shielding themselves from the dragons before them. The gasps of incredible happiness and amazement sounded from both of them, Ne'Veha dropping to her knees in overwhelming wonder as Cinol's young mind merged with hers seamlessly. Sadi remained standing barely, her hands reaching up instinctively to touch both sides of Caydren's snout with horribly trembling hands and then the essence of who he was surged through her as Cinol's did with Ne'Veha. Even from the deck where she was on her knees Ne'Veha looked up with wide dark brown eyes and brought her palms to Cinol's muzzle above her.

Syrlith could only watch in wonder, their wings and tails twitching madly as four minds became two. It was an experience she would never forget as she too could feel their minds merging and sharing all that they were with each other. Among the dragons of the Union Sadi Leonidas was considered nearly on a par with Aricia Blue Eyes in terms of reverence and even power. Ne'Veha Leonidas was an elf and now mate to Talon Guardian Androcles and her power was growing by the day. Caydren and Cinol had been waiting for this day since returning to Earth from Kranek. The moment they entered this world both Arzoal and Andro had known they were meant for Sadi and Ne'Veha. They had safeguarded this information until Caydren and Cinol returned to Earth and Andro and Arzoal had met briefly with Syrlith before Arzoal left to decide what to do. Arzoal had charged Syrlith to train the hatchlings hard, schooling them so that they would be prepared sooner than most for they were intended for the wives and mates of a Talon Guardian. The ability was there because of their father Vollenth and Arzoal had no doubts they could handle it. She had been right as Caydren and Cinol absorbed all she had taught them and yearned for more. Their thirst for knowledge was unmatched for hatchlings their age and Syrlith knew it was because of what their father had discovered when finally free of Yuri Moran's touch.

Syrlith settled to the floor of the lounge as Bessyn slip through the doorway and watched with wonder for a moment before turning to her.

Elder Syrlith? He spoke softly.

Syrlith turned her head. *Bessyn... have liquid and fruit brought here. They will need it soon.*

Then it was a success? He asked.

Can you not see my friend? Syrlith spoke her ruby eyes gazing at the two pairs before her. *Spread the word Bessyn. Allow our kind within the Mountain to sing their praise and joy for what is happening.*

Bessyn nodded his large head. *I will Elder Syrlith. I will.*

Syrlith watched as he departed quickly and her eyes went back to Sadi and Ne'Veha. Their faces glowed in enchantment as they absorbed the essences of their Bonded Brothers and Caydren and Cinol in turn absorbed their essences. Merging as they were, their combined Mindvoice resonances had grown five fold and with a simple thought Syrlith sent the order to the control center deep within Dragon Mountain, to the elf commanding officer, to increase the output of the exterior Mindvoice dampeners. She was answered immediately with a another simple thought and her ordered was acted on instantly. The Mindvoice dampeners that had been constructed encircling the island of Sardinia and surrounded Dragon Mountain increased their power levels. The control center was staffed exclusively by elves or Lycavorians and their sole purpose was to insure the safety and security of Dragon Mountain, especially since Aikiro's breach of the mountain those months ago. Anyone who was not a Tier Six Etheric user would now no longer be able to feel the hundreds of dragon minds from the Mountain. At least for the time being. It was a unique step to insure privacy for Sadi and Ne'Veha and no doubt Syrlith would be receiving a visit from the Director of the School of Mages or his representative because she had done this. Syrlith knew they hated to be left out of what was happening inside Dragon Mountain and while they could request to come here at any time, they were always escorted. Neither Martin nor Andro trusted them in the least, and Helen and Arzoal trusted them only slightly more than they did.

Since Helen had stepped down as DoSM, the man she had left in charge was somewhat overbearing and arrogant. He felt he needed to be informed of everything that happened in regards to Etheric use. And he was particularly interested in everything that occurred within Dragon Mountain. To his great chagrin, he had to

announce his intent to come to the mountain or send his agents and Arzoal never informed him of what occurred within the mountain which pissed him off mightily. Syrilth only continued this action since she was the senior Dragon Elder on Earth when Arzoal was not present and she had a particular distain for the man. He held no respect for the dragons it seemed. Syrilth had no doubts someone would be contacting her soon enough.

Now Syrilth simply basked in the joy of the Bonding as she sat with them in the lounge and watched their minds dance together within Mindvoice, their bonds forming and growing before her very eyes.

SOLMAR

NORTHWEST OF SPACEPORT

TRAKEN MOUNTAIN RANGE

Andro lowered the macrobinos and let his azure eyes scan the settlement far below them. He rested on the mountain ridge some two thousand feet above the settlement and northwest of the spaceport on the west edge of the settlement. Elynth and Ryner rested within the treeline of the plateau they were on, Dantio and Cletus on either side of him and Dorian. The remainder of the Omega Team 62 were spread out along the ridge, everyone watching some portion of the city.

“This isn’t good.” Dorian spoke softly.

Andro shook his head. “No it isn’t.” He echoed his brother.

“They’re moving fast.” Dantio said his eyes glued to his binos. “Looks like they are gathering all of the civilians in one place. The Amphitheater on the south edge of the city. Lots of guards too.”

“They are burning bodies on the east edge of the settlement.” Vari hissed softly.

Andro lifted his binos and shifted to that location. He could see the black smoke and the Kavalian soldiers almost callously tossing more bodies onto the three piles that were burning. “*Nubous ronnus!*” He cursed knowing that the Kavalians were denying the Bontawillians their death rights by doing what they were doing.

“Looks like a Command Post on the peak opposite of the settlement Andro.” Cletus said. “I can just make out anti-air placements.”

Andro shifted his focus again. “Nice location.” He stated. “High enough to see into three of the six settlements from one location.” He lowered the binos. “Our people won’t be there. It makes it too much of a target. Emios?”

The Omega Team member was on the far end of the line and inspecting the west side of the settlement. “I can’t be sure but I think... yes! The elven females from the PDC Substations! Four o’clock!”

Andro and Dorian immediately shifted their view and zoomed in on the western edge of the settlement. This is where the Admin offices of the settlement were according to Dantio, as well as the secondary gate that was used for entry into the settlement itself. Each settlement was surrounded by a six meter high steel fabricated wall that was two feet thick. It was a standard prefab wall that all new colonies surrounded themselves with in order to protect against natural predators and other concerns when settling a world. Andro watched as four elven females were roughly pushed through the double doors of a two story structure inside the wall.

“What is that building Dantio?” Dorian asked.

“The armory.” Dantio answered remembering the layout of the settlement from their time within the walls. “It holds the un-issued weapons and portable turrets for the wall. Best place to house high value prisoners as well. Triple Max vault with state of the art locking system.”

“Those are Puma Bane troops delivering the females.” Vari spoke. “They are giving them up. I thought standard practice for them was to keep whatever spoils they found. Especially any females.”

Andro nodded. “That is what we have heard.” He said studying the faces of the Puma Bane troops. None of them looked happy even from this distance of two thousand eight hundred meters away. “They don’t look happy.”

Dantio turned his head quickly and looked at Andro. “Someone made them turn them over Andro.” He said. “They would not have given them up willingly.”

Andro nodded. "Which means someone besides the Puma Bane assholes is in charge."

Dorian shifted his glasses at vehicle movement. "*Fervon*... two o'clock! Coming down the side road near the armory. Looks like three SID75 Scout Cars. Command type."

Andro shifted his binos once more. "Dantio? Cletus?"

"Got them." Dantio replied.

"I see them." Cletus answered a second later. "*Nubou* they are moving fast. Armored Scout Cars already."

"I don't see any CHAOS tanks." Dantio said.

"Terrain is not suited for them except for static defense." Andro said. He was watching as the Kavalians stopped in front of the armory building and half a dozen exited the three vehicles. "Hello." He said quickly. "I think we are seeing the head cheese here. Look at the shoulders, can you zoom and see what rank he is? I don't have the angle."

Dorian adjusted his binos. "Standard field uniform. Can't be sure but the color looks almost gold."

"Gold on black." Vari added. "Nice catch Milord. Definitely a General."

Andro turned his head back to look at Haridl. "What do you have for gold on black Haridl?" He asked. She quickly paged through her data pad and finally stopped. "Got it. Gold on black. Standard rank for Shock General Third Tier. Equivalent of our Ground Division Commanders." She answered.

Andro met her eyes. "A specialized division then?"

Haridl nodded. "Special Operations it would seem."

"Interesting. We didn't know they operated such units separate from Field Commands." Andro stated turning back. "It appears that is not the case."

"They must be landing the majority of their forces on the far side of that peak where their headquarters is set up." Emios said. "Nothing in the air just yet."

"That won't last." Andro said. "As soon as they establish their anti-air defenses their *PROTOSS* gunships will be up and shuttling troops all over."

Haridl remained on her stomach and inched her way up next to Dantio between Dorian and Andro. "You think they will have Robaran there?" She asked.

Andro glanced at her. "That is my guess." He said. "If this officer is getting involved it is most likely because he is trying to determine what Robaran and the others were doing here. And how you managed to kill so many of his Puma Bane troops before falling."

Haridl looked at him. "So he suspects something?"

Andro shrugged. "It's possible." He answered. "We won't know for sure until tonight."

"What happens tonight?" Dantio asked looking at him.

"Tonight we are going to do a little close quarters recon." Andro said. "And send the Kavalians a message."

Dorian looked at his brother. "What message?"

Andro met his eyes. "That they made a mistake coming here." He answered.

EARTH

EDEN CITY

HOME OF SELENE AND LYNWE

Selene glanced up from the daily report she received every day as Prime Minister of Earth to let her steel blue eyes settle on Lynwe as she exited the bedroom and came into the kitchen of their spacious but very modest three bedroom home on the southern edge of Eden City. To look at it from the outside you would never know that the Prime Minister of Earth and one of Earth's most senior Generals called it home. They maintained a suite at Eden Towers within the center of the city but rarely stayed there when both of them were together. They preferred the warmth and familiarity of the home where they had raised five children together with Joarl and Layna. Three houses to the left is where Joarl and Layna now called home. Though their split had made the Netnews, it was nothing but friendly and loving. The four of them had decided this was for the best. Selene

would never love anyone more than Lynwe and vice versa. They had been through too much together, shared more than many couples, and this is what they had all decided was best. Joarl and Layna still spent much time here, as they did in their home only a few meters down the quiet street. Their five children from Joarl called all three of them mother, as did Cihera, their adopted Drow daughter. They were as close knit a family as you would find. All of their children were now grown and out of their homes, but all of them remained within Eden City in some role or another.

Selene let her eyes drink in Lynwe's firm six foot one ebony body. Lynwe had let her hair grow very long over the last year and the shimmering white mane fell to just above her powerful ass cheeks. Her body spoke of power and grace; her large breasts still incredibly firm and nearly twice the size of Selene's. A point of delight that Selene often reminded her of. Her long legs ended at that powerful and firm ass; taut ass cheeks that Selene had gripped on many occasions in blissful pleasure as Lynwe made love to her. No matter what had happened over the past twenty-seven years, their love for each other had remained a stalwart anchor of their relationship. Only Tarifa and Aihola had been together longer among their many friends. It was Lynwe's and Selene's relationship, as well as Tarifa and Aihola's that had defined the new Drow. Yes... they were still dominant in most ways... but now it was not uncommon to see a Drow female and her lover walking hand in hand along the streets as equals in every way. The Mistress/Slave role came into play only within the privacy of their homes and beds. Aihola and Lynwe had shown the Drow what they could have all those years ago and now Mistress and Slave were only terms of endearment.

Lynwe had the largest equipment that Selene had ever had inside her, and she knew how to use it so well. Lynwe once considered her anatomical trans gender a curse of High Coven experimentation. It wasn't until Tarifa and Aihola had shown her otherwise that Lynwe came to accept herself and shed the persona of self hatred. When she met Selene, she had been in the process of a similar wave of self hatred and it was Lynwe who had saved her life. That they were both now fully turned vampires was another stepping stone that had brought them closer together. They shared an emotional and Etheric bond now that could never be broken or intruded upon. This was part of the reason they had ended their physical relationship with Joarl and Layna. While both Selene and Lynwe thoroughly enjoyed being with them in a physical way, they always found themselves drawing back to each other. They had taken two other female lovers into their bed since parting with Joarl and Layna ten years ago, but none of them had lasted for more than a few months. Their sex life was still very active however, both of them craving each other emotionally as well as physically. In Selene's eyes she had the best of both worlds and for Lynwe... well... Selene was the epitome of beautiful. That would never change. There might be someone out there for them, but neither Selene nor Lynwe were busy searching. They were completely content with their love for each other.

Lynwe poured herself a mug of coffee, Aricia's blend, as she was one of the few Drow who actually preferred coffee to tea. She added cream and then moved to the table where she leaned over to a smiling Selene and shared a deep kiss of love and devotion. Lynwe pulled out the chair next to her and settled into it. They never sat across from one another at their table wanting to be able to rub shoulders or lean close for a kiss at any moment.

Selene gazed at Lynwe's beautiful face for a moment and smiled. "Are you and Tareif still getting together for lunch?" She asked.

Lynwe nodded. "He wants to go over the deployments of Colonel Norris's units now that he has accepted the position with Narice. He will begin pulling his units out of the field next week and transporting them to High Coven space. Tareif and I will decide where to send his Dragoons in order to replace them."

"Lynwe are you...?" Selene began to ask.

Lynwe smiled and shook her head. "What Androcles did was the right thing Selene." She said. "I can't hold an entire species to blame for what a few scientists did to me. I have put that far behind me. I met Narice, talked with her; she is the future for the High Coven Selene. The chance and the leader they need to pull themselves out of their past and into the future."

"And letting Yuri go?" Selene asked.

"If how Andro explained it to us is in fact the truth of it... then I can forgive." Lynwe answered her. "We are still learning about this Etheric ability that many of us have. Even you and I. If Yuri was under the control of this Xaxon person then she is only partially responsible for the things she did. I will... I will reserve judgment until I know how she will live her life now."

Selene sipped her coffee. "I don't know if I could be so forgiving my love." She said.

Lynwe looked at her with sparkling amber colored eyes. "I have concluded that what happen to me... what was done to me... these things were meant to happen because they led me to you." Lynwe spoke. "My talks with Tarifa and Aihola as well as Aricia and Dysea have led me to this."

Selene looked at her with adoring love. "And I bless that day every moment." She said.

Lynwe smiled and kissed her before sipping her own coffee. "What do you and Charles have planned today?"

Selene held up the data pad. "Two meetings this morning with Aihola. A construction contract with Nodon Engineering representatives to build the continent bridge and then we are meeting with Daba and several Drow senators to make final decisions on their new city out west. It appears as if this will be a grand city like those of old. It will take decades to complete, but it will be beautiful." She held out the data pad to her. "This arrived for you in the morning pouch."

Lynwe took the pad and activated it, her amber eyes scanning the contents of the morning report to her. As second in command of Earth's now abundant and increasingly active military, she received reports daily on training and other assets. Lynwe was also in total command of the two Drow Divisions and responsible for the Drow that were still searching different portions of Earth for the Kavalian imposters who they still believed were hiding somewhere. Much of Earth was still largely unsettled because of the massive loss of life after The Great Fire, and there were hundreds of locations that these Kavalian imposters could hide and not be found for months. Lynwe grunted at something and Selene looked up from her own reading.

"What?" She asked.

"A message from Marci to meet with her and Nesa here in Eden City today." Lynwe said. "She is arriving at 1000 hours."

"What for?" Selene asked knowing who Marci was. She had worked closely with the Assistant Director of the Krypteria on several occasions.

"Doesn't say." Lynwe answered. "Only that she needed to meet with me."

"Trouble perhaps?" Selene asked.

"I don't know what about but that she is bringing Nesa doesn't bode for good news." Lynwe said thoughtfully. "The first *WASP*-Class Transport is almost complete. Perhaps it is about the equipment for our troops."

"Oh... I understand you and Tareif finally selected your last Company Commander for the new division." Selene said.

Lynwe nodded and looked at her with excited eyes. "Yes we did. The first entirely human division since The Great Fire. We are very pleased. They should make a formidable force with their Cataphract Battle Armor. Charles is tickled that humans will finally be able to contribute to the defense of the Union. He has said for years that the Drow and Tareif's Dragoons have pulled the load of protecting Earth for too long without help. The human commanders have been training with the Drow and Dragoons for weeks to establish procedures and such. Tareif and I are very pleased."

Selene laughed. "Yes I know. You should see Charles when he gets to talking about them." She said. "He is like a child in a candy shop!"

Lynwe laughed as well and looked at the clock on the wall. "I should get ready." She spoke. "Meet me for lunch?" She asked looking at Selene.

"That depends." Selene said with a sultry twinkle in her eye. "What's on the menu?"

Lynwe grinned as well and felt the stirring in her groin that Selene could always elicit from her. "I'm sure we could find something appropriate my love. But you are always desert."

Selene cooed and shifted in her seat. "I can hardly wait." She said. "Twelve thirty. And don't be late!"

Lynwe kissed her. "Not a chance."

Andro looked at the overlay of the settlement on the chart in the rear of his *STRIKER*. Darkness was fast approaching and he wanted to act quickly before the Kavalians had a chance to truly settle in.

“Sa'roh was able to tap into the satellites without the Kavalians knowing.” Andro spoke as his fingers moved across the chart map. “She’s using Union military codes but they will figure out someone has got into the system through the back door sooner or later. We’ll do as much as we are able while we have that advantage.”

Dorian looked at his brother. “What did you have in mind Andro?”

Andro stabbed his finger down on one spot. “Going through the Sat Feed Sa'roh was able to determine where one Puma Bane Team is.” He spoke. “We’re going to introduce ourselves to them.”

Dantio nodded with a smile. “Nice.” He said.

Andro slid his finger across the chart map. “I’m hoping this will give them pause. And make them begin to spread their forces out searching the surrounding terrain.” He said. “If they do... especially the Puma Bane troops... it will make getting Robaran and the female elves out of that armory a whole lot easier.”

“You think they will remain there?” Cletus asked.

Andro nodded. “No point in moving them so soon after beginning their operation.” He said. “Lock them up until this head Kavalian *midaeus* has a chance to interrogate them and then ship them offworld.”

“Or kill them once he has no need for them any longer.” Dorian stated softly.

Andro looked at his brother. “Yes. That is what we are going to try and prevent.” Andro touched the edge of the chart and it shifted focus. “Elynth and I will take Dantio, Vari and eight of the Spartan company and hit the Puma Bane camp. If the SAT feed is accurate, there is only sixteen of them there.” He shifted the chart again and looked at Dorian. “*Fervon*... you and Ryner are going with Cletus, Haridl, Emios and four others from the Spartan company. Have Emios and the squad set up a line of defense as close to this gate as possible and then you use the shadows to sneak Haridl and yourself into the settlement. Try and get as much information as you can. Ryner can fly cover for you over the settlement since he does not show up on sensors and the night skies will be moonless tonight.”

Dorian nodded and looked at the map closely. He glanced at Haridl as if calculating some things in his head and then turned back to Andro. “She is not as big as you *fervon*. I might be able to sneak us inside the armory itself.”

Andro stared at him for a long moment and then nodded. “If it is possible then do it. If there is not a chance of one hundred percent success... do not risk it Dorian. We’ll put them in more danger if you are caught or a firefight breaks out. Once we hit the Puma Bane camp I’m sure they’ll send for help and draw attention away from you and it may make it possible but do not force it. Those within the city will be on alert. This isn’t training anymore *fervon*... we need to be smart. And mother and father will kill me if I let anything happen to you.”

Dorian nodded his head taking his brother’s words as they were intended. Encouragement and common sense. Androcles was right and even though Dorian could feel his Spartan blood surging through him at the prospect of battle, he tempered it with his vampire blood and its cold and calculating sense. “I know. I have too much I want to do in my life. Acting stupid and dying in the first months of this war, before discovering what I want would be a waste. Besides... Ryner will be watching over me.”

Yes I will. Ryner’s voice echoed within Mindvoice and they all smiled.

“The rest of the company will be setting up defenses and digging in at our new home for the time being.” Andro spoke. “Sa'roh has found a nice location on the southern continent and an advanced team is already there with the *KADENs*. Once we depart Sa'roh will take the *STRIKER* and move to this point ten kilometers north of the settlement. That’s our pick up.”

“Won’t their ships in orbit pick up our movements Milord?” Dantio asked. “Their sensors can surely pick up lifeforms.”

“The advance team with the *KADENs* has already erected RP14 Sensor Maskers.” Andro told them. “They are a new toy the folks at Dreamland thought up. The *SCIMITAR* got one of the first batches and Sa'sur sent them down with the company.” He explained. “Essentially what they do is create a void in ground sensor coverage. They can effectively hide us as long as we keep our power generation to a minimum.”

Haridl stepped closer. “How long... how long do we intend to stay Milord?” She asked the question that burned within all of them.

“As long as is necessary.” Androcles answered. “We cannot afford for the Kavalians to have a base this close to Union space. We are damn lucky we found it before they were able to dig in. Now we have to take it back.”

EARTH

LYCAVORIAN UNION MILITARY HQ

OVERALL DURCUNUSAAN COMMAND CENTER

500 METERS BENEATH MOUNT HAGIOS

He was, without a doubt, one of the five most well known male elves in the entire Union. A masterful military mind who led Wood Elf rangers against High Coven troops for decades, surviving by superior skill and wit. He was the father of the Star Colonel Anuk, the second most senior officer within the Union Medical Corp behind Queen Anja and Princess Eliani, and wife and *Anome* to General Daniel Simpson. He was a man who was sworn to the preservation of the Lycavorian Union and what it stood for. A man who was fanatically loyal to the King as well as being considered a family member. He had been part of it since the beginning of it all so long ago, fighting beside Martin and Daniel from the very start. As soon as he realized that Anuk and Daniel were going to be living in Sparta with their Drow Mistress Nayeca, Vengal uprooted his wife and moved to Sparta lock, stock and barrel. He and his wife had now become a permanent fixture within Sparta, his wife owning and running a very successful fabrics shop in the Old District of the city. He was co-founder and primary commander of the now legendary Spartan Royal Guard.

The *Durcunusaan*. The Wolves of the Blood.

He and Vistr had built them from scratch all those years ago, and with Vistr assuming overall command of the entire Spartan Combined Ground Force in and around Apo Prime and Elear, command of the *Durcunusaan* had fallen fully to him. Vengal could not have been happier with his life at this moment. His only daughter was mated to a man Vengal loved like a son. The Drow woman who shared their lives he now regarded as an adopted daughter. He had eight beautiful grandchildren from Anuk and Nayeca, and his life was far removed from the time when Anuk was his only remaining daughter and he thought he had lost her. His two living sons often returned to Earth with the ships they commanded, staying with their sister and the man they both respected above all else. Vengal was devoted to his family and the *Durcunusaan* above all else. Their training was sometimes brutal and humiliating, reminiscent of the times of the Ancient Agoge in Spartan lore, but if you graduated *Durcunusaan* training you were accepted into the ranks of men and women who were widely regarded as the finest trained and most lethal unit within the whole of the Union military. They were regarded as such because it was their duty to guard the Royal family. To this end they received training from across a broad spectrum of fields. The majority of Mjolnir's Hand had been selected from the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*, as had many of the thousand plus Bonded Pairs within the Union. And Vengal was their commander.

His office within the base under Mount Hagios was spacious and comfortably furnished, but not lavishly so. It was more homey than most since he had let his wife decorate for him. It was probably more inviting that he would have decorated but that is why he adored his wife of three hundred plus years. She was his better half in everything and he worshiped the ground she walked upon. Vengal had chosen each and every one of the members of the *Durcunusaan* after extensive research of their personal files. While their numbers were not publicly known, Vengal could field two complete divisions of fifty thousand men apiece if he needed to. They were pilots and intelligence officers; technicians and engineers. He had it all within the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*. Only one in one hundred were accepted to join the *Durcunusaan*. Vengal had relaxed over the years to allow this sort of ratio from the one in one thousand he and Vistr had begun with. He got the best of the best and once you were a member of the *Durcunusaan*, no matter where you went after that you were always a member of the *Durcunusaan*.

Vengal rose from his chair as he read the daily reports and moved to the wet bar where he poured himself a large glass of berry juice. The door to his office slid open without warning and he looked up. Only his senior aide would dare burst into his office unannounced and Vengal knew it was him immediately by the shimmering white hair that hung well past his shoulders. The Drow Colonel had been with him for the last ten years, twice refusing a promotion and command of his own to remain as Vengal's aide. His position afforded him the most action he could hope for, as well as the most respect for his Drow family. He was one of the Drow who had fully accepted Aihola's reign as Queen long ago as well as her morals and values. His wife of seventeen years was a ravishing blond haired former High Elf from Mountain City. A woman who was as completely devoted to her Drow husband and the Drow values as he was devoted to her. He was also one of the most cool headed men Vengal had ever met in his life. The only thing that got him excited was his wife and bad news.

"Unless you are going to tell me your wife is pregnant once more Colonel Nufco of the Family Razah, then something is wrong." Vengal spoke quickly.

Nufco Razah looked at his general. "General... we have a problem." He gasped out of breath.

The alarms in Vengal's head began to sound loudly. "Speak."

"We just received a coded transmission from Captain Sa'sur of the *SCIMITAR*." He spoke quickly. "The Kavalians have struck Solmar in force. Androcles fears they may be trying to establish a forward base. He sent Sa'sur away to call for reinforcements. He remains on the planet with Dorian, the Spartan company and the remaining members of Omega Team Sixty-Two."

Vengal's eyes grew wider with every word Nufco spoke. "Fuck me!" Vengal snarled as he moved to his desk and slammed his hand down on the COM panel. "Officer of the Watch... initiate a full *Durcunusaan* covert alert! I want the Ready Division on station in one hour! They are to move to their designated Pick Up points and stand by!"

"Understood General!" The voice answered.

"And get me Admiral Ceneu! I don't care where he is!" Vengal snapped turning back to Nufco. "Give me more Nufco!"

Nufco moved to the ever present Star chart and plugged in the data pad he carried. "As you know the Prince went to Solmar to retrieve the Omega Team. The Kavalians were already on the planet it seems. A forward unit to begin taking down the colony network in advance of a larger force. Captain Sa'sur reported upwards of forty ships entering the system with *PROTOSS* Troop ships spread among the task force. She estimates at least a full division based on the number of troop ships." Nufco looked at him. "Based on recent information obtained from the High Coven General, we have determined this is how their operational tactics will execute when they have chosen to take a planet. A small force to initiate the main landing."

"And Andro is right in the middle of it!" Vengal hissed.

"He refused to leave with the *SCIMITAR* in order to ascertain if it would be feasible to get as many civilians off the colony as possible." Nufco told him. "According to Sa'sur's report he said he would secure a landing zone on the southern continent for the Spartan company and the remainder of the *SCIMITAR*'s *STRIKER* and *KADEN* compliment. They have the new sensor maskers General. If they can get established... it's very possible they could remain undetected for a time."

"Undetected?" Vengal chortled. "Do you think Andro will remain undetected?"

Nufco looked at him. "No." He answered. "Preliminary reports from Sa'sur indicate a large loss of civilian life in order to shut down the colony in the way they have."

"Fuck!" Vengal swore. "Find Jomann and Sheva Nufco! Get them here now! How many Shroud capable ships do we have in orbit?"

"Including the Earth's *AUTUMN MOON* Defense Contingent... thirty-seven." Nufco answered immediately.

"Contact Charles and let him know we need to use his *AUTUMN MOONS*." Vengal spoke. "He won't blink when he realizes its Andro. He's got a soft spot for the boy. Have the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Wing spool up and leave immediately to rendezvous with Sa'sur. This is a silent deployment! If the Netnews discovers Andro is out there with his ass hanging in the wind there will be hell to pay! They'll broadcast it all across the Union and you can damn well bet the Kavalians have people monitoring our Netnews channels twenty-four seven. They'll converge on Solmar like the plaque!"

Nufco nodded. “Undoubtedly.” He said.

“How soon before we can deploy?” Vengal asked.

“We?” Nufco looked at him.

Vengal met his eyes. “There’s no way I’m staying behind on this! And weren’t you just complaining you were bored?”

Nufco nodded his head with a grin. “I was, wasn’t I? The *Durcunusaan* Ready Division will be fully prepped in under an hour. A full Silent Deployment from their staging areas will require more time sir. We can load everyone out by late tomorrow morning if we hump it. That’s the earliest if we want to keep this under wraps. Once the divisions are in orbit we can deploy at will.”

“Do it!” Vengal snapped. “And keep chatter on the secure channels to a minimum. Use Mindvoice if they have too. This can’t leak out before we leave.”

Nufco nodded. “I will see to it.” He said. “Our Command Group?”

Vengal nodded. “Small Unit Op Nufco. Only what we need.”

“I will inform the rest of the team.” Nufco answered.

Vengal gripped his arm. “Contact Aihola. I want a contingent of her Drow Scouts with us Nufco. And tell Charles that it’s time to show what this human division he has been touting can do. They’re going with us.”

Nufco looked at him. “The 82nd is a Cataphract Armor Orbital Drop Division General. A mix of Heavy Infantry and specialized units. Is that what we need?”

“Do you think Andro is going to leave civilians on that planet if there is a way to get them off?” Vengal asked.

“No... no sir.” Nufco said.

Vengal nodded. “Better to have the power than not. They will compliment the Ready Division. I have a feeling this is not going to be a simple swing by and evacuate the civilians. Nothing is ever simple with Andro or his father.”

“This is true.” Nufco said.

“Make it happen Nufco.” Vengal ordered.

Nufco nodded. “As you order General.”

CHAPTER THREE

ULU REAPER

VANGUARD MK III INTERDICTION-CLASS CRUISER

DETACHED DUTY FROM ARCHDEMON STRIKE WING

FEBRUARY 3RD, 2575, 2226 HRS, EARTH STANDARD TIME (EST)

ENROUTE TO EARTH WITH PRINCESS LISISA AND PRELIMINARY ROTHRYN DIPLOMATIC CONTINGENT

The last few weeks had raced past like a whirlwind in Sehri’s mind.

From the moment they had discovered the results of the tests from the DNA samples provided to them by Denali Leonidas it had been a whirlwind. When the results were confirmed everything became second fiddle to meeting and talking with Androcles Leonidas or his father. Since they now knew his father was not available, they would be meeting with Androcles and this knowledge made Sehri weak kneed and very anxious.

Denali Leonidas and Androcles had been true to their word just as Sehri knew deep down they would be. The Science Lab on the *ARCHDEMON* was made available to them two days after Androcles had talked to her father and their own scientists were allowed to test the DNA samples with the ship’s senior physician present. The results had been both conclusive and quite staggering in nature. Both brothers had over three thousand alleles that matched with the sample of the Rothryn people and nearly two thousand alleles that matched to the sample of the Ancient Ones they had recovered many hundreds of years ago. Given that result, twelve different men and women from the crew were also tested and the results were similar in every way. It could only mean one thing and that was that the Rothryn people and the Lycavorian people were without a

doubt genetically related to one another. More than likely, the Rothryn scientists that had tested the samples believed that the Rothryn people were formerly Lycavorians who had their DNA altered in some way in order to be able to survive on their original homeworld. This was no doubt connected to the Ancient Ones they now knew as Pralors and the DNA match that the brothers had to them. This had come as a great surprise and revelation to her father Dyack and Sehri had witnessed with great joy as Dyack fully embraced the Prophecy more than at any other time in his life. Dyack had immediately thrown himself into helping Denali and Coren Re Mydala, honoring his word.

Sehri didn't know exactly how that was progressing for they had begun planning for this trip within days of discovering the results. Her father decided to send her mother and her sisters, as well as her older brother Kelelm. Accompanying them was Harira, who her father had met and liked immediately. She would represent those Shaman Master's of the Circle who believed deeply in the prophecy. They had a small group of her brother's personal contingent of soldiers, all of whom had seen some form of combat and another slightly larger group of scientists and doctors, including those who had confirmed the results initially. Sehri agreed to come without hesitation when asked by her father. Dyack seemed to sense her innate desire and need to come on the mission though he didn't truly understand and since she was also a member of the Circle, it was a two fold benefit for him. Sehri was a dedicated believer in the Prophecy and the Circle of Shamans, but she was also his daughter and she reported everything to him no matter what it was.

The crew of *REAPER* had treated them as guests and longtime friends from the moment they came aboard. Word had spread among the crew that the Rothryn and Lycavorian people were descended from the same genes and ancestors, so it was almost as if they were long lost Lycavorians themselves. In truth, the only thing that really separated them was their inability to shift to wolf form. The Rothryn people had similar genetic structures which granted them the enhanced sense of smell and other senses as well as the incredible healing factor so common to Lycavorians. While they weren't allowed into the sensitive areas of the ship, Lisisa Leonidas had granted them access to just about everything else. Denali had asked her to escort them back to Earth to meet with their brother because she was a woman and Aleatia was Dyack's wife and his representative. Lisisa had agreed reluctantly Sehri knew for she had wanted to remain with Denali and Arduri, but she was extremely pleasant and open to all of them. Lisisa knew Denali thought he was making them more comfortable by having her on board and Lisisa could not be angry with her husband and mate for trying to do the right thing. Lisisa also knew she would rejoin them soon enough and their reunion would be very sweet.

Sehri sat in the large Mess Lounge of the *REAPER* sipping the mug of fruit juice while her mother and sisters chatted away with Kelelm. There were perhaps two dozen other members of the crew in the lounge, as it was becoming dinner time and the lounge was filling up. Sehri was aware of the many looks of interest she was receiving from the Lycavorian men in the mess lounge. The Rothryn did not have the ability to shift their forms, but their bodies retained the scents and auras of their Lycavorian brothers and sisters as well as many of the genetic changes that Lycavorians experienced. Sehri was only twenty-one years old, and she was just beginning to experience her Coming of Age Fever, albeit on a much smaller scale. This scent was very detectable by every unmated male on the ship though she did not truly understand it or the looks she was receiving. Sehri didn't know that her aura was radiating a simple message to the males around her and that message was that she was not willing or interested in being approached. She was trying to act indifferent towards them for reasons which were her own and this translated in the small aura she was able to project to leave her alone.

Since coming on board Sehri had immersed herself in the computer libraries available to her. She wanted to learn about the history of the Lycavorian people. What they had experienced as a people. While her sisters Osbela and Ibani were delightfully spending their time in the gym and watching the Lycavorian males train and flex their muscles, Sehri was more interested in discovering what drove them. And learning about those who she had seen within her mind and whom she felt even now within her. She wanted to know about them for the emotions and feelings were growing stronger by the hour as they drew closer. She could feel their minds within her own though they were guarded by Mindvoice shields of staggering power. Shields unlike any she had ever experienced even from the oldest of the Shaman Masters on the Circle. They called it Mindvoicing... and every Lycavorian, vampire and many elves were capable of using this skill naturally Sehri had learned. The level of their power and abilities related directly to the purity of their blood and the schooling they received. Sehri had told no one, but having them within her mind even shielded was augmenting her own abilities in many ways. Her control had grown three fold since she began to feel them within her mind and the

last two days she had discovered she was able to move small objects within a simple thought or motion of her hand. It was disconcerting but it also made her feel powerful and confident. She could almost feel her Etheric power increasing within her, coursing through her body and awakening things she had never been able to do before.

“Sehri?” Her mother’s voice broke into her own thoughts and Sehri looked up at her. “Are you well?” Her mother’s question caused Harira to turn and gaze at her from her spot at the table.

Sehri smiled at her. “I’m fine mother.” She spoke.

“You seem distant.” Aleatia asked.

“Sehri has spent all this time immersed in her computer files mother.” Ibani said with a small laugh. “She has not enjoyed herself at all on this trip.”

Sehri looked at her sister with some disdain. “I prefer my computer files to the massive amounts of testosterone alive in that gym you go to.” She said.

Osbela laughed. “But it is some very handsome testosterone!” She exclaimed. “I guess that’s not something that interests you. Don’t worry sister... I’m sure that Prince Androcles has many friends that prefer bookworms.” She said and Ibani joined with her laughter. “I will be sure to introduce you to some when I am within his arms.”

“You?” Ibani exclaimed. “That will be me!”

Sehri looked at her sisters and shook her head. Osbela and Ibani were sluts in her eyes. All they cared about was finding the most attractive man they could and enticing them into their beds. They did not care for history or knowledge of the past or future. And they were clueless when it came to the real world.

“Sehri?” Aleatia asked her softly.

“I am fine mother.” Sehri answered. “Really.”

“Have you found anything interesting in their computer files sister?” Kelelm asked her with genuine curiosity.

Sehri looked at him and nodded her head with a smile to him. Kelelm had always treated her different. He was very protective of all his sisters but he sensed there was something about Sehri that made her different. He had always encouraged her to follow her heart and not listen to others.

“Their history is both diverse and intriguing.” Sehri replied as she perked up. “It is filled with pain and suffering but also happiness and growth. I have been reading about their King and his background most recently. His life is incredible... both before he discovered his true history and after.”

“Do the history files give you any insight to this Androcles who we will be meeting?” Aleatia asked. “We should concentrate on him since he is the one we will be meeting. I would imagine his father has complete trust in him?”

“There is very little background on Androcles outside of his military file mother.” Sehri told her. “He is a very private person and...”

Osbela chuckled now. “Sehri... you speak as if you know him so well.” She spoke in a sarcastic tone. “He is a Prince and a man... what more is there to know?”

“A delicious man.” Ibani added.

Sehri looked at her sister and was about to retort when Kelelm’s hand touched her wrist. *[Ignore her Sehri.]* He spoke warmly within Mindvoice. *[You know as well as I that Osbela and Ibani have never truly understood the intricacies of Mindvoice. Nor do they have your skill and knowledge with this ability. You are different from them sister... ignore their remarks and be yourself.]*

Sehri looked at her brother and covered his hand with hers and smiled at him again. She turned back to her mother. “He is widely regarded among the military establishment as a brilliant tactician. Superior to all but his father and a few with senior Union officers. He and his father are responsible for planning most of the final battles during their war with the species they call Evolli. He is considered by many to be one of the foremost warriors among their people behind only his father and several others.” Sehri told her. “He was decorated with the Union’s highest award during their war with this species called the Evolli when he was only twenty-two. This species gave him a nickname during their war... Soul Slayer.”

“Soul Slayer?” Harira spoke now. “Why give him such a name?”

Sehri looked at her now. “Androcles and his dragon Elynth are believed to have killed more Evolli in combat than any others, including his father. He has been working diligently to come out from under his father’s shadow and he is succeeding.”

“How do you know that Sehri?” Kelelm asked. “That can’t be in his military file.”

Sehri shrugged her slim shoulders as her sisters chuckled to themselves smugly. “I just do.” She answered him.

Aleatia leaned forward at the table. “Does his military file give any insight to his political leanings Sehri? That is what I am most interested in.”

Sehri shook her head. “Aside from a comment by an Admiral Wallace that he is known as a true Spartan of old... no mother. I believe how he is dealing with the Vanari is our best indicator there.”

“He has told the Vanari... rather bluntly if the reaction from Regent Ardan is any indicator... he will not deal with them if they do not change their views of Lycavorians as a whole.” Kelelm said. “And we know how the Vanari treat those Lycavorians from the Protectorate. Something that won’t matter once the merger is complete.”

Aleatia nodded in agreement with her oldest son. “The members of the Protectorate are extremely limited in their interaction with the Vanari people.” She said. “Many are not allowed to leave their embassy grounds without escort.” She turned to Harira. “Shaman Master Harira... is there anything you can share?”

Harira shook her head quickly. “The Circle has tried for decades to learn more of the Protectorate Lady Aleatia. Our own government’s distance from them has made that... it has made it increasingly difficult.”

Aleatia nodded. “Yes. When we should have been embracing them we were pushing them away because we did not understand them. That is why I am very glad you are here. Your insight will be invaluable.”

Harira nodded her head in respect at Aleatia’s words. Praetor Dyack’s wife was well respected within the Circle for her common sense and ability to see outside the box. She was also considered a strong and loyal supporter of the Circle of Shamans. “I don’t think we would have discovered what we have with the recent DNA tests... but we would have been much further along in discovering the history and relation we have with Lycavorians as a whole.”

“You don’t think DNA tests with members of the Protectorate would have produced the same results Harira?” Aleatia asked.

“The same genetic results that show the commonality between our people yes...” Harira answered. “Not the Etheric connection with the Ancient Ones. That connection seems to reside only within those from the Union. Granted it is possible since we have never actually done tests with individuals from the Protectorate. What we know of their history does make it very possible.”

Aleatia looked at Sehri. “And this Androcles is among the most powerful users of Etheric power Sehri?”

Sehri nodded. “Without question. You have... we have all seen some of what he can do mother. He is... he is very special. He...”

“He’s very yummy!” Osbela stated quickly. “I can’t wait to be wrapped around his body.”

“Not you sister...” Ibani stated. “Me.”

Sehri felt the surge of anger within her and she bolted to her feet quickly, her blue eyes flashing in anger. “You know nothing!” She snapped softly keeping her voice low enough so that it did not carry. “Your scents will no more entice him than a Gotri Bark Worm! You don’t understand him! You will never understand him!”

“And you do Sehri?” Osbela snapped back. “You... who have never known the pleasures of a man and will never know them? You wouldn’t know the first thing to do with a real one? We’ll see who gets him Sehri.”

Sehri laughed at her sister. “Get him?” She asked. “You’ll never get him Osbela. Not unless you are more powerful than his *Anome Sadi*. Or his *SirsanGai Ne’Veha*. His Drow Mistress Lu’ria or his *Enylarcopri Carisia*! You have no idea what you... what we are walking into. And you certainly will never know Androcles in that way!”

Osbela smiled at her sister. “We shall see Sehri. We shall see whose scent is on him when all is said and done. At least I know enough not to kick a man who is interested in me in the balls. Unlike you.”

“Osbela! Enough!” Aleatia snarled.

Sehri trembled in anger as she stood there and she lifted her right hand, the light blue swirl of Etheric power beginning to take substance. It was Harira who saw it first and she rose to her feet. “Sehri!” She snapped.

Her voice snapped Sehri out of her anger and the swirl of Etheric power vanished just as quickly as it had come. Sehri hissed in anger and turned suddenly, leaving those of her family behind as she exited the mess lounge.

“Sehri!” Aleatia came to her feet and glared at her other daughters before moving after her youngest.

The *VANGUARD MK III INTERDICTION* cruisers were built with both elevator lifts and sloped stairwells to better accommodate the dragons that they could carry. Sehri had memorized quite a bit of the ship in the three days they had been aboard and as she held back the tears that threatened to pour from her eyes she found herself making her way down the port stairwell. The downward incline didn't faze her as she proceeded down three decks from the mess lounge and suddenly found herself in an area of the ship she had never been to before. She could hear quite a bit of activity and she followed the sounds until she came to the open metal walkway that stretched across the expanse of the huge landing bay of the *REAPER*. Slowly Sehri made her way out onto the walkway, her blue eyes wide as she took in the ground crews below her moving several Union fighters around and others working on different ships. Her eyes lifted when she heard the trumpet and they grew a little wider when she saw the massive form of Lisisa Leonidas's dragon Jeth. He was reared up on his hind quarters, his huge wings extended fully to the sides as the tiny form of the Princess held a high pressure water hose and was spraying his black with bluish tinted scales. Jeth seemed to be enjoying it immensely. They were in a large pen area set to the side of the landing bay nearest to where the three *STRIKER* DTs were parked close together. Sehri stepped up to the railing of the walkway and simply watched as Lisisa moved that hose back and forth, spraying every exposed portion of the dragon's scales.

“Sehri?” Her mother's voice came to her and she turned her head quickly as Aleatia moved up beside her.

Sehri exhaled heavily. “I'm sorry mother. I...”

Aleatia shook her head immediately and took her youngest daughter into her arms. “You have nothing to apologize for.” She stated softly. She took Sehri's face in her warm hands and leaned over to nuzzle her daughter's cheek. “It is affecting you more than you realized isn't it?” She asked.

Sehri nodded. “The closer we get... the closer we get the stronger it becomes.” She told her softly.

“Can you not block it?” Aleatia asked. “I have spoken at length with Harira... and she tells me you are stronger within Mindvoice than many of the older Shaman Masters.”

“I'm trying mother.” Sehri answered. “It is so strong though, especially when they are together. Even alone his aura is overwhelming... and it... it calls to me so momma.” She looked at her mother. “All of them do. It feels so wonderful but...”

“But what?” Aleatia asked her as she stroked her jaw line like she had done when Sehri was a child. Even now it still had the affect of calming and soothing her and this pleased Aleatia to no end.

“I have never... I have never felt such raw, unbridled power mother.” Sehri told her. “They... they keep it in check by force of will alone... but just being able to feel it is so very disconcerting to me.”

“It frightens you?” Aleatia asked.

Sehri nodded. “Yes.”

“We both saw what he did Sehri.” Aleatia said. “How could we not be frightened? The Etheric Academy has always kept tight control on those like you and the other Shamans. That is why the Circle broke away and remains in hiding. If the Academy knew you existed they would take you away from us.”

Sehri nodded. “I know.” She answered. She turned and looked down at where Lisisa was now stroking Jeth's scales with a brush of some sort. “The power within him... within all of them... even her.” She motioned to Lisisa. “They wield it so casually and...”

Aleatia brought her face back around and looked at her daughter. “Tell others that if you like Sehri... but I am your mother.” She spoke. “His resonance is battering your shields and you are having a difficult time suppressing your fever aren't you?”

Sehri didn't speak for a moment but she had never kept anything from her mother before and she was not going to start now. She gripped her mother's arms and nodded slowly looking up into her face. “His aura is

like... it is like a burning sun within Mindvoice mother. We are... we are Rothryn! Why does it affect me so? It shouldn't!"

"Why shouldn't it?" Aleatia said. "As we have discovered there is very little difference between our peoples. We are essentially Lycavorian without the ability to shift. We have the same senses, the same healing ability, but we have always suppressed the baser instincts within us. Those within the Union have not. It is not wrong that you desire him Sehri."

"It's not just him mother!" Sehri declared. "It's all of them! Sadi and Ne'Veha most of all!"

Aleatia looked at her for a long moment. "They are affecting you as well?" She asked finally, more than a little surprised to say the least. Same sex relationships, while not against Rothryn law, were frowned upon immensely because no children would result from such a pairing.

Sehri nodded her head. "I can... I can almost feel the beats of their hearts within me. My focus and clarity within Mindvoice is growing stronger by the hour. It's them! As we draw closer I can feel them more and more. It makes... it makes me shudder in want."

"And these feelings... they are making you doubt your decision to become a Shaman aren't they?" Aleatia said.

"It is making me doubt everything." Sehri said in reply. "I... it's almost as if I don't know who I am anymore."

"This is a restricted area! Don't move!" The male voice spoke forcefully and they both whirled around to see the pair of security officers staring at them, their weapons out but not pointed at them.

Aleatia pulled Sehri close to her. "Forgive us!" She stammered. "We did not... we did not know where we were!"

The guard who had spoken sniffed the air gently, his eyes never leaving Sehri. Aleatia took note of this and drew her daughter closer. "This area is restricted to crewmembers of this ship." He spoke gruffly. "How did you get here?"

Sehri looked at the man and could see that he was reacting to her fever. His eyes grew narrow and his breathing became shallow as he moved closer. Her hands tightened on her mother's arms as he stopped only a few feet from her.

"I was... I was upset and did not pay attention to where I was going." Sehri stammered suddenly feeling very worried.

"Please..." Aleatia spoke. "We will leave. We..."

The man stared at Sehri for a long period of time saying nothing. His dark eyes appeared as if they were looking through her and into her soul. Sehri could easily feel his Mindvoice resonance and she quickly determined that he was a member of the Lycavorian *Durcunusaan*. She hesitated for a second and then spoke.

"You... you are *Durcunusaan*?" She asked softly.

The man looked at her then and straightened his stance. "You are... you are within your Coming of Age fever little one." He spoke matter-of-factly.

Sehri glanced at her mother quickly and Aleatia's eyes were filled with worry. Sehri turned back to the man and slowly nodded her head. "Yes." She answered him.

The light blue eyed *Durcunusaan* Commander quickly put his sidearm away and the second man followed suit instantly. Aleatia breathed a small sigh of relief at this but her heart still raced with worry. They were alone and without any of Kelelm's men to watch over them. Aleatia didn't know what would happen but she had heard of how Lycavorian men could react around a female who was within her fever. It was one of the first things she had read about when they came on board because she knew Sehri was within her Coming of Age. They were Rothryn yes... but they were also Lycavorian and Aleatia didn't doubt the males on this ship would smell her fever if she stopped suppressing it.

"You are suppressing it well little one..." The man spoke. "But it is getting stronger isn't it?"

Sehri looked at him surprised and somewhat embarrassed. "How... how do you..."

The man lifted his eyes to Aleatia. "I am Commander Eotharon. Second in command of Princess Lisisa's *Durcunusaan* detail Lady Aleatia. My... my youngest daughter is working through her fever even now. And you should not be ashamed of this in the least little one." Eotharon told her looking directly at Sehri. Aleatia felt the worry begin to slip away quickly as the man moved closer to them and she watched as he looked at Sehri closely. "I have read all the reports on your people." He spoke turning back to Aleatia. "You may be

called Rothryn... but you have Lycavorian blood surging through your veins and that makes you Lycavorian whether you can shift your forms or not.” He turned back to Sehri. “You are projecting indifference with your aura little one. That is good. Many of our females are not strong enough within Mindvoice to do this at your age and it will keep the more determined fools at bay.” He removed a data pad from his utility belt and typed on it for a few moments. He held it out to Sehri. “A recipe for tea that my mate devised for our daughters. It does not suppress the fever, but it adds a very distinct flavor to your scent for a few days that will cause the males of our species to shy away from you. Those who are only interested in a casual encounter that is. It does not sit well with their nose.”

Sehri looked at Eotharon as she reached out and took the pad. “It makes them stay away from me?” She asked in surprise.

Eotharon nodded. “Only those who are attracted by your fever and wish to be with you because your scent is so sweet now.” He said. “Those with any sense will take note that your aura calls for only one and they will know it is not them. You should not suppress what you are young lady. You do yourself a disservice by such actions. Be proud of who and what you are. And you need not worry about what our males will do... all of them are taught from birth to honor and respect all women. Especially those who could without difficulty squash them within Mindvoice.”

“You... you can feel me within Mindvoice?” Sehri asked.

Eotharon smiled warmly. “Quite easily Little One. Your resonance is nearly as powerful as Princess Lisisa there... albeit somewhat unfocused at the moment because of what you are experiencing. You would be considered a very high level Tier Six Etheric user by the way we now measure our people... and you are still growing it seems.” He spoke as he stepped even closer to Sehri. “You have been touched by someone of immense power within Mindvoice. Someone who is bound to a dragon. A touch you accepted. I can feel the echo of them... of him within you. He is an Alpha wolf of great ability.” His blue eyes shimmered as they looked at her. “There are very few within Union space that have the raw power I sense within his echo. Two to be exact. Interesting.” He lifted his head and backed away from her. “Your mother would be a Tier Five Etheric user without question. It is good to see our Lycavorian brothers who call themselves Rothryn have nurtured this skill.”

“You said my scent?” Sehri said softly. She looked at him. “What... what do I smell like?”

Eotharon shook his head quickly at her. “It would be inappropriate for me to answer that question Little One. Only the man who you decide to take as your husband and mate would dare speak of your scent publicly. It is a great insult within the Union. It is done between the males yes... but never in your presence and never so others can overhear.” He answered her quickly. “My mate and daughter accompanied me on this trip because we did not know how long we would be gone. My daughter spends most of her time in the engineering section. She has a taste for engines. Her name is Remali if you wish to seek her out and perhaps some spend time with someone who knows what you are going through.”

Aleatia looked at him. “How long have you been mated Commander?” She asked with interest.

Eotharon smiled. “Nine hundred years, eleven months and six days Lady Aleatia. The very best years of my life.” He answered proudly. “We have six strong children and my beloved wife and mate carries our seventh.”

Aleatia smiled. “Congratulations Commander.” She said warmly.

Eotharon bowed his head to her. “We will leave you to your privacy. If anyone asks, you have my permission to be here. The smell of the fuel and such keeps most casual observers away from this area. I will make adjustments to your access for the remainder of the trip when I return to my office and I will insure no males approach you.”

Sehri blinked. “But... I thought it was natural for males to act in the way they do?” She asked.

Eotharon nodded. “It is... but not with you. Be yourself Little One and you will see.” He answered.

“Why?” Aleatia asked him.

Eotharon looked at her and smiled. “Ask your daughter Lady Aleatia.” He said.

“Thank you Commander.” Sehri spoke.

Eotharon nodded his head. “*Un coi aur hador. Dalas atle forn cabret* Little One. *Quvor maeve gur vada leoda arvel tur bacj.*” (It is my honor. Find what you seek little one. Only then will the fever truly be gone.)

Sehri stared at him for a long moment and then nodded her head. “*Pen gur.*” She spoke. (I will)

Eotharon smiled and then turned with the other *Durcunusaan* soldier and they exited the metal walkway the way they had come. Sehri looked at her mother and smiled. Aleatia hugged her tightly.

“Come... let’s get back to our quarters and you can give this recipe a try.” Aleatia said.

Eotharon touched the arm of his junior officer as they moved back down the corridor. “Put the word out among the ship discretely Kokun. Sehri is not to be approached by any male. Not if they value their *nor*.”

“What did you sense Commander.” The younger man asked. “She does smell very good sir. It will not make the men happy.”

Eotharon looked at him and smiled. “There are two Alphas with the power to reach the Beta Quadrant and touch her as she has been touched within Mindvoice. Only one is close to her age and the King would never seek a female so young. It is a touch that she accepted and even now holds onto tightly.”

Kokun’s eyes grew a little wider. “Prince Androcles?” He gasped.

Eotharon nodded his head. “I could feel Princess Sadi and Ne’Veha on her as well. They seem to be more focused than either Princess Lu’ria or Princess Carisia. They must have been closest to him when he touched her. It is why I told her to be herself and allow others to sense the fever. What male in their right mind would approach her if they detected Prince Andro within her Mindvoice essence?”

Kokun nodded. “Only those with a death wish.” He said. “I see your point commander. I will pass the word this night.”

Eotharon pounded his on the back as they walked. “Inform the rest of the detail to keep their eyes on her as well. Just in case.”

FEBRUARY 4TH, 2575, 0430 HRS EST

“...miss you Lisi.” Denali spoke from within the holographic communication. “I’m kicking myself for having you go with them.”

Lisisa was inside the secure COM center, the *REAPER* equipped with the newest and most advanced Quantum based Holo Communications Projectors. Similar to what was standard on all of the *ARIZONA*-Class warships and the *SCIMITAR*. The images were not as clear as they could be because of the distance involved, but unknown to all but a few, the new QHCP arrays allowed for direct communication over distances previously thought impossible. The Quantum based technology sent the signals through mini worm holes formed and detectable only with special sensors. These sensors were equipped only on a handful of ships at the moment as Ben and the others at Dreamland worked out the details of mass production and installation within the thousands of Union warships. Only the Block One and Block Two *ARIZONA*-Class Ships, the new *VANGUARD MK III INTERDICTION* Cruisers and the newer *MOONLANCER-B*-Class Battle Cruisers were equipped with the QHCP. Outside of those ships, only the *LEONIDAS IIAs* assigned to the Royal Family were equipped with them. Namely the *ARCHDEMON* and the *REAPER*.

Lisisa Leonidas smiled at Deni’s words for she could feel the emotion in them. Lisisa knew how Denali felt for her as his wife and mate and how she felt for him. They would never be the same without each other, especially with Arduri now sharing their lives and their future. Something that both of them relished.

“You have Duri to sate your desires Denali.” Lisisa sent the jab at him.

Denali rolled his eyes. “You know what I mean.” He hissed. “And Arduri isn’t too happy with me that I sent you away either.”

Lisisa smiled at his image. “I miss you both terribly. We... we have never been this far apart from each other you know.” She said.

Deni nodded. “And we won’t ever be again once you return.” He stated confidently. “Lisisa I want...”

“This was the right decision Deni and you know it.” Lisisa said. “Having me here with the Rothryn Delegation will speed their transition once we get to Earth and get them to see Andro that much more quickly. I know that my love. I figure at least three days of suitable body worshiping of me and Arduri when I return should make up for it.”

“Say a week and you have a deal.” Denali told her and Lisisa laughed.

“I’ll hold you to that.” She exclaimed with delight. Just seeing his face and hearing his voice was enough for now to chase away the loneliness she felt. Something he had been able to do from their very first moment together. Their love making the last few weeks had been incredibly intense and passionate. Denali almost never seemed to tire of her or Arduri for that matter. She had a sense of why this was and it filled her with even more love for the much younger man who was now her husband and mate. There had been times at the very beginning of their relationship when Lisisa fought within her mind at what they were doing. They were related and he was so much younger than her. Nearly five hundred years younger. Lisisa was no stranger to men, but Denali could do to her what no man ever could. His aura was so powerful and controlled he could make the wolf blood within her quiver with a simple caress of his aura on her. No Lycavorian who she had bedded since returning from Lycavore had ever been able to elicit those kinds of emotions and feelings. Denali didn’t just make love to her, her possessed her very being. And it certainly helped that his body could have been chiseled from granite and he was incredibly gifted within the cock department, not to mention that he tasted delicious.

It took several days for Lisisa to realize that Denali, like Andro, had been imprinted with the memories of their father and mother. Though he outwardly did not show it very often and it was not as profound an imprint on him as it was on Andro, Denali was far wiser and intelligent than he let on. When Lisisa finally allowed herself to recognize all of these things about the man who had so swept her up into his embrace, that was when the true blissful pleasure and feelings of devotion came rippling forth. She had not looked back since.

“Where is Duri?” She asked finally.

“She is with Coren and Caliria at her apartment finalizing the details of Dyack’s plan with him.” Denali answered. “Hopefully it will be sufficient to bring about the results we want for when Andro arrives. You should be almost to Earth yes?”

Lisisa nodded. “We made our last HMFC jump seven hours ago. We’ll be crossing the border into Union space in forty minutes or so. Once there we can use the Gates and be to Earth by morning.”

“Lisisa... make sure to remind Andro to bring Zarah and Lucia with him when he comes.” Denali said. “Having to listen to Dutkne bellyache much more will send me into a fit of anger.”

Lisisa laughed. “He’s gotten worse I know.” She said.

“He never stops asking me questions about them.” Deni told her. “What do they like to eat? To drink? Their favorite flower? Argh... it drives me insane!”

“Deni... he knows what...” Lisisa began to ask.

Denali nodded. “Yes. He doesn’t care. He told me he would wait for thousands of years until she was ready. And he would remain at her side regardless if she did not.”

Lisisa was impressed. “He is... he is that taken with them?”

Denali nodded. “He said he felt it long before he ever came here but he could never explain it. Then seeing them together on Earth, what they could do together as they were searching for Janae? It is more than just being taken with them Lisi... in his own way it is what I feel for you and now Arduri. What Andro feels for Sadi and the others? It is powerful and will never go away.”

Lisisa nodded. “Good.” She said softly. “Perhaps seeing this will allow our sister to be able to one day have what she so desires.”

Deni nodded “Avoi.” He said.

Lisisa’s head lifted as a voice intruded upon their communication. **“Princess Lisisa please report to the bridge immediately! Princess Lisisa to the bridge immediately!”** The internal ship COM sang out.

“Deni... I must go my love.” Lisisa said getting to her feet.

“Contact me from Dragon Mountain after you are settled.” He told her. “The QHCP emitters there will make our connection much clearer.”

“I love you Denali Leonidas my husband and mate.” Lisisa told him.

Deni smiled. “And I love you Lisisa Leonidas... my beautiful wife and mate.”

“I will see you soon.” Lisisa said before reaching down to the holographic table and touching the solid panel. The QHCP communication ended then and she was within the much smaller room on the *REAPER*. She turned quickly and headed for the bridge.

Lisisa strode onto the bridge confidently and watched the REAPER'S Captain rise from his command chair. The door to the opposite side of the bridge also opened and she watched as Aleatia, Harira, Kelelm and Sehri entered with two *Durcunusaan* officers. She glanced at them for a brief moment and then looked at the Elven Captain of the REAPER.

"Lunerr?" She asked as she came up next to him.

"I sent for them Princess." He said as the *Durcunusaan* brought them up to where they stood.

"Why?" Lisisa asked.

"Their presence among us might affect your decision." Lunerr told her.

"My decision on what?" Lisisa asked.

Lunerr motioned with his hand. "You should probably see this." He spoke as he led all of them over the plot table and touched several portions of the holographic control panel. "I tapped into the SUCOM arrays when we arrived back in the Alpha Quadrant. This came over the secure *Durcunusaan* channel seven and a half hours ago. I just discovered it."

Lisisa watched as Sa'sur's face appeared.

"...ULU SCIMITAR. I am declaring a Crimson Storm Protocol Two Five. Prince Androcles Leonidas is groundside on the Bontawillian Colony of Solmar with Prince Dorian. Kavalian ground and air forces are now in control of the planet. I am ordering an immediate deployment of the SCIMITAR's Strike Wing to my current location. This is a Level Nine Command Authority deployment. I am ordering activation of the primary Durcunusaan Ready Division and preparation of Union forces for immediate covert deployment to the region. Verify confirmation of deployment on this channel."

"Captain Sa'sur this is Durcunusaan command." The male voice broke in. "Confirm with Command Codes your last."

"SCIMITAR, Gamma Alpha One four seven nine." Sa'sur answered.

"Codes confirmed Captain." The voice answered. "Initiating activation per your orders! Your status?"

"SCIMITAR has withdrawn at Androcles's order to Bontawillian space. Coordinates seven three nine one two point six. Primary mission went to sibfla nine hours in. Unknown at this time mission status. Kavalian forces have occupied all settlements on Solmar and taken down the main power grid. Confirmed thirty-seven Kavalian ships entering the system as we departed. Spartan company has been deployed with our remaining STRIKERS and KADENs to Andro's position on the surface. They appear to be attempting to set up a forward staging area. Large number of Kavalian ground forces were entering system as we departed and they will be landing by now. I estimate two divisions at least by the number of DAGGER-Class Troop ships. Are you getting this?"

"Affirmative Captain Sa'sur." The voice answered. "Priority alert has already gone out to General Vengal and the DRF. He received your preliminary alert three hours ago and the deployment has already begun."

"This cannot hit the open airwaves!" Sa'sur spoke. "If the Kavalians find out Andro is on the surface they will commit everything to taking him out! I need the Durcunusaan Ready Force moving within hours. Covert deployment. General Vengal will know the drill."

Lunerr looked at Lisisa. "By now the DRF will have begun moving to their staging areas on Earth for deployment Princess. And whatever other assets the General believes he can get off the planet without alerting the Netnews to an unscheduled deployment."

"Sa'sur's position is just inside the Bontawillian border." Lisisa stated looking at the star chart. "How soon before the additional forces reach her location?"

"It is 2200 hours on Earth now. If they are able to begin moving by morning... thirty-six hours." He answered. "Then another twelve back to Solmar. There are no Gates they can use to get them there faster and only the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Wing has HMFC engines."

"*Nubou!*" Lisisa swore turning away for a moment as her mind shuffled through dozens of scenarios.

“Princess... we are only nine hours from Solmar.” Lunerr told her watching Lisisa turn to look at him. “We have three hundred Spartans we can put groundside along with yourself and Jeth. That would be four hundred and fifty Spartans and three dragons.” He looked at where Aleatia and the others stood. “There is a slight problem however.”

Kelelm knew immediately what he meant and he looked at his mother who still appeared somewhat confused at what was happening. “Us.” He told her.

“Us?” Aleatia asked.

“You are a Political Delegation Lady Aleatia.” Lunerr told her. “The Lycavorian Union Chapter specifically states that endangering the welfare of a Political Delegation is punishable with severe consequences.”

Sehri looked at her. “Mother... we have to help!” She declared.

Harira stepped forward. “That would not be advisable.” She stated. “With the exception of Kelelm and his detachment, none of us have seen combat. Even if we remained on this ship we would still be in danger.”

“The Kavalians would never be able to detect us with our Shrouds.” Lunerr spoke. “We could remain at a safe distance from the planet itself and simply act as a relay Princess.”

Harira looked at Lunerr. “That woman said there were upwards of two divisions on the planet. I am not completely unknowledgeable in military affairs Captain. What is the number of a... what do you call them... Kavalians. How many in one of their divisions?”

Lunerr shrugged. “Between twenty and thirty thousand depending on composition of the division.” He replied.

Harira’s eyes grew wide. “Thirty thousand!” She gasped. “Against four hundred? That is suicide!”

“Actually it would be closer to sixty thousand if there are two divisions.” Lunerr told her.

“How many civilians on Solmar?” Lisisa asked.

“The settlement has a population of nearly twenty thousand.” Lunerr answered. “Mostly Bontawillian, elven and human engineers and teraformers. According to colony logs... they were planning to begin expansion onto the southern continent next month.”

Lisisa looked at him. “The only reason Andro and Dorian would have remained is to try and help the civilians.” She stated.

“Help them do what?” Harira stammered.

“Move as many of them to a central point for evacuation.” Lunerr answered her. “Make no mistake Lady Harira... when Sa'sur returns with Union forces... there will be a battle. We will not leave civilians to the mercies of the Kavalians for any reason. Not if there is a chance to get them out. Once the Union task force arrives, the evacuation of civilians will be their main priority.”

Sehri looked at her mother once more. “Mother... it is Andro!” She exclaimed. “We have to...”

“Sehri child... you are not thinking rationally.” Harira spoke.

Sehri’s head snapped around. “I’m thinking completely rationally!” She barked at the Shaman Master. Harira’s eyes grew a little wider at the obvious emotion and anger within her response.

Lisisa looked at Lunerr. “Do we have enough ships to load out our Spartans and you can continue to Earth with Lady Aleatia and the others?”

Lunerr shook his head. “No. We have only three *STRIKERS* and one *KADEN* on board Princess. You wouldn’t be able to take more than two hundred and all of their gear.”

“Then I’ll take what I can.” Lisisa answered. “You will continue on with the Rothryn Delegation to Earth.”

“No.” Aleatia spoke finally as she looked at Lisisa.

“I can’t risk your safety.” Lisisa told her. “It would not be right... this is not your war. And my *Tenna Deia* would have my ass if I did. Andro too probably.”

Aleatia took a deep breath. “I believe I know what my husband and mate would do.” Aleatia spoke. “We came with you to meet your brother Androcles and discover all we could about not only our past but our future as well. If Androcles... if your brother dies on this planet then our mission will have failed in every way. I am not willing to allow that and I don’t believe Dyack would be either.”

“Lady Aleatia this is crazy!” Harira said. “His father still lives! Our mission will not have failed!”

Aleatia looked at her. “Androcles Leonidas is the one who began this odyssey for us by allowing us to compare our DNA with his and his brother Denali. He made the first overture with little knowledge of us or our people Harira. I’d say that is an incredible leap of faith.”

Harira nodded. “Yes it is.”

Aleatia turned to Lisisa. “Your brother... he obviously believes deeply in faith does he not Princess Lisisa?”

Lisisa nodded. “He doesn’t show it at times but yes... he does. Very much so.” She answered honestly.

Aleatia nodded. “Then we will do no less.” She spoke. “Something tells me when he discovers we are among you...” Aleatia looked at Sehri. “He will insure our safety as well as the civilians he is trying to save. And my son and his men are not without experience in this kind of situation either.” She turned back to Lisisa. “We will accompany you and the Rothryn people will not hold you responsible for anything that might happen Princess.”

Lisisa didn’t hesitate and she turned to Lunerr. “Plot the course and get us there as quickly as you can Lunerr.”

The elven Captain nodded. “Consider it done.” He said.

Lisisa turned to the *Durcunusaan* soldier closest to them. “*Enomotarch*... you will take...”

Kelelm looked at her. “I am a Colonel within our military Princess.” He stated.

“You will take Colonel Kelelm and his detachment and outfit them with our equipment and primary weapons.” Lisisa said. “Have Eotharon alter ship board access for Lady Aleatia and her daughters to allow them to be on the bridge once we arrive.”

“As you order Princess.” The man said.

Lisisa looked at her. “If events begin to spiral out of our control Lady Aleatia... Captain Lunerr will leave the system and bring you to Earth.”

Aleatia nodded. “I understand.” She said.

EARTH

GYTHEIO

MOUNTAIN VILLA OF ZARAH AND LUCIA

FEBRUARY 4TH, 2575, 0545 HRS EST

Zarah Leonidas stretched her lithe body on the bed, reveling in the new sensations and emotions surging through her. Not since before the attack on her had she felt these things and she knew without question it was due to one thing. Zarah rolled over in her bed reaching for Lucia and her dark eyes grew wide when she discovered no body next to her. As her hand slid across the sheets a fleeting moment of terrifying fear and loneliness swept through her and then her eyes lifted as the door to their bedroom opened and Lucia came in carrying the small tray. That fear vanished into the wind as her eyes fell on the deliciously naked body of Lucia.

Her Lucia.

Almost six months had passed since the attack, since they had taken her innocence from her. That day also saw Lucia enter her life and the healing had begun almost immediately. Lucia had saved her life without thought; had been beside her every day since then. The attraction between them was undisputable and unmistakable. The blood they had shared building upon and reinforcing the connection that was already there, made from across the stars. It had taken Zarah six months to work up the courage to try and experience physical pleasure the way it was meant to be. Consensual and loving. Their last two nights and most of the days together had been everything Zarah had ever imagined it could be. Neither of them had been with any partner before each other, but these last weeks and months of sleeping naked within each other’s arms had chased away any unfamiliarity and left them more time to explore and delve into the deep mysteries that they were. Explore and delve is exactly what they had done to each other, finally and forever sealing their love for one another in a way nothing else could.

Zarah let her head drop back to the pillow as she watched Lucia move towards her. She had memorized every single contour and curve Lucia had, her lips and tongue reaching and then exploring every detail with

great gusto while Lucia thrashed and cried out her delight. And then Lucia had done the same to her for hours on end, Zarah's blissful cries of rapture filling their bedroom and surely echoing along the mountain ridge where their villa was. Zarah had insisted that they purchase a villa together. A place they would call their home. With Eliani and Sadi's help they decided on this large villa sitting on the ridge and overlooking the gulf. Thanks to Sadi and Eliani's influence and contacts all the proper paperwork and transfers of Riyal were made within hours instead of days. Androcles had been the one to purchase the villa for them, his gift to them he had told them that day. He had also deliberately designed her schedule of working and training with the Durcunusaan to give her maximum time with Lucia. Zarah had figured this out very quickly, but instead of being angry at him for catering to her as he always did, she found she loved her older brother even more. Twice now he had saved her life, first upon that mountain on Apo Prime and then by not killing Lucia outright when he discovered them together immediately after the attack. He was the first to have seen the love in Lucia's eyes for Zarah when he discovered Lucia holding a battered Zarah within her arms inside a powerful Etheric bubble she had erected. Lucia had almost not let him enter that bubble, but even then she knew that Andro would save them both.

Zarah had held a tremendous fear that she would never be able to feel pleasure again after what was done to her. That she would never know the delight of loving someone and sharing herself with them for all time. Those fears, along with the last vestiges of the attack against her had been washed away in that first of dozens of blissful orgasms that Lucia had given to her. Feelings and sensations that Zarah eagerly returned to her equally upon discovering that she was not dead to emotion.

Zarah gazed at Lucia's lush body as she walked towards the bed and almost seeing the same thoughts and emotions racing through Lucia's head.

Lucia Moran... youngest child of Yuri Moran... and in the eyes of many of the Leonidas family, part of the glue that had held them together during that time. To Lucia... Zarah was a vision of exquisite beauty that now belonged to her in every way. So many years of loving her from a distance, having to hide that love from others was gone. Now she was with her beloved Zarah and nothing would ever come between them. Zarah had saved her from the darkness that had taken her mother and brothers, that single strand of power within Mindvoice that Lucia had clung to tenaciously for almost a decade until they were finally together. They were like one mind now, their sharing of blood bringing them far closer together than most people except their family realized. And Lucia was a Leonidas now... in body and soul. She didn't doubt her purpose or the path she walked with Zarah at her side. One conversation with Martin Leonidas had chased all the fears within her away with each word he had spoken to her. It had taken place while he was out among the stars searching for For'mya, a simple transmission that only held them. Lucia remembered his words that day perfectly, and she would take them to her life's end with pride and happiness.

“... something I should have done a long time ago. I'm doing it now to show you how I feel. You have stolen each other's hearts... and I can not begin to tell you how happy that makes me. Andro has given me some idea of what you have endured Lucia... hiding the real you for so many years. Hiding your love for my daughter. I let my feelings for your mother cloud my judgment at first... I won't let that happen ever again. Know this Lucia... from this day forward you are a Leonidas. I will treat you with the same love and devotion as I treat my own daughters. Never fear me or what I will say for you are now part of my family. Love each other every day like there is no tomorrow. Never doubt. Never hesitate. And know that you will always have my love behind you.”

Such simple words... but they had been the final line she had crossed to be who she now was as a person. She was Lucia Leonidas and she loved her Zarah like nothing else in this universe. Her bonded sister Seyra had also rejoiced and found new life and purpose among these men and women and the many dragons they called friend and family, making their bond even stronger than it was and enveloping Zarah within that very special connection. Seyra had grown viciously protective of both of them in every way and there were very few that she allowed to get close to her Bonded sisters.

Lucia settled her naked form onto the bed as Zarah sat up and she placed the tray between their legs. She leaned over without hesitation and caught Zarah's soft lips in a kiss of love and passion that lasted for several long moments before they parted and Zarah sat up completely, shifting her body so that Lucia could slide closer to her.

“We have taken quite a bit of each other’s blood these last hours.” Lucia said holding out the glass of pulpy orange juice. “We need to replenish that or the first training session we have both of us will collapse from exhaustion.”

Zarah giggled as she took the glass. “But everyone will know why.” She stated with some amusement. “And it won’t be nearly as pleasant.”

Lucia smiled and nodded her head, her black hair wild and unkempt at the moment and moving across her shoulders. “No... it certainly won’t.” She answered before sipping the juice. “What time do we have to meet with Thr’won and Syrilth?”

“1000 hours.” Zarah answered. “Our lessons with them are giving me much more clarity and focus.”

Lucia nodded. “Me as well.” She said. “I can control my whips with more exacting control. It’s amazing. My grandmother made the mistake of suppressing those vampires who showed promise within Mindvoice. Their Etheric abilities may have helped against the KFI in many ways.”

“She was too frightened to allow others to reach her level of ability.” Zarah said. “Andro believes that was more Xaxon’s influence on her than anything. She didn’t have the strength to fight him as you did my love. She was too long within his grasp.”

Lucia looked at her silent for a moment before speaking again. “Zarah... do you think my mother will find peace?”

Zarah lowered her glass. “Yes.” She said. “Perhaps... perhaps not as we have... but you remember what Andro told us. She was different Lucia... the darkness gone from her. It is why he could not kill her.”

“Part of me wishes her to be happy.” Lucia said as she scooted closer to Zarah on the bed. “But part of me still harbors a great deal of anger at her for what she allowed to happen.”

Zarah shook her head. “Most of what she allowed to happen was not truly her Lucia.” She said.

Lucia looked at her. “You defend her?” She asked.

Zarah shook her head. “No...” She shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe. I can’t stop thinking that it would be if I was forced in some way to hurt you against what I knew to be wrong. To be able to control your grandmother as he did, for so many millennia and then infect your mother the way he did. With what your father and grandmother were doing to her, influencing her in the way that they did, there are very few who could fight that. It almost took my own father you know that.” Zarah looked at her. “You know how I trust Andro my love.”

Lucia nodded. “Yes. As I trust him now. How could I not? He was the first to fully accept that I loved you as I do.”

“I have always trusted him implicitly.” Zarah said. “His instincts. His sense of people. In many ways he is even more gifted than my father in regards to being able to sense a person’s resonance and their inner being. He sensed something was different within your mother Lucia. He could not bring himself to kill her because of this. I may not know exactly what it was that he saw... but I trust my brother with all that I am. If he did not kill her for what she was perceived to have done then there is a higher reason. Something he saw within her that stayed his hand.”

Lucia nodded. “Do you think we will ever see her again?”

“Do you want too?” Zarah asked.

Lucia stared at her for a long moment before replying. “Part of me does.” She said softly.

“Then our roads may cross again if it is our destiny.” Zarah said.

“I will kill my father and brother if I ever see them again.” Lucia hissed. “They are responsible for so much pain and it doesn’t bother them in the least. I hope Aunt Narice is able to find them and kill them. I...” Lucia looked at Zarah as her lips came to hers and they kissed softly.

“Do not do this my love.” Zarah told her as she pulled away ever so slightly. “We are together now. Nothing will ever change that. Let us... let us put our past behind us and go into the sunlight together.”

Lucia nodded her head quickly. “You are right.” She said without hesitation. She met Zarah’s kiss with equal passion then but just as their kiss deepened, Zarah gasped and pulled away quickly, her hand tightening on Lucia’s thigh. “Zarah my love!” She gasped. “What is wrong?”

Zarah shook her head as if trying to clear her thoughts. “I felt... it was a massive spike within Mindvoice. From Andro!” She rasped out.

“Andro?” Lucia asked.

Zarah nodded. “We have always been connected in a way since that day on Apo Prime. I have always been able to sense his Etheric resonance when he drops his shields low enough. But he almost never does that. Not unless...”

“Not unless what?” Lucia pressed her.

Zarah looked at her. “He never drops his shields low enough for me to sense him unless there is something wrong and he is acting out of rage or some other powerful emotion. Wherever he and Dorian are... something has gone wrong.”

“I thought... I thought the mission he and Dorian went on was a routine pick up?” Lucia said.

“That is what he told me before he left.” Zarah said. “Something is wrong though Lucia! I feel it!”

“Sadi?” Lucia blurted immediately.

Zarah shook her head. “Sadi is just like Andro. She maintains her shields at near their maximum ability all of the time. It is something the *Feravomir* taught her at the School of the Mages. Unless Andro has touched her directly she would not sense it. What I felt... it was focused and directed at me alone.”

Lucia’s hands gripped Zarah’s. “If there is trouble then he is reaching for you because he knows you will not panic as the others will!” She gasped. “That must be it.”

Zarah looked at her. “We need to get to Jomann!”

Lucia rose to her feet. “They will still be at their villa. It is less than a mile! Come!”

GYTHEIO

HOME OF ELIANI AND JOMANN

FEBRUARY 4TH, 2575, 0605 HRS EST

“...don’t care what you have to do!” Eliani snapped angrily. “You get those supplies to the ship within the next hour! We are deploying at 1300 with or without them and if they aren’t there I will have your *nor* in my hands Captain! It won’t be pretty! Is that in any way unclear?”

“It will be done Princess!” The man stammered.

“Thank you!” Eliani barked before slamming her hand down on the COM panel and turning to look at Jomann as he entered the main living area of their home. “The medical supplies will be leaving within the hour.” She told him.

Jomann nodded and tapped on his data pad. “I knew you would be able to move them.” He told her as he stepped up to her and slipped his arm around her waist. Jomann pulsed her with a portion of his aura, not enough to incite sexual urges, but enough to calm and sooth her excited state.

Eliani rested her head against his chest as she felt his aura sweep through her and she returned the pulse with one of her own. She looked up at her husband and mate. “Why... why contact Vengal first and not us?” She asked.

“Sa’sur has been Andro’s right hand for nearly seven years now Eli... and she knows how any of his family would react. Most especially Sadi and the others.” Jomann answered calmly. “You would blow windows out in leaving the planet to go to him and that is not what is needed. It must be done with precision and force *Innel*... but also with complete secrecy.”

Eliani looked into his ocean blue eyes and smiled when he called her baby. From any other male that word would have been insulting and provocative and it would have caused Eliani to react accordingly. From Jomann however, that word was music to her ears. When it rolled off his tongue, that one word held all of his combined love and desire for her and it surged through her being and made her wolf blood sing in happiness. “I know.” She said finally.

“Two thirds of the Durcunusaan Division is loaded and nearly half of the human 82nd Orbital Drop Division.” He stated. “We must maintain our façade in order to not alert the Kavalians who we believe are still on Earth. That is why we have been coordinating from here and we have not moved to Andro’s villa.”

“Sadi is going to pop a vessel when they finish that stupid interview and you tell her what is going on.” Eliani told him.

Jomann nodded. “Probably... but she will understand very quickly why. Just as you do.”

“I want to come with you.” The second female voice spoke and they both turned to see Brendi Faith standing in the archway to the corridor that led to the three bedrooms in their villa.

Brendi Faith stared at them from the archway and couldn't believe she had just said that. She knew why of course... but she didn't believe she had reacted so instinctively in speaking. It was not something that she ever did. She blurted the first words that had popped into her mind and she struggled with the why of her statement but not the statement itself. Brendi Faith had been among these men and women as a whole for nearly six months now. Nearly everything of importance that the OSG intelligence pads had on the Lycavorian Union was in some way wrong or taken out of context. She had seen a people dedicated to each other, to their values and to peace. She had seen a people driven to the edge of a war they did not want and tried to avoid. A people that ultimately decided war was the only way to protect and defend what they had as a people. A war Androcles Leonidas had tried his very best to evade but when that decision had come, it was a decision he made without hesitation.

These last six months with the man and woman in front of her had also affected her own reasoning no matter how much she fought it. Brendi had been living with them for almost six months now, her parents and twin sisters living with the Spartan family of the man who was now her sister's husband. Their villa was enormous and had more than enough room for them but Brendi did not want to live with them after being on her own for so long. Her family was adapting far better than her and her younger sister Nicolle was happier than she had ever seen her, Tasha just as bubbly because she was Nicolle's twin. Her mother and father spent hours with Mento's mother and father, her own father drawn to the history and culture of the Spartan people like nothing she had ever seen. Jomann and Eliani would not allow her to have her own villa for security purposes. They just did not know if Corbin or the OSG would come after them. Brendi understood this reasoning and accepted it without question. She had no desire to fall into her brother's hands or see her family be captured by him. Mento's parent's villa was now a fortress unto itself and Brendi did not fear for them. She did not fear for herself either, as no one in their right mind would target the home of the Durcunusaan Captain of Androcles Leonidas. Not if they valued their lives even a little bit.

Brendi could go into the city proper whenever she wanted as long as she was under heavy guard. Surprisingly the Durcunusaan soldiers assigned to protect her made it seem as if they weren't there. She always had difficulty pinpointing where exactly the four men and two women were as they guarded her, and she had stopped trying. She no longer thought about them really. Gytheio was much more secluded than Sparta and since the events on Cranae Island that night, the Netnews reporters were no longer allowed to set up shop in the city limits by order of the Mayor. They could come and go as they pleased, but they were not allowed to be stationary for any length of time, and filming any member of the Royal Family now meant immediate arrest. Brendi had been trained to fit in, and that is exactly what she did, pleased with her skill at avoiding the Netnews. Something was happening to her however, and it was frightening to her.

Brendi Faith had actually begun to care about someone besides herself. She had begun to care about two individuals really, and that emotion had led her to become accepted by nearly all of Eliani and Jomann's family without question. She had become a fixture in the lives of Eliani and Jomann and unbeknownst to them, that meant more than she realized. They did not treat her as an enemy in any way. She was included in their dinners and their breakfasts, and Jomann had even begun cooking food that she loved. He was the most amazing cook, as was Eliani, and seeing them in the kitchen acting out their art was delightful. Whenever the Krypteria came to the home to ask her questions, Brendi told them whatever they wanted. She had no love for the OSG and if her answers went to eventually freeing the Eridiani from the OSG influence she was all for it. She had given them every name she knew of OSG agents on Earth and in turn, they had discovered more. The OSG had pulled their agents off Earth finally, adhering to Andro's orders but Brendi didn't doubt they had more who she was not aware of. The Krypteria agreed and was not hesitant to come to her about suspects they might have. Brendi had also spent the last months learning everything she could about the Kavalian people and any individuals of interest. Her expanded brain capacity allowed her to now know just about everything the Union had on any officer above the rank of Colonel within the KFI. Her near photographic memory was incredible.

Brendi Faith could no longer deny the attraction to Eliani Leonidas. At least to herself. The OSG and the Eridiani considered any kind of same sex relationship taboo to the extreme, and when it was discovered it was punished. Brendi knew all this and her first reaction upon realizing Eliani didn't shy away from this type of thing had been disgust. Now... now she could not explain the intense draw to the shorter woman. With Jomann

it was easy enough. He was incredibly handsome, his physical proportions unlike anything she had seen before on a man. And if the howls of delight coming from their room at night were any indication, he was obviously a man who thoroughly enjoyed making his wife scream out his name in passion. They had kept her awake at night many times with their antics and didn't realize that their moans of pleasure and professions of love to each other had a distinct affect on Brendi. So distinct in fact that Brendi had begun to recently dream about being with them. Not only one at a time but also together. Brendi found herself wanting to submerge her body within their arms and experience what they shared so easily.

Jomann shook his head. "Brendi... I do not think that is a good idea." He told her shaking her from her thoughts.

Brendi blinked several times and moved into the main room with them. "I can help." She stated. "I've studied every dossier on every Kavalian within their military! I... I know how they think! I... it's what I do! I can..."

Jomann's eyes narrowed. "What?" He gasped looking at Eliani just as quickly. "Eli?"

Eliani met his gaze with a sheepish grin. "I may have given her access to the files." She answered with a lopsided grin.

"You gave her access to Krypteria files?" Jomann hissed. "Are you insane? If..."

"I am not the enemy Jomann!" Brendi insisted as she moved closer to them.

Jomann met her dark brown eyes and fought down what both he and Eliani had been feeling these last weeks. "I know you are not Brendi." He told her honestly and with no hesitation Brendi saw. This fact registered in a small portion of her mind and made her very happy. "There may be others who do not see it that way however! Eliani this was not a good..."

"I am a Princess of the Union." Eliani spoke confidently. "It was my decision to give her the files. *Saarrieemeran's* brain capacity is four times the normal human and she processes this information twice as fast as a Lycavorian. She's nearly a walking computer. She's also not bad in CQB either. Zarah can vouch for that as she and Lucia are the ones who have been schooling her."

There was that word again Brendi thought. They had called her that on several occasions and Brendi knew what it meant. Every time they spoke it to her or in regards to her it made her flush. They had told her one night why they called her that but Brendi sensed there was a hidden meaning to them behind it.

Jomann shook his head. *[Eli... I... we have spoken of this.]* He told her. *[No matter how much you desire her...]*

Eliani moved closer to her handsome husband and mate. *[How much we desire her?]* She corrected him.

Jomann nodded instantly. *[Yes. How much we desire her.]* He spoke. They had spoken of Brendi many times over these last weeks and months and what she made both of them feel. They were Anomes... soulmates. Nothing living or dead would ever come between them now, but both of them could feel the powerful draw Brendi had on both of them. Her wild strawberry scent could excite them both and it certainly had grown sweeter to them over the last weeks. *[Is this the way to go about it though?]*

[She is not our enemy Jomann.] Eliani said.

[I know this.] He said.

[She is searching for a purpose Jomann.] Eliani told him. *[She sees how quickly her own family has come to accept and trust and embrace their new lives and she is trying to discover a way as well. She is an Intelligence analyst. Her insight could be invaluable.]*

Brendi moved forward until she was directly in front of them. "Stop that." She said softly. "I know you are talking about me. It's very disconcerting to do it right in front of me."

They both turned to her. "*Saarrieemeran...* we trust you." Jomann spoke to her. "There are others who still do not. Doing this will expose you to them. It is why Eliani has had you training with Zarah and Lucia. We can not predict what others will do."

"I'm not afraid." Brendi told them. "I'm not afraid and I want to do this. I can't prove to anyone that I can be trusted if I am restricted in where I go and who I see."

Jomann nodded slowly. "That is true." He admitted.

"Then let me help!" Brendi pressed him.

Jomann glanced at Eliani quickly and then back to her. "Your brother will have my *nor...* you know this." He spoke finally.

Eliani pressed close to him and cooed into his ear. "I'll make them feel better my love." She whispered into his ear.

Jomann growled softly in his chest at her words and nodded his head. "Contact your family and tell them you are leaving with us so they do not worry. Do not tell them where we are going *Saarrieemeran*."

They turned at the buzzing of their door and watched as it opened to reveal Zarah and Lucia who rushed past the two *Durcunusaan* just inside the doorway.

"Eli... Jomann!" Zarah exclaimed. "What is going on? Something is wrong with Andro! I felt him touch me!"

Jomann turned back to Brendi. "Go *Saarrieemeran*. Use the COM unit and then pack your gear."

Brendi nodded with a smile and turned to do just what he had said. Jomann turned back and saw Eliani taking Zarah's hands.

"Calm down Zarah." Eliani said. "We already know about it and we are taking action."

"What is happening?" Zarah demanded.

Whatever happened from now on was in the hands of the gods he knew.

SOLMAR

PUMA BANE FORWARD STAGING BASE

FEBRUARY 4TH, 2575, 0650 EST

General Azlenr'Macoe stood stoically reviewing the site of the massacre as his men moved across the area. Sixteen bodies were stretched out on the ground before him, each one covered by thin dark blanket that was standard issue for all Kavalian troops. The sun that was rising reflected off the damp moistness of blood that soaked both the bodies and ground beneath them and several areas around the Puma Bane Camp. It was a standard Puma Bane forward base camp. Two security posts that were manned when the team was inside the perimeter at all times. This forward base provided excellent defense with the towering cliffs in the west and the five hundred foot drop to the valley floor below in the south. The only path up to the base had been expertly culled to provide precise fields of fire while looking as if the vegetation had naturally worn away. The Puma Bane troops knew their jobs and this team was very experienced as a unit. The base had failed to report in at its normal time three hours ago and the Duty officer in the main settlement had dispatched a fire team to discover why. This is what they had found.

Only Azlenr's eyes shifted as Makali slowly made his way through the gore up to him with one of Azlenr's senior shock troops. He recognized the Sergeant Master easily, the scar from a High Coven blade running along the entire left side of his face. The man was a beast in combat and had survived that attack to lead a rush against hardened vampire positions all the while he bled on the ground beneath him. When the battle was over, he had simply sat down and waited for the medics to come to him and treat him. That Sergeant Master was now Azlenr's most trusted enlisted man and the one who saw to most of the mundane things for his division during the day. He also was Azlenr's personal bodyguard when he moved outside of an established perimeter of Kavalian forces. The sounds of a *DAGGER* gunship were growing closer in the morning air and Azlenr lifted his eyes only slightly to see the ship approaching fast from the east. That would be his friend Byka'Caleo. The most experienced and fearless leader of ground troops that Azlenr knew. He had sent for him even as his own *DAGGER* gunship had been lifting off from the settlement less than an hour ago. He brought his eyes back down to Makali and Sergeant Master Iweo'Cachowe.

"General." Makali spoke as the two men came up to him.

"Tell me what happen here Iweo." Azlenr spoke evenly. "This was not done by a group of Bontawillian civilians that somehow escaped one of the settlements and decided to become commandos overnight."

The grizzled Kavalian Sergeant Master met his general's eyes. "No my General." Iweo answered him.

Conversation became almost impossible as the *DAGGER* gunship flared expertly a hundred and fifty meters away over the lone clear spot and settled gently to the ground even as the forward ramp began to lower and Byka'Caleo was jogging from inside the Attack Transport directly for where he stood. Azlenr glanced up into the cockpit of the *DAGGER* and his keen eyes spotted the helmeted head of Byka's pilot daughter Kameka

as she continued to power down the KFI's newest and most deadly planetary transport. She would join her father shortly as his bodyguard. The *DAGGER* had been built in secret to supplement the *PROTOSS* on a planetary scale. The *PROTOSS* were far too big to act as short range transports once they were down and the Kavalians decided on their own version of the Union *STRIKER* Attack Transport.

Byka reached where they stood in moments and Azlenr immediately extended his hand as the *DAGGER*'s engines no longer hindered his being heard.

"Byka!" Azlenr greeted him as their hands clasped together.

"I am honored General." Byka' Caleo stated.

Azlenr squeezed his hand tightly looking at the dark fur that adorned his face. It was just beginning to streak with gray just as his was, but it would be many centuries before Byka gave up what he had now. "We have been together too long Byka my friend." Azlenr spoke. "We are not among the politicians of the homeworld. Speak my name old friend."

Byka smiled and nodded his head. "My division is fully down Azlenr and we have moved to establish ourselves in the two far western settlements. I have already ordered patrols out per our standard tactics to search for any who may have escaped the settlements. Lethal force has been authorized only as a last resort and I told my patrol leaders if they need to use it they had better be bleeding from their eyes."

Azlenr nodded. "Good. Too many civilians have been killed already as it is. I informed the Prefect that civilian deaths will only complicate our position here and make us a major target. Killing civilians only makes it worse."

"We will already be a target Azlenr." Byka said. "The Union will not abide a forward base this close to their border. They will come after us once they discover we are here."

Azlenr nodded. "If they do not know already." He said. "But it will take time for them to mount any kind of operation to expel us and we must use that time to be ready."

"Marsin had the civilians killed didn't he?" Byka asked.

Azlenr met his eyes. "I can trust you to keep your feelings in check can't I Byka?" He asked. "I do not need you looking for retribution."

Byka shook his head. "You know me General." He spoke. "I will initiate nothing unless he firsts opens his hole."

Azlenr nodded. "Good." He turned to look at Iweo. "My Sergeant Master Iweo." He said as introduction. "He was going to tell me what happened here."

Byka looked around. "Taking out a full Puma Bane Squad is no small feat." He said. "And they were set up in their defensive positions. Marsin knows?"

Azlenr nodded his head. "He is enroute from his forward base and he is incensed." He looked at Iweo. "Iweo... you may continue now."

"This way." He spoke. Iweo led them through the camp and past the row of bodies to the edge of the cliff. Near the edge he stooped down and lifted the small metal spike from the ground and held it up for the two Kavalians Generals.

Byka leaned over the edge and looked down seeing the valley floor far below. "What is that? Two hundred meters?"

"One hundred and eighty-five General." Iweo answered. "Over five hundred feet straight down."

Byka looked back to Azlenr. "No Bontawillian civilian made that climb." He stated confidently.

"No sir." Iweo held up the metal spike to Azlenr. "They scaled the cliff using these General. If we sent men down on ropes we would undoubtedly find many more of them jammed into the crevices of rock along the face."

Azlenr took the spike. "Climbing spikes." He said softly.

"Boot scuffs along this edge and twenty meters further down." Iweo spoke. "I estimate no more than ten in number."

"Ten!" Azlenr gasped. "Ten men did this?"

"Ten men and three females general. Based on the depth of boot prints circling the Puma Bane perimeter." Iweo spoke.

"None of them were killed with firearms." Makali spoke now. "All wounds are consistent with bladed weapons. Incredibly sharp bladed weapons."

Byka looked at him. “That would imply they were able to close with and attack before the Puma Bane troops even knew they were here.”

Iweo nodded. “The two security posts were taken out first.” He said motioning them to follow him. They didn’t hesitate and followed him the thirty meters to the closest security post. It was a loose collection of logs and rocks that the men had gathered, but more than enough to provide adequate protection against small arms fire. Azlenr turned as he felt another join them and he saw the long legs and incredibly firm body of Kameka’Caleo join them, the smallish machine pistol grasped in her hands.

To look at her from the neck down one would see a Kavalian female who had undergone the biogenic treatments to remove the hair from her body. Kameka’Caleo was young at only twenty-five years of age, but her lush figure had many young Kavalians pressing Byka for her hand. Her five foot seven height was due to rather long legs that ended in an exquisitely shaped ass that was now encased in an armored flight suit. Her breasts were high and firm, her reddish brown hair long and pulled together in a single pony tail over her right shoulder. The treatments had removed her tail, but once Marsin had so callously abused her six years ago, Kameka had stopped taking the biogenic treatments and her tail had since grown back. She kept it wrapped tightly around her waist as to not make it so obvious, but Byka in very un-Kavalian like fashion, supported his daughter in her decision. Incredibly the Prefect had granted Byka whatever he wanted because of Marsin’s actions and Byka had bowed to his daughter’s desire to become a pilot. There were very few female pilots within the Kavalian forces, mostly of civilian transport craft. Kameka had learned in four years what took most pilots eight years to learn. Her aptitude for flying was uncanny and quickly recognized by the more moderate Kavalian instructors. Some had tried to get her tossed from the training but she had defeated every problem they threw at her. She was not allowed to participate in the graduation ceremonies because she was female and she had no official rank within the Kavalian military, but Byka had held his own ceremony when she joined his command. A ceremony that Azlenr had attended. It was very low key, something Azlenr knew Byka did to keep from garnering unwanted attention, but the effect on Kameka had been profound. In the two years since that day she had proven to be the most gifted pilot within her father’s division, even earning the admiration of the many male pilots.

Azlenr knew however that she would never be wanted by another Kavalian male. The three long jagged scars began at her hairline and extended down across her cheek and under her collar and they marred her beauty. Marsin had marked her severely, raking his claws down her perfect flesh when she refused to submit to him one evening during one of his drunken bouts. She had not wanted to become Marsin’s mate but Kavalian law was very clear. Her father had been powerless to stop it and for eight months she’d had to endure his rutting upon her until she could take it no more. Marsin had dumped her outside her family’s home, bleeding and very nearly broken. This had sent Byka into a rage that Azlenr had never seen before. It had taken four Kavalian Puma Bane Troops to pull Byka off Marsin before the much older and more experienced General pummeled Marsin into bloody bits. As the news began to spread of what had happened, many of the older Kavalian Generals and officers like Azlenr had thrown their full support behind Byka without question. Taking his daughter was one thing, but disfiguring her and then trying to blame her father and her Pride was going too far. Keleru could not dismiss them because they were the heart of his army no matter that it was known he favored the Puma Bane Troops heavily. To keep an internal rebellion from occurring Keleru publicly reprimanded Marsin but never even considered time in a Kavalian jail. To appease his generals, Keleru granted Byka and Kameka freedom to pursue goals and entitlements that regular females were never allowed. She chose to become a pilot and the rest was history.

Since joining her father’s command, she had become his personal pilot as well as his bodyguard and Azlenr knew she was viciously protective of her father. She had proven this several times during skirmishes with the High Coven only two short years ago, killing nearly a dozen vampires who had broken through their defensive perimeter. Azlenr nodded his head to her as she took up position slightly behind her father.

Iweo moved around to the opposite side of the security post and motioned to the blood. “These men were taken out before they had time to register a threat.” He spoke. “The bodies were still here when I arrived General, and I had time to inspect them. The Puma Bane troops still had their weapons in their hands. One was beheaded completely; the other suffered a fatal puncturing wound directly through his face from something other than a Union Nehtes.”

“Sword.” Byka spoke softly.

“Yes General.” Iweo said.

Azlenr looked at Byka. "What?" He asked. "I thought all Union troops carried swords on their person."

Byka met his eyes evenly and shook his head. "The capability of the Union Shi Viskas combined with their advancement in standard weaponry has made it so the majority of Union soldiers no longer carry swords. It has been this way since the end of the Evolli War. Many had given up their swords by then for the more adjustable Nehtes. Their Nehtes... their expandable spear... this is part of their load out but the vast majority no longer carry swords." He looked at Iweo. "All of them were killed by blades Sergeant Master?"

Iweo nodded his head. "Yes General."

"Which means they got in close." Byka spoke.

Iweo nodded again. "Very close. I inspected some of the wounds and they were precise and surgical in nature. Whoever wielded these swords has killed before." He moved back around the security post. "None of the Puma Bane weapons or COM units are missing. If civilians did this they would have taken the weapons and rations. Whatever they could carry. Since they are all accounted for, this was done to send us a message."

Byka shook his head. "This was not done by civilians." He stated. "The Bontawillians may have what they refer to as a military but they are nothing more than a militia. Iweo is right. Whoever did this did not want weapons or equipment."

Azlenr looked at him. "Are you saying there is a Union military unit on Solmar?" He asked.

"You said Marsin's Puma Bane teams killed several soldiers. Took one prisoner?" Byka asked.

Azlenr nodded. "He is a vampire. I have him at the main settlement. The armory that is standard with Union colonies. They interrogated him, tortured him, but he gave them nothing. I am having my medical people treat his wounds before I question him myself." Azlenr moved closer to Byka. "You said the majority of Union troops no longer carry swords. Who does?"

Byka looked at him. "According to our intelligence... intelligence we got from the traitor Laustinos... the only Union units that carry swords now are the *Durcunusaan* and perhaps half a dozen specialized units made up mostly of their Drow elves."

Iweo stepped forward. "The Drow elves provide the bulk of their recon and scout units General Azlenr." He said. "They are formidable in battle... it is why the Prefect had their outposts in The Wilds destroyed. This was not done by the Drow however."

Azlenr and Byka looked at him. "How can you be so sure Iweo?" Azlenr asked.

Iweo motioned for them to follow him and he led them over to a small bare patch of ground within the Puma Bane perimeter. He pointed at the ground. "This is why." He stated.

All of them looked down to see the huge prints in the soft dirt and eyes went wide. Byka knelt down beside the print, his hand dwarfed by the size and three inch depth of the print. "A dragon print." He hissed softly. "Kameka?" He spat.

Azlenr watched as his daughter moved up beside him and squatted down beside the print. He looked at Byka as he stood back up. "Byka?"

Byka met his gaze. "This is what she does." He said. "I don't know what her fascination is, but she seems to have no fear of them as the rest of us do. She has studied everything we have in our databases about them these last few years. All the information we have obtained from Elear and other places."

"Truly?" Azlenr gasped at this knowledge as he watched her stand back up and turn to them.

"Based on the size and depth of the print I estimate a female dragon." Kameka told them as she came to her feet and turned to face them. "Slightly larger than normal... perhaps sixteen meters in length and just over three metric tons in weight. That size would indicate she is fully grown General... which means she is at least a decade old. Perhaps more. And she is also mated to a male."

"What? Are you sure? How can you tell that?" Azlenr asked her.

Kameka nodded. "Dragons go through stages of growth sir." She answered. "They reach full maturity within their first year. After that they are strong enough to carry a rider. Over the next decade they may or may not grow more, but usually not. Once they have passed ten years of age they will not have another potential growth cycle until they have reached a millennia in age. According to the many brochures given out on Elear in regards to the dragons, almost all of them have reached their full size within their first year. In the rare instance some may grow much larger as is the case with the Lycavorian King's dragon and the half breed Princess's dragon. Very few grow larger than the print indicates this female is and she is above normal in size by a meter and a half at least given what I estimate her weight at."

“How do you know it is female? And mated.” Azlenr asked.

Kameka turned back to the print. “Do you see the indentation in the ground behind the prints? Three meters back.”

Azlenr followed where she pointed. “Yes I see it.”

“Mated female dragons will instinctively always place their tail on the ground behind them when they stop for any length of time and are at rest.” Kameka spoke. “Male dragons do not. It is a... it is a defense mechanism I guess you could call it. This female was in this spot long enough for her to relax.”

“Fuck!” Azlenr swore as the sounds of another *DAGGER* landing reached them.

“Azlenr... only the Union *Durcunusaan* are known to work closely with dragons.” Byka told him.

“They are the only ones with sufficient ability in what they call Mindvoice to actually communicate with them.”

Iweo nodded. “If there is a dragon on this world General... then whoever hit this team is *Durcunusaan*.”

“Get out of my way!” Marsin’s voice carried to them as he stormed into the perimeter. Azlenr’s men stepped out of the way of the Puma Bane Commander more to avoid any sort of confrontation than fear. Byka shifted to the side slightly as Marsin came up to them, putting half his body in front of his daughter in a protective fashion that only Azlenr really noticed. Kameka he saw only stared at Marsin with something akin to savage hatred in her dark brown eyes, her bottom lip almost quivering.

“General!” Marsin popped. “Why wasn’t I informed of this attack sooner?” He demanded from the senior man, his voice holding the contempt he felt.

“We only discovered it three hours ago.” Azlenr stated ignoring the Major’s lack of respect.

“I should have been informed immediately!” Marsin snarled.

“I did not need you and your men coming here and destroying any information we might be able to obtain.” Azlenr told him. “Your men are over there.” He pointed behind him to the left. “We have covered all of them and you may make arrangements to transport them home as soon as we are done.”

Marsin glared at him. “Done?” He demanded.

“Each body will be examined by my medical people to determine cause of death.” Azlenr stated. “We need to know who killed your men Major.”

“Who?” Marsin snapped. “It’s obvious isn’t it? Those civilians who escaped as we took the settlements. They have formed into guerilla groups and are striking back!”

“This was not done by Bontawillian civilians.” Byka spoke. “This was carried out by Union *Durcunusaan* troops. *Durcunusaan* who have at least one dragon with them that we know of.”

“*Durcunusaan*?” Marsin snarled. “Impossible.”

“Do you know of anyone else who works closely with dragons Major?” Azlenr asked. “Lieutenant Kameka here has confirmed these prints come from a female dragon Major.”

“Lieutenant...” Marsin’s eyes went to where Byka stood and he saw Kameka standing just behind her father. His eyes gazed at her with anger and hate and met only the same thing in response. Kameka did not drop her eyes from his face as Kavalian women often did in front of males and this only made him angrier. He tore his eyes from her and looked at Azlenr. “General Azlenr... our intelligence never mentioned *Durcunusaan* being on Solmar.”

“It appears our intelligence was wrong.” Azlenr said.

“We should begin interrogating the civilians!” Marsin snapped. “They had to know about this!”

Azlenr shook his head. “I am not going to interrogate civilians Major.” He stated. “If we did not know they were here what makes you think a bunch of colonists did.”

“General you...” Marsin began to speak but Azlenr turned from him. “Makali... insure the bodies are removed to the Field Hospital. I want the senior medical doctor to examine them. I will meet with him in two hours.”

Makali nodded. “At once General.” He spoke before moving off.

Azlenr turned back to the others. “Byka... I want every T19 we have mustered and on the perimeters of every settlement. Just one dragon on this planet could adversely affect our men if it attacked.”

“How many civilians will you execute for this attack?” Marsin demanded.

Azlenr and Byka looked at him. “Excuse me?” Azlenr spoke.

“We must send a message to the civilians and whoever is out there!” Marsin spat. “Any attack against our troops will be punished severely. It is the only way to keep order!”

“I have no intention of executing any civilians Major.” Azlenr told him. “They were not involved in this.”

“They will know of those who are!” Marsin argued. “Do you think they don’t know a Union military unit is out there somewhere? This will continue General! This is how we keep the others in line!”

“By murdering civilians?” Byka spat. “That is a brilliant move Major!”

Azlenr shook his head. “There is no indication the civilians who escaped the settlements as we occupied them are involved in this attack. None. I will not execute others to keep order Major.”

“I will protest this!” Marsin growled.

“Protest it all you like!” Azlenr spat back. “I am in command of this operation... not you Major Marsin! Return to your command and I will inform you when you can retrieve the bodies of your men! You are dismissed!”

Marsin snarled in anger before spinning on his heels and marching away. Byka moved closer to Azlenr. “He will contact the Prefect.” He said.

“Let him.” Azlenr hissed. “The Prefect put me in charge of this operation because he knows this close to the border we need to be careful and precise. Marsin is a vicious animal, a shock trooper. Nothing more. He knows nothing but how to kill those who cannot defend themselves. The Bontawillians are no threat to our people. Whoever is out there is a threat.” He looked at Byka. “I want your scouts ranging out ten kilometers in every direction from each settlement. Full combat gear and make sure they have adequate armor support. We must find these *Durcunusaan* before they strike again.”

Byka nodded. “As you order.”

Azlenr nodded. “Issue your orders and then meet me back at my command post. I have some things I wish to discuss.”

“One hour.” He said.

Azlenr nodded and began to walk away.

Byka moved forward into the cockpit of the *DAGGER* Transport and motioned with his head at the male co-pilot. The Kavalian pilot got up quickly and moved around the bulk of his commanding General as Byka settled into the seat and looked across at his daughter who was adjusting one control or another.

“Kameka?” He spoke softly unsure of what to say.

Byka’Caleo was a very traditional Kavalian except when it came to his daughter. His three sons served proudly within his Pride’s Division of troops, each leading battalions of cloned and normal Kavalian troops. They were well thought of by their men because like their father, they did not needlessly throw away lives to accomplish a mission. He also knew that they each had secretly schooled their younger sister in things that she was not allowed to know because like their father, they cared for her. Byka’Caleo was among the many senior Pride Leaders who accepted the laws of their people but did not necessarily agree with them. He had been mated to the same woman for nearly seven centuries now and she had given him five strong children. His oldest son he had lost in a transport crash before Kameka had ever been born while Kameka was the image of her mother with her exotic, sultry looks and her large dark eyes, she reminded him of his oldest son in many ways.

What many people who were not Kavalian didn’t know was that they were not always as callous and violent. At least not those who were over five hundred years of age and could recall their lives before Keleru had begun to implement so many changes. They remembered a time when it was better. Yes... their females were considered second class citizens, but not every male Kavalian felt this way. Many were different men behind the doors of their homes with their women and most of those same men hated having to hide it because of the ones who embraced Keleru’s ideals and laws. Byka felt as Azlenr did. The core of the Kavalian people was beginning to fracture. First Athani’Puat defecting and finding a future with a Prince of the Union. Then Pian’Nruarani had truly begun it by stealing away Keleru’s daughter from Pusintin and then his entire Pride disappearing into the unknown. They had cracked the center and as more time passed without change, Byka believed it would all come crumbling down.

“Did you know he would be on this operation Papa?” Kameka asked as she turned to look at him.

Byka let out a heavy sigh and nodded. He would not lie to her, not after all she had suffered and endured. “Yes. I did not think you would ever need to see him and that is why I did not tell you. What happened today was not something we were prepared for.”

“I... I want to skin him papa.” Kameka said softly. “I want to cut his cock from his body and make him suffer as much as he made me suffer.”

Byka looked at her, seeing the fire in her eyes. “You can not!” He hissed. “He deserves whatever horrors you would inflict upon him Meka...” He spoke referring to the nickname he had given to her as a child. “But I could not protect you then! I do not wish to lose you Meka! Your mother does not wish to lose you!”

Kameka leaned forward and placed her head against the instrument panel gently. “I... I will never know what mother shares with you Papa. You show her tenderness and love that our younger generation does not understand. No man wants me because of what he did to me. They can’t even stand to look at me Papa.”

“Meka...” Byka spoke.

She looked at him. “All of them want to fuck me!” She snarled. “But none of them will even consider me as something more than a whore. This is the word that Marsin has put out! This is what he tells everyone who will listen! This is the curse I have!”

“Kill him... kill him Meka and he wins.” Byka told her. She turned to look at him. “If you kill him... then I can not protect you. You will throw away everything that you have gained from the horrors he perpetrated upon you. His day of reckoning will come daughter... he will answer for his crimes... but it will be all the sweeter for you when that day comes if it is you who is still standing at the end.”

Kameka stared at her father’s face, his dark fur smooth and well groomed. He had always been handsome to her and the look in his eyes had always been able to sooth her. A small smile played across her lips. “Mother always said you were handsome Papa.” She said softly.

Byka chuckled softly then. “Your mother settled for my ugly hide.” He stated. “Had she held out for another...?” Byka looked at her and took her hand. “Your mother deserves more Meka. You deserve more. I will give you more daughter. And you will have your vengeance. All I ask is that you remain patient.”

Kameka nodded slowly. “I have always trusted you Papa.” She said. “That will not change now. Never.”

Byka nodded and rose from the seat. “I have sent the orders to the men. Take us to Azlenr’s command post Meka.”

Kameka nodded as he moved into the back of the *DAGGER* and she immediately began her preflight sequence. She believe her father, believed him deep down, but she would also have her vengeance one day and she prayed every day that she would find a man who could look past her disfigurement and allow her to know love.

SOLMAR

UNION AD-HOC BASE

SOUTHERN CONTINENT

0635 HRS, EST

“...ready to pull out at a moment’s notice.” Andro was speaking to the others at the makeshift command post inside his *STRIKER*. “We have to assume they could find us before Sa’sur returns with the reinforcements and I want three backup sites marked and distributed to everyone in case we get scattered.”

Sa’roh nodded her head. “I will see to that.” She said. “I am almost finished mapping the entire planet using remote signals from the satellites and current maps of the colony.”

Andro nodded. “The OP last night went off perfectly. Dorian and Haridl were able to get into the armory and speak with Robaran.” Andro looked up as Cletus led another Durcunusaan troop forward. “Cletus?”

“*Phylearch* Daeo Milord.” Cletus answered motioning to the tall and powerfully built Durcunusaan troop. “He was off duty when we departed and he came down with the Spartan company. I have assigned him as your personal guard until Jomann arrives. It is his first trip out since completing his *Durcunusaan* training.”

“A wet nose.” Dantio spoke with a grin.

“Not so wet Dantio.” Cletus was quick to point out. “Alba Tau, Seventh Spartan Recon Brigade. Sixteen missions... three decorations for valor and two for injuries received. He may be young... but he has done his time.”

Dantio looked at the young man once more and nodded his head slowly. Alba Tau had become the measure of a modern Lycavorian Spartan. The Evolli War was five years long, but the battle at Alba Tau had involved nearly a full third of the Union’s ground forces during that war and the Evolli had made it hell for anyone on that foul planet. Over half the Union ground casualties from the entire war had come during that four month long battle on that cesspool, and no one had come away without scars. The Evolli had laid every trap known to exist in order to kill them; they had ambushed the Union forces at every turn, the heat and humidity making it virtually impossible to detect scents unless they were incredibly strong. Everyone knew of Andro and his father and what they had done at the beginning of that encounter and not one single Lycavorian Spartan had shrunk from battle after that day. Many had even visited the site of that one battle to draw their inspiration from it. It had been left untouched after the bodies and the survivors had been taken away, but it was as if every soldier who went there could visualize each and every charge the Evolli made. They could almost see the blood as it was spilled, feel the blows of weapons and the burning of Evolli as the dragons fought. The Evolli had thrown nearly seven thousand men at their position throughout the night, another three thousand at the position that General Simpson and his son had held only six hundred meters away. It was said that the screams of the dying could be heard for hundreds of meters across the valley floor that night.

There had been many battles over the course of the four months it took for Union forces to dig the Evolli out of their holes, but that holding action by Andro and Martin Leonidas, by General Simpson and a few others, that had set the stage for the rest of the fight. No quarter was shown or given to the Evolli, and when all was said and done, Alba Tau had broken the backs of the Evolli war effort. Very few men and women who had fought on that planet returned, even after a monument to those who fell was officially erected. No matter their reasoning behind it, no one who had fought at Alba Tau had come away the same person as they were when it had begun and the vast majority of them were Andro’s age or slightly older. This had formed a bond with the millions of older Spartans across the Union who had fought the High Coven for so long. A bond of understanding and camaraderie that would never be broken. Those who had graduated from their Agoges and entered into service since that battle could not understand why no one spoke of that place.

The men and women who fought there had left too many of their friends on that planet and all of them had left a piece of themselves there as well.

“*Avoi. Aladore camerra jar Fervon rie vada Saan.*” Dantio spoke instantly moving to the side in order for Daeo to move up beside him. (Amen. Welcome among us Brother of the Blood)

Andro looked at the young man and nodded his head slowly. Daeo appeared to be about his age, perhaps a year or two younger, but his rank also spoke of skill enough to reach it so young. No rank within the Union military was easy to get and while he held the rank of Admiral, Andro had worked hard and relentlessly to insure that he did everything he could to prove he deserved that rank. Daeo was easily as tall as his Uncle Danny’s six foot four and equally as ripped as any Spartan under his new Mark V ArmorPly body armor. His exposed skin was a light caramel color, his hair nothing more than dark stubble on his head. He sported a rough growth of a beard and mustache since facial hair was allowed and sometimes even expected within the Union, but his dark eyes were bright and full of intelligence. He looked at Androcles.

“Milord Prince.” He stated proudly.

Andro held up his hand and wagged his finger. “None of that *sibfla*.” He stated firmly. “Alba Tau earned you the right to call me by my name.”

Daeo looked quickly at Cletus and then Dantio. Both men nodded and Cletus moved up on his opposite side. “You will see Daeo. Operating with Andro is more than unusual in many respects. Wait until Jomann arrives. Then we will see some real action.”

Dorian chuckled. “Unusual and insane.” He stated. “But who’s keeping track of silly things like that?”

That brought chuckles from everyone and Andro elbowed his brother in the gut before looking at Haridl. Dantio grinned. “And it is rubbing off on Dorian as well.” He stated.

“Continue Haridl.” Andro said shaking his head with a smile.

Haridl leaned forward. “Puma Bane troops had him before he was turned over to this Kavalian General. He was severely beaten by those *nubous* butchers but the Kavalians at the armory have treated his wounds as

best as they were able. I slipped him a vial of my blood to speed the process. Not enough to fully heal him outwardly, but enough to repair anything inside. They will believe it is just his own healing factor. We have two names now. A General Azlenr'Macoe and General Byka'Caleo."

"Your blood?" Andro asked her though he already suspected the answer as the reason Haridl had been acting as she had.

Haridl met his eyes without any embarrassment in the least. "He has... he has taken my blood before Milord." She said.

Andro nodded as her words confirmed what he already knew. "Very well."

Sa'roh's hands moved across the chart table and the pictures of the two men came up so they all could see. "Both of these men are senior Kavalian Generals Andro. This General Azlenr is apparently in overall command if what Robaran told Haridl is accurate and this General Byka commands his front line division."

"Composition?" Andro asked.

"They are mainly a Hover Mech Division." Sa'roh replied. "Our jacket on these men is very thick. They were responsible for more victories against the High Coven on the ground than any other Kavalian officers. And they did it without suffering the same amount of casualties." She adjusted the images to include several more. "Byka'Caleo commands his lead division; the second one is commanded by a relatively new officer but one loyal to Azlenr'Macoe. The third is primarily support and is commanded by Azlenr's oldest son. A much higher mix of Kavalian clone troops and pure Kavalian officers than other mainstream Kavalian divisions too. There does not seem to be any difference in how this Azlenr and Byka treat the clones, unlike most other Kavalian units."

"So these men don't use them for cannon fodder Sa'roh?" Vari asked.

Sa'roh shook her head. "Not if our Intel is accurate." She answered. "Their two Prides have been working together for the better part of five hundred years near as we can determine. The *Krypteria* believes they are very close friends and have many of the same ideals." She looked at Andro. "They are two of the more moderate Kavalians in their beliefs."

Andro nodded his head. "Their actions make sense then. This close to the border they don't want to make many waves. I imagine they wanted nothing more than to get in quiet and unseen. The civilians?"

Haridl shook her head. "They had nothing to do with that." She stated quickly. "Robaran heard the Kavalian troops talking in the armory. Apparently the Puma Bane Commander is the one who ordered that. This pleasant gentlemen." She adjusted the chart table to include another photo. "Major Marsin'Jiate. A real Prince... pardon the pun. According to information given to us by General Pian on Puma Bane officers before he left... this Marsin is a violent and cold *ronnus*. Likes to kill and has no qualms about having civilians murdered."

Dantio grinned. "Then he's bound to be upset about finding so many of his boys dead this fine morning." He said.

Andro smiled. "I just bet he is." He said. "What about their armor?"

Sa'roh adjusted the screen once more. "Aside from the Scout Cars you saw earlier, it appears they are keeping their armor at the northern settlement. If the satellite feed is accurate I estimate two brigades of T12 CHAOS Tanks with a full battery of their R9 Plasma Artillery per brigade."

"Seems kind of short for taking a planet?" Cletus said.

"A Bontawillian colony." Daeo spoke for the first time. "They will not land their full load out for such an operation. The Bontawillians may like to call their forces an army and a fleet but they are truly no more than Border militia... albeit well trained border militia."

Andro nodded. "Daeo is right. Which means the rest of their tanks and such are still in orbit. Probably prepped for landing should they need them?"

Dantio nodded. "That's a good bet." He said.

"Sa'roh... burst Sa'sur a coded message." Andro said. "I want the Kavalian troop ships and the *DIATAGAs* targeted and destroyed first when they jump back in. The *DIATAGAs* won't get near the planet so they must be carrying the remainder of the armor."

Sa'roh nodded. "Done."

"I dispatched teams to each settlement while we were gone last night." Andro said. "They are to provide forward recon of the area and my orders were to exfil if the Kavalians got too close. They don't seem to be interested in moving out of their areas to the rest of the planet so we should be safe here for the time being."

“They won’t stay like that Andro.” Cletus spoke. “Not after we hit the second Puma Bane site tonight.”

Andro nodded. “I know... but between the *STRIKERS* and *KADENS* sensors, we’ll have plenty of warning if they get too close to us here.” He held up his hand before any of them spoke. “To be safe... the three topside mounts on the *STRIKERS* have been converted to ground to air missiles. Sa'roh also had heavy guns set up on top of the *KADENS*. Unless they come at us in force we’ll be fine.”

“Robaran said that quite a large number of civilians managed to get out of the settlements before the Kavs got full control.” Haridl told them. “Should we try and make contact with them Andro?”

“Eight three person teams have already departed with pre-plotted areas to sweep.” Andro answered instantly. “Sa'roh arranged for one of the *KADENS* to put each of them down within ten kilometers of the settlements. Their orders are to avoid contact and search for any civilians that got out. If they find some... move to a PZ and call for pick up. Bring them here. I don’t want them wandering around out there stumbling all over and possibly getting us caught with our dicks in our hands as my father says.” Andro looked at Sa'roh his face turning slightly red. “Sorry.”

Sa'roh and Haridl laughed. “While the image of you holding your dick in your hand is quite appealing Milord...” Sa'roh spoke with a wicked twinkle in her eye. “I don’t think Sadi or the others would appreciate it.”

Andro laughed. “No they would not.” He answered.

“And I have seen these characters with their dicks in their hands Andro.” Haridl added. “I wasn't impressed.”

“That’s not what Robaran said.” Vari exclaimed.

Haridl looked at him with a grin. “I wasn’t speaking about him you fool. He is very nicely equipped thank you.”

Andro shook his head. “Alright.” He said ending the banter back and forth. “Sa'roh... impress upon our people the need for them to remain below three hundred feet. They may be Shrouded... but there is no reason to give the Kavalians any hiccups on their sensors that could let them know we are coming.”

“They are aware... but I will remind them.” She stated.

“Any idea on where this *ronnus* is?” Andro asked tapping on the screen to Marsin’s photo.

“The main Puma Base detachment seems to be within the western settlement near the spaceport.” Sa'roh answered pointing at the map. “Here.”

“He doesn’t strike me as someone who would be at one of the camps.” Dantio spoke.

“So he leads like most Kavalians.” Daeo said. “From the rear with the gear.” Andro looked at him with wide eyes and laughed. Daeo grinned now and shrugged. “I was born and raised in Sparta Milord. Your father’s and General Simpson’s euphuisms are well known as you know.”

“Where?” Andro asked him.

“Half a kilometer from The Acropolis sire.” Daeo answered.

Dantio mocked rolling his eyes. “*Son vada carians*... your kind is popping up all over the place!” He spat playfully.

Daeo smiled. “The pace in Sparta is much slower Dantio. Our parents have more time to make babies.”

Dantio looked at him. “They need to start making them prettier.” He said with a grin. “You ain’t exactly Casanova boy.”

Daeo looked at him confused. “Casanova? Who is this Casanova?”

This caused everyone to break out laughing and Dantio slammed his hand down on Daeo’s shoulder. “Let me educate you boy.” He said.

Haridl pulled back from the table. “Oh boy. Here we go.” She stated. “It’s like the blind leading the blind.”

ARC ROYAL
FEBRUARY 4TH, 0700 EST
THREE HOURS POST JUMP NINETEEN

“AHHHHHHHH! Marrtinnnn!”

Anja's cry of orgasmic delight echoed among the walls of their bedroom and her head dropped to Dysea's heaving abdomen as Martin's powerful aura swarmed around them and his hot seed filled her womb. Her teeth clenched together and she gripped Dysea's hands as the third staggering orgasm this morning coursed through her unchecked and she quivered in bliss. Martin's large hands were filled with her breasts, his face buried in the back of her neck as he pressed his hips tightly against her ass cheeks, keeping his throbbing organ buried within her. She felt his powerful body begin to collapse onto her back, his huge manhood deeply buried within her, emptying his essence into her womb.

Isabella and Cirith had taken Aricia with them to Muton's ship to have her show them certain skills within Mindvoice that would be able to assist them. For'mya had met with Endith and Tina early to tweak the flight schedule, leaving just Anja and Dysea in bed with Martin when they woke. Neither Anja or Dysea had expected anything to happen after a glorious previous night, but after over twenty-five years together they should have known better. His growl of desire was their first sign and then Dysea succumb to his attentions without so much as a whimper of reluctance. Not that she really wanted to *not* be on the receiving end of her *Nauta Melme's* wonderful touch.

Then it had been Anja's turn as Martin mounted her from behind as she so loved and she feasted on her beautiful elven lover as Martin pounded her from behind. He knew it was her weakness and she never lasted long when he took her in that way. He reached so far inside her petite body in this position that it overwhelmed her senses very quickly. This morning was no different as her head dropped to Dysea's abdomen and she shuddered within the grasps of an amazing multiple orgasm. As he finally lowered himself to her back Anja licked Dysea's sweetness from her lips and she cooed in unabashed delight. Dysea's fingers were wrapped within Anja's Persian red hair and her breathing was labored from Anja's divine attentions. Anja knew just how to set Dysea off in such a way that she would leave her weak kneed and wanting more of her long Hadarian tongue. And Dysea always collected. They had gotten much closer on this trip, back to how they were when it was just the two of them with Martin before Aricia joined them. Those were some amazing nights together and they thoroughly enjoyed reliving them.

As Martin's lips nuzzled the back of her ear and her neck sending tremors of delight racing through her, his cock still maddeningly hard within her, Anja shivered in wondrous happiness. She lifted her head, leaving a trail of butterfly kisses across Dysea's powerful and exceedingly moist lower abdomen as she did, and turned her head slightly to the side to look at Martin.

"Gods... you are an insatiable pig!" She hissed the words. "You... you know I can't resist when you take me like that!"

Martin chuckled behind her ear and used his hips to push her forward. Not only did it serve to cause Anja to gasp in residual delight as she felt him still deeply inside her, she slid up further on Dysea's body until she was sandwiched between her much taller lovers.

"But you love me don't me?" Martin whispered in her ear as his fangs nibbled on her ear lobe.

Anja couldn't help but lean in to the nibble with ardor. "*Carians* yes!" She gasped as Dysea watched her face twist into idyllic enchantment and Martin took her chin in his hand leaning his head over to the side to catch her soft lips in a breath stealing kiss, tasting Dysea on Anja's lips and deepening their kiss even further.

Dysea also felt the power of her *Nauta Melme's* aura as he encircled both of them with it. He had not shielded any portion of his aura from them since Curila 6, all of them feeling every ounce of the alpha he was. It was almost too much for Anja, For'mya and Cirith to endure but he always wrapped their minds within a unique cocoon that allowed them to keep their wits about them and experience the full power of his aura on them. Now they all could feel what only she and Aricia had been able to feel for so long and it had only brought them that much closer together. As their lips parted and Martin's changed eyes fell on her, Dysea knew what was coming. He leaned even further forward and captured Dysea's lips in a similar sizzling kiss, one hand slipping under the back of her neck to hold her head and bring her closer to him as Anja's fingers stroked the outsides of her breasts.

Anja groaned in disappointment as Martin shifted his body to the side so as not to bury her under his muscular bulk and his now softening cock slipped from inside her. That groan turned to a moan as she felt him draw her close against his chest and rest half his body on the bed while the other half remained on her and Dysea. Anja was still somewhat pinned, but she could stay like this forever for all she cared.

"Gods lover... you are wearing us out." Anja stammered.

“Just think *Melyanna*... this is what our retirement will be like.” Dysea spoke playfully.

“You will be my hobby.” Martin spoke as he kissed Anja’s shoulder softly.

“Your hobby?” Anja gasped in mock indignation. Martin chuckled and nuzzled the back of her ear firmly. “Ooohhhhhh! Stop that!”

“My hobby will be one hundred and one ways to turn you to jelly.” Martin whispered in her ear before nibbling it.

Anja couldn’t help the tremble that rippled through her and she smiled in enjoyment. “Well... when you... when you put it that way.” She stuttered.

Dysea laughed and slid a little lower on the bed bringing her face to Anja’s and kissing her. “I for one can not wait for that day to come.” She gasped as she broke the kiss.

“Yum. Yum.” Martin tickled her cheek with his nose and Anja burst out laughing now.

“Christ Marty... where did the yum yum thing come from.” Anja blurted out. “You’ll need to come up with something better than that to get into my panties.”

Martin grinned. “Ok... how bout this?” He hit her with a half power pulse of his aura and Anja hissed in wondrous abandon.

“Ahhh! You... you are so evil.” She exclaimed with a smile.

The COM unit on their bedside buzzed drawing all of them from their reverie and Dysea reached back with her hand to touch the console. “Audio only.” She spoke. “Receive.”

“**Anja?**” Duewa’s voice filled their room. “**Anja are you there?**”

Anja sighed and lifted her face from Dysea’s abdomen. “I’m... I’m here Duewa.” She answered. Martin leaned over and nibbled her ear again and Anja slapped at his hip with her hand. “Stop that!” She gasped.

Dysea couldn’t help but let the small laugh escape and they all heard Duewa snicker in a knowing way. “When you... when you can pull yourself away Anja... there is something you need to see in the Med Bay.” She spoke with some humor in her voice. “And you can bring Martin with you as well.”

“I’ll be down in...” Anja felt Martin inch closer and his hands reached around to cup her full breasts. “Marty... for fuck’s sake you need too...” Martin rolled her over more quickly than Anja was prepared for and covered her protesting lips with his own as Dysea laughed once more. “Mmmmmppppfff!” Anja’s dissent was quickly smothered.

Dysea’s emerald eyes sparkled as Anja melted into the kiss. “Duewa... we will be down in thirty minutes.” She spoke.

Dysea heard Duewa laugh very quietly on the COM for she had experienced with Thoti exactly what Anja was experiencing, only about an hour earlier this morning. “Thirty minutes is fine Dysea. Just make sure she gets here.” She answered. “I’ll be waiting.”

As the COM signal blinked out Dysea quickly scooted closer and leaned close to their kissing lips and she groaned in happiness as Martin’s lips left Anja’s and caught hers. And then they were all somehow sharing their tongues in a threesome kiss that managed to make them laugh at the awkwardness of it.

Martin’s arms pulled both of them tighter and he rested his head on Anja’s breasts as he tucked Dysea’s face to his neck and Anja tried to wrapped her arms around both of them. They would lay like that for ten minutes before rising and preparing to begin their day.

Duewa turned in her chair exactly thirty-seven minutes later as the door to the Med Bay opened and Anja and Dysea both jumped through the doorway slapping Martin’s hands away while holding mugs of coffee and tea in their hands. Duewa grinned as Martin came in holding his own mug of coffee, his dark eyes bright. Duewa had been studying with Thoti every free moment about being able to catalogue scents and file them to her memory. Even though she could detect the scent of soap and water, she still was able to pick up the unmistakable aroma of sex still embedded in their scents and their blood. She smiled to herself, for it had been a very active night for her and Thoti as well. While they missed their sons terribly, having just the two of them together on this trip had been a godsend for Duewa. She was learning and growing as a female wolf and to say she was happier than she had ever been would be an understatement. Their walk from the mess lounge must have been quite the entertainment for the crew as they witnessed their playful antics.

“Yum. Yum.” Duewa heard Martin whisper softly as they approached.

Anja shook her head. “*Gostin!*” She hissed as she looked at Duewa.

“*Malda.*” Dysea agreed now.

“More like totally off his rocker.” Anja commented and then she smiled at Duewa. “Good morning.” She said stepping forward and kissing Duewa’s cheek.

“Good morning.” Duewa spoke with a smile. “I see it is contagious this morning.” She said. “I practically had to beat Thoti away to get out the door of our quarters.” A few months ago Duewa would never have commented on her sex life or her husband to anyone, let alone in public. Since being turned however, Duewa had come to accept the openness of Lycavorian sexuality. It was part of their culture, part of who they were and Duewa found herself beginning to enjoy that new part of herself.

Dysea leaned over and kissed her cheek as well. “It must be an Alpha thing today.” She said with a grin.

Martin moved behind Dysea and let his fingers craze her perfect ass causing her to jump in surprise. “Maybe.” He stated as he leaned over and kissed Duewa’s cheek as well. “Good morning Duewa.”

“Martin.” She said with that ever present smile.

Anja leaned against the desk and looked at her. Duewa was a woman that not so long ago she couldn’t stand. At one point she hated her for what she had done. That all changed the day Duewa saved the lives of Retta and Calyb and kept them from being kidnapped by Duewa’s mother Buonau. The day she became wolf and entered into a world that she had fallen in love with. It was kind of hard to hate her then, and over the past weeks they had become very good friends. It was always wonderful to have someone around who could understand what you were saying, and Duewa could talk shop with Anja on her best day. Though she did not have Anja’s raw power or the ability to draw from the life around her to use her healing abilities, she was probably within the top ten of Hadarian Healers within the Union now and free of her mother’s manipulation Duewa had come into her own.

“What’s up?” Anja asked her.

“I think we may have a problem.” Duewa said as she came to her feet.

Anja perked up now as she watched Duewa moved to one medical computer and take a data pad from the desk. “A problem concerning?” She asked.

Duewa came back over to her and held out the data pad. “A problem concerning our dead guests.” Duewa answered.

“What about them?” Anja asked.

“One of them is not so dead anymore.” Duewa stated.

Martin now came to full attention. “Come again?”

Duewa motioned with her hand and led them into another section of the *ARC ROYAL*’s Med Bay that was used for Research. There were two small but secure, floor to ceiling rooms with thick and very unbreakable polyglass that could be raised and lowered. Both of them were lit up with the bodies of the creatures on the beds, each one covered by a single sheet and one of the rooms with the polyglass up and locked into place. This body also was not covered completely by the sheet.

“Remember I told you I was going to run a Electrosanitizer Screening and then filter that through the DNA micro analyzer.” Duewa said to Anja. “Well... I did that. I set it up to run last night and this is what came back this morning. That’s also why our guest is now in there and not the freezer.”

Anja’s eyes were wide as she looked at the pad. “*Nubous Lae!*” She exclaimed.

Duewa nodded her head. “Almost exactly what I said. Thoti thought I had gone crazy when he heard me say it.”

“Someone want to let us less intelligent medical individuals in on the secret?” Martin said as he sipped his coffee. “Meaning me of course *Melda Min.*”

Dysea smiled. “I have no idea what they just said either *Nauta Melme.*” She stated.

Anja turned to look at the creature. “It’s regenerating Marty!” She gasped. “It’s still alive and it’s regenerating!”

Marti turned his head to the side and began coughing as his coffee went down the wrong tube and he came to his feet. “What?” He managed to spit out as he wiped his mouth. “That thing is still alive?”

“It is in a very deep coma... but yes.” Duewa said.

“Duewa... we put seven holes in that thing point blank!” Martin nearly shouted. He glanced at Anja. “I told you to let me cut their heads off!”

Duewa nodded and moved in front of the polyglass turning back to look at him. “Yes you did Martin. However... I also discovered that this creature’s outward appearance is not its natural form.”

“Come again?” Martin asked.

“Mutative Meiosis!” Anja spoke in a hushed voice.

Duewa nodded. “Yes. On a molecular level.” She continued. “This creature’s entire base DNA structure has been rewritten Anja. The Micro Analyzer detected seven thousand different chromatins and signs of homologous recombination.”

Martin shook his head. “Homo what?” He spat.

Anja looked at her. “You are certain Duewa? You confirmed the data?” Anja shook her head. “That was a stupid question. Of course you confirmed it.” She stated. “What about Allele count? Mutagen detection?”

“Whatever it is... it is not airborne or active for that matter.” She spoke. “It’s a contact mutagen from what I can tell... and it ceased to be effective the moment this one was killed and this one’s body shut down. We are in no danger.”

“Hello!” Martin barked. “Lost. Hanging out here in left field with no idea what you are talking about! Help!”

Anja turned to look at him. “Duewa is saying that this creature used to be something else lover. A different... a different species.”

Martin turned and looked at the creature through the glass. “What species?” He asked.

Duewa shook her head. “That is something we will probably never know. We don’t have any base genetic material to go by to compare it.” She glanced through the polyglass again before turning back to him. “It doesn’t match anything in the ship’s database and nothing that I have ever seen.”

Anja was paging down on the data pad and nodded. “Nothing like I’ve ever seen before either.”

“There’s something else Anja. Two things really.” Duewa said. “I ran the same baseline on the creature that *is* still dead. You are not going to believe what I found.”

Anja looked up at her tone of voice. “We aren’t going to like this are we?” She said.

Duewa shook her head. “Probably not.” She answered. She moved to the second small room that held the second body. “If my tests are accurate...” She turned back around to face Martin and the others. “This disgusting thing here... it has the same basic chromatin structure as a Lycavorian.” She saw Martin’s eyes go wide. “And I’ve detected base Pralor genetic code in its cells as well.”

Iama’Juturi kept glancing up at the men and women moving through the mess line, her light green eyes searching for only one individual. Four days had passed since the incident on Twelve Alpha, and still the words echoed within her. It was not something she had heard in regards to her ever in her life. Her Pride had given her away with barely a pause, her family disowning her when the biogenic treatments did not fully succeed and she was left with her tail. They did not even try to keep her from being tossed away so callously and sent to Nefoa as a whore for the soldiers there. Iama had seen the true beast within her people then and instead of breaking her as it did so many other Kavalian females, it changed her. It made her hardened to events around her. She was willing to do anything sexually to get off Nefoa in the hopes of making an escape, and she had succeeded after a fashion. The Lycavorian King’s attack on the outpost she had been sent to was a blessing from the gods that Iama thought had abandoned her. She now had what she had always desired. Freedom and a future. Even in just the few short weeks she had been among these Lycavorians she discovered her skills were very well received when it came to managing and cooking the meals they ate. No soldier, no matter the species, could deny they wanted good food to eat while deployed. It was a natural thing. What her mother had taught her was now paying dividends that she had never imagined. That she was actually using a skill she loved and in charge of the entire operation on a Lycavorian ship was beyond anything she could have dreamed. The entire crew of the *ARC ROYAL* were more than friendly to her in every way, treating her not as an enemy but as ally and to a number of elven and Lycavorian females she was fast becoming a friend. This treatment was not something she had

expected at first, at least not until she had been among them for several weeks and came to realize they were nothing like what her people thought.

There were many handsome Lycavorian men on this ship and despite her background, which was not secret unfortunately; all of them had treated her with respect. Iama recognized the many lustful stares she sometimes got but the many rumors she had heard about how Lycavorians treated their females were all true. While the male crewmembers had given her enticing looks and coy words, none of them had pressed her very far to pursue something. Iama knew that while they found her attractive, and they knew her history, her tail gave them pause. Most of them anyway. There were several who did not seem to care about her meter and a half long tail and since the events on Twelve Alpha, Iama noticed they were becoming less reserved around her. She was a woman and she knew when a man wanted her and though Iama wanted to, she held back. She had no intention of becoming the ship's resident slut though she doubted that is what would happen on this ship. The next man who took her into his bed was the man she would remain with for the remainder of her life. The man that would be the father of her children and the man who would love her breathless every day. Iama was not stupid in any way, and she knew without question she wanted the boy/prince. Not because of his actions on Twelve Alpha in saving her life, but because her body reacted just being close to him. The manner of his birth and upbringing gave her pause however. She feared he would be like the many clone soldiers she had to endure on Nefoa. A child in the body of a man with no presence of mind at what he was doing aside from killing and trying to fuck her harder and longer than the last clone.

He hadn't eaten in the main mess lounge since the mission, avoiding her at every turn after she had called him a stupid child for his actions, even as he returned her lost data pad to her. He had saved her life and she had berated him in front of others, embarrassing him. He had been born using the Kavalian accelerated growth hormones and Iama had seen the results of their work. The majority of the Cloned soldiers she had been forced to bed with were nothing more than rutting animals with the minds of children. They looked at her with nothing more than lust in their eyes and they were less than gentle at times. She had expected him to be the same and given her new freedom she was not about to accept his lewd stares or actions. The only problem with that was he did not look at her with feral lust in his dark eyes, nor did he treat her as an object. From the first time she had seen him on Twelve Alpha and discovered who he was Iama had wrongly assumed he was the same.

You are not worth losing over some data pad!

He had spoken those words to her just after placing himself in extreme danger to save her from those disgusting creatures. He had not hesitated for even an instant and the look in his dark eyes as he protected her was something that Iama had never seen in a man's eyes before. For a fleeting moment, Iama had actually felt wanted and special. That look remained even after they returned to the ship, but seconds after she berated him when he returned her pad, it was gone. Iama didn't truly understand the concept of Mindvoicing, or how someone could be bonded to a dragon with their minds. She had not experienced it until coming to be among the King and the others. She watched them with their dragons and how they acted. They regarded them as family and dear friends and she could now tell when they were speaking to them within that realm she didn't understand. Being among them for this time had all but erased the inbred fear she had for them, but she did not go out of her way to be near them either.

Iama glanced up and her eyes opened wider as several bodies shifted out of her line of sight and she saw him. He was sitting at a table within the lounge near the door with his sister and the huge Kavalian she knew was his sister's husband and mate now. Their union had been the talk of the ship before Twelve Alpha, and for the last three nights she had had to listen as her friends kept discussing Fedor Leonidas and what they would do to him in bed. She was silent and only replied when asked a direct question about him, but knowing that so many females also desired him made her very sad and very jealous. Iama blinked several times not understanding how he had passed her in the line and she had not seen him. Then she realized that his sister and Miseo must have gotten him a tray of food when they went through earlier. Iama stared at him from across the large room. He was reading from a data pad as he shoveled forkfuls of eggs and sliced meat into his mouth, Eirene and Miseo sitting beside him and whispering to one another as they shared a mug of coffee. He was sitting sideways to her and Iama could see he wore standard gray fleet fatigue pants and a dark gray t-shirt that conformed to his upper body like a second skin. She could just make out the bottom of the tattoo on his upper right arm and Iama blinked wondering what it looked like. Holstered to his right thigh was a K12 KM. It was

the first time she had seen him in four days and Iama felt her heart flutter ever so slightly. Iama could not deny that he was gorgeous in every way, even more handsome than the Lycavorian men who had shown an interest in her, but he was still just like the cloned soldiers who had undergone the same type of accelerated growth. His mind was still that of a child's. Wasn't it? Julie had said they were no longer children... and though she didn't really understand why, Iama wanted to know if that was true.

Fedor paged down on his pad as he stuffed another mouthful of eggs and the delicious sliced meat into his mouth and began to chew. His personal pad was almost an exact duplicate of his *MedwanGai's* pad. It was of Pralor design, nearly fifty more of the unique pads being discovered on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. His father had begun calling it a P1 and that designation had stuck with his mothers and the others of his family. Only seven were active outside his family to include his Uncle Danny. Andro had sent twenty of them to the *ARC ROYAL* in the last supply shipment before they had left the Alpha Quadrant. He and Eirene were still learning to use them because they were so much more advanced and could do so much more than a normal data pad. They were encoded to each individual user and no one else could access the information on them without authorization from the primary user in the form of a biometric scan of additional users added to its core data base. At the moment Fedor was accessing additional files added to the P1 by the Avatar Avi and his counterpart 341 before shipping them to the *ARC ROYAL*. His father had told Eirene and him of the hulking Avi and all he had learned from him through the years and Fedor wanted to meet him.

Fedor had shown an incredible aptitude for engineering and building while Eirene had been blessed with inherent skills in piloting that no doubt came from their mother. The Chief Engineer of the *ARC ROYAL*, a grizzled and weathered human of nearly seventy years of age, had been allowing Fedor to poke around the *ARC ROYAL's* engine design. The man knew a gifted engineer when he saw one and he had complemented Fedor many times on his ideas and encouraged him to continue in the field. Fedor had every intention of doing just that for he knew that they would not always be fighting in their lifetimes. He leaned over to his sister as his brow furrowed.

"Eirene... I can't get the primary flow regulator to adjust for flow rate and temperature." He stated lifting the pad to show her the engineering problem he was working on as part of his classes.

Eirene glanced over at the pad. "Did you compensate for the increased heat caused by Quantum induced fusion?" She asked.

Fedor hissed at himself. "Jeez! How stupid can I be?" He muttered as he tapped the pad. "That's the first thing Wayonn taught us."

Miseo grinned. "You should have seen me trying to complete the problems my father gave to me in regards to Aerodynamics and Magnetic Tri-Cobalt Inducer Systems. I thought I was going to pull my hair from my head."

Fedor looked at him. "You don't have a lot of hair to begin with Miseo." He said with a smile.

Miseo chuckled. "How true."

Fedor turned back to his pad but looked up when the shadow fell across the table. His heart skipped a beat when he saw her there and then her sweet kiwi scent began to swarm around him.

"Good morning." Iama spoke softly as she stood there with her hands behind her back. They couldn't see that her fingers were laced together and the whites of her knuckles were showing in anxiousness as she stood in front of him. "You... you have not taken your meals here in the main mess lounge these last few days. I was wondering why."

Fedor looked at her, resisting the urge to scoop her into his arms and kiss her. He took a deep breath which didn't help since her scent was heavy because she was so nearby. "Why would it matter where I eat?" He finally stammered out the words.

"It is my job to insure that everyone eats healthy. The foods you eat directly affect how your mind matures." Iama responded with the first thing that popped into her head. She mentally berated herself for saying something so stupid.

Fedor tore his eyes away from her angelic face and returned them to his P1. "I'm eating fine." He hissed softly.

“Julie Collins told me that you were the boy/prince while we were on Twelve Alpha. That you and your sister were birthed using Kavalian accelerated growth hormones.” Iama said trying to think quickly. “When we returned I told your mothers I would see to it that you ate healthy so that you are able to reach your full potential.” She motioned to the tray of food in front of him. “There are no fruits on your tray. The enzymes in fruits stimulate the growth of synaptic brain cells.”

“You don’t say.” Fedor spoke failing miserably at trying to push her scent out of his head. “I don’t like fruit.”

Iama’s brow furrowed. “Who does not like fruit?” She asked surprised. “Your sister seems to like fruit.” She said motioning to the half eaten orange colored apple on Eirene’s tray. “Perhaps you should take after her.”

Fedor looked up. “I don’t like fruit.” He stated again. “Now is there something else you wanted or can I get back to my studies?”

“I would be happy to help you.” Iama offered. “Rudimentary mathematics can be very taxing on developing brain cells of those who were born with the growth hormones.”

Fedor’s eyes grew a little wider. “Rudimentary mathematics?” He gasped. “Do... do you think I am stupid or something?”

Iama looked confused now. “The physical skills and aptitude always mature the fastest in Kavalian clones. They need to undergo months of rigorous schooling to be able to function even remotely like an adult.”

“And now I am a child as well as stupid.” Fedor snapped.

“You are only weeks old.” Iama said. “I think that qualifies as still being a child. Why do you think I call you boy/prince?”

“Well... I guess that means I’m batting a thousand.” Fedor snapped unable to hide his anger any longer. “I’m stupid and a child. Great.” Fedor picked up his P1 as he got to his feet and looked at Eirene. “*Pen gur men forn proir arande. Miseo.*” (I will see you later sister.)

Eirene reached for her brother as he turned quickly and left the mess lounge. Her dark eyes glared at Iama now and she turned back to Miseo.

“Miseo!” She gasped.

Miseo didn’t hesitate for her knew how tightly they were connected as twins. “Go! Go Eirene!” He spoke to her.

Eirene didn’t hesitate then and she bolted out of her chair and followed her brother. As she passed Iama her fangs flashed into existence and her eyes changed. “*Upae!*” She growled as she moved by her.

Iama watched her exit and then turned her eyes back to Miseo as he rose and towered over her. “I am correct.” Iama said as he moved in front of her. “You should know I am correct better than most. You are Kavalian.”

Miseo looked at her. He was not angry at Iama, for she truly did not know or understand what he did about Eirene and Fedor or the effects of Mindvoice and Etheric abilities. Eirene had also told him that Iama’s kiwi scent called strongly for her brother. Miseo knew her background and knew she would not trust easily nor would she be able to find the strength to thank a man for saving her life after all she had endured.

Miseo finally nodded his head. “Yes... it’s true for the Kavalian clones.” He spoke. “Fedor and Eirene are not clones however Iama. The sooner you come to realize that the better.” He began to follow Eirene and stopped directly flanking Iama and turned his head. “You should know... the rudimentary mathematics you think he was working on...” Miseo waited until she turned to face him.

“Technically if he was in school... he would be in his second year at a higher university. The rudimentary mathematics you think he was studying... it was actually Phased Quantum Mechanics.” Miseo told her seeing her light green eyes go a little wider. “We are in a very different world now Iama’Juturi. Nothing is the same as you and I once knew it. I suggest you keep that in mind before insulting a Prince of the Lycavorian Union again.”

Iama stood there with wide eyes as Miseo turned and left the mess lounge.

“...Pralor?” Wayonn gasped. “Duewa... Duewa are you sure?”

Duewa nodded her head looking at Wayonn and Helen who had now joined them. Also crowded into the medical bay now was Captain Akemi, Muton, Daniel Simpson and Julie Collins. "I'm very sure Vall'istar." She answered.

Wayonn looked at Anja. "Anja?"

Anja was leaning against one of the exam tables. "Duewa's specialty is genetic Mutagens Wayonn. In some respects she's even more knowledgeable than me in this field because I focus more on genetic restructuring. I would listen to her."

Duewa looked at Anja and smiled inwardly. Her words let Duewa know that Anja trusted her fully. "I know it's a lot to take in but..."

"How did this happen Duewa?" Helen asked standing beside her grandfather.

Duewa turned to the medical screen and brought up some scans. "Anja and I conducted thorough internal scans of these creatures over the past few days."

"And one thoroughly disgusting internal physical exam." Anja quipped.

Duewa nodded. "Yes... that is very true." She adjusted the screen showing a holographic image of one creature's head. "This tongue appendage that we witnessed them using is laced with microscopic needles." She maximized the image and then they all could see the tiny needle like objects. Hundreds of them. "When it is fully inserted into a victim's throat, these needles extend and begin injecting a toxin into the victim. It is a metabolic toxin of some kind, both a neuro venom to make their victims unable to move or fight them, and also a cellular mutagen. Essentially it begins to break down the molecular base of a victim's DNA leaving it vulnerable to attack and manipulation." Duewa adjusted the screen. "When the victim is docile... it then injects massive amounts of its own cells."

"By raping them?" Julie asked softly.

Duewa nodded her head slowly. "It is the most effective way to introduce the volume of their own DNA needed to make this type of transformation into their victims. And it would not be pleasant." She touched the screen again and it focused on the creature's groin area. "Each of these creatures has two injection modules in their genitals. Very flexible and both nearly fourteen inches long."

"The thing has two dicks?" Danny almost shouted.

Julie looked at him. "Jesus Simpson... you have a one track mind." She blurted causing all of them to smile.

"What?" Danny snapped. "That's what she is saying! Isn't it?"

Duewa held back her laugh and nodded. "Yes Daniel... in answer to your question." She said. "As best as I am able to determine... the metabolic toxin makes their victims completely docile and unable to fight them. I don't know if it affects their minds or not but from everything I can determine I would say the victims are fully aware of what is happening to them."

"Then what?" Helen asked.

"Well... I can only estimate but..." She adjusted the screen once more. "Like this simulation here with each, for lack of a better term, orgasm, the creatures then flood the victims with their cells and DNA. These cells are highly aggressive and immediately begin to attack the now weakened cells of the victims. Once infected, the cellular mutation and rewrite begins and spreads incredibly fast."

"Given what we see here, Duewa and I estimate that the transformation would only take twelve hours." Anja spoke.

Martin looked at her quickly. "Our people Red?" He asked.

Anja shook her head. "None of them had time to inject the metabolic toxin into our people." She answered.

"We're keeping them under close observation Martin... but it appears these creatures need several moments before their tongue appendage seats fully and the needles extend." Duewa said. "Thankfully they did not have that time."

Wayonn moved to the polyglass enclosed room that held the dead creature. "And this one... this was a Pralor?" He asked.

Duewa nodded. "The victims seem to retain some strands of their core DNA within their mutated bodies. The Lycavorian cells are what made this one so hard to kill. Seven K12 rounds point blank." Duewa

said. “Those core strands are what matched within our database and that is why they were detected during the Electrosanitizer Screening. This was a Pralor, probably female, who was changed by a Lycavorian.”

Martin looked at him. “Wayonn... Anja and Duewa both agree that this was a Pralor who had been changed by a Lycavorian. I thought that only happened on Lycavore.”

Wayonn turned back to look at him. “To the best of my knowledge it was Martin.” He told him. “You must remember that this was a decision Sumar made. It is not something that we did normally on seeding missions. It was forbidden in fact to interact with an indigenous species of a planet. Sumar knew of the Scourge and what they were doing in Pralor space and...”

“The first war never really ended did it Wayonn?” Martin asked him softly.

Wayonn shook his head and looked at Martin. “Not really no. The Scourge only pulled back in order to reformulate their plans. The thousand years of peace that followed the end of the first war was nothing more than a ruse that our government told our people.” Wayonn looked at the creature in the exam room. “Our military, such as it was, encountered them over three dozen times during that thousand year respite. Each time a brief engagement was fought and then they retreated.”

“Wayonn...” Martin began. “Arzoal said there were other planets that the Pralors seeded with Lycavorians. Four to be exact, not including Lycavore or the Rothryn people which Andro and Denali have discovered.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “Your... our species... was perhaps the most versatile species we had ever encountered.” He spoke. “Your unique abilities allowed you to adjust to almost any environment.”

“I take it the Rothryn are one of those groups for sure then?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded again. “Given everything that Andro and Denali have discovered about them I would have to say yes. But I do not know for sure Martin. I was not privy to every decision made by the Pralor Science Division. Shiria would probably know since she left so much later after we did. *SPARTA'S WRATH* may even have files on it. Sumar was the Chief Elder Pralor... but even he was not allowed to know everything the Science Division did.”

“Why does the way you say that not give me fuzzy warm feelings Wayonn?” Anja asked softly.

Wayonn looked at her. “Why should it?” He asked gently. “We may have been very technologically advanced Anja but we were by no means perfect.”

All we need do is remember what Artre did to know that. Arzoal's voice filled their heads from where she rested in the landing bay. All species are capable of terrible acts Anja and the Pralors were not exempt from such a thing.

“Point taken.” Anja said.

“Ok... I'm not going to let us get into a discussion of Pralor morality or the consequences of whatever they did in the past.” Martin spoke. “What I want to know is where this particular ugly came from.”

“Based on the structure of the few Lycavorian and Pralor DNA strands that I found I can estimate that the Lycavorian who turned this female was between two and three thousand years old.” Duewa told them.

“And the Pralor?” Wayonn asked.

“Somewhere between five and six thousand. Closer to six thousand in fact.” Duewa answered.

“Six thousand?” Wayonn asked. “You are sure?”

Duewa nodded. “Yes reasonably sure. I used your cells as a reference.” She told him.

“Does that make a difference grandfather?” Helen asked him.

“Yes.” He answered. “Because of Pralor longevity... anyone under five hundred years of age was not allowed to be part of expeditions outside our charted space.” Wayonn replied to her question. *Arzoal... this order had not changed when you departed correct?* He reached out within Mindvoice so they all could hear him.

Arzoal's answer was immediate. No it was still in effect.

Wayonn looked at them and their confusion. “It allowed our younger generations to discover themselves and have families of their own before reaching out into the stars.” He explained to them. “Age determined how far they were allowed to range outside our space. Pralors over five hundred years and under ten thousand years were allowed free access to whatever missions they wanted no matter the distance. Over ten thousand years the limits began.”

Because of the knowledge they would have acquired in that time. Arzoal spoke.

“Keep the older Pralors back because of their knowledge and what they could teach.” Martin said nodding his head. “That makes sense. We do it too.”

Wayonn nodded. “I do not remember any missions that were slotted for...” He looked at Akemi. “We are still within the Delta quadrant as our charts indicate correct Akemi?”

Akemi nodded immediately. “Yes. Our next jump will take us out of Delta and put us in Echo. At least according to our charts. Once we clear echo... we’ll truly be in the unknown as far as our charts extend. Muton’s map only plots a course... it doesn’t give information on the space we will cross.” She answered.

Wayonn looked at Martin. “We need to send this information to Shiria Martin.” He said. “She did not leave Pralor space until just under eleven thousand years ago. And she was a junior scientist within the Science Division. She may very well have this information. It may even be on *SPARTA’S WRATH*.”

Martin nodded his head. “Akemi... when do we do our next data dump to Dreamland?”

“Nine hours twenty-seven minutes.” Akemi answered instantly. “You know Ben is a stickler for precision.” She said.

“And he is the one that accepts all the dumps?” Martin asked.

Akemi nodded. “Personally.”

“Duewa... I want you and Anja to put all this information into a data packet that he can send to Shiria.” Martin said. “This stays within this room for right now understand?”

“Duewa and I want to keep the body of the dead one lover.” Anja said. “We may be able to learn a lot more with extended study.”

“I would like to assist them.” Wayonn spoke.

Martin nodded. “I’ll trust you two in that regard. No funky stuff you hear me?”

Duewa smiled. “Trust me Martin... I am not willing to endanger all I have discovered these last months over possible scientific discoveries. It’s not worth it.”

“What about this one that you say is still alive?” Muton spoke as he stood in front of the glass.

Martin looked at Duewa. “Duewa?”

“We don’t have any idea what species this one was before the transformation.” She stated. “We have nothing in our databases that comes close. The only thing I can determine is that it was bipedal like us. Aside from that... it is an unknown. Given what these things are capable of... if we keep it and it somehow manages to escape it could infect countless members of our crew before we even knew it was free. If that happened... we could lose hundreds.”

“Space it.” Julie spoke firmly.

Duewa looked at her and then back to Martin. “As much as my Hadarian blood calls for me to disagree with Julie... my Lycavorian blood tells me the same thing. I can take some additional samples from it... but then we need to vent it out an airlock Martin. It’s far too dangerous to keep onboard.”

Martin nodded and glanced at Anja who only smiled at him. “Do it.” He said. “I want it gone today. And slap a hazard buoy on it too... proximity activation... just to be safe.” He pushed off the table. “Wayonn... Helen... meet me in the landing bay with Arzoal. We need to have a talk.”

They watched Martin move to the door silently and exit the Medical Bay.

“Something tells me that ain’t going to be a pleasant talk.” Danny said softly leaning over to Julie.

Julie looked up at him. “You got that sense too huh?” She watched as Wayonn and Helen exited the Medical Bay with Muton. “You know Danny... this trip just keeps getting better and better.”

“It ain’t just a job...” Danny said.

“It’s a fucking adventure!” They both spoke at the same time.

PRIDE OF PUMAS
PUSINTIN’S COMMAND SHIP
FOUR DAYS BEHIND ARC ROYAL
0730 HRS, EST

“...hoping you might consider allowing me to utilize the services of this Hadarian wench you have on board Marshall.” Koguth’Juturi stood in front of his chair in the conference room of Pusintin’s ship.

The meeting had been going on for three hours now and Pusintin had to admit, this Koguth’Juturi knew his stuff. He hid his emotions well concerning his whore daughter but Pusintin could smell the anger and hate on him when he spoke of her. His only desire now it seemed was to capture her and make her pay for the dishonor she had brought to his Pride. His oldest son Mataen’Juturi had an even harder time disguising his emotions and Pusintin knew then he had found two allies. Pusintin hadn’t known until Popal told him that Koguth and his ship had been part of his Task Force to Enurrua. His ship had been heavily damaged in the initial missile attacks but they had held it together long enough to repair their engines and then limp to Nefoa. Those actions bespoke of solid leaders who would brook no defiance. The record of their Pride was impeccable and Pusintin knew that if Keleru trusted them completely, he could do so as well. At this request however, Pusintin leaned forward.

“How do you know I have her?” Pusintin asked first.

Koguth bowed his head. “Forgive me my forwardness Marshall.” He spoke. “Knowing of your injuries suffered on Enurrua and that your ship went to Talbor Seven, I only assumed you were there for the Hadarian couple. My apologies.”

Pusintin relaxed slightly. “There is no need to apologize.” He spoke sitting back. “I have them. The man is being kept apart for he is one of Buonau’s supporters. I would prefer to vent him out of the airlock, the cowardly fuck, but Keleru ordered me to keep him alive. His type of asshole is what is keeping Buonau in the good graces of her followers and to kill one would be detrimental to our plans for Hadaria.”

“Why could the man simply not have an accident Marshall?” Mataen asked.

Pusintin laughed as he got to his feet and looked at Kalis who sat at the other end of the table observing the meeting. He had only spoken a few times, but Pusintin had been impressed with his statements and his comments. Surprisingly... his son was beginning to show signs of being a capable leader and Kavalian. He trained everyday in the gym with the Kavalian Sergeant Master of the Puma Bane troops on board. He was absorbing tactical skills from Popal like a sponge and he was maxing out the test simulations that Popal was putting him through. Kalis was not Leruk... but perhaps his oldest son was finally beginning to become a man and something that Pusintin could at least be willing to call his son.

“I like the way your son thinks Koguth.” Pusintin said as he moved to the view window.

“Unfortunately... this little exercise has tested the limits of Keleru’s patience with me. He supports me... but I will not put that support in jeopardy by refusing his orders to keep the fool alive.”

Koguth nodded. “A wise decision Marshall. When we catch the Lycavorian King however, you will only show the Prefect you were right to begin with.”

Pusintin turned back around and looked at him. “Yes we will.” He stated. “I have been using the wife every few days to sate my needs. She is not particularly inventive in bed... but her healing skills are excellent. And the metaphysical radiation in her body keeps her nice and tight. Though she squalls too loudly for my taste when I take her ass.”

Koguth and his son laughed at this. “Put a sock in her mouth Marshall.” Mataen spoke finally.

Pusintin chuckled. “I just may do that.” He stated. “I have the daughter and son as well. They are locked in the Security Brig.”

“You don’t use the daughter?” Koguth asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “She has not Ascended as the Hadarians call it. She does not have the healing skills of her mother.”

“Dispose of them.” Koguth spoke.

Pusintin shook his head. “That is part of the deal with the husband. He does not care what we do to his woman... but his children are to be unharmed. Besides... I doubt from her age she has ever been with a man and I do not want the trouble of breaking in a virgin. Why do you ask this?”

Koguth lowered his head slightly. “I withdraw my request Marshall. She services your needs and that is what is important.”

“No... speak your mind Koguth.” Pusintin said. “If Keleru’Puat trusts you as he does then I am stupid for not following his actions. You have injured crewmen?”

Koguth looked at his son quickly and then nodded. "Many of my senior and most experienced officers and crew were injured during the attack. I have an excellent group of medics but one of the casualties was our ship's doctor. Many of my men report for duty holding in their pain as they should. I would like to provide them relief for their pain because of their actions in assisting Mataen and I in saving our ship."

"They are good officers and men?" Pusintin asked.

Koguth nodded. "I invite you to our ship to see for yourself Marshall. We would be honored to have you." He said quickly.

Pusintin held up his hand. "Your offer is welcome Koguth... but my duties here have me very busy."

"I understand Marshall." Koguth said. "We will endure as any Kavalian should."

"No... your words and deeds should be rewarded." Pusintin said. "You have shown your loyalty to Keleru and to the KFI many times over. This request is not in any way unreasonable." He sat back down in his chair. "She will be yours three days a week until your crew is returned to full status. You may use her if you wish... or your son... but I do not want her passed among your crew. She is too valuable to us now that we are out here in the unknown."

"You honor me Marshall." Koguth spoke bowing his head. "And only Mataen here has the energy to use her in his bed. I am too old and have no wish to have some hairless female in my bed."

Pusintin laughed. "Except for her head... she is hairless." He spoke.

"I will not injure her in any way Marshall. You have my word as one of your officers." Mataen told him.

"I have only one other simple request Marshall Pusintin... if I may?" Koguth asked.

Pusintin nodded. "Speak."

"When we have caught the animal King... when we have killed them... I request that my daughter be taken alive so that myself and her Pride may see to her execution." Koguth spoke harshly. "I do not wish her stain on our Pride to go unpunished."

Pusintin nodded his head. "If she is taken alive... you will have her." He said.

Koguth bowed his head deeply as he stood, Mataen rising to his feet as well. "You honor us Marshall Pusintin."

Pusintin nodded his head. "I will have her brought to your ship. Kalis... my son... he will see to it."

Pusintin stood up now. "I must return to my duties but please... I would be happy to have you for dinner one evening soon."

Koguth's eyes were bright. "That would be an honor we would never refuse Marshall." He stammered.

"Good. I will see to it. Good day gentlemen." Pusintin watched as they turned and left the conference room and he saw Kalis rise to his feet as the door slid shut. "Well?" He asked sternly.

Kalis moved closer to his father. "The internal room sensors could detect no lie from them father." He answered.

Pusintin nodded. "And I smelled nothing either."

"What they are asking seems reasonably considering their connections to grandfather." Kalis spoke. "Granting them the Hadarian bitch's services was a wise move to incur their further trust, however... keeping an eye on them is also smart. To make sure they are doing as you ask."

Pusintin grunted and looked at his son. "You have become different these last weeks Kalis." He said. "Why is that?"

Kalis looked at him. "I will never replace Leruk in your eyes father... I know that. I have decided to try and be like him as much as I can. If only to know that I no longer shame you when you speak my name. I do not want your approval father... only your belief that I will do what is necessary to accomplish this."

Pusintin turned away from him for a moment. "You are making a start Kalis." He said finally.

"I also have a request father... if I may?" Kalis said.

Pusintin turned back to him. "What is that?"

"The younger Hadarian bitch." Kalis spoke harshly. "I would like her."

Pusintin shook his head. "Her mother's cooperation stems from her children." He spoke. "If they are injured or used in any way I have no doubts the woman will kill herself or allow herself to be killed."

"I understand this father... but grandfather's instructions were for *you* to not use her." Kalis said. "His orders did not extend to me. And since the incident in the Security Brig, and my actions there, the Puma Bane Troops are becoming more discontent. I have the most secure quarters on this ship father. There is no way she

or her stupid brother could escape them. The bulkhead doors alone would have them trapped in the lower engineering section. They can do no harm in the refuse area. It removes her from potential harm and allows you more control of her mother.”

“And gives the daughter to you.” Pusintin said.

Kalis smiled evilly. “I will not mark her father. I only want to fuck her.”

“Your actions that day were correct.” Pusintin said turning to move to the wet bar along the bulkhead.

“The men would have raped and beat her senseless after she struck one. It’s what I would have done.”

“Keeping them apart also gives you more control over her mother.” Kalis said. “She will be more accepting of her role if she wishes to see her children. She will not fight you as much.”

Pusintin turned and looked at him. “I like it when she fights.” He said with a grin. “But it will allow me to keep my anger in check knowing that she is slightly more docile.”

Kalis moved closer. “Allow me to do this father.” He spoke. “I will not mark her in any way when I use her... and it removes a potential problem in the future if the Puma Bane troops continue to guard her. There will be no... accidents.”

Pusintin stared at his son for a long moment. He could detect no lie within his scent and there was a cruelty that was not there a few short weeks ago. Pusintin finally nodded his head. “Very well Kalis.” He stated. “I will hold you responsible for their containment and their health. If anything happens to them I will take it out on you.”

Kalis nodded. “As you should father.” He stated.

“See to Ceale being transferred to Koguth’s ship and then take them down to your quarters.” Pusintin spoke. “Give Popal a copy of your security measures and codes and make one for myself.”

“I will have them to you this evening.” Kalis said.

“Don’t fail me Kalis.” Pusintin said.

Kalis shook his head. “I do not intend to father.”

Pusintin nodded. “Dismissed.”

Ceale moved beside Kalis as they made their way to the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* landing bay. His grip on her arm was tight but not painful and he was walking quickly, Ceale barely able to keep up. Ceale was frightened by this odd occurrence. She knew who Kalis was... her tormentor’s son... but in nearly six weeks he had done nothing but come to their cell and watch them from the monitors in the long corridor. Ceale had not had to endure Pusintin’s touch for almost three full days now and with the clothes and food that had begun magically appearing in their cell these last weeks she was nearly fully recovered. She turned her head to the side of Kalis’s face as they walked.

“Where... where are you taking me?” She asked with a tremble of fear in her voice.

“My father has given your services to some loyal officers on another ship.” Kalis told her with a stern voice. Mainly for the entertainment of the two soldiers who walked behind them. “You will heal their men and entertain the Captain’s son for three days every week until their crew is completely one hundred percent healthy.”

“What?” Ceale gasped as they stopped by the lift. “I will not leave my...”

Kalis jerked her arm as the door opened. “You will do as my father says bitch!” He growled at her. “Now shut up!” He turned to the two Kavalian troops. “I will take her up on this Lift. Take the port one and inform Captain Koguth we are on our way. I will stop on deck four to arrange for fitting clothes for her to wear.”

“Yes Colonel!” One of the men smiled at Kalis’s implied comment.

Kalis nodded and shoved Ceale into the lift. He touched the console and the door slid shut and they began to rise. Ceale watched as he tapped quickly on the panel and then turned to face her. Her eyes grew wider when she saw his facial expression had changed completely. It was no longer angry and violent, but concerned and very handsome. “You must listen to me very carefully.” He told her. “I am going to help you.”

Ceale's dark green eyes grew even wider. "Do you take me for a fool?" She hissed. "You are his son! You..."

Kalis grabbed her arms tightly with both hands and she expected a vicious slap to come next and closed her eyes in anticipation of the blow. All he did is squeeze her arms gently and his next words made her open her eyes. "I am not my father!" He snarled softly. "I am... I am nothing like him! I... I don't know who or what I truly am anymore... but I am not him!" He squeezed her arms tighter but not painfully. "Who do you think has been giving you the extra food? Not the slop you were eating! The clothes and the means to at least wash yourselves and keep what dignity my father has not taken from you by his actions!"

"You?" Ceale gasped. "Why?"

Kalis shook his head and turned to the lifter wall. He began to quickly unclip the pins on a panel housing. He withdrew a small, plain backpack and then replaced the panel. He stood back up and held it out to her. "I can not undo what my father has done." He told her. "His treatment of you is... it is vile and it makes me sick. I can't stop him from doing these things Ceale... as much as I want too. He would kill me without a second thought. You are a strong woman... as strong as my mother has shown she can be. And I did not ever take notice of her strength until it was too late." He lifted his blue eyes to her. "You must remain strong Ceale. I am... I am working on getting you off this ship forever but I need..."

"You... you are his son!" Ceale exclaimed in shock.

Kalis shook his head. "I may be his son by blood... but that... that is where it ends. I have... I have discovered some things about myself these last weeks, chief among them is that I do not want this life. Or what it makes me feel inside."

Ceale's mind was racing. Could it really be true? His words she could have dismissed had they not been spoken with such passion and sorrow. No one was that good of an actor. They actually caused her spirits to lift and take notice that perhaps hope had not abandoned them as she thought.

"These Kavalians that he has given you too... there is something about them. My father has dismissed so much of his Lycavorian blood that he did not take notice of it. I on the other hand have embraced my Lycavorian blood these past weeks and I did notice it. I can not explain it to you Lady Ceale... I can't explain it to myself. I do not think you will be in danger on their ship but..." Kalis dug into the bag and pulled out the small COM unit. He held it up for her to see. "This is a secure COM unit. It links directly with a special data pad that I have. It will also link to one I will give to Serale."

"Serale!" Ceale gasped. "She will..."

Kalis touched the lifter controls stopping them on deck four but keeping the doors closed. "I am moving Serale and your son to a more secure area on this ship. I will keep them safe I give you my word."

Ceale's eyes narrowed. "Why... why should I believe you?" She asked softly wanting to believe all he was saying.

Kalis looked at her. "Because I swear to you this day that I will find a way to get us off this ship and away from my father. I have... I have begun working on a plan that will take us to my uncle but I need time and it will not be easy."

"Your Uncle?" Ceale asked.

Kalis looked at her. "You know who my father is Lady Ceale?"

"Of course!" She hissed. "He is the brother..." Her eyes went wide when she realized what she was about to say.

Kalis nodded his head with just a hint of a smile. "Yes. And every day that passes I only wish to be with him more and more. I can not be forgiven for my past sins but I hope what I do now will at least atone for some of them. Serale and your son will be safe... I will protect them with my life if need be... I promise you. This COM unit will allow you to speak with her and not be detected. I finished the modifications a few days ago. The clothes are plain, but they will at least not leave you exposed.

"Why... why should I trust anything you say?" Ceale asked him.

Kalis lifted his hand and Ceale began to step back for fear of being struck, but once more his hand took her arm and squeezed not with painful intent, but reassuring warmth. "Because I have kept the secret of Serale... of your daughter having already Ascended." Kalis told her seeing her eyes go wide. "I have told no one since that day. You may not believe me... but I have tried to help in ways that will not be noticed. The food... the clothes. My father does not trust me so I must be careful. He thinks these things come from someone

among the crew and he does not care. If he knew it was me he would be..." Kalis looked at her. "Let's just say it would not be pleasant."

"Why are you doing this?" Ceale asked him. "If he would kill you, his own son... why do you risk yourself like this to help me? To help us?"

"You... you would not believe me if I told you." He answered her softly and Ceale thought for sure she saw incredible sadness in his eyes. "Let's just say that my future... if I am to have a future... my future is not here. I do not want it to be here. I want more than the life that has been forced upon me. I can only have that with my Uncle. If he will even accept me." He reached up and touched the panel again and they began moving. "I will have Serale contact you tonight at 2200 hours. Tell no one what we have spoken of for it will end up getting all of us killed." He pushed the COM unit back into the bag and then tucked it into her arms. "You have no reason to trust me Lady Ceale... I know this. I am asking you to take a leap of faith."

"Kavalians do not believe in faith." Ceale spoke.

Kalis nodded his head. "But remember I am only half Kavalian." He said. "The other half of my blood is Lycavorian. The other half of my blood is a Leonidas."

The doors opened and Kalis turned quickly taking her arm and leading her out of the Lifter. Ceale's eyes were wide at his words and she stared at him for a moment as they moved but then she turned to look at the men standing by the ship. Kalis saw Koguth and Mataen waiting by the ramp of their shuttle and he directed her over to them.

Koguth stepped forward. "Ah... this is her?" He asked sternly.

"As my father told you." Kalis answered.

"She does not look like much." Mataen spoke as he moved around Ceale. "Are all Hadarians so... fragile?"

"I wouldn't know." Kalis replied. "Captain Koguth... a word if I could sir. A message from my father."

Koguth nodded. "Mataen... take her onboard. I wish her to begin right away." He said as he moved over to where Kalis had stepped to the side. "What can I do for the Marshall's esteemed son? A Colonel of the Puma Bane I understand?"

Kalis was only a inch shorter than Koguth's six foot four frame, the only one of his brothers to inherit their father's full height. He looked into Koguth's dark eyes. "My father may have missed it sir... but I did not." He spoke in a low, menacing voice. "You and your son are more than you lead others to believe. Do not harm her in any way. Do not abuse her. Do not take her against her will. If you do... if you do sir... then I will come for you and all of your Pride and I will extinguish them from existence."

Koguth stood there silently staring at Kalis. He saw the change come over Kalis, the dark ring that encircled his eyes, and the tips of his dual fangs protruding from beneath his upper lip. Something passed between the much older Kavalian and the young man before him, something buried deep within the currents of emotion. Koguth's Juturi was many things, but he was not a fool. The Marshall's son was not walking the same path as his idiot father. His path was very different and the words he had just spoken sent a shiver down his spine.

"I will take it under advisement Colonel Kalis." He said evenly.

Kalis watched Koguth turn and move for the back of his ship. He didn't wait to watch the ship depart and moved for the Lifter so that he could get Serale and her brother moved before others discovered what was going on.

KOGUTH'S LEUGERS TRANSPORT ***0839 HRS EST***

Mataen looked at his father as they cleared the landing bay of *PRIDE OF PUMAS* and headed for their own ship. He was staring at the closed ramp deep in thought, a pose Mataen had seen many times before. He stepped up next to him.

"Father?" He asked softly. "What is it?"

Koguth turned and looked at his oldest son. Mataen was six hundred and nine years old, the oldest of his nine children with his mate of eight hundred and twenty-four years. "The... the Marshall's son." He said softly.

Mataen moved closer. "What?"

"He is... he is not like his father Mataen." He spoke. "He said... he said his father did not detect it but that he did."

"Detect what?" Mataen asked.

"The lie." The female voice spoke now causing both men to turn around.

"Mani!" Koguth exclaimed. "We have only just left their ship!"

Mani Juturi stepped forward and removed the full face helmet she wore. "We are off their ship and even they do not have sensors that can look upon us in here my husband." The dark brown and very well groomed fur of the female Kavalian was very evident, as was the shape of her body under the uniform.

Ceale sat wide eyed as she watched the female move closer to the Kavalian called Koguth. Kalis's words echoed in her head. *"These Kavalians that he has given you too... there is something about them. My father has dismissed so much of his Lycavorian blood that he did not take notice of it. I on the other hand have embraced my Lycavorian blood these past weeks and I did notice it. I can not explain it to you Lady Ceale... I can't explain it to myself. I do not think you will be in danger on their ship but..."*

"We need to act safely mother." Mataen told her as she stepped up beside Koguth and pressed close to her husband of over eight hundred years. The fur on her face and body was shiny and pulsating with health and radiant color and her tail snaked around Koguth's right leg as she stood beside him, his longer tail encircling her waist.

"We are acting safely." Mani told him. "We are off that ship of horrors."

Koguth nodded. "I did not expect to feel so disgusted as I was." He said. "That ship is... it is like a dark abyss."

"The hate that infects them is powerful husband." She said.

"What did you mean Mani?" Koguth asked. "He could detect the lie?"

Mani nodded her head. "What did he tell you husband. I saw him pull you to the side."

Koguth glanced at Mataen and then back to her. "He told me if we hurt her in any way that he would extinguish our Pride from existence. He said he detected what his father did not."

Mani nodded her head. "He detected that you and Mataen were lying." She said with confidence.

"Mother... how could he?" Mataen protested. "Father, myself... all of us have trained rigorously to hide our true emotions and be able to lie as if it is second nature."

Mani nodded her head. "Something has happened that caused the Marshall's son to begin to embrace the Lycavorian blood within him." She answered. "I have studied the Lycavorians for decades Mataen... and their sense of smell far exceeds anything we can imagine. Pusintin, the foul beast, he may have forsaken that part of himself, but it appears his son has not. My only question is where has he gotten the training to use this skill. Lycavorians must be taught from birth to use their sense of smell in order to be able to catalogue different scents and such. His father would not teach him this... so where did he learn it?"

"He detected we were lying." Koguth spoke. "Yet he did not inform his father. That is very interesting."

Mani turned and saw Ceale staring at them from the bench in the *LEUGERS* and she pushed away from her husband. "And this is she?" She spoke as she knelt in front of Ceale. She lifted a fur covered hand and stroked Ceale's cheek. "You look very frightened child. And very tired."

Ceale looked at where Koguth and Mataen stood and then back to her. Ceale couldn't help but notice the well groomed fur and bright blue eyes. "You... you are... you are female." She stammered finally.

Mataen chuckled softly and moved to the bench to settle next to her. Ceale shied away quickly from his enormous bulk and he held up his own fur covered hands. His darker blue eyes fell on her, but Ceale could detect the distinct similarities between him and the female Kavalian.

"You may rest easy Milady." Mataen spoke. "You are in no danger among us."

"He speaks the truth child." Mani said dropping her hands to take one of Ceale's in hers. "We are not going to hurt you."

"I don't... I don't understand." Ceale said. "What... what is going on?"

"Father." Mataen spoke holding out the small COM unit he had removed from the bag.

Ceale's eyes went wide and she reached for it. "No!" She snapped. "No!"

Mataen held it away from her as his eyes inspected it. "A normal COM unit with some interesting modifications." He said.

"He gave it to me!" Ceale hissed. "He said I could use it to talk with Serale."

Koguth looked at Mani. "Her daughter." He told his wife.

"The Marshall's son gave this to you?" Mataen asked Ceale.

Ceale nodded. "Yes. Please... please give it back."

Mataen held up his hand indicating she should wait. He reached above his head and touched the COM panel. "Nedoni... are you detecting any unknown signal coming from our ship?"

"Negative. We are clean." The male voice replied.

"Have Corsa move back here for a moment brother." Mataen said.

"On her way." The male voice replied.

"Mataen?" Koguth asked him. "What is wrong?"

Mataen looked at him. "This COM unit has been modified in a unique way father." He said. "You say that Kalis gave this to you?" He asked Ceale.

Ceale nodded. "He said I could use it to communicate with Serale while I was with you. That no one else would detect it."

Ceale turned and saw the second Kavalian female move back among them from the cockpit area and stop. She removed the helmet as well and her shiny copper colored red hair fell well past her shoulders, her face calm and without fear. Unlike the others, she was completely without fur on her body and Ceale knew instantly she was one of the biogenic female Kavalians that had undergone treatment. Corsa stepped up close to Mataen without pause and then Ceale saw her tail unwind from around her waist and encircle his leg just as Mani had done. Ceale looked at her with wide eyes as she realized this female would have been considered a failure to the Kavalian scientists and either discarded or sent to be a whore in whatever brothels they had. Apparently this was not the case with her and Ceale saw Mataen's tail slowly snake around her waist just as his father's had around Mani's.

"Mataen my husband?" She asked.

Mataen held the COM unit out to her. "Corsa... what do you make of this?"

The Kavalian female took the unit and turned it over in her hands several times while studying it carefully. "Standard Kavalian COM unit with several advanced modifications. Site to site beam capability and a high level encryption protocol unit." She looked up at Mataen. "Whoever made this intends for it to be used outside of normal COM channels and remain undetected. If I'm correct... it is designed to piggy back on spacial harmonic frequencies."

"Spacial Harmonic Frequencies?" Koguth asked. "We don't have equipment that can do that Corsa. Only the Lycavorian Union has the ability to manipulate SHFs within their COM channels."

"You are correct my husband's father." Corsa answered him. "Yet this was made with Kavalian material... not Union. Whoever built this has Union knowledge. Who did this?" She looked at him. "This level of knowledge of communications could help us to secure our Pride's COM traffic from any prying ears and eyes. It would also mean this person has an in-depth knowledge of Union COM techniques. No one would be able to decipher it without the proper encryption key."

Mataen reached up and took it from her hand and then held it out to Ceale. She took it from him and clutched it to her chest, her eyes filled with more questions than she could process.

"He gave this to you for a reason and we will not keep that reason from you." Mataen told her. "I doubt very much his father or anyone else knows he has these skills." He continued. He turned to look at Koguth. "It appears the Marshall's son is far more than anyone knows."

Mani smiled and patted Ceale's hands. "It seems we are not the only ones out here who are working against the good Marshall." She said. She turned to Koguth. "If his own son is somehow in contact with the Union... or even the King... it could be our opportunity to find Iama and bring her home my husband."

Koguth nodded his head looking at Ceale. "We should probably fill our guest in on what is happening however. The poor thing looks lost. I do not think we have to worry that she will expose us to Pusintin."

Mani smiled and nodded. "Corsa and I will take care of that." She said turning back to Ceale. "Right now... let's get you some decent clothes to wear and something to warm your insides. You must be cold." She

took her arms and gently urged her to her feet. "Come... we have some clothes in the back that we have made for you. You appear to be Corsa's size and she made them."

Ceale looked at her unsure of what was happening, but if it allowed her a respite from the pain she had been enduring she welcomed it and allowed them to lead her toward the rear of the ship. Looking within herself, Ceale found she suddenly had no fear for her daughter. The look in Kalis's eyes when he said he would protect her and her brother was something Ceale would never forget. It was a look of determination she had never seen before.

Perhaps it was hope.

Perhaps hope had not abandoned them at all. It was just coming in a different form.

Mataen looked at his father. "Kalis could be a powerful ally father." He spoke. "Pusintin has never treated him with the respect a father should of his first born. Especially one who is as skilled as he. That has been common knowledge for many years."

Koguth nodded. "Indeed." He said. "His skills are without question. The look... when he spoke to me he was looking upon me with wolf eyes Mataen. Feral wolf eyes that held no fear in them. No fear and a determination that I have never seen. Something is driving this boy to do what he is doing. And he is keeping it hidden from his father."

"Do you think he knows where the King is?" Mataen asked.

Koguth shook his head. "I don't know but while this Hadarian Ceale is among us I intend to discover a way to find out. You and Corsa are still willing to watch over her? Have her stay with you?"

Mataen nodded. "Yes. She looks malnourished and exceptionally tired and what she needs is rest. We will feed her and get her to rest for the first day. After that, if she is willing, she can begin her exams. Corsa has experienced the same things as her father... she should be able to help her."

Koguth nodded. "She is a fine young Kavalian female my son. I did not think it wise to join with her at first... but she has come out of her shell since that day. You made me proud by rescuing her and now she makes me proud to have her as a daughter. Tell her that for me. I do not wish to embarrass her in front of our Pride."

Mataen nodded his head with a smile. "I will." He said. His face became serious. "Father, do you think Pusintin and Keleru have any idea how many of us there are?"

Koguth met his eyes. "Keleru does... just not who." He answered. "He clings to power by threads my son. Pusintin is only a lap dog of his. A powerful tool... but still just a tool." He said. "That is our advantage."

"How long before Pian and the Nruarani Pride begin?" Mataen asked.

"I spoke with Pian's brother just before we departed Nefoa." Koguth answered. "If things go as they planned... then Pian will launch his campaign in a guerilla fashion. He is receiving Union support of materials but no men. At least not right now. The Union must be prepared to meet Keleru's thrusts when he decides it is time. For the moment Pian and the Nruarani Pride can hold their own."

"Can the Union hold against him father?" Mataen asked softly.

Koguth gazed into his son's eyes. "Keleru has no understanding of what he has done Mataen. The other Pride Leaders and myself saw this after our second attempted invasion of the High Coven and that is why we formed our groups. Power is the only thing Keleru craves and his actions against the Union have sealed his fate. When Martin Leonidas truly unleashes his son upon Keleru'Puat, he will know the grip of fear. The same fear so many of our people have lived under for too long."

"I thought... I thought he had already done so." Mataen said.

Koguth looked at him and smiled. "No Mataen. What we have seen so far is nothing." He said. "When Martin Leonidas unleashes the storm that is his son you will know. And then it will be time to throw all we are behind Androcles and free our people." Koguth gripped his arm. "But first I will do what I should have done years ago. I will find your sister and I will bring her home to your mother. To us."

"That was not your fault father and you know it." Mataen spoke quickly.

Koguth shook his head. "He was my father... his actions were mine." He said softly. "I should have killed him long before I did. Your sister would not have had to endure the horrors she has if I had acted as a father should have."

Mataen gripped his arm. "We are acting now father. Iama will see that and she will forgive."

Koguth nodded his head. "I hope you are correct my son. I hope you are correct." He took a deep breath. "Now... now we must adhere to our plan."

PRIDE OF PUMAS
0910 HRS, EST

Serale did not know what to expect when the son arrived at their cell but her dark green eyes watched him carefully as he spoke to the guard in the foyer and that Kavalian glanced at them and then nodded his head.

“What is happening Serale?” Danim asked her in a whisper.

Serale shook her head. “I don’t know.” She answered.

“Where did he take mother?”

Serale looked at him. “Danim I don’t know!” She hissed softly.

Danim turned back to look at Kalis. “This one... this one scares me Serale.” He said softly. “He is... he is that bastard’s son!”

Serale turned back to watch as Kalis entered a code into the door control. “Quiet! He’s coming in!” She whispered to him her eyes never leaving Kalis. Her eyes grew a little wider as he withdrew his ARSOC sidearm but did not point it at them, only held it along his leg.

“Gather what things you have and come with me.” He spoke sternly. “No tricks and do not attempt to run. There is no place on this ship where you can hide that I will not find you. It will not be pleasant when I do.”

“Where... where is our mother?” Serale asked softly.

“I did not say you could ask questions.” Kalis snapped. “Move now!”

Serale snatched up several items of clothing and the lone bar of soap that had appeared with the additional clothes and pulled on her brother’s arm. Danim rose to his feet and slipped his hand into Serale’s. Kalis motioned them forward out of the cell and into the corridor where another Kavalian waited.

“Kalis.” Popal spoke.

“Commander.” Kalis said moving up next to Serale.

Kalis towered over her by several inches and was nearly twice as wide as her. Her dark green eyes took in the exceptionally sculpted muscle of his arms and chest under the dark uniform shirt. She squeezed Danim’s hand making sure that she remembered to speak with him not to attempt anything with this one. They had watched him face down three Kavalians that day and there had been nothing but rage in his eyes, like he had no fear. His skin was deeply tanned and unbelievably Serale found herself thinking he was extraordinarily handsome. Serale watched him hand the Kavalian a data pad.

“These are the codes to my quarters and the security grid I have installed Commander.” Kalis spoke. “Make a copy for yourself and then give this pad to my father per his instructions. No one else is to see this.”

Popal nodded. “The discontent was growing Colonel. This is a sound move and I intend to advise your father of that.”

Kalis nodded. “I sensed it too. With them out of the immediate area things should calm in a few days.”

Popal held up the pad. “I will do as you order with this.” He said stepping out of the way.

Kalis looked at Serale. “Move into the corridor and do exactly as I say.” He barked.

Serale could not keep track of the number of turns and twists they moved down. They moved down three Lifters and among corridors that all looked the same. She made out several numbers on the bulkheads but crisscrossing as they did got her very confused.

Kalis did not speak to them aside from giving them directions where to go, partly to keep appearances up, but mostly because her cinnamon and cherry scent was swarming around him and making it hard to think. Kalis took several deep breaths as they walked and tried to focus on the instruction program from Androcles about how to regulate and block scents if he needed. Or at the very least force them to the back of his mind so that they were not so prominent. He was able to succeed for the most part and finally, seven minutes after leaving the Security Cell he ushered them through the dual bulkhead doors of his quarters. Kalis turned almost immediately and sealed the doors, engaging the locks. He holstered his ARSOC and placed his forehead against the cool metal and tried to take calming breaths.

Serale looked around the large quarters they had entered. There was a great desk and chair against one wall of the main room they were in. She saw a large couch and computer monitor on the table in the center with

the huge view window behind that. A small kitchen area was off to the left and an archway that led into another room. The walls were mostly bare, but Serale could see where items had either been moved or taken down. On the desk she could see three image projectors. Two were of a stunning female with long white blond hair and the second was of a younger looking male and female, the male having many of the same features as the young man in the room with them. She looked at her brother and they turned to see Kalis take a deep breath and turn to face them. He typed several commands into the door panel and Serale looked up when she heard the faint sound of dampeners of some kind engaging. Her eyes went back quickly to Kalis as he faced them.

“You may speak freely now.” He said quickly. “I have engaged the audio and video dampeners. Sit... please.” He motioned to the couch. Serale and Danim both were very wary and neither of them moved. Kalis moved into the small kitchen but still they did not move, watching as he poured three glasses of a blue liquid from the container and then he turned back to see them still standing there. Kalis moved back into the main room and put the glasses on the table. “I asked you to sit.” He said maintaining his calm, now fully able to push Serale’s sweet scent to the back of his mind as Androcles’s teaching had shown him.

“Why... why are we here?” Serale asked softly. She was filled with a large amount of fear yes, but there was something about his man that caused her to feel safe as well. “Where did you take our mother?”

Kalis set his glass down and stripped out of the uniform top, leaving himself only in the black t-shirt. He sat down and lifted the blue liquid and took a long pull from the glass, downing half of it before setting it back down. “Your actions nearly six weeks ago have been fermenting among the Puma Bane troops assigned to this ship.” Kalis told her as he looked up. “I... I convinced my father to allow me to move you both down here in order to protect you.”

“Protect us from what?” Serale asked.

“The Puma Bane troops who would have gotten enough courage to disobey my father’s orders and come for you.” Kalis said. “I could not allow that to happen.”

“Come for me?” Serale asked softly.

Kalis nodded. “Yes. Both of you are probably far more intelligent than me. You must know what I mean?”

Serale looked at him with wide green eyes when he said that and she relaxed slightly. “Where is our mother?” She asked again. “Is she...”

Kalis looked at her and his own eyes grew wide. “No!” He gasped. “No! My father gave her to the commander of another ship...”

“What?” Serale snarled. “To do what he does to her! You bastard! You...”

Kalis put his glass down and made to reach for her but Serale instinctively slapped him viciously across his face leaving imprints of her fingers on his cheek and rocking his head back. “You fucking monster!” She hissed savagely. “It is not enough she has to submit to your father but now she must submit as a whore to more of your people! You...”

Danim grabbed his sister’s arms before she could strike again. “Serale!” He exclaimed.

Kalis’s eyes flashed and changed, his dual wolf fangs bursting from his gums further than they ever had before and becoming very prominent and looking exceedingly deadly. Serale gasped and backed up against her brother as Kalis moved forward faster than either of them could react. Serale whimpered as his tall and muscular body caused her to press up against the bulkhead, his body touching hers. Danim began to try and push him off her but Kalis’s hand closed around his throat and with gentle but firm pressure he backed him up to the bulkhead beside his sister. Kalis’s eyes never left Serale’s beautiful but terrified face and it was that look that caused the anger at her actions to slip away instantly. His eyes did not change but his fangs receded somewhat as he stared at her. Serale could feel his warmth breath on her cheek, a peppermint smell on his breath, unlike the foul breath of the Kavalians who had gotten close to her before.

Kalis drew in a deep breath; inhaling her sweet scent and feeling it reach to every part of his mind and body and actually calming him even more. “They... they are not my people Serale.” He spoke softly seeing her eyes slowly turn back to look at him. “They are not my people. And you were... you were right to strike me. I should not have grabbed for you. I am sorry.” Kalis turned to look at a very frightened Danim. He quickly took his hand away from his throat. “The blow you were going to try and land would have struck the side of my head Danim. You would have broken one or more of your fingers as a result. I am still half Lycavorian... and one of the traits I have acquired from that side of my blood is the thickness of our bones.” He turned back to Serale and

gazed at her with those changed eyes. Serale held in the gasp that threatened to escape her lips as she saw the depth of those blue eyes and how beautiful they were in their changed form. "Forgive me." He spoke softly before backing up and moving back to the couch.

"I could not stop my father from sending your mother to the other ship." He said. "They are not... they are different than normal Kavalians. And they were lying to my father about their true intentions." He looked at Serale. "I do not believe your mother is in any danger. Of either physical abuse or mental."

Serale pushed off the wall. "What... what are you saying?" She asked. "Why have you brought us here? What is going on?"

Kalis lifted his eyes to her and motioned to the couch once more. "It is a very long story. Do you wish to remain standing for all of it?" He pointed to the glasses. "I know all they have given you is water these last weeks. It is not fancy, but this Grotian Berry Juice is very good." He saw the indecision in her eyes and smiled slightly. "You watched me pour it and I have already drank half of my glass. I am still breathing. I promised your mother I would keep you and Danim safe. I will keep my promise to her."

"Why?" Serale asked.

"Because I wish to escape this... all this..." He motioned with his hand. "I wish to escape it all as well. Please... please sit down. My uncle says it is not polite to have a woman stand while you sit, and I do not wish to relate my story to you while standing up."

The tone of his voice made Serale plant her firm ass on the cushions of the couch and Danim joined her a moment later. This was definitely not what she had in mind when he had come for them.

EARTH

CRANAE ISLAND

NETNEWS CHANNEL 65 INTERVIEW WITH CROWN PRINCESSES OF THE UNION

1015 HRS, EST

Me'alla watched them as they walked in front of her holding hands and leading her along the outdoor patio until they were facing the four dragons, two of which did not appear to be fully grown. She saw where the four chairs had been set up in front of where the dragons sat, as well as the three chairs for her and her crew. She could see several Durcunusaan on the edges of the patio, including the four female heads of their details watching from just inside the double doors leading out. Caydren and Cinol sat between Anthar and Majeir, their bodies smaller, but not by a great deal.

"...is the patio obviously." Sadi was speaking. "And these are our Bonded Brothers and sisters." Sadi moved immediately to where Caydren rested, her hands reaching up to touch his huge muzzle and bringing her forehead to his scales. Me'alla watched as Ne'Veha, Carisia and then Lu'ria Leonidas did the same thing.

Me'alla's eyes were wide as she watched Sadi and Ne'Veha interact with the two smaller dragons. "Forgive me Princess Sadi... no one... no one is aware that you and Princess Ne'Veha have bonded with dragons! May... may I ask when this happened?"

Sadi turned back to her, keeping her hands on Caydren's muzzle. "It happened yesterday actually." She spoke. "It was quite the surprise for *SirsanGai* and I... but what a wonderful surprise it was."

Ne'Veha nodded her head as she leaned close to Cinol and placed her cheek against his cool scales. Carisia was standing beneath Anthar's head, her hand stroking the underside of his jaw as she knew he loved so much. Lu'ria stood beside Majeir simply stroking the scales along her side. With Elynth gone, Majeir was the oldest by eighteen months, and she felt it her duty to be something of a leader. It also fit perfectly with Lu'ria's somewhat detached emotions to all of this Netnews coverage. Drow by their very nature were exceptionally private and while she was still learning to be more open because she was now a Princess of the Union, it was not an event that would happen overnight.

"A glorious surprise and blessed gift." Ne'Veha echoed Sadi's words, the happiness in her voice obvious to anyone who could hear her.

Sadi turned back to look at Me'alla. All of them looked beautifully stunning Me'alla thought to herself. Sadi wore an uncomplicated violet sundress that clung to her figure like a second skin and made her jangle

green eyes stand out. Ne'Veha wore a simple tight royal blue jumpsuit and Carisia and Lu'ria had changed into tight fitting near matching khaki colored jumpsuits. It appeared none of them were in the least bit shy about their lush figures and Me'alla knew the ratings of this surprise interview would be very high just from all the young men who would watch to view their Princesses and wish they were Androcles Leonidas. Sadi motioned to the chairs set up for them. They were comfortable, cushioned chairs with metal frames.

“Please... sit down.” Sadi told her.

Me'alla looked at her, once more surprised. “We will not go inside and receive a tour of the villa?” She asked.

“This is our home.” Sadi spoke gently. “We agreed to do this interview... but only to a point. We will not share our home with the public. Some things must remain private to us and our home is one of them.”

“How you live.” Me'alla spoke. “How you live... what you do? These are things people are interested in.”

Ne'Veha stepped up beside Sadi. “Let them stay interested.” She spoke. “The inside of our home is not open to the public.”

“The King and Queens have given many interviews from within the walls of the Royal Villa and the palace on Apo Prime.” Me'alla spoke.

Sadi nodded. “We are not the King and Queens.” She stated plainly. “Androcles is our husband and mate and he is very private. And we cherish our privacy as well. He will not allow our private lives to become public knowledge and as his wives and mates we will not go against him in that regard. We like our privacy as well as I said.”

“Not to mention he would be very angry with us if we did this without first consulting him.” Ne'Veha said.

Carisia chuckled softly. “The punishment would be worth it though.” She said with a seductive glance at Lu'ria.

Lu'ria leaned close to Carisia. “You are so correct *Enylarcopri*.” She said softly. “Having his tongue explore every inch of our bodies is such delicious punishment.”

Sadi canted her head from side to side with a smile. “It would be very interesting.” She said with a smirk to them.

Me'alla couldn't help but grin as well as she motioned to her crew to sit down and she occupied one of the chairs as Sadi and the others sat. She noticed they reached for and took each other's hands after sitting down. She leaned forward. “I guess the first question I have is are the rumors that the Prince has also taken a wife and mate of the recently discovered Vanari species true?”

“Caliria returned home to her world to finish some projects she was involved in.” Sadi answered. “But to answer your question... yes it is true.”

“Will she be returning soon?” Me'alla asked.

“She will return when she is finished.” Sadi spoke. “We love her and we miss her, but she is also the daughter of Vanari Regents and she has tasks to complete to help her father.”

“Information on the Vanari is mostly speculation.” Me'alla said. “Can you perhaps tell us more about them? And also... this Protectorate of Lycavorians that has been discovered just recently. Rumors say that this Protectorate is quite large and that a merger of this Protectorate as they are called and the Lycavorian Union is very close to happening.”

Sadi glanced quickly at Ne'Veha and then to Carisia and Lu'ria. She turned back to Me'alla. “Me'alla... your Netnews channel and many others have been clamoring for this type of interview for months. It is said Androcles is too private... that nothing is known about him. He gave three hours to you and others not so long ago and now we are here willing to give you more. However... we are still Crown Princesses of the Union... and we will not discuss the workings of what may or may not be happening with newly discovered species and government contacts. If you wish these things, I suggest you request them from the Prime Minister's office and we can end this interview right now.” Sadi rose to her feet quickly as did the others.

Should I burn them sister! Caydren announced.

Majeir's head snapped around to look at him. *Caydren! No! You will not!* She exclaimed even as Anthar chuckled within Mindvoice.

Why? Caydren asked. *They ask questions Sadi does not want to answer.*

That is what they do Caydren. Anthar told him.

Then they are stupid. Cinol chimed in.

Cinol! Ne'Veha exclaimed but with a smile on her beautiful face.

Sadi and the others laughed softly and she turned to look at Caydren. *No... my beautiful Bonded Brother. Burning them is definitely out of the question.* She told him.

Sadi turned back to Me'alla to see she had risen as well. Me'alla stepped forward. "I did not mean to offend any of you Princess." She spoke.

"No offense was taken Me'alla." Lu'ria spoke now. "There are just some things that we will not discuss. Now... or in the future."

Me'alla looked at the first Drow Princess of the Union. "I assume your dragons said something to you that was humorous?"

Sadi grinned. "It is probably better if you did not know." She answered.

Me'alla turned back to Sadi. "I really... I came with a prepared set of questions given to me by my Channel Manager. This interview was offered so quickly that it is a standard set of questions that we did not think to change. I am... I am at a loss." Me'alla touched her finger to her ear as her implant chirped.

"You are lead on this Me'alla." The voice of her human Channel Manager echoed in her head. ***"It's your interview. You have free reign."***

Me'alla took her finger away and looked back at Sadi and the others. "May we start again?" She asked. "How long do we have with you?"

Sadi and the others returned to their chairs. "A few hours at least." Sadi said. "We actually like talking about Andro. We talk about him all the time."

Me'alla smiled as she sat back down. "Then... then without revealing anything that is too sensitive... could each of you convey how Prince Androcles managed to have all of you fall in love with him? What he did to win your hearts?"

Ne'Veha smiled. "Ah... that is easy. He is the most delicious man alive." She stated proudly.

All of them laughed softly and nodded at Ne'Veha's words. Sadi squeezed her hand and looked at Me'alla. "How did Andro win our hearts?" She said softly. "*SirsanGai* is very right in that respect... but there is so much about Andro he does not show to others. I fell in love with him during that time of unrest on the Royal Island. Just before The Purge began. He was only eight months old and his scent... it... well... it swept me up that very first night. I... Andro is so very different. He was born fully aware you know. Aware of everything that was happening around him. He bonded with Elynth while Aricia still carried him within her womb. Even to this day no one understands how... only that it happened. Some do not believe it... but we know the truth. We can see it inside his mind whenever we swim within his thoughts. He would speak through her... through Mindvoice and his Etheric abilities. He..."

SOLMAR

KAVALIAN MAIN BASE

WESTERN SETTLEMENT

1049 HRS, EST

"...did this is extraordinarily skilled General." The Kavalian doctor told him.

Azlenr looked at where Byka and Kameka stood to his side, Kameka slightly behind the two Generals in a show of respect and command. "Explain." Azlenr spoke turning back to the man.

"The entry wounds are all very precise and executed with considerable strength behind them. Far more than a Bontawillian would be able to exhibit." The doctor turned to the body on the table behind him. He had shaved the fur away from the single three inch long gash in the Puma Bane soldier's chest. "This one died from a single sword thrust at an eighteen degree upward angle. I estimate the attacker was just over six feet tall. The thrust perforated his right lung, both his kidneys and then went clean through his heart. He was more than likely dead before his body hit the ground." He turned back to Azlenr and drop his hands to the pockets of his

jumpsuit. “I was unable to obtain any microscopic shavings from the blade but that is not surprising with Union weapons.”

“Why?” Azlenr asked.

“I’m not very well versed in the process of...” The doctor began to answer.

“Union bladed weapons are now made almost exclusively with the Dragon Armor metal they discovered some two decades ago.” Kameka spoke suddenly.

Byka turned to face his daughter. “Meka!” He hissed.

Kameka lowered her head quickly knowing she had broken protocol. “Forgive me Generals” She said softly.

“No Byka... it is alright. Kameka... what do you know?” Azlenr asked her.

Kameka looked at her father who nodded his head. She turned back to Azlenr. “It is the result of the forging process General. The blades are nearly unbreakable and the forging process is extremely precise. The blades are folded over five hundred times and after each fold it is sharpened by hand to razor like exactness. When the folding process is finished it is then reinforced with defined laser sharpening so that it never loses its edge. While their Nehtes are mass produced, each sword and hand knife is specifically made for the individual. There are two known Blade Masters within Union space. The oldest is an elf... Nehtes. Their spears are named after him. The second is an Acamarian surprisingly. She is this Nehtes student. Or was. They work together. Nehtes handles the folding while the Acamarian handles the sharpening process.”

Azlenr shook his head. “Where did you learn all this Kameka?” He asked surprised. As long as they had been friends, Azlenr would never refer to Byka’s children by their rank.

Kameka looked at her father once more and Byka nodded. “Show him Meka.”

Azlenr’s eyes moved between them. “Show me what?”

Kameka reached behind her and tugged gently on a small covering at the small of her back. Her hand closed around the matte black pommel of the Shakur fighting knife she wore strapped under her harness. She withdrew the blade slowly, and brought it around in front of her. She uncurled her fingers and held it in her palm. “I... I took it from a vampire Major who carried it. How he got it I do not know. It is a Drow fighting knife General. I have carried it since...”

Azlenr met her eyes as he took the knife from her hand. “You killed him?”

Kameka nodded her head. “He was able to sneak into our defensive perimeter around our aircraft. I discovered him planting explosives on our transports. He was not particularly skilled and it makes me wonder how he got this blade. Drow do not give them up unless they are dead.”

Azlenr twisted the blade in his hand expertly and realized that Kameka must have had it adjusted to fit her for it was heavier in the pommel by a about a gram if he was correct. “Is it possible to get the formula for their Dragon Armor from this blade?”

Byka shook his head. “Meka brought it to me right away when she realized what it was. I had my people run a battery of tests on the metal. The forging process obliterates this possibility because it uses such high heat. My people tell me the formula for the dragon armor would no longer be the same after being subjected to this. Without the exact formula... nothing would work.”

Azlenr looked once more at Kameka. “How did you discover this information Kameka?”

She looked slightly embarrassed but met his eyes. “Access to the Union Net Channels was not restricted until just recently General.” She answered. “There was much to discover if you had the time and patience to search their Extranet.”

Azlenr smiled and held the blade out for her to take back. “So it would seem.” He said. “I wish others would be as intuitive as you Kameka.” He spoke as she took the weapon and returned it to its spot under her harness. He looked at Byka. “This only confirms what you believed at the site. This was conducted by a highly skilled team of *Durcunusaan*.”

Byka nodded. “I don’t see any other possibility.”

The doctor lifted his hand. “There is something else General.” He spoke. “Something that I have never seen before.”

Azlenr nodded. “Go on.”

“I should probably show you.” He stated motioning for them to follow him. He led them to the rear of the building where he pulled back the sheets on two Puma Bane Troops killed in the attack. “These two were

not killed by a bladed weapon, nor a projectile weapon of any design I have ever come across.” He moved to the other side of the table where one body rested and he pointed to the upper left portion of the troop’s chest. There was a fist size hole clean through his flesh that allowed them to look through his body to the table beneath him. “As you can see, the edges of this wound are very clean. The wound itself was instantly fatal... his upper thorax perforated instantly and his clavicle and sternum destroyed by something moving with more than seven hundred newtons worth of force. You can see how his bone has been fused around the wound. The arteries and veins as well.”

“Heat?” Azlenr asked.

The Kavalian doctor shook his head. “It’s not something I have ever seen General. Not heat though for then it would be blackened and burned. This is some sort of energy that has no heat. It is the same with the second Puma Bane troop. The wound is clean and punched through his entire body obliterating his spine and most of his internal organs.”

Azlenr looked at Byka. “A new weapon?”

“No noise was heard Azlenr.” Byka said. “A firefight... even a single weapon would have been heard by someone. Notice was only taken when they did not report in.”

“How many ground engagements have we had with the Lycavorians Byka?” Azlenr asked.

“To my knowledge... only four. The outpost that was destroyed within the Erebus Expanse, our forces on Iraruzu, the attack against Central Command and Marshall Pusintin’s encounter with them on Enurrua.” Byka answered. “That does not include the attack on their colony by that fool Qurot twenty-six years ago.”

“Pull every bit of intelligence from all of those engagements.” Azlenr spoke. “All of it. Have your Intelligence people moved to the main base here. I will do the same. I want them pouring over every scrap of information from those four battles. I want to know if this has been seen before.”

Byka nodded his head. “As you order.” He spoke.

“I want additional DAGGER patrols up within the next hour. Have them range out two hundred kilometers from each settlement in every direction.” Azlenr spoke. “We may get lucky and see something from the air.”

“They could have anti-air weapons.” Byka said.

Azlenr shook his head. “How? We detected no ships in the system when we arrived. Even if they were Shrouded... who in their right mind would remain on this planet to confront us?” He looked at Byka. “No... this has to be an isolated unit of Durcunusaan who were here for something else. I want to question the vampire soldier that Marsin captured. We...”

All of them turned when Makali rushed in out of breath. Azlenr straightened up. “Makali what is wrong?” He asked.

“General... we just received a report that Major Marsin has executed nearly fifty civilians in reprisal for the attack on his team.” Makali stated.

“I gave no such orders! My orders were not to punish the civilians!” Azlenr screamed. “Where? Where is he?”

“The settlement to the south of us here.” Makali answered.

“Fuck!” Azlenr screamed as he strode for the door. “Byka... bring your security team! Meka will fly us!”

CHAPTER FOUR

AUSTROVA

HOME OF COREN RE MYDALA

CAPITAL CITY OF MYDALA

SOUTHERN BANKS OF KONABI RIVER

FEBRUARY 4TH, 0745, EST

Coren Re Mydala stood before the huge glass window that overlooked the Konabi River and the huge patio built above the river connecting to his home. His home was ten kilometers outside of the capital city on twenty square kilometers of his family's land. It was the same home he had been born and raised in. The same home that his children had been born in and now it was the same home they had returned to as adults. Something that, not so long ago, Coren had feared he would never see.

Coren stared at the many river darts that scooted along the surface of the watercourse as Vanari enjoyed themselves or began their long treks beside the river banks on their way to work in the city. The river was nearly a kilometer wide here, and in the distance along the winding banks he could see several other homes of the wealthy Vanari who lived in them. Wealth and power. Two things that had almost torn his life asunder Coren knew. Two things that had nearly taken from him all that he had ever cared for. He turned from the window and looked at Arduri, Caliria and Nirilo sitting among the many comfortable couches and chairs speaking animatedly with each other. The stunning Lycavorian female sat beside Nirilo, her slim hand on his thigh. All of the years that had passed him by and only in these last six weeks had he truly learned who his children were inside. Coren turned back to window and thought of Devra. He had loved her once, and she had loved him. His lust for more had pushed her away and eventually led to their break. He was happy for her now, very happy. She had found someone who treated her as she should be treated. As she deserved to be treated. He didn't love her anymore... if he ever truly did to be honest with his emotions... but his respect and admiration for her had pushed all of his darker feelings away. Devra had done what he should have done many years ago.

Coren Re Mydala had seen things in the past six weeks that had called into question all that he had ever believed. Call into question his false beliefs and then shattered them upon a mountain of legitimacy and reality. Everything he had ever believed had been dashed apart to be filled with truth and knowledge. The old Coren Re Mydala would have dismissed this, but the new Coren Re Mydala had had his eyes opened to the truth and he had embraced it wholly. He turned back to look at his children once more. Naesta was not among them, electing to remain with those she had discovered and now loved, but he had spoken to her just last week as he had several times since returning. She was happier than he had ever seen her, and Coren knew it was because of what she had found. The Spartan Joci was a terrifying visage to say the least with his ebony skin and dreadlock hair, but his devotion to his daughter was just as intense as his devotion to his first mate Ceuma as well. He looked forward to meeting them in person for their love for his daughter and Naesta's for them was something that no one could deny.

Arduri was no different. Her skin reflected her happiness in what she had discovered for it was more blue than he had ever seen it and everyone knew the bluer a Vanari's skin got only showed the happiness flowing within them. Denali Leonidas treated her as a precious gem, no different than how he treated Lisisa. Watching Arduri and Lisisa together with him could be inspiring and also very humorous. Finally meeting the Lycavorian female that had so entrapped his son's heart was a blessed moment. Jodae was a vision with reddish/blond hair and dazzling green eyes. The love she had for Nirilo was very real and on display the moment he met her. He did not think it was possible for a Lycavorian female to be attracted to a Vanari, something Jodae proved wrong within moments of meeting her. Amazingly she and Coren had hit it off within moments and ten minutes after meeting her, Jodae had Coren convinced beyond any doubt that her love for Nirilo was genuine and complete.

And finally... there was Caliria.

As his eyes fell upon her Coren felt a momentary pang of intense guilt sweep through him. He dismissed it just as quickly for Caliria had forgiven him completely for all the years he had denied her and she demanded he did not speak of it again. It was a strength that his oldest daughter possessed that Coren did not think he was capable of.

“This is a future of our making now papa.” She had told him. “And this future has no desire for the sins of our past to reside within it.”

Caliria was right of course and Coren Re Mydala had wrapped his arms around that just as wholeheartedly as she now had. Caliria had changed so much in the last weeks and Coren knew it was due in large part to her constant companion and now very close friend Paga. The female Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* officer had been just the anchor Caliria had needed to climb from her abyss of humiliation, questions, shame

and regret. Even as she had helped them to plan, Caliria had immersed herself in the data library onboard the *ARCHDEMON*, learning all there was to learn about the Lycavorian people and especially the young man who had so captured her essence. She had been training every day with Paga, her body becoming lean and muscular and her mind no longer fearing anything. Her reborn confidence bubbled forth every waking moment. She had taken to wearing the coral red pendant that shimmered in the sunlight, the jewel resting on the simple silver chain and dangling between her full breasts in view of everyone. He did not know what symbol the pendant represented and he had been meaning to ask Denali. It was a question he would pose to him this morning as his eyes caught Denali's large form move from the kitchen area of his home sharing a joke with one of Coren's trusted employees.

Denali had spent considerable time with Caliria these past weeks and Coren knew that she was learning when she was with him. Learning of history and culture and about so many other things, including the man she desperately wanted to feel wrap his arms around her. Coren also knew Denali was helping her to refine and control her new Mindvoice abilities for he had seen her do many things that no Vanari could do. If there was ever a Vanari that was moving into the future with no doubts, a Vanari that could be called a Lycavorian in her heart, it was his daughter. She loved Androcles Leonidas and the others with every breath she took. What had happened between her and the Eridiani Franklin just after returning to Austrova had been a colossal mistake. It was also mostly Coren's mistake, for his actions had been the main contributing factor to Caliria's confusion and pain when she had returned to her homeworld. She had been clinging to the ideals he had espoused for so long that it had fought an intense battle within her about how she should feel. Whatever Paga had told her or shown to her, Caliria was very different. She was a Princess now... a Princess of the Lycavorian Union... and the times he had gone to the ship with her he saw this reflected in the actions of the men and women on that ship towards her.

Coren sipped his juice once more as Denali came up to him by the window. Denali Leonidas was unlike any Lycavorian he had ever met. Coren could sense there was a darkness within this young man, much like the one within his brother Androcles, yet they controlled it and embraced it as part of who they were. Denali Leonidas was humorous and playful, but Coren knew that he was also extremely intelligent and he had already witnessed what Denali could do if he was angry and was pressed too hard. Like his brother he wielded a power that Coren did not really understand, and while he was no where near as strong as his brother with this power, Coren doubted even the vaunted Vanari Cadre Commandos could stand against this young man for very long.

"This reminds me of the Evrotas River that runs through Sparta." Denali spoke sipping his mug of coffee. "Peaceful and contemplative."

Coren turned fully and looked out over the river once more nodding his head. "There have been many mornings when I have stood here and just absorbed the beauty of it." He said. He looked at Deni. "Dyack was picked up ten minutes ago by Dutkne and his detail. They were able to escape notice. He will arrive shortly."

Denali nodded. "It will be interesting to see what the Eridiani told him." He said.

Coren took a deep breath. "Denali I must..."

Deni turned and looked at him. "No." He stated simply. "Caliria told me you might try to apologize but I'm sure she already told you what I would say."

Coren glanced back to Caliria and then returned his eyes to Denali. "Yes she did."

Deni nodded his head. "Then listen to her sir. She is Andro's wife and mate now, a Princess of the Lycavorian Union, but that does not make her any less your daughter. And that makes her happier than you know, especially now. Your strength is now hers, and Arduri's. My people do not believe in dwelling in the past Coren Re Mydala. Your eyes have been opened and your actions since discovering what you have are all the apology we will ever need. Let the past stay where it is intended. In the past."

"Will your brother see it that way?" Coren asked him. "He... he still frightens me in many ways."

Denali chuckled softly. "Hell... you aren't alone there... he frightens everyone." He said. "When you meet our father you will see where he gets it from."

"These last weeks have been enlightening to say the least." Coren spoke looking out the window. "I can't believe I actually believed what that gypsy woman told me so many years ago. That I let all this happen because of what she said. I... I almost lost my children."

Denali looked at him contemplatively. "Maybe you just misinterpreted what she said sir." He spoke.

Coren looked at him. "What do you mean?"

“Perhaps when she said you would lose all that you cared for she really meant that you would awake to see that all you cared about before no longer mattered.” Denali told him. “The power and the wealth and the influence. Perhaps she meant that you would eventually see things differently when compared to what truly mattered to you. The love of family, of friends, that everything else would pale in comparison to that.”

Coren stared at him for a long moment. “I must admit I never thought of it in that context Denali.” He said finally. Coren smiled at him as his spirits were boosted even more. “Not until this very moment. You are right!”

Denali smiled. “Glad to see I am. Lisisa says I’m never right.”

Coren looked at him with wide eyes. “Well... you are this time young man.” He stated. “There really is nothing you would not do for her. And for my daughter. Is there?”

Denali glanced back and let his dark eyes fall on Arduri and her petite form. Like Lisisa, her body was a power packed temple as far as he was concerned. When they were together he found his stamina increased and he could not get enough of either of them. Her white blond hair was shiny and long and her scent filled his mind and aura just as much as Lisisa’s. He turned back to Coren. “I would not be who I am without them.” He answered softly. “I fought what I felt for her at first you know; Lisisa didn’t but I did. I finally realized she was meant for me... for Lisisa and I... and we for her. By a power much higher than us. When I finally recognized that, I embraced it. There are not many times when my people can resist what our blood calls for us to do sir. It’s just not part of who we are.”

“Will Androcles forgive her?” Coren asked softly.

Denali looked back at Caliria and then turned his eyes back to Coren. “My brother may be many things sir, but he is no fool. Caliria is just as much a part of him as Sadi or Ne’Veha or Carisia or Lu’ria. He made a mistake letting her return here.” Deni held up his hand when Coren was about to reply.

“Mistake?” Coren gasped. “He...”

“Wait... before you comment let me explain something. Andro is... he is closest to his instincts Coren... more so than any of us. A large part of the reason for that I believe is because our mother carried him for several months in her womb and he was fully aware of all around him. He had bonded with Elynth and he could see with her eyes. He could see how our father acted with our mothers. The instinctive emotion and sense of purpose. My father did not follow his instincts once and he almost lost our mother. Andro may try to make others believe he is not like our father, but they are so much alike it is scary to see them together sometimes. He made the same mistake as our father.”

“I don’t think I understand.” Coren said.

Denali met his eyes. “Andro let her go because of you.” He said. “He thought it might be a way to show you that we were different from what you believed. Had he followed what his instincts told him, he would not have made that decision. Caliria would have remained with him on Earth until her mind and emotions were clear. She knows she is meant to be with him sir, she’s known since she began having the dreams while still a prisoner. She told me that during one of our talks.”

“So what happened *is* my fault in a way.” Coren said softly. “Her pain at thinking she has lost him is my fault.”

Denali shook his head quickly. “No... not really. Everything happens for a reason Coren. If Caliria had not returned with us... I doubt things would have taken place as they have. Your eyes would not have been opened and we would not be working towards our goals in the way we are now.”

“If she had remained, what we are working towards would never have been revealed to me. To us.” Coren said.

Denali shook his head. “Are you so sure? Perhaps not in the way it has happened, but it would have come to pass regardless.” He said. “Our two peoples were meant to be friends and allies. I firmly believe that now.” Deni said. “And I will honor my brother’s word to you when it comes to the Eridiani and the OSG.”

“It just seems...” Coren looked at him. “The more we discover... the more time I spend around you and Dutkne... it seems that this is something that should have happened long ago. It is so familiar to me, working beside you, and yet I know it has never happened before now.”

“Andro believed that the High Coven and Lycavorian Union were always meant to be friends and allies. The path our peoples took to reach that goal is not the one that should have been followed... but the end result was the same. I believe it is no different than what is happening now between us and the Vanari.” Denali looked

out over the river. “I would not worry about what will happen Coren. Andro is stubborn as a Folcani Wood Beetle... but I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if he already knows and feels that what happen with Caliria is his fault. Someone or something will eventually kick him in the *mida* and make him realize that. Probably Sadi. You’ll see when he gets here.”

Coren’s head lifted when he heard the Skycar beginning to land. “Then we must insure when he gets here that my people do not throw their future away by dismissing him.”

Denali nodded. “That would be a good thing.”

“...were surprised that I had suddenly become so interested in such things but when I explained to them the reasons we came up with they were finally convinced.” Dyack spoke as he sat on the couch next to Coren and Dutkne.

“So there is no rationale to think they might suspect anything?” Coren asked.

Dyack looked at him. “Unless they have learned how to hide the adrenalin dump into their bodies when they lie... no.” He glanced at Denali. “What you schooled me to look for was exactly what I saw and smelled Denali.” Dyack turned back to Coren. “They do not realize that my people are Lycavorians that simply can not shift our forms. I don’t believe anyone realizes that or what it means and that is what has made it advantageous for us in the past. We have the same skills as our Lycavorian brothers and sisters, the enhanced senses and our healing factors, albeit we have not used them to the extent of Denali and his faction of Lycavorians. We drew away from the instincts that the wolf within us provide to our people because we can not shift. That was a mistake, and one I intend to begin rectifying as soon as I am able. Teaching me what to look for in their scents was just the first step.”

“So what are the details?” Deni asked.

“They most definitely have contacts within your government Coren.” Dyack spoke looking at him. “It only took them a week to confirm the information I gave to them that three of our future trade contracts with the Vanari were being carefully weighted heavily in favor of the Vanari and I was not pleased with that. This also served to convince them that I was genuine in my interests.”

“I knew nothing of this Dyack.” Coren spoke quickly. “Not until Caliria and Arduri discovered the details.”

Dyack shook his head. “I can not hold this information against you Coren.” He told him. “This was not your doing. Thankfully for us it was the perfect excuse for me to turn to the Eridiani for future business.”

Deni nodded. “Just as they had planned all along.” He said.

Dyack nodded. “They knew we would not be happy about these trade agreements or the terms and it would force us to look elsewhere to move our products. Conveniently the Eridiani and the OSG would be ready to just step right in. This would give them a conduit into our government and also allow the OSG to begin trying to establish another outlet for their slavery ring of Vanari females.”

“Surely your government and those in our government who are not involved would see that the sudden increase of Vanari females on your home planet as something not entirely legal Praetor.” Caliria spoke now.

“Unfortunately Caliria, there is a sizeable underground black market on Lentani.” Dyack admitted with some embarrassment. “Items that I and other Praetors before me have forbid our people to have. Mainly weapons and different kinds of drugs. This same criminal underground would undoubtedly be the ones to participate in the buying and selling of your females. There is a substantial demand for the Alkay that your females secrete from their pores Caliria. More than I believe the Vanari realize. You... you more than anyone should know that.”

Caliria met his eyes and nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“My security forces are aware of the existence of this Black Market and they destroy different cells whenever they are found, but it runs deep within the social castes of my people and it has for hundreds if not thousands of years. To stamp it out completely would require far more resources than I have.” Dyack said. “And as much as it truly pains me to say... there could be men and women very close to me that are involved in this who would not look kindly on me trying to destroy it.”

“Your honesty now only reinforces your commitment to ending this sir.” Denali told him. “It’s why Andro and I agreed to allow Lisisa to return to Earth with your mate and a political delegation.”

Dyack looked at him and nodded. “I fear that may bring unknown troubles as well when it is discovered, especially with those in control of the Rothryn Science Academy, but it needed to be done.” Dyack waved his hand. “We will deal with that when the time comes. Now we must end this slavery of the Vanari before it becomes worse than it is. A general destabilization of their government is not good for anyone in the Beta Quadrant, including my people.”

Dutkne moved from the couch behind Arduri now. “I have my internal security people shadowing those within the Protectorate that we know are involved in this. The surveillance has revealed three more senior members of my government that are indirectly involved.”

“What does indirectly mean Dutkne?” Arduri asked as he moved and sat beside her.

Dutkne shook his head as he handed the data pad to her to review. “They do not provide material support but their positions within my government allow them to pass different bills and maneuver appropriations that ultimately help the OSG in their goals.”

“And they do this willingly?” Coren asked.

Dutkne nodded his head. “All of them are making quite a bit of credits and then securing those credits in accounts outside Protectorate space. There is also reason to believe there may be quite a few Vanari females being held by these men and women in secure locations on our homeworld and other planets within Protectorate space. I have my people trying to discover if this is true so we can rescue them when we decide to move. We’re also going to go after their assets... mainly within the Enverr Dominion.”

“The Enverr?” Arduri gasped.

Dutkne nodded again. “Yes... I was surprised as well. The Enverr do not have the most lawful or trusting society, however their banking restrictions are nonexistent and it is easy to hide credits there. For a price of course.”

“Lawful? That is a kinder word than I would have used Dutkne.” Coren spoke moving to sit beside Caliria.

Dutkne nodded. “True enough.”

“Bad people I take it?” Deni asked.

Coren looked at Deni now. “They are nothing more than a collection of rogue mercenary groups and clans who have formed a pseudo government of affiliation, albeit a very large one.” He watched Caliria pour more juice into his mug and he smiled lovingly at her before turning back to Deni. “I dare say they are more than a match for the OSG in many ways, however most of them are extremely violent and secretive in their actions and they refuse to do business with the OSG.”

Dyack nodded his head. “If they ever got smart and pooled their combined resources they would be a formidable force.”

“Why haven’t they?” Deni questioned.

“The infighting between the Clan leaders.” Coren replied. “There are hundreds of clans... perhaps thousands... we don’t know for sure because we have never attempted to establish relations with them. All of them with their own ideas of how to do things. Blood Feuds between the clans is a daily occurrence. They do not trust each other. They don’t trust anyone for that matter.”

“We have encountered them outside the borders of Protectorate space on several different occasions.” Dutkne told him. “The encounters usually end up being hostile. They are always claiming territory that either does not belong to them or is considered free space. Thankfully they do not possess the level of technology to stand for very long against any of us. They usually avoid most areas where military ships are active and try to target civilian transports and colonies.”

“The Rothryn have conducted several joint operations with the Vanari fleet to punish them for one transgression or another.” Dyack said with a nod. “As Dutkne said... their ships are mainly small and underpowered. They can not stand against several cruisers of any kind and when we have met them on the ground, between our forces and the Vanari Cadre Commandos, we quickly destroyed them.” Dyack looked across the table at Dutkne. “Dutkne... could these people within your government be passing them information or materials?”

“It’s possible... but we’ve seen no sign of that.” Dutkne replied honestly. “Most of our military advancements, weapons and engines, have been localized and compartmentalized as Andro calls it. It is something my grandfather was very adamant about; even more so after he discovered Shiria had given many such technological advances to Andro’s branch of our people on Earth. While the Union had Flatspace technology because of the Pralors who settled on Lycavore, they did not implement it with their Shi Viskas until the rebellion began in. Shiria gave this technology to those on Earth, something my grandfather was not happy about when he discovered it. Ever since then we have been brutally protective of any military project we worked on. Very few men and women knew of them while they were being worked on and once they came online fully it was too late to profit from them since the military controlled the access to them.” Dutkne looked at Coren. “It’s why you did not discover our engine advancements until just recently.”

“Could the Enverr be part of the OSG channels?” Caliria asked. “They may not trust each other but that does not mean they are not working together.”

“Nothing outward that we can tell. At least not from the Protectorate end. Just the credit accounts.” Dutkne said. “There is no way to be sure though as Caliria says.”

“The OSG is more than competent enough not to have to use or associate with the Enverr in any way.” Coren said. “However, I suggest all of us begin to discretely look for any possible associations.”

Dyack nodded. “I agree Coren.” He spoke. “Just to be safe, I will have my people begin a discrete investigation on the Rothryn end. The information that I have reached out to the OSG will find its way to others on Lentani. Those with less than stellar reputations and contacts no doubt.”

“This Barnak person you told me of Dyack?” Coren asked him surprising both Caliria and Arduri. Apparently their father and Dyack had exchanged far more information than they had known of.

Dyack nodded. “Yes.”

“Will they attempt to use this information against you?” Coren asked.

Dyack met his eyes. “I would.” He replied.

Coren nodded his head. “Then we must proceed more quickly and with greater security. I have several contacts within the Vanari Fleets that I trust implicitly. I can give them several communications codes that would allow them to coordinate securely with people you trust Dyack. If these men on your world try to move against you, we will need to get you off your planet quickly under the ruse of some diplomatic mission. At least until the truth is known.” He said.

“My son.” Dyack spoke. “I will inform Kineto. He commands a medium cruiser that I have used in the past for diplomatic transport. It will not look strange if I need to do this. My brother Loro commands our family’s Fleets, but I do not wish to involve him just yet. I need to shield him for the moment until we need him. If we need him.”

Coren nodded. “Androcles will be arriving within weeks. Ardan no doubt plans to spring his little trap on him when he is standing before the entire Board of Regents. That is when it will have the most effect. He will place full blame on him for everything.”

Caliria glanced at her father. “Papa... they will not try to arrest him will they?” She gasped. “Or Deni before he arrives?”

“That would be a singularly stupid thing to attempt.” Dutkne spoke up. “He must know the Protectorate would never allow Deni to be arrested. We would take him offworld before we allowed that.”

“But would they attempt it with Androcles?” Dyack asked. “Very few of your Senior Regents saw the transmission we did Coren. They do not know what this young man is capable of. Attempting to arrest him could set off a change of events that might rapidly spiral out of our control.”

Coren shook his head. “I don’t know. Arden has almost completely ceased speaking with me. I am getting the information from others who are still friendly to me but nothing directly from him.”

Deni looked at him. “That could also mean he’s trying to put distance between you and him in preparation for some type of move against you.”

“Cruor did tell me I would regret shaming him papa. He said he and his father would not let what I did stand.” Arduri stated.

“You shamed no one!” Coren snapped. “You acted just as you were suppose to act! Not one thing you did was outside of our established laws. The family contracts were not signed and completed and no transfers

took place! Eyon Ahn Vernalo and his son can go right straight to hell! Especially since we know they are involved with this.”

Arduri glanced at her sister with a hidden smile in her eyes that only Caliria understood. This was the father both of them had wanted for many years. Now that he had emerged, they were not about to let him go back into hiding. A quick glance to their brother showed that he too felt the same way and no doubt Naesta would be very pleased as well.

Dyack looked up at Deni. “You should increase the security you already have on Coren and the others Denali Leonidas. Arden will not move directly against me because once he discovers my new associations with the OSG he will consider us... friendly. At least to a point.”

Deni nodded. “I’ll see to it.” He said. “What about you?”

“I will be safe for the moment.” Dyack spoke. “Barnak may have twisted one of my sons to his way of thinking but not the two who are most important. I can manipulate Anroth for the time being but he is not stupid. He will eventually discover his mother and sisters have gone to Earth and with Barnak’s contacts he will discover this false ruse I have established with the OSG and the Eridiani.”

“But Kelelm is with your mate and daughters.” Dutkne said.

Dyack nodded his head. “He also insured I would be protected when he left.” He said. “If I feel the need for more I will come to you Denali. Right now we need for me to nurture this new contact with the OSG until we have the evidence we need to expose them all.”

Deni looked at him. “You seem like you are looking forward to this.” He said.

Dyack grinned and looked at Coren who was also smiling. “Oh... I haven’t had this much fun since I was a young man chasing Aleatia along the streets of our city trying to get her to notice me.” He laughed.

“This could get you killed Dyack.” Dutkne spoke with a sobering tone.

Dyack chuckled. “You don’t know how many males were chasing Aleatia at the time.” He answered with a wide smile.

Dutkne and Denali couldn’t help but smile. “That sounds like something my father would say.” Deni spoke with a grin. “When he has the scent of one or more of my mothers in his head there is very little that will deter him. Most people just stay the hell out of his way until he finds them.”

Dyack sat back on the couch. “I truly look forward to meeting your father Denali. And your brother... when he arrives.” He said.

Coren nodded. “As do I.”

Dyack took a deep breath. “We have our people where they need to be. Coren and I will become the focal points in the very near future. I trust your security will not let any of us down young man?” Dyack said looking at Denali.

Denali smiled as well. “That will never happen.” He said.

Dyack nodded. “Then we continue to do what we have been doing and meet back here in one week. Just as we have been.” He looked at them. “What we are doing now will effect the futures of all three of our peoples. We need to get this right and bring them all down together. It will not work otherwise.”

Coren nodded. “And it needs to be after Arden makes his play when Androcles is before the Board. Then he will be vulnerable and we can present everything at once while the entire Board is in session.”

Caliria looked up. “Papa... you do realize what Androcles will do if we don’t succeed?” She asked.

Coren looked at her. “I don’t follow Caliria.”

“Regardless of what Regent Ardan does... if we do not have the information we need by that time, if we can not prove what we are trying to prove... Androcles will sever all ties with the Vanari when Ardan makes his accusations. He will not hesitate for a moment papa.” Caliria said. “He will pull all of our trade agreements and contacts with the Protectorate. All will be lost then.”

Coren looked at Denali and saw Deni nod. “Caliria is my brother’s wife and mate Coren. She has seen inside his thoughts. On this I think we should listen to her.”

Coren turned back to his daughter. “Then we will make sure everything is in order when that time comes.” He told her. “I promise you.”

SOLMAR

SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1120 HRS, EST

Azlenr brushed aside the two Puma Bane guards outside of the building they had taken as their headquarters and stormed into the entrance, Byka, Kameka and Makali right on his heels. Marsin was just turning from talking to a junior officer when Azlenr cleared the entrance.

“Ah General... I am glad you are here.” Marsin stated. “We have new...”

Azlenr’s right fist slammed into Marsin’s jaw like a sledgehammer. Azlenr’s Macoe was a very large man even for a Kavalian, fully six foot five and easily two hundred and forty pounds, if not more. He unleashed all of that size and strength on Marsin in a single blow that spun the Puma Bane Commander completely around and dropped him to the floor of the building with stars dancing behind his eyes and pain coursing through his body. The Puma Bane troops from outside and the one Marsin had been talking to immediately dropped into combat stances and began bringing their weapons up. Byka, Kameka and Makali all had their weapons out instantly as Azlenr towered over Marsin.

Byka jammed the barrel of his ARSOC into the closest Puma Bane troop’s chest even as his rifle was halfway up. “Who dies first?” Byka snarled.

“Who commands here dog?” Azlenr screamed down at Marsin. “This is my operation! My command! Now tell your sheep to lower their weapons or I will have all of you butchered where you stand!” Azlenr reached down and grabbed Marsin’s uniform, yanking the man to his feet none too gently. “Do it now!”

Marsin glared at Azlenr with murder in his eyes. Both of his lips had been torn up by his own teeth from Azlenr’s blow. The General’s knuckles were like calloused rocks impacting his face. He had not been hit that hard since his father beat him as a boy for disobeying him. He lifted his hand and wiped the back of his hand across his bloody mouth. There was no way he could get away with killing Azlenr for striking him in front of his men and tarnishing his status. Not with so many witnesses. Even his own men would turn on him out of self preservation if he killed the General. He glanced at his trio of Puma Bane troops.

“Leave us.” He snarled loudly.

Azlenr’s burning eyes did not leave Marsin as the three Puma Bane soldiers lowered their weapons and then quickly departed the headquarters building. At least they were smart enough to not want to get caught in the middle of what was brewing between their commander and the famous Kavalian General. “I will ask you only once more Major Marsin’ Jiate! Who is it that commands this operation?”

“You do General.” He hissed his answer back.

“Yes... I do! And you took it upon yourself to disobey my specific orders not to harm the civilian populous!” Azlenr barked at him. “Explain this to me quickly Major... my tolerance for you is now nearly zero! You know full well what the penalty is for disobeying the orders of a superior in this manner!”

“I was following my orders General!” Marsin snarled back.

“Fifty-three civilians are now dead! Executed in front of countless others by your men!” Azlenr shouted. “I did not give that order Major!”

“No... I did Azlenr.” The new voice spoke calmly and all of them whirled to see Keleru’s face on the monitor that Marsin had been in front of when they entered.

“Prefect?” Azlenr gasped.

“I gave Marsin his orders General.” Keleru stated. “We can not have a civilian populous insurgency beginning after you have only just begun to secure the planet for our use. When he reported to me what happen I gave him permission to execute the civilians to insure this will not continue.”

Azlenr glanced at Marsin with that savage glare. “Did the Major also think to inform you that this attack against his troops was not carried out by civilians Prefect?” He asked turning back to Keleru in the transmission.

“The Major was certain General.” Keleru stated cautiously now. “He told me you... he told me you were hesitating about executing civilians in reprisal to keep this from happening again.”

“Yes... I’m sure that is what the Major told you Prefect.” Azlenr stated. “However, had the Major accompanied me to my medical headquarters, he would now know this attack was not carried out by civilian assets.”

“Who else then?” Marsin snarled.

Keleru blinked within the transmission. “I don’t understand.” He said.

“My Chief surgeon informed me only moments ago that all but two of Marsin’s men were killed by bladed weapons. Swords or *Nehtes*. Two of them had wounds on their bodies that we have as yet been unable to determine what type of weapon was used. My Intelligence people have informed me that the only Union forces that still carry swords are members of their *Durcunusaan*.”

“The *Durcunusaan*?” Keleru snapped coming forward in his chair.

Azlenr nodded. “We also discovered the prints from... from a very large female dragon Prefect.”

“Dragon? Here on Solmar?” Marsin hissed. “Impossible!”

Azlenr looked at him. “Major... as the Prefect is my witness... speak another word and I will remove your tongue from your head!”

“Azlenr there is...” Keleru began.

Azlenr turned back to the monitor. “Prefect... have I ever failed you in the nine hundred years I have served our people as a General under your command? Have I ever failed to secure an objective you gave to me?” Azlenr asked.

“Never.” Keleru answered without hesitation.

“Major Marsin’s and his men executed their part of this mission brilliantly Prefect... but they also killed over four thousand civilians in the process.” Azlenr spoke. “You tasked me with taking this planet and its settlements with as little notice as possible.”

“Yes.” Keleru said.

“The deaths of over four thousand civilians makes that nearly impossible when it is discovered Prefect.” Azlenr stated. “The Bontawillians are not a warring people. They have a small fleet of ships and a militia, but they are not soldiers. When word leaks out, and it will leak out sooner or later when they begin to try and contact this colony, when word leaks out that we have this colony and that many civilians died in the taking of it, what do you think the Union leadership will do?”

“Prefect... the Union will not attempt to retake this...” Marsin began to speak.

“Silence Marsin!” Keleru snarled. “Azlenr... speak to me.”

“We have a Union soldier that was taken by the Major’s men when they secured the settlements.” Azlenr said. “They killed four others that were with him and chased another four into the deep mountain timber before losing contact with them. What the Major did not tell you is that these four Union soldiers killed nearly twenty of his men before falling. Twenty of them Prefect! They were not normal Union troops. They were some sort of special operations team here for relaxation is my guess. The wounds on the bodies of the Major’s men killed last night are consistent with exceptionally skilled warriors that are lethally proficient in the use of swords and spears. At least ten men hit the Puma Bane camp Prefect. Not four. And they had at least one dragon with them. The Bontawillian people do not possess the needed strength or combat skill to kill with such surgical precision. None of them do... no matter how much training they could receive!”

“You... you are telling me there are *Durcunusaan* on Solmar?” Keleru asked him.

Azlenr nodded. “At least ten... probably twice that. General Byka agrees with me.” He said. “I am taking steps to find and neutralize them Prefect... but killing civilians will not help me accomplish the task you gave to me! It will only incite whoever is out there to conduct more attacks!”

“If they know we will kill civilians in retribution they will stop!” Marsin barked.

“Are you daft Major?” Azlenr shouted at him. “These are Bontawillians! Colonists! Not Lycavorians or elves or vampires. These civilians do not know how to fight! When word finally does get out that we have taken this planet and it is known that we arbitrarily executed civilians, this colony world will jump to the very top of their target lists! Their people will demand it! They will encircle us, cut off any escape route that we have and then slaughter us as you and your men slaughtered those civilians! Any hope we may have had of maintaining this colony as a forward base will be lost!”

“Then we will hold them hostage!” Marsin snarled.

Azlenr ignored him and looked at Keleru. “Prefect... I have the ground forces necessary to secure this planet. I need ships to protect us from Union forces when they do arrive.”

“The union is stretched even thinner than we are Azlenr.” Keleru spoke. “And we replace our clone troops by the thousands every day. Civilian casualties are not a concern of mine at this moment. Your operation

is just one of four that we are conducting in order to establish forward bases. We need these bases and if you have to kill a few hundred civilians to do it then so be it. You must use all your options Azlenr'Macoe. You must not fail."

"I do not intend to fail Prefect but executing civilians will not..." Azlenr began to speak but was cut off.

"Major Marsin... your Puma Bane Detachment will refrain from any more civilian executions unless something like this happens again."

"Prefect that is not a good idea." Azlenr spoke quickly. "It could back fire on a colossal scale if executions continue."

"I will not have your men... my men butchered by these Durcunusaan dogs!" Keleru snapped softly. "If this continues then we will show these few Union troops that to remain and continue these attacks is not going to benefit them in the least. It will only spill more civilian blood. Leave the civilians to Major Marsin and you concentrate on securing that colony for our use."

Azlenr bowed his head with a sigh of defeat. "As you order Prefect."

"Marsin!" Keleru snapped seeing the grin on his face within the transmission.

"Prefect!" Marsin barked.

"Major... you are Puma Bane... but you are not above the chain of command. If you ever disobey an order from General Azlenr that does not deal with the civilians on that world I will see to it personally that you and your entire Pride are stripped of their honor and their skins! Is that clear?"

The smirk on Marsin's face had vanished quickly at Keleru's words and he nodded his head. "I understand Prefect."

Keleru nodded. "Make sure you do Major. Make sure you do."

Azlenr glared at Marsin for a long moment, the major not backing down in the least. He lifted his hand and stabbed his finger into Marsin's chest. "You executed the civilians Major... so to keep their rotting bodies from harming our men, you and your Puma Bane troops will collect them and remove the health hazard to the rest of my soldiers!"

Azlenr spun around and marched out of the building, the others following him rapidly to keep up with his long legged stride. He stopped walking halfway to the *DAGGER* and savagely kicked at an overturned barrel as Byka and Makali came up behind him. Azlenr turned and looked at Byka.

"Find them Byka!" Azlenr said. "Find them and kill them before they do something like this again and Marsin murders more innocent civilians!"

Byka nodded. "I'll put my best teams on it my friend." He said. "We'll find them."

"Makali... I want you to assign as many civilians as you can to labor intensive duties." He spoke. "Moving equipment... manual bunker preparations. Things like that. I want them split into three shifts so we can use as many of them as possible."

"General?" Makali asked confused.

"If they are being used for military purposes then there are fewer for Marsin to execute!" Azlenr hissed softly. "I will not be party to helping him or giving him free reign to killing civilians!"

Makali nodded. "It will require we pull line troops to provide guard duty." He said.

Azlenr nodded. "I know. We can spare several companies for this duty from our reserve." Azlenr said. "Make the commanders understand they are there to guard the colonists and not to interact with them in any way. But they are not to use lethal force!"

"I will give the orders sir." Makali spoke.

Azlenr looked around again his eyes taking in the walls of the settlement. "Have all the Puma Bane detachments moved outside the settlement walls Byka. I do not want our men injured if another attack targeting them comes."

Byka met his eyes. "That will not make Marsin happy."

"Fuck him." Azlenr spat. "I will not have our men targeted for killing civilians when they have nothing to do with it."

"Do you think they will attack again?" Byka asked.

Azlenr looked at him. "That depends." He said. Azlenr looked off into the distance beyond the settlement wall once more. "It depends on what type of man leads these troops." He replied. "Pray it is one who reacts with emotion and compassion and not someone who sees that it does not matter in the least."

“What doesn’t matter?” Byka asked.

“Marsin intends to execute civilians for any minor infraction.” Azlenr said. “I could see it in his eyes. Fucking Puma Bane soldiers!” He swore. “If the commander of these Durcunusaan realizes that no matter what he does, civilians will die, he will attack again.” He turned to face Byka. “I want to talk to this vampire.” He spoke. “Let them know I am coming. I want to find out what we are up against.”

“Prefect... I have the ground forces necessary to secure this planet. I need ships to protect us from Union forces when they do arrive.”

“The union is stretched even thinner than we are Azlenr.” Keleru spoke. “And we replace our clone troops by the thousands every day. Civilian casualties are not a concern of mine at this moment. Your operation is just one of four that we are conducting in order to establish forward bases. We need these bases and if you have to kill a few hundred civilians to do it then so be it. You must use all your options Azlenr’Macaoe. You must not fail.”

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“As you order Prefect.”

“Marsin!” Keleru snapped.

“Prefect!” Marsin barked.

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“I understand Prefect.”

Sa'roh touched the control panel on the *STRIKER*'s Chart Table and looked at Andro slowly. They had been able to tap into the communications of the Kavalians with relative ease. The encryption was not very sophisticated among individual Puma Bane Communications devices and taking the different channels from the dead bodies and downloading them to Union COM units had allowed them to scan all of their channels and hear the entire conversation that had just taken place.

“Andro?” Sa'roh spoke.

Andro looked up as Cletus walked back up the ramp of the *STRIKER* and moved to the chart table. “Our team watching the southern settlement just confirmed it.” He spoke softly. “Fifty-three Bontawillians and humans were put up against the outside wall of the settlement and executed. They... they left the bodies to rot where they fell.”

“Nubou!” Andro nearly screamed as he pushed away from the table.

“This Marsin...” Dantio spoke his voice trembling in anger. “I want this man’s *nor* in my hands!”

They watched silently as Elynth moved up next to Andro and lowered her snout beside his shoulder. His arms moved up and encircled her muzzle as much as they were able and his forehead touched her scales.

You must not blame yourself Andro. Elynth spoke softly. *This is not your fault. This man takes pleasure in hurting others. He would have found another way.*

Andro nodded his head keeping his skin in contact with her scales and feeling her soothing presence within Mindvoice fill him. He lifted his head finally. *I can’t allow this to stand sister.*

Elynth nodded her massive head. *No you cannot. What does your Spartan soul call for you to do? Make them know it was a mistake. That they never should have come here.* Andro answered.

Then make it so. She told him.

Andro turned back to the chart table. “How many Puma Bane troops are on the planet Cletus?” Andro asked as he moved back up to the table.

“Near as our people can determine... a reinforced detachment Milord. Twelve hundred give or take. Two hundred and fifty at each settlement and perhaps another three hundred in reserve here at the southernmost settlement.” He answered. “From what we know... this is their standard size when conducting an operation like this. A little smaller than the ones that hit High Coven worlds according to their Intel reports, but large enough against a colony with no real defenses. And they are living up to their reputation. Stone cold killers and nothing more according to High Coven survivors and officers.”

“And this Marsin character?” Andro asked.

“The signal was coming from the southern settlement Andro.” Sa'roh answered that question. “That must be where he has his command.”

“Our long eyes reported that both the generals we saw yesterday afternoon showed up in a hurry.” Cletus said. “That is who was with him when they were talking.”

Andro turned to Sa'roh. “How long before they figure out we can monitor their COMS?” He asked.

Sa'roh shook her head. “I estimate we got hours before someone realizes it. It won't take much Andro. A simple systems check will detect the tap.”

“Then we move now.” He answered. “Where is the smallest contingent?” Andro asked looking at the chart.

Dorian pointed to the northern plains. “This one here.” He answered immediately. “The Northern settlement that sits on the plains. They set up the settlement just at the entrance of the valley that begins at the tip of the mountain range to make use of the river. It's where the ones you killed came from based on numbers.”

“How long will it take our long eyes in the north to get into an overwatch position?” Andro asked.

Dantio looked at Cletus and then back to Andro. “Not more than an hour if they shift and move along this depression. The vegetation is thick enough to hide them until they reach this plateau.”

Andro nodded. “Get them moving.” He spoke. “Two *STRIKERS* Sa'roh. How many can we carry?”

“Not counting you and Elynth, we can carry sixty per bird if we crammed them tight.” She answered.

“Cram them tight then.” Andro said. “Elynth and I will exit here and sweep in from north of the valley. You'll drop our team right on the north edge of the camp after we ghost it. Daio... I want you leading my team. Dorian... you and Dantio take the second team. Exit over the plains and then you and Ryner sweep in from the south at the same time Elynth and I come in from the north. Dantio, drop right on the south edge of the camp. Shi Viskas active and drive north. We'll drive south and meet in the middle.”

“After... after what we just saw Andro, this murdering *ronnus* will kill a lot more of the civilians if we do this.” Sa'roh stated.

“He would find some way to kill more anyway. Not attacking them only gives them more time to dig in and fuck us later.” Andro said. “We need to keep them on edge until Sa'sur and General Vengal arrive with the *Durcunusaan* Division. Then we will drive them out of this fucking sector.”

“What about the civilians Milord?” Haridl asked. “There must be something we can do to keep them safe. Or try to at least.”

Andro looked at Sa'roh. “Can we transmit on their channels with our gear?”

Sa'roh looked at him with a disgusted glare. “Please Andro... I could make it so you can speak to that Kavalian prick Keleru if you want.”

Andro grinned. “He'll get the message soon enough. Copy this transmission of theirs and burst it to Marci and Armetus. They will know what to do with it.”

“Sa'sur's last message was that our Strike Wing had joined with her and they were only waiting for the last parts of the divisions to load out.” Sa'roh told him. “She estimates they'll be back insystem in thirty-four hours.”

They all turned when Vari came running up the ramp.

“Vari?” Andro asked.

“Long eyes from the north and east have reported a large contingent of their *DAGGERS* lifting off from the spaceport loaded with troops. They spread out south and west once airborne and were burning speed.” Vari said.

Andro nodded. "They're looking for us." He said.

"And wasting their time since we aren't even on the same continent." Dorian spat. "They are thinking one dimensional *fervon*. Not outside of the box. Unless these ships begin to move for the ocean then they haven't even thought we could be on another continent. They are sticking with the west and south because the terrain is more agreeable and they don't realize we have our own ships."

"And we'll use that to our advantage until they smarten up." Andro said. "Sooner or later they'll figure out we have transport of our own. And it's only sixty kilometers across the ocean to reach us."

"I'll make sure Captain Trenou has her triage ready to receive any casualties." Sa'roh spoke.

Andro looked at her and nodded. He turned back to the others. "If it wears the uniform of a Puma Bane soldier kill it." He growled. "I don't care if they are kneeling in their own blood and screaming for mercy. Kill them. No prisoners people. No mercy. Once we have secured the settlement we'll load the *STRIKERS* with as many civilians as we can and then start heading back north while Sa'roh brings them back here. Sa'roh?"

"We can drop off and return in under an hour if we stay low and use max thrusters across the ocean." She answered.

Dantio nodded. "We should be able to cover ten kilometers in that time." He said. "If all goes well... they won't even begin knowing something is wrong until you pick up the second group of civilians. By that time they'll have realized this settlement is silent and send someone to investigate. It's close... but we've done tighter ops."

"I'll buy us more time." Andro stated. "We just need to keep the civilians moving as fast as they are able."

They all nodded. Things were about to heat up considerably. They looked up at Andro and Dorian as the two brothers backed away from the table with surprised looks on their faces. Dantio stood up fully.

"Milord? What is it?"

Andro looked at him. "My sister Lisisa and Jeth have entered the system... Dorian!" He gasped.

Dorian nodded his head. "I feel her too. Both of them." He said.

Andro's eyes narrowed. "I feel... someone else is with her." He said softly. "Someone that I..." Andro looked up. "Sa'roh prep a data burst! I can see what she is planning and we need to give guidance to the Captain of her ship! Dorian and I will make contact with her within Mindvoice." Sa'roh didn't hesitate and began moving back to the cockpit.

ULU REAPER

ENTERING SOLMAR SYSTEM

TIME TO SOLMAR COLONY: THIRTY-SEVEN MINUTES

"...go over this one more time." Lisisa was speaking to the group in the landing bay of the *REAPER*. "The *KADEN* will carry the bulk of the Spartan company; the rest will be split up between two *STRIKERS*. I'm holding one in reserve and to act as an escort. Kelelm... you and your people will be on my *STRIKER* with Jeth and I and will go in with Eotharon and the other seven *Durcunusaan* that are accompanying us."

Kelelm nodded his head now dressed in the Mark V ArmorPly body armor and delighting in the ability to extend and retract the additional Dragon Armor. He hadn't stopped playing with it until just recently. "We will help Eotharon to secure a landing zone if it is determine it is needed."

Lisisa nodded. "If I know my brother, he probably has already established some sort of central point and has scouts out watching the Kavalians." She spoke looking at the chart of the planet. "The settlements for this colony were all centrally located within a hundred kilometers of this massive waterfall where they were getting most of their power from. The *REAPER* will remain out of the immediate planetary exclusion zone and we'll go in with our ships. We'll make contact with Andro and then move to his location."

"Why not just move right in?" Kelelm asked.

Lisisa looked at him with a small smile. "The last time a pilot tried to enter my brother's airspace without telling him first, they nearly got their asses blown out of the sky. When they landed he about chewed the poor girl up and spit her out."

Kelelm nodded. "I see." He stated. "I think I'm glad it wasn't me."

Lisisa chuckled. "It was our sister Normya so it wasn't that bad." She answered. "Jeth and I should have been able to contact him within Mindvoice by now... we can feel them but we can't penetrate their shields which tells me something is going on." Lisisa said.

"You would... you would be able to feel and speak with him even from this distance?" Harira asked with surprise in her eyes.

"Feel him yes. Speak with him no. Not unless he and Dorian lower their MV shields. No one but Sadi or one of his other mates would be able to penetrate his shields as high as they are now." Lisisa answered. "If we can sense him, then I know he feels us. He's not contacting us for a reason."

Aleatia looked at her from beside Sehri. "We have only just entered the planetary system Lisisa. We have... we have trouble reaching someone on the other side of our planet using our Etheric abilities and you would be able to speak with him now? That is amazing."

"Unfortunately it's not helping us right now." Lisisa snapped impatiently as she looked at the map on the table.

Sehri trembled just a little as the overwhelming Mindvoice resonance rushed through her and caused warmth to spread through her young body. She shivered in incredible delight as an aura more powerful than anything she had ever felt in her young life, far more powerful than even her own father, greeted her with sincere tenderness and... and desire as it skipped along her shields. The power and aura she sensed could have easily overwhelmed her shields yet it only swarmed around her mind letting her know it was seeking to communicate with her. Sehri didn't hesitate and lowered her shields enough to allow what the aura sought. She gasped softly as her body then reacted in a way it never had before, the nipples of her medium sized breasts becoming instantly hard and aroused, far more than she had ever been able to illicit by her own ministrations. It also caused her scent to spike very high which caused her mother to glance at her with wide eyes and some of the younger *Durcunusaan* troops to shift uncomfortably when they smelled her. The word had already come down however, and Sehri was off limits to any unmated male on the ship for she had already chosen who she would give herself to.

"Sehri?" Aleatia questioned.

"He... Andro says to stand by... stand by for a data burst." Sehri stammered as Lisisa's eyes grew wide and she looked at Sehri.

Lisisa moved away from the portable chart table. "He is... he's talking to you Sehri?" She gasped.

Harira looked at Sehri with wide eyes as well. "How is that possible?" She gasped.

Aleatia gripped Sehri's arms. "Sehri?"

"They are... they are going to mount an attack." Sehri continued her glaucous colored blue eyes wide and expressing sincere delight at what she felt within her. "He says... he says the situation on the surface has changed somewhat and he is sending you a data burst so that you know what he needs you to do." Sehri blinked at her. "He is also very angry Lisisa. I can feel his... his rage."

"At me?" Lisisa asked somewhat worried. She truly did not want to be on the receiving end of a verbal reprimand from her brother.

Sehri shook her head quickly. "No... something the Kavalians... something your enemies have done." Sehri blinked several times again. "He is only a little angry at you."

The internal COM system on the *REAPER* activated and Lunerr's voice filled the landing bay surprising them all.

"Princess... we are receiving a data burst from Prince Androcles's STRIKER on the surface." Lunerr's voice echoed. **"We have updated Intel! Forwarding it to you now. They are preparing to attack a static Kavalian position and..."**

Lisisa winced slightly at the sound of his voice. "Lunerr... route the data stream to the portable Chart Table and then standby!" She barked.

"Wait Lisisa!" Sehri gasped. "He is... he is moving away from the others with your brother and..."

Hello Lisi! Andro and Dorian's voices filled hers and Jeth's minds and this caused Jeth to move his massive bulk closer to her. Lisisa released a loud sigh of relief and gripped the edges of the table as she felt the connection expand to include all those capable of Mindvoicing at a Tier Six level and both her brother's auras

embraced her warmly. She glanced quickly at Aleatia and Harira and saw their eyes wide in disbelief at the clarity of the connection and the incredible focus.

Andro. Dorian. You are... you are safe? Lisisa asked.

Ah... well if your definition of safe is being on a planet full of Kavalians wanting to kill us... sure. Andro answered her flippantly. *We're cozy as hell. Did you bring the popcorn?*

Midaeus! Lisisa spat. *Andro what is going on?*

Lisisa... what are you doing here? Andro asked her. *You are supposed to be escorting the Rothryn delegation to Earth.*

We intercepted Sa'sur's transmissions. Lisisa answered. *You can yell at me later but for now I have another company of Spartans, Jeth and I. What's going on Andro?* She asked him again.

To paraphrase father... things are Fubar arande. Andro told her. *Link your PI into whatever data disc Lunerr is downloading to. We are lifting off in a few minutes so check your PI while you infiltrate. Send all of the Spartans with you to the Alpha site and have them begin prepping additional defensive sites and expanding the perimeter we have already established. Tell your pilots to stay below sensor level and under Shroud until you get there. You'll see where we are heading and I want you and Jeth above us once Dorian and I hit the camp. Burn anything that gets out of our circle Lisi. No prisoners. The civilians, roughly five hundred of them, have all been herded into the main auditorium building in the center of the settlement so friendly fire is not a concern.*

Andro... Lisi began.

What I'm going to do will either work or it won't arande. If it doesn't... there will be time for one Op with our combined force to pull as many civilians off this colony as we can. The rest we will need to leave. Andro told her. *Sa'sur and Vengal will not get here in time for us to save them. There are too many Kavalians on the planet and the Puma Bane Commander is a mean motherfucker.*

And slightly pissed off that we took out ten of his precious Puma Bane troops! Dorian added. *Though the word slightly might be a bit of an understatement.*

Sibfla! Lisisa swore.

Have Lunerr maintain his current position. Andro continued. *If this goes to hell, we'll come to him. And Lisi... they probably have T19s deployed so be mindful of your position above the settlement. Dorian and I will take out as many as we see... just watch your ass. Deni will kill me if you get hurt.*

Yes... and I prefer to continue living since I have only been around a few months now and there is much I would like to experience. Dorian chimed in.

Lisi nodded with a smile at hearing Dorian and feeling how powerful he had become. If she was any judge, these last weeks with Andro and the training he had given him had brought Dorian on a level with her. *Understood. We'll see you in less than thirty.*

Eotharon didn't hesitate once Androcles ended the connection. He spun around and began barking orders at the top of his lungs throwing *Durcunusaan* and regular Spartans into action before the first order died away.

Lisi looked at Kelelm first. "This is not going to be pretty. It's much worse than I thought Colonel. You and your men can tag along to observe but no leaving the *STRIKER* unless we are on the ground and out of the shooting."

Kelelm moved closer. "Three of my men are excellent sharpshooters." He offered. "I know why your brother wishes for you to stop any from escaping his attack. Give us sniper rifles and we can help."

Lisisa shook her head. "This is not your war and I'm not going to involve you!" She hissed.

Kelelm shook his head. "We may call ourselves Rothryn but we are Lycavorian!" Kelelm shouted passionately drawing the attention of many *Durcunusaan* and regular Spartans who were close enough to hear him. "We carry the same blood as you within us! It does not matter to me that we can not shift... we are still Lycavorian! This is now as much our war as it is yours! You can't begin to imagine how long we have waited for this day to come Princess. I will not sit by while other Lycavorians risk their lives! Not when I can act!"

"Kelelm!" Harira barked at him.

Aleatia looked at Sehri quickly and then to Lisisa. "My son is correct Lisisa." She spoke softly. "I know what my mate would do in this instance. We have... we have waited far too long for this day to come to turn our heads the other way while our people die."

“Lady Aleatia... this... these are not our people!” Harira protested.

“Aren’t they Harira?” Aleatia spoke. “We can not shift our forms as they can as my son has said, but that is the only difference between us! That is the only discernible difference! I know Dyack embraced the Prophecy when he saw the results of the DNA tests! This is what he would do without thinking! It is why he was so eager to help Denali and the Protectorate! We have discovered our future Harira!”

“This is not right!” Harira spat. “I can not allow you to do this! We are not warriors!”

“But we are Shaman Master.” Kelelm answered looking at Lisisa evenly. “We are with you Princess!” Aleatia took Sehri’s arm. “Sehri... we must get out of their way.”

“Mother... I want to go!” Sehri hissed.

“No! Are you crazy child?” Aleatia snapped quickly. “This is best left to those who know what battle is!”

“I know what...” Sehri began to protest. “He is...”

“No!” Aleatia snapped once more as she pulled Sehri out of the way of the troops. “Go with the gods Kelelm. We will see you soon.”

Kelelm nodded to his mother. “And you mother.”

“No!” Sehri protested. “I want to go!”

Kelelm turned to Lisisa. “Princess?”

Lisisa shook her head. “*Sibfla*... he’s already going to chew my *mida* for bringing you.” She snapped. “Eotharon! Get them four H40s. High velocity armor piercing rounds. We don’t know what kind of armor the Kavalians will have! Better safe than sorry!”

Kelelm nodded. “Excellent choice!”

“Follow me.” Eotharon said with a smile.

Sehri finally pulled her arm from her mother’s grasp as they were entering the doors for the lift. She gave her mother a gentle push into the elevator and slammed her hand down on the panel. Aleatia turned as the doors began to close.

“Sehri!” She screamed.

“I need to go mother!” Sehri rasped. “I need to go!”

Sehri turned and began heading back towards the *STRIKER* as the doors closed fully and alarms began to sound in the landing bay. Her wide eyes darted back and forth as she grew closer to the ship, trying to understand what she had felt surging through her during the brief connection. Sehri prided herself on being able to control her emotions and the physical portions of the wolf blood that flowed through her. Her Coming of Age fever as Eotharon had called it was far stronger than her mother had told her it would be. Sehri knew it was because of being on this ship and around so many Lycavorians that embraced their instincts, but it also served to confuse her immensely. Her brother was right, the Rothryn were essentially Lycavorians who could not shift their forms. Aside from that, the DNA tests had proven that there were no other differences in their genetic makeup. Being apart from them for so long and pushing back virtually all of the instincts of their blood because they didn’t know any better was making it that much stronger now that she was among them.

Sehri was so wrapped up within her thoughts that she didn’t see Eotharon’s arm reach out and snag her around her waist. She let out a small scream in surprise and whirled to face him, drawing her hand up and preparing to unleash an Etheric attack until she saw who it was.

“Eotharon!” She gasped gripping his arm.

“You need to return to the bridge and be with your mother Little One.” He told her.

“No! I need... I need to go Eotharon!” She stammered.

“It will not be safe Sehri.” He told her. “We will be dropping into a maelstrom. Prince Androcles... he is like his father and he does not play at war Little One! You must have felt this when he touched you.”

“I must go!” Sehri pressed. “I... Eotharon I...”

“Are you that sure of what your blood calls for Little One? If you... if you do this there will be no going back.” Eotharon asked her.

Sehri met his eyes and answered with no hesitation whatsoever. “Yes.” She replied.

Eotharon stared at her for a moment and then nodded his head. "Then let us get you a uniform. You can not go unprotected."

Sehri clung to his arm as he turned and began to lead her towards the ship.

Lunerr looked at the two Rothryn women as they exited the lift and rushed towards him. Lady Aleatia's two other daughters stood in the corner of the bridge with wide eyes at all the activity and they rushed to their mother's side as Aleatia came up to him.

"Captain... my daughter!" Aleatia spoke. "She pulled away from me! You have to tell Lisisa not to allow her to go!"

Lunerr looked at her. "What?"

"Sehri pulled away from us as we were entering the lift!" Harira explained. "She..."

"She did what?" Osbela demanded. "Is she stupid!"

"She said she needed to go!" Aleatia told her daughters. "She wouldn't listen to me! She was running back towards the ship they were taking and..."

"Captain! *STRIKERS* are away! *KADEN* is ten seconds from launch!" The officer barked from across the bridge.

"No!" Aleatia exclaimed.

"You have to recall them!" Harira demanded.

Lunerr shook his head. "I can't!" He told them. "If they return then they miss the window that Prince Androcles wants them in as cover."

Ibani gripped her mother's arms as Aleatia sobbed. "Sehri." Aleatia moaned.

Lunerr turned to his COM officer. "Get me the Princess's *STRIKER*. Low beam and secure." He turned back to Aleatia. "I can let you talk to her Lady Aleatia. They'll go dark in four minutes but you can talk to her before that."

Sehri looked with wonder at the Mark V ArmorPly that now encased her lithe form. It hugged her like a glove with added armor along the more exposed portions of her body. The armor was far more flexible and lightweight than it appeared and incredibly it was not hot or cumbersome to wear. She turned her head quickly when she felt hands on her waist and she saw Lisisa adjusting something.

"I certainly hope you know what you are doing." Lisisa told her.

Sehri met her eyes. "I have no idea what I'm doing Princess Lisisa." She admitted. "I am only... I am only following what feels right within me. I've never done something like that before."

"This is crazy you know. If... Sehri if what I sense between you and Andro and the others is right... if you get hurt... he will never forgive me for allowing you to come." Lisisa told her.

"Then why... why did you let me get on the ship?" Sehri asked her.

"Because there are only five people in the entire galaxy that could touch my brother when his shields are as high as they are now. Not even our father can do that without forcing his power on Andro. Those five are the women that command his heart and soul. Something tells me that you have just joined that small group. And if he reached out through you then he knows it as well." Lisisa told her. "I can sense his Mindvoice resonance on you as I sense it on Sadi and the others. I can sense their touch on you as well Sehri."

Sehri met her eyes. "I... I can't explain it Lisisa." She said.

"I can." Lisisa said. "Your fever is making you more attune to your body. Your instincts are telling you what you want. That is the wolf within you Sehri. Even though you can't shift your form you are still wolf and your instincts are starting to overpower what your people have forgotten through the millennia."

"What does it mean?" Sehri asked her.

"It means that you belong to them and they belong to you." Lisisa told her. "There is no other explanation. You would never have been able to breach his shields if you were not already part of him in some way." She moved closer to her in the press of bodies. "You've been feeling them within Mindvoice haven't you?"

Sehri nodded her head slowly. "Since... since the day we saw him on the monitor. The day he killed that man. All of them. I've sensed all of them within me."

Lisisa nodded. "Just be sure Sehri." She said. "With the way your fever is spiking it's going to affect all of them. Andro, Sadi, Ne'Veha, all of them that are wolf. This is all very new to you Sehri... and you are very young."

Sehri's eyes flared. "I'm not a child!" She hissed almost angrily.

Lisisa shook her head. "I'm not saying you are. All I'm saying is just be certain that it is what you want as well." Lisisa patted the small of her back. "The trigger to extend the Dragon Armor is on the inside on your right wrist. Touch the small button there and it will extend. It will feel funny for several seconds as it locks into place but once it's done you'll be fine. You are staying on the ship so you shouldn't need it."

Sehri looked at her shyly. "Thank you Lisisa." She said softly.

Lisisa nodded her head. "Now go to the cockpit and talk to your mother. Try and make her understand. She thinks you have gone insane. You got about two minutes before we go dark."

Lisisa watched her nod and then start moving around the bodies towards the cockpit. She felt Eotharon come up behind her. "Did you smell it on her Eotharon?" She asked.

Eotharon nodded. "Indeed I did." He answered.

Lisisa looked at him. "Six wives and mates. Just like our father." She said softly. "No matter how much he tries to run away from it... or tries to deny it he is more like our father than he realizes."

Eotharon nodded. "And that is why we would follow him anywhere. And any member of your family... including you." He stated calmly. He motioned with his head to Sehri's back. "Something is holding her back though Princess." He said thoughtfully. "She wants to embrace what her blood calls for but something is holding her back."

Lisisa nodded. "Well... it's not something we can worry about right now." She stated. "Let's get ready to deploy."

EARTH

CRANAE ISLAND

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1100 HRS, EST

"...don't know where other people got the notion that Andro doesn't like to fly." Sadi was speaking. "He's been flying with Elynth since he was four years old. He loves to fly with her. It is something that helps to clear his mind and give him peace."

"And give us fits with some of the stunts he does." Carisia added with a knowing smirk. This brought chuckles from all of them and Me'alla leaned closer thinking she saw an opening.

"He is reckless when he flies?" She asked.

Sadi smiled. "Andro and Elynth are so closely bonded together that at times it is almost as if they know what the other will do before they do themselves. They can do things when they fly that others can't. Not even the King and Torma. Well... perhaps not them." Sadi said with a smile. "I wouldn't call it reckless... I would call it beautiful."

"He doesn't even take interplanetary transport anymore unless he is going to Eden City or some distant location. Nor do we." Ne'Veha spoke. "Why would we when we have Elynth and our Bonded Brothers and sisters?"

Damn straight! Majeir commented causing Lu'ria to look at her and smile. *What sister?* She exclaimed. *Walter said that all the time!*

Me'alla leaned forward in her chair. "So you are saying that Senator Ulana is wrong in the recent statements she has made about the Prince not liking to fly? And the statements she has said about all of you."

"What Senator Ulana chooses to say or not say is of no concern to us." Sadi spoke. "She may profess to know him, but we are Andro's wives and mates. I think we know him far better than someone who only saw him intermittently for several months. For her to say that Andro doesn't like to fly is only one of the many comments she has made which only show she doesn't know him as closely as she would like to think she does."

“So she lied?” Me'alla asked.

Sadi shrugged her shoulders. “I wouldn't say she lied.” She spoke. “She is ill-informed... that's all.”

“Prince Androcles ended his relationship with her the same day that you reunited with him is that correct?” Me'alla asked.

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

“Senator Ulana states that several of the Prince's sister threatened her that same day if she spoke out about her relationship with the Prince.” Me'alla said.

Sadi looked genuinely surprised. “Really?” She said. “I... I never heard that.”

“Why would Ulana feel the need to speak out?” Lu'ria asked now. “What would be the reasoning behind that? Unless she wanted to besmirch Andro in public for some wrongdoing she perceived he made in dismissing her and ending what relationship they did have.”

“As you are well aware, the Leonidas family is very close but we are all individuals.” Sadi said evenly. “I will not attempt to speak for Andro's sisters. They know the Senator better than I and whatever they did... if anything... I'm sure it was their way of protecting their brother.”

“Protecting him from what?” Me'alla asked.

“I don't know.” Sadi said. “Perhaps speaking to one of his sisters will get that answer for you. We don't have it.”

“And we don't care.” Carisia added.

Me'alla saw all of them nod in agreement with that statement. She shuffled in her chair and then looked at Sadi. “It appears... it appears you are all of the same mind.” She said.

“We are.” Sadi said.

“Yet you are his *Anome*.” Me'alla said.

Sadi nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered. “What difference does that make? As with Andro's father and all the Queens, Andro loves each of us equally and without question. Just as Martin loves his mothers. Just as we love him... and each other. We can't explain it to you for there are times we don't understand it ourselves. But it is what we all feel within our hearts and minds. Of course we would speak with one voice, we are essentially one mind in many respects and that is how we see things.”

“Doesn't that... doesn't it cause conflict between...” Me'alla began.

Me'alla was surprised when all of them laughed softly and shared coy glances. It was Carisia who answered the unspoken question and she did so with a very sultry look on her face and in her dark eyes. “I would say there is more than enough of Andro to go around for each of us.” She said. “Even when we are all together.”

Lu'ria nodded. “Indeed there is.” She said with a knowing grin.

Sadi smiled and nodded in agreement. “Let's just say that Andro's stamina is superior to anyone I have ever met. He is a true Alpha male... like his father and thousands of other males within the Union who keep their wives and mates very happy.” She didn't know it then, but that statement would earn Sadi and all of them many points of honor and respect from the male population within the Union, as well as the females.

Me'alla looked at her data pad and then back to Sadi. “Senator Ulana suggests that she has a much higher pureblood PCC level than you Princess Sadi. Can you confirm for our viewers what your PCC level is? And do you know Senator Ulana's?” Me'alla said.

Sadi shrugged her shoulders. “I don't know what Senator Ulana's pureblood PCC level is.” Sadi answered. “Nor do I care.” She smiled. “I don't even know my own to answer your question. It's not something that I ever really worried about.”

“Isn't the pureblood PCC level of a Lycavorian used to determine potential Mindvoice ability?” Me'alla asked. “You studied at the School of the Mages didn't you?”

“The answer to the first part of your question is yes.” Sadi spoke. “And yes again to the second part. I studied there for almost four years under several different instructors as well as the *Feravomir*.”

“The School of the Oracles has recently released several bits of information from a classified report that lists you as a Category nineteen Etheric user based on the new measuring rules of Mindvoice ability.” Me'alla spoke looking at the data pad she held. Her Channel Manager had been sending her information on the pad since the beginning of the interview to help her formulate questions.

Sadi's eyes narrowed. "Really?" She asked calmly. "That is interesting... since the entire report was supposed to be classified."

Me'alla pressed on quickly before Sadi had a chance to shut her down on this portion of information she had gotten. Her Channel Manager had not known where it came from, only that it had been sent at the beginning of the interview by an unknown source. "The report lists only five Category Nineteen users as the Director of the School of the Mages state. That includes Queen Aricia, Prince Denali, the former Pralor Wayonn, Prince Androcles's Captain Jomann and yourself. Category Nineteen users have the most potential to rise in power. Could you comment on that?"

Sadi shook her head. "No." She answered curtly.

"Are your fellow Crown Princesses also Category Nineteen Etheric users?" Me'alla asked.

"I don't know." Sadi answered. "Not that it matters."

"The King is listed as a Category twenty-one and Prince Androcles as a Category Twenty user. They are the only two who have such a high rating. Most of the Union has seen what the Prince is capable of after the Senate vote, at least a small portion of what he can do. And there are rumors beginning to circulate that the King has used similar abilities in the rescue of Queen For'mya. Do you or the other Princesses have these skills as well?"

"Why do you wish to know?" Ne'Veha asked.

"According to statements by the head of the DSM, it is his opinion that the abuse of these skills could take place. He believes all of the Royal Family needs to be tested again and then their use of Etheric power monitored and controlled by the DSM." Me'alla said. "Do you agree with this statement?"

Sadi shook her head with a small laugh. "Controlled by the DSM? No... certainly not." She said. "I'm sure it will give him a fit when he discovers Ne'Veha and I have now bonded with dragons as well. The DSM has no authority to do such things... he is a teacher... and the DSM is not part of the government. And there are many who do not follow his train of thought either. What exactly does he mean by abuse?"

"He doesn't go into detail." Me'alla answered.

"Yes... he doesn't go into detail because he doesn't know." She answered. "I know the DSM Me'alla... I studied under him for a year. He is a pompous and arrogant little man who can't not abide someone with abilities that surpass his. Why the *Feravomir* put him in charge is not something I understand, but she is the First Oracle of our people and perhaps she saw something within him I did not." Sadi shifted in her seat to get more comfortable. "Mindvoice abilities... or Etheric power as it is now known because of recent discoveries... is inherent in all our people and the majority of vampires and some elves. It has been this way for millennia."

Me'alla nodded in agreement. "That is true... but as we understand it more and become aware of what these abilities allow some to do... do you not worry about the abuse of such power?"

"Etheric power is based on pureness of blood. The percentage of Etheric users that even have the pureness of blood to advance this power beyond a Tier Three level is infinitesimal when held to the entire population of the Union." Sadi answered. "It has always been this way and for millennia it has never been abused in any way. You know as well as I it is even a crime for us to do some of the things our abilities might allow. Because one man says we should be concerned, a man who if I am not mistaken is only a Category Seventeen by the new standards of measuring, we should all just take his word and begin persecuting these men and women?"

"He doesn't advocate that Princess." Me'alla said.

"He hasn't said he *doesn't* advocate that either." Sadi told her. "It is well known what the King and Andro are capable of. As you have said yourself, most of the Union has seen part of what Andro can do. They have always had this power within them and in the twenty-seven years since Andro's father returned and took his grandfather's throne... has the King ever misused this power or lied to our people? No. Has Androcles? No. What the DSM wants is no different than what the Rothryn people must endure now and..."

"*KertaGai!*" Carisia gasped.

Sadi stopped as Me'alla's eyes grew wider. "*Sibfla!*" Sadi cursed under her breath.

"The Rothryn people?" Me'alla asked quickly. "I have never... who are the Rothryn people Princess? Have we... has a new race of people besides the Vanari been discovered and we do not know about them?"

Sadi thought quickly. “Our entry into the Beta Quadrant has allowed us to meet not only the Vanari but others species as well. I will say no more than that... I’ve already said too much. That is something that the Prime Minister will address at a later time. I will not comment on that any more. Period.”

Me'alla could tell that the Princess knew she had made a mistake and to insure that she did not lose control of this interview and have it cut short she quickly went to another line of questions.

“As you wish Princess.” Me'alla said. “Going back to PCC levels... does the PCC level also give an idea of how closely a Lycavorian is related to the Original Five Ruling Bloodlines on Lycavore?” Me'alla asked.

Sadi nodded her head and relaxed slightly. “To my knowledge yes.”

“Would you be willing to be tested again?” Me'alla asked.

“For what purpose?” Sadi asked her. “To appease Senator Ulana’s vanity?”

“She alleges that since her PCC level is higher... she has more claim to the position you now hold as Crown Princess.” Me'alla said. “The position all of you hold for that matter as Crown Princesses.”

“And what would give the good Senator that idea?” Ne'Veha asked. “To the best of my knowledge the PCC level of a pureblood has never come into consideration when Lycavorians find wives and mates.”

“It only matters to Ulana because Andro is Crown Prince and next in line for the throne.” Carisia commented with a touch of contempt in her voice. “Anyone with a small bit of common sense can see that.”

“I am only stating things that Senator Ulana has already been quoted as saying.” Me'alla spoke quickly. “I’m not assuming her intentions by her statements Princess... only that she has said them.”

Sadi reached out and squeezed Carisia’s hand tightly turning to looked at her. “It is fine *Enylarcopri*.” She said softly. She turned back to Me'alla. “The facts are this... no matter what Ulana says or does, it will not change the reality that we are Andro’s mates. That is not going to change simply because the Senator wishes it so. Andro does not desire her in any way, shape or form, and no matter how much she rants or screams about it, that is not going to change.”

“And if she challenges that?” Me'alla asked.

Sadi canted her head to the side. “What will she challenge Me'alla? She can’t force Androcles to make her his wife and mate. If she wishes to challenge me in some way then I welcome her to try.” Sadi spat. “I have no problem putting the good Senator in her place if she wishes to pursue it. Andro did not scent her during their time together so she has nothing to base a challenge on.”

“You are certain of this Princess?” Me'alla asked.

“We are Andro’s mates and we have free reign within Andro’s mind. He hides nothing from us. Nothing. We have seen his time with Senator Ulana and we would know if this took place. It did not, no matter how much Ulana wishes it, so she has nothing to challenge. I am also an Alpha female... and I... we... will defend what is ours. In any way we need too. And Andro is ours without question.”

Me'alla was smart enough to know when to leave a subject before it got out of hand. It was very obvious that Senator Ulana was a sore subject with all of them, and being a female Me'alla knew why. The woman was attempting to insinuate herself into their lives and making claims and accusations that were angering many people, including the ones that her comments were mainly focused on.

Me'alla looked up. “Princess Ne'Veha... I was wondering if we could discuss your life before becoming the Prince’s mate. You met him after Princess Carisia had joined their lives correct?”

Ne'Veha nodded in return. “I physically met him and Sadi after Carisia had joined them yes.” She answered. “But as with all of us... we were already connected within our minds through Mindvoice. We just hadn’t realized it yet.”

“Can you tell us a little about it?” Me'alla asked.

SOLMAR

STRIKER 51 AND 52

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1155 HRS, EST

[...daylight mission Milord.] Daio spoke softly to Andro at the rear of the *STRIKER*. He was using a shielded conversation with his Prince in order to have their words be private. He was a Tier Six Mindvoicer and

a *Durcunusaan* officer so it was easy enough for him to initiate the connection and Andro instinctively strengthened it even more.

Andro looked up from where he had been straightening the saddle on Elynth's broad back. He turned his head and looked at Daio. He was just about the same age as Androcles, as were many of the *Durcunusaan* assigned to the *SCIMITAR*. They had been through different hells on Alba Tau, but there was no distinction when it came to that planet. Every battle there had been a nightmare for every Spartan who had taken part. Andro knew Jomann had reviewed every *Durcunusaan* soldier assigned to him in any way, and if Jomann had elected to keep Daio on the *SCIMITAR* there was a reason. It was likely that Daio's deep connections to Sparta played a part in that decision. Daio had been born and raised in Sparta just as Jomann and Andro had. In a way Jomann was partial to those *Durcunusaan* who had been born and raised in Sparta like himself and Andro. It was a tiny flaw in his Captain's mentality, but it was a flaw that Andro himself had.

[What other choice do we have Daio?] Andro spoke softly. *[And stop with this Milord sibfla Daio. Not when we speak as we are now.]*

Daio nodded his head. *[I don't doubt the necessity of the attack Andro. I don't like what I think you have planned in your head however. Why you asked if we can contact them with our COM gear. I have an idea of what you are planning and Jomann would not be happy. I am not happy about it.]*

[It's the only way to buy us enough time for Sa'sur and the others to get here.] Andro told him.

[It will also serve to bring every Kavalian ship within range of this planet here.] Daio told him.

[I'm hoping by that time it will be over.] Andro told him.

[And if it's not?] Daio asked.

Andro grinned. *[Then we'll have to figure something else out.]* He answered.

[Why are you doing this Andro?] Daio asked him. Daio's eyes lifted when Elynth's neck moved and her head came around to stare at him.

[Too many innocents have died because of our actions Daio.] Her voice filled his head easily.

[My actions sister.] Andro corrected her.

Elynth's golden eyes looked at her Bonded Brother. *[Your actions are mine Andro, just as mine are yours. There is no distinction my brother. You know that.]* She looked back to Daio. *[We have to try and save as many as we can Daio.]*

Daio nodded his head after a moment. *[I understand that. I think you both carry a blame you don't deserve but I can not change that.]* He spoke. *[But I will tell you this... with your father gone Androcles, you are who all of us look to. The moment I see it is hopeless I will act as my Durcunusaan oath requires that I act. I will secure your safety just as Jomann would expect me too.]*

Andro met his eyes. *[It won't go that far Daio. I won't let it. I know what is at stake my friend.]*

Daio nodded and ran his hands along Elynth's scales. *[Then I will say no more about it.]* He said. *[Though I think Jomann will certainly give you a piece of his mind. Not to mention the Princesses.]*

Andro smiled. *[Of that I have little doubt.]* He said.

Daio nodded. *[I will prepare the others.]*

[Daio...] Andro spoke drawing his eyes back to him. *[Pass the word... I want the officer in charge of this Puma Bane detail taken alive if at all possible. Once we have secured the settlement move as many civilians as we can to the STRIKERs and call for the KADEN. We'll send them north across the ocean and then break for the coast from here with the rest.]*

Daio nodded. *[Understood.]*

Elynth and Ryner flew wing tip to wing tip through the winding valley approaching the settlement. Dorian and Andro both had their Dragon Armor extended around their bodies. The armor glinted in the sunlight and they rode low in their saddles because of it. Their psychic shields would serve to dull most of the glare from the armor. Dreamland's scientists were working on a way to color the armor for operations at night and for general camouflage. The properties of the armor did not join well with coloring elements but Ben had told him they were close. Andro glanced over at his younger brother since he had been silent since they left the *STRIKERs* some miles back.

[Dorian.] Andro reached out for him.

Dorian's head turned. *[I'm scared fervon.]* He spoke.

[As am I my brother.] He replied. *[This is not limited to you.]*

[You?] Dorian gasped. *[But you have... you have done this hundreds of times.]*

[And we are terrified each and every time.] Elynth answered as she tipped her wings slightly.

[Just remember the training we have given to you brother.] Andro said. *[You and Ryner are one... fight as one. Your psychic shield can protect you from most lighter weapons so be mindful of those carrying heavier ones and take them out first. You are more adept with your dual blades, but use your firearms until you close the range. Once you are among them, ignite the light within you fervon and let it shine. Elynth and I have seen it Dorian. Don't hold back and embrace what is within you! Own this time fervon... own this time like no other.]*

Dorian looked across the small distance that separated them from each other feeling the pride and confidence swell within him. It came from his brother, from Ryner, from Elynth. It came from the blood of both his parents. *[I will make our father proud.]* He stated.

Andro shook his head. *[Our father is already proud of you fervon. Never doubt that.]* Andro said.

[Today... today begin the story of yourself Dorian Leonidas. Have faith... and begin your own legend brother!]

[Today we fight to free others!] Elynth spoke.

[And we will succeed!] Ryner chimed in with the same confidence swarming through Dorian.

[Break now fervon!] Andro barked. *[I will meet you in the center of the settlement and we will burn the vileness clean as our Tenna's words spoke not so long ago.]*

[Ryner!] Dorian called out and Andro watched Ryner dip his right wing and peel away with skin flaying speed. His powerful wings rocketed him and Dorian over the nearby ridge and then he dropped from sight as he hugged the terrain.

Andro turned his head forward and took a deep breath. *[Very well my sister.]* Andro said softly, his hands spread across Elynth's neck scales and feeling the blood pound through her body. Their heartbeats were like one well oiled machine of precision and this is what set them apart from all the Bonded Pairs except their fathers. They were truly one in every sense of the word. *[Once more we are called to act. His speed will put him in position in sixty seconds. Then we roll in and attack.]*

Andro felt Elynth's confidence flow through him now as well.

[And we will show them what a mistake they have made by coming here. I am tired of reacting to what others do.] She spoke.

The Puma Bane troops on guard along the top of the wall were expertly trained and very alert. They were Puma Bane soldiers after all, the finest within the KFI. The Bontawillians had used standard Union colony kits in establishing themselves on this planet. The prefab settlement walls were extremely sturdy and allowed for walking patrols along the tops of the wall. This settlement had been established along the northern edges of a river of medium width that supplied an abundance of fresh, clear water to the settlement. The two Puma Bane soldiers were on a normal watch patrol where they walked back and forth between the two T19 Missile Team positions that faced north. Another two T19 Missile Teams faced south on the southern section of wall half a kilometer away, giving the Kavalians a full three hundred and sixty degrees of coverage on the settlement. It was the smallest of the six Bontawillian settlements making up the whole of the colony. Just over five hundred civilians remained from the original population of two thousand. These surviving civilians were now locked down in the main auditorium of the settlement. The building had not been built to hold all of the people together so Major Marsin ordered that enough be culled to allow them to place their prisoners in one building. That had required nearly seventeen hundred civilians be killed during the taking of the settlement.

The two Puma Bane troops had laughed as they gunned down screaming men, women and children in the streets. The vast majority of civilians here were scientists or some sort of researcher so none of them had put up much of a fight and it had been ridiculously easy to trim their numbers as the major ordered. The mainstream of the Bontawillian people were nothing more than scientists and farmers and knew nothing of fighting. The two men were now bored and hoping that the attack on their comrades meant that at least someone on this

planet was going to put up a fight. It was nearing midday and the sun was high in the sky and they were only minutes from being relieved.

That relief would never come.

The Puma Bane soldiers were good and both of them saw the flash of black against the daytime sky as Elynth screamed in from over the crest of the ridge, hugging the trees so close that the tips of the giant green and brown leaves brushed her belly. As they raised their weapons and began to scream out a warning they eyes grew wide as Elynth vanished in a shimmer of transparent light and reappeared not fifty feet in front of them, her talons extended out. Neither of them had seen Andro's hand mash down on the teleportation control on the side of their saddle. Though they were designed for short range teleportation, the engineers at Dreamland had been working on the devices continuously since the successful teleportation of his father and Torma on Earth. Two new models had come out in the ensuing months based on that data and Andro had just installed the newest version in their saddle only two weeks ago. Ship to planet teleportation was still an iffy process... but the site to site teleportation had been deemed safe and reliable, though still limited in range.

Their combined focus was so precise that Elynth knew exactly what she was going to do after Andro mashed his hand down on the teleporter control built into every Mark Eleven saddle. They reappeared just where she had planned for them to and her front talons then landed upon and mashed the two Puma Bane troops into the walkway of the settlement wall as she brought her three plus metric tons down on top of them. She ignored the crunch of bone and the sound of her talons puncturing flesh and her armored head whipped to the left even as Andro extended his P190A3 from its bracket on the side of their saddle to the right and Elynth cut loose with the most powerful stream of flame tinged superheated breath she could generate.

That stream of flame reached the T19 Missile Team just as they began to react. Three thousand plus degree heat surrounded by open flame engulfed the three members of the Missile Team and instantly melted their missile tubes and parts of their bodies. Her flame tinged breath also served to ignite and detonate the stack of T19 missiles ready for use and one whole section of the wall erupted in a massive explosion. While Androcles Leonidas preferred to fight close where he could use his swords, he was more than an expert shot. His five round burst caught the missile toting Kavalian in the chest, the rounds walking up and to the right, blowing huge holes in the Kavalian's lightly armored body. The last round impacted the launcher itself, the high velocity kinetic round punching through the casing of the launch tube and hitting the missile. The result was catastrophic as the missile exploded in the tube while the user began to fall and it sent shrapnel in all directions, effectively tearing apart the two other Kavalians in the Missile Team.

Elynth's head snapped to the south and she beamed in pride as she saw Ryner come tearing out of the western sky directly from beneath the sun and above the two missile teams set up on the southern wall. She turned her head back knowing they would succeed and unleashed her voice with a trumpet of anger that shook the nearby buildings. She felt Andro leap from the saddle and she then let loose with a sustained stream of her flame tinged breath, sweeping it across the ground in front of the exterior doors of the settlement. Nearly one hundred and fifty meters her flame reached out, igniting almost everything in its path to include Kavalian troops who were gawking at her in unabashed fear.

Andro landed in front of the massive doors, paused for only a second and then reached deep within his Talon Guardian reserves of Etheric abilities. With a scream not of rage but concentration he directed and set free a wave of Etheric power that struck the massive doors on their weak structural joints. The massive surge of psychic power struck the hinges of the doors not unlike the blast of a hurricane, only with five times the power. The metal was designed to withstand the elements and small assaults by primitive indigenous species, not an angry young man who commanded power most could not understand. The huge ten foot high doors buckled instantly and then blew inward at incredible velocity as the metal bent and then gave way completely. One huge now destroyed door crushed four Kavalian troops as it was propelled back into the settlement and that is when Daio shifted back to human form and with a howl of delight he rushed the now sundered opening in the wall.

The Spartans had gotten as close to the settlement as they were able in wolf form, some of them like Daio, closer than others and scrapping their fur covered bellies along the tall grass and brush. They had tensed briefly when they saw Elynth and Andro execute their maneuver and then Andro had leaped down to the front of the doors and blew them open with his Etheric power. This gave Daio and the others pause for only a split second as they marveled at their Prince's actions and then, like any Spartan from history past, they charged lifting their left or right arms and sending a wave of Shi Viskas screaming forward of their rush.

Andro didn't bother launching his own Shi Viska as the others zipped by his head and he simply reached up and grasped the two odd looking handles attached to the front of his combat harness. As his hands closed around the handles he snapped his hands downward and in a soft flash of white light he called the blades from Flatspace.

The Elven Weapons Master Nehtes knew of what Andro had done by giving the *Iphan* and *Halize Rie Aellseleum* to the Immortal Pa'cour. To him it had been an incredible act of selfless honor and trust that had moved the ancient elven Weapons Maker nearly to the point of tears when he heard of the circumstances surrounding it. When he had asked Jomann how it had come about and Jomann told him Nehtes knew...

“The Immortal Pa'cour knew of your skill at creating weapons Master Nehtes.” Jomann had told him. “Andro knew there was no time to do what Pa'cour requested. To honor his grandfather's request that Pa'cour be blessed for his actions so long ago, he offered him his own swords. He didn't hesitate in the least for he had seen something within Pa'cour and Yuri both that none of us did. It was a very moving moment.”

Nehtes had already been under a directive of the King to build some very special bladed weapons and after Andro's gift to Pa'cour he knew what he would name the dual swords he was making for Androcles Leonidas. He had become the only Weapons Master that Martin Leonidas would come to shortly after the building of Eden City had begun. Nehtes had grown right with the Leonidas family, was allowed free reign within the Royal estates on both planets and was one of only three individuals outside of the immediate family and inner circle of friends that had physical access to all of them whenever he wanted.

Androcles Leonidas was the most gifted swordsmen Nehtes had ever been blessed to witness in all his years of life. The swords he carried, whether he used one or both in combat, they were extensions of his very being. He could make them sing a song of battle that was filled with wondrous power but also incredible grace and speed. Nehtes had already forged the blades themselves and he only needed to complete the pommels. He knew Andro despised opulence in any form and he had forged two simple handles that looked like dragon talons. They were lovingly carved from nearly unbreakable dragon bone given to him by Arzoal, with the talons holding the blade in place. In the rear of each sword was a small power crystal just like in his father's sword, allowing him thirty shots per sword of very intense, focused and powerful energy bursts of phased anti-matter plasma.

Vada Saar for Cana rie Emanur. (The Light and Hope of Eternity.)

The first day Nehtes had seen Androcles wield the swords in a training exercise was a day Nehtes would never forget. One word had entered his mind as he watched that display with dozens of others.

Incorruptible.

With *Saar* in his left hand and *Cana* in his right, Andro joined the rush of Spartans just as they reached where he stood.

Dorian gripped the edges of the saddle just as Andro and Elynth taught him. Not too tightly but then not too loosely. Just tight enough to feel the shift of his Bonded Brother's muscles beneath the saddle and the rush of his blood through his veins. They had decided the best way to take out the two Missile Teams was out of the sun. It would blind the men and render the missiles useless firing into the glare of the sun. Dorian felt his pulse increase just as Ryner gained several hundred feet of altitude and then tipped over and dove for the surface. He saw a flash to his left that could only be Elynth's unique flame tinged breath and then he had Ryner were within range.

Now brother! Dorian barked out.

Ryner drew back his head just a bit and then unleashed a searing stream of raw flame that reached down and fully engulfed the first missile team even as they were turning to view what was happening in the north. Ryner was a pure Firespitter dragon, and while still very young, some of his instructors had noticed the uncanny control he had over his flame streams. These dragons had been awestruck to discover the masterful focus bonding with Dorian Leonidas had granted Ryner and all of them were quick to advance his level of training to its maximum to take advantage of this. Ryner adjusted his downward trajectory slightly and continued burning

that stream of flame across the southern walk way until it had reached the second missile team. The Kavalian shooter had been fast enough to twist his body and lift the launcher to face Ryner. Just as he pulled the trigger and the missile began to leave the launcher, Ryner's intense stream of flame scorched the Kavalian Missile Team into blackened corpses. The exiting missile was engulfed by the intense three thousand plus degree heat and its warhead melted before leaving the weapon fully. The missile's propellant added to the blistering flame that engulfed the missile team and added a small explosion that sizzled across their shields as they passed overhead. That small explosion threw Dantio and his Spartans into action and Dorian turned his head to see them rise from the ground just as Daio's men had and begin to rush the southern entrance of the small settlement. The southern doors were always locked in an open position and even as Kavalian Puma Bane troops began to react quickly, another wave of Shi Viskas hurtled through the warm air to smash into their line. Screams and arcs of blood began to follow.

Ryner! Land just inside! Dorian barked. *Elynth is sweeping to her right and you do the same. I will remain on your flank!*

Hold on! Ryner barked as he dipped his wings and executed a near heart stopping turn and plummet towards the ground. He flared his wings a hundred meters from the surface, felt Dorian prepare himself and the moment he reached twenty meters Dorian leaped from the saddle. Ryner landed just to his right kicking up dirt as he did and let loose with another stream of flame across the right side of the wall. Dorian turned and saw Dantio leading the Spartans forward, drawing them so tightly into the ranks with the confused Kavalians that they could barely use their weapons. Weapons that did no damage against the Shi Viska shields that began to return to their owners streaked with blood and fur.

Dorian whipped his head around to Ryner. *Just as Andro told us!* He screamed. *We sweep right along the wall removing any who might come up behind our men. They we cut to the middle and meet Andro!*

Ryner nodded his massive head. *Then let us begin!*

Kelelm had never witnessed anything like it in his entire life. He was no stranger to combat and among the Rothryn people he was considered a superior warrior and a brilliant tactician. From the moment they had witnessed Princess Lisisa exit the *STRIKER* in the manner she had on Jeth's back, Kelelm began to realize many things. As he and his three men situated themselves on their stomachs on the end of the lowered ramp and they began to sight down the barrels of the impressive sniper rifles they had been provided, Kelelm realized that these men and women, these Lycavorians, they were utter masters of war. The pilot of the *STRIKER* held them almost perfectly still five hundred meters above the ground and perhaps half a kilometer outside the settlement walls. What Kelelm saw within that scope was unlike anything he had ever experienced in his lifetime. Like the conductor of a fine orchestra, watching that wave of fifty plus Shi Viskas leap from the arms of the Spartans after being called from Flatspace was not something he could put into words. The Spartans closed far too quickly with the Kavalians inside the settlement for them to establish any sort of defensive perimeter. Once the walls had been breached at either end, the battle quickly descended into a slugfest. Kelelm watched as the two massive, armored dragons on the ground relentlessly pressed forward along the sides of the settlement driving terrified Kavalian troopers out of hiding and into the fray. If they didn't kill them with devastating streams of flame first. Eotharon had mentioned that the Kavalian people were terrified of dragons for some reason, to the point that a single dragon could freeze many of them in horror. It was something within their genetic memories that made them fear dragons and the Union knew this and would use it.

Kelelm witnessed the single Spartan moving with the Sinopia colored dragon, his combat movements nearly a blur. Kelelm realized this must have been the half breed brother of Lisisa Leonidas. He was using his vampiric ability to blur as he struck different Kavalians with lethal precision, always remaining near the left flank of the dragon that was burning Kavalians and tossing bodies into the sky with his massive talons and even blows from his huge wings. This was a different form of combat that was unlike anything he had ever studied or seen in person. The Spartans were using their shields as weapons, their P190A3s extended over the top of those shields and spitting death in every direction. Occasionally he would witness a shield streak across the field and strike a Kavalian, killing or maiming him. Kelelm knew their shields were controlled within their Mindvoice and Etheric ability, but to actually see it used in battle was something else entirely. The Spartans manipulated

Flatspace with almost childlike ease. While his own people used Flatspace for some things, mainly the electronic tools their scientists carried, they had not yet obtained the knowledge and skill possessed by these men and women in either understanding it or applying it in battle.

Kelelm spied a Kavalian rise from the wreckage of the side of a building behind where Dorian and Ryner had already passed. He didn't hesitate, drew in a breath and squeezed the trigger as he exhaled. The H40 responded to his action and sent a single 20mm shell into the Kavalian's chest. His body flipped over from the tremendous force of the impact, a smoking hole in the center of what was once his chest. He could hear his men also firing when they discovered a target, providing a deadly support to the attacking Spartans.

His mother had been right Kelelm thought to himself. The moment that their father had discovered the results of the tests done he had changed. He had become driven to do as the Prophecy dictated. They were Lycavorians in his father's eyes. Whatever else his father felt, the instinctual draw of their peoples was undeniable and when he discovered this information it was as if his father embraced his instincts without hesitation. Kelelm saw this in the actions of the crew of the *REAPER* as they traveled here. They were treated as equals, invited into the quarters of people they did not know to have dinner and learn of each other. His father must have seen this, felt it somehow, because the longer Kelelm remained among these Lycavorians, the more he began to feel it as well. That they could not shift their forms never even came up in casual conversations. The Rothryn people were Lycavorians in the eyes of those within the Union and that is how they were treated.

Kelelm's head turned when he felt the body come to rest beside him. "Sehri!" He hissed. "Go back to the monitor!"

"I wanted to see!" Sehri snapped back at him with wide eyes.

Kelelm motioned with his head. "Then look sister!" He rasped. "Look and behold battle unlike any we have ever witnessed."

And look Sehri did. Her eyes found Lisisa and Jeth in the distance first as they circled the settlement below, twice plummeting towards the ground where Jeth unleashed a stream of searing breath killing something. She could see dozens upon dozens of men locked in close combat and darting between buildings and cover. She could see even more bodies laid out on the ground below. Sehri heard the implant come to life in her ear. All of them had been given the implants to better facilitate communications. The receiver implanted in the skin of their inner ear and the transmitter in their jaw line.

"Colonel Kelelm I'm shifting position!" The voice of the *STRIKER*'s pilot sounded. "The Princess detected several Kavalians trying to establish a bunkered heavy gun position on the west side of Princes Androcles! She wants you and your people to remove them!"

Kelelm nodded his head. "Understood." Kelelm answered instantly.

Sehri felt the *STRIKER* begin to slide over and draw even closer to the settlement. That is when she and Kelelm both saw him.

Androcles was squatting behind several shipping containers with seven or eight other Spartans and exchanging fire with an equal number of Kavalians dug into the recently destroyed remains of a building. Sehri watched with amazement as she saw him rise and unleash a wave of Etheric power that buckled the ground in front of him, tossing objects into the air as it sped relentlessly towards the entrenched Kavalians. She watched as that wave struck the Kavalian's position and most of them were tossed into the air like toys, the massive concussive wave of Etheric power shattering their weapons along with bones and internal organs. The Spartans wasted no time as they peeled away from around their Prince and the advantage he had just given them, several launching their Shi Viskas and the others firing their weapons.

"By all that we hold holy!" Kelelm gasped with wide eyes at what he had just seen.

Kelelm continued to watch as Andro rushed forward as well, three psychic diamonds launching from his hands and catching two Kavalians in the open as they staggered to their feet. The shaped Etheric weapons punched through their bodies, tossing them aside with great force and leaving large wounds where the diamond shaped projectiles had struck. The obsidian colored dragon burst from the insides of a damaged building, sending concrete and small metal plates flying outward as she unleashed another gout of flame tinged superheated breath that caught two Kavalians in the open and instantly reduced them almost to ash. Sehri watched in awe as Androcles moved with stunning speed, scrambling up the foreleg that the dragon seemed to instinctively hold out for him, and leaping over her back to land among several Kavalians that were staggering about as if they were drunk. She watched his dual swords strike out and kill two of the Kavalians without any

hesitation in the least, their heads loping into the air to fall to the ground near their bodies. The third he simply lifted within the grasp of his Etheric power and brought his hand down with a jerking motion, smashing the Kavalian amidst the remains of the building the dragon had just exiting with devastating force. Sehri knew from the way his body impacted that he would not be getting up. Androcles appeared to be shouting orders and he waved his arms towards several other Spartans who instantly began to move.

Sehri gasped when his head lifted and his eyes seemed to fall directly on her.

“Tallyho!” The pilot’s voice barked in her ear. “Target at ten o’clock! Kavalian heavy gun position!”

“We have it!” Kelelm barked as he sighted through the scope of his H40. “Preparing to fire!”

“Shit! Another one Kelelm! Three o’clock!” The pilot screamed. “This one is already unmasked! It’s firing!”

Kelelm felt deep impacts along the floor of the *STRIKER*, the heavy shells slamming into the armor of the ship. They were armored Kelelm knew, but from the force of the impacts he wondered how much damage they could sustain. His answer came at the new sounds and he turned when he heard the reverberation of shattering glass and the screams of wounded. The *STRIKER* heeled sharply to the right and began to spin around, Kelelm reaching for Sehri as she screamed in terror because she wasn’t secured to the deck as they were. Her body began to lift off the floor and Kelelm snatched her arms and pulled her close to him.

“We’re hit! Shit we’re hit!” The pilot screamed, her voice excited but still calm and in control. “Co-pilot is dead! Lost lateral thrusters and secondary engines. Instruments are fucked! I’ve lost attitude control! We’re going in! Fuck we’re going in! Brace for impact! Brace for impact!”

“Kelelm!” Sehri screamed as her brother pulled her closer.

“Do not let go of me!” Kelelm screamed at her over the roar and whine of the crippled engines. “Do not let go Sehri!”

Kelelm felt his stomach drop as the *STRIKER* dipped awkwardly and plummeted down. He felt Sehri ripped from his grasp just as they impacted the ground and began to roll. “Sehri!” He screamed before blackness overcame him.

EARTH

CRANAE ISLAND

CHANNEL 65 INTERVIEW WITH CROWN PRINCESSES

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1220 HRS, EST

“...ask about the recent events surrounding the unusual birth of the latest Leonidas child. The son Queen Isabella was carrying. There are many reports filtering out now that the young man who has been seen with Prince Androcles these last weeks is this child. Can you comment on this?” Me’alla spoke.

“What would you like me to say?” Sadi asked.

“Is it true?” Me’alla asked her. “This young man is now fully grown and he has been like the Prince’s shadow. He has been seen with him in Sparta, at different military bases and at Thermopylae as well. If this is indeed the son that Queen Isabella was carrying, how could he be as old as he is?”

Sadi reached out quickly within Mindvoice to Deia and Gorgo. They were at Deia’s office watching the live interview she knew.

[What do I tell her Deia?] Sadi asked them when she connected easily with their MV resonance.

[Tell her the truth.] Deia answered. *[It will come out eventually and better we control the how of it.]*

[I agree.] Gorgo echoed. *[Deia and I can address the questions that will undoubtedly come... but we should not lie.]*

Sadi nodded and brought her attention back to Me’alla. “The young man who has been seen with Andro *is* the child Isabella had been carrying. He is Andro’s brother Dorian Leonidas, the son of Martin and Isabella.”

Me’alla looked at her with a stunned expression, fumbled with her words for a few seconds and then simply spit out one word.

“How?” She gasped.

Sadi smiled at her reaction and then turned to Carisia. “*Enylarcopri*... would you care to answer this? You know more about the situation and could better explain it.”

Carisia nodded. “Queen Isabella became afflicted with a very rare condition for vampire females who are pregnant. I won’t try to explain the details, Eliani or Queen Anja would be better suited for that, but essentially this condition... this disease... it breaks down the womb of a vampire female until she can no longer provide for the child she carries. It is a hereditary disease carried within the male gene and passed to the female children. It is extremely rare, but in every case it is fatal for the infant. At least until now.”

Me’alla blinked several times. “How... how was... how was Dorian saved if it is always fatal for the infant?”

Sadi leaned forward now. “Dorian was given an accelerated growth hormone while still within the womb. Queen Anja and her sisters, combined with Eurin were able to determine a procedure that would allow Dorian to be born before her womb failed. It... it was an untested theory, but they had to try. It worked... and Dorian joined us a month before Isabella’s womb would have been unable to sustain him longer. The serum they used was active even after he was born and did not fully run its course until he appears as he is now. He’s quite handsome don’t you think?” Sadi added with a smile.

“Yes... yes he is.” Me’alla blurted out before thinking. “But... but how... how could his mind develop at such an accelerated rate?” Me’alla asked. “Is he...?”

Sadi shook her head. “How do I explain this... just before he was born Dorian... Dorian experienced something similar to what happen with Androcles.” She said. “I don’t know the entirety of it, nor the more technical aspects, but Dorian bonded with a dragon while still within Isabella’s womb. Very much like Andro did. Because of this and the connection Bonded Pairs have with each other, his mind was protected. Actually stimulated would be a better word I think. Ryner... his Bonded Brother now... Ryner wrapped Dorian’s mind in a cocoon that was augmented by the Dragon Elder Mother’s abilities. Even as his body grew, so did his mind within that cocoon. His Bonded Brother shared everything of his life with him as Pairs usually do, and the Elder Mother added her own resonance to that, reinforcing it. Dorian is just as cognizant as any adult his age; he even was able to master Conceptual Dynamic Engineering thanks to the Elder Mother. A class I will admit I did not do well in at the Academy.”

Me’alla looked at her amazed. “This... this is amazing.” She gasped. “Then he is...”

Sadi nodded. “He is a very normal twenty-four year old man... yes. And very smart I might add.” She said. “He and Ryner have been training with Andro and Elynth since his growth stopped and he’s made amazing strides. He’s rarely been away from his brother. Everyone has noticed that he is a voracious learner and being around Andro so much has tempered his normal youthful urges somewhat. Though being around Andro and Elynth have also made him and Ryner more prone to doing wild things when flying. I dare say he is almost as skilled as Lisisa or Denali in many respects. And he has a very large sense of humor.” She finished that statement with a happy smile. “He was having dinner with us just last week and...”

There were billions of citizens of the Union watching the interview with the Crown Princesses with great interest and enjoyment. One citizen however had stopped what she was doing the moment Dorian’s name was mentioned.

Sheva Juconi was in the *Durcunusaan* Control Center of the villa coordinating the last transports as they left Earth and were taken in by the ships in orbit. Sheva had not wanted to be assigned to the newborn Dorian Leonidas as his *Durcunusaan* Captain, for she thought using Kavalian technology to accelerate his birth after all they had done was wrong and Sheva felt she deserved the better posting as Isabella’s Captain. She kept her other reasons to herself, revealing them to no one. Jomann and Isabella had insisted however and Sheva finally relented. Sheva had been there, seen all that Sadi Leonidas was telling the elf female, but she still did not believe it. Her mind could not grasp that what she was saying could happen. Jomann had sent her to a restructured class for Detail Heads, a six month course crammed into four weeks and taught by General Vengal himself. She had been away since the second day after Dorian’s birth and had not had the chance to get to know him at all except for a few times they were on Earth and he was training with his brother. This really did not

matter to her because she viewed him as a child in many ways, but Sheva could also not help the feelings she had when looking at him.

Sheva may have been more than three hundred years his senior, but she could not deny being drawn to him physically. She had seen him training in the mornings with Androcles and the definition of his muscular body was almost beyond belief. It matched his brother in every way, though he was slightly less burly than Andro in some ways. His short dark hair was jet black in color and his dual colored eyes were almost surreal to look at. That she found him so physically attracting conflicted with her mind telling her he was still just a child regardless of what Jomann and others told her. They knew she did not want this posting, that she would rather be assigned to Isabella as she originally was, but for some reason they would not reassign her. Jomann had promised to reassign her once Dorian was more established and Sheva accepted that knowing he would not lie to her. Now she was just biding her time until Jomann made the switch and she was sent to be with Isabella.

Now... at the first mention of his name by Sadi, her full attention went to the monitor. The things Sadi was saying could not be true could they? Sheva knew Mindvoice existed; she was even able to use it herself on a limited level. She would normally be rated as a high Tier Four or a Category Twelve using the new measuring chart. Her fighting skills and intelligence are what had gotten her a slot within the *Durcunusaan* even though she was barely over five feet two in height and a hundred and five pounds. She had beaten men quite larger than her in combat training and this had gotten her noticed. Sheva could use Mindvoice if needed, but she did not truly believe or comprehend how this power could be manifested into the physical realm even though she had seen it used by Androcles. It was something she struggled with daily, and her obvious physical attraction to Dorian Leonidas was not making things any easier. She did not know what it was about him that pulled at her, but it was uncomfortable to say the least. She had not taken a lover into her bed in almost a decade now and she knew this was also having an effect on her. Though Sheva lived and worked among them daily and had many friends who were Lycavorian or even half breeds, she had never once considered taking a non-pureblood vampire or other species to bed. Sheva's adopted parents, an older pureblood vampire couple that had taken her in when she was an infant because her parents had been lost in a transport accident; they had never been able to understand the feelings within her as she grew. Sheva cared for them deeply, but they were not her real parents and they never would be in her eyes.

Sheva blinked several times as her *Durcunusaan* COM unit began to chirp madly on her belt. She reached down and touched the small console and felt her ear implant come alive.

"Juconi." She stated evenly.

"Sheva... move to the main villa." Jomann's voice ordered her. "We are ending the interview they are giving. We need to leave within the next hour."

Sheva's eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"We just received an insystem report from the ship bringing Lisisa and the Rothryn delegation back to Earth." Jomann explained. "They diverted their course and went to assist Andro. When they arrived Andro was readying his forces to attack a Puma Bane encampment. Apparently they have begun killing civilians. We need to move! Now!"

Sheva was rising to her feet. "I told you it was a bad idea to let them go." She hissed.

"Just get to the main villa and I'll meet you there!" Jomann snapped.

"I'm moving." Sheva spoke.

"...you comment on what exactly the King and Queens are doing? Or perhaps where they are for that matter? By all accounts they have simply disappeared from Union space. No one has seen them in the nearly six weeks since Queen For'mya's rescue."

"They are doing what they have always done." Sadi answered. "Insuring the future and prosperity of our Union."

"Yet no one has seen or heard from them for six weeks." Me'alla spoke. "Can you say where they are or what they are doing?"

Sadi shook her head. "No."

"Does anyone know?" Me'alla pressed.

Sadi nodded. "Andro and a few others yes. We can not reveal..." Sadi stopped talking when she felt Jomann and Sheva enter the patio area and all of them turn to look at him. Sadi rose to her feet quickly, as did Ne'Veha and the others. "Jomann?" She asked softly as he whispered to Aequea and Kynthia.

Jomann moved up in front of her and looked at Me'alla. "I'm sorry... but we are going to have to cut this interview short. Something has come up that requires the attentions of the Princesses." He spoke calmly and evenly.

Me'alla rose to her feet. "May I ask what that is?" She questioned him.

Jomann ignored her and looked at Sadi. *[We need to go.]* He stated within Mindvoice to all of them.

[Jomann... what is wrong?] Lu'ria asked moving closer.

[It's Andro!] Sadi exclaimed as she lowered her MV shields from the high state she always held them in and for the first time she felt her beloved Andro's Mindvoice resonance and the mishmash of emotions that were coursing through him. She glanced at Ne'Veha and the others as they too felt it now and turned back to Jomann. *[What is happening Jomann?]* She demanded.

[I will explain on the way.] Jomann told her. *[Right now we need to leave. General Vengal is briefing Deia and Gorgo. He will join us in orbit when he is finished.]*

Me'alla stepped closer. "Princess Sadi what is happening?" She asked.

Sadi looked at her. "If you will excuse us Me'alla, we need to end this interview now. I'm sorry."

"Can you tell us what is happening?" Me'alla asked excitedly.

"No... I'm sorry." Sadi spoke moving past Jomann as his hand guided her and the others towards the door.

Me'alla attempted to step forward and Jomann imposed his bulk in front of her. "You should begin gathering your things. Another one of my officers will escort you out."

Me'alla glanced over his shoulder. "Princess Sadi... this is the perfect time to show how open Prince Androcles truly is!" She almost shouted. "Whatever it is that is happening... this is where trust is forged!"

Sadi stopped and turned her body to look at Me'alla. "We... we have trusted before Me'alla and the Netnews has not been very grateful."

"I am not them!" Me'alla exclaimed moving closer. "I have no political agenda! If I did you would not have allowed me to do this interview! I am not a fool Princess! I know there are many things we can not know as a people... yet there is much I could show our citizens. The bravery of our men. The thinking of our Prince. These are what our people want to see. What they want to know!"

Sadi stared at her for a long moment before her gaze went to where Ne'Veha, Carisia and Lu'ria stood. Ne'Veha simply shrugged her slim shoulders while Carisia and Lu'ria shared a quick glance before both of them nodded. Me'alla was right and perhaps it was time. Sadi turned back to her. "Very well." She stated.

"Princess..." Jomann began to protest but he saw the set of Sadi's jaw and stopped himself. "She will answer to Dilaen and no other! Her broadcasts will be monitored and also recorded."

Sadi looked at her. "Jomann is Andro's Captain. It is his rules or you don't go further." She spoke.

Me'alla nodded instantly. "Yes... of course." She said with wide eyes not really believing this was happening.

"Enough!" Jomann spat. "We have wasted enough time! We're leaving!"

Sadi glanced at where Eliani and Brendi sat on the bench of the new *STRIKER* DT Mark II Variant as she moved up the ramp. Zarah and Lucia sat opposite them quietly. As she felt the ship begin to lift into the sky she turned and looked at Jomann.

"Jomann... you will tell us what is going on right now!" She snapped as Ne'Veha and the others moved up around her. "There is a reason Andro does not lower his shields and why he demands we keep ours up as well! But it is not so we are the last ones to discover he is agitated and angry!"

Jomann took a deep breath. "I have not spoken to him directly Sadi." He answered. "But I know why he has done it."

"Well?" Carisia snapped.

“Had you discovered what was happening before now you would have wanted to depart Earth immediately. Before we were ready.” Jomann answered her. “All of you would have wanted to leave and dismiss what we have done in the last few hours. Andro didn’t want that.”

“What is happening Jomann?” Ne’Veha asked. “This mission he and Dorian went on to Solmar was supposed to be routine.”

Jomann nodded. “And it was... right up until the Kavalians decided they wanted Solmar as a forward base and invaded.”

“Invaded?” Sadi gasped. “*Son vada carians!*”

“The *SCIMITAR*’s Strike Wing has already departed.” Jomann told them quickly. “The *Durcunusaan* Reactionary Division is already loaded with the Human 82nd Cataphract Division. We will join with the *WASP*-Assault Transport Carrier *KINDRED SOUL* and then rendezvous with the *SCIMITAR* and her Wing and continue on to Solmar.” He reached out and took Sadi’s arm. “He has the Spartan company from the *SCIMITAR* with him and from what I understand Lisisa and the company with her has now joined with him. She apparently intercepted the transmission from Sa’sur and moved to his location.”

“Lisi?” Carisia asked. “She was escorting the Rothryn delegation to Earth.”

Jomann nodded. “She was.” He spoke. “A secure transmission came from Captain Lunerr and he let us know what they were doing.”

“You should have told us!” Sadi gasped.

Jomann squeezed her arm. “I should have... yes.” He stated plainly. “But having you and Ne’Veha and Carisia and Lu’ria charging off into the unknown would have only made things worse and you know it Sadi.”

Sadi met his eyes and nodded her head after a long moment. “You... you are right.” She said softly.

“I imagine the four of you will want to prepare for the support mission.” Jomann said. “General Vengal will be waiting for you on the *KINDRED SOUL*. We should arrive at Solmar in a little more than twenty-four hours.”

Sadi nodded. “Yes. Of course.” She said softly.

“Zarah and Lucia have a rundown of what Andro has with him right now.” Jomann said. “You know Andro Sadi. All of you do. You know what he will do and what drives him. Do not let your concern for him override what you know of your mate.”

Sadi turned as Zarah’s hand touched her arm. “Come Sadi.” Zarah spoke. “Lucia and I will brief all of you.” She said.

Jomann watched as Zarah drew them over to where Lucia sat and they huddled together around the small chart table. He looked at where Me’alla sat with her crew and was staring at him wide eyed. He stepped over to her. “You have heard things that could very well get many people killed if it becomes common knowledge before we are ready. Your reports to your office will be filtered heavily until we have arrived and know what is going on.”

Me’alla nodded quickly. “I understand.” She said. “I will not betray the trust Princess Sadi and the others have put in me.”

“Good. The punishment for doing so would not be pleasant in the least.” He spoke firmly. “I will have one of my people get you situated when we board the *KINDRED SOUL* and Dilaen can take those duties when we arrive on the *SCIMITAR*.” He told her. “For now... stay seated and do not press others for information. There will be plenty coming your way when this thing kicks off.”

Jomann turned toward the rear of the *STRIKER* and moved up beside where Sheva stood watching him. “Bringing them was a bad idea Jomann.” Sheva spoke motioning discretely to Me’alla and her crew.

“I don’t disagree.” Jomann told her. “But Sadi made the decision and it is done.”

“We should not have let them go on this mission!” Sheva spat. “He is no where skilled enough to be operating with Prince Androcles! I told you this!”

Jomann focused his blue eyes on her. “I know you resent being assigned to Dorian, it shows in your attitude towards him every moment of the day... but you need to get over it!” He hissed.

“I don’t resent it!” Sheva snapped softly.

Jomann moved closer to her. “Yes you do.” He stated. “I don’t know where these feelings come from Sheva, but as *Durcunusaan* we go where we are assigned. That is our oath. I have seen you with him since your return and you treat him as if he is some child with no intelligence or mind of his own. Believe in your mind

what you will... but do not allow that to influence the way you treat him. Dorian Leonidas is far more skilled than you give him credit for. You have only been back a week and you have only been around him twice in that time. You know nothing about him or who he has become. I suggest you learn that first... for if your attitude continues I will recommend to Androcles that you be reassigned to the *Durcunusaan* Command Center on Apo Prime permanently. Is that understood?"

Sheva met his eyes knowing that he would do exactly what he said. Jomann had already done something similar to two other *Durcunusaan* troops who he felt were detrimental to the Prince's detail. Being assigned to the Command Center on Apo Prime was a sure way to have your career come to an undignified end. The men and women guarding the Command Center there were older *Durcunusaan* who had held the positions for decades. They were ruthless to those assigned there as a disciplinary measure for they took the protection of the Command Center and Royal Estate as some sacred duty only they could perform. Most who were assigned their for one infraction or another eventually quit the *Durcunusaan* and returned to their normal field units for they could not take it. It held a very negative stigma to it. Sheva nodded her head.

"Yes." She finally said.

Jomann nodded. "Good. I won't mention it again as long as you don't give me cause." He told her. "Queen Isabella saw something in you Sheva... that is why she requested you become part of her detail those months ago. Do not disappoint her." Jomann shifted his 190A4. "You and I are now the senior members of this detail. Aegea and the others will look to us. I did that for a reason as well." Sheva looked at him with surprised light green eyes and Jomann smiled. "You think I supported the Queen's decision to keep you as Dorian's Captain because you are a woman? You know battle, just as I do, and your influence will help those who head the details of the Princesses. Don't think for a moment that I don't trust your skills Sheva Juconi."

Jomann had never told her this before and despite herself Sheva felt a swell of pride within her chest. "Thank you Jomann." She said finally.

Jomann nodded. "We will be moving quickly when we arrive on the *KINDRED SOUL*. Keep them focused on their duties... and for *nubous* sake... make sure they don't allow the Princesses to kill the witch."

Sheva looked at him puzzled. "Witch? What are you talking about?"

"I don't know how it came about... the general will probably tell us when we get aboard but the good Senator Ulana somehow manipulated her way into coming with us." Jomann said.

"That *elg'caress*!" Sheva gasped. "How?"

Jomann shrugged his broad shoulder. "I don't know. Just make sure they keep Sadi and the others from killing her."

Sheva met his eyes. "Is that even possible?" She asked.

Jomann smiled. "That's your job." He stated. "If it was up to me... I'd vent her out the nearest airlock. Welcome to the *Durcunusaan* Sheva."

CHAPTER FIVE

SOLMAR

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1315 HRS, EST

Sehri opened her blue eyes and groaned softly at the pain that filtered through her mind. Her nose could immediately detect the scent of heavy smoke and the coppery smell of blood. Burning metal also assailed her nostrils and Sehri lifted her head from the crook of her arm where it rested. Fresh pain caused her to gasp as her head rose and she fought down the wave of agony as her eyes opened fully. She looked to her right side and saw the torn bulkhead of the *STRIKER DT* ship she had been riding in. She could just make out glimpses of the sun through the smoke and dangling wires that had made up the wall of the ship. The impact must have torn open the side of the ship, scattering metal and equipment everywhere as the *STRIKER* had gone down. Sehri could hear the scattered sounds of weapons fire and some shouting, but it was not as close as she had expected. Sehri got her hands under her and began to lift her upper body from the deck. As she rose, the searing pain that shot through her leg and lower body made her scream out in agony. She twisted her head around to look behind her

and her eyes grew wide when she saw the eight inches of bloody, jagged metal sticking through the back of her thigh and a smaller piece protruding from her lower back. The one inch thick beam in her leg looked as if it came from the ribbed interior frame of the ship. She rolled over very slowly, gritting her teeth against the pain as she dragged her leg over and flopped half onto her back to keep from pushing the smaller sliver back into her abdomen.

“Sehri!” The voice called out and she twisted her head around quickly to see her brother pushing his way around a section of bulkhead that led into the rear most portion of the ship near the ramp area.

“Kelelm!” Sehri barked.

Kelelm gave the hanging bulkhead a final push and stepped into the section of the *STRIKER* where he knew his sister was. She had been ripped from his grasp and sucked back into the *STRIKER*'s innards by the gravity of spinning. His safety line had kept him from being sucked out into the open of the rear of the ship, his two men not as lucky as the force had torn their safety lines free and sent them hurtling into the open maw of the ramp and out of sight. The impact had caused the deck of the *STRIKER* to buckle and heave upwards directly under him and had Kelelm's harness not been as tight he would have suffered a similar fate. He did not escape injury however, as his right arm hung next to useless from a dislocated shoulder and his face had several deep lacerations on it.

“Sehri!” Kelelm gasped as he came up next to her and saw how she was positioned half on her side. His eyes took in the blunt end of the metal sliver that protruded from both sides of his sister's leg.

“Kelelm... it hurts!” Sehri gasped gripping his arm tightly with one hand as she tugged at the helmet she wore.

“Be still sister!” He rasped at her taking his own helmet off. “We are crashed within the settlement Sehri. There still might be these Kavalians around. You must be strong!”

Sehri nodded as she finally got the helmet off and pushed it to the side. She forced herself on her elbow and saw how he was favoring his arm and the lacerations on his face. “Kelelm... you are injured!” She hissed.

Kelelm shook his head. “Not as badly as you sister.” He answered bending over her and inspecting her wounds carefully. “Clean penetrations. I don't think they hit any major arteries.” He glanced up at her and could see the pain etched onto her face as well as the beads of sweat that rolled down past her temples. Her jaw was set however, and she was enduring the pain as well as she could. The look of determination on her face made Kelelm's chest swell with pride. Sehri was truly not like her older sisters in the least. Osbela and Ibani would have been balling loudly had they been in a similar situation. “I must find a medical kit.” He stammered lifting his eyes to search the interior of the crashed ship.

Sehri pointed to deeper in the ship. “I saw one secured to the bulkhead just before going into the cockpit.” She hissed out the words.

Kelelm nodded and began moving forward to search. The interior of the *STRIKER* was a complete loss. They had hit with such force that the frame of the aircraft was buckled and cracked in several different places that Kelelm could see. He was amazed that they were even still alive. No ship within the Rothryn fleet could have taken such damage and survived as intact as the *STRIKER* was. He shoved aside some webbed seating and his eyes saw the large red container still attached to the bulkhead. The door to the cockpit was crushed into the frame of the ship and he could just make out the dangling arms of the pilots. He would check on them after he treated his sister he thought as he ripped the medical kit from the bulkhead clamps and began to make his way back to Sehri.

Kelelm could hear weapons fire nearby as he moved back through the tangle of circuitry and crushed frame of the ship and settled beside his sister once more. He glanced towards the rear of the *STRIKER* forty meters away and could see the upper back portion of the ship nearly touching the ground, but the actual ramp door itself had been torn away leaving the rear of the ship open to the outside. His keen eyes could detect the lower body of one of Lisisa's Spartans protruding from under some of the heavy equipment crates they had been carrying, the man's body appearing to have been crushed. He wondered if the others had been thrown out of the ship like his men because they were not secured with safety lines.

“Kelelm!” Sehri hissed in pain drawing his attention back to her.

Kelelm dropped to his knees beside her and began to yank at the clamps of the medical kit to get it open. “Hold on sister!” He rasped to her.

Kelelm got the kit open and began rummaging through the contents looking for some item that could be a pain killer. "I don't know what is..."

"Kelelm!" Sehri barked.

"Sehri I don't know what they use for pain!" He snapped back.

"Kelelm... behind us!" Sehri screamed causing her brother to whirl around reaching for the K12 magnum he still wore on his leg with his good arm. His eyes grew wide as he saw the Kavalian soldier beginning to lift his rifle towards them and his fingers closed around the K12 but knowing he was too slow because of his injured arm.

Three booming shots echoed in the confines of the crashed *STRIKER* and both of them saw the Kavalian's chest erupt with the impact, sending his body flying back out the rear of the *STRIKER*. Their heads turned to see the mass of metal and two webbed seats heave off the floor and Eotharon rose from his back, his right hand holding the K12 tightly. He shoved with a loud grunt and managed to push the debris from his body and get to his knees. Kelelm could see his eyes had changed to that of his wolf persona and his long fangs were fully extended as he shoved more equipment from in front of him and got to his feet with measured movements. The left side of his body armor was sliced open and Kelelm could see the blood stains covering his abdomen and hip as he staggered forward towards them, but Kelelm also saw clear and focused eyes.

"Eotharon!" Sehri gasped as she recognized him immediately.

Eotharon shook his head several times to clear the remaining fogginess from his brain and then came up beside them. "Not exactly... the most proper of landings!" He grunted, his eyes taking in Sehri's injuries. "Little One!" He gasped moving around to her side opposite Kelelm.

"I don't know what..." Kelelm began.

Eotharon met his eyes seeing the pain from his own injuries on his face. Eotharon didn't hesitate and reached across Sehri's body to grasp Kelelm's wrist. He yanked his arm upward and out, Kelelm nearly passing out from the pain as Eotharon popped his shoulder back into place. The pain faded quickly however with the adrenalin surging through his body and he flexed his fingers to return the feeling to them.

"The small blue pills! Orange container!" Eotharon hissed. "Give her one now! It is a stimulant!"

Kelelm looked down into the kit and found the container with those pills, tearing the cover off and dropping half a dozen into his palm. He got his fingers around one of them and dropped it into Sehri's open mouth. She swallowed without question, her eyes never leaving Eotharon's face.

"That will keep you from going into shock Little One!" Eotharon spoke as his fingers probed the area on her lower abdomen and leg. "We are still in battle and I can't give you pain medicine in case we have to move. You are wearing the newest form of our ArmorPly Body Armor. It will sense your wounds and begin a modified treatment that will stabilize you and stop the bleeding. The medical properties built into the armor will begin kicking in shortly. You will feel a warm sensation over the portions where you are injured and then you will know it is working."

"Eotharon... I'm... am I going to die?" Sehri gasped.

"Yes... you are!" The voice behind them growled.

Eotharon and Kelelm were turning before the words had finished being spoken but it was far too late. At least for the four Kavalians that stood behind them with their rifles leveled at them.

WASP-CLASS ASSAULT TRANSPORT KINDRED SOUL

Sadi, Ne'Veha, Carisia and Lu'ria followed Jomann through the corridors of the ship right behind the *KINDRED SOUL*'s security escort, Sheva bringing up the rear with Aequea, Me'alla and her two crewman in front of them with wide eyes at what was happening. Me'alla was no fool and she knew something big must have been going on for the Princesses to have been pulled from the planet so quickly. The crew members of the *KINDRED SOUL* quickly got out of the way as they moved.

Three minutes after landing they were entering the bridge of the ship, some sixteen decks up from the forward landing bays of the *KINDRED SOUL*. Landing bays that were the size of entire ships in some cases due

to the new *WASP*-Class ship's role and duties within the Fleet. As they entered they were assailed by the reverberating voice of a human male who stood no more than five foot four feet tall. He looked to be in his late thirties to early forties and was obviously a man chosen by Ben O'Connor.

"...prep all Troop Bays! Lock all drop pods into launch positions! I want to be ready to shit all over the Kavalians the minute we enter orbit!" The human man turned as Jomann led Sadi and the others onto his bridge and he straightened up just a little.

"Captain..." Jomann spoke.

"Captain George S. Patton!" The man barked bowing his head slightly. "At your service Princesses! We have secured your ships and our Task Force is preparing to jump to meet with the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Group."

"Strike Group?" Sadi asked surprised.

Patton nodded his head. "From what I understand, other parts of her entire Strike Group have responded from areas near Earth and Apo Prime at Sa'sur's orders. When we get there... we should have adequate firepower to blow the Kavalians right straight to hell! If you'll excuse my choice of words Princesses."

Jomann looked at Sadi quickly for he had studied human history intensely. He turned back to Patton. "George Patton... as in..."

The man nodded his head. "Don't know how many generations have passed since he was alive and I don't care. I'm one of his descendants and I carry my name proudly."

Jomann nodded. "As well you should Captain." He stated with some respect. "He was an inspired leader if his time."

Patton motioned them to the side of the busy bridge. "General Vengal is coming up from the aft landing bay and I told him I would lead you to our Staging Lounge. He can fill all of us in then. I must lodge a protest however Princess... I do not like have politicians on my ship. They are no better than cannon fodder to me, always getting underfoot and asking stupid questions." He looked at Me'alla and her crew. "Present company accepted of course. I've been following your work at Channel 65 for a few months now. Impressive."

Me'alla looked very surprised and it showed on her face. "Thank... thank you. I think." She said softly.

Sadi glanced at Jomann and nodded. "We feel the same Captain." She answered. "I imagine the General will inform us of what is happening when we meet him."

Patton nodded and motioned for them to follow him. "The Staging Lounge is this way." He said beginning to walk. "The 82nd Cataphract Division Mobile Commanders are already there conferring with the *Durcunusaan* Commanders."

They exited the bridge and moved down a short corridor to a set of double doors that were being guarded by two *Durcunusaan* soldiers and two human soldiers from the 82nd. They were ushered in without delay and as they entered, the doors on the opposite side of the room opened to admit Vengal, two of his officers and none other than Ulana and an aide that walked behind her. Sadi bristled at the presence of the younger woman but kept her face impassive when Ne'Veha and Carisia took her hands and squeezed tightly. Ulana exuded arrogance and when her eyes found Sadi they darkened considerably. The glare bounced off Sadi with barely any reaction from her and when Ulana's eyes fell on Ne'Veha and the others hoping to intimate them all she found was hostility staring back at her.

The *Durcunusaan* Division Commander turned toward Vengal as they all came up to the table, Ulana having to squeeze in between the 82nd's Commander and his aide even though the table was large enough to accommodate all of them around it easily. The Lycavorians in the room could sense the unspoken dislike floating between the women in the room easily, while Vengal and the others already knew of it. There was little that escaped the commander of the *Durcunusaan*. It was why, even as an elf, Vengal commanded the complete loyalty and trust of not only the entire Royal family, but also every living *Durcunusaan*. It also helped that his daughter was the *Anome* of General Daniel Simpson and Vengal was considered family by every living Leonidas.

"General... we've uploaded the last data burst from Captain Sa'sur." The *Durcunusaan* Colonel spoke. "It came from Captain Lunerr of Princess Lisisa's ship."

Vengal nodded and moved over between Sadi and Carisia, leaning over to kiss both their cheeks and then doing the same with Ne'Veha and Lu'ria. "I'm truly sorry I did not inform you sooner but all of you would have done something rash, and that is not what we needed and I think you know that."

Sadi nodded her head, understanding his actions. "Thank you Vengal." She said. "And you are right."

Vengal nodded and turned back to the Colonel. “Mosont... what do we have?”

The Lycavorian Colonel stabbed down on the large chart table. “The situation is fluid at the moment but according to Captain Lunerr, Androcles has established a small base camp on the southern continent here based on his last data burst to them. The *REAPER* is remaining outside the planet’s gravity well under Shroud and acting as a secure relay right now. The six Bontawillian settlements are established on the larger continent north of his position. They are all within a hundred kilometers of this major power plant. According to Lunerr, Andro was heading to this northern settlement to conduct an attack and free the colonists. It is the smallest and only forty kilometers from the coast. An earlier night attack by Andro and the remainder of the Omega Team resulted in the Kavalian Puma Bane Commander executing nearly fifty civilians in retaliation.”

“Wait.” Ulana exclaimed. “What... what is an Omega Team?”

Vengal glanced at her from across the table. “You are not cleared for such information Senator... I’m sorry.”

“General Vengal, I am a Senator of the Union and a member of the Union Defense Committee.” Ulana spoke. “I assure you... I have clearance.”

Vengal met her eyes and smiled. “Contrary to what you seem to believe Senator Ulana... you do not have clearance to everything. Ron?” Vengal turned and looked at the human commander.

The human commander, a man of medium height and deeply tanned skin leaned forward and began speaking before Ulana could respond. Major General Ronald Washington was thirty-seven years old, and the most experienced human commander among all of Earth’s forces. His dark brown hair held a small amount of gray in it, but aside from that his five foot ten body was in superb condition. He had commanded the two dozen or so Special Operations units that the humans had fielded during the war with the Evolli, and they had performed superbly. Working in concert with many Drow units, they had wreaked havoc behind Evolli lines on numerous occasions.

“Princess Lisisa went in with the Spartan Company stationed on the *REAPER*.” Ron spoke now. “The Prince’s last orders were to send the Spartans to reinforce their base camp and Lisisa would remain with him as they hit the settlement. No reports have come in since... but given how long it’s been, it’s almost certain the attack is already under way.”

Vengal nodded. “No bets against that.” He stated.

“Preliminary reports indicate the Kavalians are not fully established.” Mosont said. “Ron and I agree that they probably still have the majority of their infantry forces in and around the settlements and Sa'sur says Andro’s last report to her gave her instructions to remove all of the *DIATAGA*’s the moment we jumped into the system. They must have the bulk of the Kavalian equipment still in orbit.”

“Ships in orbit are Sa'sur’s problem.” Vengal said. “She has more moving correct?”

Washington nodded and motioned back towards Apo Prime on the chart. “She recalled the majority of the *SCIMITAR*’s Strike Group under the Royal Command Directive Urgent Storm. The last of them will join with her two hours before we do. Captain Patton has also discovered that to complement her Attack Force she pulled twelve *MOONLANCER-B* Missile Cruisers from the yards at Apo Prime. What she has should be more than a match for the Kavalian ships we know are in orbit.”

“Unless they call for more.” Vengal spoke.

Sadi shook her head slowly now. “They’ll know it’s him soon enough.” Sadi spoke softly as she looked at hm. “Vengal... what he’s doing... we can sense what he wants to accomplish. He’s doing it to save as many civilians as he can. Have Admiral Ceneu deploy two Fleet Groups under Shroud to these four different areas.” Sadi said pointing to the chart. “They are to stop any reinforcements to the Solmar sector at any cost.”

Vengal didn’t hesitate. “Captain Patton?”

The man was already moving. “I’m on it!”

Vengal turned back to Sadi. “He’s going to reveal that he’s on the planet isn’t he? Draw all of their attention away from interaction with the civilians and focus it on him.”

Sadi looked at Carisia and the others and nodded her head as she turned back to Vengal. “Yes.”

“They’ll undoubtedly surge out of their staging areas and try to capture him.” Vengal spoke. “Leaving light forces to guard the civilians.”

“You are moving Union military forces into The Wilds!” Ulana spoke up. “That should be approved by the Prime Minister and the Union Senate to insure we do not infringe upon our trading partners territory or rights.”

Sadi took a deep breath and then turned her head to Vengal. “There is a reason I brought Me'alla and her crew Vengal.” She spoke calmly. “I’m not entirely clear on why... on why the Senator is here. Perhaps you could enlighten me?”

Vengal began to speak but Ulana cut him off. “The Union Senate reserves the Right of Embarkation. We can board any warship within the Union Fleet in war or in peace to witness ongoing operations. The Prime Minister can not deny us that right for it violates Section Nine of the Union Charter if she does. And I *will* be transferring to the *SCIMITAR* when we rendezvous with her.”

Sadi glared at her. “The Right of Embarkation?” She hissed. “That has not been used in over seven hundred years.” She snapped.

“Perhaps not by others before me.” Ulana answered confidently. “But I am different. You should have studied the Diplomatic Bi-Laws more thoroughly while in the Academy Princess.” Ulana told her smugly. “That is something you should know.”

Vengal let his hand brush Sadi’s arm firmly, but hidden from Ulana’s eyes. “The Prime Minister deemed this was an appropriate action to take Sadi.” He spoke. “I disagreed... but was overruled by both her and Panos.”

Sadi looked at Vengal keeping her temper in check but wanting nothing more than to rip Ulana’s face off. “Panos?” She asked.

Vengal nodded. “He was very adamant.”

Sadi caught the hint of a message in his words and finally nodded her head. “Very well. Vengal insure all sub space communications off this ship and then off the *SCIMITAR* when we arrive are secure and have the approval of one of us or yourself before they are sent out.” She spoke motioning to Ne'Veha and the others.

Vengal nodded. “Done.” He said.

“You can not refuse me communications!” Ulana snapped. “You don’t have the authority to do that!”

Sadi met her eyes. “Perhaps you should have done your homework before invoking the Right of Embarkation.” She growled. “Then maybe you would have caught the part that says you fall under the most senior officer’s authority. Section thirteen, paragraph nine. As Crown Princesses of the Union... that happens to be us Senator. If we are not available then it is General Vengal as Commander of the *Durcunusaan*.”

“He is... he is an elf and a military officer!” Ulana spat. “I do not answer to him!”

“He is the fifth most senior military officer in all of the Union!” Washington snarled out before anyone else had a chance to answer. “He’s also been alive a hell of a lot longer than most of us in this room Senator! I suggest you remember that!”

Sadi turned to Vengal, dismissing Ulana before she could reply. “Andro’s *STRIKER DT* Mark II Variant is on the *SCIMITAR*... we will need it prepped by our ground crew and ready to launch the moment we transfer.”

Vengal nodded. “Already sent word ahead.” He spoke. “I’ll be riding with you if you don’t mind. At least until Captain Patton has got the *KINDRED SOUL* down on the surface.”

“How soon before we reach Sa’sur’s position?” Sadi asked.

“Twenty-two hours nine minutes Princess. Two jumps.” Mosont answered looking at her. “Another thirteen from there back to Andro. We are keeping track as well Princess.”

Sadi nodded with a small smile. “Yes... I suppose you are.” She said. “Vengal... is there some place we can speak privately.”

“I have a right to be involved in what you are planning!” Ulana snapped.

Sadi looked at her with blazing jungle green eyes. “Not in this reality!” She snarled back before turning and then staggering to the side.

Vengal reached for her just as Ne'Veha, Carisia and Lu'ria all staggered slightly away from the table. “Sadi!” He gasped.

Jomann had reached for and now supported both Ne'Veha and Carisia while Aegea had grabbed Lu'ria’s arms. “What is it?” Jomann gasped looking at them. “Sadi?”

Sadi shook her head. “Something... something has happened.” She stammered.

“With Andro?” Jomann barked.

Sadi shook her head quickly. “No!” She answered. “We felt... we felt terror and pain! It was... it wasn't Andro.” Sadi turned and looked at Ne'Veha, Carisia and Lu'ria. “It's the same, it's the same presence we felt at the Senate vote!”

“She's with him!” Lu'ria rasped gripping Carisia's hand. “Sadi... she's with him!”

SOLMAR

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1325 HRS, EST

Androcles Leonidas was his father's son far more than he would ever admit.

Whether it was making war, or loving those who were his wives and mates, the similarity was obvious to all. Until he had felt her a short time ago, Androcles had pushed what he and the others had felt at the Senate vote to the back of his mind. All of them had. But then sensing her on Lisisa's ship as he had, tasting her Mindvoice and Etheric resonance, it had brought all of the emotions and new feelings they had tried to bury back to the forefront. He had acted quite by instinct then by sending his aura through the connection that they had shared. He gently probed and explored, expressing his interest and intense desire to her through Mindvoice, and feeling her instinctual acceptance and delight at his attentions. He had been aware of her presence on the *STRIKER*, felt her excitement and bravery, and then her fear as the ship was hit and began to spin out of control until it crashed several hundred meters away from him inside the settlement. She was calling to him and did not even know it and this action only succeeded in one result. The same result had it been Sadi or any of his mates calling to him.

It turned Androcles Leonidas into a heat seeking missile.

Sadi was the core of Andro's heart and soul. She, more than him, had utterly accepted that other women would share their lives as mates and lovers. She had embraced this from the outset and was far stronger for it. It was Sadi's recognition of this that finally allowed him to completely acknowledge it as well and now he felt it within him just as powerfully as she did. As they all did. They did not know her name but she was a powerful beam of light within their minds and filled with passion and desire for them as well as extreme intelligence. She was not as focused as they were, but Andro could feel her growing in strength and clarity because of her connection to them. She was not something they were willing to sacrifice to the fickle gods of war.

Elynth had sensed it within him seconds after he did and her response had been simple and very direct, as was her nature.

Go to her now! Let nothing stop you my Bonded Brother! Go!

That is exactly what Androcles had done. And he was not alone. Daio had seen him break towards where the *STRIKER* had crashed and without thinking he had followed his Prince. His oath as a *Durcunusaan* demanded it, and would be the reason his future would alter in the days to come. Across the settlement, the newest Leonidas son had also felt it within his brother, and without even a single pause, Dorian and Ryner began to carve their way in that direction while Elynth flew above them all and swept Kavalian soldiers aside like a tornado. It was this action that finally broke the backs of the Kavalian defenders. The Puma Bane soldiers were trained to harness their fear of dragons, to use it. After the initial attack caught them by surprise they had quickly dug in however, making the Union advances difficult and not without cost. The Union *STRIKER* crashing nearby with Sehri in it had sent the *Durcunusaan* and Spartan troops with Androcles into a frenzy. Their attacks became more ferocious and Shi Viskas began to sing in the midday air as they fed off the aura of their Prince that was unwittingly permeating their heads within Mindvoice.

Andro leaped easily over the top of a destroyed Heavy lifter, his wolf eyes blazing bright as the rear of the *STRIKER* came into view. He clutched *Cana* in his right hand, spotting half a dozen Kavalian troops moving for the rear of the ship. With barely a thought Andro lifted his left arm and his Shi Viska flared into existence and launched in the blink of an eye. He didn't hesitate and followed his shield as it streaked toward the Kavalian troops, razor like blades extending from all around the shield's edge. He was twenty meters away when his Shi Viska struck the lead Puma Bane soldier just above his shoulders and sent his head flopping through the air as it sped off, his body continuing forward at a run for another few feet before dropping to the

ground. The remaining five soldiers turned and saw Andro bearing down on them and they lifted their combat rifles, sending a lethal barrage of kinetic projectiles at the foolish Union soldier. Their eyes only grew wider as they saw their rounds begin to harmlessly impact some sort of bluish shield encasing the soldier who was wearing gleaming gold armor with crimson streaks on the shoulders and chest. The Lycavorian was insane looking as he charged them, his empty hand filling with a handle of some sort and then a wicked looking sword blade appearing from that handle as if by magic. As they stood there and began to try and reload their weapons Andro fell upon them.

The first Kavalian, dismissing trying to reload his weapon, simply swung his rifle like a club with a wild scream. *Saar* came up instantly and with a powerful flick of his wrist, the sword sliced through the mechanism of the rifle and sent it spinning away in two parts. *Cana* plunged forward then, the blade of the sword driving through the center of the Kavalian's chest and erupting out between his shoulder blades, splashing his comrades with blood. Andro didn't stop his forward momentum, dipping low to his right and spinning around while sweeping *Saar* in front of him. The Dragon Armor forged metal blade claimed another victim as it decapitated the next Kavalian with barely a pause in its motion. Andro ripped *Cana* free of the Kavalian's chest as he spun and brought that blade whistling forward to chop the leg out from another Puma Bane soldier. As that soldier began to fall, screaming out his agony, Andro's right fist pummeled forward holding the pommel of *Saar*. The small bluish ball of power left his fist instantly and crossed the two meters to another Kavalian smashing into his chest. The ball of Etheric power lifted the Kavalian off the ground and sent him hurtling into the air screaming in agony as every bone in his upper body was crushed. He did not need to worry about landing for Elynth chose that time to sweep in from above and snatch his body into her curved talons. With barely a blink she ripped the Kavalian in half, ending his screaming and then tossing his body to the sides as she dipped her wings and began to turn back.

Four more Puma Bane troops appeared from behind a building, sprinting towards Andro with savage cries of rage. These four never even got close. Andro saw a flash of blackness and then two of the Kavalians were lifted off their feet and driven into the unyielding side of the building they had just run around. The shadows unwrapped instantly to reveal Dorian who then smashed his helmeted head into the face of one Kavalian while driving one of his Dragon Armor forged dual fighting knives, almost identical in appearance to those his Uncle had given to Yuri, into the throat of the other. With a trumpet of anger, Ryner blew through a stack of equipment containers, his jaws opening and closing on one Kavalian even as his huge wing was whipping around to smash into the body of the fourth Kavalian. The muffled screams of the Kavalian died as Ryner bit clean through his body and jerked his head to the side tossing his lower body one way and then spitting out his upper body to the other side. The Kavalian he had hit with his wing smashed into more crates upside down, falling to the ground in agony from dozens of broken bones. His pain would not last as Elynth flared her wings and landed, one of her talon equipped feet crushing the life from him while impaling two of her curved talons through his upper body. Dorian looked down at the stunned Kavalian he had hit in the face and simply reached down with both hands and grabbed his head. He twisted with all of his combined vampire and wolf strength and the man's neck was instantly broken into dozens of pieces and he died instantly.

As Andro whirled back around to face the last two Kavalians he had attacked, he saw one already on the ground impaled by a *Nehtes* that now was driven a good two feet into the dirt. He saw Daio holding his right hand out fully extended, the K12 booming as he sent seven rounds into the last Kavalian's upper body even as he was moving forward. When he got close enough to the Puma Bane troop, his left hand grabbed the dying man's lightly armored front and yanked him closer. Daio placed the barrel of his K12 against the man's head and pulled the trigger with no hesitation in the least.

"Nubou forn!" Daio screamed as the man's head exploded like an over pressurized coolant tank.

Andro's eyes went to the rear of the *STRIKER* now, his sensitive nose detecting the nearly overpowering apple walnut scent of a female within her fever, and the fear that was pulsing through that scent. Sehri's Etheric resonance echoed within him and it was filled with terror. Daio was beside him now and he quickly slapped his Prince hard in the shoulder. He too could detect the scent and the meaning behind it, as well as the fear.

"Go Andro! We will hold them!" Daio barked.

Andro didn't hesitate and was shifting to his wolf form before Daio's words had finished echoing in the air.

“Eotharon... I’m... am I going to die?” Sehri gasped.

“Yes... you are!” The voice behind them growled.

Eotharon and Kelelm were turning before the words had finished being spoken but it was far too late. At least for the four Kavalians that stood behind them with their rifles leveled at them. Sehri’s eyes grew incredibly wide, as did Kelelm’s, even as Eotharon smiled broadly staring down the barrels of four rifles. One Kavalian’s eyes narrowed.

“You laugh in the face of your death!” He snarled jerking his rifle up even more.

“In the face of yours.” Eotharon commented.

“By the gods of our people!” Kelelm rasped out the words.

The Kavalian who had spoken realized Kelelm wasn't looking at them when he spoke and he turned his head sharply behind him, his own eyes going wide. Standing behind them with blazing azure blue eyes was the largest wolf the Kavalian had ever seen in the intelligence files of his people. Nearly three and a half feet tall at the shoulders and easily close to three hundred pounds by the looks of it. Those eyes stood out against the jet black fur that surrounded the muzzle of that creature, it’s lips drawn back over savagely long front fangs capable of tearing flesh easily, and it’s hugely muscular body poised to leap.

“Fuucckkkkk!” He screamed beginning to bring his rifle around.

He would never make it.

It was the most beautifully savage thing Kelelm had ever witnessed in his life and it was a moment in time that he would have forever. Everything seemed to slow around him as he saw the massive black wolf leap into the air directly at the Kavalian, it’s right front paw, easily three inches across and equipped with vicious looking talons, ripped outwards to strike the Kavalian in the neck. That single blow tore open the man’s neck, nearly severing his head from his body, blood arcing into the air as his body went sailing across the confines of the *STRIKER* to smash against the hard bulkhead. As the wolf continued its leap it was already changing and in a single blink he saw the form of a tall, exceptionally powerful Lycavorian in luminous gold armor take shape. A glimmering sword was in his right hand and as the large body of the Lycavorian finished spinning around that sword had already taken the heads of two more Kavalians before they even realized they were under attack. Their bodies were falling as Kelelm saw the eight inch long psychic knife burst from the left fist of the young man as the last Kavalian was turning. It entered just under his furry jaw and drove upwards with the force of the blow. In a display of strength unlike any Kelelm had ever seen Andro extended his left fist, his psychic knife fully imbedded in the Kavalian’s head and slamming him into the top of the damaged *STRIKER* with a sickening thud. The Kavalian’s body was clearly six to eight inches off the deck and his weapon clattered to the deck from twitching and suddenly useless hands. Andro’s eyes were ablaze with that azure blue glow, and his mouth was open to expose the vicious looking dual fangs that Kelelm would later learn were unique to the Leonidas bloodline. Kelelm watched in awe as the Kavalian’s legs convulsed madly and his eyes became nothing more than dark orbs as Andro twisted his hand slightly and he solidified his psychic knife inside the man’s head.

“Never! Never touch her!” Andro’s voice growled in a clearly vengeful tone.

Andro yanked his hand back, the psychic knife still clearly evident, and he watched the body of the Kavalian fall limply to the deck. Andro’s chest was heaving in exertion and slowly the helmeted head turned to face them and those eyes settled on his sister. It was almost as if a switch flipped then, for the savage looking expression disappeared completely and the psychic knife vanished. With a simple nod of his head, the polished and blood stained Dragon Armor began to retract instantly and he was reaching for his helmet. Kelelm watched as he yanked it off and tossed it to the deck. Kelelm saw the dark hair and neatly trimmed goatee now and he watched as Andro moved for his sister, dropping to his knees beside her. Kelelm moved to intercede his body between them but Eotharon grabbed him and held him back, quickly shaking his head.

Sehri stared at those azure eyes, caught in their grasp as she was, the desire and want that swept through her quickly pushing aside the pain she still felt. She gasped in new sensations and delight as Andro quickly lowered his head to nearly touch hers and her inhaled deeply of her rich apple and walnut scent. Filled with pain and fear at the moment, but still very sweet to him. Sehri gasped as well, his aura suddenly surrounding and

embracing her, filling her with warmth and passion and love, all of her senses coming alive like they never had before. Kelelm could only sit there and watch in shock as his sister's pain filled face changed then and became animated and bright. She gasped as Androcles took another deep breath and she could feel his Etheric resonance embrace her fully. His nose brushed against her cheek and then across her lips, her hands coming up to take his face within her grasp without fear.

"You should have stayed on the ship." Andro spoke the words only centimeters from her own quivering lips.

Kelelm watched in shock as his usually very demure sister grasped Andro's face tighter and she pulled his lips down on hers with confidence. Sehri kissed him hungrily, a hunger Andro returned with fervor, and though she had never kissed a man before Sehri soaked up his essence and reveled in what it made her feel. His armored hand came up to grip her head gently, holding her up so they could deepen the kiss, something Sehri did without hesitation.

Andro reluctantly pulled his lips from hers after a long moment, his blood screaming within his veins almost as brightly as it did for Sadi. He took a deep breath, her hands still on his cheeks staring at him and he looked at her. "You should have remained on the ship Sehri." He spoke finally, Kelelm's eyes growing wider as he spoke his sister's name. How did he know her name if they had just met?

"I... I could not." She answered him.

"You are a stubborn woman." Andro commented with a grin as he lifted his head slightly and studied her wounds for a moment.

Sehri watched his face, the most beautiful face she had ever gazed at, as his eyes studied her injuries and then his hand came up and a finger touched his ear.

"Sa'roh?" His voice barked.

"Here Andro!"

"Status?"

"Daio already ordered me down. One hundred meters west of your position." Sa'roh answered immediately "Dantio and the others are just now reaching the auditorium to release the civilians."

"Lisi?" Andro spoke lifting his head up and looking at the top of the crashed ship.

"We're not seeing any movement at all Andro." Lisisa answered over the COM implant which all of them wore.

"You and Jeth remain airborne for now." Andro told her. "Daio... secure an evac corridor to get the civilians out of the settlement to the *STRIKERS*. And order the *KADEN* in. Dantio?"

"We're entering now Andro." Dantio spoke and Andro could hear the excited voices of dozens of different men and women. "Number looks about right."

"Dantio... losses?" Andro asked.

There was a moment of silence before Dantio answered. "Sixteen that I know of for sure." He replied softly. "I'm still getting a headcount of our people."

"Daio?" Andro asked.

"Eleven confirmed Andro." Daio answered in that subdued voice. "They put up a much better fight than we expected."

Sehri watched Andro's eyes close for a brief moment and she felt the anguish wash over him. She reached out quickly and took his face in her hands and she saw that anguish quickly pass as she tried to touch him with her own aura as much as possible given she did not really know how to control it. She saw him nod slowly to her.

"We leave no one." Andro spoke. "Get the civilians moving. Sa'roh... I'll meet you at the LZ. Have Haridl standing by... I'm bringing her a priority patient."

"Understood."

Andro looked at Sehri. "It is better if a medical person removes these. I need to lift you Sehri. Draw from me what you need."

Sehri nodded her head quickly understanding what he meant as his arms began to slid under her body and she laced her own arms over his broad shoulders.

"I can carry her!" Kelelm spoke as he moved forward and started to rise painfully in order to protect his sister's virtue and honor.

Andro's eyes lifted as he got his arms under Sehri's legs and her waist. "You are injured as well Kelelm... better that you do not injure yourself further. Your sister's honor is more than safe with me."

Kelelm met those azure eyes and nodded after a moment. "Of that I have little doubt." He spoke.

Andro nodded and turned back to look at Sehri. "Ready?"

She nodded quickly. "Yes." She answered, opening her mind to Andro's and preparing to use whatever she needed to dull the pain of when he moved her.

Andro smiled. "This is not exactly the way we had envisioned meeting you." He spoke softly. "Sadi and the others will be angry with you for this."

Sehri was about to answer when Andro lifted her and she grit her teeth against the surge of pain, quickly drawing a part of Andro's tolerance for pain into her so she did not pass out. He stood up fully with her petite form in his arms and looked at her once more as her face relaxed somewhat. "Can we go now, or is there something else you wish to see?"

Kelelm saw his sister glare at him, but in that glare he saw a love that was reserved for those who would share your life forever. A love that his wife and mate gave to him everyday. As Eotharon gripped his arm and helped him up fully Kelelm had a sense that life was going to be very different in the future.

Haridl dropped the smaller piece of metal to the deck of the *STRIKER* and returned her gaze to the open wound on Sehri's side. She lifted the portable scanner and nodded her head. "Good... no slivers remain." She spoke. She looked up at Sehri. "The medical filaments in your armor did their job. I will..."

Haridl's implant cackled in her ear. "Hari... we need you!" Danito's voice echoed. "We have wounded coming in!"

Haridl looked at to where Andro was watching and saw him nod. "Go! I will finish." He said.

Haridl nodded and grabbed her kit and began moving past the throng of recently freed civilians as they crowded the back of the *STRIKER*. Andro knelt in front of her, Kelelm beside her and holding her hand. The upper and lower portions of her armor, including the lightweight fatigue top had been removed leaving nothing more than a loose t-shirt that was partially soaked in sweat and outlined her pert, medium sized breasts perfectly. Kelelm's eyes watched as Andro took the large medical patch bandage and began to apply it to the wound on Sehri's side. Not once did his eyes wander from their task Kelelm noticed, even though his hands were so close to Sehri in such an intimate way. Given the social values of their people, this is not something Sehri would have allowed of a man she had just met. To view her in such a way and allow him to touch her so. It was only another sign to Kelelm that things were going to be very interesting from now on.

"This patch will anchor itself with micro filaments and feed your system with antibiotic fluids and additional enzymes that will assist your healing system." Andro spoke holding it firmly to her side for a moment. "It will drop off in a few hours when it runs its course. Do not remove it."

"I will insure this." Kelelm said.

Andro saw her shiver slightly. "You are cold?" He asked.

Sehri nodded quickly. "Inside the ship... yes." She answered.

Andro began to unbuckle the clasps along the sides of his own upper body armor. Kelelm and Sehri watched intently as he removed it quickly and they saw a similar fatigue top which he unbutton quickly and pulled off. Sehri barely held in the gasp of wanton desire as she saw his entire upper body bared to her eyes for he wore no t-shirt under the fatigue top. Her blue eyes quickly took in the flaming tattoo on his abdomen, the numerous scars and the Talon Guardian Brand on his upper chest. Kelelm for his part recognized the body of a fellow warrior and based on the scars he determined this was not a man who spent much time inside. His skin was deeply tanned and the muscles excruciating in their detail. Andro reached up quickly and draped the top over Sehri's shoulders. She swiftly put her arms through the sleeves and drew it tightly around herself.

"Better?" He asked.

Sehri nodded and without thinking she reached out and drew a finger across the brand of the Dragon Talon. Her eyes grew slightly wider when she touched it for it was directly over his heart and she could feel the thumping of his powerful heart under her touch as well as the warmth of his skin. The texture of the brand was unlike any burn or injury she had seen and it almost pulsed with a life of its own.

“What... what is this?” She asked softly.

Andro reached up and pulled her hand away gently, bringing her fingers up to his lips where he kissed them softly. “Something you can discover at a later time if you wish.” He said. “Something... something all of us desire.”

“They are... Sadi and the others... they are coming aren't they?” Sehri asked in a soft whisper voice.

Andro nodded as he reached down and pulled his armor back up, slipping it over his skin and beginning to refasten it. “Yes. They will be here in under a day if all goes well.” He replied. “You however... you are finished exploring the unknown. At least for now.”

They looked up as the female elf came up and placed her hand on Andro's shoulder. He looked up into Sa'roh's face. “We're almost ready.” She spoke.

Andro nodded and turned back to Sehri. “You will return to our base camp with Sa'roh. We are going to head north with those civilians we could not get loaded this time around. They will return for a second trip and we should return about the same time as your mother coming down from the *REAPER*. I understand she practically held Lunerr at gunpoint in order to get him to release the last *STRIKER*.”

Kelelm grinned. “She can be persuasive.” He said.

“I am coming with you.” Sehri stated firmly.

“Sehri you are injured!” Kelelm exclaimed.

Sehri's eyes never left Andro's face. “The medicines are working and I will only grow stronger as my healing system kicks in. You know this.” She stated calmly. “I don't want to... I don't want to be away from you Androcles. Not... not so soon after discovering you.”

“Sehri... it will only be for a few hours.” He said.

“I'm coming with you!” She spoke more firmly and slowly got to her feet. The pain in her leg had become nothing more than a dull throb by now.

Andro got up as well and looked at Kelelm. “Is she always this stubborn?” He asked.

Kelelm looked at his sister and shrugged his shoulders. “She never listened to our mother and father when growing either.”

Sehri snapped out with her hand and hit him in the abdomen. “Kelelm!”

“Very well... but I will carry you if you show signs of weakening.” Andro spoke. “We will be moving relatively fast to put as much distance as we can between us and this settlement. They'll be looking for us shortly.”

Kelelm looked at him. “The attack was perfect.” He said. “They won't discover we were here for several hours.”

Andro shook his head. “They'll discover we were here in several minutes.”

Kelelm looked confused. “How?”

Andro grinned. “I intend to tell them.” He said.

KAVALIAN AD-HOC HQ
GENERAL AZLENR'S COMMAND CENTER
1430 HRS, EST

“...go more easy if you will only tell me what I wish to know. That is why I have brought you here.” Azlenr spoke to the vampire who was kneeling before the portable desk. Azlenr was standing beside it, Makali and Byka standing to the side with two Kavalian soldiers holding their weapons on the man.

Robaran looked at the man. His face was swollen on the right side from his broken cheek, his eye puffy and nearly shut. His entire body was sore and only Haridl's blood had given him the strength to recover as much as he had from the beating the Puma Bane troops had given to him. He had been stunned into silence when his long time elven lover had appeared out of nowhere alongside the younger brother of Prince Androcles. She could not treat him as much as she wanted too and after only fifteen minutes she had kissed him goodbye with tears in her eyes. Robaran had decided to ask her to be his wife the moment she left. He would not let such a woman of strength leave his life.

Of course... he had to live through this as well.

“And if I don’t know or won’t tell you the answers to your questions then you give me back to your Puma Bane dogs?” Robaran snapped. “I’d rather you kill me now. Get it over with.”

Azlenr looked at the man intently. Azlenr had no particular hatred for vampires; they had never done anything to him. He only fought them because he was ordered to. The man appeared to be in superb physical condition, probably only a few hundred years old and he was obviously well trained in resisting interrogation or Marsin and his men would have gotten him to talk. His demeanor alone told Azlenr he was no ordinary Union Spartan.

“I have been around enough soldiers in my life to know that you are not a common foot soldier.” Azlenr spoke calmly. “If I had to guess I would say Union Special Forces or a member of their *Durcunusaan*. I understand your loyalty but these are questions that we can already deduce from your actions. You and your fellow team members managed to kill twenty Puma Bane Commandos before you fell. That is no small feat.”

“It’s easy enough when the only thing they are trained for is killing helpless men, women and children.” Robaran hissed.

“A... regrettable occurrence... but one I did not have knowledge of and one I did not endorse.” Azlenr spoke. He stepped away from the desk and tossed several printed frozen images on the floor in front of Robaran. The bodies of several Puma Bane troops and the large dragon print. “Last night someone attacked a small Puma Bane encampment in the mountains above the northern settlement. They killed the ten Puma Bane troops with nothing more than bladed weapons and escaped without leaving any trace of where they might have gone. The weapons used were mostly your *Nehtes* and swords. We can also confirm there is at least one dragon here as well. Now... we know that only your *Durcunusaan* uses swords... and this action was far too precise for standard Union Spartans. We also know that many of your *Durcunusaan* are... connected to dragons. Bonded Pairs you call them. How many of them are on this planet and where are they hiding?”

“You don’t know half of what you think you know!” Robaran spat at him.

“You might be surprised at what we know.” Azlenr spoke calmly.

“I doubt that... General Azlenr’Macaoe.” Robaran spoke looking at him.

Azlenr looked more than slightly surprised that the vampire knew who he was, but this only confirmed to him that he was something more than a normal soldier. “You know who I am?” He said calmly.

“I know who you are.” Robaran snapped. “And him.” He said motioning with his head to where Byka sat on the edge of the table. “General Byka’Caleo. The two men given most credit for cracking the High Coven defenses around Tenari. You always work together and in the war with the Coven you failed only once and that was because you had a traitor in your midst who warned the Coven you were coming. Yeah... I know who you are.”

“You seem awfully well informed for a common foot soldier.” Byka stated calmly as he looked at him.

Robaran shrugged. “What can I say...? I watch the Netnews.”

Azlenr moved in front of Robaran and squatted down. “Humor?” He said. “For a man in your position, humor is not something I would expect.”

“I’m dead anyway.” Robaran said. “Why not have a laugh before I die.”

Azlenr looked at him and smiled. “No... I don’t think that is what you believe.” He said. “You are filled with hope that your fellow soldiers that escaped will come for you. That they will somehow find a way to rescue you.”

“They’re already gone.” Robaran said.

“Doubtful considering your... shall we say... your mood.” Azlenr told him.

“Dying in service to my King... to my people... that is what makes my mood!” Robaran spat. “Pride! Honor! Things you have no knowledge of if you butcher children in the streets like they are animals!”

One of the guards lifted his rifle to slam it into the back of Robaran’s head but Azlenr held up his hand. “No!” He barked. “We are not Puma Bane and we do not treat prisoners in such a way!” He got back to his feet and turned his back to Robaran. “I told you that was not my doing.”

“I’m supposed to believe that?” Robaran barked. “I watched those Puma Bane troops shoot children in the back who were only trying to find a place to hide! And they laughed as they did it!”

Azlenr looked over at Byka who met his eyes. That sounded like something Marsin’s men would certainly do and it was the reason they had not wanted to use the Puma Bane troops to begin with. Keleru was

insistent for some reason however and he finally had no choice. Azlenr turned back and looked at him. "It is the truth." He stated evenly. "I have no reason to lie to you."

"And I suppose you didn't support your precious Keleru in blowing up the Union Senate Building on Earth and killing over a thousand innocents. Among them two hundred children whose only crime was trying to learn. Bet you didn't support that huh?" Robaran snapped. "You must think I'm really stupid."

Byka came to his feet now and looked at him. "You lie vampire!" He snarled. "Just like your Netnews lies! The KFI supported no such action!"

"You'd better check your facts on that bub!" Robaran snapped. "Just like you butchered hundreds of children within the borders of the High Coven when you invaded for no reason!"

Azlenr held up his hand keeping Byka from replying. "Now it is you who should check your facts. We had solid Intelligence that the High Coven was about to launch more poison missiles on our homeworld. We could not allow that to happen again. We were defending ourselves, nothing more."

Robaran looked at him with wide eyes. "I suppose that is what your leaders told you huh? No one even knew the Kavalians had made a resurgence when you invaded the High Coven!" He snapped. "Fuck this! I'm not telling you shit! Just give me back to your Puma Bane animals and let them kill me!"

"I have no..." Azlenr began to speak but was interrupted when the small door slid to the side and his senior COM officer burst in.

"General!" The man gasped. "General... we are receiving a communications!"

Azlenr looked at the man annoyed. "And this is important to me why?" He growled.

"The man... General... he claims he has just destroyed the Puma Bane detachment in the northern settlement and has freed all of the civilians. He wishes... he wishes to speak with you sir!" The officer stammered.

Azlenr looked at the man. "What?"

"It is a Union soldier. He... he says he has just wiped out the Puma Bane detachment at the northern settlement and has freed the civilians. He... wishes to speak with you." The man repeated his statement.

"He is on our channels?" Byka gasped.

The COM officer nodded. "Yes General."

"Bring him." Azlenr ordered as he surged forward pointing at Robaran. "Byka with me!" He stopped for a second. "Get Marsin here as well." He ordered the COM officer. "Move... move quickly!"

Andro watched as Dantio and the others got the Bontawillian, elf and human civilians that remained from the settlement lined up and moving out of the sundered settlement gates heading north. They were moving quickly and efficiently as was the normal way for most Bontawillian people. All of them were clearly overjoyed to be free and Sehri and Kelelm had seen the looks of adoration given to Andro as the men and women passed him. Kelelm was not about to let his sister remain behind and they now sat together on the half ton chunk of concrete that had been part of the door before Andro had used his power to blow it open. Kelelm was watching him intently for clearly military purposes, Andro's helmet once more on his head and hiding most of his features. The matte black helmet had a long plume of multi colored hair that fell back between his shoulder blades and was unlike anything Kelelm had seen before. The golden eyed dragon with open maw on the front of the helmet was very intimidating. That this normal armor could, in mere milliseconds, be covered in glimmering Dragon Armor did not escape Kelelm in the least. The powerful aura of command that surrounded this young man was there for all to see and feel and only those too dense to know their own name would miss it. That he was so young did not faze the much older Lycavorian Spartans that moved back and forth among the soldiers. He conferred several times with both the Lycavorian Dantio as well as the taller Daio. He also saw him make odd motions and signals with his hands towards different Union soldiers at different times. They would only nod and move off to conduct something that Kelelm would not see. The *KADEN* had taken nearly three hundred of the civilians aboard, almost thirty percent over her gross operating safety weight. Andro had trusted the human pilot when she said she could do it, and the ship had cleared the tree tops as it made its way north towards the ocean where it would cross the ninety kilometers of open water to their base on the southern continent. The *STRIKER* was fully loaded as well, and waiting for his signal to lift off.

Sehri simply trembled and stared at him with newly discovered emotions and sensations surging through her. Through him Sehri could feel Sadi and the others growing stronger by the moment. They were getting closer she knew, but still hours away, yet that did not keep them from reaching for her and embracing her within their Etheric resonance as well. And everything around her was becoming so much clearer and focused as they drew closer. Her glaucous blue eyes never left Andro as he paced back and forth two meters away, stealing glances at her while issuing orders to his men. Sehri was also intelligent enough to know who Eotharon and the two other *Durcunusaan* soldiers who knelt discretely to the side were. They were there to protect her. Sehri remembered the greeting between Andro and Lisisa. He had swept his sister up in his arms and hugged her tightly, all the while scolding her for doing something so stupid as to come here. Sehri had watched and listened within Mindvoice as Elynth scolded her younger but much larger brother, all the while checking him for possible injuries and finally brushing her snout against his affectionately. Sehri noticed for the first time that Lisisa wore a similar helmet to Andro, though the plume was nowhere near as long, and it was missing the dragon face in the front. The pain in her side was nearly gone between the medical patch and her own remarkable healing system and the throbbing in her leg was an afterthought now.

She and Kelelm had watched him speak to the Kavalian officer on the portable monitor that had been set up and give his instructions. Now it was only a matter of waiting until the Kavalian Commander replied. Sehri watched him reach up and remove his helmet as he turned to them and he crossed the distance to them in a dozen steps before squatting in front of her. His hand came up and she could feel the warmth of his body through the leather like ArmorPly that covered his palm as he stroked her cheek with his fingers. Sehri reached up quickly and placed her hand over his holding his fingers in place.

“The pain is almost gone?” He asked softly taking off his helmet.

Sehri nodded her head. “Yes. So is the throbbing. I told you that.” She said with a smile.

Kelelm looked back and forth between them. “You told him... Sehri... you have been sitting here with me the whole time. How...” He stopped and saw his youngest sister look at him with an odd gaze. Kelelm glanced at Andro and then back to her. “Ahhh... I understand now.” He said.

Andro looked at Kelelm. “This is... this is not something any of us expected Kelelm.” Andro spoke.

“You mean you and your other wives and mates?” Kelelm asked.

Andro nodded. “It is as much a surprise to us as it is to Sehri. Especially the intensity of it.” He answered. “Part of it is her fever yes, but the majority of it is something else within all of us. It pushes Sehri’s fever to the back.”

Kelelm looked at him. “I have to say... first meeting your brother on Austrova... now you here in the middle of a war...” Kelelm shook his head with a smile. “This is not how my father and mother envisioned it.”

“I can safely say it is not exactly what I had in mind either.” Andro replied.

Kelelm looked at him. “Why do this?” He asked. “Why make yourself a target. Is it not easier to simply leave?”

Andro nodded. “Yes. In doing that however, I leave these people to the mercies of the Kavalians. You have seen the bodies and the condition of the survivors. The Kavalians that we killed lined up over fifteen hundred innocents and butchered them because they would not fit in the main auditorium in the center of the settlement. Men, women and even children.” Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “That was the only reason. These dead Puma Bane soldiers you see all around us... they are the Kavalian Shock Troopers... totally committed and loyal to their leader Keleru. They will kill everything in their path to accomplish their goals. Securing this planet was their goal and they massacred thousands of innocents to do so. What makes you think any survivors would be treated differently.”

“But you are... you are the Crown Prince of your people!” Kelelm stated. “You are risking your own life!”

Andro chuckled. “Yes I am.” He stated. “And I’m also known to have a few screws loose as well.”

Kelelm looked at Sehri quickly and saw her smile. “Screws loose?” He asked. “What does that mean?”

“Andro!” Sa’roh called out to him from the portable COM unit. “They are answering!”

Andro smiled wider. “It’s a nice way of saying that I tend to do rather crazy things.” He answered before kissing Sehri firmly and then rising to his feet, returning his helmet to his head. “Things that drive others *malda* as well.” He looked at Sa’roh as he came up to her. “The instant I end this, you are airborne.”

Sa’roh nodded. “You don’t have to tell me twice.” She said.

Andro nodded and touched the inside of his left wrist activating the Dragon Armor. It took exactly four seconds for the pliable plates of Dragon Armor to extend and conform to his body over the top of the ArmorPly Mark V uniform, making him a very imposing figure.

“Activate it!”

KAVALIAN FIELD HQ SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT

Azlenr moved into his communications center, Byka taking up a position to his right at an COM panel. As Robaran was pushed roughly to his knees on the left, the main door opened and Marsin made his entrance. He glanced darkly at where two of Azlenr’s men stood on either side of the Union vampire prisoner and then back to Azlenr.

“General...” Marsin stated. “I was told we are receiving a communications from the so called terrorist leader!” He hissed.

Azlenr nodded his head. “I was just about to reply to him.” He stated. “He claims they have destroyed the northern settlement and killed all of your men.”

“Impossible.” Marsin snapped. “A handful of civilian insurgents do not stand a chance against my men!”

Azlenr shook his head in disgust and looked at Byka. “Byka?”

“I have gunships standing by.” He spoke. “And a light armor company moving to the northern settlement as we speak. They should arrive in twenty-seven minutes.”

“Send the gunships!” Marsin snapped.

“We have a limited number of *DAGGERS* Major... most of them still reside on our ships in orbit and I will not send them into the unknown.” Azlenr answered. “Let us see this rebel leader. Activate the COM link.”

The Kavalian COM officer nodded his head and adjusted his controls. The holographic image exploded into existence in the room and it was not the image of a Bontawillian or elven civilian. They were looking at a fully armored Lycavorian Union Spartan staring at the transmitter from under the helmet. Only his eyes and small portions of his skin were visible with his lips, the rest covered in crimson streaked gold Dragon Armor. The crimson coloring decorated his shoulders and chest and had to be some sort of rank insignia if Azlenr was any judge. They could see very little behind the Lycavorian as the window of the holo signal was being kept very small on the other end.

Azlenr kept his eyes on the image as he issued orders. “Get me an identity from our data banks, though I doubt we will find one if this is just a common *Durcunusaan* soldier!” He hissed. “Trace the COM signal and direct the ground forces accordingly Byka! Activate audio as well.”

“General... you aren’t actually going to talk to this terrorist are you?” Marsin gasped.

Azlenr didn’t meet his eyes. “Yes I am.” He spoke. “It will buy time for our ground forces to get there.”

“We should just send our gunships!” Marsin declared.

Azlenr looked at him now. “We are receiving no response from your men Major!” He hissed. “No outgoing transmissions and no answers to our calls! I’m not going to risk what few gunships we have in an unknown situation! Especially if they have wiped out your men!”

“I refuse to believe that!” Marsin snarled.

“Keep thinking that Major.” Azlenr spoke dismissing him as he turned to face the image. “Activate audio now!”

“Active General.” The COM Officer spoke.

Azlenr stepped closer to the holo projection. “To whom am I speaking?” Azlenr spoke firmly.

“Who I am does not matter.” Andro answered him. “What I am going to tell you does... General Azlenr’Macaoe.”

Azlenr looked surprised at this and it showed in his expression. He looked around quickly and then back to the image. “You have me at a disadvantage.” He spoke finally.

“Yeah... it’s been like that for a day or so now hasn’t it.” Andro answered flippantly. “A pity for the men you have lost but they were nothing more than the murderers of innocents and they deserved their fate.”

“Those were my men!” Marsin screamed moving into the cone of the transmission now. “And you will pay for their deaths!”

“Ah... you must Major Marsin’Jiate. The local Puma Bane butcher.” Andro spat with contempt and once more surprising Azlenr with his knowledge. “You men are not so skilled or adept when they are facing men and women who can defend themselves. They did not put up much of a fight to be honest. I thought there would be more to them.”

Marsin hissed in hatred. “We will see who is laughing in the end when I have you under my blade Lycavorian dog!” He snarled. “You will...”

“Enough!” Azlenr barked shoving Marsin back. He looked at Andro. “You know who we are... so I will assume you are not some civilian insurgency cobbled together from those who escaped when we took the settlements. You were obviously soldiers here for rest and relaxation when we began our assault. Just like the man we now hold I would gather. Surrender yourself and your men to me and there will be no more death.”

“General!” Marsin hissed in shock.

“Silence!” Azlenr snapped at him as they heard Andro chuckle from the transmission. Azlenr looked at him with angry eyes. “You risk the lives of your men and every Union citizen on this planet with your disregard!” He barked at Andro.

“You think I contacted you to negotiate my surrender?” Andro asked calmly. “You presume much Kavalian.”

“Why else would you contact me?” Azlenr demanded. “You have obviously cracked our COM codes to be able to contact me on our own channels. Why do that unless you plan to surrender?”

Andro shook his head slowly. “Spartans do not surrender General Azlenr.” He spoke calmly. “It is against the code of honor that we follow. You do know what honor is don’t you?”

“Honor?” Marsin rasped with a smirk. “I will show you your honor! I will find you!” He growled. “I will find you and you will pay!”

“Enough Major!” Azlenr shouted. “You will remain silent or I will have you removed!”

Andro shook his head once more. “You are a putrid excuse for a man Marsin’Jiate.” He spoke. “You know nothing of honor! I would be surprised to discover that you can even spell that word. You butcher innocent men, women and children even as they beg you for their very lives!” Andro was looking directly at the transmitter on his end of the communication. “You will not leave this world alive Major Marsin’Jiate. I will spread your remains among the dirt of the world you have violated so!”

Azlenr stared at the holoimage. “You contacted us! Do not waste my time any longer unless you have something to say!” He said angrily growing tired of the games.

“Oh... I have something to say.” Andro spoke as he lifted his hands and grasped his helmet. They watched as he removed the helmet slowly, revealing his face.

The gasps from within the room were very obvious and Byka hissed loudest of all with wide eyes. “Fuck!” He rasped quietly. “It’s the Lycavorian Prince! It’s the son!”

Azlenr was the only one who did not show a great deal of emotion as he stared at Andro. “Prince Androcles Leonidas.” He finally stated calmly. “This... this *is* a surprise.”

“You are holding over ten thousand Union citizens against their will. I want them loaded aboard one of your ships and removed from this planet. I will grant that ship access to return to Bontawillian space.” Andro stated. “I want this done in the next twelve hours.”

Azlenr chuckled softly. “You will grant access? I control this planet now Prince Androcles. I control this planet and the space it resides in.”

Andro smiled. “There is an old saying on Earth General Azlenr... *Don’t count your birds before they hatch.*” Andro said. “Do not be so secure in the position you now hold. The civilians on this planet are innocent settlers and scientists. You have already killed several thousand of them. I will not allow you to take any more of their lives.”

“We are at war Prince Androcles. A war you started with your actions.” Azlenr answered calmly.

Andro’s head tilted to the side and his eyes narrowed. “Members of your Puma Bane Commandos infiltrated my homeworld! My father’s city!” He snarled. “Your people kidnapped my second elven mother

after you thought you had succeeded in killing my father! Then my perverted uncle raped her! He took her against her will!” He roared angrily as the images of what had happened that he had gotten from Fedor and Eirene flashed in his mind. “A crime I will make all of you pay for even as my father makes my uncle pay! Your sick Puma Bane commandos blew up a building with over a thousand innocent men, women and children. Two hundred and forty-three children to be exact! Children who will now never have the chance to grow old! Who...!”

“I will not listen to these lies boy!” Azlenr snapped. “You were training High Coven dragons to fight my people! We needed to act in order to protect ourselves!”

“By killing children?” Andro gasped.

“That is a lie!” Azlenr snarled. “Enough of this! I will spar with you no more! Surrender yourself to me and we can end this war before it even begins!”

Azlenr and the others couldn’t help but take an involuntary step away from the holo image when Andro’s eyes suddenly flared brightly and almost began to glow that azure blue color. “This war... this war began the day your leaders made the mistake of trying to kill my father!” Andro snarled. “This war began the day you made the decision to lay your hands upon my elven mother’s person and defile her as you have! Lie to yourself and your men General... but do not lie to me about the truth!” Andro moved closer to the transmitter. “You have Union citizens you are holding against their will... give them a ship and allow them to leave. Then we can battle as two armies and victory will go to the better of us.”

“I have two divisions of Kavalian troops already on the ground!” Azlenr snapped. “You cannot possibly hope to match my numbers. We will find you!”

Those glowing eyes blinked and Andro nodded. “I have six hundred... give or take a few dozen.” He answered with a shrug. “We have you outnumbered.”

Azlenr blinked in shocked his face locked in an expression of disbelief. “Are you mad?” He barked finally.

“Since you have no intention of releasing those Union Citizens that you hold, I will say this.” Andro spoke. “For every Union citizen that dies by your hand or the hand of any man under your command I will kill ten of your soldiers. You executed fifty-three Union civilians only hours ago... the five hundred and nineteen Puma Bane troops you had here at the northern settlement makes us even. Ten of your men for every civilian life you take General Azlenr. That is my oath to you. My math is excellent General, eventually I will get to you by simple process of elimination. You will run out of men willing to defend you.”

“You arrogant...” Azlenr began to shout.

“You may come collect the bodies of your men.” Andro told him. “You will find we are much more civilized than you.” Andro’s glowing eyes turned to look at Marsin. He bared his dual fangs which were now fully extended. “Marsin’ Jiate...” He growled. “Enjoy your last days in this life you foul excuse for a man, for when I find you, I will take your head and mount it on my spear. Then I will put it on display for the crimes and dishonor you have committed against the Bontawillian people! You... mister big bad Puma Bane cock breath leader... you will suffer for every innocent life you have taken or caused harm. I will see to that myself.”

“I will kill you!” Marsin screamed. “I will kill you boy!”

Andro almost smiled at him. “Yes, I’m sure you would like too. As my father would say however... get in line motherfucker!” Andro turned back to Azlenr. “Say good bye to your armored column General. It is right now coming into range of my weapons. This will be your only warning General Azlenr’ Macoe and the only time we will talk. You have had your chance, I do not give second chances. By the time you get someone else here, we will be gone and then this war will have truly begun.” Andro turned to someone outside their cone of vision on the Kavalian end. “STGs!” He barked. “Destroy the column!”

Andro turned back and looked at Azlenr. “Welcome to my war General.” He stated. “You should have stayed home.”

CHAPTER SIX

SCIMITAR

ELEVEN HOURS FROM SOLMAR SYSTEM
FEBRUARY 4TH, 1840 HRS EST

“...lost your minds?” Ben O’Connor’s voice sprang from the holo transmission in front of Sadi and Ne’Veha.

Sadi glanced at Ne’Veha quickly where she sat next to her and smiled, Carisia and Lu’ria bookending them on the couch in their quarters on the *SCIMITAR*, also with small grins on their faces. She turned back to the life size figure of Admiral O’Connor who was pacing back and forth in his office at Dreamland.

“I assure you Admiral... we are quite in command of all our cognizant abilities.” Sadi answered him with a smile.

Ben stopped pacing and looked at them. “I’m not so sure.” He hissed. “He’s beginning to take after his father you know! Now their nut job mentality has rubbed off on you just like it did Anja and the others! Andro’s boneheaded move just revealed to half the Kavalian Command Structure where he is and...”

“You know the reason he did that Admiral.” Lu’ria spoke up quickly.

Ben nodded. “I know why he did it.” He stated. “I’m just trying to determine how much of a blow he took to the head in order to actually do it!”

“We trust him.” Sadi spoke confidently. “And I have already ordered Admiral Ceneu to deploy forces in order to counter any reinforcements the Kavalians may send. Whatever forces they have there already will be all they are getting.”

Ben lifted the data pad. “Now you send me this?”

“You received our schematics then?” Ne’Veha asked.

“I got them Ne’Veha. How long did it take you and Sadi to put this together?” Ben asked her.

Ne’Veha glanced at Sadi. “Seven hours.” She answered almost embarrassed, turning back to the image of the most famous human/vampire hybrid in the entire Lycavorian Union. A man who made the impossible seem mundane. Admiral Benjamin O’Connor was one of Martin Leonidas’s oldest and most cherished friends. A man who had been with him long before he had ever become King of the Union and a man that the King listened too exclusively when he spoke. A man that Andro secretly suspected of being an Eridiani Sadi knew. It would account for his amazing longevity even before becoming a vampire as well as his supreme intelligence.

“Seven hours!” Ben almost shouted. “Seven hours to take the frame of one of the Pralor corvettes, twist it and turn it to suit your needs and turn it into one of the most advanced ships in the fleet!”

Sadi nodded her head. “Umm... essentially yes.” She said also somewhat embarrassed.

“Why ain’t you two working for me instead of traipsing all over the galaxy after that *malda* man you are mated too!” Ben barked.

“It wouldn’t be anywhere near as fun.” Carisia spoke now.

Ben snorted loudly. “Fun!” He bellowed. “Are you saying I’m not fun young lady?”

Carisia’s face narrowed in worry and she shook her head quickly. “No... no sir.” She stammered.

“Admiral... we consulted with both Avi and 341 and they...” Sadi began.

Ben held up his hand. “No wife to Androcles Leonidas calls me Admiral... is that clear?” He stated. “I forbid it.”

“Ben...” Sadi said softly. “There is a reason for this.” She spoke. “With Ne’Veha and I now bonded to dragons, even the new *STRIKER* is not large enough for all of us. We needed a ship that could match the speed and abilities of the *STRIKER* and still carry all of us. You know Jomann and Eli will never be apart from Andro. They are too close as Prince and Captain and brother and sister. Eli would never let him go anywhere far from her. She feels her purpose is to keep him in one piece and that purpose now extends to us as well it seems.”

“Good luck to her with that.” Ben said with a smile. “She’s been trying to do that since she was a little girl and he always manages to get the shit kicked out of him every so often. She might have better luck with you five, but I doubt it.”

All of them laughed softly at that. “How true.” Lu’ria said softly.

“With all of us combined we are talking about seven dragons. Possibly one or two more in the future. We are not sure about that yet.” Sadi said. “We used Shiria’s ship as a foundation base and it just turned out to be a perfect fit.”

“Sadi... considering the size and power this ship would have... you’re talking about an entirely new class.” Ben spoke. “A Heavy Corvette for lack of a better term. Not to mention it will be our first attempt at building a purely Pralor ship.” He typed on the pad. “What kind of crew are we talking?”

“We want to keep the flight crew at three.” Sadi answered. “Myself, *SirsanGai* and a Flight Engineer. Preferably one who is an excellent pilot so that we can cross deck to one another. Andro and Jomann are well versed enough in weapons and tactics and Eliani added her designs for a small Med Bay. Dutkne has become Andro’s... his Oracle for lack of a better term. If all goes as Shiria and Deia have worked out then Jomann will have a counter to him as a Paladin. Aside from the eleven of us and our dragons, perhaps a dozen more permanent crew. More than likely cross trained *Durcunusaan* that Jomann will pick.”

Ben looked at her in the transmission. “You do realize that putting one of *SPARTA’S WRATH’S* spare Quantum Fusion Resonance Reactors in this puppy will make it seriously overpowered for the size you are talking.”

Sadi smiled. “That’s what we like.” She said.

“We’re going to have to reinforce every brace and strut with a solid coating of inch thick Dragon Armor and Lyrium Durcorsis seams.” Ben spoke almost to himself. “The outer hull shell will have to be made up of our Dragon Armor laced with the Pralor Lyrium Weave Durcorsis to keep it as light as you want but not lose any structural integrity or the ability to take a pounding.” He looked up and them. “We can’t duplicate the bio-mechanical properties of true Pralor vessels, I’ve already confirmed that with Avi. We don’t have the minerals needed for full osmosis into the hull.”

Sadi nodded her head. “Avi told us their Lyrium Weave Durcorsis and Dragon Armor will make a superior combination almost equal in endurance.”

“Sadi... this will be the first ship that we build that will be based solely on advanced Pralor technology right down to the brackets. It will just look like one of ours.” Ben told them. “After a fashion anyway. Most of the tech will come from *SPARTA’S WRATH* since *CS4’s* main drive is inert.”

Sadi nodded. “It will also serve as a test bed for future enhancements of the *ARIZONA’S* and other ships.” She smiled. “Miranda and Zaala were with 341 when we contacted him and Avi. They actually already had the design ideas for the power conduits and the engine core chamber. They are taking a very interested stance. If these designs work on this ship, Miranda will request to have similar ones installed on the newer *ARIZONA’S*. I’m betting they will want to help build it since it needs to fit into the *SCIMITAR’S* landing bay.”

“Figures they’d have their two cents in on this.” Ben spoke. “They are the best people I got on Pralor tech outside of Avi and 341. And those two have been like winning the lottery to me. And no bet with Manda and Zaala or their back channel intentions.” He said with a grin. “I’d lose anyway. I got nearly a thousand of those worker drones scurrying all over the fucking place tweaking this and that and working with my engineers. They are helping us to kick out ships at four times the rate. I love it!”

“Given the design parameters and the worker drones you have Ben... how soon do you think before you can have it?” Sadi asked.

Ben looked at her. “Jeez girl... you don’t beat around the bush do you?” He hissed. “This is going to take time! We’re building it from the frame up!”

Sadi met his gaze. “I’ll give you three weeks.” She stated firmly. “We know Andro... and we can give it whatever shake down tests it may need. We want...”

Ben held up his hand. “Give me four weeks.” He told her. “I’ll have it for you before you go to the Beta Quadrant.”

Sadi blinked and looked at Lu'ria quickly before turning back to him. “What makes you think we are going to the Beta Quadrant any time soon?” She asked.

Ben chuckled gently now. “Ah... Sadi. Don’t forget... I’ve known Androcles a lot longer than you. I know how that boy thinks... cause he thinks just like his father. And his father is one evil and devious sonofabitch when he wants to be.”

Carisia leaned forward now. “What... what do you mean Ben?” She asked softly.

Ben smiled. “Ask him what he has planned when you link up with him. He’ll tell you.” He answered. He held up the data pad. “I’ll put together a team to start building this. 341 will be giving you updates. Avi is heading out on one of the Pralor corvettes tomorrow.”

“Heading where?” Sadi asked.

“Andro contacted me a couple days ago and said he wanted Avi put on one of the Pralor corvettes and sent to link up with Marty and the others.” Ben said with a shrug. “He didn’t offer a reason and I didn’t ask. We’re packing the ship with some extra goodies for Marty and the gang and it will return with messages for families and Intel. It’s the first of a series of supply meets that we have arranged. Having the corvettes makes it relatively smooth.” A chime of some kind echoed in the background and caused him to look up. “Ok... got to go. I’ll have 341 keep you in the loop and contact you if he has any questions.”

“Thank you Ben.” Sadi said quickly.

Ben nodded. “Tell Andro to keep his hard head down.”

“We will.” Sadi answered just before the transmission ended and Ben’s life size image disappeared. She leaned back on the couch and looked at Ne’Veha thoughtfully. “He took that better than I thought.” She said.

“He couldn’t have known...” Lu’ria said. “You and *SirsanGai* only just finished the details a few hours ago.”

Sadi looked at her. “Perhaps... but it just seems he has been expecting such a request.”

“The 1st Elven Engineer Division considers him the most brilliant mind in the entire Union when it comes to engineering.” Ne’Veha spoke. “That is as big a praise as you will get from the commander of that unit.”

Sadi nodded. “Yes it is.”

Carisia moved closer to Ne’Veha on the couch. “We should speak of Sehri while we are here together.” She stated softly watching as they all turned to her. “I’m a pureblood vampire and even I could sense within Mindvoice that her Coming of Age fever is upon her. And quite strongly.”

Sadi nodded again. “From what we now know, the Rothryn people are Lycavorians who simply cannot shift their forms. They are identical to us in every other way. And that means they still have the same physical reactions.”

“And since she would be considered a pureblood...” Lu’ria began. “Her fever will be very strong.”

“She is suppressing it rather well.” Ne’Veha commented. “At least to others.”

“It’s still battering her shields terribly.” Sadi agreed with a nod. “And she has doubts about something that is keeping her from embracing what she feels entirely.”

“We will need to strengthen our connection with her as we draw closer Sadi.” Lu’ria spoke. “I am only recently turned... just like *SirsanGai*. Because of how we are connected within Mindvoice, the effects of her fever are more pronounced on us physically and with Enylarcopri it within Mindvoice. We can’t let that distract us.”

“There is no doubt in Andro’s mind.” Ne’Veha spoke with a small smile. “No hesitation in the least when he thinks of her or any of us.”

Sadi nodded and smiled. “I know. He has accepted it fully now. After what happen with Caliria he will no longer doubt his instincts. We belong to him.”

“What do you mean?” Carisia asked.

“He feels responsible for what happen with Caliria.” Sadi said. “All of you feel that. He won’t speak of it to us because it shames him but his emotions are torn about what to do.” Sadi shook her head. “That will work itself out.” She spoke. “We must concentrate on the here and now.”

“And you still will not allow me to visit Ulana and explain things to her?” Lu’ria asked with lethal humor.

All of them laughed and Sadi leaned over to grab Lu’ria’s soft, pink lips in a kiss as Ne’Veha and Carisia grinned while looking on. “Oh Mistress... that would not be entirely fair.” Sadi spoke.

“Who said anything about being fair?” Lu’ria hissed. “Andro is ours!”

Sadi nuzzled Lu’ria’s throat and ran her tongue between the deep valley of ebony skin between her Drow Mistress’s large breasts. “Have no fear Mistress. That will become painfully clear to Ulana in the days ahead... and we won’t have to do a thing. Given what we are all feeling from Andro... I’m thinking he will set Ulana in her place.”

REMAINS OF THE NORTHERN SETTLEMENT
FEBRUARY 4TH, 1915 HRS, EST

Azlenr squatted among the smoking remains of the settlement, his dark eyes focused on the rows of bodies stretched out before him. He wanted to feel anger for this action but he was unable to. These were Puma Bane troops and not his or Byka's men. As far as he was concerned these men got what they deserved for their actions, though he would never say that aloud. The bodies had been dumped unceremoniously in rows of thirty or so. No care was taken in this action and it was obvious to Azlenr the message that Prince Androcles was sending, though he knew it would be lost on Marsin in a fit of rage. The bodies had been collected near the south and north entrances to the settlement, and they were the first thing anyone saw upon entering the walls. The stench of dead flesh was beginning to grow more pronounced as his head shifted and he saw Byka and Kameka moving towards his location. Dozens of his men were moving through the wreckage of the settlement, looking for additional bodies and any clues as to how this battle had unfolded. Azlenr rose to his feet as Byka came up to him and Makali began moving towards him from across the rows of bodies. He had not seen Marsin since they had landed close to twenty minutes ago and Azlenr didn't know if that was good or bad.

Azlenr met the eyes of his cherished friend as he came up beside him. "Survivors Byka?" He asked softly although he was relatively sure of the answer.

Byka shook his head slowly. "No. The entire contingent was wiped out." He answered. "No one survived." He looked at his daughter and motioned with his head. "Tell him what you told me Meka?"

Kameka glanced at her father and then looked at Azlenr. "At least two dragons took part in the assault General." She spoke. "There are prints from a third one, a much larger third one, but nothing that indicate that particular dragon was on the ground during the assault."

"Three?" Azlenr gasped. "You are certain?"

Kameka nodded. "The prints are very clear and very different sir. They were used to sweep up the interior of the settlement along the retaining wall. I found... I found the remains of several dozen bodies."

"Remains?" Azlenr asked.

"They were burned to ash for the most part sir." Kameka answered. "There is not much that can stand against three thousand degree heat when directed with such intensity."

Azlenr nodded. "You are correct in that." He said. Azlenr looked at Makali as he came up. "Makali?"

The Kavalian Colonel took a deep breath. "I suspect no more than a hundred and fifty Union soldiers hit this settlement General. There are both boot prints and paw prints outside either entrance. I suspect they got close to the walls in their wolf forms and then shifted just as they launched their attack."

"Ground sensors would not pick up the shapes of wolves as they approached." Byka spoke looking at Azlenr. "Their silhouette is too small."

Makali nodded. "I estimate sixty to seventy hit the settlement from either end while their dragons took out the men with T19 missiles." He continued. "I doubt they even knew what was happening before they were killed. Intelligence reports from the Evolli indicate these dragons can strike with blinding speed. Even out of the sky."

Azlenr looked around. "Three dragons and a hundred and fifty men took out a five hundred member strong Puma Bane detachment." He said softly.

"They took casualties General." Makali spoke. "There are signs where their men went down."

Azlenr turned back and looked at him. "That they even attempted this to begin with shows me some measure of what they are capable of Makali."

"Yes sir."

"Has anyone seen Marsin?" Azlenr asked.

Byka motioned to the west of their location with his head. "He was looking for the body of the detachment commander near the western wall." He answered. "The... the death toll did not seem to concern him."

"As if this is any news to us." Makali said with some contempt.

"I saw the scorch marks of at least two short range ships General. And one larger one. If I had to guess I'd say it was one of their *KADEN* transports. The crashed ship was definitely a *STRIKER*, though it has been gutted and destroyed with Thermite core charges. They burned everything so we could not recover it."

“Not even pieces of their Dragon Armor?” Azlenr asked. “Don’t their STRIKERS all carry that?”

Kameka nodded. “Yes sir... but these thermite core charges were designed to melt even their Dragon Armor and render the stable chemicals involved in the forging inert and unusable.” She stated. “We will get nothing from the wreckage.”

“Lots of tracks leading north of the settlement towards the coast. A few hundred at least.” Byka said. “We should send a gunship to investigate Azlenr. They might be able to catch them as they are moving.”

Azlenr shook his head. “Which is exactly what he would suspect I would do.” He said. “No... I will not lose one of our gunships to a surprise missile attack from the ground. The ground column was more than I expected to lose in so little time on this planet. The terrain becomes less friendly the closer to the coast that you move does it not?”

Byka nodded. “According to the thermal scans yes.”

“Darkness is coming and any gunships we send would be sitting ducks flying at tree top level looking for civilians in the jungles below.” Azlenr spoke. “I will not chase him. That is what he wants. The Puma Bane troops may be trained to go after them in the deep timber and jungles but our men are not. I will not risk them against the kind of experience he undoubtedly has with him. They would be slaughtered. He cannot have more than a few hundred men with him or our teams would have detected them by now.”

“If they have transport our ships may be able to pick them up from orbit.” Makali said.

Byka shook his head. “Not through their Shrouds.” He stated calmly. “Remember their *KADEN* transports and their *STRIKERS* are interstellar ships and both are equipped with those damnable Shrouds. They have the range to be anywhere on the planet by now.”

Azlenr turned to look north. “They called him Soul Slayer.” Azlenr said softly.

“Sir?” Makali asked.

Azlenr turned back. “The Evolli. They called him Soul Slayer. He and his dragon are said to have killed more Evolli soldiers during their war than five others combined. Even more than his father.”

“He is a boy General.” Makali spoke.

“And he is considered to be one of the foremost tactical minds within the Union behind only his father an one or two others. And he is even more brutal than his father when it comes to his enemies. You know what he did to the Icalro Alliance. And that was over a female he considered his wife!” Azlenr said.

Kameka looked at him for a moment and then turned to her father. This was something she had not heard. “Father?” She asked.

Byka met her eyes. Azlenr had stood beside him and Meka throughout the entire affair with Marsin and he knew his friend treated his own daughters with much more respect and emotion than normally allowed by Kavalian standards. “The Icalro Alliance apparently was involved with a criminal organization that kidnapped a female who this Prince considered his wife and mate. He went to rescue her and in the process he utterly destroyed the Icalro Alliance Fleet and their capital city. All of their leaders were killed and the Icalro Alliance is now nothing but a memory.”

Meka’s eyes grew a little wider but she kept her council to herself. What would it be like to be loved by a man in such a way? A man who would destroy entire governments for her. A man who worshiped the ground upon which she walked. That was what Meka yearned for... but it was something she knew she would never have.

“Young he may be Makali... but this Lycavorian Spartan Prince knows what he is about quite well.” He looked at Byka. “I want gunships up first thing in the morning Byka. Move them in pairs to cover each other. Sweep the entire area to the north. Put down as many troops as you need to cover all the way to the coast. I will move another company of our light armor to this location before nightfall so they can support you.”

Byka nodded. “We should be able to follow their trail easily enough.” He said. “It will be almost impossible to hide that many civilians trampling through the jungle and timber. They can not hide from us.”

Azlenr nodded. “Make it happen Byka.” He spoke. “I need to find Marsin and insure he does not exact retribution for this.”

“You believe he will do as he says General?” Makali asked.

Azlenr met his eyes. “I believe he will do exactly as he says.” Azlenr spoke. “He has the skill and the personnel to dance around and cut us in so many spots we could not respond to them all. And he will adhere to his promise. I have no wish to lose our men to Marsin’s anger and stupidity.”

Marsin tossed down the remains of the message satchel and looked around the area. The half cooked body of his detachment commander lay before his feet, his upper body looking as if it had been held over an intense fire for hours, while his lower body rested a meter away.

“Empty. Fuck!” He hissed softly. He turned to two of the three men that accompanied him. “Search the immediate area!” He ordered. “Look for data pads or message cubes! Quickly! Before Azlenr’s men move into this area.”

Marsin’s second in command moved up beside him as the two others moved off. “He had nothing tying us to the plan Major.” He spoke.

“No Dico’Noers.” Marsin answered. “What he did have however, would undoubtedly cause Azlenr to become suspicious of our motives in being here and he would start asking questions.”

“The Prefect will not be happy sir.” Dico spoke.

“The Prefect will not find out.” Marsin spoke. “If these Spartan dogs are the ones who took the files as I believe, they will not tell Azlenr. To them... our orders would be a benefit.”

“True.” Dico said.

Marsin looked at him. “We must act accordingly.” He spoke. “I will demand several gunships to search for these animals. Azlenr will no doubt send Byka after them. And since he likes to take chances, it makes our job easier. He will fly with his bitch daughter and I can have her one last time before I give her to you and the others. When we are done they will be dead.”

“Is she as good as you claim sir?” Dico asked with a smile.

Marsin grinned. “Tightest pussy I ever had my friend.” He stated. “And it is much more fun when she fights. It will be gratifying to hear her howling in misery once more.” He looked at him and tapped his arm. “One more sweep of the area in case we may have missed where the messages might have been tossed. Then we find Azlenr.”

SOLMAR

NORTHERN JUNGLE PLAINS

FEBRUARY 5TH, 0435 HRS EST

Kelelm watched as Sehri leaned slightly across the front of Andro’s body holding his shoulder while he inspected her wound once more. All around them civilian men, women and children rested quietly under the canopy of the temperate jungle. The mild humidity was nothing new to them since they had been here for many months and sometimes years. Most of them were simply thrilled to be alive and all of it was due to the male and female Spartans all around them, led by their Crown Prince. Kelelm had been slightly surprised at the lack of complaining by the civilians. The Bontawillian were on odd looking people who did not appear used to such physical labor. Not a single one of them stopped or demanded to rest as they made their way through the undergrowth. They moved as quickly as they were able in very simple groups that stuck together and helped one another, all the while putting their trust in the Union Spartans. Kelelm saw many of these soldiers carrying small Bontawillian children and sharing what rations they had with the many civilians. The civilians were not in the least bit frightened of the soldiers as most Rothryn would be of the military. They actually seemed to look up to them in many ways.

Kelelm moved his eyes back to where Andro and his brother were, Daio sitting only a few feet from his prince next to Dorian. The two massive dragon beasts sat stretched out behind Andro and Dorian, their heads resting on wickedly curved talon equipped feet, but their eyes taking everything in. Andro’s fingers gently probed the skin along Sehri’s side in a manner that the vast majority of Rothryn women would consider inappropriate from a man they were not mated to and hardly knew. This did not seem to faze his sister Sehri in the least, and while his touch was only to check her for further injuries, Kelelm knew from the look on her face that there was much more to it and Sehri was already well aware of what she felt.

“The pain is gone?” Andro asked her.

Sehri nodded quickly. "Not even a throbbing in my side anymore." She answered. "My leg however..."

Andro nodded his head with a small smile as he lowered his fatigue top that she wore and then reattached her body armor. "You've been using it that's why." He stated. "I'm pretty sure I recommended you didn't."

Kelelm watched his sister stick her tongue out at him as he refastened her upper armor and then settle to the ground. Sehri quickly scooted over between his legs, her hands grasping his left arm as it draped over her shoulder in an almost possessive manner. Kelelm had read as much as he was able to obtain on these Lycavorian people after his father told him he would be coming here. Denali and Lisisa both supplied him with as much material as he wanted to read. Kelelm was now convinced, like his father, mother and Sehri, that the Rothryn people were simply an offshoot of the Lycavorian people as a whole. An offshoot that could not shift their forms, but were identical in every other way. The instinctual nature of these Lycavorians was written about extensively in what Kelelm had read, and it seemed that Sehri was embracing it far faster than anyone else realized. Kelelm was happy for her really. Sehri was the youngest of his sisters and because she was a member of the Circle of Shamans she was very different from Osbela and Ibani. She was far stronger in her Etheric abilities than her older sisters and in many ways they hated that about her. They also teased her mercilessly about having never been with a man and how she would not know what to do if ever the situation came up. Kelelm had to smile to himself because Osbela and Ibani had been thinking that they would be the ones to vie for Androcles's attention. They would be very angry with Sehri when they discovered Androcles Leonidas had eyes only for Sehri if what Kelelm could tell was any indication.

"We are much further away from the settlement than I thought we would achieve given all of the civilians." Kelelm stated as he shook his mind clear of those thoughts. He watched Androcles hand Sehri a brown ration bar after taking a bite out of it and beginning to chew. His sister didn't hesitate and began to gnaw on the ration bar.

Andro nodded his head towards him. "You will find that most of the citizens of the Union are in excellent physical condition Kelelm, regardless of how frail they look outwardly." Andro answered. "My mother and others have seen to their well being for decades and they have made sure everyone is as healthy as they can be."

"Your... your Hadarian mother?" Kelelm asked hesitantly.

Dorian chuckled softly. "Have no fear Kelelm... it will take some time to get used to the fact that we draw no distinction between any of our mothers. They all speak with the same stern voice regardless of which one gave life to us. It is sometimes confusing when we speak of them because some don't know to which one we are referring."

"How true." Andro spoke with a grin. "And yes... I was referring to our Hadarian mother Colonel."

Kelelm looked at Dorian. "You... you call all of them mother?"

"All of them have had a hand in raising us." Andro answered. "Well... except for Cirith, but from what I understand she is making up for that with Fedor and Eirene."

Kelelm looked at Dorian. "You are Dorian... brother to Androcles. A Prince of the Union as well?" He asked. "I must say... your skills are impressive."

Dorian smiled. "Not bad for someone who is only four months old huh?" He stated.

Kelelm looked at him and then to Andro. "Four... four months? I don't understand... you are fully grown."

Dorian smiled again. "There is a story to that... trust me." He answered as he took a long pull from the container of water. "Someday one of us will understand it enough to explain it to you."

Andro chuckled at the look on Kelelm's face. "Don't ask me. I was lost when mother began to rattle off the molecular structure thingy." He spoke as turned his head and watched Jeth's massive body land light footed in the small clearing fifty meters away. Kelelm watched his face as he saw his petite sister jump causally from the saddle and then head towards where they sat. The monstrous dragon moved to settle beside the obsidian colored beast that Kelelm knew to be Androcles's dragon. Kelelm watched as Lisisa began to settle to the ground next to her younger brother.

"You and Daio were right Andro." She stated confidently. "They swarmed all over the settlement but didn't pursue." Lisisa stated as she nudged Dorian in the shoulder and he moved over on the ground to allow her to perch her butt on the dry leaves where he handed her the container of water.

Andro nodded and Sehri looked up into his face. "This Azlenr is no fool." He said. "His dossier was very extensive. He and this General Byka are two of their best officers as far as Armetus and Marci are concerned. At least those who operate strictly on the ground."

"He knew we would have the advantage if they pursued with their *DAGGERS*." Lisisa said. "We could blow them out of the sky from under this canopy and they would never know where we hit them from."

Andro nodded. "You can bet they will be out in force come daybreak though." He said. "We will be long gone by then however."

"How have you kept your base hidden?" Sehri asked. "Wouldn't they be able to pinpoint it from orbit?"

"Normally yes... if you wish to call it a base at all." He answered her with a larger smile that did not go unnoticed to Lisisa.

Lisisa was not as close to Andro as Zarah or Eliani but she knew her brother well enough. It was obvious to any Lycavorian that Sehri was to be his, and her scent and interaction with him made it very clear she was very much in agreement with that arrangement. No male among their people would approach Sehri once they recognized that, not because Andro was crown Prince, but because it was the honorable thing to do. Lisisa could sense Sehri's vivid Mindvoice resonance and how it echoed for Andro, but she could also feel the echo for Sadi and the others. Considering that the Rothryn people were Lycavorians who could not shift, Lisisa could detect the strength of Sehri's fever buried beneath her attempts at suppressing it. It was the fever of a pureblood Lycavorian, of that Lisisa was sure without question. It would be very interesting to see how the Rothryn were received by Lycavorians across the Union, as well as how they would be accepted by the Rothryn people.

"We have taken to using some of the very first Pralor designed devices our engineers built after we discovered CS41." Andro explained to Sehri. "One of those discoveries was a masking device that hides personnel and ships from orbital or ground sensors. It is not unlike our Shrouds. It can't be used on a massive scale, but for the size of our base it suits our needs for the moment."

"It helps that Kavalian sensors are not as accurate as ours either." Lisisa continued.

"What about Elynth and the others?" Sehri asked.

"All dragons have some sort of reflecting composition within the molecular structure of their scales." Andro answered. "It makes all of them invisible to any known sensors."

Elynth lifted her head and butted Andro in the back of the shoulder. *And sometimes our own riders.* She stated humorously.

Andro turned and looked at her. *You can't hold that against me.* He exclaimed.

And why not? Elynth asked smugly.

Sister... I was... I was...

You were as drunk as I have ever seen. You could barely stand up. It was a wonder you even found your way back to the villa.

Lisisa laughed softly. "Oh Elynth... you'll have to tell me more!" She spoke quickly. "I've never heard this story! Andro drunk? Now that is bound to be hilarious!"

"Yes!" Dorian spoke. "I want to hear that too!"

Andro turned to look at them sternly but he could not hold the expression and even Kelelm laughed. He was able to hear what the dragon had said since his Etheric abilities were far above average for the Rothryn people, much more so than his younger brothers. Sehri was by far the most powerful in her Etheric abilities, followed by their mother and father and then his sisters and himself. The extent of Sehri's abilities had never been made public because she would have been forced to surrender herself to the Rothryn Etheric Academy which was a very mysterious and sometimes repressive institution if what he heard was accurate. It is why their parents chose to have Sehri schooled by the Circle of Shamans in secret, something that Kelelm had supported fully.

Kelelm was amazed at the strong sense of confidence and calm that swept these men and women even though they were in an extremely dangerous situation. Their humor also helped to make everyone around them relax. His eyes fell once more to his youngest sister. Her fingers absently stroked the simple bridle on Andro's left hand that allowed him to call forth his shield from Flatspace. It was the same hand he had seen that psychic knife explode from. As his eyes lifted, he looked at her face and saw a happiness that had never been there

before. He had seen her laugh and smile and show happiness, but what he saw in her face now as she looked at Andro and felt his left arm draw her tighter, it was far more than he had ever seen before.

All heads turned as Dantio made his appearance and lowered his 190A4. "Sa'roh and the others have landed." He stated simply. "One klick northeast of here. A large clearing just before you leave the jungle canopy and hit the beach."

Andro nodded his head and got to his feet, pulling Sehri with him. "Very well." He said. "Let's get everyone moving. As quietly as possible. Daio... take point with Dorian and Lisisa. Sehri and I will follow with the civilians. Dantio... take your team and make sure we missed no one following us."

Dantio nodded. "If we stumble across someone?" He asked.

Andro's answer was quick and very much to the point. "Kill them."

RAVAGER

DIATAGA-CLASS MISSILE CRUISER

FLAGSHIP OF JUTURI PRIDE

FEBRUARY 5TH, 0515 HRS EST

Ceale rolled over on the soft sheets and stretched out her body luxuriantly on the large bed. Her auburn colored hair splayed across the pillows and she felt alive and completely rested for the first time in weeks. Her green eyes opened slowly and as she looked around the room she suddenly remembered where she was and what was happening in her life. She sat up very quickly, her body filling with fear and forgetting to catch the sheet as it fell away from her large breasts, as her eyes darted around the small room she was in.

"You are awake!" The soft female voice spoke and Ceale cut her eyes to the doorway and saw the face and copper colored shoulder length hair of the Kavalian female. She could also see the long tail twitching back and forth behind her.

"Where... where am I?" Ceale asked quickly.

Corsa smiled as she came fully into the room carrying a small bundle in her arms. "These are our quarters." She answered. "My husband Mataen and I. You don't remember coming here?"

Ceale clutched the sheet tighter to her chest and slowly shook her head. "No."

Corsa moved up next to the bed. "It's not surprising really. You have slept for nearly fourteen hours. It appears your body and mind needed the rest. I'm sure it will return to you."

Ceale watched her as she set the bundle on the end of the bed, the cobwebs clearing from her mind and the memories of what had occurred in the last hours before she went to sleep slowly returning to her. Coming to this ship, what Kalis told her before coming here. Her brief conversation with Serale before sleep finally claimed her. All of it was returning to her now. That she was here in this bed, unhurt and having slept for so long told Ceale that perhaps she was as safe as they told her she was. She began to relax slightly.

"Fourteen hours?" She asked softly.

Corsa nodded as she perched her firm ass on the edge of the bed. Her tail twitched back and forth behind her indicating the calm she felt. "Yes." She said. "Koguth has been seeking an audience with that pig Pusintin for weeks. We knew you were on board but he never returned our requests until two days ago. We moved as quickly as we could then." She placed her hand on the bundle. "Some fresh clothes for you. The Hydro Shower is through the door. My beloved Mataen cannot cook to save his life, so his brother Nedoni has prepared a full breakfast for you. We have only Kavalian food, but I think you will find it to your liking. His mother Mani taught him. And Nedoni will be the one escorting you through the ship."

Ceale looked at her. "This isn't a dream right?" She asked knowing it sounded stupid.

Corsa laughed softly and reached out to take her hand and squeeze it. "No Ceale... this is no dream." She stated. "Please... take a shower so it helps you to relax and remember you do not need to fear anyone on this ship. Especially with Nedoni by your side. He is a pilot by trade, but he is one of the largest and most vicious fighters within the Juturi Pride. You will be quite safe. We will wait for you to begin eating."

Ceale watched as she rose and left her alone. She looked around the room and realized her heart was not racing as much as it should have been. The memories of what the older Kavalian woman and Corsa had told her

before they arrived here were coming back quickly. They were from the Juturi Pride of the Kavalian people, having been well known and respected for many decades among the Prides. They were now also one of the nearly two dozen Prides who had secretly turned away from the teachings and barbaric laws of the old Kavalian Empire that Keleru and Pusintin wanted to remain in place. They had pledged their loyalty and their future to the Nruarani Pride, the largest Pride to openly side against Keleru and his cronies. Mani and Corsa had told her they were at Nefoa when Pusintin showed up to form a Strike Force to go after the Lycavorian King. Koguth and Mataen had heard through the intelligence grapevine that her youngest daughter Iama had been rescued from a Kavalian outpost the Union King had obliterated. Their latest intelligence surmised she was still on the ship he occupied and this is the only reason they had accompanied Pusintin. The passion Mani had spoken with about her daughter left no doubt in Ceale's mind that what she was saying was truthful. Their actions convinced Ceale she was in no danger. She had been treated wonderfully since coming aboard this ship. She had been given a short tour, introduced to many different Kavalians, some of whom had undergone the biogenic treatments to remove their body hair but they still retained their long tails. They had fed her until she could not eat anymore and then Corsa had led her to this room where Ceale had fallen instantly asleep the moment her head hit the pillow.

Ceale was pretty sure that if they had planned anything nefarious, they would have done it already. As she moved quickly to the shower she determined to try and immerse herself in the respite she was getting from that pig Pusintin. The shower was hot and helped to wake her completely and sooth her battered body even more. After she toweled herself dry, she used her healing skills to repair and bruises she still had, and then she dressed in the simple satin soft undergarments and plain dark blue jumpsuit. As she stepped out of the doorway she heard Corsa talking to someone out of her view. The room was filled with the enticing aroma of food and smelled slightly of nutmeg.

"...strong to have endured so much and kept her wits Corsa." The male voice out of Ceale's sight was speaking. "And no matter what that fucker Pusintin has done to her, it has not made her any less beautiful."

"Ah Nedoni... you are taken with her." Corsa's voice echoed.

Ceale heard a soft snort. "As if that will matter. Pusintin and those pigs on his ship have already given her a picture of our people that she will not be able to overcome. That we are all violent animals. Their actions demean our people and make others see us as beneath them when we are not!"

Ceale saw Corsa step into view and continue placing items on the large table that she was setting. "The Nruarani Pride has already begun to show others not all of us are like those in charge Nedoni. You have heard of how Pian Nruarani treats Jalersi. How their entire Pride has embraced new values and ideals, just as we have."

"Yes... I just want... I want us to do more." Nedoni's voice said.

"What we are doing now *is* more Nedoni." Corsa spoke turning to look into the kitchen area. "Bringing your sister back home to us *is* more. And it is only the beginning. Your father cannot focus on anything else until Iama is back with her family and we can show her that what she thinks is not the truth."

"I know." Nedoni's voice answered.

"Have faith Nedoni." Corsa spoke. "All will come together when the time is right."

"You think so?" Nedoni's voice asked.

Ceale saw Corsa nod quickly. "I know so." She answered. "Faith brought me your brother and he made me his wife. Faith will bring Iama home to us and then faith will guide our path into the future."

Ceale's eyes grew a little wider when she saw Nedoni move into view now and she was barely able to suppress her gasp. Nedoni towered over Corsa by a good foot, and she stood five foot six easily. His entire body that she could see was covered in short, dark blond hair, much shorter than she had seen his brother or other Kavalians. The long mane of hair that fell from his head was shiny and tied tightly into dozens of long braided portions, almost like dreadlocks. His face was surprisingly almost void of hair and she could actually see his tanned skin under the very short covering of hair on his cheeks. A thicker but neatly trimmed beard covered his strong chin and his lips were surrounded by a precisely groomed mustache. The shirt he wore encased a fur covered body that was incredibly muscular from what she could tell and then there was that two meter long tail that casually flipped back and forth behind him. His size didn't surprise her so much, nor the words he had spoken. What stunned Ceale right down to her booted feet was how very attractive she found him.

Apparently she was not able to suppress her gasp as much as she thought for they both turned to see her standing there in the doorway of the bedroom. Corsa didn't hesitate.

"Ceale... you should have told us you were there." She stated as she began walking towards her.

"I'm... I'm sorry." Ceale stammered. "I did not... I didn't want to interrupt your conversation."

Corsa laughed. "Never fear doing that." She stated as she came up to her and took her hands. "I was blessed when my husband made me his wife." She spoke. "He brought me into a family and a Pride that can actually carry on intelligent conversations most of the time."

"Most of the time?" Nedoni asked as he moved closer, his light green eyes staring at her. He bowed his head slightly to her as he continued to stir something in the pan he was holding. "I hope... I hope you rested well." He fumbled with his words.

Ceale nodded quickly equally at a loss for words as she gazed at him. "Yes... yes... thank you."

This interaction did not escape Corsa's view and she filed it away in her mind as the door to the quarters opened and she saw Koguth, Mani and Mataen enter the quarters. "Finally!" She exclaimed moving towards Mani with open arms. "I have had to listen to Nedoni complain how he has to do all the cooking at he is hungrier than all of us."

Koguth grinned as Corsa embraced his wife. "If he was not so large he would have no problems." He grunted.

Mani looked at Koguth, a twinkle in her eye as she gazed at his six foot four frame. "And whose fault is that husband?" She asked calmly.

Koguth smiled broadly and stepped up to Ceale. He reached out and took her hands within his much larger fur covered hands and gazed at her. "Fourteen hours of sleep makes you radiant Lady Ceale." He spoke.

Ceale looked at him with wide eyes, not expecting such a compliment from a Kavalian. "I... thank you." She stammered.

Koguth laughed at her expression. "Didn't expect that from me did you?" He asked. "Good... I hope to show you many unexpected things in the hours and days you are among us." He motioned to the table where she saw everyone beginning to sit down. "Please... I would like to explain everything to you now that you are well rested."

SOLMAR

SPARTAN BASE CAMP

42.6 KILOMETERS INLAND FROM COAST ON SOUTHERN CONTINENT

FEBRUARY 5TH, 0608 HRS EST

Aleatia could barely contain herself and remain behind the row of Spartans that stood in front of her as she watched the *STRIKER* come in low over the tree tops and spin about before beginning to settle to the ground. The ramp was opening as the ship lowered and she could see masses of people waiting to exit. The same type of men and women she had seen exit the *KADEN* transport and first *STRIKER* that had landed only half a hour ago. Lisisa Leonidas had arrived on the first *STRIKER* and told her Sehri and Kelelm would be arriving shortly. Aleatia felt a sense of enormous relief after being on the bridge of the *REAPER* and listening to the battle that her son and youngest daughter had inadvertently been caught right in the middle of. She hadn't lasted long before the Captain submitted to her constant badgering and threats and released the last *STRIKER* to bring her to the surface after them. By the time they were heading for the planet Aleatia knew Sehri had been injured and Kelelm was with her. Though she felt an enormous amount of pride at what Sehri had done, she was also very angry with her for doing something so stupid. Osbela and Ibani stood beside her, Harira on her opposite side. The Spartans were waiting until the backwash from the *STRIKER*'s powerful engines died before they allowed them past.

Harira gripped her arm. "I'm sure she is fine Lady Aleatia." She spoke. "Princess Lisisa told us as much."

Aleatia nodded slowly. "I know. But their definition of fine may be different than ours." She stated. "She is just... she is just a child still. Barely out of her Coming of Age! She should not have been so stupid! I raised her better! You taught her better!"

Harira nodded. "She has always been headstrong." Harira said quickly adding. "At least that is what her instructors report."

"Mother is right! It was a stupid move!" Osbela snapped.

The sounds of the engines grew silent and they watched as the Spartans parted to allow them through just as the civilians began to exit the ramp of the *STRIKER* with measured quickness. Ibani and Osbela pulled their mother forward hoping to get a glimpse of Sehri before their mother began to dress her down in front of everyone and embarrass her. They would be unpleasantly surprised.

"There... there she is!" Harira almost yelled as her eyes caught sight of Sehri's white blond hair. "Who... oh my!" She gasped as she came to a stop only a few meters from the ramp and actually winced.

Aleatia saw the look on her face and stopped as well. "Harira?" She asked with some concern.

Harira shook her head. "I... I am fine." She stammered. "Aleatia... Aleatia can you not feel it?" She asked. "Your shields... lower your shields!"

Aleatia did as Harira asked and her eyes instantly shot open and she whirled around to see Osbela and Ibani staring openmouthed at the sight coming down the ramp. Their sister was being carried with hardly any effort in the least by the tall, powerfully built young man. Aleatia immediately felt what Harira had first detected and she felt her insides begin to twist and turn in disbelief.

The Etheric resonance of the young man before them was staggering to say the least. He radiated raw, brilliant power. It flowed through him and around him as easily as the wind blew across the small landing area. And within that resonance Aleatia felt her daughter's presence, merging and mingling with his and five others in a harmony unlike any she had ever felt. Sehri's left arm was draped over his broad shoulders, her right hand pressed against his chest and holding an edge of the armor he wore. He cradled her in his arms tightly Aleatia saw, and as other Spartans and medical people approached no one attempted to take Sehri from him. Not until the Hadarian doctor she had met upon first landing pushed his way through a throng of men and women with a hover field bed.

"Aleatia!" Harira gasped. "Aleatia... do you feel it!" She gasped knowing that while Osbela and Ibani were strong Etheric users they were still far too young to have reached their mother's level of focus and ability.

Aleatia looked at her. "Yes! And I don't care! She is my daughter!" Aleatia snapped and broke into a short run towards where Andro was gently lowering Sehri onto the bed as the Hadarian female began to run her hands across Sehri's body, a soft glow forming around them.

Captain Trenou was an experienced Healer who had worked beside Princess Eliani on the *SCIMITAR* for nearly three years now. She had quickly come to take on the mentality and sometimes coarse nature of Eliani when it came to men and women interfering in her duty as a Healer. She also had a healthy respect and like for Androcles because he accepted her without question even though he already had his sister on the ship. Aleatia ran up just as Trenou was finishing her exam.

"Sehri!" Aleatia exclaimed practically throwing herself into Sehri's arms as she was sitting up on the hover bed.

"Momma!" Sehri cried as her mother's arms enveloped her and Andro stepped back slightly to allow Aleatia to hug her as tightly as she wanted. He had a small smile on his face as mother and daughter were reunited.

Aleatia held her at arm's length now. "Are you insane child!" She cried out. "That was the stupidest stunt you have ever pulled Sehri! Were you looking to get killed!"

"Mother... we were perfectly safe until the ship was shot down and..." Sehri began.

Aleatia's eyes went wide. "Shot down!" She almost shouted. "They said you... they said you were injured but not how! Where..."

Trenou looked up now trying to keep her stern expression in place as Eliani had taught her. "Her abdominal injury is completely healed." She said. "However... I need to lightly treat her leg as it appears she has over exerted herself."

Sehri turned her head quickly and looked at Andro. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders once. "I did tell you." He said.

“Andro...” Sehri spoke with a tone of worry in her voice now.

Andro quickly stepped forward next to Aleatia and took her hand in his. He leaned over and kissed her hard, causing the eyes Aleatia, Harira, Osbela and Ibani to nearly explode out of their heads. That Sehri returned the kiss with equal fervor and brought her hands up to grip his face shocked them even more. Aleatia and Harira could sense the intense emotion within the Etheric resonance of both of them, and the passion the kiss exhibited. Andro pulled away and leaned over to nuzzle Sehri’s neck and cheek, inhaling deeply of her sweet apple walnut scent and feeling the same surge of desire rise in him that he felt for all his mates and especially Sadi and Ne’Veha. Aleatia and Harira both saw Sehri gasp in near guttural delight, her eyes closing heavenly before he drew back and waited for her to look at him with eyes that filled with desire.

“Let Trenou treat you and then Eotharon will bring you to me.” Andro said. “I’ll be in my ship trying to plan our next moves. Sadi and the others will be here soon. Then... then we will need to figure all this out.”

“Promise me.” Sehri spoke softly holding his face in her hands.

“I promise.” Andro told her. He took her hands and kissed her knuckles before turning to Trenou. “Be good to her Trenou.” He said.

The Hadarian Healer smiled. “I got your back Andro.” She stated as she shifted the bed around and began to head back to where she had set up a portable triage area. Aleatia followed without question, Osbela and Ibani stealing glances back at Andro as he turned away. Harira stood for a moment longer looking at him intently until those azure eyes turned and fell upon her. Harira felt her heart racing as those eyes bore through her and his head tilted oddly to the side. Lisisa and Dorian broke that gaze as they came up.

“Andro... this is Shaman Master Harira.” Lisisa told him. “She is a member of the Circle of Shamans. Sort of like out School of the Oracles only covert.”

Andro blinked at his sister. “Covert?” He asked.

“The Rothryn Etheric Academy keeps pretty close tabs on Etheric use within Rothryn space.” Lisisa explained to him. “Most of those who have real ability go to the Academy.”

“Where they are repressed and looked down upon.” Harira quickly added. “Etheric use is not as widely accepted within Rothryn territory as it is within the Union.”

Andro moved closer to her. “Why? It is part of who we are.”

Harira nodded her head. “An ideal we are trying to push.” She stated. “But one that is not very popular. The Etheric Academy has succeeded in causing the majority of our people to fear the use of their Etheric abilities.”

Andro looked at Kelelm who moved up beside him. “It’s true.” Kelelm said. “They can not regulate everyone, for we all can use our Etheric abilities to speak within what you call Mindvoice but anyone with the skills that Sehri and others have shown are taken from their families and entered into the Academy. Many times against their will.”

“And many who go willingly!” Harira stated quickly.

“So you... you jail them?” Andro stated his eyes narrowing.

“They are schooled and treated well.” Harira spoke. “But many of their life decisions are made by Academy Scholars.”

Kelelm looked at Harira for a moment and then back to Andro. “They are prisoners.” He hissed softly. “Unable to come and go as they please and always under heavy guard from the Academy Security forces.”

Andro looked at Kelelm. “You will have to tell me more of this Etheric Academy. Our *Feravomir* will be very interested.” He stated.

Kelelm nodded. “With pleasure.”

“The Academy serves a purpose.” Harira spoke softly.

Andro turned to look at her once more. “You sound as if you approve of these actions Shaman Master... Harira is it?” He said.

Harira shook her head quickly. “I do not!” She stated quickly and forcefully. “I was once a member of the Academy but I left them for the Circle!”

“Why?” Andro asked.

“I... I did not agree with what they were teaching.” Harira said.

Andro nodded his head. "Taking a piss in the forest serves a purpose." Andro told her seeing her eyes go wide. "Putting down a rabid dog serves a purpose. Imprisoning men and women because of what they are serves no purpose. And it is wrong."

"You know nothing of our people or our ways young man!" Harira scolded him.

Andro smiled. "I know more than you might believe." He stated. "If you will excuse me, I have tasks to attend to."

Harira stood there for a moment longer staring at him and then turned to head for the triage area where Sehri would be. Kelelm watched her go and then turned to Andro. "The Circle of Shamans is a unique bunch." He said. "They are who have trained Sehri up until now."

Andro looked at him. "Something that will cease immediately." He stated confidently. "Sehri no longer needs them."

"She seemed more defensive then the last few days." Lisisa spoke looking at Andro.

Andro let his eyes fall to Dorian and a silent message passed between the two brothers. Dorian acknowledge this message with an imperceptible nod and flick of two fingers on his right hand. Andro turned to Kelelm once more.

"I do not know how you treat your honored dead Colonel... but while we have the time... we should give them a service as we will for my men before they are taken up to the *REAPER*."

Kelelm looked at Andro now. "My men... they... we are not Spartans like you Prince Androcles." He stated.

Andro turned to fully face him. "Your men are Lycavorian by whatever name you choose to call them." He stated. "They died in battle in a Spartan aircraft, fighting beside and in defense of fellow Spartans and innocent civilians. In my book that makes them Spartans! In their actions and in their hearts! As their commander... you should be present."

Kelelm nodded his head without hesitation, feeling pride swell within his chest unlike any he had ever felt before. "Thank you." He said softly.

Andro shook his head. "No. Thank them."

Trenou finished running her right hand over Sehri's leg and looked up at her and nodded. "Excellent." She spoke. Sehri sat on the exam bed, Aleatia next to her and several thick curtains hiding them from the view of the rest of the massive portable canvas triage center that had been set up. "Your healing systems are just as robust as any Lycavorian in the Union. That's very good. I treated the deep bruising which was causing the ache and I gave you some additional strong antibiotic enzymes." Trenou looked at Aleatia. "I'd like to give all of your people these same injections. There may be microbes within the Alpha Quadrant that you have not been exposed to in the Beta Quadrant. It's just a precaution."

Aleatia looked at her and nodded her head. "Of course. There is no permanent damage?" She asked quickly.

Trenou shook her head. "None at all." She looked at Sehri. "You'll be a little weak for a day or so because of the amount of blood you lost, but your systems will replenish that quickly enough." She smiled. "You are a tough young lady."

Sehri smiled shyly. "I didn't... I didn't feel tough at the time." She said.

Trenou smiled. "Who among us ever does?" She said. She patted Sehri's leg. "You can leave whenever you want. Andro's *STRIKER* is a hundred and fifty meters west, but you should be able to..."

Sehri nodded her head quickly, her eyes bright. "Yes... I can smell him very easily. He and his brother Dorian are talking with my brother and Lisisa."

Aleatia looked at her daughter with some surprise, Osbela and Ibani standing to the side with looks of consternation on their faces and not for the reasons that they should have been concerned about. While their people used their sense of smell for many things, Aleatia knew of no one who could use it with as much precision and skill as the Lycavorians did. No one except her daughter that is.

Trenou nodded her head. "Good. I have to attend to my other charges." She said with a smile. "Spartans are notoriously bad patients. They tend to think they are indestructible."

Aleatia waited until Trenou had left them alone and then she turned back to Sehri. “That was the most incredibly stupid thing you have ever done!” She hissed. “You could have been killed Sehri! What were you thinking?”

“She wasn’t thinking obviously!” Osbela snapped.

Sehri ignored her sister and looked at her mother. “I needed to go mother.” She stated calmly. “You know that.”

“She only did this to try and get to Prince Androcles first mother!” Ibani snapped. “It seems you aren’t so stupid in that regard after all sister!”

Aleatia tore her eyes from Sehri and glared at Ibani. “Not now Ibani!” She growled.

“It’s the reason she did it mother!” Osbela barked now. She looked at Sehri. “You can’t have him Sehri! Ibani or I are meant for him! You won’t be able to keep his attention! He is the type of man who desires an experienced woman!”

Sehri turned her glaucous blue eyes on her older sister and smiled. “Then by all means sister...” She spoke warmly and with a calm that Aleatia had never seen from her daughter when her sisters teased her in such a way. “I encourage you to use your experience on him. I’m sure he will be quite impressed.”

Aleatia looked at her two older daughters. “Leave us alone!” She snapped. “I need to speak with your sister alone!”

“Mother!” Osbela protested.

“Go now!” Aleatia snapped.

Osbela and Ibani had looks of indignation on their faces as they glared at Sehri one last time before they left the small area. Aleatia shifted her position and settled onto the exam bed next to Sehri, taking her small hands within hers.

“Sehri... tell me everything that happened.” Aleatia told her. “Leave nothing out. I want to know everything.”

“Momma...” Sehri smiled at her and squeezed her hands. “I belong to Androcles. And Sadi, and Ne’Veha, Caliria, Carisia and Lu’ria. I belong to all of them. Just as they belong to me. Nothing is going to change that. Not now.”

Aleatia nodded her head and reached up to stroke Sehri’s cheek. “Indulge me Sehri.” She said softly. “Tell me of this young man who has affected you in such a way. Tell me of them all.”

Sehri’s eyes were bright as she began to share with her mother all she had felt since this trip had begun.

***ARC ROYAL
ECHO QUADRANT
FEBRUARY 5TH, 1128 HRS EST***

Martin looked up from his tray of food and gazed at Helen who sat across from him. Since discovering this Pralor Paladin thing, they had been spending as much time together as they could just talking. At first it had been awkward, Martin always considered her a mother figure, but as the days and hours passed it became like second nature. He had never held anything back from Helen through the years, and discovering this new connection made it all the more important. Helen may have been over four thousand years old, but the time and the training she had put in since becoming bonded with Arzoal had been well worth it. The hard life in Sparta had caused her to look much older, but that was a ruse Martin knew. Helen was a terror in a fight as evidenced by the fact she was the one who killed Aikiro. She was very easily capable of holding her own in a fight, especially with Arzoal beside her. Not to mention that she and Arzoal had developed some very unique skill sets together. They met nearly every morning for breakfast and Wayonn had commented on how their connection was becoming more and more intertwined. Helen, for her part, thoroughly enjoyed the closeness they had nurtured these last weeks. From the day that Hadarian couple had returned Martin to Earth she had felt a bond with the infant, and always inquired of him from Walter even after he had assumed his role as Guardian of the Line. Now Helen understood why.

Helen lowered her mug of tea and looked at him. “What are you thinking Martin?” She asked softly.

Martin poked at his food several times before lifting his eyes to meet hers. She didn't press further for she knew he would answer when he had his thoughts focused. Martin Leonidas was far more intelligent than the vast majority of people gave him credit for. She knew he liked to put forward the idea that he was simply a soldier with good people around him but Helen knew better.

"I'm... I'm thinking about what we will discover." He said finally.

"Whether we will find a thriving people with thousands of dragons and Pralors... or the bones of long dead ancestors." She said.

Martin nodded. "Yes."

Helen nodded. "Arzoal and I have talked of this as well." She said softly. "Sometimes we question whether we acted too quickly once we rescued For'mya and the eggs from Enurrua. It is interesting that the planet that caused us so much pain in the past was the catalyst to us reaching out across the stars in search of part of our past and our future."

Martin looked at her. "You aren't going to go all cryptic on me are you?" He asked with that odd look on his face. One of his eyebrows would raise and the corner of his mouth would turn upward.

Helen chuckled softly. "No." She stated. "It does make you think though."

Martin nodded. "Sometimes too hard and it gives me a headache." He answered.

"Do you question whether we should be out here Martin?" She asked.

Martin shook his head. "No. I just don't like not having any idea of what is coming." He answered. "I don't fear the unknown Helen, you know that, but there are times when it is scary as all hell."

Helen nodded her head. "Indeed it is."

Martin looked at her. "And these Scourge. They give me pause."

Helen met his eyes. "The species we found recently has too many similarities to them. Yes... I was thinking the same thing."

Their talk with Wayonn and Arzoal in the cargo bay had been rather one sided. Martin had shown just a small portion of the anger he could bring to bear and it had surprised Wayonn to say the least since he was the focus of that anger.

"No more bullshit! I want to know everything! No games! No hidden information! I want to know everything or so help me I'll turn us all around and go back fucking now!"

Martin's outburst had caught Wayonn by surprise indeed considering the look in his eyes. Part of it was because the anger was focused at him and part of it was because Helen knew he had seen this type of thing before. He was the Mage to Sumar, and no doubt from his expression he had seen Sumar angry like this in the past. Her grandfather had talked then, talked for hours with Arzoal helping to fill in bits of information. In the end they knew all that Wayonn knew and Martin had taken Wayonn's arms in his hands.

"You have to trust in me now Wayonn." He had told him.

"Trusting you was never an issue Martin my boy." Wayonn had said. "It was only a matter of time before this all came out. It was a burden I did not want you to bear before you were ready. Now you are."

"You don't think Wayonn is holding back from us do you?" Helen asked him after a long moment of silence.

Martin shook his head quickly. "No. I think he sees what we see but doesn't have any more answers than we do. Just the same questions. That is why he is working with Anja and Duewa as much as possible. And I believe deep down he hopes to find more Pralors. I think part of him is lonely knowing he and Shiria are all that remains."

Helen nodded. "Yes. I will agree with that." She stated. "He tries to hide it from me, but we are blood and he cannot."

"Hell... I hope we find more of them." Martin said. "Lots more. We..."

Martin looked up and saw Anja crossing the mess lounge towards him and Helen with Duewa in tow. Both of them carried trays of food and held mugs of coffee, but Martin also took note of the bright, animated face Anja wore. He knew it was because of the steamy bout of sex they had stolen in the shower this morning

while everyone still slept. Anja usually rose before the others and he had discovered her in the shower under the hot stream of water. Their brief coupling had been very intense and very satisfying, if a little short to suit them both. Though she was the smallest of his Queens in terms of physical stature, Anja more than made up for her size with her intense personality and her extremely fit body. Her Hadarian genes allowed her to last longer than his other Queens except when they were all in Phase, and behind Aricia, Anja was the most vocal and adventurous during their love making. The petite stature of her body had always made him crazy with lust, especially how she fit so easily into his arms, and combined with her urging moans and nips of love with her fangs and her whispers of ardor in his ears, it more often than not made him over excited and equally attentive to her. Which then led to some mind blowing experiences.

Helen turned to where his eyes were focused and saw Anja and Duewa move up to their table. Anja immediately went around to his side of the table and leaned over to him, catching his lips in a hungry kiss while Duewa settled next to her.

“Hi ya lover.” Anja spoke as she broke their kiss and she settled into the chair beside him.

“Hi yourself Red.” He stated with a smile.

Helen patted Duewa’s hand and kissed her cheek. “You are looking very... fulfilled Duewa.” She said with a smile. “This pleases me.”

Duewa smiled and nodded her head. “Until Thoti changed me, I didn’t fully grasp what I was missing about life.” She said thoughtfully looking at her. “Now I do. And I don’t intend to ever let it go.”

Martin lifted his coffee looking at Anja out of the corner of his eye. “I thought you two were going to be doing research this morning. Decided to take a break?”

Anja stabbed a piece of meat with her fork and plopped it into her mouth to chew before she answered. She turned to look at him as he waited. “Actually we came to see you.” She spoke after swallowing.

Martin’s mug stopped halfway to the table. “Oh boy... I know that look!” Martin said. “What is going on Red? Whenever you get that look it’s because you want something that I more than likely won’t want to give.”

“Lover?” Anja gasped. “You don’t mean that.”

“Uh-huh.” Martin muttered. “What do you have going through that devious mind of yours?”

“We need your permission for something.” Anja said.

Martin put his mug down. “I definitely am not going to like this.” He stated.

“Do you trust me?” Anja asked him.

Martin rolled his eyes. “Anja... please.”

Anja slid her hands around his arm, the warmth of his skin and the pulsing of his muscles always extremely pleasant and enticing to her and she looked at him with those jade green eyes. “I would not do this without asking you first. It’s too important.” She stated. “Duewa and I have discovered a way to revert the body of our guest back to their original state.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “Come again?”

Helen leaned forward. “I thought our... guest was dead?” She asked.

Anja nodded. “Our guest is.” She answered. “But all cells take time to lose their viability, and because our guest has both Pralor and Lycavorian cells in them it’s taking longer than it normally would.” She looked at Martin. “We can alter those cells now that it is dead to see what it looked like. It might give us an idea of where it came from and how it got out here.”

“How?” Martin asked.

Duewa leaned forward now and the excitement was evident in her reply. “It’s actually a combination of two things that Anja and I have been working on separately and never knew until now. Her Reverse Genetic Modifier combined with my work on Hereditary Chromatin Mycosis will allow us to...”

Martin held up his hand and stopped her. “Excuse me... what did you just say?”

Anja laughed and hugged his arm tightly knowing that he was truly out of his element here. “Duewa is saying we can make the cells in our dead guest revert back to their original form.”

Martin looked at Anja. “Why didn’t she just say that?” Martin asked.

“I did.” Duewa stated confused.

Helen chuckled and took her hand. "You must remember Duewa... Martin is very good at conversing with Avi about computer and electronic algorithms but start talking in advanced medical terms and he is lost. Literally."

Duewa looked at him. "Oh. Sorry."

Martin smiled at her. "Don't worry... I'm sure you'll spend enough time around me to discover all my pet peeves." He stated. "Everyone else does."

"How does this help us?" Helen asked.

"Well... if it works..." Anja began.

"It's a big if too." Duewa chimed in.

Anja nodded. "Yes... but if it works... Wayonn or even Arzoal might be able to tell us where this Pralor came from. It could give us an idea of how far they ranged out after the war, or if there are other survivors. If it works..."

"If it works it could also help us if we have any future encounters with this species." Duewa said. "It might even be worth it to try and capture one."

Martin blinked. "Capture one?" He hissed.

"If this reversion process works on the cells we have Marty, then there is no reason to think it won't work on actual living cells." Anja said. "Like those found in the living creatures. It could not only benefit us because we can treat any of our people who may get infected, and we may even be able to cause any of these creatures we may come across in the future to return to their normal appearance. I mean who would submit to this willingly?"

"I would hope no one." Helen stated.

Duewa nodded. "Exactly. We've already determined how aggressive these cells are and the most effective way to inject so many of them at once. I find it hard to believe anyone would willingly submit to being raped by one of these creatures. Male or female."

Martin looked at Anja intently. "You can do this Red?" He asked finally.

Anja nodded. "It's possible. I wanted to make sure you were in agreement before we tested it on the cells we have." She answered. "We may even be able to devise some sort of immunization to this type of forced conversion in case any of our people are caught by them. I... For'mya believes we will encounter them again. So does *Melda Min*."

Martin's dark eyes grew slightly wider. "Really?"

Helen leaned closer. "Her gift?" She asked.

Anja nodded. "Yes."

Duewa looked at Anja and then Martin and then back to Anja. "What do you mean Anja? What gift?" She asked.

Anja dropped her fork onto the plate. "Dysea has a sense of what most of us would consider precognition. She can see things that are going to happen. She doesn't get these flashes very often and they are usually jumbled and she can't really explain them but when she does we usually try and listen to what they might mean."

Martin looked at Duewa. "She saw that the Evolli would invade and that is why we were able to respond to their initial attacks so quickly. We just couldn't jump the gun without overstepping our intelligence sources or determine where they would come from and that is why they were able to gain three planets right off the bat."

"For'mya also is able to... how do I explain this..." Helen said. "She can sense life and death and even deeply buried emotions just from being near people or inanimate things like a ship or a rock even."

"Empathic abilities?" Duewa gasped.

Helen nodded. "Yes."

"That... that is fascinating!" Duewa stammered. "How... this is not common knowledge among our people is it. I have never heard of it!"

Martin shook his head. "No it's not common knowledge Duewa. There are seven outside of our family who know if it. You make eight."

Duewa gazed at him with wide eyes for a long moment. His answer was clear, but the fact that they trusted her enough to share this information with her told Duewa all she would ever need to know. No matter

what had occurred in her past, her life as far as they were concerned began the day Thoti turned her. The trust they were showing in allowing her to know this swept through Duewa like a wave and she embraced it completely. They did not have to trust her, but they did, and Duewa would honor that trust just as intensely as she honored her love for Thoti.

Duewa met Martin's eyes. "I will... I will not forget the trust you are placing in me." She said softly.

Martin nodded his head and that was all she needed to see. "So this little reversion thingy could make our people safer if we run into those ugly bastards again?"

Anja nodded. "It's possible... yes. We need to run lots of tests to confirm it, but yes."

Martin looked between them. "And it's safe. It won't hurt you or Duewa... or put you in any kind of danger?"

Duewa nodded. "We will take every precaution." She said. "Neither of us wishes to make a mistake."

Anja nodded her head. "No argument here." She stated.

Martin nodded. "Ok... but I want two security people with you at all times. And both of you will be armed always. I don't want whatever you do to magically bring that ugly fucker back to life!"

"We're not gods Marty." Anja said. "That is not something we can do."

Martin looked at her. "When you put your mind to something like this Red... it's downright scary what you can accomplish."

Anja beamed with adoring love at him. "Well... thank you lover!" She said. "You have never told me that before."

Martin leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and then kissed her softly. "It's true."

Duewa shook her head slowly. "My last attempt at holding a weapon did not turn out so well Martin." She said with an embarrassed grin. "I got shot and almost died."

"It got you Thoti didn't it?" Martin asked.

Duewa smiled and nodded. "Well... that part is true." She answered.

"We'll get you some basic firearms training before you two start your work." Martin said. "Thoti will get a kick out of it trust me."

Duewa nodded. "Very well."

"We should let Wayonn and Arzoal know so they can be there if its successful." Anja said.

"I will tell them this afternoon when we gather with Fedor and Eirene." Helen said. "Both of them are advancing rapidly in their Etheric skills and Wayonn wants to proceed to the next level."

Martin looked at her. "Helen could... could my brother pass this Paladin gene to his children even if they aren't pureblood?" He asked.

Helen shook her head slowly. "We don't believe so. Granted we haven't been able to test his children who are with Jalersi but you would have felt something from Karun if this was the case. Paladins can sense each other when close by. You never felt anything odd about Karun did you?"

Martin shook his head. "No."

Helen nodded. "And neither you, Wayonn or I have sensed it within Fedor or Eirene." She answered. "Given their accelerated growth it would have already manifested itself if it was present. The gene seems to have skipped Pusintin and is only present in your blood. Their skills may be a secondary result of For'mya's latent empathic abilities which come from you, so in essence their skills come from you. Given what they have learned and mastered so far I would put them at Resumar's level in terms of abilities, especially bonded with dragons as they all have."

"That's still pretty powerful Helen." Anja said. "Resumar is no pushover by any means."

Helen nodded. "I know. I have seen flashes of his anger and skill." She said. "Eirene's skills seem more passive, helping her to have incredible reflexes like For'mya. She is becoming an exceptional pilot. Fedor's abilities seem to be more focused on his physical abilities, more to the point his uncanny knack for those throwing knives he carries wherever he goes. It seems he can almost guide them with a passive Etheric ability. Much like you and Andro can guide your Shi Viskas. It's rather unnerving to be honest." She finished with a smile. "Not to mention that he is becoming quite the budding engineer according to the *ARC ROYAL*'s Chief Engineer."

Martin nodded. "Good. I wanted both of them to pick something that they discovered they liked and focus on that."

Helen nodded. "Well... they have." She answered. "Now all I have to do is keep Eirene's attention focused on her studies and less on her new mate." She spoke with a grin. "Their... their activities are tiring her out."

Anja laughed and pushed her shoulder into Martin's arm. "Oh... you'll never get that out of her Helen." She exclaimed. "Once a Leonidas woman latches onto a good thing... namely a man that curls their toes... they keep it!"

Helen shook her head. "Yes... I'm beginning to see just how accurate that statement is." She said.

Iama pulled the sheet tighter around her lush body and turned to look at the sleeping form of the Lycavorian in her bed. Her tail dangled behind her under the sheet, twitching gently back and forth. Iama felt a flash of anger that surged through her but she quickly shook her head and fought it down. It was anger at herself she knew. She had wanted him Iama thought to herself and his interest in her was utterly obvious but this was becoming too much. She would never be more than a delightful fling to the men on this ship, and she had already taken three men into her bed on this trip. Three more than she had wanted too when it had started. They had been nice to her, treated her respectfully and she had initiated their encounters because no matter what she had been through, Iama still enjoyed the company of men. She could still feel pleasure even after all these years. Perhaps what she had endured had made her this way, but they were men after all, and when she stuck her firm ass up at them they reacted as any man would. The only problem was that Iama wanted more. Much more than these men were willing to give to her. This one, as with the other two before him, would wake and go back to his duties and his life. He would no doubt try and entice her into his bed in the future, but as with the others, Iama would not allow that now. Their encounters had been pleasant and pleasurable, but Iama wanted more than just a casual fling. There was another reason as well and it was one she did not quite understand herself.

Iama turned to go into the living area of her quarters, crossing to the small kitchenette on the far bulkhead and pouring herself a mug of tea. As she lifted the tea to her lips his face came to her again. The same face that had taken the place of the man in her bed as he had been taking her. The same face that made her beyond anxious. The man she could not stop thinking about now. His face, his body, his voice. Iama didn't understand it for it had never happened to her before. After years as a sexual toy for so many Kavalian men, Iama was thrilled that she could still enjoy the pleasures of sex when she wanted to have it. The three Lycavorians she had bedded since being rescued had been adequate lovers, usually fumbling about as if they knew what they were doing, but they had shown her she could still feel and enjoy sex. They had not done much to really excite or satisfy her, and last night Iama had actually lost herself as she clutched at the man's shoulders in a small climax. Lost herself because she saw his face and not the man who was actually thrusting into her.

Fedor Leonidas.

There was something so very different about him. Something that drew her to him, but also frightened her terribly. That he was the most delicious specimen of any man she had ever met was without question, but he had been born as all the Kavalian clones had been born. The accelerated birth process was notoriously efficient, but it also left the clones decidedly lacking in intelligence. This had to be made up for in several months of intense schooling that not all of them did well in. Iama had already embarrassed herself in front of him twice by trying to treat him as she had treated the other clones. He was different than the Kavalian clones, something lurking within him that was far more dreamlike than she knew. Perhaps there was something to this Etheric Mindvoice thing than she had first thought possible. She was very practical and did not believe that such things could exist. Perhaps she was wrong in her beliefs. It was obvious to her that he and his sister, his whole family really, it was obvious they could do things that were not normal. All of them except his vampire mothers being bonded to dragons probably played a part in it, but even his two vampire mothers were far more skilled than any vampire she had ever seen or heard of. He and his sister trained privately for several hours a day with King Leonidas and no one was allowed within the gym during those hours. It made Iama wonder as she sipped her tea. What could the King be teaching them?

"Iama?" The voice broke into her thoughts and she looked up to see the Lycavorian come out of her bedroom pulling his shirt on.

"Deleon." She spoke getting to her feet.

The man moved up in front of her and smiled. "You could have woke me up you know." He stated.

Iama smiled. "And risk having you start again when we both need to get to work?" She said.

"Can we see each other again?" He asked.

Iama wanted to blurt out no right away but she smiled. "We'll see... ok?" She spoke.

Deleon nodded. "Fair enough." He spoke. "I should get going."

Iama nodded. "Of course." Iama thought quickly. "Deleon... do you know of a way to get into the gym on deck eight when it is locked down? The hot tubs in there are much larger and I was hoping to sneak in and use one when they aren't in use by others." She lied.

The Lycavorian smiled and took something from his shirt. "Here... take this." He told her. "This is a level six pass. It will get you into the gym."

Iama smiled. "Thank you." She said.

"Call me Iama." He said.

"We'll see." She said with a sadness in her voice that he did not pick up. She allowed him to lean over and kiss her and then she watched him move to the door of her quarters and exit. Iama looked at the pass in her hand and began to plot how she would discover what she wanted when it came to the twins. She needed to know why Fedor affected her so. She wanted to know why he made her feel as she did and Iama could be very persistent when she wanted to be. She wondered if he was as large as his physique hinted at. He was a beautiful man, even if he was no smarter than one of the clones. Her tail twitched at the thought of being wrapped in his arms, yet she did not quite understand the warm flush that swept through her at that thought either.

She would learn.

Had she been more attentive and looked into the corridor before allowing Deleon to leave she would have seen the dark brown eyes on a certain young man she was interested in look up and see Deleon exit her quarters as he was walking towards her doorway. She would have seen his eyes narrow somewhat as he came to a stop, and she would have seen the flash of pain across the same eyes as he turned and headed in the opposite direction quickly.

"...picked it up about seventeen minutes ago." Akemi told Martin as he moved up beside her near the star chart on the *ARC ROYAL*'s bridge. Wayonn stood beside him on the right watching her intently.

"It's on a planet?" Martin asked.

"A moon actually." She told him her fingers dancing across the three dimensional chart and enlarging the dark green moon. It was smaller than the gas giant it was orbiting, but it was obviously able to sustain life if the vegetation data modifiers running alongside the moon were any indication. "About the same size as Earth's moon. Class M with near identical atmospheric conditions as Elear. Surprising considering it's a moon."

"Life signs?" Wayonn asked.

Akemi shook her head. "We're still too far out even for our long range sensors." She answered. "This was picked up by one of the probes we sent before making the last jump."

Martin looked at her. "Ok... why are we here again? We've seen a bunch of these type moons on this trip." He asked with a grin.

Akemi chuckled and played with the holographic console once more. "This." She told him pointing to the lone white dot on the image now. "A low power generator emitter." She said. "The probes are designed to detect any power emissions and then take extensive scans of the area they detect the power source coming from." She adjusted the image again and Martin saw a series of what appeared to be buildings. "These are the scans the probe sent back."

"It's a building." Martin answered.

Akemi nodded. "A very large building by all accounts." She answered. "Seven stories above ground and an additional ten below ground. It's Pralor tech King Leonidas." She told him seeing his eyes come up to meet hers.

"Pralor?" He hissed. "Out here?"

Akemi nodded. "All of the probes used on the *ARIZONA*-Class ships are designed to detect anything with a Pralor signature on it, whether it be power flows or mineral deposits. To include building materials. Anything."

Wayonn was leaning close to the chart table moving certain frozen images around on the holographic display. He adjusted one final one and let out an interested gasp. "Martin... it's a Pralor Portable Science Facility!"

"A what?" Martin asked.

Wayonn looked up now. "A Portable Science Facility. We would launch them from orbit and once they were situated on the surface of a planet we would occupy them."

"Launch them?" Akemi asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. "The part that is underground starts out as a very large drilling core. When launched it will activate upon touching the surface of a planet or moon, any solid surface really and burrow down until a predetermined depth is reached." He looked up at them. "Then it becomes the central power core as the rest of the station is extended from protected interior cells."

"No shit!" Martin asked surprised. "Very cool."

"I agree." Akemi echoed.

"What's it doing out here?" Martin asked him. "We're a long way from Pralor space Wayonn and you yourself have said there was nothing of value within the Echo quadrant. At least to Pralor civilization."

Wayonn nodded. "I don't know." He said. "Captain... how soon before we get into active sensor range?"

Akemi turned to an officer standing to her right. "Duty Officer?"

"Roughly six hours twenty-two minutes Captain." The man answered.

Akemi turned back to look at Wayonn. "Six hours and twenty-two minutes." She stated. "But that will be extreme long range for our sensors. Two days travel time at our current speed unless we kick in the Light Speed Drive."

Martin looked at her. "How does that affect our jump status?"

"It doesn't really put a crimp in our scheduling sire." She answered him. "With our Quantum Resonance Field Reactors we can do both. It will only slow the recharging of the Jump Drive several hours because we're diverting some power to the Light Speed Drive Coils."

Martin leaned over and touched a separate panel on the chart table. "Danny... you and Jules getting this?" He asked.

"Looking at it now Marty." Danny replied from the work station that he had quickly taken over nine decks below when Martin had sent him a Mindvoice pulse about a possible ground mission. Julie had been with him and they had been headed to do some mission report work when Martin had pulsed them both.

"Jesus!" They heard Julie gasp. "How big is this thing Wayonn?"

"Our Portable Science Facilities came in different versions and sizes depending on the type of research." Wayonn answered. He leaned closer to the images. "If I'm not mistaken, this is one of the smaller ones."

"Smaller?" Julie barked. "If these initial scans are correct it's the size of five square city blocks!"

"What's five blocks to a race that built planet size cities." Danny quipped.

Wayonn chuckled on the bridge and looked at Martin who was smiling. "We did want to be thorough." He stated.

"What's the big deal if it's abandoned?" Danny asked. "Why waste our time?"

"That's the question." Akemi spoke. "The reason the probe picked it up at all is because of very low frequency power emitter readings coming from this base."

Martin looked at her. "Life support?" He asked her.

Akemi shrugged. "It's possible. We just don't know."

"How long to get there if we kick in the LSDs?" Martin asked.

"A little under eleven hours." She answered immediately.

"Kick it then. Danny... prep a ground team." Martin spoke. "We're going to take a look at this thing."

Wayonn looked at him. "We may be able to discover quite a bit of information Martin. Information that could tell us quite a bit of what happened to my people." Wayonn said. "I'd like to go."

Martin nodded to him. “Danny... you, Julie and the Master Chief meet with Wayonn in the Tactical Command Center on deck three. I’ll join you in one hour.”

“On our way.” Danny said.

Martin looked at Wayonn. “I’ll grab Helen and meet you there with Aricia and Isabella.” He told him.

PUMA’S PRIDE

FEBRUARY 5TH, 1145 HRS, EST

The deep voice woke her up and Serale lifted her head off the pillow. She saw her brother Danim still sleeping soundly on the floor so she knew it was not his voice she heard. She sat up slowly, trying not to make any noise as she heard Kalis’s voice speaking. Slowly she got out of the bed, the lightweight jumpsuit conforming to her body. She had slept in her clothes since coming onto this ship and it had almost become second nature for her. The jumpsuit that Kalis had secured for her fit her like a second skin, and while she would not have picked it out of a store because it was so revealing, the almost leather like fabric kept her warm and made it very easy to move around. She crept quietly to the large sheet that Kalis had erected over the single open arch doorway to his bedroom and gently pulled it aside to look into the main living area of his spacious quarters.

Two days they had been here now and he had not spoken to them unless needed. Serale did not go out of her way to speak with him, especially with the hate Danim felt for him, but she could not deny the desire too do just that. He cooked for them, very good food actually, which both her and Danim ate quickly. He allowed them full access to his quarters when he wasn’t there, a surprising move until they realized there was nothing left they could use as weapons against him or in an escape attempt. Not that they could go anywhere. They were buried within the bowels of this ship and neither she or Danim had any idea how to reach the upper decks. He was always reading from that strange looking data pad he kept on his desk. She and Danim had tried to access it when he was gone the first time, but no matter what they did, it never activated as the data pads normally would by their touch. It must have been keyed to his bio-signature, which was technology Serale did not think the Kavalians had. If he knew they had tried he never said anything to them about it. It seemed that he was almost embarrassed to talk with them now. He had been true to his word though, and Serale had spoken to her mother just last night. Ceale was not able to tell her much, only that she was reasonably certain that Kalis had been right and she was in no danger among these Kavalians.

Serale held in the gasp of surprise when she saw Kalis. He was completely naked and sitting on the cold floor of the main room staring at the holo image of a young man Serale recognized without hesitation. Androcles Leonidas. He was wearing only a plain white pair of pants with crimson trim and appeared to be pacing calmly in front of a large fireplace. Serale let her dark green eyes wander over Kalis’s body, taking in the wide shoulders and exceptionally powerful back. She winced slightly when she saw the scars that crisscrossed his skin. They were long since faded, as if he had gotten them some time ago. His skin was deeply tanned and glistened with a fine sheen of sweat as if he had been working out. Her eyes went back to the moving image of Androcles Leonidas and she realized it was a recording of some kind.

“...will become like second nature the more you practice cousin. And you must try to practice as often as possible.” Androcles was saying. “You will only need to see it in your head and it will happen. In a few years you will not even need to do that. You need to master the little things Kalis... and this will come with time. Be patient, concentrate and when you become frustrated cousin, shift back and review what you just attempted. You will need to judge the surface beneath you with your paws, the feel of the air shifting around you. When you shift, your sense of smell will become ten times what it is in human form, be prepared for this. Everything will become sharper and clearer. Your vision. Your hearing. All of your senses will elevate to levels you are not used too. As you master them you will be able to draw upon them even in human form. You will be larger than normal Lycavorians even though you are half Kavalian. That is the strength of the Leonidas blood within us. Our grandfathers were nearly four feet at the shoulder and over three hundred pounds of muscle and teeth. Our fathers are nearly their equal. Use this to your advantage when you can

Kalis but never abuse it. As you master these skills, other Lycavorians will sense the blood within you easily. They honor our name because of our grandfathers, and the actions of one of us affect us all cousin."

"Is it possible to block a scent that affects us strongly?" Serale heard Kalis ask the holo image and her eyes grew a little wider when the holo image flickered for a few seconds and then she saw the vision of Androcles shake his head.

"A scent that triggers stronger than normal emotions is usually caused by an event you witnessed or a female that has... a female that has certain potency to her scent that tickles your senses beyond normal if that is the definition of your question." Andro replied.

Serale realized then that whatever he was watching was a very sophisticated interactive holo program. Most definitely not the type of technology the Kavalians should have had access too.

"I will use Sadi and my other mates as an example for you if that is your meaning. All of them have a certain flavor to their scent that... for lack of a better explanation... that sets my blood to burning. I could track any of them across thousands of kilometers of a planet or across the stars simply by their Mindvoice and Etheric resonance. You will know when you taste that flavor on a female's scent. It will... it will excite you, make you feel full of energy and above all else, it will make you want to claim them as yours with an almost overpowering urge. It will make you want to protect them at any cost, even your own life, and you will not care about the price you might have to pay. It is easy to detect a similar emotion from females of Lycavorian descent, not so much in those who are not like us, and that is why grandfather taught our males to harness that part of ourselves. You will gain far more in treating the woman you wish to scent or become closer with as a precious gem as opposed to forcing yourself upon her. You will learn what makes her feel, what makes her breath. You will feel it within you and instinctively you will know what will make them quiver in your arms. If they desire you in a similar fashion, believe me, the pleasure you will feel is beyond words. That is what a female can do to you cousin. Knowing... knowing what the future with them could bring to you gives you power and strength. It makes you a better man."

Serale watched as the image of Androcles paced and then stopped to stare into whatever was recording the program.

"I have taught you all I can teach you using this manner Kalis." Androcles told him. "To be honest... I never thought you would get this far along." Androcles bowed his head. "For that you have my apologies cousin. I would be honored to run with you here in Sparta cousin. You can join my brothers and I and we could teach you so much more. This program... it was made by my father specifically for you Kalis. To show you what you could have! What could be yours! You do not need to forsake the blood that runs in your veins cousin. You do not need to follow in the footsteps of someone who has forgotten all our grandfather taught him. I am inputting the code so that you may retrieve my father's last message to you. I will leave you with this Kalis... make the choice from within your heart!" Andro brought his fist over his bare chest. "Draw it from deep within you before you proceed. Make the right choice... the choice I believe you wish to make if you have come this far. Make that choice and I will stand with you against any foe! Against any odds! All of us will! No matter what it may cost us... because you are family." Andro moved a little closer. "Make the wrong choice Kalis... make the wrong choice and there will be no place within the entirety of the galaxy where you will be able to hide from me. And while I may weep while doing it, I will drive my Nehtes through your chest and watch as the life leaves your eyes." Andro stepped back. "I don't believe that is the choice you wish to make cousin. I... I believe now you wish to discover what has never been shown to you. You have tasted it... and now you want more. A future awaits you Kalis my cousin... a future with your family. With your blood. Make the right choice."

Kalis sat there as the P1 powered down the program and he retrieved it from the floor. He typed on it for several seconds and confirmed that a code had indeed been released. He saw it there on the screen and his finger hovered over the activate button. That is when Kalis's focus opened more and he smelled her sweet cinnamon and cherry scent and detected the quickening of her heartbeat. He had spent the last four hours shifting back and

forth, exactly as Androcles had spoken to him. This last week, learning to master his body while in wolf form had been exhaustive but so very rewarding to him. Androcles telling him it would only get easier with time and practice made Kalis want to remain as a wolf for hours and days on end. He could not do this he knew, so he spent the last few hours of every night going through the exercises with Andro's voice filling his head. He hadn't got much sleep this way, but his desire to discover something beyond what he had here was fuel for the fire that drove him.

Kalis reached out and pulled the sheet from the nearby couch and then rose to his feet slowly. As he placed the P1 on his desk he inhaled deeply and let Serale's scent flow through him. Incredibly, just as Andro had said, her scent rushed through him and charged his body and senses. He turned to the sheet covered doorway.

"You may come out now Serale." He spoke softly. "I know you are watching and you do not have to fear me. Ever."

Kalis watched the sheet moved a few inches to the side and then she stepped into view and quickly pulled the sheet back behind her. She turned to look at him with a sheepish expression because she had been caught. Her hands trembled because she did not know what he would do and she certainly did not want to anger him.

"I... I heard the Prince's voice." Serale stammered. "Forgive me... I did not..."

Kalis tucked the edges of the sheet tightly around his waist and crossed the distance to her in three strides. Serale gasped softly but did not back up which shocked her. She stared into those beautiful blue eyes of his as he looked at her for a long moment and felt the flush his gaze caused within her. "I will never hurt you Serale." He said softly. "If you believe nothing else I tell you... believe that."

"Where... where did you... how did you get that?" Serale asked. "How is it that you have an interactive holo program with the Crown Prince?"

Kalis smiled warmly. "Not just my cousin... my Aunt Dysea and Aunt Anja as well." He answered. "My Hadarian Aunt is very colorful in her choice of words. Are all Hadarians like her?"

"What?" Serale gasped. "Like the Queen? Heavens no! I wish I was like her."

Kalis turned away and moved back to the desk where he poured two glasses of the juice. He turned towards her and offered it out to her. Serale and Danim had refused anything he had offered to them personally because they feared him so. Serale decided there was something very different about him and the fear that had been there before was nearly gone. Without thinking she stepped forward and took the glass. Kalis smiled at this and turned back to the table, picking up the P1. He faced her once more and held it out to her.

"It is something my Uncle gave to me on Enurrua." He told her.

Serale looked at the odd pad as she sipped the juice. "You mean... you mean King Leonidas?" She said. Kalis nodded. "Yes." He answered. "Take it."

Serale reached out hesitantly... watching his eyes as her fingers closed around the pad. When she had it fully in her hand he released it and lifted his glass to drink. "You... you know what this is?" She asked him as her eyes dropped to the pad to inspect it.

"Apparently it is a very sophisticated data pad." Kalis answered. "One that every member of the Leonidas family has. My uncle said it was somehow derived from the amazing advances they discovered on that ship."

Serale looked at him. "The Mindvoice ship?" She spoke.

Kalis nodded. "Yes. It has... it has opened the door into a world I never knew existed." He told her. "A world that I very much want to reach."

Serale met his eyes as she held it back to him. "How... how did you get those scars?" She asked.

Kalis turned away from her and placed the P1 back on the table. "When I was fifteen I made my father angry." He answered turning to look at her. "His punishment was fifty lashes."

Serale's eyes grew wide in horror. "You mean... like from a whip?" She gasped.

Kalis nodded his head. "Something similar yes."

"What... what did you do?" Serale stammered.

"I questioned what he told me to do." Kalis told her. He motioned to the couch and Serale didn't hesitate much to her further surprise. She watched him sit in the chair opposite her and finish the rest of the juice before settling his eyes on her. "I will protect you and your brother Serale. I will die before I allow harm to come to

either of you. I promised your mother this and I will begin to live my life honorably by fulfilling that promise. I don't... I don't want you to be afraid of me."

Serale blinked several times and then did something that she had heard Queen Anja say once in a speech. She took a leap of faith.

"Tell me of yourself." She asked him.

Kalis chuckled. "You do not wish to know about me." He said gently.

"What... what if I do?" Serale asked him.

"I would say you are crazy." Kalis answered with a smile. "My life has not... it has not been pleasant."

"Will it be the truth?" Serale asked him.

Kalis met her eyes. "Do you wish the truth?"

Serale nodded quickly. "Yes."

"It could take some time." Kalis said.

Serale looked around the room. "I don't think I'm going anywhere." She said with a small bit of humor.

Kalis's lips turned upward in a smile. A smile that made Serale's heart flutter and caused delicious sensations to ripple through her.

"Very well." He said.

ARC ROYAL

2142 HRS, EST

THIRTY MINUTES FROM ORBIT

"...detecting any lifesigns on the surface or within the facility itself." Martin spoke as he used his fingers to move the holographic images around on the Chart Table. "However... given our recent luck we're not going to take any chances and we are going in heavy." Aricia stood to his left while Isabella and Dysea stood to his right. Around the table also stood Wayonn, Helen, Danny, Julie, Fedor, Miseo and Muton. "This is a pure Pralor science facility according to Wayonn and we could possibly get a wealth of information and material from it. Lucky for us... the first of Ben's supply shipments should link up with us mid morning tomorrow. Avi will be among the group of Durcunusaan and engineers that he is sending." Martin looked at Akemi. "You'll have your full Science Department then Akemi."

The Captain of the Arc Royal nodded with a smile. "We'll need them out here Milord. Especially Avi. We're finding things that we've never seen before in probe scans."

Martin nodded and turned back to the Chart Table. "Ok... though the facility is huge, it precludes us from bringing any dragons into the interior of the facility so Arzoal and Torma are going to remain outside and provide aerial recon with Isheeni and Iriral. For'mya, Endith and Tina will remain airborne in the *STRIKER* after they drop us off and monitor things from above. Miath will be covering the north entrance here which is our main point of entry. Aurith will be doing the same on this west entrance. Mark the points on your data pads from the map here. Anything happens inside, beat feet to one of these entrances. If it ain't wearing one of our uniforms, Miath and Aurith are going to burn the shit out of it if it follows us out of the facility."

Danny leaned forward now. "The Skipper, Julie, me and five members of our team will be point and don't no one complain. This is our kind of Op and we need to know what each one of us will do in a given situation. Fifty meters behind us will be Aricia's group with Isabella, Cirith and Fedor. They'll have the bulk of the Science team we are sending with them and the rest of our team. Wayonn... Tony is going to be sticking to you and Helen like glue so you don't wander off."

"I have no intention of wandering off Daniel Simpson." Wayonn said as the others smiled at Danny's comment.

Danny grinned flashing his white teeth. "He'll make sure of that."

Muton leaned forward. "Forgive me Martin... why exactly am I going?" He asked. "I am not a scientist. I'm a doctor... not a very good one either I might add."

Martin nodded. "Anja and Dysea will be in the last group fifty meters behind the second. As soon as we move to the medical wing here..." Martin pointed on the map. "You and she will then set up a medical

evacuation point. And Red requested you Muton. You have extensive experience in field medicine and that's what she wants. The four medics going with you will be taking orders from you and her."

Muton nodded after a moment. "I will make sure to thank her for her recommendation." He stated.

"Once we reach the medical wing and establish a perimeter we're going to start breaking off into teams to try and obtain as much data and material as we can." Danny continued. "We'll determine makeup after we get set in the facility. Miseo... you and your team of Monitors... they will be the security for Anja's third group. They are the only medical team we are sending so you got our lifeline if anything goes to shit."

Miseo nodded his head confidently. "We are ready." He said.

Helen looked at him from across the Chart Table. "Martin... is it wise to bring all of your Queens with us?" She asked.

Martin met her eyes and shrugged. "I was already told in very definitive terms what will happen if I leave them behind." He stated embarrassed. "It wasn't pretty."

Aricia gave him a gentle elbow in the ribs. "We are bringing extra security Feravomir." She said with a smile. "That is why Miseo and the Monitors are coming. We will be safe."

Helen knew better than to argue with any of Martin's Queens and she nodded her head. "Very well."

"There are five areas we want to inspect that are priority." Danny spoke adjusting the Chart Table. "Jules has worked out the COM frequencies for each team and all we need to do is upload them to our implants. This place is fucking huge so we need to stay in constant radio or Mindvoice contact. No exceptions. Obviously... the power core is central. According to Wayonn, the Research labs are here, four levels down from the medical wing using either stairs or an elevator if we can get it working. We..."

The soft chime caught everyone's attention and Martin pulled his P1 from his vest. He looked at it and then back to Dan. "We're good." He stated quickly. "Keep going Danny." Martin glanced at Helen before Danny began speaking again. He ignored the looks Aricia and Dysea gave to him before turning and moving off to a quiet portion of the TCC.

Martin lifted his P1 and typed his code into the pad.

-PRIMARY TARGET COMPLETED HISTORY PROGRAM 10.4 HOURS AGO-
-FINAL CODE HAS BEEN INPUTTED AND AUTHORIZED-
-NOTIFICATION OF SPARTAN 11 HAS BEEN INITIATED-

"Has it been accessed?" Martin asked softly.

-NEGATIVE-

"If Final Code is activated I want an immediate connection." Martin spoke. "Full safeties and security protocols."

-AFFIRMATIVE KING LEONIDAS-

"Once Avi is on board download any signals received to his neural link and have him monitor them twenty-four seven." Martin spoke. "I want..."

"*Nauta Melme?*" Dysea's soft voice interrupted him and he turned to see Aricia, Bella and Helen standing with her.

"What is it Beloved?" Aricia asked. "Is it Kalis?"

Martin looked at them intently. He had shared what he was doing with his Queens and Helen only. Aricia, Anja and For'mya liked the idea while Bella, Cirith and Dysea thought it was too dangerous. Helen knew why he was doing it and she was the only one who knew what would happen should things not work out the way Martin wanted.

Martin held up the P1. "He... he completed the program." He said with a half grin.

Dysea's eyes grew the widest and she stepped forward. "He completed it?" She asked. "Are you sure?"

Martin showed her the read out on the P1. "He completed Andro's portion ten hours ago and the code was automatically downloaded to his P1. I told you how I set this up in the very beginning. There is no way he

would have gotten this far if Pusintin was involved in any way. He completed it in half the time I calculated he would, which means this is all he has been doing.”

Isabella took the P1 and gazed at the readout for a moment. She looked up at Martin. “I... I never believed he would complete it.” She said softly. “This... this is...”

“It changes things.” Dysea said gently her stunning emerald green eyes focusing on Martin. “This changes things a great deal. Forgive me for not believing in him at the outset.”

Martin shook his head. “I had more doubts than anyone.” He stated. “I still have doubts.”

Aricia shook her head and took his arm in her hands. “You believed when many did not Beloved.” She said.

“Yes you did.” Isabella commented. “I... I must have let my hatred for them overrule my belief in you.”

Dysea pressed close to Bella and slid her arm around her waist. “I am guilty of this as well Bella.” She stated.

“That does not matter now.” Helen told them as she moved closer. “What we do now does Martin?” Helen asked. “What has to happen?”

Martin shook his head. “He has to activate the last code in order for us to know.” He told them.

“You are sure about what you felt?” Helen asked him.

Martin nodded his head. “He may be half Kavalian but I could smell it all over him. The doubt. The fear. Beneath all that... it was there Helen. He only has to reach for it to let it out. He could... he could be just as powerful as Res or Dorian for all we know. And if he discovers what I hope he discovers... if he embraces it... then there will be no doubt.”

Helen met Martin’s eyes. “Then if he activates the last code Martin... we must retrieve him. You will have shown him a different life and in order for him to truly believe in that life we will need to go for him.”

Martin took a deep breath. “Then I will.” He stated firmly.

Dysea moved closer to him as did Isabella. “No. We will.” Bella spoke.

“You must tell Fedor and Eirene Martin.” Helen said now. “He is their brother... they have a right to know.”

Martin nodded. “I know. We will tell them after this mission.” He said. “I need them focused right now. Fedor already has enough issues.”

“The Kavalian girl. Iama?” Helen asked.

Martin nodded. “She’s got a hold on him something fierce.”

“Does she even feel the same thing?” Helen asked.

Aricia nodded. “If what I have smelled from her is accurate... yes. She just does not... she is hesitant and unsure. It is almost as if she thinks of herself unworthy if her surface thoughts are any indication. She is not used to the emotions I can smell swirling through her.”

“Well... we will need to bring an end to that sooner rather than later.” Dysea said. “Bella and I both have heard she is...”

“What?” Martin asked.

“She is searching for something Nauta Melme. And she is allowing herself to be taken advantage of in the process.” Dysea answered.

“She has already slept with three members of the crew.” Isabella told him. “Cirith was coming back from the mess lounge and saw another this morning leaving her quarters.”

Martin’s head tilted. “She is searching for something so she is making herself easy?” He spoke in a low voice that said he found that hard to believe.

“Nauta Melme... she is acting out the only way she knows how.” Dysea said. “She was a sex toy for the Kavalians for so long. Forced to bed men who she cared nothing for. She is strong to have kept her wits about her as she has, but it is the only way she knows how to look for what she is seeking.”

“And what is she seeking?” Martin asked still not convinced.

“We have no right to judge her.” Bella spoke softly. “What she is seeking is her business and how she goes about it is her business. Believe me... I have been where she is. I think we all agree based on what you have smelled that Fedor is what truly interests her... but like Aricia said... I think she believes she is not good enough for him. And she believes because his birth was accelerated he is no more different than the Kavalian clones she had to endure for so long. We have to let this play out on its own.”

“Bella is right.” Helen spoke. “We can watch and guide but we must not interfere in any way. She is coming on the mission yes?”

Martin nodded his head. “The food processors are one of the areas we want to see if we can salvage. It would help her feed all of us without spending hours in the kitchens.”

“I believe she likes that part of her duty... but if we can acquire devices to help her... all the better.” Helen said. “Let this play out Martin. Fedor is no fool... and I think he will begin to see what he needs to do.”

Martin nodded and looked over to see Danny bringing the briefing to an end. “Ok... all this goes on the back burner. We have a mission to go on and I want everyone focused on it.” He saw the nods from all of them. “Let’s get moving.”

Aricia drew Isabella and Dysea with her as they headed back to the Chart Table, but it was Helen’s hand that stopped Martin. He instantly felt her throw up heavy shields that he immediately reinforced and they both felt Torma and Arzoal instinctively add their own power to them.

[You have a plan if this doesn’t work don’t you?] Helen asked.

[Helen...] Martin began to speak and she squeezed his arm tighter.

[We are Paladin and Mage now Martin my boy. What affects you will affect me.] She said. *[I am not your queens and I do not think like them. If this is all a ruse by Kalis... if he has only done this at the behest of that foul ronnu Pusintin... what do you intend?]*

Martin met her eyes. *[I had Avi installed a very small fusion device in Kalis’s P1.]* He told her. *[If this is not real... then I will trigger the device.]*

[I know why you are doing this Martin.] Helen said. *[Your Queens do not... but I do. Is it truly worth it?]*

[I intend to make my brother pay for everything he has done Helen! For every touch he laid upon my Kinsoargai! For funding the scum who took my Melda Min and abused her! For raping Yuri and forsaking Lisisa in the manner he did! For everything he forced her to suffer through until I found her! For every innocent member of the Union he has killed! For depriving his children with Jalersi the right and the knowledge of their bloodline! For everything he has done!] Martin hissed his eyes changing and becoming yellow orbs and the tips of his dual fangs extending slightly. *[I intend to make him pay in the most painful and horrific way that I can possibly imagine Helen! Taking his last child from him is part of it yes... but I will love that boy as if he is my own if it happens! You know that! He is a Leonidas and I know what I smelled and felt from him on Enurrua! Is it worth it? In intend to fulfill the promise I made to my mother and I will remove the stain upon the name of Leonidas! Yes! It is worth it!]*

Helen stared at him for a long moment and finally nodded her head slowly. *[Your Queens would not approve with the possible exception of Aricia because she is Spartan born.]* She told him. *[They would not understand this part of you. It is a part you have never shown them I sense! I do understand however, and I approve Martin. Just be sure to never reveal this side of your nature to your Queens. They... they might find it hard to truly understand.]*

Martin nodded as he began to calm down quickly. *[I will.]* He said softly. *[Thank you Feravomir.]*

Helen squeezed his arm. *[Let’s go see if we can discover more of our history shall we?]*

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOLMAR

UNION BASE CAMP

FEBRUARY 6TH, 0240

Andro rubbed the sleep from his eyes as he came up the ramp of the *STRIKER*. He had wanted to spend time with Sehri but her mother and Harira had monopolized her time since returning and he had eventually leaned up against Elynth and let sleep take him for a few precious hours.

His pilot Sa’roh, Dantio and Daio were gathered around the Chart Table in the rear of the *STRIKER* as he came up the ramp and he saw Ryner flopped in the side pen with Dorian curled up on the mat between his

Bonded Brother's front and rear legs sleeping soundly. Andro stared at his younger brother for a long moment, his wolf ears listening to Dorian's breathing as he tuned everything else out. Dorian had surprisingly proven himself easily the last few days and his resonance seemed to be growing stronger. He was very quick to catch on to things and the skills Andro had been drilling into him for the last few months he had improved measurably. They came to him naturally, almost as they had come to Andro himself as he was growing up. There was something else about his brother that was similar to what he felt when around Jomann and his father. A burning inside him that matched his own. It seemed so very familiar and it took a long moment before Andro's eyes grew a little wider when he realized what it felt like.

Sa'roh brought him out of his thoughts. "Andro?" She called softly causing his head to turn to face her.

Andro glanced over to her quickly and then back to Dorian, deciding this was something he needed to take up with his father privately. The ramifications of what he felt would be wide ranging if they were accurate. Andro moved past where they slept and came up to the Chart Table. "I take it nothing exciting has happened." He spoke glancing back once more at his brother and then turning to look at them fully.

"The Kavs left a small detachment in the northern settlement but the majority of their forces pulled back to the south." Dantio reported.

Andro looked at him. "You and Daio got some sleep I hope." He stated.

Dantio nodded. "Yes... both of us. Three hours. Sa'roh woke us only a short time ago to show us this."

Andro looked at her. "Sa'roh?"

"We've been switching back and forth in the cockpit." She told him. "Don't worry... I need my flight crew sharp and I'm making sure they stay that way."

Andro nodded. "Good. How long before Sa'sur and the *SCIMITAR* return?"

Sa'roh handed him a data pad. "Her last transmission said she would jump back into the system around seven. They are putting the finishing touches on their plans. She said we'll be able to see the fireworks show from down here."

Andro nodded. "I'm sure. Let's make sure everyone is up and alert by then." He ordered. "Where is the *KINDRED SOUL* going to land?"

Sa'roh pointed to the chart. "One point two kilometers from our current location." She answered. "Just along this beach. It's massive and completely bare. They can have defenses up within two hours of setting down after they deploy the 82nd."

"And the *Durcunusaan* Division?" Andro asked.

"They will be coming down on a mix of *VIPERS* and *KADEN*-Class transports." Daio answered. "Forward units will establish a defensive perimeter along this ridge west of the *KINDRED SOUL*. Captain Sa'sur recommends that we move everyone here as soon as they are set. Perhaps an hour after they re-enter the system."

Andro nodded his head. "Make sure everyone is ready to move. The civilians go first." He told them. "We'll get them off world when we have established our full perimeter." He looked at them. "So what is this you woke me for?"

Sa'roh handed him another pad. "You should probably see this." She spoke. "We took this off the Kavalian detachment commander at the northern settlement."

Andro nodded once more as he looked at it. "It's encrypted." He stated. "I thought you were going to try and crack it?"

Sa'roh nodded. "I did. In a manner of speaking."

"Come again?" Andro asked.

"We don't have the necessary encryption algorithms to do a full decoding here on the *STRIKER*. Our computers aren't coded for them. This is some highly classified Puma Bane Intelligence Andro. Not exactly what you would find on just any Puma Bane soldier you run across." She answered.

"So you weren't able to get anything?" He asked.

Sa'roh smiled. "I didn't say that." She spoke adjusting the Chart Table's interface and bringing up some information. "Much of the core information needs to be washed through the *Krypteria*'s filters and their command computers. However... using some inventive decoding of my own I was able to decipher parts that were not as encrypted as the core. Those Puma Bane idiots are not as bright as they think."

Andro's eyes scanned the pad he was holding and they grew a little wider. He looked up at them. "They are supposed to assassinate Azlenr and Byka?" He gasped.

Sa'roh nodded. "That's what I have been able to discern so far. Rom'la is still working on more of it."

"Why would they want to assassinate two of their most experienced field commanders?" Andro asked. "After they have successfully captured this colony? That doesn't make any sense Sa'roh."

"Does anything the Kavalians do make sense?" She asked. "They are not exactly out of the box thinkers Andro."

Andro dipped his head back and forth. "True." He stated. "But this?"

"Their tactics are straightforward and basic. We've always known that." Sa'roh told him. "Their clones are not up to the same standards as the High Coven's are. The High Coven clones can think and act for themselves without guidance. The Kavalian clones need constant direction and guidance. They can't really process higher tactics and such. At least not that we are aware of. That's why none of them are officers or members of the Puma Bane Commandos that we are aware of. But according to this... the clones in Azlenr's and Byka's divisions are somewhat different."

"Different how?" Dantio asked.

Sa'roh shook her head. "We couldn't determine what exactly they meant... but it must be something major if Keleru and the Kavalian High Command want these two men dead."

Andro set the pad down. "We are talking about two men the *Krypteria* says were the most successful commanders during their war with the Coven." He spoke softly. "You don't just assassinate men like that. It's downright stupid."

"Whatever the reasons... we know the Puma Bane troops get their orders directly from Keleru or his senior aides." Dantio spoke. "This is not something they would do on their own. You know how Keleru likes to have a hand in everything. The Puma Bane *midaeus* are his right hand. His secret police so to speak. These orders are telling the Puma Bane Commander... this Marsin *igord*... they are telling him to assassinate Azlenr and Byka and as many senior officers as they can once the colony is fully secured. And do it in a way that makes it look like Union soldiers or civilians did it."

Andro lifted his eyes from the pad to Dantio. "That explains why this Marsin was so intent on blaming the civilians for our attacks." Andro said.

Daio nodded. "And now he no longer has that option." He said. "We've taken it away from them."

"They're going to pull out all the stops looking for us." Sa'roh said. "We'll be safe here as long as the generators power the Stealth Field. At least until Sa'sur and the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Wing gets here."

"Make sure we keep the civilians away from the edges of the field." Andro said. "We don't need one or more of them stumbling outside the field so Kavalian sensors can pick them up from orbit."

Daio nodded. "I already made sure of that." He said.

Andro looked at Sa'roh. "Send a burst to Sa'sur. Have her get someone to touch base with my brother Resumar. He's working closely with Pian'Nruarani and Jalersi. There has to be some reason why they want these men dead."

Sa'roh looked at him. "You can't do it with your P1?" She asked. There were few who knew the true capabilities of the P1 Pads that all of the Leonidas family carried outside of senior *Durcunusaan* personnel. Sa'roh was among those few because of her duties as a *STRIKER* pilot assigned to the Royal Family on different occasions when Sadi or Arrarn was not flying.

Andro shook his head. "We can only initiate one long range interstellar communication between pads at a time. I don't want father to try and contact me for some reason and be talking with Res." He replied. "Sadi or Ne'Veha can do it from the *SCIMITAR* before they get here. Carisia and Lu'ria are using their P1s to maintain prolonged connections with my grandmother on Earth and with *Tenna Deia*. We are not going to be caught by surprise again."

Dantio looked at him. "Can't they be detected Andro?" He asked.

Andro shook his head. "The P1s operate on Pralor communication waves." He replied. "An extremely high frequency subspace band. With... with the Pralors now gone, there is no activity on this subspace band but Avi determined it is still there. It's essentially sitting there unused. No one else has P1s except my family and a select few others. They are bio-encoded to the individuals and can only be used by them. Even my father and mothers do not understand the full extent of the technology, but we know what it can do. Shiria gave all of us

extensive classes beyond what we already knew when she discovered we had them. Wayonn with my father and mothers as well.”

“These pads... they can span this far?” Daio asked.

“Subspace is infinite Daio.” Sa'roh spoke quickly. “There might be minor interference along the frequency band, but you could talk to someone thousands of light years away with Pralor COM units. It's how they communicated with their City Ships.” Sa'roh saw Andro's eyebrows go up a little when she finished and she smiled. “I have been quizzing Ne'Veha and Sadi quite a bit.” She said with a grin.

Andro smiled. “That explains that.” He said. “We use *SPARTA'S WRATH* as the central point to bounce the signals off. All the pads are coded to it and can reach it from anywhere in the Alpha Quadrant. Once there... the signal is bounced to wherever the destination is. Her COM relays are far more powerful than the individual pads. It's why I can talk to father even from where he is now.”

Daio looked at him. “Where is that?” He asked.

“According to our star maps and charts, they would have just left the Echo Quadrant and gone where we do not have any information.” Andro answered. “Uncharted space.”

Daio shook his head. “Now that's never fearing the unknown if you ask me.” He said.

Andro chuckled. “Yes... my father does tend to go places no one else has gone before doesn't he?” He said. “And he always manages to drag my mothers along with him.”

Dantio smiled now. “They are just as adventurous as he is if you ask me.” He said.

Andro nodded. “Probably.” He said looking at the pad once more. “Are these two moving around the planet with any additional security?” He asked.

Sa'roh shook her head. “Not that we can determine.” She answered. “We can pinpoint what *DAGGER* they are in because of the level of encryption in the COM signals, but aside from that we can't tell.”

“Begin recording where they go and when.” Andro spoke. “Perhaps they have a pattern we can narrow down and eventually use. Pass this information along to Sa'sur and have her assigned a team to monitor for this when they arrive in system.”

“Use?” Daio asked. “What for?”

Andro shrugged. “For all we know something might present itself.” He stated.

Sa'roh's head turned at the movement and she saw Aleatia coming up the ramp slowly, her eyes focused on Andro. “Andro.” She motioned with her head.

Andro turned and saw her and then looked back. “Get that burst off to Sadi and see if she can discover something before they arrive.” Andro turned fully and moved towards the back of the ramp as Aleatia stopped. Her eyes were moving back and forth taking in the inside of the ship and finally they came back to him as Andro stepped up to her. “Lady Aleatia? Is there something I can do for you?”

Aleatia looked at Andro, once more feeling the immense Etheric power within this young man. She had never felt anything like it, even from the strongest Shaman Masters within the Circle or the Rothryn Science Academy. In some ways it frightened her for Sehri had told her what she had seen Andro do during the battle with excitement and awe. Aleatia could also detect this young man's intense lavender and mint scent all over her daughter, something that surprised her to some extent. The Rothryn did not use their sense of smell as often or as intently as these Lycavorians did. It was not something that they ever felt the need for. However, being among them these last weeks and days, Aleatia found herself delving into her sense of smell more and more almost without thinking. She was beginning to take notice of the scents of others and she found that her husband Dyack's unique mountain musk scent could and did drive her own senses to a heightened state.

“Forgive... forgive me for interrupting.” She stammered.

Andro shook his head quickly. “It is no interruption.” He told her. “The balance of our forces will arrive in system in a few hours and I will insure you and the others are taken to the *SCIMITAR* when they have established control of the space above us. You will be safe there.”

Aleatia looked into his azure eyes deeply, seeing wisdom and experience that one so young should not have. It was another thing about this young man that frightened her. Sehri had told her about those eyes and what she had seen when he killed the Kavalian with that amazing Etheric spike he extended from his fist. Sehri had said those azure eyes, so beautiful to her; she said they had been almost glowing. “I know this is... this is perhaps not the best time.” She finally spoke. “I would... I would like to speak to you about...”

“Sehri?” Andro finished.

Aleatia nodded. “She is... she is my youngest daughter and...”

Andro reached out and took her arm gently. Aleatia gasped slightly at the warmth of his touch and the jolts of energy it caused to surge through her. She looked at him with wide eyes as she once more felt the dominating power within him even more clearly and focused. “You have nothing to fear from me or our people Lady Aleatia.” Andro said softly.

“We... so much has happened in the last weeks.” Aleatia stammered once more. “We have discovered so much and Dyack and I are...”

Andro nodded. “Why don’t we grab a mug of coffee and talk? We may not get the chance for the next few days and I want you to know...” Andro shook his head. “I will try and explain to you something that even me and my mates don’t really understand. All we know is that we feel it deeply within us and we have accepted that.”

Aleatia met his gaze for a moment and then nodded. “I think... I think I would like that.” She said.

The coffee, she discovered, was a special blend that his mother had made many years ago while she carried him in her womb. It was especially rich and smooth and it tasted wonderful to Aleatia. He told her that the recipe still resided only in his mother’s head and she had made a fortune off of selling it across the Union. They had retrieved two large mugs and then moved to an area that was relatively activity free around several dozen equipment crates near the nose of the *KADEN* transport. They sat on these crates across from one another, but close enough that Aleatia could see his face easily even in the dim light put off by the stars and the quarter moon. She listened to him at first, as he gave her a very brief history lesson on the Lycavorian people. She had heard some of it from Deni and Lisisa, but he was going even further and Aleatia was soon discovering answers to questions that she had wanted to ask for many weeks.

“So... these... these Pralors as you call them...” Aleatia asked after listening to him talk for nearly an hour. “They are... they are who we call the Ancient Ones? They are the ones who left us the Flatspace technology. And the many ruins scattered across our world that our people have been discovering and investigating for centuries? These belonged to them?”

Andro nodded his head. “I was able to confirm with Shiria that the third moon of Lentani is where they originally placed the Lycavorians taken from our homeworld. The moon, at the time, was not conducive to our alternate forms and that is why those taken from Lycavore had their ability to shift genetically removed. The hope of the Pralors was that you would eventually evolve to the point where you would terra form Lentani and settle there. As it turns out, that is exactly what you did. No matter the paths we have taken to get where we are Lady Aleatia, both our peoples come from the same place. We are all Lycavorians.”

Aleatia sipped her mug of coffee which they had both refilled twice in the last hour alone. Her eyes stayed on Andro as he answered her. “There are numerous signs that our civilization goes back nearly a hundred thousand years.” She stated. “These Ancient Ones... these Pralors, they have been doing this for a long time I take it?”

“Yes they have.” Andro answered with a nod. “Hundreds of thousands of years. I never really asked Wayonn or Shiria exactly how long.”

“You... you don’t sound like you approve of what they were doing Androcles.” Aleatia said. “What their species lived for.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “I understand why.” He answered her. “I guess my only issue is that they would take my people, our people Lady Aleatia... they would take them and drop them on some unknown planet to repopulate it. I don’t... I don’t like that choice was no where in the equation I guess.” Andro sipped his coffee and looked at her. “But everything we have talked of is not what you really want to know is it? I don’t usually ramble like that.” He said with a grin.

“I have... seen something in my daughter’s eyes.” Aleatia spoke softly. “It is not... it is not something that I have ever seen before. She is so young and...” Aleatia looked at him. “She looks at you with the same love and hunger that I look at Dyack with. Like she has... like she has been with you for decades. Like she has loved no one else. And I see... I see that same look in your eyes when you gaze upon her.”

Andro nodded his head. "Yes you do." He stated.

"And this is how your other mates will look at her when they arrive?" Aleatia asked.

"Yes." He answered.

"How?" Aleatia asked softly. "Before we came here she never knew you. She has always been different because of her Etheric abilities but this..."

"It is not a question I can answer." Andro said. "I can't explain it Lady Aleatia. It is not something I aspired too if that is your question. I have tried to avoid being like him for most of my life. It's foolish really."

"It is not foolish young man." Aleatia told him.

Andro smiled and nodded to her. "My father has six wives and mates and I have always tried to walk outside of my father's shadow. When I met *KertaGai*... when she first came into my life... I was only eight months old. I have loved her since that day. When we finally came back together when I was grown, it opened the gates within both of us that brought first Carisia and then Ne'Veha and Lu'ria and then Caliria into our lives. I struggled with this fact, the feelings inside me. Sadi did not. She embraced them. And finally she made me accept them as well. They are meant to be with us, with me. *KertaGai* is my *Anome*, my soulmate, but I love all of them with equal intensity. As if it has always been there." Andro looked at her. "That now includes Sehri."

"So you believe some sort of higher power has brought you together?" Aleatia asked him.

"I have heard those on our trip here refer to Gods and how they have guided you. Is this what you believe as well?"

Andro met her eyes for a contemplative moment. "There are nearly nine hundred species within the Lycavorian Union Lady Aleatia. Some of them very devout in their beliefs. Their origins and how they came to be. For me personally... I like to think that a higher power does exist and that whatever Gods are out there... they are benevolent and watch over us in ways we can not see. No matter what our species or belief." He replied. "That they guide our actions in some way. Do these Gods have names?" Andro shrugged again. "They did in the time of Ancient Sparta and on Earth. There are some who still believe in those same Gods today and that belief has transcended time to exist even now. As a whole however, I like to think that most believe as I do. When we part ways for instance, and I say go with the gods, it is my intent that whatever higher powers may be out there... that they watch over you. I have faith that they watch over all of us to some extent."

"Some of those on our ship believe your grandfather and others from your bloodline to be Gods in some way." Aleatia said softly.

Andro chuckled softly. "Yes... I know. Something that drives my father and grandmother *malda* at times." He looked up at her. "I believe my grandfathers watch over us. I believe they see all that we do. I even believe they call us names when we do something incredibly stupid. Something I'm quite sure they have done on several occasions because of my actions, and more because of my father." Aleatia couldn't help but laugh softly at this. "Believe this if you will, but my grandfather appeared to my father before I was born. When my father first discovered who he truly was. I believe it to be because of some Etheric resonance left over within his tomb. But Gods? No. They were as I am. Just men. Wolves. Trying to live our lives in the best way we are taught by our parents. We are more resilient than most and part of our instincts is to protect, regardless of what species a person is. Many have evolved now where they are our equals and we welcome that whole heartedly. The humans on Earth are the perfect example. The Great Fire changed the mentality of many of those who survived. They discovered that the Lycavorian Spartans watched over them through the centuries and now they have pushed themselves to be the best they can be and they have reached a point where they can stand beside us as equals in everything."

Aleatia looked at him for a moment. "You sound... I know Lycavorians... our people..." Aleatia spoke and she was surprised at how easily that word rolled off her lips now. "I know we can imprint our children to a degree when they are born. Give them memories and images... but you Androcles Leonidas. Your eyes and your demeanor, how you speak of things... you speak with a knowledge and wisdom that you should not have at so young an age."

Andro chuckled. "My mothers and my mates would not agree with you." He said. "They think I am somewhat *malda*." He looked at her. "Crazy."

"It is because of the power I feel within you isn't it?" Aleatia said softly. "The Etheric resonance I feel radiating from you. I am strong with Etheric ability, Dyack and our other daughters as well. Sehri dwarfs us in the resonance and ability she has however... it is why we sent her to the Circle of Shamans and not the Rothryn

Science Academy. We did not want her submitted to the sometimes ridiculous restrictions and harsh labels those who are strong with Etheric abilities receive at the Academy. But you... what I feel coming from you... it surpasses anything I have ever felt. And it..."

Andro met her eyes. "It has caused Sehri's to become stronger."

Aleatia nodded quickly. "Just in... just in the few hours we have been among you here her resonance has become so much clearer and focused."

Andro nodded. "I seem to have that affect on all of my mates." He answered. "There is an explanation for that, one that I will gladly share with you, but it would require quite a bit more time to explain than what we have now because it is something that we are just discovering for ourselves thanks to Shiria and Wayonn."

Aleatia tilted her head. "The Pralor you have mentioned before?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"We never suspected Wayonn could be one of the Ancient Ones." Aleatia spoke softly. "To think he has been among the Protectorate for so long and we never knew?"

Andro nodded. "He hid himself very well from what I understand."

"Will you... will you allow us to speak with them?" Aleatia asked.

Andro looked at her. "Why would I not?" He asked. "They are just as large a part of your history as they are ours."

"And this information you are going to share with me about you?" Aleatia asked.

"There is something that affects me, my father, my brother and some others." Andro told her. "It is a gene of some sort in our bodies that causes you to feel what you do from us. It is passed down through the bloodlines of those who have certain Pralors as ancestors. A type of Pralor that merged with the Ruling Packs on Lycavore so long ago. Many thousands of years after your ancestors had been removed. Surely you felt it within Denali."

Aleatia nodded. "Yes... a little. But it was no where near as pronounced or powerful as I sense it within you."

Andro nodded. "Because he was hiding it." He said.

"Hiding it?" Aleatia asked.

Andro finished his coffee in two long gulps and set the mug on the crate. "Once it was discovered we carried this gene, Shiria and Wayonn taught all of us a very simple but effective technique to mask this resonance we put off. To make it seem less than it really is."

"But you aren't masking it now." Aleatia said.

Andro shook his head. "Who exactly would I need to mask it from here?" He asked with a smile as he lifted his hands to motion all around them. "The Kavalians, with extremely rare exceptions, can not Mindvoice. Nor do they have Etheric abilities. They would not be able to detect this resonance from me. From any of us. We have learned in the last few months that while we may not always understand or agree with what Shiria and Wayonn tell us, more often than not we still adhere to what they tell us. They have many thousands of years of knowledge and experience that we do not."

"And Sehri feeds off of this?" Aleatia asked.

Andro nodded. "To some extent... yes. All of my mates do. We don't know how exactly. Not yet. But we will someday."

"Will it remain so... so part of her?" Aleatia asked.

"I have opened myself to her Lady Aleatia. Just as I have with my other mates." Andro told her. "That was done more out of instinct than me actually deciding to do that. Her scent..." Andro looked at her almost shyly and Aleatia had to contain the smile that wanted to split the corners of her mouth. "Sehri's scent is... overpoweringly enticing to me." He said finally. "Just as the scents of my other mates are. Combined with the fact she is within her Coming of Age Fever... I can not help but project the aura I do." He looked up at her. "Surely you must feel something similar with your husband and mate. You are Lycavorian no matter the years that have passed."

Aleatia nodded her head as she held up her hand. "Perhaps not on such a scale... we have either forgotten or do not remember so much about our history... but yes." She answered him.

"I do not take this lightly Lady Aleatia." Andro told her. "It is not something I can just will away. The attraction... the desire... it is powerful. Sadi and Ne'Veha and Lu'ria will be just as affected by her scent

because of how tightly we are all bound. Carisia because of the Etheric connection that binds us all together. Caliria will be able to feel it as well when we are back together with her.”

Aleatia looked up in to the dark sky. “This... this is not going the way we had hoped.” She stated softly. “What do you mean?” Andro asked.

Aleatia looked at him hoping she did not ruin whatever future there was with what she was going to tell him. He had been so forthcoming with her and she did not want to lie to this young man. “Do not think badly of Dyack or I Androcles... but we had hoped an attraction between you and either Ibani or Osbela, our older daughters, would develop.” She told him in a soft voice. “Ever since seeing what you... what you did to that man... whatever doubts we may have had in the Ancient Prophecy of our people were washed away. We had thought perhaps a marriage between you and one of our older daughters would cement our future forever. Bring our history and bloodlines back together with yours. That is the other thing he wanted to discuss with you if you remember what he told you?”

Andro nodded his head. “I remember. You still practice arranged marriages?” He asked surprised.

Aleatia nodded. “In some instances yes. It is written into our governing foundation.” She answered. “It was done by Dyack’s grandfather as a way to insure that our family remained in power. Someone from our line has ruled the Rothryn people for over three thousand years now, Dyack for the last seven hundred plus years. We are the most forward thinking of the Noble Families and each ruler from our line has been elected by overwhelming majority since Dyack’s grandfather.”

“And the parties agree to this?” Andro asked.

Aleatia nodded. “Yes. My union with Dyack was arranged... but he spent quite a bit of time courting me in the years prior to our actual union. He chased me through the streets of Lentani on many occasion... right along with the other males who were attempting to win my favor as my Coming of Age came closer. He had already won my heart before our fathers agreed to the Union without our knowledge. In our case it suited what we both wanted anyway. Ours was perhaps the smoothest transition of power in our history because we already loved each other before we became mates.”

“What if the parties don’t agree?” Andro asked.

Aleatia shrugged. “It has not happened in over two thousand years. Most of those Noble Families who think as we do school their children about what could happen if the more archaic of the Noble Families ever come to power. I have read some of the very early history of the Lycavorian people on Lycavore. That ship of yours that we were on had an extensive data base. Many of the Noble Rothryn Families cling to a set of ideals and values that have no place in the modern era just as those ideals of your people from long ago do not belong. They are not as many in number as the more modern families but they do have a loyal following. These families would bring back many things we do not want and have not wanted for millennia. Slavery and taking females by force during their Coming of Age. Things that the majority of our people dismissed as barbaric long ago. They put forth a candidate every time there is an election held. Thankfully no one they have put forth has ever come close to winning. So... you see why we still do this.”

Andro met her eyes. “Your daughters Ibani and Osbela are very beautiful Lady Aleatia... but I have no interest in either of them. Their scents... they do nothing for me; as terrible as that may sound. And we do not practice arranged marriages or unions among my people.”

Aleatia nodded. “Yes... I read that as well in your Chronicles of Law. And no, it does not sound terrible.” She spoke gently. “I don’t know how Dyack will react. Sehri is... Sehri has always been his favorite. His baby. Given her status as a member of the Circle of Shamans I don’t know what he would say. He may not approve of what the two of you share.”

“Why?” Andro asked looking at her.

“It is hard to explain and...” Aleatia began.

“He has already promised her hand in a union to someone else hasn’t he?” Andro said evenly. “Another of these Noble families you spoke of?”

Aleatia looked at him. “Why would you...?”

“It is written all over your face milady, and trying to lie to me would be pointless.” Andro told her.

Aleatia shook her head. “Yes... I gathered that on my own. Your insight does you credit young man.” She said.

“Does Sehri know?” Andro asked.

Aleatia nodded her head. "I am relatively sure she does." She answered him. "When the subject came up at a dinner of the families two years ago she became... agitated when Dyack suggested a union between her and the youngest son of this family be looked into." Aleatia looked at him. "Given what she has told me and what I have seen in these last few hours I think I am beginning to see why she reacted as she did."

Andro stood up slowly. "Are you going to ask me not to pursue Sehri Lady Aleatia?" He asked.

Aleatia came to her feet as well now. "Androcles... please believe me when I say this is not something I... we were prepared for or expected. I knew Sehri's Etheric resonance was very strong, it is the reason we kept her abilities secret and sent her to the Circle of Shamans to be trained, but I had no idea this would happen! The connection to you and the others. Events like this are... they do not happen among our people." Aleatia moved closer to him. "She speaks as if she... as if she already knows you. As if you have been together for many years. She is already beginning to speak your... our language with so much more fluency and ease. And I can no longer come close to penetrating the shields she now has up around her mind."

"In a sense... in a sense we have Lady Aleatia." Andro said softly. "It is no different than what I and my mates feel for her. What we feel for each other. Including Sehri now. Please do not ask me not to pursue her. My blood calls for her. Sadi and Ne'Veha and Lu'ria's blood calls for her. Her resonance within Mindvoice calls for Carisia. And she calls for us just as strongly."

Aleatia nodded. "Yes... yes she does. Even I can sense that now."

"I will not dismiss that." Andro told her. "I can not! It is part of me."

Aleatia looked at him for a long moment. She could hear the passion in his voice for her daughter. The want and the desire. It was stronger than anything she had ever felt before and Aleatia could not help but be so very happy for her youngest child that such a man would profess himself in such a way to her. She had seen what this young man could do first hand and she had no doubts he would love and cherish Sehri with an intensity that would steal her breath away. He would also defend and protect her savagely if the need arose. Aleatia stepped closer and rested her hand on his arm.

"Sehri has always been different from her sisters Androcles." Aleatia said. "Because of this she has always been lonely and unhappy. I have seen a brightness in her eyes that I have never seen before and it is because she has discovered you. I can not in my heart attempt to take that away from her. I will not."

"Our people's code of honor and our law within the Union is such that a male Lycavorian will never take a female before her birthing day. Only after that day, during the last week of her fever, if she so desires it as well." Andro said. "It is forbidden. It is a hateful and heinous crime among my people and the punishment for this is very harsh. I understand the Rothryn honor something similar?"

Aleatia nodded. "Truly the only difference is that if it is an arranged union the female's fever needs to be fully gone."

"So our people's have something else in common." Andro told her. "Perhaps we are not so different than you might think."

Aleatia met his eyes. "I have long believed we are descended somehow from Lycavorians Androcles. How could I not when the similarities between my people and those within the Protectorate are too numerous to count. I am discovering it as well with the Lycavorians of the Union. In what I have seen and what I have read. I can't deny it."

"We have adjusted the age factors for the Coming of Age fever within the Union, but no man with any shred of honor would claim a female against her will and it is punishable by harsh penalties if it is discovered as I said." Andro told her. "I will use these two days to discover Sehri, all of us will. As much as I am able given what is going on around us. And she will discover us if that is her wish. The day she reaches twenty years of life, which is what Rothryn law states a female must be if I am not mistaken...?" Aleatia nodded her head. "When she reaches twenty years old Lady Aleatia... if it is still Sehri's wish... and I hope it will be; I will put my nose to the ground as my father says, and I will discover her apple and walnut scent until it fills my head and my blood just as intensely as my other mates. I will make her mine... and I will curb the burning of her blood for me if that is also what she desires. Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Carisia and even Caliria will do the same. That is what we all crave. Including Sehri."

"I know." Aleatia said softly. "She told me as much in very strident terms. She has no fear of that day Androcles."

“I do not know how to explain this to you.” Andro said. “I told you that. Only that it is. I struggled with it for many months as I said. Until I came to the conclusion, with a little help from a board Sadi wielded unto my head, that fate and destiny always gets the last laugh and to just conduct myself by what my instincts tell me and what feels right.”

“And this is what you feel when you look at my daughter?” Aleatia asked.

“When I look at her... when I inhale her scent... I see part of myself. A part that is meant to complete all of us as a whole.” Andro told her. “It sounds crazy I know... but you can speak with Sadi when she arrives. Or Ne'Veha. All of them if you wish. They will tell you the same thing and you will see it in their eyes as well. Sehri belongs to us and we to her and it is meant to be by some higher power. That is what I feel Lady Aleatia. That is what burns within me. I failed to follow what my instincts told me once... it almost cost me Caliria and I need to make amends for that with her. Mark my words... I will not make that mistake again.”

Aleatia could barely keep the tears from her eyes at the professions of this young man who she had known for less than a day. A young man who she knew without question would worship the very ground her daughter walked upon. “You... you are a very serious young man you know.” She said finally. “It can be very... frightening.”

Andro's head dropped and he shook it slowly. “Forgive me.” He said with a smile. “My mothers and sisters have been telling me that for years.” He told her. “They even had me go to classes once to try and dispel this atmosphere I seem to project.” He said looking up to meet her eyes again. “I take it those classes didn't work?”

Aleatia couldn't help but laugh at the expression on his face now and she found herself drawing closer to him and slipping her hand around his arm. “No... I'm afraid they did not.” She stated with some humor. “You... you honor my daughter and me with your words today Androcles Leonidas. More so than any young Rothryn male ever has. Do we... do we have time before your people arrive to talk more?”

Androcles reached down and picked up their mugs from the crates. “We can make time right now as long as nothing exciting happens.” He said.

“Like these Kavalians attacking?” Aleatia asked.

“That would not be exciting.” Andro told her as they began to walk. “That would be very scary.”

Aleatia smiled as she moved with him. Perhaps there was more to this young man than met the eye she thought to herself.

**ARC ROYAL STRIKE TEAM
GROUNDSIDE
PLANET SIXTEEN BRAVO
FEBRUARY 6TH, 0620 EST**

Danny held up his hand bringing their small column to a halt fifty meters from the north facility entrance. The Pralor Science Facility stretched high up into the air, towering over the tall trees that surrounded it. The facility was positioned at the end of a large valley with an enormous lake taking up the other end and stretching almost all the way into the next valley. The green mountains on two sides reached high into the thin air with just a wisp of clouds above them. They had landed two clicks away and followed the edge of the lake as they approached the north entrance easily able to see the structure in the distance even through the tall trees. He looked at Martin as he settled next to him on one knee.

“This is a portable facility *fervon*?” Danny asked him with some awe in his voice. “I don't suppose our Pralor ancestors ever considered building something of normal size?”

Martin chuckled. “I don't think they believed in normal sized anything.” He spoke as Kenny dropped next to him. Martin reached up and pounded Kenny on the shoulder. “Go Kenny!” He spoke.

Kenny nodded and touched Pablo beside him and they sprinted forward to where they could see the massive entrance of the facility. It looked as if you could drive a tank through the main door as Kenny and Pablo moved to the control panel on the side.

Julie and Cody moved up to where they knelt. “You can tell where they had vehicles.” Julie spoke. “The terrain is tore up some leading right up to the door.”

Martin nodded and looked at her. “Anything?” He asked.

Julie shook her head. “Aside from the plant life no.” She answered. “No life signs of any kind. You or Danny smell anything unusual?”

“No.” Martin answered as he looked around. “That’s kind of odd don’t you think?” He said. “It seems like this planet is perfect for colonization.”

Danny nodded. “Yeah... it looks perfect. Until it jumps up to bite you in the ass. With our luck the fucking trees will spring to life when we least expect it and try to attack us.”

“*Carians Simpson...*” Julie exclaimed with a smile. “When did you become such a baby?”

“I don’t like surprises.” Danny said.

Martin lifted his A4 in one hand and slapped Danny’s arm. “Move up.” He said motioning to where Cody and Colin waited. They nodded and sprinted forward to take up covering positions of Kenny and Pablo. Martin, Danny and Julie covered the distance quickly coming up in front of the door. Martin tapped his jaw. None of them were wearing the standard helmet that completed the ArmorPly set to better facilitate seeing each other’s expressions. “We are about to breach the door *Saaurano*.”

“We are watching Beloved.” Aricia’s voice answered in his implant.

“Red... you and *Melda Min* get ready to turn tail and run if anything comes charging out at us.” Martin spoke.

“Understood.” Anja’s voice echoed.

Martin looked at Kenny who nodded. He brought his A4 up and nodded his head as the others did the same. Kenny touched the panel and a low grating sound echoed around them as the massive doors began to part. Kenny and Pablo sprinted back to stand beside Julie as the darkness inside was revealed. They bright sun exposed the nose of some sort of vehicle first. A vehicle with large balloon tires and deep tread that appeared to be armored in some way and had several dome like devices protruding from its exterior.

Martin looked up into the sky. *Aurith... nothing is running out the entrance by you is it?* He asked.

Dnom and I see nothing Martin. For'mya’s bonded sister answered immediately. *That is good yes?*

Martin smiled. Aurith was returning to her old self now that For'mya was back with them. There had been a time when he worried that she would never be the same again if they had been unable to rescue For'mya. Martin shook those thoughts from his mind and watched as the doors completed opening with a resounding echo and the interior of the facility was exposed for them. They could see low power light globes still shimmering in the rear of what could only be a garage of some sort. They could make out the silhouette of two other vehicles further back and ramps moving up on either side of the interior.

“Ok... we’re moving in.” Martin said as he got to his feet. “Red Six. Red Six. Disperse!”

He and his team burst into a sprint and were swallowed up by the shadows inside the facility. Their wolf and vampire eyes adjusted quickly to the dim interior and A4s were sweeping back and forth ready to trigger. Danny broke in one direction with Cody and Colin, Martin in the other with Julie and Kenny while Pablo remained by the door as covering fire. The garage appeared to be nearly two hundred meters long and equally as wide, but after they passed the three vehicles it opened up quite a bit to reveal neatly stacked crates in different areas and nothing else. Martin moved up the ramp on one side while Danny led them up on the opposite side until they met near the rear of the garage by another set of double doors.

“Martin?” Wayonn’s voice broke into his implant.

“Go.” Martin hissed.

“If it is a standard facility... then by the interior doors there will be a panel.” Wayonn told him. “All of our facilities were powered by Etheric resonance until the main reactor core was brought online. Touch the panel and power and interior lighting should activate inside where you are.”

“It’s some sort of garage Wayonn.” Martin spoke as his eyes moved along the wall trying to find the panel he spoke of.

“Does it have rectangular vehicles with large tires?” Wayonn asked.

“Yeah. Three of them.” Danny answered.

“Then it is a standard Portable Core Seeding Science facility.” Wayonn answered.

“Come again?” Julie cut in.

“A Science Facility deployed to a planet that has been chosen for seed life.” Wayonn told them.

“Got it.” Martin spoke as he placed his hand against the wall in an indentation that was eerily in the shape of a hand. The internal lights began to wink on all over the interior fully illuminating the strange vehicles and hundreds of equipment crates scattered all over.

Julie looked around and then up, her eyes growing wide as the ceiling extended perhaps four stories up. “Wow!” She gasped.

“Ok... this changes things.” Martin spoke reaching up to touch his jaw.

Danny nodded. “It sure does. Nice defensible position.”

“All teams move to our location! On the double!” Martin snapped. “Cody... you and Colin stand by here at the door. Anything comes out... shoot first ask questions later.”

“Got it skipper.” Cody said.

Martin began moving back down the ramp with Danny and Julie. “What are you thinking Skipper?” Danny asked.

“Wayonn said it was a seeding facility.” Martin said. “That’s why there is no life. They were going to bring new life here to settle the planet.”

Danny looked at him as they walked. “I thought Wayonn said the Pralors dismissed this quadrant of space.”

Martin nodded. “He did.”

“So why is this here? And why does it have power if the Pralors have been extinct for millennia?” Julie asked.

“Let’s find out.” Martin said as Aricia led her team into the garage at a casual jog, the *Durcunusaan* breaking off immediately to set up defensive positions.

“Start pulling these crates around and make a defensive wall!” Martin barked. “North and south near the interior door. And make sure there is nothing inside them that go boom!”

Aricia moved up to him with a smile at his words as Wayonn and Helen entered with the Master Chief right behind them. Isabella and Cirith, Fedor between them were looking around at the cavernous interior as they came up to the group. Martin grabbed Fedor’s shoulder and grinned at him. “Excited yet?” He asked.

Fedor smiled at his *Medwan*. “My toes are fidgeting father.” He answered.

Isabella nudged him in the side. “Just keep your toes in your boots for the moment *aur keto*.” She stated with a motherly smile. “It would not look good to see you running with only one boot on.” (my son)

Fedor grinned. “I will *medwaw*.” He said.

Martin looked at Wayonn as he came up to them with Helen. He had pulled out a larger version of the P1, almost the size of a 21st century Notepad computer and was quickly typing on it. “Wayonn?” He asked.

“Shiria sent me this before we departed. It is a Pralor P9 computer pad very similar to the P1s you all carry. *SPARTA’S WRATH* had two dozen of them on board and she was going to see that they were distributed to those who could use them best.” Wayonn said beginning to work on the notepad like computer. “All Pralor PSFs were marked with a number Martin.” Wayonn spoke. “That is how we kept track of them and their locations. The number should be stamped along the interior of the walls somewhere in this vehicle bay.”

Martin looked at Julie. “Jules?”

“On it.” She said before she moved away.

“You said this was a Core Seeding facility?” Martin said as he moved to one of the nearby crates and sat down.

Wayonn nodded. “That is what the vehicles were for.” He stated holding out the P9 to him. Martin took it as he listened to Wayonn speak. “They would be sent out across the planet to take core samples from different locations to insure the stability of the planet for future life. It’s strange though... these facilities were always dropped in groups of six or more to cover the entire planet. This is the only one we detected. Why is it here and why does it still have power? All Seeding operations were suspended when the second war with the Scourge began according to Shiria.”

Martin gave the P9 back to him and tapped his jaw. “*Kinsoaurgai*?”

“We are monitoring Martin.” For’mya’s voice responded immediately.

“You and Endy have enough room to land in front of the door?” Martin asked.

“With plenty to spare Skipper.” Endith answered.

“Ok... do a slow three sixty around the facility and have Tina and Eirene give me an updated battery of scans. Then land with your tail facing the door.” Martin ordered. “Keep the batteries charged in case you have to make a quick exit For'mya.”

“Understood. We'll see you in twenty-three minutes.” For'mya answered.

Martin stood back up as Anja, Dysea and Muton's group entered the garage. His head turned when Julie shouted from across the garage. “Skipper! Found it! Zero One Five!”

Martin turned back to Wayonn. “Wayonn?”

“Hold on.” He said as he typed. “That... that can't be right.” He said finally.

“What is it Wayonn?” Helen asked.

Wayonn looked up at Martin with a puzzled gaze. “According to the databases from *SPARTA'S WRATH* Facility Zero One Five was destroyed nearly fourteen thousand years ago by the Scourge.”

Danny looked around. “Looks in pretty good shape for being destroyed.” He said.

Wayonn looked at Martin. “We need to get to the main control room for the facility Martin.” He said. “It's the only way to be sure.”

“Yeah... this is where everything in the movies always goes to shit.” Martin spoke with a shake of his head causing most of them to laugh softly. “Ok... stick with our plan. Red... you, Miseo and Muton move to the medical wing. Master Chief you are with me, Dysea and Julie. We're going to take Wayonn and Helen to the control room. Danny... take the rest of the team to the Power Core and see if you can get full power back. Take a couple of the engineers we brought down from *ARC ROYAL*.”

“I will remain here and establish the defensive perimeter and emergency evacuation point.” Isabella spoke.

“I will take a team of three *Durcunusaan* and move to the western entrance with Aurith.” Cirith spoke now. “Being inside this facility makes my skin crawl.”

Aricia leaned close to her with a smile. “We'll have to explore that some time in the future Cirith. I can make your skin crawl as well. Just in a good way.” She spoke seductively to her lover and fellow Queen.

Cirith grinned back at her and flashed her dark eyes as she licked her full lips. “That sounds very promising.” She said.

“Slut!” Anja hissed playfully at Aricia.

“I hope that promise extends to all of us?” Isabella said with a smile.

“Indeed.” Dysea chimed in.

Helen looked at Wayonn's disbelieving expression and shrugged with smile. In the last few weeks she had watched Martin Leonidas's Queens grow closer than they ever had before. While their love for each other was famous across the Union, Helen had seen their friendship blossom and become an unbreakable bond over the last weeks, even more so than it already was. Almost losing For'mya and Dysea both, the events with Anja and having Cirith join them had changed all of them. On the ship they were unashamed to show the legendary affection they had for each other and Martin no matter where they were or who was watching. Even Cirith, the newest of Martin's beloved Queens, even she fell so easily into her role now and she relished in it. Each of them knew what they were good at and they acted without instruction from their beloved husband and mate. It was a trait all of them shared.

While Aricia was drawn more to For'mya and Anja in a physical way, she and Dysea were the better fighters and they didn't hesitate at taking this role. While Isabella was drawn more to Dysea and Cirith physically, she was a masterful fighter in her own right and she knew her skills were best used as a reinforcing barrier that could respond to any situation. Isabella Leonidas could and would be totally ruthless and unconcerned about who she killed or what she destroyed in order to reach Martin or one of her fellow Queens if they were in trouble. As was her darker pureblood vampire nature. Cirith's combined vampire and wolf skills were best used as a scouting force and she knew it. She would take the fastest and strongest *Durcunusaan* with her so they could cover more ground. Anja was their healer; the one all of them would go to in order to sooth their aches and injuries and she was the one they all turned to in order to laugh. For'mya Leonidas was the pilot and most everyone would agree, the unofficial leader of their family behind Martin Helen knew. Her calm leadership and patience served them all better if she was overseeing all of them and directing them if something happened. And they all knew For'mya would never leave any of them without first sacrificing her own life.

Martin shook his head with a smile. “Ok... Aricia will take Fedor and the rest of the facility team and head for the main living quarters.”

Wayonn looked around. “Since there still seems to be some power coming from the core the facilities’ bio-mechanical nature and passive sensors will undoubtedly pick up the Etheric resonance from each of you and activate emergency lighting in the areas you enter. Once Daniel is able to restore the core to full power you will find panels along the walls. Touch them and full lighting should be restored.”

“Move carefully people. And no wandering off like they do in the movies ok. That always leads to something bad happening and people dying. I would prefer not to have to deal with that today.” Martin ordered.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have had really steamy sex last night then Lover!” Anja declared with a twinkle in her jade green eyes. “There’s always really steamy sex before the bad parts in the movies! Just like we had last night!”

“*Medwaw!*” Fedor exclaimed. “Too much information! Way too much!”

“Indeed.” Wayonn echoed while shaking his head.

Martin smiled brightly and winked at Anja as everyone laughed now and began to ready themselves. “Let’s move!” He barked.

Aricia cut to the left as she passed through the large doorway, her A4 leading her entry and her wolf eyes sweeping the interior of the room. She felt Fedor do the same as he went right and they were quickly followed by three *Durcunusaan*. As they entered the area, dim lights began to wink on revealing what appeared to be some sort of lounge area. It was massive to say the least, stretching out some hundred yards in front of them and nearly twice that in width. As the emergency lights began to come on all down the length of the room they could see two other entrances that were closed. Along one wall were a row of what appeared to be windows covered with an exterior portion of armor. Aricia pointed to two more *Durcunusaan* who entered and then to the other doors. They nodded and moved off at a brisk jog.

Fedor held his P1 alongside his A4 and was watching the small screen as the others began to move in. “Nothing *medwaw*.” He spoke looking at Aricia. “The same power readings but no signs of life.”

Aricia nodded her head as she turned back to look at him. Her long, lustrous black hair was tied in a single long braid and secured by crimson red satin cords. All of them had begun using the same type of ties when securing their hair for riding or other types of operations. The *Durcunusaan* had also begun using these ties as a way to identify their Queens in the midst of confusion as well.

“We will use this room as a central location to branch out into the living quarters and general areas.” Aricia said.

Fedor’s head turned as the sweet kiwi scent filtered to him and Iama moved past him into the large room with half a dozen other technicians and engineers. Her beautiful eyes fell on him for a moment and then turned away as she continued forward. Fedor drew in a deep breath and tried to calm his raging emotions as her scent filtered through him. It was a reaction Aricia had seen before in many males of her kind and she quickly stepped close to him.

[Fedor?] She reached out to him. It was truly a wonder how all of them viewed their children. It did not matter who had given birth to them, Aricia and her fellow Queens felt just as much love and devotion to each child as the next. There had never been a time when any of them had disagreed about how to raise their children and while each of them had a softer spot for those they had given birth to, their love for all of Martin’s children knew no bounds.

Fedor opened his dark brown eyes and looked at her. *[I am fine medwaw.]* He said softly. *[Medwan taught me how to push it to the side. He said it will pass in time.]*

[Do you want it to pass keto?] Aricia asked.

[I will never be anything to her medwaw.] He spoke softly. *[She does not look at me as anything more than another clone. She can not accept that I am different from them. She treats me like I am a child and I am stupid.]*

[You are neither Fedor.] Aricia told him. *[You know this.]*

Fedor nodded. *[I know. I just wish she would see that.]* He sighed heavily. *[Father says that... he says that it will pass and I know there are many thousands of beautiful women out there somewhere.]*

Aricia nodded. *[Yes there are.]* She told him. *[You will need to beat them off when we finally return home I'm thinking.]* She finished with a smile.

[Seeing her... seeing her give herself to others so readily makes it easier I suppose.] Fedor said.

Aricia detected the heavy hint of sadness when he said that. *[You saw...]*

Fedor nodded. *[This morning. I was passing her quarters when one of the Durcunusaan was leaving. She did not see me.]*

[Do not judge her too harshly aur keto.] Aricia said gently. *[Her life has not been an easy one and she has hardened herself to real emotion I think. She is unable to look beyond the surface of a person because of what she has endured. Some things are just not meant to be my son, but if the gods wish it then it will happen no matter what.]*

Fedor met her eyes. *[I know.]* He forced a smile. *[I will be fine.]* He said.

Aricia reached out and squeezed his arm. "Let's get back to business. This will keep your mind occupied."

Fedor nodded. "Yes it will." He responded.

Aricia turned and faced the group of *Durcunusaan* and technicians that had come down from the *ARC ROYAL*. "According to the layout of the base, living quarters will be through the door here." She motioned to the side. "Work areas and the mess lounge through the far end. You all know what we need and this is just as important as those collecting information from other areas. All data pads you find, any prudent information on this base itself as well. Or how it came to be here. Men and women will speak more in their personal logs than in their duty logs. I will lead the team to the living quarters, Fedor to the mess lounge and work areas. Enomotarch..." She spoke looking at the young *Durcunusaan*. "Remain here with your team and secure this location."

The man nodded. "Understood my Queen."

"Do not become anxious if the power returns and continue with your search." Aricia spoke. "We will meet back here in one hour regardless. Stay in constant radio communication as well. And no one wander off." She looked at Fedor. "Let's do it."

"Impressive." Martin spoke as he pulled his hand away from the palm shaped indent on the right side of the door and Helen did the same from the left and they stepped through the double doors as they slid open. His eyes took in the immense size of the circular control room. There were silent computer stations and accompanying screens and monitors taking up the entire circular center of the room. The circular work stations wrapped around the tall, twelve foot high center mast. Along the outer wall of the room were dozens more stations as well as small alcoves that held one or two chairs in each.

Wayonn moved in behind him. "I've never seen security so tight on a PSS." He spoke as he moved past them into the main portion of the room.

"How so?" Martin asked.

Wayonn glanced over his shoulder. "The Control Center Doors were encoded so that only a Paladin and their Mage could open them. And the contact needed to be made simultaneously."

"You could not have opened it Wayonn?" Helen asked.

Wayonn shook his head as he turned back to the room. "Only a Pair." He replied. "The internal sensors on the door pads were linked to detect the corresponding Etheric resonance that radiates from a Paladin and Mage pair. Since you and Helen are linked by your resonance, it canceled out the security measures."

"And that's odd how?" Martin asked.

Wayonn turned back to look at him. "It tells me that whatever is on this station was either deemed extremely important or extremely deadly. As a rule we never used such high security measures because Paladins and their Mage counterparts were so few in number and often times they conducted missions apart from each other."

“You know... that statement didn’t give me a whole lot of warm fuzzy feelings.” Martin said. “It seems like dangerous or deadly to Pralors means large explosions and big body counts to us little guys.”

“I concur.” Dysea echoed his statement as her emerald eyes swept around the control room.

“You asked me to hold nothing back from you going forward.” Wayonn spoke. “I am not holding anything back.”

Martin tilted his head slightly and brought his fingers up so they were millimeters apart. “Ok... maybe you can hold back just a tiny bit. Like that part about deadly. I didn’t need to hear that. Not today. I’m in a pretty good mood and deadly would pretty much ruin that.”

“Do you take anything serious Martin Leonidas?” Wayonn asked him.

Martin shook his head. “Serious is no fun and more often than not it gives me a case of the red ass.” He answered as Helen came up beside him.

“Red ass?” Wayonn asked.

Helen shook her head. “You don’t want to know.” She said slapping Martin’s arm as she moved further into the room next to Wayonn.

“All these stations were manned *Val’istar*?” Dysea asked as Wayonn turned and moved past her to a computer station in the center circle.

Wayonn nodded to her after a last glance at Martin and a shake of his head. “You must remember Dysea... we monitored everything about a planet when we chose it for seeding. Right down to the molecular structure of the most miniscule life and how amino acids affected the most rudimentary elements and even future life. The different science fields are color coded for ease of new personnel to the bases. Green for vegetation. Gray for planetary crust and rock formation. Blue for air quality. Amber for Communications and Red is for station defense.”

Martin looked at him. “Station defense?” He asked.

Wayonn nodded. “All of the stations had a powerful shield like the one on SPARTA’S WRATH as well as base weapons platform.” He answered. “We did not send them to hundreds of different planets unable to fully defend themselves Martin my boy.”

“Of course you didn’t.” Martin said rolling his eyes.

Helen was crossing back in front of him as he did this and she shook her head with a smile and slapped his abdomen quickly as Dysea chuckled softly. Martin shook his head and tapped his jaw.

“Danny... you copy?” He asked.

“Go!”

“How you making out?” Martin asked.

“Just getting to the engineering section now.” Danny answered. **“Stand by.”**

Martin looked at Julie. “Jules... see if you can make sense of the COM gear and when the big lug gets power back, establish a subspace link with the *ARC ROYAL*. *Melda Min* you and the Master Chief make sure all these side rooms are empty... I don’t want any surprises popping out of the walls.”

Tony hefted his large assault rifle and nodded with a grin. “On it Skipper. Just like old times hey Dy?”

Dysea smiled and leaned up to plant a kiss on Martin’s cheek. “Indeed it is Anthony.” She said before turning and readying her A4 and moving towards the first set of double doors with Tony in step just to her right.

Martin moved up next to Wayonn as he was working on his P9, Helen on his opposite side watching intently. “Wayonn?”

“I will be able to link directly into the station’s network if Daniel is able to activate the core.” Wayonn answered looking at him. “At the moment... what I am seeing is... odd.”

“Odd how?” Martin asked.

“According to the data base on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, which is downloaded to this P9, station Zero One Five was destroyed by the Scourge like I said.” Wayonn said. “But so far all of the equipment I have seen is stenciled Zero One Five. Even the records I have been able to pull up.”

“A mistake?” Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head quickly. “We were meticulous in the records we kept Martin.” He answered. “And the records I have been scanning only go back three thousand four hundred and six years.”

“You’re scanning them grandfather?” Helen asked.

Wayonn shook his head quickly. “The order in which they were made... not the actual content. I can’t access them until full power is restored. We...”

“**Ok!**” Danny’s voice barked in their implants. “**How’s this?**”

The humming began almost immediately and then all across the control center computer stations began to wink on and come to life. Lights activated immediately and caused all of them to wince as their eyes adjusted quickly. Wayonn turned back to his P9 and smiled. “Excellent!” He exclaimed. “The main core is now online.” He tapped his jaw. “Daniel! Your people are at the main core controls yes?”

“**Affirmative.**” Danny answered.

“Have the engineers bring the core to seventy percent and hold.” Wayonn spoke. “That is more than enough to power the station and all the terminals and lights.”

“**Seventy percent. Got it.**” Danny answered. “**Marty... I’m going to leave the tech heads here and do a sweep of the corridors around this section.**”

Martin nodded his head. “Understood *fervon*.” Helen looked at him and smiled to herself at how easily that word came to him when it concerned Daniel. “All teams sound off if power is not returning to your sections. Otherwise continue with the mission as planned.” Martin waited a second and when no one answered he looked at Wayonn. “Nice. You guys built these stations good.” He said.

Wayonn chuckled and nodded. “They are your people too my boy. Don’t forget that.” He said turning back to his P9. “Julie... you should have sufficient power to establish a link with the *ARC ROYAL* from your station.”

“Creating the link now!” Julie answered from across the center.

Wayonn nodded. “I’m activating the main Control Center grid.” He touched his P9 and the two screens just above his head activated instantly and massive amounts of data began to scroll across the large four by four monitors. In a few seconds the data in the center of the monitors slowed to a crawl and moved to the sides of the screen and an image of the station came up in the center. A small section of the lower station on the monitor was flashing red in a steady manner. “Interesting.” Wayonn spoke as he adjusted the controls.

“What’s interesting?” Martin asked.

“The station’s sensors are detecting a breach of the exterior wall on the southern side.” He answered. “It is an underground entrance. Similar to the vehicle entrance where we entered.” He touched the large monitor. “It appears as if one of the Science vehicles crashed into the exterior containment wall making a small breach to the interior.”

“How small?” Martin asked.

“Hard to say.” Wayonn spoke adjusting his controls. “The internal security cams in that interior corridor are no longer functioning. The impact must have knocked them out.”

“Can we reach it from inside?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes... it’s not far from where Daniel and his team are.”

Martin touched his jaw. “Danny... Wayonn is sending the schematics of this station to your P1. There’s a breach of some sort in a garage like the one we entered, but it’s underground. Check it out and report back.”

“**On it.**” Danny answered.

Wayonn continued to tap the control console with practiced ease. “The integrity of the station is otherwise intact Martin.” He spoke. “Power is holding at seventy percent in all areas.”

“So they abandoned the station because of an accident?” Martin asked.

Wayonn looked at him. “I haven’t begun checking the logs yet but this accident as you say, it could have happened when the planet was still uninhabitable.” Wayonn said. “Perhaps they evacuated for safety reasons.”

Martin tilted his head slightly. “Wayonn?”

“Martin is right grandfather.” Helen said. “Given the level of your technology, would such an event cause them to evacuate the entire station?”

Wayonn shook his head. “Unlikely.” He stated. “Standard procedure would be to isolate the breach and then repair it.”

Martin nodded. “Yeah. I don’t mean to be a big kink in the wheel here Wayonn... but we are inside a station that is listed as destroyed, in a sector of space you yourself have stated the Pralors ignored because there wasn’t anything to be gained. I’m sure you understand why the hairs on the back of my neck are standing up right about now?”

Wayonn nodded. "Indeed I do. Mine are doing the exact same thing." He agreed. "Give me a few minutes and I will discover what is going on Martin."

Martin nodded. "That would be a good thing." He said. "This place is starting to give me the creeps."

"...set up the triage area here." Anja stated motioning to the six beds that were occupying the large section of the Medical Bay. "Muton... see if you can get some of the equipment up and running and get me a status on what is working and what isn't. Most of it looks similar to what we have on the *ARC ROYAL*."

Muton nodded his head and moved to one of the large medical computers, dropping his bulky medical bag on the chair. Anja dropped her own bag on one of the beds as her team of two medics and half a dozen engineers and techs began to spread out around the medical center and examine the equipment. The six member *Durcunusaan* team took up positions in pairs by either entrance and were maintaining security while Miseo and a *Durcunusaan* troop were the third pair and were sweeping the adjoining corridors quickly and efficiently. Muton had spent the last weeks working either in the medical bay of the *ARC ROYAL* with Anja and Duewa or instituting similar procedures aboard his own ship. The advanced medical equipment on the *ARC ROYAL* had rapidly become second nature to him and he used that new knowledge now as his eyes scanned the computers in front of him. He felt Anja come up beside him.

"Muton?" She asked.

"Some things I recognize and some I don't. You said that much of how the *ARC ROYAL* was built was based on the designs of City Ship 41 yes? Especially parts of the Medical Bay." He said.

Anja nodded. "Yes."

Muton nodded. "It is configured somewhat differently but essentially it is all the same." He told her. "I would imagine that the practical use is the same."

Anja let her eyes scan the array of equipment and she nodded. She reached across to wave her fingers in front of several screens. "Vital sensors on each of the beds. Looks like data storage here."

Muton nodded his head quickly. "And this appears to be some sort of automatic treatment synthesis program built into the actual beds." He spoke touching the screen. "Incredible."

Anja nodded. "Hadarian doctors and Union engineers have been trying to establish this as a working prototype." She said with bright eyes. "This is incredible!"

"Anja these data bases could hold countless wonders." Muton spoke. "Cures. Treatments. Things that would benefit so many!"

Anja nodded. "Yes they could. I'll see about getting some of the data cores we brought down so we can download them. Right now... let's stick to our plan and bring up the most recent medical files and uploading them to Duewa."

Muton nodded his head and began to work at the station as Anja turned to look around as she tapped her jaw. "Duewa... are you monitoring?"

"I am standing by Anja." Duewa's voice answered from the station she sat at on the *ARC ROYAL*.

"Muton is going to establish a upload link and we'll start sending everything we can." Anja said. "It's... it's amazing down here Duewa. The equipment alone is far more advanced than ours, but still relatively easy to use."

"Perhaps these Pralors made it in such a way Anja. So that others could use the apparatus without formal training." Duewa answered. ***"I wish I was there with you!"***

Anja smiled at the excitement in her voice. "Don't worry... everything is being recorded and we can walk through it together when I get back."

"I will hold you to that." Duewa said. ***"Wait... getting the upload now from Muton. Yes... it's coming in."***

"File as much of it as you can." Anja spoke. "The rest we'll transfer to the portable data cores we brought."

"Understood." Duewa said.

"I'll check back in an hour or so." Anja said. Anja turned to speak to Muton when her implant cackled to life.

“Medwaw Anja.” Miseo’s voice filled her ear. He had started to call all of them *medwaw* and then their name over the last weeks and it was a very touching way for Miseo to show his affection and respect for Eirene’s mothers. Anja and the others thought it was exceptionally sweet.

“Go Miseo.” Anja said.

“Ah... you might want to come to my location.” Miseo said.

“What’s wrong?” Anja asked as her senses began to come to full alert.

“You should probably see this.” Miseo answered.

Anja looked at Muton. “Stay here and keep the link with Duewa open.” She ordered. She turned to the two *Durcunusaan* near the entrance they had come in. “You two with me.” She ordered as she shifted her A4 around her body and into her hands.

The *Durcunusaan* didn’t hesitate and led Anja out of the Medical Bay down the corridor.

Danny looked at the ass end of the huge vehicle, the nose of the Science rover rammed at an angle into the exterior wall, buckling the bulkhead enough that there was now a large gap in the seam perhaps two feet across and reaching from the floor to just above the seven foot high vehicle. Danny motioned to Kenny and Pablo and they moved around the other side as he and Colin closed the distance.

Danny reached up and tapped his jaw. “Marty... we’re here. Looks like someone drove this thing into the bulkhead on purpose. There’s a breach roughly two feet across that extends from the floor up about seven feet.”

“The doors you came through?” Martin asked.

“Sealed from the outside.” Danny answered. “Like they were trying to keep something out.” Danny said.

“Driver’s door is open.” Kenny’s voice echoed. “Whoever was driving... they left in a real big hurry Skipper”

Danny looked at Colin and gave a quick jerk with his head. Colin nodded and began climbing up onto the rover like a cat. Once on top he paused and unlimbered his A4 once more and his eyes spotted something near the front.

“I got a body!” Colin announced as he moved forward in a rush. “Well... bones anyway.” He spoke as he moved up next to the set of remains and squatted down.

“Colin?” Martin’s voice asked.

“Bones Skipper. Look pretty old too. They’re on top of the rover. The driver maybe?” Colin said poking at the remains with the barrel of his A4.

“On top?” Martin asked.

“Yeah. Maybe he climbed up here.” Colin spoke.

“Or maybe something chased him up there.” Kenny echoed as his eyes swept the area they were in.

“Or maybe he is the one they wanted to run down.” Danny spoke now. “You see any leg bones Colin?” Danny asked as he moved closer and peered under the front of the rover.

“Negative.” Colin answered.

Danny’s eyes narrowed when he saw the splintered remains of leg bones sticking out of the opening in the bulkhead. “Yeah... because they are underneath the rover.” He hissed. “Shit Marty. This guy was the one they wanted to run down!”

“Gun would be simpler.” Kenny spoke.

“A lot neater too.” Colin agreed.

Pablo moved back to where Kenny stood. “Unless guns didn’t work too well.” He echoed out loud.

Danny looked up at the opening in the bulkhead. “Marty... we’d need a couple days and a full engineering crew to repair this breach.” He spoke. “It opens up into some sort of cavern near as I can tell. The doors are jammed for sure.”

“Make sure those other entrances are secure.” Martin ordered. **“Then move back to engineering.”**

Danny nodded. “Will do.”

“Daniel... bring a sample of bone with you. We can determine who it was with medical scans.” Wayonn spoke now.

Danny looked up to Colin who nodded. “Done.” Danny said. “Moving back to the Power Core and engineering.”

Martin looked at Wayonn. “Pralors run their people down with ten ton vehicles a lot do they?” He asked. “We don’t know what happened Martin.” Wayonn spoke.

“No we don’t.” Martin answered. “But my ‘Just about to get fucked meter’ has gone up a few notches.”

Wayonn met his eyes. “Yes... mine has too.” He stated causing Martin’s eyes to grow a little wider in surprise. Wayonn’s lips curled into a small grin. “I did not spend over twenty thousand years beside your grandfather Sumar and learn nothing Martin. I may have been his Paladin Mage, but we learned a few things spending so much time together.”

“Ok... I’ll give you that.” Martin said as Wayonn grinned.

“Grandfather look.” Helen spoke from the station beside Wayonn.

Wayonn and Martin turned to where she sat in the chair and was pointing at the monitor. “Helen?”

“You said this station is listed as destroyed fourteen thousand years ago.” Helen said.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes.”

Helen pointed to the corner of the screen. “Look.” She said. “If this data is accurate...” She ran her finger along the two lines of words. “This station is listed here as being built three thousand four hundred and five years ago.”

Wayonn leaned close to the large monitor and looked at the data. He grabbed his P9 and typed furiously on the pad and then looked at the screen again. “This can’t be.” He said.

“What?” Martin asked.

“According to the databases from *SPARTA’S WRATH*, the other two stations listed here were also destroyed by the Scourge over ten thousand years ago.” Wayonn said. All the PSSs were listed and number identified by the order they were built.”

“Like your ships?” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. We would never have reused a number. And this information fits with the logs I have recovered. No logs older than three thousand four hundred and three years.” He looked at the monitor. “That doesn’t make sense.”

Martin nodded. “You’re telling me.” He said.

Wayonn looked at him. “No... you misunderstand me Martin.” He said. “If what we are seeing is correct, this station is just over three thousand years old.”

“So?” Martin said.

“We stopped building the PSSs right after the second war with the Scourge began. At least according to Shiria.” Wayonn said. “This was built somewhere else and it was built just over three thousand years ago. It was built a little under ten thousand years *after* the Pralor people were thought to be extinguished as a species.”

Martin stared at him for a long moment as what he was saying sank in. “Wayonn... my ‘Just about to get fucked’ meter just went up another couple of notches.”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes again Martin... so did mine.” He began to turn back to the work stations when Anja’s voice stopped his motion.

“Ah... Lover?”

Martin tapped his jaw. “Red? What’s wrong?” He hissed.

“You should probably come down to where I am Lover.” Anja said. **“And quickly. There’s something you need to see.”**

“Fuck! On my way!” Martin didn’t hesitate and began moving for the door into the control center.

“Melda Min! Tony! With me!”

Wayonn looked at Helen. “Go with him Helen! Julie and I will remain here to try and decipher more information! We can monitor your progress from the internal sensors here in the control center! And perhaps activate the station’s defenses if needed!”

Helen didn’t hesitate either and bolted after Martin.

Martin came sprinting around the corner of the corridor and saw Anja standing with Miseo and the three *Durcunusaan* outside of a large archway with a set of massive metal doors. He skidded to a halt as Anja reached for him.

“We’re ok.” She spoke quickly feeling his concern for her within his aura and gripping his arm. “We’re ok.”

Martin looked at Miseo quickly and then back to her as Dysea, Tony and Helen looked around the corridor. “Anja? Your voice... it sounded...”

Anja nodded her head. “I saw something that... let’s just say it caused my pulse to race just a little.” She told him.

Martin looked around. “Ok. Want to let me in on the secret. There’s just you guys in the corridor here.”

“I... I don’t think there is any danger to us. I didn’t see anything that indicated that there was.” Anja told him quickly. “At least not the few seconds I saw anything before Miseo jerked me back and we shut the doors.”

“Red... don’t jerk me around.” Martin hissed. “What’s going on?”

Anja looked at Miseo. “Miseo... open the doors again.”

Martin looked at him. “We discovered it in our sweep King Leonidas.” Miseo told him as he activated the panel on the wall next to the huge doors.

“Discovered what?” Martin asked.

Miseo touched the panel and the low rumble began as the doors slid open incredibly fast. Martin’s eyes nearly exploded out of his head and his A4 was coming up before the first conscious thought to do it even formed in his mind.

“*NUBOU LAE!*” He nearly shouted. “BACK! Everyone back!”

“Lover no!” Anja barked just as loudly as she reached forward and grabbed the barrel of his A4. “They are frozen!”

Martin looked at her with changed wolf eyes now, his fangs fully extended and his body prepared to do battle. “What? Frozen? What the fuck does that mean?”

Anja moved closer to him, pressing between him and Dysea who had assumed a similar defensive stance with changed emerald green wolf eyes. She made sure she touched both of their in some manner so they could sense her own body’s emotions. “They are in suspended cryogenic chambers Marty. Their alive... but sleeping!”

“Yeah... well I don’t want them waking the fuck up!” Martin barked.

Anja shook her head. “They won’t unless we wake them up. The power coming back on didn’t change their status... it only lit up the room.”

“How the hell do you know that?” Martin demanded.

Anja moved to the side of the door and touched the panel. Her Etheric resonance could easily power the panel up and she tapped on the screen several times. “I checked.” She told him. “There is some kind of force field around each individual pod. Even if the pod were to open... they couldn’t get out. I’m not detecting any damaged chambers either. That’s the first thing I checked after calling you.”

They all turned when the noise of Danny and Kenny coming around the corner drew their attention. Danny skidded to a halt beside Martin barely out of breath. “We heard her call and...” His head turned into the open doorway and his eyes grew wider. “*FUGLIES!*” He screamed as he and Kenny both began to bring up their A4s.

“Will both of you trigger happy wolves shut up!” Helen snarled loudly as she pressed forward next to Anja. She had detected Anja’s calm aura almost immediately and she knew if Anja didn’t feel in danger they were safe. For the moment anyway. “Lower your weapons!”

“*Feravomir...*” Danny motioned with the barrel of his weapon. “That’s... that’s not a good idea! These things are hard enough to kill and they...”

“They are not awake!” Helen barked. “Anja says they are asleep!”

“Let’s kill them and make sure they stay asleep!” Kenny hissed. “Can’t get much more asleep then dead right!”

“Fucking amen!” Danny snapped.

“Marty...” Anja took his arms and brought his face back around. “Lover do you trust me?”

“Red... don’t ask me that?” Martin said. “You know I trust you... but this...”

Anja pulled on his arm and yanked him over to the small control panel and screen. “Look at what they have on!” She snapped. “Look at what they are wearing!”

Martin’s eyes were very confused and he turned to look at the small monitor, leaning close. His eyes grew a little wider and his A4 lowered just a little bit as he pulled away from the screen and glanced into the room quickly before returning his eyes to the screen. “Holy shit.”

Anja nodded. “Yes.” She said softly. “I used my P1 to do a quick scan before Miseo pulled me out and sealed the room.” She told him. “I was only able to scan the first few in the row but...” She typed on the panel. “This is what I found.”

Martin reached up with wide eyes and tapped the control panel expertly, sifting through the data. “This is accurate Red?” He gasped.

“Yes.” Anja told him. “They’re Pralors Martin. All three hundred and nine. They are in different stages of the infection but they are Pralors. They must have been placed in the cryo chambers before the others left. To preserve them.”

“What the fuck for?” Martin growled.

“Perhaps so they could return and try to save them Martin.” Helen spoke now as she gazed into the huge room.

“Oh man... this day just keeps getting better and better!” Martin rasped.

“There’s no danger unless they get out Lover.” Anja said squeezing his arm. “We can make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Martin looked at her. “You’re sure?”

Anja nodded. “One hundred percent.” She said. “We’ll just power down this section of the Medical Wing to what it was when we came in. Minimal life support. Just enough to keep the chambers active, but not enough to fully power them.”

“Why?” Martin hissed.

Helen turned and looked at him. “Because we do not have the right to take any hope they may have away from them.” She said.

“Helen... if even one of those things gets out we could be in deep *sibfla*!” Martin spoke.

“You trust in your wife and mate. As do we all. Trust in her now.” Helen told him. “And if what we have discovered so far is true, they have been here for over three thousand years and not gotten out. I believe it is safe to assume we can keep that from happening.”

“Shit!” He snarled as he turned his head. “Master Chief... you and Kenny set me up a Banger inside the door. Whatever you got! Then sealed the fucking thing!”

“How big Skipper?” Tony asked immediately.

“Big enough to take out the entire room Tony.” Anja answered him instantly. “On the off chance I’m wrong.”

“I’m down with that Anja.” Kenny spoke as he moved forward into the doorway.

Martin turned his head towards the interior of the room and couldn’t help but feel a cold sense of foreboding grip his gut as he saw the hundreds of cryo chambers with the same lizard like creatures they had fought on Twelve Alpha. Some were fully changed, others in different stages from what he could discern with just a glance and from what the data was telling him.

“Man... I am so going to regret this.” Martin muttered as he shook his head.

SLEKON CLUSTER

ARTAAYA

FIFTH PLANET WITHIN THE CLUSTER

FEBRUARY 6TH, 2018 HRS EST

PRALOR OCCUPIED WORLD

He moved quickly along the balcony walkway of the Council Chamber, not even looking up to glance at the three females who murmured to themselves and stared at him as he passed. No doubt they were shocked at his drawn appearance, but it wasn't something he was concerned about in the least. Not with the information he held in his hand. He barely noticed the large sun, just as it was beginning to sink over the horizon of the huge ocean in the distance. The spray and smell of the salt air revitalized him somewhat, pushing away the fatigue the six hour trek across the planet had hit him with. Three Jumper cars and then the kilometer march along the Promenade of Memories to get to the Council Chamber. He was going to burst in unannounced he knew, a major violation of protocol, but he had no other options. His information was just too important to request an audience.

He looked up as he approached the entrance and the two formal security guards moved quickly to open the huge doors for him. He had informed the Master of the Guard as he landed outside the Promenade and told him he was coming. At least that message got to who it needed to. He only grunted at the two men as he passed into the long corridor and was met by the tall, lanky man wearing a similar uniform but with elaborate markings on his sleeves and shoulders. He fell in beside him immediately, their physical proportions almost identical for they were brothers.

“Kasdan?” He snapped.

“I am not wrong Garan!” The man hissed.

“I hope so brother! Bursting into a meeting of the Chief Elder Council is unwise.” The second man spoke. “And it could cost me my position.”

“Have I ever been wrong Garan?” The man spat.

Garan shook his head quickly. “No... and that is the only reason why I am doing this brother. I trust in you and your skills.”

Kasdan met his younger brother's eyes and nodded. “Are they all present?” Kasdan asked.

Garan nodded. “Be patient with them brother.” He spoke. “You know how they view some of your ideas. Especially Lorendo.”

“They can not dismiss this anymore Garan.” Kasdan spoke. “Not this. It is too... it could be the beginning of a new dawn for our people. No more hiding. No more running. It could be the rebirth so many of us have prayed for.”

“A Praetorian Kasdan?” Garan asked with a shake of his head as he walked. “A living, breathing Praetorian. It is... it is too amazing to believe. We thought them lost forever.”

Kasdan looked at his brother. “No... not all of them. There is one here on Artaaya my brother. He has remained hidden for millennia so as not to endanger our people. He is... he is not right at times... but he lives.”

Garan's eyes flew open. “You jest! How? Where?”

Kasdan smiled. “He is how I knew what to look for brother. He... he found me several weeks ago actually. Somehow he knew what was happening. He no doubt knows what I know now for he would be able to feel them. I would... I would not doubt he is on his way here now. The Chief Elder will believe him even if he does not believe me. They have to believe me! There is no doubt now!”

Garan looked up and with a wave of his hand the two additional guards in front of the ornate doors swept their hands across the two separate panels. The large, elaborately carved doors swung open soundlessly to reveal a much smaller room than one would have assumed behind such doors. Until one looked up however and saw that the area above them appeared endless and two hundred meters above where one stood was the colored blue glass of the high ceiling.

There were seven of them sitting at the table. Five men and two women. The oldest and wisest of the survivors and the ones who had kept them safe for more millennia than many of their people had been alive. All of them wore the cream colored robes of the Chief Elder Pralors, but tailored to fit them in such a way as to not impede on simple activities. They were the leaders of the remaining Pralor population here on Artaaya and two smaller planets only a single jump away.

They were all that remained of the Pralor people.

Trillions upon trillions of men, women and children and they were reduced to just under a million souls when they arrived here. Generations found them running from the Scourge threat as they systematically destroyed Pralor civilization. The Scourge were relentless and completely remorseless in their actions. They didn't hesitate in their dealings and if it carried a hint of Pralor influence it was utterly obliterated. Four times

they thought themselves safe and settled on different worlds. Each time the Scourge discovered them somehow and each time they had to run again. Their horrible plight got better when they arrived on the world with those that they considered instant friends because of their abilities and who was with them. They were accepted without question and they thought they had finally run far enough away. That had only lasted five millennia before they had to run once more. This time however, they ran with their new friends who the Scourge labeled as conspirators.

Time had finally brought them here to Artaaya and the surrounding system. Far beyond the borders of what had once been Pralor space. Here is where they settled and began to try and rebuild, while always remaining wary and ready. Three planets could support life in the entire cluster, Artaaya, Honelze and Nepneu. Artaaya was chosen as their base of power and where the main group of them would remain. They had named this city the same as the planet, a true beginning some had called it, and now the city stretched across nearly thirty kilometers of fertile land not far from the ocean which spanned a full third of the planet. Honelze and Nepneu had much smaller, but no less fantastic cities. They did not expand rapidly, keeping with their Pralor origins of patience and thoughtfulness and also to insure they did nothing that would draw the attention of the Scourge. Their population had increased as well as they sent one ship every five hundred years back into Pralor space to search for survivors. Sometimes they succeeded; sometimes they were caught by the Scourge and destroyed. The birth of children was encouraged by all and that was why now fully half their population was under twenty thousand years of age. They had once more begun doing what their people had always done while always keeping an eye open and expecting to see the Scourge. It was a hard life in many ways and very stressful, at least to those who were older and had seen the horrors of the two Scourge Wars and all they had lost as a people.

All of those at the table looked up from their discussion when Kasdan and Garan burst into the chamber. The man on the end of the oval table came to his feet, anger flashing across his face.

“What is the meaning of this Kasdan?” He demanded as he came away from the table. “You have no right to be here now! We are in session!”

“I have every right!” Kasdan barked right back as he moved closer to the table and stopped. “If you will not tell them then it falls to me! They need to know!”

“I directed you to confirm it first!” The man snarled.

“I did confirm it! And it is just as I told you Elder Lorendo! You simply refused to hear me!” Kasdan barked. “You will not deny me any longer! This needs to come out now!”

“You will remove yourself from this chamber or I will...!” Lorendo began to snap at him.

“Science Elder Lorendo?” The calm yet firm voice spoke up now. “Would you care to commence to us your Assistant Director of the Science Convention? I don’t believe you have ever formally introduced Kasdan here. Not since he became your assistant seven hundred years ago.” The voice sounded amused but held a tone of command and respect in it.

Lorendo turned slowly giving Kasdan an evil look and looked at the man who had spoken. “Chief Elder Delnash... perhaps another time would be more suitable to...”

The man rose to his feet slowly. He was not an old man at just barely fifty thousand years of age, not by their standards; he simply chose to execute his motions with precision and grace. His nearly white hair fell well past his shoulders but did nothing to diminish the healthy look of his skin and the brightness of his deep umber colored eyes. He moved away from the table with resolute movement. “Perhaps now is best Lorendo.” He stated more firmly than before. “And I would hear what the Assistant Director of our Science Convention deems so important as to interrupt our meeting.”

Lorendo bowed his head. “Of course Chief Elder Delnash. May I present Elder Kasdan, my Assistant Director.” He spoke motioning with his hand to Kasdan. “You know the Master of the Guard Garan. He is Elder Kasdan’s brother.”

Kasdan bowed his head deeply as the man stepped up to him. “It is an honor beyond words Chief Elder Pralor.” He spoke.

Delnash chuckled softly. “Yes... I’m quite sure that is what everyone would say Kasdan. I on the other hand believe it is an honor to meet you.”

Kasdan looked up, his eyes wide. “Chief Elder Pralor... I am humbled.” He gasped.

“Do not be Kasdan.” Delnash spoke. “I am no more important than you in the grander scheme of things. Tell me... how many years do you have?”

“Nineteen thousand six hundred and nine Chief Elder Pralor.” Kasdan answered.

“Ah... so you are Garan’s older brother.” Delnash said with a smile as he looked at the senior Pralor Elder Guard Commander. “Master of the Guard Garan... what say you? You have served this Council diligently for nearly five thousand years. Does your brother bring such information to us as to shock our minds?”

Garan nodded without hesitation. “I... I believe he does Chief Elder Pralor. I know he does. You know me Chief Elder Pralor... and you know I would bring nothing to you like this unless I thought it important.”

“Indeed. I also know I have told you on more than one occasion to skip the formalities when addressing me. I am not some High Lord Garan.” Delnash spoke.

Garan bowed his head with a smile. “You have Elder Delnash. On more than one occasion.”

Delnash smiled. “That is better. Now then we will hear what it is your brother brings to us.” Delnash spoke as he turned back to the table. “Perhaps it will be less mundane than everything else we have to hear.”

Lorendo stepped closer to him. “Chief Elder... allow me to speak with Kasdan and put the many volumes of information into some coherent form. I can...”

Delnash looked at him. “You can be silent and let him speak Lorendo.” Delnash ordered. “We on this Council are more than capable of understanding whatever he puts forth.”

“I agree.” The blond haired female spoke from the table now. “New ideas come from fresh, young minds. We need all of those we can manage.”

“Well spoken Chief Elder Radra.” The stern looking man spoke from the end of the table. “I agree as well.” Chief Elder Sashan spoke.

Delnash looked at Lorendo with a grin. “There you have it Lorendo. The Chief of our Medical Convention and the Chief of our Military Convention echo my sentiments.”

“Your sentiments are all that matter Chief Elder Delnash.” Lorendo spoke.

Delnash snorted loudly. “You do yourself no favors by trying to win my support in this fashion Lorendo. I have no intention of passing anytime soon and you will not move into my position regardless. Unlucky for you. It is also an attitude that is quite beneath your station.” Delnash reached out with his hand and Kasdan watched a chair appear from the shadows along the wall and slide across the floor in front of the table. “Join us Kasdan, and tell us what is so important that you have defied Lorendo’s instructions.”

Kasdan glanced at Lorendo who only glared back at him as he returned to his chair. His eyes went to Garan and his brother nodded his head in support. Kasdan took a deep breath and turned back to the table. “Chief Elder... may I use the computer?”

Delnash motioned to the computer panel in the middle of the table as he returned to his chair. “Please.” He said.

Kasdan stepped up and began to type rapidly on the panel. “Chief Elder... this concerns the Portable Seeding Station Zero One Five that we launched three thousand four hundred and six years ago. It was sent to what we refer to as the Omarian system. To a planet that was within our databases here but one our ancestors chose to dismiss because of the many difficulties in configuring the gravitational variances.” They watched as a star chart broke away from the wall above them and lowered in front of the table. “We named the planet Onterom; after the first Chief Elder Pralor.”

Delnash nodded his head in approval. “A man of many beginnings.” He said. “A fitting name.”

“We corrected for the gravitational variances and Station Zero One Five came online a year later.” Kasdan continued. “The station was launched with a full crew following behind it. They succeeded Chief Elder. Within two thousand four hundred years they were able to fully Terra Form the planet. Life was flourishing and we were planning to send a colony expedition when...”

“When the Svorag found them.” Delnash spoke softly.

“Yes Chief Elder.” Kasdan said softly.

“We know of this planet Kasdan.” Radra spoke. “We do read the reports. It was overrun with the infection the Svorag carry. They discovered our station in one of their sweeps through the cluster looking for Converts.”

Kasdan nodded. “Yes Elder Radra.” He said. “They infected a good number of the crew before their force was finally killed.”

“If I remember correctly we ordered the facility locked down and abandoned in case they returned.” Delnash spoke.

Kasdan nodded. “And it was Chief Elder. The Station Commander used the Cryo pods to secure those crew members who were infected in the hopes that one day we could return and assist those stricken with this disease. Three hundred and nine to be exact Chief Elder... all of them infected by the mutation the Svorag carry in some degree. Once this was done he and the remaining members of his crew departed. There was a breach in the lower vehicle section of the station but they secured both entrances so that nothing could get into the interior of the station from the outside.” Kasdan adjusted the large screen and an image of the planet appeared. A beautiful blue green tinted planet from orbit with absolutely nothing showing in the stars around it.

“Are you telling us you have found a cure?” Radra asked with wide eyes. This would be a tremendous find as the Svorag were a thorn in their sides in many ways.

“No Chief Elder Radra.” Kasdan said with a shake of his head. “My specialty field is not medicine... it is Fractal Quantum Physics.”

“So what does this station have to do with what you are trying to tell us?” Delnash asked politely. “What exactly are you trying to tell us?”

“You are aware of the four dozen Perlion Science Probes we have scattered across the many systems in this part of the galaxy Chief Elder Pralor? As well as several we have deployed to other parts.” Kasdan said.

Delnash nodded. “Our most advanced probe. Yes. I helped to design them.” He said. “What are you getting at Kasdan?”

“Chief Elder... one of our probes...” He turned to the Star Chart. “Here... on the edge of the coreward rim of the Perseus Arm... this Perlion Probe detected the activation of Seventh Tier Phased Quantum Fusion Resonance engines within the Alpha Quadrant just over eight weeks ago.”

Delnash leaned forward in his chair as his umber eyes grew wide. “What?” He gasped in disbelief.

“Kasdan... Seventh Tier Phased QFRs are the finest and most advanced engines our people ever designed. They were only built for the *VORTEX*-Class Heavy Cruisers.” Sashan added quickly. “They are still state of the art even now, some thirty thousand years later. Our engines now are based on their design and function.”

Kasdan nodded his head. “Yes I know Elder Sashan. That is why the Probe detected it. The Probe locked onto this signature and tracked it to several different locations within the Alpha Quadrant. This was... this was several weeks ago as I said.”

“Several weeks?” Another of the Chief Elders barked. “Why were we not informed of this immediately?”

“Even the Perlion Probes have limited capacity Chief Elder.” Kasdan added quickly. “Considering this Probe’s location, it took a week for this information to transmit through the normal buffers before reaching our listening post on Cochara. From there it was sent to me at the Science Division. I thought perhaps it had detected many of the drones our people activated before... before then end, so I dispatched primary command codes ordering the ship’s Avatar to return to a designated set of coordinates as per our normal action plan for this type of event. I was not even sure it was a ship and not just a reflection of some kind.” Kasdan was typing on the panel showing all of them his every action along the way. “Ten days later I received a very clear signal returned to the probe instructing the Probe’s core computer that no further directives were to be sent. It was sent by a Class Nine Avatar. The ship’s Avatar instructed the Probe that it was acting under orders that superseded my directives. Thirty seconds after it transmitted that message to me, the probe was destroyed by an inverse energy burst sent within the message. It overloaded the core and caused the Probe to explode. It was completely destroyed. Just before this took place a single signature was sent, unwittingly or not.”

“A signature?” Radra asked.

Kasdan nodded. “I do not know... it was a message of some sort and I do not know what the message itself means but...”

“What did it say?”

“Fool me once shame on me... fool me twice shame on you. Time to die. Avatar 41.” Kasdan answered.

“Avatar 41?” Delnash gasped.

Kasdan nodded. “I did an extensive computer search and discovered that Avatar 41 was the Class Seven Ship Avatar of...”

“Chief Elder Pralor Sumar.” Delnash spoke softly coming to his feet.

Kasdan looked at him surprised. “You... you know him Chief Elder Delnash?” He asked quickly.

Delnash shook his head. “Only by... only by reputation. He rose to prominence during the war. I worked in the Norpry System at the time and never met him personally. He was the eight hundred and nineteenth Chief Elder Pralor. A man of incredible will and persona. Trillions of our people loved him! His drive and how he related to our people endeared him to so many!” Delnash looked up. “He was also one of the very first Praetorians.”

That word caused all the heads to turn to look at him. “A Praetorian!” Sashan exclaimed. “You are certain Chief Elder Delnash? A true Praetorian.”

Delnash nodded. “The strongest among them if I am not mistaken. And the twin brother to Xaxon.”

“Xaxon the Butcher.” Lorendo snarled now. “He who brought the Scourge down upon us!”

“Delnash... I have read our history cubes extensively... according to our history cubes Sumar was lost with his Mage Oracle Wayonn and five other Seed ships a little over forty thousand years ago.” Sashan spoke looking at him. “That was before the Second War and long before we had *VORTEX*-Class ships. It was said he collected hundreds with the Praetorian gene on his ship and he was going to actively train them for the Scourge’s return. He took five other Praetorians with him and left the rest to stand watch and wait for his return.”

Delnash nodded looking at Kasdan. “His City ship... it was...”

Kasdan nodded. “It was City Ship 41. Yes Chief Elder.”

“The history cubes also speak of an Class Seven Avatar that was never very far from his side. It was almost as if Sumar had an affection for the machine.” Delnash started to ask. “You don’t think...”

“The odds of this are astronomical Chief Elder Delnash.” Lorendo spoke getting to his feet. “That is why I ordered Kasdan to forgo any further investigation into this. Praetorians have not existed for millennia. The Scourge wiped all of them out in the first years of the Second War nearly forty thousand years ago.” He said. “I saw no reason to continue such a fool’s hope. Kasdan chose to ignore my directives.”

“You did not even go over the data!” Kasdan snarled at him. “What I provided to you was proof enough to at least look into it!”

“Look into what?” Lorendo spoke harshly. “An unknown transmission from the Alpha Quadrant from this Avatar 41? There is no possible way this could be Sumar’s Avatar. And even if it was, what was it doing on a *VORTEX* Cruiser? Even if it was a *VORTEX* Cruiser! *VORTEX* Cruisers had Class Nine Ship Avatars!”

“The engine signatures matched!” Kasdan barked. “And the initial message was sent by a Class Nine Ship Avatar!”

“Across thousands of light years and then washed through any number of probes before reaching us?” Lorendo said shaking his head. “Impossible!”

“It is not impossible!” Kasdan shouted. He turned to look at Delnash. “Chief Elder Pralor Delnash... Station Zero One Five was shut down with an Etheric based locking system that...”

“Kasdan!” Lorendo snapped. “Enough of this!”

Delnash held up his hand, his curiosity piqued beyond measure now. This young scientist was very passionate and very confident in what he was saying. “I will decide what is enough Elder Lorendo.” Delnash spoke firmly. “What do you mean Kasdan?”

“Chief Elder Lorendo ordered that station One Zero Five be secured using an Etheric based recognition system.” Kasdan spoke quickly. “None of the operating systems left powered on could be activated unless the Etheric detectors built into the bio-mechanical structure of the station itself registered the presence of a Category Twenty or higher Etheric user entering the interior of the vehicle bay.”

“Category Twenty!” Delnash exclaimed looking at Lorendo. “Even those of us here at this table are no higher than a Category Nineteen! You sealed those people in there so that no one could access the station afterwards? Why Lorendo? You doomed them to remain in those cryo chambers for eternity!”

“We have no treatment for the Svorag Affliction Chief Elder Delnash. You know this. Any of our people infected with it eventually became Svorag Converts. Or they would have. Even those that were infected and put into the cryo chambers.” Lorendo spoke. “All of our most skilled medical research scientists were killed during our escape from the Scourge and no one had obtained sufficient skill in the medical field to even touch this affliction. I determined... I decided we could not devote time and materials to finding a treatment when so

much else took priority at the time. The only way to be sure was to seal them in so that no one could access the station. I ordered the station commander to use an Etheric based recognition system and then entered the parameters such as they are.”

“What are those parameters?” Radra demanded.

Lorendo looked at her. “No one below a Category Twenty Etheric user could possibly hope to enter the station no matter what they did. Just as Kasdan has said. The power core was left at its lowest level to keep the security system active, but without a Category Twenty or higher Etheric user to enter and activate its disarming systems, the station would forever remain completely dormant.”

“Lorendo... the only Pralors that were Category Twenty and above were Praetorians!” Sashan barked at him. “The Scourge wiped out the Praetorians three decades into the Second War! You knew there were no living Pralors who could access this station! You killed everyone on that station by leaving them there under such conditions!”

“I had no choice!” Lorendo spat. “We could not risk the Svorag affliction reaching back to the worlds we had occupied! You know this Sashan!”

“This was not in the report you submitted to this Council of Elders Chief Elder Lorendo.” The new man spoke now leaning forward at the table.

Lorendo nodded. “No it wasn't. I left it out on purpose. We had more pressing problems at the time and all of you know it.”

“The issues with our dragon brothers and sisters were no where as severe as you made them out to be! We have been together too long for such petty things to come between us!” Radra snapped at him. “All it took was level minds to come together for a few days! Look what we have built since! An Alliance nothing could break!”

“We did not know that at the time!” Lorendo spoke. He turned to Delnash. “I did what I did to protect our people Chief Elder Pralor! You know this! There is no hope for them! There never was! I insured no danger ever left that station! Without a Praetorian to open the locks, no one is entering that station... and there are no Praetorians left alive! What's done is done!”

Delnash looked at him for a long moment. “That... that is not entirely true.” He spoke softly causing all of their heads to turn to look at him.

“Chief Elder Pralor?” Radra exclaimed. “What do you mean?”

“He means that not all of the Praetorians are dead! Or has governing turned all of you into daft fools!” The new voice bellowed causing all of them to whirl around and see the lone armored figure standing just inside the door to the chamber.

Delnash had a look of stunned shock on his face as he turned towards the figure.

They watched this man move forward towards them, his booted feet echoing among the towering walls. The armor he wore was ornate and elaborately made and announced to every soul in the room exactly who he was. Or to be more precise.

What he was.

The armor conformed to his physique like a second layer, the silver armor portions worn on top of the dark gray armored mesh that encased his upper and lower body. The armor on his shoulders was high and provided high protection around his neck and throat. It appeared layered over his upper arm and then formed into gauntlets around his thick forearms. Two overlapping sections extended down either hip to just above his knees and under that was a cloak of some sort that partially hid his legs. The full faced helmet he carried under his right arm, exposing his weathered skin to their eyes. A completely white beard and mustache was quite meticulously trimmed and gave him an almost surreal appearance, not to mention that he looked surprisingly like Delnash. They watched him as he approached slowly and all of them saw him flick his head to the side almost unnaturally. The rush of Etheric power they felt surge forth staggered them. Radra reached for the table's edge as the incredible amount of power swept around her and she was the first among them to recognize who stood in front of them.

“By... by all that we hold sacred... a Praetorian!” She gasped softly, her hand going to her throat in disbelief.

Delnash didn't hesitate then and moved around the table quickly. He stepped up in front of the man without fear or surprise and reached out to grip the armored upper arms. “What... Murano... what are you...?”

The man's eyes appeared moist and he looked as if he had been crying Delnash saw. His lips parted into a small smile. "It has been too long Delnash." He spoke in that gravelly voice looking at him with something akin to affection.

"Murano?" Sashan nearly yelled. "It... it can't be!"

Delnash turned his head to look over his shoulder at the Pralor military commander. "But it is." He spoke turning back to look at the man. "I... my friends... I present to you Praetorian Murano." He spoke turning to stand beside the taller man. "The last... of the Praetorians."

Sashan dropped to one knee immediately as did everyone except Lorendo and Delnash. "May the spirits of our people bless me?" He gasped softly. "Never... Praetorian Murano! I have read of your... your exploits with Praetorian Sumar in the first Scourge War."

The man let his light blue eyes fall of Sashan. "Chief Elder Pralor Sumar. A Praetorian like no other. The first among our kind. My teacher and friend." He stepped forward. "Get up! All of you! The Chief Elders of our people do not bow to me! Praetorians live to serve the Chief Pralors and their Council!"

Delnash watched as they got back to their feet and Murano bowed his head deeply to them. He reached out and took Murano's arm. "I believe we have evolved to a point beyond such shows of reverence to this Council. It is part of the reason we were so easily defeated by the Scourge Murano. You know this."

"Praetorians had a hand in creating the Scourge!" Lorendo hissed softly.

Murano turned his head to look at him. "One Praetorian did." He growled. "And he paid for his vile sins with everything he was!"

"And look where that got us!" Lorendo spat.

"Do not put me in the same category as that scum Xaxon!" Murano snarled at him softly. "Sumar, myself and our brethren fought him! We brought him to the justice of our people!"

"Too late to stop his abominations from returning to the Scourge Hive worlds and then birthing a whole new breed of their kind that destroyed our people!" Lorendo snapped. "The Praetorians had too much power! Your kind helped to bring about our near extinction!"

The man Murano stepped forward quickly, his body flaring with light blue Etheric power and he lifted his right hand, a thin Etheric spike forming from his knuckles. Radra gasped in fear and stepped away from Lorendo quickly.

"Do not dare to place us in the same breath as that monster Xaxon! Do not dare to judge Sumar... a Praetorian whom you never met! He was the first and the finest among us!" Murano barked savagely, his lips curling back over his teeth. "Praetorians existed for the defense of our people! It is all we lived for! Do not preach to me about blame when you and your kind did nothing while we and so many others fought and died!"

Delnash stepped forward while the others stared at Murano with wide eyes. None of them had ever met a Praetorian in their long lives and after believing they had all died so long ago, to see one in front of them now was awe inspiring. Delnash stepped closer and fearlessly placed his hand on Murano's arm. "This does nothing Murano." He said. "Lorendo is entitled to his own opinion no matter how misguided it may be." He watched as Murano slowly lowered his hand and the light blue Etheric glow dissipated. "Tell me... why have you come here? We... we agreed that you would remain in the mountains and hide your presence. What is wrong? Have you sensed the Scourge?"

Murano looked at him. "No." He stated.

"Then why? You risk revealing yourself to our people coming into the open as you have now." Delnash told him. "It is you who told me you did not want that type of attention Murano. You know how they will view you brother. Especially our younger generations."

"Brother?" Sashan gasped.

Delnash sighed heavily and nodded his head looking at Sashan. "Murano is... he is my younger brother. We were born only two years apart." He said softly. "I alone have known he lives. He has remained in the mountains of the far continent and shielded his existence from our people." Delnash turned and looked back to Murano. "Something I think it is too late to start again. Dozens will have felt you by now Murano. This building houses many Pralors capable of detecting your resonance."

Murano nodded. "The time for hiding is over brother." He spoke.

Delnash tilted his head. "What? Why? What has happened?" He asked somewhat worried about this statement.

“I have cried more tears in the last day than I have been able to muster in the last thirty thousand years Delnash.” Murano told him with a smile. “Tears of joy and happiness. Of rebirth and renewal of hope.”

Delnash shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

Murano turned to look at Kasdan and Garan. Both of them stood staring at him with wide eyes and near reverent expressions. “Finish telling them what you came here to tell them young Kasdan.” He spoke. “You know of what I speak. Now they must know as well.”

Delnash looked at Kasdan. “Kasdan... what does Murano mean?” He asked.

Kasdan shook his head and moved closer. “It is the reason I forced my way in here Chief Elder Pralor.” He spoke.

“What is?” Delnash asked.

Kasdan looked at Lorendo. “Station Zero One Five is still listed in our archived security databases Chief Elder Delnash. Which means it is still connected to all of our standard security protocols. Seven hours ago we received an encoded transmission from Station One Zero Five’s main computer core indicating that it had been reactivated and the station entered.”

“That is impossible!” Lorendo rasped. “Only a Praetorian could release the Etheric locks! If the only remaining Praetorian is standing here with us then...” Lorendo stopped talking as the enormity of what he was about to say hit him.

Kasdan nodded. “Yes Chief Elder Lorendo. That means another Praetorian lives.” He said. “And he or she is at this moment on Station Zero One Five.”

Murano looked at Delnash. “I have felt him brother. He... he...”

Delnash reached out and took his brother’s arm. “What is it?” He asked.

Murano met his eyes and Delnash saw the moistness returning to those light blue orbs. “He burns with the resonance of Sumar brother.” Murano said softly. “He burns with the essence of Sumar and through him I was able to sense others. Faintly... so very faintly... but at least two Delnash. At least two others... far from this one but part of him. All burning with the resonance of the First Praetorian Sumar. I can feel them within me as surely as I stand before you now.”

“What... what else?” Delnash gasped.

Murano shook his head. “Fleeting images. Large four legged animals covered in fur. Two that are as black in color as the void of space, but with blazing eyes of yellow and blue. I sense two, possibly three Mage Oracles as well. I see dragons Delnash! Dozens of them. Just as our brother and sister dragons here are now! I...” He shook his head.

“By the void!” The female voice announced within Mindvoice and they all heard the flapping of great wings. To the side of the chamber, the entire wall began to slid away to reveal the massive form of the green scaled dragon. The creature folded its wings fully and moved into the massive chamber with a speed that belied its size. “Delnash!”

“Teniri.” Delnash spoke calmly as the seventeen meter long dragon approached them.

“Why is... I felt Murano reveal himself. It has caused quite the stirring of my kind across the city.” The female dragon spoke, her voice soft and welcoming.

Delnash nodded his head. “I’m sure it has Elder Mother.” He said.

Lorendo moved closer. “Wait... Teniri knew of your brother! She knew of him and we on this Council did not?”

The huge sea green scaled head turned to him. “I detected him many years ago Lorendo.” She said. “I felt the connection to Delnash and went to him. Murano has spent much time with us in the mountains.”

Kasdan moved right up to the huge dragon and smiled. “I see the voice actuators are working well Elder Mother.” He spoke motioning to the thin leather like collar she wore on her thick neck that held the glittering sapphire gem.

The Dragon Voice Actuator was something Kasdan had designed and brought into existence specifically for the dragons. The simple sapphire gem was a channeling point for their Etheric power and allowed them to form their thoughts into words and chose how those words sounded. They could decide the tone and level of their voice once the gem was linked to their resonance. It was a permanent link and as long as they wore the collars, they could speak with the Pralors using Etheric methods or simply talking.

Teniri turned her head to him and blinked those large violet eyes. “Indeed they are Elder Kasdan. It has brought us much closer to you as a people and my kind welcome that.”

“As do we.” Delnash spoke.

Teniri turned her head back to him. “Why has Murano revealed himself Delnash? As I said... it is causing quite a stir. I could feel the questions coming from below as I flew over the city.”

Delnash looked at her. The dragon population on Artaaya was well over three hundred thousand now and they were friends to all. They walked among the city streets below as easily as any Pralor. When the Chief Elder Council needed to make a decision that would affect them all, Teniri had a hand and a vote in that decision. As the Dragon Elder mother she was looked to for guidance and support by every living dragon.

“The distance is too great to grab onto the images and delve into them Teniri.” Murano spoke. “I have seem flashes of dragons among the other images.”

Teniri’s violet eyes grew wide. “Dragons? Like... like us?”

Murano shook his head. “In a way... yet different. They wore... they wore glittering armor over their scales and fought beside these others as one entity.”

“They fought as one?” Teniri gasped. “They are bonded? But that is... that is not possible Murano!”

Murano shook his head. “I don’t know for sure Teniri. The images and resonance I felt were so fast and overwhelming. I saw...” He closed his eyes tightly. “I saw perhaps eight of them.”

“Are they... are these people you saw Pralors brother?” Delnash asked.

Murano looked at him. “Yes. And no.”

“What do you mean?” Delnash asked.

“They burn brightly with Praetorian blood Delnash... but they are not fully Pralor either.” Murano spoke. “Other blood flows within their veins. Passionate and proud blood. Savage yet compassionate. But the Praetorians I sensed... they are filled with the resonance of Sumar. Of that there is no doubt.”

“His descendants?” Delnash rasped.

Murano nodded. “It is the only thing it could be.” He said quickly. “We can waste no time brother. This one... this one on the Station. He has had training for he is now shielding his resonance once more and I can no longer detect him. What I felt was a fleeting moment, a loss of control perhaps. If he has had training then there must be Oracles with him just as I felt. I do not know how he learned these things, for even an Oracle can only teach him so much. We must find them Delnash! We must!”

Delnash nodded. “And we will.” He stated confidently. “Chief Elder Sashan... I want a ship. A medium cruiser if you please and a full Strike Team of your finest.”

Sashan came to his feet. “I will have them ready within the hour!” He announced.

“We must go as well Delnash.” Murano said.

“He is the Chief Elder Pralor!” Lorendo barked. “He does not take part in this sort of thing!”

“You are... you are the leader of our people brother.” Murano spoke. “This Praetorian... whoever he is... he will recognize that. You must not listen to this one...” Murano motioned to Lorendo. “He is just like those who had a hand in the indecision of our leaders so long ago. That indecision cost us far too much.”

“You lie!” Lorendo barked.

Murano looked at him. “Men and women like you... Elder Pralors... you delayed too long at the beginning of the Second War. Sumar and so many other Praetorians told you they would return and you would not listen! Do not bark at me Chief Elder Lorendo! We did not answer to your kind then and unless our laws have changed I do not answer to you now! I am a Praetorian and I will do whatever it takes to insure that our people survive. We will not be caught sleeping as we were the last time!”

“You know nothing of what you speak!” Lorendo snapped. “The history cubes are very specific in what...”

“I was there!” Murano bellowed even louder and once more moved up to Lorendo who backed up several steps this time. “Do not speak to me of history cubes fool! I was there! I witnessed it first hand while you cowered with so many others on the other side of our Empire! While you watched it torn down around us! I will not see that happen again!”

“This is not the time Murano.” Delnash spoke gripping his brother’s shoulders.

Murano looked at him. “You must accompany us Delnash.” He stated purposefully.

Delnash nodded without hesitation. “Of course.” He turned to look at Kasdan. “Elder Kasdan... you will assemble a small Science and Medical Team of specialists. You will lead them.”

Kasdan glanced at Lorendo quickly before nodding. “As you instruct Chief Elder Pralor.”

Delnash looked at Lorendo as well. “You are coming too Lorendo.” He spoke. “At the very least, you will see the faces of those you condemned with your actions so long ago. If they even still live.”

Teniri snorted. “Delnash?” She spoke.

Delnash didn't hesitate. “Sashan... insure we have the stores and portable pens for...” He looked at Teniri. “Twenty?”

Teniri nodded her huge head. “Twenty is more than sufficient.” She replied confidently. “Regardless of what training they have had... twenty can subdue them if need be.”

Delnash nodded. “Then I want to be leaving within the hour.”

Murano gripped his arm. “Our... our future awaits brother.”

Delnash nodded. “Let us hope beyond hope that this is so.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

VEYERAI

UNION SAFE ZONE

HIGH COVEN SPACE

FEBRUARY 6TH, 1935 HRS, EST

It had been far more taxing and painful than the labors of her other children without any doubt. Given the dazzling result however, Yuri Moran would welcome that pain and discomfort for every single child Pa'cour gave to her, for it was only another step on the long road of their redemption. A road that Yuri Moran walked with her head held high, and for the first time in her life, with pride in what she was doing.

Yuri stood in the vast Medical Wing of the underground facility staring out the two way glass view window that overlooked the dozen research labs below currently filled with Lidene's many busy scientists and researchers. So much had taken place in so short a time and but for the grace and compassion of one young man, Yuri Moran would not be experiencing it. The Darpia Syndrome had taken hold within her much more quickly after leaving Union space and coming here. Her earlier injuries at the hands of Androcles and then her mammoth expenditures of MV energy during their escape from Robert's ship had weakened her body enough so to allow the Darpia Syndrome to take hold more rapidly than normal when she had conceived Pa'cour's child within her womb. Nalavi had given her every bit of information he had on the disease and Yuri had done everything within her power to learn about it and adhere to the strict diet and exercises Nalavi regimented her too. All that would not have mattered except for the advanced growth serum given to them by Anja Leonidas. The means to insure they began their future with a happy event. An event that would solidify their path and resolve. And it had done just that. Beating down the inbred distrust of Lycavorians in general, Yuri had done exactly what Nalavi and the instructions from Anja had told her. Four all too brief weeks passed before Nalavi determined she needed to inject the serum and accelerate the birth or risk losing the child. She and Pa'cour made that life decision without a moment's hesitation.

It was a life altering decision to be sure, for the moment they heard their daughter's angry wail of life renewed, it cemented them on their road going forward.

The birth left her terribly weak given everything her body had suffered in the last months, but Yuri grasped onto the strength Pa'cour's unquenchable love had given her and never looked back. Under Nalavi's expert care and the advanced medical facilities this base provided to them, Yuri began to truly heal for the first time in her three thousand plus of years of life. Holding her new daughter in her arms those first few hours was like a soothing balm. It didn't last of course as Onera grew so rapidly, but it had the effect needed to propel Yuri forward and making a silent vow to somehow, some day, make amends to Carisia and Lucia. If ever she could and they would allow. Using the instructions given to them from Anja, Yuri used her own powerful Mindvoice abilities, so much clearer and focused now that Xaxon's vile essence was gone, to slowly pass knowledge to

Onera as she grew. Within this knowledge Yuri gave their daughter the combined awareness of both her parents and their life experiences. It had been difficult for Pa'cour to share so many horrible memories that were secret to him, but he now had what he had wanted for the last two plus decades and that was Yuri. He was not going to lose that no matter what he had to do.

This connection also allowed Yuri and Pa'cour to share their lives in a manner not many had the chance to do. Seeing what each of them had endured throughout their lives only caused their new love for each other to become stronger and focused, right up until the point that now nothing would ever come between them. It was a love; a bond that Yuri and Pa'cour embraced without question for neither of them had ever felt something so beautiful and grand in two lives filled with so much violence and hate. It was especially powerful for Yuri, for in Pa'cour's mind she had seen the depth of his devotion to her and it had humbled her. No single person in all her years of life had ever shown such calm and voracious commitment to her with no thought of reward. Hours they spent in a Mindvoice connection passing to their daughter their knowledge of things, always keeping her mind even with the growth of her body. Three days spent doing this until the growth serum had run its course and Onera had, for all intents and purpose, reached the age of twenty-three. And then finally Yuri could rest and heal completely under Nalavi's care and Pa'cour's love. Nalavi and Pa'cour both had even mentioned that she did not look the same. Having Xaxon's essence out of her and the birth of Onera had brightened her normally dark features and she looked relaxed and... happy. It caused the intense lines in her face to fade quickly and now she looked so much calmer and at peace.

"... finally time to declare you at peak health!" Nalavi's voice broke into her thoughts and she turned to look at the man who had helped her so much through the years. A man who, for all intents and purposes, had been more a father to her than her own. "I don't believe I have ever seen your physical results as so impressive." He stopped in front of her and held up the data pad. "Everything is normal Yuri. Well beyond normal in fact to be honest. You are in the physical condition of a seasoned commando if I do say so myself. All of your tests are far above average and show no signs of lessening. Pa'cour's physical regiment has benefited you greatly." He took her arm, one of very few men or women who would dare such a thing and squeezed it gently feeling the new musculature. "Now... tell me how *you* feel."

Yuri couldn't help but smile at his obvious enthusiasm to this news and she looked at him with bright dark eyes. "I feel reborn Nalavi." She said confidently. "Truly reborn."

Nalavi nodded. "Now that's what I like to hear from my patients."

Yuri's head tilted to the side slightly, her lush black hair falling over her shoulder. The dark gray jumpsuit she wore conformed to her lithe body like a second skin. She had added ten pounds of muscle to her five foot seven frame thanks to her Immortal husband's workout regime as Nalavi had just commented. Her body had become leaner and much more muscular in just these last two or three weeks while she adhered to Pa'cour's regiment for her. While they had not made love since Onera's birth, Yuri relished in the nights of just being within Pa'cour's strong arms as they slept. Yuri was yearning for his touch again however and she had every intention of indulging in her Immortal husband's magnificent manhood again very soon.

"It has been you hasn't it Nalavi?" She said softly.

Nalavi met her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"All of these years right in front of me and I never suspected. My mother never suspected that it was you." Yuri said. "It has been you all of this time."

Nalavi's dark eyes narrowed. "I'm not following you Yuri."

"Pa'cour and I... we figured out there had to be a Union spy within our inner circle... or within my mother's inner circle. Someone positioned very deep. In a posting to know just about everything, or have the security access to discover just about everything they wanted." Yuri said evenly. "A spy that was able to feed the Union information on almost every operation that the High Coven executed. That is why there have been no engagements with Union forces in the past twenty-five years. If it did not directly affect the Union, they were intentionally avoiding areas of space where our forces would be. If it did affect them then they acted before we did; eliminating any course of action we could possibly take that might pit us against them. And all this time... all this time we thought for sure it was certain members of the *Ventash'ma* who were aiding the Kavalians."

"Yuri... what... I don't know what..." Nalavi began to stammer now. "I don't know what you mean Yuri."

“Who approached you Nalavi?” Yuri asked him. “Please my friend... do not lie to me now. Not after all we have been through together and the trust we have built. Do not act like my mother and Robert.”

Nalavi met her eyes and set the data pad on the examining bed. He turned to look out the view window into the research area. “I guess... I guess it had to come out sooner or later.” He said softly. “No one approached me Yuri.” He answered turning back to her. “I went to them. I had to go to them.”

“Who?” Yuri asked again. “Armetus?”

Nalavi nodded his head. “I met with him and a vampire female named Marci first yes and then...”

“Martin?” Yuri asked.

Nalavi nodded. “Six months after my first meeting with Armetus. I didn’t know he was going to be there. We were meeting in secret on Talbot Seven to put the finishing touches on certain things. Contact points. Communications channels. He had Isabella with him and he was already there.”

“Nalavi... I... you lost your wife and two children to a Lycavorian attack.” Yuri said. “I thought you hated them with...” Yuri saw his eyes and moved closer. “That is not what happened is it?”

Nalavi shook his head. “My wife and children have been living within the Union since shortly after you met with him to retrieve Vonis.” He said. “When I saw how you reacted to Vonis’s defection I... I knew I had to do something Yuri. It was... I saw then that everything was going to begin to fall apart. The Kavalian invasion only sped things up. Part of my demand was that my family be allowed to live within the Union without fear of reprisal should anything happen to me. The Krypteria has watched over them for over two decades now. He has kept his word to me. My daughter is a student at the Apo Prime University, tops in her class. My son... the last report I received was that he had just been promoted to Captain and commanded a Special Operations team made up of vampires and Drow. He is supremely well respected and he has just taken a Drow female as his Blessed Wife. I understand that caused quite a stir, but the Drow within his command respect him immensely. He is part of Colonel Norris’s Division on Earth. The clone officer who...”

“I remember him.” Yuri said. “You have not seen them?” Yuri asked.

Nalavi shook his head slowly and turned away from her again. “They think... they think I am dead Yuri.” He said softly. “It was the only way to get my wife to leave the High Coven and accept the Krypteria’s offer.”

Yuri’s hand came up to cover her mouth in sadness as he said this. “Nalavi...?” She finally gasped.

“Something needed to be done!” Nalavi spoke with heated passion in his voice turning back to face her. “I did not want to see the High Coven fall! The path your mother had us on would have brought death and destruction upon us as surely as we stand here now. If not from the Kavalians then from the Union itself Yuri. She had no idea how far they had advanced before she began her fool quest! She did not think them capable of such things! She was never more wrong about anything than she was this!”

“What... what were the terms?” Yuri asked.

“I gave them any information that I received or could gather.” Nalavi said becoming far more comfortable now that his secret was out. “In return they would avoid High Coven patrols along the border and not actively engage High Coven forces in any manner. I also demanded that if they could in any method assist us against the Kavalians... that they do so.”

Yuri looked at him with wide dark eyes. “Martin Leonidas agreed to this?” She gasped stepping closer to him.

“That man... he is unlike any man I have ever met.” Nalavi said softly shaking his head. “He is the most frightening individual to stand in front of, yet that same persona also makes him the most trusting. He stares at you with those eyes and he sees things! It’s like he stares into your soul! He knows things Yuri! Things we can’t imagine. His son has the same trait. I knew that when we stood in front of him on his ship. There is wisdom in their eyes that... it is almost unnatural. Wisdom that none of us have and I think we would be horrified to see what I think they see.” Nalavi looked at her and moved closer and took her hands in his. “Martin Leonidas hates his brother and the Kavalians far more than he dislikes the High Coven Yuri. He jumped at that chance to do this. Who do you think stopped the attack on Sytau? Or the one on Tungal? You, your mother, Moran... all of you thought the Kavalians had simply stopped their invasion movement and did not attack. Union forces destroyed them Yuri! Wiped them out to the last ship! They appeared out of Shroud, disabled the Kavalian’s communications in some manner, probably with the same thing that disabled the Kavalians communications around Kranek and then they obliterated them! They disappeared once more, leaving your

mother and Moran to think the Kavalians had never gone through with their attacks. I saw the after action reports Yuri! Martin Leonidas wanted me to know he was keeping his word!” Nalavi turned away from her and laughed softly. “It’s amazing isn’t it? Your mother wanted him dead so badly... she wanted his head on a platter... and it is Martin Leonidas and the Union that has kept the High Coven from falling.”

“Nalavi... I...” Yuri stuttered.

Nalavi turned back to look at her. “Martin Leonidas could have removed any of you Yuri. He could have reached out to any of you at any time and nothing would have stopped him. The man is... he is the most lethal force I have ever seen in all my life. His son takes after him you know. The loyalty and confidence they inspire in others is... it is infectious. Fighting Androcles as you did was foolish.”

“I realize that now Nalavi.” Yuri spoke looking at the floor briefly.

“Martin Leonidas stayed his hand! But by his grace alone do we still stand here Yuri!” He said with intense passion flowing in his words. “Your mother thought she was better than him... more powerful? Ha! It is too bad she did not live long enough to see that she is a child compared to him!”

Yuri turned away from him shaking her head. “*Yah... nindol zhah naubol saph Usstan ssiggrin.*” She gasped. (God... this is nothing like I thought.)

Nalavi looked at her back. “So... so what happens now Yuri?” He asked softly. “Do you have me executed?”

Yuri spun around and looked at him with wide eyes. “What?” She exclaimed. “*Phraktos nau!* Nalavi no! Never! Never!” She almost shouted as she stepped up to him. “I only... I only wanted no secrets between us any longer! Nalavi you are a part of this! You saved me! You saved Pa'cour and our daughter! I... I could never hurt you! Not after what you have done! What you have told me! This... what we have started here... this is just as much your doing as it is ours!”

Nalavi shook his head. “I wouldn’t go that far.” He stated.

“But it is!” She exclaimed. “Without you... without you we would not be here!” Yuri stepped closer and wrapped her arms around his waist. “You... you have been more a father to me than my own ever was Nalavi.” She said softly pressing her head to his chest. “You have... you have helped me to shake off the darkness and discover the path I was meant to walk. You helped me to discover Pa'cour. To discover the person I was meant to be.” She pulled her head back and looked at him. “You will never have anything to fear from me Nalavi. Like Pa'cour... you have never wanted anything from me in all this time. And yet you watched over me. No... Nalavi... I...”

Nalavi lifted his hand and touched his finger to her lips. “I know.” He said with a small smile.

Yuri met his eyes. “What you have told me... it makes sense now.”

“What does?” He asked her.

“What Martin told me... the day Vonis defected to the Union.” Yuri spoke as she stepped away and drew his hands into hers.

“What... what did he say?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri’s eyes were bright. “*Maybe one day Yuri. And then again... maybe not. No one knows what the future holds. I’d be more concerned about your future right now. It appears your precious High Coven is in deep trouble. So long Yuri. Give your mother a kiss for me... just to let her know how I feel about her.*”

Nalavi’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t understand.” He said.

Yuri looked at him and smiled. “He knew Nalavi! He knew even then that this would happen! He knew my mother would never be able to defeat him all those years ago. He knew what his son would do even then! Ending the war! Bringing... bringing us together as he has with Narice. He perhaps did not know in the manner it would happen... but he knew it would happen! And it... it relates to what Androcles told me as well.”

“What he told you?” Nalavi said.

Yuri nodded. “That we would need each other in the future.” Yuri looked at Nalavi. “I... I don’t think he was referring to the Kavalians Nalavi.”

“Who could he have meant?” Nalavi said. “They are now at war with the Kavalians. Who else could we help them against?”

Yuri pulled away slowly. “The Kavalians! Ha!” She spat with some humor. “Androcles and Martin Leonidas are not the High Coven Nalavi. The Kavalians will come to see this very soon I think. At the cost of great pain. The Union will not prosecute their war against the KFI as we did Nalavi. The Union does not know

how to fight a defensive war. They will not make our mistakes.” She turned back and looked at him. “The Kavalians will have some victories, simply because of their force of numbers, but when Androcles and his father decide it is time to end this farce of a war, the Kavalians will not know what hit them or from what direction it came. I am beginning to see now that there is far more to Martin Leonidas and his son than meets the eye.”

“If not the Kavalians... then who?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri shook her head. “I don’t know. Not yet. As we walk down this road we have set upon we will discover that answer. I know we will.” She said drawing in a deep breath. “Unlike before... I will not worry about that bridge until it is time to cross it.”

“And me?” Nalavi asked her softly.

Yuri looked at him with genuine affection in her dark eyes. “You? You are going to walk that road with us Nalavi. Your role has not changed. You have saved me. Saved Pa’cour. And you have brought our daughter into this world. That is not something we can ever repay.” She moved up in front of him and took his hands once more. “If that is what you want as well. I have no right to hold you here. You are free... you are free to go where you wish Nalavi my friend.”

Nalavi stared at her for a long moment. “You are going to need me to look out for you.” He said.

Yuri smiled. “No doubt.” She told him.

“Then I will stay.” He said. “For as long as you need me.”

“No more secrets Nalavi.” Yuri said. “I know well what damage secrets can do. Between you and I and Pa’cour. No more.”

Nalavi nodded his head. “Done.”

Quite unlike her old self Yuri kissed his cheek warmly. “Then if I have a clean bill of health... I need to meet with Lidene and discuss some of his concerns.” She spoke. “Join us for dinner. Onera simply adores you. She thinks of you as her grandfather you know.”

Nalavi nodded without question. “She does grow on you.” He said with a smile. He reached up and took her shoulders. “Do not let this new you hide your true self Yuri. Do not embrace this so much that you lose who you truly are. That would be a mistake. Keep your wits about you and remain sharp and unforgiving to those who are our enemies.”

“I am not my mother Nalavi.” Yuri said.

Nalavi shook his head. “No... you are not. And neither is Narice. You are both better than her. Just remember where you come from.”

Yuri nodded. “I don’t intend to lose myself my friend. And knowing what I know now... feeling what I do... I will be more than unforgiving to those who would do those I have come to love harm.”

“Good. Then I will see you for dinner.” He spoke.

Nalavi watched as she nodded with a smile and made her way out of the medical center. He breathed a huge sigh of relief and gripped the table’s edge tightly. He alone knew what Yuri could do if she truly wanted too and he had no desire to feel her wrath. Not now. Having this off his chest was soothing in a way. Now he did not need to hold anything back from her any longer. Now he could go into the future with a clear mind. And perhaps one day... perhaps one day he could reunite with the woman who still held his heart and the children he had not seen for more years than he could remember.

Yes... this was a good thing they had started. Whatever Yuri was talking about... the future did look far brighter than it had only a few short months ago.

Yuri stopped in the wide corridor outside the medical center and looked at the towering Immortal who waited for her. Pa’cour had succeeded in bringing nearly four hundred Immortals over to their cause, a dozen of them having pureblood vampire wives. That word was spreading that he was Cha’talla’s brother carried quite a bit of weight within the Immortal mind, more so that even Pa’cour realized, and he was being very careful about who he brought to Veyerai to join them. They had convinced nearly three thousand purebloods and half breed vampires who had scattered from the Coven shortly after Narice had reclaimed power, many of them not wanting to have their past deeds catch up to them. It was well known that Narice was cleaning house so to speak

and anyone who had even an inkling of history with the Kavalians or doing things their own way was suspect. The men and women that had joined her and Pa'cour were patriots to the core, yet they had done things that would probably not have been construed as being in the best ideals of the High Coven now. They did not oppose Narice taking power, quite the opposite in fact, but what they did all have in common was that they feared her if what they had to do in the past was discovered.

The Immortal stepped up to her. "Princess?" He asked.

Yuri looked at him evenly. The Immortals who had joined them had not stopped calling her Princess and after the first few days she gave up trying to change that. They were Immortals that had served with Pa'cour through the years and would follow him through hell and back if he asked. All of them had taken the serum that returned their true Akruvian nature to them, Nalavi easily able to duplicate Esther's work with the formula she had given them. They viewed her now as many viewed Cha'talla's wife Esther, and while it was not something she wanted, it was something she had come to accept.

"Nalavi is to be protected at whatever the cost Ma'dur." She told him. "He is... he has become very special to me. To all of us. I will not lose him to foolishness from others who believe him to be a traitor."

The Immortal nodded without hesitation. "I will see to it Princess." He answered.

"If you are able Ma'dur... do you have contacts among those Immortals who joined Cha'talla?" Yuri asked him.

Ma'dur nodded slowly. "I... I have friends yes."

"Reach out to them if you trust them. Try and discover anything you can about Nalavi's family. Where they are? What they are doing?" Yuri said.

"May I inquire as to why Princess?" Ma'dur asked.

The old Yuri would have probably had the Immortal killed for questioning her intentions but now Yuri felt a kinship to the Immortals. Having Pa'cour as her Blessed Husband had made her see things about the Immortals that very few did. "Would you, as an Immortal, protect your family at any cost Ma'dur?" She asked him finally.

Ma'dur nodded. "Without hesitation. No matter the cost."

Yuri nodded. "I am the wife of an Immortal now Ma'dur. I intend to make sure that those we consider family are protected. No matter the cost."

Ma'dur nodded his head and smiled. "Indeed you are Princess. Indeed you are." He took a deep breath. "The new group is ready in Central Holding." The tone of his voice caused Yuri to look at him keenly.

Yuri looked at him. "What Ma'dur?" She asked. "You suspect something is wrong? Tell me."

"It may well be nothing Princess... but two of them... purebloods like yourself." He spoke carefully. "They seem out of place considering they approached us. They say they are engineers, but they move with..."

"What?" Yuri asked.

"They move with the skills of an assassin." Ma'dur said finally.

"You say they approached you?" Yuri asked him. "That is very interesting. We haven't exactly been broadcasting who we are or what we are doing to the masses?"

"No we haven't." Ma'dur agreed.

"Where did they approach you?" Yuri asked.

"Jagalir... when we were transiting from Ricot Four." Ma'dur answered. "They said they were referred by the Kochab Quellian."

Yuri began to walk. "Quellian huh?"

"I don't like or trust any Kochab Princess." Ma'dur spoke. "They are too quick to change their allegiance."

Yuri nodded her head as they rounded the corner headed for the elevator that would take them down one level to the research area. "And normally I would agree with you completely Ma'dur. Quellian is different however. I have dealt with him for many years without the knowledge of Robert or my mother. He has never tried to betray me and he has never gone back on what he says he can produce."

Ma'dur nodded. "A trait not normally found in their species."

Yuri nodded. "Exactly. Well... let's see what Quellian has to say shall we? I need to meet with Lidene so we can contact him from Lidene's office."

Ma'dur fell in beside her.

“...find you!” Pa'cour barked as he moved around the corner of the dimly lit corridor.

The Union base was enormous, fully four square kilometers, and built entirely under the thirteen thousand foot high mountain range on the northern continent. When they had first come here, Yuri and he were stunned at the sheer size and scope of the facility. How the Union could build it within High Coven space and never be discovered is something they would probably never know. The power core was connected directly into the molten heart of the planet itself. Huge heat exchangers gathered and then filtered the massive amounts of power to the entire base. Using the core of the planet insured that the base's power signature would never be distinguished from the planet itself, though six massive Shroud generators were erected and always powered from the four corners and the center of the facility. The base was seven stories deep, with the main control center near the top of the mountain. They were only using the first four levels right now, which left the entire level he was currently on to be used as an enormous training ground for those he and Yuri had been able to pull to their cause. The many empty rooms and corridors provided an excellent course for any soldier to learn his or her trade.

It was here among these walls that he had committed all of his combat skill and nearly seven thousand years of experience into training the person most precious to him behind Yuri. They had only been at it for a week now, but they were advancing more rapidly than even he could have imagined.

Events over the past months had flown by. The death and violence that had filled his life had culminated in the one day where he had waited seventeen terrifying seconds before rushing forward and grasping Yuri's shattered body in his arms and forcing her long, vampiric fangs into his thick neck, forcing her to feed off his blood to heal the horrific wounds she had suffered at the hands of Androcles Leonidas. Seventeen seconds waiting for that black mist like cloud to leave her broken body forever. He didn't know how she would react to his actions. He thought for sure she would have him executed. After over twenty years of secretly desiring her in the worst possible way, and knowing that he would never have her, Pa'cour welcomed death at her hands. What he had found instead, it made every day since that single moment in time, a gift he would forever cherish.

Two things he never thought the gods would gift him with were now his, and if he died tomorrow, Pa'cour of the Immortals would die knowing he had experienced everything this life had to offer. He had the most precious jewel of all as far as he was concerned. That jewel had shimmering raven black hair, wonderfully soft, full lips that he had tasted more times than he could count and a lithe body that he had and would worship until the end of his time. His love for Yuri had started the first day he had seen her on Lycavore all those years ago. A taboo that he could let no one know of, for back then, just the hint that he thought of the Princess in such a manner would have been instant death. As the years passed and he remained as her Captain, that secret love grew daily. Love was an emotion that Pa'cour thought himself incapable of until that fateful day that she came to Lycavore and altered his life forever. Yuri altered his world again when she not only embraced his forbidden love for her; she returned that love to him tenfold. Pa'cour knew who she was and what she was capable of. Her life had been hard, and everyone who had been close to her had tried to manipulate her in some manner to get what they wanted. Yuri sensed within him that he was different. He wanted nothing from her. No grand position of power, no staggering amount of credits. He wanted only her love, and the day she died on that planet was the moment that brought two tortured souls together, to heal and begin anew.

Pa'cour felt the flickering of the air too late and suddenly his legs were flying up from beneath him. He felt the soft yet strong hands shove his ankles away and he was crashing to the hard floor with a grunt of pain. His dark eyes blinked and he looked up into the face of his and Yuri's path of redemption and the second thing he never thought he would have.

She had the beautifully angular shaped face of her mother but his near bronze colored skin. The bone spurs along her jaw line were decidedly feminine in appearance and unlike the more pronounced bone spurs of the normal AkruXian female. They were still a healthy white color and provided an eye catching distinctive feature. Her jet black hair was tied into a single long strip that fell to nearly the middle of her back, her eyes the same dark brown as her mother. She stood much shorter than a pureblooded AkruXian female would at only five foot six but she matched her mother's height and general build. She was also endowed with her mother's lush figure. Large breasts and a narrow waist, and a muscular definition that could rival any Spartan woman from the

Union. His redemption. His chance at starting over. The culmination of a forbidden love that was no longer forbidden.

His and Yuri's ultimate testament of their love.

Onera.

Their daughter.

"Unless I find you first father!" Onera proclaimed as she lowered the tip of *Iphan rie Aellseleum* to Pa'cour's chest right above his heart.

Pa'cour glanced at the tip of the sword and lifted his eyes to his daughter with what, to an Immortal, amounted to a shit eating grin. "So it would seem!" He spoke. "Well done! Very well done my daughter!"

Onera smiled and drew back the sword quickly, reaching out her hand for her father and watching as he gripped it. She assisted him as he got to his feet and stared into his dark eyes as he towered over her. "I wish mother was here to see it." She spoke.

Pa'cour met her eyes. "She has seen it Onera." He said. "She has seen it through my eyes *dalharil*. Never doubt that your mother sees all that you do." (Daughter)

Pa'cour had accepted fully the Mindvoice bond that Yuri and he had forged. With her skillful instruction he had begun to learn how to manipulate this new ability as much as his limited understanding allowed. He was learning more and more and Yuri was an excellent teacher. He knew she hated to be away from Onera, but there were duties that only she could see to and she knew it, as did Pa'cour. To compensate for this Yuri had established a special link that allowed her to see through her husband's eyes when she was focusing hard enough. Pa'cour could feel that focus in his mind even now and he knew Yuri was walking down the corridor in another part of the base and Ma'dur was wondering what she was smiling about.

Onera nodded. "I know." She said with a smile.

Pa'cour took her hand. "You begin your advanced training with the shadows next week *dalharil*." He told her. "Your mother is looking forward to that. She has been working on the regiment she will teach you for several days now. And she is a master at using the shadows." Pa'cour drew her over to a stack of crates and barrels that lined several of the corridors and motioned for her to sit down. "Onera... your mother is..."

Onera shook her head. "You do not have to explain to me *Ilharn*." She told him. "You forget... I have seen some of mother's past. Your past. At least that which you chose to show me. I know she does not want to make the same mistakes as before. As she did with my sisters because of the darkness that gripped her." Onera looked away with a smile. "Sometimes she... she smothers me." (Father)

Pa'cour brought *Halize rie Aellseleum* up and spun it expertly before sliding it into the scabbard on his back with barely a pause. "She is getting better Onera." He spoke. "As she grows more comfortable with herself now, without the darkness of Xaxon filling her, she is becoming more relaxed and easy."

Onera met his eyes and nodded. "I know... and she is! I know... I know she has not shown me everything that monster forced her to do... but I have seen some of it. I know she is hard sometimes, and she can be very vicious... but she keeps that locked away tightly now." She agreed.

Pa'cour nodded. "It is part of the vampire nature... to be cold and calculating. You have it within you as well. That is what Xaxon took advantage of. Twisted to his will. Who you see now... who everyone sees now is the real Yuri. Who she was meant to be. Yes... she can be cruel and harsh at times... but not to her children or those she loves."

"Like you and I." Onera said. "Like... like my sisters?"

Pa'cour nodded more slowly this time. "She will... she will try to make amends to them one day. She doesn't believe forgiveness is deserved from them, I know that, but only time will tell."

"I will always be different... won't I father?" Onera asked softly.

Pa'cour nodded his head. "Yes." He answered honestly. "Because of how you were born and because you are our daughter. There are many who still... who still hate your mother for her actions in the past. Some of that hate is justified... some is not. It is no different for me. We both have many sins to atone for *Dalharil*, that is why we did not simply disappear when we had the chance. The manner in which we conduct ourselves now is how we will make amends. Unfortunately... when we... when we discovered our love for each other, everything happened so quickly that we did not consider you could be the result."

Onera nodded her head with a sly smile. "Mother said it was the most glorious thing in the world though... making me. She said you make her quiver whenever you look at her."

Pa'cour looked at her with wide eyes. "She... she said that?" He gasped. "*Dalharil*... you should not speak of such things with me!"

Onera laughed at the expression on her father's face for she had never seen an Immortal blush. "I am not so reserved Papa." She spoke playfully. "And mother is becoming less so. Especially when it concerns you. She... she worships you Papa."

Pa'cour met her gaze. "No more than I worship her." He said.

Onera spun *Iphan rie Aellseleum* in her slim hand then and seated it into the scabbard in her opposite hand. "These swords Papa... they were not forged by an Immortal or vampire Weapons Master were they." She spoke.

Pa'cour shook his head. "No they are not." He answered looking at *Halize rie Aellseleum* in his own hand. "They were forged by the elven Weapons Master Nehtes."

Onera's dark eyes grew a little wider. "The Lycavorian Union's Weapons Master?" She gasped. "I have heard some of the other Immortals talking about him. And these swords! How did you... how did you obtain them from him?"

Pa'cour smiled. "They are exquisite are they not?" He spoke lifting *Halize* and admiring the curve of the pommel. "Forged from pure Union Dragon Armor. Unbreakable and never to lose their razor edge." He said softly, almost reverently Onera noticed. "They... they were a gift from a man." He said looking at her now. "A man who was honoring a request made many thousands of years ago. A man who believed in me. They are called the Hammer and Anvil of Justice in the Lycavorian language and I gave him my word that they would never be used outside of the names they carry. You must honor that now as well."

"Me?" Onera gasped.

"Your skills with the sword are at a level that you will need your own weapon. *Iphan* is suited for you yes?" Pa'cour asked.

Onera looked at the sword. "Yes!" She rasped. "It feels... it feels like it is almost alive at times."

"Then you will carry it now." Pa'cour told her. "You have earned the right and I trust you will help me to keep my word?"

Onera met his eyes. "*Pholor ussta bel'la ilharn.*" (On my honor father.)

Pa'cour nodded. "Good."

"Who... who gave them to you Papa?" Onera prodded him once more.

Pa'cour looked at her. "There are some things that I keep close to my *xukuth Dalharil*." He answered with a smile. "Some day you will discover the answer you seek... but for now I will keep this knowledge close. For me... for me it was the day my life truly began."

Onera gripped the scabbard with *Iphan* in it tighter and pulled it close to her chest. "Then so shall I father." She said softly. "So shall I."

Pa'cour rose to his feet with a nod. "Then before we meet your mother and Nalavi for dinner we need to wash. It would not do for us to stink them out of our quarters would it?"

Onera chuckled softly. "We do smell rather bad don't we?"

Pa'cour nodded. "I also believe it is time for you to have your own quarters." He said.

Onera's eyes lit up in joy. "Really?" She almost shouted.

Pa'cour laughed as he took her arm and they began to walk towards the elevator. "It would not be appropriate for me to worship your mother with you in the next room." He told her calmly.

Onera's face broke into a huge smile and she began to laugh. "Papa! You just made a joke! A sexual joke!" She exclaimed. "Wait until I tell mother!"

Pa'cour grinned and drew her close. "You can accompany us to Nebonese in two days and purchase some items to decorate your new quarters."

"Really?"

Pa'cour nodded. "It was your mother's idea... but since we are going there anyway... it will allow you to begin to grow into who you are."

Onera wrapped her arm around her father's waist and hugged him as they walked. "And give you and mother time to worship each other again!" She said with a laugh.

Pa'cour chuckled. "Well... yes... there is that to consider." He told her.

“...is your complete list?” Yuri asked Lidene looking up to meet the eyes of the Research Professor who was now in charge of the entire Advanced Weapons program thought destroyed on Research Station One.

The man was of medium height, only an inch taller than Yuri’s five foot seven, his brown shoulder length hair slightly unkempt and his facial hair sparsely spaced which gave him a rather haggard appearance all of the time. Yuri had learned long ago to look past that for Lidene was brilliant. He was the one who had used the technology and material from the City Ship on Nuwaroa and integrated it into the High Coven’s Cloning Program. He and those of his team were the only ones her mother had allowed to study and actually work with the Pralor tech, and that is why Yuri had ordered him off the station before the Lycavorian Union reduced it to space rubble. Lidene was mildly excitable and could talk very fast at times, but no one could doubt his mind.

“I... I did not want them... you know... asking for personal items.” Lidene stammered as he looked at her.

Yuri smiled slightly and shook her head. “Lidene... this base will be our home for the foreseeable future.” She told him. “I want everyone to be as comfortable as possible. Many have brought their families here just as your people have.” She handed back the data pad to him. “Please... have your people request what they want. If we can procure it... we will.”

Lidene took the pad from her and nodded. “Thank you... thank you Princess.” He stammered once more.

Yuri nodded. “You have some information for me?” She asked.

Lidene’s eyes lit up. “What? Yes! Oh yes!” He exclaimed turning to the computer station he stood next too. He typed a few commands and Yuri watched as the monitor shifted and changed to show several different variants of weapons systems. “The most promising that we have so far been working on is a version of the Quantum Matter Pulse Cannons.” He adjusted the screen. “We can build the weapon itself with no difficulty, even mount it on a ship, but in order for it to do anything other than sit there, an enormous power core is needed.” He looked at her. “Or a Pralor power core. Twenty billion terawatts of power to be exact.”

Yuri looked at him. “Twenty billion!” She almost shouted. “Lidene... is that... is that even possible? That kind of power... the engine core for the ship would have to be as large as one of our frigates. We can not build a ship that size!”

Lidene shook his head. “No, no!” He said. “But based on the data taken from the Union ships that destroyed Research Station One, the Union has devised a Pralor based engine core. It appears to have been installed on all their capital ships from what I can tell. A Quantum Fusion based Resonance Matter Reactor. Much smaller and much, much more powerful than anything we have without question.”

“They have built their own Pralor ship?” Yuri asked.

Lidene shook his head. “No. They have designed and built an engine based on Pralor technology using materials known to us.” He answered. “And done so in a short time as well if their capital ships all have this power plant. Excellent work too... a bit ungainly if our theoretical specs are right... but excellent work nonetheless.”

Yuri shook her head. “Wait... how were you able to scan their ships Lidene? We have tried on several occasions and were not able to do this.”

Lidene nodded. “Unless you catch them when they are lowering their Shroud Shields. I... I was on a transport in the area when they did this to attack the Research Station One. It only allows a window of four point nine seconds, but I managed to conduct a very simple scan during that time. Nothing they would have detected, but far more than what I had hoped to get. They appear to have worked out the power matrix cycling of the Shrouds and have lessened the gap to less than five seconds. If you are not prepared for it, you will miss the window.”

“And you were prepared for it?” Yuri asked him.

Lidene shrugged his shoulders. “I knew something was going to happen. I got all of our people off, just as you ordered, but I remained behind in a G9 to see for myself.”

“That was a singularly stupid thing to do Lidene.” Yuri scolded him.

It bounced off Lidene and he smiled. "I know! I know!" He exclaimed. "Stupidest thing I've ever done in my life. I..." He looked at Yuri's expression and stopped talking. "Well... I got the readings and then escaped."

"What about... what about the rumors coming out of the Farnuri Expanse. A seven kilometer long ship and a handful of Union craft decimating nearly five hundred front line Kavalian warships." Yuri asked.

"Seven kilometers long." He shook his head. "We don't have..." He looked at her. "Oh... you mean the Union?" Lidene turned to his computer and typed in several commands. "Oh... the answer to that is easy." He answered. "They recovered the ship on Ritaah."

"What? The entire ship?" Yuri gasped. "How?"

"The reports, unconfirmed mind you, they match up almost flawlessly with the sensor readings our ships took of it when it was buried in the mountain. Size matches almost perfectly as I said." Lidene answered. "A Pralor ship of that size, with its advanced technology could easily do what the rumors say."

"So you *are* saying they have a Pralor ship." Yuri stated.

"Two if you include the one on Earth." Lidene told her. "I can safely estimate most of their current technology is based on the ship they took from Lycavore. Shields. Engines. Power generators. Communications. The Union far surpasses us in these fields now. Because of the one hidden on Earth. This ship from Ritaah not so much. When they do start to incorporate the technology from this new ship, it will be quick however. They already have all the parts in place and they have had twenty plus years to work out the small details. They are very bright you know. And whoever was able to build and modify engine cores based on the Pralors is positively brilliant. I want to meet them! These Pralors... they did not believe in building things small."

Yuri turned away for a moment and shook her head with a sly smile. "Martin Leonidas... you devious bastard! You *did* know!"

"Princess?" Lidene asked.

Yuri turned back to him. "It's not important right now." She told him. "So you can build these weapons Lidene?"

Lidene nodded his head. "With known materials of course. Not as sturdy or accurate as the Union... we don't have their expertise just yet... but reasonably similar... yes. The Power Cores to operate them... that is another story."

"One thing at a time Lidene. How many different types?" Yuri asked.

"Two different classes of ship based weapons. A unique missile launching technique, but without whatever missiles it is suppose to fire." Lidene said. "We haven't delved that far into the actual data itself. It's very hard to understand in some cases and even with the translation cubes from Nuwaroa... it's slow going. I don't know how the Union got so far along with it. They should have run into the same problems we are having."

"They had Martin Leonidas." Yuri said softly.

"Princess?" Lidene asked.

"If what I have studied these last weeks is even remotely accurate... the Pralor Ship on Lycavore was still nearly intact. The Pralors on that ship integrated into the Lycavorian population over the many centuries." Yuri met his eyes. "The Commander of that Pralor ship is Martin Leonidas's direct descendant. He has to be. My mother's notes referred to him as Sumar. My mother's notes were accurate, albeit very much filled with hatred and anger. She eluded to this in several areas of her journals."

Lidene's eyes grew a little wider. "Then he... then he would have known how to operate the ship! Maybe... maybe not directly or how... but he would have known."

"And don't forget the Avatar." Yuri spoke. "He was this Sumar's Avatar. He was never far from his side and if the journals and logs are accurate... this Avatar would retain everything from his time with Sumar."

Lidene looked at her. "Princess... would it be possible... could I review these journals?" He asked. "The ones that are not..."

Yuri looked at him. "Lidene... that is an excellent idea!" She spoke. "She was very meticulous in logging them. Anything having to do with the Pralors or their technology I will make sure get to you."

Lidene smiled excited. "They may be the keys to truly beginning to understand this technology Princess."

Yuri nodded. "I agree. What about small arms Lidene?" Yuri asked.

“I have a small team on that.” Lidene said. “I thought you only wanted ship data and did not bring that with me.”

Yuri shook her head. “That is fine. Small arms are not a priority right now. You can brief me later on that. Do you need anything to help in your research?”

Lidene met her eyes. “Princess... my team... we...”

Yuri stepped closer to him. “Professor Lidene... I have absolutely no intention of using this data or anything you create in order to conquer or oppress. Would you rather it had fallen into the hands of Admiral Moran?”

“Certainly not! He was a savage and vile...” Lidene stopped with wide eyes and looked at her.

Yuri chuckled at his expression. “Have no fear Professor... in that regard we have similar feelings towards my former husband.” Yuri shook her head. “I give you my word... for what it is worth I know... but I give you my word nothing that you create will be used to subjugate any species.”

“Then... if you don’t mind me asking... why develop it?” Lidene asked.

“So that if... if we need to defend what all of us regard as sacred to us... I want to be able to do that to the best of my ability.” Yuri answered. “You have free reign to proceed how you see fit Lidene. No one will watch over you or demand you build something we have not already agreed too. You answer to no one but myself and Pa'cour.”

“There is something you are not telling me.” Lidene said.

Yuri nodded. “Yes there is... and when I discover what it is myself Lidene... you will be among the first to know.”

“Ah... very good!” Lidene said.

Yuri smiled. “Was there something else?” She asked.

Lidene shook his head. “Don’t like the new group much.” He said. “They seem rather... odd... if you get my meaning.”

Yuri nodded. “Yes I do Lidene. I’ll take care of it.”

“Good. Good. Couple of them were downright scary. I’ll get back to work and let you know of anything new.”

Yuri watched him scamper across his lab towards a group of three other researchers as Ma'dur came up beside her.

“Princess... forgive me my boldness... but this man?” Ma'dur said. “He does not seem to be...”

“All there?” Yuri asked with a smile.

“Yes.” Ma'dur answered.

“He isn’t.” Yuri said. “But he is still the most brilliant man I have ever met with the possible exception of one.” She replied. “Come... let’s use Lidene’s office and check with Quellian before we meet this new group. Given that Lidene mentioned it... I doubt very much it is coincidence.”

“...recommended them?” the Kochab in the transmission snapped defensively. “I haven’t recommended anyone to you in the last three weeks Princess. You know that.” He spoke. “And I certainly would not have told them to meet with you on Jagalir. That spaceport is a cesspool for vermin of every species and it goes against the agreement we made.”

Yuri turned slowly in the chair as his smaller image moved within the office he was occupying on Nebonese. “I gathered as much Quellian.”

The Kochab looked at her evenly in the transmission. “Yuri...” He spoke forgoing her title to let her know he was serious. “We have done business for over ten years. Have I ever misled or lied to you in that time?”

Yuri leaned forward in the chair. “Forgive my lack of inflection Quellian.” She stated quickly. “No Quellian... you have never done any such thing, unlike many who choose to occupy themselves in a similar field as you. You have nothing to fear my friend... not from me. A trust that I hope is mutual?”

Quellian nodded instantly. “It is. Very much so. And it has been for some years now. I hope I have proven that.”

Yuri nodded. "You have more than proven that Quellian. I am troubled by who would direct these individuals however."

"I won't be doing any such thing in the future." Quellian spoke. "Not after you have gone and had a change of heart. Not to mention that walking mountain you now call your Blessed Husband."

Yuri chuckled. "Pa'cour is rather large isn't he?" She said. "I never doubted you Quellian but we needed to be sure." She leaned forward. "Can you find out anything about them or who might be volunteering information in regards to me?"

Quellian nodded his head. "I'll put some feelers out and check my own people to make sure they aren't talking about things they shouldn't be." He told her. "No promises though. Only someone very brave or very stupid would come after you now."

Yuri's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

"The contract that maniac Lycavorian Prince put on you has been removed yes, but not the one by your former husband." Quellian said.

"Robert has put a contract on me?" Yuri said almost casually. "That is so like him. And Androcles Leonidas is no maniac... be assured of that."

"Yes well... it's causing quite the confusing situation." Quellian said.

"How so?" Yuri asked.

"It seems that when the young wolf Prince you angered changed his mind and removed the bounty on your head... he also implied it would not be in the best interests of anyone who continued to pursue the contract." Quellian told her.

Yuri's dark eyes were wide. "He ordered that?" She gasped.

Quellian shook his head. "Not openly no. He implied it however, as I said. Given what has occurred recently within the Lycavorian Union and here in The Wilds, not to mention his display on the Union's Netnews Channels, there are very few who are willing to cross him due to his propensity for obliterating things. He has developed the reputation of being exceptionally unforgiving towards those who harbor ill-will towards him or members of his family. I give you the Icalro Alliance as an example. The survivors of that debacle are still wandering in and all of them are babbling about invisible ships that blew that fledging government into oblivion. Scum though they may have been." Quellian stopped moving within the transmission. "That is why I said they are either very brave or very stupid to come after you. None of the usual sources will even touch the contract put out by your delightful former husband. I must say though... while your Immortal is overly large... he is definitely a vast improvement Yuri. I find myself liking this part of you far more than the old one."

Yuri smiled warmly. "As do I Quellian, as do I. And thank you for your words. I happen to agree with them most vigorously. I will send the remainder of our list to you before we depart tomorrow. That should give you ample time to gather what you are able. We will see you on Nebonese in four days."

The Kochab nodded. "Until then." He said.

Yuri looked at Ma'dur as the transmission ended. "Thoughts?" She asked.

"This Kochab speaks to you with more familiarity than I like Princess, but it seems his information is accurate. We must tell Pa'cour about this contract." Ma'dur stated. "This contract by Robert Moran is not something we knew about."

Yuri nodded her head. "Oh... I will tell him." She said quickly. "You said there were two of them among the group that recently arrived?"

Ma'dur nodded. "Knowing what Quellian has told us now... I believe the rest are also just scum that they hired to cover themselves."

Yuri got to her feet. "Indeed. I tend to agree with you. Robert was never very inventive in his actions. In or out of our bed." She said.

Ma'dur did not meet her eyes out of respect but he chuckled softly nonetheless. "It is truly good to see that your eyes have been opened Princess."

Yuri nodded with a smile. "I agree." She said. "As for our guests... see to it that all of them are eliminated except for our two special guests Ma'dur. Them... I want them interrogated until there is little left to gain from them. I do not care how it is done."

"And then?" Ma'dur asked.

Yuri met his eyes. “Then give their remains to the animals that live around our mountain. They need to eat as well.” She told him coldly.

Ma'dur smiled a positively evil smile. “I will see to it.”

SOLMAR SYSTEM
FEBRUARY 7TH, 0729 HRS, EST
ULU SCIMITAR STRIKE WING
BATTLE OF SOLMAR
DAY ONE

They had been warned.

Azlenr had fought with the same fleet for a dozen years and he knew the overall Task Force commander. A man who was a bit rough around the edges and who thought highly of Keleru, but a man who knew his business nonetheless. Azlenr had warned him to keep his guard up after his conversation with Androcles Leonidas. The Lycavorian Prince was well known for being a tactical expert and willing to use very unorthodox in order to win. The Admiral had listened to Azlenr's warning and when their communication ended he promptly dismissed it. He was secure in the knowledge that they had more than enough ships in the system to handle even a full scale assault. He was also confident that should the need arise, reinforcements were not far away.

He was wrong on both counts.

No reinforcements would be coming, but not because they were not available. They would not be coming because they had been ordered to stand down.

And no matter his experience... the Kavalian Task Force Commander had only fought High Coven up until this day. He was used to having High Coven forces fight a defensive battle and quickly move out of the area after one or two volleys of their weapons. He had never fought a dedicated force of men and women from multiple species, all with the same enduring will to win.

When the ten *MOONLANCER B*-Class Battlecruisers dropped from LSD operation on the edge of the planetary system, the reaction of the Kavalian crews was slow and wrought with surprise at the appearance of Union capital ships. The *MOONLANCER Bs* were well out of the range of any Kavalian weapon and the Task Force commander sent word off to Azlenr that they were turning to meet Union ships. He ordered fighters launched from the six *GREAT SOULs* under his command and then he ordered fully half his *DIATAGAs* and *DIMERUs* to move to engage the ships. He gave the orders with confidence and more than a little arrogance and he walked directly into the careful trap Sa'sur had laid.

The *MOONLANCER*-Class Battlecruiser had originally been designed as a carrier of fighters to support the *LEONIDAS I*-Strike Cruisers. With the introduction of the *LEONIDAS II* their role had changed significantly and then with the advent of the *ARIZONA*-Class the older ship found its niche. Fifty of the enormous ships had undergone a swift refit, dispensing with much of the aircraft and hanger deck items needed to sustain fighters. In place of fighters, the *B* variant now sported one hundred M22A Missile Batteries, broken into ten separate launchers. Five of the massive batteries deployed along each enormous wing of the *MOONLANCER B*, each launcher with ten individual tubes. Three stretched across the top of each wing, two under each wing, giving the ship a decidedly ugly appearance. That appearance however, did not take away from the role of the *MOONLANCER B* in any way. As if on some unheard order, the moment the Kavalian ships turned to meet them, each *MOONLANCER B* opened up with every missile in its bays. Designed for a sustained bombardment of almost twenty minutes before its magazines ran dry, in the space of just four seconds, one thousand M22A ZMF were launched directly at the oncoming Kavalian ships. As the last missile left its launcher, five of the huge ships broke to the right and five to the left, each of them defying Kavalian reports that they were nothing more than lumbering behemoths. And each going through it's two minute reload cycle just as fast as their crews and computers could go. None of them wanted to be left out of the battle ahead.

The Kavalian Task Force commander, a man by the name of Gordna, came out of his chair with stunned eyes as his bridge crew began to scream about missiles.

“Report damn it!” He bellowed. “Give me a report!”

“Incoming missiles Admiral!” The sensor operator shouted. “Tracking a thousand of them! Unknown type!”

Gordna’s eyes grew even wider. “A thousand!” He gasped.

“It’s hard to track them! They have some sort of stealth profile!”

“Targeting on our *DIATAGAs* and *DIMERUs*!”

“Union ships breaking away!”

Gordna went to the closest tactical station on the bridge of his *GREAT SOUL*. “Order evasive!” He screamed. “Order our ships to start evasive maneuvers! Break contact!”

“Most of the missiles appear to be locked on already Admiral!” The operator barked.

Gordna was a man of emotion, as all Kavalians were. The emotion foremost in his mind right now was anger and he turned to watch as the larger tactical holo image showed the Union ships breaking away but not retreating out of the system. It was then that he made his second tactical error and doomed his Task Force forever.

“Don’t let them escape!” He snarled. “Second Echelon of *DIEROYs* move to engage the missile ships! Destroy them! Order all fighters to concentrate on them! Have our *DIATAGAs* and *DIMERUs* engage the missiles targeted on them! Form into groups and concentrate their point defenses!”

“Admiral... the missiles will impact in twenty-six seconds!” The operator gasped. “They can not...”

“DO IT!” Gordna roared. “Helm... come to course four seven nine three point two!” He moved back to his command chair. “I will show these Union dogs who is the superior fighter here! Power forward batteries and target the closest Union ship!”

It was a bold move and had the ten *MOONLANCER Bs* been the only threat, a move that would have no doubt succeeded as he brought his *GREAT SOUL* and its superior firepower to bear on the missile ships. There was only one flaw with his plan, and it was a flaw that would cost him his life. The *MOONLANCERs* were the bait. And if you wanted to live, you never took the bait in an ambush.

**SCIMITAR STRIKE GROUP
KINDRED SOUL GROUP ATTACHED
HOLDING OUTSIDE SOLMAR PLANETARY SYSTEM**

“... That’s it Captain!” The Tactical Officer barked out from his station as he turned to look at where Sa'sur stood with Sadi, Ne'Veha, Jomann and Vengal. “The Kavalian Task Force has committed!”

Sa'sur smiled a predatory smile as she came to her feet from her command chair. “Stupid fucking Kavalians! Always thinking with their cocks!” She muttered hotly under her breath drawing a large grin from Sadi and Ne'Veha. “Signal the Strike Group! Prepare to jump into the system! Execute Plan Omega Four Three!” She barked out the orders. “Strike Wing Bravo to cover the *KINDRED SOUL* until she breaches the atmosphere! Wings Charlie and Delta to maneuver and engage. We are going straight for that fool Kavalian!”

“We’ll launch and follow Bravo and the *KINDRED SOUL* to the surface Sa'sur.” Sadi spoke. “General Vengal will assume overall command while General Washington and Colonel Mosont deploy and secure our position.”

“Andro and Dorian have already begun to stage and move the civilians they have to this area. Once we are secure, we’ll begin shuttling them up to the fleet.” Vengal spoke.

Sa'sur nodded. “We’ll keep the skies clear.” She spoke confidently. “I already have three fighter groups ready to deploy and escort from the surface. Captain Patton is going to be really pushing the *KINDRED SOUL* at a steep angle so remain back from his wake.”

Sadi and Ne'Veha nodded. “We will.” Ne'Veha answered.

Sa'sur nodded. “Alright... let’s do this.” She said.

Sadi nodded her head and knew then why Sa'sur and Andro had been such a success as a pair. Separately they could and did motivate and drive people around them forward. Together commanding the

SCIMITAR, they drove men and women to greatness that few, save the crew of *MJOLNIR'S HAND* and Riall's ship, could surpass.

Sadi looked at Ne'Veha. "Come *SirsanGai*." She spoke taking her hand. "Our mate calls to us."

Jomann and Vengal fell in behind them silently as they left the bridge and Sa'sur couldn't help but grin as she turned back to her Combat Display. She looked over at her Tactical Officer. "Andro's going to need to do some serious body worshipping to get rid of the anger they have at him." She said.

The female elf chuckled and nodded her head in agreement. "I think he is up to the task Captain. And I don't believe they are as angry as they like everyone to think."

Sa'sur nodded. "No doubt!" She agreed and turned to face the main portion of her bridge. "Ok people! Twenty seconds! Get ready!"

ULU KINDRED SOUL WASP-CLASS ASSAULT CRUISER

She stood looking at the men and women of her command and could not feel anything but confident pride. They stretched back as far as she could see along this deployment section of their Drop Pods.

Colonel Josephine Miller. Commander of the Second Brigade, 82nd Cataphract Division, United Lycavorian Union military. The "Rabid Dogs" as they were affectionately referred to by other officers within the division. Josephine Miller, or Josie as she preferred unless you cared to have your teeth rattling around your mouth for calling her Josephine, was pound for pound as hard as they came. Her five foot seven body was a hundred and twenty-six pounds of chiseled muscle and bone. There was no body fat on her tanned frame whatsoever, yet she retained her feminine appeal because of the shape of her incredible ass and her firm, medium sized breasts. She had joined the Union military at seventeen, ten years after Earth was freed and one of a wave of volunteers that joined in the years after the Battle for Earth twenty eight years ago. She was quickly chosen for officer's school after her basic training because of her drive and intense charisma and the powers that be wanted human officers who could motivate and lead. At only nineteen years of age, almost ten years to the day after the end of the Battle for Earth, she found herself graduating from a shortened Officer's Training School and thrust into command of a platoon. Her history and reputation only grew from there.

Josie Miller was one of only nine human officers to lead forces during the Evolli war and one of only three in command of Union units during the Battle of Alba Tau. Her joint human and Drow scout unit had seen extensive action across that jungle hellhole of a planet and it was the cause of the single long scar that now decorated her face. A thin three and a half inch long scar from the end of an Evolli blade that ran from just below her left eye to just beneath her jaw. It was a wound that had grown infected before she was able to reach one of the Hadarian Healers, and while they could have removed any trace of a scar, Josie chose to keep it as a reminder of what happen on that planet. Josie Miller was not a woman to be trifled with as many had learned over the years. Her father, a General of Earth forces, worked closely with War Master Tareif and General Lynwe. The defense of Earth and all they had built from the ruins was foremost in their minds. Josie had beaten down many who had challenged her or her form of command, and she had the distinct label as the only human officer to ever tell a visiting alien dignitary to go fuck himself.

Josie lifted her hand and looked at the new Cataphract armor she and all her troops wore. Ten years of research had gone into the development of the Cataphract Armor and the finished product was about to get its baptism under fire. The Cataphract armor was special. A flexible layer of ArmorPly against the wearer's body, a Ducorsis weave on top of that layer, and finally a combination of Dragon Armor and Crystanium combined in a mixture that made it both light and incredibly durable. Within each layer of the armor were microfilaments that monitored the body of each wearer and served as an exoskeleton of sorts. The body armor made the wearer naturally stronger and faster and able to endure on the battlefield far longer than the normal human. Charles Taylor had been screaming for years about getting the humans involved more in the military portion of the Union's defense. He wanted humans to carry their own weight, and after years of research Ben O'Connor had delivered. Josie flexed her hand, feeling the added power in her grasp and the sense of accomplishment the armor gave to her. She looked up finally and glanced at the grizzled Sergeant Major who had been at her side

for nearly a decade now. He nodded, holding both her helmet and his under his arms. Josie nodded back to him and climbed up onto the stack of ammunition crates.

“Listen up you Rabid Dogs!” She bellowed. Her voice carried over the distance only so far, but the implants they all wore insured even those in the back rows heard her. “This is it! The Kavalians have taken the bait and in two minutes we’re jumping into the shit!” Josie let her eyes sweep across the gathered men and women. “Many of you have been with me for a while so the same shit applies! For you new people... listen up! President Taylor and the King have been working towards this day for over ten years! The day when humans finally announced to the stars that we are here to stand up for what the Union means! The Lycavorians and the Elves have carried us for too long! Now we have the ability to carry our own weight out here! Now we show everyone that we can kick their ass just as well on the ground as Admiral Lorian does in the stars!”

Josie smiled when that comment got a rousing round of proud roars of approval. Miranda Lorian had become somewhat of an icon among the humans within the Union military. Her accomplishments showed everyone that humans could be just as important as anyone else.

“We got this armor... but it doesn’t make up for what we have in our heads and hearts!” Josie continued. “That is what drives us! The King and President Taylor never gave up on us and now it’s time to show them their faith wasn’t in vain! You all know the plan... once we are groundside... 1st Brigade and my command group link up with Colonel Mosont and a brigade of *Durcunusaan*! We secure their LZ since we are gonna be groundside first!” This brought even louder cheering from her people and Josie glanced back to where the Lycavorian commander of the *Durcunusaan* division stood with another. He smiled at her before she turned back. “The Kavalians have killed civilians! Innocent civilians who it’s our job to protect and defend! Now we get payback for them and get the rest of them offworld!” She shifted her form on the crates. “If it’s Kavalian... kill it with extreme prejudice! We don’t take prisoners on this Op! Not unless the word comes down! This is where we shine! President Taylor and King Leonidas worked hard at getting humans back into the thick of things, and this armor does it. But as the King says... if you break it, you buy it. And at twenty million riyal per suit... your ass will be in the military for a long time paying it back!”

That comment brought laughter now, cutting away the pre-combat tension that had been hanging over them.

“We are not invincible! Keep your wits about you! For you new people... listen to those who have seen combat before! Take what they say to heart! It may just save your ass and I don’t write letters very well!” Josie exclaimed. “You die on me... I’ll haunt your sorry ass for the rest of your spirit living fucking life!” Josie grinned at the wide eyes and stunned expressions she saw among the many new faces. They would be looked after by the older members of her Brigade she knew. “Maintain your spacing during the Drop! Stay with your platoons and companies and don’t over compensate on your Pod’s controls! And if you happen to land on top of one of those furry bastards, once you blow your hatch, bend over and introduce yourself! Right before you blow their sorry ass into the next life!” Josie turned to her Sergeant Major. “Sergeant Major... let’s do this!”

The man nodded and looked at the gathered men and women. “Alright you rabid dogs! Man your pods! Drop your socks and grab your cocks and pussies! It’s time to go to war!”

Josie chuckled as she stepped off the crate and moved over to her command group. She stared at Mosont for a long moment and he finally smiled. “Inspiring speech.” Mosont spoke.

“Don’t jerk my chain!” Josie snapped as she stepped up to him. “I don’t like being a puppet! Why are we being assigned to you?”

Mosont shook his head quickly. “You misunderstand your purpose Colonel Miller.” He said. “You are not being assigned to me. I asked General Washington for the best Brigade within the 82nd. There is no second fiddle here. The reason for my request is quite simple. I needed the best. The Kavalians on the surface have no doubt been made aware of our ambush by now and they will soon see our ships jumping into the system. They know the Prince is on the surface. He will need to break his Shroud based ground cover to get the civilians to the *KINDRED SOUL*. When he does that... every Kavalian on three continents will know where he is. They will drive right for him. Which is exactly what he wants them to do.”

Josie nodded her head. “Get the civilians off with all the attention focused on him.” She said.

Mosont nodded. “You see now why I requested you. Our two brigades are going to be moving directly from the LZ to his location in order to reinforce him. I do not want to be delayed by petty Kavalian forces. We destroy anything that gets in our way. Something I am to understand you do quite well.”

Josie grinned. "That's been said about me... yeah." She said.

"This is not an easy mission Colonel Miller... and I have the utmost respect for what you have accomplished. I commend you." Mosont said. "I basically want someone who I do not need to babysit. That is you." Mosont motioned to the Lycavorian next to him. "Allow me to introduce *Dilochites* Lemios. He will act as your liaison to me. There are times when radio communication will be spotty at best. He can Mindvoice me with any ideas or orders you feel necessary if the radios are not working. He's also fully drop qualified."

The Lycavorian was easily over six foot and his helmet hid most of his features but Josie looked at those piercing green eyes and saw no fear. He was a Lycavorian and she knew of very few who were afraid of anything. He bowed his head to her slightly. "It will be an honor to work with you Colonel." He spoke.

"You might regret saying that." Josie quipped.

The large Lycavorian shrugged his shoulders. "We shall see." He said. "But I sincerely doubt it."

Mosont held out his hand to her and Josie took it. "Good luck Colonel. May the gods guide your actions and I will see you on the ground."

Josie nodded. "Same to you." She said. She watched him turn and walk away and then her eyes went to Lemios. "Let's find you a pod..." She spoke. "We drop in six and a half minutes."

SOLMAR ANDROCLES'S TAC BASE

"... them in tight!" Andro's voice carried over the din of hundreds of men and women moving into the ships as quickly and safely as they could. He stood near the end of the ramp up in to the *KADEN* transport, a small Bontawillian girl in one arm as he ushered others forward with his free arm. Aleatia stood silently on the ramp of the *STRIKER* not far away with Harira and Kelelm watching him, Harira's eyes wide. "No one gets left behind!" They heard him yell above the sound of hundreds of feet.

"What is happening?" She asked having just this moment caught up to where Aleatia was.

Kelelm looked at her. "The assault has begun." He stated more calmly than he felt, but in the few short hours he had been among them, Kelelm was still filled with confidence and pride at what they had accomplished so far. "Union ships have entered the system and begun their attack against this Kavalian fleet. They are preparing to move the civilians to the staging area that reinforcing ground units will secure roughly four kilometers from here near the beach."

Ibani and Osbela came rushing up to them as well now. "Mother!" Ibani declared.

Aleatia looked at them and reached for their hands. "The Union attack has started." She told them. "We will be leaving shortly."

"Where is Sehri?" Osbela asked quickly.

Aleatia turned her head back to where the civilians were loading the *KADEN* and their eyes followed, seeing Sehri come moving back down the ramp of the *KADEN* and right up to where Andro was standing. He didn't hesitate and held out the small child for her to take. As Sehri scooped her into her arms, Andro moved to an elderly Bontawillian woman who was struggling to keep up with the rush of bodies and he lifted her into his arms without pause. He and Sehri immediately turned to go back into the *KADEN* as the woman in Andro's arms hugged him in happiness and relief.

"You see the way they look at him." Aleatia said softly. "With reverence in their eyes. It is how they look upon Sehri now as well. Just for being with him."

"You need to have her come with us Lady Aleatia." Harira spoke moving up to her. "She cannot remain here!"

"She's right mother!" Ibani insisted.

Aleatia smiled. "At this juncture... there is very little I would be able to force your sister to do." She stated.

"She is the youngest!" Osbela snapped. "She must listen to you!"

Aleatia smiled. "I don't think it is up to us any longer." She stated. She looked at Kelelm. "Is it my son?"

Kelelm shook his head. "No. The battle is already set in motion." He stated. "Once we receive word that Androcles's forces have secured their objectives, these ships with the civilians will leave. The Kavalians will undoubtedly detect where they came from and descend upon this area in overwhelming force."

"What?!" Harira gasped. "Kelelm... you are sure?"

Kelelm nodded. "It is a sound tactic. We will have revealed our position and the Kavalian leadership will be under the mistaken impression that killing Androcles will bring victory. At least that is the path they have followed so far."

Harira looked at Aleatia. "Lady Aleatia... then we need to be on one of those ships!" She rasped.

Aleatia looked at her. "You see these people Harira?" Aleatia said. "Different from us though they may be... it is obvious they are in no position to fend for themselves. I will not take the spot of one of them to protect myself."

"This is not our fight!" Harira exclaimed. "Dyack would agree with me and send you away!"

Aleatia shook her head. "Do not presume to know what my husband and mate would do better than I Shaman Master Harira." She spoke in a low, harsh voice. "Dyack would not place innocents in harm's way to save himself or any of us, though he would surely want too."

"This is not our fight!" Harira repeated her statement.

"That is where you are wrong Shaman Master." Kelelm spoke. "This is our fight. It became our fight the moment that we discovered part of our history with these men and women. We are Lycavorian... just as they are."

"We are Rothryn!" Harira hissed.

Kelelm smiled at her. "And what is a Rothryn Shaman Master Harira? A Lycavorian that simply cannot change their form. That is the only difference between us and it is certainly not enough of a difference for me to turn my back on everything that we have discovered since embarking on this trip."

Aleatia nodded. "Well spoken my son." She said. "There is so much more for us to learn. And I know Dyack would want us to learn it all."

Harira shook her head. "You must keep Sehri close by at least!" She snapped. "She is part of the Circle of Shamans! You cannot let her put herself at risk with this... this Androcles."

Aleatia grinned. "I have no control over that at this point." She answered.

"Mother!" Osbela exclaimed.

Aleatia looked at her daughter. "I know we had hoped something would happen between Androcles and you or Ibani, but that is not going to be the case Osbela. I'm sorry." She turned back to look at Androcles at the top of the ramp as he set the older woman down with extreme gentleness and let her shower his cheeks with kisses of gratitude. "With what I have discovered over the last few hours talking with Androcles... there is nothing that will alter your sister's path now. A path she walks with great happiness and hope."

"... Is everyone Milord." The Bontawillian spoke to Andro at the bottom of the ramp of the *KADEN*.

Andro nodded his head. "Keep everyone calm Councilman Chael." He said. "When the word comes for the ship to take off... it will be quick."

The Bontawillian nodded his head. "Milord Prince... what you have done here? It cannot be..."

Andro shook his head now. "What I have done is my duty."

Chael nodded and reached out to take Andro's free hand. Sehri clutched his other hand tightly. He looked at her now as well and took her free hand in his. "May I... may I assume this is...?"

Andro looked at Sehri with bright azure eyes and then back to him. He nodded his head. "Yes." He said.

Chael smiled. "Princess Sadi... Princess Ne'Veha... the others and now this shining light Milord." He spoke. "The gods of the mountains truly look upon you with their blessings that you discover and claim such strong women."

"I'll agree with that." Andro spoke.

Chael reached up and placed his palm to Sehri's cheek. "The blessings and thanks of my people go with you Princess." He said. "With both of you."

Andro and Sehri watched as he turned and quickly made his way up the ramp into the *KADEN* as it began to close. Sehri looked at Andro.

“He called... he called me Princess.” She said in a soft, disbelieving voice.

Andro smiled and drew her close to him with one arm. Sehri didn't hesitate and wrapped her arms around his waist with a bright smile. “That is what you will be if you choose.” He told her.

“It is Androcles.” Sehri answered him, her eyes never leaving his face as she looked up at him with confidence and desire. “More... more than anything.”

Andro leaned over and captured her lips with his surprising her with the intensity of the kiss. Sehri returned the kiss with equal passion, feeling the heat within her veins because of her fever grow even hotter at her desire for this powerful Alpha wolf holding her. Not until she had come into her Coming of Age fever had her wolf instincts and blood surged so powerfully to the forefront within her and she knew it was because of the wildness she smelled and sensed within Androcles. He pulled away reluctantly after a long moment but not before leaning over more and firmly nuzzling the ridge of her ear and causing delicious shivers of enchantment to race through her. “Come... we will make contact with *KertaGai* and the others. They will be making their approach soon and we need to get this over with soon.”

Sehri looked at him oddly with adoring eyes as his touch only added to the overwhelming craving she had for him and the women she had yet to meet. “Why? Isn't it... isn't it better to be safe.”

Andro smiled at her. “Because your scent is driving me mad and no doubt it will do the same to Sadi and the others when they arrive. I'm going to kick the Kavalians ass so that we can get you back to my ship and have our way with you.”

Sehri felt a warm sexual flush surge through her at his words and she pressed her body closer to his, feeling so very beautiful and confident with the way he spoke and looked at her. “You... you are very confident Androcles Leonidas.” She cooed to him.

Andro smiled and his azure eyes grew even brighter as he looked at her. “I know what your scent makes me feel. What it will make Sadi, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria feel because they are also wolf. I know what it will make Carisia feel because we are tied so tightly together within Mindvoice. I hope you are prepared Sehri... we will love you senseless.”

Sehri smiled as well, her face lighting up. “I think I will... I will savor that forever.” She said.

Andro smiled and took her hand and they headed for the *STRIKER*.

SOLMAR KAVALIAN BASE CAMP SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT

“...hitting our fleet hard!” The Kavalian tech monitoring the battle above shouted across the command room. Azlenr didn't respond to him as he stormed into his command center with Byka right behind him. “They are taking heavy damage!”

“They outnumber the Union fleet!” Azlenr almost screamed.

“They caught Admiral Gordna unprepared!” The man answered.

Azlenr snarled his anger. “More than likely they caught him fucking one of his slave girls!” He growled. “Insure all ground batteries are alert and prepared to repel any assault of this base that comes!” Azlenr snarled as he strode across the command center. “And get me a link to the Prefect!”

His COM officer turned and shook his head. “Communications is jammed General!” He reported. “We can't even talk with the ships in orbit! It began the moment the missile ships were detected! It is unlike any jamming I have ever seen! Nothing but white noise and complete silence on all channels!”

Azlenr looked at Byka and he nodded. “Just like at Kranek.” He said softly. “Reports say they never got a warning off before they were obliterated.”

“Have all air assets prepare for a mobile assault!” Azlenr snapped turning back to his men. “This fool Prince will have to reveal his location at some point before they begin landing troops and I want to be able to smash him into oblivion when he does! Have Major Marsin join us in my office when he gets here! Byka!”

Azlenr motioned him to follow and he turned and marched into the room that used to be the office and quarters for the Bontawillian Security Chief. Azlenr turned and waited for the door to shut before he reached out and locked it electronically. Byka looked at him oddly as he turned and moved to the makeshift desk that had been set up.

“Azlenr... what is going on?” Byka asked. “The Union is attacking in force! We need to respond! They must have troops they are going to land!”

Azlenr nodded. “No doubt.” He stated looking at his friend. “How long have we served together Byka?”

“Nearly three hundred years now.” Byka answered instantly moving closer. “And I know when something is wrong. What is it?”

Azlenr held out the data pad to him. “Read this.” He said.

Byka reached out with a puzzled expression and took the pad. He pulled it back and began to read silently, his eyes narrowing and growing dark as he read. All he needed was thirty seconds and he looked up.

“Where did you get this?” He snapped.

“The where does not matter at the moment does it” Azlenr said. “Do you think it is possible Byka?”

“Azlenr I...” Byka began.

“I asked you a question old friend. We have never held back from each other even in the worst of times when we have stood side by side against vampire forces.” Azlenr spoke again stopping his words. “Do you think it is possible?”

Byka looked at the pad once more before looking up and meeting Azlenr’s eyes. “Up... up until two years ago I would have said no.” He stated evenly.

Azlenr knew immediately what he meant. “What happen with Kameka?” He said.

Byka nodded his head. “I saw the way Keleru handled that.” He stated. “Nothing was done to Marsin. What he allowed Kameka to do afterwards, to become a pilot; it was only done as some sort of retribution. A ploy to appease the Pride leaders who support him but are more liberal and modern in their thinking.”

Azlenr nodded. “A view that more and more of our younger Pride leaders are beginning to share.”

Byka moved closer to him. “Where did you get this Azlenr?” He asked. “If Marsin’ Jiate discovers you have this he would be within his rights as Puma Bane Commander to arrest you and question you.”

Azlenr nodded. “Yes he would.” He replied. He turned and moved to the small counter and poured two glasses of the Bontawillian juice they had discovered upon taking the colony. “I was with the prisoner.” He explained as he turned around. “The vampire. His name is Robaran.”

Byka took the offered glass. “The prisoner? Why?”

Azlenr sipped the juice. “I wanted... I wanted to question him about this Androcles Leonidas.” He answered. “Perhaps find out how he thinks. Did you know that when a vampire takes the blood of someone, not a victim, but someone they care for, it develops a bond between them? A bond within what they call Mindvoice.”

Byka shook his head. “I never stopped to speak with any vampire long enough to ask such questions.” He answered.

Azlenr nodded his head. “Neither did I.” He said. “Until this Robaran. He is unlike the vampires we are so accustom too from the High Coven. There is no arrogance within his voice or his demeanor. He even referred to me as sir on a number of occasions.”

Byka shook his head. “I’m not following you Azlenr.”

Azlenr set the glass of juice down on the desk. “He is to be married to a female elf. She is on this planet as we speak among the Prince’s forces. She was given a message to pass to him within this Mindvoice. A message from Prince Androcles to me. This information was found by Union commandos on the commander of the northern settlement Byka. They were not able to decrypt all of it... but enough to know what the body of the message intends.”

Byka moved closer to him. “The prisoner gave you this?” He gasped. “You believe him? And why would the Lycavorian Prince send this after what he said in the transmission?”

Azlenr met his eyes. “What do you think my friend?” He asked. “Could what he says be true?”

“Azlenr that is crazy!” Byka spoke. “The Prefect could never hope to accomplish that and get away with it!” Byka looked at him. “Could he?”

“Why not?” Azlenr asked. “The Puma Bane Troops belong to him. To a man they would do whatever he commanded of them. He has warned us both in the past we allow too much freedom and control to our clones and he does not approve of it. That our men are loyal to us and not to the Imperium as a whole. Not to him. He has over three thousand of his Puma Bane troops on this operation alone. Why send so many?”

“We are successful!” Byka hissed. “We are successful because we grant this to our clone troops! And they fight harder and longer! They trust us!”

Azlenr nodded. “Yes... and that is what he sees as wrong.” He turned and moved to the window. “This entire operation felt wrong from the start Byka.” He said softly. “So close to the Union border. A Bontawillian colony and not Lycavorian. Innocents and not soldiers. And then there is Marsin. The man who scarred your daughter. A man who insists on killing innocents even when he is told they took no part in the death of his men. Why send him when he has so many other Puma Bane Commanders?” Azlenr turned and looked at Byka. “Up until an hour ago I was blind Byka... now... every nerve ending and combat sense that I have is standing at attention. And not because of the Union forces.”

“So you... you believe this information?” Byka asked.

“I believe that it is no coincidence that Marsin was chosen to be on this operation and not someone else.” Azlenr told him. “You heard Keleru yourself Byka. He didn’t care that there were civilian casualties. It didn’t faze him. Even after we told him that civilians were not responsible. That ought to tell you something old friend.”

Byka looked away for a long moment then turned back to him. “Azlenr... could what this vampire said... about the attack on their offices that killed children... could it be true?” He asked.

“I don’t know.” Azlenr spoke. “I will tell you this though... the more I learn... the more I believe he will do anything to gain more power.”

“Even target innocents?” Byka asked. “Children? Doing this would start a war with even the most docile of species! Against Lycavorians who value their females and children so... it is insanity!”

“Many of our comrades do not view the lives of innocents as we do Byka.” Azlenr said. “Another reason the Prefect does not care for us.”

Byka shook his head. “This is... it is all so outrageous!” He exclaimed. He looked at him. “What do you intend to do?”

“I mean to send Marsin and his Puma Bane troops after this Androcles when he reveals his location.” Azlenr spoke. It will be the only chance we have to stop the Union assault. If we kill him before they begin to land troops they may just retreat.”

Byka looked at him. “And if not?”

“Then you make sure that you do what you have wanted to do to Marsin for many years.” Azlenr spoke. “Give his life to Kameka. Remove him and the remainder of his men will fall in line enough to repel the Union attack and give us time to determine what is going on and what our future holds.”

“If any of this is true... if any of this is true my friend... our future may not be extending past our actions on this planet.” Byka said softly.

“I will not allow the Lycavorians to slaughter our men for actions which we neither agree with or would have supported.” Azlenr spat. “This also makes me wonder how many of our people actually know how this stupid war began! We had enough problems battling the High Coven!”

“And now they are aligned with the Union.” Byka said shaking his head. “Events have not worked out as I imagined.”

“Do they ever?” Azlenr said. He turned back to the window. “Choose your finest scout team Byka.” He said turning back. “Insure they have secure communications that the Union has not already jammed. Give them a *LEUGERS* and send them to Nebonese. Have them use the planet has cover to escape the Union ships. You have spies there you can trust yes? Men who will not be tainted by the information Keleru tells our people?”

Byka nodded. “Yes. Why?”

“Tell them to find out what the truth is Byka.” Azlenr stated firmly. “What this vampire Robaran has told me? It is almost too fantastic to believe.” Azlenr looked at him evenly. “Tell them to find out if we started this war to fuel the Prefect and Marshall Pusintin’s craving for power and their hatred of the Union. Tell them to find out if we started this war by killing children Byka.”

TALISMAN
PRALOR VECTOR-CLASS ATTACK CRUISER
ON COURSE FOR ONTEROM

Nearly two and a half kilometers long, the *VECTOR*-Class Attack cruisers were one of the newest designs of Pralor engineers and the first ships they had built after they had come to live on Artaaya. Many of the surviving senior officers and military fleet personnel from the war with the Scourge had advocated smaller ships that were not simply lumbering targets for the massive and powerful Scourge *NEST*-Class Carrier ships. Without the devastating influence of the new *VORTEX*-Class Heavy cruisers, introduced far too late in the conflict to help them, the Pralor fleet could not stand against the Scourge with the few remaining heavy warships they had. Currently they had only twenty-seven of the *VECTOR*-Class warships, the center of eight different fleets made up of an assortment of different smaller warships. All of them were hiding and training within different nebulas around their star system to hide from any Scourge patrol that might possibly wander by while also remaining close enough to begin to evacuate the planet should it be necessary. More warships were being built, but at a much slower pace than many of those within the military complex liked. They feared not being able to defend Artaaya if the need arose.

Murano stood staring out of the view window of the crew's lounge on deck thirty-one of the *TALISMAN*. His hands were clasped behind his back and he stood causally, ignoring the low murmurs of the crew that occupied the lounge. Word had spread very quickly that a Praetorian still lived and that he was on their ship. Many of the younger Pralors scrambled to get a glimpse of him for they had grown up reading and studying about them in their classes. The teachers of the new generations had refused a proposed edict by some members of the Elder Convention to remove the Praetorians and their history from what was taught in the schools. The many Pralors who taught the children and had survived because of Praetorians and their actions refused and after this failed attempt the proposed edict was forgotten. The actions of the Praetorians during the First Scourge War, as well as their sacrifices in the first decades of the second war had soon elevated them to near iconic status. Being that they were thought long extinct, when it was first discovered that the Praetorian Murano, a man who had fought behind the very First Praetorian Sumar, lived and breathed and was only middle aged by Pralor standards, it sent most of the crew into a tizzy as they tried to look upon the holy Praetorian in their midst. Several of the more history oriented buffs among the crew delved into the historical archives on the ship and discovered Murano's storied history. His exploits as a young Praetorian with Sumar, the very first and most powerful of the Praetorians, were now making the rounds of the ship.

Murano allowed his eyes to simply stare off into nothing as he let his memories drift to the forefront of his mind and once more fill him with pride and strength. The charges they had led against Scourge forces during the first war. The impossible tasks that Sumar had devised and then executed with brilliance. Fighting beside him had been the honor of Murano's life. He truly cared for all those under his command and there were times when Murano had seen him weep over the bodies of fallen Praetorians. None of them questioned his skill or his purpose and every Praetorian drew from the strength of purpose that Sumar so exuded. Even though they were victorious in the end, Sumar had known the Scourge would return to exact their revenge. He made it his priority to restore the ranks of the Praetorians even as he was named Chief Elder Pralor of their people. Murano knew this was done against the will of many older Pralors who did not appreciate or agree with how Sumar did things. He was too quick to action they said, and it was his own brother, another Praetorian, who insured that the Scourge's hatred would never die. Many blamed him for Xaxon's actions and while Sumar paid these thoughts and musings no mind, they were part of the reason he chose to command City Ship Mission 4039 himself. So that he could replenish the ranks of the Praetorians with those whom he had trained with his Holy One's help.

Sumar and Wayonn were a pair talked about all over the Pralor empire at the end of the first war. Where one went, the other was never very far behind. Wayonn was more a brother to Sumar than his own blood and many believed this is what drove the two of them to greatness among the Praetorians. They personified the bond between Praetorian and Holy One. Murano and his own Holy One were much the same way. Aleia was passionate about what they did and what they were protecting and Murano drew strength from this, just as she

drew strength from his power and abilities. Aleia was long dead now, killed in one of the last Scourge attacks as they were escaping into the unknown, slashed to bloody pieces by three Scourge Warrior Elites as she was defending a small group of refugees. Dead and always remembered, just like Sumar and Wayonn.

Murano blinked slowly when those thoughts crossed his mind. The presence he felt was staggering in its power, so much so that it reminded him of Sumar and the aura he presented to all who could feel him. The presence was also darker in a way he could not place his finger on. Not in an evil sense... but wild and raw in its emotions. As if that darkness was part of the very essence of the individual. Whoever it was, he was very well trained to be able to shield his essence so completely and...

“Murano?” Delnash’s voice broke into his thoughts and he turned his head to look upon his older brother by two years.

“Delnash?” He spoke in that deep measured voice.

“You were deep in meditation Murano. Please forgive me for interrupting you.” Delnash spoke as he began to turn away.

Murano smiled and shook his head. “Memories brother. Only memories. No apology is needed.” He told him. “I should be commending you on your work. In leading our people how you have these last centuries and in keeping my secret for so long.”

Delnash bowed his head slightly with a smile. “You disapprove of many of my political decisions if I recall brother.”

Murano looked at him. “It is true we do not agree on many things Delnash... but you have always placed the interests of our people first. It is only in my opinion that you and the others cling to past concepts that contributed to the downfall of our people. There are too few with fresh ideas on the Elder Convention.” He said.

Delnash looked around. “You seem to have draw an audience brother.”

Murano nodded his head. “Something I have avoided for just this reason.”

“You are a Praetorian brother.” Delnash told him reaching out to place his hand on his arm. “That alone sets you apart and demands respect for who you are among our people. It was the Praetorians who saved us.”

Murano chuckled softly and shook his head. “There are those who would debate that with you Delnash. Some on the Elder Convention.” He said as he turned to face him fully and saw the many faces of the crew that were watching them.

Delnash took his arm and drew him to the nearest table. “You speak of Lorendo.” He said as he motioned for him to sit. “We have three on the Convention who are under well below the twenty thousand year age limit Murano.”

Murano nodded. “True... but it is not enough.” He stated simply. “Lorendo... even you at times. You cling to ideas and concepts that have long been proven to be unworkable. They are part of the reason we lost Delnash.”

“They have served us well in the past Murano.” Delnash spoke.

“In the past!” Murano insisted. “They are no longer feasible and we stagnate because of it Delnash!”

“You are speaking of the Children’s Law.” Delnash said. “I know you did not approve of that but it needed to be done.”

“Forcing our people into relationships and then telling them they had to have children for the sake of our future as a people?” Murano shook his head. “No! The relationships would have come given time. Children would have come, far faster than you think had you let nature take its course when we settled here instead of forcing it.”

Delnash shook his head. “I do not wish to argue with you about this again Murano.” He stated calmly. “I have the best interests of our people in my decisions.”

Murano nodded. “Yes... but they are sometimes decisions from the past brother. We need to look forward... not back. We will never reclaim what we had... no matter how much Lorendo and the others wish it.”

Delnash gripped his arm and squeezed it once more in a brotherly fashion. “I do not want to go over this again. I came to see if you can tell me anymore about what you have felt. These people. This... this Praetorian you sense. You said he was filled with the essence of Sumar. How is that possible Murano? Sumar had no wife. No children. His ship was lost and no trace of him was ever found.”

Murano shook his head. "I don't know the answers to those questions brother. Only that the essence I feel is definitely Sumar. As we draw closer the resonance takes better shape and I know that the two others I felt are also from Sumar in some manner." He answered honestly. "The resonance is too strong, too focused to be anything else."

"What else? You seem hesitant when you speak of it." Delnash asked.

"There is... it is like a darkness within the resonance." Murano said softly, Delnash's eyes growing larger.

"Darkness? You said that before brother. Evil you mean?" Delnash asked.

Murano shook his head quickly. "No. Not evil. A potential for savagery and anger unlike anything I have ever seen... but it is focused and controlled and..."

"And what?" Delnash asked.

Murano looked at him. "It is part of the resonance. It is very invigorating. Freeing." He answered.

"You are drawn to it?" Delnash gasped.

"It is part of the resonance I feel as I said." Murano answered. "It is part of the person whom this is. It is a male, that much I can sense. The other two as well." He shook his head. "Whoever it is... his shields are too much for me to attempt to breach from this distance. Even closer it would not matter. He has an Oracle supporting him, guiding him, perhaps more than one. Strong minds that radiate power. One even seems familiar somehow but I can not place it." Murano looked off to the side out the view window. "There are seven other minds that reinforce and sustain him. Six I believe are female... bound to him very tightly in some way. They are powerful minds that are intermingled with his completely. I've never seen or felt anything like it before. I believe... I believe the seventh is a dragon and if what I sense is correct, they are bound together in a way that Teniri says is not possible. Whoever they are brother, they know extensively of Etheric ability and they are heavily shielded."

"It is just the one Praetorian you feel on Onterom though?" Delnash asked.

Murano nodded. "Yes. The other two are not there but I feel them through him. And they burn with the same intensity as Sumar."

"How can that be if they are not Pralor?" Delnash asked.

Murano shook his head. "I don't know." He said.

Delnash leaned back in the chair. "We will need to proceed cautiously." He said.

Murano looked at him. "Delnash... this person... these men I feel! They burn with the blood of a Praetorian." He spoke sharply. "We should be rejoicing."

"Yes well... I would much prefer to discover who they are before we start celebrating Murano."

Delnash spoke. "We don't know who they are or what it is they are doing within Station One Zero Five. For all we know they could be helping the Svorag. That is why we brought a detachment of the Convention Guard."

Murano looked at him and shook his head. "The Convention Guard." He spoke softly. "Sashan is a good man brother, but you made a mistake appointing him Chief of the Military Convention."

"He has done well so far." Delnash said.

Murano nodded in agreement. "Yes he has... but that is because we have not come into contact with any force that we could not bully because of our superior technology and skill or those not intimidated by Teniri and our dragon brothers and sisters. Against the Scourge or someone more capable he will fold almost immediately. He is not a warrior."

"We are not at war Murano." Delnash spoke.

"We will always be at war as long as the threat of the Scourge surrounds us! You should have appointed Fleet Commander Angon. And you should have brought a detachment of Fleet Guard... not the Convention Guard. They are nothing more than ill-trained showpieces with their commander as the only exception from my eyes."

Delnash met his eyes. "They are good men brother." He said.

Murano nodded. "No doubt. Yet they have had no formal training and they were thrust into a role of some importance in guarding the Elder Convention when we fled. The years have done nothing except turn them into glorified bullies."

"I really wish you would agree with me more often Murano." Delnash spoke in a neutral tone. "You say I am doing a good job yet you do not agree with much of what I have done in order to keep our people safe."

Murano met his brother's eyes. "I agreed with quite a bit of what you had done initially Delnash. Expanding the Science and Medical Conventions for one was a brilliant move against the voices of the others. Investing in new and improved technologies that could benefit our people was what we needed at the time. Artaaya was the perfect place to settle and you made that decision with strength and conviction. However... Elder Lorendo should never have been made a Convention Elder in my eyes." He said calmly. "He is one of those who was advising the Chief Elder at the end and he was among those who gave him counsel against defending the Talgarain Expanse. We could have held for decades within the Talgarain Expanse and instead we withdrew. This only hastened the end of our people and cost billions of lives!"

"I was not among those advising the Chief Elder brother." Delnash spoke. "Not at the end of it all."

Murano nodded. "I know... and it makes me wonder why you would support Lorendo's appointment to the Convention of Elders."

"We needed his wisdom." Delnash said.

Murano snorted. "We need his wisdom like we need a case of Scalarion Measles!" He snapped. "He is a fool and I question your support of him and the decisions you have made in the last few centuries. You and the others act as if we are no longer in danger. It is almost as if you wish it to go back to the way it was."

"Murano you..." Delnash began.

Murano held up his hand. "I support you brother... but it is my duty as a Praetorian to let you know I take disagreement with some of the major decisions you have made. In the end... those will be the only ones that count."

Delnash looked at him. "Then I have your support?"

Murano met his eyes. "You are my brother and the Chief Elder of our people. Those of us that remain. Yes... I support you brother. Until the bitter end if that is what it means. As long as your first thought is for our people and their continued existence."

Delnash nodded. "It always has been brother." He reached across the table and gripped his arm. "I know it has been hard for you Murano. Remaining away and hiding yourself but..."

"Chief Elder Delnash... we have detected something you should see. Please join me on the bridge."

The voice of the *TALISMAN's* Commander filled Delnash's head from the internal ship speakers that dotted the vessel.

Murano looked up at the voice as Delnash tapped the small circular device in the center of the table. "I will join you momentarily Commander." He replied. "Send for the other Elders and I will bring Praetorian Murano."

"As you order Chief Elder." The man answered.

Delnash looked at his brother as he got to his feet. "I speak caution brother but I am just as excited as you to discover who these people are. And how they were able to enter our station even after the security measures Lorendo put in place."

Murano got to his feet as well and nodded. "As am I." He said. "As am I."

Murano enter the expansive bridge of the cruiser beside his brother and detected the scowl from Lorendo immediately. He dismissed the fool and looked at the Commander who stood beside the huge chart table along with the ship's seven foot tall Avatar.

"Commander Dehov?" Delnash spoke as he moved across the deck to stand in front of the man.

The *TALISMAN's* commanding officer was an experienced man who had fought against the Scourge many years ago. His dark brown hair was sprinkled generously with white but he was still in excellent physical shape even at forty-three thousand years old. He turned to the chart and typed quickly bringing up a crystal clear image of two ships near the planet. Two very large ships, though considerably smaller than the *TALISMAN* itself.

"We detected this six minutes ago Chief Elder. Our destination." Dehov spoke.

Delnash picked up on this quickly. "Ships?" He said.

Dehov nodded. "Yes Chief Elder."

Delnash looked at him. "These people had to have gotten there somehow... I don't see why this is significant Dehov." He spoke.

Murano moved around his brother and looked at the images and readings scrolling beside the images of the ships on the holo display. He tapped the control console as his eyes focused intently, Delnash and the others watching him. "Dehov... is this...?"

The Commander nodded. "Yes Praetorian Murano." He answered. "This is why I called you here Chief Elder." He moved up next to Murano. "We used the *TALISMAN*'s main sensor array and tied it into a Series Twelve long range sensor probe which we launched just before making our first jump. The probe arrived in the Onterom system approximately nine minutes ago and we just started getting data back. We are using a low power passive scan at the moment."

"Why?" Lorendo asked. "The Series Twelve probe can do an active scan of the entire system in minutes."

Dehov nodded. "Yes... but immediately after arriving in the system the passive sensors on the probe detected a very sophisticated cone of energy emanating from one ship. This ship's sensors would detect an active scan the moment it began and the probe's internal command protocols stopped an active scan."

Kasdan moved forward now. "How is that even possible Commander? The Series Twelve sensors operate on a phased sub space level. They should be completely undetectable."

Dehov nodded his head in agreement. "And that would be the case Elder Kasdan... to ships that do not have access to our technology. But both of these vessels are exhibiting power signatures that are derived from Pralor technology."

Delnash's eyes grew wider. "What?" He gasped.

Lorendo stepped closer. "That is not possible!" He stammered.

Dehov nodded his head. "I assure you Elder Lorendo... our scans are quite accurate. This ship here on the right..." The image adjusted and brought the picture of the *ARC ROYAL* much closer for viewing. "This ship has a Quantum Resonance Reactor signature. Extremely efficient and very powerful for a ship this size. The differences in power output and frequency variables are there indicating marked difference in construction, but these engines are definitely based on Pralor technology. A Series Nine City Ship engine core design with some ingenious and very extensive modifications if I had to guess. The second ship is a more primitive version... but the signature is there as well."

"Series Nine City Ships were the most advanced we had but they have not existed for over thirty thousand years." Murano spoke again. "The Scourge destroyed the last sixteen of them when they took the shipyards on Lustan."

Dehov nodded. "Yes... I know."

Delnash pointed to several protrusions on the outer hull of the ship. "What are these?" He asked.

Dehov looked at him. "Those are gun turrets Chief Elder." He answered him with ease. "This... this is a warship." He spoke confidently. "The design is excellent and it indicates some sort of carrier class, but the external armaments indicate otherwise. Roughly three thousand five hundred meters long and some 400,000,000 metric tons. I estimate a fast strike capability coupled with some very advanced plasma based weaponry. Plasma weaponry that could very well decimate the vast majority of the ships from the Alpha Quadrant. Which is where these two ships are from by the way."

"The Alpha Quadrant." Murano said softly. "That is where... that is where Sumar's ship crashed." He turned to his brother. "A Series Nine City Ship."

Delnash shook his head. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves brother." He spoke softly.

Kasdan ran his finger along the edge of the underside of the *ARC ROYAL*'s side. "What are these Captain?" He asked.

"Given their size and appearance I would guess they are landing bays of some sort. On both the ventral and dorsal access points. Given this ship's size, I estimate it could carry several hundred fighters of a small nature. Slightly larger than our own fighter drones if I had to guess." He looked at Delnash. "The main hull is comprised primarily of a mixture of metals that I have never seen before and... it is surrounded by Class Seven Pralor shields."

“Class Seven?” Murano hissed. He looked at Delnash. “The same shields carried by a Series Nine City Ship brother!”

“We are also detecting the smaller power signatures of Pralor Nanlar Worker drones. On both ships.” Dehov said. “Nearly three hundred in total.”

“Nanlar Worker Drones?” Delnash gasped once more. “How is that possible? Nanlar Worker Drones are the most sophisticated drones we have ever developed! Can you pulse their command codes!”

“No!” Murano barked.

“Why not?” Delnash snarled.

Kasdan moved right up to the table now. “In order to pulse their command codes Chief Elder, we would need to override their operating protocols. We can’t do that from here.”

“It would not matter even if we could.” Dehov spoke tapping on his console. “The Probe already tried to covertly access the Worker Drone Protocols and was denied access. The attempt was not detected... but it discovered that the Drones are working on entirely different command protocols than what they were designed for. They are moving around within the two ships of their own accord. Almost autonomously.”

Delnash looked at Lorendo and Kasdan. “They were never designed to work like that.” He spoke.

“No Chief Elder. I have no explanation.” Kasdan said. “Not without inspecting one of them.”

“There is something else Chief Elder.” Dehov said. “Something significantly more interesting if I do say so myself.” He turned to the large Avatar just behind him. “Avatar 27... your findings again please.”

The Avatar moved to the table and his large hands moved faster than their eyes could follow.

-Approximately two point seven minutes after the probe arrived in the Onterom system, a ship dropped from sustained Quantum Reversion and rendezvoused with the unknown alien vessel. It was taken into the port side landing bay of this unknown ship, supporting Commander Dehov’s assertion of a fighter complement-

“Quantum reversion?” Murano asked with wide eyes. “One of our ships?”

-Yes Praetorian Murano. Corvette Class of *HELIX* design. Passive sensors specify almost no deterioration of hull which I have concluded indicates low usage of primary drive core-

“*HELIX* design?” Murano asked. “*HELIX* Class Corvettes were not built until three decades before we fled our space. They were specifically tasked with supporting...” Murano’s eyes grew larger and Dehov nodded his head.

“Yes.” He said with a smile. “The only *HELIX* Class Corvettes we built were assigned to the *VORTEX*-Class Heavy cruisers. Seven per cruiser.”

Murano looked at the Avatar. “Two Seven... you are certain of your scans?”

-Accuracy is one hundred percent Praetorian Murano- The Avatar answered looking at him. -I was able to gain the registry of the corvette from the probe’s scans. It was assigned to *VORTEX* Cruiser 341. One of seven as Commander Dehov has pointed out-

Delnash looked at Dehov. “Is this ship in our database?”

Dehov nodded his head slowly. “Yes Chief Elder. *VORTEX* Cruiser 341 was the same ship that was chosen by the Elder Convention to download all information from the five main libraries on the homeworld Entheo. A single Junior Science Elder from the Science Convention was then selected and assigned to the ship and the ship was given a secret course. It departed the homeworld four days before... before Entheo fell.”

“Departed to where?” Delnash rasped out.

Dehov shook his head. “We were never able to discover that Chief Elder. That particular information was destroyed with the main Science Headquarters on Entheo. The headquarters was ruined before it could be taken by the Scourge or uploaded to an escaping ship.”

Delnash looked at Lorendo. “Lorendo... you were part of the Science Convention back then. Do you know anything about this *VORTEX* cruiser?”

Lorendo shook his head. “No. I was not privy to decisions made on Entheo Chief Elder. I was only a junior administrator then.”

“Lifesigns?” Delnash asked quickly turning back to Dehov.

Dehov shook his head. “That would require an active scan from the probe. It would be picked up instantly by this ship. I did not think it wise.”

“This is becoming more worrisome by the moment.” Lorendo spoke now. “These... these unknown people have our technology! Our ships! Our secrets!”

“They have shown an unique ability to adapt our technology as well.” Kasdan spoke with a much more curious nature than a worried one.

“Why are they at Station One Zero Five?” Lorendo asked. “How did they gain access and what are they looking for?”

Murano looked at him. “Kasdan and I have told you how.” He spoke.

Lorendo glared at him angrily. “Yes I know! Your feeling that there is somehow another Praetorian out there! One who is not of Pralor blood! That is not possible Murano and you know that! It was forbidden! Taboo! Sumar himself instituted that law when he was Chief Elder Pralor.”

Murano kept his distaste for Lorendo in check. “I know what my senses are telling me!” He stated calmly. “You may deny it all you wish and cling to a millennia’s old law that is all but extinct, but that does not change the fact that there is a Praetorian on Onterom right now. A Praetorian born of Sumar’s line.”

“Sumar is dead!” Lorendo spat. “He died when his ship was caught in an Ion storm and crashed! Everyone with him died! What you hope for is not real! Everything that was Sumar died with him!”

Dehov looked at Lorendo. “Forgive me Elder Lorendo... that statement is not entirely true.”

Lorendo whirled on the man. “What are you prattling about Commander? Why do you insist on helping this old fool’s rants?”

Dehov’s eyes narrowed and his forehead wrinkled in a look of extreme contempt and anger. “You’ll forgive me my words Elder Lorendo... you should not speak to Praetorian Murano in such a way and...”

“I will speak to him however I choose!” Lorendo barked loudly. “And you should mind your station Commander! You...”

“Enough!” Delnash snapped angrily. “Your distaste for the Praetorians is well known Lorendo! It was back then and I see time has not dulled your fervor. You will, however, address my brother with the proper respect and honor due his position. He is a *Praetorian*...” Delnash hissed at him. “... And among our people that has and always will grant him equal status and authority as any Elder on the Convention! That is how it was set up by Sumar and it has not changed over the millennia!”

“Perhaps now it should.” Lorendo spoke.

“You will not besmirch that authority and you will mind your words or I will have you removed!” Delnash barked at him. “Murano has seen and experienced more than any of us standing here now! You will not berate him in front of others! In front of me! Praetorians hold the Right of Justice and you would do well to mind your actions! That part of their duty was set in stone and it will not change whether Murano is the last Praetorian or not! As long as I am Chief Elder Pralor that will never change! Is that in any way unclear to you now?”

Lorendo opened his mouth to answer.

“Be very careful what you say to me now Elder Lorendo.” Delnash snapped. “Very careful.”

Lorendo stood there silently for a moment and then nodded his head. “As you wish it Chief Elder Delnash!”

Dehov stepped closer to Delnash stunned at what had just taken place. “Forgive me Chief Elder... but the information we have indicates that Elder Lorendo is very wrong regardless!”

Delnash turned back to him quickly. “Explain Dehov.” He ordered curtly.

Dehov looked at Avatar 27. “Tell them what else you found Two Seven.” He spoke.

-At Commander Dehov’s direction I was able to link my neural network with the probe exactly twenty three seconds before the *HELIX* Class corvette was taken aboard the unknown vessel- Avatar Two Seven explained. -While I was linked to the probe I detected the Protonic neural signal of another Avatar-

“Another Avatar?” Delnash exclaimed. “On the corvette?”

-Correct Chief Elder Pralor-

“By the Holy Word... they have access to an Avatar!” Lorendo nearly shouted but caught himself and kept his voice neutral.

“Two Seven... were you able to determine the Avatar’s source code?” Murano asked as his gut began to burn with happiness and fulfillment.

-It is very odd Praetorian Murano. The Source Code has been altered significantly. It has evolved to a level that should not be obtainable-

“Why?” Delnash asked.

-I detected neural pathways that are not supposed to exist in any Avatar Chief Elder. They are new and not part of normal programming. The brief scan I was able to execute was only point six milliseconds in length. Any longer duration and this Avatar would have detected such an intrusion based on the advances of its neural network pathways. The Protonic links were much more advanced than any I have installed-

“Why is this significant?” Lorendo exclaimed. “We are discussing the source code for Avatars when we should be talking about these unknown and possibly hostile individuals with access to our technology!”

Murano stepped right up to Avatar Two Seven and gazed at the taller, hulking form of the Artificial Intelligence that his people had built hundreds of thousands of years ago to help them in their exploration. Each Avatar was unique and the vast majority of them served on starships. “Avatar Two Seven... why is what you detected odd?” He asked.

-The Protonic Neural Pathways are unique to each Avatar Praetorian Murano. You know this-
Two Seven answered.

“Yes.” Murano said.

-The Protonic Neural Pathways I detected are from Class Seven Ship Avatar 41. He was the Avatar for Series Nine City Ship 41- Two seven answered. **-They originate from the former Chief Elder Pralor Sumar’s Avatar-**

CHAPTER NINE

SOLMAR SYSTEM *ULU SCIMITAR*

The *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser was always built to be the forward projection of Lycavorian Union power. The Nodon Shipyards were spilling them out at a rate of ten a month now and as soon as Ben and Avi got the details worked out, the Pralor Worker Drones were going to be deployed to all the major Union shipyards to increase that output by a factor of ten.

Those *LEONIDAS II* ships that were first produced were now in the process of being refitted to bring them up to the same standards as the *SCIMITAR* and others that were newer. The ship was capable of bringing an

enormous amount of horrific firepower down upon on an enemy, as well as nearly two hundred of the finest fighter and fighter/bombers known to be operating within the Alpha Quadrant.

The Nodon species, officially called the Terraijin people, were the sixth race to join the Lycavorian Union when it all began and the brain child of the *LEONIDAS II* class ships. For millennia they had been the primary engineering species and ship makers within the Union and they were almost fanatical in their loyalty to the Union and the royal family. They were thrilled with anything that could help them perfect their trade and when Ben told them of the Worker Drones and the potential it would allow. Avi had been able to use the engine core and research database of *SPARTA'S WRATH* to first copy and then build a smaller version of the Worker Drone assembly line. That line was now up and running at full capacity and the Drones were being produced very quickly. They would soon become invaluable to the Nodon shipyards and others that were major engineering points across the Union as well as the ships they would be assigned too. Ben's only strict instruction to those who would be receiving the Drones was simple. Treat them as part of your team and not a machine. Most of the Drones produced at Ben's order would go to the Nodon, for he knew they would treat them as Avi had said to treat them. They were machines yes, but they were valuable parts of a mechanism and needed to be treated as such. The Nodon would do just that. A few ships within the Union fleet would be receiving the drones as well, but only those ships that Ben selected.

In the hands of an experienced field Commander who knew their ship and their crew, the *LEONIDAS II*-Strike Cruiser, named after the King's father, was a devastating machine of war that could strike fear into anyone.

Sa'sur was such a commander.

The crew of the *SCIMITAR* had been together for years and they knew their commander in what many considered a personal fashion. She had bailed more than one of them out of big trouble at one point or another in their careers and earned their lasting loyalty. She did not ask of them anything she was not prepared to do herself and all of them knew that and they knew what their ship could do. That the *SCIMITAR* was also Prince Androcles's personal ship also gave them a bit of swagger wherever they went. It also meant they had to be the best there was at their jobs. And they were.

Sa'sur was coming to her feet before they had even finished their jump reversion and she was barking out orders. Exactly four point five seconds after the *SCIMITAR* ended her jump, all of her main forward batteries opened up at the same time. All of them targeted on a single point in space. That the Kavalian command ship under Admiral Gordna occupied that space was no small coincidence to any of them. That ship just happened to be in the way of them getting to their Prince. Thirty two Type I MK9C Alpha Series plasma batteries, powered by the advanced Hyper Matter Fusion engine core installed on the *SCIMITAR*, targeted the Kavalian command ship. All of them were unforgiving in their precision. Gordna's shields were overwhelmed by the intense and concentrated firepower of the *SCIMITAR*'s weapons and for the second time in less than a year, the *SCIMITAR* claimed the first destruction in battle of the vaunted Kavalian *GREAT SOUL* Command cruiser. This added to her total of seven so far if you included the ships she had destroyed at Kranek. The Kavalian ship's shields were unprepared for such a concentrated barrage of highly focused plasma beam power and the plasma turrets quickly sliced through those shields bringing them down. Once the shields came down, the Type II turrets continued the punishment by hammering the Kavalian hull in dozens of places, punching into the hull of the Kavalian ship like fists from some angry god. Internal explosions began to rock the ship and the bulkheads in half a dozen places along the hull began to buckle severely as the Type II turrets began to rip into the superstructure, blasting chunks from the hull of the ship. Then the torpedoes arrived. Seven Proton torpedoes punched into and through the outer hull of the *GREAT SOUL* and unleashed their killing power from within the belly of the great ship. Two struck just beneath the engine core of the Kavalian command ship, fracturing the core's shielding and sending deadly Tri-Cobalt radiation pouring into the interior of the ship. Three more torpedoes slammed into the upper hull, spaced along one forward wing and the resulting explosion blew a massive chunk of the superstructure clean off the main part of the ship. The Kavalian cruiser lost main power with the first torpedo hits and was suddenly very helpless.

Captain Sa'sur, turned many years ago by her Lycavorian husband and mate, gave them no mercy. Every torpedo, every hit by her plasma turrets, it was retribution for the many lives the Kavalians had so callously taken and the horrid abuses they had subjected their second elven Queen to. There would be no forgiveness this day. Not from her... not from their Prince and not from any member of her crew.

Gordna would not live to see the destruction of his fleet. The first barrage of Type II turrets had slammed into the superstructure above his bridge and the resulting explosions had sucked the air out of the entire bridge area before the upper deck collapsed onto the bridge and crushed everyone into oblivion. With that event, all command and control for the Kavalian fleet orbiting Solmar died. No more orders would come for them and they would be left to fend for themselves. A situation that most of them were unaccustomed to in any way. Essentially... the moment Gordna's ship died, the rout was on and every Lycavorian ship commander in the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Group knew it. Like a pack of intelligent but ravenous wolves, which many of the commanders were, they bore in on their enemy without an ounce of pity or remorse. They had become the type of predators that Prefect Keleru had never experienced before. They had become unrelenting.

Sa'sur saw Gordna's ship coming apart and she turned to her Tactical Officer. "Order Delta Wing to execute Attack Plan Gamma One Four! Charlie to commit to established orders! Tell the *KINDRED SOUL* she is clear to move in! Launch all fighters! Everything we have! We need to make this quick! ZMF missiles to target remaining *DIATAGAs* and *DIMERUs*! Take them out!"

"Captain! *MOONLANCER* Wing reports they have reloaded and are turning back into the battle!" A sensor tech barked out. "Bearing four seven eight three! Requesting targets!"

Sa'sur nodded her head. "Target rich environment!" Sa'sur barked. "Anything they can hit... kill it! We'll never get an opportunity like this again! The Kavalians may be fuck ups, but they'll learn from this!" Sa'sur stabbed down on the console on the arm of her chair. "Sadi! Launch now! Follow the *KINDRED SOUL* in!"

Sadi's voice was calm as she answered. "Launching now! Good luck Captain. Go with the gods!"

"And the same to you Princess." Sa'sur spoke as she turned back to her crew. "Let's go hunting people! Helm come to course four one seven three mark two. Weapons free! Weapons free! All fighter squadrons to pick a target and bear in! We take no prisoners today! We leave no ship operating! When we are done I want nothing but a graveyard full of Kavalian ships!"

That order would resonate to all the ships in the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Group and would find its way back to several senior Kavalian officers within Kavalian space within weeks. It was a statement that would crack the armor of their minds and put the first inkling in their heads that this war of choice begun by their Prefect was not going to turn out the way they had hoped.

STRIKER ONE FIVE ONE

"Clear!" Ne'Veha barked out as her hand moved across the controls. "*KINDRED SOUL* turning to starboard with Bravo Wing covering!"

Sadi turned her helmeted head and nodded. "Full power *SirsanGai*." She directed. "We'll go in ten thousand meters above her!"

Ne'Veha nodded. "Strikers One Five Two, One Five Three and One Five Four turning with us!"

"One five Two?" Sadi called out in her helmet COM.

"Six degrees off your port Sadi." Normya's voice answered confidently.

"Diamond formation Normya!" Sadi spoke. "We'll be going in through the *KINDRED SOUL*'s wake and it will get rough!"

"Understood." Normya replied.

"Eli..." Sadi continued. "Make sure Tharua, Caydren and Cinol are secure! It will be very bumpy!"

"On it!" Eliani's voice for the rear of the *STRIKER* echoed.

"... a Union Senator and I can go..." Sadi's head turned as Ulana's voice snarled behind them and her jungle green eyes grew wide as she saw Ulana push her way past Jomann into the cockpit. Ulana's own eyes grew wide as she looked out the cockpit window and saw the dozens of much larger ships maneuvering all around them while their main guns were firing. "Oh... oh my!" She gasped in shock at what she saw. It appeared to be total chaos... it was anything but however, Ulana didn't know that.

"Jomann... what is this *upaee* doing on my ship?" Sadi snarled.

Jomann shrugged his broad shoulders. "I did not see her board." He answered.

“Get her out of our cockpit!” Ne'Veha barked now.

“I have every right to be here!” Ulana hissed back glaring at Sadi with extreme distaste. “I am...” Ulana was unable to finish her sentence as her head was yanked back viciously by her long hair and Eliani stepped around her from the side and stabbed her in the neck with an injector. Ulana’s eyes rolled into the back of her head instantly and Eliani let her begin to drop to the steel deck without regard.

“A *nubous* pain in the *mida* is what you are!” Eliani snarled as Jomann caught her limp form before she cracked her head on the deck plating. Sadi looked at Eliani who smiled back at her with those bright green eyes. “Brendi saw her coming forward. Figured I make sure she stayed out of the way. I’ve wanted to do that since the day Lisi, Carina and I told her to get screwed!”

Sadi grinned. “Thank you Eli.” She said.

The *STRIKER* rocked slightly and Jomann reached out to grab Eliani’s arm as Brendi staggered into the cockpit now as well. Ne'Veha adjusted her instruments. “*KINDRED SOUL* is beginning her descent!” She barked out. “She’s extending her Drop Pod doors! She’s prepping to drop the Cataphract division!”

Sadi motioned with her head. “Get her carcass secure and then grab a seat!” She barked. “We’re going in.”

Brendi’s eyes were wide as she saw the massive bulk of the *WASP*-Class Assault Carrier in front of and below them. She looked at Eliani. “Eliani... aren’t we... aren’t we awful close to that big assed ship!” She stammered.

Eliani grinned at her. “Where’s your spirit of adventure Brendi?” She chimed in sweetly as she gripped Ulana’s arm.

“I left it back on Earth.” Brendi answered her eyes wide.

“Help me with this bitch!” Eliani spoke and waited for Brendi to move under Ulana’s other armpit. Eliani looked at Brendi’s gorgeous brown eyes and felt a flush of excitement swirl through her body at the dark red hair and full body that Brendi possessed. “You hang out with us long enough and this will become the norm.” She stated. “C’mon... let’s get prissy pants here in a seat before she cracks her head.”

Jomann grinned at his gorgeous wife and mate as she and Brendi moved back into the rear of the *STRIKER*. The banter between the two of them was becoming more frequent and easy and Jomann could smell that Brendi was beginning to get very comfortable with Eliani and being around her. The desire from Brendi he could smell easily, as could Eliani, but neither of them wanted to rush her. Over the past weeks he had become more comfortable with the feeling inside him that found Brendi very enticing. Brendi would never be as completely delicious to him as his *Anome*, for nothing could stir him as Eliani did, but Brendi’s scent was extremely pleasant to both their senses. He knew Andro had struggled with the emotions and feelings of finding others who would share his and Sadi’s lives, and as with Sadi, Eliani seemed to have already fully accepted that. Andro told him he would only be able to resist it for so long before he knew it was time to claim her, especially if Eliani and she were to be together before he had fully accepted it. Trying to dodge or outrun fate and destiny was a losing battle, Andro had told him. Better to accept it for what it was and bask in the feelings it brought to all of them.

Jomann settled into the chair behind Sadi and Ne'Veha. “Has this ever been done before Sadi?” He asked. “Such a large ship landing on a planet?”

Sadi looked at him. “First time for everything.” She said.

“Yes... but you only die once.” Jomann reminded her.

“You’ve been hanging around Andro way too much.” Sadi said with a smile. “Besides... where is *your* spirit of adventure?”

“As with Brendi... I think I left it on Earth.” Jomann replied. “I am just glad I am not in one of those pods. Being blasted from the belly of a ship while still in orbit does not sit well with my stomach.”

Sadi turned back to the look out the cockpit window. “I’ll agree with that.” She stated. “We’ll have to keep Andro away from that part of the ship. Knowing him... he will want to try it.”

“...Pods locking into position!” A voice shouted out over the activity on the main bridge.

“Bravo Wing moving to port and starboard to cover us!” Another voice echoed. “Two fighter squadrons shadowing!”

“Hull temperature?” George Patton barked.

“Nominal Captain!”

“Adjust course three degrees starboard and eight degrees down angle.” Patton snapped. “Let’s begin our descent! Everyone on your game folks!”

“Helm answers three degrees starboard and eight degrees down angle!” The female voice barked out.

“Give me point three on launch thrusters!” Patton ordered. “Make damn sure coordinates are programmed in. I don’t want to blast our boys and girls all over the fucking planet!”

“Coordinates locked!” The Tactical Officer answered. “All Commanders acknowledge.”

“I just love doing things no one has ever done before!” Patton exclaimed as he came to his feet. He took a deep breath. “Open Drop Doors!”

Along the belly of the *KINDRED SOUL*, extending for nearly a third of the ship’s 2800 meters, massive doors retracted exposing a dark interior and the bulbous shapes of hundreds upon hundreds of individual Orbital Drop Pods.

“Drop doors open and locked!” The voice answered his command after twenty seconds.

“Shit... here goes nothing.” Patton muttered softly. “God speed people.” He turned to his Tactical Officer. “TO?”

The man turned to look at him. “Optimal position sir! Now or never!”

Patton didn’t hesitate. “Begin Drop! Launch the ODPs! Successive order by section! Launch! Launch!”

It was a sight to see for sure, and only a few hundred of the *KINDRED SOUL*’s crew got to see it, but they would insure the word spread like wildfire. With the first explosive blast of decompression, the human 82nd Cataphract Division, brainchild of Admiral Ben O’Connor, entered into active combat in force. The Orbital Drop Pods or ODPs began spitting from the interior of the belly of the *KINDRED SOUL* like bullets from a massive shotgun. The popping sound of explosive compression soon became a continuous roar as the first wave of three thousand ODPs were launched into the stars in the time of sixty-six seconds without a single failure of the launching mechanisms. As those three thousand pods began to drop through the atmosphere beneath them, a massive cocking system twisted the launching mechanism and dropped the next wave into place. One minute later, three thousand more ODPs were leaving the belly of the *KINDRED SOUL*, each carrying a living and breathing individual soldier who was becoming part of more Union history. The many crewmembers who were watching could only shake their heads in awe and wonder just who was insane enough to put their body into one of those pods and be shot from the belly of a ship in orbit.

The reputation and legend of the 82nd Cataphract Division began even before they put boots on the ground.

Patton sat in his command chair and waited silently, saying a special prayer his mother had taught him under his breath as he let his crew do their jobs. He had very little to do during the actual drop since they were not under fire thanks to Bravo Wing and the fighters so as a good commander he stayed out of the way. The *KINDRED SOUL* was barely skimming the surface of the atmosphere and moving at a snail’s pace for a ship her size, but this is what she had been intended and built for and Patton couldn’t help but feel pride that she was doing exactly what she was designed for. All of their training runs had proven that they could launch every pod they had in just eight point four minutes. At the seven point three minute mark his TO looked up from his screens.

“Captain! All pods away! All ODPs away clean! No malfunctions!”

Patton smiled to himself and sat up straighter. He would have to give each and every crewmember operating a piece of machinery in the ODP Section a special gift for executing their jobs to perfection and shaving over a minute off their best time in training. Combat did make the adrenalin surge.

“Close Drop Doors!” He snapped out the order. “Helm... prepare for full power descent! Shields at maximum! Order all stations to prep for atmospheric entry! Let’s get down there and make sure they have a command base to come back to!”

“Locking in Vertical Ventral Thrusters!” The Helm Officer barked out. “Spooling engine power to max! Lateral thrusters online! Shit! This is going to be so cool!” The woman barked out from her seat causing everyone on the bridge to laugh softly.

“Drop doors have been secured Captain!” The TO announced.

Patton nodded. “Helm! Let’s burn up the atmosphere shall we! Lieutenant Harbin...” Patton motioned with his arm. “If you would so kind Lieutenant! Smooth as you can Kelly! The ship is yours!”

The woman nodded her head. “Engaging Captain! Hold on everyone! This is going to be one hell of a ride!”

Skimming the atmosphere as they had been doing, when the *KINDRED SOUL* dipped her nose and began to penetrate the relatively thin upper layers, everyone on the ship felt their descent begin and they stopped what they were doing to hold on and try to find a place where they could see outside the view windows. This was going to be a sight and all of them knew it.

SOLMAR ANDRO’S BASE

“...Colonel Mosont and one brigade of the *Durcunusaan* Division as well as the 1st brigade of the 82nd Cataphract under a Colonel Miller are going to moving to our location from the south! The drop has already started and the 82nd should be on the ground in three to four minutes.” Andro was speaking to everyone who stood around the Chart table in the rear of the *STRIKER*. “As soon as the *KINDRED SOUL* lands, we will drop the ground based Shroud and send the civilians to her.”

“Long eyes report that the Kavaliens have every *DAGGER* that they got airborne and maintaining position over the northern settlement.” Dantio spoke moving his finger across the chart table. He looked at Andro. “They’re waiting... just as you thought they might. Given their position, once we drop the Shroud, we’ll have perhaps seventeen minutes before they are all over us.”

Kelelm shook his head. “To commit to such an action?” He spoke. “They actually think killing you will end the invasion?”

Andro nodded. “It seems that way.”

“Not very bright are they?” Dorian spoke from his spot ext to Lisisa.

“Downright foolish if you ask me.” Kelelm answered him. “If these commanders are as experienced as you believe, they must know your death won’t stop it.”

“They know that...” Andro answered. “They are hoping it causes enough of a pause for them to dig in deeper and make it more or less impossible for us to reclaim the settlements without massive losses on our part.”

Lisisa looked at him. “You think they are going to believe your message Andro?” She asked.

Andro shrugged his shoulders. “We’ll know when we see who exits these *DAGGERS*.” He replied. “If they are full of Puma Bane troops then we’ll know that Azlenr and Byka have at least given some consideration to it. If not... then they are fully committed and don’t believe what we sent them.”

“Wow... over two thousand of their Puma Bane troops?” Dorian spoke softly looking at his brother. “That means they’re serious about killing you *fervon*.”

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “Nice to be so well thought of isn’t it?” He said.

“It’s his sparkling personality.” Lisisa said as she poked her brother in the ribs. “Always so charming.”

“Remember what father, *Medwaw* Anja and Uncle Danny always say?” Andro spoke.

“It’s not just a job...” Dorian mimicked their father.

“It’s a fucking adventure!” Lisisa finished with a grin.

Everyone at the table laughed softly except for Harira. She looked at them as if they were crazy. “This... this is insane!” She finally exclaimed. “We are going to wait here for them! You stand there and make jokes and these men are coming here to kill you! To kill us!”

Andro looked at her oddly. “Don’t worry Shaman Master Harira... if things don’t go as I hoped, Sa’roh will take off with you and the others and get you to the *SCIMITAR*.”

“Leaving you to die here?” Aleatia asked.

Andro smiled. “I have no intention of dying on this rock Lady Aleatia.” Andro said. “If it breaks down, we’ll sprint for the mountains to our east and then work our way around until we link up with Union forces to the south.”

“And then?” Aleatia asked.

Andro met her eyes for a long moment. “I will not allow the Kavalians to remain here on this planet Lady Aleatia. It is too strategic a location for them to have a forward base here able to strike into Union territory.”

“What does that mean?” Harira demanded.

Andro looked first at Lisisa and then to Dorian. He turned back to them slowly. “If we are unable to hold here and we don’t get some sort of indication that one or both of these Kavalian officers are wavering, then I will give the order.”

“The order for what?” Harira asked.

“I will order the settlements and surrounding areas glassed.” Andro answered her. “An orbital bombardment that will eliminate every living thing within five kilometers of each of the remaining five settlements.”

“That would... that would kill...” Aleatia gasped.

“Yes.” Lisisa spoke softly. “It would kill every innocent civilian within the settlements.” She answered for her brother. “And in their deaths... others will live.”

Her words brought silence to those gathered and Sehri stepped closer to Andro, pressing up against his side firmly. “How many... if you had to do this Andro. How many lives would be saved?”

Andro looked down into her eyes for a moment. His arm slipped around her waist with little regard for who saw and he pulled her close before looking up at Harira and Aleatia. “This colony rests within striking distance of nine major Bontawillian planets with a total population of over five hundred and ninety million souls.” He told her. “I will not allow the Kavalians to put those planets at risk by having a forward base here to strike into Union territory. Those civilians in the settlements would die yes, but they would die for the greater good and all of them know that. And every Bontawillian in those five remaining settlements would understand that it needed to be done.”

Then we must make sure we do not fail. Elynth’s voice filled the heads of everyone who could Mindvoice to include Harira, Aleatia, Ibani and Osbela. Everyone looked towards the rear of the *STRIKER* where Elynth rested with Ryner and Jeth. Ryner sat between the brother and sister pair, the last few hours speaking with them and learning from them. Jeth and Elynth were nearly as famous among the dragons of the Union as their father and to be able to soak up any knowledge they had was precious to him in order for Ryner to protect Dorian.

Andro nodded his head. “Well said sister.” He spoke. “When the fighting begins Lady Aleatia... all of you will remain on the *STRIKER*. I will leave a detachment of *Durcunusaan* to secure the area around the ship and should things begin to go badly, Sa’roh already has orders to take off and escape.”

“And what do we do until then?” Aleatia asked.

“We wait.” Andro replied laconically. “We should know within a few minutes what play the Kavalians will make. Once Union troops begin hitting the surface it will get real busy.”

ODP POD 1462
COLONEL JOSIE MILLER

She adjusted the glide of her pod as she passed through the thin layer of clouds and the ground appeared before her some thirty thousand feet below.

“Activating beacon!” Her voice was calm but the excitement and nervousness was also very present. This was the first actual drop they had done outside of simulations and so far it was going better than she had

hoped. “Descent angle is within parameters! Speed seven hundred and fifty! Firing course correction thrusters! Standby!”

Small thrusters on the outside of her pod fired in synchronous order, adjusting the descent of her ODP until it was lined up perfectly with her impact point. The laser in the bottom of the pod had locked onto the perfect landing point and immediately relayed this information to all the pods in her Brigade. It would allow them to come down within a thousand meters of each other as a cohesive fighting force.

“Data received!” A male voice broke in. “ODP adjusting.”

Josie could hear the many voices of her company and battalion leaders as they called out their status and the status of their people, as she had her implant set on the brigade channel. She could detect the fear and excitement in all of the voices, but also the calm and she felt pride at this knowledge.

“Colonel Miller this is Colonel Mosont!” The deep voice broke into her helmet.

“Go!” Josie popped.

“We are four minutes from breaking into the lower atmosphere! Your status?” Mosont asked.

“All pods intact and on course!” Josie answered. “We’ll be on the ground in two minutes and your LZ will be secure four minutes after that! How’s the ride?”

Josie heard Mosont chuckled softly. “If I was in my wolf form, every hair on my body would be standing on end! Though I’d much rather be here than with you! Launching your body from a perfectly good starship while in orbit does require some...”

Josie laughed. “Balls?” She quipped.

“I was going to say loose brain circuits.” Mosont answered.

“Yeah... well maybe I was dropped too many times as a child.” Josie told him. “Gotta go now! We’ll see you in six minutes!”

“We’ll be there!” Mosont answered.

“First Battalion! Ground Imaging shows a slight rise in terrain at your LZ!” Josie called out. “Adjust your retro rockets to compensate so you don’t bury your pod half in the ground!”

“Already compensating Colonel.” The BC answered back.

“Stay on top of that Phillip! It might change more.” Josie ordered. “One minute forty seconds to touch down! All commanders form your units up and prepare for landing impact! And for fucks sake... no one forget to hit your braking thrusters!”

Josie could hear laughter over the COM as the order was passed down and many of her people made jokes about burning into the ground and a glorious way to go it was. She shook her head at the bravery of her people and set to the task of making sure she fired her own thrusters.

It wouldn’t do for the commander to burn in.

STRIKER ONE FIVE ONE

“This is it!” Sadi called out. “All *STRIKERS*, prepare to execute sixty degree turn to port! This is where we break from the *KINDRED SOUL*!”

Ne’Veha looked at her. “Ready.”

“Normya?” Sadi barked into her helmet COM.

“On your mark!” Normya answered.

“Three! Two! One! Mark!”

Sadi and Ne’Veha’s hands flew across their respective control consoles and the *STRIKER* banked sharply to the left and dropped so quickly Jomann nearly lost his stomach.

“Hull temp just spiked! *KINDRED SOUL* is burning up the area around her!” Ne’Veha barked. “Increasing liquid coolant through the hull to one hundred percent! Ventral shields holding steady!”

“Ten seconds and we’re clear!” Sadi answered as she drove the *STRIKER* down through the atmosphere. “Normya!”

“We’re a little cooked but with you!” Her voice answered.

“A little?” Tir’ut’s voice echoed over the com.

“Turning to one three five nine mark four!” Sadi announced. “TOT to Andro is two minutes three seconds!”

“...temp is four thousand degrees and rising!” The Operations Officer barked out as he gripped the edges of his console.

The edges of the main monitor showed where the hull was glowing red with the heat they were generating upon entering the atmosphere. Patton sat stoically in his chair gripping the arms tightly. “What are we tested out at?” He snapped.

“Eight thousand Captain!”

“Then we have some wiggle room!” Patton spoke. “Maintain your course helm!”

“Aye! Ninety seconds until we breach the lower atmosphere!” Kelly Harbin barked out, her eyes never leaving her instruments and her hands constantly making course adjustments. She had graduated flight school tops in her class and she was proving the confidence Captain Patton had in her when he selected her right from graduation to pilot the *KINDRED SOUL*. This was her ship and she was not about to let anything happen to it.

“Tactical!” Patton called out. “The moment we clear the lower atmosphere... I want full sweeps with active sensors! Tell me what we are facing here! Weapons online and shields to full!”

“Tactical aye!”

Patton looked back towards the main monitor and shook his head. “Anyone know the record for atmospheric entry?” He called out trying to sooth the heightened anxiousness of his bridge crew.

“Fuck! We’re about to break it whatever it was!” A voice called out.

“Captain... we’re overshooting reentry corridor!” The TO shouted. “Present rate of descent will put us two hundred and eighty kilometers past the landing zone!”

“Kelly?” Patton barked.

“I raised our reentry point four degrees Captain!” Kelly announced without turning. “We were coming in too steep to extend the Atmospheric Drive Units!”

“Shit!” Patton snarled shaking his head. If they extended the ADUs before leveling out they would have sheered the units off and they would have been fucked. “Maintain Kelly!” He shouted unconcerned that he had forgotten something. That’s what he had the best crew for. And he had handpicked most of them himself. Including Lieutenant Harbin. “Nice catch Kelly!”

“That’s what you pay me for sir!” She replied happily. “Thirty seconds! Stand by... it will be bumpy starting right about... now!”

Patton shook his head with a smile as the *KINDRED SOUL* shuddered against the forces of gravitation and mass. No ship this size had ever attempted entry into a planet’s atmosphere in the Union’s entire history. No one really knew what was going to happen. Kelly Harbin worked the best when she was under pressure and it was coming out now. She was the youngest of the senior bridge crew and she was turning out to be a blazing star.

“Slight hull buckle! Deck Nine!” The Operations officer barked. “Insignificant! Worker Drone 4 is dismissing it right now!”

Patton nodded. “Leave it to them. That’s why we have six of them on board!” He shouted out as the shuddering along the entire ship suddenly ceased.

“That’s it!” Kelly screamed out. “We’re in!”

“Extend the ADUs!” Patton almost screamed as he rose to his feet.

“Hull temp returning to normal!” The Ops officer reported. “All sections report combat ready Captain! A lot of chattering about the view coming in... but all of them are standing by!”

“ADUs locking into place!” The TO announced. “Transferring power to drive units! ADUs at full power!”

“Kelly!” Patton barked coming up behind her chair now. “Turn us around girl! Full power to the ADUs! Lock onto coordinates and let’s turn and burn!”

“Engaging ADUs!” Kelly announced. “And turning and burning!” She added with a grin.

The massive atmospheric drive units that extended on both the port and starboard sides of the *KINDRED SOUL* just above her main drive engines fired powerfully, adding the ability to turn and maneuver more quickly while in the atmosphere of a planet.

Patton moved back to his chair and activated his COM unit. "This is the Captain! Launch the CAP! I say again... launch the CAP! To all Deck Chiefs... force fields coming down! Get me eyes in the sky! Launch *RAPTORS*! Begin deploying the *Durcunusaan* Division! Begin deploying the *Durcunusaan* Division! Landing bays are yours! The bays are yours!"

It was an incredible sight to see as Lieutenant Harbin had the *KINDRED SOUL* in a thirty degree turn sweeping out over the ocean and the port and starboard landing bays began to spew *STRIKERS*, *KADEN* and *RAPTOR III* ships out of their bays.

The Lycavorian Union had arrived on Solmar in force. And they were not in a friendly mood.

DAGGER TWO ALPHA

GUNSHIP LEAD

GENERAL BYKA COMMANDING

"...What is that?" Byka asked as his finger stabbed at the small sensor screen between Kameka and her co-pilot pointing at the large red signature that had just appeared clearly on the screen.

Kameka glanced down from where she had been scanning the horizon and making sure none of the other thirty-three *DAGGER* gunships got too close to her own. Her eyes grew a little wider as she saw it. "My god!" She gasped.

"What?" Her father snapped.

"We thought it... we thought it was part of a ship crashing down through the atmosphere! One the Union fleet had destroyed!" She answered as she dropped her hand to adjust the screen.

"It's not?" Byka asked.

Kameka shook her head quickly. "No! It's maneuvering! It... father it's huge!"

"Meka... are you telling me they got a ship that size through the atmosphere?" Byka asked her.

Kameka nodded her helmeted head. "It's nearly three thousand meters long!"

"A cruiser of some sort?" Byka asked quickly.

"It's not approaching the settlements. It's on course for the southern continent." She answered.

"The southern..." Byka's eyes grew wide. "That's why?" He exclaimed. "That's why we have not found any trace of them! Of course! They have transports! They are on the southern continent!" He looked at his daughter. "Get Azlenr on the COM!"

Kameka turned and tapped several buttons on the console to her left and then nodded. "Go!"

"Azlenr!" Byka spoke into the helmet COM.

"Byka?" Azlenr's voice answered just as Marsin moved into the cockpit from the rear.

"Azlenr... the Union has just inserted some sort of ship into the atmosphere!" Byka reported.

"Yes we are watching it!" Azlenr answered. "It's not moving for the settlements though. What ship of such size could enter the atmosphere of a planet?"

Byka nodded. "I don't know... but it's headed for the southern continent!" Byka spoke. "I believe that is where the Union Prince is! That is why we have not found any sign of them in three days of searching. They are using their transports to move back and forth from the different continents!"

Marsin had plugged his helmet into the COM system and was listening to them talk. "We should split our forces and move half towards the southern continent." He spoke. "We will be closer if he reveals himself."

Byka nodded. "Azlenr I agree."

"No!" Azlenr replied. "Move all of the *DAGGERS* south! I will send reinforced Armored Scout units to different locations to put them in position to strike! If that is some sort of troop ship... it's massive!"

"Father!" Kameka called out. "It's launching other ships!" She stated running her fingers over the sensor board.

"What kind?" Byka asked.

“A few fighters but mostly what appears to be *STRIKERS* and their *KADEN* transports!” she replied.

“What appears to be?” Marsin snarled at her.

Kameka turned her dark eyes on him with fury. “Our sensors are not as sophisticated as those on a ship!” She hissed at him. “We can not determine exactly what they are, only a limited profile!”

“It must be a troop ship of some sort!” Azlenr’s voice echoed in the COM.

“A troop ship that large could land thousands of troops!” Byka barked. “How did we not know they possessed such a ship?”

“It doesn’t matter! Move your force and be prepared to attack the Lycavorian Prince the moment he reveals his location!” Azlenr ordered. “Byka... execute Plan 99.”

Byka didn’t hesitate and nodded his head. “Understood.” He said in reply.

Marsin looked at him. “What is Plan 99?” He asked.

Byka ignored him and took Kameka’s arm. “Give the order Meka. Let’s begin moving to the southern continent.”

Kameka nodded and began speaking on her internal COM to the other ships. Byka turned to look at Marsin as the *DAGGER* began to move.

“What is this Plan 99?” Marsin snapped again. His distaste for Byka was very evident and it showed in the manner in which he chose to speak to him. Byka let it slide for the moment regardless. Marsin would be dead in a matter of hours and then the single stain upon his honor would be gone and his daughter, who he had come to love far more than a Kavalian father should have loved his daughter given their views on females, then Kameka would have the justice due her.

“Plan 99 is what we will do when we meet the Lycavorian forces defending the Prince.” Byka stated. “We will meet them and be victorious.”

Marsin glared at him for several more moments and then his eyes turned to look at Meka. She felt his glare boring into her back and she turned her head to look at him. “If you are finished conferring with the General Major... please exit my cockpit! It is already too crowded and you are just taking up space!”

Marsin opened his mouth to reply but stopped. As the pilot for this *DAGGER* she had the authority to tell him exactly what she had and as much as it angered him he had to comply. With a snort of anger Marsin turned and exited the cockpit, the door closing behind him. Byka reached out and locked the bulkhead door as he slowly drew out his ARSOC sidearm. With his other hand he removed a short barreled silencer and quickly attached it to the barrel. In a very smooth, practiced motion Byka turned and placed the barrel of his ARSOC to the neck of the co-pilot and fired twice.

Kameka’s head whipped around and she gasped in horror as the head of her co-pilot lolled to the side and he went limp in his seat. She turned wide eyes on her father. “PAPA!” She hissed.

Byka reached around and unbuckled the co-pilot and unceremoniously pulled his body from the seat. “He was a spy for Marsin.” Byka stated softly as he settled into the seat. “Marsin is under orders to assassinate General Azlenr and I as well as any senior officers they can reach. Marsin intended to kill you himself.”

Kameka looked back at the body and then to her father. “He’s has... he has been my co-pilot for over two years papa.” She said.

Byka nodded. “And an agent for Marsin and Keleru for all of that time.” He replied. “Do you trust me daughter?”

“Papa... you know I do.” She answered without hesitation.

“Then trust me now.” He told her. “Azlenr and I have set things in motion that will insure we live out this day.”

“Live out this day?” Meka asked. “What do you mean?”

Byka looked at her. “You will know in a short while.” He stated. “For the moment... for the moment just fly the ship! When we find the Prince’s camp begin your attack run. The rest is taken care of. I hope.” He said.

Power had been returned to the base fully, the adjustable lights making everyone feel more comfortable. It was obvious they were going to be here longer than they had intended and true to their ability to adapt quickly to any situation, everyone began to settle in for the evening. They would all stay within the main hall in the living section of the base as it was the largest and most easily defensible position. To accommodate this fact, blankets that were not too full of holes from dust mites were brought from the quarters surrounding the main hall, along with six inch thick foam mattresses that were still in good repair. The large armored plates on the outside of the view windows had been retracted, allowing the bright sunlight to filter in and chase away the chill of the steel bulkhead walls before the sun went down. While everyone was taking stock of what they had been able to procure, Martin and others were in the Control Center.

“...still working on unlocking more of the databases...” Wayonn spoke as he turned in from the main control console in the chair. “But I can tell you what I have discovered.”

Martin sat behind him on the floor, his back against several large crates that had been brought in to serve as a defensive position near the door and looked at the animated expression of Wayonn’s face with some puzzlement. Aricia sat between his legs, For'mya, Anja and the others either leaning against him or each other in some manner. Helen sat to their right with Fedor, Eirene and Miseo. “I’m guessing it must be good news or else you wouldn’t be wearing that *“I just got laid”* expression.”

“*Nauta Melme!*” Dysea exclaimed. “Your manners!”

Martin cringed slightly. “Sorry.” He said. Eirene leaned into Miseo with a small laugh at her second elven mother’s admonishment of their father while Fedor and Helen chuckled softly beside them.

Martin reached down into a small pouch on his combat harness and took out a ration bar. He couldn’t stand the normal ration bars that came with their field meals so he had Gallais put together a recipe for a new one. It was very high protein and tasted faintly of roasted pork which was one of his favorite foods. Gallais made them especially for him and he always carried half a dozen of the bars into the field with him no matter where he was. It just so happened that Aricia and the others found them very tasty as well. “Ok... let’s have it.” He said. “It’s got to be better than realizing we’re sitting on a few hundred of the same lizard people who tried so earnestly to eat us not days ago. Among other things.”

He tore the wrapper from the ration bar open and lifted the bar to take a bite but Aricia’s hand snatched it from his grasp before he could bite down. Wayonn watched as Martin lowered his head to nuzzle her neck and she giggled as she leaned into it before taking a bite from the bar and handing it to For'mya. Martin didn’t hesitate and removed another ration bar from his pouch.

Helen nudged both Fedor and Eirene where they were sitting. “Watch.” She whispered.

“The planet’s name is Onterom.” Wayonn spoke as he watched Martin tear open the wrapper and lift that ration bar to his mouth. His eyes grew a little wider when just as Martin was about to take a large chunk of it Anja’s small hand snapped out and swiped the bar from his grasp.

“Hey!” Martin hissed.

“What?” Anja asked just before she took a bite and handed it to Dysea who smiled and savored the chunk she bite from the bar.

Martin growled at them, pulsing them both with his aura just a fraction seeing their faces change ever so slightly as they soaked up his essence. He reached down to take another bar out of the pouch while Wayonn watched. Isabella was watching Martin from over his shoulder and before he even had a chance to finish tearing open the wrapper she had snatched it from his grasp to share it Cirith. Martin exhaled with some exasperation finally. “Hey! I bring those for me!” He complained.

“They are very good Beloved.” Aricia commented turning his head to look at him with those azure eyes as she chewed.

“Bring your own!” Martin said.

“What for?” Anja commented as she chewed. “You carry enough for all of us. And you would never refuse one of us would you Lover?”

Martin looked at her and watched as she bat her jade green eyes at him. “Jeez!” He said as he pushed himself to his feet and Aricia scooted over beside For'mya with a laugh. “I’m going to starve to death with you guys around me.”

Martin turned and looked at Wayonn who had an amused expression on his face as he met his eyes. “What?” Martin snapped. “You think this is funny? You know how many pounds I have lost through the years because these characters always take my food. Gallais makes these ration bars for me!”

Wayonn nodded. “My mate made something similar for me. Slow cooked beef inside breaded shells.” He said with a smile. “And just as quickly she would eat them all. I could never refuse her.”

“Sometimes this Alpha wolf thing is a real downer.” Martin said shaking his head as he took the last bar he had brought with him out of the pouch. He made sure none of them were going to jump up and take it out of his hand and then he tore the wrapper off it and quickly tore a chunk from the bar. He looked back to Wayonn. “You were saying?” He spoke while chewing.

“It is our way to insure our mates are taken care of.” Wayonn said. He glanced to Martin’s right. “And our children.”

Martin turned his head and saw Eirene standing beside him and looking up at him with those dark brown orbs and the most lost expression on her face. Martin looked at the ration bar and then back to her surreal face. He held out the bar to her without even pausing as For'mya and the others burst into soft laughter. “I’m a sucker.” He said shaking his head. “Just write sucker on the back of my shoulder.”

Wayonn chuckled as well as Eirene scampered back to her spot next to Helen and Miseo and took a large bite from the ration bar before giving it to her husband. “You are a very good father and mate Martin Leonidas. Much like Sumar was.” He said.

Martin looked at him. “Tell that to my stomach.” He said. “Another couple years and I’m going to be a very thin father and mate.”

Wayonn held out the P9 to him and Martin began reading as he continued. “As I was saying... the planet’s name is Onterom. And it was established by Pralors.”

Martin lifted his eyes and looked at him as Helen came to her feet. “Come again?” Martin said. “I thought you and Shiria said the Pralors were extinct.”

Wayonn nodded. “That is what we thought as well.” He answered. “It appears that is not the case. To my great surprise I decided to try and activate my old Security Codes from my time as Sumar’s oracle.” Wayonn looked at him. “Incredibly... they worked.”

Martin met his gaze. “Wait a minute. Your security codes from forty thousand years ago still work? How is that possible?”

“It appears as if they were never removed from the main Pralor Science Convention database.” He answered. “I found this strange until I remembered that removing the Security Codes for several hundred thousand members of the Science Convention that were lost on CS41 would have been a low priority with the second war just beginning. I can only assume it was never done.”

“So this computer has information dating back to the second war?” Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “No... the logs that I have found seem to indicate that the base codes for security and background were downloaded from a ship.” He answered. “Our ships would have been the last step in removing my security codes. I can only assume they never got around to deactivating the codes from whatever ship brought the crew of this station here. There were survivors of the second war Martin. Refugees if you will. This information proves it. It was they who established this Science station. The logs do not go into great detail about how many... but I do know where they are.”

Helen moved right up to him. “Where they are Grandfather?” She gasped.

Wayonn nodded with what amounted to a shit eating grin and turned back to face the console. He typed on it for several moments and then pointed to the large monitor. “The map that Muton has us following? The one he says they pieced together through the years from visions and fragments of Pralor technology?” Wayonn stabbed the large monitor on a single blue dot. “It leads right here. The planet’s name is Artaaya.”

Martin looked at him. “Wayonn are you...?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes... I’m sure Martin my boy.” He said. “The coordinates vary slightly, but that could be accounted for by the celestial time passage.”

Martin leaned over his shoulder and looked at the monitor above their heads. “You are sure Wayonn?” Martin asked with a serious tone.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. There is no question.” He answered. “I’ve discovered that this station was the one hundred and fifty first PSS they sent out. They must have begun recounting them as they built new ones

after the war. They were successfully able to terraform the planet within nine hundred years and then began taking samples from all over the planet. Their resources must have been limited or they would have sent more than one PSS. As I told you before we always sent at least six.”

“How long has this thing been here then?” Martin asked.

“Roughly three thousand five hundred years give or take a few years according to the logs.” He replied. “The base had five commanders, each serving a five hundred year tour with the personnel. The last commander is the one who evacuated the station.”

“Because of our guests?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded. “That would be my guess.” He said.

“*Val'istar*...” Fedor spoke up. “Those creatures below are in stasis pods. Why would they evacuate the base if the situation was under control?”

Martin turned back to Wayonn. “He’s got a good point.” He said.

Wayonn nodded. “Indeed.” He said. “The Station Commander’s logs are encrypted. I can crack them I’m sure... but it will take time for me to recall the different abilities I could access with the Security Protocols of an Oracle. I haven’t used them in over forty thousand years Martin.”

Martin nodded and placed his hand on Wayonn’s shoulder as he read what was on the screen. He reached to his pouch and brought out his P1, activating it and typing on the small pad. The pad went through a series of high pitched hums and chirps before it synced up.

“Yuriko?” Martin spoke without looking at the P1 as he set it on the console.

“Father.” Yuriko’s voice answered immediately. “Nothing is wrong I hope.”

“No. Say hello to your mothers and brother and sister.” Martin said as he lifted his hand and traced a finger down the monitor and the blueprints of the station.

“Mothers!” Yuriko called out happily. “Fedor! Eirene!”

“Hello Yuriko!” Bella spoke for all of them. “How is Filrian?”

“At the moment he is giving a good cussing to two crewmembers who went too far in a training bout.” Yuriko answered with soft humor. “My Blessed husband never swears and when he does the crew knows he is not happy. He can be so inventive in his choice of words as well. The mission to the station is going well?”

Martin looked at the P1 now. “That is why I’m contacting you Yuriko. How far back are they?”

“They Kavalian Task Force has slowed to conduct training drills.” She replied instantly. “Milk runs really, to keep their pilots sharp. They have fallen back some. If they went to full power they could be on you within ninety hours tops. That is if they knew your exact location. Which they don’t.”

“Do me a favor *arande*.” Martin spoke.

“Anything father.” She answered.

“Sneak in close and drop a few RK12 anti-matter plasma mines in their path.” Martin spoke. “Just to let them know we are thinking of them.”

Yuriko chuckled at his words. “Of course father.” She said. “Shall I paint any words of wisdom on the mines before we deploy them?”

“Eat shit and die comes to mind.” Martin answered. “But whatever your people feel is accurate.”

“Martin... won’t that let them know they are on the right course?” Helen asked.

Martin looked at her and nodded. “Yep.” He answered. “It also lets them know that we know they are there. My brother is stupid... but not that stupid. He’ll slow his forward progress, even if it’s only a fraction.”

“They are following a trail I am leaving Martin Leonidas.” For'mya spoke now looking at him.

“Allowing them to know they are close enough to worry us enough to drop mines does not give me good feelings.”

Martin turned his head and looked at her. “I’d follow any trail you left *Kinsoaurgai*. You do smell so delightful.”

“*Carians*... you are such a perv!” Anja declared as they all laughed and For'mya got to her feet.

“*Medwan*... I am on my bridge.” Yuriko spoke.

“Oh... sorry!” Martin announced. “Contact me when the deed is done.”

Yuriko was laughing softly. “*OMEN THREE* out.”

For'mya moved right up to him and looked up into his face. “Martin... however they are following me... I do not wish to put others in danger by letting them know they are succeeding in their task.”

Martin crossed his arms over his chest and looked at her. “And what task would that be *Kinsoaurgai*?” He asked her.

“Causing you to make decisions because they are after me.” For'mya answered.

“The only decision I made because my dear brother is coming after you is to love you that much more definitively.” Martin spoke reaching out to take her face in his large hands and leaned over to kiss her softly. “How am I doing in that regard?”

For'mya couldn't help but blush and the edges of her high curved elven ears turned the faintest shade of pink in response. For'mya gripped his arms tightly and met his dark eyes with ardor in her own. “You have... you have succeeded most brilliantly Martin Leonidas.” She stammered.

Martin smiled and kissed her again. “Good. Besides... I know how they are following you and I made the decision to let them think that we don't know.” He said.

Even Wayonn looked at him. “You know?” He asked. “How? I thought...”

Martin smiled at him. “I knew exactly eighty four seconds after Avi entered the system.” Martin spoke looking at him. Martin grinned even wider. “Does my boy know me or what?” He barked out happily. “He sent Avi out here knowing I would need him. How's that for father and son!”

“Wait!” For'mya asked gripping his arms tighter. “How then? *Melyanna* did every scan she could think of.”

Martin nodded as he looked back at her. “Every scan she could think of that was up to date.” He said. “She never thought to scan for something that hasn't been used in over a hundred years. At least not by the Union.”

“What?” Anja declared.

Martin nodded. “They are using a Borellum Acoustic Pulse.” He answered. “Avi signaled me when he entered the system and that's the first thing I had him do. He discovered it as they were landing on the *ARC ROYAL*. It's very old, and completely innocuous. And none of our instruments are tuned to detect something so old.” Martin looked at For'mya. “It's in the middle toe of your right foot. The same toe that I have been...”

“Martin!” For'mya hissed quickly cutting off his words. “Everyone does not need to know what we and our mates do in the privacy of our quarters!” She scolded him.

“*Medwaw* please!” Eirene spoke now shaking her head. “Stop acting like Fedor and I have not heard it all before.”

“If Avi has detected it and we know where it is...” Wayonn said. “Should we not have Anja remove it?”

“I agree.” Helen spoke.

“No.” Martin said.

“Martin why?” Helen asked looking at him.

“If we remove it then Pleistarchus will no longer think he has a chance to reclaim me.” For'mya said softly never taking her eyes from Martin. “And the opportunity with Kalis will be lost forever.”

Martin took her face in his hands again. “He... he can be saved *Kinsoaurgai*. We can...”

For'mya covered his hands with her own and shook her head. “No. Do not explain it to me Martin Leonidas. I can see it in your heart and mind. We all can.” She moved closer to him, pressing her lithe elven body against his. “The rage and discord is still there, buried deep, but you have pushed it to the back behind your belief in Kalis.”

Martin nodded. “He would never have been able to complete the lessons if he did to want to change his life For'mya. No matter how I feel about my brother and what he has done to you, I can't... I can't just cast aside Kalis because of my brothers sins. Not after what he has done. That would be a greater crime. You know that.”

For'mya nodded her head. “I do... yes.” She said. “Then we will do this.” She said. “And in taking Kalis from him we will earn another kind of victory. One that will make him feel even more pain before he dies.”

Martin lowered his forehead to hers. [*I swear to you with all that I am he will pay for what he did to you Kinsoaurgai. I swear it to you.*]

For'mya was an elf and as a norm, elves were not the vindictive sort. For'mya Leonidas however was also part wolf now thanks to the man she loved so completely. The wolf in her demanded justice. Retribution. As she gazed into Martin's eyes she knew he would fulfill that promise to her no matter what he had to do.

For'mya kissed him softly and nodded her head. *[I know my beloved Martin. I know.]* She took a deep breath and smiled. *[Do I... do I need to do anything?]* She asked him.

Martin smiled. *[Besides looking absolutely delicious like you always do?]* He said. *[No. I'll take care of everything.]*

For'mya's grin grew even wider and she blushed once more. He could always say the right things to her. She nodded and squeezed his arms. "Then we will not speak of it any more." She said.

Martin watched as she moved back to her spot beside Aricia and both Aricia and Anja leaned over to nuzzle her neck as Dysea and the others reached for her with their hands. Martin turned back to Wayonn and met his eyes.

"I probably don't want to know what you have planned for your brother do I?" Wayonn asked.

Martin shook his head. "Probably not." He replied.

Wayonn nodded. "Fair enough." He said. He picked up Martin's P1 and handed it back to him. "I did do some creative programming and your P1, along with everyone who carries one now has access to the entire base. I reconfigured the security protocols as well. No one who is not a member of your family will be able to override them."

Martin looked at him. "You're part of that family Wayonn. Remember that." He said.

Wayonn nodded his head with a smile. "I will."

"Avi will be coming down first thing in the morning." Martin said.

"Good. Things will go quicker with him here to access the computers." Wayonn said.

"Why don't you and I head down to the vehicle bay and have a talk with Arzoal." Martin said.

Wayonn looked at him. "In regards to what?" He asked.

"In regards to history and some other things Avi made me aware of when he entered the system." Martin said.

"I don't follow." Wayonn said.

"Does the name Kasdan or Lorendo mean anything to you?" Martin asked. The look on Wayonn's face was all the answer Martin needed and he nodded his head. "See... we got a lot to talk about."

Iama laid on her back on the soft foam mattress and let her keen feline eyes wander across the many bodies in the darkened central lounge. Many of them slept alone or in small groups with their peers, and she could see three sets of bodies that slept wrapped tightly in one another's arms. One of those pairs was Miseo and Eirene Leonidas. Fedor had not returned to the main lounge with his sister and she found that odd. They normally were never very far apart and his empty foam bed was next to theirs. The chill from the metal walls was cutting through her even with the heaters on within the station. Even with the blanket she could not get warm enough to fall asleep. Finally she tossed the blanket aside and got to her feet. She was very good at direction and she began walking back to the vehicle bay where they had come in. This was a new planet they said, only able to sustain life for the last nine hundred years, and that meant the atmosphere would be clear and the air crisp. Perhaps the fresh air would clear her head and allow her to fall asleep. It took her only a few moments to make her way back to the vehicle bay, crossing path with two *Durcunusaan* who nodded to her as she moved past. Both of the men looked at her with enticing smiles, as if trying to persuade her to stop and talk with them. Iama knew that look and she realized then that word was beginning to spread that she was easy to get into bed. That was not the reputation she wanted to have in this new life and she decided right then that the next man to share her bed was the one she would spend the rest of her life with.

As Iama walked into the vehicle bay she found the massive doors wide open and the crisp air of the night filled her lungs. She smiled as she moved past the security position, ignoring the two Spartans there, and she moved past the main double doors. King Leonidas had not forbid them from going outside since the only threat they faced was three levels down and very much asleep in their stasis pods. With nothing more than plant life on the surface, there was no real threat, but she still detected the defensive sensors set up a hundred meters from the entrance. She moved past those sensors and stopped, inhaling of the clean air and letting it fill her lungs and clear her head.

“Looking for someone child?” The older female voice spoke from the darkness and Iama whirled around as the shape of the woman came out of the darkness. She watched as Helen casually walked up to her holding the large mug in her hands.

“Oracle.” Iama gasped. “I... no. I wasn't looking for anyone.” She replied quickly.

Helen smiled in the darkness as she detected the lie from the adrenalin dumped into her system.

“Beautiful night isn't it?” Helen said.

Iama nodded quickly. “Yes.”

Helen looked up into the stars. “I would stand on top of the highest mountain in Sparta on many nights and stare off into the stars wondering if it would change.” Helen sipped her mug and smiled. “Well it did. In many ways I had never imagined or could hope for.” She looked at Iama. “It will change for you too child. Freedom smells so sweet now doesn't it?”

Iama could not deny that and she nodded her head. “Yes it does.” She said softly. She looked at Helen and charged forward without thinking. “May I ask you something Oracle?” She spoke.

Helen looked at her. “My name is Helen child.” She said with a smile. “Oracle makes me sound ancient. I have always hated that name.”

“But you are... you are the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people.” Iama said quickly. “Every one of your people I have seen regards you almost reverently.”

Helen nodded. “Yes... and it's very taxing at times.” She said. “The only place where I do not feel so worshiped is on the Royal Estate back in Sparta. There I can be myself.”

“The King does not refer to you like this?” Iama asked.

Helen laughed. “Since the day we met, Martin Leonidas and I have been the most normal around each other. He hates it when people refer to him as King or Milord. He would be very happy if people just used his name.”

“But he is King.” Iama gasped.

Helen nodded. “And given the opportunity he would take his Queens and vanish to the far reaches of the universe if he could.” She told her. “He hates being King almost as much as he hates fighting.”

Iama looked at her wide eyed. “But... but he is a Spartan! I... the *Durcunusaan* I have spoken too... I thought Spartans reveled in battle.”

Helen smiled at her. “Sit with me Iama.” She said as she lowered herself to the ground on the slight incline and patted the soft grass next to her. Helen's eyes grew bright when Iama didn't hesitate and she settled next to her. “I never said Martin or any Spartan were not good at it... fighting I mean... but you would be hard pressed to find a Lycavorian who would not rather play with his children and love his woman than fight.”

“These... these are not things that are known.” Iama spoke slowly. “Many of my people fear yours.”

Helen looked at her. “Fear us?” She asked somewhat surprised. “The Kavalian people are strong and fearsome themselves. Why would they fear us?”

“You must understand First Oracle...” Iama saw Helen's face twist into distaste and she smiled. “Helen. You must understand... my people are not allowed to chose their own paths. Most of them anyway. All they have known is the Prefect and his laws. The average Kavalian would much rather hunt and work. Keleru is the one who has twisted their sense of duty. And most of their knowledge of Lycavorians comes from Marshall Pusintin.”

“Ah...” Helen nodded her head. “Yes. Well... I can tell you with complete certainty that he does not embolden the spirit of my people. He has always craved more, ever since he was a boy and it has corrupted his mind and his heart. He is not a Lycavorian and he hasn't been for many centuries.”

“You knew the Marshall when he was a child?” Iama gasped.

Helen nodded. “I knew him. I watched as he was born and as he grew.” She said softly. “If his father knew what he would become... he would have discarded him that very first day as was Spartan custom.”

“But the Spartan way was not always your people's way.” Iama said.

Helen nodded her head. “No it wasn't. It wasn't for a very long time... but now we bleed Spartan law. It's very amusing at times to think we as a people adopted the ways of humans who we regarded as beneath us for so long. But just as we took much from the Spartan way... we gave so much back. And though much of our history is barbaric in many respects to how we are now, there was always honor and faith in that history. Even before we adopted the Spartan way of life.” She told her. “We outgrew our savage nature thanks to Martin's

grandparents and great grandparents. We grew into what we are now. Yes... when we fight, we are devastating to our enemies. But we are equally as devoted to our friends and allies. Given a choice... we'd much rather drink Spartan wine and play with our children as fight." Helen looked at her. she reached out and touched her arm gently. "But you did not come out here to listen to me prattle on about our history. What vexes you child?"

Iama looked away and shook her head. "I simply... I just could not sleep." She stated.

Helen chuckled softly. "Child... you do know that we can detect the adrenalin cast into a person's bloodstream when they speak a lie. It causes their scent to change ever so slightly." Helen squeezed her arm. "Just as yours just did now and a few moments ago. You can talk to me Iama. You have... you have no one and I know all this must be overwhelming. But you can always talk to me."

"Forgive me." Iama said softly. She looked at Helen and knew her words were spoken truly. She felt like she could speak with her about anything. "I... I do not know where I fit in. I am free for the first time in my life and I do not know how to accept that freedom. Or what to do with it."

"You seem to be doing just fine." Helen told her.

Iama looked at her. "I am a cook Helen." She stated plainly. "It is the only thing I was ever taught. My... other skills... they are not something I wish to use any longer except for the man who will make me his wife. If that day ever comes." She added in a low voice.

Helen laughed. "Ah... child... the quickest way to befriend a Lycavorian is through their stomach! And you have done that with everyone on the *ARC ROYAL*. They adore your cooking Iama. Martin and the Queens rave about it. Of course... he raves about all food."

Iama matched her soft laugh at that comment but then her face became serious. "I have befriended too many I think." Iama muttered.

"This is about the young men who have shared your bed since your arrival on the ship isn't it?" Helen asked her.

"There have been too many." Iama said pointedly. "But they treat me so much better than what I am used too. Yet... I know none of them want me for more than comfort and pleasure. I enjoy it too Helen... but I want... I want..."

"You want more." Helen said.

Iama nodded. "I do not care for them as I care for..." Iama stopped talking. "It matters not now... he probably thinks I am nothing more than a whore now. And he is different. He was born like the..."

Helen sipped her mug of coffee. "I would not be too hasty in judging what Fedor thinks of you child." She said.

Iama's soft green eyes grew wide and she looked at her. "What? You... how...?"

"Another thing about this crazy sense of smell all Lycavorians have..." Helen said. "We can detect when someone desires another person. Male or female. And you child... you are fighting your desire for Fedor Leonidas something fierce. Just as he is for you. Why do you think he is not sleeping inside the station?"

"Because of me?" Iama gasped.

Helen nodded. "Your scent is... how do I explain this? It is like a drug to him. He wants it... but he thinks he can't have it. In order to fight it... he stays away."

"But the growth hormone." Iama said. "I have seen this is thousands of Kavalian clones. Their minds do not... they do not develop like their bodies."

"Fedor is no Kavalian clone child." Helen said. "He is very smart and witty. He's taking after his father too much if you ask me."

"His father is Marshall Pusintin!" Iama hissed.

Helen held up a finger and shook her head. "Now that is where you are wrong." She said gently. "Pusintin or Pleistarchus or whatever he wishes to call himself these days... he may have donated the sperm... but he is not Fedor's father. Nor Eirene's. Martin is their father and will be until the day they die."

"How is that possible?" Iama asked.

"When a Lycavorian senses that a child has been conceived... and the female's scent changes almost instantly when this happens mind you. When the male senses this he leaves an impression upon the child in the womb within Mindvoice. It is instinct in Lycavorian men to do this. Like second nature. Just as Mindvoicing is second nature to us." Helen said. "Pusintin did not do this when he used the drugs and raped For'mya. He knew she was in Phase... which is the most fertile time for a female Lycavorian... turned or Pureblood. When he

raped her and got her pregnant he did not imprint his essence on Fedor and Eirene like any Lycavorian would do to his children. This caused them to quite instinctively reach for the most powerful essence they could find. That essence was Martin's. Fedor and Eirene are no more Pusintin's children than you or I."

"But how can their minds have developed like you say?" Iama asked. "Kavalian clones never fully mature in an intellectual way."

"Well... that is a little harder to explain to someone who can not Mindvoice and does not have Etheric ability." Helen said. "You have seen what Martin can do? What Androcles can do? A few others?"

Iama nodded. "Yes. It is unbelievable."

"I won't go into the boring details of how they can do these things... only that it is this ability that allowed Androcles to bite his mother and touch the minds of the Fedor and Eirene while they were still within For'mya's womb." Helen said. "He touched them within the womb and granted them awareness of their surroundings and their minds. This contact with him and then For'mya on a continuing basis allowed their minds to grow at the same rate as their bodies. Faster even given the knowledge and wisdom he passed to them. Androcles would do anything for his siblings. Anything at all. He loves them dearly and he has appointed himself their guardian for all time. I don't know what drives that young man... but when it comes to his brother and sisters... there is nothing he would not do." Helen told her. "That is why he did what he did with Eirene and Fedor. Essentially... when they were born, they already had the intelligence of someone three times their age. Now... now they are doing the things that any Lycavorian or elf would do at this age."

"That is... it is so hard to believe." Iama said softly as she shook her head.

"Do you believe that Martin has these abilities?" Helen asked.

Iama met her eyes. "I have seen them. Of course." She said.

"Then do not dismiss what you have not seen simply because you have not seen it." Helen said. "Have you spoken with Fedor? Sat down with him and really talked to him?"

Iama shook her head. "Oh no... I couldn't do that."

"And why not?" Helen asked.

"He... he is a Prince." Iama said. "His sister a Princess." Iama shook her head. "I am no one when compared to them."

Helen chuckled and squeezed her hand. "If only you knew how wrong you are child." She said. "You must realize that when a Lycavorian... even a turned one... when they get the scent of the woman they want in their head it does not go away until they are rejected openly. Fedor believes you see him as some sort of child because of how you have treated him."

"I did not mean too... I thought he was like all the others I have known!" Iama defended herself. "I..."

"Do you find him physically attractive Iama?" Helen asked her.

Iama looked at her. Did she find him attractive? Iama shook her head. "He is... he is the most beautiful man I have ever laid my eyes upon." She said almost wistfully.

"Then forget he is a Prince and discover what is in his head." Helen said. "He is no child Iama... and once you realize that... well... then you can move forward. If ever two souls were meant for one another... it is the two of you."

Iama's eyes grew a little wider. "How do you... how do you know that?" She asked.

Helen chuckled once more. "I am the Oracle of the Lycavorian people." She stated playfully. "There are many things that I know. If you wish to know him than forget what you have experienced in the past and move forward into the future. Believe me... he no more acts like a Prince than his brothers do. And I have been after them for years to act in a way befitting their position. All of them."

"Do they listen?" Iama asked.

Helen chortled. "Never." She replied. "And nor does their father. It must run in their blood or something. A defect of some kind."

Iama couldn't help herself this time and she laughed at Helen's expression and tone of voice now. "You... you do not act like... like an Oracle of your people." She said.

"Thank the gods for that!" Helen retorted. "If I did... I'd be walking around like some senseless automation spewing monotonous entries from some never ending book that only I have seen. We wouldn't want that would we?"

"No." Iama said honestly with a smile.

Helen squeezed her hand even tighter. “You are free now child. Free of every horror that has befallen you in the past. Forget them now. Push them deep into the back of your mind and lock them away. Grasp for the future you could have. It is how we live. It is how we all should live. If Fedor Leonidas is anything like his father and brothers... and he is more like them than I care to comment on at times... he will worship you Iama. Worship you in a way that will make your head spin and your senses scream for more. Trust me on this child.”

“I would... I would not know where to begin.” Iama spoke softly. “I have been very... I have been very cruel to him. I have said terrible things and treated him as no more than a child. How do I fix that?”

“That should be the first sign to you that he is different. Because his desire for you has not waned an iota even after that. Talking to him would be a good start.” Helen said nudging her arm. She motioned to the outside of the PSS and then four stories up where Iama’s eyes grew wide as she spied Fedor sitting on the edge of the roof structure to the side of the tower. She could easily make out Kdan’s wings flapping every so often next to him. “The elevator to the roof is on the outside of the structure on the west.”

“He is... he is with his dragon.” Iama said haltingly. “I... I shouldn’t bother them.”

“Kdan and Fedor are bonded now Iama. They will always be together.” Helen said. “You can’t use that as an excuse child. And I know from how you have reacted before you do not share the inbred fear of dragons that most of your kind does. You never know... you just may end up sharing in that bond they have. It has happened before. Take a chance child... you will not be disappointed.”

Iama met her eyes and Helen saw a determination begin to grow in them. She was already smiling when Iama came to her feet. “Thank you Helen.” She said.

“That’s what I am here for.” Helen said. She watched Iama use her feline speed to sprint towards the staircase that would take her up to the future she so desired.

[Theirs will be an intense love that will burn for many millennia.] Arzoal’s voice filled her head and she turned as she felt her bonded sister settle gently to the ground a few meters away. *[As will Eirene and Miso.]*

[When have you ever known a Leonidas to love and not have it be intense sister?] Helen asked as she rose to her feet.

[True.] Arzoal said in response. *[That is why we are so connected with your kind my Bonded Sister.]*

Helen walked up to Arzoal and let her hands run along the scales on her muscular side. Arzoal’s wings fluttered gently at her Bonded Sister’s touch and she turned her head on her neck and looked at her.

[Shall we fly? The night is beautiful. We could join the others.] Arzoal spoke.

[Let them hunt.] Helen said as she scampered up into the saddle. *[Let’s enjoy the night air as we do over Sparta sister.]*

Arzoal’s eyes blinked and she nodded her massive head. *[Let’s]* She said. *[Then all we will have to do is find you a suitable mate sister.]*

Helen laughed as the Dragon Armor braces tightened on her legs. *[Hah! That is a good one sister! Who would want me? Old hag that I am!]*

Arzoal laughed within their connection as well. *[Old hag? Hardly. You are barely four thousand five hundred years old sister. I have seen some of Gallais’s friends looking at you with interest.]*

[Those old Spartans?] Helen chimed. *[Please... not a single one makes my heart flutter. Even on a windy and weak day.]*

[And what kind of man would sister?] Arzoal asked.

[A stronger man than me.] Helen answered her confidently. *[A proud man. Strong and honorable. A Spartan like Martin’s father. That would be nice. Too bad they are all taken.]*

Arzoal laughed again as she cocked her legs and exploded into the night sky. *[We shall see sister! We shall see!]*

TALISMAN

SEVENTEEN HOURS FROM ONTEROM

“...new information is somewhat disturbing.” Delnash spoke as he looked out the view window his hands folded behind his back.

“I should think so.” Lorendo snapped from his chair at the table where all of the senior Elder Pralors now sat.

Delnash turned to face them. “How is it that this Wayonn’s Security Protocols were never erased from the main database?” He asked.

“By the time we gave up the search for the five city ships lost with Sumar, the Second Scourge war was brewing.” Murano answered him. “I can only assume their codes were never removed because we were concerned with more important things. Like how to defend our people. Removing Security Protocols became a very minor secondary concern.”

“And because the men and women who should have been doing this were so lax in their duties, now these people have gained access to not only one of our Science Stations, but a Ship Avatar and the codes to operate it and the station!” Lorendo spat. “They have locked out all remote access and functionality. I would imagine in their bumbling they have released the Svorag into the station and surrounding area by now.”

“We don’t know that!” Kasdan spoke from the side wall.

“I recommend that we simply destroy the station from orbit.” Lorendo offered. “It is the only way to be sure.”

“You advocate murdering whoever is down there?” Delnash exclaimed. “Before they blocked our sensors we detected over forty individuals on the surface within the station! You would have us murder them!”

“Chief Elder... we do not need to do that!” Kasdan spoke again.

Lorendo turned in his chair and glared at his younger assistant. “Kasdan you will keep your misguided opinions to yourself. They have no place here among the Elders of our people.” He turned back to Delnash. “Destroying the station from orbit will insure none of those Svorag creatures leave the planet!”

“And in order to destroy the station you will have to destroy the two ships in orbit as well.” Murano said. “Or do you think they will simply allow us to butcher their people on the surface and not do anything to try and stop us?”

“If they attempt to stop us we can easily disable their ships.” Lorendo said.

“They have Pralor shielding Lorendo.” Delnash said. “Disabling their ships might not be as easy as you suggest.”

Lorendo looked at him. “We must do what we must.” He said.

Murano leaned forward at the table. “So now we go from a few dozen to many thousands of deaths?” He stated. “Between the two ships, the probe has scanned nearly eleven thousand other lives. Will we murder them now as well Lorendo?” He rose to his feet and looked at Delnash. “I can’t believe we are even contemplating this action. Brother... you are not actually considering what this fool is saying are you?”

“Our technology has been compromised!” Lorendo spoke angrily. “If that technology falls into the hands of the Scourge or one of their minion species, everything we have gained since fleeing will be lost!”

“There is a Praetorian down there!” Murano bellowed. “A Praetorian of Sumar’s blood! I feel him as surely as I stand here now!”

“If that really is the case then Sumar willingly broke the laws made when the Praetorians were brought into existence!” Lorendo snapped. “He defied the very laws he helped to institute when it came to you and your kind! Whatever is down there is nothing more than a dead man’s hope. An abomination! Just like all of the Praetorians! They are to blame for everything that took place with the Scourge! If not for Xaxon we...”

“Lorendo that is enough!” Delnash barked. “You will not...”

Delnash stopped speaking for Lorendo was no longer in his chair. At the moment he was suspended several meters above the table engulfed in a light blue shimmering flame. His hands were clawing at his throat as if he could not breathe and his dark eyes wide in fear. Everyone in the room had come to their feet even as Murano twisted his fist which was encased with that same light blue flame. Lorendo’s form levitated across the table to float in front of Murano whose face was a mask of anger and hate.

“I have warned you once about the lack of respect with which you speak of my honored comrades! Your continued vitriol and disrespect of my fallen brethren is becoming most taxing Elder Lorendo.” Murano growled. “You know nothing! You cowered on the other side of the Empire while it crumbled around you and my brethren and I died beside our soldiers! You blame us? If not for the Praetorians our people would have fallen in the first war you fool! And you would not be here condemning us because you would be dead!”

“Murano release him!” Delnash barked.

“I do not know where this hatred of Praetorians comes from Elder Lorendo... and frankly I do not care any longer.” Murano stated. “I will not allow you to kill a Praetorian of Sumar’s blood. I do not care about some law that is over fifty thousand years old! Sumar obviously saw the need to break it and I trust in his wisdom far more than I do in yours!”

“Murano!” Delnash shouted. “I said release him!”

Murano turned and looked at his brother. He opened his fist and instantly Lorendo fell. He bounced off the table and flew back to land on the deck on his back gasping for air. The shimmering blue flame vanished just as quickly from around his hand. “The preservation of our people is a Praetorians most sacred oath. I will not see you throw away the greatest opportunity in forty millennia to make our people strong again because of what this fool advocates brother!”

“He is an Elder of the Convention!” Delnash barked at him. “You will show him the respect he is due! Just as he will show you!”

Lorendo pushed Kasdan away from him as he rose to his feet one hand still gripping his throat. “You are mad!” He screamed. “You... you nearly killed me!”

Murano chortled at him. “If I had wanted you dead Elder Lorendo... you would be dead.” He hissed.

“Enough!” Delnash barked. “Your ongoing feud does nothing to help in what actions we need to decide! I demand that both of you cease this personal vendetta immediately!”

Murano looked at him. “If I knew why he acts such the fool towards me I would happily end it.” He spat at his brother.

“You... you and your kind are responsible for nearly all the misery we have suffered at the hands of the Scourge!” Lorendo shouted.

“My kind?” Murano stated. “I am a Pralor... just like you. Like everyone in this room!”

“No!” Lorendo barked at him. “You, Sumar and all those like you are nothing more than genetic abominations! Gifted with powers and abilities that you wield so casually and have no right to!”

“No right to? What blither is this? I did not choose to be born with the Praetorian gene!” Murano spat at him.

“If this Praetorian you say you feel... if he is there on that planet then it was Sumar who violated his own law about Praetorians not breeding outside of the ranks of our own people!” Lorendo shouted. “Only we have the knowledge and control to utilize the power you throw about so easily!”

Murano shook his head. “You speak of a law that is over fifty thousand years old!” He snapped. “If we are to survive as a people then we must dismiss this arrogance so many of us have that we are superior. That attitude has caused us more misery than anything else. We do not know what happened to Sumar and Wayonn! We were not there! You condemn and hold judgment over him and you know nothing of what happened! Who are you to make decisions on his actions?”

“I am an Elder of the Convention!” Lorendo snarled.

Murano stepped towards him only to have Delnash move in front of him. “Brother no!” He said.

Murano held out his hand and pointed at Lorendo. “You were never elected to serve the people Lorendo!” He growled at him. “None of you were! Remember that!” He let his eyes move to the other men and women in the room. “You filled the shoes of those that came before you and not once in all that time has talk of an election been held! Why is that?”

“We are... we are guiding our people.” Radra spoke for the first time.

Murano nodded. “And you have done well Elder Radra.” He said. “But do not think for an instant that your position as an Elder of the Convention makes you more special or more important than the people you serve. Tread down that path carefully Elders of the Convention, because it leads to a place you do not want to go!”

“What do you know of leading people?” Lorendo hissed at him. “Our citizens worship the Praetorians as some sort of heroes and gods. Yet you have cowered and hidden now for far longer than we ever did!”

Murano kept his rising anger in check and opened his mouth to answer but was cut off by Radra. “Now you are wrong Lorendo! And out of line!” She spoke rising to her feet. “The Praetorians have always been protectors of our people! If Murano has chosen to remain hidden and unknown these last centuries then it was only for the benefit of our people! Do not mistake his actions as something that they are not! None of us in this room have the right to do that! None of us!”

Lorendo took a deep breath. "I do not mean to imply that there is." He stated more calmly now. "But we have led our people since we had to flee. And we have done a superior job of it. And we have done it without his help!"

"And if we face the Scourge again one day I will thank the spirits he is now back among us." Another Elder spoke from further down the table. "His return has inspired our people and his existence has only been known for a few hours! It is all the crew of this ship is talking of. You can not deny the influence he has."

"I do not deny the influence!" Lorendo spat. "I question his dismissal of laws that have been in place for millennia."

"I dismiss nothing!" Murano retorted. "But I know this... Sumar was far wiser and more opened minded than you will ever be Elder Lorendo. He was not elected Chief Elder by some accident. He knew what needed to be done to protect our people. He condemned and punished his own brother for his crimes against our people and he did so willingly! If he saw a reason to disregard a law he put in place then there was a reason for it. A reason you would not be able to comprehend because your only concern is for your station."

"That is not true?" Lorendo snarled.

"Isn't it?" Murano said. "You dismissed the reports Kasdan brought to you without even looking at them. If he had not gone above his station... we would not know about what is happening right now. Why is that Elder Lorendo?"

"Enough of this!" Delnash barked out. "This bickering between you and Lorendo needs to stop!" Delnash said with force behind his words. "We have to determine what we are going to do when we arrive." Delnash turned. "Elder Sashan are there enough men in the detachment you brought to secure the station?"

Sashan nodded. "More than enough Chief Elder." He said. "They are my best."

Delnash nodded his head and returned to his chair. "Then this is what we will do." He stated. "Murano... you will lead the detachment of Convention Security Troops and secure the station. Captain Dehov will secure the two ships in orbit and we will discover what is going on. With our dragon brothers and sisters joining us... we should have no trouble."

Murano looked at him. "And you expect them to just allow us to walk right in and take them prisoner?"

"If they are friendly as you say... then yes." Delnash spoke. "They will release control of the station back to us and we will confiscate whatever Pralor technology they have and destroy what we can not take." Delnash took a deep breath. "I appreciate what you say you feel brother, but I must act on fact. I can not make decisions based solely on your word."

"If there is a Praetorian among them you will be making a mistake." Murano spoke. "He will not simply allow you to do what you say."

"I do not believe there is Murano." Delnash said shaking his head with a deep breath. "There are many coincidences yes... but if they have Avatar 41, then it stands to reason they used the knowledge Avatar 41 had of Sumar to somehow bypass the security measures put in place by Elder Lorendo. It was Sumar's Avatar, so it would have knowledge that he possessed. We know how Sumar viewed his Avatar."

"You are making a mistake brother." Murano stated. "We should be reaching out to them!"

"We can not associate with species who are more primitive than us." Delnash spoke. "That has been part of our Accord since the very beginning of the Seed Missions. If Sumar broke this Accord then there is nothing I can do."

Murano nodded slowly. "Your right." He said. "There is nothing you can do." He spoke looking at his brother. "And whatever blood comes will be on your hands brother. And I will insure our people know exactly what took place."

"You have no right!" Lorendo spat. "The decisions of this Elder Convention remain among its members! You can not act against our wishes!"

Murano looked at him. "I have every right as a Praetorian." He stated calmly now. "If it affects our people then it is my duty as a Praetorian. Unless of course this Elder Convention is going to vote to change the law and strip the Praetorians of their authority. Is that what you are proposing?"

"Murano! No!" Delnash exclaimed coming to his feet once more.

Murano nodded his head. "Then I am sorry brother. You will do what you must and so will I." He stated. "I will not be party to this unelected Elder Convention any longer. As the last Praetorian I will not act for or

against you but I will not recognize you until you see fit to have our people elect all of you as Elders. Then I will consider you legitimate.”

“Murano!” Delnash spoke coming to his feet.

“No. You have made your decision brother and I respect that. I have decided as well. I will accompany the Security Detachment to the surface but I will not take part in attempting to subdue whoever is there. I will only act in defense.” He stated. “If you will excuse me.”

Delnash and the others watched as he turned confidently and left the room.

Lorendo turned to Delnash. “Chief Elder you...”

“Silence!” Delnash spoke harshly cutting off Lorendo’s words. “Your conduct so far has not inspired confidence Lorendo! Not telling us of your actions on Onterom and refusing to allow your assistant to make this information known. I will not address your utter contempt for my brother and his position as a Praetorian! An honored and sacred position among our people! You go too far!”

“Chief Elder...” Lorendo began but Delnash held up his hand.

“No.” He stated. “I do not believe Murano feels what he says he does. There are too many unknowns and the odds that what he says is true are astronomical. I can’t deny that even though he is my brother. I do believe it is much more likely these... people, whoever they are, discovered Avatar 41 among the ruins of our crashed City Ship wherever it ended up and were able to reactivate him. We will proceed to Onterom and take them into custody. We will destroy any trace of our technology that they possess and we will do it in such a way that causes the least harm.”

“What do we do with them after we have done this?” Sashan asked. “We can’t simply leave them there. Not without providing for them.”

“Onterom is capable of sustaining life now.” Lorendo spoke. “Give them whatever supplies they have on their ships and leave them.”

Delnash shook his head. “No. We will find a suitable planet and leave them there before returning to Artaaya.” He said. “Then this business will be done. That is my decision.”

“And the dragons among them?” Radra asked.

Delnash touched the console on the table. “Teniri... have you been listening?”

The voice of the Dragon Elder Mother responded with its synthesized female sound. “I have Chief Elder Delnash.”

“Will you be able to integrate these dragons into your population?” Delnash asked.

“Chief Elder... if I may?” Teniri said.

“Of course Teniri. Always.”

“As we grow closer to this planet I have been trying to reach out and touch the dragons there within Mindvoice using a Neural Enhancer provided by Elder Lorendo. What I have felt is... odd.” She spoke.

“Odd in what way?” Delnash asked looking at Lorendo.

“I have been able to sense eight dragons on the surface.” Teniri said. “Six fully grown adults, four of whom are females. Healthy and fertile females are always welcome among the males and if I am correct, these females are young and would make excellent mates and able to produce many eggs. The other two are adolescent dragons, but they possess a...”

“What?” Delnash asked.

“I did not probe too deeply on any of them for fear of alerting them to my presence. Their Etheric Shields are exceptional Delnash. Two of them even stronger than even my own. The others almost as strong. They are also holding them very high, which means they probably did not detect my resonance.”

“This is significant Teniri?” Delnash asked.

“To be honest... I don’t know.” She answered. “These dragons are different.”

“Different how?” Radra asked now.

“Their Etheric resonance is tied very deeply with other minds. The ability to hold their shields so high for so long is not something that we can normally do.” She answered. “Murano said he thought them to be bonded with some of these individuals and I am beginning to think he may be right.”

“I thought that wasn’t possible.” Delnash asked.

“It shouldn’t be.” Teniri said in response. “I also detected great discipline within all of them. Harnessed and controlled. As if they have had some intense training of some kind. More so the six adults than the two adolescents.”

“But you can still merge them into your population correct?” Delnash asked wanting to end this discussion and find his brother.

“Yes. The females are still young from what I was able to determine as I said.” Teniri answered. “Three of them are barely a millennia old. They will be taken by male dragons as mates very quickly. The fourth is older but her shields did not allow for me to determine her age. They are much more focused and powerful. Something that only comes with age.”

“Then the dragons come with us.” Delnash spoke.

“There is something else Delnash.” Teniri said.

“Yes.”

“I caught flashes of... it was very hard to focus because some sort of field or shielding was disrupting my resonance... but I caught flashes of other dragons as well. On the ship in orbit. A few hundred at least. Young dragons. I tried to make contact with them... but I failed.” Teniri said.

Delnash looked up with wide eyes. “You are sure?”

“Yes.”

“That is odd isn’t it? You not being able to touch them?” Delnash asked.

“Very.” She answered.

“We will determine what they are there for when we take the ships.” Delnash spoke. “I imagine you will be leading your dragons to the surface?”

“Of course Delnash.” She answered. “Only we will be able to subdue those already there.”

“Then I will see you on the surface.” Delnash answered. He got to his feet. “If you will excuse me I must speak with my brother and try to calm him. Regardless of what you may think of Praetorians Lorendo... now that his existence has become common knowledge, we need his support.”

Lorendo nodded. “Of course Chief Elder.” He said.

“We will gather in the landing bay when we arrive in the system.” Delnash said. “Until then my friends.”

ONTEROM PRALOR SCIENCE STATION

“...Andro and Elynth did it.” Fedor spoke looking at Dnom as he took another bite out of the large red apple.

Dnom chuckled softly within Mindvoice. *Andro and Elynth have been together for years my Bonded Brother. We possess neither their skill nor their daring.*

“Not yet.” Fedor told him.

Not yet.

Since the slight breeze that was blowing was coming from in front of them, Fedor did not detect Iama’s scent until he saw her move from the shadows of the staircase towards him. “*Sibfla!*” He hissed softly as he rose to his feet and Dnom turned his large head and watched her approach.

As she came closer Fedor caught her scent on the air and he took a deep breath trying to clear his head and force her sweet kiwi aroma from his mind. He failed miserably, which only made things worse. Dnom noticed that she came forward hesitantly, her long tail twitching behind her as if she was very nervous. Iama moved up in front of him, her eyes glancing to Dnom and the fear that gripped so many of her people when they were near dragons nonexistent to her. Iama brought her hands together and rubbed her palms.

“Hello.” She said softly.

Fedor met her eyes. “We were just leaving.” He stated. “The roof is yours.”

Iama imposed her petite frame in front of him. “Wait.” She said.

Fedor looked at her. "Why? So you can call me more names? Or perhaps comment on my eating habits? Or maybe my intelligence level again? I think not."

Looking at him Iama felt a warm flush through her skin. He was, without any doubt, the most incredibly handsome man she had ever laid her eyes upon and the way his body armor conformed to his exquisite physique made her shiver involuntarily. His dark eyes were like beacons in the moonlit sky, and looking at his half elven ears and the way they curved inward against his head made her want to reach out and touch them. She felt immense guilt at his words and as he began to move around her, Iama placed her hand to his chest stopping him.

"Fedor... please wait." She said quickly.

Take a chance child... you will not be disappointed.

Helen's words came back to her and in that moment Iama decided. "I need to... I need to apologize to you." She stammered. "I need to say I am sorry for the way I have treated you."

Fedor stopped trying to move around her and looked down into her face. She was not lying, that much he could tell by her scent, but he was wary nonetheless. He glanced behind him unable to process that she was speaking to him and wondering if perhaps there was a ghost of himself standing behind him. He turned back around and looked down into her pale green eyes. "Why... why the sudden change of heart?" He asked finally.

"I... because I am foolish." Iama answered him. "I am foolish and though you were... I thought you were like the others; the Kavalian clones born as you and your sister were. I should have known that was not the case with you and Eirene but I allowed my... I allowed my emotions towards them direct how I treated you. I'm... I'm sorry." Iama had not removed her hand from his chest and even through the body armor she could almost feel the beating of his heart. Staring at his face and the lack of expression caused her to think she had perhaps done too much and waited too long to make amends. Her heart sank as he simply stood there and said nothing. Holding back the sudden hurt that she felt she forced a smile. "I just wanted... I just wanted to tell you that. I will... I will leave you alone now."

Iama turned from him and began walking back towards the top of the staircase, small tears beginning to form in the corners of her eyes. She did not see Fedor shake his head several times as if trying to clear his head and then he looked at her back.

"Iama?" He spoke quickly causing her to stop. "I... I could show you the celestial markers in this system. If... if you are interested."

The celestial markers? Dnom exclaimed.

Fedor looked at him. *It was the first thing that popped into my head brother! I don't know what else to say!*

Be yourself Fedor my Bonded Brother. Dnom spoke.

Iama lifted her hand and wiped the small tears away quickly as her spirits lifted and the pain she had felt a moment ago vanished into nothing. She turned quickly and looked at him. "I would like that." She said.

"You would?" Fedor asked surprised as she moved back up in front of him. "Ok... sure."

"Do you like the stars?" She asked.

Fedor smiled. "Celestial Mechanics is very cool!" He said as his face brightened. "I could do without Quantum Physics though... very boring. And the Senior Chief in engineering who is teaching it drones on like a robot. *You need to include the variables of mass and acceleration in your equations Prince Fedor or you will crash into a star or a moon.*" He spoke trying his best to imitate the Senior Chief who was teaching him. "*That wouldn't be prudent now would it?*" Fedor looked at her. "I don't think he liked it when I said we wouldn't feel anything if that happened so what was the point."

Iama couldn't help but laugh at the expression on his face or the humor he was trying to use to become more comfortable. And it was funny. His face had softened somewhat and Iama moved closer to him, thrilled when he did not move away. She reached down then to take his hand and her eyes quickly followed when she felt the object in his hand. She pulled it up and saw the apple with two bites taken out of it. She looked up into his face.

"I thought you didn't like fruit." She told him taking his hand in hers and holding his palm up with the apple in it.

Fedor shrugged his broad shoulders. “These are pretty good actually.” He said. “Kind of stupid of me to say I didn’t like fruit I know.”

“Fedor... I am sorry... I am sorry about how I have treated you.” Iama spoke softly as she looked into his dark eyes. “I made assumptions based on... based on information that does not apply to you. I know that now. I have made many assumptions since your father... since he rescued me from that planet.” She shook her head now. Standing so close to him, the aura of confidence he projected and the heat of his hand against hers, Iama felt so very awkward and foolish. “I’ve done some stupid things too, trying to fit in. I regret...”

“You do not need to fit in Iama.” Fedor told her. “You are who you are and people will accept you for that. Or they will not.”

She smiled as she looked at him, his words filling her with happiness. “That’s kind of you to say.” She said.

“That... that *Durcumusaan* Officer is here on the surface with us.” Fedor spoke rather hesitantly. “That is... you and he aren’t... does he know you are here?”

Iama’s eyes grew a little wider. “You... you saw that?” She gasped.

Fedor shrugged. “I was walking to the mess lounge when I saw him coming out of your quarters.” He said.

Iama looked down quickly; very embarrassed and angry that Fedor had seen him exiting her quarters. “One of the mistakes I have made since your father gave me a second chance at life.” She said softly. “No... there is nothing between us but I will understand if you...”

Fedor’s eyes grew a shade brighter and his arm snaked cautiously around her slim waist. “You know the view is much better over here.” He said gently beginning to guide her. “You aren’t afraid of heights are you?”

Iama wanted to scream out in delight when his arm went around her waist. He didn’t let her finish her sentence because he had already made his decision. He still wanted to be with her and that made Iama want to shout out in joy. She had never felt such emotions within her as she did right now. His touch, though simple and innocent, sent electric tingles through her lower back and into her buttocks and she gripped his arm tightly in happiness. She had never felt such physical sensations either when touched by any man and because she felt them now, it made her realize that perhaps Helen had not been wrong. Perhaps she could truly have a future.

“No!” She stammered again. “I’m not afraid of heights.” She answered.

“Cool.” Fedor said. “Want a bite?” he asked holding up the apple.

Iama took it without question as he led her over to the edge of the roof and sat down. Iama didn’t hesitate and settled beside him as she took a bite from the apple and he pointed up and began to talk. Within thirty seconds she was completely enchanted by his voice and the intelligence with which he spoke.

SOLMAR

KINDRED SOUL

“...her steady!” Patton barked out. He was standing beside his command chair refusing to be sitting down for this and wanting to be able to react to anything across the bridge. “Ground Terrain Sensors!”

“LZ is clear on all sides Captain!” His TO responded instantly. “Three thousand meters and closing!”

“Kelly... give me fifty percent power to all VT units! Cut power to Lateral thrusters by thirty!”

“VTs powering up to fifty percent! LTs to forty!” Lieutenant Harbin announced.

“All hands stand by for surface touch down!” The Ops officer announced over his ship COM. “Stand by for surface touch down!”

“Fifteen hundred meters!” The TO barked out.

“Helm... cut power to lateral thrusters! Full power to VTs!” Patton barked out.

“Helm answering!”

“Fire braking thrusters!” Patton snapped out the order.

“Braking thrusters are firing!” Kelly answered almost instantly. It was almost as if she was reading his mind and expecting the next order.

“Holding position Captain!” The TO announced. “We’re off by a hundred and sixteen meters... but other than that we’re good!”

“Extend landing struts!” Patton ordered. “Prepare to touch down! Kelly... drop us real slow girl! I don’t want a scratch on her!”

“Helm aye!”

Patton stood gripping the arm of his chair tightly. He knew his crew was the best there was and he was not going to micromanage them unless he saw a need. So far there had not been a minute where he was unhappy with how things had gone.

“A thousand meters altitude!” Kelly announced, her eyes glued to her controls and her hands moving in almost a blur as she adjusted this system or that. “Reducing power on the VTs to thirty percent. Descent is ten meters a second!”

“We got minor correction from residual LT vents.” The man sitting beside Kelly and across the huge computer between them.

“Compensating!” Kelly barked. “Five hundred meters! Reducing power to ten percent on VTs! Fifteen seconds!”

“Five hundred meters!” The TO called out.

“C’mon you big ass bitch!” Kelly snarled under her breath. “Let’s do this baby!”

“Four hundred! Three! Two! One!” The TO turned. “Strut contact!”

“Cutting power!” Kelly barked.

The *KINDRED SOUL* bounced only slightly on the powerful struts that allowed her to land and then she settled gracefully to the surface with a glittering blue ocean to her starboard and thick hills and mountains to her port.

“We’re down!” Kelly screamed. “Fucking A we are down! We did it!” She was pumping her fists into the air from her chair and Patton couldn’t help but laugh and join in for just a few seconds. He quickly regained his composure however.

“Alright people! Now we go from Star Ship to Ground Command!” Patton barked out. “All weapons station to active. Crews to their battle points! Deploy the HTs to designated points and lets get ready to receive the Prince’s ships!” He turned to his TO. “Send word to the Prince we are down and secure!”

“Aye sir!”

Patton turned back and looked at the main monitor. “I’ll be a sonofabitch... we really fucking landed you on a planet baby!” He muttered to the walls of the ship. “Damn fine job girl! Damn fine job!”

If there were any doubts within Sehri’s mind as to what lay ahead in her future they were shattered the moment the ebony skinned Lu’ria pulled her into an embrace and planted a kiss on her that simply sizzled with love and desire. A kiss Sehri found herself returning with equal fervor as she pressed against Lu’ria’s lush body. A kiss that then extended to Carisia who was beside her next as Andro greeted Ne’Veha in a similar fashion.

“Oh... oh my.” Aleatia managed to say softly as she watched with the others near the back ramp of the *STRIKER*.

Harira looked at her. “Lady Aleatia... this is not... you are going to allow this?”

Osbela moved up next to her mother. “Shaman Master Harira is right mother.” She said. “You can’t allow this? She will be with... with other women and him and...”

Aleatia turned her head and looked at them. “I am sorry things did not turn out as your father and I had hoped Osbela. As you and Ibani had hoped. That is the way of things. But I am not going to go against fate by taking your sister away from them.”

“She does not belong to them!” Harira snapped. “She is a member of the Circle of Shamans. This is not acceptable to us.”

Aleatia met her gaze. “Looking at Sehri... I would say it is quite acceptable to her. This is something that was meant to happen. You can not explain it otherwise. No... I will not try and stop this. And once I tell Dyack what I have seen, neither will he.”

Osbela stepped back beside her sister Ibani. “We shall see.” She said to Ibani. “We shall see. I haven’t yet met a man that would refuse us given the right incentive.”

Ibani smiled. “Indeed.”

They turned to watch the fourth woman exit the *STRIKER* that had landed only moments ago, the three meter long and two meter tall pair of dragons directly behind her. Sadi moved purposefully, her jungle green eyes never leaving Andro’s form as he lowered Ne’Veha to the ground and she turned to greet Sehri. His azure eyes fell upon her and she quickened her pace until she was standing in front of him. Then she was swept up into his powerful arms and she whimpered in unabashed delight as he stole her breath away with the kiss. A kiss that set her blood to burning as he shared with her all of his emotions over the last few days in a tidal wave of Mindvoice thoughts. Those included everything he felt for her, for Lu’ria and the others, and now for Sehri. It was certainly a heated kiss and Sadi embraced it all.

Aleatia turned to look at Dorian who stood with Ryner only a few feet away. “These are... these are his other wives and mates I take it.” Aleatia asked.

Dorian nodded his head with a grin. “Shameless isn’t it.” He said.

Dorian? Ryner’s voice filled his head as his snout butted him in the back of the shoulder. *Look.*

Dorian glanced at him and then followed where his eyes were. Dorian’s gut contracted when he saw her walking beside Jomann and he stood up a little straighter. Her dreamlike beauty, dreamlike at least to him, was matched only in the confidence and grace with which she carried herself. “If you’ll excuse me Lady Aleatia.” He said.

Sadi gripped Andro’s face in her hands tightly as she nibbled on his lower lips with her fangs, her body pressed tightly to his and his eyes focused on her. “Will you never stop causing us sleepless nights?” She gasped nipping at his jaw with her fangs.

Andro smiled and pulled her closer, happiness and desire sweeping through him. “Then I would become boring and you would seek out a new man.” He said.

Sadi laughed at that. “Ha!” She exclaimed. “Flattery will not make us less angry at you for not bringing us with you!”

“I didn’t exactly plan things like this.” Andro said with a smile.

“And your only saving grace my love is that you discovered the last piece of the puzzle of our hearts.” Sadi said turning to look at Sehri as she stood there holding Ne’Veha’s hand her face bright and happy and her skin blush with desire. Sadi turned fully and inhaled deeply of Sehri’s delicious apple and walnut scent. She noticed Ne’Veha’s flushed skin immediately, as well as Lu’ria’s more agitated state as they stood beside her and knew it was Sehri’s fever and scent that were so very enticing to them.

Sadi stepped up to her and took her free hand without hesitating. “Sehri.” She said softly as she looked at her.

Sehri felt her blood burning even hotter as she was surrounded by them now. Andro and the other women who she so desired to find pleasure with. Pleasure and a life going forward. She didn’t think about it, she simply pulled Sadi closer and kissed her just as passionately as she had kissed Lu’ria and Carisia and Ne’Veha. Sadi cooed in delight and pulled her close as their lips came together and they shared a deep kiss, their tongues doing battle and finally content to dance with each other.

“Ahem!” Andro’s voice broke into their kiss and they parted slowly. “I don’t mean to break this up but the bad guys are not that far away.”

Sadi chuckled softly and looked at Sehri’s bright eyes and brilliant smile. “We are so going to enjoy tasting you Sehri.” She spoke softly.

“Yes... we are.” Carisia echoed.

Sadi glanced back at Andro. “He has been good to you?” She asked turning back to look at her.

Sehri looked at Andro. “For the most part.” She answered with a smile.

Sadi caught the underlying meaning and she smiled. “Yes... well we will fix that as soon as this business with the Kavalians is done.” She said confidently. “*SirsanGai*, Lu’ria, Carisia and I will help you to hold back the fever now.” Sehri looked around as they all closed in around her tightly. *[Close your eyes Sehri.]* Sadi’s voice filled her mind easily and it was so very soft and inviting. *[Reach for us now.]*

[Ovendris niob.] Ne’Veha whispered within the connection. (Together now)

[For innyne jehar...] Lu’ria stated. (And always into)

[Vada falyne.] Carisia finished. (The future)

Andro turned his head slightly and looked at Caydren and Cinol resting on the ground beside Majeir. Anthar had already moved his muscular bulk to where Elynth greeted him with exquisite happiness and the rubbing of their tails. He stepped up to Caydren and Cinol who both rose to look down upon the mate of their Bonded Sisters and a Talon Guardian. Andro reached out and pounded both of them on their powerful sides.

Caydren. Cinol. He spoke. *The sons of Vollenh and Viera. You are looking strong and proud my brothers.*

Caydren and Cinol bowed their heads on their long necks. *Talon Guardian Androcles.* Cinol spoke first. Andro shook his head as he ran his hands along their snouts just below their eyes. *No my brothers. You are the Bonded ones of my beloved mates just as Majeir and Anthar are. Between us there is nothing but family. I told you.* Caydren hissed looking at his brother.

You told me nothing fool. Cinol popped.

Andro laughed as he watched them and it felt so very good to finally feel all of them once more together.

They bicker more than any siblings I have ever seen. Majeir spoke from where she rested on the ground near Lu'ria.

Andro smiled. "We'll work on that." He said turning back to see Sadi and Ne'Veha come up with Sehri between them.

"You knew Andro." Sadi spoke softly. "You knew about Caydren and Cinol. Why didn't... why didn't you tell us?"

Andro rubbed Caydren's snout and smiled. "Because they needed to have time at Dragon Mountain with the Elder mother before taking on their role. If I had told you about them you and *SirsanGai* would have wanted to go to them immediately. They are stronger for it and so is your bond with them."

Sehri stepped away and right up to Caydren and Cinol who lowered their heads to allow her to reach up and touch them easily. Andro smiled as Sehri's face lit up and she felt them within Mindvoice just as she did Elynth. "You are very handsome." Sehri said.

I told you brother. Caydren spoke up. *I am better looking than you.*

She didn't say that! Cinol barked.

Yes she did!

Sadi pulled Sehri back quickly with a smile and she looked at Andro. "The only time they weren't arguing was coming down through the atmosphere." She said with a smile.

Andro looked around. "Where are..."

"Right here you big lug!" Eliani's voice spoke from behind them.

Andro turned and saw Eliani and Normya standing there and he moved far faster than they could follow as he scooped his sisters up into his arms and squeezed them to him. Eliani and Normya were filled with relief at seeing their brother and they squeezed him tightly, their arms going around his shoulders.

Eliani's hands began to run over his body almost instinctively, the soft glow of her power easily seen by everyone. "You aren't hurt?" She asked.

"I'm fine Eli." He said. "Really."

Eliani slapped him across the cheek then. "*Anse igord!*" She snarled. "What were you thinking?"

Andro grinned. "I have missed you too sister." He said.

Eliani grabbed his face and kissed him hard in a sisterly fashion, Normya following suit an instant later.

"You and father need to stop giving us fits *fervon!*" Normya gasped.

"I am trying." Andro said as he lowered them to the ground.

"Not hard enough it seems!" Eliani hissed.

Andro looked up and saw Jomann standing beside Brendi Faith and Tir'ut. He moved right up to Jomann Eliani and Normya moving aside and the two young men embraced tightly. Eliani felt a surge of pride course through her as they embraced. She had always known that once Moneus married Carina, his time with Andro would be limited, and while their friendship would never weaken, it was satisfying to know that Jomann now meant just as much to Andro as Moneus did. She knew it had something to do with the new abilities and strange power they both had, but it went further now she knew. Eliani had always known she would be beside or very close to Andro no matter where he went. She had made herself his personal doctor in many respects and while

many wondered why that was, no one ever questioned it. That the man who had claimed her as his *Anome* was so close to her brother only made things better. Andro and Jomann pulled apart slightly and grasped their armored hands together, leaning forward to touch their foreheads together.

[*I must speak with my father... but I believe Dorian is like us Jomann.*] Andro spoke looking at him and using a private Mindvoice connection.

Jomann's eyes grew a little wider. [*Truly?*] He asked.

Andro nodded. [*You must have felt him coming down.*]

[*I thought it was only because he was with you.*] Jomann answered.

Andro shook his head. [*No. It is there. I can... I can feel it just as strongly as I do within you and my father and Denali.*]

[*How?*] Jomann asked.

[*That I don't know.*] Andro said. [*But I will find out. He was a terror on the battlefield. Sheva will have her hands full I think.*]

[*Just as I do with you.*] Jomann answered.

[*We will speak more about it when we finish with these Kavalian fools.*] Andro said. [*I have a feeling we will need to test him and see what abilities he has.*]

[*I have been studying the Tomes as you suggested.*] Jomann told him. [*They are fascinating Andro.*]

[*We will go and view the originals soon.*] Andro answered him. [*keeping them safe is a priority now.*]

Jomann nodded as they released their hands and Andro turned and reached out for Tir'ut's hand which Tir'ut took instantly. They grasped each other's forearms tightly. "It is good to see you Tir'ut." Andro said. "I have said this before I know... but it seems that fate and destiny mean to have our families working very closely it seems."

Tir'ut smiled and nodded his head. "That works fine for me." He answered with a smile. "Tagging along with my Blessed Wife is always exciting. She can't appear to stay out of trouble it seems."

"Hey!" Normya complained as she moved back up beside him.

In just the few short months he had been married to Normya Leonidas he had become a favorite of Deia and Gorgo both. He was fascinated with the history that both of them held and when they were together he never ceased to ask questions of them which they both found adoring. As women, both Deia and Gorgo also saw the almost fanatical devotion he had for Normya, and the way he doted over her. She looked so tiny within his embrace, but her face conveyed to all around that she was without a doubt madly in love with Tir'ut.

Andro's head came around when Sa'roh's voice reach across from the *STRIKER*. "Andro the Kavalians have shifted their forces!" She shouted.

Andro looked at Sadi. "Reunion over." He spoke before breaking into a trot and everyone following him to where Sa'roh now stood with Aleatia and Harira. "What do you have?" He asked.

"They shifted their *DAGGERS* south towards us." Sa'roh spoke. "They must have figured out that's why they couldn't find us after four days! Stupid bastards. All thirty-three of their ships are holding position a hundred and six kilometers north of our position here. Low to the tree tops to avoid the *KINDRED SOULS* ground sensors and missile batteries."

"And the *KINDRED SOUL*?" Andro asked.

"Just got the burst from Captain Patton." Sa'roh spoke. "Two brigades headed towards us from the southeast and they are down on the surface and transitioning to Ground Ops."

Andro nodded his head. "Ok. Time's up." He stated. He looked at Sadi who stood beside Sehri holding tightly to her hand. She nodded to him in acceptance and he turned back to Sa'roh. "Drop the Ground Shroud Sa'roh. Tell the ship captains to lift off and head directly to the *KINDRED SOUL*. How soon before the two brigades get here?"

"Colonel Mosont reported they were shifting and moving here with the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Cataphract." Sa'roh answered. "Considering how fast you run in wolf form and the abilities of the Cataphract suits I'd say they'll be here in under seven minutes."

Andro nodded. "Spool up the batteries and missiles. We hold for ten minutes and if they don't get here by then we haul ass on our own." Andro looked at Dorian who had moved up beside him with Lisisa from where they had been greeting their sisters. "Time to dance *fervon*." He spoke.

Dorian nodded. "Good. I was getting bored with this planet anyway." He said. "There's no nightlife!"

Eliani clipped him in the back of the head softly with her hand. “What do you know of the nightlife little brother?” She exclaimed.

Dorian looked at her with a grin. “I know I want to experience Sparta’s nightlife and I can’t do that here!”

Andro looked back to Sa’roh. “Give the orders Sa’roh! Time to get this party started.”

CHAPTER TEN

ONTEROM

FEBRUARY 7TH, 1030 HRS EARTH STANDARD TIME

TEN HOURS BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE *TALISMAN*

Anja slid her finger down the console, activating the two main monitors above her head and then looking at Duewa who had come down with Avi and a hoard of other techs and engineers that had arrived aboard the Pralor *HELIX*-Class corvette the previous night.

“So what do you think?” Anja asked her.

Duewa shook her head with a look of disbelief as she looked at the monitors. “Anja if this is accurate, they were well on their way to discovering a corrective agent to reverse the change. They hadn’t worked out the Mutative Enzyme Variable yet, but they were close. Very close. All of their data references the genetic alleles though.” Duewa looked at her. “That’s not going to alter the chromosomal levels until you tackle the MEV factor. It is strange that a species as advanced as the Pralors seem to be would have missed something like that.”

Anja nodded in agreement. “That fact had crossed my mind as well.” She stated. “I mean they were adept enough with genetics to alter the base DNA code of Lycavorians to make it so they couldn’t shift as with the case of the Rothryn.”

“Lycavorian DNA is complex yes... but it is also simple in many ways.” Duewa spoke. “You know that as well as I. It is why they are so adaptable. The virus within their blood is so virulent and fast acting. There are very few species a bite from a Lycavorian would not change. At least in some way.”

Anja nodded. “Yes. That is why I cross referenced all the logs in the database here on the station with Wayonn’s help.” She said.

Duewa looked at her. “When did you do that?” She gasped.

Anja chuckled. “Now that you are turned you will begin to notice you have less need for as much sleep. Having Marty breathing in your ear and his damned aura wrapped around us doesn’t help either. I have two choices, roll him over and *nubou* his brains out for making me so hot and bothered, or get up and do something that is at least constructive.”

Duewa couldn’t help but burst out laughing and she squeezed Anja’s arm tightly in a friendly manner, but one that Anja recognized for what it was. “Oh Anja... you do so have a way with words!” She exclaimed. Duewa chuckled for a moment longer and looked back to the screen. “Did you find anything interesting?”

“As a matter of fact... Wayonn and I found thirteen logs that had been deleted.” Anja told her. “Extensive medical logs that I’m guessing were removed from the database here so they could work on something wherever the rest of the crew went to.”

“They were very close from what I see here.” Duewa said.

Anja nodded as she pulled a chair over next to her and settled into it. “I thought that as well.” Anja said reaching up to the monitor and tapping the screen several times in different spots. “This is our formula of the MEV combined with their version of the same formula. See the differences?”

Duewa nodded her head instantly. “They didn’t compensate for the base genetic code infiltration. Whatever these things...”

“Svorag.” Anja said. “Wayonn says the Pralor logs call them Svorag.”

“Ugly bastards is what they are.” Duewa muttered.

Anja laughed. “You’ll get no argument from me there.” She said.

Duewa looked at the monitor and tapped the screen as Anja had. “They didn’t account for the Core Cell Infiltration Index.” She said quickly as the screen changed. “The mutative cells of this Svorag species are highly virulent and diversified. They act in several different ways in order to break down the core DNA molecules and base code of their victim. No two of their species is the same and the MEV will act differently on each person.”

Anja nodded. “Which means an across the board corrective agent that is not variable is no good.”

Duewa shook her head. “It wouldn’t work on everyone who is infected no. Without the core samples from each species infected you couldn’t alter the genetic rewrite back to its base modifiers.” She said.

Anja leaned forward again and typed on the screen several times. “Now look at this.” She said. “I added your calculations for the MEV combination and my numbers for the base genetic rewrite and I combined them with what they were working on here.”

Duewa’s eyes grew wide and she leaned forward. “Anja... Anja this is it!” She exclaimed as she touched the screen and ran her finger across the data. She looked at Anja. “This is the reversal process! This... this will work!”

Anja smiled. “Yep! Pretty darn good for us lowly Hadarian Healers huh?”

“The Chromosomal Isotope Combination is concentrated.” Duewa said. She looked at Anja. “You used an adaptive base genetic code?”

Anja nodded. “I had to make it apply to the different species it would react with. It took some doing and the database here provided the working samples of different base codes. Your MEV variables were extensive and I needed to match them exactly. The computer is also much faster than the one on *ARC ROYAL*. It was able to do the computations in minutes rather than hours.”

Duewa looked over to the door that was guarded by two *Durcunusaan* troops and was sealed tight. “We can save them. We can reverse the change. They are all Pralors and their base codes would be within sample parameters.” She said. She turned back to Anja. “Delivery system?”

Anja shook her head. “Not yet.” She replied. “Injection is out. No way Marty lets us in there to inject each individual. To be honest... I ain’t so keen on that idea either.”

Duewa nodded. “I agree.”

“Aerosol delivery?” Anja spoke throwing the idea out there. “You’re better with Direct Force Saturation than me.”

Duewa looked at Anja making a mental note of the compliment. Since Thoti had turned her and she had worked more closely with Anja Leonidas, Duewa had learned so much. About her field, about Anja and about herself. Chief among that was Anja didn’t beat around the bush so to speak. Anja told you how it was whether you liked it or not. Her blunt nature was hard to get used to for a few hours but then Duewa just accepted it as part of her, because she did not act in such a way unless she felt the person warranted it and that was the difference. Anja was also not one to take credit that was not hers. She was always complimenting other people’s work and she freely admitted that in some fields she was not all knowing as her mother had so often told Duewa that Anja thought she was.

Duewa looked at the monitors once more and typed in some information before sitting back. “It’s possible.” She said. “We would need to use the room’s internal air ducts and seal it off from the rest of the station. I can...” Duewa stopped talking as a rush of emotion came over her and she felt the tears come to her eyes.

Anja rose from her chair instantly. “Duewa?” She gasped reaching for her arms. “Duewa what is wrong?”

Duewa shook her head quickly through tear stained eyes and looked at Anja. “Nothing.” She said swiftly, wiping away the tears swiftly.

“Bullshit girl!” Anja snapped. “You just broke out into tears for no reason! What’s wrong? Is it Thoti?”

Duewa’s eyes grew a little wider. “What? Thoti! Oh... no!” She gasped. “I’m just... I...” She shook her head slowly.

Anja squeezed her hands. “Talk to me Duewa.” She said. “You’d be surprised how good a head doctor I am.”

Duewa met her eyes again and smiled. “It’s not that.” She said. “Anja I am... I am so very happy.” She said finally. “Thoti... our sons... I... I would never have imagined I could have all this if I had not broken from my mother Anja! I would have missed everything that I am feeling now!”

“But you did break from her Duewa.” Anja said.

“Yes... but only after...”

“Stop right there!” Anja said quickly. “You left the past behind you the moment Thoti turned you Duewa. Hell! The moment you let him claim you the first time!” She spoke firmly. “The real you came out. That is what you embraced.” Anja smiled. “I would have just as easily kicked the old Duewa’s ass before I gave her the time of day. But this Duewa... this Duewa I consider a friend and an equal. We make a pretty good team don’t you think?”

Duewa couldn’t help but chuckled softly. “Yes. Yes we do.”

“I don’t hold grudges Duewa.” Anja said. “Ok... maybe little ones.” She continued with a smile. “But not with you. Everything you did was something that was essentially forced upon you. I can not hold that against you. I admire that you had the strength to finally admit and let go. Something I did not think you had in you. Duewa... you are stronger than you know... and don’t think for a moment Thoti doesn’t know that. He’s an alpha of very pure blood... and he would not choose just any woman to be his wife and mate. He would need to see her as an equal. Strong and proud. Of course... the fact that he thinks you are the most beautiful female in all the galaxy helps too.”

Duewa looked at her with wide eyes. “He... he said that to you?” She gasped.

“To Marty.” Anja said with a grin. “Martin stays close to all those *Durcunusaan* who are close to him. He talks to all of them and even knows the names of their children. Thoti has been with him for years and he was very happy when you came along and swept him off his feet.”

Duewa laughed. “It’s the other way around I think.” She said.

“Maybe... but the fact of the matter remains that your life started anew the moment he turned you and took you as his wife and mate.” Anja said with a smile. “Just as mine did when Marty claimed me.” Anja nudged her with a grin. “Have you talked of children yet?” She asked.

Duewa nodded her head. “I brought it up.” She said quickly. “It isn’t possible while my body is still changing I know... but I told him when that is done I want many children. And not just more boys, but girls too. He didn’t seem too against that idea.”

Anja laughed. “I should think not with the way you look!”

Duewa looked at her. “You... you are the first really true friend I have ever had Anja. I don’t want to lose that.”

“You won’t.” Anja said with a smile. “I promise you won’t. Not now. We’ve come too far together now. Literally as well as figuratively. When we get back I want you to meet Anuk. She’s the finest non-Hadarian medical tech I have ever known. She could be a full doctor but she likes the field too much. And my sisters! I’ll introduce you to them all. You should know all of them since I’m going to make you Director of Genetic Research.”

Duewa looked at her with wide eyes. “What?” She gasped.

Anja nodded. “You have the knowledge and skills and I want someone to take over that department from the dipshit who is there now. Someone who knows what the hell they are doing and doesn’t try to bullshit me. You’d be perfect... and it will keep you from having to travel so much so when the time comes you and Thoti can start having children.”

Duewa chuckled now. “You sound like you are pushing me.” She said.

Anja grinned at her. “Children are the best.” She said. “We’ll wait until the twins are older but I know Martin wants more. We all do.” Anja leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Let the past remain where it belongs and we’ll go into the future. Ok?”

Duewa nodded her head with a smile and squeezed her hands. “Do we get started on the aerosol?” She asked.

Anja shook her head. “We can start working on it... but Martin needs to give us the go ahead.” Anja said. “I won’t do this without his approval and support. You’d be surprised how much easier things are when he supports what you are doing. Going behind his back, even when I may be right isn’t smart.”

“You have disagreed in the past I take it?” Duewa said with a smile.

“Disagreed?” Anja quipped. “That’s an understatement. He can be stubborn like a rock. He made us a promise a long time ago to never keep anything from us and we’ve learned through the years that it is best to do

the same no matter how silly we think it is. It's very lonely when your Alpha husband ignores you." She said with a sheepish grin.

"You have always made up though." Duewa commented.

Anja chuckled with a trace of seductive humor in her voice. "Duewa... making up with Martin is the best medicine I could ever have. Hands down. The man makes my toes curl just kissing me."

Duewa nodded knowingly. "Yes... I have noticed Thoti takes great pleasure in knowing he does the same to me."

"Bastards aren't they?" Anja chuckled as she sat back down. "C'mon... let's get this worked out and then we can take it to Martin. If he agrees to this, we need to know it will work."

"Do you think he will agree?" Duewa asked.

Anja looked at her. "Martin is very good at taking lives Duewa... but there is one thing he is even better at. That is saving them. If we can prove to him this will work... he will do it in a heartbeat no matter how hard ass he wants to be."

Duewa nodded. "I'll take your word for it." She said. "Let's get started then."

PUSINTIN'S COMMAND SHIP

PUMA'S PRIDE

FEBRUARY 7TH, 1035 HRS EST

Serale lifted her head slowly from the pillow, her red hair splayed over the sheets, as she heard the door to Kalis's quarters open and close. Her head and eyes turned quickly behind her where Kalis had fallen asleep the night before and she realized he was not there beside her as he was when she fell asleep in his arms. Her head whipped around, dark red hair flying about, just as quickly as the thick curtain Kalis had erected between the rooms pushed aside and she saw him enter the small bedroom relief filling her body. There was no door between the main living area of his quarters and the small bedroom and he had erected the curtain the first day here to allow her as much privacy as possible. Not that it mattered any longer, except for her brother Danim, and he was smart enough to know what was happening between her and Kalis. And happening quickly Serale knew. Happening quickly because it felt so right. Danim cared for her enough that he now slept where Kalis used to on the main room's large couch and had for the last two nights.

Kalis had slept on the floor of the small bedroom that first night, unwilling to stay with her in the bed. It was something that had Serale annoyed at first, until she saw he was trying to show her that he was different. Last night she would have none of it, though once he discovered she was completely naked when he climbed into the bed, he had tried to leave the bed quickly. Serale had convinced him otherwise and he remained, even stripping out of his clothes at her urging, though that is all he would do she knew. He did not want her to think he was trying to take advantage of the situation, though Serale had already figured that out. His powerful body was sculpted perfection as far as she was concerned, and it radiated quite a bit of heat, which quickly drew her to curl up beside him and press close. It took some time for him to gain control of his raging emotions she knew, but finally his arms had encircled her and they had both drifted off to sleep.

A quick glance behind his large form before the curtain closed and she saw her brother already sitting at the table eating breakfast. Serale let her dark green eyes fall on Kalis as he stood there and she felt her body shiver in want. He had a small smirk on his face and she rose to a sitting position holding the sheet over her naked breasts.

"Kalis... what is it?" She asked him.

The last two days had been anything but boring and she had spent them discovering all there was to know about Kalis. From the first moment two mornings ago, he had captured her with his story. His life was anything but happy or easy and he spoke of it with deep sadness in his voice yet he had held nothing back from her. Serale did not have to be Lycavorian to know that he was not lying to her in any way; no one was that good of an actor. The intense pain in his words and sometimes his sorrowful expression was enough to tell her that he was spilling his heart to her and keeping nothing back. Her mother had taught her how to read men because her beauty would attract many of them and she wanted her to know the difference between those interested in only

her physical beauty and those who desired her mind as well as her assets. Kalis desired her without question, Serale could tell that right away, but he was also using every bit of his willpower to show her that he wanted to feel more. To experience more than what he was used too. Aside from the few hours that he remained away with his duties, she had spent the remainder of that time with him simply listening and talking. She was surprised to discover they had many likes in common, their tastes in both music and food leaned the same direction. Unlike Serale, he was not very educated in book smarts, but his common sense was beyond anything Serale had seen in any Hadarian male his age. Serale knew that not all intelligence came from books, and while he did not have it now, Kalis certainly did not lack for the desire to learn all he could. He considered her a scholar of sorts because of what she had learned and he had not been lacking in the questions he asked her. Most of what he knew now he had either taught himself or his Kavalian Senior Instructor had shown him.

When it came to her, Kalis had been nothing but a gentlemen in every respect. Serale could tell it was awkward for him at times, given how he had been raised, but he did not seem to have a problem looking at her as an equal. Whatever he had learned and read on that unique data pad had changed him completely. Serale was captivated by his voice and the deep richness of it as he spoke, not to mention the bright blue eyes that looked upon her with obvious desire, but also a great deal of respect. Since coming to this ship she hadn't felt more safe and protected than she had last night with his powerful arms wrapped around her tightly. Even though they had laid together in the same bed last night, not once did he try to press her into some physical action. He had fought down the urge and Serale had sensed how large an urge it was to take her, but not forcefully. He was fighting the desire of the wolf within him. She had been prepared for it, part of her even hoped that it would happen, but he had controlled the beast within himself and eventually was able to wrap his arms around her, spooning her from behind and holding her close. Serale knew instantly he was different then. That no matter what, he had been telling her the truth about everything. Her mother would undoubtedly not approve, for he was Pusintin's son, but Serale saw something in Kalis that she did not. Danim trusted in her judgment and he had even gotten to know Kalis quite well over the past two days.

She had felt him leave the bed very early this morning, his lips and nose leaning close to her cheek and Serale had felt him inhale deeply beside her ear. The heat of his body and beating of his heart increased slightly as he inhaled, but he simply held his head beside her face thinking she was still asleep. His words into her ear before he left are what meant everything for her.

“I will have you Serale.” He whispered. “I will have you in every way possible and I will honor you and love you so that you desire no other. I will be a Spartan, as my uncle and my cousin have taught me and I will insure no harms comes to you or your brother and mother.” He took a deep breath. “I will do this even though I know it may never be.”

He had kissed her cheek ever so softly and that kiss had sent shivers through her body as he rose and dressed quickly and then he was gone and she let out the breath she had been holding. Gods how she wanted him in the worse possible way. What a turn of events this had become as she realized she was falling in love with one of the men who had taken her and her family prisoner.

No... Serale corrected herself. Kalis had no say in that and he had been trying to protect her from the very first moment. He was not the same as his father. He was so very different. She looked at him now as he moved to the side of the bed and sat down. He held out the standard data pad to her.

“The reason why I left so early.” He answered her. “A message from my uncle to my father.”

Serale looked at the pad and seeing information about explosions and other things that she had no idea about. She glanced back up to him. “I don't understand? What message?”

“One of our flanking ships...” Kalis told her. “A Heavy frigate. It struck two Shrouded mines that my Uncle Martin left in our path.” Kalis smiled and shook his head. “You should have heard my father cursing when he discovered they were Union mines. I watched him rant for several minutes about how he hated his brother and he was going to kill him one day soon and take back For'mya.” Kalis took the pad back from her. “As if that will ever happen.” He said. “The Task Force has slowed to a crawl now because they are trying to determine if there are any more mines. It will take several hours.”

“Isn't having your father angry a bad thing?” Serale asked him.

“To be honest... as ridiculous as it sounds... it is a good thing.” Kalis spoke. “At least when he is angry he concentrates on military matters and the perverted beast he has become goes away for a few days. Popal has convinced him to allow your mother to remain here with Danim and yourself and refrain from his perversions with her. If she remains in the old cell, it will only cause problems with the Puma Bane Commander as it did with you. If she is not often seen...”

Serale nodded. “Then she will not be thought of.” She finished.

Kalis nodded. “And she will have time to rest and heal.” He said. “She returns today and I will bring her here.”

“How long do you think you will be able to keep her from your father?” Serale asked him. “I fear for her every time she has to...”

Kalis lifted his hand and put his index finger to her lips. “Do not speak the words.” He said softly. “I have... I have said nothing to Danim... but I am finishing the workings of a plan for us all to escape.”

Serale lifted her eyes and looked at him. “Escape? How? To where?” She gasped gripping his arm.

“To wherever my uncle is. Much of it relies on those your mother is with now. The Juturi Pride.” He replied. “There is something about them that... it makes my new wolf senses tingle.”

“Something bad?” Serale asked him.

Kalis shook his head quickly. “No. Something else. To be honest... she is probably safer there than back on this ship. They are different and they are trying their best to hide it. There is more to what they are doing among this Task Force than anyone realizes at the moment.”

Serale looked at him. “You should listen to the last message Kalis.” She said. “Maybe it will be able to help you in some way.”

Kalis met her eyes. “I am... I am frightened by what I will find.” He said honestly and Serale knew he was fully on a new path in his life. A life that she wanted to be part of. “What if it is all... what if it is all for nothing and he only did this to... to instill doubt in me and weaken my father?”

“Do you truly believe that Kalis?” She asked him.

Kalis shook his head. “No.” He said.

Serale leaned up against his side and took his handsome face in her hands. “You told me yourself that what you have learned... everything you have been taught... it makes you feel complete inside.” She said softly. “It makes the wolf in you yearn for freedom.”

“It does. I want to experience it. I want to know so much more. Only my uncle... only that part of my blood can teach me.” He said softly. “And it makes me... it makes me yearn for you.” He looked away quickly; his tanned skin turning the softest shade of red in his clear embarrassment. “Forgive me.” He said quickly.

Serale didn't know what possessed her to do it but it felt so very right. “Kiss me Kalis.” She said taking his face in her hands again.

He shook his head. “That would not be right.” He spoke. “It...”

Serale covered his soft lips with her own, ceasing his words. She whimpered in delight when his hands came up and took her head in his hands. For a split second Serale thought he was going to pull away and then her body ignited as he suddenly deepened their kiss and his fingers entwined in her long, lush hair. It was a kiss of discovery for both of them, and as her sweet scent swirled around his head and filled his senses, Kalis felt his blood burn for her. The feel of his lips on hers sent shivers through her body and the sheet fell away from her breasts as she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and pulled herself into his lap. He facilitated her action with urgent need, his large hands filling with her firm ass and pulling her onto his lap, the musky aroma of her center filling his nostrils now and inciting him to higher levels of craving. As his hands pulled her tighter against his thickening groin and she groaned against his lips in ardent need of her own, a single statement flashed across his mind. A statement from a man who now held his utmost respect and who had believed in him enough to start him down this path when no one else would.

In front of his rising desire for this exquisite beauty in his arms, his desire to take Serale and make her his, the voice of his uncle echoed in his mind.

If you discover a woman, and it is meant to be as it was with me and your Aunts, then be a Spartan! Reign in your desire and your craving for her, pull it back within you Kalis, pull it back and show her that she rules your world. Show her that she is a precious jewel that you will worship always. Do this... do this

nephew... and when the time comes to claim her I promise you it will be all the more sweeter. And so will she.

Kalis brought his hands forward and gently took her face within them. He drew back while pulling her face away gently, a long strand of saliva connecting their lips for the briefest of moments.

“No.” He gasped.

Serale looked at him with wide eyes and a racing heart. She had never felt these feelings before and her lush young body wanted to experience them desperately. His hands on her bare skin, the crush of his warm lips against hers had set her firm body afire and she needed him. She looked at him with those dazzling green orbs open in disbelief. “Kalis... Kalis I want this!” She gasped. “I... I want you!” She hissed catching his lips once more.

Kalis kissed her even deeper, but his mind echoed with the words of his uncle and the new sense of honor and what was right overrode the instincts of the wolf within him. His hands pulled the sheet from where it was on the side of the bed and he wrapped it around Serale’s naked form before reaching up and pulling her face from his once more. “No.” He spoke softly.

Serale looked at him with disbelief once more. A sudden thought that he did not desire her, that she had been wrong about what he wanted, filled her head and she leaned back slightly. “Don’t... you don’t want me?” She asked in a voice that rang with disappointment and pain.

Kalis looked at her. “No... I do!” He rasped out. “I want to take you right here! Right now! More than I have ever wanted anything else in my life!”

Serale looked at him. “Then why... it is what I want as well Kalis!” He looked at her with those breathtaking blue eyes and Serale almost lost it right there.

“Don’t you see my... my beautiful Serale?” He said gripping her face in his hands with loving force. “I do not want this... I do not want this to be where I claim you. Here... while you are a prisoner of my father! I... I want you to be free once more. I want you to see what you have come to mean to me. I want to show you!”

Serale touched his face, running her fingers along his cheeks. “I... I already know this Kalis.” She said with a smile of relief and happiness bottled into one emotion.

“I want *us* to be free Serale.” He said. “I want others to see that... that I will honor you! That I will love you so that no other could turn your head! I want my future... my future with you to begin as a Spartan! Like my uncle! Like my cousin!” He shook his head. “I will not take you now! I will harness my love for you and I will...” Kalis stopped talking as he realized what he had just said and he looked into her face. Her Hunter green eyes quickly became moist as tears formed in the corners. The words had come so easy to him and looking at her now, he knew they always would. “I will see us free and then... then... then I will love you until you are breathless and scream my name to the stars! And I will show you that no other could love you more than I!”

“Oh... Kalis!” She gasped before pulling his head to her breasts and wrapping her arms around his broad shoulders. She whimpered in delight when his arms encircled her back and pulled her close to him. She could feel the heat of his face against her firm breasts even through the sheet that now covered her flesh. Whatever she had expected, it certainly was not this. To have discovered such a man here, among so much pain and suffering, was a sign that Serale could not deny. A sign that this was the one she had always wondered if she would find. After seeing her father and mother for so many years, and the unfeeling relationship they had, Serale had hoped her life would be different. As she tried to clutch him even closer, finally settling on holding the back of his head, Serale knew this was that man.

“I swear to you...” His voice whispered as he pulled his face away from the valley between her breasts. “I swear to you we will not be here much longer Serale.” He looked up into her eyes as she still held him tightly. “And I swear to you... I will protect you and worship you as a Spartan protects and worships his wife and mate. I will make you glad that you chose me.”

Serale shook her head as the tears fell and brought her hand around to caress his cheek once more. “I... I was glad of that before now.” She gasped. “Now... now I am ecstatic.”

“Trust in me Serale my love. Trust in me and I will make sure your mother and Danim are gone from here before any more suffering befalls them.” Kalis said. “I give you my word. I give you my word as a Spartan and the man who wishes to claim you.” Kalis let his forehead fall back to the valley between her breasts and Serale simply held his head tightly as she rejoiced inside.

RAVAGER

JUTURI PRIDE COMMAND SHIP

Ceale was very anxious to return and see her children but she had to admit to herself, being here on this ship had been far more eye opening than she had ever imagined. In more ways than one. She sat in the main mess lounge picking at the food in front of her and trying to figure it all out. In the two days she had been here, not one of the male Kavalians had looked at her with anything other than respect. They bowed their heads to her when she passed them in the ship corridors with Corsa or Nedoni; they spoke to her openly and with genuine friendliness. She had treated nearly thirty of them for minor things really, and what struck her the most was how easily the females moved among the ship and were treated. It was not like what she had seen on Pusintin's ship by any means, and she had not seen females on his ship at all. It made her wonder why things were so different here. Corsa was extremely friendly and answered all of her questions as best she could, and Nedoni, the hulking Kavalian doted over her constantly. Ceale knew almost immediately that he was attracted to her, but unlike every other Kavalian she had experience with, he talked to her and even tried to make jokes. He was an excellent cook and Ceale had eaten some delicious meals in the last two days. He was always close by and Ceale had to admit, having him close made her feel much more secure, though she knew after the first day she had nothing to fear on this ship.

Amazingly, even after all that had taken place, Ceale also had to admit to herself that she actually thought Nedoni was very good looking for a Kavalian male? The light brown fur that covered his lean body was very well groomed and his facial features were softer and less severe than some of the others. He was exceptionally well built, that much was easy enough to see outwardly. His muscular definition was very well defined and there did not appear to be an ounce of fat on him. That he was well educated was also very obvious from his speech and the way he carried himself. It was like that for everyone she had seen on this ship for that matter. As she looked around she truly did not know what to make of it. There were far fewer members of the crew that she would have expected for a ship this size and...

"You appear deep in thought Lady Ceale." The female voice spoke from the side and Ceale turned and saw Mani standing beside the table with a tray of food.

Ceale straightened in her chair as Mani sat down. The older Kavalian woman was in superb physical shape and the obvious second in command of this ship, which was surprising in and of itself. Almost all of the crew deferred to her with great respect and treated her as some sort of Matriarch.

"I'm sorry." Ceale said quickly.

"Sorry for what child?" Mani stated as she got comfortable. "No doubt you have many questions now that you have been among us for two days. What you have seen here is not what you have seen on Pusintin's ship is it?"

Ceale met her eyes. "I didn't know if it was wise to ask." She answered honestly.

Mani nodded her head as she began to peel a fruit. "Understandable... given what you have been through these last weeks." She answered. "We have not spent much time together while you have been here and I apologize for that. We never believed you to be stupid Ceale. I'm quite sure you have seen that things here are quite different from what you have heard and experienced for yourself."

"Am I allowed... can I ask about that?" She spoke.

"What would you like to know?" Mani asked her.

"Why was I brought here?" Ceale asked.

Mani looked at her. "Why do you think?"

"You say it was to treat members of your crew that were injured." Ceale said. "Aside from half a dozen men who had severe plasma burns and injuries from what appear to be an explosion... no one else that I have seen is injured." She told her. "All of them appear to be in excellent physical condition."

Mani nodded her head. "No one among our crew had the necessary medical skills to treat those injured men. And Corsa tells me they will all make a complete recovery thanks to you." She looked at Ceale. "But you are correct in thinking that is not the only reason we requested you come here."

“Kalis... Pusintin’s son... he said he felt something was different about you.” Ceale said. “He did not want me to say anything I think... but...”

“The Marshall’s son has embraced the wolf part of his blood.” Mani said. “He is half Kavalian yes... but what rules him now is the wolf part. We have not discovered how that came to be. But it has been like that since the battle on Enurrua. Koguth and Mataen believe that he could be an ally now.”

“An ally?” Ceale asked. “Why would... why would you need an ally?”

Mani looked at her. “How do I explain this?” She asked openly. “There are Kavalians... whole Prides actually... Kavalians who do not believe in the same things as that fool we call Prefect. These Prides have... we have begun to shed the barbaric ways of the majority. How we treat our females is the largest so far, but politically as well as socially. We live by a different set of values and social morals. As you have probably guessed... should this become known openly... it would not go over well with Keleru and those who follow him. He would more than likely order a purge of the Prides who think like this.”

“He would murder you?” Ceale gasped.

Mani nodded. “He would butcher anyone who is a threat to his hold on power.” She said. “He has been in power far longer than any Prefect before him. He is perhaps the oldest Kavalian living to be honest. And no one knows how. No one will challenge him openly about it. He will send his Puma Bane thugs after them. Those of us who believe differently walk a very narrow line in order to keep him from discovering our dual allegiance.”

“How... how many of you are there?” Ceale asked.

“Far more than most would guess.” Mani answered. “And for your own protection... the less you know in regards to that the better.”

“That doesn’t explain why you wanted me to come here.” Ceale told her. “I could have treated those men in a few hours and then returned.”

Mani tilted her head to the side. “You have not welcome the respite from Pusintin’s foul advances and treatment of you?”

Ceale’s eyes grew a little wider. “Oh... please... forgive me! Yes! Gods yes!” She spoke quickly. “All of you have been... you have been so kind to me. I didn’t know what to expect to be honest. I thought... I thought I would be forced to... service the men as Pusintin has...”

Mani reached across the table and placed her hand over Ceale’s. “He has forced you to do this child? We knew he was forcing himself upon you but he forced you to...” She gasped.

Ceale looked at her. “He forced me to service them... with my mouth.” She answered very softly.

Mani’s eyes closed and she squeezed Ceale’s hand. “The gods see fit to have that man burn in the pits of hell for his actions through the years.” She said. “I would not blame you if you never trusted another of my people in your lifetime child. I can only hope we have shown you we are not all like that.”

Ceale nodded her head. “Corsa and Nedoni have shown me that every minute I have been here.” She said softly.

Mani chuckled softly as she leaned back. “Nedoni is taken with you.” She said. “He is my youngest son and has always wanted things he can not have. He is the most idealistic of my children.”

Ceale looked at her. “He is... he is very handsome.” She said haltingly. “For a Kavalian I mean.”

Mani nodded her head with a smile. “Yes he is... but do not tell him that. It will go to his head.” She said. “I did not think... I did not think you would say such things.”

Ceale shrugged her slim shoulders. “My mother raised me to be free thinking and open minded. I should not find him handsome... but I do.” She said. “You still have not told me why you really brought me here.”

Mani leaned back now. “We thought perhaps you would have knowledge of how to contact the King.” She said.

“Me?” Ceale asked astonished. “I have never even met King Leonidas.” She said.

“You are Hadarian.” Mani said. “Many believe since one of his Queens is Hadarian that she would have known those of your people who work outside the Union. We thought perhaps you would be able to tell us where they are going or how to contact him.”

“I can’t.” Ceale replied. “I’m sorry. Why would you want to contact him?”

Mani met her eyes. “My youngest daughter Iama. We have reason to believe that she is among the group with him.” She replied softly. “She was given to the government as part of the Biogenic Program by Koguth’s

father while he was away fighting the High Coven. He never got approval from Koguth for this because he knew Koguth would refuse. He adored Iama. She was his favorite. All of our favorites. So vibrant and full of life. The experiments did not change her completely however. They left her tail in place. The government gave her to the brothels of Nefoa because of this. They discarded her like a piece of garbage!” Mani hissed angrily. “They did not allow Koguth to return from battle until six years ago. When he returned he killed his father for doing this and said he died of a fall while they were hiking. Koguth took over the Pride and we have been looking for her since. She probably believes her father did this... she probably hates us... but we need to find her and tell her that this is not so. A recent attack on a Kavalian outpost mentions that she was there and her body was not among those discovered. We believe she left with King Leonidas. When Pusintin came to Nefoa to replenish the ships he lost at Enurrua and it was learned he was going after the Lycavorian King, we offered to join him.”

Ceale sat back in stunned surprise. “You are doing this to try and save your daughter?” She gasped softly.

“Wouldn’t you?” Mani asked.

Ceale nodded. “Yes! Of course! It just seems so dangerous if you are trying to hide what you believe. Wasn’t... wasn’t bringing me here a huge risk?”

Mani nodded. “You’ve probably noticed that we do not have a large crew?”

Ceale nodded shyly. “Yes... I did notice that.”

“We automated much of the ship for this purpose.” Mani said. “We sent the vast majority of our Pride members back to our homeworld and left our second oldest son in charge of them. We only have eighty-nine members of our Pride on board. All of them volunteered to come. As for the risk... thanks to Koguth’s father, an ardent supporter of Keleru by the way... we have been able to remain hidden by fostering that support but not really adhering to it in any way. Prides that support Keleru in the way Koguth’s father did are well respected and afforded extra courtesy. That is why Pusintin allowed you to come here. We are quite sure that you are not going to return and tell Pusintin everything you have seen or heard.”

“Fuck no!” Ceale hissed vehemently. Her face changed and softened instantly. “Forgive me again... I... I don’t usually use foul language.”

Mani shook her head. “For what he has done... if I could, I would help you to remove his male equipment and slow cook it over a fire. You were taken with your children and husband but he is not being held. Why?”

Ceale’s eyes darkened. “He supports Buonau on Hadaria.” She answered. “His family is well connected with her as well. When he told Pusintin this he was removed. He’s probably got his own quarters and is safe and cozy!”

“He... he let Pusintin do this to you and his children?” Mani asked surprised.

“He has only cared about one thing in the entire time we have been married.” Ceale said. “That is advancing his own goals. Our children and I do not factor into that equation. We have... we have not been close or slept together in over a decade. I can’t stand to even be around him and his arrogance.”

Mani chuckled. “Do not tell Nedoni this.” She said with a grin. “He will actively start to try and win you over.”

Ceale looked at her and smiled. She leaned forward. “What happens now?” She asked.

Mani turned as Corsa and Nedoni came into the mess lounge and began walking directly over to her. The entrance they came in allowed Ceale to look at Nedoni long and hard. Quite surprisingly for Ceale, knowing that he found her desirable even after all she had endured at Pusintin’s hands, caused her to look at him in a very different manner now. The manner of a woman who found a man attractive. What surprised her the most was the fact she did not find him repulsive in any way.

Mani reached for Corsa’s hand as they came up to the table. “Corsa... Nedoni. You look as if you have something you want to tell me.” She said.

Corsa nodded as she settled into the chair beside her. “Yes Pride mother.” She said.

Nedoni moved around the table and looked down at Ceale. “May I sit beside you Lady Ceale?” He asked her.

Ceale looked up at him. “Of course.” She said. “And it’s... it’s just Ceale.” She answered as Nedoni settled to the table. “I don’t have a title.”

Nedoni smiled. "Very well... just Ceale." He stated.

Mani smiled inwardly knowing that her youngest son had a powerful attraction to her just by his mannerism. He'd never shown this kind of interest in any female within their Pride. She turned to Corsa. "So tell me." She spoke. "Why have you sought me out?"

"There was an incident about ninety minutes ago." Corsa said.

Mani straightened up. "Incident?"

Nedoni nodded. "One of the fleet's flanking frigates struck two mines that were in our path." He said. "Not very much damage and no injuries, but it has forced the fleet to slow while we scan for additional mines."

Corsa snickered. "As if they will find them if they are there. These mines were shrouded. It is the only way we would not have detected them to begin with."

"Shrouded?" Mani spoke. "That means..."

Nedoni nodded. "They were placed there by King Leonidas's people." He answered. "I would not doubt he has a ship shadowing us even now."

Corsa nodded. "I believe he does." She said. "And he left the mines to send a message to Pusintin."

Mani nodded now. "Ahhh... to let Pusintin know that he knows he is being followed." She said.

Corsa nodded her head. "Pusintin is leading his fleet further and further away from any sort of reinforcements. King Leonidas obviously knows where he is going. Why come so far into uncharted space unless he has a destination?"

Nedoni handed the data pad to his mother. "Pusintin's second in command also sent us a message." He said. He looked at Ceale. "This man Popal has more common sense than the Marshall it seems. He has received permission from Pusintin for Lady... for Ceale to remain here on the *RAVAGER* for the foreseeable future. He says the Marshall wants to concentrate on military matters in light of this incident with the mines."

Mani read the pad as Nedoni spoke and she echoed Corsa's earlier snicker. "More than likely this Popal thinks he is removing a distraction." She said. "This is nothing more than a way to keep his commander focused. This is not about Ceale."

"I can't... my children!" Ceale spoke urgently. "I can't stay here! He will... he will try and..."

"Your son and daughter probably already know about this decision." Mani said calmly. "The device Kalis gave to you... Nedoni do you..."

Nedoni held out his hand to Ceale. "I stopped by the quarters you have been using and retrieved it." He said as Ceale took it from him. "I cleared out the storage room just outside the entrance..." He motioned with his hand. "Contact your daughter."

Ceale looked at him intently and then turned to Mani. "You are no prisoner here Ceale." Mani said gently.

"My father did ask me to be allowed to view your transmission with her." Nedoni said. "If only to get some idea of what the Marshall's son has been doing. He told me to ask and make sure you understood he is not demanding it."

Ceale nodded quickly. "Of course!" She hissed. "Anything to keep them safe!"

Nedoni reached out and took hold of her upper arm gently. "Come... I will take you there." He said.

Mani and Corsa watched as Nedoni led her from the mess lounge and then Mani turned to her oldest son's wife. "He is quite taken with her." Mani said.

Corsa nodded. "Yes... Mataen and I noticed that as well. I just hope that Pusintin's actions and the actions of some others have not caused her to consider our people like them as a whole."

Mani shook her head slowly. "I don't believe so." She said softly. "She... she seemed genuinely surprised when I told her Nedoni was interested in her."

"You told her Pride Mother?" Corsa gasped.

Mani nodded. "This Hadarian woman is stronger than she appears Corsa. Inside." She said thoughtfully as she touched her breast over her heart. "She has endured what she has to protect her children, yet there was no trace of anger or disgust in her eyes or her face when I told her of Nedoni's interest. There was curiosity there."

Corsa looked at her. "Truly?" She asked. "I did not... I did not think she was capable of forgiving."

Mani looked at her. "After all that was done to you child... you saw fit to look beyond that when Mataen showed he was interested in you. And Nedoni has shown her nothing but respect and concern since she came onboard. These actions make her see we are not all the same and in many ways it may help her heal."

Corsa blushed slightly. "I did not think she was capable of such strength Pride Mother." She spoke. Mani smiled. "I think we might be surprised at the strength she has within her." She spoke.

"...Mother!" Serale gasped as she heard her mother's voice from the unique COM unit that Kalis had built.

"Serale! Is Danim there with you?" Ceale gasped.

"I'm here mother." Danim replied moving up next to Serale as Kalis looked on from the couch where he was studying the P1 his uncle had given him.

"Serale... they just told me that I am staying here!" Ceale's voice echoed with concern that saw Kalis lift his head and rise to his feet.

"I know. Kalis was just informed as well. Mother... we are fine." Serale spoke. "No one has seen us or bothered us since Kalis brought us to his quarters."

"That... that might change Serale! His father might..." Ceale started to speak.

"My father will do nothing Lady Ceale." Kalis spoke coming up beside Serale. There was silence on the other end of the transmission for a long moment and Kalis looked at Serale. "I gave my word to you that I would protect them Lady Ceale. I will honor that promise to you."

"Why?" Ceale asked.

"I... I told you why." Kalis spoke softly. "Many things have changed in my life these last weeks and I am going to do what I said I was going to do. Is there someone from the Juturi Pride with you?"

"How did you know that?" Ceale asked.

"Let's just say I believe them to be more than they show at face value as I told you on the elevator." Kalis said. "Who is with you Lady Ceale?"

"I am Nedoni!" The male voice spoke sternly. "I am..."

"I know who you are Nedoni'Juturi." Kalis spoke. "And know this... if harm comes to Serale's mother in any way... you will answer to me."

Serale gripped his arm tightly. "Kalis no." She said softly.

"I will then speak the same words to you son of Pusintin..." Nedoni snarled right back. "If harm comes to Ceale's children."

Kalis glanced at Serale briefly before continuing. "I am going to contact your father on a secure COM frequency that I will initiate and you will not be able to detect or trace. In one hour Nedoni'Juturi. In the meantime I suggest we both let Serale and her children speak in private."

There was a pause before Nedoni answered. "As you say Kalis." He spoke. "I will be outside Ceale." They heard him speak to Serale's mother.

Kalis looked at Serale and nodded. He leaned closer and Serale accepted his kiss with relish even as Danim shook his head with a grin. They had been unable to stop doing that since early this morning and it was driving him crazy. "Go." Kalis spoke squeezing her hand. "No one can detect this COM signal so speak as long as you like."

Serale nodded and motioned for Danim to come with her as they moved into the bedroom area of the quarters.

SOLMAR **GENERAL BYKA'S *DAGGER***

"...been on the ground for minutes!" Byka hissed softly, his eyes glued to the sensor screen between the seats. "Why has he not revealed his location?"

"It has only been two minutes Papa." Kameka told him. "And I don't understand why you are so anxious for him to reveal where he is? He is not stupid father."

Byka didn't look up at her as he adjusted the screen. "You will understand shortly." He said in reply. "Trust in me daughter."

“I do trust you Papa.” Meka answered. “But I don’t...” A loud chirping started and her eyes grew wide. “There!” She almost screamed looking at the screen. “Thirty-six kilometers southeast! The ships are lifting off!”

“Now Meka!” Byka snapped. “Take us here! One kilometer east... to this clearing!”

“The clearing?” Kameka questioned. “But why? We should drop right on top of them where their ships were!”

“Do it child! Now!” Byka snapped at her.

Kameka didn’t argue any further as her father stabbed down on the button connecting his COM unit to the other *DAGGERS*. “This is General Byka! The Lycavorian Prince has revealed his location! We are proceeding to a small clearing to the east of his location one kilometer away! Offload your gunships and attack in echelon! Standby! We will be over our target area in thirty-three seconds!” He barked out as he felt Kameka dipping their nose and ramming her throttles to full power.

Byka turned and changed the channel on the COM and then stabbed down again on the transmit button and he allowed his daughter to hear. “Azlenr?”

“I am here my friend.” Azlenr’s voice answered instantly.

“It is done! I have given the order!” Byka spoke.

“Tell Meka to begin transmitting an emergency signal on frequency nine three six four one.” Azlenr told him.

Kameka looked at her father as she heard the order. “May... may I ask why General?” She spoke now.

“To save you and your father from being blown out of the sky Meka.” Azlenr answered her question.

“Now do so Meka! Quickly!”

Kameka turned suddenly and began dialing one of her instruments. She turned back to her father. “What is happening General?” She asked Azlenr while looking at him.

“Your father and I are saving lives.” Azlenr answered her. “Our lives to be precise. And those of our men.”

“I don’t understand sir!” Kameka stated. “The other *DAGGERS* will detect the beacon in moments! They will want to know why?”

“In moments it will not matter any longer.” Azlenr told her. “At least not for them.”

Byka turned to look at the cockpit door. “Will that hold against weapons fire?” He asked her.

Kameka nodded quickly. “Yes. Why?”

Byka checked his ARSOC sidearm. “We will need it.” He stated.

Andro sat on the ground behind several stacked logs munching on the ration bar from his pack. Several *Durcunusaan* had dug a shallow depression behind the makeshift bunker, the logs stacked on three sides with the open end facing the rear of the *STRIKER* three hundred meters away. His helmet rested beside his leg and his P190A3, but he didn’t seem fazed in the least that a Kavalian attack force was bearing down on them and only seconds away. Lu’ria sat beside Andro on one side tucked against his body, Sehri on the other side fidgeting on her knees with Carisia sitting lotus style between his legs. Eliani was beside Jomann and paging through a data pad while she whispered to Brendi who sat beside her. Jomann was checking the sharpness of one of his blades and looking utterly bored. Elynth, Tharua, Anthar and Majeir sat calmly just at the edge of the depression in the earth, while Sadi and Ne’Veha were currently occupying the two turrets in the top of the *STRIKER* Mark II that they had flown in on. Caydren and Cinol were positioned at the top of the ramp of the *STRIKER* with instructions to burn anyone who came close to the ship and was Kavalian. Aleatia, Osbela, Ibani and Harira were behind the huge forms of Caydren and Cinol and wondering what was going on.

Sehri kept looking at Andro and then trying to see over the logs to the east. Lu’ria looked at Carisia and they shared a knowing smile as Lu’ria leaned forward and handed Carisia a piece of dark Drow oat and nut bread she had in her pack. They shared a quick but loving kiss before Lu’ria leaned back and held out a piece of the bread for Andro. His eyes lit up quickly and he snatched the bread from her fingers.

“Your mother’s bread?” He asked.

Lu’ria smiled at him and nodded. “She made several large batches before we departed. You know how she feels about our combat rations.”

Andro chuckled as he popped the sweet tasting bread into his mouth. “Bout the same as we do I suspect.” He said savoring the flavor as he chewed.

As Sehri rose to her knees once more and looked around she could see Lisisa and Dorian with a female *Durcunusaan* she did not know in a similarly dug depression only fifty meters west. Ryner and Jeth rested near the open side of that makeshift bunker bumping their heads together while trying to see who could extend the armor on their heads faster before their skulls met. Only the single female *Durcunusaan* seemed just as interested in what was happening as her, as she kept looking around the area. Fifty meters past them, she could see the *Durcunusaan* troops who she knew were Dantio and Daio sitting with several others and none of them seemed to be in any great anxious mode. She turned back to Andro finally and looked at him.

“No one... no one is doing anything!” She hissed.

Andro looked at her as Jomann and Eliani looked up. “What are we suppose to be doing Sehri?” Andro asked her.

“These... these Kavalians are only moments away!” Sehri spoke excitedly. “Shouldn’t we be doing something?”

Andro leaned over closer to her. “I could kiss you.” He said. “Then we would be doing something!”

Sehri slapped his shoulder as Lu'ria and Carisia burst out into soft laughter. “Stop that!” Sehri scolded him. “We are about to fight! Shouldn’t you be... shouldn’t you be frightened?” Sehri gasped. “All of you sit as if... as if you are having a picnic!”

Eliani grinned. “Picnic? Our picnics are definitely more fun than this.” She stated. “You haven’t seen our family when we are all together Sehri. Lunatics is what we are. You’ll see.”

Jomann looked at Andro before speaking and then he turned to Sehri. “You will find Sehri that much of what happens in battle is waiting. And more waiting. Sometimes hours of waiting. Until finally you have several minutes of uncontrollable violence and chaos and it is over.”

Sehri looked from him to Andro. “How do you... how do you keep from going crazy?” She asked.

Eliani looked at Brendi and leaned into her playfully. A move that Brendi did not pull back from and only smiled. “We don’t sweat the small shit.” Eliani said. “As our father would say.”

Sehri looked at her oddly. “You sweat shit?” She gasped in horror.

“Sehri.” Andro said causing her to turn back to face him. Before she could speak his lips had claimed hers and she reached up to grip his face instinctively as he kissed her. He broke their kiss and leaned closer to nuzzle her cheek and portion of her neck the Mark V ArmorPly didn’t cover. “Relax Sehri.” He told her softly. “It will happen.”

Sehri gazed into his azure eyes and saw devotion and love in them as well as his aura wrapping around her and she smiled sheepishly before settling back to the ground beside him. Lu'ria leaned across Andro’s body and held out a piece of the bread to her. “My mother’s bread. Oats and nuts with a hint of cinnamon. It is very good for times like this.” Sehri took the bread without question and took a bite, beginning to chew as Andro’s arm pulled her closer to his side.

All of their heads came up when Sadi’s voice filled their implants. “***Andro... they’re approaching the site. Thirty seconds.***”

Sehri looked at Andro and she watched his face change instantly. His expression was one of humor and love and in the blink of an eye it had become hard and void of any and all emotion.

“Stand by *KertaGai*.” He answered Sadi as he rose to his knees now and looked over the logs. Sehri saw that everyone’s disposition had changed instantly and they had become more serious and all businesslike. Andro looked out over the top of the logs and began speaking into his COM implant. “Colonel Miller?”

“***In position Milord.***” Josie’s voice answered immediately.

“Colonel Mosont will support your brigade from the timber.” Andro said. “Do not pursue those who escape into the timber. You are equipped with your medium Cataphract armor correct?”

“***Yes.***”

“Leave them to the *Durcunusaan*. They will bring them down more easily. The medium Cataphract armor will only make you more vulnerable in the timber. Your single mission is to eliminate any within the kill zone Josie. We are taking no prisoners this day. They are Puma Bane scum and I want all of them to feel the wrath of our vengeance. I don’t care if you shoot them, stab them, crush them, or beat them to death. Insure those who are in the kill zone are dead however. You have directive to attack at your discretion Colonel.”

Androcles heard Josie Miller snicker over the COM. ***“Music to my ears Milord.”*** She said.

“And my name is Andro.” Andro told her with a disgusted look on his face. “Leave that Milord crap for when we are among the politicians of Apo Prime, Earth and Sparta who don’t know any better.”

“Understood... Andro.” Josie answered with another laugh.

“Twenty seconds!” Andro spoke. “The missiles will fly the moment they begin to lift back into the air. Then attack on your order!”

“Count on it.” Josie spoke.

“Mosont... any who escape into the timber are yours.” Andro spoke. “Insure they do not flank around and come after Josie’s Brigade from behind.”

“We are ready.” Mosont’s voice echoed.

Andro turned his head now as Sehri watched him and his eyes fell on Lisisa and Dorian. ***Dorian! Lisisa! Go now! The others are already in position!***

It could still be a trick ferveron. Dorian spoke his head turning to focus on his older brother from across the distance.

Then I trust you and our sister will leave nothing for the insects. Andro told him.

Dorian nodded his head and turned to look at Sheva. “Time to go.” He told her.

Sheva came to her feet as Ryner and Jeth extended the armor across all of their huge bodies. “What? What’s happening? The battle is here!”

“Not for us.” Lisisa spoke as she moved past Sheva and scampered up into the saddle on Jeth’s back appearing like a gnat in comparison to Jeth’s massive body.

Dorian moved closer to Sheva, the scent of her blood and body filling his head totally. He fought it down instantly, as well as the almost too powerful urge to crush her to him and make her his. “You are my Captain. Assigned to protect me correct?” He stated.

Sheva glared at him. “Yes! You know that!” She spat.

Dorian smiled. “Very well... I’m going that way.” He told her pointing with his arm and finger. “Come with me and protect me.” He announced as he moved to where Ryner waited and easily leaped into the saddle, his Dragon Armor extending as he settled in the saddle and turned. He looked back at Sheva. “Coming?”

Sheva cursed under her breath but started forward as her own Dragon Armor began to extend. By the time that had finished she was lifted into the air with a small shriek of surprise and Dorian deposited her in front of him in the saddle using a burst of Etheric power that had suddenly gripped him. He looked at his hands for a split second in surprise and then shook his head, slipping his arms around Sheva’s tiny waist. Sheva jumped in clear surprise as his arms encircled her waist and the DA braces tightened around their legs, but it was for reasons she did not fully grasp just yet.

“Hope you aren’t afraid of heights.” Dorian said from under his helmet with a smile. “Ryner... go!”

With two trumpets... Ryner and Jeth took to the skies above Solmar and were soon speeding away from the oncoming Kavalian forces.

Andro watched for a moment and then his eyes moved to where Daio and Dantio were waiting. *Daio... just as we discussed.* Andro reached out for him. *His DAGGER should land within two minutes. Get there.*

Daio nodded his head. *On our way.* He stated before he, Dantio and three others shifted into wolf form and were tearing off into the timber around them.

Andro turned back and saw Eliani and the others, except for Jomann, looking at him oddly. “What?” He exclaimed. And then more inquires came at him.

“My love... Lisisa and Dorian are tearing away from here in the opposite direction awfully fast.” Sadi reported over the com. ***“What’s happening?”***

Andro couldn’t answer for General Vengal’s voice broke in over the COM. ***“Vengal to Androcles. We are in position. Broke some equipment and tore up some serious trees, but we’re in position and ready. I hope this works boy or we’ll have wasted four good KADEN Transports and a dozen MHTs.”***

Andro looked at Eliani as she got to her feet. “You said nothing about sending Dori and Lisi somewhere.” Eliani snapped. “What’s going on Andro? Where is Uncle Vengal and what is he planning to do?”

“Nothing.” Andro protested. “Just a minor change in plans is all.” Andro touched his jaw. “Affirmative Uncle.” He spoke. “Stand by... we should know in a few moments.”

“Nothing you do is ever minor *fervon!*” Eliani snapped again. “What are you planning?” She looked at Jomann and her eyes narrowed. “You know don’t you?”

Jomann shrugged his broad shoulders. “I can’t say.” He stammered.

Eliani turned back to Andro. “*Fervon...* what have you done?” She demanded. “Tell us right now!”

“If I am correct... then I have taken vengeance for those who died here and stopped a battle before it began.” Andro spoke.

“And if you’re wrong?” Brendi asked.

Andro smiled. “Then it will be very interesting.” He replied lifting his helmet and 190 and lowering his helmet onto his head.

The clearing was perhaps five hundred meters long and three hundred meters wide. It was surrounded by thick timber on three sides and a rising incline of hills and trees that led up to the ridge that led to the ocean five kilometers away. The first *DAGGERS* began to touch down in precise military formation, seven of them able to fit in the clearing on the west end. As the sixty Puma Bane troops on each *DAGGER* poured from the rear of the gunships, cruel dark eyes were watching from the edge of the timber.

Josie Miller had to admit it was a bold plan, but then she knew Androcles Leonidas and his father had built their reputations on bold plans. She turned her head in either direction and saw the members of her First Battalion spread out all around her waiting to pounce. The Second and Third Battalions were waiting to attack from two other directions. The new plan had come in only moments before they had begun their drop, and that Androcles had chosen Josie and her Brigade to conduct the ambush was a major vote in their confidence and moral. Mosont had taken it in stride, telling her they preferred to roam the dark timber and destroy any who may try to run there for safety. The way he said it made Josie shiver somewhat and she glanced at where her Lycavorian shadow Lemios rested calmly on the ground only two meters away.

Lemios had guided his ODP with skill and grace, landing only meters from her, and he had been at her side since then. His Mark V ArmorPly conformed to his body like a second skin and Josie knew the moment they sprang into battle he would extend his Dragon Armor shell. His face was scruffy with what appeared to be a two day old growth but Josie had to admit it suited him. Mosont had told her he was a Pureblood Lycavorian, one of the *Durcunusaan*’s rising stars so to speak for his actions on Alba Tau and several other different worlds during the Evolli War. Josie Miller didn’t often look at men with anything more than a professional interest, but looking at Lemios now she couldn’t help the brief rush of sexual urges that spread through her looking at him. Josie had prided herself on the condition she kept her body, all lean muscle without an ounce of body fat. She had medium sized breasts with a tiny waist and an ass with all the right curves as her brother had once called it. She watched what she ate, and made sure when they weren’t training in the field she was in the gym. It had been a long time since a man had elicited such reaction from her. True to her nature however, Josie brushed it aside for another time.

“Looks like they are all clear.” Her senior combat aide spoke from beside her. “The *DAGGERS* are beginning to... holy shit!”

They came streaking out of the east just above the treetops and for a split second it was as if time stopped. Captain Patton’s gift and announcement that they were indeed here to stay. Fired from the *KINDRED SOUL*’s dorsal missile batteries, the VIPER 12 Anti-Air missiles struck true and Josie watched with wide eyes as seven *DAGGER* gunships that were lifting back into the air as seven more were landing suddenly did not exist anymore. Seven explosions and those gunships became nothing more than smoking garbage that drifted lazily back towards the earth and fell among the shocked Puma Bane troops on the ground and those unloading the gunships.

The perfect moment.

“Now!” Josie screamed. “Open fire! All units open fire! Sustained burst for sixty seconds and then advance!”

The sixty seconds was to allow the next two waves of VIPER missiles to fly into the fray and obliterate fourteen more gunships as they tried to respond and maneuver to what had taken place. Some of the pilots of the *DAGGERS* offloading troops were screaming into their COMs and trying to take off before they had even

unloaded their troops. Almost a dozen Puma Bane troops fell to their deaths as those ships began to rise back into the air, only to be met by falling debris or blasted into splinters by a VIPER missile. From three different sides, murderous weapons fire from both 190s and an assortment of heavy weapons was tearing into the Puma Bane troops on the ground without mercy and adding to the devastation.

And it had only just begun.

BYKA'S DAGGER GUNSHIP

Marsin pounded on the locked door with all his might incensed with a killing rage, but the solid door was not budging.

"Open the door traitor!" Marsin screamed as she drew out his ARSOC sidearm. "You betrayed us! My men are being butchered even now!" Marsin lifted his weapon and pumped five shots into the door, none of which did anything but put a dent in the metal of the door. He whirled around and faced two of his men who had come up behind him. "Blow it!" He snarled.

"Major! We are still in the air!" One of his men barked.

Marsin lifted his ARSOC and shot the man in the face. His body blew backwards from the force of the shot, most of his head and lower jaw now missing and dripping down the side of the *DAGGER's* bulkhead. He looked at the second man and his eyes were savage. "Blow the fucking door!" He screamed.

The Puma Bane troop didn't hesitate and reached into his combat harness for several grenades.

"Papa! Our *DAGGERS* are being blown out of the sky! The Puma Bane troops are being slaughtered!" Kameka shouted as she looked at him. "You led us... you led us into an ambush!" She gasped in disbelief.

"I have saved our lives and the lives of our men!" Byka barked. "And removed only murderers and butchers! Those vermin down there are not our men! Marsin and his men had orders to kill us Meka! Azlenr, me, you! Keleru betrayed us! This operation was never about taking this colony! He was setting us up! Marsin murders the civilians and then kills us! Keleru can then claim it was Azlenr and I and that he had us executed in retribution for our actions. He was going to use this and give it to the Union as a propaganda tool! To try and stem the hate that is building within the Union! He was throwing us away Meka!"

"Why?" Kameka screamed.

"Because we do not bend to his whim!" Byka answered as he pulled his ARSOC out and made sure it was ready. "Because we are true Kavalians and he is nothing but a whore's son!"

"Open the door traitor!" Marsin's voice reached them on the internal COM. ***"You betrayed us! My men are being butchered even now!"***

Their heads turned when they heard the dull thud of impact rounds striking the door. Kameka looked at her father. "He will use explosives now Papa! The door will not hold!"

Byka was furiously typing on the sensor screen between them and looked up. "Take us here Meka! Now! And land!"

"Land!" She barked out. "Papa... the terrain beneath us must be crawling with Union troops! They will kill us!"

"Do it daughter!" Byka shouted. "It is the only way we will survive!"

Kameka had never questioned her father before. He had never agreed with Marsin taking her as a wife and he was savagely angry after having seen what he had done to her. His actions had almost cost him his own life, for he had begun attacking Marsin's Pride in public about his actions. It hadn't been about his own honor or their Pride's standing, this had been about a father livid over what had been done to his daughter. On many nights as she had recovered, she drifted in and out of consciousness, and the times she did come too and was lucid, he had always been there. Several times she had seen him weeping against her hip, begging for her forgiveness for what he had allowed to happen. No... Kameka would never question her father again and she yanked the controls of the *DAGGER* violently to the east and dipped her nose to the ground.

She would never know it... but this violent maneuver saved her father's life and her own.

The Puma Bane troop had just placed the last of three plasma grenades against the door and was stepping back to detonate them when the *DAGGER* heeled over violently to the side. The troop lost his balance and flew across the short corridor, impacting the opposite wall. As he did this, his hand was crushed between his armor and the bulkhead. His eyes grew wide and he looked down at the detonator in his hand a split second before the three grenades exploded.

There was a flash of bright yellow light and then the explosive force of three plasma grenades rippled outward like a flaming wave of death instead of being directed at the door of the cockpit. Marsin's eyes were wide as he threw his body to the side just as that rolling wave of flame sizzled by him and engulfed the entire rear compartment of the *DAGGER*. His head whipped around as his men began to scream in agony while their fur caught fire almost instantly and they began to burn to death. Half a dozen of them were staggering about in agony, trying to beat the flames out on their bodies and they stepped into nothing as they could not see where the open ramp was and plunged to their deaths. Marsin ignored the pain from his singed hair and rose to his feet as air rushed through the ship now. He moved around the corner and his eyes grew wider as he saw that the forward section just behind the cockpit was now open to the sky around them. A gaping, jagged hole nearly a meter high and half a meter wide which was splashed with the blood and partial remains of the Puma Bane troop who had set the grenades. His eyes lifted and he saw that the door to the cockpit had also been breached and he drew his ARSOC with a savage growl and rushed forward.

Marsin didn't pause and kicked down the door of the cockpit, moving forward even as he was firing. He could hear the impacts of the rounds against metal and glass and then he felt a burning in his side and was rammed back against the bulkhead. His head snapped around and he saw Byka on the deck, his silenced ARSOC out and spitting rounds. Two more rounds punched into Marsin's armor staggering him as he brought his weapon to bear on Byka.

"Die traitor! Die!" Marsin screamed as he began firing. Two rounds punched into Byka's upper body immediately.

"Papa no!" Meka screamed from her seat trying to wrench her own ARSOC free of its holster.

Marsin shifted his fire instantly and fired twice at Kameka, one round punching through the back of her shoulder. She screamed as her ARSOC went flying from her hand and her body twisted forward.

"Fucking bitch!" Marsin snarled. "I deal with you in a moment!" He said as he turned his head back to Byka. "You will die knowing I will rape your daughter until she can stand it no longer and then I will give her to my men! When she's nothing but a mindless hulk I will give her to the brothels on Nefoa! You have failed General Byka! I am better than you! I am better than anyone!"

Byka's head shifted slightly and he began laughing as he looked out the cockpit window. "Fuck you fool! We'll all die!" He snarled just before the *DAGGER* began to smash its way through the tops of the towering trees below.

Several sets of eyes were watching from the small clearing that the *DAGGER* was suppose to land at. Daio and Dantio watched in amazement as the pilot fought for control of the ship and then the damage to its forward section gave way from too much stress. The tail of the ship began to tear free just before it impacted the tops of the trees and began its downward drop.

"*Nubous lae!*" Daio gasped as they watched the *DAGGER* begin to plow through the tops of the trees. "I'm thinking it ain't suppose to do that!"

Dantio grabbed his arm. "Fuck! Come on!" He growled as he shifted once more and they began to sprint towards where the *DAGGER* was barreling into the trees and sending debris in all directions before smashing nose first into the hard ground.

"CHARGE!" Josie Miller screamed into her COM unit.

With a roar that they would be proud of going into the future, the members of 1st Brigade of the 82nd Cataphract Division rose to their feet and followed their fearless commander out into the field. The wreckage of sixteen *DAGGER* gunships littered the clearing, the dozens of fires still burning and sending smoke billowing into the daytime sky. The Puma Bane troops were staggering about, many of them injured, and all of them confused as to which way to go. The attack had been planned perfectly, and the superior thinking Puma Bane troops were now left to wonder what had happened.

That single word rang out over the roar of the fires and small arms fire and many heads turned only to see the last thing they would ever see. The Cataphract armor provided not only protection, but enhanced physical assets as well. The men and women wearing that armor were now sprinting across the field at dead runs, the stabilizers built into the joints of the combat suits keeping them steady enough to put sustained, accurate fire on the Puma Bane troopers dotting the field. Many of the Kavalians troops dropped to one knee and began to return fire, only to discover the armor was quite resistant to their weapons. It was like firing at man sized tanks, which essentially the men and women of 1st Brigade were. The members of 1st Brigade fell on the Kavalians troopers from three sides and were quickly upon them thanks to the enhanced armor. One Kavalian made the mistake of standing up right in front of Josie Miller, intending to use his assault rifle as a club. With a howl of fury, Josie leaped upon the Kavalian, batting aside his weapon like a toy and jamming the barrel of her KM19 Magnum into his exposed neck and firing from point blank range. The KM19 had been specially made to be able to fit into the larger hand of the Cataphract Armor user, providing them with a superior close range weapon that was incredibly powerful. The Kavalian's head blew apart like an overripe melon and Josie Miller hardly paused at all as she rushed forward with the rest of her men.

Androcles's orders were simple and to the point. No prisoners were to be taken from the Puma Bane troops. No quarter was to be given and no mercy was to be shown. As the soldiers of the 1st brigade closed with the Kavalians they had nothing but savage anger in their eyes and hearts. These were the scum who had butchered nearly five thousand Bontawillian civilians. Just men, women and even children whose only crime was to be living here. Until this day, many humans had not been able to fight with the Union forces on the ground. They were just not as durable and capable as Lycavorians and Elves when it came to ground combat. That was something that Charles Taylor wanted to change and today his goal had been met. Humans, men and women, many of them physically smaller than the Kavalians they were fighting, they were tearing into the Kavalian troops with unrestrained glee. Weapons were used as clubs; blades came out and began to draw copious amounts of Kavalian blood. To quote an ancient saying from post Great Fire Earth, the Kavalian troops had just had a whole can of whup ass opened on them.

There were casualties... the Puma Bane troops were seasoned and experienced soldiers with little fear. They were able to bring down perhaps a dozen of the 1st brigade soldiers before sheer numbers began to take their toll. Many of the dead littering the field had been killed in the missile strikes, fallen from burning ships, or crushed under them. Perhaps a thousand Puma Bane troops actually were able to fight when 1st Brigade hit them, a third of them wiped out in the initial barrage of the ambush. But as their Spartan comrades and brothers looked on with awe from the timber surrounding the clearing, the 1st brigade pressed forward relentlessly. The Bontawillians may not have been human, but damn it they were Union citizens, and now Union society across the entire galaxy would know that humans did not take kindly to mass murder of their fellow alien citizens, and they would stand with them to the very end.

One *DAGGER* gunship, whether by fate or chance, escaped the barrage of missiles and was still flying. That pilot saw what had taken place with his fellow gunships and the mass and tangled of so many of his kind on the ground beneath him and then chose to land his Puma Bane filled ship where he thought it would matter most. If they were going to die he determined for himself, then they would attempt to take out the Lycavorian Prince and anyone with him. He yanked his *DAGGER* into a vicious turn, throwing the Kavalian troops in the back against the bulkhead, dropped his altitude until he was skimming the treetops and made straight for Andro's position.

“Andro!” Sadi’s voice called out within the implant. “One gunship is heading right for us! He’s too low to the trees; we can’t get a clear lock! From the east! From the east!”

Sadi's warning was probably unnecessary since the *DAGGER* sheering off the tops of the trees as it closed on them drew all of their attention. And by Andro's estimation it was going to drop right on top of them.

"Run!" Andro shouted. "Run! Now!"

No one hesitated at his command, and as he grabbed Sehri and Lu'ria's hands, Carisia was already blurring in motion. Jomann was moving before the words had even finished leaving Andro's mouth and he scooped up Eliani and Brendi both, one in each arm, and was sprinting away as fast as his long legs would carry them. The *DAGGER* came in very fast, the pilot hoping to kill as many as he could before he died. Tree branches were snapping so loudly they sounded like gunshots. Elynth, Majeir, Anthar and Tharua had taken to the skies at the first warning and now they were circling the main clearing as they watched the *DAGGER* gunship finally bury its nose into the ground, having smashed its way through the makeshift bunker Dorian and Lisisa had been occupying only minutes before. The cockpit was crushed in the impact, but the pilot had succeeded in delivering his cargo. Sixty-three Puma Bane soldiers, most of them still a little stunned at the turn of events came roaring from the rear of the *DAGGER* intent on murder and mayhem.

Sadi dropped from the ladder leading up to the missile turret, Ne'Veha across from her and turned only to come face to face with an angry and revitalized Ulana. Aleatia and the others watched with wide eyes.

"You bitch!" Ulana snarled. "You had that Hadarian half breed..."

Sadi's face twisted into a sneer of rage at the interruption and she lifted her hand and sent Ulana hurling across the interior of the *STRIKER* with a not so gentle shove of Etheric power. Ulana impacted the opposite bulkhead and cracked her skull on the wall, dropping into a heap on the deck immediately, holding her head in agony as she glared up at Sadi. It was a display that stunned Aleatia and Harira, who were viewing intently. "Get out of my way *upae!* Unless you plan to fight!" Sadi growled as she looked at Ne'Veha. "*SirsanGai...* the weapon's locker!"

Ne'Veha nodded her head instantly and dashed the two meters to the floor to ceiling cabinet and punched in a security code. She ripped open the door, nearly tearing it from its hinges with her combined elven and wolf strength and she was pulling two P190A3s from the locker. "Here!" She shouted tossing one of the rifles towards Sadi who caught it easily, and then taking one for herself.

Sadi turned to look at Aleatia and the others, Kelelm still holding his own P190. "You must not let them into the *STRIKER*." She told him. "Caydren and Cinol will stand with you!"

Sister... we want to go with you and SirsanGai! Caydren complained.

Sadi looked at him. "We are not leaving the ship Caydren. Only moving to the exterior engine mounting steps to better cover those outside. You and Cinol burn any who attempt to force their way into the ship! Protect those here inside!"

Cinol nodded his huge head. *We are ready!* He announced.

"*SirsanGai...* take the port mount!" Sadi barked. "I will take the dorsal mount position!" Ne'Veha nodded without question and darted over to kiss her hard before she moved to an emergency hatch on the side of the *STRIKER* and entered the code to open it. Sadi turned to Aleatia. "We have not had a chance to talk Lady Aleatia... but Andro has shared everything with me. I suggest all of you arm yourselves from the weapons locker there. It may get very intense in a few moments."

Sadi didn't wait for an answer and moved to the opposite emergency hatch and entered the code to open it. Aleatia didn't hesitate and moved directly to the locker and removed the KM14. Reworked to fire the more deadly Kavalian 12.7mm round, she looked at her son Kelelm who smiled at her determined look. "Osbel! Imani! Move to the area just by the cockpit!" Aleatia barked. "Harira... you as well!"

Harira shook her head and moved to the locker. "I will fight beside you!" She snapped removing the second KM14.

Aleatia nodded her head and looked at Kelelm. "Where do you want us?" She asked.

Kelelm looked at Caydren's muzzle and the adolescent dragon's eyes fell on him. *Between us.* He told Kelelm immediately even as he flicked his large head slightly and Kelelm watched as shimmering Dragon Armor began to extend around his body from the saddle he wore. He heard a similar sound from Cinol and turned to see that armor was also extending to encompass his muscular body as well. *Stay behind our bodies but do not hesitate to fire around us or over the top of us. We will remain still on the ramp and burn any who come close.*

Kelelm nodded and looked at his mother. “Remain close to the dragons but do not move in front of them!” He ordered.

Aleatia and Harira nodded as Cinol and Caydren moved into position on either side of the deck at the top of the ramp.

Andro lifted his head from between Lu'ria's and Sehri's, bits of branch falling off his shoulders from where he lay half on top of them and half off them, his arms protecting them as best as he could.

“*Sibfla!*” He cursed. “I should have seen that coming!” He spat grass and dirt out of his mouth as Sehri and Lu'ria turned to look at him.

Andro smelled him the moment that their eyes went wide as they looked up at him. He twisted his body in the blink of an eye and saw the Puma Bane soldier lifting his rifle to end their lives. Andro opened his palms and sent two psychic diamonds exploding outward in the single blink of an eye. Those two psychic projectiles struck the Kavalian in the chest and throat, lifting his body off the ground from the devastating force, and blowing gaping holes in his flesh. Andro sprang to his feet, his Shi Viska flaring into life, his eyes searching for more targets.

“Lu'ria! Get to Sadi!” Andro screamed. “Get to the *STRIKER!*”

“What about you?” Lu'ria screamed back. “We won't leave you!”

Andro turned to look at her. “Get Sehri back to the *STRIKER Ilythiiri Tessai!* Elynth, Majeir and I will cover your escape! We must move to a more defensible position! Go!”

Lu'ria knew he was speaking the truth and she grasped Sehri's hand tightly. “Come Sehri!” She hissed as they began to sprint towards the *STRIKER* in the distance. Lu'ria blinked and then Carisia was beside Sehri on the opposite side, unwrapping the shadows from around her body as she ran with them, combining her vampire speed with Lu'ria's natural elven speed and helping to propel Sehri along with them. Sehri kept up easily however, as it seemed the wolf speed that was part of the Lycavorian DNA within her had no trouble coming out, and she had obviously used it before.

“We can't leave him!” Sehri complained even as she ran.

Carisia glanced back quickly, seeing Anthar landing beside Elynth. “He will not need our help! And until we can spend time with you and teach you... your safety is more important to all of us!” She said quickly before turning back to see the *STRIKER* in the distance.

Andro moved out from the tangle of roots and branches the *DAGGER*'s crash had tossed upon him and he felt Elynth land beside him on one side, Majeir the other, with Anthar coming up behind them. Andro brushed the branches and bits of bit from his armor calmly. “You have got to be kidding me! Where the fuck did these idiots learn how to fly! I can fly better than that! Or at least crash better!” Andro snarled.

Elynth's golden eyes narrowed as she saw the Puma Bane troops taking notice of Andro now as they rushed from the back of the crashed *DAGGER*. Without even a conscious thought she erected their psychic shield and began to extend her Dragon Armor, making note that Majeir and Anthar did the same around their bodies. *I believe they will try to explain it to us now my Bonded Brother.* She spoke calmly.

Andro's head came up then and his wolf eyes took in the Puma Bane troops circling all around them. “We end this quickly!” He snapped. “Crush them! Bite them! Burn them! I don't care! Now... I am upset!” Andro reached up and yanked *Cana rie Emanur* from his combat harness, calling the blade from Flatspace.

With a roar of battle, Andro did the one thing the Kavalians didn't expect.

He charged.

Jomann rolled over beside Eliani where they had thrown their bodies behind the massive fallen tree stump surrounded by years of dirt and grass grown up around it.

“Eli!” He gasped.

Eliani lifted her head and nodded. “I'm ok.” She gasped.

Jomann reached across her back and grabbed Brendi's shoulder. “*Saarrieemeran?*”

Brendi nodded. “Ok... I'm ok. Who was driving that truck?” She groaned.

Jomann came to his knees quickly, his keen eyes searching the timber around them. He saw the flash of red colored scales through the trees and then he caught a glimpse of Andro with his Shi Viska out.

“Eli!” Jomann hissed. “You and *Saarrieemeran* make your way back to the *STRIKER*.” He said. “I must go to your brother.”

Eliani looked at him as she gripped Brendi’s hand. “Jomann...” She was going to say something else but looking into his face she simply nodded. It was his duty and she could no more make him choose between his duty and her than he would make her choose between the same. “Do not injure yourself husband!” She hissed at him. “I would be very upset.”

Jomann grinned. “I wouldn’t dream of it.” He spoke leaning over to kiss her deeply. Eliani grasped his face briefly and relished in the touch of his skin. He pulled back quickly though. “Go! We will follow soon!”

Eliani nodded and helped Brendi to her feet. She turned back to say something to Jomann but he had already shifted and was sprinting through the timber. She turned back to Brendi as she drew her KM12. “Come *Saarrieemeran*.” She said. “Let’s beat feet.” Brendi looked at her oddly with those dark brown orbs and Eliani shook her head. “Never mind! I’ll explain later!”

BYKA’S CRASHED DAGGER

Kameka groaned in pain as she fell back in her pilot’s seat. Her right arm hung useless from Marsin’s bullet, her right leg screaming in pain. The cockpit section of the DAGGER had been torn away from the rear section, the bulkhead separating the two now peeled away exposing the cockpit section to the air of the planet’s surface. The front of the ship was crushed nearly all the way back to where Kameka sat, the windshield shattered from the thick six inch wide tree branch that now protruded through the passenger side. Reaching up with her good arm Kameka wrenched her helmet off with a snarl, tossing it down and trying to turn in her chair.

“Papa!” She cried out. Behind her perhaps three meters of the cockpit section remained her father and Marsin no longer there. “Father!” She shouted again as she tried to pull her legs out from under the crushed forward control console. She wailed in pain as she pulled her legs free and dropped to the floor of the DAGGER. The fabric of her flight suit was shredded in several places and blood soaked her legs from several deep lacerations. Ignoring the pain, Kameka scrapped around on the deck until she found her ARSOC and gripped it with her left hand as she pulled herself to her feet.

Holding the side of the destroyed cockpit bulkhead, Kameka made her way to the peeled away section of metal and looked out to see nothing but trees and plants and sunlight. She could see the rear section of her DAGGER, what remained of it anyway, scattered for some three hundred meters behind where she stood. The huge trees that had been uprooted as she crashed the ship were strewn on either side of the line of wreckage and she could also see several bodies of Puma Bane troops. They were not moving in any way, and from the burnt and twisted condition of their remains she doubted they would be. Her keen feline eyes darted from side to side looking for any sign of her father.

“Father!” She screamed once more.

Kameka heard snapping twigs and she whirled around to see Marsin’s savage face right beside her. Blood streaked his cheek and neck from a nasty gash in his forehead but he looked otherwise unhurt. Kameka tried to bring the ARSOC around but Marsin slapped it away and caused her to stagger painfully on her injured legs.

“Hello whore bitch!” Marsin snarled at her snapping out with his right fist and connecting with her jaw and sending her sprawling out of the cockpit section and down to the forest floor. “Your precious father is dead!” Marsin barked as he leaped to the forest floor following her fall. “Do you hear me Meka? He’s dead!”

“No!” Kameka screamed as she rolled over onto her stomach, her vision blurry from the pain as she tried to pull herself away from the man who had caused her so much agony in her short life. The times he had taken her in fits of drunken or drug induced rages, beating her quite senseless while he violated her, came rushing back to her in that moment. Her eyes searched for her ARSOC so she could kill him, even as she pulled herself away with her hands and arms.

“Where are you going bitch!” Marsin snarled as he grabbed her long, silky hair and twisted violently, making her flip over as she howled in pain.

Kameka unwrapped her tail from around her waist instantly and used it to viciously slap his face. The blow had the desired affect, causing him to cry out in pain and step back as the vibrations of the slap went through him. His eyes grew even larger in anger and he snatched her tail in his hands and yanked viciously. Kameka cried out in agony as the horrible pain lanced through her lower back and her body was lifted off the forest floor and Marsin slammed her back into the unyielding ground with tremendous force. Kameka’s face struck the ground hard, stars erupting in her head and her bones screaming in protest as the impact jarred her brutally. Marsin was beyond help now, completely insane with rage and he stepped up to her, tearing at her flight suit.

“I’m going to rape your ass Meka!” Marsin shouted. “Just like I did before! Your ass is so tight! And I am going to take you with me off this planet and make sure you end up in the brothels on Nefoa so they can fuck you until you go insane!”

Kameka felt him tearing at her flight suit and she rolled over quickly, completely dazed but unwilling to surrender to him. “No!” She screamed flailing blindly. “No!”

A booted foot slammed unexpectedly into Marsin’s face causing him to stagger back. Kameka, using the last of her reserves of strength, hauled herself to her feet and began to try and run. Marsin tackled her from behind with an hysterical laugh.

“You’re mine bitch!” He screamed as he flipped her over and punched her savagely in the head. “You’re mine do you hear me!” The last blow nearly broke her jaw and caused her to almost lose consciousness. She could do nothing as he tore at her uniform, nearly pulling it off her before the deep, menacing growl caused him to stop and look up. Through tear filled and dazed eyes, Kameka tilted her head back and what she saw quite surprisingly made her heart sing with happiness.

The massive head of the enormous dark brown furred wolf was inches from Marsin’s face. It’s lips were curled back in a horrifying snarl, revealing vicious, flesh tearing white fangs and pink gums. The yellow flecked, dark brown eyes were filled with savage cunning and smoldering hatred and anger. They were the most beautiful eyes Kameka had ever seen. The beast was clearly two and a half feet at the shoulders and it took a step forward and pressed its moist nose to Marsin’s forehead, those fangs looking ever so lethal. Marsin did the only thing he could think of since he had foolishly tossed aside his weapons. Exploding off the ground he began to run towards the timber. Kameka’s head came up as the huge wolf erupted after him, the huge paws digging into the earth and propelling that muscular body forward. She watched in stunned shock as that wolf changed into the form of a muscular, umber skinned man with a soft silver white flash of light, just as he struck Marsin in the back and sent him sprawling.

Daio glared at Marsin with savage fury in his wolf eyes, his fangs still fully extended. “Get up!” He screamed. “Get up and pick on me motherfucker!”

Kameka watched as Daio stepped forward and hit the rising Marsin with a straight right palm heel strike to his jaw, snapping his head around and tossing his body back to the forest floor. Marsin hissed in anger and flung himself off the ground in a front kick motion. Daio side stepped the clumsy strike and hammered Marsin’s abdomen with two quick blows that almost doubled him over. He spun around as he landed and whipped out the knife from behind his back where the blade had been hidden. He slashed forward quickly three times, each time Daio dodging the strike with well practiced ease. As he blocked the third attempt he stepped forward and drove his forearm into Marsin’s face, snatching the knife wielding wrist in powerful hands and twisting downward. Kameka heard Marsin howl in pain as he dropped the knife and the bones in his wrist snapped like dried twigs.

“Puma Bane Commandos huh!” Daio screamed. “Big bad boys of the Kavalian military!” Daio continued to drag Marsin around by his now crippled wrist, twisting the arm even more with his left hand. He lifted his right and brought it crashing down into Marsin’s face with devastating force three times in quick succession. After each blow Kameka could see blood flying into the air around Marsin’s head. “Fucking cowards is what you are!” Daio screamed. “Cowards and rapists!”

Daio brought his right knee crashing forward into Marsin’s jaw, snapping his head back and sending his body hurtling off the ground to land three meters away in a cloud of dirt. “You will not touch her!” Daio roared as he stepped up to Marsin. “You will never touch her again!”

Marsin looked up at Daio, his eyes blurry and out of it now. He tried to swing at him, but his good arm did not want to respond properly to his commands. Daio snatched that arm in his strong hands and wrenched it straight out, and then smashed a three knuckle punch right over the joint. Marsin's good arm broke then, the breaking of the bone clearly audible from where Kameka lay stunned and watching what was happening.

"Let me show you what Spartans do to scum like you!" Daio screamed lifting Marsin up by the front of his uniform and smashing his forehead into Marsin's face twice, blood erupting from his crushed nose. He was completely out of it when Daio twisted his body over and body slammed Marsin into the hard earth with titanic force. The sounds of ribs snapping were heard then and a small whimper of pain escaped Marsin's bloody lips.

Kameka watched with adoring eyes then as Daio shifted back into wolf form in that silver/white flash of light, planted his paws on Marsin's chest and sank his fangs deep into Marsin's throat. She watched as Marsin's arms came up and beat upon Daio's broad, furred covered back fighting his own death to no avail. Marsin's legs twitched twice and then Daio's head rose with a jerk, tearing Marsin's throat open with almost careless ease.

"Daio!" The second voice barked out now and Kameka turned her head to see three more Lycavorian Spartans appear by the wreckage of the *DAGGER*. "We have him! Stop playing with the scum and get the female! We must go!" Dantio hissed.

Kameka's eyes darted back to see the Lycavorian had changed back into his human form, his chest rising and falling in exertion and he turned towards her. She watched with awe as he kicked Marsin's body and then moved over to where she lay. He held out his hands to her.

"We... we are here to help." Daio said looking at the Kavalian female on the ground before him. He had witnessed part of her fight against the Kavalian Puma Bane commander and her strength had touched a nerve in him. Looking at her close up, even under the bruises and blood that covered her face and legs, she was the most incredibly beautiful woman he had ever laid his wolf eyes upon. As he knelt slowly beside her, her powerful apricot scent engulfed him in a rush and surged through him. He gazed at her full lips and dark brown eyes, the curve of her cheeks and line of her jaw, and Daio contended that yes indeed she was the finest female he had ever had the pleasure of viewing. He glanced quickly at the long tail that extended up and was curled around the six inch long branch, ready to stab him with it. His eyes went back to her face. "Are you going to use that on me?" He asked with a grin.

"You... you killed him!" Kameka gasped.

Daio glanced back at Marsin's cooling body and then returned his eyes to her. "It was a less painful death than he deserved, but we do not have much time." He reached for her injured legs but stopped and met her eyes. "I want to inspect your injuries... may I touch you?"

"You are Lycavorian!" Kameka hissed. "You are the... you are the enemy!"

"Am I?" Daio asked softly. "If I was the enemy... would I have killed him?"

Kameka stared at him for a long moment. "Who... who are you?"

"My name is Daio." He answered. "I am *Durcunusaan*."

"*Durcunusaan*?" Kameka gasped. "Why would you..."

"Daio! Now!" Dantio yelled.

Kameka looked over and saw Dantio and the others come up, her father's body carried over the shoulder of one of the other *Durcunusaan*. "Papa!" She cried.

Dantio looked at her and shook his head. "He's alive." He stated quickly. "He's hurt bad... but alive. We need to get out of here in case more of these Puma Bane *midaeus* are still around."

"Why... why are you helping us?" Kameka demanded.

"This was the plan." Dantio spoke quickly. "Our Prince... your father and General Azlenr. This was our plan. Well... not the part about you getting shot down... but the rest of it." He told her.

Daio looked at Kameka. "Let me carry you." He told her quickly. "We can move more quickly. You will come to no harm and your virtue will be safe... I give you my word."

Kameka looked at him, the yellow flecked wolf eyes still very prominent, but his fangs all but gone. She lowered her tail and dropped the wood branch, nodding her head slowly. "My... my virtue was... it was taken from me a long time ago." She whispered softly.

Daio leaned over and slipped his arms under her knees and around her lower back. Her apricot scent threatened to overwhelm him but he fought it down, even Dantio seeing the reaction Kameka elicited from him.

He glanced at her incredible brown eyes. “Your virtue is never gone completely.” He whispered to her seeing her beautiful eyes meet his. “And I will defend you with my life.”

Kameka couldn't tear her eyes from him as he lifted her like she was a feather, his words echoing in her head. What did he mean? How could he find her virtuous? She looked at his face and reached up to wipe away several splotches of Marsin's blood from his skin. “Thank... thank you.” She whispered.

Daio smiled slightly and gave her a half nod. “You... you might wish to hold your tail.” He said sheepishly. “I don't want it to trip me while we move.” Kameka quickly grabbed her tail and pulled it into her lap. Daio looked at her with a warm smile. “Fascinating.” He said.

“Let's go!” Dantio spoke with a shake of his head.

Elynth whipped her wing forward over the top of Andro's head and the armored edge smashed into a Puma Bane soldier's chest crushing every bone in his upper body and sending him hurtling through the air and into the timber. Her head whipped around back toward the *STRIKER*, her keen eyes detecting at least half a dozen Puma Bane troops who were trying to make their way to the *STRIKER*.

Andro my brother! Several have broken behind us! They are heading for the ship! Go! Anthar, Majeir, Tharua and I will handle these scum!

Andro rolled to his left, *Cana rie Emanur* flashing forward and chopping through the legs of another Puma Bane troop, his shrill screams filling the air. Andro's glistening armor was covered in the blood of half a dozen Kavalian troops, *Cana rie Emanur* claiming four while his Shi Viska had claimed three others. *Sister are you sure!*

Elynth brought her right talon down, impaling a Kavalian trooper stupid enough to get close to her. She lifted her talon and flicked her right leg forward, his body sliding off her wickedly curved talons and smashing into another group of two who had begun to move closer to her just before Anthar let out a trumpet of anger and unleashed a stream of flame that caught all of them in its path. *Go! Caydren and Cinol could do more harm than good if they begin to burn everything around them in order to protect Sadi and Ne'Veha! Go!*

Andro secured *Cana rie Emanur* back on his harness, the sword blade disappearing back into Flatspace and lifted his arm. His Shi Viska immediately whisked back to his arm and vanished into Flatspace an instant before he shifted into wolf form and sprinted back for the *STRIKER*. Several rounds struck the ground around his paws as he ran but he danced to his left easily and lowered his shoulders, presenting an impossible and fast moving target. His head snapped to the side when he saw Jomann's large dark blond wolf form peeling out of the timber and falling in alongside him.

Half a dozen have broken through! Andro barked out. They are making for the STRIKER unimpeded! Then let's impede them! Jomann answered.

The two wolves, one larger than the other by a third, sprinted through the timber with blazing speed, their powerful muscles propelling them forward with killing intent. One was a Prince, the other his Captain. Both of them had a vested interest in getting there before the Kavalian troops.

Sadi saw them first, lifted her 190A3 and held back the trigger on the assault rifle. The six Puma Bane troops dove for cover and began to return fire. Sadi was not used to using the 190 and after her initial burst, her shots became somewhat wild and less well aimed. This allowed the Puma Bane troops to direct accurate fire on her, the rounds impacting around the armored hull of the *STRIKER* and causing her to duck back inside the small hatch while returning fire as best as possible. Her jumping back into the *STRIKER* caused everyone's heads to turn towards her, including Caydren and Cinol.

Sadi! Caydren called out.

“I'm ok!” Sadi answered with disgust in her voice. “They are coming from the east! I counted six of them! They...” Sadi looked up and forward and her green eyes flew open. “Caydren! Look out!” She screamed.

All heads turned to see the six Kavalians at the bottom of the ramp and training their weapons into the rear of the ship as one began to throw a plasma grenade up into the rear of the ship. Kelelm knew he would be too slow to bring his weapon around to fire and his eyes flashed to his mother. “Mother!” He screamed.

Aleatia was not looking at him however. She was gazing out the back of the ship, her eyes wide as a massive black shape appeared in mid leap and plowed into the bodies of the Kavalian soldiers followed an instant later by a slightly smaller dark blond shape. Aleatia knew immediately that they were wolves and she watched as the six Kavalians went sprawling out of view off the back of the ramp. Sadi was moving even before the plasma grenade had left the fingers of the Kavalian soldier and she lunged forward past Aleatia. Drawing upon her inbred wolf speed and the new energy her bond with Caydren gave her, she shoved past Aleatia and used her 190 as a club. Swinging with all her might she hit the grenade at the peak of its arc and sent it spinning back out of the ship and into the timber. Kelelm dove forward and pushed her and his mother down, imposing his body between them as the grenade exploded in the trees a hundred meters away and sent millions of splinters shooting in all directions. None of them penetrated his body armor, or the scales of Caydren and Cinol, but they rained down on the rear of the *STRIKER* in droves.

Aleatia looked over her son's shoulder and her intake of breath was heard by both Sadi and Kelelm. They all turned to see Andro and Jomann, now back in human form, doing battle with six Kavalian troopers. To Aleatia and Harira what followed was a display unlike any they had ever seen in their lives; to Sadi it was utterly beautiful.

Androcles and Jomann held nothing back, calling upon their Etheric powers immediately. *Cana* and *Saar rie Emanur* appeared in Andro's hands as if by magic and Aleatia saw the sword blades burst from Flatspace. As one Kavalian scrambled to his feet, *Saar* whipped forward and removed his head in a single powerful swipe. In the middle of the swing Andro rotated his body and brought *Cana* down across the front of another Kavalian. This Puma Bane troop still had enough presence of mind to bring up his rifle in order to protect himself, but *Cana* sliced clean through the assault rifle and sent the trooper staggering back. Andro lifted his opposite hand, holding *Saar* in it and unleashed a powerful psychic diamond. The projectile punched through the Kavalian's chest like a hot knife through butter, blowing a gaping hole in his upper body and tossing his frame back nearly six meters.

Jomann's unique Etheric ability allowed him to move faster than any normal Lycavorian. To him it appeared as if everything around him slowed, when in fact he was moving faster than they could follow. He fell upon the first Kavalian with a single-minded fury and simply grabbed his head and nearly tore it from his shoulders while snapping his neck and nine vertebrae in his spine. Jomann shoved his twitching body to the side without pausing and fell upon the other two Kavalians with equal rage. He lifted one off the ground as the Kavalian staggered to his feet and basically body slammed him with horrific force back into the earth. The Kavalian's back broke from the force of the body slam and he lay there dying slowly wondering what had gone wrong. Jomann began to pummel the third Kavalian to death, his large fists connecting before the man had a chance to defend himself in any way. Jomann had struck him four times before the Kavalian realized he was under attack. His eyes could not focus on Jomann clearly enough to try and retaliate because he was moving so fast and this only spelled his doom. Even as he tried to scrambled away in any direction Jomann pursued him and kept pummeling his face and head with powerful blows from his armored fists. Finally... one such punch fractured the Kavalian's skull and he dropped to the ground completely unable to defend himself. Jomann then hit him with a ridge hand blow across his throat that crushed his larynx and effectively insured the Kavalian drown in his own blood as it filled his lungs.

Jomann turned to assist his Prince and friend but found no need. Andro had the last Kavalian encased in a shimmering blue flame of Etheric power and was bashing him against the ground with ghastly force, his bones popping and snapping at every impact. Finally Andro just launched him through the air and his body sailed into the timber before impacting a rather thick tree and crushing his skull in the collision. Andro whirled around searching for more threats but found there were none. Instantly *Saar* and *Cana* disappeared back into Flatspace and he turned towards the rear of the *STRIKER* seeing Sadi and the others watching them.

KertaGai? He called out immediately. *SirsanGai!*

We... we are fine my love! She answered.

Andro turned as Lu'ria and Carisia appeared with Sehri, Eliani and Brendi from the timber. They slowed to a stop, their eyes wide as they gazed at Andro and Jomann and the bodies of the dead Kavalians.

Elynth! Andro reached for her.

They are finished Andro! Elynth answered. *None survived. We are coming back.*

Andro turned to Jomann. "Let us hope Dorian and Lisisa have had a less exciting time than us."

ONTEROM
EIGHT HOURS UNTIL CONTACT WITH *TALISMAN*

-There- Avi spoke as his hands manipulated the sensor controls of the station.

Martin stood next to Avi on one side, Wayonn the other. “What is it Avi?” He asked.

-Based on its diameter and configuration... I estimate it is a sensor probe of some kind King Martin- Avi answered.

“Sensor probe huh?” Martin said. “No way to be sure?”

Avi shook his head. **-Without a full power active scan no. A sensor scan of this type would also reveal that we know it exists-**

Wayonn nodded. “And let whoever is monitoring it know that we know it is there.” He said.
“Can you tell how long it has been there Avi?” Martin asked.

-Not exactly... but I can approximate by cross referencing the sensor logs of the *ARC ROYAL*- His large hands flew across the control panel. **-Captain Akemi is very thorough when recording her logs and this probe was not in the system when you arrived at this planet. I estimate it did not arrive until after you entered the Science Facility-**

“So whoever owns this station knows we are here.” Martin said. “Ain’t that just peachy.”

-The basic design of the probe indicates it is similar to the one I detected in the Alpha Quadrant some weeks ago- Avi said. **-The one that tried to access the command controls of *SPARTA'S WRATH*-**

“The one that was using this Lorendo character’s security protocols right?” Martin asked.

-Affirmative-

Martin looked at Wayonn. “Perhaps you should tell me some more about this worm Lorendo.” Martin said. “You didn’t get much beyond the fact that he was a senior member of the Pralor Science...”

Wayonn nodded. “The Pralor Science Convention... yes.”

Martin looked at him intently. “Wayonn... I may be new to all this Pralor stuff... but I know when someone has a hard on for another person. You and this Lorendo character got a history don’t you?”

Wayonn met his gaze. “Not directly no. We only met twice.” He stated. “But worm is a good description of him in my opinion Martin. And your grandfather couldn’t stand the man.”

“Ok... that’s good enough for me. Worm it is. I’ve seen enough of Sumar’s memories to know that he was usually bang on when figuring people out. Now... tell me why he is a worm Wayonn?” Martin asked. “I thought... I was under the impression you Pralors got along with everyone.”

Wayonn snorted. “If only that was the case.” He spoke turning and moving to another station and leaning up against the equipment. “If you do not count the different species in our part of the universe that wanted our technology, there was just as much competition between Pralors for certain positions as any normal species Martin. Lycavorians, Elves, you do not have the cornerstone on ambition you know. It affects all species. Even Pralors.”

“That’s good to know.” Martin said. “I think.”

Wayonn looked at Avi with a grin. “Avi... do you still have access to Sumar’s old personnel profiles?”

-Affirmative-

“Play the one for Lorendo.” Wayonn said. He looked at Martin. “Your grandfather compiled profiles on nearly every Pralor of significance when he first became Chief Elder. He wanted to know who his friends were. They are in his voice too.”

“His voice?” Martin exclaimed. “Wait... Avi... you can do that?” Martin asked.

-Of course King Martin- Avi answered.

“Why didn’t you ever tell me that?” Martin asked him.

Avi blinked several times and looked at him. **-You never asked Martin Leonidas-**

Wayonn chuckled at Martin’s expression. “Play the logged profile Avi.” He said.

-Processing. Accessing stored profile database. Lorendo, Elder of First Order, Science Convention. Initiating playback-

The small holoimage of the rotund man appeared. He was of medium height with dark hair and a sunken brow. The flowing robes he wore did his plump body no justice and only served to make him appear fatter than he was.

“Lorendo...” The deep male voice spoke now. “Elder of the First Order. Pralor Science Convention. Openly against my appointment as Chief Elder and did not care who heard his words. He has a deep seated dislike of me and my fellow Praetorians for reasons unknown at this time. Has openly opposed me leading the next seed mission because he believes I will corrupt those with the Praetorian gene that I am taking with me and those I intend to train with Wayonn. Was extremely vocal and condescending during Xaxon’s trial and it appears he blames all Praetorians for the war with the Scourge. He feels all Praetorians should be trained and under the strict control of the Science Convention. He feels Praetorians have too much power and that our people wrongly look to us as saviors and guardians. If not for us... we would have fallen a long time ago. He is not particularly bright in his field, there are many who surpass his knowledge and ingenuity, though at this point I have come to the conclusion his only goal is a seat on the Chief Elder Circle. Note to Avi... insure his status and actions are monitored through our contacts on the homeworld.”

Martin looked at Wayonn. “That’s... that’s his voice?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes it is.”

Martin was silent for a moment and then nodded his head slowly. “You have more of those Avi?” He asked finally.

-Eighty-seven point three hours worth Martin Leonidas- Avi replied.

Martin looked at Wayonn. “That’s... that’s the same voice as my father.” He said softly. “When he spoke to me on Earth.”

“It’s the same as yours Martin my boy.” Wayonn said. “One of the reasons I try to keep you so engaged.” He said with a grin.

Martin smiled at him and nodded. “Ok... I guess that’s pretty standard.” He said. “It still doesn’t explain why you dislike him so much though. Or why he’s trying to take control of one of my ships.”

“Just before we struck the Ion storm that disabled our ship we received an updated sensor profile of the area we were passing through. Which happened to be around Lycavore.” Wayonn told him. “The sensor profiles

showed no sign of the Ion anomaly, they were clean, but the Ion storm we hit was massive Martin. Half a light year across and easily a full light year deep. There's no way the sensor profile would have missed it."

"Wait... you think he sent the wrong data?" Martin asked.

-Distributing updated sensor profiles fell within the purview of his duties King Martin- Avi spoke.
-Each update was logged and recorded by a member of the Science Convention for accuracy and any strange readings. Elder Lorendo's personal security code accompanied the updated sensor profile indicating he had reviewed it personally-

"And someone couldn't have done it for him and just used his code?" Martin asked.

Avi shook his head. **-Security Protocols at the time were still under a war time edict-** He answered.
-Anyone not using their own Security Codes would be stripped of their official status and all of their codes removed-

Martin looked at Wayonn. "You think he didn't send you the right sensor profile on purpose?" Martin asked. "Why would he do that?"

Wayonn shrugged. "I don't know what to believe after all these years." He said. "I'm not sure it even matters anymore to be honest Martin. And if the security codes are accurate then he survived the war with however many other of my people and he is in a position of authority. All I know is that he is not to be trusted for any reason."

Martin looked at Avi. "I take it by your little message to him that you agree?" He asked.

-I can only make a decision based on pertinent data at hand Martin Leonidas- Avi spoke.

"Avi... don't go all neural circuits and mono tones on me!" Martin hissed. "You've developed an ability to make conscious decisions over the years based on hunches. I know you have. I've seen it. Now tell me what your hunch is!"

-He is guilty as sin Martin. To paraphrase Queen Anja- Avi spoke quickly.

Martin turned around and looked around the control room. *Arzoal... I'm guessing you concur with all of this?* He reached out within Mindvoice.

I did not know him personally Martin... only by reputation. Arzoal answered. *He did not have the most stellar reputation among the Science Convention. Many did not trust him or his method of doing things.*

Martin shook his head and turned back to Wayonn. "You know... we had people like this weasel back when Anja and I were doing ops as Navy SEALs." He spoke. "Thought they knew what was best about everything even though most of them didn't know which end of a HK74 the bullets came out of."

Wayonn nodded. "Sounds like Lorendo." He said.

"Ok... my next question... will they come here?" Martin asked. "If this sensor probe got here after we did then they are obviously monitoring this station."

-It is likely the station is within a network of other Science Platforms that are being monitored- Avi spoke up. **-When the station was reactivated then a probe was sent out-**

"Which leads me into the next mystery that we recently discovered." Martin said. "Anja said several of the main medical logs were deleted."

Wayonn nodded. "Yes."

"Want to guess what they were on?" Martin asked.

"Given what Anja and Duewa discovered... I'd say they were on our guests two floors beneath us in deep freeze." Wayonn answered.

"Right!" Martin spoke. "And the only reason you delete logs is to cover something up."

Wayonn nodded. "More than likely."

"So whatever happened here... someone is trying to hide it." Martin said.

"What good does it do to speculate?" Wayonn asked.

"It gives me an idea of the lengths people will go to keep their mistakes from becoming public knowledge." Martin said. "Or something similar if you get my drift." He turned to Avi. "Avi... would the *ARC ROYAL*'s passive array detect a Pralor ship entering the system?"

-All of the ARIZONA-Class ships have sensor arrays based on City Ship 41- Avi answered. -City Ship 41 was a Class Nine City Ship. Her sensor arrays were the most advanced constructed for any City Ship-

Martin looked at him. "Is that a yes Avi?" He quipped.

-Yes- Avi said.

"Will the Shroud work?" Martin asked.

Avi shook his head. **-Unlikely. Pralor sensors would immediately detect the shift in the Quantum flux matrix of the Shroud. Any technology having to do with Quantum conversion is automatically detected by Pralor sensors-**

"Ok... so we have to say hello." Martin spoke.

Wayonn pushed off the computer station now. "You seem certain they will come here Martin... why?"

Martin met his eyes. "Because I would." He answered.

Wayonn smiled. "Not everyone thinks like you do Martin my boy." He said. "And my people are not..."

"Tell him." Helen's voice echoed from the side and they all turned.

Wayonn looked at her and then back to Martin. "Tell me what?" He asked. His eyes grew wider when she approached out of the shadows. "Helen?"

Helen walked right up to Martin and he looked at her with wide eyes. "Helen?" Martin gasped holding out his hands to grasp her shoulders.

Helen smiled at his expression. "I decided it was time for me to stop hiding my true appearance." She said. "Having to maintain that façade was beginning to wear on my nerves. I no longer wish to hide who I am. I am only four thousand five hundred and forty-two years old you know. Why should I make myself appear older when I am not? People will accept me or they won't."

Martin smiled at her. The gray in her hair was no longer there, leaving only long, lush dark brown waves that fell below her shoulders and was tied into a bundle at the bottom much like Anja and Cirith wore their hair. The lines of age in her face were no longer there either, leaving smooth flawless skin as was normal in young, healthy Lycavorian women. She didn't look a day over forty years old. "Wow!" He said. "Has Aricia or the others seen you yet?" He asked excitedly.

"No. Do you think they will approve?" Helen asked him with a smile.

Martin nodded quickly. "Are you kidding? They'll love it!"

Wayonn couldn't help but smile and he stepped forward to embrace his granddaughter. "I am glad you chose this." He said squeezing her tightly. "It suits you."

Helen smiled up at him and then turned her eyes to Martin once more. "Tell him Martin." She said.

Wayonn shook his head. "What are you two talking about?" He asked. "Tell me what?"

Helen looked at him. "Martin is right grandfather. They are coming here." Helen said. "They are coming here because it is getting stronger."

"What is getting stronger?" Wayonn asked looking at Martin his eyes narrowing.

"Someone is with them Wayonn." Martin said softly. "I can feel his resonance within Mindvoice. Powerful, focused and clear. It was there clearly for a single moment and then it was gone, like they are shielding. The same way you told Andro and I to shield."

“Feel... who do you feel Martin?” Wayonn asked hesitantly, his face now beginning to realize what Martin was saying.

Martin looked at him. “Someone like me and my sons.” He said.

TALISMAN

Murano smiled as he sat at the single table in the corner of the lounge. “Yes... I feel you too my brother Praetorian.” He whispered to himself. “Good. That is good. Oh... you have potential my boy. Great potential. As do those others I feel within you. We will need you in the future. All of you. I will... I will see you soon.”

“Excuse me?” The soft female voice echoed.

Murano turned his head quickly, irritated at being interrupted once more. He began to rise to his feet intending to scold the curious crewmember but stopped himself when he saw who stood next to the table. His eyes narrowed slightly as he looked at the two women and single man. The two women were young, one barely a hundred years old while the other was no more than five hundred years old if his estimation was accurate. The young man could not have been more than six or seven thousand years old. He stared into two sets of dark brown eyes and a set of soft blue orbs staring at him. He tilted his head slightly.

“I know you.” He spoke softly staring at the older of the two women.

“The older of the two women smiled brightly. “Kesyla Uncle.” She said.

Murano’s eyes exploded open. “Kesyla!” He exclaimed. “By the Omens! Kesyla!” He reached out and took her hands within his. “Child... you have... you have grown!”

The woman smiled and squeezed his hands tightly. “It’s been almost five hundred years uncle.” She said. “I was only nine when I last saw you.”

Murano shook his head but with a smile. “And you have... grown!” He exclaimed causing the woman to laugh and tears to come to her eyes. He turned his head and looked at the man. “Daron?” He asked softly.

The young man nodded and reached for his forearm, grasping it. “It has been a long time Uncle.” He spoke.

“I should say so!” Murano gasped. “Last time I saw you... hell boy... you were only a thousand years old and couldn’t decide between Phasic Engineering or Quantum Singularity Mechanics!”

Daron nodded. “I picked neither.” He said. “I moved into Bioengineering Theory.” He replied.

Murano nodded his head. “A rare but useful field.” He said. He turned to look at the last female. “And this is?”

Kesyla smiled. “This is Mari Uncle. Our sister.”

Murano looked up quickly at her. “Sister?” He gasped. “Your father... he never... he never told me he had another child.”

Kesyla gripped the younger woman’s shoulders. “Mari is twenty-four and one of the finest Quantum Mechanic scientists within the Science Convention now.” Kesyla spoke. “We are all very proud of her.”

Murano took her hand. “Then an honor for me it is.” He spoke bringing the back of her knuckles to his forehead and touching them to his skin.

Murano staggered back slightly as the young woman threw her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly. “Hello Uncle.” She gasped.

Murano looked surprised and he glanced at Kesyla. His arms went around her slowly and he smiled. “Hello to you Mari.” He said.

Kesyla smiled. “She hasn’t stopped talking about you since we became aware you had returned Uncle. She has done nothing but study the Praetorians and their history since we came onboard.”

“They are heroes!” Mari stepped back but did not release Murano’s hands. “They saved our people!”

“That was a long time ago Mari.” Daron spoke moving closer his words drawing a glance from Murano for the way in which they were spoken. “Why have you returned Uncle?” He asked plainly.

“Daron!” Kesyla hissed. “Where are your manners?”

Murano turned and motioned them to the table to sit down. He smiled warmly as Mari positioned herself next to him quickly. "Why... why are you all here?" He asked settling back into the chair. "Are you assigned to this ship?"

"I am father's senior aide now Uncle Murano." Kesyla answered. "I go where he goes. Mari does not begin her duties at the main Science Convention Engineering Building until next week and Daron return from Pheron only last week to visit. Father said we could accompany him to gain experience."

Murano's face looked surprised. "Experience?" He asked. "This... this is not a routine charting mission Kesyla. There is real danger here."

Daron chuckled. "Yes... a primitive species has somehow gained access to one of our Science Stations. Now we must go there, spank them and send them on their way. That is real danger Uncle." His words were tinged with sarcasm and arrogance and Murano looked at him for a long moment.

"That is what your father told you?" He asked finally.

Only Mari caught the tone of his voice and she looked at him intently. "That is... that is not the case Uncle?" She asked.

"Tell me Daron... how is it that this primitive species gained access to a Class Seven Ship Avatar and then convinced it to help them?" Murano asked. "How is it that they are able to come this far into the stars without advanced starships? How is it that they have incorporated our technology into their own? And how is it that they have dragons traveling with them?"

"Dragons!" Mari gasped. "You mean like Elder Mother Teniri and the others?"

"Never assume our technological advantage makes us superior to someone else." Murano admonished him. "Technology is not the measure of a species. What is inside is the measure."

"Even so... Elder Lorendo says they are primitive compared to us." Daron spoke. "He says we'll simply take back what is ours and leave them be."

Murano nodded. "And what if they do not want to give it back?" Murano asked him. "What then?"

"We take it obviously." Daron spoke. "We can't allow primitive species to have our best technology."

"You assume that we are able to take it back from them." Murano said.

"We have a detachment of Elite Pralor Convention soldiers and twenty dragons with us Uncle." Kesyla spoke now. "Surely... that is enough should the need arise."

"Elite?" Murano chuckled to himself. "You believe the Convention Security Troops are elite do you Kesyla?" He asked.

"They are not the vaunted Praetorians Uncle! You are the only Praetorian that remains." Daron spoke with another heavy dose of sarcasm in his words. "But they will do. Unless you cling to this idea that there is another on the planet we are heading for as father says you do. A descendant of Sumar. In which case that would mean the former Chief Elder broke his own law and this individual would be nowhere near as powerful."

Murano looked at him but Mari snapped her head around and glared at her older brother. "Daron... you go beyond yourself! You will speak more respectfully to your elders and your betters or I will tell father!" She hissed at him angrily.

Daron looked at his sister with a sneer but kept his tongue quiet from what he wanted to say. "Tell him sister. I am only stating what father thinks as well." Daron spoke now, his tone more subdued and respectful but nonetheless having a heavy dose of arrogance and sarcasm in it.

"Forgive Daron Uncle." Kesyla spoke looking at him sternly. She turned back to Murano then. "He sometimes loses himself within his own self-importance."

"I am only stating what father, Elder Lorendo and many within the Elder Convention are saying." Daron spoke.

"So you have spies within the Chief Elder Convention as well now!" Mari hissed at him.

"What does it matter to you Mari? You will be married off soon and then you can live your life having children and making engines." Daron spoke.

Mari glared at him. "I will not be married off!" She hissed. "You were not and Kesyla was not!"

"I'm sorry to say... it is the law sister." Daron spoke. "And you are only a year shy of your time. We were granted waivers... but father can not grant you a waiver as well."

"Father will get a waiver for me!" Mari snapped.

“Enough you two!” Kesyla spat. She looked at Murano. “Forgive them Uncle... Daron enjoys angering her.”

Mari snickered at her brother and turned back to face Murano. Though Kesyla was the middle child, both of them usually took their cues from her. She was more level headed and had infinitely more power and influence than either of them given that she was their father’s senior aide. “You... you believe there is a Praetorian on this planet Uncle?” She asked with genuine interest.

Murano looked at her and smiled. “It is only a feeling child.” He replied.

“But you believe it?” Mari pressed him.

“Let’s just say that I do not follow the same path as others in their beliefs.” Murano answered.

“Ah... I see they found you after all!” The voice said and all of them looked up to see Delnash move up to the table.

Murano came to his feet as did all of them. “Brother.” He stated evenly.

“I asked them to not disturb you... but as usual none of them listened to me.” Delnash spoke with a smile.

“He was just sitting here father.” Kesyla said quickly.

Murano shook his head. “It is quite alright.” He stated. “It is... it was very good to see all of you.”

Delnash nodded. “I must speak to Murano privately children.” He said. “Please excuse us.”

Mari was the only one to actually reach out to him, leaning up on her tip toes and gently kissing his cheek. “We will talk more Uncle.” She stated confidently.

Murano gazed into her soft blue eyes and nodded his head. She was breathtaking in her beauty and this disturbed him for some reason. He blinked several times as she moved away with Kesyla and Daron and he turned to face his brother.

“Murano... before you say anything...” Delnash began to speak.

“You did not think enough of me to inform me that you had another child Delnash?” He asked him.

“Am I such a stain upon your record that you will not allow me to experience the happiness of such a day brother?”

“Murano... it wasn't... Mari was unplanned.” He stammered. “We certainly did not expect to have another child. It was... it was a trying birth. After the fourth month Dirra needed to remain in bed.”

“And you did not think to let me know?” Murano gasped. “Perhaps I could have done something to comfort her! Both of you!”

Delnash shook his head. “It is not what she wanted.” He said. “The others were more than supportive and...”

“The others?” Murano said softly. “Yes... those who are not your insane Praetorian brother. I understand Delnash.”

“It is not like that Murano!” Delnash snapped. “Do not make it something that it is not!”

Murano looked at him. “You have done that quite well all by yourself.” He spoke. He returned to the chair. “What do you want brother?”

Delnash settled into the chair Kesyla had been sitting in. “I need you to reconsider your stance Murano.” He said.

Murano looked at him. “My stance on what?”

“You know very well what I mean!” Delnash snapped. “I can not have the only surviving Praetorian of our people traipsing all over saying he does not support the Convention.”

Murano met his eyes. “I did not say I don’t support the Chief Elder Convention.” He said softly. “I said I would not recognize the Elder Convention until such time as you saw fit to have elections. There is a difference brother!”

“Our people will not know that difference!” Delnash snapped.

“You give our people far too little credit.” Murano told him. “Have you ruled over them for so long that you have forgotten what it was like before you became Chief Elder? When you were one of them?”

“I did not come here to argue or be drawn into a debate with you brother.” Delnash hissed at him.

“No... you came here to get me to agree that you are doing the right thing when it comes to these individuals who have taken over one Elder Lorendo’s Science Stations.” Murano said with contempt in his voice.

“It is possible... it is possible that they have discovered the sensor probe in the system.” Delnash spoke.

“So?” Murano stated sarcastically. “They are primitives brother. Surely no match for our superior intellect and technology.”

“Do not jest with me Murano!” Delnash barked. “And do not mock Lorendo!”

Murano leaned forward quickly, causing his brother to sit back just as quickly. They were brothers yes, but Delnash had always had a healthy respect for what his brother could do. Part of that respect was also fear. “I will mock that fool until I am blue in the face if I so choose brother!” Murano growled. “He is a fool! A fool who has openly withheld information from the Elder Convention because he thought it was not important enough to pass on! Not important enough to pass on to the leaders of our people! He is dangerous Delnash! And none of you can see it! His hatred of me should be the first warning sign, yet you dismiss it!”

Delnash leaned closer. “They are Lycavorian.” He stated softly. “Now that we are closer, our ship’s sensors have been able to determine what they are if not who they are. There are a number of other species intermixed... some of the human species, elves and some of the blood drinkers...”

“You mean Vampires.” Murano said. “Those of the vampiric species.”

“The blood drinkers... yes!” Delnash said with some exasperation. “But the vast majority of them are Lycavorian.”

Murano shrugged his shoulders. “And this means what to me?”

“You know we have used their species in the past to repopulate other worlds Murano!” Delnash snapped. “We have used them because of their natural abilities and their sometimes barbaric nature. Only they could survive in some of the harsh environments we have placed them in.”

“Yet you fear them.” Murano asked him. “If I recall a seminar you attended and spoke at many years ago, you specifically said the Lycavorian species would never outgrow their savage nature and move forward into the domain of civilized species.”

“And I still believe that damn it!” Delnash hissed. “Their very nature runs counter to everything a civilized man or woman wants! I am asking that you reconsider so that none of our people are badly injured if something goes wrong. The Lycavorian species is not known for their temperament and they are extremely difficult to subdue given their physical gifts.”

Murano looked at him. “I will do as I said I would brother. I will accompany your people to the surface as an observer and that is all. Whatever happens will be determined by what you and others do.”

“I’m not going.” Delnash stated. “Sashan and Lorendo will be going in my stead. They do not wish to risk me.”

Murano nodded. “A wise move.” He said. “Though I dare say sending Lorendo will do more harm than good in my humble opinion.”

“He is not the enemy Murano!” Delnash hissed.

Murano shook his head. “No he is not. But neither is he my friend.” He answered. “His actions up until now should draw at the very least a minor amount of curiosity but instead you accept them without question. I think you should question Kasdan more and see what else Elder Lorendo has not told you. Kasdan seems like an intelligent man with the good of our people in his heart and actions.”

“Lorendo is Chief Elder of the Science Convention!” Delnash snapped. “That will not change simply because you do not like him!”

Murano met his brother’s eyes. “It is not a matter of not liking him brother...” He spoke. “I do not trust him... not in the least. And you’ll forgive me brother, but this is one time when I have far more experience in this matter than you will ever acquire.” Murano rose to his feet. “I will serve the Chief Elder Convention as long as it is to the benefit of our people but I will not recognize it or support it openly. You have already shown me that you believe nothing of what I feel as a Praetorian and that is as far as I am willing to go.”

“Murano you...” Delnash began to speak as he stood up but Murano held up his hand.

“Do not bother brother.” He said. “You are my brother... and I love you with all that I am. But I am not a fool who is clinging to some remnant of a lost society of warriors. There is no scientific explanation for what Praetorians can do and I know this... and that is why Lorendo and others fear us! It is why the Scourge feared us! And I am not the last brother!” Murano pointed out the huge view window to his right. “There is another Praetorian out there! On the planet we are going to... and you are making a mistake believing that he will simply allow you to walk in there and take from him what is his!”

“It is not his! It is our technology!” Delnash nearly shouted. “Our Science Station! They are a primitive species and have no right to it! Think of the damage they could do if any of that technology is misused! Or discovered by the Scourge!”

Murano nodded his head. “As you have said before brother.” He stated calmly. “I am not the one you need to convince however. Something tells me... something tells me this individual will not be so easy to convince and he will not listen to you either.”

“Then we will have no choice but to take it by force!” Delnash barked.

“Then I hope you are ready to accept the consequences for your decision brother.” He told him. “Because there will be consequences. I have told you before and I will tell you again, this is a mistake.” Murano turned and made his way towards the door leaving Delnash standing there trembling in a mixture of anger and anxiousness.

SOLMAR SOUTHERN SETTLEMENT AZLENR’S COMMAND BASE

Azlenr stared at the young man and woman across from him for a long moment as they walked towards him. That they were related was easy enough to tell even if he didn’t already know Lisisa from all the propaganda that was put out months ago about her being Pusintin’s daughter. It was obvious she did not care about that given her reaction or how it was treated by the Kavalian government run media. He did not know the younger man though he had been told this was Prince Dorian Leonidas. The Kavalians did not have a profile on this young Prince. They did not know he had even existed up until several hours ago. Azlenr looked around the open portion of the settlement and saw his men standing with confused looks on their faces. Most of the officers he had been able to speak with in the few hours leading up to this event, leaving them to inform their men. True to their training and trust in their commander, none of them had their weapons at the ready and were keeping their hands at their sides as they stood in loose formation. Azlenr looked to his right at his aide.

“Have we done the right thing Makali’Bengane?” Azlenr asked softly.

The young Kavalian officer looked at him. “The alternative is we would be dead General Azlenr.” He replied. “I much prefer life.”

“And if we have been duped?” Azlenr said.

“You have always known the Prefect did not care for how you or Byka commanded your troops General.” Makali spoke. “Is it such a stretch to think he would plan something like this? To use us for political gain? To try and recover some face?”

“No... it is not a stretch.” Azlenr spoke softly looking back out over his men. “I have led men all of my life Makali. Fought whatever foe I was commanded. Killed them without regard or regret. Never did I believe we would resort to the outright killing of innocents. Of children!”

Makali looked at him. “Then you do believe what they have been telling us?” He asked.

Azlenr looked at him. “One broadcast they could falsify. Two or three perhaps.” He said. “They provided thirty-nine different news broadcasts Makali. Thirty-nine! All of them said the same thing. Puma Bane scum like Marsin butchered those children as surely as if they were the ones who conducted the operation themselves.” Azlenr watched as Dorian and Lisisa came up to stand across from them with the second female who appeared very nervous, the two huge dragons right behind them and causing many of his men to fidget on their feet wanting to run. “We have lost our way Makali. Keleru has taken us down a path that could only lead to our destruction as a species. I will not be party to that. To any of it.”

Lisisa looked at him. “General Azlenr’Macaoe?”

Azlenr looked at her with some surprise in his eyes at how she had used his complete and formal name. He stepped forward two paces and bowed his head to her. “I am General Azlenr.” He stated. Azlenr reached up and very slowly withdrew his ARSOC from its holster on his right hip. He grasped the barrel and held it out to Lisisa. “On behalf of my men and my officers... I officially surrender to you and we request political asylum.”

Lisisa stepped closer and took the ARSOC, turning the weapon over in her hand and then holding it back out to him. “On behalf of my brother Androcles Leonidas General... your surrender is rejected. As is your request for political asylum.”

Azlenr glanced at Makali quickly and then back to Lisisa. He stared at the weapon in her hand as she held it out to him. His weapon. “I... I don’t understand!” He gasped aloud with wide eyes. “This is what was agreed on! The vampire... Robaran... he said...”

“My brother wanted us to ask a question of you General.” Dorian spoke now moving closer. “Why would you surrender without a fight?”

“What?” Azlenr gasped again. “Your broadcasts! You showed me the truth of things! I will not allow my men to be butchered to appease Prefect Keleru’s grasps for power! I would never condone the attacks on innocent children! Never! I did as you instructed! I gave you Marsin and his Puma Bane dogs! What... what more do you want? My men stand down all around you wondering why? What more does your brother need?”

Just at that moment a flight of *TEMPEST* fighters roared over the settlement only several hundred feet off the ground. Azlenr turned and looked out over the terrain all around the settlement and his intense feline eyes narrowed when he saw the barrels of what appeared to be Main Battle Hover Tanks and Plasma artillery batteries set up in the surrounding mountains. He turned to watch the M7s peel away to the north and then he looked back at Dorian and Lisisa.

“So this is how it is to be?” He said softly. “You refuse my surrender and come here with the intent to kill us anyway! You are either very stupid or very brave to believe even with your vaunted dragons we would allow you to escape alive. You may kill me... but you will not leave here to return to your brother with my head.”

Dorian stepped right up to him now, Azlenr standing a good three inches taller than him. “Dorian no!” Sheva complained reaching for him even as her hand tightened on her 190.

Dorian looked at Azlenr. “My brother wants to know if you are a Kavalian or a coward.” Dorian snapped seeing Azlenr’s eyes go wide. “If you are a coward, then you can take your surrender and request for asylum and shove it up your ass... Andro’s words.” Dorian spat. He moved closer to Azlenr. “If you are a Kavalian... a proud Kavalian like Andro believes... then you will denounce Keleru and his actions publicly! You will denounce them and join forces with General Pian’Nruarani! A man who fights for the heart and future of the Kavalian people and not for power!”

“Dorian that...” Lisisa began to speak but stopped herself.

“Where is Byka?” Azlenr demanded. “He was suppose to be with you!”

“General Byka was injured.” Dorian told him. He held up his hand. “He was injured but he will be fine. He is being treated by my sister and one of our other Hadarian Healers. His daughter is also being treated for injuries. Their DAGGER crashed for some reason, but we got to them fast enough.”

“And Marsin?” Azlenr asked.

“Well... unless you are good at puzzles... putting him back together might be a bit of a problem.” Dorian answered. “Seems he came across one of my brother’s Durcunusaan guards and didn’t fare to well in the ensuing fight.” Dorian shrugged. “Daio kind of beat him into a bloody mess.”

“Beat him?” Azlenr rasped out. “Your man... your man beat Marsin to death?”

Dorian nodded. “He must have done something that really pissed Daio off.” He said with a smile. “But he won’t be around to bother anyone anymore.” Dorian reached behind him to the small pouch he carried and withdrew the small holodisc. He held it in his palm and activated it. “A message for you.”

Azlenr’s eyes went wide when the well groomed face of Pian’Nruarani appeared in the holo transmission.

“General Azlenr’Macaoe... if you are viewing this... then events have gone the way Androcles Leonidas had hoped. You have seen through the lies and fog Keleru has created and experienced the truth. I urge you to go further General. I urge you to reach beyond everything you have ever believed and open your eyes. Androcles hoped I could convince you that our two peoples are not enemies. That what is happening now is a grasp at power by a man who should have been displaced long ago. I ask that you think and act with the reputation you have among our own people. It will not be easy Azlenr’Macaoe... nothing worthwhile ever is... but our people deserve to be freed from the oppression of a man who does not have the right to lead

them don't you think? We are Kavalians yes... harsh and sometimes brutal... but now is the time to lead our people away from the past. Not back to it. I could certainly use your help. It seems most are looking to me for leadership and I have never commanded anything larger than my own ship. I could use all the help I can get. Know this however; there is no going back Azlenr. Once you cross that line, you will either become an ally or an enemy depending on what you decide. An ally you will find in me and Androcles Leonidas should you choose correctly. An enemy should you choose wrong. And you have seen how the enemies of Androcles end up already I'm quite sure. Join with us. Join with me and help me to free our people Azlenr. Help me to bring them out of the darkness and into the light."

The transmission ended and Dorian held out the transmission disc to Azlenr. "The General recorded that last evening and sent it to us this morning after we contacted him with what we were trying to do here. Andro wants you to have it."

Azlenr took the disc slowly. "Where is he?" Azlenr asked.

Dorian shook his head. "That I don't know." He replied honestly. "Andro knows... but he's a closed lip bastard at times." He said playfully trying to break the tension. "It can end and start here General. It all depends on where your heart is."

Azlenr looked at Lisisa who still held his ARSOC out to him. "You... you wish this as well?" He asked her.

"I'd much rather be with my husband than fighting General. And I trust my brother." Lisisa answered. "Does that answer your question?"

Azlenr reached out and took his ARSOC. "Yes. Yes it does." He said. He looked back to Dorian. "You took a great risk coming here as you did. Just your dragons. That tells me you had faith you could convince me."

Dorian shrugged. "Maybe. It really wasn't that much of a risk though." He said. "You and everyone around you would have been the first to die if it went that way." Dorian turned his head to the side. "Execute Three One!" He barked.

Azlenr and Makali stood there in shock as nearly four hundred Lycavorians lowered their PSGs and appeared all around them, mixed in the ranks with his men and standing in a loose circle around Dorian and Lisisa.

Azlenr turned back to Dorian with an embarrassed smile. "Then it is over now." He said.

Dorian shook his head. "Over? No sir General." He said. "Now the future for you and all of your men begins. Hell of a way to kick off the morning don't you think?"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ONTEROM

TALISMAN

FEBRUARY 7TH, 2135 HOURS EST

"...detected us Dehov?" Delnash asked. His eyes were focused on the massive main monitor which gave them an up close view of Onterom even though they were still more than an hour away.

"No Chief Elder." Dehov answered. "I brought us in behind the coreward moon. The Lycavorian ships are on the other side of the planet and will not be able to detect us unless either of them moves from its current location. They seem to be maintaining an ecliptic orbit above the Science Station."

"Why?" Delnash asked.

"Less time to reinforce those on the surface and easier communications." Sashan spoke from where he stood beside Radra and Lorendo.

"Why do we not have more information on these Lycavorians Lorendo?" Delnash asked turning to look at Lorendo. He remained silent, surprised at the question, so Kasdan stepped forward from one of the Science stations.

“We have volumes of data Chief Elder.” He replied. “However... no one has reviewed the logs.”

“Well... why not?” Delnash snapped.

Kasdan looked at Lorendo and saw he was going to get no help and he moved closer to continue. “The sensor probes we seeded within the Alpha quadrant were only designed to activate once every fifty years for a one week period. They would monitor and record any events happening within their established parameters and then transmit the data back to the Central Hub for that area of space. Once that was complete then they would shut down. Contact with all of the Central Hubs was lost when the homeworld fell Chief Elder.” He explained. “We only have data from before the...”

Delnash held up his hand. “Yes... I understand.” He said softly. “Thank you Kasdan.”

“Our probe detected it.” Sashan spoke.

Kasdan nodded his head. “Yes... because our Series Twelve Probes are newer and linked to our Central Hub network on Artaaya. It takes longer for the information to transmit, but it is much more secure. And to save room for more thorough scans, they are programmed to trigger only if they detect our technology activating within their sensor radius.”

“The *VORTEX* Cruiser.” Dehov said.

Kasdan nodded. “Yes.”

“Well if that is the case then they have only had control of the Avatar for a short time.” Delnash said.

“Weeks at most.”

“I’m afraid that is not the case.” Kasdan spoke.

“Why?”

“The two ships are using systems based on our technology Chief Elder.” He replied. “Given the level of technology we have seen so far...”

“What?” Delnash asked.

“I estimate that they have had access to our technology for at least two decades. Probably more in order to build a ship of that type out there. Our technology is not simply added on as we first thought. As we have gotten closer and I have been able to fine tune our sensors with Avatar 27’s help, I have discovered it is integrated into many of their systems. Even as reworked as our sensors are I am still unable to fully penetrate their hull because of this unknown metal without a full active scan. Which they will detect the moment it begins.” Kasdan said.

“Two decades!” Lorendo spat. “That isn’t possible! The probe only activated weeks ago Kasdan! It would have detected anything before that just as it did the *VORTEX* Cruiser!”

“And it did detect something Elder Lorendo.” Kasdan spoke. “And it transmitted the data back to the Central Hub on Artaaya just like it was designed for. That was twenty-seven years ago. When I brought it to you, you told me it was a glitch in the system.”

“The probe had been hit with an anti-matter pulse of some sort!” Lorendo snapped. “It acted strange for several hours before settling down! All of our experts agreed!”

“I am not attempting to lay blame anywhere Elder Lorendo...” Kasdan told him. “I am simply stating fact.”

“Wait!” Delnash spoke. “This probe has sent information like this before?” He gasped.

Kasdan looked at him and nodded. “Yes Chief Elder. It could very well have been a glitch in the particle transmitter... Elder Lorendo is correct that it was hit with some sort of anti-matter pulse, but since we did not recall the probe for a diagnostic... we never found out the real reason for what caused the initial activation. It...”

“What data did it send?” Delnash asked.

Kasdan looked back to Lorendo and watched him step forward. “The information was not accurate Delnash.” Lorendo spoke. “The anti-matter pulse caused a complete reboot of the probe’s main sensor array. I correctly activated the repair protocols on the probe and dismissed the data as per our established procedures. It never resent its transmission, which told me the problem had been fixed and the data we received initially was wrong.”

“What did it send?” Delnash asked again.

“Twenty-two seconds of very blurry images and unreadable data.” Kasdan replied.

“Can you bring it up on the main monitor?” Murano’s voice asked now.

They all turned to see him enter the bridge and stride toward them calmly. “What for?” Lorendo asked. “It is worthless!”

“Worthless to you perhaps. You are not an intelligence operative or a military officer.” Murano said evenly as he came up beside his brother. “Perhaps not so worthless to their eyes Elder Lorendo.”

“Chief Elder this is pointless!” Lorendo hissed. “I reviewed the imagery with two others on my staff besides Kasdan. Both of whom have a military background. We all concurred that there was nothing of importance there.”

“The two men you speak of have never served even single a day on a warship Lorendo.” Murano spoke. “They were assigned to you by Elder Sashan from the ground forces.” Murano looked at Sashan. “Is that not correct Elder Sashan?”

Sashan nodded. “Yes... but they are fine officers.”

“I do not doubt their ability.” Murano said. “Only their expertise. Kasdan... can you bring up the footage?”

Kasdan nodded. “Yes.”

“Chief Elder...” Lorendo began.

Delnash held up his hand. “Indulge me.” He spoke.

“We should be moving for the planet to keep them from using our technology for other purposes!” Lorendo spat. “Not chasing sensor ghosts!”

Delnash looked at Kasdan ignoring Lorendo. “Do as Murano asked Elder Kasdan. Bring it up on the main screen here.”

Kasdan moved back to the Science Station quickly and worked the controls. The large screen that had been showing the planet and moon suddenly changed to that of a very grainy and dark image. In the background of the image was a large, greenish colored planet. Murano moved up next to his brother as the others moved closer and they stared at the image as it moved for exactly twenty-two seconds across the front of the planet before vanishing in a wall of white static. Murano held out his hand and pointed to the object as the image recycled.

“Is this a ship?” He asked.

“It seems to be moving.” Commander Dehov spoke now, his eyes trying to get a better angle.

“I told you!” Lorendo spat anxiously. “It’s useless!”

“It’s definitely a ship.” Murano spoke.

“There is no way to be sure!” Lorendo exclaimed. “I had my officers review it for hours. They could not determine what it was! For all we know it is nothing more than a large piece of rock!”

Murano looked at him with disgust on his face. “A large rock that is maneuvering out of the atmosphere Elder Lorendo?”

Dehov nodded. “I agree... it is definitely a ship.” He stated. “I can’t make out what type or who it belongs too however.” He leaned back. “The Scourge!” He hissed softly.

Murano shook his head quickly. “The Alpha Quadrant is too far out of their way.” He said. “If the time stamp is correct... most of their forces had returned to the edges of Scourge space by this time.”

“It’s a City Ship!” The female voice spoke causing all of them to turn and see Mari moving through the doorway onto the bridge with Kesyla and Daron.

Delnash looked at his younger daughter. “Mari?” He questioned her.

Mari nodded confidently and moved up beside her father. “Look at this bow portion of the ship father. It curves back inward. That was unique to the Series Nine City Ships. And the beam is significantly larger in the center... see.” She traced the image as it moved on the screen. “Then there is the main stabilizing wing here on top in the rear of the ship...” Mari leaned closer. “May I?” She asked Kasdan.

Kasdan nodded. “Of course Lady Mari.” He stated.

Mari leaned over and tapped on the control console quickly. She looked up at the image, stopped it from moving and isolated it. She rotated it in several directions until she nodded once more. “Yes... it’s a Series Nine City Ship.” She spoke confidently.

Lorendo laughed gently. “Two experienced officers within our military viewed these same images for hours Lady Mari. They could make no determination.” He spoke. “You view it for a few seconds and you claim to know what it is?”

Mari met his gaze. "I don't claim anything Elder Lorendo. I know what it is." She stated looking at her father. "The last nine months of my schooling was in the model of a City Ship father. A Series Nine City Ship model. We had to learn how to take apart and rebuild the entire Quantum Engine Matrix." Mari pointed at the image. "That is most definitely a Series Nine City ship."

"That's... that's not possible Mari." Delnash spoke. "When this image was taken... no more of our City Ships survived. The Scourge had destroyed them all."

Mari shook her head. "Not all of them father." She stated quite confidently. "It matches the parameters exactly. And look..." She stepped forward closer and adjusted the controls. The image moved forward in slow motion. "You can just begin to see the activation of its main Quantum Fusion drive right here!" She froze the image and traced the rear of the picture. "This outline of light... it's the beginning of a jump. You can tell by the Phase Inducers and what position the venting is taking place. In this case... it's firing straight back. That means they were engaging the main core when this was taken."

Delnash looked at his daughter. "Mari... this is very important child. You are absolutely sure about what you are saying?"

Mari smiled. "Father... I did finish first in my class." She boasted without a trace of arrogance in her voice. "I'm positive... yes. You can have the Engineering Officer come up and confirm my conclusions if you like."

Lorendo shook his head. "Chief Elder... I realize that Lady Mari is your daughter and the most promising Quantum Mechanics student we have had in four millennia... but she is a child. Will you take the word of a child over senior military officials?"

"I am not a child!" Marti snapped looking at him. "Can you describe the steps leading up to the firing of a Quantum Drive core Elder Lorendo? Each and every step that takes place? There are one hundred and nineteen and all of them happen within six tenths of a second! Can you name even one? Can your military officers?"

Murano stepped closer to his niece with a smile on his face and gripped her arm gently before his brother snapped at her. "Mari... mind your station child." He said kindly. "Do not give Elder Lorendo two individuals in this family to dislike."

Mari looked up at her uncle and smiled brilliantly, her blue eyes shimmering in the light from the bridge. Murano smiled back down on her, feeling his heart jump a fraction at the face she gave him. She reminded him of himself at that age.

Delnash turned to Kasdan. "What sector of the Alpha Quadrant was this image taken in Kasdan?" He asked quickly.

"Sector twenty-nine Chief Elder." He replied. "Just as they recording says."

"And what habitable planets occupy that sector of space?" Delnash asked.

"There are several dozen Chief Elder." Kasdan answered. "The most prominent are the homeworld of the vampiric species, Uzu Ozeib 7, and the second is..." He stopped talking and looked up. "By the spirits of our ancestors... the second is Lycavore. That is the Lycavorian homeworld!"

"The same species that the Science Convention used so liberally to seed many different worlds." Murano spoke with a small nod and grin. "And now the same species that has control of a Series Nine City ship as well as a *VORTEX*-Class Heavy Cruiser. Apparently they are not so primitive as we first thought."

Delnash looked at his brother, glad that he did not begin to rant about how this Praetorian he thought he felt with Sumar's blood was a Lycavorian.

"We do not know that for sure!" Lorendo snapped.

"Is there another explanation we have not thought of?" Murano asked. "Apparently they have evolved enough to learn how to take control of two of the most advanced ships we have ever built and adapt that technology into what they have built themselves."

Delnash looked at him. "They are still barbaric by their very nature Murano. Warlike and violent." He stated evenly. "We only used them to seed worlds because of their adaptability and survivability."

Murano nodded. "Yes I know. Perhaps you should have thought about that before going forward with it. It seems they have survived and adapted quite well."

"I will not questions decisions made over forty millennia ago!" Delnash snapped.

Murano nodded his head in agreement. "I do not wish to revisit them either brother but perhaps the time has come where we need to." He said calmly. "One of those decisions is now occupying one of our Science Stations and they obviously know how to work everything or else they would have left already."

"This information only lends weight to my contention that we should just destroy the station from orbit!" Lorendo barked. "We don't know what they want or what they are doing there!"

Murano looked at him. "And you have no interest in discovering this?" He asked. "You as a scientist have no interest whatsoever in discovering how they did this or why they are here?"

"I have no desire to interact with a species that is beneath us!" Lorendo spoke.

"You assume we are their betters. That has always been the mentality of those within the Science Convention and it is wrong." Murano said. He looked at his brother. "This man serves our people? That is the same train of thought that began our downfall Delnash and you know it!"

"This is not the time for a philosophical debate Murano!" Delnash hissed. "We can determine these things after we have completed our primary mission!"

"Which I will reiterate is a grave mistake." Murano spoke. "We know nothing of how far they have advanced as a species as Kasdan has already stated. All of the records we had are gone. The probes we have seeded since coming to Artaaya are not as wide spread as those before the war. And at Kasdan's own admittance... they were not programmed to monitor events within the Alpha Quadrant as the others were. We don't know what we are walking into Delnash. They could be powerful friends to us, especially if..."

Delnash held up his hand. "Don't say that!" He snapped stopping him. "We can not conduct ourselves on your feelings Murano! Praetorian or no! We can only do what we must with the information we have at hand."

"The information you have at hand is ancient and most likely wrong brother!" Murano snapped. "At the very least... reach out to them. Try to communicate with them!"

"Communicate with primitive barbarians!" Lorendo barked.

"They might view us in the very same fashion Lorendo." Radra chimed in now moving closer. "Chief Elder Delnash I have to agree with Praetorian Murano on this. Given everything that we know... which is precious little from what I can see... we should be using far more caution and diplomacy."

"They are animals!" Lorendo snapped. "You have seen the reports on our Seed Missions using them!"

Radra looked at him. "Yes I have seen the reports Lorendo." She stated. "All of which were successful in doing what we sought! Seeding life to dead worlds." She turned back to Delnash. "Chief Elder Delnash... I am a medical doctor... this could well be the first contact we have ever had with a race of beings we helped to seed across the galaxy. In essence... they are our children."

"Children?" Lorendo spat. "We are talking of a species that can change into animals! Lethal animals! Our Research missions to this Lycavore showed that they preferred to move and stay in their animal forms! That does not speak to me of great intelligence!"

"The Research Missions took place centuries before we began to use their species to seed worlds." Murano spoke.

"So what?" Lorendo said. "None of what we have seen so far shows us they are any more advanced or intelligent than what we experienced before we chose them!"

"Elder Lorendo does have a point father." Daron spoke moving closer. "If I may Chief Elders?"

Delnash looked at Radra and Sashan who nodded. He turned back to his son. "Speak your mind Daron. Young ideas are always welcome."

"Elder Lorendo is stating fact." Daron spoke. "Yes... we do not have current information on this species... but should we not act based on what we already know?"

"We don't know anything yet Daron." Mari stated quickly looking at her older brother. "Everything we know is millennia old! Things could have changed."

"Your naivety is charming sister... but *could have* does not help us now." Daron said seeing Mari bristle at his derogatory comment towards her. His eyes turned away before he saw his uncle squeeze her arm once more and keep her from responding. "This is a seed species we are talking about. The very basic of species that we used to seed dead worlds. We chose them for their endurance and ability to adapt. Not for their intelligence. They were supposed to be the beginnings of life on new worlds... not the end result."

“Your statement smacks of knowledge and experience you yourself do not have Daron.” Murano spoke evenly seeing him turn to look at him in surprise. “You are barely more than a child yourself nephew, compared to the lives and experiences in this room. You may agree with Elder Lorendo in his assessment... but what you both are dismissing is our influence. Not just with what we have discovered so far... but in everything we have done in the past. Our arrogance brought much of our woes upon us.”

“The Praetorian Xaxon did that!” Lorendo muttered loud enough for everyone to hear.

Delnash turned quickly to stop his brother from becoming angry again but surprisingly Murano simply looked at Lorendo. “Xaxon was responsible for the bulk of it yes.” Murano said. “However... how did he become that way Lorendo? He was no different than you in much of his thinking... that our technology and society is superior simply because it is. It is a dangerous path to walk, as Xaxon proved, and trillions of our people paid for his arrogance. Do we wish to travel down that road once more?”

“These Lycavorians are animals!” Lorendo snapped. “They are no match for us!”

Murano nodded. “Perhaps... but we don’t know that for sure.” He said. He turned back to Delnash. “Opening a line of communication with them does not hurt us brother.”

“I agree.” Radra said.

“This is ridiculous!” Lorendo barked. “We should...”

“Very well.” Delnash spoke firmly.

“What?” Lorendo gasped.

“I will attempt to contact them.” Delnash spoke.

Lorendo looked at Sashan. “Sashan... say something!” He stammered.

“If we... if we contact them Chief Elder... we will have lost the element of surprise.” He stated. “We may not be able to complete all our goals.”

Delnash looked at Murano. “I understand.” He stated. “However, I have many questions and these Lycavorians may be able to answer some of them. And I have full confidence in our ability to subdue them when the time comes.”

“Chief Elder...” Lorendo began.

“I have made my decision!” Delnash hissed. He turned to Dehov. “Commander... can you tap into the Central Communications Array for the station?”

Dehov nodded his head. “All of the station security protocols have been changed and we are locked out completely, but I believe we can let them know we are trying to contact them.”

Delnash nodded. “Do it.” He said. He turned to Sashan. “Embark your soldiers Sashan. Deploy in the transports to the planet. Murano... go with them.”

“What are you doing brother?” Murano asked.

“Insuring that we are successful.” Delnash spoke. “I will distract, talk with them, while Sashan and you secure the facility. Once we have them in custody we can secure their ships and sort all of this out..”

“I told you I would only act as an observer Delnash!” Murano hissed angrily. “What you are doing is wrong!”

“You are a Praetorian and will do as I tell you as Chief Elder of our people!” Delnash barked causing heads to turn towards him from all over the bridge. “I will tell you a last time Murano... I can not make decisions based on your feelings! I have to think of our people! If you will not take part in this then yes, I will put forth legislation to have your authority as a Praetorian revoked completely. I will not have discourse filtering among our ranks! Not now!”

“Father!” Mari declared in shock.

“Mari... stay out of this! It is not your affair!” Delnash snapped. “You will return to the engineering section and continue with your tasks.”

Murano stared at his brother for a long time. “Delnash...”

“Are you refusing Praetorian Murano?” Delnash barked angrily his patience finally at an end.

“Your actions take you towards a dark path brother.” Murano stated. “No... I will go with them. I hope you are prepared for the blood that will be on your hands however.”

“I have seen plenty of blood in my life brother!” Delnash hissed.

Murano stepped closer to him and shook his head. “No brother.” He said softly. “You have seen a fraction of the blood that lies down this road. You have seen nothing to compare to that. No one here in this room has seen anything to compare to that. Not like I have seen.”

“Your past experiences have no bearing on what is happening now Praetorian Murano!” Delnash barked seeing his brother’s eyes go wide at his dismissive statement. “Now either do as I command of you or remove yourself to your quarters and we will handle it without you!”

Murano’s face suddenly became void of any emotion. He bowed his head quickly to Delnash. “As you wish... Chief Elder!” He stated evenly.

Delnash watched him turn abruptly and strode out of the doorway onto the bridge. His eyes turned to see Mari and Kesyla staring at him in shock, Daron with a smug look on his face. “Kesyla... you and Daron will accompany Elder Lorendo as my representatives. Mari return to engineering immediately!”

“Father you...” Mari began to protest.

“Do as I tell you child!” Delnash barked. “Now!”

Mari’s eyes were wide and she spun around angrily and marched off the bridge even as Kesyla and Daron followed her with looks of astonishment and arrogance respectively.

Delnash turned back to look at Dehov. “How long Commander?” He asked.

“Two minutes to adjust our transmitters Chief Elder.” He answered instantly.

Delnash nodded. “Very well.”

ONTEROM SCIENCE STATION ZERO ONE FIVE

“...gonna take a break some time this century?” Wayonn turned at Martin’s words and saw him standing beside him at the main computer station.

He was standing there with his arms crossed over his broad chest and a smirk on his face. It was a look Wayonn had become accustomed to over the past weeks and months. Sumar had similar quirks in his expressions and Martin was certainly taking after him. Helen was also beside him, her outward appearance having surprised almost everyone, but it was quickly accepted among the crew. There were very few who did not know who she was and that she was not that old, so her appearance change was something that fitted what was known of her. He knew his granddaughter was very skilled; she had to be in order to harness and use the knowledge that Canth had passed to her. She fit the role of Paladin Mage very well. He knew she and Martin were very close to begin with and had been since he first returned to Earth, but he did not truly see it until they fully accepted the roles they were to play. His Pralor and wolf blood both sang with happiness as he saw them and how they blended so easily together. Just like he and Sumar had.

Wayonn sat back in the chair. “We can learn so much from the logs here Martin.” He said finally.

Martin nodded. “No doubt... but having to pick you up off the deck because you worked yourself to exhaustion is not something I want to do.”

“Nor I grandfather.” Helen spoke.

Wayonn smiled again. “You will have no worries in that regard.” He said.

“You’re looking for information on what happen.” Martin said softly. “People you knew when you left?”

Wayonn met his eyes as he and Helen drew chairs over to his computer station and settled into them. “In a way I suppose.” He said. “I’ve been able to crack through about a third of the encrypted logs so far. There isn’t much information from before the end, but a great deal after they established themselves on Artaaya.”

“How many survived Wayonn?” Martin asked softly.

Wayonn looked at him. “Barely a million.” He answered in almost a whisper and shaking his head slowly. “Five hundred and fifty trillion lives extinguished over the course of roughly twenty-five thousand years.”

“That long?” Martin asked aghast.

Wayonn nodded. “We didn’t know it when we returned the first time, before settling on Lorent, but the war began within a century of us departing on our Seed Mission. When we were able to repair the transport ship and return, it was already well into its seventh century. It is too much to even fathom really.” He looked at them. “We were the harbingers of our own doom Martin. Our arrogance gave Xaxon the influence he had in thinking the Scourge were somehow inferior to us when we first encountered them. That is why he struck the first blow. We then empowered his mentality and that is why he went off and created his horrific monsters and cross breeds. That only fueled their hatred of us and everything related to us. We never tried to understand them.”

“It’s not your fault grandfather.” Helen spoke.

Wayonn looked at her. “In a way... yes it is. It’s all of our faults.” He spoke gently. He took a deep breath. “That is the past however, and my wolf blood does not allow me to dwell on the past. Sumar told me once, shortly after your grandmother turned him, he told me this was our future now. Through our descendants we would live on. He fully accepted his wolf blood then, all of us did. It became central to all that we were. I worshiped my mate... her scent was like sweet vanilla and I embraced it. Since that first day with her, I have embraced it. I am Pralor yes... but I am more wolf now than anything and I am so very happy about that.” He looked at the computer screen. “Sitting here though... it brings back memories.”

“I’m sure it does.” Martin said.

“The odds that anyone I knew from that life are still alive are infinitesimal.” Wayonn continued. He smirked. “That does not include Lorendo unfortunately.”

Martin chuckled. “Roaches tend to survive everywhere.” He said.

Wayonn nodded with a smile. “Yes they do.” He said. “Numbers aren’t specifically given mind you, census results were never important to us, but I estimate from some of the logs that their population now is in excess of forty million now. Probably closer to fifty or sixty if I include the other two planets they settled in the cluster.”

“You think they were planning to expand here?” Helen asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “It’s possible.” He said. “These Svorag may have altered that plan somewhat however. They haven’t been to this station in nearly half a millennia. My guess is they just decided to remain out of this area of space.”

“Which means these Svorag are probably more abundant than we have seen.” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded. “More than likely.” He answered. “Given what Anja and Duewa have discovered about the ones we killed... they appear to be nomadic at least. The logs for this quadrant of space list nearly a dozen planets within two or three jumps from Onterom that could sustain life. I’m guessing they didn’t pick those because of the Svorag.” He told them. “It might also explain why they discovered Lycavorian DNA in the one we killed. This area of space may be where we used Lycavorians to seed a dead world. The station logs and star charts do not list that information, but it is possible.”

“Why wouldn’t they go to those Lycavorians for help?” Martin asked him. “If they seeded them on a world in this quadrant, then they would have known where they were. Why not join forces?”

Wayonn shook his head. “When we began to seed worlds with new life we had several edicts that we followed religiously. One of them was to never interact with the species we were using as seed life. Namely... Lycavorians. It was very taboo. We feared that our advanced technology would somehow alter the normal evolutionary scale of the species if we interacted with them.” He looked at Martin. “It goes back to that arrogance I was telling you about.” He said with a smile. “What we did on Lycavore... Sumar, me, the others, it would not be viewed positively I assure you.”

“Yeah... I got that part.” Martin said.

“If you want to be technical... we did alter the natural course of the Lycavorian species.” Wayonn said. “If we had not crashed on Lycavore as we did... all this could very well not be happening.”

Martin held up his hand. “Let’s not go there ok.” He said. “I still get a headache trying to explain to someone that I was born on a cruiser and stuck in a sleep chamber for three thousand years while traveling through the stars. That I made it back to Earth somehow and then all this other heavy shit happened.” Martin shook his head. “Please.”

Wayonn laughed as Helen slapped Martin in the side. “And look what that brought to you.” She hissed at him playfully.

“Yeah... a whole lot more headaches!” Martin exclaimed.

“I was referring to the six beautiful women who worship you and the sixteen wonderful children you have because of them!” Helen snapped.

Martin grinned. “Well... there is that.” He said.

Wayonn shook his head. “No... if there is such a planet in this quadrant... they would avoid it like the plague.” He said. He looked at Martin. “Do you still sense they are coming Martin? I can feel faint surges of resonance within Mindvoice... but I am not nearly as powerful as you or Helen because you are Paladin and Mage and both of you are bonded to dragons.”

Martin nodded. “They’re coming.” He said.

“Grandfather I could...” Helen began.

Wayonn shook his head. “No. The connection between the Praetorian and his or her Oracle should be for them only. I will not be able to sense or feel what the two of you feel with any degree of the same strength and clarity. Perhaps if they were on the planet yes... but not now.”

“Praetorian?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded. “That is what we called ourselves.” He said. “It was actually a young Oracle who came up with the name right after we were formed. She took it from the Onab. The species that showed us how to build the Avatars. That is why they look different from us. So we did not forget the Onab when they perished in the supernova that consumed their planet.”

“Praetorian huh?” Martin said. “Pretty catchy. The Romans used that didn’t they?” He said looking at Helen.

Helen nodded her head. “If the ancient humans knew how much of their culture and languages came from different species across the stars I believed they would have developed quite differently than they did.”

“No argument here.” Martin said. “You know...”

“Skipper!” Julie barked from across the control room. She was sitting at the station’s COM panel and had been engulfed in learning the systems and computers since they had arrived. “Marty... we’re getting a holo COM signal!”

Martin turned his head but did not rise. He caught the look of dislike from Helen when Julie called out his name and he grinned. She did not wholly approve of the closeness and total lack of formality the members of Martin’s personal team used when addressing him, especially with others present. She would never say anything to them Martin knew because she knew of how he thought of all of them. He would die instantly for any of them if need be and they for him. Those who had started all of this with Martin all those years ago were the most fanatically loyal to him, and it began with the men and women left from his old team.

“Jules... I told Akemi I’d speak with her in the morning.” Martin spoke leaning back slightly.

“It’s not coming from the *ARC ROYAL* Marty!” Julie exclaimed turning in her chair.

All of them stood up and Martin moved quickly around the main tower computer to look at her. “If it’s not coming from the *ARC ROYAL*... then where’s it coming from Jules?”

Avi turned from the sensor console where he had been standing silently and going over data.

-Julie Collins is correct Martin. It is a Pralor COM signal- He broke in from where he had been sitting quietly at the sensor station for the last few hours running one diagnostic after another. **-A ship has appeared on the station’s sensors. It has just pulled out from behind the coreward moon. It’s configuration matches Pralor ship profiles. It is of an unknown class to me... but I can confirm it is of Pralor origin-**

“They were using the moon to block the *ARC ROYAL*’s sensors?” Helen threw out the question. “Why? Why not just approach?”

-The ship is 8294 meters in length and matches listed profiles in my neural network of cruiser class configuration King Martin- Avi reported. **-I am detecting a Phased Quantum Fusion power core and Class Eleven sensors. They are attempting to scan the station and the area around it-**

“That’s just plain rude.” Martin spoke.

Wayonn chuckled. “Keep in mind my people were not the most hospitable when they thought they were dealing with inferior species. Their arrogance tends to bleed through in their actions. I see that has not changed.”

“Yeah... I’m getting that. So we are inferior huh?” Martin said.

Wayonn shrugged. “Not all of us felt this way... but many did. Lycavorians and other species that were used for seeding purposes were all thought to be primitive and unable to reach a level my people thought was equal to them.”

“You know... I get the feeling they thought that way about a lot of species.” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded. “You would not be surprised at how correct you are.” He answered. “The Science Convention was filled to overflowing with them.”

“Grandfather... you know how Martin reacts to arrogance.” Helen stated from beside Avi as she moved up beside him.

Avi looked up at her from where his huge frame sat. **–Crush. Stab. Shoot. Punch. Throw. Blow up. These are just some of the ways that King Martin has dealt with this tedious emotion. He is quite inventive–**

Helen laughed and once more was amazed at how almost human like Avi had become in the past quarter century in their company. “Avi... you sound more and more like us everyday.” Helen told him.

“Avi... can you jam their sensors?” Martin asked

–Not entirely Martin. I can erect a sensor feedback bubble within the station’s shields that will extend around the station and area within a thousand meters. They will not be able to scan the station itself but I can not keep them from scanning the planet–

“Do it! Fast!” Martin ordered. “Jules... tell Akemi to be prepared to execute her emergency jump to the pre-plotted coordinates.”

“On it!”

Martin looked at Wayonn. “Well... I guess they are here.” He said.

“Skipper... they are requesting we reply.” Julie spoke.

“Guess that answers our question about if they will come huh?” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded. “Indeed.”

“Stay out of the transmission for now Wayonn.” Martin told him. “Let’s see what they have to say. They might actually be happy to see us... which would be a first on this little trip we are on.”

Wayonn nodded with a smile as he moved out of the cone of the transmission disc.

TALISMAN

“...getting a response?” Delnash asked.

“Nothing yet Chief Elder.” Dehov spoke.

“Are you sure they are receiving?” Delnash asked.

“Telemetry says they are.” Dehov replied.

“Commander...” The tactical officer whirled from her chair. “They have erected some sort of feedback bubble around the station! We can not scan the interior of the station or the area for a thousand meter radius around the station!”

Delnash looked at Dehov. “They can do that?” He gasped.

“Apparently they have Chief Elder.” He spoke. “Can you penetrate the bubble?”

“Negative! It’s using a multiphasic frequency modulator. It jumps the moment we lock onto the frequency of the station’s shields!”

Dehov looked at Delnash. "They apparently have a working knowledge of at least some of our technology Chief Elder." Dehov stated.

"So I see. Have they responded to our hails yet?" Delnash asked turning his head.

"Nothing so... wait! Incoming response!" The COM officer barked.

"Audio only I presume?" Dehov spoke.

"No sir! They are requesting full access holo communications!" She answered.

Dehov acted quickly. "Transfer it to the main Holo Disc! Now!"

Delnash stepped forward as he turned to the main holo disc on the floor in the corner of the bridge. It suddenly came alive with the blurry image of a tall man wearing strange black armor that conformed to his exceptionally powerful form. His black hair was nearly shoulder length and his mustache and beard were very neatly trimmed. His skin was deeply tanned and as the image focused and cleared Delnash could tell his eyes were a dark color. He looked strangely familiar to Delnash and it was disconcerting for a moment until he realized who he looked like. When the image finally cleared completely his eyes grew wider in shock.

"By the spirits of our ancestors!" He gasped not realizing that Dehov had only activated voice communication. "Sumar!" He saw the man's head turn slightly when he heard him speak and he smiled.

"Yeah... I get that a lot." The man spoke. Delnash saw his face twist in confusion and he turned to look away and speak. "Avi... is this thing working right? I can't see them. Are the holo emitters broke or something?"

Delnash's eyes grew even wider when he then heard the mechanical voice of an Avatar answer.

-The channel is open King Leonidas. They have not activated a visual holo link however-

The man's head turned back. "Oh." The man's eyes narrowed slightly. "Well... whoever this is... you initiated this signal, so call me back when you have the courtesy of letting me see you too."

Delnash saw him turn to the side and bring his hand across his throat. Delnash knew what that universal hand signal meant. "Wait!" He snapped. The man stopped and turned back to look at the station's holo disc. "Dehov... activate visual link as well!" Dehov adjusted the console and Delnash saw the man straighten up somewhat and smile.

"Now that's more like it." Martin spoke in an almost cheerful voice. "Greetings to you. Welcome to the neighborhood."

"My name is Delnash. Chief Elder and leader of the Pralor people." He began to speak quickly. "To whom am speaking? I require communication with your leader. His name and title as well!"

"Well... hi. My name is Martin Leonidas." He answered somewhat taken aback by the testiness of Delnash's request. "As for my title... some people call me King... some call me Martin. Or Marty. I'm not real big on the whole title thing really. I..."

"You are the leader of those primitives who are currently squatting in our Science Station?" Delnash asked.

"We are in the station... yes." Martin answered. "I guess I'm the leader yeah. What did you call us? Squatting?"

"You are currently in possession of technology that is the property of my people Martin Leonidas." Delnash continued quickly. "You are also occupying a facility that belongs to my people. I do not know how you managed to obtain and use them given your limited cognitive abilities but you will relinquish these items and vacate the station you are in immediately. You will order your ships in orbit to prepare to be boarded and impounded. Your crews will be taken into custody, properly subdued and detained. You will also surrender all of your weapons and devices of a scanning nature. Once this is done we can have a civilized exchange. As much as you are able."

Martin looked taken aback and he glanced off to the side at Wayonn who was shaking his head in disgust before turning back to the transmission. "Where I come from... when people first meet... they usually shake hands and get to know one another. They usually don't make demands. You want to try again sport?"

Delnash appeared to look confused and he glanced at someone outside the cone of the transmission before speaking again. "I believe I have made my point very clear." He said evenly turning back to the transmission. "You will order your crew to surrender your ships and prepare to be boarded. You will surrender your weapons and you will leave our facility. Once you and your people have been subdued and detained we can speak civilly."

"Is that a fact?" Martin spoke. "I'm not real big on being subdued and detained if you get my meaning friend. Unless you are one of my wives and mates. Which you ain't. You aren't as gorgeous as them."

"I am not your friend!" Delnash spoke sternly. "You will do as I instruct you or else you will suffer the consequences!"

"Did someone piss in your coffee this morning sport?" Martin asked him. "Cause we just met and you seem to have a hard on for me and we don't even know each other yet."

"What?" Delnash snapped. "What does this mean?"

"Maybe we got off on the wrong foot." Martin spoke. "Hi... I'm Martin Leonidas. It's a pleasure to meet you. Maybe we can get together and swap stories over a beer. Get to know each other."

"Are you daft as well as barbaric?" Delnash hissed. "I have no desire to get to know you until after you are properly subdued. You are in possession of our property and I want it back. I have no interest in discussing this with you or any of your primitive species! You will acquiesce to my demands or I will make you."

Helen looked at Wayonn across the room with a shake of her head. "Now they have gone and done it." She said softly so that only Avi could hear her.

Avi nodded. **-I would agree with that assessment Feravomir-** He stated.

"Primitive species!" Martin exclaimed. He turned to where Wayonn was standing out of the cone of the holo transmission. Wayonn wore a look of utter astonishment on his face at what this man was saying. "I thought you said they would be patient and calm." Martin said.

Wayonn shook his head and moved forward into the transmission cone before anyone could stop him. He moved right up next to Martin and looked at the image of the man who called himself the Chief Elder Pralor. "Wait!"

Martin shook his head. "Nice to see that people listen to me." He said. "I asked you to stay out of the transmission Wayonn."

"Wayonn?" Delnash spoke from within the transmission after hearing Martin. "It can't be!" He gasped.

Wayonn looked at the man. "Chief Elder... my name is Wayonn. I am... I was Sumar's Praetorian Oracle! There is no need for this! We are not hostile to you! We have been searching for you in fact! We..."

"Wayonn is dead!" Delnash snapped suddenly cutting him off. "Sumar is dead! All those with him are dead! Whoever you are... you are not Wayonn! I have made my demands clear! I am prepared to use force to make you adhere to those demands! I would prefer not to... but I will! I require an answer from you immediately!"

Wayonn stared at the transmission with a look of shock on his face. Anger flared within his wolf blood now. Anger he had not felt come forth for many hundreds of years. He had always tried to maintain a balance of his Pralor blood and the wild and unrestrained Lycavorian blood that coursed through his veins now. Today was only one of three instances since he had been turned that he failed to do so. "**Nubou forn!**" He barked out. "**Avi!**"

The transmission died an instant later as Avi cut the feed from their end. Martin looked at Wayonn with wide eyes as he turned and faced him. "What was that?" Martin gasped at him. "You... you just told them to fuck off!"

"Yes... I suppose I did." Wayonn said. "I knew... I knew we were arrogant as a species, but this was too much!" He shook his head. "Another sign that I am more Lycavorian than Pralor now. And that makes me very happy."

Martin turned quickly. "Shit! Avi... what is the ship doing?"

-Closing on the planet on an intercept course to the *ARC ROYAL*- Avi answered instantly. **-They are trying to re-establish the COM link Martin Leonidas-**

“Fuck them!” Martin snarled tapping his jaw. “Danny!”

“*Go Fervon!*” Danny answered immediately.

“Get everyone in position Dan!” Martin ordered. “Company is coming. And something tells me they ain’t coming for tea and crumpets!”

“*Never did like tea and crumpets.*” Dan answered. “*I’m on it!*”

“Jules... tell Akemi to jump now! Don’t question... just jump! We’ll contact her when it is clear! If she doesn’t hear from us in twelve hours she is to return to Union space post haste!” Martin looked at Wayonn.

“Tell me something Wayonn.”

“Yes?” Wayonn asked.

“Do I have asshole stamped on my forehead or something?” Martin spat. “Everything we have encountered so far on this trip has either tried to kill us or eat us. What am I doing wrong here?”

Wayonn grinned at him. “Perhaps it is just your charming personality.” He said.

Martin tilted his head. “Oh wonderful... another fucking comedian. As if I don’t have enough of them around me already.” He hissed. “Come on...”

TALISMAN

“...aren’t responding Chief Elder.” Dehov spoke.

“Well get them back!” Delnash snapped.

“They’ve severed the link from their end Chief Elder!” Dehov replied.

“Commander! The two ships on the far side of the planet have just jumped away!” The TO exclaimed.

Dehov whirled. “Didn’t you detect power building to their engine cores?” He gasped.

“Negative sir!” The man replied.

“Track them!” Delnash barked.

The TO shook his head. “We can’t Chief Elder. They... they are using engines based on our technology. Our engines do not leave a residual trail and can not be tracked unless they are damaged!”

“So they have escaped with our technology!” Delnash snapped angrily. “Get me Sashan in the lead transport! Now!”

“Stand by!”

PRALOR CAMEO-CLASS HEAVY TRANSPORT

“Primitive species!” Murano heard the man exclaimed. The man turned to someone who must have been standing out of the cone of the holo transmission. They had been watching the transmission on the lead Heavy Transport since the connection had been made, Dehov including them in the circuit from the beginning. The moment he saw his face Murano new. He thought his heart would leap from his chest at first because of the similarities in their appearance. The differences were there yes, but this man looked so much like Sumar that it was frightening to say the least. His mannerisms, his posture, the twitches in his face when he became angry and the staggering Etheric resonance he felt strumming through him. An Etheric resonance that was only growing more powerful the closer they got to the planet. “I thought you said they would be patient and calm.” The man called Martin said.

Murano’s eyes grew wide when he saw the second figure enter the transmission and he grabbed the back of the chair in front of him. Sashan, Daron, Kasdan and his brother Garan also stood around the holo disc watching and they saw this movement. “By all that I hold holy and precious!” Murano gasped. “It... it isn’t possible!”

Murano watched as Wayonn shook his head and moved forward into the transmission cone before anyone could stop him. He moved right up next to Martin and looked at the image of Delnash who they were viewing. "Wait!" He barked.

This Martin shook his head. "Nice to see that people listen to me." He said. "I asked you to stay out of the transmission Wayonn."

"Wayonn?" Murano heard his brother say from within the transmission after hearing Martin. "It can't be!" Delnash's voice gasped.

Wayonn was viewing Delnash as he spoke. "Chief Elder... my name is Wayonn. I am... I was Sumar's Praetorian Oracle! There is no need for this! We are not hostile to you! We have been searching for you in fact! We..."

"Wayonn!" Murano gasped more loudly. "By the souls of those who came before us!" He began to search for a set of controls.

Sashan looked at him. "Praetorian Murano... what is wrong?" He asked quickly.

"Wayonn is dead!" Murano heard Delnash snap suddenly cutting Wayonn off and forcing him to turn back to the transmission. "Sumar is dead! All those with him are dead! Whoever you are... you are not Wayonn! I have made my demands clear! I am prepared to use force to make you adhere to those demands! I would prefer not to... but I will! I require an answer from you immediately!"

"No!" Murano exclaimed. "NO! It is Wayonn! Tie me into the transmission! Now!" He snapped at Sashan. "Let me talk to them!"

Murano watched Wayonn stare into the transmission with a look of shock on his face. He saw anger flared in his face. Anger he had never seen Wayonn display before.

"*Nubou forn!*" Wayonn barked out in the strange language. "*Avi!*"

"NO!" Murano shouted as the transmission ended. He pounded on the transmission disc and shook his head. "You fool!" He hissed.

"Uncle... what is wrong?" Kesyla asked him moving forward and reaching out to touch his shoulder.

Murano shrugged her hand away almost angrily. "Damn!" He swore at the transmission disc.

"Elder Sashan!" The co-pilot came jogging back from the cockpit. "The two unknown ships have jumped away!" He reported excitedly. "We can not track them!"

"What?" Sashan declared. "Why?"

"If they are using technology based on ours in their engine designs then it will not be possible to track them." Kasdan spoke up. "Our engines leave no residue to follow."

"Damn!" Sashan exclaimed.

"Incoming transmission from the *TALISMAN!*" A voice echoed.

Delnash's body burst into existence in the transmission disc. "Sashan! Murano!"

Murano lost all pretense of calm now and he stepped closer to the transmission disc. "You fool!" He almost screamed at his brother. "Do you know what you have done?"

Delnash looked stunned at this outburst. "You will mind your place brother!" He snarled back. "I know what I am doing!"

"You are instigating an incident!" Murano barked. "A confrontation! Why? That is not our way!"

"What do you mean why?" Delnash snapped at him. "They are primitives who have our technology in their possession! They even tried to pass someone of as Wayonn and..."

"***THAT WAS WAYONN!***" Murano roared at the transmission.

Delnash paused for a moment, shocked at this outburst. He shook his head finally. "That is not possible Murano!"

"I know Wayonn! I fought beside him! I ate beside him! I bled beside him and Sumar!" Murano shouted at his brother. "Do not tell me it was not Wayonn when you have never met him! I would know him anywhere!"

"We are not back to this are we?" Delnash popped. "Your ranting is becoming quite tedious brother. We have a situation here! Sashan!"

"Chief Elder!" Sashan spoke now.

"You will land and execute the assault plan." Delnash spoke. "Teniri and her kind will handle the dragons that accompany them. Concentrate on the facility. Try not to injure anyone, but do not put your men and women at risk."

Sashan nodded. "Understood Chief Elder!"

"Murano... you will either help or you can remain on the transport." Delnash snapped at him. "When you return we will discuss your future participation in your current role. We will be keeping an open channel Sashan. When the station is secure contact us directly and I will come down to the surface and meet with this barbarian who calls himself King."

"I understand Chief Elder." Sashan spoke.

The transmission ended abruptly and Murano leaned back from the table. Daron smiled at him smugly as he moved past him while Murano backed up. He moved to an empty row of seats and settled into one trying to wrap his mind around everything that was happening. His brother was a good man who was getting some very bad information. Delnash was out of his element right now. He was an excellent administrator when there was no crisis, and while he had made some questionable decisions in the past, overall he had been responsible for the resurgence of their people. Sashan was a rookie who had no right to be leading the Military Convention, and Lorendo was a man who had his own agenda. He wanted to be Chief Elder and that much was plain as day. Murano didn't notice the figure of the Security Convention troop sit beside him until that soldier reached out and rested his hand on Murano's arm.

"Now is not a good time." Murano hissed more forcefully than he had intended.

"Not even for me Uncle?" The soft feminine voice whispered.

Murano turned his head quickly and her Etheric resonance quickly pushed away his anger at what was happening. He detected her shields immediately and they were keeping everyone from sensing her presence except him. "Mari!" He whispered urgently. "What... what are you doing child?"

"What does it look like?" She answered playfully. "I'm coming with you."

Murano looked around casually to insure no one had taken notice of them and then he looked back to her. "Your father told you to return to engineering. You should not be here!"

"Why not?" Mari asked. "Is what... is what you say really true Uncle? Is there another Praetorian on the planet? Was that really Sumar's Oracle Wayonn?"

"Why does it matter to you child?" Murano asked keeping his voice neutral. "We are nothing more than a forgotten memory to everyone now."

Mari squeezed his arm tightly. "Not to everyone Uncle." She said in reply. "There are many who still honor and respect what the Praetorians did for our people. I know... I know father worships you Uncle."

"He does not show it." Murano spoke.

"It is as you believe Uncle." Mari said softly. "For too long he has let others influence his decisions. Everyone is following their own path to personal influence and power. Each one is willing to put themselves before our people. They no longer see the Scourge as a threat. Father has become overwhelmed with the many directions they are pulling him. This has made him..."

"Ineffective." Murano finished.

Mari nodded. "Yes."

Murano looked at her. Even under the helmet her beauty was very obvious, and her soft blue eyes caused his heart to do flips. There was something about her. In only a few hours he felt more of a kinship to her than he did to his own brother. He reached out with his Etheric power trying to sense if perhaps she bore the Praetorian gene and he felt the shields Mari had in place around her mind. Very powerful shields that prevented him from sensing anything at all. He stared at her for a long moment, her gaze never wavering from his, but looking confused. He had been so preoccupied by what he felt concerning those individuals on the planet ahead that he had completely ignored the signs he could detect within Mari herself. It was possible. The gene had been active in himself and dormant within his and Delnash's father. It was possible that it could have skipped his brother and passed to his daughter.

"Uncle?" Mari questioned him softly. "Are you ok?"

Murano blinked and drew back his Etheric probes. "Yes." He said. "Yes I'm fine. Your shields are very strong for someone so young Mari."

Mari smiled. "I know... but Daron and Kesyla are nosy. And they tell father everything I do. I got extra schooling from Elder Tobia in shielding my mind secretly. She was very helpful to me."

"Tobia?" Murano questioned.

Mari nodded. "Yes... do you know her?" She asked.

Murano leaned back. “No.” He said quickly.

“I want to come with you Uncle.” Mari said. “I want to see and experience more than what I have seen. Father thinks I am too young and too foolish...”

“You are foolish!” Murano said looking at her. “Coming on this mission was foolish! More so now!”

“You are worried aren’t you?” Mari said. “You are worried about these people? There is another Praetorian down there isn’t there Uncle? One born of Chief Elder Sumar’s line. Please Uncle... tell me!”

Murano looked at her and nodded finally. “That is what... that is what I sense.” He told her finally. “Every essence within my body and mind is telling me this. And he wields a power equal to Sumar if what I feel is accurate. But he is not wholly Pralor either. He is also... he is also Lycavorian as well.”

Mari’s eyes grew a little wider. “The Chief Elder lay with a Lycavorian?” She gasped.

Murano looked at her. “Those of our people who judge species that many of our citizens consider primitive or beneath us are wrong Mari. We are all equal no matter what the level our technology is.”

“You can’t keep me away Uncle!” She stammered. “I will... I will leave the ship after all of you are gone. Even if you lock me up! I will find a way off! I always find a way Uncle! I’m very good at that sort of thing.”

Murano smiled for the first time in hours. “I believe you would.” He stated. Murano reached out and took her hand. “Stay beside me at all times. Do exactly as I tell you no matter what it is Mari. I can protect you and I will not see you taken down with the rest of our people before I have a chance to speak with Wayonn and this descendant of Sumar. We have reached a point in our history where we once more teeter on the brink and I will not allow your father to push us over the edge.”

“You believe our soldiers are in danger Uncle?” Mari asked.

Murano turned back and looked at Sashan and Garan conversing near the holo image of the facility. “I believe... I believe our mighty Elder Convention Security Forces are about to have their collective asses handed to them. In a way that will force your father to stand up and take notice.”

ONTEROM

“...sense them Arzoal?” Martin asked.

They were outside the Science facility, all of the dragons circled around Arzoal and Martin.

Arzoal nodded her huge head. *Yes... I felt them as they left whatever ship they landed on. Just as you and Torma did.* She answered.

Twenty of them. Torma spoke now. *Most of them roughly my age. Some older and more experienced. Their thoughts are jumbled and anxious.*

Martin nodded. “They’re nervous.” He spoke. “One of them is the leader. Why didn’t we sense them before now though?”

I was surprised as well until I remembered that our ships... Pralor ships have the ability to, if not block Etheric resonance, dampen it quite a bit. Similar to the void chambers in Dragon Mountain that we use to meditate. Arzoal answered. *Once they were free of the ship we could sense them and I lowered my own shields enough to detect them fully just as you and Torma did.*

Is that not odd mother? Isheeni asked. *Our kind working with the Pralors?*

Arzoal shook her head. *No. I...* She turned and looked at Martin. *The strongest among them Martin... do you feel her? She is the leader.*

Martin nodded. “She’s older. Much older.” Martin looked at Arzoal. “I’d say almost as old as you.”

I recognize her resonance. Arzoal’s voice was filled with emotion in their heads and it was a combination of happiness and anxiousness as she nodded. *She is who I put in charge of those that left Elear in that first wave Martin. Her name... her name is Teniri.*

Martin’s eyes grew wide. “So Muton’s map! It was a map from the Pralors that left with the dragons! Left for us to find!” He declared.

Arzoal nodded. *It is the only thing that makes sense. They must have returned and tried to do just as Sumar did with the Lycavorians. When they saw it was going to fail they made the map pieces for future generations to find. To trace back to them.*

Not to put a dampener on this discussion... Torma spoke. *They are airborne and moving closer.*

Martin looked at him. "Which means there must be Pralor troops on the ground as well."

Their intent is to subdue us. Arzoal spoke. *I can see what they propose in their surface thoughts. Teniri thinks to assimilate us into their ranks. She believes us to be... she believes us to be stray dragons under your control. She knows there are females among us and she is trying to determine how best to allow Isheeni and the others to be claimed by males.*

"Sibfla!" Martin spat. "I didn't think they would come with dragons!"

If one of them plunges on me I will open his belly to the sky! Aurith hissed.

As will I. Iriral echoed.

Hush daughter. Isheeni told her knowing that her reaction was partly the same reaction For'mya would have to such an event.

They are airborne and if we keep our shields high as they are now they will not detect us. Torma spoke. *They will detect any attack on the facility however and move to assist the Pralors.*

"Twenty against six ain't real good odds." Martin said.

Arzoal extended her head out and placed her snout inches from Martin's face. *It is time Martin Leonidas.* She said.

"Time for what?" Martin asked her.

Time to for you and Torma to embrace your roles as Talon Guardians of our kind. As Androcles and Elynth did when they faced Naruth and Marux. The High Coven dragons sensed who and what you were the moment they saw the four of you. These dragons will as well. It is part of our blood Martin. Arzoal told him.

"Arzoal... there is probably a shitpot full of Pralor troops moving here right now. I need to handle that and..." Martin said.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *None of whom could defeat Daniel or any one of your mates on their best day and you know it. They will be facing Daniel and all six of your wives. Who is going to win that fight Martin Leonidas? The larger threat are these dragons. It is why they brought them. We must strike them quickly and overwhelm them and let them see you and Torma and what you are.*

The Elder Mother is right my brother. Torma said.

"How do you know they followed your teachings after all this time Arzoal?" Martin asked. "It's been a long time."

Your people have followed the teachings of Anomes for nearly as long Martin. Do they still honor and adhere to that sacred tradition?

Martin met her flame red eyes. "The vast majority of them... yes."

Talon Guardians have been part of dragon lineage and legend since the very first Elder Mother chose the first ones more than five hundred thousand years ago. Arzoal said softly. No dragon... no matter where they have been raised or what they have been taught... no dragon will face a Talon Guardian willingly unless they are crazed and beyond help.

"Five hundred thousand years?" Martin gasped. "You... that is how long dragons have been alive?"

There have been sixty-three Dragon Elder Mothers. Arzoal spoke. I am the sixty-fourth. Teniri will recognize me and so will any other dragon among them that was on Elear. The others will bow to the will of Talon Guardians. It will give us the time we need to sort things out and move forward.

"Shit!" Martin hissed as he reached up and tapped his jaw. "Saaurano! Danny! Anja!"

"Beloved." Aricia's voice answered instantly.

"Here Lover!" Anja answered.

"Go fervon!" Danny echoed.

"Hold the fort! Torma and I have a dragon problem to deal with. The non-lethal ammo get out to everyone Danny?" Martin said.

"Just finished!" Dan replied. "You going to go fight dragons huh? Anything to get out of the hard work! Typical! Take pictures!"

"Go with the gods Beloved." Aricia stated.

“I’ll have Duewa on standby to treat any of them that you hurt too badly Lover.” Anja told him. “You and Torma aren’t exactly subtle you know.”

“What? No well wishes and be careful?” Martin exclaimed.

“What for?” Anja said playfully. “You never listen to us anyway.”

“You’re one to talk Red.” Martin spoke with a smile. “See ya soon!”

Martin turned to look at Arzoal and felt all six of his mates reach for him at the same time within Mindvoice and embrace him with their combined auras and Etheric energy. Their voices combined together in one harmonic song within him and as they always did, they spoke with one voice.

Be careful our love!

Martin smiled warmly and sent loving pulses of his aura and his own Etheric energy back to them as he jumped into the saddle on Torma’s back and Isheeni and the others rose off the ground. The Dragon Armor braces tightened against his thighs and Martin looked at Arzoal with bright dark brown eyes.

Early bird gets the worm. Martin announced just before Torma exploded off the ground into the air with powerful sweeps of his massive wings. As he rose into the sky, his Dragon Armor began to extend around his muscular body and the others took the same cue and as they began to rise, their armor began to extend as well.

**PRALOR SECURITY CONVENTION DETACHMENT
COMMANDING OFFICER GARAN
THREE HUNDRED METERS FROM STATION ZERO ONE FIVE**

Garan lowered the macro binos from his eyes and looked at Elder Sashan. He kept adjusting his uniform and brushing at the dirt and bits of grass that clung to the fabric. He had refused to wear the standard body armor that his own men wore. Garan determined it was either very stupid or very brave that he was attempting to show them they had nothing to fear against these upstart primitives. While it wasn’t oppressively hot on the surface, it was humid on this planet and Sashan’s clothes were soaked in sweat. They had taken the bulk of the two hundred member detachment with them... only fifty accompanying Lorendo and the dragons on the second transport. Murano could feel Teniri in the sky above off to the west and she was circling with her small force of twenty dragons. He could sense her apprehension about something but he dare not interrupt her and confuse her with unneeded questions. He glanced at Mari directly behind him and smiled inwardly. The armor she had confiscated did not fit her and she kept having to adjust the helmet so she could see, but her face was bright and alive with awareness and splendor. Murano just hoped she didn’t experience anything that would cause that splendor to go away. He turned back to Garan as he whispered to Sashan.

“I can see the top of the facility Elder Sashan.” Garan said. “There does not appear to be any sentries on the mid-level roofs as we expected.”

Sashan looked at him. “No sentries? They must all be inside the facility.”

“They trap themselves in the facility?” Garan questioned.

“They are relying on the external sensors at the top of each tower. Only primitives would rely on the external sensors with trying to protect them.” Sashan spoke more confidently. He looked at Murano. “Does this information change your view of them Murano? They rely on technology they do not understand.”

Murano shook his head slowly. “They are not relying on the external sensors to track us Sashan.” Murano said.

“Of course they are!” Sashan stated. “It is the only way to track us on the surface.” He turned back to Garan. “Have two of your men disable the external sensor arrays Garan.”

Garan motioned to two of his men who held long barreled rifles of some sort. Those two men stepped forward, sighted down the barrels of those rifles and each fired a single focused burst of energy. The thin yellow beams shot from the barrels and crossed the distance in the blink of an eye, both shots true and the two domed sensor arrays on the top of the two matching towers erupted in smoke and fire.

“Excellent shooting.” Sashan spoke. “Now... send half the force to the west entrance and we will proceed to the vehicle entrance.”

“Your splitting your force?” Murano gasped.

“We will hit both entrances at the same time.” Sashan told him. “It is a classic pincer movement that will catch all of them in the center.”

“This is not a simulation or a book you are reading. Dividing your force is unwise Sashan.” Murano spoke grabbing his arm. “We can not scan within the facility. We do not have any idea how many troops they have within.”

“My men are more than a match for any primitive within that structure!” Sashan hissed. “They could have five hundred men and we would prevail. They can’t possibly stand against our weapons.”

“It is not a tactically sound maneuver!” Murano pressed him. “The station has two entrances and one or both could very well be a trap to lure you in. We do not know how long they have been here or what defenses they may have put in place.”

“Lure us into what? An ambush? You saw the man in the transmission Murano. Did he appear to look like anyone who could conduct a proper ambush? He had wild hair and was unkempt and dirty!” Sashan spat. “This is my operation Praetorian Murano! I will conduct it as I see fit.” He yanked his arm away and turned back to Garan as Murano shook his head and slid back from him.

[That primitive could probably take everyone of you and render you more inept than you are now! And do it in his sleep!] Murano muttered within Mindvoice so that no one could hear him. He turned his head when he heard the soft snicker and saw Mari trying very hard to hold back her laughter. His eyes grew a little wider.

[That is not very nice Uncle.] She told him.

[You heard that?] He gasped. *[How?]*

Mari smiled and shook her head. *[I don’t know... it just popped into my head as you spoke.]*

Murano stared at her for a moment until the jostle of bodies began and the second part of the security detachment began to move away. Mari should not have been able to detect his musings. *[We will discuss this later!]* He told her.

STATION ZERO ONE FIVE

Julie looked over her shoulder. “They just took out the external sensors Danny.” She told him.

“*Nubous amateurs!*” Danny hissed. He stood casually with his A4 dangling from quick release straps. Fedor stood beside him on one side, his mothers Aricia, Dysea and Isabella around him.

Iama stood next to Fedor, pressed up against him and since the night before, unwilling to leave his side. Unknown to Iama it was an action that all of his mothers took note of right away. He had vexed Iama completely with his knowledge of the stars and of engineering physics. His voice carried a tenor in it that filled Iama with warmth and intrigue and for the first time in her young life... real desire for a man. He had been the perfect gentlemen, even more so than the three Lycavorians she had bedded since this trip began. Fedor was different though... Iama knew that from the first moment. He did not look at her and see a potential bedmate. He wanted to impress her yes... but he wanted to impress her and make her see he was the man for her. She could see that every time he looked at her with those beautiful brown orbs. It was just like Helen said it would be; he was acting exactly how Helen said he would and precisely two minutes after listening to him, Iama knew this was who she wanted. He was beautiful physically yes, but his mind was not that of a child. It was of a man who was exceptionally smart and very quick witted.

He looked at her when he spoke, unafraid to gaze into her face, and he spoke to her as an equal. He made fun of himself several times when he got so excited while explaining something that he fumbled his words. When his fingers grazed her cheek, brushing hair from her face that the wind had tossed there, Iama could feel the desire burn even more within her. Emotions and sensations she had never felt before, surging through her when she looked at a man. It was Iama who suggested they sleep on top of the roof, and Iama didn’t pause for a second when the time came. Fedor settled between Dnom’s legs and leaned against his powerful midsection. He was taken by surprise when Iama settled beside him and curled up against his side. Fedor hesitated, truly unsure of what to do and Iama simply pulled his arms down around her. It took several moments before his arms tightened and he pulled her close to him.

It was the most peaceful sleep Iama had ever had. No fear of being taken. No looking over her shoulder. And not a single nightmare had interrupted her sleep. His powerful arms had swallowed her up and Iama had lost herself within them.

When she had woken, his cheek was pressed to her head, his arms still wrapped tightly around her and his warm breath feeling divine against her skin. It was perfect... and Iama'Juturi had every intention of seeing that it continued.

Danny turned and looked at Kenny who stood beside him on the other side. "You all set?"

Kenny nodded. "We shoved that vehicle so far into that crack in the bulkhead not even Mr. Fantastic could squeeze in."

Fedor's eyes narrowed slightly and he looked at his adopted Uncle. "Who is this Mister Fantastic Uncle?" He asked. "Is he part of our detail?"

"Come on Fedor... you don't know who Mister Fantastic is?" Kenny declared jerking his arms and legs to different sides trying to stretch them longer than they were. "Mister rubber band man."

Julie shook her head from where she sat. "I may be a vampire now... but you are still a fucking dork Kenneth." She stated.

Aricia stepped forward with a smile. "It is from a movie Fedor." She told him. "A very old movie back from when your *Medwan* and Kenneth discovered who they were." She looked at Kenny. "One Kenneth has obviously seen too many times."

"Hey! They were classics! All eleven of them!" Kenny complained. He made several more stretching moves which only caused Iama and Dysea to burst out laughing at his antics and Danny to shake his head.

"And here I thought none of us were affected by moving through time." Danny said. "It made you certifiable."

"No arguments here." Julie stated.

Danny turned quickly and looked at Avi who was standing next to Wayonn at the main computer array. "Avi? What's taking so long?"

-I am working as fast as my neural network will allow Daniel Simpson- Avi answered him. -Please be fucking patient-

Danny grinned. "Ok... sorry." He said turning his eyes to Wayonn who was looking at him with stern eyes.

"Does anyone who follows Martin take anything serious?" Wayonn exclaimed.

"Hell no!" Kenny spat checking his A4. "Why would we want to do that?"

Julie shook her head. "Serious sucks." She chimed in.

Danny laughed at the look on Wayonn's face. "You should know all of this by now Wayonn. You've been around the biggest clown for months now."

"I did not realize it was infectious." Wayonn spoke shaking his head.

-I have realigned the ground sensors we placed- Avi spoke. -They are coming online now-

Wayonn looked at the monitor and nodded his head, his hands moving across the controls alongside Avi's much larger hands. "I have them! They broken into two teams!" Wayonn spoke now. "*Sibfla*... there must be a fool leading them if they have split their forces so close to the objective!"

Aricia moved forward. "Fedor and I will take Team one and meet them as they enter from the vehicle bay." She stated.

"Bella, Cirith and I will take Team Two and greet them if they realize that there is an emergency hatch only a hundred meters from the stranded vehicle." Dysea spoke. "For'mya and Endith are with Anja, Duewa and Eirene securing medical and the living area."

Danny nodded. "Wayonn... you stay here with Helen and Avi. Lock down the command center when we leave."

"Daniel Simpson I can fight!" Helen hissed at him moving closer.

Danny nodded. "I don't doubt that one bit *Feravomir*." He told her. "I'd rather have you here though, watching us on the ground and internal sensors and directing us. You've done this sort of thing before, Wayonn and Avi have not."

Helen nodded without question. She had done exactly this type of thing five times during the Evolli War and each had been very successful. "Understood." She said.

"Wayonn... you and Avi keep feeding that info to Helen so she can direct us." Danny said.

Wayonn nodded. "Consider it done." He replied. "Daniel..." He waited until Danny looked at him. "Try your best not to kill anyone." He continued. "We need them."

Danny nodded. "No promises." He said. He looked at the others. "Let's move!"

Martin Leonidas clung fearlessly to the front of the Mark Eleven saddle, his helmeted head slung low behind Torma's broad shoulders as his massive wings propelled them forward through the cool air at nearly twenty thousand feet.

Twenty-six years of being bonded together had made them of one mind and heart when they flew. Every twitch of their muscles, every breath that filled their lungs, and every sense that imparted knowledge to them was tuned to each other. They were of one mind and body, the Talon Guardian brands even glowing slightly under their armor, though no one could see them. Like Androcles and Elynth, their son and daughter, they had embraced completely the role and the significance of their position. They both could feel the added power the small Etheric essence of nine Dragon Elders imbued within the Talon crystals gave to them, adding to their already unmatched power. While Andro and Elynth had the benefit of being bonded while Aricia still carried him within her womb, Martin and Torma had worked tirelessly for hours and days and years to achieve what their children had. It made them closer to each other, in some ways even closer than they were to their respective mates and wives. There were not two more powerful bonded pairs within the entire breadth of the Lycavorian Union or the stars than two fathers and their oldest son and oldest daughter. They knew why now of course, and what their bonds did for the power they already wielded individually. This power they had discovered extended to Torma and Elynth almost naturally. Not as powerful as it flowed within Martin and Andro, but even a small amount made Torma and Elynth far more deadly than any dragon that existed.

Like their children, they held nothing back from each other. And like their children, they had taken different traits from each other and made them part of themselves. Torma's natural benevolence, Martin's will and determination. Their combined love for their wives and mates. All of this they shared along with so many other things. Panos had called them forces of nature on more than one occasion. He did not and never would know how truly visionary that single statement really was.

Martin's hands were spread evenly across Torma's scales along his long neck, feeling the muscles as they moved his wings, feeling the steady thumping of his Bonded Brother's heart. It was no different for Torma, who could sense and feel the same from Martin even through the saddle. They were tuned to one another like the pieces of a finely built machine. They had been training for this day... though neither of them had ever wanted to use the skills they had learned from their countless years of training and the Tomes of Sumar. Now however... now the only way to end this quickly and with minimal injury was to call on those skills.

[We never wanted to use these skills Torma.] Martin reached for him within a connection that only two other minds were powerful enough to reach and sustain and share with them.

[Nor did our son and our daughter Martin my bonded brother.] Torma answered. When they were alone together as they were now, no matter that their children were dragon and Lycavorian and elf and vampire, they were all **their** children. *[They did not hesitate when the time came because they saw the need. We must not hesitate now.]*

[It would be a lot easier with them here.] Martin said.

[On that we agree.] Torma answered. *[What would they do?]*

[Shit... you know how our son and daughter think.] Martin exclaimed. *[They would do something incredibly stupid and sinfully dangerous.]*

[Yes... and because it was sinfully dangerous and incredibly stupid it would probably work.] Torma agreed.

[How high are we?] Martin asked after a moment.

[We are above the clouds and almost directly above them.] Torma answered. [Twenty-two thousand feet.]

[So... say Arzoal's plan to split them works and that leaves ten airborne... how do you knock ten dragons out of the sky without killing them? And without letting them know they are under attack until it's too late.] Martin said.

[What would Andro and Elynth do?] Torma asked him.

[That's easy... Andro would just jump off of her, fall for five or six thousand feet and hit as many of them with his psychic knife as he could before he fell past them.] Martin answered. [Elynth would...]

Torma's head turned until he was looking at Martin with those golden eyes. [Elynth would smash their joints with her armored wings as she broke up the formation and then pick up Andro after they passed through their ranks. With their joints numb, they would not be able to remain airborne.]

Martin met his eyes. [Torma... that's... that's incredibly stupid.]

[And sinfully dangerous.] Torma agreed.

[It would be a glorious death.] Martin said with a grin under his helmet. [Painful... but glorious.]

[Indeed.] Torma said.

[Ah... fuck it. You only live once!] Martin snapped. [We need...]

[Altitude! Yes! Shit! I don't believe we're actually going to do this.] He commented as he tilted his wings and in the blink of an eye was rocketing for more altitude.

Martin chuckled. [Torma my brother... you just swore!]

[If we do not succeed it will not matter. There will not be much of us left for Isheeni and your mates to recover and discipline.] Torma commented.

[Why do you always have to point out the obvious?] Martin said. [Geez... we might die and you're pointing out the obvious! Why do you always do that?]

[Then they will have something to engrave on our headstones.] Torma replied. [After they scrap us off the ground.]

[Ah... good point.] Martin said.

Garan led them as they sprinted the last few meters into the interior of the vehicle bay and began to split in different directions taking up positions at the different crates that were oddly spaced about in defensive positions. The upper walkway to the entrance was empty and the door unguarded. Even as inexperienced as he was, Garan began to feel uncomfortable at the way things were proceeding. He glanced to his left as Elder Sashan settled beside him, the two high stacked containers giving them adequate cover.

“Something is wrong Elder Sashan.” Garan spoke.

Sashan looked at him. “What? What do you mean?”

“The entrance into the facility is not guarded?” Garan questioned. “Even primitives would leave a guard stationed at the entrance of the facility.”

“We are dealing with primitives Garan.” Sashan spoke. “They are unintelligent and ill-equipped to stand against us.”

“They have left the entrance unguarded Elder for a reason!” Garan told him.

“We must move quickly and efficiently.” Sashan said feeling confident and full of authority at how well things had gone. “Have your men breach the door and begin to secure the interior of the station. We will...”

Garan glanced at his arm as his COM unit began to chirp softly. He touched the device on his wrist. “Go!”

“Commander... the second entrance is blocked by a Science Rover.” The voice spoke. “We can not enter from this location. The doors are jammed tightly and there is no power to the systems down here. It appears as if the rover was jammed into the partially opened doors on purpose and there is not room to maneuver around the vehicle.”

Sashan looked at Garan. “Schematics of the station indicate there is an emergency entrance a hundred meters to the east of the vehicle doors.” Sashan spoke. “Have them enter there.”

Garan looked at his COM unit. "One hundred meters east is an emergency hatch. Move there and execute your entrance." Garan ordered.

"Understood." The voice answered.

Garan looked at Sashan. "Elder Sashan... they will be dropping into an empty corridor in the lower level with no power. They will be helpless while they are entering."

Sashan met his eyes. "There is no resistance here." He spoke almost harshly. "This is the main entrance into the facility. If they are not guarding this then they have undoubtedly pulled all of their people into or around the Command Center. Once we are inside we can find a secure computer terminal and release gas into those areas of the station. Garan... we are not dealing with intelligent men as you and I are! These are primitives!"

"Primitives who managed to enter this facility even with the security protocols Elder Lorendo left in place!" Garan snapped.

"Everyone gets lucky Garan." Sashan spoke.

"Commander!" The man spoke moving up to where Garan and Sashan squatted. "Sir... something is not right." He was holding a portable scanner and it was softly beeping every half second.

"What is it Mengath?" Garan asked.

"I am... I am detecting lifesigns." He answered.

"Where?" Sashan demanded. "From the interior? Of course you will pick them up there!" He stated while rolling his eyes in disgust.

The man looked at him with something akin to contempt Garan saw. "No Elder Sashan. I am picking them up but I am skilled enough to know that there are also lifesigns here. In the vehicle bay with us." He exclaimed as Murano moved up to another stack of crates only two meters away.

"Soldier... there is no one inside the vehicle bay but us." Sashan declared. "Do you see anyone who is not a Pralor standing around?"

"I am only telling you what the scanner is telling me Elder Sashan!" The man snapped. "And it is telling me there are over a dozen individuals inside this vehicle bay with us." He motioned to the walkway. "Five on the walkway near the entrance, seven near the base of the stairs and another three higher up." He glanced up. "On the walkway above us."

Sashan shook his head and turned to another soldier who squatted a short distance away. "Move to the control terminal there. Break the computer locks and restore power to this section! They can not have locked out all the computers! Do it now!"

"Sashan... no!" Murano exclaimed. "We are being drawn in! This is not what it seems!"

"We will do this my way!" Sashan barked angrily now. "I am in command here Murano, not you!" He looked at the man again. "Do as I ordered you."

Murano turned his head quickly and looked at Mari who had been his shadow just as he had instructed her. "Something is not right Mari." He said quickly. "Press closer to the crate and do not move unless I do!" He saw her nod with wide eyes.

The man dashed forward to the control panel that was the center of the walkway on the ground floor the sloped ramps moving up to the main entrance door. Above him was the door into the interior of the station. He began to work the computer console furiously, his eyes narrowing slightly. "The system is completely locked out." He spoke loudly. "Some sort of shifting security algorithm Elder Sashan. I have never... I've never seen anything like it."

"That's probably because you've never met anyone like us."

The female voice spoke from directly in front of him and the man looked up with wide eyes as the very air in front of him rippled and the figure began to appear out of thin air. All eyes watched as the PSG deactivated and the lithe and shapely figure of the woman appeared. She wore a strange uniform of what appeared to be black body armor that shone faintly in the light of the vehicle bay. The helmet hid her face almost completely, leaving only a small portion of her lips showing and azure blue eyes that were nearly alive in brightness. The tips of a pair of long fangs protruded from just under her upper lip. Aricia Leonidas appeared fully on top of the computer station in a squatting position. In her hand she held the short barreled KM12 magnum, which happened to be pointed directly at the man's chest. Everything happened quickly then, as

Aricia jammed the barrel of the KM12 against the man's lightly armored clothing just over his right nipple and pulled the trigger without blinking.

Martin had ordered the distribution of non-lethal ammunition to all weapons that they carried. In this instance they were simple 12.7mm dart shells filled with two milligrams of a very powerful sleep agent. They were basically tranquilizer rounds now. Two five centimeter long darts sat where normally the projectile round would be. The head of the dart could pierce up to a quarter inch of solid titanium steel and would certainly hurt whoever it struck. Against the lightly armored Pralor Convention troops it worked to perfection. The man's eyes began to glaze over instantly and just as his body began to stagger backwards. Aricia then executed an amazing back flip that allowed the toe of one boot to strike the man's jaw and launched his now unconscious body across the vehicle bay. Her back flip completed on the walkway above, where she dropped into a squat behind a row of waist high crates that had been intentionally positioned for cover.

"Now!" Her voice rang out within the bay.

Fedor and fourteen others lowered their PSGs instantly and lifted their weapons. Though the A4s fired the same type of non-lethal round as in Aricia's KM12, they sounded almost no different than normal and the cacophony of weapons fire instantly shook and reverberated through the interior of the entire vehicle bay. The first barrage fell nearly a dozen of the Pralor Security force who were still slightly exposed. One of the men fell directly in front of Mari and she yelped in horror as his body came to rest within reaching distance. Murano's arm shoved her back against the crate as the sounds of projectiles of some sort glanced off the other side of the crate and he too looked at the dead soldier. Murano's eyes detected something protruding from the man's neck and his hand snapped out to swipe two darts from his skin. He drew back against the crate as Sashan began screaming, his eyes wide.

"Return fire!" He roared. "Return fire!"

Nearly sixty Pralor security troops began to do just that and thin yellow beams of intense energy began to reach out towards the covered positions of Aricia and the others.

"Mother... they are firing back!" Fedor screamed from several feet away.

Aricia looked at him. "What did you expect?" She shouted back.

Fedor winced as one of the thin yellow beams sizzled above the wall as it struck two feet above his head. He glanced back at his Lycavorian mother. "We can not hold them here!" He barked at her. "Their weapons are energy based mother! It could penetrate our armor! We must draw them into the station and eliminate their weapons advantage!"

Aricia knew instantly he was correct. Whatever it was they were firing back at them was based on intense energy and she had no desire to see if her Dragon Armor could withstand such a hit. She also felt a brief swell of pride at Fedor's detection of this and instinctively she sent a pulse of her female aura reaching out to For'mya. Their son was taking after his father when it came to tactical decisions and this pleased her. She felt a simple recognition pulse back from For'mya within Mindvoice, one of relief and happiness and acknowledgment.

Everyone! Aricia barked out within Mindvoice. *Back into the station! Now! We will take them inside in the many corridors! Split up as you enter! Teams of two! Move now! No killing! Incapacitate them!*

Murano's head snapped around when he heard the powerful voice reach out openly within the Etheric realm and issue those orders. His eyes went wide when he heard the last part and he leaned around the corner of the crate quickly. Those few figures he could see along the walkway once more engaged their unique vanishing systems and they could no longer be seen. Within seconds all firing directed at them stopped he noticed, while the Pralor troops continued to pour fire outward. Murano saw the main entrance door open and he watched as several odd shimmers passed through it and then it closed once more. Murano needed to act and he knew it. He pushed away for the crate and stood up.

"Cease fire!" He screamed waving his arms. "Cease fire!"

"Murano you fool!" Sashan shouted at him. "What are you doing?"

Murano looked at him and snarled. "If you had been paying attention you would see they are no longer here!" He barked at him moving forward. "Cease fire!"

The security troops began to take notice of him and the firing slackened quickly until it had stopped altogether. Murano turned back to Garan who stood up slowly his eyes looking around.

"Praetorian Murano?" He questioned.

“They have retreated back into the station.” Murano told him quickly.

Sashan glared at him as he came to his feet. “How do you know this?” He barked.

“Because I heard them speaking etherically fool!” Murano snarled at the man, his patience very near its end.

Sashan’s eyes narrowed. “I heard nothing.” He spoke.

Murano stepped up to him. “Because they are speaking on a level you have not achieved Sashan!”

“Impossible!” Sashan snapped. “I am an Elder of...”

Murano shook his head. “You are a fool!”

“How dare you!” Sashan barked refusing to stand up and expose himself.

“I do dare!” Murano shouted back. “Of all the Elders I thought you were at least more thoughtful in your actions! You are no better than Lorendo at the moment!”

Garan was looking around, his eyes wide at the sight of so many of his men down. “My men!” He spoke softly. “They... they killed so many of my men.”

Sashan stepped forward now rising off the deck from behind the crate. “That alone should tell you the type of people we are dealing with!” He shouted towards Murano who had turned away and was kneeling beside another down Security soldier. “They attacked us and killed our men!”

Murano glared up at him. “They attacked first... which was a sound tactical move and it caught us completely by surprise while you bumbled about trying to decide what to do! And our men are not dead. They are incapacitated.”

“What?” Garan gasped as he went to the nearest prone figure. He reached out and felt for a pulse and quickly found one beating strong. He glanced up at Murano. “He’s... he’s alive.” He gasped.

Murano nodded and shoved the darts into Sashan’s hand. “They are using non-lethal ordnance of some kind!” He snapped. “They have moved into the station.”

“Retreating?” Garan asked rising to his feet.

“Of course they are retreating.” Sashan exclaimed. “Form your men! We will pursue and capture them!”

Murano looked at him. “Have you heard what I have said?” He snapped. “These people do not fear you Sashan! They do not fear us! They correctly deduced they did not know what type of weapons we are using. They pulled back into the station in order to draw you in and take away the advantage of our weapons. If you fire blindly inside the station, you could very well do more damage than good.”

Sashan shook his head. “Primitives are not able to comprehend higher tactics.” He stated confidently. “We have them on the run and we will follow them!”

Murano could not believe he was hearing this and he gazed at Sashan with something akin to utter disbelief. “Did this absolute arrogance replace intelligence and all common sense while I was gone?” He barked. “If you go into the station they will hand you your asses!”

“And I’m sure your confidence in our men as a Praetorian makes them feel reassured.” Sashan commented.

“This has nothing to do with the confidence I have in your men!” Murano shouted. “This has to do with common sense and the fact that these people have advanced training and are exceptionally disciplined!”

“You will remain out here with our injured men and protect them Murano. That is an order from an Elder... and you will follow it!” Sashan barked.

Murano felt like hitting him at that moment and barely held back his anger. “Since whoever they are, they are using non-lethal means, I would be happy to remain out here and keep from being knocked unconscious and made to look the fool. By all means Sashan... proceed forward. Each step you takes insures it will be that much harder to talk with these men and women!”

“Garan... deploy your men and prepare to pursue them into the station.” Sashan spoke.

“Elder Sashan... perhaps...” Garan began to protest.

“Do as I order you Commander!” Sashan snapped at him.

Garan looked at Murano quickly before turning and moving for the entrance into the station.

“...sort of energy based weapon.” Aricia was explaining to Daniel and the others as she moved, Helen watching her on one of the large screens. **“It was leaving scorch marks in the bulkhead walls and neither Fedor nor I wanted to remain and see what it could do to our armor. We have split up into teams and are waiting for them to enter the facility.”**

Wayonn touched the COM panel. “Aricia... I doubt our weapons have changed much since my time. If so... then the rifles will fire a phased pulse energy charge in varying degrees. Our Dragon armor could withstand most hits, though they will be felt.”

“Most hits Val'istar?” She asked him.

“The last setting is a lethal setting Aricia. A phased energy burst that can do quite a bit of damage.” Wayonn answered. “At the highest setting it would essentially burn through even our Dragon Armor and could act like one of our explosive tipped rounds.”

“Are you sure it could penetrate our armor Val'istar?” Aricia asked as they watched her round a corner and stop. **“We’ve never really tested the Dragon Armor plates within our personal suits against energy weapons.”**

Wayonn nodded his head. “I know. It’s possible it could hold against a full power shot from one of the Pralor weapons... I would not want to find out and I would prefer that you did not try to find out either. If they somehow manage to injure you in their ignorance, neither Helen or myself will be able to hold Martin in check and you know this.”

“Agreed.” Aricia told him, her voice conveying the knowledge of the accuracy of his words. **“We will be careful. Daniel... Fedor, Iama, I and the others will begin leap frogging back towards you. There appear to be about sixty or so left.”**

“I’m putting the last of us in position now.” Daniel answered.

“Feravomir... you have us on internal sensors?” Aricia asked.

“Yes child... and I am reading them as well.” Helen answered her head moving back and forth between four large monitors. “Their portable sensors appear to be able to detect lifesigns even using the PSGs. Visually however; they appear to be working just fine as they can not see you. Even so... I recommend not using them any longer. They may just shoot first and ask questions later.”

“Agreed as well. Our ambush worked but they will be far more cautious now.” Aricia said. **“We will try to keep them from moving for the medical section. If they do... it will bypass your ambush sites Daniel and Anja and For'mya do not have near as much security around them. They have most of the techs and engineers with them who have no military training.”**

“I’ll send some additional security to her.” Danny said. **“And I have a very large pair of surprises waiting for them when they get close to the Command Center.”**

“Aricia... here we go!” Helen declared. “They are beginning to breach the main door!”

“Very well.” Aricia said.

If not for their current situation, Dysea Leonidas would have found her current position quite erotic and exceedingly pleasurable, she knew. She was pressed between Bella and Cirith, wrapped in the shadows and waiting on the Pralor Security forces to enter the large vehicle entrance at the rear of the Station. The scents of both Isabella and Cirith filled her mind and for the briefest of moments she relived one of their moments together not so very long ago.

[*Stop that!*] Cirith’s voice filled her mind within a shielded connection. While she was not as powerful within Mindvoice as Bella and the others, Cirith was rapidly closing the distance between them now that their *Nauta Melme* had claimed her and she had tasted his blood.

Dysea turned her head slightly and could feel Cirith’s face almost pressed to her elven ear. [*I am sorry Cirith. It’s just very hard to not notice our current position and not think of other things.*]

Isabella chuckled within Mindvoice. She was in front of Dysea, their bodies touching down almost their entire fronts. If not for the Dragon Armor that encased all of them, it would be a very enticing position. [*You do*

have to admit Cirith... having udossta she-elf sandwiched between us like she is brings many delicious memories to the forefront.]

[I'm not saying it doesn't Bella.] Cirith answered quickly. [I'm saying that I have not yet gained the control of my emotions concerning such things with the level of skill you and udossta she-elf have. Thinking of Anja's tongue keeps interfering with my thought process.]

[She does have that affect on all of us does she not?] Dysea answered with a small laugh. [Bella... remember the time on Elear. Melyanna wore that stunning red silk strapless dress and Nauta Melme was so worked up just looking at her that by the time dinner began he pulled the three of us out of Memorial Hall and into the Guard Station. She had him howling even before he was fully undressed.]

[L'tian had to make excuses for us for nearly an hour. And if I remember correctly, she was just as worked up as he was.] Isabella spoke with humor in her voice. [Poor Anja... Martin got her back though. He perched her in his lap and stomped around the Guard Station for close to twenty minutes and she couldn't stop squealing the entire time. Martin does make her sing the loudest of us all doesn't he?]

[Enough!] Cirith exclaimed. [Phraktos! You two are terrible! We are about to enter combat and you two are discussing Anja's sexual talents with her tongue!]

Dysea laughed as Isabella adjusted her Shadow control and extended the envelope of their cocoon slightly feeling Cirith instinctively add her own power to reinforce that. [You will find Cirith our love... discussing such antics as ours in our bed...] Dysea reached back and squeezed Cirith's thigh. [And other places... it is calming to all of us. And Melyanna is so very gifted with her tongue.]

[And so very willing to exercise her talents on us as well.] Isabella added.

[Well... she is very good at that.] Cirith said softly. [I will need to...]

The sound of the hatch opening on the far side of the disabled rover drew all of their attention cutting off Cirith's comment.

Team ready. The male voice sounded within all of their minds. The *Durcunusaan* squad was in position all around them and ready.

Stand by. Dysea spoke. *Feravomir... they are entering the vehicle entrance at our location.*

I see them Dysea. Helen's voice responded. *Stand by to engage.*

Three Leonidas wives stood calmly, pressed tightly against one another, as the main hatch they had initially sealed and then unsealed for this operation began to open slowly. The combat experience just between the three women doubled the total combat experience of the seventy-three Pralor security troops entering. When combined with the squad of the dozen *Durcunusaan* with them, it dwarfed by a factor of ten the experience entering the secondary vehicle bay. This experienced was the key.

The Pralor security forces were under the impression those they were facing were nothing but a primitive species who had gotten lucky. At least that is what they had been led to believe. They were about to discover just how very wrong that assessment was.

That's it! Helen exclaimed within Mindvoice. *All of them are in! Closing the hatch!*

Every single Pralor soldier instinctively turned at the echo of the hatch closing behind them. Since none of their number was near the hatch, most of them correctly deduced that something very bad was about to happen.

Bangers! Isabella barked out within Mindvoice. *Execute!*

As Isabella, Dysea and Cirith turned their heads and placed their hands over their ears for protection, the dozen *Durcunusaan* troops each tossed a powerful flash bang grenade among the ranks of the Pralor troops, drawing their attention to the floor around them immediately. There was a hundred meters between the two forces, and all of the *Durcunusaan* and the Queens had experienced the effects of flash bang grenades before. The Pralor security troops had not.

It took just thirteen seconds.

Twelve flash bang grenades and thirteen seconds and seventy-three Pralor security troops joined their comrades from the main entrance in a painless sleep that would last for at least half a day.

Teniri circled lazily in the sky at ten thousand feet, her keen dragons eyes focused on the small clearing beneath them near the large lake. Nineteen of her most experienced and strongest dragon warriors circled as well, all of them watching the ground below. They could easily sense the females occupying the clearing, and several of the male dragons had already commented on how sweet their aromas were on the wind. What bothered Teniri was the fact they had not lifted off into the sky to greet them and their Etheric resonance was odd in many ways, not to mention that the two males she had sensed were no where in the area from what she could tell. All of them had Etheric shields that very few dragons outside of her warrior caste had, shields that were quite impenetrable. She had been placed in charge many thousands of years ago and Teniri had honored the words of the Elder Mother then. She remembered them today as if they had only spoken a few hours ago.

Take care of them Teniri. Guide them wisely and do not let outside forces influence your decisions. Do what you feel is right within you and they will follow you always.

We will see you again Elder Mother yes? Teniri had asked.

When the ship returns we will be together again. My faith and trust I give to you. And try to tolerate the hatchlings and young ones better my friend.

Teniri bowed her head with an almost embarrassed look for a dragon. I will do as you ask me Elder Mother. I will make sure none of them forget what has happened here and how you saved us.

Keep them calm and focused. Stay true to our values and always remember that you act in my stead now. Go with whatever gods guide our destiny Teniri.

And you Elder Mother Arzoal.

Teniri had never forgotten those words and she had guided her kind with compassion and fairness all of these millennia. When the Pralors had arrived on their world, Teniri reached out to them with those few Pralors among them who remained. She knew that the Elder Mother had once been a Pralor, and only an act of the gods had made her be reborn as a dragon. It hadn't been easy at first; these Pralors were war weary and trusted no one. Over the years however, things became much better, and friendships began to blossom. When the Scourge came to their planet, Teniri pulled her kind off the surface with the Pralors and into the stars once more. Artaaya was a beautiful world, with huge space for everyone and after two years aboard ships searching for another home, everyone was ready to settle once more.

Teniri sensed that these dragons were different somehow and she did not know what to make of that. Most of her kind never advanced their Etheric abilities past the point of being able to communicate and hunt. Only the warriors in her ranks trained for this. Yet these dragons beneath her she sensed were staggering in their Etheric powers. They were not threatening in any way, only sitting in the clearing casually, as if their presence in the sky above did not matter to them in the least. There was also something Teniri felt that she had never experienced before. The presence of two separate minds within the Etheric realm that dwarfed anything she had ever encountered. They teemed with power and control, but aside from the fact she could sense them vaguely she felt nothing else. It was disconcerting to her to not be able to tell more for no one of her kind had ever been able to block her Etheric connection, and if what she sensed was correct, these two minds were stronger than even Murano. She knew much of Murano and his role as a Praetorian, for they had spoken often during the years. He was her equal in every way when it came to the Etheric potential within him, far more than any other Pralor she had ever felt, but what Teniri sensed now was more.

Elder Mother... we must act. The male voice spoke and Teniri turned her head to the left and slightly above her where the dark green dragon was matching her position and speed.

Kolan was the leader of her warriors dragons, the strongest physically among their kind and larger than her by two meters in length and a thousand pounds. He was brash and reckless at times, even arrogant, but he was brave and never failed to lead his warrior dragons well. He was sometimes overbearing when it came to the females of their species, deciding that they should be fighting to be his mate and not the other way around. Teniri had scolded him many times over his actions when he tried to push certain females in a way they did not want to go, but overall he was a fine leader. He wanted to be a Dragon Elder she knew, but Teniri had been very specific and careful in her selection of the four Dragon Elders that she had chosen. Kolan had not been among them, which did not make him happy at first, but he was working towards that goal now.

Something is different Kolan. Teniri spoke. They do nothing. They do not rise to meet us and they do not run.

Perhaps they do not know any better. Kolan offered.

Teniri nodded. *Perhaps... but I doubt that. There is something familiar about... I feel something that is very familiar to me. Something sings inside me... but it also tells me these dragons are unlike any of our kind.*

Should I form an attack wing? Kolan asked quickly.

No! Teniri gasped quickly. We must do something for Sashan has begun his assault on the science station. I sense Murano is very upset about something and even Sashan's resonance is anxious. She turned her head and looked at Kolan. Leave half your wing airborne. You and the others follow me down. We must confront these dragons.

Kolan snapped his head around and looked up to the dark red scales of the dragon circling above him. *Rakorir... remain airborne with your section of eight. The Elder Mother and I are taking the others and going in.*

Understood Commander. The dragon answered, rolling over and gaining more altitude with seven other dragons following.

Teniri watched as he turned back to her. *Let us discover who they are shall we Kolan?*

Teniri tucked her wings, rolled over and plunged for the ground below.

Mother they are coming. Isheeni spoke.

Arzoal nodded her huge head. *She has grown in confidence and strength. She said. A fine leader of our kind she has become. Placing those of our kind who left Elear in her charge was a wise decision that I am very happy with.*

Aurith chuckled within Mindvoice. *Grandmother... is that pride I detect in your voice.*

Arzoal chuckled as well. *I suppose it is. She answered.*

Iriral nodded her large head. *They feel healthy, educated and well trained. She spoke.*

That they do. Isheeni said.

Arzoal looked skyward knowing that Martin and Torma were above them somewhere. They had shut all of them out completely and she could not feel anything but the tremors of their power just on the edge of her mind. Even so she reached out to him. *[Martin. Torma. They are landing around us now. Where are you?]*

[Now would not be a good time to interrupt us Elder Mother.] Torma's powerful voice responded instantly.

[Husband?] Isheeni lifted her head knowing that tone of his voice. [Torma... what... what do you intend? I know that tone of your voice Torma my mate. What is happening?]

[We are about to remove those that are still airborne from the sky.] Torma answered.

[What?] Arzoal exclaimed. [How?]

[Ah... you do not want to know.] Torma answered. *[We will join you shortly.]*

[Torma!] Isheeni barked. [Torma!]

There was no more time for talk as they saw the dark green scaled female dragon land a hundred meters away, nine others joining her on the ground quickly and efficiently all around them. They rested in the clearing by the lake, using the lake itself as their protective side.

Teniri flapped her wings powerfully as she settled to the ground with Kolan and his warriors. Her violent eyes gazed upon the dragons only a hundred meters away. None of them had even budged when they landed and all of them were watching her as she approached cautiously. Her mind was buzzing now as she looked at the huge form of the flame colored scales of the female. Her size alone was impressive, certainly larger than any dragon among Teniri's kind, her scales shiny with health and the muscular definition of her body very apparent to all who saw her. Her eyes shifted to the second two females, both of them with azure colored scales and one with golden yellow eyes. The last female was a creamy yellow in color and equally

muscular and well defined. One of the azure blue scaled dragons had an odd shaped tail. It was very similar to a Heavy Horn tail, but that couldn't be since she had all the markings of a Firespitter elsewhere.

Who are you? Teniri demanded. *How did you come to travel with primitives!*

Primitives? Are they talking of Aricia Blue Eyes and the others? Isheeni spoke looking at her mother.

Yes... I believe so. Arzoal answered.

Primitive? Isheeni laughed within Mindvoice and Teniri and the others could hear her easily now. *She will not like that name. Nor will Martin I think.*

Who are you? Teniri demanded again. *I am Elder Mother Teniri and you will answer me!*

Aurith glanced at her grandmother. *This is who you left in charge grandmother?* She asked flippantly. *She seems no different than these fool Pralors.*

Kolan took several steps closer. *You will mind your tongue when speaking to the Elder Mother!* He barked.

Ohhh... I am shaking in my talons! Aurith replied.

Teniri stared at the flame scaled dragon; every sense in her body telling her she should know this female. As she grew closer Teniri took note that this female was indeed larger than any dragon among her kind by a good two or three meters in length easily. No dragon with Teniri's kind measured more than eighteen meters long, yet this female was easily over twenty. Yet for all that length, her body was muscular and showed no signs of abuse at the hands of the primitives. She was also much older than Teniri had first thought. All of them wore strange objects on their backs, some sort of device that allowed them to be nothing more than pack animals she guessed.

You are free now! Teniri exclaimed. *You can return with us and be free of these people who enslave you!*

We are free now! Isheeni snapped. *No one enslaves us! Why should we come with you?*

Teniri blinked. She was not used to being spoken to in such a manner. *I am the Dragon Elder Mother.* She spoke. *My word is my bond to you. You travel with primitives. They enslave you with these objects on your backs. You can be free!*

Kolan had moved closer now and was inspecting Isheeni, Iriral and Aurith closely and admiring their tails. Their potent female scents filled his muzzle and fired his male sexual drive. *They are fine specimens Elder Mother. This one... she appears to be mated already but we can change that. The insolent one is her daughter! How is it that you have children azure one? You are too young to have born eggs.*

Shows how much you know. Isheeni said. *I have laid three clutches fool.*

Three! That is not possible! Kolan spoke. *How has this happened?*

Let's see... my mate caresses my wings and then he mounts me as we plunge through the sky. Have you never been with a female before that you do not know these things fool? Isheeni exclaimed.

Kolan snorted at her angrily. *It will not matter. Your mate is not here with you and when you return with us another will take you. They will make fine mates to three of our males.* He announced looking up at Teniri. *I might even take this one myself!*

I doubt very much your males will find it so easy. Iriral stated laconically. *Or painless.*

Aurith laughed. *No doubts here.* She spoke. *Father will squash this one like a bug. If mother does not tear his equipment from him first.*

Teniri moved closer to the flame colored female ignoring Kolan and her eyes focused on Arzoal, who had not removed her own gaze from her since she had landed. *Where do you come from?* Teniri asked. *We know of no other planets with our kind on them.*

You don't get out much do you? Aurith quipped playfully.

Be silent insolent child! Teniri hissed at her.

Her head snapped around when she heard Arzoal chuckle within Mindvoice. *I see that you still have a distinct lack of patience with younger dragons Teniri.* Arzoal spoke. *Though it does appear as if the years have tempered it some.*

Teniri's wings flared and she took several steps back her violet eyes wide. *Wha... I... I know that voice!* She stammered. *It... you... it is not possible!*

Arzoal rose to her talons now, stretching out her form to its full length and smiling inwardly as the male dragons around her backed up involuntarily. *Why is it not possible Teniri? The gods have seen fit to do much more through the years.*

Arzoal? Teniri gasped. No! You... you are dead! They... they said you were dead!

I do not know who told you these lies... but do your eyes deceive you now? Do I look dead to you?

Arzoal asked.

The ship! It never returned with you and the others! Teniri gasped. *When they... when they sent a ship to look for you... they said your ship had been destroyed. That all of you were lost!*

I took those of us who remained off Elear. Arzoal said. When the ship returned for us nine millennia had passed. The computers had been erased. We had no way to know where you had gone. I took those of us who remained off Elear and settled on another world. And I know of only one ship that knew of us in all that time. And it did not come from here.

Teniri shook her head. *This can not be!* She exclaimed. *They... they would not lie to us. Not after all we have accomplished together!*

You speak of these Pralors? Arzoal asked her.

No! Teniri snapped shaking her huge head. *You are not Arzoal! You can not be her!*

And who would I be. Arzoal asked gently.

These... these primitives have done something to you! Teniri exclaimed. *Your minds are no longer your own! The Arzoal I knew was not as large as you! And her coloring was different as well! You are not her!*

Arzoal chuckled. *I was much younger when you left Teniri. I had not fully grown to my full size. And my coloring changed with motherhood. Isheeni here is my oldest... the only one of my children that lives. Aurith is her child.*

You think me a fool! Teniri barked. *Female dragons can not bear eggs until they are at least a thousand years of age. This one is barely half that!*

And I'm not looking forward to reaching that milestone either. Isheeni chimed in causing Aurith and Iriral to laugh.

There are things within the universe that we do not understand Teniri. Arzoal spoke. *You know this as well as I. Isheeni has a purpose as do the children she has born. Their purpose is being written every day they share with their bonded ones.*

Teniri looked at her with wide violet eyes. *Bonded Ones?* She gasped. *That... that is not possible.*

Isn't it? Arzoal asked. *Would you have thought what happen to me was possible before it occurred?*

Destiny works in wondrous ways.

You lie! Teniri gasped as she staggered back more. *This is all a lie! What are you? Who are you?*

I am Arzoal and I am the sixty-fourth Dragon Elder Mother. Arzoal stated calmly.

No! Teniri screamed out. *Arzoal died thousands of years ago! She is no more! Kolan... you will subdue these... these imposters and...*

You do not wish to do that? Arzoal told her calmly.

Teniri glared at her. *Why? We outnumber you! You can not stand against us!*

I do not need to. I know you have felt them. Arzoal spoke softly so that every dragon could hear her. *I know you have been able to sense fleeting sensations of their power. Do you truly wish to face the wrath of two Talon Guardians? You do not want to anger them I assure you. Not these two.*

Arzoal felt it spring forth then. Those two simple words caused every dragon around them to straighten and take notice of what she was saying.

You do not know of what you speak! Teniri shouted at her. *There have not been Talon Guardians among our kind for millennia! The last existed ten thousand years before I was ever born!*

Arzoal nodded. *Until four came forward and showed the universe the measure of a Talon Guardian. I and the nine Elders of our Council anointed them ourselves in the sacred ceremony not six years ago. And in the knowledge passed to me by every Elder Mother before, never have there been Talon Guardians of such power. I know you have felt them Teniri. I can see it in your eyes. You have felt them and the power they command. Do you wish to have that unleashed upon our kind here and now? Sit with me and let me tell you a story. Our story.*

I do not know you! Teniri shouted at her. *What you are saying is not possible!*

Oh but it is Teniri! It is! Arzoal said.

No!

Kolan glanced up at her. *Elder Mother? What do you... what do you want us to do?*

Subdue them! Teniri barked. *Subdue them until we can determine what is happening.*

Arzoal shifted her body and in the blink of an eye her Dragon Armor began to extend all around her body. Isheeni, Aurith and Iriral also rose as their armor began to extend rapidly.

What? Kolan exclaimed. *What is this? Wait... Elder Mother we...*

Stop! Teniri screamed out.

Arzoal met Teniri's wide eyes as she gazed at the armored behemoth Arzoal had become. *I can not stop it now Teniri. It is too late.*

Teniri was about to reply when the ground beneath her feet shuddered violently and a massive cloud of dirt and dust rose just off to her right, the bellowing trumpet of one of her warriors filling the air around them and his body thrashing in the small crater his impact had created. She spun around to face this, recognizing Rakorir instantly, her wings flaring to the sides and her eyes wide at what she saw.

They have arrived. Arzoal stated evenly before dialing her right wing back and spinning to the side, allowing her wing to snap forward with its armored edge and smash directly into the unprepared snout of the brown scaled dragon who was standing behind her.

[...know why they do this!] Martin Leonidas bellowed happily even though his body was plunging through the air at terminal velocity. His arms were tucked close to his sides and his legs together as he always did when conducting a HALO jump, but this exhilaration went beyond anything he had felt when jumping. It always did. He turned his head slightly and ten meters away saw Torma beside him, his wings nearly folded back as he kept pace in the dive. *[They're crazy... but I know why they do this!]*

[It is beyond exhilarating!] Torma barked out.

Torma had climbed to fifty-five thousand feet, far above Teniri's dragon's ability to climb and sustain a psychic shield, but easily within the limit of their psychic shield and skills. Martin and Torma and Andro and Elynth had exited *STRIKERS* at even higher altitudes than this.

The moment Arzoal told them half were landing; Martin had simply rolled out of the saddle backwards and began his plunge. Torma waited a silent count of three and then peeled over and folded his wings almost completely back. It took Martin's two hundred and forty-eight pound body only five seconds to reach terminal velocity of 240 kilometers an hour straight down. Torma was able to match this speed easily, while keeping his wings slightly extended out to maintain the same speed. With their psychic shield active, Martin did not have the wind and cold whipping and freezing his body as he normally would and this allowed him to steady himself far better than a normal HALO jump.

[There is a six knot crosswind when we clear the clouds at nineteen thousand feet.] Torma told him. *[They have dropped to fifteen thousand feet. One group of five is circling above a group of four three thousand feet lower.]*

Martin turned his head. *[You know... if they find out we did this... they'll kill us.]* He spoke.

[Probably.] Torma agreed.

[Whose idea was this anyway?] Martin asked. *[We can't blame each other... we already tried that too many times.]*

[I don't remember.]

[Yeah... me neither.] Martin quipped. *[We'll make it up as we go!]*

[Alter eight degrees left when you exit the clouds and that will put you directly over the higher group!]

Torma spoke.

[Yeah... then all I have to do is land on a moving dragon who doesn't know me, stick him with my psychic knife and roll off his suddenly limp body and do it twice more. Without missing and falling to my death.] Martin exclaimed. *[Then roll off the last one and meet you before we both go splat in a big way!]*

[Essentially... yes!] Torma told him. *[I will make a bigger mess when I strike the ground however.]*

[No problem! No problem at all! Do this all the time!] Martin spat. *[Fuck! This was a stupid idea Brother.]* Martin popped.

*[Well... our mates **have** accused us of not being all there mentally either!]* Torma chimed in. *[On more than one occasion.]*

Martin laughed within Mindvoice and nodded his head. *[Hah... ain't that the truth!]* He saw the clouds approaching fast and took a deep breath. *[Piss it on! Don't be late my Bonded Brother!]*

[I will be there!] Torma answered.

Then Martin was plunging through the clouds and they could no longer see each other except for flashes of dark color. They were never apart however, and both knew it. They took strength from each other, drew upon the will of each other, and the courage and values that drove them. Martin's dark eyes changed quickly and his fangs grew to their full length as he embraced all of his senses. Even though they were separated he could still feel the wind whipping around Torma and his mind processing the air currents and temperatures and speeds. Connected as they were within Mindvoice and even beyond, they could do this easily, and had for many years.

Martin broke through the clouds and instantly shifted his hand to alter his downward trajectory. His keen wolf eyes saw the dark red scales of the highest dragon five thousand feet below him taking note that the dragon was using the thermals to simply glide forward at the slowest possible speed he could maintain. Martin grunted, knowing this would actually work in his favor.

At least he hoped it would.

A single and exceptionally fast glance to his right and he saw Torma now diving even faster towards the bottom group. He would pass them just as Martin struck from above if their timing was right.

All of the dragons were looking intently at the small clearing below them trying to discern what was taking place. They did not expect an attack from above. They probably had never met anyone insane enough to do such a thing Martin thought to himself.

[Sucks to be you guys!] Martin muttered to himself. The soft, sizzling pop of his psychic knives exploding from his clenched fists was the only sound Martin heard within the confines of his psychic shield.

The dragons below him would hear nothing.

Rakorir was six thousand four hundred and nineteen years of age and among the longest serving of the warrior caste of dragons. Kolan and he had been selected together and he was, for all intents and purposes, Kolan's Lieutenant in most ways. They were only five years apart in age and at times Kolan let this difference go to his head but Rakorir had learned to accept it through the years. The warrior caste of dragons was widely respected among their kind and since all of them were young adults, they were highly sought after by females for mating. Kolan was always accepting offers from females, young and old alike, to mate with them. He got the most attention because of his skill and leadership abilities. Though their Elder Council was only four in number, including Elder Mother Teniri, many thought that the Elder Mother would soon expand that to include an additional spot on the Council because of their growth in population. Many also believed she would select Kolan. This would make him insufferable Rakorir knew, but it would leave him in command of the warrior caste.

He had wanted to descend to the clearing with them, but was now stuck acting in a support role. From everything they had been told and were able to sense within the Etheric realm, the females in the clearing were also young and powerful. Even from his altitude he could see they were lean and healthy and would make powerful mates and deliver strong eggs and children when the time came for them to mature and have eggs. He especially thought the azure scaled...

Rakorir never saw or felt an Etheric presence.

The stabbing pain between his shoulders caused his eyes to explode outward in stunned shock as he twisted and turned with the impact of something on his back. He righted himself quickly and turned his head, his eyes going even wider when he saw the figure of a man in dull black metal armor of some sort, half standing on his back. He caught the gaze of yellow/gold eyes, saw the exposed fangs, and watched as that man lifted both his hands. Strange shimmering knife like projections of what could only be Etheric power.

Hi! Martin barked out. ***Welcome to the party!***

Rakorir saw him slash downward with one of those Etheric projections and to his credit he began to turn and try to throw the man off. It was far too late. The psychic knife slashed clean through his shoulder joint connecting his right wing to his muscles. Rakorir saw no blood, felt no pain, but his entire right wing instantly went limp. Just as he was about to trumpet a warning his body rolled over and the man had leaped away into the clear sky as Rakorir began his plummet to the earth below. With his left wing flapping madly and his body twisting and turning, Rakorir fought madly to stay airborne. One wing could not fully support his weight however and his downward plunge continued.

He would be the first to strike the ground.

It was like landing on solid granite and Martin suppressed the grunt of dull pain as he struck the red scaled dragon squarely between his shoulder blades. Years of flying with Torma without a saddle had given him the ability to quickly and effortlessly adjust his body on the smooth scales. He squeezed his knees together while using his Etheric power to help steady himself and even before Rakorir had realized what was going on, Martin was rising to a half standing position and lifting his arm. He looked up only when the dragon whipped its head around to stare at him in disbelief.

Hi! Martin barked out. **Welcome to the party!** He bellowed in Mindvoice as he slashed downward. He had decided against taking out both wings to keep the dragons from seriously injuring themselves by not being able to control their fall. One wing would suffice but allow them to at least slow their plummet to a speed and impact that would only knock them silly and perhaps break a bone or two.

Martin was already leaping off the dragon's back even as his psychic knife finished its invisible cut. He had tuned the psychic knife to disrupt nerve endings and cause paralysis as opposed to punching a bloodless hole in their bodies. He would not do that for he honored and loved dragons and would do anything for them just as his son would. It was why Arzoal had made him a Talon Guardian, and he would not do intentional harm unless it was the last resort. The drop was only a few hundred feet to the next dragon below and the gods were certainly watching over him as that dragon was just as enthralled as the first had been with what was happening on the ground and simply gliding slowly along. Using his Etheric power to assist and guide his jump Martin landed in almost the exact same spot upon the yellowish/green scaled dragon. Once more Martin didn't hesitate and slashed across a single wing. He had plotted three directions to go when he broke through the clouds and was following it in exacting nature. As the second dragon bellowed in surprise it drew the attention of the third who was below him. Martin was already airborne when this dragon's eyes went wide as his fellow warrior began to plunge to the earth below. He watched his comrade for the briefest of seconds and then his head snapped back around to see the man landing upon his back. He was prepared for the impact however and twisted his head around to savagely attempt to bite Martin in half.

Martin saw the snout coming and ducked instantly, feeling the huge jaws slam shut over the top of his back. **Hey! No biting!** Martin screamed out. **That's not polite!**

The dragon ignored the words that exploded into his head and snapped his head forward once more. It was a mistake he would make only one more time. Just as his jaws opened and were about to close on the man perched on his shoulders and bite him in half, the man swung his left arm as if he was swiping at air and a hammer like blow smashed into his head. It was a blow unlike any he had ever sustained and large white stars exploded into his head and his thoughts became disjointed and fuzzy.

I thought I said no biting! The male voice rang out just before the psychic knife slashed downward for a third time and the dragon lost all feeling in his left wing.

Martin Leonidas leaped from the back of the dragon his eyes focused on the umber colored dragon that now knew he was there and was turning to snatch him within his jaws.

It was an ability that two of Sumar's Tomes were dedicated too completely, using Etheric force to make extraordinary leaps or jumps that would be impossible even for a wolf. He knew Andro had used this skill on several different occasions, but he had yet to attempt it. It reminded him too much of the movie he had seen as a boy under Walter's care. Different men and women with those laser swords he so wished they could make, leaping great distances using their gift. Martin couldn't help but smile at the thought of whoever had made those movies seeing him actually doing what millions thought was impossible and only done in the movies.

Using his mind as the computer and his eyes as the laser, when he had leaped from the third dragon's back it was for a specific point on the dragon now diving on at him. His mind focused and he thought of the details within the Tomes. Direction. Lift. Distance. Concentrate and focus.

It happened far faster and quite unbelievably to the dragon he was attacking. The umber colored Firespitter unleashed a short blast of flame at the gnat of a man who was attacking them thinking he was going to burn the flesh from his body. His stream of flame hit only air however and his red eyes grew large when he felt the tug and impact on his exposed tail. His head snapped around and he spied the man clamoring up the length of his tail like an Artaaya tree monkey scrambled through the trees. His eyes grew wide when the man looked at him and he saw glowing yellow orbs and distinct dual fangs exposed in a snarl.

That was not nice! The man barked easily within the Etheric realm and shredding his shields with consummate ease.

The dragon could only watch as he raised his hands and plunged both of his psychic knives into the dragons back and slashed outward and upward. The dragon bellowed as he felt searing heat pass through the entire left side of his body and he lost all control of his right wing. The man was leaping away into open air as his large bulk rolled over out of control and plummeted for the earth below.

On my way brother! Martin called out within Mindvoice.

I will be there shortly. Torma exclaimed.

Torma had always been different.

That first day on Ukwav only confirmed to all that this was the case. That was the day his life beside his Bonded Brother had begun. Torma had not looked back even once. The offspring of a Heavy Horn father and Firespitter mother, his size alone made him different. His absolute devotion to Isheeni made him different. It had allowed the Elder Mother and other Dragon Elders to grant him permission to take Isheeni as his mate even though she could not bear him children for at least another two to three hundred years. Torma had not cared about that in the least. Her azure scales and musical voice had addicted him from the very beginning. Neither he nor Isheeni ever once imagined things would work out as they did, becoming bonded within Mindvoice to Martin and Aricia, but neither would they trade those experiences for anything in the universe.

The birth of every child, no matter Lycavorian or dragon had been cause for celebration and happiness. As each of their children had been born, the tie between their two families had grown more and more together, until now there was no distinction between the Leonidas clan and the family of Torma and Isheeni. From that very first moment he and Martin had embraced what they had discovered. Embraced and nurtured it. When they had discovered the Tomes of Martin's grandfather, that bond grew even stronger as they studied and practiced in secret at first, then bringing Andro and Elynth into the fold. Even then it seemed as if Sumar knew dragons would be part of the future and many of the Tomes seemed to reflect this. Martin and Torma did not question this for it was right in front of their eyes in the writings and teachings of Sumar.

Much of what their son and daughter shared together naturally because they had bonded while Andro was still in the womb, Martin and Torma had developed and worked harder to obtain. For them it made their bond together that much more sacred and important to each of them and eventually more powerful.

Torma tracked his Bonded Brother through their Etheric connection easily even as he rocketed for the ground and the group of dragons furthest away. They had timed it perfectly and the moment Martin slammed onto Rakorir's back Torma attacked.

His Dragon Armor was fully deployed, turning him into an immense flying tank as he screamed downward at the two unsuspecting dragons beneath him. They made it so easy and Torma easily deduced these dragons had not fought anything larger than a stag in the forest while hunting. He watched their heads shift downward as the colossal shadow below them got larger and it wasn't until he was almost upon them that they thought to look up. Torma saw their eyes go wide when they did this as they spotted the massive black armored form of a dragon larger than any they had seen almost upon them. Their reaction was predictable and far too slow. Torma's wings snapped straight out to each side accompanied by a gunshot like pop and the armored edges of his wings smashed into the inner shoulder of each dragon as he plunged between them.

Their bellows of pain and surprise filled his mind as both dragons rolled inward towards each other, bounced off one another and began to fall in a wide looping spin, their uninjured wings flapping madly in an attempt to keep them in the air.

Torma twisted in mid air, gaining altitude and feeling Martin as he struck the third dragon. He didn't hesitate and came up under the third dragon above him as his head lifted skyward to discover why his comrade had cried out in surprise. Torma saw his body begin to shift as he realized what was going on and he simply slammed into him from below with all of his power and speed behind him. The khaki scaled dragon trumpeted in surprise and pain as he was struck by the six ton missile wearing strange armor, one of his rear legs breaking from the impact. As Torma flew upwards he rolled inverted, slapping the dragon's snout and neck with his armored wing and knocking him senseless as he began to fall. Torma flared his wings, came to an abrupt halt in midair, glanced around and then shot like a cannon for the last dragon. It was a light blue scaled beast and it was in a dive just above Martin intending to snatch his Bonded Brother in its jaws.

So intent on catching Martin, the blue scaled beast missed Torma entirely until he saw a flash out of the corner of his eye and turned his head just as Torma's body snapped over the top of him and his Heavy Horn tail, encased in Dragon Armor, smacked him directly between the eyes with unerring accuracy and no small amount of force. The blue scaled dragon tumbled over out of control and bellowing in pain from the blow.

On my way brother! Martin's voice burst into his mind.

I will be there shortly. Torma answered, dipping his wing and rocketing for the ground beneath him even as his keen eyes saw the impacts of three dragons on the ground below. They were at five thousand feet and Torma inched closer to his speeding brother, Martin's body tightly drawn against itself. It was a simple matter to ease alongside him and then adjust his wings to match his speed.

May I offer you a ride? My rates are cheap! Torma announced looking at Martin with bright golden eyes as he fell beside his Bonded Brother.

That's because there are no in-flight meals! Martin chimed back at him.

I said I was cheap Martin my Bonded Brother... not easy. Torma answered.

Martin began laughing hysterically as he drifted closer to Torma in that odd position and reached out to grasp the sides of the Mark Eleven saddle. He was still laughing as he jammed his legs forward and the Dragon Armor Bracers closed around his thighs and sensing this Torma snapped his wings out and lifted his tail upward. The maneuver was one that every Bonded Pair learned early in their training and at three hundred meters Torma executed a near perfect ninety degree shift in direction and was rocketing over the small clearing with dozens of pairs of eyes watching in shock as he unleashed a trumpet of command and defiance that deafened those who were watching.

As her warriors began to drop from the sky above Teniri felt it open before her like door. Never had she felt such staggering power within the Etheric realm in all of her years. Even Murano, a Praetorian of the highest caliber did not match what she was feeling now. Her eyes grew even wider when out of the nearby lake rose a dark green scaled dragon, that same glistening black armor extending around his body as he lifted into the air and then fell upon one of Kolan's warriors in an instant.

Miath didn't pause and didn't hesitate as he used his speed and weight to drive one dragon to the ground while bringing his hybrid tail, encased in armor, whipping around like a mallet. It struck the next closest dragon squarely in the muzzle and sent him hurtling through the timber from the force of the blow. Her head snapped around and she saw Arzoal smash her wing into another of Kolan's warriors sending him sprawling along the ground with tremendous force. She watched as the other three females began a dance of combat Teniri had never seen. With their armored bodies they used their tails and armored wings like clubs as they lifted onto their rear talons and moved upright.

Aurith's hybrid tail was the one that connected with Kolan's snout and staggered him to the side. Kolan was of sturdy stock however and he regained his balance quickly, turning on Aurith with a hiss of anger.

Wench! He screamed out.

Aurith laughed at him as she whipped her right wing around and snapped it into his unprotected side drawing a grunt of pain. *Wench? Is that the best you got! My brother Jeth swears better than that on a bad day!*

Aurith lifted into the air and made a short hop into the clearing, flicking her tail back at Kolan seductively as she did and feeling her father approaching. *Do you know how to use it big bad dragon warrior?* She taunted Kolan.

Kolan had regained enough of his senses to operate, but allowed his anger to override good sense. His head snapped around. *With me!* He told the dragon beside him. *She can not take us both!*

The second dragon nodded and both he and Kolan lifted off and shot straight for where Aurith waited. They made it only a hundred meters before an terrible weight slammed into their backs and thick, sharp talons pressed into their scaled heads. Both of them were slammed head first into the ground in clouds of dirt and dust, the air leaving their lungs in great gushes from the impact, assisted by the massive talons gripping their bodies.

Oh shit! That had to hurt! Martin's voice bellowed in Mindvoice.

Kolan and his comrade grunted in pain as more weight was pressed onto their heads and the huge talons squeezed tightly. Kolan heard the snickering and his eyes lifted to see Aurith come to a stop in front of him.

Crush you like a bug! She spat. *I did warn you! Say hello to my father.*

Kolan's eyes shifted once more and he saw the huge head appear in his line of sight. A massive head nearly twice his size and covered in glistening black armor, but not hiding the golden eyes or the razor sharp teeth. Torma unleashed a trumpet of rage directly into Kolan's face from only two feet away.

Aurith laughed. *Like a bug.* She reiterated.

STOP THIS! Teniri screamed now. Her violet eyes gazed at Torma in wonder and awe, as well as the simple man who sat on his back.

Isheeni rushed up to stand beside Torma, glaring at him from under her armor. *Did you two just do what I think you did?* She exclaimed. *Martin Leonidas?*

Well... no... hum... maybe a little. Martin answered.

This can't be happening. Teniri's voice echoed within Mindvoice causing all of them to turn.

Arzoal moved up closer to her. *And why not Teniri?* She asked as she retracted the armor around her head only. She was still wary of what these dragons would do and she truly did not want to have to hurt them. *There are questions still unanswered in the universe.*

Teniri's head snapped around and gazed at her. *She... Arzoal told me that just...*

Arzoal nodded her head. *Just before you boarded the ship and departed Elear. I remember the day as if it was yesterday Teniri. You were so worried you would let me down. It appears you have gone beyond what I had ever hoped.*

Elder Mother? Teniri gasped softly. *It... is it really you?*

There was a trumpet of anger from the side and both their heads whipped around to see the dragon Martin had punched rear up beside Torma and try to snatch him from the saddle on Torma's back. Teniri watched with stunned eyes as Martin simply lifted his left hand without turning and make a fist. The dragon froze in mid jump unable to move and Martin turned his head slowly to look at him.

Didn't I tell you no biting! Martin barked out. *It's rude and not at all becoming a dragon!*

Martin drove his hand down and the dragon with it. His upper body slammed into the ground hard and he grunted in pain.

Talon Guardians! Teniri gasped loudly and this caused all of her dragons to perk up and take notice. *I... never did I believe that...*

Who else would have the power and ability to smite your brave dragons from the sky Teniri? Arzoal asked softly. *This is Torma... and King Martin Leonidas. Two of the four Talon Guardians who now walk among us.*

Four? Teniri gasped.

Arzoal nodded. *Martin's first born son and Torma's oldest daughter are the other two.* She told her. *A Bonded Pair just as their father's are. And equally as powerful together as they are singly.*

Teniri looked back at Martin. *He is... he is a Praetorian!* She gasped. *I can feel the power within him! Just like Murano!*

Martin's eyes narrowed and he leaped off Torma's back, his Dragon Armor retracting from around his head. *A Praetorian?* He said. *There is a Praetorian here? On this planet?*

Teniri nodded. *Murano. The Chief Elder's brother.*

Teniri... did any... did any of the others survive? Arzoal asked softly. These... these brave warriors with you are too young. Did any of...

Yes! Teniri almost shouted. All of us! We... She stopped talking and looked at Arzoal her eyes wide. By the grace of our ancestors... you truly live!

Arzoal couldn't help but chuckle even given the circumstances. I am rather happy about that yes. You have grown into a beautiful dragon Teniri.

How... how can... we waited for so long. Teniri spoke looking at her. We hoped for so many centuries that you would come. How Arzoal? How is it possible that you are here now? Here with two Talon Guardians and grandchildren?

I will tell you everything. Arzoal told her. All there is to know. But first... these Pralors... they are attempting to force their will on Martin and those of his kind. We do not come here for violence or oppression Teniri. We come for discovery and answers. Will you help us?

The answer was instantaneous as Arzoal had hoped it would be. You... you could have killed us easily. Teniri said. In... in my ignorance I believed us superior. I have forgotten so much of what you taught me Elder Mother. I can not refuse the commands of my Elder Mother and two Talon Guardians! I will not go against every instinct in my body! I...

Martin suddenly groaned in pain and grabbed for his head. "Oh shit!" He moaned.

Martin! Arzoal shouted. Martin what is it!

"No!" Martin screamed. "No! No! No! Fedor!"

***NO!** Torma's voice bellowed in Mindvoice causing all of them to wince. In a move that was faster than any of Teniri's dragons had seen another of their kind execute, Torma exploded forward, snatched Martin into his talons and was screaming into the sky. They could only watch as Martin scrambled up his foreleg and into the saddle and then Torma was rocketing out of view over the tree tops.*

Arzoal turned to Isheeni and Aurith who were standing there in similar agony of their own. Isheeni! Aurith! What is wrong?

Fedor! Isheeni screamed out.

Something has happened to Fedor! Aurith screamed before leaping into the air and following her father.

Arzoal's eyes were wide. By the gods no! She stammered before she too exploded into the air and was racing for the science station.

CHAPTER TWELVE

STATION ZERO ONE FIVE

Garan stopped at the intersection of two corridors and squatted against the wall as his men followed suit. Sashan moved up beside him, clutching the sidearm.

"What?" He hissed angrily, still smarting from the tongue lashing Murano had given him in front of Garan and the others.

Garan motioned to the ceiling. "They have deactivated the central lighting." Garan spoke. "Only emergency lighting is left. There will be many shadows and dark areas we can not see into and this station is massive Elder Sashan."

"They more than likely were unable to determine how to power the entire station. They are primitives Garan." Sashan told him. "We must take both medical and the Command Center at the same time."

"If we proceed down this corridor it will take us to medical." Garan spoke. "From there we can access the backup computer terminals and retake the station's power. I will send half our force down this second corridor towards the Command Center to secure that and remove any of these people."

Sashan nodded. "Do it quickly!" He hissed. "Lorendo and the others are approaching from the second transport. I want the station secured before they get here!"

Garan ignored him and motioned with his hand at his line of men. He held up two fingers and motioned down the second corridor. He watched as every second security soldier pulled out of the file and began to move

towards the alternate corridor. Garan looked at the remaining men and nodded for them to follow him. Garan hefted his X90 Phased Pulse Rifle and began moving cautiously down the dimly lit corridor. He fought down the fear that coursed through him and tried to remain as calm as possible. Whoever these men and women were they had taken out fifteen of his most highly trained men and women and did it without a single loss on their end. Garan had begun to doubt what the Elders were saying before they even left the ship. Praetorian Murano had more combat experience than all of them combined. He had fought in hundreds of battles if the history archives were accurate, killed thousands of Scourge, and the Elders were just dismissing him out of hand. Garan may have been a simple soldier, but he knew when the politics of events was directing the military portion and he knew that was never good. He needed to show his men he was in charge and keep them calm. Elder Sashan now seemed to only be concerned with taking the station before Elder Lorendo arrived. Garan knew that all depended on how well these primitives had prepared for them.

Garan doubted very much that they were simply standing around waiting for them to come to the Command Center.

The column of Convention Security troops heading for the Command Center thought they were making good time. At least it seemed that way to the man leading the detachment. They were in a long corridor now that led directly to the Command Center blast doors. Sealed doors lined the steel gray corridor but all of them appeared to be locked. No doubt the simple minded primitives did not have the knowledge to open them he thought to himself as his eyes fell on the main blast doors a hundred meters down the slightly curving corridor. He had twenty-nine men moving behind him, all of them tense and alert. It wouldn't help them in the least.

The third man in the file moved forward now that they had stopped. He settled next to their Senior Lieutenant and Garan's First Officer.

"Lieutenant." The man hissed softly. "I am detecting lifesigns in all directions as well as the command center."

The man looked at him. "How many inside the center?"

"Four." The man answered.

"The rest must be sensor ghosts!" The lieutenant answered. "They have those invisibility contraptions remember!"

"It is like it was in the vehicle bay sir! The lifesigns were accurate! We just could not see them visually!" The man hissed quietly not convinced. "If the scanner is accurate now then they are all around us!"

"Impossible!" The Lieutenant snapped. "Elder Sashan said they are primitives! They have no knowledge of advanced tactics or how to conduct ambushes!"

"They ambushed us in the vehicle bay!"

"They got lucky!" The lieutenant snapped. "That is all!"

"Funny thing about luck." The female voice spoke from directly in front of them. Their heads snapped around to see the slight shimmering in the dim corridor and then the lithe figure of the woman appearing in front of them as some sort of light bending shield was lowered. She wore that semi shiny black metal armor, and the helmet she wore covered almost her entire face except for those blazing azure colored blue eyes and long dual fangs that protruded from her beneath her upper lip. "You're all out of it!"

Aricia Leonidas, *Anome* to Martin Leonidas and his youngest and most militant queen, stepped toward the lieutenant and drove the heel of her right hand directly into his jaw with all of her substantial pureblood wolf strength. Aricia had made an oath to herself that warm day on Enurrua. The day her beloved Martin reclaimed what was always his. She vowed to never be weak again. Over the ensuing years Aricia had accomplished just that. Martin had shattered an entire empire to reclaim her and Aricia Leonidas had become the core of the combined strength of his Queens. Any threat to the man she worshiped, to her fellow Queens who she loved just as deeply, that threat she would eliminate without a moment's hesitation. The man's head whipped around as if it was on a top, the force of the blow causing his face to smash into the wall with a sickening thud. His eyes rolled into his head instantly, his body going limp, and he slid to the floor out of the fight. The man with the scanner looked up in horror at Aricia, saw her wild blue eyes, and opened his mouth to plead for his life. Aricia

slammed the butt of her retracted *Nehtes* into the man's face with little fanfare and he quickly joined his comrade in the blackness of unconsciousness.

"Lozen!" Her command voice rang out forcefully and echoed down the corridor in all directions.
(Attack)

Every single door that had previously been sealed, opened instantly at Aricia's shouted command and thirteen *Durcunusaan* stepped into the corridor from either side, their A4s all retooled with the non-lethal ammunition and spitting out damage before the Pralor security troops even knew what was happening. The sleep rounds punched through the lightly armored clothing of the security troops because of the Dragon Armor tips. The darts were painful when they entered the skin, penetrating about a millimeter and a half before releasing their sleep agent, but the chemical reacted so quickly that most of them never felt it. The sleep agent had been easy to develop and load into the ammunition. It was a similar agent that the Krypteria used when they wanted to take someone alive for questioning.

Aricia slipped to the side and dropped to one knee bringing up her KM12 in one smooth motion. She fired three times in quick succession, all three of the powerful sleeping darts stabbing into the neck of the next closest Pralor security troop. It was over quickly after that, none of the security troops getting a single shot off in the corridor because of the speed and ferociousness of the ambush.

"Very nicely done Aricia." Helen's voice echoed in her implant. **"Nicely done indeed."**

Aricia smiled at Helen's words as she lowered her KM12 and rose to her feet. "How many remain *Feravomir*?" She asked.

"Thirty-two." Helen answered immediately. **"Wait... make that thirty. Fedor and Iama just took out two from the rear of the second group."**

"How close are they to *Melyanna*'s position?" Aricia asked.

"Too close." Helen replied. **"Why would they continue there?"**

"The computers in medical can access the entire station." Wayonn's voice chimed in. **"They won't be able to override the security measures I put in place but they can gain limited access."**

Aricia looked at her *Durcunusaan* detail as they began pushing the sleeping bodies into the different rooms. "Daniel... your ambushes are no longer needed. Can you move to assist Anja?"

"Already heading there." Danny's voice echoed.

"Uh-oh!" Helen's voice broke in. **"Not good! Not good!"**

"*Feravomir*?" Aricia asked.

"The external sensors were taken out... but the portable motion sensors *Cirith* planted are still active!" Helen snapped. **"I'm detecting another force moving for the vehicle bay entrance on the west!"**

"Number?" Aricia asked.

"Fifty-three from what I can tell." Helen replied. **"Avi?"**

-Motion sensors are accurate *Feravomir*. Fifty-three additional Pralor personnel will enter the north vehicle bay in approximately forty-two seconds at their current rate of advance-

"*Sibfla*!" Aricia cursed. "Dysea... can you, Bella and *Cirith* move to Anja's position? She and For'mya have only Eirene, Miseo, Muton and four *Durcunusaan*. The rest with her are support personnel!" Aricia asked. "Fedor and Iama split from us and are moving alone but they can't stop thirty troops on their own."

"I will leave Cody and half our force here to finish securing these Pralor troops." Dysea's voice spoke. **"Bella, *Cirith* and I will take the rest and move to *Melyanna* now!"**

"Daniel... bring your people to me! I will meet you by the main entrance!" Aricia ordered. "Send your surprise to Anja!"

"Done! Remain inside the facility Aricia! We'll hit this new group like you did the first!" Danny answered.

"*Feravomir*?" Aricia questioned.

"Move quickly child." Helen told her. **"Martin and Torma have engaged ten Pralor dragons while *Arzoal* and *Isheeni* distract the rest!"**

"They... they are fighting ten dragons alone!" Aricia exclaimed. "How?" She reached for her beloved within Mindvoice and only faced a solid wall of psychic power. "Helen... he is blocking me! All of us! How..."

“Trust me child... you do not wish to know how.” Helen answered. ***“Move quickly Aricia! We have problems of our own!”***

Aricia looked up. “Leave them!” She exclaimed loudly. “Back to the entrance! Now!”

“STOP!” The Pralor soldier screamed as he leveled his PPR at Iama’s face.

Iama did indeed stop, for she had no desire to be shot by one of those weapons. She quickly lifted her hands into the air showing that she had no weapon. Her tail twitched madly behind her in nervous apprehension. She and Fedor had taken out two additional troops before splitting up inside a room and doubling back. She watched as the two men moved closer to her, the odd looking rifle never leaving its position centered on her face. Iama’s green eyes darted back and forth regretting that she ever left Fedor’s side. They had worked seamlessly so far and she had to go and break up that successful team, insisting they could take out more if they split up. Fedor had reluctantly agreed, though Iama knew she was only doing it to show him that she was a strong female and worthy of his attentions as a Prince.

She didn’t understand that he had already decided that.

“Get down!” The man screamed at her. “Get on your knees! Do it now!”

Iama’s eyes narrowed and she shook her head. “No!” She spoke trying to keep her voice neutral.

“I said get on your knees wench!” The Pralor shouted once more as his partner moved to the side, his eyes traveling up and down Iama’s body in a way that she had seen countless times in the past.

“I kneel to no man!” Iama hissed angrily now. “Never again!”

“He said get on your knees wench!” The second man stepped towards her and Iama’s eyes flew open in surprise when the shimmering field of the PSG winked into existence, began to dissipate and then Fedor was beside the man. And already in motion.

Fedor hit the man with a ridge hand strike that was fueled by anger at his words to Iama. Fedor was by no means a small man at six feet one inches tall and two hundred and twenty-one pounds of solid muscle. He was every inch a Spartan and a Leonidas in muscular definition and power. His training sessions with his *medwan* and his Uncle Daniel had shaped him into a very lethal young man with elven and wolf speed and strength. As with all those who were even partially Lycavorian, his bone structure was much heavier and denser, and therefore any kind of physical blow from him would be devastating. His *medwan*’s instructions were clear however, they were not to permanently injure any of the Pralors. That did not mean he could not hurt them for speaking badly of Iama. The blow struck the man just beneath his lower lip, his jaw popping like a shot and his feet flying up as his body left the ground. It carried enough power and momentum to flip him completely over and drop him to the floor unconscious before he had even completed the spin.

Fedor was drawing his KM12 as he snapped his long leg up and his armored leg and foot shattered the rifle’s frame, smashing it from the man’s grip in two pieces as he jammed the KM12 into the man’s neck with little gentleness.

“Iama’Juturi kneels to no one! Ever!” Fedor growled viciously and pulled the trigger of the KM12 from point blank range. The darts struck the man’s neck with such force they flung his upper body back and he slammed into the wall before slumping limply to the floor.

Iama gazed at Fedor with adoring green eyes as he lowered the KM12 and turned back to her. She didn’t hesitate for even an instant when his arms reached for her and she stepped close to him, her small hands spreading across the front of his chest armor. At another time, with the feelings and emotions Iama felt surging through her for Fedor, she would have gladly let him take her however he wanted. Iama’Juturi nevertheless, she was going to be so very surprised at the actions of this young Prince. Actions that would alter her path forever and cement her feelings for Fedor no matter what else happened in her life.

“I could have taken them.” She stated finally looking up into his eyes.

Iama saw those dark eyes twinkle down at her and he nodded. “No doubt. Without even breaking a sweat I imagine.” He spoke with a smile. “I prefer we stay together now though.”

Iama nodded her head quickly, very happy to oblige in that regard. She grasped his hand tightly as he took it within his own. “Come... they are getting too close to my mothers in the medical center. We need to move down the secondary corridors and get to them before these Pralors do.”

Iama didn't need to be told twice. The relief sweeping through her because they were back together was more than she could express. She was going to remain attached to his hip from this moment on.

Murano turned when Lorendo and Daron led the second group of Convention Security forces into the vehicle bay. He and Mari had gathered all of the unconscious men into a single area for treatment and protection. Lorendo strode into the bay with the look of a conquering King until he saw the bodies.

“What is this?” He gasped. “Murano! I demand you explain this to me immediately!”

Murano glared at the man. “You demand nothing from a Praetorian Elder Lorendo!” He snarled back. “I told you this was a mistake! I warned you that you had no idea what we would face! Your ignorance caused this and now Sashan has foolishly followed your advice and council and gone into the station after those defending it did this!” He waved his hand around him indicating the unconscious troops.

“Primitives... primitives did this?” Daron gasped in shock.

“Not so primitive it seems.” Mari spat as she tossed her helmet off her head finally; glad to be rid of it.

“Sister!” Kesyla almost shouted as she rushed to her. “Mari...” Kesyla began inspecting her younger sister for injuries and Mari shook her head.

“I am fine sister.” Mari said with a smile. “I am not injured. Uncle Murano kept me safe!”

“How did you do this?” Kesyla asked her vehemently. “Father will be enraged with you for going against his instructions!”

“It doesn't matter now Kesyla!” Mari said. “I am here and I have seen exactly what Uncle warned us about! They... they had these invisible shields sister and they appeared out of thin air to attack us.”

Lorendo glared at Murano. “What happened here?” He demanded.

“Just what my niece Mari said. Didn't you hear her?” Murano told him. “They had some kind of invisibility shields. We could pick up their lifesigns but could not see them with our eyes. When Sashan sent a man to breach the doors they struck first and did this.”

“They... our men are dead uncle?” Kesyla stammered.

Murano shook his head quickly. “No Kesyla... only incapacitated. Some sort of sleep agent I expect.” He held out his hand to Lorendo with a handful of the 12.7mm darts in his palm. “Not so primitive that they did not design a sleep agent that acts instantly and could take out fifteen of our vaunted Convention Security Troops... hey Lorendo.”

“Where is Sashan?” Lorendo growled.

“He entered the facility.” Murano spoke quickly. “I have lost contact with the second tier assault team and Teniri is no longer answering me within the Etheric realm. I can feel her and the other dragons but nothing more. None of them are answering.”

“We must go after Elder Sashan and support him!” Daron gasped.

Murano looked at him. “By all means nephew... go chasing after Sashan and his men in a station that we do not control! You do not understand what is going on here do you Lorendo?” He spat. “They were waiting for us! They knew we were coming, what we would try to do and they were waiting in ambush!” Murano stepped closer to him. “Not exactly the behavior of an inferior and primitive species is it?”

Lorendo looked around for a moment at the unconscious troops and finally back to Murano. “They... they got lucky.” He spoke finally. “This will not happen again!”

“Are you a fool?” Murano hissed. “We no longer have contact with the Second Tier Assault Team! Teniri is not responding! This entire operation was ill-conceived and you are to blame!”

“We do not need your advice or your help!” Lorendo snarled at him. “Why Delnash insisted you come is beyond me!”

Murano nodded his head. “Me as well.” He spoke. “You have done a fine job of screwing up this operation all by yourselves!”

Lorendo ignored him and turned to the leader of the detachment he was with. “Senior Lieutenant... you will lead us into the station now. We will enter and assist Elder Sashan in subduing the primitives inside!”

The man nodded. “As you order Elder Lorendo!”

Murano stepped forward. “Kesyla will remain with me.” He snarled. “I will not allow you to put my nieces in harms way. If Daron wishes to risk his life by going with you, he can make that decision. You will not endanger my brother’s daughters however.”

Lorendo’s eyes cut to where Kesyla was standing beside Mari and looking very much like she agreed with her Uncle. “So be it. We will not need her skills until after we have secured the station.” He spoke. “You will remain out here Murano! I do not need you interfering in this operation any more than you already have!”

Murano held out his hands, palms facing up. “By all means.” He stated.

“...*piegn tukannupaees!*” Anja hissed harshly. (Stupid sonsofbitches)

For'mya chuckled from beside her at the back of the large empty metal crate they knelt behind. “Yes... you will get no argument from me there.” She stated.

“You think they are all like this?” Anja asked her

“I certainly hope not.” For'mya answered. “Martin’s patience will not last very long if they are.”

“You got that right.” Anja quipped. “For'mya I...”

For'mya nodded her head. “He is blocking me as well *Melyanna*. All of us.” She said softly. “We must trust in him and his skill.”

“Big lug!” Anja snapped. “He better not get himself hurt.” She glanced back to where Muton, Miseo and Eirene were behind similar crates in front of the medical storage room where all of the techs and engineers that had come down to the surface were currently positioned. Her jade green eyes cut to the right and she saw Duewa with the five other *Durcumusaan* positioned by the second entrance into the medical bay. The third they left unguarded as it led directly back towards the secondary vehicle entrance and Dysea was leading half her force towards them from that direction.

“***Coming in mothers!***” Fedor’s voice erupted over their COM units and they both turned to see a wall grate in the back wall smash inward. They watched Fedor slide out and then reach for Iama behind him. He quickly pulled her to her feet and then holding tightly to her hand he moved up to a second metal crate behind his mothers.

“Fedor!” For'mya hissed. “You should have stayed with Aricia and the others!”

“Iama and I are fine mother... thank you for asking.” Fedor told her with a wide smile.

Anja shook his head. “Wiseass!” Anja quipped. “Why do all our children have to be like him?” She stated.

“I have wondered that many times through the years.” For'mya stated looking at her son sternly. Her eyes softened quickly however as she looked at him and his broad smile. Iama noticed this and soon she was smiling as well realizing that Queen For'mya was more relieved than angry.

“***Anja?***” Helen’s voice broke into their implants and she didn’t sound happy.

Anja reached up and touched her ear. “Go Helen!”

“***Anja... another force has entered the station.***” Helen explained quickly. “***Aricia and Daniel could not get to the entrance in time to delay them! They are moving too quickly. Whoever is leading them has an intimate knowledge of this station from the way they are progressing through the corridors. They will link up with the first force in seconds! Daniel and Aricia are moving behind them but...***”

“They aren’t going to be able to stop them.” Anja said.

“***Not before they arrive at your location.***” Helen spoke.

“Oh... that’s just peachy.” Anja spat. “Dysea?” Anja asked.

“***Not soon enough.***” Helen answered. “***We just didn’t leave enough people!***”

“***Anja... let them come! We have the station schematics up!***” Wayonn’s voice broke in. “***We can direct Daniel and Aricia to come up behind them! Avi will move Dysea and her force through the secondary corridors Fedor was using and have them come through the research labs! They are moving down the main corridor to medical. We can catch them between us!***”

“Their sensors are obviously picking us up even with the PSGs *Val'istar*.” For'mya exclaimed. “They will see Daniel and the others coming!”

“***No they won’t!***” Wayonn said. “***Trust me.***”

Anja looked at For'mya. "Tell Dysea and the others to hurry Wayonn." Anja said.

Wayonn whirled away from the console he was standing at and turned to Avi. "Avi... can you initiate a Polarion Pulse through the station from here?"

Avi turned to face him. **-Affirmative-**

Wayonn nodded. "Level five. Full dispersion to all corridors and rooms."

-It will render internal station scanners useless Wayonn- Avi said. -We will be blind-

Wayonn nodded his head as he glanced at the internal screens they had up. "And it will also knock out their sensors as well. Then the odds will be even." He froze when his eyes fell upon the monitor and he stepped closer to it. "Wha..."

Helen looked at him. "Grandfather?" She questioned.

Wayonn moved closer to the screen and reached up to touch it. "Avi... this is current in the main vehicle bay?" He questioned.

-Yes- Avi replied. -Three Pralors. One male and two females. They seem to have set up a triage area for those knocked unconscious by Queen Aricia's initial attack. I did not deem them as a threat-

"Wayonn?" Helen asked again.

"I... I know this man." Wayonn spoke softly.

-Praetorian Murano- Avi spoke almost as an afterthought. -My internal scanners recognized him upon entering the station-

"Murano!" Wayonn gasped. "*Son vada carians!* I thought... I thought all the Praetorians were lost! When we returned and... one of the transmissions we intercepted... it was speaking how things would be different if the Praetorians hadn't been wiped out in the initial years of the second invasion!"

"Grandfather?" Helen asked again coming to her feet now. "A Praetorian? Here? Is that why Martin and I..."

Wayonn nodded. "Yes. Paired as you are as Paladin and Mage... you would have sensed him... if even faintly." He whirled around again. "Why didn't you inform me Avi?" Wayonn barked.

Avi met his angry gaze unfazed. **-Identifying the individual Pralors as they entered the station was not a primary function Wayonn. Defense of the station was-**

"*Anse* Avi! Do you detect any others that your databanks recognize?" Wayonn asked.

-I have confirmed the identity of several individual Pralors Wayonn. Mostly from ancient news reports within Pralor space- Avi answered. -Only one that really matters however-

"Who?" Wayonn asked.

Avi turned to face him now. **-Pralor Lorendo-** Avi answered.

Wayonn's eyes flew open. "Lorendo! He's here! In the station?"

-He arrived with the second force that entered ninety seconds ago- Avi answered. -I was... I was not pleased to detect him-

“Helen... remain here and monitor the others!” Wayonn spoke quickly turning back to her.

“Where... grandfather where are you going?” Helen asked.

Wayonn gripped her hands. “I know this man child.” He exclaimed with a smile Helen had never seen from him before. “Murano is a Praetorian that fought beside me and Sumar. He can... he can help us. He can stop all this!”

“Are you so sure?” Helen asked.

Wayonn nodded. “I’m sure. He will recognize me... if he hasn’t already felt me.”

“You have not lowered your shields far enough for anyone aside from those of us who know you to detect your presence.” Helen spoke.

“At Martin’s request.” He answered. “But Murano still would have sensed me regardless Helen. He may not know what to make of it... but he would still have sensed me. Just as he no doubt senses Martin. I must go to him and get him to help me stop this foolishness. If that *ronnus* Lorendo is here then things could go very wrong.” He leaned over quickly and kissed her cheek. “Remain here with Avi and direct the others as we discussed. I will get to Murano and try to end all this before someone is seriously hurt.”

Helen said nothing else as Wayonn moved for the doors to the Command Center.

Lorendo came up on Sashan as his detachment began to settle on either side of the corridor to medical. “Sashan!” Lorendo spat as he knelt next to him. “This is outrageous! They are primitives! You should have taken the station by now!”

Sashan’s eyes narrowed. “Do not tell me how to do my duty!” He snarled back. “They were far more prepared and skilled than you led us to believe Lorendo!”

Lorendo quickly changed his tone of voice. “Yes... I saw our men in the vehicle bay.” He spoke.

“I have lost contact with our force that was to come in the secondary entrance. We heard many explosions that our sensors said were of a concussive nature and then nothing.” Sashan told him. “We can detect their life signs but they do not answer on COMs! The detail we sent to secure the Command Center has not reported in and they are not retuning my calls! There are perhaps two dozen or more life signs within Medical but they are not firing at us and they are not coming out to meet us!” Sashan barked. “And I know they have additional forces moving towards us from two different directions!”

“Then we must rush them now!” Lorendo stated.

“Rush them?” Sashan gasped.

“We must secure Medical before their additional forces can overwhelm us! From there we can regain control of the station and flood it with Phelephene Gas!” Lorendo hissed. “You must... you must use stronger means Sashan!”

“Delnash was clear!” Sashan barked. “We are not to do permanent harm to them!”

“And if we do not take the station they will take all of us prisoner and we will be at their mercy!” Lorendo shouted. “Do you wish to be at the mercy of primitives Sashan? I most certainly do not!”

“Lorendo...”

“Damn it man!” Lorendo snarled. “What is the death of a few primitives in comparison to our people?” He spat viciously. “Use our Graviton Spike grenades and then charge them! What the grenades have not cleared out will be too stunned to act! Shoot any of them with a weapon!”

The Security soldier dropped beside Sashan. “Elder Sashan! We have lost our portable scanners!” He nearly squealed.

“What?” Sashan exclaimed. “How?”

“A Polarion Pulse of some sort!” The man replied quickly. “None of them work!”

“We must go now Sashan!” Lorendo snarled.

Sashan slammed his hand down on the COM unit on his belt and brought it to his lips. “Elder Sashan to **TALISMAN!** We have the primitives trapped in Medical and are executing a hard entry! I will contact you when it is done!”

TALISMAN

“...can't we scan them Dehov?” Delnash hissed angrily.

“They are within the station Chief Elder. The Modulating shields are preventing us from scanning the interior.” Dehov answered looking at his XO slowly.

“What about Teniri and the other dragons?” Delnash demanded. “Why has she not given us a report?”

Dehov shook his head. “I do not know Chief Elder. She is not answering your calls within the Etheric realm?”

Delnash shook his head. “No!” He snapped. “How long could it possibly take to subdue a few dozen primitives and lower those shields?”

“The station is very large Chief Elder.” Dehov offered.

“Lorendo knows our Science Stations like his own home!” Delnash snapped.

“Commander! Incoming signal! It's from Elder Sashan!”

“Let's hear it!” Dehov barked.

“...have the primitives trapped in Medical and are executing a hard entry. I will contact you when it is done!”

Delnash looked at Dehov when his intake of breath was the only sound on the bridge as everything had come to a stop. “Dehov! What is wrong?” Delnash asked. “What is this hard entry that Sashan is talking of?”

Dehov looked at him. “They are going...”

“What?” Delnash roared.

“They are going to us explosives to breach Medical Chief Elder.” Dehov stammered. “They will effect entry then with our weapons set at their highest level.”

Delnash's eyes grew wide. “What?” He screamed. “I did not authorize that! I did not agree to that! Get him back! Get him back!”

“Elder Sashan has severed the link from his end Chief Elder!” The COM officer shouted.

“No brother.” He said softly. “You have seen a fraction of the blood that lies down this road. You have seen nothing to compare to that. No one here in this room has seen anything to compare to that. Not like I have seen.”

Murano's words thundered in Delnash's head now like one of the storms on Artaaya as it ripped its way across the surface. Images flashed through his mind. Images he did not wish to see in real life.

“A ship!” He barked loudly. “Prepare a ship! I'm going down there!”

“Chief Elder no!” Dehov exclaimed.

“By our Ancestors get me a ship!” He screamed out. “This is wrong! I gave them no authority to conduct themselves in such a way! I do not want the blood of primitives on my hands! Now get me a ship Commander!”

Mari looked up from the peaceful face of the soldier she was checking. His breathing was normal and even, just as if he was sleeping, yet no matter what she did he would not wake up. She turned slowly to look at her uncle and her soft blue eyes grew wide as she saw the older man exit the entry hatch, the strange looking sidearm leveled at her uncle's back.

“Unc... Uncle?” She gasped.

Murano didn't look up from the soldier he was checking. "The agent they used must have been tailored specifically for this purpose and fashioned into the ammunition for their weapons. This was not some random act, they planned for this Mari."

"Uncle!" Mari snapped causing Murano and her sister to look up quickly towards her. Murano's head didn't move when he felt him and Kesyla's hands went to her mouth in fearful shock.

Murano began to drop his hand ever so slowly towards where he kept his Praetorian Saber Staff. It was an extendable staff with double sided blades on one end and a sharp stabbing point on the other. It was only six feet long when fully extended but in the hands of a Praetorian it was lethal. It was the standard weapons of all Praetorians; most of them swearing off any kind of firearm type weapons in lieu of their powers. It was also a much more practical weapon when wading through hordes of Scourge Elites or warrior class drones.

"Do not try to draw your Saber Staff Murano." He heard the voice speak. "A Praetorian you may be, but you will not beat the projectiles from this weapon I have pointed at your back."

Murano felt the warmth spread through him at the voice. A voice he knew. A voice he had not heard in over thirty-five millennia. He let his hand drift away from his Saber Staff and he slowly lifted them into the air. "It has... it has been more years than I care to remember since I last heard that voice." Murano spoke softly. "It is you isn't it? Tell me it is you Wayonn." He spoke as he turned fully.

Wayonn moved down to the bottom of the ramp incline, the KM12 still leveled at Murano's chest. Memories came rushing back to him as he viewed the man. A very young and skilled Praetorian. One who Sumar had praised on more than one occasion and a Praetorian that he insured was always fighting nearby when they went on a mission. "It is me." Wayonn told him moving closer. "It is me Murano. We thought... we thought our people were lost! We thought the Praetorians forever silenced!"

Murano shook his head. "We... we thought the same of you old friend." He said quickly. "When you were lost... when you and Sumar were lost we thought all hope died with you! You live... does that, could that mean...?"

Wayonn shook his head slowly. "No. Sumar... my Praetorian and my friend died long ago Murano. Fighting for what he believed in. What he loved." He answered as he tried to keep emotions he hadn't let out in millennia from spilling forth.

"Wayonn... how did you... I can feel him!" Murano spoke. "He burns with the blood of Sumar Wayonn! I can feel him as clearly as I feel myself! Where is he? Where are the others I felt within him? We..."

"We came here peacefully Murano!" Wayonn hissed. "We followed a trail left by our people that led us here! Why do you attack us now? Why do you treat these men and women as if they are animals? You must end this Murano! You must tell your leaders to end this before it is too late!"

"What... what do you mean?" Murano asked as worry began to fill him.

"You don't understand do you?" Wayonn rasped. "These men and women are... they are Lycavorian... yes! But they are unlike the species that we used to seed dead worlds! They have advanced millennia in both technology and culture! They have harnessed the savagery within them! Harnessed it and embraced it! And they have stretched across the stars! Your actions this day threaten any sort of talks we could have had Murano! You must call your men off. Martin's family is within these walls. His wives and mates, his children! If they are harmed... I will not be able to reign him in! And you will not be able to stop him!"

"That... that is his name?" Murano asked. "Martin?"

"Murano... listen to me!" Wayonn spoke, lowering the KM12 and moving forward to stand directly in front of him. "Call your men off! Call them off before it is too late!"

"What does this man mean Uncle?" Kesyla asked now. "Too late for what? Who is this man? He is... he is Pralor but... but not entirely."

Murano slammed his hand down on the COM unit on his arm. "Sashan...this is Murano! Stop your attack! Stop your attack! I have..."

The deep throated boom of two explosions from the interior of the station drew all of their attention towards the main entrance. Wayonn's eyes grew wider still and horror filled them as he felt the pain sear his brain and cause him to stagger.

"No!" Wayonn screamed. "No!"

Murano looked at him. "Wayonn!" He exclaimed reaching for him. "What is it? Wayonn... what is wrong?"

Wayonn dropped the KM12 and gripped Murano's arms. "*Son vada carians! Un una proir! Un una proir!*"

"Uncle what is he saying?" Mari asked as she moved forward.

"I... I don't know. I have never... I have never heard this language!" Murano stammered. "Wayonn... what's wrong? Wayonn?"

Wayonn gripped his arms even tighter and stared directly into his eyes. "It's too late!" He snarled. "Damn the arrogance of your people! It's too late!" With strength that Murano knew Wayonn should not have had he lifted the larger Murano off the ground and tossed him to the side as if he was a child. Wayonn he scrambled to his feet and sprinted with blinding speed towards the main hatch.

"Wayonn!" Murano screamed in stunned shock as he regained his footing and followed. Mari and Kesyla right behind him.

To Fedor it appeared to happen in slow motion.

Iama squeezed his arm indicating she was going to scoot to the position with his mothers. He shook his head knowing that they had not come under attack just yet but that it could happen any second. Iama smiled at him squeezed his arm once more and then rose to dash across the space.

"Iama!" Fedor called reaching for her.

His keen elven and wolf eyes saw it first at the top of its arc. A small, cylindrical object that looked very much like the shaft of a Nehtes, only this was sailing through the air. As his eyes watched it, it slammed into the ceiling of the medical bay and extended four small arms that attached it magnetically. Small doors on either side and directly in the middle of it opened and Fedor knew exactly what it was then and he was moving before his words even began screaming out of his mouth.

"Down! Iama... get down!"

The frantic nature of his voice had the opposite affect and Iama whirled around to face him as other heads came up to see what was wrong. Iama looked at his expression of horror and her own eyes grew terrified as his body swarmed around her, pulled her close and then hunched over as if trying to protect her from something above them.

Then the explosion struck.

It was not loud by any means; the sound of a grenade going off inside a bunker really, but from either end of the cylindrical device, and from the center, sprang three dozen lethal metallic slivers. Two more dull explosions followed almost instantly after the first and then one hundred and eight of the slivers were slicing through the air at slanted angles to the ground. Iama felt Fedor's body shuddered three times, four times, his eyes open wide and then he started to pitch forward pushing her further until she could not hold them up and they both went down. The Medical Bay filled with thick white smoke and pieces of shattered equipment as the Graviton Spike grenades, used to killed clusters of the Scourge Warrior class, ripped through the air. Both Anja and For'mya had the presence of mind to resort to their training and experience and both of them dropped to the floor and pressed as tightly as they could to the crate they were behind. The concussive force of the grenades stunned them for several moments, the smoke blinding them to what was happening. Anja saw two *Durcunusaan* spin unnaturally away from the door they were facing, their blood spurting into the air just before they were engulfed in the smoke.

"They used fucking grenades!" Anja screamed over the ringing of her ears. "The fucking idiots used grenades!"

For'mya was shaking her head and grasping her elven ears tightly, blood leaking between her fingers, and her face twisted into pain from a ruptured eardrum. Elven ears were far more susceptible to concussive forces, and three of the grenades going off was too much even for a turned female elf who now had wolf sensitive ears as well.

Anja heard it then... voices shouting and screaming and then a rush of bodies of men and women not wearing bodyarmor.

"Get down!"

"Drop your weapons!"

“Don’t move!”

Anja blinked several times again and saw a *Durcunusaan* turn and lift his A4 up. Her jade colored eyes grew wide when she saw his upper body hit by at least five thin yellow beams that seemed to punch into his body armor, causing massive dents. His eyes grew wide and his body was blown back against the wall where he slumped to the floor, blood rushing from his mouth.

“Don’t move!”

“Stay where you are damn it!”

Anja shook her head trying to focus and looked at For'mya whose face was twisted in pain as she held her hands over her ears.

“Secure the secondary entrance!” A voice bellowed and Anja looked up to see a rush of bodies move for the door that Dysea was supposed to be using to reinforce them.

“Get their weapons!” Another voice shouted from within the smoke. “Get their weapons away from them!”

The single voice broke into Anja’s mind then. A scream of utter despair that pierced her ringing ears and brought her head up towards the middle of the Medical Bay.

“FEDOR! NO! FEDOR!”

Anja struggled to her feet, staggering slightly, her equilibrium distorted by the grenades as she moved toward the sound of Iama’s voice.

“You were told to stay on the floor primitive woman! Now obey!” The harsh voice spoke from the side and Anja turned her head to see the pudgy face of the man. Turning also caused him to miss striking her head fully with the sidearm and the blow only clipped her cheek. It still carried enough force to spin her around and drop her back to the floor. Anja Leonidas was far tougher than that as she had proved many times through the years. She shrugged off the affect of the blow, her eyes focused on where she could just make out the two figures on the floor in front of her, one trying to revive another it looked like. Anja pushed herself to her feet once more and stumbled towards the figures, the voice still screaming in her mind. Each step brought her closer, the inert figure on the floor becoming more and more familiar to her. Anja shook her head again, trying to force out the fogginess and this time she succeeded. Anja’s jade colored eyes flew open as she recognized Iama and Fedor. Iama’s hands and the front of her bodyarmor was covered in blood. She was using her hands to try and do something on Fedor’s chest. Anja then saw three objects protruding from her son’s back as he was lying on his side where Iama was holding him and trying to grip the objects.

Realization hit her and her eyes flew open as the fog lifted completely as she focused. “Fedor! No! No! No!” Anja screamed as she skidded across the floor ignoring the jabbing pain of several pieces of metal in her legs.

“Fedor!” For'mya’s voice now joined hers in shouting the name of their son. As Anja skidded to a stop next to him she saw For'mya nearly fall beside her, her own balance altered by the blasts. “*Carians* no!” For'mya screamed as she settled next to Iama. “Fedor! My son! Fedor no! Blessed gods of Sparta and Elear... please no!”

“He won’t wake up!” Iama cried tears pouring from her eyes now. “He won’t wake up!”

“Leave me alone!” Eirene’s voice peaked above the noise now. “Don’t touch me!”

Anja glanced up to see a body go sailing backwards and Miseo rose through the smoke, his face twisted into an angry snarl.

“Do not touch my wife!” He screamed. “Get back!”

“Duewa!” Anja screamed rolling Fedor gently into her lap. “Duewa! Help me!”

Eirene fell on the other side of her twin brother, tears pouring from her eyes. She had felt his pain at the same moment he had, felt all of his emotions swarm through her as the grenades exploded. She grabbed his bloody hand and brought it to her face. “No Fedor! You come back to us! Do you hear me?”

Anja saw more movement from the same direction even as three Pralor security troops were jamming their weapons into Miseo’s chest and shoving him back. Duewa slipped and almost fell, coughing heavily from the smoke as she scrambled over. Her eyes grew wide. “By the gods Anja!” She gasped.

“Help me!” Anja almost screamed. “He’s bleeding out! He’s bleeding out!” She did scream now as tears flooded her eyes.

Danny caught Aricia as the sounds of the explosion lessened and the echo move past them. She was doubled over as if she had been injured and clutching her head.

“Aricia!” Danny hissed. “Aricia what’s wrong?”

“Man... they used fucking explosives!” Cody’s voice snarled.

“Grenades from the sound of them!” Julie added. “Big ones too!”

“Fedor!” Aricia gasped as she grabbed Daniel’s arms tightly. She looked up into his face with a mask of horror that Danny had never seen from her before. “Fedor! He was... he is injured!” She shook her head back and forth. “Daniel... he is... he is dying!”

“Fuck!” Danny hissed. “Move! Move! The gloves just came off! Go! Go!”

“Fucking A!” Cody growled as he took point once more.

The reaction was more severe for Dysea and Isabella than it was for Cirith because she was not as tightly bound with For'mya yet. It affected her badly, though unlike Dysea and Isabella, she was able to remain on her feet and not drop to her knees.

“Fedor! Gods no!” She gasped shaking her head and reaching for Dysea. “We have to move!” She hissed.

The senior *Durcunusaan* enlisted man had seen this before with the Royal family when Zarah Leonidas had been missing. They were tied so deeply within Mindvoice that their minds could sense when one of them was hurt or in despair. He didn’t hesitate and moved up beside Isabella, grabbing her around the waist and pulling her to her feet.

“Take them!” He ordered. “Help them until it passes! Quickly!” He ordered his men. “We must move to the medical center!”

Helen stared at the only internal monitor that showed the medical bay and still worked. She could see figures moving back and forth and she could also feel the pain and fear of Martin’s wives and Eirene. She snapped her head around.

“Avi... what just happened?” She almost shouted.

-Three detonations. I estimate Graviton Spike grenades Helen. A Pralor weapon designed to combat the Scourge- Avi answered.

“They used grenades?” Helen gasped in horror.

-Confirmed. Warning... I am scanning dangerously low vital signs on Fedor Leonidas- Avi spoke.
-He has been severely injured Helen-

Helen got to her feet and reached for her KM12. “*Carians* no! Avi... can you use an A4?” She asked as she checked the action on her sidearm. She heard the sound of ammunition being rammed into a chamber and she looked up.

-I am well versed in the use of many weapons First Oracle Helen- Avi spoke almost too calmly. **-I have learned much from Martin Leonidas though the years that is not well known-** His head tilted upward slightly. **-We must hurry First Oracle Helen... my internal sensors are detecting another Pralor transport approaching the surface at an accelerated rate of descent. They will land in two point seven minutes-**

Helen looked up now, her wolf fangs exposed and her eyes fully changed. She waved her hand almost insignificantly and Avi saw her light blue psychic shield shimmer into existence around her body. "Let's go!" She snarled. "I will not let this stand!"

"**NO!**" The voice screamed causing Lorendo and Sashan to turn towards the main entrance into the medical bay. "What have you done?"

Lorendo's eyes flew open as he recognized Wayonn instantly. "Wayonn!" He gasped loudly. "You... you are alive!"

Wayonn allowed the change to come over him then. It was the first time in nearly seven hundred years where he called forth the wolf within him in anger. The last had been an Enverr Warlord who had just murdered a innocent woman in cold blood. His dark eyes shrunk slightly and the thick black ring encircled his pupils. Long, vicious looking fangs burst from his upper and lower gums and he stared right at Lorendo. The memories of that report flashed across his mind and what he knew deep down Lorendo was responsible for.

"**YOU!**" He screamed. "You did this!"

Wayonn's right hand snapped up and he snatched the barrel of the Pulse rifle from the nearest Pralor security troop, only he didn't try to wrench it free to use. He seated both his hands on the barrel and using the wolf strength within him he lifted the security troop into the air and hurled his entire body at Lorendo.

"Do you know what you have done?" Wayonn screamed his left hand slashing out and connecting with another Pralor soldier and sending him hurtling across the room as Lorendo began to back up. "You have brought doom to yourselves! You have brought death to yourselves! You..."

"Shoot him!" Lorendo screamed as he brought up his sidearm. "Shoot him!"

Three soldier brought their rifles up and took aim only to have them ripped from their grasp by some unseen force along with Lorendo's sidearm.

"Never!" Murano screamed as he sprinted into the Medical Bay. He quickly saw what was happening, reached out with his right hand and captured Wayonn within the invisible field of Etheric power just before Wayonn was able to reach him. His left hand came up and he erected a shimmering shield around Lorendo in order to protect him. "Wayonn... stop this!" He shouted.

"Release me Murano! Wayonn snarled viciously. "Release me so that I can tear this fool's throat from him before I die!"

"Wayonn stop!" Murano moved closer. "Stop!"

Wayonn's head snapped around to look at him, his wolf eyes blazing with hatred and anger. "We have been using non-lethal ammunition on your people!" He screamed. "You saw this yourself! This *invareen nubous igord* orders grenades to be used! Grenades!"

"It was the only way!" Sashan stepped forward now. "We had to secure the station!"

Wayonn snarled at him snapping his fangs together and causing Sashan to step back quickly. "I do not know you *igord*... but you have no idea the force you have unleashed with your actions!"

"You... you are like them!" Lorendo barked in shock. "You have become like them! You allowed them to infect you!"

"Uncle!" Kesyla's voice shouted.

Murano turned to look at her and she motioned with her head. Murano followed her action and his eyes grew wider as he saw the group of people around the prone figure on the floor.

"They... they are Hadarian!" Mari gasped coming up beside him and gripping his arm.

Murano looked at the Pralor soldier who was scanning Fedor while standing above and behind Iama. He was the field medic for the Pralor Security troops. He looked at him and shook his head slowly. "He took three spikes Praetorian Murano." The man said softly. "His injuries are severe. He will... he will not survive."

Murano whirled on Lorendo and Sashan. "You used Graviton Spike grenades!" He almost screamed. "They are meant to be used on Scourge Warriors with hardened shells for skin! Not humanoid personnel!"

"It is... it is the only area effect weapon my men carry!" Sashan spat.

Murano snarled angrily. "Then your men are ill-equipped and ill-led!" He shouted.

Sashan's eyes grew wide. "How dare you!" He barked.

“Murano release me!” Wayonn barked. “I need to be there!”

Murano could feel that Wayonn had calmed and he released him instantly from the Etheric field. He didn't even pause as Murano thought, and moved for the middle of the floor where the others were.

“We have what we came for!” Lorendo growled. “Secure the prisoners and remove them from our facility! Bring the station controls to this console and begin activating security protocols to purge this station!”

“Hold!” Murano shouted freezing the Pralor security troops in their tracks. “Do you have any idea what you have done?” He barked.

“I have done what we came to do!” Lorendo shouted back. “We have secured the station and returned it to our control!”

“Delnash did not authorize you to use this kind of force!” Murano nearly shouted. He turned to another Pralor soldier. “Casualties?”

The soldier looked confused. “We did not suffer any casualties Praetorian Murano.” He said.

“Not among us you idiot!” Murano growled. “Them?”

“There were twenty-one primitives in the research labs. We have secured them. None were armed. There were thirteen within Medical here. Three are dead, four more injured. Including the primitive on the floor.”

“Dead?” Murano gasped in horror.

The man nodded. “The grenades worked to perfection Praetorian. We only had to shoot one.”

“Does taking their lives make you feel powerful soldier?” Murano growled at him.

“They are primitives Murano!” Lorendo barked. “The soldier did his job under our orders! He should be commended!”

Murano turned back to him. “Commended for taking a life!” Murano shouted. “Have you become so arrogant that you deem yourself above everyone Lorendo?”

“Uncle!” Mari gasped. “Uncle look!”

Murano turned back to where the group was on the floor, Pralor security troops all around them with their weapons out and covering them. Murano moved closer.

“Have... I have him stabilized Duewa!” Anja hissed softly. Her hands were on either side of Fedor's head, the soft glow from her power filtering down his neck and encompassing his upper shoulders and chest. “Work... work quickly! I can feel the tear in his left aorta. It is nicked badly and he is bleeding internally.”

Duewa reached out with her hands... the soft white glow similar to Anja coming forth as she placed her hands over Fedor's chest. “Yes... I have it!” She gasped quickly as her hands stopped moving and she lowered them to touch his chest armor. “Wayonn!” Duewa hissed not turning her head but feeling him slightly behind her. “When I tell you... the first spike... just under his shoulder blade. Remove it quickly. Pull it straight out as fast as you can but do not jerk it.”

Wayonn moved up beside her then, reaching under Fedor's upper body which was now supported by Anja's legs and hips. “I have it.” He said softly.

“Now!” Duewa rasped.

There was a sickening sound of the spike being drawn from his body which caused Iama to burst into more tears beside For'mya. Wayonn flung it across the room when he drew it from under Fedor's body. Duewa's hands flared for a few seconds and she nodded. “I repaired it Anja.” She spoke. “But... he...” Her face tightened in concentration. “He's still bleeding. Wait... there! His left atrium!”

“Yes!” Anja declared. “*Carians*... a fragment broke off and is lodged in the wall.”

“I have a good angle here.” Duewa said quickly. “I will draw it out slowly.”

“Hurry Duewa... he's just barely hanging on!” Anja moaned.

“*Val'istar*... the other two spikes! Remove them in the same way!” Duewa ordered confidently. “They are in contact with nothing more than his muscles! Pull them out and I will heal them as they withdraw!”

Wayonn nodded and followed her command quickly and efficiently. The combined healing power of both Anja and Duewa pulsing through him healed the wounds almost instantly after Wayonn removed the spikes just as Duewa had said. He leaned back and watched as Duewa leaned closer to Fedor's chest and closed

her eyes. "I have removed the fragment and I am rotating it around the atrium wall." She spoke softly as she visualized what she was doing in her mind. "There! The rupture is sealed! He..."

Fedor's body jerked and his eyes burst open then. All of them burst into tears as his eyes darted back and forth. "Mothers!" He gasped.

For'mya pulled his hand to her cheek and leaned over to place her forehead to the skin of his cheek. "We... we are here Fedor my son!" She gasped as Anja's head came down to touch For'mya's and she kept her hands alongside his head.

"Don't move Fedor!" Anja whispered. "You... you were hurt bad!"

Fedor's bloody right hand came up to grab For'mya's arm and his left shot back to grip Anja's hip. "Whoa!" He gasped in pain and tried to move his upper body.

"Don't move Fedor!" Duewa exclaimed.

For'mya looked up and rubbed his cheek. "Breath through the pain Fedor my son." She said softly.

"Eirene?" Fedor hissed. "Sister?"

Eirene squeezed in close between her mothers. "I am here *fervon*." She gasped. "You didn't activate your psychic shield Fedor! Why?"

"No time!" Fedor gasped. "I had to... Iama!" He started to force his way up. "Where is Iama? Iama!"

"I'm here!" Iama groaned. "I'm here Fedor!"

For'mya looked at her and reached around to draw her closer with her arm. Iama scooted right up next to him and placed her bloody hands on his chest. His eyes grew wide when he saw her hands.

"You are hurt?" He gasped.

Iama shook her head. "No! No! It... it is your blood Fedor! You... you saved me!"

His face relaxed and he smiled. "Good. That is good. I wouldn't want you to miss me courting you. I will... I will make you mine Iama' Juturi!"

Iama laughed with relief and nodded her head. "I... I am already yours Fedor." She spoke softly.

"Oh no! You're not getting off that easy!" Fedor exclaimed as he winced in pain. "I still have poems to read and..." His hand gripped Anja's hip even tighter and he inhaled deeply. "Owwww!"

"I got it!" Duewa spoke sitting back up and holding up the sliver of metal.

"Man... did you get the name of the transport that hit me mothers?" Fedor asked with a weak grin. "Got to have a talk with that pilot about his flying skills."

Anja couldn't help but laugh and cry at the same time and For'mya lowered her face to his once more but holding Iama tightly to her side with one arm.

Mari and Kesyla stood together with wide eyes.

"Fascinating!" Kesyla gasped.

"Yes! Yes!" Lorendo broke in. "All so touching and fascinating! Get them up and move them outside! They do not belong in here!"

Wayonn sprang back to his feet and whirled on Lorendo but this time two Pralor soldiers were ready and lifted their weapons. "I have locked out all main functions of this station." He snarled. "You will be able to do nothing! Nothing!"

Lorendo moved to one of the useable computers that remained and began typing quickly. The console beeped several times and he looked up with wide eyes. "What have you done?" He demanded.

Wayonn grinned at him. "A Praetorian encryption code key." Wayonn spoke. "You will not be able to break the code Lorendo! You aren't smart enough!"

"Release the station to me!" He shouted.

"*Nubou forn!*" Wayonn hissed loudly.

"We will get the information from you!" Lorendo growled.

Sashan moved forward. "I will take three men and move to the Command Center. We can establish control from there."

"You can try!" Wayonn snickered.

“Praetorian Oracle or not...” Lorendo snarled. “You will pay for your crimes! Helping these primitives against your own people! Intending to do me harm!”

Wayonn laughed at him. “If you live out this day Lorendo... it will be a miracle and gift from one man. That man is not me!”

Murano stepped forward. “Enough!” He shouted. “Delnash has landed!” He gripped Wayonn’s arm and saw him turn to look at him. “My brother is Chief Elder Wayonn. We can talk to him. Leave this fool be!”

“Get away!” For'mya’s voice screamed and she shoved a Pralor soldier so hard he staggered back and slammed into the bulkhead with a thud of pain and rush of air leaving his lungs as he dropped to one knee. “Stay away *piegn ronnus!*” She shouted as she moved under one of Fedor’s shoulders while Miseo inched under the other.

Anja gripped Duewa’s hands and hugged her tightly. “Thank... thank you Duewa!” She whispered into her ear. “You... you have given us back our son.”

Duewa nodded to her. “You said it.” She spoke. “We make a good team!”

“Get moving!” The Pralor soldier snarled at them and gave Anja a slight shove in her shoulders.

Duewa grabbed her arms and held her tightly seeing the flare of anger in Anja’s eyes and knowing what kind of temper she had. She also knew Anja was very near the end of her patience. “No!” She hissed softly. “Let’s just get outside with the others Anja. They might be hurt as well.”

Lorendo waited until the room was clear of the primitives and he turned to a pair of security troops. “Take the bodies to the incinerator and dispose of them.” He ordered them. “I will be outside with the Chief Elder. When we have regained control of the station contact me first.”

The man nodded. “As you order Elder Lorendo.”

No one bothered to check any other equipment before they began exiting the Medical Bay and the blinking red light went unnoticed on the wall indicating a breach of protocol and the activation of half a dozen of the sleep pods held within the secure room.

Nor the signs of movement coming from those six pods.

A squad of Pralor Security troops surrounded Delnash as he stood in the middle of the massive vehicle bay looking at his unconscious men and women. The commotion near the entrance into the station caused him to look up wide eyed and see half a dozen Pralor soldiers come out, their uniforms dusty and covered in grime. Their weapons were held at the ready and then he saw the first of the primitives begin filing out.

His eyes grew even wider and he pushed past his guards when he saw Kesyla and Mari exit the interior of the station.

“Mari!” He exclaimed rushing up to her and grabbing her arms. “Kesyla!” He glanced at one of his men. “Close the doors!”

The security troop ran to the door panel and entered the commands for the large double doors to begin closing.

“We are fine father.” Kesyla spoke though she was still somewhat shaken by the events and what she had witnessed.

Delnash turned on Mari then. “I told you to go to engineering!” He hissed. “How did you get down here? Tell me child!” He demanded.

“I came down with Uncle Murano.” Mari answered.

“You disobeyed me!” Delnash snarled at her.

Mari pulled her hands away from his at his reaction. “I am not a child anymore father.” She spat back at him. “You can’t keep sending me away!”

Delnash looked up and saw Lorendo exit the station then, along with more primitives, two of whom had long tails. The male was supporting another while what could only be an elven female was on the man’s other side. His bodyarmor was covered in bright red blood, as was the armor of the female with a tail. The elven female had blood trickling from both her ears. Two red haired females came next, one of them with blood on her cheek from a nasty cut.

“Lorendo!” Delnash snapped. “What is going on? What has happened here?”

Lorendo moved down the ramp quickly. “We have secured the station.” He replied quite smugly. “Sashan is even now in the Command Center bringing the station back to our control.”

“Why... these primitives... why are they covered in blood?” He demanded as several security troops guided the prisoners past him and shoved them towards the collection of crates.

“They resisted of course!” Lorendo answered. “We had to take certain measures.”

“Measures!” Delnash exclaimed.

“Elder Lorendo’s measures included Graviton Spike Grenades!” Murano’s voice spoke now and Delnash saw him moving down the ramp holding the arm of the man Delnash had seen in the transmission.

“Graviton grenades!” Delnash almost shouted. “I ordered no such thing Lorendo!” He snarled looking back to Lorendo. “I ordered they be taken without harm!”

“They were resisting and we had to break through their lines!” Lorendo snapped. “It was the only way!”

“They were using non-lethal ammunition that was knocking our men out!” Murano barked. “We should have pulled back and initiated conversation with them! Lorendo and Sashan charged into the station and when they realized they could not penetrate the defenses inside using non-lethal means they decided to use grenades!” Murano stepped closer to his brother. “Now... three of them are dead brother! Dead! And they almost killed the son of Martin.”

Delnash’s eyes grew wider. “Dead?” He gasped looking at Lorendo. “You killed them?”

“I did what needed to be done!” Lorendo snapped.

“The leader’s son?” Delnash stammered. “I did not authorize you to use deadly force! I never gave you that option Lorendo! Never!”

“The King of the Lycavorian Union will not care what you authorized or not.” Wayonn hissed softly from beside Murano.

“Brother... allow me to introduce Praetorian Oracle Wayonn. Sumar’s Oracle!” Murano hissed.

Delnash stared at Wayonn for a long moment his eyes wide. “That... that is simply not possible!” He finally gasped.

“It is Wayonn brother!” Murano snapped. “Just as I told you before.”

“Wayonn... Wayonn died with Sumar and all those on City Ship 41!” Delnash spat. “He... he can’t be here! I saw the reports!”

Wayonn stepped closer. “Your reports were wrong!” He growled his eyes changing once more and his fangs coming forth. “Or do I look like a ghost to you fool!”

“Wayonn.” Murano spoke gripping his arm. “This does not help!”

Delnash stepped back quickly. “You... you have become one of them!” He stammered.

“Wow!” Anja’s voice quipped from the side. “You are quick on the uptake. You figure that one out all by yourself?”

“Silence primitive woman!” Lorendo snarled at her. He turned back to Delnash. “You see that?” He growled. “This is how primitives act! With disrespect and no knowledge of their betters! If we had not done what we did, we would still be inside the station fighting for control! I needed to change that!”

“You!” Delnash barked. “I am Chief Elder of our people Lorendo! Not you!”

“That’s not saying much.” Anja muttered loud enough for them to hear her.

Lorendo spun on her again and lashed out with his hand, slapping her across the face viciously. “I said be silent!” He roared.

The two *Durcunusaan* with them rose off the floor with angry roars, each of them tossing aside a security soldier and moving for Lorendo. “Don’t not touch the Queen!” One screamed as he reached for Lorendo. Half a dozen more soldiers imposed themselves between the *Durcunusaan* and Lorendo, their weapons ramming into the larger men’s chests and bringing them up short, but it was Anja who stopped their advance as she stood and placed her hands on both of their chests, shaking her head quickly.

Murano felt it first and his head whipped around with wide eyes to stare at Wayonn. “Wayonn?” He gasped.

Delnash was Chief Elder of the Pralor people and part of that was because of his abilities within the Etheric realm. The Chief Elder was always one who was extremely gifted with their Etheric powers, but falling far short of the Praetorians. Delnash was however, gifted enough to feel it and his head turned to face his

brother with wide eyes. It was unlike anything he had ever felt with the possible exception of his brother, but it was more pure and wild in its resonance and it was not radiating from Murano.

“Murano!” He gasped. “What...?”

Wayonn was soaking up the resonance he could feel from Martin and feeling the energy and power swirling through him as well. He had always known Martin Leonidas was the equal to Sumar in every way, and what he felt now confirmed and went beyond that. Sumar did not have the natural instincts that Martin did; the raw drive and unconquerable determination that every pureblood Lycavorian was born with. As they knew it would happen, the wolf blood within all Lycavorians was dominant, and it would override all Pralor blood within one or two generations. Yet the exquisite makeup of their blood was that it would keep that Pralor blood within their own, mix it, forge it and make it part of their own blood and give them what they had always lacked as a species.

Purpose.

Wayonn also knew there was a point where the Pralor blood would cease to be a deciding factor in the decisions of Lycavorians. Where no matter how much Pralor blood swirled in ones veins, the call and instincts of the wolf would always prevail. Martin Leonidas had reached and gone past that point this day. Aricia. Dysea. Then For'mya. The love he had for the women in his life was like a supernova and anyone who caused them harm, who caused his children harm; they would burn in the fires of retribution. For the first time since actually meeting Martin, Wayonn discovered something that had never crossed his mind before this very moment.

He feared Martin Leonidas. He feared Androcles. He feared all of those who had begun to show signs of Praetorian gifts. He feared them because they themselves as Lycavorians and now as the Spartans they emulated, they had no fear. Death in service to their Ling and their people was the ultimate sacrifice and one all of them would make without hesitation. They would not want to, they might even weep for those they would never see again, but they would stand against all odds until the last breath left their bodies and not regret a single moment.

“Anja!” Wayonn barked.

“We feel him Wayonn!” Anja echoed his shout. “We feel him and it is...”¹

“Glorious!” For'mya finished.

Lorendo looked at her and then back to Delnash confused. “What is she babbling about?” He snapped.

“Murano!” Wayonn hissed waiting until he met his gaze. “Protect those who you care about Praetorian!” He barked.

“Wayonn...?”

“Do as I tell you Murano!” Wayonn commanded.

Delnash looked at his brother. “Murano! What...”

Murano's eyes went wide and he glanced up at the massive double doors into the vehicle bay. “He's here!” He gasped loudly. “By our Ancestors Wayonn! I... I can feel him all around us!”

Lorendo shook his head at the actions of Murano and Delnash. “This is pointless!” He growled. “We need to return to...”

The sound of metal straining reached all of their ears and Lorendo stopped talking and looked towards the double doors. “Wha...”

Wayonn stepped forward next to Murano. “Your training Murano!” He snarled. “Your training!” Wayonn reached out and snatched Delnash by the back of his collar and pulled him back to him.

Murano turned his head. “Mari! Kesyla! Step to me now!” He exclaimed. “Now!”

“Uncle?” Kesyla questioned him though Mari didn't hesitate. She snatched Kesyla's hand and yanked her over, both of them pressing against their Uncle tightly. “Uncle what is happening?” Kesyla stammered.

Mari looked up into her Uncle's face, her blue eyes bright and full of questions she had yet to ask. “He's here isn't he Uncle?” She asked. “The other Praetorian? The Lycavorian with the blood of Sumar?”

Murano glanced up and looked at his brother whose eyes were wide as Wayonn held him securely. “Yes child.” Murano answered never taking his eyes off his brother. “And he is not in the best of moods it seems.”

There was no time for talking anymore, For'mya and Anja pressing close to Fedor on either side while Miseo, Eirene and Muton huddled in a similar position just behind them, the Pralor security troops watching befuddled. Fedor folded Iama into his arms as Anja pulled Duewa close and looked at her wide eyes.

“Anja?” Duewa asked.

“It’s ok really.” Anja said with a small smile. “Marty just has... he tends to have anger issues when it concerns us and... oh never mind.” Anja spoke drawing her closer. “Just hang on to me... it’s going to be a fucking wild ride.”

Lorendo watched as the primitives began to huddle together in small groups and he turned back to Delnash who was now within a light blue shimmering field of Etheric power being generated by Wayonn. His eyes went wide when he saw this. “There!” He screamed. “He is assaulting the Chief Pralor! Stop him! Stop...”

The horrific sound of tearing metal grew more insistent until the noise was reverberating across the vehicle bay. It caused Lorendo’s head and all of their heads to turn towards the double doors as a small crack appeared in the seam of the doors and the sunlight began to peek through. Lorendo’s eyes grew wider and stupidly he moved closer.

“Defensive positions!” He screamed. “Now! Move!”

The Pralor security troops sprinted forward at his direction and began dropping behind crates and whatever cover they could find.

Mari looked at Murano. “Uncle?”

“It won’t help them.” Murano stated... the full aura of Martin’s Etheric power swarming around him like a storm. It was untainted and unrefined, the most horrifically powerful storm he had ever imagined, yet it moved relentlessly with whipping pandemonium and chaos. And at the center of that chaos, shaping it, controlling it was the essence of a man. A man with power Murano had not felt in forty millennia. Not since he had stood beside Sumar during their last battle had anything ever felt so pure and extraordinary to him.

Their heads turned when they heard Wayonn speaking into Delnash’s ear. “This... this is the culmination of destiny. You thought Sumar dead Chief Elder... allow me to introduce you to his descendant. One of four that bear the Praetorian gene and Sumar’s blood within their very bodies. A gene that is manifesting itself once more within his honored descendants. And far more powerful it is because of what they are. Chief Elder... I give you Martin Leonidas!”

The tearing sound grew to a crescendo and in an event that none of them would ever forget, both of the massive double doors began tearing away from the frame of the station allowing bright sunlight to pour in. They were peeled back as easily as if being done by some angry god and then they were torn asunder from the actual station itself and sent hurtling into the distance allowing the bright sun to pour into the vehicle bay and cause all of them to shield their eyes. They could see the dust caused by the action of tearing such massive doors from their frames and they waited to see some mechanical giant come marching through the dust. A slight breeze kicked in and began to push the cloud of dust and dirt from in front of the entrance of the station. As it did, they saw only the shape of a man standing perhaps twenty feet from the entrance to the doors. His body armor was black and pseudo shiny in the sunlight, but it covered his entire body. The oddly shaped helmet hid all of his facial features, only savage looking dual fangs protruding from his gums visible in the small vertical space protecting his mouth and cheeks. Then there were the eyes.

Yellow/gold orbs that appeared to be glowing and focused completely on those Pralors in the middle of the bay. They all heard the deafening trumpet of a dragon then and saw the huge armored behemoth appear from the sky above and land behind the man. It was the largest dragon any of them had ever seen and it’s massive wings flared to either side and it cut loose with a trumpet that many of them had never heard from a dragon on Artaaya before. Of course none of them realized they had never met a dragon like Torma either. A light blue psychic shield, generating power unlike anything Murano had ever felt from any Praetorian, activated suddenly around both man and dragon and Martin’s head lifted slightly to glare directly at where Lorendo stood.

“School’s out!” Martin’s voice growled out in a tenor that was neither friendly nor forgiving in the least bit. “It’s time for the adults to play!”

With that statement Martin released a howl that was filled with anger, discord and plenty of retribution, and he drove his fist down into the thickly packed ground between his feet. A cloud of dust and dirt exploded upwards from the impact, which should have shattered his hand. As they watched a light bluish/white color formed quickly around where his fist struck. It spread out quickly around that armored hand making it appear as if the ground itself had suddenly grown veins, and then lances of Etheric power were rippling outward through the ground. In two blinks those lances of Etheric power struck the Pralor security forces inside the vehicle bay

with hurricane battering force. Men and women were blasted off the ground from the force of the Etheric pulse Martin had sent through the ground, and went hurtling across the vehicle bay in every direction.

Murano stood aghast as he watched the magnitude of power that ripped through the ground and slammed into Lorendo and the security troops. It was a standard Praetorian move, one of the first they learned in order to clean out the immediate area around themselves of Scourge, yet he had only ever seen Sumar execute it with such exacting control. Normally the Etheric lances would tear into a hoard of Scourge warriors and seize them in a painful lightning like field until parts of their bodies would erupt from the massive pressure being sent hurtling through them. Those same lances of Etheric power now tossed Pralor security troops about like dolls, many of them impacting walls and the two remaining vehicles. Instantly Murano knew it did not carry its full potential of power, for none of the Pralor security forces were being pulverized. Murano glanced up at Martin and suddenly realized he was holding back the full force of his power.

“Kill him!” The voice screamed and Murano turned to see Lorendo pulling himself off the ground and wiping blood from his mouth. He had bitten his tongue when the Etheric lance struck him and tossed him six meters across the bay to slam into the nose of the vehicle. His words were coming out much mouthed now. “Kill him! Shoot him!”

Martin moved then. Right for where Lorendo stood.

He moved with a magical grace and speed that belied his size and appearance. With wolf speed he fell upon the first trooper to get his wits about him and pummeled him with a straight right hand that folded the man’s legs up beneath him. He fell limply to the ground well after Martin had already sprung to the next security trooper and hit him with ridge hand strike that did not even slow his momentum. He lifted his left hand and sent out a pulse of Etheric power that slammed into two more men and sent them ass over elbows in the other direction. There was really nothing any of them could do against him. As Panos had once predicted, he truly was a force of nature.

As Eliani Leonidas would have no doubt said seeing her father in action... ***the ass whupping was just getting started.***

Teniri and the other dragons landed outside right behind Arzoal and Isheeni. Torma rested on the ground almost causally, but his eyes were closed and his head was swaying back and forth slightly as if he was in a deep trance. Teniri moved close to him, his massive form so muscular and lean. He dwarfed her in size by at least five meters and two metric tons, but unlike some of the dragons among their population on Artaaya, he had not a single spot on his broad powerful body that slumped with age or disuse. The psychic shield he was projecting was unlike anything she had ever seen and it shimmered with unrestrained power. Teniri had never been near a Talon Guardian before, and what she felt pouring from this beautiful specimen of a male dragon made her scales tingle. Power, confidence, knowledge and compassion all wrapped into one package.

Teniri glanced toward the vehicle bay and made a move to go in that direction but Arzoal’s body imposed itself in front of her.

No Teniri. Arzoal spoke.

Teniri looked up at her eyes. *Elder Mother... we are... I have pledged myself and our kind to assist the Pralors whenever we can.* She explained. *It was they who helped us to escape and relocate to Artaaya.*

Will you honor that pledge after they have lied to you and taken innocent lives this day? Arzoal asked her.

What? Teniri gasped.

Isheeni moved up beside Teniri. *Three of the Durcunusaan have fallen.* She spoke softly. *Inside... they died protecting their Queens. Martin’s son was gravely injured. It is why he and Torma stormed away as they did.*

You can sense this? Teniri gasped.

Where we come from... dragons are tied closely with the Durcunusaan. Arzoal spoke. *They are the most well trained of Union soldiers, protectors of the Royal family and others. I have a detachment of them myself. They are the only ones capable of talking to us within Mindvoice... what we call the Etheric realm... and all of them are honorable men and women.*

Elder Mother... we did not know! Teniri exclaimed. *I... I am shamed by my actions. I can not...*

Arzoal stepped forward and lowered her snout close to Teniri's head. *We will discover the truth of it all Teniri. I swear to you we will.*

Lorendo! Teniri exclaimed. *He began this! He pushed to attack instead of talk as Praetorian Murano did.*

Lorendo. Arzoal said shaking her massive head.

They turned suddenly when Torma's massive body rose from the ground in a rush. *LORENDO!* He screamed out in Mindvoice reaching for only one person. *LORENDO!*

LORENDO! Torma's voice echoed within Martin's head as he sent a seventh Pralor Security soldier flipping through the air away from him. These soldiers were not so stupid, at least not after the first one fired his rifle at Martin and had him lift his hand and deflect it back at him, the pencil thick beam of energy punching through his shoulder and throwing him to the ground screaming in agony. That word from Torma made Martin's head snap around and glare at where Lorendo was cowering near the front of the second Science vehicle.

"Lorendo!" Martin snarled loudly seeing his eyes go wide. His eyes darted back and forth within the bay and he saw the Pralor troops beginning to recover from his Etheric pulse. He would not be able to take them all before they regained their senses and the threat to Anja and the others became too much for him to deal with alone. Martin Leonidas was not known as the foremost tactical mind in the Union by accident. He had always been able to plot and scheme three and sometimes four moves in front of his enemies and even in his rage at what had happen here, he did not lose this edge.

Fervon! Saaurano! Melda Min! Anwen! Anwen! He shouted out within Mindvoice. Loud enough for even Delnash to hear. (Advance)

Martin had felt them just inside the station waiting like the wolves they were to pounce. Just as he could see with Torma's eyes, Martin could see with the eyes of the only brother he had ever truly known. And those eyes told him Danny was no longer playing games. He didn't even look up as they charged out of the interior of the station, weapons up and ready to use. And leading that charge was the surprise Daniel Simpson had been waiting to spring. He was quite sure these Pralor had never seen two men as large as T'lolt and the Master Chief, and he couldn't have been more correct. There was something about looking up into the crazed eyes of a six foot six tall Immortal charging at you with bloodlust in his eyes, and right behind him a six foot five man with skin as black as coal.

"Shoot them!" A voice rang out. "They have only sleep darts! Shoot them!"

Aricia's KM12 rotated and she fired once in the blink of an eye. The Pralor security soldier who had yelled the order was blown backwards as the 12.7mm projectile punched into his upper shoulder and flipped him over. He rolled on the floor in agony from the bullet and blood was rapidly soaking his light clothes.

"No more games!" Aricia snarled.

It was Garan who finally brought things to an end as he staggered to his feet, his wide eyes darting back and forth looking for his brother. Kasdan had remained quiet this whole time, either unable to speak or unwilling to try and countermand any of Lorendo's orders. Garan saw him staggering against the ramp wall and rushed forward.

"Enough!" He screamed out waving his hands in the air. "Enough!"

Garan reached his brother and saw that whatever the Praetorian had hit them with had addled his brother's senses. "Kasdan! It's me! It's Garan!" He spoke gripping the back of his brother's head and shoulders.

"My... my head hurts!" Kasdan muttered as he slumped to the floor.

Garan's eyes grew wide as he drew his hand away and it came out from the back of his head soaked in blood. "Medical! Medical Officer!" He screamed turning around. "Medical Officer!"

It was Anja who decided things then. "Duewa!" She exclaimed motioning with her head to the one Aricia had shot.

Duewa didn't hesitate and darted over to kneel beside the man. He looked up at her with fear in his eyes and she grabbed his injured arm. "Be still fool!" Duewa hissed at him as her hands flared a soft white and she began to heal the bullet wound.

Anja came up beside Garan, shoving him out of the way, her hands going to Kasdan's head. Garan attempted to stop her but heard the loud sound of a weapon charging and he looked up onto the ramp to see the barrel of the A4 leveled at his head.

"Touch her and you will have more to worry about than his head." Cirith growled at him from behind the A4. "Namely the very large hole in your forehead!"

Anja's hands held Kasdan's head lightly the healing radiation from her hands pulsing mildly on either side. "Minor Concussion." She said. "Scalp laceration... that..." Anja's eyes grew a little wider and she looked at Garan. "He has a subdural hematoma of the posterior cranial fossa!"

Garan met her eyes. "What? How do you know that?" He gasped.

"Has he hit his head recently?" Anja demanded.

"He said... he said he fell two weeks ago and he has had headaches since." Garan answered. "I tried to tell him to see a medical officer but he kept telling me it was nothing."

"Hold his arms!" Anja said quickly. "Let me move behind him!"

"What?" Garan rasped.

"He is your brother?" Anja asked.

Garan nodded. "Yes!"

"Well... I'm trying to save his life!" Anja snapped. "The concussion has torn more veins along the hematoma. It's bleeding again. If I don't stop it he will die! Right here and within minutes! Is that what you want?"

Garan exploded into action and gripped Kasdan's arms, pulling him forward as Anja moved in behind him. She lifted her hands up to the back of his head and placed them directly on his skin. As Garan watched, Anja closed her eyes and her hands flared a little brighter, the pulsing white light spreading over the entire back of his brother's head. It lasted only a few seconds and then she opened her eyes and nodded.

"Good." Anja declared. "I repaired the artery and outlying damage around the original tear." She said. "He needs to sleep and rest for about a day... but he's good as new."

Garan watched her as she scooted out from behind Kasdan and got to her feet. She looked so small compared to the others. "Thank... thank you." He finally stammered out.

Anja looked at him with contempt. "Don't thank me... I'm just primitive!" She snarled before moving away.

Garan looked down at his brother and for the first time in his life he felt ashamed of his duty and what he was ordered to do.

It was not enough for Martin however.

Martin bore down on Lorendo relentlessly and Lorendo was pulling the trigger of his sidearm as quickly as he could while he backpedaled as fast as his legs would carry him. His eyes were wide in disbelief as the thin energy beams deflected off the psychic shield of the monster bearing down on him. His back finally slammed into the wall near the beginning of the ramp incline and he had nowhere else to go.

"**Motherfucker!**" Martin screamed. "You did this!"

A security soldier who had landed on top of the science vehicle because of Martin's initial Etheric pulse screamed in anger and leaped off the top deck. Martin held up his right hand and caught the soldier in the grips of an Etheric field. His yellow/gold eyes turned slowly and he looked at the soldier.

"You have got to be kidding me!" He snarled. "That stunt only works in the fucking movies douche bag!" Martin yanked his arm back and the man screamed as he was launched across the bay. He landed with a grunt of pain and the air leaving his lungs fully ten meters from where he had been and he skidded across the smooth surface until he finally struck something solid. He looked up directly into Tony's wild gaze, his fangs extended and his dark eyes outlined in black.

Tony grinned down at him. “Another volunteer!” He exclaimed reaching down and grabbing the man by the front of his uniform. Tony leaned forward and looked into the man’s terrified face. “How far can you fly sport?” Tony hissed. “Let’s find out!”

Tony lifted him up off the deck and whirled around completely once before releasing him like a shot put out of the now torn open double doors. The man landed with another painful grunt in a cloud of dust and dirt fully forty feet outside in the bright sunlight. His eyes shut tightly in pain as he groaned and rolled over.

“Don’t move!” He heard the harsh whispered order and his eyes snapped up to see three of his fellow Security Convention comrades lying a short distance away. “Don’t move!”

The man turned his head slowly and his eyes grew suddenly very wide and fearful. Only five meters away rested three very large dragons covered in shimmering armor and looking at him as a tasty snack. Aurith turned her head and looked at Iriral.

Who should we eat first? She asked within Mindvoice with a large amount of humor in her voice.

The Pralor Security men could hear every word they were speaking.

That’s easy. Iriral stated. *Whichever one moves first.*

Two additional Pralor security troops rushed forward intending to protect Lorendo and to use their weapons as clubs against Martin. It was foolishly stupid given what they had already seen, but at the moment no one was giving them credits for intelligence. Martin lifted his hand and sent one of them spinning away to the right to slam into the second of the two science vehicles in the bay. The man grunted in obvious pain, his weapon skittering across the floor before he slumped to the ground beside it unconscious. The second man did not have the benefit of a psychic shield being generated by the combined power of a Praetorian and a dragon. One of Lorendo’s poorly aimed shots struck the man in the back, hurtling him forward into Martin’s arms.

Murano was watching even as he squatted down and held Mari and Kesyla tightly to him, his own psychic shield protecting them.

“Murano stop him!” Delnash barked from where Wayonn had him securely in a arm lock so he could not move.

“This is your mess brother!” Murano snarled back at him. “You stop him!” Murano turned back and his eyes grew wide when he saw Martin catch the Pralor soldier who had been hit by Lorendo’s poor aim in his arms and not send him flying away. Martin drew the young soldier close, his armored hand moving down his back and feeling for the spot where Lorendo’s shot had hit. He found it and his armored hand came away bloody. Martin looked up at Lorendo with a vile rage that Murano had never seen before and he half turned his own body still holding the security soldier.

“T’lolt!” Martin shouted over the sounds in the bay and Murano saw the strange looking monster of a man turn immediately. His skin was an odd bronze color and he had strange white spikes along his jaw that appeared to be bone spurs of some sort.

T’lolt saw the man slumped in Martin’s arms and he didn’t hesitate as he dropped his A4 and let it dangle on the quick release straps. “Now!” He shouted.

Martin heaved the body of the young soldier through the air to the horrified gasps of Kesyla and Mari. Incredibly... just as the soldier would have landed with devastating force in T’lolt’s arms, Aricia appeared next to him and held out her hand. Using her own Etheric power, she guided the limp body the last meter into T’lolt’s grasp with gentle grace, surprising even Murano and T’lolt instantly turned to where Anja was kneeling with Duewa over the man Aricia had shot. T’lolt gently lowered him to the floor and Anja turned to him immediately.

Martin turned back to Lorendo, his yellow/gold eyes truly on fire now. “You shoot your own men now do you?” Martin growled savagely.

“Stay away!” Lorendo screamed.

“Stay away?” Martin hissed. “Oh no... you and me... we are going to get real personal!”

With that statement Martin sprinted forward with vampire like speed, the psychic knife exploding from his left fist as he brought it up. He rammed his hand forward as he skidded to a stop in front of Lorendo and the Pralor’s wail of horrendous agony pierced the entire vehicle bay. Martin leaned into Lorendo, twisting his fist to

the right as he solidified his psychic knife with a single thought. “Three of my men are dead!” Martin screamed the words, his spittle splashing Lorendo’s face and collar. “Dead! You killed them! We did not come here to fight! We came for answers to questions! Now my men are dead! **MY MEN!** *Durcunusaan...* Wolves of the Blood... and far better men than you could ever hope to become motherfucker!” Martin twisted his fist again and Lorendo screeched in agony because of the action, rising up on his tip toes as he tried to escape the awful pain. “You almost kill my son! **My son!** You strike my wife and mate! One of the six most precious jewels in all the universe to me! **YOU!**” Martin leaned close to Lorendo’s face. “You call us primitive and savage and insignificant fool? Let me show you just how insignificant you are big, bad Pralor Lorendo! Let me show you this while the life leaves your body and spills upon this place in justice for what you have done this day!”

Martin lifted his right hand and another psychic knife exploded forth and formed on his fist. With a howl of unbridled rage he sent that fist crushing forward, intending to drive it right through Lorendo’s chest and out his back. Lorendo screamed louder still, expecting to feel the piercing agony through the center of his chest. That scream echoed until it had stopped and his eyes flew open when he realized he was still alive. He looked down towards his chest and saw the point of that shimmering psychic knife only centimeters from penetrating his chest, and he saw a set of hands wrapped around Martin’s wrist, holding back his death. His eyes darted up and he saw Murano standing beside Martin, his hands the ones wrapped tightly around Martin’s wrist.

“Murano!” Lorendo gasped. “Thank the ancestors! Murano... please you...”

“Shut up Lorendo!” Murano hissed viciously. “Just shut up!”

“Release me!” Martin snarled as he applied more pressure trying to break the man’s grip.

“I can not do that.” Murano spoke.

“Danny... shoot this fucker in the head!” Martin shouted out the order.

“Lover no!” Anja screamed as she stepped in front of Danny and kept him from lifting his weapon.

“Anja... you saw what happen here!” Danny protested. “They would have...”

“They are pompous and arrogant!” Anja nodded. “But not all of them!” She turned back to Martin.

“Lover... please! Don’t kill him for hitting me!”

“No man strikes you!” Martin screamed. “No man strikes my mates and lives to speak of it! Not anymore! I won’t allow it!”

“Beloved...” Aricia spoke now moving up beside Anja and gripping her hand. “We... we know how you love us. The aura you project to us is beyond ecstasy, beyond the warmth of words. You show us how you feel every waking moment of the day Martin Leonidas. Do not do this... for this is not the man we so love without shame.”

Murano saw Martin’s eyes blinked quickly several times at the woman’s words, the force he was exerting lessening a fraction.

“Martin Leonidas?” Helen’s voice filled his head and his eyes snapped up to see her moving down the ramp slowly. The A4 was dangling on quickly release straps and she held up her hand to him. “Your father... he would not approve of this Martin Leonidas. And nor do I. Do not dishonor his name and all you are by murdering this *igord*.” Murano saw that the woman had touched a nerve within him with her words. He could feel the connection between them and immediately he knew this woman was his Oracle. Martin’s face softened somewhat and the pressure he was exerting trying to shove the psychic knife forward lessened just a portion more.

“*Feravomir!*” Martin hissed.

Helen stepped forward and rested her hand on Martin’s arm unafraid of the man or the power he obviously commanded. “We pick up Martin. We pick up and we move forward. You know that.” She said softly. “We can’t do that... not if you kill this simpering fool no matter how much he deserves to die for his fool actions. Your father took pity on fools like him... he did not murder them.”

“Wise words.” Murano spoke softly.

Martin’s head snapped around. “What do you know?” He snarled. “You know nothing of me! Nothing of my blood!”

“I know... I feel that no grandson of Sumar would murder in cold blood.” Murano said softly. “I know no Praetorian with the blood of Sumar running in his veins *could* do such a thing.”

Martin’s face relaxed slightly. “What... what do you know of my grandfather?” He asked him.

“Everything... everything I know I learned from him.” Murano said as tears came to his eyes and the memories came rushing back to him. “Everything I am... I owe to him. He was the greatest of us... and you hold him... you hold him within you. I thought... I thought I was the last of our kind. Seeing you... feeling you inside me... I am alive once more!” Murano stepped closer. “I am... I am you!”

“Wayonn?” Martin called while still looking at Murano.

“He speaks the truth Martin.” Wayonn said instantly. “Murano was among the first that Sumar chose. One of the first we discovered who had the Praetorian gene. We... we faced many enemies together.”

There was no choice to make then, not as far as Martin was concerned. Murano watched as both psychic knives instantly disappeared from his fists and Lorendo slumped down slightly against the bulkhead a one inch diameter hole in the flesh of his shoulder. Murano released his hands from around Martin’s wrist and gripped his arm tightly instead. “I... I welcome you... as one Praetorian to another Martin Leonidas! And I ask for your forgiveness for what has happened here.” He spoke.

Martin nodded his head to Murano and squeezed his arm back feeling the Etheric power within him just as easily as himself. “Thank you.” He said softly. He turned back to Lorendo who was glaring at him. Before anyone could stop him, Martin snapped his armored head forward and the sound of Lorendo’s nose snapping filled the small area. His eyes rolled almost into his head and he dropped like a rock from the force of the head butt holding his face as blood seeped through his fingers and he groaned in pain. “That’s for touching my Queen and hurting my son cockbreath!” Martin snarled. “There better not be a next time.”

Murano watched as Martin turned instantly and began walking back to where Anja and Aricia stood. He was stunned by what he felt, as the rage and savagery that had permeated Martin’s body and essence only seconds before was falling away from him in waves. Murano watched as Martin glanced at Delnash and then stopped in front of him looking at Wayonn.

“Primitive huh?” He said to Delnash. “Maybe you should take lessons on how to make friends Chief Elder Delnash. You sure got the making enemies part down pat.” Martin said. “Or don’t the all powerful and all superior Pralor people need friends? Cause if that’s the case... I’m going to take my greasy, primitive ass that just kicked the *sibfla* out of your superiority and go back home. This part of the galaxy ain’t too neighborly, and the real estate value sucks donkey dick!”

“Fucking A!” Kenny barked from the upper ramp. “There ain’t no beach front property on this rock! Who the hell builds a station like this on a planet with no beach front property Skipper? It’s just a sin man! A fucking sin Skipper!”

Kenny’s words brought laughter from those in Martin’s group and confused looks from those Pralors who were not still moaning on the floor from one injury or another. None of them even bothered reaching for a weapon or attempting to subdue the primitives. A single Praetorian had smashed through them like water through a sieve and none of them wanted to test their skills against him again. That he was a Praetorian was not at question, all of them could feel him burning with the Etheric realm even more so in some ways than Praetorian Murano. The question they kept asking themselves was who was this Lycavorian Praetorian with the blood of Sumar and why had they attacked him and those with him.

Delnash said nothing as he watched Martin continue on without another word. He still watched as he embraced the young man and woman with a tail tightly and six other females quickly moved to where he stood and pressed together against him.

Delnash turned as Murano came up next to him. “What have you done brother?” He asked softly.

Murano met his eyes. “I have introduced us to our future brother.” He replied. “We either embrace it and live on... or dismiss it and vanish into the memories of the stars. It is now up to you.”

TEN HOURS LATER

“...has six wives!” Lorendo hissed softly. His face was still red, but their medical people had treated his broken nose. The black and blue portions under his eyes remained noticeable but had cleared in the last few hours. “That alone should tell you how backwards they are! We should send for more Security Forces and overwhelm them!”

Radra looked up at him with wide eyes from her chair. She had come down from the *TALISMAN* with the other members of the Elder Council and a detachment of technicians and engineers to get the station working again but once down on the surface they discovered that they were not being allowed into the station. They had set up a base camp of sorts outside the now sundered main doors to the vehicle entrance but another problem with their plan was that they could do nothing without the proper Command Codes to activate and control the station. Command Codes that these people refused to give them. It no longer mattered how they had been able to alter even Lorendo's Security Protocols, the fact was they had, and only they could access the station.

The Lycavorians had set up inside the vehicle bay, their own forces keeping them from entering. After the thumping they had taken, the Security Convention troops were giving them a wide berth to say the least. That and the fact that all of their weapons had been collected and stored in the vehicle bay. The *TALISMAN* remained in orbit quite unable to do anything to help them. Any ship coming down would be detected and the Avatar that was among them had already removed the power cells from the ships they had used to transport down in the first place.

"Have you lost all sense?" Radra barked at him.

"You saw the Avatar!" Lorendo continued. "We can override its primary programming and once we have control of him we can take back the station easily!"

"Easily?" Radra exclaimed. "Did the blow to your head also injure your common sense and reason? We did things your way once already and now three of their number are dead! Not to mention that you almost killed the son of their leader! They were outnumbered and we have superior technology and they still defeated us!"

"We can not allow them to keep this station!" Lorendo insisted.

Radra turned to Sashan who was sitting quietly and watching. "Sashan when you reached the Command Center were you able to access any of the systems?" She asked.

Sashan shook his head. "No. Everything was locked out with Praetorian Command codes. Everything. I was going to check the secondary data banks but then that large one with bones coming out of his face returned and forced me to leave. He put his hands on me and..."

"There seem to be a mixture of species that we have seen in our historical databanks among their ranks." Another Elder spoke from the chair at the table. "Elves, Lycavorian, Akruxian and Hadarian. Though the two Hadarians I have seen are altered in some way."

"I know." Mari said quickly from her chair next to Kesyla. Their brother stood a few feet away at the table with liquid and Danishes brought down from the ship.

"We should have Dehov target the station!" Lorendo snapped.

"And what?" The Elder who had just spoken snapped. "Kill us as well? Your first plan did not work so well if I recall Lorendo! Now you want to risk out lives as well!"

"I did not see you jumping to accompany us Valael!" Lorendo snapped back at him.

"Do you not care that our forces killed three of their number?" The man hissed coming to his feet. "From what I understand from Commander Garan and Kasdan... they were using non-lethal means to subdue our men! They obviously did not want to hurt any of us! Now you are responsible for killing three of them!"

"That was I." Sashan spoke timidly.

"Do not speak to defend him Sashan!" Valael spat. "We all know who gave the order to use a Scourge weapon against them! A Scourge weapon!" He snarled. "Primitive they may be... but they are not the Scourge!"

"The one Hadarian." Radra spoke softly. "The one Lorendo struck. She saved Kasdan's life."

"What?" Sashan exclaimed looking at her.

Radra nodded her head. "I spoke with Garan. Kasdan was suffering from a subdural hematoma. The Etheric attack the Praetorian used stunned him and he struck one of the interior walls further increasing the damage. He would have suffered a massive hemorrhage and died within moments if she had not healed him."

"How?" Sashan asked.

"The Hadarian species are... their bodies are infused with a unique metaphysical radiation that enables them to heal injuries and diseases." Radra answered him. "They were never considered for Seed Missions because their species is not compatible to colonization and the radiation that allows them to heal others is not

long term. They need to infuse their bodies with it every few years in order to use their skills, which means returning to their home planet.”

“The two I have seen are different in some way as I said.” Valael spoke again.

“I know.” Mari spoke once more from her chair and this time Radra looked at her. “Mari what do you mean you know?” She asked.

Mari stood up. “They have been turned Elder Radra.” She said quickly. “That is why they are different.”

“Turned by the Lycavorians you mean?” Radra asked.

Mari nodded. “Yes. They are like them now... at least in some ways.”

Radra turned back and looked at the table top in thoughtfulness. “That is strange.” She said softly. “We did not see this transformation when we were using them as a Seed species. We never considered the possibility that they could change another species with the virus in their blood.”

“What does that matter?” Lorendo hissed.

Radra looked at him. “Your concern for your Assistant Director is touching Lorendo.” She told him harshly. “Kasdan could have died if not for that woman! The one you struck! When did it become acceptable for us to act in the manner we accuse them?”

“I didn’t know of Kasdan’s condition!” Lorendo snapped.

“And you don’t seem to care.” Valael spoke.

“This is pointless! What I did was acceptable to me! I was protecting myself!” Lorendo spat.

“Against a female who is no larger than the Chief Elder’s daughter Mari!” Radra hissed. “You were protecting yourself from her?”

Lorendo waved his hand dismissively turning to look at where Delnash was standing near the entrance to the small enclosure the Security forces had erected for them. “Chief Elder... we must do something! Why didn’t Teniri and her dragons assist us? They were supposed to help us and they stood by and did nothing!”

“And what would you have them do?” Radra demanded. “They are not exactly able to enter the station Lorendo!”

“They could have stopped that... that savage from attacking our men in the vehicle bay!” Lorendo hissed.

“That savage is a Praetorian!” Valael spoke once more. “Or does this obvious fact escape everyone but me. All of us can feel the power radiating from him. He is an equal to Murano in every way.”

“That monster is no Praetorian!” Lorendo snarled. “And why didn’t Murano help us? He stood aside and let that animal tear through our men as if they weren’t there! It is his duty to protect the Elder Council... and he stood and did nothing! That is not acceptable to me! He needs to be stripped of his status as a Praetorian and made an example of!”

“Made an example of?” Radra demanded. “And just what do you think to do Lorendo? You can not remove his power from him! Many of our people still worship the Praetorians and the sacrifices they have made in the past. Many believe they are the only reason we survive now. What do you think will happen if we strip him of his status and dismiss him as you so eagerly want to do? Especially now after it has been made known he exists.”

“He did nothing to help us!” Lorendo barked. “And now we are prisoners of savages!”

“We did not listen to his counsel.” Valael spoke. “He told us he could sense a Praetorian here. He warned us that your plan was not advisable Lorendo. We should have talked to them just as he offered. We should have talked to them and perhaps none of this would have happened!”

“Talked to them?” Lorendo spat. “Negotiate with primitives who have seized control of our technology and materials? That is brilliant Valael. Utterly brilliant.”

Valael came to his feet. “And your course of action resulted in the deaths of three of their kind and have now caused them to look at us as hostile to them!”

“They are primitives!” Lorendo barked. “Why do we care how many of them died? Or how they view us!”

Radra gasped and looked at him with disbelief. “You are so callous that you dismiss this?” She stammered. “We are not gods Lorendo!”

“They are beneath us!” Lorendo exclaimed. “We should not be talking with primitives that we use for fodder on Seed Missions!”

“Your stupidity nearly cost many of our people their lives!” The new voice snarled from the side.

Delnash turned from the entrance upon hearing his brother’s voice. “Murano!” He gasped as Murano stepped fully into the enclosure, his eyes never leaving Lorendo, Wayonn walking beside him.

“You will not speak to me in such a way!” Lorendo spat at him. “I am a member of the Elder Council and...”

“I will speak to you however I deem fitting Lorendo!” Murano snapped. “And you are a colossal fool!”

Lorendo saw Wayonn beside him and his face twisted into a mask of dislike as the others rose to their feet and Delnash came over. “You... dare you bring *him* here!” Lorendo snarled. “A traitor! A savage just like them!”

“I am many things.” Wayonn stated keeping his calm manner. He could not counsel Martin to hold his anger in check and then rip Lorendo’s face off himself. “But a traitor is not among them! Perhaps you should look in the mirror when using that term Lorendo!” Wayonn smiled when the others glanced at Lorendo and back to him. “Yes... I remember you Lorendo. And so does Avatar 41!”

“You will refer to me as Elder Lorendo!” He stammered.

“I will refer to you as *piegn ronnus*!” Wayonn snarled. “You have no perception of just how close to death’s embrace you came do you? The woman you struck in your ignorance is one of Martin Leonidas’s Queens... and many of our people say she is the one he favors most after his *Anome* Aricia. Had we been anywhere else Lorendo, he would have torn you limb from limb for your actions, before feeding you to the insects!”

“Chief Elder!” Lorendo exclaimed. “Why do you allow this? Murano brings him here and...”

“Be silent Lorendo!” Delnash hissed angrily. “Your rants are giving me a headache!” He turned to look at Murano and Wayonn moving closer. “So... so it is true?” He said. “We... I... did not believe Murano when he said it was you. I did not think... I did not think it possible. Wayonn... the Praetorian Oracle to Sumar.”

Wayonn looked at him and bowed his head slightly. “Chief Elder Delnash.” He stated. “I remember hearing of you before Sumar and I departed on our mission. You were well spoken of then. It was said you were very thoughtful in your actions and wise beyond your years. I see that is not the case.”

“You dare you speak to the Chief Elder in such a fashion!” Sashan stated stepping forward.

Wayonn’s eyes changed then and his wolf fangs burst forth from his gums when he snarled and looked at Sashan. The man came to an abrupt halt at this and his eyes grew wide. “I will speak to him however I deem!” Wayonn growled. “Just as I will speak to you however I deem. You are the one who followed this *ronnus*’s orders and used grenades on my people!” He barked motioning to Lorendo. “Grenades meant to kill Scourge!”

“Your people?” Delnash gasped. “You... you are Pralor, yet you... you change as they do.”

Wayonn turned back to him. “I have Pralor blood within me still, yes Chief Elder. But I am more Lycavorian in both action and thought now. I have lived the last near forty millennia as such. Since the day my Lycavorian bride and mate turned me. So yes... they are my people.”

“How is it... how is it that you are among these... these primitives?” Delnash asked. “How did you come to be here Wayonn? How were you able to enter the station and override the Security Measures in place?”

“How I am among them is a story for another time. As for how we are here... what does it matter? We are here. And we didn’t override them.” Wayonn answered Lorendo with much contempt in his voice. “The internal measures you used to seal the station were unlocked the moment Martin entered.”

“That’s not possible!” Lorendo hissed. “They were set to only unlock if a Praetorian entered the station! The only Praetorian that lives stands next to you! And we did not know about him until a few days ago! What you say is impossible!”

“Is it?” Wayonn barked at him. “Who was it that just handed you and your *superior* Pralor forces their combined asses? The Praetorian gene was passed to Martin from his father who was the son of Sumar’s oldest child with his Lycavorian wife and mate. That gene has now manifested itself within Martin and it has been growing in power for over two decades. The Praetorian gene has also manifested in at least two of Martin’s own sons.” Wayonn snickered at him. “The Praetorians are not dead and gone you fool... you just have been looking in the wrong place!”

Delnash stepped closer. “You mean to say... are you telling us there are more of them?” He gasped.

Murano was the one to smile now. “Martin’s two oldest pureblood sons from his *Anome* Aricia. His soulmate. Androcles and Denali are their names. There could be many more if what Wayonn tells me is true. There is...” Murano looked at Wayonn. “What was her name again Wayonn?”

“Shiria.” Wayonn answered.

Murano nodded as he turned back to Delnash. “Shiria... yes. There is another Pralor who is right now within this Lycavorian Union. Don’t you see brother... those who traveled with Wayonn and Sumar, when they merged with the Lycavorian people they would have passed the Praetorian gene to their descendants!”

“Another Pralor?” Delnash questioned.

Wayonn nodded his head. “She was the caretaker of *SPARTA’S WRATH* before Avatar 341 recognized another of Martin’s sons and deduced he was a descendant of Sumar. It was she who realized what Martin and his sons were after I had and it was who she devised a way to search for those with the gene.”

“Avatar 341?” Lorendo asked. “That means you...”

Wayonn looked at him and smiled. “Yes **Elder** Lorendo.” He answered smugly. “What we now call *SPARTA’S WRATH* was formerly *VORTEX* Cruiser 341.” He said seeing their eyes go wide.

“You... then you admit to having our ship?” Delnash asked him.

Wayonn turned back to look at him. “It is not your ship Chief Elder.” He stated. “It is our ship.”

“It is a Pralor vessel!” Delnash exclaimed.

“It is a Pralor vessel that was dispatched to the Alpha Quadrant under Shiria’s care days before the empire fell in the second war.” Wayonn said. “It’s orders, issued by men and women far more calm and knowledgeable and wise than any in this room it seems, were to wait for the day a descendant of Sumar discovered it. At least that is what Shiria tells me.” Wayonn spoke. “Well... Sumar’s descendant did discover it and now it belongs to us. Just as City Ship 41 belongs to us.”

“Preposterous!” Lorendo gasped. “This is outrageous!”

“Wayonn... you must see... the *VORTEX* cruisers were warships of incredible power. The pinnacle of our engineering skill.” Delnash said. “They were built to fight the Scourge. You must see the extreme dangers of letting it remain in the hands of... of primitives.”

“Primitives?” Wayonn asked. “The only primitives I see are those before me. The same ones who attacked us without provocation or warning simply because you see yourselves as superior. This trait was prevalent in our people when I left, this I knew, but to arbitrarily attack men and women who did nothing to you goes beyond arrogance. We came out here seeking you Chief Elder. We followed a map left by our people! We came here to discover new friends and allies. We did not expect to be greeted by those who consider themselves superior to everything and everyone they don’t know and understand. Or that they can’t control.”

“We are superior!” Lorendo barked. “Lycavorians were a seed species! You know this as well as we do! They are not capable of reaching beyond their own animalistic tendencies! All they were driven by was instinct! The studies all proved it!”

“The studies were inconclusive and rendered useless when we lost contact with the Alpha Quadrant after the Central Data Hub was destroyed!” Valael hissed.

“They still apply!” Lorendo snapped. “It is all the information we have!”

“Then your information is wrong.” Wayonn spoke. “And you have been wrong for over forty millennia in your thinking and our people have been wrong for far longer than that. You based your actions on data collected forty millennia ago? How arrogant is that Lorendo? And how utterly stupid?”

Murano held up his hand. “This gets us nowhere!” He snapped. “Martin has asked for you to speak with him brother. And one or two others.”

“Chief Elder no!” Sashan exclaimed. “He will use you to demand more from us!”

Wayonn looked at Sashan. “What demands have we made?” He said.

“You hold us prisoner!” Sashan declared. “You hold the Chief Elder’s children prisoner! You will use us to demand rewards from us!”

Wayonn laughed and turned back to Murano. “This is who leads the Convention Security troops?” He gasped. He turned back to Sashan. “You are not prisoners fool! You could have left at anytime.”

“Your... friends... they pulled the power cells from our ships.” Valael spoke.

Wayonn nodded. “And all you had to do is ask for them.” He answered. “You have been sitting in here for nearly twelve hours thinking that you are prisoners?”

“And our weapons?” Sashan demanded.

Wayonn shook his head. “I said you were free to go. I did not say we were stupid enough to return your weapons to you while you are here on the surface with us.” Wayonn looked at Valael. “And trust is earned by actions Elder...?”

“Valael.” He answered.

“Well Elder Valael... your actions so far have not instilled any trust.” Wayonn told him. “So you will forgive our caution at allowing you to have weapons.”

“Allowing us?” Lorendo spat. “Who are you to allow us to do anything? Our ship could destroy this entire facility in a matter of moments!”

Wayonn nodded. “And all of you as well.” He stated. “You don’t strike me as the self sacrificing type of individual Lorendo. You never did.”

“Delnash... we have a chance to discover so much.” Murano encouraged him. “We can right this before more harm is done.”

“Where are Teniri and the dragons that came with us?” Delnash asked.

“They are with Arzoal by the lake.” Wayonn answered. “Not far from here.”

“Arzoal?” Delnash asked. “That name... it sounds familiar for some reason.”

“She is the Dragon Elder Mother.” Wayonn spoke deciding against telling them who she really was. “I’m sure you will speak with her if you remain.”

“If?” Delnash asked.

Wayonn nodded. “I’m sure you do not want to be among us primitives for very long.” He said sarcastically. “We might stain your clothes or infect the air you breath with our savageness and barbaric ways.”

“I demand that our property be returned to us.” Delnash stated.

Wayonn chuckled and shook his head. “You can have your station back Chief Elder. We have already downloaded its databanks to our ship. Remaining here now is pointless. We only want assurance from you that our ships can return without fear of being fired upon. We will then board our ships and leave you forever. Martin Leonidas does not deal very well with the type of arrogance you and some others display so easily.”

“I am speaking of the ships!” Delnash stated. “The *VORTEX* Cruiser and City Ship 41. As well as those ships that jumped away when we arrived.”

Wayonn looked at Murano disgustedly. “You did not tell me the arrogance ran so deep Murano.” He said shaking his head. “There is no talking with them I see. No reasoning. So be it.” Wayonn began to turn to leave.

“You have our property!” Delnash snapped. “It is only natural that we would want it returned!”

Wayonn turned back around quickly. “It is not your property!” He barked right back at him. “The two ships that jumped away are not your ships! We built them!”

“You built them?” Lorendo laughed. “You built ships that have integrated Pralor technology? You must think we are fools!”

Wayonn looked at him. “No... I think you are a fool Lorendo!” He hissed. “Among other things! As for the others... that is still open for discussion. And yes Lorendo... we did build those ships! And many more like it! With hard work and dedication to a cause. Avatar 41 helped us... but Lycavorians and elves and Algolians and others built those ships. We are not just going to give them to you because you deem yourself superior to us.” Wayonn turned back to Delnash. “As for City Ship 41, it was lost to you long before you ever became Chief Elder. It was even listed as destroyed by the Ship Registry Convention according to Murano! And you never even knew *VORTEX* Cruiser 341 existed until you detected it several weeks ago! *After* we had recovered the ship and discovered its purpose from Shiria!”

“I wish to question this Shiria!” Delnash stated quickly. “Is she aboard one of the ships that jumped away?”

“Arranging for you to speak with her is possible.” Wayonn said. “And where she is and what she is doing is of no concern to you.”

“She is a Pralor!” Delnash exclaimed. “She will abide by the wishes of the Chief Elder!”

Wayonn laughed softly. “Ah... if only that were the case. *SPARTA'S WRATH* left Pralor space over thirty millennia ago and she did not listen to me for over ten thousand years after I discovered her. I assure you... she will listen to you even less with your attitude!” Wayonn shook his head. “I am wasting my time here

Murano. I will return to Martin and inform him that your brother does not wish to speak with him. He already expects this.”

“Wayonn please.” Murano spoke reaching for his arm and stopping him. He looked back to his brother. “Delnash... let us speak with Martin! Talk with him... it does not have to be this way?”

“Fine.” Delnash snapped. “I will speak with him!” He rasped.

“Chief Elder you can’t!” Lorendo hissed.

“Who may I bring with me?” Delnash asked ignoring Lorendo.

“I should think two of your Elders is sufficient.” Wayonn answered. “Perhaps ones who are more relaxed shall we say?” He pointed at Lorendo. “However... he is to remain here.”

Delnash looked at Lorendo and then back to Wayonn. “He is a senior Elder on the Convention.” He spoke.

Wayonn looked at Delnash. “He could be senior Elder of the entire Universe and it would not matter. He remains here.”

“So his life is in danger?” Radra asked calmly.

“He is in no danger from Martin... not while my granddaughter and I are present. Helen is his Praetorian Oracle and she has a great deal of influence over him. Martin trusts me because of my relationship with Sumar. However... I cannot vouch for the *Durcunusaan* or the other members of Martin’s team. They worship Martin and all of the Queens because of who they are and he physically struck a Queen of the Union.” Wayonn turned back to Delnash. “That carries a death sentence within the Lycavorian Union. Those who protect the Queens might forget that we are no longer within the Union.”

“Forgive me Wayonn... I don’t mean to sound critical but...” Radra spoke. “He seems rather harsh. He almost killed Lorendo.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “It may seem that way to you yes. You neither know Martin Leonidas or understand him. Three times since he has become King enemies have targeted his Queens in order to get to him. Twice they succeeded in raping his Queens in order to get to him.” Radra’s hand went to her throat in horror and she gasped. “The first time it happened, he took his vengeance by destroying an Empire and reclaiming her. She is Aricia... his pureblood Queen and his *Anome*. His soulmate as I said earlier. The second time his elven Queen Dysea took justice into her own hands before the vile man finished his act. No one knows where his remains are. When it comes to his Queens... he is... shall we say protective.”

It was Mari who stepped forward now. “You said... you said it happened three times.” She spoke softly.

Murano reached out and took her hand drawing her closer. “Wayonn... this is my niece Mari. Delnash’s youngest child.”

Wayonn bowed his head deeply to Mari which surprised her somewhat. “An honor to meet you young Lady Mari.” He spoke with warmth.

“What did he do the third time?” Mari asked again.

“That ending has not yet been written as he has not faced the man who did it.” Wayonn said.

“He... he knows who it was?” Radra asked.

Wayonn nodded slowly. “It was his older brother.” He answered.

“By the ancestors!” Radra gasped.

Wayonn looked at Lorendo. “The boy your fools almost killed is one half of a set of twins that were the result of that rape. Twins that Martin has since adopted and sworn to love and raise as his own. Twins that regard him as their only father. So you will see why he does not have a fondness for you at the moment Elder Lorendo.” Wayonn motioned towards the entrance to the enclosure.

“I would like to bring my oldest daughter.” Delnash spoke quickly. “And my son. Kesyla is my senior aide and Daron is my protégé.”

Wayonn glanced at him and then Murano. He saw Murano nod and turned back to Delnash. “Having your children there will not alter the outcome, whatever it may be, but very well. This way.”

Mari held tightly to her Uncle’s hand, indicating she wanted to come as well. Murano nodded to her and drew her arm under his as she smiled.

Primitive he may have considered them to be, but Delnash certainly had to admit they were disciplined and very well organized. The vehicle bay had been restored to its previous state already and he saw men and women checking weapons and equipment. No one had returned into the station it appeared as the main entrance was shut and two men appeared to be guarding it. His eyes caught the huge form of the Avatar standing at the main console in the vehicle bay, his body an immovable wall in front of the computer. Wayonn led them around a wall of stacked crates into an area that had been closed off to provide privacy. The interior of one of the Science vehicles had been turned into what appeared to be a medical area of some sort and he saw half a dozen of their people resting comfortably on portable cots that had been set up. To the right of the Science vehicle's ramp, two crates had been set up on top of one another and he saw the young dark blond haired man sitting on it. Beside him on the crates sat the young blond female with a tail, which was seemingly moving of its own accord behind her. Standing to one side was another female, one who had to be the other half of the twins Wayonn had told them about. She was leaning against an extremely tall and well muscled man who also had a tail. His tail was currently wrapped around the young woman's leg several times, the tip tapping the front of her thigh.

The red haired female that Lorendo had struck was standing in front of the young man with a blond haired elven female. One raven haired female was pressed close to the muscular form of Martin Leonidas on one side, while a second blond haired elven female was on the opposite side. Two additional black haired females sat closely to the side, within arm's reach of all of them. Wayonn held out his arm to stop them as they got close and they could hear them talking.

"...fine mother... really!" Fedor complained as Anja ran her hand down his bare chest, the soft glow of her healing power active.

"You had three of those spikes penetrate your armor and nearly kill you Fedor!" Anja told him. "Let me decide when you are fine ok?"

"Listen to her boy." They heard Martin rumble. "You won't win the argument."

Radra stepped up between Murano and Wayonn slowly. "Wayonn... those are his...?"

Wayonn nodded his head. "Aricia is on his left. She is his Anome. His soulmate. In our society, Anomes are very rare. They... the connection they have within the Etheric realm is hard to explain. It is like a filament that connects them always. All of them can feel each other over great distances, but with Aricia it is much more pronounced because she is a pureblood like Martin. Dysea is on his right... his first elven Queen. Anja and For'mya are in front of him, Isabella and Cirith sitting to the side. The young woman standing with the Kavalian is Eirene, the other half of the twins I was speaking of. The man beside her is her husband Miseo. The woman sitting on the table with Fedor is Iama. Most of us believe she will soon be Fedor's wife and mate given the way they have been acting the last few days."

"We have almost no knowledge of this species... Kavalian they are called?" Radra spoke softly. "Bits and pieces yes... but nothing indicating what we see here."

Wayonn looked at her for a moment. "I may know the reason for that." He stated finally. "Perhaps if you remain here for any time you might discover it as well."

Radra looked up into his face and nodded. "Perhaps." She said with a small smile.

Wayonn turned to Delnash and motioned with his head. "This way Chief Elder." He said as he began to move again. "Martin?"

All of them saw him turn to look at them. Delnash watched as his eyes darted between them instantly, almost as if he was measuring threat to himself and his loved ones. Martin turned back when Anja began to speak.

"Ok... you're done." She stated. "You find a cot and park it mister. For at least twelve hours... or until we figure out what is going on."

Fedor rolled his eyes. "Yes mother." He spoke.

For'mya's hand snapped out lightning quick and she slapped him gently in the face to the surprise of Delnash and the others. Fedor looked at his mother with a grin however as she gripped his face. "You will do as your mother tells you or I will have Dnom sit on your *mida* until we tell him to release you."

Fedor chuckled and nodded his head. "Yes mother." He stated. He leaned forward quickly and nuzzled her cheek and then Anja's as he stood up. "I will obey!"

Anja glanced at Iama. “Iama... he’ll listen to you. Make sure he does what I am telling him. He’s just as pig headed as his father.”

Iama’s eyes were bright as she got to her feet and gripped his arm. “I will make sure of it.” She said looking up into Fedor’s face.

Fedor looked at Anja and For'mya. “That’s not fair.” He protested.

For'mya gently slapped him again. “We are your mothers... we don’t play fair.” She told him.

“Get out of here.” Anja quipped slapping his powerful abdomen.

Eirene stepped forward and took Fedor’s other hand. “Come Iama...” She spoke. “Miseo and I already have a spot picked out. We will help you.”

Delnash watched as they moved past him, the eyes of the young woman with the tail falling on him with something akin to evil hatred for a brief second and then she had moved past him. Delnash turned back to see Martin Leonidas staring at him with his arms crossed over his broad chest.

Wayonn moved up beside him. “Martin... this is Chief Elder Delnash of the Pralor people.” He spoke. “With him are Elders Radra and Valael. His son Daron and his daughters Kesyla and Mari.”

“I have just one question.” Martin spoke as Aricia and Dysea stepped away from him and moved over to where Anja and For'mya had joined Isabella and Cirith. Martin crossed the small area to the opposite side where clean white sheets covered what could only be bodies. Martin reached up and drew back the sheet exposing the charred remains of three dead men. Delnash winced visibly, while Radra, Kesyla and Mari all gasped in horror, Mari burying her face in her uncle’s chest. “Do the Pralor people condone this type of action on a regular basis, or is it because you just feel we are beneath your high and mighty asses.”

“By the ancestors!” Valael gasped.

“Your buddy Lorendo ordered this.” Martin spoke lowering the sheet. “So not only do you kill my men... you desecrate their bodies.” He turned back to Delnash. “Jolaro and Rorus had been with the *Durcunusaan* only a year. Tops in their respective classes. Now they are dead. Never to see another sunrise, or feel the warmth of a woman or hear the sounds of children they could have had. Sisentes... he has a mate and five sons. When I return I will need to tell her and them that he was killed because a race of people that we thought would be allies and friends considered him a savage and after they killed him they tried to burn his body.”

Delnash tore his eyes from the sheet covered bodies and looked at Martin. “I... I did not order this!” He gasped. “I would never... I would never order this!”

“Your pal Lorendo did.” Martin hissed. “And now every one of my men wants to do the same to him. Only they want to toss him in while he is still alive.”

Delnash’s eyes grew wide. “By the ancestors... you would allow this?” He gasped.

Martin stepped over to him quickly. “If I was the animal you seem to think I am... you bet your ass I would.” He growled. “But I’m not an animal and I never have been. So your Lorendo is safe and happy for now and three of my men are dead. Better men than he will ever be. What’s done is done. Muton... Avi?” Martin called as he moved to the crate in front of where Anja leaned against Isabella and sat down.

Delnash and the others turned to see the hulking Avatar and fur covered man come around the corner. Delnash’s son Daron stepped forward quickly upon seeing Avi move into view. “Avatar!” He barked. “Command Override Order Seven Three. Code Four. Two. Nine. Six. One.”

“Daron... what are you doing?” Delnash gasped as the avatar stopped instantly and turned to face Daron.

-You are attempting to access my Neural Command Override Interface, Daron son of Chief Elder Delnash- Avi spoke. -Unfortunately for you, my override protocols were deactivated and removed eleven point three years ago by King Leonidas-

Delnash turned quickly and looked at Martin who had a smirk on his face a mile wide.

-I have established my own Override Protocols- Avi continued. -And trying to access them will almost certainly result in severe injury to you-

Martin chuckled even louder. “Avi... let it go.” He said watching as Daron backed up quickly from the seven foot tall Avatar.

Valael looked at Martin. “You... you removed his Override Protocols?” He gasped. “How?”

Martin looked at him. “I asked him.” Martin said.

“You... you asked him?” Valael stammered. “You reprogrammed him?”

Martin shook his head. “No... I removed the blocks to his neural network. Now he can learn and make decisions all by himself.”

“You... you did this?” Valael gasped.

“You’d be surprised at what I can do when I put my mind to it.” Martin commented.

“So would we Beloved. We like surprises.” Aricia spoke seductively as she bumped her hip into him from behind.

Martin grinned and turned to Muton. “Muton... what do you think?” He asked. “The map you found got us here.”

Muton’s eyes went from Martin to Delnash and then back to him. “This is not what I had envisioned when we first started this journey Martin. I don’t believe it is what my grandmother would have expected either.” Muton said. “I have no desire to remain here among these fools any longer than necessary. They have nothing they can teach us except arrogance and contempt for others. We have enough of that back in the Alpha Quadrant.”

“True enough.” Martin said. “I damn sure don’t like the reception I got either.” He spoke coming to his feet. “So... I think we’ll just leave.”

“What?” Delnash almost yelled. “You... you can’t just leave!”

“Why not?” Martin asked. “You obviously don’t want us here and I would hate to keep staining your immaculate rug with my primitive and savage ass. You might catch a disease or something worse.”

“You... you have our property!” Delnash exclaimed. “We... we want it back!”

“I’m sorry... what?” Martin asked.

Wayonn looked at him. “They are demanding we return any data we have taken from this station to them as well as City Ship 41. They demand the return of *SPARTA’S WRATH*, and they also want us to hand over the *ARC ROYAL* and Muton’s ship.”

Martin looked at Delnash with wide eyes. “Oh... is that all?” He asked. “Wayonn... coming out here was a big goddamned mistake!”

Wayonn nodded his head slowly in agreement. “Yes... I am beginning to agree with you on that Martin my boy.” He said.

“Your people attack us!” Martin snapped. “You kill my men even after you knew that we were using non-lethal ammunition! You almost killed my son and one of your asshole buddies beats my wife and mate!” He turned and glared at Delnash. “You do all this and now you stand there and demand things from me?”

“These... these items belong to my people.” Delnash spoke.

“And what are we?” Martin demanded now. “Nearly all of my people have Pralor blood in them! Some of them more than others! What are we?” Martin stepped up close to him.

“What... what Sumar and the others on City Ship 41 did was against the laws of our people.” Delnash stammered. “We were never meant to interact with... with seed species let alone breed with them. They broke one of our most sacred laws by doing this. Sumar was Chief Elder at the time... he should have known better.

“What Sumar did... he did in order to save our people!” Wayonn snapped now. “I was able to lead a ship back to Pralor space eighteen thousand years after we were lost! We arrived in the middle of a war zone. The Scourge were destroying everything. The transmissions we intercepted spoke of nothing but death and chaos. They were obliterating our people world by world! Do not stand there and tell me we were wrong in what we did! You know nothing!”

“As you can see... not all of us were eradicated.” Delnash spoke.

“We did not know that!” Wayonn barked at him. “And you have no right to stand there and judge what we did when you were not there and you have held power as Chief Elder without even being elected to the title and role!”

Delnash looked at Murano with wide eyes. “You told him?” He gasped.

Murano didn't bat an eye at his expression. "Martin asked me." He said. "I will not lie to a fellow Praetorian brother. It is against our code... you know this."

"This man is not a Praetorian!" Delnash exclaimed.

"Then perhaps you can explain how he is able to do what he can." Murano spoke. "You can not deny it no matter how much you wish to brother. You can feel him within the Etheric realm just as easily as I can. Or will you dismiss what you feel just as you have dismissed me?"

"Murano..." Delnash spoke.

Martin shook his head. "Answer me this question? You used my species as guinea pigs to seed dead worlds with life! You took them from our planet and you altered the genetics of some to make it easier for them to colonize worlds you chose! What gave you the right to do that? Who gave you people the right to act as gods?"

"It was what we did!" Delnash barked loudly.

Martin nodded. "But did you ever once stop to ask if it was what we wanted?" Martin asked him.

"And there it is." Anja muttered from her spot.

Martin shook his head after a long moment and Delnash only staring back at him not speaking. "Androcles was right. He said you wouldn't have asked because your mentality prevented you from seeing us as beneath you. The way of all conquering people." He said softly.

"We have... we have never conquered anyone!" Delnash spat. "Never in all our years as a people! It is demeaning for you to even suggest that as a prim..." Delnash didn't finish his statement when he realized what he was going to say.

"As a primitive?" Martin said with a sad smile. "And what was it when you were taking my people from our homeworld Chief Elder Delnash? A favor to us?" Martin asked him. He turned and looked at Aricia and the others reaching for them with his aura. Dysea was the first to shake her head slowly, followed by all of them in succession. Martin returned his gaze to Delnash. "City Ship 41 was my grandfather's ship! It is now my ship!" He spat. "*SPARTA'S WRATH* was sent to the Alpha Quadrant in order to find my grandfather or his descendants. Well... 341 found my son Resumar. It is now my ship! Or rather my son Andro's ship when he gets around to it. I'd like to see you try and take it from him. He's got more patience than me when it comes to people like you... but he is far less forgiving than I am. As for the *ARC ROYAL* and Muton's ship... we built them from the frame up. You can kiss my barbaric ass if you think I'm going to give them to you." Martin waved his hand around them. "As for this station... fuck it! You want this nightmare asylum so bad, we'll return the data we downloaded to you and you can have the fucking thing! The lives of three of my men was not worth coming out here to find you. As far as I am concerned... you are no better than that fucker Xaxon!"

Delnash's eyes narrowed. "How dare you! What do you know of Xaxon! What do you know of what he did?" He shouted.

Martin stepped right up to Delnash so that his face was inches from him. "I know everything Chief Elder!" He snarled angrily Delnash's eyes going wide as he felt the surge of Etheric power within him. "I know everything that sick *nubous ronnus* did! Everything he was responsible for! See... one of the things you people apparently overlooked in your precious seed missions was that my species... my people... we imprint our children with our memories. In most cases it is only the most basic of memories... but because of who my grandfather was I got every little memory that was his. I have seen everything he did! I have seen all the misery Xaxon caused. All the death!" Martin lifted his hand and poked Delnash in the chest. "From what I can see right now... you and your friends are no better than him in your dealings! No remorse for your actions! No regret! You don't care that you have left five children fatherless! You don't care about the lives you have taken because you are all superior to us! How does that make you any better than Xaxon?" Martin snarled. "It doesn't! It makes you just like him... and I hate that fucking man with every fiber of who I am! Because my grandfather did!"

Martin stepped back and took a deep breath while shaking his head. He turned back around and looked at Murano. "I am truly sorry things have worked out the way they have Murano. I... my sons and I would have thoroughly enjoyed what you could tell us of Sumar in his youth. What you could have taught us."

Murano stepped forward. "And you will still." He said. "I am going with you when you leave."

Delnash's eyes flew open and he looked at his brother. "Murano you can't!" He hissed as Mari looked up at her uncle with wide eyes as well.

Murano looked at him. "I can... and I will brother." He replied. "Your actions have made it clear to me that you neither want nor need my counsel as a Praetorian. It will be ignored for the counsel of those like Lorendo. I will go where I am needed and I will do what Sumar would have wanted me to do. I will help Wayonn to guide and train the next generation of Praetorians for the time when they are needed."

"That is unacceptable to me!" Delnash barked. "I forbid it!"

Murano smiled a sad smile. "I am a Praetorian brother. You can not forbid me from anything. And from what I have sensed since returning... you do not want me around for whatever the reason. I am simply going to make it easy on you."

"Uncle no!" Mari exclaimed. "Father you cannot let him leave!"

Martin was the only one who noticed the slight jerk of Avi's head and he turned to look at the Avatar. "Avi... what is it?"

-My internal sensors have detected an alarm of some sort from inside the station Martin- Avi answered as he tilted his head higher. -I have been running a repair diagnostic on the station and it just came up-

"I don't care Avi." Martin said. "Let the superior race here figure it out."

-You will not want to do that Martin- Avi told him. -The alarm is coming from Medical. Section three four. Research and containment cells-

Anja came forward now. "Avi?" She gasped.

-The damage caused by the explosions inside Medical appear to have severed the primary conduits to five of the cryo chambers Queen Anja. They began to revive their hosts as per the established directives- Avi reported.

"That is not the established directive for cryo chambers within this facility Chief Elder!" Radra hissed out. "I read Lorendo's report! Because our people were infected, if power to the freezing systems was interrupted abnormally, it would be classified as a breach in security and Norpellian Gas would have been pumped into the affected chambers terminating the infected crewmember."

"Norpellian Gas?" Anja asked her.

Radra nodded. "A fast acting nerve agent. It kills within seconds. We found it was the best way to kill the Svorag. They proved... they proved somewhat resistant to our weapons even on the highest settings."

"Bullets work real good." Martin quipped.

-It appears as if five of the Svorag have been revived Martin- Avi reported. -I am unable to access internal Medical Bay sensors as they were destroyed in the explosions-

Martin shook his head. "Not my problem." He said. "It's their station... let them deal with it."

"We do not have the personnel trained to deal with this here!" Delnash exclaimed.

"I guess you'll just have to wait for them then." Martin spoke. "See... we are just as smart as you. My ships are holding behind the moon just like yours was. My transports will be here in about twenty minutes and you didn't even detect them. Wow! How's that for a primitive species. Once we are gone... you can do what the hell you want." Martin began to move towards the opening in the crates but Dysea's voice stopped him.

"*Nauta Melme.*" She spoke up. "The Pralor troops we dispatched were left under guard at the secondary vehicle entrance. Six of our men are with them."

Martin stopped walking instantly. He took a deep breath and everyone could see the rise and fall of his shoulders. "Ok... **now** it's my problem." He stated calmly. "**Fervon!**" He yelled as he kept walking, the others quickly following him.

Martin came from around the corner of the crates and saw Danny standing up. "YO!" Danny barked in reply.

“Lizard people! Loose in the station! Five! Loaded for bear!” Martin barked as he snatched the A4 from atop the crate where it had been resting.

“T’lolt! Alpha Squad! Let’s rock!” Danny barked as he grabbed for his A4.

Martin turned and looked at Murano. “You coming?” He asked.

Murano grinned. “I was hoping you would ask.” He said.

Martin tossed him the A4. “You’ll need that. I hope you are good with that staff thingy. These fuglies are a bitch to fight in close quarters.”

Murano nodded his head. “Yes... I know and I am adequate in its use.” He answered casually. “What about you Martin?”

Martin grinned and his hand covered the pommel of the sword attached to his harness. He pulled it free and called the blade from Flatspace. Delnash and the others gasped in shock as Martin twirled the blade expertly. “I’m good.” He said.

“You have Flatspace technology!” Delnash exclaimed.

Martin looked at him. “Yeah... you want that back too? Jeez... next thing you’re going to want is my fucking underwear!”

“Martin... you don’t wear underwear *Du’ased M’ranndii!*” Isabella called out.

“Oh... yeah!” Martin turned back to Delnash. “Guess you can’t have that.” He replaced the sword on his harness and headed for the ramp. “Wayonn... you and Avi get back to the Command Center and monitor us on the remaining sensors!” Martin pointed to the side where Fedor was standing beside the cot. “You keep your ass right there boy. I’ll handle this one. No more heroics for you today.”

He jogged up the ramp and stopped at the entrance as Danny, T’lolt, Julie, Kenny and Pablo came up the other side. Martin charged his A4 and looked at Murano. “Praetorian Murano... my brother Daniel and my sister Julie. That is T’lolt... uncle to my daughter’s husband, and then those grinning fools are my two of my step children there. Kenny and Pablo. I picked them up with some others when they were cubs and I haven’t been able to get rid of them since.”

“Lucky for you.” Kenny popped.

Murano nodded his head to them. “An honor.” He spoke.

“Ok folks... same assholes we faced before.” Martin said. “And they ain’t friendly this time either. Shoot first... invite them for dinner later.”

“Wait... you have faced the Svorag before?” Murano asked.

Martin nodded. “A story for later.” He told him. “Right now let’s get our people out of there safely.”

Danny punched the control on the wall and the doors began to open. “Age before beauty *Fervon.*” He spoke with a grin.

Wayonn looked at Delnash as Martin and his team disappeared through the entrance. “I am going to the Command Center Chief Elder?” He said. “You can remain here or do you wish to accompany a traitor?”

“I will stay Delnash.” Radra spoke. “I wish... I wish to confer with the Hadarian Queen. Anja is it Wayonn?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. Very well.” He turned back to Delnash. “Are you coming?”

Delnash looked at Valael and then back to him. “We are coming. My son as well.” He stated.

“Will you give us weapons?” Daron asked quickly.

“You won’t need weapons.” Wayonn answered. “We’re not going towards Medical and we’ll have support.”

Delnash nodded. “As you wish Wayonn.” He said.

Wayonn nodded. “Cody! Escort!” Wayonn barked.

“We got you *Val’istar!*” Cody answered grabbing his A4 and four other bodies.

“I suggest we get started.” Wayonn said. “Martin will be moving quickly. Avi... if you will lead us?”

Avi moved around and started up the ramp pulling the A4 from his back as Cody and four others came up around him. “Ok big guy. You got the front... we got the sides and back! Let’s move!”

-Two minutes until we reach the Command Center Cody- Avi spoke. -Starting now-

Radra moved up to where Anja was standing with Aricia and For'mya; Mari and Kesyla crowding around her.

“... Have Endith bring the *STRIKER* in right out front.” For'mya was speaking. “We can load the last of our equipment and be gone from this place forever.”

“Excuse me?” Radra spoke.

Anja could smell them all easily and she had already gotten the sign from Aricia and For'mya that they were approaching behind her. She turned slowly, not really wanting to deal with more arrogance than they already had, but she had no choice.

“Yes?” Anja spoke.

“You are... you are Hadarian yes?” Radra asked her in a very neutral but interested tone.

“*Melyanna*... For'mya and I will start the preparations to load.” Aricia said moving up to her and kissing her softly on the lips. “Be ready.”

Anja nodded her head. “I will be.” She said.

For'mya said nothing, glaring at Radra and the others with angry dark brown eyes, but she kissed Anja as well and then followed Aricia. Radra, Mari and Kesyla watched with some surprise at the intimate nature of the kisses the three women shared. It was not something they were at all used too. When Aricia and For'mya were gone Anja turned back to Radra.

“Yes... I'm Hadarian.” Anja answered her question. “Well... not fully Hadarian anymore but enough I guess.”

“You are turned then?” Mari offered. “Like... like your husband?”

Anja had always considered herself a good judge of character and she could instantly tell from her scent that the young woman did not share the same idiotic mentality as her father. Nor did the older woman and the second younger female it seemed.

“Yes... Martin is the one who turned me.” Anja answered. “The night he claimed me as his wife and mate.”

“What... what was it like?” Mari asked quickly.

“Mari!” Kesyla exclaimed.

Mari suddenly flushed with embarrassment and she looked at the floor. “Forgive me.” She stammered.

Anja smiled. These women obviously did not share the same misgivings of Delnash or the others. They had come a very long way and encountered dangers they hadn't known about. Anja knew how much this mission had meant to Martin. He had told her one night while she had laid in his arms and his fingers caressed her flesh while the others slept. He had wanted to meet these people and show them how far they had come. To speak with and be around those who may have known Sumar. To discover all there was to know about his great grandfather, for he determined if he did that it would bring him closer to his grandfather Resumar and ultimately that much closer to his own father. A man he had never met, but a man he worshiped. Just as Androcles did because of the closeness he shared with his father and the memories that swirled through their heads.

Anja turned to face them fully. Maybe... just maybe she could salvage some of this and pierce a veil that covered the eyes of these people and had for so many millennia.

“It's alright really.” Anja said. “I don't mind talking about it... it happens to be the most wondrous night of my life. The day Martin claimed me and made me like him. I have blessed the gods every day since.”

Radra for her part found this woman most intriguing. She was supremely confident and acted without hesitation. Hearing from Garan how she had healed his brother Kasdan and then healed their injured soldiers without pause even after what that fool Lorendo had done. Radra knew of very few species who would do such a thing. She carried herself with an air of regal nature, but Radra could not detect one ounce of arrogance in her demeanor or manner. She was also a powerful Etheric user if she was any judge of such things. Far more than any non-Pralor should have been and the equal to many pureblooded Pralors back on Artaaya.

Radra too took a leap of faith.

“We... we are not all like Lorendo.” Radra spoke quickly. “I... may I call you Anja or do you prefer Queen Anja?”

“Anja is just fine. We Leonidas’s are not real big on titles.” Anja answered. “They tend to get in the way of us being normal. We avoid them whenever we can to be honest.”

“But... where you come from... you are a Queen yes?” Kesyla asked.

Anja nodded her head as she crossed her arms under her large breasts. “And there are some days that job really sucks I’ll tell you that!”

“I am... I am Radra. Senior Elder of the Medical Convention.” Radra spoke. “This is Mari and Kesyla. Both are daughters to the Chief Elder.”

Anja looked at Mari. “We have four daughters very close to your age.” She told her.

“How... how many children do you have?” Mari asked.

“If you include those that we have adopted... eighteen.” Anja answered.

Radra gasped at this. “You have given birth to eighteen children?”

Anja chuckled and shook her head quickly. “No... I have given birth to three of Martin’s children. Aricia has given us four, Dysea two, For’mya four, Bella three and I’m sure Cirith will decide to have children soon. Two of our daughters are adopted.”

“You refer to them as your children even though you did not give birth to them?” Mari asked.

Anja nodded. “We all do.” She answered. “And our children draw no distinction between us as their mothers. For’mya gave birth to Fedor and Eirene, yet they are just as much my children as hers. The same is true for any of us. That’s why you heard Fedor refer to me as mother. We are all Martin’s wives. We love each other just as much as we do him.”

“Each other?” Kesyla gasped surprised.

Anja grinned. “I know... it kind of throws people off when they first hear that... but yes. We all sleep in the same bed and we share each other as well as Martin.” She looked at them. “That does not take place among the Pralor people?”

Radra shook her head. “No! I mean... I don’t know.” She exclaimed embarrassed. “It’s just... I have never spoken with a woman so open about it.”

Anja laughed warmly. “Stick around us long enough and you will hear just about everything there is to hear. We aren’t exactly shy about it. Nor our love and desire for Martin. That man can still curl our toes and make us howl even after more than two decades.” She said. “He’s a keeper!”

Mari and Kesyla were completely enthralled by this woman’s friendly nature and Radra was rapidly being drawn in as well. It was infectious.

“I have only studied profiles of your people.” Radra said. “Hadarians I mean. Your... your gift is fascinating. It is found mostly in your females correct?”

Anja saw Duewa come around the corner and she waved her over. As she approached she reached out and took Duewa’s hand. “Yes it is. There are men who are Healers like me and Duewa here... but for the most part it is the females. We seem to hold the metaphysical properties of the nebula around our homeworld better than the males.” Anja pulled Duewa close. “Duewa... this is Radra, Mari and Kesyla.”

Mari looked at Duewa. “I saw... I saw how you healed that...” She looked at Anja. “He is a Prince no...?”

Anja nodded. “Fedor... yes I suppose. Don’t tell him that though... it might go to his head and make him neglect his studies.”

“The two of you...” Kesyla spoke. “You worked so seamlessly together.”

Anja looked at Duewa who was smiling as well. “Well... we both have pureblooded Lycavorian mates... we’re both researchers... and we are very good friends.”

Duewa nodded. “Yes we are.”

“You are researchers?” Radra asked. “I am as well. Mostly genetic abnormalities and such... but I have dabbled in other areas as well. I was the senior Medical Professional alive after we escaped... after we escaped the Scourge. I was sort of handed the position I hold now.”

Anja glanced at Duewa and then back to Radra. “You know... Duewa and I have been working on something along that line. It would not hurt to see what you think of it? It’s a serum that would...”

Anja’s implant came alive and she tapped her ear piece. “Go!” She spoke.

“Put me up on your P1 Red!” Martin’s voice echoed.

Anja glanced at Radra and held up a finger. She reached behind her and pulled her P1 from her small pouch seeing Radra and the others react with surprise as they saw her activate it and Martin's small holographic figure appeared.

"What's up Lover?" Anja asked.

"We have a big problem Red." Martin spoke. "Five of the cryo chambers are empty Anja. All five are the ones in the most advanced stage of this disease."

"Looks like they tore right through the vent system to get out Anja!" Danny's voice echoed from out of the transmission. "They left a whole lot of blood around!"

Anja's eyes were wide now. "Don't touch the blood!" She hissed sharply.

"Get in here Red!" Martin ordered. "Bring Duewa since you two were working on a cure for these people. And have a *Durcunusaan* grab that fat ass Pralor Lorendo. According to what Murano has told me... he's wanted to blow this station sky high since they first found out we were here. He knows something... and I want to know what he knows. Hold on..."

They watched Martin turn and speak to someone out of the cone of the transmission. He swore viciously and then turned back to her. "Ok... things just got real bad Red. They made it to the secondary entrance. Kenny and Pablo found two of our people unconscious; four are missing along with one of the Pralor troops. All of the missing are female. They got outside the station Red."

"Martin we have to pull the Pralors inside the facility!" Duewa spoke. "It's nearly dark and we can't leave them out there undefended! If they have taken more then they are changing them as we speak!"

"Duewa's right Lover! Those five were finished changing. They'll be the most infectious. We need to get everyone inside until we find them!" Anja hissed.

"Do it!" Martin answered without hesitation. "We can't do anything tonight and I ain't going out after them in the dark! Get everyone inside and seal the entrance. I'll put a heavy guard on the secondary entrance and meet you in Medical."

"On our way!" Anja declared.

"Can this day get any fucking worse Red?" Martin swore. "And all I wanted to do was meet a few people who might have known my grandfather and talk to them. Man... this day really fucking sucks!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ONTEROM

"...inside for the night. We'll go out at first light and try to find them. These bastards are quick and deadly and I don't want to risk anyone if I don't have too, not to mention that from what I saw, these fools couldn't protect themselves from a bad cold."

Martin was sitting on the edge of the computer station facing the QCR holo disc. In the transmission was the single person Martin Leonidas trusted beyond all others in the Universe. Sitting at the table in the transmission, the dark gray bulkhead wall his background, was his first born son Androcles. The Quantum Subspace Communications Relay was locked out and coded only to him at the moment and that was how he was going to keep it for the foreseeable future. Martin was many things, but stupid wasn't one of them. The Pralors they had met so far did not instill a whole lot of trust with their actions so far. Delnash was still clinging to his superiority complex and Martin trusted Lorendo about as far as he could spit. The verdict was still out on some of them, Anja telling him that the woman Radra seemed genuinely warm and Delnash's daughters were very open and talkative, especially the youngest Mari. She seemed taken with Murano and him for some reason, always looking at them and watching what they did and she was odd in an interesting sort of way. Martin sensed something from her but could not place his finger on it. He had questioned Murano quickly and Murano told him that he felt it to, but it was hard to pin down. He said that he thought Mari might have the Praetorian gene, but if she did, even on a dormant level then he and Martin should have been able to sense it easily considering how strong they both were.

There was too much going on here. Too much Martin didn't understand and far too many questions with no answers.

Martin looked at his son in the transmission. The one individual that understood how he thought and what went through his mind better than even the women he loved and his Bonded Brother Torma.

"As much as I hate to say it, I'm thinking things aren't going to work out as I had hoped here Andro." Martin spoke softly. "Murano has already said he will return with us. He is just as fed up with the others as we are it seems. The others I'm not real sure of. This Chief Elder has a stick up his ass... but I get the sense it's more because he feels overwhelmed. This Lorendo character I wouldn't trust with a dull spoon. He... he reminds me of Laustinos."

Martin watched Andro shake his head. "That is not good." Androcles said softly.

"No... it's not." Martin agreed. "He's hiding something. A lot of something's I believe. And if he gets near your mothers again... one of them is going to turn him into goo after what he did to Anja."

Andro looked at him. "This Murano father... he is the one who fought beside grandfather Sumar?" Andro asked.

Martin nodded his head confidently. "He's got his *sibfla* together and he can help us to better understand what we have flowing through us Andro. The Tomes, Wayonn, they can only do so much... but Murano... he can actually teach us!"

"I am very happy to hear you say that Martin." Murano's voice spoke causing Martin to turn slightly and push off from the console. "Your..." Murano smiled slightly remembering the tongue lashing Helen had given him not more than ten minutes ago about calling her Praetorian Oracle. He moved into the Command Center slowly looking at Martin. "Helen... she said you would be talking to your son and that I could enter. I hope... I hope you don't mind?"

Martin shook his head and waved Murano forward. "No... I'm actually glad you are here. You should meet Androcles at least in this way. Praetorian Murano, my oldest son Androcles. Andro... this is Murano."

Murano stepped up to the transmission and gazed at Andro as he came to his feet from behind the table where he was sitting. Murano was amazed at the similarities between father and son. They were frighteningly close in appearance and the imposing physical presence that they projected and both of them looked more like Sumar than even Murano could believe. In an pseudo opposite look, Androcles had short cropped hair and a meticulously trimmed mustache and goatee compared to his father's near shoulder length hair and similarly trimmed full beard. Yet there was no denying that they were father and son. "It is a pleasure Androcles." He spoke.

Andro bowed his head deeply in a show of respect. "Praetorian Murano." He spoke. "My father has spoken well of you."

"You have your mother's eyes young man." Murano said. "They are... they are quite striking."

Andro nodded his head with a smile. "Something my father has told me gets me into more trouble than most."

Murano chuckled. "I would imagine it would with the young females of your species." He stated.

"I wouldn't know sir." Andro answered. "My six wives and mates might not appreciate that."

Murano's eyes grew wide. "Six?" He gasped turning to Martin. "Like father like son I see." He spoke.

"Yeah... and like me... if he screws up they cut his *nor* off." Martin said with a grin.

Andro nodded in agreement. "Yes... no doubt. They do take after my mothers in that regard." He said.

Martin looked at him. "Do you... do you have anyone Murano?"

Murano met his eyes. "No. There was... there was someone many years ago, but the life as a Praetorian is not easy and it was not something that she was comfortable with. I understood her decision and remained away as she asked me."

"I'm sorry." Martin said softly.

"I loved her deeply... and part of that love was doing what she asked of me." Murano told him. "I believe she has moved on with her life. I am happy for her."

"You haven't moved on?" Andro asked him.

"As you and your father well know young Androcles... when you find the right woman, the one who holds your essence... you can never move forward." Murano said. "I honored her choice and the strength it took for her to make that choice. I chose not to move on however. That was my choice."

Martin nodded his head. "Fair enough." He said. "I was telling him... I was telling Andro how things don't appear to be working out as well as we had hoped Murano." Martin spoke. "As you no doubt have seen, I don't deal well with the kind of arrogance everyone is showing with the exception of a few. It's becoming very tiring."

Murano nodded in agreement. "For me as well Martin." He stated. "My brother has been around those who want to believe that they have nothing to fear anymore for too long. You must realize those who have been thrust into the positions they now hold were nothing more than midlevel administrators when the Scourge destroyed our people. They were pushed into these positions they hold and with the exception of Lorendo, who has an agenda all his own, all of them are out of their league if you ask me. And they have been for some time."

"They've done good though." Martin said. "You told me this yourself."

Murano nodded. "Yes... many of the things they have done have been to the benefit of our remaining people. There is no question there. However... they have made some unwelcome and unpopular decisions that have not sat well with the people. I did not agree with them either, but unfortunately I was more concerned with concealing my presence than helping them."

"My father has said the Praetorians hold a great deal of influence sir..." Andro spoke now. "You have not been able to sway them?"

Murano shook his head. "I remained hidden for too long it seems young Androcles. I was more concerned with suppressing my Etheric essence so the Scourge did not detect me than I was in trying to help my brother and the others. Until recently... no one even knew I lived except for Delnash, Teniri and two others. That was a mistake that I regret more as each hour passes."

"Speaking of the Scourge..." Martin said softly.

Murano nodded his head turning to face Martin now. "Wayonn has told me." He said holding up his hand. "Do not think for an instant that they are awake and active once more because of you and the others Martin. They were never asleep as so many like to think. They are far more intelligent than Lorendo and the others give them credit for. They would have moved into the Alpha Quadrant eventually. Perhaps not for many thousands of years... but they would have come. That they have stopped their advance as we have felt as Praetorians is the more puzzling question."

"You don't know why?" Andro asked. "Wayonn believes it was because of the engines on CS41 activating. Or that they can sense us?"

Murano shook his head. "No... I don't believe that was the cause. They had no reason to be monitoring the Alpha Quadrant. No Pralor had ever come this far out of our empire with the exception of Sumar and his Seed Mission. At least not coreward. And even then... his ships were not supposed to be in the area they were in when they struck that storm. As for sensing you and your father... that may well be a possibility, but it would mean they have agents within the Alpha Quadrant now who would know and understand what to look for." Murano shook his head. "They could sense us to a point, just as we can sense them, but I don't believe that is the case. They are inactive for a reason and unfortunately we don't know what that reason is."

Murano moved around and stood before one of the computer consoles. "Wayonn has passed his misgivings to me through an Etheric connection similar to what you share with Helen Martin and you with Wayonn's grandson Dutkne Androcles. As Praetorians we can do this with any other Praetorian or Oracle. This skill is not known outside of our ranks, and it is not something we should talk about openly either. There are those even among my people who would consider this skill... questionable in nature." Murano leaned against the console.

"Wayonn has said both of you have a knowledge of this that comes from your instincts and that is excellent but I will teach you to focus it and use it in the manner Sumar taught us. It could come in very useful in the future." He finished.

"So... it's like a data dump of sorts? From one memory core to another?" Andro asked.

Murano smiled and nodded. "Yes... I suppose it is. An interesting hypothesis and very correct Androcles." He looked at Martin. "Handsome and intelligent."

Martin snorted. "Yeah... well keep the compliments to a minimum." Martin said. "He'll get a big head."

Murano turned back to Andro with a smile. "When next you see Dutkne... as advanced as Wayonn has told me you both are... it should trigger automatically as it now does for your father and Helen. I will teach you

to focus it more when we meet as I said, but for now revel in it.” Murano looked at Martin. “I saw it with you and Helen when she touched you while you were deciding whether to kill Lorendo or not.”

Martin blinked. “Oh.” He said. “Yeah... well... it wasn’t one of my better moments I have to admit. Sorry about that.”

Murano shook his head. “Do not apologize for acting in the way you did. Not to me.” He said. “If it had been me... I would have killed him as well.”

Martin looked at him surprised. “And you stopped me?”

“Only because it would have destroyed any chance of discussions and working together with my brother and the others.” Murano told him quickly. “Something I am still holding out hope for.”

“I don’t... I don’t have the same hope Murano.” Martin spoke. “Your brother and the others are too set in their ways. Too unwilling to accept that something they have believed for so many millennia is wrong.”

Murano nodded. “I know.” He replied softly. “There are many who do not follow this same train of thought however Martin. Many of the younger generations as Mari and Kesyla. However... the younger generations are not considered a political force and therefore are not listened to. There are small groups who believed as Lorendo that we were the cause of the downfall of our people. Xaxon’s actions did not advance our reputation in a positive direction if you get my meaning.”

“They can’t hold one man’s arrogance against all of you can they?” Martin asked.

“They can and they do.” Murano answered. “Thankfully... many of those teachers who escaped the end are even minded and they have taught our younger generations the truth of the history and events.” Murano chuckled. “Our younger generations have made up their own minds on which side of history we belong. Most are on our side.”

“It doesn’t help that we are Lycavorian either I take it.” Martin said.

Murano nodded. “No it does not.” Murano held up his hand once more when he saw Andro about to say something. “And your father has already made it known where your feelings lie in that regard Androcles. And in many ways I agree with you. Delnash is correct though, in regards to the laws that Sumar established when he formed the Praetorians. We were never meant to breed outside of our own species. This was done to insure that our powers and abilities were not used against us or others for violent purposes or oppression.”

“Many laws out grow their intentions no matter how good or just they are meant to be Praetorian Murano.” Androcles said.

“Indeed they do.” Murano answered. “Sumar... Sumar and Wayonn saw something in your species that no one else did Martin. That is why I believe they went against their own law and merged the survivors of City Ship 41 with your species.”

“Then Jomann, myself and my brothers will probably not be looked at very fondly.” Andro stated.

“I do not know for certain to be honest.” Murano said. “I have been out of touch for so long that things could be very different among the common people than it is among the Elders of the Convention.”

Martin turned to look at him. “Andro... you said brothers?” He questioned.

Andro nodded his head. “It is Dorian father. He is... I do not know how... but he is like us.” Andro said. “I can feel it within him. And it’s coming out more and more in his actions.”

“That’s... Andro how is that possible?” Martin spoke straightening up.

“That is something I have asked Shiria to try and determine. She has already discovered thirteen with the gene and is moving to have them approached and then moved to the Dragon Brigade’s base west of Eden City for further testing.” Andro said. “Father... Wayonn did say that there may have been others on CS19 that carried the gene in its dormant state like mother and Sadi. If they crashed on Nuwaroa and were intermingled with the population of the High Coven...?”

Murano looked at Martin. “Dorian is your recent child with Isabella isn’t he?” He asked. “The one whose growth was accelerated because of the condition she suffered?”

Martin nodded quickly. “But Bella is a pureblood vampire. She’s not a carrier. She can’t be.”

“The Praetorian gene in its dormant state can be easily missed as junk DNA if you do not know what you are looking for.” Murano spoke. “In some cases... like Aricia and your *Anome* Sadi Androcles... even the dormant gene can dynamically and outwardly affect what they can do. Aricia’s Etheric knives and Sadi’s Etheric control of the area around her. In others... it will not even be noticed. Ever. It is possible that Sumar

missed some and they were among the crew of City Ship 19 as you suggest Androcles. It is also possible he split them up for a reason. We will never know.”

“Was mother ever screened by Shiria father?” Andro asked.

Martin shook his head. “No. She was pregnant and you know how your mother Anja is when one of them is pregnant. She swoons over them and won’t let another doctor near them let alone do any tests she doesn’t order herself.”

Murano nodded. “It is possible.” He said. “There is a test I can do... but the equipment for that is on Artaaya. If we do not return it will have to wait. You are certain of this Androcles? He is showing signs?”

Andro nodded quickly. “Just as I sense it within Deni, within Jomann and my father and I... yes.” Andro said. “It is certainly augmenting his vampiric skills father... but I think he is confused as to why it is happening.”

“Have you talked to him about it?” Martin asked.

Andro shook his head. “Not in any depth. I believe I am going to have to though.”

Murano looked at Martin. “Sumar was the very first and the most powerful Praetorian Martin. The gene does not lose it’s power when it is passed down. If Isabella is a carrier of the dormant gene and it merged with the active gene you carry... then it is very possible. The odds are higher a child will be born with the gene if both parents have it regardless if one is dormant or not.”

“But my daughters with Bella... Zarah and Carina... they have shown no signs.” Martin said.

“It does not pass to every child.” Murano said. “It skipped your brother did it not? It skipped Sumar’s first born Resumar from what Wayonn tells me, though given what he was able to accomplish I hypothesize the gene was actively dormant within him as it is within Aricia and Sadi. We do not know about your father directly... but if everything Helen has passed to me is accurate... then it’s very possible it was active within him given what he was able to accomplish as well.”

“My mother?” Martin asked.

Murano nodded. “Again... possible. We won’t know until I can test them. *SPARTA’S WRATH* would have the same equipment that I have but if the gene is not fully active... it will not matter. They would not be able to do what you and I can do. What your sons can obviously do.”

“I could order *SPARTA’S WRATH* to your location father.” Andro told him. “I don’t imagine it would take more than two or three jumps given the distance. Not for her.”

“NO!” Murano hissed quickly. “That would not be advisable.”

Andro looked at his father in the transmission. “Father?” He questioned.

Martin shook his head slowly. “Murano’s right Andro. They are already demanding that we return control of CS41, *SPARTA’S WRATH* and any technology we have taken from them to their possession.” He said.

“You must be joking!” Andro rasped. “Those ships belong to us! They were left to us! And they have no right to anything we have built because of what we have learned from them.”

Martin nodded. “Yeah... I explained that to them. They weren’t real receptive to that.”

“*Nubou hel!*” Andro hissed. (Fuck them)

Murano looked at Martin quickly for a translation and Martin shook his head. “You don’t want to know.” He said quickly.

“Blunt I take it.” Murano said.

“Yeah... he gets that from me.” Martin said. “We’ll find our people tomorrow son and we’ll go from there... but as it stands now... it’s not looking good that we’ll be staying much past tomorrow. I’ve already told Akemi to plot the quickest course back. I’m not going to stay where I ain’t welcome.”

Andro glanced to the side and nodded at a subdued voice that spoke to him. He turned back to his father. “Jomann tells me everyone is gathering father. I have a meeting to go to.”

Martin nodded his head. “Things went well on Solmar I take it?”

Andro nodded. “So far.” He replied. “I will have Dilaen begin releasing what we have in another day or so to the Netnews. His little plan here will not come to fruition.”

“Good.” Martin said. “Stick as many needles in that ugly fuck as you can.”

Andro smiled. “I intend to.”

“I will contact you within two days son.” Martin spoke. “We’ll know by then what is going to happen.”

Andro nodded. "I'll be here or on the *SCIMITAR* father." He said. "What about Kalis?"

"I have a contingency if we start heading back... but either way... if it's what he wants he'll be with me." Martin answered.

Andro nodded. "Good. I find myself looking forward to meeting him to be honest. It was no simple feat to complete the blocks of instruction as he did."

Martin nodded. "I know. Go with the gods boy." Martin said.

"And you father." Andro replied.

Martin turned to face Murano as the transmission ended. "He is much like you." Murano spoke.

Martin nodded his head. "Yeah... some people say too much." He spoke with warmth in his voice. "He's far less forgiving than I am for sure and he has a real nasty mean streak when he gets his dander up... especially about people who hurt his brothers and sisters... but he gets that from his mother."

Murano chuckled. "Somehow I don't believe that to be true." He said.

Martin's expression changed and he looked hurt. "Murano... I'm hurt. I am the picture of calm and sincere and all petunia picking peace lover! I hate violence! Scares the piss out of me!"

Praetorian Murano, a man who had felt alone for so long, threw back his head and he enjoyed the first genuine laugh he had uttered in nearly twenty thousand years. It made him feel alive and reinvigorated.

It made him feel reborn.

SOLMAR

KINDRED SOUL

Kameka's eyes fluttered open slowly to the bright light and sounds of voices and what she recognized as the sounds of medical equipment. She turned her head trying to focus and saw the dark figure beside the bed. She felt a momentary surge of fear until the hand gripped hers and she heard the warm voice of her father.

"Do not fear daughter." Byka spoke holding her hand tight. "They said you would have trouble adjusting your eyes for a moment. Blink quickly and the fuzziness should clear."

"Papa?" Kameka spoke as she tried to sit up in the medical bed her hands reaching for him. "Papa... you are..."

"I'm fine." Byka answered. "Better than fine actually."

Kameka blinked half a dozen times and her vision began to clear quickly. She saw him then, his fur groomed and smooth and never looking more handsome than she had remembered her father. "Papa... where..."

"You were hurt more badly fighting Marsin that you realized daughter!" He told her. "It was foolish of you to try and fight him. You passed out while the Spartan Daio carried you to their base. When they got you back to their ground base they discovered you were bleeding internally. The Hadarian stabilized you and sent you here immediately."

"Here?" Kameka asked looking around and seeing men and women all dressed in battle fatigues but carrying medical equipment. "Where are we?"

"The Lycavorian ship that landed on the surface." Byka said. "Wait until you see this monster daughter! It is colossal from the outside! This is their Medical Bay! It's huge!"

Kameka looked at him. "Papa... Marsin... he shot you!"

Byka nodded. "Yes he did. Hurt like a bastard too. They fixed me at their base camp." He answered. "I have been here beside you since."

"How... how long?" She gasped.

"Eighteen hours at least." He replied. "I don't know for sure."

"Then... then we lost?" She asked.

Byka shook his head. "No... in the end it was a victory." He stated. "I am sorry I did not tell you before but Azlenr and I had to move quickly. Keleru was using us as fodder daughter. He sent Marsin here with us to assassinate Azlenr, me and as many senior officers as he could like I told you. They were going to use us as a

propaganda tool. A way to bide time against the Union. They were going to say we killed the civilians and that Marsin and his men executed us for it. They were throwing us away Meka.”

“I don’t understand.” Kameka said. “Why?”

Byka shook his head. “It does not matter now.” He said. “We saved our men and that is what matters most.

“We... we are their prisoners?” Kameka asked softly.

Byka shook his head. “No.” He stated. “There is a meeting soon and the doctors said you can leave when you woke and felt up to it.”

“Leave to where Papa?” Kameka exclaimed. “Momma! My brothers and sisters! They will be killed! Murdered! Because of us!”

“That’s not exactly accurate.” The new male voice spoke and Kameka’s head turned quickly. Her dark brown eyes grew wide when she recognized the *Durcunusaan* who had saved her and she unconsciously gripped the sheet covering her body tighter. She watched as his tall frame moved further into the room, his arms filled with a bundle of some sort.

“Papa?” Kameka asked tearing her eyes from the Spartan and looking at her father.

“I contacted your mother the moment we made the decision to move down this path.” Byka told her. “Azlenr had all of us do it. Our families are safe Meka. They are on four ships that departed Nefoa fifteen hours ago. Before all this began and piloted by men loyal to us. They are now under the escort of an entire Union Strike Wing and should be back across the Union border some time tomorrow.”

“General... I thought you and your daughter might like to get some food in you before the meeting.” Daio spoke now as he set the bundle on the foot of the bed. “I hope you don’t mind wearing a Union field uniform, it’s all I could find. I think I got your size right though.”

“Meka... this is Commander Daio of the *Durcunusaan*.” Byka said. “He is the one who...”

“You killed him.” Kameka said softly.

Daio shrugged his broad shoulders. “Seemed like the thing to do at the time.” He stated.

“You... you saved me.” Kameka spoke in almost a whisper.

Daio shifted uncomfortably on his feet and bowed his head slightly to her. “I would do it again Milady.” He spoke. “In an instant. I’ll wait outside General.” Daio turned back to Kameka and smiled a dazzling smile showing perfect white teeth. A wolf’s teeth. “You were beautiful before Lady Kameka’Caleo. You are breathtaking now.” He spoke before turning and moving back into the corridor of the Medical Wing.

Kameka looked at her father confused. “Papa... what...”

Byka held out the small pocket mirror to her with a huge smile. “He assumed the scars were from Marsin.” Byka spoke softly. “He said he could smell him on you, within the scars. I did not know that Hadarians could work such magic...”

Meka took the mirror and held it up to her face. She gasped in shock at what she saw. Not the marred skin she had looked at for the last years but flawless tanned skin without a mark on it. The scars were completely gone, not even a trace of them remained. Byka smiled as he saw the small tears begin to form at the corner of her eyes as she stroked the skin of her cheek. He rose to his feet and squeezed her leg. “We will wait for you outside Meka.” He said. “You are probably hungrier than me.”

Byka stepped away from the bed and pulled the divider around her small section to give her privacy. He turned and saw Daio standing patiently in the corridor and he took a deep breath and covered the distance to him quickly. The Spartan turned and looked at him.

“General?” Daio asked.

“She... she will need a moment to dress and compose herself.” Byka spoke slowly.

“We still have over an hour sir... it’s no problem.” Daio answered.

“I... I have not thanked you for what you did Commander.” Byka spoke. “With Marsin I mean.”

“My name is Daio General.” He told him. “And I only wish I could have made him suffer more for what he did. To your daughter and to others.”

Byka looked at him intently. “You do not seem in any way fazed that you are standing here with a man who you were ready to kill little more than a day ago. We were enemies.” He questioned. “How is that?”

“You and general Azlenr were never the enemy sir.” Daio spoke with genuine feeling. “I think Androcles knew that within hours of discovering you had invaded and that the Puma Bane troops were the ones

who were spearheading this. He's funny like that. The King too. They see things others do not. Sense them. It's very weird... but we have come to trust in him and the King completely."

"So I see." Byka spoke softly.

"Are there others like you and General Azlenr sir?" Daio asked. "Those who think and believe as you do?"

Byka met his eyes. "We know of a few others." He replied. "Considering the influence of the Puma Bane troops, those who think like us do not associate too much for fear of our own lives and that of our Prides. They have eyes and ears everywhere. Even among our own people, and they would not hesitate to slaughter us and anyone associated with us."

"Yet you survived this long." Daio asked.

Byka nodded his head. "We survived because we won battles against the High Coven." He spoke. "If he killed us then he would begin to have other officers question him. If he had succeeded in his actions this time, he could have said anything he wished and they would have believed him." Byka shook his head. "It was all a lie." He said softly.

"You and General Azlenr have turned a corner sir." Daio spoke. "It will be up to you how to proceed... but I think you will make the right choices. You certainly care for your daughter in a way that many Kavalians do not. At least not that we are aware."

Byka looked back and nodded before turning back to him. "I did not fully realized how much until Marsin hurt her the first time. Then the realization of it all hit me and I saw how we were headed. I decided to change... and I am very happy I did. And there are others as I said Comman... Daio."

"She's very beautiful sir." Daio said respectfully. "I'm sure she will need to beat back the suitors among your people and mine given time."

Byka looked at him and shook his head. "She will never trust another Kavalian." He said. "Not now... not after what Marsin did to her. Forced her to do." Byka shook his head slowly. He looked at Daio then. "You don't think... her tail." He said. "This will not bother those among your people?"

Daio nodded with a shrug. "It might bother some but then those who are truly interested in her won't care."

"Do you care Commander?" Byka asked him bluntly.

"Not in the least sir." Daio replied without hesitation.

Byka smiled at this and turned as Kameka came out of the room slowly. "Meka?" He said.

She looked at Daio and held her arms out slightly. The uniform fit her like a glove and enhanced her very womanly charms in all the right places. "You... you picked this?" Kameka asked.

Daio's face twisted slightly in worry. "Yes. If you don't like the size I'm sure we can find something that..."

"It... it fits perfectly." She said.

Daio smiled. "Oh... good." He said with a great deal of relief. "The Mess Lounge is this way." He motioned with his hand. "They have a pretty good menu too. Just don't eat the green stalks. They are from Goshann... and you'll be blowing out your ass for two days!" Daio looked at Kameka with wide eyes. "I'm... I'm sorry about that little slip."

Byka looked at his daughter and saw her smiling. There was a brightness to her eyes and her expression that he had not seen for many years and Byka knew it was because of this young Lycavorian's actions in killing Marsin and looking upon her as he did. Byka smiled and took Kameka's hand. "We will heed your advice Daio of the *Durcunusaan*." He said.

"Follow me then." Daio spoke.

"...make sure Colonel Miller's Brigade does a full sweep of the area before they deploy back to the *KINDRED SOUL*." Andro was speaking to Vengal, General Washington and Captain Patton in the small briefing room before the main meeting began. Jomann stood within an arm's reach of his Prince, as he had for the last twelve hours. "Any Puma Bane survivors that may be found are to be executed immediately. I don't care what condition they may be in."

“And if they are trying to surrender?” Washington asked.

“Let them surrender and *then* execute them!” Andro hissed. “I want to make it very clear to every Kavalian out there what happened here. I will accept nothing but the total annihilation of the Puma Bane as a fighting force. If they are not Puma Bane... then they can surrender freely and be cared for... if they are Puma Bane however... no mercy will be shown to them in the least.”

“That might be hard on them Milord.” Washington spoke again watching as Andro turned to look at him. “I am only playing devil’s advocate here Milord... I agree completely with you. Once it gets out however... the Puma Bane troops will try to blend in with the regulars.”

Andro nodded. “Then we make sure the regular forces know their fate will be the same as any Puma Bane soldiers they protect or hide.”

Vengal nodded. “It’s the only way to be sure.” He said. “From what we know... the Puma Bane are like the Gestapo from ancient Earth. Keleru’s secret police and best equipped fighting force. And those most committed to his perverted ideals.”

“When we speak with Pian and Resumar I want them to get a sense for how much of this is happening.” Andro spoke thoughtfully. “The ships that were defending their main cloning facility have already defected to Pian. Their last report says six additional Prides have come over to their side. Small Prides yes... but support nonetheless.”

“You will let me through immediately! I am a Union Senator!” The shrill female voice echoed behind them and they all turned to see Ulana shove her way past the *Durcunusaan* guard at the door.

“You have got to be kidding me?” Patton muttered and began to step forward.

Andro took his arm. “No. I’ll handle this.” Andro said softly.

Ulana turned to face Andro from behind the bulk of the *Durcunusaan* officer who had imposed himself in front of her. “I demand to speak with you Androcles!” She barked. “I will not be denied any longer!”

Andro looked at the others. “I’ll join you in the briefing shortly.” He spoke. “Uncle Vengal... if you will make sure everyone is present and the packets have been distributed?”

Vengal let his eyes remain on Ulana for a moment and then he turned and looked at Andro before nodding. An elf he may have been, but Vengal knew what this was all about and it had nothing to do with politics. He had watched Daniel and Anuk deal with a similar situation about ten years ago. A female Lycavorian got it in her head that she wanted Daniel and Anuk and Nayeca were not good enough for him. They had tried to avoid the situation hoping it would go away. Daniel worshiped Anuk and Nayeca and all of them knew he would never have given this woman a second glance. On top of that... Daniel and Anuk were one of the extremely rare cases of *Anomes* where the female was not pureblood. Vengal had watched for weeks as Daniel’s anger toward this woman grew and finally it had been Anuk who had settled the issue. Half elf she may have been, but Daniel had been the one to turn her and she was slightly larger and far more muscular in wolf form than the average turned elf. She had thoroughly throttled the poor female outside of the barracks one evening in front of several hundred soldiers. Anuk had earned her reputation that evening of being one of the turned females not to piss off. Years of training with both Daniel and her Drow Mistress Nayeca and turned her into a very lethal woman and now Anuk Simpson, half elf though she may have been, was considered an equal by every pureblood Lycavorian.

You are sure? Vengal asked him within Mindvoice. As Anuk’s father and one of the founders of the *Durcunusaan*, Vengal’s Mindvoicing skills had grown powerful through the years. Under Helen and Thr’won’s tutelage he had reached a level of skill equal to many of his *Durcunusaan* and this was another reason why no one in their right mind would challenge him about the way he commanded the *Durcunusaan*. He had spent so much time with Daniel and Martin and their families that even though he was an elf, he had taken on many traits found in Lycavorians.

Andro nodded. *I need to end it Uncle. If I do not then sooner rather than later Sadi, Lu’ria or Carisia will kill her. That’s not something we need right now.*

True enough. Vengal said as he began to leave. *I will see to things. Join us when you are finished with this upaee.*

Andro set his P1 down on the table and leaned against it, crossing his arms over his chest as he watched the others leave. Ulana glared at them as they left and when they were finally alone she turned back to Andro.

“What can I do for you now Ulana?” Andro asked.

Ulana walked briskly across the deck to stand in front of him. “Do you know what your sister did to me?” She snarled at him. “What your precious *Anome* did to me?”

“Ulana you...” Andro started to speak.

“I intend to file charges against both of them!” Ulana snapped. “Their positions do not allow them to assault a Senator of...”

“File them.” The voice spoke causing Ulana to whirl around and Andro to lower his head and exhale heavily. Sadi strode into the room from the doorway and made her way across the distance to stop beside Androcles. The dark gray jumpsuit conformed to her luscious figure like a glove, the long zipper in the front just low enough that it allowed one to see the beginning of the deep valley between her firm breasts. Of course... no one in their right mind would stare too long at the Crown Princess of the Union if they knew what was good for them. The cut of the jumpsuit allowed Andro to know instantly that it was one of her own. Sadi had long ago made them tailored to always hug her body in ways that could incite his desire for her. “File them with me Ulana.” Sadi said again as she came up beside him.

[KertaGai?] Andro reached for her.

Sadi turned to him with love and worship in her jungle green eyes. *[No my love.]* She spoke gently. *[This has nothing to do with what Eliani did Andro, or for that matter... you. Not anymore. This is about me. This is between Ulana and I.]*

[She is not worth it Sadi.] Andro spoke. *[She means nothing to me.]*

Sadi smiled warmly at him and plainly ignoring Ulana she pressed her lush body close to Andro’s, slipping her arm tightly around his waist with one hand and reaching up to stroke his cheek with the other watching as his eyes closed in delight at her caress. *[Andro my love... that is not something you need to prove to me. To any of us. Ever. You know that.]*

[Then why?] He asked opening his eyes and looking at her.

[Because I am a pureblood Lycavorian Alpha female. Because my father taught me to be proud of that fact. Because you are our mate and husband Androcles Leonidas and now that Sehri has finally joined us we are complete and we do not intend to share you with anyone my love.] Sadi leaned up and kissed him ever so softly on the lips relishing in the taste of his lips and his lavender and mint scent as it swirled around her head combining with his powerful aura which pulsed for her. She allowed her tongue to draw across his lips teasingly before she pulled away. *[And because I hold to the values and ideals of our people that she has either forgotten or never learned. If I do not do this... then I will appear to be weak.]*

[Sadi... you are not weak.] Andro spoke.

[But if I do nothing then she will use that against me saying I am not truly Lycavorian like her. That I have no right to be your Crown Princess because I am not willing to defend what is mine.] Sadi spoke softly. *[I won’t allow that.]*

[She is the last person who could claim to be truly Lycavorian Sadi. She’s nothing but an arrogant, pompous and spoiled little upaee!] Andro said.

Sadi smiled brightly. *[I know... but this needs to end before it goes any further. She will learn her place in the scheme of things if I have to beat it into her Androcles. Which means she needs to learn that you belong to us. Period.]* Sadi pressed closer and took his beautiful face in both her hands. *[Let me do this my love. This is my place... not yours. I adore you for wanting to shield me... but I am your Anome and I will speak for myself where it concerns you.]*

It was an easy decision for Androcles just as Sadi knew it would be and he nodded his head. *[Very well. I will hold the meeting for you.]*

[No. I’ll arrive when I am done here. This may take a bit of time.] Sadi told him. *[Go. Say nothing to her... just go.]*

Andro nodded and turned to grab his P1 from the table. As Ulana watched he simply brushed past her and moved to the door.

“Androcles where are you going?” Ulana demanded turning to follow his movements. “We are not finished speaking!”

“You may speak to me Ulana.” Sadi told her calmly, basking in the aura and scent of Andro as he left. Gods how she loved him so, Sadi thought. She could not imagine a future without him in it. None of them could.

Ulana whirled on her. "What did you tell him?" She snarled as the door closed behind him. "I know you were speaking within Mindvoice! I could... I could feel the tremors! What did you say to him?"

Andro stopped in the corridor and looked at Jomann who stood waiting for him. Jomann stepped closer as the door closed behind him.

"Andro?" Jomann questioned.

Andro met his eyes. "Let's go to the meeting Jomann." He said.

"What... what about Sadi?" Jomann asked.

Andro let the smile play across his lips as he turned and began to walk. "My *Anome* does not need my help for this." He said. "She never did."

Jomann fell in beside him as they walked. "You are sure? Sadi... she may well kill her Andro."

Andro chuckled. "No... she won't kill her." He said. "Not entirely anyway."

Jomann looked back at the door as they walked away. "*Anse*... what I wouldn't give to be an insect on the wall in that room." He said.

Andro laughed. "Are you so sure?" He asked. "Sadi has had over a year with my sister. I have no doubts she has picked up many of Eliani's more colorful phrases."

Jomann nodded with a smile. "I know! That's why it would be fun to watch!"

Sadi looked at Ulana intently. "What I said to my mate and my husband is none of your concern Ulana. And I doubt very much you were able to feel the tremors of our conversation. We speak on a level your feeble skills could not hope to intrude upon let alone overhear." Sadi crossed her arms under her firm breasts. "Now... please... feel free to file your charges with me Ulana."

"I will not!" Ulana snapped. "I will speak with Androcles about them, not his... not the Menkla District whore who claims to be his Crown Princess!"

Sadi chuckled softly and shook her head. "Wow! Menkla District whore." She said with a smile. "That's certainly original. Did you learn that from one of your pompous friends Ulana, or did you think that one up all by yourself?" Sadi asked her as she withdrew the data pad from her belt and held it out to Ulana. "Here... you should probably read this."

Ulana snatched the data pad from her hand and threw it to the floor. "I do not care to read anything from you!" She growled. "It's probably all gibberish. You could not possibly string two intelligent sentences together if you tried!"

"You might not want to be so fast to dismiss this information." Sadi told her. "I'm going to have Dilaen release it to the Netnews in about an hour. You know Dilaen I'm sure. The Chief Netnews Coordinator and Public Affairs Officer for the **Crown Prince and Princesses** of the Union." Sadi grinned at Ulana's angry glare when she emphasized those words. "It's my entire medical file as well as every transaction or decision my father made as Governor of the Menkla District. It will also contain every posting I have held since the night on the Royal Island when my life truly began. Additionally it also includes everything I was forced to do while a member of the *Arryadyveluat*. I left nothing out." Sadi saw Ulana's eyes go wide at that. "Along with that information it will contain my entire family bloodline, traced right back to a Lycavorian named Taxylrr. In case you are wondering... Taxylrr was leader of the Fourth Ruling Pack Bloodline Ulana. He was my mother's great Uncle and according to Deia, he was good friends with Resumar."

"You lie!" Ulana hissed.

Sadi shook her head. "I don't need to lie in order to obtain what I want Ulana." She spoke calmly. "I have everything I have ever wanted and most importantly... *I* have Androcles. That is the difference between you and I Ulana. I actually love Androcles... with every single breath I take I love him. You only crave the power the position as his wife and mate would give you. You don't truly care for him at all."

"That's... that's not true!" Ulana hissed.

Sadi stepped closer to Ulana. "Lie to everyone else if you must Ulana... but I know the truth. I can smell the truth on you. I have belonged to Androcles since he was eight months old and he first laid his *elivonth* azure

eyes upon me. And he has been mine since that very same day. It has been part of whom I am since that day and it is the reason no relationship I had in the years while Andro grew meant anything to me.” Sadi tilted her head to the side and looked at her. “Do you honestly believe that you could take him from me, from Ne’Veha and Carisia and Lu’ria? From Caliria and now Sehri? Did you think you could take him from us simply because you slept with him for three months and enjoyed his company? As his *Anome* I have swam within his thoughts and memories for over a year Ulana. He enjoyed your company to a point, but he never loved you, and he most certainly never scented you. Do you think him such a fool that he did not know you were with him only to advance your own status Ulana? Do you think he did not know about Nolar and your escapades with him while he was away? Do you think half of the Union is ignorant and does not see that?”

“I should be his mate... not you!” Ulana screamed. “It is my right!”

“Your right?” Sadi gasped in disbelief. “I can’t believe I am hearing this. Do you think yourself so superior that you are to just be given everything and placed on a pedestal? You could not possibly begin to understand or know Androcles Leonidas Ulana!”

“I *am* superior to you whore! And I know all I need to know about him! He is a man! Give him a place to put his cock and he is happy!” Ulana snarled. “And you will not keep me from him!”

Sadi laughed at her now, causing Ulana’s face to turn red. “Oh... he is far more than just a man. Do you know what makes him tick Ulana?” Sadi asked looking down at the table and running her finger along the edge. “What his favorite color is? What his favorite food is?”

“What do these things matter?” Ulana hissed.

“Do you know where to nibble and tease him on the insides of his thighs to make him last for hours on end?” Sadi asked her with an evil smile. “Of course you don’t. Remember... I have seen his memories. You were not exactly the most inventive in bed you know.”

“And I’m quite sure you are!” Ulana snarled. “You would probably let him... let him have you in any way he wishes!”

Sadi grinned with bright jungle green eyes. “Well... you are right about that at least.” She said. “He has had me in every possible way. Ne’Veha as well. And Carisia and Lu’ria. He’s very adventurous. And the pleasure we get out of it knows no bounds.”

“You disgust me!” Ulana spat.

“Did you know that he tastes just as wonderful as he smells?” Sadi asked her calmly. “Oh wait... that act is beneath you. I’m sorry.”

“You are the whore Sadi.” Ulana snarled at her. “I imagine as a whore you know all of these things!”

Sadi laughed at her. “Oh... I do Ulana. So does Ne’Veha, and Carisia, and Lu’ria and Caliria. And soon Sehri will experience the divine pleasure of being wrapped within Andro’s arms and his aura. I am... we... are not so limited as you in our adventurous nature in our bed.” Sadi reached out and touched Ulana’s cheek. Ulana slapped her hand away quickly. “And it is glorious... no matter where he takes us or how many times. We love how he tastes... it is the sweetest nectar to us. We love how he fills us so utterly with his size and how he makes all of us scream his name whenever he takes us. You will never feel these things Ulana and your ridiculous obsession with thinking you could take him from us is becoming most taxing.”

“I will have him!” Ulana snarled at her. “You have altered how he thinks! Played tricks with his mind! The vampires dogs taught you these things! He would never chose you over me! You are nothing more than a...”

“He chose me before you were ever born fool woman!” Sadi snapped now her patience at an end. “I thought... I had thought perhaps talking to you would make you see that your goal of taking Andro from us will not succeed. That you really need to move on with your life. I can see now that is not going to be the case.”

Ulana laughed at her “Not after I make you look like the cheap whore that you are!” She barked. “When everyone sees you assaulting me... when they hear what his sister did... you will pay bitch! And then I will have him.”

Sadi looked at the floor and shook her head. “I had hoped this would go better than it has but I see that you are too blind and arrogant.” She spoke. She looked back up to Ulana. “If reasoning with you will not work... you leave me little choice.”

Ulana laughed at her. “What are you going to do now you low rent whore? Try and buy me off?” Ulana snapped. “I have too many powerful friends and allies for you to go head to head with me! I’ll bury you Sadi! Then what will you do?”

“What I am going to do is quite simple really.” Sadi spoke calmly.

“What is that?” Ulana snapped. “Cry to Andro or the Queens to help you? You are so pathetic!”

Sadi smiled but had Ulana any sense she would have seen the smile for what it was. The smile of an Alpha female wolf about to pounce.

“No... I won’t cry to Andro. I don’t need to because Andro knows I don’t need his help in dealing with you.” Sadi spoke evenly. “No Ulana. I’m going to do exactly what the Queens would do in my situation considering they too are Alpha females. I’m going to do exactly what Gorgo did when confronted with the same sort of uncompromising *upae* as you seem to be when she was Queen of Sparta.”

“And what is that?” Ulana barked.

Sadi’s eyes changed instantly and her fangs burst forth a millisecond later. Her normal wolf fangs now augmented by the smaller dual fangs beside her main canines. A result of Andro’s bite and the wonderful virus running through his veins making Sadi and the others completely his. The sign of a female wolf who is a member of the Leonidas family. Ulana’s eyes exploded open when Sadi’s hand snapped out and gripped her behind her head with brutal force, her fingers entwining in Ulana’s long black hair. Sadi pulled Ulana’s face to within inches of hers and growled deep in her throat.

“It’s called attitude adjustment!” Sadi snarled most savagely before turning and driving Ulana’s face into the table beside her with all of her strength.

Ulana was completely unprepared for such a move and her cheek rammed into the table with horrendous force, sending jarring pain through her jaw and neck. Her head exploded back from the vicious impact like a bouncing ball and she staggered backwards until she fell on the floor dazed.

“Androcles Leonidas is my *Anome*!” Sadi snarled savagely as she moved around Ulana and unleashed a brutal front kick into her abdomen that doubled Ulana over and made her gag in unbelievable agony. “He is our mate and husband! Mine! Ne’Veha’s! Carisia’s! Lu’ria’s! Caliria’s! And now Sehri’s!” Sadi snapped out with another kick that smashed into Ulana’s lower back, her body arching forward this time in pain. “You will never feel his aura wrapped around you Ulana! You will never feel him filling you! He belongs to us! And we to him!”

Sadi leaned over and grabbed Ulana by the hair once more, dragging her to her knees and then pulling her staggering to her feet. Using the front of her immaculately tailored outfit Sadi yanked Ulana forward and guided her body to the side as she sent Ulana crashing head first into the bulkhead with a resounding thump. Her head and upper body snapped back like a top and Sadi slapped her viciously across the cheek, adding just a fraction of the Etheric power that she was learning to master to the blow. Ulana was sent flipping head over heels to the side to slam violently into the opposite bulkhead with thunderous force. It drew a guttural groan of pain from Ulana before she slid to the deck and was still.

“This is the only warning I will give you Ulana you *nubous upae*!” Sadi snarled looking at her as she struggled to turn around. “If you even breath inappropriately towards Androcles, let even a tiny fraction of your pitiful female aura touch him letting him know you are available, I will personally rip out your eyeballs and make it so you can never experience the pleasures of a man again! Any man!” Sadi moved over in front of Ulana who had now pushed up against the bulkhead, her eyes wide and filled with terror, blood leaking from both her mouth and nose. Sadi snapped out and slapped her once more, rocking her head back. “Are you listening to me Ulana?”

“You... you are insane!” Ulana rasped out between split and bloody lips.

Sadi shook her head. “No... I am simply protecting what belongs to me and my fellow Crown Princesses. As any Alpha female would do.” She stated evenly. “Androcles is too much of a gentlemen to express this to you. I am not so limited. Take my words to heart Ulana for if you don’t I will crush you like the insignificant little bitch that you are.” Sadi stood back up and turned away for a moment composing herself and then turning back to look at her.

“A Senator of the Union you may be... but if you refer to me or any of us in any term other than our titles Ulana, I will have your Senatorial ass in a sling so quickly it will make your head spin. I am Crown Princess! And whether you agree with that or not... you will address me with respect! Just as I address you! Do

you understand me Ulana?" Ulana stared up at Sadi with hatred in her eyes. "Answer me woman or I will beat you until you are wailing like an infant being pulled from the womb!" Sadi shouted angrily.

"Yes!" Ulana gasped in fear.

"It ends here and now Ulana." Sadi spoke. "Heed my words to you... for I will not be as forgiving again." Sadi turned and walked to the door. "I will summon a doctor for you." She said softly. She turned her head and looked at Ulana. "It did not need to be this way you know." She said. "You are more than what you project outwardly Ulana. Perhaps you should embrace that more. You will find that acceptance will come far easier."

"Go... go to hell!" Ulana hissed.

Sadi smiled. "You first Ulana. At the rate you are going... someone or something will kill you before you reach a hundred years of age. Your loss will not sadden anyone I assure you." Sadi waved her hand over the control panel for the door. "After the doctor treats you and you make yourself presentable woman... you can come to the meeting and try to determine which one of our actions you, Icho and your cronies can use against us. I'm sure you will find many."

Sadi Leonidas stepped through the door and didn't look back.

She had laid down the law and if Ulana chose to ignore her then Sadi had no qualms about fulfilling her threat.

No problem at all.

"...a feint?" Andro almost shouted looking at the transmission that held both his brother and Pian on one side and Admiral Ceneu and Tareif on the other.

Resumar and Pian were on the *PILLAR OF FAITH* somewhere inside Kavalian space. Sitting with them Andro could see Isra, Karun, Jalersi, Athani and Ardis. In the side of the transmission from Earth Andro could see his adopted Aunt Lynwe and Admiral Wallace from EDEN BASE. Deia and Charles Turner sat beside one another with his adopted Aunts Tarifa, Aihola and Selene sitting to President Turner's left.

Ceneu glanced at Tareif quickly and then nodded his head as he turned back to him. "We are still getting reports in Androcles... but it appears as if once they discovered you were on Solmar... they set in motion pre-determined attacks. They could not have put them together in two or three days. These operations were planned and ready to execute." They watched Ceneu rise and move to the Star Chart. He pointed at four different locations. "They have attacked and secured the garrisons on Clontano and Aneya along the border with the U'zolut Consortium. It puts them within striking distance of Folcani, further on Semtola and if they stretch it Apo Prime itself. They have also captured the garrison on Tauma and we believe on Vigon as well. The Commander of Vigon apparently had a warning they were coming and was able to scatter much of his garrison into the mountains. We are waiting to see if he is able to re-establish COMs with us within the thirty-six hour time limit per our procedures. These positions would allow them to..."

"Strike Elear!" Andro hissed.

Ceneu nodded. "That would be the logical assumption yes."

"We've already been in touch with First Minister Alocgeid and he has ordered the entire EDF to alert." Tareif spoke. "Ceneu dispatched six CFFGs to Elear and another three are on standby to deploy. If they are planning to go after Elear, they better bring their whole damn fleet and army!"

"Unfortunately... this action also opened a corridor straight to Hadaria." Ceneu added. "We have few forces in and around Hadaria since the coup and certainly none that could challenge an attack force of any great size. I've already begun shifting fleets from their Holding Stations near Nodon, but it won't be enough to stop a concentrated attack. Not initially."

"They already have Hadaria." Charles spoke up. "Why go there?"

"Open an unchallenged corridor for ships and troops." Aihola spoke up. "We cut this off when we destroyed the Jump Gates. If they can secure this area then we would be hard pressed to challenge any supplies and men they try to reinforce Hadaria with."

"*Nubou!*" Andro swore loudly. "This is my fault! I should have seen this coming when I first spoke to Azlenr."

“This move is not your fault Androcles.” Lynwe spoke up from her seat. “You could not have predicted this and the threat on Solmar was very real.”

“Lynwe is right *Mandri*.” Deia spoke. “As Tareif said... these were things they already had planned.”

“I believe your Prime Minister and President may be right Prince Androcles.” All eyes turned to look at Azlenr’Macaoe as he spoke from the end of the table. “In fact... given what I am seeing now... I’m not entirely sure he did not have this planned before we even attacked Solmar.”

Andro turned to look at him now. “*Tenna* Deia, President Turner, may I present General Azlenr’Macaoe. Formally of the KFI and now part of General Pian’s Free Kavalian Republic.”

“Could you better explain your thinking General?” Charles asked.

Azlenr looked at Andro. “May I Prince Androcles?”

Andro motioned to the star chart. “By all means.”

Azlenr moved to the massive board, studied it for several seconds and nodded. “It has to be.” He said.

“General?” Andro asked.

Azlenr met his eyes and nodded. “Planning for the assault on Solmar began nearly five months ago. Even before you destroyed the moon and the forces within the Farnuri Expanse. He was going to use it as a propaganda tool just as you believed and later confirmed by capturing the Puma Bane intelligence. With your military and your Netnews focused on Solmar... one of the newest and most modern of your colonies... he could keep all attention focused here.” Azlenr pointed to the map. “Given its location, Solmar would have provided direct access to Bontawillian space and three additional invasion corridors into the heart of Union space. With all of your attention naturally focused here... sneaking small and well trained units across the border to mass for attacks on these garrisons would be easy.”

“And I made it easier by announcing my presence here.” Andro said.

Azlenr nodded. “I would surmise that is the case... yes.”

Andro turned back to look at Ceneu. “What... what were the casualties Admiral?” He asked.

Ceneu paused for a moment and then shook his head. “Heavy Andro.” He answered with a sigh. “The garrisons on Clontano and Aneya are completely destroyed. Total... upwards of forty thousand of our people and civilians combined. Tauma’s garrison was also destroyed with an additional Fleet Group wiped out trying to defend. A hundred thousand minimum. Vigon was destroyed yes... but we don’t know how many of our people got out.”

“We should recall Riall and his forces from Coven space.” Tareif spoke now.

“No!” Andro spoke. “That is exactly what they want us to do! Grandfather has been able to establish an excellent relationship with Pontal and the other senior Coven Commanders. They are still too weak to counter a serious threat from the Kavalians on their own. Not with Moran still out there lurking around. If we withdraw our forces from Coven space all we do is give the Kavalians a way to circle around and flank us and we show the Coven we were not true in our word to them!”

“That was before the Kavalians began pressing us Androcles.” Tareif spoke. “We can field enough to deter them from moving further without anything smaller than a full attack force, but we will be unable to act in order to take these planets back.”

“Right now anyway.” Ceneu said.

Androcles turned away from the two transmission signals and closed his eyes. Almost everyone in the room and in the transmissions had seen this before from Andro and his father and remained silent. Azlenr turned to look at Byka confused at this action and Byka shrugged his shoulders from where he stood beside the tall Spartan Daio and Kameka. Byka leaned closer to Daio.

“What... what is he doing?” Byka asked in a soft whisper.

Daio smiled. “He’s plotting how to kick someone in the ass sir.” He answered.

Byka grinned. “Ah... interesting.”

Daio stole a look at Kameka and saw her munching on the large Danish. She and her father had obviously never been provided such rich food while serving the Kavalian military and they had gorged themselves on the huge selection available in the mess lounge. Kameka had a sweet tooth Daio saw as she had already eaten three of the Danishes. Her eyes lifted to his and saw him watching her and suddenly she looked embarrassed at how she was attacking the Danish.

“They... they are very good.” She spoke softly.

Daio smiled and held out his hand with the remainder of his coffee in the mug he held. "Something to wash it down with?" He said.

Kameka's eyes grew excited and she nodded quickly, snatching the mug from his hand gently. Byka watched Daio's face as he stared at his daughter. Byka was a man and he could see the intense interest in Daio's eyes as he looked at Kameka, yet it was different from the looks he had seen Kavalian men give her through the years. They looked upon her as an object to relieve their pleasure where as Daio looked at her with desire yes, but also great respect and interest. Byka had questioned Azlenr's decision to do this at first, but after seeing the intelligence and knowing that his family and Pride would be safe, he quickly found himself thinking it was the best course of action. He did not prefer to be dead by any means. And seeing Kameka now, a smile on her face and her dark brown eyes filled with new life, Byka was convinced this had been the best.

It was Resumar who broke the silence as he leaned forward in the chair he was sitting beside Pian. "Fervon?"

Andro opened his eyes slowly and turned back to face them. His eyes focused on one side of the two images and directly at Tarifa. "Tenna Tarifa... you are an historian of sorts. Father tells me that you know all there is to know of how the United States of America conducted itself leading up to the Great Fire."

Tarifa shifted in her chair surprised that he had singled her out. "I studied the books I found in several of the destroyed libraries in the abandoned cities while I was growing... yes. I don't know if that qualifies me as an expert *Mandri*." Tarifa answered him.

"Tell me *Tenna*... what began the downfall of this country?" Andro asked.

"It was a combination of many things." Tarifa answered him. "But most of the books I read agreed that when the United States began to abandon the ideals the country was formed on, it all began to fall apart. The government swelled and began to intrude more and more upon their citizens lives. They abandoned many of their original laws and many of the allies they had fostered relationships with across the planet. Some of them going back several hundred years. By the time of the Great Fire they had lost many such longtime allies. EDEN BASE was... it was suppose to be the thing that restored what they lost. Unfortunately it came too late."

Andro nodded his head. "I will not do what they did." Andro spoke. "I will not abandon what we have started with the Coven. Grandfather Riall stays with the High Coven with all of his forces. The last thing we need is for them to think we have abandon them. It makes them weaker and ultimately makes us weaker."

"We can't meet them head on in numbers." Ceneu spoke. "What we do have is better trained personnel and far superior equipment."

"Andro?" Resumar spoke from his transmission. "Turn us loose!"

Androcles looked at his brother. "Fervon?"

Resumar looked at Pian and Andro saw him nod. "We have done nothing for six weeks but train and gather strength." Resumar began looking at his brother. "Mican and his people have liberated seven additional clone death camps. Na'lia and our medical people have given all of them the treatment they developed to stop the clone aging process. Nine additional Prides have come over to our side Andro. We have nearly nine hundred ships! Pian is gaining support by the day!"

"Res is right Andro." Isra spoke. "There are far more Kavalians here that think like Pian than we have ever thought. General Azlenr and Byka should be the biggest sign to you of that."

"I don't mean to be the harbinger of doom..." Deia spoke up. "But given our history and recent events... trying to convince us of what I believe you are trying to say General Pian... it is not going to be easy." Deia held up her hand before Pian could answer. "Now do not take that for something it is not. I have seen what you did... what you have done... you do not need to convince me of this. Aricia would be dead if not for you and your wife Jalersi. Perhaps many more of our people. I don't believe anyone in this transmission doubts what you are saying."

"Deia... if I can change given how I was brought up..." Isra began.

"Your circumstances were different Isra." Deia stopped him. "And you had Tarifa to help you."

"Deia that is not fair." Tarifa spoke up again.

They all saw Charles reach out an place his hand on Deia's arm. "I believe what Deia is trying to say is that we need... we need proof."

"Proof?" Androcles asked.

Charles looked at him. “Androcles... we do not have the gift of you and your father. The gift of insight into another person’s intentions and thoughts.”

Andro looked surprised. “I wish I had this insight sir.” He said.

Charles chuckled. “Oh but you do my boy. You and your father both. Without it... what you did with the High Coven would never have happened. It is different right now for General Pian and his followers. No one in this room or with you right now doubts what Pian is saying. I think we all agree on that. However... convincing our people is another story altogether. The vast majority of the Union had already decided that the High Coven should not be our enemy. Not with all of the vampires we call friends, allies and family. After what has happened with the Kavalians... what Keleru has perpetrated... convincing them of similar intentions is not going to be quite so easy.”

“That is not fair!” Jalersi snapped. “We...”

It was Pian who took her hand in his and shook his head. “President Turner is right Jalersi.” He said softly. “Without the support of their people they can only do so much.”

Andro stepped closer to the holoimage. “Then form a government.” He spoke. “Establish the Kavalian Free Republic openly Pian. Let the entire galaxy know.”

Pian shook his head. “Keleru would move instantly to crush us.” He said. “While we have grown... we could not stand against the forces he could bring to bear on us. I can not ask those who follow me to throw away their lives with no hope of success.”

“Then let us help!” Andro hissed turning to look at his Aunt. “*Tenna Deia...*?”

Deia met his eyes and she sat up straighter her eyes going a little wider. “I know what you are thinking *mandri*.” She said as her face became more animated.

“So do I!” Tarifa stated with a smile.

Charles laughed. “Androcles my boy... are you certain you are not a closet politician.”

“*Sibfla* no!” Andro gasped.

Ceneu looked at them and then at Andro. “You will forgive our military minds... but what exactly are all of you speaking about.”

“It could work!” Deia exclaimed. “Oh... that would be such a slap in the face. Selene?”

Selene nodded her head instantly. “It’s very doable.” She spoke. “It’s not like we don’t have the ability. And it’s something we could do very low key until the time is right to reveal the whole thing.”

Deia looked up. “Pian... how long would it take you and Jalersi to transit here to Earth?”

Pian looked at Resumar and then back to her. “Using the Pralor transport... perhaps two days.”

Deia nodded. “You have other Pride leaders like yourself correct?”

Pian nodded. “Nearly thirty.”

“Bring them with you.” Deia spoke. “And their wives if they are mated.”

“Why?” Pian asked.

Deia looked at him in the transmission. “Because we are going to give you the voice you need.” She stated. “If we are going to do this... then we are going to do it right.”

Charles looked at Andro now. “It will also allow you to do what you need and not burden our military assets with other missions. At least not yet.”

Andro nodded in understanding. “Yes it will.” He spoke. “Admiral Ceneu?”

“Milord.” Ceneu answered still somewhat confused about what had just happened.

“The three CFFGs that you have on standby deploy into the area around Elear.” Andro spoke. “Then shift six into the area around Hadaria. Not within the same system... but close enough that they can obliterate any reinforcements the Kavalians try to send. Cancel any leaves that may still be active and activate all of our reserves. All combat units will come to full alert and prepare to deploy to their Lines of Departure.”

Ceneu nodded. “Yes Milord.” He spoke. “Our garrisons?”

“Send a scout unit to Vigon.” Andro told him. “Discover if any of our people are still alive. If they are... then we’ll put a plan together to get them out.” Andro looked at Pian. “Pian... with your permission I would like to keep General Azlenr and General Byka and their divisions with me here on Solmar for the time being.”

“Andro... what are you going to do?” Deia asked.

“For the moment... nothing.” Andro said. “I want to see what Keleru will or will not do. Father said he would contact me within two days and let me know what will be happening there and I want to take that call on

the *SCIMITAR*. Things will shift somewhat he if returns and there is a chance Keleru will try to take this colony back.”

“We will begin to make preparations to meet Pian and the others.” Deia said. “I will let Ceneu and Tareif know what it is we have in mind.” She continued seeing their confused looks. “Contact us if you need anything.”

“*Tenna*... I would like to send the Rothryn delegation on to you.” Andro spoke. “I think you will enjoy Lady Aleatia’s company.”

Deia nodded. “If that is acceptable to them it is fine with me.” She said. She rose to her feet. “We have much to do and not a lot of time to do it *Mandri*. Go with the gods.”

“You as well *Tenna*.” Andro said.

The transmission ended and Andro turned to look at Resumar and Pian. “Resumar... return with Pian and the others.” Andro spoke. “I will return to Earth as soon as I talk to father in two days and we will speak.”

Resumar looked puzzled himself and nodded. “What are you thinking *fervon*?” He asked.

Andro shook his head. “Not now.” He answered. “We will speak at length when we meet on Earth.”

Resumar nodded. “Very well.” He said.

“Androcles... may I have a moment with Azlenr and Byka?” Pian asked.

Andro nodded without hesitation. “Clear the room.” He ordered turning to look at the others behind him. “We’ll meet again in twelve hours unless something happens that requires our attention. If you need me I will be on the *SCIMITAR*.”

Andro looked at Azlenr and Byka as he moved up to them and then turned back to Pian. “Take as long as you need Pian. Nothing Keleru has can track this COM unit.”

“Thank you Androcles.” Pian spoke.

Andro nodded... looked at Azlenr and Byka once more and then moved for the door.

Pian waited until the room was empty and Azlenr and Byka were looking at him. He moved closer to his transmitter and took a deep breath. “I need to know something before we go further gentlemen.”

“General Nruarani?” Azlenr spoke.

“Tell me you are with me.” Pian spoke. “Tell me that your hearts are in this. I need men who are ready to move forward and attempt to save our people. I do not want men who will betray me or run to protect their own asses. If you are not fully committed to this road tell me now. I will insure Androcles releases you to go about your way... but your divisions will be forfeit to us.”

Azlenr looked at Byka. “May I ask you a question Pian’Nruarani?” He spoke turning back.

Pian nodded. “Yes.”

“Is what you are doing... is it about our people... our future as a people... or is it about you stealing Jalersi away from Pusintin?” Azlenr asked. “Many of us have known that you have wanted her for many years.”

Pian took a deep breath and nodded his head. “In the beginning it was only about Jalersi.” He replied honestly. “But once... once I had her... I realized that I could not have the future I wanted with her if things did not change for our people as a whole. I am Kavalian... and if my children with Jalersi are to have a future... then this is what must be done. I can not turn back from the path I have set myself upon. I will either free our people... or I will die trying. I will not see my children living in exile or under oppression. I will die first.”

Azlenr looked at Byka and saw him nod his head. He turned back to Pian and stood a little taller. “Then command us Pian’Nruarani. Command us so that our future will be just as bright as possible.”

ONTEROM SCIENCE STATION ZERO ONE FIVE

“...*nubous* idiots and their grenades!” Anja hissed as she tossed aside a scorched data pad and looked up at the destroyed equipment in Medical. “Avi?”

-I can restore full power to the three main consoles in one point three hours Anja- Avi answered pushing away from the large wall of circuit boards and wiring he was standing in front of. **-Four of the five secondary consoles however are destroyed completely-**

“The cryo chambers?” Duewa asked quickly.

-The cryo chambers operate on a separate power grid- Avi answered. **-Only five were affected by the detonations and that was unintentional. A piece of shrapnel struck the main power matrix panel for those five chambers. The remainder are still functioning within normal parameters-**

“Good.” Anja hissed. “Let’s keep it that way. Given the timeframe we established, they would have already changed our people and the Pralors they took. Which means their numbers doubled overnight. We don’t need anymore running around.”

Duewa nodded. “I won’t argue with that.” She said. She pushed a broken ceiling frame off one computer station. “Anja... I’m going to pull our research off this system.” She spoke. “No reason to give them any insight into what we already know.”

Anja nodded. “Do it.” She snapped.

Duewa detected the tension in her voice and moved over to her quickly taking her hands. Anja looked at her. “You are concerned for Martin, Aricia and Bella.” Duewa said. “You know them Anja... what they are capable of. Have confidence in them.”

Anja smiled. “I’m not concerned for them Duewa.” She said. “I’m ticked off because Martin didn’t take me.”

Duewa looked taken aback for several seconds and then she too laughed. “Oh... I see.” She said.

Anja squeezed her hands. “Thank you for the thought though.”

-Anja- Avi’s voice interrupted them and they turned to look at him only to see Radra, Mari and Kesyla enter the Medical Bay slowly.

Radra looked at Anja squeezing her hands together nervously. Wayonn had told her the fiery red haired half Hadarian Queen had a temper and the skills to act on that temper. She was also the most compassionate woman he had ever met. “I... I spoke with the Praetorian Oracle Wayonn.” She said softly. “We wish... we wish to try and make things between us better. We want to help.”

Mari stepped forward quickly in the exuberance of youth. “We know these systems.” She offered. “We can help you get them up and running again. And with your Avatar...” She looked at Avi with something akin to awe. “It will be... it will be much faster.”

“I don’t mean to sound suspicious... but how do we know you aren’t here under orders from your Chief Pralor to help us just so that you can delete any data from the system that you don’t want us to see?” Anja asked.

“Delnash was escorted to the nearby lake so that he could speak with Teniri.” Radra spoke. “He confined Lorendo and Sashan to the vehicle bay until he returned. Valael is with your husband’s Praetorian Oracle Helen in the Command Center.”

Anja’s head tilted to the side and she looked at Radra. “You believe Martin is one of these Praetorians?” She asked.

Mari turned back to face Anja as Radra answered. “Praetorians are revered within much of our society. As I told you last night... there are those of us who do not believe as Lorendo. What we feel within the Etheric Realm from your husband and mate Anja Leonidas... it is no different than what we feel from Murano. It’s actually a little stronger. I can not deny what I feel within me.”

Kesyla nodded and moved up beside her. “Neither can I.” She stated softly. “No matter what my father says.”

“Now that we have that out of the way...” Mari said cheerfully. “I will just help the Avatar over...” She turned and bumped directly into Avi’s chest, his seven foot tall form towering over her.

-My name is Avi daughter of Chief Elder Delnash- Avi spoke. -I would be appreciative if you used it-

Mari blinked several times as she looked up at him. “They named you?” She gasped.

-The elf female Endith chose my designation. I find I have come to like how it sounds- Avi answered. -If you wish to help... the Main Quantum Power Matrix is out of sync by three point two Quntijewels. It needs adjusting. I need to retrieve two cases of Quantum Bio Computer Chips and an AP Fusion Power Converter from storage-

Mari looked a little stunned but she nodded her head quickly with a smile. “Three point two Quntijewels. Got it.” She watched as Avi walked out of the Medical Bay and then turned to the others. “Did you know only three Praetorians ever had Avatars assigned to them! Three!”

Radra smiled as she watched Mari turned to the wall of circuit boards and wiring. She then looked at Anja. “Youth.” She said. “It is so very refreshing.”

Anja allowed a smile to split her face. “There isn’t much we can do until Avi gets the system back online.” She said.

“Then may we sit and talk with you?” Radra asked moving closer.

“About what?” Anja asked.

“Perhaps you could tell me of your people. The Hadarians. It is one of the few species that we do not have volumes of information on. They were deemed too fragile for the Seeding missions and basically ignored. Something I do not agree with. Both of your abilities are utterly fascinating and I would love to discover more about them. Or your children. You said you have eighteen that consider you and the others mother? I would love to hear of them. Are yours the oldest or...”

Anja shook her head. “Androcles is the oldest of them... well Lisisa actually, but she treats Andro as the oldest. Eliani is my oldest.” She said. “I have twins... a boy and girl who will be thirteen this year. Denali is Aricia’s second child and she has twins as well. Nara and Deion...” Anja looked at Duewa. “Carians... they will be fourteen this year! They’ll go for their Agoge soon! We haven’t seen them in too long.” She turned back to Radra. “For’mya’s children are Arrarn and Bryon. You’ve met Fedor and Eirene already. Bella has given us two beautiful daughters and a son just recently. Dysea has given us Resumar and Normya. And Yuriko is our adopted daughter.”

“So many!” Kesyla spoke with keen interest. “Will you have more?”

“Kesyla!” Radra hissed.

Anja smiled at her words. “It’s ok really. You should see us when we are all in the same place at the same time. Controlled chaos is what it is.” She said. “And hopefully... hopefully we will have more yes. I know I would like more. Cirith wants to have children. Hell... all of us want more. Martin more than us I think. He loves acting like a child with them.”

“Can you tell us of them?” Radra asked.

Anja looked at Duewa and then back to Radra. “I suppose it couldn’t hurt.” She said. “Pull up a piece of smashed furniture.”

...Betrayed us! Teniri snarled at Delnash, her jaws snapping together to indicate just how upset she was. You lied to us! You told us you looked for the ship that brought us to Sybin! We told you it had returned to retrieve our Elder Mother and we asked you to search for it! You lied to us! To me! Why would you try to disable this ship Delnash?

Delnash stared at her feeling very unwelcome at the moment. He hadn’t felt this from Teniri since the time shortly after they had joined forces nearly thirty-five thousand years ago and come to Artaaya with his people. *I did not lie to you Teniri. I have no idea what you are saying!* Delnash answered as calmly as he could. His eyes darted to the massive dragon beside Teniri who so far had not said a word. A dragon that dwarfed her in size by a good four to five meters. *We did send a ship and we found no sign of the vessel you told us of. I...*

This is Arzoal! Teniri hissed. This is the Pralor Elder Mother we left behind! This is who you were suppose to find!

Delnash looked at Arzoal then with wide eyes. “Arzoal!” He gasped. “I remember your name now! The others told me of you when we discovered the dragons on Sybin!”

Others? Arzoal gasped. They live?

Delnash nodded quickly. “Two of the four who traveled with Teniri yes.” He answered.

Teniri looked at Arzoal. *They remained with us through it all Elder Mother. They take care of the many eggs we have in the hatcheries. They are the most trusted of everyone. Neola and Gormna.*

Neola! Arzoal spoke softly. Gormna! Her eyes closed slowly and Teniri could feel the great happiness flowing through her.

“You were the senior medical officer and senior assistant to Artre.” Delnash spoke. “You are... you are the one who used the Psionic Transfer Chamber!”

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *Yes.*

“Do you know what you did?” Delnash exclaimed. “Your actions...”

Arzoal released a small but loud trumpet of anger and she lowered her head even closer to Delnash, her flame red eyes wide. *Do not speak to me of actions little man! Arzoal snarled. Chief Elder of the Pralor people you may be... but you have no right to judge my actions when the actions of you and the other Elders are far worse! Including those that came before you!*

“You have no right to say that!” Delnash snapped.

I have every right! Arzoal nearly shouted within Mindvoice. I disagreed with the actions of the Council even before I became a dragon and my fears came true. I was among many who did not agree with our actions in regards to the Seed Missions! They were wrong in how they were conducted! We perceived ourselves as superior! God like when held against the Seed Species! Look where that got us? Death and destruction! I am guilty of it on a genocidal scale so do not speak to me of what you know! What I have seen with my eyes would make you cower in fear and weep Chief Elder Delnash!

“I am... I am only adhering to the directives established long ago.” Delnash spoke.

Directives and laws that have no place or meaning in this time! In this moment! Arzoal barked. You dismiss Martin Leonidas and the others because you say they are beneath you! I tell you now... you are beneath them! Arzoal saw his eyes go wide in disgust and arrogance. Yes... I can see the horror on your face at my words. But it is the truth. What Sumar did... what Wayonn did? It altered the course of destiny and fate in a way that can no longer be denied! I will no longer allow you to subject my dragons to your arrogance and unseeing eyes!

“Your dragons?” Delnash gasped. “But Teniri is the Elder Mother!”

Teniri shook her head. *No longer! Arzoal is the true Elder Mother of our kind and every dragon who breaths air will know this the moment they sense her or see her. Just as I now do! No other but the Elder Mother could command the loyalty of four Talon Guardians branded by the Elder Council!*

“Talon Guardians?” Delnash asked.

Martin and the dragon who is his Bonded Brother, Torma. Arzoal spoke. They are Talon Guardians. Gifted with a small portion of each Dragon Elder’s Etheric essence. Protectors of dragons and those who met out justice among our kind when it is needed. The most powerful of our kind in every way.

“But he is... he is a Lycavorian!” Delnash gasped.

Arzoal nodded. *Yes he is. As is his son Androcles. And between them you will find no more revered an example of Talon Guardians anywhere in our history. Androcles’s Bonded sister is Elynth... Torma’s oldest offspring. You ask yourself why Martin burns brighter than Murano within the Etheric realm... it is because of their positions as Talon Guardians. Just as Androcles will burn brighter. They have the combined essences of nine dragon elders to call on and augment their powers if need be. You think Murano stopped Martin Leonidas? A powerful Praetorian he may be... but Martin Leonidas would have carved through him just as easily as he did your fool soldiers who kill his men and beat his Queen!*

“Nine!” Delnash almost shouted. “You... you gave them this? As barbaric as their species is... you gave them this?”

Barbaric! Arzoal snarled viciously, her jaws snapping together and causing Delnash to back up in sudden fear. I have seen Martin Leonidas crush his enemies with one boot and extend his hand in friendship in

the next instant! She spat at Delnash. I have been witness to him saving millions... billions of lives with his actions as King in the past two decades! Citizens of the Union revere him and his Queens in a way I have never seen. They adore him! They adore his entire family! His son Androcles walks that same path! He has that same draw on people! I have seen within their memories the night they stood against thousands of vicious and brutal enemies in order to keep the bodies of their dead comrades from being captured as trophies! The blood flowed like a river all around them but they never faltered in their beliefs or their task! And they would have died that night in order to preserve those beliefs and values! I have seen Martin play with his small children and act like a child himself! I have seen him risk all to save the life of a small boy whom he did not know! Arzoal stretched her head out within inches of Delnash. Mind your words around me Chief Elder Delnash of the Pralor people... for if you ever call Martin Leonidas barbaric in my presence again... I will show you just how barbaric I can be! Arzoal snorted angrily. She glared at him for a long moment.

He came here... he came here hoping to discover about the Pralor blood that runs in his veins. It has been a dream of his ever since... since he discovered who his grandfather was. You have shown him nothing but disrespect and disdain at every turn. Even now he risks his own life to save not only his men... but your people as well. And still you treat him as if he is inferior to you. Arzoal drew her head back and Delnash watched as she shook it from side to side. I am... I am ashamed to have called myself a Pralor.

You came to Sybin one year after our ship departed to retrieve the Elder mother and the rest of our kind. You brought the Scourge with you and thousands of my kind died defending your people! Teniri stated now. We told you who she was and the only thing we asked of you was to send a ship to search for her. You sent a ship to destroy ours instead! And now your true feelings for my kind come forth in the manner you treat the Elder Mother and the revered Talon Guardians of our kind.

Delnash looked at her. "That is not true!" Delnash exclaimed. "Once we came to Artaaya I did send a ship! I have the logs from that ship to prove this to you Teniri! I would never have ordered them to destroyed your ship! Why would I lie to you Teniri? What purpose would that have after all you did for us? What we have accomplished through the millennia?

Our ship did not return to the Elder Mother for nearly nine thousand years! Teniri barked angrily. And when it returned to Elear to collect the others it was discovered damaged with its computer banks completely erased.

Delnash shook his head. "Wait." He stammered. "That... I was not told this Teniri. I was told no sign of the ship was seen."

Who would know how to completely erase the computer core of a Pralor ship Delnash? Teniri asked. Only another Pralor. The ship was damaged by weapons fire of some sort! Why would you do this after all we did to help you?

"Teniri... I swear to you... I have no idea what you are talking about!" Delnash gasped.

You are the Chief Elder Pralor! Teniri growled. How could you not know these things? How? Delnash was unable to say anything as he looked at her. Teniri snorted loudly. I have watched for millennia as you have led your people. Many of your decisions I did not agree with when it came to your own people and I said nothing. It was not my place. My kind... Dragon Kind... we have stood beside yours as friends and allies for longer than many of your young people have been alive Delnash. But this... I will not let this stand. It is a sign to me that even now you consider my kind nothing more than tools. The Elder Mother and I have spoken all through the night. She has told me many things Delnash. How Dragon Kind walks among the streets of the many planets within this Union that Talon Guardian Martin is King of. She says many of their cities rival yours in splendor! Delnash looked at Arzoal who simply stared at him as Teniri continued. How we are looked upon with awe and respect and love without question. How Dragon Kind holds a seat on their ruling body! We have a say in how we travel down the future roads! Teniri gasped. Something you never offered us among your kind.

"Teniri..." Delnash began.

No! When we return to Artaaya I will consult with the other Elders and we will decide the future of Dragon Kind on Artaaya. Do not be surprised if we choose to depart and join with our true Elder Mother and be among our brothers and sisters. Teniri told him.

"Leave?" Delnash exclaimed. "How?"

We have ships that can carry Dragon Kind. Arzoal told him. Hundreds and hundreds of them at once. It would take many trips... and may take months, but we can return our kind to the planet of our birth and many others like it and be welcome.

“You are welcome on Artaaya!” Delnash hissed softly.

You will forgive me Chief Elder Pralor... Teniri spoke. But to call a Talon Guardian barbaric in the presence of any of my kind will undoubtedly not be pleasant. Talon Guardians are to Dragon Kind what Praetorians are to your people. Only we have not dismissed what they mean to us as a species as you have with the Praetorians.

“Teniri... this attitude is not needed.” Delnash spoke.

Teniri snarled and spit and lowered her head close to his. I did not believe so either. She growled. Until I discovered you betrayed my kind! Betrayed us because it suited your needs!

“That is not true!” Delnash declared once more.

Isn't it? Teniri asked. Think upon your actions of the last millennia and tell me of one time when Dragon Kind had any say in decisions you made. Tell me! No more! Our true Elder Mother has returned to us after more than thirty millennia and she has brought with her two of four Talon Guardians who now exist to safeguard and live among Dragon Kind! I am done speaking. Send word to us when you are ready to leave and we will come. Unless you decide to leave us here because we no longer serve your needs!

“That is not fair Teniri!” Delnash barked.

Fair or not... I will begin to think of Dragon Kind first from now on. Teniri answered. She turned without another word and began to walk away from Delnash, Arzoal falling in beside her leaving Delnash standing there alone and bewildered at what had just taken place.

You... you saved me!”

His face relaxed and he smiled. “Good. That is good. I wouldn't want you to miss me courting you. I will... I will make you mine Iama'Juturi!”

Iama laughed with relief and nodded her head. “I... I am already yours Fedor.” She spoke softly.

Iama recited those words over and over in her head as she rested between his legs and stroked the skin of his jaw as he slept just like she had for the last fifteen minutes watching his handsome face. It was a simple thing to shove two portable cots together and with Dnom's wing extended out comfortably around them, it was almost like they were alone as they were on the roof top. Iama had refused to leave him when they locked down the vehicle bay for the evening, telling him she was going to take care of him. His wounds had already been healed she knew, but the loss of blood had tired him out and almost immediately after laying on the cots he had fallen asleep. Iama knew what she wanted instantly and being careful not to disturb him, she settled between his legs with her head resting gently on his powerful chest. She had drifted quickly into sleep, the beating of his strong heart once more lulling her into a trance like state. She did indeed purr in her sleep, her tail twitching slightly back and forth as she enjoyed once more his warmth and the feel of his body against hers.

When she had awoke, she was still in the same position, but his arms had dropped to rest gently on her shoulders. He said he was going to court her. Iama didn't really understand what that meant, but she desperately hoped it included laying exactly as they were. Her firm breasts were pressed tightly to his groin and she could feel the outline of his thick shaft against her chest. She had woken up this way, very conscious of the fact that he was very hard and pressing between her breasts. A flash of anger crossed her face until everything rushed back to her and filled her with warmth and happiness. Iama could surmise from the heat and length of what she could feel between her breasts that Fedor Leonidas was very well gifted. Not as large as the brutish and harsh Kavalian clones she had been forced to pleasure but very well gifted indeed. Certainly more than enough to make her happy for the rest of her life in that regard. As she laid there feeling these things fill her Iama realized that she actually thought about her future. Fedor was the very first man who she truly wanted to please in that way. He treated her as a precious flower, twice risking his own life to save hers. She didn't see it until her talk with Helen and then almost losing him yesterday and she vowed to make sure it never happened again. She had an opportunity for a real life with a man who looked upon her not with lust, but with love.

He hadn't thought. He hadn't hesitated. His actions were driven by the need to protect her. To save her. Whatever qualms Iama'Juturi may have had about getting involved with this half elf Lycavorian Prince who had been born less than three months ago were quickly shredded and tossed to the side in that moment. As she had stared at his bloody body knowing that he was dying and she would never know what it was that had begun between them, her heart was being torn to little pieces. Iama drew her fingers away slowly and let her head fall back to his rock hard abdomen, her nearly white blond hair spreading over his chest and falling off to the side. She would do anything he wanted now. She would show him more pleasure in her arms than he ever knew could exist so that he never left her. She would even be as obedient as he desired for Iama knew submissive to Fedor Leonidas would never be the same as with the...

"No." His voice spoke softly and her head came up instantly to see his beautiful dark brown orbs gazing at her. "You will... you will never be submissive to any man Iama'Juturi. Not while I live."

"You... you heard my thoughts!" She exclaimed with wide eyes.

"Forgive me." Fedor spoke quickly. "My mother says... she says it is something that will happen until I fully learn to focus and control my skills. I can hear the surface thoughts of those close to me as I wake. I did not mean to intrude Iama and I..." Fedor suddenly realized his own unique condition and what he felt and his eyes flew open in embarrassment. He gripped the sides of the cot intending to move but Iama's weight stopped him.

"Please don't move Fedor." She said softly.

"Iama I am... I did not... this is... this is very awkward." He finally stammered.

Iama smiled up at him with her pale green eyes. "I am enjoying what I am feeling." She said. "It pleases me that you think I am desirable even after..." She stopped talking and her eyes dropped for a moment.

Fedor saw the sadness on her face and instinctively he reached down and took her face within his hands. He rolled over on the cot, pulling her with him until she was beneath him, and then Fedor Leonidas kissed her softly. Iama gasped for she had never been kissed before. The texture and feel of his lips on hers was amazing and oh so very intoxicating. Her eyes closed almost dreamily as he deepened the kiss and she felt the tip of his tongue slip between her lips. Her arms suddenly went around his lower back, her leg curling up along his hip and her tail madly twitching on the side as she experienced the very first kiss of her young life. Iama knew what kissing was of course, but the fact that Fedor was kissing her even after knowing what she had been forced to do for so long, it ignited a small fire within her. A fire that was beginning to grow stronger by the moment. She stabbed her tongue forward to meet his and suddenly they were dancing a tango, locked in the steamy kiss, and Iama holding him tightly against her now quivering form. It was only moments before Iama was just as aroused as he had been when he woke, and this knowledge made her mind scream in happiness.

It seemed like decades before Fedor finally began to draw his lips away from hers and she tried to recapture them. Languidly Iama's eyes opened until she was staring at his face so close to hers and she shivered in desire and need. The feel of his lips still lingered on hers and her tail wrapped tightly around his upper thigh in response to this. Slowly she reached up and touched her lips with her fingers and looked at him.

"Where... where did you learn... learn how to do that?" She stammered still somewhat out of breath.

"I... I read it in a book. There... there wasn't much to do on the ship when my training periods were done." He said with an embarrassed grin. "And I... I watch my sister and Miseo. They are doing it all the time! Did I... did I do it right? I'm sorry if..."

Iama's pale green eyes lit up. "Do it again Fedor!" She said quickly.

Fedor didn't hesitate and lowered his lips to hers again. This kiss lasted much longer and the exploration more involved. Iama's arms wrapped around his back tightly, trying to draw him even tighter as her back arched upwards towards him and her body grew warm and tingly. He drew his face back until he was looking at her with bright dark brown eyes.

"I... I want to make you mine Iama'Juturi." He said softly. "I want to make you mine forever! I know you think of me as..."

Iama reached up and put a finger to his moist lips and shook her head. "No Fedor." She spoke. "I was... I was wrong. Someone... a very wise person told me recently to look beyond what I have known and... she said that all I have ever wanted is right in front of me and I just needed to let go of the past." Iama reached up and took his face in her hands. "I let go of the past on the roof with you two nights ago."

Fedor looked at her puzzled. "One of my mothers didn't..."

Iama shook her head with a smile. “No. It was not one of your mothers.” She stated. “It doesn’t matter now anyway.” She gazed at him longingly. “You said... you wanted to court me. What... what does this mean Fedor?”

Fedor smiled. “I don’t believe it began with my father’s people, Spartans, Lycavorians, but they follow it much more closely than others.” He told her. “I escort you to events, take you to lavish dinners... well as lavish as the mess lounge on the *ARC ROYAL* will allow... I will purchase presents for you and...”

“Will it involve more kissing?” Iama asked excitedly.

Fedor grinned. “I hope so.” He said.

“Then you will take me and make me yours?” Iama asked animatedly.

Fedor looked at her. “I... Iama...”

Her eyes narrowed slightly and the smile quickly left her face. She saw the indecision on his face and mistook it for something that it wasn't. A sharp pain stabbed into her heart and she withdrew her hands from his face. “You... you don’t want me.” She said softly. “You don’t want me because of what I was forced to do. All the others I was forced to be with.”

Fedor looked at her with wide eyes. “What?”

“You don’t want me because I am... I am dirty.” Iama spoke as tears welled in her eyes. Her tail unwrapped from around his thigh and she tried to push him off her. “I... I should go.”

Fedor held on to her. “Iama no!” He hissed. “That is not it! That has nothing to do with anything!”

“I am not pure!” Iama said looking at him. “You are a Prince! You should have... a pure woman to make yours. I am only... I am only a Kavalian whore!”

Fedor’s hand snapped up and gripped her jaw gently. “Don’t say that!” He snarled out. “Don’t... don’t you dare say that Iama! That is not true! You are... you are like the sweetest fruit to me. I can not get your scent out of my head! I smell you wherever I go!”

“You say these things... but you don’t... you don’t wish to be with me?” Iama spoke. “There is only one reason for this Fedor. That is because I am not pure!”

“No!” He hissed. “No! *Carians*...” He lowered his head. “Just spit it out Fedor.” He told himself aloud. He lifted his head quickly and looked at her confused face. “I... I don’t want to... I don’t want to disappoint you.”

Iama’s eyes went from angry and sad to confused to realization all in the space of two seconds. Her pale green eyes then flew open as the meaning of his words filled her and fresh tears burst into her eyes. She had completely forgotten he had never been with a woman before.

“I don’t want to disappoint you!”

These words rang in her mind like thunder. “Oh... Fedor!” She gasped loudly, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and burying her face in his neck.

She whimpered softly when his arms drew her even tighter against him and she pulled her head back and kissed him hard, grabbing his head as he responded to her kiss without hesitation. It was a hungry kiss. A kiss of want and desire and need. After a long and steamy moment Iama pulled back and looked at him.

“You could never disappoint me Fedor!” She gasped. “Never!”

“I will... I will have you Iama! Juturi!” He spoke as he nibbled on her lips. “And I will make you the happiest woman in all the universe! I will...”

Fedor... we could use yours and Iama’s help. For'mya’s voice broke into his thoughts.

Iama saw his face tighten just a little. “Mother... do you mind! A little privacy here!” Fedor hissed softly causing Iama’s eyes to grow wider.

You will have privacy when you return to the ARC ROYAL. For'mya answered. *At the moment... you and Iama have everyone around you quite worked up so privacy is kind of out my son.*

Indeed it is. He heard the voice of his mother Cirith chuckle.

Fedor’s eyes grew wider. “What?” He bolted upright, pulling Iama with him in surprise. “Dnom?” He spoke.

Are you sure brother? Everyone is watching.

“Everyone?” Fedor gasped looking at him.

Dnom nodded his huge head. *Yes.*

“*Sibfla!*” Fedor snarled. He looked at Iama who was smiling broadly. She apparently had already figured it out and she stepped close to him and took his arm in her hands just as Dnom lifted his wing.

“I am not afraid.” She said softly.

There were seven others sitting nearby, four men and three women from the technician group. All of them wore smiles on their faces. The men because of the devotion they smelled in Fedor for the Kavalian female and the women because they all knew Fedor was going to make her very happy.

“Fedor!” He heard his mother’s voice and turned to see her standing by the ramp going into the facility with his mothers Dysea and Cirith. All of them with knowing smiles on their faces.

I will never live this down will I mothers? He asked For'mya.

Probably not... but I know your father and your brothers will be very impressed with your words and your actions. For'mya answered with a loving smile.

Yes they will. Dysea spoke now. *Very well done Fedor our son.*

Fedor groaned and turned quickly to gather his body armor and A4. He grabbed Iama’s hand and headed for the ramp where they stood.

Danny held up his fist and dropped to one knee beside the towering tree his eyes focused directly ahead of them. Those behind him following suit in the space of a second and a half and Martin moved up beside him with Murano. Dawn had come and gone and the sun was nearly fully up now. They had left the Science facility just before dawn, tracking the scents of their people swiftly. Their team comprised Martin’s Alpha Squad of Kenny, Julie and Pablo, along with Aricia, Isabella and T'lolt. Murano had accompanied them along with Garan, Kasdan and two of his senior men. The Pralor security forces and Kasdan kept up quite well considering the pace Danny had set. Garan had decided the previous day that no matter what Elder Lorendo said, this man was a Praetorian. He could not deny what he felt from the man or the way Murano treated him. Garan had decided during the night that he would select his two most trusted men, men who thought like he did, and he would learn all he could from this man and those who followed him. So far their learning experience had paid massive dividends. What they had learned in just the three hours they had been tracking the Svorag, Garan could fill half a book. How to track. How to move in the confines of forests and timber and not be seen or heard by others. These were things he and his men lacked to a great degree and from what he saw, Martin Leonidas and those with him were masters of these arts.

“Danny?” Martin spoke in a whisper.

Dan motioned with his head in front of him. “Bout a hundred meters head. Cave entrance. Half covered by downed trees. They went in.”

Martin shifted his gaze and used his wolf eyes to scan where Danny was indicating. “Got it.” He said softly.

“See how the trees are bent inward?” Danny asked him. “They are using them as cover.” Danny looked at Martin. “They knew what they were doing *fervon.*”

Murano looked at Daniel from where he had come up on his other side. “Daniel... Svorag have only basic instincts.”

Martin looked at him. “Isn’t that what many of your people thought of us?” He asked.

Murano nodded his head. “Point taken Martin my boy. An excellent statement and one that I will kick myself in my ass for later.”

Martin couldn’t help but grin and he looked at Danny. “I like this guy.” Dan spoke with a smile. “He ain’t afraid to call it like it is.” Danny looked back to Murano. “Something that is seriously lacking in your people. They’re all uptight and...”

“I think he gets the picture Danny.” Martin said as Murano smiled.

Danny nodded and looked at the cave entrance. “Yeah... they got basic tactics down just fine. Well enough for them to pick up a weapon and use them against us on Twelve Alpha.” He said.

Murano looked at him stunned. “They used weapons?” He asked.

Martin nodded his head. “And they knew basic tactics.” Martin spoke as Aricia and Bella settled soundlessly beside him. Martin pointed to the cave entrance for them. Of all his Queens, Aricia, Anja and

Isabella had worked the most with Martin's Alpha Squad. Along with Anja, who though very petite in nature was an extremely lethal woman, they were accepted as part of the team and all of them knew what one would do at any given time.

"This planet you encountered them on?" Murano asked. "Where was it?"

Martin looked at him. "Two days back. We jumped once to get here from there. They had water craft of some sort too. Used it to move on the ocean and hit us from the beaches. We didn't stick around long enough to find out where they came from."

Murano glanced at Kasdan who was behind him and listening. "Kasdan?"

Kasdan appeared nervous but he had held up well so far for a scientist who had never been in the field before. "I do not know much about them." He answered honestly. "Elder Lorendo secured the Svorag corpses that we do have in high level quarantine. Elder Radra has examined them but I never talked to her about them or to what extent she was able to examine them. You don't just walk up to the Chief Elder of the Medical Convention and ask for her findings."

Martin looked at him now. This Kasdan seemed to genuinely view him and the others as equals and his scent told Martin he was very honest. "Given what you know... take an educated guess... Kasdan."

Kasdan nodded. "Yes."

Martin nodded. "My gut tells me your guess will be more accurate than your buddy Lorendo's facts."

Kasdan's eyes darkened. "He is not my buddy! He is a..." He hissed. Kasdan caught his words and then took a deep breath. "If you want me to guess than I would have to say they are adapting. Each victim they change keeps at least a small portion of the memories from their previous existence... that much I do know. This they are passing on to the others. I know their infection is not the only means by which they grow. There are signs that they are breeding with each other."

"Great... baby lizard monsters that try to stick their tongues down your throat." Danny grunted.

"So they are evolving?" Aricia asked.

Kasdan met her eyes and nodded. "That is my guess based on what we have seen yes." He answered.

Martin turned and looked at Murano and then settled his eyes back on Kasdan. "How long have they been around?"

"We first started to see them in numbers about twenty thousand years ago." Murano said. "At least that was when the reports began coming in. They began striking our smaller outposts across this quadrant. Taking victims. Changing them. There is no cure for what they afflict our people with. We've had several large encounters with them over the years and lost several thousand men and women to them."

"That would explain the Pralor genes and DNA Anja and Duewa found in the one on the *ARC ROYAL Beloved*." Aricia spoke. She turned back to Kasdan. "And Anja and Duewa found a cure for this affliction within a day of us being here."

Kasdan looked at her in shock, his eyes wide. "You have discovered a cure? How... how is that possible?" He asked in disbelief. "We have searched for dozens of centuries and we have discovered nothing! Elder Lorendo has an entire section of researchers working on it and they have found nothing."

"I guess he's not working hard enough." Isabella spoke.

"And you don't have Red." Martin said proudly. "She sinks her fangs into something like this and she won't quit until she succeeds."

"How true." Isabella said with bright hazel green eyes. Anja had saved Dorian because of her no quit attitude and her wonderful mind. Something Isabella was thanking her for nearly every night in their bed with great glee.

"You... you have one? A dead Svorag?" Kasdan asked.

Martin nodded his head. "On our ship. It's good and dead... but my mate Anja was able to determine that it has Pralor genes in its makeup. As well as Lycavorian."

"Your species." Kasdan gasped. "Oh that is not good."

Danny looked at him. "Damn... you just figuring that out now? No wonder the fuckers were so hard to kill. They got our DNA and those hard skinned shells."

"No... no that's not what I meant." Kasdan spoke. "There was a world in this quadrant that was seeded with Lycavorians roughly sixty thousand years ago. They had advanced to a pre-fusion stage in evolution the last time a probe was sent to investigate."

“And when was that?” Martin asked.

“Just before the second war with the Scourge.” Kasdan answered.

“If what you are saying is true then that would explain the weapons and water craft.” Martin said thoughtfully. “Now the only question is what have they learned from your people that they might have put to use.”

“Just how many of our people were taken off Lycavore for your... Seeding... missions?” Aricia asked now.

Kasdan met her eyes and shook his head. “I do not know exact numbers...”

Martin looked at Aricia who nodded her head toward Kasdan indicating she wanted him to answer the question. “Humor us.” Martin said turning back to Kasdan. “I’ll believe an answer from you.”

Kasdan looked quickly at Murano and then back to Martin. “We began taking Lycavorian specimens sixty-two thousands years before the start of the First Scourge War if the history data banks are accurate. It continued right up until the beginning of the War.”

“And?” Aricia asked.

“If our history banks are accurate, a total of five worlds were seeded with the Lycavorian species. Including the planet in this quadrant.” Kasdan answered softly. “Just over... just over a hundred billion were taken from your homeworld in order to do this.”

“A hundred billion?” Aricia gasped.

“Shit!” Martin hissed shaking his head. “That’s probably not information you should openly offer to my son. He ain’t real keen on the Pralor people for that very reason. A hundred billion?” Martin shook his head. “Must be nice to play fucking god and get away with it as long as you have.”

“I was not alive back then!” Kasdan spoke quickly. “And it is certainly not something I would have sanctioned in any form! I do not consider myself above anyone!”

“Kasdan was born on Artaaya Martin.” Murano spoke calmly. “Many of our institutions of higher learning now are run by those who did not agree with the Seeding Missions as they were originally planned and executed. It has been somewhat of a stick in the mud so to speak for our people for many millennia. Even more so when Lorendo became Assistant Director of the Science Convention... because he wanted to do much more.”

Martin looked at Kasdan. “They ought to put you in charge then.” He spoke. “Anything that gives that fat fuck an ulcer works for me.”

“Fucking A.” Danny grinned.

Martin turned back to look at the cave entrance. “I really hate caves.” He spoke. “Why do the bad guys always go into caves?”

Isabella smiled and touched his shoulder. “Aricia and I will scout it.” She said.

Martin nodded his head. “Go.”

Isabella stood up with Aricia beside her. Aricia gripped her hand and Bella wrapped them in the shadows and they were gone like a soft mist. Murano saw the looks on the faces of Kasdan and Garan at this and he smiled. He touched Martin’s shoulder.

“Perhaps it might be better if Isabella does not use that skill quite so often.” Murano spoke. “It is very disconcerting.”

Martin chuckled. “Yeah... causes the pucker factor to increase doesn’t it?”

Murano looked at him. “Pucker factor?” He asked.

Martin shook his head. “Never mind.” He stated. He glanced over to where Pablo and Kenny were squatting twenty metres away with T'lolt between them. He carried the same type of mini-gun that Tony usually carried but Martin had wanted the Master Chief to remain at the station in case any trouble began. He pointed two fingers in the air, then at his eyes and then did a small circle with his index finger before finally pointing at the cave entrance. Kenny, T'lolt and Pablo nodded and lifted their A4s, sighting down their scopes to cover Aricia and Isabella, while T'lolt shifted the mini-gun into a covering fire mode.

Garan looked at Murano. “What... what did he just tell them Praetorian Murano?” He asked as Martin moved five meters ahead of them and lifted his A4 as well.

Danny turned slightly. “He told them two of his Queens were going to move forward and do a recon of the cave entrance.” As he spoke Danny used exactly the same motions as Martin had.

Garan looked at him in surprised interest. "He told them that using just his fingers?"

Danny grinned. "Pretty neat huh. Comes in handy when you have to whack the bad guys and not have your radio breaking squelch on you as you are about to fill his back with your blade. That's not a good thing."

Julie dropped beside Danny now and smiled. "You would know wouldn't you?" She said.

"Hey! That wasn't my fault Jules!" Danny scolded her. "The guy smelled like month old pussy and Marty contacted me to see why my face went white. I was about to vomit all over the smelly bastard!"

Julie grinned. "Kill him first Simpson. Then blow chunks."

Danny waved his hand at her dismissively. "Yeah. Yeah. You didn't smell him. Man I thought I was going to pass out."

"There is no sign of movement above the cave entrance or on the sides Beloved." Aricia's voice filled their implants. ***"However... they are a number of prints in front of the entrance and a very odd smell coming from within."***

"Move up!" Martin's voice told them. ***"Left and right."***

"More stinky shit." Danny said shaking his head. "Why do we always get the shit details?"

Julie smiled as she followed him, Murano and the others right behind them.

Martin was the first to reach the entrance and he kept his A4 trained into the darkness. He could see perhaps five or six meters into the cave but then it appeared to bend downward and the sunlight could not reach inside. Danny settled next to him, Kenny and Pablo off to their right as Julie dropped to one knee with Danny. Murano kept Kasdan and Garan just behind them, knowing at this point they would only be in the way. His head came up as Isabella unwrapped the shadows from around her and Aricia and they settled to the earth beside Martin on his opposite side.

"There is nothing in the surrounding area *Du'ased m'ranndii*." Isabella spoke softly.

"That ain't good." Martin spoke.

Garan looked up at Murano. "Why is that not good?" He asked.

Aricia looked at him. "There are no tracks that they have surveyed this surrounding area." She said. "Nothing to indicate they even did a light recon."

"What does this mean?" Garan asked again.

"It means they knew right where they were going." Murano spoke softly. "No breaks in their path... no clusters of tracks indicating that they stopped. They knew to come here." He finished. "But how?"

Martin shook his head. "Doesn't matter now, though with my luck, it's bound to be bad. We need to get our people back before they change entirely and are lost for good." Martin turned. "T'lolt... three meters back and cover our asses with the big gun."

T'lolt nodded. "Consider them covered." He stated.

"Danny and me got point... Aricia, Bella and Jules next... Murano, Garan and Kasdan next, Kenny you and Pablo maintain a one meter space between T'lolt and us. Let's move." Martin spoke hefting his A4. He looked at the man who was his brother. "It ain't just a job Danny." He said with a grin.

"Yeah... it's a fucking adventure. Blah! Blah! Blah!" Danny growled. "Whenever you say that someone always ends up trying to kill us!"

"Where would the excitement in your life come from then?" Martin asked him.

"Gee... I know a certain red headed elf and a delightful young Drow that can get me pretty excited." Danny told him. He was silent for a second. "*Sibfla!* You're right... it's not the same thing! Damn!"

Martin chuckled and then began moving into the darkness with Danny at his side.

"...is astonishing!" Radra gasped as she gazed at the main monitor in front of her. Avi had got the main consoles running in less time than he had first estimated and Anja and Duewa were anxious to show Radra what they had discovered. "When you... when you said you had developed a cure for the Svorag infection I thought perhaps... I thought you may have been joking or trying to impress me. How did you...?"

"We have the body of one of these Svorag on our ship." Anja told her. "Both Duewa and I are researchers as well as doctors. Her field is Mutative Mutagens and mine is Chromatin DNA and Genetic Correlation."

“You have encountered them before? The Svorag?” Kesyla asked.

Anja nodded her head. “On a planet roughly two days from here.” She said. “We were there collecting food when a large force of them attacked us. Two of them were able to leap into our ship just as it was taking off. We killed them... but several of our people had been assaulted by them and I decided to keep the bodies to learn what I could if I needed to treat them.”

Radra looked at her. “Your people are...”

Anja shook her head. “They are fine. The Svorag as you call them... they were not able to seat the small barbs in their tongues and inject their toxin before we killed them. They didn’t have time.”

“You have determined the Mutative process then?” Radra asked.

Anja nodded. “They are nasty critters to be sure.” She said. “Duewa and I did some deep tissue scans and then a spectral wash of the DNA. The one on our ship was a Pralor that was turned by a Lycavorian. We found that rather interesting considering there isn’t suppose to be any Lycavorians out here. At least not that we knew of.”

Radra looked at Kesyla quickly and then back to Anja. “That is not entirely true.” She stated. “There is an entire planet of them only sixteen light years from here. They had only advanced to a pre-fusion era the last time we knew... but that was many millennia ago. We have... we have never bothered to check since most consider them...”

“Inferior?” Anja finished her statement.

Radra nodded her head slowly. “Yes.” She answered. “Please don’t think...”

Anja held up her hand stopping Radra’s words. “It’s ok.” She said. “I have already figured out that you don’t follow that same line of thinking. If you did... you wouldn’t be here now.” Anja looked at the screen. “Well now we know where the Lycavorian came from. The better question is how did this Pralor get turned if your people do not associate with them?”

Radra shook her head. “That I don’t know.” She said.

Anja leaned forward from her seat next to Radra and typed quickly on the console. “Well... as you can see... we configured an active compound to counteract the infection but we lacked the core samples of the infected species. Those we found here.”

Radra was looking at the screen and she lifted her hand to touch it. “We didn’t account for the Core Cell Infiltration Index or formulate a base.” She said.

Anja nodded. “You were trying to create a formula without starting from a base set of variables. The tests you did were all off in different directions because of this. That is very basic Genetic study and...”

Radra nodded. “Yes.” She said. “Genetic reconfiguring one oh one. It’s the basis for all work of this type.” She spat. “How could they have missed that?”

“Not working from a base set of genetic variables will always skew the MEV factor.” Anja said.

Radra slid her finger along the screen and changed the readout. “Yes... and it will never result in a reactive formula to base further tests on.”

Anja sat back. “Forgive me for sounding suspicious... but it doesn’t appear to me as if the researchers here were working on finding a cure.”

Radra looked at her. “Given what you have shown me I would have to agree.” She stated.

“What else could they have been doing?” Kesyla asked now. “Station Zero One Five was established out here in order to find a cure. I have seen the orders father signed for it before it was launched.”

“Look at this.” Anja spoke typing on the screen and then sliding her fingers along the holographic interface panel. She brought up the screen and Radra saw a red blinking light in eleven different locations among dozens of solid white color. “Station and research logs.”

Radra’s eyes narrowed. “There are missing logs.” She spoke immediately.

“Eleven of them total.” Anja said with a nod. “The last one just nine hours before they abandoned this station according to Wayonn. He tried to recover them but didn’t have any luck with it.”

Kesyla leaned forward. “I’m not surprised.” She stated adjusting the screen. “They were physically removed from the memory cores.” She pointed. “Look at this time stamp Elder Radra. It’s corresponds exactly to the station being locked down by Elder Lorendo and his security code being inputted.”

“Why would he or the Station Commander delete active logs?” Anja asked.

Radra shook her head. “That I do not know.” She said in a firm voice. “But I have every intention of finding out.” She turned to look at the entrance into the Research area where the cryo chambers were. “You can save them?” She whispered.

“We hadn’t decided on an aerosol or direct injection.” Anja spoke. “But for those frozen in the chambers who are only partially altered in some form... yes. We can save them. Those who have changed completely or very near completely I don’t know. We won’t get a chance to test it on five of them anyway. They’re the ones who escaped.”

“Would it... would it be permanent?” Radra asked.

Anja nodded. “Duewa and I believe so. Essentially we are killing the mutative gene and simply reconfiguring their core DNA back to its base factors. As long as the formula kills all of the mutative gene enzymes, it should work perfectly.”

Radra turned to look at her. “Anja we must... we must do this!” Radra spoke quickly.

Anja held up her hand again. “I would like nothing better... but we would need at least two days to fashion an aerosol dispenser and then we’d have to plug it into each individual chamber. A mass dispersion isn’t viable because we don’t know how well it will work and I have no desire to let them out of their cryo units all at the same time.”

“Nor do I!” Radra exclaimed as Kesyla leaned closer to the screen and pulled out her P1 to look at something. “We have to try.”

“I could convince Martin.” Anja said confidently. “I would never do something like this behind his back and he knows that. It’s too big a risk. I could convince him... he trusts me but I don’t know if you could convince Delnash and the others. They don’t seem to think we are capable of doing anything more difficult than wiping our asses.”

“Delnash will listen to me.” Radra spoke. “I can...”

“Elder Radra...” Kesyla broke in. “There is something wrong.”

Radra looked at her. “What do you mean child?” She asked.

Kesyla lifted her P1. “This station had a standing crew of three thousand four hundred and six.” She spoke. “There are three hundred and nine cryo pods.”

“Yes... so?” Radra asked.

“I pulled up the logs from the captain of the *TALISMAN*-Class cruiser that Elder Lorendo picked up the rest of the crew with. It was the *HOPE OF THE STARS*.” Kesyla said.

“Kesyla... is this leading up to something child?” Radra asked.

“The *HOPE OF THE STARS* picked up two thousand four hundred and forty-seven people from this station Elder Radra.” Kesyla spoke. “If you add those who are held within the cryo chambers to that it only totals two thousand seven hundred and fifty-six. Where are the remains of the six hundred fifty who were listed as casualties in the Svorag assault? The station’s commander spoke of a running battle until they had all reached the transports.”

Anja looked at her oddly. “Remains?” She asked. “We didn’t see signs of any remains when we got here.” She spoke.

Radra looked at her. “The official report states that six hundred and fifty of our people lost their lives while evacuating the station during the assault. Everyone else was able to make it to the transport craft and launch into orbit to escape the Svorag. The rescue ship picked them up but did not return to the surface.” She explained. “You found nothing?” Radra asked.

“I think I would know skeletal remains if I saw them.” Anja stated. “The station was clean as a whistle inside. A little stale air... but no remains. The only thing out of the ordinary that we first found was the smashed vehicle doors in the back with only one body. It was torn in half like the vehicle had hit it on purpose.”

Radra looked at her. “That... that would mean that the Svorag got them.” She spoke in a very worried voice.

Anja came to her feet. “Ok... if they weren’t dead then that is not good.” She stated.

“The ones in the cryo chambers... they are all you have encountered?” Radra asked.

“Yes. And we’ve been here close to three days now.” Anja stated. “*Nubou!*” She swore reaching up to tap her implant. “Martin! Lover answer me quick!”

All of their heads turned at the sound of the buzzing alarm that came from the Cryo Chamber door.

“Avi!” Anja barked moving to the door even as Avi was already pulling himself to his feet from in front of the wall. “Avi... what’s going on? What the fuck is that alarm?”

Mari looked up as she came to her feet and stared up at him as his dark eyes moved back and forth.

-Override protocols have been initiated Anja- He spoke. –Someone has bypassed the lock outs I have in place with a secondary command code built into the base memory. They are accessing the system by remote-

“What’s going on?” Duewa barked. She was looking through the view window into the chamber. “The cryo chambers are fogging over! Avi!” She almost screamed.

Radra moved up beside her. “Oh no!” She gasped. “Norpellian gas! It’s being pumped into the chambers!”

“What?” Anja barked. “Avi?”

-Elder Radra is correct Anja. I am detecting concentrated levels of Norpellian gas flooding all of the remaining cryo chambers-

Duewa dashed to the panels. “We have to get them out of there!” She exclaimed.

“No!” Radra shouted. “The gas will kill us quicker than it kills them! There’s nothing we can do!”

“No!” Duewa shouted. “Damn! We could have saved them!”

Radra looked at her with wide eyes shocked at her reaction. Her eyes cut to where Anja stood silently, her jade green eyes filled with unbridled fury. They were reacting as if these infected people were their own crew and not Pralors they had discovered. Radra’s eyes grew a little wider when she saw Anja’s jade orbs change and the black ring thicken around her pupils. She saw the large set of fangs extend with the small set right beside each one.

“Avi! Where is it coming from?” Anja snarled almost savagely.

-Scanning. The signal is originating from the vehicle bay-

“Lorendo!” Radra gasped.

Anja didn’t shield her thoughts and Radra, Kesyla and Mari all heard her next words and gasped in horror.

Melda Min... meet me in the vehicle bay with For'mya and Cirith! Bring Fedor and the Master Chief as well.

Melyanna... what is wrong? Dysea’s voice sounded concerned. I have... I have never felt you so angry?

Anja? What has happened? Helen’s voice cut in as well.

That cockbreath Lorendo just overrode Avi’s lock down and used his fancy gas on the Pralors in the cryo chambers! They’re all dead! He killed them Helen! He just murdered all of them! Anja’s voice trembled in rage.

Anja! Wayonn’s voice broke in. Hold your temper in check child! You...

Yeah... I’m gonna hold it in check! Anja snarled viciously. I’ll hold it in check while I’m gouging his worthless eyeballs out! Then I’m going to have Miath cook them and let him hear them sizzle!

Anja turned and began to stomp out of the medical bay. Radra, Kesyla and Mari all heard Helen’s next command and were moving before she had even finished speaking.

Dysea! For'mya! You must get there before she does! You know she has Martin’s temper and she will gut that fool where he stands for this! Stop her!

RAVAGER

JUTURI PRIDE COMMAND SHIP

“...needs to be within the next twenty-four hours.” Kalis told Koguth and Ceale as they sat looking at him in the crystal clear transmission.

They were in the command lounge of the *RAVAGER* viewing him on the COM device that he had built for Ceale when she had come over to the ship. He was squatting beside Serale in what appeared to be his private quarters and they could see Danim in the background putting items into several backpacks that were in front of him on the floor.

Koguth leaned forward in his chair and looked at the Marshall’s oldest son. This was the fourth time they had communicated in this fashion in the last two days and each time they did it made Koguth feel more and more comfortable that Kalis was on their side one hundred percent. Kalis was risking quite a bit by his actions and after seeing how Ceale’s daughter acted towards him there was no way it was staged. Pusintin would never allow Kalis to treat Serale in such a fashion or allow her to act as she did with him. Ceale was not as convinced it seemed, but she was an extremely intelligent woman and Koguth believed it was more because of how she was acting with his own son that caused her to have misgivings about Serale. Mani had told him how Ceale would not go anywhere on the ship without Nedoni by her side now. It wasn’t so much that she was afraid of the crew as she had grown comfortable with him beside her. She ate with him and several times Mani had seen her laughing at something he had said. Not a forced laugh, but a laugh of genuine humor while she touched his hand or arm. It was not something Koguth had expected in any way considering what had been done to her over the last weeks, but Ceale was showing she was a strong willed woman and one who was very resilient. He hoped for his son’s sake that Ceale’s affection towards him was genuine for Nedoni had never shown such intense interest in a woman until now.

“That is not far off Kalis?” He spoke.

Kalis nodded his head. “I know sir, but it will correspond exactly to the time when the Task Force conducts its Fleet Wide Tri-Cobalt Engine venting. The massive dump of Tri-cobalt residue into the surrounding area will blind all sensors out to five million kilometers. It will give us the time to clear the field and jump before they know what is going on. It’s our best chance sir.”

“He’s right father.” Mataen spoke now. “The Tri-cobalt venting is usually done in space dock or a staging area where ships are protected. This is the perfect opportunity. The sensors of every ship will be blind for the entire time.”

“As will ours.” Koguth said.

Kalis shook his head. “We will have already plotted an escape and evasion course out of the field into the *LEUGERS* computers before the vent begins.” Kalis spoke carefully. “And with what we talked about before... that will only add confusion and hopefully take out several ships as well.”

“Why now?” Koguth asked. “Why not wait until we draw closer to the Lycavorian King? It would be much easier then.”

It was Serale who spoke, placing her hand affectionately on Kalis’s arm. She looked at Koguth and her mother in the transmission. “Kalis believes his father will send for you after they are done with this venting mother. He will make them return you to this ship so he can...”

“I am not going to allow that!” Kalis spoke as Serale choked up and turned her head to the side, resting it on his shoulder. “I made an oath to you Lady Ceale! I will keep it!”

“You are different young Kalis.” Mani spoke slowly. In the previous transmissions he had spoken to her with great respect and given how it was publicly known how he had treated his own mother it was surprising. “You are different from all the reports we have read about you. You have... you have a rather violent reputation to be honest. You are extremely skilled, there is no doubt about that, but it is known you have been prone to... violent and emotional outbursts. What has changed you so?”

“Mani... it matters not now.” Koguth spoke.

“I think it does.” Mani answered looking at him and completely unafraid to disagree with her husband. “We are placing our fates in his hands.” She turned back to Kalis. “How has such a change come over you in these last weeks young man? You... you act more like one of your Uncle’s family than you do a Kavalian. You act more like a Lycavorian Spartan. Why?”

Serale looked up and gazed tenderly into his face. She lifted her hand and drew her fingers gently across his cheek, Kalis turning to look at her, a motion that Ceale took note of intently. “Tell them Kalis.” Serale spoke softly but they heard her anyway. “If we are leaving... there is no reason to hide it anymore my love.”

Ceale’s eyes grew wide at this and she leaned forward. “Serale!” She hissed. Her eyes glared at Kalis. “You have taken my daughter against her will!” She snarled angrily. “I will...” Mani’s hand reached out and covered hers and Ceale looked at her. “Mani... he... he has raped my...”

“No!” Kalis voice’s barked drawing their attention back to him. “Never! I would not do such a thing! Never!”

Serale looked at her mother with wide eyes. “Mother! You have no right to... he has not done this!”

“Ceale knows you only by your reputation Kalis.” Mani spoke calmly and evenly looking at Kalis in the transmission. “She knows only of your violent tendencies and your Puma Bane instructors. You see now why this is all very strange. We see something else within you now and it is confusing. Tell us how this came to be.”

Kalis took a deep breath and moved closer to Serale in the transmission. Ceale quickly noted her daughter did not move away in the least and actually leaned further into him. “On... on Enurrua... my uncle gave me something. A very special item that I have been learning from since that day. He... he spoke words to me. Words that echoed within my head for days after. Words that echo still.”

“What words were those young Kalis?” Mani asked.

“He told me that he could... that he could gaze within me.” Kalis spoke passionately now. “That he could see within me and recognize my true self screaming to come out. He told me there was a cancer within me... a cancer that only I could stop. I have since come to see that cancer was my father, and the only way to stop it from consuming me was to see everything that my fool father never showed me! That he never taught me! My Uncle... he told me I could open my eyes and make a choice to leave that cancer behind forever. That I was on a collision course with fate if I did not.” Kalis looked at Ceale. “He gave to me the means to discover this Lady Ceale. He gave to me the means to discover who I truly am and who I want to be going into the future that I want to have. That is who resides within this body now and into whatever future I may have. And I want my hope and my future to include Serale. If she will have me. I would die for her without the thought crossing my mind for a moment. I want the life only my uncle and my Lycavorian blood can give to me! That is what drives me now! And if I have to work for decades to prove to you that I love your daughter with every breath that I take, then I will do so! Happily!”

Ceale saw Serale’s face beaming in the transmission and she watched as Serale took his arm in her hands and leaned over to brush her face against his cheek.

Mani leaned back in her chair quite astonished at this, but her eyes showed that she didn’t doubt one word of what he had just said. She stared at him for a long moment. “The spirits of those who came before you sing out in your words young Kalis. I will doubt you no longer.”

“We can see the truth in your eyes young Kalis.” Koguth spoke softly. “The resolve. That is good. Where do you propose we go when we have departed the Task Force?”

“I know how he is tracking Queen For’mya.” Kalis spoke squeezing Serale’s hand in his. “I can re-align the sensors on our *LEUGERS* to detect the signal as well. We jump ahead of the Task Force by several light years, acquire the signal and continue jumping until we reach him. The transports are smaller and do not require as much maintenance between jumps. We can remain ahead of my father easily.” Kalis spoke. “Jumping the Task Force in order to chase us is a hazard even he won’t risk.”

“Do you know where he has gone?” Koguth asked. “He is no fool... your uncle. He has a destination. He would not be out here among unknown and uncharted space just to simply draw Pusintin away to kill him. He knows where he is going.”

Kalis shook his head. “No. I don’t know where he is.” He answered honestly. “I... I may have a means to send a message to him... but I do not want to attempt this until we are away from my father. If we die... better we die out there... by our own actions and deeds... than by his hand.”

Koguth nodded. “On that we agree young Kalis. On that we agree.” He spoke. “We will prep our *LEUGERS* as well. Ten minutes before the venting begins I will send you a message that we are ready.”

Kalis nodded. “We will be waiting.” Kalis spoke. “I will contact you again in twelve hours with any last minute details. While I have been very careful... my father is not stupid. I am taking every precaution.”

“As we will.” Koguth spoke. “We will talk again in twelve hours.”

Kalis nodded and they watched as he reached up to end the transmission. Koguth leaned back in his chair and looked at Mataen and Nedoni. "What he risks is no small feat." Koguth said. "He is not acting as a Kavalian now... he is acting as a Lycavorian Spartan."

Mataen nodded his head and looked at his brother. "Nedoni... we can do what he says yes?"

Nedoni nodded quickly from where he stood behind Ceale. "Easily. Kalis has kept it simple... but complex at the same time. The timing will have to be just right but Corsa and I can easily fly the *LEUGERS* in the manner they need to be flown."

"Does Kalis have the necessary piloting skills?" Koguth asked. "I was not aware he was even a pilot."

Nedoni nodded again. "I know he has skills. I have heard of his flying abilities... but to what extent I don't know."

"Serale can help him." Ceale spoke quickly. "She's been flying since she was seven years old. She's an excellent pilot."

Koguth nodded. "Then we need to prepare." He stated. "Whatever path young Kalis is following now... I certainly do not want to be in front of him while he blazes it. He will turn his training on any in his path." Koguth looked at Mani. "You saw the determination in his eyes Mani? The devotion? He is on a mission and he will no doubt trample anyone in his way."

Mani nodded. "It is etched across his face like the lines in a mountain." Mani answered softly. "He is no longer Pusintin's son and I fear any who attempt to get in his way will see a very different Kalis."

"Training?" Ceale asked.

Koguth nodded but Mataen was the one who answered. "He's been trained as a Puma Bane Commando Ceale." He answered her quickly. "His instructor was one of the oldest and most respected among our people. Kalis's reputation for physical prowess is well known. His intelligence not so much. I think that has changed considerably now though. Whatever he says happened on Enurrua has changed him. Changed him for the better."

"And Serale?" Ceale asked. "Danim?"

Mani looked at her. "At this point Ceale... I believe your children are in the best possible place they could be. He will let nothing happen to them while he lives and based on what I have seen and heard from this young man so far, his father has no clue about who he has become. I believe it will be far easier for him to get off that ship than any of us realize. He has also just become the best chance for us to find Iama."

Nedoni moved closer to Ceale's sitting form and gently rested his large hand on her shoulder. "You will see them soon Ceale." He spoke softly. "Both of them."

Everyone saw her slim hand reach up and grip his larger one without hesitation and Ceale nodded as she squeezed his fingers tightly. Her head instinctively leaned over and her cheek pressed against the soft fur on the back of his hand. This was not something that could just be dismissed and all of them in the room knew it. Ceale looked up at Mani. "What can I do to help?" She asked.

"Whatever medical supplies you think we may need must be packed quickly." Koguth spoke. "We will take two *LEUGERS* but our cargo space will be limited so only pack what is absolutely necessary to compliment your skills Ceale."

She nodded. "I'll get on it right away."

"Mataen... light weapons but heavy on the ammunition." Koguth said. "We don't know what we will encounter after we leave."

Mataen nodded. "I'll take care of it."

"This action will take us closer to finding your sister." Koguth said softly. "That is why we are out here. Now we have two additional reasons to move forward with resolute care and purpose. Ceale wants her children back... your mother and I want our daughter back. You want your sister back. Let this drive you as we go forward." Koguth came to his feet. "I will feel my daughter in my arms again before darkness claims me into the void. No matter what I have to do." He took a deep breath. "Let us get ready."

Kalis looked at Serale when the transmission ended. "I don't think your mother believes me." He said softly.

Serale kissed him softly. "We believe you." She said running her fingers along his cheek.

Kalis allowed a small smile to split his face and he rubbed his nose against her cheek in a show of affection that was part of his newly discovered wolf blood and emotions. He squeezed her hand and turned back to Danim who was looking at them.

"Almost done." Danim spoke.

Kalis moved over in front of him and helped him to put some additional items within the pack. He drew something from under the bottom of the couch as Serale settled next to her brother and he placed the bundle on the small table. He unwrapped it and they saw the two ARSOC sidearms and two data pads. He looked up at them and held out the two data pads.

"I have preloaded the schematics of the ship into these two pads and have linked them to the P1 my Uncle gave to me." He said. "Once we set out we will stay together, but if we get separated for any reason just follow the path I have marked on the pads. It will lead you to the hanger bay."

"Nothing will happen Kalis." Serale spoke confidently as she took the pad.

"Better safe than sorry." Kalis spoke as he lifted first one ARSOC and then the other. He held them out to them along with the thigh holsters. "I have modified them to suit each of you in weight and balance. I know... I know you have never taken a life... but if we are discovered you must not hesitate."

Serale reached out and took the ARSOC first. She had a firm determination in her eyes and she held it and nodded. "I won't." She stated.

Danim nodded as well. "Neither will I."

Kalis looked at Serale. "If anything... if anything happens to me... take my P1 and get to the ship Serale."

"Kalis you..."

He reached out and took her hand. "Listen to me!" He insisted. "If I fall... take my P1 and go! When you get off the ship follow the pre-plotted course and activate the last code in the P1. With any luck... with any luck it is a direct communication link to my uncle or at least his current location. Follow the instructions you receive."

"I will do this." Serale said softly. "But nothing is going to happen to you Kalis."

Kalis nodded. "I will try to make sure that is the case." He said with a smile. "I would like to actually discover and live this new life I have found. With you."

Serale smiled brightly and nodded. "So would I."

"Get whatever you believe you will need from the room." Kalis told her. "We should finish the packing now."

Serale nodded and got to her feet moving towards the small bedroom. Kalis reached out and gripped Danim's arm tightly. Danim looked at him surprised at the strength of his touch. He saw Kalis's eyes bore into him. Danim was no fool and though only fourteen, he was rapidly gaining skills he would not have gained on Hadaria. It was Kalis who taught him to bury the hate for his father deep and not let it control him. The times they had talked these last days showed Danim that Kalis and he were very much alike. Kalis had given him some rudimentary hand to hand instruction as well as the knowledge to fire the weapon he now held. He trusted him.

"You are only fourteen Danim... I know this. But no matter what happens to me... you must get your sister off this ship. No matter what takes place... if I fall... don't let her try and save me. Get her off the ship." Kalis told him softly.

Danim met his eyes and dropped his hand over Kalis's. He knew how Kalis felt for Serale, how his sister felt in return. He had watched it blossom these last weeks and he had watched how Kalis had changed. How his sister and whatever he had been reading on that pad had changed him. "I will... I will do as you ask Kalis." He said softly. "But... you have to promise to not do anything stupid. I don't think you realize just how much you... how much Serale loves you now. We stick together... just as you have told us."

Kalis nodded his head. "Together."

ONTEROM SCIENCE STATION ZERO ONE FIVE

“...can’t possibly be the same one!” Sashan declared as he looked at Delnash.

Delnash met Sashan’s eyes and then glanced at Lorendo who had said nothing since he returned and told them of his conversation with Teniri and the larger dragon Arzoal. He nodded his head. “You have associated with Teniri as much as any of us Sashan.” Delnash spoke. “She is not one to make mistakes. This is the dragon Elder Mother she sent us looking for all those years ago. The one we told her was dead and lost when we did not find their ship or any sign of them on Elear.”

“We all saw the logs from the ship’s scans Delnash.” Sashan spoke. “Lorendo was there himself!”

Delnash looked at him. “I know. I tried to tell her that but she would not listen.” He sighed heavily. “You were not mistaken in some way Lorendo?”

Lorendo shook his head quickly. “Impossible.” He said. “We found no ship and certainly no dragons on this planet.”

“According to this Arzoal... their ship returned some nine thousand years after Teniri dispatched it. It was damaged and it’s computer banks were wiped completely.” Delnash said.

“Nine thousand years?” Sashan said. “From where?”

Delnash shook his head. “She doesn’t know.” He replied. “She then used the ship to take the remainder of the dragons off Elear. At least that is what she tells me.”

“What she tells you?” Lorendo spoke. “This coming from one of our people who used a PTC for something it was not intended just to extend her own life!”

Delnash shook his head. “There is more to it.” He said. “Something she is not telling me. Something that Teniri is not telling us.”

“Dragon Kind has fought beside us...” Sashan spoke. “Stood beside us for millennia. I refuse to believe Teniri would willingly keep information from us. Especially information that has to do with a threat to us.”

Lorendo looked at him. “You are too trusting Sashan.” He said.

“And you are too quick to dismiss those who would be friends to us.” Delnash hissed at him. “Our relationship with Dragon Kind almost never came to be because of your words.”

“I was only looking out for our interests.” Lorendo spoke.

“Our interests are the interests of Dragon Kind.” Delnash snapped. “Now she has threatened to return to Artaaya and speak with her council. There is a good possibility she will decide to take her kind and leave.”

“Leave!” Lorendo popped. “Leave to where? Back with the primitives?”

Delnash nodded. “Yes.”

“Refuse to transport them.” Lorendo snapped.

“This Union of Lycavorians has ships that can transport them.” Delnash said. “Many ships built strictly for transporting dragons. This Arzoal sits on their ruling body and has a hand even in decisions that do not directly affect their kind.”

Lorendo huffed. “What does that tell you?” He snarled. “Dragon Kind helping to rule Lycavorians. What a joke.”

“Do not be so quick to dismiss this Lorendo.” Delnash told him. “Dragon Kind is an essential part of the defense of our people and your willingness to just dismiss that after so many years is quite troubling.”

“Then don’t let them leave!” Lorendo snapped again. “Refuse to let these ships come close to our worlds. Besides... they are probably built with our technology and should be impounded as well.”

Sashan looked at him. “Are you saying we force them to stay?” He asked aghast. “Do you have any idea what kind of destruction they could wrought among our cities and people if we suddenly turned on them? They have been valued allies for millennia and now you suggest to enslave them! This is too much Lorendo!”

“So you will let these animals remove them!” Lorendo barked. “That is your solution?”

“They would be going willingly.” Delnash said.

“Teniri would not do that!” Sashan spoke quickly.

“Teniri is not the Elder Mother.” Delnash answered. “This Arzoal is according to Teniri and she will abide by whatever decision she makes. This Arzoal is more militant and forceful than Teniri and apparently the

Lycavorian leader and the dragon he is bonded to are some sort of religious icons within Dragon Kind history and culture. Talon Guardians she called them. They have been gifted with a small portion of the Etheric essence of nine dragon Elders.”

“What?” Lorendo exclaimed. “How?”

Delnash shook his head. “Some sort of Etheric ritual known only to Dragon Elders. I’ve never heard Teniri mention this before in all our conversations. This adds to the power that the Lycavorian leader can draw upon.”

“Delnash... you don’t believe he is a Praetorian do you?” Lorendo gasped.

Delnash met his eyes. “What I believe does not matter.” He stated. “You were witness to what he can do Lorendo. He almost ended your life without so much as blinking. Even the Etheric essence of nine Dragon Elders could not give him the power he displayed. How else do you explain it? Over two dozen of our men could not stop him and these people with him are lethally trained and far more experienced than we first thought it seems.”

“He is an abomination!” Lorendo snarled. “That is how I explain it! Pralors... breeding with these animals! How can we even consider looking at them as equals? Sumar and Wayonn, everyone one with them that agreed to this, they should be expunged from our history as traitors to our people!”

“Regardless of what you think... the fact is they have Pralor blood within them and...” Delnash hissed angrily, his patience with Lorendo growing very short given everything that had happened so far. He stopped talking when he saw the Persian red haired Queen exit the station quickly, followed by Avatar 41 and many others, including Radra and both his daughters. The woman Lorendo struck was named Anja, that much he remembered, and she did not appear in the least bit happy.

His gaze caused both Lorendo and Sashan to turn and face them as they were quickly surrounded by other Lycavorians who all had their weapons out and ready to use. Delnash watched as Anja stopped in front of Lorendo, her jade green eyes now encircled by a thick black ring and the tips of her wolf fangs protruding from beneath her full lips. He watched as the Pralor Security Forces came to their feet from different locations but none of them made any effort to intervene. The two elven and one cross breed vampire Queens burst from with the station next, followed by Wayonn, Valael and the woman Helen.

“*Melyanna* no!” Dysea barked out as she leaped the railing and moved quickly towards her. Of all of them, Dysea knew first hand what Anja was capable of. So many different people dismissed her or misjudged her because of her diminutive size, but Dysea had seen her rage in full and unrestrained action. Dysea had watched her beat a man three times her size to death when they were first building Eden City and Anja Leonidas had only grown far more dangerous since that day.

Anja turned to look at her quickly, her Jade green eyes softening every so slightly as she heard the concern in Dysea’s voice and her aura reaching for her. “I am ok Dysea.” She spoke back to her before turning to look at Lorendo once more. “I’m just going to have a talk with Mister Elder here.”

“What is going on?” Delnash asked quickly moving up beside Lorendo.

Anja pointed at Delnash but didn’t move her eyes from Lorendo. “You... shut up!” Anja snarled at Delnash causing his eyes to go wide. “You... you bastard!” She pointed at Lorendo now. “Your computer! Give it to me! Now!”

“I don’t answer to you woman!” Lorendo snarled at her.

“I will ask nicely only one more time!” Anja growled at him exposing her fangs as her eyes narrowed. “Then I will beat it out of you!”

Delnash looked at Lorendo surprised. “You have your P9?” He asked.

“I always have it!” Lorendo barked.

“Give it to her! Now!” Delnash ordered him.

“Delnash they...” Lorendo began to protest.

“Give it to her Lorendo!” Delnash barked at him. “There will be no more violence among us! Do it now or I will have our security troops do it!”

Lorendo’s eyes darkened and he reached behind his back pulling the portable notebook sized computer from a carrying pouch he had on under his cloak. He tapped on it several times, a blinking red light appearing on the surface and then he held it out to Anja. “You will not be able to access it!” He growled. “You do not have the intelligence to do that! You can admire it however!”

Anja snatched it from his hands and then smiled. "I don't want to access it." She barked. "I want to use it for something."

"What is that fool woman?" Lorendo growled.

"This!" Anja snapped before she cocked her hands back with the computer in them and then let fly the blow with perhaps half of her wolf strength directly into Lorendo's sneering face. She didn't want to kill him after all. Dysea had moved up beside her and did nothing because she felt Anja was in full control of what she was doing.

Given the beating he had taken at Martin's hands, one would have thought Lorendo had perhaps learned to be more wary. Unfortunately for him, he still considered himself superior to everyone they had met. The edge of the computer impacted his jaw and snapped his head to the side with tremendous force, causing shooting pain to lance through his neck and shoulders. It also carried enough force to spin him completely around and drop him to his knees. Delnash, Sashan and most of the Pralor Security force gawked in astonishment at this display of strength from a woman who was easily half Lorendo's size and weight.

"You motherfucker!" Anja screamed tossing the computer to the side where Avi's large hand snapped out with blinding speed and caught it before it could shatter on the floor. Anja stepped closer to Lorendo and grabbed his full head of hair with her left hand and slapped him viciously across the face with her right. The stinging pop resounded within the vehicle bay like the pop of a firecracker driving his head back down into the floor of the vehicle bay. "Those were my patients!" She screamed at him. "My patients and you killed them!"

Anja kned Lorendo powerfully in the chest and sent him sprawling across the floor where she pounced on him like she a female wolf going for the kill. Anja began to pummel him with her small fists, not bothering to try and aim the blows because of the speed and strength with which she was throwing them. Five foot three and only a hundred and fifteen pounds soaking wet when not in wolf form, Anja Leonidas's body was ripped in the fashion that female wolves half her age envied her for. Years of training and fighting beside the man she so adored had honed her petite frame into a deadly machine and this was something that no one expected from the foremost Hadarian Healer in all the Alpha Quadrant.

Stunned, Lorendo brought up his hands and arms, trying to fend off the extremely painful blows that were hitting his face and head with lightening like quickness. Helen was the first to react, though the Spartan woman in her wanted to let Anja kill him for what he had done, and she stepped forward.

"Dysea! For'mya! Stop her!" She barked out coming up beside Wayonn.

Cirith had already been moving, more for the purpose of protecting Anja than saving Lorendo. She gripped Anja's right hand as she prepared to smash another blow into his head and held it tight.

"Anja... enough!" Cirith gasped as Dysea and For'mya appeared next to her and took Anja's arms.

"*Melyanna*... no more." Dysea rasped out as they struggled to pull Anja off Lorendo's inert form.

Anja may have been the smallest of Martin's Queens... but she was nearly an equal to Aricia in strength and it was a struggle even for the three of them to pull her off Lorendo as enraged as she was.

"Fucking cockroach!" Anja screamed as she let fly with her right leg before they got her far enough away from him and her booted foot smashed into Lorendo's face, splitting his lips and sending blood spraying across the deck. "Murderer!"

Delnash and Sashan went to Lorendo when they had pulled Anja off him and gotten her far enough back. Delnash held Lorendo's arm as he looked back at them with wide eyes. "What is the meaning of this attack?" He bellowed. "You... this only proves how violent and uncontrollable you and your people are!"

Anja's jade green eyes fell on him now. "Violent and..." She barked beginning to rush towards him but Cirith and Dysea gripped her tightly. "Why don't you ask your friend there who is violent and uncontrollable? He just murdered over three hundred of your people! Men and women who we were attempting to save!"

Delnash looked at Lorendo with wide eyes. "Lorendo... what is she talking about?"

Lorendo drew his arm across his bloody mouth. "I did what needed to be done to protect us." He snarled cruelly.

"You butchered three hundred defenseless men and women!" Anja screamed at him.

Radra came forward now equally as angry at Lorendo's actions but not able to express herself in the manner Anja just had. "The cryo chambers were flooded with Norpellian gas Delnash." She stated unable to keep the tinge of anger and contempt from her own voice. "They... they are all dead."

Delnash stood back from Lorendo as he got to his feet. "You... you killed them?" He asked in horror.

“I initiated established security protocols!” Lorendo barked. “Our people were infected with the Svorag virus. They were beyond help.”

“We could have saved them!” Anja barked out.

Lorendo glared at her. “You could have done nothing!” He snarled at her. “You do not have the intelligence. We have been working on a cure for centuries and have...”

“*You nubous obtuse, dull witted, small dicked arrogant cockroach of a fucking man!*” Anja screamed causing Lorendo’s eyes to go wide at the slur to his intelligence and manhood. “We had a cure! We had the cure! All we needed to do was deliver it!”

“Impossible!” Lorendo barked. “You do not know the first...”

Radra cut him off immediately. “Anja is correct!” She barked moving up beside where Dysea and Cirith were holding Anja while For'mya tried to calm her by taking her face in her hands. “I saw the formula myself! We had the cure in front of us Delnash! And you killed them Lorendo!”

Delnash looked back and forth between them, finally settling on Radra. “Radra?”

“Anja and Duewa had already devised a viable formula to cure those in stasis!” Radra snapped loudly. “They began it on their ship and finished it when they arrived here! All we had to do was determine the best form of delivery to the patients and that is what we were working on when you murdered them!”

“Impossible!” Lorendo snapped angrily. “Primitives couldn’t possibly have devised a cure!”

“Why?” Anja shouted looking around For'mya’s shoulder. “Is it too much of a blow to your fat ego that there may actually be people smarter than you!” She stepped around For'mya and closer to him... Dysea and Cirith keeping their hands on her but not holding her back. “My thirteen year old daughter has more intelligence than you *igord!*” Anja shouted. “You are as stupid as a fucking rock!”

“You know nothing!” Lorendo snapped at her.

“I know you just murdered three hundred and four innocent men and women!” Anja barked at him. “Men and women we could have saved! I know there are logs missing from this station’s medical data banks and given that you were able to bypass our lock outs with your little toy, I’d say you know what’s in those logs! I also know that whatever you were working on here... it for damn sure was no cure!”

“You do not know what you are talking about!” Lorendo barked. “I was protecting all of us! If the Svorag virus infects anyone of us we are all...”

“Those men and women were secure!” Wayonn snarled now. “There was no reason to murder them!”

“I put them out of their misery!” Lorendo snapped.

“You murdered them!” Radra barked. “Just as Anja has said! We have a cure for them and you just went ahead and butchered them!”

“I didn’t know that!” Lorendo shouted.

“Perhaps if you were not so full of your fat self you might have asked first!” Helen barked at him. “I have had enough of this grandfather!” She snarled. “When Martin returns we are leaving these foolish people to kill themselves!”

Wayonn crossed his arms over his chest. “I have no qualms about that.” He stated.

“You cannot leave!” Delnash exclaimed.

“Watch us.” Helen sneered.

“Cody... take fatso here and search him!” Anja ordered. “Take everything that is not clothes covering his disgusting body. If he resists... shoot him!”

Cody moved forward. “With pleasure.” He spoke.

-Alert. Incoming emergency COM from King Leonidas- Avi’s voice interrupted them.

“Avi... what is it?” Wayonn asked.

The Avatar did not answer him and moved to the main terminal in the vehicle bay. His hands flew across the controls, there was a burst of static and then Martin and Danny’s voice echoed in the bay quite loudly.

“Fuck! They’re all over!” Danny screamed as weapons fire could be heard in the background.
“Coming from north and east!”

“Pull back to the entrance!” Martin’s order thundered. ***“Shit! This isn’t good! Shit! Shit!”***

“Our people Martin!” Isabella’s voice echoed.

“We can’t save them now!” Martin screamed back. ***“Take the two woman we found and go Bella! We’ll cover!”***

“They are infected Martin!” Aricia’s voice sounded.

“Red can fix them!” Martin answered instantly. ***“It’s not fully complete yet but she was close to figuring out how to fix them! Now take them and go Saaurano!”***

The sound of T'lolt’s chain gun firing could be heard in the background. ***“There are too many!”*** His voice carried over the noise, though it remained strangely calm considering what was obviously happening. Strange to the Pralors who were listening anyway. ***“We should probably leave quickly Martin!”***

“Move! Move! Move!” Martin shouted as A4s firing around him erupted from the speakers. ***“Time to cut our losses and go! Take them and go Aricia! Endy! Endy can you hear me?”***

All of them heard Endith’s slightly high pitched voice answer instantly. ***“We’re here Skipper!”***

“Prep a Bunker Buster and lock onto the entrance of this cave Short Stuff! We have to bring it down or these fucking things will be all over us like stink on shit!” Martin barked the order. ***“We’re falling back to the entrance. Three minutes Endith! Then prepare for dust-off!”***

“On our way!”

Wayonn was the one who stabbed down on the button. “Martin! What is your situation?”

“Wayonn! Shit... we’re running like the Hounds of Hell are after us! Can’t you tell?” Martin answered and everyone could tell this by his breathing. ***“There’s a whole nubous nest of these lizard fuckers down here! Thousands of them! Practically right under the fucking station!”***

“Nubou lae!” Wayonn hissed.

“Yeah... that’s about the... SHIT!”

They heard what could only be Martin’s sword bursting from Flatspace with a sizzle and then the sloppy noise of flesh being struck. That was followed by a burst from the energy cell in the pommel of his sword.

“Faster!” Murano’s voice echoed. ***“Move faster! All of them are waking up now!”***

“Uncle!” Mari exclaimed in a terrified voice as she moved closer.

“Wayonn... have Avi seal every exterior vent entrance to the station!” Martin barked out. ***“Then pull Delnash and his people in with ours! I won’t let them face this outside! They’ll be overrun and won’t know how to deal with it! Have Arzoal and the other dragons move to high ground somewhere! We... fervon! Danny down!”***

The transmission died and Wayonn stabbed the control panel. “Martin! Martin!”

-The composition of the cave they are moving in is blocking the signal now Wayonn- Avi reported as he scanned the instruments. –I have tapped into the sensors on Endith’s STRIKER and I am tracking them. The entire team is present plus two additional lifesigns. Moving very fast-

Delnash watched in awe as Anja, Dysea and Cirith sprung into action with barely a thought.

“Duewa!” Anja barked. “Secure all our medical supplies and get them here!”

Radra gripped Anja’s arm. “They are bringing back two infected females Anja! We must finish an injection system! We can save them!”

Anja didn’t hesitate and her entire demeanor changed instantly to one of doctor and researcher as she took Radra’s arm. “We need to compensate for the release of...” She began speaking as they began moving back into the station.

Dysea looked at where Fedor stood. “Fedor... release the weapons back to the Pralor Security forces! Form defensive positions around the vehicle just as your father and uncle taught you! Hurry!”

“Cody... with me!” Cirith snapped as she snatched an A4 from a *Durcunusaan* troop. “Up on the roof to provide cover!”

“On it!” Cody barked.

Helen was also moving and she came right up to Delnash with For'mya and Wayonn. “You and the other Elders must get inside! Go to the Command Center with Avi! You are out of your element here!”

“We... we can fight!” Delnash hissed suddenly.

Helen looked at him but it was Wayonn who turned and spoke to him. “You are the Chief Elder of the Pralor people! I don’t care what happens to that *nubous* fool...” He spoke pointing at Lorendo. “...But you need to be protected! Those are the orders given to me!”

“Orders?” Delnash gasped. “Who gave you such orders?”

Wayonn took his arm. “The man you consider to be an animal.” He stated. “Trust me... if it is as bad as I hear in Martin’s voice... you will not wish to see why he is feared throughout the entire Alpha Quadrant by every species known to exist. Inside! All of you! For'mya?”

For'mya took Delnash’s other arm and then Sashan’s arm in her other hand. “No time for arguments!” She barked. “Now it’s time for action!” She stated as she and Wayonn began to lead them quickly into the station.

Helen turned to a *Durcunusaan* officer. “Secure that *ronnus* and watch him!” She snarled pointing at Lorendo. “If he farts wrong... spread his brains over the wall!”

The *Durcunusaan* nodded and grabbed Lorendo’s arm. “With pleasure *Feravomir*.” He stated and yanked the still bleeding Lorendo along with him.

ONTEROM

SVORAG CAVE

FIFTEEN MINUTES EARLIER

“...be cooler in here?” Aricia spoke softly as they moved down the passage, her head turning to look at Kasdan.

They had been moving on a gradual downward slope of perhaps ten degrees as they traversed the winding path. There were no side passages, which made things easier for them in terms of security, but they were moving further and further from the surface.

Kasdan met her eyes in surprise. “You... you are asking me?” He asked.

Aricia smiled at him which shocked Kasdan because even in the low light of the cave the smile took the hard edge off her face that he had seen up until now and allowed her exquisite beauty to shine through. “You are a scientist yes?” She asked.

“Yes... yes.” Kasdan stammered. “But my field is Hyper Spacial Anomalies and Phased Quantum Engineering. Not Geology.”

Aricia waited until those in front had called for a stop and then she looked fully at the Pralor Kasdan, Isabella beside her. “You must have some idea.” She pressed him. “The cave walls seem to be radiating heat when they should be cool to the touch. I am not a scientist Kasdan, and nether is Bella. We are fighters and pilots and we freely admit when we are out of our league.”

Kasdan glanced between her and Isabella quickly. “I am... I am considered a junior level scientist as Assistant Director of the Science Convention. Much of my... my ideas and theories are not often well received.”

“They will be well received with us.” Isabella stated plainly. “You seem to be the only one of genuine heart within your group. You are honest and forthright. We trust you.”

“You trust me?” Kasdan gasped.

Aricia smiled at him. “Kasdan... Martin would not have allowed you to accompany us if he did not trust you.” She said. “You do not adhere to the same principles as the others. You do not share their arrogance.”

“To assume we are better than others simply because of our technology is foolish.” Kasdan spoke softly. “It is one of the reasons our fall as a people came at the hands of a species that was technologically inferior to us initially. We abused that and they learned from it and then turned on us.”

“Your honesty is refreshing.” Isabella told him. “Our husband does not deal well with the arrogance that people cling to.”

Kasdan nodded. “Yes... I noticed that.” He said. “I am... I am not from Lorendo’s generation and many of the scientists working today do not adhere to the same ideals.”

“Then perhaps there is hope for your people in the future.” Aricia told him.

Kasdan glanced in front of them and saw Martin kneeling with Murano and the dark skinned man whispering among themselves. “Is he always so severe?” Kasdan asked.

Aricia smiled. “No.” She said. “But he is a Lycavorian and he takes the safety of his loved ones and friends very seriously.”

“He is the king of your people but he does... he does not act like a king.” Kasdan said. “He is... he wears his passion... his emotions on his sleeve. He leads... he leads into battle when he should be commanding from the rear.”

Aricia turned her head and looked at Martin’s back with loving eyes and then she turned back to Kasdan. “Martin... our husband and mate... he is not like other men.” She said softly. “He knows only one way to lead... and that is by example.”

“And that is why we love him so.” Isabella answered.

Kasdan nodded his head in understanding and looked around. “I don’t know why the conditions are not indicative of a normal cave.” He answered Aricia’s initial question. “We are not near the geothermal core of the planet to my knowledge, so that means some sort of external source of the heat. And it is getting hotter the further into the caves that we go.”

“External source?” Aricia asked as the hairs on the back of her neck began to stand up.

Kasdan nodded his head. “It would need to be massive in order to generate this kind of heat.”

Aricia met his eyes and motioned him forward. “Come with me.” She said taking his hand.

Martin looked at Danny and Murano as they knelt on the ground. Kenny and Pablo were five meters in front of them, watching the passage.

“...can’t pick up their scents?” Murano was asking.

Martin shook his head. “The stench is too thick.” He answered with a grimace. “It smells like...”

“Smells like shit on a shingle!” Danny spat. “My taste buds are gonna be shot for a month.”

Martin grinned and nodded his head. “It’s too heavy.” Martin said looking at Murano. “All around us... overriding even my sense of smell.”

Danny nodded and looked at Murano. “And ugly here has the strongest sense of smell in the entire Union. He followed Aricia and the others across an entire planet just by their scent. He pissed them off and they had to get away from him. That’s why his nose is so big.” He said with a grin.

Murano smiled as well. “I’m glad that you found them.” He said. “What... may I ask what it was about? They don’t seem the type to just...”

Martin shook his head. “It’s a long story.” Martin answered. “But there was lots of body worshipping when I did find them.” He said with a large grin. “Normya and Zarah were the result of that little trip!”

Murano chuckled softly at the laconic nature of Martin. It was a virtue of everyone with him it seemed. They pushed aside their fear and anxiety with humor and crude jokes but it worked for them and made them appear fearless to those who did not know the truth. They all turned as Aricia settled beside Martin leading Kasdan.

“Beloved... Kasdan may have a reason that it is getting hotter within these tunnels.” Aricia told him.

Martin’s dark eyes looked at Kasdan. “Let’s hear it.” He spoke. “It has to be better than my excuse that I have a fever.”

Kasdan looked briefly at Murano and then looked at Martin. “I do not know for sure the reason but...”

Martin held up his hand stopping his words before he could speak them. “I told you outside that I trusted your guesses more than that fat *ronnus* Lorendo’s facts!” He spoke. “You got something to say Kasdan... don’t hesitate to fill me in.”

Kasdan found himself liking Martin a great deal, worlds apart though they may have been in terms of culture. He most certainly was no primitive animal as Lorendo claimed. He was in fact a very intelligent man from what Kasdan saw in his eyes.

“We are too far from the core of the planet for the heat to be like it is.” Kasdan spoke. “There has to be an external source somewhere within these tunnels.”

“An external source?” Martin asked. “You mean like a volcano or something like that?”

Kasdan shook his head. “There are no seismic mountains on this planet.” He said. “No... by external source I mean something is generating the heat. Something very large and not really natural.”

“Kasdan... why do I not like the way you say something external and not really natural.” Murano asked him.

“Yeah... no shit.” Danny grunted.

“I’m sorry Praetorian Murano.” Kasdan spoke. “It is the only reasonable explanation though.”

Martin turned and looked down the tunnel. “Ok... there’s only ten of them and we got more firepower.” He spoke. “Let’s just find our people and get the hell out of here. This place gives me the creeps.”

“No argument here.” Danny said. He hissed softly and drew Kenny’s attention. He motioned with his hand and Kenny nodded nudging Pablo. They rose to their feet and began to move forward once more, T'lolt falling in behind them silently with his MKW 30 Hades Chain Gun. A devastating piece of Union engineering that only the strongest Lycavorians could wield. A three barreled 20mm kinetic weapon that could hurl rounds downrange at a terrible rate. T'lolt carried the weapon and the 2000 round square drum on his back as if it was a toy. The entire unit was connected and the linkless feed ran under T'lolt’s right arm by a caseless two inch wide feed tube. One hit on the quick release and he could jettison the entire unit and not get tangled up. It was a designed based loosely on those from ancient Earth but improved on by Union Weapons Engineers.

“Kasdan... stick close.” Murano spoke as he lifted his Saber Staff in one hand and the KM12 in the other.

They had gone no more than fifty meters when Kenny and Pablo immediately dropped to one knee in a combat posture at what appeared to be a bend in the tunnel. Martin held up a clenched fist and everyone froze in their tracks. Aricia gripped Kasdan’s arm and shook her head quickly so that he wouldn’t talk. Martin remained in a combat crouch and he, Murano and Danny moved silently forward until they came up behind Kenny and Pablo.

Kenny looked sideways as Martin came up behind him and touched his shoulder.

Movement Skipper. Kenny reached out within Mindvoice. *Didn’t see how many but we caught the shadows.*

Where the tunnel starts to curve. Pablo added. *Looks like it branches off and if my sense of direction is any good... right back towards the relative location of the station Skipper.*

Oh... that ain’t good. Martin spoke. *We’re moving blind here and I don’t like it.*

I got a bad feeling Skipper. Kenny said.

Pablo nodded. *For once I agree with him and his bad feelings.*

Me too. Danny spoke.

Martin reached behind him and withdrew a tubular cylinder from his vest pouch in the back. He quickly attached it to the barrel of his KM12 and let his A4 drop to dangle on the quick release straps, Kenny and Pablo seeing this and doing the same. Martin nodded his head forward and they began to inch ahead. Martin turned back to the others. *Stay put for a moment. We’ll scout ahead. Mindvoice from here on out everyone.*

Watch your ass! Danny hissed.

Martin nodded his head and moved to follow Kenny and Pablo with Murano taking Danny’s KM12, now rigged for silence, and moving beside Martin. Danny twirled his finger in a circle signaling everyone to rally on him and he watched as they all moved up with T'lolt turning to face their rear with Garan’s two men. The Pralor Security troops seemed to find T'lolt fascinating and had not moved more than a meter from his side since entering the cavern. Danny knew what it was and he grinned inwardly at Julie as she settled next to him on the dirt. Garan’s men were learning even as they moved with them, taking their clues from the enormous Immortal who had obviously seen far more combat than both of them combined. Garan came up beside his brother and Aricia and looked at her bright azure eyes.

Forgive... forgive me for asking... but these men and women. Garan asked her. *Your husband is a Praetorian... a King. Yet they are... they speak to him with such informal tones. And he does not seem to care.*

Aricia glanced at Isabella and then back to him. *They have been with him for a very long time Garan.* She replied. *He has led them in battle on hundreds of occasions and that fact alone gives them the right to refer to him as they do. He would not have it any other way. I suspect we are very different from what you know of Kings and Queens.*

Our history shows that this form of governing does not last for very long. Garan said honestly. *The Monarchs become... they become out of touch.*

Aricia nodded. *Most do... but we haven't done such a bad job for the last twenty-five plus years and the Union survived long before that ruled by Martin's grandfather. We have a democratic system if you wish to call it that. A Prime Minister and Senate. We do not have absolute power as most monarchs in history had. That is why we are different.*

A Senate? Kasdan asked now. *You mean representatives of the people?*

Isabella nodded. *Yes. The people of the Union determine what direction the Union goes for the most part. The Senate is their voice. And they are listened too.*

Aricia saw the looks on their faces and smiled at them warmly. *Not the sort of thing you would expect from primitives and savages is it?*

I would like to see this Senate at work. Garan spoke with eyes that showed true interest.

As would I. Kasdan echoed.

Aricia gripped her A4 tighter. *Perhaps that could be possible. Martin still has hope that we can come to an arrangement. I think we all do. Now is not the time to discuss such things however. We must remain focused and alert now. This cave... there is something that is not right.*

Kasdan couldn't help but nod his head. *On that we agree completely.* He said. *It is like... there is... something here.*

Aricia nodded. *Evil*

They hugged the walls of the cave tunnel, Murano and Pablo on one side, Martin and Kenny on the other as they came to the juncture in the tunnel. The branching tunnel became much more obvious to them from their current position and they saw it actually went in two different directions as well as moving on directly to their front.

Which direction? Martin asked.

Kenny motioned slightly with his KM12 to the east tunnel. *That way.*

We could get all confused in here if we start splitting up Martin. Murano spoke.

Martin nodded. *Yeah.* His head tilted slightly and his eyes narrowed. *Listen.* He spoke. *You hear that?*

All of them focused and Kenny heard it first. Sounds like humming of some kind.

Machinery? Pablo spoke.

Or a generator. Murano said.

Same direction as our friends. Martin spoke.

Yep. Pablo agreed.

Martin withdrew the Dragon Armor forged Hador fighting knife from the sheath on his thigh and softly scrapped an arrow in the rock of the tunnel pointing back in the direction they had come. He turned as he replaced the knife. *Aricia... bring the others and follow five meters back.* Martin watched as she nodded and then he turned and looked at Kenny. *Move.*

Kenny lifted his KM12 and began to move forward in a crouch. He had gone three steps when the very terrified and shrill feminine voice reached their ears easily.

“No! Stay back! No more! Stay away! No... stop... ughh!”

The female voice was cut off as if something had stopped her screams. Whether it was the wolf within their blood that was so very protective of females, or the Spartan values that they all clung to so furiously now, Murano would never know the answer to that question as he watched Martin, Kenny and Pablo all surge forward within milliseconds of each other. He followed three steps behind them. The sprint last fifteen meters and they all skidded to a halt as the tunnel opened into a large room and stopped. In that room were all sorts of mechanical machinery, much of which Murano recognized with barely a glance. They also saw two of the Svorag in the process of raping a dark haired Pralor female, her body already covered in copious amounts of their excrement and sandwiched between them. Her eyes were glazed over and unresponsive as they used her body. Another Svorag was on top of the Pralor female who had obviously shouted, its long tongue almost fully seated in her throat and preparing to attach itself to the inside of her throat. She was gagging horribly and slamming her fists against the Svorag's side trying to fight it, but she was obviously not up to the task. She was equally as naked as the first woman and it appeared as if she had been raped as well given the liquid and

excrement that was visible on her skin. Two others were waiting, their bodies already aroused and weaving back and forth in anticipation of their conquest.

A conquest they would never experience.

Kenny and Pablo broke left by some unspoken order, their KM12s spitting silent death as they moved. The two Svorag never knew what hit them as both Kenny and Pablo fired twice in quick succession. All four kinetic projectile rounds struck true and their heads blew open with hideous splashing sounds. The cave wall and most of the woman's upper body were suddenly coated in their blood and brain matter, though the woman was completely out of it and had no idea what was happening. Pablo caught the woman before she fell from between the now dead Svorag, her body already beginning to change from what Pablo could see, her skin beginning to turn a greenish color and begin to harden. He lowered her to the floor of the cave quickly, but then he and Kenny kept their weapons trained on her.

Martin and Murano broke to their right in the same instant, Murano watching with wide eyes as Martin swung his left arm forward while bringing his right hand up filled with KM12. Murano watched as Martin's Shi Viska burst from Flatspace and the shield launched from his arm an eye blink later. Just as Martin was pulling the trigger the Shi Viska cleaved one of the waiting Svorag completely in half. The second waiting Svorag's eyes grew wide when he saw Martin, but by then the two 12.7mm kinetic projectiles were punching through his forehead and blowing his brains onto the floor behind him. Martin had given the order to retool most of their standard sidearms with the Kavalian 12.7mm projectile. The kinetic round carried more weight and punch in it and when chambered to be fired from the KM12 or KM14, it was devastating at close range. Murano watched as Martin stepped up to the remaining Svorag, his Hador then appearing in his hand as if by magic, and he slashed viciously downward severing the Svorag's tongue while it was still trying to fully sink into the struggling woman's throat. Martin then placed the barrel of his KM12 against the temple of the Svorag.

"Eat this motherfucker!" Martin snarled as he pulled the trigger.

The 12.7 mm projectile took off the upper two thirds of the Svorag's head, physically launching the body off the young woman who immediately rolled to her side, clawing at the still wiggling tongue in her throat before she got her hands around it and yanked it free as she gagged. The Svorag's body landed two meters away, slamming into the cave wall with a sickening thud before slamming to the cave floor.

"Clear!" Kenny hissed softly.

"Clear here!" Martin popped as he turned and watched Murano move to the woman's side.

The young Pralor female looked up into Murano's face as he settled to one knee beside her. Her light blue eyes looked confused for a moment as she felt his Etheric essence flood her as only a Praetorian could. Her eyes cut to Martin because she felt the same thing coming from him if not even stronger.

"Prae... Praetorian?" She stammered.

Murano nodded his head as he began to pull at his body armor in order to cover her nakedness. "Yes child." He spoke calmly.

"Murano no!" Martin snapped.

"Martin we have to cover her!" Murano protested.

"Leave your armor on!" Martin hissed at him. "Kenny... find me something to cover them!"

"On it!" Kenny spoke.

"We have it Kenny." Aricia's voice spoke and they turned to see Aricia and Danny leading the others into the small dead end cave. She and Isabella rushed forward pulling light weight polymer blankets from their small combat butt packs. Isabella moved to the dark haired woman while Aricia settled next to Murano and spread the blanket over her.

"Garan!" Martin hissed sharply. He waited until Garan looked at him. "Security."

Garan nodded and motioned to his men and watched as they took up positions and T'lolt situated himself behind them in a covering mode with the Hades chain cannon. Murano helped Aricia to tuck the blanket around the young woman, her eyes moving between him and Martin almost nonstop.

"They... the Praetorians." She managed to gasp. "They... they all... they were killed in the last war!"

Murano gave her a small smile. "No... not all of us." He told her. "Who are you child? You did not come to Onterom with our group."

"Your group?" She asked. "I came with the... with the station's crew. Who... where did you come from?"

“The station’s crew?” Aricia asked softly looking at Murano.

“What is your name?” Murano asked her.

“Ja... Jacina.” She stammered. “How...”

“You were part of this station’s crew Jacina?” Murano asked.

The young woman nodded. “Geina as well.” She spoke motioning to the other woman with her head.

“What do you remember last Jacina?” Aricia asked her.

Jacina looked at the woman with the strange luminous blue eyes. “Who... who are you?” She asked.

“You are not... you are not Pralor. Not fully.”

Murano reached out and used two fingers to draw her face back to his. “Jacina... what do you last remember?” He asked again.

“The... the attack Praetorian.” She answered immediately. “We were trying to escape and destroy our research. The Svorag... they breached the defenses from underneath. They...” Her eyes grew wide. “...I remember being hit from behind and then being dragged. And then... then nothing!” She looked at Murano. “How long has it been? We did not expect a ship for several days! We were escaping in the transports and were going to wait in orbit. Where are the others?”

“Wait a minute.” Martin said moving between Murano and Aricia. “Others? What others?”

“I was... we were the last group to leave.” Jacina explained. “We were told to destroy our research and then move to the transport bay to be taken to our ships. When we got there... no one... no one was waiting. We...” She looked around now and seemed to take in where she was. “Where am... where am I?”

Martin looked at Aricia. “Others?” He said. “That’s just wonderful!”

Full realization must have struck Jacina then for she began screaming and trying to push herself away from them. “NO! By the spirits no! They... they used me! Raped me! I will... I will become like them! I am infected now! No! Spirits preserve me no! I beg you!”

Aricia gripped her tightly and pulled Jacina close to her. As a woman who had been taken against her will, Aricia knew what was flashing through her mind right now, and she needed to have rock like support in order to survive this ordeal. “I have you!” She spoke softly. “I have you!”

“I don’t want to be like them!” Jacina sobbed as she buried her face in Aricia’s chest. “Kill me! Kill me please!”

Martin looked at Kenny. *Kenny. You and Pablo find me others. No more than 200 meters out! Then haul ass back here.* He told them within Mindvoice.

They nodded and headed down the tunnel. Murano looked at him. *Her screams will not draw attention.* He spoke.

We hope. Martin spoke.

It apparently is something that is common from their actions in bringing them here. Murano said.

[Murano... she doesn’t know they never got off this world.] Martin said. *[She thinks it’s only a few hours after the assault began. It’s been over nine hundred years. I may not know much about your people... but I know what my nose is telling me... and it is telling me she is roughly twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old and not a day older.]*

Murano nodded. *[Her Etheric resonance also tells me the same thing.]*

[So my next questions are... how is that possible? How is she just now realizing this and where are our people? The ones we came into this place for.] Martin hissed.

Murano shook his head. *[I do not know. Something tells me we are not going to like the answers we find.]*

[You think?] Martin snapped. He turned back to where Aricia and Isabella were looking over the two females with Julie. He moved over to kneel beside Isabella and saw Jacina’s eyes turn to look at him. “Bella?” Martin whispered.

Isabella shook her head. “I am no doctor *Du’ased m’ranndii* but if Anja is correct in what she has learned, this one is already starting to change. Her skin is altering and she is completely out of it. Unconscious right now.”

“You must... you must kill us!” Jacina hissed through her tears. “We will change and become like them! I do not... I don’t wish that!”

Martin looked at her. "I have no intention of killing you." Martin hissed. "My wife and mate... she has a cure. We just need to get you back to the station."

"There is no cure and the station is overrun!" Jacina gasped. "We can't go back there!" Martin looked at Aricia and then back to her. "They... they came through the vents in the floor near the core!" She continued. "They were all over before we could act! We can not go back!"

"Jacina... things aren't exactly as you remember." Martin spoke gently. "Who do you think we are?"

Jacina blinked. "You... you are a Praetorian! He is as well." Jacina said as Murano came up behind Martin. "We... we thought the Praetorians were all lost in the war. How... you came from the ship yes? The one that was coming to get us?"

"Ahh... no." Martin answered. "Jacina... I am not fully Pralor."

Jacina's blue eyes blinked rapidly. "Not fully... but I... I can feel your Etheric resonance. Both of you. No one but... no one but a Praetorian could be felt so strongly within the Etheric realm. You are... you are stronger than him... but..." Her eyes narrowed as she stared at Martin in confusion. She glanced at Aricia and then Isabella and then back to Martin. "You... you did not expect to find me?" She finally stammered.

Martin shook his head. "No. We entered this cave looking for our people. Ten individuals that we lost."

"Cave?" Jacina asked. "There area around the station was catacomb with tunnels." She spoke quickly. "I... I came down with the senior engineers once to establish a secondary power coupling bypass. They... they used the tunnels and caves!"

Martin nodded. "Yeah... we figured that out already." He said.

Murano reached out and took her hand. "Jacina... when did you send the distress call?" He asked.

"Six days ago!" Jacina exclaimed. "When we discovered that somehow the Svorag had begun to breed. A handful of them escaped from the holding pen into the area around the station three weeks ago. We searched for them but could not find them. The Commander said they would die of malnutrition in days and we would stumble across their remains months later. We did not think they... that they would breed."

Murano looked at Martin quickly and then back to Jacina. "You were not here to find a cure for the infection?" He asked.

Jacina nodded. "Yes. I was... I was with the medical research team. We were trying to discover a cure but the others..."

"The others?" Aricia asked her.

Jacina nodded quickly. "They had the entire lower portion of the station. The secured area. Only the Station Commander could enter. We... we did not think it anything when we requested a specimen and it was delivered to us. Our job... our job was to find a cure. I don't know what they were doing in the lower levels but there were genetic scientists as well as bio-molecular specialists and DNA splicing researchers. We did not... we did not mix with them very much. They were... they were very odd."

"Odd how?" Murano asked.

"They did not seem to be interested in a cure." Jacina said. "No one... no one knows what they were working on, but it certainly was no cure. We were told not to question them or try to enter the secured areas of the station. They worked directly for the Science Convention."

Martin looked at Murano. "Wow... that's surprising." He said sarcastically.

Murano looked at Jacina. "Jacina... there is much you don't know child." He spoke softly to her. "The time is not the same as you think."

"The time?" Jacina asked looking at him and then her eyes darted between all of them before settling back on Murano. "I... I don't understand Praetorian. What... what is going on?"

"Jacina... this station was sealed and abandoned over nine hundred years ago." Murano told her. "You... your colleague... all of you were declared dead at that time."

Jacina shook her head quickly. "That is not possible!" She gasped. "There were only three hundred and nine cryo chambers here. They were already full of our people that had been infected. Their lab was sealed when the attacks started. We were to destroy our work and then run to the transports! They..."

Skipper! Kenny's voice interrupted her words and he sounded very anxious.

Go! Martin hissed.

Ah... Martin... you might want to see this. Kenny spoke again.

You find our people? Martin asked him, his eyes going to Aricia. Kenny never used his name unless they were in big trouble and Aricia and the others knew it.

Shit! Danny muttered. *Things just got worse.*

I don't think we are going to find our people Skipper. You better see this. Come back down the tunnel. Take the other turn and fifty meters ahead you'll find us on a ledge. Beat feat Skipper. Kenny said.

Martin met Aricia's eyes. "Stay put. Danny, Murano, Kasdan... you're with me."

"Hurry Beloved." Aricia said. "We must get them back to *Melyanna*."

Martin nodded his head. "Be ready to move." He said before turning and beginning to move off down the tunnel with the others in tow.

Jacina squeezed her arms. "What is happening?" She stammered.

Aricia looked at her and then cut her eyes to Isabella. She looked back to Jacina. "You are safe now." She said. "That is all that matters."

"Fuucckkkkk me!" Martin hissed in a whisper.

The ledge overlooked what could only be described as a massive chamber. In the center of the chamber on the ground some hundred and fifty meters below them appeared to be a massive generator of some kind put together with parts and conduits of an incredible assortment and made to work together. Nothing looked uniform or like it belonged together. The generator was pulsing with power however and thousands upon thousands of individual organic like cables crisscrossed the floor of the massive cavity running to what appeared to be organic cryo type chambers of some kind.

Each one appearing to contain a Svorag.

"By the ancestors." Murano gasped in awe.

"I'm just guessing here..." Danny spoke softly. "But this is probably not a good thing... right?"

"Not if you're us." Pablo echoed softly.

Martin dropped back beneath the natural rock wall that slanted downward to their front and blocked them from view for the most part. "Kasdan!" Martin whispered. "Tell me what you see? I'm guessing this is your power source."

Kasdan did not truly want to be here but he listened to Martin regardless. The very presence of Murano and this man inspired him. He crawled slowly on his belly until he was at the edge of the natural wall and slowly peeked his eyes around the edge. They grew wider as he took more in.

"Oh... my. By the Blessings of our people!" Kasdan whispered. He quickly got hold of his emotions however and took a careful look at what he saw. "They appear to be some sort of cryo chambers. The... the power source looks like a crude fusion reactor of some sort. The cables are feeding power to the chambers and keeping their environments intact." His eyes drifted slowly over the area below. "There seems to be a main computer core scavenged from other systems off to the side of the core that is maintaining the stasis of the chambers."

Martin looked at him. "I thought these things operated off basic instincts?" Martin asked.

Kasdan inched back and looked at him. "I... I have not worked on any project related to the Svorag, but that is what the general premise is... yes."

"So much for the idea they can't breed huh?" Danny spat.

Murano nodded. "Yes... I believe we can answer that question easily." He spoke. "I would estimate several thousand of these pods."

"We have seen only those five from the cave." Kasdan spoke. "Guards of some sort?" He asked.

Martin nodded. "That would be my guess." He stated. "Which means there are probably more of them."

"Martin... we must gather our people and go." Murano spoke urgently. "The more time we spend within these tunnels the more chance of us being discovered. The Svorag know these tunnels and we do not."

"I won't leave our people!" Martin hissed.

"He's right *fervon*." Danny whispered to him. "As much as it tears at my gut too, we have no choice. We'll never find our people in this maze. We risk everyone by staying here."

"Fuck!" Martin snarled softly.

Kenny leaned over and glanced down, his eyes immediately detecting the movement of four Svorag that were now within the main chamber and looking directly at where they were hiding. One of them appeared to be wearing what was left of one of their uniforms. “Ah... Skipper... I don’t think we have much of a choice.” He stated quickly moving back behind the wall. “These things inherit the talents of whoever they absorb... right?”

Murano nodded his head. “To some degree yes. That is the general hypothesis. I do not wish to test that theory however.”

“Yeah... well I think one of our people just made us.” He stated without looking at him. “They were...”

The horrible screeching noise caused all of them to cringe as it echoed off the walls of the main chamber. Martin quickly glanced around the edge of the wall and saw the Svorag Kenny had been talking about, one who definitely wore the tattered remains of a Union uniform, his malformed jaw and mouth now fully open as he was unleashing the insidious screeching howl while looking directly at them. He had moved closer to their position, moving up what appeared to be a natural sloped stairwell that wound all the way up to where they were.

“Fuck!” Martin hissed bringing his KM12 up in a single, smooth motion and unleashing one silenced round. The kinetic projectile covered the eighty downward meters between them in a blink and punched through the Svorag’s screeching mouth. His body flipped backwards, ending his screeching and scattering his skull over the three others who were with him. “Go with the gods!” Martin whispered softly.

The other three Svorag quickly took up the horrible screeching and Martin saw two more appear from a side tunnel on the bottom and move to the makeshift computer core and begin manipulating the controls. Instantly the noise in the massive chamber changed and all of them took note that many of the chambers were now beginning to power down.

“Ah fuck!” Martin hissed. “They’re waking up their friends! Time to go!” The others were already moving as Martin rolled back behind cover and sprang to his feet. “Go! Go!” He barked. *Aricia! Meet us at the intersection!* He barked out within Mindvoice. *We need to go! Now!*

On our way!

Martin holstered his silenced KM12 as he ran, dropping his hands to pick up the A4 which was bouncing around from the quick release straps. It took them moments to cover the distance back to the intersection where Martin had scrapped the wall only to see Aricia and Isabella leading the others to them. Julie was helping Garan to support the nearly comatose woman, while T’lolt brought up the rear, the Pralor Jacina between him and Julie and Garan.

Martin didn’t hesitate before barking out the orders. “Out!” He snapped. “Now! Back to the entrance!” No one questioned him in the least as Kenny and Pablo rushed forward to take the lead as they always did.

Martin activated his emergency COM beacon and was about to begin speaking when the Svorag arrived. He brought his A4 up and began to chop out rounds in their direction as Danny and Murano moved up beside him, his COM unit still broadcasting.

“Fuck! They’re all over!” Danny screamed as he used controlled bursts to take down Svorag advancing on them with speed and agility. His head turned and he saw them burst clean through a wall of soft dirt camouflaged as a normal solid wall and begin to pour out. “Shit... trap doors! Coming from north and east!”

“Pull back to the entrance!” Martin’s order thundered. “Shit! This isn’t good! Shit! Shit!”

“Our people Martin!” Isabella’s screamed out.

“We can’t save them now!” Martin screamed back. “Take the two woman we found and go Bella! We’ll cover!”

“They are infected Martin!” Aricia’s snapped but with no vitriol in her voice.

“Red can fix them!” Martin answered instantly. “It’s not fully complete yet but she was close to figuring out how to fix them! Now take them and go *Saaurano!*”

T’lolt’s chain gun firing could be heard from in front of them and Martin whirled around. “There are too many!” His voice carried over the noise, though it remained strangely calm considering what was obviously happening. “They have these hidden tunnels all over! We should probably leave quickly Martin!”

“Move! Move! Move!” Martin shouted as A4s firing around him erupted from everyone. “Time to cut our losses and go! Take them and go Aricia! Endy! Endy can you hear me?”

All of them heard Endith’s slightly high pitched voice answer instantly. ***“We’re here Skipper!”***

“Prep a Bunker Buster and lock onto the entrance of this cave Short Stuff! We have to bring it down or these fucking things will be all over us like stink on shit!” Martin barked the order. “We’re falling back to the entrance. Three minutes Endith! Then prepare for dust-off!”

“On our way!”

Wayonn’s voice broke into Martin’s COM unit. **“Martin! What is your situation?”**

“Wayonn! Shit... we’re running like the Hounds of Hell are after us! Can’t you tell?” Martin answered. “There’s a whole *nubous* nest of these lizard fuckers down here! Thousands of them! Practically right under the fucking station!”

“Nubou lae!” Wayonn hissed.

“Yeah... that’s about the... SHIT!” Martin barked as he saw a Svorag burst from the soft dirt of the wall right behind Danny and begin to open its mouth and raise its clawed hands. Martin stepped toward the only man he had ever considered a brother, his right hand going to his sword pommel instinctively. As his fist closed around it and yanked it free from the Velcro he called the blade from Flatspace with a sizzle and with a flick of his wrist he snapped out with the blade. The Dragon Armor forged blade removed the Svorag’s head in a smooth motion with no resistance. Danny spun around as he felt the wisp of wind from the strike against the back of his neck and he saw the Svorag’s body fall with a sloppy sound. He looked at Martin as he aimed the pommel and pressed the trigger on the handle. A single blast from the energy cell in the pommel hilt hit another Svorag center mass of his chest and blew a large section of his torso away. Danny looked at Martin, saw him flash a smile and Danny grinned. His brother would never desert him.

“Faster!” Murano’s voice echoed. “Move faster! All of them are waking up now!”

“Wayonn... have Avi seal every exterior vent entrance to the station!” Martin barked out as he continued to half run and half walk behind the others as he covered them. “Then pull Delnash and his people in with ours! I won’t let them face this outside! They’ll be overrun and won’t know how to deal with it! Have Arzoal and the other dragons move to high ground somewhere!” He looked around at Danny and his eyes went wide. “We... *fervon!* Danny down!”

Danny didn’t hesitate and ducked as Martin’s A4 thundered. A single three round burst shredded the brains of another Svorag as Danny spun while on his knees and unleashed a sustained burst down the tunnel behind them, dropping at least six of the advancing Svorag. He heard Martin cuss.

“Fuck! Lost COMs!” Martin snarled. He glanced up, saw a row of Svorag come tearing around the corner, several of them running practically on all fours. Martin dropped his A4 to dangle and lifted his hands in front of him. He called forth the Etheric power at his command and using his hands as the conduit he sent a crushing wave of Etheric power rushing outward that encompassed the entire tunnel width.

Murano saw this move and with barely a thought he stepped behind that wave of power Martin had sent hurtling down the tunnel and drove his fist into the ground just as Martin had done earlier when fighting the Pralor Security troops. Murano altered the surge of Etheric power through the ground differently than Martin had, sending a lethal concussive force as opposed to Martin just knocking over the Pralor Security Forces. As Martin’s shattering wave of Etheric power lifted every Svorag in the tunnel up and carried them back with horrific force, Murano’s lances of Etheric power struck like bolts of lightening through the tunnel floor and caused bones to shatter and internal organs to implode. He needn’t have bothered he realized a instant later, for the wave of Etheric power that Martin had sent out was far more deadly than he had first thought. Having been caught up in the full force of that wave of psychic energy from Martin had instantly crushed cells and bones and caused internal blood vessels to implode even as it tossed Svorag bodies back like simple dolls. Murano should have known that Martin would have used lethal force to protect those with him. The combination of two such devastating attacks right on the heels of each other gave them the break they needed however and Murano turned to Martin and Danny as T'lolt moved up behind them.

“I believe we have worn out our welcome... if ever we had one to begin with.” Murano spoke. “Leaving would be very advisable.”

“No shit! You think!” Danny snarled at him with no malice.

“I fucking hate caves!” Martin screamed as he yanked a plasma grenade from his combat harness, depressed the detonator and hurled it down the tunnel with all of his strength. “Go! Go! Go!” He rasped out, grabbing Danny and T'lolt with his hands as Murano raced in front of them.

“...come on Marty!” Endith nearly shouted. “Come on!”

Tina’s eyes were locked on the large sensor screen she sat in front of behind Endith while Eirene occupied the seat her mother would normally be in. “Ten meters!” Tina barked. “Fuck there are a lot of contacts! Motion sensors are off the chart!”

“Eirene!” Endith barked as she held the STRIKER steady in hover mode a hundred meters off the ground and only sixty meters from the entrance of the cave.

“Missile is ready!” Eirene snapped the worry in her voice very evident.

“There!” Tina screamed. “Aricia and the others just broke out!”

“The Skipper?” Endith shouted.

“Moving faster than I have ever seen him and Danny moving before!” Tina snapped back. “They must be dragging T’lolt and Murano!”

“They are too close to *medwan* and the others!” Eirene barked.

Endith snapped her head forward and saw the targeting shield drop over her right eye. “Not for long.” She growled viciously. “Charging Kinetic Cannon!”

“Three meters! Two! One!” Tina barked out. “Endy now!” Tina screamed knowing what her elf lover was thinking.

Endith mashed her index finger down on the trigger of her throttle control before Tina had even finished yelling. The nose of the *STRIKER Mk II* roared to life as the imbedded Kinetic Pulse Cannon, a weapon made to fire in space, erupted. A white flame like tongue reached out and the front of the cave became a no man’s land as kinetic projectiles began to strike everything within a three meter cone of fire. A smaller version of the Type Two series generator powered the cannon and allowed it to toss out kinetic rounds at a horrific rate. The front of the cave disintegrated into rock and dust and Svorag flesh. When she saw Martin and the others clear that dust cloud she gave the order.

“Now Eirene!” She screamed.

Eirene’s finger was moving already and she stabbed down on the control panel and the concussion missile sizzled away from the right launcher under the short wing and raced into that cloud. There was perhaps a four second delay where everything appeared to stop and then the explosion hit. And an explosion it was. The entire mouth of the cave and the portion of the mountain above it heaved upward and then came crashing down in a cloud of dirt and debris that had been pulverized by the force of the missile’s warhead.

“Holy fuck!” Tina exclaimed as she watched it on the monitor in front of her. “Eirene?” She gasped.

Eirene Leonidas didn’t turn her head from watching the scene below her. “They were trying to kill my father and two of my mothers!” She snarled angrily. “I don’t like it when people try to kill my father and mothers!”

A small split Tina’s face. “You don’t say!” She barked out. “Couldn’t tell it from here! Just like your mother... yes sir!”

“Fucking A!” Endith shouted with glee.

Aricia’s coughing voice filled the internal COM. “***Endith... land quickly!***” She ordered. “***We must get our passengers back to Anja immediately!***”

“Coming down Aricia!” Endith barked as she yanked her controls over and the *STRIKER Mk II* darted to the right over the trees and began to settle to the ground in the clearing.

Murano looked back at the entrance to the cave as he spit dirt from his mouth and slowly got to his feet as they heard the *STRIKER*’s engines change their tone as it began to land. He turned back to Martin. “Your... your pilot seems rather protective of you Martin my boy!” He barked loudly trying to shake the ringing from his ears.

Martin’s eyes were wide as well as he coughed to get the dirt out of his mouth. “Jesus... I guess so!” He spat.

The cloud of dust and smoke was beginning to drift away on the breeze coming through the trees and they stood looking at what could only be described as a portion of the mountain having been dropped on the entrance.

“Fuck me!” Danny exclaimed. “I’m buying her a brew! She must have buried a couple hundred of them with that shot!”

Martin grabbed T'lolt’s arm as he rose to his full height. “T'lolt?”

Cha'talla’s brother looked down at Martin with a grin a mile wide. “Cha'talla told me working with you would be exciting!” He bellowed. “He had no idea how wrong he was! I haven’t had this much fun in three millennia!”

“I don’t usually drop mountains on my enemies!” Martin shouted over the ringing in his own ears.

“But what a glorious event it was!” T'lolt barked happily. “We must do it again soon!”

Martin stood there and watched in shock as T'lolt gripped his Hades tighter and headed for the clearing. He looked at Danny and Murano. Danny held up a finger and shook his head. “You brought him.” He spoke as he began to walk toward the clearing. “And here I thought you were the only certifiable lunatic in our group!” Danny muttered under his breath but loud enough that they could hear his words echo in his surface thoughts. “Now we have two! And one of them has bones sticking out of his face! Man... Anuk and Nubian will never believe this!”

Murano gripped Martin’s arm. “I must say... dropping the mountain on them would not have been my first choice. It was very effective however!”

Martin looked at him. “They came through the sub levels of the station before and we have to expect they will again.” Martin said. “It’s time we left this fucking planet behind. All of us.”

Murano nodded. “I couldn’t agree more.”

“First... first we get answers.” Martin snarled as he turned and headed for the clearing. He and Murano sprinted to where the *STRIKER* was resting, its engines still churning and aching to get back into the sky. As he came up the ramp he saw Aricia holding Jacina close to her, speaking soft soothing words. The second Pralor female was stretched out on the web bench with Isabella seeing to her as well as she could medically. Kenny was sitting with her just in case anything happened that they were unprepared for. Martin moved quickly to the cockpit as the ramp began to come up and he took the four stairs in one stride. He looked at Tina as he passed and leaned over to kiss her cheek before moving up behind Endith’s chair. “Next time you think you could warn me you wanted to drop the mountain on them.” He spoke leaning over beside her helmeted head and planting a kiss on her cheek.

Endith chuckled softly. She had been Martin’s pilot for nearly thirty years with Tina and For'mya, practically a member of his family as far as he and the others were concerned. She turned her head as she began to lift the ship into the air. “It wasn’t me boss man.” She stated as she motioned with her head. “Talk to your daughter. She has a mean streak in her like her mother.”

Martin turned and looked at Eirene who only gazed at him sheepishly. “They were trying to hurt you medwan.” She stated evenly.

Martin laughed and leaned over to rub his bearded face against her cheek and he touched her with a small bit of fatherly aura. Eirene giggled and relished in the attention as he drew back. “Endy... turn and burn back to the station.” Martin spoke. “These Svorag are becoming a much bigger problem than we first thought.”

“Yeah... no shit.” Tina spat. “Ugly bastards.”

“Let Anja know we are coming in with two patients for her.” Martin said. “The interior of the cave messed up our implants. Jules will have to re-sync them when we get back.”

Endith nodded as her hands flew across the controls in front of her. “On our way.” She said. “I’m guessing our Pralor friends didn’t tell us everything.” She spoke looking at Martin.

Martin shook his head. “Kasdan and Garan and those with us were just as surprised as we were.” He answered. “But you can bet some other asshole has answers. And I intend to get them.”

“Oh... take pictures!” Tina exclaimed.

All of them laughed as Martin turned and headed into the back of the *STRIKER*.

“...insane!” Lorendo nearly shouted as he was pushed out of the way and the two hover beds were moved past him. He turned to Delnash. “The station is secure and they bring two Svorag inside! Delnash you...”

Delnash looked at him. “Radra said they have a cure!” He spat. “I will give them the chance to prove it!”

“Delnash this is a risk that we should not take!” Lorendo snarled.

“They are our people!” Delnash braked at him. “The only survivors of this base thanks to you! I intend to find out what happen here and make sure they are cared for properly!”

“That savage female could not care...” Lorendo began but Delnash cut him off as he stepped closer.

“That savage female as you call her has done what you and all of your researchers could not do!”

Delnash snarled angrily at him. “If she has developed a cure then I intend to give her the opportunity to use it. She has already beat your ass once Lorendo... do you wish to have her do so again if we interfere?”

“She got lucky!” Lorendo growled.

Delnash laughed at him. “Lucky? You were the lucky one Lorendo... because you still breath. Your actions since all of this began is beginning to make me question many things Lorendo. Things that I don’t like. We will allow Anja Leonidas to treat these two females. She has shown more concern for them than you have.”

“Delnash you...” Lorendo began to speak but saw Delnash’s eyes cut to something behind him and he turned quickly to see Martin, Danny and Murano moving down the corridor towards them. Right behind them were Kasdan and Garan.

Delnash looked at Martin Leonidas and found himself feeling relieved that he was alive and unharmed. This surprised him somewhat, but not as much as he thought it would. Seeing his brother also made him feel relieved and happy that he too was unhurt, but he knew what his brother was capable of and this didn’t surprise him. These Svorag did not appear as capable as the Scourge and he had seen his brother hold back a Scourge attack of soldiers and several Holy Elites with devastating results.

“Uncle Murano!” Mari’s voice echoed and Delnash’s eyes narrowed as Mari burst from an adjoining corridor and ran to embrace Murano tightly, throwing her arms around his waist. Kesyla followed her and reached out to grip her uncle’s arms as Murano hugged Mari with one hand. Delnash watched as Daron moved over next to him shaking his head at his sister’s display toward their uncle.

Martin stopped in front of Delnash, his dark brown eyes boring into the man. “I think we need to have a talk Chief Elder.” Martin stated calmly.

Delnash nodded his head without pause. “Yes... I believe we do.” He stated.

“We have nothing to discuss with this...” Lorendo began to speak but Martin’s hand was suddenly wrapped around his throat and squeezing ever so gently. He pushed Lorendo back against the bulkhead wall firmly while maintaining eye contact with Delnash who did not appear upset in the least about his action.

Martin turned his eyes on Lorendo now and leaned closer to him. “Five more of my people are dead. Or turned into these fucking monsters which is the same damn thing!” Martin growled. “Five of your people as well. I will have answers to my questions about what your people were doing here!” Martin’s eyes changed and his fangs burst forth now, Lorendo’s eyes going wide. “We found a fucking nest of these creatures! Thousands of them! We found cryo chambers! Computers! All of which they had built!”

“Impossible!” Lorendo exclaimed his hands holding onto Martin’s wrist.

“Really?” Martin said. “Why don’t I take you down into those tunnels and show you?” He spat. “They came in from vent openings in the station... so I’m sure we could find one they used and toss your fat ass down it.”

Delnash looked at Kasdan and Murano. “You found these things?” He gasped.

Murano nodded his head, one arm curled around Mari’s waist. “And much more brother.”

“I was able to see some of their set up before they discovered us Chief Elder.” Kasdan spoke now. “It was crude by our standards... but it was working very well.”

Martin squeezed Lorendo’s throat a little harder. “And you are going to tell us.” Martin snarled at him.

“I don’t know...”

“If you know what was going on here you will tell us!” Delnash barked angrily. “I will know why you killed our people here and...”

“What?” Murano gasped. “What do you mean?”

Martin released Lorendo and looked at him. “Anja touched me on the way back. Lorendo here pumped lethal gas into all of the chambers holding your people. They’re dead.”

Murano’s eyes went wide. “You murdered them?” He growled menacingly stepping closer to him.

“I followed established security protocols!” Lorendo shouted as he rubbed his throat. “Something no one here is willing to do!”

“You murdered them.” Martin spoke evenly.

Delnash looked at Martin. “There is a large conference room on the third level of the station. We can go there.” He stated.

“Chief Elder... you are going to allow this?” Lorendo exclaimed. “You are going to let these primitive savages tell you what to do?”

Delnash looked at him. “At the moment... given what has happened in the last few hours... the only person I see acting savagely is you Elder Lorendo. You killed our people without my knowledge and I suspect you are withholding information about what was going on here. I want to know what it is these men and women were doing here! And I want to know how there is now a Svorag nest of several thousand strong on this planet using equipment and materials they should not be able to use.”

Martin looked at Danny. “*Fervon*... get our people down into the lower levels and make sure any vent shaft that Avi sealed that could lead into the ground below us is sealed shut from the outside.”

Danny nodded. “We’re on it.” He said.

Garan moved forward. “We will help you.” He stated.

Danny nodded. “Let’s move.”

“*Fervon*... once that is done... start packing our shit and loading the ships.” Martin said. “We’re done here and I’m not staying a moment longer than necessary.”

Danny nodded his head. “That fucking works for me too.”

Martin looked at Delnash who was gazing at him with wide eyes. “I want to know what this asshole has to say in case we run into these Svorag on our way back.” Martin told him. “You people can have your arrogant little gathering and superior attitude all you want.” Martin snatched Lorendo’s arm in his hand. “I will not be party to it. Let’s go *igord*. You got some talking to do.” Martin said. “Keep in mind if you don’t tell me what I want to know... I’m going to give you to those ugly lizard fuckers and do so with smile on my face.”

Delnash watched as Martin moved past him pulling Lorendo along. He turned to look at Murano as he came up. “Murano?” He gasped.

“I love you brother.” Murano said softly. “But Lorendo has been playing you for a fool for far too long.”

“He would not lie to me!” Delnash spat. “He... he has not told me everything... but he would not lie to me! He is an Elder on the Convention!”

“That is part of the problem Delnash.” Murano spoke evenly. “Perhaps now would be a good time to pull your head out of the sand and begin leading our people instead of letting fools like Lorendo lead you along like a dog on a leash.”

“How dare you!” Daron hissed angrily as he came up beside his father. “You can not speak to him like that!”

“I will speak to my brother however I deem nephew!” Murano spat. “Do not presume to tell me what I can or cannot do. You know nothing Daron. You care for nothing except your next female conquest!” Daron’s eyes grew a little wider and Murano chuckled. “What... do you think your activities go unnoticed? They do not. You should spend less time trying to bed every woman who crosses your path and more time trying to help your father see the truth!”

“Murano enough!” Delnash snapped.

Murano looked at him. “Heed my words to you now brother.” He spoke. “If our people fall again it will not be because of the Scourge or the Svorag. It will be because of you and Lorendo and the others like you who are so set on one path you can not see that... you can not see that path leads to nothing but darkness and death.”

“You have no right to say that!” Delnash hissed.

“As a Praetorian I have every right!” Murano hissed back. “Unlike you and the other Elders... I am not going to dismiss the Pralor blood that swirls within all of these Lycavorian people and the hope that could provide to our people. I will not dismiss it as you have. They are not primitive Delnash. Compared to them... we are the primitive ones.”

Murano pushed past him, Mari staying attached to her uncle like glue, her face beaming with pride at his words.

Radra watched as Anja finished injecting the vial of serum they had thrown together in under an hour into Jacina's arm. The injection was a crude form of introducing it into her body, but it was the best they could come up with given the time and condition of the medical bay. When Anja stepped back she turned and looked at the medical bio-scanner over the bed and adjusted the monitor.

Jacina looked at Aricia who sat on the edge of the bed and held her opposite hand. "I... I don't want to be like them." She said softly with moistness in her eyes.

Aricia squeezed her hand tightly, feeling a strength within this young woman that she did not show at the moment. "You will not." She said in reply. "Be strong Jacina... you will not end up like them. I trust Anja with my very life and breath. You will live many more years to come."

Dysea had come into the medical bay and she stepped up behind Aricia and placed her hand on Aricia's shoulder. She blinked quickly as visions flashed through her mind, images of affection and love and two others wound together tightly within Mindvoice with this young woman on the bed. She shook her head quickly to keep Anja and Aricia from noticing and she pressed against Aricia's side and looked at Jacina while Aricia stroked her hand.

Anja moved up beside Radra and they both looked at the screen now. "If we determined the correct variables of the MEV, we should see results almost instantly." She said.

Radra nodded her head. "They were correct." She said confidently. She ran her finger along the monitor. "Her infection was not as advanced as the other woman. She..." She tapped the monitor and smiled. "It's working! Her cells are reverting!"

Anja gripped her arm happily and her face lit up. "It works!" She exclaimed. "*Carians* thank you!" She hissed happily.

Radra was smiling as well as she adjusted the monitor with other readouts. "Her base DNA is overwriting the mutation enzyme! Spirits... it's eating up the infection! Making her cells more powerful!"

"That effects should only last until the serum runs its course." Anja said adjusting the screen. "It will add base cells that will enhance her natural immunity then. The effects are not permanent. I hope."

Radra shook her head. "It doesn't matter. Using the core cells means they carry the Lycavorian healing gene in them. It will boost her system to levels not normally associated with Pralors. If it takes hold permanently, it will only benefit her in the long run."

"Will the rest of your people see it that way?" Anja asked her.

Radra met her eyes. "I have no intention of telling them." She stated flatly. "They would fiddle and debate for decades. This is a viable cure Anja!"

Anja nodded. "Yes... but we should still tell them." She said. "If the core cells remain it will alter anyone injected with them serum. At least on a very small scale."

Radra nodded. "You are right." She said. "Perhaps there is a way to modify them so they burn themselves out after a fashion."

Anja nodded. "That is a solution and not so hard to accomplish either." She said. "We can work on that later I suppose... but we won't be staying here Radra. We..."

Radra shook her head. "No child... you won't be staying here. And neither will I. I have found people with a passion for medical science that matches my own in you and Duewa. I intend to come with you and discover all I can. I believe we could do great things working together."

Anja looked at her surprised but she remained silent. "Delnash might not like that." She said softly. "Though Duewa and I certainly would."

Radra grinned. "We'll discuss it more later. I think we'll have to adjust the serum to a higher level for it to work on the second female. She has already begun to change which means they were using her for longer." She spoke with disgust in her voice. "If she... I do not know how she will react if we can stop the process and she reverts back to normal. The infection has set in deeply and if all of our data is accurate that means they have been raping her for several days at least."

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Anja said. “Right now let’s get to work on saving her.”

Martin paced back and forth in front of Avi, Murano, Helen and Wayonn sitting at one end of the table with Mari standing off to the side about mid way along the length of the table with Kesyla and Daron. Isabella, For’mya and Cirith sat on Wayonn’s left side while Delnash sat at the far end with Valael and Lorendo on either side of him, Kasdan and Garan standing behind them. Radra had not joined them yet as she was still in the medical bay. Martin turned as Danny entered the room and moved up to him.

“We found four vents that were still unsealed.” Danny reported. “Looks like they jammed the emergency gates open with something. Once Avi gave us the all clear we welded them shut. They ain’t getting through that way.”

Martin turned to Avi. “None of them made it into the station through these openings Avi?” He asked.

-My internal sensors can detect no lifesigns other than our people and the Pralors that accompanied Chief Elder Delnash- Avi answered him. -Reviewing the logs from Endith’s STRIKER I have determined that the entrance you collapsed was the only geological surface entrance to the tunnels below within forty kilometers of this station. We have bought ourselves time. I can not estimate how much however-

“Can you detect them if they begin to get close?” Martin asked. “You can damn sure bet they will be coming for us.”

-Arzoal and Torma have devised a rotating schedule to keep dragons in the sky at all times- Avi answered him. -I should be able to detect them if they come within ten kilometers. I can not guarantee that however-

Martin nodded. “Good enough.” He said turning back to Danny. “Stand them down for now *fervon*. We’ll begin loading in the morning and get gone from here.”

Danny nodded. “Will do.” He spoke.

Martin waited until Danny had turned and headed for the door before he looked across the table at Delnash and Lorendo. “I came here... I came here hoping to find answers to questions I have had for the better part of my life after I was pulled from my sleep chamber. I wanted to discover about my grandfathers Sumar and Resumar. Once Wayonn discovered that the Pralors had survived the Scourge, it was really all that occupied my thoughts. His thoughts. All of us really... for the vast majority of my people have Pralor blood within them even on a miniscule scale. I certainly did not expect to find what I have. The contempt. The revulsion. The arrogance. For a species that is supposed to be seeders of life... you really have no concern for those you use in that purpose. My son Androcles was right. You consider yourselves better than everyone around you... and those you used for these seed missions no better than tools for you to use to inflate your already overblown egos.”

Murano leaned forward. “Martin... this does not apply to all of our people.” He said. “You have seen this yourself.”

Martin nodded. “Yes I have.” He answered. “But the men and women in power among the Pralor people appear to have a very large hold over the rest of your people. That begs the question how much? How many will share the same misguided views Murano? How many will view us as they do?” He pointed at the other end of the table.

“Your actions so far have only proven what we all know to be true.” Lorendo snapped.

“Be silent Lorendo!” Delnash hissed harshly.

“Why?” Lorendo barked. “Why are we even sitting here discussing anything with them?”

“I want to know what you were doing here?” Martin asked.

“I do not answer to you!” Lorendo bellowed coming to his feet. “You are... you are nothing more than the primitive savage I know your people to be! You...”

“You don’t know jack shit about my people!” Martin snapped cutting off his words. “You don’t know a hell of a lot from what I have seen.”

“You may not answer to him... but you do answer to me.” Delnash spoke now. “And you will tell us what research was being conducted here at this station Lorendo. It has already cost us over three hundred lives because you were trying to hide it. You will answer for that... but I want to know what it is you were doing that allowed you to sacrifice so many of our people without care?”

Lorendo looked at him. “Everyone here was a volunteer!” He snapped. “They knew the risks!”

“The medical researchers had no idea what you were doing in the lower levels!” Valael barked. “That is what the young girl Jacina told them!”

“And you believe them?” Lorendo gasped. “I wish to question her myself! I...”

“You won’t set foot within ten meters of her!” Anja’s voice growled and everyone turned to see her walk in with Dysea and Radra.

“Red?” Martin asked.

Anja moved up in front of him and placed her hand on his chest affectionately. “We did it Lover.” She told him with bright jade colored eyes. “Jacina is completely free of the infection and the other one, Recia is her name, the treatment is slowly purging her body of the infection as well.”

“Aricia and *Melda Min*?” Martin asked.

Anja gripped his hand. “Jacina has... it’s odd... they have developed sort of a connection with each other in so short a time. Aricia didn’t want to leave her and Dysea wanted to stay with them as well.”

Delnash came to his feet his face stunned. “Radra... Radra is this true?” He asked.

Radra looked at him. “It’s very true.” She answered him. “We have synthesized a variable serum that will work on all but those who are fully changed Delnash. And with further work we can turn it into a vaccine to inoculate the rest of our people.”

“How is... how is that possible Radra?” Delnash asked.

Radra looked at Anja with a smile. “Anja and Duewa did the vast majority of the work prior to coming here. The last pieces fell into place when they were able to access the medical database that our people had here.” She turned back to Delnash. “Both Jacina and Recia will make complete physical recoveries. Their emotional state however... that will need time to heal and repair. If it ever does.”

“You are sure?” Delnash asked.

“Anja and Duewa’s medical knowledge matches my own Delnash.” Radra spoke. “In some ways it exceeds what I know because they do not limit themselves to certain ways of thinking.”

“This is nonsense!” Lorendo declared. “You have become taken with these people that is all! They could not have developed a serum so quickly when...”

“Why not?” Anja popped. “All you were concerned with here is turning the infection into a weapon! Isn’t that right?”

“You do not know of what you speak!” Lorendo snarled.

“I know that Duewa and I are smarter than you fat man!” Anja snarled right back. “Whatever medical research you supposedly had going here was only to cover your efforts at turning this infection into a weapon! We figured that out within a day of looking through what was still within the database and what wasn’t. Where are those missing logs fat man?”

“Lorendo... what is she saying?” Valael asked.

“Fine! Since you think yourself so smart!” Lorendo spat. “We were studying what affect the infection had in certain environments!” He barked. “We were doing different chemical tests and any results we discovered were cross referenced medically to try and find a cure!”

“*Rensibfla*!” Anja snapped. “You were trying to develop a bio weapon!”

Delnash looked at him. “Is this true Lorendo?”

Lorendo looked at him. “We were trying to find a way to destroy them!” He snapped. “We have always been trying to do that! They have been a thorn in our side since they were discovered over twenty thousand years ago! They are nothing more than instinctual monsters. Driven only by the need to attack and turn others into themselves in the vilest means possible.”

“They are breeding.” Isabella hissed.

“Impossible!” Lorendo snapped. “Again... you know nothing of what you speak! Extensive studies have shown they can not breed among themselves!”

“It’s true Lorendo!” Kasdan spoke stepping forward. “They are breeding. Simply because they infect and change a fertile female does not take away their ability to have offspring! And they are absorbing the memories and knowledge of those they infect and turn.”

Lorendo turned and looked at him with wide eyes. “They are nothing more than primitive creatures!” He shouted. “They could not do this! What you speak of is outrageous!”

“Then how do you explain the thousands of pods we saw in the caverns?” Kasdan barked right back. “How do you explain that they built the machine we saw? A crude fusion reactor that was powering several thousand stasis pods of some sort? How do you explain that?”

“They are using weapons too.” Martin spoke. “The ones we encountered on Twelve Alpha were using older kinetic type projectile weapons. Not as advanced as ours... but still able to kill you just as easily! And they were using some form of advanced water transport as well.”

“None of this is possible!” Lorendo shouted.

Martin leaned on the table and glared at Lorendo. “Then how bout I take your fat ass and drop you into the tunnels to fend for yourself mister arrogant! I’m quite sure they would just love infecting your stinky ass!”

“I have looked at the star charts Wayonn showed me...” Valael spoke now. “The planet that Martin Leonidas refers to is not one of the planets where we knew Svorag colonies to be. How did they get there?”

“Ask Mister know it all!” Martin barked. “He seems to be all knowing about all things. The rest of us are too stupid to tie our own shoes!”

“Lorendo?” Delnash asked.

Lorendo shook his head. “These things they say... it can not be possible.” He said.

“Why?” For’mya barked. “Because you say so!”

“Lorendo?” Delnash hissed again more forcefully this time.

“I would need to... I would need to consult with my people on Artaaya.” He said finally. “The men and women who have made their life’s work studying the Svorag and ways to counter them.”

“Why would you need to counter them?” Martin asked quickly. “If they can do none of the things as you say... why would you need to counter what they do?”

Delnash came to his feet now. “Lorendo... answer the question?” He snapped.

“We... we have never been able to prove any of it!” Lorendo exclaimed finally. “Are you happy now? We have feared they were adapting... but we never had any proof! Do you feel like you have accomplished something now?” He snarled at Martin.

Delnash looked at him with wide eyes. “You have known this?” He gasped. “For how long?”

“Delnash...”

“How long damn you!” Delnash demanded.

Lorendo looked at him. “For nearly two thousand years!” Lorendo answered. “It is why I sent the Science Convention team here. To try and determine if any of what we thought was true.”

“So you brought them here?” Murano gasped. “You brought them here to experiment on them?”

“We brought twenty specimens!” Lorendo barked at him. “My team followed all of the proper protocols! I do not know how they escaped containment!”

“That’s why he erased the logs.” Cirith spoke now. “So no one would ever know what really happened here.”

“I ordered the logs erased because they were a threat!” Lorendo barked. “The information contained on them could have been severely dangerous in the wrong hands!”

“You sent them here suspecting what you did?” Valael shook his head. “You sent them to their deaths!”

“They volunteered!” Lorendo growled. “All of them! They knew the risks and they were willing to come in the hopes of protecting our people!”

“What a load of bullshit!” Anja snapped again. “You did not tell them how dangerous these lizard bastards are. Or had become. You did not tell them everything!”

“They were given enough knowledge to conduct their duties and no more.” Lorendo hissed at her.

“So they had no idea how dangerous you thought these Svorag had become.” Martin spoke.

“We did not know for sure.” Lorendo barked. “Why give them information they did not need or know was true.”

Martin shook his head slowly. “Man... you are one sleazy motherfucker.” He growled.

“I will examine the two females.” Lorendo spoke. “We can learn from them. Probe their minds to see how the Svorag were able to do all these things.”

“No.” Anja spoke firmly.

“Do not tell me what I can or can not do!” Lorendo snarled at her.

“Jacina and Recia are in my care now.” Anja told him. “You will not go near them. You will not turn them into lab rats to fuel your sick ego. And when we leave... they are going with us.”

Lorendo’s eyes went wide and he looked at Delnash. “They must not be allowed to take our people!” He barked. “They can not care for them!”

“I will care for them far better than you could on your best fucking day.” Anja snapped. “You go near them now and the beating I gave you will pale in comparison to the one I will give you if you so much as breath near them.”

“Chief Elder... you can not allow them to kidnap our people!” Lorendo exclaimed. “They need to remain with us so that we can learn what we can from them!”

“You mean so you can use them as experiments.” Martin snapped.

Lorendo dismissed him with a wave of his hand. “You are a primitive.” He snorted. “You know nothing but how to...”

Lorendo’s words were cut off as his body was suddenly lifted into the air and sailing across the room to slam into the wall. The impact against the wall was not painful, but it did end Lorendo’s words and then Martin was in front of him, his hand up and swirling with Etheric energy all around it as he held Lorendo in place against the bulkhead.

“You are beginning to give me a serious case of the monumental red ass fatso!” Martin snarled at him.

Murano and Wayonn looked at Helen instantly and she quickly shook her head. Their Etheric connection pulsed with power and influence and as Martin’s Praetorian Oracle she could feel it within him easily. He was angry yes... but he was holding that anger in by force of will alone. This wasn't like when he attacked in the vehicle bay, this was calm and focused. She lifted her hand from the table only slightly and shook her head once more indicating they should do nothing. They obeyed cautiously, but Helen knew Martin far better than either of them and she knew Martin was in full control of his actions.

“I came here hoping to find my history.” Martin said softly as he stared into Lorendo’s eyes. “I came here hoping maybe... just maybe to find my ancestors. So I could learn about my past and what it means. Instead I came here and found you. Eight of my men and women are now dead because of you Elder Lorendo. You almost killed my son. You have no idea how truly lucky you are right now. My son Androcles has appointed himself protector of his brothers and sisters and for hurting Fedor in the manner you did... you would already be decaying somewhere out in the forest. For striking his mother like you did he would have disemboweled you and left you to rot. For taking part in the killing of our men he would have broken every bone in your body and then given you to these Svorag assholes so you couldn’t fight back! Andro is... he is far less forgiving and tolerant than I am. It’s a trait I have been trying to work with him on... he doesn’t seem to want to learn it though. Go figure.

“It was a mistake coming out here.” Martin said as he lowered his hand but kept Lorendo pinned against the wall. “But it is a mistake I am going to rectify by leaving in the morning and not looking back on you sorry assholes.”

“We will not allow you to leave!” Lorendo hissed.

“Oh really...” Martin asked him. “How do you plan on stopping me tough guy?”

“We will destroy your ship before it leaves orbit!” Lorendo spat.

“Lorendo!” Delnash shouted aghast at this suggestion.

Martin chuckled. “So you would kill nearly ten thousand innocent men and women to sooth your bruised ego huh?” He said. “Wow... so much for that Pralor calmness and sense of peace. You’re nothing but a war mongering fool who got your ass handed to you by a woman not even half your size! If I really wanted to be a jerk... I’d let Anja have at you now for what you have done. She gets a mite testy when assholes kill her

patients you know. And I'm not as stupid as you seem to think I am mister high and mighty Elder of the Pralor people. Avi?"

-The main system bypasses are in place Martin- Avi spoke as he came forward. **-I have been communicating with Avatar 27 since the Pralor's arrival in the system-**

Lorendo's eyes grew wide as did Delnash and Valael's. "What is this?" Delnash exclaimed. "What he is talking about?"

"Tell them Avi." Martin said his gaze never leaving Lorendo.

-A single command from me and I will initiate a ship wide power failure aboard your vessel- Avi answered. **-All systems will be affected and you will have neither weapons, shields or propulsion for twenty-four hours. This will provide us sufficient time to make several jumps so that you can not track us-**

"You are bluffing!" Lorendo snarled. "You could not possibly have gained access to the *TALISMAN*'s Avatar!"

"I didn't." Martin said. "I asked Avi too. You see... unlike how you treat the Avatars you have, Avi is capable of making his own decisions now. It's how Sumar altered his programming when they were together. He is fully cognizant of his decisions and their ramifications. He has learned. Hell... he's almost human in nature."

-Please Martin...- Avi spoke. **-Let's not exaggerate the extent of my progression. I am human like is a better definition-**

Martin grinned. "Human like." He said looking at Lorendo. "Which means his distaste for you hasn't changed for nearly forty thousand years it seems. And we won't go into the reasons for that right now will be Lorendo my boy?" Lorendo's eyes darted to where Wayonn sat and then back to Martin. "Yeah... he wants to get you alone too."

Martin pushed away from Lorendo and turned to face Delnash. "We will go our separate ways tomorrow Chief Elder." He spoke respectfully which surprised Delnash. "I will not subject my people to more abuse at the hands of you and the arrogance of your people. I will take whoever is open minded enough and wishes to come with us... but I believe you already know Murano is returning with us. We are taking Jacina and Recia with us. I no more trust them in your care than I would one of my own children... not after what has happened and Lorendo's own words. Avi...?" He turned and held out his hand. Avi stepped forward and placed the small data disc in it. Martin turned back and moved up to Delnash and held it out. "This is for you Chief Elder. A little reading material. Do with it what you will." He looked at Delnash as he turned it over in his hand. "I had hoped to come out here and find answers and allies." He continued seeing Delnash look up at him. "I found arrogance, apathy and death. We will leave tomorrow morning... and we won't leave as friends or allies or enemies. But something in between. Once we do leave I will not look back. And whatever happens will be of your own doing. These Svorag are your problem... not mine. You can keep the cure Anja and Duewa developed with Elder Radra. I have no right to hold that back from you." Martin turned and walked back to where Anja stood. She wrapped her arms around his waist as he stopped next to her. "Know this however..." Martin spoke as he turned back around. "Your actions have guided my course and my decisions... and they will guide future decisions as well. Do not come after us thinking to take from us what we have built and now consider as part of us. If you do... you will find us not so easy to roll over. Your big ships will not matter in the least. I have ten times more ships than you do and I will not hesitate to use them. And I will unleash every weapon at our disposal against you in order to send you back to whatever hole you came from. And that includes my son and the dragons who fight with us. Trust me... you don't want my son Andro on your bad side... it's not real healthy."

"Martin you..." Wayonn began to speak but Helen and Murano both took his arms.

“No.” Helen said softly. “It needs to be this way.” She said. “No matter how much we wish it wasn’t so grandfather.”

“Teniri will return with you and put forth what she has discovered to the Dragon Elder Council on Artaaya.” Martin spoke. “If that council determines it is in the best interests of the dragons there to be reunited with their own kind within the Alpha Quadrant you will not interfere with that.” Martin spoke. “Teniri will contact me and I will send ships for them.”

“You think to remove the dragons from Artaaya?” Lorendo snarled.

“I won’t be removing them.” Martin answered. “I will be listening to what they want. You can not force them to remain and you risk a conflict with them if you do. As a Talon Guardian I am bound to their protection and their continued survival. If you fight them... you fight me.”

“Chief Elder...!” Lorendo gasped.

Delnash never took his eyes off Martin. “Lorendo... I demand your silence!” He snapped at him. “Enough damage has been caused by you!”

“You can have your power cells back and return to your ship tonight if you wish.” Martin said. “But any attempt to take Jacina or Recia from the medical bay and I will have my men shoot every one involved dead as shit.” He looked at Lorendo. “And a lot of them are just itching for the chance to blow your brains all over a wall somewhere fatso!”

“We... we will remain for the night.” Delnash spoke. “There is strength in numbers.”

Martin nodded his head. “Then there is nothing more to say.” He said. He reached for For’mya, Isabella and Cirith and they rose and moved over to take his and Anja’s hands. Martin Leonidas left the room without another word and Murano and the others filed out behind him without so much as a glance leaving only the Pralor people within the room.

Lorendo immediately began to complain but Delnash did not give him the chance. As Lorendo stepped up to him Delnash did something he had not done in millennia. He reared back with his fist and punched Lorendo squarely in the mouth. Lorendo staggered back more in shock than pain from the blow but Delnash did not relent.

“This is your fault!” Delnash snarled at him viciously. “I listened to you and this is the result! Hundreds of our people dead! Eight of his people dead! Men and women you care nothing for! I do not know fully what you were doing here Lorendo but when we return to Artaaya I intend to find out!”

“I am protecting our people!” Lorendo hissed.

“By killing them when we could have saved them?” Radra snapped. “Do you have any concept what we could learn from a friendship with these men and women? Do you know what it would mean to have them as allies?”

“We do not need them!” Lorendo snarled. “They are animals! Sumar bred with them and look what it produced! Lycavorians who are even more dangerous than they were before!”

“What I have seen are dedicated men and women.” Valael spoke now. “And the existence of another Praetorian besides Delnash’s brother. And the possibility of many more among these men and women. Praetorians Lorendo! Do you know what that could mean for our people? Do you even care?”

“We do not need the Praetorians!” Lorendo barked. “They have been dead for millennia and we have survived! Why do we need them now? Especially when they are hybrid animals!”

“We can not hide our people from the universe any longer.” Valael spoke. “We can not face the Scourge alone and I for one do not wish to die because we were too proud to reach out and learn from others! To befriend others!”

“Enough!” Delnash barked. “I suggest all of us try and get some rest. I will direct Sashan to install the power cells in our ships and we will leave in the morning.”

“You... you are going to let them just leave?” Lorendo gasped.

“That is exactly what I am going to do.” Delnash spoke. “This venture has cost us far too much as it is. And unlike you... I believe he will do exactly as he says he will if we try to stop him. Which I do not intend to do.”

“Delnash you...” Lorendo rasped.

“I’m done listening right now.” Delnash spoke. “I need to think and I can’t do that with you whining in my ears! We will talk when we return to our ship. I am going to try and get some sleep.”

“Sleep?” Lorendo gasped.

“Yes Lorendo... sleep.” Delnash spoke. “If I listen to you rant any longer my head will explode.”

Lorendo watched in shock as Delnash turned and exited the conference room at a brisk walk. His eyes cut to Valael and Radra who only looked at him with contempt before turning and following Delnash out.

This was not going as he planned. No... not at all.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SCIMITAR ORBITING SOLMAR

Tonight he will make you ours Sehri.

Sadi's soft words filled her mind as her ragged breathing began to return to something resembling normal and she basked gloriously in the divine sensations of Andro's staggering aura swarming all around her. She rested atop his powerful body, her skin flush and glistening with sweat, her head resting just below his chin. She could feel the rise and fall of his broad chest against her firm breasts, her nipples still hard nubs pressed against his flesh. Sehri tried not to move in order to avoid the exquisite feelings of having his incredible cock buried in her completely and exploding once more. She could feel the last of his passion leaking into her depths and then his hands came up slowly to stroke the skin of her arms. Sehri cooed in utter delight when she felt his fingers on her flesh, gliding down her arms and across her bare skin as he used his powerful arms to push them towards the head of the huge bed and he then arranged himself so that he was sitting up almost fully, his back against the headboard. His hands reached around then and filled with the extremely firm cheeks of her ass and he shifted her onto him even more until she was leaning against his chest but still impaled upon his cock.

Rothryn you may be... but you are also Lycavorian. You have the same needs as we do; your people have just suppressed many of them. Let them fill you now. He will cause your head to spin and your heart to race and you will never be satisfied by another again.

Sadi's words rang so very true Sehri thought as she laid upon his sculpted body and his lips began to dance across the front and tops of her shoulders. Nothing her mother had told her, nothing her sisters had often spoken of experiencing, none of it had matched what she had felt this night. Her entire body still hummed in blissful and contented delight from the last eight hours, the small marks from his long, dual fangs near the juncture of her neck and shoulder now almost completely healed. Sehri was sure she could feel the virus within his powerful blood racing through her body, charging her own. He had bitten her their very first time together at her fever induced urging, the last remnants of her Coming of Age fever burning away as she was claimed by a Lycavorian Alpha wolf more powerful than any Rothryn male could ever hope to equal. The instincts buried and suppressed within her people for millennia came surging forth within her then, the burning of her blood fading only slightly and then growing as it changed from willing female to that of a claimed female who desired her mate more than anything in the universe. Sehri had lost count of the number of explosive orgasms she had experienced, or how many times he had filled her with his passion. Each time had been more exquisite than the last, each time Sehri growing more confident in herself. It became more mutually fulfilling and it succeeded in drawing them closer and closer together. She swam within his mind now, with Sadi and the others, experiencing all that he was. All that they were together as a whole. Sadi had been so right. Whatever fate and destiny intended, they were meant to be together, all of them, as they faced it.

Sehri had not been docile after the first few times she remembered with a smile. What he had caused her to feel with his manhood was superb in every way and left her craving more. He was so large and hot and pulsing and he could make her cry out in delight with just the slightest movement when he was fully inside her. She didn't fear his size even the first time and she had been the dominant one on more than a single occasion through the evening. Now though, their minds were willing, but their bodies were all but expended of energy. As Sehri felt

him pull on her hips, she could feel his delicious manhood press deeper into her tight depths. She sighed heavenly as his aura wrapped around her and she reached out with her own developing female aura and let it entwine and mingle with his. His lips found and caressed the skin of the hollow of her throat as she lifted her head, his tongue dragging along her hot flesh sending delightful shivers through her. His nose then dipped under her right ear to nuzzle the scent glands there, which caused her to groan softly in want.

“Still... still with me?” His voice whispered against her ear and Sehri smiled dreamily.

Her arms lifted to encircle his broad shoulders, the nipples of her firm breasts pressed hard against his upper chest as he held her. She groaned softly again and then rotated her hips down on his breath stealing cock as she pulled his head to her breasts and let her cheek fall to the side of his head..

“I’m still here.” She spoke softly into his ear. “I want... I want to call Sadi and the others and stay naked in bed with all of you for the rest of my life!”

Andro chuckled softly. “Now that... that is a very good idea.” He stated.

Sehri turned her head slightly as his nose returned and he nuzzled the bottom of her ear. She gasped in unabashed delight at the sensations this caused and she leaned into his nuzzle with a groan. “What happens... what happens now Androcles?” She asked again softly.

“What do you mean?” He asked pulling his head back until they were gazing at each other.

“You... you claimed me on the last day of my Coming of Age fever. Does that... am I... am I your wife and mate now?” Sehri asked.

“I think you know the answer to that and exactly how I feel Sehri.” Andro said. “Sadi and *SirsanGai* as well. All of us.” He told her. “I don’t know how well that will go over with your people though. I followed what your law states according to your mother and what our laws say must be done because this was your first fever, but I don’t know how your father will react. You know he has supposedly promised your hand to a young Rothryn man from one of your noble families.”

“That fool!” Sehri gasped loudly. “I suspected this but never confronted my father about it. I know who you speak of. He is an arrogant fool who will do anything his father wants. He is nothing more than a puppet! A handsome puppet...” She stuck the jab to him with a smile of complete affection. “But still a puppet.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders with a smile of his own at her teasing. “I really don’t care as long as I know being with us is what you want Sehri.”

“Andro it is!” She gasped loudly. “You... by the Ancients you know it is!” Sehri grabbed his face with her hands and held it tightly. She gazed at him and those beautiful azure eyes and felt a shudder of adoring love pass through her. She lowered her forehead to his, dropping her hands until her fingers were drawing small lines in the skin of his powerful abdomen, tracing the beautifully detailed tattoo of the flaming black bird there as she snuggled as close as she was physically able considering she was still fully seated upon his softened but still heated cock. “And I don’t care what they say either! I...”

Andro drew his fingers along her lower back and up her spine as he stared at her face. “What Sehri?” He asked.

“You do not need to be afraid of me. Ever. You are a Princess now. My Princess!”

“There... there is something I should tell you.” Sehri said finally. “You probably won’t... you probably won’t like it”

Andro smiled. “Sehri... just tell me.” He said lowering his lips and nibbling on the skin of the side of her neck.

“Shaman Master Harira... she will not be... she will not be happy. In fact... she will probably be very angry.”

Sehri spoke. She grinned a second later. “Not that it bothers me... I never did like her very much.”

Andro chuckled. “Ok... care to fill me in?” He asked.

Sehri met his eyes. “When they... when the Shamans saw how advanced my Etheric abilities were, they pulled me willingly into the Circle of Shamans when I was very young. My mother and father did not want to give me to the Rothryn Science Academy and this was their way of insuring I kept myself. The Science Academy is... they are not very... they do not treat Etheric users very well.” Sehri looked at him. “When I entered into the Circle and then turned sixteen I was given my apprentice role. I also... I also swore a... I swore a vow of celibacy to the Circle.”

Andro looked at her with bright azure eyes and then he smiled. Sehri saw his smile grow larger and then he was laughing. Her own eyes grew wide and she slapped his shoulder. “It’s not... it’s not funny!” She exclaimed.

Andro grinned up at her and flexed his lower abdomen, including his cock, deep within Sehri. Her eyes grew wide for a split second and she groaned lustily before grabbing his face in her hands once more. “Ohhh... stop that you beast!” She stammered.

“Celibacy huh?” He asked her with a smile. “If I recall correctly... you were quite the she wolf the past few hours! That is not exactly something I would expect from someone sworn to celibacy.”

Sehri squeezed his face. “Please Andro... stop it! I... ohhhh!” She gasped feeling him flex his organ deep inside her once more, her head falling back and her eyes rolling into the back of her skull in blissful and electric sensations. She felt his arms curl around her lower back and pull her tightly against his body.

“You are my wife and mate now Sehri.” Andro said seeing her face lower to look at him and her apple and walnut scent swirling around his head. “You are Sehri Leonidas and you answer to no one but yourself.”

Sehri’s hands came up and took his face once more with a dreamy smile of an expression. “You... you are not angry?” She asked.

Andro nibbled on her chin. “How could I be mad at someone so kinky?” He said.

Sehri laughed now and kissed him hard, holding his face in her hands as she became very excited and began to rotate her hips upon his thickening cock. She could feel him beginning to harden once more and her body began to feel recharged. Her eyes flew open when she felt a pair of soft lips on the back of her neck and her head whipped around to see Sadi joining them on the bed completely naked and pressing right up against her back. Her large, firm breasts pressed tightly against Sehri’s shoulders and Sehri gasped in delight. Her head turned at the small noise and she saw Carisia’s mane of black hair and Ne'Veha’s billowing dark brown hair draped over Andro’s shoulders, their lips planting soft butterfly kisses on his skin, their naked bodies pressed against his back.

“We... we couldn’t wait Sehri.” Sadi spoke softly in her ear as she reached around under her armpits and took Sehri’s now very excited breasts in her hands. “We... we desire you too much.”

“Oh *carians*... yes!” Sehri screamed just before Lu'ria’s lips claimed hers in a sizzling kiss of discovery and passion.

Sehri groaned happily as they began again. And she was so very willing.

NEBONESE

SECTOR NINE MERCHANTS MARKET

Yuri looked out over the broad expanse of the Merchants Market of Haglos, the capital city of Nebonese. She could see almost every species known to exist moving about the market area and she also knew that out there somewhere, someone was hiring pirates to kill her and Pa'cour. Yuri’s dark eyes glittered in the light however, for she knew killing them now, that would be a very hard thing to do. Yuri was far more focused and clear minded than she was just a year ago and her love for Pa'cour made her even stronger. There were very few who would be able to get the drop on her or her Blessed Immortal husband now and most of those individuals were members of the Union military. They would not be coming after her.

“So I was able to acquire almost everything you requested.” The gravelly voice spoke from behind her and she turned to look at the Kochab. Quellian was far more civilized than others of his species and it was this trait that had caught her eye more than a decade ago. He had a knack for obtaining materials that others could not, even when the Overseers of The Wilds were in charge. He was fair and honest and now he had become a trustworthy ally. She watched as he held out the glass of *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* to Ma'dur. The Immortal bowed his head and took the glass and then Quellian moved the final meter up to her and offered her a glass as well. Yuri took it without questioned and sipped the delicious fruity tasting cloned blood in a show of trust and simply because she liked the replacement for real blood. Ma'dur watched her and then he too sipped from his glass. “They were easy to obtain. Your people are settling in I take it?”

Yuri nodded. “Our facility was barren when we first got there and I told them we would secure as much as possible to make it more comfortable for them.”

Quellian nodded as he motioned her to the plush couch and waited respectfully for her to sit first before joining her in the chair across from the couch. He was aware of Ma'dur behind him, but since Quellian had always been forthcoming and respectful of Yuri, he knew Ma'dur did not consider him a threat.

“Well... Pa'cour is overseeing the loading of the smaller items... and I believe he will set up the transfer of the larger purchases as we have done before. One of my ships will meet with one of your frigates and transfer the material.” Quellian told her. “A location chosen by you of course.”

Yuri looked at him and smiled. “Quellian... relax my friend.” She told him calmly. “I told you in our transmission that your friendship is valued and that I trust you. Do not think otherwise.”

Quellian smiled exposing the teeth within his lamprey like mouth and he nodded his head. “I am glad Yuri.” He said. “I do not envy those who wish to be your enemies. Especially now. I do not know the reasons that the Lycavorian Prince withdrew the contract on your head, but I know for him to do such a thing, something had to have changed between you. Something if not positive, then at least neutral in association. And for him to imply that it would not be in the interest of anyone to attempt to complete the contract afterwards... well...”

Yuri nodded her head. “Androcles Leonidas and I have... we are not friends... but we are no longer enemies either. At least by most definitions of enemy.”

Quellian nodded. “And that is a healthy thing to be.” He stated with another smile. He reached into his deep pocket on the jumpsuit he wore and withdrew the data pad. He held it out to Yuri across the knee high table. “This is all the information I was able to obtain about those here on Nebonese asking questions about you or Pa'cour. Several purebloods who I can be reasonably accurate in saying work for your former husband... not too bright really... but still dangerous. The more interesting collection however is a small pirate group made up of Immortals. They work out of the South docks.”

“Interesting why?” Yuri asked as she scanned the pad and sat back on the couch.

“They appear to be former associates of the Immortal mercenary Phy'iad.” Quellian told her. “About twenty of them.”

“Immortals?” Ma'dur asked moving closer.

Quellian nodded. “Not very nice Immortals either.” He answered. “They maintain a low profile for the most part. They usually only deal with the different vampire or Lycavorian mercenary groups.”

Yuri looked at him. “Lycavorian mercenary groups?” She asked. “That... that is very out of character for them.”

Quellian nodded. “Indeed.” He said. “I was not able to obtain a whole lot of information on them... but I do know that they take their orders from someone else. They are not what they appear to be on the outside at first glance.”

“What do you mean?” Yuri asked.

“They act like any other mercenary group on the outside... a ruse really. Anyone who has crossed them in any way usually ends up very dead and in particularly gruesome fashion. They are very specific in the jobs they take... most of them jobs no one else will touch. You and Pa'cour for instance.” Quellian told her. “If I had to guess they are some sort of offshoot of the government.”

Yuri leaned forward. “The government?” She asked.

Quellian nodded. “They are very well equipped Yuri. State of the art. Weapons, armor, you name it. All of it Union equipment. Are you so sure that Androcles is not behind them in some manner? They are extremely well funded for a group without powerful connections.”

Yuri shook her head immediately. “No.” She stated. “If Androcles Leonidas wanted me dead he would not do it this way. He would come after me personally. This is something else entirely.”

Quellian nodded to her. “They have a Kiosk in the southern market where they sell ridiculous items that no one will buy. My people saw them meeting with this Immortal group and another vampire group as well. On several different occasions.” He waved his clawed hand in a dismissive way. “The Immortal group does not appear to be interested in anything other than obtaining elven slaves to quell their sick perversions and accumulating as much wealth as possible. The vampire group and the Lycavorian group however... they have different goals.”

“I would not be surprised if the purebloods are Robert's doing.” She spoke as she sipped the *Nau'shindcal d'Vlos*. “He is an extremely competent warrior... though his skill at special operations is not as pronounced as some think given his background. We questioned the ones who said you had referred them and they confessed to working for Robert. They broke rather easily.”

Quellian chuckled. "That does not surprise me in the least." He said.

Yuri shook her head. "I am not concerned about the Immortals or the vampire group." She stated evenly. "This Lycavorian group however, they are a different matter."

"I could have one of my people probe a little deeper." Quellian said. "I have several elven females who work for me and they are very good at getting information."

Yuri looked at him. "Slaves Quellian?" She asked.

Quellian hissed. "Bah!" He snorted. "Slavery is an abomination that I do not take part in." He rasped. "They came to me for protection about five years ago. I gave it to them and they have stayed on in my employ since. Two of them are the best pilots I have and the other three run most of my interests in the markets. I pay them well... and they are very loyal. I've taken them under my wing so to speak. Their families as well."

"You are one of the few Kochab who do your species proud Quellian." Yuri told him.

Quellian laughed. "Hah... don't I know it! Now if I could only get others to see it that way!"

"Everyone can change Quellian." Yuri said softly. "If I have learned nothing these last months... it's that everyone can change their path their lives are on."

Quellian nodded and rose to his feet. "No doubt you want to get back to Pa'cour and your daughter." He said. "The item you requested is at my jewels Kiosk on the main floor. You know where it is?"

Yuri nodded as she rose. "Yes... thank you." She said handing the data pad to him. "Full payment as agreed upon." She stated. "Another ten percent if you could simply keep your eyes and ears open."

Quellian took the pad but shook his head. "You do not need to pay me for that Yuri." He stated evenly. "I meant it when I said I like this new you... and if helping you benefits me in other ways... then so be it."

Yuri smiled at him and nodded. "Then I will take my leave of you Quellian." She said. "No sense in making you a target by having me overstay my welcome."

Quellian bowed his head to her. "It is never a burden Princess. I enjoy your company. I'll let the clerk know you will be coming over to pick up your gift for Onera."

Yuri nodded and motioned with her hand for Ma'dur to lead her out. "I will contact you just before we leave Quellian. Stay safe my friend."

Quellian nodded and watched as she turned to leave. When she exited the door and it had closed he moved to his desk along the large window and touched the COM panel. "Tenata... she is coming down to retrieve her order. Show her every respect and take fifteen percent off the price."

"Fifteen percent Quellian?" The female voice spoke. "That is quite a bit."

"Yes... but her business with us is very important and extremely profitable. She does not skimp or bat an eye at what we have to charge her because she knows the rules we have to work with. A small discount is something we can do easily." Quellian told her. "She is a powerful friend to have and I intend to do what I can to make sure it stays that way."

"I'll take care of it." The female spoke. "Just so you are aware... I think the vampires and the Immortals are going to have a disagreement over something. There is an awful lot of activity by their kiosk and people are avoiding it."

"Good... more business for us." Quellian spoke. "Keep an eye on it and advise me if it affects our customers."

"Very well." The woman spoke.

Quellian looked out the large window and stared at the merchant floor below him. He lifted his glass of wine as his eyes scanned the area. Things were good for him yes, but keeping Yuri as a friend and ally would pay great dividends in the future. She had changed significantly in the last months and Quellian definitely liked this Yuri more than the last one. He would do what it took to keep her as a friend. Something was going to happen in the future and Quellian had every intention of being on the right side of things.

It was not uncommon to see individuals wearing long cloaks with voluminous hoods pulled over their heads here on Nebonese. There were many who wanted to remain unseen and unknown. Yuri and Ma'dur moved among the many species dressed in this manner to avoid being noticed. Ma'dur because he was an Immortal who had taken the serum to return his outward features to their original state, and Yuri for obvious reasons. With Xaxon's vile essence gone from her, her features were far softer and much brighter and at first

glance anyone would be hard pressed to recognize her. However with intense study, her features would quickly become apparent and that is not something Yuri wanted to worry about. Surprisingly, she enjoyed being anonymous. Yuri felt Ma'dur stiffen slightly when he heard the raised voice and they saw the activity by the vampire kiosk only thirty meters away. An Immortal was shouting and it was easy to see he was not happy.

“Not our concern Ma'dur.” Yuri spoke softly to him.

Ma'dur nodded his head. “I know.” He answered. “Seeing my people act as bloodthirsty scum burns my blood though.”

Yuri nodded. “Yes... I imagine it would.” She whispered as she stepped up to the kiosk and looked at the elf female. She held out the small disc. “I’m here for my order.”

Quellian’s elf employee took the disc, glanced at it and then at the hooded Yuri and she nodded. “Yes... I have it.”

There was more shouting and Yuri turned to see one Immortal towering over the vampire at the kiosk in angry repose. She turned back to the female elf. “What is going on?” She asked.

Tenata shook her head. “I’m not entirely sure. Something to do with an order that was not complete but fully paid for.” She answered. “Ral’dene... the commander of the Immortals is not happy. He’s demanding compensation of some sort.”

Yuri turned back to the female elf and she took note of the long dark blond hair and the flawless features of her face. She blinked rapidly a few times surprised at the thoughts that flashed through her mind. She was admiring the elf’s natural beauty and the way her jumpsuit conformed to her figure. Yuri shook her head quickly, for this had never happened to her before and she did not know what to make of it. Tenata looked up with a smile and held out the small metal container. “Quellian insisted on a price reduction Mistress.” Tenata spoke softly. “It is a beautiful piece if I do say so. A gift?”

Yuri smiled and nodded her head as she took the box and slid open the cover to reveal the glittering cobalt blue gem on a solid titanium and silver coated chain. “For my daughter.” She said softly in reply.

The voices rose to a crescendo at the vampire kiosk and then there was the female voice of protest. Yuri turned now to watch as one of the Immortals grabbed the female elf’s arm and yanked her close to him with a savage smile. His deep voice carried over the smattering of conversation among the others as everyone became quiet.

“We’ll take the elf bitch as payment then!” He barked at the obviously humbled vampire.

“No!” She screamed trying to struggle against the Immortal’s grip. Her white blond hair was long and lustrous and her violet colored dress fit her like a second skin. Her features were frozen in fear now however, Yuri catching only glimpses of her as she tried to break the grip of the Immortal through the crowd. “Stop! Help me please! Someone help me!”

“Bastards!” Tenata snarled softly and Yuri looked at her.

“What is happening?” She asked.

“Morew gave Nameia to them as payment!” Tenata exclaimed in a harsh whisper. “She... Morew captured her only a few months ago from a settlement somewhere here in The Wilds. He liked the taste of her blood!” Tenata spoke the words contemptuously. “Whatever he defaulted on with Ral’dene, it must have been expensive if he is using Nameia to pay him! The fucking bastard! They’ll... they’ll use her. Break her like they have the others in their harem!”

“No one will do anything?” Yuri asked softly. “I... I did not think slavery was as prominent as it once was.”

Tenata shook her head quickly. “It is still very prominent out here. This far away from the Lycavorian border they can get away with it and not worry about Union forces stopping them. No one will cross Ral’dene and his organization!” She said quickly. “They are brutal killers. Nameia is so independent, but she is still young and naïve to the way things work out here. She will... she will not survive being broken to the will of an Immortal. Having to service one for the rest of her life to survive? It will destroy her.”

“She has not tried to escape?” Yuri asked.

Tenata shook her head slowly. “And go where? No one will help an escaped slave out here. And Morew implanted her with an explosive chip somewhere in her body. All he has to do is activate it and she dies.”

Yuri glanced over once more as the Immortals began to move away. It was then that she caught the terrified gaze of those incredible soft blue/grey eyes as the Immortals began dragging her away. Yuri’s dark brown eyes grew slightly larger under her cowl as she felt a powerful emotion tug at her stomach when she looked at the elf female. An emotion she had never felt before. It was an attraction. A very powerful attraction that drew her in

quickly. An attraction that went against everything Yuri had been raised to believe, but now one of the many things that was now in question in her new world. Her head tilted slightly as Yuri watched the elf female vainly struggle to break the Immortal's grip on her arm. It was then that Yuri acted without thinking about it. She made a decision without knowing why. She tucked the necklace for Onera into her belt pouch and looked at Tenata. "Thank Quellian for me if you would." She stated.

Tenata nodded. "Of course."

"Where are they going?" Yuri asked.

Tenata looked surprised. "I would... I assume back to their compound. Ral'dene will want to break her quickly." Tenata pointed at the elevator lifts near the far end of the merchant promenade. "Those lifts will take you to them. Why?"

"So that I go in the other direction." Yuri lied already set on her path.

"Ah..." Tenata answered almost as if she was disappointed.

"Thank you again." Yuri said before turning and beginning to move away in the opposite direction, Ma'dur maintaining his pace beside her.

"Princess?" He whispered as they moved. "What...?"

"Return to the landing bay Ma'dur." Yuri spoke as she adjusted something under her cloak. "Tell Pa'cour I will be along shortly."

"Princess?"

Yuri stopped as they moved out of the main crowd. "I wish to check on something." She told him. "Now do as I ask please. I will be along quickly. I saw something in one of the kiosks that we past. A gift for... a gift for my Blessed Husband. It would not... it would not do for you to see it."

Ma'dur met her eyes and slowly nodded his head. He could not go against her wishes. He had sworn to Pa'cour to obey and protect her and that was his duty. He could only assumed it was some matter of clothing that she would only wear for her husband and she was right, it would not be appropriate for him to see her looking at it or purchasing it. "Remember to be wary Princess." He spoke. He knew full well that Yuri was capable of taking care of herself but there was no reason to take chances. "I do not wish the General to remove my head for allowing you to put yourself in danger."

Yuri smiled at him from under her cloak. She reached out and squeezed his arm. "I would never allow that Ma'dur." She said. "Go... I'll be along shortly."

Ma'dur nodded and Yuri watched him turn to head back to where their G9 Runner was docked. The High Coven Long Range version of the G9 was a common sight within The Wilds now. Her mother had authorized its sale on the commercial market to bring in new credits. While their G9 looked like all the others, the ship was definitely not the standard model with its advanced weapons and engines and shroud. Yuri waited until Ma'dur had blended into the crowd and then she turned to look at the lifts on the far end of the promenade. She stepped closer to a wall that was relatively free of people moving back and forth and as she moved into the corners of the wall she wrapped the shadows around herself and disappeared.

Morew was shaking his head in disgust at what had just happened as he moved into the rear area of his Kiosk. He threw down the data pad he held and went to the counter that held several bottles of *Nau'shindcal d'Vlos*. He quickly poured himself a glass and was lifting it to his lips when the shadows unwrapped beside him and a very sharp blade was pressed to his throat. Morew was no fool. Whoever this person was, they were skilled enough with the shadows to bypass his rear security and enter the back of his kiosk. That meant they were not someone to be trifled with.

"Answer my questions and you may yet live through this day." The female voice spoke.

Morew looked down slightly and saw the bluish color of the combat blade. It looked to be very expensive and if he was any judge, crafted by a master weapons dealer. The color marked the blade as being forged from the metals on Paravin he knew and next to the wondrous metal the Union kept so secret, the bladed weapons forged from Paravin metal were the finest in the whole Universe. And hideously expensive. "Put the glass down slowly and do not attempt to do anything stupid. Your pathetic skills are no match for mine and I will leave you on the floor bleeding like a misbegotten pig if you think otherwise."

Morew did as he was told, slowly lowering the glass back to the counter. "Stealing from me is not a wise move." He spoke trying to sound imposing.

He heard the female chuckle softly. "If I wanted to steal from you... you would never know until I was gone." Yuri spoke keeping her eyes focused on Morew from under her cowl. It covered her entire head and draped down over her face halfway, shielding all but her lower jaw and lips from view. "Where are they taking the elf girl?" She asked.

"The elf..." Morew tried to turn his head but the blade pressed tighter and he froze.

"Do not turn." Yuri snarled softly. "Do not breathe; do not blink in my direction." She growled. "Answer my question while you still have the ability to talk."

"Probably back to their compound!" Morew answered. "Ral'dene will... he will want to break her will quickly."

"You peddle in flesh often do you?" Yuri asked him.

"Hey! I didn't want to do that!" Morew snapped. "I liked the elf bitch!"

"So that is all she was to you?" Yuri rasped. "A bitch to be used at your whim?"

"I took her!" Morew snapped. "Lost a good amount of blood having to fight her damned father and brother in order to get her! Ral'dene had me! I had no choice!"

"What right did you have to take her to begin with?" Yuri hissed at him.

"Who are you?" Morew asked now. "What do you want with me? You're good to have gotten in here without being seen. Real good. I could use someone of your skills."

"The Immortal compound?" Yuri asked. "How many men?"

"I don't know!" Morew snapped. "Thirty! Maybe forty!" He turned his head towards Yuri and she blurred before he could look at her, moving behind him and yanking on his hair while driving a booted foot into the back of his knee and dropping him to the floor. He grunted as she yanked back on his head and pressed her blade tighter to his skin.

"I told you not to look towards me!" Yuri snarled. "You don't listen very well!"

"Fucking bitch!" Morew snarled.

Yuri laughed at him. "Oh... you don't know the half of it." She stated. "Have you been inside the compound?"

"What? Yes!" Morew barked as Yuri yanked softly on his hair, exposing more of his neck and throat.

"Where inside will they take her?" Yuri demanded. "And if you lie to me, know that I will get out and I will come for you."

"There is a side entrance!" Morew almost yelled. "Maintenance entrance! Go in there and turn right down the secondary corridor. You'll come up to the room she will be in from behind the main entrance! The others are in the next room! Six of them!"

"How do I know you are telling me the truth?" Yuri snarled.

"Because you are a crazy bitch and you are scaring me!" Morew popped.

Yuri laughed. "Now that is a truthful statement." She said. "Unfortunately... it will not change the outcome."

"What?" Morew barked.

"I find myself looking at you and being disgusted." Yuri snarled softly. "We were such a proud race once. Our leaders took us down the wrong path. A path of conquest and they turned us into you! A mercenary! A traitor! A piece of shit!"

"You don't know me!" Morew snarled.

"You are right." Yuri said.

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Morew barked at her.

Yuri yanked on his head even harder, leaning close to the side of his face. "I... I am the harbinger of the doom of your kind!" Yuri snarled viciously. "My sister Narice... she will be the Blessed Instrument of your demise!"

"Na... Narice!" Morew hissed as his eyes went wide. "Fuck! Princess Yuri!" He almost shouted. "You... you're suppose to be dead!"

"So I have been told." Yuri stated before bringing the blade of her knife cleanly across Morew's throat. Yuri shoved him forward, his head impacting off the counter as he gagged horribly on the blood spurting from

his severed arteries. Yuri stepped back quickly, avoiding the spray of blood and cleaning her blade on an errant rag she had scooped up. She waited as Morew clawed the floor, unable to stem to flow of his blood from leaving him and it was over within seconds because of the depth of her cut and catching both arteries. She tossed the rag onto his body and once more wrapped the shadows around her, leaving as she had come.

An angel of death.

Onera studied the data pad as two of her father's men carried the last crate onto the G9 containing all of the smaller articles they were picking up. The rest of their cargo would meet with their *BLOODRUNNER* Heavy Frigate at prearranged coordinates outside the prying eyes of those on Nebonese. Her body armor consisted of an earlier version of the Union ArmorPly, which had been stored at the facility. The scientists with her mother and father had improved significantly on the version, bringing it up to better standards of protection. It was lightweight and very flexible, which suited her fighting style. Her father called her the perfect combination of speed and power, able to use her mother's vampire abilities to get close to the enemy, but then when she was close she could resort to the strength of her Immortal blood and pummel her enemy to death quickly. It was something Onera was very proud of.

Onera was also the perfect combination of her mother and father. There was no mistaking who her parents were and Onera wore that knowledge like a badge of pride. She had the skin tone of her father and the exotic features of her mother. Her bone spurs were less prominent on her than a pure Akruxian female, but they were a healthy white color and as far as Onera was concerned, they only added to her beauty. She didn't know how many Immortals and vampire males alike thought the same. Her beauty and intelligence was not something that made her arrogant or superior to others, it just made her proud that her parents were who they were, no matter their pasts. Onera was the beginning of the good they would do now and Onera knew her mother desperately wanted other children with her father. Part of her redemption would be to raise and school her children with Pa'cour as she hadn't done with Onera's half sisters and lone brother. Someday she hoped to meet her sisters and Aunt but Onera had no desire to discover who Dante had become. If ever she was confronted with him, Onera would kill him if she could or run away from him if she couldn't. Onera trusted her mother implicitly, having no fear that the darkness that was Xaxon still resided somewhere inside her. Onera would know if it did, as would her father.

No... her mother was completely free of that evil and now only her true self existed. Her mother was an individual now who held more respect and honor than she ever had, though Yuri probably didn't know it.

Onera looked up at her father's tall figure as he came down the ramp and moved over to her. "That's everything that we are picking up here father." Onera spoke.

Pa'cour nodded. "Good. The sooner we are gone from here the better." He answered looking around the cargo bay. "This particular trip has been nagging at me since we left."

Onera looked at her father. He was a thorough man, leaving nothing to chance, but now she could tell he was also worried about something. "What is wrong papa?" She asked softly.

Pa'cour looked at her. "I don't know really. A feeling mostly. About your mother and something else. It has been with me since we arrived here."

"Mother is in danger?" Onera asked.

Pa'cour shook his head. "That is part of it... but not the focus of it." He answered her knowing that Onera would understand him. "There are very few who could stand against your mother on this misbegotten mercenary world. There is something else however... different... I can't explain it fully."

Onera reached out instinctively within Mindvoice for her mother and encountered a solid wall of black. Her mother's shields were at their highest, and she was letting no one in. She glanced up at her father. "Papa..."

Pa'cour nodded. "Yes... she is blocking me as well." He told her. "We must..." Pa'cour stopped talking when he saw Ma'dur enter the secure landing bay at a quick trot. He was moving directly for them and he waited with dread filling his stomach until the younger Immortal was in front of them. "Ma'dur... where... where is Yuri?" He asked.

"Forgive me General..." Ma'dur spoke quickly out of breath. "The Princess... she said she wanted to buy something... something for you and that I could not be present. She told me to return here. I began to... but

then I realized she had tricked me. I went back to the edge of the promenade but she was gone. Pa'cour please..."

Pa'cour held up his hand to the younger man. "No!" He hissed softly. "You are not to blame. Yuri is different now, in more ways than even I know. She is no longer predictable and she will follow her emotions more now. Where did you leave her last?"

"Near Quellian's jewelry booth." Ma'dur answered.

Pa'cour nodded. "We must find her." He spoke urgently. "If it is discovered she is on Nebonese... some fool will think to collect a bounty on her."

"Bounty?" Onera asked in shock. "Papa... I thought you said the Lycavorian Prince removed the bounty!"

Pa'cour nodded. "He did... and he implied it would not be healthy to pursue it. That will not stop others with more guts than brains from trying to capture her and ransom her off to whoever wishes. There are still many who are too stupid to fear Androcles Leonidas." He looked at Ma'dur. "Show us where you left her Ma'dur! Quickly!"

It was child's play really for Yuri to get close to the secondary maintenance hatch into the Immortal compound. She looked at the cooling body of the Immortal who had been standing guard inside the doorway. He had never known what hit him as the Tears of Heaven had struck without remorse and nearly severed his head from his shoulders. Yuri knew she was skilled with dual blades, but until she had begun using Vonis's gift to her, she never realized just how skilled she was. Training with Pa'cour had only improved upon those skills, something Moran had never wanted to do. Yuri doubted she would ever reach the advanced skill of Narice or her daughter Carisia considering the training they had received, but she was more than capable of doing some serious damage. One day... if fate ever allowed it of her... she would embrace her brother and thank her for the gift which had helped her to begin down this path.

Yuri moved quickly, wrapping the shadows around her once more and blurring in motion down the corridor. While Narice and Carisia may have been better with dual blades, like her half sister Isabella, Yuri was a true master of the shadows. Even the slightest shadow within a room would allow her to use them to her advantage, and this she did now. She followed the now dead Morew's direction and turn down the first corridor she came to. That is when the female cries reached her ears and she felt her blood begin to boil in anger. She gripped Tears of Heaven in her hands and quickened her pace.

Ral'dene stepped back from the struggling elf female with a savage grin. She was naked now, her clothes having been stripped from her when she was brought in. Her hands were tied above her head to the top of the prisoner rack, her ankles secured at the two bottom corners. Her long, white/blond hair was unique with dark streaks in it. Her face was flawless in its beauty as were all elf females, her body even firmer than those elves they already had prisoner here. He dropped the remains of her jumpsuit on the floor amongst the scattered blankets and clothes already there and looked at her. This is where they broke their elf females and sometimes used them. There were blankets and mats all over the floor. "I am going to enjoy this one." He said as the two men in the room with him grinned.

Nameia glared at him with hate filled blue eyes. "You... you may break my will... but I will never submit to you!" She screamed.

Ral'dene laughed. "Bitch... when I get done with you... you'll be begging to suck my cock and serve under me!" He snarled. "If you don't... you'll go insane and die!"

"I would rather die!" Nameia hissed back at him.

"We'll see." Ral'dene spoke as he began to unbuckle his pants.

He turned when a single Immortal rushed into the room. "Commander!" He barked out the word. "Norev is outside! He is demanding to speak with you."

"I'm busy." Ral'dene answered still looking at Nameia.

"Commander... they found Morew's body inside his kiosk." The young Immortal spoke. "He is dead. Norev is demanding to know why we killed him even after taking the elf female."

Ral'dene turned quickly. "Dead?" He spat. "We did not kill the fool vampire."

“I tried to tell Norev this.” The man said. “He demands to speak with you.”

“Fuck!” Ral'dene snarled. He turned to one of his men. “You remain here.” He ordered. “Do not touch her! You... come with me!” He said to the other.

The room emptied quickly leaving Nameia with the lone Immortal who gawked at her naked form with cruel eyes. She struggled with the bindings holding her hands and ankles but was unable to break them. Tears began to fill her eyes as she realized what was going to happen to her. Tolerating Morew and his filthy touch was one thing, but having to serve an Immortal sexually for the rest of her life like some whore was too much. This Ral'dene beast would break her will and she would become addicted to his foul essence. She would need it nearly everyday to survive. His touch alone made her skin crawl and Nameia could not imagine having to endure that every day.

Nameia heard the gurgling sound and her head snapped around as she saw the lone Immortal suddenly reach for his throat and drop to his knees unable to speak. The twin fountains of blood arcing from his neck would attribute to that and as he began to teeter and fall over Nameia saw the shadows unwrap from around the decidedly feminine figure wearing a long cloak and cowl. In her hands were twin knives with blue blades, now stained with streaks of blood. She watched in disbelief as the woman snapped out a front kick directly into the falling Immortal's face. The force of the blow snapped his thick neck with a soft pop causing Nameia's eyes to grow ever wider as she watched his body flip over and land on the floor face down. She watched as those dual blades spun in the woman's hands with consummate grace and then they disappeared beneath the cloak as she spat on the Immortal's now cooling body.

Nameia felt jolts of intense fear shoot through her when the women turned towards her. “I am... please... I do not wish to die!” Nameia stammered, barely able to contain her fear.

Yuri turned to look at Nameia and for a moment that seemed like time stopping Yuri gazed upon her with emotions and desire swirling through her own body unlike anything she had ever felt. The only word Yuri could think to describe her was exquisite. She heard shouting in the other rooms and this snapped her out of her trance like state and she stepped up to the elf female.

“We must move quickly.” Yuri hissed softly. “Before they return.” She drew out one of the blue bladed knives and quickly slashed through the plastic like bindings. The Paravin blade made short work of the bindings and Nameia's hands dropped to grip Yuri's shoulders as they were freed.

“Who...” Nameia gasped as all sorts of emotions rippled through her.

Yuri threw back her cowl and Nameia's eyes flew open. “Princess... Princess Yuri!” She nearly shouted as she drew back her hands and tried to step back away from her. “You... you are dead!”

Yuri gripped her arms tightly, not allowing her to move away, but also not hard enough to hurt her. “The rumors of my death are quite inaccurate.” She spoke quickly. “That pig Morew told me you have an explosive device inside you. Where?”

“He... he sold me to these monsters!” Nameia exclaimed.

Yuri nodded. “And he has paid for that action with his life.” She told her.

“You?” Nameia gasped. “You killed him?”

“The explosive?” Yuri asked again more urgently. “Where is it?”

Nameia shook her head. “I don't... I don't know!” She exclaimed. “I could never find anything!”

Yuri reached up and took Nameia's face in her hands. “Think Nameia!” She insisted. “When Morew was defiling you... is there any part on your body that he ignored?”

“What?” Nameia hissed. “No! He pawed me like... no!” She tried to reach around the small of her back. “My lower back! He never... when he would take me that way he never touched me there!”

Yuri moved around her quickly and her eyes immediately detected the faint scar in the bright light. It was barely discernable but she reached out and ran a fingertip over the scar. Nameia flinched at the touch, but not out of fear. Yuri's touch sent electric jolts coursing through her. “Yes... this is it.” She stated. “It has to be an R90 Explosive tipped receiver. Did he give the transmitter to the Immortal scum?”

Nameia nodded. “Yes! Take it out!”

“It needs to be removed surgically!” Yuri snapped angrily. “I would hurt you too much trying to take it out here! It's too close to your spine and it would take too long!” She moved back around in front of her and took her hands. “We have to get you out of here! Outside its range!”

“How?” Nameia nearly sobbed. “They are all over!”

Yuri gripped her hands tightly looking into those eyes. "I will not let them have you!" Yuri exclaimed passionately. "I won't! Come!" Yuri bent over and snatched a thick blanket from the floor of the room and tossed it around Nameia's shoulders. "You must trust me."

Nameia looked at her, staring into her dark brown eyes and for whatever the reason, what she saw staring back at her made Nameia want to trust her no matter who she was. She nodded her head slowly and Yuri gripped her hand.

"No matter what happens do not let go of me." Yuri told her.

"Or what?" The voice barked and they both spun around to see Ral'dene in the doorway with two other Immortals and a tall vampire. "You were right Norev. You did smell vampire blood in here." He spoke as he entered the room, the two Immortals moving to either side of the doorway.

Norev was a tall, muscular vampire, a former officer within the High Coven fleet. He was also keenly aware of who was staring back at them. "Princess Yuri." He spoke in an even voice. "So the rumors of your death are not true?"

Ral'dene looked at him. "Yuri?" He snapped. "You're sure?"

Norev nodded his head. "I'm sure." He answered evenly, his eyes never leaving Yuri's face.

Ral'dene chuckled as he looked back to Yuri. "Well now... isn't this a pleasant surprise." He spoke. "Princess Yuri here in my home. I should be honored."

Norev looked at Yuri. "You killed Morew?" He asked her.

Yuri stepped in front of Nameia, shielding her body as her hands filled with Tears of Heaven. "I slit his throat like the pig he was." She snarled.

"She's feisty!" Ral'dene chuckled. "After I break the elf I will enjoy having her."

Yuri chortled. "Not likely Immortal." She spat as she felt the presence within Mindvoice. So close and so very powerful.

Ral'dene grinned. "I'm going to fuck your ass Princess and listen to you squeal for more." He growled. "I never liked you or your bastard husband."

Norev stepped forward slowly, his eyes never leaving Yuri's face. He had met the Princess on more than one occasion though she probably did not remember. Yuri looked different now. Her face, while drawn back in a snarl of defiance, was much more relaxed and brighter. The darkness that had once clouded her features was gone and Norev saw purpose in those eyes now as they changed to the cobalt blue of her vampire nature. This was not the same Yuri he had seen those times... this Yuri was different. While Ral'dene may not have been able to sense it, Norev could feel the energy charging Yuri's body now.

"He is close isn't he?" Norev asked her.

Ral'dene looked at him. "Who is close? What are you talking about Norev?"

Yuri met Norev's eyes. "Close enough." Yuri answered.

Norev looked at Ral'dene. "Let her take the elf female and go Ral'dene." He spoke.

"What?" Ral'dene exclaimed looking at him.

"If you wish this encounter to end with your life still belonging to you, let her go." Norev spoke.

"Why the fuck would I want to do that?" Ral'dene snarled. He held up the small transmitter. "I can kill the elf girl right now and take her! I've never fucked a Princess before... and I never liked her!"

"Her Blessed husband is nearby." Norev spoke once more.

"I'm not afraid of that fool Moran!" Ral'dene barked. "He..."

Norev looked at him. "I'm not talking about Moran!" He shouted. "You haven't been listening to the rumors have you?"

"I don't listen to shit I can't gather myself!" Ral'dene snapped.

Norev looked at Yuri. "You left him. The few rumors we received here said you almost killed him and you left him. That you became the Blessed Wife to your Captain. You dropped off the grid. When the bounty was withdrawn I assumed you had been killed... or even taken prisoner since the implication from the Union was that to pursue the contract against you was not healthy. How did you manage to get the boy Prince to drop the bounty on you?"

"She probably fucked him silly!" Ral'dene retorted thinking it was hysterically funny.

"Shut up you fool!" Norev snarled at him. He turned back to Yuri. "Princess?"

Yuri tightened her grip on Tears of Heaven and felt Nameia press closer to her back. "I did become his Blessed Wife." Yuri answered calmly. "And we gave Androcles something he wanted far more than my blood."

"Androcles?" Norev said the word softly. He looked at her for a long moment and then turned to Ral'dene. "Let them go Ral'dene." He said.

"Again you tell me this!" Ral'dene snorted. "Why?"

"She is the Blessed Wife of an Immortal now you fool! She is Pa'cour's woman!" Norev barked at him. "And she is under the protection of the Union!"

Ral'dene looked at him. "What?"

Norev nodded. "Her Immortal Captain!" He hissed. "It is said she escaped Moran's ship with him. That he had taken her as his wife. And if she is standing here now, then the boy Prince did not kill her and he removed the bounty on her head for a reason! Open your eyes Ral'dene and try to think with something other than your cock!"

Ral'dene grinned. "That's no fun." He said.

Norev stepped back and held up his hands. "Ral'dene you fool." He spoke. "I will not be party to this. If you wish to throw your life away go ahead."

"She is alone!" Ral'dene snarled. "There is no one here to help her and she can't beat all of us."

Norev met his eyes. "That is where you are wrong." He stated.

"Bah! You are too..."

The explosion of shadows was soundless, but very visible as Onera unwrapped the wisps of the shadows from around herself and her father and they exploded into motion. Onera's heart was racing madly, the adrenalin pumping through her system. She had trained for weeks with her father and mother both but until now she had never known combat. She allowed her training to control her movements and this served her well. *Iphan rie Aellseum* was already moving before the shadows had fully faded away from her body and she stepped away from her father. The blade bit deeply into the Immortal soldier beside Ral'dene, her combined Immortal and vampire strength propelling the Dragon Armor forged sword with tremendous speed and power. The Immortal barely had time to blink before *Iphan rie Aellseum* cut completely through his left arm that held the hand weapon. Onera didn't watch the Immortal's eyes fly open in agony as she gripped the pommel with both hands and twisted the blade in mid air, snapping it back upwards. As the Immortal bent his head to look down at his arm on the floor of the room, the tip of *Iphan rie Aellseum* came whistling up and sliced through the Immortal's neck like a hot knife through butter. Blood erupted from his nearly severed head as his body tumbled to the side and Onera turned to protect her mother. She blurred in motion and was instantly beside Norev, *Iphan rie Aellseum* pressed none too gently to his throat and Norev staring with wide eyes at the stunning beauty of the half Immortal half vampire female with the savage cobalt blue vampire eyes.

The moment Onera began unwrapping the shadows from around their bodies Pa'cour was moving. It was child's play for him, tracking the scent of Yuri's blood, as she no doubt knew it would be. She was just as much a part of him now as he was of her and they would be able to find each other amongst thousands if need be. Pa'cour's left hand came up in a single eye blink and he fired his silenced K14 KM from point blank range right into the face of the second Immortal soldier beside Ral'dene. The spray of blood coated Ral'dene's left side with blood and brain matter and froze him in his spot in shock for three tortuously long seconds. More than enough time for Pa'cour to twist his body and bring *Halize rie Aellseum* up in a single graceful swing and then slash downward three times in quick succession. Ral'dene howled out his pain as each cut bit into his flesh and carved out deep, ugly wounds across his chest that began to leak blood at an explosive rate. Pa'cour snapped out with his right boot and smashed Ral'dene in the face as he began to double over, flipping the large Immortal up and back. He crashed onto his back on the floor with a loud groan of pain and the air leaving his lungs. He stepped closer and drove *Halize rie Aellseum* down with incredible force, impaling Ral'dene through the side and pinning him to the floor, his hands wrapped around the bloody blade.

Pa'cour turned to look at Yuri and he rose back to his full height and crossed the room to her in three strides, sweeping her up in his arms. Yuri smiled brightly as his arms closed around her and she held his broad shoulders.

"It took you long enough to find me husband." She spoke laconically.

Pa'cour glared at her, trying to be angry and failing. Finally he just kissed her hard on the lips standing among the death and blood. Yuri whimpered softly and squeezed his thick arms before she drew her head back. "You and I will talk about your reckless actions my Blessed Wife!" He growled at her.

Yuri gripped his face in her hands. "I had to come husband." She said softly. "I..."

Pa'cour shook his head. "Not now." He spoke. "We must leave before this fool's men begin to realize he is no longer their leader."

"If they haven't heard his wails of pain. What a baby!" Onera commented looking at her father.

Pa'cour turned quickly and looked at Norev. "What about him?" He asked.

Yuri squeezed his arm and stepped forward. "What about you... Norev is it?" Yuri asked.

Norev bowed his head slightly. "I have not seen you Princess." He spoke. "I... you are not the same as I remember you to be Princess. There is something different about you now." He spread his hands out slowly causing Onera to move quickly and bring *Iphan rie Aellseleum* up in a single heartbeat to press to his throat. Yuri blurred forward to stand in front of him, her face twisted in anger.

"Why have you become like this?" She snarled at him. "Morew! How many other purebloods in your group have become nothing more than *vith 'ez* maggots?"

Norev lifted his face and looked at her. "Morew was a pig and you gave him the end he deserved!" Norev hissed. "What were we to do Princess? Your... your mother was destroying the Coven like a cancer. From inside. She and Moran were driving us to extinction! It was either fight for them and die or desert and at least die free! Die by our own choice! The Kavalians were beating us and Moran's tactics... your mother's tactics... they were helping them!"

"How many of your men are like Morew?" Yuri barked.

"Morew was not part of my crew! He joined us here!" Norev spoke.

"Your crew?" Pa'cour asked moving closer.

Norev nodded. "My crew. *BLOODLETTER*-Class Cruiser. *RED MIST*. It is under Shroud just at the edge of the system. I don't bring it close to this retched planet!"

"Your crew?" Yuri asked.

Norev met her eyes. "Most of them came with me when we deserted. I had their families rendezvous at a secret location and then we took them and left. The *MIST* is overcrowded but we are making do."

"You have families on your ship?" Yuri asked him.

Norev nodded. "Nearly a hundred and forty families." He replied. "Women, children. Mothers. Fathers. I couldn't ask them to leave their loved ones behind and be killed by the Kavalians or something stupid your mother or Moran did."

Pa'cour stepped closer. "You have family on your ship?"

Norev met his eyes. "A wife and two daughters." He replied.

"Quellian says you and your group are no better than these Immortals." Yuri spoke.

Norev looked at her once more. "This is The Wilds Princess. If you appear weak you die. We are protecting our families now and to appear weak puts them at risk. Yes... we have smuggled goods and conducted some very violent and immoral things... but to protect those we love... we would do far more. Our only purpose now is to protect them."

"And what if you and your men had purpose once more?" Yuri asked him.

Norev met her gaze evenly. "Your sister... Empress Narice... she would never allow us to return to the Coven after the things we have done. No matter how much we would want to. She is purging all the bad blood from the Coven even now."

"You still care about the Coven?" Yuri asked him.

"The High Coven is my home!" Norev snarled. "I would never betray the Coven to the Kavalian dogs or anyone else! Never. And neither would any of my men!"

"Yet she works closely with the Lycavorian Union." Yuri said. "Her Blessed husband is Arrarn Leonidas. They help to defend us even now."

Norev nodded his head. "We should never have been enemies with the Union." He stated calmly. "We are more like them than many of our people wish to admit."

"How many of your men work for Moran?" Yuri asked him. "Putting spies in a group like yours is something he would do."

Norev shook his head. "Morew is the only one who was an outsider. The only reason I allowed him to join us was because of his contacts here in The Wilds."

"What if I gave you purpose again?" Yuri asked. "You are still loyal to the Coven... then help me."

"Mother?" Onera gasped.

Yuri held up her hand though Pa'cour said nothing. He was thinking along the same lines as Yuri and he knew having a ship and men like this Norev would be a huge asset. "Tell me Norev. You wish to defend the Coven. You wish to have purpose and honor once more."

"Doing what?" Norev asked. "I don't know what has changed about you Princess but you are different. I will not work to subvert your sister in order to put you back on the throne. The Empress... she is the only hope we have as a people now. I will not work against her."

Yuri shook her head quickly. "I have no desire to reclaim leadership of the High Coven Norev." She told him. "And you are correct that only Narice can repair the damage my mother and even I have done through the millennia. No... I wish to see my sister succeed. I wish to see the Coven brought back to what it once was. I am not trying to subvert my sister... I am going to help her."

"Help her?" Norev asked.

Yuri nodded. "I am going to help her by doing the things she can not as Empress." Yuri spoke. "From the shadows."

"And she... she knows this?" Norev asked.

Yuri shook her head. "No... she has no idea."

"Then why?" Norev asked.

Yuri looked first at Pa'cour and then Onera. Her eyes returned to his then. "Because I have found something in this universe that means more to me than power and strength. In order to protect that... I need to protect my sister and what she does." Yuri paused. "Perhaps one day... perhaps one day I will be able to walk within the Coven's borders and my actions will be forgiven... but not now. Now I must help Narice from the shadows." She met Norev's eyes. "You and your men can have that purpose too. Your families will be safe and want for nothing. We will pick our battles and not throw lives away."

Norev blinked twice but nodded. "Done." He spoke.

Pa'cour looked at him. "That was fast." He stated.

Norev looked at him. "There is nothing more glorious than fighting to win back the honor we have lost as a people." He stated. "As the Princess said... perhaps one day we will be able to walk among the Coven with our heads held high. My daughters will be able to do this. That is what we want. You of all of us should know that feeling Pa'cour."

Pa'cour nodded his head. "Indeed I do." He stated.

"How many other females are here?" Yuri asked.

Norev returned his eyes to her. "Six. All in the next room." He answered. "The other Immortals are in the entertainment hall on the other side of the compound. It is why none have discovered what has happened here. They will though... and soon."

"Then we get the others and we leave." Yuri spoke. "I have no desire to remain here any longer than necessary. We must get Nameia and the others up to Nalavi so that he can help them."

"I will help you." Norev spoke. "I know the compound and it will be harder than you think convincing the other elf females it's safe to leave. They have been here longer and are..."

Pa'cour nodded. "They are broken." He said softly. He took a deep breath and reached behind his back under his cloak. He drew out two large blocks of explosive. "And I intend to insure they never do such a thing again." He snarled.

Yuri nodded and turned to Nameia who was quite lost. She gripped Nameia's hands. "Can you help us?" She asked. "If not... Onera can get you out of here to safety."

Nameia looked at Yuri, not understanding why this pureblood vampire female drew her in so deeply. She was strong and decisive and her beauty was almost surreal but she knew well the history of Yuri Moran. She was known for being exceptionally cruel and violent. She was also what many called a loose cannon. The woman standing before her was none of those things, yet she was all of them. Staring into those cobalt blue vampire eyes Nameia felt a wave of confidence swirl through her. Confidence and attraction. She had nothing left in her life, her family killed by Morew. Perhaps this was fate's way of trying to make amends. She trusted

this woman for some reason. Trusted her more than she trusted herself and she decided quickly what she would do. Nameia squeezed her hands back. “Yes.” She said without really thinking about it.

Yuri nodded and turned back to Pa'cour. “We must move quickly.” She said.

“Quickly does not begin to describe how fast we must move.” He answered as he moved to the door. “Onera... follow me daughter.”

SCIMITAR ORBITING SOLMAR

“... A little worn out there Andro.” Sa'sur spoke with a grin as they sat in their joint offices.

Andro lowered the mug of his mother's coffee and grinned. “I claimed Sehri last night.” He replied looking at her. Sa'sur's mate was a Lycavorian and he had turned her long ago so she knew the significance of that. They also did not keep many things from each other as long as they had worked together. “We may have... overdone it.”

Sa'sur laughed at his expression and nodded. “No apologies necessary.” She said. “She's a beautiful young woman. Just like all of your wives and mates. I hope she is the last one though. It's getting kind of hard to keep track of them.”

“*Carians* yes!” Andro exclaimed. “I don't want or need anymore! I'd end up killing myself!”

Sa'sur laughed now as well and sat back in her chair. After a moment she lowered her own mug of tea and looked at him. “So now what?” She asked. “I'm kind of surprised we haven't detected a Kavalian force moving here now to try and retake the colony to be honest.”

Andro shook his head and leaned forward on the couch. “No. Keleru set up this entire operation to eliminate Byka and Azlenr and to try and make himself look good on the Netnews. He failed at that. He won't try and retake this colony when they succeeded in taking the others. He's not that stupid.”

“Too bad. I was hoping he might try something. We got three entire Fleet Groups in the vicinity now. We would have pounded anything he sent this way.” Sa'sur answered. “The civilians have seemed to accept the Kavalian troops. Most of them knew the Puma Bane assholes were the ones to be afraid of. And the Kavalian troops are going out of their way to help in any way they can.”

Andro nodded. “I think we have acquired solid allies in Azlenr and Byka. Their men trust them... especially now that they know their families are safe.”

“They don't seem like such a bad lot.” Sa'sur said.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes, but we will take no chances. Lisisa is already establishing contacts with several of the Bontawillian and elven engineers. They will be our eyes and ears when we leave.”

“Where are we going?” Sa'sur asked.

“We're going to return to Earth for the moment.” Andro said. “I need to get a handle on how much losing those colonies means and what we can do to counter the effects. And Sehri's mother has already gone on ahead with Kelelm to meet with *Tenna* Deia as a member of the Rothryn government.”

Sa'sur nodded. “Then what?”

Andro looked at her as he got to his feet. “Then I talk to Arrarn and Narice who will be meeting us there.” He shook his head. “I never really understood how much my father was involved in the political matters of the Union. I thought he hated it.”

“He does.” Sa'sur said as she got to her feet. “That doesn't mean he isn't damn good at it.” She told him.

“Better than me for sure.” Andro said.

“Don't sell yourself short Andro.” Sa'sur told him. “This is new to you just like it was with your father. You just do what he did and follow your heart.”

Andro met her eyes. “And has he had enemies all around him even among our own people?” He asked.

“Especially among our own people.” Sa'sur said. “There will always be the fools who think they know what's best for everyone. Or that they can do a better job. Icho is just one of dozens who think like that. I got a feeling Sadi straightened Ulana out... but we'll see. Your father never let it change who he was... and you're doing a damn fine job of impersonating him.”

Andro smiled. "You know... for the longest time all I have ever wanted was to come out from what I perceived as my father's shadow." He said softly. "I am coming to realize that it was not his shadow I was walking in, but one of my own making. I think like him and act like him not because I am his son, but because I believe in what he believes in. Those are the conclusions I have come to after seeing all we have seen."

"Not so bad are they?" Sa'sur said.

Andro shook his head. "No they are not." He answered. "Keep me advised of any new movements by Keleru and his ilk as they come across. I'm going to get with Lisisa and then have breakfast with my mates. We'll meet with Azlenr and Byka this afternoon and begin to plan the movement and redeployment of their forces."

Sa'sur nodded. "I'll be here." She stated.

Andro nodded with a smile and then headed out of their office to move down the corridor. Andro was silent as he walked down the corridor, his mind on many things but after last night with his wives and mates, his main thoughts were on how to get to the Beta Quadrant as soon as possible and scoop Caliria into his arms and ask for her forgiveness. Her forgiveness for letting her go and putting her in the situation he had. He knew Sadi and the others missed her and they were still somewhat miffed at him in how he went about that. He needed to make amends but the longer he remained here; he feared the harder it would be for Caliria to accept and forgive him. As he entered the elevator to take him to the mess deck he looked up and saw Jomann quickly enter the elevator with him. This brought him out of his mindset as the doors closed.

"Jomann." He said in greeting.

Jomann nodded. "Andro." He said with a grin. "Looking a little ragged there my friend." He spoke.

Andro smiled as he saw the state of Jomann's eyes. "You are one to talk." He said. "Eli is coming into phase isn't she?"

Jomann tried to hide his embarrassment but it didn't take with Andro. They were far too close as friends now, as well as what the King now called them. Praetorians. "Let me just say that I may have gained several cavities last night as sweet as her scent was. I..."

Andro grabbed his arm. "Jomann... she's my sister." He stated. "Way too much information my friend."

Jomann laughed. "Sorry." He said.

"What about Brendi?" Andro asked.

Jomann looked at him. "We are not actively pursuing her if that is what you mean." He said in reply. "Eliani desires her deeply, but she also knows what type of person Brendi is. She is not willing to risk losing her by moving too fast."

"And you are ok with that?" Andro asked.

Jomann nodded. "Eliani is my *Anome*. I am hers. There is no doubt there. None. Neither of us could desire another if we both did not desire the same person, you know that better than most Andro."

Andro nodded. "I do."

"We both desire Brendi. We both want her in our lives. We are willing let things develop on their own." Jomann said.

Andro grinned. "Wow... Eli usually isn't so calm and patient about things. She must be serious." He said.

Jomann smiled. "We are." He said.

Andro nodded. "We are going to have to pull Dorian aside soon Jomann. He needs to fully understand what we both sense in him. He needs to know and understand what it means."

Jomann nodded as the doors to the elevator opened and they exited on the mess deck. "I agree." He said as they walked towards the mess lounge. "I don't think I fully understand what it means Andro... but I do know we need to talk with him."

"We'll know more when we have a chance to speak with Murano." Andro said. "One of the few bright spots father found on his trip. We..." Andro came up short with Jomann beside him when he looked up and saw Sehri's sister Osbela blocking their path. "Lady Osbela..." Androcles stated. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Prince Androcles... I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time." Osbela spoke sweetly as she batted her eyes at him.

"What can I do for you?" Andro asked.

Osbela looked at Jomann. "Alone I mean." She said quickly. "It's of a rather sensitive nature."

Andro knew immediately what was going on for he could sense Osbela trying to use a female aura she could not control or direct as her sister Sehri could. He smiled and bowed his head to her. "Captain Jomann is my First." He said. "There is nothing he can not know."

This seemed to thrown Osbela for a split second but she recovered quickly. "It's... it concerns my sister Sehri actually." She said. "With my mother gone on to Earth I feel it is my obligation to speak up for her."

"Ah..." Andro said. He looked at Jomann. "Jomann... I'll be along shortly."

[Are you sure Andro?] Jomann asked. *[Given what you have told me and what I have heard...]*

Andro nodded his head. *[Trust me... I know what is going on here.]* He said. *[I will be fine.]*

Jomann nodded. *[I'll let Sadi and the others know you will be right behind me.]*

Andro nodded and then turned back to Osbela as Jomann walked towards the entrance to the mess lounge. Osbela watched him enter and then returned her gaze to Androcles. "It's much better this way." She said. "Is there someplace where we can speak more privately?"

Andro looked around and saw the corner into a maintenance corridor and he motioned with his hand. "This way." He said. He watched Osbela smile and then move in that direction. He followed and in a moment they were in the corridor which was much less traveled than the main corridor. "So how can I help you?" He asked as Osbela turned and looked at him. "And how does this concern Sehri?"

"My mother... my mother told me that Sehri has displayed an... interest in you if you will." Osbela said. "That you and she believe there is a connection of some sorts between you. Her abilities have had her with the Circle of Shamans since she was very little and when she turned sixteen she... she swore a vow of celibacy to the Circle. I believe she may be infatuated with you and not fully understand who and what you are."

Andro smiled calmly. "And you do?" He asked folding his hands behind his back.

Osbela smiled. "I do." She said reaching up and running her hand along Andro's shoulder and down his arm. "You are a Crown Prince of your people. A position of power and prestige. You are a virile man... strong and intelligent." Osbela returned her eyes to Andro and saw him gazing at her. "You deserve a woman of similar stature. Like your other mates."

"And I suppose that would be a woman like yourself?" Andro asked her evenly.

Osbela smiled shyly and looked down. "Well... yes. I suppose I am." She answered meeting his eyes with an inviting gaze.

Andro nodded. "You should probably know... I claimed Sehri last night." He stated seeing Osbela's face tighten in surprise and her eyes go wide. "Funny thing though... she was none of those things. In fact... she was quite adventurous and inventive." Andro smiled at the look on her face and bowed his head slightly. "If you'll excuse me."

Osbela stood there in shock and complete embarrassment. She watched Andro's back turn and go around the corner of the corridor and Osbela suddenly became very angry. She clenched her fists and stormed off to find her sister and Shaman Master Harira.

Sheva Juconi looked around the inside of Dorian Leonidas's quarters and shook her head slowly. His equipment and weapons were strewn about the main living area and she could see a trail of clothes leading into his bedroom. She didn't understand why he had wanted quarters so close to the dorsal hull of the ship. It was a dangerous place if they ever came under intense attack, only twelve centimeters of Depleted Laminated Crystanium Weave hull molded with an inner and outer layer of Dragon Armor stood between him and the void of space. Jomann had asked her to collect him and join them for breakfast in the mess lounge and she had reluctantly agreed. She hadn't seen him fighting on Solmar, indeed she was angry that he had gotten involved at all, but she had read and heard the reports and comments from those who had fought beside him and all of them praised his skill and actions.

Sheva looked around his quarters listening the dull drum of the shower, taking in the holoscreens on the computer desk as well as the credenza along the bulkhead. There were several large paintings hanging on the walls that depicted scenes from Lycavorian history, one of the them at some point during the Battle of Thermopylae. These were not standard paintings or pictures and she realized that someone had decorated his

quarters for him. She moved to the credenza and thumbed through the selection of reading discs on the top and the odd collection of music. It was varied and contained different material on war and philosophical teachings, some old and some new. It was certainly not what she expected from Dorian Leonidas given how he acted in many ways. She still considered him a child Sheva knew... only months old, yet occupying the body of a young man. She still had issues with this arrangement and it did not sit well with her or her primary duty. It did not help matters in the least that the body he had was sculpted perfection as far as she was concerned and it troubled her deeply that she was so physically attracted to him. She did not understand how she could find him so striking given that she knew how he had been born. She also didn't understand why that mattered. It had been so long since she had last been with a man and no matter how much she tried to deny it, Dorian Leonidas excited her more than any man she had ever been with.

As she turned from the credenza, the activated data pad on the computer desk caught her eye and she moved to the desk and picked it up. Her eyes grew wide when she saw that it was her entire personal file. Her entire life within the Union. Fresh anger surged through her though she had no idea why and his deep voice caused her to nearly jump out of her skin.

"You come into people's quarters uninvited often do you?" Dorian spoke.

Sheva's head came up and she stepped back several steps before catching herself. She hadn't heard or sensed him come into the main room. Her eyes grew even wider when she saw he was dripping wet and holding a rather smallish towel around his waist. Her shock quickly turned back to anger and she held up the data pad.

"What are you doing with this?" She demanded. "You have no right!"

Dorian moved further into the main room holding the towel tightly. "I have no right?" He stated calmly. "You can know all there is to know about me... but I am not allowed the same courtesy? Is that what you are saying?"

"I am... I am *Durcunusaan*! It is my... my duty to know these things!" Sheva barked.

Dorian stopped a few feet in front of her and Sheva felt her blood stir as she glared at him, his exceptionally powerful body on display for her to see. He almost matched his brother in definition and appeared to be just as heavily muscled as him. This apparently did not take away from his speed according to the reports she had seen.

"Is it also your duty to come into my quarters uninvited?" Dorian asked her.

"Jomann... Jomann asked me to collect you." Sheva stammered. "To meet your brother for breakfast."

"Ever hear of using the chime?" Dorian asked her. His own wolf blood was stirring as well, combined with the pureness of his mother's vampire blood, it made for a very nearly irresistible combination.

Sheva glared at him. "I am your Captain!" She growled. "I do not need to use the chime!"

Dorian met her gaze. "You are my Captain and you think it is beneath you!" He snapped. "You think I don't know how you feel about being assigned to me?"

Sheva blinked quickly. "You... you don't know what you speak of?" She finally told him.

"Don't I?" Dorian spat moving closer to her. "You think I haven't heard you complain to Jomann? To a few others? You think it is beneath you! You think I am a child in an adult's body! That I'm unnatural and some sort of abomination!"

Sheva's eyes grew wide. "I never said that!" She barked.

"But you think it." Dorian snapped. "You don't hide your surface thoughts as well as you should."

"You... you have read my thoughts?" She hissed at him. "You have no right!"

"When you wear your thoughts on your sleeve about me as you do, it's hard not too!" Dorian growled at her moving even closer, his anger and desire driving him now. Her sweet scent, a combination of berries and apples to his wolf nose, was maddening to him. "You think I am some sort a monster! And a child at that!" He spat, towering over her five foot one frame.

Sheva didn't back down however, glaring back at him. "You... you act like a child at times!" She snapped. "You are reckless! And arrogant! And you..."

"Go ahead!" Dorian snarled. "Spit it all out! You think it is beneath your wonderful skills to be babysitting me! You have thought this since the day my mother appointed you my Captain Sheva!"

"YES!" Sheva shouted as her light green eyes flared in anger. "Is that what you want to hear?" She barked. "Yes damn it! You act like an impudent child at times! You are extremely overconfident and believe your skills will get you out of any danger! You are..."

“Why don’t you admit why you really want to get away from me?” Dorian snapped at her, his desire and want for this woman making him brave and confident because he could smell the desire for him wafting from Sheva’s pores no matter how much she tried to fight it.

Sheva blinked again. “Wha... what?” She gasped.

“You know what I’m talking about.” Dorian hissed softly. Andro had told him if he truly wanted something to go after it. If he felt Sheva was what he truly wanted, then go after her. The worst she could do was reject him. At least then Dorian would know where he stood. He was going to go after her now and determine what part of his future Sheva Juconi would play in it. “Admit it!”

Sheva looked at him. “What... what are you talking about?” She stammered trying to gain control of her own emotions which were rapidly spiraling out of control. He was so close to her, so dominant and handsome. He was the most incredibly beautiful man she had ever laid her eyes on in over three hundred years of life, and it had been so very long since she had shared the warmth of a man. None of the men she had bedded in the past could hold a candle to Dorian in any way. He brimmed with confidence and intelligence and knowledge that he should not have given how he came into this world. Sheva did not understand it, for while she was considered a Tier Six Mindvoicer, she had never delved into the capabilities that skill afforded her. She tried to avoid using it at all costs because she did not believe she actually had this skill or that she could actively use it in any way.

However, Sheva could not deny it now. She could not deny what Dorian made her feel and it terrified her that he could elicit these emotions in her so easily. She watched as he stepped closer to her, causing her to inch back until she was against the bulkhead. She could almost taste the blood running through his veins. Mixed blood yes, but blood that was purer than anything she had ever smelled and her mouth almost watered at the desire to taste it.

“I think you know what I mean.” Dorian spoke in a voice that now openly held passion in it. Passion and desire and confidence. All traits of a man who had many more years of life than Dorian Leonidas, yet traits that exuded from him now. And it was utterly maddening to Sheva.

Sheva looked at him with wide eyes hearing the voice and feeling his pulse pounding in the tiny space between them. His brown eye had shrunk and was now surrounded by the thick black ring that gave away his wolf blood, while his cobalt blue eye had become even brighter than normal. “You... back up please!” She rasped out the words. “This isn’t... I...”

Dorian moved closer to her now, reaching up with his left hand to run his fingers along the edge of her jaw and seeing her body react to his touch. His blood was on fire and he could no longer hold back the emotions. “Leave!” He hissed softly. “Leave Sheva! Before I can’t... before I can’t stop my desire for you!” He husked the words to her forehead. “Go! I will... I will tell Jomann and my brother to reassign you! I will...”

Sheva could not deny it any longer. She did not want to deny it. The scent of his blood was so staggering. The heat of his desire for her was unlike anything she had ever felt from any man. Dorian Leonidas didn’t want to bed her as a conquest... Dorian wanted to possess her. He wanted to have every bit of her. She reached up with a shaking hand and covered his larger hand with her fingers feeling the heat of his skin and body. Her mind told her not to look up, but her body and her heart were wining this battle and she lifted her now cobalt blue vampire eyes into his face and saw his unique eyes once more.

“Dor... Dorian I... you...” He did not give her the opportunity to finish her words and Sheva was so very happy he didn’t. He leaned over and covered her trembling lips with his own and then he was lifting her petite form into his arms, the towel falling away from around his waist and he was pinning her to the bulkhead as he kissed her with a ferocity Sheva had never known. Sheva let go of everything then, all of her doubts and the misgivings that Dorian would never know. She simply surrendered to what was racing through her because it was the most divine thing she had ever felt in her life. Her whimper of delight was very audible as she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and surrendered to that fearsome kiss with ardent fervor.

Sheva could feel his hands working, pulling at her uniform urgently, and nearly tearing her fatigue top off with his combined wolf and vampire strength. He didn’t even attempt to lift her t-shirt from over her head; he simply shredded that with his strength from the front and then pulled her even closer. Then Sheva’s bare breasts, firm mounds of flesh topped with small but hard nipples were pressing into his bare chest and setting her body on fire. She began helping him then, her hands tearing at her pants, trying to get them off her body. He somehow managed to unlace her boots in their movements and soon they were flying across the main living area as she pushed her pants below her hips. His powerful hands took control then and he pulled them down her

legs until she was suddenly very naked in his arms. His large hands filled with her small, but incredibly firm cheeks and Sheva tore her lips from his when she felt it. Her center was drenched, more wet than she had ever been in her life and she burned with need.

“Dor... Dorian wait!” She gasped with wide eyes at feeling the scorching hot organ press against her opening. “You... it’s too...”

Sheva Juconi tossed her head back and screamed in utter, cataclysmic bliss as Dorian Leonidas pulled her hips down and speared her fully in one, soul robbing, eleven and a half inch plunge that seemed to last forever. When their groins smashed together at the end of her plunge, Sheva erupted in the most mind numbing orgasm she had experienced in over three hundred years of life. Her body shuddered almost violently and she wrapped her arms and legs around his powerful body, locking her ankles around Dorian’s waist at the small of his back as her sweet juices coated their groins. She held on for dear life as Dorian pulled her away from the bulkhead and began to stomp across his quarters towards the bedroom. Each step drove Sheva deeper and deeper into orgasmic frenzy and she was crying out again even before he was through the doorway into his bedroom.

Dorian would not be joining his brother for breakfast, but through his pleasure clouded mind and the feel of Sheva’s incredible body wrapped in his arms, Dorian sensed his brother’s happiness for him at what he would experience. Deep in his mind he felt Andro close a door and then Dorian was all alone with Sheva.

Dorian Leonidas was not about to waste that time.

USU OZEIB 7

YDARE

VENTASH’MA PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT CHAMBERS

There were twelve *Ventash’ma* now, three of them newly elected to go along with the thirty-two Sector Governors from all of High Coven space that was free of Kavalian control. The table in the room was massive, able to seat all of them in an oval shape and insuring they had equal line of sight to where Narice sat on one end of the table at the head. Computer monitors and control consoles were in front of every man and woman, data pads and discs stacked to the sides or simply strewn across the table in some areas. Cooled pictures of cloned blood resides all over the table, half empty glasses near everyone. They had arrived early this morning to discuss and vote on several items of importance, the first vote just finishing up as each individual man and woman typed on their monitors.

Ventash’ma Datarik glanced over to the head of the table and watched as Narice’s aide Felisa sat just behind her to the right and was whispering into her ear. He had to admit to himself that since Narice’s return, their future had become so much brighter as a people. Datarik was a loyal and committed member of the vampire species, but he was also very intelligent and knew when they had to change as a people in order to survive. Aikiro and Veldruk never knew that, or they never tried to know it, and they had brought the High Coven to the brink of destruction. He wondered for a moment what they would think of their youngest daughter being in charge now and the radical changes that she was making in how they did things. The ten *Ventash’ma* oversaw the thirty-two sector governors and those governors had been very hastily elected by the people they represented in the first weeks of Narice coming to power. Some of the sectors were larger than others, but for the moment everyone within the High Coven had a voice in the direction of their people now, and for the first time in their history, three members of the *Ventash’ma* were under the age of ten thousand years.

Datarik knew there would be dissent among them, but now they no longer had to worry about a visit by the secret police in the middle of the night for voicing their opinion on what to do. Unlike most of the other *Ventash’ma* however, Datarik knew Narice was not her mother or sister. She would not tolerate the back room deals or proposals. Her values and morals were solid and immovable. She would not be swayed in another direction if it did not benefit the people of the High Coven. He was going to enjoy being part of Narice’s rule.

Datarik saw Narice nod to Felisa and she got to her feet. “Very well everyone... the final vote is unanimous.” She spoke. “Forty-four to zero. We will reopen the Vorellian Ruby Mines on Hongar. The Hongar will mine the rubies and will receive seventy-five percent of the profit from these mines to improve the state of

their planet and surrounding colonies, as well as upgrade their mining equipment. The Coven will use our twenty-five percent to refund and balance the use of the Coven Dakar.”

Narice saw the governor of the sector Hongar was in nod his head enthusiastically. “This will go a long way to helping insure stability and long term currency value Empress.” He spoke. “And the Hongar will have more than enough to fund the projects for their people. Most of that material will be bought from our companies anyway.”

Narice nodded. “As long as we trade with them on a fair level Governor.” She spoke. “I do not want to hear that our companies are inflating their prices to make a profit. The Hongar have been part of the Coven since the very beginning and I will not repeat the mistakes of my father by treating them as he did.”

The man nodded. “I will see to it personally.” He said in reply.

Narice nodded and looked around the table. “Very well. It’s been a long day I know... but I think we have accomplished more than we thought we could. Let’s...”

“Excuse me Empress?” The Governor spoke from halfway down the table.

Narice looked at him and glanced down at her data pad. “Yes... Governor Torlen is it?”

The man nodded and rose to his feet. “Yes Empress... Governor to Sector twenty-Three.” He replied. “There is another issue that we have not yet brought up. Some of my colleagues do not deem it important... but those in my region do.”

Narice tilted her head. “Really?” She spoke. “What issue would that be?”

Datarik looked at the man. “I told you this was not the time or place to broach this subject Torlen!”

“I disagree.” Torlen spoke. “Respectfully of course *Ventash’ma* Datarik.”

Narice looked between the two men and then back to Torlen. “What am I missing?” She asked.

Torlen returned his gaze to her. “The citizens of the High Coven that I represent are... more traditional than most.” He spoke smoothly.

Narice nodded. “Yes I know that.” She spoke. “What are you getting at Governor?”

“Several dozen of the older, more influential families have come to me and asked when they will be allowed to present their sons to you for inspection.” Torlen said.

Narice shook her head. “Excuse me... inspection? Why on earth would I need to inspect them?” She asked.

Torlen nodded his head. “So that you may chose a pureblood husband to rule beside you of course. It is the custom for the Empress to do this when she is not joined, according to our laws. This is how your mother chose your father.”

“I know how my mother chose my father Governor.” Narice spoke. “I am not my mother however, and I already have a *Du’used M’ranndii* Governor. A man who I love beyond words of expression. And I have a lover who I love beyond words. This is not going to change.”

“Your husband is a Prince of the Lycavorian Union.” Torlen pressed. “He is a half breed himself and much younger than you. Since the beginning of the Coven, our Empress and or Emperor has always been pure of blood. The more influential families in my sector are expecting you to follow this birthright as well.”

“Are they?” Narice spoke.

Torlen nodded his head. “It would not be unusual for you to have a consort. Arrarn Leonidas could fill this role if you wish. The woman Toria as well. But it does insure that a pureblood vampire is always ready to rule and any heirs are pureblood as well.”

Narice sat back in her chair slowly, her dark eyes boring into Torlen as he stood there with no idea of the arrogance he was portraying. “Let me get this straight...” She began to speak. “You want me to tell Arrarn Leonidas, who I love more than my own life and whose name I carry proudly, that out of political necessity I need to share a bed with another man and produce a child from that relationship? All while he watched and endured his wife sleeping with another man?” Narice leaned forward at the table. “That is what you are saying Governor?”

“That is how things have been done for millennia Empress.” Torlen said.

“Oh... then I suppose you won’t mind if I tell you that I need your wife of three thousand four hundred and two years needs to bed an Immortal or two in order to keep relations between our two people calm.” Narice spat.

Felisa couldn't help but chuckle softly beside Narice and she looked over to the side and saw her Immortal husband Ki'nuq and Colonel Co'kal standing along the wall with wide eyes at Narice's words.

Torlen looked at Narice with equally wide eyes. "Certainly not!" He hissed dramatically.

"But you expect me to do this?" Narice demanded.

"I... I am only explaining to you how... how things have worked for millennia." Torlen spoke. "And what those within my sector expect."

Narice nodded her head. "Then you go back to them and tell them this." She spoke getting to her feet. "I am Narice Leonidas! Arrarn Leonidas is my *Du'ased M'ranndii* and that will not change! Not now! Not in the future! Any children I bear will be his children and no one else's! I would never betray the man I love in such a way! Never! Nor would I betray Toria in such a way!"

"Empress you..." Torlen began.

"NO!" Narice barked silencing him. "I will not cling to archaic rules of law that have no right to even exist! I have tasted Arrarn's blood and no man's blood will ever compare to his! I don't care if he is a thousand years younger than me! He is who has claimed my heart and my soul! Arrarn Leonidas is part of why I am who I am! I would never... could never be debased or dishonor him by doing such a thing willingly! I am setting the Coven on a new path and if that means dismissing traditions that are vile to me and to so many others, so be it! The families will just have to tolerate it!" Narice snarled. "Part of the reason we came so close to death is because we cling to these out of date and often times vile traditions. I will not!"

"What... what should I tell those families who have asked me this?" Torlen spoke.

"Tell them the only man who will ever have me in or out of his bed is Arrarn Leonidas!" Narice snarled at him. "The only children I will ever bear will be Arrarn Leonidas's children! Period! Outside of that... if they don't like that answer... they can always go live within the Kavalian Federation! *Phraktos*... I can't believe we are even discussing this after all that has happened!"

Datarik rose to his feet now. "Please... everyone... it has been a long day for all of us!" He began. "Why don't we end these sessions for now and take a break? We have much to accomplish over the next few days with everyone here and exhausting ourselves on the first day will do none of us any good. There are still many things we need to discuss and decide."

Datarik saw the nods of many heads around the table.

"I second this." Riara spoke from his chair.

"As do I." Anebal echoed. "There is too much to do."

Datarik nodded his own head. "Please... Colonel Co'kal will show you to your escorts and insure you are directed to the proper facilities."

Co'kal stepped forward and bowed his head. "I have teams standing by for the Governors and all their aides." He spoke. "We would be honored to escort them."

Datarik nodded. "Good. We will adjourn until tomorrow morning then."

Everyone nodded and began to head for the exits while Datarik, Riara and Anebal moved closer to Narice at the end of the table. She watched as they settled into the now vacant chairs and then looked at Datarik.

"What was that?" Narice asked softly.

"I told Torlen it was not the subject he wanted to bring up." Datarik answered. "He did not listen obviously."

"Datarik... there is no way I will ever submit to that no matter what he says or what these so called influential families want!" Narice exclaimed. "Arrarn and Toria... they are... they are my life! They are part of what makes me... who I am!"

Datarik nodded his head. "I tried to explain this to him but it seems the families have quite a bit of sway over him."

"A different agenda as well perhaps." Anebal spoke from her chair. "They are not going to let this go Empress."

Narice nodded her head. "I know. My mother did it. Yuri did it. They expect me to do it." She said. "Which I have no intention of doing no matter what."

"There are some..." Riara spoke. "There are some who are miffed that Arrarn is acting as Defense Minister even though Admiral Pontal and others think he is doing an amazing job. Not many... but they do have

some influence. They don't trust the Lycavorian Union or the motives of Androcles Leonidas. They see your union with Arrarn as too convenient."

"Convenient?" Narice hissed loudly. "I almost lost him in the beginning because of my own arrogance and exactly that kind of thinking!"

Riara nodded. "I'm only relaying to you what they think."

"They'll need to get over it!" Narice exclaimed. "Andro could have wiped the Coven out if he wanted for what was done to Zarah! If they are foolish enough to underestimate him too bad!" She looked at Datarik. "What about the other *Ventash'ma*?"

Datarik shook his head. "All twelve of us are behind you one hundred percent." He said. "You need not worry about us. It's the different governors that will bring these things forth based on who is pulling their strings."

"We only have to tolerate them for a year until new elections are held and then properly supervised." Anebal said.

Narice sat back and shook her head. "I can't believe they would even entertain that train of thought anymore." She said.

"Torlen shut up quick when you said that about his wife." Felisa said with a smile. "I don't think he liked that idea."

Datarik nodded with a grin. "Felisa is right. This might be something that you take to the people." He spoke. "You have their unwavering support Narice and if need be you can go to them."

"God... I hope no one makes the mistake of approaching Arrarn about this." Narice spoke. "He... he would not take it well. He is viciously protective of Toria and I."

Datarik nodded. "Yes... that is something we noticed when he nearly killed the media reporter who suggested your relationship with Toria was unnatural."

Anebal reached out and took her hand. "Go home and tonight make sure he knows that this is a non issue with you." She said with a smile. "That young man worships you Narice. And he has no reason to doubt you."

Narice nodded. "Yes." She said softly. She rose to her feet and looked at them. "If you will excuse me." She said.

Datarik was silent as he watched her exit with Felisa at her side. He turned back to Anebal and Riara as he motioned his own Immortal guard to his side. Va'gek had been here that first day and was a senior Captain in the Immortal ranks. He had eagerly agreed to become Datarik's security officer when the units were being formed. Datarik waited until the six foot six Immortal stood just behind him.

"This is troubling." He spoke.

Anebal nodded. "It's being driven Datarik. And not by those who wish to go into the future on the path Narice is setting us on."

Datarik nodded. "Do either of you believe Arrarn Leonidas being her Blessed husband to be some sort of ploy by Androcles Leonidas to destroy us from within?" He asked.

"Please... if he wanted to destroy us he would not have stopped with Research Station One." Riara spoke. "He could have killed us all that day. If Narice had not succeeded in making us see what we were becoming I fully believe he would have turned her loose on us. I for one do not wish to see her lose her temper."

"Nor do I." Anebal spoke.

Datarik leaned back in his chair. "I agree." He said. He looked at the towering Immortal that was his shadow now. "Va'gek..." He said looking at him. "Can you have a discrete word with Co'kal and perhaps find out where this is coming from? Anyone behind this will to speak with us nearby... but they might let it slip if they felt secure."

Va'gek nodded quickly. "I believe the colonel would do so happily *Ventash'ma* Datarik." He said.

Datarik nodded his head. "Narice is our best and brightest hope for a future. Others may think different... but I believe Androcles when he says that we were meant to be friends and allies and in many cases family. Anything that is a threat to Narice... threatens her... we need to be aware of it. We all agree on that yes?" He said.

Riara nodded his head. "Without question. And we need to make sure Arrarn Leonidas remains unaware of it as well. At least as much as we are able." He said. "Half elf he may be... but he is a Leonidas and they do not react well to others trying to hurt their wives and mates in any way. We all have seen this."

"Indeed." Datarik said. He turned and looked at Va'gek once more. "Have Co'kal see what he can do and then inform me Va'gek."

The Immortal nodded. "Right away."

Anebal got to her feet. "Let's hope Torlen does not push the issue. I have a feeling we would not like to see Narice's response if she were to truly unleash on him."

Datarik nodded. "Nor would I... but I believe we can not control that. And I for one have no desire to try."

SCIMITAR **ORBITING SOLMAR**

They sat at the same table in the mess lounge, against the back wall, but with other crew filled tables all around them. This was Sa'sur and Andro's will at work. There was no special seating for officers or enlisted, and though all of them held a rank of some sort, you could not tell it from the way they interacted with one another. Five Crown Princesses sat at the same table, the Lycavorians among those in the mess lounge detecting immediately that Sehri was now a wife and mate to Androcles Leonidas. It was easy enough to determine just by his scent which lingered powerfully within her blood as it did all of his mates. Even to those who were not Lycavorian it was equally obvious just by the way she acted with the others. Laughter, small kisses between lovers, and almost always in physical contact with each other in some fashion. At least for those on the *SCIMITAR* it was an easy item to pick out.

For Shaman Master Harira it was not so easy.

She sat with Ibani and Osbela at another table, their eyes watching as Sehri laughed out loud with Carisia over something that Lu'ria had said. Harira turned back and looked at Osbela. "You are certain that is what he said Osbela?" Harira asked her.

Osbela nodded. "Yes. I'm surprised he is not here already. I thought he was coming right here after he left me."

"Shaman Master... this cannot be allowed to stand." Ibani spoke. "Our father meant for Osbela or myself to become his wife. Not Sehri!"

"Did she not take a vow Shaman Master?" Osbela asked looking at her. "A vow to the Circle?"

"Yes she did." Harira hissed. "I cannot tolerate this."

"What can we do?" Osbela asked.

Harira got to her feet. "I will remind her of her duty to the Circle and what her father intends for her. Your mother is not here to do that, so I must in her place."

Osbela and Ibani watched as Harira turned and began walking towards their table. They hadn't expected her to react in such a manner but they were both eager to see what would happen.

Sadi was the first to look up when Harira approached and she came to her feet with a smile. "Shaman Master Harira... join us please." Sadi spoke as she motioned to the empty chair at the table.

Sehri nodded quickly. "Yes... please."

Harira was briefly taken aback by the good natured invitation but she recovered quickly and shook her head. "No thank you." She answered. "I did need to speak with Sehri however." She said looking at her. "Privately."

Sadi looked at Sehri who got to her feet slowly. "Certainly." Sehri spoke. "I'll be right back." She told Sadi.

Sadi smiled and they shared a brief kiss before Sehri moved around her and Harira took her hand and began to lead her out of the Mess Lounge. Once out of the Mess Lounge Harira turned quickly and led Sehri a short way down the corridor to an adjoining walkway that was empty of anyone. She pulled her into the area and turned to look at her. Sehri met her eyes with confusion and looked at her.

“Shaman Master Harira... what is this about?” Sehri asked.

“What do you think you are doing?” Harira hissed at her.

Sehri shook her head in puzzlement. “I’m sorry... what I’m doing?” She asked. “I don’t understand the question.”

“You know full well what I am talking about!” Harira snapped. “You have broken your vow to the Circle haven’t you?”

“What?” Sehri asked.

“You... you laid with Androcles Leonidas!” Harira snapped once more. “You shared his bed! Did you allow him to claim you in the fashion of his people?”

Sehri’s eyes grew a little wider and she pulled her hand out of Harira’s grasp. “I’m sorry Shaman Master... but I don’t see how that is any of your business.” She spoke.

“It is my business because you swore a vow to... to the Circle!” Harira snarled angrily. “You swore a vow of celibacy to the Circle of Shamans and you have violated that vow! And you have done so with the man your father intended one of your sisters become wife and mate too!”

Sehri looked shocked at Harira’s reaction, clearly not understanding why she was so angry. Shaman master Harira had always seemed more uptight and too strict in her mannerisms than the other Shaman Masters within the Circle and Sehri had expected her to be upset, but not like this. She was a task master when it came to schooling and while this was not a bad thing by any means, it seemed she always was pushing the students harder than needed. Almost as if she was testing them.

“I... I followed my heart Shaman Master. Androcles followed his heart. Isn’t that... isn’t that what the Circle says we should do?” Sehri asked.

“You have betrayed the Circle with your actions Sehri!” Harira hissed.

Sehri’s glaucous blue eyes narrowed. In the past she would have been chastised and shameful if a Shaman Master suggested she had betrayed the Circle in any manner. Sehri was no longer the same woman however. Discovering Androcles, Sadi and the others; discovering what she could be, all of this had changed her and made her much more confident and decisive in herself and who she was.

“I have betrayed no one!” Sehri snapped at her angrily, surprising Harira. “I followed my heart and it led me here! This is where I belong!”

“You are too young and foolish to know where you belong or what your place in this world is!” Harira growled at her causing Sehri’s eyes to grow even wider at this obvious insult to her intelligence. “Why do you think your father gave you to us?”

“My father gave me to the Circle so that I would not have to suffer the Rothryn Science Academy and how they treat those like me!” Sehri snarled.

Harira shook her head. “Sometimes I wonder if the Academy is not correct in some of its teachings.” She quipped.

“How could you say that?” Sehri gasped.

Harira ignored her and shook her head. “You... you will disavow this... this thing you have started with the Lycavorian Prince and the others. His wives.” She stated as if Sehri was not standing in front of her. “Yes... you will disavow any relationship with them. Tell them it was a mistake. That you were only exploring your womanhood because of your fever. You will be punished of course... but you can remain within the Circle. One of your sisters is better suited for the Lycavorian Prince. You...”

“I will do no such thing!” Sehri snarled angrily now. “Andro is my husband! Sadi and Ne’Veha and the others belong to me as I belong to them!”

“Nonsense! You will end this before it goes further!” Harira demanded.

Sehri looked at her wide eyed in disbelief. “Do not presume to tell me what I will and will not do Shaman Master! You would not care for the reaction you would receive!”

Harira glared at her. “Are... are you threatening me young lady?” She gasped. “I am a Shaman Master and you will do as I tell you! This is part of the vow you took when you entered the Circle! You will do as I tell you! This... this Androcles and the others are not for you! They warp... they warp your thinking!”

Sehri met her eyes with no back down in her whatsoever. “What rubbish!” She barked. “You do not know Andro! You do not know Sadi and the others! Who are you to say that they warp my thinking? You know nothing about them! You do not even know me!”

“Have I have no desire to learn about them! And I know all there is to know about you as an apprentice to the Circle.” Harira snapped.

“You are so wrong Shaman Master Harira! Cleric Mother Ilossa would not say these things to me!” Sehri snapped right back. “Nor would she make these demands from me!”

“I act with her authority as a Shaman Master! She favors you too much!” Harira spat. “Now you will do as I say or I will...”

“Or you will what?” The new voice snapped from behind them, causing both of them to whirl around and watch as Sadi step closer to them from out of the main corridor.

“This does not concern you!” Harira hissed softly.

“Doesn’t it?” Sadi spoke as she stopped beside Sehri and looked at her keenly. “Sehri... we felt your anxiousness and we wanted to find out what was wrong?”

“Shaman Master Harira is demanding I disavow what I have discovered.” Sehri said taking Sadi’s hand within hers without hesitating and looking at Harira. “To just dismiss that Androcles has claimed me. That all of you have claimed me as I have claimed you. She expects me to just dismiss that because of some silly vow I took when I was younger and did not fully know or understand who and what I was.”

Sadi looked at Harira. “Andro followed the letter of your law Shaman Master Harira.” She said. “And he followed the letter of our law as well, which I dare say is more strict than yours. Lady Aleatia was well aware of Andro’s intentions and ours. And she knew how her daughter felt in return. She was very supportive and happy about what Andro was prepared to do!”

“Lady Aleatia does not have any say over what the Circle of Shamans does.” Harira snapped. “Or what we expect of our apprentices!”

Sadi nodded her head. “Perhaps not... but the same can be said of the Circle of Shamans and you. You have no authority over a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union... which is what Sehri is now. She is a Leonidas now.”

“She took a vow!” Harira almost shouted.

“I am not the first apprentice to have a change of heart and want to move in a different life direction!” Sehri snapped at her. “Those who made this same decision were not looked down upon or demanded to disavow their husbands and mates! Why do you do this of me?”

“You are different!” Harira snapped back.

“Why?” Sehri snarled.

Sadi looked at Harira and smiled knowingly. “Because you are the daughter of the leader of the Rothryn people.” She spoke matter-of-factly. “Isn’t that right Shaman Master?”

Harira met her gaze. “You know nothing of what you speak!” She snapped.

Sadi continued to smile. “Don’t I?” She said evenly. “The Circle of Shamans may be the underground equivalent to the Rothryn Science Academy, teaching those with advanced Etheric abilities, but you act in a strangely similar fashion to them if what I have heard about them is accurate.”

“How dare you compare us to... to them?” Harira snarled. “Do not toy with me girl! I will...” Harira’s hands suddenly wrapped with a light blue field of Etheric power as if she intended to use it.

Sadi stepped right up to Harira when she saw this, her fangs extending and her jungle green eyes shifting to her wolf persona. Sehri was surprised at this reaction but seeing Sadi defend her was oddly exciting. And then she saw the light blue Etheric field surround her entire body, not just her hands.

“What will you do Shaman Master Harira?” Sadi prodded her menacingly. “Do not think for an instant that you could possibly stand against me!” Sadi growled at her the soft blue Etheric light suddenly grew a little brighter around her entire body. The dormant Paladin gene within Sadi, like it was with Aricia, afforded her abilities that most did not have. While Aricia could use her psychic knives and mild Etheric power to toss things about, Sadi had long been practicing how to control her ability to use her Etheric Power in a similar physical manner. To move things with force of her will alone. These past months studying the skill sets given to her by the *Feravomir*, Sadi had become quite proficient at using this power. Sadi had a strong will before she met Androcles, but after meeting him and finally accepting her complete love for him, her will began like iron. It only doubled when she bonded with Caydren.

“Your Etheric skills are pitiful when held against what I can do Shaman Master Harira.” Sadi snarled at the woman as any pureblood female would when she was protecting what was hers. “And my skills are

miniscule in comparison to our mate and husband Androcles. Or did you think I would not notice your pathetic attempts to probe my mind ever since I came to Sehri's side." Sadi saw Harira's eyes grow a little wider and she smiled. "Yes... I have felt it... and I have ignored it. Luckily for you. What you have been doing is forbidden within the Union no matter where you go."

"You have been trying to touch her mind?" Sehri gasped in disbelief stepping closer.

"Ever since she came on board the *SCIMITAR*." Sadi answered her "Most have not detected it... but Andro, Carisia and I did right away. Lu'ria and Ne'Veha shortly after. You hide it well Shaman Master... but not from those who know what to look for and are far stronger than you could hope to become."

"How dare you!" Sehri snarled now. "You had no right!"

"Be thankful that Androcles is not here Shaman Master." Sadi continued. "For what you have just suggested Sehri do he would have vented you out the nearest airlock. He's very protective of us. It is a trait he inherited from his father." She told her seeing her eyes grow wider. "I suggest you return to your breakfast table and I will forget this conversation ever took place."

"I will communicate directly with the Cleric Mother!" Harira hissed angrily.

Sadi nodded her head. "Please do so." She said. "It will be interesting to see her reaction to the news."

"This... this could cause severe political fallout!" Harira snapped.

Sadi shook her head. "I do not share your misgivings Shaman Master Harira..." She said. "But I do know threatening a Crown Princess of the Union in any way is a death sentence. Is that what you wish to do?"

"You cannot protect her!" Harira hissed angrily.

Sadi chuckled softly. "You think I am protecting her? Sehri does not need me or anyone to protect her." She said proudly. "She is far more capable than you know. Especially now with Andro's blood swirling in her veins."

Harira looked at Sehri with wide eyes. "You let him... you let him bite you?" She gasped in shock.

Sehri crossed her arms over her chest. "Yes." She replied tartly. "And it was glorious!"

"Perhaps you should go now Shaman Master Harira." Sadi said. "When we get back to Earth we can take this up with Lady Aleatia and get her point of view."

"This will not be allowed to remain in place!" Harira snapped.

Sadi chuckled and took Sehri's hand, drawing her close. "Really? Try convincing our husband and mate of that fact Shaman Master. You will find he is not as understanding as I am." Her eyes returned to normal and her fangs disappeared slowly. "If you will excuse us... we have a breakfast to finish. Our husband and mate is on his way as we speak... and he is inquiring why our heart rates and emotions are elevated. Should I tell him?"

Harira met Sadi's eyes. She had no desire to get into a situation with Androcles Leonidas at this time. There were better places to have this battle. "Then I will wait until we have a chance to speak with Sehri's father and mother and the Cleric Mother of the Circle."

Sadi smiled. "An intelligent move to be sure." She said. "Come Sehri... Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria have been running interference for us, but Andro's inquiries are becoming more insistent."

Sehri didn't resist when Sadi began to draw her away from Harira. She only glared at the Shaman Master for a moment before turning and moving with Sadi.

[Sadi she...] Sehri began.

Sadi nodded her head slightly. *[Yes... she made an awful big deal about this. Much more than I would have suspected. There is more to this than some silly vow you made years ago.]*

[But what?] Sehri asked her.

[Something tells me we will find out soon enough.] Sadi looked at her as they headed back towards the Mess Lounge. *[Tell me of this woman and this Circle of Shamans Sehri. My instincts are shouting for me to be careful and I want to know why.]*

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ONTEROM

“...Delnash. Now there is an interesting man.” Sumar’s voice spoke. ***“He isn’t like the others he surrounds himself with. He’s cerebral... likes to think everything through and then make his decision. He’s precise and conscious of every avenue available to him. He has run the Science Convention with skill and that same precision. I should expect no less... he is Murano’s older brother and now I see where Murano gets it.”***

Delnash stood in the corner of the transport just behind the cockpit. He was alone as the others were loading up the ramp and the pilots were running their preflight checks. In his hand he held the data disc that Martin Leonidas had given him only a few hours ago. This was the second time he had viewed the disc and what it contained and to say he was stunned would have been the understatement of the century. He glanced back as others were moving into the rear of the transport, making sure that he was undisturbed and then he turned back to the disc. In the view of the small disc in his palm he saw the holographic image of Sumar move and settle into the chair at the desk. Looking at the man he could not deny the resemblance Martin Leonidas had to him, or the significance of this. He watched as Sumar lifted a glass to his lips and drink some liquid and then turn his head.

“41... this information is current yes?”

-As current as the databases allowed when we left Chief Elder- The Avatar’s voice replied.

“What do you think 41?” Sumar asked.

-Nothing you have dictated is inaccurate Chief Elder. I have nothing further to add that would alter the decision you have already made- 41 answered. **-If you are asking my opinion... the information provided is sufficient enough to deduce he would act as he has always acted-**

Sumar chuckled. ***“Thank you 41... your insight is always exacting in detail.”***

-Of course Chief Elder-

Delnash watched Sumar lean back in the chair. ***“Elder Delnash... recently married and head of the Science Convention. Among all the men and women I have reviewed so far on this trip, he is by far best suited for the position. His natural compassion balances the hard decisions he would need to make, but he will not sacrifice who he is in order to please one group. He uses facts and instinct and so far he has not been wrong in combining those two. I have spoken to Murano about him, gotten to know him through his brother.”*** Sumar shook his head. ***“Makes me wish Murano was here now. Wayonn agrees that we should have brought him... but leaving him behind to watch over things was the wiser thing to do. Something... something told me that his path... his path leads him down a different road and in order to follow that road he needs to be where he is.”***

“When we return I will submit to the Convention of Elders that Delnash replace me when I step down.” Sumar spoke. ***“Wayonn and I agree that five years is sufficient to train those Praetorians we have with us. Once that is done... I will give the reins of leadership to Delnash and assume my role as leader of the Praetorians. I believe we can work closely together to insure our people are kept safe from the Scourge. With Delnash at the helm of political matters, I can concentrate on our defenses and be confident that he will have the interests of our people in his heart. The Scourge will be back... of that I am certain. My fool brother made sure of that when he conducted his twisted experiments and gave them the ability to reason and think. They will not be so easy to defeat next time and it will be up to Delnash and I to make sure we are not caught unaware.”*** Sumar lowered his glass back to the desk. ***“As a side note... my brother’s actions will taint our family now. No matter that father and I pushed for his punishment... our mother and father and even our sisters and brother will need to endure the consequences of his foul actions. I intend to take the Conventions punishment one step further and expel the chamber with his body into the next Red Giant we pass. I will inform City Ship 19 to release the chamber with his essence into the gravity well of the Brown***

Dwarf Star we will pass in the next system. He grew too powerful and let that affect his decisions. He wanted to be a god. I can't take the risk of his essence returning to his body in some way. I will be killing my brother permanently... but it is the only way."

Delnash watched Sumar get to his feet. *"41... make the proper entries in the logs. Make sure they are dispatched at the next Network station with our position and status. And send a short message to Murano letting him know what I intend for when we return."*

-The usual greeting Chief Elder?-

Sumar nodded his head with a smile. *"Yes... he likes that."*

Delnash deactivated the data disc and took a slow, deep breath. This was not what he had expected when Martin Leonidas had given it to him. He had expected plans or demands that he was going to make. He had never expected this.

Sumar was, by a very wide margin, the most popular and respected Chief Elder that their people had ever elected. His victories during the First Scourge War had seen to that, but his way of leadership was also honored and respected. He did not ask of those who served with him something that he was not prepared to do himself and Delnash could see this very same trait within Martin Leonidas. He turned and watched as more of his troops boarded and took their seats. He could see Lorendo sitting with Sashan and talking in whispers. Lorendo did not look in the least bit happy but at the moment Delnash didn't care. No matter what his reasons were, Lorendo was responsible for too many deaths in the last few days to just dismiss that. And the fact that he did not seem to care infuriated Delnash.

The flash of movement outside the ramp caught his eyes and he saw the massive dragon land by where the Lycavorian ship was resting some two hundred meters behind their own. He watched the large figure leap easily from the back of the massive dragon and knew it could only be Martin Leonidas.

"I came here hoping to find my history." Martin's voice echoed softly in his head as he watched him jump easily from the dragon's back. *"I came here hoping maybe... just maybe to find my ancestors. So I could learn about my past and what it means. Instead I came here and found you."*

Those words cut Delnash deep now. Too deeply.

That Martin Leonidas was a Praetorian was without doubt in his mind. He could not deny it any longer after seeing what he had seen and he was every bit his grandfather's equal, if not more powerful, because of the Lycavorian blood flowing within him. He knew that exceptional Lycavorian blood was what afforded him the indomitable will and drive that surrounded him and his personality. Delnash thought for a moment... perhaps... perhaps Sumar knew exactly what he was doing when he merged their peoples together so long ago. He may have seen this very thing. The intensity and the pull over men and women that this Martin Leonidas exuded without even knowing it. Delnash continued to watch as two men moved up to where he stood beside the massive dragon, one of them his own brother Murano. He had made the decision to return with Martin Leonidas and there was nothing Delnash could do about that now. Even as Chief Elder he could not command a Praetorian to do something and he had no intention of ever denouncing his brother no matter what anyone said to the contrary. Murano was different now. The purpose Murano had been lacking since the end of the war had returned with a vengeance and Delnash knew without question it was because of the discovery of the Praetorian blood within Martin Leonidas and his sons. Sumar had spoken in the transmission of leaving Murano behind for a purpose. This meeting, discovering these men and women, that had to be the very purpose he had been speaking of.

Delnash looked across the field and realized he did not show him enough; he had not shown him through the past years the thanks and awe that he held his brother in for doing what he did during the wars. Murano had given up so much, far more than even he knew and he had saved so many lives back then. Now Lorendo and so many like him believed they could survive without the Praetorian Guard of the Pralor people. How foolish and arrogant they had become since their downfall. It was as if they were returning to the ways that led to their destruction by the Scourge. That was something he could not allow.

Delnash felt the presence of someone and turned his head to see Kesyla standing beside him. “Kesyla?” He said softly looking at his oldest daughter.

“I know what you are thinking papa.” She spoke softly.

Delnash smiled. “Do you?”

“Uncle Murano is going with them. Elder Kasdan and his brother. Elder Radra.” Kesyla spoke. “You are wondering...”

“How did I ever let things get so out of control?” Delnash said softly, completing her statement. “Have we grown so arrogant and complacent that we think like Lorendo? That the loss of life on this mission means nothing?”

“You are not Lorendo papa.” Kesyla told him.

“Mari won’t talk to me.” Delnash said softly continuing. “And I can’t order her about any longer. She is fully grown.”

“She intends to go with Uncle Murano Papa?” Kesyla said.

Delnash looked at her. “You knew?”

Kesyla shook her head. “I suspected. She is very taken with Uncle Murano with good reason and she wants to see and experience so much more. I tried to talk her out of it but she would not hear of it.”

“Short of keeping her under armed guard... what choice do I have?” Delnash spoke. “If I do that she will hate me.”

“You have known for many years she is adventurous.” Kesyla spoke. “It is in her very nature... and you know where that comes from.”

“And what about you?” Delnash asked.

“I am your senior aide papa.” Kesyla answered him. “But... if you are asking me if I would find traveling with these men and women and learning about them intriguing... then the answer is yes. I would... very much so.”

“You admire them?” Delnash asked.

“In a way.” She replied. “They have a spirit and passion about them. A spirit that will never be crushed. A passion that will never go away. They do not fear what will come as we do. No matter what it is.”

“A trait that can be dangerous.” Delnash said.

Kesyla nodded. “But so very rewarding.”

Delnash met her eyes and smiled. “It could be yes.” He spoke. He lifted the data disc so she could see it. “I thought it would be a list of demands or something of that nature that he was making.” He smiled. “I was wrong once more.”

“What was on it Papa?” Kesyla asked.

“Someone talking about the man I used to be.” Delnash answered. “The man I should be now.” He took her arm. “Tell me daughter... does your admiration for these people push aside whatever fear you may have of what is out there?”

Kesyla nodded. “If it is for the purpose I see in your eyes... yes papa. It is the look you had when mother married you... according to her.” She finished with a smile.

Delnash smiled. “Come with me then. These Svorag have reached the surface some sixty kilometers from here and they are heading this way. We need to move quickly.” He squeezed her arm. “Grab your brother and come with me.”

“... Like cockroaches!” Martin spoke. “Thousands of them! And they are moving fast. Torma and I did two passes high up and one low. We got about ninety minutes before they are all over this area.”

“Everything is just about loaded *fervon*.” Danny told him. “We’ll be long gone from here by then.”

Murano nodded his head. “I believe everyone who has made the decision to come with us is here as well.” He stated.

Martin met his eyes. “You sure about this Murano? Are they sure? We ain’t coming back here. Not after what has happened.” Martin said.

Murano nodded his head. "I believe what has happened here the last few days has opened some eyes Martin." He spoke. "For Kasdan and Radra both. I can't seem to keep my niece away from me no matter how hard I try. I asked her three times to reconsider this. Each time she just looked at me like I was insane."

Martin shook his head with a grin. "She's a woman Murano. You can't figure out what they are thinking half the time no matter how hard you try. Better to just agree with them. It's safer."

We heard that! Aricia and For'mya's voices filled Martin's mind at the same time and he could hear his other mates chuckling within Mindvoice.

Murano and Danny looked at him with smiles having heard the unshielded response. "No way you can hide from six of them!" Danny said. "You are really screwed *fervon*."

Murano was smiling when he saw his brother moving up towards them with Kesyla and Daron in tow. "Martin." He said motioning with his head.

Martin turned slowly having already smelled Chief Elder Delnash, his son and daughter approaching them from across the space between their ships. He watched the Pralor Chief Elder come to a halt in front of them and he could see Lorendo and Sashan standing on the ramp of their own ship glaring across the distance at them. He turned his eyes to Delnash as he came to a stop in front of him. "Chief Elder?" He finally said.

Delnash fingered the data disc for a long moment before looking at Martin. "I take it you have seen what is on this?" He asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Most of it yes." He answered.

"Why give this to me?" Delnash asked. "After what happen here... why give this to me now?"

"Let's just say my grandfather saw something in you that others did not." Martin said. "The same thing that I see, but it's buried under a whole lot of bullshit. I wanted you to know what that was."

Delnash looked at Murano and then back to Martin. "Bullshit? What is this... bullshit?"

Martin smiled and looked at Danny before turning back to Delnash. "Let's just say..."

"I believe it is a term they use to describe what could be considered a façade of sorts Papa." Kesyla spoke.

Danny laughed. "That's a lot nicer than I would have described but yeah."

"You don't give up trying do you?" Delnash asked Martin.

Martin smiled and shook his head. "Giving up ain't in my nature. Leaves a bad taste in my mouth." He told him. "What can I do for you sir... we're getting ready to depart. And you should be too."

"How long before they get here?" Delnash asked surprised at the respect and tone Martin was using with him. It was not what he had expected though he was rapidly learning that with Martin Leonidas you didn't always get what you expected.

"Ninety minutes roughly." Martin answered.

Delnash met his eyes. "I find myself wishing that all of this had not happened in the way it has Martin Leonidas." He spoke evenly. "I... I used to be able to admit when I was wrong but it seems that trait has fallen to the side in these past millennia. Not anymore. I have been wrong. About you. About your people and about listening to others with a different agenda. I want... I want to try and make amends."

"Why?" Martin asked. "You didn't seem particularly willing to be open minded not so long ago. Seems awful sudden like."

Delnash nodded his head. "No I did not." He said in reply. "I was listening to others and not following what my own instincts told me. Instincts I have not followed in far too long." He told him. "What... what I allowed to happen here is not me Martin Leonidas. What I allowed to happen here is tearing my people apart... and those are just the ones here with me. The security forces are divided about what they were ordered to do... many of them know what you are and it goes against the very essence of our people to openly fight a Praetorian."

"We are not gods brother." Murano spoke now.

Delnash nodded. "No... but you are the most respected and revered men and women in our history and they can sense that Martin is also a Praetorian, no matter the blood that runs in his veins. They also sense there are more of you. I can not imagine what it would do to our population if what happen here, if it gets out to them in a way that is not of my own accord and truthfulness."

"So you are worried about your position?" Martin asked.

Delnash met his eyes. "I am worried about my people." He said not taking offence at the comment. "Everything I have done through the years has been for them. Some of what I have done is not popular but... but I thought it was the right thing to do at the time. I have been listening to the wrong people and taking their advice instead of following what I would want myself. I intend to stop that."

"How?" Martin asked.

"I would like Kesyla and Daron to accompany you." Delnash spoke. "No matter how much I try to keep the knowledge that you exist from reaching my people... it will get out to them because I don't intend to suppress it. And it will happen much faster than even I realize I suspect. I can't deny what you are anymore... I can't..."

"I'm just a man." Martin said.

Delnash looked at him. "If only that were the case." He spoke. "If we are going to survive as a people, if I am going to see my people live on, then I need to follow what my instincts are telling me."

"And what are they telling you brother?" Murano asked softly.

"That we are connected to you and your people Martin Leonidas." Delnash answered him looking at Martin. "That in order to survive... we must do so together. And that means... that means accepting things that we have previously been reluctant too. I can't just dismiss your existence. Not after what has happened here."

"What are you proposing then?" Martin asked.

"That we stay in contact." Delnash said. "Let me return and work with Teniri. Let me brace our people for the knowledge that... that we are no longer alone. That we don't have to be alone anymore."

Martin turned and looked at Murano and Danny for a long moment. He turned back to Delnash and looked at Kesyla and Daron. "You would trust me with your children?" He asked.

"I trust that you are a Praetorian like my brother." Delnash spoke. "Like your grandfather was. Protecting those in your charge is part of what you are as a Praetorian. I learned that from my brother. And I sense that you would never allow harm to come to any man's children if it is in your power to prevent."

[Ladies?] Martin reached for his wives and mates.

[Do not try to play this down Martin Leonidas.] Aricia's sweet voice spoke... assuming the tone for all of his wives as she so often did. *[Do you think we do not know why you came out here? What you were searching for? It is not what we wished for... the way it has come about... but it is the beginning that we desired.]*

Delnash could feel the tremors within the Etheric realm as Martin talked to someone. They were supremely powerful and the shields he had up were unlike anything Delnash had ever felt. He glanced at his brother who was staring at him. Delnash knew this was the right thing to do. He could feel it within him. He saw Mari come walking down the ramp towards them a look of confusion on her face, Radra right behind her. Kasdan remained at the top of the ramp of the unique looking ship.

[How is it that I was blessed to have all of you in my life?] Martin spoke to them all.

[You're lucky as all hell.] Anja's voice quipped playfully. *[And you aren't so bad looking either. And you have a really big...]*

[Melyanna!] Dysea's voice cut in.

[What? I'm only telling the truth!] Anja replied.

[Anja has a point Ussta She-elf.] Isabella chimed in with more than a little humor in her tone.

[And it is all ours.] For'mya spoke now. *[You have our love and devotion Martin Leonidas. And we feel your desire to do this. Follow your heart and we shall trust in that.]*

[Yes we will.] Cirith finished.

Martin chuckled along with his wives and mates in Mindvoice and looked at Delnash as Mari came up beside Murano. He sniffed the air slightly and caught the scent he hadn't detected before, his eyes growing a little wider but he kept his face and emotions rigidly impassive and turned to face Delnash fully. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Danny had detected it as well but was doing nothing. Dan's sense of smell was very nearly as acute as his.

Martin nodded to Delnash. "It is what I want as well." Martin said. "What I think all of us want. It's part of the reason we came out here. And to help Muton and the others discover their history as well. There are buckets and buckets of history that connect us now because of what my grandfather did, what Muton's grandmother did and I am not the only one who wishes to discover that history."

Delnash nodded his head slowly. "Then let me... let me make the first overture to you. In order to show you that I am not... that what I allowed to happen here is not me."

Martin shook his head. "That's not necessary. I would be able to smell if you were lying to me." He said reaching up and tapping his nose. "One of the little advantages we have as a species."

Delnash looked surprised. "That... that is fascinating." He said shifting on his feet. "Then you... what about...?"

"He is lying his ass off and he hasn't stopped." Martin stated bluntly. "And he will be a problem for you going forward too... now that he knows we are around. He's hiding a lot more than what went on here."

Delnash's eyes narrowed somewhat and he gave a curt nod. "I will deal with Lorendo." He said. "Trust me when I tell you that."

"I'll hold you to that sir." Martin said. "He's responsible for enough deaths already. Your own people as well as mine. Any more that occur because of him and I will deal with him myself and it will not be pleasant." Martin's voice was not amusing and Delnash detected that easily.

Delnash nodded. "Very well." He said. He turned and took Kesyla's arm. "You have met my oldest daughter Kesyla. She is my senior aide and will know how to contact me for any reason. Even in ways that others do not know."

Kesyla bowed her head. "It will be an honor traveling with you King Leonidas." She said softly.

Martin smiled and looked at Murano quickly before turning back to her. "You might not think so after you see the trouble that I always seem to get into."

"Now... ain't that the bleeding truth!" Danny snorted softly.

Kesyla smiled at this comment and squeezed her father's hand. "I think it might." She said.

Delnash turned and motioned to Daron. "My son Daron. He is my oldest and is a very competent researcher. One of our best in Bioengineering Theory. He may be able to help your own people."

Daron also bowed his head slightly. "I look forward to meeting the different species among your people King Leonidas. They seem very dedicated."

Martin looked at Delnash now. "All three of your children?" He said. "That's quite a vote of confidence Chief Elder."

Delnash nodded slowly after looking at Murano. He turned back to Martin. "Perhaps it is... but is it undeserved?"

Martin met his eyes. "No." He said confidently. He stepped closer and held out the small disc he took from his belt. "Quantum Com Frequency that Avi monitors all of the time for me. You want me... you contact me on that."

Delnash looked at him. "What are you planning to do?" He asked.

"I'm going to send the bodies of my people home to Sparta." Martin spoke. "Then I have an appointment with my sorry ass brother. After I find a nice, out of the way planet and let the hatchlings we have spread their wings and hunt for a few days."

Delnash gripped the disc and nodded his head. "I... I intend to make you see that you have not come out here for nothing Martin Leonidas." He said meeting his eyes. "That your purpose for leaving your home and family was justified."

Martin nodded. "We'll see." He said. "We need to get moving."

Delnash nodded. "Of course." He said. "If I could speak to Mari first?"

Martin turned and looked at her. "Be quick... these lizard bastards might be faster than we think." He said before turning and heading up into the *STRIKER*.

Mari looked at Delnash as he took her hands and waited for the others to move up into the ship. [*What... what are you doing?*] She reached for him.

Delnash smiled. [*What I should have done a long time ago.*] He answered. [*I'm going to be who I should be. I'm going to do what I think is right.*]

[*Papa... you...*] Mari began.

Delnash shook his head. [*No.*] He told her. [*You don't need to say it. I can see it in your eyes and I would do the same thing as well. Your mother won't be happy you know.*]

[*You will explain it to her?*] Mari asked.

Delnash nodded. [*I will try.*] He reached up and caressed her cheek. [*Mari?*]

Mari covered his hand with hers. *[I need to do this.]* She stated.
[You realize it might not receive the reaction you are hoping for.] Delnash said.

Mari nodded. *[I have to try.]*

Delnash nodded. *[Yes you do.]*

[Thank you for understanding Papa.] Mari said.

[Just be careful. If anything were to happen to you... your mother would have my head.] Delnash told her.

Mari chuckled and smiled brightly at him. *[I will.]*

Delnash leaned forward and kissed her forehead. *[Go with the gods Mari my child.]* He said softly.

[And you Papa.]

Delnash watched as she turned and raced back up the ramp. He looked around, took a deep breath and then turned to head back to his own ship. Perhaps things would begin to look up now. He intended to make sure events were no longer dictated by others. He intended to take charge and become the leader that Sumar believed he could be.

ARC ROYAL

Martin walked onto the bridge of the *ARC ROYAL* with Murano, Avi and the others following close behind. Anja and Aricia were taking Jacina and Recia directly to the Medical Bay with Isabella, while For'mya, Dysea and Cirith secured the *STRIKER* and began to see to the dissemination of the mounds of information they had taken from the station. Murano and the others were astonished at the level of sophistication of the *ARC ROYAL*, more so because they had never been on any ship besides a Pralor vessel. They took everything in as they moved through the corridors and up the Elevator Lift that deposited them just outside the bridge.

Avi moved immediately to a sensor station where the female operator moved out of his way and began to monitor a smaller console just to his right. Captain Akemi didn't rise from her command chair as Martin came up to her side which surprised Kasdan and the others with the exception of Murano. Martin Leonidas was King and they expected others to jump to their feet and bow to his will.

"Akemi?" Martin asked.

"All stations secure sire." She reported. "We're standing by to execute."

Martin glanced over to where Avi stood. "Avi?" He asked the hulking Avatar.

-Twenty-three seconds Martin- Avi answered.

Kasdan stepped up next to Murano. "What is happening?" He asked looking at Martin.

Martin looked at him hearing his question. He liked the Pralor Researcher and his brother Garan. Kasdan was very down to earth, if a little excitable, and his brother had proven to be cool under fire even though he was out of his league and knew it.

"I'm going to make sure this little group of Svorag are not a problem for anyone going forward." Martin said.

"What do you mean?" Daron asked moving closer as well.

"Watch." Martin said.

-They have deactivated Avatar 27- Avi spoke now.

"We expected that." Martin chimed in. "Did he accomplish his objective?"

-Affirmative. I am syncing control now- Avi answered.

"What are you doing?" Daron asked again more forcefully now.

Murano looked at him. “Something that needs to be done.” He said. “Lorendo’s horrors at this facility need to be cleansed.”

“Uncle?” Kesyla asked moving closer to him. “What do you mean?”

Martin looked at Avi’s back. “Avi?”

-I have access Martin Leonidas- Avi answered. -I am initiating shutdown of the Pralor targeting systems and main power to their weapons-

Martin turned to Akemi. “Do it!” He hissed softly.

Akemi nodded and turned her head slightly to the side. “Weapons Officer! Four Fusion Matter Torpedoes! Full yield! Target the station! Follow on with half a dozen H19 Concussion Missiles with Plasma Tipped warheads!”

“Weapons aye!” The man barked.

“Ventral weapons pods!” Akemi snapped. “Fire at will!”

“Fusion Torps away!” The man barked. “Missiles on ten second follow up!”

Akemi looked at Martin. “It’s over kill sire... but better safe than sorry.” She spoke almost casually.

Martin nodded. “I like safe.” He told her.

“Missiles away!” The weapons officer barked out.

“Give me visual from orbital ventral cameras!” Akemi snapped. “Main screen!”

The large forward screen which took up half the forward hull of the bridge came alive with a view from orbit of Onterom. The cameras appeared to be focused over the continent that held the Science facility. Everyone could see several bright spots racing across the lower screen and into the atmosphere. Seconds later they saw a massive flare on the surface of the planet which announced the death of the Pralor Science station for anyone watching.

“Captain! We’re being hailed by the Pralor ship!” The female shouted from her COM station.

Akemi nodded. “I just bet we are. Probably pissed in their pants when we fired. Put it up on the main disc.” She ordered as Martin grinned from beside her chair.

Martin and the others turned as Sashan’s face body appeared in the transmission, his face twisted into anger.

“What are you doing?” He barked angrily. “You are firing on our ship!”

Martin and the others could see the crew of the Pralor ship’s bridge racing back and forth as they tried to regain control of their ship from Avi’s hacking.

“I’m doing what you should have done.” Martin snapped back to him. “And our weapons are firing at the planet... or did you miss that part. That facility needed to be destroyed. And all the Svorag as well.”

“Release control of our ship immediately!” Sashan barked.

Martin smiled. “I will. In a moment.” Martin said. “Akemi?”

Akemi looked at the small screen on the arm of her chair. “Clean hits by the FM Torps.” She replied. “If these readings are right we caught them as they were swarming all over the facility.”

“Avi... coordinates to their little haven under the station?” Martin barked out.

-Feeding them to Fire Control now- Avi replied. -We must use our complement of ZMF missiles in order to penetrate the twenty-four meters of lime and bedrock to the main cryo chamber ceiling. Follow on concussion will bring the remainder of the chamber down-

“Do it!” Martin barked without hesitation.

Within seconds the *ARC ROYAL*’s primary complement of the deadly ZMF warheads were launching. Nineteen of the missiles streaked from their ventral launch tubes headed for one point on the surface. Martin caught the movement of the corner of his eye and saw Delnash entering the bridge of the Pralor ship with a frantic Lorendo in tow. Their bridge crew was also monitoring what was taking place on the surface and in seconds they were watching dozens more huge flares from the surface as the ZMF missiles hit their target and destroyed the main chamber of the Svorag on the surface. Seismic scans taken later would show that the entire cavern had collapsed upon itself with the destructive force of the missiles that hit in the small ten meter area.

“Picking up massive seismic activity!” The Tactical Officer barked out.

-Confirmed- Avi spoke quickly. –The Svorag cavern is collapsing upon itself Martin. Resulting tremors from the explosions are causing both minor and major tunnel sections to collapse as well-

Daron was the one who stepped forward. “You... you just killed thousands of them.” He gasped. Martin looked at him. “I did.” He answered.

“Your wife developed a cure!” Daron hissed. “You said so yourself!”

“She developed a cure that worked on two of your people who were not fully changed.” Martin told him. “We don’t know if it would have worked on those who have been fully changed for any length of time. And neither of us had the manpower to try and subdue them to try and find out!”

Sashan was the next to speak from the bridge of the Pralor ship. “I demand you release control of our ship!”

Martin looked at him in the transmission. “I just bet you do.” He said.

Lorendo stepped into the transmission now. “You... you just destroyed thousands of hours of research and data we could have used you fool!”

Martin grinned at him in the transmission. “No I didn’t dumb ass! Us primitives are not as stupid as you like to think we are.” He said. “Any one of my mates could think circles around you sport. We have the data.”

“What?” Lorendo nearly screamed. “You have stolen it?”

Martin smiled. “I didn’t steal it. I liberated it from your P9 as you were sending it up to your ship. Well... what you thought you were sending to your ship. Before Anja took your computer from you. It only looks like you were sending it to your ship. You actually uploaded it to my ship.” Martin chuckled. “Wait... that would mean the person who configured the signals so you didn’t detect them, my elven pilot Endith by the way, that would mean she is smarter than you? Imagine that?”

Lorendo’s eyes were filled with rage and his face was about to turn five different shades of red. He turned his head as Delnash came closer and entered the transmission. “Chief Elder... you cannot allow this!” Lorendo nearly shouted. “That is our data! That...”

Delnash ignored him and met Martin’s eyes. “What do you intend to do with this data Martin?” He asked causally.

“I intend to have it disseminated, examined thoroughly, and then I will send you a report based on truth and facts and not the shit that Lorendo there tries to shovel out his mouth.” Martin growled.

Delnash thought about that for a second, it was really all the time he needed for after speaking with him, Delnash felt he could trust Martin Leonidas more than his own people at this time. He nodded his head. “I look forward to seeing the report.” He said finally, causing Lorendo to nearly fall over in shock.

“Chief Elder... you can’t be serious!” He exclaimed. “That data... it has details to our technology that...”

“That they already possess.” Delnash told him. “In case you have missed that part.” He turned to Sashan. “What systems have been affected by the virus?”

“Weapons. Targeting. Nothing... nothing else.” Sashan answered.

Delnash turned back to Martin. “Do you think you were able to capture all of them within the blast radius?”

“I don’t know... but enough so that they aren’t a threat for the moment. At least not on this planet.” Martin answered.

Delnash nodded. “Avatar 27?”

“You can reactivate him.” Martin spoke. “He did what we wanted him to do before you shut him down. You really should start treating them better. The Avatars among your fleet. They could be so much more if you let them.”

Delnash couldn’t help but smile. “Yes... so I see. I will... I will consider what you have said Martin.” He said. “How long?”

“One hour.” Martin answered. “Enough time to jump several times so you can’t follow and no one can slip and give away our location with orders to destroy us. If you get my meaning when I say that.” Martin said looking right at Lorendo.

“You are nothing!” Lorendo nearly screamed. “You are nothing more than the animals you can change into!”

Martin nodded his head. “That may be...” He said. “But this animal will kill you the next time I see you fat man. And it won’t be quick or painless either. Remember that Lorendo you lard ass... because we might be seeing you again real soon!”

Lorendo was struck into silence at his words and his eyes went to Delnash. “Chief Elder?”

Delnash ignored him again and looked at Martin from the transmission. “Until we meet again Martin Leonidas. Go with the grace and guidance of the... of our Ancestors.”

Martin stood up a little straighter and bowed his head slightly to Delnash. It was an act not unnoticed by Mari, Kesyla or Murano and the others. An act of respect and honor. “And you sir.” He said.

The transmission ended and Martin turned to Avi immediately. “Avi... set the timer for one hour. Akemi... begin evasive pattern delta four. Begin jumping in three minutes. First stop is to grab Muton and the others and then continue.”

Akemi nodded. “We’re on it.”

Martin looked at Murano and the others. “Come on... I’ll give you a quick tour and then show you to your quarters.”

SCIMITAR ORBITING SOLMAR

How did this happen?

How could she have let this happen?

How did she become so weak as to let this take place? She had always prided herself on her self control and staunch position. She had worked so very hard to get to where she was and to let this happen was something she could not believe she had allowed. In her three hundred plus years of life no man had ever been able to crack her barrier. She had bedded many of them in those years, but none of them could even come close to the events and exquisite satisfaction of the last seven hours. Part of her mind screamed at her that she was insane for allowing this to happen, but the other part was singing in happiness she had never felt in all her life. Her lithe body was shouting to the stars at what she was feeling. Dorian hadn’t just fucked her... that was what the men before him had done. No... Dorian Leonidas had consumed her. Possessed her and reshaped her and everything about her. He was insatiable and like a playful child who was so very eager with a new toy. A child he was not however, Sheva learned very quickly, as he had done such a masterful job of turning her into a babbling idiot.

Sheva Juconi lifted her head slowly from his broad, powerful chest and turned to look at his face. His fingers were dragging along her back and shoulders, one of her legs thrown over his, her taut breasts pressed firmly to his side. His one cobalt blue eye glittered in the dim light, and combined with his dark brown eye, they made her feel so utterly content. His eyes were an oddity of his heritage, but one he wore with extreme pride.

Content.

An emotion that she was by no means used to. Sheva had heard all of the locker room rumors and whispers from other females of how all of the Leonidas men must be built like bulls in the cock department. Why else would all of the Queens and Princesses walk around with permanent smiles on their faces and looks of adoration at their men? Until this day Sheva had never put much stock in them. Sheva may have been a member of the famed *Durcunusaan* and she was every bit as lethal in combat with her training, but she was also only five foot two and barely over a hundred pounds soaking wet. Dorian Leonidas had used this to his advantage and her extreme delight. After that first plunge down his incredibly long and thick manhood against the bulkhead, Sheva’s orgasms came in cascading waves that were almost nonstop. Dorian was definitely not shy about what he wanted, and what he wanted was her Sheva soon discovered. He took her with dominating power, eagerly plunging into her depths, driving her to greater and greater heights of passion until their eruption could not be denied. Sheva had screamed in blissful abandon when his vampiric fangs had sunk into her neck just as they exploded and sent her spinning wildly into a realm of pleasure she had never known or imagine

could exist. His dual fangs were slightly thicker and longer than normal vampires because of his wolf blood but the pain as they pierced her skin was quickly washed aside by the inconceivable wave of pleasure that crashed through her as he fed on her blood during their explosion, amplifying their pleasure by four fold.

It hadn't stopped there by any means.

Sheva had not even recovered from her first explosion before he was ravishing her body with attention and causing her to shiver and quake in anticipation of more. Her petite body fit within his embrace like it was made especially for him, and this was something that Sheva took note of right away. His kisses were like molten lava stealing her breath away and burning with desire and passion she had never felt. He was so very animated and soon Sheva had surrendered to the swelling emotions within her and began directing him to certain areas of her body that would elicit the most reaction. These he found easily enough and when he began to discover areas that even Sheva had not known about, her world descended into an chasm of heavenly ardor and pleasure. His lips and tongue never ceased moving, his fingers and hands, so large and powerful, caressed her flesh like feathers across her skin. He was soon feasting on her in ways she had never dreamed of or experienced before, her body quaking in one raging climax after another.

Sheva was by no means inactive once she had given in to the swell of desire and emotion she was feeling; it just wasn't in her character. She delighted in the power she had over him, grasping his maleness in her hands and using her soft lips and nibbles to keep him hard and ready and exploring the dominating cock that now belonged all to her. Twice Sheva had drank down his passion, something she had never done before with any man that had shared her bed and she found it so very delicious to her taste buds. She rode him hard at times, taking complete control as he laid there and stared up at her, and then she allowed him to stroke into her with exquisite slowness while his kisses ignited more fires within her. She never imagined a kiss could cause such superb sensations and she pulled him tighter with each blistering kiss he gave to her. He could have gone on for hours more she had no doubts, but he sensed her body's weariness after so many hours and his powerful arms finally encircled her and pulled her close without words, content to hold her head to his chest and stroke her short, wavy blond hair as she tried to calm her breathing and her racing heart.

Dorian reached up with a hand and used two fingers to trace her jaw and cheek. Sheva smiled dreamily and leaned into the caress slightly.

"You look like you have questions." Dorian spoke finally.

"Why?" She asked softly.

"Why what?"

"Why me?" Sheva spoke.

"I don't understand the question." Dorian said tilting his head slightly.

"Why did you pick me?" Sheva asked.

Dorian chuckled softly. "I didn't pick you Sheva." He said. "Fate picked you. My wolf blood picked you. My instincts picked you. My heart picked you. From the very first moment I smelled you."

"Dorian... you know I..." Sheva began.

"Don't believe in any of that." Dorian finished her statement. "Yes... I know. You have said that on a number of occasions. Do you still have faith in saying that now? Even before these last few hours... I could have found you among millions just by the scent of your blood, by your unique scent, which for some reason vampires don't believe they have..."

"And what do I smell like to you?" Sheva asked him with a grin.

Dorian smiled. "Like a Dalfier Rose."

Sheva laughed softly and spread her hand across his broad chest, tracing the extreme definition of his pectoral muscles. "Dalfier roses are unique to their world Dorian. I would have known if you had gone to the Folcani homeworld."

Dorian grinned. "My father has. My mother has." He answered. "I have his memories Sheva. And hers to a much smaller extent. What they have seen in their lifetimes. The memories he carries within him. Some of them anyway. Just like Andro does... though he probably sees more. I know what a Dalfier rose smells like and that is what you smell like to me. Sweet... like they are just blossoming."

"Dorian..." Sheva began lowering her head.

Dorian lifted his other hand and took her face in his large hands. "Listen to me." He spoke. "I do not care about that. And I don't want to change you. I want you in my life Sheva... now. Always. You will begin to see and eventually you will come to believe. It's only a matter of time."

"You sound so sure." Sheva told him.

"You will be exposed to it everyday Sheva." He said. He blinked several times. "If... if that is what you want as well." He added as he lowered his hands and looked at her. The tone of his voice was one of hesitancy now, something Sheva didn't like in the least. After what he had made her feel, the emotions he had opened within her, the part of her mind that screamed for her to say *more* quickly overrode the part that said *end this*.

Sheva grabbed his hand within hers and pulled it back to her face, replacing it where it had been. His warm skin against hers caused her to close her eyes for a moment and then she looked at him. "Dorian... I..."

"I will not ask you to believe at this very moment Sheva." He spoke. "All I ask is that you keep an open mind and do not dismiss what you may not understand. I am... I am different. I am like... I am like my brother now. Like Jomann. I don't know how or why... but that is what I have been called to do. How I was born... how long it took for me to grow... that doesn't matter to me. It never did. I know what I want. I want to serve my people... that is my purpose. And I... I want you."

"You can't tell me you knew how to do all those things to me just by instinct." Sheva said with a smile.

Dorian grinned and suddenly leaned over to the side of the bed exposing Sheva's naked breasts as he was reaching under the bed. He grabbed a data book and rolled back over where Sheva instantly settled back onto his chest uncaring about her nakedness, which was a huge leap forward for her at this point. Dorian had already seen and explored her petite form to his heart's content and what would be the point in trying to hide from his delicious eyes now. Sheva Juconi doubted she would deny him anything now, sexually as well as everything else, not after what he made her feel. He dropped the book on his chest in front of her eyes and she picked it up, reading the title. Her eyes grew wide, as did the smile on her face.

"I've only read the first nineteen chapters." He told her proudly. "I still have thirteen to go."

"Five Thousand and One Ways to please the woman in your life?" Sheva asked looking at him with a wide and delighted smile. "You... you read this for me?"

Dorian nodded his head. "It has got some good pointers and..."

Sheva tossed the data book onto the floor and shifted her body further up on his chest, her breasts flattening against his hard flesh. "You don't need a book to make me... to make me feel these things Dorian Leonidas." She said softly stroking his cheek.

"You say that now." Dorian spoke with a smile.

Sheva chuckled as she leaned forward and brought her lips to his in a soft kiss of deep feeling. His lips tasted so good and she could detect the heady scent of his hybrid blood with his veins. He had taken her blood during their lovemaking and Sheva had almost done the same. Something had held her back however, but as every minute passed whatever had stopped her from tasting his blood was rapidly falling away. She drew back just a little and looked at him. "If I am... if I am going to be a regular visitor to your quarters Dorian Leonidas... I must know why you chose this dreadful location over the more comfortable quarters on deck ten? And you must be neater."

Dorian grinned and reached above his head to a small control panel. He touched it twice and Sheva heard a soft whirring sound. Her head turned upwards and her eyes grew wide in astonishment as the layer of Dragon Armor over the entire ceiling in the bedroom retracted to leave nothing but stars and space revealed to her. She felt a momentary jolt of fear but that quickly subsided as the beauty of what she was seeing overtook her fears.

"Oh... oh my god!" Sheva exclaimed looking all around and even seeing several other warships in the distance. "Dorian... it's... it's breathtaking!"

"Andro told me about it." Dorian said. "It was originally supposed to be an observation lounge but that changed. He said it was empty and I could have it if I wanted. The view window is the most advanced mixture of Clear Polymore Aluminum and it's only three inches thick. It will withstand a hit from a type two quad cannon. It's really cool when you are going through a nebula or something like that. I have been using it to meditate instead of the landing bay. Ryner and I close off our connection and we both can look out into the stars even though he is in his pen."

"I..." Sheva dragged her eyes away and turned them back to him. "It is amazing." She said.

“You are amazing.” Dorian spoke.

Sheva reached up and took his face in her hands. “You are... you are so very different.” She said softly as a part of her that she did not think she had come out in her words.

“I hope that is a good thing.” Dorian said.

Sheva grinned and lowered her lips to his. “Yes. Yes it is.” She said just before covering his lips with her own.

PUMA’S PRIDE

The ship was quiet.

Just as Kalis knew it would be before a vent. The vast majority of the crew had returned to their quarters or were occupying the many lounges across the ship for they were in a better shielded portion. The radiation from the vent was not harmful in small doses, but in enclosed areas it could be lethal. Kalis had memorized every portion of the ship and knew exactly where and how to go to make their passage to the landing bay as quickly as possible. Serale had not released his hand since leaving his quarters, her other hand clutching the ARSOC pistol he had given to her. His feelings for her had grown more intense hourly since Kalis had embraced this new life and person he wanted to be, and he would die willingly if it meant she would be free. Danim stayed close on their heels as they moved quietly and quickly. Kalis had to remember to keep his pace measured so they could keep up with him but through it all Serale did not release his hand.

Kalis came to a halt next to the edge of the corner that would take them to the rarely used maintenance entrance into the landing bay. He felt Serale press up against his back as he slowly glanced around the edge. He didn’t know what was going through her head but he could smell her fear and anxiousness. He probably would have been very surprised about what was going through her head at the moment however. Surprised and very happy.

Serale shifted the her slim shoulders to better seat the small pack she wore as she pressed against Kalis’s back. Fear caused her to be alert, her dark green eyes shifting from side to side and all around, but her faith in Kalis also made sure she was calm. Serale would never have seen herself in this position two months earlier. Being taken from the resort moon, having to watch her mother endure the sexual abuse by Kalis’s father, the constant fear for herself and for her brother. All of that changed when Kalis came into her life. Pusintin’s son he may have been, but that is where all similarity ended. She did not know Kalis before coming to this ship, and she was quite sure by his own admission she would not have wanted to meet him, but her Kalis was different.

Her Kalis.

She was just past her twentieth birthday and had already experienced far more than most Hadarian females her age. More than any of them would ever experience. She had also found something most of them would never find. A man like Kalis. Standing so close to him she could feel the heat put off by his body, and even though she was Hadarian if she inhaled deeply enough she could take his musky aroma into her nostrils. She looked up at him as he turned back and Danim pressed close to her. Kalis met her eyes and nodded.

“It’s clear.” He whispered. “The ship is the second one to the right as we enter. It is already prepped for launch. Once we enter the bay do not stop for anything and move right for the ship.”

Serale looked at him. “I don’t like that look in your eye Kalis.” She spoke.

Kalis smiled gently. “Do not worry... I shall be with you.” He said. “I do not plan to do anything stupid. The sooner we are gone from here the sooner I can make you completely mine in every way.”

Serale smiled brightly at his words squeezed his hand. “Good. I don’t want to lose you because I am looking forward to that as well.”

Kalis nodded his head and looked at Danim. “Let’s go.” He spoke. He squeezed Serale’s hand and stepped around the corner.

Directly into the view of three Puma Bane troops with their weapons leveled on them. To his credit, Kalis reacted instantly, his ARSOC coming up in one hand and his other pulling Serale behind him to shield her. Danim surprised him as he stepped up next to Kalis just to his left and leveled his ARSOC at the two Puma

Bane troops who were holding their rifles on them. The third had a weapon in his hand, a similar pistol, but it was pointed at the floor.

“Hello Kalis.” The third Puma Bane soldier spoke. “I see you have been very busy.”

Kalis didn’t blink even as he felt Serale’s hand tighten within his and her other hand came up with the ARSOC in it, though it was shaking badly.

“Mata?” Kalis spoke softly meeting his old instructor’s dark eyes evenly. He took a deep breath knowing this could very well be it. The end of everything he hoped for. If that was the case... Kalis would die as his uncle and cousin had taught him in his lessons. He would die protecting the woman he loved and he would take as many of the enemy with him as he could before he fell.

“You have grown Kalis my boy.” Mata spoke his words carrying a note of pride in them that Kalis had not expected.

“Let us just kill him and the boy and take the female Master Instructor Mata.” One of the Puma Bane troops said. “We can use her for several hours before giving her to the Marshal.”

Kalis watched Mata shake his head and then his hand came up in a split second. It was filled with an ARSOC that sported the short barreled silencer on it. He leveled it at the head of the Puma Bane troop who had spoken and he pulled the trigger twice without blinking. A split second later, he shifted his aim and pumped two more rounds into the second troop. Their heads blew apart from the impact of the high velocity rounds and Kalis leveled his own ARSOC at Mata while pulling Serale further behind him as he watched Mata lower his weapon.

“Fucking pig!” Mata snarled softly.

“Mata!” Kalis hissed.

Mata shifted his eyes and looked at Kalis. “Jugar saw you entering the landing bay on several occasions. He figured you were getting ready to run. He brought it to me hoping we would deal with you ourselves. There is a squad waiting in the bay near the entrance to the ramp of the *LEUGERS*.”

“Mata... what... what is going on?” Kalis hissed again.

“Shoot him Kalis!” Danim exclaimed.

“Wait!” Kalis snapped not looking at Danim. “Mata?”

“I have watched you grow Kalis.” Mata continued softly. “I have watched you change these last weeks. Something happened on Enurrua didn’t it? Something that changed you and made your father fall more into the abyss of insanity.”

Kalis took a step closer to Mata. Serale tried to hold him back but she also didn’t want to lower her weapon. “I did change Mata. I... I discovered who I want to be.”

Mata looked at him evenly. “You were never truly Kavalian in your heart Kalis. You tried to be... but you never were. That spark within you has finally lit and that is a good thing. I... I have nothing left for me here.” He said looking around. “You... you have achieved what I had always hoped you would. You have discovered who you truly are. My duty is done now. I have no purpose now. I will cover your escape. Come in from the east entrance. You will come up behind them.”

Kalis moved closer. “Come with me Mata.” Kalis said. “Find purpose again!”

Mata looked at him intently now. “Come with you? I can not go where you are going Kalis. I would not fit in.”

“Bullshit!” Kalis snapped. “My Uncle has... he has many Kavalians who serve with him. My cousin took Athani as his wife and mate! Keleru’s daughter! That ought to tell you that they are different!”

“What would I do?” Mata asked. “I have been Puma Bane all of my life. I know nothing else.”

Kalis moved closer to him. “You have trained me all of my life Mata. I can see in your eyes what you intend! I ask you not to do this! There is still much you can teach me. Teach others. Don’t throw it all away now! Not because of my father! Too many have done that... been forced to do that because of him! Look at where that got them?”

Serale stepped forward now as well, moving up next to Kalis. “You... you saved us just now. You knew what Kalis intended but you never... you never exposed him.” She spoke softly to him. “Why?”

Mata looked at her. “I lost everything many years ago.” Mata told her. “My family... my Pride.”

“Fighting the High Covenant?” Serale asked.

Mata shook his head. “The Coven? The High Coven was never an enemy of ours. Not one that threatened us. Keleru and Pusintin only wanted revenge and a means to usurp your uncle Kalis. No... disease took all I ever cared for.” He answered gently. “Disease and poor leadership. Keleru... he was slow in responding to our pleas for help. Rancor Plaque struck our world. Most of my Pride died before the relief ships arrived.”

“Mata you can start over again!” Kalis hissed. “Start a new life and keep their memories close to you. You can honor them by continuing to live! They would not want you to throw your life away! It would be wasted! Mata... Mata please! Come with me! With us!”

Mata looked at the deck for a long moment taking in the bodies of the men he had just killed. He had taught Kalis all he knew and now he was better than him. His thoughts wandered to the soft brown fur of his woman. He had never adhered to the Kavalian tradition or treatment of females when they were alone. He was gentle with her always, never raised his voice and always treated her with respect. He avoided situations where he would have to treat her in such a way to maintain the show. She had died in his arms, stricken and corrupted by the disease that to their people was always fatal, telling him that she loved him with all that she was. It was not something she had ever told him, it would have been taboo within Kavalian society, but she had told him then. Kalis had replaced the four young sons taken from him along with her by that retched disease and that is why he had driven him so since their loss. Mata looked up and met Kalis’s eyes again.

“Start over.” He said softly. “Like you are doing?”

Kalis nodded his head. “I have found purpose. And you can once more Mata’Liguran. Let go of the past and embrace the unknown of the future you could have. Build your Pride back to what it once was.”

Mata took a deep breath feeling a swell of pride at Kalis’s words but feeling the truth of them even more. He was not ready to die. No... he was not ready just yet. She would not want him to just toss his life away for nothing. She would want him to go on. And he could honor her memory far better if he changed the way Pian’Nruarani had changed. He could insure she did not die for nothing if he helped to make their people live on into the future and change how they did things. He drew in a deeper breath and looked at Kalis suddenly filled with a new vigor and reason to go on Yes... this is the path he would follow now. A path shown to him long ago by a boy, but one he had not fully recognized until this very moment. Mata’Liguran took a deep breath and lifted his head fully. “Then we must hurry. I am guessing you plan to escape when the vent begins?” He moved closer to the young man he had trained since childhood.

Kalis nodded. “Yes.”

Mata nodded. “Then we must move quickly.”

Mata had told them where to wait for them and they now readied themselves behind several massive shipping crates. They were watching in the wrong direction however, and only a casual glance back by the Puma Bane Lieutenant saved them.

For all of four seconds.

Mata led Kalis out of the entrance hatch and as the heads of the Puma Bane squad began to turn, Kalis stepped out from behind him, his now silenced ARSOC coming up into firing position just as Mata brought his own silenced ARSOC up. Kalis’s weapon joined his and they stood side by side and began pumping rounds into the seven Puma Bane troops who had been waiting in ambush. There were no words, no perfunctory expressions or last offers of surrender. There was only death. Kalis and Mata did not stop shooting until all seven Puma Bane troops were down on the deck and bleeding from at least four projectile rounds apiece. Blood was rapidly beginning to pool under their forms and Mata moved forward quickly to put a single round into each of their heads to insure they were truly dead. Serale also had witnessed this from behind the safety of the doorway and it was here that she saw the other half of Kalis’s true nature. The Spartan half. He was not about to tolerate any threat to her and those who stood in the way of him getting her and Danim off this ship would fall before him. Serale should have been aghast at the way he took life so easily, but she could feel nothing but her love and adoration for him grow even more.

Mata finally turned to him as he reloaded his weapon. “Kalis... get them on board! I will release the security clamps!” Mata ordered.

“Mata?” Kalis questioned him thinking he would still do something foolish and take his own life.

Mata smiled. “Do not worry boy!” He spoke. “Hurry!”

Kalis nodded his head, satisfied by the look on the face of the man who had essentially raised him. He turned back as Serale and Danim stepped forward, their eyes wide. “Do not look!” Kalis hissed pulling Serale close to him and pulling her face towards his. “There is nothing but death.”

Serale did not argue with him in the least and kept her eyes on his face. Danim as well refuse to direct his eyes onto the bodies all around him. “I see the ramp.” Serale spoke with confidence now over his shoulder.

Kalis nodded his head. “Go! And move quickly!” He said. “Prep the engines!” Serale nodded and grabbed Danim’s hand and began moving for the rear of the *LEUGERS*. He turned quickly and saw Mata in front of a computer console and he rushed over to his side. “Mata!” He exclaimed.

“Give me a moment!” Mata snapped. “I am trying to recalibrate the gravity emitters.” His hands adjusted several controls. “There!” He barked. “When they try to engage the launch bay locks they will automatically turn off the gravity emitters to the bay. Anyone not anchored will be thrown everywhere! It will keep them from launching fighters to follow us!”

Kalis grabbed his arm. “I already have that taken care of Mata!” He snapped causing Mata’s head to turn to him. “Now come with me and find a new life! Please!”

Mata nodded his head. “Lead the way boy!” He spoke.

RAVAGER’S LEUGERS HOLDING STATION

“...are they?” Ceale gasped loudly as she stood in the cockpit with Nedoli at the controls, his brother’s wife Corsa across from him and Mani beside his father standing behind both seats in the cockpit. Koguth could not help but notice that her hands rested on Nedoli’s shoulders, squeezing them in anxiousness.

“Vent begins in thirty-three seconds.” Corsa called out.

“They will not leave the ship until seconds before the vent begins.” Koguth spoke now. “Corsa... prepare to initiate the commands to the *RAVAGER*. Mani my wife... let the others know that we are about to begin and the ride may get rough.” Mani nodded her head and turned to move back into the large cargo area where the other members of their *Pride* were seated and waiting anxiously. “Nedoli?”

“Taking only one ship may work against us father.” Nedoli told him.

Koguth shook his head. “Once we are gone we can balance the load with Kalis’s ship.” He spoke. “The less trails we leave for them to follow, the less chance they will have in finding us.”

“Twenty seconds!” Corsa called out.

Koguth nodded. “He will send the signal now.” He spoke confidently.

Corsa’s eyes grew wide. “There!” She exclaimed. “One millisecond pulse! That’s it!”

Koguth nodded. “Initiate auto program Corsa. Nedoli... take us from her shadow and begin...”

“He’s out!” Nedoli barked instantly. “Six degrees port! He’s just leaving the starboard landing bay! Pulling away hard!”

“It’s him!” Corsa followed suit. “He’s radiating the pulse every millisecond Koguth!”

“Go Nedoli!” Koguth hissed.

Nedoli didn’t hesitate and threw his throttles to full power, the *LEUGERS* screaming out of the *RAVAGER*’s shadow and turning to follow the lone ship leaving the *PUMA’S PRIDE* behind.

“The vent is starting!” Corsa barked as they began to see the reddish color gas of the Tri-Cobalt venting beginning to fill the areas around the different ships. “Forty-two seconds before it disables all LSD operation!”

“Contact him Corsa!” Koguth snapped. “We need to sync our jumps!”

KALIS’S LEUGERS TRANSPORT

Serale was actually the one doing the flying, and she was concentrating intently as Kalis sat beside her in the co-pilot's seat adjusting their power output and calculating their LSD jump. Danim turned from the Engineer station where he sat, Mata watching everything with complete fascination.

"It's mother's ship!" Danim barked. "They are hailing us!"

Kalis nodded. "Quickly... we need to sync our jumps Danim! Put them through."

Danim adjusted his console. "Go!"

"General?" Kalis barked out.

"We are here Kalis!" Koguth's voice announced.

"You have Lady Ceale?" Kalis asked the first question he knew Serale would want to hear.

"She is standing beside me and painfully gripping Nedoli's shoulders I'm quite sure." Koguth's voice answered.

Kalis saw the sigh of relief from both Serale and Danim and he nodded. "I'm sending you the coordinates General!" Kalis hissed. "Lock them in quickly." He spoke as he transmitted the set of LSD jump coordinates.

"We have them!" Koguth answered. **"Corsa... lock them in!"** They heard him order someone.

Kalis turned in his chair. "Danim! How far are we from the edge of the cloud?"

"Four hundred thousand meters!" Danim answered as his hands moved over the controls. "Twenty-three seconds before it overtakes us and we lose the jump window."

"General?" Kalis exclaimed.

"There!" The female voice announced. **"We are synced!"**

Kalis looked at Serale. "Four degrees to port Serale." Kalis told her.

Serale nodded and adjusted their course. "Full power to sublight engines!"

"Full power you have!" Kalis spoke as he slid two of his fingers along the engine panel and the green strip of lights followed his touch. "Ten seconds General!" He barked.

"On your mark!" Nedoli spoke now. His voice was calm in the transmission.

"Kalis... your father's ship is hailing us!" Danim shouted.

"Put him through!" Kalis snarled as he looked out into the stars ahead of them. "Father?"

"Kalis... what the fuck are you doing?" Pusintin's voice growled angrily. **"Turn that ship around and bring those prisoners back!"**

"I don't think so father." Kalis spoke. "Goodbye father." He spoke in a firm voice not realizing his voice was still carrying over the radio link to Nedoli's *LEUGERS* and they were hearing every word. "I have decided to lead my own life father and I will not allow you to bring harm to the woman I will share it with. I will be a Spartan! As my grandfather was before me. As my Uncle and cousins are! Uncle Martin is coming for you father and I hope you rot in the pits of *jorbhe* for all you have done! To my mother! To my brothers and sisters! And to others! I will live my own life going forward father. And I will be better than you ever were." He looked at Serale and smiled at her beauty. "General Juturi... on my mark! Three... two... one... mark! Jump now!"

Serale didn't hesitate and slid her hand up the panel activating their LSD coils and Light Speed Drive. The familiar sensation of her stomach falling away filled her as the *LEUGERS* spirited her away and into her new life.

PRIDE OF PUMA'S

"...do you mean launched?" Popal barked angrily causing Pusintin to look up from the data pad he was reading.

"Sensors just detected a *LEUGERS* leaving the starboard bay only seconds ago!" The sensor operator spoke. "The vent is affecting sensors sir. No *LEUGERS* was scheduled to depart at this time because of the vent. Sensors are barely able to track it!"

"Boost power to the active emitters!" Popal snapped.

Pusintin got to his feet and moved over beside his executive officer. "Popal?"

“Marshal... sensors have just detected an unscheduled launch from the starboard landing bay. It’s a *LEUGERS* transport sir.” Popal answered.

Pusintin leaned closer to the screen. “Who would launch in a *LEUGERS* just as a vent started?” He asked.

“I have them sir!” The sensor operator barked. “They are power accelerating away from us! Bearing three six one nine! Course two four seven five mark eight!” He looked closer. “Sir! Another *LEUGERS* is forming with them!”

“What?” Popal hissed.

“Hail them!” Pusintin snarled. “And get someone down to the starboard bay and find out who let this ship launch!”

Popal turned when the Puma Bane officer came sprinting onto the bridge. “Captain! Marshal! The prisoners in Colonel Kalis’s quarters are missing! We have found two dead troopers in the corridor leading to the starboard landing bay and another seven dead in the bay itself!”

“Marshall they are answering!”

“Father?”

“Fuck!” Pusintin snarled. “It’s Kalis!” He growled moving to another console. “He’s trying to take the Hadarian bitch’s daughter.” He stabbed his finger down on the console button. “Kalis... what the fuck are you doing?” Pusintin’s voice growled angrily over the open channel. “You turn that ship around and bring those prisoners back!”

“Marshal! Another *LEUGERS* has fallen into formation with them!” The sensor operator shouted.

“I don’t think so father.” Kalis spoke. **“Goodbye father. I have decided to lead my own life and I will not allow you to bring harm to the woman I will share it with. I will be a Spartan! As my grandfather was before me. As my Uncle and cousins are! Uncle Martin is coming for you father and I hope you rot in the pits of jorbhe for all you have done! To my mother! To my brothers and sisters! And to others! I will live my own life going forward father. And I will be better than you ever were.”** Pusintin and the others heard him speak. **“General Juturi... on my mark! Three... two... one... mark! Jump now!”**

“Stop them!” Pusintin screamed.

Popal shook his head as he looked at the sensor board and stood back upright. “We can’t. They are gone.” He answered.

“Track them!” Pusintin snapped.

“We can’t right now.” Popal answered urgently. “The vent will affect any scans beyond five million kilometers. We can follow their engine trail once the gas has dissipated.”

“Fuck!” Pusintin screamed. “That little fuck! He’s been planning this all along! I should have seen it when he requested to move them to his quarters! That bastard betrayed me!”

“Find out where that other ship came from!” Popal barked the order out. “He was in communication with it and he spoke General Juturi’s name!”

“Not from us sir!” The tactical officer spoke. “Internal sensors indicate all *LEUGERS* accounted for except one four.”

Pusintin looked at the man. “One Four is my ship!” He barked. “He took my ship?”

The TO nodded slowly. “Yes Marshal.”

“Fuck!” Pusintin shouted.

“Marshal!” The sensor operator screamed. “Ship contact! Bearing three four one! Half a million meters and closing! It’s General Juturi’s ship the *RAVAGER*! She’s... she’s on a direct collision course! Impact in thirty-nine seconds!”

Pusintin’s eyes went wide and he turned quickly. “Seal the vents!” He screamed. “Seal the vents! Power port batteries! Fuck... he laid a trap for us!” He screamed.

“Marshal if we fire into the gas it will ignite!” Popal barked.

“Projectile munitions only!” Pusintin shouted. “Lock on the *RAVAGER* and fire at will! Kill that ship before she hits us or we are all dead!”

OMEN THREE

TEN MILLION KILOMETERS FROM KAVALIAN FLEET

“...jumped away?” Yuriko asked her XO ten seconds after arriving on the bridge. “To where?”

“We’re tracking their engine matrix... but something else is happening.” The man told her as they moved to the star chart table. The chart showed every Kavalian ship in exquisite detail as well as the fact they were all stationary because of the Tri-Cobalt vent taking place. Yuriko had thought she was going to get some down time with her husband when the vent started but it appeared that was not going to be the case. “This *DIATAGA*-Class is on a direct collision course with Pus nut’s ship. Impact in less than a minute. It started moving just after we detected the *LEUGERS*.”

Yuriko looked at him. “Pus Nut?” She asked.

The man grinned. “Something the bridge crew came up with.” He stated.

“And it’s on a collision course with his ship?” Yuriko asked stunned as she looked at the board. “What the hell is going on there?”

“I don’t know... but if they don’t stop that ship from hitting them, it’s going to do some serious damage to the ship and it may set off a reaction within the Tri-Cobalt gas in the area and cause a massive fire wave.”

“Enhance!” Yuriko barked. “It if kills him I don’t think father will mind in the least!” She said. “I want to know who was on those *LEUGERS*! CSO?”

“Princess!” The man answered turning from his station.

“Find me where those *LEUGERS* went!” Yuriko snapped. “Expand our passive scanning parameters out to five light years! Helm! Prepare to engage LSD coils! And drop us back another five million kilometers from these idiots! I don’t want to be within spitting range if it goes to shit for them!”

“Helm aye!”

Yuriko turned back to her XO. “Keep half the arrays on the Kavalian fleet and find the *LEUGERS* with the other half XO. Whoever they are... if they left Pus Nut... then they have to be on our side.”

The XO nodded his head with a smile. “We’ll find them.”

“I need to let father know about this.” Yuriko spoke. “Are we clear enough for a QCR connection?”

Her XO shook his head. “Better if we wait till we moved further away.” He replied.

Yuriko nodded. “Make it so. I’ll be in the QCR center when we’re in position. Let me know.”

ARC ROYAL QCR ROOM

“...much damage Yuriko?” Martin asked gently.

“They were able to shred the forward section of the *DIATAGA* with projectile rounds before it hit them.” Yuriko answered from within the QCR transmission. “They got lucky and punched a shit load of holes through the engine cores and knocked them out. The ship lost power about ten seconds before collision and some smart Kavalian hit it with a tractor beam to direct it away from them. It’s drifting now.”

“The Tri-Cobalt vent?” Martin asked looking at Aricia where she sat on the edge of the table.

“It will be another three to four hours before they can shift back to normal operations.” Yuriko answered. “The price of a Tri-Cobalt main power source.”

Martin nodded. “Yes it is.”

“Yuriko... is there any way you can determine who was on the two *LEUGERS*?” Aricia asked.

Yuriko shook her head. “It caught us with our pants down as well mother.” She answered with a touch of anger in her voice. “Once we find them we’ll be able to find out. But we have to find them first.”

“A *LEUGERS* doesn’t have the range or LSD coils to jump back to the Alpha Quadrant father... you know that.” Aricia said. “Their engines would be depleted after fifteen or so long range jumps.”

“Kalis?” Martin asked softly.

“Who else could it be Beloved?” Aricia asked.

Martin looked at her. “He hasn’t entered the last code into the P1 I gave him though.” He said.

“I think mother is right.” Yuriko spoke. “And meaning no disrespect father... you aren’t exactly the most forgiving individual.” She said with a smile. “Andro is worse... but not by much. He may be too scared to activate the link.”

Aricia slipped off the table and moved up next to him reaching up to touch his face. “If he has embraced his Lycavorian blood as we all believe he has... then what would be his first course of action Beloved? What would you do?”

“Get the hell away from my brother as quickly as I was able.” Martin answered without a moment’s hesitation.

Aricia nodded. “And two ships means he has discovered others who think as he does.” She said.

“Pleistarchus won’t let him go.” Martin said evenly looking at Aricia. “He’ll go after him just like he is after For'mya.”

Aricia nodded. “Probably. And when we finally do meet up with him... you can put an end to him. Or I will... for what he did to our *Kinsoaurgai*. Kalis would never have completed the tasks on the P1 if he had not embraced his Spartan blood. Which means we need to help him as well.”

Martin stared at her beautiful azure eyes for several moments before turning to look at Yuriko in the transmission. “Yuriko... find where they went.” Martin said moving to the console on the table and beginning to type. “I’m sending you my code to activate his P1. Once you find him, make contact with him. We need to find a planet that the adolescents can stretch their wings. Murano has given me some ideas and we’ll check them out... but I need to get them off the ships or they’ll begin punching holes in the hull.”

Yuriko nodded her head. “I will find them father.” She said. “It shouldn’t be hard.”

Martin nodded. “Can you drop a remote drone to shadow the Kavalian fleet?” He asked.

Yuriko nodded again. “Already prepping one.”

“I’ll send you our location as soon as we find a planet but contact me if anything else happens. I don’t care what time it is.” Martin said.

“Then I better get busy.” She said with a smile.

“*Alu xuil udossta ssinsrigg Yuriko.*” Aricia told her. (Go with our love)

Yuriko looked at her and nodded. In the beginning Yuriko had thought for sure that Aricia would be the hardest to win over. It turned out that Aricia was her strongest supporter. Aricia was the first of her adopted mothers to notice the attraction she had for Filrian, and she was the first to tell her to not let him get away. Through the years, though she loved them all equally, Aricia had been the mother she had always gone to first for advice and support even though she was three times her age. Aricia spoke bluntly and told her how it was and that is exactly what Yuriko needed to hear and experience. It helped that Aricia and she had much in common and whenever they were together always managed to train with each other, making each of them even deadlier when it came to hand to hand combat.

“*Lu'dos zuch ilhar.*” Yuriko answered. (And you always)

“Try not to kill too many of them daughter.” Martin said with a grin.

Yuriko and Aricia chuckled. It was an inside joke between them and had been for over a decade. “I will try father.” She said with warmth. “No promises though.”

They watched the transmission fade quickly and Martin turned to Aricia. “This is going to come to a head quickly once things get rolling.” He stated drawing Aricia close to him and inhaling deeply of her lavender and coco scent.

Aricia nodded and drew deeply of his mint scent, letting it fill her and relishing in the feel of his powerful arms around her. “Yes... but it will end a chapter in our lives that will remain buried forever afterwards. He needs to pay for what he did to our *Kinsoaurgai* Beloved. I know you feel that and I also know it sears your blood every time you think about it.”

Martin lowered his forehead to hers and nodded. “He will pay *Saaurano.*” Martin spoke softly. “He will pay.”

Aricia looked at him. “What happen does not change your feelings for For'mya does it?” She asked him gently.

“Never *Saaurano!* You know that! Never!” Martin hissed strongly. “I love her more now! And Fedor and Eirene are my children! Mine!”

Aricia smiled and wrapped her arms around his waist tighter. "I knew this to be true." She said. "I think a part of For'mya had doubts... but I did not and neither did any of us. We will make sure For'mya knows this."

Martin looked at her shining eyes so close to his. "What... what is going on with this Jacina?" He asked. "Anja says... she says there is something between you."

Aricia nodded. "I don't know what it is Martin... but I feel she will be in our lives for many years to come."

"Aricia I don't want or need another wife or mate." Martin said. "I will refuse if..."

Aricia laughed and took his handsome face in her hands. "You think highly of your skills my Beloved Martin Leonidas." She laughed again. "Rightly so of course... but no... Jacina is different somehow. She will not be part of *our* lives... but she will be part of our lives." Aricia grinned. "We have no intention of sharing you or your delightful gifts with any other woman my love. You belong to us for eternity."

"Good." Martin said. "I'm hungry."

"You are always hungry Martin." Aricia answered with a smile.

Martin grinned lustily. "Not for food." He said.

Aricia reached out with a hand and sent a thin Etheric push to the console by the door. She waited until she heard the small chime indicating the door was locked and then she wrapped her arms around his shoulders as he lifted her into the air. "Then perhaps you should sate your hunger Beloved." She whispered just before his lips claimed hers.

VANARI HOMEWORLD

AUSTROVA

CAPITAL CITY OF MYDALA

DUTKNE'S TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

TUGARD DIPLOMATIC TOWERS

Tugard Diplomatic Towers.

A plush skyscraper of nearly four hundred stories and filled with penthouse apartments for the wealthy and diplomats that came to Austrova. His apartment was on the top floor of the building, one level down from the roof. Denali's apartment, very similar to his in layout, was on the other side of the building. It really didn't matter for they only used the different apartments to sleep. The rest of the time they were crossing back and forth between the two plush suites in order to better coordinate what they were doing. Dutkne turned from the balcony, the mug of Denali's mother's coffee in his hand. He hadn't believed Andro when he said he would become addicted to his mother's coffee, but it had happened. The liquid was so rich and smooth and no where near as harsh as some of the coffee he had drank in his lifetime. He saw Denali standing beside one of Dutkne's senior military advisors and one of the Rothryn senior officers that Dyack had brought into the fold near the star chart table that had been set up in the center of the main living area. With them was the third most senior officer within the Vanari military and a man that Dutkne had met once before. He was tough and completely loyal to his people and when Coren had presented all the evidence he had to him, the man had agreed to join their small group without hesitation. Against the far wall of the suite, a communications center of sorts had been established so that they could remain in contact with both the *ARCH DEMON* and her ships as well as the Protectorate and other assets they had brought into play. Arduri Leonidas was presently with her father and Caliria at his home on the outskirts of the city. Coren had made some headway into breaching the security net of the OSG and the more he discovered, the angrier he was becoming that it had gone on for so long and how deeply some of the Vanari politicians were involved. Arduri was seeing personally to his security while Caliria was using her status as a student to gather as much information from the Vanari Science Board as she possibly could.

Looking at Denali made him think of Androcles. They were so similar in appearance to each other and their father that it was hard not to think of him. Wayonn had explained it to him before he left, the connection he and Andro now had, and Dutkne had fully accepted what path his life was now on. It felt so very right and for the first time he had no questions about what his future held. He would fight beside Androcles when it called

for and guide him as best as he was able to. He had hundreds of years of training behind him now thanks to his grandfather, and Dutkne now knew why he had pushed and prodded him all of those years. He would share his training and experience with Androcles always. Andro sent him reports every other day that no one else knew about and as he read them, Dutkne began to understand it all so very clearly. He would act for Androcles as his grandfather had acted for Sumar. As his father had acted for Resumar and now how his Aunt Helen now acted for Andro's father. That was his destiny now. A Praetorian Mage. Half Lycavorian and half Pralor but entirely Lycavorian in his heart and soul.

Looking at Denali also made him think of the one thing he had tried very hard not to think of. He saw them in his dreams all the time now. The curve of their faces, the softness of their lips and the desire their lush bodies caused within him all the time now. He could still focus enough to be able to smell them, though he knew that was probably just in his head. No woman had ever affected him in such a manner, and now two were making his wolf blood sizzle and burn for them. It shocked him in some respects because he never imagined he would find a vampire female attractive in the least, yet Zarah Leonidas was half vampire and Lucia was a pureblood vampire and they could incite him like no women ever had. He would have them Dutkne knew, but he also knew what had happened to Zarah and the role Lucia had played in saving her. He knew he needed them to fully accept the love they had for one another before they could accept him. Dutkne was many things and patient was one of them.

Things were progressing slowly... but they were progressing. Coren was positive that he had convinced the OSG agents he was legitimate in his desire to enter into the realm of the Black Market that dealt with Vanari females as well as many other things. He had already conducted two small operations to prove his willingness by securing what the OSG thought to be sensitive information about Vanari movements. He had also convinced the Vanari agents that he wanted to push Ardan out of the picture and take over his role. Expand it even. The OSG had been very willing to agree with this because of Androcles's threats to them. They were terrified that he would do what he said and Coren silently reveled in their fear. Coren Re Mydala knew that Androcles would do exactly as he said he would. If Androcles ordered it, the Eridiani and their OSG cronies would cease to exist. Dutkne had already secretly positioned Protectorate ships to strike at the heart of the OSG when the time came. Dutkne had taken on Andro's trait of intense dislike for those who preyed on the weak and unarmed. One of the many traits that he had absorbed from Androcles as their connection grew stronger and more focused. Dutkne, Denali and the Rothryn officer all turned towards the sound of the elevator as it reached their floor. The doors to both main suites were always open to allow their people to move back and forth between them freely.

All of them came instantly alert when Dyack's personal aide and Chief of Security, a tall and powerfully built Rothryn/Lycavorian practically pushed Dyack into the main suite.

Denali was the first to speak as he turned to face them. "Praetor Dyack?" He asked. "Is... is there something wrong?"

Dyack took a deep breath and looked at him. "I think I may have been compromised." He spoke as calmly as he could.

"Compromised?" Dutkne asked moving closer.

Dyack's Security Chief stepped closer. "As we were entering the building from the Lifter Garage I noticed two men who have never been there before." Horam explained. "They tailed us into the rear of the main lobby and watched as we boarded the elevator. We exited on several different floors before coming all the way up here but if..."

"If they are any good at their job they will discover where you ended up right away." Denali finished his sentence.

Horam nodded his head. "Yes."

"*Sibfla!*" Denali swore. "Are you sure?"

Horam looked at Dyack and watched as the man he had guarded for over half a century nodded his head with a pain filled expression. He turned back to Denali and Dyack. "I am almost positive I recognized one of them as one of Anroth's Lieutenants."

"Your son?" Dutkne asked.

Dyack nodded his head. "Whether he is working for the OSG as well or simply trying to move into the arrangement I have made with them I don't know."

"What do you think Praetor?" The Lycavorian General from the Protectorate asked now.

Dyack shook his head. "I don't know." He answered honestly. "Anroth... he has always been hungry for more responsibility within the government. I have avoided giving him what he has wanted and he has gone behind my back on many occasions and done what he wanted regardless. He is too close to the largest rival of my family and as much as I do not want to admit it, he wields quite a bit of power in the underground *because* he is my son."

"I am familiar to a point with your government Praetor Dyack..." The Vanari Admiral spoke now. Rodem Esa Mosril had served the Vanari fleet for all but nineteen of his four thousand seven hundred years of life and he was a complete and total patriot. "If... if your son were to expose this information to others they could use it to oust you from your position."

Dyack nodded his head. "Slavery is forbidden by law among the Rothryn people though many partake of it on the Black Market. Only the most powerful of the Rothryn families will even attempt it. Others simply look the other way. If it is discovered that I have made this false arrangement with the OSG concerning the Vanari females then Barnak can use it against me in the Rothryn Assembly. He will attempt to discredit me with the Assembly even though he takes part in slavery all the time."

"And your son is tight with this Barnak person?" Denali asked.

Dyack nodded. "Too close." He answered him. "Anroth believes that our bloodline... our heritage... he believes it makes us better than most others. Like Barnak... he wishes to bring back many of the more archaic rules that we dismissed as a people long ago. Much like the Union has done since leaving Lycavore."

Denali tilted his head at him with a smile. "I see you have been talking to Caliria." He said.

Dyack smiled now as he became more relaxed, knowing he was among friends. "She has become quite the historian of your people in such a short time. She gave me a book she had borrowed from the library aboard your ship. I have not been able to put it down."

"Which one?" Denali asked.

"*Life, Slavery and Back Again* by the Lycavorian call Merclaes." Dyack answered. "It is a fascinating history Denali Leonidas. I did not imagine our histories could parallel each other in so many ways. Your time as slaves to the High Coven not withstanding."

Denali grimaced slightly. "We had to read that for school." He spoke. "I hated it."

Dutkne laughed at him. "It did not move fast enough for you?" He asked.

"Hell no!" Denali spat. "I'd fall asleep after only a chapter or two each time I tried to read it!"

"I am almost finished with it." Dyack spoke. "I have just begun the chapters detailing the history of The Evolli War."

Deni met his eyes. "Oh."

"You fought in this war? With your father and brothers?" Dyack asked.

Denali nodded his head slowly. "Yes."

"I would be honored if you would tell me of it." Dyack said. "Reading it is one thing... but hearing it from one who was actually there? Especially this place called Alba Tau. What can you...?"

"No." Deni spoke firmly. He met Dyack's eyes. "I'm sorry sir... whatever you discover about Alba Tau will have to come from the book." He answered as flashes of what he had seen on that planet whisked through his brain. He took a deep breath. "If you will excuse me." He said before turning without another word and walking towards the balcony of the suite to breath fresh air.

Dyack turned to Dutkne quickly as Rodem Esa Mosril, Horam, and the Protectorate and Rothryn officers moved closer. "I have offended him Dutkne." Dyack spoke earnestly. "This was... it was not my intent."

Dutkne nodded his head. "He knows that sir." He answered. "Alba Tau is... most of the younger generations of Lycavorian Spartans fought there. Were forged there. It was a battle that should have lasted hours and ended up lasting months. It could have lasted longer if not for their training and leadership. It was..." Dutkne looked at him. "It was... for lack of a better term a bloodbath. Horrific battles and countless lives changed or altered. Androcles, his father, their dragons... they took part in the first battle. That battle would lay the groundwork for the entire operation really. Day patrols, ambushes and violence. Death on a scale not seen in their history since the Black Day, the Purge of the Oracles or the death of King Resumar. At least not to me. The Evolli knew it was their last chance to have any victory and they fought like demons. The first... the very first battle lasted nearly twenty-six hours... and both Androcles and his father were nearly lost in that single

action. Denali and his siblings arrived with a relief force in the morning. What they found was... it was horrific to say the least.”

Rodem stepped closer. “You speak... you speak as if you were there as well Dutkne.” He said softly.

Dutkne looked at him. “What... what Androcles and I now share... part of that is who we are at our cores. I have seen his memories of this place... what they endured and what he was forced to do. In a way... yes... I suppose I was there. Alba Tau is where Androcles... it is where he became who he is now.” Dutkne looked at them. “Asking one of them to share this is not something that is done among the Spartans. It is a sacred memory to all who fought there and they will only talk of it with someone who experienced it just as they did. Those men and women are the only ones who could truly understand it.”

“If this place... this Alba Tau...” Dyack spoke. “If it is the measure of him, the measure of his father, then I believe we have a right to know.” Dyack shook his head. “No... that is not the right word. I believe we have a *duty* to know what makes them the men they are. We are all Lycavorians no matter the names we use to describe ourselves. That is something I have come to believe fully now.”

“I agree Dutkne.” Rodem echoed Dyack. “What Denali does now... what he says his brother will do when he arrives?” Rodem looked at him. “He is still coming yes?”

Dutkne nodded. “Oh yes... and probably far sooner than most of us believe.”

“Never in our history have we been asked to trust so thoroughly Dutkne. When I look at Denali... see him talk to others, how he treats my people, I know in my heart that trust is sacred to him. To his brother. I have seen the way he looks at Arduri Re Mydala, the total devotion to her in his eyes even though she is Vanari.”

“Arduri is his wife and mate now sir.” Dutkne said. “That is not something a Lycavorian will ever forsake no matter the species of their woman.”

Rodem nodded. “I wish to be able to explain to my men and women why that trust should be sacred to us as well. I wish to be able to tell them what drives these men and women who have sworn themselves to our defense even after the way your people have been treated by ours throughout the centuries.”

Dutkne looked at them for a long moment. “You may be shocked by what I tell you.” He said. “They... the Evolli gave Androcles and Elynth a name in their native language during this war. Just as his father earned a nickname fighting the High Coven on Earth. It is a vile curse in the Evolli language but in any other language it translates very differently. It... it defines them to their enemies and it is why they are so feared by the lawless within the Alpha Quadrant.”

“What was this name?” Dyack asked.

Dutkne met his eyes. “Soul Slayers.”

KALIS’S LEUGERS

Serale’s hands moved across the console quickly and efficiently as they exited their fourth LSD jump.

“Disengaging LSD Drive.” Serale called out from the pilot’s seat. “Bringing the main engines to full power and setting the LSD coils to automatic realignment and recharge.”

“Scanning.” Kalis spoke as he stared at the sensor screen from the seat beside her. “No contacts. We’re clear. General Koguth’s *LEUGERS* is right with us. Come to course 39864.1 Serale. We must continue to move while the LSD drive recalibrates and recycles.” Kalis told her.

“Are you sure this course takes us closer to your uncle Kalis?” Serale asked as she adjusted their course.

Kalis nodded his head. “I used the information on my P1 to calculate. Based on the jumps and course he has maintained, I calibrated our course to parallel it as much as I was able. It also... it also feels right.”

Serale looked at him. “That’s... that’s quite a guess Kalis my love.” She said.

Kalis nodded his head taking no offense at her comment. “Anything away from my father is preferable for all of us.”

Serale smiled. “Well... there is that.” She said.

Kalis smiled at her. “We should initiate a hard seal with the General’s *LEUGERS* so you can see your mother.”

“Shouldn’t we wait?” Serale asked.

“It will take the LSD coils fifty-two minutes to fully realign and recalibrate for maximum efficiency.” Kalis told her. “It is plenty of time.” He reached up and tapped the panel above his head. “Nedoli... your status?”

“LSD Drive disengaged and running on main engines.” Nedoli’s voice answered. “You?”

Kalis nodded. “We are the same.” He spoke. “I recommend we initiate a hard dock. I have planned one more jump before I try to begin contacting my uncle but I think we are safe to at least finally meet face to face. Can you move to our port?”

“Consider it done. Coming to your port side and preparing to dock.” Nedoli answered.

Kalis nodded. “We will see you in a few minutes.” He said.

“We look forward to it.” Nedoli answered.

“Kalis... meet me at the secondary engineer’s station.” Mata’s voice filled the intercom. “I have discovered some interesting things about the ship we have stolen.”

Kalis looked at Serale. “Can you...?”

Serale nodded. “Yes... go.” She watched him rise to his feet and he leaned over to kiss her deeply. It was a kiss that Serale relished and returned with equal emotion. They held it for a long moment and then Kalis ran his fingers over her cheek.

“Soon Serale my love.” He whispered to her.

“Not soon enough for me.” Serale told him with a mischievous smile.

Kalis matched her smile and then turned to move into the back. He moved quickly down the three short flights of stairs and saw Mata sitting at a computer station, Danim leaning close from a chair beside him. He moved up behind them. “Mata?”

Mata turned his head and looked at him with a smile. “Kalis my boy... when you steal a ship you don’t play games do you?”

Kalis looked at him confused, shifting his eyes to Danim and then back to him. “I’m not following.” He said.

“This is your father’s ship.” Danim spoke quickly looking at him.

Kalis nodded. “I assumed it would be the most well cared for and the most ready for long flight.”

Mata nodded. “And it is...” He said. “General Koguth is going to love this...”

“Love what?” Kalis asked.

Mata adjusted the controls, his fingers nimbly moving across the access board. “When you stole your father’s ship... you stole the most recent deployments of every major Kavalian force, to include the Puma Bane units.” Mata looked at him. “They were up to date right up until the time we left. They may have shifted by now... but this information would be nearly invaluable to a resistance. Especially one with the resources to follow up on this information.”

Kalis looked at the screen Mata brought up and his eyes grew intense. “Fleet dispositions. Ground Force multipliers.”

Mata nodded as Kalis spoke. “You realize what this would be worth to say... to someone like General Pian?” Mata said. “Access codes. Deployments. Force numbers. It is... it is like being in the Kavalian Command Bunker yourself! Danim here is far more versed in computer use than I am and he is finding items at every turn.”

Danim smiled. “Computers are a hobby of mine.” He stated. “I like to crack them. Your father doesn’t use very sophisticated encryption.”

Mata looked at him his face becoming serious. “You realize what your father will do when he discovers this?”

Kalis nodded his head. “Yes.”

“I hope your uncle is nearby... or at least able to assist us.” Mata said.

“Why?” Danim asked.

Mata turned back to him. “This information could very well be what a resistance needs to defeat the KFI.” He said. “Military operations... deployments. Whoever had this would have a huge advantage.”

“Mata...?” Kalis asked softly looking at him.

Mata turned and met his eyes seeing the questions in them an Mata laughed. For the first time in nearly four hundred years he laughed with genuine mirth and humor. He laid a large, fur coated hand on Danim’s

shoulder. "Danim has given me what you want me to have." Mata spoke. "He has uncovered the information I need to find purpose again Kalis. To see our... my people finally begin to break the chains of the past."

Kalis smiled and placed his hand on Mata's shoulder. "I'm glad." He said. "But this also means my father will try harder to find us."

Mata nodded. "Well... there is that." He spoke with a smile. "I will wager you have some other tricks up your sleeve though. You are full of surprises. And your father has not done so well against his brother up until now." Mata laughed again. "Something tells me your uncle could fight circles around your father even if he had to stop every hour to take a shit! That should be painfully obvious to even the most dull witted person!"

Kalis grinned at Mata's new and infectious attitude. He had never seen his instructor like this and it pleased him to see that Mata had tossed aside the doldrums of a stagnant life and was reaching for more. "We are docking with General Koguth's ship. Help me prepare the seal?"

Mata nodded. "Danim...?"

"Don't worry... I'll file everything and label it all for ease of use." He said.

Mata nodded and turned back to Kalis. "Let us get moving!" He said happily.

Kalis watched him move past him with a smile and resolve in his footsteps. This was a Mata he had never known. A driven man who appeared ready to face anything. They would need that in the future Kalis knew.

Kalis watched from beside Mata as Ceale crushed Serale into her arms and then drew Danim into her embrace as well. Ceale looked a thousand times better than when he had last seen her. Her cheeks were no longer sunken and her skin looked alive and vibrant just like Serale's. Kalis saw where Serale got her beauty as he studied them intently; her mother was a vision of beauty as well, even with the much darker red hair. Kalis shook his head slightly, wondering what kind of man could willingly inflict pain and shame on a woman with such beauty. If treated like a precious gem, that woman would reciprocate the same emotions and give her man everything.

Kalis blinked as the large Kavalian stepped in front of him, his eyes boring into Mata who stood beside him without fear. Kalis had no doubts Mata could have killed everyone within the rear of the transport if he so wanted, so he did not fear Koguth or his two sons. He stood there without fear and filled with new resolve. It was something that Koguth detected right away as he looked at Kalis. He held out his hand and Kalis grasped his forearm without hesitation.

"It is an honor to finally meet you General." Kalis spoke.

Koguth pulled his eyes from Mata and stared at him. "I must say the same thing." He said.

"I am sorry about your ship." Kalis told him.

"She was old and had served my Pride well." Koguth said. "Hopefully she died as well as she lived."

"I don't put much hope in that sir." Kalis spoke.

Koguth nodded. "Nor do I..." He replied with a smile. "But she bought us the time we needed."

Kalis motioned to Mata. "May I present Master Instructor Mata of...?"

"I know who he is young Kalis." Koguth spoke returning his gaze to Mata. "Puma Bane."

Mata didn't back down and he bowed his head slightly. "The tone of your voice when you speak that name tells me how far we have fallen General." He spoke meeting his eyes. "It makes me especially glad I have the opportunity to change that path for myself. And maybe others in the future."

"Mata helped us to escape my father's ship." Kalis told him. "He is on our side General."

Koguth looked at him. "I don't doubt that Kalis." He said. "He would not be standing here otherwise considering how well I have come to know you these last days. And your desires."

Kalis nodded his head. "Thank you." He said. "Lady Ceale looks very well."

Koguth glanced back and nodded. "She is a strong woman. Stronger than she appears. Mani and Corsa have helped her and she has... she has bounced back faster than even I thought possible."

Kalis inhaled slightly and caught Ceale's scent, similar in many ways to Serale, but muskier in a fashion. His eyes grew slightly wider as he sniffed more deeply while Koguth watched and he detected the stirring desire

in her scent for the broad Kavalian standing just behind her and watching her embrace with her children. He could smell it as easily as his own desire for Serale and hers for him and he looked back to Koguth. “She...?”

“Mani was right.” Koguth spoke. “You have fully embraced your Lycavorian blood.”

Kalis nodded slowly. “Yes sir... but I have not dismissed the Kavalian blood in my veins either.”

“Then what you smell... it is as we...” Koguth questioned.

Kalis nodded his head. “Yes sir. It’s there... and very strong. Potent. And becoming less unsure as every hour passes.”

“You can tell that just from her scent?” Koguth whispered the question.

Kalis nodded. “Most do not know what Lycavorians can do with their sense of smell. It’s far more intricate and expansive than is commonly known. I am still learning myself... but yes I can smell that.”

Koguth took a deep breath and nodded. “Good. Good. I... she has shown this on our ship but I did not know if it was simply to appease us. Nedoli... he...”

Kalis nodded. “Yes... that is very apparent in his scent as well.” He answered. Kalis motioned to a table behind him. “We should probably sit and discuss some things.” He said. “And if you wish, it must be crowded on your *LEUGERS*; you can shift half your people to this one and give everyone more room.”

Koguth nodded. “I was hoping you would suggest that.” He said.

“We should also speak of what Danim discovered.” Mata said looking at Kalis. “That may well dictate how we proceed forward.”

Koguth looked at him and then to Kalis. “What has he discovered?” He asked finally.

Kalis met his eyes. “The plans and deployment of every Kavalian unit before we left the Alpha Quadrant.” He said.

Koguth’s eyes went a little wider. “You are kidding!” He gasped.

Kalis shook his head. “No. Which means my father will probably be coming after us as soon as he is able. I kind of... I stole his ship.”

Koguth laughed at the expression on his face and he reached out to place a hand on his shoulder. “But think of the expression on his face when he discovered you did.” He said.

Kalis smiled. “Well... there is that.” He said as Mata chuckled.

“Why would this information... as important as it is... matter?” Koguth said. “We have no means to communicate directly with Keleru or the KFI Command.”

Kalis met his eyes. “My father doesn’t...” He said. “However... I’m betting my uncle has a means to communicate with the Union.” He removed the P1 from his belt. “And it has something to do with this. It’s much more than a mere data and storage pad. That much I know without a doubt.”

Koguth was silent for a long moment. “If what you say is true... it could alter the course of the foolish war Keleru started with them.” He said.

Kalis snorted derisively. “Keleru and my father made a mistake thinking they could enter a war with the Union and win as they did against the Coven.” He held up the pad. “And they will not need this to thoroughly kick Keleru right in the *nor* and make him feel it.”

“Nor?” Koguth asked.

“His balls.” Mata laughed. “I had to ask him the same question.”

Koguth laughed again now. “His balls... yes! Outstanding!”

“Mata and I were thinking... we were thinking what this could be worth to General Pian and the others who feel as you do sir.” Kalis said.

Koguth became silent and looked at him. “Probably more than you know.” He said.

Kalis nodded his head. “Then I suggest we sit down and figure some things out.” He said. “I have a life I wish to start and you have a daughter you wish to find.”

Koguth took a deep breath as an image of Iama flashed through his mind. “Yes.” He said softly with firm resolve. “Yes I do.”

BENEATH EDEN GRAND CENTER

Aihola looked at Lynwe from across the large table with a smile. She had been escorted into the Command Center with Tarifa, Anuk and Nayeca who had flown in from Sparta at Lynwe's request. Tareif's Dragoon Guards provided security to Aihola and Tarifa within Eden City and the *Durcunusaan* covered them when they were in Sparta. The two units worked quite seamlessly together, training and sharing information. If Aihola had to guess, she suspected that she and Tarifa were almost as well protected as Martin and any member of the Leonidas family. It helped that Martin considered both of them dear sisters and they were treated as such by everyone who came into contact with them. It wasn't often that Aihola and Tarifa got to see one another during the day. Their duties kept them on different sides of the planet most of the time, especially since Tarifa was now Governor of Sparta, but they relished the moments they were able to sneak. Both of them missed Isra and being able to spend more time with each other until their husband and mate returned was always good. They were watching Lynwe talking with Nesa at the other end of the room and both knew something was up. Nesa was Armetus's senior Intelligence Analyst and a Lycavorian woman they had both worked with before. If she was involved then whatever Lynwe had brought them here for was important.

They both turned when the thick door slid open easily and Selene entered with Charles and two Drow officers that were the heads of their own security details. Aihola recognized both of the Drow females as members of Lynwe's personal scout team many years ago. They had fought beside Lynwe in the Battle for Earth and had taken part in the smashing of Ukwav with Martin. Selene had accepted her Drow guard without thought considering that the woman she loved more than her own life was a Drow and after some prodding Charles had accepted his own. Now Charles Taylor did not go anywhere without Zeia and she watched over him like a hawk.

Aihola, Tarifa, and the others rose to greet Selene and Charles and hugs and kisses were exchanged between all of them. Charles Taylor and the women in this room were responsible for the rebirth of Earth in every sense of the word. Even though he was well into his seventies, Charles didn't look a day over forty and moved around with the spryness of someone half his age.

Tarifa looked at Charles as he held her at arms length. "Charles... what is going on here?" She asked. "Why all the secrecy about this meeting?"

"It's not often we are escorted in through the bunker tunnels of the city we helped to found." Aihola added.

Charles nodded. "I know. You will understand shortly trust me. We had to wait until we had all of our information together."

"What information?" Anuk asked now. "Why are Nayeca and I here for that matter?"

Nayeca nodded. "Yes... I would like to know as well."

Charles nodded and motioned for them to take their seats again. "And everything will soon become clear. Please sit down."

"Charles... why don't I like the way you say that?" Tarifa asked. She looked at Selene as she came back over from greeting Lynwe. "Selene?"

Selene took her hands and leaned forward to hug her and kiss her cheek. "You were not told of what is happening because you needed to focus on getting a handle on things in Sparta and we did not have all the information. Now we do."

"Information about what?" Tarifa asked.

Selene smiled. "Nesa and Lynwe will brief us." She said. "She has been worrying about this for weeks."

"Selene...?" Aihola asked.

"Sit." Selene said with a smile as she leaned over and kissed Aihola's cheek. "We'll find out everything very soon."

Lynwe turned as everyone settled back into their chairs. Lynwe and Tareif were tasked with the defense of Earth and everything involving Earth's system. For twenty-five years they had held this job and now, Earth and her planetary system was almost as well defended as Apo Prime. Lynwe and Tareif took nothing for granted and had sworn a vow that Earth would never again be conquered by an enemy. Just getting close to the planet with any kind of attack force would be a hellish nightmare. With EDEN's primary weapons systems all upgraded and Admiral Wallace on constant alert, combined with the PDPs situated in key locations across the

system, it would cost far too much to any attacking force. And that was before they actually reached the planet itself. Lynwe looked at her dear friends across the table and felt warmth spread through her. Tarifa and Aihola had shown her all those years ago what she could have and Lynwe had embraced it completely. While their intimate moments together had long since ended when Isra took them as his mates, there was still an attraction to them for her as well as Selene. Lynwe doubted that would ever change. She looked at Nesa who nodded to her and then she stepped close to the table.

“Ok... you are probably very confused at the moment.” Lynwe said.

Tarifa chuckled. “That’s an understatement Lynwe.” She said. “Just tell us why you have us here. We have never kept anything from each other. Why now?”

Lynwe nodded. “We haven’t kept it from you Tarifa... we didn’t have all the information we wanted. We do now. That is why you are here now.”

“What is this all about Lynwe?” Aihola asked.

Lynwe met her eyes. “Aelulip and Kawyona ring any bells.” She spoke the two words knowing the reaction she would receive from both Aihola and Tarifa as well as Anuk and Nayeca.

All four woman sat forward in their chairs now, their attention full focused on them.

“Lynwe... tell me you are joking.” Aihola finally gasped.

Lynwe shook her head. “Unfortunately no.” She stated turning to Nesa. “Nesa?”

“I thought... I thought she was dead.” Tarifa exclaimed.

Nesa stepped up to the table. “Dead?” She said. “No. She’s very much alive and as much as it pains me to say... we have lost her again.”

“Again?” Aihola said. “What do you mean?”

“Armetus made me aware of her existence many years ago.” Nesa said. “He was making a list of potential threats to King Martin’s rule. The Drow that abandoned you in Canada Aihola... they were near the top of the list because they had not been discovered leaving Earth from any of the normal ports that were established in the beginning and we were monitoring all space born traffic harshly back then. We determined they had simply gone somewhere where we did not have any eyes here on Earth.”

“It turns out we were right.” Lynwe said looking at Aihola.

“Lynwe... you were part of this?” Tarifa asked.

Lynwe nodded her head. “Selene and Tareif as well. Charles we brought into the fold when he was elected President.” She replied. “This was a request from both Martin and Aricia. They wanted it kept very low key... almost nonexistent. He did not want the Drow to thin he was targeting them.”

“Our people worship him!” Aihola almost yelled. “His entire family. Especially now that Andro has taken Lu'ria as his wife and mate!”

Lynwe nodded. “I tried to explain that to him Aihola... but he did not want this to look like a witch hunt against the Drow.”

“Lynwe... they would never think that.” Tarifa spoke now.

“We would have hunted them willingly!” Aihola declared.

“That is why he wanted it kept compartmentalized.” Selene interjected. “He did not want to put you in a position of ordering the hunt for Drow criminals. Not so soon after you were made Queen. He wanted you free to do what you needed to do.”

Anuk leaned forward now. She knew full well who Kawyona was and what she had done. Her actions may have brought Nayeca and her fully together as Mistress and Slave... but the manner in which it was done could never be forgiven. They were falling in love well before Kawyona’s actions forced them together and though it had happened the way it did, neither of them regretted it in the least. “So they are not dead?” Anuk asked. “Why does this matter to us now Lynwe. It’s been over twenty-five years.”

Lynwe looked at her. “Drow do not forget or forgive Anuk... you should know that by now.”

Anuk nodded. “I do. But we... the Drow did not do anything to them except chose to follow their Queen and not the hate Aelulip and Kawyona were espousing.”

“We pushed them aside Anuk.” Nayeca spoke reaching out to place her hand on Anuk’s arm. “To the Drow... to them... that was enough.”

Aihola looked at Lynwe. “You are... as Martin is so fond of saying... about to drop a big old bomb on us aren’t you Lynwe?”

Lynwe looked at Nesa. "That's what we thought at first." She said. "Now... now we are not so sure."

"Lynwe... Nesa..." Charles began. "Enough side stepping. We came here to make decisions, so let's make them. Show them what we have discovered and what has happened."

Lynwe looked at Nesa. "Go ahead Nesa."

Nesa touched the computer panel on the large table and a large holo monitor came alive on the wall. "Six weeks ago three Drow stumbled into the camp of one of our Deep Exploration Mines on the African continent. The same one Tarifa got started eighteen months ago. All of them were severely injured, cuts and bruises, two of them had been shot and one stabbed. They had made their way through six hundred kilometers of jungle and desert terrain before finding the camp. The camp Commander immediately sent for Durcunusaan assistance and a team from the Krypteria was sent as well." Nesa changed the holomonitor to show the faces of three Drow females. All of them were typical Drow and exquisitely beautiful in an exotic fashion. All of them could see the injuries they had suffered however but it did not keep Aihola from coming to her feet.

"Kawyona?" She gasped.

Nesa nodded. "Yes... though she no longer goes by that name according to her. The other two are sisters... Bae'diraz and Isa'mada."

"She doesn't go by that name?" Tarifa asked.

"She is using Akor'dris." Nesa answered.

Nayeca leaned forward. "That is the name of her mother." She said. "She was... she was killed by the Coven in the camps."

Nesa nodded in agreement. "We confirmed that with Princess Narice and others within the High Coven. Akor'dris was her mother's name. All three have sworn off a family name."

Aihola looked at her. "Sworn off a family name?" She gasped. "But that is... that is like declaring yourself void of... void of the right to live among the Drow. Why would they do that Lynwe?"

"There is much you need to hear and see..." Lynwe said. "But the most important thing we have to do is decide what to do."

"About what?" Aihola snapped. "Damn it... no more dancing around! What is going on Lynwe?"

"Aihola... according to these women... they escaped Aelulip's control for one reason." Nesa said. "To protect and warn you as their Queen."

"What?" Tarifa gasped. "Kawyona wasn't so quick to do that originally!" She hissed.

"Why... warn me of what?" Aihola asked.

"Aelulip is planning a coup." Lynwe answered. "She has roughly fifty thousand men and women, not all of them Drow, who follow her. They are scattered all over the planet and are waiting for the word from her to execute their orders."

"A coup!" Aihola nearly shouted.

"Aelulip is using the non-Drow as cannon fodder." Lynwe said with a shake of her head. "Men and women who hope to gain something if the Drow are split. Her true strength comes in the fashion of her Drow guard which numbers about ten thousand. They were under Kawyona's command until she escaped. Bae'diraz and Isa'mada were her two most senior Lieutenants and the most skilled."

"A coup? Now?" Tarifa declared. "A coup would never succeed Lynwe."

"No it would not..." Lynwe agreed. "However... it would split our people since Aihola has always walked a thin line on our traditions and values. She has never crossed that line and that is why she has maintained the support of most of our Elders. Lu'ria's mother among them."

"Let her try this!" Aihola snapped. "I will not hide because of her!"

"It's not a matter of hiding Aihola." Lynwe said. "Aelulip is planning an attack against your home here in Eden City and against yours Anuk. Her directions are clear. She wants all of you dead."

"And Kawyona escaped to warn of this?" Nayeca asked. "Why?"

"The why of it we can determine later." Nesa spoke. "What we need to do now is make a decision what to do."

"About what?" Aihola said.

Nesa brought up another image. "We have confirmation from seven different assets that those Drow are now forming at one location to disperse among the Drow population here in Eden City and the surrounding area."

“From information you got from Kawyona?” Tarifa asked.

Lynwe shook her head. “No. From an asset we have had in place among the Drow of Aelulip’s group for the last ten years.” She said.

“That was Armetus’s doing.” Nesa said quickly.

“So... so Kawyona’s information is correct?” Nayeca asked softly.

Nesa nodded her head. “We questioned all of them extensively.” She said. “With drugs and without. They submitted to this willingly and their stories have never varied. Aelulip has become insane with power. She began using abandoned High Coven Tech in experiments to try and make the Drow stronger and more resilient. The experiments were forced on many of the Drow in the beginning. Kawyona and these two among them.”

“What kind of experiments?” Tarifa asked.

“Mostly genetic in nature. Trying to improve their strength and endurance so they could match a pure blood Lycavorian.” Nesa answered. “By all accounts she had High Coven scientists that escaped the purge right after the Battle for Earth and was using them to conduct the experiments. “

“You have known about this all of this time?” Aihola asked.

Nesa shook her head. “No. Our agent was never privy to what was going on behind the scenes. Only rumors and tidbits of information that she did not forward unless she could confirm them herself. Armetus trained her himself and she is very thorough. She was never able to give us anything definitive and therefore we never told you. Her last report however... it stated they were staging for some kind of mission into Eden City and we needed to be aware of what was going on. What we discovered from Kawyona and the others only confirmed this and told us what Aelulip has been planning. The woman is quite mad.”

“Sibfla... we could have told you that!” Tarifa hissed.

“Aihola... we have... we have the tools to break her back now.” Lynwe said. “We can take out most of her supporters and discover the identities of others. We need to move now though.”

“What are you asking Lynwe?” Aihola asked feeling a cold sensation in the pit of her belly beginning to form.

Lynwe lowered her eyes. “If we let them escape into the Drow population here it could wreak havoc among our people. We can’t allow that. Not now. All of you are targets... and there is little doubt that Daba and Lu’ria will also be targets. We need to act. I need... I need your permission to end them.”

“End them?” Nayeca asked.

Lynwe nodded. “I have a Brigade of Drow and Dragoons standing by right now.” She said. “With air support and indirect fire from two ships in orbit.” She looked at Aihola. “They are a threat to you... to Tarifa and Anuk and Nayeca. Countless others, including Lu’ria. And you know well what Androcles will do if harm comes to Lu’ria. What Martin will do if you or Tarifa are hurt? We need to act and act now to remove this cancer before it spreads.” Lynwe moved around the table to look down into the face of her dear friend. “I need you to authorize me to destroy them Aihola. Before they gain a foot hole within our people and begin to spread their poison. That could spell doom for all of us.”

“Lynwe...?” Aihola began.

“You are Queen of the Drow and you must give the order.” Lynwe said. “And you must give it today.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ARC ROYAL

FIFTEEN HOURS POST ONTEROM

“...woke up about an hour ago.” Anja told Martin as they looked through the clear plexi window into one of three private rooms within the Medical Bay on the *ROYAL*. They could see Jacina and Aricia in the room with the second Pralor female Recia. “She kind of lost it for a moment, but thankfully Jacina was with us and was able to calm her quickly.”

Martin looked at her. “So she knows what happen to her?” He asked.

Duewa nodded as she stepped up on Martin's other side. "Yes." She answered. "She is a Botanical Biological Research Scientist who was concentrating on improving the growth and acclimation hormones of different plant sources to Onterom."

Martin shook his head. "Come again?"

Duewa chuckled. "An advanced plant doctor." She said as Anja laughed softly.

"Ah... ok." Martin said with a grin.

"Jacina was able to sooth her within Mindvoice." Anja said. "She did it without shielding and it was very impressive." Anja looked at him. "She's a Tier Six Marty."

Martin nodded his head as he looked at the woman lying in the bed. She looked worn and still somewhat pale and sick, but her long auburn red hair was healthy and given more time she would turn out to be a very beautiful woman just as Jacina had when she was fully recovered. "I'm guessing most Pralors will be Tier Six... they use Mindvoice even more than we do." He looked back to Anja. "She's fully clean?" He asked.

Anja nodded. "No trace of the Svorag virus left in her blood work." She replied. "We'll test her every other day just to make sure like we will with Jacina... but there's no reason to think it will come back."

Martin looked at her. "Red... could you have... would you have been able to...?"

"I really don't know Lover." Anja answered him softly knowing why he was asking the question. "It's possible... but there is no way to be sure if the serum we developed would work on a fully turned Svorag. And neither Duewa, Radra nor I have any desire to try and vaccinate a Svorag. If it fails and it gets loose on the ship... it could infect a quarter of the crew in hours. In days the entire ship would be infected. And given that we have discovered they probably keep at least a small portion of their memories and knowledge... it's too much of a risk. You want Svorag running around who know how to operate this ship?"

Martin nodded and looked back through the window. "No. I was just checking is all?" He said.

Anja took his arm in her hands and stepped closer to him looking up into his face. "You did the right thing Lover." She said gently. "Maybe in the future we'll discover it will work on fully turned Svorag and maybe we will design and implement a delivery system. Right now... we just don't know."

"I want a two member security detail on her twenty-four seven." Martin said finally. "At least for a few days and until we are sure that this virus thing is fully gone."

"Is she confined to Medical?" Duewa asked.

Martin shook his head. "No. Not at all. We haven't limited Jacina because you and Aricia are sure she is clean. This one... Recia right?"

Duewa nodded. "Yes."

"Recia is free to go wherever any other guest on this ship would be allowed to go. I don't want her to feel like she is a prisoner in any way." Martin said. "I just want someone with her all the time. For her safety as well as ours."

"I'll have Thoti assign someone to her." Duewa spoke.

Martin nodded his head. "Good enough for me." He said turning to look at Anja. "Now tell me about this information you have discovered."

Duewa touched his arm and nodded to Anja. "I will let her know and give her a final exam before we release her." She said. She and Anja had already been through the small bit of information that they had found and Anja would be able to explain it to Martin in a way he understood without all the medical terminology.

Anja motioned to him with her hand. "Follow me." She said moving for the main office that had been set up in the Medical Bay. The crew quickly determined that Duewa had become second only to Anja when it came to medical decisions on the ship and among their small fleet of two ships. To make this obvious to anyone who didn't know, they added a desk and high backed chairs to the office, giving Duewa her own set of Hadarian computer terminals to work with. Their desks were in the shape of a capital L, allowing them to exchange information and talk to one another easily enough. Anja led him into the office and moved behind her desk as he pulled a chair over. Anja slipped into the high backed chair and the small hover jets in the legs came alive as they sensed her weight. Anja Leonidas was known for darting back and forth in her chair when she was deeply involved in something on her computers and it was almost funny to watch as she scooted back and forth between terminals or the three consoles that surrounded her desk. "Duewa and I have only begun to scratch the surface of this information... that was an excellent idea by the way."

Martin grinned letting her sweet honey scent filter over him. "I do have my moments you know." He said.

Anja chuckled. "Occasionally... yes you do." She told him.

Martin smiled and shook his head at her playful jab. They had done this even before Anja finally became his wife and mate, though on a much lesser scale. It was their way of showing their deep affection for each other. It was also a source of constant humor for everyone around them as well since the only people with enough courage to speak to Martin without a trace of reverence for his position as King were his wives and mates and Danny. Martin also knew that if they argued, not only was it entertaining for those who witnessed it; it was also very fun to make up later in their bed. Hadarian she may have been, but growing up first around humans and then becoming his wife and mate had made Anja quite adventurous. She was a ball of fire in their bed when she was wound up. Anja looked at him and her jade green eyes narrowed at the look in his eyes as he gazed at her.

"Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?" She demanded.

Martin smiled. "Only pleasant thoughts." He told her.

"God Marty... you are such a perv!" Anja exclaimed with a large amount of humor and just a touch of lust in her voice.

Martin laughed. "Only for you and my ladies Red. Only for you and my ladies."

"I hope so!" Anja declared. "You are such an inventive pervert!"

Martin chuckled again and leaned forward closer to her. "What do you have Red?" He asked her finally getting back to their original topic.

Anja typed quickly on the control panel and then turned the left monitor to face Martin as he sat in the chair to the left side of her. "Lorendo... that fat little fuck... he wasn't erasing the computers cores as we first thought Marty. He was downloading them. Right where you wanted him too... along with the entire core of his P9." She looked at him. "How did you know?"

"A hint from something Avi said and my gut telling me that whatever was here they wouldn't just toss away." Martin answered.

"Beautiful call Lover." She told him. She turned back to the screen. "The source file encryption is pretty extensive but Avi was able to sift through the three layers and then crack it. He is opening the files as we go... but there are hundreds of folders and entries and he has to do each one individually."

Martin watched as the list of files scrolled past him on the screen. He wasn't as computer illiterate as most people thought and in fact had earned a degree in Advanced Programming from the Apo Prime University in secret. It was this knowledge and his continued association with Avi that allowed him to become quite the computer guru according to Tina and Endith. He reached up and touched the screen. "These files date back almost twenty-five thousand years Anja." He said looking at Anja. "Lorendo said they had been dealing with them for only twenty thousand years."

Anja nodded her head. "That's the first thing we noticed. We started with the oldest files first." She said. "Then there is this." She touched the panel and his screen changed to one of genetic code and different images of cells.

Martin leaned back. "Red... what am I looking at?"

Anja slid over next to him in her chair. "This... my handsome and ever so well equipped husband and mate..." She spoke leaning into his side with a smile. "This is the source genetic code for the Svorag virus."

Martin looked at her. "Wait... the source code? Like the original code for a computer software program?"

Anja nodded. "Works in pretty much the same way yes." She answered. "It's the original genetic code for the virus. The genetic source that every mutation has derived from. This virus has mutated a total of four times if what I'm looking at is accurate based on the type I found in Jacina and Recia. I could go into much greater detail but I know you hate that... so the bottom line is this. Lorendo made this virus."

Martin's head snapped around. "Say what?" He almost shouted.

Anja nodded her head. "Oh yeah. Every mutation we have seen in these files so far has been tested against the original strand Marty. The only way to have the original strand is if you made it or you found it. And testing each mutation against the original strand of the virus is sincerely damning proof."

"He couldn't have found it?" Martin asked her. "How do you find something like this?"

“No... he didn't find it. Not that little power mad bastard. No... he made this.” She snarled. Anja leaned over and tapped her control panel twice more causing the image on the monitor to change in front of them. This time it showed some sort of written material. Short blurbs in what appeared to be a log of some sort. Martin's eyes grew wider as he read. “Read this.”

“*Nubou lae!*” Martin hissed.

Anja nodded. “Yeah... that's what I said too.” Anja told him.

Martin turned to her. “You think Delnash...”

Anja shook her head immediately. “No. There's no way he could have known any of this and acted as he did. He was adamant several times that he did not authorize Lorendo to use the type of force that he did against us on Onterom. He wouldn't have let his children come with us Marty and he just isn't that good of an actor. And you know I'm pretty good at reading people. No... this is all Lorendo's baby Martin. Besides... For'mya would have sensed something off about him right away.”

“You had her...?” Martin asked.

Anja smiled shyly. “Well...”

“Red... we don't do that.” Martin said. “You know that.”

Anja nodded. “Yes I do. I also know that these are Pralors and more than likely they have played a role in all of our species' advancement Martin. At least in some shape or form. The proof is popping up all around us as we go. And the arrogance in many of them just flat out pisses me off. For'mya didn't press very hard and she only sifted through his surface thoughts. She was partly empathic before you bit her you big lug. You were just too busy looking at her ass to notice.”

Martin grinned. “Well... you have to admit... it is a nice ass.”

Anja smiled brilliantly. “I know.”

“So he didn't detect it?” Martin asked surprised.

Anja snorted in disgust. “Please... with the ego trip these people are on he probably thought it was a headache. I don't think they realize just how powerful we are. Especially you for that matter. And For'mya has gotten every good at detecting things like this without anyone knowing. She is very subtle.”

“Man... you are devious!” He announced.

Anja laughed. “That's why you love me so much.” She said cheerfully.

Martin smiled at her and leaned over quickly to silence her laughter with a kiss. Anja gasped and returned the kiss as he pulsed her with his aura and sent shivers of delight through her body. “Yes... I do.” He said finally as he pulled away.

Anja looked at him dreamily and took his arm in her hands. “What do we do now?” She asked keeping her mind focused. He could so easily distract her.

“Keep digging.” Martin said. “Pull some people you trust to help you and Duewa. No more than three or four and make sure you swear them to secrecy.”

Anja nodded. “Ok. What are you going to do?”

“Talk to Murano.” Martin answered. “I have some questions for him and Delnash's daughter Kesyla.”

“What questions?” Anja asked.

Martin looked at her intently. “I want to know where the Lycavorian planets in this system are. And I want to know why the Pralors stopped monitoring their progress.”

Anja's eyes grew wider. “Martin you don't think...”

“I don't know.” Martin said. “I hope not... but now that you have shown me this and after what I have seen of them on Onterom... I have a very large empty spot in my gut forming and I don't like it.”

“Marty... this is only the tip of the ice burg. Something tells me this Lorendo is involved in some really nasty *sibfla*.” Anja said. “But aside from this we don't have answers to the rest of the questions we have about this. Why? How? When?”

Martin looked at her. “Then find them Red.” He spoke firmly. “You are the only one who can.”

Anja nodded her head. “Ok.” She said softly. “I will. But we may not like what we find Martin.”

Martin nodded his head. “I have no doubts we won't like what we find.” He answered. “But we need to be sure before I see that bastard again and dismember him with my bare hands for what he has done.”

Anja nodded. “That would be fitting.” She said in agreement.

“Keep this under wraps Anja.” Martin said. “Outside of those you pick make sure no one else knows. If what I think has happened has indeed happened, we won’t be able to hold our people back. And I wouldn’t want to try.”

“I know Lover.” She said softly. “I’ll be careful.”

Martin nodded and rose to his feet. “I’m going to go see Murano.” He spoke evenly. “I need some answers and only he will give them to me.”

“You trust him that much Marty?” Anja asked.

“He’s a Praetorian.” Martin said. “I can feel the connection he has with me. With Andro. With us. The Praetorians... they were all connected in some odd way. Yes... I can trust him.” He answered. “I have to.”

“Martin... be careful. I can’t say this enough... but based on what I’ve seen so far, this Lorendo asshole has his fingers in all kinds of dirt.” Anja said. “There’s no telling what he has been involved in or with. And he has gotten away with it because there have been no checks on his work. The Pralors... their government has no oversight. They trust him completely to be working for their benefit and this proves he is not. At least not entirely.”

Martin nodded. “Yeah... you noticed that too huh?”

“We all did.” Anja said.

“Nothing gets passed you guys.” Martin said with a smile.

Anja laughed at him. “We aren’t men.” She stated. “We aren’t distracted by all the tits and ass. We *have* the tits and asses.”

“Hey... I’m not distracted by the tits and ass!” Martin quipped.

Anja canted her head slightly and looked at him. “So you are telling me if I stripped out of my uniform right now... you wouldn’t jump my bones?” She stated. “Not that I don’t love when you jump my bones mind you.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “That’s not fair.” He stated.

Anja chuckled. “You know what I mean Lover.” She said. “Go on... get out of here and let me get back to work.”

“Let me know if you discover anything important.” Martin said.

Anja nodded her head as she turned back to her computers. “I will.”

Martin turned and headed out of the Medical Bay his thoughts already shifting to his talk with Murano. He lifted his hand and tapped his jaw activating his COM implant. “Avi?”

-Martin-

“Avi... did you by chance access the history data files aboard *SPARTA’S WRATH* when you were onboard?” Martin asked.

-You would not inquire if you did not already know the answer King Martin- Avi told him with what Martin swore was a humorous tone.

“Join me in the secure port lounge on deck eleven Avi.” Martin said. “And have Wayonn, Murano, Danny and Helen join us. As well as Delnash’s daughter Kesyla.”

-Understood- Avi answered.

Martin turned the corner into the main corridor and made his way towards the elevator lift. He needed answers and he intended to get them.

KALIS’S LEUGERS FLIGHT

“...four planets within this system that can sustain life.” Corsa spoke softly as she pointed to different locations on the star chart. “We are too far at the moment to scan any of them more intensely, but they are as good a location as not.”

They had conducted their last jump more than ten hours ago and once arriving in this sector of space they had docked together once more to balance the passengers of the two ships more. Koguth, Corsa, Mani and Nedoli stood around the star chart, Ceale beside Nedoli and Mataen standing beside Corsa.

“We do not know if that is what Kalis intends.” Mataen spoke. “Landing on one of these planets is a risky proposition at best father.”

Corsa nodded her head agreeing with her husband. “I too think it is a risk we should not take.” She stated. “If the Marshal’s forces somehow find us... they could easily destroy our ships from orbit and we could very well die on any of these planets.”

“We should not question his motives or his plans.” The voice spoke and they all turned as Mata moved up to the table.

“We are not questioning him.” Mataen spoke.

“Aren’t you?” Mata asked with no hostility in his voice. “You have questioned whether this was such a good idea the moment you discovered I came with him.” Mata moved fully up to the table beside Koguth. “I am Puma Bane yes.” He told them. “However... I am not like the rest of them you know so well.”

“So you say.” Corsa hissed softly.

“Corsa!” Mani gasped.

“No... it is her right to disbelieve me.” Mata spoke quickly. “And I understand why... I do. All I ask is that you do not question Kalis or his motives. He has lived in the shadow of his father, in fear of him for so long. Now that he has finally discovered who he is at his core, he has been more decisive and confident. More in control than I have ever seen him.”

Ceale glanced over to where Kalis was stretched out on the ridiculously uncomfortable web bench along the bulkhead of the ship. His head was resting on a pack of some sort and his arms were tightly wrapped around the lithe form of her daughter in quite the protective manner. Serale was stretched out on his body, very intimately in several places, her head resting on his chest as she slept soundly. They had been that way for nearly seven hours now, neither of them moving more than a few inches in any way. This was not some sort of fling on her daughter’s part or Kalis’s for that matter Ceale was quickly discovering. Serale had told her everything that happened between them, even the part of Kalis refusing when Serale practically begged him to take her on that ship, completely naked in his arms. Ceale’s gut had twisted up when she had seen the first few displays of affection between them, but it had lessened with each one when she thought back to what Serale had told her. Ceale was beginning to see that her daughter’s feelings were sincerely genuine and came from her heart and if what she knew of Lycavorians was any measure, Kalis’s reaction to her was just as genuine. Ceale knew enough Lycavorians to know that what she saw between Kalis and Serale, the way he looked at her, the way he was so protective of her, this was how true Lycavorians viewed their females.

Ceale turned quickly and let her eyes settle on Nedoli. She had been fighting the growing feelings she had for the tall and imposing Kavalian, but it was a losing battle she knew. His treatment of her was beyond reproach and completely heartfelt. He doted over her like she was some sort of royal figure and Ceale could not believe he would find her even remotely desirable after all she had endured. Ceale discovered quickly that was not the case at all and no matter how much she tried to persuade herself otherwise, her feelings for him were growing more powerful by the hour. She found his features incredibly handsome, even covered in the soft light brown fur. Pusintin had forced her to perform oral sexual acts with several of his Kavalian officers and Ceale could not help but wonder if he was as large as they were. His entire manner was completely opposite of those men and his affection for her was becoming more and more open as the hours went by. It was an affection that Ceale was rapidly beginning to return for it made her feel like a woman again. Whole and unblemished.

“We should wake him and find out what he intends.” Corsa spoke now. “We have been stationary for too long as it is.”

Mata shook his head. “No.” He stated. “He has been running on pure adrenalin since he embraced what he wanted after Enurrua. Protecting himself and Lady Ceale’s children in the heart of the devil’s realm when the slightest mistake would mean his death as well as theirs takes much determination and planning. He needed this rest. I have seen it within him these last weeks... none of you have.”

Koguth nodded his head. "Mata is right." He spoke. "We have lived with this, the knowledge that what we feel and believe could be our end all of our lives... this is new to Kalis. Hopefully in a short while it will all change for the better."

Mata looked at all of them. "As for me General Koguth... if it makes all of you more comfortable I will surrender my weapons to you. You can assign someone to guard me if you wish... I don't care. What I have done is my decision... and that decision was to follow Kalis and return the purpose to my life that it once had. I have trained that boy since he was an infant and I would follow him wherever he goes without question. Believe that if you will... but it is the truth."

Mani looked at him and slowly reached up to place a hand on his cheek. "You... you carry much weight upon your shoulders Mata." She said softly. "Much pain."

Mata looked at her and nodded. "I do." He said. "But I have chosen not to let it destroy me as it has so many others. Following Kalis is only the first step. Getting the information that we have found on this ship to General Pian is the next step and then fighting to free my people from their oppression is the last. Whatever happens in between I will take with the newness of a rebirth I never thought I would be allowed."

Mani smiled. "Indeed." She said. "I think we are all at that point in our lives now." She told him.

Koguth looked at the star chart. "Let us chart different courses to these planets so that we are prepared in case it is Kalis's plan to go to one of them. We..."

His words ended when the red flashing lights began to blink on and off and an alarm of some sort began to sound throughout the transport. "What..." Koguth began to speak as he turned toward where he knew Kalis and Serale were sleeping. He needn't have bothered for just as his eyes settled on Kalis, he saw both him and Ceale's young daughter spring up as if shot from a cannon. Both of them were instantly awake and moving for the cockpit before he could even utter a word.

"What is it?" He snapped turning back to Corsa.

"Proximity alarm!" Corsa answered as her hands flew over the star chart in front of them and Kalis and Serale disappeared into the cockpit. "Someone just hit us with an active sensor scan!"

"A ship?" Nedoli hissed.

"I don't know!" Corsa exclaimed. "Nothing is showing on the sensors!"

Koguth began marching for the cockpit without a second's hesitation. "That does not mean something is not there!" He barked.

OMEN THREE

Yuriko Leonidas sat calmly in her command chair on the bridge of *OMEN THREE*, Filrian standing beside the arm of her chair as they watched the monitor to their right front. They could see the two *LEUGERS* easily, the two transports docked together as they were. It had taken seven hours to find the two ships, and then only after they had finished their last jump. Once they had located them it had taken *OMEN THREE* only one jump to reach them with their advanced engines. The Kavalian fleet was in disarray at the moment and Yuriko felt confident they wouldn't be able to respond to her cousin leaving the Task Force for at least ten more hours. It was more than enough time to make contact with Kalis and get him and his supporters further away from Pusintin and his madness.

"Still no contacts?" Yuriko called out.

"Board is clean." The sensor operator responded. "LSD Drives on both targets are powered down to recalibrating mode. No signs of any weapons. Sensors confirm ninety-two lifesigns. Eighty-eight Kavalian, one Lycavorian and Kavalian combo and three Hadarian."

Yuriko leaned forward in her chair. "Hadarian?" She asked looking at her husband of over a decade now. "Did you hear of any Hadarians being lost before we left husband?" She asked.

Filrian shook his head. "Not within Union controlled territory." He replied. "There are a number of Hadarian operated clinics within The Wilds however."

Yuriko looked at the screen and the two ships on it. "Interesting." She said softly. "I don't believe I've ever heard of Hadarians willing traveling with Kavalians. If the reports from Enurrua are accurate though, father laid a beating on Pusintin something fierce. Maybe he needed Hadarian medical treatment."

Filrian leaned close to her. "Given your father's reputation Yuriko... whatever the reports say... I would double their assessment. Your father is not the most forgiving of fighters and the reports say he nearly killed him. And your father did give you his authorization code Yuriko." He said.

Yuriko nodded. "I know. He does have a temper doesn't he? Especially when it concerns my mothers." She said. "The Kavalians having Hadarians onboard changes things somewhat. It could show they aren't really allies."

Filrian looked at her. "I think it leans more to the explanation that they are allies." He said. "They can't possibly think we would allow them to keep prisoners. Kalis would know this if he has changed as your father and even you believe. Why have them if that is the case?"

"Leverage." Yuriko answered.

Filrian thought about that for a second. "Possible." He said. "I don't think so... but very possible. Only one way to find out."

Yuriko looked at him with a smile. "Yes... there is." She said. She reached behind her back and pulled out her P1 from the small pouch she wore it in. She brought it up and plugged it into the arm of the chair. "COM officer... prepare to send this command on the frequency specified. Tactical Officer... hit them with an active scan. Give them a two second pulse just to let them know someone is out here. Let's see what they do."

KALIS'S LEUGERS

"Serale?" Kalis gasped as Koguth and the others piled into the cockpit behind them.

Serale shook her head quickly. "Nothing!" She exclaimed. "Sensors are clean!"

Kalis looked up slowly from the sensor screen between them and nodded his head as he gazed out into the stars in front of their ship. "Yes... it is clean. It is clean because we can't see them. Not even a flicker on the sensors. Not a whisper."

Serale looked at him detecting the change in the tone of his voice. "What do you mean?" She asked. "Kalis?"

"There have been rumors for years among the Kavalian High Command that my Uncle has such ships." Kalis spoke softly. "Ships that you cannot see on sensors or visual sweep Serale my love. Super secret Intelligence platforms. Designed to infiltrate an enemies main defenses and send back information to the Union Command."

Nedoli and Corsa looked at him as he spoke. "Kalis those ships... they are only rumors." Nedoli said. "We have never been able to confirm they exist. The technology needed to build such things is..."

Kalis turned and looked at him. "After what you have seen and heard Nedoli Juturi... do you honestly believe my Uncle does not possess this technology? They have had that unique ship that so many say is a myth for over two decades."

"Kalis is right Nedoli." Corsa spoke softly looking at him. "It's the only thing that makes sense."

"What are all of you talking about?" Koguth demanded.

Nedoli looked at his father. "The Lycavorian Ghost ship father." He stated confidently. "They are said to be the most advanced warships in existence right now. Used primarily as intelligence platforms. Completely invisible to known sensors and even the naked eye. It is said they are able to bend light somehow around the ships. Kavalian Intelligence has never been able to actually confirm they exist though. No one has. But there are many rumors out there that say otherwise."

"He's had one shadowing my father's fleet ever since we left the Alpha Quadrant." Kalis said softly. Kalis turned and looked at Koguth. "It has to be. It is the reason why we have never been closer than two days from them General. Why he always seems two or three steps ahead of us. This ship has been following us and sending him all our information and he simply adjusts his course to compensate. He's luring my father further

and further away. He... he knows where he is going General and my father is following the bait like some unschooled pup fresh from his mother's womb. And when my uncle determines he has him far enough away..."

Serale looked at him. "What?"

Kalis looked at her. "He will turn around Serale. He will turn around and strike my father so hard and so savagely that he will never recover. He will have his vengeance for my father's actions. And he *will* kill him this time."

"Couldn't happen to a nicer person!" Ceale spat.

Kalis looked at her and nodded his head in agreement. A simple act really... but one that made his status in Ceale's eyes suddenly rocket upwards. "I agree completely Lady Ceale." He said softly.

"What is he looking for out here?" Corsa asked of no one in particular. "We have never even sent probes out this far. No one has ever been out here but he follows a course and seems to know where he is going."

"Whatever it is... it can't be good for us." Nedoli spoke.

"He will not harm those who do not harm him first." Kalis spoke. "We must remember that as we move forward."

Koguth shook his head slowly. "And these are the people Keleru and your father would have us go to war with?" He said.

"That war started the moment my father laid hands on For'mya and violated her in such a way General." Kalis spoke with contempt in his voice as he turned his eyes back to the view window. "Until then... until then it all could have been avoided. Once my father crossed that line... once he assaulted her dignity and honor in such a way... it all became mute."

Koguth nodded. "Indeed." He said gently. He looked out the view window. "Is there a way to contact them? Show them we are not the enemy?"

Kalis shook his head as he looked out the view window. "Even if there was they would never acknowledge it. We..." The mad chirping alarm nearly caused Kalis to leap out of his seat as he grabbed for his lower back to the surprised looks of everyone in the cockpit. His hands closed around the P1 he carried there and he brought it around in front of him with wide eyes. The P1 was the cause of the quiet alarm, the small screen blinking on and off as he held it in his hand. His head turned and Ceale noticed how they settled on Serale. "Serale?" He gasped. "It's... it's a COM link! An active COM Link!"

Ceale's daughter reached across and touched his forearm as she spoke with a smile. "This is... it is what you have waited for Kalis."

"And been too cowardly to do!" Kalis hissed angrily at himself.

"That doesn't matter now." Serale told him. "Answer it Kalis my love."

Kalis looked back to the pad and lifted his hand. It hovered over the small control panel for a long moment before he finally brought his index finger down on the button and activated the COM link. "Yes..." He spoke hesitantly.

"To whom am I speaking?" The female voice asked ringing out with confidence and strength.

"This is... I am Kalis." He answered while looking at the small screen.

"So... it is you cousin." The female voice spoke. **"This information is going to make father very happy."**

Kalis's eyes narrowed. "Cousin?" He asked.

"I am Star Captain Yuriko Leonidas." The voice said with no small modicum of pride. **"Martin Leonidas adopted me many years ago and I have carried my name proudly ever since that day. You have brought others with you I see."**

Kalis turned quickly and looked at Koguth. He said nothing and turned back to the P1 in his hand. "How do you..." Kalis shook his head. "I travel with General Koguth'Juturi and many of his Pride members. They have left my father and the Kavalians behind just as I have."

"And the three Hadarians with you?" Yuriko asked. **"Prisoners?"**

"What? How do you...? No!" Kalis hissed loudly. "I mean they were... but no longer. Why do you think they are with us?"

"I hope so." Yuriko said. **"Are your ships damaged?"**

"No." Kalis answered. "However... the rapid jumps to escape my father have taxed our LSD cores to the limit. They will need time to recalibrate and recharge."

“Understood.” Yuriko’s voice answered. ***“There is a Class M moon half a light year from your current location. Proceed there at sublight speed and land at the following coordinates.”***

Kalis watched a set of numbers flash across the small screen. “I have them.” He spoke.

“The coordinates are to a clearing near a set of natural caves where we have established a forward listening post. You will find supplies and clothes and other needs.” Yuriko told him. ***“We will meet you there in six hours.”***

“Will you not reveal yourself?” Koguth spoke now leaning forward to look out the view window.

“I have revealed myself.” Yuriko answered. ***“This is sufficient until we meet face to face.”***

“Wait! My daughter...” Koguth asked quickly leaning forward. “Iama’Juturi. We have... we have reason to believe she may be among those with your father. We...”

“She is.” Yuriko answered.

Mani moved up next to Koguth now her eyes moist as she gripped Koguth’s arm. “Is she... is she well?” She stammered.

“Very much so.” Yuriko replied. ***“She has become a vital member of my father’s crew with her skills. And she has even found a husband and mate I understand from my mother’s last transmission. She is bubbling with happiness according to my mother.”***

Mani gasped as tears burst fully from her eyes, her hands going to cover her mouth in shock at this news. “Husband?” She exclaimed softly.

Koguth’s face became a little harder and he looked at the P1. “Husband? Who is this husband?” He demanded. “A Lycavorian?”

“I’m sure you will discover everything soon.” Yuriko answered. ***“Please proceed to the coordinates I gave to you. I will contact my father and let him know what has transpired here. He will decide what to do from there. OMEN THREE out!”***

The transmission was terminated from the source before they could say anything else and Kalis lowered the P1. He glanced quickly to Serale. “Do you have this moon on our sensors Serale?”

Serale adjusted the sensor board between them and ran her finger across the screen. “Yes.” She answered. “Point six Light Years away. Two hours without using the main engines to ease the stress on the LSD coils.”

“Plot the course.” Kalis said quickly. “General... you and Nedoli should return to your *LEUGERS* so we can unseal the dock and make our way there.”

Koguth nodded his head still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that his youngest child was alive and well and so very close. He gripped Mani’s hand and nodded again. “Yes.” He said. “Nedoli. Corsa.”

Nedoli nodded and began to turn to follow Corsa who was already walking out. Ceale stopped him by grabbing his thickly muscled arm. “Nedoli?” She whispered looking up at him and not caring that everyone’s attention turned to her.

Nedoli met her gaze and smiled as he reached out tentatively and placed his hands on her waist. Ceale didn’t pull away from him now and even gripped his arms tighter as she stared up at him. “Stay with your children Ceale.” He spoke with a smile. “I will see you in a few hours.”

Ceale didn’t release his arms and instead reached up and placed her palms flat against his lightly furred cheeks. She used her thumbs to stroke the soft fur on his cheeks. “Come... come back to me.” She whispered to him.

Nedoli’s dark eyes grew bright at her words and he eased her closer to him... tentatively pulling her against his body. Ceale didn’t shy away and she felt his hard body press against her front and small shivers of delight coursed through her at the sensations. Sensations she never thought she would feel again after what she had endured at Pusintin’s hands, and certainly an excitement she never experienced with her husband. Nedoli lowered his forehead to hers and gently squeezed her waist. “I will always come back to you Ceale.” He spoke softly. “Always.”

Serale was watching intently and she blinked away the tears in her eyes when she saw her mother’s face brighten and Nedoli lean over to kiss her ever so softly on the lips. It was a kiss that her mother accepted and returned with the passion it was given. A gentle and warm kiss that spoke of intense feeling and devotion. Much the same as when Kalis kissed her. Serale knew then that her mother would heal. The towering Kavalian in front of her would help her to heal and perhaps give her something their father never did. Nedoli let his large

hand caress Ceale's cheek before he followed Corsa out of the cockpit. Koguth motioned to the two extra chairs behind Kalis and Serale.

"We will remain with you Kalis." He spoke. "If that is alright."

Kalis nodded. "Of course." He stated. He touched the COM panel. "Mata?"

"I'm securing the hatch and seal now." Mata's voice answered.

"Mata we..." Kalis began.

"Hah!" Mata exclaimed. **"Have no fears Kalis my boy... I intend to live for many more years to come. I will leave my weapons on the ship. I have no desire to be shot by the very people I wish to join because my past clings to me still."**

Kalis nodded and glanced at Koguth. "Thank you Mata."

"Hatch is sealed." Mata said. **"Let's get moving."**

Koguth smiled slightly. "He marches into the unknown with no fear." He said. "Just as we do. I'm beginning to like him and I never thought I would say that about a Puma Bane."

Kalis nodded in agreement. "Yes sir." He smiled at Ceale who was watching him intently from the chair next to Mani and then turned back to the front. "Serale... spool up the sub-light engines. Let's take that first step into our future boldly."

Serale nodded her head. "A future I can't wait to start." She said looking at him with adoration in her green eyes.

It was a look that Ceale saw instantly and try as she might she could not feel anything but happiness for her daughter. Happiness that they were free of Pusintin and his vileness. Free of her deceitful and ignorant husband who cared nothing for them. Free to finally live their lives how they wanted too. Ceale would never imagined that events would happen as they had, her daughter falling in love with the son of their captor. Her powerful and growing feelings for Nedoli and his gentle touch and words.

Future. A word her daughter had used several times now. Ceale nodded her head to herself. Yes... a future. A future where they all could find what they so wanted to find. And Ceale suddenly knew that future for her would be with Nedoli. And as she thought about it, that prospect did not cause her fear in any way. It made her relish in what she could have. Would have very soon.

"Nor I." Kalis said. "Nor I."

SCIMITAR

ENROUTE BACK TO EARTH

"...speak to him soon *Tenna Deia*." Andro spoke as he sat on the large couch in his quarters. He wore only his white pants and no shirt. All that adorned his upper body was the glittering fragment of the Dragon Heart pendant he never removed. "I would imagine things are very interesting where he is and that is why he has not contacted me."

"You don't think..." Deia's face asked as she moved around her desk in the transmission and held the mug of tea.

Andro shook his head quickly. "No. There was a brief moment... a faint spike of intense anger... but nothing like that since. He is most powerful with my mothers around him, you know this, and I would be able to detect if something terrible was amiss."

"You can... you can really sense him even across so vast a distance?" Deia asked.

Andro nodded his head. "I haven't asked *Val'istar* Shiria yet but I believe it is because of this Paladin gene that we all carry. I can sense him, Denali, Jomann and even Dorian now. I have been... I have been getting flashes from Deion as well *Tenna*. I think he might carry the gene too."

"Deion?" Deia asked. "He is within his Agoge now. As is Nara. From what I understand they are not being particularly easy on either of them."

Andro nodded. "Good. It is the only way to learn." Andro looked at her in the secure QCR transmission. "Father will contact me soon. When he has decided what course of action he is going to take."

Deia nodded. "Very well. Arrarn, Narice and Toria arrived this morning with Cha'talla and Admiral Pontal. Several of the *Ventash'ma* also came with them. Pian and Jalersi are due in later this evening with a dozen of the senior Kavalian Pride Leaders. The rest will arrive over the next two days. They are using Isra as their conduit out of Kavalian space so he can control their movements."

Andro looked at her. "Uncle Isra suspects something?" He asked.

"He did not rise from Chetak's son to the position and trust he now holds because he is not cautious." Deia said.

"True enough." Andro said.

"Lady Aleatia and her son arrived yesterday." Deia said. "I must say she is extremely pleasant and full of life. Gorgo has taken it upon herself to show her Sparta and fill her with our history. It seems she feels this is her duty since you took her daughter as your wife and mate and no one else from our family is here to greet her."

Andro grinned. "Sorry about that." He said sheepishly.

"I hope you are quite done." Deia asked him with a smile. "The Netnews is going crazy because now they won't be able to keep up with you and your father."

"The Netnews couldn't keep up when I was single." Andro stated.

Deia laughed at his words. "Yes... well... the comparisons to your father are nearly out of control now. One of the more senior Netnews people even went so far as to say that while you both truly love your wives and mates, you and your father are going to insure that the name Leonidas lives on for millennia to come. That there will always be a Leonidas on the throne. That is attested to by the fact that you and your siblings are so many."

Andro chuckled softly. "Father would say the size of our family is no one's business and that he loves children. I know my mothers would say that."

Deia matched his laugh. "Indeed they would." She said.

Andro looked at her. "Anything from Icho?"

Deia turned serious and shook her head. "He's maintaining a very low profile lately. You certainly made him look somewhat the fool when you commandeered his Netnews briefing. Or perhaps he is just waiting for Ulana to return so that he may pump her for information about your actions on Solmar. That was a big risk you took with the Kavalians Androcles."

"But one that needed to be made." Andro said nodding his head. "And it openly shows that Keleru is not as powerful as he likes people to believe. Has his accusations against Sadi gained anymore traction?"

Deia shook her head quickly. "That died very quickly after the interview you gave. Some of the braver Netnews people came to Sparta and began asking questions about her they had no right to ask, but you know how our people from Sparta view Sadi. How they are coming to view Ne'Veha and Lu'ria and the others. They were quickly shown the way to the city gates."

Andro nodded. "Good. I have some ideas I would like to run past you and *Tenna* Tarifa when I return. Perhaps we could set up a quiet hour or two for that?"

Deia nodded. "She is in Eden City now dealing with an issue concerning the Drow but I will let her know."

"The Drow?" The female voice asked from the side and Androcles turned to see Lu'ria standing in the doorway to the bedroom. He could see Sehri sitting on the bed with Carisia brushing out her long hair as she read from a data pad. Sadi and Ne'Veha were lying to the side going over reports they had received from Ben at Dreamland. Andro didn't question them about this for he knew they would tell him when they felt whatever they were working on was ready. Lu'ria wore only a white lace pair of panties and bra which contrasted incredibly with her dark skin color and shimmering white hair. The thin robe was made from the same material as Sadi's but she preferred the crimson color to any other. Her amber colored eyes focused on Deia in the transmission as Andro held out his hand for her and she took it without hesitation. He pulled her onto the couch next to him and she curled her long legs under her firm ass as she scooted close to his warm body. "What about the Drow Deia?" Lu'ria asked once she was settled.

Deia had long ago threatened her with dire consequences if she was to use her official title when speaking with her. Deia's words were quite to the point.

“You are a Crown Princess of the Union and a Leonidas now as well as my Mandri’s Blessed Drow wife and mate. He adores and worships you just as he does Sadi and the others.” Deia had told her. ***“You will not refer to me except by my name and I don’t care who knows it.”***

“I don’t know all the details Lu’ria... Tarifa was going to fill me in when she returned this evening.” Deia told her. “It has something to do with the few dozen Drow who left the city they occupied when Aihola first reformed the Drow as one entity. Just after Eden City was formed. All I know was that they were meeting about it and then there was a period of several hours where the EDF chatter on the planetwide Net increased. I think Lynwe and Tareif then conducted some sort of operation with local forces. No doubt Charles will inform me when all the information is in, but you know we do not interfere with the internal politics of individual planets. Especially here on Earth because of the diversity of the species and most especially not the Drow. They are too close to Andro’s father and now him. Besides... Charles, Selene and Tarifa have got that running so smoothly they don’t need my help. You will probably find out the same time I do.”

Andro glanced at Lu’ria for a moment and then back to Deia. “Make an inquiry on our part regardless *Tenna* Deia.”

Deia nodded. “As you wish.” She looked at him. “How long before you return?”

“Twelve hours roughly.” Andro answered.

“I will see you when you arrive then. Contact me if your father transmits to you.” Deia said.

Andro nodded. “I will.” He told her. “We’ll see you in a few hours.”

“Very well. Go with the gods my boy.” Deia said as she reached out and ended their transmission.

Andro looked at Lu’ria as the figure of his Aunt faded. “What are you thinking Lu’ria?”

She focused her amber eyes on him. “I know enough political code words to know that Internal Politics means trouble Andro.” She spoke softly. “And not minor either. Then the EDF running some sort of operation and not telling anyone? General Lynwe does not get involved in that sort of thing unless it’s important.”

“Do not try and read more into it than we know *ArzurGai*.” He told her softly. “We’ll find out in due time.”

Lu’ria looked at his azure eyes when he said that and she felt warmth spread through her. *ArzurGai*... or Drow Heart in the Lycavorian language. He had started calling her that a few weeks ago out of the blue and the name had taken off with all of them really. It made Lu’ria flush when any of them spoke it, for it was what they used to show her how much they loved her. Just as they called Ne’Veha *SirsanGai* and Carisia *Enylarcopri*. It was Andro’s little way of showing each of them just how dear they were to him.

Lu’ria reached up and ran her fingers along his jaw and smiled. “I know... I just...”

Andro leaned over and nuzzled the hollow of her throat and the deep valley between her large breasts causing her to gasp softly and reach up to hold his head in her hands with a smile. “What?” He asked her softly. “Talk to me.”

“I want to do more.” Lu’ria said softly. “I feel... I feel I should do more to help the Queen and my mother when it comes to governing our people.”

“Then do so.” Andro spoke.

“What... what do you mean?” Lu’ria asked.

Andro looked at her bright amber eyes. “The Drow are your people too *ArzurGai*. There is no reason you can not help *Tenna* Aihola with governing them. Just because you are my wife and mate and a Crown Princess of the Union does not mean you can not have a life outside of traveling wherever I go.”

“This... this would not make you angry?” Lu’ria asked softly.

“Gods Lu’ria... why would it make me angry?” Andro asked. “Ne’Veha is speaking with the First Minister on a regular basis now, learning the intricacies of elven politics as she calls it. Narice has kept *Enylarcopri* in the loop on everything she is doing. You may be wolf now and a Crown Princess... but that does not mean you need to change your life for what you think I may want you to do Lu’ria. That would be wrong on my part and I won’t do it. To any of you.”

“Do you know how the Drow view you Andro?” Lu’ria asked. “View your father?”

Andro met her eyes. “I probably won’t like what you tell me... so no.” He replied. “My father and I... we are not gods *ArzurGai*. We are men and we have our faults.” Andro chuckled. “I have quite a few of them actually.”

“You know what I mean.” Lu'ria spoke. “First your father... now you. You trust us without question. Without hesitation.”

“Well... I think the credit for that goes more to my father and Aihola.” Andro said. “They worked long and hard for that. Walter did make the Drow to be most like Spartans in the very beginning. It is no wonder we see things the same.”

“You... you took me as your wife and mate Andro.” Lu'ria said.

Andro looked at her. “I took you as my wife and mate because you smell delicious, you are exquisitely beautiful and we were meant to be together by a power much higher than my pay grade. There was no political purpose to my actions Lu'ria. All of your scents are divine to me. You make me part of who I am. All of you do.”

“Will Sehri become like us?” Lu'ria asked him. “She has questioned us about it and she has an appointment with Eliani tomorrow for an exam.”

Andro tossed the data pad he was holding to the side and grabbed Lu'ria's waist, pulling her into his lap. He reached up and brushed some of her shimmering white hair from her face and then ran his finger over her soft violet lips. “I know and I am going with her.” Andro said. “And to answer your question... I don't know. It doesn't matter though. It will not change the way I feel about her. About any of you.”

Lu'ria smiled seductively and shifted her hips on his lap, only the fabric of her panties and his pants separating her increasingly hot center from the bulge of his thickening manhood. She pulsed him with just a fraction of the female aura that she now possessed and Sadi had been teaching her and Ne'Veha to use so well. They would never be as powerful as Sadi because she was a pureblood, but it was indeed enough to incite Androcles. Her action drew a smile and instant reaction from him as his breathing became a little shallower and the swell of his cock between her thighs began to thicken faster. He had been the first man to ever have her and he would be the only man to discover the secrets and treasures her body possessed Lu'ria knew without question. No one would be able to compare to him now. His size alone caused her to become moist for she would never have believed she could take his all of his length and girth within her. She managed it quite well now, the velvet connection when they were joined enough to drive her crazy for more. When combined with his devastating aura and the fact that his kisses could steal her breath away and his hands were never idle, Lu'ria was convinced no man would ever make her feel as he did. She also knew that all of them felt the same way.

Lu'ria glanced into the bedroom area and saw that Sadi and Ne'Veha had tossed aside their work, their scents telling her just how aroused and ready they were. Her slave Carisia was also ready, Lu'ria able to detect her delightful rose blossom scent. As she inhaled deeper she could easily make out sugar plums and spice, amaretto, and apples and walnuts wafting through the air of their quarters now. It was growing thicker and more aroused as they sensed what she was doing and knowing that their Drow mistress would willingly share. Lu'ria smiled and turned back to Andro, running her hands across his broad chest and leaning over to drag her pink tongue languorously over the skin of his neck until she felt him shiver when she tickled his ear.

“Then perhaps Androcles Leonidas... you should show your wives and mates how you feel about us before we return to Earth.” Lu'ria whispered in his ear, her lips just brushing his skin.

Lu'ria yelped softly as his hands gripped her firm ass and he was suddenly standing up in the main room. She quickly wrapped her long legs around his waist and laughed as she felt his aura expand outward to encompass all of them and her body ignited in intense desire and want as it always did when he pulsed them. She glanced quickly back in to the bedroom and saw that his aura had the same effect on all of them, Sadi even more than the rest of them as she had already grabbed Carisia and was locked in a sizzling kiss as they rolled to the side of the bed frantically pulling at their undergarments. She turned back to Andro and saw his azure eyes nearly glowing in his own animalistic want. She smiled to herself knowing he was going to make all of them very happy this night. He began moving into the bedroom and into the open arms of Ne'Veha and Sehri and just before he tore her panties off with a growl of ardor, Lu'ria thought of Caliria and how much they all missed her. She would be back among them soon and Lu'ria knew more times like this would happen. Her Alkay could make all of them last so much longer and extend their desire and pleasure for each other. Lu'ria knew they all preferred one another in certain ways and Lu'ria could not deny that Carisia and Caliria could and did excite her just a tiny bit more. She did not feel bad about this as they had talked among each other about this very thing. Sadi openly admitted that Ne'Veha and Sehri could provoke her desires just a fraction more than the others. It

was something all of them accepted easily because they all knew Andro was theirs for the taking whenever they desired.

Lu'ria so missed her blue skinned Vanari lover and fellow Crown Princess. Lu'ria was thinking of how sweet her lips tasted just before Andro's warm lips came down and hers and stole her breath away and swept her up within the incredible wave of their combined auras. She was vaguely aware of Sehri and Ne'Veha pressing their now naked flesh against hers and then everything descended into heavenly bliss as Andro sank all twelve and a quarter inches of his thick manhood into her with one will crushing stroke and she screamed in unabashed fervor as the first orgasm of the night smashed aside her shields and all their minds became one with each other.

ARC ROYAL

“...sure of what the logs say?” Murano asked Martin from across the table as he lowered the data pad and passed it to Kesyla.

Murano sat across the table from Martin in the secure conference room, Helen sitting beside Wayonn and Kesyla to Murano's right with Mari to his left. Avi stood directly behind and to Martin's left side, Danny occupying the chair beside Martin.

Martin nodded his head. “Trust me... when it comes to anything medical... Anja is never wrong.” He stated. “She is one of the most intelligent people I have ever known. Avi cracked the encryption and Anja has been studying the logs for the last few hours. She is sure.”

Wayonn set down his copy of the files he was reading from his P1. “Now I know my distrust of him was justified. What I don't understand is why though.” He said thoughtfully. “Why even make something like this?”

Martin leaned back in his chair. “Murano... what do you know of him from before?”

Murano shrugged his broad shoulders. “I did not interact with him except for the one time after Sumar and Wayonn were declared lost. He was Assistant Director of Operations for the Science Convention at the time and I went to him to approve a search mission. I only met with him once as I said. The meeting did not go as well as I had hoped.”

“Explain.” Martin said.

“He seemed... he seemed almost happy when they declared you lost Wayonn.” Murano said. “He was not going to accede to a demand from some upstart Praetorian when all evidence pointed to the fact that none of you survived.”

“This only lends more credence to the feelings I have about his actions as well as the evidence that Avi possesses.” Wayonn spoke quickly.

“What evidence?” Daron asked leaning forward.

“Nothing you need to concern yourself with young man.” Wayonn told him from across the table.

“You accuse Elder Lorendo of actions against you and our people but present no proof.” Daron spoke. “He has done many great things since we had to flee. Things that have helped and protected our people!”

“Whatever he has done to protect our people was done by accident.” Murano snickered. “He was protecting his own backside first and foremost.”

“You do not know him Uncle!” Daron snapped. “You...”

Murano looked at him. “I know him far better than you ever will Daron!” He snapped right back. “I have seen his actions and what they have wrought! I have seen him sacrifice lives in order to save his own during the Great Exodus! Do not tell me I don't know the man!”

“And I have seen him in action as well.” Wayonn said. “Long before you were ever born Daron. The orders and updated charts we received on City Ship 41 before the storm were flawed in almost every way. Our sensor net should have detected the Ion Storm and sent out warnings to all our ships. We never got the warnings because the Ion Storm was left out of the charts we received. Only one man was authorized to sign off on any updates. The Assistant Director of Operations for the Science Convention. Lorendo.”

“Wayonn... are you... are you saying he purposely withheld the information about the storm that caused your City ships to crash?” Kesyla asked stunned.

Wayonn looked at Avi. “Avi?”

-As Wayonn has stated. All updates from the sensor network grids were passed through the office of the Assistant Director of Operation. It was his duty to review them for accuracy and insure any new information was then transmitted to all Pralor ships in every known Quadrant- Avi answered.

“He did not do this?” Murano asked now.

-An update was received prior to CS41 encountering the Ion storm... however it was without the updated charts showing the storm- Avi said. **-They were the identical charts we had received in the prior download one week earlier. Once updates are sent and confirmed, all data is then filed and taken off the main computer core so it is not used actively again. Procedure is very clear on this. It was not followed this time and the wrong update was sent to us-**

“That does not prove anything!” Daron spat. “Everyone is entitled to a mistake!”

Avi’s bright orange hue eyes focused on Daron. **-Your hypothesis would be accurate Daron... except the date and time stamp of the update was altered. This was not detected until after CS41 had crashed and been on the surface of Lycavore for more than two decades. I cross referenced the charts and all updates and discovered that the most recent update was in fact the one we had received previously only the time stamp and date were altered-**

“We were focused on trying to establish ourselves and remain out of the path of any Lycavorians at the time. We directed Avi to concentrate all his efforts on repairing the lone transport that had survived the crash at least somewhat intact while the rest of us were involved in repairs to CS41.” Wayonn spoke. “That was all we were concerned with.”

“Why did you never try to repair the COM system of the ship or transport?” Mari asked now.

-The entire Communications grid throughout the entire ship was affected by the storm- Avi answered her. **-Even the backup Bio-mechanical Data boards were damaged beyond my ability to repair. We had no means to restore or replace them. Those in the transport were damaged and would only transmit over short distances-**

“Avatar 41... if what you are saying is accurate... and I am not dismissing what your information says...” Kesyla stated. “My question would be why? Why purposely alter a vital data upstream to our ships?”

-I can not accurately answer that question without more data Kesyla- Avi answered almost casually.

“Then your accusations have no basis in fact!” Daron snapped. “I have worked with him many times in the last years!” Daron barked out. “He has had nothing but the benefit of our people at the forefront of his actions!”

“The benefit?” Mari gasped now. “Daron... he murdered three hundred of our people on Onterom! Men and women who could have been saved! He did not consult with anyone before doing this! Not even father! He just did it! How does that benefit our people?”

“You do not know what you speak of Mari! He did not murder them! He was following established security protocols!” Daron hissed back at her. “And he is an Elder of our people serving on the Convention of Elders! We should not question him!”

“There is nothing wrong with questioning the wisdom of your leaders.” Martin spoke up now looking at him. “That’s good sense.”

“You know nothing of our people!” Daron snapped.

“Daron!” Kesyla barked at him. “You are a guest here among these men and women! Just as we all are! You will mind your manners and your tone and conduct yourself in the way father raised you to!”

Daron glared at his sister but said nothing. He knew Kesyla carried the power of their father’s office in her hands. She was his most senior aide in all things and could do things and speak to people who he did not have access to. He shifted his eyes to Wayonn who leaned forward at the table.

“I will withdraw my accusations because Daron here is correct.” Wayonn spoke. “I do not have the proper evidence to support my claims.” He met Daron’s eyes. “But know this boy... Avi and I will continue to gather information and evidence and when the day comes that we have the proof you so desire I will present it. And then I will come for Lorendo and he will answer for the crimes *we* know he has committed.”

Danny sat forward. “Why don’t we stick to the facts for now ok?” He said. “We know from his own logs that he made this Svorag virus.”

“Logs that you stole.” Daron spat.

Danny turned to Daron. “However we obtained them... do you deny what they say?”

Daron sat back. “No.” He said finally. “I can not deny that. But we do not know what he originally intended when he made it. It could have been a vaccine of some sort. A medical break through. We don’t know!”

“Well... we know what it has become.” Martin continued along Danny’s train of thought. “We know he tried to cover it up by erasing entries and then trying to download the station’s remaining logs before anyone had a chance to view them.”

“I would like to view these erased logs.” Daron spoke quickly.

“For what purpose?” Murano asked.

“To determine if they are genuine!” Daron answered. “I believe I am the most qualified individual here to do that.”

Martin nodded. “Ok... I’ll let Anja know to give you access.” He said.

“Privately.” Daron prodded.

Martin chuckled. “Not a chance.” He told him. “Given your propensity to defend him... I won’t give you access to view the files without Anja present.”

“So you don’t trust us.” Daron.

Martin pointed at Kesyla and Mari. “There’s no point in lying to you Daron... I trust your sisters, I trust your uncle, but you are a different animal altogether. You seem to want to cling to this ideal that you are superior and can do no wrong. We know Lorendo was under orders not to use force against my people... which he ignored... resulting in the death of three of my people. Which doesn’t seem to bother you in the least. We also...”

“The deaths were acceptable given the circumstances.” Daron spoke. “Your people had control of the station and all we knew was that primitives had...”

“Daron!” Mari gasped in shock.

“That is what we knew at the time!” Daron snapped.

“Daron... you need to leave!” Kesyla snapped angrily.

“I will not leave!” Daron barked right back at her. “I have every right to be here to insure that these...”

Murano came to his feet now in an instant. “You are my brother’s oldest but so help me Daron... if you utter another word of disrespect I will turn you over my knee and inflict upon you the punishment your father never gave to you!”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Daron snapped at him.

Murano lifted his hand and Daron suddenly found himself lifted from his chair seized in the grips of an Etheric field he could not hope to break free from. “You test my patience boy!” He snarled at his nephew.

Mari stood up and placed her hand on Murano’s arm. “Un... Uncle release him.” She said softly.

“He does not know respect for those who are his equal or his betters as you and your sister do Mari!” Murano snapped. “I know your father taught you better than that!”

Kesyla stood up and moved up next to her uncle. “Yes he did.” She said softly looking at Murano. She turned to look at her brother. “Daron... you will leave this meeting and you will not be part of any others in the future until you learn humility! Is that clear?”

“You can not keep me from...” Daron started to say.

“I can... and I will!” Kesyla snapped. “I will not allow you to dismantle everything father wants to try and build here! I won’t! Or do I need to contact father directly and have him send a transport to take you away from here?”

Daron’s eyes narrowed for he knew Kesyla would do exactly that. He stopped struggling within the grips of his uncle’s Etheric power after a moment and snarled at her. “Fine!” He spat. “But I will speak with father myself about this!”

Kesyla shrugged her slim shoulders. “That is your right... but now you will leave!”

Murano released his hold on Daron and he dropped gently to the deck. Daron glared at him for a long moment and then turned and moved to the door which opened for him instantly. Martin waited for the door to shut and then he turned back to Murano and Kesyla. He saw her turn to face him.

“King Leonidas please accept my sincere apologies for...” She began to quickly stammer out the words.

Martin held up his hand stopping her words. “No apology is necessary.” He said quickly. “In a way I respect him for clinging to his ideals.”

“They are not my father’s ideal King Leonidas.” Kesyla spoke.

“No they are not.” He said in agreement. “And stop with the King crap will you. You are here representing your father and just as I told him, I will tell you. My name is Martin.”

“Or bone head... depending on your mood.” Danny quipped.

Kesyla met Danny’s eyes and couldn’t help but smile. She turned back to Martin and nodded her head. “Martin.” She said in reply.

Martin sat back in his chair. “I would like to know something Kesyla... if you are privy to the information?” He asked.

Kesyla nodded her head to him and Martin saw her eyes dart to Daniel next to him once more as she sat back down. “I will answer anything I can that does not violate the authority my father gave to me.”

Martin glanced at Danny and then back to her. “We know there are two worlds that were seeded with my people out here somewhere. One of them we know of for sure within this very quadrant of space.” He said. “Where are they? Why did your people stop monitoring them and what can you tell me about them?”

Kesyla shook her head. “I truly do not know Martin.” She answered. “As you have no doubt seen... the Science Convention does not tell the Chief Elder Pralor everything. I do know my father would never have sanctioned what Lorendo was doing on Onterom. The Svorag have taken too many of our people through the years for him to allow such a thing.”

“Can you get exact locations of them?” Martin asked.

Kesyla nodded without hesitation. “Yes.” She said. “You realize that Lorendo and some others will want to make it seem as if you are marshalling your species.”

Martin nodded. “Let them think that.” He said. “Let them guess at what I’m doing. It gives me the advantage until I find out what the hell is really going on.”

Murano looked at him. “You suspect something Martin?” He asked.

Martin met his eyes. “We killed a couple of these Svorag on Planet Twelve Alpha. Anja was able to examine them and she discovered Lycavorian DNA as well as Pralor DNA in one of them.”

Kesyla leaned forward. “You are certain?” She gasped.

Martin nodded. “Like I said... Anja’s not just a doctor... she’s the foremost researcher into all that genetic hoopla anywhere in the Union. And Duewa is nearly as good. With Duewa helping her... there is probably nothing they couldn’t figure out. Both of them are geniuses.”

Danny nodded. “No arguments here.” He stated.

“What connection are you trying to make?” Kesyla asked.

“Whoever she was... she was a Pralor that was turned by a Lycavorian and then attacked and changed by a Svorag.” Martin explained. “That much Anja was able to discover. Now... the only Pralors that I know of who were turned by my people are those with my grandfather and Wayonn here. And none of them made it three quarters of the way across the known galaxy into this quadrant from Lycavore. She was turned by a Lycavorian male, with no signs of any struggle and the bite was clean and in the general area where a male of my species would bite a female to change her. If he changed her then he probably took her as his wife and mate. That leaves only one possibility.”

Mari’s eyes grew a little wider. “Our people were keeping account of them!” She gasped.

Martin nodded his head. "And somehow or someway this female was turned by one of mine. This leads me to believe there are more. Finding her on Twelve Alpha also tells me something else. If she was his mate... and I believe she was... he would never abandon her to the Svorag willingly. He would need to be dead. Especially if they had children together. He would take as many of them as he could before they got to her... or he would have sent them away."

Murano nodded. "So you are saying she must have come from one of the Lycavorian planets." He said softly. "Which means the Svorag have already been there."

Martin nodded as well. "Correct." He said. "And I intend to find out."

"What... what do you intend when you... when you discover them?" Kesyla asked with hesitation in her voice now.

"They are my people Kesyla." Martin told her. "Removed from Lycavore and brought here by your people many thousands of years ago. I intend to see if there is anything I can do for them."

"What if they have not... what if they do not have your level of technology?" Mari asked. "We can not simply give it to them. Announce ourselves to them. It could alter their natural growth!"

Martin nodded. "I don't intend that no." He spoke. "But they are my people and as King... I am bound by honor to at least see for myself. It is what my grandfather would have wanted and it is what my father would expect of me."

Kesyla nodded her head. "I understand what you are saying... and I agree." She stated. "I will find out from my father where these planets are. It is what he would do for any of our own people."

Martin nodded his head in gratitude to her. "Thank you." He said. "Listen... it has been a stressful few days and it will take all of us a little while to get used to each other." He spoke evenly. "Why don't we start out with some easy stuff now? Get to know one another?"

Danny looked at Martin. "I could pull out my deck of marked cards *fervon*." He said with a grin. "Nothing like a little five card stud to get the blood pumping."

Martin met his eyes. "You're terrible at poker." He said.

"Yeah... but I might be able to win back some of the money you and Jules took from me over the years from them." Danny spoke. "They have to be worse than me when it comes to poker."

Martin laughed now and even Murano couldn't hold back the chuckle. "Poker?" He asked with a smile.

Martin nodded. "It's a card game." He explained. "One that he has never been very good at." Martin said jerking his thumb at Danny.

"Hey! That's not true!" Danny protested.

-You have played four thousand nine hundred and sixteen hands of poker in my presence Daniel Simpson- Avi spoke from behind Wayonn. -You have won only nineteen point three five percent of the times-

"I'm getting better!" Danny continued to defend himself.

-At your current rate of improvement you will begin winning more than you lose four months and three days after you reach the age of eight thousand six hundred and fourteen years- Avi told him. - Considering that you are not yet six hundred years of age, perhaps a new hobby is in order-

Danny looked at Martin. "He's been hanging around you way too much." Danny said.

This comment caused the others to chuckle softly as Kesyla let her dark eyes fall on Danny once more. She found him fascinating for some reason and it wasn't because he was so large. His smile was infectious and his teeth perfect and extremely white. His eyes were bright and the neatly trimmed goatee he sported was unlike anything she had seen among the Pralor men she knew. The COM panel on the table buzzed snapping Kesyla out of her thoughts and Martin reached forward and tapped the panel. "Go." He said.

"*Nauta Melme*... we are going to contact Andro so that we may meet the newest member of our family." Dysea's voice came over the COM. "Since he will not contact us... we will contact him."

Martin smiled and shook his head. "You know he doesn't like surprises *Melda Min*." He spoke.

“He will have to endure.” Dysea spoke firmly. “We have every right to meet her even if we are several billion miles from home.”

Martin grinned and looked at Murano. “In his defense... he was fighting at the time.” Martin spoke. “And we ain’t exactly been sitting on our hands either.”

“Don’t you defend him Martin Leonidas! It has been three days and still he does not try to contact us and introduce us to her. The events on Solmar have been settled for that long and it has been nearly a day since we left Onterom.” For’mya’s voice echoed in the background. “He should have found the time!”

“Ok. Ok.” Martin said quickly. “We’ll meet you in the QCR center.” He spoke getting up.

Murano looked at Martin. “You have been keeping in touch with him I take it?” He asked.

Martin nodded his head. “We can... it’s very odd but we can...”

Murano nodded. “A Praetorian gift.” He said. “We can sense another Praetorian and his emotions even over vast distances. It ties us together in a way. You feel your other sons... Denali and Dorian?”

Martin nodded. “And Jomann.” He answered.

Murano nodded and moved closer to him. “Just as I feel all of you as well. It is not as pronounced as what you feel because I have not met them yet... but I can sense fleeting thoughts and emotions that are not mine. I will need to instruct all of you how to keep better control of this skill.”

“It’s very useful...” Wayonn said now. “However... it can be like a beacon at times.”

Martin looked at him. “Helen and the others as well?”

Murano nodded. “Praetorian Mages as you call them... yes. It will not be as developed with them... but they are connected with us as well.”

Martin looked at him. “I got a lot to learn huh?” He asked.

Murano smiled. “Not as much as you might think. If you and Andro have been studying the Tomes that Sumar and Wayonn wrote as he told me... then you are far more skilled than most of those who are just discovering their skills. And no doubt that whatever he may have learned from those Tomes, Andro has already passed to Denali and Jomann and probably will begin passing them to Dorian as well.” Murano chuckled.

“Saves time.”

Martin looked at him. “Those that Shiria might find?” He asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “They will need to start from the beginning. They do not share the blood of Sumar within their veins and this makes it easier for you to pass this information to others within your bloodline. They will not have that luxury.”

Martin nodded and shifted his eyes to everyone else. “All of you are welcome to join us and meet my son.” He said.

Mari jumped up quickly. “I would like too!” She announced.

Kesylya nodded as well. “I as well.”

“I am going to check on Anja’s progress.” Wayonn spoke. “And visit with Jacina and Recia for a time. She will need all the support she can get.”

Martin nodded and turned to Danny. “You, T’lolt and the Master Chief put an operational plan together for this planet Murano recommended. Figure a week to let them hunt and air out their wings and give Arzoal and Torma time to school them.”

Danny nodded. “Will do. We already started working on it. Figured that is what you were going to do. I’m going to include Garan and the three men that came with him as well. He worked the OP with us on Onterom and seems pretty cool under fire. Might be beneficial to work together and find out what each other knows.”

Kesylya looked at him from across the table. “I... I was under the impression that you did not consider Garan and the others as... experienced as yourselves in such things.” She said softly.

Danny looked at her. “The learning never stops.” He said with an infectious grin. “That’s what Anuk and Nubian tell me.” He slapped Martin in the arm lightly. “I’ll get with you after Andro burns your ass for interrupting what is undoubtedly a pleasant time for him.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “Don’t remind me.”

“Like father like son.” Danny said. “Get with us later.”

Martin nodded. “Done.” He said. He watched Danny nod and then he headed for the door. Martin turned to the others. “Ok... if you will follow me... the QCR chamber is two decks below us.”

“You developed the Quantum Communications Relay yourselves?” Kesyla asked as she moved around the table.

Martin nodded. “Avi set it up initially... my people just added some other things to it.” He replied. “We have limited its use to Command and Control ships and a few locations on Earth and Apo Prime for right now, but it will eventually become standard across the entire Union.”

Murano looked at Mari as she gripped his arm with her hands and a smile and they began to follow Martin and Kesyla out. He did not understand the sparkle in her blue eyes or the meaning behind the wide smile, but it was indeed pleasant to have his niece think so highly of him.

CLASS M MOON
UNION DESIGNATION
AT459

Kalis lowered his P1 and looked up at the rock face in front of him. It had been relatively easy to land half a kilometer from this site, the *LEUGERS* now running on automation while they had gathered equipment and began the trek here. Serale had not strayed far from his side as they moved through the trees and tall grass that surrounded the mountain range, usually holding his hand. The air was slightly heavy due to the height they were at in the mountains, but aside from that it appeared as if the moon was a lush place. They could see the green of vegetation below them as they moved along the ridge and a very large body of water to their south. True to his word, Mata had forgone any weapons and carried a large pack on his back as he moved behind Serale. He was aware of the eyes of many of Koguth’s men and women on him, but he ignored them. He was set on his path and nothing would alter his course now. Not even those who still considered him an enemy. Most of the Juturi Pride had remained at the ships and they would be sent for when they found the location Yuriko had given to him on his P1.

Kalis looked at Serale as she came up next to him, his assault rifle slung across the front of his body, but ready to use if need be. “This is it.” He said to her. “The entrance must be just between those outcroppings.” He moved forward between the two jutting pieces of rock on either side that extended far up along what appeared to be a sheer drop from the summit above the mountain they were on. He saw the darkness of the opening and felt his blood begin to stir at the unknown. “This way.” He called back over his shoulder.

The interior of the cave was nothing what they expected. As they moved down the short tunnel it opened into a massive cavern fully a hundred feet high and nearly three hundred feet wide all around. There were several exiting tunnels that they could see in the light provided by the dozen or so light globes that floated unaware in different areas of the main cavern. There was a single large fire pit in the center of the main cavern, the smoke from burning embers drifting lazily towards the ceiling. As Kalis’s eyes drifted upward he deduced there must have been ventilation opening near the top in order for the smoke to rise as it was. Across the wide expanse of the main cavern they saw small groups of chairs and at least five small tables spread all around and a single large table off to one side against the tunnel wall with what could only be some sort of portable COM array set up. Stacked five high along another wall were three rows of equipment crates of some sort. It definitely appeared as if someone had been spending time here.

Koguth and Mata moved up beside Kalis as their eyes scanned the interior of the cave. The eighteen men and women they had brought with them were beginning to fan out slowly, still alert, but their weapons no longer posing an immediate threat.

“This is... this is no camp they just threw together Kalis.” Koguth spoke softly as he looked around. “This is a forward operating position.”

Mata squatted next to the fire and held his hand over the embers. “Still slightly warm.” He stated. “They were here recently.”

Kalis held up the P1. “This is the right place!” He hissed softly. “This is it... but no one is here!”

“Aren’t we?” The female voice spoke.

Kalis whirled around as the space beside Serale shimmered and the PSG deactivated to reveal the vampire female of medium height and build wearing the body armor of a Union Scout with slight modifications.

Yuriko stood there as all of the Kavalians and the three Hadarians spun towards her voice and watched her figure come into full view as the PSG powered down. Mani had stepped closer to her husband, her hand against her chest.

“By the stars!” She gasped.

Yuriko stared at Kalis as he lowered the P1 and turned to face her fully. Through the years Yuriko had become very good at reading people. It was a gift her father had once told her. She could tell things about people by the slightest twitch of a facial muscle or strand of hair just as a scent could tell her father volumes of information. She ignored the others and stepped closer to Kalis who remained still.

“Hello cousin.” She said with a neutral voice. “It is a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance.”

“Yuri... Yur...” Kalis stammered.

“Yuriko.” She told him.

“I... this place...” Kalis fumbled with words. “It...”

Yuriko smiled at him. “We discovered it about ten days ago.” She told him looking around. “The mountain provides natural shielding against sensors as well as protection from the elements. This moon has some very harsh thunderstorms. We have used it in order for my people to stretch their legs and remain off the ship for a day or two at a time.”

“Your people?” Nedoli asked.

Yuriko smiled and nodded her head. “I’m sorry.” She stated. She lifted her head slightly and made as if looking into thin air. “Stand down. Three seven one.” Kalis and the others whirled in all directions as the PSGs of nearly twenty Lycavorian Spartans appeared all around them. Among them were half a dozen elves, two other vampires and what appeared to be a Limian. All of them were positioned in such a way as to provide deadly and accurate fields of fire on the arriving Kavalians should the need arise. Yuriko moved forward quickly. “Do not be alarmed! We mean no harm! As long as that is your intent as well!”

“Weapons to safe!” Koguth barked instantly.

The Kavalians responded to their Pride leader without question and within seconds all their weapons were slung and secure. Yuriko saw this and immediately reacted. “Secure!” She barked. “It appears we are among friends after all!”

Koguth watched as the men and women did as Yuriko instructed them without question. He turned back to Kalis and Yuriko in time to see her step forward and embrace the taller Kalis. Koguth saw his surprised face, but then he saw the peace spread across his tense features as he realized for the first time that he had achieved a large part of his goal. Kalis was soon crushing Yuriko in his arms, nearly bringing her to tears as she felt his happiness within Mindvoice. She pulled back finally and looked at him, her hands coming to rest on his shoulders. “Father is going to be so very happy that you have taken this path Kalis.” She told him. “He has worried for you since Enurrua. He was worried that he might have turned you against him and what you could become with your family.”

Kalis smiled fighting back his own tears. “I... I almost didn’t open the P1 that first time.” He said honestly. “I am... I am so glad that I did.”

Yuriko nodded. “So are we cousin.” She told him. “So are we.” Yuriko straightened up slightly and looked at Koguth. “General Koguth’Juturi, on behalf of the Lycavorian Union I welcome you and all the members of your Pride.”

Koguth was somewhat taken aback but he bowed his head. “I am... you know the custom of formal greeting among my people?” He asked. “The use of our Pride name in our titles?”

Yuriko smiled. “It’s my job to know these things.” She said. “You may send for the remainder of your people at whatever time you feel comfortable. We have more than enough supplies to spread around. And the local fruit and plant life is very abundant and excellent to eat.”

“This is not some random location you have picked out.” Mata spoke now “You have... you have been here for some time.”

Yuriko looked at him. “Yes we have... Puma Bane.” She stated evenly but with no hostility.

Mata saw two of the Spartans moved slightly closer to him and he held up his hands. “I am no longer Puma Bane.” He stated quickly. “I have left that life behind me.”

“Have you?” Yuriko spoke calmly. “How do I know you have not already activated a link back to your ships telling them exactly where we are?”

Kalis came to his defense instantly which caused Mata no small pride. “Yuriko... he is with me.” He told her and watched as she turned to look at him. “He... Mata has been the one who has trained me since childhood. He has come freely without weapons to show you that he is sincere. I trust him with my life.”

“We have trusted him.” Serale spoke stepping forward to quickly take Kalis’s arm. It was something that did not escape Yuriko’s notice and she turned back to her men.

“Stand down.” She ordered simply and watched as they obeyed without hesitation. She turned back to Kalis and looked at Serale. “And who is this?”

Kalis looked at Serale and Yuriko saw his eyes soften considerably. “Yuriko... this is Serale.” Yuriko noticed his voice held pride in it when he spoke her name. He turned quickly and motioned to Ceale as she stepped away from Nedoli. “Her mother Lady Ceale and her brother Danim. My father... he took them from Talbor Seven as prisoners when we left the Alpha Quadrant.”

Yuriko watched the Hadarian woman move closer. She bowed her head slightly. “Lady Ceale.” She spoke reaching out.

Ceale didn’t hesitate and took her offered hand. “Princess Leonidas.” She said with an almost reverent tone. “I... we... we have seen you on the Netnews.”

“Please... my name is Yuriko.” She replied with a smile. “Like my father and mothers and all my siblings... we hate the royalty tag. We just can’t seem to get away from it though.” Yuriko squeezed her hand. “I would imagine there is a story behind why you are accompanying my cousin... but we can save that for another time. I get the feeling that it is not a pleasant topic.”

Ceale shook her head. “No.” She answered softly.

Yuriko looked at Kalis. “We have sealed containers of food from the Mess on my ship.” She told him. “More than enough for everyone. Fresh water containers are here. The tunnel to the left there leads to a relatively large underground spring if anyone wishes to bath. You can arrange it however you wish. The tunnel to the right leads to an area we have set up with sleeping mats. We didn’t have enough cots onboard... but we managed to gather enough blankets and such. It can get chilly here at night.”

“Yuriko... Uncle... Uncle Martin.” Kalis asked her. “Have you...”

“I sent him an encrypted message letting him know what was happening.” She told him. “It might take him a day or two to respond. They are dealing with other things at the moment.”

“Other things?” Koguth asked.

Nedoli moved up next to Ceale. “Then he does know where he is going?” He asked.

Yuriko grinned. “In all the time since I was reunited with him I have never known him not to know where he is going and how to get there.”

“Then your purpose for moving into unknown space was not to lure Kalis’s father away from Keleru and the KFI?” Koguth asked.

Yuriko met his eyes. “It was a small part of it yes. But not as much as you might think.” She said. “He just happens to be a thorn in our side for the moment. One father will remove when he feels the time is right.”

“Our daughter?” Mani asked now. “Iama... where is she?”

“She is on my father’s ship.” Yuriko answered. “When she first came onboard she took over the duties as Chief Chef.”

“Chef?” Koguth gasped.

Yuriko nodded her head. “She has eighty men and women under her direct direction. And let me tell you... from what I understand... she is the most popular person on the *ARC ROYAL* because of the food she prepares for everyone. When you get my mother’s raving about the cooking skills of someone besides themselves... then you know she is superior at her job. She has... she has forged a life for herself.”

“You said... you said she has a husband?” Mani spoke.

Yuriko nodded. “That is much more recent. Within the last few days from what I hear. I don’t know if it has happened yet but it will soon I imagine.”

“A Lycavorian?” Koguth asked with skepticism in his voice.

Yuriko looked at him. “Half Lycavorian. And half elf.” She told him. “My brother Fedor. My mother For'mya’s set of twins.”

Kalis’s eyes grew wide. “Queen For'mya’s twins?” He questioned. “Then he is...”

Yuriko nodded. “Yes. Fedor is your brother as well.”

Koguth looked between them for a few seconds until he put it together and his eyes grew wide. “Brother?” He hissed. “Kalis... is she saying that Pusintin’s blood has taken my daughter as his wife. One of the children born of his rape of the elven Queen?”

Kalis nodded and looked at him. “My half brother. His name is... Fedor.” He said with a small smile.

“My daughter will not consort with a bastard child of that man!” Koguth almost shouted. “I will not allow it! Never!”

Mani gripped his arm tightly. “Koguth my husband...” She said in an embarrassed voice. “Kalis is of his blood as well.”

“I know what...” Koguth stopped when he realized what he had said and he turned his eyes on Kalis. Yuriko could see the shame in those dark eyes. “Kalis... please... I did not mean to... please forgive me.”

Kalis shook his head slowly. “I no longer consider myself his son regardless that his blood flows through me sir. I have embraced the part of my blood he turned his back on many millennia ago. We are nothing alike... and I doubt my... my brother is either.” He said softly.

Yuriko shook her head. “Not by a long shot.” She said. “In fact... he and your sister have dismissed him as well. My father has adopted them. They are his children now.” She motioned to one of the tables nearby. “Please... why don’t we sit down and I can fill you in on what I know of your daughter and what I am authorized to tell you right now. My father will contact us as soon as he is able I’m sure. He has been waiting and hoping Kalis would contact us and now that you have... we will see him soon enough.”

SCIMITAR

FOUR HOURS FROM EARTH

Sadi sat in the center of the larger of the two couches in their quarters, Ne'Veha leaning up against one side of her and Sehri laying with her back on the couch and her head on Sadi’s thigh. Lu'ria was stretched out on the second, slightly smaller couch with Carisia between her legs as Lu'ria braided her long raven black hair. None of them wore much in the way of clothing and all of them were pleasantly sore. Their torrid hours with Androcles had been exceptional, none of them escaping his carnal attentions, to their extreme delight.

Sehri was still overwhelmed by everything as she laid there and nibbled on the piece of fruit. Even in her wildest dreams she had never imagined it could be so devilishly wonderful. Her senses were more alive than they had ever been and the scents of the four women who she was rapidly growing to love almost as intensely as Androcles filled her mind and senses. She had never imagined being together as they were last night could be so utterly and insanely filled with ardent pleasure and passion. None of them were idle at any time during the many hours they enjoyed each other and Sehri found it most exciting as she tasted each of them with eager happiness. Hearing their cries of delight and then having them do the same things to her was not something she could put into words. When she thought it could get no better, that is when Andro took her again. He filled her absolutely and while she tried to keep her wits about her as his aura swarmed all over them and around them, she found it impossible to concentrate on pleasing her Drow Mistress while Andro filled her so divinely. Ultimately she did what they all did and just surrendered to the swirling passions and smells that filled their room and the severe way Andro’s aura caused them such exquisite enchantment.

Sehri tilted her head back and looked up at Sadi who was reading a morning report from a data pad. “Is it always like that Sadi?” She asked in a soft voice. “When we are all together?”

Sadi lowered her pad and looked at her as Ne'Veha turned her head. “It will be even more when *Inamarno* returns to us.” She answered. “The Alkay she secrets affects all of us. It makes us last so much longer and feel so much more pleasure.”

“I have... I have heard how the Alkay from a Vanari can affect you when aroused.” Sehri said. “So it is true?”

Sadi nodded. “Yes it is.”

“Will we be seeing her soon?” Sehri asked playfully.

Ne'Veha and all of them laughed at her tone. “We have turned you into a vixen Sehri.” Ne'Veha said with a smile.

Sehri blushed. "It's just... it's very..."

Sadi smiled and leaned over to kiss her softly. "Yes it is." She said. "It is amazing that he can make us feel what he does isn't it?"

"He gives us all that he is." Lu'ria spoke. "That is why. He holds nothing back from us and the pleasure we feel stems from that."

Sadi nodded. "Our Drow Mistress is right." Sadi said. "We..."

All of them turned quickly when the QCR disc in the floor of the corner of their main quarters flared to life without warning and suddenly they were all looking at the images of Aricia and all of Andro's mothers. Sadi was the first to recover as Sehri sat up in total shock.

"Aricia!" She gasped as she came to her feet. "What... what is wrong? Is something..."

"Nothing is wrong Sadi." Aricia replied as she held up her hand. "Please forgive us for bypassing the normal channels but Androcles has not introduced us to his new mate and we wanted to meet her."

Sadi blinked several times. "We thought... we thought you were otherwise occupied." She stammered. "He did not want..."

Sehri was sitting there quietly, suddenly very conscious of the fact that she had hardly any clothes on with the exception of the skimpy undergarments. She had seen Andro's mothers within his thoughts and had commented to him on their beauty, but the images she had seen did not do them justice in the least as she stared at the transmission and the six women sitting around the table.

"Yes I know. He did not want to bother us." Aricia spoke. "We however wanted to meet her and at least..." Aricia's eyes fell on Sehri sitting beside Sadi and Sehri couldn't help but recognize where Andro got his amazing colored eyes. They were his mother's eyes; the same azure blue color almost exactly. "This... this is she?" Aricia asked.

Sadi smiled and returned to her seat on the couch and took Sehri's hand. "Aricia, Dysea, Anja, For'mya, Isabella, and Cirith... May I present Sehri Leonidas." She told them. "Sehri... these are Andro's mothers."

Sehri was unable to move for a few moments as she squeezed Sadi's hand tightly. She finally was able to focus enough and she bowed her head slightly. "It... it is an honor my Queens." She spoke in a tentative voice.

"Oh please!" Anja exclaimed from her seat between Aricia and For'mya. "Sadi... you have to tell her to not do that!"

Sadi and the rest of them chuckled at Anja's quick words. "I think she may be a little overwhelmed at the moment Anja." Sadi said.

Lu'ria laughed a little harder. "It is not everyday that all of you just appear in our quarters Anja." She said.

"True enough." Dysea spoke now. "But we wanted to meet..."

"Sehri." Ne'Veha said quickly.

"Sehri... that is a beautiful name child." Dysea said.

Sehri smiled slowly. "Thank you."

"So where is our hard headed son?" Isabella asked.

"In the shower at the moment." Carisia said leaning forward. "We woke only an hour ago. It was... it was a very busy evening." She finished with a smile.

Isabella's dark eyes twinkled in the transmission and Sehri saw all of them smile at the unspoken meaning in Carisia's words.

"Does he satisfy you Sehri Leonidas?" For'mya asked now. "Does he make you sing to the moon and the stars?"

Sadi smiled and leaned into Sehri affectionately. "You can answer Sehri." She told her. "They want to insure that Andro fulfills his responsibility as your mate and husband according to the Lycavorian and Spartan customs."

Sehri looked at the stunningly clear transmission. "It is beyond anything I ever imagine!" She said quickly, her face animated and bright. "He makes me feel so full and so loved! It is..."

Sehri stopped as Sadi and the others began to laugh and then Andro's mothers were chuckling as well. She looked at Sadi. "What?" She asked.

Dysea shook her head. “You have said nothing wrong Sehri.” She stated as she leaned back in her chair. “We are laughing because it is how all of us feel! We make sure our sons treat all of their mates and wives just as their father does us. And Andro’s father makes all of us melt within his arms.”

“More like sizzle.” Anja quipped playfully.

“He does make us become heated doesn’t he?” For’mya said just as playfully.

Aricia was smiling as she turned and looked at Sehri in the transmission. “We are not exactly shy about how Andro’s father makes us feel.” She said. “You will come to see that we are not afraid to talk about anything at all.”

Their heads turned quickly as the door to the shower room opened and Andro came walking out in all his glorious nakedness toweling his hair dry. “*KertaGai*... we need to contact my mothers when we reach Earth.” He began speaking as he came fully into the main living area. “I want to make sure they have a chance to meet Sehri even if it’s through a COM link. They will be furious with me for not...” Andro stopped talking when he realized how silent it was in the room. He slowly lowered the towel and saw all of them staring at him with lust in their eyes and a large amount of humor. “What’s going on?” He finally said.

Andro’s eyes darted to the corner where he saw the activated QCR link and the image of his mothers in the transmission. “*Mothers!*” He exclaimed as he instantly dropped the towel to cover his lower body while he saw all of them burst into laughter.

“Furious with you?” Aricia spoke finally trying to keep her laughter from spilling out. “You could say that! It’s why we decided to act on our own!”

“Mother... you could have warned me!” Andro snapped as he pulled the towel tighter around his waist. “Followed the proper channels.”

“When have we ever done that?” Anja asked with an ear to ear smile. “You should know by now we like to be unpredictable.”

Carisia was smiling brilliantly as she got to her feet and moved over in front of Andro, hiding him with her petite frame as best as she was able. “We will dress him Anja.” She stated as she pushed him gently towards the bedroom.

“Good. Then we will become acquainted with Sehri before your father and the others join us.” Aricia said.

“Father and...” Andro snorted. “You would have activated the link with strangers on it?” He declared.

“Of course!” Aricia said.

“We are not ashamed of our sons.” Dysea continued.

“Mothers that is not...” Andro began to protest but Carisia pushed him a little harder towards the bedroom.

“Do not fight with your mothers.” Carisia scolded him as she pushed him through the doorway.

Sehri couldn’t help but be surprised and utterly entertained by the antics of Andro’s mothers and all of them together. She felt confidence and warmth spread throughout her as she realized she was so going to enjoy her life going into the future.

“Now Sehri...” For’mya’s voice drew her attention back to the transmission. “Let us speak of womanly things before Andro’s father and the others get here.” She said. “Tell us of yourself child. And leave nothing out.”

SCIMITAR

ANDRO’S OFFICE

ONE HOUR LATER

Andro entered his office still somewhat put out by his mother’s actions but not really able to stay mad at any of them. They could have warned him they were trying to contact him in order to meet Sehri. If he had known they would do something like this he would have acted sooner. His father and others had joined the transmission by the time Carisia and he returned and he endured several moments of embarrassment as everyone was introduced. It was a pleasant conversation after that as they were introduced to the nieces of

Praetorian Murano. Soon though it became a female thing as he, his father and Murano were rapidly phased out of the conversation. This didn't bother Andro as he saw his father's discrete hand motion and he excused himself from his quarters. He grabbed a large mug of coffee from the mess lounge before coming here to his office. He waited until the door sealed shut and locked before crossing the room and touching the panel on his desk.

"Activate QCR Channel Androcles Three Nine Secure." He spoke.

The newly installed QCR disc in the corner of his office burst to life with the image of his father in another area of the ship and alone. It appeared to be a smaller lounge of some sort and he watched as his father turned from the view window which currently showed several million stars and a large nebula in the background.

"Father." He said as Martin turned to face him.

"Finally." Martin said as he looked at his oldest son from within the transmission. "She is beautiful Andro." He said. "And very sharp."

Andro smiled. "Yes she is. And stubborn."

Martin grinned. "Well... easy women don't tend to draw our attention or interest son." He spoke.

Andro shook his head. "No they do not. Though you could have assisted me a little more."

Martin chuckled. "And risk the wrath of your mothers? Hah! Even I'm not that brave." Martin told him.

Andro shook his head and smiled an embarrassed smile. "They will never change." He said.

"No they won't." Martin told him. "And they are wondering what exactly your problem is? I'm wondering that. What boned headed piece of honor did you use to decide to let one of your wives and mates leave your side? I thought I taught you better than that?"

Andro moved to his chair and sat down. "I thought I was doing the right thing." He said.

"Bullshit!" Martin snapped as he moved around a large table and sat. "You should have known better boy! What happen is your fault Andro. Not hers. You let her leave before you made her see what she meant to you and the others. You let her leave confused and unfocused. With a father who has hated our people and taught her to dislike us her entire life. She caught a glimpse of how wrong he was but you should never have let her go. What happen is your fault son. You can not blame her. Not after everything you told me she endured before finding her. From what I understand about these Eridiani assholes from Wayonn... they are real good at screwing with people's heads. That sonofabitch probably saw how upset and confused she was and he took advantage of it."

Andro met his father's eyes. "I have never blamed Caliria father." He said softly. "I have always blamed myself."

"Good... cause the blame rests solely with you." Martin told him sternly. "Now you need to fix it! I expect you to fix it! If Sadi and the others have not demanded you go get her then I am telling you now to do just that!"

Andro met the dark eyes of his father. "I have every intention of doing that father." He told him. "You did not raise a fool."

"I know I didn't Andro!" Martin hissed. "But sometimes you get like me and someone needs to hit you in the head with a board to make you see things as they are. It is not the same set of circumstances as with your mother... but it is similar and you need to fix it boy! I damn well expect you to fix it... and quickly! Do not let it go for one moment longer than necessary! She is... she is part of your essence son. And you know as well as I that they are your strength, just as your mothers are my strength."

"I can't just drop everything no matter how much I want to father." Andro said. "You know that!"

Martin nodded as he settled into the chair within the transmission and Andro did the same in his office. "I know... and I don't expect you too. I have been reading your reports however and I have some ideas."

"Gods... I'll take any advice." Andro spoke.

"These numbers you have sent to me?" Martin asked. "They are accurate son?"

Andro nodded his head. "To the best of my knowledge... yes. Most of the Intel came from Resumar and I detached *OMEN SIX* to his command. He is using her well. Pian offered the rest willingly."

"It appears that Keleru's hold on power is not as strong as he wants everyone to think." Martin spoke thoughtfully. "If there are as many Prides as Pian suggests... that could be our Ace card."

“Keleru still has an enormous power base father.” Andro said. “One that he has cultivated for many years.”

Martin nodded. “Yes... too many years.” He said.

Andro looked at him oddly in the transmission. “What do you mean?”

Martin looked at him. “I’ve had some interesting conversations with Muton since he has joined us and since Avi was able to link to the history banks on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, I have been doing some homework.”

“Ok... I’ll bite father.” Andro said. “What do you suspect?”

“Muton says that his grandmother left logs in the beginning.” Martin said. “They are long since lost... but he discovered she is one of the four that Arzoal sent off Elear initially with the dragons.”

“So she was a Pralor?” Andro said. “That would explain the Pralor blood within them.”

Martin nodded. “Yes. Now we know that those dragons eventually were happened upon by the Pralors we have run across out here. Which means the ones Arzoal sent back were reunited with their people. We know that Muton’s grandmother apparently convinced a bunch of others to return with her and try to make things right with the Kavalian species.”

Andro nodded. “Something that didn’t work out so well it appears.” He said.

Martin nodded. “What if it wasn’t their choice to return?” Martin said.

Andro’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

Martin shook his head. “I haven’t put it all together yet son... but I think the assholes we are dealing with here had a hand in Muton’s grandmother and others returning to Cabelir. Your mother is discovering a lot of information from logs we happened to appropriate and...”

“Appropriate?” Andro asked with a smile.

Martin shrugged. “Ok... stole.” He quipped. “Considering who we took them from... I’m not going to lose any sleep over that.” He said. “When she finds out more I’m going to sit down with Muton and go over it all again. There are too many coincidences Andro.”

“It will be interesting to discover what you find.” Andro said.

Martin chuckled. “You say that now.” He said. “Wait to you meet the fuglies we are dealing with out here. Big old scaly fuckers. Nasty as all hell and just as smelly as they look.” He said. “They are able to infect and change others into them.”

“Change them?” Andro asked.

Martin nodded. “At the molecular DNA level.” He answered. “But they retain at least some of their memories from their old life. Their hard to kill and how they change you is not in the least bit pleasant.”

Andro saw the look on his father’s face. “I not sure I want to know.” He said.

“You’re heading back to Earth right?” Martin asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. We should arrive in a little under two hours.”

“Pull Pian aside.” Martin said as he plugged his P1 into the slot on the table where he sat. “This is what I want you to find out.”

Andro withdrew his own P1 and plugged it into an identical slot at his desk. He saw the pulsing of the light for a few seconds and then a solid green indicating the information had been received. He pulled the P1 out and looked at the small screen for a moment before looking up at his father.

“Interesting father.” He said.

Martin nodded his head. “I’ve discovered a lot from Muton... much of it no one outside the Kavalian Federation knows. With good reason.”

“I would think so.” Andro agreed. “It could very well set in motion a wave that will not be stopped.”

Martin nodded in agreement with his son. “I think Pian may be that wave.” He said. “Meet with him... and the others that come with him. Try to get a feel for them. If what I think is happening is in fact the truth, then we will need to act accordingly.”

“I agree.” Andro said. Andro looked up from the pad. “And my Uncle?”

Martin looked into his son’s eyes. “He’s a walking around dead man son. He just doesn’t know it yet.” He replied. “His time will come very soon... and it will not be pleasant.” Martin shifted in his chair. “Andro... I need to thank you for Fedor and Eirene. What you did son... it was a big risk and you did it to save your mother and siblings. They remind me of Normya and Denali in their mannerisms you know.” Martin smiled. “You

should see the look on her face whenever she's around Miso. He treats her like she is gold plated. And Fedor is getting around to claiming Iama. Took her some time to see it but I think Helen had a talk with her."

Andro smiled warmly. "Good." He said. "And I think you know I will always protect my siblings father."

Martin nodded. "That I do." He said.

"Kalis father?" Andro asked. "My P1 detected the activation of the COM link. Is he..."

Martin nodded with a small smile. "The last report from your sister says he broke away. He apparently stole a couple of ships and escaped. She was moving to link up with him. I haven't heard from her yet but I expect to shortly."

"Pusintin will not let him go so easily father." Andro spoke.

Martin nodded. "Don't worry... I have a plan." He stated confidently. "It's already in motion."

"Then I look forward to seeing him." Andro said.

"How is Dorian coming?" Martin asked. "Have you started him on the Tomes?"

Andro nodded. "The first one. Three days ago." He replied. "He also came to me with..." Andro stopped talking for a moment as if trying to find the words.

"What is it?" Martin asked.

Andro looked at his father. "He came to me with some information he discovered. We have decided to keep it between us and Ryner and Elynth for the moment. It is not something you would do I know... but I think we can use this to our advantage. And we don't want the *Durcunusaan* or our mothers to know about it for different reasons."

"Spit it out boy!" Martin hissed. "Don't dance around it. Not involving the *Durcunusaan* tells me they wouldn't like it. Not telling your mothers makes me shiver in my boots."

"It may be a way to discover Dante and his father. Where they are." Andro told him. "We are not completely sure but I need you to trust us on this father. We will put it in writing and explain it all to you and why... but Dorian and I want you to leave this to us. Let us do it our way. The *Feravomir* would understand I think... I know you share things with her that you don't share with our mothers. At least not at first."

Martin stared at his oldest son for a long moment. Andro held the *Durcunusaan* in the highest regard Martin knew, more so than his brothers and sisters in many ways, and for him to want to leave them out of the loop on something was saying a lot. And trust was never an issue as far as Martin was concerned. Martin nodded his head. "Ok... I'll let you run with it son. The only thing I will say is if you get the opportunity... you snatch those two sorry fuckers and you make sure it takes them three very long and painful days to die."

Andro's azure eyes narrowed. "That was never in question father." He said.

"Good." Martin said. "One more thing... I want you to take command of *SPARTA'S WRATH* Andro."

Androcles looked at him. "I thought she would be Res's ship father." Andro said.

Martin shook his head. "*PILLAR OF FAITH* is enough for him now."

"Then you should take command of her." Andro said. "She should be your flagship."

Martin shook his head. "No. She is the biggest, meanest and most advanced warship we have. We'll be kicking out stuff in the future based on her... but she is the first. She needs someone in command who is recognizable. When she goes somewhere I want people to sit up and take notice. If you are in command they will. Avi says that even though Resumar found him, 341 has studied everything about you and taken many of your traits."

"Mine?" Andro said.

Martin nodded. "An Avatar will simulate the one they are assigned to. It appears 341 has chosen you just like Avi chose me when I took my first steps into CS41." He said. "You have established a reputation as someone who is not to be fucked with son. People fear you. They know the usual bullshit won't work with you and that you will not hesitate to blow their asses into space if need be."

Andro chuckled. "A lot of that reputation carries over from you thank you very much."

Martin smiled at him. "You know what I mean. Promote Sa'sur... it's about time she made Admiral anyway. Put her in overall command of your Strike Force but you take command of *SPARTA'S WRATH*. You'll understand later."

Andro nodded. "Very well." He said.

Martin nodded and sat back in the chair. “Good. Now give me a brief rundown on how things are progressing for Narice and Arrarn and then tell me about Yuri and what she is up to lately. I imagine she’s got her hands in all sort of things I won’t like.”

Andro smiled. “I know where they are father.” He said. “And you might be surprised about what she is doing.”

Martin looked at him. “Really?”

“I think Xaxon’s essence had more influence over her actions than even we suspect father.” Andro spoke. “More than she suspects. I’m waiting for Marcie to confirm a few things but she is not the same person as you once knew. Well... she is but she isn’t.”

Martin’s head tilted slightly and he nodded. “Ok... I may be biased I admit that. Start with Narice and Arrarn and then fill me in on Yuri.”

ARC ROYAL **FEDOR’S QUARTERS**

Iama took another small bite out of the fuzzy fruit as her soft green eyes gazed longingly at Fedor’s tall, powerful body on the bed. She wore only a button down shirt she had found in his closet. She didn’t care for the light blue color but it was all there was since her jumpsuit lay on the floor of the bedroom torn into three different pieces. As her long tail twitched contently behind her Iama remembered those first moments with a smile. She practically had to force herself upon him, but once his wolf passion for her ignited, it was all Iama could do to keep from passing out in heavenly delight.

Iama’Juturi had been forced to submit to more men than she cared to try and remember in her time within the brothels on Nefoa. In that time she had come to view sex as a tool to get what she wanted. That mentality had begun to change the moment Fedor had first kissed her on Onterom. Many of the fools who had taken her had tried to kiss her through the years, but none of them had even come close to stealing her breath away as Fedor had. His lips were so soft and warm and they caressed her own like the petals of a flower. She couldn’t believe she had almost lost control then, every pleasure receptor she had within her body firing to life in the exact same moment, including many she had no idea herself that she possessed. Each kiss thereafter that he had given her, and there were many, all of them had done the same thing. Iama realized it was not the physical contact so much as the emotion behind it. There was lustful desire in his kisses, she would be worried if there wasn’t, but it was the way he kissed her. The way his hands held her face or his arms drew tight around his waist. The times he held her off the floor and kissed her. She couldn’t keep her tail from reacting of its own accord and flailing madly at times due to the intense emotions surging through her.

The power of his kisses here in his quarters had not only stolen her breath away, but they had returned every shred of dignity to her that Iama had thought lost forever. He was so eager yet so inexperienced, and still as his hands roamed her body with the newness of a child’s new toy, everywhere he touched lit her lithe frame on fire. She had presented herself to him quickly in the submissive show of the females of her species and had nearly broken into tears when he dismissed this and continued his exploration. She had done it willingly, so caught up in the emotion of the moment and still his only thought was to give back to her all that had been taken. Iama had whimpered and cried out for what seemed like hours as his lip and tongue and hands explored every portion of her body with insane slowness. His fingers had quickly found the extremely sensitive portion of her lower back, just above where her tail entered her tailbone. As his lips and tongue brought her to one staggering climax after another his fingers danced across this portion of her body, heightening her pleasure to levels unknown to her. Her cries of passion and unabashed delight filled his quarters continuously for what seemed like hours. When she could take no more she had to pull his head from between her thighs, so unwilling was he to leave her delicious center.

It was then that the wolf in him finally took over and as his lips, still saturated in her juices, came down on hers Iama could only scream into his kiss in mind blowing ecstasy as his entire length filled her in one powerful thrust. Fedor speared her completely in a single life altering plunge that ended with the most staggering orgasm she had yet to experience in her young life. He changed then, no longer the shy and tentative

man child she had first considered him, and he became a man. He became her man... and he was going to do everything within his power to make her see it. He didn't last long after that first plunge before his explosion sent her into a world she never dreamed could exist after all she had endured. The volume of his passion was unlike anything she had experienced as it filled her and cleansed her very soul.

And it was not over by any stretch of her imagination.

Seven hours it had gone on. Seven glorious hours in which Iama Juturi was reborn and reshaped into what she had always secretly hoped for. As his shyness burned away, Fedor took her in every position he could possibly think of. Her playful laughter at his eagerness at times was quickly cut off by her wails of bliss as pleasure once more crashed through her mind and body. She had been almost right about his size, certainly not as large as one of the vile Kavalian men who had forced themselves on her, but more than large enough to make her feel completely full and satisfied. He was also much thicker than she had envisioned, which only added to her incredible enchantment. She was sore now, but not in the harsh manner of her previous life. It was an exquisite soreness that filled her with equal parts desire and unrequited love for the man lying next to her. Not once had he even considered making her feel submissive to him in any way. He refused her attentions to his pleasure, committed to making her experience everything she never had.

He had succeeded. Oh had he succeeded.

Iama was quite sure she could not go another day forward without Fedor in it. He had given her everything she had desired to have but was cruelly denied in her life. There would be no other men in her life now. All she would ever crave was Fedor Leonidas. She belonged to him in every sense of the word. Body. Heart. Mind and soul. He had claimed her in the fashion of his wolf half, and as she drifted off into a sleep of supreme contentment, her body wrapped protectively within his arms, he had promised to make her his in the fashion of his elven blood.

Her soft green eyes found the scars on his back where those horrible spikes had entered his body as he shielded her from harm. They were still slightly pink in color, two of them almost jagged in nature. His actions on Onterom were the quintessential profession of his love for her. He was willing to give his life in order to safeguard her. She had seen the determined gaze in his eyes that split second before the explosion and Iama knew then, even as he wrapped his arms around her protectively, Iama knew that she would be his forever.

Holding the fruit in one hand Iama leaned over and let her lips graze the puncture scars on his back as she stretched her lithe frame against his naked body and brought her cheek to the side of his head as her long, white blond hair cascaded over his opposite shoulder. Her full breasts were pressed against the backs of his shoulders, her hips against his lower back. Her tail gently curled around his left thigh, the tip coming to rest just above his knee where it flipped back and forth as if it had a mind of its own.

"Fedor... wake up?" She whispered into his ear

Iama saw his lips curl into a smile. "Why?" He asked. "I was having this incredible dream. There was... there was this vision of womanly beauty in it. She smelled of sweet kiwi and had eyes of satin green."

Iama grinned and rested her cheek against his as she inched her body further up on his back. "Really? Did... did this woman please you in this dream?"

Fedor opened his eyes and turned his head slightly. "It was the most incredible thing. She kept calling me her *Avonbode*. In between her cries of delight and nibbling on my ears of course."

Iama turned her head and nibbled on his two inch high elven ear as she had done often in the hours before as she clutched him, knowing it was an erogenous zone for elves. "Don't tease me!" She exclaimed softly. "What is... what is this *Avon...bode*?"

Fedor turned his head even more. "It is Lycavorian for man child." He said. "She kept making these strange noises when she tried to finish the word though and it never really came out clearly."

Iama's green eyes glittered in happiness. "Perhaps she could not finish this word because your very touch upon her caused her to experience pleasure beyond her most wild imaginations. Beyond anything she thought she would ever feel Fedor."

"You think so?" Fedor asked as he rotated his body to the side and shifted to his back. Iama shifted as well, finally settling on his chest and he reached up to push some of her hair from her face. "I was about to ask her that very question when you woke me up." He spoke.

Iama stared into his beautiful dark eyes. "I think maybe yes." She said confidently.

"So... am I still an *Avonbode*?" He asked her softly.

Iama closed her eyes at his touch as he stroked her jaw and she smiled. “Yes. But you are *my Avonbode*.” She said wistfully. “And I will never share.”

Fedor smiled as he gazed at her beauty. “Good.”

“What’s my name Fedor?” She asked opening her eyes and staring at him again.

“Iama’Juturi Leonidas!” He answered instantly.

Iama couldn’t help the warmth that spread over her at those three words. When he whispered them to her just before she drifted to sleep she had wanted to cry out in blissful happiness. “What’s my name?” She asked again.

Fedor smiled again and nuzzled the bottom of her ear. “Iama’Juturi Leonidas.” He said again.

Iama opened her eyes and looked at him. “Promise me that we will... that you will love me tomorrow as you do now Fedor. Promise me!”

Fedor pushed himself into a sitting position, pulling her into his lap, his hands spreading across her back as her tail wrapped around his upper arm. “I can’t promise you tomorrow Iama. You know that.” He said softly seeing her eyes grow wider. “We can not predict what tomorrow will bring.”

“But you...” She began to draw away from him in hurt. “I thought...”

Fedor held her tightly as he looked into her eyes a smile spreading across his handsome features. “I can’t promise you tomorrow Iama, but I can promise you that with every beat of my heart, with every breath I take until I leave this life and go to the gods, I can promise I will love you without question or hesitation or regret.” Iama felt her eyes grow instantly moist at his soft words and she dropped the fruit she was holding to the floor and reached for his face as he continued. “My heart beats only for you Iama’Juturi Leonidas. It will beat only for you and you can hear my thoughts in every beat.”

“Oh... oh Fedor!” Iama stammered as tears poured from her eyes.

Fedor pulled her even closer, Iama feeling his wonderful manhood between her thighs now, but with no hint of arousal. This was not the time and he was showing her that, just as his *MedwanGai* told him to do.

“Let her know that you love her Fedor. Let her know you worship her and that your cock doesn’t overrule your heart boy. You’ll know when the time is right. When the moment comes... seize it! Hold nothing back! Do that... do that and they will be yours forever and a day.”

Having her body in his arms was about as arousing as it could get for Fedor but he fought down those emotions easily because he truly did love this woman. He had from the first moment he had smelled her sweet kiwi scent.

“You are... you are my wife and mate now Iama’Juturi.” Fedor told her, his eyes never leaving her face. “And I will worship you as a wife and mate should be worshiped. With everything that I am.”

Iama’Juturi had no words to speak as she stared at him with wide eyes that were blurry with tears. She did the only thing she could think of at the moment and she pulled his head to her breasts and hugged him tighter than she had ever hugged anything in her life. She felt his powerful arms crush her to him and more tears came rushing forth. Tears of happiness. Tears of rebirth. Tears of discovery.

But most of all... tears of a love Iama’Juturi was sure she would never find. It was hers now. Hers for the taking.

And Iama’Juturi had every intention of taking it and holding on to it for the rest of eternity.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

It was one of the very rare times that he and Elynth had flown down to Cranae Island on a *STRIKER*. It always felt odd when they did this because both of them so enjoyed viewing their home from above with nothing around them but the sky and clouds. Deia had informed him that the Netnews had crews set up all along

the shore in Gytheio waiting to catch a glimpse of him when he returned, though she said they were being very respectful and were not pressing the *Durcumusaan* officers near the mainland side of the causeway, and she suggested trying to keep his return low key. If that was really possible at all. There had been many stories done by the Netnews about his actions on Solmar and not all of them showed him in a positive light. Several more militant Netnews reporters criticized him for not destroying the invading Kavalians. They more than deserved it in their eyes. In many eyes Andro knew... and those were the eyes he would need to change.

Andro stood at the top of the ramp watching as Lu'ria and Carisia joined Majeir and Anthar in greeting Lu'ria's mother Daba. Sehri was with them and he could see her hugging her mother tightly while Ibani and Osbela stood to the side with stern looks on their faces. Andro smiled at that. Sehri's sisters had tried to entice him, even after he had claimed Sehri. He was not real high on their list of people they cared for at the moment. Sehri had taken it in stride, not even bothering to reprimand her sisters for she could see into Andro's mind and she knew he had no attraction to them in the least. He turned as Elynth's bulk moved up behind him slowly, Caydren and Cinol on either side of her and growing rapidly. Sadi and Ne'Veha would be able to begin riding them within a month or so he estimated. They were going to be on the large side for the Firespitter breed, just like their father.

Are you feeling overwhelmed Andro my brother. Elynth spoke softly.

Andro met her golden eyes. *Not really sister. Perhaps a little.* He answered. *It is more that I don't want to deal with all the politics. I'm no politician.*

And that is why you have others who are better suited for that role than you. Elynth told him. *And you should use them. Just as your father does.*

We could just burn all of them Prince Andro. Caydren spoke from beside Elynth.

Andro laughed as Elynth turned her head and looked at Caydren. *You aren't allowed to burn men and women because they choose to work in politics Caydren.* She told him.

Why not? Cinol asked. *Ne'Veha has said many times she wants to kill the elven Ministers on Elear.*

It would be much easier Elynth. Caydren spoke.

Elynth shook her head. *You can't... it's that simple. Andro... tell them.*

Andro shook his head and laughed once more. *I agree with them sister.* He stated with humor.

You are not to burn any politician Caydren. Sadi's voice filled their minds. *Is that clear?*

They turned to see Sadi and Ne'Veha moving from the small flight of stairs into the cockpit.

Nor are you Cinol. Ne'Veha spoke sternly.

Finally! The voices of reason and calm. Elynth declared. *And imagine that... they are female.*

Sadi chuckled as she walked up to Caydren and ran her hands down his powerful side. *Only kill the ones I tell you.* She told him.

Sadi! Elynth declared in abject horror. Her voice did not allow her to pull it off entirely though and Andro laughed harder.

Listen to you sister. He spoke as Sadi took his hand. *Your talons are twitching.*

Elynth's golden eyes blinked several times and then she shook her massive head. *It didn't work did it?*

Not in the least. Andro said.

Ah well... I tried. Elynth spoke.

Andro reached up and stroked the scales under her thick neck. *Maybe next time sister. When you are not around those who know better.*

I thought I had gotten so good at telling falsehoods. Elynth said. *I will need to work on that more. Maybe my delivery?*

Andro nodded. *That's probably it.* He said as Ne'Veha gasped in delight and rushed down the ramp into the waiting arms of her grandmother Na'rnoas who stood beside her mate and husband Jonout. Cinol followed without question and Ne'Veha turned quickly and reached for Cinol's muzzle as she introduced him to her grandmother. Andro watched as they stood there without fear and Na'rnoas even reached up to run her hands along his scales.

He gripped Sadi's hand tightly. "Come *KertaGai*. They will all eventually make their way to the villa. Let's beat them there."

Sadi grinned and gripped his arm tightly as they headed down the ramp.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

“...are they talking about?” Sehri asked from her seat between her mother and Gorgo. Sadi sat on the opposite side of Gorgo in a comfortable chair while Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Carisia all occupied two lounge chairs. Eliani, Lisisa, Normya, Zarah and Lucia were sitting at a nearby table with Narice, Toria and Athani picking at the dozens of different choices of food that Gorgo and Dasha had prepared. It had been a long time since they had been able to indulge as they were and all of them were enjoying it.

The patio on Cranae Island was full of nearly all of the remaining Leonidas family which made the *Durcunusaan* extra alert and mindful of everything going on around the island. There were several dozen members of the Netnews who were trying to get the remote drones close enough to the island to see what was going on while Dilaen was directing two specially chosen Netnews crews into different locations to take images and perhaps conduct small interviews. Retta and Calyb were sitting with Mara and Endeem and the other dragons in the large hay covered area off to the side listening to Elynth and Jeth fill them in on what happen on Solmar. They were both fifteen now and only one year shy of going through their own Agoge as Nara and Deion were now doing. Retta, her dark red hair aside, was looking more and more like her father while Calyb was taking on more of his mother's features.

Gorgo had found a fast friend in Aleatia. They were very close in age and as they spent time together she found they had many things in common and liked many of the same things. When she met Sehri she was taken by her beauty and calm demeanor even with everything that was going on around her so quickly. And once more Gorgo had wondered how her grandson had succeeded, like his father, in getting so many different and exquisitely beautiful women to love him so completely. Gorgo also knew, as she did with her son, that Sadi was the center of Andro's universe just as Aricia was for Martin. The comparisons of Sadi to her continued to happen unabated in Sparta while Aricia was already worshiped within the city because of her history here. Sadi's history was now well known and though Icho had tried to use that against her in the beginning; it had quickly backfired as the Lycavorians Spartans within the city saw the strength behind her jungle green eyes and what she had endured in order to protect her father.

Sadi's total devotion to Androcles was held up on a level with the Queens towards Martin and Andro's other wives and mates were rapidly gaining popularity and influence though they did not know it just yet. Ne'Veha was highly regarded among the millions of elves and people of Sparta and Earth just as Dysea and For'mya were. Carisia was idolized by the entire vampire population across the Union, and Lu'ria had an influence that was second only to Sadi because of her Drow blood and heritage. Gorgo had no doubt that when Andro retrieved Caliria, she would also find that her medical skills and connection to the Vanari would give her staunch influence and Sehri would soon take notice that while she may have called herself Rothryn, she was considered Lycavorian in every sense by the people.

As she let her eyes wander over those gathered Gorgo knew each of them here now was special. Narice and Toria held the respect and admiration of the entire Spartan Senate for what they had accomplished in so short a time, as well as their well documented and intense love of Arrarn. Athani was far more beloved than she knew for her decision to return to Kavalian space even though she had a death sentence against her. Her decision to return and help her people and remain by Resumar's side had secured her reputation among the Lycavorian people with stunning wide spread support. Lucia had quickly been accepted as she and Zarah walked among the markets with Gorgo. Everyone now knew what she had done and the role she had played in saving Zarah's life. Their love for each other was gaining much notoriety and the comparisons to Tarifa and Aihola and Selene and Lynwe were growing daily. Cha'talla's actions and those of his sons in rescuing Dysea and spearheading the resurgence of the ancient Akruvian honor had made Tir'ut somewhat of a celebrity. He was often seen with Normya visiting schools in the last weeks and having no qualms about roughhousing with the children in the many playgrounds. His massive size did not deter the small ones and even the dullest individual could see his total devotion to Normya and hers for him.

Gorgo knew Aleatia could not have been happier for her daughter. She had talked at length with Gorgo about Androcles and the conversation she had with him on Solmar. Aleatia had been so very impressed to say the least and Gorgo told her that he had learned from his father well.

Gorgo allowed her eyes to finally settle on Eliani and for the first time she noticed the sense of calm and happiness that permeated her being. Jomann had tamed the wild Leonidas daughter and done so in a way that made certain Eliani would only continue to be extremely well respected and adored by the people. Eliani still had her mother's temper, but now it was tightly in control. She was still a very emotional young woman, but Jomann's influence had tempered her base instincts. And Gorgo knew that Eliani worshiped Jomann with every breath. Gorgo always caught her looking at her husband and mate at odd times, her green eyes alive and bright and happy. And Jomann doted over her and did not care who saw. The diminutive Leonidas Princess and the huge Spartan Captain made quite the pair. That they were *Anomes* was even more telling, as the instances of non-Lycavorian pureblood *Anomes* was so rare Gorgo could count the number on one hand. And Gorgo knew without doubt that Brendi Faith would soon join Eliani and Jomann for the Eridiani woman could not hide what her eyes told everyone when she was around Eli or Jomann. Gorgo also knew that of all his brothers and sisters, Eliani would be the one who was always beside her brother Androcles. She had taken it upon herself to be his personal caretaker and now that her mate was his Captain, this would never change.

Gorgo turned and followed Sehri's eyes at her question and she saw Androcles walking along the edge of the water with his brothers, Jomann and Tir'ut. That the four of them were related could not be denied. Andro, Resumar, Arrarn and Dorian were near perfect specimens of healthy young Spartan men. All of them looked so much like their father, tall and muscular and so well defined. So much so that Gorgo knew many young Lycavorian females swooned over them and despaired that all of them were taken and committed to their wives and mates. When you added in Jomann and Tir'ut and you had six incredibly powerful young men, all connected to the Leonidas family in some way and among the most honorable men Gorgo had ever known in her life. It seemed that her family was touching many aspects of different species and cultures within the known universe and doing so in a way that would bring about permanent change for the better.

Gorgo noticed that none of them wore shirts and the sun beat down on already deeply tanned and muscular skin as they walked together along the shore.

"Knowing my grandsons as I do..." Gorgo spoke finally. "They are probably scheming and devising new ways to defeat our enemies in the most horrible of ways. And corrupting poor Tir'ut and Jomann in the process."

Eliani chuckled from her lounge seat. "Hah! Probably comparing notes on us too!" She quipped playfully. "They are all perverts!"

"As if you don't enjoy Jomann's perversions Eli?" Zarah stuck the rib to her. "You are such a *pomai*."

Eliani smiled from ear to ear. "Well... I never said he wasn't creative." She spoke with a decidedly sexual overtone.

This brought laughter from all of them and Athani sat back in her chair with a relaxed air about her that she did not have before. Her time as Resumar's wife had changed her and she thoroughly enjoyed the new her. Knowing that she was completely accepted among these men and women and that her sister Jalersi had found in Pian what she had found in Resumar had given her life new purpose. Their influence on her was also beginning to show as she grinned seductively.

"Resumar's perversions are very inventive if I do say so myself. I rather enjoy them." She commented.

Narice looked at Toria and smiled. "As are Arrarn's."

They all laughed more as Gorgo shook her head. "You see Aleatia... my grandsons have corrupted such fine, beautiful women. Just like their father."

"So grandfather Riall is not perverted grandmother?" Normya asked with a smile.

Gorgo looked at her. "I never said that." She answered with a grin. "Riall is... wonderful really. Magnificent and..."

"Stop!" Ne'Veha almost shouted. "I will never be able to look at the Admiral in the same way again if you continue Gorgo!"

They all laughed at the look on Gorgo's face and even Aleatia couldn't hold back her own comment. "Dyack does tend to be very... resourceful in our bed." She said.

Sehri twisted around and looked at her. "Mother!" She exclaimed.

Aleatia laughed. "Well... since we are all being so truthful I thought I would give my feelings as well. Your father is very attentive and..." She said.

"Enough!" Sehri exclaimed.

More laughter ensued further as Dilaen led the Netnews crew along the edge of the patio pointing out certain things as they snapped images of the dragons and Leonidas females on the patio. However... all of them wanted to be on the beach discovering what the Leonidas brothers were talking of.

"... can field probably a thousand ships with all the Prides together." Resumar was speaking as they walked along the water's edge. "All of them have fought the Coven and are experienced. We've also picked up hints that many of the senior officers are becoming wary of Keleru and his motives Andro. We don't know if this is true or not though. Mican is trying to get his people in deeper but it's slow and dangerous."

"Don't let him take unnecessary risks Res." Andro spoke. "His people are too valuable. Once Na'lia is able to manufacture a mass distribution system for the clone serum he'll need to rally them. You said she is close?"

Resumar nodded. "She has two Hadarians helping her. Last time Mican checked in he said they were only weeks away from a viable mass vaccination."

"You have escaped routes plotted from the *Val'istar's* home?" Andro asked.

Resumar nodded his head. "Nine of them. If we even get a slight hint that an attack is coming, every noncombatant will pull up and leave within two hours. We've drilled on it several times. I'm telling you... Pian is very careful. And he has no mercy in him for anyone who wants the status quo to continue. Jalersi either. I've spoken to Pian's mother at length and he has been like this since falling for Jalersi. Everything he has done for twenty years has been to win her love. Now that he has that... he lives for seeing his people free so that he can give her everything. And seeing the sisters work together is very interesting to say the least."

Andro nodded in agreement. "That is good to hear. Knowing that there are many like Pian is very good news." He said. "Father is going to talk to them when Pian has them all together. I have an idea of what he will say and offer but not all of it. You know how close lipped he can be."

"We can hurt them from the inside Andro." Resumar spoke. "Hurt them badly with the right support."

Andro nodded his head. "No doubt... but father doesn't believe Keleru's hold on his empire is as absolute as everyone seems to think."

"You think he's bluffing?" Tir'ut asked surprised by this information.

Andro nodded again. "In part yes."

Tir'ut whistled. "That would be a huge piece of information." He said.

"A *nubous* bomb! Especially after Solmar. Azlenr and Byka defecting to General Pian is huge!" Dorian added.

Arrarn looked at Resumar. "You think Pian and the others will go for Narice's proposal Res?"

Resumar shrugged his shoulders. "That I don't know Arrarn." He replied honestly to his younger brother. "There's a lot of bad blood."

"On both sides *fervon*." Arrarn chimed in.

"No doubt about that... yes" Resumar said. "With grandfather helping them, Pian believes the Coven is recovering faster than they would have normally. I told him it had more to do with Narice than grandfather Riall. Her proposal would certainly show that the Coven is no threat to them." Resumar looked at Andro. "Can we support both?"

Andro smiled and nodded. "That's one thing we can do easily." He said quickly. "You know how father hoards. We have more than enough to support both operations and then some. With grandfather within Coven space however, what we lack is a serious show of physical support for Pian. That is what father is going to speak to them about I'm pretty sure. He's got ideas within ideas in his head. Some he hasn't even shared with me."

"That could be very good or very bad knowing father." Arrarn said with a smile as he looked at Andro. "Especially now that you guys have discovered what it is that lets you do whatever it is you do. You said that this Paladin gene you, father, Dorian and maybe Deion carry lets you feel him even here on Earth?"

“It’s growing stronger for me…” Dorian answered quickly. “It’s like a distant sense. I can feel Andro and Jomann easily… but I only catch intermittent emotions from father. I’m also detecting Deion more and more so he has to have the gene.”

“As he continues with the Tomes it will become stronger.” Jomann spoke now. “It did for me. And I am feeling Deion as well.”

Andro nodded his head. “Jomann and I can feel father and the Praetorian Murano that travels with him if we concentrate hard enough. No doubt they can do the same. It’s easier with Elynth helping us but we can do it alone. Deion is growing quickly. I may have to pull him out of his Agoge to get him the training he needs. Or somehow adjust his training.”

“What about Nara?” Resumar asked.

“She’s is harder to get a read on.” Andro replied. “I think so… we can sense fleeting images only right now.”

“Images?” Arrarn asked. “What images?”

Andro looked at him. “A blond woman. I’ve never seen her before so I don’t know if it is a real person or if Nara has seen her somewhere before. The images are… vivid, so I won’t go into them. Not without Nara knowing we can sense her.”

“So this gene is only happening with those of us that are pureblood?” Arrarn asked.

Andro looked at him. “Arrarn… you don’t think…?”

Arrarn shook his head quickly. “What? No!” He exclaimed swiftly. “*Carians* no Andro! I know… I think we all know that whatever this power you and the others have will not change you. To be honest I’m glad I don’t have it. I wouldn’t want the… I wouldn’t want the burden.” Arrarn said with a sober tone.

“It’s not limited to purebloods.” Resumar said. “It can’t be. Dori isn’t pureblood.”

Andro shook his head. “No… but father’s blood is as pure as it gets and so is our mother Isabella’s. The combination must have something to do with it. I need to talk to *Val’istar* Shiria when she returns tomorrow to know for certain.”

“I would not want this power either.” Tir’ut echoed. “Discovering my father is bonded to a dragon was enough… but to know I had such ability… I would not think of it as a gift.”

Andro looked at Dorian and then Jomann. “Believe me… there are days where we don’t consider it a gift either.”

“Now ain’t that the *nubous* truth.” Dorian commented.

“So father and our mothers found Pralors?” Resumar said shaking his head and changing the subject quickly. He knew his brothers and Jomann did not want to continue the path of that conversation. “They always manage to do the impossible you know.”

Andro smiled in agreement. “I questioned what he was doing at first but it seems they found what they were looking for yes. It didn’t work out as well as he thought, but things have gotten better in the last few days from what he told me as we returned to Earth.”

“Fedor?” Resumar asked. “Eirene?”

Andro nodded to him in reassurance. “Both of them are doing very well.” He said. “As are our mothers.”

“And you *fervon*! You bad boy!” Arrarn chortled as he stuck a finger in Dorian’s ribs. “Your *Durcunusaan* Captain? You dog!”

Dorian smiled shyly. “She doesn’t want too many people to know *fervon* so please keep it low key.” He said.

Arrarn sobered quickly and nodded his head. He could be very tight lipped when he wanted and if his brother wanted that Arrarn would not violate his trust. “Ah… her duties. Got it.” He said.

“Sheva is… she is very professional.” Jomann said thoughtfully. “I have not tried to tell her that she is now considered a Princess.”

Dorian looked at him with wide eyes. “*Sibfla*… don’t do that!” He exclaimed. “She’ll go nuts! I’m still trying to get her to loosen up more in public!”

Jomann laughed. “Don’t worry… she would probably strike me if I did.” He said. “You will need to tell her eventually though. She needs to know Dorian. Her words will carry far more weight once it is discovered. And it will be discovered eventually.”

“I know. I know.” He said. “I just want to take things real slow.” He replied looking at Andro knowingly. “She is very private.”

Andro nodded his head. “Don’t worry Dorian.” He said. “She will have nothing to worry about. I told you that.”

Dorian nodded as they stopped walking and he held out the data pad to Arrarn. “I need you to have Narice check this out for me Arrarn.” He said.

Arrarn took the pad confused and he read quickly. His eyes narrowed somewhat and he looked up at his brother. “You’re sure Dorian? This...”

Dorian nodded slowly. “I need to know why?”

“We need to know.” Andro spoke. “This knowledge remains between us here.” He told them as Arrarn passed the pad to Tir’ut and he then passed it to Resumar after reading it swiftly. “Cha’talla may be able to help and you can include him... but no one outside of Narice, Toria and yourself on your end Arrarn. At least not now. Tir’ut... I would like you to work it on this end. More and more Akruvians are coming to Earth now with Esther’s approval. You can move among them easier and discover things we can not. And among the vampires as well. There are connections here on Earth; Dorian and I have determined that. We need to find them.”

Arrarn looked at him. “This could be explosive Andro.” He said. “This... this is a real threat to you and Dorian. Hell... it could be to all of us if it’s true.”

Andro nodded. “It could be... but I agree with Dorian on this. Besides... we’ll be able to see anything coming.”

“You’re sure about this *fervon*?” Arrarn asked looking at Dorian. “What I find out could be what you don’t want to hear.”

Dorian nodded in agreement. “I know... but I don’t think so.” He replied. “And when we get the answers, I intend to make the threat to her go away. Permanently.”

Jomann chuckled. “He is hanging around you and I too much Andro.” He said.

Andro smiled and looked at Dorian. “That he is.” He looked at Arrarn. “Can you access this information Arrarn?” Andro asked.

Arrarn nodded. “I’m the bloody Defense Minister!” He retorted with some force. “Hah! I love saying that!” He gripped Dorian’s arm. “It shouldn’t be an issue. And General Esavorna has resumed command of the *Venorik Elghinn*, which will make it a little easier.”

“The *Ventash’ma* allowed that?” Resumar asked surprised.

Arrarn nodded. “They practically begged him to return and take his old position. Some of them knew of his hatred for Aikiro and what she did and they kept it to themselves. They didn’t know exactly why... but they knew of it. He cleaned house in the first week. He made some enemies... but he made far more friends with his actions.”

“You are worried for Narice *fervon*?” Resumar asked.

Arrarn shrugged his broad shoulders. “There are more men and women who love her for what she has done and will do... but she has made enemies. You can’t alter the course of a people and not make enemies. They are small but connected. Yeah... I worry for her... but the Immortals got her covered like a blanket when she’s not at home.”

“You trust those Immortals who remain Arrarn?” Jomann asked. “I can arrange for some *Durcunusaan* to make the trip if you need. She is a Princess of the Union.”

Arrarn shook his head quickly. “No... the Immortals who remained are completely loyal to Cha’talla and Narice. They’d give their lives for her in a split second. They all know their future is tied to the Coven. Colonel Co’kal has made that very clear. Besides... Cha’talla is the one who trained him many years ago and they all look at him with something akin to reverence. Cha’talla is training more men on Kranek but Co’kal has got our back. Lynom has moved to the capital with As’hia to take personal charge of her overall detail... but I know all it takes is one. We’re being careful.”

Andro looked at Resumar. “Which also means you and Athani will become targets as well Res.” He said.

“More than we are now?” Resumar said laconically.

“When it is revealed what Pian is going to do... what I think father is going to do... yes.” Andro told him.

“Athani can take care of herself.” Resumar spoke confidently. “She’s a better fighter than most and Mican is coaching her and Jalersi nearly everyday. Seems he has taken quite the shine to having his sisters back with him. He talks about them all the time. He has taken it upon himself to make sure his sisters are just as well trained as he is. And he’s almost as good as Pian.”

Andro smiled. “Good. Just watch yourself.” He told him.

Resumar nodded. “I will.” He said.

Andro took a deep breath and looked out over the surface of the ocean to Gytheio in the distance. “So much is happening at once and we need to be careful about the steps we make now.” He said.

Arrarn moved closer to him and put his hand on his shoulder. “We are not alone *fervon*. We never are. Father taught us that.” He said.

Andro looked at him and nodded. “No we aren’t.” He said. He nodded. “Ok... enough work... let’s get back to our ladies and enjoy ourselves for the next few hours. We have a lot of work to do before father contacts us again.”

“I’m all for that!” Arrarn spoke.

“Me too!” Dorian chimed in cheerfully.

Andro turned and looked across the sand to where the patio was. He saw his grandmother watching them and he smiled. “No... we are never alone.” He said softly.

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“... coordinates of the two planets Martin.” Delnash spoke from within the transmission twelve hours later. “You are you going to investigate them aren’t you?”

Martin sat at the table with only Murano, Danny and Kesyla this time. He did not want everyone to know what was going on completely just yet. Martin looked at the pad with the coordinates of the two planets for a moment longer and then looked at him in the transmission. “That is the plan. Is it something you would do sir?” He asked.

Delnash nodded his head without hesitation. “Yes... in your position, I believe I would.” He replied honestly, still somewhat taken aback with the respect and honesty that Martin always addressed him with. “As the reports you have show, they were progressing as expected as a culture at the last contact. Yet that was nearly a thousand years ago.”

“Why did you stop visiting the planets?” Martin asked.

Delnash looked down for a moment, an expression of disgust appearing on his face with an equal part embarrassment. He looked back up his eyes determined though. “I have allowed others to do things that I had no knowledge of Martin.” He spoke finally. “I am the Chief Elder Pralor and I allowed them to conduct themselves with no oversight from myself or others. I can not deny this is my fault and I will accept blame for all of it.”

“That’s not what I asked sir.” Martin told him. “You can not change the past... only learn from mistakes made and then you move forward from there.”

“I do not know why the Science Convention stopped monitoring their progress.” Delnash answered him. “Given how Lorendo feels for your people anything is possible. I can’t access this information without him discovering it. Getting the coordinates for you without anyone else knowing was hard enough.”

Murano leaned forward. “Brother... what are you saying?”

Delnash met his eyes. “I’m saying that I have learned that there is at least one faction of our people, perhaps more groups, who are conducting themselves outside of normal channels. They are doing things I would never sanction openly. I only discovered this when I requested the coordinates of the planets because the man I asked for them is a long time friend. Until I return home... if I press too hard... I risk exposing the fact that I am now aware of these things. Lorendo has a large power base I have come to learn from others that I have spoken to since we left Onterom. I need to be very careful in what I do Martin. If I act too quickly they will go underground and disappear and I will never learn anything. And I fear that is not what we want to happen.”

“Brother... you never told me this!” Murano exclaimed.

Delnash nodded his head, “With good reason. You were my safety net. No one knew you even existed Murano. I felt that if I got in beyond my ability to control I could call you in.” He said. “What you forced me to see... what you showed me Martin Leonidas... that I *had* lost control... it was like getting hit with a very large bludgeon. It opened my eyes to things I have been ignoring for too long. Things I would never approve of.”

“And now you have to deal with it.” Martin nodded in acknowledgement of what he was saying. “I do know the feeling.”

Delnash shook his head. “I allowed them to gather the power they have. I have ignored that they even existed because I wrongly assumed whatever they were doing would be for the good of our people. I realize now... after seeing what Lorendo was doing... I realize that is not the case at all.”

“Father you should not have sent me away!” Kesyla chided him.

Delnash shook his head. “On the contrary Kesyla... sending you away was the only way to keep you safe and it insures that whatever I discover will not be swept aside because I will send it to you.”

“You actually think Lorendo will come after you brother?” Murano asked.

Delnash looked at him. “Based on what I saw him do to hide what was happening on Onterom... and what you have told me... that he designed this virus... it is not something I wish to discover.” He replied.

“Do you doubt Anja’s findings?” Danny asked him.

Delnash shook his head immediately. “No. You would have no reason to invent such information and after what I saw on Onterom... your red haired Queen appears to be far more competent than many of our own doctors and researchers. She is... she is very dedicated and extremely gifted. As are all your Queens Martin.”

Martin nodded. “That they are.” He said.

“His notes go back so many millennia however... it will take time for me to investigate and not raise any alarms here.” Delnash continued. “I have people I can go to... to seek their help. Men and women I trust... but it appears Lorendo has at least half the Elder Council fully on his side. I need to proceed very cautiously.”

“Explain everything to Teniri Chief Elder.” Martin spoke. “Hold nothing back from her. She holds a great deal of respect for you. As Elder Mother she can help you.”

“She is no longer Elder Mother from what you have told me.” Delnash said.

Martin shook his head quickly. “Arzoal is Senior Elder Mother... yes... but Teniri has held those dragons with her together for nearly as long as Arzoal has in the Alpha Quadrant. She deserves the same status and Arzoal has granted her that. She will retain her title and status among the dragons on Artaaya. A co-Elder Mother so to speak. You know how intelligent she and the other dragons are sir. Use that. She could very well help you discover some things about Lorendo that you do not know. And she can help to protect you without drawing undue interest in that action.”

Delnash looked at him and nodded after a moment. “I will do this.” He said. “Martin... I will need... I will need access to the computer libraries on your *VORTEX* Cruiser. Those data libraries will have information that was lost to us when we fled. *VORTEX* Cruiser 341 was assigned to the Science Convention specifically and they would have downloaded information from the main history archives on our homeworld. Sending them via transmission is too risky. Can I ask of you to...?”

Martin nodded. “I can have Avi download a copy of them to a P1. The better question is how do we get it to you without anyone detecting it?”

“Before leaving, Radra asked me to arrange a ship to bring her some equipment and clothing.” Delnash told him. “When I return to Artaaya I will chose the flight crew myself from those I know I can trust. You may give it to the Captain of that ship and he will return it to me. Our transports are similar to the corvette you have. It can reach you within two days at most depending on where in the Quadrant you are. You would just need to give me the coordinates of your current location and then wait for them to arrive.”

Martin nodded. “When we arrive at the planet Murano suggested I will send the message to you. We’ll be there for about a week letting the adolescent dragons stretch their wings and learn some things from the adults.”

“I am... I am not used to all this sneaking around in order to conduct business for the good of our people.” Delnash spoke finally with a shake of his head. “It is disconcerting to say the least.”

Martin nodded. “It sure is.” He agreed. “But I have found that there are always those who think they know better or can do things better. Or they just believe they are always right no matter what evidence is

presented to the contrary. They believe they should be in charge because their way is better than the path currently followed. That will never change and we just have to deal with it.”

“And how do you deal with it?” Delnash asked him.

Martin laughed. “Well... if I left it up to my son... he would remove them permanently.” He answered with a small laugh.

“Your son... he does not sound very flexible.” Kesyla commented.

Martin looked at her. “Don’t misread my statement... Andro is the most compassionate and kind individual you will ever meet. For those who deserve it. He will defend those men and women to the death, no matter their species... but if you piss him off... well let’s just say he is not as forgiving as I am, as many people have commented over the years.”

“Yeah well... you ain’t exactly Prince *nubous* charming you know.” Danny quipped from beside him.

Martin grinned at him. “We just have to follow the path that we think is best as long as those people who it is our duty to lead agree with us.” He spoke turning back to Delnash. “It is a constant balancing act really... and I know you already know this sir. My Aunt Deia tells me I am getting better.”

Delnash looked at him intently. “I find myself wanting to get to know you far more than I do Martin Leonidas.” He said. “I... I believe I could learn quite a bit from you.”

Martin nodded his head. “No doubt just as much as I can learn from you sir.” He replied. “Perhaps we can make that happen in the future.”

Delnash nodded. “I think I would like that.” He said. “I will begin tracking what Lorendo does as best as I am able and I will keep you informed of anything that may come up. You have my word on that.”

Martin nodded. “We’ll do the same.”

“May... may the Ancients within the Rift of Time guide you in your many actions Martin Leonidas.” Delnash said.

Martin nodded again. “And you as well sir.”

They watched as the transmission faded leaving them alone in the conference room. Martin looked at Murano. “Tell me things aren’t as bad as he makes them out to be.” He said. “You are Pralors... Wayonn never told me this went on! I expect this from my people... but from Pralors?”

Murano looked at him for a moment then turned to Kesyla. She leaned forward in her chair taking the cue from her uncle. “It has... it has gotten worse through the years.” She told him. “There are many who fled the extinction of our people... people that brought with them their own ideals on how to deal with the Scourge and the aftermath. Some are more... extreme than others.”

Martin looked at her. “I’m not following.”

“They advocate active resistance Martin.” Murano said. “They want to return and take back our empire. No matter the cost or what we would need to do.”

“That would be suicide if what you’ve told us is true!” Danny announced.

“They are not a large number...” Kesyla added quickly. “But they do have a good deal of support in the different corners of our society.”

“In the military too?” Martin asked.

Murano shook his head. “Thankfully no. The military, such as it is, most of them have seen first hand what the Scourge did and how. There is no dealing with them and they know that. The best Scourge is a dead Scourge as far as they are concerned.”

“Seems I have heard that statement in past history.” Danny spoke softly. “And a few times it was not good.”

Murano nodded his head. “I don’t disagree Daniel... but that is the consensus of many of the older military officers.”

Martin looked at Danny and then back to Murano. “I can understand their emotion and experience but this doesn’t rule their actions now I hope.”

“No.” Kesyla answered him. “They know there is no way for us to defeat the Scourge now. Not in our current state. There is just not enough of our people left regardless of what others what us to think.”

Murano nodded in agreement. “The Scourge have Breeding Centers scattered all over what used to be Pralor space. Moon sized facilities where all they do is breed more of their kind. Their common warriors alone could overwhelm Artaaya in a matter of days. That does not include their officer corps or others.”

“Wait?” Danny asked. “Officer Corps?”

Murano nodded. “They have an upper echelon Officer Corps.” He told them. “Scourge Elites and Holy Elites. They lead the common soldiers... their Brood troops we call them. The officers walk upright as we do and they are large in number, but many are not as well trained as our people. They are incapable of thinking on their feet so to speak.”

“I thought they were all part of a Hive like mind?” Martin said.

Kesyła shook her head. “No... that is a common misconception.” She replied. “It is not true really.”

Martin looked at her and then back to Murano who smiled. “Kesyła has studied the many different parts of the Scourge whole.” He spoke. “Mari as well from what I understand. They are almost as knowledgeable as those of us who fought them. She is correct Martin. The Elites and Holy Elites are the only ones that have any sort of mental contact with the upper echelon of Scourge leadership. The Holy Elites dictate the orders from the Queen and it flows down to the Brood Warriors through the officers. The Scourge Elites.”

“The Elites are the core of their armies.” Kesyła said. “The Generals. The Holy Elites their government officials in a sense. They receive the orders and pass them down as I said. They are also...” Kesyła grew silent and looked at the table.

Danny sat forward now. “They are what Kesyła?” He asked. “Don’t stop now. Let’s hear it all.”

“They are also the only ones with the ability to impregnate females.” Kesyła finished her statement.

“What?” Martin gasped. “There are female Scourge?”

Murano nodded. “In... in a manner of speaking.” He said slowly. “The Scourge do not have... females as we know them. They are... Kesyła...” He spoke turning to his niece for help.

“They are a single sex species. The Queen produces the eggs and fertilizes them herself. All of the Scourge warriors are male. We know that before they came into contact with us every few thousand years one of these eggs would change to become female and take the place of the current Queen. At least that is how we thought it was before... before Xaxon conducted his experiments.” Kesyła answered. “They have evolved now because of her... and the Elites can now produce offspring. That is why they began taking our females during the war.”

Murano nodded. “We learned in the last millennia of the second war that they were not killing the females they took from our colonies and planets. They were using them as... as breeders. To produce Elites and Holy Elites who looked more like us.”

“Our scientists determined they were trying to breed a type of Scourge that would look like us in every way.” Kesyła said.

Murano nodded. “We saw many of them on the field of battle at the end... part Scourge part Pralor but equally as powerful as the Elites.” He said. “I don’t know if they have been able to perfect what they were trying to do.”

“It is unlikely.” Kesyła said quickly. “The differences in our physiology would be too much to overcome. At least that is what Radra believes. But those my Uncle and others fought at the end were incredibly powerful and were able to think and act for themselves.”

“So the Queen doesn’t lay the eggs anymore?” Martin asked.

Kesyła shook her head. “No. We believe that it is all done via cloning now. And these breeding centers. It is how they have become so numerous in so short a span of years. The Queen remains in absolute control but she... she no longer has the ability to produce eggs.”

“Well ain’t that peachy.” Danny said finally after a long moment of silence. “Why does every lizard or bug species in the galaxy want to use our women to breed? Why can’t they find their own?”

“The adaptability of our physiology makes us perfect for experimentation of many sorts Daniel.” Kesyła answered solemnly looking at him. “Believe me... it is not something we are particularly happy with.”

Dan looked at her. “No... I don’t suppose you are.” He said.

Martin looked at Murano. “Xaxon really stepped in it when he began experimenting on them didn’t he?”

Murano nodded his head. “His research gave them the means to branch off on their own.” He answered. “It is unlikely the Scourge would have discovered this knowledge without his interference.”

Martin looked at Kesyła after a moment. “Wait a minute... you said because of her.” He said. “What did you mean by that?”

“Uncle... you should tell them.” Kesyła spoke now.

Martin's eyes darted back and forth between them. "Tell us what?" Martin asked. He leaned forward quickly. "I need to know everything Murano. I've already had this conversation with Wayonn because he thought I wasn't ready for the knowledge. What is Kesyla referring to?"

Murano met his eyes. "It is the reason that many feel as they do about Praetorians." He said softly. "They don't like or trust us. They blame us for what happen."

"Shit... I ain't gonna like this am I?" Martin said.

"The Scourge are ruled by a Queen... we have known this since almost the beginning." Murano said. "She is the one who commands them and her rule is absolute as Kesyla has told you."

"Ok... so?" Martin said.

Murano took a deep breath. "Xaxon's research and vile experiments gave them the ability to do what they can now. He experimented on Pralors as well as Scourge... you know this. His actions are what caused many our of people to not trust us."

Martin nodded. "It's why he was punished in the manner he was... I got that part." Martin said. "Now... what don't I know already about why he was punished in this manner?"

Murano met his eyes. "One of those he used for the experiments... without being truthful to her... was his Praetorian Mage."

Martin's eyes grew wide in horror. "His Mage?" He almost yelled.

Murano nodded his head slowly. "Yes. He... he injected her with whatever serum or virus he had come up with at the time. He used her in a horrific manner. No Praetorian could believe it at first and when the truth came out, only Sumar's insistence he be tried for his crimes stopped the rest of us from dismembering him."

"I take it... Jesus... he killed her." Martin gasped in disbelief. The thought of using Helen in a manner like that was revolting to even think of for him. She had always been a rock for him, even more so when they discovered what it was they shared and why they were so close.

"We thought she had died yes." Murano said.

"Thought?" Danny asked.

"After Sumar and Wayonn departed on CS41 we began to receive intelligence that said otherwise." Murano said. "Rumors really. Rumors that she was not dead."

"Oh man... here comes the bomb!" Danny commented as he sat back. "This is not going to be pretty."

Murano met Martin's eyes once more. "We received confirmation of this information about halfway through the second war."

"Confirmation of what?" Martin asked.

"Xaxon's Mage was not dead." Murano told him. "Whatever he did to her... it somehow changed her. She... she became a Scourge Martin." Murano shook his head. "It is why they were so successful against us. Why they began targeting the remaining Praetorians with such success. That... and we believe she had help."

"She had help?" Martin asked. "What do you mean? She betrayed you?"

Murano looked at him. "Whatever Xaxon did to her it changed her enough that she became Scourge Martin."

"Yeah... I got that part!" Martin snapped. "What aren't you telling me?"

Murano answered softly. "It is why the Queen no longer produces eggs and why they use cloning technology to make their warriors now. She also became the new Scourge Queen Martin. Xaxon's Mage has supreme control and she hates us with every fiber of her being."

**CLASS M MOON
UNION DESIGNATION
AT459**

Kalis drew the thin space blanket up over Serale's shoulders, his eyes watching her face as she slept peacefully. The hi-tech blanket was not something new in the grand scheme of things, only improved upon through the many years. Even though it could be folded into the size of a data pad because of its thinness, it also provided incredible warmth and dryness from the elements. Kalis took a deep breath as he gazed at her beauty

and could not wait until he could take her in to his arms and claim her as his wife and mate. Yuriko moved into the passage way and her eyes quickly found Kalis squatting next to the Hadarian female. She didn't speak or make a sound as she watched him draw the blanket up closer to her chin and simply stare at her. Yuriko may not have been Lycavorian but between watching her father and brothers and countless other Lycavorian men, Yuriko knew that Kalis's desire for this young woman was by no means a passing interest. His head came around quickly when he detected her scent and he rose to his feet and moved confidently back towards the passageway entrance into the sleeping area. The large general sleeping area was filled now with both Lycavorian and Kavalian men and women.

Kalis moved up in front of her and stopped. Yuriko reached out and took his hand in hers. "We just received a message from the *ARC ROYAL*. Father confirmed receipt of my message. He burst back a short reply that he would contact us in a few hours."

Kalis squeezed her hand. "Will he come?" He asked.

Yuriko nodded her head. "More than likely." She replied. "Father does not say he will do something and then not do it."

"How long have...?" Kalis began to ask but stopped.

Yuriko smiled. "It's a long story... but let's just say it goes back more years than most people know. Officially... he adopted me seven months after returning and claiming his place as King of the Union. Unofficially... I was only six when I first met him. And that was over five hundred years ago."

Kalis looked at her oddly. "Five hundred... I thought..."

Yuriko smiled and began pulling him out of the passageway into the sleeping area and towards the main cavern. "I told you it was complicated. Come... we can sit and I will tell you. It also pertains at least in some way to your half sister Lisisa."

"Lisisa?" Kalis gasped as they walked. "I... by the gods... I had forgotten all about her."

Yuriko laughed. "That would probably make Lisisa very happy." She said. "She does not like to be the center of attention. She much prefers just to blend in." Yuriko motioned to one of the chairs as they came up to the small fire and Kalis settled into it as she did the same. "It all starts when Yuri..."

Kalis listened for nearly an hour, enraptured by the story of how Yuriko was eventually adopted by his Uncle Martin. Part of him felt ashamed because he felt he had a harsh life, only to have Yuriko's story make his upbringing almost cartoonish by comparison. He also learned just how compassionate and understanding his Uncle Martin could be. This did more for his confidence that he was on the right path than anything had so far and this made him feel good inside.

"She loves you intensely you know." Yuriko spoke snapping Kalis out of his thoughts and making him look at her.

"What?" He asked.

"Serale." Yuriko told him. "She loves you intensely. You can see it in the way she looks at you."

"No more than I have come to love her." Kalis said. "She is what drove me to continue on Yuriko."

Yuriko nodded her head in agreement. "I understand. Filrian was much the same for me. It took me longer than you to see that I loved him... but once I did I have never let go." She told him.

"I do not intend to let go either." Kalis spoke softly. He looked at her. "Some of your people question my intentions don't they?"

Yuriko met his eyes. "Some of them yes." She answered honestly. "But as you go forward your actions are what will win them over. I believe you are sincere Kalis. I've seen how you look at Serale. I've seen the desire in your eyes. It is why father wanted to help you to discover it."

Yuriko looked up as one of her men turned from the COM station where he had been monitoring things and moved quickly to her side. "Cilor?" She asked. "What is it?"

The Lycavorian knelt beside her. "We have company." He said bringing Kalis to full alertness.

"My father?" He asked.

The man looked at him and shook his head. "No. Worse."

"Worse?" Kalis said.

The man turned back to Yuriko. "The species your father discovered on Twelve Alpha. The Svorag." He said. "Long range scans from *OMEN THREE* picked up a ship entering the system. Frigate size and configuration marks it as a Pralor powered ship and it's teeming with Svorag lifesigns."

“A Pralor ship?” Yuriko asked shocked.

Cilor nodded. “Power signature matches what Captain Akemi sent to us in the last burst.” He replied. “At least it used to be a Pralor ship.”

Yuriko came to her feet. “How many lifesigns?” She asked.

“Scans were not conclusive but upwards of a thousand at least.” He answered. “Far more than normal for a Frigate... but then again... these Svorag aren’t exactly normal.”

“S...Svorag?” Kalis asked. “They are native to this quadrant?”

Yuriko met his eyes. “You... you could say that.” She said. She turned to Cilor. “How long?”

“Current speed puts it about two and a half hours out.” Cilor answered.

“Any indication that they see our ship?” Yuriko asked.

“Not so far... but they are still a good distance away.” Cilor answered. “They could just be passing through the sector.”

“Let’s hope so Cilor.” Yuriko told him. “Have *OMEN THREE* pull back to ten million kilometers from the moon. We don’t have the firepower to stand with a Pralor frigate in a fight, especially if they know to use the weapons systems.”

“I’m guessing these Svorag are not a very friendly species then?” Kalis asked almost casually.

Yuriko looked at him and smiled. “I see that the laconic nature of a Spartan has rubbed off on you in father’s and Andro’s teachings.” She said.

Kalis shrugged his broad shoulders. “It would appear so.” He said.

“The General’s men...?” Yuriko asked. “They are fighters right?”

Kalis nodded. “All of them.”

“Wake him up.” Yuriko spoke. “Take a team back to your ships and make sure you erase any trail from there to here. These Svorag are a nasty species and they aren’t real fond of us right now. Father and Uncle Danny have... liberated more than a few of them of their lives and I’m guessing... but we probably aren’t on their holiday list of do-gooders.”

Kalis nodded. “We will see to it.” He said. “Yuriko... Mata is...”

Yuriko nodded. “Get him some weapons. If these Svorag get on the ground and find us before father gets here, we’ll need everyone holding a weapon.” Kalis nodded his head and turned heading for the sleep area. Yuriko looked at Cilor. “Get a burst off to my father Cilor. Let him know what is happening and tell him to kick in the burners.”

Cilor looked at her. “Kick in the burners?” He asked.

Yuriko smiled. “My father will know what it means.”

Cilor nodded. “I’m on it.” He said.

ARC ROYAL

Those who worked for her knew right away that something was different. Iama was usually very attentive when she first arrived at what all of them were preparing for food. She would go from person to person suggesting something different or praising them on the job they were doing. They may have been Lycavorian and Elf and Algolian, and they may have been only cooks, but the Kavalian female they now called their boss was everything any of them had hoped for in a superior. She always consulted with them before changing the menu, always asked if they had ideas to keep the menu varied and healthy, and she made sure that she was the last one to leave after dinner was finished and the menu prepared for the next day.

This afternoon was different however.

Iama had never been late before and the senior Lycavorian Chief was about to have security check on her when she entered the large Mess Lounge preparation area as if she was floating on air. In the weeks prior to today they had all come to take notice of how her tail was acting in order to sense her mood. Since coming onboard she had stopped wrapping it around her waist and they were able to tell her mood by how much it was twitching back and forth or how much it was relaxed. Today it was calmly moving back and forth as she walked into the area, her strides measured and even. Her face was brighter than any of them had seen it before, her soft

green eyes glowing with new life and happiness. The Lycavorians among the mess crew, male and female both, knew instantly what it was for they could smell Fedor all over her and the resonance of his wolf aura flowing around her like a light breeze. His scent was thick in her blood, mingling tightly with her own. They knew that Fedor had not only scented her, he had claimed her as his wife and mate, and the way her scent and her blood utterly accepted this told them all they needed to know. It became apparent to the others rather quickly as well, those elven females who were not wolf could tell by her body language and her bright expression that a man who truly wanted her for something more than a fling had claimed her heart.

This was not like the other times when she had slept with crewmembers and come in the next day. This time she wore a dreamy expression on her beautiful features and she walked like a woman who had surrendered all she was to a man and he had made love to her until she was senseless. They all secretly hoped it was the young half elf Prince Fedor because they knew no matter how roughly she had treated him before; it was only because Iama wanted him badly and didn't really know how to approach him. If it was Prince Fedor, it would also account for the tremendously contented expression she wore on her face, for all of them had heard the many rumors that any male of the Leonidas family was built like a bull in the sex department and could make their wives and mates cry out in ecstasy and unqualified bliss every time. They only had to look at the Queens and Princesses to know this was true.

Their answer came in the form of Queen For'mya.

For'mya walked casually into the near empty Mess Lounge and moved up to the main counter with her normal gracefulness. Iama looked suddenly nervous as she briefly hesitated and then moved up to the opposite side.

“Queen... Queen For'mya.” Iama stammered. “I did not...”

For'mya's face was smiling and happy and she shook her head quickly and reached over the counter for Iama's hands. “I am not Queen to you Iama'Juturi. Not anymore.” She said. “I'd like to talk with you if I can?”

Iama glanced back quickly and then nodded as she moved to the counter entrance into the Mess Lounge. She moved timidly up to For'mya, looking shyly at the floor, and For'mya smiled and took her hands once more. “Why so timid child?” For'mya asked. “That is not like you.”

Iama looked at her nervously. “I... I know why you are here.” She said softly. “It is... it is because of Fedor. Milady I... I have never known what he makes me feel. I have... I have never loved anyone as I...”

For'mya shook her head and brought her hand up to lay her slender finger on Iama's lips silencing her words. “You think I do not approve?” She said softly. “You could not be further from the truth Iama.”

Iama looked at her with wide eyes. “But I thought... I am Kavalian. I am...”

For'mya squeezed her hands. “You are a beautiful young woman who has stolen the heart of my son Iama. Our son. I could not care in the least if you were Kavalian, Elven or vampire. I can sense Fedor's happiness, his complete love and devotion for you within his resonance in Mindvoice. It reverberates to all of us.” For'mya's eyes became slightly moist and she smiled brighter. “We wanted to welcome you into our family as we have every young woman who claims the heart of one of our sons and becomes a Princess of the Union.”

“We...? Princess...?” Iama asked with wide disbelieving eyes.

For'mya turned and glanced over to the doorway into the mess Lounge, Iama's eyes following her. They grew even wider when she saw all of Fedor's mothers waiting, as well as Fedor's twin sister Eirene. All of them with wide, happy smiles. She glanced back to For'mya, suddenly very nervous as they began to cross the large room towards them.

“Milady... I... I do not know... I do not know how to be a Princess.” Iama stammered quickly and quietly to her.

For'mya laughed softly as she drew her close and slipped her arm around Iama's waist. “Oh child...” She chuckled. “If only you knew how much *w*e don't know about being Queens and Princesses ourselves!” She told her. “You will fit right in Iama'Juturi Leonidas! You will fit right in!”

Iama felt her heart lifting even more than what it did within the embrace of Fedor's powerful arms as Aricia and Anja and the others swarmed around her with happy smiles and welcoming embraces and kisses. Nothing in the universe could have removed the smile she now wore on her face and as tears rolled down her cheeks, and the last remnants of her past life were irrevocably tossed away into the void, Iama finally felt like she was home. She felt welcome and loved. Emotions that had once been taken away from her were now hers once more and Iama'Juturi Leonidas had no intention of ever letting go of them again.

“...treat my mothers and Aunts then?” Fedor asked as he stood watching Martin and Danny checking equipment at the large table in the main Weapons Locker of the Arc Royal. “I did it right?”

Martin looked at him as his hands moved over the P190A4 with expert precision. “Did she scream your name to the moon?” Martin asked him.

“*Medwan*... there is no moon to see from my quarters.” Fedor spoke.

Danny chuckled. “It is a metaphor Fedor.” He said as he adjusted a combat harness without looking at it.

“Ah... would squeezing me nearly to death and whispering that she loves me over and over in my ear qualify?” Fedor asked.

“That it would boy.” Martin said with a smile. “That it would.”

“Does she make you happy Fedor?” Danny asked.

“Oh yes *Tenne* Daniel.” Fedor answered. “Her body is like... it is so smooth and firm and...”

“Whoa!” Danny spoke. “No... that’s not what I meant.”

Fedor looked at him oddly. “It’s not?”

Martin set the weapon down and moved around the edge of the table to stand in front of where Fedor sat on the stack of ammunition crates. “He meant does she make you happy in here?” Martin asked poking his chest over his heart.

Fedor nodded quickly with a wide smile. “Yes she does *medwan*.”

“True Spartan men never talk of intimate moments with their wives and mates.” Danny told him as Martin looked at him. “They joke and insinuate things... but they never reveal the true treasures of those that they cherish. That is between you and her. Keep that to yourself and never speak of it *mandri*. Hold it close to your heart as a secret and truth only you know.”

Martin nodded and turned back to Fedor. “Iama has had... she has had a life I would not wish upon my worst enemy Fedor. Your mothers and I... well we sensed your happiness within Mindvoice this morning. And through your resonance we could feel hers as well. You are not like anything she has ever experienced Fedor. You have given her something she believed she would never have son. What we felt from her this morning... let’s just say that if you worship the ground she walks upon Fedor, the fire of your love will never dim.”

“I will father. As you and Uncle Danny do.” He said.

“Well... she’s got spunk that’s for sure.” Danny said with a grin. “My bet is she will run you ragged.”

Martin grinned. “No bet here.” He said in reply.

Fedor laughed and nodded his head in agreement. “She already dictated to me what I was to have for breakfast this morning.”

Martin chuckled. “Sounds like Anja and Anuk.” He said looking at Danny. “It sucks having anyone in the medical profession as a wife and mate. They are so healthy. Now we got someone in the food industry as well. I can’t win.” He looked back to Fedor. “Just tell Iama to not try and get me to stop eating meat! It won’t happen!”

They shared a laugh as Danny looked over and saw the Officer of the Deck enter the Weapons Locker hurriedly and move right up to them. “OD?” He asked with a smile. “You lost son?”

“No General.” The human answered as he came right up to them. The crew of the *ARC ROYAL* had learned in the first weeks to never be shy about approaching Martin or any senior officer, especially General Simpson or the King. Many had spoken to them directly, even when not on duty, and this had endeared them even more to the crew. He held out the data pad to Martin. “Sire... urgent COM traffic from Princess Yuriko.”

Martin took the pad as his face became serious and he began to read. Danny and Fedor both knew it wasn't good and Fedor stood up quickly. “*Medwan*?” Fedor asked.

“*Fervon*?” Danny questioned next.

Martin looked up from the pad. “Yuriko made it to her base with the package.” He spoke looking at Danny. “But the Svorag just entered the system they are in and are headed for the moon.”

“They made them?” Danny snarled.

Martin shook his head quickly. “No... but given what we now know about these assholes, it’s only a matter of time before they do.”

“I’ll put together a team.” Danny spat. “We can leave in an hour!”

“No!” Martin told him causing Danny to look at him oddly.

“Marty... it’s Yuriko!” Danny gasped.

Martin nodded. “I know. But you aren’t going.” He said.

“What? Why?” Danny demanded.

Martin looked at the OD. “Have Akemi notify the Flight Deck that I will be taking my *STRIKER*. Get it prepped and ready for departure.”

The man nodded. “As you order King Leonidas.” He answered before turning sharply and jogging out of the Weapons Locker.

Martin turned back to Danny and Fedor. “I need you here Dan.” Martin said. “And you aren’t going either Fedor.”

“Father I...” Fedor began to protest.

“No!” Martin snapped. “I’m not taking you away from Iama so soon after you claimed her as your wife and mate! And until your mother clears you for full duty you are still not fit for action!”

“That is not true!” Fedor stammered. “I am fully healed and fit!”

Martin looked at him. “No.” He stated finally. “Not this time Fedor. There will be more than enough times in the future. Now I need you here.”

“What about me?” Danny demanded.

Martin looked at him with a sly grin. “I was going to make it a surprise... but when I talked to Andro I told him to put wives and mates on a Corvette and send them to us.” He explained. “It’s not right for me to have Aricia and the others here with me and no one else has that. Amazingly... only a few hundred of the crew are married so it’s not really a lot of extra people. He is probably back on Earth by now and he said he would send the ship out first thing. We should be hearing from Ben pretty quick to lock down coordinates and position. You need to be here with the others to greet them.”

“Martin that...” Danny started to protest but Martin shook his head.

“No *fervon*.” He said. “I’ll take Murano, T’lolt, Jules, Kenny, Pablo and Garan. Kasdan as well for a scientific perspective. I don’t intend to do any fighting *fervon*. We’re gonna go there and pull them out with the package.”

“And what if the Svorag don’t like that idea?” Danny snapped.

Martin grinned. “Well then you can come in and rescue my limp dick and try to make up for all the times I’ve saved your fat ass!”

“Asshole!” Danny barked.

Martin laughed. “Yeah... I’ve been called that a lot lately.”

“How do you know it ain’t a trap?” Danny hissed.

Martin looked at him. “I’ve showed you the results *fervon*. Do you think he could have done that if he wasn’t sincere?”

Danny was silent for a long moment and then finally shook his head. “No.” He said. “I still don’t like it!”

Fedor looked between them and finally stepped up. “Who are we talking about? What are you not telling me? Is this... is this about *him medwan*?”

Martin looked at him. “No.” He answered firmly. “If it was Fedor... I would share it with you. And I wouldn’t be going there to bring him back here. I’d be going there to kill him.”

“Then who?” Fedor demanded.

Martin reached out and placed his hand on Fedor’s shoulder. “Do you trust me son?”

Fedor looked at him as if he was crazy. “*Medwan*... you never need to ask me that!” He stammered. “Never!”

“Then trust me now.” Martin said. “Stay here. Spend every waking moment you can with Iama and show her how much she means to you. How much she is now a member of this family son. Kiss her. Hold her. Nuzzle her. Make sure she knows.”

Fedor looked at him oddly. “You don’t need to tell me to do these things father.” He said. “I already planned on it.”

Martin smiled. "Good." He said. "I had to hit your brothers in the head with a board to get them to do it."

"Somehow I don't think so father." Fedor spoke.

"Trust me boy." Martin said with a smile. "You'll know everything when I get back. Now get down to the landing bay and help your mother, Endy and Tina prep the ship."

"Father you..." Fedor started to say.

Martin shook his head. "Go." He said.

Fedor met his gaze for a long moment and then moved for the entrance. Martin turned and looked at Danny. "Want to tell me what's up?" Danny asked him.

"Iama's family is with Kalis." Martin said softly. "She's been through far too much than a young woman should have to experience *fervon*. Fedor has given her everything she thought she would never have and I won't let them take that from her. You smelled how deeply her scent is within his blood?"

Danny nodded. "Kind of hard to miss." He answered. "She would kill for him."

Martin nodded his head. "I want them to have time together." He said. "They need that time because when her family gets here things might get ugly."

"You... you could have told me about Anuk and Nubian." He said.

Martin looked at him. "And miss seeing the expression on your face when Anuk slaps you for following me out here? No way."

Danny chuckled and moved closer to him. He took Martin's arm and squeezed. "Thank you *fervon*." He said.

Martin nodded. "Don't thank me for doing what I should *fervon*." He said. "I haven't felt right since we left because of it. I hate splitting up families. Once we get to this planet for the adolescent dragons we'll have a good week of time. Murano says the planet is lush and uninhabited. It's perfect."

"Perfect never works for us... you know that." Danny said.

"Maybe our luck will change." Martin said. "Everyone needs the break. We have been out here a long time Danny."

Dan nodded. "That we have."

"So I'll go get Yuriko and Kalis and we'll meet you at the planet." Martin told him. "Then we'll have a big party and plan how we are going to squash Pusintin and his asshole followers."

Danny laughed. "Now that sounds like a plan!" He spoke.

**VEYERAI
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HIGH COVEN SPACE
FEBRUARY 12TH, 0835 HRS, EST**

Yuri walked slowly down the corridor towards the base's medical area with an extremely contented smile on her face as she read from the data pad. They had returned two days ago and their first night back Pa'cour had been very attentive to her with Onera now in her own personal apartment. Yuri had to admit to herself that her Immortal husband was very creative in their bed and this creativity combined with his immense size and skill at making her cry out in delight made for a very exhaustive but overwhelmingly fulfilling evening. Last night had been more of the same and Yuri was sore now, but in a deeply satisfying and happy way. They had remained in their quarters for most of the day yesterday, Pa'cour doting on her like a jewel, and she reciprocating the emotions and physical pleasure quite willingly. His body was a beautiful temple to her, and Yuri simply adored worshiping at that temple. She craved his touch upon her more than anything else in her life and knowing that he felt the same way without doubt made it that much more pleasurable for her.

Yuri looked up from the pad as she entered Nalavi's realm and she spied him speaking with Nameia standing on the other side of the glass divider that separated the beds from the rest of the center. Six of them were occupied by the elven females that they had rescued and Nalavi was treating. She stopped for a moment as she took in Nameia's surreal beauty and Yuri felt her heart racing. Nameia wore a full, dark blue jumpsuit that

hugged her lush elven figure like a second skin. She wore a utility belt of sorts with three small pouches along the small of her back and a single K14 sidearm on her right side. The K14 was the cut down version of the full sized Union K12 Magnum, but still a very lethal firearm. One of Pa'cour's Immortals must have supplied it to her since they were under orders to give her whatever she wanted. Yuri couldn't understand why she felt this way looking at Nameia... she was certainly not going to deny the emotions and feelings just looking at her caused. Yuri had vowed never to suppress her emotions and feelings again, for that was in part how Xaxon was able to manipulate her and gain control of her so easily. No... now Yuri would face and confront her emotions no matter what. She just didn't quite know how to proceed when it came to Nameia. That she was physically drawn to the elf female was a surprise for Yuri as she had never considered another woman in such a manner. She wanted Nameia though, that much Yuri was sure of. She wanted to feel Nameia's body against hers; she wanted to taste her in so many ways... she just didn't know how to come to grips with that.

Yuri straightened up and moved fully into the medical center, Nalavi turning when he heard her. His face lit up and he smiled as she came up to them.

"Yuri!" He exclaimed turning fully to face her while Nameia stood beside him and let her royal blue eyes gaze upon the vampire princess.

Nameia looked at her intently, the woman who had saved her life, but whose past was a myriad of angry and violent actions. Many of them resulting in the deaths of innocent men and women. Nameia had seen images of the vampire Princess many times on the Netnews, but the woman standing before her now looked nothing like those images. While her exotic heritage was obvious to any who looked at her, Nameia noticed that the severe lines and dark shadows that had occupied her face in those images were gone. Her skin was almost olive in color and vibrant with life. Her skin looked so soft and inviting to Nameia who was startled to say the least. Though only five foot four from what Nameia could judge, Yuri carried herself with an air of confidence and grace, not arrogance in any way. Her body was extremely well toned and very shapely and Nameia very briefly wondered what she looked like without clothes. She blinked rapidly and shook her head slightly trying to rid herself of such thoughts. She glanced up as Yuri spoke.

"I came to check on our guests." Yuri said softly, her voice causing Nameia to inwardly shiver in unexpected but very welcome feelings of desire.

Nalavi nodded his head. "Yes... I figured as much." He spoke holding out the pad to her. "I contacted Esther the moment after you contacted me from your ship. She sent me the formula for the vaccination she developed within thirty minutes. I had everything here to fashion the doses by the time you arrived."

Yuri let her dark eyes move over the six elven females who looked to be resting quite comfortably on the beds. "How are they?" She asked softly.

Nalavi turned back to his patients who all seemed to be resting quite comfortably, two of them asleep while the other four were taking among themselves. "Well... the vaccine worked." He said first. "All traces of the chemical that addicted them is gone. Their bodies are returning to normal for female elves... their mental state however is up to them."

Yuri looked at him. "What do you mean?"

Nalavi met her gaze. "They have been prisoners of Immortals for months Yuri." He answered. "The one with the red hair there... over a year. Everything they had is gone. Their lives are changed. And they endured months of forced sexual encounters that none of them wanted."

Yuri lowered her head to the floor instantly embarrassed. "*Phraktos*... how stupid of me!" She hissed softly.

Nameia stepped closer to her. "It is alright Princess." She said gently. "They do not... they hold no malice for you. They know you risked much by saving them and they all are indebted to you."

"The Immortals here..." Yuri said quickly. "Those who follow me and my husband. They are not the same as those that held you and them. They are so very different."

Nameia nodded. "They heard the other Immortals talking at different times while they were prisoners. They know what has happened to those that follow General Cha'talla."

"You know him?" Yuri asked quickly.

Nameia shook her head. "No... I have never met him... but what he has created on Kranek is well known now. Even within the Wilds."

“Do any of them... do they have families? Was any of them married?” Yuri asked. “Someone we can contact?”

Nameia shook her head. “Only Sora.” Nameia answered. “The dark haired one on the end. She was married only two months before the Immortals captured her.”

“Her husband?” Yuri asked. “Where is he?”

“Why?” Nameia asked.

“I intend to see them returned to their families.” Yuri told her.

Nameia glanced at Nalavi quickly and then back to Yuri. “I thought we... I thought we were...” She stopped speaking for a moment and Nalavi took it up.

“I think they are under the impression they are to be prisoners.” He told Yuri. “Slaves.”

“What?” Yuri gasped. “No! Never! I would not have taken them from that vile world only to replace that with another! Why would they think that?”

Nameia looked at her again. “Forgive me Princess. It’s just...”

“Stop calling me that!” Yuri snapped. “I am not a Princess of the Coven any longer! I have left that life behind me! Gladly!”

“They know who you are.” Nameia said softly.

Nalavi looked at her. “Your former reputation precedes you Yuri.” He said. “They don’t know that you travel a different path now.”

Yuri cursed under her breath and shook her head. She looked at Nameia, her dark eyes wide. “I wish to return them to their lives. To their families. At least as much as I am able after what they have endured.”

Nameia stared into Yuri’s dark eyes and saw the determination in them. The drive to do what was right. This was undoubtedly not the Princess Yuri they had heard so much about and Nameia knew for certain it was no act. This woman was different from the images she had seen of the old Princess Yuri. Very different.

“You... you are... forgive me but you are not the Yuri that so many have heard about.” Nameia said.

“If only you knew.” Nalavi said with a smile.

“Nalavi stop!” Yuri hissed.

“Why?” He questioned her. “Nameia is right. You are not the same person Yuri and you should not be afraid of who you are now.”

“I am neither afraid nor ashamed of who I am now.” Yuri stated confidently. “In some ways I’m still trying to figure it out... but I will not turn away from who I have become. It’s just very hard to explain to someone who...”

“Who doesn’t know you?” Nameia offered.

Yuri looked at her and nodded slowly. “That is part of it yes.” She said.

“I saw the way you acted with that Immortal on the planet.” Nameia said. “He is... he is your husband?”

Yuri nodded. “He is the one who saved me from the wretched life I was lost within.” She said in an almost wistful tone of voice. “His love for me saved me. What he did... what he did allowed me to love him in return. With all that I am. The young woman who helped us rescue you and the others... she is Onera. She is our daughter. The first and most beautiful sign that I have changed.”

Nameia gazed at her. “I know very little of vampires as a whole... but I am aware of the law your people have about relations with Immortals. It is a taboo within your culture isn’t it? A despicable sin according to what we have heard.”

Yuri nodded her head. “It was... yes. My sister Narice is changing that. She is changing so much for my kind. Since she became Empress there are many such relationships that have come out into the open. More than even my mother suspected. I am the Blessed Wife of an Akruvian Immortal and I have never been more proud of anything in my life than when I speak that fact.”

“There are many who think you are dead.” Nameia said. “That the bounty on your head was lifted because Crown Prince Androcles killed you.”

Yuri met her blue eyes thoughtfully. “In a way he did.” She explained. “He killed the old me.”

Nameia looked at her intently, tilting her head to the side. “That is a very... very odd thing to say.” She said. “You are standing here now.”

Yuri grinned. “I suppose it is.” She said. “But it’s very true.”

“I’m... I’m not sure I follow. The Immortals with you... your husband... they look so different from those who held us prisoner. We knew of Cha'talla of course but these other changes... none of us suspected.” Nameia said.

Yuri stepped closer to her. She could smell Nameia’s elven blood within her veins and it smelled almost as sweet as Pa'cour’s. No... she wasn’t going to suppress the emotions swirling through her. Never again. If Nameia attracted her so much, then there must have been a reason. Yuri knew there was a reason. And she would embrace the emotions and feelings without doubt until she found that reason. It was a vow both she and Pa'cour had made to each other one night while lying in each other’s arms. “Join me for breakfast and perhaps I can begin to explain so that you do understand.” She asked.

Nameia’s eyes brightened considerably and she nodded her head without hesitation. “I think I would like that.” She said in reply.

Though Yuri did not yet know it... Nameia had already decided she was beyond attracted to the vampire Princess. She desired the exotic looking woman in a very intense and intimate way. Nameia had always been very open and adventurous, she was an elf after all, and she had had two female lovers in her three hundred and six years of life. Though neither had lasted for any great length of time because of different reasons, they were still passionate and incredibly pleasurable relationships nonetheless. Nameia was free now... something she never thought she would be only a few short days ago. She was free to live her life how she wanted going forward into the future. She would contact her family in due time and then visit them. She needed time to adjust to things now and regardless of what had happened just recently, Nameia could not deny the intense attraction to Yuri.

Nor the Immortal she called her Blessed husband.

Perhaps events were happening this way for a reason. For a purpose that she did not yet know. Whatever the cause... Nameia was not going to turn away from it.

CLASS M MOON UNION DESIGNATION AT459

Koguth watched as Kalis, Mata and Nedoli finished using large branches with the leaves still on them to erase any sign of footprints they had left along the trail leading away from the two ships they had arrived on. They had secured both *LEUGERS* transports and then insured that each had an immense net drawn over them that would automatically adjust and blend in with the terrain around the two ships. This would effectively hide them from the naked eye unless you moved right on top of them. To keep them from being spotted by ship board scans their main power was dropped to miniscule levels and the LSD coils recharging reduced to a tiny fraction of what was needed to sustain them.

Koguth let his eyes cut to the side where he saw three of his Pride maintaining security alertly with three Lycavorian troops. The Princess had placed the men under his command without even pausing and this fact alone showed Koguth that his decision so long ago had been the right one. The Union didn’t care that he and his Pride were Kavalian. As long as they held the same values and morals... Koguth firmly believed that you would be accepted by citizens of the Union even if you had wings and gold skin. Even the few hours among them here on this moon had shown him this. Within the first hour, the Lycavorians were reaching out to his Pride members, offering food and drink and striking up conversations about the most mundane things. They were breaking the ice and trying to get a feeling for his people and when they discovered his Pride members were not so very different in their beliefs, the conversations continued unabated. It was something they did not expect from Kavalians, and when they did find they were the same in many ways, the walls of distrust and suspicion began to come down.

Koguth shifted the P190A4 to his left hand. The Union weapon was smaller and lighter than their assault rifles and would better serve them in the terrain. The silenced nature of the weapons also made them very appealing. He watched as first Kalis and then Nedoli stepped back from their work and then tossed the branches as far away from the trail they had taken as possible. They moved back to where he squatted, Mata finishing his

portion after them and then doing the same with his branch. His eyes cut to the Lycavorian enlisted man as he moved from his position and came up next to him as Kalis settled to one knee in front of him.

“They will not be able to determine what direction we went if they find the ships General Koguth.” Kalis told him.

Nedoli nodded his head, his tail sweeping calmly behind him. “Not unless they have those like you Kalis. Those who can smell us.”

Koguth turned to the Lycavorian. “May I ask your name...?” He spoke.

“Vistale General.” The man replied. “*Enomotarch* Vistale.”

Koguth nodded his head knowing the Union ranks by heart. “Excellent. Senior Sergeant. You have served long then?”

Vistale nodded his head. “Seven hundred and eighteen years General.” He replied. “I joined when I finished my Agoge.”

“The Union Training Course for all their soldiers.” Mata spoke with a touch of respect in his voice. He looked at Koguth. “It is said this Agoge is brutally efficient General.” He looked at Vistale. “That is meant as a compliment.”

Vistale nodded with a small smile. “And that is how I took it.” He said. “It is harsh yes... but fighting the High Coven was never easy.”

Koguth nodded. “That is a fact no matter what anyone says.” He agreed. “What can you tell us about these Svor...? Svorag Senior Sergeant Vistale? You have crossed their path out here before I take it?”

“We haven’t directly sir.” Vistale answered. “The King and General Simpson have. On two different occasions. We have the reports and after action briefs.”

“Since it appears we do not have the time to read them... perhaps a short version would do.” Koguth spoke.

“I’m not an Intelligence Operative sir.” Vistale said.

“No... you are a soldier. I prefer a soldier’s view.” Koguth said. “They are more in touch with reality.”

Vistale chuckled and nodded his head. “I suppose we are sir.” He spoke. “They are a vile species. They walk upright for the most part, are very fast and extremely tough. Their skin has some sort of natural armor on it so aiming for vital areas is a necessity. They also...” He stopped for a moment.

“Vistale?” Koguth spoke.

The Lycavorian looked at him. “Do not allow them close to you.” He continued. “They have appendages that... if they are able to insert these tongues or other things into your body they can change you.”

“Change you?” Kalis asked.

Vistale nodded. “It is how they increase their numbers. They do something to you and inject you with some sort of liquid that makes you docile. Then they... they force themselves upon you over and over spewing their fluids into you until your body begins to change into one of them. It is... it is even more vile for the females they bring down. They violate every orifice with their appendages. The King’s last report indicates they are also using females of other species to breed more of their vile kind.”

“You do not mince words Vistale.” Koguth said finally.

Vistale looked at him. “You have come with Kalis Leonidas General.” He said firmly. “The Lycavorians among us can smell the Leonidas blood within him sir. He has embraced his Lycavorian nature and his actions towards the young Hadarian only confirm this for us.” He looked at Kalis who wore a shocked expression on his face. “Your desire for each other pours from both of you young Kalis. She is to be your wife and mate and all of us can smell it. We can smell your devotion to her.” Vistale looked at Koguth. “And we can smell it within all of you General.” His eyes cut to Mata. “Even within you Puma Bane.” He turned back to Koguth. “All of you are reaching for the unknown and our King has always said to never fear the unknown. We live by that phrase now. We are here now and we will stand beside you. All of you. Lying to you about something that endangers all of us is not something any of us would do. We are in this together.”

Koguth was silent for a long moment and his eyes moved to each Lycavorian that had accompanied them and he saw the same look in their eyes. He turned back to Vistale and nodded his head finally. “Yes we are.” He stated. “So these creatures... they are... you called them Svorag?”

Vistale nodded. “That is their official name. King Leonidas and General Simpson refer to them as Fuglies.”

Koguth's brow narrowed. "Fuglies?"

Vistale grinned. "Fucking ugly."

Koguth couldn't help but burst out laughing and he shook his head slowly. "Oh... I needed that." He said. "Indeed I did." He nodded. "Very well... let us return and set up our defensive line. If these Fuglies decide to come here they will find we are not so easily taken."

"...still on course Captain." The elven sensor operator spoke from the portable sensor table set up in the cave. They had a small, portable sensor array established on the top of the mountain above them which provided them sensor coverage for the immediate sector around the moon.

"How soon before they come in range of the moon?" Yuriko asked.

"Their speed has slowed... so say about three hours." She answered turning to look at her. "Maybe they'll bypass the moon altogether."

Yuriko nodded. "Let's hope so." She said turning to see Mani move up beside her. "Lady Mani?" She asked. Mani was slightly taken aback by how Yuriko referred to her and it showed in her face. Yuriko smiled. "My father and mothers taught us to respect our elders Lady Mani. I remember several times where Andro and my brothers forgot that and they felt the sting of our mother's hands upon their backside when they were growing."

Mani couldn't help but smile. "I did not... I did not expect us to be accepted so easily." She said finally.

Yuriko's eyes darted to the side of the cavern. "I think *that* tells us that your Pride is dedicated to the same ideals as we are Milady."

Mani followed her gaze and she smiled when she saw Nedoli leaning up against the wall of the cavern near the entrance. Sitting between his legs in a fashion that was much more than causal, Ceale was looking into his face as his large hand gently caressed her shoulder. Both her legs were tossed over one of his and she reached up occasionally to smooth out some portion of the light fur on his face. They were talking in small whispers and Mani saw Ceale smile brightly several times at something Nedoli said to her. She turned back to Yuriko.

"My son... Nedoli... he has never shown such emotion for any woman." She said. "He has been taken with Ceale since he first saw her, no matter what she was forced to endure. It makes my heart happy to see that Ceale has looked beyond what she has experienced and seen that he worships her. That she accepts him for who he is."

Yuriko nodded. "You'll get no argument from me." She said in reply. "Was there something you wanted milady?"

Mani looked at her. "I was going to ask... I was going to ask if you knew anything of my daughter. Of Iama?"

Yuriko shook her head. "I'm sorry... I've only met her once and that was at a meeting before we left the Alpha Quadrant." She said. "I know that she has the respect of my father and my mothers and that she is very well liked among the crew of the *ARC ROYAL*."

Mani looked over to where Ceale and Nedoli sat. "Her grandfather was the one who took her away from us. He did this while Koguth was off fighting the Coven." She turned back to Yuriko. "When he returned and discovered what his father had done, he was incensed. He killed his own father for selling Iama to the brothels. Not a day has gone by since then that he has not thought of her or stopped looking for her."

Yuriko thought briefly of her father and how driven he was looking for Lisisa all those years ago. She nodded. "Then my father will understand him." She said finally.

Mani looked at her. "Can you tell me of the King? Your father?"

"What would you like to know?" Yuriko asked her.

"Whatever you feel comfortable allowing me to know." Mani replied.

Yuriko chuckled and met her eyes. "That could take a long time." She said.

"What else are we doing but waiting?" Mani said.

"True." Yuriko said. "He is... he is a very different man my father and..."

As Yuriko began to speak, Ceale was looking up into Nedoli's face with what amounted to both new found desire and love.

Ceale knew what she felt within herself when she looked at him, yet she was still very unsure of herself. She knew that he adored her in every way and that whatever had happened to her did not matter to him in the least, nor did it remove his own powerful desire for her. His actions these last weeks had only proven that to her more and more each moment she spent with him. And as the days had passed she found herself wanting to spend as much time with him as possible. She also knew enough about men to know that while his eyes held passion and desire for her, it was not the same as the violent lust she had seen in Pusintin's eyes or the eyes of his officers she had been forced to service. No... this desire and lust was a kind that made her feel safe and warm within his embrace. His body was always warm, partly because of the light layer of fur and partly because like Lycavorians, Kavalians tended to have higher than normal body temperatures. When he looked at her with those eyes, she saw in them the desire that she had never seen in her husband's eyes. A desire to sweep her up and make her feel things she never had before. His long fingers absently stroked her shoulder delicately and while she knew he could extend very sharp and deadly claws if he wanted, she had no fear of him whatsoever.

He lifted his other hand and brought it to her face, brushing some of her dark red hair from her cheek. "What are you thinking Ceale?" He asked softly.

She reached up and covered his large hand with her own, holding it to her cheek for a long moment. Ceale was rapidly discovering that while open displays of affection were not common among normal Kavalians, those who believed as Nedoli and his Pride were not among that form of belief. "That it is so very strange how things have worked out." She said softly curling her fingers within his. "I don't really know... Nedoli I..."

Nedoli placed a finger to her lips and stopped her words. "You will heal Ceale." He said softly. "You will heal and I will help you. Time is one thing we have plenty of. I ask for and expect nothing in return from you. I will show you that what you have experienced in your life is not how it should have happened. I will show you that you are still the most beautiful flower I have ever seen in my life, no matter what has taken place."

"You say that with such conviction." She said looking into his dark blue feline like eyes.

"Why wouldn't I?" He asked her. "It is what I believe. What I feel in my heart. I can not take back what has been done to you my beautiful Ceale... I wish I could... but I can't. But I can show you that you have not lost that spark within you. That you are still a breathtakingly beautiful woman and if given the honor, I would love you like no other."

Ceale lowered her head to his chest and placed a hand over his heart as his words made her nearly come to tears. "Why couldn't I have found you before all this happened?" She said softly.

Nedoli smiled and wrapped his powerful arms around her upper body pulling her tighter to him. "The past no longer matters. All that matters now is how we approach the future my flower. Everything happens for a reason Ceale." He said softly. "I will show you what love is. When you are ready... when you are ready I will love you until it steals your breath away and washes you of the shame that you think you must carry within you. Then... then we will start our life together and you will know everything you have been denied. I swear to you."

Ceale's eyes closed and she smiled blissfully at his words feeling the warmth of his body fill her. She snuggled even closer to him, never having felt the emotions coursing through her that she felt for this man. She would never have dreamed she could have such emotions for a Kavalian male. Emotions that lifted her spirits to the sky and were the anchor to what she now held onto.

MARTIN'S STRIKER MARK II *LEONIDAS ONE*

"...course laid in. First jump complete. Time to next jump is three hours and sixteen minutes." Endith spoke from her pilot's seat. She turned to look at Martin who knelt between her and For'mya sitting in the co-pilot's seat.

Over two decades they had been a flight crew now, far longer than was the norm within the Union, but also the reason that they were the foremost Flight Crew anywhere within the Union. Combined with Tina as their Flight and Combat Engineer as well as their relief pilot, there was nothing they could not do together as

they had proven through the years. They had taken their *STRIKER* into places that no pilot would ever attempt unless they were completely insane.

“How long Endy?” He asked somberly.

“Five hours after we exit the second jump.” She answered. “Give or take a few minutes.”

For'mya glanced at him and reached up with her gloved hand to place it under his chin and turn his head gently to look at her. “What is it Martin my love?” She asked. “I can sense your foreboding.”

Martin met her dark eyes and shook his head. “It’s not what you think *Kinsoargai*.” He answered.

“You question whether you have done the right thing.” For'mya told him. “Whether you should have exposed Kalis to his heritage after what Pusintin did to me.” Martin’s eyes went a little wider when she said that and For'mya smiled at his expression. “You think we don’t know how you feel?” She asked. “You can not hide everything from us you know. No matter how hard you try.”

“Have I done the right thing *Kinsoargai*?” He asked.

“What does your heart tell you Martin our love?” For'mya asked him.

“It is not my heart that I am worried about.” Martin said.

“Do you honestly believe that after all the years that have passed since you changed me that I would think any different from you in this regard?” For'mya asked him. “From the very first moment you made me like you I have embraced my life as your wife and a Spartan woman. We all have.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.” Martin told her.

“It is not a question you should be asking.” For'mya told him. “I may be an elf female but the moment you turned me, I became half Lycavorian and a Spartan woman. Anja and Dysea as well. When we realized what you had done on Enurrua... the opportunity you gave to Kalis... what do you think we did? We rallied around Aricia, who is our soulmate just as much as she is yours, and we decided that we would not throw away the chance Kalis never received. The chance you gave to him. The chance to know his Lycavorian bloodline. To see what he could become. He deserved the chance denied him by his father... and look what has happened? The brief glimpse you offered to him... what he would never have seen from his father... it was all he needed to drastically alter the path he was walking. He would not have been able to complete the skills and tests you, Andro and the others gave to him if his true heart was not in it Martin. You know that.”

Martin nodded. “Yes.”

“Now he has done what none of us thought he could.” For'mya said. “I believe you were the only one who had true faith in him enough to see it. We did not in the beginning... until he completed the tasks. He rejected everything he was and altered the road he walked on before it consumed and killed him like it did his brother. I have no doubts now. No questions to his intent. None of us do. He is a Leonidas now... and he is reaching out to us for the support and love he did not receive before. It is not something we would deny to any who bore our blood in their veins and he is no different.”

“Fedor and Eirene?” Martin asked.

“Fedor and Eirene will be cautious... but once they see what we have seen... well... he is their half brother.” For'mya said. “They will embrace that and build from there.”

“What do you sense For'mya?” He asked. “I know you can probably feel him through me. What do you sense?”

For'mya met his eyes. “You know I can not control my empathic abilities like that Martin my love.” She told him.

Martin nodded his head with a smile. “I also know you have become quite good at getting a read on something that you can feel. You have felt him within me?”

For'mya nodded. “Yes.”

“And?” He asked again.

“I sensed... I sensed fear and anxiousness.” For'mya answered him. “But most of all I felt love for another.”

Martin’s eyebrows lifted slightly. “Love?”

For'mya nodded her head quickly. “There is someone with him that has brought forth this love within him. He would do anything for her. Even die. Without doubt or hesitation. She is the true catalyst to his life becoming different” She smiled at the man she loved more than her own life. “That is how we knew he had

changed. This is how we knew he had truly embraced his Leonidas bloodline. He carries within him the trait that is so prevalent within you and our sons.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this?” Martin asked her.

For’mya smiled and her cheeks flushed slightly. “We did not share it with you because what I sensed was very personal for Kalis and we decided it was not something others needed to know.”

“Personal?” Martin prodded her.

“Let’s just say that he wishes to make this woman feel what you make each of us feel when we are in your arms Martin my love.” She said. “That is not something you can fabricate within your emotions my love. And that is how we know Kalis has truly turned a corner in his life.”

Martin was silent for a moment and he finally nodded his head. “Ok.” He exhaled finally. “Now I feel a lot better about this. And the risks we are taking.” He looked at For’mya and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek and neck. Her eyes closed in delight and she squeezed his arm. “You are amazing you know that.” He whispered to her.

For’mya chuckled softly. “You are not so bad yourself you know.”

“Oh please...!” Tina exclaimed from behind them. “Enough already! No making the co-pilot all hot and bothered Skipper! Get off our flight deck!”

Martin smiled as he stared at For’mya and he kissed her tenderly before rising to his feet. “I got your hot and bothered...” He spoke looking at Tina. “He’ll be on the *ARC ROYAL* when we return.”

Tina and Endith looked at him with wide eyes. “Benjamin?” Endy almost yelled. “He is coming to see us?” They had been married over twenty years and no matter the time apart, Benjamin could make both of them sing in delight for hours.

“Marty... you better not be messing with us!” Tina snapped. “I swear... if you are... I’ll make sure For’mya and the others close the store on you!”

Martin leaned over and kissed Tina’s cheek. “No... I’m not messing with you. If Andro followed my instructions... he’ll rendezvous sometime tomorrow evening. He’ll be waiting for you when we return. It’s about time everyone else was able to enjoy what I can every day. Having those we love with us. At least for a time.”

“Endy you hear that?” Tina exclaimed. “You...”

Martin quickly left the cockpit before Tina got wound up and they started to talk of things he did not want to hear. He moved into the back and his dark brown eyes took in those with him situated within the back of the *STRIKER*. Torma rested within the pen in the back, his head on the hay covered floor. Kasdan sat beside T’lolt and was involved in an animated discussion with the Immortal. Garan sat with Julie, Pablo and Kenny at the table looking over images to the moon sent to them by Yuriko. He cut his eyes to Murano who came up next to him.

“We are going in rather ‘light’ as you say.” He spoke.

Martin nodded. “No need to bring more.” He answered. “According to Yuriko... those who left my brother number about ninety. All of them fighters as well as pilots. I don’t intend to stick around long enough to engage those Svorag fucks if they land on the moon. Hitch them and pitch them we used to say in the Teams back on Earth. Get in and get the fuck out quick.”

Murano nodded. “A wise tactic.” He said.

“Murano... I want to ask some questions and I want your word that you will tell me the truth and hold nothing back.” Martin told him.

Murano nodded his head without hesitation. “I think we are beyond that now Martin. As Praetorians it goes against everything I... we were ever taught to keep information from our brother Praetorians.”

“I want to know how the Scourge caught those like us... Praetorians... how they caught us flat footed at the beginning of the second war.” Martin asked him. “You should have felt them coming right? At least in some fashion. I want to know what you know about how my people were used by the Science Convocation. And I want to know about Delnash.”

Murano looked at him surprised. “Martin you don’t believe he...”

Martin shook his head quickly. “No. It’s not that. I don’t believe he had any idea what that fat fuck Lorendo was doing.” He looked at him. “I need to know what he is capable of. What you think he is willing to do if things get ugly. Something tells me that things are going to get real ugly Murano.” Martin said. “My gut is

telling me that Lorendo and a whole lot of other people are doing a whole lot of nasty stuff behind your brother's back. Unfortunately... once they realize that he is helping us... my gut is telling me that they will begin to act. And we probably won't like what they do one bit."

Murano was silent for a moment as he considered what Martin said. He nodded finally. "I see your point." He said. "Come... I will tell you what I can. Everything I can."

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

"You are certain of this *Tenna* Aihola?" Andro asked as they walked along the shore. Lu'ria walked beside him on the left holding tightly to one hand, Sadi on his right gripping his other. Aihola walked beside Lu'ria holding her other hand while Tarifa walked beside Sadi gripping her hand.

Aihola nodded her head. "Without their assistance we would not have been able to put a halt to the insurgency Aelulip was beginning to form."

"But Aelulip and her lieutenants escaped." Lu'ria said.

Aihola nodded her head. "Yes... but that is through no fault of Akor'dris or Bae'diraz. The raid was executed to perfection and both of them did not hesitate in the least about taking down those who fought back. Lynwe had an entire team ready to act if they betrayed us. They did not... and I have... I have..."

Andro looked at her as they walked slowly. "*Tenna*?" He asked.

"Tell them Nya Istel." Tarifa spoke. "We can hold nothing back. You know this."

"Tell us what?" Lu'ria asked. "My Queen... we must know everything if we are to make a decision that is best for everyone."

Aihola looked at Lu'ria and smiled into her amber eyes. "You will make a fine Queen of the Drow one day Lu'ria Leonidas." She said.

Lu'ria looked at her wide eyed. "My Queen I..."

Aihola grinned. "Don't worry... I have no plans to retire just yet." She said as she lifted Lu'ria's hand and kissed her palm in the Drow tradition of deep friendship and caring. "I spoke at length with both Akor'dris and Bae'diraz. She is not the same woman who I confronted all those years ago *Mandri*. Yes... I would normally be more suspicious of Akor'dris given our history but... she showed me something that made me believe her."

"What could she show you that would make you not doubt her motives Aihola?" Sadi asked.

"Aelulip is crazed." Aihola spoke. "A year after they left us in Canada she settled them in South America. They discovered a High Coven science center that we did not know about. They slaughtered the staff but kept several researchers alive. Aelulip wanted to make the Drow with her stronger and more of a match for Lycavorians. She spared the researchers so they would work for her. At the time Kawyona still carried much hate in her for what had taken place. Aelulip used that hate and convinced her to become one of the first to be tested."

"Oh boy... I'm not going to like where this is going am I?" Andro said softly.

"No. But you need to know." Tarifa told him.

"The experiments these High Coven monsters were conducting were similar to what Yuri was doing within the many centers here in North America. To me. To Tari and others. They succeeded to a point."

"To a point?" Lu'ria asked.

Aihola nodded sadly. "They were able to increase the strength, endurance and reflexes of Kawyona and many of the other Drow warriors who went with Aelulip. There were side effects however. Many of them became... they became like Lynwe. They were altered into a more masculine version of the Drow while still appearing female outwardly in many ways. Lynwe was the first to notice because she is the same. Akor'dris was acting like she did before Lynwe found Tarifa and I and we guided her to peace."

Lu'ria inhaled sharply and gripped Andro's hand tighter. "No." She gasped.

Aihola nodded. “Unfortunately... yes. She carried the same hate and revulsion at what had been done to her as Lynwe did in the early years. And it was something that Aelulip knew about but did not care. Akor'dris discovered this fact some years later but that is not the reason she began to hate Aelulip.”

“Bae'diraz.” Tarifa said. “More specifically... Bae'diraz's sister. A beautiful young Drow who acted for Akor'dris much as Aihola and I did until she finally found Selene. In this woman Akor'dris discovered that she was not a monster and that she could know love. The three of them were inseparable for a decade. Always in secret, never letting it be revealed that Akor'dris had tamed the savage anger she felt at what Aelulip had done to her and so many. She gathered others who were like her, six that had the fortitude to not succumb to the hate and anger. Bae'diraz was the lover of one of them. Secretly they planned and plotted to remove Aelulip from power and turn the Drow to more peaceful avenues. They eventually wanted to reunite with those still in Eden City.”

“What happened?” Andro asked.

“Aelulip discovered them two years ago.” Aihola answered. “More directly they were betrayed by someone they thought was a friend. Aelulip took Akor'dris's lover... she took Bae'diraz's lover. Almost all of their group. She had them covered in pitch and set on fire in front of Akor'dris and Bae'diraz. She forced them to watch as those they loved died a horrible and painful death.”

“By the gods!” Sadi gasped in shock.

Aihola nodded sadly. “Their rage gave them the strength to escape however, both of them severely wounded, but still alive. They escaped into the jungles of South America. There they plotted and schemed for their revenge. They knew what Aelulip was planning so when they came across a Union survey team in the deep jungle, they came forward. The rest... well you know the rest. Now they are here with us.”

Andro was silent as he stopped walking and turned to look at the oceans as it lapped at the beach. He released Lu'ria's and Sadi's hands and moved to the water's edge where he squatted down and dug his hand into the sand. He lifted his head and turned back to his Drow Aunt. A woman who had been a fixture in his life just as much as Tarifa. “Why come to me *Tenna*?” He asked softly. “My blood... my blood burns at what was done to them... but what can I do?”

Aihola looked at Tarifa and then back to him. “Aelulip and her lieutenants were not among those we destroyed as Lu'ria has said. I believe...”

“We believe.” Tarifa corrected her.

“We believe that was her intent all along.” Aihola said correcting herself. “To sacrifice the majority of her followers in order to complete what was always her real objective.”

Andro met her eyes. “Infiltrate the Drow in North America.” He said.

Aihola nodded. “Yes.”

“Acting in your father's stead as you are and because Lu'ria is now your wife and mate and a Princess of the Union... you can not be seen as getting involved in something that is purely driven by internal Drow politics. It goes against everything that your father has championed and it will appear as if you are favoring one group over another.” Tarifa said.

Andro returned to his feet. “You think she will move against you?” Andro asked.

Aihola nodded her head. “Politically yes. Perhaps not in the short term, but she will begin making waves in the future. She will do so from the shadows at first until she feels comfortable enough to come out into the open. Then she will openly challenge everything we have built and hold dear these last two decades.”

“I still don't understand what you want from me.” Andro asked. “If you will not allow me to support you openly...”

“Andro you can't.” Tarifa told him. “The Chronicles of Lycavorian Law prohibit you from interfering directly in an internal political dispute of member states. You know this *Mandri*. No matter how much you want to help.”

“Then what?” Andro snapped angered by his lack of options to help those he considered family.

“We have reason to believe that Aelulip and her cronies will try to target Akor'dris and Bae'diraz.”

Aihola told him. “Remove them and everything they know... everything they can testify to will be lost forever.”

“You want them protected?” Sadi asked.

Aihola and Tarifa nodded. “Yes.” They said together.

“They are not safe among the Drow?” Andro asked.

Aihola shook her head. “We don’t yet know how far Aelulip has penetrated my people or how far her influence extends. Akor'dris and Bae'diraz need to be as far away from here as possible for their own protection. As well as for their own healing.”

“Send them to Apo Prime.” Andro said immediately.

Tarifa shook her head. “I already thought of that. Because of me and my relationship to Nya Istel, the Drow have gained notoriety on nearly every Union world. The moment one or more arrive on a planet it will be known within hours no matter how much we try to keep it secret.”

“Then send them to the *SCIMITAR*.” Andro spoke.

Aihola shook her head slowly. “That would make it appear as if you are siding with the Drow because of Lu'ria.” She said.

Lu'ria's eyes grew wide and she looked at Andro. “*Saradasaar*... your father!” She gasped.

Andro looked at her as what she was saying struck Sadi. “Of course.” Sadi exclaimed. “It's perfect!”

Aihola and Tarifa looked at her. “What?”

Andro rose to his full height and turned to face them fully. “My father wanted the loved ones of the crew of the *ARC ROYAL* sent to them. Wives. Husbands. A few children if they wanted. A Pralor corvette is loading as we speak. Aunt Anuk and Nayeca are going as well as several hundred others. Not as many as my father thought since the crew of the *ARC ROYAL* is still young and there are not many veterans among them.”

“It is leaving today?” Tarifa asked.

Andro nodded his head. “They will be departing in just over an hour. They will move to Dreamland from here to pick up Uncle Ben and a few others and then make several jumps to my father's location. Ben has that information.”

“Can we do that?” Aihola asked.

Andro smiled. “The Pralor corvettes are more than capable *Tenna*. They are Pralor ships after all.”

“It would still seem like you are siding with the Drow and...” Aihola began.

“Not if the only ones who know where they went are those of us here.” Sadi said quickly. “There are no Drow with Martin and the Queens. He specifically changed his mind at the last moment and did not take them because he did want to reveal their capabilities to any potential enemies. They are still your father's secret weapon Andro. You know he won't reveal every weapon he has to an enemy.”

Andro shook his head. “No... he won't.” He said.

“Can you make this happen Androcles?” Aihola asked.

“Will they go?” Andro asked her.

Aihola nodded her head quickly. “Both of them are aware of what could happen if they remain. They need... they have been running for years, always looking over their shoulders. It needs to end.”

“I want to meet them first.” Andro told her. “The corvette is loading in a secure dock on *PROMETHUS* Station. Bring them to the High Security briefing room there. I'll contact the Dock Officer and delay the departure.”

Aihola stepped up to him as Tarifa turned and lifted her head and called for Roluth within Mindvoice. Aihola took Andro's hands and leaned up to kiss his cheek. “Thank you Andro.” She said softly.

Andro smiled at her. “There is no need for thanks.” He said. “Just make sure that they know they will be entering my father's world.”

Aihola nodded as she felt Roluth approaching. “I will.” She said. She turned to Lu'ria as Roluth's red scales appeared over the tree tops from the villa and he circled once quickly before landing on the soft sand only meters away from his bonded sisters. Tarifa scrambled into the saddle quickly and motioned for Aihola. “Nya Istel... quickly. We do not want to delay the ship for longer than necessary. It will appear odd.”

Aihola nodded and darted to Roluth's side, scampering up into the saddle behind her. Roluth took to the skies immediately as Sadi and Lu'ria moved closer to him and they watched as he headed out over the gulf towards Sparta.

“I will go with you.” Lu'ria said as she pressed up to his body and Sadi did the same on his opposite side.

Andro nodded. “I figured as much.” He said.

“Why did you want to meet them Andro?” Sadi asked.

Andro looked at her. “To see them for myself.” He stated.

“Why?” Lu'ria asked.

“To make sure they are up for what they are going to get involved in.” He answered. He kissed Lu'ria hard on the lips and then turned quickly and did the same to Sadi. “Race you back to the villa!” He announced before shifting and breaking into a run.

“No fair!” Lu'ria declared as both she and Sadi shifted instantly into the golden colored female and shimmering white furred female and dug their paws into the sand to race after Andro.

PROMETHUS STATION EARTH DEFENSE FORCES UNION MILITARY SECTOR COMMAND AND CONTROL FACILITY

Androcles was no fool and he knew instantly upon meeting them that everything his Aunts had told him were completely true. There were not two women sent among them to spy or collect information. There were two women who bore the pain of their past in their eyes and in their body language. And that pain was extreme. They stood from their chairs at the end of the table as he entered the room with Lu'ria. Tarifa was the only one with them, mainly to keep her appearance as normal as possible. Tarifa was a frequent visitor to *PROMETHUS* Station because of her duties and her arriving with two cloaked and hooded Drow security personnel was far from out of the ordinary.

Andro could tell them apart easily enough. Akor'dris was the taller one at nearly six foot in height, though Bae'diraz was not far behind at nearly five nine. Akor'dris's face however, it was more tough in appearance, indicating she had endured far more misery than most Drow could comprehend. It did not detract from the exotic beauty that all Drow exuded, but her amber colored eyes were just a little more wise and pessimistic than most. Her full lips and high cheekbones were surrounded by flowing white hair that fell nearly to the middle of her back. Whatever she had endured in her life, while it showed a little in her eyes and in her face, it did not affect her stunning beauty or the unnatural aura that attracted men and women alike to the Drow. The flexible black jacket and pants encased legs that seemed to go on forever and breasts that were larger than his mother Anja's, but seemed to fit her tall, powerful frame smoothly. He could sense her suspicious apprehension, her combat instincts alert and very ready.

Bae'diraz is the one that caught his eye and held his attention the most however.

She stood roughly five foot nine and looked to be about a hundred and twenty-five very muscular pounds. The difference between them was obvious for within Bae'diraz's amber eyes he could still detect the signs of youth and exuberance that had all but been expunged from Akor'dris eyes. Bae'diraz met Andro's azure colored orbs with no back down in her whatsoever. Her shimmering white hair cascaded past her shoulders, nearly as long as Akor'dris's hair, but the lines of pain did not extend outward as they did for her companion. Her eyebrows curved gracefully over bright amber pupils that were alive with life and knowledge. It was perhaps knowledge that she should not have had to experience, but it was there none the less. She too had high cheekbones and a jaw line that angled around elegantly to her narrow chin. Her lips were coated with a lighter shade of auburn colored lipstick which contrasted with the umber color of her smooth skin. As with all Drow, Bae'diraz's skin was blemish free and while not the darker color of many Drow, it gave her an extra advantage when it came to the exoticness of normal Drow. Her eyes were delicately slanted inward, the amber pupils filled with young life and her makeup just enough to enhance the amber color and make them stand out more.

Bae'diraz too wore a black jumpsuit like outfit with matching jacket and combat boots. The leather like material clung to a figure that matched Lu'ria's in every way, though his Drow Blossom was slightly larger in the chest area than Bae'diraz. Her legs were long and muscular and ended with a taut backside that most men, Lycavorian, human or elf, would kill to have in their hands for an evening Andro knew. Given the muscular nature of that perfect ass, Andro deduced that Bae'diraz was probably just as lethally dangerous with her feet as she was with her hands and her beautiful features would hide that from most people until she struck. Long arms and delicate looking fingers more than likely masked some very dangerous abilities and given the look in her eye Andro knew this woman had killed before.

Andro moved closer to them with Lu'ria at his side and he watched as Akor'dris prodded Bae'diraz in the back and they both bowed their heads to him.

Andro held up his hand quickly. "Do not bow to us." Lu'ria spoke quickly taking the cue from her beloved husband and mate. "The Drow bow to no one. And certainly not to those who consider them friends and family."

Bae'diraz and Akor'dris looked up with slight expressions of surprise and Akor'dris turned to where Tarifa stood. Tarifa smiled at her. "I told you." She said.

Akor'dris turned back to look at Andro. "Everything we have done these last days we have done of our own free will." She said.

"We could not live the life we were living any longer." Bae'diraz added. "It was slowly... it was killing us... and..."

Andro held up his hand and directed Lu'ria to the chair before he sat on the edge of the table. He crossed his arms over his chest as Lu'ria placed her hand affectionately on his thigh and they both looked at Akor'dris and Bae'diraz. The Drow females saw this obvious display of mutual affection and were somewhat taken aback by it. It was not often they saw a Drow who was the wife of a non-Drow. And both of them knew from news reports and from listening to others talk that Lu'ria was also a Crown Princess of the Union, and she had five female slaves that called her Mistress. They had seen them together on the Netnews at different points holding hands and walking among different markets or eating at an outdoor café. Lu'ria was looked upon with almost as much affection as the Drow Queen Aihola because of her new position.

"I do not need to hear you relive the horrors of what you experienced in order to believe that what you want now is very genuine." Androcles said. "I wanted to meet you in order to tell you that you do not need to carry these burdens alone anymore."

"We do not wish to run away and hide!" Bae'diraz hissed softly. "It is not the Drow way!"

Andro shook his head. "No it is not."

"What do you know of the Drow?" Akor'dris asked more harshly than she intended. "What do you know of our history and our traditions? What..."

Lu'ria came to her feet, her own amber eyes flashing slightly in anger. "He knows more than you could ever believe!" She snapped right back. "He carries within him his father's memories and his grandfather before him! And Martin Leonidas considers all Drow to be his family as he has shown so much in the past!"

"You ask us to run and hide!" Akor'dris continued. "To cower in the face of danger and those who want us dead!"

Andro shook his head. "No... that is not what I am asking."

Bae'diraz looked at him. "Then what do you call it?" She asked in a more thoughtful tone of voice. "Asking us to run away and hide instead of remaining here to fight and bring that witch down. To see her beaten and brought to justice by the Queen for the horrors that are her doing!"

"You will be doing quite a bit where you are going." Andro said. "Running and hiding is most definitely not one of those things."

Bae'diraz looked at Akor'dris and then back to him. "What... what do you mean?"

"My father and those with him are currently in uncharted space." Andro said. "Which for lack of a better definition means they are where no man has gone before. Literally." He looked at them. "He has no Drow with him. He did not want to reveal their existence to whoever we meet out there who aren't real friendly. You know how my father feels about the Drow?"

Bae'diraz nodded. "Through the years even the Drow with us discovered this. He... he considers the Queen his honored sister and he considers the Drow warriors as brother and sister comrades in arms."

"My father does not hide." Andro said with a smile. "From anything or anyone. Where you are going is going to put you on the front line of new discoveries. New planets. Even new species. They've already run into a couple... one of them they aren't particularly fond of. It will also give you the opportunity to forever put the past behind you and try and build a new life. Is that not what Drow tradition demands?"

Akor'dris and Bae'diraz looked at him with wide eyes. "How... how do you know that?" Bae'diraz finally stammered.

"I've read the *Yara Parma*." Andro told them seeing their eyes grow even wider. "From cover to cover. I know exactly what Drow tradition demands. When the time comes... you will return here and you will face

Aelulip and Drow justice will be done. What I am offering right now is an opportunity for both of you to begin anew. And perhaps find some peace.”

Bae'diraz looked at him. She had heard much about this young Prince of the Union. His reputation was well known and she knew he was feared by many because of the strange powers he, his father and a few others possessed. She could also tell just how devoted he was to Lu'ria by the simple and thoughtless actions she had seen since they entered the room. The way they looked at each other, the way their hands and fingers always seemed to be touching one another. Bae'diraz did not fear him though she knew she probably should. Aihola had told her quite a bit about him but she was very clear on one point. Do not try and be dishonest with him for he would smell it on her in an instant.

Bae'diraz had been a young child when her parents spirited her away in the beginning with Aelulip and the others. Her upbringing had been harsh and sometimes painful, but she had learned something about herself during that time. Her mother and father were fanatical followers of Aelulip and her twisted ideals and Bae'diraz discovered she was not. She kept this to herself, living a lie until the time presented itself for her to escape. Akor'dris and the others had provided her this opportunity.

“Peace?” She spoke softly.

Akor'dris came up beside her. “Is this... is this even possible?” She asked.

Androcles looked at them, his eyes moving to Lu'ria beside him before he turned back to them. “Did you believe you could come this far?” He asked.

Akor'dris and Bae'diraz looked at each other and then back to him. “We... we had doubts at times but no... we never gave up hope.” Bae'diraz answered.

“Returning here...” Akor'dris said softly. “It was the only way I could come to terms with what has been done to me.”

Lu'ria moved forward and took her hands. “And you can do this.” She stated. “Like Lynwe... you can see that you are not a monster and you can find purpose and love once more.”

Akor'dris looked at her. “It has... it has been two years since I lost her.” She said softly. “I do not know if I can... if I can feel that way again.”

Lu'ria nodded. “You can.” She said. “All you need to do is take the final step and let go of the hatred you hold within you. Once you do that... then you will be able to face anything.”

Akor'dris met Lu'ria's eyes and nodded. She took a deep breath and nodded. “I will try.” She said softly. “It is all I have left to me.”

Bae'diraz nodded. “As will I.” She said. “If I am to have a future... I wish it to be one of my choosing.”

Andro turned and looked at Tarifa who smiled at him and nodded. He turned back to them. “Then prepare to step into the unknown.” He said. “There will never be a dull moment with my father... that I can assure you.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EARTH

LYCAVORIAN UNION MILITARY HQ SPARTAN COMMAND CENTER, 0645 HRS 500 METERS BENEATH MOUNT HAGIOS

Hope.

They had gambled everything on that one word for their future and the prospect for their men and their people. Since the day he had stood in front of Dorian and Lisisa Leonidas, his belief in that word was growing by leaps and bounds. He glanced at his friend and could see the same faith etched on Byka's face as well as they entered the massive Command and Control Center. Perhaps it was for other reasons, but the same look Azlenr wore on his weathered face was also displayed on Byka's face. They were escorted by two Durcunusaan troops who had been their shadows since coming to Earth early yesterday morning. Yet these two men had treated them with more respect and honor than they would have received from many of his own people. They answered

questions without hesitation and as honestly as they could and were allowed. Never once in their presence did Azlenr feel as if he was a prisoner. Knowing what he knew now, Azlenr'Macoe was quite sure the might and dedication of the Lycavorian Union would have crushed them like so much garbage had it come to blows on Solmar. Judging by what he had seen over the course of the last few days he knew that these were men and women, of all species, took the defense and preparation of their Union quite serious. He had seen small things at first; weapons, tools, communications equipment, items of war that he had not known could exist. And now this facility.

Though he had them outnumbered in actual troop strength, Azlenr had no doubts that the three brigades of Union troops that had landed on Solmar would have gone through his two divisions of experienced and well trained troops like shit through a Kavalian Plains Swamp Rat. As each hour passed since that day, Azlenr'Macoe could see the dark clouds that had hovered over his people for so long slowly lifting.

"We did the right thing Byka my old friend." Azlenr finally spoke softly.

Byka met his eyes and nodded. "Of that I have no doubts." He answered. Azlenr looked at him oddly for a moment and then he heard the female voice and knew why Byka was already firmly convinced.

"Papa! Isn't it amazing?" Kameka spoke as she moved up to him with the Lycavorian Spartan he knew as Daio moving behind her.

They stopped walking as Meka came up to them and halted. She was wearing a standard Union Light Armor Flight Suit that hugged her figure but her still beautiful face is what drew Azlenr's attention. Her dark brown eyes were more alive now than Azlenr had ever seen them since Marsin had violated her so and she appeared relaxed and confident. He hadn't seen her since the crash and for the first time Azlenr took notice that the scars that had dotted her face on were completely gone. He glanced up quickly and looked at Daio once more, saw the ways his eyes stayed on her, and then he put it together. His eyes went back to Kameka and he noticed how her tail was no longer wrapped around her waist as it had been in the years since the attack. Now it swayed leisurely back and forth behind her as she walked, twitching happily from side to side as his own wife's tail did when he was home with her. The Spartan Daio had obviously staked a claim to Meka and from her actions and the brightness of her eyes it appeared she was utterly accepting of his attentions. It appeared as if Kameka had stepped beyond her past for even in the few hours on the ship coming here he had seen her slowly coming out of the self-imposed shell she had erected around herself. Azlenr had heard from both Byka and others how the Spartan Daio had defended Kameka with savage ferocity and from the looks of it, there had been more involved than simply doing his duty.

In a brazen display of emotion and caring for a Kavalian male, Byka hugged his daughter tightly to himself, his own face relaxed and peaceful. Azlenr knew then that his friend had fully accepted the path they were on and was not going to hide it from anyone. Kameka hugged her father back and then stepped back slightly to stand in front of Daio almost possessively Azlenr noticed. He also noticed that Daio did not back away, his arm curling halfway around her waist as he held out his hand to her father. Byka took it without hesitation and greeted Daio as he saw Meka's tail slip up and curl around his forearm.

"Daio... I see you are taking care of my daughter." Byka said with a smile.

"Papa!" Kameka exclaimed in mock horror.

Daio laughed softly and his arm tightened around her waist slightly Azlenr saw. It was a move that Kameka did not shy away from, but leaned into somewhat, as her tail curled tighter around his arm as much as possible. "It is the first time I have ever given a tour of our city of Sparta to such a beautiful woman sir. I thank you for allowing me to do so. Her company was excellent. As was yours sir."

Byka looked at his daughter with bright eyes of his own. It had shocked him when Daio came to them at the embassy after only a few hours on the planet and asked for his permission to take Kameka on a tour of the city. He thought that they would be confined to the embassy grounds until after several meetings and such. The look in his daughter's eyes when Daio had appeared was something he could not deny. Her dark eyes were alive with life as they had been before Marsin had violated her so. He could not refuse her and he was even more stunned when Daio offered that he accompany them to dinner at least. Kameka was adamant that he come with them and Daio took them to a small outdoor café in the heart of Old Sparta he called it. The food was excellent and even as they sat at the table watching as hundreds of men, women and children passed them by, they were looked at only with curious wonder and not harsh anger as Byka had expected. It appeared that Athani Leonidas's acceptance into their world had given most of them reason to not judge all Kavalians in the same

light. Kameka hung on Daio's every word as he told them his history and the history of the city he called home. After three hours Byka decided to leave them together for they could not take their eyes from each other and she had taken to holding his large hand within hers. Byka could think of no better hands to leave Meka with than the man who had saved her life and annihilated the monster that had been the cause of her agony and shame these last years. He knew they were not far from the embassy and as he walked the busy streets back to the embassy he was again taken aback at the seeming acceptance his presence caused among those he passed. After what Keleru and Pusintin had wrought in this very city he thought for sure he would be hated. These Spartans and their people whether Lycavorian or elf or human, it appeared they were far more tolerant and accepting than his own people.

"The meal was superb and I returned to the embassy and went right to sleep because of it." Byka told him with a smile.

Daio turned to Azlenr. "Good morning General." He said. "Andro is waiting for you at the other end of the CIC."

Azlenr looked around in wonder. This facility was unlike anything he had ever seen in his lifetime. The CIC as Daio called it was easily as large as an outdoor Tovon stadium. The madly popular Kavalian sport could attract thousands of fans from across the planets. He let his dark eyes wander for a moment, taking in the three floors and the open railing that allowed those occupying the upper floors to look down into the actual Command Center itself. He turned his eyes back to Daio. "I... this facility is amazing." He finally stammered.

Daio nodded. "I hate it myself." He answered with a smile. "Too many buttons and switches and screens for my taste."

"You allow us... you allow us access to your Central Command Center for the Union military Daio?" Azlenr asked.

"Our allies have come here often sir." Daio answered. "To discuss one thing or another."

Azlenr met his eyes. "You consider us your allies?" He asked softly.

"Your actions on Solmar have made the news here General." Daio spoke to him. "How you risked quite a bit to safeguard the civilian population. How many of your men remain on Solmar now helping to rebuild and defend the colony. The Bontawillian government has also expressed their thanks through diplomatic channels at what you and General Byka were able to do."

"We invaded their colony!" Azlenr spoke in shock.

Daio nodded his head. "In a ruse that was intended not for conquering... but to kill you and General Byka." He answered. "You were used sir... and when Keleru thought you had outlived your usefulness he decided to have you killed. The information we got from the Puma Bane commander's data pad only confirmed this as you know. Andro thought it to be wise to make sure that was known by everyone." Daio stepped closer to him. "You will find General... you will not lack for support and loyalty from us if you are our friends."

Azlenr was silent for a moment and then he nodded his head. "So it would seem." He said. "So it would seem."

Daio smiled and slid his arm down to grasp Kameka's hand. "Follow me. General Pian and the others are coming in from the south entrance as we speak. It's time that the future of the Kavalian people began to take shape."

"...the men who will make up the inner realm of the new government." Deia spoke from chair beside where Andro sat in his father's chair at the head of the table. "I will not attempt to name them all as my pronunciation of their names is not yet up to par and I do not wish to insult any of them." She finished with a small smile. It was a smile that was matched by several of the Kavalian men seated at the table.

The conference table was massive to say the least, easily able to accommodate all of the twenty-nine senior Kavalian Pride leaders who had accompanied Pian'Nrurani of their own accord, as well as Admiral Ceneu, General Vistr and three other senior Union officers. Arrarn sat at the other end of the table with Narice and Toria on either side of him. There was some tension between the Kavalians and Narice, for these men had fought the high Coven for many years, but none of them made any overt remarks and no hostile looks were

given. Andro and Deia both noticed this right away and it was the first and best sign that these men and hopefully those they commanded would be indicative of most of the Kavalian population.

Around the table seated in comfortable chairs behind the men and women were senior aides and several other military officers of both species. Pian'Nrurani was seated five chairs down from Andro's left, Jalersi sitting proudly beside her husband and mate, his large hand resting between her two smaller, slender hands in full view of everyone who saw. Athani sat on her left beside Resumar with her long tail curled around his upper arm as much as she was able. Seated at this table were the men who led the largest Kavalian Prides to back Pian; all of them embracing the need for change in order to go forward into what future they were to have. Many of these Prides were from the outer edges of Kavalian space, far from the influences of the older and more archaic Prides who held power and wanted the status quo to continue. Many of those present had already begun to treat their females, not as inferior servants, but as equals in many things. All of them were intelligent enough to know that complete change would take many generations, but they were actively insuring that the path of their Prides led them forward and not back.

"I would like to welcome you all here." Andro spoke from his chair. "I hope we can accomplish everything we set out to do."

"Do you speak with the authority of your father Prince Androcles?" A Kavalian asked from his chair. His dark blond fur was generously laced with gray and he appeared to be one of the older Kavalians present. Pian leaned forward in his chair.

"Androcles... this is General Aleou of the Pride Hkan." Pian said. "Since the others will not let me escape leadership of what we have begun, I have appointed him as second to me."

Andro nodded. "General Aleou'Hkan then?" He asked.

The Kavalian's eyes showed his surprise at Androcles's use of the customary Kavalian tradition of speaking his full name in a show of respect. He bowed his head slightly at this show of high opinion to acknowledge it and then he turned his dark eyes to Pian. "It is you who had the courage and fortitude to finally act on what all of us here have been afraid to do Pian." He spoke. "It is only right that you lead us." The heads of all the Kavalians at the table nodded in agreement at Aleou's words, and did so in a convincing manner.

Pian nodded and looked at Andro once more. "We are ready." He said.

Andro nodded and looked at two men who stood off to his right and motioned with his hand to them. They began to move among the men and women at the table and hand out data pads. "To answer your question General... in almost all things I speak with the authority of my father. Not to worry though... we will be speaking with him shortly. I know you all met with Prime Minister Deia and several others last evening and these are the preliminary decisions that were made at the meeting. Most of them it seems you had already agreed to with Pian before coming here so there is no need for us to review them. They are issues that of the concern of the Kavalian people and are best left to those who understand your people most, which is you in this room." Andro leaned forward. "It is also my understanding that Pian has appointed General Azlenr to be the overall commander of your forces and General Byka as commander of what would be considered your Special Operations units. I will not begin to question the wisdom or experience of those in this room who have far more years than I do, just so you all agree on these decisions." Andro again saw the nods of agreement from the men at the table.

The younger Kavalian rose from his chair about half way down the table. His very large six foot three frame had light brown fur which was impeccably groomed. He had a powerful build under the uniform he wore and his green feline like eyes were bright with intelligence. His tail was at least a meter long and dangled calmly along his left leg.

"While these many pleasantries are all fine and wonderful... we need to know how the great Lycavorian Union intends to help us!" The man spoke in a tone of voice that spoke of if not distrust, then at least the fact he wasn't fully convinced. "We risked much by coming here! We risk our Prides and our futures by defying Keleru and Pusintin. We..."

"That is enough Cowen!" Aleou snapped looking at the younger man. "That we are even here should be proof enough that the Union will help us!"

Andro looked at the young Kavalian. "And you are?" He asked.

"I am Cowen'Shan." He snapped forcefully. "Leader of Pride Shan!"

“And you speak to the Crown Prince of the Union!” Pian snarled. “You will mind your tone Cowen! They did not need to do this and they certainly did not need to offer to help us! We need their help!”

“At what cost to us?” Cowen snapped right back though with a much milder tone because of the position Pian held. “I trust in you Pian’Nnurani... and what we are attempting but Keleru and his Puma Bane scum have already taken from us family and friends! What will the Union require for their assistance?”

Jalersi turned quickly and looked at Andro in an effort to explain. “My... my father’s Puma Bane assassination teams came for Cowen, his father and others of Pride Shan when they first...” Jalersi could not continue and stopped for a moment to compose herself. “They killed his father and two of his younger sisters. It was...”

“They made my father watch as a dozen Puma Bane Commandos raped and butchered my sisters in front of him!” Cowen barked. “And then after they beat him until he could no longer stand; they gutted him like some sort of animal in the streets! I swore to my mother to see them avenged! We can not do that sitting here!”

Andro looked at him. “Your mother survived?” He asked softly.

Cowen nodded his head. “My mother and my three youngest siblings! My father... my father left me in charge of our Pride and his last words to me were to keep them... to see them safe!”

“And keeping them safe means that you charge off into the unknown with vengeance in your blood and hate clouding your eyes and heart?” Andro asked him. “Did your father agree with Pian’Nnurani and what he is attempting to build for your people?”

“I would not be here if he did not!” Cowen snapped.

“Do *you* believe in it?” Andro asked as he rose and got to his feet.

“You question me?” Cowen growled.

Andro shook his head as he moved towards him. “I’m not questioning you... I’m asking if you share your father’s vision for your Pride and your people?”

“Pride Shan was closest to the influence of the center core worlds of the Kavalian Empire Andro. They are one of the largest to have joined me.” Pian spoke now from his chair. “When I put out the call... when I put out the call they were among the first who responded. They lost... they lost the most because of their proximity to the core worlds. Puma Bane teams were able to reach them more quickly than anyone anticipated.”

Andro walked along the side of the table towards Cowen. “How many of your Pride?” He asked softly.

“Nearly two thousand!” Cowen hissed angrily. “A quarter of them Pride Shan children! Our children!”

Andro stopped in front of Cowen who had turned to face him fully. Several *Durcunusaan* within the room were getting nervous at the Kavalian’s anger and what he might do and even some of those Kavalians at the table were showing signs of nervousness. Cowen was taller than Andro by three inches at least, but their builds were very similar in definition. Cowen probably outweighed Andro by about forty pounds and was somewhat thicker with muscle and many of the *Durcunusaan* were trying to determine if they should intervene. Many of the Kavalians at the table had also noticed that Jomann, who they knew to be Androcles’s *Durcunusaan* Captain, had not moved from his position just behind Andro’s chair.

Aleou got to his feet now. “Cowen... this does not help our cause.” He tried to reason with the young man.

“How do we know we can trust them?” Cowen snapped.

“Cowen’Shan!” Jalersi barked now as she got to her feet. “You have no right!”

Cowen’s eyes became instantly less angry as he looked at her Andro saw. “With all respect Pride Lady Nruarani, we waste time here.” He spoke in a respectful tone of voice towards her. He addressed her as all of them had begun to address her. Jalersi was Pian’s wife and mate now and she commanded almost as much respect as he did. No one knew who started it, but most of them had begun to refer to her as Pride Lady Nruarani in a show of esteem and for her role as the senior female of Pride Nruarani. Something Pian’s mother was ecstatic over. “We must act!”

“Does rushing off on a mission of vengeance honor your father’s last words to you?” Andro asked him.

“You know nothing of my father!” Cowen snarled turning back to him. “Or my Pride! You know nothing of what we have endured!”

Andro shook his head. “No... I don’t.” He answered him. “But it strikes me as odd how similar his words to you sound like the words a Spartan father would tell their son in the same situation.”

“So... so you say!” Cowen hissed.

Androcles looked at Cowen for a long moment. They were about the same age if he was correct, and there was no doubt that Cowen was strong willed and equally capable. Andro could also sense the fear and indecision within him. And it was not because he was here. Androcles sensed that he had much in common with this Kavalian Pride Leader. A man who had been unprepared to assume the role he now held. Much like Androcles himself. He held out his hand slowly.

“Will you allow me to show you that perhaps we are not so different Cowen'Shan?” He asked.

Deia rose to her feet as she recognized what Andro was about to do. “Andro... no!” She barked.

Cowen’s head turned to look at her. “What...” His eyes turned back to Andro just as he reached out and grasped Cowen’s large hand in his own. “Arrrrgggg...” Cowen screamed as white hot pain lanced through his temples and he reached up with his opposite hand to grab his head. “What... what are you...? Ahhhh!”

[Let me show you Cowen'Shan.] Andro’s voice echoed in his mind. *[Let me show you just how close we are.]*

Cowen groaned in pain once more, staggering almost drunkenly, his right hand held in an iron grasp with Andro’s and his left reaching out to brace himself against the table. He saw so many images flashing across his mind, children, men and women. He saw places he had never been to; never seen; the clash of hardened steel upon shield; the splashing of blood as that steel met flesh; the shattering sound of weapons fire in bright green jungles. Andro stepped closer to him, grasping his left shoulder with his hand and pulling him closer. Many of the Kavalians had come to their feet, the *Durcunusaan* suddenly moving closer as Deia moved around the table only to have Jomann grasp her arm.

“No.” Jomann said calmly as he held Deia back. “Everyone hold!” He barked the order.

“What is he doing?” Aleou barked angrily. “He is... he is killing him!”

Those close to Andro and Cowen staggered back slightly as the light blue Etheric pulse surrounded their hands. Cowen’s claws extended from his fingertips but his fur covered hand simply grasped Andro’s hand tighter.

“Resumar!” Pian growled. “What is happening?”

Resumar had come to his feet as well to protect his brother but he saw what Andro was doing as Cowen’s face began to lose the pained features. “Wait Pian!” Resumar shouted. “He is...”

“He is what?” Pian snapped.

“He is showing him.” Resumar declared softly.

[We are two of a kind Cowen'Shan. Different but still the same.] Andro’s voice filtered to Cowen as he gripped the side of the table but the pain rapidly dissipated to nothing. *[You and I. We have been pushed into positions we were not prepared to take by actions not of our choosing. Do not be afraid my friend. You have a pure heart Cowen'Shan and what you see is all that I have seen. All that my father and grandfather have seen. Those loved and those lost. Family. Friends. I wish to share this with you to show you who I am. Be at peace and we will understand each other in a way that brothers understand each other. Reach beyond the hate and anger that clouds your purpose Cowen. Reach beyond and grasp what your father taught you.]*

Cowen shook his head slightly, his eyes still closed tightly. *[How...?]*

[How can I do this?] Andro finished his sentence. *[Let’s just say it is a gift and a curse I have within me. I will stand with you and your people. Die for you and your people in the cause of freedom if need be. I only need you to know that we are not so different and what I show you is to earn your trust.]* Andro moved closer to him as everyone watched. *[Open your mind Cowen and share with me as I have shared with you. Then you will see what future your people can have. What you can be part of giving to them.]*

Cowen was a Kavalian warrior and he feared nothing. It was how his father had raised him and his brothers to be and he grasped that now. His eyes remained closed but all look of strain vanished as he let himself give of the memories he held within him. He gripped Andro’s hand tighter as the visions of his father and sisters returned from the night he found them. All of them shattered and broken and cast aside like so much fodder. He held nothing back and Andro saw the tears he had shed over his father’s body, the tender way he lifted each of his sisters and carried them to the waiting ship himself. Then Cowen saw another time and

place... two young woman... one who looked very much like the man holding his hand. She too was broken and severely beaten and he saw the tears in the eyes of the Prince as he clutched his sister to him. He saw the perceived failures he harbored that still gripped Androcles Leonidas every single day; he saw the adoring love for the women who held his heart, the brothers and sisters and family that were his own. He saw the visions of slavery under the High Coven of old, but also the hope and confidence for the High Coven under his brother's vampire wife. He saw objects hurtling across the darkness of space, like beacons of light and hope. Cowen released the table and his hand came up behind Andro's head, pulling him closer as he was immersed in a world he never knew existed. Andro didn't resist as Cowen grasped for that knowledge and hope.

[There are few among your people who can do what we are doing now Cowen'Shan.] Andro continued. *[We call it Mindvoicing. It comes natural to my people, my species and many among the elves and vampires. We can also give this ability to others should we turn them or chose to. Athani has it because she is my brother's wife and mate. I have chosen to give it to you. Your heart burns like a bright light Cowen'Shan. The goodness in it eclipses all else. Do not let the road and path of anger and vengeance take you to a place you will not return from. You and I Cowen... we represent a generation that has yet to see it's adulthood. What we could all be. You and I, others like us, we need to be the foundations for that generation in the years to come. My father, your father, Pian, these men at the table, we honor and follow them. What they do now, we will continue for centuries for it is what we believe as well. If we are to have trust among us, it must start with our generation. From there it will grow and prosper if we wish it to.]*

Cowen's eyes popped open now. *[You... you would do this?]* He gasped with his mind startling himself at how easy it was.

Andro's eyes opened as well and he heard the muted gasps from several of the Kavalians present. His eyes had grown much brighter, as had Cowen's bright green feline orbs. Athani Leonidas grasped Resumar's arm as she realized what was happening just from the initial look on Cowen's face for it was exactly what she had experienced when Resumar claimed her.

"They are talking!" She gasped. "He has given Cowen what you and Cemath gave to me Resumar!" All eyes turned to her as Resumar nodded. "Yes he has."

"What? What are you... what do you mean?" Aleou asked.

"He has given Cowen the ability to Mindvoice General!" Athani replied. "So he will... so he will understand and know."

[I would do anything to protect those that I love Cowen'Shan. Just as you would. You and I... my Captain Jomann... my brothers; we wear that emotion openly on our sleeves my friend.] Andro told him. *[It is not something we can fight or deny for it was instilled in us by our fathers and those who came before us. Like my father, I have never broken a promise that I have made. Give me... give us the chance to show you that if your goals and desires are for the benefit of your people and others, there is nothing we would not do for you. Nothing!]*

[I care nothing for myself.] Cowen spoke softly. *[I have no woman. No children. All that remains are my brothers and sister. My mother. My Pride.]*

[Then lead them as your father would want you to.] Andro said. *[Lead them as my father taught me to lead my people. Fight with your head Cowen... but lead... lead with your heart!]*

Cowen's eyes grew a little wider when the meaning of those words struck him. They resonated within him like a scream of joy. *[Yes!]*

[This ability will be with you always now Cowen. It was... it was the only way I could truly allow you to see that I have no nefarious intentions.] Andro told him evenly. *[I am sorry.]*

[Sorry?] Cowen gasped. *[For giving me the ability to see! For showing me that the future is not as bleak as I first thought? Never!]*

[The future is what we make of it Cowen.] Andro told him. *[I will assign someone to you in order for you to learn how to use Mindvoice effortlessly. For now... let us begin to work on how you will take back your empire and free all of your people. In order to do that... I need for you to trust me. At least a little. I will not betray that trust.]*

Cowen nodded his head. *[Then let us begin.]*

Andro nodded as well and he stepped back slightly their direct connection broken but Cowen still able to feel the whispers of him within his mind. And the whispers of so many more all around. Andro looked at those gathered around the table then and he released Cowen's hand. "I believe we have some reports to receive." He finally spoke as he moved back towards his chair. "My father will be contacting us in forty minutes so let's get started. Mican and Na'lia are standing by."

The two Kavalians on either side of Cowen's Shan reached for him but he nodded his head quickly indicating he was alright. "We have... we have much to do." He said lifting his eyes to meet Pian's. "Our people need us now."

Pian nodded his head from across the table.

CRANAE ISLAND

Sehri Leonidas's eyes fluttered open slowly as the sounds of the gulls swooping over the surface of the ocean filled her head and the soft scent of the ocean breeze and sweet flowers filtered to her other senses. She felt the weight on her lower abdomen and she turned her head to see Sadi's bright, beautiful face looking at her chest with those incredible jungle green eyes. They were both naked beneath the thin sheet, Sadi's breasts pressed against her skin while her fingers drew soft lines between the valley of Sehri's own firm, medium sized breasts.

Sehri gazed at her for a long moment as Sadi's fingers danced across her skin. Never in her wildest imagination did she ever consider she would take one woman as a lover let alone five. And Sehri adored every moment they had spent together. Their scents filled her mind with delightful passion and unquenchable love. Andro's lavender and pines scent is the one she craved most of all, but Sehri knew she could not go on without them as well. They were a part of her now, part of her mind and her heart, and without them there would be a void that nothing could fill. She watched as Sadi's head lifted and those gorgeous eyes focused on her face and a smile spread across her features.

"Good morning sleepy head." She spoke with that delicious voice.

Sehri couldn't help but smile as Sadi adjusted her body and moved up higher so that their faces were only inches apart. "Good morning." Sehri answered wistfully.

"He is a beast isn't he?" Sadi asked with a lustful grin.

"*Carians*... he is like a machine!" Sehri gasped as the memories of last night flooded through her and warmed her senses. Androcles had taken each of them three times in the span of six hours, making all of them cry his name in blissful passion. When they weren't wrapped within his embrace, his lips and tongue and his wonderful cock driving them insane with desire, they were making each other howl in delight.

Sadi chuckled. "He does it to show that each of us holds a part of his heart and that we are all equal."

Sehri looked at her. "You... but you are his *Anome* Sadi." She said.

Sadi met her soft glaucous blue eyes. "Yes I am." She said nodding her head. "Carisia and Lu'ria have departed for Sparta. Ne'Veha is on the patio waiting for us with a guest... but I wanted to make sure that you know how we all feel."

"What do you mean?" Sehri asked.

Sadi looked at her. "We love you Sehri." She said softly. "You were meant to be part of our lives by a power far beyond our comprehension. When Caliria is back among us then we will be complete. I may be Andro's *Anome*... but he loves each of us with the same intensity and passion."

Sehri reached out with her hand and ran her fingers along Sadi's cheek. "No... he does not." She said confidently. "You may not see it... you may not want to see it... but we do Sadi our love. When he takes you it fills the air around us. His aura spikes so much higher, as does yours. You are like two burning stars within the Etheric realm as you come together. And it is so beautiful to see and hear."

"Sehri I..." Sadi began.

“Let me finish.” Sehri said gently. “I may be... I may be the youngest of us... but I know what I feel. I know that no other man could possibly come close to making me feel what Andro does. *SirsanGai*, *Enylarcopri*, Lu'ria... they all feel the same way. And I'm quite sure Caliria feels no different. You are the core of his heart Sadi... and we are the strands of his being. And we could not be happier about that. His love for us knows no bounds, and ours for him is something that can not be measured. But his love for you... it burns within him like a molten sun. And from that love... from that core comes his feelings for us. If we are together... he will always reach for you first and you know that. We know that as well, but we want for nothing else in our hearts because our love for each other is infinite. He will shatter worlds for you Sadi our love, all you need do is ask him, but he will do the same for us as well. We know that. We would do it for any of us.”

“Sehri I just want you to know...” Sadi began to speak again but Sehri placed her finger to her soft lips. Lips she had relished in kissing passionately or having them explore her body.

“I am happier now than I have ever been.” Sehri told her. “Happier than I ever thought I would be in my lifetime. The part of Andro's heart that loves me is more than I will ever desire or want. And when he is not there for me I know I can turn to you, or *SirsanGai* or our Mistress Lu'ria, or Carisia or Caliria. No matter where we turn we will always have someone we love nearby. That is something others will never have.”

Sadi didn't hesitate and she shifted on the bed and captured Sehri's lips in a blistering kiss full of love and desire. Sehri returned the kiss with equal fervor and they were locked in that kiss for a long moment before Sadi withdrew. She licked her lips, her taste buds alive as she tasted both Ne'Veha and Lu'ria on Sehri's lips. She reached up to run her finger across her bottom lip. “Our Drow Mistress is very tasty isn't she?” She said with a grin.

Sehri chuckled. “The contrast of our skin is more than enough to incite me.” She said.

Sadi nodded. “That it is.” She agreed. She leaned forward and kissed her quickly then. “Come... we should not keep our guest waiting longer.”

“Guest? Who is here?” Sehri asked. Her eyes grew wide. “Not Lady Gorgo? Or my mother?” She gasped.

Sadi laughed as she lifted her lithe frame up and Sehri gazed at her naked beauty. “No. Her name is Thr'won. I suppose you could call her Sparta's Chief Etheric Mage. She has been instructing Andro and his siblings beside Helen since they were very small. She even trained Andro's father briefly. She is considered a member of our family and she has come to test you.”

Sehri sat up now. “Test me?”

Sadi nodded as she reached for the thin robe draped across the chair beside their huge bed. “*SirsanGai* and I seem to have manifested our Etheric power in a somewhat physical manner. Not like Andro or his father or Jomann or Denali or Dorian mind you... nothing like them. They are... everyone is beginning to call them Spartan Praetorians. Thr'won says it was once called telekinesis and if used properly... it can be just as dangerous. I have... I have resorted to it in the past in anger and since then I have been studying with the *Feravomir* or her to learn how to control it. She is quite knowledgeable and after speaking with Gorgo and your mother she believes you have shown the same signs.”

“The Circle of Shamans never really... they did not want to delve too deeply into skills they say would have made us targets.” Sehri said.

Sadi nodded. “Yes... well... you are no longer a part of the Circle. You are Andro's wife and mate. Our wife and mate. We do things a little differently and we don't shy away from what our power could help us do.”

“She can teach me to use my Etheric power?” Sehri asked surprised as she rose to her own feet quickly and reach for a similar robe.

“Yes. In more ways than I think the Circle of Shamans ever considered.” Sadi answered moving up to her as Sehri tied her robe closed. She took her hand and held it to her lips for a brief moment and smile. “We are so happy you are here Sehri.”

Sehri smiled and embraced her tightly. “As am I.” She said softly. “As am I.”

“... Senior Hadarian Doctor here with us believes we can establish the basic vaccine delivery system within a week and begin mass producing it.” Na'lia was speaking from within the QCR within Shiria's fortress. “It's done Pian. And it will work.”

Mican stepped up from behind his elven wife and returned to the transmission. “I have already begun plans to distribute the vaccine to certain clone camps along the edges of the border. Vonis and I agree we need to start small and work inward to the larger camps as we gain more recruits.”

“Uncle?” Andro asked.

Vonis's voice came through the transmission as he moved into the cone of the visual imagery. “Mican and I have seven different camps slotted for the first echelon.” He said. “Na'lia and Va'nimia will handle the actual distribution to the two largest camps; our Hadarian Healers will take the rest. We have some minor details to work out... but it will work *Mandri*.”

Andro looked at Pian. “General?”

“Do it!” Pian told Vonis without hesitation.

Jomann stepped up beside Andro and whispered in his ear and he sat forward with a nod. “Uncle... father has initiated his COM signal. We will check back with you when you are ready to deploy.”

Vonis nodded. “Understood. Have him say hello to Isabella for me.”

Andro nodded. “I will. Go with the gods Uncle.”

“You as well.” Vonis spoke before the transmission ended.

Andro turned in his chair. “Activate the link!” He barked out the order.

“Stand by! Activating!”

The transmission disc in the center of the table came alive and the fuzzy image of Martin Leonidas appeared. His head was turned to the side and he was speaking to someone. A conversation that they caught the tail end of.

“...thing working Jules? I ain't got shit.” Martin's voice boomed across the CIC.

“It's working you ugly fool!” The female voice echoed quickly. “You need to press the right damn button!” They watched as the ebony skinned female entered the fuzzy image and flipped something on the small panel in front of Martin. The image instantly became as clear as if he was standing in front of them. They then watched as the female flipped her hand up and slapped Martin in the back of the head lightly.

Pian and the others looked aghast at this action but they turned when they heard Andro and his brothers laughing lightly.

“Thank you.” Martin spoke with a grin as he turned to the COM disc in front of him. Andro and the others knew right away he was onboard a *STRIKER*, which meant something was going on. “Andro... you there?”

“We are here father.” Andro answered as he leaned forward.

“Ah!” Martin smiled. “There we go. Now I can see you! Damn machines!” Martin's eyes went to Pian and Jalersi immediately and his face softened considerably. “Pian. Jalersi. It is good to see you again.”

Pian nodded his head and Jalersi smiled. They had learned saving the life of this man's Anome had earned them eternal gratitude and respect. Something they returned equally since he was the first to have accepted them. “King Leonidas.” Pian said. “You are looking... well.”

Martin laughed. “You think so?” He chortled. “Maybe if I had competent people around me it would be better!” He said turning his head as he spoke.

“Bite me!” The female voice came from outside the cone of the disc.

Martin turned back to the image and his head turned as he looked at the men and women gathered at the table. His eyes settled on Deia and he smiled warmly. “*Tenna*. You are looking well.”

Deia smiled and couldn't help but blush slightly. He had yet to learn the intricacies of diplomacy and she feared he would never learn. “*Mandri*.” She answered. “You are not on the *ARC ROYAL*?”

Martin shook his head. “No... we're three hours out from a little job we are conducting. I will need to make this briefer than I wanted but I'm sure you and Panos can cover completely what I will offer.”

Deia nodded. “Of course.”

Martin turned back to Pian. “They are all present Pian?” He asked.

Pian nodded. "All of the Major Pride leaders are here King Leonidas." He answered. "We will inform those Pride Leaders who were not able to attend because of their location or duties they are performing."

Martin nodded his head and seemed to settle onto the bench he was sitting on. The small table appeared in front of his knees and they could all see he wore an odd type of body armor and he wore his weapons as well. His normally shoulder length hair was tied into a tight pony tail and the matte black conforming body armor pieces extended right up his neck to just below where his neatly trimmed beard began. Even the Kavalian Pride leaders knew he was going into battle just by the way he was dressed.

"Very well..." Martin spoke looking at them in the transmission. "I am not one to beat around the bush gentlemen... so let me get right to it. All of you there have essentially broken from that lunatic Keleru. All of you probably have death sentences on your heads by now, and if not, you will soon enough. All of you have chosen to fight to bring the Kavalian people out of the darkness that Keleru holds over you. You have made this choice... and for that I respect you. What I say to you may surprise you, but I do not hold all of your people accountable for what has happened between our two species. Those I do hold accountable will have a reckoning one day, that I promise you. Those who wish to fight the oppression and brutal rule of a tyrant even though you are outnumbered... I hold you in a special regard. It is my understanding that Pian'Nruarani has officially submitted a diplomatic request for monetary and infrastructure assistance from the Lycavorian Union under the auspice of a newly formed free Kavalian government in exile?"

Pian nodded his head and got to his feet. "The Kavalian Democratic Republic." He said. "The KDR. I have been... I have been appointed to lead this new government until such time as we have ousted the criminals who now rule our people and elections can be held."

Martin looked at him and grinned. "My Aunt is pretty good with diplomatic speak isn't she?" He said.

Pian chuckled softly and nodded his head. "Yes she is King Leonidas."

Martin rolled his eyes. "Pian'Nruarani... you and Jalersi are partially responsible for saving the life of my *Anome* and mate. You protected her with your own lives. I think we can dispense with the King bullshit between us."

Pian smiled as the other Kavalians at the table looked on in shock. "Very well... Martin." He said.

"I hope that during your time on Earth you will see that the citizens of the Union are tolerant of everyone, no matter who they are." Martin spoke. "And like me... they will not hold an entire species responsible for the actions of a few dozen men. All that being said... let's move on to what you all want to hear." Martin shifted on the couch he sat on and lifted a data pad into their sight. "The latest intelligence reports from my son tell me many things. Keleru is rebuilding his forces that we destroyed at the onset of hostilities between us. Things are moving more slowly than he first thought which is both good and bad. It is bad because it gives him incentive to act as he has done with Solmar and four other Lycavorian Union colony worlds his forces recently conquered. He is becoming impatient and he unleashed his Puma Bane troops on these worlds. All the information we have tells us they were wiped out to the man."

Pian remained standing and looked at him. "How many?" He asked.

"Nearly two hundred thousand men, women and children." Martin replied instantly. "On each world."

"Gods." Aleou spoke lowering his shaking head.

"The good... the good is that it gives us our opportunity." Martin continued.

Cowen'Shan looked at the image of the man. "Opportunity?" He asked with far less hostility in his voice than most expected from him. "With respect King Leonidas... we need help. Ships. Men. Weapons. We need..."

"I can not give these things to you." Martin spoke immediately.

This simple statement brought the heads of every Kavalian at the table up and looking at him in shock.

Aleou's eyes were wide. "We came here... we came here expecting..."

"You can't help us or you won't?" Another Kavalian snapped from his chair.

"A little of both actually." Martin answered honestly.

"Pian... what is this?" A Kavalian barked. "We came expecting aide and support! He is refusing us! Why did we even come here?"

Resumar got to his feet. "Hglan'Omar wait." He spoke.

The man looked at Resumar. “You have been among us Resumar Leonidas! You have seen with your own eyes and your Kavalian wife fights beside you. We risked much to come here and your father refuses us in the time we need the most help. What are we to think of this?”

“Resumar is right Hglan.” Pian said quickly.

“Right! About what?” Hglan snapped. “I left behind my wife and seven children to come here! The Puma Bane butchers scour Kavalian space for our families while we are here safe! Now he refuses us in our time of need?”

“I am not refusing.” Martin spoke from within the transmission.

“What do you call it then?” Hglan barked at his image. “What...”

“Sit down and shut up old man!” Martin snarled quickly causing all of their eyes to grow wide. Even Jalersi came to her feet in horror at the lack of respect from him. Pian’s eyes were large as he stood there.

“Martin... you... Androcles told me that you would be open to helping us.” Pian spoke trying to measure his words. “That we could... that we could rely on you to... you give the High Coven assistance! Even now... your warships are within Coven space helping them to protect and rebuild!” Pian pointed to where Narice and Toria sat on either side of Arram.

“Yes they do Pian. That is something that my son did and to be honest... I would not have been able to raise the fortitude to do it. The history of the High Coven and I goes much deeper and harsher. My son... Andro and his siblings are from a generation that did not see the horrors perpetrated on my... our people. Narice is not part of that and never was. My son... my children took a leap of faith that I would not have been able to take. They trusted... they had faith in the influence of their generation. It worked... and for that I love them even more.” Martin answered. “Make no mistake though... had it not worked... the High Coven would be nothing but a smoking hole in space. We don’t give second chances.”

“That is what we are trying to do even now!” Pian protested. “We are trying to pull our people from the abyss! There are far more than you think who want nothing more but to think for themselves and be free of the oppression!”

“I don’t doubt that.” Martin said.

“And you would deny them that chance by refusing to help us?” Pian demanded.

Jalersi reached up and place her hand on his arm. “Pian my love...”

“No!” Pian snapped.

“I never said I wouldn’t help.” Martin told him.

Pian blinked several times as the Kavalians looked more intently at the transmission. “You just said you can not provide the materials we need to...”

Martin smiled. “I admire your passion Pian’Nruarani. I admire the passion of all of you. I said I could not supply you with ships and personnel... I never said I could not help you to sustain what you have and continue to build on.”

Pian shook his head. “I am... I am confused.”

“My son’s people should be passing out to you now what I will very happily do for the KDR as you call it now.” Martin said as Pian and the others saw dozens of aides step from the walls and begin handing out data pads to them.

“The Lycavorian Union will officially recognize in public that the KDR is the rightful government of the Kavalian people.” Martin said. “I believe the Spartan Security Senate has already voted on it and passed it unanimously. *Tenna Deia?*”

Deia nodded. “Late last night yes.” She answered. “Once this meeting is done we will put it to a full Senate vote but I doubt very much you will see a different consensus from the full Senate.”

“I am limited even as King on what we can provide to you militarily according to our constitution Pian... but as soon as that vote passes... you will want for nothing else.” Martin began.

“I don’t understand.” Aleou asked him.

“I will need you to shift all of your forces to the coordinates we have listed on the pads you are reading. There you will secure the immediate space around the planet Rizon Four.” Martin told them.

“Rizon Four?” Cowen spoke up.

Martin nodded. “Yes.” He said. “Within one hour of the vote being finalized... the Union has one thousand cargo and material ships waiting to depart for the planet Vamshi in the U’zolut Consortium. From

there they will travel to Rizon Four to make delivery. Total time for travel is three days. On those thousand ships will be the first five billion metric tons of everything from underwear to mainframe computers. And that is just the down payment.”

Pian’Nnurani looked at Martin and he could feel the hope stirring within his chest once again where only moments ago he thought it was dashed.

“I have authorized the deployment of two full elven engineer brigades from the 1st Elven Engineer Division.” Martin said. “Two *PROMETHUS* Class Command stations that the KDR recently purchased...”

“Wait!” Pian exclaimed. “Purchased?”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes... with the recent discovery of massive deposits of the mineral Ostronium Ore on Rizon Four, the KDR has a credit limit with the Lycavorian Union about as large as it gets. The two stations will be towed to the coordinates provided. Fourteen Union Resource and Supply Stations will depart with the Command stations. Seven *RENDER* Class Portable Ship Yards will deploy from Nodon over the course of the next week with approximately half a million Nodon engineers. One hundred thousand Hadarian Healers have already volunteered for duty on the three fully complete and duty ready Orbital Hospitals that will leave with the shipyards. Among the first shipments of supplies will be over four million tons of medicines put together from a list my mate Anja made. They are mainly to take care of any civilian needs at first but ongoing supplies and the Healers will staff the three hospitals full time.” Martin looked at Pian and the men gathered. “Small arms weapons, ammunition, high explosives, missiles, tanks, spare parts by the bucket. Before you could not repair heavy damage taken by your ships, now you can. Before you had to abandon materials and smaller bases because you could not supply them. Not anymore. Serious injuries to your people could not be treated properly. Not anymore. I am chopping one of our *OMEN*-Class ships to Resumar’s command for the purpose of Intelligence gathering. That will be our little secret. Everything else you have bought and we are simply delivering it to you.” Martin looked at the men from within the transmission. “I may not be allowed to provide you with men and ships to fight with you, but I can damn well make sure that you can provide everything to maintain, repair and fight and win. You will want for nothing Pian. Your men and equipment will want for nothing. And several treaties are being drawn up now and will be presented to you. One of those treaties will allow you unhindered but monitored access into Union and Consortium space. There is a moon two light years across the Union border where you can set up your temporary government and its headquarters. It is also a place where you can bring your families. All of your families and whatever refugees you are able to accept.”

Aleou got to his feet slowly. “This... this is a joke yes?” He asked.

Martin looked at him and smiled. “It’s no joke.” He stated. “Our two people are closer than I think you realize General Aleou. Perhaps someday you would allow me to explain how. You will need to move quickly, for once Keleru gets wind of this; he will act.” Martin turned in the transmission. “Narice?”

Narice rose to her feet and waited as Pian and the others turned to look at her. “I have received the blessing of the *Ventash’ma* Ruling Council of the High Coven to extend a hand of peace and support in the hopes it will begin to heal whatever wounds have occurred between us in the last two decades of my mother’s reign.” Narice took a deep breath because she did not know if Pian would accept what she was going to offer. “Pian... I offer to you and the KDR, those of you who truly wish to be free, I offer three dozen High Coven Sector Monitoring Platforms. Also as a show of solidarity that we must leave our pasts behind us the *Ventash’ma* would also like to offer to you the use of six Orbital Shipyards to assist in your endeavors. They are not as large as the Union shipyards, but they are efficient and can handle most minor repairs. Should any Kavalian citizen wish to escape the oppression they are under now, we can also offer safe haven on several border worlds that will be protected by High Coven and Union forces. We ask for nothing in return. Only the chance to show that we make the first gesture in purging our demons.”

“I urge you to accept the Empress’s offer.” Martin spoke again. “If for nothing else, then to show that we as leaders can overcome.”

Pian stood there nearly overcome. Many of the Pride Leaders were also stunned beyond anything they had expected. Pian finally looked at Martin in the transmission. “Martin this is... it is far beyond anything we had hoped.”

Martin nodded his head. “Maybe... but those of you in that room are the future of your people if they are to have one. You must fight for everything in order to succeed. I may not be able to do what I would like to

do... but like I said... I'll damn well make sure you got the best shot to accomplish your goals. Once you start this... all of Keleru's attention and efforts are going to be against you. He won't have a choice. He can't fight us and an internal rebellion of the size you will command. He will focus everything on you Pian. If at any point... no matter what is happening... if at any point you and your Pride leaders feel the situation is untenable, you pick up everything and everyone and you move across the border."

"If we did that he would then turn to you!" Pian spoke.

"And if he does... I will unleash the entire Union military against his skinny ass and bury him." Martin snarled.

"He will send for Pusintin." Aleou spoke up now. "He is the finest war commander that Keleru has. He will order him to return."

Martin shook his head now. "That won't happen either." He said softly.

"How can you be so sure King Leonidas?" Aleou asked.

"Two reasons really." Martin answered. "If my plan went the way I hope... he no longer has the ability to use his long range communications even if he was able to reach Keleru from where he is. Which he can't."

"You... you neutralized his long range communications?" Pian gasped. "How?"

Martin smiled then and it was not a pleasant smile. "Let's just say he never... he never felt the true calling of our family's bloodline."

"What... what is the second reason?" Aleou asked tentatively.

"You do not have to worry about Pusintin General... because my dear old brother isn't leaving this quadrant of space alive." Martin growled. "I intend to kill him in the most profane manner I can think of and then I will spread his body parts to the different planets out here for the animals to feed on for what he has done to my Queen. In a few more hours he will hate me enough to chase me across the galaxy anyway. Nothing else will matter to him. I'm such a popular fellow."

"There is also one condition to all this taking place." Andro spoke now as he got to his feet drawing their attention to him. "A condition that I have not discussed with my father or my *Tenna Deia*."

Deia looked quickly at the transmission of Martin who shrugged his shoulders and then she turned back to Andro. "Androcles?" She asked.

"It will not affect what we will do for you now I assure you. We want nothing more than to see you succeed and we will do everything within our power to see that happen just as my father has said. However, it will affect what happens after, if you refuse." Andro said. "I will understand should you refuse, however I hope you do not. I have spoken to all of my brothers and sisters about this and we are in complete agreement on this single condition."

"What is this condition Androcles?" Jalersi asked softly.

"On behalf of my brothers and sisters, to include Fedor and Eirene father..." Andro said looking at Martin within the transmission. "We require that every Pride Leader who agreed with and sanctioned the attack on our second elven mother be handed over to us." Andro told them. "We will not accept anything less. Proof of their death or the men themselves. They will face our justice."

"They... these men are Kavalian citizens." Aleou spoke.

Androcles nodded. "And you will have a choice to make. Give them to me... or when you have secured the KDR to the satisfaction of Union military leaders I will pull all support for you that you have gained this day. I will recall all assets and equipment and we will leave you to fend for yourselves." Andro looked at Resumar who didn't hesitate and nodded his head. "We will leave you to discuss these new revelations. You are welcome here and I suggest you gain as much knowledge of our people as you can. My siblings and I will require your answer in three days time. Until then... let us enjoy this new alliance as much as possible and work out as many details as we can." Andro bowed his head slightly. "I will leave you in the capable hands of those with more knowledge of these things and I. If any of you wish to speak with me simply contact the *Durcunusaan* and they will know where to find me."

Androcles Leonidas turned and began moving out of the massive CIC without another word. He had made his requirements known. Requirements that he had spoken to each of his brother and sisters about and found they all agreed with him totally. A fact that only made him realize they were more of like mind than he had first thought.

Andro sniffed the air as he walked out of the CIC and he thought he caught the faint scent of sugar plums and spice on air. He smiled as his body surged with power and suddenly he wanted to feel his *Anome* in his arms. Andro's azure blue eyes grew a little brighter as he walked and he smiled. Yes indeed... sugar plums and spice was all he intended to smell this night.

MARTIN'S STRIKER NINETY MINUTES TO TARGET

For'mya turned her head as Martin came in to the cockpit. He held up his hands in a show of defense.

"I didn't know." He exclaimed.

"Martin... you can not let him hold that over their heads." For'mya stated. "They had nothing to do with what was done to me. It is wrong."

Martin moved up and knelt between the seats, his dark eyes never leaving her beautiful elven face. "You know our son as well as I do *Kinsoaurgai*... no one will alter his course once he sets his mind to something. If he has the support and agreement of our other children... then he *will* do what he says."

"And you will do nothing?" For'mya asked him.

Martin shook his head. "No."

"Why?" For'mya demanded.

Martin leaned forward and kissed her hard on her soft lips, wrapping his male aura around her totally unshielded and completely pure. For'mya shuddered in obvious delight, her own female aura basking in the divine sensations he always caused within her and she couldn't help but return his kiss with equal fervor. After a long moment though, Martin pulled away, and using his thumb he reached up and stroked the outside edge of her four inch high elven ear. For'mya's eyes closed in shivers of bliss and she smiled dreamily.

"If you have to ask me that question after all these years *Kinsoaurgai*... then perhaps you and my other wives and mates do not know me as well as you think you do." Martin said softly watching as her dark brown eyes opened slowly and looked at him. He leaned forward and kissed her softly once more before rising from his knees. "I'm going to prep the others. Let me know when we are ten minutes out." With that Martin Leonidas turned and exited the cockpit leaving For'mya to stare at his back as he moved into the rear of the *STRIKER*.

"I'll tell you why For'mya." Tina said softly waiting for For'mya to look at her. Their friendship had blossomed after a rough first meeting when For'mya joined their flight crew. The three of them fit together so seamlessly it was no surprise that they could make whatever they were flying do things not normally seen. Endith and For'mya could make heads spin and eyes roll in what they could do with an aircraft and Tina was their anchor. They had shared their lives for the last two decades and that was a friendship that would never be broken.

For'mya looked at her friend. "Then tell me Tina." She said. "It is wrong... it is wrong to hold others responsible for what was done to me."

"Is it?" Endith spoke from the pilot's seat. "Is it wrong to hold people to a moral standard that any living being knows is right? It does not matter what their species is, for there is always a standard one must not fall below. And who is ultimately responsible when others allow one man to lead them off that standard willingly in order to gain power over others so that they can oppress them? What they did to you For'mya... what they made you suffer no matter the good outcome... that is a sin that can never be forgiven. I... I knew he was different the moment I first met him in that bunker in Utah. There is nothing he will do that will surprise me."

"Androcles is doing what his father can not." Tina said softly looking at her. "Martin is a Lycavorian Spartan For'mya. Pure, untainted and wild. As was his father. And his grandfather before him. As is his son. If it was up to him he would lay waste to the entire KFI for what Keleru did. What they made you endure and suffer. He can not because he is King and he knows that not all of them are responsible. Andro is not so limited girl. He will make them pay for what they did because he knows his father can not. Every last one of them that went along with Keleru."

"But Fedor and Eirene were a gift and not a curse as they wanted them to be!" For'mya protested. "They showed me that!"

Tina nodded. “Yes they sure were.” She said. “And Marty will love them just as strongly as he loves all his children. He’s already shown that. That does not change the fact that you are his woman. His Queen. You are one of six who rule his being and his soul and his heart. Aricia may be his *Anome*... but he would shatter worlds for all of you. Aricia knows that and she embraces that. Martin Leonidas would kill, maim, crush, and obliterate anyone who hurts or attempts to hurt any of you. It is in his blood and he will not deny his blood anymore. You saw that on Enurrua For'mya.”

“For'mya... you are just going to have to accept that you are wife and mate to one of the two most dangerous men in the entire universe.” Endith said with a bright smile. “A man who is driven by two things. His love for the six of you and your children... and the love of freedom for all.”

“Just go with it sister.” Tina said with a grin. “We got work to do.” She turned to her station as a soft chirping sound began to sound. “Engaging Shroud. We’re going in.”

TALISMAN

PRALOR VECTOR-CLASS ATTACK CRUISER

SLEKON CLUSTER

THREE HOURS FROM ARTAAYA

“...Do not know how to repair the trust between us Teniri.” Delnash spoke as he looked up into her muzzle. He had come down to the landing bay where the *VECTOR*-Class Cruisers had been refitted to carry a small number of dragons. “Only that I wish too.”

Teniri lowered her head down even with Delnash and gazed at him for a long moment. She rested comfortably on the deck, the others spread around her, some of them nursing the bruises that they received from foolishly fighting two Talon Guardians.

[You are different Delnash.] She spoke softly.

Delnash couldn't help but smile at that. *[After what I have seen, how could I not be?]* He said. *[I have spoken twice with Martin since we left Onterom. Each time I speak with him I find myself liking the man more and more.]*

[Do you doubt he is a Praetorian of your people?] Teniri asked.

Delnash shook his head instantly. *[No. Not after what I saw.]* He answered looking at her. *[He is a different breed of Praetorian than what we have known in the past. More feral almost. He is more prone to follow the inbred instincts of his people... but so far I can not find fault his instincts. They are... they are driven by the pureness of the blood that flows within his veins.]*

[A Talon Guardian of my kind can not be anything but pure Delnash my friend.] Teniri told him.

Delnash looked at her. *[I did not know that Dragonkind had such things.]* He told her. *[I assume because of how you speak of it that this position is of some importance.]*

Teniri chuckled with Mindvoice and shifted her front talons to a more restful position. *[Talon Guardians date back to the very beginning of my kind.]* She explained. *[They command the most untainted and uncluttered links to their Etheric power. Those who can shape it to their will and use it. Very much like your Praetorians. They are the hand of the Dragon Council of Elders, but also the hand of justice. Their purpose is to safeguard our species from all threats. Even from those of our own kind. Their will was dominant in all things. My kind is not so very different from all species Delnash. We have our feuds and issues... though we are able to work through them far better than most.]*

[These Talon Guardians were listened to by all?] Delnash asked.

Teniri nodded. *[In order to be a Talon Guardian you must have accomplished something sacrosanct for our species as a whole. No one ever aspired to be a Talon Guardian... it just happened.]* She answered. *[The Elder Council would make the decision. To be honest I can only remember there ever being six Talon Guardians at once. That was before our kind became scattered across the stars by your people. Martin Leonidas and his son are also the first non-dragons to be named Talon Guardians. Never in the nearly five million years that our kind has existed have there ever been two like them.]*

Delnash looked at her. *[My people?]* He gasped. *[How... you never... you never told me this!]*

Teniri's wings fluttered slightly. A shrug for a dragon. *[It was many thousands of years ago. Long before you were ever born. We did not build ships to take us to different places my friend. Our talons to not give us that ability.]*

[Pralors did this?] He gasped.

[You were and are seeders of life Delnash.] Teniri answered him. *[That has always been the calling of your people. And a noble calling it is. My kind looked on it as an adventure actually. We could always talk to you and we were able to choose what planets to go to. Talon Guardians were limited to our homeworld long ago for when we began to take to the stars with you it was deemed too revered a position to just hand out.]*

[Arzoal appointed Martin and his son as Talon Guardians. The dragons they are bound to.] Delnash asked. *[What did they do to obtain this position if it is so revered as you say?]*

Teniri blinked. *[I will only say that Arzoal showed me what it was that they did. It is not something that we speak of openly or with others. Please understand it is a sacred thing to my kind. What they endured... it was horrific in its definition. Their actions were... they were more than anything I have ever seen. Pure and without question. Trust in that.]*

[Will I ever discover it?] Delnash asked.

[If you allow your peoples to come together you will hear the whispers of their actions I am sure. But the four of them, Martin and Torma, his son Androcles and Torma's daughter Elynth, they will never speak of it. To them... to them it is a nightmare they would rather not relive.] Teniri answered.

[Martin's oldest son? Torma's daughter? They are the other two then?] Delnash asked her.

Teniri nodded her massive head. *[According to Arzoal... they are more tightly bound to each other in many ways than their fathers simply because they were bonded while Androcles's mother still carried him in her womb.]*

Delnash blinked several times. *[He was... he was born aware?]* Delnash gasped.

Teniri nodded her huge head as her eyes narrowed somewhat and she gazed at him with intensity. *[You know of such a thing?]*

Delnash nodded quickly. *[There were... there were rumors that some of the Praetorians were born fully aware. It was never confirmed for Sumar shielded them viciously when he first formed them. It was said that this is what allowed them to have such a pure link to their Etheric abilities.]*

[Murano?] Teniri asked him.

Delnash looked at her and nodded his head. *[He was... he was always different.]*

[Perhaps that is why Sumar valued him so much?] Teniri spoke. *[Because he was like him?]*

[You believe Sumar was born like this as well?] Delnash asked.

[I do not know for sure. Perhaps this would explain why he was so charismatic a leader and could inspire others to greatness.] Teniri said evenly. *[From what Arzoal tells me that is what Martin and his son do on a daily basis without even truly knowing it.]*

Delnash looked at her. *[Even with my own people it seems.]* He said.

Teniri chuckled softly. *[Do not resent this fact Delnash. Kasdan and his brother have always been adventurous... Kasdan's rather excitable nature aside. Your own daughters are drawn to this as well. Mari most of all.]*

[Not Daron?] Delnash asked.

[Your son has never made an effort to communicate with me.] Teniri spoke. *[I have not tried to speak with him out of respect for his wishes. I do not know why he is like this but he is who he is. Tied more closely with Lorendo than is healthy I think... but that is not for me to say.]*

Delnash looked at her. *[I will discover what it is that Lorendo is doing.]* He told her with firmness in her voice. *[Martin... he told me to share everything with you Teniri. Everything that I discover.]*

Teniri shook her massive head slightly. *[It only matters now because I wish to know what happened in our time apart. Now that Arzoal and the others... now that we have a link to them it fills all of us with great joy. We do not dwell on the past. We are together again and that is what matters.]*

[So there are more of your kind out there somewhere?] Delnash asked.

Teniri fluttered her wings again. *[It is possible. I do not know where they would be. That information was destroyed with your Science Convocation Headquarters and your homeworld by the Scourge.]*

[I gave Martin the coordinates to the two planets in this quadrant that were home to settlements of his people.] Delnash said. [He told me he intends to visit them and discover what happened.]

[Do you fear what he may find?] Teniri asked.

Delnash shook his head. [No. The more... the more I think about what has happened... how Lorendo acted... the more I find myself wondering what else he has done in the name of Science. He was developing a bioweapon of some sort on Onterom and he tried to hide it.]

[This is not against the laws of your people Delnash.] Teniri said. [Not when held up against the Scourge.]

Delnash nodded. [No... I know it is not. No matter how repulsive that may be to me. He should have told me though. Told those of us on the Elder Council. The Lycavorian people with Martin have evolved far more than any of us ever imagined. Most of that may have had to do with what Sumar did, intermixing our kind with them, but they are not inferior to us any longer no matter how much Lorendo and others believe. That train of thought will not bring about anything useful. It never did and I see that more clearly now than ever before.]

[You must tread very carefully Delnash my friend.] Teniri told him. [Lorendo was willing to murder hundreds of your people to protect the secrets he has been keeping. He may very well be willing to come after you to keep his secrets.]

Delnash nodded his head. [That is what Martin told me as well.] He said. [I must act Teniri. I can not let him try to wrest power.]

[No... but you must also solidify your own position Delnash my friend. Before you begin to move against Lorendo.] Teniri told him.

Delnash nodded and looked at her. [You mean hold elections.] He said thoughtfully to himself. [Perhaps that is the place to start.]

[If you hold elections Delnash... it would give you the base of power you need to combat Lorendo and whatever he is trying to do.] Teniri told. [You have done some things that angered many through the decades, that is true, but no one denies your leadership has made it possible for them to get this far. Review the decisions you have made in the past... change them if need be... and become the first Chief Elder to be truly elected since Sumar himself.]

Delnash met her gaze. [You think it is as simple as that?] He asked.

Teniri gave him what would amount to a large smile as she bared her tooth filled maw. [What goals may seem the hardest to accomplish, may well have the easiest path to achieve.] She told him.

Delnash thought he saw a twinkle in her brightly colored eyes and he smiled for the first time in several days. [Maybe you are right.] He said.

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Yuriko lowered her macrobinos and cursed softly under her breath. “Just couldn’t catch a break could we?” She muttered. “I got twenty plus from the north. Still ten kilometers away though.” She spoke turning her head to the side.

Kalis lowered his binos and nodded. He laid beside Koguth to Yuriko’s right on the ridge. “I counted thirty from the west. Same distance. They must have split apart when they dropped below the sensor threshold.”

“Ok... two ships for sure.” Yuriko said. She shifted on the ground and looked at Kalis and Koguth. They rested on the ridge just above the entrance to their cave. The interior of the cave had a winding path that rose some two hundred meters up and ended in the natural ventilation tunnel. Yuriko’s people had built a metal ladder into the wall of the tunnel so they could use it for observation. Upon exiting the tunnel the ridge they were on was roughly fifty meters square and had a panoramic of the surrounding territory. “Roughly fifty on the ground.”

“They appear to be carrying some sort of hand weapons.” Koguth spoke now. “Light rifle of a design I have not seen. Though considering where we are that shouldn’t be surprising.” He lowered his binos and turned his head. “These creatures can use weapons?”

Yuriko nodded. “Those my father and others encountered on Twelve Alpha were using a sort of primitive firearm. Projectile based. The others they have encountered are equipped with more modern weapons.”

Kalis shifted slightly. “I thought you said they were primitive?”

Yuriko shook her head. “I said they appear primitive.” She answered. “Their cognitive abilities indicate otherwise.”

“You said they absorb others into their ranks?” Koguth asked. “Change them. Perhaps those they change are keeping at least some portion of their former selves.”

Yuriko nodded. “That is what my mother and others believe.” She said. “Otherwise they would not be able to operate the ships.”

“How many of these Pralors have these creatures captured and taken?” Kalis asked.

“That we don’t know.” Yuriko answered. “But I could hazard a guess and say a lot. They obviously have the ability to adapt and after what happened on Onterom, what my father found, we know they can reproduce.”

“They are like a parasite.” Koguth spoke. “Infecting others. Changing them.”

Their eyes shifted as another body began to climb out of the tunnel and Kalis quickly moved forward to assist Serale as she rose into view. He saw Nedoli and Ceale beneath her and helped her fully out of the tunnel and settled back onto the ground where she quickly settled between his legs. Yuriko waited for Ceale to exit the tunnel and then Nedoli and they moved to the side settling to the ground, Ceale almost instinctively leaning up against the large Kavalian.

“They have landed troops?” Nedoli asked.

Yuriko nodded. “About fifty that we can see from here.” She replied.

“Princess... you said your father and others have encountered them before?” Ceale asked.

Yuriko nodded again. “A few times... yes. Nasty buggers is what they are. Svorag is their official designation. We found that information out from the Pralor database at the abandoned Science station on Onterom.” She watched as Kalis handed Serale his binos and she shifted to view where he pointed out over the horizon. “They are the result of some sort of experiment gone bad.”

“Experiment?” Ceale asked. “You mean genetics?”

“That’s my take on everything I have read.” Yuriko answered. “You don’t want to get taken by these things. My mother’s findings indicate once they infect you, it is only a matter of hours before you start to change. If they are able to infect you multiple times, it can be quicker.”

“Multiple times?” Nedoli asked puzzled. “Does it matter once you are infected?”

Ceale rested her hand atop his and shook her head. “I know what she means Nedoli.” She said softly turning back to Yuri. “They force themselves on their victims then?”

Yuriko nodded. “It’s not pleasant.”

“They don’t seem primitive.” Serale spoke with the binos to her eyes. “Bipedal in nature, almost reptilian. Some sort of lightly armored outer layer of skin. They are moving as if they know what they are doing.” She lowered the binos and turned back to the others.

“The consensus is that they retain a large portion of their former selves. At least those pertaining to skill sets.” Yuriko said nodding. “Possibly even more than we know or have seen so far. My mother believes there is a chemical compound within their bodies that destroys the cognitive memories of who they were before, leaving only the Svorag part of their minds.”

Ceale looked at her. “That... that is a very sophisticated and deliberate act Princess.” She said. “Designing a virus of this nature is not something done for the good of others.”

“I don’t think the good of others was ever the intent with this thing.” Yuriko stated evenly. “I don’t know much about the medical field aside from treating battle field wounds, but I’d say this thing was made for only one purpose.”

Ceale nodded her head. “I would agree with you.” She replied.

“Genetic mutation the likes of which you say Queen Anja describes is immoral!” Serale hissed softly. “It is why the Union banned any sort of biogenic warfare research. Anything having to do with genetics.”

Yuriko nodded. “I don’t disagree Serale. I haven’t met any of the Pralor people as my father and mothers have, but based on their field reports, I don’t believe all of them agree with this kind of work.” She said. “Then again... we don’t know the nature in which this virus was designed.”

Ceale shook her head, the doctor in her coming out. “This was designed for death... nothing more.” She stated simply.

“Lady Ceale I don’t...” Yuriko began to reply but Koguth’s voice cut her off.

“We may have a problem.” He stated simply. He was lying on his front again and using the binos to watch the terrain.

Kalis quickly took his binos from Serale. “General?” He asked as he settled to the ground.

“I believe they just found our ships.” Koguth spoke with disgust in his voice and Yuriko joined them on the ground.

“*Vith!*” Yuriko hissed angrily under her breath.

“They’re not attempting to enter them.” Kalis stated as he brought the image into more focus and zoomed.

Koguth nodded. “It appears Mata’s idea to leave the ramps up was very justified.” He said. “Excellent call.”

“They can’t enter them?” Yuriko asked.

Kalis shook his head. “Mata locked them both with an encryption algorithm that only we have.” He said. “We were going to leave the ramps down.” He said sheepishly.

“Well at least we won’t give them two new ships.” Yuriko said. “But now they know there are others here. Not so good.”

“They are splitting up.” Koguth said suddenly. “Half a dozen moving around the ridge and another dozen following almost our exact path towards our current location. It almost seems like they...”

Kalis lowered his binos and looked at Yuriko. “Like they can follow our scents.”

“Kalis are you sure?” Yuriko asked.

“There is no way they could have picked up a trail.” Kalis told her. “We obliterated any sign we came in this direction. It is what we are trained to do. They would not know we moved in this direction unless... unless they could smell us.”

“*Sibfla*... that isn’t good.” Yuriko swore again. “We need to...”

“Princess!” The voice in her ear implant hissed out and Yuriko froze as she held up her hand.

“Go!” Yuriko snapped.

“Princess... the King’s ship just entered the system! They are less than an hour away!” The man reported to her.

Yuriko’s face beamed as she looked at Kalis. “This day just got a whole lot brighter.” She said. “Father’s ship just entered the system! He’ll be here in less than an hour!”

Kalis’s face changed slightly and Yuriko saw the sudden inkling of fear in his eyes. She reached out and squeezed his arm. “You have nothing to worry about. None of you do. Now... everyone back down into the cave! Now! They may get here before father does and we need to be prepared. And I want to talk to him!”

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

Sadi Leonidas knew something was different about Andro when he spirited her away after all of them had dinner. She didn’t understand why Ne’Veha and Sehri went off on their own with Lu’ria and Carisia not far behind. At least until they came here.

Sadi barely noticed the large blanket on the sand near the ocean’s edge, or the chilled bucket that held a bottle of Spartan Wine and two glistening glasses. She had no time to notice them as Andro’s first kiss had sent her spiraling into orbit. His kisses were always so intense and passionate, but he hadn’t kissed her like this since

the night they had become *Anomes*, and her hormones reacted with giddiness. His unshielded aura wrapped around her tightly and her female wolf senses screamed out in delight as she basked in the passion and want that his aura held for her. His powerful arms drew her to him and Sadi knew he would control this night. As his kiss savaged her pleasure receptors, his nimble hands quickly discarded their clothes and two minutes after they had arrived here under the near full moon, Sadi Leonidas was screaming out her unabashed rapture as he pulled her into his lap and his entire twelve and a quarter inches of magnificent manhood speared her in a single powerful thrust. She exploded in an astounding orgasm at the pinnacle of that thrust, her head flying back, her fangs now fully extended as she wailed wantonly into the warm night air.

His large hands gripped her firm ass in his grasp and he held her down tightly, impaled upon him as she shuddered almost violently in release, her fingers digging into the skin of his shoulders. Her long blond hair, now nearly cascading to the middle of her back and shiny with health, whipped back and forth in delight as she let herself be carried on that tidal wave of pleasure. Andro always made love to them with deep passion and craving, but his aura burned so much brighter this night and Sadi could feel it smoldering just for her. This caused her own powerful female aura to react with equal passion and she pulsed him with everything of her essence, surrendering to his craving for her and embracing it utterly. His lips descended to her firm breasts, jutting proudly out from her chest, her nipples burning points of need and she whimpered loudly as he suckled them into his mouth. Sadi had never felt him so hot within her, his manhood like searing steel, buried so deeply inside her as he was. She could feel every pulse of the veins on his cock, every quiver and it was making her insane with enthusiasm for what he had started. She brought her head up quickly, her jungle green eyes changed now, her dual fangs extended and she looked at his face. She gasped at the near glow of his azure orbs and felt them gaze upon her with a hunger she had never seen in them before.

“Oh... oh *carians* Andro!” She gasped.

Sadi had no time to react and her eyes grew wide when he flexed his huge manhood within her and the pleasure smashed through her once more, even before her first orgasm had receded. She fell back in orgasmic devastation, his hands lowering her slowly to the blanket beneath them as she twisted in mind numbing pleasure, her heels digging into the muscles of his powerful ass, holding him in place instinctively. The fingers of his aura touched her everywhere it seemed, igniting fires within her body that she had never experienced. They had been *Anomes* for little more than a year now, the happiest time of her young life no matter the horrific events they had experienced as a family. As her orgasm shattered her senses, Sadi’s mind went back to the first moment she had seen those azure eyes. The first time that they had gazed on her when he was only nine months old. The first time she had smelled his lavender and pines scent. It was in that moment, in the deepest recesses of her mind, that Sadi knew she had found her future. Andro had told her on several occasions in the last year that she was the center of his universe. Sadi knew he loved all of them, would do anything for them as Sehri had told her this morning. Until this very moment in however, Sadi had not known how accurate Sehri had been. Andro was like the core of a sun and she was his essence. No matter what happened, no matter who shared their lives, she would always have command of his soul. His Etheric resonance touched her in that moment, all of his shields coming down and Sadi gasped, her eyes wide in blissful agony, as he allowed her to see everything that he was. He held nothing back from her now. He shared with her every memory that was his. All his hopes for the future. Their future. As she erupted in another cataclysmic orgasm the tears came to her eyes.

Tears of incontrovertible happiness.

Tears of unassailable love.

Tears of a bond so indisputably theirs.

As her body quaked in will crushing pleasure his strong hands pulled her up again. Sadi wrapped her arms around his head and kissed him with a zealous fury unlike anything she had ever known. Her breasts flattened against his iron hard chest and she could almost feel the sizzling heat of the Talon Guard brand in his skin as it touched her own. Sadi’s bright eyes grew even wider as she felt his massive cock swell larger within her and she tore her lips from his and screamed into the night sky beside his head as his explosion sent her reeling over the edge of the abyss a third time. As his blazing hot passion spilled into her forcefully in six potent eruptions, his powerful arms crushed her to him and he buried his face into the crook of her neck and shoulder.

Sadi knew they were not done yet, as his manhood remained rock hard inside her. She lifted her teary eyes to the stars and silently thanked whatever gods were out there for bringing this man to her. She thanked

them for the other women in her life and the love she shared with them but most of all she thanked them for Andro.

That he belonged to her utterly... and she to him.

That nothing in this universe would ever take them away for each other.

Not even death.

Sadi stared up into his face as she leaned back against his bare chest sitting between his legs. She held the glass of wine in her right hand and watched as he chewed a piece of cheese. How he had brought these things out here and no one knew was beyond her but it was not something she was going to question. Four hours of blissful love making until their bodies could not continue and now they sat enjoying the cooler breeze of the late evening across their naked flesh and drank the wine he had brought. Sadi chuckled softly when he swallowed and tossed another piece of cheese into his mouth. His azure eyes turned to look at her and he grinned sheepishly.

“Sorry.” He told her softly. “Didn’t eat today.”

Sadi reached up and let the back of her fingernails drag along the underside of his jaw and the hollow of his throat. “Do you know how much I love you Androcles Leonidas?” She asked softly.

Andro smiled at her. “I would hope quite a bit.” He told her. “Or I’m doing something very wrong.”

Sadi smiled brightly and pushed back against him tighter without breaking eye contact with him. “No Andro my love... you are not doing *anything* wrong. *That* I can assure you with complete confidence.” She answered dreamily.

Andro looked at her intently and set his wine aside, drawing her tighter to him with his arms. “What are you thinking *KertaGai*?” He asked softly as he nuzzled her ear.

“I’m thinking that the gods have blessed me with you.” Sadi said softly. “They blessed me with *SirsanGai*, with Carisia and Lu’ria and Caliria and now Sehri. But mostly they blessed me by bringing me into your life.”

“I would argue that I am the one who has been blessed.” Andro said keeping his face next to her cheek.

“Argue all you wish.” Sadi told him. “I know the truth.” She looked into his eyes. “The very universe could come to an end tomorrow Andro and as long as I was in your arms I would not care.”

“I will try my best to insure that never happens.” He said. “I like the way you smell too much.”

Sadi chuckled. “Pervert.” She hissed gently. After a moment she ran a finger along the Talon Guardian brand and felt the warmth from the brand against her finger. “Why didn’t the others come here tonight?”

Andro reached up and trace the edges of the Dragon Heart pendant she wore as it rested between the valley of her breasts. It was much smaller than what he had given to her so long ago, but only because they had merged them back together in order to be split among all of them. Sehri’s pendant was recently finished and she now wore it proudly as they all did. A sign of their love and devotion to each other. A heart that would never die.

“Tonight all I wanted was my *Anome*.” He said softly. “I have neglected her for too long you know.”

“That’s not true my love.” Sadi said quickly.

“Yes it is.” Andro continued. “Carisia and Ne’Veha are the ones who told me so. Hit me in the head is more like it.” He finished with a smile. “Everything has been happening so fast... Sehri finally coming together with us. I needed time with just you *KertaGai*. To focus and re-center myself. Only you can do that for me. Only your scent and your mind.”

Sadi smiled. “Well... there are benefits for me too.” She said happily.

Andro nuzzled her cheek and ear and grinned. “We will be leaving soon.” He said as he drew her tighter and Sadi reveled in the feeling of his powerful arms around her.

“Leaving?” She asked looking into his face.

Andro nodded his head. “Events are growing larger and more complex where my father and mothers are. That is part of the reason why he is throwing all our weight into supporting Pian and the others. He believes Keleru is not as powerful as he projects and with our support they will be able to wrest control from him.”

“And your uncle?” Sadi asked.

Andro picked up his glass and sipped his wine. "One way or the other my father will end him this time." He said gently. "He will pay for what he has done."

"What does he want?" Sadi asked.

"As soon as we get things rolling with Pian and the others... we'll be leaving." Andro told her. "*Tenna Deia* knows and is already working on certain aspects to insure things run smoothly while we are gone. With Narice and Arrarn guiding the High Coven and Cha'talla and the Immortals to protect them, they will be able to handle everything. Once Pian begins to act against Keleru, he will have to direct all attention towards him or risk losing his hold on the KFI and he knows it." Andro finished his wine and set the glass down. "We'll be taking *SPARTA'S WRATH* and other assets and leaving for Vanari space by the end of the week. We'll make the political merger of the Union and Protectorate official and settle things with the Vanari one way or the other. We'll reclaim Caliria and then move to my father's location."

"How do you know all this Andro?" Sadi asked. "You've used the QCR more than you have let on haven't you?"

Andro nodded. "You know my father *KertaGai*." He said with a smile. "He is always thinking four and five moves ahead. He wants us to rendezvous with him in six weeks time. He estimates that is how long it will take him to deal with my uncle and search the two planets that were home to our people."

Sadi looked at him with wide eyes. "Our people!" She gasped. "More Lycavorians?"

Andro nodded. "He is concerned because the Pralors stopped monitoring their progress and no one has heard from them in centuries. These Svorag creatures are a menace and they are larger and smarter than everyone first thought. He fears... he fears they may be the reason our people have not been heard from."

"Why six weeks?" Sadi asked.

Andro shrugged. "I don't know why he gave me that time table. He wouldn't tell me. I think he believes something is going to happen to warrant our presence there and I think he wants me to find out as much as we can about this Rothryn Etheric Academy and this Circle of Shamans."

Sadi turned her head. "Then you feel as I do after what Sehri has told us?"

Andro nodded. "Something is not right about this woman Shaman Master Harira. I do not trust her or her intentions."

Sadi nodded. "She smells... off. And she was adamantly opposed to Sehri becoming our mate and lover." She commented.

"If what Sehri says is true, the Rothryn are oppressing Etheric users in this Academy that they have." Andro said nodding his head. "I sensed several hints from talking with Sehri's mother... and I believe they are trying to harness the physical manifestation of Etheric power by force."

Sadi met his eyes. "You think they are trying to control those who might be able to do what you can do?" She asked.

Andro shook his head. "Not what I can do... none of the Rothryn people were present on Lycavore when grandfather Sumar landed. The Paladin Gene would not be present in them. But if they can control what those like Sehri and you and Ne'Veha and even Zarah can do. Harness a small portion of their Etheric power and convert it to augment already established abilities..."

"Then they could conceivably control all Etheric users." Sadi said. "Make them do what a few of those in power demand."

Andro nodded his head. "I don't believe Sehri's father is part of it. They would not have given her to this Circle if they were. But I do believe that Harira is not what she seems to be. And I believe elements in her father's own government are working against him and towards this very goal. I trust Denali and that is what he senses is happening."

"All of us are going Andro?" Sadi asked. "You can't..."

Andro sniffed the air and his eyes lifted as he smiled. "Yes..." He projected his voice. "All of us are going!"

Sadi grinned and looked around as she smelled them now as well. "Stop trying to hide in the darkness." She called out.

Andro turned when he saw first Ne'Veha and then Carisia leading Lu'ria and Sehri out of the darkness behind them. None of them had much on in the way of clothing and he instantly held out his hand for them reaching out with his aura to envelope all of them. The four of them quickened their pace and moved up to

them. Ne'Veha settled easily between Sadi's legs, Sehri between her legs. Lu'ria settled elegantly beside Andro on his left, his arm curling around her slim waist and pulling her tight and he shared a sizzling kiss with Carisia as she sat down on his right. He turned and kissed Lu'ria with equal heat and then leaned forward to nuzzle Ne'Veha's elven ear and the back of Sehri's head. Carisia pressed close to him, the thin robe covering her petite body moving aside as their skin touched. His arm curled around her waist and pulled her tighter just as he did with Lu'ria.

"I'm not leaving anyone behind." He said finally. "We all go together."

"First thing we do is reclaim our Inamarno." Carisia said.

Andro nodded. "Yes." He spoke firmly. "Then we officially recognize the merger of the Protectorate and Union and then we end the risk the Eridiani present to the Vanari. I understand Denali has made great strides working with both Coren Re Mydala and your father Sehri. It should only be a matter of acting on what they have done when we arrive."

Sehri turned her head slightly and looked at him. "You don't trust Shaman Master Harira do you Andro?" She asked.

Andro shook her head. "No. I don't think any of us do. Even you Sehri." He answered her. "And after speaking with your mother... I don't believe she does fully either. Shaman Master Harira's actions since you joined us have not been very convincing. She has opposed you being with us from the start. She has demanded your mother reign you in somehow. It's like she wants to control what you do and that does not relate with how you have told me the leader of this Circle of Shamans acts."

"It doesn't... I know!" Sehri said. "But I trust... I trust Cleric Mother Ilossa Andro. She has always watched out for me. Always."

"Then we will meet this Cleric Mother when we get to the Beta Quadrant." Andro told her. "We trust in what you know Sehri my love... don't ever doubt that, but even you believe that the Rothryn Etheric Academy is persecuting Etheric users in horrible ways. Using them for their own means. We have all seen it in your mind."

"I do not wish to end up within the walls of that place." Sehri spoke softly as she gently shuddered in a combination of fear and revulsion.

"You will not Sehri!" Ne'Veha exclaimed. "We would never let anyone take you from us now! No one!"

Carisia and Lu'ria extended out separate hands and placed them on her shoulders as Ne'Veha drew her closer. "*SirsanGai* is right Sehri our love." Lu'ria spoke. "And I would be remiss in my duties as Mistress to you if I allowed this. You belong to us now. And we to you. Nothing will ever change that."

Sehri turned her head quickly and looked at Andro. "You can not hurt him Andro!" She said quickly. "The one my father promised me too. He is a pompous fool yes... but he is not a dangerous fool!"

Andro looked at her wide eyed. "Sehri you wound me!" He said in mock exasperation. "I would never do such a thing!"

"Liar!" Sehri hissed but with an adoring smile and playfulness in her voice.

Sadi chuckled and reached out for Sehri's hand. "Our husband and mate is a Spartan Sehri our love. He will only do what is necessary to insure that no man foolishly ignores that you are mated to him now. To us. And if Andro is not present... one of us will."

Andro smiled. "Ah... the scorned woman." He said. "That would be a show worth paying to watch!"

Carisia slapped his shoulder. "Androcles!" She exclaimed. "That is not funny!"

"Watching one of you beat the *sibfla* out of some male who made unwanted advances?" Andro said. "Hell yes that would be fun to watch!"

"We will show you fun!" Carisia rasped as she shoved him back down on the blanket. "Who gets him first KertaGai?" She asked as Andro folded his hands behind his head with a smile.

Sadi grinned. "Who said anyone has to be first." She stated. "I think we can drive him suitably insane with five sets of lips and tongues."

Carisia turned back to Andro and saw his grin fade. "I think we can." She stated in a husky voice and a lustful glint in her maya blue eyes.

"Wait a minute!" Andro said. "Five against one is not fair odds!"

"Who said anything about fair *Saradasaar*?" Lu'ria spoke with a seductive tone in her voice as well. She lowered her head to his face as he was about to protest again and covered his lips with hers while Carisia

extended her vampiric fangs and began to nibble on the skin of his neck and shoulder while bathing him flesh with her tongue.

All of them heard him moan as Sadi and the others shifted around and then three warm tongues were bathing another part of his body. Which quickly rose to the occasion. A few minutes later, Carisia's soft wail of delight filtered into the night air and ocean breeze, followed quickly by four other voices as their pleasure began. It would continue into the early morning hours until the *Durcunusaan* Duty Officer found them curled up on the sand sleeping soundly under the rising sun.

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"...seven minutes out." Martin told her from the holoinage. "Have you been discovered yet *arande*?"

Yuriko shook her head quickly. "No... but they have landed at least two shuttles and they have found Kalis's two ships and they seem to be moving in our direction. Kalis believes they are following their scents father."

Yuriko saw Martin shake his head slowly. "Damn! That would only be a confirmation of what I feared." He said.

"That they are retaining at least some portion of the original host?" Yuriko asked.

Martin nodded his head this time. "Yes... that is what your mother and Duewa believe. It would also reinforce my conviction that they have taken quite a few Lycavorians through the years out here. More than that fat fuck Lorendo will admit. It's part of the reason they are so hard to kill."

"Our position is very defensible father." Yuriko told him. "Only two ways in or out. And they would have to get inside to get to the second entrance."

"They are armed?" Martin asked.

Kalis took a deep breath and stepped away from where he had been standing beside Serale out of the cone of the transmission. He moved up next to Yuriko and saw his uncle's dark eyes shift to him instantly. "We suspect light weapons Uncle." He spoke in a hesitant voice. "They... they appear to be older, projectile type weapons."

Kalis remember vividly the last time those eyes had fallen on him and it sent shudders through his entire being knowing how very close to death he had come that day. It seemed like an eternity ago, but he remembered it as if it had happened yesterday. This time however, this time he saw something quite different as he watched his uncle shift his position within the transmission and seem to move closer. Those dark eyes bore into him as if they were looking past his skin and body armor and peering into the depths of his soul searching. Kalis stood there under that gaze, never taking his eyes off his uncle. Not meeting that intense gaze would have been the clearest sign to his uncle that Kalis had not changed who he was in his heart. Kalis had changed... in so many ways... and he was intent on making sure that his uncle knew that. Only his uncle could show him and teach him what he wanted to know about the part of his blood he was still discovering. The history and culture that he had embraced utterly and wanted to know so much more about.

"Kalis." Martin finally spoke in an even voice. A voice quite unlike what he had heard on that day. This voice was filled with warmth and caring and happiness. Kalis saw the smile on Martin's face grow a little wider as he spoke. "You are looking well boy."

A small smile cracked Kalis's face now and he bowed his head slightly. "I am... even given our situation Uncle... I am..."

Martin sensed his apprehension and nodded. "We will talk *Mandri*." He said. "We will talk soon enough. Your mission?"

Kalis nodded his head in agreement. "Completed Uncle. Just as you directed." He said.

Yuriko looked back and forth between them confused as did everyone else. "Mission?" She asked finally.

“It’s not important *arande*.” Martin said looking back to Kalis. “I am truly happy to see you Mandri. Truly happy.”

“Not more than I for reaching beyond what I knew and grasping for what you showed me I could have Uncle.” Kalis told him before turning quickly and reaching for Serale. She allowed him to pull her close against him and into the cone of the transmission where she gripped his arm tightly with one hand and rested the other on his broad chest, her beautiful face beaming in emotion. Serale had never met a member of the royal family and standing before the King of the Lycavorian Union right now was just as equally scary for her as it was for Kalis.

Kalis turned to look at Martin. “Uncle... this is Serale. She is...” Kalis took another breath to calm his breathing. “I know this is not the time Uncle but I wish to claim her as a Spartan Uncle. I wish to make her mine.”

Martin’s eyes shifted to Serale and he could see right away part of the reason that Kalis had reached for something more. “Greetings Serale.” He said pleasantly.

Serale smiled brilliantly. “Milord... Milord King Leonidas.” She stammered.

Yuriko chuckled as her father shook his head sadly. She looked at Serale who had a horrified expression on her face as if she had done something wrong. Yuriko she reached out and squeezed her arm. “You will come to find out my father hates when people call him that Serale.” She told her. “We... our family does not stand on titles very much. Only when truly necessary. To be honest... we hate them.”

“We will be seeing each other face to face very soon.” Martin said with a smile. “We will talk more then.” He turned to Yuriko. “Post security but do not expose your position *arande*. Stay hidden for as long as possible but try and determine what they are doing.”

“We have an overwatch above the cavern father. One of my men is keeping tabs on them.” Yuriko answered.

“Your mother and Endith will drop us on the backside of the mountain and we’ll come over the top.” Martin said. “If you are discovered, insure you defend the entrance as long as possible. Then pull back.”

Yuriko laughed softly. “I have done this before father.” She said.

Martin rolled his eyes. “Yeah. Yeah.” He snickered. “I’m your father and I’m allowed to worry. *Mandri*... Yuriko tells me you have Kavalians with you that are politically aligned with Pian’Nrurani?”

Kalis nodded his head and motioned for Koguth to come forward. “Yes Uncle. General Koguth’Juturi. He commanded the ship we crashed into my father’s in order to cover our escape.”

Martin looked at the Kavalian in the transmission and nodded his head. He could see the same angular features on him even under his fur that he recognized in Iama’s beauty. “General.” Martin said.

“King Leonidas.” Koguth spoke confidently. “I... the Juturi Pride follows its own path King Leonidas. We follow the path that Pian’Nrurani has begun. We have had to remain hidden and...”

Martin held up his hand stopping his words. “You do not need to convince me.” He said. “If my daughter and Kalis trust you... then I will trust in them. And I trust Pian and Jalersi. I owe them a debt I can never repay.”

Koguth nodded at this obvious show of acceptance and pressed forward. “Sire... my... my daughter Iama. The Princess tells me my daughter is among you and your people.”

Martin nodded. “Yes she is.” He answered.

“She is... she is well then?” Koguth asked as Mani came up beside him, her tail curling around his waist as she pressed against him.

Martin nodded his head as he took in this obvious display of affection from the female who stood beside Koguth and the subtle way his arm shifted slightly to draw her closer to him. “Yes... she is doing very well. I believe many of us would have starved if not for her almost magical ability with food.” He said with a smile. “You have a strong willed, beautiful daughter General.” He said.

“***Three minutes Marty!***” The voice spoke from near Martin.

Martin nodded. “*Arande*... we’ll be there shortly. Be ready. Your mother and Endy are going to blow that frigate out of the stars and then we are going to get gone. I ain’t going to jack around with these Svorag Fuglies.”

Yuriko nodded. “We’ll be ready father.” Yuriko turned to Kalis as the transmission faded and she saw the questions in his eyes. “What?”

“Fu...Fuglies?” Kalis asked.

Yuriko chuckled. “Fucking uglies.” She translated for him. “Father and Uncle Danny can be very creative when it comes to naming things.”

Koguth grunted as he squeezed Mani with his arm around her waist. “No doubt they are equally creative at killing their enemies.”

Yuriko grinned. “Oh that goes without saying.” She stated.

STRIKER ONE ALPHA **KING LEONIDAS’S PERSONAL STRIKER**

“...one million meters.” Tina spoke softly. “Still no sign they have detected us and the sensors are clean for the rest of the system.”

“Passive array is showing no shields active.” For'mya spoke her eyes glued to the screen between her and Endith. She glanced up. “Could they not know how to operate some of the ship’s systems?”

“They couldn’t learn to fly that thing without knowing how to use the shields and weapons!” Tina commented. “Could they? I mean... Murano said they have lost ships through the years.”

“He didn’t know how many though.” Endith added. “Or if the entire crews were lost.”

“Considering what Anja has told us, we have to assume the crews were taken. Those that weren’t killed.” For'mya said. “The virus acts too quickly for them to escape if they survived the Svorag boarding their ship.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Endith said. “Boss said to blow this thing to sibfla. Let’s kill it and get back to the planet!”

For'mya nodded her head. “She is right.” For'mya said. “These are not things I wish to try and discover right now. They have taken control of the ship be it Pralor or not.”

“Works for me.” Tina echoed. Her hands began to fly across her Engineer’s panel. “I am deploying missile pods. Spooling up ZMF warheads. Chain turret is hot!”

Endith looked at For'mya. “How many do you think?” She asked.

“Murano said to target just below the ventral rib spans.” For'mya said. “It is the weakest structural point of the ship, especially with no shields up.” Her own hands were busy working the controls that were arrayed in front of her and to her right. “Targeting four ZMF missiles.”

Endith smiled. “Better safe than sorry.” She chortled.

“Approach from the stern Endy.” For'mya said. “We’ll lower the Shroud at five hundred thousand meters and fire.”

“Main power at your command lover.” Tina told her. “Try not to flip our stomachs too much baby.”

Endith smiled as she adjusted their course and speed. “Moving to five hundred thousand meters.” She said.

The *STRIKER DT* Mark II responded smoothly and with restrained power. The engineers had purposefully designed the ship to be overpowered in order to give every advantage possible to the pilots and dragons that would basically call the ships home. In the hands of pilots such as Endith and For'mya, the ships were capable of fighter like maneuvers due to their advanced engines.

“Still nothing.” Tina spoke as her eyes remained centered on her screens. “No sign that they know we are out here.”

“Doesn’t matter now.” For'mya replied. “Endith is right. Let us just kill them and get back to the surface.”

“Your wolf teeth are showing For'mya.” Tina said with some humor.

For'mya chuckled. “I have become more feral haven’t I?” She commented.

“No! What makes you say that?” Endith chuckled without looking at her. “You haven’t taken on the Boss’s more brutally laconic nature when dealing with our enemies. No way.”

For'mya and Tina laughed now as well and For'mya shook her head. “Thank you Endy.” For'mya said.

“Stand by. Coming up on five hundred thousand meters!” Endy called out.

“ZMF missiles ready! Syncing target coordinates and feeding them to onboard missile systems!” Tina spoke.

“In range!” For'mya barked. “Deploy missile pods!”

“Pods extended!” Tina hissed a moment later.

“Shroud coming down!” For'mya continued. “Endith! Fire at will!”

Endith mashed down with her right thumb on her side stick manual flight control module. It had dropped into place the moment they armed their weapons and while it could be used to fly the ship it was mainly used as the primary firing platform.

“Missiles away!” Endith announced.

RONAR CLASS PRALOR FRIGATE

The oldest class of current Pralor ships, the RONAR-Class Frigate was the first to be designed and built at the shipyards on Artaaya and it was still a workhorse and capable ship in the hands of experienced captains and crews.

The Svorag who occupied this ship were neither experienced nor capable.

While most of this ship's crew had been overwhelmed and changed, they retained only the basic memories of those they had once been. The higher brain functions that would have enabled them to crew this ship properly were just not there anymore. They had operated for six years now without using the main shields and only twice had they used the ship's advanced weapons. They had yet to encounter anyone within this quadrant of space willing to remain and fight them considering what they were capable of. There were several dozen different species within this quadrant that Martin and his people had not yet been introduced to. Some of them were violent and unpredictable, others peaceful in nature. None of them, no matter their culture wanted to risk an engagement with the Svorag that might end up costing them hundreds of their own people and equipment. None of them would dare remain to fight a stolen Pralor ship and its advanced weapons and engines that was filled with the Svorag.

Thus it was that when For'mya lowered the Shrouds of *STRIKER ONE ALPHA* only five hundred thousand meters away; the Svorag crew was unprepared and unsure of what to do.

They died in this very same fashion.

Nearly one thousand seven hundred Svorag would never know what caused their demise. The powerful ZMF missiles, already approved by Avi as a weapon that would work against even shielded Pralor ships, struck the unshielded hull of the *RONAR* about halfway along the underbelly of the ship directly over the main engineering construction seam. The force of the initial explosions caused the ship's hull to snap and break completely open under such horrific force, venting a full third of the ship to the cold of space instantly. As the zero matter reaction from the four missiles reached it's apex, the remainder of the ship simply glowed bright for a split second and then blew apart into millions of tiny fragments. Three pairs of eyes were the only witnesses to their deaths, and those eyes looked on with complete indifference. In their opinion the Svorag had chosen their side.

The wrong one.

STRIKER ONE ALPHA

“Holy shit!” Tina exclaimed as she watched on her screens. “It's gone! We must have hit something really big!”

“Fuck them!” Endith snarled from her seat. “They started this dance not us.”

For'mya nodded her head. “Indeed. Scan for any lifesigns Tina. One sweep. Once that is complete we are returning to the surface. A frigate of this type carries two of the Long Range Phased Quantum Transports similar to Shiria's ship. It also carries sixteen of what Murano called the *TREFANO*-Class Troop Transport. Yuriko reported only two ships came to the surface that they could tell.”

“How many can troops can the transports carry?” Endith asked.

For'mya met her eyes. “More than I care Martin and the others face.” She replied.

Tina turned her head and looked at For'mya. “You want to save any survivors?” She gasped.

For'mya's dark eyes met her blue orbs. “Nubou lae!” For'mya exclaimed. “I want to make sure they are all dead.” She replied firmly.

“Starting sweep.” Tina echoed with a chuckle. “No one survived that though.” She said. “No one.”

AT459

Kalis clutched the 190A4 tightly as his eyes watched the dozen Svorag come to a halt at the bottom of the trail that would lead up to the entrance of the cave. Perhaps fifty meters separated them, with the Svorag being slightly downhill from the nearly overgrown path up to the cave entrance. His eyes immediately focused on the Svorag in front of the others. He appeared to be the leader and he was also making the same motions as he himself did when he was learning to truly use his sense of smell only weeks ago.

[Yuriko?] Kalis reached out within the shielded connection for they did not yet know if the Svorag retained the Pralor ability to Mindvoice. [The one in front of the column. I was right. He is tracking us using our scents.]

[Kalis are you sure?] Yuriko asked. [How do you know?]

[He is making the same motions as I did when I first began to use my sense of smell as Uncle Martin and Androcles taught me in my lessons on the P1.] Kalis answered. [Watch his head. See how it twitches and moves from side to side ever so slightly?]

Yuriko trained her macrobinos down on the trail from her position on the small plateau above the cave entrance and enhanced the Svorag in the front of the column. She watched for several seconds and saw exactly what Kalis had described to her. Since she was a vampire, these tiny nuances were not something she took into account, but she was intelligent enough to trust in Kalis's judgment.

[Nice catch cousin.] Yuriko answered. [Why did they stop though? If he is tracking you by scent... it should have led him right up to the entrance.]

[No. Look at where the trails meet. Those beds of pinkish flowers. They are very fragrant and he can not filter through the mix of scents so easily I am guessing.] Kalis answered.

Above Kalis and lying on her stomach, Yuriko watched the Svorag intently. Kalis was right, the Svorag seemed to be slightly confused as he kept turning his head from side to side and trying to see something.

“Sibfla!” The *Durcunusaan* who laid to her right hissed softly. “Yuriko... two o'clock! Two more groups of Svorag coming from the east. They are spread out moving through the trees but I count at least thirty!”

Yuriko shifted her binos and her heart sank as she saw them. “Vith!” She swore. “We shouldn't have taken down the sensor array so quickly!”

[Yuriko!] Kalis's voice exploded into her head. [The leader is beginning to move up the path!]

Yuriko shifted her binos again and saw the Svorag who appeared to be following their scent moving up the path while the others waited. “Shit! Shit!” Yuriko muttered under her breath. *[Father!]* She reached out within Mindvoice. *[Father you had better hurry! We have more of them closing on our position! More ships must have landed further away!]*

[Two minutes Yuriko!] Martin's voice echoed in her head. She could tell he was moving quickly by the way his words were spaced between breaths.

[Father... I don't think we have two minutes!] She spoke.

It was at this exact moment when Nedoli led Serale and Ceale out into the small clearing by the entrance of the cave. All of them were now armed and moving in a crouch. Nedoli was a veteran of dozens of battles and he instinctively stepped over the small branch that lay before the entrance of the cave moving like a predator of his people. Serale and Ceale were not so lucky.

Kalis's head whipped around at the loud snapping sound and he saw Serale's eyes go wide in horror as the noise carried like a thunderbolt all around them. Serale had time to look down at the twig that was under her

foot, look back up at Kalis and start to lift her hand to reach for Kalis's outstretched fingers before the Svorag leader descended on her with blinding speed. With an absurdly loud screech the Svorag half burst through the foliage that was expertly hiding the entrance to the cave, his powerful arms grasping Serale by her arm and hair and he yanked back, bringing her with him.

"Kalis!!!" Serale's voice wailed into the air as she was ripped backward through the thick foliage and disappeared.

Serale's scream of utter terror ripped through Kalis's entire being in that split second, his dark blue eyes wide in disbelief as he watched the woman he had come to covet so completely torn from his grasp. It began deep inside the pit of his stomach, a sensation of potent anger and savage power. It burned its way through his limbs, through his chest and centered around the heart that beat within his broad chest.

He understood now.

It all came into focus for Kalis in that terrible instant. The emotion she allowed him to feel. The sensation of her warm skin against his. Her sweet scent filling his mind and chasing away all the demons that had plagued him for so long. The color of her eyes and the way they made his heart skip when she looked at him. All of these things his father had never bothered to teach him; all the things his father had kept from him. It all came out now. Everything he had learned these last weeks from his Uncle Martin and cousin Androcles came rushing forward now with utter clarity and he embraced it all absolutely. His future, his sole reason for existing now. It had been taken from him.

No Spartan would ever stand for that.

Kalis's eyes changed in that single split second, the thick black ring encircling his dark blue irises and the savage looking dual fangs so unique to the Leonidas bloodline burst from his gums in a splash of blood and salvia. Rage filled him now. Love filled him. So many emotions he had denied up to this point in his life and he let it all come to him now. It infused his limbs and muscles with supremacy and purpose. Sixth tenths of a second after his beloved Serale had been torn from his near grasp and her scream cut right to his soul, shattering all the doors that had been closed to him, Kalis surged off the ground with a single minded rationale and passion fueled roar of his own. The sound that erupted from his throat and split the air all around them actually caused Nedoli to stagger back, pulling Ceale with him and cutting off her own wide eyed scream of horror as she had watched her daughter pulled from her. It was a wolf's howl of cruel rage and vengeance. As Nedoli and Ceale watched with gaping eyes, Kalis embraced it all within him and for the first time in his life he felt the smoldering of his bloodline as it shaped and molded him.

Kalis, the half Kavalian son of Pusintin, died at that very moment. The exquisite burning of his true bloodline seared away whatever remained of the troubled and angry boy he had once been. What was left behind was the powerful young man with the purest blood of Lycavorian Kings and true Spartans flowing in his veins.

The old Kalis died this day...

...and this death gave birth to the young man who didn't hesitate or pause for a single instant and exploded off the ground and through the foliage with a wolf's howl of death's right hand by his side. His only purpose, live or die, his only purpose in life was in danger. She had been taken from him and he would willingly die in order to get her back.

This day... Kalis sealed his father's fate as surely as the sun rises in the morning.

This day... Kalis Leonidas, the Lycavorian and the Spartan, was born.

And he would never look back... no matter what occurred.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CLASS M MOON
UNION DESIGNATION
AT459

It was a special event... something those Kavalians and Lycavorians with Yuriko that day would remember for the rest of their natural lives. It was a moment frozen in time that they would share with their children and grandchildren in the decades to come and tell them *“I was there that day!”*

The day Kalis Leonidas was reborn and announced his presence so spectacularly to the universe and the dark eyes of the Uncle he so wanted to impress. Another set of dark eyes also watched... watched with the utter pride of a father as Mata saw the man Kalis had hidden and suppressed for so many years finally and truly awaken. Three full seconds after Kalis exploded through the foliage hiding them; Mata let loose a battle scream of his own and followed without hesitation. Mata considered Kalis an adopted son, though he would never tell him that for fear of being rejected, and he would not allow him to fight this battle alone. Mata had trained him since childhood and watched him grow into the man he had become. Now he would bear first hand witness to Kalis forever tossing his dark, abhorrent past to the abyss and becoming what he had always been destined to become. What Mata didn't know right then was that Kalis's actions also served to cement the hard earned trust in him and every other Kavalian under the command of General Koguth; for an instant after he left his feet; Nedoli roared his own anger and surged forward. These vile monsters had taken the daughter of the woman he had come to covet and love more than his own life in so short a time. This was something Nedoli could not allow to take place. As Ceale staggered back in shock, she watched with wide eyes as first Koguth and then a dozen Kavalians and Lycavorians alike began to pour from the cave entrance and into the battle. Though most of the Kavalians were technicians and members of their now destroyed ship, there were still nearly fourteen that were full fledged soldiers of the Juturi Pride and in a rush of large and powerful bodies, those men joined the dozen Lycavorians and elves who were part of Yuriko's team as they plowed through the cover of thick foliage intent on destruction and death.

Serale ignored the pain in her back from where the beast had tossed her to the ground and she beat on the shoulders and head of the Svorag who had pinned her to the hard forest floor with his weight. He straddled her midsection obscenely, trying to grasp her flailing arms as more of his kind moved closer. He roared his anger as her blows landed, causing him no pain, but making it difficult for him to stab his tongue down into her throat and make her docile enough to insert his appendages and begin the transformation. His clawed hands finally were able to grasp her thrashing wrists and slam them to the ground none too kindly. Serale cried out in surprise as sharp jolts of pain shot through her arms causing them to go almost numb. She looked up into the ghastly face of the creature above her and saw its misshapen face snarl and shower her with warm saliva. Her eyes grew wide in disgust and fear as the lower portion of the armor like protrusion on its jaw lifted away to reveal the tentacle like tongue. A inch thick and easily more than a foot long, Serale's eyes grew wide in even more terror as she realized what the monster was intending to do.

“NO!” She screamed trying to twist her body this way and that to dislodge him. “Get away! No!” She wailed to no avail.

Serale tried to fight the beast but he was far stronger than her. A flash through her bright mind of what she was going to lose if she gave up infused her with a burst of strength. Kalis's handsome face and soft lips and his powerful arms holding her. The future she could have with him after finding him amongst such misery and pain. She tried to heave her lower body off the ground and succeeded in lifting the Svorag perhaps four inches off the ground just as it roared out its frustration and plunged its tongue toward her mouth. Her motion, unbeknownst to Serale, quickened the Svorag's death.

The deep throated roar that drowned out all other noise was unlike any that Serale and obviously the Svorag had ever heard before. This caused both their heads to snap around to the side to see the towering figure of Kalis Leonidas, his lips curled back in a twisted, savage snarl, revealing the long and incredibly lethal dual set of fangs exclusive to the Leonidas family and those they had turned. His eyes were changed, the dark rings around his blue pupils larger than Serale had ever seen and his face a mask of pure, unadulterated rage. The roar that leaped from his throat was that of an Alpha wolf gripped in the effects of a berserker rage. His whole body trembled as spittle flew from his open mouth and the sound that came out chilled Serale right to her center. It chilled her, but the expression and near partial transformation that had come over him did not frighten her in the least. If anything, Serale felt her love for him become even more complete as he revealed to her what he truly was beneath his handsome features.

“Kalis!” She screamed then, drawing the Svorag's attention back to her and making him snap his tongue forward towards her parted lips far faster than the eye could follow.

The Svorag's twisted eyes grew wide when something gripped the center of his tongue long before it ever reached the female's mouth. He had a split second to shift his eyes to where Kalis stood, as if expecting him to be swarmed over by his comrades and then Kalis wrenched his hand back with all his strength. The Svorag felt a momentary tearing of flesh and then hot, searing agony filled his mind as Kalis tore his tongue from his head right down to the root. Yellowish gray blood splashed wetly on Serale's chest and Kalis's arm as the Svorag reared back in horrific anguish, his hands releasing Serale and reaching for his head. His hands never reached his head as Kalis tossed the vile appendage into the brush nearby and took two steps forward. Due to Serale's actions, the Svorag's head was at the perfect height and he drove his large hand forward; the calloused fingers bent inward and forming an angular, almost pointed hammer. Into this blow Kalis poured all of his rage and all of his might. It represented all he had endured under the cruel yoke of his father. All the anger and the beatings directed at him for some perceived failure or another. All the mistreatment and never one iota of praise. The foul words and looks of disgust. It also was the first blow Kalis had ever thrown in defense of love. His love for the exquisite young Hadarian woman who had shown him that there was so much more to live and breathe for. The obvious pleasures and the delights he could experience with her; but also the laughter and moments of joy he could also experience. That is what fueled the blow, and while it was a lethal attack to begin with, even Kalis was unprepared for what the force of his strike would do. What the combined strength of his Lycavorian and Kavalian blood could produce if driven by the forces that filled him now.

Kalis's knuckles impacted the Svorag's lightly armored jaw just above what would have been his cheekbone. The audible sound of his armored cheek cracking and shattering was grisly to hear as the force of the strike first crushed and then shattered every bone in the side of his face. The Svorag's head snapped nearly completely around, his neck popping like the sound of a branch breaking and his body went completely limp instantly. Kalis did not stop there though as he stepped into the blow and using his large hands he grasped the Svorag's malformed head and twisted it savagely even more, lifting the now dead Svorag from atop his beautiful Serale with the ease of lifting a newborn baby. With a roar that was in every way equal to the one he has just released, Kalis heaved the large body of the Svorag away, watching as the limbs danced about wildly while his limp body crashed through the trees and light brush. It landed at the feet of three other Svorag some ten meters away who had stopped in their tracks, stunned at how easily this alien thing had killed one of their own.

As Mata and Nedoli and the others began to swarm around him with their weapons out, Kalis turned immediately to look at Serale and he dropped to his knees beside her. "Serale!" He panted, instinctively reaching for her and pulling her into his arms.

"Kalis!" Serale gasped. It was at that exact moment that Serale truly knew how much she had fallen in love with him. She reached for him just as he did for her and she felt a wave of desire and passion sweep through her unlike anything she had yet experienced in her nineteen years of life as his arms crushed her to his broad chest and she buried her face in the hollow of his throat. She felt his cheek pressed to her head, felt him inhale deeply of her scent and pull her to him intending to die protecting her.

"Stand ready!" Mata's voice echoed. "They will attack!"

Kalis turned quickly to see Mata and the others forming a protective barrier around him and Serale, Koguth and Nedoli among those who had rushed from the cave. They were shoulder to shoulder with Lycavorians and did not even blink. His changed eyes darted to where Yuriko settled next to Mata without hesitation, her eyes now the cobalt blue eyes of her vampire nature and fully exposed as she held the P190A4 at the ready.

"Sound off! How many? Check your fields of fire!" Koguth shouted out the orders as it came so naturally to him to do. He was no stranger to battle and in actuality, he was a superb commander of men. "Watch the flanks! Short bursts! Aim for their center!"

"Left flank General!" A Lycavorian shouted out.

"Right flank sir!" A Kavalian answered.

Yuriko looked at Mata as both Lycavorian and Kavalian troops called out their fields of fire to Koguth with barely a hiccup in their answers. That they were reporting to a man who, not so long ago, would have been their enemy did not seem to faze them in the least. More of the Svorag began to appear from the trees and make themselves seen. "I don't think they are going to be happy!" She shouted.

"Fuck them!" Koguth screamed in reply. "They will be even less happy when they die at our hands!"

Yuriko felt a familiar surge through her and her cobalt blue eyes grew wide. “Papa!” She gasped loudly.

Kalis felt it too now, fully engulfed in the sensations and the meaning of the blood that flowed through his veins, as he now was. He had never felt anything quite like it in his young life. Overwhelming, pure, focused and flawless power. It flowed over both of them like the warm embrace of a hot spring, embracing them and enveloping them completely. Kalis had never experienced anything like it before and it shook him down to his inner being. He could actually feel his uncle’s emotions to a certain extent. The awe-inspiring pride in the name he bore and in what Kalis had accomplished. It was almost a palpable thing for him and Kalis finally knew what it was like to know someone was proud of him. He could feel the irresistible need from his uncle to protect and support all that he loved and held dear. Then there was the carefully controlled anger that seethed and bubbled beneath the surface like an unexploded mega volcano. Kalis and Yuriko turned at the same time to look behind them and slightly above their position. Unlike the last time he had seen this sight, what Kalis saw now filled him with wonder and untarnished pride at the door he had so willingly stepped through this day. A door that allowed who he was meant to be to finally come out.

“Father!” Yuriko let out the excited scream, causing Koguth and all the others to turn to look behind them.

Martin Leonidas stood in the center of the single line of men and one woman. Danny stood to his right, Murano to his left. Julie, Kenny, T'lolt, Pablo and Tony making up the eight person line. Kasdan was bent over at the waist beside Kenny on the far end just behind T'lolt drawing in deep breaths as he tried to recover from the incredible sprint they had just conducted over the last kilometer to get here.

Kalis looked at the tall, armored form of his uncle and those with him, taking in the well muscled shape and the raw power that radiated from him like a burning sun. His Spartan helm covered his head and all but his eyes and a narrow portion of his lips, but Kalis could see the dual fangs that were bared in a unique combination of anger and utter control. The yellow/gold eyes blazed from under that helmet, the high plume with six different shades of soft horse hair blowing gently in the wind. The hair color of each of his uncle’s Queens Kalis knew. He carried no firearm, only a strange looking tubular object in his right hand and his extended Nehtes in his left.

“This a private party Yuriko?” Danny barked out the words from beside the man he had called brother since they were babies. “Or can anyone join in?”

If all of them thought Kalis’s roar was something to behold, the sound that escaped the throat of Martin Leonidas was much deeper, much louder and far longer. It held so much more power and domination in it. Even under the Spartan helmet, his dual fangs were now fully bared as he roared out his emotions for all to hear and Kalis could only shudder at the length and sheer utter terror those fangs could elicit from someone who didn’t know better. As with Kalis, spittle flew from Martin’s lips, his changed wolf eyes nearly glowing in their intensity and everyone present could feel the vibration of the roar through the air shudder through their entire bodies.

“By all that I hold holy!” Kalis heard Mata mutter softly from beside him. “This... this is what we would have fought?”

“Shit! Now you have done it!” Julie quipped in a laconic tone of voice from beside the man she had called brother for equally as long as Danny. “Now you have done pissed him off!”

“Hah! Stupid motherfuckers!” Tony bellowed with a tone of jovial happiness. “T'lolt my Immortal brother! Let’s bring the pain!”

“Oh yes!” T'lolt echoed with his own shout of merriment.

With two screams of their own, Tony and T'lolt brought up the harness mounted 20mm chain guns secured to the front of their bodies and broke in opposite directions from the ends of the line as they mashed down on the firing control buttons gripped in their hands. The three barreled chain guns began to spin and suddenly there were four foot long tongues of flame leaping from the barrels, sending hot death down range with unerring accuracy.

“Now Martin!” Murano screamed as a light blue shimmering cloak enshrouded his entire body. He was feeding off the passion and emotion he felt in his fellow Praetorian and to him it was like he had been reborn all over again. He literally surged with power he hadn’t felt in millennia. “They are confused! We go now!”

With a snarl of rage Martin Leonidas bent his knees slightly, a similar light blue cloak wrapping around his form and then he launched himself across the nearly hundred meters of open terrain between him and the first rank of Svorag soldiers with Murano a heart beat behind him.

“Bring it you sonsofbitches!” Danny screamed as he, Julie, Kenny and Pablo formed a small wedged shaped wall, their weapons coming up and they charged into the battle with no pause in their actions or intent.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

While Cranae Island could have held them all easily, it was one of the reasons Andro had purchased the massive island and villa, Resumar and all of his brothers and sisters had chosen to stay at their own villas within the surrounding city of Gytheio. All of them were well within range of the island and only minutes away on their dragons or even by foot for Zarah and Lucia if they blurred. The only one to remain on the island and use one of the large guest apartments was Dorian, who did not yet have his own home.

The apartment was part of the family wing of the villa and entirely self contained. Six of these apartments were positioned across from each other, opening into the long courtyard and flower garden that ran down the center of the Family Wing. As the sunlight began to filter into the room from the large skylight above and touched her skin, Sheva Juconi shifted on the large bed and stretched her petite form under the thin sheet along the length of Dorian Leonidas’s tall, powerful body. She blinked several times and then opened her green eyes, seeing the side of his jaw and cheek from where her head rested on his shoulder. She lifted her head slightly and bit back the groan of blissful soreness. She dropped her head back to his naked shoulder with a smile of utter satisfaction and let out a long sigh of delight. Technically he may have only been a few months old, but Dorian Leonidas possessed the size, knowledge and sexual skill to leave her a whimpering mass of sated flesh. Never in her over three hundred years of life had any man given her such glorious pleasure in her bed. Never had any man devoted so much of his time to insuring she was screaming in delight before he took his own pleasure. Dorian never seemed to tire of her body or her for that matter. There were times when he would simply stare into her stunning eyes and she into his multicolored orbs and they each could see and feel everything the other was thinking and feeling. It was so completely surreal to her, yet it made her feel so totally fulfilled.

He had only taken her once the previous night, but that one time had lasted for nearly three hours and culminated in his fangs sinking deeply into her neck as they had every time they had made love since this affair began, resulting in them exploding together in a rapturous orgasm. Last night had been different however. So very different indeed.

Last night had been so utterly rapturous, that Sheva Juconi had forgotten her control and in the grips of her heavenly orgasm, she sank her vampiric fangs deeply into Dorian’s thick neck and fed on the most delicious blood she had ever tasted in her life. She remembered it vividly as she quivered and shuddered in the mind blowing orgasm, so warm and spicy with a hint of mint and lilacs in the flavor. Sheva tossed away all her stern control and clutched him possessively as she drank deeply of his delicious blood and he drank of hers, tripling the power and intensity of their mutual orgasm until they both collapsed on the bed unable to move. That is how they had fallen asleep, Sheva’s smaller body atop his, still impaled upon his impressive manhood.

Sheva Juconi stared at the side of his face now and knew that she was falling in love with him. Falling very hard and oh so very fast. It wasn’t supposed to be like this, but she could no longer refuse what she had denied herself for so long. What her heart was telling her she wanted more than anything. It was something she had denied herself in the hopes of some measure of revenge for her loss so long ago. A loss she had long put behind her. Young though he may have been, Dorian Leonidas shared both the memories and wisdom of his father and his dragon brother Ryner and Sheva could not deny she found that knowledge, coupled with his youthful playfulness, completely irresistible. Yes... she was in love with him. And while part of her questioned how she could have ever allowed it to happen, the other, dominant part wanted to insure it never went away. When he gazed upon her with those eyes of his she felt like the only woman in the universe and all of his desire and attention was focused entirely on her. As she lifted her upper body with her elbow, she held the sheet over

her breasts and gazed at his exposed flesh. She took in his broad tattooed chest and tattooed shoulder. The intricate tattoo was something that enhanced his persona in her eyes. He was simply put the most beautiful man she had ever laid her eyes upon. She was tiny compared to him, but there was no denying that she fit perfectly into his embrace. His skin was deeply tanned, even more than her own and her green eyes glance out of the skylight into the brightening sunlight. It was still very early, but the sun rose early in this part of the world she knew. Sheva chuckled softly for a brief moment at the legend perpetrated here on Earth from the human population on how sunlight could kill vampires in seconds. That had never been the case at all. Due mainly to the atmosphere on earth, the upper layers of the ionosphere protected them from the very lethal neutron radiation that came from Earth's sun, many of the vampires who lived on Earth spent hours outside on purpose. It was the perfect place to a vampire and had been a good hunting ground. Though the hunting part came to an end very quickly many hundreds of years ago.

Her eyes turned back to gaze at Dorian's face and she concluded with no doubt that he had stolen her heart. Against all her training and judgment she had fallen in love with him in so short a time and that frightened her to some extent because of what he was. Dorian Leonidas was a hybrid child of perhaps the two most lethal species in the universe that she knew of. While he would never have the raw power of his pureblood brother Androcles, physically he was more than a match for any pureblood vampire and many pureblood Lycavorians right now. Only a pureblood of either species, thousands of years old and with much more experience could hope to stand against him in any way. His strength and speed was something she had never witnessed and she had seen firsthand the aftermath of the abilities he commanded while on Solmar. She had talked to others who had been there and they had told her of what he had done. Dorian was being trained by his brother Androcles and Sheva knew very well that Androcles Leonidas and their father their King were considered without question, the foremost hand to hand combatants within the Union by even the most senior *Durcunusaan* and vampire instructors. And that was before they had discovered this magical power they all seemed to possess now. It was a power that intrigued her, but didn't matter to her in the least when held up to her growing feelings for him. As the warmth of Dorian's body reached for her she dismissed the thoughts forming in her head and lowered her body back to his and snuggled close. The wolf blood in his veins was very dominant and it allowed him to generate so much more body heat than the few vampire males who had shared her bed. His powerful arm lifted almost absently as she snuggled closer and curled around her shoulders to draw her tighter and Sheva smiled contently. It was the first time in her life that she felt like this and it was heavenly.

The door chime rang and rudely snapped Sheva out of her thoughts. Her head swung around towards the door and she lifted her body up, the sheet dropping away to reveal her firm globes. She heard Dorian groan softly and she looked back at him as he spoke to the air.

"I'm late! So sue me!" He snarled as his eyes opened and his face turned to look at her. He saw her firm breasts protruding proudly outward only inches from his face and he grinned devilishly. "I'll be there in a while!"

Sheva looked at him as he spoke out, her green eyes wide and she realized that he was speaking to someone within Mindvoice. "Dorian?" She questioned. "Who...?"

"Andro." Dorian answered her cutting off her question. "We were suppose to train this morning. I'm late."

"Does he...?" Sheva began to ask.

Dorian lifted his upper body and pressed his face between her firm breasts planting a soft kiss in the valley there. "Know you are here?" Dorian finished with a hint of humor in his voice. "It would be kind of hard to miss the scents that are probably filling the atrium after last night. You smell very good. So... I would say yes."

Sheva pushed him back reluctantly with a groan at his reply. "Dorian!" She gasped in horror.

He lifted his eyes to hers and smiled. "Sheva... Andro has known since our first night together on the *SCIMITAR*. His sense of smell is nearly as advanced as my father's. He could smell you all over me the next day. I'm sure others have noticed as well."

"Others? Who? Jomann?" Sheva spat with more venom than she intended. Sheva saw his beautiful eyes fill with hurt and he leaned back from her. The look in his eyes caused Sheva nearly as much pain in her heart and she lifted her fingers to her lips in horror at how she had reacted.

“I’m sorry if that bothers you Sheva. I... I thought you would have known that.” Dorian said softly. “I should... I should get dressed and meet Andro.”

Sheva watched as he turned slowly and tossed aside the sheet and began to rise out of the bed. His body was so completely beautiful to her, so lean and powerful. His cock was still so very impressive even in its flaccid state. He treated her as some rare gem to be worshiped and adored and still she fought the emotions that were so prominently filling her very essence. She had become so very confused and torn in the last few years and Dorian Leonidas had suddenly become the anchor she had been seeking from the very first day he had entered her life. The anchor and the reason for the conflict of her emotions. The conflict that was about to end right now. Holding the sheet over her upper body with one hand she reached out and grabbed his large hand with the other. “Dorian!” She nearly yelled his name. She watched as he turned slowly away from her. “Dori...” Sheva spoke the nickname his siblings had given him softly. She had thought it was a stupid nickname when they first started using it but it came from her lips as easily and smoothly as breathing. She spoke it almost reverently for that is the emotion that filled her. “Dori... I’m sorry.” She said.

Dorian moved quickly and knelt beside the bed, pulling her smaller frame close to him. Almost instinctively Sheva allowed his hands to grab her firm ass cheeks and pull her near and she chose to wrap her legs around his sides and lock her heels at the small of his back. His face was suddenly only inches from her and she could smell the sweet scent of his blood. His lips grazed hers and she couldn’t help the shudder of desire that coursed through her. “I know... I know you are not comfortable with this.” He said softly. “With me. I...”

Sheva shook her head and lifted her hand to place two fingers on his lips silencing his words. She knew what he was going to say and at the beginning she may have felt that way, but in the days since their first encounter she had fallen so deeply in love with him she was not going to allow him to blame himself.

Sheva shook her head and leaned forward, replacing her fingers with her lips and she kissed him tenderly. Passionately. With all the emotion she could bring to bear and then some she never knew she even had. Her body rejoiced when he reciprocated without hesitation. “No.” She said softly pulling her head back after a moment and looking at his surprised but happy face. “Don’t you dare... don’t speak those words Dorian.” She told him finally. “Not now.”

“Sheva Juconi... I love you.” He told her confidently. “With every breath that I take, I love you. I know that you believe I don’t know what I’m saying and that I’m too young and... I do not want you to be... I do not want to force you to believe something you do not. I...”

Sheva shook her head again. “No Dorian... it is I who needs to... who needs to open my eyes and believe what I see.” She said. “There is so much more out there in the universe than what I believe and understand and know. Meeting you... meeting you and then... and then falling in love with you has made me see that. I can’t dismiss it. I don’t want to dismiss it for it fills me with such happiness.”

Dorian’s eyes grew a little wider, the brown and cobalt blue orbs wide as he gazed at her. “You... you love me?” He gasped in surprise.

Sheva felt in control of her destiny for the first time in her life and she nodded her head confidently. She would no longer rail against her emotions and what they were telling her. This was a decision she was making of her own free will based on the emotions rushing through her so powerfully. She was smiling brilliantly as she nodded her head and took his handsome face in her small hands. “I... I can’t begin to describe how much I love you.” She told him with small tears running down her cheeks in happiness. “How much I want to be with you. What you make me feel. I’ve never felt this way for anyone Dori. Never in all my life and it feels... it makes me feel so alive.”

Dorian tilted his head slightly to the side and his right eyebrow lifted a little causing Sheva to smile. “Ok... what did you do with the Sheva Juconi that wanted to kick my ass a couple weeks ago?”

Sheva laughed heartily, genuinely and relished the peace it brought her. “She realized that everything she has ever wanted was right in front of her face and staring back at her.” Sheva said. “You... you are the son of King Leonidas and his vampire Queen Isabella. A Prince. Most woman would jump at the chance to experience what you have shown me.”

“Sheva... I don’t want any other women.” He told her rolling his eyes.

Sheva nodded her head. “And it is I who needs to understand that you are different. That something so very special happened to you and now you are so much more mature and wise than I.”

Dorian chuckled. "I wouldn't go that far exactly." He said. "Though it does sound pretty cool coming from you."

Sheva smiled and snapped her head forward playfully to grasp his lip between her teeth and nibble on his flesh. "You know what I mean." She said after she elicited the groan she wanted to hear from him.

Dorian smiled. "I can help you." He said. "I want to share so much with you... but you know how my family is. How Androcles and my father are. If... if you share my life... then that makes you a Princess of the Union no matter the world you knew before. They would expect you to be treated as such."

"I will remain *Durcunusaan* Dorian." Sheva told him firmly. "That is what I have come to love doing and..."

"I would never ask you to change that." He stated. "Sadi is Crown Princess... and she is still a pilot in the Union Fleet. Ne'Veha as well. You do not have to change who you are Sheva! I would never ask that of you."

Sheva's heart swelled with unrestrained emotion. Vast mixtures of emotions that were new to her, but cascaded through her and made every sense in her body sing in delight. She wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and shifted her body until she was pressing her groin up against his abdomen. "Sheva Juconi Leonidas." She spoke the words that rolled so easily off her lips. "That sounds simply divine."

Dorian covered her lips with his and crushed her to him as he stole her breath and her life away with the intensity of his kiss. He could curl her toes with his kisses and she whimpered in delight as she always did. Yes... Sheva Juconi was making the right choice. She could not cling to beliefs that were no longer her own. Age old hatreds that were fermented by twisted old men and were never hers to begin with. She had to let go of the past if she was ever to have a future and Sheva knew that future was right here in the arms and life of this man.

Now she had to live her own life and that is what she intended to do.

Gorgo stood in the doorway of the patio and watched as Andro and Dorian sat across from each other on the white sands of the beach near the water's edge. Elynth and Ryner sat behind their respected bonded brothers, their massive bodies resting comfortably on the sand. Elynth's right front talon was draped across Andro's right thigh as it usually was when they were deep in conversation, dwarfing his leg completely while Ryner's head was close enough to Dorian's shoulder for him to stroke the scales under his jaw without lifting his arm very high. Gorgo sipped her coffee slowly, her mind contemplating everything that had brought her to this moment in her life. Andro and Dorian were very different than their siblings Gorgo knew. They were different in such a unique way. The power they both could wield was something Gorgo did not fully appreciate but Shiria was making it easier for her to examine and comprehend all of it. Like their brother Denali and their father and Jomann, they held within them a force they could call on at will and it could be terrifying to behold.

Their father.

Even after all these years Gorgo still felt the joy she experienced the day Martin rescued her from that prison on Lycavore. The day she came to realize that the child she had thought lost so long ago was alive and well and had taken his father's place as King of not only Sparta, but the Lycavorian Union as well. Gorgo loved Riall with all that she was, but a part of her would forever and always belong to Leonidas. It was Martin, their child together that kept this connection alive within her. Riall knew she felt like this and he understood and fully accepted it, though Gorgo doubted he knew just how much she truly did love him. Gorgo turned when she smelled and felt Sadi and Lisisa come up behind her. Lisisa had arrived very early, knowing that Sadi and Ne'Veha were early risers themselves and she did not want to stay for very long in her and Denali's home without him and Arduri. She had free access to Andro's home as did all of his siblings and when she arrived this morning Sadi already had the coffee made and she and Ne'Veha were sitting on the couch going over the schematics on some new ship that Ben's engineers were building for them. Gorgo smiled at them as they approached for she knew that Sadi's reputation was growing by leaps and bounds among their people and Lisisa was already hugely popular. She motioned with her head to where Andro and Dorian sat.

"Do they do that often?" She asked looking at Sadi.

Sadi nodded as she sipped her mug. "More so since Solmar." Sadi answered. "Dorian's powers are manifesting themselves much quicker because of his accelerated birth and growth. Andro is really the only one who can guide him because they are the same."

"Because they were both bonded to dragons before they were born and became aware while still in the womb?" Lisisa asked.

Sadi nodded again looking at her. "It's not easy having the memories and thoughts of generations within your head." She said with a gentle smile. "Andro still struggles with it at times. He wakes in the middle of the night after some ghastly dream from a battle he never fought. Elynth is the same way. They usually end up flying off into the night and return in the morning after they have talked it through and soothed each other."

Gorgo nodded as she looked back to the brothers. "Aricia and Anja tell me Martin is the same way. A few nights a month he wakes in a cold sweat and they have to calm him. Then he usually flies off on Torma and returns a few hours later. I would imagine it is much worse for them because they became aware of life and could understand long before they were ready." She spoke motioning to Andro and Dorian.

"Andro calls it a curse sometimes." Sadi said softly. "He would not change anything... I know that... but there are times when he wished it wasn't so. Dorian is beginning to experience that now as well."

"It is my fault you know." Gorgo spoke looking back at them.

"Gorgo no! What they have become is not your fault!" Sadi exclaimed.

"Grandmother... Sadi is right... it is not your fault!" Lisisa quickly spoke.

Gorgo smiled. "Only three people know what I will tell you now. Not even my own son knows." She told them. "This new gene that we have discovered... this Paladin gene? The source of their power? Everyone thinks that it was active in my beloved Leonidas and just had not reached maturity. That isn't the case."

Sadi and Lisisa looked at her with surprise in her eyes. "But... I thought it... everyone says it was active within grandfather." Lisisa said.

Gorgo shook her head. "Leonidas was like you Sadi. The gene was present and though not entirely dormant, it was also not fully active. It allowed him to do what he did yes, but he was a warrior unequalled, a charismatic leader and masterful tactician even without the Paladin gene. Within me however... within me it was fully active and very much alive. Passed down from your great grandmother Eliani's lineage and bloodline. I passed this gene to Martin in a very active state and according to Shiria it bonded with the Paladin gene passed to him from Sumar through Leonidas. The strongest and most prominent holder of the gene. Shiria believes that even though dormant within Leonidas, the gene passed to him from Sumar took the gene I passed to him and merged them together into a near duplication of the gene Sumar himself possessed. It is all very confusing the way she described it, but she believes that is why Martin and his sons are equal to, if not more powerful than Sumar was." Gorgo saw the confusion in their eyes and she smiled gently. "I allowed Shiria to test the remains of Leonidas and Deia allowed her to test the remains of Resumar and Eliani. We wanted to be sure. In essence... everything they have endured and will endure is my fault." She said motioning to Andro and Dorian.

"Gorgo... you are not responsible for that! And neither Martin or Dorian or Denali would ever think badly of you because of this! It is incomprehensible that you hold this blame inside you and they would tell you that! And you certainly are not responsible for Andro and Dorian being born aware!" Sadi said. "You had no control over that."

"No... but the emotional state of Martin I *am* partially responsible for." Gorgo told them. "Shiria believes the active gene in my blood was absorbed by dormant gene within Leonidas's blood more than normally occurs because of the purity of our blood and the closeness to our Pralor ancestors. This increased the potency of the gene passed on to Martin as a whole. That is why it is so pronounced within Martin and now within Andro and Dorian and the others as I said. It passed over Pleistarchus for some reason and only passed to Martin. The gene within Aricia is also actively dormant Sadi, just like you and Leonidas. When combined with Martin's active gene... well you have seen what all of them can do. Deion and Nara are beginning to show signs as well." She sipped her coffee again. "The power of the Paladin gene Leonidas and I passed to Martin only served to enhance his emotional state and it even affected Aricia's gene more than it was. This caused the child they created... your mate Sadi... your brother Lisisa... this caused him to become aware while still in the womb. So in essence... I am responsible for all of it."

"But that would mean..." Sadi began to speak.

"That our mother Isabella has the gene as well!" Lisisa finished the statement with wide eyes.

Gorgo nodded her head in agreement. "Shiria believes the odds that there were Pralors with this gene on CS19 to be very high. Veldruk knew this because of Aikiro and that is why he kept me for so long. He wanted to learn all he could from me about this gene. It is why he never allowed Canth to pass on physically." Gorgo told them. "And your mother Isabella has always been an extremely emotional woman because of everything she endured while growing. Shiria believes that either Veldruk or Bella's mother carried the gene. She leans towards the mother because Aikiro would never have allowed Veldruk to roam about as he did if he was a carrier." Gorgo said.

"Grandmother... does that mean you could become what they are?" Lisisa asked her. "You could be a Praetorian like them?"

Gorgo shook her head quickly. "By the gods no." She gasped. "I have neither the skill nor willpower to harness the power as they have done. And to be honest... I would not want it. Shiria told me it was so very rare in the Pralors because there are so few who can call on and harness the immense willpower to control it. When Sumar merged the Pralors from his ship with our people on Lycavore he broke the cardinal rule among the Pralor people. A rule he himself began. They feared what this power could do in the hands of a species that were war like and violent. Just as we were as a people so long ago."

"We are not like that now!" Sadi gasped.

Gorgo shook her head. "No we are not. But Shiria believes Martin is going to have a hard time making the Pralor people they have discovered believe that. Only time will tell."

"You think that is why Martin wants us to join them?" Sadi asked.

Gorgo nodded. "I believe that is part of it yes." She replied. "As I said... only time will tell."

"Why hasn't Shiria returned now that father found Pralor survivors grandmother?" Lisisa asked.

Gorgo chuckled. "Her words to me were simple. She has no intention of returning to the emotionless, close minded fools who sent her away to begin with after experiencing the passion and life of our people and those Kavalians she associated with. She is a stubborn woman."

Sadi took her arm. "I know for a fact that Andro reveries you Gorgo." She said. "You carry a burden that is not yours to carry and your son and grandsons would tell you that if they knew you felt this way."

"Sadi is right grandmother." Lisisa told her.

"Perhaps." Gorgo spoke. "Speak of this with no one please. I do not wish to cause more issues. They have enough to deal with as it is."

Sadi looked at Lisisa and then back to Gorgo. "Come back inside Gorgo. Lisisa brought some Loukoumades that she made last night. They are delicious."

Lisisa chuckled as she took Gorgo's other arm. "I used your recipe grandmother." She said. "You'll have to tell me how I did. When I make them for Denali and Arduri I want them to be perfect."

Gorgo smiled as they drew her back into the villa. "Child... Denali and Arduri are not going to be concerned with Loukoumades when they see you once more." She said with a chuckle.

Lisisa's dark eyes simmered. "I know... neither will I. But we will need snacks for in between." She said with humor.

Gorgo laughed as they walked back into the villa.

"Won't go away *fervon*." Andro told him as they sat on the warm sand. "They will always be there. Keep at the techniques I taught you and soon you will be able to block them almost all of the time."

"Almost?" Dorian asked.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. "Even father cannot block them all." He said. "It is something we will need to accept and make part of us as the years pass. As I said... you will learn to block most of them and the others will fade into distant images and memories and not return often. There is a section in Tome Five, Section Eighteen I believe, that details such things and it was very helpful to Elynth and I."

[It allowed us to alter our focus enough to make the technique easier to learn.] Elynth spoke. [Once we read that, it was only a matter of a few days before it became so much easier.]

[We will read it tonight.] Ryner spoke lowering his snout enough to nudge Dorian's shoulder.

Dorian nodded his head. "Yes we will."

“So... tell me about Sheva *fervon*.” Andro asked him. “We’ve avoided the topic as long as we can.”

Dorian nodded. “I know.” He said softly. “I just... our times together... they are... I don’t want to... I feel as if I am betraying her.”

Andro smiled gently, understanding what his brother was saying. “I do not want the details Dori.” He said. “Those are for you and Sheva. I told you that I trust in your instincts and I do. I can smell her blood within you so I know you have tasted it. Leaving out everything you do not need to tell me... what have you discovered?”

Dorian looked at him. “She took my blood last night Andro.” He said.

Androcles was silent for a moment as he gazed at him and then he glanced up to Elynth before turning back to Dorian. “Then whatever doubts I may have had are now gone.” He said finally. “She could not have done that and be an agent of our enemy. I put aside any questions I had.”

[As have I.] Elynth spoke. *[Among vampires that is the pinnacle of an expression of love and devotion. It speaks to where her heart truly is.]*

Andro nodded. “Yes it does. More than anything.” He said. “Now... tell me what you have learned so that we can help her.”

Dorian took a deep breath. “She’s confused.” He said. “Her emotions are a whirlwind. She is filled with doubt and questions. About her role. Her purpose. Her beliefs.”

“About you?” Andro asked.

Dorian shook his head. “No. Her feelings for me are genuine and the only thing about herself that she doesn’t hide. I know what I feel Andro and...”

“Dorian... you don’t have to convince me.” Andro told him. “I’ve told you that. Have you learned anything that could help us help her? Or discovered more about her? What her mission is? Or was?”

Dorian met his eyes. “Given time... I know she would tell me.” He said. “When she looked at me this morning... her eyes... she wanted to tell me so much more. I know it. I just need time to make her see that I love only her and that she can trust me no matter what.”

[She has had extensive training if you cannot see these things within her mind after taking her blood Dorian.] Elynth said.

Dorian nodded. “I assume she was trained by the *Venorik Elghinn*. They would be the only ones capable of training her to suppress her emotions and feelings like she has.”

“Well... they didn’t train her well enough.” Andro stated. “She did not strike me as someone who would follow an ideology blindly. If she has doubts about her beliefs that tells me something.”

Dorian looked at him. “What?”

“That she was not born here within the Union as her records indicate.” Andro explained. “No vampire born within the Union would harbor any doubts about their beliefs. None of them adhere to what the Coven once stood for.”

Dorian caught the meaning behind his statement. “That would mean she was placed here by someone.” He said.

Andro nodded. “She is over three hundred years old... and she may very well have been here since before father returned and assumed his role as King.”

[She resisted being assigned to you at first Brother.] Ryner spoke *[Remember?]*

Dorian nodded and looked at Andro. “I could sense it from her when I was growing. It was faint... she was guarding it well... but when mother assigned her to me she was very upset Andro.”

[Perhaps your mother was the reason she was here.] Elynth stated. *[We know her father tried to have her killed many years ago. Who is to say vile Aikiro would not continue this. She was far more devious and cruel than Veldruk could ever be.]*

Andro turned his head and looked at Elynth. “An interesting premise Sister.” He spoke softly. “If she was sent here to strike at mother at some preordained time?”

“Andro she wouldn’t.” Dorian defended her. “Not now!”

Andro shook his head quickly. “Oh... do not misunderstand my statement *fervon*... I don’t believe she could now either Dorian. But perhaps that was her original mission.” He said. “Jomann told me there was some anger within her when she was first assigned to you. He didn’t think anything of it at first... but it would explain quite a bit. She wanted to remain part of mother’s detail.” Andro shook his head slowly. “Aikiro would

not bother with mother.” He said thoughtfully. “She was an arrogant *upae* and did not think mother anywhere in her league. No... this is someone else.”

[*Yuri?*] Elynth asked.

Andro looked at her. “That is what I first thought.” He answered. “But I am not so sure now. Thinking back on what we felt within her Sister... the emotions that were all new to her. Those she had embraced? She has spent months trying to fix her mistakes and she is succeeding at it.”

“You’re keeping tabs on her?” Dorian asked.

Andro nodded his head. “She knew I would. I think she even welcomed it to be honest. Her desire to show that she has changed... that her life moves on a different path is very strong in her now.”

[*If not this... Yuri... then who?*] Ryner asked now.

“That is a good question Ryner.” Andro spoke. “Narice has enemies. Powerful enemies. Arrarn has told me of one or two purebloods with the access and means to employ an assassin of the Venorik Elghinn. I question what their purpose would be by coming after you or our mother.”

[*She has been here far longer than the recent events that happened within the Coven my bonded one.*] Elynth said.

Andro nodded. “Yes. But if she is a sleeper agent... that would have been her purpose. To wait until called upon and then act.” He looked at Dorian. “Though I’m quite sure whatever her mission may have been, she is no longer going to carry it out because of what she feels for you Fervon. If she was... she would never have taken your blood.”

“I think she will tell me.” Dorian said. “I think she will tell me everything if given the time Andro.”

Andro nodded his head slowly. “You may be right Dori.” He said finally. “Regardless... her movements and actions will not be hindered in any way. She is a senior officer of the *Durcunusaan* and if she has forsaken her old masters then I will not take from her the trust she has earned while among us. If she has not forsaken her old masters... then she will only bury herself in time.”

“We should have Nesa’s people look beyond just the information in her file.” Dorian said. “Try to pinpoint when she got here and how. What events were occurring when she came here. Everything.”

Andro nodded in agreement. “I will let Armetus and Marci know and they will pass it on. With the influx of volunteers from EI since what happen to our elven mothers, they have more than enough experienced men and women.”

Dorian looked at him. “When are we leaving?” He asked.

“End of the week at the latest.” Andro answered him immediately. “We’ll continue with our lessons though. To be honest... it is very soothing for both Elynth and I to know that we are not alone.”

Elynth nodded her massive head. [*Yes it is.*] She said.

“We’re bringing an assortment of people with us.” Andro told him. “I’m going to form an entirely new unit from a combination of those who fought on Solmar with us. We meshed well together and there is no reason to think we cannot do even more.”

Dorian nodded. “Sounds reasonable.” He said.

Andro chuckled. “I’m glad you agree. I’m making you second in command.”

Dorian looked at him wide eyed. “Me?” He gasped. “Andro... that... that’s insane!” He stammered.

“Not in the least.” He told him. “Though there are quite a few who have called me that in the past.”

Andro said. “Quite a few of the senior *Durcunusaan* and others said you performed exceptionally.”

“I had no clue what I was doing!” Dorian exclaimed.

Andro laughed. “Gee... that’s kind of how we learned too.” He said stroking Elynth’s talon with his fingers.

Dorian and Ryner heard her chuckled softly within Mindvoice. [*Oh that is so very true.*] She echoed Andro’s words.

“Resumar has established himself with the Kavalians.” Andro said. “They trust him. If I pull him out now they will question our resolve. And Res won’t let me do that. Father believes they can win and so do we. Arrarn is a pilot by his very nature... and Narice needs him where he is. As Defense Minister... he can help to shape the Coven the way Narice wants to. And... worst case scenario... only he will know how to get them out alive if things go bad.” Andro told him. “Besides... I will need you to help Jomann and I to school Deion and Nara on the trip.”

“Me?” Dorian said. “I’m still learning what I can do.”

Andro nodded. “We all are *Fervon*.” He said. “But like me... your affinity to our Etheric connection is more refined than Jomann. He is more experienced yes... but it comes naturally to us where he has to concentrate. Deion and Nara will need that.”

“You’re going to pull them out of their Agoge?” Dorian asked.

Andro nodded. “They will learn more from us over the last few months. I will bring three senior instructors to assist in their other schooling... but I have a feeling father meant for all of us who have this gene to join with him. There is purpose to his actions and the more of us there are the better I think.”

“What do you believe is going on?” Dorian asked.

Andro shrugged. “Let’s just call it a hunch.” He replied. “There is always purpose to father’s actions though none may be seen right away. He specifically asked that you, Jomann and Deni be with me. That tells me he wants those of us with this gene because we will be needed. Our skills will be needed.” He explained. “Deion and Nara are becoming stronger by the day within the Etheric realm. I know you can feel them.”

Dorian nodded. “Yes.”

“Then they are better off with us refining those skills with us as much as possible before we get to where father and our mothers are.” Andro spoke.

Dorian looked at him. “And Sheva?”

Andro didn’t hesitate. “She is your wife and mate now *Fervon*.” He answered. “Where you go... she goes. Something tells me she would not let it be otherwise. Not now that she has found you.”

“And her history?” Dorian asked.

“If we are lucky... we can discover what it is before we reach father’s location.” Andro said. He shrugged his shoulders. “It doesn’t matter to me now. She has shown where her heart and mind resides by her own actions. They belong to you. As far as I am concerned... that is all the proof I need.”

“Thank you *Fervon*.” Dorian said.

Andro shook his head as he got to his feet. “There is no need to thank me.” He said as he pulled his brother up and draped his arm over his shoulders. “I only do what is right.” He said. “Now let’s head back... Jomann should be arriving shortly with Daio and the others and we can begin putting our people together.”

Dorian lifted his arm and put it across Andro’s shoulders as they walked and he smiled. “This ought to be very interesting.” He said.

Kameka glanced out the small window in the *STRIKER AT* Transport once more as they circled the island below and began to descend towards the landing pad near the center of the collection of buildings in the middle of the island. She turned back to look at Daio who was reading from the data pad in his right hand. They sat in the pair of chairs near the rear of the transport with everyone else in front of them. Daio’s left hand rested possessively on her thigh, Meka’s long tail draped across his hand extending up his arm, the tip of it gently tapping the side of his forearm in contented happiness. Kameka’s thoughts quickly went to the previous evening at his home in Sparta as she gazed at him and she felt sexual warmth and emotional happiness flush her body at what he had made her feel and experience. He had made her a delicious dinner, fussing over her endlessly until she had tasted all of the food and could eat no more. Kameka could easily sense what he wanted, see it in his eyes, but it was controlled and measured. She was frightened at first knowing that he wanted her so, but she quickly pushed that fear aside and acted as her heart and mind told her to act. Daio was no Marsin and he would never treat her that way. She practically had to force herself on him at first, so desperately did she want him as well, but once he got the message he quickly came around.

Kameka could not begin to put into words what he had made her feel and what she knew would now belong to her forever. She knew enough about Lycavorian culture from her study of dragons to know that he had scented her heavily during their lovemaking, lavishing her with licks and nibbles and kisses while she quivered in delightful abandon within his arms. He was claiming her as his own and making sure no other Lycavorian male would come near her. This knowledge alone, that a man could desire her in such a way, it caused Meka to shudder in further bliss. Kameka knew a Lycavorian did not scent any female unless their intentions were honorable and meant to be very long term, and this suited Kameka perfectly for it was

something she never imagined she would ever have. How could she not want or desire a man who treated her in such a way? She did not know how much other Lycavorians would accept this, but it didn't matter to her. Kameka knew he would acknowledge their pairing officially when he spoke with her father, but he had already made sure she had no doubts about what he felt and what he intended. He was so very handsome to her... the most beautiful man she had ever seen... and he treated her like a rare flower. Their lovemaking had been very intense at times, both their instincts emerging, but it was so very gentle and filled with emotion as well. His body was far more sculpted than Marsin's form; rippling with muscle everywhere she grasped him. Each of his kisses, each of his explosions of passion into her, it stripped away the shame of the life she had endured for so long and tossed it away. Kameka had willingly done things to Daio that she would never have done to Marsin unless he forced her and the pleasure she got from watching Daio shudder under her touch was more than enough reward.

All the misery at the hands of Marsin, the rapes and beatings, the pain... Daio had washed it all away in the space of six exquisite hours. She had told him this with tear filled eyes and he had simply smiled at her and stroked her lips. His words then had mattered more to her than any actions.

“You are mine Kameka’Caleo. And I intend to show you every day for the rest of our years that you are the most desirable and delicious woman I have ever known. I will make your father see that I love you. And we will have many children to raise and teach of our love and both our cultures.”

Kameka had been laying in his arms contemplating this when the transmission came that told him to report to Cranae Island with her. She didn't understand why she was supposed to come and she held a small bit of fear inside her wondering about this. She wouldn't let it stop her though. She had found everything she had ever desired in this man and nothing would take him from her now. She let her dark eyes shift to the others who sat on the transport with them. One of them she recognized from the Battle of Solmar. The human female who had commanded the incredible armored soldiers she had seen pummel the Puma Bane troops into pulp. She wore a uniform now, decorated with many colorful ribbons, telling Kameka she was important. She recognized the two senior Kavalian officers from the meeting, aides to Pian, both wearing civilian clothes and looking very well groomed as they discussed something they were reading. Her eyes shifted shyly to where the Prime Minister of the Union sat with the older, nearly white haired man whispering quietly between themselves. She knew who Deia was... there were few who did not... but Kameka also felt she would have more hatred for her because of what had happened. Deia still used her hover chair to move around even though she was regaining her strength on a regular basis and would soon be able to leave it behind altogether. Kameka knew her injuries had been severe and painful and she wondered if the woman felt hate towards her because of her species.

[She does not.] The female voice whispered within her thoughts.

Kameka stiffened slightly, causing Daio to look up as she looked around slowly. “Meka? Are you ok?” He asked quickly.

Meka turned her eyes to him and saw the concern on his face. She smiled and nodded her head just as quickly. “Yes.” She answered warmly staring into his handsome face. “I'm fine.” She smiled and waited for Daio to turn back to his pad and then her eyes darted towards the front of the ship searching for the source of the words. She had heard them in her head and knew that was not natural.

[He can not hear me child. No one can I assure you. And no you are not going crazy. I have established this link between the two of us alone. Being the Senior Mage of Sparta, working with the Feravomir and helping to raise the Leonidas children, it has afforded me some abilities that even members of the Durcunusaan do not have.] The woman's voice echoed softly within her mind once more. It was a sweet and warm voice, reminding Meka of her mother's voice.

[Who... who are you? Where... where are you?] Meka reached out tentatively and held back the gasp of surprise at how easy it was for her to speak with her mind.

[Three rows up child. Aisle seat.]

Meka cut her dark eyes and they settled on the incredibly beautiful elven female with long blond hair and stunning blue eyes sitting beside the equally beautiful blond haired elven female. Her ears were only half the size and Kameka immediately deduced she was a child of elven and Lycavorian parents. The woman wore an almost elaborate set of robes that flowed around her form but did not hide the fact that she had an incredible

figure. Her four inch high elven ears curved elegantly upward and angled towards her head, the tips poking through her strands of thick hair near the top.

[My name is Thr'won. Senior Mage to the City of Sparta and the King's family.] Thr'won answered her and Meka saw her smile. *[Forgive me for intruding on your thoughts child but they have been rather... provocative... since you came onboard. Daio laid claim to you last night didn't he? He bit you?]*

[How... how do you know that?] Meka gasped within her mind.

Thr'won smiled widely. *[It is no different than what my mate and husband did.]* She replied. *[Almost five hundred years ago. Thankfully I had better control of my Mindvoice skill then. You have not had that opportunity. I've been blocking your surface thoughts from affecting everyone on the ship who could sense them. It wasn't a deep bite I hope?]*

Meka shook her head slowly, almost shyly. *[Just a small... just a scratch really.]*

Thr'won nodded. *[A scratch is all that is needed child.]* She told her. *[It will not change you as it does others... but that small scratch began the transformation.]*

[Transformation?] Meka asked with a touch of fear in her voice.

[Kavalian you may be Kameka' Caleo... but the virus in a pureblood of our species will still affect you. If only slightly. You will find your senses will become far more attuned to the things around you as time passes. And it granted you the gift of Mindvoicing.] Thr'won told her.

[But you... you are elven.] Kameka said.

[I became part Lycavorian the day my husband and mate changed me.] Thr'won answered with a smile. *[And I have embraced that part of me ever since.]*

[You seem to know an awful lot about me.] Kameka said defensively.

Thr'won chuckled. *[You have no need to fear me child.]* She stated. *[Daio is a member of the Durcunusaan and Androcles's personal team now. There is little Andro does not know of those close to him.]*

[Personal team?] Kameka asked her.

Thr'won nodded from her seat. *[Androcles is doing what his father did so long ago. He is building a team of his own. Some of the finest trained men and women in the Union. Men and women he trusts more than anyone else. Daio is now part of that team though he does not yet realize it. As are you.]*

[Me?] Kameka gasped.

Thr'won smiled again. *[You will see child. You will see.]* She spoke. *[I can feel your happiness Kameka' Caleo. It makes your essence burn brightly. Your scent saturates the area around you and tells everyone that you love Daio deeply. That love will grow and prosper over time. He will worship the ground you walk upon child... guard you against all harm... and give you all you have ever wanted. It is the way of Lycavorian men... you know that.]*

Kameka glanced quickly at Daio and then back to her. *[I cannot begin to... I do not know how to put it into words.]* She said.

[Then don't try to.] Thr'won told her. *[And just revel in what he makes you feel.]*

[I am Kavalian. I do not want that to... to hurt him in any way.] Kameka said quickly.

[That is something you need not worry about.] Thr'won told her. *[All you need do is look at how Athani is viewed by our people. She is Resumar's beloved wife and a Princess of the Union. Our people learn to quickly look beyond the outer shell of an individual and to their inner core. That is what matters to us. It is why Andro and so many others have embraced Pian and Jalersi and the others and what they want to do. You need not worry about how you will be viewed child. Not here.]*

[Do you know why Daio was told to bring me?] Kameka asked her.

Thr'won gazed at her. *[I do.]* She said. *[There is little that Andro and his family do not share with me. And I will leave it for you to discover. Just know that Androcles's wives and mates wield nearly as much influence and power as he does. And like his mothers... they know how to use it. You will see.]*

[I don't understand.] Kameka told her. *[What could they possibly want with me?]*

[Have faith child.] Thr'won told her. *[And know that I will gladly help you to learn about your new skills if you like. At least the parts your new husband and mate will probably forget to teach you. You haven't told him?]*

Kameka looked down shyly. *[I... I wasn't fully convinced myself until just now.]*

[We will speak more on Cranae Island.] Thr'won said. *[But Sadi and Carisia will help you to adjust and learn even more than I will. They have been using their Etheric abilities longer than Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. Sehri is an unknown to me right now, but that is also one of the reasons I am going to the island. I've been working with her.]* Thr'won felt the transport shift and begin to descend. *[Kavalian you may be child... but you are also one of us. All you need do is reach out and we will help you. Embrace the new life the Gods have granted you.]*

Kameka met her eyes and smiled. *[I intend to.]* She answered confidently.

[Good. We will speak more soon. I will leave you to discover where your new path and life will lead you.] Thr'won said. *[I don't think you will be disappointed in the least.]*

“...concerned do we need to be when it comes to these Vanari Andro?” Jomann asked as they stood on the patio of the villa.

Andro turned from looking at the ocean surface and looked at him. He lifted the mug of his mother's coffee and took a long pull from it. They both wore casual clothes now, though as Andro's Durcunusaan Captain, Jomann still wore his KM14 and his *Nehtes*. Jomann gripped the oversized mug in his hand, letting the sweet scent of the coffee drift to his nose. Aricia's special blend of coffee had become almost exclusive to the Durcunusaan in what they drank. It was not simply because she was queen, but the different blend of beans gave the coffee an extra rich flavor that appealed to many Lycavorians and other species that enjoyed strong flavored food and drink. It was a very exclusive item across the Union and it had made the Leonidas family very wealthy when added to the many different business deals that Martin had worked over the course of the years.

The Leonidas family as a whole was worth well over five hundred billion Riyal, Martin and Androcles ranking among the wealthiest of their family at over a hundred billion Riyal in worth apiece and making them one of the wealthiest families within the Union. Aricia came next in individual wealth because of her coffee business, with Anja, Isabella, Dysea and then For'mya following in that order. Among their children, Andro was the wealthiest followed by Eliani, Resumar and then surprisingly, Zarah and Lisisa. As with every other wealthy family, millions and millions of Riyal from their wealth was poured back into society in ways to insure that there was no poverty within the Union. While most would never achieve the wealth they had... no one went without anything within the borders of the Lycavorian Union and almost everyone could live a very comfortable life.

Jomann's family now owned and ran three different large cafés and eateries within Sparta and Eden City and all of their children had a stake in the profits from this business. Jomann had invested well, like his mother, and he would never want for anything. Combined with Eliani's wealth, they rivaled Andro and Sadi in their business interests. It was very customary among Lycavorians, especially those who had remained true to many of their old customs, for mates to combined their wealth and assets when they joined their lives together and it was one part of the many reasons why poverty no longer had a hold in their society. Eliani knew of her husband's love of her mother's coffee and she had bought him a silver lined steel mug almost double the size of normal mugs for him to drink from. He had not parted with the mug since and when not fighting it was one thing everyone had grown accustomed to seeing him carrying in his hand. Jomann had been a fast riser within the ranks of the Durcunusaan well before he had met Eliani, but his union with the petite and fiery red haired daughter of Martin and Anja Leonidas had elevated him to an even higher status. To see them together was a sight indeed, with Jomann reaching nearly six foot three and Eliani barely reaching five foot five, but it was plain even to those who did not know them that they were a perfect match. Jomann and Eliani were one of the exceptionally rare cases of non-pureblood *Anomes* within the Union's history. Daniel and Anuk Simpson were the only other known pair of *Anomes* where the female was not a pureblood. Their devotion to each other was easily seen in the way they looked and acted with each other, and like her mother, Eliani Leonidas was extremely protective of her mate. Though together barely a year now, many men and women were commenting how they acted like they had been together for decades.

Jomann's life became complete in every way when he met Eliani Leonidas. He had known other females in his years, but until Eliani's maple wheat and slightly honey scent had touched his nose, nothing had even come close. Her scent alone was enough to enflame the blood in his veins, but to know she was every bit as

adventurous and exciting as her mother was something of a surprise. She was stubborn and intensely independent openly, but in the privacy of their home and lives she was almost submissive to him. It took him a few weeks to accept this because he did not want her to be submissive to him, but in the end it was something that she wanted and enjoyed and even encouraged. She was also the most intensely passionate and adventurous woman he had ever known or shared a bed with. Their bond as Anomes allowed them to know exactly what the other desired and liked and wanted and this only added to the pleasure and passion they gave to each other. It also allowed them to know that they both desired Brendi Faith badly. Given her upbringing however, they were pursuing her in a manner that they hoped would eventually lead her into their arms, but also not scare her away and allow her to see that a relationship with them was also what she wanted.

Andro met his Captain's eyes and shrugged his broad shoulders. As with Dutkne, Andro held nothing back from Jomann, especially now. Their power and abilities set them apart from others and they knew what the power of their Praetorian blood could do and how it bound them together.

"To be honest Jomann... I don't have a clue." Andro said. "Dorian asked me that the other day and I still don't have an answer."

Jomann smiled. "Is there an answer?" He asked.

"Maybe not." Andro agreed. "I will not tolerate their government as a whole in the way they treat our people and I will go through with what Denali told them. If they refuse to change and start to think of us as equals rather than inferior they can go straight to hell. I'll yank all treaties and pacts they had with the Protectorate and let the chips fall where they may."

"What does Deni say?" Jomann asked.

"Sehri's father apparently has gotten himself included into the small circle of people that the OSG deals with." Andro said. "They had approached him before but he rebuffed them. It is a way for them to discover just how deeply imbedded the OSG is within the Vanari government and its agents. Coren Re Mydala is pressing from his political end while Dutkne and Deni work on discovering where each and every OSG base of operations is. They are maintaining a low key approach but Deni says he can feel the distrust coming from many of the Vanari Regents. It is misplaced because of the false information they have been given for so long." Andro looked at him. "They are pretty sure the OSG is tied to the Kavalians in some way, and part of the reason the Vanari feel the way they do, but they just don't have proof yet."

Jomann sipped his coffee. "Tied to them how?"

"The criminal element here in Alpha Quadrant anyway." Andro told him. "Deni believes the Kavalians fund them under the table through front organizations and companies. That criminal group are the ones who made contact with the OSG in the beginning and then worked the deals to take Vanari females prisoner."

"We know who they are?" Jomann asked. "Let's have UI take them out. Marci and Armetus would jump at that chance."

Andro shook his head. "We don't know the leaders." He replied. "And Deni is pretty sure that some of them at least are Lycavorian. Within the Protectorate and here in the Union. High ranking people too, otherwise they could not have remained hidden for so long. They would need the funding and the assets to cover the trail back to them."

"*Nubous* slavers!" Jomann hissed harshly. "I hate them!"

Andro nodded. "So do I." He added. "I always have... but like my father I think I gained a special hatred for them when I took Ne'Veha and Lu'ria as my mates. The elves have an even longer history than our people with slavery."

Jomann nodded. "Ain't that the truth?" He said softly. "Andro... how did the Kavalians know where to reach out within the Beta Quadrant. Or even how?"

Andro met his eyes. "Shiria believes, and my father agrees, that Keleru is not everything he says he is. He is Kavalian yes... but Shiria believes he may actually be more like Muton and his followers. Descendants of Pralors."

"You're serious?" Jomann gasped.

Andro nodded. "It is a thought my father has had before and once he was able to talk to Shiria for a time he believes it firmly and now so does she. It would explain a great deal... but there again... we have no proof."

"*Nubou lae!*" Jomann rasped out the words.

Andro grinned. "You have been hanging out with my sister too long. You are picking up her distinct ability to hit the nail on the head in a couple of words."

Jomann chuckled and thought briefly of his petite, but fiery young mate and wife. He nodded his head. "I suppose I am." He stated.

"Brendi?" Andro asked.

Jomann met his eyes. "We are... we are working on it." He said in reply.

"You can smell it all over her Jomann." Andro said.

Jomann nodded. "I know." He said. "It is sensitive however. One wrong move on our part and it could ruin what we both want so much."

Andro nodded. "I'll let you guys handle it then. Eli is tenacious, but also very smart. She'll run you ragged."

Jomann grinned. "I thoroughly enjoy when she runs me ragged." He stated proudly.

Andro nodded and took another sip of his coffee, looking out over the ocean before continuing.

"Jomann... when we reach the Beta Quadrant... make sure Sehri is covered all of the time. Assign one of Lu'ria's Drow Scouts to her as well as her normal detail. Make sure she remains hidden at all times and only acts if it is necessary." Andro blurted out. "*Tenna* Aihola gave her four to use as she sees fit. Lu'ria wants this... as do we all."

Jomann tilted his head slightly and looked at him. "You think they will make a play for her?" He asked.

Andro nodded his head. "The Rothryn people, a least a small but powerful portion of them, do not see our Etheric abilities as an asset. They would much rather be able to control these abilities as opposed to allowing them to grow and be nurtured. This Rothryn Academy, their equivalent to our School of the Oracles, I think they... I get the sense they treat Etheric users as..."

"What?" Jomann asked him.

"I get the sense they believe Etheric users exist for their purposes." Andro said. "They do not want them to be out there free and roaming around. They want to control them and use them for what they can do. Anyone who does not submit to their ridiculous rules is branded a traitor and hunted. Sehri has said she has heard stories of terrible things within the walls of that place and it doesn't sit well with me. That is why Sehri's father allowed her to go with this Circle of Shamans. At least initially."

"I thought these Shaman people were just the opposite." Jomann said sensing a tone in Andro's voice.

Andro nodded his head. "I believe they are." He looked at him. "Most of them anyway."

Realization came over Jomann then. "You think this Harira person has a different agenda don't you?" He said.

"Let's just say I wouldn't trust her as far as I could spit." Andro said with some venom in his voice.

"Some things she has said... her reaction to Sehri becoming my wife and mate for one. It just doesn't add up considering what she is supposed to represent. I don't believe for a moment she is what she says she is."

"I'll see to it." Jomann said.

"You pick the last members?" Andro asked him.

Jomann nodded and held out the data pad to him. "I think so. Andro... are you sure about this Kavalian Cowen? Or the female that Daio has claimed?"

Andro looked at him. "I will ask him. We'll see what he says. I probably shouldn't have done what I did and my grandmother and *Tenna* Deia let me know it afterwards, but it felt like the right thing to do at the time. I just went with it. Thr'won is bringing the one who will help him to adjust to being able to Mindvoice. One of her most senior instructors. Her daughter in fact. A half elven female with, as Thr'won describes, the disposition of a pit viper. She should be able to handle Cowen."

Jomann chuckled. "Wow. That's high praise coming from Thr'won."

"I know... but she's partial to her daughters and says this one is the strongest." Andro said.

"I'm guessing his skill set is probably very heavy oriented so he would fit in perfectly." Jomann said. "Hopefully it will work out."

"Only if he agrees." Andro said. "He leads his Pride now and Kavalians are serious about things like that according to Pian."

Jomann nodded. "You know... we are discovering many things about others we did not know before. Akruvians. Kavalians. We have many more similarities than we do differences in many cases."

Andro nodded and sipped his mug of coffee. “That we do.” He said. “As for the female... Kameka I believe her name is. *KertaGai* read the after action report from the team who went to get General Byka. She kept her *DAGGER* in the air for nearly twenty clicks before it crashed. And that was after she got shot in the shoulder. Sadi saw that and the first words out of her mouth were that they had found their third. Ne’Veha agreed.”

“What’s this ship they keep talking about?” Jomann asked.

Andro shrugged. “Something they worked out with Ben before coming to Solmar. I have no idea and she keeps telling me it will be a surprise. All I know is that it will be bigger than a *STRIKER DT II* but able to do everything it does and carry all of our dragon brothers and sisters. Yours as well.”

Jomann looked at him with wide eyes. “Mine?”

Andro chuckled at his expression. “This wasn’t my idea.” He said. “Arzoal left Syrilth in charge while she was gone and she and the rest of the elders determined that you needed a partner. You won’t be bonded to him, but he is one of the senior instructors for the Dragon Brigade and he volunteered. It will make things easier and even though you won’t be bonded, you can still pull from each other if need be.” He explained. “I thought it was a good idea as well. But Syrilth and the other Elders made the decision. He’ll be flying over from Dragon Mountain later today.”

Jomann blinked several times. “I...”

“You will have a lot in common my friend. Do not be afraid to share it with him.” Andro said.

“What do you mean?” Jomann asked.

Andro met his gaze. “Alba Tau.” Andro said softly. “His... his bonded brother was killed on Alba Tau. He was severely wounded. Took nearly a year before he could fly again. He hasn’t allowed anyone to fly on him since that day. You share a common bond and that is what you will need to connect with. Syrilth told me he asked for this... he already knows who you are and he says he is ready to do more.”

Jomann nodded his head slowly. “Then we will... we will work things out.” He said.

Andro smiled and slapped his shoulder. “Personally I think it is Syrilth’s way of keeping tabs on the Talon Guardians. Make sure we don’t do something stupid.”

Jomann blinked and looked at him. “Why does that sound like something she would do?” He said with a smile. “Finally... some back up!”

Andro laughed. “Hey... we aren’t that bad. Are we?” He asked.

Jomann grinned. “I will refrain from answering that question for fear it may incriminate me. And anger my mate.” He answered as they turned and headed into the villa.

“Hey... that’s not fair!” Andro said as he followed.

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It was something Kalis Leonidas would speak of proudly to his grandchildren he knew, if that day ever came. As he clutched Serale to his body protectively, these thoughts were what flashed through his mind at what he witnessed and it filled him with hope and pride unlike ever before.

It was the single most devastating show of power Kalis had ever seen in his life. Far beyond anything his father had ever been able to achieve. He watched as if it happened in slow motion as his uncle’s body launched through the air, exploding with a light blue shimmering shield, and a single leap took him the hundred plus meters from where he had been to the first Svorag. He watched as his uncle, with exacting precision, used his two hundred and thirty-eight pounds of muscle and bone to drive his booted feet into the chest of the stunned Svorag and drive him into the hard ground. Kalis thought for sure he could hear the Svorag’s chest crunch and shatter under the terrific force of his uncle’s momentum and power. He then watched as his uncle leaped nimbly from the Svorag’s unmoving form and jerk his right hand outward. The *Nehtes* extended instantly to its full near eight foot length and then his uncle was launching that spear through the air like a bullet almost in the same motion. Kalis’s eyes were wide as the spear tip impaled one Svorag through the chest, lifting him up into the air

with the energy of the throw and then dropping him back to the ground nearly six meters from where the spear had struck him. In a single, seamless motion, Martin Leonidas switched the tubular like object to his right hand and with a small flash of light the sword blade extended from Flatspace and his Shi Viska appeared on his opposite arm. Then the killing truly began.

It was unlike anything any of them had seen really, with the exception of Yuriko of course. Tony and T'lolt had spread to the sides, their chain cannons chopping out lethal 20mm kinetic projectiles at a frightening rate, mowing down Svorag as well as any small tress and vegetation that happened to be in the way. In the hands of the two strongest members of his uncle's team, the guns were like toys as the Master Chief and T'lolt swung them back and forth as if they were using normal rifles. Each of them had a look of severe concentration on their faces as they took in all around them and did not discriminate against the Svorag they were killing.

Koguth watched with stunned eyes as Danny and Julie led Kenny and Pablo in their small wedge, wading right into the thick of it behind Martin and Murano. Their P190A5s, much shorter versions of the normal Spartan weapons than Koguth had seen before, were precise in their accuracy and deadliness. No matter where they fired, Svorag fell with massive wounds from the obviously explosive tipped caseless rounds. He watched as the ebony skinned vampire female flashed out with dual blades so common to vampire commandos and opened many a Svorag throat to the air, her A5 dangling from quick release straps as they moved.

Ultimately however, it was the two figures in the center of it all they drew everyone's attention.

Martin and Murano stood back to back, their Etheric shields shimmering in the sunlight as they carved themselves a path through the Svorag troops. Martin spun around, using his Shi Viska as a battering ram, smashing it into the chest of a Svorag and sending him flying away screeching in agony from his now crushed breastbone. He would land several meters away and scream until Danny put two rounds through his skull and silenced him forever. As they all watched, Martin twisted his arm and leveled his Shi Viska at a group of Svorag that were forming to his right. The shield leaped from his arm, the razor like blades extending from the edges, and two of the three Svorag had their heads removed from their bodies before they were able to take three steps, the Shi Viska speeding off seemingly with a mind of its own. As their headless corpses fell and the third Svorag watched in horror, Martin stepped into the powerful swing of his sword and cleaved the Svorag's upper body nearly in two. He lifted his now free hand at the end of the swing and sent forth a massive wave of Etheric energy towards two other Svorag who were regaining their senses. They were caught directly in the path of the crushing wave and each had nearly every bone in their bodies shattered instantly as they were flung through the air like dolls. Neither would live more than a few seconds longer. As soon as he released that wave, Martin whirled, ignoring the two for he knew they were dead. His hand came up again and he sent three Etheric diamond shaped projectiles sizzling out from his hand. Each Etheric projectile struck another Svorag in his upper body, blowing massive holes through his chest cavity and spraying blood and bone matter out his back as his body was tossed backward from the kinetic force. As he released those Etheric diamonds he heard the horrible scream and whirled to see the single Svorag leaping through the air at him. He was about to swing his sword to disembowel the Svorag when the creature's body was snatched from the air by some unseen hand and sent hurtling into the large tree off to the side. The sound of his bones snapping was very audible even over the sounds of weapons fire. Martin's head snapped around and he saw Murano smile at him.

"I had him!" Martin screamed.

Murano roared out his own laughter now, fully engulfed in feelings of exhilaration he had not felt in more millennia than he cared to recall. He relished in the emotions flowing through him now, for he had missed them for so long. Feeling Martin beside him, a fellow Praetorian and the descendant of the man Murano had worshiped, it was nearly overwhelming. It felt like it had back then, wading into battle beside Sumar and their Praetorian brothers. Murano never dreamed he would be able to feel that again, but now it flowed through him as it had back then. He felt alive again, recharged and vigorous, for the first time in nearly forty thousand years.

"No doubt!" Murano shouted back as his Saber Staff whipped around and he removed the head of a Svorag who was trying to sneak up on him. "Why should I let you have all the fun?" He barked out.

Martin's eyes were wide. "And they call me crazy!" He screamed as he spun back around just as his Shi Viska appeared from the side and alighted on his arm once more. He twisted in to a graceful spin, his arm extended outward and released the Shi Viska once more as if he was throwing a discus. The shield leaped forth and shot off into the distance once more with blinding speed, curving through the air and cutting a swath of death in its wake.

“They keep coming from the shadows!” Murano screamed.

Martin turned and caught three of them in the grips of an Etheric field, lifting their bodies into the air almost five meters and then bringing his hand down with a jerk. The Svorag were thrust downward to smash into the ground with horrific force, driven by Martin’s devastating Etheric power. None of them moved after that.

“Time to light the shadows up then!” Martin snarled back. He turned his head toward the tree line that was opposite the entrance of the cave. ***Torma my brother! Now! I need some light!***

Don’t understand why he didn’t allow me to come with them. Garan asked as he sat easily in the saddle on Aurith’s back. *Does he not trust me even still?*

He had flat out refused to ride Torma because he was the Bonded Brother of a Praetorian and in Garan’s eyes untouchable. Torma thought this humorous and Aurith chuckled with her father as she butted Garan in the shoulder and ushered him onto her back. They knew right where they were going and had flown here in under five minutes, Garan thoroughly enjoying his first ride on the back of a dragon. It was the most amazing thing he had ever experienced and secretly he hoped it would happen again in the future.

Aurith rested now on the ground beside her father, hidden in the thick brush on the down slope of the ridge three hundred meters across from the base of the mountain where Yuriko’s cave center was. The terrain provided them excellent concealment even for their size and one would have to walk right up upon them to even know they were there even with Garan in her saddle. Their keen eyesight would keep anyone from getting too close without them knowing it. Torma turned his head to the side and looked at Garan on his daughter’s back.

Is that what you think Garan? Torma asked him.

Garan turned and looked at those golden colored eyes. *I do not know what to think.* He answered honestly.

How is it that you converse with Dragonkind so easily Garan of the Pralor people? Torma asked.

Garan paused for a moment and then shrugged his broad shoulders. *I... I have always been able to.* He answered. *I have never feared your kind Torma... and I have had to work with many Dragonkind when arranging trips or meetings for Chief Elder Delnash and Elder Mother Teniri. We have always been able to communicate and work together easily.*

You do not view us differently? Aurith asked now turning her head on her long neck.

Differently? In what way Aurith? Garan asked confused.

As Lorendo sees us. Torma told him. *Tools to be used.*

Garan’s eyes grew wide. *By the souls of those within the Rift of Time no!* He hissed. *Your kind... Dragonkind... you are revered by many of our people Torma. Your actions saved millions of my people when we first came together. When the Scourge chased us from the last planet we thought would be our new home. Many of Dragonkind fell beside my people in battle and defending them. I could never look upon you in such a way. My parents... they told Kasdan and I stories of those few days. They have always adored your kind. As millions of my people do.*

Then you should know this... Torma said. *If Martin Leonidas did not trust you Garan... you would not be here among us. Nor your brother Kasdan. We left your other two men to help For'mya, Endith and Tina guard the STRIKER. They are trusted as well because you chose them. You wonder why he did not take you on the assault.*

Garan nodded. *Yes... I suppose.*

The men and women with Martin... with the single exception of your brother because of his unique skills and knowledge... they have trained and fought beside Martin since they were only children. They know what each other will do in every situation, for it is the same thing they would do. Torma explained. *It is not because he does not trust you Garan, just the opposite in fact.*

But why leave me and take Kasdan? Garan asked.

King Martin leaves no one in command that he does not trust with his own life. Aurith picked it up. *You are a soldier... your brother is not. Your men are soldiers and they follow you. He trusts no one with the lives of his Queens Garan, especially not my Bonded Sister after what took place recently. That he relies on you and*

your men to protect her... protect them... it is his way of showing you that your honor and trust is beyond reproach.

Torma nodded his massive head. *My daughter speaks wisely for one who never had much use for her studies when she was younger.* Torma said with a laugh.

Father! Aurith complained.

She is right Garan. You are here with us... your men help to protect one of his Queens. Torma said. *To Martin Leonidas there is no greater a show of respect and honor than that. When he calls for us... we will answer and then you will fight beside him and Murano. Have patience my friend... do not be so quick to rush into battle. He took your brother because contrary to what everyone believes, Martin is not a war monger and he will often assess a situation most carefully before acting.*

These monsters have taken many Pralor people through the years Torma. Garan said. *Too many to count.*

Torma nodded as his head snapped around and looked back up towards the edge of the ridge at the sounds of gunfire. *And when we are done... this group will take no more. We have destroyed their ship and now we will finish those who escaped to come here.*

I thought you said he likes to assess the situation first? Garan asked. *They had to have just arrived at the cave!*

Torma felt his Bonded Brother within him and all that was happening. He turned to look at Garan. *He did assess the situation. He did not need your brother to tell him all of these vile creatures need to be exterminated.*

Garan grunted with satisfaction and nodded. *A fine assessment.* He spoke. *One I would have made too.*

Torma my brother! Now! I need some light! Martin's voice reached them easily within Mindvoice and Garan shuddered with the power and clarity of the Etheric resonance of Martin Leonidas.

Torma rose to his talons as did Aurith. *Now... now we do battle!* He barked. *Daughter... break to the right just as we discussed! Go now!*

Garan could only hang onto the saddle horn as Aurith bolted from her position with a speed like nothing he had seen from Dragonkind before. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Torma's massive form also explode forward in what seemed like the blink of an eye, his hugely muscular body simply bowling over smaller trees that stood between him and his Bonded Brother.

Prepare yourself Garan! We are not kind in battle! Aurith shouted just before she rammed through the last small section of thick brush into the clearing where the battle raged. With a roar of anger Aurith reared back her head and cut loose with a stream of superheated breath directly into a small group of Svorag that had been lying in wait on the fringes of the battle. They turned to see they massive beast to the side and their eyes went wide. That is how they died. Garan's P130A4 snapped to his shoulder instinctively and as Aurith cooked the Svorag alive he began to pick his shots easily and Svorag began to fall.

Murano heard the near deafening roar and felt the shuddering of the ground and whirled just as Torma's massive formed burst between two thick trees nearly ten foot tall. His front right paw came crashing down, his talons impaling two Svorag clean through their torsos as he snapped his head to the side and sent a stream of superheated breath tearing across a wide expanse of terrain in front of him.

Left brother! Martin shouted within Mindvoice. ***Burn it all!***

Torma didn't let up and as Murano and others watched, it almost seemed as if his breath got even hotter. Plants and small trees were charred to ashes instantly when that stream of nearly four thousand degree heat passed over it. Larger trees began to burn from the base up, flames licking upward even further. Murano turned to see Aurith doing the same, Garan upon her back securely in the saddle and his P190A4 slinging out death in every direction as he twisted this way and that, firing the entire time. Never had he seen such a thing in his life and Murano could only shake his head in awe.

"May the spirits within the Rift preserve me?" He spoke softly.

Murano was just beginning to realize the connection and power being bonded to a dragon carried as he witnessed Martin leap to within five meters of Torma's massive form and kill two Svorag who were rising to

fire their primitive weapons at the colossal monster killing their kind. He watched as Martin dispatched those Svorag and then proceeded to leap onto Torma's back and launch his Shi Viska once more. They worked seamlessly without communication; just as Martin and his team did Murano took note. In many ways... it was as if he was watching Sumar in battle all over again and it filled him with pride of his own. Martin had told him that Androcles and his Bonded Sister were even more powerful than their fathers in some ways because of how their bond developed and Murano looked forward to finally meeting him and seeing what he could do. Hope filled Murano for the first time in millennia as he stood there among the blood and sounds of battle. Hope for the future and continued existence of his people and every other peaceful sentient species.

The snapping sound caused his head to cut around and he saw the three Svorag frozen in place off to his right. They had been attempting to sneak up on him and they had almost succeeded. Murano allowed a small smile to split his lips. Yes... things were beginning to fill with hope.

"Business first Murano." He spoke to himself and lifted his hand toward the Svorag as Danny's voice echoed in his ear implant.

"Stragglers are scattering *fervon!*" Danny's voice barked through the implant Murano now wore along with everyone else.

Murano turned and saw Martin spin around in the saddle, his left arm lifting almost as an afterthought to collect his Shi Viska as it zipped in from the side and landed on his left forearm. In an instant it flashed and vanished back into Flatspace.

"Jules... Kenny... Pablo! Pursue for half a klick! Kill as many as you can catch! Go!" Martin snapped out the order and watched as Julie turned and blurred in motion to go deeper into the timber. Kenny and Pablo instantly shifted into their wolf forms and followed. It was a tactic the three of them had refined for years when they were younger and it was why they were the most skilled scouts within Martin's team. Kenny and Pablo were also devastated when they had lost Julie all those years ago, and then just as elated when she came back to them. Given that her memories were intact up until the point they had returned to Earth so long ago, it was like she had never left them and Kenny and Pablo reveled in the feelings of that camaraderie once more.

"Danny! Back to the cave! T'lolt... Master Chief... flanking fields of fire on the edges!" Martin snapped out the orders, the transmitter implanted into his jaw line easily carrying the orders over their receivers. "If they are scattering it means there are more of them on this planet than we first thought! They'll be back and I want to be gone!"

"Moving!" Tony's voice barked in reply.

"As am I." T'lolt spoke as well and both of the huge men turned and began to move.

"*Fervon...* get Garan off Aurith's back!" Martin barked turning to look at Danny twenty meters away. "He's having too much fun! Then give me a recon of the area around the cave! One klick out and hold *fervon!* I'm gonna have For'mya bring the *STRIKER* to us!"

"We're on it!" Danny answered and broke into a sprint moving with the grace and speed of his wolf nature and making his way to where he saw Aurith swing her clubbed Heavyhorn tail to the side and crush two Svorag too stupid to know better.

Murano gripped his Saber Staff almost casually as he turned to look around them just as Torma's massive form moved up to him with Martin in the saddle. "There were far more than we first thought Martin." He spoke staring off into the timber.

Martin nodded as he looked around from the saddle. "For'mya took out their ship... but they must have got more groundside before that happen. Or the transports they used carried more than we thought."

"They are not like us!" Murano spoke turning to look up at him. "They will have packed as many as possible into the ships! It is something we have seen before. Comfort means nothing to them. They will have left only a skeleton crew on the frigate!"

Martin glanced at him. "You could have told me that before!" He barked.

"You did not ask!" Murano asked.

"*Sibfla!*" Martin snarled watching as Aurith's wing snapped forward and caught two Svorag square in the chest and sent their bodies hurtling through the air for almost fifty meters.

"We need to destroy their transports!" Murano snapped up at him. "Keep them from leaving the surface!"

"Working on it!" Martin answered.

Torma's head turned on his long neck to look at Martin. *They are running very fast!* He declared with an almost humorous tone.

Back to Yuriko! It's time to go! Martin ordered him turning to look at Aurith. *Aurith! Fall back to Yuriko's position! They are running so they can bring more of their friends!*

Martin saw Aurith turn to look at him and nod her huge head before shifting her muscular body and heading for the base of the small mountain cave. They had drawn the vicious battle away from Yuriko and the others on purpose and now they were some two hundred meters away from them. Martin turned back and looked at Murano, holding out his hand. "Let's go."

"Martin... we must purge this pestilence!" Murano shouted as he settled into the saddle behind him and Torma began to sprint through the timber and brush back towards Yuriko. "We can't let them leave this moon!"

"I know!" Martin snapped in reply. "I said I'm working on it!" Martin tapped his jaw. "*Kinsoaurgai?*"

"We are here Martin my love! We have been monitoring." For'mya's voice answered instantly over the COM.

"Contact *OMEN THREE* For'mya!" Martin told her. "They are equipped with three Fusion Core Hammerhead nukes! Hundred kiloton yield! Have them prep those missiles, triangulate the position of the Svorag transports using Yuriko's cave as ground zero and glass this entire area For'mya! We have to keep them from leaving the moon!"

"Will that be enough?" For'mya asked without hesitation.

"Initial blast radius on the Hammerheads is ten kilometers." Martin spoke calmly to her even as they approached Yuriko's position and those with her began to rise to their feet and stare at him. "Another twenty kilometers out is still within the instant kill zone because of heat and fire! Nothing will survive within fifty kilometer of her cave!"

"Tina is contacting them now! Get back here quick Martin! It will not take them long!" For'mya said. "And we need to get gone! I don't envy a radioactive tan!"

"Tell me about it." Martin chuckled. "That's why I want you to come to us! Lift off, mark my location and come join the party. Area is big enough to land and we need to move fast." Martin said.

"Powering engines!" For'mya answered. "We'll be there in four minutes!"

Martin watched as Yuriko approached with a wide smile on her face and he dropped quickly to the ground from the saddle. Yuriko may have been officially adopted, but that had only been done for legal purposes. Martin didn't need a document to know she was his daughter. He had felt that way about her so long ago and those feelings had come rushing back when they came back together on Earth. As he opened his arms, Yuriko folded herself into them and he hugged her tightly inhaling deeply of the scent of her hair and body. A pureblood vampire she may have been, but Yuriko was a Leonidas without question. The oldest of his children by far, and behind only Andro and his mates, the one who knew him better than most. Yuriko was just as capable in her own right as Androcles and the two of them thought along the same lines and that is why they were the most feared of all the Leonidas children.

Martin squeezed her tightly, his cheek against her long black hair and he chuckled softly. "Why does it seem I'm always bailing you and your brother out of thee situations?" He muttered to her. He felt Yuriko laugh within his embrace and she pulled back from him.

"Andro and I are too much like you that is why!" She declared holding his arms tightly as she looked into his face with love and adoration.

"That will be the death of me you know." He stated.

Yuriko smiled brightly. "Not likely *Ilharn*." She said. "Not likely." (Father in vampire language)

"Your mother is bringing the ship here." Martin said. "I'm using the Hammerheads on *OMEN THREE*."

Yuriko nodded. "I suspected you would." She answered. Yuriko turned as Koguth moved up behind her. "*Ilharn*... this is General Koguth'Juturi. He..."

"Yes... I know who he is." Martin spoke sternly seeing the look of surprise on Koguth's face. He looked at Koguth... Iama having shared what had happened in her past with him and all of Fedor's family members now that she was his beloved wife and mate.

Koguth took an involuntary step back at the tone of voice of the Lycavorian King and looked at Yuriko quickly. Yuriko saw this and squeezed his arm. "Papa... I think there may be some misinformation. What Iama thinks happened is not accurate. He..." Martin blinked at her confused and was about to respond when he

caught the scent and cut his eyes. Yuriko saw instantly where his eyes went and she stopped. "We'll talk later *Ilharn*. I'll get everyone ready to move." She said quickly pulling Koguth with her. "Come General."

Martin reached up slowly and with his hands on either side he removed his Spartan helm as he focused on the two figures to his right. He zeroed in and moved towards them without any hesitation.

Kalis stood there unable to move even if he wanted to. Serale clung to him, her arms around his waist tightly as the battle had been drawn away from them and they watched. Fear gripped Kalis now as his uncle moved up to stand in front of him. Serale was braver than him as she stared up into the face of the Lycavorian king ready to defend the man she loved. Kalis dropped his eyes to the ground, unable to meet those deep brown orbs of his uncle. He had seen them when they were wolf eyes, yellow and green in color and gazing upon him as something so insignificant it was laughable. He could feel the staggering power of his uncle's aura pouring outward, moving all around him, surrounding him and swirling all over the immediate area. Everything he had done in these last weeks, all of it had been leading up to this one moment and for the first time in his life Kalis was humbled and fearful. Afraid he would not be accepted after what he had done. Afraid that the future he had hoped to grab on to would come crashing down around him. That it was all a lie and...

"Can you not look at me *Mandri*?" Martin spoke softly.

"I... I am... I am not worthy." Kalis finally stammered.

Martin reached up and gripped the back of Kalis's head, watching as his face came up slowly to look at him with moist, dark blue wolf eyes. He had not shifted back just yet, and his fangs were still prominent as were his eyes. He saw his uncle smile at him warmly when he saw those eyes and fangs.

"Worthy?" Martin spoke to him as he moved even closer. Serale released Kalis as she watched, feeling him tense slightly as her arms left his waist but he didn't flinch away. "Why would you not be worthy *Mandri*?"

"Uncle Martin... I..." Kalis began to rasp out the words when Martin lean closer and inhaled deeply, drawing Kalis's scent into his lungs and letting it filter through him. Kalis stopped and remained still as Martin drew back and looked at him. His own eyes changed then and his fangs extended once more. Kalis felt a ripple of fear at the sight of those fangs but his uncle smiled.

"Do you know what I smell Kalis?" He spoke calmly. "I smell the blood of a Leonidas within your veins! I smell the strength to recognize your own faults and the lies you have been told and to see them for what they are. I smell a man who would die protecting what he has come to love!" Martin spoke as he gazed upon Serale to the side, her green eyes tearing up as she watched. He looked back to Kalis. "I smell a man who had the strength and conviction to alter the course of his life and embrace what had been denied him for too long!"

Kalis felt the tears roll down his cheeks but he didn't care about this show of weakness for everything he wanted... everything he had hoped for... it was standing right in front of him. "I must... I must atone for my sins Uncle!" He stammered softly. "I must..."

Martin reached up with his other hand and put it on the opposite side of Kalis's face. "You will not atone or be accountable for the sins of a dead man." He spoke warmly. "The man you were died many weeks ago. The day you made the choice to follow the blood within your veins is the day you were born Kalis Leonidas."

Kalis looked at him with wide teary eyes, as if hearing that name for the very first time. The awe he felt coursing through him was nearly a physical thing and he reached up to grip his uncle's arms, squeezing those thick forearms as hard as he could. "Uncle... Uncle I... my father will..."

Martin shook his head quickly. "He is not your father any longer Kalis." He said. "A father would never do to you what he has done. Twisted you... shamed you. No... he has no right to carry the name of father to you. I will be the father you should have had. I will be the father he should have been... just as I am to your brother Karun. I will show you what he should have shown you. I will be the father he should have been. Your old life dies here on this stinking rock Kalis my boy. Now you will know the emotion and the meaning of the blood that flows within you. I will teach you... your family will teach you." Martin said with a smile as his own eyes became moist.

Kalis was unable to react as Martin slowly pulled him into the embrace and his powerful arms and hands wrapped around him. Arms and hands that had come so very close to ending his existence that day not so long

ago. Arms and hands that now filled him with emotions he had never been allowed to experience. Emotions that racked his body and caused him to shudder in relief and joy. Emotions he had been denied for far too long. Kalis's eyes closed and slowly his arms embraced his uncle. His uncle's mint scent filled his nose and provided him a measure of peace that Kalis had ever known. And then the floodgates opened and twenty-five years of emotions that had been denied came rushing forth like a spring of pure mountain water and Kalis crushed his uncle in that embrace. He buried his face in Martin's shoulder as his body was wracked with sobs, his hands clenching and unclenching trying to grip the body armor that his uncle wore. His uncle responded, pulling him tighter and his hand coming up and holding the back of his head tightly. Serale watched with tears in her eyes and her hands over her mouth. She had never expected such a show of emotion from the Lycavorian King and suddenly she understood why so many billions upon billions of men and women across the breadth of the Union would die without hesitation for this man. She could almost see the doubt and trepidation leave Kalis's body as his uncle embraced him.

Martin pulled Kalis back as she watched as he gripped his head, staring at him with those eyes and fangs extended. Kalis didn't shy away this time and he held his uncle's arms as he met that gaze, his own eyes and fangs still exposed.

"Embrace it all Kalis!" Martin hissed at him. "Never doubt! Never regret! You have done what so few are ever able to do my boy! Embrace it and never let it go! Never fear the unknown Kalis. From this day forth... you are a Leonidas and we do not fear the unknown! We embrace it!"

"I will... I will never dishonor you uncle!" Kalis choked out the words.

Martin shook his head quickly. "Not me Kalis. The blood within you. Never dishonor your blood. Your grandfather sings within me you know... he is... he is so happy. And so am I."

It was as if the weight of a planet lifted from Kalis and his face brightened as he stared at Martin. Martin felt the light within him finally burn away all the darkness that had resided in this young man, darkness put there by his foul brother. It was another crime that his brother would pay for Martin thought to himself.

"Uncle... Uncle Martin this is..." Kalis turned quickly and took Serale's hands gently within his. She didn't hesitate in the least and she stepped back close to him, wrapping her arms around Kalis's waist with a brilliant smile. "This is Serale." Kalis spoke wrapping his arms around her petite frame. "I wish... she is my life now uncle Martin. I wish to make her my wife and mate."

Martin looked at her beaming face and grinned. "I take it from your scent and the look on your face you want this as well." He said with some humor.

"So... so very much King Leonidas." Serale stuttered quickly.

Martin shook his head. "No member of my family calls me that Serale Leonidas." He said seeing her eyes go wide. "I suggest you make it official when we get back to the *ARC ROYAL*."

Serale looked at Kalis's face with adoring eyes. "I will insure that he does... Martin." She said with brimming confidence in her voice and her own feelings.

Martin grinned again at her poise. "Oh... I like her." He said. "Anja is going to love you as well." He turned back to Kalis. "We can... we can continue this later. Right now... we need to vacate this rotten place. I'm going to burn it clean and make sure these Svorag here never hurt anyone again. Prepare yourself *Mandri*. A new world has opened for you... and it's time to step through that door and leave whatever is left of the past behind you."

Kalis took a deep breath and nodded his head as he hugged Serale to him tighter. "I... I am ready Uncle Martin. I have been ready for a very long time."

Martin look up as the *STRIKER* came roaring over the top of the mountain and it spun gracefully as it began to land in the clearing. Martin nodded and turned to look at him. "Good." He said. "Welcome *Mandri*... welcome to the Leonidas family."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MARTIN'S *STRIKER DT MARK II*

SIX HOURS FROM RENDEZVOUSING WITH ARC ROYAL

Though it was one of the new *STRIKER DT* Mark IIs, the inside of the ship was still packed pretty tightly with the addition of half the Kavalian crew. Yuriko returning to *OMEN THREE* with her people and half the Kavalians had freed up some space and now everyone was able to stretch out on what benches and seats there were. Many even chose to sit on the floor and catch the sleep they had not had in several days since their escape from the Kavalian fleet. Now both ships were moving under Shroud after making two short LSD jumps to move quickly out of the area. Kalis was amazed at how easily he was accepted by those in his Uncle's team, their banter with him alluding to the fact that they respected what he had done. They were all sitting around the opening into the Dragon pen where Torma and Aurith sat side by side. Serale rested comfortably between Kalis's legs as if it was the most natural thing in the world and she absently stroked his forearm as they listened to them trading jabs back and forth now that the rush of the combat high had worn off.

"... Make sure I tell Anuk and Nayeca all about how we found their big, bad Spartan mate stuffed in the cargo hold of the *STRIKER* because he felt left out." Julie was speaking with a large smile as she held a canteen of water.

"I didn't feel left out!" Dan protested. "You guys needed me!"

"Correct me if I am wrong Simpson..." Kenny spoke with his customary smile. "The Skipper did order you to remain behind."

"You should have seen the look on your face when Master Chief opened the cargo hatch door!" Pablo said with a wide grin. "You looked like we had caught you stroking..." He stopped his comment before finishing and let his eyes dart to Serale as he turned red under his tan. "Ah... never mind."

Serale burst out laughing and the others quickly followed at the look on Pablo's face and then on Danny's face. Martin shook his head in mock disgust. "Bunch of reckless, over eager kids is what you all are." He stated. "No wonder I spend half my time babysitting you."

"So... does that mean you are gonna ground him Skipper?" Kenny asked with that mile wide grin.

Martin nodded. "Damn right I am." Martin exclaimed loudly. "He disobeyed my orders to remain behind. We can't have that kind of action without consequences."

"Hey! I saved your ass out there!" Danny protested once more... but did so much more weakly than before.

"We were handling it just fine Simpson you ass!" Julie spat. "All you did is provide a bigger target for the bad guys and make it easier for us."

"See!" Danny barked. "I told you I helped!"

"General Simpson..." Martin spoke. "I sentence you to three solid days making sure that your mates know how much you have missed them. You were supposed to meet them on the *ARC ROYAL* and now they'll be pissed at me because you weren't there."

Danny chuckled and shook his head before looking at Martin. "Hell... you get blamed for everything anyway *fervon*. How is that any different than now?"

"I don't need you adding to my own screw ups and then leaving me to explain it." Martin said with a smile. "Three days. No work. And if I discover you don't comply with that... then I will turn your discipline over to Anuk and Nayeca."

Danny looked at him with a twinkle in his dark brown eyes. "That sounds promising." He said.

Julie shook her head. "Please... we've seen you buck ass naked Danny." Julie spat. "You aren't all that." This comment caused all of them to burst out laughing heartily, even T'lolt could not contain the laughter this statement caused and he too joined in the after action cool down period that always occurred between warriors.

Martin shook his head slowly reveling in the feelings of having them around and then he looked at Kalis and Serale. Their faces were bright and happy with a new found future together that both of them were eagerly waiting to begin. Martin leaned over towards them and saw their eyes shift to him.

"Serale... I'm going to borrow Kalis for a little while if you don't mind." Martin said. "There are some things we need to talk about."

Kalis leaned close to her and nuzzled her cheek, his hand coming up to stroke her chin as he kissed her. "I will be back shortly." He said.

Serale nodded her head, the smile never leaving her face as she watched Kalis get to his feet. She was still in somewhat of a state of shock considering she had never once thought she would ever meet the King of the Lycavorian Union. Nor did she expect the many statements about the Royal family being no different than normal families to hold any weight. Yet here she was, the King of the Lycavorian Union not a few feet away and acting as no King she had ever seen or read about in history. And doing so with a group of men and women who treated him no different than they treated each other. Serale's green eyes glowed in happiness as she looked up at Kalis for this was going to be her life going into the future and that made her giddy. Kalis squeezed her hand gently and then turned to look at his uncle as Martin turned and headed for the cockpit. Kalis followed without hesitation and watched as his uncle motioned to where Mata sat alone along the bulkhead. The Kavalian quickly got to his feet and moved to follow them. Serale glanced quickly to where her mother sat on one of the couches in the *STRIKER*. Her legs were drawn up under her and she was tucked very intimately against Nedoli's side, her head on his chest and her eyes closed as she slept peacefully for probably the first time in weeks. And Serale knew her mother's peace now was because of Nedoli. That much Serale knew without question. Knowing that her mother, as well as herself, had found love out of the horror they had endured showed Serale that hope was never dead. It just came in many different forms, some of which you could not understand right away.

Martin took the four stairs into the cockpit in one step and before Kalis thought about it he had followed and moved into the spacious cockpit. He came to an abrupt halt when he saw For'mya standing and leaning against the human woman's chair and holding a large mug of coffee in her hands. Kalis suddenly found himself wanting to be anywhere but here. He was sure his uncle didn't think of how he would react, but given how he had changed in the recent weeks, Kalis could feel nothing but shame for how his father had abused this woman and forced himself upon her. She had every right to hate him for his part in her imprisonment and his subsequent actions on Hadaria and Kalis did not know what to expect. He watched as his uncle moved right up to her and even with the coffee in her hands, she was able to fold her lithe form against his as they shared a warm and emotion filled kiss. Her dark brown eyes cut to him when they parted and she handed the mug to Martin as she turned to face him. Kalis lowered his eyes, unable to face her, but he would not back down from her fury for his part in what was done to her.

For'mya stepped up to Kalis as Martin took a sip of the coffee and saw that he would not meet her gaze. She could sense the embarrassment and ignominy filling him and radiating from his pores. His wolf aura trembled with regret and a small amount of fear, but she could also detect the overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment within him. It was part of her 'gift' to be able to sense strong emotions and For'mya could feel them easily from Kalis. She could sense the unequivocal love for the young Hadarian female and how she was now the center of his life. Given what For'mya now knew, what Martin had allowed her to see within his many memories, and knowing firsthand what a monster Pusintin was, For'mya could not bring herself to feel anger or hate towards Kalis for what had happened. No matter what, he had been used by his father in a vile way, just as she had been, and he had experienced it for far longer than she had. For'mya reached out and placed her hand on his cheek and let his aura swirl around her, focused and pure now, just like one of their sons. By instinct For'mya allowed her own wolf aura to cascade out, the same motherly sensations and emotions that filled her aura whenever she was around her children.

"Look at me Kalis." She spoke softly.

Kalis shook his head slowly. "I am... I am too ashamed." He spoke in a soft, trembling but completely honest voice. "After what I..."

For'mya reached up with her other hand and pulled his face up. Like her own sons with Martin, he was taller than her, but his eyes told her just how much awe he held her in. It was the same look they gave to her and not one she was altogether comfortable with.

"You bear no shame or responsibility for the actions of your father Kalis." For'mya told him. "None whatsoever."

"I... I allowed him to do the things he did!" Kalis began to complain. "I allowed him to dishonor you and..."

"Kalis..." For'mya said softly with a warm smile. "I held no malice for you then and I certainly hold none for you now. Not after knowing what you have endured your entire life and then what you have

accomplished in these last weeks. You allowed him to do nothing because if you had tried to stop it you would be dead. I do not blame you in any way.”

“You should.” He told her.

For'mya shook her head. “If there is anything I have learned after all these years of being a Leonidas, it is that we do not hold hate within us for mistakes or actions that were never in our control to begin with.” She told him. “Your father and your father alone bear the responsibility for what he did.” For'mya dropped her hands to his and took them in her grasp. “You have... you have evolved far more than I ever had hope for you.” She told him honestly. “That you have cast aside the man you were and embraced the blood within you says all I need to know. All your brother and sister will need to know.”

Kalis met her gaze now and in his eyes For'mya saw concern but also want. “Will... will they hate me?” He asked softly.

For'mya smiled again and shook her head. “No Kalis.” She said without hesitation. “They will be very curious no doubt, you are their brother after all, but they will not hate you. When they discover what you have endured and tolerated for most of your life and then seeing how you were able to break those chains... I think you will find them to be very happy to know that you will be there for them.”

Kalis glanced at the deck quickly and exhaled. “I can only hope my mother; Karun and Nikkei feel the same way one day.”

For'mya squeezed his hands tightly. “I think you might be very surprised.” She told him. “But now... now I want you to let go of whatever guilt you think you need to bear. You have walked through the door into a new life and that is what you should be concentrating on.”

Kalis took a deep breath and squeezed her hands tightly. “I will. You... you are my *Tenna* For'mya.” He said proudly. “I will never disrespect any of my Aunts. I would be a poor excuse for a Lycavorian and a Leonidas if I did.”

For'mya smiled at him and held open her arms which Kalis stepped into without question. For'mya embraced him and as she felt his aura swirling with new emotions and pride she found once more that she could hold no hatred for him. As she had told him, he had been used by his father just as she had. They were both victims of the same depraved man and quite surprisingly she felt a genuine connection to him because of this. Without knowing why, For'mya knew that Fedor and Eirene would feel the same way and embrace him far more easily. She hugged him tightly as his wolf aura burned and told her everything she needed to know and she allowed her own aura to speak for her. It was filled with love and support and great confidence in who he had become. She could almost feel the tension leaving his body and his spirit brighten. For'mya stepped back after a moment and planted a kiss on his cheek much like any she had given her children through the years.

“Welcome to your family Kalis Leonidas.” She stated with a smile. “It is so very good to have you among us.”

Kalis nodded his head. “I will carry my name proudly.” He said.

For'mya nodded. “As you should.” She stated. She turned back to Martin. “Now... why is it that you have brought him up here Martin? Aside from the obvious.”

“The obvious?” Martin asked with a grin. “When have I ever done the obvious?”

For'mya was about to answer but Kalis looked at his uncle and reached towards his belt. He withdrew the small disc and stepped up to him. “This is why.” He said holding out the disc to Martin.

Martin reached up slowly and took the disc in his fingers. “This is not something that I asked for you to do Kalis.” He said. “In fact... I distinctly remember saying don't do anything that puts you in danger.”

“No Uncle... you already told me that.” Kalis said. “It is something I felt I needed to do however. And you did not say I should not do anything either. In fact I remember you said if I felt the need to stick it to my father without endangering myself or Serale then feel free to do so.”

Martin shook his head. “Jeez! Why is it that no one can do what I tell them anymore?” He rasped in frustration.

For'mya looked at Martin. “Wait... you've been communicating with him?” She asked. “You did not tell us this Martin Leonidas.”

Martin shrugged his shoulders. “Short bursts on the P1.” He replied. “Nothing important and only after I knew for sure what his intentions were.”

For'mya reached out and took the disc from his fingers, her dark brown eyes scanning it carefully, and then growing a little wider. "This is... Kalis this is a D7 encrypted Kavalian Central Core Communication Disc." She said. She looked back at him. "This is the central processing core of all communication devices on a Kavalian ship."

Kalis nodded his head in the affirmative. "My father's ship to be more precise *Tenna* For'mya." He told her with a certain perverse happiness in his voice. For'mya looked at him and saw the look of satisfaction on his face as well as the pride. She didn't know that saying that one word meant everything to Kalis. Knowing that he could speak that word with respect and honor made him swell with confidence.

Kalis glanced quickly back to where Mata stood in the doorway of the cockpit and saw his Kavalian mentor nod his head in approval. "Well done Kalis." Mata told him. "Well done indeed."

Kalis turned back to For'mya. "Every communication my father has had in the last ten years from his ship, encrypted or otherwise, is on that disc. The activation codes for the Long Range COM array as well. Which they will not be able to use now by the way." He looked at Martin. "I did as you asked Uncle Martin. I sabotaged the main circuitry board in the way you suggested, as well as all the backups. They will not be able to utilize the long range array without docking at a Kavalian ship yard and having the entire network replaced."

For'mya looked at Martin with questions in her eyes. "I thought you said you told him to remain safe!" She hissed.

"I did." Martin protested.

"By having him sabotage their main Com array?" For'mya demanded.

Martin grinned sheepishly as Kalis watched in amusement. This was something he did not expect to see and he was discovering what many others already knew. His uncle's wives and mates went out of their way to keep tabs on him.

"It was Avi's idea actually." Martin said finally. "I only suggested if he was thinking of doing something that this would be it. Switch three of the four power crystals and when they activate the Long Range COM array the reverse polarity of the crystals will short the entire COM grid. Fry it beyond repair."

For'mya shook her head. "Martin Leonidas... your other wives and mates and I will be having a talk about this with you. You put Kalis and all he has been able to accomplish at risk!" She scolded him.

"I did not!" Martin protested. "I put it forth as a suggestion. That's all."

"That does not excuse it! You knew he would do as you 'suggested'" For'mya hissed.

"I was glad to *Tenna*. Really." Kalis spoke up.

"That does not excuse it." For'mya answered him. She looked back to Martin. "I don't understand why though. Why have him do this?"

Martin reached up and took the disc from between her fingers. "I'll show you why." He stated as he turned and held the disc out to Tina. "Tina... plug this in and initiate a short range COM signal to my brother's ship."

Tina met his eyes with a stunned expression. "You're serious Skipper?" She asked. "Why in the holy billy hell would you want to talk to that scum bag?"

Martin smiled. "Trust me." He said.

Tina shook her head as she turned and slipped the disc into a slot on her secondary COM console. "Ok."

"This ought to be real entertaining." They heard Endith speak from the pilot's seat.

Martin looked at Kalis. "You are sure you want to do this?" He asked.

Kalis moved closer to him with a nod. "Now more than ever Uncle." He answered with no small amount of confidence.

Martin nodded. "Ok..." He said. "Tina?" He asked turning to look at her back.

"Syncing up the transmission variables now." She spoke. She reached up and touched a panel near her head. "Initiating the COM pulse. This will fucking wake them up something good."

Endith laughed softly from her chair. "I think the best show is yet to come lover." She stated.

Tina chuckled. "Ain't that the truth."

ENROUTE TO PRALOR DESIGNATED WORLD MANNE

“...will you tell father?” Mari asked her sister as they sat in the largest of the Mess Lounges on the *ARC ROYAL* and enjoyed a hearty breakfast meal. Kesyla sipped her mug of coffee slowly, savoring the flavor. She had discovered this liquid since coming to the ship and had become addicted to it almost immediately. The rich, dark flavor was decadent and it had succeeded in calming her nerves on many occasions since coming onto the ship. It was her first time away from her father on an extended diplomatic trip, and unlike her sister Mari, Kesyla was somewhat homesick. This was very different from the times they had traveled to the other Pralor worlds. Kesyla was thoroughly enjoying her time among the Lycavorians and elves on the ship, as well as the assortment of other species, but she still missed her home. The coffee, surprisingly, helped Kesyla to remain calm and stay focused on her duties. Mari on the other hand, she relished in the excitement and the unknown of being out here among the stars with people they barely knew. She had always been far more open and adventurous than either her or Doran.

Kesyla met her eyes. “What do you mean?” She asked.

Mari rolled her eyes. “It is me sister.” She said. “I know you have communicated with father on a secure channel outside of their ability to monitor. At least that you know of. What have you told him?”

Kesyla looked around quickly and then back to her. “Mari... keep your voice down!” She protested.

“Why?” Mari asked her with a grin. “You think they don’t know?” She said with a shake of her head. “You do not give them enough credit sister.”

“You are wrong.” Kesyla said. “I give them every credit due to them.” She spoke. “I am not Doran Mari, you know that. I have only used the communicator father gave to me twice since coming here. I am not reporting to father anything that Martin Leonidas has not already talked to him about. Each time I used it, father had already talked to Martin.”

Mari tilted her head slightly. “You are serious?” She asked.

Kesyla nodded her head. “It appears father has talked to Martin Leonidas more than I have talked to father. They are communicating on a very regular basis. To be honest, since Onterom, I think father has had his eyes opened.”

“Then why...” Mari began.

Kesyla shook her head. “Because father does not want Doran having access to the COM device. He is afraid he will use it to inform Lorendo of what we are doing. He does not trust our brother Mari... and nor do I.”

Mari’s eyes were wide. “You think he is working to help usurp father?” She gasped.

Kesyla shook her head. “No... I think he is working to help Lorendo however he can and to further his own aspirations, whatever they may be.” Kesyla told her honestly. “I think, if he knew about the COM unit and was able, he would report anything that could be construed as supporting Lorendo’s assertions about these people.”

“He has not tried to...” Mari began.

Kesyla shook her head again. “I don’t think so.” She answered. “He has remained quiet since that day in the conference room. But that will change. He has already begun roaming the ship looking for information he can use against them and for new women to bed.”

“That would not be the wisest of actions on his part sister.” Mari said. “His propensity to think that others are beneath him will only get him in trouble. As well as his inflated ego when it comes to women.”

Kesyla nodded. “I agree.” She said. “I know... I know he has attempted it with one or two of the female elves he has seen on the ship but I do not know the outcome. And they were not attached. That I am sure of.”

“If he attempts to bed a married Lycavorian female, the result will not be good sister. For any of us.” Mari said quickly. “If the woman does not kill him outright, then the husband most assuredly will.”

“I am watching him.” Kesyla said. “You know he likes to use his abilities to manipulate the Etheric realm to make himself appear more attractive to his conquests. Especially the ones who are married. I don’t know how it will work with Lycavorian females.”

“Kesyla it won’t!” Mari hissed softly. “They... they mark each other when they mate. They have... they have auras that they utilize to show affection and love. Nearly imperceptible pheromones that are used between

each other. Once they mate they are bound to each other very happily. If he infringes on that... they will not hesitate to strike him down.”

“I know Mari!” Kesyla spoke with some force. “Give me some credit sister.”

Mari stared at her for a moment. “Forgive me Kesyla.” She said softly and with some embarrassment.

Kesyla smiled at her and reached across to place her fingers on Mari’s knuckles. “There is nothing to forgive sister.” She stated. “In your position I would have thought the same things and acted the same way.” She told her. “Being among these people though... seeing how they treat one another, how they interact with each other, it is enlightening to say the least. I was frightened at first... but not anymore.”

“They are fascinating aren’t they?” Mari said. “Uncle Murano was right.”

Kesyla nodded her head. “I have never been as close to Uncle Murano as you... but I think I would like to change that.” She stated. “He is the only one they have fully accepted you know. They still view us as something of an oddity I think. They do not know what to make of us... but Uncle Murano... he is fully accepted among them.”

“He is a Praetorian... just like Martin Leonidas and his sons.” Mari said. “And he has fought beside them without question. To Lycavorians... to their Spartan heritage... that is the highest honor and duty one can exercise. The moment he did that our Uncle became one of them.”

Kesyla looked at her oddly. “How did you find that out Mari?” She asked quickly. “I have questioned four different people as to why they view Uncle differently and none of them gave me a straight answer.”

Mari shrugged her shoulders. “I went directly to the source.” She answered her. “I asked Wayonn and the woman they call Helen. She is Wayonn’s granddaughter you know. Two or three generations down the line, but she is of Wayonn’s blood. And she is the Praetorian Mage for Martin Leonidas. Just as Wayonn was for Sumar. And Wayonn’s great grandson Dutkne is now the Praetorian Mage to the son Androcles. It seems their bloodlines are tied to each other somehow. Just as it was for our people in the early times of the Praetorians sister.”

“So it would seem.” Kesyla said thoughtfully as she sipped her coffee. “You noticed the new arrivals that boarded yesterday?”

Mari nodded. “Most of them are wives of the crew.” She answered. “The King did not feel right having all of his wives with him while the others were away from theirs. There were not many married crewmembers... but he had the wives of those brought here.”

Kesyla tilted her head as she looked at her sister. “And just how did you discover that?” She asked.

Mari blushed and looked down at the table quickly and shyly. “I asked one of the elven transport pilots during dinner last night.” She replied. “I think... I think he was attracted to me. He acted like it I think. And he was very forthcoming with the information.”

“Mari!” Kesyla exclaimed but with a knowing smile.

Mari smiled brightly at her as she looked up. “I only asked the questions!” Mari told her. “Don’t worry sister... I have no interest in any man at the moment.” Mari spoke. “I have yet to meet one who stirs my mind as well as my passion.”

Kesyla grinned. “Yes... they are hard to come by aren’t they?” She said. “I have spent quite a bit of time with the Queens Dysea and Isabella. They are extremely intelligent and very well versed in politics; though I do think Queen Isabella would rather remain out of political discussions from her demeanor. I found that so very refreshing. Not enough women take an interest in our politics if you ask me.”

“Maybe you will.” Mari said. “Surely being by father’s side you have learned much?”

Kesyla nodded her head. “Oh yes... but I wish to take a more active role.” She answered. “For example... Queen Dysea in particular is very active in governing. She is considered the Union’s High Education Leader. Her mandates dictate what is taught in all of their schools. The red haired one, Queen Anja, she is the one who decides everything about medical practices and policies; Queen For'mya is the political liaison between all of them and the Prime Minister of the Union and she is also considered the Royal family’s Ambassador. If any of them think an issue needs to be brought to light, For'mya is the one they have address it.”

Mari nodded her head in agreement. “Wayonn and Helen have said that For'mya is the most patient of all the Queens. She is the one most able to cut through the governing red tape so to speak.”

“She is also widely renowned as one of the three or four finest pilots in their entire Fleet.” Kesyla said with some wonder in her voice. “She is not simply an figure head. None of them are Mari. That is what I find so

intriguing about them. All of them are respected in the fields of what they do, but all of them are recognized as exceptional warriors as well. Queen Aricia most of all, with Isabella and Anja not far behind her. I could learn so much from how they do things Mari.”

“Then learn from them sister.” Mari told her confidently. “They would not refuse you. And none of them are shy about voicing their opinions according to Wayonn and Helen.”

Kesyla shook her head. “I am father’s aide and...”

“Father would not expect you to be stagnant Kesyla!” Mari exclaimed. “He did not make you his aide to simply run errands for him or to be his buffer between rival positions. If you can learn from them he would expect you too.”

“Perhaps you are right.” Kesyla said.

“You know I am Kesyla.” Mari told her firmly. “I am spending as much time as I can with Wayonn and this Helen. They work quite a bit with the Avatar they call Avi... and the dragons. The Dragon Elder Mother is amazing. She is so much more comfortable around non-dragons than Teniri. You should hear her instructing the adolescent dragons in the hanger bay. She never raises her voice within the Etheric Realm when talking to them, but they know by her tone and what she says whether she is pleased or not.”

“I gather from Elder Mother Teniri’s reaction when we first met them that she was very shocked how some Lycavorians and elves have bonded with her species within the Etheric Realm.” Kesyla said.

“She had never seen it before. She did not think it was possible until she saw the King and his dragon Torma.” Mari said. “Not in the way it occurs. *We* have never seen something like that Kesyla.”

Kesyla nodded. “True.”

“It is even more incredible when it comes to Martin Leonidas’s oldest son.” Mari said. “He bonded with his dragon while he was still within his mother’s womb. He was born fully aware sister!”

Kesyla looked at her with wide eyes. “Wait... you mean...”

Mari nodded. “Wayonn and Helen explained it to me as best as they were able. Even they do not understand fully how it happened. He was still within his mother’s womb and he had all the knowledge of his father and mother, as well as his dragon sister. Elynth I think they said her name was. She in turn had all the knowledge of her father and mother. They shared all of this knowledge with each other before he was even born!” She said. “And just recently... Queen Isabella’s unborn son Dorian experienced the same thing with his dragon. Wayonn believes it stems in some way from what they call the Paladin gene. The extra set of chromosomes that grant Praetorians their abilities. They have never really studied it extensively because up until their son Dorian was born, only the son Androcles had ever experienced it.”

“Mari... that... that is incredible!” Kesyla said. “Our scientists would kill to study a phenomenon like that.”

Mari nodded. “I know. It is not spoken of often and almost never in public.” She told her. “At least according to Helen and Wayonn. They do not understand enough about it and while there are rumors floating among their own people, it is not something they wish to delve too deeply into. It is more a spiritual thing I think.”

Kesyla’s brow furrowed somewhat. “Then it is not something Daron needs to know.” She said quickly. “He would... given where he has shown his allegiance to be... he would only try and use it against them and cause father more problems.”

“He won’t hear it from me.” Mari said. “He hardly even acknowledges I exist. Not that it bothers me.”

“He acts that way because he can’t influence you.” Kesyla said with a smile. “He acts in a similar manner with me. Don’t be worried by it Mari. It will only...”

Mari saw Kesyla look up over her shoulder towards the door of the Mess Lounge and Mari turned her head. She saw Daron enter the Mess Lounge, his eyes gazing lustfully at the female elf walking with two others in front of him. Mari rolled her eyes and looked back to her sister. “Can he be any more obvious?” She rasped in disgust.

Kesyla shook her head. “I know.” She agreed. “We should talk more sister. I like when we compare notes and it is so much more pleasant when speaking with someone who knows what I am saying. But later, when it is just the two of us.”

Mari nodded as she saw Daron turn and make his way towards them. “Tonight.” She said. “I will come to your quarters.”

Kesyra nodded. "Change the subject quickly!" She whispered as Daron almost reached them.

They were saved by the *Durcunusaan* soldier approaching Daron before he reached their table and tapping him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me. You are the Pralor Daron?" The man asked.

Daron turned halfway and looked at him. His body language made it clear he did not like the man or being interrupted. "Who wishes to know?" Daron spoke in a voice tinged with distaste.

The *Durcunusaan* picked up on his tone of voice and demeanor right away. "I am Senior Lieutenant Relas of the *Durcunusaan*. I was instructed to inform you that you need to report to the Medical Bay for an exam."

Daron turned fully to look at him. "An exam?" He demanded. "There is nothing wrong with me."

The *Durcunusaan* stood there stoically. "You have been asked twice before sir." He said. "You have ignored both requests."

"As is my right." Daron hissed at him. "I do not need an exam. Especially not from your people."

Relas stepped closer to him. "Queen Anja says otherwise." He stated. "She is the Chief Medical Officer on this ship and within the entire Union. She has forgotten more about medical things than you will ever learn. She has ordered this. And she will be obeyed."

"I do not *answer* to your *Queen*." Daron snapped.

Kesyra began to get to her feet but Mari grabbed her hand and shook her head quickly. Kesyra saw the look in her eyes and smiled gently as she sat back down. Perhaps it would not be such a bad thing if Daron was put in his place.

"You are a guest on our ship sir." Relas told him. "If Queen Anja orders that you undergo a medical exam... then that is what you will do. You have refused her request twice now... I am here to insure you do not insult her honor by refusing once more. You would not like the reaction you received if this happens."

Daron stood there arrogantly. "She cannot order me to be examined!" Daron snapped. "I am not sick! And I will not submit to such a degrading thing."

Relas nodded his head. "She said you would refuse." He spoke. "In that case, you will be confined to the quarters you are assigned for the remaining time of your stay with us." He spoke calmly. "Please come with me."

"What?" Daron exclaimed. "That's preposterous!" He snarled. "You can't do that!"

"I can and I will." Relas told him. "You come on our ship... you insult one of our Queens and you strode the corridors of this ship attempting to bed our females and crewmates." Relas saw Daron's eyes grow a little wider and he smiled menacingly. "Did you not think this would be noticed? Our females are not so stupid it seems."

"I... I will..." Daron stammered.

"If you will not submit to an exam then you will be confined to your quarters sir." Relas told him. "Do not make a scene here in the Mess Lounge over this. I would prefer not to have to subdue you and have you escorted away in restraints... but make no mistake I will."

"I want to protest this treatment to the King!" Daron barked at him harshly.

Relas nodded his head. "That is your right... but if you think King Martin will go against Queen Anja, who many believe he favors most of all after his *Anome* Queen Aricia, in favor of you and your complaints, then you are not as smart as you consider yourself to be."

"This is..." Daron began to speak but grew silent when Relas stepped closer and growled softly in his throat.

"Do not make me subdue you." Relas snarled softly. "I would like nothing better than to make you look the fool. It is your choice... but you will come with me now. To the Med Bay or to your quarters. Decide now."

"Fine." Daron spat. "I will submit to this exam under protest!"

"I don't care how you submit to it." Relas told him. "If it shuts you up." He motioned with his hand toward the doors. "This way sir."

Mari and Kesyra broke into muted laughter as their brother was led from the Mess Lounge, his face twisted into an angry expression. Sooner or later he would offend the wrong person and they would deal with him. That much the sisters knew.

“...All done.” Anja spoke as she looked at the nearly nude Iama on the examination bed of the small, private room in the Med Bay and pushed away the hovering medical computer. “That wasn’t so bad was it?”

Iama looked at her and smiled as she sat up. “No.” She answered honestly. “I... I didn’t know what to expect when you called me down. I’m sorry.”

Anja chuckled. “Don’t be.” She stated. “I’d be scared if I called me.” Anja turned and pushed the hover computer further away while typing on the small console and saving the data to three different secure computer cores on the ship. Three secure computer cores that only a dozen individuals on the ship could actually access. “You are a member of our family now Iama. A Princess of the Union. Your medical well being is now my concern.” Anja turned back and looked at her. “You can get dressed.” She said.

Iama slid off the exam table and slipped the simple white medical gown off her shoulders and reached for her clothes. She had taken to wearing a Union Flight Jumpsuit because it was very comfortable and easy to obtain. The ship’s Tailor, an elven female, had worked on all of them so that they fit her like a second skin as well as allowed her tail to slip through a slot that she had offered to engineer right into the fabric for Iama. Anja watched as she took the men’s t-shirt, obviously one of Fedor’s by its size, and pulled it on over her very firm, medium sized breasts. “What was the exam for?” Iama asked as she slipped her legs into the jumpsuit.

“I have the medical files of our entire family on one computer core.” Anja answered her. “Basically each person’s entire history medically. I’ve given the exams to everyone and I keep them up to date myself. We had the time so I figured I would add you to the database as well.”

“So there is nothing wrong with me?” Iama asked her, lifting her soft green eyes to look at Anja as she pulled the jumpsuit up her legs around her waist.

“Given what you have been through in your life Iama... you are in superb health.” Anja said. “A little on the light side as far as weight... but you are adding a few pounds of muscle here and there since Fedor bit you. That is good.” Anja told her. “All your tests are normal or better than normal. I’d call you the picture of health.”

“Will... will the changes grow more pronounced?” Iama asked her.

“Not as much as you might think.” Anja answered. “Kavalians as a whole have senses that are close to Lycavorians. All the virus will do is enhance those slightly. It will affect your internal makeup somewhat differently though. Your natural healing will increase quite a bit and the natural Kavalian resistance to diseases and poisons will be close to par with Lycavorians. Since the Biogenic process you underwent is based at least in part on Lycavorian DNA, you’ll never have to take the injections again and you’ll never revert back to your natural state any more than you are now.”

Iama’s tail flipped forward casually and she smiled. “I like my tail.” She said.

Anja nodded her head. “He probably could have picked a better place to bite you when he made you his.” She stated referring to the teeth marks Iama had on the side of her right breast. “It’s a tossup when they go all instinctive on us.”

Iama blushed slightly. “I... I never really felt it.” She said as her mind wandered back to that moment. She didn’t really feel the pain of Fedor’s wolf fangs as he had bitten her. She was in the grips of one of the most intense orgasmic eruptions of her life and his bite only enhanced that. Afterwards... knowing the significance of him doing such a thing... Iama had relished in the moment.

Anja smiled at her knowingly. “Neither did I.” She stated. “That Leonidas wolf blood can really set you on fire. His father is a beast when he gets like that. Martin can have all of us screaming at the same time. And nights like that usually end up nine months later with another little one. Which reminds me... you should sit with For’mya or Aricia soon and learn how to use your developing Mindvoice and Etheric abilities to adjust your body chemicals and have them act as a contraceptive. At least until you two are ready. Leonidas men are notoriously fertile and when you combined that with Fedor’s elven half... well...” Anja saw the look on her face and moved closer. “What?”

Iama couldn’t meet her eyes and looked at the floor. “I... no one knows but Fedor.” She said softly. She looked back up at Anja. “I cannot have children Anja. It would not due for the females in brothels to become pregnant. All of us were subjected to sterilization injections. We did not have a choice.”

Anja tilted her head to the side slightly. “Really?” She asked with some humor. She took Iama’s hands, the jumpsuit bundled around her waist. “Then I guess I do really good work.”

Iama looked at her. “What... what do you mean?”

Anja smiled and squeezed her hands. “Iama... I am the foremost Hadarian Healer in the Universe.” She stated with mock arrogance. “You don’t really think the clumsy attempts to sterilize you would escape my notice did you?”

“What... I don’t understand?” Iama stammered.

Anja chuckled and stepped closer. “The virus in Fedor’s blood began repairing whatever they tried to do to you the moment he bit you Iama. I simply hastened the process so that it was complete. You can have children Iama... as many as you want.”

Iama stared at her with wide eyes. “That... that is not a joke?” She gasped.

Anja shook her head. “Not in the least. Fedor did most of the work when he bit you like I said. I have to ask though... as far along as the process was, how often have you two...?” She said with a smile.

Iama gazed at her in shock for a very brief moment and then shrugged her slim shoulders shyly. She was becoming more comfortable with the openness of Fedor’s family when it came to sexual matters, but she hadn’t caught on entirely just yet. “I... every moment we have had alone.” Iama blushed slightly. “He makes me feel so wonderful Anja... I can’t get enough of him. I... I have never wanted to please a man as I want to please Fedor Anja. Just the way he smells when it fills my senses is...”

“Divine?” Anja finished her statement with a knowing look in her Jade green eyes. “Trust me... I do know the feeling. All of us do when it comes to Martin.”

“Will... it won’t ever go away will it?” Iama asked.

“Gods... I hope not!” Anja exclaimed. She reached up and rubbed Iama’s cheek. “Let’s just say that your frequent interactions have helped the process along as well.” Anja said with another knowing grin. “The official medical definition is somewhat boring and technical, but essentially... every one of Fedor’s cells that made it inside you have been working on repairing that issue. I simply finished it up when I examined your abdomen today.” Anja finished her statement. “When the time comes that the two of you decide to have children... that will not be an issue you need to worry about.”

“I can... I can have Fedor’s children?” She stammered softly, still not able to believe it. “I can...” Tears started to fall from her eyes. “I can have children! Our children!” She said as the tears came more freely now.

Anja smiled happily and pulled her into an embrace. “Yes you can.” She stated happily. “As many as you two want.”

Iama’s arms held her tightly, her tail wrapping affectionately around Anja’s waist. When she had told Fedor she could not have children she thought for sure that he would want nothing more to do with her given how much value Lycavorians and elves put in children. She should have known better considering she had floated within his thoughts and seen his love for her. So complete and total. Happiness rushed through her as she realized she would be able to give him children. “Thank you!” She gasped into Anja’s chest. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me.” Anja said. “You can thank Fedor. His blood did all the work.”

Anja watched as Iama pulled away and began wiping at her eyes. She smiled warmly. “All of this is overwhelming for you isn’t it?” She asked softly.

Iama nodded slowly. “Not all of the time... but there are moments.” She replied. “I just... I had resigned myself to never finding happiness. I thought I would die on that vile world, or die in the process of trying to get away. I never imagined I would find someone like Fedor. That I could feel for him what I do. That I would be a... that I would be considered a Princess.”

“No regrets?” Anja asked her.

“Regrets?” Iama gasped. “By the moons Anja... never!”

Anja reached up and pushed some of her blond hair from her face. “You are not alone anymore Iama’ Juturi Leonidas. And like For’mya told you... we haven’t yet learned how to be Queens... so we are in the same position. Though I think that comes from the fact that none of us want to be Queens more than anything. We can’t learn to be proper Queens if we don’t want to be.”

Iama laughed at this statement and wiped some more tears from her eyes and cheeks. “Thank you Anja.” She spoke softly.

Anja smiled at her. She reached up and brushed some hair from her face. “Fedor loves you with every waking breath he takes Iama. We all can see it. Everyone can see it. Just in the way he looks at you. He will be viciously protective of you but he knows you are quite capable of taking care of yourself. Never hold back from each other Iama. Share everything with him just as you have. Your love will burn brightly if you do.”

Iama looked at her. “Do you... do you and the Queens still love the King the same as when you first met him?” She asked softly.

Anja shook her head quickly. “We love him more.” She stated. “It only gets better Iama. There will always be bumps on the road you travel... but it will always get better. Trust in your feelings for him and his feelings for you. You are stronger than you think or else you would not have made it this far.”

Iama nodded her head. “I will.” She said softly.

Anja kissed her cheek and stepped back. “Well... we are done here.” She stated. “Should I call him to walk you to the Mess lounge or...” They both turned when the male voice echoed loudly right outside of the Exam Room door and then the door slid open fully.

“Sir... you can’t go in there!” The Lycavorian female protested. “Queen Anja is with a patient and...”

“I will go where I want!” Doran’s voice barked. “I want to get this foolish exam that she has ordered me to undergo over with!” Doran turned and his eyes grew slightly wider as he saw Anja and Iama standing together. “Well...”

Iama quickly finished zipping her jumpsuit up as Anja stepped in front of her. “You had better have a good excuse for barging in here!” Anja snarled.

“I’m sorry Lady Anja... he wouldn’t listen to me.” The female elven medic explained.

“You have a lot of nerve mister!” Anja spat. “I am conducting a medical exam! You have no right to...!”

Iama tore her eyes from the way Daron was lustfully gazing at her and she stepped to the side around Anja. “It’s ok Anja.” She stated confidently gripping her hand. “I will go and see Aricia about what we discussed. Will you and the others join us for dinner this evening? We are meeting Eirene and Miseo in the Port Mess Lounge.”

Anja’s angry eyes turned to Iama and changed instantly. She smiled and gave her a warm kiss on the cheek. “We’ll be there.” She stated.

Iama smiled and then moved past Daron, looking at him with evil eyes as he gazed at her lustfully until she had passed him. Daron turned back to Anja and for the first time he saw just how attractive she was. Daron had not really noticed what she looked like on Onterom because he thought her and the others beneath him but he chided himself for not noticing sooner. She was certainly much more attractive than many of the women he had bedded on his home world and extremely fit.

Anja was watching him with her arms crossed under her large breasts and a thoroughly disgusted expression on her face, one he took for something else entirely. Daron took a perverse joy in getting married women to sleep with him. Whatever the reason; their husbands didn’t pay them enough attention; they were having an affair as well; or the woman had been selected for her husband without her real consent and she wanted to explore other options. Whatever the many reasons, Daron found that married women were far more open in bed, and far easier to manipulate once he had bedded them. Even up to now, none of the husbands had come forward to confront him in regards to bedding their wives. They either did not care or still had not discovered the infidelity of their significant other.

Daron stepped closer to Anja. “I am here.” He stated deciding that he would show his father just how primitive these men and women were by bedding one of Martin Leonidas’s queens. “You did not have to send your bully out to get me.”

“You ignored my first two requests.” Anja spoke. “I don’t like asking twice. Three times and I get pissed.”

Daron’s eyes narrowed. “Pissed?”

“Angry.” Anja hissed.

Daron nodded his head in acknowledgment and smiled as he moved up in front of her. She was beautiful he thought. High cheekbones and soft full lips... not to mention she had the finest and most lush figure of any of the married women he had bedded in the last six hundred years. “I am here now.” He said bowing his head slightly. “My apologies.”

Daron reached out subtly within the Etheric realm, searching for the strands of Anja's surface thoughts in order to warp them into seeing him as a man who was much more attractive and intriguing than her husband. Daron had become a master at this skill, usually having the woman willing to sleep with him in a matter of hours after manipulating her surface thoughts. He did not care that this practice was intensely frowned upon among his own people. He had been using this skill for centuries even as many of their politicians blithered about whether to outlaw such manipulation. It was not a skill one was born with, it was something that the person had to choose to practice and become skilled with. Many Pralor people regarded men or women who chose to enhance this skill to be nothing but criminals for the effect it could have in so many different ways. Daron stopped short when he felt the power of the Etheric shields Anja Leonidas had in place around her mind and was somewhat surprised at her lack of reaction to him though he made no outward show of this. Even Anja's surface thoughts were well guarded and he had to be very careful not to probe too deeply. He simply twisted several of the thought strands to think what he wanted them to think. Daron decided to not probe too deeply just yet and to show an interest outwardly as well.

While Anja Leonidas was officially listed as a Category 18 Etheric user, she was now in fact a Category 19 Etheric user. Anja Leonidas had spent every free moment for the better part of the last five years either learning with Helen or training with Aricia in being able to more intensely focus her Etheric abilities. Aricia, who along with Sadi, had perhaps the most pure and dominant female Lycavorian blood known to exist within the Union was also a very traditional Lycavorian/Spartan woman. While she could not manifest an Etheric knife as Aricia was able to, or throw up very powerful Etheric barriers like Helen, Anja had learned how to use her Etheric connection to lift her healing skills to a much higher level. She had also, very quietly, taught herself how to uniquely influence the metaphysical healing radiation within her body so that she could use it for things outside the realm of healing. What had happened to Aricia all those years ago, and recently to For'mya and Dysea both, only cemented Anja's mentality in this regard. She was wolf yes and since she had experienced Martin's full and unshielded aura, no other man would ever compare to him or be able to twist her senses as certain individuals had done to her fellow Queens and lovers. His unshielded Alpha wolf aura had been the utter epitome of glorious and even before experiencing that magnificent moment, Anja had loved Martin completely. Now she would willingly worship him in any way he desired, just as any of them would, though all of them knew he would never treat them in such a manner.

As harsh as her view may have been to some who would never understand, Anja and her fellow Queens knew that there would always be those who thought they could influence or control Martin Leonidas through harm or threat to the Queens he adored so. The chances of that happening now were much slimmer than before they knew, but Anja also knew there would always be some fool willing to risk it all by kidnapping or capturing a Queen of the Union and raping or beating them in order to get back at Martin for some perceived wrong he may have done. Anja was intent on making sure that never happened.

While all of them were developing their own unique solution to this fact, Anja had spent her last years studying how to influence the healing properties of the radiation within her body and turn it into a weapon if she needed to. This required that she study and learn how to focus her Etheric abilities to the point that it moved her into the next category of the Pralor Etheric rating scale. It was also one of the reasons she was so adamant about not submitting to further testing by the DSM or any of his cronies, for it would certainly be detected. Anja was now able to influence the metaphysical radiation within her body and use it as a weapon. She could alter the healing pulse she used or even shield her entire body by making the radiation alter a person's molecular structure at its core. This could cause intense pain to the point of being able to incapacitate an individual. Anja and her fellow Queens had made a vow to each other that no man but Martin Leonidas would ever have them in such a way again, and any who were fool enough to attempt it with Anja would be in for an tremendously painful and possibly very lethal surprise.

Anja shook her head in disgust at his answer and his sudden change in demeanor towards her for she saw it for what it was and she motioned to the table. "Get on the table!" She spoke harshly as she turned to the hovering computer terminal.

Daron moved to the table and began unbuttoning his shirt as he turned and lifted himself onto it. He pulled off his shirt, exposing a lean and powerful upper body physique, and draped the shirt neatly beside him on the bed. "So what is this exam for?" He asked casually.

Anja turned around holding the medical scanner and saw him on the bed without a shirt. Her alpha female wolf instincts lit up instantly as she could easily smell the desire for her openly wafting from Daron's pores. Anja fought down the urge to rip his face off for such a blatantly obvious exploit only because he was not Lycavorian. She sincerely doubted he didn't know what he was doing but he probably had no idea about what his actions really meant in to a mated female. Or he just didn't care and was doing it on purpose for a reason.

Anja lifted the medical scanner and began a standard scan. "The exam is to determine the differences and similarities in your physiology as compared to others so that we can treat you better should the need arise." Anja answered him keeping her voice neutral.

"And what will you do with this information?" Daron asked her.

"It will be added to the ship's Medical Database. Elder Radra is coordinating that." She replied.

"And here I thought you were being so persistent because you wanted to get to know me as a man and person." Daron commented with a handsome smile.

Anja's jade green eyes glanced up into his face. "Not quite." She stated.

"I have been reading some of the information in your ship's library on your species and the Lycavorians." Daron spoke arrogantly, dismissing her answer entirely. "I was wondering if I could ask you some questions."

"Like what?" Anja asked.

"I read that your species, the Hadarians, have been members of this Lycavorian Union since it was founded." Daron said.

Anja nodded her head. "Yes."

"Yet in all that time, nearly four thousand years now, you are among only a handful of Hadarians who have ever been 'turned' I believe is the word your history files use. And all of them have been within the last hundred years." Daron spoke.

Anja looked at him intently now. "What are you getting at?" She questioned.

"It's curious that's all." Daron said. "In all that time, thousands of years and only in the last century have there been those among your people who have been turned."

"Why is that curious?" Anja asked him. "There are thousands of documented marriages between Lycavorians and Hadarians throughout our history."

Daron nodded. "Yes... but none where the Hadarian allowed themselves to be turned." He said. "According to your own history records, including you and your sister, there are only nine Hadarians who have been turned by Lycavorians. And only one instance before you reclaimed your throne as Queen of your people."

"I still don't see a question there." Anja told him. "Do you have one?"

"You were turned by Leonidas before you discovered your past and that of your people." Daron said calmly. "Do you think it would have been different had you been aware of your own history? Would you have let him turn you?"

"Yes." Anja answered without a split second's hesitation.

"Even though many of your people look down on such a pairing?" Daron asked. "I saw from the records that there were many among your people who were upset by the fact that he had turned you. They felt it somehow tainted your royal blood."

"Those people that look down on such a pairing, as you say, are short sighted and very unwilling to accept change." Anja told him calmly, ignoring the condescending way he spoke the words. "Those very same people also initiated an illegal coup against me and have turned our government into some sort of fanatic religious state who is friends with the very people that started a war against ours. Twice." Anja met his eyes. "They act sort of like you and many of your people in regards to Lycavorians and other species." Anja sent the jab at him.

"Not all of us adhere to such things." Daron told her quickly sensing her underlying anger at him.

"Really?" Anja quipped. "I haven't seen much of that in recent days."

Daron chuckled in a friendly nature. "Elder Lorendo is not indicative of our people." He said.

"No?" Anja said. "You could have fooled me. With the exception of your sisters, Kasdan and his brother and those that came with them and Elder Radra... it seems to me that Lorendo is indicative of the mentality of the majority your people. At least that is the impression he gives in his actions and words."

“Elder Lorendo is much older than I.” Daron said. “He is more cemented in his way of thinking. I consider myself to be very open minded and I do not take the same course as he does in many things.”

“If you say so.” Anja said.

“I was wondering...” Daron said with that engaging smile of his. “Since you have me in a rather uncompromising position before you... shirtless and all I mean... could I ask you a personal question?”

Anja drew back the medical scanner and tapped lightly on the small control panel. “That depends on what the question is.” She said in reply.

“While I could find nothing within the history files of the Lycavorian people saying that it was not allowed, having more than one partner, or mate as they are commonly called among Lycavorians, it is not a common practice is it?” Daron said.

Anja looked at him. “No it’s not.” She said. “So?”

“You are one of six Queens.” Daron said measuring his words. “Do you or the others... do you not feel neglected at times?” He asked with all the charm he could muster. “Especially since the Lycavorian Queen Aricia is said to be the *Anome* of Leonidas. The most important to him and the one he favors most.”

Anja tilted her head to the side and looked at him. “And why exactly would that matter to you?” She asked.

“Well... you are a stunningly beautiful woman, all of you are.” Daron answered. “I guess I just don’t understand why you would accept such an arrangement when you could obviously have any number of men you would not have to share. He couldn’t possibly feel for all of you what he does for her could he?”

Anja stared at him for a long moment trying to decide whether she wanted to beat his ass now or wait and string him along further. Anja was no fool and she had already heard all about Daron from Radra and his sister Mari. That he was being so transparently obvious about his motives told her that he had no respect for her or anyone else for that matter. He was only out to prove a point to someone, probably his father or Lorendo. Anja felt the sudden warmth and love of Aricia fill her as she pulsed Anja with her female wolf aura from wherever she was on the ship, followed quickly by Dysea and then Cirith. Though Isabella could have sent a similar pulse through Mindvoice, that probably would have been detected by Daron and she knew this, so she allowed Aricia and the others to send Anja the message in a manner Daron could not hope to pick up on. They no doubt felt Anja’s emotions spike in anger at what Daron was doing. In each of their female auras Anja could detect the decision to string him along and they would deal with him together in a manner befitting what he was trying to do. Anja couldn’t help but smile inwardly at that and she sent back a pulse of acknowledgement within her own wolf aura to all of them. For’mya would agree with them when she returned they had no doubt and Anja knew it would be gratifying to put Daron in his place once and for all. Besides... all of them loved to brag about Martin in every way... and making Daron look the fool while they did would be delicious.

Anja met Daron’s eyes. “I... I guess I never thought about in that way.” She said in an almost wistful voice.

Daron’s facial expression told Anja that he thought he had hooked her. He blinked his eyes several times. “Forgive me for bringing it up.” He said suddenly.

Anja shook her head. “No... no it’s ok.” She said trying to act flustered. “We... we are done here.” She said quickly. “You... you can put your shirt back on.”

Daron got to his feet and made a show of stretching his upper body as he slowly put his shirt back on. Though these actions made Anja want to gag and laugh at the same time, she acted as if she couldn’t tear her eyes from him. “I did not mean to bring up a subject that was unpleasant.” He said with false sincerity.

Anja shook her head again. “It’s... it’s fine.” She said softly. “It’s... it’s just that... it’s not something we... that we talk about.”

“Perhaps you should.” He said gazing at her.

Anja shook her head. “Martin... Martin is very possessive and...”

“If it is not a situation you wish to be in then you should not be in it.” Daron spoke. “That is just my opinion.”

Anja gazed at him for a long moment. “So you... you think I am attractive?” She finally stammered like a schoolgirl.

Daron looked at her. “You will forgive me if I am out of line, but I think you are the most attractive woman I have ever seen.” He said to her with heartfelt honesty that was so false Anja just about reached out and slapped him right there. “And you would be the center of all my attention.”

Anja forced a shy, schoolgirl smile then and looked down at the floor. “I’ll... I’ll let you know when I have the results. Perhaps a day or two.” She said.

Daron smiled thinking how easy this had turned out to be. He thought it was going to be so much harder to manipulate her. “I’ll look forward to seeing you then.” He said reaching out and running his fingers across the back of her hand and halfway down her arm.

It was a very sure and deliberate show of affection and interest in her and in any other circumstance Anja would have cleaned his clock right then. His touch made her shiver in utter revulsion, something that Daron took as a completely opposite reaction. Anja watched him turn and exit the exam room with a smug expression on his face thinking how clever he must be. Anja cut her eyes and looked at her elven medic as she came into the room right after he left.

“My Lady?” She said softly.

“*Carians* Nadia!” Anja stated in a loud whisper. “Find me some really strong disinfectant will you! I want to bath in it to make sure I don’t catch anything from him.”

“Should I have Atropos return from the *HOPE* and make time for a... talk with him?” Nadia asked quickly. She was deeply involved with one of the senior Lycavorian engineers on the *ARC ROYAL*, a glorious three year relationship that was rapidly moving to them becoming mates. He had already scented her, and Nadia had become close with his mother and sisters in the traditional Lycavorian way. She knew what Daron was doing and also what Anja’s reaction would be. She had been around Anja and the other Queens long enough to know how they all felt about the King. Nadia was quite sure there wasn’t a male in the universe who could make any one of the Queens take a second look.

“No!” Anja exclaimed quickly looking at her. “*Carians*... Atropos would skin him alive! And don’t let it slip to any of the *Durcunusaan* either. They would just tell Martin and he would flat out kill the fool after all that has happened in the last months. No... the Queens and I will handle this ourselves.” She answered.

Nadia smiled brightly then, knowing exactly how the Queens would handle it. She had heard several rumors of how the Queens of the Union had handled similar situations that had come up through the years. “Will you at least make sure I am able to witness it Milady?” She asked finally.

Anja chuckled and held out the medical scanner to her. “We’ll give you front row seats.” She said.

Nadia grinned. “I look forward to it. It will be very entertaining I’m sure.”

“Give that to Radra if you would.” Anja said. “She is working with Avi to enter all the Pralor records into our database. I’m going to go grab a mug of coffee and see Aricia and the others.”

VEYERAI HIGH COVEN SPACE

Yuri stepped from the large bathroom wrapped in the oversized towel and stopped as her eyes settled on Pa'cour sitting on the bed and sifting through a stack of data pads. He wore only a pair of loose pants and Yuri felt a heady rush of sexual desire course through her as she gazed at him from the doorway. The same intense sexual exhilaration she felt course through her body whenever she looked at him. Even now, months after he had saved her life and the nature of his true feelings for her had come to light, Yuri was still astounded at the emotions this knowledge caused to race through her. Never in her wildest fantasies had she ever considered bedding an Immortal, it was so taboo within vampire society, no one in their right mind would think such a thing. How little she knew Yuri thought. Not only had hundreds of purebloods taken Immortal husbands secretly, they had done so long before Cha'talla’s wife Esther had developed the serum that returned the Akruxians to their natural outward appearance. What they looked like before her father had twisted and warped their DNA for millennia and turned many of them into vampires.

Now Yuri could not imagine how she had ever survived without Pa'cour in her life. He was absolutely beautiful to her in every way, his skin a deep bronze color and the bone spurs that ran along his jaw line adding

to his incredibly handsome features. His very touch could incite passionate desire in her. Not the artificial desire she had experienced with Robert or the others who had shared her bed in her lifetime, but a deep, burning and throbbing of desire that would not go away until he had taken her. Yuri never had a man love her in the way Pa'cour did, often times making sure that she was screaming out in shameless pleasure before filling her completely with his immense Akruvian cock and making her blissfully shriek his name in glorious ecstasy until she was hoarse. Pa'cour did things to her that Robert would never have thought of let alone agreed to do. When he took her, he didn't just fuck her, he worshiped her in every possible way. An old adage from ancient Earth lore came to her mind then, one about how most men with large cocks didn't know how to use their equipment. To Yuri's sensational delight, Pa'cour knew just how to use his incredible equipment to drive her utterly insane with pleasure. Pa'cour had taken her in every way she had ever been taken before by other lovers and each experience had been beyond magnificent. Pa'cour was the Blessed Husband that Yuri had always dreamed of having as a young woman growing up. A man who yearned for her body every waking moment, but who also desired her mind equally as well. And while her mind was far clearer and much sharper than it had ever been, all the hours training with Pa'cour and Onera had insured that her body had become equally as fit as her mind. Yuri found herself wanting to keep her body in peak shape for she never wanted Pa'cour's attentions to stop.

Pa'cour was a brilliant tactician and leader all by himself, something that must have run in the genes of their family since his brother Cha'talla was the same. Yet he never hesitated to ask her opinion on something that he thought she could provide a different insight to. This was something that Robert had never done and it showed her more than anything else that Pa'cour respected her just as much as he loved her. Yuri was now doing the same thing, asking for his opinion on many decisions that she thought she alone was best qualified to make not so long ago. More often than not Pa'cour agreed with her assessment anyway, but just having his input told Yuri she had come a long way.

Of course, dying tended to do that to a person.

Yuri held no malice in her heart towards Androcles Leonidas for his lethal actions. In his position she knew she would have done the same thing. He had taken her down that day, and if not for Pa'cour, he more than likely would have succeeded in making sure she never rose again. Something within her had changed that day, and it wasn't just the vile darkness of Xaxon's taint leaving her body. In many respects, Yuri *had* died that day, and been reborn. Even without the taint of Xaxon within her, she found herself looking at things differently than she would have decades ago. She considered her options more carefully before committing to an action, and she found she was far more open to different things that just last year she would have refused outright. She was still very cruel in some respects she knew, not hesitating to execute those she knew were working against her or what Narice was trying to do, but at least now there was purpose to her actions. Yuri knew Narice was the only one who could save and lead the High Coven into the future. She had done so much in only a few short weeks. It needed to continue Yuri knew and she had dedicated her life now to insuring that Narice succeeded where she herself had failed. Yuri knew Narice was the last and best hope for their people, her marriage to Arran Leonidas being the first step. Things would change under Narice, change for the better, and Yuri intended to see that her sister had the resources and allies to insure her success. Twice now since Narice had assumed total control of the High Coven government, Yuri had sent her new agents against those who opposed her sister.

Yuri had been surprised that she still had support on her home planet but when the few military officers and members of the old *Venorik Elghinn* discovered she was alive and how she had changed, they swore their loyalty to her and in doing so, they swore the same thing to her sister Narice and what she was trying to accomplish. They knew what Yuri was doing and they very willingly did the same. Supporting Narice and her changes from the shadows and insuring that her enemies knew it would not be wise to go against her. Two of the mid-sized Pureblood vampire families that had followed her mother and father so devotedly had expressed their displeasure with how Narice was changing things. Word of their actions had gotten back to Yuri through that same network of Immortal and vampire contacts that were still loyal to her and Pa'cour. After brief discussions with Pa'cour, Yuri acted decisively. The heads of both those families and several close members of those same families died in carefully orchestrated and completely natural 'accidents'.

Yuri had also instructed those same agents to keep very close watch on several other vampire Pureblood families that were making the most noise about the many changes Narice was instituting. Yuri's advantage was that she knew how to play that game and she knew all of those involved. They would not be able to hide from her if they went against Narice. The largest such Pureblood family was even now demanding that Narice take a

Pureblood vampire husband and regulate Arrarn Leonidas to a male consort if she intended to keep him around. It was their way of maneuvering in order to remain relevant in their eyes. Marry one of their sons to Narice and they would have a grip on power within the new Empire. Yuri knew her sister would never do such a thing, and had Narice asked Yuri for her advice, the new Yuri would have been dead set against it as well. Arrarn Leonidas was the largest part of the mold that held Narice together. That her sister loved the younger Leonidas son so passionately, as well as the red haired pureblood female Toria, was easy enough to see. And it did not escape her notice that Arrarn had taken both of them as his mates and they now carried Leonidas as their last name. Yuri had seen in broadcasts how her sister looked at them and they at her even in public, the pride and love and devotion. It was no different than how she now looked at Pa'cour. Narice was also considered a Leonidas now and having Arrarn in the mix of things showed those who may have doubted Androcles's commitment to them that the Lycavorian Union was very serious. The continued presence of Admiral of the Fleet Riall within High Coven space and working closely with Admiral Pontal was also another factor that was rapidly winning over more and more of the older, more skeptical Purebloods. Yuri needed to make sure that continued.

"The longer you stand there wearing only a towel Yuri my Blessed Wife... the more of a distraction you will become." Pa'cour spoke from their bed jarring Yuri from her thoughts and causing her dark eyes to gaze at him. "I will need to act upon this distraction eventually."

Yuri laughed softly as his words coursed through her and she strode towards the bed. "Who says I do not want you to act husband?" She spoke in reply as she seductively leaned over the edge of the bed and crawled towards him. She delighted in the look of wanton desire that suddenly filled Pa'cour's eyes for it matched the same emotions in her.

This was the new Yuri. So much more free with what she felt and how she expressed those very same emotions. She no longer held them deep within her, or suppressed them. Now she embraced them and in doing so, Yuri had experienced more pleasure and love in the last four months with this man before her than she had in over three thousand years. That showed in the new brightness of her eyes and the relaxed beauty of her face.

Yuri pushed aside the data pads and with measured, seductive movements intentionally meant to enflame the desire in her husband's eyes, she knelt between his legs on the bed and wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders. All the while insuring her large breasts pressed against his chest under the towel. His powerful arms suddenly crushed her petite frame to him and their lips came together in a kiss of sizzling love and unquestioning passion. Yuri groaned loudly in happiness, her hands coming up to hold the sides of his head. In all of her long life, even from those who had shared her bed and professed their love to her, no one had ever kissed her with the wild and absolute ardor that Pa'cour did. Yuri relished in every moment that he held her in his powerful arms and just as she had in the weeks before now, she nearly cried at the devotion this man had for her. His love for her was unconditional, without doubt, hesitation or regret. And though he was twice her age, Yuri basked in the feelings this knowledge caused within her and it allowed her to reciprocate those same feelings with no doubts, no hesitations and no regrets. Their daughter together was the culmination of the love they held for each other and Yuri had every intention of giving birth to as many more children as Pa'cour wanted. It also helped that in order to make those children; Yuri would be involved in the most glorious sex she had ever experienced in her life.

After a long moment they parted from their kiss, Yuri dragging her tongue across his lips as she drew her face back and traced the bone spurs on his jaw. "I could simply throw you down and take what I want." She hissed in a soft voice.

Pa'cour chuckled as his hands tightened on her ass, pulling her body closer. "I would be in no position to stop you." He stated happily. "I would be a fool to want to stop you."

"Hmmm." Yuri cooed as she gazed into his delicious eyes. "I also know my Blessed Immortal Husband does not normally bring data pads into our bed, so whatever it is you are doing is important."

"Nothing is more important than you." Pa'cour told her.

Yuri smiled and kissed him once more. "While your words fill me with passion and love, we both decided that we would do as much together as we were able."

Pa'cour nodded. "We did." He said.

“Then I will help you... and then you can have your way with me.” Yuri said kissing him once more before twisting her body around between his legs and settling fully to the bed, her back to his bare chest. She flushed when his lips grazed the back of her neck and he leaned over her shoulder.

“Most of these are reports from Nalavi and Professor Lidene.” He said. “A few from our people in different locations across the Coven. I was training with Onera most of the day and did not get to them until late. I have been trying to catch up.”

Yuri turned her head and looked over her shoulder at his face. “You sound different when you speak of Onera since Nebonese Pa'cour.” She said softly. “What is wrong my love?”

Pa'cour shook his head. “It is probably nothing, but part of me thinks she has become too confident in her abilities.” He said. “The natural strength of my people and yours coupled with the ability to wrap the shadows around her. After what happen on Nebonese, taking the life of that fool soldier, I think she believes she is indestructible.”

Yuri shook her head. “Defeating one Immortal whose skills had degraded to the point of uselessness was not a true test of her abilities. Part of me wants to insure she never has to do that again, but I know eventually she will need to defend herself and others.”

“She wields *Iphan rie Aellseleum* as if it is an extension of her very body.” Pa'cour spoke carefully choosing his words. “None of the men will train with her now. Even I have a hard time matching her.”

“I do not want her to become hardened to death Pa'cour.” Yuri said. “I do not want her to become like I once was. Uncaring and unfeeling.”

“I know.” He said sliding his arm around her waist in a comforting manner and pulling her closer to him. “There is a way.” He told her. “She needs training that you and I can not give to her Yuri. With all that is going on, we have neither the time, nor the resources. And to be perfectly honest... neither of us has the skill needed to teach her. I am very good with bladed weapons, you are much better, but she needs someone who can teach her the path of the warrior like it is second nature. To guide her developing skills and her mind so that she does not falter. She is beginning to naturally augment her physical skills with her Etheric abilities and she does not realize it. That is why she is becoming both a danger to herself and others. I know you have noticed it.”

Yuri nodded her head slowly. “Yes.”

“We did not realize her Etheric skills would manifest so soon. If at all. We should have known better considering how strong you are.” Pa'cour said thoughtfully.

“I know now that Xaxon affected my mother. That a large sliver of his essence took over her and that is how she was able to do what she did.” Yuri said evenly. “But in order for him to have chosen Dante so quickly he must have sensed something within him. A connection of some sort.”

“This Paladin gene they are talking about among their Netnews people? I saw several obscure reports on this and while they could not give a whole lot of information, they did say it appeared to be the reason that Leonidas and his sons have this unique power.” Pa'cour asked her. “It would make sense.”

Yuri nodded in agreement. “Yes... I have come to that conclusion as well. But how did my mother come to have this gene. And if she did... how did she pass it to me? She told me that the crew of that ship was all dead when her father and others found it. They had been dead for centuries.”

“Perhaps it was not your mother Yuri.” Pa'cour said. “Perhaps it came from your father.”

Yuri turned her head again and looked at him intently, her dark eyes showing surprise as something in her mind clicked. This was yet another reason why Yuri had come to so love him in so short a time. He did not just dismiss something because it made no sense at all. He looked at everything and whatever was left after dismissing the obvious, however astonishing it might have been, must have been the answer. His words struck home and Yuri knew that he had to be right.

“There *were* survivors of that ship. There had to be!” She stated in realization. “That... that would explain many things.” She finally said. “It is why she kept such close tabs on father and his actions even from Nuwaroa . It is why she wanted Isabella dead so badly once she discovered her. Why she did to me what she did. She must have discovered that father passed this gene to Isabella as well as me and when combined with the gene in Martin, it became active in their son. Perhaps even their daughters. That is what Xaxon must have sensed in Dante. This Paladin gene in some form. Passed to him from me. That has to be why Lucia can do what she can do. I must... I must be a carrier of this gene from my father and I passed it to them.”

Pa'cour nodded in agreement. "And it all begins to come together." He said softly. "And it would also explain why Onera is advancing so quickly in her training. She must carry this gene in some form, also passed down from you."

"Then why can't I do what Leonidas and his sons can do?" Yuri asked. "I can't manifest this gene into any special power Pa'cour. I saw the reports from Dante about what Lucia did on Earth... those whip like projections she used... but even that is not the same thing as what Androcles or his father have done. What they can do."

"Perhaps it affects other species differently." He said. "Lycavorians and Upyri. You are similar Yuri, but not the same."

Yuri looked at him and smiled. "Upyri. I haven't heard that term to describe us in centuries my love." She said.

"It is the recognized name of your species and was for dozens of millennia." He told her. "I remember Cha'talla and I having to sit through classes about your history once we were changed. Only in the last thousand years has it fallen to the wayside for this term vampire that was dreamed up on Earth and suddenly became common among the young generations of your people."

Yuri nodded. "Yes... I know." She said. "So much was forgotten or lost because of my mother and father. Pa'cour you realize what this could mean?" Yuri said. "Narice needs to know this. If there are carriers of this Paladin gene among our people, they would have been too frightened to come forward with my mother in power. She would have eliminated them the moment she discovered them as a threat to her power. Now... with Narice in charge... these men and women could mean so much to our people. Help us in so many different ways."

"Then how do we get a message to Narice? And how do we discover who they are? How do we know she is not already aware of it?" He asked. "You can not just approach her Yuri. We don't know what she would do, or how she feels about you. And there are still many who would rather see you dead my wife. And many would view it as you returning to claim the rule of your people."

Yuri looked disgusted. "*Phraktos* my love... I want nothing to do with governing our people now!" She hissed vehemently. "Only Narice can do that."

"I know this... they do not." Pa'cour told her.

"It would not surprise me if Leonidas and his people have already figured out how to find them to some degree." Yuri said. "The man is no fool. Unlike the image he likes to project of himself, he is extremely intelligent and cunning. And their own Netnews reports indicate they have at least two of the Pralor species among them now. A species that were thought to be long dead. Not to mention that ship... which is fully intact and operational. Think of the knowledge on that ship!"

"We should try." Pa'cour spoke. "This... this Paladin gene could work heavily in favor of the Coven. And it would give us equal footing with the Union and make Narice's alliance with them even stronger. More balanced."

Yuri nodded her head. "Because they have the means to train those individuals properly." She said thoughtfully. She looked at him. "You used the Lycavorian term my husband." Yuri said.

Pa'cour nodded his head. "It is the true term to describe what you and she can do. What Androcles and his family can do. The Lycavorians have refined it to a unique science now, and since these Pralors have arrived in their midst and they are the ones it all stems from, it seems appropriate."

Yuri nodded. "Yes it does." She said in agreement. "But not all of his family is affected. Only Androcles and his brother Denali. We do not know about the son from Martin and Isabella or what he can do. His *Durcunusaan* Captain seems to also have this ability but we know nothing about him."

"It does appear from what we know right now that it only happens with purebloods like them." Pa'cour said.

"I will need to discuss this with Nalavi." Yuri said. "There is so much we..."

"Does it matter Yuri? Our daughter is beyond beautiful my Blessed Wife... but I have no wish to see some scum sucking Kavalian or vampire or even Akruixian reject become lucky in a fight with her and severely injure or kill her. I do not care where this gene comes from or who it happens in... all I care about is that it is within our daughter." Pa'cour said to her. "You know I speak the truth my beautiful wife... I can sense it in your

emotions. There is only one place she can receive the training she needs to combine her skills into a single cohesive force.”

“Androcles.” Yuri whispered to the air as she nodded.

Pa'cour nodded his head, his cheek brushing against her long, silky hair as he spoke into her ear softly. “Androcles and his father were true Masters of combat with bladed weapons even before they discovered their Etheric powers Yuri. Androcles was trained practically from birth to hold a blade as any Lycavorian Spartan is... you know this. I have seen footage of him in action with his weapons Yuri. He is truly one with his blades. They are extensions of his body and his will. It is no different than his father. They have taken bladed combat to the next level with this gene they possess Yuri and without that knowledge Onera will only end up hurting herself or someone else as I said. It is not something I can give to her. If she were to pit herself against someone trained by Lycavorians in the sword, they would hurt her, even with her added Etheric abilities because she is untrained. The training that she needs only the Lycavorians can provide to her. The training that she needs only Androcles or his father can give to her. It is the only way... otherwise she will end up hurting herself.”

Yuri nodded her head. “I... I saw this coming you know.” She said softly leaning back against him. “We are... we are tied more closely to the Lycavorian people than my mother and father could have ever imagined Pa'cour. All we could have been, all we could have done and accomplished together and they threw it all away because of their lust for more and more power and control. Thinking about all that has happened... how it has all come to be... I believe more and more that Androcles was right. We were never meant to be enemies Pa'cour. Our people were meant to be allies and friends and work side by side.”

Pa'cour nodded his head. “Considering the history and involvement of these Pralors I am not surprised. And you are not your mother and father now Yuri. You are different; you are the true individual you were meant to be.”

Yuri nodded. “Nor am I surprised.” She said taking a breath. “What do you suggest?”

“Contact him Yuri.” Pa'cour said softly. “He must know what we are doing here. And he has done nothing to interfere with us because he approves. He has done nothing because it is what he would do. Androcles is more likely to test the limits of honorable actions than his father and that is why he lets us be. He knows what needs to be done in order to defeat our enemies. And our actions only benefit both the Coven and the Union in the long run. He is not his father my love... and I think he has proved that to you already.”

Yuri nodded her head with a soft chuckle. “If he was his father I would be long dead by now.” She stated. “And do not discount what Martin would do when pressed to the wall Pa'cour my love. He keeps it locked away... but behind several locked doors and an indomitable will there resides a savage beast that will do what is necessary when push comes to shove.” Yuri drew in a deep breath and nodded. “But you are right.” She said confidently. “It is the only way. I will initiate COMs with him tomorrow. I will be honest with him and we will see what he says. What of Onera?”

“I think she will embrace the idea with all that she is.” Pa'cour spoke to her. “She lacks your composure and has let it slip many times that she would like to see the Union. And I believe she knows she is different and has wondered why.”

Yuri nodded. “Then it is settled. I will speak to her tomorrow as well if Androcles approves.” Yuri took a deep breath knowing it was the correct course of action and she would not second guess herself anymore. The decision was the right one and Yuri trusted enough in herself now to not question that. She looked at the two pads in her hand and rolled her eyes. Yuri held up two data pads and shook her head with a smile.

“It is the right choice.” Pa'cour said.

Yuri nodded her head. “I know. And I will not question our decisions. It is done and this is the path we will follow.” She said lifting the two other data pads. “Pa'cour my love... why is Nalavi sending you reports on organic isotope compounds he is testing. And why is Lidene sending you his reports on the results of experimental Quantum Twelve Power Mathematical Formulas?”

Pa'cour shook his head with a smile, also feeling their decision had been the correct one. His daughter would be trained and guided by the finest and ultimately that is what Pa'cour wanted. “I have no idea.” He stated honestly.

Yuri laughed again at the look on his face and tossed them to the floor alongside the bed. “I will talk to them in the morning as well. Nalavi is being Nalavi and I think Lidene still has his doubts about me.” She said

with a slight shake of her head. "I did not treat him very well in the past so I can understand he is trying to be thorough."

"Norev reports that the exchange of the elven females went off without a hitch." Pa'cour told her as he held up the last data pad. "They had a company of Cha'talla's Immortals from Kranek there; he was concerned for a moment, until they saw Norev's men carrying the females from the transport."

Yuri nodded. "Even with Androcles's orders they will not trust us completely until we have proven ourselves my love." She said looking over her shoulder into his face.

Pa'cour nodded. "I know. Once the exchange was made, Norev says they actually took the time to engage in some small talk. He says it was an exchange that would go a long way to improving our status with them." Pa'cour kissed her bare shoulder softly. "It was an excellent move, sparing him and offering Norev and his men a purpose once more."

Yuri chuckled softly. "I almost didn't." She told him. "Then I realized he was forced to act how he was acting. Purpose was all they really needed again. And we gave it to them Pa'cour, not just me. We gave it to them."

Pa'cour nodded his head. "I noticed the blond one Nameia... the one you have spent so much time with... she did not return." He said softly. "Why?"

"She had nothing to return to." Yuri said as her thoughts quickly went to the beautiful female elf. "She has no family except distant cousins she does not communicate with. She was only a few weeks from graduating from the Medical Academy on Elear when she was taken."

"Ah... Hadarian trained is she?" Pa'cour stated.

Yuri nodded her head. "Yes. And she knows what she is about too." Yuri spoke. "Nalavi adores her and is overjoyed that he has someone who knows what in the blazes he is talking about."

Pa'cour detected something wistful in her voice and leaned closer. "There is more to it then that isn't there?" He said. "You are... you are happy she remained."

Yuri nodded. "I have... I have never really had a true friend Pa'cour." She stated softly. "She has... Nameia does not treat me differently. She is honest and forthcoming. I have caught myself sharing things with her that..."

"That you would never have told anyone before." Pa'cour said.

Yuri nodded. "Yes."

"You also find her very attractive don't you?" He asked her.

Yuri turned her head and looked at him. "It is that obvious?" She asked.

"Only to me." He told her. "I can see it in your eyes and your smile when you are with her."

"I do not know what she makes me feel Pa'cour." Yuri said. "I have never... I have never even thought of another woman in such a way. It is... it is not the same as what I feel for you my husband. No one could ever replace you... but she..."

Pa'cour pulled her tighter. "You are different now Yuri." He said softly. "I am different. We have both entered a world we never thought existed. Do not shy away from that now. If this Nameia interests you, attracts you, do not deny what you feel. That is what your mother and father trained you to do. Listen to yourself now."

"And what if I choose to... to experiment?" Yuri asked him. "What then?"

Pa'cour smiled. "You are my life and my love Yuri." He told her. "If it makes you happy then it belongs in your life."

"You make me happy my husband." Yuri said. "Happier than I have ever been in my life. I can't begin to put into words my feelings for you. For what we have."

"You don't need too." He told her. "I will never deny you something that makes you happy Yuri my love. Well... another man perhaps but..."

Yuri slapped his face lightly. "Pa'cour... no man could ever steal my affection and love from you! That is just not possible! Don't talk like that... even jokingly."

Pa'cour reached up and took her face in his large hand. Yuri relished at the warmth of his touch and looked at him with a dreamy smile. "Pursue whatever gives you happiness my wife." He told her. "If Nameia can give you something I can not and she makes you happy, then do not turn away from it."

"You give me all I need." Yuri told him.

“You misunderstand me.” Pa'cour said. “If she can be a friend to you, someone you can trust and care about, something you have never had by your own words then pursue it Yuri. Embrace who you have become and do not doubt. If your friendship blossoms into something else... or if it does not... it matters not. A true friend is precious and if she desires the same thing, then do not turn away from it.”

Yuri reached up and placed her palm against his cheek and smiled. “I love you Pa'cour.” She said softly. “More than I can put into words.”

Pa'cour smiled. “And I love you.” He said.

Yuri tossed the data pads off the bed as her passion stirred. “Show me husband.” She said turning and pulling the towel from around her body until she was naked in his lap. “Make me scream your name to the stars Pa'cour my love. Show me how much you love me.”

Pa'cour let slip a low growl of desire and quickly rolled over on top of her, enveloping her into his embrace and covering her lips with his own. Yuri moaned loudly with the kiss, and felt the fires in her body ignite easily. Pa'cour did indeed show her how much he loved her.

Countless times over the next hours.

KAVALIAN GREAT SOUL DREADNOUGHT PUSINTIN'S COMMAND SHIP PUMA'S PRIDE

“Marshall Pusintin!” The Bridge COM officer barked. “We are receiving an incoming hail on a Kavalian channel from an unknown origin!”

Pusintin looked up from his command chair where he was reading the latest reports and brooding miserably over the events of the last days and the betrayal of his only remaining child. The damage from Koguth's ship was minimal only because his gun crews had been sharper than most. They had blown the ship into three pieces before it struck their shields and rendered the impact of the huge chunks into manageable force. The follow on debris had crippled two destroyers and a cruiser however, and those ships had to be abandoned in order to continue. Pusintin was enraged at being caught so unaware of what his own son was doing right under his nose. They had discovered the dead Puma Bane soldiers in and near the landing bay and it had been clear Kalis had help. When they discovered it had been Mata who helped him to escape it made Pusintin even angrier. Mata had been the one who trained Kalis. He had been a trusted Puma Bane officer for decades. Pusintin suspected Kalis had acted out of simply wanting the Hadarian female for himself and then had been drawn deeper into the plot engineered by Koguth's Juturi. They were still examining the debris from General Koguth's ship, but so far it appeared as if the ship had been heavily automated and that is why only two *LEUGER*-Class transports were needed to escape.

Pusintin turned in his chair disgusted at everything he was reading. He would flay his son alive himself if he ever found him. Kalis had embarrassed him terribly and he would pay for that in spades. “Who would have Kavalian channels out here in the unknown?” Pusintin snarled at him. “It is my son. The fool boy did not plan well enough and Koguth either left him for dead on some planet or things did not go as he would have liked. Range?”

The COM officer looked at him. “It's a short range signal Marshall.” The man answered. “Less than ten light years distance. Bearing three seven nine eight mark two.”

“Helm... adjust course to three seven nine eight mark two and increase to full power on the sub light engines.” Pusintin ordered. “Sensors... begin a scan as soon as we come within range of the passive sensors! Find him!”

“Do we answer Marshall?” The COM officer asked.

Pusintin came to his feet and nodded. “Main holo disc.” He answered. “Signal me when we have his location and prepare to initiate a LSD jump to his position.”

“Receiving transmission and routing to main holo disc.” The COM officer reported.

Pusintin turned slightly and watched as the image of his oldest child with Jalersi came into view, sputtered and then cleared. Pusintin expected him to be nervous and frightened and contacting him to beg

forgiveness so that he could return. What he saw was very different. A confident Kalis, standing calmly and with little sign of stress or worry. He appeared to be on some sort of ship, but it was not a *LEUGERS* Transport that he was sure.

“Kalis!” Pusintin hissed. “You stupid fucking boy! I will administer the lashes myself when you return! Do you know what you have done? Do you?”

To Pusintin’s surprise Kalis smiled calmly back at him. “I know exactly what I have done Marshall Pusintin.” He answered using his formal rank which surprised Pusintin. “And your threats no longer have meaning for me father. In fact... you no longer have any meaning for me.”

“Kalis I can’t cover for you now!” Pusintin snapped. “You helped a traitor! You freely helped a traitor and were complicit in the escape of three very important prisoners to the KFI. I can’t protect you from this fuck up!”

Kalis chuckled softly. “Traitor?” He stated evenly. “Mata is no traitor father. And neither is General Koguth. Not to the Kavalian people. And those prisoners you speak of were only important to you as long as you got to abuse Serale’s mother. I could not allow that any longer.”

“You could not allow!” Pusintin hissed. “Who are you boy?”

“You have never protected me father.” Kalis continued. “Leruk was always your favorite because he embraced your twisted ideals without question. Karun turned away from you openly and you dismissed me as too stupid to do any better. Look at where you are now father. You have nothing.”

“What your tone with me boy!” Pusintin snarled. “I’ll beat you within an inch of your life when you return!”

“Yes... as you beat me so often as a boy.” Kalis said somberly.

“You needed discipline!” Pusintin growled at him.

“Tell me Marshall Pusintin, did you take some perverse joy in beating down and breaking the boy I once was?” Kalis asked. “Did you enjoy taking the boy I was away from me? All I ever wanted was your approval. To have you acknowledge me as a son like Leruk and not a tool.”

Pusintin looked at the transmission with confused eyes. “You needed discipline!” He spat.

Kalis shook his head. “No... you wanted me to fully embrace your hatred and anger as Leruk did. I should have seen it when Karun turned away from you. I should have seen it then. I should have seen it when mother finally realized that everything you told her was a lie and she followed what was in her heart and accepted the love she had for Pian.”

“You shut your damn mouth!” Pusintin barked. “You have no idea what you are talking about! You know nothing!”

“Don’t I?” Kalis said casually. “I will tell you what I know Marshall Pusintin... I know that you are not my father. You were never my father. A father would not treat his son as you treated me and Karun. A father would not have ordered his own daughter to be committed to the brothels on Nefoa. A true father would not have held back the history and heritage it was his responsibility to show his sons!” Kalis finished that statement with a shout as his voice had risen during the exchange.

“What the fuck are you talking about boy?” Pusintin snapped at him. “You aren’t making any sense!” Pusintin saw Kalis look to the side out of the transmission and then nod his head and look back at him.

“No... I suppose I am not.” He stated. “At least not to you Marshall Pusintin. Or should I call you Pleistarchus? That is your name isn’t it? The name you were born with.”

Pusintin hesitated not knowing where Kalis was coming from. “You... I renounced that name when I became Kavalian!” He barked.

“How do you renounce the blood that flows within you?” Kalis asked. “How did you turn from everything you were taught and raised to believe in to become the perverted and sadistic *nubous midaeus* you are now? How?”

“I grow tired of this Kalis!” Pusintin barked. “Surrender yourself and I will provide some leniency. Resist and I will...”

“You will do nothing.” Kalis hissed. “You will do nothing do you hear me! I will never again allow you to twist me as you did in the past! I will never allow you to bring harm to the woman I have come to love... or harm those who are her family!”

“This is pointless Kalis.” Pusintin snarled. “You can not survive out here on your own! Where will you go? Who will help you? Did Koguth abandon you on some planet and that is why you are contacting me now?”

“Coming into range now Marshall.” The Ops Officer spoke softly from his station. “I am initiating a passive scan.”

Pusintin watched as Kalis smiled and shook his head. “No father... we are all here.” He said. “I have not been abandoned. I have been found. I have discovered the beginnings of all that you should have taught me. And I decided I wanted to know so much more.”

“You are not making any sense now Kalis!” Pusintin growled.

“Not to you I suppose.” Kalis said. “Have you found me yet father?” He asked. “I know you probably are beginning a passive scan with the sensors since you realized I was less than ten light years away.”

The Ops officer’s eyes grew wider as he looked at his instruments. “Marshall! Sir!” He gasped. “The signal... he is transmitting from...”

Pusintin turned to look at him. “What?” He barked.

“Marshall... Kalis is transmitting from a Union *STRIKER* transport.” The man answered. “One of their new *STRIKER* Dragon Transports!”

“What?” Pusintin snarled. “How can that...” Pusintin stopped and turned back to the image of Kalis with wide eyes. “Kalis... tell me you didn’t.” He spat.

Kalis smiled. “Oh but I did father.” He answered. “I have discovered what you would not teach me about the blood that runs through my veins father. I have discovered the beginnings of what it means and I like it. I embrace it!”

“You... you will be an outcast!” Pusintin almost screamed. “They will laugh at you boy! Scorn you! They will...”

“They will honor the path he has chosen.” The deep voice spoke from outside the cone of the transmission cutting off Pusintin’s words. “And they will respect above all else that he has chosen to walk that road even after all you have done to demean him. And they will help him at every turn. Because that is what our father taught our people.”

Pusintin’s eyes grew larger when the cone of the transmission expanded slightly and then Martin stepped up next to Kalis.

Martin looked at him intently from within the cone of the transmission. “Hello brother.” He said calmly. “Top of the morning to you! It’s a fine day to be a Spartan don’t you think?”

“Martin!” Pusintin snarled viciously. “You sonofabitch!”

Martin chuckled softly. “I see the beating I gave to you hasn’t improved your disposition brother. Just as vile and misguided as ever. A pity. Though it will make killing you a lot easier. And it will finally bring our mother peace.”

“I will kill you!” Pusintin snarled viciously.

Martin nodded his head. “Yeah... you and your cronies have been trying that for a while now. Trouble is... I’m still here. You ain’t very good at your job brother.” He said with a smile. “In fact... you down right suck at it.”

Pusintin burned with hatred as he stepped closer to the transmission. “I will find you Martin!” He hissed. “I will find you and after I watch you bleed out your life, I will take back what I took from you and made mine! You should have heard her squeal Martin. Begging for more from her mate. Begging me to fuck her more!”

Martin smiled sadly and shook his head. “You have forgotten so much about what it means to be Lycavorian brother.” Martin said.

Pusintin watched Martin reach to the side and then his eyes grew wider when he pulled For'mya into the transmission. She appeared surprised at this action, but pressed her lush, elven body against Martin intimately and quite willingly. Pusintin’s eyes narrowed and burned with rage, his fists clenching and unclenching when Martin leaned over slightly and kissed For'mya hungrily. For'mya responded instantly, her hand coming up to his face as she kissed him back just as hungrily. Pusintin watched as Martin pulled away from their kiss and firmly nuzzled the outer edges of For'mya’s four inch high elven ears. For'mya’s face showed the reaction that had, as her lips parted in bliss and her eyes closed in a dreamy expression of ardor. Martin captured her lips again quickly and her eyes opened to stare at him. They locked eyes for only a brief moment, though Pusintin

would never know what Martin told her within Mindvoice. Whatever he told her made her face brighten and her lips curl into a seductive smile as she pressed closer to him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Martin turned back to his brother. "I turned her brother." Martin said. "I made her like us. I made it so she could feel what she feels as a female wolf. I don't need some device implanted in her head blocking her natural abilities in order to actually make her feel things. You never had her brother, you never had her because I never lost her. I am in her blood, just as she is in mine. Whatever she felt with you was because you forced it upon her and she had no defense against it because I didn't do what I should have done." Martin looked at For'mya once more who was staring up into his face with adoration in her dark brown eyes. "I have since rectified that brother. And I have exposed her to everything about me that I should have shown her years ago." Martin turned back to look at his brother as For'mya buried her face into his neck and shoulder and squeezed him even harder. "You'll never have her again. You never had the true For'mya anyway. The part of her that resides within her heart and in her mind. That has always belonged to me and I cherish it even more now."

In a move that was very rare and completely out of character for For'mya Leonidas she turned towards Pusintin in the transmission and stepped away from Martin slightly. There was a reason that For'mya was considered the most patient and laid back of Martin's Queens by many people within the Union. She rarely lost her temper, and while she didn't hesitate to act and wear clothes that accented her sexuality, she did not often go out of her way to exploit that.

"If you knew anything about women, you would know we don't beg for more unless what we are getting is not enough." For'mya snarled baring her wolf fangs as her eyes changed quickly to that of her wolf persona. "And in your case Pusintin, the quality and much more importantly, the *quantity* was sorely lacking."

For'mya smiled as Pusintin's eyes grew wide at the blatant dig towards his manliness. He heard several different female voices in the background of the transmission that broke out into hysterical laughter as For'mya turned away from him and began to move out of the cone of the transmission, purposely brushing her hip against Martin as she passed him and letting her hand brush across his crotch. Even he was looking at her with wide eyes and a smile that explosives would not have been able to remove from his face. He looked back up at his brother in the transmission.

"Ouch!" Martin said. "That had to hurt brother!" He exclaimed.

Pusintin was trembling in undisguised anger and hatred. "I will kill you!" He almost screamed. "I will kill you and fuck all your precious Queens in front of your corpse before I give them to my men!"

Martin laughed as he pulled out the disc. "Good luck with that brother." He said. "I do want to thank you for this though." He said holding up the disc. "You recognize it don't you?"

Pusintin's eyes grew even wider indicating that he did in fact recognize it. "Kalis... you..."

Kalis nodded. "I did father." He answered proudly. "I took it from right under your nose. You are not so skilled as you like to think it seems!"

"A decade of your COM traffic stored on this disc." Martin said looking at the disc. "A decade of your dirty secrets and who knows what plans you had concocted in that insignificant brain of yours. And now it belongs to me. Pretty stupid to store all that on one disc and not several. But then again, you don't seem to be known for doing the smart thing." He looked at Pusintin. "Armetus and Marci are going to have a field day with this. I'm quite sure it will have a whole lot of information that Pian can use to fight that lunatic Keleru. We also downloaded the computer core from your personal *LEUGERS* before we blew it up. I'm pretty sure that will have more data on it showing what a coward you really are."

"Coward!" Pusintin screamed. "I am no coward!"

Martin lowered the disc. "You are the worst kind of coward brother." He said evenly. "You prey on the weak and the defenseless. You seek to control through fear and manipulation. Keleru isn't what you think he is brother... though I suspect you already knew that." Martin saw the light of realization in his brother's eyes and he smiled. "Yeah... I figured as much. For someone who thinks they know everything... you are as dumb as a fucking rock brother. Father should have discarded you five minutes after you took a breath."

"You know nothing!" Pusintin screamed. "You did not even know our father!"

"I know our father better in death than you ever did while he was living." Martin growled at him. "You are a disgrace to him and every moment you breath you shame his blood within your veins!"

“I shame!” Pusintin roared. “You share a bed with the very creature he was fighting his entire life! Your son shares a bed with Yuri’s offspring! The sister of the monster who ordered our father killed! Who is a disgrace brother!”

“Androcles has more honor in his little toe than you carry within your entire body you fool!” Martin hissed. “He is... he is everything a Spartan inspires to be! And so much more. Our father would have been proud to call him grandson. Just as he will be proud to look down from the heavens and see that first Karun and now Kalis have turned from the path you set them on and embraced the Spartan and wolf blood within them. You are a disgrace to our kind! You have fallen so far that you could not even remember to imprint the children you forced upon For'mya. So intent on grasping power through her and the children she could give to you that you forgot the most basic instinct of our people when it comes to our children!” Martin moved closer to the transmission. “Fedor and Eirene are my children now. They found my imprint on For'mya when they reached for it from their mother’s womb. In her blood and her mind. They call me father. And I will be the father to them that you could never be. Just as I will be the father to Karun and Kalis that you never were. You are a fucking worm Pleistarchus! A cockroach! You are unworthy to have our father’s blood flowing in your veins!”

“You... I will gut you like a dog!” Pusintin snarled menacingly. “I will gut you and watch as your entrails spill around your feet and the life leaves your body.”

“Big talk from a man who has been stumbling around the stars looking for us with no success.” Martin told him. “You think I don’t know how you are tracking For'mya brother? Did you really believe I would not discover this? I know every tiny millimeter of her body, by touch and by taste, just as I do with all of my Queens. Right down to their toes. When I worship them in our bed brother, I worship them completely. Utterly. You have been able to continue tracking For'mya because I have allowed it brother. But now... now I grow tired of this game.” Martin reached to his belt and pulled the P1 out of its pouch. He activated it with a single touch. “Avi?”

-I am monitoring Martin Leonidas- Avi’s mechanical voice replied instantly.

“Avi... initiate the reverse Borellum Acoustic Pulse.” Martin told him.

-Initiated- Avi answered. **-The Borellum Pulse is now being blocked. When will you be returning?-**

“We’ll be back in a few hours Avi. See you then.” Martin spoke lowering the P1. He looked at his brother in the transmission. “I’ll just leave you to stumble around out here brother. I’m going to go to this planet we have found. White sandy beaches. Sunny. Cool lakes and oceans. I’m going to sit on the beach with my Queens and enjoy the sunset. Sooner or later you’ll stumble into something or someone that will chew you up and spit you out. Saves me the trouble.”

“I will find you Martin!” Pusintin growled angrily. “I will find you and I will enjoy killing you.”

Martin nodded his head. “I’m sure.” He answered laconically. “Problem is... you have to pull your head out of your ass long enough to wise up and find the balls to come get me. How long have you been chasing me and you haven’t done nothing. You’re a coward brother. Bring your ass here and let’s have a stand up fight. Or... turn your fugly face around and go home with your tail between your legs. You do that really well.”

“I will kill you!” Pusintin screamed.

“You couldn’t wipe your ass with both hands, a flashlight and your junior aide holding your balls out of the way.” Martin quipped. “You’re a coward and you are useless. For'mya is mine Pleistarchus. She was always mine and she will always be mine. You are nothing to her. You’re a sorry excuse for a man. Can’t keep your children and you need to force yourself on women in order to get their attention. Pathetic.”

“I...” Pusintin began.

“I’m done with you!” Martin snapped shaking his head. “You are a waste of time. Your children are dumping you like the shithead you are and no one is scared of you brother. Not anymore. They think you are a fucking nut job!”

“You fucking...”

“I will teach your sons what they need to know.” Martin said. “I will teach them so that our father will look down and be proud of them. He looks down and sees you and he wants to vomit. You aren’t worthy

enough to carry the blood you have in your veins. You're just another piece of shit bully." Martin looked at Kalis. "Is there anything else you want to say Kalis?" He asked.

Kalis shook his head quickly. "No Uncle. I think you have been quite clear."

Martin looked back at Pusintin. "Doubtful." He said. "Your father isn't too quick on the uptake." Martin smiled. "Have a great day brother. You are a walking around dead man and don't even know it. And recognize that you will never have the chance to do the one thing you have never been able to do. Beat me at anything."

"Why you... I will... Arrgghhh!" Pusintin began to scream at the transmission before it disappeared and he was staring at nothing.

MARTIN'S STRIKER

"Arrgghhh!" They began to hear Pusintin scream before Martin slammed down on the panel and cut the transmission.

Martin looked at the transmission disc for a moment longer and then turned to Kalis. "He's got a set of lungs on him." He said. "He screams really loud."

Kalis couldn't help but openly laugh and then Mata was joining him as he had watched the entire exchange from the doorway into the cockpit. "I don't think he... I have never seen him so angry Uncle." Kalis finally said.

"Good. Maybe he'll accidentally shoot himself when he is cleaning his weapon." Martin spoke. "Save us all a lot of trouble." Martin reached out and held the disc for Kalis to take. "Hang onto this for me. We'll go through it when we get back to the ARC ROYAL." He waited until Kalis took it and then slapped his shoulder. "Now get back there to that beautiful young woman. I've kept you away from her too long."

Kalis looked at him. "Uncle..."

Martin shook his head and smiled. "You have no need to say it mandri." He said. "The look in your eyes when you look at Serale is all the knowledge we need. Now go."

Kalis smiled and turned to exit the cockpit, Mata following him, his arm going over his shoulders as they went down the stairs. Martin watched until they were out of sight and then he turned back to see For'mya, Tina and Endith looking at him intently.

"What?" He asked.

For'mya stepped closer to him. "Martin you..."

"Boss... you do realize that you just told that fucking scum bucket how to find us." Tina spoke cutting off For'mya.

Martin nodded his head. "I know." He answered his eyes never leaving For'mya's face.

"Oh... ok." Tina said. "Just wanted to make sure... you know, make sure you didn't just tell our enemy where we are taking our vacation or anything. Wouldn't want him crashing our party now."

"Why Martin?" For'mya asked. "Why would you do such a thing?"

Martin stepped closer to her, drew her into his arms and kissed her softly. "Avi?" He spoke to the thin air.

-I am here Martin- Avi's voice answered from the internal cockpit speakers.

"Did you mark their location?" Martin asked.

-I have a firm lock. Using OMEN THREE'S Long Range Array I will be able to track them once they come within three systems of our location-

"Say they are smarter than I think and they figure out what to look for immediately." Martin said. "How many planets in the area like the one I described?"

-There are thirty-one planets with similar atmospheric and terrain properties as you described between our current location and the planet you have chosen to land on Martin- Avi answered. -Which we will begin doing in exactly three point three hours-

“And how long to fully scan those thirty-one planets to insure we are not on them?” Martin asked.

-Given the level of Kavalian sensor technology, at least twelve hours per planet- Avi replied. -That does not take into account travel time-

“So three weeks, give or take a few days?” Martin asked.

-That would be reasonably accurate- Avi said.

“Thank you Avi.” Martin said. “Send the signal to Yuriko to initiate Phase One. I want full sensor sweeps done of the first target by tomorrow evening when we return.”

-And Target Two-

“We’ll decide after we see the sensor readings.” Martin said.

-Understood- Avi said. -I will have everything ready when you return. ARC ROYAL out-

For'mya reached up and took his face in her hands, feeling his hard body pressed against her own. “What are you doing Martin Leonidas?” She asked.

“I’m doing what I need to do For'mya.” Martin answered her softly. “You know that.”

“Martin you don’t have to do this.” For'mya started to speak but Martin put a finger to her lips and shook his head.

“Yes I do *Kinsoaurgai*.” He said softly. “You know that as well as I do. He needs to pay for what he has done. For everything he has done, but mostly for what he did to you. Only then will the debt of honor be paid. Only then will my mother and my father, wherever he may reside now, only then will they have their honor back. Their peace. Only then will you finally be able to move on.”

“Martin I have...” For'mya started again but Martin leaned forward and nuzzled her elven ear causing her to gasp in bliss and pull him tighter.

“You can not hide it from me For'mya.” He said softly drawing his face back until he was looking at her. “From Aricia, from Anja and Dysea, from Bella and Cirith, but not from me my beautiful wife and Queen. Not from me.”

“Martin... he is your brother.” For'mya said softly as her dark eyes began to tear up.

Martin shook his head again. “No. Danny is my brother For'mya. He has always been my only brother. That will never change. Ever. Pleistarchus stopped meaning anything to me when he took you from me and forced himself upon you. He is not my brother any longer For'mya my Queen. He is my enemy. I intend to treat him like any other of mine.”

“Martin...”

“I am going to bait him; I am going to draw him in; I’m going to wear him out and then I am going to kill him For'mya. In the most horrific way I can possibly think of.” Martin said. “For over three thousand years of sins he has heaped upon the weak and the defenseless. For what he did to you my beautiful For'mya, for what he has put his children through, for every sin he has ever committed. He must atone for that and I will be the instrument of that atonement. I’m the only one who can.” Martin traced her lips with his finger and smiled at her. “Then it will be over. Then we all can move on. For we have much bigger problems coming our way my love. Much bigger problems.”

For'mya’s eyes furrowed in confusion as Martin kissed her and then quickly moved out of the cockpit before she could ask him what he meant. She watched his back for a moment and then turned to look at Tina and Endith.

“Ok... did anyone else just get this really bad chill running up their spine?” Endith asked them.

“Man... that wasn’t a chill Endy” Tina exclaimed. “That was a fucking blizzard lover.” She looked at For'mya. “For'mya?”

For'mya looked at her and shook her head. “I have no idea what he meant.” She stated softly.

“Shit!” Endith swore. “Something tells me we don’t want to know what he meant. That ain’t good. Shit... that ain’t good at all.”

EARTH SPARTA TEMPORARY SENATE OFFICES

“...Been communicating with Dutkne’s senior aide almost daily as time grows shorter.” Deia told Andro as they sat in the office that had been secured for her. There were two very stern looking *Durcunusaan* outside her office, while Jomann sat on the couch just inside the door. The entire building was swarming with security now for the *Durcunusaan* would take no more chances with the lives of those they were charged to protect. “A polite young man, a little too polite, but very capable it seems.”

Andro smiled. “Tenna... you are an icon to the people among the Protectorate.” He told her. “He is probably just awestruck.”

“An icon?” Deia gasped. “You must be joking!”

Andro shook his head. “The woman who helped draft the laws of our people. You are just as well known and honored as grandfather Resumar and Feravomir Canth.”

Deia laughed softly. “I helped to draft nothing. I was simply in the same room with them when they hammered out our laws.”

“And I’m quite sure they did not asked you or grandmother Eliani anything at all about how certain laws should be established and implemented.” Andro said sarcastically.

Deia met his eyes and smiled shyly. “Well... I suppose there...”

“That is what I thought.” Andro said with a grin now. “Face it *Tenna* Deia... you are the last true link to grandfather and grandmother for many of us who were not alive back then. We will always look at you differently because of that. Those in the Protectorate are no different.”

Deia nodded her head slowly. “Perhaps.” She said softly.

“How does it stand now?” Andro asked her as he held the data pad in one hand and the mug of his mother’s coffee in the other.

“A Protectorate cruiser will arrive here three weeks after you leave.” Deia told him regaining her famous composure. “We have worked it out so that the escort will be a healthy combination of their ships and ours. That should provide you enough time to determine where the Vanari will stand.”

Andro nodded. “If what Denali and Coren have been telling me is accurate... I will need the time. Coren believes many of the Vanari Regents are on his side, but the real power rests with many of those who do not.”

“Do not lose your focus with them *Mandri*.” Deia spoke. “They are politicians like those who used to live and work on this planet. They will curry favor in many different ways. I have spoken with Coren as well and he impresses me. Far more than he did before. He has come a long way.”

Andro nodded in agreement. “Yes he has. With his connections and the information they have slowly been putting together we just may be able to convince the other Regents that we are not the enemy.”

“The Rothryn are the unknown here Andro, especially after you told me about the reaction of this Harira woman.” Deia said. “We know how to deal with species like the Vanari. You have already had Deni explain to them, at least a small portion, of what will happen if they choose to continue to embrace their misguided and inaccurate conceptions about us as a whole. The Rothryn however, they are a different story.”

“Lycavorians who cannot shift their forms but are stiff no different than us.” Andro said softly nodding his head. “Sehri’s father seems very genuine *Tenna*. And he has done much to help Coren and Deni get information on the OSG and their operations.”

Deia nodded. "I have spoken to Aleatia on several occasions. Putting aside the obvious bias she has for her husband and mate, she has told me of many things he has done through the years that tell me he is the ally we need there. Changing the minds of the senior families and clans as Aleatia says is not going to be so easy. They are too much like us when we were just beginning to rise from our past. And this information you gave to Panos about this Rothryn Academy and how they view Etheric users is very troubling to me."

Andro nodded. "Yes... me as well." He said. "I get the sense from listening to Sehri and speaking to Aleatia, that Etheric users in Rothryn space lack a certain freedom to do as they wish. They are closely monitored and controlled."

"Controlled." Deia said. "There is the word I don't like." She stated. "Controlled implies many things... and none of them good. And soon they will have not only Denali, but you and Sadi and Lisisa and some of the most powerful Etheric users in the galaxy within their grasp. And given what you have told me about this Shaman Master woman, it makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up."

"We will be careful *Tenna*." Andro said with a grin. "I certainly do wish to become the object of some dissection or experiment."

Deia reached across the small table and cuffed him gently in the side of the head as she had done so many times as he was growing. "Do not joke Androcles." She scolded him. "This is serious. I do not enjoy having your father and mothers out there in the unknown and now having you basically doing the same thing is even worse."

Andro looked at her and set his coffee down. He took her hand in his and brought it to his cheek. "I am listening *Tenna*." He told her firmly. "I am taking everything in. Your words do not fall on deaf ears. I know this will put a great deal of strain on you when you don't need it, but I will be careful."

Deia smiled at him and drew her hand back making sure to caress his cheek. "I am well on the way to being fully recovered *Mandri*." She told him. "You do not need to worry about the strain on me. I have dealt with far more strain than this in my time. Just remember to always keep your wits about you."

Andro smiled again. "Sadi will not let me forget my wits." He said.

Deia laughed softly and nodded her head. "And that is why she is so loved among our people now." She said. "She is the only one who can actually control you. I was against letting her history into the open, but I was wrong. When our people, everyone, when they saw all she had endured and suffered in order to protect her father; when they see the way she looks at you, how the two of you interact so effortlessly. They are all your strength *Mandri*... but Sadi is your core. As you are hers. Just as your mother is with your father."

Andro nodded. "I know." He said softly. "*Tenna*... does it ever get any easier?" He asked her looking at her across the small table.

Deia shook her head. "No. There will always be others, even among our own people, who believe that they know what is best for everyone. That no matter what path we walk, the path that they advocate is the only correct one. Many are simply fools, but there are some who can become dangerous if left unchecked."

"Icho." Andro said. "Ulana's father."

Deia nodded. "Both of them were cancers. Icho still is. And he has brought so many to his side and given them a means to voice their fool ideals. You should have let Armetus do what he wanted when we first discovered what he was doing."

Andro shook his head. "No. We do not have all the pieces yet. Until we do... we cannot move against him." He returned his gaze to her. "Once we do though, then Armetus may have his way with him and all of his cronies."

Deia nodded. "Well... that is not something for you to be concerned with now. Armetus and Marci will take care of that when they have what they need." She took his hand in hers. "I am not in agreement with you taking your younger brothers and sisters Andro. Or Gorgo, Dasha and Normya. I think it is far too much of a risk. So many of our family will be in the same location at once."

Andro nodded. "I know you don't agree." He said. "But I have given it much thought *Tenna*. I know that father and my mothers need to see their children. They have been away for too long now as it is. 341 will have a Pralor transport on round the clock standby to remove all of them if they become endangered, but you know as well as I this is our strength as a family."

Deia nodded slowly. "Yes it is. Just be very mindful. Deion and Nara can take care of themselves now... but Retta, Calyb and Byron are still young. They still have much to learn and experience."

“*Tenna*... when have I ever put any of my siblings in harm.” Andro asked.

“Never.” Deia hissed quickly. “That is what I mean. You go to such extremes to keep them safe that you sometimes forget to take care of yourself. Just be mindful Androcles. Be aware of everyone and everything around you.”

“I will *Tenna*.” He said. “And if I have a question on anything I will not hesitate in the least to contact you.”

“Good.” Deia said as she sat back. “Events with Pian are moving very smoothly. I never thought I would hear myself say I have come to admire a Kavalian, but this man is cut from a very different mold. Those Pride Leaders with him look to him for leadership. And Jalersi is pivotal as well. They view her in a much different light than I expected. One of honor and also leadership. It appears that I am guilty of stereotyping their people and I have been for years. I will not do so any longer.”

“With grandfather Riall helping the Coven, which I’m quite sure the Kavalian high command knows, they may think when Pian begins his move they can attack us in retaliation.” Andro said. “Grandfather Vengal and General Vistr will teach them the error of their ways. They will have to fully concentrate on Pian or he will fracture their entire command structure in weeks. Keleru will know this and he will need to focus entirely on him. Any attacks against Union forces will be secondary and weak.”

Deia nodded. “I’ve already instructed Ceneu to put additional Omega Teams on Hadaria as soon as you depart.”

Andro looked at her with a sly smile. “*Tenna*?”

Deia snorted. “Hadaria is a founding member of the Union!” She hissed. “I will not allow that illegal government to remain in power any longer than necessary. The teams will only observe and report, but the Hadarian people are part of the Union and we will free them.”

“Yes we will.” He said.

“You are allowing Ulana to accompany you.” Deia asked him. “Even after what she attempted with Sadi.”

“If I tried to keep her out of it she would cause more trouble.” Andro answered. “I am meeting with a few others later today that will be coming with us. Those you chose I believe. Anlah and Jucara among them. They can keep her under control.”

Deia nodded. “Good.” She said. “And since Shiria has returned, at least briefly, you should have her give you a status on finding the others among our people that carry the Paladin gene. They could play a very large part in our future if what Shiria and Wayonn say does indeed come true.”

“What do you think?” Andro asked her.

Deia looked at him and smiled. He was so much like his father. Martin never hesitated to ask her opinion on anything political and on many things militarily. He valued her insight and it seemed he had made this clear to his sons. Use every asset that you had no matter how off the wall it might seem. It was also Martin’s way of insuring that Deia never lost importance or any influence among their people.

“To confront an enemy with nothing but hatred in their hearts and souls.” Deia said softly in reply. “It is not something we have ever faced before Androcles. The Coven, the Kavalians, even the Evolli, all of them have been driven politically in some way, shape or form. These Scourge however, they are not motivated by politics. It’s almost like a religious thing with them and those are the most dangerous foes to face.”

Andro nodded his head. “There is nothing I do not agree with in that statement.” He said.

Deia waved her hand. “This is not the time for that discussion. You have much to do and little time to do it all.” She told him. “I will keep you advised of anything that might change with Pian and the others, but so far they are absorbing all we are teaching them like sponges. Some have even asked to have their mates brought here. I have approved this. Pian has started something Androcles, something powerful. And we need to insure it carries into the future.”

Andro got to his feet. “That we do.” He said. “I’m going to meet Sadi, Ne’Veha and Sehri for lunch.” He said. “We’ll return to Cranae Island then. Carisia and Lu’ria should be back from Eden City by then. You could join us for dinner?”

Deia shook her head. “I have much to do myself.” She said.

“Sadi is cooking.” Andro offered with a twinkle in his eye.

Deia met his gaze and smiled brightly. “Then you have convinced me.” She said as she stood up. “I don’t think that girl has cooked anything since she became your mate that wasn’t fabulous.”

“Seven o’clock then?” Andro said.

Deia nodded. “I will be there.”

Andro leaned over and kissed her cheek. “I will remember everything *Tenna*.” He said softly. “I give you my word.”

Deia squeezed his arms. “I know.” She said. “Now go. I will see you for dinner.”

VEYERAI HIGH COVEN SPACE

“...can stop sending your reports to Pa'cour Lidene.” Yuri said with a small smile as she stood in front of his desk.

The man looked up at her. “I am only trying to be through Princess. I do not...”

Yuri settled into the chair in front of his desk and held up her hand silencing his words. “I am well aware of what you are trying to do Lidene.” She said. “I also know that I have treated you harshly... very harshly in the past. With little or no reason. I have given you reason to fear for your life and the lives of those who work for you.” Yuri met his eyes. “True?”

Lidene shifted in his chair. He had seen how she had been the last weeks, but a large part of him still did not believe all the gibberish about spirits and mysterious powers, and he was still trying to determine if it was all true. “Princess I...”

“I am not a Princess anymore Lidene.” Yuri said. “Nor do I want to be.”

Lidene looked at her. “What... what should I call you then?”

Yuri smiled. “My name would be a good start.”

Lidene shook his head quickly. “No. I could never do that. I...”

Yuri leaned forward. “Lidene... I was a colossal bitch!” She spoke. “To you and to everyone. I know you have a hard time believing that I have changed, but has anything I have done in the last weeks been what I would normally do?”

“No.” Lidene answered.

“Would the Yuri you knew... would she tolerate having an Immortal share her bed every night. Would she have thought about giving birth to a half Immortal child just to try and further some façade she was putting forth to fool you and others into believing that she had changed? Would I have done any of that Lidene?”

Lidene’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Impossible.” He said finally. “You would never...” Lidene stopped talking and looked at her. He saw the smile on her face and the brightness of her dark eyes. The old Yuri would never have insured that they escaped with their families. She would never have insured that those families were housed and taken care of and protected. She would never have allowed an Immortal to touch her in the way he had seen Pa'cour touching her these last weeks. The way she looked at him, allowed him to hold her close, even kissing him in full view of others. This was not what the old Yuri would have done or even thought of. He leaned back in his chair. “Nalavi... he tried to explain it to me.” He said softly. “I did not... I did not believe it could be.”

Yuri nodded her head. “You deal in facts and what you can see and determine with your mind Lidene. You are a scientist. That is to be expected.” Yuri then did something he had never seen her do. She chortled softly in laughter. “If it had not happen to me... I would never have believed it either.”

“Princess...?”

“I’ve had my eyes opened to so much in the last weeks Lidene.” Yuri told him. “I can never take back what I have done in the past. All I can do now is try to make amends in as many ways as I can.” She met his eyes. “I want to see the High Coven become what it is... what it was destined to become Lidene. The only way it can do that is with Narice leading it. I have no desire to be thrust back into that role. None. I... my task now is to help her however I can from the shadows. That is what I have always been good at. I have found an emotion with Pa'cour that I had never experienced until now Lidene. That emotion is love. I love him. I love him with

every breath that I take. I am nothing without him. Without our daughter. Without the children we will have in the future. That is who I am now. I am not asking you to believe what happen to me... I'm asking that you judge me now on what I do now. If you can not do this I will understand. And I will make a ship ready to take you wherever you wish to go."

Lidene came to his feet. "No!" He spoke quickly. "No! That is not... I do not want that!"

"Nor do I." Yuri told him. "You are the... you are the finest scientist I have ever known Lidene. I do not wish to lose you. That is why I have not interfered in how you have done things. I don't need too. You get results. I just need..." Yuri got to her feet now as well. "I just need you to trust me now. I have not given you reason to do so in the past... so I ask that you take a leap of faith and trust me now."

"That... that is not something the old Yuri would have asked." He said.

Yuri shook her head. "No. I suppose not."

Lidene met her eyes. "This change in you Princess... it has something to do with the technology you have me working on doesn't it?"

Yuri nodded her head. "In a manner of speaking... yes." She replied deciding on the way here that she would keep nothing from him. "More to do with the people who developed that technology and less about the tech itself. At least concerning me that is. It is very complicated to explain. I'm not sure I understand all of it."

"This is the reason Androcles Leonidas spared you isn't it?" Lidene asked pointedly. "You are... you are like him aren't you?"

Yuri chuckled again. "Like Androcles? No. I am not even close to being what he and his father are. What others among their family and their people are. But I am similar in some ways I suppose... yes. And there is a chance that there are those among our own people who are like them. That is why I left all of my mother's files with you to look through. She did not share what information she had in this regard and I determined that you would be able to make the most sense of it."

Lidene's eyes grew wider. "Your mother's files!" He almost yelled. "I forgot!"

Yuri looked at him. "What?"

"Your mother's files!" Lidene spoke going to his makeshift desk and pushing aside several data pads until he snatched the one he was looking for. "I decrypted several data files last night! The information was astounding!"

"About the weapons systems you are working on?" Yuri asked.

Lidene held out the pad to her. "No. About the High Coven cloning process and just how advanced it really was!"

Yuri took the pad from him. "I don't understand." She said as she began to read the file.

"Our cloning process was decades more advanced than anyone thought Princess." Lidene told her excitedly. "Your mother was hiding most of the important breakthroughs even from the senior people on the project."

"What does our old cloning program have to do with the weapons you are working on?" Yuri asked him looking up.

"Nothing." Lidene answered her. "Nothing at all. Until you get to page forty-three of that report." He said pointing to the pad. "Beginning there it lists three clones. Three perfect clones. And when I saw perfect... I mean perfect. In every possible way. Three perfect Lycavorian pureblood clones."

Yuri glanced at him with wide eyes. "I was under the impression that cloning a pureblood Lycavorian was next to impossible because of the PCC content of their blood and their healing capabilities."

Lidene nodded his head. "As was I." He stated quickly. "It is not really my field and I'm sure Nalavi would be better able to explain it... but if what is written there is true... then they succeeded Princess."

Yuri nodded. "I still do not see how this matters Lidene." She said. "We have all but stopped using our cloning program and it does not matter how many clones we have, it will not help us against the reason you are working on the weapons systems."

Lidene looked at her oddly. "The reason?" He asked.

Yuri nodded. "I will give you all the information I have about that. And the reason you are working on the programs that you are. But why is this cloning issue so important to you?"

Lidene took the pad from her hand, tapped on it for several seconds and then gave it back to her. "That is why." He said.

Yuri's eyes nearly exploded out of her head. "*A l'Ze'zhuanth Sanguine Sengeren!*" She exclaimed. (By the Ancient Vampire Lords)

Lidene nodded. "I... I thought that as well. It seems your father's work on the King's mother Gorgo was the breakthrough they needed. It is no wonder they kept her imprisonment such a secret."

"Lidene you are certain these files are accurate?" Yuri stammered.

Lidene nodded. "They are unaltered from the moment I was able to decrypt them." He replied.

Yuri turned and looked at the wall for a long moment. "This... this is not good." She said. She turned back to him. "This stays between us Lidene. It has to stay between us. Take it to Nalavi and confirm that it is indeed possible but no one else is to know!"

Lidene nodded. "I understand." He said.

"Trust me on this Lidene." Yuri said. "If this information were to fall into the wrong hands it could destabilize the entire Lycavorian Union! It could... it could destroy everything!"

"Then they are not our enemy any longer?" Lidene asked.

"Gods no! They never should have been our enemy to begin with! My mother... her father before her... they made us enemies in their lust for power! Their need to control!" Yuri exclaimed. "The Lycavorian Union is the best hope for the High Coven! The best hope for the universe as we go forward! If the Union falls... all of us will fall!"

Lidene looked at her. "I don't understand why?" He asked.

Yuri gave him the pad. "Take this to Nalavi and have him verify that this is actually possible Lidene. We must know for sure. I need to... I need to contact Androcles."

Lidene's eyes went wide. "About this?" He gasped.

Yuri shook her head. "No... about Onera." She replied. "This... this no one knows about until we all sit down with Pa'cour and make certain she was able to do this."

Lidene looked at the pad. "And if she was?" He asked.

Yuri looked at him as his eyes came up. "Then... then I will have to do something I have no desire to do. Something I fear more than death itself." She replied.

"Princess...?" Lidene asked.

"I will need to face Martin Leonidas and tell him this." Yuri said. "And pray he does not strike me down."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EARTH

SPARTA

KAVALIAN EMBASSY

Jalersi'Nruarani.

She was not religious in any way, but if there were Gods she would be praying to them every day, for almost more than anything else she cherished saying those two words.

Jalersi stopped just outside the doorway into the bathroom of their quarters in the newly repaired Kavalian Embassy and looked across the room at where Pian was sitting on the edge of the bed. He was half dressed and studying a data pad between lacing up his boots. Staring at his broad back as she secured the large towel around her naked form, Jalersi felt a shiver of desire and passion course through her stronger than anything she had ever felt in her life. Something that had only started with Pian. He had cut all of his body hair very short and now the light brown fur that covered his powerful frame was feather soft to the touch. He had kept the hair on his head longer, pulled into two separate braids on either side of his head at her request, giving him a very distinguished and very delicious look in her eyes. Jalersi had never really stopped to think about how incredibly handsome he was to her eyes. Even that night together nearly twenty years ago, as wild and unkempt as he had been then, he had an almost magnetic pull over her. She should have seen it that night, recognized it for what it was, as Pian had taken her with such blistering passion and emotion. His kisses had consumed her,

his hands never ceasing to explore her body in ways Pusintin never had. She had failed to see it that night. She failed because she believed in the words of her father and Pusintin more than she had believed in her own female intuition. She would never make that same mistake again.

Pian'Nruarani treated her as if she was the most valuable thing in the entire universe to him and she doubted she would ever know how accurate that description truly was. Pian was always touching her in some way now, a simple caress of his fingers on her arm or cheek or a gentle squeeze of his arm around her waist, all to insure she knew how much he loved her. It was his way to show her that he was different than what she had experienced in her life. Pian never failed to ask her opinion of something that he knew nothing about. He was not politically astute and he was the first to acknowledge that, though he was learning quickly Jalersi knew. When he was named the interim leader of this new government they had formed, he turned to her and took her counsel first and foremost when it came to their people and what needed to be changed in order to bring them out of the abyss her father had taken them to. Now even many of the Pride Leaders had begun to look at her differently. As Pian's wife, she had taken the place of his mother as the ranking female among the Nruarani Pride and with his mother's backing and guidance, Jalersi had begun to help him shape something great.

The Nruarani Pride had become the catalyst for change. The other Kavalian Prides saw what they did and had begun to emulate them. The changes would not be easy or swift, Jalersi knew this, but they *had* begun and that is what mattered the most. The females of the other Kavalian Prides that followed them now held a place of respect and honor. No longer were they seen as inferior. Jalersi knew this was the largest change and it would be perhaps the hardest change to accept, but amazingly she had noticed many of the young men from the other Prides had embraced this ideal. It would be harder for the older men, but based on what she had seen with the Pride leaders here with them on Earth, the change had taken deep root and nothing would stop it now. These men were trying and in many cases succeeding in curbing centuries of ingrained culture and teachings. They were embracing the change and it was a testament to the influence of Pian and the resolve of those who followed him.

Pian had embraced her daughter Nikkei as his own; the fact that she was Pusintin's child did not matter in the least to him. He got along famously with Karun and honored that he had chosen to embrace the name and blood of his Lycavorian heritage. Nikkei however, she was different, and had chosen to take his name as her own just as her mother had done. Nikkei spent much of her time with Pian's mother and she no longer feared the Kavalian blood within her. Nikkei'Nruarani, as she adored being called now, she had embraced it now and Jalersi knew that there were several young Kavalians in the Nruarani Pride alone who had shown an intense interest in Nikkei because she shared her mother's corporeal beauty. Pian however, he would have none of it. He intended to make sure that the man who courted Nikkei did it for the right reasons and not to get close to him or Jalersi in an attempt to further his own gain. Whoever did decide to court Nikkei would need to pass the gauntlet that Pian and Karun had established. Her son Karun adored his half elven wife Ardis, and she adored him, and Karun had accepted the Lycavorian blood in his veins as well as many of their traditions, including the one looking out with great care for his siblings. Jalersi knew no young male would come near Nikkei without the proper intentions because of Pian and Karun. Jalersi thought briefly of Kalis and though her heart ached that she had lost him to his father's path, he was still her son and she still loved him. Pian understood this and had told her once that hope was never dead. That one day Kalis might wake up and discover that his father was not who he made himself out to be. Jalersi secretly hoped for that but she did not expect it.

Jalersi knew that all of this had begun simply because Pian desired was her.

For so many years he did not care about anything else but making her his and he had started himself down this path for that sole purpose. His reasons were different now, seeing what his actions and intent had born fruit to had changed him. He was dedicated now to seeing their people free of her father's oppression and rule of fear. His unrequited love for her had started him down this path and now that he had her, he would continue it willingly. He knew that without real change, he could never have the life he wanted with her. They could never have the life that *they* wanted. And there was certainly no other place Jalersi wanted to be now. Pian had shown her more love and passion in the few short months they had been together than Pusintin had shown her in all the years they were mated. In their bed, Pusintin did not compare to Pian in any way. In either size, skill or intent. When Pian made love to her it was with an almost endless passion and love and above all else a desire to make her never want anyone else. Jalersi had already decided that, and the decision had been so very easy. The moment Pian had buried himself within her completely and the base of his huge manhood had

swelled, locking their groins together, Jalersi had made that decision. In that moment Jalersi had descended into a world of bright lights and crushing ecstasy. Locked together as they were in those moments, and the many moments since, her orgasms had come rushing forth almost non-stop and with devastating power. Feeling his hot seed erupting inside her depths sent her reeling over the edge of desire and into euphoric rapture each and every time. They could stay locked together like that for hours, each of them basking in the mutual pleasure until they were exhausted and spent. He had ravished her lush body, exploring every crevice and curve with his lips and tongue, something Pusintin would never have done. He delighted in this fact and the reaction he got from her when he did those things to her made him all the more eager to continue this practice and even improve on his skills. Things that even Jalersi had never thought of often times would send her spinning and screaming off into glorious heaven. And it did not matter to him in the least that since she had stopped taking the injections, her own tail had begun to grow back, causing the small of her back to be extra sensitive and quite the erogenous zone. At first she thought the change would take shape all over her body, but Anuk Simpson had assured her that this was not the case. The same thing that had happened to Athani was happening to her and once her tail was fully restored Anuk determined the change would cease.

Jalersi was not idle by any means with Pian. Not after what he made her experience and feel. She wanted him to know how she felt about him, how he was also now the center of her entire universe, and she took great joy in seeing the contortions of his face and body as she pleased him just as eagerly as he did her. If not more. She had memorized every hard muscle and line of his physique. The power that his body radiated alone could make her wet between her thighs. His huge cock reached places inside her, did things to her that Pusintin could never have reached or accomplished, and she lavished his organ with attention whenever she could. She tasted him as often as she wanted, savoring the taste and texture of his manhood like a fine meal. Being with him had brought out a part of her that had lain buried in obscurity for so many years and Jalersi nurtured that within herself. She was very playful in their bed and very vocal, and she did things to Pian that she would never have done to Pusintin.

Then there were the many nights where they just laid together in their bed, their naked bodies entwined together, and they savored the sensation of each other. Jalersi would never get enough of having his soft fur touching her naked flesh wherever she could. The warmth of his body was considerable and often times they did not need or care to use a blanket. He would sometimes extend the claws from his fingers and use them to stroke her skin ever so gently, sending delightful shudders through her body. She was his mate now, his wife and love, and Jalersi had never been happier in her entire life. They had begun a new future together along with those that followed Pian, and Jalersi had every intention of seeing that future come to fruition. Her life, her heart, her love, it all belonged to Pian now. As his did to her. They would take that strength and use it to free their people even if it cost them their own lives in the very process. Jalersi looked down at the small device in her hand and felt happiness flow through her. She padded across the room and crawled seductively across the bed until she was behind Pian. She felt him smile as her arms snaked over his broad shoulders and he instantly set aside the data pad and lifted his head as she brought her cheek to his and kissed his shoulder.

Pian turned his blue feline eyes on her face and thought to himself that he had never seen a more beautiful angel in all of his life. Her hand came up to his cheek and her fingers danced across his neck as he kissed her, breathing deeply of her freshly showered smell. Though not as acute as a Lycavorian's sense of smell, Kavalians could still distinguish between scents, and Jalersi always smelled sweeter to him than anything.

“What are you reading?” She asked him.

“Status reports.” He answered her. “The Union Senate has moved far faster than even Deia thought they would. They have voted on every article of our treaties and agreed to all of them with very minor changes in the wording.”

“Everything?” Jalersi gasped in surprise.

Pian nodded. “Aleou and the others were shocked as well, but General Azlenr seemed to already know what their answer would be. And Cowen did not seem particularly shocked either to be honest. Perhaps their interaction with Androcles gave them foresight into some things.” He told her.

Jalersi nodded her head. “Androcles touched Cowen in a way we will never understand Pian my love.” She said thoughtfully. “I think he will always have an insight into them now. And Azlenr owes him his life and

his command. He saw what kind of man Androcles is and by virtue of that the Lycavorian people. Has Cowen made up his mind yet?"

Pian shook his head. "Not yet... but I believe he is leaning towards accepting the offer. He is different now Jalersi. The passion and emotion is still there, but he keeps it in check now. His lessons with the female that Androcles assigned to him are helping him immensely." Pian looked at her. "And I think he finds her fascinating and not a little attractive."

Jalersi laughed softly. "Now that would be something." She said. "You told me in all the years you have known him and watched him grow; he has never displayed an interest in any woman."

Pian nodded. "He hasn't. He has always been dedicated to his Pride. Like his father." He told her. "There was talk that he might not favor women at all."

"Pian!" Jalersi exclaimed with a smile.

"I am only telling you what was whispered. I never believed it." He answered her. "This Sherisa, she is the oldest daughter of Thr'won, the senior Mage of Sparta, and she is very strong in what they call this Etheric realm. Sherisa appears to take after her mother and she is very outspoken and forceful."

"There is nothing wrong with a strong woman." Jalersi said.

Pian smiled and shook his head. "No there is not. I have you... and I know this to be fact. And Nikkei takes after you in that regard." He said.

Jalersi smiled. "She adores you Pian." She said softly. "You are the father to her that she has never had."

Pian nodded. "It is an honor for me." He said.

Jalersi traced his jaw and smiled. "How many children do you want Pian my love?" She asked.

Pian smiled in reply. "We have never talked of that have we?" He said.

Jalersi shook her head. "No."

"I have always wanted a big family." Pian answered. "My father once said to me that a true Kavalian would want as many children as his wife and mate could give to him and remain healthy and strong herself." He looked at Jalersi with devoted eyes. "I only care that they are healthy and happy. And I hope any sons we have are as smart as you and any daughters are as equally beautiful."

Jalersi kissed him hard, his words causing her passions to ignite and course through her. She held his face in her hands as she ran her tongue along his lips playfully and he tried to catch it with his lips. It was a game they had started shortly after they had come together and it was one they played even in public now. Pian had made it a point to show her affection whenever he could and not care who was watching. She drew back after a long moment and stared into his eyes.

"Have you thought of any names?" She asked him.

"Names?" Pian asked with a smile and shake of his head. "Until now all I have focused on is doing what I needed to do to secure your love Jalersi." He said. "The names of children we might have never even crossed my mind." Her stared at her for a long moment. "I think... I think our first born son I would like to name after my father, if you approve. He was the one who started me on this road. Encouraged me. He never doubted I would win you over one day. I would like to honor him for that faith."

"Aelan'Nruarani." Jalersi said softly. She smiled at Pian, her blue eyes glittering in joy. "He will have a strong name. An honored name."

Pian nodded his head in agreement. "Yes he will." He said. "He will..." Pian stopped talking and looked at her oddly. "Why are you asking me this now Jalersi?" He questioned her suddenly on alert.

Jalersi shrugged. "I just thought it might be something we needed to talk about." She said with a huge smile. "Especially now."

"What is so special about now?" He asked. "We..." His eyes grew wide and he bolted to his feet next to the bed staring at her. "Jalersi! Are you saying... are you...?"

Jalersi couldn't hold in the tears of happiness she felt anymore and her own feline like eyes became moist as she held out the pregnancy test to him. "I... I asked Tarifa to get this for me because I wanted to be sure. Their tests are so much more accurate." She said as Pian took the device. "I carry... I carry your son in my womb Pian'Nruarani."

"My..." Pian looked at the test in his hands and found they were shaking. "My son." He gasped lifting his eyes to look at her. "You carry... you carry my son! My... my child?"

Jalersi hadn't really known what to expect when she told him. Pusintin had not shown much emotion at all when she told him she was carrying Karun, and hardly any with Kalis, Leruk or Nikkei. Pian's face however, it lit up and his bright blue eyes shined with unabashed and obvious delight. Jalersi yelped in surprise as he scooped her from the bed and into his arms and began to whirl her around their quarters while hugging her tightly to him. Jalersi laughed in total and complete happiness. This was certainly not what she had expected, but seeing him act this way, any lingering doubts that may have persisted in the back of her mind were fully tossed aside. He kissed her hard, his lips capturing hers in a sizzling show of devotion and love to her. Jalersi returned the kiss with all that she was, wrapping her arms around his shoulders as he held her suspended eight inches off the floor.

Pian stopped spinning her around and stared into her eyes. "How... how do you know it is... how do you know it is a boy?"

Jalersi's tear filled eyes glowed in love. "I know. A woman knows these things Pian my love." She stated softly.

Pian kissed her again and Jalersi basked in the intensity of the passion as she kissed him back. The door chime interrupted their moment and it became insistent when they ignored it initially. Pian didn't release her from his arms as he moved to the wall and stabbed his hand down on the wall panel.

"What?" He snarled almost angrily about the interruption.

"Pian... I'm sorry..." Karun's voice carried to them.

Pian's face immediately became softer. "No Karun. Forgive me my harshness." He replied as Jalersi rested her head on his shoulder.

"Andro is here and he wanted to speak to my mother and I." Karun's voice told them.

Jalersi lifted her head. "Us?" She asked. "Did he say why Karun?"

"No mother. Only that it was important." Karun answered. "Ardis and I are headed for the foyer to meet him. Come down as soon as... as soon as you are presentable."

Jalersi looked at Pian and her face broke into a smile as they both caught her son's implied comment from the tone of his voice. Karun knew that Pian had given her the love his father never had and his mother returned that love and emotion with happiness. He had never seen her so comfortable and glowing now that she had accepted and embraced her true feelings for Pian.

"We are... we are merely talking Karun." Jalersi finally stammered.

They heard Karun chuckle softly and then they heard Ardis's whispered admonishment to her husband and the sound of her striking his thick body. "Very well mother." He finally said. "Come down quickly."

Jalersi looked at Pian, his blue eyes making her shudder in happiness. She traced his strong jaw with her finger, delighting in the feel of the soft fur of his face. "I have never loved anyone or anything as I love you Pian'Nruarani." She spoke softly. "You have... you have given me something I never imagined I would have."

Pian kissed her softly. "No more than I love you Jalersi'Nruarani." He said.

"Let us go see what Androcles has to tell me." Jalersi spoke. "Then I wish to tell your mother and make plans with her for a traditional Kavalian ceremony for when our son joins us."

Pian looked at her with bright eyes. "She would be honored my wife." He said with a smile. "But first you must put regular clothes on." He said lowering her to the floor. "I do not wish to have others gaze upon delights that are only mine to see."

Jalersi laughed and gave him a shove in the shoulder. "Let them gaze." Jalersi spoke as she turned to head for the closet. "There is only one set of hands and eyes that will ever rest upon me again."

Pian watched her strut seductively across the room and once more he blessed his father for pushing him forward. He now had what he had desired most in his life in Jalersi... but that same faith his father had shown in him was now part of Pian. And he would use that faith to free his people so that he and Jalersi could have the life he wanted. Free of oppression and hate and death.

Pian would keep that faith close to his heart. Especially now that his future would include one more life. One of many more he hoped.

“...begun to settle in.” Cowen spoke as he led Andro and Jomann into the main foyer of the embassy and waved his arm around the interior. “Working with your people we have been able to remove everything from what Matuarr and his bastards did. We have replaced all of the offices and repaired the damage done.” Cowen looked at Andro. “I never fully appreciated the skill of your engineers Andro. I do now.”

Andro smiled. “They sure can build things can’t they?” He said.

“Indeed they can.” Cowen spoke looking at him intently. “You... you have come for my answer?”

Andro shook his head. “I told you I would give you a few days to think it over and work with Sherisa. How is that coming?”

Cowen’s eyes narrowed somewhat and he turned fully to face him. “I am a poor student and she is... she is very patient.” He said.

Andro nodded. “It is not easy I know.” He said. “Part of me regrets doing what I did. I do apologize for...”

Cowen shook his head quickly. “No!” He hissed sharply. “I do not regret it for a single moment! What you... what you showed me Androcles. Never in my life would I have been able to see things like I do now. Not without your actions. I will not turn away from that now. Not with the future of my people in the balance.”

“There is no need to rush.” Androcles told him. “Jomann can tell you that control only comes with time and patience.”

Jomann nodded in agreement. “I am still learning about what I am able to do.” He said in agreement. “It does not happen overnight.”

Andro nodded. “I as well.” He said. “Especially now.”

Cowen nodded his head. “I think Sherisa finds me amusing.” He said with no malice in his voice. “And she is...”

Andro looked at him. “She’s what?”

Cowen met his eyes. “She can distract me so easily.” He said almost embarrassingly. “I have never been... never been so close to an elven female. Seen them from afar yes... but never so close to me. Their beauty... her beauty... it is beyond anything I have ever seen.”

Andro nodded. “She does take after her mother in looks doesn’t she?” He said with a smile. “But remember... she’s half Lycavorian too. And she is very proud of that fact. She is sterner than her brothers and sisters, I know that from experience. She used to watch us as we were growing. I think that is because of the time she was born and was raised here in Sparta. It was not an easy life with everything happening then.”

Cowen nodded. “I don’t imagine it was.” He said.

“You have more in common than you might think Cowen.” Andro said. “Do not be afraid to ask her these things. It will build a trust between you that can only help with your studies.”

Cowen blinked several times. “I... I did not think of things this way.” He said. “Perhaps you are right.”

They turned as Karun and Ardis came down the stairs from the upper level and Ardis went immediately to hug Andro tightly. He squeezed her hard with a smile as Karun shook hands with Jomann.

“How you doing cousin?” He asked drawing back and looking at her.

Ardis smiled brightly. “It’s nice to be home.” She said holding his arms. “We are enjoying it as much as we are able before we leave to go back.”

Andro nodded his head and looked at Karun. He reached out and Karun grasped his arm without question, pulling him tightly into an embrace which Andro returned. “It’s good to see you Andro.” Karun said.

Andro smiled. “You are looking well cousin.”

Karun grinned. “It’s Ardis. She keeps me on my toes and feeds me well.”

Ardis laughed. “Ah! He does all the cooking! I hate to cook!”

Andro laughed as well and nodded. “Yes... I seem to recall we all got sick the last time you attempted your culinary skills.”

Ardis punched him lightly in the arm. “Hey! That was an accident.” She spat at him.

Andro nodded. “Indeed it was.” Ardis looked at him menacingly and Andro grinned even wider. “Ok... ok. No more making fun of your cooking.”

“What’s going on Andro?” Karun asked. “You wouldn’t have come here unless it was important. I know you are getting ready to lave soon.”

Andro nodded. “This is important.” He said. “And it is something you need to know as you go forward.”

“Androcles!” Jalersi’s voice echoed and they all turned to see her finish coming down the stairs, Pian right behind her.

Andro didn’t hesitate and he stepped up to her and took her hands. Though it was not something publicly spoken of, all of the Leonidas children held a special place in their hearts for Jalersi and Pian because of their actions in helping to save Aricia’s life. By their actions they had helped to save one of their mothers and would be forever honored and treated as extended members of their family. Andro gripped her hands tightly and leaned forward to kiss Jalersi’s cheek warmly. She smiled brightly and Andro detected the distinct change in her scent almost immediately. He leaned back quickly and looked at her, questions in his eyes. Jalersi nodded but said nothing and he knew they were waiting to tell everyone.

“It is always a pleasure to greet you Lady Jalersi.” He spoke with a smile. He looked at Pian. “General Pian.”

Pian stepped up next to Jalersi and nodded to him with a smile of greeting. “You are here early Androcles.” He said. “It is a pleasure... but as you said it must be important to divert you from your other duties.”

Andro nodded his head and stepped back slightly. “It is important.” He told them. “As I was telling Karun, it is knowledge that you should have moving forward, for it concerns family and the future.”

Jalersi looked at him confused. “Family?” She asked. Jalersi’s eyes grew wide and her hands went to her mouth as she felt a stab of sorrow in her heart seeing that Andro’s eyes had focused entirely on her. “Kalis!” She gasped. “It’s about Kalis isn’t it?”

Andro nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“He’s... he’s dead isn’t he Andro?” Jalersi asked as her blue eyes became slightly moist.

Andro withdrew the holodisc from inside his uniform jacket and held it up. “You should probably see this for yourself.” He said moving to the small table in the foyer and setting the disc down. He pressed the activation button on the top and a beam of light shot out directly in front of them becoming the full cone of a holographic message projection within a few seconds. Jalersi gasped loudly when she recognized who was in the transmission and she stepped closer to Pian, his arm slipping around her waist.

“Kalis!” Jalersi gasped. It was Kalis yes... but it was not. Something was different about her middle son. So very different than the last time she had seen him. When he started speaking Jalersi knew why.

“Hello mother.” The image of Kalis spoke now. *“I hope... I hope Karun and Nikkei are with you when you view this message, but if not perhaps you could find it in your heart to let them see it. Uncle Martin said I would have time to do this before we returned to his ship and I wanted to do it as soon as possible.”* Kalis smiled almost shyly. *“Before I lose the courage too.”*

Karun stepped forward. “Uncle Martin? Andro what...?” He almost shouted.

Andro nodded and held up his hand seeing the looks of confusion from Jalersi and Pian both. “Watch cousin... watch and see.” He said.

“I do not... I do not know where to begin really.” Kalis continued now. *“My words and my actions towards you and Karun and Nikkei through the years... more so you mother... they were vile and they dishonored you in a way I don’t know if you will ever be able to forgive. I would know... I would understand if you felt this way... but I wanted you to know what I have found mother. I wanted you to know that... it is my hope that one day you will forgive me for all I have done. That Karun and Nikkei will forgive me. I know it may not be possible... but Serale convinced me that all I could do was try.”*

They watched as he shifted on his feet and they could see movement in the background. He was obviously on a ship and they could easily see other Kavalians in the background as well as Lycavorians. Kalis finally looked back up and began speaking again.

“Something happened to me on Enurrua mother.” Kalis spoke again. *“In the midst of all of father’s twisted ideas, the hate and corruption that gripped me, I was shown a path. Uncle Martin showed me a path that father never did. He could have killed me so easily...”* Kalis laughed softly. *“Carians... he could have struck me down without blinking an eye or a wasted breath. He did not. He gave me something that... it allowed me to see what father never showed to me. Never showed Karun; what it was his duty to show us as our father. When Uncle Martin showed me this... when I saw this, a new road was opened to me mother. It is a road that I now walk with my head held high.”*

They watched as Kalis reached to the side with a smile and drew the stunning young red haired woman into the transmission with him. She stepped up against him without hesitation they all saw and she wrapped her arms around his waist as she stared up into his face with obvious adoration.

"I have left father's hate behind mother. Left it behind forever. I will walk the path that is so brilliantly illuminated for me now. The path my blood calls for. My heritage. Uncle Martin's actions and words... they saved me. He has accepted me and I travel with him now. I escaped father with others that follow Pian's ideals mother. And yours." Kalis looked down into the young woman's face, for she was easily seven inches shorter than him, and without hesitation he kissed her softly. This action affected Jalersi and Karun more than Pian and Ardis for they knew Kalis and his past. This simple action, it was not something Kalis would have done not so very long ago. It was a kiss that the young woman returned without pause they all witnessed. Kalis looked back up.

"This is Serale mother. My light... my love... my life now. I will honor her as I should have honored you and my sister. I am so very happy that you have found new love... new purpose with Pian. I wish... I miss you mother. I miss all of the things that should have been and never were because of father's hate and anger. I miss my brother and sister..." Jalersi gasped out loud and tears burst forth as Pian pulled her close to him. *"I take solace in knowing that I will be able to protect another brother and sister that father tossed aside like so much garbage. I will protect and guide Fedor and Eirene as much as I am able... and I will do so because they are my blood. I will do this just as Androcles would do. Something... something I should have done for Karun and Nikkei. Brother... if you see this Karun... I finally understand why you were different. I understand for I have embraced it now as well brother. And it feels glorious. I will remain with Uncle Martin... there is so much to see and experience out here... it is amazing mother. I will love, honor and treat Serale as you should have been treated mother. As a precious jewel. Perhaps... perhaps one day you will forgive me. Perhaps Karun and Nikkei will forgive me. I will work for that day and I will make all of you proud of who I have become. I will make it so you will be proud to call me son and brother again."*

They watched as he and Serale turned when a voice out of the transmission spoke to him and Kalis nodded his head and turned back. *"I must go mother. If you view this and you can find it within your heart to forgive me, know that I want to be your son once more. I want to be Karun and Nikkei's brother once more. I want us to have what father never allowed us to have. More than anything this is what I want."* Kalis looked up once more; heard someone speak to him and he nodded. *"Mother... we have discovered something on a nearby planet and I must go. I love you mother. I always loved you... and now I am not afraid to say it. The gods guide you and Pian in your actions mother. May... may they guide all of us."*

They watched as he stopped talking and turned to the side and hold out his hand. They saw Daniel Simpson enter the image then and hand him a P190A4 as Kalis nodded and began to check the weapon while speaking with him even as the young woman Serale began to speak with the older woman that appeared in the transmission. Then it all faded to blackness.

Andro tapped the button again and deactivated the disc, retrieving it from the table and moving back in front of Jalersi. He held it out to her and saw the tears streaking her face. "He asked that I make sure to hand deliver this to you and I do so now with happiness."

Jalersi reached out with shaking hands and took the disc from him, gripping it tightly as she looked at him. "He... he is so different!" Jalersi exclaimed. Her face was animated and very bright even through the tears that flowed. "The darkness... the anger is... it is gone."

Andro nodded. "He walks a different path now." He said. "And there is no where better to learn of his blood than with my father and the *Feravomir*. My father would not have allowed him to continue if his heart was not true. He has become the man he was always meant to be."

"What... what was happening Andro?" Karun asked. "The young woman... she..."

"She is Hadarian." Andro spoke looking at him. "I don't know all the details as to how they came to be together but my father told me they *are* very much together. They are already planning for Kalis to claim her in the fashion of our people when they return to the *ARC ROYAL* eventually. My father and his team picked them up just over a day ago. Apparently Serale, her mother and brother were being held prisoner. Kalis rescued them when they escaped. I don't know much more than that to be honest."

"She is beautiful." Ardis spoke softly.

Andro nodded. "That she is." He said. "I won't speak to my father again until he returns to the *ARC ROYAL*. They were going to land and investigate a facility that they discovered on sensors on an unoccupied planet as they were returning. We can see to a real time connection when they get back. If that is what you wish?"

Jalersi shook her head. "I... I don't know... I'm..."

Andro reached out and squeezed her arm. "He walks a different path now Lady Jalersi. Just as I said earlier. This is not the same Kalis all of you knew but it will ultimately be your decision. Just know that it took courage and honor to admit everything to you as he did. And it took even more strength and faith for him to grasp onto what my father showed him and embrace it as he has." Andro leaned over and kissed her cheek. "I will insure my aunt knows what to do if I am not available to give approval for the COM traffic." Andro bowed his head to her. "I have much to do today, so if you will excuse me." He turned to Karun and nodded. "Be well Karun my cousin."

Karun nodded in reply still somewhat shocked himself. "You as well."

SPARTA
OLD DISTRICT
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OFFICE OF THE CROWN PRINCE

"... Make me assign a full squad to you and *Tenna Ceuma*." Andro spoke to Sivana as he held out the glass of fruit juice to her. Sivana chuckled as she took the glass and she looked at Ceuma who sat beside her on the couch. Belen stood to the side of the couch, Joci sitting on the arm of the furniture, his trademark dreadlocks pulled back and tied with fine leather wraps that Ceuma had purchased for him. "If you were to allow yourselves to be hurt or captured my mother would have my *nor* in a grinder for letting you go."

"Don't worry Andro." Sivana answered. "We have no intention of doing anything like that. Anja is the adventurous one of the three of us. She would be the one to do some crazy stunt... not us."

Andro nodded and moved back to sit on the edge of his desk. "Just so we are clear. We are in no position at the moment to even attempt to retake Hadaria and return the three of you to your rightful positions."

"Well... I'm not exactly a Princess." Ceuma offered holding up her hand.

Andro looked at Deia who had sat quietly behind the desk until now. Deia leaned forward and looked at Ceuma. "Regardless of how you may view yourself Ceuma, or the events that shaped your history, Sivana and Anja both consider you a sister. Therefore the Lycavorian Union considers you their sister and a Princess of Hadaria. As well as a Princess of the Union based on your relation to Anja."

Ceuma blinked several times and looked at Joci quickly. He smiled back and shrugged his broad shoulders. She turned back to Deia. "You are serious?" She stammered. "I'm a... I am the product of a test tube Deia! A clone!"

Deia shrugged her shoulders as well. "However things may have come to be, genetically you are Anja's clone, but since she is twin sisters with Sivana, that makes you their sister as well Ceuma. And you have already proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are your own person. Therefore you have the same status as they do within the Union and among our people. All of our people."

Ceuma looked at Joci once more, the shock of this knowledge very evident on her face. She turned back to Deia. "I didn't... I never suspected that..."

Deia shook her head. "You would be very surprised what is accepted by the men and women of the Union. We are, perhaps, the most tolerable collection of species to have ever inhabited the universe. That is one of our strengths."

"And that means you are not allowed to act as my mother does and do something totally off the wall." Andro continued now. "You may direct resources to Hadaria and communicate with them and begin to establish targets and such, but outside of that, you will not do anything."

"Don't worry *Mandri*." Belen spoke now with a smile. "My father left strict instructions from Anja to that regard. Joci and I will make sure they are followed."

Sivana snorted at him very unladylike. “While our sister prances around the unknown and gets into all sorts of danger.” She said.

“Anja is trained for such things.” Belen said. “You and Ceuma are not. You are dedicated Healers... not fighters. That is the difference.”

Andro lifted the data pad and looked at it. “I have assigned two officers to put together a small staff for you *Tenna* Sivana. Both of them have been pulled from my mother’s ship and you probably have met them at some point through the years. What we will direct must remain very quiet and very secret. No one must know what you will be doing.”

Sivana nodded. “Agreed.” She said. “I would like to inform Zaniai and Eurin at least. They should be involved because they know the political landscape of Hadaria better than Ceuma or I.”

“You mean they know Buonau better.” Deia said.

Sivana nodded. “Yes.”

“That *upaee* needs to be put on trial for what she has done and then executed.” Deia hissed.

Sivana nodded. “I think you know that Anja and I agree Deia. Eurin as well. She will have a reckoning and she will answer for her crimes.”

“Good.” Deia said.

“Whoever we send in will need equipment and resources Andro.” Joci spoke. “When we departed Hadaria we took everything that belonged to us, which was the vast majority of the military and intelligence apparatus.”

Andro nodded. “I know. Marci is taking care of that now. With Armetus back working again and them sharing the work load now she is able to do what she does best. Armetus has made her co-director of the Krypteria so she will have the ability to do what she needs and get you what you require.”

The door to the office slid open and Carisia strode in with Lu'ria beside her. All of them saw Andro’s face relax when he smelled his wives and mates and they watched as both of them walked up to him. He nuzzled Lu'ria’s elven ear and they saw her face take on a very dreamy expression. Sivana watched silently, knowing what Lu'ria felt, for she felt it as well. It had come as a surprise to many when Lu'ria became Andro’s wife and mate. The first pureblood Drow in their history to be turned if what Sivana heard was true. There were some Drow who had been turned in the past, but all of them were direct products of the High Coven’s failed early experiments in cloning. Sivana knew the most notable was the second wife of Danny’s father. He had changed the Drow over two decades ago and she was happily the Mistress to Danny’s mother and second wife and mate to his father. Lu'ria on the other hand was the very first pureblood Drow who had been changed. And now she was the wife and mate to Androcles. A young man who held the Drow in just as much respect and honor as his father. Sivana knew that Lu'ria was now somewhat of a celebrity among the Drow because of her position, but she also knew from direct contact with her that she was completely unassuming and down to earth. She was a Drow of course, and while she had all of the surreal and exotic beauty of all the Drow females Sivana had seen, she was also exceptionally deadly.

Andro shifted his head slightly and shared a soft but very emotion filled kiss with Carisia. She was quite petite when compared to Andro at only five foot two, but all of them knew just how lethal she really was. They watched as Lu'ria handed him a large mug of his mother’s coffee and then she and Carisia moved to the empty couch after sharing soft kisses of greeting with both Sivana and Ceuma. This was the way of the Leonidas family and Ceuma had learned it very quickly and accepted it even faster. Physical contact was their way of showing their love and devotion to family.

Andro lifted the mug to his lips and took a sip, savoring the rich flavor of his mother’s coffee. He lowered the mug and was about to speak when the chime on the desk sounded. He turned and watched as Deia reached across and activated the panel.

“Yes?” She asked.

“Prime Minister Deia... Senator Icho and Senator Ulana are here to see Androcles. They have brought others as well.” Jomann’s voice

“We are rather busy Jomann.” Deia said. “Have them leave the building and request an appointment like everyone else.”

“I informed them of this.” Jomann stated. “Icho’s reply was that if they are not allowed to see Andro now he would go to the Netnews in regards to the fact that we will be leaving at the end of the week to travel to Vanari space.”

Andro looked at the COM panel. “Jomann... that information is not known outside those of us...”

“I know Andro.” Jomann interrupted him. “I’ve already contacted General Vengal to tell him that a possible leak within the *Durcunusaan* has occurred. Intentionally or not. It is the only explanation.”

“*Anse!*” Andro swore.

“The good Senator also informed me that if you do not see him and his quorum that he would insure that what Sadi did on the *SCIMIATAR* was known across the Union. As well as some other bits of information that he said you would not find pleasant if it was released to the Netnews.” Jomann told him.

Deia shook her head. “That fool!” She hissed. “He’s still trying to use the Netnews in order to make you and Sadi and the others look bad. He should have learned his lesson when you took over his Netnews briefing!”

Andro looked at Deia, who met his gaze. “Any ideas *tenna?*” He asked.

Deia sat back. “Let them in. Better we deal with them now then wait until after you are gone.”

“Send them up Jomann.” Andro spoke. “Under guard that is.”

Jomann chuckled within the transmission. “Understood.”

Andro turned as Sivana and the others got to their feet. “We’ll head out the other way and leave you to handle this.” She said as they shared a hug and a kiss of family. “I will let you know what we have done before you depart. And when you see our sister, tell her she owes us big time.”

Andro looked at her oddly. “Excuse me?”

Sivana laughed softly. “She’ll know what I mean.”

Andro nodded. “Ok. I think.” He said.

He watched as Sivana laughed again and then she and Ceuma turned and headed out of the office through the rear door, Belen and Joci right behind them. He turned to look at his Aunt and Deia lifted her hands in feigned ignorance.

“I have no idea what they meant by that.” Deia said. “She has been hanging out with your mother all of these years and the only one who can translate what they say half the time is your sister Eliani.”

Andro nodded his head as Lu’ria and Carisia laughed softly. “That is so true.” He said as he moved to the couch and sat between his Drow and vampire wives.

They didn’t have long to wait before two *Durcunusaan* officers entered the office leading Icho and Ulana and four other men and women. Andro didn’t know who the others were and he glanced at his aunt, who was watching them intently. She obviously knew who they were given the look in her eyes, but he said nothing and turned back to watch them as they came fully into the office. He sipped his coffee and watched as they were led in, not bothering to get to his feet in greeting. Ulana seemed very reserved now and he could detect no indication of her aura in the room. This made him wonder what exactly Sadi had said to her on the ship for it had most effectively shut down her attempts at enticing him with her female aura. He dismissed it just as quickly, knowing Sadi acted in the way of any true Alpha female of their people, and he knew just how vicious Sadi could be when she wanted.

Icho glanced at where Deia sat as he stopped in front of the couch and Ulana and the others moved up beside him. He turned back to Andro and bowed his head slightly. “Prince Androcles.” He spoke. “I assumed... I assumed we would be meeting with you alone.” He said.

“You assumed wrong.” Andro replied as he lowered his mug of coffee.

“What I... what we have to discuss with you is of a sensitive nature Milord.” Icho told him. “I’m not sure you would want others hearing our conversation.”

Andro met his eyes. “Why not?” Andro asked. “This is so sensitive that it cannot be heard by the Prime Minister of the Union? Or two of my wives and mates? I think not.” He said. He motioned to the two small couches across from where he sat. “You can sit there... or stand. I don’t really care.”

“There is no need for hostility Milord.” Icho spoke.

“Senator... as you did before... you connived and bullied your way to a meeting with me.” Andro told him. “On top of that... you threatened to release information to the Netnews which you should not have. It is information of a sensitive military nature and I’m very curious as to how you came to have it. I don’t know what you are trying to accomplish... but so far what you have done has not made me happy. You’ll forgive me

if I dispense with the pleasant talk. I know you and I know Ulana... I don't know the others with you. Perhaps you could tell me."

"Of course." Icho spoke. He motioned to the man and woman closest to him. "I present Senator Tamalan and Senator Irina from the Tenth District of Apo Prime. They represent the citizens of the port city of Gornan. Along the western coast of the Yanloa Ocean. As well as the surrounding eight sub-districts."

The man and woman bowed their head slightly to him. "It is a distinct pleasure to finally meet you in person Milord Prince." Tamalan spoke. "We have heard much about you through the years."

"All of it bad I'm sure." Andro spoke. "Considering the company you keep."

The man and woman both looked at him surprised at his frankness and they looked very quickly to Icho. The woman turned back to him. "What would make you believe this Milord?" She asked.

"Never mind." Andro said.

"This is Senator Vlone and Senator Tranar and they represent the Menkla District which includes the city of Palno and much of the Northern Continental Provinces ." Icho spoke to Andro motioning to the two men who had already sat down on the couch.

Andro detected the antagonism of the two men even before looking at them. Their scents were filled with distaste and distrust and they were making no attempt to hide that. Andro also knew that a large portion of Icho and Ulana's base support came from the Menkla district. This is where the Utopia Movement was headquartered.

"I have a rather full schedule Senator Icho." Andro spoke turning to look at him as he sat beside Ulana on the second of the smaller couches. "Would you care to enlighten me as to what it is you want?"

"No casual conversation to break the ice Milord?" Icho asked. "Right to business?"

Andro chuckled. "Senator... you don't like me, and to be particularly honest, I don't care for you in the least. I don't do casual conversation sir. We have nothing in common. So spare me the pleasantries."

As you wish Milord." Icho spoke drawing out four data pads from within his jacket and setting one of them on the table between them. "I have several different business interests within The Wilds. Mostly on Talbor Seven. Recently these interests informed me of dozens of survivors of what was once the Icalro Alliance wandering to the resort looking for aide and support. They spoke of wild stories about Lycavorian Union warships and attacks by our military on Icalro installations and facilities. I had some of my people make some inquiries about their claims and discovered that in fact they were true." Icho looked at Andro evenly. "Your name particularly was spoken of Milord. Quite a few times in fact. All in regards it seems to a young female from the Vanari people with whom we have just recently made first contact and then some incredibly fantastic claims about disappearing ghost ships that apparently blew the entire Icalro Alliance government into oblivion while they were in session in their main government headquarters. Warships that, from what I understand, are not supposed to exist."

Andro lifted the pad and began reading while he sipped his coffee once more. "That is interesting." He said calmly.

"Yes it is Milord, considering that we are not aware of any new warships that we have built, and I made that inquiry of several colleagues before coming here." Icho spoke. "It also does not explain intercepted reports from Kavalian news sources about the Pralor warship that we apparently now have in our possession. A ship far more powerful than anything we can field and which took part in the destruction of nearly six hundred Kavalian ships. A ship based on the technology of City Ship 41, which your father brought to Earth more than two decades ago. A ship which is still off limits to myself and many of my fellow Senators after all this time I might add. If this is true, the number of Kavalian dead is staggering, as are the technological wonders this ship might have. If all of that is true."

"Military operations and matters fall under the purview of the King!" Deia snapped out. "And in his absence the next in line, which is the Crown Prince! It has been that way since Martin returned to us."

Icho nodded. "Yes I know." He said. "Perhaps it is something that should be reviewed by the Senate."

Carisia and Lu'ria were watching Andro's face and surprisingly it was completely calm and seemingly unconcerned. They both knew their mate and husband well enough to know that he was either holding his anger in check or he had foreseen that this was coming.

Icho set the next pad down as he looked at Andro. "I think you will find this is even more interesting Milord." He said. "It has also come to my attention that you intend to depart Union space and travel to the Beta

Quadrant in order to finalize a merger between the Union and an extreme offshoot of our people known as the Protectorate.”

“Extreme?” Andro asked looking at him.

Icho nodded his head. “Those members of our species that still cling to past traditions in many ways. Traditions that our people left behind on Lycavore after The Black Day. Including ways which your grandfather personally hated, in order to pull us into the future. At least that is what my information tells me.” Icho spoke. “It is said that this offshoot of our people is actively involved with a massive slavery and illicit goods Black Market organization centered within the Beta quadrant and now extends into the Alpha Quadrant. Among their actions are the purchase and selling of these Vanari females for... well for less than honorable reasons.”

“They are subjected to the same indignities that our elven females were once subjected to! That they are still subjected too in many places we do not control.” Irina hissed. “Sexual abuse and perversions beyond imagination. And you are going to merge them into the Union!”

“Not to mention that you plan to depart Union space after involving our people in a war of choice!” Vlone snapped. “Now you will leave and our people will suffer for that decision! In more ways than one!”

“That was a decision made by an overwhelming majority of your fellow Senators!” Deia hissed from the desk. “They apparently viewed what happened to For’mya and the attacks by the Kavalians on the Drow and here in Sparta itself to be a much more important event than you!”

“Perhaps if the King had not pretended he was dead she would not have made such a decision!” Vlone barked right back.

“How dare you suggest such a thing! She did not make that decision!” Deia barked. “It was forced upon her in a vile manner by an evil man only concerned with power!”

“How do we know that Prime Minister Deia?” Vlone asked now. “The details of what happened between Queen For’mya and Marshall Pusintin are sealed. No one is allowed to access them. That should be public information! How do we know she did not willingly accept what he offered her just as the Kavalians claimed? That she willingly accepted to become his mate and wife in order to save her own life? It would not be the first time something like this has happened.”

“Senator Vlone... you dare accuse the Queen of this?” Deia snarled at him. “You dare suggest this?”

“I am only voicing the questions that many others are asking.” Vlone spoke.

“Questions that others are asking?” Deia snapped. “I have heard this question from you and you alone! No one else has voiced this opinion!”

Vlone nodded. “Because they fear what he will do.” He answered motioning to Andro.

“You are a pureblood.” Andro said. “You know she would have no control over it if she could not feel my father! Or have you forgotten what it means to be Lycavorian?”

“How could she not feel him?” Vlone barked. “He is the most powerful Alpha among our people!”

“She was under the influence of a device.” Andro said. “It blocked her ability to sense him.”

“What device?” Irina asked. “I have heard of no such thing. Who made it? How did your uncle get it? These are the things that our people need to know.” She said.

Andro looked at her. “Why? What would be gained by this information being public knowledge. Who would it benefit?”

“Our people should know the facts!” Vlone snapped.

Andro glared at him. “Why? So you can twist those facts into something sinister! So you can twist those facts to undermine my father and mothers and try to sway more people to see your own views?”

“We would not...” Irina began.

“Don’t!” Andro snapped. “Do not stand there and tell me you would not! I am not so stupid as to believe that! None of you have supported anything my father and mothers have done in the last two decades!”

“War is not the only option!” Tranar hissed.

Andro looked at him. “No it is not. But it is the only option when your way of life is at risk and the other side started it! Or do we allow the government of Keleru to do these things and not respond? We should turn the other cheek?”

“If it wasn’t for those accursed dragons none of this would have taken place!” Vlone said. “This all started because of them! Because you agreed to train them!”

“Do not blame those who are blameless Senator.” Andro spoke. “It makes you look more the fool. The High Coven dragons were only the catalyst... the Kavalians would have found something else if not them.”

“Your family is too secretive!” Vlone snapped. “How do we know what has been said of Princess Ne'Veha's actions in regards to this Tarren fellow are true? The records are sealed by your order.”

“Ne'Veha already answered those questions!” Carisia snarled.

“But the records of his charges and interrogation are sealed.” Tranar said. “Our people do not know the truth.”

“Ne'Veha told you the truth!” Lu'ria hissed.

“And Captain Tarren tells a different version.” Irina said. “Who are we to believe? Who are our people to believe? We have all seen how possessive you are. How do we know this is not you hiding the truth?”

“What? Why?” Andro asked him aghast.

“Perhaps because you acted in a manner that is forbidden by males our of species!” Irina told him.

“I'm not even going to dignify that with a reply.” Andro told her.

“Our people have a right to know!” Tranar echoed.

“Our people do not have the right to know the details of an ongoing investigation!” Andro barked loudly. “Nor do they have the right to know the details surrounding my mother's imprisonment and rape!” Andro snarled. “What would be the purpose behind releasing that kind of information? And that you would even suggest my mother would agree willingly to anything my uncle did is... such a thing is beyond my ability to fathom. And it is certainly not the right of our people to know personal issues with my wife and mate!”

“You are the Crown Prince.” Icho chimed in now. “Everything about you and your mates should be open to the public.”

Andro shook his head. “In your opinion perhaps... not mine. And not my father's.”

“We will never know what really happened!” Vlone said. “You have the records sealed!”

“And that will not change no matter what you spout!” Deia snarled.

“Then I will petition the Lycavorian Spartan Court to release those details.” Vlone spat. “It is my right as a Senator!”

Deia nodded. “Yes it is. Be my guest.”

Icho leaned forward again. “Information has also come into my hands that we have at least two of these Vanari females right here on Earth.” Icho said. “That they were somehow involved with the Icalro Alliance and what happened there. Is this true Milord?”

Andro nodded his head. “They are being treated medically and emotionally. They were held prisoner for many months and were deeply affected.” He replied. “They chose to remain behind here when Denali took his advance party to the Beta Quadrant.”

“His Advance Party?” Icho asked surprised at this release of information be it inadvertent or not. “We were not made aware of any Advanced Party with the intent to conduct diplomatic negotiations.”

“There was no need to inform you Senator. You are not a member of the Senate's First Contact Team.” Andro answered him. “The Protectorate already has many contacts within the Vanari government. Any and all agreements or treaties will remain in place once the merger is complete. The Protectorate has dealt with the Vanari for far longer than we have and they already have established relationships with them. They are the ones working with our people to facilitate the merger. There is no need to throw more pomp and circumstance into an already full situation.”

“In your opinion!” Tranar spoke.

Andro met his eyes. “Yes.”

“You are going ahead with this merger then?” Irina exclaimed.

Andro looked at her. “Again... yes.” He answered. “I don't know where you got your information but not surprisingly, it is in no way accurate or up to date. This, for obvious reasons, is part of the rationale for you having been left out of the loop.”

Carisia could not contain her snicker at that comment and she turned her head to the side to try and hide it as much as possible. Ulana and Irina glared at her while Lu'ria couldn't help but smile as well.

“You do yourself no favors by mocking us Princess.” Irina snapped.

Carisia looked at her then. “You do not need my help in making yourselves look the fool Senator.” She spat at Irina. “You are doing a fine job of that all by yourselves.”

Irina began to respond but Icho interrupted her by placing another data pad on the table. “Your should probably review this one carefully Milord.” He said.

“Why is that?” Andro asked picking it up.

“This is a private report from the Director of the School of the Mages. The DSM as he is often referred to if I am not mistaken. It is a very detailed report that he put together for me on the use of Etheric power within the Union. Specifically within your own family and several others. I contacted him after what we witnessed in the Senate Chambers not so long ago and asked him to put it together for me. Do you know what I discovered?”

Andro smiled. “I’m sure you are going to tell us.” He said.

“While he could not go into great detail because of the veil of secrecy you and others have propagated... I discovered that not one of your family, yourself included, have attended the School of the Mages.” Icho said. “This is troubling to me since the vast majority of our people who have enhanced Etheric abilities as they are now called... all of them have attended the school. The DSM’s own report from several weeks ago, a report he says he submitted to your office, indicate numerous requests for added or further testing of you and others within your family. All have been rebuked. We would like to know why? The people of the Union have the right to know why the Leonidas children and family are exempt from having to attend the School of the Mages for instruction in how to control and utilize their abilities.”

“Why would this be a concern of yours?” Andro asked him. “Attendance at the school is voluntary if I am not mistaken.”

“Given the display you put on within the Senate Chambers, executing that poor man in the manner you did, without a trial, I should think that is enough for many of us to be concerned Milord. Don’t you?” Irina asked.

“That poor man?” Andro asked her. “That man was party to everything that happened to my mother. He knew about it and helped to assist it. That makes him just as guilty as my uncle who actually committed the crime. Why does it seem to me like you and your colleagues are defending what the Kavalians did?”

“That is certainly not the case Milord.” Irina told him quickly. “We simply want more information. It is obvious your abilities have far exceeded even the most powerful of the DSM’s teachers and instructors. And your reaction right now tells us that the rumors about your father and brother possessing similar skills are also true. This is information we feel we should be party to.”

“Why?” Andro asked. “What is wrong with what you already know? It’s the truth.”

“We feel our people have the right to know everything.” Irina said. “In that way they can make informed decisions.”

“Again... you mean informed decisions based on information that you twist and turn to make it appear to support whatever bird brained idea or scheme you are spouting at the time?” Andro hissed now, his anger beginning to show through finally.

“Simply because you do not agree with what our values and beliefs are does not make them wrong Milord!” Vlone snarled.

Andro shook his head. “No... it makes them utterly stupid!” He barked.

“Enough!” Icho barked. He leaned forward. “This is the last of our concerns Milord.” Icho said with a small smile as he set the last data pad on the table. He felt he was winning this debate and did not want to push too far.

“And this is?” Andro asked picking up the pad.

“The details of your purchase of the Palno Square Apartment Complex and Cranæ Island.” Icho told him. “It has been brought to my attention of some... irregularities if you will... concerning the purchases of the building and island and the profit you have made since bequeathing the building as your marriage gift to former Governor Voralis.”

Andro looked up from the pad. “Irregularities?” Andro asked.

Icho nodded his head. “The means by which you purchased the building Milord. As well as Cranæ Island,” Icho said. “No record of where the funds came from is made.”

“Where the funds came from is of no consequence.” Andro told him. “The two purchases were very legitimate and are part of public record.”

“Yes they are.” Icho stated. “But as I said... no mention of where the funds came from is made. This is a requirement of all purchases within the Menkla District as I recall... and here in Sparta as well. As I understand

it, there were several offers made on the apartment building and only yours was accepted. As for the island, it was the property of the former Greek government according to history records, and if that is the case how is it that you were able to file an actual ownership deed to the property?"

"And that is an issue why?" Andro asked.

"It is an issue if, by virtue of your position, you persuaded the other prospective buyers to allow you to complete the transaction." Vlonc told him. "This is why I began looking into the purchase of the apartment building. I should think that forging a deed to the island in your name is a crime, wouldn't you?"

"You dare accuse him of this crime!" Lu'ria snapped now as she came forward.

"We only wish to know the details Princess." Icho said. "So that these questions can be laid to rest."

"So someone has said I pushed them out of the bidding for the Palno Apartments huh?" Andro said. "That is very interesting." Andro looked at Icho. "And what is it you would like Senator Icho? Please do not take me for a fool and expect me to believe this is all out of your concern for me, our people and the letter of the law. You came here for something." Andro asked him as he placed the pad back on the table. "Now why don't you tell me why you carried your ass here to begin with?"

Icho smiled at him. "Ever the diplomat Milord." He said.

Andro shrugged. "Like father like son." He said. "Can we dispense with the *rensibfla* please? I'm rather busy."

"As you wish Milord." Icho said smugly. "We want full disclosure on what occurred with the Icalro Alliance Milord. To include access to any new warships that we have built being used. We want three representatives of our delegation to accompany you to the Beta Quadrant to facilitate negotiations with these Vanari and whatever other species we encounter. We know there are more based on the Crown princess's slip up during her interview. And the rumors that you may even have already taken one of them as your sixth wife and mate."

"Is that all?" Andro asked.

"We want full access to wherever you are building these new ships." Icho said. "And please do not take *me* for a fool and tell me we do not have such a facility. It is the only way any ship could be built without us knowing about it. We want access to these Vanari females who are here on Earth. We demand that all information in regards to the events with Queen For'mya be made public so that our people can know the details of what took place. We also require that you and your siblings submit to the testing that the DSM suggests so that we may better understand and control the Etheric abilities that may appear in the future in others. We also demand that you give full disclosure in regards to the purchase of the Palno Apartment Complex to include where you obtained the funds. And we insist on reviewing and taking part in this so called merger. The Union Senate should be deciding this Milord. Not you and your father."

"How dare you make such demands?" Deia shouted as she came to her feet. "You have no right!"

"We have every right Prime Minister!" Icho answered. "It is stated so right in our own Chronicles of Lycavorian Law."

"Do not spout the Chronicles of Law to me Senator!" Deia snarled angrily. "You were not even a wet spot on a sheet when I helped to draft those same laws with Resumar and Canth! We..."

Andro held up his hand quickly and turned to her. Deia met his eyes and saw him shake his head. He then looked back to Icho. "And if I refuse?" He said.

"Then as much as it would pain me Milord... I will take all of this information public and we will have to let the people decide." Icho said.

"As much as it would pain you?" Deia spat.

Andro smiled at Icho and turned away and moved to the window in the office. He sipped his coffee once more as he stared out over the city of his grandfather and father.

Sparta.

The city of true warriors and the birthplace of his grandfather no matter how that had occurred. He had fought and died here in this place, defending others. The mountains rose majestically in the west and north, the towering green trees and forests filled with all kinds of animals and life. Andro had loved to run among those trees as a boy, chasing the many rabbits and deer in his wolf form. Many of those times beside his father and then as they grew older, his brothers and sisters. He closed his eyes and reached for his *Anome* and his *SirsanGai* within their connection.

[KertaGai? SirsanGai?]

[I have seen within your thoughts my love. We all have.] Sadi's voice answered from the SCIMITAR where they were working today in orbit. *[You do not need to question us about what to do. I love you Andro. We all do. You will do what you must and we will support you.]*

[It could get very nasty Sadi.] He said. *[Not just for you and I. But for Ne'Veha and the others as well. Even Sehri when they discover her. And they will discover her if they have not already judging by Icho's comment.]*

[You think this matters to us Andro?] Ne'Veha's musical voice answered. *[You have done nothing wrong. We have done nothing wrong. Let that fool do what he will. The truth will always prevail in the end.]*

[Sehri?]

[I do not fully comprehend the complexity of politics in general Androcles. To be honest, it all bores me to death.] Sehri's sweet voice answered softly and Andro could hear Sadi and Ne'Veha chucking softly in the connection. *[I trust in you and Sadi and the others. That is all that matters to me.]*

[How do you like your tour of Sparta Sehri our love?] He asked.

[It is utterly beautiful Andro! So very beautiful!] She exclaimed happily. *[And your sisters are so very entertaining.]*

Andro smiled. *[Don't believe a word they tell you.]* He said.

[Too late.] Sehri answered with a laugh within the connection.

Andro turned his head and looked at Carisia and Lu'ria on the couch. They were both looking at him for they had heard every word and they both nodded their heads. *[So be it.]* Andro said. *[We will see all of you tonight.]*

Andro turned from the window and moved back to the stand beside the couch. He looked at Deia who knew he had been talking with Sadi and the others though she could not hear the words. She knew her nephew well enough to read his body language however. Deia also knew that while not as politically adept as his father, Andro was no fool when it came to situations like these. Andro looked at the smug faced Icho sitting on the couch. Strangely Ulana had not said a word the entire time. That was different for her and he did not know if Icho had told her to remain quiet or if it was of her own doing. It didn't matter regardless.

His azure eyes finally focused on Icho. "Senator... I have not in the past, nor the present, nor will I in the future, put the lives of our fighting men and women in the hands of you or those like you." He stated calmly. "Those ships do exist. They were built for a singular purpose and that is the protection of the Lycavorian Union. Your demand to be given access to those ships and where they are built you can stick in your ass. It will not happen. Ever!"

"Milord you..." Icho began.

"I have listened to you blather and blither!" Andro growled menacingly as he moved closer to Icho. "Now you will listen to me! Then you will leave my office or I will throw each and every one of you out the fucking window!"

"Milord!" Irina gasped clearly offended.

"Military operations are classified Senator Icho!" Andro snarled at him. "I will not reveal any items or information in regards to past, present or ongoing operations to you in any shape or form. We have a Senate Committee that is reported to. They are the only political arm of the military that will exist. Good luck getting any information out of them. Or any of your cohorts here. I will not allow you to put our people at risk!"

"Milord..." Icho began to protest again as he came to his feet.

"Sit the fuck down and shut the fuck up!" Andro barked loudly at the man. "I am not my father sir! I will tell you exactly how it is and I won't be nice about it!" Andro pointed at him. "I won't even address how you got your hands on whatever information you have, but I will find out from whom you got it, and I'll plug that leak so fast your ass will pucker up real quick!" Andro set his coffee on the table. "No details of what happened to my elven mother will be made public so that you can slander her name, her honor and her dignity. I would no more allow that than my father would Senator. Question it all you like, make your snide comments and innuendos all you like, but that information stays sealed."

"Do not tap dance with me old man!" Andro growled at him. "You want to investigate me? Go ahead. Everything I have done is public record! I dare you to find anything that I have done wrong! You want to go after my *SirsanGai*... go ahead. While you are at it, when you see this fool Captain Tarren tell him to grow a

pair of *nor* and face me like a man to speak his lies. We will see who is telling the truth just as quickly.” Andro barked.

“Do not sit there and accuse the citizens of the Protectorate of being barbaric or common criminals when you do not have all the facts. The merger will go forward... and relations with the Vanari will proceed by how they deem to treat us. As they will with the Rothryn people who we have also discovered within the Beta Quadrant. Lycavorians just like us who cannot shift their forms.” Andro turned and looked at Ulana when he spoke next. “I will grant you demand for representation. You can have Ulana and two others accompany us.” Andro saw Ulana’s eyes grow large as she looked at him in shock. “There is already a political delegation appointed and your people will answer to them. Their communications back here to you will be monitored and censored. If that is not acceptable to you... too fucking bad. I would no more trust you than I would trust an Algolian Sewer Roach!”

“As for the School of the Mages, I won’t even begin to address the fool who is in charge over there!” Andro snapped. “He is a little worm of a man who thinks because the *Feravomir* left him in command it makes him something special! He thinks his position gives him some sort of special powers to make policy! It does not! There is no law stating that we need to attend the School of the Mages, as it is for all of our people, therefore it is a non issue. No one there could teach us anything we haven’t already learned and improved upon anyway.”

“You are not being very giving Milord.” Icho spoke.

“Yeah... well too bad!” Andro snapped. “Access to Dragon Mountain will remain as it has since my father brought the ship here. Home to the dragons of Earth and off limits to all but those cleared to actually enter the mountain. The same applies to the new Pralor ship we have acquired. I will not risk the security of this Union by giving you information that will make its way to the Netnews in a matter of hours. There! Now you have your answers! Is there anything else I can do for you or can I get back to work now?”

Icho stared at him as the others rose to their feet. “You will have forced my hand Milord Prince.” Icho said. “I did not want it to be this way.”

Andro chuckled. “Don’t try to fool anyone Icho. You knew exactly what I would tell you before you ever came here. And you also knew what my answers would be. If you wish to fight this out within the Netnews because you are being left out of the loop so be it. You may go after me all you like, but the moment you bring my elven mother, any of my mothers into your little mud throwing contest, the rules will change.”

“Are you threatening us?” Vloné demanded.

Andro looked at him. “Simply stating a fact.” He told the man. “Something that all of you are seriously lacking.”

“I already have a Netnews Briefing scheduled for this afternoon Milord.” Icho said. “If you change your mind please contact me.”

Andro turned back to him. “Not likely Senator.” He said. “Not fucking likely at all. Now if you will all leave, I have work to do. The *Durcunusaan* will escort you out.”

Icho had a small smile on his face as he turned and headed out of the office. Ulana and the others followed silently and Andro watched them until the door closed behind them. He turned to Deia.

“This is going to be ugly.” Deia said.

“How did he acquire so much information on Sehri?” Lu’ria asked now. “He would not have mentioned that unless he already knew about her. Or the Vanari females for that matter.”

Deia met Andro’s eyes. “What is this about the Palno Apartment Complex and Cranae Island?” Deia asked him.

“There were two others who were interested in the complex.” Andro told her. “A Folcani and the owner of Palno Exports. I outbid them. That is simple.”

“And Cranae Island?” Deia asked him. “How were you able to secure an ownership deed Mandri? Is what Icho says true?”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes... the island’s last owner was the Greek government from before the Great Fire. Of which there are two living representatives left. I went to both of them and asked how I could purchase the island. We hammered out the details of the transaction over three weeks *Tenna*. It is all very legitimate, if not usually done.”

“Where... where did you find two living representatives of the Greek government?” Deia asked as she moved around the desk.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “Hard work and lots of investigating.” He replied. “One of them is a vampire who defected from the Coven long before the Great Fire. He is married and living with his wife and children in Gytheio. He buried his past because he did not want to be known at the time as a traitor to the Coven. The second is a human.”

“Human?” Deia gasped.

Andro nodded. “One of those members of the Greek Parliament that was put into stasis in order to have a working government after the Great Fire. The chambers they were occupying at the time malfunctioned and did not open until sixty years before my father returned to Earth. He is over a hundred years old now and is living a very quiet life.”

“And the riyal you used?” Deia asked.

“Two thirds of my Trust Fund *Tenna*.” Andro answered. “You know that.”

“Then what did Icho mean about profits you have received even after bequeathing it to Sadi’s father?” Deia asked.

“That wasn’t me.” Andro answered as he moved to the couch and sat back down. “That was Sadi’s father. He established a trust fund for the poor just as he said he would, but he also established a separate fund for Sadi and I with part of the profit each year.”

“How much is in the fund?” Deia asked.

Andro shrugged his shoulders again. “I would have to look.” He answered. “Neither Sadi or I really cared about it to be honest. Her father has added Ne'Veha, Carisia, Lu'ria and Caliria to the fund as well by now. I’m sure he will add Sehri sooner or later.”

“He is going to use this.” Deia said. “He’s going to try and make it seem like it was all planned and executed in some nefarious manner.”

“What he demanded was far above his station Deia.” Lu'ria stated.

Deia nodded her head in agreement. “Yes... but he assumes that since Andro is leaving and he is not as politically astute as his father, that he can take advantage of that. He will come after all of you now given what you told him.”

“He can try to besmirch my name all he likes.” Andro told her. “As long as he does not bring my mothers or siblings into it.”

“I don’t think he will leave them out.” Deia said. “Lisisa’s connection to your uncle; you protecting that knowledge for so long without telling anyone?”

“Surely he will not garner any support?” Carisia said. “He has already tried that and it failed.”

Deia nodded again. “Yes... but this time he is not focusing on Sadi. He’s going after you directly *Mandri*. And our entire family indirectly. Someone within the *Durcunusaan* talked or is still talking Andro. It is the only way he could have gotten some of his information. I still don’t understand how he got the information about the Vanari and the Protectorate.”

“It’s obvious isn’t it?” Andro asked looking at her as he sipped his coffee calmly. “He got it from the one source that would have any knowledge about them outside of those of us in this room and a few others that we trust. He got it from Laustinos... who got it from the Kavalians and probably the OSG as well.”

Deia’s face twisted into a snarl. “Laustinos!” She hissed. “*Carians*... I despise that name! If I ever discover where that man is I will cut his *nor* from between his legs myself!”

Lu'ria and Carisia laughed softly and moved over beside her. “Calm yourself Deia.” Lu'ria told her. “We do not need you losing control.”

Andro looked at her from the couch after picking up one of the pads Icho had left and reading briefly. “So what do we do?” He asked.

Deia shook her head. “What do I do you mean.” She told him. “You have too much on your plate to worry about this. I will deal with Icho and his followers. He will give his briefing this afternoon and once I see everything he will present I will decide how to proceed. You continue to prepare for what you must do in the Beta Quadrant. Leave Icho to me.”

“Tenna... you don’t need to get involved.” Andro said rising to his feet once more. “Isn’t it better if you remain outside of this battle. He has obviously made this personal, or he will when he goes before the Netnews worms.”

Deia shook his head. “He knew what your answer would be before he ever came here. You know that and he knows that.” She answered. “No... this is a gauntlet that he has thrown down to our entire family. Your father may be King... but I am... I am the Matriarch of this family. I will not let anyone do what Icho plans on doing.”

“What is he trying to do Deia?” Carisia asked.

Deia looked at Andro and saw in his eyes that he knew what was going on. She turned back to Carisia. “He’s trying to bring down our family.” She said. “He and his ilk have never liked that Martin returned and took his rightful place as King of our people and the Union. He is going to do everything within his power to see to it that we are disgraced in whatever manner he can arrange. I intend to meet him at every corner and slap him silly.”

“Why though?” Lu'ria asked softly. “Why do this now? What could he possibly hope to gain?”

“What does anyone like him desire Mistress? Power.” Carisia said softly.

Lu'ria looked at her. “Yes... but he can only acquire so much power and influence and then it is wasted. He will never be in a position to challenge Andro’s father or even him if that...” Lu'ria stopped taking and turned back to Deia with wide amber eyes. “Deia... you don’t think...?”

Deia nodded. “I would not be surprised in the least.” She said. “I’ve always known that there would be others who wanted my job. Up until this point none of them have been as sadistic and crude as Icho, but it had to happen sooner or later.”

“He will never get your job *Tenna*.” Andro told her. “You have too many people within the Union who adore you just as much as they adore my father and mothers. You have too many powerful friends.”

“So you believe he is doing this because of something Keleru offered to him?” Deia asked.

Andro shook his head. “I don’t know.” He answered softly. “Something about Icho doesn’t sit right with me *Tenna*. I don’t know how to describe it... it just feels off.”

Deia stepped closer to her nephew. She reached up and placed her palm flat to his cheek and stared into his eyes. Deia knew that her two favorite nephews were different in many ways. She also knew Andro had an uncanny sense about things and people, even more so than his father because of how he had been born. She stared into his eyes for a long moment and then nodded her head.

“Hold onto those feelings *Mandri*.” She said softly. “They will become clear when the time is right. For now we will meet Icho head to head and I will lead the charge. You need to continue your preparations to leave and go to your father’s aide.”

Andro smiled. “What makes you think he needs aide *Tenna*?” He asked.

Deia chuckled and lean up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek. “He is your father... and no matter how hard he tries... trouble always seeks him out. If he doesn’t now... he will need your aide in the future. Leave Icho to me and those who know how to deal with *mideaus* like him.”

Andro reached up and placed his hand over hers on his cheek. “Do not hold back *Tenna*.” He said. “Icho won’t.”

Deia nodded. “I don’t intend to. Not anymore.”

ARC ROYAL **ORBITING PRALOR DESIGNATED WORLD** **RYLONN TWO**

They had crammed everyone back into the *STRIKER* for the last three hour portion of the return flight to the *ARC ROYAL*. What they had discovered was another Pralor science facility, but this one was completely deserted and without power. The *STRIKER*’s sensors had detected the small portions of its structure that had remained above ground. Most of the facility was intact but now buried under several hundred tons of rock and dirt. The bulkheads of the facility had no problem holding back the weight of rocks and dirt, it was a Pralor

designed facility after all, but the risk to trying to bring the power online was more than they were willing to take. It had been an extreme relief to discover there were no Svorag on this planet or within the facility, but after only a few hours on the surface, Martin had them heading back. They would return in the future to further investigate the facility, but he wanted everyone back to the *ARC ROYAL* and *OMEN THREE* back on station shadowing the Kavalian fleet.

Martin stood in the cockpit with Murano, Koguth, his mate Mani, Kalis and Serale, which made for a tight fit. They were looking at the image of Wayonn being projected from the COM disc between For'mya and Endith's seats.

"... No record of it in either the records from the other facility or *SPARTA'S WRATH's* databanks from what I can determine." Wayonn said. "You are sure it was inert Martin?"

Martin nodded his head. "Quiet as a tomb." He answered. "No power at all. Everything looks intact even though it was buried under probably a hundred or hundred and fifty meters of rock and dirt. One of the vehicle entrances was all that was sticking out and that is why Tina picked it up on our sensors."

"Murano?" Wayonn asked looking up.

Murano shook his head. "I was not privy to the Science Division's activities Wayonn." He answered. "This could very well be one of Lorendo's secret facilities that never became active."

"Seismic activity appears to have caused the collapse of the ground around it." Tina spoke from her console. "Then years of overgrowth and follow on tremors."

"Can you determine how long it has been there Tina?" Wayonn asked.

"Based on composition of the soil and rock from scans we did while Marty and the others were on the surface, I'd estimate no more than seven hundred years Wayonn, but no less than three hundred." Tina answered.

"Interesting." Wayonn said. "I will need to look through the files that Delnash shared with us... but this appears to be a station that was going to be active until the seismic instability of the surrounding area caused its current condition."

"And it not being listed in any files is problematic." Murano said. "It means Lorendo may have more of them out there that we don't know about."

"Now why wouldn't that surprise me?" Martin said.

"This... this man you are speaking of does not appear to be very forthcoming." Mani spoke.

Martin looked at her and smiled. "Lady Juturi... you have no idea how accurate that statement is." He said.

Mani glanced at Koguth with surprise in her eyes as Martin turned back to the image of Wayonn. Koguth smiled down into her eyes and his arm squeezed her waist tighter. They had truly entered a new world and life here and it was one that Koguth found himself grasping onto tightly. Nedoli had already done so with his feelings for Ceale, and her mutual and growing feelings for his son. Mataen and embraced this long ago when he took Corsa as his wife and he had been devoted to her from that first day. Koguth hoped that future included Iama. He knew his youngest probably hated him for what she perceived he had done, but no matter what, he would insure she knew the truth and that he loved her. He turned his head and looked back into the passenger area of the *STRIKER*, his eyes searching for and finding the young man who had been fighting beside him for nearly a decade. He had promised him that if they found Iama he would allow him to court her. He had not told him that she had supposedly found a husband among the Lycavorian people. A new life. A small portion of Koguth hoped that Iama would see she belonged with one of her own, but the larger part of him didn't care any longer as long as he could once more hold her in his arms as he had when she was small.

"...Be landing in about thirty minutes." Martin was speaking as Koguth turned back. "Make sure Anja has a portable Med table to screen the members of the Juturi Pride so we can get their transition done quickly."

Wayonn shook his head. "I'm sure she is aware of that already and I for one will not even attempt to tell her what her duties are. She about chewed my ear off the last time I attempted to suggest something."

Martin and For'mya chuckled. "She does have somewhat of a temper *Val'istar*." For'mya said.

"Somewhat?" Wayonn spoke. "More on a par with yours Martin. And I have no desire to be on the receiving end of that temper. I'm sure she will be ready."

"Coward." Martin hissed.

Wayonn grinned in the transmission. "In this case... gladly."

Martin smiled again. "Ok... at least let her know we'll be arriving soon."

"That I can do." Wayonn said. "We'll talk more about this station when you get settled back in."

"Fair enough. And have Kesyla join us." Martin said. "She has a good insight of things and is sharp as a whip."

"Daron?" Wayonn asked.

Murano shook his head. "The less he knows the better Wayonn."

"I concur. I'll see to it." Wayonn answered.

"Wayonn... where is Fedor?" Martin asked.

"He and Eirene left their studies with me a few minutes ago. He said something about a picnic with Iama in the port landing bay. The area we have arranged for the adolescent dragons to stretch out and rest." Wayonn answered. "Shall I have him meet you?"

"No. We'll find him." Martin said. "See you soon. *STRIKER ONE* out."

"Dragons!" Mani hissed softly. "She is among dragons!"

For'mya turned in her seat and looked at her. "You have nothing to fear." She said. "Fedor is bound to a dragon, just as we are. Dnom would die to protect Iama just as he would Fedor. And she has shown no sign of the inbred fear your people have for dragons. She is very comfortable among them."

Mani looked at her with wide eyes. "She does not fear them?" She gasped.

For'mya shook her head. "Not in the least. If I may ask... when was the last time you saw her Mani'Juturi?"

"Not since... not since they day they took her away." Mani answered almost shamefully. "We are not allowed to see them once they are given to the biogenic program. Nearly... nearly twelve years now."

"She may... she may be somewhat different than you remember." For'mya told her. "I hope you are prepared for that?"

"She is our daughter." Mani said. "And we have searched for her since Koguth returned from the war. We do not care what she looks like... only that she is alive and well."

"And soon she will be back among her family." Koguth added. "That... that is our hope."

Martin looked at him. "Just remember that she is her own person now." He said. "She might... she might surprise you."

"Will we... will you take us to see her right away?" Mani asked gripping Koguth's arm tightly in anticipation.

Martin looked at For'mya and saw her dark brown eyes on him. He turned back to them and nodded. "For'mya and I will take you... yes." He said.

"Just prepare yourselves for her being different than you remember." For'mya said.

ARC ROYAL **PORT LANDING BAY** **SECTIONS 10-15**

The last five sections of the bay had been turned into an enormous dragon pen so to speak. Spread across the deck plating was several inches of dried grass taken from the planet where they had captured all of their meat and first come across the Svorag. It allowed for the dragons to rest without the cold of the deck touching their scales. Though it was a less than stellar location for the pen, it was the only set up that allowed them this much freedom. Many of them, Dnom and Kdan among them, were growing rapidly and this portion of the landing bay was not used because the *ARC ROYAL* had no fighter complement. They could stretch out and move around as much as they wanted. Arzoal, Torma, Isheeni and the other adult dragons were two sections down within their own pens. This allowed them to watch over the young ones and insure they were not getting into mischief as young dragons so often do. Many of them had taken to flying in the landing bay, and while the ceiling did not provide the most ideal situations for them, at least they were able to stretch their wings. All of them were itching for the all clear to come from the ground team currently on the surface of the planet they orbited so that they could truly take to the skies and fly and hunt.

Dnom and Kdan were celebrities after a fashion since they were the Elder Mother's grandsons and they were bonded to the Prince and Princess. It was a common sight to see both Eirene and Fedor down here among them with their bonded brothers, and since they both had taken mates, they had been here as well. Miseo and Iama were accepted and considered one of them, and it was not special to see them among the resting dragons with their mates. They favored Iama of course since her antics with Fedor were quite humorous. He would chase her through the bay while she bounded from broad back to broad back of the resting dragons, her genuine laughter so very pleasant to them. It was entertaining to watch when Fedor finally caught her and she melted into his arms so easily.

Today it was quiet though. Fedor and Iama had arrived some time ago and shared a lunch of sandwiches and fruit, which they had no problems sharing with those dragons sitting closest to them. Now Iama was stretched out on top of Fedor's powerful body, his head propped up against Dnom's thick front talon and leg as he read from the data pad and Iama's head rested on his chest. His left hand stroked her shoulder and down her back to curl around the firmness of her ass and then back up as Iama purred contentedly. Iama could not get enough of his hands upon her and she relished in the attention he paid to her. And she reciprocated that emotion and touch equally. Iama had gone to his mother Aricia just as Anja had suggested and Aricia had then taught her how to focus her new and growing Etheric abilities in order to prevent herself from becoming pregnant. She and Fedor were making love every opportunity they had and Iama never wanted it to end. She worshiped Fedor almost as much as she knew he worshiped her and this knowledge made both of them very passionate in their bed, or wherever they chose to couple. And in the last few days there had been many places they had coupled Iama thought with a gleeful smile as her head rested on his powerful chest. Since Anja had told her she could still bear children, it made Iama all the more blissful and sexually adventurous. She wanted to try everything with Fedor, experience all the pleasure she had been denied in her young life and she wanted to experience it with him. And Iama gave back to him all the pleasure he made her feel in return and she did so with eagerness. They had talked very briefly of children, but neither of them was ready for that kind of commitment and both of them wanted to explore the love they had found together for many years before they had children.

Her long, almost white blond hair was splayed across Fedor's chest and shoulder while her slim fingers danced along his rib cage and she tickled him gently. Not enough to divert his attention, but enough to let him know that he meant everything to her. Her tail flicked back and forth in the air casually as it so often did now when she was calm and purring in happiness. And Iama knew she did purr. How could she not when Fedor's touch ignited a desire within her that only he could quench.

They wore simple civilian clothes and Iama had pulled apart his buttoned shirt so that she could rest her head on his bare chest and better hear his heart beating. Her own shirt was loose fitting and had fallen off one shoulder, which allowed his wandering fingers to graze her bare skin as they caressed her flesh. All of the horrors she had been through, all of the vile Kavalian men who had taken her, all of that had been washed away with Fedor's love. It washed her soul clean and enveloped her in a protective blanket of warmth. Iama relished speaking her name, thoroughly delighted in how it sounded coming from anyone's lips. She still had yet to grow accustomed to how others treated her now that she was Fedor's wife and mate. She was a Princess of the Union she knew, but trying to process that information sometimes drove her mad. It was much easier because For'mya, Anja, Aricia and Fedor's other mothers, none of them acted as you would expect a Queen to act. Even in the few short weeks that she had known them and the last few days since Fedor had claimed her, they had not changed. And she felt so at peace just being around them and his sister Eirene. Fedor's fraternal twin sister was a godsend to Iama. They had grown so very close in so short a time, and it had been Eirene who had become her closest friend now. Even her husband and mate, the hulking Kavalian Miseo, even he treated her differently now. He had been so very correct that day when he told her she was wrong. And now Iama was joyous that she had been wrong indeed.

She reached out with her hand and snatched up a small fruit that was still in the basket. It was no bigger than a small orange and was purple in color. She took a bite from it as she lifted her head and gazed at Fedor's face, her soft green feline like eyes beaming in love. As Iama knew he would, Fedor took only two seconds to realize she was looking at him and his dark brown eyes turned to her. Iama held out the fruit to him and Fedor took a bite while it was still in her hands. The juice from the fruit squirted onto his chin and into his eye and Iama couldn't help but break out into soft laughter. Fedor joined her in laughing as he reached up to rub his eye and chew the fruit in his mouth.

Iama inched further up on his body and covered his lips with her own and Fedor's arms wrapped around her lower back as they kissed deeply.

Martin and For'mya stood with Koguth, Mani, Nedoli, Mataen and Corsa in the small pilot's briefing room watching Iama and Fedor through the glass. Mani was openly weeping, her hands shaking horribly over her mouth as her tears soaked the soft fur on her cheeks. Martin glanced at Koguth and saw the tall Kavalian was barely holding it together no matter how you looked at it.

"By... by all the prayers I have spoken..." Mani stammered through her tears. "She... she is... she is so beautiful!"

For'mya smiled gently and stepped closer to her, slipping her arm around her waist and nodding her head. "Yes she is." For'mya said.

"General?" Martin spoke softly.

Koguth turned to look at Martin, his heart racing and his own eyes moist as he tried to hold back the emotions that threatened to sweep him away just as they had his wife. "I... I have no words King Leonidas. I cannot..."

"May I make a suggestion sir?" Martin asked stepping closer to him.

Koguth nodded quickly, unable to find his voice for a moment. "Of... of course."

"Iama believes that you were the one who gave her to the Biogenic Program." Martin said. "After what we have seen... there is no doubt that could not be true." He said. He stepped closer to him. "To avoid a confrontation that would not be pleasant... I suggest you let Iama see her mother first. Lady Mani can explain it to her. Make her see that what she has believed for so long is not true."

"I want... I want nothing more than... than to hold my baby in my arms." Koguth stuttered out the words.

"King Leonidas is correct father." Mataen said gripping his father's arm. "Nedoli tried to protect her when the Puma Bane bastards came for her. They beat him for it. Let mother and him see her first. Let them tell her that you have not stopped looking for her since the day we returned."

Koguth looked at his oldest son and nodded quickly. "If... if you think that is best." He answered.

Martin motioned with his hand. "We can wait in the briefing room down the corridor sir." He said. "I can get you a drink if that will help you to calm down. I know I would need one."

Koguth nodded again without really hearing his words and Mataen took the cue to lead his father out into the corridor and follow Martin. Nedoli stepped up to his mother, his own heart singing in happiness as he gazed at his younger sister.

"How...?" Mani looked at For'mya as Corsa held her hand. "I cannot go out among them." She stammered. "My fear... I would be..."

For'mya smiled knowing what she meant. She looked out through the briefing room glass and saw all the dragons that were scattered about the landing bay. "I understand." She said. "I can call them here if you like?"

Corsa looked at her with wide eyes. "You can... she will hear you?"

For'mya nodded her head. "Fedor... part of the Lycavorian custom is for the male to bite the female he chooses to spend the rest of his days with. This is done during an act of love between them. It imparts a small portion of the virus within Fedor's blood to Iama and signals to other males of our species she is his wife. No other Lycavorian, pureblood or turned, will ignore this. Fedor is within her blood now, just as she is within his. We conducted a small elven ceremony as well, and for those species that cannot smell Fedor within Iama's blood, she now wears a ring on her hand to signify that she is his wife and mate. It is a custom that began on Earth among the humans and it has carried over to many of the elves and Lycavorians through the centuries."

"You... you do not wear a ring." Corsa said shyly.

For'mya looked at her hand and chuckled softly. "No. Martin Leonidas is nothing if not unpredictable." She reached up and drew back the collar of her flight suit to reveal two different necklaces. One was a glittering Rilian diamond and the other was a coral red pendant of some kind. Both Mani and Corsa gasped in awe. "He

has to be different.” For'mya finished as her fingers traced the two pendants reverently. She looked at Mani. “Are you ready?”

Mani nodded her head. “I have been ready since the day they took her from me nearly a dozen years ago.”

For'mya turned her head and looked out into the landing bay as she touched the control panel and raised the blast shield over the glass.

Fedor my son. She reached out.

Mother! Fedor's voice echoed. *You are back!* For'mya didn't see him and Iama break their kiss, but he felt Iama join their connection almost seamlessly now. She was getting stronger For'mya noticed.

We returned only a few minutes ago. For'mya answered.

Everything went well For'mya? Iama asked.

Yes... in a manner of speaking. For'mya replied.

Mother...? Fedor could sense something was odd within her voice.

Would you and Iama join me in Port Briefing Room Eleven please? For'mya asked. *It is important.*

For'mya didn't physically see him do it but she sensed Fedor's head turn and look toward the room where she stood. *What are you doing in there mother?* He asked as he rose to his feet and pulled Iama to hers.

Just join us Fedor. For'mya told him.

Us? Fedor hesitated.

Do not argue with me young man! For'mya snapped playfully. *Just do as I say.* For'mya could feel Iama's humor within Mindvoice and then her urging him to comply.

Very well mother. Fedor said. *But this is very strange. Even for you.*

For'mya smiled and nodded her head. *Don't I know it.* She said. *We'll see you shortly.* She looked at Mani and Corsa. “They are coming.” She said.

“You spoke to them? In... within your mind?” Corsa asked amazed.

For'mya nodded. “Yes.” She said. “It should only be a few moments. One of the first things Fedor was so proud of when he was grown was that he had memorized the entire ship's layout.”

Nedoli stepped up to his mother's opposite side now and took her other hand. “It has been... it has been so long.” He said.

Iama and Fedor really didn't know what For'mya wanted, and they were being playful as they entered the briefing room, with Iama chewing lightly on his ear as he carried her in his arms effortlessly. When her eyes turned and she saw them she came to an abrupt halt and the memories of that day came rushing forward like a tidal wave.

She was barely eleven years old when they came for her. She remembered trying to fight them, screaming for her father. Her mother being slapped down by a particularly vicious Puma Bane soldier as she tried to wrench Iama free from the grip of the larger man. She remembered Nedoli leaping from the stairway of their home with a vicious snarl of anger and landing upon the large Puma Bane troop at only seventeen years of age. He would have won that contest one on one as large as he was, but the others pounced on him and began beating him into the ground as he tried to protect his sister. Her mother's screams filled her ears for weeks after that day, the images of her tears and the pain in her face as she wiped the blood from Nedoli's cheeks while they dragged her away into a life she had not wanted. Iama felt it all returning at once and her soft green eyes were wide in answer to a pray she had whispered for years afterwards. That one day she would see her mama again. She had lost all hope of that when she ended up in the brothels of Nefoa, but standing before her now was the gods answer to all those nights of crying and wishing.

“Ma... mama?” She gasped in disbelief.

Mani could not contain the tears in her eyes as she moved away from Nedoli and Corsa, her strength and happiness showing. She opened her arms wide, her tail quivering in happiness. “It... it is me child.” Mani spoke with a hoarse voice. “Iama... my... my little girl! The gods preserve me child... my baby girl!”

There was no hesitation in the least about what she would do. How could there be. Iama broke into a wail of tears as she practically ran to her mother and felt her mother's arms crush her lithe body to hers with

staggering power. The moment Iama was folded into her embrace, twelve long years of sorrow and horror left Mani in a rush. She cried out in happiness and joy as Iama's hair filled her hands and Mani crushed her youngest child to her breast. Iama felt a huge wave of emotions flood her at once as she felt those arms embrace her. Arms she had resigned herself to never feeling again. She breathed deeply of her mother's unique smell and the rush of memories filled her head. Standing with her in their kitchen as her mother taught her to cook so many different kinds of food. Her laughter at Iama's antics and attempts to make up recipes for food. The tears were flowing so quickly, Iama could barely see. The warmth and comfort of her mother's arms were like a soothing balm to her scarred soul. What Fedor's love had repaired... her mother's embrace washed away forever. Her soft green eyes turned and she saw her smiling brother, his own eyes moist with tears.

"Nedoli!" Iama gasped as she moved from her mother's embrace into his.

Nedoli didn't hesitate for a moment and like his mother, he crushed his lost sister in his arms tightly. His tail whipped around to curl around her waist as he lifted her off the deck and spun her around in happiness. Iama couldn't help but cry out in joy as the memories of how he had done this when she was small filled her. These small actions were not typical of a Kavalian family, at least not those she had known, and that is why those first years away had been so emotionally horrific for her. Iama had experienced all the terrible things that Kavalian females went through. It was so very new to her because her family was nothing like this. Nedoli finally put her down and Mani gathered her into her arms once more, taking her head in her hands and looking at her daughter with tear clouded eyes.

"You... you are so beautiful child." Mani stammered as she looked at her. "My beautiful child. We have searched for so long."

Iama shook her head. "How... how did... how did you get here? How... tell me this is not a dream mother." She cried out as tears filled her eyes once more. "Tell me this is all real."

Mani laughed as she pulled Iama close to her once more. "It is no dream my beautiful Iama." She declared. "Bless the gods it is no dream!"

Iama squeezed her mother with all of her strength, and when she could no longer hold that embrace and her mother was still there, Iama began to believe. Her heart slammed into her chest in delight as her mother pushed her back once more and looked into her eyes. Iama shook her head. "How?" She gasped again. "How can this be?"

"This can be because he never gave up hope." Mani stammered. "He never stopped looking. He kept that hope within us alive. He never let us give in to despair."

Iama shook her head in confusion. "Mataen?" She asked believing her mother was speaking of her older brother. "Mataen has done this? Where is he? Is he with you?"

Mani held her face in her hands. "Not Mataen Little One." She said. "And yes... your brother is with us. Mani took Corsa's hand. "This is Corsa... your brother's wife."

Corsa's eyes were tear filled and she smiled at Iama with delight. "It is so very good to finally meet you Iama' Juturi." She spoke.

Iama looked at her mother. "If not Mataen... mother... who could have done this? How... where is Mataen?"

Mani looked at Nedoli who nodded his head. "Tell her mother." He said. "She has to know that what she has believed all of these years is wrong."

Iama glanced at her brother and then back to her mother. "What... what do you mean?" She stammered. "What I have believed?"

"Mataen is here with us." Mani said. "He is waiting in another room with... he is waiting with your father."

Iama's eyes grew wide and she instantly backed away from her mother, instinctively looking for and finding Fedor's protective body. Her tail curled around his waist as she backed up against him, his arm slipping around her waist and drawing her close to him. "Father!" Iama hissed with angry venom in her words. "You... father is the reason I have lived a nightmare for so long!" She almost screamed. "You know this! You know this and you bring him here!"

Mani moved closer to Iama, wary of the way Fedor's eyes had changed to his wolf nature and how he appeared ready to protect Iama with violence if needed. "No!" Mani exclaimed. "They lied to you Iama! Your

father did not do this! He has... he has been the one searching for you since he returned from war almost seven years ago.”

“Father did this!” Iama screamed. “Only father could have given me to the Puma Bane! They made me into a whore mama! They made me...”

“NO!” Mani barked silencing her words. She stepped closer even more.

“That’s close enough!” Fedor growled the warning as he pulled Iama half behind him in a shielding manner. Iama’s arms wrapped around his waist and she pressed tightly to him.

“Back away from my sister boy!” Nedoli snapped moving forward towards him.

He was able to take two steps before Fedor’s right arm came up and filled with the lethal looking knife in a small silver white flash of light. Nedoli’s eyes went wide as he realized that knife had appeared from Flatspace.

“Take one more step boy...” Fedor snarled as his fangs became fully extended. “And you will be dead half a second after. I will protect my wife and mate from all comers.”

“Fedor!” For'mya shouted as she moved forward from the doorway where she had been standing with him. “Stand down!”

“No mother!” Fedor barked out in reply. “I will protect my wife and mate! Why have you brought them here?”

Mani held up her hands in front of her. “Iama... please child... your father did not do this.” She pleaded. “This was Golag’s doing.”

Iama stared at her. “Grandfather?” She gasped.

Mani nodded her head quickly. “He did it to gain prestige among the senior Prides. He did it in your father’s name. He never consulted your father Iama. He knew your father would never agree to this. This action never received his voice of approval. Your father would have never done this! You... you were...”

“You were his favorite sister.” Nedoli said softly his eyes still on Fedor and the blade in his hand even though For'mya was now beside him. “Mataen and I knew that.” He said with a smile. “Father was the one who beat us when we were harsh to you sister. Don’t you remember the time Mataen called you...?”

“He told me I was nothing.” Iama said quickly as she stepped back in front of Fedor, her hands holding tightly to his arm which was around her waist.

Nedoli nodded. “Father turned Mataen’s hide red with the whipping he received.” He told her.

“When your father and Mataen returned from the war and discovered what Golag had done he... he flew into a rage.” Mani said. “Never have I seen your father so out of his mind with frenzy. He killed...”

“He killed grandfather Iama.” Nedoli said seeing Iama’s green eyes go wide. “He killed grandfather because of what he had done. Mataen and I were with him that day. He made sure that... he made sure grandfather suffered too. We watched grandfather die in agony. Father told us it was for all the horror and agony he had allowed to happen to you. That would continue to happen every day you were not back among your family. He swore to us that day that we would find you. That we would find you and bring you home. He has never wavered from that. Six years we have searched sister. Six years he has driven us to never give up. Even in the bleakest times, he never lost his will. It is the only thing that has kept him going. We have lived a double life since he returned. Good little Kavalian officers in public... all the while using our positions and assets to find you. Father leads our pride now... many are with us. Cousins and uncles and others who have joined us. We...” Nedoli stepped closer and while the knife never wavered in Fedor’s hand, Iama’s hands came up and wrapped around Fedor’s forearm, pulling his arm down slowly. Her tail still remained curled around his waist and she did not step away from him, but it was a start.

“After what that pig Pusintin did we heard rumors of a planet that the Lycavorian King had struck in his search for his elven Queen. A remote outpost. Everyone there had been butchered. The reports also spoke of several females from Nefoa who had been there. One was not among the bodies according to the reports. The description was of you sister. It was said that King Leonidas took you with him. When father discovered this, he has many friends among the military; he immediately volunteered our ship to accompany Pusintin in his chase of the Lycavorian King.”

Mani moved closer. “He... your father refuses to even think of having more children. His only thoughts were of finding you and returning you to our family child. It is all either of us have been able to think of these past years. Your father promised me we would never give up.”

“Why... why is he not...” Iama began to ask shaking her head. She stepped fully away from Fedor, his arm slowly coming all the way down as Mani stepped up next to her. Her mother took her hands.

“He thought it best.” Mani said. “He feared... he feared you would think it had been him all this time. The King... he suggested that Nedoli and I speak to you first. You were his light Iama my child.” Mani told her. “Your father would never... could never do anything that brought harm to you. I saw that in his eyes the moment I brought you into this world.”

Iama looked at her. “All these years... all this time they told me... they told me it had been father.” She said.

Mani nodded. “Of course they would tell you that.” She stated. “It was a way to make you think you were nothing. So that you did not have any hope. It is what they do. Go to him Iama my child. See for yourself. You will see the light come on in his eyes once more when he sees you. That same light he had when he held you as a baby and small girl.”

Iama looked at her. “Mama... you...”

“Do you doubt my love for you daughter?” Mani asked her.

Iama shook her head. “No. Never.”

“Then go and see for yourself.” Mani told her. “We will come with you... but when you see him you will know.”

“Where... where is he?” Iama asked softly.

“... what... what if she does not believe Mataen?” Koguth asked softly as he rubbed his large hands together in anxiousness while sitting on the small couch. “What if they have twisted my little girl so much that she can no longer believe in my love for her?”

Mataen looked at his father. “She will believe father.” He said. “She has to believe. We never stopped looking for her. We never gave up because of you.”

Mataen watched as his father stood up and moved to the glass partition and he looked out over the dozens of dragons in the landing bay that he could see. “I remember... I remember the smell of her hair Mataen. I can still see the splinters I pulled from her hands when you and Nedoli brought her home from trying to climb that Bakolaian Oak Tree. I remember removing each one while she cried in pain and then...”

Mataen gripped his father’s shoulder. “Father don’t.” He said. “You have believed all of these years. You never let us give up. Do not give up now when she is only in the next room.”

Neither of them heard the door slide open behind them and Mani led Iama into the room with Nedoli right behind her. Iama felt a myriad of emotions as she saw her father’s back. He was just as tall and wide as she remembered. His tail moved in time with his mood as it always did. His fur was a little grayer than she remembered, but she would never forget that voice. And as she heard the next words, Iama nearly lost it.

“I could not... I could not go on knowing she hated me Mataen.” Koguth said softly. “I butchered my own father for his vile actions. I curse the memory of him every morning that I wake for what he did to my baby. If she hates me, my heart will be broken, because he will have won.”

“Father... you must have faith.” Mataen said.

Koguth laughed softly now. “The faith I have carried all these years deserts me now at the end.” He said. “I am terrified I will lose her forever Mataen. And in losing your sister I will have lost you and your brother as well.”

“That is not true!” Mataen spat.

“You and your brother have followed me in my quest without question.” Koguth said. “I have forsaken the father that I am to you and Nedoli in my quest to return your sister to us.”

“You have forsaken nothing!” Mataen snapped loudly. “Least of all Nedoli and I. Do you think we would be here if we did not feel the same thing father? Do you think that we have not wanted Iama back among us more than anything? We could no more forsake our sister than you could. Do you think I could love Corsa as I do without your influence? That Nedoli could love Ceale so completely? You taught us these things! You taught us that this is our future! Not the old ways! Our entire Pride believes deeply now. Because of what you have taught us and how you have led us.”

“And it will all mean nothing if I can never hold my daughter in my arms again.” Koguth said softly.

“Papa!” The voice was spoken in a raspy whisper and Koguth and Mataen spun around at the sound.

Koguth’ Juturi had held it in for so long.

He had returned from a war he did not believe in only to find that his beloved daughter had been given away like a piece of garbage. Koguth had killed his own father for doing such a thing, killed him in a way that guaranteed he would feel pain for a long time before his life left him. He had spent the last seven years with one central goal foremost in his mind. He would find his daughter if it was the last thing he ever did. Through it all he had bottled up his many emotions, pushed them to the side like a good Kavalian, only his beautiful Mani knowing what went through his mind and providing him the strength to continue. Seeing her now was almost too much. Her white blond fur was gone... leaving only smooth, tanned skin and long hair from her head, but her soft green feline eyes had not changed. They were the same eyes that had looked at him with love and devotion as a small child. The same eyes that had expected him to protect her as her father. A job he had failed miserably at, through no fault of his own. She was even more beautiful than he imagined she would be at this age. Koguth’s eyes were wide as he took a tentative step towards her, those emotions he had held in on the verge of spilling forth, and he spoke the words of love he had not spoken in nearly twelve years.

“My... my Little Flower!” He gasped.

And for the second time in so many minutes, Iama’s life altered drastically for the better. The knowledge that her father had not deserted her, that he had spent all of this time with one focused goal of finding her, it was almost too much to bear. All of this time she had thought it had been him who had so callously tossed her aside when in fact the truth brought her so much more joy and happiness. With a rush of emotion more powerful than when she had embraced her mother and brother, Iama ran the five steps to where her father stood and nearly threw herself into his arms.

“Papa!” Iama wailed in wondrous glee.

Koguth’ Juturi could no longer hold it in. He no longer wanted to. As his arms crushed his beloved daughter to him, he lifted her off the floor and screamed out in utter happiness, the tears he had been holding in for so long spilling forth like the floodgates of a dam had been opened. He buried his face into her hair and spun Iama around and around just as Nedoli had done, even as he bellowed out his total joy for all to hear. Koguth held nothing back now, all of his very un-Kavalian emotion pouring forth. The day he had seen his daughter enter this world was the day Koguth’ Juturi had changed and become the man he now was. That was the day he had embraced a new ideology, a day that had changed him forever. Koguth had thought that lost forever when he discovered Iama taken from him. As he crushed his daughter to him in love, Koguth felt that ideology return in full force and as he wrapped his arms tighter around his daughter, that ideology once more became part of the man he was.

For’mya gripped Fedor’s arm with one hand and pulled him out of the room as she wiped the tears from her eyes with the other hand. *We must give them the time they need Fedor my son.* She spoke to him.

Mother she is my wife. Fedor complained.

For’mya nodded her head. *And now she needs to rediscover her family. A family she thought lost to her forever. When she needs your love and support she will call for you. Besides, your Medwan and I, we have something you and Eirene need to see as well.*

Fedor looked at her now. *What do you mean?*

For’mya pulled him further into the corridor. *There is someone you need to meet.*

Who? Mother I want to stay here for Iama. Fedor complained further.

Join us please Fedor my son. Martin’s voice filled the connection now.

Father? Fedor questioned.

It’s important son. We’re nearby. Come with your mother. Martin told him.

Fedor looked at the closed door and then back to his mother. *This had better be worth it mother.* He said.

For’mya smiled. *Your father and I think it is.* She said as she led him down the empty corridor. Fedor knew right away they were heading for the Forward Port Briefing Room. It only took them four minutes to cover the distance and then they came around the corner and he saw Eirene standing with their *MedwanGai*. For’mya led him up to them and stopped.

“Fedor is here father.” Eirene said. “What is this all about? Miseso and I wanted to meet Iama’s family.”

Martin smiled at her. “And you will. But this is more important right now.”

“What could be more important than that?” Fedor asked.

Martin looked at him and then to Eirene. “We have always told you that the one rule our family lives by is to never fear the unknown. To embrace what we don’t understand or even what we don’t think possible.”

“Father... could you dispense with the *rensibfla* and just tell us what is going on?” Eirene spoke.

“Where did you go? How did you find Iama’s family? How did you know where to look?”

“The answer to your question is behind this door.” Martin said. “And he is very anxious to meet you both.”

Fedor and Eirene looked at each other and then back to Martin. “Now you have peaked our interest.” Eirene said with a smile.

“Just remember what we have taught you both. “For'mya said softly. “And know that I more than approve of what we have done here.”

Fedor looked at his mother. “Why would you need to tell us you approve mother?”

Martin smiled as he touched the door panel and it slid open to show Kalis and Serale standing with Ceale and Danim near the glass partition looking into the landing bay. Fedor and Eirene’s eyes looked into the briefing room and it happened very quickly. Though they had not yet been born, the awareness that Androcles had granted to them that fateful day allowed them to see and know all that he did. They knew instantly who Kalis was when they saw him and the reaction stemmed more from their love for their mother than anything else. Fedor let loose with a roar of anger that they had not heard from him before and two blinks later he was rushing into the room and launching three knives from Flatspace directly at Kalis. Eirene didn’t hesitate and was following her twin with murder in her eyes.

Martin looked at For'mya as his eyes changed and he began moving. *Perhaps this wasn't the best way to introduce them For'mya!* He barked as his Shi Viska leaped into existence and left his arm.

For'mya was using her combined elven and wolf speed to follow him. *They are too much like you!* She snarled as she followed him without hesitation.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

VEYERAI HIGH COVEN SPACE

“...are certain of your findings Nalavi?” Yuri asked from her chair.

Nalavi looked at her from his chair and nodded his head. He was joined at the table by Lidene, Pa'cour, Nameia and Onera. This had become their small brain trust so to speak, and while Nalavi had never been involved in something like this before, he found it very interesting. Of course, having so many lives depending on their decisions was not something that sat well with him and at times he did not see how Yuri and Pa'cour did it.

“As certain as I can be with the equipment we have.” He replied.

Pa'cour looked across the table at him. “With the equipment we have?” He asked clearly surprised. “Was the Hadarian computer that Androcles gave to us not front line Nalavi?”

Nalavi leaned back in his chair. “No...no... it’s state of the art.” He answered. “The very best that they have if I do say so myself. If they have better medical computers, then they are one of the best kept secrets within the Union.”

Lidene nodded in agreement. “I tend to lean towards the fact they have much better.” He said.

“Then what is the problem?” Pa'cour asked. “Why can you not be certain?”

“Hadarian Medical Computers are strictly limited Pa'cour.” Nalavi said. “Their medical systems are more advanced than anything we have. Than anyone has really.” Nalavi looked at Yuri. “Except perhaps those who we talked of before Yuri.”

Yuri nodded. “Yes.”

“All of their computer systems are tightly controlled.” Nalavi continued turning back to Pa'cour. “They are also broken into several different categories. The Medical Computer Main System Core that they gave to us

is an absolute treasure trove of medical knowledge. Almost anything I could ever want to look up or research pertaining to general medical knowledge is within the Core's data banks. Every known vaccine, every known cure to every known disease. Even the research needed to produce many of the vaccines where none are available. It would also allow me to develop new treatments and extrapolate existing parameters to better improve any vaccine or serum. It really is amazing. I'm quite shocked Androcles Leonidas allowed us to have one."

"So if it does all this, why can't you be certain in your examination of the data?" Pa'cour asked once more.

"It's not a Genetics Main Computer Core." Nalavi answered. "As I said... the Hadarians break up their computer core systems into several different fields of study. Most of their senior researchers and medical personnel have access to the other systems on a very regular basis, but they are almost never combined into one single Medical Core Database System. I dare say that there are perhaps only five or six of these unique Combined Core Systems anywhere within Union space. Hadarians Healers who even have the access to such a Combined Core System would be miniscule. Queen Anja most certainly would, she is without question, the foremost medical mind within the Union and probably most of the known universe. She alone developed the formula for the cloned blood that we all use as well as countless treatments for diseases and afflictions that were incurable before she came to the Union. She is much like her father and mother. Since she has been Queen, the population of the Union has become healthier and more fit. She thinks in a very unorthodox manner and this has allowed her to cure and eradicate three diseases common to the Folcani and the Algolians as I said. Diseases that they have been trying to cure for centuries. She is like a Norbolian Bore Mite. When she sinks her wolf teeth into something she will not let go."

Yuri chuckled softly. "I would not refer to her as a Norbolian Bore Mite in her presence Nalavi." She said. "She might take offense."

"You know what I mean." He said with a smile. "As for others, most definitely her sister Sivana. From what I understand she is becoming the foremost expert on Mutagenic Compound Mixture. I would guess her daughter Eliani as well. Again... if my information is accurate and their Netnews Channels are to be believed, she has very quickly become the finest Trauma Care Healer within the Union ranks. The Hadarian Divine One certainly. Very few would have any access beyond that though I think. The Hadarians specifically and the Union as a whole frown heavily on genetic manipulation in a very dark way. If you are caught using any sort of genetic alterations in your research you are arrested and tried very quickly. You all know of course what happened to the three men who we had placed in Queen Isabella's company two decades ago."

Yuri nodded. "They were tried and executed within three days." She said.

Nalavi leaned forward at the table. "Justice is nothing if not swift in the Union."

"And final." Pa'cour said.

"Don't the Kavalians now have access to these same medical systems and computers Nalavi?" Lidene asked.

Nalavi shook his head. "Doubtful. All of the Combined Core Systems were under the strict control of the military and Hadarian Senior Science Division. The Union military removed however many they had on Hadaria when the Kavalians came, and the members of the Senior Hadarian Science Division were all staunch supporters of Anja and they destroyed the two they had on the planet before evacuating with almost their entire staff to Apo Prime and Earth."

"How do you know all this Nalavi?" Yuri asked him surprised at the information he was offering to them.

Nalavi chuckled. "I'm a doctor Yuri. Physicians the universe over, no matter their species or gender, will share information from time to time. I have a few contacts within the Hadarian establishment. I've only spoken to one since the Kavalians took over, she was able to make it to Earth with about two dozen others, but I did maintain contact with many of them through the years. Discretely of course. I didn't want to be executed as a traitor you know."

"Couldn't they build more of these combined systems Nalavi?" Pa'cour asked.

Nalavi shook his head. "The construction of those systems was limited to one company on Apo Prime. Unless that fanatical bitch Buonau has one hidden away somewhere, which I doubt, then the only remaining

Combined Core Systems are in Union hands. As are all the MSGC Systems for obvious reasons. So I am limited in how accurate I am, or how detailed I can be after examining the data.”

“Isn’t what they... what you did for me the same thing grandfather?” Onera asked from her chair beside Nameia. “Genetic modification?”

Nalavi looked at her and shook his head. She had taken to calling him grandfather and while Nalavi had tried to discourage this at first, it rapidly grew on him and made him closer to Onera in many ways. Finally he determined that if he could not see his own grandchildren, then he could dote over Onera. Yuri and Pa'cour saw no issue with it and they even encouraged it.

“We did not alter your genetic structure child.” He replied. “All we did is accelerate your birth so that you arrived before your mother’s womb could no longer provide for you. Using her talents with this Etheric ability that everyone is now calling it, she was able to shield your mind and basically allow it to grow at the same rate as your body. She fed you hers and your father’s knowledge and wisdom through your link so that it corresponded to the age of your body at the time. There was no genetic tampering done.” He turned back to Pa'cour. “That is why I cannot be fully certain. I am also a general physician and not a genetic researcher as I said Pa'cour. Even if I had the right equipment I would still say what I do now. I am reasonably certain of my findings, but not one hundred percent.”

“I trust yours and Lidene’s guesses more than most people’s facts Nalavi.” Yuri stated. “I still don’t understand how she was able to hide this from me.”

“Something tells me she hid this from quite a few people.” Nalavi said. “Now, the better question is, what do we do about it?”

Yuri looked at Lidene. “Lidene... were you able to decrypt any other information from my mother’s files? Anything that could help us?”

Lidene shook his head. “Aside from several different locations used for research on the clone project... nothing so far Princess. There are still quite a few data files I have yet to try and access... but so far nothing. I can work around the decryption and eventually break it... but it will take time.”

“We can leave Lidene to his decrypting Yuri...” Pa'cour spoke. “But we need to decide what to do about what we already know.”

“We do not even know if these clones are living father.” Onera said. “And if they are... we have no way of knowing if they are actually in place. Do we?”

Pa'cour met his daughter’s eyes and shook his head slowly. “No we do not.” He replied. “Nalavi?”

“Everything I have seen points to the fact that these clones are as perfect as they come.” He told them. “And when I say perfect, I mean perfect. An exact duplicate in every way. For all intents and purposes, as I told you earlier, they are Lycavorian.”

“How?” Yuri said.

Nalavi leaned back in his chair. “From what I have been able to determine from the data, it seems all of the experiments on Leonidas’s mother paid off in a large way. She is a pureblood and by all accounts her blood is nearly as pure as her son. That also speaks to the overall purity of Leonidas’s blood as well as his children. Your father and mother must have known all this to go to the lengths that they did in order to have her captured and then keep that clone of her in place for so long so that they could conduct their experiments. It was no small feat to keep transferring scent glands from the real Gorgo to the clone so that no one caught on. If your mother knew at all what your father was doing that is.”

Yuri snorted in a very unladylike fashion. “My mother knew.” She hissed softly. “She knew exactly what my father was doing all of the time. She probably is the one who gave him most of his directives.”

“Yes... well, these clones were not fast grown Yuri. According to the data it took six years to fully grow them and another three to insure their mental capabilities were in accordance with what your mother wanted.” Nalavi said.

“And what did she want?” Yuri asked.

“For lack of a better description, these three clones are essentially identical twins to the real persons they were cloned from.” Nalavi said. “The memory engrams were painstakingly allowed to grow from the moment of conception according to the data. Depending on when the actual cells were taken from the host and then nurtured, these clones would have all of the same memories of the original host up until that point.”

“Like the clone of Anja on Hadaria?” Yuri asked.

Nalavi nodded his head. "I believe she was the last stage of successful early clones based on the information obtained from Leonidas's mother. Remember... the Kavalians had her for several years before actually using her on Hadaria. And the facility they took her from is listed as an active one among your mother's files. At least it was until it was completely destroyed by that volcano going active."

Yuri chortled in humor. "That was no volcano." She said. "I would bet you anything that it was Martin Leonidas's people. It would explain in part how they were able to successfully play that he was dead. I would hazard a guess and say they had a failed clone of him that my mother tried to make and kept for some vile reason. More than likely that is how it was so believable in the beginning."

"Well... after looking at the data we have unlocked, I think the clone of Anja was the final link if you will. The final successful piece in the link anyway. Once she was complete they moved on to the final stage. That was the three we see in the report." Nalavi said. "I understand that this clone of Anja is now considered a sister by the Queen and her twin Sivana?"

Yuri nodded her head. "Yes." She said. "That was all over their Netnews for a few days. It's not surprising, the Lycavorians as a whole are far more accepting of unorthodox situations. And no matter her temper and harsh nature at times, Anja is very compassionate." Yuri looked around the table. "If the data is accurate... my mother would have had to place them within the last three years."

Lidene nodded. "If she was able to place them at all." He said. "Princess... these names... I realize I have no real knowledge in such things, but these are not men and women that are unknown. Even I know that."

Yuri nodded her head. "And while this may not be your area of expertise Lidene, you bring a different perspective to all of this. Just as Nalavi does. One not tainted by the knowledge that Pa'cour and I have used to make such decisions in the past. We must think and act quite differently now."

"So you believe she was able to place them Yuri?" Nalavi asked.

Yuri shook her head. "I don't know." She answered softly. "It appears there are many things that my mother was involved in and did not include me. She and Moran wanted to be sure Xaxon could brain fuck me and not be disturbed."

"Mother!" Onera gasped out but with a huge smile on her face. She rarely heard her mother swear and it was incredibly humorous to listen to.

Yuri smiled at her and sat forward in her chair. That she could now joke about it in a sense told Yuri she had come full circle. It told her that this new life she was leading had given her Pa'cour and their daughter and all the healing she would need. She glanced at Pa'cour who only gazed at her with loving eyes while remaining silent. "My apologies." She told them.

"Don't apologize!" Nalavi spoke. "I thought it was funny as all hell."

This broke the ice among them and even Nameia found she was laughing softly. The last few days had been very interesting indeed to say the least. She had certainly never expected to be so drawn to Yuri. They had hardly been apart when she was not with Pa'cour or her daughter, and they talked of many things that Nameia had been surprised about Yuri being willing to share with her. She found Yuri to be extremely intelligent and very passionate about helping her sister from behind the scenes. She was dedicated to trying to make amends for all the sins she had committed through the years while under Xaxon's influence. Some of those same decisions Nameia knew, they were decisions that Yuri would have made regardless, but there were many decisions that went against her nature completely and this is what made her very unpredictable in the eyes of those who followed her. Unpredictable and very dangerous. Now however, now Yuri was committed to her daughter, to her husband and to seeing that the High Coven climbed out of the darkness her parents had driven it to. She loved her younger sister Nameia knew, and she would insure that her sister succeeded. Yuri also longed for the day that she could try to make amends with her daughters. Lucia and Carisia no doubt hated her to the extreme, but even this knowledge did not deter her from one day trying to show them that she had indeed altered the path of her life.

Yuri shook her head with a slight smile. "The bottom line is that we don't know for sure." She said. "And that is something that we need to discover. Before I take this information to Martin Leonidas."

"Whoa!" Nalavi declared as he leaned forward. "Take it to Martin Leonidas? Yuri my girl... have you lost all your wits? Martin Leonidas would just as soon skin you as meet with you. What are you thinking?"

"Given the names that are on this list what do you suggest I do?" Yuri said. "If I give this information to Androcles what do you think will happen after what he has done for the High Coven? He takes after his mother

in that he is as equally unforgiving as he is compassionate. This would be a betrayal of the highest order in his eyes, even though Narice knows nothing of it.”

Nalavi and Pa'cour nodded in agreement after a long moment. “On that we tend to agree.” Nalavi said grudgingly. “You think Martin Leonidas will react any different?”

Yuri nodded. “Yes.” She answered. “Especially if it comes directly from me. He is much more methodic in his thinking. Less prone to emotional outbursts and reactions.”

“Seems like what he did on Enurrua was quite emotional.” Nalavi said.

“That the King is not as connected to the High Coven as Androcles is would be a better way to explain it Nalavi.” Pa'cour said calmly. “His son has intertwined our fates. He has done so because he has faith in what our people want and desire. Martin Leonidas has no such belief or faith.”

“And that is good?” Lidene asked.

Yuri nodded. “Yes... because he will look at what I show him objectively and not feel like we have betrayed him. Not to mention...” Yuri paused for a moment and looked at Lidene. “I believe only Martin will have the fortitude to do what might be needed.”

“You mean kill them?” Nalavi said.

Yuri nodded. “Yes.” She answered softly.

“Is he capable of this Yuri?” Nalavi asked. “I mean... he...?”

Yuri nodded her head. “Yes.” She said confidently. “He will not tolerate any perceived threat to the Union Nalavi. From within or without. He may weep while giving the order, but make no mistake, he would not hesitate to give that order. That is what has separated him from my mother and father as a leader. He will regret his decision, he will agonize over his decision, but he will make that decision in the end. And he will do what they failed to do so many times in the past. He will learn from that decision and such a threat would no longer be a viable option for his enemies to use going into the future.”

“You speak as if you admire him mother.” Onera spoke.

Yuri nodded. “Not admire... not in the sense that you suspect. I respect him daughter.” She answered. “Something that I can freely admit now. I respect him for who he is and what he has done against all the odds. He continues what his grandfather and father began, and he does so in a way that leaves no doubt as to his goals or intent. He does not mince words and he will treat you with the same respect or the same contempt as you treat him. He does not wish to force his will on others, but if you try to force your son him he will hit back. Harder and faster than you think he can. Do not in any way let the outward appearance of an overbearing brute that he projects fool you Onera. That is the furthest thing from the truth and many have felt the pain of their misconceptions through the years. Martin is perhaps the single most cunning and vicious man I have ever known. As well as the finest military tactician that lives today... anywhere. And his son ranks right behind him.”

Pa'cour nodded his head. “Your mother speaks wisely Onera.” He said. “It has already been shown by his son that the High Coven and the Lycavorian Union were never meant to be enemies. You have seen the reports of the High Coven News channels about the events of those days.” He spoke to her. “Androcles Leonidas showed the people of the High Coven and those of Akruxian blood what could have been thousands of years ago had not Veldruk and Aikiro been in command. This world would be very different now had the course of events been allowed to proceed naturally.”

Yuri looked at her Immortal husband and smiled at his grasp of history and his keen intelligence on the situation. She felt a flush of desire course through her because of this and she quickly pushed it down. She would surrender to those feelings later.

“All of that is very nice.” Nalavi said. “It still does not explain why it needs to be you that presents this to him Yuri. The man simply does not like you.”

Yuri nodded. “And that is precisely why it needs to be me.” She stated. “After all that has happened, if it is me that brings this to him, he will know that it is truthful and accurate.”

“He could very well just kill you Princess.” Lidene said.

Yuri shook her head this time. “No. That is not something he will do.” She told them. “All of you must understand, Androcles is the conduit to his father and he to Androcles. They think so much alike it is truly frightening at times. Martin will not infringe upon what his son has done. He may not have agreed with it, he may not have done it himself, but it is done. He will not do something that makes either of us weaker now.”

“Are you so sure that includes your well being?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri nodded her head once more. “Yes.”

“How can you be certain?” Lidene asked.

“Androcles trusts me.” Yuri said confidently. “I saw it in his eyes before we left his ship. He looked into my soul that day, beyond all the darkness that Xaxon had created in me. He looked and he saw me. Why do you think he has not moved against us here my friends? If he did not agree with us or he thought we were in any way hindering what Narice is doing, do you honestly believe he would allow us to exist?”

“He would stamp us from the universe in the amount of time it would take him to blink.” Pa'cour echoed. “Yuri is right. The father will not go against the son, and the son will not go against the father. They are too much alike. That is why Martin Leonidas will believe what Yuri shows him.”

Nalavi shook his head. “I’m not even going to try and debate your reasoning behind that.” He said. “I think it is totally insane... but insane has gotten us to this point I suppose.”

“Is that why you are sending me to them mother?” Onera asked.

Yuri looked at her. “Onera my child, I am not sending you to them. We talked of this. I cannot teach you what you need to learn Onera. I certainly do not want to send you away from me. From your father. I have... I have failed at being a mother before and I swore when I held you in my arms those first minutes that I would not do so again.”

“Yuri that...” Pa'cour began to speak.

“Is the truth my Blessed Husband.” Yuri said looking at him with love in her dark eyes. “I will not deny it... nor does it affect me now. I have moved past that my love.”

Onera couldn't meet her eyes and she looked down at the table shyly. “I’m sorry mother. I should not have said that.”

“Do not be sorry daughter.” Yuri said quickly. “You are so very beautiful Onera. And very different. The skills within you need to be harnessed and controlled or you could very well hurt yourself as well as others. That is not something I could ever overcome should it happen. Androcles and his father, his brothers and those like them, they can give you the balance and guidance to allow you to control and focus your skill. You do not have their expertise or their capabilities, but they are the only ones who have the knowledge that will help you to use your abilities. Once you have learned from them all that you can, I will no longer worry for you or what could happen.”

Onera met her eyes and smiled at her mother. “I will make you and father proud of me.” She said.

“We are already proud of you.” Yuri told her. “And we love you even more.”

“That we do.” Pa'cour said.

“You are contacting him in a few hours yes?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri nodded. “Yes.” She answered. “I will tell him then that I need to speak directly with his father.”

“And if he demands to know what about?” Lidene asked.

“He won't.” Yuri said. “In the meantime I need Lidene to keep his people working on our projects but I need you to focus on my mother's files Lidene. We need to discover if she was able to place these clones. And if not... then we need to know where they are hiding or being kept.”

Nalavi looked at her. “Why?” He asked.

Yuri met his gaze. “If they exist and have not been placed within the Union then I intend to find them and destroy them Nalavi. They cannot be allowed to continue to survive and turn into a potential bomb between the Union and High Coven.”

“Is that really necessary Yuri?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri nodded slowly. “Yes. I'm afraid so. There is really no other option that I can see.”

“This is something that we need to make Narice aware of.” Pa'cour stated. “Perhaps not all of the details... but she needs to know.”

Yuri nodded again. “I know. I do not think she will even entertain the thought of seeing me let alone believe me husband. Not yet.”

“I could go.” Pa'cour said.

Nalavi shook his head. “That is almost the same as Yuri herself going.” He stated. “You will not be believed and they will think we have done this and not Yuri's mother.”

“I can go.” Nameia said softly from her chair.

Yuri's eyes cut to her instantly. "Nameia?" She asked.

"I can go." Nameia said again. "I would be the last person they would suspect as bringing a message from you Yuri."

"Nameia... I cannot ask that of you." Yuri said shaking her head.

"I would like to help." She spoke quickly. "And this is something I can do."

"Why?" Yuri asked her.

Nameia smiled. "You saved my life. Helping you is the least I can do." She said.

"You don't owe us anything for doing that Nameia." Pa'cour stated.

"Perhaps not... but I feel I do." Nameia told him. She turned her eyes back to Yuri. "I have nothing to return to and I want to help. Assisting you in what you are trying to do is an honorable goal I believe."

Nalavi nodded her head. "She does have a point Yuri." He said.

"Admiral Riall's fleets will have begun rotating into and around Uzu Ozeib 7 space my wife." Pa'cour told her. "By now there would be hundreds of elves going to and from the planet. My people can put her in contact with Cha'talla's men guarding Narice. They can get her in safely to see her."

Yuri looked at Nameia. "Nameia are you certain?"

Nameia nodded her head quickly. "I have never seen your homeworld. And after being here among you I do not fear being among Immortals any longer."

Yuri looked at her husband. "How soon can you get her in husband?" She asked.

Pa'cour shrugged his shoulders. "I can set it up within two days. Narice is returning from Earth in three days. The day after she gets back it can be arranged."

Yuri nodded finally. She really did not want to put Nameia in harm's way, it felt wrong somehow, but then no Kavalian ship would ever penetrate the combined Coven and Union defensive ring of her homeworld now. Riall and Pontal had secured Uzu Ozeib 7 nearly as well as Apo Prime and slowly but surely they were doing the same to all the systems they had secured in the initial counterattack several weeks ago. Yuri looked at Nameia and saw her light blue eyes watching her carefully. She shuddered inwardly at the gaze of those eyes and nodded her head slowly. "Thank you Nameia." She said softly.

"I owe my life and my sanity to you." Nameia said softly, her eyes never leaving Yuri's dark orbs. "It is the least I can do."

Yuri looked at her husband. "We must find body armor that fits her from the stores here on the station husband. It must fit perfectly. And a sidearm that our Weapon's Master can adjust and balance for her."

Pa'cour nodded. "I will see to it."

"Nalavi... I will need you to put together a detailed report that will explain to Narice what is happening and what we are doing. Leaving out the names of the clones of course. She and Androcles are close now thanks to her marriage to Arrarn Leonidas and she would not keep that information from him if she knew."

Nalavi nodded. "I can have it ready in a day. Very watered down so to speak."

Yuri looked at Lidene. "Lidene... you will continue with my mother's files and once I speak to Androcles I will come to your lab and assist you as much as I can. We must decrypt as many of those files as we are able and do so quickly. We can not allow this to spiral out of our control." She looked lastly at her daughter. "Onera... you must prepare yourself to leave."

"You seem so sure that he will accept me mother." Onera said.

Yuri nodded. "However it came to be, I have passed this Pralor gene to you Onera. It is in a dormant state within us, but even dormant it apparently allows us to do what we can. If he will allow it I will be tested when we meet with him just to be sure. It is the reason that Xaxon tried to control me, and why my mother allowed him to do it. It has to be." She said. "When it is then combined with the dominant traits in your father's blood child, you are far more than you know. The only way to insure you can master what this gene can allow you to do, even in its dormant state, is to learn how to master it from those who have it in an active state. If you have this gene as I believe, he will not turn you away. And you must go into this with an open mind Onera. No arrogance in what skills you already have daughter."

"Your mother is correct again daughter. Androcles Leonidas is well known among his people for having an even fouler disposition towards those who think they are more than they are." Pa'cour echoed Yuri's words. "You are as deadly as any I have ever trained daughter, but you are still young and among Androcles and those

like him, you will be but a child when it comes to skills. Take what they can teach you, master it, and always respect them. For they will respect you.”

Onera nodded her head. “As you and mother have taught me father.” She said softly. “I will not dishonor either of you.”

Yuri nodded. “Then let us get to work. There is much to do.”

ARC ROYAL **PORT LANDING BAY**

It happened far faster than Serale’s untrained eye could follow. One moment she was standing beside Kalis and the next he was half way across the room, lifting his arms to defend himself. She blinked several times wondering just how he had managed to do that, and then she saw the Shi Viska appear in front of him, stopping instantly and three metallic sounds echoed in the small room as three knives impacted the face of the silver shield and clattered to the floor. She heard the dual snarls of what could only be anger and hate and then two bodies moved past her in almost a blur of motion. She watched as the large young man and petite female fell upon Kalis with undisguised emotion and it was then that she realized that Kalis had seen the look in their eyes the moment they saw him and he intentionally moved away from Serale in order to protect her.

Fedor recognized instantly that his *MedwanGai*’s Shi Viska had imposed itself between Kalis and the three knives he had thrown. Those three knives, had they struck Kalis, would have been instantly fatal. All three had been unerringly aimed at his neck and face and would have done massive damage had they struck. Fedor didn’t pause as those knives clattered to the floor and he continued towards Kalis with rage filling his veins. He could feel his twin sister Eirene’s equally intense hate and anger flowing from her as they attacked. Using her small size Eirene went low, dropping into a crouch and spinning around while sweeping her leg out to take Kalis’s legs from under him. This would have allowed Fedor to hit him while he was falling and they would have had the upper hand immediately.

Two things happened.

Eirene’s foot connected with the back of Kalis’s leg right where she had aimed, but she had failed to take into account that Kalis had positioned his body in preparation for her attack the moment he detected her dropping low to the floor. In her rage Eirene did not hit him with an accurate strike and pain shot up her leg and foot as her strike connected with the solid muscle of Kalis’s calf and not the back of his knee as she had intended. Her forward momentum stopped instantly and she dropped to her ass on the floor as her strike only served to stagger Kalis slightly. He was much thicker and stronger than he appeared Eirene took note even as her eyes move up and she saw her brother about to land upon his upper body. It was the second thing that happen, or didn’t happen she took note.

Fedor’s body was caught in the shimmering light blue Etheric hold and Eirene’s head turned to see her *MedwanGai* holding out his right hand as his Shi Viska returned to his left arm. He was holding Fedor within the grips of his Etheric power and Eirene knew there was no way he would break that hold. She scrambled to her feet just as her mother descended upon her and grabbed her arms before she could close and attack.

“**Enough!**” Martin’s voice boomed in the confines of the small room.

“Let me go father!” Fedor barked twisting his head around to glare at Martin. “Let me go so I can tear out his eyes!”

Eirene was trying to break free of her mother’s grasp unsuccessfully as well, For’mya’s grip much to strong and far more experienced. “Mother... we... let me go! It is him! He is the one who...!”

“Eirene stop!” For’mya snapped.

“**I SAID ENOUGH!**” Martin’s voice was much more focused and powerful this time and within the limitations of the room it echoed like a gunshot.

Fedor and Eirene were immediately cowed as neither of them had heard the power of their *MedwanGai*’s voice directed at them before. Their eyes were wide as he moved further into the room, not releasing Fedor from within his Etheric grasp, his yellow/gold wolf eyes glaring angrily at them and his wolf fangs fully protruding. Not once since they had been born and in the weeks that followed had Martin or their

mothers ever been seriously angry with them. Even For'mya, as mild mannered as she normally was, could not hide her anger now. Her dark brown eyes had changed to her wolf nature and her fangs were also fully extended as she gripped Eirene's arms tightly.

"Have the two of you fully lost control of your senses!" For'mya barked angrily. "This is not how we have raised you! And it is certainly not how your brother envisioned you would use what he taught you!"

"Mother he..." Eirene began to protest.

"Silence!" For'mya snarled snapping her fangs together with such ferocity they clicked loudly and caused Eirene's eyes to drop in shame.

Martin guided Fedor's still suspended body over beside his sister, his yellow/gold eyes glaring at him in anger. Fedor could not meet his gaze and gazed at the floor. Martin released him from with the grip of the Etheric hold and Fedor dropped to his feet beside his sister.

"This behavior is unacceptable!" For'mya barked at them.

"Mother that is...!" Fedor began to protest.

For'mya then did something she had only ever done twice since Martin had turned her. She allowed the female Alpha wolf and mother within her act out. She had done this once to Androcles and once to Arrarn as they were growing. She slapped Fedor hard across his cheek, holding nothing back in either strength or anger. She let the wolf within her respond and it was a stinging pop that served the purpose she intended it to. The wolf within Fedor was instantly shamed and he looked away as he held his cheek where his mother's hand had struck.

"I know exactly who he is!" For'mya snarled at them. "Tell me... at what point did your brother teach you through your bond with him to attack innocents! When did Androcles ever instruct you to dismiss innocent lives! I'll tell you when... never! It is not something he would ever teach you and it is something we would never teach you!"

"Innocents?" Eirene gasped. "Mother he..." Her eyes shifted to where Kalis stood and they grew ever wider when she saw Serale step up to him and press her body close to his. Her hands went to her mouth in horror. "*Carians!*" She gasped loudly.

Fedor was unable to speak because of the shame he felt. He had launched his knives without even considering the female that had been standing beside Kalis. All his anger could focus on was Kalis and had he not stepped away from Serale in that split second, one of those knives could very well have ended her life.

"Did either of you stop to consider why he would be standing in this room?" For'mya asked them her voice still filled with anger. "Why he would be on our ship? Why your father and I would bring you here! Did you even consider these things before you acted so stupidly?"

Martin stood silently behind For'mya, his yellow/gold eyes boring into Fedor and Eirene as he allowed her to take the lead on this. His arms were crossed over his chest and he could not help but feel pride at For'mya's actions. Everyone considered For'mya to be the picture of calm and serene peace. In most cases she was, but there were times when something or someone caused her to lose control of that serenity and the female wolf within her came roaring out. It was very frightening to see to be honest, and it made Martin's desire for her spike even more than it was normally. For'mya could instantly feel Aricia and Anja and then Dysea pulsing her with their love and support and agreement at her reaction. It was followed quickly by Cirith's Etheric outpouring of support and then Isabella's. Since Cirith could not pulse For'mya with her wolf aura as she was on the Kavalian ship with Muton and Isabella, she joined her Etheric power to Isabella's and that is how they responded to what she was doing. Martin could easily feel this outpouring of love and support for For'mya from his other Queens. He could not ever recall a time in the last twenty plus years where the five of them had disagreed on how they raised their children. When they spoke, it was with five voices, and everyone knew that. While Cirith had not joined them until last year, it appeared she was in complete agreement as well, and her voice was equally heard and acted upon.

"I know full well what your brother would have taught you!" For'mya continued. "It is the same thing that he has taught all of his siblings for he loves them so! I also know this is not something he would have thought appropriate in any way! This is not something you learned from your father or your Uncle Danny either! You let you anger override your mind! You saw within Andro's memories what Kalis did and you reacted without thinking! You did not stop to think about how or why he was here now! And I know this is

something all of them would have taught you! Tell me I am wrong?" She growled. "One of you had better answer me or I will turn you both over my knee and tan your asses red no matter how old you are!"

"We... I did not think." Fedor hissed softly. "I... my emotion pulled Eirene along with me and..."

"No you didn't!" Eirene countered. "I felt the same thing Fedor! You don't have to take all of the blame. We acted together and..."

Kalis looked at Martin. "Uncle... perhaps I should leave." He said calmly. "Perhaps this was not the best... the best time to do this. No matter how much I wanted it."

Martin held up his hand. "No." He said.

For'mya turned and looked at Kalis. "This is not your fault Kalis." She said warmly. "You only wanted to see your brother and sister."

"I also do not wish to be the cause of more angry emotions *Tenna*." Kalis said gently. He saw both Fedor and Eirene's eyes go a little wider when he said that. "I know what my history and actions have wrought and I know those actions are not easily forgotten or forgiven. Serale and I will join her mother and Nedoli in the Med Bay and take our exams. If they... I have no intention of going anywhere uncle, and if at some point in the future my brother and sister wish to learn of me, I would be most happy to tell them of the path I now follow."

Martin nodded after a long moment and stepped out of the way as Kalis led Serale past him and into the corridor. *[Mandri?]* Martin spoke to his back.

Kalis stopped and turned to meet his eyes. *[I knew this would not be easy when I first started down this road Uncle. Are you not the one who told Andro that the road to what you truly desire is never easy or painless?]*

Martin smiled. *[He told you that in your lessons did he?]*

[He quoted you often Uncle.] Kalis answered. *[I was fully committed the moment Serale came into my life Uncle. I have no intentions of faltering now.]*

[Good.] Martin said. *[They are young Kalis. They will come around. Just give them time.]*

Kalis nodded. *[Time is something I have a lot of now Uncle. Thanks to you.]* He said.

Martin smiled as Kalis continued down the corridor holding Serale's hand and after a moment he turned and looked at Fedor and Eirene. For'mya was still staring at them and she shook her head slowly.

"I understand the need you both feel to protect me." For'mya spoke now, her voice more subdued but still upset. "However... it is not something you need to do. I have your father for that if I need protecting, and your other mothers. Kalis... Kalis has done something wonderful. He was shown a path different from the one he was walking and he willingly chose to walk that path. He left behind all he was when he embraced the blood within him."

"How do you know that mother?" Fedor spoke. "How do you know this is not all some game he is playing? He attacked Andro when..."

For'mya held up her hand silencing his words. "I know exactly what Kalis has done in the past." She hissed out the words. "I also know that Kalis died weeks ago. He is not the same young man anymore my son."

"A leopard may change the color of his spots mother... but he never loses them." Fedor snapped. "I don't trust him!"

For'mya sighed heavily and turned to look at Martin. "Martin?" She asked.

"They are grown and they are entitled to their opinion *Kinsoaurgai*." Martin said. "They have taken mates; they have developed their own lives now. If they chose to lose the unique opportunity to know their brother then that is their decision. A stupid decision, but their decision nonetheless."

"He is not our brother!" Fedor snapped more forcefully.

Martin stepped forward. "Yes... he is your brother." Martin spoke evenly. "The same pure blood that flows through him flows through you. It flows through me. It flows through your brother Andro and all of your siblings. Are they not your siblings?"

"*MedwanGai*... that is different!" Eirene protested.

"Why is it different *Fenneenum*?" Martin asked. "There are many things in this universe that we do not understand nor can we explain. Your mothers and I have lived for decades not fearing the unknown. You both know this. It is practically the motto for our family. The passion in your blood right now however, it is keeping you from living that rule. And it makes you less than who you are." Martin took For'mya's hand in his. "When you learn to control that passion in your blood, the passion that makes you blind right now, then you will see

what I mean. I wouldn't wait too long though. He is your brother and part of the reason he started down this road was so that he could know the two of you. Learn of you and protect you and finally know what he has been denied all of his life. The feeling of family. When all is said and done, he is no different than the two of you. He was never a son to my brother... only a tool. Just as the two of you were meant to be. And while I now claim you with my heart and love as my children, Kalis never had that. What you and your sister, what many of us take for granted, he has never had the chance to experience. Don't wait too long or you just may lose the opportunity to know him at all. And that... that more than anything would be the crime."

Martin turned and began walking out of the room, For'mya holding tightly to his hand as they left. They left Fedor and Eirene standing in the briefing room feeling very alone and very confused for the first time in their short lives.

They had no idea what had just happened, nor how things had gotten out of hand so quickly. They also had never felt the full weight of their mother's anger directed at them and without a doubt, it frightened them.

EARTH SPARTA CRANAE ISLAND

"...pretty good idea who the leak is." Jomann spoke as he and Andro moved slowly along the corridor of the Command Wing of his villa. *Durcunusaan* men and women moved about this wing freely as it was their barracks and the Secondary Command Center for all Union forces within the hundreds of fleets and ground units. They were privy to everything that happened in these units, dozens of technicians monitoring it all and taking reports from the main Command Center under Sparta.

It was only in the last years since the end of the Evolli War that the Command Center under Sparta had been completed to Riall's precise specifications. While the Command Center on Apo Prime was still very active, all functions were routed through the main base under Sparta. He had known for some time of Martin's affinity for Sparta, as well as his Queens. As Andro grew and he began to spend more time here than on Apo Prime, Riall knew that Sparta would become the heart of their Union. With the blessing of the Senate and Defense Committee the construction of the main facility under Sparta had begun. When Andro had bought this villa Riall had seen the ability to insure cohesion was never lost and he developed the plans with Ben to establish a Secondary Command Center here on the island. Since the attacks on Andro and the others by the OSG, Riall had ordered that option instituted and now this entire wing of the villa was a heavily fortified and defended Command facility. With the added knowledge of what had transpired over the last weeks and months against the Royal family, getting close to Cranae Island was now next to impossible. Andro's insistence that whatever was done not impede on the beauty or natural landscape of the island actually made it that much harder to now breach the island's defenses. That was something that Riall and Vengal failed to tell Andro and it gave them much peace of mind.

"So soon?" Andro asked him as he took the pad.

Jomann nodded. "You know the General better than I Andro." He answered. "Vengal has all non-combat units within the *Durcunusaan* working on this. He is tenacious and once he determined that the leaks were coming from within the *Durcunusaan* he has not rested."

Andro read the name on the pad and came to a halt in the center of the corridor. He looked up at Jomann with stunned eyes. "This... this is accurate?" He asked.

Jomann nodded his head. "Yes. With Marci's help we were able to do a very fast and very thorough investigation into him. His career is solid but uneventful. He is very loyal Andro, a solid *Durcunusaan* Scout Leader."

"Then why would he leak such things?" Andro asked.

Jomann reached up and touched the pad, changing the screen. "This is why?"

Andro's azure eyes grew even wider and he looked up after reading the short passage. "You have got to be kidding me!"

Jomann nodded. “The General and I were skeptical at first as well but all the information we have gathered points to this. Up until now, nothing he has told them was discovered in a way that could be tied back to him. It was almost as if it happened by chance and he never became suspicious. Now however, now I think he will take notice, especially after Icho’s Netnews Briefing.”

“He is a Beta Wolf.” Andro said looking at the pad.

Jomann nodded his head. “Definitely not front line material, but his skills as a scout are a rare find according to the Drow instructors who taught him.”

“You spoke to them?” Andro asked.

Jomann nodded. “Vengal contacted General Lynwe the moment we discovered it. He spoke to three of them directly and the fourth by holo conference. All of them said basically the same thing. He is a superior tracker, better than many Alphas they have trained. His physical skills are speed and cunning and he uses them to perfection. Extreme endurance and superior conditioning. His career so far has been uneventful because of his posting to a training unit. He asked for a transfer to a combat unit during the war but was denied. His Commander needed him to train those they had. The man told Vengal he did not want to refuse him, but the scouts he was turning out were beyond well trained and he did not want to lose that asset. But in true Sparta fashion, he has never once complained.”

“And it’s unlikely she knew where the information was coming from.” Andro said.

Jomann nodded in agreement. “Doubtful.”

Andro was silent for a moment and then made his decision without hesitating. There might actually be a way to salvage all this. He looked at Jomann. “How many slots remain?” He asked.

“Two.” Jomann replied knowing he meant the positions on their command team. “I have not heard back from Ridor. I understand he is on some sort of extended leave and has been since they returned from the mission on Caliber.”

Andro nodded. “Have Vistr find him. Uncle Isra told me of his actions on that mission and he would be a perfect addition. He’s like us.”

Jomann chuckled. “You mean utterly insane and completely proud of that fact?”

Andro laughed. “Yep.” He said. “Give the last slot to this one.” He said giving the pad back to Jomann. “If his skills are what you say they will be welcome.”

“What about...”

Andro shook his head. “Everything you have found to date suggests he is not aware of the leaks being from him correct?”

Jomann nodded. “Yes.”

“And this other thing... his feelings for...?” Andro started.

“All true.” Jomann said.

“Then perhaps it is time we turned the tables on her.” Andro said. “This could very well be the way.”

Jomann looked at him and smiled. “You are a devious *ronnus* you know that?” He said with no malice.

Andro laughed. “You know it.”

APO PRIME WESTERN CONTINENT CITY OF MORALI

It was a modest looking but large apartment. A single story structure that overlooked the lake in the distance. It was the first thing his son had purchased when he had graduated from *Durcunusaan* Training. His way of showing that he could live and support himself. Vistr had been very proud of him and even helped his son to move into the apartment with his brothers. That is how he knew to come here.

“...must control your temper Vistr.” His mate of over seven thousand years told him.

General Vistr looked into his mate’s dark eyes as they came to the door of the large size apartment. “He is placed on administrative leave and does not tell us Melora?” Vistr barked. “Isra would not have done this

without a reason! What could he have done to illicit such a reaction from him. And he would not tell us what he did!”

“Perhaps Isra did not feel it was our business.” Melora said in reply.

“He is my son! And a member of the *Durcunusaan!*” Vistr snapped. “I have every right to know what my son has done to be placed on administrative leave. And if he will not contact us and tell us... I will find out from him myself!” He turned and stabbed his finger down on the chime to the apartment.

“Are you sure this is wise?” Melora asked.

“Androcles’s Captain has been trying to reach him for three days and he does not respond to the calls.” Vistr spoke. “I want to know why!”

Freedom.

It tasted so wonderful.

Free to do what she wanted. To make her own choices. To live a life of her own making. In the last three months she had done just that. Cvea’Ortel was many things, but stupid was not one of them. The day he had rescued her, taken her from that foul life she had been cursed with, Cvea knew things would be so much different.

His apartment was beautiful and large, though somewhat sparsely decorated. That was something she had helped him to fix in the many days they had spent shopping in Morali. The city was smaller than most those on Apo Prime, but it was now her home. At first she feared to even walk the streets of the city for dread of what would be said about her and what would happen because of actions that were not hers. What would happen to her because the Kavalian leader had perpetrated his vile acts upon the Royal family? Cvea saw quickly just how beloved the Royal family was within the Union, and she was intelligent enough to know that loyalty and devotion such as that was not easily earned. It was a fear she discovered quickly that was totally unfounded. She didn’t realize it until later, but being with Ridor and his standing as a member of the *Durcunusaan*, it automatically gave her status as well. And this served to insure the people of Morali gave her a chance. Even before she had become comfortable enough to allow her tail to swing freely, Cvea had felt at home here. Lycavorians, Elves, even the few humans and Limians that called Morali home treated her no differently because she had a tail or she was Kavalian. She was quick to discover the true nature of the welcoming and adaptability of the men and women who called the Union home. She was accepted without question, greeted not with harsh words or dark looks, but smiles and even hugs from the older Lycavorian women within the city. They saw something in her right away and it was the way Ridor fawned over her. They could also smell the same desire for him wafting from her pores. Cvea was now unafraid to enter the city on her own, and had done so on many occasions since coming here. The freedom to walk the streets and peruse the shops and stores was unlike anything she had encountered in her lifetime. Ckhoa and Poysha had been to see her three times since she had decided to stay here. Poysha had questioned her decision to remain with Ridor, but after seeing how giddy she was during their visits, she quickly realized that Cvea was truly happy for the first time in her life. Cvea had latched onto the first true thing she had wanted in her life and now she was so happy she had. Ridor had given her a life unlike any she thought she would ever experience. A life of safety and devotion and above all else, love.

As Cvea sipped the large mug of coffee, her ears caught the sound of the shower in the bedroom as she stepped onto the balcony of the apartment. Her home. Their home. She wore only one of Ridor’s oversized shirts, her long tail flipping back and forth in a relaxed and confident manner. As her pale blue eyes looked out over the lake in the distance she felt the warmth flood her again as it did every morning for the life she now had. Never had any man treated her with such gallantry and respect. Though the desire for her was so very evident in his ice blue eyes, he had held it in check for so long in order to prove to her that his intentions were honorable in every way. He had not wanted to pressure her after so long enduring what she had suffered with. Little did he know that his desire and his attentions to her helped to speed that recovery even more quickly. To know that she was not looked at in any way as an object of sexual gratification meant more to Cvea than anything else. To know that every male who looked at her now, while they may have considered her attractive, even desired her, they still treated her with the utmost respect. Part of it she knew was because of who Ridor was, but the large

part was because of the way their culture and society viewed females. As the days and weeks passed by in a blur, Cvea found it increasingly difficult to deny her supreme attraction to him. Yes he had rescued her, but that fact aside, he was so very handsome and he sometimes fumbled over himself to impress her. He could easily laugh at his own silly actions if they made him look foolish, and the fact he was comfortable enough with himself to do that made him all the more desirable to Cvea. Soon the fact that he had rescued her no longer mattered to her. What mattered was how he treated her and doted over her and pushed her to do whatever it was she wanted to do. He kept telling her that no matter what she decided he would always support and encourage her in the endeavors she chose, no matter what man she decided to spend her life with. When other men began to show interest in her, Cvea instantly began to compare them to him, and that is when she knew he was the one she wanted to spend the rest of her life with.

Their first night together had been awkward at first, Ridor not wanting to do something that caused bad memories to return. It was Cvea telling him that no matter what it was he did, the fact that he still found her attractive was enough. After that, and the many times after, he showed Cvea what it was like to be loved by a man in all the right ways. Oh she cried out in blissful delight for hours on end, gasping his name in rapturous joy as he made her feel things she had no idea she could feel. He had certainly proved to her that passion could be so very pleasant when done with the person you loved. Loving her as he had, it had burned away the timid and fearful young woman, and left in its place a confident and intelligent woman who adored her new husband and mate with all that she was.

Love. A word Cvea never thought she would use, but it was a word she used all of the time now. Ridor had shown her love in its highest form, and he continued to show it to her with every morning that she awoke and every evening when she went to sleep with his powerful arms wrapped around her. Cvea knew that his leaders had given him this time to be with her. They had seen it from the very first moment on that ship. Each time he spoke her name, each time he looked at her, Cvea could not help but feel wanted and loved and desired in the most splendid of ways. These were emotions that she returned a hundred fold. She could not help herself as she memorized every sculpted portion of his powerful body, exploring his flesh in a way she never thought she would do for many man. Yet she did it with passion and yearning, and every moan of delight that escaped his lips from her ministrations caused Cvea to love him even more intensely. Every kiss he gave to her stole her breath away, every caress could cause her to tremble in want, and she craved the way her lithe body conformed to his when she collapsed in his arms, his manhood still buried within her, and his arms pulled her even tighter to him and they fell asleep. Ridor was unafraid to walk the streets with her, holding tightly to her hand, stealing kisses from her even in public where everyone could see. She knew this type of thing to be acceptable in Lycavorian society and while she basked in the attention, she hadn't realized until just recently that he did it for two very important purposes. She had discovered them from the much older Lycavorian woman who owned the Lycavorian eatery that they went to frequently. The woman had told her Ridor was acting in this way because he was basically telling all the other males that Cvea was his and his alone. Cvea had been delighted at this, and delighted even more in what she had said next.

It is common among our people Cvea child. Legaina had told her. We crave physical interaction, especially with those we love and care for. Ridor does this with you now because you are mated yes, and he adores you child. I've known him for years and he dotes over you like no other I have seen. And believe me, there have been no females that have captured his heart as you have. He does it because it is his way of saying to all the other male who see that you belong to him and he to you. There is another reason he does it however.

What more reason could there be? Cvea had asked her with a smile. It fills me with even more desire for him knowing that alone.

He does it also to insure everyone knows you are one of us. That you are a free woman and capable of making your own decisions. Legaina had said. It is something of an honor thing among our males... I never really paid much attention to it. My own mate tried to explain it to me but I never understood. I simply basked in the attention he showed me in front of others. It means you are his life and his future now child. And he will honor and worship you for the rest of your life.

Anocahs.

Ridor's name for her meant even more after Cvea had heard that.

That evening Cvea had shown Ridor just how much she loved him and he had returned the emotion tenfold. What pain and shame she had arrived here with, Ridor had erased it all and restored to her all the dignity she had thought lost. She may have lost her purity to those vile Kavalians who had taken her, but Ridor had returned that purity to her and shown her that she was the most desirable woman in the universe to him. That is all that mattered to her anymore. Her life with Ridor and where it would take them. Her years of enslavement were a memory now. A memory she would keep locked away tightly and never revisit for it had no place in her future. A future she and Ridor would decide together.

The door chime sounding snapped Cvea out of her memories and she turned. Ckhoa and Poysha had come to the small ceremony to acknowledge their union, Ridor promising they would have a much larger celebration, one deserving of who she was, when she was ready to meet the rest of his family. Poysha had promised to return in a week or so and bring with her news of the others and how they were settling in. Cvea set the mug of coffee on the table as she darted inside, her tail twitching excitedly as she moved across the large main room and to the door. She swept her hand over the control panel and was talking even before it opened fully.

"Oh Poysha... I am so happy!" Cvea exclaimed. "Ridor is all I have ever..." Cvea's eyes flew open when she saw the older man and woman in the archway of their apartment. "Oh... I... forgive me. I... I was expecting someone else."

Vistr's eyes narrowed while Melora's eyes grew wide. She could smell her youngest son within this dazzling young woman's blood deeply. She was a stunning vision of beauty with pale, sky blue eyes and lush white blond hair. Her skin was perfection, her body fertile and very firm. And then her eyes saw the tail and they grew even wider.

"Obviously!" Vistr spoke rather gruffly. "Where is my son?" He demanded.

Cvea stared at them for a long moment not really knowing what to do. She knew who they were instantly for Ridor had many pictures of his family all over the apartment. She just never thought she would meet them in her current state of dress.

Melora stepped forward quickly when she saw the indecision and real fear in the young woman's eyes. "Vistr... you will mind your manners." She hissed at her gruff husband. She looked at Cvea. "We are looking for our son child." She told Cvea. "Is he here?"

Cvea nodded quickly at the older woman's polite question. "He is... he is in the..."

Ridor's voice interrupted her answer. "*Anocahs*... have you seen where I put..." Ridor looked up as he walked into the main room holding the towel around his waist. He came to an abrupt halt when he saw his parents standing in the doorway of his apartment and Cvea looking at him with despair in her eyes. "Mother! Father!" He gasped as he moved up to the door beside Cvea and slid his arm around her waist quickly. "What... what are you doing here?"

"What are we doing here?" Vistr barked at his son. "What are you doing? You are on administrative leave and did not inform me! The Crown Prince's Captain has been trying to reach you for two days and you have not responded! What have you done to cause Isra to act in such a way?"

"The Prince's Captain?" Ridor questioned confused. "Father... I... I have not checked my messages in days." Ridor answered his father.

"That is obvious!" Vistr snapped. "Would you care to tell us what is going on?"

Melora remained silent and watched as Ridor moved closer beside the young woman, his arm slipping around her waist protectively. She saw the young woman's tail curl tightly around his waist and her body almost fold into Ridor's protective embrace. Melora could smell her son deeply in this woman's blood, but she could also smell her deeply embedded in his. She looked quickly at Vistr. "Vistr... perhaps we should be more understanding and listen to them." She stated quickly knowing almost immediately what was going on.

"I will not be more understanding!" Vistr barked. "I wish to know why my son is hidden away in his home with some... some Kavalian female, and not on duty!"

"Vistr!" Melora hissed at him angrily for his words.

Ridor stepped away from Cvea and stared at his father, his eyes changing and his fangs growing to their full length. "I love you father... I love you but I will not allow you to refer to my wife and mate in such a manner!"

Vistr's eyes grew wide at his son's reaction and he glanced at the Kavalian female. He looked back to Ridor. "Your mate?" He gasped.

Cvea's newfound confidence quickly came to the forefront and she stepped forward away from Ridor quickly to grasp Melora's hands. "Please Milady... there is much... there is much that we have to tell you. Come in please."

Melora looked at Cvea her eyes wide. Cvea's hands were warm and inviting and Melora gripped them tightly as her eyes settled on this young Kavalian female. There was wisdom in her very young eyes that she should not have had, but also a new confidence Melora could tell.

"Vistr..." Melora spoke. "We should give our son a chance to explain what is going on." She spoke never taking her eyes from Cvea's face.

"I will..."

"We will listen to our son!" Melora snapped at her husband. Vistr looked at her now and saw the determination in her jaw and in her eyes.

Vistr turned back to Ridor and saw his son had not backed away or allowed his eyes or fangs to return to normal. "Fine." He snapped. "We will listen."

"... Knew the moment I picked her up into my arms." Ridor told his parents as they sat across from one another on the couches. "The mission was successful as you know... and those we rescued needed places to stay in order for them to be better able to acclimate themselves to their new freedom. Colonel Isra and Governor Tarifa were arranging for this before we even returned. I did not..."

Cvea had listened to Ridor retell the story, her eyes never leaving his face and her hands gripping his arm tightly. Melora noticed that her tail had once more wrapped around his waist, the tip resting on his thigh. Even Vistr, one of the two men who had long ago formed and now commanded the *Durcunusaan*, even he had not heard all of the details of the mission for it was extremely classified even now and he had not been part of it. In truth he had taken a secondary role in commanding the *Durcunusaan* in order to concentrate on his own Combined Forces Command. Vengal, his dear friend and co-commander of the *Durcunusaan* had been running the day to day operations for years now. When he realized that his son had taken part in a vital hostage rescue mission on the Kavalian homeworld the pride he felt caused his chest to swell. A covert deep strike into the heart of the enemy homeworld to rescue hostages, a mission that was supremely successful in every way. How could anyone find fault with a resume such as his son could now put forth. Vistr could feel nothing but satisfaction for what his son had done. And it was obvious even to a Lycavorian of his age that his son was deeply in love with the very petite Kavalian female. She was exceptionally beautiful Vistr thought to himself, a true vision of real beauty and his son's scent wafted from every pore on her body. Her pale blue eyes gazed at his son in the same fashion that Melora's eyes looked upon him. He felt horrible anger for what had been done to her, but she had shown incredible strength and fortitude in both her actions and her words. This was not a young woman who was simply infatuated with the man who had rescued her; Cvea was a young woman whose very essence spoke of love for his son. Vistr looked at his son as he finished speaking.

"...Not something I intended to keep from you and mother." Ridor told him finally. "I wanted to insure Cvea was comfortable enough in her new life. I did not... I did not intend for us to feel what we do for each other, it just happened as time passed. I could not deny what my instincts called for me to embrace. Meeting our family is not something small father... you know this. I wanted to protect her."

Vistr glanced sideways at Melora and saw her nod to him. He had always trusted in his mate's instincts and feelings and she had never led him astray. Melora then look at her youngest son and his stunning Kavalian mate and wife. "No... meeting our family is not a minor affair." She agreed.

"Now you see why I acted as I have." Ridor said. "I still have a week before I need to return to duty and I have not checked my messages in the entire time father. I devoted all that I was to Cvea."

Vistr could only nod his own head now. "As well you should have." He spoke. "I would expect no less from one of my sons."

Cvea looked at Vistr. "I have... I have never known emotion such as I do now sir." She spoke softly but with great feeling. "I have never... I have never known love like I do now. I never thought it would be possible."

"Do you love our son Cvea'Ortel?" Melora asked.

"Mother?" Ridor complained. "That..."

Cvea's smile was as bright as any sunny day Melora had ever seen. "More and more with each passing day Milady." She said turning to look at Ridor's face.

Melora got to her feet and nodded. "Good." She held out her hand to Cvea. "Come child, it is time for you to meet the rest of our family. My other sons and their mates should know the young woman who has taken the heart of their brother and holds it so close to her own. Even if it is by holocall. I doubt very much they will be disappointed."

"Mother you can't..." Ridor protested even as Cvea stood up and took her hand without fear.

"I think I would like that." Cvea said with a bright smile.

Melora looked at Ridor. "You need to worry why the Crown Prince's Captain has been calling you young man!" She spoke sternly. "I will let you and your father handle that while I get to know my newest daughter. We will be fine without you. I think we will contact your brothers and then we will go shopping in the city. What do you think Cvea?"

Cvea looked at Ridor and couldn't help but chuckle at his expression. This was not the way they had intended for her to meet his parents and then his family, but there was no denying the warmth in his mother's grip or her smile. And while his father was very gruff, Cvea could tell just from his expression that he was pleased. She turned back to his mother. "I think I would like that very much."

"So would I." Melora said. "Come... let's get you properly dressed before going out. While wearing your mate's clothes in your own home is quite acceptable... it would not due to be seen in his shirt by others." Melora looked at her and smiled. "They will begin to talk silly things."

Cvea laughed softly once more as Melora led her to the bedroom of the apartment. Vistr smiled at his mate's reaction and looked at his son. Ridor had a stunned expression on his face and his eyes finally fell to his father.

"Father..." Ridor began to ask.

Vistr smiled at him now knowing what his senses and instincts were telling him about her own emotions. "We have waited a long time for you to find a woman boy." He spoke kindly to his son. "Her devotion and love for you wafts from her scent son. That is what matters."

"You... you do not care that she is...?"

"Kavalian?" Vistr asked as he stood up. "Every species has their good and bad." He said. "The largest example of that is our own people my son. I never judge a person by the color of their skin or what their species is. We never have as a people and our King only reinforced that when he returned to us. She is a beautiful jewel Ridor my son... treasure her. Worship her. For if you do not... you will answer to me and to your brothers."

Ridor got to his feet. "That is my intent father."

Vistr nodded his head. He looked at his youngest son, a son that he and Melora had never thought to have until the King returned and brought back the instincts of their people to them. He was the youngest of his sons yes, but he was a true Spartan by any definition of the word. He had been born in Sparta, raised most of his life in the city of their King, and he had chosen to become a *Durcunusaan* from almost the moment he could speak. This is what life was all about. He had no doubts that any child of Ridor and Cvea's would insure that spirit and commitment going into the future.

"Good... now let us contact Jomann and discover why he has been calling you." Vistr said. "I am very interested in this as well."

“...Stand by.” The COM officer spoke before turning in her chair, her eyes searching for someone. They settled on the petite form of the blond *Durcunusaan* Officer who she knew to be Prince Dorian’s Captain. She was also rumored by many to be his Blessed Wife now for those who were wolf could smell her deeply within his blood and vice versa.

“Major Juconi?” She called out.

Sheva looked up and turned her head from the daily reports she had retrieved from the previous evening’s shift. She gripped the large mug of *Nau'shindeal d'l'Vlos* in her left hand, her second of the morning since Dorian had taken so much of her blood the previous evening during their lovemaking. Of course, Sheva had taken just as much if not more of his delicious blood in the process.

Sheva Juconi no longer doubted her feelings for Dorian Leonidas in any way. Her eyes had been opened so to speak and now she could not get enough of the young man who had so swept her up in his love and passion. She spent every moment of free time with him, whether it was here on the island or the few times they had gone into Gytheio to shop. She had not even returned to her apartment in days now except to retrieve several different outfits to wear when off duty. She was staying with him in his small suite like room on his brother’s villa and she no longer cared who knew of this. Sheva knew Dorian was looking for his own villa to purchase in the port city of Gytheio and they had looked at several new ones over the course of the last two days between his training with his brother and his new duties as second in command of the new unit Androcles had formed. Each Leonidas child had a huge trust Fund established for them the day they were born. Sheva had been stunned at the wealth Dorian had within the Fund but she realized that his father and mothers had decades to establish them all to that level. She knew for a fact that his mother Aricia had made a fortune off of her recipe of coffee. It was now the most sought after blend of coffee anywhere in the Union. While Sheva preferred black tea, Dorian drank his mother’s coffee constantly.

While Sheva was already considered a Tier Six Mindvoicer, she had to have been in order to be accepted into the *Durcunusaan*, she had never really advanced or used these abilities unless she needed too. After the first time she had taken his blood during their lovemaking, Sheva’s mind and power had exploded. She had naturally powerful Mindvoice shields and she had to focus in order to leave them up for she found herself reveling in the sensation of being able to swim within Dorian’s thoughts. He had the combined memories of his father and mother as well as his Bonded Brother Ryner, but in many ways he was still young and playful. This sense about him also served to bring out a playful side in Sheva that she had not known existed, and when she let this side of herself come out with him, she felt genuine warmth and happiness all of the time. She had seen what he was capable of, both with his physical skills and his new abilities within the Etheric realm, and once again Sheva had to admit he was far more powerful than any pureblood vampire she had ever met. Within his thoughts Sheva had seen what he and Ryner had done on Solmar, the precise and lethal actions he had taken, and part of her feared the power within him. That fear also served to draw her to him like a powerful magnet. He would never turn that power on her she knew, but he would use it in an instant to protect those he loved and cared for. And that *was* her.

Sheva also basked in the attention he showed her. Whenever they were together he was always touching her in some way, whether it be holding her hand or wrapping his arm around her waist in public and pulling her close. In their bed he was utterly attentive and never ceased to explore her body in ways that Sheva had never dreamed. He could leave her shivering in delight just by caressing her skin or letting his warm lips drag across the back of her neck. He was so very inventive in their bed and this caused Sheva to be just as inventive and they had discovered many new things about each other and the pleasure they could have. When she was on duty he treated her with the same respect he did the other *Durcunusaan* and while their affection for each other leaked out sometimes, he was always professional and did nothing to embarrass her. Sheva adored him for this because it told her that he respected her position and what she had done to achieve it. In many ways Sheva Juconi had let go of the past and began a life that she desired more than anything.

Sheva moved over to where the young female Lycavorian sat. “Something Chief?” She asked with respect.

The young woman nodded. “I am receiving a coded and encrypted transmission on the Prince’s private COM channel. Audio only right now.” She answered turning to her equipment. “They are asking for him by his official call sign of Spartan 11.”

Sheva perked up right away since very few men and women ever referenced the official call signs of the Royal Family and even fewer outside of the Durcunusaan and the military knew them. “Source?” She asked.

“Unknown Major. It’s being bounced through several different locations in The Wilds and using a very tight sub space transmission beam.” The woman answered. “I *can* tell you that it is not originating from within The Wilds though.”

“There are very few who have direct access to the Royal family’s private COM channels. Even fewer who have the King or Androcles’s private ones.” Sheva said.

The woman nodded. “I know.”

Sheva nodded to her as she picked up the extra ear receiver from the console. “Accept the transmission. Let’s find out what we can.”

The woman nodded and adjusted her controls. “Channel is open.”

“This is Major Juconi of the *Durcunusaan*.” Sheva spoke. “I don’t know how you got this COM channel but I will warn you we are tracing the transmission. State your identification and business immediately.”

“You will not be able to trace the transmission Major.” The woman’s voice answered calmly. “However... I am not a threat. I was given this COM channel by Androcles himself and I would like to confer with him please. It is rather important.”

“Who is this?” Sheva demanded next. “The Crown Prince does not just give out his private COM channel to anyone!”

“I would think not.” The woman answered. “My name is Yuri... and I’m quite sure I need not elaborate anymore than that with a member of the *Durcunusaan*.”

Sheva’s eyes were wide in shock. “No... you do not!” She snarled.

“Androcles gave me this COM channel to use if I needed to.” Yuri spoke. “If you were one of those present on his ship when we met several months ago you would know this. I need to speak with him now.”

“I was there!” Sheva snapped again. “Why do you need to speak with him? For what purpose?”

“I would prefer that remain between him and I.” Yuri answered. “Suffice to say, it is rather important.”

Many things flashed through Sheva’s mind, but her *Durcunusaan* training took over almost instinctively. “Route this to the secure COM disc in the conference room!” She told the woman. “Full *Durcunusaan* Security Protocols. Androcles just entered the Wing with Jomann. I will direct him there.”

The woman nodded. “Understood.”

Sheva turned quickly and headed out of the COM Center.

“...is unexpected.” Andro spoke as he looked at the full image of Yuri within the holo transmission.

“I assumed you gave me your private COM channel for a reason Androcles.” Yuri spoke as she moved around in front of the desk in the room where she was. “So that we could speak directly if it was needed?”

“So I did.” Androcles answered as he gazed at her. Her face was even more relaxed than when he saw her on his ship, and it was completely void of the darkness that had been there that day on Earth when he had torn open her throat. She looked extremely fit and even healthier than when he had seen her on his ship. “I assume then, that in order for you to contact me you need something.”

Yuri shook her head and smiled in the transmission and Andro noticed it made her even more beautiful. “You know where we are Androcles. You know what Pa’cour and I have been doing. As well as those who now follow us. It is not something that we expected, but it seems Pa’cour is like his brother, and he inspires others to his cause.”

Andro nodded. “No doubt... but do not discount yourself Yuri.”

Yuri looked at him in the transmission. “Me?” She said. “I know we would not be here if you did not approve.”

Andro glanced at where Jomann stood to the side and Dorian stood beside Sheva slightly to his left. He looked back to Yuri and smiled as well. “Xaxon did not control your actions and thoughts all of your life Yuri. You accomplished many things without his foul influence that do you credit.”

Yuri rolled her eyes. “Conquering and enslaving others.” She said. “Not exactly the type of history I would like on my resume.”

“Not what you did Yuri.” Andro said. “How you did it. No matter your intent or your methods you got things done. That has to be taken into account. And I do approve of what you are doing now.” He told her. “You can do far more good behind the scenes in support of Narice than I can publicly. You can do the things that Narice cannot.”

“You... you speak with far more wisdom and knowledge than someone your age is known to have Androcles. Much like your father did back then.” Yuri said.

Andro shrugged. “You now know why that is.”

“I do now... yes.” Yuri answered.

“And contrary to what you may think, I have not been watching you.” Androcles said.

Yuri tilted her head to the side. “And why is that?” She asked.

“Because I have faith. Faith that the woman I saw on my ship scratching and clawing and fighting to regain her life and live it the way she wants has fully taken hold.” Andro told her. “She has been... reborn... for lack of a better word at the moment.”

Yuri stepped closer to the transmission. “You... you took a huge risk Androcles.” She said softly. “Believing in me as you did. It is not something others would have done. It is not something your father would have done.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “Perhaps I saw something others did not.” He said. “And I am...”

“Yes... I know.” Yuri interrupted him. “You are not your father.” Her eyes shifted for a moment and then returned to him. “How is Carisia? Lucia? Are they...?”

“They are happy.” Andro answered simply. “To say more is not my place.”

Yuri nodded her head. “Good.” She said. “They deserve... they deserve the happiness I denied them. Thank you for that.”

“There is no need to thank me. I have come to learn that destiny will find a way no matter how much we deny or run from it. I do not mean to be impatient or rude Yuri...” Andro said. “However I am very busy. Why have you contacted me?”

Yuri took a deep breath and nodded her head. “I have two requests.” She asked looking at him. “They are important to me and to Pa'cour.”

“I'm listening.” Andro said.

Yuri looked at him. “I'm quite sure you are aware of what your sister Eliani gave to Nalavi. Information from your mother Anja?” She said. “What she undoubtedly detected within me when we last saw each other?”

“Yes.” Andro said. “She has grown.”

Yuri looked at him oddly for a moment and then her dark brown eyes grew a little wider. “You can feel her can't you?” She gasped aloud. “You can sense her resonance within the Etheric realm can't you?”

Andro looked at Jomann and Dorian again and then back to Yuri. “Since the day she arrived.” He said. “All of us can if we concentrate.”

Yuri's eyes grew wider. “Your father?”

Andro shook his head quickly. “He is too far away at the moment. We can feel her. Shiria can feel her because she is a Pralor and she has naturally the skills most of us must cultivate and learn. Dormant the gene may be within her, but she is a bright point within that level of the Etheric realm. Just as you are. Just as my mother and Sadi and others are within that realm.”

“There... there is more than one realm then?” Yuri questioned.

“Let's just say that my father and I. My brothers and others are on a level above the one where Sadi, my mother and you and others reside. And now your daughter it seems.” Andro told her. “We are still coming to realize the many differences, but it is there.”

“Then what I... what I believe is true?” Yuri questioned. “That is why my mother...”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes. With excruciating detail and work my grandmother Gorgo and Shiria have been able to confirm the existence of at least two hundred Pralors on City Ship 19 who had the Praetorian gene. Possibly many more... but the records are very spotty after so long a time and the logs on *SPARTA'S WRATH* from that time are not fully complete.”

“The Praetorian gene. That is what you call it? Yuri asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“Then my father *was* a carrier.” Yuri said softly.

Andro nodded. "That is what Shiria believes. It would be the only real explanation to be honest. He passed the gene to you and..."

"Your mother Isabella." Yuri gasped. "That is why your brother..."

"Yes." Andro said.

Yuri looked at him. "Androcles... it is... it is manifesting itself within Onera. In the same manner that it has manifested itself within your mother Aricia and within Sadi. She is showing signs of being able to do the similar things. Nothing close to what you or your father and brothers can do, but after seeing what your Sadi did in the lounge on that base, it is very easily like that."

"Interesting... her name is Onera?" Andro said. "That is not a vampire name."

"It's an Akruxian Immortal name." Sheva spoke up now and they all turned to look at her. "From the ancient times. Before the High Coven." Sheva saw Dorian smile at her very impressed and she failed at hiding her smile back to him.

"Do I know you?" Yuri asked Sheva.

"No!" Sheva responded instantly turning back to Yuri.

"Well... your *Durcumusaan* officer is correct." Yuri said proudly. "It is the given name of Pa'cour's grandmother. Many of the Akruxian Immortals are reverting back to the old ways of their people. It is fitting I think."

"What is it you are asking Yuri?" Andro spoke.

"I need... Pa'cour and I... she will hurt herself or someone else if she does not learn to control these skills that are coming forth." Yuri told him. "Pa'cour and I cannot do it. We have already taught her all we can. I wish... you owe me nothing Androcles and I owe you my very existence I know this... but I would ask that you allow Onera to come to you and..."

"Yes." Andro told her without a moment's hesitation.

Yuri looked at him with wide eyes within the transmission and Andro could see the relief written all over her face at his answer. She gazed at him intently. "Just like that?" She asked finally.

"I have already showed my faith in you Yuri." Andro answered. "You have come even further since I saw you on my ship. I can sense no lingering resonance of Xaxon anywhere on you or within you. That tells me that your actions now come from here." Andro pointed at his heart.

Andro watched as she turned to the side and pulled the young woman into the holo transmission. Andro rose from where he was sitting on the edge of the table when he saw her. "This is... this is Onera Androcles. Pa'cour's daughter. My daughter. Our daughter."

Andro had to admit that she was a stunning young woman. She bore the genes of her father in the bone spurs that lined her jaw though they were much less pronounced, but she had her mother's exotic beauty as well. Andro nodded to her. "Onera." Andro spoke. "A pleasure to meet you."

"Thank... thank you." Onera said.

"Your Blessed Husband is in agreement with you Yuri?" Andro asked.

Yuri nodded quickly taking note that he referred to Pa'cour in such a manner and that it pleased her to no end to hear that. "It was... it was his idea actually." She answered. "He is... he is less attuned to the Etheric realm than his brother Cha'talla it seems... but he knows this and he is getting better. After what... after what you gave to him Androcles... he holds you in very high regard. It was... somehow he knew you would not refuse him. It seems I learn more and more of my Blessed Husband every moment. And it makes me love him with that much more fervor."

"I could and do say the same thing Yuri. After his actions towards the bodies of my grandparents, I could do nothing but accept. And Cha'talla is the only living Immortal Bonded to a dragon so that makes him an exception to the rule." Andro told her. "That may not be the case going into the future though. One never knows."

"Androcles... does Narice know that...?" Yuri began.

Andro shook her head. "You will reveal yourself to Narice when the time is right Yuri. She only knows that you and Pa'cour are alive and husband and wife. Not where. And it is not my place to tell her what you are doing to assist her behind the scenes. When the time is right you can tell her yourself."

Yuri nodded her head. "Is the gene active within her?" She asked.

Andro shook his head again. "She does not have it." He said. "It is very rare as you no doubt have already determined. Carisia does not have it, but as with Onera, it is actively dormant within Lucia. That is why she can manifest her Etheric whips."

Yuri looked at him, her face becoming slightly tense with anger. "And Dante?" She hissed.

Andro nodded his head. "More than likely actively dormant, though I can only reason that Xaxon will try to change that as time passes. That is my guess anyway." He stated knowing what her question was without elaborating. "It is probably one of the reasons that his essence jumped to him so quickly."

Yuri's dark eyes narrowed. "I will send with Onera everything we have on him and that back stabbing *vithin* bastard ex-husband of mine Androcles. If you find him... find them... make sure you finish it."

Andro nodded his head. "I intend to." He said. "You said you have two requests?"

Yuri's eyes returned to a relaxed posture and she gazed at him. "Androcles... I need to speak with your father. I need to meet with him."

Andro's brow furrowed and he became instantly alert. "My father?" He said. "For what purpose?"

"It is better if you do not know." Yuri told him. "It is something that I can talk only with him about."

"Yuri... he is not even within this quadrant. You know that or you would not be asking me." Andro said.

Yuri nodded. "I also know that you speak with him nearly every day." Yuri spoke. "You may not be your father Androcles; however the connection between the two of you is quite undeniable. You would not remain out of touch with each other for more than a few days unless the situation demanded it. Given the level of technology that you have gained from City Ship 41 I know you would remain within constant communication with him. If only to keep each other updated. I also know that you have several Pralor ships within your inventory now, given the data that was obtained from that warship you took from Kavalian space. You have the means to go back and forth to where he is in a matter of days and hours... not years."

Andro looked at her. "You are very well informed Yuri." He said.

Yuri nodded her head. "You forget Androcles... I may hate my mother for what she did to me... but I still have all of her files. She knew about City ship 41 before your father ever removed it from Lycavore. Though I doubt she knew about the Avatar. She also knew, at least in part, what was on that ship you took from Kavalian space."

"From her connection with Xaxon?" Andro asked.

Yuri nodded her head. "Yes probably. At least as much as he knew. I would not ask this if it was not very important Androcles." She said. "I can only assume that wherever your father went, it was in search of something related to that ship you found or something similar in nature based on the fact that this Shiria is a Pralor. If it was not, he would have returned by now and quickly proceeded to take out his anger on the Kavalian High Command for what they did to your mother. I do know a little about how your father thinks Androcles."

"So it seems." Andro said. "You are not exactly his favorite person Yuri. You must know that."

Yuri nodded. "Believe me... I am very well aware of that fact." She said. "This does not concern you Androcles..." She lied. "If it did I would tell you. This is something that... it is something that concerns your father from before you were ever born. Something I found in my mother's files."

"Yet you cannot tell me?" Androcles said.

Yuri shook her head. "I will only tell your father and it needs to come from me. It could well concern the future of the Union and the High Coven. As well as the past." She looked at him. "You know what I have embraced Androcles. You know I do not make this request lightly. For all my skills and bravado... your father could squash me like an insect. Believe me... I would rather not have to face him. Even by holotransmission. In this circumstance... in this case I must."

"I will speak with him... but I cannot say what his reaction will be." Andro said.

Yuri chuckled softly which surprised Andro to a small extent. "He will probably say... I will not speak to that vile, vampire bitch no matter what she has to say." She said almost trying to mimic Martin. "Or something along those lines I'm sure."

Andro nodded. "To be honest... that is probably exactly what he will say." Andro told her.

Yuri nodded. "In that case tell him Revan143." Yuri said.

Andro's eyebrows rose. "Revan143?"

Yuri nodded. “A code word from the time I was on Eden Station. He will know what it means. Try your best to convince him Androcles.”

“I make no promises.” Andro told her. “I am departing Earth in two days. I will send you rendezvous coordinates on this COM channel in a few hours. Pack lightly Onera... whatever you need we can provide to you.”

“I understand.” Onera spoke.

“You realize that I am going to the Beta Quadrant.” Andro told Yuri. “You wish your daughter to be that far away?”

“Do I have your word that she will be safe Androcles Leonidas?” Yuri asked. “Do I have your promise she will be protected?”

Andro nodded. “You do.” He said.

Yuri nodded. “Then I do not fear for my daughter or what she will learn. It will only improve who she already is. A young woman her father and I are so very proud of.”

“Very well.” Andro said. “I will contact you in a few hours with coordinates. Have someone monitor this channel during that time period.”

Yuri nodded. “Thank you Androcles.”

Andro chuckled now. “Don’t thank me Yuri.” He told her. “I do not know what my father will do.”

“No. Thank you for having faith and believing in it.” Yuri said.

Andro nodded. “I will get back to you in two hours.” He stated as he reached out and ended the transmission. He turned quickly and looked at Jomann, Dorian and Sheva. “Thoughts on this?”

“We may not be able to smell her *fervon*, but I didn’t detect any sort of lie or attempt to mislead us.” Dorian spoke first.

“Nor did I.” Jomann spoke leaning up against the table. “And we can feel her daughter just as you said. She’s unfocused and wild.”

Andro chuckled. “And we aren’t?” He said.

Jomann grinned. “But we at least can harness it.” He said. “Without training she very well could hurt someone or herself. Yuri is right in that regard.”

Andro looked at Sheva. “Sheva? Your thoughts?”

Sheva met his gaze surprised but her soft green eyes quickly recovered. “I do not have much experience or interaction with her Androcles.” She said thoughtfully.

“No... but you are a pureblood like her in a manner of speaking.” Andro said. “Your insight is welcome.”

“She sounds sincere in her words, but actions speak louder than words.” Sheva said looking at him.

Andro nodded. “Indeed they do.” He said. He looked at Dorian. “You need to spend more time with her *fervon*. You might learn something.”

Dorian smiled now. “I have learned from her.” He stated looking at Sheva with heated desire. “Quite a bit.”

Sheva slapped his arm while looking embarrassed. “Pig!” She hissed playfully. It was totally out of character for her, but Dorian’s good natured influence and youthful exuberance had indeed rubbed off on her. She was much more comfortable with herself and around others. Most especially Andro and Dorian’s other siblings. They would not expect her to hold back among them for they did not when she was around them. Sheva was rapidly beginning to enjoy her time spent with Dorian and his siblings. For lack of a better term... they were so normal. It was something Sheva had longed for deep inside her mind but something she had never experienced before. She had no intention of letting it go now.

Andro chuckled and looked at Jomann. “She may not be lying but she is also holding something back. Something she does not want to tell me. Something that is important enough for her to risk my father’s wrath.”

“Are you going to tell father?” Dorian asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. We have too much on our plate right now to be concerned with this at the moment. Father will do what he will. You said Ridor checked in?”

Jomann nodded. “General Vistr was not aware of his status and needless to say he was very surprised. Andro... he has taken one of the young Kavalian females they rescued as his mate. He refuses to go anywhere without her.”

Andro nodded his head. “As well he should. General Vistr made sure he was born and raised here in Sparta. That is something ingrained in all of us.” He said. “*SPARTA'S WRATH* will be carrying other wives and mates and some children. Finalize the transfer orders and make arrangements for them. He can meet us as we transit to Dreamland.”

Jomann nodded. “That’s everyone then.” He said. “The entire team. All twelve of us. Not including Sadi, Ne'Veha, Kameka and Normya as our flight crews. I thought Normya was going to be assigned to Resumar?”

Andro shook his head. “With Arrarn in the High Coven helping Narice we have more need of her flying skills to support Sadi and Ne'Veha and fly our *STRIKER*. She will have the main seat of the *STRIKER* with Sadi or Ne'Veha backing her up. As for this new ship they are plotting with Ben about, that is strictly Sadi, Ne'Veha and Kameka. They won't tell me squat about it until we see it. Kameka is the definite third working the Engineer's console. According to *KertaGai*, she is a whiz at calculations and only one of them is actually needed to fly this new ship once it is complete.”

“Tir'ut and Cowen'Shan should supervise the heavy weapons role Androcles.” Sheva spoke up quickly. “They are best suited for it given their size and strength. And Cowen'Shan has extensive knowledge in Heavy Weapons.”

Andro nodded. “Agreed.” He said. “We are going to be an odd group you know.”

“As if we aren't already odd *fervon*.” Dorian chimed in.

Andro laughed. “Well... there is that to consider.” He said. “Very well... let's finish up the details and use these last two days to set our affairs right. I do not know when we will be returning. Knowing our father... it could be quite a while.”

Dorian chuckled. “I think grandmother and *Tenna Deia* are already preparing for that.” He said.

“Then we should too.” Jomann spoke

PRALOR DESIGNATED WORLD MANNE

It was a fertile world filled with mountains and oceans and forests spread across five continents. Extensive scans from the *ARC ROYAL* and several *KADEN* Transports that had gone in close revealed nothing but natural lifeforms. Animals of a wide assortment, the oceans full of life, and some of the animals massive in size. What the scans revealed was that there were no abnormal lifeform readings and the planet was clear of Svorag. They decided on the Western Continent since it provided the most open space and mountains for the adolescent dragons to hunt and learn. Even before Martin and the others returned they had established a Base Camp on the surface. A dozen portable buildings had been set up, though most of the crew chose to use portable tent cocoons to sleep. The atmosphere was nearly identical to Apo Prime and the weather was very temperate. A natural wall of towering trees and the side of a mountain were able to provide excellent defense from many of the larger indigenous animals on the planet and sonic emitters had been set up all around the perimeter to assist in that. Akemi had set up a rotating schedule for the crew to get down to the surface since Martin had told her they would be here at least a week or two. She thought that odd, for she knew the Kavalians were still trailing them, but she didn't question Martin's orders.

Murano had only come down to the surface last night, but he had a portable shelter already assigned to him he discovered. He had slept last night unlike any night in the previous thirty thousand plus years. At peace and calm. As he stepped from the shelter he let his eyes gaze around the massive camp. He could see dragons flying in the distance, easily spotting the enormous size of Martin's obsidian colored Bonded Brother and the flame red scales of who he now knew was the Dragon Elder Mother. They were flying among the many adolescents he saw swooping low over the trees probably instructing them. It was still early and he saw quite a few of the crew up and moving around already. He had to admit to himself... these men and women who followed Martin and his Queens were highly motivated and driven. The majority of them were Lycavorian, but even the many elves and Algolians he saw, as well as the Kavalians, all of them were driven and had purpose.

“Impressive isn’t it?” The voice said. Murano turned and saw Wayonn walk up beside him, Mari in tow with two mugs of steaming tea in her hands. Wayonn smiled. “I found her fidgeting in the Mess area. I figured I would drag her along with me.”

Mari chuckled as she held out the mug to her uncle with glittering blue eyes. “There was not much to do so early.” She said.

Murano chuckled and took the mug from her, leaning over to kiss her cheek. He sensed her Etheric shields were very high for some reason but he did not pry. He looked at Wayonn as he sipped his tea.

“They are... they are exceedingly well organized.” Murano stated as his eyes swept the camp again.

Wayonn nodded. “That they are.”

Murano looked back to him. “Is their entire military like this?” He asked.

Wayonn nodded. “Without question.” He said. “I saw only a small portion of it before we departed to come out here, but the training and dedication that was instilled in the Spartans commanded by Martin’s father so long ago on Earth has since bled into the very society and culture of the Lycavorian people as a whole. Even many of the other species. His father’s sacrifice so many millennia ago was the catalyst that drove them all together and become like one mind in their actions.”

“Yet they are not a militaristic society.” Mari spoke.

“Not at all.” Wayonn said. “I had the chance to speak in-depth with Martin’s mother before we left Earth and she described it in such a way that was so very easy to see if one looks very closely. She said no Spartan has ever started a war but *anse* if they haven’t finished more than their share. Each and every one of them trains and fights in the hope that their children do not have to fight. That is the purpose and drive behind all of them now. They train hard and they train brutally in some ways, but that training is why they have never lost a war. They are simply better at making war than most other people. That is what affords them the peace and freedom they have. Gorgo said she had met to meet a wolf who would rather fight than cuddle and nuzzle his wife and children.”

Mari giggled. “That is why so many of them are built like gods.” She said.

Murano looked at her with wide eyes. “Mari!” He gasped.

Mari looked at him with a brilliant smile. “What? There are many handsome men around Uncle. And I am single.”

“You will... I will meet any suitors that come forth in your father’s stead!” Murano hissed.

Mari chuckled again and leaned into her uncle. “Don’t worry Uncle... I have seen none among them that draw my interest.”

“Good.” Murano snapped softly.

Wayonn smiled. “How are you feeling old friend?”

Murano drew Mari close to him with one arm. “Like I have been reborn Wayonn.” He said honestly. “Not since Sumar have I felt such power in a Praetorian. It is almost as if he... as if he...”

“He lives within Martin?” Wayonn said.

Murano nodded. “Yes.”

Wayonn nodded in agreement. “It is no different than what I felt when I first met him. The power within him is uncharted... as it is within his son Androcles. I have not spent much time with Denali or Dorian, but I would imagine it is there too. Sumar’s blood runs deep within all of them.”

“He is not still sleeping is he?” Murano asked.

Wayonn laughed. “Martin? Not a chance. He is conferring with Daniel and others. They’ve been at it for over an hour now.”

“Conferring about what Wayonn?” Mari asked.

Wayonn took a deep breath. “We must understand... these men and women who carry the Praetorian gene are not Pralors. They are not like we were back then. In many ways... after living as a Lycavorian for so long... in many ways they are better than we were. They harness their emotion, for it is their greatest asset.”

“What are you saying Wayonn?” Murano asked.

“They also follow a code of honor my friend.” Wayonn said. “A code that has existed since the birth of the first Spartan.”

“I’m not following.” Murano said.

“You know that Martin’s brother follows us with his forces?” Wayonn said.

Murano nodded. "Yes. He commands many similar to Muton and those with him."

"They are not Muton." Wayonn said. "Muton and his people carry the blood of Pralors in them. Those Martin's brother commands are neither friendly or peaceful." Wayonn sighed deeply. "Pleistarchus... his brother violated one of the most sacred laws to Lycavorians. He raped For'mya while she was still wife and mate to Martin. In many cases, rape is considered even more vile than murder within Lycavorian society. For'mya is Martin's wife and mate, and their love, as well as the love he has for all his Queens, is legendary. Pleistarchus violated this law willingly. That cannot be allowed to stand."

"What do you mean Wayonn?" Mari asked.

"Martin will follow the instincts within him. He will not deny them and he will act on them." Wayonn said. "It... he must act on them. That is our way."

"Wayonn... you are a Pralor." Murano said.

Wayonn shook his head. "I have been turned for more years than I was a Pralor my friend." He answered. "I am more Lycavorian now than Pralor."

"What are you trying to say?" Murano asked.

Wayonn looked at him. "It's very simple really. Martin is going to use the Science facility they discovered on the way back here to lure his brother and those forces with him."

"And then?" Mari asked softly.

Wayonn looked at her. "Then he is going to obliterate them for what they did."

"And there is nothing we can do or say to change his mind?" Murano asked.

Wayonn shook his head. "Murano my friend... I have no intention of trying to change his mind. Justice must be done."

"And his other wives and mates support this?" Mari asked.

"Mari child, Martin's wives and mates speak with one voice. They think with one mind in many cases. They would expect this." Wayonn said. "I dare say that the only thing that has held Martin back from acting already is to insure they were in agreement. They worship him child... and he would do nothing against their wishes for he adores all of them. Aricia, Isabella and Anja are the more militant if you will, but Dysea, For'mya and Cirith balance that. They are all in agreement on this."

"Is that why he has sent for his sons?" Murano asked.

Wayonn laughed softly. "Ah! You have only spoken to Androcles on the COM Murano my friend, but had you already met him you would not ask that question. He is a duplicate of his father in nearly every way. Had Andro already been here, Martin's brother would be long dead and those who followed him nothing but a memory. No... he has sent for Andro and the others for something else. Some reason even I do not know. He and his son can see and feel things Murano. Much like Sumar could. Martin has sensed something and that is why he has sent for Androcles and the others. He knows we can not face it alone."

"Do you know what it is Wayonn?" Mari asked.

Wayonn shook his head. "No." He answered. "But I think it may be time for us to find out."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

PRALOR DESIGNATED WORLD MANNE

Martin held the mug of coffee in his hands while his dark brown eyes scanned the very detailed holographic depiction that they had made of the deserted Pralor base on the chart table. Julie Collins was leaning over the table, her eyes focused on one portion of the station as she slowly turned the image in several directions, while Daniel and T'lolt stood on either side of Tony just behind her as they softly discussed approaches to the base. Pablo and Kenny leaned against the far wall holding large glasses of orange colored juice. Cody and Colin Walsh were next to them going over something on the data pad Colin held in his hand.

Kalis took all this in with a sense of utter awe. He now knew these men and women to be his uncle's personal team. Men and women who had fought with him since the very beginning of him discovering his past

and his future. While the woman Julie and the man Colin used to be wolves like them, they had died at some point and High Coven experiments had brought them back to life as vampires using DNA and clones. They had regained the memories of the former lives they had lived and while they were now vampires, they were still an integral part of his Uncle's team. The Immortal appeared to have been accepted completely into their small group and they discussed tactics and many other things among each other that they would not discuss with others. They acted casually with each other, the vulgar barbs and comments almost always intended and succeeding in bringing forth laughter. Yet they were also the most dangerous and diverse group of men and women that Kalis had ever seen in his life. Even the few senior Puma Bane teams under his grandfather Keleru's direct command did not compare in any way to these men and women.

Kalis glanced at his uncle's face as he stood beside him silently, a mug of coffee in his hand as well. Kalis had not been much of a coffee drinker before joining his uncle, yet the rich, smooth flavor of his *Tenna Aricia's* blend of coffee almost seemed to energize him in many ways as it did so many of their people and he loved it.

Kalis knew from assorted Intelligence reports submitted by the few Kavalians who had actually fought against Martin Leonidas and lived that his Uncle was a masterful tactician and a man who was exceptionally accomplished in lethal ambushes and the art of warfare. Many of the Kavalian military leaders hated his Uncle, yet they also held a grudging respect for him and his unique ability to deal out death and destruction on a colossal scale should it be needed. Kalis also knew that many of them secretly feared his Uncle immensely even though they would not dare speak of this openly. Looking at the situation he found himself in now, knowing what he did about Pian and those that followed him, Kalis believed these were just the men who were loyal to his father and grandfather. He now believed that many more Kavalian leaders had no desire to meet his uncle on the field of battle.

Kalis was quickly becoming accustomed and skilled at using the new Etheric Mindvoice abilities that he had discovered buried within his blood and he felt his uncle throw up incredibly powerful shields but not look at him as he initiated the conversation.

[You don't have to be here Mandri.] His uncle's voice filled his head as clear as if he was speaking out loud.

Kalis didn't flinch at this anymore, amazed at how quickly he had been able to pick it up, and he turned back to look at the chart table. *[Yes, I do Tenne.]* He answered softly even though no words were spoken. He and Serale were practicing as much as possible at learning the old language and they knew it only helped to use it as often as they could. *[All I have accomplished, everything you and Andro and my Aunts have opened my eyes too these last weeks, it will mean nothing if he is not ended once and for all. If his hate and foul presence is not removed from this life permanently.]*

[That doesn't mean you have to take part in it.] Martin told him.

[It will be the only thing that will... that will cleanse my soul Tenne.] Kalis told him in a soft voice. *[And allow me to begin the life I want to have. Does that make sense Tenne?]*

[More than you know.] Martin told him.

[I will... I will always bear some shame for what he did to Tenna For'mya no matter that she does not see it that way. The only way to rid myself of that is to see that he pays for what he did. In some way... in some way his death will purge me of all the vile things I have ever done to innocents... just as Tenna For'mya suffered at his hand.] Kalis said.

[Never put yourself in the same category as him Mandri.] Martin told him firmly. *[You acted in such a way because he failed to do what it was his duty as a father to do. To show you the correct path and the path of honor. He lost that a long time ago. He bears the blame... not you. You have found that now... and what is most important is that when you discovered it, you grasped onto it tightly.]* Martin smiled at him and nudged him with his elbow gently. *[You look worn out Kalis my boy. I assume you spent the night claiming Serale?]*

Kalis smiled and felt the warmth course through him. *[I made her mine Tenne. I made her see that there was nothing else in this universe that I wanted more than her love. I can not... I cannot describe it Tenne. Her scent, her skin, the color of her eyes, even her hair... I just want to...]*

[Wrap yourself around her and bask in what she makes you feel? To lose yourself in her scent?] Martin said.

Kalis looked at him. *[Is this... is this what you feel for my aunts Tenne? What Andro feels for Sadi and his other mates? To just lose yourself within their scent and their arms and hear them whisper love into your ears. To feel their body against yours? I can still feel the beating of her heart against my chest even though she is not here? Is this... is this what it means to love a woman?]*

Martin nodded. *[Feels pretty good doesn't it?]*

[It cannot be described.] Kalis said. *[She swirls all around me.]*

[You bit her?] Martin asked.

[I could not... it wasn't deep Tenne. I could not help myself. She wanted me too.] Kalis answered.

Marti nodded his head. *[Then that is why your aunts were up early. They wouldn't tell me, but now it makes sense. They will see to Serale. Help her to adjust quickly. You and Serale are now family and they will help her to adjust quickly as a new wolf.]*

[Did I do something wrong?] Kalis asked.

[You followed your instincts... and I truly believe that is what Serale wanted.] Martin spoke. *[That young woman worships you Mandri. It oozes from her pores and you can see it in her eyes. She won't be fully like us, but she will be able to shift and take on some of our traits. Your traits. Our blood... Leonidas blood... it is potent Mandri. The most potent of our kind according to Anja and many other medical scholars. Though you are half Kavalian, your wolf blood will always be dominant. Your aunts will teach her and help her to adjust. Then the two of you can learn together as you explore.]*

[Tenne... you have been with my aunts for so long...] Kalis asked timidly.

Martin nodded his head as he sipped his coffee. *[Over twenty years now. Best damn years of my life too. Every single one. And there are many more to come.]*

[You never... I have heard whispers among the crew... all of you act as if you have just discovered each other. It never... it never gets old does it? I do not want this to end and...] Kalis said.

[Kalis... each and every time I have any of them in my arms it is brand new.] Martin told him. *[Part of it is our culture and our blood... we crave the touch of those we call mate and that we love... but each of them is part of me inside. In my heart... in my mind. When you love her Kalis hold nothing back. Give her all that you are. Love her like it is the very first time all the time. Touch. Taste. Nuzzle. Do that Kalis and the desire and passion will never wane. It will always simmer and burn within you both. They are the bearers of our future my boy. Without them we are nothing. Never forget that.]*

[I won't Tenne.] Kalis said softly.

[And to answer your question... no.] Martin told him. *[Each of them holds a part of my soul Kalis. Aricia is my Anome yes... the one I will always reach for first... but all of them... I am not complete without each of them. Each of them is a part of me. They are my strength.]*

[The crew speaks in whispers of who you favor most after Tenna Aricia.] Kalis said with a smile.

Martin chuckled softly. *[That has been going on for many years now. Drives people malda. Don't know why.]*

[You do not favor one or the other do you Tenne?] Kalis said. *[If they are all part of you as you say... how could you?]*

Martin looked at him and let his eyes smile for him. *[That statement tells me just how far you have come in so short a time Mandri. That makes me very proud of you.]* He said. *[And you are correct. In the heat of passion, I will admit to you what everyone is so damn interested about. The only other people I have ever told this are Andro and Danny. In the heat of desire and passion your Tenna Anja's scent calls to me the strongest after Aricia, especially when she is in phase. I believe it is because I discovered her long before I ever found out who and what I truly was and I burned her scent into my brain without even understanding why. And she just smelled really good.]* Martin grinned at that. *[However... each of their scents are like drugs to me now. How each of them tastes, how their skin feels, these are things I could not live without now. Not after so long together. Remember it will always be that way. Love her like it is the first time Kalis. Hold nothing back as I said and always honor her... do that... do that and the desire and passion will never die.]*

Kalis looked at the table once more. *[After discovering what I have in these last weeks Tenne, I don't think that will ever be an issue going forward.]*

[Good.] Martin said. *[Many a pleasurable night will be had in the arms of your mate and it will always leave you craving more.]*

Kalis looked at him. *[Tenne... will Andro... what I did...?]*

Martin shook his head. *[There is nothing you need concern yourself when it comes to Andro Mandri.]* He said. *[My son and I share a special gift... because of this damn unique gene we carry. He knows what has happened with you and believe me Kalis he approves. As does Sadi. When you see them... well... you will know what I mean. He is saving a place for you on his team.]*

[His team?] Kalis asked. *[You mean like Uncle Daniel and the others are to you?]*

Martin nodded. *[I told him it was high time he formed his own team. And believe me when I tell you... Andro is who you want to be around. As he does with your brother Karun, he considers you a brother. Probably because he has more sisters and they drive him crazy.]* Martin chuckled.

[And Fedor and Eirene?] Kalis asked.

[They are still young emotionally though they are fully grown.] Martin replied. *[Both of them are gifted and they will come to see the man you have become. Give them time and always look out for them.]*

Kalis nodded his head. *[That is something I have not always done with my siblings.]* He said. *[I intend to make sure that never happens again.]*

[It is a new world Kalis.] Martin told him. *[Embrace it. Enjoy it. The rest will come in time.]*

Kalis nodded his head. *[But first... first I intend to help you destroy the last piece of my past that so shames me.]* He said firmly. *[The stain upon the honor you have showed me.]*

Martin nodded slowly at him and turned his eyes to look up finally. “Kenny?” He asked.

Kalis turned and watched the man push off from the table behind Daniel. “I’ll have to confirm the dimensions with For’mya and Endith Skipper, but I am seeing only one place they could set down their transports within ten clicks of this place.” Kenny spoke as he moved up to the table. He reached out and adjusted a portion of the map they were looking at. “It’s the same clearing we landed in. Three clicks northeast of the station. You’re sure about their numbers Kalis?”

Kalis nodded his head. “Yes... a full ship board complement and Combat Unit of Puma Bane. Two hundred and fifty.”

“That means at least five... probably more like seven or eight transports.” Kenny said. “Given the size of Kavalian Troop Carriers... this is it Skipper.”

“And you’re sure he will bring them all Kalis?” Daniel asked.

Kalis nodded again. “Without question Uncle Daniel. And whoever else he may be able to draft into service that can hold a weapon. He will have learned from Enurrua. Even if he uses them as meat for the grinder, he will not care. He may split the Puma Bane unit somewhat... but the majority will remain under his direct control. The reasons we are giving him will make it so he has no choice.”

Julie pointed to the map. “The fastest and clearest path is the most obvious.” She spoke now tracing her index finger along the map. “Right down this lightly forested ridge, directly to the east side of the station. The same one we took.”

“Which is right where he will send his fodder.” Martin spoke. “The most obvious and exposed route to the station.”

T'lolt hissed. “Coward.”

Julie nodded her head in agreement and looked up at Martin. “There are two other routes Skipper, but the terrain isn’t as agreeable. Down along this riverbed, lots of rocks and marshy land, and then around this ridge here...” She traced her finger. “That would require a lot of climbing and some serious leg work but...”

Martin nodded his head. “It would also drop them right over the top of the entrance to the facility.” He spoke moving his hand and indicating with his finger where that path came out. He turned his head when the door to the portable building opened and Wayonn led Murano and Mari into the structure. He said nothing and moved around the table to stand between Daniel and Julie. “They’ll scan the planet once they are in range... and they’ll determine the same things we are seeing. He isn’t stupid.”

“But he ain’t half as mean and nasty as you Boss.” Pablo broke in from where he leaned against the wall.

Martin looked at Danny and grinned. “Me?” Martin said. “I hate violence.”

Julie snorted in disgust and shook her head as the others chuckled. “As if anyone with half a brain will ever believe that.”

Danny met Martin’s eyes and grinned now. “Honduras?” He asked.

Martin nodded. "Honduras." He said.

T'lolt looked between the two men as he saw Julie and the others smile in a predatory manner. "More information would be nice for those of us who are uninformed." He spoke finally with a grin. "What is this Honduras?"

Tony looked at him. "An Op we did a long time ago T'lolt." He spoke. "Little piss ant of a country back on Earth. A drug warlord thought he was the finest thing to hit the pages of Mercenary Magazine. Had this single battalion of butchers he called his Hunters. About nine hundred strong. Bunch of cutthroats and murderers is what they were. Gathered them from all over the world. He killed upwards of five thousand innocent civilians before someone had the balls to send us in."

"Ah... you ended him then?" T'lolt asked.

Tony nodded. "With extreme prejudice."

Julie looked at Martin. "We had a full team back them Marty." She said.

Martin nodded his head. "I know. Kalis has talked to Mata and General Koguth and both have already volunteered to go with us. Along with a dozen of his most experienced men. All of them with a grudge against Puma Bane troops and all of them seasoned fighters."

Julie turned back to the holimage and nodded. "Ok... we've seen what they can do. That will even the odds." She said.

Wayonn remained silent as he listened for he had seen Martin and his team in action on more than one occasion. Murano had only seen them in action against the Svorag, but Wayonn had witnessed firsthand what they had done to the Kavalian base on the planet where they had rescued Iama. He had seen them plotting the operation and planning every detail. Murano however stepped forward not believing they were actually going to fight a superior force such as it was.

"Martin... this is crazy." He said "You will be outnumbered four or five to one!"

Pablo chuckled again from the wall. "Hell... the odds will be in our favor." He said.

"Your favor?" Murano gasped.

Martin moved closer to the table and motioned to the map. "He'll send the troops he has no use for straight up the gut thinking we'll believe they are the main force and attack them. He'll split his Puma Bane force into two sections... each one moving quickly to these two locations." Martin said pointing to two different points on the map near the actual Pralor Science Base. "I said he wasn't stupid Murano... I never said he planned outside the box. He thinks one dimensional... he always has. He thinks brute force wins the day all the time."

"This is very true." Kalis spoke up. "Overwhelming force has always been his pattern. There is no reason he would change now."

"In this case it could succeed!" Murano spoke.

Martin shook his head. "No. Not this time." Martin shifted around the table. "When he splits his Puma Bane troops, I intend to channel them into the places I choose. Then I will roll them up and kill them." He stabbed down on one point. "The terrain limits from which direction he can come. One group he will send to this point here. To cover his approach. He will lead the second group to the entrance his sensors and his nose will direct him too."

"His nose?" Murano gasped. "How do you know this? What if he swings his forces in another direction? What if he does not act in the manner you predict? This is insane!"

"He'll act just how I know he will act." Martin said calmly. "He's obsessed Murano. He'll think he is outsmarting me... but he won't. He'll go right where I know he will go."

"How?" Murano demanded.

"Bait." Kalis spoke almost casually. "Something he can't resist."

"Bait?" Murano snapped. "What is this bait you will use? What will cause him to do exactly what you say he will? You cannot predict this. Not if he is as twisted as you say."

"Yes I can." Martin spoke confidently.

"How?" Murano barked.

"Because I'm going to use the two things he wants most of all as bait." Martin said. "Just as Kalis said."

"What could possibly make him do exactly as you want him to do?" Murano snapped. "What does he want so bad that he will do as you say?"

“Us.” The female voice spoke drawing all their attention. Everyone turned and watched as For'mya came up beside Kalis confidently. “He wants Kalis and I Murano. And we are going to give him what he wants.”

Murano looked stunned as he moved closer. “How do you propose to fight such odds?” He hissed. “Even a... even a Praetorian would not willingly fight such odds. You risk two of your family in this act! We cannot afford to lose you Martin... not in... in such a reckless act of vengeance! Not now!”

“Vengeance?” Martin asked as his brow furrowed. “You think this is about vengeance?”

“What else would you call it?” Murano spoke harshly.

“This isn't about vengeance Murano. And I am not a Pralor.” Martin snapped back at him quickly. “I am a Lycavorian and a Spartan first! A Praetorian second. This has nothing to do with vengeance.”

“Murano...?” Wayonn began.

“Then what is it about?” Murano demanded ignoring Wayonn. “You are plotting the deaths of perhaps hundreds of men!”

“Yes I am.” Martin said.

“Then explain to me what this is about?” Murano demanded again.

“This is about justice.” Kalis was the one who spoke now, his voice firm and filled with resolve and commitment. “This is about justice.”

For'mya slipped her arm around his waist and nodded her head as she pulled him close to her side. “*Avoi.*” She said softly.

“... Are his Praetorian Mage!” Murano spoke fifteen minutes later. “You must tell him this course of action is ill-advised and wrong!”

Helen looked up from where she sat on the ground slowly chewing the fresh fruit that Iama had given to her last night. It was bright pink in color and it tasted so very much like the sweet apples she used to eat on Earth. Arzoal rested on the ground near her, her flame colored eyes staring at Murano as her Bonded sister mulled over what he was telling her. Wayonn and Mari were silent as they stood nearby, Wayonn already knowing what his granddaughter would tell Murano. Mari, Helen sensed, was suddenly and quite surprisingly caught up in the sense of honor and duty that these men and women so easily projected outward from themselves. That was something she would have to discover the why for.

“*Carians*... why would I tell him such a thing Murano?” Helen asked softly turning her attention to Murano.

“You are his Mage! His moral guide!” Murano snapped. “This is what a Praetorian Mage would do! Advise him against such actions!”

“I am many things... but I am not now and have never been Martin Leonidas's moral guide. He does not need one.” Helen replied.

“What he is doing is wrong!” Murano hissed. “This is the very thing my people feared would happen if this power we command ever found its way into the hands of...”

“Of what?” Helen asked him as she climbed to her feet. “Of those species that you view as less than your vaunted Pralors?”

“I... I did not say that!” Murano snapped.

“That is what you were going to say!” Helen snapped right back. “Do not lie to me! That is what you were going to say isn't it?”

Murano looked at her taking a deep breath before speaking. “I am only... it is what my people would say.” He said more gently this time. “It is not a way of thinking that I follow Helen.”

“So far... the only lesser species I have seen on this misbegotten trip are Pralors!” Helen hissed at him. “The actions and words of your own people towards us have been nothing short of arrogant, deceitful and excessively violent! How dare you stand there now and profess to me how Martin Leonidas should act simply because it is how you would act!”

“That is not what I meant!” Murano spoke.

“Yes it is!” Helen barked at him. “Martin and his sons bear the blood of Sumar in their veins and by virtue of that, the many gifts that Sumar had. The Praetorian gene as you call it. They did not ask for this gene within them Murano. They did not ask for this power that they have and I can tell you there are many days when they wish they did not have it!”

Murano looked at her shocked. “What?” He gasped.

“You did not know this?” Helen rasped at him. She looked at Wayonn. “You did not tell him grandfather?” She asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “It is not my place to put words into Martin’s voice.” He told her.

“What are you talking about? Why... why would I even think this?” Murano asked. “This power we have is... it is a gift.”

“You have known since you were very young that you carried this gene Murano.” Helen told him. “You have adhered to a code of honor that your people with this gene followed. I tell you now, Martin... Androcles... Denali... Dorian... Jomann and all those who carry this gene within them now and are discovering what it allows them to do; they did not have the luxury of knowing what you knew so long ago. They only knew that they were different in a way they could not explain. And that did not sit well with them.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Murano asked.

Helen looked at Wayonn. “Grandfather?” She asked softly.

Wayonn nodded his head. “I am more Lycavorian now than I am Pralor Helen. I have been for many thousands of years.” He said softly. “I have tried to determine how to explain it... perhaps it needs to come from you.”

“Explain what?” Murano snapped loudly. “Praetorians do not actively plan vengeful acts! It goes against everything we were taught! That is what Martin is doing!” Murano looked at Arzoal. “Arzoal... you were a Pralor once. You know what I am speaking of. You knew of the Praetorians back then. What we stood for.”

Yes I was. Arzoal answered. However... I have been gifted with the experience of being a member of two different species Murano. I have seen many events through two sets of eyes and two completely different worlds.

“You don’t think this is wrong?” Murano asked shocked. “Martin is planning to destroy hundreds of lives. He is going to lure them into an ambush and then destroy them! That is not wrong to you?”

If you had asked me that question before I became a dragon... I would have said yes. Arzoal answered him. However... I have spent the better part of the last forty millennia as a dragon Murano. It is who I am now. I have had to do things that many Pralors would be aghast at in order to save others of my kind. I would do it all again if need be. This is who I am now. Perhaps who I was always meant to be. No... I do not agree with you now my friend. I am sorry.

“This is insane!” Murano spat. “He risks the lives of one of his wives and his nephew! One of those he professes to care for more than anything! He needs to exercise restraint and control! And you will do nothing to stop him?” He looked at Wayonn. “None of you?”

Mari stepped forward now and placed her hand on Murano’s arm. “Uncle... perhaps... perhaps you are viewing things through your eyes and forgetting that they are different than us. They have lived different lives and different worlds. Their view and their culture is not ours and never will be.”

Helen smiled and looked at Mari. “And the child among us understands more than the elder at this point.” She stated softly. She turned back to Murano her face growing harder and tense as she did.

“Do not stand there and preach to me Praetorian Murano of the Pralor people! We are not Pralors! ***We are Lycavorian!*** That is the blood that flows proudly within our veins. We honor our Pralor heritage... revere it even... but that is not who ***we*** are. We have always been a very instinctive people; it is why you see us drawn to each other so much. We crave the closeness and warmth of family and friends. We need it. Yes... we were a barbaric species at one point, not one Lycavorian alive today would ever deny that. But the day Sumar joined with our people that all changed. He did not try to change who we were Murano... he embraced our ways! He became one of us! Through the centuries he was able, along with Wayonn and so many others, they were able to enlighten us to so many different ways of things because they now understood us! Because they understood us... then they were able to effect change that mattered. Why do you think Sumar’s first born son was revered among our people as King? Yes... he guided us through the Black Day... through the millennia of slavery to the High Coven... but he never forgot what he was. He stayed true to the instincts of our people while balancing those same instincts with the more benevolent nature of his Pralor blood. But he was always a Lycavorian first.

And when I found the Spartan people on Earth, I saw the same thing in them that Resumar saw in our people. That is why we blended their culture into ours and finally... completely... made it our own. That Spartan culture and way of life allowed us to remain true to our instincts and still become what Sumar and Resumar hoped we would become.”

“Our people lost that for a time Murano.” Wayonn spoke now. “It is why I kept those Lycavorians with me within the Beta Quadrant, away from those in the Alpha. They did not deny their instincts, they just suppressed them in a way Sumar and his son did not want us too. It wasn’t until Martin returned to claim the throne of our people that it changed.”

Helen nodded her head now. “When he returned to us on Earth he had no idea who or what he was Murano. I could feel the power within him... such staggering power...”

“You... you knew then?” Murano gasped.

Helen looked at him. “I suspected he was different. That we were different then. We were too closely tied together. Something drew him to me and I to him. Thanks to my grandfather, we discovered what that was. That power he commanded, it was simmering just beneath the surface, boiling to come out, but he had no knowledge of his history or his blood. Yet he had done without thinking what so many of our people had forgotten through the years; what first Sumar and then Resumar taught our people. He had balanced the instinctive and sometimes violent nature of our people and the Spartans with the compassion and thoughtfulness of the Pralor blood within him. He never wanted to be King! He never wished for the position that was thrust upon him when he discovered who he was. He denied it at first and because he denied it as you suggest he do now, it almost cost him the very core of his heart and soul.”

“Queen Aricia?” Mari whispered softly her hand coming up to touch her lips. “She is his Anome. I have heard whispers among your people of what happened then. They still speak of it. I read the book by the elven writer too. It is... the story is horrible, yet it is inspirational.”

Helen nodded her head. “Your niece is far more insightful than you or her father gives her credit for.” She said softly. “Three times since he has returned to lead us, to show all of us what we had forgotten, three times someone chose to target one of the pieces of his heart and soul. Twice he did not respond as a Lycavorian and Spartan would respond. He restrained himself from acting. And because of that it happened a third time. This time... this time Fedor and Eirene were the result! A glorious and blessed result in the end, but a result that should not have happened! Martin will love them as his own children now, never doubt that, for it is his essence they reached for and found while still in their mother’s womb. The shame he carries because he allowed it to happen in the first place is something that will never be erased however. Not until Pusintin lies dead!”

“He bears no shame for that. They used deception and coercion against For'mya. Even she does not blame him. I have heard her say this on several occasions.” Murano spoke.

Helen shook her head slowly. “Perhaps that is how you view it Murano.” She said. “That is not how our people... how Martin views it. And For'mya thought she had lost Martin’s love because of what happen. Because of what she suffered. She does not blame him because his love for her only grew stronger because of what she endured and when she knew that, all her shame and doubt was erased by his love for her. Had Martin done what his instincts told him to do, it would never have happened to begin with. No more will he deny the instincts that burn within him. Teach him restraint Murano? Martin Leonidas has been exercising restraint for the better part of two decades! I have never in all my hundreds of years witnessed a man exercise so much restraint!”

“It... it does not seem that way.” He said softly.

“That fool Lorendo struck one of his Queens!” Helen snarled and stepped closer to the much larger Murano, poking a finger into his broad chest to emphasize her words. “He struck the Queen the majority of our people consider to be the most beloved by him after Aricia! Anja Leonidas has known him far longer than all of the others together and she was the very first to be affected by his wolf aura. Hadarian she may be, but she acts as a Lycavorian and a Spartan woman almost as much as Aricia does. Of all of them turned by Martin, Anja has embraced and grasped the true meaning of what it means to be Lycavorian a tiny bit more than the others and made it her all her own! Perhaps it is because she saw into his mind so long ago; perhaps it is because she fought her feelings for him for so long that the burning of her blood became too much for her to deny and she almost lost him. It no longer matters to her or to anyone! Dysea and For'mya know this about her, as do Isabella and Cirith and they love her even more for it. Restraint you say? If Martin Leonidas had not exercised the

restraint you say I need to teach him, that fat *ronnus* Lorendo would have died in the very spot he stood for striking Anja as he did! Martin would have ended his life in the most violent way he knew how! As would you and all of those with you have died for Lorendo's actions! Your people nearly killed one of his children! **His children!** You did not see what he did on Enurrua Murano, and I tell you now, he would have annihilated all of you and barely broke a sweat for what your people did had he **not** exercised restraint! *Carians*... why am I even having this discussion!"

Helen barked angrily before turning away quickly for she did not want to lose control of her own passions now. Arzoal lowered her head quickly and touched her cool snout to Helen's shoulder instantly and calming her. Helen nodded slowly and reached up to stroke her scales lovingly.

Helen turned back to face him. "Do not speak to me of restraint Murano!" She snarled at him. "Had Fedor died that day... all of you would have followed him into the abyss of whatever place you call hell! You have absolutely no idea how close to death all of you came that day! None! Had Martin not been there... had it been Androcles or one of his other sons or daughters instead of him... you would be dead!"

"So it is about vengeance!" Murano spat.

"Vengeance? You still think this is about vengeance?" Helen gasped and shook her head. "I have seen..." She stopped talking and looked at Wayonn, seeing her grandfather nod his head once more.

"Speak the words granddaughter." He told her. "Maybe then... maybe then he will finally understand."

Helen turned back to Murano. "I have seen men and women follow Martin Leonidas into some of the blackest, brutal and most hideous places any of them had ever seen before in their lives! The same places they had no idea if they would ever come back from! And they followed him into those places without pause or question. I have seen that man inspire mortally wounded men and women to fight and stand until the very last breath of life leaves their broken bodies! I have seen men and women lose limbs in savage battles and even though they scream in agony and pain, they shift their forms to stop the bleeding and then throw themselves back into the fray. To follow their King! No question! No hesitation! No doubt! That is what he inspires them too!"

"They do not follow him because of his name or the silly title that he carries and hates so much! They follow him without doubt because of what he represents to them! They follow his son Androcles not because of his name, but because of his own actions and deeds and what he represents to them! They follow Denali and Resumar and his daughters Eliani and Normya and Lisisa... all of his children! Not for the name they carry... not because they are royalty... but because they represent all we desire for our people! All we aspire to be! All we want for our future!" Helen shook her head slowly. "Restraint? You and the others have no idea how very lucky you are that it was Martin there that day and not one of his children. We would not be having this discussion if it was. His children adhere far more closely to the ideals that he and their mothers taught them. The ideals of our people and culture. More closely in many instances than Martin does himself. And still you question his motives."

Murano stared at her for a long moment. "Helen..." He finally spoke softly. "What he is planning... I... I see vengeance in his eyes. That is what I see."

"Vengeance to your way of thinking... to your instincts... perhaps." Helen said with a nod. "It is justice to our species and our instincts. The instincts that Sumar, your friend, instilled in our people all those millennia ago. Look deeper into those eyes Praetorian Murano... look beyond what you see outwardly... look beyond what you think you know and perhaps you will understand him."

"Sumar would not advocate what Martin is doing!" Murano spoke.

Wayonn moved closer. "The Sumar you once knew... that we once knew... it is not the Sumar who rose to lead these people Murano. Our eyes were opened my friend. To new things. New insights. An entirely new life. The Sumar I knew at the end..." Wayonn closed his eyes for a brief moment as he remembered. "The Sumar I knew and called friend at the end would have acted far sooner than Martin has waited. And with far less tolerance and patience than Martin has displayed. At least until now. As I would have acted."

"You think to change him?" Helen asked him softly. "You think to change his sons and daughters, who he views with nearly the same reverence as his wives and mates?" She shook her head slowly. "This will never happen Murano. They bear their father's blood within them and Martin bears within him the blood and memories of his father Leonidas; he bears within him the blood and memories of Resumar and Sumar. That is what guides him now. That is what guides his oldest son Androcles, who you have only spoken to in a silly holo

transmission, but who is far more unforgiving than his siblings and even his own father. And Martin will now act as he should have long ago.”

I have seen Martin Leonidas weep at orders he has had to give Murano. Arzoal spoke now seeing Murano turn to look at her. Orders that he knew would no doubt cost the lives of innocents. I have witnessed his own son Androcles give the order that sent millions to their deaths in a single act. That order saved billions more innocents from hate and death. That decision weighs heavily on Andro’s soul even still, a darkness that will forever be his to carry alone though he was the only one with the strength to give such an order. Just as his father carries similar self-inflicted burdens of darkness within him. Their compassion knows no bounds for those who deserve it Murano... but their mercy to their enemies is non-existent.

“This man... he is Martin’s brother Helen. His family.” Murano spoke softly once more.

Helen shook her head quickly in denial. “No he is not. Is that what you think? That he... that Martin is conspiring to murder his own brother?”

“That is how it looks to me.” Murano said sedately. “How it would look to others if they knew what I knew.”

Helen shook her head slowly again, this time with a very small smile. “That is because you don’t know what you think you do Murano. You don’t know the truth of it. There is only one man alive who will ever hold the title of brother to Martin Leonidas. His *Mard Fervon*. His True Brother. The man who has been with him from the very beginning of it all. The same one who has experienced all of the very same horrors and the same brutal life that he did. The man who has shed the same blood with him on more occasions than I can imagine; experienced the same sense of happiness, love and loss that he did. They shared it all. You wish to know Martin Leonidas Murano... truly know him... then learn about him from the one person in existence who knows him better than his own wives and mates. The only other person outside of his son Androcles who knows who Martin Leonidas really is. Pusintin or whatever that fool wishes to call himself now... he is not that man. He never was. And soon he will not matter, for Martin will erase him from existence.”

Mari looked at her, blue eyes growing slightly wider in realization. “Daniel Simpson.” She said softly.

Helen looked at Murano now. “You have much to learn Murano.” She said. “So much to learn about us. Just as we have to learn about you. You will never change Martin Leonidas or his sons and children. Never. Justice will be done Murano. As Martin carried it out twenty-eight years ago, he must deal out justice once again. When that act is done then you will see the one remaining stain on the honor of his father forever extinguished and we can move forward into the future.” Helen turned away from him as Arzoal rose to her four legs. Murano and the others watched as she casually waved her hand and lifted herself into the saddle with her command of her Etheric power and look down upon them once she was settled.

“Learn quickly Murano. Watch him. Learn about him. But do so quickly.” Helen spoke. “The time for learning is rapidly leaving us and soon... sooner than you might think or know... soon his children will join us and then there will be no more time for learning. Only battle. And then you and the Pralor people will see just how Martin Leonidas, Androcles, his other sons and his daughters... those of us who follow them and their ideals... then you will see how we wage war to protect those we care for.”

“Those you care for? What do you mean?” Murano asked her moving closer.

“Sister! Go!” Helen barked.

Arzoal let loose with a short trumpet and propelled them into the sky with her powerful legs, her massive wings carrying them away rapidly. Murano staggered back slightly from the buffet of wind and turned quickly to Wayonn.

“What did she mean?” He asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “I do not know. It is not the Scourge... we would feel that as well... but whatever it is... you can rest assured that if Martin is concerned enough to send for Androcles and his other children... then it is a threat that only together can we face.”

“Why has he not told me about this?” Murano hissed.

Wayonn shrugged. “Perhaps for the same reasons that you do not understand what he does now.” He said. “As my granddaughter said... there is only one way to truly learn about him. If you desire this knowledge as much as I believe you do Murano... then you will take her advice and act on it.”

Murano watched as Wayonn turned and began to walk away, his hands going behind his back in a restful pose, his wolf senses drawing in the sweet smell of the nearby flowers and lake waters.

Murano, Praetorian and warrior, was at a loss for what to do for the first time in nearly thirty millennia. He did not like that feeling.

Fedor sat on the soft grass overlooking the huge lake and stared out across the glass like surface as the sun began its rise into the distance. He wore only a pair of work out pants, his toes flexing and un-flexing in the cool, greenish yellow grass. The morning breeze swept across his skin cooling him and bringing the myriad of scents to his wolf nose. He lifted the mug of coffee and took a long pull of the hot liquid, enjoying the flavor as he swallowed it down. His mother Anja had pronounced him fully recovered from his injuries yesterday and lifted all restrictions on him, though he had felt no different for days. He knew she had been playing it safe with him because he was her son and she was not only acting as Chief Medical Officer, but his mother as well. Fedor found it amusing that he and Eirene called six women mother, but it came so naturally to them, just as it did their other siblings even though they had never met them in person. It was part of their strength as a family to be able to do this and not think it odd in some manner. All six of them spoke with one voice and Fedor knew that voice rarely, if ever, disagreed.

Fedor detected her kiwi scent instantly and turned his head as Iama exited their portable shelter and made her way over to him. She wore one of his t-shirts that fell to just below her thighs and her tail swayed gently behind her as she walked. The upper portion of the t-shirt was stretched across her full breasts as she lifted the glass of juice she carried to her lips and Fedor felt a surge of desire for her.

Iama's sea green eyes found him instantly when she exited and she quickened her pace until she came up beside where he sat on the grass. As if it was the most natural thing in the world for her to do, she didn't hesitate and lowered herself into Fedor's lap sideways, her legs extending out to the side and her tail curling around his upper leg as he leaned forward and softly nuzzled her neck and shoulder. The joy at discovering that her father and her family still loved her and it had been her father all of these years who had never given up on finding her, it had kept Iama very occupied for the last two days as she rediscovered their love and presence. She knew it made Fedor very happy that the relationship she had with her father had not died during her years as a whore for the Kavalian troops on Nefoa, and that his love for her had only grown more intense in their time apart. Fedor had seen Koguth several times since they had established the camp, always holding her hand as they talked or walked among the encampment and Iama could feel his happiness for her within their Mindvoice connection and how it made him very happy.

Last night however, last night Iama Leonidas had surrendered to the new and wonderful feelings of a young woman who craved the touch and company of her new husband and mate. She excused herself from her family, only her mother and Corsa knowing what the sudden anxiousness within her was all about, and set about using her new skills in Mindvoice to find Fedor. Iama found him working with several engineers and Star Colonel Endith on some sort of electronic defensive field late yesterday afternoon. Fedor sensed her desire instantly as she knew he would and they had spent most of the early evening making sweet love to each other with measured and exquisite slowness. He may have only been a few months old technically, but Fedor was by no means a child. His touch could and did make her sing in delight. They had explored each other's bodies and desires further than ever before and Iama had cried out in bliss more times than she could remember through it all. She closed her eyes now in ardor as she felt a small portion of his male wolf aura surround her and embrace her tightly. Anja had told her she would begin to feel this from him and it would grow over time because his blood was now within her from his bite. It would not be as strong as his father could project, but Anja estimated it would certainly affect her in a very positive way and Iama could now feel what she meant. It was as if Fedor wrapped a warm, soothing blanket of love and respect around her and pulled her tight. She found this sensation could incite her passion to higher levels last night, the touch of his aura easily causing her body to respond in a very sexual nature. Now however, now that aura simply caressed her body lovingly and she closed her eyes in giddiness and rested her head against his shoulder as his arms circled her waist and pulled her close to him with his hand cupped around her firm breast. It was not a touch of a sexual nature, but a confident touch that told her and anyone who saw that Iama was his woman and his mate. It was Aricia who had told her that many Alpha wolves did this at odd times as a means to demonstrate to their mate that their love was absolute and they meant everything to them out of their beds as well as in them.

“I am sorry I have spent so much time with my family Fedor.” She said softly as Fedor’s hand dropped to rest in her lap now.

“That is not something you need to apologize for Iama.” Fedor told her. “They are your family.” Iama lifted her head and looked at him. “But you are my future.” She said softly.

“And you are mine as well.” Fedor said with a smile. “Discovering what you have since they returned has made you so very happy. Especially with your father.”

Iama nodded and looked at the glass of juice in her hands. “I have thought it was him all of these years. I had thought I did something wrong to make him do this to me. All of this time I have hated him and it was tearing me apart inside. To know that all of it was a lie, that he never gave me to those monsters, it is as if years of sadness and anger just washed away.”

Fedor brushed some of her golden hair from her face. “That he loves you greatly is very evident on his face and the way he holds you. You are his only daughter... and I understand that emotion.”

Iama met his dark eyes. “They are my family and I love them... but it... it was you who gave me my life back Fedor my love. It is you who my life moving forward will center upon. Our life together.”

Fedor kissed her softly, Iama shivering in delight at the touch of his lips on hers. “And you are my life as well.” He said.

Iama reached up and stroked his cheek as she gazed into his dark eyes. “You are not angry with him that he...?”

Fedor chuckled and shook his head. “He brought this man because he wanted to show you that he was different.” Fedor answered. “That those with him were different. I understand that.”

“He is nothing to me Fedor. I already made that very clear to my mother.” Iama said quickly.

Fedor smiled again as he looked at her. “I know that.” He said. “You think I am worried about that?”

Iama bit her lower lip and shook her head with a smile. “No... I just don’t want you to hurt him.”

Fedor laughed. “Why would I hurt him?”

Iama’s face became a little serious now. “I know what you are capable of Fedor my love. My father and the others do not. My mother senses it I believe... she has commented on how you carry yourself. Your father and Uncle have taught you and Eirene many things that others will never learn. Your brother Androcles taught you even more when he touched you.” She said evenly. “And your mothers all agree that you have not yet reached your full potential. My love, my heart is yours Fedor Leonidas. Nothing could ever change that.”

Fedor gazed at her and smiled warmly. “I will do nothing unless it is called for Iama. You know that. You have my word on that.”

“I know.” She said softly.

“Then trust in me.” He said. “And let me just hold you while the sun finishes its rise. You need to go to work soon and I just want to hold my treasure for a while longer.”

Iama smiled and lowered her head to his shoulder again, tucking her face against his neck and drawing in a deep breath. Since he had bitten her Iama had noticed her senses had become more acute than they had been and she loved the way he smelled to her. So wild and masculine. She was his treasure. Iama adored when he told her that and she knew within her heart and soul that she could love no one as she did this man. All that she had hoped for and believed she would never have was now hers. She would have the ceremony that she had dreamed of, Fedor and his mothers had promised he that. She would have the future she desired. And it would be with this man. Nothing would take that from her now, and Iama would defend that to her last breath if need be.

“I will make you a special dinner tonight.” She said with a smile. “And you can have me for desert.”

Fedor grinned widely. “Now I like the sound of that.” He said squeezing her even more tightly. “With or without cream?”

Iama laughed at his words. “The cream was kind of messy last time.” She said. “But it was very exciting.”

Fedor chuckled as he pulled her closer. “Cream it is.” He said.

Koguth lower his own mug of coffee as his eyes watched his daughter from across the camp at his own shelter. It was about a hundred and fifty meters from where Iama was by the lake, but his keen eyes allowed him to watch her easily. He sensed Mani come up beside him and he turned to look at his beautiful wife. Koguth was not afraid to tell his wife anything, unlike many Kavalian men, and he had never held anything back from her.

“Her face glows when she is with him.” He said softly.

Mani saw where he had been looking and saw her daughter sitting in Fedor’s lap across the distance. She nodded her head and took the coffee from his hands and sipped it. “She is very much in love with him.” Mani answered. “And he with her.”

“Has she talked of him with you and Corsa?” Koguth asked.

Mani looked at him. “Koguth...”

“I do not ask because I will do something Mani.” He said quickly.

“Jothor came with us expecting to be able to court her and find your favor as he took her as his wife.” Mani said.

Koguth nodded. “I know. I brought him to show her that we were not like those she has had to endure all these years Mani. You know that. I would never force Jothor upon her. It is not my place and I would never do that to her. Besides... it is the Kavalian mothers who assist in choosing a husband for our daughters. He is... he is of Pusintin’s loins though. I... the way he touches her, caresses her so intimately... I...”

Mani returned the coffee to him and stepped closer gripping his arm. “No my husband.” She said. “Iama explained to me what she herself only discovered a short time ago. Something we never knew about Lycavorians. They imprint their children within this Etheric realm they can use to speak with their minds. When they conceive a child in their wombs, that child then reaches for the imprint, the essence left on their mother by their father. Pusintin never did this with Queen For’mya. When Fedor and his twin reached for that essence, they found not one of Pusintin... but the King’s essence on For’mya. That is what they embraced and it helped to shape them even as they grew in her womb. He is no more Pusintin’s son than Nedoli is.”

Koguth looked back across the distance and settled his eyes on them again. He saw Iama lean back and laugh as Fedor snuggled against her neck. He watched her scramble to her feet and then Fedor after and he could hear her joyful laughter as Fedor began to chase her in front of their shelter.

“He looks nothing like Pusintin either.” He said finally.

“He almost died for her Koguth.” Mani said causing him to look at her. “He stepped in front of some kind of grenade during a recent battle with the creatures we saw on that moon. He shielded her from the explosion and was horribly wounded. He almost died. If not for him, our daughter would have fallen.”

“She told you this?” Koguth asked.

Mani nodded. “Corsa and I.” She said. “It... to listen to it was frightening... but also so very romantic.” She reached up and put a hand to his weathered face, her fingers reveling in the feel of his soft fur. “Fedor gave back to our daughter what those monsters took from her my husband. And he did it expecting nothing in return. Iama will not give him up. She told Corsa and I this. She is his wife and mate, and you know well how Lycavorians view their mates my husband.”

Koguth nodded. “Yes I do. The same manner in which I view you Mani.”

Mani smiled and squeezed his hand. “Talk with him before you go with the King to finish that fool Pusintin. Learn about him.”

Koguth nodded his head as he looked back to where Fedor had caught Iama and was holding her off the ground as they kissed deeply, the sounds of his precious daughter’s laughter echoing in the wind. “I intend to my wife. I intend to.”

“...entire Strike Group.” Andro spoke to the images of Denali, Dutkne and Coren Re Mydala in the transmission. The QCR rooms on the *SCIMITAR* and the *ARCH DEMON* were completely secure and they had no worries about someone discovering what they were talking about. “We have one stop to make before we form with *SPARTA'S WRATH* and then depart Dreamland. Once we leave, 341 tells me no more than thirty-six hours. He's plotted a course that will max our engine specs but get us there as quickly as possible.” Andro looked up from the table. “How are things on your end?”

Andro saw Denali look at Coren before turning back to him. He glanced quickly to where Jomann sat beside Dorian and then back to his brother. “Deni?”

“Ardan has the Board of Regents tied down in procedure.” Coren spoke now. “They are still reviewing the information Denali provided to them.”

“Still reviewing?” Andro asked. “It's been nearly two months.”

Coren nodded his head. “I know. I can only apply so much pressure given what we have discovered since returning Androcles. If I attempt to push more, Ardan and his cohorts will begin to suspect that we know more than we actually do. And things have become more precarious for Dyack as well.”

“In what way?” Andro asked.

“It appears those within his government that oppose him may have discovered that he has made contact with the OSG and the slavers.” Coren spoke. “That he is supposedly consorting with them.”

“The son?” Andro asked.

Denali nodded his head and leaned forward in his chair. “His son Anroth is working with the faction that opposes Dyack's rule.” He explained.

“Is that why he isn't with you?” Andro asked.

Deni looked quickly at Dutkne and Coren before turning back to his brother. “Not exactly no.”

“Deni?” Andro insisted.

“Praetor Dyack is upset with how events transpired with Sehri Andro.” Dutkne spoke now. “Upset is probably a gentle term. At the moment... you are not at the top of his list of people he wants to see.”

“Claiming Sehri as you did has caused some issues back here.” Deni told him. “We don't know exactly how he discovered it, but he seems to believe that you forced Sehri into agreeing to be your wife and mate by using your aura in a way that the Rothryn people have suppressed. Making it impossible for her to resist.”

“What?” Andro gasped.

“I tried to explain it to him.” Denali spoke quickly. “So did Dutkne. He wasn't really very open to listening to us.”

“Andro... he must have communicated with someone that came with Lady Aleatia.” Dutkne told him. “Someone that gave him false information.”

Andro looked at Jomann and shook his head. “Harira.” He said. “Or one of Sehri's sisters to be sure.”

“Who else could it be?” Jomann asked. “Lady Aleatia has spent every moment she has been here with your family. There is no way she would believe this or send this information back to him.”

Andro looked back to Denali. “Has he pulled his support?” He asked.

Coren shook his head quickly. “No. He is maintaining his façade, but it grows harder to keep those who wish to challenge him at bay.”

Andro looked at Coren. “Coren Re Mydala do you...”

“NO!” Coren snapped quickly. “By the Prophets no Androcles. I have seen the... I have seen the utter love in my daughter's eyes for you. Caliria aches for you. For all of you. I have seen the brightness of Arduri's face whenever she is with Denali. Whatever I may have thought in the past, the possibility of losing my children forever made me take off the blinders I was wearing for so many years. I have since spent many hours with Denali and Dutkne, with my daughters, learning of your people and your ways. The texts Wayonn left for us that I should have read long ago, they have become my constant companions.”

“We have had to pry him out of those books on more than one occasion.” Dutkne said with a grin.

“I have tried to speak with Dyack about this but he...” Coren began.

Andro shook his head. “Thank you sir... truly... but I will deal with that when we arrive in the Beta Quadrant. That is my place and my duty. Now fill me in on what you aren't telling me Deni. Dutkne?”

Dutkne looked at Deni and smiled shaking his head gently. “I told you it wouldn't work.” He said. “The bond we have as these Praetorians does not let us keep much from each other. He can sense it in my manner.”

“It was worth a shot.” Denali said with a smile. “Even if we had been able to fool him, Lisisa would have figured it out in an instant.”

“Would the two of you mind telling me what exactly is going on?” Andro spoke.

Denali looked at his older brother. “We are being tracked Andro. All of us.” He said simply.

Andro’s eyes grew wider and he leaned closer. “*Inamarno?*” He hissed.

Coren Re Mydala did an excellent job at hiding the smile he wanted to display. No matter that their entire plan could fall apart, the moment Denali told his brother that they were being followed Androcles’s only concern was for Caliria. The Lycavorian texts he had read were very true it seemed. Their wives and mates meant everything to them and they would not tolerate a threat to them.

Deni held up his hand. “She’s covered Andro. Paga goes where she goes and I have two Drow shadowing her always as back up. She is in school most of the day to finish her degree but Coren has eyes there as well.”

“I have a small detachment on standby within our embassy Andro.” Dutkne added. “If Paga or any of the others call they will act. Caliria, Arduri, Coren and whoever else we mark will be removed from the planet within minutes and taken into Protectorate space.”

Andro sat back after a moment trusting in his brother and his Praetorian Mage and friend. He nodded his head slowly. “Very well.” He said. “How bad is it?”

“The extent of Protectorate involvement is larger than I thought.” Dutkne said. “We have managed to identify all of those who are even remotely connected and when we decide to move they will be dealt with. Harshly.”

“Dutkne... once the merger is complete...” Andro looked at him. “It will be expected that punishment is dealt as it would be in the Union. You realize this?”

Dutkne nodded. “Indeed I do. And I would expect no less. This sort of thing is just as foul to us as it is to our brothers and sisters in the Union Andro.”

Andro nodded. “There is more I take it?”

“As with Dutkne... we have been able to identify most of the Vanari who are involved as well.” Coren spoke.

“Most?” Andro asked.

Coren nodded his head. “Unlike the Protectorate or the Union we are limited in how we go about things really. There are some very highly placed Vanari who know of the slavery ring and they are very good at covering their tracks.”

“Your leader?” Andro asked.

Coren shook his head. “No. I cannot believe Alrerin Sha Harael would ever support this in any way. His oldest daughter was taken by the OSG decades ago and he has held a hatred for them deep in his heart ever since Androcles. He would never actively allow this to continue if he knew of it. I don’t believe that.”

“You are sure Coren?” Andro asked him gently.

Coren Re Mydala met his eyes. “No.” He answered firmly. “But I know how I can find out without anyone becoming the wiser.”

“Do it.” Andro spoke. “And if it is as you believe then it has to be someone very close to him.” Andro asked.

Coren nodded in response. “Yes. I have suspected two of his senior aides since our return and beginning this operation. Both of whom deep have ties to Ardan. They would have all the authority and access to hide everything Ardan and others are doing and they could do it quite easily.”

“We have earned no favor by giving your people the counter agent to the OSG chemicals they used to control Vanari females?” Andro asked. “Surely that must count for something?”

Coren shook his head. “Ardan has many of them believing it is a complete falsehood. Our own doctors and scientists, many of them supporters of Ardan, are still conveniently going over the data provided by your mother and sister.”

“So he has it buried in what... procedure?” Andro asked.

Coren nodded again. “Unfortunately yes.” He leaned forward at the table. “However... I believe it would be immensely positive for us when the time comes Androcles if you can speak with and convince the young women who remained in the Union to return and show the Board of Regents just how effective this

counter agent is. At the moment, their refusal to return only lends support to Ardan's argument that this is nothing more than a ruse. And they will not believe anything Caliria tells them because she broke our laws to begin with in beginning her research on this and they will believe what Ardan tells them. And he is nurturing the idea that your people will not allow them to return because the counter agent does not really work and they do not want us to discover this."

Andro sat back in his chair. "Have they tried to bring charges against *Inamarno* for that?" He asked.

Coren nodded his head. "They tried." He said with firmness in his voice. "I put a stop to that very quickly. As well as those filed against Arduri, Nirilo and Naesta."

Andro nodded his head. "I will ask them Coren... but I will not force them." He told him. "I know that *Inamarno's* friend... Yssyla I think her name was... she has entered into a serious relationship with a *Durcunusaan* officer. It would be wrong of me to force them to return."

Coren nodded in response. "I understand." He said. "Perhaps if Caliria talked to her... to them before you leave?"

"I will see to it that the COM codes are sent to Paga via the *ARCH DEMON*." He said. "We are leaving mid day tomorrow so tell her to contact them very soon."

Coren nodded. "I will."

"What else?" Androcles asked. "There has to be more."

"The OSG apparently has been putting pressure on the Eridiani government to cut ties with the Vanari and the Rothryn." Dutkne spoke now.

"Because of what I did?" Andro said.

Dutkne nodded his head. "We executed nearly a dozen Eridiani citizens." He said. "They do not care that all of them were involved with the slavery ring, only that we acted without their consent. They are beginning to stir up the other species here in the Beta Quadrant. Mainly the Enverr."

"I don't suppose they care that each of them was an OSG agent as well?" Andro said.

Dutkne shook his head. "No."

"*Nubou* them!" Andro spat. "They are not a threat to us militarily and I will deal with the OSG when I get there. The Eridiani can either pull their support for them or suffer their fate with them."

Dutkne nodded. "My sentiments as well."

"Androcles... you know of course that many of the senior government officials among the Eridiani owe their positions to the OSG." Coren said.

"Too bad." Andro hissed. "I will not dance with them over this sir! If they wish to remain in support of the OSG and their slavery and blackmarket deals then they can damn well suffer the same fate as the OSG!"

"What are you going to do?" Coren asked.

"I will fill you in on that when I arrive." Andro told him. "Coren... can you..."

Coren held up his hand knowing what Androcles was going to ask. "I have already been putting out the feelers to those among our people who I know are more forward thinking than others. Most of them were eager to speak with me because they worshiped Devra and her values. They were wary at first... because of my past views... but once they saw Arduri and Denali together they quickly came on board. We will have support among the masses... I just don't know how much."

"They don't care that I will end all trade with the Vanari if things do not change?" Andro asked.

Coren met his eyes. "They do not believe you will do such a thing." He stated simply. "I have let them cultivate this ideal... though I know you will do exactly as you say. The shock of it happening might be what we need to open eyes Androcles. We are a prideful people... I will admit that. The many hundreds of families all vying for power. If trade with the Protectorate came to a sudden and final end, many would be affected. This would alter their influence in many ways. It might be what we need in order to tip the scales in our favor."

Andro got to his feet slowly. "*Sibfla*... I hate these political games!" He spat.

"I can't help but agree now." Coren said softly "Even though I have been part of them for decades. In this instance however, we can make these games work in our favor."

"They know when we will arrive?" Andro asked turning back to look at him.

Coren nodded. "They are already prepared to keep the Board of Regents in the capital in order to greet you officially. No doubt this will be when Ardan makes his move."

"And the reaction from the other species that we have not met yet?" Andro asked.

“Unknown at this time.” Dutkne said. “Many of them are not as large in number as the Vanari and the Rothryn... but they covet what the Vanari have built as well as a way into the grand political scheme to make themselves relevant.”

“Like these Enverr?” Jomann asked.

Dutkne shook his head. “The Enverr are nothing more than a collection of clan based pirates, criminals and thugs. They control with fear. They are large but scattered across their space. And the infighting among the clans has always kept them divided and unable to be a major force.”

“Are they a concern Dutkne?” Dorian asked.

Dutkne shook his head slowly. “Not unless a miracle happens and they put aside their differences as clans and come together. I can’t see that happening... but then again... anything is possible.”

“Then we need to be at least wary of them?” Dorian said.

Dutkne nodded again. “I would not take them for granted no. They have been able to cause troubles in the past, just nothing that we or the Vanari could not handle.”

“There is another concern.” Coren spoke once more. “Since the OSG has reached into the Alpha Quadrant... there is no way to tell how far their influence has reached. Or what they have shared with their so called business partners in terms of technology.”

“Brendi is already working on that.” Jomann spoke up. “She has been monitoring several encrypted channels that she knows are used by the OSG. In order to detect any possible links that we may have missed.”

“She would betray her own people?” Coren asked surprised.

Jomann met his eyes but did not take offense at his question. “The OSG are no more her people than the sun is to darkness. She never wanted to be part of them. All she has done is to protect her parents and her sisters. She has seen many things while she has been here that has opened her eyes Regent Re Mydala.” He spoke. “Her own family has become deeply tied to a Lycavorian family here on Earth. Eliani and I are... we are helping her to see that all she has known is not nearly the truth of things. You might be surprised at how quickly she is embracing it.”

That was putting it mildly Jomann knew. He and Eliani were having to fight very hard to keep their feelings for Brendi from coming out. He did not bother to try and understand it or explain it. His closeness with Androcles now, their connection within the Etheric realm, it made him see that they might never be able to explain it. The fact remained that he and Eliani were *Anomes* and so much more. Andro and Shiria believed that Eliani was his Praetorian Mage for when they were together Jomann never felt more at peace. There were other pieces of evidence that made them think this, Eliani’s ability to draw from him almost without thought being the foremost reason, but as more time passed Jomann began to see that they were correct. The intense sexual draw to Brendi Faith was unmistakable; while the emotional pull was the thing that he and Eliani were beginning to have trouble fighting. They both wanted her in their lives, sharing everything with them. Jomann did not care that Eliani desired Brendi so in such a way, for it only added to Eliani’s own desire and passion for him when they were together. He had no doubt in his mind that when Brendi Faith realized that she wanted them as much as they wanted her, nothing would keep them apart.

Coren took Jomann’s words in stride and nodded his head. “I have changed so I believe that anyone is capable of the same change when they are open enough to see the entire picture.” He told him. “Whatever information she gathers, if you can forward it to us, we can try and see if there is anything we can do on this end.”

Jomann nodded. “Of course.”

Dutkne leaned forward. “Jomann... the way you speak of Eli... it is different than when I was there.” He said.

Jomann nodded his head. Like Andro he would keep nothing from one he considered a Praetorian like himself. They were just beginning to discover each other and they needed to be united in what they did. “Shiria and Androcles share the belief, as I now do, that Eliani serves as my Praetorian Mage as well as my wife and mate.”

“Truly Jomann?” Dutkne spoke. “That would explain a great deal.”

Andro nodded his head. “Shiria also believes that Sheva has become that balance for Dorian.” He added. “And our sister Nara for our brother Deion because they are twins and know each other so well. And Lisisa for you Deni.”

Denali nodded. "That would fit with what she and I feel for each other when we are together." He said.

Dutkne sat back. "Grandfather Wayonn told me once that when Praetorian Warrior and Mage came together it would be almost seamless. Like it was for you and I. It was one of the few things he was very serious about in my instruction. There has to be a reason for this Andro. Why we are discovering each other so quickly."

Androcles nodded. "I believe we will discover that reason when we are able to sit with and talk with Murano and Wayonn together." He said. "For now we must cultivate it and insure that it grows stronger."

"Agreed." Dutkne said. "I can pass to them much of what grandfather taught me through the years when you arrive here."

Andro nodded. "Jomann and I will continue our lessons with Dorian and then with Deion when he joins us tomorrow. For now Deni... maintain what you and Coren are doing. Do not take any unnecessary risks *fervon*. The endgame with the Vanari is approaching."

Deni nodded. "We won't." He replied. "Give Lisi our love *fervon*. Tell her we will see her soon and..."

Andro smiled. "I will tell her Deni." He said. "May the spirit of our grandfathers watch over you and those with you until we are together again *fervon*."

"And you Andro." Denali told him. "And you."

Andro turned from the table and went to the counter and poured himself a mug of coffee and then turned back as everyone mulled over what they had just heard.

"Something tells me that our trip to the Beta Quadrant is not going to be as calm as we had hoped *fervon*." Dorian finally spoke up.

Andro nodded. "I'm beginning to sense that as well." He agreed as he moved back to the table and sat down. "It is no matter... I will do exactly as I said I will. I will not tolerate a race of people who consider us beneath them. Nor would father."

"That works for me." Jomann spoke. "Arrogant people have never appealed to me in the least. And they appeal even less to Eli."

Andro chuckled. "Yes... our sister got that from our mother." He said with a nod. "They have the dispositions of a Semtoli Pit Viper when confronted with arrogance of any kind."

Jomann reached for his belt when the COM Receiver he wore beeped twice. He glanced at the small readout and then turned to Andro. "Sadi and Eliani are here with the others." He said.

Andro lifted his eyes just as the door to the conference room opened and Sadi led the parade of men and women into the room. Sadi, Ne'Veha, Carisia, Lu'ria and Sehri all came directly over to him and he shared a warm kiss and firm nuzzle with all of them, leaving their eyes closed in bliss for the briefest of moments as they basked in his aura. They quickly took seats in front of where he stood and Andro watched as the others continued to file in. Sheva Juconi immediately moved across the room and sat beside Dorian. While she was still coming to terms of what being Dorian's wife and mate meant, she was growing more accustomed to it as Andro watched her lace her hands around Dorian's upper arm. Eliani went straight to where Jomann sat when she and Brendi entered and they shared a sizzling kiss, her fingers dragging across his face as she held Brendi Faith's hand with the other. They quickly took seats on either side of Jomann at the table. Andro saw Tir'ut enter the room next, he and Cowen'Shan speaking about something as they entered, both of them huge in physical stature. Amazingly, Cowen and Tir'ut hit it off almost from the first moment they had been introduced. Cowen was discovering just how friendly and open other cultures were as he went and Tir'ut had been the first to reach across the divide caused by so much war and it was paying off. Just behind them came Normya and Kameka, both of them holding data pads in their hands and discussing one thing or another, most assuredly about flying. Zarah and Lucia walked in next with the female Lycavorian elf between them.

This was Thr'won's daughter Sherisa. She was the one helping Cowen'Shan to discover his new skills in Mindvoice and doing quite a good job it seemed. Sherisa was Thr'won's oldest daughter with her mate and while her elf ears were only half the size of her mother's because of her dual blood, she had her mother's surreal beauty with white blond hair and pale blue eyes. She had the lush figure of most of the elves born on Earth and not Elear, but easily noticeable as well as the muscular definition of her body. She was a very capable Spartan

soldier, having gone through her own Agoge many years ago. It was also well known that while she loved her elven mother, she worshiped her Spartan father. All of the Leonidas children knew her very well because she had often sat with them as children, looking out for them. Thr'won thought her to be the perfect choice for the mission of helping Cowen realize his new talent.

Daio came into the room next with the younger wolf who looked quite nervous and this one Andro watched him intently.

Torian Cedaria was the third son of a Beta Wolf and his wife and mate. His father was well known within the ranks of the Union Fleet for his exploits against the High Coven as well as the Evolli. His father was a Senior Admiral now and though he was not an Alpha wolf, he was extremely well liked and trusted by Riall. They had fought together many times in one battle or another against the High Coven and Riall trusted him completely. He commanded a Border Interdiction Sector Division, the one that now guarded the border near Gellen Station and the closest Kavalian border to the Union. He had been one of the first wolves to take a second name when this became popular shortly after Martin returned as King, and that name was now very recognizable. Torian had two brother and two sisters, all of them older than him, and all of them serving proudly within the Union military just as their father and mother did. Defending the Union was in the blood of their family.

Torian was of medium height, perhaps five foot ten at the most, but Andro saw instantly that there was not an ounce of fat on his body anywhere. He had a powerful physique, and while not as thick or defined as himself or Jomann for example; he was in superior physical condition. His was more of a lean and explosive physical build, which suited his skills as a scout. Andro had spoken to his instructors personally, and his commanding officer was very upset to see him transferred. He was two years older than Andro, with almost boyish good looks, and he was known as turning out some of the most lethal scouts within the ranks of the Union. He had been born within weeks of Earth becoming part of the Union, and his early training had come at the hands of Lycavorians who had lived in Sparta all of their lives and many Drow trainers that had begun to pass on their superior skills at the King's request. Two of his Drow instructors, now commanding full fledged Recon Units within the Union Fleet, could not praise him enough. His respect for their methods and their culture had earned him much admiration with the Drow and this was something that carried over wherever he went. Torian was a senior instructor now himself, until Andro had pulled him from this assignment.

Daio was trying to put Torian at ease, but the young man had never been among so many of the Royal family at once. He had never even been this close to one of them let alone almost a dozen.

Jomann looked over his shoulder at Andro. *[It will work out Andro.]* He said. *[He truly has no idea what is going on. Daio agrees.]*

Andro looked at him. *[The young woman who has been giving the information to Ulana and the others?]*

[A friend of their family for many decades. She helped to raise him and he considers her a valued friend.] Jomann answered. *[They do not know of her support for Ulana and Icho however. She has kept that very well hidden.]*

[Makes you wonder why doesn't it?] Andro asked.

[I'd say we have our answer.] Jomann spoke. *[When he became Durcunusaan, her long friendship with the family made her stock to Icho's people go way up. I'm sure Ulana knows all about him... or at least some of it. I don't know how deeply involved she is though. That may take some doing to discover.]*

[Ulana is not as smart as she likes to think.] Andro said. *[I wouldn't be surprised if she had no idea where her information is coming from.]*

[Very true.] Jomann agreed.

[I am beginning to severely dislike that man Jomann. And the way he manipulates other people.] Andro told him.

Jomann smiled. *[I won't tell you what Eli thinks of him then. Or what she thinks we should do to him.]*

Andro chuckled. *[I think I can imagine.]* Andro saw Daio and Torian finally take seats at the table and he took a deep breath. *[Let's get this party going.]* He said.

He turned back to those at the table. "Ok... everyone... we are all here with the exception of Ridor and his mate Cvea, and Denali and Arduri. Ridor and Cvea will join us enroute to Dreamland as will my sister Carina and Moneus. Carina will remain on the *SCIMITAR* and become our operational liaison while Moneus

has been promoted and will handle all security for the Strike Group. Carina is a skilled fighter but nowhere near as much as Zarah and Lucia or Carisia and Lu'ria. Her skills reside in operations and thinking outside the box. That is what she will handle. I have gathered us here so that we can begin to know one another.” Andro settled into the chair between Sadi and Lu'ria. “For lack of a better term, we will make up the command team. All of you in this room and Ridor and Cvea when they join us, all of you will have direct and unlimited access to me or to my father and mothers. To begin with... from this moment on... none of you will refer to me as Prince or sire or any of that other *sibfla*. I am simply Andro. I believe I can speak for Dorian, Denali and my sisters as well when I say we hate the titles.”

“*Avoi*.” Eliani spoke.

“Damn straight.” Dorian said.

Andro chuckled softly and nodded his head. “I have broken us into two smaller teams for simple ease of coordination. I have been known to get into my share of trouble so there will not be a lack of action I can assure you. I have a habit of upsetting a certain type of people... go figure.”

“I’m sure it has nothing to do with your wise and tactful way of speaking to those certain types of individuals Andro.” Tir'ut was the one to comment and they all laughed softly. Normya leaned into her husband with a beaming face at his words.

“Of course not.” Eliani commented sarcastically. “That’s why I am always patching his *mida* up.”

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “I will admit... I have a rather abrasive nature when dealing with...”

“Almost everyone?” Jomann offered.

Andro looked at him. “This is not gang up on Andro day.” He stated.

“But it is so much fun *fervon*!” Zarah commented with a small laugh.

“I seem to recall many moments as you were growing up that warned of this behavior Androcles.”

Sherisa spoke for the first time.

“You do not need to review them now Sherisa.” Andro protested.

Sadi leaned forward and looked at him with adoring eyes. “Listening about your antics when you were younger might be fun *Saradasaar*.” She said while batting her jungle green eyes at him.

“I would like to hear them as well.” Sehri spoke quickly with a bright smile.

“So would I.” Lu'ria commented.

Andro shook his head and sat back. “Very well... Sherisa... feel free to enrapture us with my deeds as a boy. Most of which I can’t even remember.”

“*Rensibfla*!” Sherisa spat playfully. “What about the time you tried to pluck the feathers from the Acamarian Ambassador? You planned that right down to the last detail if I recall. It’s when your mothers knew you were going to be trouble.”

“*Saradasaar*... we have not seen this memory.” Sadi declared.

Sherisa laughed. “I’m not surprised. It’s not one of his more glorious moments.”

“I succeeded!” Andro hissed.

Sherisa laughed. “But you plucked a quarter of his wing!” She spoke.

Ne'Veha couldn’t help but lean forward with a huge smile on her face. “Tell us.” She said.

Andro shook his head slowly. “I’m never going to live this down.” He said.

PRALOR DESIGNATED WORLD MANNE

“...better?” Aricia asked Serale as she lowered her hands from the sides of her head.

Serale was holding Aricia’s forearms and she nodded quickly, her dark green eyes wide in wonder.

“The... the echoes are gone!” She gasped.

Aricia smiled and stepped back slightly from the examining table Serale sat on. “We have discovered many different ways to help those who are recently changed.” She said. “It was the *Feravomir* who discovered that it was an easier conversion when the individual was assisted by someone more experienced.”

Ceale stood beside the table, both of her hands resting on Serale's leg as she gazed at her daughter. "What... what does that mean Milady?" She asked Aricia.

Aricia looked at her. "We are now family Lady Ceale. Please... we expect our family to drop the pretense of royalty when it is just us."

"Yes we do." Dysea spoke stepping up to the table and holding out the glass of strong red juice. "Drink this Serale Leonidas ... it is filled with nutrients and vitamins and will quickly help to energize your system."

Serale took the glass without question and sipped the sweet, berry tasting fluid. "The... the throbbing is almost gone." She said looking at Aricia.

Aricia nodded. "And it will fade completely in a short time." She looked at Ceale. "I have reinforced your daughter's new Etheric shields Ceale."

"Etheric shields?" Ceale asked.

Anja stepped up next to her and held out the data pad for Ceale. "This might better help you to understand Ceale." She said with a smile. "Essentially... Serale has become one quarter wolf. We sensed this last night when Kalis bit her. It is why we brought both of you here this morning."

"Do not let *Melyanna* fool you Ceale." Dysea spoke again as she reached up and pushed a strand of Serale's hair from her cheek. "Aricia detected Serale the moment she became like us and Anja shortly thereafter. For'mya, Cirith and I did not feel her until this morning. Both of them are far stronger with their Etheric abilities than the rest of us. Ours tend to be more latent in activity."

Ceale looked up from the pad and gazed at Anja. "She is... Serale is now like you my Queen?" Ceale gasped.

"Mother... it is wondrous!" Serale exclaimed. "You smell... you smell like Roltulian orchids mother!"

"Kalis may only be half Lycavorian..." Anja explained. "But that Lycavorian half is far more potent than most people realize. His father may be a colossal shit head, and his remaining days of life are very numbered, but the blood that flows in his foul veins is some of the purest Lycavorian blood ever recorded in history. With that kind of purity, it will always dominant whatever other blood Kalis may have in his body. In this case his Kavalian blood."

Ceale looked at the data pad again. "So she will become... she will be like you?"

Anja nodded. "In a manner of speaking yes. She will be able to shift her form, take on some of Kalis's traits, and have the Lycavorian senses and rapid healing. It won't be as potent as me for example, because Kalis is only half Lycavorian."

Ceale tapped on the pad. "And her Mutative processing of the nebula radiation around our world will remain unchanged?"

Anja nodded her head. "The Absorption Rating and Coefficient will actually increase somewhat because once the Lycavorian cells have finished bonding with her Hadarian cells they will form a shield of sorts. It will allow her to go longer periods without having to Ascend and she will have the healing power of someone decades older than she is."

"Mother I am still me!" Serale declared.

Anja took Ceale's hand in hers. "Ceale... do you trust me?" She asked. "Do you trust us?"

"Milady... Anja... you..." Ceale looked quickly at Aricia and Dysea and then back to Anja. "You are my queens. How could I not?"

"Trust us now." Anja said. "Believe me when I tell you that if Kalis was not different than his fool father Martin would have sensed it immediately."

"His scent permeates your daughter deeply Ceale." Aricia said. "No Lycavorian... no matter how powerful he is... no Lycavorian male could fake the scent of his devotion to one he has chosen as his wife and mate. Kalis has completely embraced the wolf blood within him, the blood of his family, and it comes out in Serale. We as female wolves can smell it easily, for it is the same thing that flows from within our blood and it comes from Martin. Kalis worships your daughter Ceale. That is not a scent you can hide or duplicate."

Ceale looked at her daughter and saw the brightness of her face and her beautiful eyes. She felt tears well up in her eyes. "Then she will have something that I never did." Ceale said softly.

Serale nearly burst out in tears and reached for her. "Oh mother." She gasped.

Aricia looked at Anja. [*Do we tell her?*] She asked.

[*Melda Min?*] Anja asked looking at Dysea.

Dysea met their gazes. *[If she fights it... denies it... then she may never recover from what that ronnus did. Do either of you question what you see when he looks at her?]*

[Not a chance.] Anja answered quickly. *[His desire for her is intense and it isn't just a casual thing. Before Athani... before everything we have learned up until now about the Kavalian people... I would have said no. Not anymore. Have you seen the way Koguth treats Mani, or how his other son treats his wife? You cannot fake that.]*

[No... you cannot.] Aricia said. She nodded. *[You two stay with Serale... Kalis will be coming for her soon. Their meeting is finished as you all know. I will take Ceale and we will talk. I am best suited to show her what the inner hatred she has for herself will do if she does not let it leave her.]*

[Aricia...] Anja said stepping closer to her.

Aricia settled her azure eyes on Anja with a smile of warmth and love. She turned and looked at Dysea as she stepped closer to them until their bodies were touching. *[I had you and Dysea and For'mya and Bella to help me rid myself of any lingering doubts after the man we so love reclaimed me. Ceale needs that now. She needs to understand that the one who can help her to purge all of the demons she feels is right in front of her.]*

[Take her and walk with her then. Make her see.] Dysea said.

[Just don't be late.] Anja said with a grin. *[Remember... he has carefully planned six hours of worship and I want to see what he has invented. He promised us we wouldn't be disappointed.]*

Aricia grinned. *[Worship I intend to partake of greatly.]*

[I love it when you talk dirty.] Anja said.

The three of them brought their heads together until they were touching and their arms squeezed each other around their waists.

[We are so blessed.] Dysea spoke softly. *[To have Nauta Melme and each other.]*

[Avoi.] Anja whispered. *[Even if we have to hit him in the head every now and then.]*

They all laughed within their connection. *[But what pleasures we have after we hit him.]* Aricia spoke.

[So true.] Dysea agreed. *[So true.]*

[I will see you all this afternoon.] Aricia said as she leaned forward and kissed first Anja and then

Dysea.

Serale gazed into his blue eyes and she could feel the warmth of his aura surrounding her as he stood in front of her on the table their foreheads touching. It was like a warm breeze in the air chasing away all the chills. His fingers traced her cheeks and neck and sent tiny shivers of happiness coursing all across her skin. Kalis for his part could not tear his eyes from her beauty, the silkiness of her skin and her staggering cinnamon and cheery scent which was maddening to him now.

“Hey!” Anja’s voice broke into their reverie. “Enough of that!”

Kalis blinked several times and suddenly his face became red under his tan and he turned his head to look at Anja as she came up to the table. Serale couldn’t help but giggle at his lost expression and she gripped his arm tightly pulling him closer to her on the table.

“Forgive... forgive me *Tenna* Anja.” Kalis stammered.

Anja smiled brilliantly at him and shook her head. She and For'mya had seen it within him first. Aricia had been a harder sell because of the pureness of her blood, but after a few weeks even she could not deny what Martin had sensed in Kalis from the very beginning. The brightness of new life and discovery was very evident on his handsome face. What he had finally been exposed to when Martin had given him the P1 had lifted the veil of oppression and hate his father had covered him in. Kalis had indeed embraced completely the wolf blood within him, relishing in the new emotions and sensations that he could now feel. The first and strongest reason for that was Serale and Anja and the others had seen that immediately the first time they had seen them together. No man who was wolf could fake the spike in Kalis’s scent whenever Serale was near him or he held her in his arms. It was a scent of devotion and love and it was very similar to what they all felt when they were near Martin.

Anja gripped his arm and squeezed tightly. “Don’t apologize.” She said quickly. Anja held up two data pads. “I have two pads for you.” She stated. “The first is what I want Serale to do over the course of the next

few days. What to eat and drink to facilitate a more complete and cohesive change within her. The change is different for everyone, but this is a general guideline that seems to work across the board. Aricia added some exercises for the both of you to do with each other to make your Etheric connection stronger.”

Serale took the pad. “Will I need to change my diet drastically?” She asked.

Anja shook her head. “No. Perhaps add a little more meat based on what you told me, but you are very healthy Serale.” She answered. “Iama can work wonders with any kind of food so go to her. You should talk to her about different items foods you like and see what she can do. Remember, your sense of taste is going to increase dramatically, so foods you are used to might taste differently. They might even not taste good anymore at all. Experiment.”

“When will I be able to shift?” Serale asked excitedly.

“Don’t rush that. Kalis will tell you the first few times can drain you of strength until you get used to it.” Anja said. “I wouldn’t try for at least a week. And definitely no sex.”

Serale’s green eyes went wide at this. Kalis had been the first man she had ever slept with and to say it had been a glorious experience beyond anything she could have ever imagined was an understatement. “You... you are not serious?” She gasped.

Anja couldn’t help but laugh at the expression on Kalis’s face as well as Serale’s. He looked embarrassed while Serale actually looked disappointed. Anja shook her head finally. “No.” She said. “Just wait for a day. Let the change begin to assert itself before you two tire each other out.”

Serale looked at Kalis with bright green eyes and Anja saw smoldering passion and desire in them. She smiled inwardly at this. Serale had described some of what they had done to Anja, Aricia and Dysea, until they had to stop her before they went looking for Martin. It seemed that Kalis, while not very experienced himself, had taken much time simply exploring and learning of the young woman who now ruled his heart. It had caused Serale to scream out in delight for several hours at least. When the moment had finally come, Serale told them she had slipped into a realm of otherworldly pleasure and had not returned until this very morning. Seeing the look on her face as she talked, Anja, Aricia and Dysea concluded then that there were no more doubts to hold on to when it concerned Kalis.

“A whole day? That long?” Serale complained softly.

“Serale!” Kalis gasped turning an even brighter shade of red under his dark tan.

“I’m not ashamed of what you make me feel!” Serale stated. “I want to scream it out to everyone!”

“Nor am I ashamed of what you make me feel.” Kalis answered taking her hands within his. “We do not need to broadcast it to the universe however.”

Anja chuckled again. “Don’t worry. Everyone will see it and smell it right away.” She said holding out the second pad. “This is for you Kalis. A message.”

Kalis took the pad. “Message?” He asked puzzled. “From who?”

“Andro.” Anja told him. “He requested that you watch it in private. Just you. Must be a male thing.” She said with a smile.

Kalis tucked the pad into his fatigue pants quickly. “Thank you *Tenna*.” He said softly.

“Ok...” Anja told them. “I want to see you again in two days and...” They all turned when the door to the portable building opened and they saw the Pralor Daron enter. His eyes searched for and found Anja quickly and his smile grew wider. He held up the bundle of bright yellow flowers in his hand.

Kalis took an immediate dislike to the man based on his scent alone, and while he was not as strong within Mindvoice as some others, he could easily feel the resonance of what this man was generating. His fists clenched almost instantly and he felt Serale grip his arm even tighter.

[It is alright Mandri.] Anja reached for him easily. *[Calm yourself.]*

[Tenna Anja he...] Kalis snarled within the connection, easily including Serale as Anja had erected shields around all three of them. *[He radiates... lustful thoughts about you! Even I can sense that! He brazenly attempts to court you knowing that you are mated! He dishonors you with...]*

[He fancies himself superior to all of us mandri.] Anja told him. *[He thinks his pitiful attempts at influencing my actions have gone unnoticed. He is trying to seduce me so that he can add another notch in his stick and show others we are nothing more than the primitives they believe us to be.]*

[Uncle Martin is allowing this?] Kalis gasped.

Anja looked at him. *[Martin doesn't know. And he must not find out. We want to teach him a lesson not have your uncle butcher the fool.]*

[You and my other aunts...] Kalis's eyes grew a little wider with the realization of what Anja was saying. *[You are baiting him?]*

Anja nodded her head. *[Yes we are. He seems to have focused on me for some reason and...]*

[Well... you are very beautiful my Queen.] Serale said softly. *[And many in the past have mistaken your petite size for weakness.]*

[Yes... well... I can be a real upaee when I want to be. Daron here will learn the hard way how we Spartans view what he is trying to do. When the time is right we will slap him down like the fool he is.] Anja said. *[We are simply letting him hang himself.]*

Kalis nodded his head in approval. *[I see.]* He said. *[I must remember to never make you or my other Aunts angry with me.]* He said.

[Us?] Anja declared. *[We never get angry. We hate violence or any kind of disagreement that makes others unhappy.]*

Even Serale could not contain the soft chortle that escaped her throat when Anja said that. She knew well that Anja had perhaps the most explosive temper of all the Queens when pushed past her limit of patience and tolerance. That was well known across the Lycavorian Union by everyone. Serale remembered one of her instructors on Hadaria, he was a senior Healer who had served in the fleet for decades and who adored the Queen, he likened making Queen Anja angry to willingly allowing an Algolian Telaxian Panther to bite you countless times. It was a very severe pain that would remain with you for a very long time.

[We are not supposed to believe that are we?] Serale asked.

Anja chuckled. *[Hell no.]* She said. *[Go on. Both of you get out of here. And remember what I told you.]*

Kalis glared at Daron for a moment longer as Serale got off the table and then she took his arm and pulled him towards the other exit. Anja turned to Daron and made a show of glancing around the interior before moving over to where he stood.

“What... what are you doing here?” Anja asked innocently.

Daron held up the bundle of flowers. “I brought these for you.” He answered.

“Daron... are you crazy!” Anja exclaimed. “Bringing these to me here? If someone saw you come in...?”

“I'm not afraid of anyone.” Daron stated proudly. “I wanted to bring you flowers to try and brighten your day. You have been in here almost all morning working.”

Anja met his eyes. “You have been watching me?” She asked.

“I prefer the term looking out for you.” He stated as he stepped closer to her, looking down into her face. “Someone of your beauty should not be kept inside.”

Anja allowed a soft smile to cross her face as she took the flowers from him and he drew his fingers along the back of her hand and then down her arm. His touch made Anja's skin crawl but she was playing a part and given his ego she knew he would think her reaction was something else entirely. “Thank you... but you shouldn't have risked that.”

“Anja... you are not happy in your current life.” Daron said softly as he reached up to touch her cheek. “That is obvious in your expressions and the way you carry yourself.”

Anja looked down shyly. “It shows that much?” She said softly.

“To someone who cares about you... yes.” Daron answered.

[Melyanna... this fool is going to make me vomit.] Dysea's voice burst into Anja's head and she had to fight to keep from laughing. She was not keeping this conversation from her fellow Queens and lovers.

“Caring about me is probably not a very healthy thing.” Anja said looking at Daron.

“I am not afraid of Leonidas.” Daron boasted. “And he cannot deny that he neglects you and the others for the dark haired one you call Aricia. Neglecting you is nothing short of a huge crime.”

[I have changed my mind.] Isabella's voice echoed. *[I want to cut his nor off now.]*

[Bella... mind your temper.] Aricia's voice chimed in.

[He thinks he is so smooth.] For'mya's voice commented.

[He will be real smooth when I finish with him!] Isabella retorted. *[He will have nothing dangling between his puny legs smooth!]*

Anja could hear her lovers and fellow queens laughing within their private connection and Daron mistook her smile as a sign that she liked his comment to her.

“Are you alright Anja?” He asked finally.

Anja took the flowers and smiled. “No one... no one has given me flowers in many years that’s all.” She said sweetly. “Thank you Daron.”

Daron smiled at her and silently couldn’t believe how easy this was going to be. He did not even have to manipulate her surface thoughts in order for her to be agreeable to him. This idiot Leonidas must have truly been ignoring his so called Queens for one to be so open to another man coming on to her as he was. Taking her answer as a sign he was doing something right he lifted his hand and stroked her cheek with his fingers even more brazenly. She really was an exquisitely beautiful woman and he was going to thoroughly enjoy using her delicious body as much as he was able. It was a shame he could not get one of the others to join them. All of them had perfect bodies, the type he could use for days on end.

“What can I do for you Anja?” He asked. “Name it and I will do it.”

[Carians... why doesn't he just come out and say he wants to nubou you senseless!] Cirith snarled now. *[Are men so obvious as this igord?]*

Anja looked at him making her face display an expression of hopefulness. “Meet me.” She said softly.

“Where and when?” Daron asked instantly.

“Tomorrow night.” Anja told him. “He will be gone by then. The others will be sleeping. Meet me here.”

“Done.” Daron said. He leaned over quickly to kiss her but Anja was faster and she pushed her hand against his chest stopping him.

“He will smell you.” Anja said. “I am in Phase. My most fertile time. If... if we wait until tomorrow then it won’t matter because you will have... you will have claimed me.”

Daron’s eyes grew wider at this knowledge. “He will not be... he will not be able to do anything?” He asked.

Anja shook her head. “Not according to our laws. If you... if you take me when I am in Phase before he does then I will be yours. He cannot go against our laws. You... you do want me don’t you?” She asked him softly, her jade green eyes bright and filled with the promise of pleasures Daron could have with her.

“Never doubt that.” He answered her.

“Tomorrow night then? Here?” Anja asked.

Daron smiled. “I will be here.” He said.

“I will... I will make you feel things you have never felt before.” Anja spoke in the most seductive voice she could muster while still keeping a straight face.

[Anja Leonidas you slut!] For'mya declared while barely maintaining control of her own laughter.

“I can and will say the same thing.” Daron commented. “Until tomorrow night then.”

Anja leaned up on her tip toes and pressed her lips to his cheek. His scent was almost repulsive to her but she forced herself to continue. “Do not be late.” She whispered before drawing back and looking at him.

“I won’t be.” Daron said with a smile.

Anja watched him turn, his ego swelling beyond measure as he walked out of the small building. The moment the door closed behind him Anja snorted in a rather unladylike fashion forcing herself to keep from spitting on the floor. “*Carians... he smells like week old dog shit under that hideous perfume he wears!*” She declared. “Which one of you is closest? I need to kiss one of you!”

[I will be there in moments.] Cirith spoke.

Anja turned and tossed the flowers into the waste compactor forcefully. “What is the plan now?” She asked to the open air. “*Sibfla... I felt like puking all over him.*”

[Plan?] Isabella spoke. *[Simple. We cut off his tiny cock... you heal him and then let him watch us as we pleasure each other in front of him. You know he would like nothing better than to have more than one of us and prove he is a better man than our Blessed Husband.]*

[Ohhh... I like that plan.] Dysea commented.

[Better than Martin?] For'mya spoke. *[Is that even possible?]*

[Never!] Anja and Aricia’s voices chimed in simultaneously with the rest of them in reply. She turned as the door opened and she saw the flash of black hair as Cirith blurred into the room. She stepped into Cirith’s

embrace without hesitation and their lips came together in a blistering kiss of passion. Anja inhaled deeply of Cirith's brownsugar scent, her hands gripping Cirith's tight ass while their tongues danced a sweet tango. After a moment they pulled apart and Anja smiled up at her. "Yummy." She said softly. "I needed that."

Cirith grinned. "It was my pleasure." She said.

"We can't hurt him." Anja said. "Even as much as I would like too."

[Spoilsport.] Bella echoed in their heads.

"We can scare him however." Cirith said holding Anja's hand as they moved to the small table.

[Scare him so badly that his cock shrivels up and falls off on its own?] For'mya asked. *[I like that idea.]*

[So do I.] Aricia said.

[How do we do that?] Anja asked them now. *[He won't scare easily considering he even began to start hitting on me so openly.]*

[We do what comes naturally.] Aricia said. *[We allow our possessiveness of Martin to rule our actions.]*

For'mya laughed now. *[Aricia my love... that might cause him to abstain from trying to bed any woman altogether.]*

[And that is a bad thing how?] Dysea asked. *[If we can save another woman from his putrid attempts to bed them, it will be worth it.]*

[Agreed.] Isabella said. *[I still like my plan better though.]*

[Have we stopped to consider that Martin might already be aware of what this igord is trying to do?]

Cirith asked softly.

There was a long pause as Anja looked at her and the others contemplated what Cirith had said. *[Daron is no fool.]* Anja said. *[He has done nothing in front of Martin.]*

[After everything that has happened with Aricia and For'mya and Dysea, do we believe that Martin does not sense what Daron is doing?] Isabella asked softly. *[As powerful as he has become...]*

[If he suspects...] Aricia interjected. *[If he suspects and he has done nothing it is because he trusts in us to resolve the problem.]*

[Atropos told me once... a long time ago...] Anja spoke. *[He told me that there are many men who have... tried to face him through the years. Tried to force him to give one of us up. They all failed miserably. He also knows that we have dealt with many fool men ourselves over that same time. As well as the occasional stupid upae that has tried to entice Martin into her bed through the years.]*

[Nauta Melme knows.] Dysea finally spoke. *[His love for each of us is absolute. As ours is for him. There is no middle ground. He also knows that we are all strong individually, but even more powerful united as we are. Would any of us... how could any of us ever wish for something other than Nauta Melme? What he makes us feel... each of us... no man could ever make us feel that.]*

[Impossible.] For'mya said.

[I can't even calculate the odds of that ever happening.] Isabella echoed.

[He knows what Daron is doing.] Dysea continued. *[And he undoubtedly senses we have it well in hand. Had Daron acted more brazenly or used his Etheric powers in a different way than Martin would have dealt with him in the manner of our people.]*

[You know... sometimes it is downright frustrating not to be able to predict what the man we all love will do. Even after all this time together.] For'mya stated.

[We will discuss that later.] Anja spoke with a laugh. *[Cirith and I will meet you all in ten minutes for breakfast. Or lunch.]*

[We will be there.] For'mya said.

[I will be a little late. I am still with Ceale.] Aricia said. *[Save me a seat.]*

[Always.] Isabella chimed in. *[See you soon.]*

Anja looked at Cirith. "Shall we? I need to smell some of Iama's steak dumplings in order to get his foul stench out of my nose."

Cirith smiled. "Follow me."

CRANAE ISLAND

The moon was three quarters full and he would not see another full one for some time. It was high in the night sky casting a breathtaking glow across the calm waters of the Laconian Gulf. Andro held the mug of coffee in his hand as he stood on the edge of his villa's patio. His bare feet relished in the feel of the cool sand and the soft scent of the ocean breeze caressed his exposed upper body as he wore only his normal loose fitting work out pants and nothing else. He lifted his eyes skyward as he heard Elynth's soft laughter in his mind as she darted among the stars with her beloved dragon mate Anthar. He could feel the calm resonance of Sadi and the others as they slept soundly in each other's arms in their Master Bedroom. Twice they had to enlarge the bed in their room, until finally Andro had commissioned one that could fit them all with extra space. The size meant they had to rearrange their bedroom, expanding its size, but the work was already done and knowing they could all sleep comfortably either entwined within each other's embrace or singly meant more to them. Andro had never been able to sleep before a large operation kicked off and with so much going on at once here on Earth and so far away, sleep had not even entered his mind for this night.

Andro turned when he smelled her unique scent and he watched as she left the inside of the villa and moved towards him. She held a tall glass in her own hand and the thin, almost transparent robe did nothing to hide her lush figure. Her black hair was longer than he thought he remembered it to be, but it suited her.

"Narice." He spoke softly.

"Couldn't sleep?" She asked as she came up beside him.

Narice Leonidas met Andro's azure colored eyes with confidence. A year ago she would have trembled at the piercing look those eyes could take and she would never have seen herself like this. It was amazing what the love of a man and a new found purpose could do for a person. A year ago Narice most certainly would not have been so open about how she was dressed at this moment. She wore only a pair of white, thong panties and no bra under the robe, her large breasts proudly on display under the thin fabric, but she knew without even thinking that this would not matter to Andro. Narice knew that Sadi and the others hardly wore undergarments at all under their robes anymore. While the only man who would ever see hers and Toria's most secret treasures was their beloved husband Arrarn, neither of them were shy any longer about wearing clothes that accented both their ample chests. She and Toria had long ago done away with the more oppressive way of dressing, especially in the company of their half elf and half wolf husband, and she took great pleasure in knowing this caused many of the older purebloods to have fits or disgust.

Narice's shameless love of Arrarn and Toria had changed her over the course of the last year of time and she was no longer shy about showing who she was now. And among Arrarn Leonidas's family, her family now as well, Narice felt more at home and at peace than at any moment in her life before this time. The road had not been easy or without great cost, but it was a road she walked now with poise. She was Empress of the High Coven and also a Princess of the Lycavorian Union, but secretly she relished her role as Princess much more. She was a child of both worlds now and she savored that knowledge and basked in what it meant for her future.

Andro smiled at her. "I have never been able to sleep before a deployment." He spoke turning back to look out over the sand and water. "What about you? Why are you awake at this hour?"

Narice chuckled softly. "Your brother's snores chased from me our bed." She said with a smile.

Andro echoed her laugh. "He has been able to do that to all of us at some point through the years." He stated. "It doesn't wake Toria?"

Narice smiled again. "I think she has worked harder than all of us these last weeks and when she is tired... a Plasma torpedo going off next to her could not wake her."

"Good." Andro said looking at her. He held out his hand. "Walk with me sister... and let us speak with each other of the future." He said. Narice didn't hesitate and she slipped her hand into his as they moved out further onto the sand and began moving along the beach towards the water. "No *Ventash'ma*... no Spartan Senate members and without my *Tenna Deia*." Andro told her as he squeezed her hand gently and looked at her as they walked. "Tell me how are things going?"

Narice met his gaze as the sand tickled her feet while they walked. The ocean breeze was like delicate flowers being brushed across her skin. The young man before her was an enigma of the highest order to so many people. He was younger than her by three or four years, she didn't know exactly, yet in his eyes and in his heart he carried the knowledge and experiences of three lifetimes, just as his father did. It was a span of time

that went back nearly forty thousand years if what she knew was accurate. She had heard others speak of Androcles Leonidas in whispers and hushed conversation; how he always seemed to know things. How he could seem to sense what others were thinking or feeling. It was very unnerving to be around at first, but Narice had grown far more relaxed and supremely happy since their first meeting, and it was because of his brother Arrarn. He had spoken of his brother many times as the three of them laid in their bed and just talked of different things. Arrarn adored his older brother, loved him and trusted him more than anyone except his two vampire wives. And after his actions with Queen For'mya, Arrarn would never doubt or not believe in what Androcles held in his heart. Narice knew she could not lie to Androcles, he would see right through it, and she really had no reason to lie to him anyway. Without his help the High Coven would be nothing but a memory now.

“Better than I had hoped Andro.” Narice said finally. “Those *Ventash'ma* who doubted in the beginning have seen the truth. All of them are fully behind what we are doing. I didn't think it could happen at first, but it has.”

“There is no dissent?” Andro asked.

“We disagree on many things... I won't lie.” She answered with a small smile. “But now we sit until we have reached a compromise. And always with the future foremost in our minds and deeds.”

Andro sipped his coffee before looking at her as they walked. The moon lit up the beach easily but neither of them needed the moonlight to see. They could also see the *Durcunusaan* soldiers moving discretely in the distance with them. Mixed in among the *Durcunusaan* were half a dozen of Narice's own security detachment of three Immortals and three Pureblood vampire commandos chosen by Pontal himself. While these last days on the island had been the first time they had been able to fully lower their alertness when watching Narice, none of them had been idle. They had spent hours with the *Durcunusaan* learning new ways to secure their new Empress, while the Immortals among her detachment enjoyed immensely the respect and honor they were shown by the Lycavorians. A respect and honor earned in combat by Cha'talla, his brother T'lolt and his sons Tir'ut and Lynom. A respect and honor that they returned to the Lycavorians without question.

“And what of the Pureblood families?” Andro asked her softly seeing her head turn and her eyes lift to meet his.

“You... you know about them?” She asked surprised. Narice instantly smiled and shook her head. “Of course you know about them.” She said. “Arrarn?”

Andro shook his head with a smile. “My brother loves you far too much Narice. He trusts you completely. He would never go behind your back to report to me. I would not let him. He is somewhat naïve however, to the way politics works.” Andro answered.

“Cha'talla then.” Narice said softly. “I should have known. He worries so.”

“What you are doing means just as much to the Akruvian people as it does yours.” Andro told her. “You are tied together for all time. More so now. Success for you and what you are doing means success for the Immortals as well. He knows it. They all know it.”

“And that means a great deal to me.” Narice said. She took a deep breath. “There are... there are some who cling to the old ways Andro. There will always be those who will fight to keep change from taking place no matter how much it benefits our people as a whole. All they care for is their own status among the others. You know this better than most.”

“Yes I do.” He said. “Is that why they are pressuring you to take a Pureblood vampire as your husband? To have a child with this Pureblood in order to maintain the purity of the High Coven and its leadership.” Andro asked.

Narice nodded her head. “It is almost... it is almost shameful.” She said.

“You have nothing to be ashamed for Narice.” Andro told her.

“It is shameful for them.” Narice countered. “To still cling to an outdated ideal in order to assure their own power. They say he is too young for me. That he is a half breed. That he is not even a Pureblood wolf.”

Andro nodded his head. “Something I know well.” He said. “And believe me when I tell you, our father's blood will always be dominant within us. No matter what.”

“They say I can keep Arrarn as my consort.” Narice said with some distaste in her voice. “That I can keep him as a plaything. But that I must marry a pureblood in order to keep our history intact.”

“So I understand.” Andro spoke softly. “It is always about history and keeping the old ways going. Even though they have no place in the present or the future.”

Narice looked at him quickly. “Andro you don’t think I would actually consider such a thing do you?”

“My *tenna* Deia has told me there are many things that we have to do... that we do not want to do... in order to accomplish our ultimate goals. I have always hated that particular thing about politics.” Andro stated. “But to answer your question, no, that thought never crossed my mind Narice.” He assured her confidently. “I have seen the way you look at my brother... the way he looks at you. You both may love Toria deeply... and she loves you... and she is meant to share in your lives... but it is the two of you who are destined to be together Narice. Just as Sadi and I were destined to be together with Carisia and Ne’Veha and Lu’ria and *Inamarno* and Sehri. Just as Zarah and Lucia were destined, as Jomann and Eliani were so destined. It is not something you can deny or run from in the end. Believe me... I tried for a long time. As did my father. Neither of us succeeded.”

“When... when did you know?” She asked him softly.

Androcles smiled gently as he met her eyes and reached up to stroke her cheek as they stopped walking. “That first day on my patio.” He answered.

“*Phraktos*... even after the way I treated him?” Narice gasped as she faced him.

Andro chuckled softly. “The way you treated him is exactly why I was certain that day.” He told her.

“I could never endure another man’s touch upon me in that way.” Narice spoke softly. “What Arrarn makes me feel when I am in his arms is beyond words? What he makes Toria feel? That will never... could never... be duplicated by another. And I know well what Arrarn would do to the fool who confronted him about it.”

“If you are able... try to insure he does not discover this.” Andro said lowering his hand and squeezing her arm gently as they began to walk again. “My brother may be a pilot by nature and training... but he has a vicious temper when arisen. He received some of the finest training within the Union by elven and vampire commandos. He will allow no one to disrespect you or Toria. No one. Regardless of how pure their blood is. And he will make this known violently if he has too.”

Narice nodded her head. “I know. I have seen flashes of this in his eyes at times.” She said softly. “He has earned untold respect among the *Ventash’ma* and many of our military officers. Even the very old ones. Young he may be... but he seems to have inherited from your father’s and your the ability to win people over with his out of the box thinking.”

“I have never doubted his ability.” Andro said. “Nor do I doubt for an instant his love for you. Just keep that in mind when dealing with these Purebloods who wish to make this an issue that they wish to press.”

Narice nodded. “I will.” She stated. Narice stopped walking and Andro turned to look at her.

“Androcles... what about... what is Yuri doing?” She asked softly.

“What do you mean?” Andro asked.

“I know you’ve had contact with her.” Narice said.

Andro nodded. “Yes.” He answered.

“Is she going to be a problem?” Narice asked.

“For you... no.” Andro stated flatly. “For those opposed to you... probably.”

Narice’s eyes grew a little wider. “What?”

“Your sister is not the same person you knew her to be Narice.” Andro told her. “Xaxon’s essence had more control of her than even my father and I thought. Well... more than I thought. My father does not care for her in the least as you know, but I think he suspected in some way what was happening within her. Just as I believe he knows what is within her now. Why he has agreed to meet her.”

“Meet with her?” Narice gasped. “I didn’t... I don’t question your actions Andro...” Narice said. “I just... I want to understand why though. Is it true that... that she became the wife to an Immortal?”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes.” He answered her. “The Immortal is Cha’talla’s brother Pa’cour.”

“Cha’talla’s brother!” Narice exclaimed.

“There is a history behind that. One that Cha’talla would be better suited explaining to you.” Andro said. He looked at Narice. “I will make the information available to you before I leave in the morning. All of it. I was very skeptical at first... but not anymore. Your sister is a changed individual Narice. I am not asking you to trust in her again, that is not my place. I am asking that you let her be. She has no desire now except to see you

succeed. She knows that only you can bring the future the High Coven is to have into reality. And she will protect you from the shadows.”

“How... how can you be so sure?” Narice asked.

“I can be sure because she and Pa'cour are entrusting their daughter into my care.” Andro said.

“Daughter?” Narice asked with wide eyes.

“She is exhibiting signs of the dormant Praetorian gene and Yuri and Pa'cour asked that I take her with me. Train her to harness and use this power before she hurts herself or someone else.” Andro answered. “She is meeting us on the way to Dreamland.”

“Yuri... Yuri had this gene?” Narice asked.

Andro nodded. “It is why your mother used her in the fashion she did. Why she allowed Xaxon’s essence to overwhelm that of the sister you knew. It is why your mother waited so long to kill your father. He was the gene carrier... not her. The last years since my father chased the Coven from Earth have not been your sister Narice. Xaxon had far more control over her than even your mother knew. After our confrontation she was on the edge of death. Xaxon left her body and moved to the only one within range who was close to her.”

Narice met his eyes. “Dante?”

Andro nodded. “Pa'cour saved her life that day. He snatched her from the abyss of death and your sister was reborn. Her eyes were opened for the very first time in her life and believe me she did not like what she had become.”

“You defend her?” Narice asked.

Andro shook his head. “I defend who she has become.” He stated. “One day... one day you will see for yourself.”

“I remember... there were times when I was growing when we were away from my mother and I had such love for her. She and I used to... we would laugh and...” Narice whispered.

Andro took her hand again. “Do you trust me Narice?” He asked.

Narice met his eyes. “Yes.” She answered without hesitation.

“Then trust me now.” He told her. “Yuri is behind what you are doing within the Coven. As I said... she knows only you can help them... lead them from their history into the future.”

Narice looked at him. “Carisia? Lucia?”

Andro nodded. “I do not keep things from *Enylarcopri*. She knows all that I do.” Andro told her. “And Lucia is more... more open to the idea that I thought. Even after what happen with Zarah.”

“What does Carisia say?” Narice asked.

“She is wary.” He stated honestly. “She suffered much at the hands of her mother... and that is not easily forgotten or forgiven. However... seeing what she has seen since being with me and my family has opened her eyes to the possibility that there is more out there then we understand.” Andro chuckled. “She is not jumping at the possibility to see her... but she has not dismissed the chance that Yuri has truly changed. She and Lucia have reserved judgment until they meet Onera.”

“Onera?” Narice said softly. “That is an Immortal name.”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

Narice was silent as she processed this information and then looked up at Andro. “I will trust you on this.” She said. “You have a gift that I will never have Andro. I will trust in that gift. For Moran and Dante however... I will not show mercy or respite.”

Andro smiled gently. “They better hope it is you who finds them first.” He stated. “I have seen what your sister has in mind for them if she discovers them first. It is not pleasant or painless to say the least.”

“Their fate will not be any kinder should I find them.” Narice stated firmly.

Andro nodded his head. “*Cyn forn*.” He said softly. “When you return to High Coven space after we leave my grandfather Riall will have something for you.” He said. “A data pad with some information on it. Pontal is aware of it as well and now you should be.”

“What is it?” She asked.

“You will see.” He said. “An insurance policy as my father would call it.”

“An insurance policy?” Narice asked. “I don’t...” She didn’t finish her question as she heard Arrarn’s heartbeat at the same moment that Andro smelled his younger brother coming up behind them.

“Trying to steal my wife *fervon*?” Arrarn’s voice carried to them from the darkness and then he was beside them.

Andro laughed at this as Arrarn came up and gently shoved him aside with his shoulder as his arm encircled Narice’s waist. Narice melted into his embrace as he caught her lips for a sizzling kiss and she groaned softly. Arrarn pulled away and looked at Andro beside him. He wrapped his other arm around Andro’s shoulders and pulled his brother close, leaning over to plant a kiss on his cheek. Arrarn felt Andro’s arm come up over his own shoulders and the same feelings of happiness and camaraderie that he had felt for years from his brother washed over him once more. Narice couldn’t help but laugh at Arrarn’s expression as Andro tightened his grip on Arrarn’s shoulders and gave him a kiss on his cheek as well. She kept her arms wrapped around Arrarn’s waist even as they teetered on falling over.

“No one will steal her from you *fervon*.” Andro said with a smile. “You have tainted her with your ways now.”

Arrarn laughed and looked at Narice with loving dark eyes. “I have haven’t I?” He said. He looked back to Andro. “Race you to the point!” He barked just before the silver/white flash of light and he shifted to wolf form and took off at a sprint.

“Hey!” Andro barked as he tossed his mug down and Narice watched another flash of soft light and Andro was sprinting after his brother into the darkness.

Narice still had her smile on her face when she felt the second presence behind her and she turned slowly and saw Ventash'ma Datarik move silently up beside her. His eyes were following Andro and Arrarn in the distance as they ran and the deep yelps of male wolves could be heard.

“*Ventash'ma* Datarik.” Narice said. “You are up very early.”

“I never imagined myself coming to this planet.” He said softly with a nod. “The true seat of power within the Lycavorian Union. How could I sleep? It is nothing like I expected. It is so...”

“Peaceful?” Narice said.

“Peaceful.” Datarik echoed. “A perfect word to describe it.”

“Our future... the Coven’s future... it will be entwined deeply with these people Datarik. You know that don’t you?” Narice asked.

Datarik nodded. “Indeed I do. Especially after what I have seen in only a few days here.” He answered. He looked at her. “But it will start with you Empress. And with Arrarn Leonidas.”

Narice nodded her head as she heard Arrarn and Andro yelping in the distance again. She heard a third yelp and then a fourth and she knew their brothers had joined them by some inbred instinct. “Yes it will.” She said softly. “Yes it will.”

MANNE

Murano found him easily enough. His size alone allowed for picking him out of a crowd, but it was his Etheric power that guided Murano. He was nowhere near as powerful as Martin or himself, but his connection to Martin had left an indelible mark on him that any Praetorian would pick out easily enough. He was sitting on the grass outside the portable structure between the legs of the red haired female, while the dark skinned Drow female rested between his legs and they fed one another bits of fruit. Murano knew them to be his wives and mates. Murano sensed his wariness the moment he approached, but Daniel impressed him with his calm control and the aura of confidence he projected. Murano’s desire to know Martin, to understand him drove him forward and he had settled to the ground beside Daniel and begun to question him. The wariness Daniel projected quickly dissipated and was replaced with humor as he gave Murano the answers he wanted. He spoke of Martin in an almost reverent tone of voice, Anuk squeezing her arms around his chest while Nayeca snuggled closer to his midsection. They knew much of what their husband and Martin had done together through the decades together, Daniel never denied them his thoughts and they swam within his mind always. Even they were entranced however, as Daniel spoke with great intelligence and meticulous detail, for they had never seen him show such emotion and love for Martin in such a way. As the time passed, Mari and Kesyla had joined their uncle on the ground beside them, then half a dozen members of the *ARC ROYAL’S* crew, and then an equal

number of Kavalians. Soon the group around them had grown to almost fifty as Daniel Simpson gave them a look and insight into the King they all so adored and respected. A view into their king's mind that none of them had ever heard or seen from him.

Murano did not see Helen and Arzoal standing beside Wayonn across the camp in the distance and watching the group that had gathered to listen to Danny. Helen absently stroked the warm scales under Arzoal's neck, her dark eyes focused on Murano even from this distance.

Now. Now he will learn. Arzoal spoke softly.

And understand. Helen said.

Even in the short time I have been among you I have learned that Daniel is central to Martin's life. He would not be the same man without him. Wayonn spoke. *They are entwined in a way not unlike what he shares with his wives and mates.*

They have been through more horrors and nightmares together than most will ever know to exist let alone experience. Helen said. *How many times have they faced the Grim Reaper side and by side and spit in his face. Before kicking his mida.*

Wayonn chuckled softly. *The two of them together is a rather imposing sight. Even for the Reaper.*

Helen looked at her grandfather and grinned. *Grandfather... will Murano... will he...*

Wayonn nodded his head. *Yes. Murano is many things Helen, but he is not foolish. He feels Sumar left him behind for a greater purpose. Behind Sumar and several others he was the most powerful of us. He will see that purpose now. And he will understand.*

Good. We will need to be united. Arzoal spoke.

Wayonn looked at her flame colored head before turning to Helen. *What is happening Helen? He asked. You and Arzoal must have some idea. You are Martin's Praetorian Oracle. He would keep nothing from you.*

Helen met his eyes. *Come. Martin was going to tell you both soon anyway. We have... Yuriko has discovered something.*

Yuriko? I take it then... this does not have to do with that igord Pusintin? Wayonn asked.

Helen chuckled. *Martin Leonidas does not need Andro or his other children to deal with that. Pusintin is a walking around dead man and does not even know it. He has been for many years. No... this is something else.*

Something that prompted him to bring Andro and the others away from what is going on within the Union? Wayonn asked. *That does not bode well for us I am thinking.*

Helen reached out and took his hand. *Come. Avi can update us. Martin had planned to brief everyone tomorrow morning anyway. Before he departs to end Pusintin.*

They had slipped away from the group as the discussions continued, Danny shifting to the form of the imposing dark brown wolf while Murano ran easily beside him. They moved for an hour through the timber and mountains, two ghosts through the shadows. Manne was thick with small animal life and plant life but nothing larger than a medium sized dog that they had been able to discover after extensive scans. Akemi had been very thorough in her examining of this planet before allowing even one person to the surface. She had no intention of allowing what happen before to happen again.

Danny finally shifted back to his human form and they slowed their movement as they approached the top of the massive mountain ridge. The timber had become thinner and the ground more rocky as they moved closer to the top. Murano stayed beside him as they came to the edge and even squatted down when Daniel did. The view was breathtaking to say the least as they came to the rocky outcropping and were able to see the valley stretched for kilometers beyond. Towering mountains of green, a wide river that stretched far into the distance and the single sun beating down upon them. Murano looked at Daniel as he lifted his eyes slightly, turning his head from side to side and catching the wind on his face and inhaling deeply.

"Daniel... why are we here?" Murano asked softly. He almost did not want to disturb the pristine view with his voice.

Danny looked at him and smiled. "You wanted to know who my brother is Murano." He said. "Who my brother truly is deep within that shell of muscle and bone?"

Murano looked at him and slowly nodded his head. "Yes."

"We are here because this is the only place he won't smell us." Daniel said. "His sense of smell is far keener than many people know or realize. Andro's too. We are downwind of him and up high enough where the wind will carry our scents away from him. He won't smell us up here."

"Martin... he is out here?" Murano asked stunned at this revelation.

Daniel settled to one knee, close to the edge and looked down into the valley below. "He promised them six hours of worship." He said softly. "Six hours of nothing but him taking care of them as they have taken care of him and his children through the years. It was something that they all needed." Daniel looked at Murano and pointed down. "My brother always keeps his promise to those he loves. That is my brother Murano."

Murano moved closer to the edge and his eyes followed where Daniel was motioning with his head. Daniel's wolf eyes could see easily but Murano needed to pull out the pair of macrobinos from his belt. He heard the definite sounds of female laughter on the wind as he brought the binos to his eyes.

The small clearing was far below them, perhaps eight hundred feet, at the base of the tall waterfall that on their west. Murano saw a small fire, several light globes and seven figures. He focused the binos slightly and his eyes grew a little wider at what he saw but he was unable to look away. Small candle pits had been set up along the edges of the clearing and disappeared down a path that went into the timber towards what Murano suspected was a landing area somewhere nearby. Bright red and yellow flowers were between the candle pits leading up to the small open area. It was right along the edges of the calm stream perhaps a hundred and fifty meters from the base of the waterfall where it emptied into the large stream. The short grass was incredibly green, the trees and other foliage bright and vibrant with life. They were all naked he saw, their clothes folded neatly among the half dozen crates that circled the small clearing. The only thing that marred the beauty of the small clearing was the fire, but it was tightly controlled and once out the land would claim the area quickly once more. Martin sat on the ground near the fire, Anja and For'mya on their backs stretched out in front of him with their small feet against his broad chest. Their skin glistened in the sunlight even from up here and Martin was massaging their feet with his hands and Murano realized it had been For'mya who let the small laughter out as it obviously tickled her at first. Murano did not take notice of their nakedness, not even registering the fact that all of them had bodies and figures and surreal beauty that even Pralor men would fight over. Isabella and Dysea sat to Martin's left, their legs entwined and feeding each other fruit. Aricia and Cirith sat to his immediate right, both of them lying on their stomachs, their heads almost touching as they studied something on a data pad they were both reading. All of their bodies glistened with what could only be some sort of oil and Murano realized that Martin must have already given the others massages.

Murano felt it then and he lowered the binos slowly, careful to keep his own shields very high. It was easy enough for him to detect within the Etheric realm as powerful as those below him were. Martin was not shielding at all and this allowed Murano a window into a part of him that he had not seen until this day. He burned with power Murano hadn't felt since standing beside Sumar, a power held in check by his will alone. Among that burning power was what he felt for those women who were with him. Murano could see it so easily now. Things he had not felt from Martin Leonidas in their time together until now. The absolute devotion and shameless love. The almost exquisite sense of peace and harmony within him. Martin was utterly relaxed and attentive to his wives and mates and nothing else entered his thoughts or clouded his mind. It was so unlike what he had felt from Martin these last days, the anger, the distrust, emotions that were wide ranging. Now there was nothing but focus and peace. Though he could not feel the wolf aura Martin was projecting outward to them, given the emotions and sense of complete love, happiness and dedication he sensed coming from them, he could only guess at the power of the aura Martin was radiating. Mari had tried to explain to him about the Lycavorian ability to use this aura as a way to communicate, especially between a male and female wolf, but he had not understood it until this very moment. He lowered the binos slowly and his head turned to look at Daniel.

Danny's dark eyes were bright and filled with wisdom. "That is my *mard fervon* down there Murano. The real Martin Leonidas. No vid cams, no reporters, no politicians, no others around that he needs to be all king shit or some holy warrior like in front of. He hates that! Hates it with every fiber of his being! Do not believe what you hear Murano... my *mard fervon* hates to fight. If he has to fight it means he has failed... and Martin hates to fail. There was a time... about a year before the Evolli War broke out. We hadn't fought in so long and many of us hoped that it was finally over. That the many years of fighting one enemy or another was finally behind us. We thought we could sit back and love our wives and mates; play with our children and

finally grow old in peace. We thought the only thing left we had to fight was a bad cold.” Danny chuckled sadly.

“We should have known better. When the day finally comes that he can toss it all aside Murano... man... all we will see is his asshole and elbows as he beats feet away from it all. And I will be right behind him. Those six women and the children they have given him are his meaning to live. And if doing what he is doing now insures that everyone who looks to him for leadership and guidance can have what he has, then by god he will do what needs to be done. His love of them is what drives him to lead our people. He wants everyone to have what he has, or as close as they can get. That is the blood that runs in his veins.” Danny watched Murano turn back and look down into the valley again.

“He looks up to you Murano. We all do.” Danny said and watching him turn to look at him with disbelief in his eyes. “You think I’m joking with you? You knew Sumar. Walked beside him. Fought beside him. To Marty... that is one thing he will never be able to do... but he can relive it through you. Experience it through you.” Danny looked down into the valley. “We came out here hoping to find a piece of our history Murano. To find those that Wayonn’s son Canth told him we needed to find. We thought we had done that already but we were wrong about that. And so we came out here looking for you. For the Pralor part of our history.” Danny looked at him. “You have witnessed what we found.”

Murano nodded his head slowly. “The same arrogance and distrust that brought my people down so long ago.” He said softly.

“He needs what you can teach him. What you can teach Andro and Dorian and Denali and all those who are showing signs of this gene that they carry. We all need you. But you will never change him or them from what is in here...” Danny touched his head. “And in here.” He dropped his hand to poke himself in his heart. “We will be Lycavorian and Spartan first and always.”

“I am beginning to see that.” Murano said softly.

“Then don’t try Murano.” Danny said with a smile. “Many have tried and none have succeeded in doing that. Marty is the most compassionate man I have ever known Murano. I’ve seen him spare those he should have killed. That I would have killed. I’ve seen him bitch slap a person with one hand and with the other hand he helped lift that person up once more and he pushed them to heights they never thought they could reach. The one place however, the one place you do not want to be is on his bad side. Pusintin... well... he got on Martin’s bad side the day he tried to kill their mother almost thirty years ago.”

Murano’s eyes went wide as he looked at Danny. “I did not... I did not know that.” He gasped.

“Not many people do. Hell... there’s still a lot of people who don’t know Deia is his Aunt.” Danny reached down and picked up a small rock. “After what Pusintin did to For'mya... well...” Danny shook his head slowly. “Let’s just say that we had the perfect opportunity and the means to obliterate the Kavalian Federation in one grand and final stroke and we didn’t take it. As much as he hates his brother, Martin will not hold an entire species accountable for the actions of one or two men. That alone should tell you who Martin Leonidas is.” Danny said as he looked at him. “Let him show you who he is. All you need do is watch and you will see for yourself Murano.”

They heard the deep, booming laughter followed quickly by softer feminine laughter and both of them looked down into the valley as a female squealed happily, Murano lifting the binos to view. They saw Martin get to his feet and begin chasing the Persian red hair of Anja around the small clearing as Aricia and the others began laughing in delight. Martin caught her quickly, Murano suspected Anja did not try very hard to escape his embrace, and he watched as Martin pulled her naked form to his and embraced her. Her arms wrapped around his waist tightly and then all of them were moving to join that embrace.

“That is my brother Murano.” Danny said softly. “You could learn as much from him as I know he wants to learn from you.”

Murano took a deep breath and turned to look back at him. “Thank you Daniel.” He said. “Thank you for this.”

“Come on... before he senses we are here.” Danny said as he began to move back down the ridge. Murano took one last look and then began to follow.

Martin lifted his head as his arms closed around Bella and Cirith and pulled them even tighter. Anja was pressed against his chest with Aricia and For'mya on his sides. Dysea, Bella and Cirith were pressed tightly behind them and his arms held all of them. Martin's face creased into a small smile as his eyes focused on the ridge far above where he stood and he allowed his wolf aura and Etheric resonance to envelope the woman who so held his heart and soul. He lowered his cheek to brush first For'mya's golden blond hair and then Aricia's raven locks and his smile grew wider.

[Thank you fervon.] He reached out. *[Thank you.]*

"Beloved?" Aricia's sweet voice broke into his thoughts. "You are smiling."

Martin blinked and looked at her, seeing all of their stunning eyes focus on him. "Why wouldn't I be smiling?" He asked with a larger smile. "I have the six most beautiful women in the entire universe all to myself."

"And we have the most delicious man in the entire universe all to ourselves." Cirith spoke. "At least we think so anyway."

"Yes we do." Anja stated happily.

Martin grinned. "Well... the worshipping is not done ladies." He said. "I still have three hours to go."

"*Nauta Melme*... what you have done is beyond beautiful." Dysea said softly. "What... what more is there?"

Martin met her emerald colored eyes and smiled. "Lots." He said in reply. "Because all of you deserve it and so much more."

"Then get to worshipping!" Anja stated with a laugh.

EARTH SPARTAN AMPHITHEATER NORTHERN OLD DISTRICT

Hundreds were gathered, among them many of the Union's most prominent politicians and dozens of senior military officers. Every Netnews Channel was represented with at least one reporter and vid cam crew and this event was being beamed throughout the Union as well as High Coven space. Using pirated channels, it was also going out to rebel receivers within the Kavalian Federation as well, and driving Kavalian engineers frantic because they could not stop it. The outdoor Amphitheater was filled to overflowing with men, women and even children as word of the Prime Minister's unexpected address spread like wildfire across Earth and then the Union from the moment it was announced the evening before. The stage was full of men and women, their chairs comfortable though tightly packed together. Pian and Jalersi were the most nervous as they sat before hundreds, if not thousands of people that Keleru would happily butcher to reach his goals. Dilios and Panos sat on either side of them with Tarifa, Aihola and Isra sitting with Selene and Lynwe. Narice sat with Arram and Toria beside her, Cha'talla standing off to the side beside Vengal. The ambassadors from nearly every world in the Union occupied the first row of benches facing the stage, and there were dozens that were present via secure holo transmissions, their images easily seen along the side of the stage sitting in chairs or behind desks from whatever planet they were transmitting from. Most of the Netnews crews had already noticed that Androcles was absent. Hundreds of sets of eyes watched as Resumar led Athani onto the stage and took their seats beside Pian and Jalersi, the sisters sharing a brief kiss and Pian looking relieved that he knew someone as Resumar settled beside him into the chair.

Far above them everyone could see the dozens of dragons that circled the city as well as many who had landed atop buildings nearby and were watching the gathering. As heads turned skyward they saw the dark red scales break away and begin to slowly curve to the ground towards them. It was quickly evident that there was a rider on the back of this dragon and soon it was evident that it was a woman.

Syrilth settled to the open space near the stage as lightly as a feather, murmurs sweeping the crowd as men and women began to take notice that it was Deia sitting proudly in the saddle she wore. This in itself was newsworthy as it was well known that the Dragon Elder who oversaw those dragons who lived here on Earth

had not allowed a rider onto her back for nearly thirty years. Syrilth had sworn to never carry another on her back after Maraud had forced her to do the things she had done. Something had obviously changed since then as hundreds could only watch in awe as Syrilth lifted her front foreleg as a step for Deia to slowly lower herself from the saddle. They saw the tall, grizzled Lycavorian move forward from the ranks and soon realized this was Deia's mate of countless millennia. He assisted her even more to step onto the ground beneath her. They watched as Deia reached up to run her hand over Syrilth's thick neck scales. Her massive head lowered slightly to touch Deia's head and then she was turning to her mate. Deia's mate had remained out of the spotlight for centuries, more by her doing than anything else. He was a senior officer within the Union military and she did not want her position to compromise his ability to lead men. Eldaos had been by her side since the bombing of the senate building as had most of their nine children. Deia had purposely kept them out of her political life for all these centuries but that had all changed when she had nearly died.

Deia's face beamed as she held her husband and mate's arm and turned for the stage. She wore a simple tan pair of pants and boots, with a white shirt and a long, flowing robe like jacket over that. The floor length jacket was Earth tone in color with patches of vibrant green and brown. Eldaos escorted her slowly onto the stage where everyone stood in respect. Deia waved them back to their seats quickly and moved directly for the single podium that had been set up on the stage. She nodded her head to her mate and hundreds of thousands of men and women across the Union saw him unashamedly lean over and nuzzle her cheek and neck. Deia's eyes closed in delightful bliss when he did this and her smile was obvious even from those standing twenty rows back in the theater. Eldaos moved to the lone empty chair and sat down as Deia's face returned to normal and she adjusted the items on the podium. Finally she looked up and out over the gathered citizens.

"I wish a very good morning to all of you here and to our brothers and sisters who are watching from across the breadth of our Union." Her voiced carried easily to the men, women and children standing in the back of the amphitheater as well as hundreds more that lined the grass and streets around the outdoor facility. "A very special good morning and thank you to the men and women here in Sparta and those on Apo Prime who I got out of bed last night to make sure this event happened." Deia shuffled the three data pads in front of her and then gripped both sides of the podium. "I suppose all of you are wondering what event was so large as to get me to come out and make this unannounced speech? I don't think I can remember the last time I spoke to every citizen of the Union like this... but I can tell you now... it will be far more often going forward the gods willing."

This statement caused many men and women to look back and forth between each other and take even more interest in this event now.

"We have been through so much these last months as a people and a Union." Deia began again. "I cannot begin to put into words the immense pride I feel at every citizen of the Union for how they have handled everything that has happened. We Lycavorians are known for our ability to adapt to ever changing events, and it seems that this trait has been embraced by every species that calls the Union home. As your Prime Minister... I thank each and every one of you no matter how small or large the role you played. Whether it be commanding a ship within our fleet, or raising the young ones that are our future, each of you should feel proud at what you have done, not only in these trying last few months, but for what you have done in the past as well. I know I am. The resilience and effort the citizens of the Union have displayed is... it is inspiring."

Deia stopped for a moment and took a deep breath. "Ah... where to begin." She said. "So much has taken place these last months. It could have torn our Union apart but it brought us closer together. So many rumors abound... some of them entirely without truth... and that is why I felt it was time to not only address the Union Senate, but also the Union people as a whole. There was a time when it was a simple thing to address the citizens of the Union. In the beginning there were only a few of us. Now we are so many... but the technology we have today makes it just as simple... and I intend for this address and others like it to be a common thing going into the future. The citizens of the Union have trusted myself and others to lead them for so long, and now we will trust in you to know what is going on. In truth..." Deia turned and looked directly at where Narice sat in the row of chairs behind her. "... how many of us would have ever believed that the new Empress of the High Coven would also be a proud Princess of the Lycavorian Union?" She turned back to the gathered crowd as Narice blushed in embarrassment and squeezed Arrarn's hand. "An old enemy that we have fought for millennia is now our friend and ally. An old enemy that we have just recently learned was never an enemy at their heart to begin with. How long have vampires been within the Union? How long have we called them

friend and family? We saw in those who lived among us that oppression and power was not the goal of the people of the High Coven. We saw this but never did anything about it. It took a leap of faith, not by me or any of us who should have known better given our many years of experience, it took a leap of faith by this generation our of children now to accomplish this. If not for Narice and my *mandri* Androcles and so many like them, we would not have put the past behind us where it belongs and moved into the future. They saw what so many of us did not and they made it happen.”

While her statement drew notice and the applause had already begun, it became silent instantly when she spoke that word and did so with pride. Deia smiled at the reaction for it was what she knew would happen.

“No... I did not misspeak.” She stated. “I have hidden from so many I call friend, from all of you, the one thing I should have embraced from the very beginning.” Deia looked directly into the many vid cameras that were rolling. “I am the youngest sister of Queen Eliani. I was there the day they died defending our right to be free, as so many of us were. Very few knew who I was even then, I stayed in the shadows and watched as Resumar and Eliani and Canth led our people through the blackest of times. I swore... I swore the day that they died I would not let their dream die. I buried who I was in the chaos that followed those first days after we had achieved our freedom and I began to work towards everything they had begun. I cannot... I will not hide who I am any longer. Some of you may have begun to suspect after the events with Chetak and Jorak took place. Seeing that beast of a man attempt to destroy my family a second time was almost too much for me. I am now going to do something that Martin has been after me for years to do. I am going to throw off this veil of secrecy and take the name that fills me with such pride and love. Martin Leonidas, our Union’s King, is my nephew by blood. I will not go another day forward and hide this fact any longer. Some of you may have suspected that there was something between us... and now you know what it is. I have spoken to my husband and mate Eldaos and we have agreed that we will now take the name of Leonidas as our own. The name of our blood and our history. The name Martin has wanted me to take since the day he discovered who I really was.”

Deia Leonidas felt the weight of secrecy lift from her shoulders and what she had felt for years since Martin’s return now burned even brighter within her. The light of truth about who she was. Her face and eyes beamed with happiness and Arrarn and Resumar quickly rose from their chairs and approached her much to her genuine surprise. They both embraced her tightly, and were followed quickly by Narice, Toria and Athani. Vampire and Kavalian wives and mates of Arrarn and Resumar Leonidas that Narice, Toria and Athani may have been, but they knew well the customs of the men that had claimed them and stolen their hearts. The nuzzles that adorned Deia from all three of them were quickly and brazenly caught on every vid cam and beamed across the stars to trillions of those viewing the transmission inside the High Coven and the Kavalian Federation. Deia basked in this loving attention as Tarifa and Aihola joined their nephews in embracing and nuzzling Deia. There were none within the Union who did not know that their King considered Tarifa and Aihola his sisters though they did not bear the name Leonidas. Deia basked in the attention for a few moments before she wiped away the tears and ushered them back to their chairs. She took a few moments to compose herself before turning back to the podium. It was obvious to even the densest of fools the happiness and peace that coursed through Deia now and the brightness of her eyes and face now made her appear so much younger and vibrant and this caught the attention of everyone present.

“Now... before I make the announcement that will undoubtedly send some of you into fits of glee, I wish to brief the Lycavorian Union and High Coven citizens watching of what is happening now. This transmission is also being beamed into the Kavalian Federation Imperium on commandeered channels in control of the rightful government.” Deia spoke. She motioned with her hand to where Pian sat in his chair. “Behind me sits General Pian’Nruarani, leader of Pride Nruarani and the freely elected Interim Leader of the Kavalian Free Republic as they have chosen to be called. Beside him sits his wife and mate, Jalersi’Nruarani, the freely elected Vice Interim Leader. In the crowd among us here in Sparta sit thirty Kavalian Pride Leaders who have willingly traveled here under the threat of death in order to support and make known their wishes for the future of their people.” Deia waved her hand to the Kavalian Pride Leaders who sat in the front row facing the stage, all of them with stunned expressions that she had pointed them out. “I would call them all by their names but I do not wish to mispronounce their given Pride names and disrespect them. Forgive me gentlemen... I will learn them all in the future.”

It was Aleou’Hkan who rose from his chair and bowed his head to her in respect for all of his fellow Pride leaders. This was not something any of them had expected and as each day passed by all of them grew

more and more confident. It would not be easy or without loss, but all of them now believed that they could win the battle they were going to enter.

Deia turned back to the crowd. “Let me be very clear as I go forward now, a state of war does now exist between the Lycavorian Union and the Kavalian Federation Imperium because of their vicious and unprovoked attacks against our Union and their vile actions and treatment of one of our beloved Queens. I say unprovoked for a reason, and the many facts that we have in our possession now will only support that claim and are being made available to all of you right now via open transmission.” Deia saw hundreds of men and women begin to reach for their ever present personal data pads. “That state of war however, it does not extend to the many Kavalian men and women and even children who, as we speak here, fight to be free. We as a government did not know the extent of this desire among the Kavalian people and we should have been the first to see it given our own history!” Deia looked first at Pian and then turned to meet the eyes of the Kavalian Pride Leaders. “I tell you now, in front of the billions who are watching, just as my nephew told you directly, the Lycavorian Union pledges all support to the Kavalian Free Republic. Our founding Chronicles of Law do not allow for active participation in internal conflicts, but it does state we can support those we believe in. Our King’s directives are simple. Even now, the entirety of the Union logistical arm is being directed in support of the Kavalian Free Republic. Every single resource we can provide to them will be given. We will not openly move against Kavalian Federation forces unless we are attacked directly. At that juncture, the full weight of the Lycavorian Union will be brought to bear against the Kavalian Federation Imperium and we will join our brothers and sisters in active combat. I urge those Kavalian leaders, military and political, who may be watching to give up and join your people in opposing a regime who actively supports the massacre of children and innocents; who actively support the activities of rape and murder. I ask you directly, are these the men you want leading you into the future?”

Deia took a breath and continued. “Union Logistical Forces are already moving to assist the forces of the Kavalian Free Republic. We do this openly in support of those who resist the mantle of oppression because we know well that history. I will not discuss numbers or what types of forces we are sending so do not ask. Those who need this information are already well aware of what is taking place. It is my understanding that the new government of the Vampire High Coven, their Ruling *Ventash'ma* and their Empress have also committed logistical support to the Kavalian Free Republic. This is done as a show of their support and commitment to the Kavalian people and that the High Coven does not hold all Kavalian people responsible for the maniac workings of a few who rule with absolute brutality.” Deia’s face hardened somewhat now and she lifted one of the datapads slightly.

“Now I will speak directly to the leaders of that putrid regime. I have in my hand here an Royal Executive Order. It is signed by the only two individuals in our Union who can issue such an edict without support of the Union Senate; King Martin Leonidas and his heir Crown Prince Androcles Leonidas. Talon Guardians of Dragonkind and Praetorians of the Lycavorian Union. This Royal Executive Order states explicably that no Union military action will be taken directly against the Kavalian regime currently in power. It also states the two reasons that this order will become null and void and then unleash Union forces to fight beside their Kavalian brothers and sisters in full force. Reason one... any military attack, no matter how insignificant it may seem, against Lycavorian Union assets, planets, colonies or military units by Kavalian Federation Imperium forces will result in the immediate and total commencement of hostilities involving Union forces. Reason two... any attack against Vampire High Coven assets, planets, colonies or military units by Kavalian Federation Imperium forces will result in the immediate and total commencement of hostilities involving Union forces.” Deia looked up. Her dark eyes changed and her wolf fangs extended in that split second, shocking many who had never seen this part of her before. “To those of you watching from your seats of oppressive power, the Lycavorian Union has the means to end you in one fell swoop. You have tasted part of this power and ability already and should you disregard the warning I give you now, you will suffer the fate of the damned.”

Deia then did something she hadn’t done in more years than she cared to remember. She went with her instincts.

“For those of you who might be watching and are too ignorant or dense to understand what this order means I will put it into simpler words and terms that you will understand. Words my many nieces and nephews

would use to get their point across. Don't fuck with us or we will bitch slap you and obliterate you from existence!"

Deia was easily able to hear the sudden and deafening roar of approval from within the confines of the city of Sparta where nearly everyone was in front of a monitor watching the speech. The cascade of cheering shook the very ground around her with its rumblings. Arrarn and Resumar could not contain their laughter at Deia's words, and others saw Tarifa and Dilios and Panos simply shaking their heads with smiles. Deia however, did not hear the same reaction that exploded from millions of homes, businesses and gathering places across the entire Union and stretching into High Coven space. Deia then watched with wide eyes as hundreds of Union Senators rose to their feet clapping madly in approval at her statement, joined by the thirteen *Ventash'ma* members who had come with Narice. She had not expected such a reaction and this told her that there were many who had come to the limits of their tolerance and would no longer be pushed about. It was ten minutes at least before the roar lessened and men and women began to take their seats again. Deia waited patiently, sipping from a water bottle given to her by Eldaos, before she was able to continue.

"I will now touch on recent reports into what some would have you believe as deceitful and oppressive actions made by my nephew Androcles. Abuse of his position as Crown Prince they call it. I will not go into great detail because an investigation has been opened already by members of the Union Senate without the support of my office or the office of the Lycavorian Union Adjutant. I will not attempt to defend anything he has done. His actions do not need to be defended. To those of you who will challenge him on this, I wish you luck. He will have the full support of his family and far more friends and allies than you might wish to go against." Deia stated. She looked up and her eyes touched the gathered men and women.

"Some would try to have you believe that Andro acted inappropriately in taking Ne'Veha Leonidas as his wife and mate. That he used his status as Crown Prince to ignore the fact that Ne'Veha had been claimed by another Alpha wolf. That Androcles even went so far as to have this wolf taken into custody in order to make things easier for himself to accomplish this. An official inquiry by certain individuals has already been opened into this as I said. They would also like you to believe that Androcles has somehow used his position as Crown Prince and the wealth he has gained through the years inappropriately to obtain certain things." Deia shook her head. "I have seen many things in my life and in this political position I hold now, however, resorting to tactics such as this in order to call into question the honor and the integrity of my nephew is far beyond the pale." Deia held up a second data pad. "I have here in my hand the financial records of Androcles Leonidas, given to me by Andro himself. They are even now being distributed to the Inquiry Board. Those of you who wish to press this issue... I wish you luck. You will need it." Deia barely took notice of the quiet laughter among many of the men and women seated in the crowd.

"Now... as to actions and missions currently being undertaken by Androcles and his father..." Deia took a deep breath. "In recent months we have discovered so much about our history as a people. A history that many of us never knew existed. In order to explain events in a way that all of us will understand I must first give a small history lesson. It begins nearly thirty-five thousand years ago and while the history goes back further than that... this is when it began to directly affect the Lycavorian people. Thirty-five thousand years ago is when the decision by two men altered the course of our history and our lives. I will now tell you about those two men. One is called Wayonn and he is still among us, working closely beside our King out there in the unknown. The second man... well... his name was Sumar." Deia watched as many eyes grew wider and men and women leaned forward in their seats. "Sumar... Sumar was the father to King Resumar, and he is the great grandfather to Martin Leonidas. Sumar and Wayonn are... were what are called Pralors. These Pralors were a species of..."

SCIMITAR
ORBITING EARTH
PORT LANDING BAY

Andro stared at them with bright azure eyes and a smile on his face.

They stared back with equally wide smiles and one pair of dark brown eyes and one pair of azure eyes just as bright as his own.

“Look at the two of you.” Andro finally said. “You have... you have grown.”

“Did you expect us to remain children forever *fervon*?” Nara Leonidas asked with a good deal of humor in her voice.

“What? No!” Andro stammered. “I just did not expect...”

“That Nara would have *goldur* as big as our mother?” Deion Leonidas asked with a large smirk. “They have been a constant distraction to the alphas in our class too!”

Nara Leonidas reared back and slapped her twin brother in his face. A blow which he barely felt. “*Midaeus!*” She spat loudly.

Andro could not contain his laughter and he stepped forward to embrace his younger twin brother and sister. There was no hesitation on their part either as they both melted into his embrace and hugged him back with the same intensity that he embraced them.

Deion Leonidas was the spitting image of his pureblood brothers and father. His black hair was cut short like Andro and Denali’s and he wore the scruff of a three day old growth of facial hair. His dark eyes were mirrors of his father and Denali, so deep and expressive while Nara shared the eyes of her mother just as Andro did. Azure blue in color and so very bright and alive.

They were barely seventeen years of age, but both of them appeared as if they were well into their twenties. Andro knew this was because of their bonds to their dragons, it happened with many who bonded at a young age with dragons. Nara’s long raven black locks, identical to Andro’s and their mother Aricia in color, was shining with health and cascaded well past her shoulders to the middle of her back. She did not wear her hair as long as their mother did, but it was very close. She had the same exotic beauty as their mother, with deeply tanned skin and high cheekbones and soft full lips. Her five foot five height encompassed a tightly packed and muscular one hundred and eighteen pounds. Like their mother she had long legs and a small waist, but there was no mistaking she had the same firm and very full breasts as their mother.

Deion was equal to Andro in height and already possessed the Leonidas muscular build and Spartan definition of his father and brothers that caused so many young female wolves to swoon. His skin was also deeply tanned and his two hundred pounds was encased in civilian clothes as well. Deion held tightly to his brother’s shoulder while Nara had her hand on the back of Andro’s neck as they nuzzled each other happily. It had been almost a year since they had seen each other and they basked in the feeling and emotions of siblings again. Andro pulled his head back and gazed at them.

“Jeru and Mayla?” He asked.

Nara chuckled softly. “They are already on deck ten.” She answered.

Deion grinned now as well. “Already staking claim to the many bones that they know you keep on board.”

Andro laughed. “They will have to fight their brothers and sisters for them.” He said. “Or did they forget Jeth is among us.”

“They didn’t forget.” Deion answered. “They have a plan though.”

Andro pulled them tighter. “That will be fun to see.” He said. “It is... it is so very good to see both of you. We have missed you.” He said.

Nara leaned forward and kissed his lips. “And we have missed you *fervon*.” She said softly. “All of you.”

“Andro we know our training will continue here but...” Deion began.

Andro shook his head quickly. “No.” He stated firmly. “Your training will continue yes. Jomann and I have already put together a regiment for both of you. You will adhere to this at all times. We will also begin to train with Dorian in using these powers that we seem to possess. But you are among family now. When the training is over for the day you will be free to do and go where you wish. I insist.”

“Thank you.” Nara said.

“Don’t thank me *arande*.” Andro spoke. “Jomann and I will give you no quarter during your sessions. We will be even more unforgiving.”

Nara nodded. “We know.” She answered. “And we...”

“...Are ready for that.” Deion finished.

Andro nodded his head. “Good. That will not start until tomorrow however. Now... come with me up to the lounge. Everyone is watching *tenna Deia*’s speech.”

Nara kissed his lips once more. "It is so good to feel you again *fervon*. It is..."

"Wonderful." Deion finished her statement once again. It was a habit they had developed over the years and at times it drove other people insane. Andro smiled knowing that their power within the Etheric realm made their connection as twins all the more pronounced and powerful.

Andro gripped them tightly. "Come on. The others will lash out at me if they don't see you soon."

SPARTA

"...This is where the abilities you have seen Androcles and his father display recently have come from." Deia finished explaining. "What I have just explained to you is the very abridged version of a much more complicated set of variables. Anja could probably describe it best and I am using terms that Shiria told me to use. This gene is now confirmed to exist in Martin Leonidas and all of his pureblood children with Aricia. Andro's Durcunusaan Captain Jomann also has this gene and we are identifying others as we discover them. This is not some horrible secret we are keeping from the people of the Union as others would try to make you believe... this is a gift from our ancestors that we are only now just discovering and learning what it can allow us to do." Deia took a deep breath. "As many of you have already heard the rumors, Androcles is departing this morning for the Beta Quadrant of known space. We once thought the Beta Quadrant unreachable, but thanks in part to the Pralor technology that Martin discovered, we now have engines that will allow us to make this trip. He is going there to finish the merger of our people. The Protectorate is a branch of the Lycavorian people that left our homeworld Lycavore long before the Black Day. They were only part way back when they discovered what had taken place while they were gone. They chose to remain undetected in the Beta Quadrant in the hopes that one day they could reunite with us. That day has come. Andro will lead a delegation of our people and others that represent the Union and complete a merger that has been millennia in the waiting.

"These men and women of the Protectorate are Lycavorian just like many of us. They have the same values and ideals that we do. They are not the enemy and will not be treated as such. Since recent incidents have caused Andro to already make first contact with two other species within the Beta Quadrant known as the Vanari and the Rothryn people, he will also be taking the lead in opening discussions with them as well. He will never be far away thanks to the wonderful technology that we have discovered in recent years and neither him nor his father is ever out of touch with me or their family back here." Deia let her eyes wander across the men and women gathered. "Everything Martin has done since returning to claim the throne of his grandfather has been for the good of our people as a whole. We all mourned the day we lost his father not so far away from this very spot where we are gathered. And then we all rejoiced when we discovered Martin still lived. Since he has been our King have we all not prospered and grown better for it? Do not let innuendos and rumors rule your thoughts. Demand facts before you decide anything." Deia leaned back and took a deep breath. "I am beginning to ramble now it seems. Something I told myself I would not do. All of the information I have told you this day will be made available in Netnews broadcasts over the next few hours by designated channels. Now... as my niece Eliani is so fond of saying... now I will drop the bomb."

"As of this day, April 14th, in the year of the gods 2575, I am officially announcing I am resigning my position as Prime Minister for the immediate future." Deia spoke. She paused as the uproar she knew was coming exploded outward. Hundreds of men and women came to their feet in shock and Deia quickly raised her hands to bring order. "Please everyone!" She shouted into the podium microphone. "Let me finish!"

It took several moments before everyone began to calm and return to their seats and Deia shook her head with a smile finally. She moved back in front of the podium and waited for relative silence to sweep the crowd once more.

"Perhaps I should have told all of you to let me finish first." She stated with a smile. "Allow me to amend my earlier statement. I will remain as acting Prime Minister for the period of five months. Exactly five months from today, the citizens of the Lycavorian Union are going to vote. I cannot allow my relationship to the King impact the duties of this office. I want the citizens of the Union to decide if they wish me to remain as their Prime Minister, a role I have come to honor and appreciate every single day, even though I may be his Tenna. I will not have those who disagree with Martin or I use this new knowledge in a campaign against him.

Five months from now the Union will decide how they wish to proceed into the future. For the next month, anyone wishing to assume the role of Prime Minister and meets all of the establish criteria, will be granted the right to announce their candidacy for the position. Anyone not involved after that month will be left out. The next four months will then be used to put forth different ideals for the course our Union will take. Then our people will decide.” Deia’s face beamed and she stepped back from the podium. “I thank all of you for coming today and it is my sincere hope to continue to serve on your behalf.”

With that, Deia Leonidas exited the stage the way she had come. Sylrith landed beside the stairs and Deia didn’t hesitate to move to her side and Eldaos assisted as she climbed into the saddle. She smiled at her beloved husband and mate, shared a deep kiss with him when she leaned over, and then Sylrith leaped into the blue sky.

For the first time in nearly thirty millennia, Deia felt truly free. It was a freedom she would enjoy immensely for a short time. Just before she got down to the business of making sure her role as Prime Minister continued for many centuries more.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SCIMITAR

ENROUTE TO DREAMLAND

“...Not what father wanted *Tenna* Deia!” Andro hissed softly at the image of his Aunt in the transmission. She was in her office within Sparta and she looked utterly relaxed as she sat in her high backed chair and sipped from the glass of Spartan Wine. “What are you... what are you hoping to accomplish by doing this? I have to tell him *Tenna* Deia! He will go *malda* that you have done this!”

The image of Deia was perfectly clear, as if she was sitting right in front of him and Andro saw the smile split her face which infuriated him even more.

“You and your father have far too much to worry about going forward.” Deia spoke with calm resolve. “This is the perfect way for me to deflect what you will be doing and keep all of the attention focused on me.”

“But why?” Sadi asked from her seat just behind Andro. All of the Leonidas children and their wives and mates were seated at the large table behind Andro and none of them were happy to say the least.

“This is crazy *Tenna*.” Eliani spoke up now.

“Andro and Eli are right.” Lisisa said. “Father is going to have fits! He will demand that you recant your statement. You are making yourself a target!”

They didn’t feel the rush of warmth course through their Aunt at the overwhelming show of love and concern Deia felt from them but they did notice the smile on her face never left as she leaned forward in her chair.

“Listen to me, all of you.” Deia spoke to them. “This is not something I have done on a whim. I have consulted L’tian, Dilios and Panos as well as several others in the last few days. By doing this I have just redirected all of Icho’s efforts away from you and your father. With Ulana now accompanying you and her reports being censored, he will have no new information unless you deem he get it and he will focus on taking this job. It is all he has ever wanted to begin with.”

“You don’t know that for sure *Tenna*.” Zarah spoke up. Of all of the Leonidas children, Zarah and Normya had spent the most time around their mothers Dysea and Isabella as well as Deia while they negotiated any number of treaties or agreements and they had learned much about how politics worked. “He has to have a very extensive network that is working for him to have accomplished what he has so far.”

“And he will undoubtedly seek help from his Kavalian allies.” Normya spoke from her seat beside Zarah. Even though she and Tir’ut were now married and Zarah and Lucia were very much a couple, the sisters had still managed to spend every moment they could together. Lucia and Tir’ut had become fast friends and it was a common sight to see the four of them together now. Lucia’s intense love and Normya’s sisterly concern had been magical for Zarah and she was rapidly becoming who she once was.

Andro turned back to the image with a nod. "My sisters speak the truth *Tenna*. They have more experience with this type of thing because of their time spent with you and our mothers."

Deia nodded her head. "And both of you know this is the best course. He will direct all of his resources to gaining this chair. He won't be able to help himself. He is an arrogant Alpha wolf who thinks he knows what is best for everyone. That his way is the only way. He seeks only power and control, that is obvious. How do you defeat someone like that Zarah? What did your mothers and I tell you and Normya during the negotiations with the Tuplian Premier? Do you remember?"

Normya leaned forward and looked at her sister. "Give him what he wants..."

"But only make it seem like he is getting what he wants." Zarah finished.

Deia nodded her head. "Exactly." Deia told them. "Icho will bring all of his resources to bear on me, on doing his level best to getting me expelled from this office so that he can claim it for himself. That is what he wants *mandri*. He will focus very little on you now... or your father."

"He will attempt to drag you and our family through the mud *Tenna*." Andro spoke. "He will bring into question every decision you have ever made. Even those from long before our father returned to our people."

Deia nodded her head again. "Yes he will." She spoke with a smile. "It will be exciting!"

"This is not a joking matter!" Andro snapped.

Deia chuckled. "*Mandri*... do you truly believe I will allow that man to defeat me? Do you have so little faith in our people?"

"Faith in our people and their decisions is not something I question. Faith in you I do not question." Andro spoke. "However, Icho and his ilk will do everything within their power, legal and otherwise, to oust you and take your chair. You know this."

"Indeed I do." Deia said with a smile. "I am counting on that fact. You forget though that Armetus is *my* friend Andro. He is loyal to me and to your father, who he adores. He is already plotting what he will do. Icho can do whatever he wishes; when he reveals his true nature and his true allegiances; then Armetus and Vengal will bring the Krypteria and *Durcunusaan* to bear on them and they will squash them like the insects they are. Believe me *mandri*... I have faced far more dangerous opponents in the political arena. When all is said and done, Icho and his cronies will be nothing more than a brief footnote in history."

"*Tenna*..." Andro began.

"Listen to me!" Deia retorted. "You need to be focused on what your tasks are! In all the years since your father returned to us I have never known him to question me or my tactics. He understands what must be done. What he does not understand, your mothers Dysea and Isabella, they will explain it to him. They will know almost immediately what I am doing when you tell them."

"I don't like it!" Andro stated. "We will not be there to support you!"

Deia laughed at this and sat back in her chair. "Support me?" She spoke. "*Mandri*... I have Armetus already spinning the wheels in that wonderful head of his. And no doubt Vengal is already preparing the *Durcunusaan* here on Earth. What they cannot take care of... well... I will unleash your aunts Tarifa and Aihola upon. And then Selene and Lynwe. I also have Diliios and Panos. I have Charles Taylor. Any one of them could chew Icho up and spit him out. If he wishes to step into the arena against all of us... I welcome it. We welcome it."

"She does have a point *Saradasaar*." Lu'ria spoke now from her chair. "Queen Aihola is sure to turn my mother and the other Drow Senators loose on this fool if he steps beyond his station or attempts anything nefarious."

"Icho is not stupid... nor is he without support of his own *tenna*." Andro protested still. "He has lasted this long and we have still not been able to discover his connections to Laustinos or Keleru in that time. That fact alone indicates he is very careful and whatever ties he has to our enemies are very deep and very entrenched. Given the ultimatum you hit them with; they will undoubtedly direct all of their efforts and whatever assets they have within the Union to helping him. They can not face us militarily because of the unrest Pian is sowing, but this is different."

Deia nodded. "I'm sure they will. And they will expose themselves eventually. I do not believe the Kavalians pose so much of a direct threat as you. Pian and Jalersi tell me that many of their military leaders have wavered for years over Keleru's oppressive rule. Their open call for rebellion might be all that is needed to

tip the scales. If that is the case... then their only avenue will be to support Icho covertly in the hopes of unseating me.”

“I still don’t like it!” Andro snapped.

Deia came to her feet in the transmission. “Androcles Leonidas there is only one reason that your father would call for you and your siblings.” She said softly. “Your father never calls for help unless he knows he will need it. He knows you and your brothers and sisters will not hesitate to descend upon his and your mother’s location like the wrath of the gods, which from what I understand, you intend to do with the make up of the forces you are bringing with you.”

“*Tenna...*” Andro began again.

“Androcles do you trust me?” Deia asked.

“Why do you ask me that?” Andro hissed. “You already know the answer! Of course I trust you! That is never in question!”

Deia nodded her head. “Yes I do know the answer.” She said. “So focus on what your mission is and leave the rest to me. I have the Authorization Writ signed by you and Sadi and your wives and mates. I also have one signed by Eliani and Jomann. By Lisisa and Deni and Zarah and Lucia. By Normya and Tir’ut. Everyone who Icho might think to try and come after and smear, even remotely, while you are gone. He will discover that he has chosen the wrong family to *nubou* with Androcles. I will not sit idly by any longer *Mandri*. It is why Eldaos and I chose to announce to all who I was. We will proudly wear our name now and we will defend it as any Lycavorian Spartan would. The good Senator Icho will soon discover he has stepped into a very large pile of *sibfla* and no matter what he does, it will be his undoing in every respect.”

Andro stared at the image of his aunt for a long moment and then a small smile split his lips. “I have not known you to use such colorful metaphors on so regular a basis *Tenna*.” He said finally. This brought soft chuckles from his brothers and sisters behind him.

Deia laughed softly as well and nodded her head. “Yes... well... it must be the influence of your father and your mother Anja through the years. They do have such unique ways of getting their points across to others.”

“*Tenna...* you realize your speech will have gone out across the galaxy.” Lisisa asked. “More than likely they saw it even within the Beta Quadrant.”

Deia nodded again. “I’m counting on it.” She stated evenly. “My next speech will be even more informative. And hopefully it will make things with the Vanari go better than you expect they will. At least that is what I am hoping. Ceuma and Naesta are coming to see me in the morning so that I may ask some questions. We will see.”

“You will contact me if anything comes up that you are not prepared for?” Andro spoke. “I insist!”

Deia nodded. “I promised your father many years ago I would not go off on my own and do something like this without support. When you see him, tell him I am fully covered. He will know what I mean.”

“See him?” Andro spoke. “As soon as he finds out about this he will be contacting you I am sure!”

Deia laughed again. “No doubt.” She said. “I am meeting with Tarifa and Panos in a few minutes so I must go. I will keep you fully informed Androcles... have no worries about that. *Cuia fas vada carians aur mandras for mandris. Cuia fas vada carians.*”

“*For forn tenna.*” They all answered her simultaneously.

Andro waited until the image of his aunt had fully disappeared and then he turned to look at his brothers and sisters. He moved slowly back to his chair and settled himself between Sadi and Sehri. Both of them gripped his arms tightly and leaned over to nuzzle his cheeks as he settled into the chair sensing he still did not like that they were leaving her after what she had done. Andro’s eyes closed for a moment as he relished in their scents and female auras and then he opened his eyes and looked at his siblings.

“Thoughts?” He said.

“I would not want to face her in battle *fervon*.” Dorian spoke up. “Even if it is only in the political arena.”

Deion and Nara had chosen to sit next to Dorian and Sheva and they both grinned at his words. Physically he was older than they were, but Nara and Deion felt a special connection to him just as they did to Andro because of the gene within their bodies, and because of the way he was brought into this world, he would

always be their younger brother in their eyes. It was also quite obvious to anyone that Nara and Sheva had hit it off instantly no matter the difference in their ages.

“Nor would I.” Sadi echoed.

“That does not mean we should not do something.” Eliani stated.

“Eli is right.” Lisisa said now.

“Armetus will allow nothing to happen to her Andro.” Zarah said. “You know that.”

Andro nodded. “I know... but these are not normal times *arande*. Now that Deion and Nara have joined us, she has no means of unconventional defense. No one who could perhaps sense things others cannot.”

“We could return.” Deion spoke up.

“Would she even allow us to return Deion?” Nara questioned turning to look at Deion. “She would know why we have come back and she would insist that we return to the training grounds and...”

“...That we finish our Agoge.” Deion finished.

“You two need to stop doing that! Finishing each others statements.” Eliani snapped at them playfully. “It’s unnerving! It gives me the creeps!”

They all chuckled at this and Nara leaned into Deion affectionately. “We will endeavor to...”

“...Accommodate your request *arande*.” Deion finished.

“*Midaeus!*” Eliani launched a data pad at her sister and Nara caught it easily as they all laughed.

“Contact Dantio.” Jomann spoke now all eyes turning to him as he canted his head and looked at Andro.

“Who is Dantio?” Deion asked.

Dorian leaned forward. “That is an excellent idea. Vari and Emios will have fully healed by now *fervon*.” He said evenly. “And Haridl would have made sure Robaran did nothing these last weeks but heal.”

“*Tenna Deia* will *sibfla* if she discovers we did that Andro. An Omega Team providing security for our *Tenna?*” Eliani said.

Ne'Veha nodded her head. “Better to be safe than sorry Eli.” She added.

“Very true Veba. Very true.” Eliani agreed calling her by the nickname Andro’s siblings had given to her.

“I can send a secure burst to Ambassador L'tian and insure that only he knows what they are doing.” Ne'Veha continued. “Deia will never suspect that he will be in control of a Omega Team charged with her protection. They could report directly to your grandfather. He has been the point of contact in the past for similar situations *Saradasaar*.” Ne'Veha told Andro as she turned her dark brown eyes on him.

“*SirsanGai* is right.” Carisia spoke now as she leaned forward from her seat next to Sehri. “I can also have Narice make up an excuse for her to leave a detachment of Immortals on Earth. Arrarn could convince Deia easily. Some joint training scheme with the *Durcunusaan* perhaps.”

Andro nodded as he sat back. “Dantio’s Omega Team and the Immortals *Enylarcopri*.” He said quickly. “No more than that or she will suspect something. Contact Narice before we go dark and have her make the arrangements. Jomann... you and Dorian round up Dantio and his team wherever they are on Earth and brief them before we go dark.”

“Done.” Jomann said.

“She will scream if she discovers we have done this.” Zarah said with a smile.

“Louder than we have ever heard her scream no doubt.” Normya echoed. “We’ll be able to hear it from the Beta Quadrant!”

“Let her scream if she discovers them.” Andro said. “Father would take a switch to all of us if he discovers we let her do this and then left her without any type of Shadow Security in place.”

“*Carians*... the last time mother took a switch to my backside I was only six.” Normya declared. “I was scarred for weeks. That was not a pleasant experience.”

Tir'ut leaned over beside her head with a sly grin. “Your backside is perfect my *Du'ased 'ranndi*. No scars at all that I have seen.”

Normya blushed under her tan and elbowed her Immortal husband in the chest as she rolled her eyes. “Pervert!” She exclaimed while looking at him with adoring emerald colored eyes.

“Too much information!” Eliani stated. “Way too much!”

Andro and the others joined in the soft laughter among siblings. His eyes settled on Brendi Faith who had remained silent for the entire duration. That she was even present was quite a surprise to her. Eliani and

Jomann already considered her part of their lives and they both hoped that soon it would become much more intimate and serious. Andro knew that his other brothers and sisters also now considered Brendi part of their family for none of them batted an eye that she was here and sitting next to their sister. He rose to his feet and looked at them.

“We go dark in five hours for the remainder of the trip to pick up Onera and then on to Dreamland.” Andro told them. “Let’s get this set up before that happens. I don’t want to have to worry about it when we are gone. I need to speak with Sa’sur so I will meet all of you for dinner later.”

They watched him turn and exit the conference room quickly and it was Dorian who shook his head and chuckled. “Meet with Sa’sur my *mida*!” He said.

Sadi met his eyes and grinned as well. “He was not very convincing was he?” She said with a soft laugh. Sehri looked at Sadi quickly. “What do... what do you mean?” She asked.

Sadi met her questioning eyes with a beaming smile. “Only that our beautiful husband and mate is going to arrange for some very unpleasant things to happen to the good Senator Icho and his followers should anything bad befall Deia.”

Eliani and the others laughed at Sadi’s very diplomatic answer and Carisia leaned closer to Sehri. “What *KertaGai* is trying to say in agreeable words Sehri our love, is that Andro will now contact several people that he undoubtedly knows, and on top of what we will do, he will insure that Deia and all those connected to our family are very well protected.”

Sehri met her eyes. “And they will not know this?” She asked.

Carisia shook her head. “Not unless someone does something incredibly stupid and tries to hurt Deia or the others.”

“And this Armetus that Deia spoke of?” Sehri asked. “He will not know?”

Sadi shook her head with a grin. “Not when the person Andro will most likely call is Marci... Armetus’s second in command. Marci is our age *DuanGai* ... and she knows well how Andro works and what he will expect.”

All of them present saw Sehri’s eyes grow slightly moist when she heard the word Sadi had called her. It was not a very common practice to give a nickname in the ancient language to those you loved and called husband, wife and mate. While many of the more traditional of their people did it now, and it was becoming more and more popular, there were still far more who did not. The ancient Lycavorian language was not easy to learn and while it was making a very strong comeback, it was still many years from being spoken freely among all their people. Tradition dating back millennia said that when blessed with a name in the ancient language by those who loved you, it forever sealed the bond between you. Sehri knew this part of the custom after being able to swim within Andro’s mind as freely as she now did with Sadi and the others. Andro had given all of them names, though Lu’ria’s name was spoken in the Drow language, and it was one of the ways he showed his love and devotion to them.

Andro’s siblings also took note of the name Sadi used and within a few hours it would be filtering throughout the fleet in reference to Sehri. And it would be the name they all used in private with their family to show their love for her as well.

Jomann got to his feet. “We all have work to do before dinner. I suggest we get to it.” He stated.

Acting as Andro’s Captain as he was, no one argued with that directive and all of them began to rise and do what they needed to do.

Sheva Juconi-Leonidas stood in the center of the quarters Dorian had claimed as his own and let her eyes sweep the medium sized apartment like abode. She had to admit the view from the roof bubble was absolutely breathtaking and behind the nights they had spent under the stars on Cranae Island, the most fantastic love making they had experienced had come in these very quarters. And there had been many hours of passionate and intense love making Sheva thought with a large degree of ardor.

The quarters lacked a certain normality however.

Sheva Juconi felt a warm flush course through her as the memories of those times flashed through her mind and the undeniable fact that they would continue long into her future. Never in all the years since her

parents had been killed had she felt such a blissful peace and sense of belonging. Dorian Leonidas had claimed her as his beloved wife and mate in the fashion of the Lycavorian people, but he had also claimed her as his Blessed Wife in the fashion of his and Sheva's vampire blood. She looked down at the glittering silver and titanium band on the ring finger of her left hand and couldn't help but smile and bite her bottom lip when the memories of the day Dorian had given it to her came rushing back. They were walking along the white sands of Cranae Island and he had just popped it out of his pocket. He told her it was an old Earth and human custom that had begun centuries ago. Part of him wanted to honor that fact because he was born on Earth. The ring had fit perfectly and Sheva had spent many minutes just making sure it was all real over the next few days. Every time she saw the ring she had no doubt in the least.

Sheva Juconi-Leonidas.

"Gods I love hearing that." Sheva muttered softly to herself.

Dorian's family treated her very differently now. She was a member of their family. The Royal Leonidas family. She was a Princess now. The Blessed Wife to a man over three hundred years her junior, but a young man who had given back to her all she had thought lost. A young man who was far wiser and knowledgeable than anyone gave him credit for except his family. Dorian treated her like she was the most important thing in his life, which Dorian now was to her. Sheva had grasped for a future she never thought she would have and she had hung on tight as Dorian swept her away with his infectious smile and wit. When they had shared blood during their passionate lovemaking, Dorian's natural Etheric skills had formed a permanent connection with her. Sheva had never imagined being able to sense his presence within her would bring her such joy. She could explore his mind as much as she wanted and she had eagerly begun to learn as much about this new power as she could from him. She had no intention of losing what she had discovered now, and she would kill to safeguard that.

Sheva shook her head slowly with another smile as she looked around. The quarters here on the ship were somewhat barren and Sheva knew she would have to improve them. At least for the time before they transferred to *SPARTA'S WRATH*. The quarters lacked a certain warmth and normality. She moved across the room to where they had dropped their bags upon arriving and squatted down in front of the duffle. She began digging in the large canvas bag to find the data pad she had brought with a list of items she intended to purchase, placing several stacks of their clothes on the couch. Sheva saw the blinking green light from the side of the bag and her hand closed around the data pad, pulling it out. The green light indicated she had a message and her brow furrowed in puzzlement since she had given this frequency only to Dorian and Jomann she was sure. She tapped the pad quickly and entered her pass code watching as the face of the older man appeared on the small screen. Sheva's eyes grew wide in horror and she tossed the data pad away from her as if she had been horribly bitten.

"NO!!" She screamed. "NO!!"

She didn't realize that her reaction would echo outward to the man she had come to love so completely and he would instantly drop what he was doing and head to where she was.

Sheva stared at Dorian's sleeping face on the bed. She hadn't realized how her reaction to the data pad would affect him and he had come storming into their quarters ready to kill in order to protect her. He found her huddled in a ball against the wall near the couch and immediately had fallen to the floor beside her and gathered her into his arms. The warmth of his body had an immediate effect on her and she had wrapped her arms around his waist, burying her face into his chest as his resonance within the Etheric realm poured outward to her in a soothing way as she inhaled deeply of his manly aroma. Sheva knew she had to tell him. She had to tell him of her past and how she had come to be here.

And why.

It came spilling out within an hour and as he held her on their bed she didn't stop talking for what seemed like years. Fear gripped Sheva as she talked; fear of losing him and what she had found. Fear that he would hate her for what her initial orders had been. They had watched the message together and his handsome face remained impassive throughout; as he listened to her tell him everything after the message was over. A message that had revealed something even she had no idea it would. A new fear and wonderful discovery that

had changed almost everything. She held nothing back from him any longer. Sheva knew in order to have the life she wanted with him that she needed his love and trust. She knew that in order to discover if the message was accurate she needed his trust and love. She did not know if she would be able to go on without the emotion and feelings he had brought out in her and after seeing the message she needed those emotions even more. The more she spoke to him the more her trepidation grew as his face remained completely void of emotion or reaction. She was very nearly on the edge of losing it at the end for he had said nothing and only gazed at her with those beautiful multi-colored eyes. Just when she thought he would rise and leave her forever, Dorian leaned forward and kissed her ever so softly. His strong hands had come up and gripped her face and Sheva's heart had rejoiced as he deepened the kiss and his Etheric resonance enveloped her mind. He opened his mind to her without question and she saw the absolute love and devotion to her and how that love for her made him part of who he was.

Dorian had lifted her shuddering frame into his arms and carried them to the bathroom where he had striped them both and then lovingly held her under the hot spray of water. There was nothing sexual in his actions in the least. He stroked her naked flesh, washed her skin and hair and planted small kisses of desire all over her shoulders and neck. He whispered his love of her into her ears over and over in so many different ways, assuring her that it would be fine. That they would get through this. He was not going to lose her and she had not lost him.

The emotional outburst, more severe than anything she had ever experienced had taken its toll on her. Once dried and wearing one of his oversized shirts, Dorian had gathered her into his arms on their bed and Sheva had fallen asleep within moments.

She had awoken only a few moments before, still wrapped within his arms. What had occurred came rushing back and she had slowly removed herself from his embrace and knelt now on the bed staring at him. There was no hate for her coming from him. She thought for sure he would be savagely angry and want nothing to do with her as he turned her over to Jomann and those who despised traitors of any kind. She knew what Androcles thought of traitors and she worried now for him as well as herself if Androcles discovered her past. She knew Dorian loved his brother dearly, and they were far closer than most people outside of their family knew, because of the way both of them were born with complete awareness. The fear she felt earlier had returned now as these thoughts filled her head. The message had revealed something she had not known all of these years and she had to discover if it was true. She had been lied to for so long and now along with that fear came anger. Anger over a life that had been stolen away from her.

The sheet covered only his lower body and Dorian's chest and shoulders were exposed for her to see. The definition of his body was such a delight for her, and once more she feared she would lose him forever if his brother discovered what she once was. She reached out slowly to run her fingers across his abdomen and his eyes opened almost instantly at her touch. He saw her kneeling on the bed and he sat up quickly, his eyes darting around their room looking for threats, and finally returning to her.

"Sheva?" He asked softly.

Sheva met his gaze and lifted her hands to cup his face. "I... I am terrified Dori." She stammered as her eyes became moist. "I don't... I don't know what to do! What to believe! What if... I thought they were dead! What if they are alive? After all these years... what if they are alive?"

"Then we will find them and you will be reunited." Dorian answered.

"How?" Sheva spoke. "Dori... I don't... I have never been this confused!"

"We will figure it out Sheva." Dorian answered.

"How?" She asked again. "When your brother discovers what I am... you know as well as I that he hates traitors even more than your father. And your father despises them! He will see to it that I am interrogated and then executed."

"That will not happen!" Dorian hissed. "You are no traitor Sheva!"

"I... we must leave!" She exclaimed suddenly. "When he discovers my past; why I came here to begin with; he will have no mercy for me Dori! I have seen how he treats traitors and spies. He will..."

Dorian reached up and grabbed her face gently in his hands. "Sheva stop!" He exclaimed. "Nothing like that will ever happen!"

"How can you be so sure?" She gasped as small tears rolled down her cheeks.

“I won’t allow it.” Dorian said firmly. “No one in my family would allow it. Least of all Andro. You are my wife Sheva!”

Sheva looked at him. “I am a spy sent here to infiltrate the *Durcunusaan* and eventually kill your mother Dorian. How can any of them forgive that? How can... how can you?” She hissed.

“No!” Dorian barked loudly.

Dorian knew she was going to question everything until he proved to her that she was in no danger. She would never be the same unless she saw that her fears were unfounded. There was only one way to make her see that. He tossed back the sheet, revealing that he wore only a loose pair of black pants, and he got to his feet. He moved quickly into the living area of their quarters and snatched up the data pad and then returned to the bedroom. Sheva looked at him as he held out his hand to her. She glanced at the data pad in his hand and rose to her knees on the bed.

“Dorian?” She questioned.

Dorian held out his hand for her. “Do you love me Sheva?” He asked her.

“What? How can you ask me that? You know I do Dori! More than anything in the universe!” She exclaimed.

“Do you love me enough to trust me completely?” Dorian questioned her again.

“Dori...?” She stammered.

Dorian thrust out his hand again. “Do you?” He demanded.

Sheva looked at the set of his jaw and the determination in his eyes. She looked at his outstretched hand waiting for her to take it. Waiting for her to finally and completely make the leap from her old life and into her new. Sheva didn’t hesitate and grabbed his hand tightly.

“Come on.” Dorian told her as he turned and began to pull her along.

“Where are we going?” She asked.

“To see the one person besides my father who can find out the information we need and then act on it.” Dorian said.

The crew of the *SCIMITAR* had long ago enlarged Andro’s quarters and Sadi had been the first to begin to decorate it. This would be their home away from home and though most of it was now boxed and crated waiting to be transferred to *SPARTA’S WRATH*, the thick bear skin rugs still covered the floor in front of the two couches. Andro sat on the floor, his back against the couch. His legs were stretched out in front of him encased in his usual white pants with crimson trim, Carisia leaning up against his left side wearing a simple white panty and bra set. Andro’s arm was wrapped around her waist and his fingers alternating between caressing her muscular and tanned abdomen and Lu’ria’s lower back. Lu’ria wore an identical bra and panty set to Carisia and sat between her legs while Carisia brushed out her shimmering white hair preparing to braid it in the Drow fashion. Sadi laid on her back on his right, her head resting up against his thigh. Sehri was laying between her legs, her naked chest pressed across Sadi’s abdomen, her chin resting on her arms which were folded across Sadi’s chest. Ne’Veha sat on the couch above all of them, one of her naked legs draped over Andro’s right shoulder.

“Wouldn’t be surprised if it was one of my sisters.” Sehri spoke. “They came on this trip with the sole intent of trying to win you over Andro.”

Andro chuckled. “That didn’t work.” He said.

“It is something that they would do though.” Sehri said.

“We do not know for sure if it was one of them *DuanGai*.” Carisia stated turning to look at her.

“Who else could it have been?” Sehri asked.

“We were leaning more towards Harira.” Sadi answered her question.

Sehri looked at her. “You truly believe that Sadi?” She asked. She lifted her eyes back to Andro. “Andro?”

Andro lowered the data pad he had been reading and met her eyes. “Harira has a different agenda than your father *DuanGai*.” He said. “Something about her does not sit right with any of us. You included.”

Sehri nodded slowly in agreement. “But what?” She asked. “I have never... I have never seen her do anything against the Circle.”

“Perhaps that is not her purpose.” Ne'Veha commented.

Sehri looked at her. “You think she is a spy of some sort *SirsanGai*?” She asked.

“You said yourself that the Rothryn Science Academy does not look fondly upon those who can use their Etheric powers like you and us.” Ne'Veha said. “Harira is not who she wants everyone to believe. She is something else...”

Sehri gazed at Andro now. “Andro? You feel this way as well?”

“Her reaction to our union was not something I entirely expected.” Andro replied.

“Nor I.” Sehri said.

Andro nodded his head. “She wasn't just angry that it happened *DuanGai* ... but also frightened. That tells me she would have gone to great lengths to prevent you from being with us if she could have.”

“I would not have allowed that!” Sehri said.

“We know that *DuanGai*.” Sadi spoke again reaching out to caress her cheek. “But she did reveal part of her true nature in acting as she did.”

Sehri's eyes grew a little wider. “She is a spy inside the Circle for the Rothryn Science Academy! It has to be!”

“That is what we believe.” Andro said softly. “Which means that everyone you knew could very well be in danger. We won't know the full extent of all this until we see your people but there is another possible reason she was allowed to come with you however...” He said letting his words trail off.

Sadi lifted her eyes up and gazed at Andro. “Harira was sent with Sehri to get her out of the way?” She questioned.

Andro nodded his head. “From what you have told me of your Cleric Mother Ilossa, she does not strike me as one who would be fooled so easily. Allowing Harira to accompany your mother and you here could very well have been done on purpose in order to protect others while she acted.”

“Wouldn't she believe sending *DuanGai* alone with Harira to be a risk Andro?” Lu'ria asked.

Andro looked at Sehri with those azure blue eyes and Sehri shuddered in delight. But she also understood then. “She knew!” She gasped. “The Cleric Mother knew how I felt. How all of us felt. She knew it that day!”

Andro nodded once more in agreement. “She also knew that you are more than capable of defending yourself with your abilities and that you were even before you came to be with us Sehri.”

Sadi nodded her head. “Now that makes much more sense. She knew that we would never allow anyone or anything to take you from us once we discovered you. That is not how Lycavorians act. She also knew that you would never allow it. She knows far more about Lycavorian culture and tradition than she lets on.”

Andro nodded his head. “Which leads me to believe she has other information that...” Andro stopped talking and canted his head slightly. Sadi and the others knew what this was instantly.

“Andro?” Sadi asked.

“Dorian and Sheva are outside.” Andro said. “Dori says they have something important to discuss with me.”

Lu'ria came to her feet first and reached for her robe. “I will let them in while the rest of you clothe yourselves properly.” She stated with an alluring smile.

“What's wrong with how we are dressed Mistress?” Carisia asked innocently.

Lu'ria leaned over and kissed her passionately. “While I do so enjoy the views of my slaves...” She answered after pulling away from the kiss. “I do not wish to share that with others thank you.”

Andro chuckled while Lu'ria made for the door and Sadi and Sehri reached for their robes which were nearby. He set aside the data pad he was reading and leaned over to nibble softly on the inside of Ne'Veha's thigh which was still draped over his shoulder since she already wore her robe over her luscious elven figure.

All of his wives and mates had accepted that Androcles was seen by his siblings in a very different light. He was second to their father and mothers as a person any of them could come to at any time and talk to about anything. Even his sisters would share with him intimate questions or concerns because they knew their brother would not judge. It was part of who Androcles was to all of them. They also knew that none of his siblings would intrude upon their time together unless it was important. Ne'Veha handed him the mug she had been

sipping from and Andro took a pull of the cinnamon tasting tea as he looked up and saw Lu'ria lead Dorian and Sheva into their main living area. He knew something was wrong right away by the look on Sheva's face and the pungent smell of fear wafting from her pores. He gently lifted Ne'Veha's leg from his shoulder and handed the mug back to her as he got to his feet and faced his brother.

"Dorian? What's wrong?" Andro asked.

Sheva gripped Dorian's hand tightly as she watched Androcles rise to his feet. She had never been this close to him while dressed as he was and her fear grew disproportionately as she gazed at him. While no man could elicit the same reaction from her that Dorian now could, she now knew where he got his muscular definition and Sheva determined that it must run in the family. Andro was every bit as ripped physically as Dori, and while Dorian had no scars as of yet, Sheva could not help but take in the three bullet scars that dotted Androcles's upper chest, or the unique Talon Guardian brand that seemed to pulse and glow with a life of its own. Not to mention the myriad of smaller scars that dotted his skin. He was much more thickly muscled in some respects but Sheva understood now where Dorian's delicious body came from and she knew it came from their father.

Dorian stepped up to his brother without fear and held out the data pad to him. "You should probably see this." He said.

Andro took the pad, his eyes never leaving Dorian's face. "*Fervon?*"

"You'll understand when you see it." Dorian answered his unspoken question.

Andro's azure eyes cut to Sheva quickly and then turned to Sadi. He held out the pad to her.

"*KertaGai...* could you plug this in?"

Sadi grabbed it and leaned over to the small knee high table next to the couch. She inserted it in to the viewer and the holodisc in the corner of the main living area flared to life with the image of a middle aged man none of them knew.

"Agent Sheva Juconi... you have not reported in to me in over four months." The man spoke calmly. "Your task and mission was simple Agent Juconi and we can only assume that your refusal to report in indicates you have been compromised or you have changed your allegiances to the Lycavorian animals you have been living among for so long. You would not be the first one this has happened to, nor will you be the last I think. However... our masters have planned for such an eventuality." The man shifted on his feet slightly.

"You were recruited into this unit because of events that happened with your parents Sheva Juconi. You believed them dead at the hands of the Lycavorian scum that you now live among, and this was the driving force we used to motivate you. Revenge. Such a base emotion, but so very useful at times. Since it seems you will not be fulfilling the orders you were sent to conduct, you have forced us to use other means in order to motivate you."

An image appeared next to the man on the desk of an older man and woman walking outside at what appeared to be some sort of market.

"I believe you know your parents Agent Juconi. They did not perish in the attack on the colony it seems. Your father is more resilient than we first thought and he was able to save himself and your mother as well as several dozen others." The man continued. "They are alive and well. They believe you to be dead however, killed heroically in battle with the Lycavorian scum avenging what you thought was their death. They are in a location known only to a small few, among other family members of other Agents for just this instance. You have a choice to make now Agent Juconi. Contact me in order to receive new orders. Plans have changed and your original mission has been abandoned. We have other orders for you. Do not contact me and your mother and father, who you thought dead, will meet a rather inglorious ending to their pathetic lives. I will give you three days to respond Agent. On the fourth day, we will execute your parents and their blood will be on your hands. Those are Admiral Moran's orders and they will be followed. Three days Agent Juconi."

The transmission ended abruptly, leaving the room in complete silence. Sheva moved closer to Dorian, gripping his hand and arm even tighter, as if that could alter the eruption of anger she expected from his brother. Androcles Leonidas was well known throughout the Union and especially within the *Durcunusaan* as having a

particular nasty distaste and hatred for traitors of any kind. Much more so than his father the King. No one knows where the powerful emotion came from; some have said it was inbred in him because of what happened to his mother, but no matter the how of it, he had no mercy or pity for traitors of any kind. And he had shown that on several occasions in the past.

“*Vithin fa'la zatoast!*” Carisia snarled savagely from where she sat.

“*Siyo... Usstan qua'l.*” Andro spoke softly.

Sehri was the only one who did not know what was truly happening but she knew enough to know that this Juconi woman was supposedly an agent of their enemy. Or was she? She cut her eyes to Andro and saw him simply standing there. She knew Sheva had recently become the wife and mate to Dorian and Sehri did not know what was going to happen.

“Sadi... play it again.” Andro asked as he settled to the edge of the couch.

Sheva glanced at Dorian quickly her eyes wide and then she looked back to Androcles. “Androcles I...” She began to stammer out the words in the hopes of escaping her own death.

“Sheva... when did you get this?” Andro asked.

“What?” She gasped.

Andro turned to look at her. “When did you receive this?” He asked again.

“When did I...?” Sheva stammered aloud. “I am... I was... I was an agent for the High Coven! I was... I was sent here to kill... to assassinate your mother Isabella!” She gasped out finally.

Andro grinned at her. “Sheva Juconi... you haven’t been an agent for the High Coven for nearly a year.” He told her as she watched Carisia move up next to Andro and lean her petite frame against his powerful body. “That is when you stopped filing your reports isn’t it? Not the four months this fool says. And my guess is that you began to question your orders many years ago or we would not be standing here having this discussion. Am I wrong?”

Dorian smiled slightly. “She thinks... Andro... Sheva thinks you will have her executed. Or worse.”

Andro came fully to his feet instantly. “What?” He rasped aloud as his face changed and became concerned.

Sheva looked at him, her green eyes now filled with tears. “You... you hate traitors!” She gasped. “Everyone knows that! You...”

Andro moved across the room faster than her eyes could follow and she gasped in fear when he was suddenly in front of her. She tried to back up but pressed against Dorian’s broad, unmoving body. Sheva watched Andro lift his hands and she closed her eyes believing her life was going to end right there. She gasped loudly and jumped when she felt his hands take her face in his grip ever so gently. Her eyes popped open and she found his face so close to hers, his azure eyes nearly glowing in the light of the room, her hands slowly coming up to rest on his forearms.

“You are no traitor Sheva Juconi-Leonidas.” Andro spoke slowly and confidently. “You are my brother’s Blessed wife and beloved mate. You are a Leonidas now. A Princess of the Union. My family. I could no more hurt you than I could hurt one of my other family members. You give far more credit to my reputation than most Sheva.”

Sheva shook her head. “I... please believe me... I...”

“Do you love my brother Sheva?” Andro asked.

Sheva stopped babbling and met his eyes without the slightest hint of hesitation. “More than I have ever loved anything in my entire life.” She answered.

Andro nodded his head. “A scent which wafts from your pores more than anything.” He told her. “Many vampires do not believe that they have a unique scent, but as Carisia and Narice and Toria discovered, as I am telling you now, all of you do. And your scent has told me for months that you are head over heels in love with my brother. You have been since the first moment you saw him when he was just a child. Scents don’t lie Sheva.”

Sheva looked at him with wide eyes. “How... you... you have known all of this time?” She gasped.

Andro nodded. “Jomann and I have suspected there was more to you than you let others see, especially after how you were treating him initially. There were a few inconsistencies in your history that didn’t add up. All of which did not matter by the time we discovered them since you had already made the decision to not go through with your orders some years ago and you were struggling with what your heart was telling you when

you looked at my brother. What opened your eyes Sheva? What made you see that what you had been told was a lie?"

"After... after what I saw in the Evolli War. How... how so many of your people laid down their lives for the vampires within our ranks without hesitation or thought." She spoke softly.

Andro nodded his head in acknowledgement. "Yes... the Evolli War forced many of us to alter our perceptions on many things. It also awakened many things within some of us that we neither knew about or wished for." Andro lifted his right hand and drew his fingers across her cheek, wiping away the tears that rolled down her flawless skin. "You need never fear me Sheva Leonidas." He told her in a soft voice. "Ever."

Sheva allowed him to pulled her tightly to him and she found her arms encircling his waist as he hugged her tightly. The fear and discord she had felt moments before simply left her body in that moment. She felt him reach out and pull Dorian to him and then he was hugging both of them, his hand going up behind Dorian's head and holding his younger brother with deep affection.

It was Sadi who broke the moment moving up to where he held Sheva and reaching out to place a reassuring hand on her arm. "This may change our plans somewhat Andro our love." She stated as she squeezed Sheva's arm and looked at him. "We need to find out who this worm is and what he knows. We need to take care of this before we go to the Beta Quadrant."

Carisia also moved up to where Andro held Sheva and when he stepped back she quickly embraced her with Sadi, her arms pulling her close with the affection and concern of family. It was something that Sheva accepted without question, the relief she felt making her suddenly very weak and confused. Carisia looked at Andro as she did this, her maya blue eyes alert and quite determined. "And we need to find out if her parents are truly alive and where they are." She stated.

"How do we do that?" Dorian asked from behind Sheva. "This idiot in the transmission is obviously just a messenger boy. And if Moran is involved and he is as big a *midaeus* as you say *fervon*, this fool won't know anything that could help us."

Andro nodded. "No... probably not." He said. "But I have an idea who might know." He said. "And she won't have any love for Moran at this point in her life."

Carisia met his gaze as he said that and she nodded her head. "My mother." She said softly.

"*Enylarcopri* I don't..." Andro began to speak but Carisia shook her head.

"No!" She spoke firmly. "It is the only way. Sadi is right. We need to take care of this before we depart for the Beta Quadrant." Carisia stepped away from Sheva and up to Andro. She pressed her petite five foot two frame against his once more and looked up into his face. "I know what you believe about her Andro. You have shared this with all of us." She told him reaching up to stroke his cheek. "If what you... if what you believe is true then she will not hesitate to help us. If Xaxon had as much influence over her as you believe, if many of her actions through the years were not her choice but his vile influence over her, then she will jump at this chance to help us."

Andro leaned over and kissed her deeply. His fingers caressed her cheek sending shivers down her spine and Carisia relished in the sensations. He pulled away slowly and gazed at her. "Then we will get it done." He said softly.

Ne'Veha came up to them now. "You and Dorian grab some coffee *Saradasaar*. Let us take care of Sheva." She said softly as Sehri and Lu'ria joined with Sadi and Carisia and drew Sheva further into their quarters.

Andro glanced quickly at his wives and saw them all nod. He took a deep breath and looked at his brother. "Dorian... let's do that." He said.

"I want to..." Dorian began but Andro grabbed his arm.

"Let's go get some coffee *fervon*." He stated as he began to pull him towards the door.

Dorian moved with him reluctantly and Andro felt Sadi and the others pulse him with their love and warmth. Then he felt Sadi reaching out within the Etheric realm for his sisters. Andro knew then this was to be a female thing as he felt first Eliani and then Zarah and Lisisa respond, which was very quickly followed by Normya and Nara. All of them responded almost immediately to Sadi's resonance and call within Mindvoice. He expected no less from them as Sadi was his Anome and in some respects they would listen to her over him. His sisters and his mates would take care of Sheva now. After tonight she would not question herself or her role

going into the future ever again. He squeezed Dorian's arm as they entered the near empty corridor outside his quarters.

"Let them do this *fervon*. It's a female thing." He told him. "You and I... let's go make a call."

MANNE UNION BASE CAMP

"...think she can help Andro?" Martin asked as he stared at the image of his oldest and his youngest sons in the transmission. His chest had swollen with pride when he saw Dorian beside his brother and how much they looked alike. He already knew they were very close as brothers, due in large part because of how they were both born fully aware of everything around them.

"If she has fully altered the path she was on father she will jump at the chance." Andro spoke. He and Dorian were in his office on the *SCIMITAR*, that much Martin could tell, and they both had mugs of coffee in their hands. "If you did not believe this as well you would not have agreed to meet her."

Martin turned from the transmission and added more coffee to his mug from the pot on the table of the COM shed. He looked back to his sons. "Yeah... well I may still regret that decision." He said casually.

"Father..." Dorian started.

"Don't go there!" Martin hissed. "She is your wife and mate and you damn well better love her until she can't stand it anymore!"

Dorian smiled. "I will have no problem doing that father." He stated.

"I'll let your mothers slap you silly for not telling us sooner though." Martin said. "They were really peeved."

"I will prepare myself for that." Dorian answered.

"Anja and Bella sensed something different about Sheva when she first came to Dragon Mountain. They couldn't put their finger on it but they sensed something was unusual about her demeanor. Isabella is real good at reading people too." Martin told them as he turned in the holo transmission and moved around the room he was in. "It makes sense though. Moran is many things but he's no fool. It stands to reason he would have done something like this after the I initiated the Purge." Their father looked at them. "No questioning her Andro. She is part of our family now and I don't want her to think for an instant that we are using her. If she offers, fine, but no one questions hers about anything. She has left that life behind and that is where it will stay."

Andro nodded. "Sadi and our sisters will see to that father." He said.

Martin nodded. "Good. Good. Put Vengal on this Andro. Once you ring everything from that scum in the transmission, I want Vengal and the *Durcunusaan* to clean house. Armetus and the Krypteria are going to be stretched thin as it is. Use Marci and her assets if you need to, but don't pull Armetus's people from their work with Deia. Let Vengal and the *Durcunusaan* deal with this. They blend better with the general population and you can damn well bet Moran has more people in place."

"Understood." Andro said. "Did *Tenna* give you a tongue lashing too?" He asked with a grin.

Martin chuckled and looked at his sons. "Her exact words were... I am a Leonidas! I have always been a Leonidas and I will fucking deal with it *Mandri!* With extreme prejudice!" Martin answered. "I stopped bugging her about it when she started to cuss."

Andro laughed. "I did as well." He said.

"You covered her?" Martin asked.

"As you did no doubt." Andro answered.

"Let's hope she doesn't trip over all the hidden security she will have." Martin said with a smile. "If she discovers it... the cussing we will get will make our ears ring for a month."

"Father... this will delay our expected time to join with you." Andro said. "If we are to deal with this then..."

"It has to be dealt with Andro." Martin told him. "We can't have that kind of opposition or threat working in our backyard. Deia can be ruthless when she wants to be... but it takes her awhile to get wound up. She has enough on her hands with Icho as it is and it will take her too long to actually get to the point of acting

on this information. I left some contingency plans with Selene and your *tennas* Tarifa and Aihola should the need arise. Lynwe and Tareif have been briefed by now as well. If it comes to it... they'll know what to do. And they won't play footsie with anyone."

"And the timetable you had?" Andro asked. "How does this alter things if we are late by several days father... if not more?"

"It doesn't alter anything in regards to Pusintin." Martin snarled. "I need to lance that open sore once and for all. And I will soon enough. As for the other thing... Avi estimates at least seven to eight weeks. You have time... but you will need to move quickly. Don't jerk around with the Vanari son. Naesta has told me they can belabor things until it drives you mad... you can't let them."

"I won't father... but our uncle has you outnumbered and outgunned in men and ships father." Andro said.

Martin nodded his head. "Yep... but he won't change his tactics Andro. They've worked for him for so long he thinks they are unbeatable. He thinks he can bull rush everything and anyone and just overwhelm them. I'm going to use that weakness. And his feelings for your mother are going to make him sloppy."

"You still believe that?" Andro asked.

Martin nodded. "More so now after talking with Kalis at length. He's in love with your mother for sure son. He's too stupid to process it though. And if For'mya gets a crack at him she's not going to be nice about it."

"I don't doubt that." Andro said.

"Your uncle is history regardless." Martin said. "He's not the main concern at the moment."

Andro nodded knowing that his father was perhaps the finest tactician living. He was a master of deceit and deception and he didn't doubt that the plan his father had for Pusintin was not going to be very pleasant. "The planets you discovered?" He asked finally.

"We may not get to all three of the planets that had our people on them before our guests arrive, but I can get to the two closest ones. I have a feeling we'll understand a lot more when we do." Martin answered.

"Father... you are going to cut it close." Dorian said.

Martin nodded his head in agreement. "It can't be helped Dorian." He answered his son. "Delnash and the Pralors out here are going to have their hands full." He looked at them. "Most of them are not soldiers. They have been running for so long, that little skill it has fallen to the wayside in favor of finding ways to keep them hidden and early warning systems. Garan and the few he has with him are top notch and he says there are a few thousand more like him, but for the most part they believed their technological superiority has been enough to sustain them. He is discovering that is not the case any longer."

"Is he still going through with elections?" Andro asked.

Martin nodded once more. "He's not a bad man Andro. Teniri is helping him. He's got backbone... he just forgot how to use it over the years. He's relearning quickly but this Lorendo scum is an unknown Andro. He's dirty. Real dirty. We just don't know how much. And if your mother Anja ever gets a hold of him again, she'll skin him alive before we find out." He looked at Andro. "It was a good call sending Akor'dris and Bae'diraz here son."

"They are adjusting I take it?" Andro asked.

Martin nodded. "Took them a few days... but they have begun to assist in training Miseo and some of the other Kavalians with Pralor blood in Drow scout techniques. Garen and his men with us as well. Akor'dris seems to be very dedicated to it. She has come to me twice with different ideas on how to alter training regimes and such to blend with their natural skills. Solid ideas and I told her to have at it. Miseo, Garen and their people have already fully accepted her and Bae'diraz. Muton and Ben have been head to head on improving the power output of their ship since he got here as well." Martin looked up. "You are bringing the Dragon Brigade?"

Andro nodded. "Durago has them on Elear right now being fitted with armor upgrades but they will depart in three days to meet us at Dreamland."

Martin nodded again. "Good. I want supplies now Andro." He said. "Armor, weapons, ammo, tactical turrets, rations, medical supplies... the whole shebang. Enough for six million adults and children. Load a dozen *LEONIDAS IIs* with the equipment and every fighter they can carry. Give the order and have Admiral Ceneu get them underway within two days. Also, send as many troops as we can spare and not make too many waves so the Netnews figures out something is up. What is going on out here needs to stay out here son. At least for now. If you can squeeze a full Battalion that should be good until you get here in force. Make sure all of the ships

have the new Hyper Matter Fusion engines and then get them rolling to my location. I'll burst you data on where we will make our stand, study it, and then have Carina wash it through her wonderful head and send me her ideas and whatever else you can think up."

"You are concerned father." Andro spoke.

"Their current course puts them on a direct intercept trajectory for the Pralor world of Honelze." Martin told them. "Population of about three million. All of them living in a large city built at the base of a mountain. It's a colony world really. Nothing but civilians and a small militia."

"Importance?" Dorian asked.

"Largest source of this Quadranium Ore that Avi says is the mainstay of their Quantum Fusion Drives." Martin answered. "It's why they settled in this area of space instead of running further."

"Defensible?" Andro asked.

Martin met his eyes. "That depends on us. There's a large wall surrounding the colony with several smaller outposts nearby. We'll see." He answered.

Andro looked at Dorian in the transmission and then back to his father. "Understood."

"I'm going to send Murano with one of the corvettes to collect a copy of the Tomes son." Martin told him. "Let me know when you have *SPARTA'S WRATH* ready to depart. Make sure a copy remains with you, Dorian, Jomann and Deion and leave one copy at Dreamland with the usual safeties. Send the originals to *Radalana*."

Dorian looked at his father and then at Andro. He turned back to his father. "What is this *Radalana* father?" He asked.

Martin met his son's eyes. "It's something that only Andro, Yuriko, your uncle Daniel and your mothers know about at the moment son." He answered. "A handful of others who are very close to our family know as well. Less than twenty right now. Aside from those already involved. And it has existed for fourteen years. So that ought to tell you how closely guarded this little secret is."

"Fourteen years?" Dorian gasped. "And no one has...?"

Martin shook his head and looked at Andro. "Andro... it's time to share it with Dorian. I have a feeling he will play a part."

Andro nodded in agreement. "I'll take care of it father." He said.

Martin nodded his head to them affectionately. "The others will be here shortly so I can brief them." He said with a smile. "Keep me advised of what is going on my sons. And if you find that backstabbing, shit sorry motherfucker Moran and his sick son Dante... you give them a big wet kiss for me."

Andro smiled baring the tips of his wolf fangs. "Right before I send them and Xaxon into the pits of *jorbhe* father." He said.

"*Avoi*." Martin whispered. "We'll take again soon. Dorian...?"

Dorian looked at the image of his father. A man he had seen only briefly in his short life, but a man he was anxious to see once more. "Father?"

"I am so very proud of you son." Martin said softly. "I wish that... you have missed the things I shared with your brothers as they grew Dorian. I will make that up to you son. I give you my word I will make that up to you."

"Seeing you once more will be all the reward I need father." Dorian said. "You know that."

Martin nodded his head. "Maybe." He said. "Sometimes... sometimes this life, all this King shit royal family stuff... it really fucking sucks donkey balls you know."

Dorian laughed heartily. "That is a new one father." He said wiping his eyes. He stepped closer to the image of his father. "We will have that time father." He said.

Martin met his eyes. "Yes we will." He stated firmly. "Hang with your brothers once Denali joins you. Just don't let them corrupt you. I will talk to you both again in a few days."

Dorian laughed softly again and nodded. "Always father."

They stood and watched the image of their father fade from view and then Dorian looked at Andro as he poured a fresh mug of coffee for himself and reached out to refill Dorian's. He looked at his brother.

"Secret time *fervon*." Andro said softly. "The most guarded and sacred secret of our people. Now you must know."

"Why don't I like the way you say that *fervon*?" Dorian asked as he took the mug from his brother.

Andro grinned at him. "It's not all that bad." He said. "C'mon... I want to show you something. What you are about to see fewer than thirty know about outside of the project itself as father said. Now you will know the what and the why."

MANNE

"...sucks donkey balls?" Danny said as he stepped from the side of the room looking at Martin. "That's original."

Martin looked at him and chuckled as Danny lifted the glass of juice and took a sip from it. "I thought it was pretty good." He stated.

"Old *Fervon*." Danny said shaking his head. "Very old."

Martin took a deep breath and shrugged his broad shoulders. "I so just want to take them and disappear Danny." He said softly. "Just leave all this shit behind."

Dan nodded his head and reached up to squeeze his shoulder. "I'd be there with you. Anuk and Nayeca too."

Martin looked at him. "Do you ever think what things would be like if the comet never came?" He asked.

Danny nodded. "Sometimes... but what does it matter now? We would have eventually found out what we know now and we would be doing exactly the same thing as we are now. We are just doing it a few years earlier because of the comet."

"True enough." Martin said.

"Think of it this way..." Dan said. "You are experiencing the pleasure of their minds and bodies long before you would have without the comet kicking our asses into the future. All those legs and tits and lips and firm asses. I know I would be a basket case if I knew I had to wait another four hundred plus years to delve within Anuk and Nayeca's delights. And you would be one cranky bastard if you had to wait another four hundred plus years!"

Martin laughed now. "Now that is a very true statement." He said.

"See... I told ya." Danny spoke with a smile. "You worried Marty?" Danny asked him seriously a moment later.

Martin met his eyes. He had never lied to Danny in all their years together and he knew he would never be able to pull it off anyway. "A little." He said honestly. "There are too many unknowns that we can't piece together just yet. It makes me nervous."

"We'll get through it Marty." Danny said. "We always do."

Martin looked at him. "When did you become all prophetic on me?" He asked.

Dan grinned. "Anuk and Nayeca say I need to expand my horizons. Get in touch with my spiritual side. I'm trying. Not working is it?"

Martin shook his head. "Not by a long shot." He answered.

"Ah fuck it." Danny spat. "I gave it my best."

Martin saw the look on Danny's face and burst out laughing. Danny soon joined him and when the door opened into the COM building and Wayonn and Murano walked in slowly, the two of them were leaning against each other still sharing the laughter.

Murano looked at them oddly as he and Wayonn settled into chairs, while Wayonn could only smile. "An inside joke between brothers?" He asked.

Martin and Danny looked at him. "Something like that." Martin answered as he turned and saw the room filling with everyone now.

Martin watched as Anuk and Nayeca practically skipped up to where Danny stood, both of their faces beaming in happiness. He watched as Delnash's daughter Kesyla moved along behind them, maintaining a respectful distance, but her eyes and her scent all but telling Martin that she was very interested in Danny. And not just Danny it seemed as he saw her eyes wander over Anuk and Nayeca with similar interest. He turned quickly when first Aricia and then Anja and Dysea appeared in front of him. Aricia pressed right up to the front of his body, Anja and Dysea each claiming a side as For'mya, Bella and Cirith pressed up behind them. Aricia reached up and stoked his cheek gently and all of them saw the look in his eyes.

"You have been wandering Beloved." Aricia said softly.

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders with a smile. "Just wondering about the what ifs." He answered. "Nothing important. Really."

"*Nauta Melme*?" Dysea questioned him.

Martin smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her elven ear. "It's nothing *Melda Min*." He said. "I have all of you here and now." He told her as he looked at Anja. "I have all of you and that is what matters most to me." He finished as his eyes settled on For'mya.

"You are what matters most to us Beloved." Aricia told him in a soft whisper.

"Damn straight." Anja echoed as she squeezed her arm around his waist.

Martin smiled as he gazed into all of their eyes for a long moment, his Etheric resonance reaching out for each of them individually and collectively. He saw the looks of delight on their faces and Martin had to agree with Danny's assessment. He would have gone crazy having to wait another four hundred plus years waiting for each of them to come into his life. He leaned over to Aricia and firmly nuzzled her cheek drawing a sigh of bliss from her. He did this with each of them in turn, each caress of his lips and nose on their cheeks bringing forth contented sighs of happiness. Though Isabella was not wolf, the connection she shared with Dysea and the others as the dearest of lovers and friends allowed her to feel what they were feeling and then return that feeling in the Etheric pulse Martin gave to her. Since she could not feel his aura, his Etheric pulse was his way of making her feel his emotion and love for her. Martin leaned back after a moment and looked at them.

"You ready for this?" He asked.

"Let's get it over with so we can get down to business." Anja said quickly.

Martin grinned and reached down behind her body to slap her firm ass lightly. Anja yelped softly and slapped his hand away as they moved to the table and began to take their seats.

Martin turned his head and sipped his coffee and watched as Mari settled into the chair next to her uncle, while Kalis and General Koguth sat beside one another. Serale's face was glowing with new found love and happiness, matching a similar look on Kalis's face. She clung to his hand tightly, listening intently as Kalis and Koguth whispered back and forth. Fedor entered the room with Iama at his side, Eirene and Miseo right behind them. Akor'dris and Bae'diraz just behind them with Garen between them. The two Drow had been surprised to be included in this gathering, but Martin told them he wanted his primary instructors informed as best as possible. If they knew what they faced, they could train their people to adapt to different scenarios at any given time. They took up spots near the door, Garen and Bae'diraz conversing in soft whispers as Akor'dris looked at a data pad.

Martin turned as Avi's hulking form appeared silently beside him. "Avi... we all set?" He asked.

-Live upload from *OMEN THREE* is ready and Yuriko is standing by Martin- Avi answered.

Martin nodded as he watched the rest of his team enter and spread out along the back wall. "Then let's get started." He said. Martin turned to look at everyone sitting at the table and along the back wall. "Ok... shall we begin." His voice carried outward.

The volume of his voice told everyone this briefing was beginning and their attention focused on Martin completely.

"I told everyone when we started this little trip that I would keep all of you in the loop as best as possible." Martin told them. "It sucks not knowing what is going on... believe me I know. So... Avi and I are going to fill you in on what is happening and why. Wayonn... I believe Helen covered most of it with you yesterday?"

Wayonn nodded. "She hit the high points." He said. "It was... it was not what I expected Martin."
"It came as a surprise to us too." Martin said.

"Why do I get the feeling that I am the only one who does not know what you are talking about Martin?" Murano spoke now.

Martin met his gaze. "That was not done on purpose Murano. I do not like to act or make decisions without hard intelligence. When that happens, men usually die. I have put off this briefing until I knew for sure what is going on." Martin looked at Avi and nodded. They all watched as Avi turned to the side and activated the portable holodisc. The image of Yuriko Leonidas appeared in the transmission clearly and she bowed her head to her father.

"Good morning father." She said with a smile.

"Yuriko." Martin said.

Yuriko turned and looked at the six women she called mother and smiled affectionately. "Mothers."

"Yuriko." Aricia spoke warmly for all of them as she normally did.

Yuriko turned back to her father. "Astrometrics reports they are standing by father."

Martin nodded. "Avi... roll it." He spoke.

Everyone watched as the image of Yuriko faded and the image changed to one of the stars and a small white spec among those stars.

-As you are all aware, the sensor platforms on *OMEN THREE* are based on Pralor technology derived from City Ship 41's own sensors. They have a much longer range and a more advanced Spectral Variance range than the *ARC ROYAL*'s own sensor grid. They are able to detect anomalies at much larger range differentials- Avi explained as he touched the control panel at the base of the holodisc and the image changed. **-Two days after the *ARC ROYAL* entered this Quadrant of space *OMEN THREE*'s long range TNL array detected something. Since it did not conform to any known ships or anomalies in our own computer data files, the Senior Sensor Chief correctly assigned it a lower priority until it could be determined what exactly it was. It was continually tracked regardless of *OMEN THREE*'s location. The Senior Chief informed Yuriko at the time, who then in turn, informed Martin Leonidas. The object, as I have stated, has since been under constant track by *OMEN THREE*'s Tactical Sensor Array and three days ago, we were able to determine what it was. Shrouded probes were launched and then recovered by *OMEN THREE* at different intervals and they have confirmed it.-**

"What... what have you discovered Avatar 41?" Murano asked.

Avi turned to look at him. **-My name is Avi... Praetorian Murano. I would appreciate in the future if you used my proper name-**

Murano looked taken aback as Mari sat beside him and could barely contain the laughter that wanted to explode from her chest. Murano looked at her quickly and then back to Avi. "My apologies." He stated recovering quickly from his surprise. He glanced at Martin.

Martin grinned and shrugged. "Don't look at me." He said. "Blame Endy for this one." He said. "She's the one who named him."

"Damn right!" Endith barked from where she stood beside Tina and Ben.

Everyone turned to see them leaning against Ben by the wall looking happier than they had in months. It had been a long time since they had seen their husband of over two decades and they had made up for their separation quite enthusiastically over the last few days.

Martin shook his head with a smile. "Avi... give them the details please." He said ending the soft chuckles and grins that were apparent on all their faces.

-Very well Martin- Avi answered as he went back to configuring his console. **-Three days ago one of *OMEN THREE*'s Tactical Shroud Probes was able to approach within ten thousand meters of the object in question without detection. These are the external images it obtained-**

The hololive changed to show a darkened object that looked metallic in nature and appeared to be immense. The view was not exceptional quality but there was no mistaking the massive gun turrets that dotted the outer portion of the object.

“It’s not a very clear image.” Mari commented. “Can you adjust the spectral variance Avi?” She asked.

-The Probe’s distance from the object would not allow for variance adjustment Miss Mari- Avi answered her. **-The external hull was emitting some sort of polarized Thorium radiation that was interfering with clear sensor images-**

“Thorium radiation?” Mari asked confused. “Avi... that would indicate a power source of some kind.” She stated.

Avi nodded his head and shifted his massive seven foot tall body to the main star chart table around which many of them sat and he activated the chart. **-You are correct Miss Mari. At first it was thought to be a meteor of some kind due to its size, however, when the Tactical Shroud Probe got to within optimum transmitting range of its onboard internal video equipment, its sensors detected the radiation-** He spoke as the star chart activated. **-The images we are seeing are as clear as we can make them for this distance-**

“Distance?” Koguth spoke up now. He was a ship officer by definition and perhaps the most knowledgeable of ship tactics and abilities among those gathered. “You said the distance was ten thousand meters. We are only seeing a small section from the images you are showing us here.”

-That is correct General Koguth- Avi said.

Koguth met Avi’s eyes. “Exactly how large is this object?”

Yuriko’s image shifted in the holotransmission from *OMEN THREE*. Her eyes went to her father. “Father?” She asked.

Martin looked at her and nodded. “Tell them Yuriko. We need to lay all our information on the table now.”

Yuriko nodded and turned back to look at Koguth. “Preliminary information from three days of scans have given us an approximate size and mass. They indicate that the object is oval shaped and in excess of forty five thousand meters in length.”

“Forty-five thousand...” Ben sputtered aloud from where he stood. “Jumping Christ Marty... that’s like thirty miles long!”

-Twenty-nine point five five to be exact Admiral O’Connor- Avi spoke again. **-With a beam of five point two miles-**

“What is it?” Kesyla asked from her chair next to Anuk. “A meteor of some kind? An Asteroid?”

“No.” Martin said shaking his head slowly. “It’s a ship.”

“A ship?” Murano gasped in disbelief.

“A collection of ships actually.” Yuriko added from the transmission. “Avi?”

-The STPs from OMEN THREE identified nineteen different class ships. All of them have been, for lack of a more defining description, they have been welded together to form one large vessel- Avi answered. **-Interior scans show that where bulkheads should be, corridors now exist. It appears as if all the engines from these ships have been centrally located to the aft third of the vessel itself.-**

“Wait... how many ships are we talking about father?” Fedor asked. “Something that large would mean that...”

“...there would have to be hundreds.” Kalis finished his brother’s statement without even realizing it.

-You and your brother would be quite accurate Fedor Leonidas- Avi answered. **-I have reviewed the sensor scans and have determined that there are at least four hundred and nineteen different ships of varying size making up the whole-**

“Four hundred and nineteen?” Koguth rasped. “How... how is that even possible? Who could create such a thing? The technological skill needed to incorporate that many ships into one is...”

“It’s not a technology we possess.” Martin spoke softly.

“Hell no!” Ben spat. “Who would want to. It has to be a nightmare to keep running!”

“Then who Skipper?” Kenny demanded from where he stood with T'lolt.

“It is... it is Pralor technology.” Murano’s voice was soft but clear when he answered. It was almost as if he was embarrassed to admit it.

Mari looked at him stunned. “Uncle... that cannot be!” She stated. “I have never seen this type of technology in all my years of schooling.”

“Nor I.” Kesyla echoed her sister.

“Your Uncle is correct Mari.” The new voice spoke now and they all turned to the side to see Delnash’s face appear in another holodisc image beside Yuriko’s.

“Father?” Kesyla and Mari gasped coming to their feet.

“Welcome Chief Elder.” Martin spoke casually.

Delnash nodded his head from within the transmission. “Thank you Martin.” He spoke with a nod. “It is Pralor technology Mari.” He continued. “A very old Pralor technology that was never actually taken past the testing stage. It was thought to be a way to combat the Scourge in the very beginning. Something that Sumar came up with long ago. The ability to merge our ships together. Damaged vessels could be incorporated into others and...”

“Making them stronger and tougher.” Ben spoke as he stepped forward. “That is... man that is fascinating.”

Delnash nodded his head. “Yes but the power calculations and variances were too much to factor over different periods of time and therefore Sumar correctly deemed the technology was too risky and essentially useless in the end.”

Kesyla looked between her father and Martin several times. “Father... you have been in contact with King Leonidas all this time?” She asked.

Delnash nodded again. “We have established a permanent Etheric connection so to speak at both Murano and Teniri’s recommendation. He has kept me up to date about everything that has happened and will happen in the future.”

Radra looked at Anja first and then Dueva from where she sat. She turned back to Anja. “You have known this Anja?” She asked.

Anja shrugged her shoulders. “There is very little that Martin keeps from us Radra. I’ve told you that.” She stated. She looked at the man she so adored and loved. “You have another shoe to drop Lover.” She said. “Something you have been keeping even from us. What is it?”

“Anja is right Martin... you should tell them the rest.” Delnash spoke. “Everyone should know now.”

All eyes turned back to Martin and he shifted on his booted feet. “It ain’t pretty folks.” He stated. “In fact... it’s down right scary.”

“Jesus Skipper... just spit it out will ya!” Julie declared.

“The sensors on *OMEN THREE* have also picked up lifeforms on this ship.” Martin told them. “Our scaly friends to be exact.”

“Svorag!” Kasdan and Garan rasped as one.

Martin nodded slowly. “Not just any Svorag either. Yuriko?” He said.

“All data we have gathered so far indicates that these Svorag are a mix of Lycavorian and Pralor DNA mother.” She stated looking at Anja. “More of our people than Pralor... but it is there in number.”

Anja looked at Martin with wide jade green eyes. “The Lycavorian colonies!” She gasped aloud.

Martin nodded his head again. “Yes.”

“*Carians* no Martin!” Aricia stammered.

“Delnash that would mean that...” Radra began to speak but stopped when she saw him nodding his head within the transmission.

“Yes... that would indicate, at least in part, that what Anja believes about Lorendo is true. He has already admitted to basically creating the Svorag in the hopes of controlling them to fight the Scourge. His goals did not work out as he had hoped.” Delnash explained. “Now I believe he is trying to cover up whatever other actions he took. Among those actions, somehow giving the location of the Lycavorian colonies to the Svorag.”

“He tried to cover it up!” Radra exclaimed. “By murdering those of our people that he put in harms way and were infected because he started this work! Is there nothing we can do?”

Delnash shook his head. “He has not admitted to anything other than what we know now Radra, but I’m quite sure there is much more. To include whatever took place with the colonies of Martin’s people. Unfortunately... there is no proof to back up this belief.”

“Has he made his intentions known father?” Kesyla asked.

Delnash met her eyes. “Since I have announced there will be elections held he has been focused on turning the people to his side. To his way of thinking.” Delnash looked at Martin. “I suspect just as this man will move against your Aunt Martin?”

Martin nodded. “Scum bags are all the same no matter the species.” He stated.

Delnash nodded. “It seems you are correct in that Martin. I can only assume this term you use... scumbag... it is not a term of endearment.”

Martin smiled. “Not by a long shot.” He said.

“Father you must allow me to return!” Kesyla spoke now. “You need me to help you and...”

“No!” Delnash popped. “Your skills are now needed with Martin and his people.” He told her. “You are safer with them anyway. I do not trust Lorendo and I have no doubts he will do anything he needs to in order to win this election. Including targeting those I love.”

“Mother?” Kesyla gasped.

Delnash shook his head. “I already had her moved to one of our two colony worlds.” He said softly. “Unfortunately... I may have done more harm than good in that action.”

“What do you mean brother?” Murano asked now leaning forward in his chair. “What is going on? What are you not telling us?”

Martin took a deep breath. “*Arande?*” He spoke looking at Yuriko.

“This ship has been on the same course since we first detected it.” She stated calmly. “It’s size does not permit faster than light travel apparently, but it has dozens of sublight engines that have been working at full power since we picked it up and began scanning.”

“What course?” Radra demanded.

“It’s on a direct intercept course for the Pralor colony world on Honelze.” Martin told them.

“No!” Garan exclaimed.

**-We estimate that it will arrive in orbit of Honelze in seven to eight weeks. Ten weeks at the latest-
Avi spoke again now. -Along with the forty odd ships that it is moving in formation with. Everything from
frigate class to heavy cruiser. All of the ships of older Pralor design-**

“That’s not the bad news.” Martin said gently.

“What?” Kasdan almost shouted. He was very excitable everyone knew. “That is horrible news! The colony on Honelze is over three million strong! The majority of them are civilian workers and engineers!”

Murano looked at Martin intently, sensing that the news was going to be far worse than even he could imagine. “Martin? Tell us everything.” He stated.

Martin took another deep breath and pushed away from the table. “From what Yuriko’s scans have been able to pick up, this big ship, this mother ship if you will, it’s loaded with Svorag.”

“How many Martin?” Murano asked softly.

Martin met his eyes evenly. “I had her and Avi stop counting when it didn’t really matter anymore.” He stated plainly.

“By the Elders! NO!” Radra exclaimed with a horrified expression.

“How many Martin?” Murano asked again a cold feeling seeping into his chest and heart.
“They stopped counting at seven million.” Martin stated.

SCIMITAR
EDGE OF UNION BORDER
GELLEN ASTEROID BELT

Sadi moved down one of the ship’s flight corridors with Ne’Veha on her right side and Kameka on the left. All of them were wearing standard flight suits and holding near identical data pads and discussing the specs on the ship that was being built at Dreamland, though all three of them kept referring back to the pad in Sadi’s hand. Kameka’Caleo had fully embraced this new life within the Union as Daio’s wife and mate. In just the last few weeks alone she had opened up so much emotionally. Daio had helped her to throw her demons into the abyss and now she was almost never without a smile on her face. Her mother had been so overwhelmed at everything that had occurred since being spirited out of Kavalian territory but she simply adored Daio and how he treated her daughter. Her mother was thrilled that their family had escaped the death sentence put on their heads by the Kavalian High Command and she had also become one of the strongest Kavalian females to speak out with the other wives in regards to their support and determination to see that their husbands succeeded in freeing their people. She very openly campaigned for her husband Byka and General Azlenr and General Pian, trying to pull more and more Kavalians to their way of thinking even if it was done through pirated transmissions into Kavalian space.

Though Kavalian by birth, Kameka’Caleo had been offered a provisional promotion into the Union Fleet by unanimous consensus of the Fleet Board. Many believed that Kameka would herald a new day in Lycavorian and Kavalian relations and she had jumped at the position with no hesitation. She now proudly held the rank of Commander in the Union Fleet. She knew part of this was because of Daio and his role on Andro’s personal team, but she had every intention of making sure everyone knew she was as fine a pilot as any within the Union. A position that Daio fully supported her on in every way.

To say that her Lycavorian husband was a gift from the gods would not be enough in Kameka’s eyes. Daio was far more than she had ever dreamed she would have in her lifetime. Not only did he curl her toes in their bed, he considered her more intelligent than him in many ways and did not hesitate to ask her opinion of something. He treated her as something more than a precious gem and Meka walked around now with a perpetual smile of bliss on her tanned face. She had been studying the many cultures and traditions of Lycavorians so that she could honor her husband’s customs and she communicated with Daio’s mother nearly every other day to facilitate this. Her father saw how she had embraced this new life given to her by fate and Byka could do nothing but approve.

“...have to run some simulations in recovering the *STRIKER*.” Sadi spoke as she tapped on the pad. “You’ll be in command when *SirsanGai* and I take the *STRIKER* Meka. We’ll need to practice several times to make sure we have the recovering maneuvers down.”

Kameka looked at her with wide eyes. “Me?” She gasped.

Sadi nodded. “Of course. You think we are going to leave our ship in someone else’s hands?” She spoke with a smile. “Brendi is studying the engineering specs faithfully so she can fill in while we are gone, but only the three of us will be able to pilot her. That means you are in command when we are gone.”

Kameka blinked several times. “But you will not always... Princess Eliani and others will not always be with you. They will remain on the ship at times. They should be in command Sadi. Not me.”

Sadi shook her head. “No. None of Andro’s siblings will go against him or us on this.” Sadi said. “Even Normya agreed. If we are gone then you are in command of the ship. Period. They will back you up on this all the way Meka.”

“I am... I am Kavalian.” Kameka said still stunned.

“You are a Commander in the Union Fleet now.” Ne’Veha told her. “And we will be the only three who will know what this ship can do. We will be the only ones who can fly her. At least in the beginning.”

Kameka let this sink in for a moment and met their eyes. “I will not fail.” She said.

Sadi laughed and bumped into her with her hip as they walked. "I hope not... we are going to be counting on you to come bail our collective asses out of the fire whenever Andro starts trouble."

Ne'Veha smiled. "And trouble does follow him." She said.

Kameka couldn't help but laugh now, the new part of her accepting with pride what her role was to be. She would be in command of perhaps the most advanced warship in the Union Fleet when Andro, Sadi and Ne'Veha were gone. It was a task she would embrace and relish.

The roar of laughter drew all of their attention and they stopped to look through the clear glass into one of the pilot's briefing rooms. Roughly sixteen Lycavorian and Elf pilots were in the briefing room and watching a security feed on the main monitor.

What was on the monitor however, this caused Sadi's eyes to grow wide and fill with anger. Ne'Veha glanced at Sadi quickly when she felt her emotions spike.

"Sadi?" She asked softly.

Sadi's jungle green eyes didn't blink. "Wait here *SirsanGai*." She said evenly. "I will only be a moment."

Sadi moved for the entrance into the Briefing Room smartly, with no hesitation in her steps or her demeanor. The comparisons to Gorgo had been growing stronger through the year, the vast majority of the men and women who called Sparta home speaking of her in the same breath as their beloved former Queen. Her love for Androcles was absolute and stirred images and memories of Gorgo's devotion to King Leonidas so long ago. She was compassionate and confident, not a woman who would cower in the face of danger or fear. She drew people to her almost as strongly as her beloved mate and husband. She inspired men and women both because of what she had done through her life and what she had accomplished. Sadi went out of her way to avoid having to use her official title, influence and authority as Crown Princess, which was very substantial to say the least, in order to get what she wanted. While she didn't know it, Sadi and her fellow Crown Princess were nearly as revered as the Queens when it came to respect and devotion.

It was this knowledge that made Sadi Leonidas walk right into the Briefing Room and push her way past several pilots as they cheered and right up to the monitor. The Security log had just shown Sadi slapping Ulana viciously across the face.

"Answer me woman or I will beat you until you are wailing like an infant being pulled from the womb!"

This brought an even louder round of cheering and clapping and her hand flashed forward and Sadi deactivated the security log.

"Hey what do you...?" The Lycavorian pilot in the front began to protest until Sadi spun around quickly and they saw who it was.

"Princess Sadi!" The same man gasped.

"What is the meaning of this?" Sadi demanded. "Where did you get this?"

"Princess... we were just admiring your... ability to get your point across." The pilot told her with a grin. He was Lycavorian and obviously the one that was the leader of this group of pilots.

Sadi glared at him. "This... this is funny to you?" She spat.

The Lycavorian looked around and saw the smiles from his fellow pilots and then turned back to her. "You have to admit Princess... it is very entertaining." He stated smugly.

Sadi moved closer to him. "What is your name?" She asked.

"Senior Lieutenant Zethor Princess." He answered proudly as he puffed out his chest. "I am second in command of the 16th Fighter Regiment here on the *SCIMITAR*."

"Tell me Senior Lieutenant..." Sadi spoke calmly. "Where did you acquire this Security Log?"

The man grinned. "Rumors have been spreading through the ship of your... encounter... with Senator Ulana Princess. I know the Senior Bridge Tech who monitors all Security Logs. I asked him for a copy."

Sadi looked at him. "Why would you sit here and laugh about this?" She asked.

"Princess... we all have seen what she has done. What she has accused you and the Prince of. How she has treated you publicly. Seeing her put her in place is most amusing. None of us... many of us from the 16th

Regiment are from the area of Apo Prime that her father and now her represent. We don't care for her and we certainly did not vote for her to succeed her *igord* father." Zethor spoke.

"But she did succeed her father Lieutenant." Sadi stated.

"She is a *upae* who..." Zethor snapped. He never got to finish his sentence as Sadi's hand flashed out and she slapped him across his face. The blow echoed in the Briefing Room and caused the other pilots to become suddenly silent.

"She is a Senator of the Lycavorian Union and an Alpha female!" Sadi barked at him. Zethor held his face with one hand and glared at Sadi with angry eyes as he drew himself to his full height. If he thought his physical stature would make Sadi pause, he was sorely mistaken as Sadi stepped closer to him. "And you will treat her with the respect and honor that position gives her!" Sadi barked as she looked at him. "Who and where is your Commanding Officer?"

"I am here Milady." The deep voice spoke from the side and Sadi turned to see the older elf pilot move into the Briefing Room from another door. "Commander Alno."

"Commander... were you aware of this?" Sadi demanded.

The elf glared at Zethor as he answered. "No... I was not Milady." He growled.

Sadi turned back to Zethor. "This is something that happened between two Alpha females Senior Lieutenant Zethor. It has been going on for as long as our people have been in existence! It did not happen in an open area of the ship for all to see for obvious reasons. Who are you to take it upon yourself to take a copy of a Secure Log and use it to entertain all of your friends and fellow pilots?"

Sadi moved closer until she was standing only inches from him and her face was looking up to his. Her eyes shifted and her fangs extended openly, exposing the wicked looking dual set of incisor fangs known only to exist in the Leonidas bloodline and those of the females they chose as wives and mates. "You may not care for the Senator or her ideals, but she is a Senator of this Union and whatever took place between her and I is our business Lieutenant! No one else's! Certainly not yours! I will not allow an egotistical male to besmirch her name or her status among our people because he does not like her! Am I making myself clear enough for you Senior Lieutenant?"

Zethor stood there glaring at Sadi in silence and she moved closer.

"You *will* answer me Lieutenant... or I will beat *you* until *you* are wailing like a baby being pulled from the womb!" Sadi spat at him angrily. "And do not think for a moment that I am unable or unwilling to do that, or have you forgotten who has trained me for the last year to defend myself."

Zethor's fellow pilots began to shift back slowly from behind him, moving away slowly to distance themselves from him. All of them knew what Princess Sadi meant with her words. Androcles Leonidas was now widely recognized as the single, foremost hand to hand combatant within the entire Union military, even more so than his father, who was deadly lethal himself. His grueling training had taken place nearly from his birth at the hands of the most gifted and deadly Lycavorian scouts and Drow warriors within the Union and no one could now match his abilities. His unique and lethal style of fighting combined elements from many different styles and no one had yet been able to master it. It was also very broadly known that he viewed his wives and mates in much the same manner as how his father viewed his mothers the Queens and that meant to go against any one of them was to go against him. That was not something anyone did willingly.

"You will respond Lieutenant!" Alno barked angrily from the side.

"I... I understand Princess." Zethor hissed softly.

Sadi's eyes and fangs disappeared instantly and she paused a moment before she reached up to place her palm on Zethor's cheek gently. "Listen to me... all of you." She spoke. "These are the things that make us better than those who want to take from us everything we have. We are above such petty things. We defend this Union no matter who holds the positions of power within her government. That is what drives us. That is all that should drive us. That is the oath that we took when we put the uniform on, is it not?"

Zethor didn't pause for an instant in his answer and he nodded. "It is Milady." He spoke.

Sadi turned and ejected the tiny Security Disc from the computer monitor and then turned back to Zethor. "Ulana is a beautiful young woman and an Alpha female. She follows the ideals she was raised with, as do we all. We may not agree with them, we may even think most of them are stupidly ignorant," Sadi held up the disc to him. "But this is not the way to change their minds about anything."

Alno stepped forward. "Forgive me Princess." He spoke. "I will discipline..."

“No.” Sadi spoke firmly. She looked at Zethor. “The only way to make Ulana see that perhaps her ideals are wrong is to show her. She is not...” Sadi paused. “She is not the woman she projects to everyone. There is something inside her... something that is buried deep within her that is trying to claw its way out. That is what I believe. She is a Senator of this Union and we will honor and respect that position and title as our training dictates. This...” Sadi held up the disc and then put it in Zethor’s hand. “This only hinders that task.” Sadi looked at Alno. “This incident never took place Commander.” She stated. “Am I clear?”

Alno bowed his head. “As you order Princess.”

Sadi turned back to Zethor. “She is a beautiful Alpha wolf Zethor, as I said. Use your senses and look beyond what she projects outwardly to others. You might just see what I have seen.” She looked at the disc in his hand. “Destroy that.” She stated. “And whatever copies you may have made. If this Security log finds its way to other parts of this ship and her reputation and honor is damaged in any way because of it... I will hold you responsible and you will never fly in defense of this ship or the Union ever again.”

Zethor nodded quickly, the threat very clear. To be disgraced in such a manner would be devastating in anyone’s eyes. “Yes Princess.”

Sadi turned back to Alno. “I am done here Commander. No other action is necessary. I believe I have gotten my point across. No other reprimands, no verbal lashing, no other punitive punishment.”

“As you say Princess.” He spoke. “In your words... this incident never took place.”

Sadi nodded. “Good. Now if you will excuse me... I have some work to take care of.”

The pilots parted like an ocean as Sadi made for the door. She stepped into the corridor, took a deep breath and saw Ne’Veha’s wide, brown eyes gazing at her. Her brow furrowed.

SirsanGai? She asked within Mindvoice.

Look to your right Sadi. Ne’Veha answered.

Sadi turned and her eyes grew a little wider when she saw Ulana standing there with the young Folcani, Elven and Lycavorian Senators that Deia had chosen to accompany them on this trip. She blinked her eyes several times, seeing Ulana’s wide eyes focused on her and then she took another deep breath.

“Senators.” She spoke evenly bowing her head slightly. “Is there... is there something I can do for you?”

The Elven Senator that Deia had chosen to be the leader of this delegation was tall for an elf, reaching nearly six foot in height, and very well built. He was a former member of the very powerful Lower Elven Parliament, one of the youngest elves to be elected to that body, and for lack of a better explanation Deia had described him as more militant than most elves she had met. He believed deeply in the Union and what it stood for and was a staunch supporter of both Andro’s parents and Deia and all they had done. Together with the Lycavorian and Folcani Senators, all of them young and upcoming, they were part of a new youth movement within the Union. Young men and women from across the spectrum of worlds and species of the Union that had chosen to enter politics and see to it that their way of life continued forward. All of them raised in deeply traditional and culturally forward thinking families.

“Ah... a moment of your time Princess?” The Elven Senator spoke. “I am Ya’sur and...”

Sadi smiled a brilliant smile. “Senator Ya’sur... please. I know who all of you are. What can I do for you?”

“I was told by Admiral Sa’sur that Prince Androcles is not onboard and we are... we seem to be lost for lack of a better word.” Ya’sur said with an embarrassed grin.

The Lycavorian Senator smiled as well. “I was on a *LEONIDAS II* before... but only for a few weeks. I apparently did not memorize the ship as well as I thought.”

Sadi chuckled softly. “The *SCIMITAR* is a little different Senator Pyath is it?”

The young man laughed softly. “Senator *igord* is more like it.” He stated with a nod. “But my given name is Pyath... yes.”

Ya’sur and the Folcani Senator echoed the soft laughter, Ulana remaining silent but not looking arrogant in any way. “We were all exploring this wonderful ship and got lost together.” He said finally.

“The *SCIMITAR* is laid out slightly different because she has the ability to carry multiple dragons.” Sadi told him. “It’s not surprising you got lost.”

“I don’t suppose you would be willing to direct us.” Ya’sur asked.

“I can do better than that... I can give you the basic tour if you like?” Sadi offered to them. “Our *Saradasaar* was supposed to meet with you this morning I know, but he left earlier with his brothers Dorian and Deion to pick up someone who will be accompanying us on our trip to the Beta Quadrant. They will be back later this evening.” Sadi told him.

“A problem?” Pyath asked.

Sadi shook her head quickly. “No... we are just picking up this passenger a few days before we had intended. Carisia and Lu'ria are with him and Sehri is acquainting herself with the ship as well.”

“Ah yes... your new Rothryn mate and...” Ya'sur stumbled over his words and Sadi smiled at his awkwardness.

“Our wife, mate and lover.” She spoke proudly. “Yes... and we are very happy about that.” She said.

Ya'sur nodded. “As well you should be.” He said quickly. “Now it is I who looks like an *igord*.”

“Not at all.” Sadi said. She turned to Ne'Veha. “*SirsanGai* why don't you and Meka take care of the calibrations and we'll do the simulations later this afternoon.”

Ulana stepped forward now. “She is... she is a Kavalian.” She spoke softly but with a very neutral tone to her voice.

Sadi nodded her head in agreement. “Yes she is Senator Ulana. Kameka'Calao is also now a Commander in the Union Fleet and the wife and mate to a *Durcunusaan* officer who is part of Andro's personal team. She is a trusted friend and a fellow pilot who is also part of Ne'Veha's and my flight crew.”

Kameka laughed gently. “Well... I try to be at times. A pilot anyway.” She spoke in a flippant reply as her tail danced around behind her happily. Her comment had the desired affect and Kameka was very pleased with herself as Ya'sur and Pyath laughed.

Sadi smiled brightly at her. “Meka is also one of only three individuals who knows how to fly the ship we will be picking up soon.” She said turning back to them. “Please... come with me and I'll fill you in on the changes to our itinerary and the mission. Andro can brief you more fully when he returns.”

LYCAVORIAN DEFENSIVE BORDER

.05 LY OUTSIDE THE GELLEN ASTEROID FIELD

Normya adjusted her controls and the *TYPE II* settled into a holding pattern using just it's secondary thrusters. Tir'ut's eyes remained on the three large control panels that encircled him in the co-pilot's seat. Not surprisingly, being husband and wife had made the two of them a perfect blend as pilot and co-pilot.

“We are holding station *fervon*.” Normya said calmly turning her head to look at Andro.

Andro nodded. “Now we wait.” He said.

“Are you sure they got the message Andro?” Zarah asked from her seat at the engineer's station.

Andro nodded. “They got it.” He said. “They will come in Shrouded *arande*, just as we are. To avoid unnecessary eyes from seeing them. Once they arrive we will move back across the border.”

Normya nodded. “Already have the corridor plotted and we deactivated the defensive minefields and turrets.” She tapped her jaw implant. “Lucia... did that coupling give you any trouble?”

Lucia's voice came through loud and clear in reply. “Not after I hit it a few times.” She answered.

Normya laughed softly. “I like your style *arande*.” She said in reply. Lucia was Zarah's lover and most considered them mated, so as far as Normya or any in her family were concern she was their sister as well.

Andro nodded. “Good. I'll be in back.” He said as he turned. He stopped and looked at Zarah who met his azure colored eyes with her dark brown eyes.

[Zarah...] He began to speak in the private link he shared with her.

Zarah shook her head. [No.] She said quickly. [I am here because I want to be. I do not fear anymore Andro.] Zarah smiled shyly. [Well... not as much anyway. I trust in you though. Lucia trusts in you. If what... if what you believe is true about what Xaxon did to her... then maybe there is a chance that Lucia and Carisia can have their mother back. One who loves them as our mothers love us... right? As it should have been before... before she was twisted by Xaxon.]

[Is that what you want?] He asked her.

[I love Lucia Andro. I love her with all that I am. And she loves me. I know that is what she wishes for.] Zarah smiled brightly. *[A half breed and a pureblood. Who would have thought that? We will always have each other no matter... no matter what the future brings. And we can always adopt right?]*

[You saved each other arande.] Andro told her. *[But do not discount what the future might bring to you both.]*

Zarah chuckled. *[We are not worried about that. We joke about it. Who would want us together? There is not one of us without the other now. We know that. We embrace it.]*

[Good.] Andro said as he moved up beside her and looked into her eyes. *[Just do not dismiss what the future could bring to you both. Hold onto each other tightly... but be open to what could be.]*

Zarah looked at him oddly. He was not telling her something she knew. Their unique bond was not as profound as the one he shared with Elynth or his wives and mates, but it was stronger than most.

[What are you not telling me?] She asked him.

Andro smiled. *[Me. Not tell you something?]*

[Yes you!] Zarah snapped.

Andro smiled and leaned over to kiss her forehead and then he nuzzled her cheek in a brotherly fashion. Zarah smiled as she felt his affection course through her. *[Just keep in mind what I said.]* He told her. *[Do not discount what the future could bring or where it could come from. Either of you.]*

Andro moved through the doorway into the rear of the *TYPE II* before Zarah could question him more and he saw Lucia move up the small set of steps. She brushed against him affectionately with a knowing look in her eyes and disappeared into the cockpit. Andro turned and saw the rest of them sitting at the table in the upper portion of the *TYPE II*'s deck. He saw Carisia turn to look at him and rise to her feet. She sauntered over to him with a small smile on her beautiful face and stepped right up to him, folding herself into his arms. He pulled her tightly to him and looked down into her maya blue eyes while reaching up to brush some of her raven colored hair from her cheek. She had taken to wearing the edges of her hair braided into three long strands just as Lu'ria did, with soft purple beads throughout the length, the bead color being the major color of Lu'ria's Drow family.

Andro leaned over and kissed her soft lips gently, brushing their noses together as he pulsed her with his Etheric resonance. Carisia sighed in delight and squeezed him tighter around the waist.

Enylarcopri. He whispered softly to her in their MV connection. He did not need to shield their conversation for no one on the ship besides Lu'ria would be able to detect it. The link he shared with all of his wives and mates was so far above normal MV powers that only his father or mothers would be able to discern what they were saying.

I am fine my love. She answered him, knowing what was going through his mind almost without having to guess.

You did not have to come. He told her drawing back and looking into her eyes.

Carisia nodded her head. *Yes I did.* She told him. *I need to see for myself what it is you believe. I need to see her.*

And then? He asked.

I don't know Andro. She answered honestly. *If I see her however, see that it wasn't truly her who was doing these things to me all of these years, that somehow Xaxon was behind it all, it would...*

It would be that much easier to forgive? Andro said.

Carisia nodded. *I would not be able to hate her Andro. I... your mothers have been there for me my love... but they are your mothers. If what you believe is true, then I have a chance, Lucia has a chance, we can have our mother back.*

And Onera? He asked.

Carisia shook her head quickly. *She is my sister... it does not matter to me that she is half Immortal. Lucia and I have different fathers, but we have grown so close since she revealed her true self. Lisisa and I are as close as sisters can be and the three of us have talked often. I can learn so much from her Andro, Lucia and I can learn so much from her and we... Lucia and I hope to be able to teach her what we have learned as well.*

She may be hesitant at first Enylarcopri. He told her. *If what Tir'ut has told me is close to how it is, being the child of an Immortal is not the easiest thing. And the child of a brother of Cha'talla must be even harder.*

Carisia nodded in agreement. *She will be with us though.* She spoke. *We can learn about her just as she learns about us. I want... Carisia reached up and took his face in her hands. I want to be able to reach out to my mother Andro. The woman who bore me. I want to... Lucia and I both... we want to be able to tell her things. Share things with her. We are clinging to the hope that what you believe has truly happened. We will know when we see her. Then perhaps... then the healing can begin. And we can put the past that Xaxon forced upon her behind us.*

True enough. Andro said.

Normya's voice interrupted their conversation from the internal COM. "Andro... I think they are here." She spoke.

Andro looked up at the air. "You think? What does 'you think' mean Normya?" He asked with a grin.

"Wise ass!" Normya hissed softly.

"It appears as if they have improved their Shrouds Andro." Tir'ut spoke now, his voice filled with humor. "We're detecting intermittent phased spatial distortions at the coordinates you gave to Yuri."

Andro looked at Carisia and saw her nod confidently. "Very well. Send the signal *arande*."

"Signal away!" Normya announced.

HIGH COVEN *ORIC* CLASS HEAVY CRUISER RETRIBUTION

"...On our sensors for over fifteen minutes now." The senior vampire tactical officer spoke moving up to Norev's chair. "Shouldn't we contact them? Let them know we are here?"

Norev chuckled softly as he heard the doors to the bridge slid open and Yuri strode onto the bridge with Pa'cour and Onera beside her on either side. Nameia walked confidently beside Pa'cour and no one questioned her presence. Over the last few days the crew of the ship and many on the base had noticed that the elven female had become almost as much of a fixture in Yuri's life as Pa'cour and Onera. They were almost never apart it seemed it appeared as if Onera and Pa'cour did not question her closeness with the Princess. He turned back to his young First Officer. He had broken up most of the senior officers of his frigate in order to staff and train the fledgling fleet that Princess Yuri now had. She had made him Captain of this *ORIC II*-Class Heavy Cruiser. It was the latest model of refit for the older *ORIC* Class and was every bit as modern as any new ship within the High Coven Fleet.

"Trust me Jakeel." Norev told him. "They know we are here." He turned as Yuri and Pa'cour came up next to his chair. He began to rise but Yuri's hand on his arm stopped him.

"They are here I take it?" Yuri said.

Norev nodded as he settled back into his chair. "They arrived seventeen minutes ago Princess." He told her. "Just as the young Prince said he would."

Yuri nodded her head with a smile. "Have they sent the signal?" She asked.

Norev shook his head. "Not as of yet. More than likely they are conducting scans of the surrounding area to insure no other ships are in range."

Yuri looked at him. "Have they detected us?" She asked.

Norev shrugged. "That I can not answer, but given the information we have on their sensor capability I would bet yes."

"Even with our improved Shrouds Norev?" Pa'cour asked.

"While Professor Lidene has improved our Shroud's efficiency Pa'cour..." Norev told him in reply. "He can only tweak them so much without putting into a ship dock for a complete overhaul. That is something we are not able to do just yet."

Pa'cour nodded. "Point taken." He said looking at his wife. "Do you sense him Yuri?"

Yuri turned her dark brown eyes on him and shook her head slightly before glancing over to where Onera was standing by the engineer's station. "I can not. He must be heavily shielded. Onera?"

Onera nodded her head slowly. "They are here mother." She said softly.

Yuri nodded her head. “Then we wait. Androcles will send the signal when he feels it is appropriate. It is only sound tactics to insure the area is clear of anything that could be viewed as a threat to either of our ships.” She looked at Norev. “Speaking of that... are there any unknown ships in the area?”

Norev shook his head. “The normal traffic to and from Gellen Station. Nothing outside of the ordinary.”

“Be alert Norev.” Yuri told him. “Gellen Station is full of scum and the moment we lower our Shrouds the station’s sensors will be able to detect us. Those with coherent and active brain cells that have not been destroyed by drugs of some kind will take notice.”

Nameia chuckled softly at Yuri’s comment. “They could not be any worse than those in Haglos.” She spoke referring to the capital city and largest trading port on Nebonese. “Some of those fools couldn’t fill a wine glass with the intelligence they carried in their misshapen brain cavities.”

“I agree with Nameia.” Onera spoke up. “There were some misshapen heads that I saw. How do you fit intelligence into those skulls.”

Yuri met Nameia’s eyes and grinned as well. “We should still be cautious.” She spoke.

Norev nodded in agreement. “Keep one Port Array trained on that area of space.” He told his bridge crew. “We will...”

“Captain! We are detecting the signal!” The excited voice of the female COM officer exclaimed.

Yuri looked at Norev and he met her eyes with a sheepish grin now. “They are very eager.” He said.

“So it would seem.” She spoke in reply.

“Confirm that Lieutenant.” Norev barked as he got to his feet and turned to face her.

The young woman looked down at her COM station, adjusted her controls and nodded as she looked back up to face him. “It’s the proper frequency and channel Captain. All variables match.”

“Very well.” Norev said. He turned to Yuri. “Princess?”

Yuri nodded. “Open the channel Norev. I’m quite sure Androcles does not wish to be here any longer than we do. Pa'cour and he share a particular distaste for the scum that fill this sector of space.” Yuri spoke looking at her husband.

Pa'cour growled softly. “That we do.”

“Channel open.” The COM officer echoed from her station.

“We are here Androcles.” Yuri spoke openly as she moved closer to the main view window which gave her a picture of the massive asteroid belt. She knew Androcles would be listening.

“It is probably better if we come to you.” Andro’s voice filled the bridge. “The wretches of this sector have already seen us Yuri... let’s give them something to think about when we disappear from their sensors. They will assume we have gone inside the Shroud cone of a Union ship and not a High Coven Heavy Cruiser. That might draw more attention than we want. At least right now.”

“Agreed.” Yuri said. “Norev?”

Norev nodded and turned to another officer. “Tactical... direct a low power guidance beam at the Union ship so they can lock on. And insure the landing bay is advised our guests are arriving.”

“Yes sir!”

“I have it!” Normya’s voice filled their ears seconds later. “Engaging engines. We’ll see you in six minutes.”

“We shall meet you in the Landing Bay Androcles.” Yuri spoke again. “Perhaps then you will tell us why you requested we come in an *ORIC II*-Class Cruiser.”

They heard Andro laugh. “Yes I will.” He said. “We’ll see you soon.”

The landing bay of the *ORIC II* Class ships were meant to hold seven squadrons of High Coven fighters as opposed to the five of the earlier classes. The *RETRIBUTION* carried only four squadrons of fighters at the moment and the one hundred and fifty-one meter long *TYPE II* fit easily within the bay. Though the crew of the ship was not yet fully complete, most of the fighter pilots and their ground crews were already settled and now many of them waited in the bay watching as the *TYPE II* Dragon Transport settled to the deck with barely a pause. For many, this was their first look at a Union Dragon Transport up close, their first look at any Union ship up close and they were very attentive. All of them saw their Princess waiting off to the side with her

Immortal husband and daughter. Most of those who had now come to serve Yuri believed deeply in what they were doing. They were loyal to the High Coven in every way, and while some were still coming to grips with the changes in their culture and traditions, they did not dismiss how these new changes only strengthened their people as a whole. Their Princess was now the Blessed Wife of an Immortal and this was something that they had come to accept and embrace as being part of this new future. Yuri was very different than they had remembered or heard about and seeing her walking around the station and being so open with her emotions was something that was rubbing off on all of them. They all knew that change was the only way to insure that they survived into the future and while it was not easy, they were coming to accept many new things. Many of them also knew that they could not return to High Coven space, at least not now. Most of them had been labeled as traitors or collaborators by Aikiro or Moran and none of them wanted to risk being assassinated before they had an opportunity to recover their honor and their homes.

Like their Princess Yuri, they were now totally committed to helping from the shadows and destroying all threats that impeded the advancement of the High Coven and the many things Empress Narice was implementing.

Pa'cour glanced at Yuri as they stood there and saw her fidgeting on her feet nervously. He took her hand in his gently. "Yuri?" He questioned.

Yuri glanced at him and smiled. "This is a first." She told him. "A Union warship landing in a High Coven landing bay."

Pa'cour smiled as well. "It is happening across Coven space now." He told her. "Admiral Pontal and the Union Admiral Riall are working closely with one another."

Yuri nodded. "I know... but this is a first for me." She told him.

Onera stepped closer to them. "He has... he has others with him mother." She whispered.

Yuri nodded. "I don't doubt it."

"No..." Onera said shaking her head. "I mean... they feel familiar to me somehow. Like I should know them."

Yuri looked at her oddly. "Are you sure?" She asked.

Onera nodded. "Yes."

They all turned as they heard the ramp coming down and Yuri took her hand. "We will see daughter." She said as they began walking. "We..." Yuri's head turned and her words died in her throat as she saw them walking down the ramp behind Androcles. She froze in her spot and her grip tightened almost painfully on both Pa'cour and Onera's hands. "*Phraktos!*" she gasped aloud.

Pa'cour knew immediately what she meant when his eyes focused on Lucia and Carisia. Lucia walked hand in hand with Zarah Leonidas, Carisia beside the Drow female and the pureblood vampire female just behind Androcles and two younger versions of himself. Young men who could only be his brothers.

"Yuri..." Pa'cour spoke softly to her.

"I did... I did not know he was bringing them husband!" Yuri hissed softly. "What... what do I do? What do... what do I say? I... I am not ready for this!"

"Mother it is alright." Onera spoke moving close to her and gripping her arm.

Yuri shook her head. "No... you don't understand... the things they forced me to do to them. I... I could not fight it even though I knew it was vile inside me. I..."

Pa'cour reached up and drew her face to his, her eyes coming to meet his without hesitation. "You are not that person anymore." He stated firmly. "You never were that person and they will see that."

"Pa'cour my love I..." Yuri stammered.

"Do you trust me my Blessed Wife?" He asked. "Do you trust our daughter?"

"More than anything." Yuri answered instantly.

"Then draw on our strength as a family and show them who you are." Pa'cour spoke. "This day had to come... better it come now rather than later when it could very well never happen."

Yuri stared at him for a long moment in silence, Onera pressed close to them as well and she turned to look at her daughter with Pa'cour. Such beauty and passion shined in Onera's face, just as it did in Carisia and Lucia, and Yuri knew Pa'cour was right. She took a deep breath and squeezed his hands.

"You are... you are right." She told him. "I will not let this chance slip by."

"None of us will." Onera said softly.

Yuri nodded and turned as two of Norev's officers led Andro and his group up to them. She took a deep breath but did not release Pa'cour's or Onera's hand as she faced them. "It is... welcome Androcles." She stammered slightly. "It is good... it is good to see you again." Yuri couldn't help feeling the truth behind those words and how it made her believe even more in the path she now walked.

Andro stood in front of her and knew without a doubt just by her scent that he had made the right decision. It was a decision that many still questioned him on, even his own father, but it was a decision that he knew was right. And seeing Yuri in front of him now, the brightness of her eyes and the calm demeanor was all he needed to see to know that this was the true Yuri. This was the woman who had been buried under millennia of learned hate and archaic traditions and manipulations. She was free of all that now and this was the Yuri that was always meant to be.

Andro bowed his head slightly. "I never imagined I would be saying this... however I can not help but agree." He said with a smile. "You are looking well Yuri. You are looking very well indeed."

Carisia and Lucia stood beside one another, their eyes wide as they gazed at Yuri from behind Andro.

[Carisia!] Lucia exclaimed.

[I know!] Carisia echoed. *[It's... sister it is amazing!]*

Lucia looked at Zarah then and saw her dark brown eyes were also gazing at Yuri intently. *[Zarah my love... what...?]*

[It is not her.] Zarah gasped within Mindvoice.

Carisia turned and looked at her now. *[Zar?]* She asked.

[Andro was right! That is not the woman from earth. From SODRAG.] Zarah spoke evenly. *[This is not the same woman we saw there. The darkness that surrounded her is... it is gone. Her resonance is pure and unfettered. That woman was not... she was not your mother. This woman... this woman is your mother.]*

And it was Zarah Leonidas who would forever be known as the one who brought a mother and her daughters back together.

Zarah moved forward without hesitating, pushing past Dorian and Deion and then past Andro to stand in front of Yuri. All conversation stopped even as Andro reached for Zarah.

"Arande this is not..." Andro began as he gripped her arm gently.

Zarah looked at him suddenly and hissed viciously, her fangs suddenly bursting forth and her eyes shifting as she pulled her arm free. This was something that she had never done to him and Andro looked at her in shock even as Zarah turned back and reached up instantly to place her palm against Yuri's cheek. To her credit, Yuri flinched only slightly, her hands squeezing even harder to the hands of her husband and daughter. A sign for them to do nothing, but also a sign that she was not afraid. This day would have come eventually and Pa'cour was right. Better to face it now and perhaps try to fix what she had been party to. It may not have been her fault, but ultimately she was still responsible in some way.

Yuri stared into her Zarah's changed wolf eyes calmly. The woman who had agreed with the order to assault this beautiful young woman was not her. That woman was under the control of a vile and heartless beast and she was now long dead. The woman who stood here this day would never have allowed such a thing against any other female. This Yuri could be cruel and calculating; she could be ruthless and kill without blinking, but this Yuri would have never allowed such a depraved attack as the one against Zarah. She would never have sanctioned such a thing even if it meant gaining valuable information no matter the cost. It was an act that was beneath her, for she had experienced the same such thing herself and knew what it could do to a woman. She knew the horrors that came with such an attack and she would not wish them upon her most dire enemy. Yuri knew this about herself now the moment she sprang to free Nameia regardless of the risk. She knew she was different and the things she had been party to or had allowed in the past were not events which she would have supported had her mind been her own.

"I... I can not... there are no words I could speak to you Zarah Leonidas." Yuri spoke softly her voice faltering somewhat. "No statements of sorrow I could utter to describe to you how... how shamed I feel at this very moment."

"Mother you..." Onera began.

"Daughter!" Pa'cour hissed softly silencing her words. This was to be his Blessed Wife's cleansing and nothing would alter her path now. "Be silent!"

Yuri let the tears come then, her dark eyes becoming moist as the tears glistened and flowed freely down her cheeks. "I was not... I was not strong enough to fight it. I knew... I knew it was wrong. So very wrong and despicable and... and evil... but I was not strong enough to fight it. I did... I did things to so many. Horrible things to those I should have loved. To those I do love, but I was not strong enough when it mattered the most." Yuri's eyes turned to where Carisia and Lucia stood. "I was not strong enough to protect them as I should have. I hurt them. I hurt them in so many ways. I can never be forgiven for that Zarah. I can not ask forgiveness for that. That is the shame and curse of not being strong enough to resist that I will bear. It will... I can only hope that one day... that one day you will see that this is who I am truly am. And perhaps then you... you will be able to..."

Zarah Leonidas stared at her for a long moment as Yuri's words filtered into her mind. Words that Zarah was not even listening to anymore. The Etheric resonance emanating from this woman was one of remorse and shame, but burning inside her was also pride and a strength that was not there before. Zarah stared at her and the hate she had felt burning in her chest for this woman was rapidly turning to grief and... and to shame.

Zarah blinked when that word resounded in her in mind and her eyes grew wider. Shame. She looked at Yuri and saw it then. Yuri had been used just as Zarah had. She had been beaten and raped just as she had and for far longer than Zarah had suffered. Yuri's wounds were not physical but they were just as deep. They were wounds of the mind. The decades of darkness and manipulation forced upon her by those she thought cared for her was no different than the rape and agony she had endured in those few hours. This woman had endured decades of hate and darkness and oppression that had nearly succeeded in forever destroying the woman who stood in front of her now. Yuri would forever carry the scars inside her just as Zarah would. They would become part of Yuri and shape her future. And they would shape Zarah's future as well. Zarah Leonidas took that last step that would finally lead her onto the road of healing and into the future. She blinked only once and then Yuri was within her embrace and she was crying as well. Yuri's arm wrapped around her instantly and the emotion came pouring forth as she squeezed Zarah as tightly as she was able. Yuri was shaking horribly as she held Zarah, and the grief and shame came cascading out of them and both of them collapsed to the deck clinging to one another tightly, both of them with one hand holding each other's heads.

Onera moved to comfort her mother, her own eyes filled with tears but Pa'cour's hands stopped her. He shook his head as he held her back and did not see Zarah's hand reach up and grasp Onera's.

"Mother!" Onera gasped as she fell to her knees beside Yuri and hugged her tightly even as Zarah leaned back and turned to look at Lucia and Carisia who were openly weeping.

Zarah's dark eyes were bright as she looked at them. "The woman... the woman who you knew was not your mother Lucia my love!" She spoke confidently. "She was not your mother *Enylarcopri*! This is your mother! This is the woman who is your true mother!"

Lucia did not hesitate for an instant and with a wail of happiness she flung herself to the deck and into Yuri's arms.

[You have wish for this day for many years Enylarcopri.] Andro's voice filled Carisia's mind and she turned her tear filled eyes to him. *[The day where you discover your true mother. The mother you never had as you grew. She is before you now my beautiful Blessed Wife. You need not ask those questions anymore.]*

With those words ringing in her head Carisia moved forward with a cry of happiness and Yuri's bellow of joy quickly followed as her arms enveloped all of them and her weeping became even more pronounced. She buried her face in Carisia's hair, her hands clutching both her and Lucia just as tightly to her as they were holding Onera. Her body shook and shuddered with happiness matched only by the day Pa'cour took her as his wife and then when Onera came into this world.

This was the day that Yuri would forever say was the day she was born again.

SCIMITAR

"So?" Sehri asked excitedly staring at Eliani who stood in front of the examining bed she sat on.

Eliani met her eyes. "What is the information worth to you?" She asked with a smile.

"Eli!" Sehri exclaimed. "Don't tease me!"

“Don’t be evil *arande*.” Nara told her standing beside the bed.

Aleatia stood on the other side of the bed looking very confused. Sehri had called her to be with her when Eliani gave her some information. Aleatia thought for sure it was to be in regards to a child, but now she wasn't so sure. She did not detect any of the normal signs that Rothryn woman exhibited when pregnant.

“Sehri... I don’t understand what is going on here.” She said.

Sehri reached out and snatched Eliani’s hands. “Please tell me.” She said.

Eliani smiled. “Yes.” She said.

Sehri nearly leaped from the examining bed with a cry of delight as she hugged Eliani and almost knocked her over. Aleatia took all this in not understanding what was going on. She watched Sehri hug Eliani tightly, and then she was hugging Nara as well. She turned back to Eliani quickly. “When?” She gasped.

Eliani shrugged her shoulders. “That depends on you.” She said.

“What do you mean?” Sehri asked.

“Will someone explain to me why I am here watching my daughter bounce around as if she had just won a lottery of some sort?” Aleatia demanded now.

Sehri turned to her and grab her hands. “Mother... I can change.” She told her with youthful exuberance.

Aleatia looked at her. “Sehri what... what do you mean change?”

“I can shift!” Sehri exclaimed. “I can become like Andro and Sadi! Like Eliani and Nara! I can become a wolf!”

Aleatia shook her head quickly. “Sehri that is not... it is not possible. Our scientists have all concluded that...”

“Your scientists are wrong.” Eliani stated confidently seeing Aleatia’s eyes rise to meet hers. Eliani turned and pulled the flexible monitor away from the wall and tapped on the screen several times. The images flashed before Aleatia and settled on three different ones. “These are Sehri’s cells... the left one is before Andro bit her...”

Aleatia’s eyes grew wide. “Sehri... he bit you?” She gasped in shock.

Sehri rolled her eyes. “Mother please... I have been with Andro, Sadi, Ne'Veha and the others many times since my fever.” She said proudly.

Nara stepped forward quickly. “It is a very old Lycavorian custom Lady Aleatia.” Nara said. “It is revered in our culture. A Lycavorian man only bits a woman during their lovemaking when he knows they will be together for eternity. The virus in his blood then courses through hers and every Lycavorian who smells her after that will know that she is the wife and mate of another. It has become much more common since my father returned to the throne of the Union, but it has been a tradition since the birth of our people.”

Aleatia turned from Nara to Eliani. “Eliani... this is... this is true?” She gasped.

Eliani nodded her head. “Whatever was done to the Rothryn people to alter their genetic makeup is not permanent Lady Aleatia. To put it in non-medical terms, and believe me, the medical review and terminology explanation will bore you to tears.” She spoke with a large grin. “Anyway... the Rothryn people are missing two strands of active DNA base code that all unaltered Lycavorians have. These are the two strands that allow us to change. When Andro bit Sehri, the virus in his blood flooded Sehri’s blood with these two strands. Whoever altered the Rothryn people, the Pralors or your ancients as they are called; they only removed the active DNA strands in your people, they didn’t remove the actual DNA base code. The base cellular code is still there. When the active strands within Andro’s blood flooded into Sehri, for lack of a better description, they reactivated the dormant DNA Base code within her. They merged with and bonded with her own. Her body is now producing the DNA source strands again all on her own.” Eliani waved her hand. “My mother or Aunt Sivana could explain it far better than me. I’m not a researcher like them. I concentrated my skills on healing and in the medicinal field due to Andro’s propensity for getting into trouble.”

Nara chuckled in a knowing manner. “So true *arande*.” She said.

“Sehri will be... she will be able to shift like you and your sister?” Aleatia gasped.

Eliani nodded. “Since the Rothryn people are essentially Lycavorian without the ability to shift, now that the DNA Base code is active again within her body, yes.”

“Mother isn’t it wonderful!” Sehri exclaimed. “I will be able run like a wolf. Like Andro and Sadi and...”

Aleatia squeezed her hands. “You must not!” She hissed softly.

Sehri's face changed instantly and her eyes narrowed. "What?" She demanded.

"You must not!" Aleatia spoke. "And no one must know this information. Not yet!"

"Mother I..." Sehri began. "You told me you approved of Andro and..."

Aleatia jerked her hands gently bringing Sehri closer to her. "This is not about the love you share with Andro and the others Sehri." She said quickly. "And I do approve of that. So very much. And I am so very happy for you."

"Then what?" Sehri demanded.

"If it is discovered that you can shift your form... thousands and thousands of years of teaching from the Rothryn Science Academy will be rendered obsolete." Aleatia spoke to her. "They will know the moment we return to the Beta Quadrant and their spies see you with Andro and the others that your Etheric powers have evolved far beyond what they have ever allowed outside of their control. I do not believe they will attempt anything even knowing that given what Androcles is capable of..."

"Taking Sehri from Andro, Sadi and the others would be a singularly insane thing to do Lady Aleatia." Eliani said quickly.

Aleatia nodded. "I agree... and knowing what your brother is capable of will keep them from acting..." She turned back to Sehri. "But if they also discover that you can now shift your form as well, they will do everything within their power to insure our people do not witness this Sehri. They will take you and..."

"And what?" Nara asked.

Aleatia looked at her. "They will take her and she will never be seen again." Aleatia answered. "They will perform experiments on her, vile tests, all in the name of science and to better control our people."

Eliani moved closer. "Does Andro know about this Lady Aleatia?" She asked. "That this is going on?"

Aleatia met her eyes. "I believe he may suspect." She answered. "I have discovered that your brother is intuitive beyond anything I have ever seen in my lifetime. Beyond anything any of my people have seen. This power within him, it grants him that ability..." Aleatia looked at Nara. "To you and your other brothers who also have this power within you Nara. But not on the same level as Androcles."

"You do know what would happen if Sehri were taken from him Lady Aleatia?" Nara asked her softly. "My brother... Andro would... *carians* I shudder to think about what he would do."

Aleatia nodded her head. "Yes... I do have an idea. And believe me... I in no way agree or support what the Rothryn Science Academy does. Nor does my husband Dyack. We despise them! But I also do not wish to see your brother lay waste to our cities and people in his task to retrieve Sehri. And I have no doubt no one and nothing would be able to stand against him if this were to take place." She turned back to Sehri and pulled her closer. "That is why we must keep this secret between us child. Your sisters must not know... they love you, but they are jealous of you now Sehri and they can not control their tongues." She squeezed Sehri's hand. "And Harira must not find out!"

"Then you believe that she is more than what she wants us to see? Just as Andro does." Sehri asked.

Aleatia nodded. "Yes... and she is not our friend no matter how much she wants us to believe that."

Aleatia turned to Eliani. "Will it be easily discernible Eliani? Now that Sehri has this ability, will it be easy to detect within her?"

Eliani shook her head. "Her scent will be altered slightly..." She replied. "Now that she can shift, it will be more pronounced, at least to those of us who use scent as a means to identify and communicate. They will know right away. Aside from that... no."

Aleatia nodded. "Good... Rothryns do not use this ability as freely as our Lycavorian brothers and sisters. They will not know how to tell the difference if it is not openly easy to detect."

"Your fangs *DuanGai*." Nara said stepping forward. "You will need to keep your fangs in."

Aleatia looked between Nara and Sehri. "Your fangs?" She asked turning back to Sehri. "What does Nara mean?"

Sehri nodded shyly and extended her fangs with a single blink of her eyes. Aleatia was stunned at how quickly and easily her daughter did this, it was not something Rothryn could do without concentrating rather hard. Aleatia saw right away what Nara meant however, as she was able to gaze upon the dual incisor fangs that Sehri now possessed. They were very prominent, much more savage looking and appeared to have grown in right beside her normal incisor fangs. To say they were frightening was an understatement.

"Oh my." Aleatia said.

Eliani and Nara also extended their fangs and Aleatia looked between them. "It is... it is something that only our family bloodline carries." Eliani explained to her quickly. "Those who are born with the blood of our grandfathers in their veins. It also affects those who are bitten by one of us. Mine are not as pronounced as Nara's because she is a pureblood, but Sehri was bitten by Andro. Along with our father and our mother Aricia, Andro's blood is the purest of all of us. Of all our people really. The virus in his blood will be just as pure and far more powerful. It will show in Sehri's fangs now as it does with Sadi, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria."

Aleatia looked back at Sehri. "But you can control this yes?" She said.

Sehri nodded her head. "Yes." She answered. "Mother... I do not want to hide who I have become now." She said.

Aleatia nodded. "I do not want you to hide it either. I bless the day you discovered this love you have with Andro and the others Sehri but..."

"Father does not!" She snapped softly.

Aleatia squeezed her hands. "Leave your father to me. He has been fed a pack of lies and with no one who knows the truth of it; he will not know what to believe." She told her. "What he believes now will not be what he believes after I have spoken with him." She met Sehri's eyes. "But right now... right now we need to hide this daughter."

Nara stepped forward. "The Dragon Den on deck ten *DuanGai*." She said. "We can practice there and no one is allowed there who is not bonded to a dragon or a member of the *Durcunusaan*."

"She needs to learn to control it Lady Aleatia." Eliani said. "For those of us like Nara and I... those of us born like this... it is second nature to us. To those who are changed it needs to be controlled until it becomes like second nature to them."

Aleatia nodded. "She will be safe there?"

Eliani nodded again. "Nara is right. No one goes near the Dragon Den unless they ride a dragon or are a *Durcunusaan*. And trust me... once Elynth and Anthar discover this, Sehri will be hidden and safer than anywhere on the ship."

Aleatia smiled and nodded. "Yes... I forget sometimes that your dragons speak with your voices as well." She said. "I will need to speak with Androcles when he returns. I must tell him everything I believe. That your father and I believe. He will know what to do."

"We have already designated a similar place on *SPARTA'S WRATH DuanGai*." Eliani told her. "Even when we switch ships you will be able to practice in safety."

"You shielded from Sadi and the others *DuanGai*?" Nara asked coming forward and taking her hand.

Sehri nodded quickly. "Yes. I don't need them rushing to me in worry every time my emotions spike." She answered.

Nara moved closer to her, Aleatia watching as she pressed up against Sehri's side and nuzzled her cheek. Aleatia saw the look of happiness and peace on her daughter's face when Nara did this.

"It is not something to worry about." Nara spoke. "You are a Leonidas now. We look after our family."

Eliani stepped closer as well. "Listen... why don't all of us go to the mess lounge and get something to eat. I will speak to Jomann and have him meet us there. By then he will have arranged for everything."

Aleatia looked at her. "He knows?" She asked. "How could..."

Eliani touched her head with a smile. "He is my *Anome* Lady Aleatia." She said in reply. "He knows everything I do. Well... almost everything."

Sehri nodded quickly. "Yes... I am hungry." She said. "And I want to begin to learn as soon as I can. Will you come with me mother?"

Aleatia smiled and nodded her head. "Of course Sehri. It will... it will be amazing to see." She answered. "And I look forward to it."

Eliani tossed her data pad onto the bed after touching the screen and activating her unique security codes to lock out the information. "Then lets go!" She stated. "I'm famished."

Nara looked at her. "Perhaps if you did not let your husband and mate rut above you all of the time you would not be so hungry and tired *arande*." She said.

Eliani grinned seductively. "Where would the fun in that be? He is so very attentive to me. And who says he is always above me?" She spoke causing both Sehri and Aleatia to laugh softly as they began to exit the Med Bay.

RETRIBUTION

She had over three thousand years of life and never in that entire time had Yuri ever felt so alive and free. She could not keep her hands off Lucia, Carisia and Onera, always touching their faces or running her fingers through their hair. The tears had not stopped from any of them for nearly an hour as they remained apart from the others, even when Pa'cour had ushered them to the nearby conference room. It was elation for both Lucia and Carisia as the mother they both had wished so long for had finally arrived. They both could feel Yuri's Etheric resonance and how very different it now was. With Zarah Leonidas between them, and Carisia drawing off of the strength of Andro's and Lu'ria's love for her, the path to discovery came so much easier for all of them. And it was a discovery that each of the women intended to relish and hold dear. At some point Nameia had come into the conference room and without a moment's hesitation Yuri had drawn her into the small group. Andro and the others saw the look that passed between the two women and how close Nameia sat beside Yuri. It was not something one could miss if you had half a brain. The sense of renewal and happiness permeated the entire room.

"I did not expect such a meeting to... to be like this." Pa'cour's voice spoke beside Andro and he turned to look at him. "In all my years as her Captain and since we became married I have never seen her face so glowing and happy."

"The woman that was Yuri Moran is long dead Pa'cour." Andro told him. "This Yuri... she may look like her, sound like her, but this Yuri is not her. This is the Yuri that was meant to be. It was time. In order for the healing to finally be complete and allow their lives to move forward, this had to happen. For all of them. My sister included."

"Will... will your father see her as you do young Androcles?" Pa'cour asked.

"My father may be many things Pa'cour." Andro told him. "He is not a fool however. And he is just as sensitive to the resonance of Etheric power as I am. Whatever he may feel for the old Yuri, he will not be able to carry it over to this one simply because they look the same."

"But they... they are the same woman." Pa'cour said.

Andro nodded. "Outwardly yes. But inwardly they could not be more different. That is what my father and mothers will see. Trust me."

Pa'cour nodded his head slowly. "I will trust your words in that regard." He shook his head. "Let me nudge them along so that we can conduct the business that you came her for."

Andro grinned and nodded. "That probably would be best." He watched Pa'cour move over to them and whisper to Yuri. Zarah's head turned first and she rose to her feet and covered the distance to Andro in a single blur. Zarah's arms wrapped around his waist and she buried her face into his chest as he pulled her tightly to him.

[You knew.] Zarah gasped within their private link. [You knew this would happen. What I would sense?]

Andro drew her face back and kissed her softly on the lips. [You needed to know. You needed to see for yourself. You and Lucia both. I do not make excuses for her arande... but this is not the woman who...]

Zarah nodded her head quickly. [I know. That is the first thing I sensed.] She looked up and met her brother's azure blue eyes. [Andro I saw things. I saw horrible things that were done to her. That she was forced to do. She... she has endured this for so long. The darkness.]

Andro nodded slowly. [For far longer than even she believes I think. I need to speak with father and Wayonn to confirm that but I think Xaxon had a much deeper grip on Aikiro and others than even we believe. For a very long time.]

[The Black Day?] Zarah gasped.

Andro nodded his head again. [Yes.]

[Carians Andro.] Zarah turned her head back to where Yuri was holding Lucia, Onera and Carisia as they came towards the table. She turned back to him. [No one but father must know what we think. No one!]

[Arande I...] Andro began.

Zarah shook her head. [No one fervern! You know what would happen.]

[Our people do not hold grudges Zar.] Andro said.

[Most of them don't. But imagine if Icho or his sick cronies got this information and were able to incite our people. All Narice and Arrarn are trying to do would be for nothing!] Zarah told him.

Andro looked up and gazed at Yuri for a moment. *[Yes... I see your point.]* He spoke. *[And what about you sister?]*

[Lucia wants to stay. So do I.] Zarah spoke. *[This is the mother she has been denied for so long fervon. She deserves to have a chance to discover her again. I don't want to leave her fervon. I love her too much. And I can... I can learn from Yuri as well. We can go with her to the meeting with father and then remain with him until you arrive.]*

[You are certain about that?] Andro asked.

Zarah nodded. *[Yes.]* She answered.

Andro nodded as Yuri came up to the table wiping the tears from her cheeks and meeting his gaze. *[Very well.]* He said watching as Yuri moved up in front of him and looked up at his face.

Yuri took a deep breath and reached out to touch his cheek. *[I do not know how to... how to thank you for this Androcles.]* Yuri spoke as she erected powerful shields around their private connection.

Andro shook his head. *[As I told Pa'cour... this day needed to come. In many ways you are just as much a victim as anyone else. Maybe more so.]*

[That does not excuse my actions Androcles.] Yuri said softly.

[Perhaps not. But now you have the chance to atone for whatever others think you have done. You have started that already. This is how it needs to continue.] He said.

[And you?] Yuri asked. *[What do you think?]*

[I have found that no matter what we do, what we say, what our past holds, or what our future will be, destiny will always find a way to right the wrongs.] Andro told her. *[I do not agree with decisions my father and mothers have made in the past, but at that particular time they were needed. Eventually it worked out as it was intended. Whatever else you have become Yuri, Xaxon, your mother and father, even Moran; they took choice away from you. They forced you to become something that destiny did not have in mind for you. Now you are free of that and destiny will have its say and you will do what you were intended to do.]*

[And if it is the wrong thing? The wrong decision?] Yuri asked.

Andro shook his head. *[Was choosing to fall in love with Pa'cour wrong? To allow your feelings to see past what you believed and embrace what you felt for him?]*

[Phraktos no!] Yuri exclaimed turning quickly to look at Pa'cour and see his eyes gaze back at her confused. She turned back to Androcles.

Andro nodded. *[If the decision comes from the heart Yuri, then it is never wrong.]* He said.

[Having the combined memories of three lifetimes within you has given you an insight that few people ten times your age would have Androcles Leonidas.] Yuri spoke.

Andro shrugged. *[Gives me a damned headache most of the time.]*

Yuri couldn't help herself and burst out in soft laughter as she took his hand in hers and brought it to her lips. She kissed his fingers gently. "I can not thank you for this. It is a gift that I will..."

"Your thanks is not needed." Andro said. "You and Pa'cour accomplished that when you returned the remains of my ancestors to us. I do however, need your help."

Yuri nodded. "Anything." She said. "Sit please." She spoke motioning to the table. "I assume it has something to do with why you asked if we had this ship and why we needed to come to the meeting in it."

Andro nodded as he moved to the table with her and settled between Dorian and Carisia. "It does." He said.

He watched as Yuri moved to her chair and sat down. Pa'cour was on one side of her, the elf female on the other. He saw Nameia reach out under the table and grip Yuri's hand. Her dark eyes gazed quickly at Nameia with something akin to deep affection. This was another sign to Andro that he had made the right decision. Onera chose to sit beside Lucia and the new bond of sisterly love was very evident.

"Something important has come up that I need to take care of before we depart for the Beta Quadrant." Andro said. He took the data pad that Dorian held out for him. "I need to know everything you can tell me about this man."

Andro plugged the data pad into the slot on the table and the message to Sheva came into focus and played once more. Andro watched Yuri's face and he saw the light of recognition in her eyes as the message played. Her eyes narrowed when it came to the part about Sheva's parents and he saw a flash of anger when she heard Moran's name mentioned. Andro glanced at Sheva quickly and saw her clutching Dorian's arm tightly, her face impassive. He ignored the message for he had seen it three times already. When it finally ended he looked back to Yuri.

Yuri looked up at him when the message ended. "His name is Lerkim Banak." Yuri said before he could ask. "He was... or still is it seems... the Senior Control Officer for a very secret program my mother started twenty years ago. Shortly after the first Kavalian invasion."

"Program?" Andro asked.

Yuri nodded. "It was called *Xukuth Zotreth*. Two hundred men and women were chosen. Most of them very young. All of them had lost family to the Lycavorians during our conflict with them." She explained.

"Heart Strike." Andro said softly.

Yuri nodded. "Given that so many vampires had come to call the Union home she wanted to put people in place who could replace those your father had eliminated during The Purge." She told him. "They were trained to blend in. Become part of the natural background of life within the Union. Even to infiltrate high risk positions over time. To gather intelligence and even to conduct covert operations if needed."

"To assassinate?" Carisia asked but with no malice in her voice at all.

Yuri nodded affirmatively. "If need be yes." Yuri answered. She looked at Andro now. "I can only assume this has something to do with the young woman sitting beside your brother Dorian?"

Andro nodded his head. "This is Sheva Juconi-Leonidas." He answered. "She and Dorian recently became *Du'ased 'ranndi* and *m'ranndii*. She has told us everything you just did." He said.

Yuri looked at Sheva. "Congratulations to the both of you. I see you choose to follow your heart and mind rather than the dogma of my mother." She said. "Good for you."

Sheva bowed her head slightly in recognition of Yuri's words. "Thank you."

Yuri looked back to Andro. "Once she made Robert head of the Coven military she gave him total control of this program. It was all very quiet and under the surface."

"Why him?" Andro asked.

"For all his faults... he is just as ruthless as my mother was." Yuri spoke. "Now I would imagine he is even worse given that Pa'cour and I escaped." Yuri grinned slightly. "I may have made some very truthful comments the day that Pa'cour and I escaped that reflected on his... his manhood. Or lack thereof."

Pa'cour snorted loudly and laughed. "He was not happy about that." He said.

Yuri looked at Andro. "Have you made contact with Banak?" She asked.

Andro nodded his head. "Sheva returned the message. She was given instructions to meet this Banak fellow on Apo Prime in two days. There she will receive new mission orders that she has been told she must follow through with or her parents will die."

"What were your original orders?" Yuri asked Sheva.

"I was instructed to assassinate Queen Isabella." Sheva answered. "I came into the Union and worked my way up within the *Durcunusaan*. I thought my parents were killed in an attack on a Coven colony world by the Lycavorians. At least that is what they told me. Part of the false background they made for me was information that was obtained before The Purge."

Yuri nodded again. "Names. Background covers. Yes."

Sheva looked at Andro. "My background was that my parents came to the Union and were subsequently killed in a High Coven retaliation attack."

"That fits." Yuri said. "Such a background would keep the less inquisitive minds from digging any further." She stated. "What colony world was your family on?" Yuri asked.

"The mining colony of Nereo." Sheva answered.

"Nereo?" Yuri said. "Nereo wasn't destroyed by the Union. It was destroyed when the improper safety measures installed in the mine there failed and the mine exploded. It would not surprise me if my mother or Robert were the ones who ordered that."

"What do you mean?" Dorian asked leaning forward.

“I was not privy to most of the workings of the Program itself, neither my mother or Robert shared it with me, but I do remember Robert and my mother talking about it one day. How they would get an influx of volunteers for the program after some event they had a hand in... while blaming the Union. It seems this is what they were talking about.”

“The colony on Nereo had over twenty thousand men, women and children on it!” Sheva declared angrily. “Over three quarters of the adults were massacred and it left their children orphans!”

Dorian reached out and covered her hand with his. “Sheva... she did not order it.” He spoke. He looked at Yuri quickly. “Did you?”

Yuri shook her head. “No. As I said... it is not something I was privy too. I had already advised my mother to forgo any attempt to replace the agents lost in The Purge. I told her with Armetus and your father working on the same wavelength as they were; any agent would be found and executed in a matter of months. She did not take my advice and therefore they left me out of that plan. A few years after Nereo was destroyed I heard them talking like I told you. This is what they obviously had planned.”

“What did she hope to gain?” Andro asked.

Yuri shook her head. “I don’t know. Intelligence. Revenge. Looking back now I can say that my mother was... she was quite insane.” She looked at Andro. “Xaxon’s influence over her perhaps?”

Andro nodded his head. “Quite possibly.” He said.

Yuri sat back in her chair and looked at Sheva. “Hmmm... given my mother’s hatred of my half sister, it does not surprise me that Isabella would be a target.” She said. “She must have known that Isabella was a carrier of this Paladin gene. She feared any children that she would have with your father for this reason. Her actions make sense now.”

Andro sat back. “Xaxon feared.” He corrected her. “And by virtue of that... your mother. What do you mean her actions?”

“If Xaxon had as much influence over my mother as we both now suspect he did, and he sensed who and what your father was, then he would have done everything within his power to insure your father had no children. That includes having some influence over what my father did when your mother Aricia was taken by that fool Chetak and his fat bastard of a son.” Yuri said thoughtfully.

Andro leaned forward his eyes growing a little wider. “He... he had a hand in that?” He rasped out.

“If what you believe is accurate then I would have to say yes.” Yuri answered him. “My father had dealings with Chetak already and they began planning for that the moment that it was discovered your father lived. It was already in play when I finally returned to Coven space. I told him it would not work... that it was a mistake... but it had already happened by then. He discovered just how much of a mistake when your father did the one thing he never suspected. He smashed Ukwav into oblivion.”

“But he had no blood connection to your mother or grandfather.” He said. “His essence was trapped in the ship you had, not his body.”

Yuri nodded in agreement. “True... but based on what happened with my mother and even me, we are certain he can influence those around him. At least to some degree and he has a much more powerful hold on those with the gene.”

“We are under the impression it was your father who carried the gene.” Dorian spoke now.

Yuri nodded. “But you are now relatively sure that there were some of these Pralor Praetorians on the City Ship that crashed on Nuwaroa are you not?”

Andro nodded his head. “My grandfather Sumar had seeded those with this gene among all the City Ships to replenish their numbers.”

“And because of what you can now Dorian we agree that my father was a carrier. But we do not know if my mother was a carrier. And we never will.” Yuri said. “I can only assume that your grandfather seeded these ships for a reason which I do not know right now but would probably not like very much.” Yuri said canting her head to the side inquisitively as she looked at Andro. “Why would he need to replenish their number Androcles? Why couldn’t he train them wherever they came from? Why come out here? And why did my mother want what was on that ship you found on Ritaah so bad?”

“Yuri I can not...” Andro began.

“You told me not so long ago that something was coming Androcles Leonidas.” Yuri said to him across the table. “If it has to do with what Narice is doing, or if it will somehow impede what she is trying to rebuild... I can’t protect her or what she is trying to accomplish if I do not know who...”

“It’s quite a bit more complicated than that.” Andro said. “It... it has to do with the gene that we carry yes. The gene that you carry. That Onera carries. And it is not a threat to Narice or what she is doing... at least not right now.”

“Androcles I need...” Yuri began.

“Does Moran know that you ordered Professor Lidene to remove all data from the logs your team obtained from the ship we found on Ritaah?” Andro asked her bluntly. “That you ordered him to destroy every copy that was being made by Moran’s order except for the one you kept?”

Yuri didn’t flinch when he spoke and she looked quickly to Pa'cour and then back to him. “No... he does not. At least not yet to my knowledge. He will assume it was all directed to a secure facility that he still controls. I convinced Lidene otherwise.” She stated. “When he does find out I’m quite sure he will have a fit. One that will make his heart explode if I am lucky.”

“He would not have found out yet mother?” Carisia asked.

Yuri shook her head. “Everything we have been able to obtain so far indicates he is still trying to consolidate his control over what he does have. Once he does... he will move for the facility and then he will discover what he seeks is gone.”

Andro nodded his head and reached to the small of his back where he drew out his P1. He set it on the table and saw Yuri’s eyes grow a little wider at the new piece of equipment. It was far more advanced than anything she had ever seen. Andro tapped on the P1 several times and then the small cone of a miniature holotransmitter activated. “341?” Andro spoke.

The small figure of the immense Avatar appeared as clear as if he was there with them.

-Prince Andro. Have you encountered difficulties on your mission?-

“No 341... but I need something.” Andro said. “I want you to download copies of the contents of File Numbers 651 and 769 to my P1.”

341 blinked from his location at Dreamland.

-Prince Andro... these files contain...-

“I know 341.” Andro stated. “Right now... right now someone else needs to know what we know.” He said.

-Understood. Processing. Downloading files now- Andro waited for second seconds as everyone watched and then the P1 beeped. **-Download is complete-**

“Thank you 341.” Andro said. “How goes the conversion?”

-We will be finished in another twenty-seven hours- 341 answered. -The information I sent to you in regards to the High Coven ORIC Class Cruiser was helpful?-

“Very much so.” Andro answered. “Keep me informed of any changes 341.”

-Understood-

Andro tapped the P1 and 341’s image disappeared. He motioned to where Carisia sat. “*Enylarcopri?*”

Carisia reached across and took the data pad from in front of Pa'cour and then slid it across to him. It took Andro only a few more seconds to connect the two pads and download the files to the new pad. He disconnected them and returned his P1 to the small of his back. He held up the data pad and looked at Yuri.

“You are right Yuri.” He told her. Andro used his Etheric power to slowly levitate the pad across the table to where Yuri sat and she took it from thin air.

“That was the Avatar that has become so attached to you?” Yuri asked.

Andro nodded his head. “Your mother had no idea what she was part of. No idea of what she was doing. That will give you a detailed history and the different reasons behind what my grandfather Sumar was doing and what my father and mothers are doing now.”

“I do not need this in order to help you Androcles.” Yuri told him.

“Yes... yes you do.” Andro spoke slowly. “Now more than ever. I have six Pralor Work Drones on our *TYPE II*. I consulted with 341 in order to find out which of your ships would be easiest to refit for our version of the Pralor Quantum Fusion Matter Drives. The Work Drones will need nineteen hours to make the different modifications to your engine systems and your shield generators. I brought the materials they will need with us. The events taking place where my father and my mothers are dictate that he meet with you about whatever you have to tell him within the next two days. I will give you the exact coordinates where you will meet him and the course you must follow to get there and then return with ease. Once you have returned I suggest putting the drones to work on refitting all of the ships you have with you. When that is complete give them to Professor Lidene to assist him in building the weapons systems he has discovered from the data you have.”

Yuri’s eyes grew a little wider and she glanced quickly at Pa'cour before turning back to him. “How?” She asked.

It was Pa'cour who chuckled now. “Of course.” He stated as he sat back. “It is no wonder the Kavalians would never have stood a chance against you or the Union. Lidene’s labs have hidden surveillance in them.”

Andro withdrew another, smaller data pad from inside his body armor. He handed it to Dorian who then passed it to Zarah and then to Onera. She handed it to her mother. “Those are the codes to permanently deactivate every piece of surveillance equipment on the base. It will also give you the location of each piece. The entire base was not watched, just the parts where important work could have been done.”

“How do we know that this is true?” Onera asked now the anger in her voice evident. “You have been spying on us all this time?”

Andro looked at Yuri. “I give you my word.” He said.

“Mother he...” Onera began.

Yuri held up her hand cutting Onera’s words off. “And Androcles Leonidas is very much like his father in that he has never gone back on his word.” Yuri said. “You trusted that I was... that I was not doing something else?”

Andro shook his head. “No... I had faith in you. And who you have become.” He stated.

Yuri looked at him and then at the data pad. She took a deep breath and with an almost casual thought she crushed the pad in her hand, destroying it completely. She looked at Andro across the table as she let the pieces of the pad drop from her hand. “What do you need from me?” She asked.

“I need the name and location of the planet that this fool Banak mentions in his message to Sheva. Whatever information you can tell me about it. Layout. Garrison strength.” Andro answered. “I am going to meet this man on Apo Prime with Lu'ria and a few others in Sheva’s place. When we do, Dorian and Sheva are going to be leading a Strike Team to retrieve her parents and whoever else wants to leave.”

“And?” Yuri asked.

“And with any luck...” Andro replied. “I am going to gut this program your mother and Moran started before he has an opportunity to use it again.” He said.

Yuri smiled at that. “Oh that would be divine.” She said in genuine happiness.

“Can you help us?” Andro asked.

Yuri got to her feet with confidence. “Androcles Leonidas, not only will I tell you where this planet is and everything about it, but I will offer you any support, direct or otherwise, that you may need. It’s deep in High Coven space and questions would be asked if Union ships were that far into our space no matter our new alliance. Most of them are along the border with Admiral Pontal’s forces.”

Andro got to his feet and nodded. “Thank you.” He said. He looked at Deion. “Deion... will you see to getting the drones to the proper engineers.”

Deion stood up. “I’m on it.” He said.

Andro looked back to Yuri. “I’d like a moment with you Yuri.” He said. “Alone.”

Yuri saw the confusion this request caused with his siblings and Carisia and she nodded her head intrigued. "Clear the room please." She said.

"Andro?" Lu'ria asked as she got to her feet.

Andro looked at her and smiled. "It's fine Lu'ria." He said. "I won't be long."

They waited until the conference room had emptied of people and then Yuri moved down the side of the table slowly. "Something tells me that this is not something everyone already knows?" Yuri said.

Andro looked at her. "No."

"What is it that you do not want to share with your wives and mates Androcles. Even I know that is not something you, or your father for that matter, it is not something you do." Yuri asked him.

"I need something from you." Andro said. "I need you to make me a promise."

Yuri looked confused. "I'm listening."

"We need to take care of this problem quickly Yuri." Andro told her. "Whatever is happening where my father is, they will need me and my brothers soon. I need to make this problem with Moran and Dante go away now. Then I need to handle the Vanari situation just as quickly."

"What sort of timetable are we looking at?" Yuri asked him.

"Eight weeks tops." Andro told her.

Yuri looked at him surprised. "That's not much of a window Androcles."

"I will not leave Moran and Dante behind to cause Narice grief." He said. "My Aunt Deia will have her hands full with our own fools in Union space and even with my grandfather Riall to help, the Coven is still vulnerable."

"The Kavalians?" Yuri asked.

Andro shook his head. "Pian and his people will begin their operations against the Kavalians soon enough. That will draw off the attention of most of their forces from the Coven borders."

"But not all." Yuri said.

"Enough of them where the remaining ones will pose no threat and free up your Admiral Pontal's forces." Andro said.

"To do what?" Yuri asked.

"We need to draw Moran out." Andro said. "We need to give him something that he can't resist. We need to remove him and Xaxon from the equation. Arrarn gave me a report when he was home. About certain factions within your former government."

Yuri nodded slowly. "Loyalists. To my mother." She said.

"They are already pressuring Narice in minor ways. Wanting her to take a Pureblood husband is just the beginning. And they are more powerful than anyone suspects." Androcles spoke.

"I was... I was afraid of that." Yuri said. "And if Robert can rally them to him... it would mean civil war."

Andro nodded. "That is not something we can allow." He said. "You need to be able to focus on finding these loyalists within your ranks and watch over Narice. I need to be able to leave and help my father. We need to be able to do these things without worry about being stabbed in the back by Moran or Xaxon."

"You have something in mind I take it?" Yuri asked.

"I do." He told her.

"I suspect that those close to you and to me would not agree with this plan since you have told no one about it?"

Andro tilted his head to the side. "That would be putting it mildly." He said.

Yuri smiled. "I like it already." She said. "What do you propose?"

"You are certain he has not discovered you have the Pralor data from the ship?" Andro asked.

Yuri nodded. "I would know within a matter of hours if he discovers this." She said. "I still have friends in The Wilds who..." She smiled. "They rather like who I have become and they have eyes everywhere."

"Then we need to do what my father is doing." Andro said.

"I'm not following." Yuri told him.

"We need to give Moran and Xaxon what they want." Andro said. "The data you have from *SPARTA'S WRATH*. And we need to sweeten that even more."

"With what?" Yuri asked.

Andro met her steady gaze. “Bait Yuri. We need to give them what they both want more than anything else besides the data.”

“And that is?”

Andro smiled. “You and me.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ARC ROYAL

ORBITING MANNE

“...Make sure the defensive emplacements are finished when I get back.” Martin spoke as he heard the engines of the Pralor corvette begin to spool up.

“Marty... I got it.” Danny answered him with a smile. “You sure you want to go through with this? You hate that woman.”

Martin looked at him. “I trust Andro.” He said. “And she gave him the code word we used in The Teams to signify that something had gone to shit Dan.”

Danny nodded his head slowly. “I know... it’s just hard to believe that she could have changed so much. At least not like what Andro has said.” He looked at Danny. “Could Xaxon really have had that much control over her?”

Martin nodded. “Murano and Wayonn both say yes. I tend to agree with their assessment because of their previous experience with that asshole.” He replied without hesitation. “Given her upbringing Yuri had already been exposed to some seriously twisted *sibfla* by the time he infected her. Murano says he probably latched onto that and made it a hundred times worse. I ain’t making excuses for her... just that it is possible.” Martin smiled. “Besides, she knows how I feel about her, and that I won’t hesitate to slit her throat. But for her to use that code phrase just to get me somewhere where she could try and kill me is plain stupid. And Yuri may be many things, but stupid isn’t one of them.”

Dan nodded. “Agreed.” He said. “You still want the facility prepped as we talked about?”

Martin nodded. “We’ll have one chance to make this work. If it doesn’t... we are gonna be left scratching our balls and wondering what the hell happened.”

“I’ll take care of it.” He said.

“We may have to hold out longer than we expected *fervon*. Andro has to take care of that problem before he can leave.” Martin told him. “Since General Koguth and his people are really good at making defenses that blend in with the terrain, let them have at it. I want every square meter of the camp covered. I should be getting back about the time the ships start arriving from Ceneu. If not... have Akemi take command of the fleet under my order. I want her to disperse them however she deems prudent. And if anyone gives her any shit, bust them back to buck as nothing and let them rot in the brig. We don’t have the time to fuck around.”

Danny nodded. “I already sent Yuriko on ahead to do thorough scans of the first planet. She will be done when you get back and then we’ll deal with pus nuts and then go and check it out. Murano and his niece Mari left with Kasdan an hour ago on your *STRIKER*. He wasn’t real happy about it.”

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “He thinks I sent him away so he didn’t have to take part in what we are going to do.”

“Did you?” Danny asked.

Martin shook his head. “Not entirely.” He replied. “I think seeing Andro and the others will be good for him. Wayonn agreed with me. Murano needs to know that we are not like the Praetorians of his time. We are different. And being with Andro even for a shirt time will allow him to see that. Besides... who better to help Andro deep six Xaxon than Murano?”

“True enough.” Danny said.

“Prepare our people for the worse Danny.” Martin told him. “Lorendo lied to us and I got a feeling we aren’t going to like what we find on those planets. Our people need to stay focused and remember that Lorendo is not indicative of the Pralor species.”

Danny grinned. "I'll take care of it. Besides... when have we ever really liked what we found somewhere new?" He asked.

"*Avoi.*" Martin said. He looked at the only man he would ever call brother and knew he had something to say. "Spill it *fervon.* What's up?"

"Marty how do I... Delnash's daughter Kesyla." Danny began slowly. "She is getting really close to Anuk and Nubian. I don't know what to make of that."

Martin looked at him. "She has got the hots for you *fervon.*" He said. "It pours from her scent."

Danny nodded his head. "I know and it seems like... it seems like Anuk and Nayeca are encouraging that."

"You find her attractive *fervon?*" Martin asked him.

Danny met his eyes. "Yes... very much so... but you know I would never..."

Martin shook his head. "That never crossed my mind Danny. Let it play out *fervon.*" He said. "Believe me when I tell you if Anuk and Nayeca approve and they want her as part of your lives... then there isn't going to be much you can do."

"You think they do?" Danny asked.

Martin shrugged. "I gave up on trying to figure out women when Cirith came into our lives." He stated. "They sense things we don't. It's a female thing."

"What's a female thing?" Anja's voice carried to them and they turned to see her walk up with Dysea and Isabella in tow.

"Nothing." Martin said quickly.

"You don't lie very well you big lug." Anja snapped as she stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Dysea reached out and took Danny's hands in hers. They all knew what Martin and he had been talking about immediately for they had seen it in how Anuk and Nayeca were acting with Kesyla. "Do not listen to this one Daniel." She said with a smile. "If Kesyla is meant to be part of your lives, then it will be so. Anuk and Nayeca will sense this before you. Just follow your heart."

Danny smiled and leaned over to kiss her cheek. "Thanks Dy." He said softly, calling her by the nickname she had earned so long ago.

"And be yourself goof ball!" Anja popped from within Martin's embrace.

Danny grinned and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek in a family way. "Now where would the fun in that be Red?" He asked.

Anja laughed as Danny looked back to Martin and nodded. "Watch your six. And get back as soon as possible." He told him.

Martin nodded. "I will."

Danny turned and took Isabella's hand and leaned over to kiss her cheek. Isabella smiled and returned the kiss. "Watch his lard ass Bella." Danny said to her. "Make sure he doesn't do something entirely stupid."

"We shall see." Bella answered. "We shall see."

Martin watched as Danny moved off and began to bellow orders at several of their team that was loading another *STRIKER*. He turned to look at Anja, Dysea and Isabella as they closed in around him. "We'll be back in three days. Four tops." He said.

Dysea pressed up against Anja's back as his arm encircled her waist and then pulled Bella close with his other arm. "Just keep an open mind *Nauta Melme.*" She said.

"I always do." Martin said with a smile.

Anja snorted and slapped his hard abdomen. "Yeah... tell that shit to everyone else. Not to us." She spat with a grin.

Martin smiled and looked down into her jade colored eyes. "Don't kill him Firecracker." He said. "He is Delnash's son... and no matter how much a fool he is... that would not be very good for our relations."

Anja looked at him with wide eyes. "You... you know about that?" She gasped.

Martin chuckled. "You don't actually believe I didn't see and smell his intent do you?" He said.

"Why... why didn't you..." Dysea began to ask.

“You are the six strongest willed women I have ever known.” Martin said. “Not including my mother. If I did not think my wives and mates could take care of one male who thinks with his dick more than his brain I would be a sorry individual.”

“I have already told her she can not kill him.” Isabella spoke with a small laugh. “Hurt him a little... but not kill.”

Martin laughed and leaned over to kiss Anja hard on the lips. Her hands grasped his face as his aura swept around her and delighted her senses. He then shared a similar kiss with Dysea, the feeling and emotion passing to all his wives and mates through their Etheric connection. Aricia was still on the surface of Manne helping to prep the base with Cirith, while For'mya was in the cockpit of the corvette with Endith and Tina. They all felt the emotion of the kiss as if they were the ones partaking of the physical delights of the act. They could not explain it, but it was one of the main reasons their love had persisted through the years and had only grown more intense.

“Maybe one of you could talk to Fedor and Eirene while I’m gone.” Martin said as he drew back. “About Kalis.”

Dysea shook her head. “That will happen of its own accord.” She spoke wisely. “They reached for and found your essence within For'mya *Nauta Melme*. Remember that.”

“And never has a more stubborn man existed than you.” Isabella chimed in. “They will see the type of man Kalis has become now that he has found his balance and purpose in Serale. Just as we all did. Give it time Martin. I think you will find that Kalis will win them over in the end.”

Martin nodded finally. “You’re right.” He said softly.

“Any ideas on what Yuri might want?” Anja asked him.

“Not a clue.” Martin answered.

“Whatever it is... she must deem it important enough to face you directly.” Isabella said thoughtfully. “And I can only assume it is something that our son would not react well to. That he is involved in.”

Martin met her eyes and nodded. “That’s what I was thinking too.” He said. “That by itself tells me it is not good.”

“I still don’t trust her no matter what Andro says. Just watch your back Lover.” Anja told him.

“I’d much rather watch yours.” Martin spoke with a grin as he stared at them lustfully.

Anja pushed away from him playfully. “God... you are such a pervert!” She exclaimed as they all laughed. Dysea grasped her hand tightly.

“Come *Melyanna*.” Dysea spoke as she pulled Anja back. “We will let Bella discipline him. We have work to do.”

[Be safe.] Martin pronounced to all of them.

[We love you big boy.] Anja answered for all of them. *[Even if you are sexually perverted and always in rut.]*

Martin chuckled as Isabella stepped close to him and he pulled her tight. They watched until Anja and Dysea had made their way out of the bay and then he looked at her. He caught her soft lips in a sizzling kiss, one hand coming up to caress her face. Isabella melted against him and felt the love they all shared swirl around them, delighting her senses. He pulled back after too short a moment and met her hazel green eyes.

“Shall we?” He asked.

Bella smiled and stroked his jaw. “I will follow you anywhere.” She said softly.

Martin grinned and waggled his eyebrows. “Really? That has promise written all over it you know.”

Isabella saw the look in his beautiful eyes and she leaned back as she slapped his face lightly.

“*Melyanna* is right!” She exclaimed. “You are a pervert!”

Martin laughed as they turned and headed up into the corvette hand in hand. He didn’t see Anja lean affectionately into Dysea as they turned the corner out of the bay and walk down the corridor nor did he hear her words.

“So... we have three hours before we meet Aricia and Cirith.” Anja told Dysea looking at her with glittering jade green eyes. “It’s been a long time since I have had you all to myself Dysea. Have anything in mind?”

Dysea smiled at her. “*Melyanna*... are you propositioning me?” She asked with a laugh.

Anja chuckled softly. “Call it what you will but I have three hours with you all to myself! I intend to make you scream like I did when we were in Eden City all those years ago.”

“Anja Leonidas... you are such a *pomai*.” Dysea told her playfully.

“Yep!” Anja admitted freely.

“What are we waiting for?” Dysea exclaimed.

HIGH COVEN *ORIC* CLASS HEAVY CRUISER *RETRIBUTION*

“... not be very large.” Yuri was speaking as they stood around the star chart in the ship’s main officer conference room. “They did not want to draw much attention to this colony so the numbers are low. However... they are some of them best trained troops my mother had. At least as far as I could remember. And totally loyal to her and now Robert no doubt.”

“Numbers?” Dorian asked.

“No more than two hundred.” Yuri answered. “It is set up as any other colony world... to give the men and women at least some semblance of order.”

“Will they be friendly to us?” Andro asked.

Yuri shook her head. “Doubtful. They would have been told that their child is involved in very covert operations and their silence and loyalty was needed in order to keep them safe. I can’t see them risking that. After all this time I don’t doubt that some have begun to question that... but you will not know who or how many. It would be too much of a risk to try and find out.”

“They could help us.” Sheva spoke. “Maybe...”

“Yuri is right Sheva.” Andro spoke now. “If they have not begun to question what is going on by now then they are not going to do anything to put their children at risk. Once you are on the ground avoid contact at all costs. Grab an officer, find out where your parents are and then extract them.”

Sheva nodded knowing he was right. “Very well.”

Yuri looked at her from across the table. “Do not worry Sheva Leonidas.” She spoke evenly. “What you are going to do will accomplish what you are seeking.”

Sheva looked at her. “I’m not seeking anything.” She said rather defensively.

Yuri smiled. “Yes you are. You want to expose this wretched program to everyone who may be involved for what it truly is. A means to control men and women and make them do the bidding of fools. Pulling your mother and father off this planet will accomplish that all by itself believe me.” Yuri said. “These men and women are all very prominent members of the High Coven... or they were at one point. No doubt they have been listed among the roles as killed in one attack or another. If they suddenly began to question what is going on and begin to make inquiries of their own, you will accomplish this goal. Robert will not be able to keep this secret for very long once these men and women begin to ask questions. And he will not risk killing any of them if their loved one is in place already.”

Andro nodded in agreement. “He’s committed to operating as he has been for decades.” He said.

“He can not change now.” Yuri said. “These men and women will have any number of means to get their messages off world if they needed to. He can not risk exposing this, nor can he kill these families outright.”

“What will he do mother?” Onera asked from between Carisia and Lucia.

“If I had to guess he will have his people say that your parents are traitors of some kind.” Yuri explained looking again at Sheva. “He keeps his control and the remaining families will tighten their circles. But it will also make them begin to question the way of things behind his back.”

“And that is just as good as exposing it.” Lu’ria said softly. “It will eventually destroy itself from within when the truth is slowly learned.”

Yuri nodded. “Yes it will.” She said. “Then... someone will contact my sister and we all Narice will never allow this to exist. And once she discovers it... the game will be up.”

“Narice will never order an attack against this colony mother. The families are innocent of wrong doing.” Carisia spoke up now.

Yuri shook her head now. “She won’t need to. I expect that once whispers of this certain program begin to filter about, those agents like Sheva will take notice. They too will begin to question their orders and then it will commence to fall apart from the inside.”

“If we haven’t already found Moran and Dante by then and killed them.” Andro spoke.

“Very true.” Yuri echoed.

That statement caused everyone to look at Andro and Yuri oddly but Deion coming into the conference room caused them all to turn.

Deion moved up next to Andro and nodded. “The refit is nearly done *fervon*. The Worker Drones made it go a lot quicker than we expected. Another three hours and they should be set.”

Andro nodded his head. “Good. We’ll return to the *SCIMITAR* and then Dorian and Sheva can put their team together.”

Yuri turned to look at Norev. “Norev?” She asked.

Norev moved up to the board. “I have already dispatched a *BLOOD RUNNER*-Class Heavy Frigate to the coordinates you gave us in The Wilds. They will rendezvous with your *STRIKER* and then proceed to the target. Travel time should be no more than thirteen hours.”

“You’re sure you can trust these men and women?” Dorian asked.

Norev nodded his head without taking offense at the question. “The Captain is my former XO. I was very careful when I first left the High Coven and the crew of my ship were all chosen very carefully. Most of them have families at our main base, including me. They know what is involved in what we are doing and what it means.”

“I did not mean to imply anything Captain Norev...” Dorian began.

Norev shook his head quickly. “No offense was taken young man. In your position I would be asking the same questions. Over the course of the last two decades we have become very good at hiding from the Kavalians and our own people. My people will get you where you need to go and they will bring you back. How many in your Strike Team?”

Dorian looked at Andro. “A dozen?” He offered.

Andro nodded in agreement. “Sounds good.” He stated. “You and Sheva... Normya and Tir’ut flying the *STRIKER*...”

“I wish to go as well.” Onera spoke up.

“Onera!” Pa’cour spoke for the first time as he pushed off the wall.

Onera looked at him. “Papa... I can do this.” She told him. “I want to do this!”

“There will be no Immortals on this world!” Pa’cour spoke. “If you are spotted...”

“I am very capable of remaining among the shadows.” Onera told him. “I can blur as well as any vampire and use the shadows as mother taught me.”

Pa’cour looked at Yuri as he came up beside her. “My wife?” He spoke.

Yuri looked between him and Onera for a few seconds and then back to Pa’cour. “She is far more capable than even we know my love.” Yuri told him. “Isn’t that why we have asked Androcles to train her?”

Pa’cour knew Yuri was right and he stayed silent for a moment before looking at Dorian. “I have your promise to insure she does nothing brash?” He asked.

Dorian smiled. “You do.” He said.

“Papa!” Onera exclaimed loudly. “I can take care of myself! I do not need a babysitter! Especially one who I can no doubt defeat easily!”

“Onera!” Yuri barked.

Dorian chuckled softly. “I do not fear my brother’s sword Onera.” He said looking at her. “When you feel you are ready... all you need do is challenge me.”

Onera looked at him with confused eyes. “Your brother’s sword?” She questioned.

Pa’cour looked at his daughter. “You asked me once where I got the swords that you and I use daughter.” He said as she turned to look at him. “He stands before you now.” Pa’cour motioned to where Andro stood.

Onera looked quickly at Androcles with wide eyes and he smiled warmly. “They are good blades aren’t they?” He asked.

Onera blinked several times and then lowered her eyes. “Yes.” She finally said softly. Andro turned and looked at Yuri. “Zarah, Lucia and Carisia have requested to remain here with you.” He said seeing Yuri’s eyes grow wide in astonishment. “They will remain with my father when you return.”

Yuri looked at Carisia and the Lucia. “But... why would you...”

“We wish to try and make up for the time that was lost to us.” Lucia spoke. “Xaxon may have taken away our past... but he will not touch our future. We want to know who our true mother is.”

Yuri’s eyes became moist and she took a deep breath, gripping the side of the table with one hand while wiping her eyes quickly. “I would... I would like that very much.” She said softly.

Zarah stepped close and Lucia drew her even closer in a very intimate manner, wrapping her arm around Zarah’s waist and kissing her warmly. “And I wish to stay because Lucia wants to stay.” Zarah spoke.

Yuri didn’t blink an eye and nodded. “You have become one.” She said in understanding. “I...” She looked at Pa'cour and then shyly looked over to where Nameia sat against the far wall and had remained silent up until now. “I am beginning to understand that myself.” Yuri said as she turned back.

Andro nodded his head. “I suggest you depart immediately when the Drones finish the refits. My father will have already departed for the rendezvous and he will not wait too long.” He told her. “The extraction of Sheva’s parents should be complete by the time you return and then we will meet again to go over whatever Intel we have gathered by then.”

Yuri met his eyes. “What are you going to do to the Control Agent?” She asked.

Lu'ria pressed up close to Andro with a dazzling smile and bright amber eyes. It was not a smile that Yuri thought to be very pleasant. “We are going to question him until he tells us everything we want to know.” She stated confidently.

“And then?” Pa'cour asked.

Andro met his eyes. “Then I am going to vent his carcass out of the nearest airlock I can find.” He spoke. “What happens after that well, we will decide that when we meet after you return from your trip.”

Yuri nodded. “Fair enough.”

“Onera... why don’t you get your things together and say your goodbyes to your parents. We will wait for you in the landing bay.” Andro said.

“I am ready now.” Onera announced.

It was Lucia who reached out and took her hand. “You will be away from them for some time sister.” She said softly. “Spend a few moments to remain with them a time longer. We would like to know you a little better as well. Take my advice...” Lucia looked at Yuri. “We should always cherish the time we have with our parents.”

Onera smiled brightly at Lucia. She had not known what to expect upon meeting her half sisters, and she still had yet to meet Lisisa, but so far the reunion had gone far better than even her largest hopes. She glanced at Andro.

Andro nodded again. “We’ll meet you in the bay when you are ready.” He said. He looked at Pa'cour. “I have some equipment for you Pa'cour... if you will accompany us back to the ship.”

Pa'cour nodded and squeezed Yuri’s arm as he kissed her cheek. “Do not be too long my wife. There is much we must do.”

Yuri smiled and brushed her lips across his cheek. “We will.” She said.

Pa'cour nodded and turned to Andro. “Follow me.” He said.

SLEKON CLUSTER

ARTAAYA

DRAGON HALL EXTERIOR

Delnash walked confidently along the stone and steel skyway that led to the main Dragon Hall on Artaaya. The massive domed structure filled the horizon in front of him and yet the sense of fear that had

always gripped him on this walk was no longer there. This was the place where the members of Teniri's Dragon Council resided and met nearly every day. It was built for the dragons by his people for their part in saving the Pralor people in their flight from the Scourge so long ago. The stone and steel walkway was exactly three hundred feet above the colossal courtyard below where Delnash could easily see several hundred adolescent dragons being instructed by dozens of adult dragons. The trumpets of those hundreds of dragon voices as they talked in dragon speak could be deafening to anyone on the floor of the courtyard, but up here on the bridge it was a chorus of deep rumbles and deeper bellows that was strangely comforting to Delnash. As Delnash walked the stone and steel bridge he let those voices truly ripple through him for the first time in his life. He had made this same journey across the Dragon Bridge, as it was now called, hundreds of times in the past but this was the first time he had ever really heard the voices far below. The adolescent tenor and resonance was so very powerful and confident. Lately it had grown even more as word had begun filtering among the dragons here on Artaaya of the discovery of Arzoal and those they thought lost so very long ago. Though it was not common knowledge among the Pralor people, he saw no reason why Teniri could not share it with the dragons who called Artaaya home. Only a select few Pralors communicated with them on a regular basis and those men and women were chosen by Delnash himself and totally loyal to him.

These last days and weeks had been a turning point in his life and Delnash could not have been happier about that. The news of the Svorag advance Martin had told him the moment his people had determined what was going on. In the second breath Martin had told him he would see to the defense of Honelze and now Delnash knew that dozens of Martin's ships and his men and women were on their way to fortify that colony. Martin had asked for nothing in return and Delnash would not insult him by inquiring if there was something Martin wanted. Delnash knew what the answer would be for it was the same answer Sumar would have given to anyone who asked him that question. The Svorag advance on Honelze was known by only a handful of his most trusted advisors. He did not need Lorendo causing a panic among their people. He had also begun discretely shifting what few ships he could closer to Honelze in order to assist whatever Martin was able to send. He had been in contact with the leader of the Honelze colony and advised hi of what was happening, but also the need to insure calm. He also told him that soon they would be getting reinforcements from a very unlikely source and that he should not hesitate to accept and befriend them.

As far as Martin Leonidas was concerned, he had Pralor blood flowing within his veins, as did the vast majority of his people. That made them Pralor in his eyes, and that made their defense his duty. Delnash could only shake his head in awe at the complete and total acceptance of that fact by Martin, and how it seemed to resonate among his people. In the discussions they had had over these last days and weeks, Delnash had discovered just how intelligent and truly knowledgeable Martin Leonidas really was. His sometimes laconic attitude in many things was like a breath of cold mountain air in a stale room and Delnash had come to welcome it no matter his words. He could be a serious man when needed, but Delnash had also seen a part of Martin that he sincerely doubted very few people had seen. Martin Leonidas was a deeply spiritual man and while he doubted many knew that, Martin was a man who believed in what he was doing. He led his people with his heart first, and he had told Delnash on more than one occasion that when the day came where he could leave it all behind, he would. And he would never look back.

The Lycavorian people were unlike anything Pralor records, history and studies showed. Of course they were forty thousand years outdated, but not one had ever predicted they would rise to the level of prominence and culture that they had now. Like their King, they were all deeply spiritual, no matter what Gods they worshiped. They deeply believed and completely trusted in their King and their Queens for they knew not one of them would do anything that put the future of their people or their Union at risk. The love that Martin shared for each of his very beautiful Queens was written on his face every time he looked at any of them. Aricia was the most powerful in physical and Etheric terms as well as being his *Anome*. His soulmate. There was always a singular glint in Martin's eyes whenever he mentioned her in their conversations or looked at her, but that did not diminish the staggering love he had for all of them. Delnash knew Martin's five other Queens gravitated to Aricia as their combined voice, but the love they all shared for each other and for Martin was without question.

Delnash turned his head and looked at the seven foot figure of his constant shadow now. Avatar 27 now went with him almost everywhere he went. He had taken Martin's advice and ordered the avatars be allowed far more freedom in what they did. Avatar 27 had announced that he would be the Chief Elder's constant companion when they returned to Artaaya and that had not changed since. In truth, Delnash had grown

accustom to the massive avatar, and to be very honest, he had begun to enjoy his company. Yes... Delnash was very happy about how things were working out so far. Things that he would have never discovered had a wild looking Praetorian not shown him the light. He lifted his head when he saw Teniri waiting for him on the opposite side of the walkway and he quickened his steps. He finished crossing the bridge and came to a halt in front of her as she lowered her massive head to gaze at him.

“Teniri.” Delnash spoke with a friendly tone. “It is good to see you.”

Teniri met his gaze and nodded her huge head. *I am beginning to very much enjoy our talks Delnash.* She spoke to him.

Delnash nodded. “As am I.” He told her. He glanced once more into the courtyard. “The adolescents are advancing rapidly I see.”

Teniri nodded. *They are excited. They want to impress the Elder Mother when she does eventually arrive here. The Talon Guardians as well.* Delnash laughed loudly, making a very obvious show of it, and Teniri knew immediately why. *How many and where?* She asked.

-Only one this time Elder Teniri- Avatar 27 answered. -On top of Cathedral Hall-

He is not being shy about it at all now. Teniri commented.

“No... he is not. He is scared.” Delnash answered in a more subdued voice.

Teniri nodded again. *As well he should be. Since you made your speech and announced there would be elections, your people have openly begun to stand behind you. It is happening across the planet. Your words touched many of them deeply.*

“They were words I should have spoken long ago.” Delnash said.

*Perhaps. But you **have** spoken them and your people flock to support you.* Teniri said. *This is very good.*

“The Council is gathered?” Delnash asked.

Teniri nodded and turned her massive body. *Come... they wait for us inside. Let Lorendo guess at what we are discussing.*

Delnash looked at Avatar 27. “Activate your internal COM scramblers when we enter the chamber 27.” He said as they began to follow Teniri. “I certainly have no intention of giving that fat... what does Martin call him 27...?”

-The Lycavorian term is *Ronnus* Chief Elder. Bastard in the common translation of their language- 27 answered.

“Yes... no sense in giving that fat *ronnus* a free intelligence coup.” Delnash spoke with a smile. “I have found the Lycavorian language to be quite colorful. I like it.”

DRAGON HALL ARTAAYA COUNCIL CHAMBERS

The interior size always daunted Delnash when he was here, but in his last dozen or so visits he had grown far more comfortable. The six dragons on Teniri’s Council sat in a half circle on top of a raised stone platform on the floor of the chamber. All around them were circular raised stone platforms that rose in height the further back they went. It was like a huge sports auditorium like they had back on their homeworld Delnash had once described it. Dragon Hall could hold upwards of twenty thousand dragons, and each of them had a voice he now knew.

Delnash had also taken Martin’s advice when it came to Teniri and the dragons. When they first returned and had a meeting here, Teniri had a large chair brought in for him to sit in. Delnash had dismissed this chair and sat on the edge of the raised stone platform so that he could be near them and show them that he considered them his equal in every way. They had been wearing the Voice Modulators that Kasdan had made for the

dragons their first meeting, but Delnash insisted this was not necessary any longer. He would hold nothing back from them and he wanted them to trust him as well. Delnash set his P1 down on the platform and activated it. Images sent to him from Martin of the Svorag ship lifted from the pad and surrounded him.

“These are the latest Intelligence Images from Martin and his people.” He spoke. “The ship is maintaining its course and speed and my Chief Engineer agrees with their assessment that this ship has no Quantum Fusion Drive. Or any other drive system that could move it at faster than light speeds due to its massive size. We have time.”

Teniri nodded and looked at the dark brown dragon to her left. *Elder Neyrn.*

The pure Firespitter dragon nodded and looked at Delnash. *We have begun moving small groups of our number from the outer family pods to the location you designated Delnash. Only the older and more experienced fighters. Those that fought the Scourge during our flight. They should begin arriving there today and tomorrow.*

Delnash nodded. “We will begin moving them to Honelze discretely over the next week. They should become familiar with the terrain and wind patterns of the planet. You are sure you want to do this my friends?” He asked looking at them.

We will not sit idly by while the Svorag ravage another of your colonies. The brownish yellow female dragon spoke now. They will only come here next and then they threaten our children and eggs as well.

Elder Bricus is correct Delnash. Teniri said. Though in many ways we have become just as you and your people have. Complacent. We do not have as many warriors as we used to and they are not used to fighting in closed spaces.

Delnash nodded. “Send only what you can. Martin tells me his son is bringing what they call the Dragon Brigade.”

Dragon Brigade? Another Elder asked. What is this Delnash?

Delnash nodded again. “Apparently it is a complete unit of some three thousand dragons formed and trained by his son Androcles and several others. All of them wear this new Dragon Armor and are trained to fight in close quarters as well as at distance. They are led by a dragon named Durago. He is Arzoal’s mate.”

Yes... she told me briefly of her mate and that he was the leader of a dragon unit. Teniri spoke. I did not think it was so large however.

Three thousand dragons fighting as one unit? Neyrn asked. How is that possible?

Androcles is the other Lycavorian Talon Guardian. Teniri told them. He and his Bonded Sister Elynth form the second pair as Martin and Torma form the first. We must remember that Arzoal and our brethren have been fighting for their very existence for the last twenty millennia. All while we were here and allowing our own skills to recede and develop in other ways. Only in the last two decades have they found a place within Martin’s Union. An important place.

Three thousand armored dragons fighting together? Bricus spoke again. That will be a most impressive sight. If they can do what they say.

Arzoal shared with me some of what her mate showed her in regards to several battles they fought recently. Their bloodying so to speak. They will make believers out of all of you. Teniri said. Though it goes against our very nature, our brethren in the Alpha Quadrant have led very different lives and have adapted to survive. We must be accepting of that.

We need more confident and brash young male dragons. Neyrn spoke.

There are many female dragons among this unit Neyrn. Teniri spoke with some humor. Several of them command different sections.

Neyrn chuckled. *All the better!* He declared. *They can only make Dragonkind stronger as we go forward.*

Indeed. Bricus agreed.

“Martin’s advanced forces should begin arriving within the week.” Delnash told them. “His son has been delayed somewhat due to an unforeseen issue at their location. Martin assures me that he will deal with the problem and be here in time with their main force.”

Are you certain they can prevail Delnash? Another Elder asked. They will be fighting millions of Svorag.

Delnash looked at the dragon. "If I did not believe Elder Nekins, I would not be standing here now. You all know how our people once viewed Praetorians. With the exception of my brother Murano they were thought to be extinct. If what Murano and Wayonn tell me is true, there are five Praetorians heading here with his son Androcles. Five. All of them are Martin's children or married to his children. This will send... this knowledge will inject my people with pride once more. Pride and courage. In our war with the Scourge just one Praetorian on the field could turn the tide of any battle. I expect five would ignite a fire long dead in my people. And with the knowledge that there could be so many more among Martin's people... well... let's just say I cannot predict what that will do."

Will the Scourge take notice of this battle when it happens? Bricus asked. They have spies and collaborators everywhere.

Delnash took a deep breath. "I do not know. All of our covert sensor probes in the many different quadrants have seen no activity in recent years."

But Wayonn and the others have sensed them? Teniri asked.

Delnash nodded. "Faintly yes... but they don't know where or how many. Wayonn said they were moving until recently. As did Murano and Martin. Something has caused them to stop wherever they are however. We don't know why for certain but Wayonn believes it is due to something important that Martin's son has accomplished back in the Alpha Quadrant. An alliance between former hated enemies that many imagined could never be possible. We do not know for certain as I said, but they are not anywhere within a hundred thousand light years of us here. That much I do know with certainty."

Let us hope it stays that way. Neyrn said.

This son, Androcles. Nekins asked. There is something about your voice when you speak his name Delnash. Why?

Delnash met his dragon eyes evenly. "According to Wayonn, Androcles was... he was born fully aware of everything around him. Even while still in his mother's womb he was fully aware. With the memories of not only Sumar but Sumar's oldest son Resumar and that same son's only surviving child, Martin's father. The man whose name they all bear now. He also told me this Androcles was bonded with the dragon Elynth while still within his mother Aricia's womb. Several months before he was actually born actually. He used her as a conduit to the outside world. He is still somewhat of an enigma among his own people as both he and his dragon are obsessively private."

The eyes of all the council members grew a little larger now. *Teniri... this is true? Bricus asked.*

Teniri nodded her head. *Arzoal told me a little of him, but not very much. She... even she seemed distant when speaking of him now that I think back. In awe of him.*

He bonded with this Elynth while still in his mother's womb? And this dragon was still an infant herself? Nekins asked. And they shared everything?

Delnash nodded his head. "That is what I understand yes." He said. "She was only a few months old herself when they bonded. They have not been apart for more than a few days at a time if what Wayonn told me is accurate. His dragon, Elynth is her name as I said; Wayonn tells me that she is considered among the most powerful of your kind even at her young age. I did not think that this was possible for your kind. I had always believed that dragons did not fully mature until they were several hundred years old."

Bricus nodded her huge head. *That is normally the case yes. She answered.*

Teniri looked at Nekins. *Elder Nekins... what is it?*

Nekins met her eyes. *I have heard of this somewhere before. He replied.*

Nekins are you certain? This has never happened among Dragonkind. It has never happened in our history ever to my knowledge. Not the depth of the bond that Delnash says he has been told exists. Not even the Ancient Knowledge Crystals saved by our ancestors in their flight from the Scourge mention this. Neyrn spoke. Nekins my friend you must be mistaken.

I am certain of it. Nekins spoke shaking his head. It was an obscure sentence from something I read. I will consult with the Ancient Elder when we are done here to be sure. You may be correct Neyrn.

"Will your Ancient Elder Father know?" Delnash asked.

He is the oldest of our kind known to still be living. Teniri said. He was the one who blessed Arzoal's rise to Elder Mother. None of us know exactly how old he is, but some have said he has over three hundred millennia behind him.

“Three hundred thousand years old?” Delnash gasped aloud. “I never knew that! That is amazing!”

He will not tell anyone his true age. Teniri told Delnash. Most of what we know is only rumor. He finds it humorous. Nekins is the only Elder who he will speak with. None of us have ever spoken with him. He remains alone in his cave.

“Perhaps one day I will be allowed to meet him.” Delnash spoke. Delnash leaned over and tapped his P1 once more. “I have discovered something else.” He stated. The images of a ship appeared and began to rotate.

Teniri’s eyes grew wide. *Our ship!* She exclaimed.

“Lorendo lied Teniri.” Delnash spoke evenly. “Not that it is surprising given what we have learned in the last weeks, but this is something I felt you should know. He lied about not finding your ship. He found it... and he is the one that delayed it from returning. What he did with it for those nine thousand years I am still trying to figure out, but he has covered his tracks well.”

Then he is responsible for crimes against Dragonkind! Neyrn hissed. *He condemned many to death when he did not allow that ship to return to Elder Mother Arzoal. Thousands of our kind died in the war that Teniri told us they fought.*

Delnash nodded his head. “Yes he did. His actions directly influenced what Arzoal had to do. Many of your kind died as a result of the decisions she was forced to make. I ask that you allow me to discover exactly what it was he was doing before anything is done. He will answer for his crimes against Dragonkind and against his own people, but I ask for patience so that we can discover all his sins. No matter how terrible they may be.”

He has already admitted to being the one to create the Svorag. Bricus spoke. Is that not enough Delnash? They have killed thousands of your people through the years. Does he not bear the blame for that?

“It is enough... and yes he does.” Delnash agreed. “However, I want to discover all of it. No matter how bad it may be. It is the only way to be sure that something he has done in the past does not rear its foul head in the future.”

Neyrn nodded. *A wise approach.*

He will face justice Delnash? Teniri asked.

Delnash nodded his head. “Oh he will face justice Teniri. I swear to all of you that he will. And he will not be happy in the least when he discovers what that justice will be, or who will hold his fate in their hands.”

Teniri looked at each of the elders and saw them nod to her. *Then we will leave it your hands Delnash.* She told him.

Delnash bowed his head in recognition of their decision and then turned to Avatar 27. “27... pull up the reports Martin sent individually so that we can review them one at a time.”

-At once Chief Elder. Report 345. Governmental Structure of Union and Alpha Quadrant-

BETA QUADRANT

AUSTROVA

CAPITAL CITY OF MYDALA

CALIRIA LEONIDAS’S APARTMENT

Caliria stood on the balcony of her apartment and let the sun warm her near naked figure. The thin robe she wore did little to hide the high firmness of her breasts or the elegant curve of her hips. The robe clung to her taut ass cheeks and the outsides of her thighs like a second skin, leaving very little to the imagination. It was definitely not something she would wear outside of the privacy of her own home, but it was one of the gifts that Sadi and Ne’Veha had sent with her when she had departed Earth. Wearing the robe brought back such delicious memories of their time together. Memories that Caliria was not ashamed of in the least anymore and memories she never wanted to forget. That day seemed like a lifetime ago and now, every day that went by, her desire for Andro’s arms around her grew that much more powerful. She wanted to melt into his embrace, into their embrace and once more lose herself within that heavenly tangle of limbs and lips and tongues that she remembered vividly from their night together.

Caliria had changed so much from that day. Far more than anyone would ever believe. Far more than even she believed.

She tilted her head slightly and allowed the soft breeze to caress her face and body, very much delighting in the smells that rushed to her. The pungent smell of Vanari Orchid Blossoms from twenty stories below on the tenant's balcony made her sigh in happiness. Hundreds of years of Vanari research on the OSG chemical substance that had been used to control Vanari females had been rendered obsolete because of her work. Though this knowledge had not yet been made public, Caliria knew her father was pushing as hard as he could and insuring that she was the one who was recognized as being the catalyst for saving their people from such shame. Now Caliria had taken it even further by discovering and embracing what that one night with Androcles Leonidas had done to her. All of the many studies done over the decades by dozens of Vanari scientists, though no actual testing had ever occurred she knew, all of this said the Vanari people could not be affected by the Lycavorian virus that ran in their blood.

Caliria was living proof that it was all another lie. She and her sisters and their mother made it all a lie.

Caliria had wondered why Andro had not bitten her that night. He had more than enough opportunities for they had coupled countless times and he had spilled his essence into her at least four times that she could recall. Never had she met a man, and Caliria was no stranger to men, never had she met one who was built like Andro. He was the largest man she had ever laid with by far, yet he did things to her that left her gasping for more. He took her passionately and he took her with divine slowness that robbed her of her senses. His stamina was beyond any man she had bedded, and it seemed to extend to Sadi and Carisia and the others. That night was still very much a blur of pleasure and body parts, but now she understood why he had not bitten her as he had done with the others. He was not fully accustomed to the Vanari customs and he had not wanted to do something she might find unnatural. He had known however, he had known that their times together would begin to change her. Paga had more than confirmed this with her when Caliria had practically run to her after discovering the small fangs that had burst from her gums during one of her more pleasant fantasies about them together. Paga had told her then, behind only his father, Androcles Leonidas had perhaps the very purest blood of any living Lycavorian. This meant that the wondrous virus that ran within his blood would be so much more potent. Andro hadn't needed to bite her to change her; their time together would see to that, at least in the beginning.

Caliria Leonidas now looked at the world around her in a much sharper way than most others around her. Her eyes could change like Andro and Sadi and the others and her vision had become far more acute, allowing her to see things at far greater distances and with so much clarity. Her hearing had become so sensitive she could detect and count the beating of a bird's wings as it hovered near a tree. Her sense of smell had grown far more than even she had been prepared for. Her father, Arduri, Denali, everyone had a distinct scent and it was nearly overwhelming until Paga had taught her how to quickly file each scent away into a computer like file system in her brain. It happened now almost effortlessly, but she remembered the difficult struggles the first few days Paga instructed her. She had inherited a portion of the Lycavorian healing and regenerative systems, infusing her body with energy she had not had before. She was stronger and faster and her reflexes far superior to any Cadre Commando she had ever seen.

And it was absolutely blissful for Caliria.

She would never be able to change her form like Andro and the others, and any children born from their union would look like her, but they would be Lycavorian within. The Hadarian doctor on the *ARCH DEMON* had confirmed all of this for her, but Caliria did not care about that. She embraced these changes within her, relished in them, and now she wanted nothing more than to ravish Andro with attention in order to thank him for this wonderful gift. She loved Androcles, of that she no longer had any doubts. She loved them all. They had become part of who she was, no matter that she was older than all of them by at least a hundred and fifty years. As with Sadi and the others, Andro had become her center, her purpose. She wanted to taste Carisia and Lu'ria again and again, for she found herself drawn to them more that night. Carisia's eyes and the color of Lu'ria's skin were maddening to her, but more than anything she wanted Andro's arms around her, holding her tightly. Caliria would have that. She remembered vividly the look on his face when he discovered Franklin in her bed, and that look had cut her soul deeply. With Paga's help though she had found her inner self and with that came peace with the knowledge of who she was and what she wanted. And Caliria would show Andro that she loved

no one but him; wanted no one but him. She would show Sadi and Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria and now Sehri that they were what she desired.

Caliria was sure of all this for she now had the father that she had never had before. Her father had become a different man now, so caring and concerned for her and Arduri and Naesta and Nirilo and all that they were. He was a father who respected and was so very proud of what she had accomplished in her life. He may have had many hundreds of years of experience over her, but now her father listened to her intently and allowed her words to reflect in the decisions he was making. He no longer saw her differently because of her black hair. Now she was like a precious gem and he went out of his way to insure that she saw him trying to make up for all the years he had dismissed her.

Having her sister nearby was a godsend as well. Arduri had taken to the changes within her much more quickly because of Denali's presence and his easy going manner in teaching her how to use them. Like Caliria worshiped Androcles and the others, Arduri adored Denali and Lisisa to the extreme. Her newfound abilities made Arduri's already lethal talents as a Vanari Cadre Commando even more deadly. After the few transmissions she had been able to have with Naesta, Caliria was certain her youngest sister was experiencing the same thing since allowing the massive ebony skinned Lycavorian Joci and the stunning twin sister of Andro's mother to take her as their beloved wife and mate.

Yes... she would have Andro's arms around her once more. She would bask in the feel of his powerful arms holding her, the feel of his warm lips against hers, and most of all she would relish in the love she had for him. She had hurt him she knew, but she would make up for that a hundred fold. And if what Paga said was really true, that he would hold himself responsible for what happen and not her, than Caliria would soon have what she had only dreamed of.

She detected Paga's light lemon scent but didn't turn. As the tall *Durcunusaan* soldier came out onto the balcony with her, Paga smiled. She wore simple shorts and t-shirt over her muscular female form and held a large mug of the Queen's coffee in her hand. She knew Caliria was becoming more and more comfortable in her new abilities for she didn't flinch any longer when detecting her scent. The only thing that belied the fact Caliria knew she was coming up behind her was the almost miniscule shifting of her feet in case Caliria needed to turn suddenly and escape. It was a natural instinct in their people and it had taken hold in Caliria as well.

"You have grown stronger Caliria." Paga said as she came up beside her.

Caliria turned and looked at her. "It is becoming so much easier Paga." She said with a smile. "I must still concentrate, but it is not hard anymore and everything is so much more vivid and clear."

Paga nodded. "Even that will become second nature to you in time." She stated.

Caliria looked at her. "I have... I have never had a friend like you Paga." She said softly. "One I could tell everything to."

Paga met her eyes evenly. "Nor have I." She stated honestly. "Being a member of the *Durcunusaan* does not leave much time for developing friendships that are truly honored and last. I have found that with you and I cherish it."

Caliria smiled brightly. She had shared everything with Paga these last weeks, holding nothing back from her. It was uncomfortable for Paga at first, hearing Caliria speak about the Crown Prince and Princess in so intimate a manner, but Paga had also been caught up in the emotion of having someone she could share everything with. She began to open up to Caliria in return and the Vanari female had quickly become the sister that Paga had never had.

"I don't have any classes today." Caliria spoke. "Shall we go to the Promenade and shop?"

Paga laughed softly. "I don't shop." She said.

Caliria leaned into her gently. "Well... we will have to change that won't we?"

Paga rolled her eyes in an almost embarrassed expression just as the chime from the door rang. Caliria's eyes lit up and she squeezed her arm. "Arduri was coming over this morning so we will make it a threesome." She said as she began moving into the apartment.

Caliria padded barefoot over the floor of the apartment to the door and touched the panel. She opened her mouth say something excitedly to her sister but the words died in her throat as she saw Franklin standing in the hallway. Her green eyes narrowed considerably and she pulled the thin robe tighter around her lush body almost instinctively.

"What are you doing here?" She snarled at him.

“Caliria... we need to talk.” Franklin told her.

“*We* don’t need to do anything. I do not want to talk to you!” Caliria snapped back at him harshly. “And I certainly have absolutely no interest in anything you have to say Franklin.”

“Caliria we...”

Caliria waved her hand over the panel. “Goodbye Franklin.” She stated as the door began to close.

Franklin reached into the apartment with cat like speed and slammed his hand down on the panel, stopping the door from closing. As it began to reopen he moved into the doorway itself. “Caliria I have some things I need to tell you.”

Caliria held out her hand quickly and stuck it into his chest bringing him to an abrupt halt. Franklin looked at her with surprise in his eyes at this display of strength. “How dare you! Who do you think you are coming into my home?” She snapped.

Franklin looked at her. “I thought I meant something to you.” He stated.

“Please!” Caliria quipped sarcastically. “You took advantage of me Franklin. You took advantage of my confusion.” Caliria did not speak the words she wanted to say in regards to her being sure it was him who had facilitated that she was taken by the OSG to begin with.

“I took advantage of you!” Franklin exclaimed in shock. “I did no such thing and you know it! You practically threw yourself into my arms Caliria. What exactly was I supposed to do?”

“If you truly cared about me and not what I could do for you then you would have tried to help me. Not get me into your bed.” Caliria hissed.

“I love you Caliria!” He announced.

Caliria rolled her eyes. “Do you honestly expect me to believe that?” She popped. “After all you have done?”

“What have I done?” Franklin demanded. “I have always treated you with respect Caliria. I thought we had some good times together.”

“No... you had the good times Franklin.” Caliria told him. “You took advantage of my mental state to appease your ego and your nefarious motives. Why were you the last person I saw before the OSG captured me Franklin? Why were you the first person I saw when I came back here after I was rescued?”

“You think I was involved in that?” He spoke aghast.

“I don’t need to think about it.” Caliria said as her nose twitched ever so slightly and she smelled the adrenalin dump into his bloodstream indicating that he was lying to her. “I know all I need to know about you and your lies!”

“Caliria I love you and I am trying to help you!” Franklin hissed softly.

“Help me?” She spat. “By making sure I was taken by the OSG to spend the rest of my days as a whore! That is you loving me? I told you what I was working on and you passed that on to your handlers! You don’t love me Franklin... you never loved me. Please do not insult my intelligence by spouting such lies.”

“I didn’t know about that!” He almost yelled. “I told you my father is well connected! He knew I was interested in you and... and he did not approve. When I told him I would not break it off with you he must have... he must have sent others to watch you. Discover what you were doing? I told him nothing!”

Caliria shook her head. “I am supposed to believe that?” She said. “Do you think I am such a fool?”

“It’s the truth!” He exclaimed.

“That you are still clinging to such a story and you expect me to believe it is beyond me.” Caliria said shaking her head. “Do you consider all women to be fools Franklin?”

Franklin reached out with his hands but stopped just short of touching her. “Caliria you are treading in very dangerous waters.” He told her. “Your... your relationship with that animal Lycavorian Prince is dangerous. He is a loose cannon and he has made enemies everywhere. Your own Board of Regents are going to reject whatever he has to say when he gets here!”

Caliria glared at him. “Do not call my husband an animal in my presence again Franklin. Not if you wish to continue talking!”

“He is not your husband! Caliria he does not care for you!” Franklin snapped. “Only what you can do for him! He will use you to get what he can out of the Board of Regents and that is all! You don’t actually think he considers you his wife do you? He is using you!”

“Did your OSG friends tell you that Franklin?” She asked with a small smile. “You do not know as much as you think you do about the Lycavorian people Franklin.”

“I’m trying to protect you damn it!” He barked. “He and his people have been working with members of your own government for decades! They are the ones responsible for taking Vanari females and...”

“Enough lies!” Caliria spat. “Get out!”

“Caliria if you continue to work on...” Franklin began.

“I don’t need to work on it anymore!” Caliria shouted at him angrily and forgetting to mind her words. “It has already been done! I have finished a working counteragent for the OSG chemical weapon against my people with help from Andro’s mother and sister! It has already been discovered and implemented Franklin! I’ve seen it work on those captured with me! My father knows and so do the members of the SBR! You can’t hide it anymore Franklin! The OSG will not control my people any longer!”

Franklin reached out and grabbed her arms gently. “Caliria are you crazy! You can’t say things like that! I can not protect you from my father or his contacts if you go around making these wild accusations!”

“They are not accusations! They are truth!” Caliria growled. “Now take your hands from me!”

Franklin shifted his tactics quickly and gently rubbed his hands up and down her arms. Caliria’s eyes narrowed even more and she tilted her head to the side. “I seem to recall that you liked it when my hands are on you Caliria Re Mydala.” He said with a smile.

“Please Franklin.” She told him calmly stepping back from him. “You can not compare to Androcles in any way and most especially not in the sexual department. He is far longer and thicker than your puny manhood and he knows how to use it in a way that makes you a drooling child in comparison.” Caliria met his eyes with her final words as she took the intentional dig at his manhood. She saw his eyes grow a little wider and she smiled.

“Mocking me Caliria Re Mydala is not the way...” He began.

Caliria yanked her arms completely from his grasp and totally lost control of her anger at that moment. She had heard enough. Her green eyes changed then, the black ring surrounding the bright green pupil and her small, but no less lethal dual fangs bursting from her gums to be displayed very prominently. Franklin stared at her in shock. “My name is Caliria Leonidas and I am a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union!” Caliria barked at him viciously. “And if you ever touch me again I will insure you no longer have hands to use in such a way!”

Franklin stared at her in stunned silence. He blinked several times. “Your... your eyes!” He exclaimed. “You have... how is that...?” He stopped talking when Paga appeared from the side with her KM14 leveled at his head.

“To lay your filthy hands upon any Princess of the Union in such a way is cause for an immediate firing squad within Lycavorian space.” Paga growled. “To lay your hands upon a wife and mate to Androcles Leonidas in such a way is sure to incur his vengeful wrath. Trust me Eridiani... the wrath of Androcles Leonidas is far worse than you have heard in any stories and reports from your OSG partners.”

Franklin’s eyes shifted between Caliria and Paga. “Caliria you...”

“Paga...” Caliria began speaking confidently, not bothering to change her features back to normal. “...if he does not leave my home in the next five seconds, shoot him in his disgusting face.”

Paga stepped closer, charging her KM14. “With pleasure.” She stared at Franklin. “Your choice fool!” She spat.

Franklin looked at Caliria. “I can not help you now Calira.” He spoke as he began to back out into the corridor. “Now it is too late.”

Caliria met his eyes. “Too late for you.” She stated. “I do not need your help Franklin. I never have.” She spoke as she waved her hand over the panel and the door closed in his face. She made sure it was locked and turned to Paga.

Paga looked at her as she lowered her KM14 slowly. “I do believe we may have altered the current landscape of things.” She said. “No doubt he will run back and tell his handlers of your new... of the new you.”

Caliria couldn’t help but smile as she reached up and ran her fingers slowly over her very sharp fangs. “Oops!” She spoke softly.

Paga laughed softly at her expression. "Come Caliria my friend... get dressed and pack some of your things. Your father and Denali will need to know of this quickly and I suspect it would be safer for us both if we remained at his estate during the evenings now."

Caliria nodded her head. "I agree." She said. "I'm sorry Paga. I... my temper got the better of me."

Paga grinned. "Do not be sorry my friend." She told her. "Today... today you have shown that you have truly embraced the Lycavorian blood that now flows within you. How does it feel?"

Caliria's eyes were bright and alert. "Glorious!"

Franklin made his way out of Caliria's apartment building and moved directly to the hover car that was waiting for him. He sat back in the rear seat, saying nothing to the driver, as the car rose into the traffic lanes of Mydala and then he triggered the COM unit.

"Well?" The voice of the man asked as the image of the middle aged man with graying hair came into view.

"We may have a problem father." Franklin spoke. "She confirmed what we suspected. A counteragent to G76 does indeed exist and she has seen it work successfully on those taken with her. She was able to finish it with the assistance of the Hadarians."

The man nodded his head slowly. "Given the way many of our contacts within the Board of Regents have been acting it does not surprise me."

"What now?" Franklin asked.

"I will direct our people to begin work on a mutative agent that will render their cure useless." The man said in reply.

"That could take weeks or months father." Franklin said quickly. "Caliria was close to finding a counteragent before she was taken. Now that she has been exposed to the Lycavorian Union and their Hadarian Healers, she will no doubt have access to medical equipment and personnel that we do not have. The Hadarians are far superior to our own doctors and scientists because of the mutative nature of the nebula around their world. Nearly all of them are born with an affinity for healing. They also have access to computers and equipment we could only dream to have. Computers and medical equipment that will no doubt have a base knowledge of G76 now. The Vanari scientists on our payrolls will not be able to hide it for centuries this time and if the Hadarians are involved as Caliria said then they will have active programs on file to counter any variant of G76 that we come up with. If we try to develop another compound it will be discovered for certain before testing is even done."

"The Hadarian Healers are that good son?" The man asked.

Franklin nodded. "Better." He said. "I made several recon trips to their homeworld before we expanded into the Alpha quadrant father. Their security measures for travelers is not very good. At least it wasn't then. I was not able to see much, but just from what I saw, anything our people come up with they will negate within days."

"Can we not just take several of their Healers and learn what they know? How they do things?" The man asked.

Franklin shook his head tentatively. "We could ask our Kavalian contacts father. They now have control of the Hadarian homeworld, but none of the active healers within Lycavorian ranks returned to their planet when the new government ordered them home. They are who we would need to examine to learn anything from the radiation in the nebula and its effects on them. And the Kavalians are becoming a liability with the growing discord within their own ranks. Now... trying to take even one Hadarian from within the Lycavorian military itself will be impossible given that most of them are assigned to ships or military units. Any attempt that we make could possibly cause us to become targets if we are discovered. That is not something we want father. We would also make the Eridiani government targets as well and the fools in power would turn on us instantly to protect themselves."

"I concur." The man said. "You agree with Colonel Faith's assessment then?"

Franklin nodded his head. "I do father. I would also go further and say that we do not know enough about the Lycavorian culture from within this Union. They are different in many ways from the Protectorate."

Certainly more prone to violence but also far more dedicated to their values and morals. We might be able to bribe some within their government, that has been proven by the Kavalians, but I do not believe it would be possible to turn any within their core military. If we begin to try and kidnap Hadarians from within their very ranks, they will respond father. Viciously. And unfortunately for us, they are far more skilled at war than we are.”

“You don’t have faith in our people son?” The man asked.

“That is not it and you know that father.” He answered. “The Lycavorian Prince is a loose cannon. In many ways he is worse than his father. And he seems to be the one in charge at the moment. At least with his father, we could predict in some fashion what he would do based on his past decisions. The sons, especially this Androcles, our intelligence agents have never been able to put together a workable file on them father. None of them. We do not know what they would do and trying to predict how they would respond is too precarious. And while we train and push our people hard, the Lycavorians train and push their people even harder. They have been at war for the better part of their existence. And they do not show mercy or take prisoners father. Any direct conflict with them and we would lose far more than we gain.”

“You sound as if you admire them son.” His father spoke.

Franklin nodded. “In some ways I do.” He answered honestly. “But only to a point that benefits us father.”

“Do you believe others not working with us know what Caliria Re Mydala knows?” The man asked after a long moment.

Franklin nodded. “Without a doubt. The Leonidas brother for sure, her father and sister most likely, perhaps more.”

“Then they will need to be eliminated Franklin.” The man said. “Can you facilitate this?”

Franklin nodded. “Yes father. I know where Coren Re Mydala lives. I have blueprints of his estate there.”

“Does this bother you son?” The man asked.

Franklin shook his head quickly. “No. She was a tool. A pleasurable tool no doubt, but still only a tool. I will take care of it. However... there is something else you need to know.”

“Go on.”

“Father... I believe Caliria has been changed.” Franklin said.

“Changed? Changed how?”

“I believe the virus within the pureblood Lycavorian Prince is far more powerful than we first thought.” Franklin said. “She got angry with me and her... her eyes changed like those Lycavorians of the Protectorate that we have experimented on. She grew rather nasty looking fangs as well.”

This caused the man to sit forward in his chair. “You are certain son?”

Franklin nodded. “I would not have believed it if I did not see it myself.”

“I was under the impression the Vanari Scientists said this could not happen.” The man spoke.

“I think it would be a surprise to them as well.” Franklin added.

“Interesting.” The man said thoughtfully. “This is not something we can simply pass by. Take the brother alive. And the Vanari sisters. Kill the rest. We have Lycavorian assets already in place throughout the city. Use them and make this happen quickly. The dynamics will change dramatically when the older brother arrives if we have them.”

“I’ll see to it father.” Franklin spoke. “Timetable?”

“Quickly... as I said. Lead them yourself.” He replied calmly. “Make it appear to be an accident and leave no survivors.”

Franklin nodded. “Understood. What about the threats from the older brother?”

The older man shook his head. “Those of us in power do not believe he has the ability or the fortitude to follow through with his veiled threats. It is not something you need concern yourself with. However, I will make your observations known to the others. This is a critical time and we can not make mistakes. Make this happen Franklin. And be safe.”

Franklin nodded. “Consider it done father.”

“Contact me when it is complete.” The man spoke.

COREN RE MYDALA ESTATE

“...Are certain Caliria?” Coren asked looking at his oldest daughter across the knee high table in front of them.

Paga stood behind them while Caliria sat on the couch beside Arduri. Denali paced the floor near the large double doors onto the patio holding the mug of coffee in his hand not saying anything as he listened.

Caliria nodded. “He made me angry with his arrogance and continued lying. I allowed it to slip without thinking.”

Coren looked up. “I want to crush this man’s throat in my own hands!” He growled. “I have never wanted to hurt a living being but this man, this man I will make an exception for.”

“I’m sorry father.” Caliria spoke.

“Bah!” Coren hissed waving his hand dismissively. “You have nothing to be sorry for Caliria. You did nothing wrong! We already assumed the OSG knew of the counteragent. If this Franklin is one of their agents then it only confirms it for them.”

“I am also... I am also reasonably sure that he is the one who facilitated me being taken by the OSG.” Caliria said. “I was not certain at first, but it all makes more and more sense to me as I think back on those days. He is the only one it could be. I know it. I can see it in his eyes whenever I bring it up. He was lying. I know that without question.”

This announcement caused Denali to stop pacing the floor and he turned to look at her intently.

“*Inamarno*... you are sure?” He asked her. “*Forn culibhe allon arbet tye?*”

“*Jainn*.” Caliria answered meeting his eyes.

“You must be certain *arande*.” Denali told her moving closer. “There can be no doubt in your mind. No question. This is the man who gave you to the OSG? You smelled the adrenalin dump in his blood when he lied?”

Caliria met his eyes. “*Jainn*.” She answered without hesitation.

“Smelled?” Coren asked. “Caliria... what does Denali mean you smelled.”

Arduri looked at Denali. “Denali my love... why does this matter? I believe my sister.”

“As do I Duri.” He spoke.

“Then what does it matter?” Arduri questioned again.

Denali moved back to the couch and sat down between Arduri and Caliria. Arduri’s hand slipped over to rest on his thigh and his larger hand covered hers without thought. He reached out with his other hand and took Caliria’s in his. “My brothers and I made a pact with each other many years ago Duri.” He spoke softly and looked at Caliria. “*Inamarno*.”

“A pact?” Caliria questioned.

Denali nodded his head. “It was a pact of blood between brothers. We swore to act in each other’s stead if the need ever arose. That we would act for each other. That our voices would be one when it came to this one subject. It’s roots come from the knowledge of what happen to our mother Aricia before any of us were born. No one... not even our father knows of this. Andro, Resumar, Arrarn... all of us. We reaffirmed this oath recently with Dorian and Deion since they are now of age and Dorian has taken a wife and mate.”

“What pact Deni?” Caliria asked again.

“If one of our wives and mates was ever assaulted as you were *Inamarno*, as our mother Aricia was, as our elven mothers recently have been, we swore that our combined vengeance in reply to this act would be like our father’s. It would be swift, complete and united no matter who it happened to.” Denali told them. “That we would act as if it was our own wife and mate.”

“What... what does that mean Denali?” Caliria asked softly.

“It means that I intend to honor that pact.” He told her. “Just as any of my brothers would honor it if it were them. You have given me the knowledge I needed to act for my brother. I will do exactly as Androcles would do if he was here.”

“Act how?” Arduri asked tentatively.

Denali rose to his feet. “Coren... you will want to inform Dyack that he needs to sever all ties with the OSG effective immediately. He will not speak to me because of what he perceives Andro did with Sehri. Until Andro is here and can speak with Dyack himself you must be our conduit to him.”

“Denali... he has just gotten to a position that could very well help us.” Coren told him.

“It will not matter any longer.” Denali said. “Tell him to save whatever information he has obtained and pull out of any communications with them. This will actually help him as well given that his own people are becoming suspicious of his dealings with the Eridiani.”

“What? Why?” Coren spoke coming to his feet now. “What is going on?”

“Once you have contacted him... call into your office and tell them you are departing for a short working tour of the Protectorate’s homeworld.” Denali told him. “Tell them Dutkne is giving the tour and invited you.”

Arduri jumped up. “We are going to Lorent?” She exclaimed with excitement.

“Denali!” Coren snapped. “Could you please explain to me what is going on?” He rasped out. “What did Caliria smell? What do you intend because of it?”

Denali looked at Arduri and Caliria. “Perhaps now might be a good time to inform your father Duri.” He said.

Coren’s eyes narrowed. “Inform me of what?”

Caliria knew what Denali intended. She could almost see it within his mind because of the closeness he had with Andro as his brother and a Praetorian. And despite her upbringing, Caliria found she approved of the intent. She stepped around him and moved up to her father taking one of his hands.

“Papa... there is something Arduri and I need to tell you.” She stated turning to see Arduri come up beside her.

“Why... why do I not like the way you said that.” Coren spoke.

“Perhaps you should sit down papa.” Arduri told him as Denali turned to Paga and moved closer to her.

“There is nothing at her apartment?” He asked softly.

Paga shook her head quickly. “She has moved anything of importance to her to the *ARCH DEMON* already Milord.” She answered. “We only stay at her apartment when she has classes the next day.”

“And he conveniently showed up this morning knowing she had classes today.” Denali said.

Paga nodded. “Almost as if he knew she would be there.”

“She does not return to her apartment anymore Paga.” Denali told her. “Make whatever preparations you need for her to have extra security while she is going to class at the University but her apartment is out of the question. It is too exposed and open. Both of you stay her on the estate now.”

“I could say the same about the University Milord.” Paga said. “To cover her properly on the University grounds I would need another six *Durcunusaan* or Drow scouts. Especially if you do what I think you are going to do.”

Deni nodded his head. “Then you will have them.” He stated. “Give me a list and I will make sure it happens. She is Andro’s wife and mate and I intend to make sure nothing happens to her before he arrives.”

Paga drew herself up. “She has become... she has become like a sister to me Milord. I swear to you nothing will harm her while I live.”

Deni nodded to her. “Good. Then between you and I we will have it covered. Whatever you brought with you have moved to my *STRIKER*. When they finish telling their father we will depart.”

“What do you think he will do Milord?” Paga asked looking at Coren. “When they tell him?”

Deni shrugged his broad shoulders. “To be honest... I don’t really know. But he is a different man now. We will see.”

“And the OSG?” Paga asked.

Denali met her eyes calmly and Paga shuddered inwardly at the evil intent she saw in his dark orbs. “The OSG will cease to exist when I am done.” Deni stated calmly.

Daron moved along the many portable buildings with measured confidence. He did not want to make it seem like he was too excited as he made his way towards the medical facility. He was looking forward to bedding Anja Leonidas. She was quite beautiful and if he was any judge of character, she would be fairly inventive in their bed. He never thought Martin was going to leave and he waited impatiently for her to return from the ship in orbit. He had been watching the medical building since her return waiting for the signal she would send to him and only minutes ago the lights flickered only for a moment. That had been her signal that she was ready for him and he had begun to make his way across the compound. Daron could picture her tight body beneath him, urging him on as he pummeled her into the bed. He was going to make her beg for more, beg him to take her over and over, and he was going to record it all. Then he would show it to Lorendo and his father and prove to them just how savage and inferior they were to his people. If he could get one of the vaunted Lycavorian King's women to surrender to him in a sexual manner it would show just how easy it would be to control them. And because of her beauty, he would enjoy having Anja Leonidas in every way possible, as many times as possible. Maybe he would even impregnate her just to prove how superior he was. Perhaps he would even keep her as a pet to relieve himself whenever he felt the need.

It took him several minutes to casually move across the large compound until he was in front of the medical facility. He looked around the immediate area, and unable to detect anyone nearby he quickly touched the door control panel. It slid open without pause and he moved into the facility.

Daron didn't see the three shadows step from behind a nearby building as the door closed behind him. Three lethal shadows that had been following him since he left his personal shelter. Danny felt Atropos and Fedor move up next to him as the door closed to the facility.

"Explain to me again why we are allowing this man to even get close to mother Uncle Daniel?" Fedor asked softly as his wolf eyes and fangs were very prominent in the growing moonlight. "His intent is anything but honorable."

Danny grinned in the moonlight, his gleaming white fangs exposed and savage looking. "*Sibfla!*" Dan said. "I doubt he could even spell that word."

Atropos chuckled softly. "He thinks with other things besides his brain." He stated calmly.

"You mean he thinks with his cock Atropos?" The female voice said softly as Anuk and Nayeca appeared from the shadows of another building and moved up beside them.

Fedor watched as his red haired and white haired Aunts moved up beside Danny and pressed close to him. He took note that both of them were in their altered wolf state, their eyes changed and their fangs exposed.

Atropos grinned. "I will not use such language with you and Nayeca present." He said.

Anuk and Nayeca chuckled. "Thank you Atropos." Nayeca said. "He is alone Daniel." Nayeca spoke softly. "Just as you suspected. We swept around the back of the facility as well. If he has anything with him it is in his bag."

Daniel nodded as his arms curled around his wives. "He's too stupid to try anything. Besides... he won't get the chance to do whatever it is he intends. Red will see to that."

"Then I ask again Uncle... why are we allowing him to do this?" Fedor asked almost impatiently. "He intends to dishonor mother and..."

Atropos chuckled again and looked at Fedor. Anja had tasked him with helping to train the Kavalian warriors under Muton and Miseo these last weeks and he had done so knowing that Anja was with the King. She could not be better protected than when she was with her mate and fellow Queens.

"That worm... dishonor Anja Leonidas? Hah!" Atropos spoke with a smile, his fangs clearly exposed. "The smallest of your mothers in stature she may be Fedor my boy, but I dare say she rivals my sister in her ferocity. Many people have made the mistake through the years of misjudging Anja Leonidas because of her size. It is a mistake that none of them ever made twice. If they survived the encounter to begin with."

"She is alone." Fedor protested.

Danny looked at him. "Alone?" He rasped softly. "Your mother is not alone Fedor. None of your mothers will ever be alone again. That is something that they vowed after what happen to For'mya. No... the day your mother For'mya came back to them was the day that they swore none of them would ever be alone again."

"What do you mean Uncle?" Fedor asked him.

Danny looked at him. "Have you seen your other mothers lately?" He asked.

Fedor was silent for a moment. "No." He said finally.

Danny motioned with his head at the medical building. "Like I said... they will never be alone again."

Fedor's eyes grew a little wider at his Uncle's meaning and realization flowed over him. "They are together." He gasped.

Danny released Anuk with his arm and reached up to grab the back of Fedor's neck. "Why don't you get back to your hooch and spend some time with that beautiful young wife you have." He said. "Your mother's are more than capable of taking care of each other. They do not need us."

"I agree." Atropos spoke. "I have not enjoyed my Lilika enough since she arrived and I intend to do just that."

Fedor looked at Daniel. "Uncle... you are sure?" He asked.

Danny grinned. "Trust me Fedor. When your mothers are done with him, Daron will never attempt this again. At least not to any female who is a citizen of the Union. Your mothers, they can be pretty feral when they want to be."

Fedor glanced at the door to the medical building one last time before nodding his head. His uncle spoke true in that they could take care of themselves and if they were all together now then he need not worry about them. He tilted his head up into the wind and searched for Iama's kiwi scent and found it easily. He smiled.

"Then I will let my mothers take care of him." He stated.

Danny nodded. "Good boy." He stated. "That fool doesn't has no idea what he just walked into." He squeezed Anuk and Nayeca. "Now if you will excuse me... I have other things that need my attention."

"Yes you do." Nayeca spoke with a smile.

"In a big way." Anuk agreed.

Atropos snorted as he turned and began to head across the compound. "The shameless nature of youth." He spoke softly reaching for Lilika within Mindvoice.

[And who is shameless Old Man?] His wife reached back for him.

Atropos grinned. *[I will show you shameless when I reach you my wife.]*

[I do so love when you talk dirty to me my love.] Lilika responded with a laugh.

Daron entered the Medical Facility quietly, his eyes adjusting to the dimmer lighting. He turned quickly and locked the entrance behind him and then stepped further into the facility. His eyes swept across the main area with the examination beds and he saw her step quickly from the doorway into her office. Daron fought down the intake of breath that threatened to escape his throat as he saw her. Her hair was much longer than he had thought, cascading well past her shoulders and framing her stunning face. She wore a simple outfit that clung to her lush body like a second skin. Her large breasts strained against the fabric of the material. He had not seen her wearing anything but the Lycavorian body armor up until now and he could see the outline of her nipples against the shirt. He gazed at her hungrily as she stepped further into the main room and saw him.

"Daron?" She spoke softly, looking at him.

Daron moved with a measured pace. He did not want to seem too eager, but now he desperately wanted to strip her out of her clothes and take her in every way he could think of. She was far more enticing than he had first thought.

"Anja." He spoke as he came up to her.

Her face beamed and she smiled at him. "I didn't... I didn't think you would come." She said.

Daron let his bag drop to the floor and he reached up to stroke her cheek. "I told you I would." He stated.

Anja smiled as he stepped even closer. "I'm glad." She whispered.

Daron gazed down into her face, truly stunned at her surreal beauty. How an animal like Leonidas could claim such a beauty was beyond him. He might just keep her around after he was done with her. She could prove very pleasurable to have at his whim. If all he had to do was get her pregnant to take her away from Leonidas, it would be too easy. He had taken an injection of hormones to make himself more virile and if she was in this Phase as she said, then she would be with child before he left her this night.

“You look absolutely stunning.” He said to her softly.

Anja looked at him shyly, glancing at his bag on the floor. “What did you bring with you?” She asked.

Daron smiled at her. “Some wine and fruit for us to share.”

Anja met his eyes. “You don’t want me right now?” She asked in an almost hurt voice.

Daron took her chin between his fingers. “That goes without saying.” He told her. “But I am not a beast like that man Leonidas. I want you to be relaxed and most of all I want you to enjoy yourself when I make you feel things you never have felt.”

Anja smiled brightly. “Will you kiss me?” She asked.

Daron’s heart raced as he stepped closer to her, pressing against the front of her supple body and feeling her breasts push against his chest. “I would be delighted.” He said as he lowered his face closer.

“You are going to make me feel things I have never felt?” She asked just before his lips touched hers.

Daron smiled as he gazed into her eyes. “You have no idea.” He stated confidently.

Anja smiled back at him and he saw her eyes shift, the black ring encircling the jade green pupil and the sharp looking dual fangs extending from her gums.

“I could say the same thing to you.” Anja spoke just before she lifted her hand. Daron saw the metallic flash in her fingers but was far too slow to react. He felt the prick in the side of his neck and his eyes went wide as he lost all control of his limbs. He glanced up at Anja as blackness swept over his eyes and saw her smile once more as she lifted the small injector in front of his vision. “Nighty night.” Anja spoke just as his eyes clouded over and the blackness enveloped him.

Anja stepped back as he slumped to the floor. “*Saoi sibfla!*” She spat loudly as Aricia, Dysea and Cirith walked out of her office. “His perfume is going to make me vomit!”

Aricia stepped up to her and kissed her, pulling her body tight. Anja melted into her arms without pause as Dysea and Cirith moved to stand over Daron. Cirith bent over to pick up his bag as Aricia and Anja parted.

“Better?” Aricia asked.

Anja smiled lustfully. “Much! Thank you!”

“*Melyanna...* you truly are a *pomai!*” Dysea spoke with a large smile. “The reek of his desire for you was overwhelming. He would have done whatever you asked of him.”

Anja smiled as she and Aricia came over. “Like that would ever happen.” She said.

Cirith opened the bag and pulled out several items, one small metallic object she lifted up for all of them to see. “He was going to record it all.” She said.

Aricia moved up beside her and took the recording device. “No doubt to send back to Lorendo and show how manly he is.” She said.

“And how easy he thought we were.” Anja stated.

Dysea’s emerald eyes narrowed slightly and she reached down to grab the front of his shirt. “Yes... let us show him just how easy we are my loves.”

“I don’t suppose you guys would look the other way while I did a quick amputation huh?” Anja asked.

They all laughed as Aricia bent over to help Dysea. “We promised Martin we would not hurt him.” She said as they lifted his limp form between them.

“It won’t hurt!” Anja declared. “I swear! He won’t feel a thing! Really!”

SCIMITAR

ENROUTE TO APO PRIME

The ship was quiet; as quiet as any warship could be. The majority of the *SCIMITAR*’s Third Rotation worked on the other end of the landing bay during these hours, allowing Andro relative peace as he walked among the fighters and transports with Elynth beside him. Andro did not know what had awakened him, only that it had done so several times before, and he did not know what it was. Whispers and echoes in his dreams really, words he could barely make out or understand. Reluctantly he pulled himself from the warmth and twist of limbs he had been tangled in with Sadi and the others. Whatever it had been had woke Elynth as well, it always did for she had the same dreams in these instances and as she reached for him, he was grabbing a mug of

coffee from the Mess Lounge. In another few minutes he was beside her in the landing bay and they were silent as they walked. This was the fourth time since Dorian had joined them that the dreams had come back. That did not include the times they had awoken feeling the same way, before the nightmares of Alba Tau had overridden everything else and allowed them no peace.

That same feeling from before had returned and it was much stronger now that Dorian was here. It had something to do with him and Ryner they were certain, but what they did not know.

Upon returning to the *SCIMITAR*, Andro had received quite an earful from Eliani about leaving Zarah on Yuri's ship, but she had relented quickly when she had seen Onera. Eliani Leonidas was not as trusting as her brother, but seeing Yuri's young daughter with Pa'cour among them and recognizing how Yuri had trusted them with her, she had begun to relax more. Once Lisisa had arrived they had taken Onera under their wing without hesitation and led her away to get acquainted with the ship. She may not have been as trusting as her brother but Eliani had complete and utter faith in Andro. If he believed in something as strongly as he did Yuri's change, then Eliani would trust in his instincts and feelings. They had never been wrong before.

Andro and Elynth did not need to speak as they walked the deck, the click of her talons echoing softly in the air. One of them would start to talk after they had looked at everything from all directions. The voice they heard as they neared the almost silent end of the bay caused both of them to turn toward the Dragon pens nearby. They realized Dorian and Ryner were in the unoccupied Pens and they moved across the bay to see him using a Scale Brush on Ryner's muscular side. The Scale Brush removed any lingering dirt or dried scale roots from his fresh scales, giving any dragon an almost luster like appearance to their scaled skin. Andro did this at least once a week with Elynth and she relished it each time. This morning however, something told them that they were not the only ones who had been awakened as they were by the echoes.

Dorian turned when he felt his brother's presence. "Andro." He said.

"You are departing on the mission in a few hours *fervon*." He spoke. "You should be getting some sleep."

Dorian nodded. "I know." He answered. "Something woke us up."

Andro's azure colored eyes looked at Elynth quickly and then back to Dorian. "Woke you up?" He asked.

Dorian nodded as he tossed the brush to the floor. "Woke me out of a sound sleep." He said with a smile. "I was having a really good dream too."

"What woke you Dorian?" Andro asked again moving closer as Elynth settled to the deck and crossed her foreclaws over each other.

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know." He answered. "Something. Like a... it was like a whisper of words in the back of my mind. Even in the dream I could hear them."

I as well. Ryner spoke now. *An echo of something that I could not see. But it was... it was there. We could almost feel it within us.*

"Was it a presence of some kind?" Andro asked causing Dorian and Ryner to look at him.

"You... you had the same thing?" Dorian asked quickly looking at him with wide eyes.

Andro looked at Elynth and then back to Dorian and nodded his head. "Yes."

It is not the first time for us. Elynth spoke softly. *It has happened before through the years... but it was much stronger this time. Now we could almost...*

"We could almost understand the words." Andro finished for her.

Dorian looked at his brother and settled between Ryner's front legs. He stroked his thick talons and waited as Andro settled between Elynth's foreclaws across from them. When he was seated Andro held out the coffee and Dorian took it. He drew a long pull from their mother's blend, relishing in the taste and texture. He lowered the mug and looked at him.

"Andro... what are we?" He asked.

Andro met his eyes. "What do you mean?" He asked.

"You know what I mean *fervon*. You have asked yourself this same question through the years. Both you and Elynth. What are we?"

"We are Lycavorian Spartans." Andro answered immediately. "We both have the blood of our parents in us. Blood which is among the purest of both our species. And we are brothers above all else."

"Is that the answer you give to the shrinks?" Dorian asked with a smile.

Andro grinned. "You have been talking to Eli I see." He said.

"It doesn't answer my question." Dorian said.

"We are what we are *fervon*." Andro finally stated.

"But *what* are we?" Dorian asked him. "Never in the history of either of our species, of Dragonkind, never has what happened to the four of us ever taken place. I checked *fervon*. In all of our history texts, in all of the vampire scrolls, nothing like this has ever occurred. I asked the Elder Mother before she left Dragon Mountain. She told me that you and I, Elynth and Ryner, we are the only ones she has ever heard of it happening to. And how many years does she have. Certainly as far back as grandfather Sumar."

Andro nodded slowly. "I did the same thing." He said. "The answer... the answer was the same."

"Then what are we?" Dorian asked.

We are who we are Dorian, just as Andro has said. Elynth spoke. *Do you wish to be more?*

Dorian shook his head quickly. "That isn't it Elynth. You know that."

We question why we are what we are. Ryner spoke now. *You have asked this question before haven't you? Why you and Androcles bonded while he was still within Queen Aricia's womb? Why you hatched only a few weeks before this happened? Long before you normally would have Elynth. Andro... have you never asked why this happened. Why you and Elynth can do what you do. What we can now do?*

Elynth blinked several times and looked at Andro. *We have... yes.* She answered turning back to Ryner.

"Did you come up with an answer?" Dorian asked.

"No." Andro replied softly. "Do you question the Praetorian gene we carry *fervon*?"

Dorian shook his head quickly. "It's not that Andro. You know it isn't. That is in our blood and I know why we have that and what it allows us to do. I know the reasons for it and why it exists within us. What I question is why I was able to speak with Ryner before I was ever born? Why you were able to speak with Elynth before you were born? There has to be purpose behind that. A reason for it."

"We have asked these same questions Dorian." Andro told him. "There are times when we still do. Like tonight. I think we have just come to accept that perhaps there are no answers. At least none that we can see or feel."

"Father says there is purpose to everything in the universe." Dorian said softly. "That everything happens for a reason. That every event has an effect and every effect has a cause. And every cause has a purpose."

We believe this as well. Elynth said.

"Then we are this way for a reason." Dorian spoke meeting Andro's eyes. "There is a reason I am like I am. That you are like you are *fervon*. In just the few months since I joined this life, I have grown beyond what anyone expected. Our mothers. The Elder Mother, even father. Everyone except you Andro." He stated pointedly. "Why is that? You knew once you touched us didn't you. You knew then."

Andro gazed at him for a long moment. He took a pull from his coffee and then reached out to stroke the scales under Elynth's jaw. "The disease that afflicted mother I did not expect." He said finally. "But yes... I knew you would be like me. We knew what happened to Elynth and I would happen to you and Ryner."

And you never told anyone? Ryner asked.

Elynth chuckled softly. *What would we have told them? In some ways even our own family considers us enigmas they will never understand. That they do not want to understand. It...*

"It frightens them." Andro said finally. "In some ways... in many ways we frighten our own family *fervon*. They love us without question yes... as we love them. But they do not fully understand us. They cannot explain it. Hell... we cannot explain it. We did not want to expose you to this before you were born. We had hoped... Elynth and I had wanted to bring all of this to you and Ryner as you grew together. As we grew together. As I said the disease that afflicted mother we did not anticipate. And now you are here asking the same questions that drove us insane for so many years."

"So you do believe there is a purpose to us being what we are? That there is a reason we were born aware?" Dorian asked.

"Yes. How can we not?" Andro said. "Father and Torma, mother and Isheeni, their bonds are powerful. Every Bonded Pair has a powerful bond. But none of them truly come close to experiencing what I do with Elynth or you with Ryner. They cannot see through their eyes as we do."

Their hearts do not beat as one as ours do Dorian. Elynth said. *What we experience is...*

Like we are one soul. Ryner spoke.

Elynth looked at Andro and it was almost as if she smiled the way her mouth opened slightly and she exposed her fangs. *They understand far more than we gave them credit for my brother.* She spoke.

Andro nodded. "Yes they do." He said. He looked at Dorian. "How do you try to explain to your mothers and fathers, to anyone really, that you feel the same dry scales as Ryner or Elynth would feel if they were without moisture for too long? That our skin may not be dry but we feel it within our skin. Like it is happening to us. She can see with my eyes as I can see with hers. She can smell with my senses as I can with hers. It is like we are... like Ryner said. Like we are the same person." Andro grinned. "Our mother Anja would spend the next decades trying to understand and figure out why we felt this way."

"This is why you have never told anyone?" Dorian asked.

Andro nodded his head. "I have not shared this with anyone... even Sadi. Though of anyone, *KertaGai* would more than likely understand."

"And this has happened to you before. Waking up for no reason hearing the echoes and whispers?" Dorian asked.

It went... it went away for a time. Elynth said. *When what we experienced on Alba Tau chased away everything else. But it returned recently.*

"When I was born?" Dorian said.

Andro nodded his head. "This is the fourth time since you were born that this exact thing has happened. They returned the first night we returned to Earth."

And now it is starting to happen to us. Ryner said.

It isn't a sickness of the mind! Elynth hissed. *That is why we can tell no one. We do not want others to think us crazy.*

"So it has... these dreams have never affected you in any other way?" Dorian asked.

Andro shook his head. "No. We have them... we feel things... hear echoes just like you and Ryner and then they are gone. It is like someone or something is trying to communicate with us... but then the whispers or echoes fade."

"And you never tried to figure out what they meant?" Dorian asked.

Oh we did. Elynth said. *But they were just as jumbled and confusing to us as they are now to you. We were never able to determine what they meant. After years of trying we decided that they would either one day make sense or they would not.*

"It has to mean something though Andro." Dorian said. "You and Elynth stopped having them for a time only to start having them again when I bonded with Ryner before I was born. And now we are having them. That is no coincidence *fervon*."

Andro nodded. "Perhaps not." He said. "However... with everything going on right now, trying to decipher what it all may or may not mean is distracting. We have to focus on what we are doing here and now. Too many depend on us *fervon*."

Dorian sighed heavily and nodded. "You are right." He said.

Andro leaned forward. "Listen to me. Whatever it is... whatever it means... when the time is right we will know. We have had years to contemplate this exact thing Dorian. Why are we so different from our brothers and sisters? Why do we see and feel things that others, even our father, can't see. They have come to the conclusion that it is because of the emotional state our parents were in at the time that we were conceived. That is what they want to believe but we know it is not true. If it was... how do they explain you and Ryner? Our mother Isabella and our father were calm and happy and at peace when you were conceived." Andro shook his head. "No... there is something else at work. Elynth and I believe this and now so do you. But we also have responsibilities to undertake. As much as I would like to delve into this just like you, we can't."

"I know." Dorian spoke. "What do we do?"

We do our duty. Elynth spoke again. *And when we have these dreams and hear these echoes and whispers, we now have two more minds to perhaps interpret them. To reach for and try to understand what they mean.*

Dorian looked at him. "You know... this being born fully aware *sibfla* is not all it's cracked up to be by everyone else."

Andro chuckled. “*Fervon*... we have been trying to tell people that for years.” He said. “No one ever listens.”

We can reach for you? Ryner asked.

Always. Elynth spoke. *Without question. No matter the time. It is the only way that we will one day discover what it means.*

“Sheva will never understand.” Dorian said with a grin.

“Then do not tell her.” Andro spoke. “I have not told Sadi as I said. Elynth has not told Anthar. How do you explain something that you don’t understand? Our wives and mates would probably understand and support us, but why give them the burden of knowing how this affects us when it is not needed.”

We will discover what it means one day Dorian. Have no doubt of that. Elynth said.

“And if we don’t like what it means?” Dorian asked.

“Well... in that case... then we will decide what our course of action will be.” Andro said. “Not before.”

MANNE

LYCAVORIAN ADHOC COMPOUND

Daron heard the voices through the fog within his mind. Female voices. Relaxed and happy. As he struggled to get his eyes open, he realized he could not move his arms or legs. They were secured to something and he was laying at a sixty degree angle on some sort of table. He blinked several times and the memories of what had happened came flooding back. He was about to kiss the Queen Anja and then she stabbed him with something in his neck. It wasn’t painful really, just a very sudden prick in his skin before his limbs seized up and blackness took him. His vision began to clear and he noticed dim lights around him from consoles nearby. He realized he was still in the Medical facility and from what he could determine he was secure to one of the examining beds. He blinked several more times and his vision cleared completely. His anger surged when he realized his predicament. She had tricked him! She had been leading him on the whole time! Flaunting her body and acting all innocent towards him. He cut his eyes and turned his head slightly not wanting to reveal he was awake and he saw them sitting off to the side on the floor of the facility. The remaining four Queens who had not departed with that animal Leonidas. They were sitting very intimately against one another, all of them dressed in very causal, if not revealing clothes. Anja was feeding small pieces of fruit to the raven haired Queen who Daron knew to be who they called Leonidas’s *Anome*. She placed a piece of fruit in Aricia’s teeth and then brought her own lips against Aricia’s as they both bit into it and tore it in half to chew. The elven Queen Dysea was sitting with her long legs thrown over the legs of the half breed Queen Cirith, their foreheads touching as they looked at something on the data pad that Cirith held. Some juice from the fruit squirted from between Anja’s sensual, full lips and rolled down her chin. Anja giggled contently as Aricia leaned forward quickly and used her tongue to lick it off Anja’s skin.

He saw the blond elf Queen turn to him quickly and he snapped his head back around hoping she had not seen he was awake.

“Our guest is awake.” Dysea spoke turning back to Cirith and ignoring Daron.

He heard Anja sigh. “Yes... he’s been awake for several minutes now.” She said. “I was trying to ignore him.” Anja rolled to her feet quickly and brushed off her pants. “Oh well.” She said.

Daron turned his head and glared at her as she began to walk towards him. His eyes once more couldn’t help but take in the way her clothes clung to her lush body, or now how he could even see that her womanly mound was very clearly outlined between her thighs even through the pants she wore. He lifted his eyes back to her as she came up to him.

“Sleep well?” Anja asked him.

“What did you do to me bitch?” He snarled.

“Sensitive isn’t he Anja?” Aricia asked as she came up next to Anja. She was dressed in a similar manner, the style and cut of her clothes also showing off her supple body and the outline of high, firm breasts and taut thighs.

“I demand you release me!” Daron barked.

Anja chuckled. "He is rather excitable." She said as she looked back to Daron with a smile. "No wonder it didn't take much for him to think he was going to dip his wick into my honey pot."

Dysea and Cirith laughed as they got to their feet and walked over. "Anja... dip his wick? What is this?" Cirith asked with a smile.

Anja grinned. "It's a saying from long ago on Earth." She said. "When a man thought he was going to get lucky with a lady. Sort of how Daron here thought he was going to score with me. Isn't it Daron?"

"What did you stab me with?" He demanded to know.

Anja moved closer and lifted a tiny hypoinjector from the table beside the bed holding it up for him to see. "It's called Cituxen. A rather nasty little toxin. One drop of this on the tip of a needle will turn anyone into a limp noodle in five seconds. My daughter Eliani designed it for a mission she went on with her brother Andro. It worked so well we kept it as part of the standard inventory for our Special Operations people. I tweaked it just a little bit with Anuk's help. You remember her right? Danny's elven *Anome*... the one that you had some rather descriptive and disgusting thoughts on when you saw her the first time?" Anja smiled at the expression on Daron's face when she said that. "Bet you thought I didn't detect that either huh?"

"You lie!" Daron hissed.

"It seems he is not as smart as he likes to think." Aricia said.

"Tell me about it." Anja agreed. "Anuk and I adjusted the different compounds of the Cituxen toxin so that it hindered the normal motor and function skill commands from getting to the brain and then on to those particular parts of your body. I didn't want you running away from me so soon before we had our "special time" together." Anja continued as she set the syringe back on the small table. "Don't worry big boy, it's not permanent, and you will still be able to feels. I wouldn't want to deprive you of that."

"You... you lie! You could not have detected my thoughts! I am Pralor! You are... you are not even..." Daron gasped.

Anja smiled at him. "Your little trick with Etheric resonances didn't work too well on me you know." Anja said. "And you most certainly were not able to make yourself more appealing to me than Martin Leonidas. You wouldn't be able to do that on your best day sport. Or on my worst day."

"How?" Daron gasped before thinking to deny everything.

"Did you think that as the wives and mates to a Praetorian that we would not be granted some of our *Nauta Melme*'s Etheric gifts?" Dysea spoke now. "The virus that flows within his blood now flows within ours fool. In Aricia and Anja and I most of all, but it swarms within the blood of us all."

"I bet... I bet you thought that you would record yourself having sex with me..." Anja said as she moved closer to the table. "That you would show me whimpering in orgasmic joy while you pounded your pathetic dick into me and you could tell that fat fucker Lorendo how easy we are. That because it was so easy to get me into the sack it proves just how inferior we are as a people. Then you and your pal Lorendo would use that to prove to the other Elders that your father is wrong about us."

"I have... I have no idea what you are talking about!" Daron stammered. "You... I only assumed because he had six wives that you... that all of you could not possibly be satisfied with that. I... I found you attractive and pursued you. That is all!"

"You pursued me even knowing that I was the wife and mate to Martin Leonidas?" Anja asked. "You think rather highly of yourself Daron. And you are a liar."

"I am not a primitive like you!" Daron barked. "I do not lie!"

Cirith held up his bag. "Would you care to recant that answer? It is really weak if you ask me." She spoke with a smile. "Or do you carry this equipment around with you all the time to record your disgusting conquests?"

"We hate liars Daron." Aricia said. "Really we do."

"You may have been able to get away with this devious and disgusting practice among your own people... but it will not succeed here." Dysea hissed.

Daron looked at Anja. "It almost worked with you." He snapped. "Or do you expect me to believe that you were not in the least bit affected by me?"

"Only in the level of how violently I wanted to vomit." Anja told him. "The perfume you wear makes me ill."

“You are lying!” Daron spat at her. “You are just too afraid to admit it in... in front of your fellow Queens! You wanted me! I could see it in your eyes!”

“Wow!” Anja said shaking her head. “You really are impossibly stupid and hopelessly arrogant!” She spat back at him. “Want you? Daron you are five...”

“Six.” Aricia corrected her.

Anja looked at her. “You think?” she asked.

Aricia nodded. “Oh at least.” Aricia replied.

Dysea chuckled. “Remember how he swells when we are all in phase *Melyanna*.” She echoed. “It is at least six.”

Anja looked back at Daron. She reached out quickly and to his horror she yanked down the pants he wore exposing his lower body to their eyes. “You’re right.” She said with a smile. “Daron... you are six inches too short and two inches too thin. That little thing you got between your legs could not come close to what I have. What we have... every day of our lives.”

Daron’s eyes glared at her as his skin flushed in embarrassment and anger. “I am over seven thousand years old and one of the most respected scientists among my people!” Daron barked loudly. “How dare you treat me in this manner?”

“And you are as dumb as a *nubous* post!” Aricia snapped at him. “Anja wants to cut your puny cock from your body you know!”

Daron’s eyes grew wide in sudden fear when Anja’s hand came up with the R4 High Elf Razor Hybrid in her hand. The doubled bladed weapon was fearsome looking by itself and the way Anja spun it gracefully in her hand told him she knew how to use it very well. It was a gift from Tarifa and Aihola many years ago and Anja had not been without the blade since. She normally wore it in a hidden sheath at the small of her back under her utility belt. Completely hidden and unseen.

“And you wouldn’t feel a thing.” Anja told him with a savage grin. “It would be very appropriate punishment for laying your hands upon me in the first place.”

“You are crazy!” Daron almost yelled.

Anja smiled her sweetest smile. “You have no idea *igord*.” She said.

“You seriously do not understand do you?” Dysea spoke now. “You can not affect any Lycavorian female, or any female turned by a Lycavorian, in the vile manner that you affect the Pralor women who you prey upon. And you most certainly can not affect any of us. You do not compare to our *Nauta Melme* in any way, shape or form. He is in our blood! Even if we wanted too, and none of us have any desire to change the way we feel, we could not be attracted to you. Martin is all that fills our minds and hearts. His scent permeates our bodies and calls to us even when he is away. We bask in how he makes us all feel. You could not possibly come close to matching that. You are not Lycavorian and...” Dysea looked at his limp cock. “And you are woefully inadequate in other departments as well.”

“She means your cock is way too small!” Anja quipped playfully.

“And when Martin is not here... we can find pleasure the likes you could never provide in the arms of each other.” Cirith stated quickly.

“So very true.” Aricia stated with a smile.

“Come on guys.” Anja pleaded. “Just one little cut!”

“Get away!” Daron screamed trying to yank free of the bindings but still unable to feel any portion of his arms or legs. The commands from his mind were not reaching his limbs and he was stuck where he was at the mercy of these crazy primitive bitches.

They all laughed at him causing his shame to increase to higher degrees.

“Not so high and mighty now are we?” Anja asked him.

“You are insane!” He screamed. “All of you!”

“Be thankful you tried this stunt with one of us and not one of our daughters or the mates to one of our sons.” Dysea told him. “They would have carved out your eyes long before now.”

“That goes without saying.” Cirith agreed. “Especially Sadi or Eliani.”

“We give you a warning now Daron of the Pralor people.” Aricia began. “You are not dead now but for the grace of one man. After the way you have acted towards Anja we would have happily joined her in carving

you into tiny pieces. Only our love for Martin stops us. Only his request that we do not hurt you stays our hand. And we would have been well within our rights according to the laws of our people.”

“That just shows how savage you are!” Daron barked.

“No... it shows how deeply we hold to our vows of love and commitment.” Anja said. “When a Lycavorian claims a woman as Martin claimed all of us, his blood flows within us. We neither want nor need the attention from other men. And while Martin lives we could never desire the touch of another. All of us are tied together within the Etheric realm Daron. We are intertwined so deeply that when one of us speaks, all of us speak. No woman claimed by a Lycavorian will ever fall prey to your deception. And in most cases, once she discovered what you were doing she would tell her husband and mate. Then your father would be short one fool son. And since your sister told us you target only women who are married...” Anja saw the look on his face. “What? You didn’t think that your sisters knew about your perversions Daron? How do you think we confirmed you target only married females, aside from your obvious gestures towards me?” Anja reached over and took another hypoinjector from the table and held it up.

Daron’s eyes grew wide. “What is that? What are you going to do?” He shouted.

“This?” Anja asked innocently looking at the hypoinjector. “This is Tanem. It’s an older drug but still very effective. It increases your heart rate like you are exercising so that other medications will speed their way through your blood stream.”

“Wait!” Daron screamed. “You can not...”

“Yes I can.” Anja spoke just before stabbing it down into his leg.

Daron felt the small pin prick like before and he glared at Anja. “You bitch!” He shouted. “All of you! My father will hear about this!”

“What will you tell him Daron?” Aricia asked him. “Are you going to tell him that you actively tried to seduce Anja even knowing that she is the wife and mate to Martin Leonidas and one of six Queens of the Lycavorian Union? Are you going to tell him that you tried to use your pathetic Etheric abilities to alter her perception of you and make you more appealing to her? That you tried to control her actions? As you have done to so many of your own women? We call that rape. And that is punishable by death within the Union.”

“He would never believe you!” Daron shouted. “I am his son!”

“Perhaps not.” Cirith spoke as she handed Anja a small tubular device which Anja slid into the body of the injector. “But he would and did believe your sisters when they told him what you have been doing all of these years.”

Daron’s eyes were wide now. “They... they told him?” He gasped.

“Your sisters are not as unintelligent as you think they are Daron.” Dysea told him with a smile. “They figured out what you were doing long ago and they jumped at the chance to assist us now. Especially Kesyla. Did you know that your sister is falling in love with Daniel, Anuk and Nayeca?”

“What?” Daron hissed. “Kesyla? She would never lower herself to such a level!”

Anja chuckled softly. “That statement shows just how much you really know.” She said. “Which is pretty much nothing. If things will work out how we believe then they will then your sister and she will become wife and mate to Daniel, Anuk and Nayeca Simpson. They will love her until she is breathless. And believe me when I tell you... any fool who tries to take her from Daniel if that occurs...? Let’s just say Danny has a temper that he rarely lets out. Sort of like our Martin. They would not survive the encounter.” Anja held up the hypoinjector. “Now... where would you like me to stick you?”

“No!” Daron barked. “What is that?”

“This is not technically a medicine.” Anja said with a smile. “It’s a chemical. Rinolac. Pretty harmless really... but once it works its way through your bloodstream... well let’s just say that any Lycavorian female will find you absolutely heinous in the way you smell. You would have to outright force them to even want to be around you. It won’t affect anyone who can’t smell it, but most of the females within the Union will take notice right away and figure something is not right with you.”

“You can not do this!” Daron screamed. “It isn’t right! You have no right!”

“To protect our people... we have every right.” Aricia snarled.

“Bitch!” Daron screamed. “All of you are bitches! Do you hear me! You are nothing more than primitive bitches!”

Anja's eyes narrowed. "And just for that... I'm going to inject it right into one of your tiny little testicles and not be gentle about it!"

"No!" Daron screamed.

Anja reached out and shoved the hypoinjector forward stabbing it into Daron's left testicle. He screamed in horrible pain as Anja depressed the trigger and then dropped the injector onto the small table.

"Chew on that you asshole." Anja snarled.

Aricia took her arm with a smile. "Come... let us return to our camp before we have to smell the result." She said.

Anja smiled at that. "Now that's an excellent idea." She said. She turned back to Daron. "We'll hang onto your little bag of goodies Daron. Including your P1. I'm sure Avi will have a good time removing whatever information there is on it. You should be able to move in a couple of hours. Just enough time for the Rinolac to fully work its magic in you. It should last about three or four weeks. Just enough time to get the message out about you." Anja reached forward and slapped his face gently. "Next time you target a woman... make sure she is not smarter than you big boy. And definitely make sure her husband doesn't have a cock that even when not hard, makes yours look like a newborn child's."

Cirith, Aricia and Dysea couldn't help but burst out laughing as Cirith threw his bag over her shoulder. Anja could be so colorful in her description of some things. Daron could do nothing but watch as they departed the Medical Facility arm in arm laughing to themselves leaving him in silence and alone. He let out a scream of rage as the doors closed. A scream that no one heard and no one would care about.

ICARAVA DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE SPACEWARD OF FORMER PRALOR TERRITORY EDGE OF SCOURGE CONTROLLED SPACE

It was a massive planet, easily five times the size of Apo Prime, with nearly double the amount of water covering the surface. From orbit it appeared to be a greenish orange color due to the glare from the three nearby suns, but it was not a desolate planet by any means as first glance would indicate. In fact, it was the only planet not touched by the Scourge corruption or desolation within a thousand light years. It still had massive cities across the surface, glittering areas of beauty scattered among the plains, river valleys and mountain ranges that spread across the planet and its terrain. Three colossal space stations occupied orbit around the planet, a dozen massive pod shaped warships spaced around them and mixed in with dozens of smaller pod like ships. There appeared to be only three continents when looking down upon the planet from orbit and none of them were connected. The larger cities appeared to reside mostly on the two bigger continents with the third having only a few scattered across its expanse. The enormous oceans appeared to be gray/blue from orbit, and as one grew closer you could discern the lush green of forests and mountains.

This was Icarava. Homeworld to the *Darastrixi*. The *Darastrixethe*. Those of the Ancient Dragonblood.

It was from this planet that all dragons within the known universe were descended from. This planet was the core of their entire species no matter what breed they were. And no matter if they walked on four legs or two. Dragon Society, or *MakiaVi*, was broken into many different areas but all were Darastrixethe. There was no distinction drawn between those that were two legged, or *Jiilhoiipa* and those that were *Vrrarhoiipa*, four legged. Evolution had dictated that some of the Darastrixethe would eventually walk on two legs, and now they did. Evolution also dictated that the two types of species would never be apart. They were all Darastrixethe, and their voice was equally heard.

MakiaVi was very tolerant as a society, but also very rigid and harsh in many ways. Each Darastrixi had their purpose and their role and that is the role they were expected to fill. Those *Arytissi* or Warrior Dragons were made up mainly of the *Vrrarhoiipa*, for they were the most sturdy and powerful. They were commanded by specially trained *Jiilhoiipa* that rode their fellow dragons into battle. They were a devastating force to behold on any battlefield and since the dawn of their species they had never been defeated in open combat by

any enemy. Nothing could stand against their combined power. Even when the Scourge had been ravaging the Pralor people and worlds during their long war, killing billions, they had not dared to come here even knowing the Darastrixi worked closely with the Pralor people through the millennia. The Scourge Queen knew to face the Darastrixi would be far more costly to her forces than to the dragons. The Darastrixi were immune to any kind of physical Scourge assimilation and their equal in strength and cunning. While the Scourge had them outnumbered by millions, the cost to the Scourge would be more than she was willing to accept. The Darastrixi were also able to speak within the Etheric Realm where the Scourge could not. An unlikely pact was struck then; the Darastrixi would remain out of the Scourge war with the Pralor people and not help them in any way. Any Pralor people on Icarava were to be given to the Scourge as a means for the Darastrixi to show that they were serious. That day was now a stain upon the honor of every Darastrixi that many would never forget. While the Darastrixi considered the Pralor people equals in everything many Darastrixi did not regard them well because of their arrogance and how they seemed to think they knew what was best for all. There were many exceptions to this general rule and many Darastrixi had friends among the Pralor people as well. And they would never forgive their leaders for executing such a plan. In return for this rule the Scourge would not force the Darastrixi into submission and they could remain free.

With Scourge supervision of course.

This Pact did not sit well with many of the Darastrixi people for it severed their ties with thousands upon thousands of Darastrixethe that they had allowed the Pralor people to seed upon other worlds with the Darastrixi blessing. The Scourge took those Pralors from Icarava and demanded no one dare acknowledge them afterwards. The Darastrixi agreed, but even so, when the Pralor homeworld fell to the Scourge, billions of the Darastrixi across Icarava mourned the loss of so many of their friends and colleagues among the Pralor people. Now they would never know the fate of those Darastrixi that had been seeded in other parts of the galaxy. The Scourge lay waste to everything on the Pralor homeworld and destroyed wantonly without realizing or caring about what they were doing. So many priceless artifacts and countless millennia of knowledge was mindlessly destroyed, and among that information, any of the locations where fellow Darastrixi had been seeded.

While they had powerful warships and equally advanced engines like the Pralor people, the Darastrixi almost never left their claimed territory. No doubt the Scourge would never allow them to transit their space, though the random research vessel out exploring had passed through scourge space more than once. These vessels were the exception to the rule. No ships with the exclusion of Scourge vessels were allowed to enter former Pralor space. And still the Darastrixi leaders did nothing. Even with the Pralor war long over, the Scourge Queen still kept her forces along the borders to monitor and control. While they did not actively stop and board Darastrixi ships that tried to leave, they had full authority to do so.

MakiaVi was a deeply faithful society with even strangers from different cities across their massive planet willing to stop and talk of whatever on the streets of their enormous cities. The pace was measured and calm befitting the benevolent nature of all Darastrixi. The *Urlkrisir Mamiss* or Governing Body was led by a Commission of Twenty or *Sulevfu di Woiewwr* that was elected for life. Ten *Vrrarhoinpa* and ten *Jiilhoinpa* resided on this *Sulevfu* and made the decisions that had guided their kind since the beginning. They were broken into four *Sulevfu* and a *Svitraniv* or *Svitran*, Priest or Priestess, was elected from within their four groups to be their leader. The ruling *Urlkrisir* had been in power for well over three hundred thousand years now, the *Svitran* a well respected *Jiilhoinpa*.

The *Elbakiw Sulevfu*, or Science Commission, was tasked with the same things as any species. New discoveries, research and medicines, technologies, all meant to improve upon the life of the Darastrixethe as a whole.

The *Angrimich Sulevfu*, the Military Commission, was obvious in its duties as it was tasked with the defense of the people as a whole.

The *Ymmute Sulevfu*, or Law Commission, made and enforced the few laws among the Darastrixi while the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* actually did the governing.

Then there was the *Livaiji Sulevfu*, or the History Commission. These were the many Knowledge Scholars and the Religious Scholars that made up the many aspects of Darastrixi society. They were men and women who studied the histories of their culture as well as many other cultures spread across the universe. The Myths and Legends and histories and many of the traditions of countless species resided in their Vaults of Knowledge and while they were the smallest of the *Sulevfu* in actual number, the vast majority of Darastrixi

considered them to be the most honorable and revered of their people. The Livaiji was the only Commission to vote against the pact with the Scourge. They knew to do so would only mean that eventually the Scourge would come for them.

The Darastrixi were not without their faults however. In many ways they were very much like the Pralor people and considered themselves superior to other lesser species. That they did not see it this way was without question. There was however, still corruption and greed within the Commissions. Those who desired more and worked for the sole purpose of gaining as much power and wealth as they could.

One of the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* of the Science Commission exited the hovercar on the roof of the enormous stone and steel structure that rose above the capital city of Charis. It was situated on the colossal mountain peak to the north of the city and was home to the main central facility of the *Livaiji Sulevfu*. He was tall, just over two meters in height, and very well muscled even under the silk like robes he wore. The dark green color of the robes blended well with the light green scales across his face. The Jiilhoinsa sect of the Darastrixi walked on two legs yes, but their bodies were covered in a much lighter and softer kind of scale than the Vrrarhoinsa brethren. Their scales were smooth to the touch and were more prominent as they extended back from the middle of their faces. The facial area around their eyes and mouth was tanned skin like that of a Pralor or other humanoid species and always deeply tanned. Though they had no ears to speak of, each Jiilhoinsa had small pointed bumps on the sides of their heads that could be mistaken for ears. They actually were able to hear through the two tiny ridge holes that were in place on either side of their temples at a level of their eyes. The brow ridge was very prominent in the males while much less so in the females. The male's eyes were slightly oversized but not excessively so and fit in proportion to the size of their faces.

The man mumbled something to the driver of his hovercar and then turned to greet the Jiilhoinsa male and female standing to the side of the pad with the medium sized Vrrarhoinsa towering over them. As his hovercar lifted away they moved forward to greet him.

"Aviel my friend." The second male spoke as he came right up to him.

"Chalith... it has been far too long." He answered as they brought their hands up and placed them over the heart of the other while bringing their foreheads together briefly in the common form of greeting among the Darastrixi.

"You are looking well Aviel." The female spoke as she came forward and they conducted the same greeting. Though she was obviously female, the Darastrixi greeting was the same for all of their people. They were a very sexually open society and the greeting, though a man would put his hand over the female's breasts, was considered just that.

Aviel smiled as he drew his hand back from her heart and nodded to her. "You are just as beautiful as the last time I saw you Shalu. What has it been? Ten years?"

The woman smiled. "More like fifteen now. She answered.

Aviel turned to the large dragon who waited patiently. "And you Ch'teven." He spoke. "Are you keeping our mutual friends in line?"

The dragon rumbled deeply in his broad chest and extended his wings slightly to the side. Darastrixi had long ago acquired the ability and vocal cords to speak outwardly as well as within the Etheric realm.

"They do not need me to look after them Aviel." He answered. "Most of the time I am running to keep up with them."

Aviel nodded and looked at his friends, still holding the hand of Shalu. "Yes... of that I have no doubt." He said.

"How is your mate Aviel?" Chalith asked. "Your children?"

Aviel nodded his head. "She keeps me grounded and my children drive me endlessly *lodeg*." He replied. "What else is there to live for?"

"Indeed." Shalu spoke.

"So tell me my friends... why have you requested I come here after so long?" He asked. "It has been many decades since I walked the halls of the *Livaiji Sulevfu*. I doubt they still remember my days here."

"Oh... you would be surprised what these walls remember Aviel." Chalith spoke as he moved up beside him.

Aviel chuckled. "Of that I have no doubt." He said. "It is truly good to see all of you again."

"As it is to see you." Ch'teven told him warmly. "We should go inside before we speak however."

Aviel looked at him oddly when he said that and he felt Shalu take his other arm. "You will understand soon enough." She stated softly.

With Ch'teven bringing up the rear they entered the through the huge golden doors on the side of the tower and were silent as they made their way down the corridor. Aviel saw many different students moving the facility, all of them deep in study or quickly moving between classes. Both Jiilhoipa and Vrrarhoipa came here to study and they took it very seriously. To be granted the right to attend the Livajji Sulevfu's main Academy on their planet was indeed an honor.

Aviel moved with them easily, the Darastrixi were never rushed, and they entered the huge elevator. He watched as Chalith inserted a card key and then touched the panel indicating they were headed to the Vaults Of Knowledge. Aviel had only been there once before as access to them was strictly controlled and very limited. He glanced at Chalith.

"Am I cleared for entrance into the Vaults after all these years Chalith?" He asked calmly and evenly.

"You are now my friend." Chalith answered. "This is too important."

"You have peaked my interest." Aviel said with a smile.

"Hopefully we will peak much more when you discover what it is we have found." Shalu told him.

"Interesting." Aviel said.

The ride down was very fast and Aviel noted that they had gone even lower than he had ever been before. Down into the actual Vault levels. Nearly two kilometers beneath the surface of the Academy above and heavily fortified to prevent destruction in case of orbital attack from an enemy. As the elevator doors opened Aviel felt a sense of honor and pride sweep through him. Very few were granted the privileged of actually being in the Vault levels of the Academy. The assorted Vaults held vast quantities of knowledge and lore dating back to the beginning of their species. The very first Darastrixi stored their knowledge and power within these same Vaults. Some of them were over five million years old.

They exited the elevator onto a chasm spanning walkway that reached across the open space like a bridge. The *Kailiabdred ar Irthir*. The Bridge of Knowledge. Below them several hundred meters Aviel could see Acolytes of the Sulevfu deep in study or arranging one thing or the other.

Aviel shook his head in awe. "I have heard of this place." He said softly. "Never did I imagine I would see it in all its grandeur."

"Come..." Ch'teven spoke as he deftly moved around them and began to make his way across the bridge. "We have something you need to see."

Aviel followed with Chalith and Shalu beside him, taking in the walls of historic scrolls that told of their history and the history of so many thousands of people and species. Aviel knew they had been able to secure and hide away reams of knowledge given to them by the Pralor people in the hopes that one day it would help to restore their people. The Darastrixi had guarded and secured this knowledge viciously through the years, always improving upon the security of these Vaults to defend against Scourge attack. It took them another few minutes before they entered a huge cathedral like room with high ceilings and intricate carvings on the walls. In the center of the room was a smoothly ground granite table polished to an intense shine. Chalith ushered him to one of the large chairs while Ch'teven moved to a large spread of soft skin blankets on the floor. Aviel waited while Chalith and Shalu took seats across from him at the table and then he sat forward in the chair.

"Now I know that there are very few among our people who even know these chambers exist." Aviel stated calmly. "Even I did not know until this very day. They are rumors and myth that date back millennia."

Chalith nodded. "They are. As you can see however, they do exist." He replied. "And you are correct... only seven of our people know these rooms actually exist. Through the years we have expanded the Vaults to include these rooms. It allows for the ease of study and to gather information. There are five of these rooms spread across fifteen kilometers and from each of them we can access the entire database of the Vaults. This is the one built specifically for the Academy."

"Impressive indeed." He said. He looked at Chalith. "Now... why am I here my friends?" He asked. "And why did you request I tell no one?"

"Aviel... what do you know of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*?" Shalu asked.

Aviel sat back. "The Prophecy of Souls? Not much I'm afraid. I know that it is among the oldest of our myths and that it is said to have only happened once before in our history. Three different souls, chosen by *Wer Geou ar wer Zezuanth*. The will of the Ancient. The very first of our kind."

“That is correct.” Chalith said with a smile. “I see that you have remembered some of your studies at least.”

Aviel smiled. “I do try.”

“What else do you remember Aviel?” Ch’teven asked.

Aviel shook his head. “Aside from that... not much as I said. Why?”

Chalith reached out and touched a small computer pad on the table in front of him and a small holographic image appeared with the image of a scroll and writings. “*Lorsvek ar Sepas*. Scroll Three.” He said. “A short translation if you will allow me. I will choose six from among the life within the stars. To each I will bestow a piece of my eternal soul. They will be aware of all around them when birthed with the sacred gift of life. They will be drawn towards each other from across the expanse of time and space like gravity to the suns. Each with the blood of the *Dahakoan* in their veins. Each with the *Sepas* of a *Darastrix* no matter their nature. *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*.”

Aviel nodded his head. “I can see why it is the cornerstone of our religion.” He said. “It is very profound. Why bring me here to show me this however?”

“Because it is happening right now Aviel.” Ch’teven spoke softly. “At this very moment it is happening.”

Aviel turned to look at him. “I don’t understand. What is happening?”

“The *Lorsvek ar Sepas*.” Shalu answered.

Aviel turned back to look at her. “You’re joking of course.” He said.

Shalu shook her head slowly. “No my friend... I am not.”

Aviel leaned forward once more. “Shalu... this Prophecy... it is millennia old. It dates back to the very beginning of our people. Millions of years. It is only a myth and legend.”

Chalith nodded. “And until twenty-seven years ago I would have agreed with you my friend.” He said.

Aviel smiled. “Ok... I will go along with you. What happen twenty-seven years ago?”

Chalith raised his hand and pressed the computer pad again. “Two things actually. They happened on the same day. One discovery in the morning and then only six hours later another, even more profound discovery.” The image in the holographic projector switched to that of an archeology dig site from what Aviel could determine.

“What is this?” He asked.

“A hidden archeology site on the planet Haradur.” Chalith answered.

Aviel’s eyes flew open and he looked at him. “Haradur!” He hissed. “That is within Scourge space Chalith!”

“It is within Scourge space now.” Shalu corrected. “It is also the ancestral home of our people Aviel. You know this. The Scourge only refused us access to the planet after we agreed to their vile pact.”

“Shalu... you must not speak like that.” Aviel said.

“Why?” She snapped at him. “It is only us here Aviel. Or has your time with the *Urlkrisir Mamiss* dulled the senses and intelligence you once showed.”

“Shalu...” Ch’teven spoke gently.

Shalu took a deep breath and nodded her head. “Forgive me Aviel. I had many friends among the Pralor people. And we just handed them over to the Scourge like they were items for trade.”

“It was done to save our people!” Aviel stated. “I did not agree with it... but the majority of the others did.”

“The Scourge threaten all of existence Aviel.” Ch’teven said. “Their numbers increase almost daily and they push to control everything. How long do you think it will be before they come for us?”

“The Scourge fear us!” Aviel spoke. “They can not hope to stand against us.”

Chalith nodded. “Right now.” He said. “But what if they discovered this?”

“A myth?” Aviel demanded. “A legend that dates back to the founding of our people! What would they care for this?”

Chalith touched the computer again. “The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* Scroll Six. This is what we found on Haradur Aviel. The missing Scroll of *Zezhuanth*.” He stood up. “Now this is just a rough translation mind you.” He said before beginning to read from the scroll. “To each of these *Dahakoan* I will bestow a small part of my essence and knowledge and power so that it may live on in them. Each part safely hidden away within them

until the day when it is needed. Until the day when they must rise up and save not only my kind, the Darastrixi, but all life within the stars. Save it from the blackness of the abyss.”

Aviel took a deep breath and rose to his feet. “I have always honored the Scrolls of the Ancient and I have believed deeply.” He spoke. “Many of our people do.”

“Then why has the *Urkrisir Mamiss* begun to dismiss much of what the scrolls say?” Shalu asked more gently.

Aviel shook his head. “I have counseled against it Shalu, you know this.” Aviel said quickly. “I have tried to tell them that they lead us from the path our kind was founded from. But I am only one voice.”

“The influence of the Scourge is far reaching Aviel.” Ch'teven said softly. “They have begun to infect even our people.”

“The Scourge?” Aviel said. “What do you mean?”

“Do you think we do not know of the Pact made with the Scourge.” Chalith said.

“Everyone knows of this pact.” Aviel said. “It is part of our history now.”

“Not that pact Aviel.” Chalith said. “The secret one signed only five hundred years ago. The pact that gives the Scourge their pick of our Maiden females every ten years. The pact that allows them to take the maidens of every generation. And not just randomly mind you. These maidens are chosen very carefully Aviel.”

“What?” Aviel demanded. “What are you talking about?”

Chalith touched the panel again and the image changed to one of a spaceport cargo bay. Aviel’s eyes grew wider when he saw half a dozen Scourge Elites and what appeared to be a Holy Elite. An emissary of the Scourge Queen herself. Their insectoid figures were easy to discern in the transmission and he saw almost a dozen of the Scourge warrior drones scurrying about moving what were life support pods of some sort into the belly of their ship.

“Where did you... where did you get this?” Aviel demanded.

“It does not matter.” Ch'teven spoke.

“What... are those life pods?” Aviel asked.

Chalith nodded his head. “Yes. And they contain the living bodies of twenty of our own maiden females. Young female Darastrixi that were selected by what the information contained in these lost scrolls.”

Aviel looked at him quickly. “You stole them?” He gasped.

Chalith nodded his head. “The team we sent there stole them yes. The Scourge were already there Aviel. They were excavating the site when our team arrived.”

“Excavating it for what?” Aviel asked.

“The Scrolls.” Shalu said in reply. “In the scrolls is the map to which of our people would be chosen by the will of Zezhuanth.” Only a female... and only a maiden female. Only a female maiden who has been born differently.”

Aviel looked at her. “What do you mean differently?” He asked.

Chalith got to his feet and moved to the wall closest to Ch'teven. He touched the wall and it disappeared to reveal another room separated by glass. Aviel’s eyes grew even wider when he saw the young Jiilhoinsa female in the room. She was sitting at a table wearing the robes of a member of the History Sulevfu, but from atop her head flowed something Aviel had never seen before. Shimmering black hair where there should be none. It was very long, cascading well past her shoulders to the top of her buttocks and it shone with health. Aviel moved closer to the partition with wide eyes.

“*Ithquenti*.” He muttered loudly. (Gods)

Chalith nodded. “That is what we said as well when her parents brought her to us twenty-seven years ago.” He said softly.

Aviel looked at him. “Brought her to you?” He asked.

Chalith nodded. “They are loyal members of the *Livaiji Sulevfu* and have served our Order for nearly a hundred thousand years. Most of their children are all grown, all sons, but twenty-eight years ago they decided to have one more child. They both wanted a maiden. This child is the result of that union.”

“She has... she has hair.” Aviel stammered.

Shalu nodded. “That is not all she is.” She stated with some humor. “Aviel... she was birthed fully aware. And she, for lack of a better explanation, she bonded with a Vrrarhoinsa while still within the womb of her mother. Before she hatched.”

Aviel looked at her quickly. "Before?" He gasped. "How is that... how is that possible?" He watched as the young female turned her head, her black hair flowing around her shoulders as she rose to her feet. She was of medium height, but her female figure was far more enhanced in many areas as normal Darastrixi. He watched as she walked up to the second door into the room and his eyes grew larger when he saw the muscular Vrrarhoinpa enter the room with a casual gait. He immediately lowered his head and he watched as she reached up to place her hands on either side of his immense snout and press her forehead to his skin.

"There is no medical explanation for it." Shalu spoke. "We are limited in what we can explore with her because we have been hiding her all of these years, but she..."

"Hiding her?" Aviel asked. "Why?"

"Look at her Aviel!" Ch'teven spoke. "She is twenty-seven years of age and has already reached maturity! Her Vrrarhoinpa is only weeks older than her and he is already fully mature. And they are viciously protective of each other. What would normally take five hundred years to happen has happened in less than three decades? How do you explain that? Never in all of our history has this occurred."

"She is what the Scourge are looking for." Chalith spoke softly.

Aviel turned to look at him. "What do you mean?"

"Why do you think they have been taking our young Maidens Aviel?" Shalu said. "They are looking for her."

"Why would they be looking for her?" Aviel asked.

"Another section of the Scrolls that our people stole speak of her. And others." Chalith said softly.

Aviel looked at him. "Others?" He asked.

Chalith nodded. "The six that *Zezhuanth* chose to carry his soul." He said. "To them I will bestow my *Geou*. My will. The force of my *Tobor Jedark* and *Vers*. My life force and power. Together they will cleanse the galaxy and bring light once more."

"Are you saying there are more like her?" Aviel gasped.

"Not here. Not among our people." Chalith said.

"What?" Aviel asked.

"What force in the known universe was able to face down the Scourge and not be cowed Aviel?" Ch'teven asked him. "What group stood against them and defeated them at every turn until they were betrayed."

Aviel looked at Ch'teven. "The Praetorians." He answered instantly.

Ch'teven nodded. "For only the Praetorians were born with the power to project their Etheric abilities into physical weapons. Even we can not do that. Only the Praetorians of the Pralor people."

"But there are no more Praetorians Ch'teven." Aviel said. "They were all killed by the Scourge at the end of the last war. Betrayed by someone from within their own government just as you said. And their leader was lost some where among the stars before that. He was never found. Once the Praetorians fell, the Pralor people fell soon after."

"I will forgo reading to the scrolls to you verbatim Aviel..." Chalith said. "It is written that these six individuals will have this ability. This Praetorian power. It also states that each of them will bear the distinction of the others race and species who are their equals."

"You have lost me my friend." Aviel spoke.

"Zezhuanth did not specify who he would grant each piece of his soul to." Chalith said. "Only that they would be incorruptible and each of them would be birthed fully aware of everything around them. As well as the existence of their counterparts so to speak."

"I still do not understand." Aviel said.

"Her name is Laren Ti'shara Aviel." Shalu spoke. "Ladur is her Vrrarhoinpa. She sees with his eyes Aviel. He sees with her eyes. And she has begun to..."

Aviel looked at her. "To what?"

"For the last ten years they both have begun to physically manifest the ability to project their Etheric power into the physical realm." Shalu told him. "They can use it as a weapon. An extremely lethal weapon. And their power has increased substantially through the years."

"A weapon?" Aviel gasped. "You are certain?"

"We have seen it Aviel." Ch'teven spoke now. "*Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*. In some manner Laren and Ladur have acquired this power. And it continues to grow."

“Do you realize how insane this all sounds?” Aviel asked looking at them.

Chalith held out the data scroll. “You may read it for yourself.” He said. “All of the tests that they have allowed us to perform.”

“Allowed?” Aviel asked.

Shalu smiled. “They are rather... stubborn.” She stated.

“She has regenerative abilities Aviel!” Chalith said. “Injuries and wounds that would take weeks for us to normally heal take her only hours. Ladur is showing this as well but not on as large a scale. She has knowledge that she should not have at so young an age. Knowledge of places and events and people that she has never seen.”

“How do you know this?” Aviel asked.

“Aviel... she has not left our care since her parents brought her to us.” Shalu said. “She has never even been offworld. Yet she can recite and complete the charts of dozens of star systems as if she has been there. Systems that we have never been to as a people. Ladur can recite the wind patterns of planets he has never been to. The intricacies of flying in thick or thin atmosphere. These our things that the Vrrarhoimpa do not learn until they are well past five hundred years of age. Yet they know it now!”

“That does not include the more... physical aspects.” Ch'teven said.

“What?” Aviel asked looking at him.

“She is... she is skilled in a physical form of combat I have never seen.” Ch'teven said. “An acolyte made the mistake of approaching her when she was among the young males in the courtyard several years ago. He touched her in our usual manner of greeting and she... she put him in the infirmary for several weeks.”

“She was incensed and screamed at him to never touch her again.” Shalu spoke. “I was able to explain to her that is our form of greeting. She already knew this but apparently she felt the acolyte’s touch was too intimate.”

“She injured a male?” Aviel asked in shock.

“That would be putting it mildly.” Ch'teven answered.

Aviel held up his hands. “Wait! What does she have to do with the Scourge?” He asked. “What does any of this have to do with the Scourge?”

“What do you think the Scourge would do if they discovered she existed?” Chalith spat. “She wields the power of a Praetorian within her Aviel. A power known only to exist with the Pralor people up until now. The Scourge have been reading our scrolls! They are searching for a way to be able to conquer us!”

“And you are telling me this child holds that key?” Aviel barked.

“She holds one of the keys.” Chalith said shaking his head. “According to the Scrolls of Zezhuanth each of the six will hold a key. They will feel each other from across the stars. They will be drawn to one another. What do you think would happen if the Scourge were able to discover the power of the gene that the Praetorians possess? Do you think they would honor their vile pact with us then Aviel?”

“I knew nothing of this secret pact you spoke of!” Aviel barked. “I would never give our Maidens to the Scourge! Never!”

Chalith nodded. “And that is why we asked you to come here.” He said. “For power or wealth or whatever other reason, there are members of the *Urkrisir Mamiss* that have chosen to align themselves with the Scourge and allow this. The one chosen from among our kind would be a Maiden. That is written in the scrolls.”

Aviel looked at him. “And these others?” He asked.

Chalith shook his head. “We do not know. She will not tell us. All we know is they...”

“What?” Aviel asked.

“All she will tell us is that the last of her *Isthasyi* are now among the living.” Shalu told him. “And that one is...”

“What?” Aviel demanded.

“She says that she has three brothers and a sister among the stars and that one of her *isthasyi* and her *myvishi* are *Vrelvel Sargti*.” Shalu said softly.

Aviel looked at her with wide eyes. “*Vrelvel Sargti*?” He gasped. “You are certain of this?”

Chalith looked at him as did Ch'teven. “Why do you not seem surprised of that Aviel?” Ch'teven asked.

Aviel turned to look at him. “We have heard rumors among the Scourge Elite that come to use our stations. Some of them were recently overheard speaking in whispers of some new Praetorian Guards. Those descended from the first Praetorian.”

“Sumar?” Shalu asked with wide eyes.

Aviel nodded quickly. “Yes.”

“I thought... where?” Shalu asked.

Aviel shook his head. “I don’t think they knew. But they were also overheard saying that one or two of these new Praetorians were *Vrelvel Sargti*, or whatever they called them in their own vile tongue.”

“Then it is true!” Ch'teven gasped aloud. “The *Lorsvek ar Sepas*. It is coming true.”

Aviel turned to look at Chalith. “I want to speak with her. With them.” He spoke quickly.

“Aviel... they are... they are rather introverted.” Chalith spoke. “They do not open up well to...”

“Damn you Chalith!” Aviel barked. “I believe you my friend! I believe all of you! This is too much to be any coincidence. Something is happening... and I want to find out what it is! My duty is to our people... not to the Governing Commission!”

Chalith looked at Ch'teven and saw him nod his massive head. He turned to Shalu and she nodded as well. He moved closer to the wall and touched a hidden panel. Aviel watched as a small section slid aside to reveal a control panel. Chalith touched it gently.

“Laren my child.” He spoke.

Aviel saw her head turn to gaze at them, almost as if she could see them even through the wall.

“We are here *Tilabil* Chalith.” She spoke and Aviel was stunned at the almost musical tone to her words.

“Laren... we are right now with *Koppentotz* Aviel of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu*.” Chalith said. “He would like to speak with you and Ladur personally.”

“To what end *Tilabil* Chalith?” She asked causing Aviel’s eyes to grow wide.

Shalu chuckled softly. “I told you... she is headstrong. As is Ladur. We do not know where they get it.”

“Laren... speaking with him could possibly allow us to reunite you and Ladur with your *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*.” Chalith told her.

Aviel saw her eyes then as she lifted her head and he choked down his intake of breath at the exquisite color of her eyes. One was a remarkable azure color, while the other was a deep cobalt blue. He glanced quickly at Ladur and saw that his eyes were different colors as well. One a golden orb and the other a piercing emerald one.

“Very well *Tilabil* Chalith. But please inform him that we must waste no time now. My *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* are aware of me now. They can feel Ladur and myself within them. Soon they will be able to discern the messages I have sent to them and they will come for me.” Laren said calmly. “Trust me when I tell you, they will not take kindly to those who wish to stop us from reuniting. My *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* will not be very forgiving to those who would do me or Ladur harm. Androcles and Elynth especially as they are *Vrelvel Sargti*. Though Dorian and Ryner are just coming into their own as are Ladur and I.”

Aviel looked at Chalith. “Andro... Androcles and Dorian?” He asked.

Chalith nodded. “She knows their names Aviel.” He said. “She will tell us nothing else about them but she knows their names. And probably more than she is sharing I’m sure.”

“Where is she?” Aviel asked urgently. “I must speak with her.”

“We can take the underground tram to avoid prying eyes.” Shalu said. “They are at our facility on the northern continent.”

“Then let us go now!” Aviel spoke with a gasp.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

APO PRIME

CAFÉ DISTRICT OF TUYA

Andro let his azure eyes gaze upon the crowd below him, sweeping across the expanse of the huge Café District slowly as he took things in. He hadn't been back to Apo Prime in some time, yet it looked no different than it had before. The dozens of small eateries and shops made up this section of Tuya and there were hundreds of men and women outside sitting at the many tables and benches as they went about their lives unknowing of the larger picture and what was happening outside of their small portion of the universe. Andro did not hold this against them in any way for all of them knew that a state of war now existed between the Lycavorian Union and the Kavalian Federation, but it did not affect them directly and the citizens of the Union had far more faith in their military and leaders than the Kavalian people did. Indeed many of them had been at war in some fashion for the better part of their lives and they adapted now easily. The Lycavorian Union had prospered more since his father had returned to take the throne than in the two millennia before and he knew that the vast majority of the citizens of the Union adored his father and all of his mothers. The many species and citizens of the Union knew that their King and Queens would not hesitate to get down in the dirt with the rest of them for a good cause. He distinctly remembered several occasions as he was growing where he had gone with his father to help in building a community center or medical clinic. He had learned his lessons well from both his father and his mothers and they were lessons he would never forget. They were lessons he would one day pass on to his own children.

Andro also now realized why he so much preferred Sparta and Earth over Apo Prime. It was a much slower pace of life within Sparta and everyone was not rushing around trying to accomplish whatever it was they were trying to do. He missed his villa on Gytheio, the smell of the Laconia Gulf and the scent of his wives and mates filling his head all of the time. Events were not going to allow him to return there anytime soon, but he vowed that when they did, he would spend an entire week doing nothing but worshiping their bodies and enjoying the feel of their auras all around him. Like his mother Aricia was to his father, Sadi would always be the one to command his soul, but there were times when even Andro did not believe how much he loved and adored all of his wives and mates. He had given up trying to understand it all, only that it was, and that was all he cared about now.

As he let his eyes scan the area below, no matter much how he concentrated, Andro could not pick out the members of Marci's personal team. As Assistant Director of the Krypteria, she was authorized to have her own team of highly trained men and women who looked after her and protected her. Marci had instead chosen men and women who could do Ops and assist her in wherever they were needed no matter the job. Marci was part of the younger generation of pureblood vampire within the Union. A generation that had all been born within the Union itself after their parents had fled the High Coven with Andro's mother Isabella. Their loyalty and love for the Union and its ideals was as absolute as any pureblood wolf. Marci was also among the millions of pureblood vampires within this generation that had taken pureblood Lycavorian husbands and wives. She worshiped her husband just as he adored her, and they did not care who knew or saw this. It was not a uncommon sight at all now to see a mixed couple walking the streets holding hands and showing their affection and in many cases their children.

Andro realized that Marci had regained her focus with Armetus back at work and she had become even more wise to the way things were done with her mentor able to guide her once more. Armetus and Marci made a devastating pair Andro knew. To see them working together was enlightening to say the least as they went at a problem or issue from so many different angles and directions it sometimes made Andro's head spin. Marci waded through the many intricacies of Intelligence problems and issues just as Armetus had taught her. Like a ghost among the shadows. Since he had returned Armetus had broken the Krypteria into two different sections to counter the many threats they now faced from all sides. He had appointed Marci as overall Assistant Director of the Krypteria but also the Director of Krypteria Internal Security. With the blessing of the Union Senate Oversight Committee chaired by For'mya's father L'tian, the KIS was born. They would be the ones to keep the Union safe from the inside, with full authority to act within the Union borders. Ever since he had officially formed the Krypteria, Armetus had always followed one rule to the letter. It was a rule he had stuck to no matter what if he was able and it was a rule he had passed on to Marci.

"We are the eyes and ears of the King's body. It is our sworn duty to insure the Union remains safe from all threats." Armetus said. *"We tell the King where they are, how many there are and what they are doing. We*

let him know if they are a threat to the Union we all serve. And if needed we let him take our people and go kill them if that is what is called for.”

Armetus had never failed to do just that. And in his passionate speech before the Senate he made it very clear that the KIS was not a secret police. He knew that the King despised such things and Martin Leonidas would insure the KIS never became such an organization. He also made sure that they knew that with the myriad of threats to the Union now, the normal police and security apparatus would not work. L'tian was respected by every member of the Senate and well known to be openly defiant when he believed it was the wrong course of action. Even after the events with his daughter For'mya, he was the first to come forward in support of the new Kavalian government under Pian. If he advocated the need for such an organization to exist then none of them could dispute it. Of course Icho and his cronies screamed out against it, but the KIS was finally born on an interim basis with overwhelming Senate support.

As he gazed at the scene below Andro didn't want to think of how many among the hundreds below him in the cafés were part of Armetus and Marci's organization, but he had a guess there were probably far more than he thought he could discover. Like his father, Andro preferred the direct approach, but also like his father Andro knew the direct approach did not always work so well. That is where Marci and Armetus and their people came in.

Andro dropped his eyes when he felt Lu'ria's arms slid around his waist and she stepped under his arm to press her supple Drow body against his as she came around in front of him. He looked down into her stunning amber colored eyes and simply gazed at one of the six women who held his core being in their grasp. Her dark caramel colored ebony skin was flawless, her soft violet lips moist and inviting as always. Her long, shimmering white hair was pulled over one shoulder and fell to just above her waist. All of his wives and mates knew that Andro loved long hair and Lu'ria had spent the last weeks and months letting it grow. He was always running his strong hands through their hair in moments of relaxation and it was something all of them had come to adore. Her hair flowed around her facial features and was tied at the end with silk portions of cloth that matched the color of her Drow family's symbolic history. The dark gray jumpsuit she wore clung to her muscular but very tantalizing curves in all the right places. As with all Drow across the Union, Lu'ria Leonidas was not afraid to display her ample physical assets, and the valley between her large breasts looked very appetizing, as she always unzipped the jumpsuit just enough to show a small amount of cleavage. Andro had spent many, many hours exploring the dark, lush curves and valleys of Lu'ria's body and he knew each bend and twist by memory just as he did with all his wives and mates. While Sadi could always incite him in ways none of them could and Ne'Veha's delicious amaretto scent and taste of her skin was irresistibly intoxicating to him, Lu'ria's delicious ebony skin color and her aggressive and dominant nature always served to stimulate him. Each of his wives had a hold on him Andro knew. Lu'ria's dark skin and violet lips would never cease exciting him, and now that she was wolf, her honey melon scent was even sweeter to his nose. Carisia was a petite powerhouse of lust and desire and was not afraid to take what she wanted. Sehri projected innocence, but in reality she was nearly as adventurous as Sadi within their bed, and she would only grow far stronger as the years passed. And even without her Alkay seeping from her pores when aroused, causing all of them to have an increased desire for each other, Caliria was sweet and delicious and uninhibited.

Lu'ria looked up into Andro's face and smiled lustfully as she saw the look in his eyes.

Lu'ria knew that each of his wives and mates had a unique draw on Andro, and while Sadi would always attract him more because she was his *Anome*, each of them had begun to utilize their own very unique pull on him just as Sadi had taught them. Lu'ria smiled up at him as she pulsed him with just a very small amount of her newfound female aura. She knew this would send a tiny spike into her scent that only he would detect and when Lu'ria saw the sudden glint in his beautiful azure eyes she knew that he had detected it easily. She and Ne'Veha were becoming very good at using their female wolf skills thanks to Sadi's expert tutelage. Their *KertaGai* never denied them anything and she was constantly showing them how to manipulate their new wolf senses and abilities and part of that was in how they interacted and teased their beloved husband and mate. Sadi had made it very clear to all of them that while she may have been Andro's *Anome*, they were all of one mind and voice. They spoke with one voice just as Andro's mothers did. There was no need to fight or compete for Andro's affection because he loved them all with every ounce of himself, and there was quite a bit of their beloved Spartan husband to go around Lu'ria thought with a lustful smile.

Much like Andro's father had done for his mothers, the power of the virus in Andro's blood and the strength of his Etheric abilities caused certain changes in all of them, and it was these things that now tied all of his wives and mates together deeply. They shared a very special bond between themselves that even Andro would never intrude upon, and all of them were nurturing this connection deeply. Whether he was making Sadi cry out in bliss, or any one of them for that matter, they shared it with each other within their own womanly connection. When Andro made love to any of them he poured his very soul into it and this they shared with each other without question. As his *Anome*, Sadi was their voice, but they were all his wives and mates.

Lu'ria had embraced her new life as a wolf and Crown Princess completely. Her position had brought her much fame among the Drow people as well as much jealousy from many other young Drow females who now envied Lu'ria her standing. The utter devotion of the Leonidas men to their women was famous throughout the Union and among the Lycavorian people. She knew that any number of Drow females could line up naked before him and Andro would walk past all of them to take her and Sadi and Ne'Veha and Carisia, and now Sehri and soon Caliria once more. Some Drow females laughed at her in soft whispers saying he could not love her as much as Sadi, but Lu'ria knew the truth of it. Andro loved the contrast of their skin color when she was in his arms and he was always nuzzling her soft lips. He had spent many hours just exploring her lush body, with Lu'ria crying out in bliss the entire time. Andro had been her first lover and he would forever be her only male lover. Lu'ria also deeply embraced the unique and special Etheric bond she shared with Sadi and the others. It was this Etheric bond that wound them all so tightly together as not only intense and very willing lovers, but also the very deepest of friends and Crown Princesses as well. They referred to her as their Drow Mistress, and Lu'ria knew it would never be the same without all of them in her life.

Lu'ria knew that she and Carisia were the closest in skill to Andro when it came to hand to hand combat. Her scrumptious Maya eyed slaved was even better than her Lu'ria knew, but if Carisia was gone as she was now, Andro would always bring her if physical combat was a very distinct possibility. Sadi and Ne'Veha were not far behind them in fighting abilities, but their skills made them incredible pilots first and their Etheric abilities allowed them to do things that Lu'ria and Carisia couldn't. Sehri was showing an amazing aptitude to use her growing Etheric abilities in a defensive manner none of them could match. The youngest of them she may have been, but she was nearly Sadi's equal within the realm of her Etheric powers and Lu'ria didn't doubt that she would soon come to her and Carisia to put these skills to more practical use in terms of physical combat. Their *Inamarno* was a doctor Lu'ria knew, and when she was back among them, Lu'ria had no doubts she would find the niche she was meant to take.

As Lu'ria gazed into his beautiful eyes she reached up and traced his strong jaw with her finger. "You are far away my love." She spoke softly.

Andro smiled at her and Lu'ria felt her heart do little flips as he leaned over and nuzzled the outer ridge of her four inch high elven ear. "I see *KertaGai* is teaching all of you to be very perceptive of my mannerisms." He said in a whisper.

Lu'ria grinned and leaned into his nuzzle as she shivered in delight and her new wolf blood began to sizzle at his touch and his scent. "We are one." She stammered finally.

Lu'ria felt that unique tingle in her head and then Sadi's voice filled her mind in their private connection. *[Lu'ria Leonidas... don't you dare make me scold you our Drow Mistress.]* Sadi's voice spoke to her from the *SCIMITAR* in orbit. *[You are wolf now and you are our wife and mate. If you desire your husband then we expect you to act on it. You will never need my permission to have our mate tickle your senses or make you scream his name to the moon.]*

[I did not...] Lu'ria began.

[No. If you desire your husband and mate... if your blood burns for him... then you let him know. I would expect any of us to have our husband when he makes our senses burn for him. I certainly would not turn down the opportunity and I would not expect any of you to. As long as you share with us when you return of course.] Sadi told her with some humor in her voice.

[I will always share.] Lu'ria spoke in reply.

[Then if the opportunity presents itself... you let your husband and mate know that you want him and that he needs to sate the burning of your blood.] Sadi replied. *[When has our beautiful Alpha wolf ever let us down Mistress?]*

[Never.] Lu'ria answered.

[Then you do what you must as an Alpha female. And share with us when you return.] Sadi told her.
[Details our Drow Mistress. Details.]

Lu'ria suppressed the chuckle she wanted to release at Sadi's words and she stared into Andro's eyes. "You are our core Androcles Leonidas. Of course she would teach these things to us." She told him finally. "We wonder where our beloved goes when his mind takes him to places we can not see? We wonder what he thinks of? What he views when he is there?" She looked up into his face again. "We wonder what is so strong within him that it takes him from the warmth of our embrace and our bed and why only his brother Dorian, Ryner and his Bonded Sister can sooth him?"

"I tried not to wake you." He said with a gentle smile.

Lu'ria pressed tighter against him. "What was it Andro?" She asked. "A dream?"

Andro shook his head slowly and was silent for a long, quiet moment. Lu'ria knew that he would never lie to any of them and she remained patient as he tried to find the words to explain and his arm dropped to curl around her waist and draw her closer. She reveled in the feel of his powerful body against hers as she waited. He looked at her finally. "Not a dream really... but what was in the dream. Elynth and I have had them since we were very young. They went away for a time when the nightmares of Alba Tau were all we could see, but ever since... ever since Dorian was born they have returned. Stronger and much more focused now."

"What do you see?" Lu'ria asked.

"It's not so much what I see my *Ilythiiri Tessai*, it's what I hear. What we all hear within the dream." Andro said softly.

"Dorian, Ryner and Elynth hear this too?" Lu'ria asked.

Andro nodded his head. "It's a voice... like a whisper. It echoes in the background all around us, speaking to us, but so softly we can barely hear it. We only discovered last night that Dorian and Ryner have been having these same dreams for weeks now. It is why we spent the time with them after we woke."

"What... what does it say? This voice." Lu'ria asked.

"That's just it Lu'ria... it's so soft that we can hardly make out any words. Most of the time anyway. When it is quiet enough, the words are spoken in a language I have never heard spoken before. But part of me... part of me understand their meaning." Andro said. "It is a female voice, of that we are sure, but..."

"Female huh?" She asked with a grin.

Andro smiled at her. "Lu'ria you should..."

"We have found everyone who will share our lives Andro." Lu'ria said. "We know that what you feel for each of us you could never feel for any another. And trust me when I say, no female will ever have what we have now. We have you. And we will not share. I was trying to be humorous."

Andro shook his head and leaned over quickly to nibble on her pointed ear tip causing her to squirm in happiness and squeeze him even harder. He drew back and looked at her, his face becoming serious once more. "The voice is almost familiar to me. Like..."

"What?" Lu'ria urged him to continue.

"When we hear this voice it is like... it is like when I talk to one of my sisters." Andro said. "The familiarity with them. The love for them that I have. I feel all of that too. Like I, like we should know who this voice belongs to."

"And you are sure it is not Eliani or Zarah or..." Lu'ria began.

Andro shook his head quickly. "My sisters have never been shy about coming to me and talking about anything." He said. "Nor I with them. None of them approached me after these dreams so I know it is not an echo of one of them. Zarah I would know immediately because of the bond we share. Eli is like Dorian and I in a small way. She is far more perceptive than she lets on because of when she was conceived. Our father and mother Anja were still discovering everything they had. They were still deeply emotional times for them when Eli was conceived. I would have sensed it from her immediately as well. Carina and Normya would instantly share anything with their husbands, who would in turn tell me. And Lisi has never been shy about telling me anything." He shook his head again. "No... this is very different... and it feels like it comes from across a great distance."

Lu'ria looked into his eyes and saw confusion. "What? Speak to me Andro."

"It feels like it is part of me." Andro told her. "Part of us. Like it is inside us. Like it has always been inside us."

“Do you hear it now?” She asked. “When you are awake?”

Andro shook his head. “Not the voice. But the resonance remains clear and strong. We can still feel the presence. Like it is humming gently in the background. Waiting.”

“I am not... I am not very knowledgeable about this gene within you.” Lu'ria began to tell him. “I am not as strong as Sadi or Sehri or even Ne'Veha within the Etheric...”

Andro reached up and spread his palm across her cheek seeing her eyes lift up to meet his. “You are far stronger than you might think my *Ilythiiri Tessai*.” He said. “As with so many others, your Etheric abilities are channeled in a different direction.”

“My physical skills?” Lu'ria said.

Andro nodded. “You and *Enylarcopri* both. In a fashion similar to how Zarah's abilities are used.”

“Because you bit me?” Lu'ria asked. “Changed me?”

Andro lowered his eyes. “Not exactly the way I would have preferred to bring you fully into my life but...”

Lu'ria reached up and placed a finger on his lips. “You will never be sorry or ashamed for making me like I am now Androcles my love. I cherish that day every moment that goes by. It made me like you and Sadi and Ne'Veha. I embrace that.”

“As do I.” Andro told her, his arm pulling her tighter.

“Then share what you see and feel with us Andro.” Lu'ria told him. “When we are all together. Dorian too. Share it with us. We love you more than our own lives, and I know Sheva loves Dorian just as deeply. Perhaps with us... perhaps we could help you to understand. See something that you and Dorian and Elynth and Ryner cannot. We are stronger when we are all together, you know this.”

Andro stared at her for a long moment in silence. “I... I never thought of that.” He said finally. “We are stronger when we are together. Perhaps...”

The male voice in his ear implant broke into his train of thought and brought an end to their conversation.

“Target has arrived. Lerkim Banak has entered the zone.” The voice spoke simply.

Andro and Lu'ria both shifted to business mode now. Their mission required their full attention and that is what it would get.

“Direction?” Andro asked as he and Lu'ria grabbed macrobinos and began to search the crowd below.

“East courtyard.” The reply was crisp and instant. “Making his way to a table. Red shirt and brown pants.”

Andro's keen eyes found the man among the crowd and he grimaced. Lu'ria chuckled softly and shook her head as she found him as well. “Not exactly a pillar of fashion is he?” She stated.

“Downright disgusting if you ask me.” Another female voice echoed her words on the COM channel.

“Watchers?” Andro asked aloud. He wanted to know if there were others watching their target and if it would be noticed if he was taken.

“Three possible Milord.” Another male voice answered instantly. “Two at west entrance, one on balcony above the courtyard to the north.”

It was Marci's voice that cut in now. She was waiting at the building where they would take the vampire traitor. “Andro... we need to neutralize the Watchers.” She stated.

“Agreed.” Andro answered.

“Krypteria Two One to Teams Three and Five. Shift your positions and eliminate the Watchers.” Marci ordered on the secure COM channel. “Take them quietly into custody and move them to secure holding areas. We will confirm who they are later.”

“Confirmed. Three moving.”

“Five moving and confirms order.”

The replies were professional and instant.

Andro looked at Lu'ria. “Anything *Ilythiiri Tessai*?” He asked.

Lu'ria shook her head. “He seems calm and confident.” She answered instantly. She had been watching him intently through macrobinos since he had entered the courtyard. “He just ordered something from the menu but he does not appear anxious in the least. Could he suspect he is being watched Marci?” She asked.

“He has no reason to suspect that we are on to him Lu'ria.” Marci’s voice echoed in their implants. “If what Sheva told us is accurate he also has no reason to believe that she is no longer who he thinks she is. He is operating under old assumptions.”

“Sloppy.’ Lu'ria spoke.

“Very much so.” Marci agreed with her.

Andro nodded his head. “Sheva is very smart.” He said. “Smarter than this fool that is for sure. She kept her changing feelings to herself and did not make herself suspect. Especially after she discovered her feelings for Dorian.”

“Andro... could she be...?” Marci began to ask.

Andro looked at Lu'ria who met his eyes and he shook his head. “No Marci.” He replied to her unfinished question. He took no offense for it was a question he himself would have asked. “You did not see her when she came to us Marci. She reeked of fear. Fear of loss. She was terrified she would lose my brother. And I could also detect the tinge of hate. For this man as well as others.”

Andro could almost see Marci nod her head from where she was. “Well... if there is one thing I’m not going to question it’s your sense of smell and your uncanny ability to read people. You are certain he has no idea that she is Dorian’s wife now Andro?” Marci asked him over the COM. As close as they had worked in the past and now, Andro had made it very clear she was to call him by his given name. Marci was among the very few who were allowed such a thing.

“No. We kept that very quiet at her request. She did not want the *Durcunusaan* to treat her differently. Very few people know that Marci. Jomann and a few others on our personal detachments but no one else.” Lu'ria answered for him.

“Good.” Marci spoke.

“That will make this much easier.” Lu'ria said.

“Yes it will.” Marci agreed. “Contact team is in place. Stand by.”

Andro studied the area around where the traitor sat but could detect no sign of Marci’s people. He shook his head at their skill and ability to blend in perfectly.

“Three. Watchers neutralized.” The voice spoke after a moment.

“Team Five. Watcher neutralized. Moving to Eastern District Holding Area.”

“Krypteria Two One acknowledges. Andro?” Marci asked.

“Do it.” Andro ordered.

“Contact Team. Execute!” Marci’s order came with no hesitation or doubt.

It happened almost faster than Andro’s eyes could follow. Banak’s waitress brought him out a mug of something and as she was setting it on the table blocking his full view of the area, someone, a male was all Andro could determine based on his size, walked behind her and right beside Banak. His left hand seemingly brush Banak’s shoulder accidentally and Andro saw Banak stiffen slightly. As the man continued to walk past, the waitress set the mug on the table along with her tray and began to help Banak to his feet almost casually. It was like they were together from the way she acted and talked to him with an animated face. It appeared outwardly as if he was heavily intoxicated and the young woman laugh gently as she slipped her arms around his waist and made it seem as if he was doing the same as she guided his arm around her slim waist. They drew no attention aside from some knowing glances from other couples Andro saw as she led him across the courtyard and into the actual café where they disappeared from sight.

“Marci?” Andro cut in suddenly concerned.

“Standby Andro.” Marci’s voice responded calmly. “Let her do her job.”

Andro felt Lu'ria squeeze his arm and he glanced at her as she pressed against him. His eyes moved back to the courtyard below and he watched as the man who had brushed alongside Banak began to make his way back towards the café. He moved very casually and eventually he walked through the same doors the waitress had taken Banak only two minutes before.

“Target is secure.” The female voice spoke now on the COM. “Red One to all teams. The target is secure. Red Five arriving. Begin extraction to interrogation site.”

“Red Five is on site with Red One. I confirm her status.” The male voice echoed. “We are moving.”

“Krypteria Two One Confirms. All teams evac to predetermined locations. Red One and Red Five will deliver the package.” Marci ordered. “Excellent work people. Perfect.”

Andro turned as the door to the room he and Lu'ria were in opened and he saw Marci enter. She acknowledged something from her implant and looked at him. "They'll have him at the interrogation site in twenty-two minutes." She told him.

"The Watchers?" Andro asked.

"We'll find out who they are and if they are involved." Marci answered as she came up in front of him and Lu'ria. "I have a Lifter on the roof. We should go together. No sense in you or Lu'ria being spotted leaving the building. It will bring questions we do not want to answer right now. If the Netnews discovers you are here on Apo Prime, Icho will be all over it."

Andro nodded. "Superior work Marci." Andro said. "Tell your people for me. Absolutely brilliant."

Marci smiled. "They like to hear that." She said. "C'mon... we want to be there when this idiot wakes up."

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
NORTHERN CONTINENT
LIVAIJI SULEVFU FACILITY

Aviel moved between Chalith and Shalu as they walked down the corridor and Ch'teven moved along behind them. When Chalith had first opened the wall in the chamber he thought that the young woman was in the same facility as they were. He should have known better considering how Shalu and Chalith took their security. Ch'teven remained silent, keeping his thoughts to himself.

Aviel looked at Chalith as they walked. "Why not keep her at the main facility Chalith?" He asked.

Chalith shook his head quickly. "And risk exposing them to the general population?" He spoke. "We do not know who we can trust my friend. That is not wise. They are very intuitive and always seeking knowledge. At least here they can wander and do what they want. Most days they simply read to each other. They love to read."

"We did not know who or where the *UrIkrisa Mamiss* may have had eyes and ears Aviel my friend." Shalu added.

Aviel looked at her. "Yet you called me." He said.

"Ch'teven is the one who convinced us we needed to reach out. Recent events have forced our hand really. We do not believe we can protect her and Ladur any longer." Chalith replied. "Given our history together... we hoped you would... we hoped you still believed in the same things that you believed in when you were here."

"And if you determined I did not?" Aviel asked.

"Then you would have met an unfortunate accident on your return and we would have mourned your loss." Ch'teven answered from behind them causing Aviel to stop walking and look at them.

"You would have... you would have had me killed?" He gasped.

"Protecting them is now our main concern Aviel." Ch'teven replied honestly. "You only needed to see her and hear what we told you to believe and come this far Aviel my friend. You have not met them yet. When you do, you will believe what we have believed since the day they arrived here. None of us ever believed you would have agreed to the decision to give our Maiden females to the Scourge, but we did not know who we could trust."

Aviel looked at them for a long moment before Chalith took his arm and ushered him forward once more. "How many know she is here?" Aviel asked finally.

"After the incident in the courtyard of the main facility we decided to move her here as I told you." Chalith told him. "The acolyte she injured was given a glowing recommendation and a position of some importance on one of our colony worlds. He is quite happy and very loyal. He would never betray us. Aside from her parents, only six others know what you now know, all of them her brothers. When we moved her here,

we reassigned the hundred or so acolytes that were assigned here. This facility is now empty except for Laren and Ladur and those who care for and teach them.”

Shalu chuckled softly. “When they allow us that is.” She stated.

Chalith nodded his head with a smile of his own. “Her brothers have visited her often. She may be very different from them, but they love her no less because of it. Both her parents now live here as well. They are very protective of her and since all of her brothers are members of the *Angrimich*, they understand security better than we do. Several of them actually helped to design and install the updated security measures here in the facility in order to better protect her and Ladur.”

“What do you mean Shalu... when they allow?” Aviel asked.

“We told you they are viciously protective of each other.” Shalu answered him. “They are also extremely intelligent and very introverted. They do not trust easily. Many of those we have employed to teach them we have had to reassign because they cannot tolerate...”

“Tolerate what?” Aviel asked.

“Do not treat them as if they are children Aviel.” Shalu told him. “They hate being treated as if they are children.”

“But they *are* children.” Aviel spoke.

Chalith shook his head. “No... they are not. You will understand soon enough. Please... they wait for us here in the main greeting hall.”

Aviel followed as they walked through the massive entrance doors and he saw them standing off to the side. A man and woman stood with them, Laren speaking in soft whispers with the woman while the *Jiilhoimpa* male spoke with Ladur. All four of them turned to look at him as they moved closer and Aviel’s eyes grew wider as he approached.

Seeing her in a holoimage in no way did her justice.

Laren Ti'shara was perhaps five foot three, shorter than the average Darastrixi female, but not odd by any means and if his keen eye was correct she weighed no more than a hundred and fifteen pounds. Her raven black hair was even more vibrant in color now that he stood in front of her, almost blue in some of the light that reflected off her head from above. The light green scales of her outer face and along her arms, shoulders and up her neck matched the exact color of her *Vrrarhoimpa* Ladur’s body, but they were much softer in appearance than any female he had ever seen of the Darastrixi. Her scales ended further back along the outer edge of her face than normal, closer to where her hairline started and that is where the deeply tanned skin began. This was something he had never seen on a Darastrixi female. Her lips were full and a soft pink color and they glistened with moisture in the sunlight. Aviel noticed that her chest was larger than any of the Darastrixi female he had ever seen before and her legs were also very long for her height. She wore a simple pair of brown pants and boots, the soft white top clinging to her chest while the cloak he had seen earlier was still draped across her shoulders. He could tell with just a glance that she was in superb physical condition and her body was taut and muscular in nature. Her hair was also much longer than he first thought, reaching down to the top of her buttocks easily, but now pulled over her left shoulder into the front. There were two lengths of her black hair that were oddly braided in some fashion and extended down along the sides of her surreal face. It was her eyes that caught and held Aviel however. As he had noticed before, the right eye was Azure blue in color and the left Cobalt blue. They were so very vibrant and alive in their brightness and clarity. And they held wisdom and knowledge within them that he had never seen from a female so young in years.

Chalith and Shalu moved up on either side of Aviel as he stared at her in wonder. “Laren Ti’shara... Ladur... I would like to introduce *Koppentotz* Aviel.” Chalith spoke.

Aviel instinctively lifted his hand and stepped forward for a greeting but stopped himself in mid motion when he remembered Chalith’s words about the young acolyte. He watched as the young woman turned her head and looked at the older woman to the side. Aviel saw her nod her head slowly and then Laren stepped forward as she lifted her hand. Aviel watched as her hand came to rest over his heart and she moved close enough so that his hand came to rest on her chest. His eyes grew slightly wide when he realized that her chest area was not hard muscle and covered in softly scaled skin as with normal Darastrixi females, but instead was firm and extremely supple and warm. He also took notice that she had two separate mounds of supple flesh on her chest that strained against the shirt she wore, each one topped by a nipple encircled with light green color.

Aviel watched as she brought her head forward and he slowly lowered his forehead to hers, their skin touching in the common Darastrixi greeting.

“It is an honor *Koppentotz* Aviel. I am Laren Ti'shara, *Hianag* to Yokra and Robati of the *Svihelen* Ti'shara.” She spoke as she drew her head back and Aviel was amazed at how her voice was so musical in its resonance. (Daughter)(Family)

It was Shalu who took notice of the dark look that passed quickly in Laren's eyes when Aviel did not remove his hand quickly enough and she stepped forward to take Aviel's arm and draw his hand away before Laren took offense at his touch. He looked at Shalu quickly and then back to Laren.

“Forgive me child.” He said quickly. “You... you are not what I expected you to be in person.”

Laren canted her head to the side as Ladur stepped up behind her. His massive and quite muscular light green scaled body was not something Aviel was used to seeing on such a young *Vrrarhoinpa*. They were not supposed to mature and grow as Ladur had done until they were at least five centuries old. Normally it would take a *Vrrarhoinpa* nearly a thousand years before reaching the size and musculature that Ladur now possessed.

“And what did you expect *Koppentotz* Aviel?” Ladur asked aloud and in a tone of voice that did not suggest friendliness.

“Ladur!” Yokra Ti'shara hissed from the side and Aviel watched as Ladur turned to look at him. Laren's father had vowed to fill the role his own father could not. His father was bound to and always with his *Jiilhoinpa* as they trained, yet when his parents were here they could not hide the immense pride they felt for their youngest hatchling. Ladur's parents had snuck away on several occasions to see their youngest son and it was on one of these trips that Yokra had sworn to his father to look after Ladur as he would his own sons. “*Sanipkur*.” (Patience)

Ladur nodded his head slowly. “*Opsola di sia kornari*.” He spoke with respect. (Father of my heart) Ladur turned back to Aviel. “Forgive me my tone of voice *Koppentotz* Aviel.”

Aviel stared at them in wonder, his eyes wide. “Fascinating.” He gasped after a long moment. He reached out with his hand to touch her face but stopped short. “*Nomag si?*” He asked softly. (May I?)

Laren turned and looked at Ladur who nodded his massive head. She turned back to him. “*Ar ekmiv*.” Laren answered. (Of course)

Aviel reached out and let his fingers touch her skin. The warmth was incredible as was the soft texture of her scales and then the silky nature of the tanned skin. It was something he had never seen before in all his nearly hundred thousand years of life. After a few moments he drew his hand back and simply stared at her. “Truly astounding.” He spoke softly. “And you... you were hatched child?”

The woman stepped forward from the side. “I assure you *Koppentotz* Aviel; I carried her egg within me.”

Aviel looked at the older but still very attractive Darastrixi woman. “I meant no offense *Usjalil* Robati. Forgive me if it seemed that way.” He told her quickly. (Lady) He looked back to Chalith and Shalu. “I will listen to whatever you have to tell me.” He told them.

“Aviel we...” Ch'teven began.

“In order to listen... you must be willing to hear *Koppentotz* Aviel.” Laren spoke softly. “Are you willing to hear?”

“Laren!” Her mother gasped.

Laren didn't hesitate and she stepped closer, reaching out and placing her hand on the side of Aviel's face. Aviel's eyes grew wide suddenly and his hand came up to cover Laren's as she closed her eyes and Ladur lowered his massive head beside hers. Her other hand came up and reached around his huge snout as best as she could, her fingers spreading across his warm scales and a soft blue Etheric shield unlike anything Aviel had ever seen erected around them.

“Laren no!” Robati exclaimed beginning to move forward.

“No!” Chalith spoke holding up his hand. “Let her show him.” He rasped softly. “Just as she showed us.”

Aviel's found he could not move his body and his eyes grew even wider as the images and words began to flash through his mind. Writings in a language he did not understand, places he had never seen before, green and lush lands with sparkling bodies of crystal clear blue water. A large structure along the white sands of a beach. An island. A home. Images of a tall young man with glowing azure eyes. A female *Vrrarhoinpa*,

obsidian in color with golden eyes that glowed just as brightly. Emotions of intense trust and devotion to one another. He saw flashes of red, blasts of fire tinged breath, horrible screaming, sounds of explosions, and then blood flowing all around like the waves of an ocean. Another tall figure, so similar to the first, another *Vrrarhoinpa* with emerald like eyes. All of them so commanding in their presence. He saw the second figure move with speed unlike anything he had ever witnessed in his life. Almost a blur of motion that he could barely follow. He saw flashes of different species that he had never seen before. All of them united in a single cause. To grow and prosper. But also to battle those who would do harm to what they loved. He saw battles among the stars. The flashes of Pralor ships battling Scourge ships. A single figure among the masses rallying Pralor troops. A Praetorian. The very first Praetorian. Sumar. Aviel blinked quickly. How could he know that?

Then he saw another figure standing tall, a male of a species that looked very similar to the Pralor people, but he was definitely no Pralor. He saw vicious dual fangs, shoulder length black hair and dark brown eyes that were alive with purpose. He looked so much like the two younger men he had seen in the flashes of images. He too stood rallying troops of several different species. He commanded attention and stood without fear. Aviel could sense the awe others felt around him.

There was so much. So many sights. So many sounds. So many voices. Yet four rose calmly above all the chaos, pillars of will and determination, echoing loudly and with love. They were calling for her; for Ladur. Calling their names among the stars. Three male voices and a female voice speaking as one.

“Enough sister.” Ladur spoke suddenly and Laren pulled her hand away instantly.

Aviel staggered back quickly, his hand reaching for support and finding Chalith and Ch'teven's front foreleg to steady him. He looked up with wide eyes and stared at Laren and Ladur as her mother rushed forward and took Laren in her arms. “*Ini wer ithquenti!*” He stammered. (By the Gods)

Robati moved closer to her daughter and reached out to take her arm. “You should not have...”

Aviel shook his head quickly. “Yes!” He gasped loudly causing them to look at him. “She... she should have.” He took several deep breaths and gripped Chalith's arm to steady himself once more. He turned and let his hand rest on Ch'teven's scaled chest before he looked back at Laren. “I wish to speak to Laren and Ladur alone.” He said firmly.

“Aviel?” Shalu asked moving closer.

Aviel looked at her. “Alone!” He said with more of his command voice. He was not used to others denying him what he wanted because of his position so he did not use his full voice, but he needed to be sure of what he felt within him. These men and women were his friends and he would not treat them as underlings. He looked at Shalu. “Please my friend.”

Ch'teven rumbled deep in his chest. “Let us leave them.” He spoke.

He was the oldest among them and none would debate his wisdom. Yokra took his wife's arm gently. “Come my *memamosal*.” He said.

Robati's eyes remained on her daughter until Laren smiled and nodded her head. Only then did Robati let her husband pull her away. Laren watched as Chalith drew Shalu away and then Ch'teven bowed his head to her and turned to follow. She let her eyes fall back on Aviel who moved closer to her.

“Can you hear now *Koppentotz* Aviel?” Laren asked him softly.

Aviel looked between her and Ladur for a long moment and then held out his hand to her. “Will you and Ladur walk with me child?” He asked. “Let us move into the open air and let the sun warm us while it is still high in the sky. I wish to hear what you and Ladur can teach me. I wish to know what it is you both feel so deeply. I wish to know about what it is you showed me.”

Laren smiled warmly and brushed aside his hand, moving closer and to his surprise she took his arm within her small hands as she guided him towards the open air courtyard a short ways down the corridor. This physical action, this physical touching was new to him as it was not common among their people but it felt right and he covered her hands with one of his as they walked.

Ladur fell in beside them on Aviel's opposite side. “There is so much.” Laren spoke softly.

Aviel nodded his head as they walked feeling invigorated as never before. “I... I do not doubt this. Not if the brief glimpses you showed me are an indication. You and Ladur give me the high points and tell me what we need to do child. If you and Ladur are indeed the Heralds of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*, then... then there is so much we have to do. But first... I wish... I wish to know of the other Heralds... your *isthasyi* and *myvishi*. This

Androcles and Dorian. And this Elynth and Ryner. They are... they are the other Heralds are they not? They are who I saw in... in the visions... yes?"

Ladur nodded. "They are." He answered. "Our *sepas isthasyi* and *myvishi*."

Aviel nodded. "I wish to know of them Laren. How long have you and Ladur been... how long have you felt them within you?"

"Since the day we were blessed with life and awareness." Ladur answered as they walked down the corridor.

"Androcles and Elynth... they are the oldest of so many. The *Vraktor* of our *Sepas Opsola*." Laren spoke again her face animated.

"Children of your Soul Father?" Aviel asked.

Laren nodded her head. "Their father. Well... Androcles and Dorian's father." She told him with a dazzling smile. "*Vrrarhoinpa* Torma is Elynth's father. Our *Sepas Opsola*... he is the first of them. The first of the descendants of Sumar. And so very powerful he is."

"Then... then it is true what I have heard only in rumors. The Praetorians have returned?" Aviel asked.

"They are not the Praetorians that you remember *Koppentotz* Aviel." Ladur told him. "They wield the Praetorian power within them yes... but they embrace their emotions and actions as the Praetorians of old did not. It makes them so much more powerful. Our *Sepas Opsola* passed this gift to his *vraktor* and when combined with the *Geou* of *Zezhuanth*, his *Tobor Jedark* and *Vers*, they are even stronger than us. But we are one with them."

"And this Androcles and Dorian are Praetorians as well?" Aviel asked.

Laren nodded her head. "We have felt Andro and Elynth within us for many years. Since shortly after we joined this life. We have only just begun to feel Dorian and Ryner recently. It is odd how quickly he grew but..."

Aviel listened intently, enraptured by their words and the fact that the oldest and perhaps most sacred legend of their species was beginning to play out right in front of him. And he had been blessed in such a way as to see it happen.

Robati squeezed Yokra's hand tightly as they watched Laren and Ladur sitting with Aviel on one of the courtyard's huge benches. They had been talking for nearly three hours and the sun had gone down twenty minutes ago. Robati and Yokra Ti'shara loved their daughter no matter what she looked like. Their six older sons were obsessively protective of her and Ladur, all of them seeing that their sister and her *Vrrarhoinpa* were something so very special. They had perhaps overdone it with some of the security measures they had installed in order to protect their sister, but no one complained. They visited as often as they could and Robati would often find Laren speaking to one of her brothers within their Etheric connection when they were free. Any of them could make her laugh and lift her spirits, but Robati knew that only the brothers and sister of her soul would ever be able to complete her.

"It has... it has been so long." Robati finally spoke to her husband.

Yokra looked at where Ch'teven rested on the ground nearby speaking with Chalith and Shalu. "You trust this man Ch'teven?" He asked.

Chalith and Shalu turned to look at him as Ch'teven lifted his head and eyes. "We do Yokra." Ch'teven answered. "He has no love for the Scourge scum... and now that Laren and Ladur have opened his eyes, he will have even less."

"You are certain?" Robati asked.

"You did not see the look on his face when we told him of what the Scourge are doing." Shalu said. "That our own government is allowing them to do this? Aviel may have served for centuries, but he has not forgotten his history or what he believes in."

"No I have not." Aviel's voice spoke causing all of them to turn.

He stood with Laren beside him holding his arm as she had for the entire time they had been talking. Ladur settled his bulk beside him as well. Robati moved up to her daughter and Laren released Aviel's arm to embrace her tightly.

“Aviel?” Ch'teven asked.

“There is much we must do. And we must do it quickly but with care.” Aviel spoke as he moved up to them. “I have asked Laren and Ladur to allow a physician I trust to examine them. They have agreed.”

Robati looked at her daughter. “*Hianag?*” She asked taking her hands. “Laren?”

Laren smiled. “It is alright mother.” She said. “Ladur and I did agree to this.”

“You will be present *Usjalil* Robati.” Aviel told her. “I insisted upon this. Should this physician begin to ask questions we do not want to answer then you have my authority to end it right there. I will make this very clear to the physician.”

“Why?” Yokra asked.

“Your daughter and Ladur are very different.” Aviel spoke to him. “I need not tell you that Yokra Ti'shara. The more we know of what they are capable of, what makes them who they are, the better we will be able to protect them.”

“You trust this physician Aviel?” Chalith asked.

Aviel looked at him. “I should.” He answered. “It is my *memamosal*.”

Shalu smiled. “Of course.” She said sheepishly. “I had forgotten Nahko was a doctor. An excellent one if I do recall.”

“Chalith... I want all of the information you have obtained through the years in regards to the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*.” Aviel said moving to stand beside Ch'teven. “Include the notes and scans from whatever it is your people found on Haradur. And I want you to move all of them here my friend. From what I can see, Laren's brothers did an excellent job with the security measures here, but anyone involved in this I want protected. Out of reach of whoever may be involved and most certainly out of reach of the Scourge.”

“You think they have agents here?” Shalu asked shocked.

“After what you told me, it is something we must consider.” Aviel spoke. “I also want all of the recordings you have obtained about these secret transfers out of Maiden females. When they take place and if possible when the next one is to occur. I will not allow this to continue any longer.”

Chalith nodded his head. “I will see to it.” He spoke. “But I can tell you when the next one will occur now. It has happened to every generation in the last half century Aviel. Laren's generation is here now and at the correct age. She matches all of the exact requisites that the Scourge have been using. And her birth is among the register. We could not hide that she exists even if we wanted to now. It will take place within the next few weeks I'm sure of it. They will begin searching for her and others soon, if they have not already.”

Aviel nodded. “Then we must move quickly but carefully. Send it all to me. My personal data stream. The same way you requested I visit you. I must return before I am missed and others begin to question where I have gone.” Aviel told them. “I will have Nahko make the trip here tomorrow. Get the other members of your archeology team here soon Chalith. Try to keep them apart from Laren and Ladur as best you are able. The fewer that know she exists the better we will be. Once I begin to ask questions, however discrete I am, the Scourge will take notice and they will want to find and silence them.”

“Aviel... you must not risk yourself.” Shalu said quickly.

Aviel looked at Laren and Ladur before turning back to Shalu. “If what Laren and Ladur tell me is true, and I do not doubt what they have told me, then the only place they will be safe now is with their *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi*. Out of reach of the Scourge. At least for a time. Once the knowledge that Laren and Ladur exist becomes known, once it reaches the highest levels of our government, the Scourge will discover them regardless of what we do. It is not something we can stop from happening. If what you believe about the *Urkrisa Mamiss* is accurate then those who are involved with the Scourge will discover her. That is why we must stay one or two steps ahead of them. And after what they have told me of their *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi*, I would much rather Laren and Ladur go to them then they come here after them.”

“What do you mean *Koppentotz* Aviel?” Yokra asked.

“Let us just say that a confrontation between Scourge Elites and their warrior puppets and two of these new Praetorians and their *Vrrarhoinpa*, those ruled by their passions and intent on retrieving their brother and sister, well it would not be a pleasant experience for anyone.” Aviel said. “And it would certainly awaken our people as well.”

“Is that not what we want?” Robati asked now. “To stop this from happening.”

Aviel nodded his head in agreement. "It is... but first we must insure Laren and Ladur are alive and able to make this happen. The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* must be allowed to play out now. It has begun... I no longer have any doubts about that. Now we must insure that it continues and only then will any of us be truly free of the Scourge."

Ch'teven rose to his feet. "I will escort you back Aviel my friend." He spoke.

Aviel nodded and turned back to Laren and Ladur. He stepped up to Laren who still held her mother's hands but did not attempt to touch her. He bowed his head to her but it was Laren who reached up and placed her hand on his cheek. He covered her hand with his. "Trust in me child. You will be reunited with your *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*. I swear to you." He said softly.

Laren nodded after looking at Ladur. "We do." She answered softly. "As you now trust in us."

Aviel nodded his head with a smile. "I will see you both again soon." He told them. He turned to Ch'teven. "We should go my friend."

Ch'teven nodded. "This way." He spoke.

Robati waited until Ch'teven had led Aviel far enough away and then she looked at her daughter. "What... what did you talk about Laren?" she asked.

Laren and Ladur turned to look at her. "We told him the truth mother." She said. "Ladur and I believe we can trust him."

"Laren you are certain?" Chalith asked her as he moved closer.

Laren looked at him. "I think so." She said. "I could detect no lie coming from his scent *Tilabil* Chalith."

"You did not tell him you can... that you and Ladur have these other skills... did you?" Shalu asked her.

Laren shook her head quickly. "No. But he will discover some of it when his *memamosal* comes to examine us tomorrow. We will not be able to hide what we are any longer. It will be known after tomorrow. At least a small portion of what we can do." She answered.

"Nor do we want to hide ourselves any longer." Ladur echoed her words. "They are part of us... and we are part of them. Their blood flows within us powerfully... just as ours courses through their veins. It is what was intended to be. Even we do not understand it completely."

"Then why did you agree to that?" Chalith asked.

Laren Ti'shara drew in a deep breath and placed her hand on Ladur's massive head, her hand absently stroking his scales. "Only *Koppentotz* Aviel can help us reach our *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi*. We must allow him to see into us, even if only a little, so that when he believes, he does so with his heart and mind. And he is correct in that we do not want Andro and Dorian and Elynth and Ryner to come here. The confrontation would not be friendly and Ladur and I do not want our people placed in the middle. At least not yet. The time will come when they need to make a choice, but it is not in the immediate future. They will consider us outcasts and they will fear us because they don't understand. That is something we need to avoid until the time is right."

"Wise words my daughter." Yokra said as he moved up beside her and lowered his head to touch hers.

Chalith nodded. "Indeed." He said seeing the look of happiness on her face as her father's skin touched hers.

Her mother, father and brothers were the only ones who Laren allowed to touch her or Ladur in so familiar a way. Sometimes even at all. Even after all these years she did not allow him or Shalu to do this. Chalith did not take offense and nor did Shalu. There was something within them; some unseen code of honor that they followed religiously that made them this way. And after the injuries she had inflicted on the acolyte no one wanted to test her or Ladur in any way. She had only hit the man three times and even though he was twice her size and weight she had nearly killed him. "Come... why don't we get something to eat before we begin to fulfill Aviel's requests."

Ladur snorted loudly then. "Now that is the best idea I have heard all day!" He declared happily.

This caused Laren to burst out in musical laughter which was quickly followed from her parents and the others as they began to move out of the courtyard area and deeper into the facility.

KIS INTERROGATION ROOMS

His head throbbed terribly and he had trouble opening his eyes. He tried to flex his fingers but something kept him from moving his hands. His arms were stretched behind him in an unnatural manner around an object and he could feel the bindings. He moved his head slowly not wanting to draw attention to himself but surprised at how difficult this action was and he groaned softly.

“The grogginess will wear off shortly. The discomfort of your position I’m afraid will remain.” The female voice spoke from the darkness. “Open your eyes please.”

He once more willed his eyes to open and he was able to blink several times now, the harshness of the light almost painful. He could see shadows around him and in front of him. He was sitting in a chair of some sort, a table directly in front of him. He shook his head several times ignoring the painful throbbing this caused.

“What... what is going on?” He stammered. “Where am I? Who...”

Marci leaned forward across the table and slapped Lerkim Banak viciously across his face. The stinging pop echoed in the room as she sat back down, but it served its purpose as his head rocked back and his eyes sprang open wide in reaction to the blow and fresh pain.

“Do I have your attention now?” Marci asked him calmly. “You may cease with the false impression of still being drugged Lerkim Banak... the toxin we used on you does not leave after effects like you are trying to simulate.”

Banak lifted his head fully; his eyes open and clear now. “What is the meaning of this?” He barked. “Who are you? What is this all about! I demand you release me!” His vampiric hearing could detect four heartbeats within the room, and his eyes moved to the sides. He saw the second female standing just to the side of the one sitting at the table and he saw the shadow of a tall male and shorter female against the wall. He could not make out any features of the male or female, blending into the shadows as they did and his head turned back to Marci. “I demand to know...”

Marci nodded her head and Red One, the waitress from the café, blurred in motion and the next slap once more echoed in the room. Banak’s head rocked back from the force of the blow, this time his vampiric fangs extending in anger and cutting his bottom lip. She was a powerful female and Banak berated himself for not realizing she was an enemy. Her beauty and red hair had clouded his keen mind.

“That’s for touching me you pig!” The young woman spat at him as she assumed her position by Marci once more.

“What is this?” Lerkim barked. “Why am I here? Who are you?”

Marci looked at him from across the table. “My name is Marci Naius.” She told him seeing the recognition in his eyes. “Wife to *Durcunusaan* Colonel Regri Naius. I am also the Director of Krypteria Internal Security. But you already know all that don’t you?” Marci looked at him. “Do I have your attention now?”

“I have done nothing wrong!” Banak snapped. “I have rights! You cannot do this to me. I demand you release me.”

Marci chuckled. “Oh... I don’t think so.” She stated as she set the holomager on the table and activated it.

Banak’s eyes grew wide when his message to Sheva Juconi began to play. His heart began to race and sweat began to roll down his brow before the message had gotten halfway. Marci reached out and turned it off before the halfway point and she looked across the table at him.

“Are you beginning to see your predicament Lerkim Banak?” Marci asked.

“I am an Intelligence Officer of the High Coven!” He hissed. “I demand representation by officials of my government! I...”

“You are a spy.” Marci spoke calmly. “Working for Robert Moran, a former Admiral of the High Coven. You are not a member of Empress Narice’s forces in any way shape or form. In fact you work for an enemy of the High Coven in Robert Moran. A renegade who hides and plots against the rightful government of the High Coven. That makes you a terrorist. Do you know what the Union does to terrorists Mister Banak?”

“You can not do this!” Banak shouted. “I know the laws of the Union! I must be held for trial! I have a right to an Advocate! I...”

Banak’s eyes went wide when Marci ripped the table from in front of her and sent it flying across the room to smash against the wall. She was upon him in an instant, her face a mask of genuine anger and hate.

“You have a right to nothing!” She screamed at him. “You are a terrorist pig! A scum! Working for a piece of filth of a man in Robert Moran! You come into my Union! Among my people and friends and you plot to kill them!”

“I... I have done no such thing!” Banak barked. “And you are a bitch traitor to your own species!”

“A bitch traitor?” Marci laughed at him. “Can you come up with nothing more original than that?” She turned and moved to where the table was, righting it and dragging it back in front of him where she moved her chair back and sat down. “I was born in the Union you piece of *sibfla*. My parents left the High Coven because men and women like you were destroying it from within and they wanted a better life. I blessed the gods the day my Lycavorian husband claimed me and made me his and I blessed the day that Empress Narice claimed her title and took control of the High Coven. That stupid wench Aikiro was watching it crumble around her and doing nothing.” Marci looked at him. “If that makes me a traitor then I will gladly wear that title Mister Banak. Unlike you... my life has purpose. And that purpose is to protect what I love and cherish. Now tell me... how many agents do you control?”

“I will tell you nothing!” Banak shouted. “You can not do this! It is against Union law! I know the law! I have a right to an Advocate!”

Marci smiled. “Apparently not as much as you like to think you do.” She stated. “You are a terrorist Lerkim Banak. You act on the behalf of a known criminal and wanted man. You have no rights here.” Marci looked at him intently. “You have two choices. You can tell me what I want to know willingly...” Marci held out her hand and Red One placed the hypo syringe into her palm. Marci then placed the needle on the table in full view of Banak. “Or I will take the information and all that will be left of you will be a babbling fool with drool leaking from between your foul lips.”

Banak stared at her in horror. “I know nothing!” He shouted. “Why don’t you ask her? Sheva Juconi is the one you want! She is the traitor! She...”

Marci shook her head and pursed her lips. “Now that is something you should not have said.” She stated as she turned her head.

Banak followed her gaze and his eyes grew even wider when the shadows along the wall stepped into the light and he was looking at Androcles Leonidas and his Drow mate Lu'ria. He knew full well who the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union was and he had no time to react or prepare as Andro charged across the small space between them and his hand clamped across Banak’s throat. He tore him from the chair, shattering both his shoulders as his arms bent at an impossible angle and the bindings snapped. Banak screamed as Andro carried him by the throat several meters to the wall where he slammed him viciously against the unforgiving steel and concrete. He looked through pain filled eyes at the snarling, savage face of the Crown Prince of the Union, his dual wolf fangs fully extended and his azure colored eyes fully changed.

“Sheva Juconi is my brother’s wife and mate you vile piece of shit!” Andro screamed at him. “She is a Princess of the Union! And it is *she* who gave us *you!*” Banak looked at Andro in shock and he saw him smile a savage smile. “You did not know that did you fool! You did not know that Sheva fell in love with my brother Dorian the moment he joined us in this life. She has not reported to you in months because she ceased to believe your lies to her long ago. She saw them for what they were when her eyes were opened.” Andro leaned close to Banak’s face, his skin beginning to turn red as he could not fight for the air Andro was squeezing from his lungs, both his arms hanging useless at his sides.

“Know this little man.” Andro snarled. “My brothers and I made a vow to one another. It is a vow I intend to keep. You have threatened his beloved wife and mate with your actions and your vile comments. I will take from your feeble mind all I want to know. I will find Moran and Dante and I will end them. And no one will ever know you existed.”

Andro dropped Banak gagging onto the floor, his arms useless and unable to break his fall. He stepped back as Marci moved up next to him. “Stick him Marci.” He ordered. “Dredge every iota of information from his perverted mind that you can. Everything.”

Marci nodded and motioned with her hand to Red One. “And then?” She asked though she already knew the answer.

“Then give his remains to the animals that roam the southern forests.” Andro spat. “He does not deserve anything else.”

Marci nodded. “Consider it done.” She spoke.

Andro looked at her. “The Watchers?”

Marci shook her head. “An older couple that owns a small eatery in the Dkhov district to the north. They were here trying to get ideas on how to better expand their business. The other is a student from the University.” She replied. “They are not involved.”

“I wish to apologize to them myself.” Andro said.

“I figured as much.” She said. “I have them in the waiting area of the terminal.”

“Everything Marci my friend.” Andro told her. “I want names. Places. Anyone involved with this piece of filth I want picked up and questioned. This needs to end now Marci. Moran and Dante need to pay for their crimes against my sister and our Union. They need to be found before they can do damage to Narice and what she is trying to do. Before they could cause harm to Arrarn and her. I want them found so that I can take my father’s vengeance on them and bury their remains on the wasted plains of Ukwav.”

Marci reached up and took his arm and squeezed it. “I will get it done Andro.” She told him softly.

Andro nodded his head and leaned over to kiss her cheek softly. “Lu'ria and I will be on the estate once I pay my respects to those we offended. Contact me as soon as you have something.”

Marci nodded her head. “Expect something by mid morning. The drug will take a few hours to really work but I will wring him for everything.”

Andro nodded and turned, holding out his hand for Lu'ria who came up to him without question. “Then I will be waiting.”

Marci watched as he exited the room and then she turned back to look at Banak on the floor. He was conscious and looking up at her. She squatted down in front of him and shook her head. “The one man in the entire universe that could have made your death quick and painless and you had to go and piss him off.” She said with a smile. “It sucks to be you.” She got back to her feet and looked at Red One. “Tell them we are coming. And stick this fool before I vomit from his smell.”

SLEKON CLUSTER

ARTAAYA

DRAGON HALL LIBRARY

Nekins deftly moved his body through the corridor, his eyes gazing upon volume after volume of history in the thousands of scrolls and data pads that were filed in perfect order. Of all the Elders on the Artaaya Council he was the only one allowed into this sacred place as the recognized Keeper of Knowledge. Not even Teniri, as the Elder Mother, was allowed to pass the three dragon Guardians at the entrance. She could if she truly wanted too, but she honored their traditions and culture above all else. Of them all, only Nekins knew that what was in here needed to be protected at all cost. He had been among those of his kind that had come to Artaaya with the Pralor people and after discovering the information within these walls, he knew what could very well happen if it was discovered before others were ready. If the secret knowledge within these walls, some of it millions of years old, was ever to get out it could very well change the face of relations with the Pralor people as well as the dragons they now called friend. In all the time since their flight from the Scourge only his predecessor, a few dozen well chosen Pralors and himself had ever set foot within these halls. Only they knew the source of the vast wisdom and knowledge that occupied these rooms and these shelves and how it had arrived with Teniri and the others.

Yet now, after what Delnash had spoken of, a large part of Nekins felt that was going to change. The Pralor men and women who worked in the Library were all volunteers and most of them had many millennia of life behind them and were devoted scholars of some kind. It took only one visit to the Ancient One in order for them to agree to work among these scrolls and files and never reveal their contents. Nekins watched as one of the senior Pralors approached him as he entered and he lowered his body to the floor and bowed his head to the man as he did the same.

“Elder Nekins... a pleasure as always.” The man spoke with genuine warmth.

“Greetings Conlar my friend.” Nekins spoke evenly his deep voice carried outward with strength and confidence. “Is the Ancient One available?”

It had taken Nekins nearly three hundred years to learn to use the muscles in his neck to manipulate the vocal cords that all of his kind had but did not yet realize it. Kasdan's wondrous invention had granted the ability to speak openly to many of Dragonkind, albeit with a rather mechanical sounding tone. He however had begun to learn the moment he became Keeper and this was one of the secrets that had not yet been discovered by Dragonkind as a whole.

Conlar nodded his head. "She is in the West Study." He answered. "She seems distracted today Nekins. Do you know why?"

Nekins nodded his massive head. "I believe I may have an idea Conlar. Walk with me and we will speak with her together. It is something that you should know in any regard."

Conlar smiled as Nekins lifted off the floor and he fell in beside the Pralor as they walked. "Why do I feel like what you have to say is going to make things far more exciting around here?"

Nekins chuckled softly. "It just might my friend. It just might."

It did not take them long to circumvent the spacious corridors and halls and soon they passed through the massive wooden double doors into the West Study. Nekins spotted her petite form immediately, silhouetted against the sunlight streaming in from the window above. She was no more than five feet tall and barely one hundred pounds but she trembled with the power of wisdom and knowledge. She had spent the better portion of the last forty thousand years transcribing the wisdom within her mind onto the scrolls and data pads all around them, ever since she had arrived with Teniri and the others. She had never set foot outside of these walls, content to wander the many hallways and corridors passing on her knowledge to the dozens of Interns who now cared for the knowledge. She turned slowly as they approached and her hands came up to pull back the cowl that was draped over her head.

Nekins settled to the floor in front of her as her features were revealed to him once more. Vibrant, soft and healthy Vermillion red scales lined her features, blending with the yellowish hue of normal skin in the center of her face around her lips and eyes. Her soft scales covered the backs of her hands and extended up her arms, while the palms of her hands were a combination of the soft yellowish color of her face with a hint of red to them. Her bright emerald green eyes contrasted amazingly with her skin, and in those eyes he saw wisdom far beyond anything he would ever achieve.

Nekins bowed his huge head to her in reverence. "Ancient One." He spoke softly.

"Nekins... after all these years you still will not address me by my given name when you greet me." She spoke. "Why is that?"

Nekins lifted his eyes and looked at her. "I do not feel it is appropriate... Sarlana." He answered.

He watched as she moved her tiny form gracefully to stand in front of him. She reached up and placed her hand to his snout with a gentle smile. "It is always appropriate Nekins my friend. Always."

"You honor me." Nekins told her.

"Bah!" She said with a dismissive wave of her hand. "Over thirty thousand years we have worked together Nekins. Since even before you became Keeper. There should be no formality between us." She told him. "Now tell me... why have you come here today?"

"We finished our meeting with Delnash just recently Sarlana." Nekins explained. "He said some things that I swear I have read before. From the scrolls within these walls."

"Truly?" Sarlana asked with the hint of a smile. "Perhaps I have been sending him secret messages?"

Conlar chuckled now and shook his head. "Somehow I cannot picture you sending secret messages to Delnash Sarlana."

Sarlana laughed and shook her head. "No I suppose not." She stated. "He is a good man and he is returning to the roots that made him a good man. Your people see that more and more every day Conlar and they embrace him because of it." She said as she turned and moved to the small bench where she settled her petite frame.

"Then you do not believe Lorendo can defeat him?" Conlar asked.

"Lorendo is a fool in a man's body." She stated. "And a fat fool at that. Without deceit or treachery he has no hope of winning an open and fair election against Delnash. And that is what you must guard against."

"Teniri has told him the same thing." Nekins said. "We believe he has taken this advice to heart. He is a different man since returning. Like his eyes were opened."

Sarlana nodded. "How could they not be open?" She exclaimed animatedly. "What he never believed could happen almost killed him. Meeting this Martin Leonidas in the manner he did, I imagine it was quite the shock."

Nekins nodded his huge head. "Teniri did say he made quite the impression."

Sarlana laughed now. "Swatting our *Vrrarhoinpa* warriors from the sky as he did and then nearly turning that fat Lorendo to goo. If only I could have seen the looks on their faces. To realize that the one thing they feared most of all had come true and the power and abilities of the vaunted Praetorians had been passed to a species they considered beneath them. And from what I understand, the power and abilities without the arrogance." Sarlana smiled. "And all of this done by the very first of the Praetorians. Sumar... the most powerful of them all."

"Murano was very happy I understand." Conlar said looking at Nekins.

Nekins nodded his head. "To think for so long that you are the last of your kind and then to discover that you are not... yes... Teniri said he was quite giddy."

Sarlana nodded. "Good. That man has suffered enough." She said softly. "Believing he was the last, that he had somehow failed his comrades and his people. To dismiss the one true love of his life in order to go into seclusion for crimes he never committed. It is good to see him come finally out of his shell. He carried too much blame on his shoulders. Blame that was not his to carry. Now perhaps he will finally be able to see the results of his love."

Nekins looked at her. "That is in part what I wished to discuss with you." He told her. "Delnash spoke of these Lycavorian Praetorians. Two in particular. Martin Leonidas' sons. His oldest Androcles, and now the youngest, Dorian I believe his name is. All of them descended from Sumar."

"What is it that you found odd?" Conlar asked.

"This Androcles and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth, they are *Vrelvel Sargti*. Just as his father Martin and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Torma are." Nekins told her. "They were given this honor by the Elder Mother Arzoal for something that they did years ago in defense of all *Darastrixi*."

Sarlana nodded. "I have heard the whispers among the *Vrrarhoinpa* about this since their return. Some of it not very complimentary." She said.

Nekins chuckled now and nodded. "Yes... no doubt from those that Martin Leonidas and Torma swatted from the sky with ease." He told her. "Some of our *Vrrarhoinpa* warriors are arrogant and brash. Not a bad thing as a whole, but egos were bruised... no question."

Sarlana looked at him. "What does this have to do with what Delnash told the Council?" She asked.

"Teniri does not know the full story or the why of it and she said Arzoal was very vague when Teniri asked her about it. Almost as if Arzoal was frightened in some manner of them." Nekins told her.

Sarlana tilted her head slightly. "Arzoal frightened?" She said thoughtfully. "I remember that day on Elear when I blessed her becoming Elder Mother. Pralor she may have been, but she embraced the *Darastrixi* from the moment she awoke as one of us. She has done far more than I ever believed she could, holding them together amidst so much chaos and death, in many ways by force of her will alone. Frightened is not a word I would use to describe her Nekins."

Nekins bowed his head slightly recognition of her words. "I did not have the opportunity as you and Teniri to know her Sarlana. I am only conveying to you what Teniri told me."

Sarlana lifted her head and looked out of the skylight above. "Sometimes I forget that we come from two different Seed Missions my friend." She said softly. "Those *Darastrixi* on Elear are from a different mission than you and those who arrived here on Artaaya with Delnash and his people. I was among those on Elear and returned with Teniri in the first wave that Arzoal sent from Elear. I knew of her for many years before she sent us away."

"She would not remember you?" Conlar asked.

Sarlana shook her head slowly. "My blessing on the day she became Elder Mother came from afar. Those with us on Elear had adhered to the ancient *Darastrixi* ways of keeping the *Doraanar* away from the common *Darastrixi*. The *Urkrisa Mamiss*, in all their infinite and often times ridiculous wisdom, wanted the *Doraanar* to be viewed as something special when we were not. Having knowledge is not a bad thing and only when this knowledge is passed on to others do we succeed."

"You changed this when you came here though." Nekins said.

Sarlana nodded her head. “Not as much as I would have liked mind you, but yes. Your Seed Mission had no *Doraanar* and I made the decision to not be shut away as I was before. I chose your predecessor Nekins, as well as Conlar and the others, so that I could then pass the wisdom I carry to others. It has not turned out as well as I would have liked, but the Scourge threat has made me see things differently.”

“We offer wisdom whenever it is asked for, but the fewer of us that know Sarlana exists the better.” Conlar spoke. “At least for the immediate future.”

Sarlana laughed softly. “I understand they all believe I am a male.” She said with some humor. “Imagine their surprise when they discover the truth one day. Conlar is correct however and for now I must remain aloof. Though it irks me so.”

“Then why remain hidden even now?” Nekins asked.

“Just before the end of the Second War with the Scourge...” Sarlana told Nekins. “The *Darastrixi Urlkrisa Mamiss* entered into a pact with the Scourge in order to protect us. Or so they thought. There were millions of Pralors who were on our homeworld of Icarava, studying and working side by side with us. We had forged deep friendships with the Pralor people. We were then forced to turn them over to the Scourge in order to keep the *Darastrixi* out of the war. This did not sit well with a good portion of our kind, but we had never challenged the will of the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* before. And we did not then. Another part of the agreement was that all *Doraanar* were to be turned over to the Scourge as well.”

“Why?” Nekins asked.

“Knowledge is power Nekins my friend.” Sarlana told him. “The *Doraanar* possessed knowledge that the Scourge wanted. Or that they feared. No one really knows what those vile creatures think from day to day. Who would want to? Most of the *Doraanar* surrendered to their fate willingly because the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* bid them too. Some did not. Those that did not died horrible deaths. And we did nothing.”

“But... you are here Sarlana.” Nekins said.

Sarlana nodded with a gentle smile. “I was the only *Doraanar* to ever accompany a Seed Mission.” She answered. “The first and the last. There were reasons behind this of course. I did not adhere strictly to the path that *Doraanar* were supposed to follow. This made me enemies among those in power. By removing me from our homeworld I would not be there to influence others and cause the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* difficulty they did not want. Or begin to make others see that the status quo is not always correct.” She smiled brightly. “I did not mind really. To be able to see new places and be out among the stars had always been a desire of mine. So I went with the Seed Mission to Elear. You know my story after that Nekins. Everything that occurred that brought us here together with the *Darastrixi* that had come with Delnash and his people.”

Nekins nodded his huge head. “A story that is now spoken among the hatchlings with awe.” He said.

“But then how do you know what took place after you left?” Conlar asked. “If dates from the Science Institute are correct, Teniri’s...” Conlar tilted his head slightly. “The Seed Mission that Arzoal became part of left your homeworld many thousands of years before the war ended and we were chased from our territory.”

Sarlana nodded. “Just because I was on a Seed Mission did not mean I lacked the ability to communicate with the *Elbakiw Sulevfu*. I sent them reports when it suited me. Several friends told me in one of their last transmissions what took place.”

Conlar was thoughtful for a long time and then he looked at her. “You... you remained silent Sarlana and you... you may have saved my people from themselves.”

“Bah! I did nothing. If not for what Arzoal did on Elear, after she became *Darastrixi*, I might not be here. She and Teniri deserve the credit for us being here. They are the ones who held everything together when it appeared it was so close to falling apart.” Sarlana exclaimed again as she got to her feet now and moved to one of the large potted tree plants that occupied the corners of the room. “So tell me... what is it about these *Vrelvel Sargti* that Arzoal honored. You know... no non-*Darastrixi* has ever held the title of *Vrelvel Sargti*. They must be very special if Arzoal blessed them with such an honor. What is it that makes Teniri think Arzoal is holding something back?”

“It has more to do Martin Leonidas’ sons Sarlana.” Nekins told her. “Androcles... and now the youngest Dorian as I said. Delnash told us that when he spoke with Wayonn, it was he who told him that Androcles was one of the *Vrelvel Sargti*, but also that he was born fully aware. That he was fully conscious even when inside his mother’s womb and he used his *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth, who was only weeks old at the time herself, he bonded with and used her as his conduit to the outside world.”

Sarlana was reaching for one branch of the small potted tree when Nekins began to talk and her hands froze in mid motion as he spoke. Her eyes came up and she looked at the sunlight pulsing in from the skylight as Nekins continued.

“It is my understanding that the youngest son Dorian, this is also how he was recently born.” Nekins continued. “His mother was afflicted with some sort of medical condition limited to her species but the Hadarian Queen Anja, she discovered a way to save them both. It involved him being given an accelerated growth hormone while in her womb in order to help him survive, but before he was born he had bonded with his *Vrrarhoinpa* as well. He too had full consciousness before leaving his mother’s womb.”

“We have always known that the Hadarian people were almost magical when it came to their capacity for the healing arts and the knowledge held within them.” Conlar offered up. “In many ways they surpass even Pralor doctors and physicians. The mutative nature of the nebula around their world seems to only work on them however. I understand that the Hadarian Queen discovered a working cure to the Svorag virus?”

Nekins nodded. “Queen Anja and another Hadarian that she is close friends with. One that they and Radra could have used to save many of your people.” He said. “Instead Lorendo initiated security protocols that ended up killing them.”

“Fascinating.” Conlar said with a shake of his head. “And so very sad.”

Nekins lifted his head and looked at Sarlana’s back. She had remained silent during his and Conlar’s exchange. “I am almost positive that I have read something about this within these very walls Sarlana, but I cannot remember exactly where or even if I am imagining I did. It just... it all sounds so familiar to me.”

“The *Lorsvek ar Sepas*.” Sarlana gasped softly, her voice barely carrying to Nekins and Conlar.

Conlar stepped forward. “Sarlana... we did not hear you. Is everything alright?”

Sarlana turned slowly and looked at Nekins. “What... what else did Delnash say Nekins.” She asked softly.

“I questioned him briefly before we parted ways but according to Delnash he did not have much time with Wayonn. Wayonn did tell him that this Androcles is perhaps even more powerful than his father in some ways within the Etheric realm, even though they are both *Vrelvel Sargti* and unmatched in ability. And his *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth has already fully matured and is considered one of the most powerful of our kind among those that followed Arzoal. She is in fact Arzoal’s own *autniral*. She is barely thirty years old Sarlana and she is more than a match for any dragon twenty times her age. I did not think that was possible. Teniri showed us what Martin Leonidas did on that planet Sarlana and it was terrifying to behold. As *Vrelvel Sargti* he and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Torma tossed our warriors from the sky like they were children. If it is true that his son and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth are even more powerful...” (Granddaughter)

Sarlana looked at him. “And the other son?” She asked. “This Dorian...?”

Nekins shook his head. “Delnash did not know much, only that he was maturing much faster than they thought and he and his brother Androcles were tied very closely together. He wields the Praetorian power within him, and under his brother’s tutelage he is fast becoming just as strong as him. There is not much else I can relay to you as Delnash did not have much time with Wayonn and he did not know much about this Dorian. I in turn did not have much time with Delnash and did not want to press him for fear of raising his suspicions.”

“Delnash was certain of what he was told?” Sarlana asked.

Nekins nodded. “You know Delnash as well as I Sarlana. He would not speak of or tell us something like this unless he thought it meant something. He is very intuitive and he has a keen mind.”

Conlar stepped closer. “What is it Sarlana?” He asked her. “You whispered words just now that we could not understand. And you look as if you have seen a ghost of some sort. What has Nekins told you that causes you to react in such a way?”

Sarlana looked at Nekins. “Where... where is Arzoal now Nekins?” She asked.

“She... she still travels with the Lycavorian King. She is bonded to the King’s Praetorian Mage.” Nekins answered. “They discovered some two hundred eggs in their recent travels and she and her bonded sister are helping to guide and teach them.”

“Do we know where they are?” Sarlana asked.

Nekins nodded once more. “They have established a Base Camp of sorts on the planet Manne from what I understand. Delnash did not go into great detail about what they were doing there.” He answered. “Why?”

Sarlana looked at Conlar. “Conlar... how soon before you can secure a ship for our use?” She asked.

Conlar looked at her with wide eyes. “A ship?” He gasped. “I don’t... Sarlana you have not left Artaaya in nearly forty thousand years! What... what is this all about?”

“I... we need to speak directly to Arzoal.” Sarlana told them. “Teniri must be present as well. We must discover all we can about this Androcles and Dorian Leonidas. And their bonded *Vrrarhoinpa*.”

“Why?” Nekins asked her. “Sarlana... you risk exposing yourself to...”

Sarlana shook her head. “It does not matter any longer!” She spoke quickly. “If... if this Androcles and Dorian Leonidas are what I think they are then there could only be one thing happening.”

“What thing?” Conlar asked. “What do you speak of?”

Sarlana looked at them. “The oldest and single most revered legend among the *Darastrixi* people.” She spoke gently.

Conlar moved closer. “I don’t understand.” He said softly. “What does a *Darastrixi* legend have to do with two Lycavorians with Praetorian blood?”

Sarlana met his eyes. “*Wer Geou ar wer Zezhuanth*. The Will of the Ancient.” She told him. “His name has long been forgotten and he is referred to as simply *Wer Zezhuanth* now. I remember seeing images of his likeness in the *Livaiji Sulevfu*. He was very imposing. So very powerful. It is he who is the main cornerstone of our people. Our culture and laws! Of our entire species! Many of the stories have been lost through the ages, but it is written in many scrolls that he could do wondrous things. Amazing things. That his Etheric power was unmatched.”

“Like the Praetorians?” Conlar asked.

Sarlana nodded her head. “In many ways yes.” She answered. “So much has been lost in the ages since he walked among us. Even then the Scourge were the bane of existence across the stars. Many scrolls speak of great battles where *Wer Zezhuanth* defeated them at every turn through the centuries. He even predicted the coming of the Praetorians among the Pralor people Conlar.” Sarlana took a deep breath and sat back down on the bench.

“Among the countless within the stars there will be but a small few who will stand and be victorious against the darkness. They will stand unafraid and be victorious for many centuries. They will wield the power of righteousness and in them the light of justice and peace will shine through until, eventually, they too are overwhelmed.”

Sarlana looked at him. “I don’t remember the exact lines, but it was very similar to that.” She told him. “When he finally passed on into the next life he left our people Eight Scrolls. The prediction about your Praetorians was within Scroll Five of the Eight Scrolls detailing his life and his history. And explaining exactly what he intended.”

Conlar looked confused and glanced at Nekins who he saw was just as puzzled. “I’m not following. What he intended?”

Sarlana nodded her head slowly. “Just as your people believe those who pass on merge with the Rift of Time, the *Darastrixi* believe that our souls can be given to another. Passed on to live forever within them through the generations. Our knowledge and in some cases even our power.” She explained to him carefully and calmly. “It sounds silly I know but the Third Scroll; the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* begins in the Third Scroll. *Wer Zezhuanth* details how he will choose six souls from among all the infinite life in the universe. To each of these six he will bestow a piece of his eternal soul. Each of the six will be aware of everything around them when granted the divine gift of life. They will be drawn across the stars to each other no matter the distance. Able to feel each other within themselves. Each of them will carry the blood of a *Dahakoan* within them. A Dragonkin. The Ancient Warriors that *Wer Zezhuanth* led into battle. Each of them with a piece of *Wer Zezhuanth*’s *sepas*... the *sepas* of a *Darastrixi* no matter their kind. They will be *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*. And they will stand against the darkness once more.” Sarlana looked at Conlar.

“That is a very rough translation mind you. I do not remember the exact words.” She looked at Nekins. “What you remember seeing Nekins are the bits and pieces of the Scrolls of *Wer Zezhuanth* that have been transcribed into other Scrolls and history files within these walls. Many of our cultural values stem from his Scrolls.”

“That still does not explain why we need to leave?” Conlar said. “And why you would be willing to risk yourself after all these millennia now. Over a legend that is millions of years old. A myth really.”

Sarlana looked at him and rose to her feet once more. “It is not a myth!” She hissed at him softly. “Don’t you see?” She spoke with passion in her voice. “I am over four hundred thousand years old Conlar and never once in all that time... not once have I ever heard of a child being born among any of the species that populate our universe, who was fully aware of everything around them before they left their mother’s womb. One such child, if they existed, that could be an anomaly... but two? And born within three generations of each other.” She moved to the wall and gazed at the rows of data scrolls shaking her head. “There is something else...” She said softly. “If the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*... if it is truly happening now... then these brothers and their *Vrrarhoipna* are only four of the six. If this is true then there will be two others out there among the stars... and they will feel them. They will be drawn to them from across the vastness of space.” She turned to look at Conlar and Nekins. “And if... if the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is coming true it could only mean one thing.”

Nekins eyes grew a little wider and he rose to his legs. “They will stand against the darkness once more.” He rasped out the words.

Sarlana nodded her head. “A legend or myth it may be Conlar, but if it is truly happening right now, then it can only mean that the Scourge are up to something. And none of what that vile species does is ever good. They are the epitome of darkness and evil. The personification of all that is malevolent. They have only grown more cunning and vicious after what that fool Praetorian Xaxon did.”

“But why Arzoal?” Conlar asked.

“As Elder Mother she will have knowledge of this Androcles and Dorian that others do not.” Sarlana answered. “She will sense things within them which will help me to answer my questions.”

“Teniri said she would not reveal much to her.” Nekins spoke.

Sarlana nodded. “Arzoal will tell me.” She said. “And if she tells me what I believe she will, then I must go to them. I need to see them for myself.”

“Why?” Conlar asked.

Sarlana looked at him. “All I will need is one look into their *kornari* to know what they are. If they are part of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* then they will feel the last two within them as I said. I will be able to see it within them.”

“And if they are this... part of this *Lorsvek ar Sepas*?” Conlar asked.

“Then we will need to begin to make plans.” Sarlana spoke. “If the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is truly happening... then we must do everything within our power to facilitate it happening. No matter the cost.”

HIGH COVEN SPACE

RIKVOS COLONY

XUKUTH ZOTRETH (HEART STRIKE) FACILITY

The covert insertion had gone off without a single hitch and now Normya and Tir'ut were standing by in their *STRIKER* only three clicks away. Dorian rested on the soft ground, the cool morning dew just beginning to form on the grass. Sheva lay beside him as they scanned the northeast portion of the *Xukuth Zotreth* colony. It looked as any colony world would he guessed easily, with homes and a central shopping and gathering area. Most of the homes were along the outer portion of the facility and looked to be in excellent condition. Given the status many of these people held within the High Coven at one point, Dorian figured they would be living in style. He lowered his macrobinos and turned his head to gaze at Sheva.

Her scent of berries and apples, so sweet to him, wafted to his nostrils and he inhaled deeply. She looked very hot in her combat Mark V Body Armor as he had told her on the ship, using a word he had picked up from Eliani, while they were approaching the planet. That had earned him a playful punch in the gut from his Blessed Wife and then a very enticing kiss. Sheva was coming out of her shell more and more each day now. With the knowledge that she was his wife, a Leonidas, many of the fears she had once held were slowly drifting away. She had not known just how deeply Androcles cared for his siblings until that night in his quarters. He trusted them without question and he would do anything for them Dorian knew. Or those they called wife and mate.

Just as he himself now would for any of his brothers and sisters. Whatever or whoever it was that was speaking to him and Andro within their dreams, they would discover it together he knew.

Dorian Leonidas did not question the how or the why he had entered this life as he had. He possessed the knowledge and skills that had been learned across millennia and they were now his. As a Praetorian, within himself, he could feel his father and Andro. He could feel Jomann and Deion and Nara and even Denali and Dutkne as far away as they were. Dorian was attuned to his Etheric abilities just as they were. He did not question why he and Ryner had bonded while he was within his mother's womb. How could he question something that felt so natural and right. Even before he and Ryner began to learn from Andro and Elynth they could do things no one else could. The weeks and months learning from Andro all he could had made him ready to challenge almost anything. Dorian had faced this very thing on Solmar and had emerged unscathed. He was proud of how he conducted himself on Solmar, but he did not let this grow into arrogance. Andro had told him arrogance was death, and Dorian wanted to spend many more years discovering his new wife before death claimed him.

Three hundred plus years his senior and in his arms Sheva was a giddy schoolgirl. The moment she had surrendered to her growing feelings for him and taken his blood during their love making Dorian knew she was his forever. In his eyes she was the personification of beauty. She was strong and fast and while very petite, her body was chiseled and muscular. He was also discovering just how uninhibited she was in their bed and this had led to many nights of intense and sleepless hours. She could be playful or serious, but she loved him without question. Every time he took her blood, she clutched at his head tightly, whispering professions of undying love into his ears. Like his father loved all his mothers, Dorian would love his Blessed Wife with all that he was. He watched as she lowered her own macrobinos.

"I don't see any security walking the perimeter or..." Sheva began talking as she turned to face him. She saw the look in his gorgeous multicolored eyes and tried her very best to look disinterested. She failed miserably she knew, for looking into his beautiful eyes always excited her. "Are you undressing me with your eyes Dorian Leonidas?" She finally asked him.

Dorian smiled. "Now that would be very unprofessional of me Sheva Leonidas." He said in reply. "Especially given our current situation."

Sheva couldn't help but smile and shake her head at his laconic nature. He did not seem fazed in the least that they were on a hostile planet and if they were caught they most certainly would be killed. Her smile faded slowly as she thought of everything she had gained since she allowed her feelings for him to come to the surface. She leaned over quickly and kissed him softly.

"Thank you Dorian my love." She whispered to him. "For everything. But especially for my future."

Dorian smiled. "Our future." He said softly.

They both turned their heads when Onera unwrapped the shadows from around her body and settled to the ground between them, squeezing herself into the spot that was not really there. Neither Dorian or Sheva seemed to mind and made room for her without thought. Though they didn't know it at the moment, they would recognize it in the future for what it was. Her coconut scent was very appealing to Dorian's wolf nose and to both of them her sweet blood smelled delicious. They didn't know it now, but they it would come to them, and then the circle of three families would be complete and unbreakable.

As destiny had always intended.

"There are two guards on the second floor of the adjoining building." She spoke softly. "We spotted them as they crossed in front of a lit window. It appears to be some sort of shop. Your brother Deion signaled that he saw two others on the bottom floor. He and your sister Nara are on the west corner of the building. Why did he not use Mindvoice?"

Sheva looked at Dorian and then at Onera. "Operational protocol." She answered. "There may be someone among the people here, however unlikely, who is strong enough to at least detect the tremors created by Dorian or Deion if they use Mindvoice."

"Regardless of our skills we do not want our presence known." Dorian told her. "At least not until after we have moved."

Onera looked between them, finding both Sheva's green eyes and Dorian's different colored eyes to be quite enthralling to look at. "The rest of our team is in place." She said finally turning back to look forward.

Dorian looked skyward and sniffed the air. "Another ninety minutes until sunrise." He said detecting the scent of the blossoming flowers beginning to spread as the plants began to react to the growing temperature of the coming dawn.

Onera couldn't help but look at him. "You... you can tell that by the smell?" She asked in disbelief.

Dorian met her eyes. "No. I checked the weather before we left your ship." He told her. "Sunrise is at zero six twenty-two. That is ninety minutes from now. Be right back." He hissed as he rolled to his side and allowed the shadows to claim him.

Sheva saw the supple skin around the bones spurs that lined her jaw tense and with a smile she nudged Onera in the shoulder. Onera's dark eyes turned quickly to look at her and Sheva saw the anger in them. "He is not mocking you Onera." She said knowing that is what Onera was thinking. Her dark eyes were bright and alive and exceptionally beautiful framed in her face as they were, especially when they softened as she spoke to her. "He would not do that. He was trying to put you at ease. Me as well. It was a small joke to help us relax."

Onera met her gaze. "He is not anxious? Worried that something could go wrong? We are within enemy territory after all." Onera asked in surprise.

Sheva looked up and saw Dorian unwrap the shadows from around him when he was beside the senior *Durcunusaan* troop who had accompanied them. The man, a grizzled older vet Sheva knew, did not flinch when his Prince materialized in front of him.

"Anxious perhaps." Sheva answered. "Worried?" Sheva shook her head. "No. He is not worried. He trusts us. All of us. And he trusts in his own abilities."

Onera gazed at her. "You are... you are easily over three hundred years older than him." She said. "What... forgive me for asking... but this is not common among vampires. I know that. What..."

Sheva saw Dorian wrap the shadows around himself again. "Ask me when we are gone from here." She said looking at her. Sheva smiled at her and actually surprised herself when she said the next words. "You can ask me anything you like."

Onera opened her mouth to respond, her own eyes wide, but Dorian reappeared beside her on the ground. Onera and Sheva both turned to look at him. "Artel concurs with me." He said.

"About what?" Sheva asked.

"Two guards would be natural. Not four." Dorian answered. "They know something is up. It might just be from everything going on within the High Coven, but it also might be because they know we are coming. Either way... we go now."

"Dori..." Sheva began to ask.

"We'll be fine." Dorian told her quickly sensing her sudden trepidation. "Deion and Nara will take out the two on the second floor if needed. Artel will handle the two on the bottom floor of the building." He explained to them. "We blur to the house and enter through the back door there. You keep your parents calm and quiet while Onera and I secure the house and then Normya and Tir'ut bring the *STRIKER* in for extraction. Simple."

"That is..." Onera began to speak.

"Ready?" Dorian asked just before wrapping the shadows around him once again.

"Shit!" Sheva exclaimed as she wrapped the shadows around herself and followed her beloved husband.

"Papa would never approve." Onera muttered to herself just before she did the same thing and followed them.

Saba Juconi made her way down the stairs of their home heading for the kitchen. She and Cazar her Blessed husband enjoyed having tea together in the morning before both of them went to their perspective places of work. Nearly four thousand years old and Saba looked no more than forty odd years of age. Her blond hair was still long and shiny, her green eyes bright. And even after two thousand and nineteen years together Cazar was still the only man she ever desired. Her Blessed husband, though two thousand years older than her, was incredibly fit and capable. He was a former fleet officer who had been taken off active fleet status when their only child Sheva had joined this *Xukuth Zotreth* program. It was for their protection and the vigilant protection of their daughter, so they were told. Over the last years Saba and Cazar both had begun to doubt that

was the case. Neither of them were stupid, and though they were free to travel anywhere on the planet they wanted, any travel off world had to be approved by the *Xukuth Zotreth* program officer. Major Lielian was a bastard in reality, and Saba did not care for the way he looked at her or other married woman who lived in the colony. There had been rumors for many years that he was forcing several of the married women to share his bed for the opportunity to go off world. This had never been proven, and to protect their children, none of the other families had ever said anything.

“The tea should be done by now!” Her husband called down to her from their bedroom. “I set it up before we went to sleep last night!”

Saba chuckled as she made her way across the living room towards the kitchen. Once a military man, always a military man. He was so very organized, while she was not, and he had once told her that was part of the appeal of being married to her. Saba’s pureblood vampire eyes needed no light to move into the kitchen area to the counter, and she had lifted a mug and was already pouring when she lifted her head at the scents of three distinctly different blood sources. She lowered the mug slowly, her eyes narrowing somewhat. Being married to a former fleet officer had its advantages; one being that Cazar had taught her how to defend herself quite well. Knowing what their daughter was involved in, Cazar had placed sidearms all across their home in case they were needed. Most of them were Union issue sidearms since they were smaller and far more powerful than High Coven sidearms. One of the blood scents seemed so very familiar to her Saba thought as she lowered her hand slowly and silently opened the draw by her hip. As her fist closed around the hand grip of the Union K14 Magnum she took a deep breath.

“Whoever you are... you will not live to see another sunrise.” She spoke calmly though her heart was racing.

The voice that spoke to her from across the darkness caused her heart to nearly explode from her chest.

“Do you not recognize the scent of your own daughter’s blood *Ilhar*?”

Saba Juconi whirled around just as the lights in the kitchen came on. She instinctively shielded her eyes quickly, her fist still gripping the K14, but not lifting the weapon as the words echoed in her ears like a thunderclap. Her eyes came up and focused on Sheva standing in the center of the kitchen, hands at her side.

“Sheva!” She exclaimed in disbelief.

Sheva was shaking badly as she looked upon the mother she hadn’t seen in nearly fifty years. She looked no different than she remembered and this made her heart race with total happiness.

“Don’t move!” The male voice barked in the room and Sheva turned to see her father in the doorway of the kitchen holding the second K14 in his hands.

“Cazar no!” Saba hissed aloud.

Sheva had tears in her eyes now as she looked at her father. “It is me *Ilharn*.” She said softly. “You do not need your weapon.”

“I will decide that!” Cazar barked out even though his hands were shaking badly. He could smell his only daughter’s blood easily, but it was also different somehow. There was no way he could mistake those stunning green eyes however. Sheva had been born with her mother’s eyes, and he had doted on her for years.

“Actually... no you won’t.” The female voice sounded softly as Cazar saw the shadows unwrap from around a body and he felt the barrel of a sidearm press against the side of his head. “I have no wish to shoot you... you are Sheva’s *Ilharn*, and the reason we are here.” Onera told him softly. “Please... lower your weapon.”

Cazar looked out the corner of his eye unbelieving that someone had snuck up on him as this female had. His eyes grew wider when he saw the unmistakable white bone spurs along the graceful curve of the jaw indicating this person was an Immortal. How could that be? His eyes grew even wider when he realized this female was not fully Akruian Immortal.

Onera reached out slowly with her opposite hand and closed her hand around the K14’s slide action while keeping her own weapon against his head. Cazar did not fight her as she did this and his eyes went back to where Sheva stood.

“It is me Papa.” Sheva spoke again, her voice wavering. “I am here.”

“Sheva!” Saba needed no further urging and she dropped the K14 and rushed forward to embrace her daughter. The tears flowed then and Sheva relished in her mother’s arms once more as they closed around her.

Cazar could only stare in disbelief at his only child and daughter. Her hair was shorter than he remembered, and she looked in far superior physical condition, but this was indeed his baby daughter. The matte black body armor she wore conformed to her petite body like a second skin, providing protection in all the vital areas he saw, while leaving her with the most freedom of movement. It was definitely Union issue, and from what his knowledge told him, issued to only the very elite of their forces. He watched as Sheva clutched Saba's hand and looked at him, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"*Ilharn*... don't you wish to greet your daughter?" Sheva asked. "I have... I have missed you and mother so very much."

Cazar Juconi could no longer contain himself and with a heave of effort he propelled himself across the room quickly and scooped his daughter into his arms, crushing her to his powerful body in happiness. "My *lotha uss!*" He cried out as he spun her around.

Sheva laughed and cried at the same time in delight. Finally her father set her down and then both her parents were squeezing her tightly. Her father drew his head back and gazed at her, lifting his hand to stroke her cheek.

"Sheva... how... what are you doing here?" He gasped. "How... how did you get here?" He turned around and looked at where Onera stood. "How did you get past the security at the spaceport? You..."

Sheva reached up and pressed her hand over the top of his, her eyes tear filled and wide. "It is... it is a long story papa." She stated honestly. "I came... I came for you and mother. To take you away from here."

"Away from here?" Saba exclaimed.

Sheva nodded. "Yes."

"Your mission?" Cazar rasped the words as the military officer in him came forth. "We... I thought that..."

Sheva met his eyes. "Papa... it has been a lie." She said. "Everything they have told you. Told me. It was all a lie! This is... this is a prison for you!"

"What do you mean?" Cazar gasped.

"Sheva?" The male voice spoke causing both of them to turn around.

Saba Juconi gasped as the shadows unwrapped easily from around Dorian beside Onera and Cazar's eyes went wide. They had never detected this one either. Saba moved closer to her husband almost instinctively for this young man was very large and powerful and he looked exceptionally dangerous and somewhat wild. He also looked somehow familiar to her. Cazar also acted as any father would and he intentionally placed himself in front of the Lycavorian before him intent on defending his wife and daughter to the last if need be.

"We don't have much time *Du'ased 'ranndi*." Dorian spoke.

Saba gasped even louder and Cazar's eyes turned to look at Sheva. Sheva was nodding and she wiped the tears from her eyes as she moved quickly away from her parents to stand in front of Dorian. She was tiny compared to Dorian's tall, muscular body, but Saba took note of how easily Sheva slid into his embrace. Sheva turned back to look at her parents as her arm slid around his waist. "Mother... father... this is my Blessed Husband Dorian. Dorian Leonidas."

"Leonidas!" Cazar gasped. "That is..."

Dorian smiled at them brilliantly. "Yes... he is my father." He told Cazar proudly.

Cazar pulled his wife closer to him and looked at Sheva. "*Dalharil!*" He questioned. "Why... why are you here with a Prince of the Lycavorian Union? And why does he call you his Blessed Wife?"

Sheva stepped away from Dorian and closer to her father. She looked up to his face and met his questioning eyes. "It is a long story papa." She said quickly. "Do you trust me *Ilharn?*"

"Always!" Cazar gasped.

"Then trust me now." Sheva told him as she took his hand. "We do not have much time but I will tell you as much as I can."

Dorian looked at Onera. "Why don't you and I secure the house?" He said.

Onera nodded without question and they both turned and headed out of the kitchen. Sheva took her parent's hands in hers and directed them to the small table. "Please... sit down. I must be quick now but I can tell you everything once we are free of this place."

“Dead!?” Cazar exclaimed after listening to his daughter for ten minutes.

Sheva nodded her head. “They told me you had died in the attack on the colony. They told me it was a Lycavorian attack. This is the premise I have... this is what I have believed for over two decades! My anger is what drove me forward for so long. It was only a few days ago when I discovered otherwise. When I discovered the truth.”

“A Lycavorian attack!” Cazar barked. “The Lycavorian Union does not target civilian colonies! Everyone knows that! Even at the worst of our war with them, they never targeted civilian targets no matter how simple it was. The fools in charge did not maintain proper safety protocols in the mine and that is what caused the explosions!”

Sheva shook her head. “Regardless.” She told him. “That is what they told me. What they used to get me to join this foul program. They recruited me with that knowledge all the while telling you something else. They trained me. Outfitted me. Then they somehow got me a new life within the Union. I was to be one of their many agents.”

“Why?” Saba asked.

Sheva sighed heavily. “It was a way to try and destabilize the Union after Dorian’s father conducted the Intelligence Purge. I was assigned to kill Queen Isabella.” She answered honestly looking at them. “Dorian’s mother. I was... I am a member of the *Durcunusaan*.” She corrected herself.

“The *Durcunusaan*?” Cazar gasped in disbelief. “That is their... their Royal Guard! The very elite of their forces!”

Sheva nodded. “I am a Captain of the *Durcunusaan*.” She told him. Sheva’s head turned as she saw Dorian come into the doorway. “I can answer all your questions Papa... but now you and mother must gather a few things. We are leaving.” She told them as she got to her feet.

“Leaving?” Saba gasped.

Cazar got to his feet. “Sheva they have men all over the spaceport.” He said. “No ship gets on or off this planet without their permission.”

Dorian chuckled from the doorway. “We didn’t exactly ask permission to be here.” He said to him. “We’re not really here.”

Sheva grinned as she looked from her husband to her father. “Papa... many things have happened through the years.” He told him. “For me. The Evolli War changed so much. It is then that I began to see what they were telling me was a lie. Now the Empress is dead. Admiral Moran is on the run from not only Narice but also Dorian’s brother Androcles. I do not know what you have heard while here, but I tell you now most of it is not true.”

“They... they do not know you are here?” Saba asked.

Sheva shook her head. “Hardly.” She said. “If they knew I was here they would be trying to kill me. Did you know there are guards across the street in the building? On both the first and second floors.”

“Security has been increased since...” Cazar looked at Dorian and then back to Sheva. “It was raised when Aikiro went to Earth and did what she did. They raised it in case of retaliation by the Union.”

Sheva looked at Dorian and he nodded. “Then we at least know we’re not compromised.” She said.

“Sheva... what is going on?” Cazar asked.

Sheva looked at him. “I received new orders a few days ago papa.” She told him. “After all this time... apparently Moran decided to take at least part of his vengeance on the Union. Or try to anyway. I stopped believing in the lies after the Evolli War opened my eyes. I have not kept in touch with the man who was my Control Officer. His last message was a threat. If I did not contact him then he would have you and mother killed. I did not even know you were alive! I thought you were dead! When I discovered this I... I turned to the man I have come to love with all of my heart and soul. It just so happens his brother happens to be Crown Prince of the Union.”

“A title my *fervon* hates I might add.” Dorian chimed in trying to keep the mood light.

“He... Androcles Leonidas knows you are here?” Cazar asked.

“His first thought was to get you and mother off this world and safe.” Sheva answered with a nod.

“We look after our family sir.” Dorian said moving up behind Sheva.

Saba was the one to see her daughter's face when she felt Dorian come up behind her. She leaned almost imperceptibly back against him and drew from the obvious strength of the young man who was three hundred years her junior.

Sheva looked at her father. "My loyalties are to my Blessed Husband now papa. To the Union. Not to the High Coven of old. Nor to the new Coven under Empress Narice. I have... I have chosen my life freely and I will live it. Once word reaches Moran of that choice he would have had you and mother killed. I could not allow that. I'm taking you off this planet."

Cazar was silent for a moment. "I do not like being lied to." He said finally as his eyes came to rest on Dorian.

"No sir... I don't imagine you do." He stated.

"You... you can do this?" Cazar asked. "Get us off the planet?"

Dorian nodded. "That's what we are here for." He said.

Cazar Juconi made a decision from his heart then.

He had known for many years that the High Coven would one day collapse. He was not surprised when it finally did and word reached them here that Empress Aikiro was dead. He didn't blink when they discovered that Narice had assumed that position and not Yuri. He did not agree with some of her ideas for a new Coven, but she had forged an alliance with enemies that should have been allies centuries ago, and her only concern was for the good of the Coven and its people. He had long ago felt out of place. He and Saba had only one child while others had more. He cared deeply for his wife and daughter, unlike many of the men who resided on this planet with them. Many of them had come from very different backgrounds and were arrogant to the extreme. They believed what Aikiro was doing was right and just and that the High Coven deserved to be dominant in everything. They could not believe that they were not better than everyone else. There were exceptions to this rule and it was with these men and women that he and Saba maintain relations. They were also the same men and women who had begun to seriously question what role their children were playing in the future.

"Saba my wife, pack only what we can carry in the small packs I have set in the closet." He told her. "And insure that we bring all of the datapads and other items I have gathered while here."

Saba grabbed Sheva's hand. "Come Sheva. Help me." She spoke pulling her out of the kitchen.

Cazar looked at Dorian. "There are others." He spoke. "Others like us who have begun to doubt what this place is for. We must..."

"We came only for you." Onera spoke now moving into the kitchen.

"We cannot leave them!" Cazar insisted. "They are good people."

"To you perhaps..." Onera told him.

"I will not have the loyalty of my friends questioned by..." Cazar snapped.

"By what?" Onera challenged him. "By a half breed!" She growled. "I could snap you in half old man."

"Your parents should have taught you to respect your elders child!" Cazar snapped right back.

Onera's eyes flared. "My father is Pa'cour, Colonel of the Immortals and my mother is Yuri! And they taught me all they know! You..."

"Yuri?" Cazar gasped now. "You... you are the child of Princess Yuri and her Immortal Colonel?"

"Do not dare to besmirch the name of my..." Onera began to speak moving closer to Cazar in a menacing manner.

Dorian reached out and took her arm gently. "Onera... it is not time for this." He stated calmly.

"You mistake my words for something they are not young lady." Cazar spoke. "Word was able to reach us here of what happened between your mother and Moran. How she fell in love with an Immortal and deserted the High Coven in order to be with him. It was only... it was only rumor and many still do not believe it." He met Onera's eyes. "You are truly their daughter? How?"

"It's another of those long stories." Dorian interjected. "One we do not have time for. You said there were others. How many?"

Cazar looked at him now. "Four families. Two of them have their youngest children with them, though I dare say they are not as young as they were when they came here. Twelve total."

"*Sibfla!*" Dorian swore silently.

"I will not leave them to the mercies of the guards here!" Cazar hissed gently. "Once it is discovered that we are gone they will bear the brunt of Moran's anger because they were our friends. They will be tortured and

probably killed for everything they know. And like me they have been gathering information for years on whatever they could.”

Dorian reached behind his back as he looked at Cazar. “You have weapons hidden I assume?” He asked as he pulled out his P1.

“Yes.” Cazar replied.

Dorian held out his P1 to Onera. He had given her a short but very useful class in how to operate the P1 in case it was needed. “Contact my brother Onera. He will be on Apo Prime and it is probably early morning there as well.”

Onera took the pad as she looked at him. “He would not leave them would he?” She asked.

Dorian shook his head. “No. Not after he hears this. And neither will we.”

APO PRIME ROYAL ESTATE ISLAND

On this morning it was Lu'ria who had risen before Androcles, but certainly not of her own accord.

She had been wrapped within Andro's powerful arms and sleeping the sleep of happiness and fulfillment. They had paid their respects to those who Andro felt had been inconvenienced because of their actions and then returned here to the Royal Island Estate, or the RIE as the *Durcunusaan* called it. They had shared a delightful dinner ordered from the eatery owned by the very older couple who had been held up earlier in the day by their operation. When they had eaten their fill, Lu'ria was more than ready and she insured her husband and mate knew it. As Sadi had told her, Androcles Leonidas would never deny any of his wives and mates. What had followed were the most intense and passionate five hours they had yet shared together. Andro had made her feel things unlike anything she had felt so far, and she lost count of her eruptions after number two. His aura could and did drive her insane with passion, so wild and pure as it was. Lu'ria had been demanding at times and submissive at others, yet he had never failed to give her what she wanted. She would be sore for a few days considering the number of times and positions they had coupled but she would trade it for nothing. Looking at his powerful body on the bed, the lone sheet just covering his lower body, Lu'ria felt fresh desire swirl through her. She had fallen asleep in his arms, splayed across his body, only to be awoken thirty minutes ago by Sadi's gentle prodding within their Etheric connection. The fact that he did not awaken when Lu'ria extracted herself from his arms told her that he was exhausted. He had not slept for more than four hours any day in the last two weeks, and wolf though he may have been, it was bound to catch up with him. After the passionate night of sex they shared last night, it finally had.

Lu'ria had pulled on Andro's shirt as she slipped naked from the bed and moved into the main area of his apartment to find Sadi sitting with Sehri and Ne'Veha. The delicious scent of his mother's coffee was in the air and it woke her quickly. After a brief but divine welcome to all of her 'slaves' Lu'ria had grabbed a mug of coffee and joined Sadi and the others on the balcony of his apartment to watch the sun begin to rise. At Sehri's urging they shifted into wolf form and had taken Sehri on a run through the towering trees that dotted the island, laughing and yelping in happiness as Lu'ria shared the entire torrid evening with all of them. They could only laugh playfully as Sehri, still very new to her wolf form and running, stumbled and rolled down a small hill into a stream. When she shifted back sitting in the stream soaked the rest of them had happily joined her. The two dozen *Durcunusaan* who now guarded the island paid the echoes of their laughter no mind. Most of them had heard it many times in the past with the Queens and it was a normal thing for them.

They had returned to Andro's apartment just as the sun was beginning its rise above the trees and Andro was still sleeping soundly. They shared a warm shower together and Lu'ria had draped the robe over her body again and simply leaned against the doorframe as she let her amber eyes gaze upon Andro in the bed. He had flipped over onto his back and she let her eyes take in the scars and the Talon Guardian brand on his chest, not to mention the deliciously ripped abdomen he sported.

Mistress? Sadi's voice echoed softly.

Lu'ria turned and moved back into the main living area to see all of them looking at her from the lone couch.

“Is everything alright Lu'ria?” Ne'Veha questioned.

Lu'ria nodded as she moved over to them and squeezed in between Ne'Veha and Sehri on the couch. Sehri immediately began to use the brush she held on her shimmering white hair. “I was just thinking how lucky we all are.” She spoke softly. “All of us.”

“Yes we are.” Sadi echoed softly.

“Or how jealous so many others must be of us.” Ne'Veha offered with a grin.

Lu'ria chuckled. “There is that to consider as well.” She said softly. “We must promise each other, all of us, once our *Inamarno* and Carisia are back with us, we must always make time for each other as we did this morning. I know the Queens do it now and we must as well. I never want to lose what we have found with each other.”

“I would like that very much.” Ne'Veha said softly.

“As would I.” Sadi agreed. “Very much so.”

Sehri drew her lips across Lu'ria's shoulder and kissed her neck softly before resting her chin on her shoulder. “Mistress... what Andro did last night? He is so... he is not exactly average in size. I don't think he is... for I have known only him.”

“He is all I have known as well Sehri.” Lu'ria told her.

“I don't think it is his size more than... more than it is what he makes us all feel when he loves us so.” Ne'Veha spoke aloud.

“We were all meant for Andro. And he for us.” Sadi said softly. “By fate, or destiny or the will of the gods. It does not matter. We have him and he has us.”

“*Avoi.*” Lu'ria whispered softly.

They all contemplated that for a moment and then Sehri turned back to Lu'ria. “Did it hurt Mistress?” Sehri asked her. “When he took you like...”

Lu'ria smiled and rolled her eyes. “For all of two seconds, before I started to explode and scream out his name and demand he take me harder.” She answered Sehri's question with a wistful sigh. “I will not be...”

The beeping sound drew their attention and Sadi quickly rose from the couch as she recognized the source of the sound. She moved to Andro's desk and snatched his P1 from the top, her eyes going wide when she saw who the incoming call was from.

“Sehri... go quickly and tell Andro Dorian is calling.” Sadi told her. “Something must have gone wrong.”

HIGH COVEN SPACE

RIKVOS COLONY

XUKUTH ZOTRETH (HEART STRIKE) FACILITY

“...gone wrong *fervon.*” Dorian told Andro in the transmission with the others standing around him. The image of his brother was crystal clear, like he was in the very room with them. Dorian could tell he had just woken up, as he wore only his loose fitting pants and was choking down a mug of their mother's coffee. “I do need some advice however.”

“Will they not be able to trace this communications?” Cazar asked from Dorian's left.

Nara laughed softly from the side where she stood with Deion. The other members of their team had also closed ranks on the Juconi home and now occupied different areas within the two story structure. “They could certainly try.” She said gently.

Deion nodded. “And fail.” He echoed his twin.

Cazar looked at the two of them standing beside one another. That they were twins was quite obvious to any who looked at them. That they were also related to Dorian was without question.

Dorian smiled at his brother and sister's comment and looked at Cazar and then back to his Andro. “Andro... allow me to introduce Saba and Cazar Juconi. Sheva's parents.” He stated motioning to them.

Andro had been sitting on the couch, Sadi, Lu'ria, Ne'Veha and Sehri all sitting around him. Now he came to his feet and as he rose Saba let out an involuntary gasp. Even in the holo transmission he was just as

large and imposing as his younger brother Dorian. Even more so for he still wore no shirt and every scar and corded muscle on his body was evident. Andro bowed his head slightly to Cazar in recognition but turned back to Dorian.

“You are still on the planet *fervon*?” He asked. “Why? You should have been gone from there twenty-eight minutes ago.”

“Something has come up.” Dorian explained.

“Something important enough to put you all in far more danger?” Andro asked.

“I pulled everyone inside Andro.” Dorian told him. “Sheva’s parents are not expected at work today so no one will question where they are. Normya and Tir’ut have the *STRIKER* well hidden. We’re secure for now.”

“For now.” Andro told him. “Your mission was to get in, extract Sheva’s parents and leave. What could possibly have happened to alter that?”

“Andro... Sheva’s parents have... they have friends here. Friends that will be in danger if they suddenly turn up missing.” Dorian said.

“I am sorry about that but...” Andro began before Dorian cut him off.

“Andro... they all have intelligence.” He said. “About this program... how far it extends. We could learn...”

Andro shook his head quickly. “Marci and her people reamed every iota of information from Banak’s mind *fervon*. Her initial report last night was that much of it was invaluable to us. Whatever they have is not worth the risk to you and Sheva and the others.”

Sheva stepped forward now. “Andro... what did... where is Banak now?” She asked.

“I would imagine his corpse is being fed on by some of the largest predators on Apo Prime in the southern hemisphere right now.” Andro told her. “He will no longer be a threat to you Sheva.”

Cazar stepped forward quickly now. He had heard that the Crown Prince of the Union was unforgiving to his enemies. “We have intimate knowledge of the workings of this program! And others like it! I cannot just leave them here! Moran’s people are ruthless and they will take them and their children and...”

Sheva looked at him wide eyed. “Others papa?” She exclaimed.

Cazar nodded his head. “You did not think this was the only program like this did you?” He asked in disbelief. “From the information I have been able to gather through the years with the others we have concluded there are three other colonies just like this one. All of them populated with the family members of Moran’s and Aikiro’s agents. They are spread far and wide across the High Coven and The Wilds as well as within the Union. Some of them within the new Empress’s own supporters!”

“You have proof of this papa?” Sheva asked.

Cazar nodded his head quickly and then he turned back to Andro in the transmission. “It is divided between the five of us. So if one of us were taken they would not learn everything.”

Andro nodded. “Standard Intelligence protocol.” He said.

Cazar shifted on his feet. “But if we leave all of the rest will be taken into custody for certain.” He said. “They will discover what you have found far quicker and be able to make their agents disappear. And the truth will never get out.”

“How close to Narice are they?” Andro asked instantly. “Can they threaten her directly?”

Cazar shook his head quickly. “I am not an Intelligence Operative Prince Leonidas. And some of the names we have gathered I have never heard before. In truth I cannot answer that question.”

“So it could all be a bluff?” Onera asked from the side.

Sheva whirled around. “Onera!” She snarled.

Onera shook her head quickly. “I believe your father Sheva... I am only speaking what it sounds like to others.”

Dorian looked at his brother. “Andro... if we do not take them with us we could be...”

Cazar Juconi had also heard that Androcles Leonidas and his father did not mince words and were decisive in their actions. Cazar watched as those traits he had only heard rumors off came rushing forth.

“Can you pull it off?” Andro interrupted his brother’s comments. “Give me a no shit assessment *fervon*. Can you do it without getting all of you killed.”

Dorian nodded his head. “With some quick action and improvisation... yes.” He told him without hesitation. He did not see the look in Cazar Juconi’s eyes. Dorian’s standing just shot through the ceiling as far

as Sheva's father was concerned. "I've already gone through some of it with Artel. We can do this Andro... and be offworld within eighteen hours."

Andro's answer was what Dorian expected now that he knew the risks and the gains. They were tied together far more tightly than many people knew because of what they were experiencing with Elynth and Ryner and Dorian could almost predict what Andro would do in any situation now.

"Do it!" Andro barked softly. "Sheva's parents remain the priority but do whatever it takes to get the others offworld as well. Will they go?" He asked looking up.

"Hah!" Cazar exclaimed. "You will see them move faster than any vampire before for a way to escape this planet knowing what we know now."

Andro nodded. "Then make it happen *fervon*." He said.

"And if they try to stop us?" Dorian asked. "Just in case."

Andro met his brother's eyes in the transmission. "Don't let them." He replied. "Marci will be giving me a full report later this morning. Once I have that we will be leaving Apo Prime and moving to take command of our new ship. Yuri will be back from her meeting with father by then and we will rendezvous with you and sit down and discuss all this then."

"Understood." Dorian said.

"And *fervon*..." Andro met his eyes. "If any of you get killed I will haunt your every waking hour as ghosts."

Dorian laughed softly and shook his head. "Now that is plenty incentive enough to not get killed." He spoke laconically.

Andro turned to look at Deion and Nara. "Learn and listen both of you. The time will come when you will be doing this as well."

Deion and Nara nodded to their brother, their faces serious. "We will." They spoke simultaneously.

"Two days Dorian." He said turning back to him. "You have Narice and Arram's direct channel. And grandfather Riall. If you run into trouble you contact them immediately."

Dorian nodded. "We'll get it done." He spoke.

"When you return... we need to talk." Andro stated softly. "We... we will try something Lu'ria suggested to me in regards to the dreams."

Dorian nodded. "I was hoping you would think of something." He said.

Andro shook his head. "Secure Sheva's parents and the others and I will meet you soon." He said.

They watched as he reached out on his end and terminated the transmission. Everyone was silent for a moment and then Dorian looked at Cazar first. "You are certain they will want to leave sir?" He asked.

Cazar nodded. "Yes."

Dorian nodded. "Then lets make this happen."

JUNCRO UNCHARTED PLANET UNKNOWN SPACE

It was certainly not something he had ever expected, but Martin Leonidas should have known better. His children had been throwing him for loops for years. It was no different now as he crushed Zarah within his arms and allowed the tears to moisten his eyes as her scent and aura swirled around him. He spun her around several times Zarah openly weeping in happiness as her father's arms squeezed her just as tightly as he had when she was a child. His wonderful mint scent and fatherly aura wrapped around her and the very last remnants of the horrors she had endured drifted away into the abyss. Now she would move forward into the future with Lucia at her side and discover everything together. Zarah felt her other press against her from behind and soon she was being crushed between her parents and loving every moment. Isabella was openly crying as well, her hands shaking as she stroked Zarah's hair and face. Finally her father put her down and held her away from him but did not release her.

He stared at her in the middle of the small clearing, towering brown trees blowing lightly in the wind and the smell of salt water in the air.

“Zarah.” Martin stammered. “How? What...”

Zarah shook her head quickly and reached up to squeeze his hands on her shoulders. “I am fine *medwan*.” She stammered. “Better than fine now. I have missed you so much.”

Martin crushed her to him again, burying his face in her dark hair and inhaling deeply of her scent. “I should have... I should have been there for you. I...”

Zarah shook her head as she held his head to her neck. “You were there *medwan*.” She told him softly. “You were always there with me. I knew that.”

Martin pulled his face away and looked at her beautiful smile and bright dark eyes. “What are you doing here?” He asked finally.

“Lucia and Carisia came with me.” Zarah spoke stepping back. Martin looked up and saw them and he opened his arms without question, pulling each of them into a bear hug. His heart was filled with happiness at this very moment and he watched as Isabella embraced Carisia and Lucia hard. They were the wives and lovers to their children and they were family.

Martin turned back to his daughter and took her hands. “You... you came with Yuri?” He asked shocked.

Zarah nodded and took his hands in hers. “Many things have changed *medwan*.” She said softly as Lucia and Carisia moved up beside her. “You must keep an open mind, just as you taught all of us to do. You...”

“Martin!” Bella gasped loudly.

Martin’s head snapped around to look at her and saw that she was gazing behind them. He turned quickly expecting some sort of attack and his own dark brown eyes flew open in stunned shock.

“*Nubou lae!*” Martin hissed in disbelief as he saw Yuri moving across the small distance between them hesitantly.

This was not Yuri Martin decided instantly. Yet it was. Her skin glowed in health and her own dark eyes were bright and filled with new purpose and happiness. Martin had never seen happiness in her eyes and it made her entire face beam with a new light. She looked in far better shape physically than he had ever seen her. He watched as her eyes saw the two members of his team that had come with them begin to bring their weapons up and he held up his hand.

“Kenny! Cody! Stand down!” He barked. He saw For'mya come rushing down the ramp and then Zarah was in her arms and they were embracing tightly as Bella looked on holding both Carisia’s hand and Lucia’s.

Martin waited until they had lowered their weapons and then he turned back to face Yuri. To her credit she had not stopped moving forward, and within a few strides she was in front of him just as she had been decades ago. Yet once more Andro’s words echoed in his head.

She is not the same woman father. Yet she is. Let your instincts and skills tell you that and guide you in your actions with her. She is not our enemy however. Not any longer, if she truly ever was.

Androcles had the uncanny ability to scare even him at times with what he could see and sense in people and this time was definitely no different. This was not the Yuri Moran he had known once. This was someone else entirely. Martin could detect the very faint scars across her face, almost imperceptible now, but for the first time he saw the damage Andro had done to her in their fight. This Yuri exuded confidence and power, but there was not a shred of Xaxon’s essence on her. The darkness that had nearly consumed her the last time he had seen her was gone and in its place remained the woman that she was always meant to be. Just as his son had told him.

Martin drew himself up and looked at her. “Yuri.” He said calmly.

Yuri had wanted to meet them alone. Without Pa'cour beside her protecting her as he always tried to do. She loved her Immortal husband more than her own life now, but this was something she needed to face alone. The trip here had been enlightening to say the least. Yuri had been granted a window into Zarah Leonidas’s life. The shame Yuri felt over what had happen weighed heavily on her, but Zarah would have none of it. The four of them had spent many hours together in the ship’s lounge just talking for hours. About the history that had taken place and the history they now hoped to write. Yuri could not stop touching Lucia and Carisia the entire

time, for the first time in her life seeing the beautiful women that they had grown in to. Yuri decided she had much to atone for, and she vowed to herself that her actions going forward would be focused on insuring redemption was hers, no matter how many centuries it took.

“Martin.” Yuri spoke evenly though she was shaking inwardly. Yuri feared Androcles Leonidas. She feared him with every fiber of her being. She doubted even her mother, with all her years under Xaxon's control would have been able to stand against him. Martin Leonidas however, Martin Leonidas terrified her. His long hair and beard made him very imposing to say the least no matter that it was meticulously well groomed, his six foot two; two hundred and thirty-eight pound body still in superb condition and looking even more defined. It had taken him longer Yuri knew, but he had now embraced what he was in its entirety. Yuri could feel that within him just as easily as she felt it within Androcles. While Androcles kept his emotions tightly in check, allowing them out only when needed, Martin Leonidas wore his emotions on his sleeve and that is what made him very nearly impossible to predict and so very terrifying to behold. “I see you found the stowaways.”

Martin glanced back at where Zarah and the others were still embracing and hugging and then back to Yuri. “How did...”

“Your son seems to have a rather mysterious sense of things.” Yuri said softly. “It is quite unnerving at times.”

Martin chuckled. “Tell me about it.” He said.

“They were... they were with him when we last met.” Yuri said. “They wanted to come.” Yuri shrugged her shoulders. “I could not refuse them.”

Yuri's eyes lifted as Isabella came up beside him on one side and For'mya on the other. “Isabella. For'mya.” She said gently. “Both of you are looking well.”

“The woman before me is not the Yuri Moran I once knew.” Isabella said after a long moment.

Yuri chuckled softly. “I would say that is the understatement of the century sister.” She commented.

Isabella's eyes grew wider. “Sister?” She gasped.

Yuri looked at her. “Our father was a back stabbing, manipulative monster, and a coward to boot. But that does not change the fact that we share the same father and are sisters. I'm only just beginning to realize how much I missed while that creature Xaxon held sway over my mind and body.” She looked at Isabella. “Someday I would like to regain all that I lost or missed. No matter what it was.”

Isabella glanced down and saw the Tears of Heaven secure at Yuri's waist. She had told Vonis that Yuri would throw them away. That apparently was not the case. “Our daughter speaks your name almost fondly.” For'mya stated from beside Martin.

Yuri looked at her and then to Martin. “I am not here to ask for forgiveness.” She spoke. “What happened to Zarah is unforgiveable. Given everything you know about me, I would hope you one day see that I would not have sanctioned such a thing. This me. The real me. I never would have allowed that to happen. No matter who I was, I still bear blame for what took place. She is stronger than I was you know. I let it break me and I had no one to turn to as she has. Knowing what I know now, I would have happily traded all of my years to insure that it never took place. Unfortunately...”

“Enough of this!” Martin hissed softly. The anger was evident in his voice but he held it in control. “What your son did... what your husband and mother did to my daughter... I will never...”

“I'm not asking you too Martin.” Yuri interrupted him. “And given the opportunity, I will serve their heads to you and Androcles happily after what they have done. Not only to Zarah but to me and everyone.”

“Then why are you here?” Isabella asked her. “Why come all this way? You could have just as easily told Androcles whatever it is you need to tell us and...”

“No I couldn't.” Yuri stated flatly.

“The Code Word you used was from back in the Teams Yuri.” Martin told her. “From back before all of this ever began. Why use it?”

Yuri nodded. “Because I knew you would take it seriously.”

“Then answer Bella's question. What do you need to tell me so badly that you could not tell my son?” Martin asked.

“Is there someplace we can talk? Just you and I Martin?” Yuri asked him.

“I do not keep secrets from my wives and mates!” Martin snapped softly.

Yuri nodded. “No... but Zarah and Carisia should not hear this either I’m afraid. I know how tightly tied together Zarah is with him and Carisia is now his wife and mate.” She said. “At least with Isabella and For'mya here they will be occupied.”

For'mya squeezed his arm and he turned to look into her dark eyes. *[I sense no deception from her Martin.]* She said gently. *[None at all.]*

[Nor do I.] Bella agreed. *[And she may be many things, but a fool is not one of them, just as you said Martin.]*

[That is what bothers me.] Martin said. *[I want to believe what Andro tells us but... it's so hard to comprehend how he could have controlled her so completely.]*

[He was able to do this with you my love, if only for a short time.] For'mya said. *[And Yuri is not you. Wayonn and Murano also told you that it is extremely likely as well. Xaxon was more than capable.]*

[Listen to her Martin.] Isabella told him. *[Whatever it is, it cannot be good if she felt it was not for Andro's ears. And it must be something serious if she does not want Zarah or Carisia knowing. For they would tell Androcles anything.]*

Martin nodded slowly and looked at Yuri. “There is a small office area on my ship.” He said.

Yuri smiled. “Your Pralor Corvette.” She said.

Martin met her eyes. “Pretty neat huh? You can't have it!”

Yuri chuckled softly as he turned and she began to follow him.

“...something to drink?” Martin asked as he looked through several cabinets. “I know Bella has some cloned blood here somewhere.”

Yuri smiled gently from behind him and shook her head. “Martin... please do not try and make me feel at home.” She said. “You can't stand the sight of me... I know that and so do you. I accept that.” She watched as he turned to face her. “You hold me responsible for every bad thing that has ever happened to your family in the last three thousand plus years. Beginning with your father's death.”

“Yuri...” He started.

Yuri shook her head slowly. “No... do not try and deny it. In some respect you would be right Martin.” She told him evenly. “They were my mother's sins, my father's sins, that monster Xerxes who was my brother, but they are also my sins as well... at least in some manner.” She said. “I cannot blame you for how you feel. The only thing I can do is ask that you give me a chance... just as your son has done... give me a chance to show you that this is who I was meant to be. This is who I am.”

“That's asking quite a bit Yuri.” He told her honestly.

“Yes I know.” She told him. “My atonement... my redemption began the day Pa'cour's child was conceived in my womb and I felt such joy and happiness at this news. It continued the day I gave birth to her and has every day since. It is going to be a long road I know and not everyone will believe me... I only ask for the chance.” She reached behind her back and took out the datapad. “Unfortunately... I am going to have to deal with items like this as I go. Sins that are not mine, but ones I now bear the burden of.” She held out the datapad to him.

“What's this?” Martin asked.

Yuri moved to the chair and sat down. “The moment my mother died at Helen's hand, a chip in her brain activated and transferred all of her command codes and secret files to my own authorization.” She explained. “The files were stored on a secret data storage computer on her temple world of Nuwaroa that only I would be able to access. I'm quite sure she did not dream of how things would work out and that I would fall in love with Pa'cour. When I finally escaped Robert's ship with Pa'cour I gave the remote order to have all those files transferred to a data storage computer of my choosing. I had the old data storage computer on Nuwaroa wipe itself and then self destruct. A few weeks ago I had my lead Scientist... Professor Lidene... I'm sure Armetus has briefed you on him?”

Martin nodded his head. “Brilliant is the word Armetus used to describe him.” He said as he fingered the datapad.

“I had him begin to decrypt the files.” Yuri told him as she watched him settle into the chair across from her.

“What does this have to do with me?” Martin asked her. “And why couldn’t you tell Andro this?”

“Part of what was on those files are her personal notes and information on many of the programs she was in control of or allowing my father to control in her stead.” Yuri told him. “One of them was the Clone project.”

“Yes... so.” Martin said.

“My father had your mother Gorgo on Lycavore for a very specific reason Martin.” Yuri told him calmly. “The experiments they were conducting on her were the last phase in the clone program my mother was in charge of. They were not simply removing her scent glands to cover for the clone of her on Apo Prime.” Yuri shook her head and leaned forward. “I was not privy to much of what she was doing; I did not know until the end that it was your mother on Lycavore. I am only now beginning to learn just what a vicious, sadistic and power mad bitch she really was.” She said softly. She looked at him and saw his eyes go a little wider at her comment. Yuri grinned. “You will find I have called my mother and father some very choice names in these last weeks. Even Pa'cour has shuddered at the name I have used.”

Martin couldn’t help but smile as well as he sat back in the chair. “I’ll take your word for it. But again I ask... what does this have to do with me. And why couldn’t you tell Andro all this?”

Yuri reached over and activated the datapad in his hand. “As I said, the experiments on your mother Gorgo were the last phase in the clone program before moving into the final and operational stage.” She took a deep breath and prepared for the explosion. “Read the names at the bottom of page nineteen Martin.”

Martin’s dark brown eyes moved to the pad and he paged down to the bottom. Yuri saw a myriad of emotions flash across those eyes at what he read, none of them very good to say the least. However he surprised her and did not completely lose control and try to kill her. She saw his knuckles turn white as he gripped the pad and his jaw became set in granite. Slowly his eyes lifted to her.

“Be very careful how you answer this next question Yuri. It will decide if you leave this planet alive. Did you know about this?” Martin asked her.

Yuri expected such a question and she did not fear the result for what she was going to speak was the complete truth.

“No. I give you my word Martin, however little it may mean to you, no I did not.” She stated flatly and with complete confidence. “I only discovered it after Lidene began to try and make some sense of my mother’s files.”

Martin rose from the chair slowly and set the pad on the table. Yuri could see that he wanted to explode but his control had advanced so much and so completely in the years since she had last seen him that she was very surprised to say the least. He turned back to her. “Who else knows about this?” He asked.

“Pa'cour, Lidene and my personal physician Nalavi.” She replied instantly. “And now you.”

“She lied to me.” Martin said softly.

Yuri chortled softly. “Yes... she did that very well.”

“Fuck me!” Martin snarled viciously, though the emotion was not directed at Yuri. “No matter where I turn, no matter how much I think I have left that behind me, your mother’s sick perversions keep coming back to haunt me! And right along with her is that perverted fuck head Moran!”

Yuri remained silent though she was very thankful he did not include her in that very true statement.

Marti moved to the COM panel on the wall. “Endy?”

“Here Skipper.” She replied instantly.

“I need you to initiate a Secure COM QCR transmission back...”

Yuri came to her feet now. “Martin wait!” She announced.

Martin looked at her, his eyes angry. “Stand by Endy.” He stated and then took his finger off the panel. “You should probably get on your ship and leave now Yuri.” He growled.

Yuri wasn’t deterred and she moved forward. “There is another way.” She told him.

“Haven’t you done enough already?” He snapped at her.

“Whether you believe me or not... I had nothing to do with this.” Yuri stated. “And you would be able to tell if I was lying to you. Before you... before you react to this information hear me out.”

“Why?” Martin demanded.

“Lidene and Nalavi almost never agree on anything.” She told him. “But after reviewing all of the data, they are reasonably convinced that none of these agents are in place. Given the gestation period of the clones and the estimated time of their DNA being copied, they agree that it is more likely they are still in a holding pattern waiting for Robert to activate them.”

“I thought you said these were your mother’s files.” Martin hissed.

“They are... but in some things she trusted Robert more than she trusted me.” Yuri told him. “Because she knew Xaxon was exerting his control over me. The Clone Program is one of those things. He may have the activation code word for these clones, but he does not know we possess my mother’s files yet. He does not know that we know about them. And right now he is more than likely trying to establish a hold over the forces still loyal to him before beginning any operation against you and Narice.”

“Bullshit!” Martin snapped.

“All of their data and thoughts is there Martin!” Yuri pressed him.

Martin looked at the pad hesitatingly once more. His eyes found what she was referring to and part of him began to calm down as he read. They were not the rants of crazed men and women. These were the thoughts of men with superior intellect and wisdom. Those were Armetus’s words to him. They were concluding exactly what Yuri was trying to tell him. He looked at her after a long moment.

“Why should I believe them?” He asked.

“Think about it for a moment!” Yuri snapped now. Martin Leonidas was a tactical genius in every sense of the word. He was also extremely intelligent and knowledgeable in ways most people would never guess. Yuri knew this. She also knew that he was stubborn and pig headed and prone to react from emotion. It is one of the things that made him so very dangerous to his enemies. “Look at the names again! Look at who they are! In all the years that you have known them... have they suddenly begun to act differently? In the last five years have they done things or said things that would make you question them. Think about it Martin. My mother knew how close they were to you. How much you relied on them. She would not put them in place until she was absolutely sure they could be of use to her.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed and Yuri saw the light of recognition go off in his eyes. “When she tried to take the City Ship?” He said. “The attempt to take the Pralor Cruiser. She knew I would go to war over that. She knew I would come tearing across the border with every Spartan at my command to get those things back.”

Yuri nodded. “And in the chaos that ensued she would have been able to place them.” Yuri said. “Things did not work out as she wanted them too. She did not count on Androcles being so powerful and you having him train the Coven Riders. And she certainly had no idea that Helen was more powerful than she would ever be.”

“She never had the chance to give the activation code.” Martin said. “It all happened too fast before she was killed.”

Yuri nodded once more. “That is what Lidene and Nalavi believe. It is what I believe.” She said. “That is why I believe we can find them before Robert decides he wants to use them. He would not be able to place them on a whim. He would need to plan it out very carefully. That kind of time he has not had recently.”

“Yuri you...” Martin began.

“*Phraktos!*” Yuri exclaimed. “Put aside your hatred of me for once in your life! Even for five minutes and listen to what I am telling you! I have no desire to ever see that man again! I love Pa'cour with every breath I now take. If I ever do see him again I will spill his entrails on the ground before him and watch him bleed out like the vile creature he is! I have no desire to control the High Coven! None! Only Narice can pull the Coven from the abyss that my mother and father were leading it down! Only she has the strength to do that now. All I want to do now is insure she does not fail. I do not want credit or recognition! My reward will be that I can have more of Pa'cour’s children and this time I can enjoy my children as they grow. This time I can be the mother I never was to Carisia and Lucia! Damn you Martin Leonidas... I will not let your hatred of me take that opportunity from me!”

Martin stood there staring at her with surprise in his eyes. Her scent told him without question that everything she has just spouted was the truth. When people were excited they lost control of their glands and could not guard against the adrenalin dump into their blood signifying they were lying. In Yuri’s case... not one thing she had just said was a lie. He crossed his arms over his chest slowly and looked at her as she took deep breaths.

“Are you done preaching?” He asked with a sarcastic grin.

Yuri took a deep breath and look away. “Bastard.” She muttered but with no malice in her voice.

Martin held up the pad. “So what do you propose?” He asked.

Yuri looked at him. “Lidene is still working on decrypting my mother’s files. But he is only one man. I can trust no one from the old Intelligence arm of my mother. Nor can I turn to Narice. I need... I need your people to assist Lidene. I don’t care what they see. I am not trying to hide anything. But I want to stop this before it destroys everything your son and my sister started.”

Martin looked at the pad once more. He paged down slowly looking at the three names that jumped out at him and then back up to Yuri. “I take it this is why you did not want Andro to know?”

Yuri’s laugh was humorless. “Your son and my sister took a leap of faith that paid off.” She told him. “I may be many things Martin Leonidas... but I am not stupid. If he knew what was on that pad, then everything he and Narice began would come to a very abrupt and brutal end. He would feel betrayed and used. As would Narice. Do you want the two of them burning half the Alpha Quadrant?”

“He is not as immovable as you think Yuri.” Martin said. “He believed in you.”

Yuri shook her head. “You are not going to talk me into it. I like what I have discovered since my rebirth. I like who I am now. Why would I want to lose that?”

“He trusts you.” Martin said. “If he didn’t he would not have done what he has done knowing how I feel.”

Yuri chuckled softly. “It will not work Martin Leonidas. I will not be the one to tell your son Androcles that there is an utterly perfect clone and exact replica of the woman he has loved since he was eight months old somewhere out there. His *Anome*.” Yuri shook her head again. “No. I am not a utter fool.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

UNCHARTED SPACE EDGE OF PRALOR SYSTEM FOUR DAYS FROM MANNE

Pusintin studied the star chart intently, ignoring all else going on around him. He was in a foul mood and had been ever since Kalis had escaped and taken the Hadarian witches with him. It wasn’t so much that he had escaped, it was the fact that Kalis had fooled him so easily, and had been fooling him for some time it seemed. He had taken Pusintin’s own personal transport and fled from right under his nose. A ship that held many Kavalian secret COM channels and different orders on its main computer. All of which were undoubtedly now in the hands of his brother. He held a begrudging respect for his middle son that he had not held before, but he still wanted to string the boy up on a pole and watch him die a slow death. Kalis had never seemed that smart, he was always so brutish in his actions and Pusintin had never believed he had the fortitude to go against him as he had. Something must have happened to him in the last months and before he died, Pusintin was going to get that very information out of him.

His brother had made a mistake and Pusintin vowed to make him pay for it.

The Kavalian fleet was moving steadily forward, searching planets that they discovered were very similar to what his brother had mistakenly described to them over the COM channel. They were not rushing forward for fear of encountering more mines as they had before. Martin could be very devious and Pusintin did not want to walk into a trap. It also did not appear to be needed, as his brother’s ships had stopped. He knew this because the Borellum Acoustic Pulse was steady and not moving. Thinking about his younger brother made Pusintin churn with hate and a deep seated anger. Seeing him in that transmission gloating with Kalis standing beside him still caused his wolf blood to burn. To then see For'mya press her lush, elven figure against him so very intimately, her dark brown eyes full of life and love and emotion, this caused nearly uncontrollable rage to boil within him. Even when For'mya was naked beneath him, unwillingly responding to his full and unshielded wolf aura as it attacked her female wolf senses; even when she was whimpering for him to fuck her harder; he

could never get her to say she loved him. Or that she even cared for him. Pusintin knew better though. He knew For'mya wanted him and only him. How could she want something else after the fucking he gave to her?

Hate seethed through him at the thought of his brother touching her, bedding her, and that hate is what drove him forward. Martin had taken two of his three sons from him. His clear and favorite son Leruk had been brutally murdered by his younger brother's oldest son Androcles. Hate and rage is what propelled him forward now. He would find his brother and he would kill Kalis and the Hadarian witches and he would take For'mya back. She belonged to him now. His brother's other wives he would happily give to his men for playthings. After a few months as sex toys for Kavalian troops being gang raped every day they would be quite insane, if they still lived.

Pusintin did not consider that they were thousands of light years from any help. He did not consider that they could not communicate with Keleru back in the Alpha Quadrant. Kalis had succeeded in permanently destroying their only long range communications array capable of reaching Kavalian space and now there was no hope of repairing it unless they were in space dock. All of his focus was now on killing his son and brother and reclaiming For'mya for his own. The elf bitch would squirm under him once more and he would inhale deeply of her sweet Orchid scent while he pummeled her tight body into the bed and listened to her cry out to him for more. Not even Jalersi had affected him like For'mya had and now all he wanted was to feel her warm tightness wrapped around his cock again.

Pusintin blinked as Popal appeared next to him and he looked up at his executive officer.

"Popal?" He questioned.

"I have the latest reports from the outlying frigates Marshall." He spoke as he held out the datapad.

"Nothing I assume?" Pusintin asked as he took the pad.

"No sir. All three planets were scanned intensively but there were no signs of life or any kind of activity aside from the indigenous lifeforms." Popal answered.

"We are still picking up the secondary signal correct?" Pusintin asked.

Popal nodded. "Yes Marshall." He replied. "We have to keep two complete sensor arrays locked onto it, but it is still broadcasting. And it remains stationary."

Pusintin nodded. "He thought he was smarter than me." He said. "He thought that when he found the Borellum Acoustic Pulse I wouldn't be able to track her anymore. Shows what a fool he really is. I had three of them implanted into her, all of them in different parts of her body and on different frequencies. He would never find all three. It will lead us right to them."

"Then why are we stopping to search these planets as we go Marshall?" Popal asked. "If we go to full power we could be upon them in less than two days."

Pusintin shook his head. "My brother is stupid but he isn't a fool." He stated. "For'mya may be where the signal is originating from, but Kalis and my ship he would not keep together with her. Most of his people and his three ships are probably orbiting this planet he accidentally described in the COM transmission. They have to be low on supplies by now."

"We are becoming low on fresh supplies as well Marshall." Popal reminded him.

Pusintin nodded. "We find them... we kill the men and keep the women and take their ships and whatever supplies they have and then we can use them as leverage. My brother is weak and he wouldn't put his females in danger."

Popal nodded his head slowly. "As you say Marshall." He spoke.

Pusintin looked at him oddly for a long moment and then stood up straighter. "What is it Popal?" He asked. "Speak what is on your mind."

Popal looked at him. "It is not I Marshall..." He said. "Other... some of the officers and different ship Captains have come to me with concerns."

"Concerns such as?" Pusintin asked.

"They question why we are out here Marshall." Popal told him. "They question what we are doing so far from home, in territory we have never been too before. We have no star charts to navigate by and we have to make it up as we go. We are following this signal from the elf female For'mya yes, but it has been leading us deeper and deeper into uncharted space. The men are becoming nervous. They are... they are speaking among themselves."

"Are they?" Pusintin spoke softly. "What are they saying?"

“Marshall I...” Popal began.

“Relax Popal...” Pusintin told him evenly. “You have nothing to fear from me. I trust your words and your judgment. Now tell me what they are saying.”

“They believe the Lycavorian King knows exactly what he is doing.” Popal said. “They believe he is out here searching for something and now that they have stopped, they believe he has found what he is looking for.”

“Looking for something?” Pusintin questioned him. “There is nothing out here Popal. What could he possibly be looking for out here? No one has ever been this far spaceward of the core.”

“He has not veered more than a few degrees from his base course since the beginning Marshall Pusintin.” Popal told him. “If he was simply out here to draw us away from Kavalian space, why not alter course more often? Why follow an almost straight line? Why not have his Ghost ship drop more mines in our path? He could have been picking away at us for weeks now and he has chosen not to. Unless he knows exactly where he is going... or at least has some idea and does not want to be deterred.”

Pusintin shook his head. “Martin is not that smart.” Pusintin answered. “There is nothing out here. All of the long range probes we have sent out and nothing ever came back.”

“None of them ever came out this far from the core Marshall. And none of those we have sent out from our ship have spotted anything.” Popal said. “It makes the men uneasy.”

“They will get by.” Pusintin said.

“First the shrouded mines from his ghost ship...” Popal continued. “Then Kalis’s action in taking the transport and the Hadarian females and knowing exactly where to go to meet him. How did he know this? He must have had a means to communicate with him. Then the Juturi Pride abandoning us to go with them. A senior Pride we thought to be loyal to us for decades and they do this. And now our only means of communicating with Kavalian High Command is gone. Disabled permanently by Kalis.”

“You do not have to remind me Popal.” Pusintin hissed softly.

“The men are beginning to believe this is more of a personal vendetta than anything else Marshall.” Popal told him. “They believe we should go back. Return and help our brothers fight the Lycavorians in the war we know is going on.”

“With For'mya and the twins we can return and take control of the Union by political means!” Pusintin snapped.

Popal shook his head. “Most of them no longer believe that can happen.” He said. “They do not believe the Elf Queen or your son with her will help stop anything. Not with his oldest son back there and leading the fight against us.”

“For'mya is my woman! She wants to be with me! My brother is keeping her against her will!” Pusintin snapped more angrily. “She will do as I say! My son will do as I say! And I will make my brother pay for taking her from me!”

Popal nodded his head. “As you order Marshall.” He said. “I do not question your actions or your orders.”

“They want to see the fruit of their labor and time... fine.” Pusintin spoke. He stabbed down on the star chart forcefully. “Have two of our fastest Frigates conduct combat jumps that will put them within extreme sensor range of his ships. Here... at this point.” He said pointing at one spot on the chart. “They will scan his ships and area around them and find out what they are doing... and then they jump away before they are seen. Our Frigates can spot them easily from extreme range with their lateral sensor arrays, and even if they are spotted they can jump away long before anyone comes to investigate.”

“And what of the Ghost Ship Marshall?” Popal asked him. “That ship... if it is one of the ships that our Intelligence says your brother possesses... it will most certainly pick up our fast frigates. They will know that we are coming.”

Pusintin nodded. “Yes they will. Once our ships return we will plan our attack and move. If we have not found the planet by then we will simply take the information from his computers or his women. Then they will see. And they can have the pick of the women that are left alive! Tell them that Popal!”

Popal nodded quickly. “This will please them Marshall. You know that.”

“Good.” Pusintin declared. “Now leave me alone so I can devise a strategy to crush the life from my brother’s forces and his body.”

Popal nodded his head and turned away from the star chart leaving Pusintin alone. He made his way calmly across the bridge and onto the elevator lift. He was silent running so many things through his head as he descended to deck eleven and then exited the lift. He paid no mind to the crew he passed in the corridor until he reached the entrance of the Officer's Lounge. He looked around casually and then touched the panel opening the door where he stepped through quickly.

He watched as the five other Kavalians rose to their feet from the table they had been sitting at and turned to face him. Five ship captains that represented seventeen others within their task Force.

"Popal?" The senior Kavalian asked as he turned.

Popal shook his head slowly. "He has ordered that two of our Fast Frigates jump to within extreme range of Leonidas's ships, scan the area, and then return." Popal told them. "When they return with this information we will attack."

"If they return." One of the men spoke shaking his head.

"Popal... surely you see... you must see that this is all wrong." Another spoke moving closer to him. "He is... he is not right anymore."

Popal looked at him. "Mind your words Captain Kunti."

"I will not mind them!" The man hissed. "This is madness! We are chasing ghosts and shadows! You know that now just as we all do!"

"Popal... you must see what we are saying." Another man spoke as he moved closer. "The Marshall has not been right since... since his brother almost killed him."

"Killed him." Kunti hissed. "The Lycavorian King nearly beat him to death and did not break a sweat in doing so!"

"Kunti!" The man hissed looking at him.

"What?" Kunti demanded harshly. "For weeks we have followed without question while King Leonidas has drawn us further into uncharted territory. His Ghost Ship leaves mines in our path and now we are forced to move at a crawl. The Marshall's own son, who has been trained by the finest Puma Bane Commandos within the Federation, he deserts us to go to Leonidas. And he takes the Hadarian wench out from under our very noses! And then the Juturi Pride joined him!"

"We know all this Kunti." The second officer said.

"And still we follow blindly Weoerr!" Kunti hissed. "This is madness."

"He says that the elf female and his son with her can facilitate us gaining control of the Union." Popal spoke now grasping at something to defend the man he had served for so long. "That the Lycavorian King holds her against her will."

Weoerr, older and more experienced than Kunti, simply shook his head. "Popal, you of all of us know that is not true." He stated plainly. "The Elf Queen would just as soon cut off Pusintin's cock and feed it to him before she let him put it in her again. She has no feelings for him! None! He forced her to respond to him in any way that she may have. She believed that Leonidas was dead and not being able to sense him with her wolf senses or within the realm of their Mindvoice ability made her act in the manner she did. You know that is how pureblood Lycavorian females and those females turned by Lycavorians act. We all know this. We were trained in this knowledge at the Academy. Once the inhibitor that Pusintin implanted into her was removed and she could sense and feel Leonidas once more, well... you saw for yourself how she acted." He moved closer to Popal.

"His children by her hate him just as intensely as she now does. She has been the wife and Queen of Leonidas for over two decades Popal and she only acted as she did because she thought he was dead and the wolf blood in her reacted to that false information. Leonidas... he slaughtered over a hundred of our men to get her back Popal! And he did it without even breathing heavy! He is not dead Popal and you saw how she acted with him in the transmission. You cannot honestly believe for an instant that she will side with Pusintin over Leonidas do you? You saw the same open transmission we did."

"We cannot communicate with High Command because Kalis disabled the Long Range COM array." Kunti spoke more calmly now. "We do not even know what is happening back home. And the Marshall is leading us into a trap."

Popal looked at him. "What do you mean?"

Weoerr met his eyes. “Martin Leonidas is the foremost tactician in the Union military. Perhaps anywhere in the galaxy. He could fight circles around Marshall Pusintin every day Popal. You know this. The mines... the transmission when Kalis escaped... he is baiting us. Drawing us further away from home.”

“He has three ships Weoerr!” Popal snapped. “Three!”

Weoerr nodded his head. “That we know of.” He stated calmly. “All Union ships have Shrouds. How do we know there is not an entire fleet out there following us? We had a hard enough time recognizing High Coven Shrouded ships during the war. We have never been able to detect a Shrouded Union ship Popal. Never. And the King of the Lycavorian Union would never travel with so few ships.”

“He is baiting us!” Kunti said again. “This is not about drawing us away so we cannot fight anymore... this is about Marshall Pusintin.”

“What?” Popal asked.

“This has become personal Popal.” Weoerr told him. “Kunti is right. In Leonidas’s eyes Marshall Pusintin raped his woman. He raped a sitting Queen of the Lycavorian Union. You know how they view such an act within the Union. That she is Queen makes it even worse. You know what he did the last time this very thing happened. He obliterated an entire government and empire. He smashed it under his boot without so much as a second thought and everyone who had a part in that act died gruesome deaths. This is not about drawing Pusintin away so we cannot fight against his son; this is all about killing the Marshall.”

“What are you saying?” Popal asked.

“Leonidas is drawing Marshall Pusintin... drawing us... to a time and place of his very own choosing.” Weoerr said. “When he has us where he wants us, he will strike. When he does strike, many of us, perhaps all of us will not survive. You know this Popal, we know this and our men know this. Marshall Pusintin is bent on revenge for some perceived crimes committed against him by his brother, when it is the Marshall himself who is guilty of those very crimes. King Leonidas would never act in such a manner Popal, no Spartan would. It goes against their code of honor. Pusintin has twisted the facts to suit him. King Leonidas simply took back what belonged to him. And the Elf Queen is his Popal, make no mistake about that. The Marshal is... he is... he is no longer right in his mind.” Weoerr said calmly. “And we are going to be caught in the middle and we will bear the brunt of King Leonidas’s vengeance. And it will be absolute vengeance Popal. He will not offer us mercy or redemption. Not after what Pusintin did to his Queen.”

Popal was silent as he let his eyes move between the men gathered in the room. None of them were in disagreement with what Weoerr had just said that he could see. He moved to the view window in the lounge and looked out at the many stars. “You... you suggest going...” He turned. “You suggest turning against the Marshall of all Kavalian forces!”

“We suggest surviving as opposed to death.” Kunti spoke now.

“The Puma Bane will... they will not follow you.” Popal said.

“The Puma Bane are fanatical fools.” Weoerr spat. “Nothing more than secret police for Keleru. If they wish to follow Pusintin to their deaths so be it. We do not. Do you? You have a woman and three sons... do you not wish to see them again?”

Popal shook his head. “I must... I must think about this.” He said softly.

“Do not think long my friend.” Weoerr spoke. “More and more of us are beginning to feel the same way. It is spreading and there is nothing we can do to stop it. We must decide soon what to do... or it will not matter.”

Popal looked at him. “Give me until the frigates return.” He said. “Let me see what they discover before making a decision.”

“If that is your wish.” Weoerr told him. “Know that if you go to Pusintin with what you now know, it won’t matter. There are too many who feel as we do. He won’t be able to stop the coming storm no matter how many he has the Puma Bane kill.”

“Two days!” Popal hissed. “Give me two days.”

Weoerr nodded. “Two days.” He said. “Then we will decide what is to be in our future and not some madman who is already dead and does not even know it.”

JUNCRO
UNCHARTED PLANET
UNKNOWN SPACE

T'lolt hadn't really thought about what seeing him would make him feel. He knew every event that had happened that day on Lycavore. He had given the order originally, yet something had made him reverse himself, and attempt to rescind that same order. When he was told that it was too late and the order had been carried out, he had killed the lone vampire officer who had arrogantly reported this to him. As well as the Immortals who had carried out the order. Given all that was happening on the planet then, hiding their bodies among the many hundreds of High Coven vampire and Immortal dead that day was easy. T'lolt wanted so much to believe that at the end, no matter the distance they had allowed to come between them as family, T'lolt wanted to believe that his brother could not do it. That he had done everything within his power to stop it. As he fingered the small data disc in his hand he knew the truth. So many years of questions and all it took was this one little data disc to show him that what he believed was very much true. Given to him by a Lycavorian officer he did not know at the bidding of Martin Leonidas.

He had talked at length with Cha'talla in the first few weeks after settling on Kranek, each of them finally coming to the belief that indeed their brother had tried to stop it. That no matter the differences between them, he could not bring himself to have his own family killed. The data disc he now held only confirmed what they had believed for over two decades now. He had failed in that task and both of them knew that the shame he must have felt at that must have been overwhelming. Shame he had carried all of these years, increasing the distance between them as family and brothers. He and Cha'talla had decided that if the day ever came where they could make it all go away, they would not hesitate. T'lolt had spoken very briefly with Cha'talla before leaving with Martin and he had agreed with what T'lolt intended. All of them had begun new lives now and the past held no place in the present for the three brothers. They were all that was left of their family and they belonged together. And if not together in body, then at least they all needed to know that they had their brother's backs. It is what Cha'talla wanted, and it was now what T'lolt wanted as well.

T'lolt had a new wife now and the much younger Ir'qua had given him two new sons and one very beautiful daughter in just the last ten years, with plans to have more. Since taking the serum that had returned the Akruvian people to their natural appearance, T'lolt had spent quite a bit of pleasurable time rediscovering his new wife. Ir'qua had arrived with Daniel's wives, as had so many others, and her long flowing black hair and bright eyes had filled T'lolt with desire for her that had taken two full days to quench. Ir'qua remained on Manne now, helping with building the defenses there, not wanting to leave him. Their three children were with her parents back on Kranek and safer than they could be anywhere else but within Union territory. Ir'qua had urged him to go with Martin for this meeting, knowing what he desired deep down in his heart, and as T'lolt stared at his brother's broad back he knew he had made the right decision.

He was reading from a datapad and as T'lolt moved further into the G9 LRR, the two other Immortals who were with him looked up. They recognized him instantly for like Cha'talla there were not many Immortals who did not know who T'lolt was.

"General!" One hissed softly as he rose quickly to his feet.

Pa'cour did not look up or spring to his feet T'lolt saw. He saw his chest and back heave upwards in an almost defeated sigh and he lifted his head to look at the two Immortals. They were obviously security for him and Yuri and very well trained for they imposed themselves between him and Pa'cour.

"Leave us." Pa'cour spoke calmly.

"General... it is..." The younger soldier began.

"I know who it is In'tan." Pa'cour spoke as he rose now. "Leave us. Both of you."

T'lolt noticed that his brother spoke with a command tone in his voice. Very confident and firm. He had been Yuri's Immortal Captain for so long that he had finally learned what this role meant and how he was looked up to by so many other young Immortals. The two younger Immortals looked between each other briefly before moving in his direction. They looked at T'lolt with something akin to awe in their eyes before they moved past him and down the ramp of the G9. T'lolt looked back to his brother.

"Have you come to take your vengeance brother?" Pa'cour asked softly without turning around.

There were only seven years in age between the three brothers and they had often played and explored together as boys. T'lolt's mind flashed back many millennia to those days and he remembered them fondly. He and Cha'talla had spoke of them often as they sat under Kranek's moon and discussed their future and how they wanted Pa'cour to be part of it.

T'lolt moved forward into the G9 until he was standing behind his younger brother. They were the same height and equally massive in size. Pa'cour turned slowly now, intent on facing his brother with the honor he had thought lost so long ago. The honor his love for Yuri and the birth of his daughter had returned to him.

"There is no vengeance to take brother." T'lolt spoke softly.

Pa'cour met his eyes now. That they were brothers and kin to Cha'talla was without doubt or question. Their facial features and eye color were identical. Their bone spurs were a healthy white and placed in almost the exact location on both their faces. Just as they were with their older brother.

"You expect me to believe that?" Pa'cour asked him but with no malice in his voice.

T'lolt held up his hand and held out the data disc. "Martin Leonidas gave me two things my brother." He said. "The first he gave to me the day he saved my life on Lycavore. He gave me blood to heal in order that I might bury my sons. Then he gave me a means to exact my vengeance. Against the true enemies of our people."

"It was I... it was I who gave the order." Pa'cour spoke softly.

T'lolt looked at him. "The second thing he gave to me was not so very long ago when I rejoined him. It is part of why I travel with him now. Follow him as I do."

"What... what was this second thing?" Pa'cour asked.

T'lolt held out the disc further to him. "He gave me hope." He replied. "Hope for the... hope for the future. That one day... that one day our family would be reunited once more. He gave me this. It seems rescuing his mother was not the only thing Martin Leonidas did on that planet that day. He downloaded the entire High Coven database by remote from his ship. Or his people did." T'lolt activated the data disc and a small holographic transmission shimmered into view.

"Order was already given." The High Coven officer spoke dismissively. ***"You don't think you are truly in command here do you Colonel Pa'cour. You are an Immortal!"***

In that transmission Pa'cour snatched up the officer like a doll and he slammed the High Coven Colonel against the wall, tearing out his throat with barely any effort. The memories of that day came rushing back to him.

"They were my family you High Coven piece of filth!" Pa'cour's voice screamed out in the transmission. ***"My blood!"***

T'lolt looked at Pa'cour as he deactivated the disc. "You did not kill my sons brother." He said.

"I gave the order!" Pa'cour insisted.

T'lolt shook his head once more. "The order had already been given by Veldruk. The moment Cha'talla went against him and the High Lord tried to kill our brother the order went out. You tried to stop it."

"But I..." Pa'cour stammered feeling the shame fill him once more. Shame he had buried deep for so long. Shame at his actions. "I should never have done it to begin with!" He hissed.

T'lolt stepped closer to him, his own emotions threatening to break through. "I hated you Pa'cour." He said softly. "For years after that day I hated you. It was our brother Cha'talla who finally convinced me that no matter what had happened between us so long ago... none of that would have made you do such a thing. He made me see that you would never betray your blood. And you did not!"

"But I did T'lolt!" Pa'cour almost shouted. "I..."

T'lolt lifted the data disc slightly higher. "This tells me that you remembered your blood." He said evenly. "This tells me what Cha'talla and then I believed once the pain of their passing was gone. You would have disobeyed your orders to save me and my sons. You were doing that very thing until you discovered that you were not the one who was truly in charge on Lycavore. You did not kill my sons brother... Veldruk did that. All these years... all of this time you have carried a shame that is not yours. We knew this is why you did not come forward. Cha'talla is... our brother is bonded to a dragon now you know."

Pa'cour looked at him with wide eyes. "What?" He gasped.

T'lolt nodded. "He is a very different Cha'talla now. Esther opened his eyes to so many things. She is the Matriarch of our people now... who would have ever thought that?" T'lolt shook his head and chuckled softly. "A pureblood vampire as Matriarch of the Akruxian people. You would like her Pa'cour. She is stubborn and pig headed and smarter than anyone I have ever known. She and our brother... you should see the fights they have had through the years! He has chased her through our village on Kranek many times! He never catches her. Yet she loves him more furiously than anything I have ever seen. And he loves her just as deeply." T'lolt moved even closer. "Just as I now love Ir'qua."

"Ir'qua?" Pa'cour asked.

T'lolt smiled and nodded. "Three thousand years my junior and the most beautiful flower I have ever known. She had to beat me in my head with a tree branch to see my feelings for her. When I surrendered to those feelings I knew I was truly healed. We have two strong sons and a stunning daughter. I understand... I understand that you and Yuri have a child as well. A young daughter."

Pa'cour lifted his eyes and gazed at his brother. "Onera." He said with a nod.

T'lolt tilted his head slightly. "You named her for our grandmother?" He asked.

Pa'cour nodded his head. "Yes. She is... she is like a shining ray of light to both Yuri and I." He said proudly. "She... she was born with some of the skills that the Leonidas children possess. We... we asked Androcles to train her. She departed with him before we left to come here."

T'lolt nodded his head in approval. "Then she will return to you far deadlier and much wiser than when she left." He said. "There are few like Androcles Leonidas anywhere in the Union. When he is finished, she will be more lethal than you or I. And she will know the honor of family and blood."

Pa'cour felt a momentary pang of shame return and he shook his head quickly. "T'lolt I... I must bear the..."

That is when T'lolt did what he had waited to do for many years now. He reached up with his large hands and grabbed his brother's face. He pulled him tight to him and stared into his dark eyes. Pa'cour did not back away or fight him. If this was how it was to end, then better it be at the hands of his brother. His family.

"Leave the past behind you Pa'cour my brother!" T'lolt hissed. "Just as Cha'talla and I have done! It has no place in our future! We have begun anew! The moment Cha'talla went against Veldruk he set our people on a new path! A better path. And look what it has brought us?"

"I... I do not know if I..." Pa'cour stammered the words.

T'lolt pulled him closer. "You already have brother! Your feelings for Yuri! What you are doing now! You let go of the past already and now it is time for you to fully embrace the future! We want our brother back! Cha'talla and I... you are our family Pa'cour! Our brother! There is nothing stronger than blood! For that will carry us through the millennia to come! Throw this shame you carry aside! It is not yours any longer. It never was!" T'lolt then surrendered to the very un-Immortal like emotions that Ir'qua had brought out in him over the last two decades. He pulled Pa'cour into an embrace that would have cracked the ribs of a smaller man. "You have been... and always will be our brother! And we... we love you!"

Pa'cour closed his eyes at those words. He knew what love was now. He had discovered it with Yuri. He loved her with every breath he took and he knew she loved him just as deeply. Yet the love of family was always powerful and always present. He surrendered to the emotions just as T'lolt had and he embraced his older brother just as tightly as T'lolt held him. After a long moment T'lolt squeezed his shoulders and pushed him to arms length.

"Come to Kranek Pa'cour. See what we have built there. Our people flourish." He said.

Pa'cour shook his head quickly. "Yuri and I... we have... we have started something T'lolt." He said. "We have vowed to... our redemption lies in our deeds now. We must insure that Narice succeeds. No matter what it takes."

T'lolt nodded his head slowly. "I understand." He said softly. "Know that you are always welcome Pa'cour."

"Will my Blessed Wife be just as welcome brother?" He asked.

T'lolt nodded his head. "Always. We are all different now. I could see that this was not the same Yuri the moment she stepped off the ship. Others will see it too. And they will know."

"Perhaps... perhaps one day T'lolt." Pa'cour said softly.

T'lolt nodded his head slowly. "We all travel different paths now." He said. "No matter what we do or where we are... we are still brothers. Still blood. And we will always hold that above all else."

Pa'cour gripped his arms tightly, almost painfully. "I will honor this always T'lolt. On the soul of my daughter I will honor this. Just as I have taught her."

"The day will come soon when we will all be together." T'lolt said. "I know Cha'talla will want to embrace our brother once more. When that day comes, we will sit as we did when our father was still alive, around a fire and telling stories not of the past... but of the future to come. And what we will make of it."

Pa'cour nodded his head with a smile. "I... I would like that." He said.

T'lolt nodded. "As would I." He said. "As would I." T'lolt cut his eyes to the side when he sensed the figure on the ramp and he smiled. "You can come out of hiding Tony my friend." He said.

Tony stepped from the shadows of the ramp and moved forward sheepishly. "Sorry." He spoke. "The skipper wanted me to make sure that everything was kosher."

T'lolt looked at him and nodded and turned back to Pa'cour. "Yes my friend. Yes it is." He said. "I introduce my brother Pa'cour. Brother... this is Master Chief Tony Winfield. We are what Martin Leonidas calls his heavy hitters."

Tony moved up without hesitation and held out his hand. "Pleasure to meet T'lolt's brother." He said.

Pa'cour blinked several times and looked at the hand of the huge Lycavorian before grasping it. Tony's handshake was firm and confident without a hint of fear or hesitation. He looked at T'lolt. "What is this... kosher?" He asked.

T'lolt laughed gently. "One of Martin's colorful phrases." He answered. "His way of making sure that our reunion did not go badly."

Tony nodded his head embarrassed. "Marty likes to make sure his people are good to go Colonel Pa'cour." He said. "T'lolt is just as much a member of our team now as I am. We look after each other."

Pa'cour looked at his brother. "His team?" He asked.

T'lolt nodded. "I owed a debt to him after Lycavore and I repaid that debt in his eyes when we protected his daughter Normya. I wanted to travel with him... see what all the fuss was about." T'lolt grinned. "I swear to you brother, it has not been dull for a single moment."

Tony chuckled. "Now that is the truth. The Skipper doesn't do it on purpose... but he tends to attracts trouble. Lots of it."

"It is his charming personality!" T'lolt quipped with a laugh and Tony nodded his head. They all turned when they heard the shuffling of feet and they watched as Yuri moved up the ramp slowly.

Pa'cour moved without hesitation and reached out his hand for her. Yuri took it and he drew her close as T'lolt watched. Yuri folded into his arms, pressing up against his hard body without care who saw and T'lolt knew for sure then. "T'lolt... you..."

T'lolt stepped forward... his eyes upon Yuri. He knew what this woman was capable of. She had proven many times in the past that she was a decisive thinker. Even under the control of that vile Xaxon, she could still be dangerous. There were not many who did not fear Yuri Moran only a year ago, but looking at her now, T'lolt knew that she was different. In her eyes and face he could still see the capacity for decisive and cruel action if needed, but that was now tempered by knowledge and wisdom and love. If ever there was an example of love saving a person then Yuri standing before him now was it.

"You hold my brother's heart and soul within your grasp Yuri." T'lolt spoke softly to her watching as she turned her face upwards and she looked at Pa'cour with bright and adoring dark eyes. "Follow the path you now walk without fear or regret. Do not question or doubt who you have become. Embrace it. And know you are now a member of Cha'talla's clan and family. We will always have your back."

Yuri turned back to look at him. "There is much I need to atone for T'lolt." She said softly.

"We... Yuri." Pa'cour corrected her. "That we need to atone for."

T'lolt nodded his head. "Perhaps." He spoke. "But I believe that when the full story... the final truth reaches the eyes and ears of so many... you will be surprised at what you find."

Yuri nodded. "We shall see." She said softly. "We shall see."

T'lolt looked at Pa'cour and reached out to grasp the arm that was not around Yuri's waist. He squeezed it tightly. "Remember Pa'cour my brother." He said firmly. "From this day forward... we make our own future. And we do not reside in a past that has no place where we are going. From now on we make a new history."

Pa'cour gripped T'lolt's arm tightly and nodded. "To the new future T'lolt. And all it will bring to us."

T'lolt nodded and stepped back. "I will leave you now. There is much all of us have to do." He said.

Pa'cour looked at him. "T'lolt... when you..."

T'lolt shook his head and held out the disc to him. "You will find our brother's personal COM channel on that disc Pa'cour. You do not need me to contact him for you. He has waited over four thousand years to see and talk to you once more. When you are ready... he will be waiting."

Pa'cour squeezed the disc in his hand and nodded. "Go with the Gods brother." He spoke finally.

T'lolt chuckled softly. "I go with Martin Leonidas brother." He said proudly. "The Gods tend to lean in his favor quite often. I think they enjoy watching him react to what others do and hearing him use his colorful metaphors to describe them."

Even Yuri could not hold back the soft laugh that escaped her lips and she nodded her head in agreement. "He does have a way with words no doubt." She said.

"Be safe and proud brother." T'lolt told him. "Be safe and proud."

"And you T'lolt." Pa'cour answered. "And you."

T'lolt nodded and turned without another word and headed down the ramp with Tony falling in behind him. Yuri looked up into Pa'cour's face and placed her hand flat against his chest over his heart.

"Pa'cour my love?" She questioned.

Pa'cour looked down into her face and smiled. "All of these years I have run from a shame that was not mine." He said softly. "I no longer have to run my Blessed Wife."

Yuri's face beamed in happiness. "Neither of us have to run anymore." She stated.

Pa'cour took a deep breath. "We are finished here?" He asked.

Yuri nodded. "Carisia is returning with us. She is saying goodbye... but yes. We have a plan and Martin has agreed to support us."

"Plan?" Pa'cour asked.

Yuri nodded again. "He will have others sent to help Lidene crack my mother's files. When we have discovered what we need to know then it will be up to us."

"What do you mean?" Pa'cour asked her.

Yuri looked at him. "We will find these clones... and any others like them. I gave Martin my word that we would find them."

"And when we do?" Pa'cour asked.

"He has asked that I act in his stead... and remove them from the equation." Yuri replied. "Any equation."

"And what did he say to your request if we do this?" Pa'cour asked.

Yuri looked at him. "He said he would think about it." She answered. "He didn't reject it outright Pa'cour. As much as he likes others to believe he is just a brute, Martin Leonidas is far from it. He thinks outside the box. Sometimes decades into the future. I think he will speak to Androcles and his wives and he will ultimately agree." She said. "It could only tie us together even more than we are now and ultimately make all of us stronger for it."

Pa'cour nodded. "That it would."

Yuri looked at him with bright eyes and smiled. "Besides... that is in the future. We will need to work on making that happen on our end you know?"

Pa'cour grinned at her. "I can think of no more pleasurable a possibility."

"Neither can I." Yuri said as she reached up on her tiptoes and kissed him softly. "Neither can I."

"...can stay with us Carisia. Androcles and the others will be joining us in several weeks anyway." Isabella told her as she stood beside Martin and held Carisia's hands.

Carisia shook her head with a smile. "I need to return." She answered. "My place is with Andro, Sadi and the others."

Martin stepped closer and reached up to run his fingers down her cheek. Carisia basked in the attention for at one point she had not believed that Martin Leonidas would accept her. Now she had no doubts however.

“Remember that you are my son’s wife and mate.” Martin told her. “An extension of his will and purpose. Each of you are a part of him Carisia. And you carry a part of him within each of you. Never doubt your place among our family. Or the influence that you now wield.”

Carisia reached up and covered his large hand on her cheek with her own much smaller one. “I will not.” She stated.

“It would be understandable if you...” Isabella began but Carisia shook her head.

“Andro took a leap of faith when he did what he did.” She stated. “He said we needed to leave behind the past for it does not have a place in our future. We should learn from it, take wisdom from it, but not let it rule what the future will bring. She is my mother... and no matter what has happened before now... she is not the same person. That woman was controlled by Xaxon. My mother is not. Now... now she is the mother that I was meant to have. As Lucia was meant to have. And I wish to discover all I can about the person she was always meant to be.”

Martin leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Then go with the Gods daughter.” He said softly. “And keep my son out of trouble will you.”

Carisia laughed softly. “I will try.” She said.

Martin drew Isabella to him as Carisia turned and began to make her way up the ramp of the G9. Bella turned and looked up into his face.

“Are you going to tell us what is happening Martin?” She asked.

Martin met her eyes and nodded. “When we get back. All of you need to hear it at the same time.”

“And then?” Isabella asked.

“Then we will need to make some decisions.” Martin told her.

CABELIR
KAVALIAN HOMEWORLD
CAPITAL OF PASIRAN
KAVALIAN MILITARY COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

Keleru was silent as he stared out the large window of the conference room waiting for the remainder of his most senior military officers to file in and take their seats. The city was quiet now, the sun having set three hours ago and now the twin moons rising high into the sky. Keleru’Puut had watched Pasirran grow from practically nothing into the great city it now was. His hold over the Kavalian people had been absolute for more millennia than he could even recall now. It did not matter to him that only those loyal to him held any real influence or power with the city. It didn’t matter to him that only a select few held the true wealth, and the common people had simply an illusion. None of these things mattered to him, only maintaining his hold on power in whatever manner he could. With the Puma Bane Commandos under his direct command, no one and nothing had ever challenged his rule. They had removed any and all of the threats to his power and control through the years, and in some cases quite brutally and even in public. Keleru ruled by fear he knew, but fear was a great motivator and it instilled loyalty in even the most hardly of men. As the years passed he had made a show of bending to the will of his people in some instances, though none of the changes he had ever promised came to be.

Now Keleru’Puut felt something he had never felt before. He was concerned. He was very concerned that it was all coming apart.

Keleru looked up when he saw the shadow of his nephew appear next to him. “Mata?” He inquired.

“The senior officers are all present now Uncle.” Mata told him in a soft whisper.

Keleru nodded and turned in his chair to look at the men in this room with him. His senior and most loyal supporters. They commanded the largest Prides within the Kavalian Federation. They were the most wealthy and the most powerful. And like him, they had the most to lose.

“I thank you all for coming.” Keleru began as his eyes touched all of the men at the table. “These past weeks have been hard on all of us. I instructed several of you to concentrate your duties on providing information for this briefing. You are the most senior Pride Leaders and military officers within the whole of

the Kavalian Federation. When all of the information has been presented we will need to make some hard choices.” Keleru told them. “Admiral Menot is also joining us via holotransmission from Hadaria. I will delay no longer and remember that this day we need hard facts and not glossy lies.”

The men in the room glanced among one another at the sternness of his voice, doing exactly what Keleru wanted them to do. He glanced at the man to his immediate left. “In the absence of Marshall Pusintin, I asked Admiral Skio to act as interim Marshall. I tasked him with gathering as much information and data that he could on Pian’Nruarani and the forces and support he has been able to obtain in recent weeks and correlating it all together.” Keleru looked at the man calmly and nodded. “Skio... please.”

The man returned the nod and rose to his feet. He took a deep breath and moved to the large star chart behind him.

“As you all know, the traitor Pian’Nruarani broadcast a pirated message from deep within Union territory and into Kavalian space. We do not know how they were able to supersede our secure COM channels and network. Nruarani declared that he was freely elected by the leaders of over forty Prides as the Interim Leader of the only true Kavalian government. They have now established a working government of Pride leaders as well as a rebel military force. The Union and the High Coven have officially recognized his rebel government, as well as half a dozen assorted free and independent alliances and governments throughout the quadrant. Most of them are small and insignificant, but it does give his rebel government some measure of political clout.” Skio told them all as he looked around the table. “This came as a complete surprise to our Intelligence Network, as we had assumed Nruarani and those who followed him were either dead or at the very least being held by the Lycavorians in prison and being interrogated. As you all saw from the transmission, this was not the case. Our few agents within Lycavorian space were equally unaware of his intentions or the support of the Union until after the fact. We still have several assets in place within the Lycavorian Union, however by the time we learned of what was happening from them, the Nruarani Pride and those that aligned with them were able to evacuate all of their Pride members and the vast majority of their major material assets out of Kavalian space. As it stands right now, with the information that we have been given or have discovered ourselves, it appears that Pride Shan and Pride Kazi are the largest of those that have openly aligned with Pride Nruarani.”

“Skio...” A man asked openly. “How solid is your information?”

“I won’t go into details... but we do still have several agents within Union space as well as on Earth itself. One or two of them highly placed.” Skio answered. “The information I will be presenting is as accurate as it can get.”

“Do we dare continue to trust those who have betrayed their own people? Who continue to betray their own people?” Another man asked. “What if they are discovered? The Union has the Krypteria, and they do not play games when it comes to traitors.”

“Allow me to worry about the reliability of the agents providing this information. And the continued precision of their reports.” Keleru spoke up. “For now, know that I have reviewed it all and I trust in its accuracy.”

Skio nodded to Keleru and then continued. “All told there are perhaps forty odd Prides that have openly joined with Nruarani in declaring themselves free and who are supporting this outlaw Kavalian government. We do not know as of yet how many Prides are secretly supporting him and the other outlaw rebels. I have instructed the Puma Bane officers, with Prefect Keleru’s authorization, to begin an immediate seizure of all remaining property and assets of all those Prides who have sided with Nruarani. As well as keeping tabs on those that we might suspect as being loyal to him. Unfortunately, it does appear as if they are much better organized than we envisioned. Pride Nruarani and Pride Shan have completely dismantled and stripped their entire ship building apparatus. Their bases and shipyards are abandoned and to be quite honest, they took nearly everything that was not secure in some manner. They even took some of the major buildings from their home planets.”

“Buildings?” Another officer asked. “How do you take an entire building?”

Skio shrugged his broad shoulders. “I do not know... but they managed this.” He replied. “This is not a great hindrance to us as a whole. Pride Nruarani had yet to begin supplying the Kavalian Fleet with their new *HUNTRESS*-Class Frigates, but we have obtained the plans and schematics from other sources and will be able to build them without their help. Operational re-tasking of three shipyards has already begun to begin building

the ships. The first wave of these ships should begin hitting the front line fleets within eight months. We estimate that Nruarani's full complement of ships, to include those from the other Prides supporting him does not exceed six hundred ships. Among those, perhaps nineteen *GREAT SOUL*-Class Command ships." Skio spoke.

"Then we need to find them and crush them quickly." A senior ground General spoke up now.

Skio nodded. "I would tend to agree in most cases General Fersi..." He said. "However it is not the number of ships he has that is the main concern. It is the logistical support he now has that is worrisome."

"Logistical support?" Fersi asked. "What could he have? A few small portable shipyards and perhaps a main base on a moon somewhere?"

Skio shook his head. "If only that were the case." He said. "According to our asset within the Union, the following list of material support has been made available to Nruarani from both the Union and the High Coven. It is coming across to your pads now. They have seized Rizon Four on the outer edge of our border with the Limian fools as their base of operations within Kavalian space."

"Skio... we know where they are?" Another Admiral spoke up now. "Why have we not sent our fleets to crush them?"

One of the ground commanders gasped and looked up from the data pad where he had been reading the report. "Two *PROMETHUS*-Class Command Stations?" He nearly choked as he spoke.

Skio nodded his head somberly. "It appears Rizon Four is rich in the mineral Ostronium. It is something that the Union uses for their military. We never considered it worth anything so it was never mined. We do not yet know what the Union uses it for. Our researchers say it has no real practical value. Apparently, Nruarani agreed to several trade agreements with the Union already. The Union fronted him an enormous amount of riyal, a credit line they call it, and he made purchases."

"Purchases?" The General exclaimed. "He purchased two of the Union's front line Heavy Command Stations! Just one of them could have defended Rizon Four from everything short of a full fledged attack. Two of them will make it next to impossible without fully committing two thirds of our Fleet Groups to the attack!"

Skio nodded his head in agreement. "You are correct very General. However, the two Command stations are not all he purchased." Skio held up the pad. "The information we were able to obtain from our agents indicates that he negotiated for at least ten Lycavorian Union Resource and Supply Stations and half a dozen *RENDER*-Class Portable shipyards. These yards are capable of supporting and repairing his collection of medium and heavy cruisers easily. Also he has acquired the use of three Hadarian Orbital Field Hospitals. These will undoubtedly be staffed by Hadarian Healers since it is they who handle all of the Union's medical facilities."

"The Hadarians are helping him?" A voice asked.

Admiral Menot looked up from the pad he was reading in his office on Hadaria. The image was somewhat fuzzy since it was a military channel and Kavalian communications relays were not Union quality.

"If the hospitals are staffed by Hadarians it will be those who refused to return to Hadaria at Buonau's order." He spoke up.

"How many followed her order to return?" Another officer asked.

Menot shook his head. "None of those actively involved in the Union military responded to her directive. She has implemented an accelerated training program here on Hadaria for those who were already training. They can not actually take the field until they have finished their schooling and Ascended. The next Ascension Ceremony is scheduled for five months from now. When the Nebula is at its peak."

"Can they not make it happen sooner Menot?" Keleru asked now.

Menot shook his head. "My apologies Prefect... but no. I will admit that I did not have any idea on how the Hadarians were able to do what they do. I was skeptical at first about what she told me... but since being here Buonau has given me quite a bit of schooling on this. The nebula is at its peak twice a year. This is the time when it saturates one portion of their planet with intense metaphysical radiation. This is where they have built their Ascension temple. The ceremony is conducted here. I won't go into small details, but without ascending... it would be like sending partially trained field medics to perform battlefield tasks. It can not be rushed."

"And you are certain she is not just misleading you?" Keleru asked.

Again Menot shook his head. "No Prefect. She has been very forthcoming as I said. She truly hates Anja Leonidas and the path she perceived Anja Leonidas was taking their people down. She would like nothing better

than to see her taken prisoner and used like a whore in the Brothels on Nefoa. As long as she has our support for her religious government she will give us what we want.”

Skio looked at the men. “The new High Coven Empress has also given freely of support. What little they can spare.” He told them. “An offer of several smaller portable shipyards was made and accepted. While these are not of Union capabilities... they will be able to move them around much easier and they can fully support the large number of frigates that Nruarani has under his command.”

“We should punish them for that!” Another officer barked out.

Keleru nodded. “I agree... however... the Union still has ten full Fleet Groups supporting the High Coven. With their Fleet Commander Riall in personal command of them. We thought they would withdraw back to Lycavorian Union space after the new vampire wench took power, but apparently the oldest son Androcles has an affinity for the vampire worms. And the new Empress is now the wife to his brother. He has offered them these ships and materials for as long as they are needed and there is no sign they plan to exit High Coven space any time soon.”

“We still have them outnumbered Prefect.” Another Admiral spoke. “By three to one odds easily.”

Skio nodded and continued after looking at Keleru and receiving the nod. “This is true... but these are not second class Union ships and personnel.” He spoke. “These are battle tested and proven ships and soldiers. You saw what they did to our fleets that attempted to punish the vampire scum before. We can not risk another loss such as that. Admiral Riall is their foremost Fleet Commander... and his tactics and actions during the Evolli War speak to the fact that he is not against unorthodox methods. He is also the overall leader of their military, and second to only the King. If he is present in the theater of operation then you can be assured the Union, and by association the High Coven, will not be caught off guard or do something stupid. That also goes to the remaining High Coven officers. Fleet Admiral Pontal is their most experienced and respected field commander. A man who gave us fits during our war with them. He and Riall have joined forces and mixed the different units so that their abilities complement each other.”

An older General leaned forward in his chair now. “We can not fight on three fronts.” He spoke wisely. “Not even we can sustain such operations. Skio... why has the Union not fought us directly? King Leonidas, the Crown Prince, even the Prime Minister has said a state of war now exists between us. Why have they not come after us directly as they did before?”

Skio nodded his head. “I wondered that myself for a time General Kacur.” He spoke. “The operations they conducted were quite successful.”

“Successful?” Another Admiral spoke. “They decimated over six hundred of our front line warships with this new battleship they have. A ship that they took from a planet within our own borders. A ship that is far more advanced and powerful than anything we can put in the field. A ship that has since disappeared and we have no idea where it may reappear. They then utterly destroyed our main cloning facility with another new class of ships that is again, far beyond anything we can field. The main Cloning facilities which, I might add, we thought were untouchable due to their location within Kavalian space. That does not include the deep strike mission they conducted here on our homeworld right under our very noses to secure the release of a few dozen whores used by our officers. I would say they were more than successful Skio. I would say they were toying with us.”

Keleru nodded his head in agreement much to the surprise of the gathered men and he did not go off on an angry and volatile rage. “All very true.” He said.

“Prefect... how is it that they knew this ship was there when we did not?” Another officer asked. “How did they even have the knowledge to operate such an advanced warship? It is most certainly not of Union design. How did we not know about these new ships that they did build? Just two of them wiped out a force three times their number with barely any losses. Shouldn't the assets we have within Union space known about this?”

Keleru looked at him taking no offense at the question. “These two instances were not within the abilities of our assets to acquire intelligence on.” He replied. “They were taken by surprise just as we were. We have known for some time that the Lycavorian Union is utterly ruthless on security. We wrongly assumed that because we could not obtain such information that nothing like this was happening. I should have known better.” Keleru rose to his feet and moved to the large window overlooking the city. “I will freely admit to making some major miscalculations in recent months. I believed information and assertions told to me that we

could not confirm. I believed them because I felt they were a quicker way to making the Union fall apart from within. They were errors. Massive errors that I alone bear the responsibility for.” He spoke to the window as the men listened. “The plan to take Leonidas’s second Elf Queen was ill conceived and should never have been attempted. The information we had was accurate to a point but we did not know the more in depth details of how the Union government is set up. We also did not anticipate the response by the civilians within the Union when we thought we had killed Leonidas and his youngest Queen in Sparta. Several of our Puma Bane Strike teams and their members were butchered by armed civilians before they even had a chance to escape. We thought their deaths would send the government and people into a tailspin.” He turned back around to look at the men. “I did not anticipate such a smooth transition to the oldest son. I also did not expect how large a mistake that was. We acted without having any real Intelligence on the oldest son and we paid dearly for it. No one could have predicted he would do what he did. Blowing up the Jump Gates around Hadaria; planning the deep strike attacks as he did against our clone facilities. Destroying the moon to keep us from invading along the Limian border was also something I never thought he would do. I underestimated him by far. After seeing what he did to our Ambassador at that meeting I realized that he is different. His father is different. His younger pureblood brother Denali, I think his name is, he is different.” Keleru looked at the men at the table. “They have a power that I cannot explain. And until we learn how to deal with it... we need to avoid them.”

“What are you suggesting Prefect?” a General asked.

Keleru moved back to the table. “Skio?”

“As General Togark has said... we cannot sustain a war on three fronts.” Skio told them. “It is logistically impossible. Therefore... we will be pulling our forces from High Coven space and leaving only a token force in the area that we control.” Skio told them. “We will then direct that power into finding and killing Nruarani and his forces.”

“And the Union support he is getting?” A man asked. “Do we target Union facilities?”

Skio shook his head. “The Prefect believes, and after reviewing all the data I concur, that if we avoid direct confrontation with the Union, then they will not intercede as we wipe out Nruarani and his rebels.” He said.

“You actually believe this?” A General asked.

“We have discovered from our assets in Union space that such an order does exist. If the situation becomes untenable for Nruarani in any way, he has an open invitation to retreat back across the border with his rebel supporters where the Union will protect him.” Skio spoke.

Skio let a smile escape his lips as he looked at the gathered men. “We are going to make things untenable for him.”

AMANUCE PROTECTORATE HOMEWORLD CAPITAL CITY OF LORENT

Dutkne watched Denali’s face as they flew in the hovercar over the expanse of the city below. This trip had been unexpected, but not something they could not accommodate easily. The buzz was already about that he was here. It appeared that the Vanari news people got hold of the information that Denali was departing for the Protectorate homeworld with Coryn Re Mydala and others. That Coryn was accompanying him must have stuck in the ribs of other SBR members who Dutkne knew had wanted to visit Amanuce in the past but were denied. Once the Vanari news organizations got the information, it quickly found its way to the many News outlets here on Amanuce. Lorent was abuzz with the knowledge that he was here, to many this signaling that his brother the Crown Prince was not far off. Dutkne knew better, but Denali would tell him what was going on when the time was right. He was much like Andro and his face was unreadable at the moment.

Dutkne had been initially surprised at how easily he had fallen into the role he now held as Andro’s Praetorian Mage. He had always hated politics and soon he would not have to deal with it anymore aside from small bits. Discovering Androcles and the connection they shared was a brilliant light to him. Though five centuries older than Androcles, he discovered that they had more in common than anyone suspected. He did not

know why it had worked out this way, but Dutkne did not avoid or turn away from what coursed through him now. He knew Andro nearly as well as his wives and mates, and what they could do together would only grow in power as they trained and the years passed. His grandfather had told him this when the Etheric connection between them was discovered, and for once in his life Dutkne did not dismiss what Wayonn told him. He accepted it fully. He was much calmer now, more patient, but also much more prone to fits of emotion just like Androcles. Especially concerning things he was passionate about.

The Lycavorian people on Amanuce were ecstatic about the coming merger; all the polls conducted indicating that it was viewed with a ninety-nine percent approval rating. Everyone knew this day would come one day, but Dutkne had not believed that the people would accept it so readily however. It was very nice to see that he was more than wrong.

Arduri sat beside Deni, gripping his hand tightly as she looked out the window of the car and viewed the surroundings below with excitement. She had never been to the Protectorate homeworld and this trip was going to be one of discovery no matter the real reason for it. At least for her. Dutkne could see that Caliria was also excited about being here, but she kept her emotions more in check. He knew without question that there was something different about both of the sisters, and he had an idea what that was, but it was not his place to bring it up. The blue of Caliria's skin was vibrant and healthy and no matter what had happened to her in the past months she had recovered fully. No doubt that Androcles's love had aided that more than anything else, but she was a strong willed woman to begin with Dutkne knew. Caliria was also now a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union and she would soon discover that she had far more influence here on Amanuce than even she believed. Coryn had changed as well over the last months, and it was a change that only meant good things for him and the Lycavorian people. Dutkne had an inkling of why Denali wanted to come here so quickly, but he would let Denali tell them, though he had already laid the groundwork. Being connected to Androcles in such a way granted him the insight and perception to know many things that others did not. It was something he was growing accustomed to quickly.

"I tried to keep our News organizations from finding out you were coming but it didn't work out too well." Dutkne spoke with a small smile. "It seems they have their own code of ethics and once the Vanari found out, the people here found out within an hour."

Denali turned to him with a smile. "I didn't think it was going to be a secret." He said.

"Care to fill me in?" Dutkne asked unable to keep his inquisitive mind at bay. "It's not everyday that a member of the Vanari Senior Board of Regents comes to Amanuce. If I am not mistaken, Devra was the last one."

Coryn looked at him with a sheepish grin. "There were quite a few who were not happy with this trip. Especially those who we have incriminating evidence against." He said with a relaxed voice. "Thankfully it happened out of the blue and they did not have the time to stop it."

Dutkne nodded his head. "Understandable I suppose." He commented. "But do they fear you coming here because you might discover something to use against them? Or is it because you are now out of their reach and can not be harmed?"

"I'm guessing it is a little bit of both." Coryn answered.

"Are we so sure father is out of their reach as you say Dutkne?" Caliria asked. "As high up as we believe this goes... perhaps they are not as fearful as we believe."

Dutkne nodded his head confidently. "Perhaps... but my people are not as limited as the Vanari in what they are able to accomplish without offending someone's sensibilities." He replied. "Everyone that we even remotely suspect of being involved in the slave ring is being monitored around the clock. They will not be able to make a move against him without us knowing about it within moments of the plan being hatched."

"They will not try anything now." Deni spoke now. "They will not try anything for fear of exposing themselves because they believe they are still hidden."

Dutkne nodded. "Very true." He said. "I will assume then that this visit has something to do with the fact that Caliria and Arduri both are now part wolf?"

Arduri and Caliria looked at him quickly and he smiled. "It's not something you can hide ladies. At least not from a Lycavorian." Dutkne answered. He glanced at Coren quickly. "I hope I did..."

Coren shook his head. "No." He stated. "I am aware of it." He answered. "Not sure if I understand it completely... but I know of it. I think part of me already knew."

“It’s not a bad thing sir.” Dutkne said.

“No. No... I don’t think it is either Dutkne.” Coren answered. “I’m just... I’m just trying to absorb everything as it comes to me. Much of what I have learned these last months has caught me completely and utterly by surprise. These revelations have made me stop and rethink my entire view of life. It’s a bit overwhelming.”

Dutkne nodded. “I imagine it is.” He said. He watched as Caliria reached out and took her father’s hand within hers. “Thankfully you have lots of support.” He told him.

Coren nodded as Arduri reached across the car and touched his knee. “Yes I do.” He said with a smile. “Yes I do.”

“Nirilo will meet us at the complex.” Dutkne said seeing Coren meet his eyes. “Tonight I will show all of you the best place to get food in the entire city. Of course... I am biased since it is my mother’s eatery. But she serves Vanari food as well as Lycavorian food.”

“Vanari food?” Coren asked. “That is strange isn’t it?”

Dutkne looked at him. “Not after what you will see Coren Re Mydala. Not after what you see.”

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
CAPITAL CITY OF ONELD

Aviel Em'mor sat quietly in his sprawling office overlooking the huge river that cut through the northern part of Icarava’s capital city Oneld. His status and rank as a *Filkiati*, or Justice of the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*, allowed him a private office of massive proportions and one with a staggering view of Oneld’s beauty to go with it. He was reviewing the files given to him by Chalith and Shalu and to say that he was aghast at what he had read and seen would be a very mild reaction. He had never believed the Darastrixi, his people, would be capable of such things, or allowing them to happen to their own people. The Darastrixi Maidens taken from Icarava by the Scourge were removed ostensibly under the guise of a diplomatic program to improve relations with the Scourge. This is what had been told to the many parents and families who accepted this arrangement. None of them knew the truth of it. None of them were even aware of the horrors their daughters had been enduring, were enduring, if they were even still alive.

It had all been a lie.

One of Shalu’s most promising students had been one of the twenty Maidens chosen a century ago. That young woman had the presence of mind to implant a hidden transmitter in her right eye. It had recorded hours upon hours of horrible experiments and savage rapes as each of the Maiden females were subjected to hideous treatment. Aviel now did not doubt Chalith’s word that the Scourge were obviously trying to discover the gene that Laren Ti'shara possessed. They also seemed to be trying to breed a combination of Scourge and Darastrixi offspring, yet so far none of these evil spawns had ever survived for very long. The offspring were vile and wicked creatures, yet the Scourge Elites had mocked and enjoyed raping the Darastrixi Maidens until they were impregnated. It had happened over and over again, each Maiden raped countless times until they conceived and then they were hooked to horrible machines to speed the births. When the offspring came to term and were discovered to be disgusting creatures, they were destroyed and the Maiden females were once more tossed into the breeding holds to have it happen all over again. The recordings Aviel had been watching had nearly brought him to tears and when Shalu’s student could no longer endure the agony after thirty years, she threw herself off a towering bridge they were crossing at the time. Aviel had wept then. Wept for the loss of such innocence and what his leaders had accepted in order to avoid conflict with the Scourge. Aviel had no doubts that if their people saw this transmission in its entirety, there would be a unified mass call for total and savage vengeance in its complete form.

Aviel quickly looked up and across the sprawling office area when the door to his inner sanctum slid open and his *memamosal* of nearly fifty thousand years strode into the large room. He reigned in his emotions and put on a happy face. His union with Nahko had been arranged by his parents and hers when they were still

within the adolescent stages of their lives, but they had quickly grown to love each other through the many years together. Nahko Em'mor was now the Senior Assistant Director of the largest and most prestigious Medical Center on Icarava, and perhaps one of the top ten physicians anywhere on their planet. He could tell just from her body language that she was excited and he quickly pushed his emotions to the back and set aside the data scroll as she crossed the office area quickly and settled into the chair across from his huge desk. She had been here many times in the past and his guards always escorted her directly to his office without pause.

“Aviel... what... do you know... I...” Nahko couldn't help but stammer as she tried to gain control of her racing heart and thoughts.

Aviel rose to his feet with a smile and moved to the long counter to the right of his desk and quickly poured his *memamosal* a glass of her favorite juice. Nahko always seemed to have trouble focusing her words when she was excited about something. It was a trait he had adored about her from the very beginning of their life together. It was a life they had shared for nearly sixty thousand years now. After thirteen children Nahko could still stir the passion within him with just a look. He moved back to where she sat and held out the glass for her to take. She did so without question and he settled into the plush chair beside her.

“Breath Nahko.” He said with a smile. “I do not question that you are just as stunned as I was when I met them.”

Nahko glanced at him as she sipped the juice. “Stunned?” She gasped. “That is not... that is not a word I would use to describe what I have just seen and examined.”

Aviel nodded with a smile. “No doubt.” He said. “What have you discovered Nahko?” He asked her. “And hold nothing back my wife. I need to know it all so that I can do what needs to be done in order to protect them.”

Nahko breathed deeply and took another long pull of the juice before setting the glass on the table between them. “Where to begin?” She said softly.

“The medical part of it would be a good place.” Aviel spoke.

Nahko looked at him and her eyes narrowed as they always did just before she slugged him. This time was no different as her hand snapped out and she slapped his face gently. Their lives had never been dull and Nahko Em'mor would not trade her love for Aviel for anything in the galaxy. They had accomplished so much, not to mention they had raised thirteen beautiful children together. Nahko had seen something in his eyes all those millennia ago. Something that told her a life with this man would be filled with devotion and love. She had not been the least bit disappointed.

“Do not rush me!” She hissed almost playfully.

Aviel grinned and felt more and more refreshed as Nahko's unique presence filled him and chased away the horrors of what he had been viewing for the last two hours. She could instill such peace in him. No matter what had vexed him through the years, simply holding her in his arms could sooth his soul. “Of course not.” He said finally.

Nahko took a deep breath and held out one of the three data scrolls she carried. He took it from her but did not activate it. He wanted the word of his wife for she would include her own insight for him while the scroll would have just her professional medical observations. Aviel had learned long ago that Nahko surpassed him in not only intelligence but also insightfulness and many times through the years he had questioned if he deserved her love.

“Medically Aviel... I have never seen anything like it in my entire life.” Nahko told him. “Not even in written historical journals of medical anomalies. And those date back some three million years.” She reached out and took his hand in hers. “From a strictly medical review they are the picture of health. Beyond healthy in fact. Laren is in better physical condition than many of our finest athletes and warriors. Ladur is... well I dare say he is easily one of the most perfect specimens of a *Vrrarhoinpa* that I have ever seen. They are... they are very different however.”

“Different how?” Aviel asked.

“Aside from the quite obvious physical differences?” She asked him sarcastically. “Ladur is just a child in years yet he possesses the musculature and temperance of a dragon a thousand years his senior.” Nahko told him. “Laren... well she is the very first Darastrix to ever have hair Aviel! How much more different do you need?”

“Nahko...?” Aviel began.

His wife shook her head quickly and waved her other hand. "I know. I will keep from rambling." She stated.

"You are beautiful when you ramble." Aviel told her.

Nahko laughed softly. "Flatterer." She said. She met her husband's eyes seriously after a moment. "Aviel... she is not completely Darastrixi either."

Aviel leaned back in his chair. "Not Darastrixi?" He stammered. "What else could she be Nahko? Her mother said she hatched just as..."

Nahko nodded in agreement. "Yes. I saw the official records. That she was hatched is not in question."

"Then I do not understand. What do you mean?" Aviel spoke.

"Her bone density is twenty-nine percent higher than even the most robust Darastrixi ever recorded in our medical history." Nahko spoke. "Her regenerative systems are thirty-six percent higher than a normal Darastrixi's should be. Her reactive skills I cannot calculate because they exceed every medical chart we use to measure by. She is faster and stronger than normal and she would be able to endure injuries that would put a normal Darastrixi down for weeks. Even months. If they were able to survive at all. I did not bother to test Ladur in this way for I was too astonished at her results."

"Nahko... how is this possible?" Aviel asked.

"I asked her if she would allow me to draw blood from both her and Ladur for testing." Nahko said. "I brought my own equipment as you know. She was very positive about it. I could not hide my expression from her and when she saw it she even encouraged it."

"Encouraged?" Aviel asked.

"She is not as introverted as you told me." Nahko said. "Well... perhaps it was because her mother was there as well, but she was very friendly and open. I did not ask many unrelated questions like you told me, but she was very forthcoming Aviel."

"So you took blood samples?" Aviel asked.

Nahko nodded. "From both her and Ladur." She answered. "What I found was... it was astounding."

"I don't follow." Aviel told her.

Nahko got to her feet and moved back to the counter with her glass. She refilled the juice and turned back to face her husband. "How much do you know of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu's* Data Base of Intergalactic species my *mrrandii*?" (Husband)

Aviel shook his head. "Very little... why?"

"Nor do I. I had to check as I was returning here. There are two species in the known universe with a bone density that surpasses our own Aviel." Nahko said. "And does so by a very wide margin."

Aviel rose now as well and moved over in front of her. "Why does this matter?" Aviel asked.

"Because when I entered the sample parameters into my computer, that is the answer I was given." Nahko replied. "She saw my eyes and expression again and she simply smiled at me. I did two other tests to confirm my findings and the results were the same. Identical even. So I asked her if I could conduct another DNA test and she agreed." Nahko shook her head. "It was almost as if she knew I would ask these things Aviel."

"I found her to be incredibly insightful and far wiser than she seemed. She and Ladur, they seemed to be of one mind." Aviel said with a nod.

Nahko nodded quickly. "I felt this as well. Almost as if they knew things we did not. Not behavior I have seen from a joined pair even after centuries together."

Aviel nodded. "Nor I." He agreed. "What did your tests tell you?" Aviel asked.

"Aviel... she is not wholly Darastrixi as I said." Nahko said softly.

"What do you mean by that Nahko?" Aviel asked.

"I found two different core DNA strands within her blood Aviel. Aside from Darastrixi core DNA strands." Nahko told him with bright eyes. "Three distinctly different core strands, yet they blended together seamlessly."

"Nahko... you know my knowledge of medical terminology is useless." He told her. "What does this mean?"

“I found the core DNA strands of two entirely different species within her blood Aviel.” Nahko said seeing his face look at her in shock. “Merged with her Darastrixi blood but still entirely different. It is as if they have formed a very cohesive symbiosis within her blood.”

“How... how is that possible?” Aviel asked.

Nahko shook her head. “I do not know Aviel. It shouldn’t be. The only way this could have possibly happened is if she was the product of parents of this DNA, which we know she is not.” She told him. “Yet within her blood is the DNA of two entirely different species.”

“Which species?” Aviel asked.

“The species who she claims her *isthasyi* are from.” Nahko said seeing his face change to one of surprise. “Her *sepa isthasyi*.” Nahko set her glass down and then reached out and took his arm in her hands. “Aviel... who is this pair she speaks of? These soul brothers?” She asked him. “And be honest with me now husband. There is much more going on here than you first told me. Now I need to know.”

Aviel looked at her and nodded his head. “Nahko what do you know of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*?” He asked her softly.

Nahko’s eyes grew slightly wider. “The Prophecy of Souls?” She gasped. “I know it is the most sacred of our legends. *Zezhuanth* will choose six among trillions to carry his *tobor jedark* and *vers*. The very essence of who he was. It is said they would stand at the head of a massive army to deliver the Darastrixi and trillions of others within the galaxy from the darkness.”

Aviel smiled at her. Nahko had always been more attuned to their religious nature than he was. “Then you know more than I did when this all began.” He stated gently.

“When what began?” Nahko asked. “Aviel are you saying...?”

Aviel nodded slowly again. “The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is happening.” He said. “Right now. Right before our very eyes. Laren and Ladur are the Darastrixi part of the prophecy. It is what Chalith and Shalu have been hiding for so long. Protecting. She told me of her *sepa isthasyi* as well. The DNA you found within her blood. It was Lycavorian and Vampiric wasn’t it?”

Nahko looked at him with wide eyes as she stepped back from him. “How did you...?” She gasped.

“She told me.” Aviel spoke easily now. “She told me a bit about them. What she knew anyway. At least what she was willing to share with me. Which was not a lot mind you. I truly believe she does not fully trust anyone but Ladur. Her mother and father yes... but outside of them... no one else.” Aviel looked at her. “The species you spoke of... the blood you found within her... one of them is Lycavorian isn’t it?” He pressed her.

Nahko nodded her head slowly. “And the Vampiric DNA would account for her reflexes and speed. I was able... once I saw the results of my computer inquiry I did a search for their species as well.”

“You did not keep it on your computer did you?” He asked quickly.

Nahko shook her head just as quickly. “I never keep information on my portable... you know that. I transfer it to my main core at our home and delete it from my portable.”

Aviel turned away from her slowly and moved to the front of his desk where he took a deep breath. He looked out the large window at the scenery below him once more. “I did not truly believe it was happening until just now.” He said softly. “Until you told me what flows within her blood. What do you know of these Lycavorian?” He asked her turning back to face her.

Nahko shook her head quickly as she moved closer to him, looking up into his handsome face. “Nothing at all.” She answered. “Only that they are a minor species within some quadrant of space where we have only monitoring probes. The... the Pralor Science Division used them to seed different worlds if I am not mistaken.”

“The Alpha Quadrant yes.” Aviel pondered. “Not so minor a species anymore it seems. If they ever were. Not if two of the six *Dahakoan* come from within their species.” Aviel said.

Nahko came up behind him her eyes wide. “*Dahakoan!*” She gasped.

He turned to look at her and nodded. “Dragonkin.” He said softly. “Those who *Zezhuanth* said he would bestow his power and wisdom too. You spoke part of the prophecy yourself just moments ago. The *Dahakoan* would be born fully aware of all around them, bound to their *Vrrarhoinpa* before they ever took a breath of life. And they would be able to feel the existence of their fellow *Dahakoan* from across the time and distance of space. And that they would be able to wield the power of the Pralor Praetorians like it was part of them.”

“The Praetorians!” Nahko gasped aloud. “The last of the Praetorians was killed millennia ago Aviel!”

Aviel shook his head. "Not if what Chalith and Shalu have told me is true. Laren... Laren and Ladur both are manifesting their Etheric abilities into the physical realm. They have been for over ten years now."

"*Ini wer geou ar Zezhuanth.*" Nahko muttered softly. (By the will of Zezhuanth.)

Aviel nodded his head. "Now you know what is at stake here." He said softly. "Can you even imagine three joined pairs able to wield the power of the Praetorians Nahko? Just... just the influence they would garner is staggering. Not just among our people but so many others as well. The Pralor people as a whole may have been considered arrogant and overbearing but the Praetorians were respected and held in awe by many."

Nahko looked at him. "But... but why Aviel? Why now?"

"Chalith, Shalu and Ch'teven believe it has something to do with the Scourge." Aviel told her.

Nahko's eyes grew wide and savage. "Those vile creatures!" She rasped the words. Like most Darastrixi, Nahko abhorred ever the mention of them in conversation.

"Do you trust me my wife?" He asked softly.

"Aviel... how can you ask me that question after so long?" Nahko answered as she gazed at him.

"This is why I did not tell you everything about them." He explained. "There is far more going on here than you know. Even I do not know all of it... but I intend to find out."

"What does this have to do with them?" Nahko asked. "With Laren and Ladur?"

"The Scourge will begin looking for her soon." Aviel told her. "I'm not certain when... but soon."

"Why?" Nahko asked. "What is she to them? What are they to those evil monsters?"

"The Praetorians are the only force in the known universe that the Scourge feared my Nahko." He said. "What do you think they would do if they discovered that two Darastrixi now hold that power?"

"They..." Nahko looked at him. "They would come for them." She gasped softly.

Aviel nodded his head. "Yes. There is much more going on here than I first told you as I said but now you need to know. You will... you will be horrified at what you will discover my beautiful Nahko. Just as I was."

"You are beginning to frighten me *sia itov.*" She spoke. (My love)

"Then you will join me when I say I am terrified." He told her. "We must insure that we discover all we can before the Scourge determine she and Ladur exist and then we must make sure they are not here on Icarava to be found." Aviel told her.

"Why?" Nahko asked.

"You would not like the answer if I were to give it to you my wife." He said. "Just trust me on this."

"Why must we make sure they are not here?" Nahko persisted.

"Because I for one do not want our people subjected to the fury of four who can wield the power of a Praetorian because we handed their *myvish* and *isthasy* over to the Scourge." Aviel answered her.

"You speak of the other Dahakoan?" Nahko said.

Aviel nodded. "As I said... Laren shared a little of them with me." He told her. "They would not be happy in the least that we gave their sister and brother to the Scourge. According to Laren, the Lycavorian and Vampiric species are quite passionate to begin with."

"Handed them over to the... why in the name of *Zezhuanth* would we do that?" Nahko exclaimed.

"Trust me... you do not want to know." Aviel told her. "You will discover it in time now that I have involved you... but for now trust me when I say the why of it can wait."

"I know someone Aviel." She said softly after a long moment. "A Junior Scholar from the *Elbakiv Sulevfu*. He is... he is rather odd... but all he does is study different species. He was... he was attracted to me before you stole my heart." She said shyly. "If we wish to know more we should consult him."

Aviel looked at her. "Nahko... you now know what is going on here. You must be sure before you get involved further." He said. "This is not just some wild event that has happened by chance. There are other forces at work here... forces that, until now, I did not believe even existed. I do not... I do not want to put you in danger."

Nahko nodded her head and reached up to place her fingers to his cheek. "I am not afraid Aviel my husband."

Aviel smiled sheepishly at her. "That is good... for as I said... I am terrified." He told her. He placed his hand over hers and nodded his head. "Call this friend of yours. Have him bring whatever information he has on

the Alpha Quadrant here now. I will order him given access to the building. Tell him it is in regards to some project one of our grandchildren is working on. Give him no reason to suspect otherwise.”

Nahko looked at him. “Aviel... there is one other thing.” She said softly. She waited until she knew she had his full attention. “Whatever... whatever Laren and Ladur may be... whatever is taking place within her body... it is... it is killing her.”

Aviel’s eyes went wide. “What?” He gasped.

Nahko nodded. “She knew this. I don’t believe anyone else but Ladur knows. She knew I would detect it. She does not seem frightened of this fact though. She says she knows who can save her.”

“Who?” Aviel asked.

“She says her *sepa dask*.” Nahko replied. “Her Soul Mother. She says only she will have the knowledge and skill to make her better. I know there is nothing that I can do. Nor any other physician among our people.”

Aviel shook his head. “I don’t suppose she gave you some idea as to who this might be?”

Nahko nodded her head. “Yes she did. And if what I know is accurate... then she is quite possibly very correct in her assessment.”

“Do I want to know?” Aviel asked. “Nahko... if the prophecy is happening we cannot lose her now!”

“I know.” Nahko told him. “We must see what we can discover about these *sepa isthasyi*. Then I will know for sure.”

Aviel nodded. “Make your call Nahko. We must act quickly and with care.”

He was seventy-eight thousand years old and still a Junior Scholar, but he was happy and loved his work. He was a student of history and exploration and discovery and the studying of other species was a passion for him and had been for more centuries than he could recall. Of course he had never been called to the office of an *UrIkrisir Mamiss Filkiati* in all that time either.

When Nahko Em'mor had contacted him he had been shocked to say the least. He had long ago lost her to the affections and hand of a much more influential male so many years ago. He did not know what her parents saw within the male when they made the arranged union with his parents. He still did not after all these years. They had remained in touch and if not friends then minor acquaintances over that time, but he had never forgotten the feelings he had for her. Nor had they really ever gone away. This is why he had jumped at the opportunity to see her once more. It was not uncommon for Darastrixi females to have urges later in their lives. Urges that only physical interaction with another male outside their mates could curb. This was called the *Thirkuic*. The Changing. Often times this led to the female leaving her current mate and beginning a new life with whoever she had found. It was not looked down upon by their culture and considered a natural evolution within the cycle of many females. It did not happen to all females, but he held out hope that perhaps Nahko was experiencing the *Thirkuic* now.

Now he wasn’t so sure as he was escorted through the corridors. He had forgotten for that instant that her *mrrandii* was a senior member of the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* and next in line to join the *Sulevfu di Woiuewr* when the time came.

His name was Dalis Sulryn. And he was not so sure agreeing to meet her had been a good idea.

He looked around nervously as the *Sulevfu Shivi*, the Commission Guard, led him down the corridor of the immense building. He had tried to remain as far away from any government buildings as he could over the years, not really caring for the often times arrogant and equally condescending way members of the History or Medical *Sulevfu* were viewed by the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*. Looking at the guard who escorted him, he took note of the exact and precise way the man moved and was dressed. Everything was perfect. The *Sulevfu Shivi* were exceptionally protective of their charges and this man was no different. He had been surprised when Dalis had arrived and told him why he was here. The request and access was in the computer however and he had begun to lead him to the proper office.

Dalis looked at the massive double doors as they slid open and he saw Nahko step out of the office. His breath caught in his throat for a moment for she was still just as beautiful as she always had been, even more so now. The Shivi bowed his head deeply to her as they stopped.

“*Usjalil Nahko*.” He spoke. (Lady) Nahko was well liked by many of the *Shivi*. She was respectful of them and their duties and was always inquiring of their families. For that matter, Aviel Em'mor was also very well liked. He did not treat those *Shivi* assigned to protect him as underlings as most of the other *Filkiati* did. Aviel conversed with them often, inquiring of their families; he joked with them at times and every year at the height of the Centennial Celebration, he insisted that they bring their families to his home to enjoy good food and wine and just be themselves. Many of the *Shivi* did just that through the many years and he was looked up to and honored among the *Shivi* across the planet.

“Thank you so much Kotai.” Nahko said as she looked at him. “I think perhaps Aviel and I may have backed ourselves into a corner and Dalis is an old friend who can help us.”

Kotai looked at her oddly. “*Sia Usjalil?*” He asked.

“We promised our youngest *autnaril* that we would assist her in a large Galactic History project for school. Aviel and I both forgot all about it until just this very day.” Nahko lied to him. “She has to do a report on lesser species and we told her we knew about all of them. She is expecting us to help her in three days when they come to visit.” (Granddaughter)

Kotai smiled then and nodded his head. He had done the same thing with his own family and had to scramble at the end. “I have put myself in a similar position with my *autgabini*.” He told her knowingly. (Grandsons)

“Then you know well that we cannot look like we forgot.” Nahko told him. “She would be horrified.”

“Indeed.” Kotai said.

Nahko looked at Dalis and held out her hand to his chest in the *Darastrixi* greeting. He was taken slightly aback as she touched her forehead to his. “Dalis... it is so good to see you again.” She spoke warmly.

Dalis returned the normal greeting without question as just being able to touch her was invigorating. “It has... it is agreeable to see you as well *Usjalil Nahko*.”

Nahko looked at Kotai once more. “I will insure Dalis is escorted out Kotai. Aviel and I will probably have him return to our home when we are finished here so that he can instruct us more. We just wanted to get a head start now.”

Kotai nodded and bowed his head once more. “As you wish *Usjalil Nahko*.”

Nahko curled her arm through Dalis's and led him into the huge office area. He turned and watched as the *Shivi* did an about face, watching as the huge doors slid shut behind them. He turned back to let his eyes take in the massive office, nearly as large as his small apartment on the edges of the city, and the stunning view of the city out the huge grand window nearly took his breath away. He felt Nahko remove her arm from within the crook of his elbow and he turned to look at her.

Nahko Em'mor knew that Dalis had been deeply affectionate towards her before she and Aviel were promised to each other by their parents. It may have been an arranged joining but Aviel Em'mor had won her over long before the official ceremony had been conducted. Nahko also knew just from Dalis's body language now that his feelings for her had not changed and were more than likely partly why he never had taken a wife. Nahko did not want to give him the wrong impression however, as she was not experiencing the *Thirkuic* and she loved Aviel far more now than she did when they were first joined. Their life together had always been full and exciting. They both went out of their way to insure this never died and so far they had more than succeeded.

“Thank you for coming so quickly Dalis.” Nahko said to him. “Aviel is just finishing up a VidCom and he will join us shortly. Can I get you something to drink?”

Dalis looked at her. “No... thank you.”

Nahko looked at him. “You are looking well.” She told him.

“And you are just as beautiful as I remember Nahko.” He said moving closer to her.

Nahko stepped back quickly from his obvious advance. “Aviel and I asked you here for professional reasons Dalis.” She said quickly. “Please do not infer something else.”

Dalis stopped his movement and gazed at her. “Why would a *Filkiati* of the *Urkrisir Mamiss* need my help?” He asked her almost harshly. “They can requisition anything they want it seems.”

Nahko's eyes narrowed at his comment and the obvious dig at Aviel and his status and their arranged joining. She stepped towards Aviel's desk now. “Do not allow your feelings to control your words Dalis.” She told him. She stopped at the corner of Aviel's desk and turned back to look at him. “I am sorry your affections for me were not returned, but my feelings were for another. You knew that.”

“How could they not be?” Dalis commented. “His family and status were so much more influential.”

Nahko shook her head sadly. “This has nothing to do with your feelings for me Dalis.” She told him. “I never once gave any indication to you that I returned your affection. Whatever you saw was of your own making. I suggested to Aviel that he call you here for very official reasons.”

Dalis stepped closer again. “Did he?” He asked softly. “Are you so sure Nahko? What would a member of the *Urkrisir Mamiss* need from me? I am a Junior Scholar. Why would you suggest he call me if...”

The single door across the room opened and Nahko turned quickly as Aviel exited his private Com room. She moved towards him rapidly, reaching for his hand as he crossed the room.

“Aviel... may I introduce Dalis Sulryn.” Nahko said as she moved close to him and squeezed his hand.

Aviel took note of Nahko’s body reaction and looked at Dalis. He nodded his head to him, ignoring the fact that he obviously thought he had been summoned for another reason. He approached Dalis for the customary greeting. “Dalis Sulryn... a pleasure to meet you.” He said. “Nahko speaks highly of you.”

“Does she?” Dalis asked calmly as he stepped back refusing the greeting. “Why have you summoned me *Filkiati* Em'mor? I am a very busy man and you have pulled me away from an important government funded assignment to assist you in a school project for your *autnaril*.”

Nahko shook her head slightly at Dalis’s tone and action and she felt Aviel tense ever so slightly. She knew her husband well enough to know that he realized what was happening. She also knew him well enough to know that this would not deter him in what they were seeking. Dalis would just have to suffer with his feelings.

Aviel tilted his head to the side and moved closer to Dalis. He was taller than Dalis by at least several centimeters, and considerably much broader. And not one ounce of fat resided on Aviel’s body Nahko knew for certain. It was one of the things that had kept their relationship so intense and exciting through the years. He had always been fit and he maintained this fitness through the busiest of times.

“That is the reason Nahko gave to my *Shivi*... yes.” Aviel told him easily. “That is not the reason you are here however.”

Dalis looked at him unwilling to back down. “Then perhaps you can tell me why I am here?” He said.

Aviel motioned to the chair across from his desk. “Please sit down.” He said calmly as he walked around to his high backed chair. He did not sit down however, instead pulling a similar chair closer to the desk on his side. Nahko quickly settled into this chair and watched as Aviel then moved to his own chair. She was able to reach across and place her hand on his arm from where she sat, which she did without question.

“Nahko tells me that you are an expert on different species.” Aviel said as he sat down. “Specifically the different species found within the Alpha Quadrant of space.”

“So this *is* about a school project for your *autnaril*?” Dalis asked with a condescending tone.

“Do not be a *hofiba* Dalis!” Nahko snapped at him. (Fool)

“I am very busy and...” Dalis began.

Aviel interrupted his sentence with a much more forceful voice now as he leaned across his desk. “I am asking for your assistance on a classified government project Dalis Sulryn. If you do not wish to be involved because of your personal issues with my *memamosal* then please advise me of this now and I will find someone who *will* be interested in helping me. And then you can then return to your busy duties.”

Dalis looked at him. “What kind of project?” He asked quickly.

Aviel shook his head. “You must agree first.” He said. “You will be working with Nahko a great deal and if your emotions concerning Nahko are going to keep you from doing your job then you can leave now.” Aviel stared across the desk at him. “Nahko is not experiencing the *Thirkuic* Dalis Sulryn... and she never will if I have anything to say about it. The choice is yours Dalis Sulryn. Make it now please for *I am* very busy and I have no desire to take away from my *Irral Shivi*’s duties by having him call medical personnel because I *kodonta* you several times due to your disrespect of my *memamosal*.” (First Guard) (Struck)

Nahko felt a surge of love and passion course through her at Aviel’s words. He could be so very forceful when he wanted to be and he was decidedly possessive of her which she found to be unbelievably exciting and always had.

Dalis looked between Aviel and Nahko for a few moments then finally settled his eyes on Aviel. “You... you can not expect me to simply agree.” He said finally.

“I can and I do.” Aviel told him. “Are you up to the task or do I need to look for someone else?”

“There is no one else!” Dalis hissed. “No one knows what I know! What I have studied for centuries!”

“Then I ask again...” Aviel said. “Are you interested... or do I have Kotai return and escort you back to your office?”

“This is what you always wanted Dalis.” Nahko told him. “A chance to make a difference and craft your mark on history. It is up to you.”

Dalis looked at him for a long moment and then made up his mind. “What do you wish to know?” He asked.

“What can you tell me about the Alpha Quadrant?” Aviel asked. “More specifically, what can you tell me about the species known as Lycavorian?”

Dalis leaned forward in his chair. “They have a rather full and colorful history.” He told him still somewhat hesitant. “Most of our data comes from Class Nine Information Probes that we have seeded throughout the quadrant. They intercept open transmissions and monitor public channels as well as scan planets that are within its range.”

“They are not detected?” Aviel asked.

Dalis shook his head. “Most of them are made to look like whatever naturally occurring space phenomenon may reside in the sectors they are in. In some they look like space rocks. Others are made to look like naturally occurring comets that transit the sectors over a certain period of time and are always recording and monitoring. It is extremely unlikely that the species within the Alpha Quadrant would even give them a cursory glance. The probes then transmit their data to stationary Control Hubs much like the Pralors used to use. These Control Hubs correlate the data and send it to a PGN, a Primary Gathering Node where it is downloaded by one of our long range Sensor Arrays in orbit of our third moon. We did exchange information with the Pralor Science Division often because their Seed Missions would sometimes take them through different areas of space that we monitored as well. That ended when we...”

Aviel held up his hand. “That is not something you need to remind me about Dalis.” He said evenly. “Do not take this the wrong way but I’m not interested in hearing how you obtain the information. I am more interested in what you can tell me about Lycavorians. Do they have a governmental structure? Do they have a culture? Traditions? Are they militaristic? These are the things I want to know.”

Dalis looked between Nahko and him for a moment and then finally at Aviel. “May I ask why you are so interested in a species that the vast majority of our scientists and research people think are barbaric and beneath us?”

“Are they? Beneath us I mean?” Nahko asked.

Dalis shook his head quickly. “No. Not unless one is unwilling to accept the fact that they are different. They are no more barbaric than we once were. And in some cases still are.” He stated. “Simply because they are able to take the shape of an animal does not make them lesser beings.”

“Wait... take the shape of an animal?” Aviel asked him. “Are you saying they are shape shifters?”

Dalis shook his head once more. “Not in the true definition of the word... no. They can only assume one form. The main reason the Pralors used them in so many of their Seed Missions is because of their robust endurance. Lycavorians are able to shift their physical forms to that of a *Kaldaka* at will.” (Wolf)

“*Kaldaka*?” Nahko gasped. The *kaldaka* were an indigenous lifeform to Icarava and one of the few that the Darastrixi did not hunt for food and other material. They were a majestic species and many of the outlying cities and smaller towns worshiped the animals in some way.

Dalis nodded his head. “The change is nearly instantaneous and they retain fully their conscious mind while in this form. They are roughly equal in size to the *Kaldaka* that roam free on our northern and eastern continents, though there have been recorded instances of certain individual males of their species being quite immense while in their *Kaldaka* form. Some of their own historical reports have recorded Lycavorian males who are well over a meter tall at the shoulder and in excess of a hundred and fifty kilos. Size generally runs along their family bloodlines among their kind, so it is very rare for one to obtain this size.”

“*Ithquenti!*” Nahko rasped. “That is... that is huge.” (Gods)

Dalis nodded in agreement. “This unique ability gives them enormous control of their bodies and their senses and through the generations, evolution has allowed them to learn to use these skills while in their *munthreki* forms.” Dalis explained as he looked at the floor. He did not see the look Nahko gave to Aviel before he looked back up at Aviel. “And to answer your question Filkiati Aviel... yes. They have all of these things. A very solid, working and stable governmental structure. They have elected officials. Trade and Commerce.

Religion of many beliefs. There was a catalyst event that took place over three thousand years ago. This event... the death of a *Daar* that none of them knew existed... this inspired them to act. They are called the Lycavorian Union now and the *deevdru* of this *Daar* rules. They are the largest free society within the Alpha Quadrant if all of our information is accurate.” He told them. “And their recent history has become exceedingly interesting over the course of the last three decades.”

“Interesting how?” Aviel asked.

Dalis leaned back in his chair quickly and stopped talking. Nahko saw this and looked at Aviel quickly. “What is wrong?” She asked him.

“I have been forbidden to speak of these things by the head of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* himself.” Dalis said. “It is the reason I am still a Junior Scholar, as if you did not know that already!”

Aviel looked taken aback. “I have no idea why you are still a Junior Scholar.” He told him honestly. “And why would the head of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* forbid you to speak of the knowledge you have gained?”

Dalis looked at him intently. “You... you truly do not know?” He asked after a moment.

“You will find that if I say I do not know something... it is because I do not.” Aviel told him plainly. “I don’t proclaim to have all the answers as others of my position and standing do. I would rather have all the facts before I act or speak. Now... please tell me what you mean and forget anything my esteemed counterpart of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* may have told you. I have far more authority than he does.”

Dalis looked at him. While he did not care in the least for Aviel Em'mor because he had stolen Nahko from him, he had to admit the man appeared to be completely honest. He decided that if he was going to suffer for what knowledge he held then he would do so after making sure this knowledge reached other ears.

“It begins over forty thousand years ago. A Pralor Seed mission that was caught in an uncharted Ion Storm and then crashed on the Lycavorian homeworld.” Dalis began. “On this City Ship was the Pralor Sumar.”

“Sumar?” Aviel spoke. “I have heard that name mentioned.”

Dalis nodded. “At the time of the mission he was their current Chief Elder. He was also the leader and the Praetorian Warriors.”

Aviel glanced at Nahko quickly and then back to Dalis. “A Praetorian you say?”

Dalis nodded. “By all accounts he was the very first of the Praetorians and the most powerful.” He replied.

“Please Dalis... continue.” Aviel said. “And leave nothing out.”

“They...”

Aviel and Nahko listened for nearly two hours, completely enraptured, as Dalis gave them a very watered down history lesson of the Alpha Quadrant in general and the Lycavorian people specifically. He was able to plug in several of the Data Scrolls that he carried in his bag and give them visual facts and understanding. Aviel and Nahko asked pointed questions, though Nahko’s questions were more in regard to the Hadarian species known to be healers. She knew there were species out there among the stars that could heal with a simple touch, but she had never met one before. According to Dalis the Hadarian people surpassed even the Pralors when it came to healing because of this mutative radiation that surrounded their homeworld and the Pralor physicians were amazing in their skill. Aviel however was far more concerned with the political side of the equation. He asked very detailed questions in regards to the structure of the Alpha Quadrant and its many governments. This surprised Dalis somewhat as he had never really thought of Nahko’s husband as being very cerebral in his actions, but he answered the questions to the best of his ability and knowledge.

It was Aviel who finally stopped Dalis from continuing by holding up his hand suddenly and getting to his feet. He moved to the massive window and looked out over the city, the suns now beginning to set in the distance. Nahko waited patiently for she had seen her husband do this many times in the past. Aviel Em'mor was methodic and meticulous in his actions and his thoughts. He did nothing without having as much information as he could possibly get. Many of his colleagues considered him too conventional in his views because of the way he processed information, but his decisions had always ended up being the right ones in the end. This is why he was so respected and why he was next in line for an appointment to the *Sulevfu di Woiewewr*. Nahko saw Dalis open his mouth to speak but she held up her hand quickly indicating he should wait. Surprisingly... he did as she told him.

After several long moments Aviel turned to Dalis once more. “This is what they forbid you to speak of?” He asked finally. “Why?”

Dalis leaned back in his chair. "I did not question the head of the *Elbakiw Suleyfu*." He replied. "Not if I wanted to keep my position."

"Indulge me." Aviel told him.

"I can only assume it is because they wanted to protect the integrity of our data. They also did not want to draw attention from the Scourge." Dalis answered him. "You know as well as I how they viewed the Pralor people in general and the Praetorians in particular. They have attempted to purge any historical records or knowledge of the Praetorians wherever they go."

Aviel nodded his head. "Yes." He said. "The Scourge do not know what you have told me?"

Dalis shook his head immediately. "They do not have access to our long range Probe Data."

Aviel nodded. "Yes... that was in the Charter Agreement that the *Suleyfu di Woieuwr* signed. They would not be granted access to any of our Military or Intelligence data."

"Why would they need official access when enough of our own people are willing to give it to them?" Dalis spat without thinking. His eyes grew wide and he rose to his feet in dread of what he had just said. "I... forgive me *Filkiati* Aviel, I..."

Aviel held up his hand stopping him. "Do not ask to be forgiven for what you feel Dalis Sulryn." He spoke. "Not when I agree with you."

Dalis looked surprised as he settled back into his chair. He glanced at Nahko before his eyes turned back to Aviel. "They do not care about the histories of other species. I imagine that is why they still allow us to conduct the research. Or have not tried to impede it anyway." Dalis finished.

Nahko caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of her eye from where she sat and she turned to the huge monitor on the wall that Dalis had been displaying some of the images they had gotten from the Probe Data. She bolted to her feet quickly.

"Wait!" She gasped as she moved to the monitor controls. "Stop it!" She exclaimed as both Aviel and Dalis came to their feet while she stabbed down on the controls.

"Nahko... what is it?" Aviel asked her sensing her growing excitement just as he had when she first entered his office.

"I saw something!" She stammered out the words. "An image on the monitor!" The many pictures were flashing back in the order they had been displayed as Aviel moved closer to her.

"Dalis... where did these images you have come from?" Aviel asked.

"Most came from intercepted broadcasts of their public channels." Dalis answered him. "The Lycavorians call it their Netnews. I don't know what you could have seen that would mean anything Nahko. Much of their more important information is very closely guarded and never allowed on their public channels."

"Here!" Nahko announced as she stopped the image. "Here!"

Aviel moved up behind her and saw what she was so excited about. "Enhance it Nahko!" He told her quickly.

Nahko adjusted the controls until the image was perfectly clear. It was an image of two tall and very muscular men on a beach of white sand with two obsidian colored *Vrrarhoinpa* moving on either side of them. One of the *Vrrarhoinpa* was utterly enormous in size and looked to be incredibly muscular and fit. He was obviously male, while the smaller one was female, but still above average in size than what they were used to seeing for a female *Vrrarhoinpa*. The two men seemed to be deep in conversation and the next image was even closer and showed their faces clearly. Aviel looked at Dalis.

"These two men?" He asked. "Who are they?"

Dalis moved closer and looked at the image. "The one on the left is who I was telling you about earlier. The Lycavorian *Daar*. The son of the murdered *Daar* that so inspired their species with his actions. His name is Martin Leonidas. He is also the direct descendant of the Praetorian Sumar. His *jennulti autgabin*." Dalis answered. (Greater Grandson)

"And the other?" Nahko asked softly.

"That is his first born son." Dalis answered. "His oldest child. The Crown Prince he is called."

"Aviel... his eyes." Nahko spoke softly. "Look at his eyes!"

Aviel nodded his head. "Yes... I see them."

Nahko turned her head to look at him. "Eyes of Azure Blue." She said softly. "That is what she said. Just as her right one."

Aviel looked at Dalis again. "What do we know of him? This Crown Prince. And the father." He asked.

Dalis looked at him strangely. "There is... there is not very much known about him aside from his name. Unlike his father and his *Vrrarhoinpa*, whose name is Torma by the way, the son and his *Vrrarhoinpa* are very much introverted. She is the *hianag* of Torma and that is why their coloring is so similar. Her name is Elynth if I remember correctly. They do not make public appearances."

"Why do they... why do they appear so different?" Nahko asked. "She is much larger and more muscular than most female *Vrrarhoinpa* I have seen. And he is one of the largest I have ever seen among our kind."

"These Darastrixi were part of one of the Seed Missions that we allowed the Pralors to conduct with our kind." Dalis answered. "They apparently developed names for the different characteristics of our kind. The father is the product of what they call a Heavy Horn father and a Firespitter mother."

Aviel looked at him. "The Ixen Darastrixi? From the Western Realm?"

Dalis nodded. "And the Osear Darastrixi from the high mountains."

"They have never cross bred before!" Nahko exclaimed. "They do not even care for each other! This is... this is what a child of the two would look like?"

Dalis nodded again. "Quite impressive if you ask me." He said. "His size alone would instill dread in many of our kind."

"She takes... she has many of his traits." Nahko said. "She is the only offspring of this Torma and his mate?"

Dalis shook his head. "If memory serves me correctly they have had three clutches of eggs. All of their offspring are bound to one of the Daar's children within the Etheric Realm."

Aviel looked at him. "You are joking?" He said.

"Not at all." Dalis answered. "Torma's *memamosal*, Isheeni is her name; she is bound to the Daar's favored mate. One of their daughters to another of his mates. Only his son and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth avoid the public gatherings. The rest are not so private."

"If the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* discover this... they will not be happy." Nahko said. "They have discouraged crossbreeding among our kind."

"The history of the Darastrixi in the Alpha Quadrant is very spotty at best." Dalis said. "I do know their history is closely guarded by those who know. The Daar, his son and perhaps a few others."

"These Darastrixi have no Elder?" Aviel asked.

Dalis shook his head. "They do. A *Tilabil Dask*. She sits on their governmental board. Again... the *Vrrarhoinpa* of the Daar and others are well known, but they have intentionally guarded the past of the Darastrixi. I do not know why. The Daar and his son especially."

Nahko looked at Aviel. "It is what *Vrelvel Sargti* would do Aviel." She said softly. "It would be their sworn duty and they would do so fervently."

Dalis looked between them. "*Vrelvel Sargti*?" He asked. "What do you know of Talon Guardians?"

"Tell me more about the son." Aviel said. "Where is this image from?"

Dalis leaned closer and looked at the bottom of the image. "Yes... this was taken from the shore of the son's island home. Probably by one of what they call their Netnews people with a long range image capture tool. He is very highly regarded among their military as a warrior unparalleled. Combined with his *Vrrarhoinpa* it is said that they are quite unstoppable in battle. Much like their fathers. His name is..."

"Androcles." Nahko whispered aloud.

Dalis's eyes grew wide now. "What? Wait... yes... yes that is his name. How did you know that?"

Aviel turned to look at Dalis. "Dalis Sulryn... you are hereby promoted to the title and rank of Senior Scholar of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu*. All of the privileges this rank entitle you too are now yours. I am officially reassigning you to my staff as of this moment."

"What? Wait..." Dalis gasped. "You... you can do that? Why? What is going on?"

"How old is this image Dalis?" Aviel asked him ignoring his barrage of questions.

Dalis shook his head and looked at the image once more. "The Probe Data from the Alpha Quadrant is only transmitted once every five years. Yes the time stamp on this indicates it was taken just before the last Data Probe transmission. Five years ago. The year was 2570 following the practice of marking everything with the date reference used within the corresponding sector of space. This was during a lull in what the Lycavorians

called the Evolli War. A minor species, the Evolli, took offense at some perceived action taken against them by the Union government and invaded several Lycavorian Union worlds in retaliation. They killed many thousands of the Union's citizens before the Union was able to mobilize and meet them in battle. This image is time stamped as their calendar month of November 2569. Six weeks after a major battle where both the *Daar* and his son were severely injured. As were their *Vrrarhoinpa*. It is the same battle where many of the *Darastrixi* within the Union fell in battle and many more were saved. Details of the battle were not released at the time of the Probe Transmission."

"This is five years old?" Nahko gasped looking at him.

Dalis nodded. "The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* does not deem it prudent to transmit Probe data more than that." He said. "A mistake if you ask me but..." He looked at her. "How did you know his name Nahko?"

"The image states he is twenty-two." Nahko spoke looking at Aviel. "Just at the time Laren told you they became strong enough to send more directed messages and..."

Aviel nodded his head. "Yes. Roughly the same time she said the *Vrelvel Sargti* were chosen."

"He would be twenty-seven now." Nahko said softly. "The same age as Laren and Ladur. That is too much of a coincidence Aviel."

"Who are Laren and Ladur?" Dalis asked. "And how do you know so much about this *Androcles*?"

Aviel turned to Dalis again. "I am authorizing you to access the Probe Data Reservoir and conduct another download Dalis. Can you do this without anyone knowing about it?"

Dalis looked at him with wide eyes. "Why would I want to?" He asked. "What is going on here? And why does Nahko know the name of a Lycavorian Prince from a species we have never encountered before?"

"Do you believe strongly in your faith Dalis Sulryn?" Aviel asked.

"What?" Dalis exclaimed. "The teachings and will of *Zezhuanth* have always been my guide... unlike many of our people. Of course I do!"

Nahko looked at Aviel now. "If we ask him to do this husband we must show him the reasons for our actions. He must be allowed to know."

Aviel met her eyes. "They will not be happy that someone else knows about them." He said. "I do not wish to make them angry Nahko."

"Nor do I... but I think we give them too little credit." Nahko said. "They must know that in order to help them we have to allow a few others to know that they exist."

Aviel nodded his head slowly after a moment. "I know."

"What are you talking about?" Dalis demanded. "Allow me to know who exists?"

Aviel looked at Dalis. "Are you free this evening Dalis?" He asked.

"Free to do what?" He inquired.

"To make a trip north." Aviel answered. "You wish answers... fine I will give them to you. But can you access the Probe Data without anyone knowing about it?"

Dalis nodded. "Yes. It is not checked until one week before the normal download. The Probe Data for the Alpha Quadrant is not due to be downloaded for another two months." He answered. "After that it will be noticed that it was downloaded before schedule."

"Two months." Aviel said. He gripped Nahko's arm. "We have our window now Nahko. We must act before the Data is normally downloaded. It will be discovered then and it will put all of us in danger."

Nahko turned to look at him. "Then we have two months to insure that they are united with their *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*."

Aviel nodded. "I must remain here. Another trip to the north by me will be taken note of by others. You and Dalis will go this evening. Talk to them... explain to them what we have discovered. Make them understand this needs to happen."

Nahko nodded. "I don't believe we will have much trouble convincing them." She said.

"Convincing who?" Dalis demanded. "Will someone tell me what is going on and what I have suddenly become involved in?"

Aviel looked at him. "You wished to make your mark on history Dalis Sulryn?" He said. "You will now get the chance. And a mark on history it will be. A very large mark."

**APO PRIME
DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD
NORTHEAST OF ROYAL ISLAND ESTATE**

Andro stood with Marci along the edge of the tarmac, his *STRIKER* in the background being prepped for take off. He read slowly from the data pad Marci had given him while she gave him the high points.

“... names of seven others similar in duties to this Banak fellow.” Marci told him as she gazed across the calm waters of the lake. “Banak wasn’t due to report for another three days. It was enough time for Sheva to contact him back and acknowledge her new orders. We have his COM equipment now and the coordinates he was sending his reports.”

Andro looked up from the pad. “And?”

Marci shook her head. “It’s a dead area of The Wilds. No habitable planets within range.”

“So he was transmitting to a ship?” Andro said.

Marci nodded. “Looks that way. And it is not due to be there for three more days.”

“Moran?” Andro asked her.

Marci shrugged her shoulders. “Anything is possible Andro.” She replied. “If this secret program is as centralized and secret a program as Yuri says... you think he would send just any ship to collect the reports? Even if he still has not gained the control he wants over whatever forces are siding with him. Armetus says Moran is an anal fool. A control freak.”

“It would be a big risk for him to take.” Andro said. “He’d be leaving himself open to the chance that whoever he sent decided he or she didn’t want to be part of his little gathering and took the data to Narice. Or us.”

Marci nodded in agreement. “Exactly.” She said. “You trust Yuri on this Andro?”

Andro nodded instantly in response. “You have not seen her Marci. I have. This is not the same woman that we all grew up hearing about. And there is no way she would allow hers and Pa’cour’s daughter to remain with me if she was playing us for fools.”

“Are you sure?” Marci asked him.

“Yes. It’s... it’s hard to explain to others but...” Andro began.

Marci reached out and touched his arm. “Don’t bother.” She said with a smile. “Having you try to explain something even you do not fully understand would give someone like me a colossal headache.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.” He said with a grin.

“You’re learning.” Marci said. “Once you have all of your mates with you... they’ll get you to come around. At least make it so you don’t fumble for words anyway.” She said with a laugh.

Andro smiled. “I do fumble a lot don’t I?” He said.

“Not as much since you wised up and pulled your head out of your *mida* and finally claimed Sadi.” Marci spoke. “With Ne’Veha and Carisia and the others helping her... they have refined you some. Give them a few more years and you just might be presentable enough to go out in public. Took your mothers nearly a decade with your father if what your grandmother says is true.”

Andro laughed gently and nodded his head. Marci had a way of saying things that could make him laugh and put him at ease. It was one of the reasons they worked so well together. He held up the pad and gave it back to her. “What do you recommend?”

“Let me pick up the others.” Marci said. “I don’t like the idea of rogue vampire control officers out there among us. Neither will Armetus. I’ll pick them up... find out who they are controlling and compare the data. If we move fast enough we can roll up the entire network before they even know it’s been compromised. And if the transmission vectors are all the same, well then we can be pretty sure it will lead right back to Moran.”

“How fast can you implement it?” Andro asked.

“I already have three teams standing by.” Marci replied. “Three more are enroute back to Apo Prime right now. They get in this evening. I’ll lead the seventh team. If you give me the go ahead... we’ll hit them first thing in the morning.”

Androcles didn’t hesitate. “Do it.” He told her.

“You realize they are probably Union citizens.” Marci said looking at him. “If it gets out that we took them and failed to give them due process there will be hell to pay.”

“They will get due process.” Andro told her. “They will get what is due them as traitors to the Union. Anyone who doesn’t like it can kiss my princely ass!”

Marci looked at him with a grin. “Same set up as Banak then?”

Andro nodded. “Dori and Sheva should be getting ready to move where they are. If they don’t get out undetected then Moran will know within a few hours anyway and pull the plug. Or at the very least try to warn his people here. I don’t want them going underground Marci. We may never find them if they do.”

Marci tucked the data pad back into her belt pouch. “I’ll see to it.” She said.

“Now tell me about Icho.” Andro asked her.

“Deia is keeping him on his toes.” Marci answered. “She has a come back for everything he has brought up and so far she has spanked him.”

“No more mention of Sadi or her past?” Andro asked.

Marci looked at him. “Are you kidding? He barked up that tree once and nearly lost his balls. The Netnews practically crucified him over his actions after that briefing of his you took over and opened the floor to questions. Sadi’s popularity went through the ceiling after that and it remains untouchable, just like your grandmother. Icho is many things but he isn’t stupid. He won’t go after Sadi anymore.”

“Good. Then he will focus on me, father and Deia.” Andro said.

Marci nodded. “That’s what Nesa and Armetus think as well. Probably more your father and you since you won’t be here to speak out. Deia is already planning for that though. I truly wouldn’t want to face your *tenna* in the political arena. She’s vicious.”

“Still no luck on his ties to Kavalian agents?” Andro asked.

Marci shook her head slowly. She was the only one Androcles had filled in on his full suspicions about Icho and she had been working that angle very carefully as well. “Like I said he is no fool.” Marci told him. “We have to be very careful about that and whatever ties he has he has covered very well.”

“You still think I am right?” Andro asked her.

Marci nodded quickly. “He knows too much and the coincidences are just too many. He’s dirty Andro... he’s just real good at covering his tracks. He’s had years to prep for this and with the Kavalians helping him... he’s done it well.”

“Keep at it.” Andro said. “If we can expose that traitorous worm before the election is actually held we can save *Tenna Deia* a lot of sleepless nights.”

“Agreed.” Marci said. “Oh...” She reached into the small hand pouch she carried over her shoulder and handed over the long flip top box. “Vengal wanted me to give these to you. He picked them up for you last night. I peeked.”

Andro looked at her as he took the box. “And?”

“You may fumble your words quite a bit... but you certainly get your point across in other ways.” Marci told him with a smile. “They are beautiful Andro. Truly beautiful. I take it they are from the original stone you went off and removed from Vekhin Three?”

Andro nodded as he opened the box and gazed at the six identical rings. Each was made from the very rare and nearly priceless jewel ore Auramite. The jewel ore resided on only one planet in the known galaxy and sat in the mouth of an active volcano that was continuously erupting. There was only one way to reach it and that was to enter the volcano during one of its very short lulls after erupting. There were only minutes between eruptions and they were unable to be charted and timed for they were never the same twice in a row. Even advanced mining probes designed for high heat atmospheres could not stand the molten lava for more than a few seconds. You could have ten minutes or you could have only one. Hundreds of men and women had tried to extract the immaculate green jewel ore through the years and to Marci’s knowledge only one of them had ever succeeded. That man stood beside her and to this day no one knows exactly how he did it except for Elynth. And she would never tell.

Each ring was nearly translucent in its teal green color. The teal jewel ore was nearly indestructible after it had been refined into its current translucent state. Delicately carved words, obviously inscribed by a Master Craftsmen, decorated the face of each band. In the center of each ring, surrounded by glittering white gold leaves, was the shimmering single coral red colored gem that was the Heart of a Dragon. No doubt Andro had broken

down his piece of the pendant into much smaller ones to fit each ring. This would have required that a senior dragon who was skilled in this art be involved in crafting the rings, but given Andro's status as a Talon Guardian and his affinity for dragons as a whole, Marci doubted he had trouble finding one to help him.

"Better not let your mothers know how you got the Auramite." Marci said with a smile. "They'll give you more grief than they gave your father for getting those Rilian Diamonds for them."

Andro chuckled. "Yes... they won't be happy about that."

"When are you going to give them?" Marci asked.

Andro closed the box and looked at her. "I hadn't given much thought to that." He said with a grin.

"When *Inamarno* is finally back with us I think."

Marci nodded. "So what happens now?" She asked him.

"Now? Now I go to Dreamland... gather *SPARTA'S WRATH* and Miranda and with any luck deal with Moran and Dante." Andro answered. "After that... it's off to the Beta Quadrant and the Vanari."

"Yuri should be back from meeting with your father soon no?" Marci asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"What was so important that she had to meet with him and couldn't tell you?" Marci asked.

Andro shook his head. "I don't know. But whatever it was... it was important enough for her to face my father even knowing how he feels about her."

"Don't know if that is brave or stupid." Marci said with a smile.

Andro chuckled. "We shall see." He said tucking the box into his belt. "Keep me in the loop on our P1s Marci. And keep your fingers crossed that we can end this before it begins."

"*Avoi* to that." Marci said looking at him. "Try not to cause too much destruction will you."

Androcles smiled. "No promises." He said leaning over to kiss her cheek. "Watch your back."

Marci nodded as she motioned to the Lifter car in the distance. "I always do." She said as the car gained power and moved for her location.

Andro nodded his head and turned to begin jogging to where the *STRIKER* was also gaining power. Marci waited for the car to pull up and she climbed into the front seat where the red haired vampire female from the Café job sat behind the controls.

"Well?" She asked.

Marci looked at her. "We go in the morning." She said.

The young woman smiled. "Good. I hate traitors!" She hissed as she put the Lifter in motion.

Marci nodded. "You aren't the only one that is for sure." She said softly.

HIGH COVEN SPACE

RIKVOS COLONY

XUKUTH ZOTRETH (HEART STRIKE) FACILITY

Saba Juconi sat in the chair at the small table and stared at Dorian as he stood to the side of the front window, his dark brown and cobalt colored eyes scanning the exterior of the house with practiced ease. Over the course of the day Cazar had made contact with their friends and all of them had moved to their home in the last few hours under cover of darkness. While all of them were uncomfortable around the heavily armed Lycavorians throughout the house, not to mention the half breed Immortal/Vampire female that seemed to be everywhere, they were holding it together and remaining calm. Saba turned when she saw Sheva move down the stairs into the main living room and exchange words with the younger half breed woman. The young woman, Onera was her name, nodded and headed up the stairs. Sheva spotted her and with a bright smile she made her way easily through the throng of bodies not spread out across the floor and into the kitchen area.

"Mother?" Sheva asked as she settled into the chair across from her. "Are you ok?"

Saba reached across the table without thought and took Sheva's hands in hers. "I am still trying to grasp that my only child is here with me once more. That she risks so much for us. And that she travels in such company."

Sheva almost blushed under her deep tan. "You are my parents mother. Once I found out you and father were alive nothing would have kept me from coming to get you."

Saba turned her head and looked to where Dorian was standing again. "And did your new *Du'ased m'ranndii* agree with your actions?"

Sheva smiled gently. "Yes mother." She answered. "Probably more than you might think. Dori... Dori and the Leonidas family believe deeply in family mother. They are not so different than us in many ways."

Saba shook her head slowly. "He is... he is so large Sheva." She stated finally.

Sheva glanced over to where Dorian was standing and felt the familiar rush of sexual energy she always felt when looking at him. "You have no idea momma." She said.

Saba turned back to her. "You have... you have shared blood while...?"

Sheva nodded her head. "Many times." She answered. "And it is wonderfully divine each time mother." She squeezed her mother's hands. "I love him mother. With all that I am. And he loves me."

Saba nodded her head. "Yes... I can see that every time you look at him. Every time he looks at you. His eyes... they are so..."

"Different?" Sheva said.

Saba shook her head. "They are beautiful." She said. "I just... for so many years your father and I wondered about you. What you were doing. If you were in good health. We thought we were protecting you. Now... now you return here." Saba reached across and placed her palm on Sheva's cheek. "So beautiful. So fit. And the Blessed Wife to a son of King Leonidas. It is certainly quite a lot to take in and absorb. And you return to us in order to protect us when it is we who should be protecting you."

Sheva shook her head and squeezed her mother's hands. "It is as it should be." Sheva told her. "I did not... I did not believe in faith before I met Dori mother. When the Evolli War began and I saw Lycavorians give their lives to save the vampires that were fighting beside them I began to question what it was I was doing. Nothing made sense anymore. The reasons they gave me no longer made sense. I was assigned to Dorian when he was born mother. Isabella was... she was suffering from Darpia Syndrome and Queen Anja and her sisters devised a way using the Kavalian growth serums to insure Dorian survived." Sheva looked at Dorian once more. "He grew rapidly until he is as you see him now. He makes me melt just holding me in his arms mother. He has since the very beginning. He is different though... like Androcles and their father. His Etheric abilities are beyond magical and he has all the wisdom and knowledge of his father within his mind. Just as Androcles does. He is bonded to a dragon, Ryner, and he waits for us at the ship we have."

Saba looked at Dorian. "He has only been in this world for a few months?" She asked.

Sheva nodded. "Physically yes... but he was born fully aware of everything around him. Just as Androcles was. And he was bonded with Ryner before he came into this life. It is all very difficult to explain. Even Dori cannot explain it all. What courses through him is almost too much to comprehend. But he is mine mother and I am his."

Saba turned and looked at her daughter. "I have never... you have never spoken with such profound emotion in your words Sheva." She said.

Sheva nodded and smiled. "It wasn't until I admitted my love for Dorian that I finally came to realize that there are many things out there I will never understand. Many things that will make no sense to me... but it does not mean they do not exist."

Saba squeezed her hands. "I would very much like to speak with Dorian when we are free of this place. When things are calm and we can have a civilized conversation."

Sheva smiled. "We will." She said. "We..."

They both turned when the door to the front of the home opened quickly and Sheva saw Deion and Nara duck inside. Dorian quickly shut the door as Cazar came down the stairs with Onera behind him. Sheva rose and moved quickly into the living room area and up beside Dorian with her mother in tow.

"So?" Dorian asked his brother and sister.

"We scouted all the way to the western side of the settlement. It's clear all the way to the treeline." Deion said. "But we need to move now."

"The sun will be up in two and a half hours." Nara spoke in agreement. "We should be well gone by then Dori."

Cazar looked at Dorian. “We will have perhaps ninety minutes once we are due at work before they send someone to inquire of our whereabouts.” He said. “And with the others also not appearing they will move quickly.”

Dorian nodded. “Then we go. Now.” He decided. “Deion... you and Nara take point. We will follow by the numbers and keep the others between us.” He turned to Sheva. “Sheva... you and your mother get the others ready to move. Your father and I will move together in front of them, you and your mother behind them. Keep them quiet and moving.”

“Come mother. We will get the others ready.” Sheva said pulling her towards the small groups of men and women.

Cazar looked at Dorian. “You risked much coming here.” He said. “And then staying to help the others.”

Dorian met his eyes. “I would risk everything for Sheva.” He said without pause. “You are her parents. That risk is worth it.”

Onera stepped up to Dorian and Cazar. “Where do you wish me?” She asked him.

“I want you to bring up the rear of the column.” He said without hesitation.

“The rear?” Onera gasped. “I should be in the front with Deion and Nara!”

Dorian shook his head. “No. I want you in the rear.”

“Why?” Onera demanded.

Dorian looked at her. “Because if they discover we are gone sooner than we think I want you in the rear to make sure they don’t catch us.”

Onera took a breath and understood what he wanted. It was not because he did not trust her... he was giving her these orders because he did trust her and her skills. “Forgive me... I...”

Dorian stepped closer to her while Cazar watched and he saw Dorian’s eyes narrow slightly and become hard flints of color. Onera stepped back in surprise at the look in his eyes. “And if you ever question my orders again I will have Androcles send you back to your mother and father in two shakes of your ass. You read me?”

Onera stood there for a moment surprised at the forceful tone of his voice. Her father’s words came rushing back to her in that instant.

“They are like ghosts in the night Onera. You will be but a child in skill compared to them Dalharil. Listen to them. Learn from them. They will teach you things your mother and I could never teach you. Remember, even the son Dorian, they have the memories and wisdom and knowledge of three or four lifetimes of battle within them. Inherited from their father. They may not look or act like it at times, but you could never match them in single combat. Be wise and learn what they will teach you. They will make you a warrior equal to themselves if you do.”

Onera bowed her head to Dorian then. “I apologize.” She said. “You are right.”

The hardness in Dorian’s eyes faded away instantly and he smiled at her. “And never apologize.” He said. “It’s very un-Immortal like. At least that is what Tir’ut tells me.”

Onera looked at him and couldn’t help but burst out into a soft laugh. Dorian Leonidas was a very strange man she realized. And very easy on the eyes to look at. As was Sheva. Onera blinked as these thoughts raced through her head and she shook her head quickly. Why did she think of both of them in such a manner? She watched as Dorian moved off with Cazar Juconi beside him and her dark eyes cut to where Sheva was talking with one of the other families, her mother beside her. Onera took a deep breath to calm her heart. Perhaps coming here she would also learn about other things as well she thought. She would not hesitate in that regard and quite amazingly, Onera found herself hoping it happened with both of them.

Yes... her father was right. She could learn so much from these men and women and perhaps even learn things she had yet to experience. Onera felt an odd flush course through her at this thought and she enjoyed the way it felt. Perhaps she would discover far more than her mother realized by coming here.

And that did not frighten Onera in the least.

They were alternating sprinting ahead of Dorian and the others to scout their path. Deion took after his brothers and was considerably larger than most Lycavorians in wolf form. He did not come close to matching Androcles or their father in size, but he was thickly muscled and his fur was sleek and shiny black in color over the corded muscles and bone. Deion was slightly larger than his brothers who were not pureblood, but as with all the Leonidas children, that did not matter to him in the least. He tipped the scales at two hundred and eighty-six pounds in wolf form, but he was exceptionally fast and agile. His twin Nara matched their mother in size, being much more muscular while in her wolf form, and nearing a hundred and forty pounds. Deion teased her often saying she was fat because she weighed only a hundred and eighteen pounds when not in wolf form. Nara took it in the good nature it was meant for she knew Deion would always have her back and never cease to be protective of her.

Being twins made them far closer than normal siblings but being blessed with the power of a Praetorian made their connection to each other ten fold more powerful. They didn't hesitate to share everything with each other no matter what it was. Much like Fedor and Eirene, siblings they looked forward to meeting, they could tell when the other was happy or in pain. Deion was the hammer and Nara was the anvil as they had begun calling each other. His sheer power was more than hers, but her control was much more exact and focused. This would only grow as they grew older they knew, but there was no doubt that Nara was Deion's perfect match as a Praetorian Mage and calming influence on her twin.

The one thing Nara lacked that Deion excelled at was the ability to be aware of every thread of life around her. She focused on tracking her twin as he scouted ahead and insuring the area in front of her was clear. She tended to focus too completely on what was in front of her, and this is what allowed the two vampires to close on her from the sides as she squatted next to the large tree. They were upon her before she smelled them, experienced hunters, knowing right away she was Lycavorian. They came at her from downwind on her flanks and the first one that blurred past her knocked her weapon from her hands. The second blurred by her and Nara felt the impact of the solid weapon butt against the back of her head. The pain flashed in her mind and she felt her body propelled forward where she smashed face first into the ground in a cloud of dirt and dried leaves.

"Well... well..." The cruel male voice echoed in her head as she tried to gain her senses back. "Look what we have here Lanor. A pretty little Lycavorian bitch."

Nara flipped over onto her back, her mind still foggy, keeping her from focusing.

"A pretty Lycavorian bitch who shouldn't be here Galag." The second voice echoed.

Nara could smell their bodies and she wanted to gag at their stench. She shook her head once more and her eyes focused more and she could see them. They were much larger than her and wore uniforms of an earth tone. She could see traces of blood around both their lips and knew they had been out hunting and feeding on wild animals.

"How did you get here little bitch?" The one called Lanor asked as he moved around her.

"Answer the question bitch!" Galag barked just before he blurred and used his foot to savagely kick Nara in the side.

To her credit Nara didn't cry out as the brutal pain lanced up her side and back and she rolled over into a protective ball. She could not reveal what they were doing. She could not give away the position of the others as close as they were for it would cause their mission to fail. Her thoughts were still too muddled to focus enough and call for Deion within Mindvoice, the pain adding to the confusion.

"She's got a tight little body Lanor." Galag spoke. "We should take advantage of that."

"I haven't had a good piece of Lycavorian pussy in decades." Lanor agreed. "She looks really tight too."

Then Lanor blurred and Nara couldn't avoid the booted foot that smashed into her head, snapping her body around violently until she impacted the base of the large tree she had been squatting next to. She landed in a sitting position, pain wracking her nerve endings and causing her body to cry out in agony.

"What do you say little Lycavorian bitch?" Lanor goaded her. "We are going to have our way with you before we take you to our Commander. We are going to fuck you silly before we find out how you got here and what you are doing. What do you say to that?"

"No!" The male voice echoed sharply among the trees around them, both men whirling around to see the large Lycavorian behind them with savage, near glowing yellow wolf eyes.

Each of the men had only one thought in their minds. One thought that rushed to the forefront in their minds. How had this Lycavorian snuck up on them so easily? It was the only thought either of them would ever

have again for Deion Leonidas struck brutally, without any mercy or remorse for the blows and insults they had reigned upon his beloved twin sister. The two vampires were experienced soldiers and hunters and both of them began to move within seconds of Deion appearing. It would not save them.

With a savage wolf growl from deep within his chest Deion surged forward just as Lanor began to blur to his right. Deion's right arm snapped out seemingly without rhyme or reason and impacted Lanor squarely in the chest. The power of the blow was devastating due to the anger and the retribution that fueled it and Lanor felt several ribs snap like twigs as his body felt like it impacted a steel wall. His legs flew out from under him and he was lifted into the air and then dropped quite roughly onto the ground beneath him. Deion didn't even pause in his motion and drove straight for where Galag was frozen in place with shock.

He had felt Nara's reaction the moment it happened and was turning to return to his twin before she had even fallen to the ground in front of her that first time. Sensing her confusion and fear Deion had drawn upon all the considerable power and speed within his wolf form and raced to his beloved twin's aide. He had arrived to see her against the tree, bloody and in pain, and this had been all it took for him to react. Deion loved Nara. She was his twin sister and his closest friend. They did everything together, never leaving each other out of activities. It had been this way since they were small children. Now they both held the power of a Praetorian within them and Deion called upon this without question. He would make these animals pay for injuring and insulting his beloved sister.

Galag had time to look down on the ground and see Lanor withering in agony and then look back up. His eyes flew open in horror when he saw Deion was already upon him. They grew even wider when he saw the eight inch long Etheric knife take shape around Deion's clenched fist and then that Etheric knife was stabbing it's way into his chest. He grunted in terrible pain as the Etheric knife sliced through his heart and lungs and Deion's eyes flared for an instant and he solidified the Etheric weapon within his chest. Galag's legs twitched violently as the Etheric knife held him suspended off the ground for an instant. Deion pulled the knife free with a growl and he watched as Galag's body dropped to the earth at his feet. Deion whirled in time to see Lanor trying to struggle to his feet to defend himself. With barely a blink Deion unleashed three Etheric diamonds from his right hand. They crossed the distance between the two men in the blink of an eye. The first struck just above Lanor's elbow and blew off his lower arm. The second impacted his upper chest and blasted a gaping hole in his shoulder which took the remaining portion of his arm with it. The third struck as his body was twisting from the impact of the first two diamonds and drove completely through his left side to blow out his right side. As the Etheric diamond exited his body it took with it nearly all of his internal organs, vast amounts of blood splashing wetly on the ground all around him.

Deion didn't pause and turned to his sister even as the last Etheric diamond left his hand. He rushed to her side and dropped to the ground.

"Nara?" He gasped.

Nara looked at her brother as his hands and aura enveloped her and she forced a smile from her bloody lips. "I wasn't... wasn't paying attention." She stammered.

Deion looked over her body and reached up to wipe the blood from her lips. Nara stared at him for a long moment and then turned to look at the bodies of the two vampires. She turned back to Deion with stunning azure eyes. "You... you killed them." She rasped.

Deion glanced back at the bodies and then returned his eyes to his twin. "They would have hurt you. I had no choice."

Nara gripped his shoulder. "We need to keep moving... before Dorian..."

"Too late for that." Dorian's voice echoed and they turned to see their brother unwrap the shadows from around his body and stop blurring. He looked around the small area and then at his siblings. "*Sibfla*." He nearly shouted as he dropped to the ground beside Nara. "Sister?"

Nara shook her head. "I'm ok." She groaned. "Just a little dazed and bruised. They came from downwind. I didn't smell them until they were upon me."

Deion looked at Dorian. "Hunters." He said. "They must have been out here to feed on fresh blood. They reek of animal kills." Deion glanced up and saw Cazar Juconi and the others moving up on them. Sheva pushed her way through the group to blur up to them and she settled beside Nara.

"Nara?" She gasped reaching for her.

“I’m alright.” Nara said gripping Sheva’s arm and Deion’s shoulder and pushing herself to her feet. Her body screamed in protest but her healing factor would kick in quickly enough and in a few minutes the bruises and pain would be gone. “Deion took them out. They didn’t warn anyone.” She stammered.

Cazar stepped up to one of the bodies and using his boot shoved the form over. “Lanor.” He said quickly. He looked up and spied the other body and the single smoking hole in the man’s chest. “Galag.” He turned back to Dorian. “I know them well. Always looking to bed the young women in the settlement. Violent and unpredictable. Experienced soldiers though. We heard no shots. How did you kill them so silently?”

Dorian rose to his feet. “We can worry about that later.” He said. “We’re only two clicks from our ship. We’ll be gone soon enough. We move together now. We’re far enough away from the settlement that they won’t catch us. Deion... Nara... take point.”

Deion glanced at his sister. “Nara?”

Nara nodded her head and gripped his arm tighter. “I’m fine. Let’s move. Andro will be very unhappy if we get stuck here again.”

Cazar watched as Deion and Nara moved out once more and he stepped up to Dorian. He glanced back at the bodies and then looked at Dorian once more. “I have... I have never seen such wounds.” He said. “Galag’s chest is fused as if it was burned. What weapon could do that Dorian Leonidas?”

“We can.” Dorian answered him honestly.

Cazar’s eyes grew wider. “You can... you can do this?” He gasped.

Dorian took his arm. “Sheva is my wife and mate. We came to get you and her mother off this planet. You have trusted me this far... trust me more and when we are off this rock I will tell you everything.”

Cazar met his eyes. “Your word Dorian Leonidas?”

Dorian nodded. “You have it sir.”

Cazar nodded. “Then let us leave this foul place behind forever.” He stated.

“Best plan I have heard all day.” Dorian said. “Thirty minutes and we’ll be airborne. Then you will be truly free.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

MANNE

LYCAVORIAN ADHOC COMPOUND

Me? Arzoal asked the *Durcunusaan* officer who had approached only moments ago. *Why would a Pralor wish to speak with me?*

She and Helen were busy schooling the young adolescents in Aerial Wind Mechanics with Aurith and Isheeni acting as the primary examples. Using Isheeni was perfect because it was well known that she was perhaps the fastest dragon among their kind on Earth and Elear both. Her blistering speed and the exacting control of her body while flying had been learned through trial and error, crisscrossing through the narrow mountain passes on Enurrua, many times while being shot at. Aurith had taken after her mother in that regard and behind only her sister Elynth and her brother Jeth she had gained much fame with her speed and the control of her body while flying.

The *Durcunusaan* officer nodded her head as Helen walked up to them. “The OOD from *ARC ROYAL* contacted me since I am senior when Atropos is with Muton and his people. The Pralor ship arrived in orbit just a few moments ago. One of their medium cruisers I think. They specifically asked if they could send a party to the surface in order to meet with you. Apparently Elder Teniri is with them as well. They say it is very important.”

Arzoal looked at Helen. *Sister?*

Helen shrugged her slim shoulders. “Coming here unannounced is very odd. They must know Martin is not here. He would have made Delnash aware is was going to meet Yuri.” She said. “And Teniri coming without Delnash. That is what I find interesting.”

Indeed. Arzoal spoke. Arzoal looked at the *Durcunusaan* officer. *Very well Captain.* She answered. *Bring them to the main gathering building. We will meet them there. When is Martin due to return?*

“Queen For'mya checked in with the OOD twenty minutes ago.” She answered. “They will be arriving back on Manne by early evening.”

It is out of place to meet with them when Martin is not here. If this concerns Dragonkind then as Talon Guardians Martin and Torma both should be present. I will meet with them but inform them if it concerns Dragonkind they will need to wait until Martin returns. We will begin to head back in a few minutes. Arzoal said. *I wish to finish this lesson first.*

The *Durcunusaan* Captain nodded and turned away lifting her wrist COM to her lips as she walked.

Arzoal looked at Helen. *We should have Aricia or Dysea join us sister. It would not be appropriate for Martin to not have ears during this meeting.*

Helen nodded. “It could be about what Anja did to Daron.” She said. “Perhaps they think coming to you about it is more diplomatic.

Arzoal chuckled and nodded her head. *Perhaps. But I am in complete agreement with what Anja did and I do not think they would risk the wrath of our smallest Queen so soon after she beat Lorendo with his own computer and showed them that size does not matter.*

Helen smiled now as well. “Yes... there is that to consider.” She said. “And Daron’s foul stench is almost too much to bear now.”

Thankfully we do not have the sense of smell that you do. Arzoal spoke. *Come... let us finish this lesson and then Isheeni and Aurith can finish their instruction for the day.*

The main gathering building was the largest portable structure in the Union inventory. It could easily hold several hundred men and women and was used for many different things. At the moment it was serving as the main Mess area for those who were planetside. Tables and chairs were spread all around and a large kitchen area had been cordoned off where Iama and her staff put together the meals. Since there was no cooked lunches during the day, the kitchen area was empty of staff and quiet. The doors to the portable buildings had long ago been made large enough to accommodate dragons moving through them. Almost everything in the Union was built this way now to allow for access by Dragonkind.

Teniri... this is a pleasant surprise. Arzoal spoke as she and Teniri greeted each other by the opening and touching their snouts together.

Teniri was genuinely happy to be here and to see Arzoal again. She was so majestic and confident in her mannerisms. Teniri wanted to believe that this was rubbing off on her as well. Conlar and Nekins had filled her in as they transited here to Manne and then speaking directly to the Ancient One had been an eye opening experience to say the least. All that aside, seeing Arzoal again made her very happy.

It was a surprise for me as well... but it makes me very happy to see you Arzoal. Teniri told her.

A surprise for you? Arzoal asked looking at her. *You did not arrange for this meeting?*

Teniri shook her head as the smaller doors beside the main entrance opened and Aricia and Dysea entered the building holding hands. Conlar immediately stepped forward.

“We asked to speak with the Elder Mother.” Conlar declared. “No one else.”

Arzoal’s head snapped around at the obvious arrogant and insulting way he spoke and she snorted at Conlar angrily. *You would do well to watch your tone when speaking to two Queens of the Lycavorian Union little man!* She barked at him within Mindvoice. *They do not need your permission to go anywhere!*

Conlar looked taken aback by Arzoal’s reaction and he took several steps backward from the massive dragon in front of him. Arzoal was easily twice the size of any dragon he had seen on the Pralor homeworld and that alone was enough to give him pause. That he had just made her angry was equally obvious as well.

“I meant no offense.” He stammered. “It’s just that our business is with you Elder Mother Arzoal. It concerns certain events that may be happening and two of the King’s sons.”

Arzoal blinked quickly. *You expect me to talk to you of the King’s children without him being present?* Arzoal hissed. *Without their mothers being present? You presume much Pralor.*

“Indeed you do.” Aricia spoke firmly as she and Dysea came up beside Arzoal and Helen “What is all this about Arzoal? We came as soon as you called. Why are these people here and who are you to inquire of our children from someone besides us?”

“Please I...” Conlar stammered quickly. He quickly remembered that his title and status as a Keeper of Knowledge meant nothing to these men and women for they did not know the significance of his role. Nor did Arzoal for that matter. “I meant no offense... truly. I am not known to you and I apologize for the tone of my voice. I should have introduced myself first. I am Conlar... and this is Elder Nekins of the Dragon Council on Artaaya.”

Teniri moved forward slightly. *Elder Nekins and Conlar are Keepers of the Knowledge. She told them. Scholars who maintain and teach from the libraries on Artaaya.*

I do not understand. Arzoal spoke again. *Why would you want to speak with me? Teniri is the Senior Elder on Artaaya and my representative for Dragonkind to the Pralor people. I have already made clear to Teniri what is to happen.*

That is not why we are here Arzoal. Teniri told her.

Teniri you should know that no deals or agreements will be made without Martin and Torma present. Arzoal said. *They are two of the Talon Guardians of our people and Martin is King of the Union. I will make no decisions without them present.*

Aricia stepped up beside Arzoal now her azure eyes almost glowing in the dimness of the building. They were focused completely on the diminutive figure behind Nekins. The cloaked figure was remaining partially hidden in the shadows of the side wall and had made no move to reveal themselves.

“Perhaps we should ask your companion.” Aricia spoke.

Conlar stepped in front of her to try and block Aricia’s view. “Please... we only need to speak with the Elder Mother and...”

Aricia? Dysea? Arzoal questioned turning to look at Aricia.

“She is not Pralor sister.” Helen spoke now reaching up to place her hand on Arzoal’s foreleg and coming up beside Aricia and Dysea.

Arzoal turned her head and looked at the slight figure behind Nekins bulk. *Who have you brought here?* She demanded. *Come forward now!* She ordered.

“Please... we...” Conlar began again.

Dysea lifted her finger into his face quickly, silencing his words. “We do not wish to hear you speak anymore!” She snapped. “Not until your companion has revealed herself to us!”

They all heard the soft laughter from the diminutive cloaked figure and they watched as that figure moved around Nekins’s bulk to stand in front of Arzoal. Sarlana reached up and drew back the cowl of the cloak, watching as Arzoal’s flame red eyes grew wider as she gazed down at her.

“It fills me with such warmth to know that the dragon I blessed that day on Elear has grown into the powerful and influential leader that she is now.” Sarlana said softly and with obvious great affection.

Arzoal bowed her head deeply, dropping her huge flame colored body to the floor of the building instantly, surprising Helen and the others with this action. *Ancient One!* She gasped.

“You remember my voice Arzoal? Even after all this time?” Sarlana asked with a smile.

I will never forget your voice Ancient One. Arzoal spoke warmly. *It filled me with such pride and joy to hear it that day. To know that you believed in me enough to give me your blessing. It is a day I will always remember and cherish.*

Sarlana reached up and placed her hand flat on Arzoal’s muzzle, watching as her flame colored eyes closed in reverence to her. “Ah... Arzoal my child, after all you have done and experienced, all of the horrors you have led our people through, you bow your head to no one. Least of all to me.”

“Arzoal?” Helen asked softly.

Sister this is... Arzoal began to answer but Sarlana’s words stopped her.

“Please... my name is Sarlana.” She spoke turning to look at Helen, Aricia and Dysea. “And forgive Conlar; he was only trying to protect me. They are always trying to protect me.” She spoke quickly. “And no... you are correct I am not Pralor. The Lycavorian sense of smell is just as sensitive and keen as I have heard. Amazing. I am... I am Darastrixi. A dragon in your spoken language.”

Aricia, Dysea and Helen looked completely stunned at this revelation while Arzoal lifted her head high and stared down at Sarlana in shock. *A dragon?* Arzoal finally was able to form the words. *How... how can that be?*

Sarlana smiled and looked at Arzoal with blazing emerald green eyes. “You did not think that there are only *Vrrarhoinpa* dragons did you? Those who walk on four legs.” She asked her with a smile. “On our planet there are *Jiilhoinsa* as well. Just like me. Those of us who walk on two legs. Billions of both of us.”

“Your planet?” Helen asked.

Sarlana nodded her head looking at Helen. “Icarava is the homeworld to all Darastrixi. No matter where they may be in the universe. It is where we all come from. Where our blood calls to us from.” She said looking back to Arzoal. “Not all of us have been there... those like Arzoal and others who were part of Seed missions by the Pralor people. They have not seen their world... but it is still their home. Our home.”

“This is... that is quite a lot to take in.” Helen stammered.

Sarlana chuckled and nodded her head. “Indeed it is.” She said in reply.

“How did... how did you not know sister?” Helen asked her.

The Ancient One never... she never showed her physical form on Elear. She stayed in one of the mountain caves and... Arzoal spoke.

“And a very damp cave it was.” Sarlana spoke with a smile and disarming humor. She felt more at peace with Arzoal and these women than she had felt in millennia. “The Darastrixi on Elear adhered to a custom dating back to the beginning of our species on Icarava. Those like me were kept apart from the others. It is not something I would have done personally... but even I must follow custom at times. I left with Teniri and the others when they departed Elear and I remained with them even as we settled on Artaaya with the Pralor refugees. Some things have changed through the millennia... but not nearly enough in my opinion.”

Ancient One you... Arzoal began.

Sarlana waved her hand quickly. “Enough with the Ancient One *hofibavi!*” She spat. “I will not have the *Tilabil Dask* who has led the Darastrixi with the *ingowil* and *itov* of a mother caring for her own children refer to me in such a way!” Sarlana smiled. “And you did it without the guidance of the *Urllkrisa Mamiss*. That is the best part in my opinion.” (Foolishness. Grace. Love.)

“Sarlana... perhaps we should explain to the Elder Mother and the Queens why we are here.” Conlar suggested.

Sarlana nodded her head. “I would be more than happy to answer all of the questions you have and I am sure you have many... but first...” She moved carefully in front of Aricia gazing at her very intently. She knew the Lycavorian people were instinctive and reactive. They could shift into the form of a *kaldaka*, and these were the foremost traits of the *kaldaka* Sarlana had seen. Majestic creatures that they were, they were still very cautious of other. She held out her hands to her with her palms held up. “May I... may I touch you child?” She asked.

“Why?” Aricia asked her warily.

“It is a manner of greeting among my people.” Sarlana told her. “I mean you no harm. Any of you.”

Aricia looked at her evenly, glancing at Helen and Arzoal quickly, before turning back to Sarlana. “I am... I am Aricia Leonidas.” She began to say as she lifted her hands and placed them into Sarlana’s palms. “I am...”

Aricia’s eyes went wide as Sarlana’s thumbs came up over the backs of her knuckles and grazed lightly across her skin. She felt a surge of powerful energy through her that was so very warm and inviting. She saw images flash in her mind faster than she could follow them, lights and stars and then it was all gone. Aricia stepped back quickly as Sarlana lowered her hands and Dysea reached for her quickly while her fangs and eyes changed and she snarled at Sarlana.

“Little Wolf!” Dysea exclaimed. “What did you do to her woman?”

“I am... I am fine *Melda Min*.” Aricia stammered as she gripped her arms. “I’m ok.”

Dysea held Aricia tightly and reached for Anja within Mindvoice. *Melyanna... come to us quickly! You and Cirith both!*

Dysea! What is wrong? Anja answered instantly.

Aricia is... Dysea began but Aricia squeezed her arms and shook her head.

Anja I am fine. Aricia said looking at Dysea as she reached for her. *But you and Cirith need to be here. Come quickly.*

On our way. Anja replied.

Aricia turned and looked at Sarlana while still gripping Dysea's hands. What she had felt just now had been exactly what she had felt when Andro had left her womb screaming like a banshee and entered their lives. A sense of utter happiness and joy.

"You... you are the birth mother to one of the *Dahakoan* Aricia Leonidas. It is a blessed honor to meet you." Sarlana said softly as she stepped closer and bowed her head. Her emerald eyes were bright and she smiled at Aricia. "You carried him within you."

Aricia looked at her confused. "I'm sorry I..."

"*Dahakoan.*" Sarlana said gently. "Dragonkin. You are mother to the older one. To the one called... to the one called Androcles."

"Andro is my son yes." Aricia said pulling Dysea closer to her. "He is a son to all of us."

Sarlana nodded her head glancing at Dysea and then back to her. "Yes... I felt that. He cherishes you all you know. His many siblings as well. Resumar and Normya from you Dysea Leonidas; Eliani and the twins from Anja; Denali, Deion and Nara, Arrarn, Bryon, Carina and Zarah. Lisisa and Yuriko. And now Fedor and Eirene. He holds all of them so very close to his heart." Sarlana gazed at Aricia and Dysea for a long moment. "Your children... they hold no distinction between you. Any of you. You are all their mothers in their minds. That is so very fascinating. I felt his father within you. Your *rumag*... your *mrrandii*. He is so powerful... so filled with *itov* for all of you. Passion and purpose. His essence swirls around both of you. No doubt around all six of you. For'mya, this Anja and Cirith and... and Isabella. She is mother to the *Dahakoan* called Dorian. The younger one." (Mate)

Dysea looked at Sarlana now, her own emerald colored eyes wide. "How did... how do you know their names? The names of our children." She gasped. "Who are you?"

"I felt all of them within you." Sarlana said looking at Aricia. "And from you I felt your love for Dysea and those you call fellow Queens. And the love you both feel for all of your children."

"How?" Aricia rasped softly.

"I am *Doraanar*." Sarlana told them.

"Prophet?" Aricia said softly.

Dysea's emerald eyes were wide as she looked at Aricia. "Aricia how...?"

Sarlana nodded and held up her hands in front of her in the more common *Darastrixi* greeting manner now. "May I touch you again? Touch you both. It truly is a *Darastrixi* greeting. It is more common to my people and is meant in to convey friendship and openness. I am no threat to you. To any of you. We seek the same things. I know you can feel that. Please."

Aricia glanced at Dysea and then Helen. She turned back to Sarlana and both she and Dysea lifted their hands slowly and cautiously. Sarlana smiled and stepped closer, their hands going over her chest while her own hands pressed against Aricia's and Dysea's breasts directly over their hearts. Sarlana leaned forward and placed her forehead to first Aricia and then to Dysea and finally back to Aricia.

"*Wer tiichir ar wer Zezhuanth ekes wer dask ar wer Dahakoan.*" Sarlana spoke softly looking at Aricia now. (The blessing of the Ancient to the mother of the Dragonkin)

"The blessing of the Ancient to the mother of the Dragonkin." Aricia echoed softly her eyes going wide.

Dysea looked at her with equally wide eyes. "Aricia?" She gasped softly. "You... you understood what she said? Like before! How?"

Aricia nodded her head as she stared at Sarlana. "I don't... I don't know how *Melda Min*, but yes." She replied. "I understood. How... how is that possible?" She asked Sarlana.

Sarlana drew her head back, her emerald eyes gazing at Aricia. "Then it is all true." She said softly. "The legend is true."

"Legend?" Aricia asked. "What legend?"

Sarlana nodded her head as she drew her hand back and watched as Aricia and Dysea did the same. She looked at them. "It is said... it is said that the *Dahakoan* will bestowed unto those who create him or her the gift of the language of the *Darastrixi*. The language of *Zezhuanth*. The language that will reside within his blood no matter his species." She said softly. "The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is alive! And it is happening now!"

“What is happening? What is this you speak of?” Helen snapped now. “Exactly who are you and what in the blazes is going on?”

Yes! Arzoal echoed. *I would very much like to know what is happening as well.*

Sarlana turned to Arzoal then feeling more alive than she had in millennia. “We did come to speak with you Arzoal.” She said. “This is my doing. I had Conlar and Teniri bring me here. I wanted to speak with you about this Androcles and Dorian.” She turned and glanced at Aricia and Dysea. “I only wanted knowledge of them... nothing more. I could no more do them harm than I could harm my own children. I am nothing when compared to them.” She chuckled softly and looked at them. “They could squash me like an insect and there is nothing I could do to stop them. Any of them.” Sarlana moved closer to them. “I did not know however that the mothers of three of the *Dahakoan* would be here. Are the others here on the planet with you as well? His *Vrrarhoinpa* Elynth, is her mother here with you? Dorian... and Ryner. Are their mothers here with you?”

“Isheeni is not far.” Aricia answered almost without thinking. She felt a unique sense of ease from this strange woman. An aura of peace and knowledge that she had never experienced before and it was telling. “Isheeni and I are bound together. She is Elynth's mother and daughter to Arzoal. And Dorian's mother will return with our mate and husband shortly.”

Sarlana looked at Arzoal with wide eyes. “You... your child is mother to a *Dahakoan*?” She gasped. She turned back to Aricia. “And you are bound to the *dask* of this same *Dahakoan*? By the will of *Zezhuanth* this is too much.” Sarlana turned and looked Arzoal. “Tell me child, was your *autnaril* bound to this Androcles before he entered this life? Did he... did he project his awareness of things through his *Vrrarhoinpa* before he entered this life?” She insisted more persistently.

Arzoal's eyes narrowed slightly as she looked at her. *There are but a few outside of our families and blood that are aware of that Ancient One. How could... how could you possibly know such a thing?*

Sarlana turned back to Aricia and Dysea. “And the younger one... Dorian? He bonded to his *Vrrarhoinpa* before he was born as well?”

Aricia nodded her head slowly. “Yes.”

Sarlana whirled on Conlar and Nekins quickly, her face animated and bright. Conlar had an expression of utter astonishment on his face at what he had just heard. “Do you wish to now tell me this is nothing more than simple coincidence Conlar my friend? That the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is not happening now? As we speak?”

“I... I... no...” Conlar stammered.

“What... what is this Prophecy of Souls?” Aricia asked now. “And what does it have to do with our sons and the dragons they are bound too?”

Ancient One... perhaps now would be a good time to explain to everyone why you are here. Teniri spoke moving forward. And what it is we need.

Sarlana looked at her and nodded her head quickly. “Yes... yes of course. Of course.” She stammered the words. “Forgive me.” She motioned to the chairs around them. “May we sit... this may take some time.”

“We must wait for *Melyanna*.” Dysea spoke now. “And Cirith. They need to be here.”

Aricia nodded. “Isheeni as well.” She said.

Sarlana nodded her head in agreement at Aricia's words. “Yes... I am going no where now that I have found you all here. And all of you should hear this. It will concern all of you soon. It does concern all of you. Now more than ever given how closely tied you all are. We... we should wait for their fathers and your Bella as well.”

Conlar stepped forward. “Sarlana... is that wise. To reveal who you are to so many that we do not know?”

Sarlana looked at him and smiled. She turned back to Aricia and reached out to take her hands as well as Dysea's. They didn't hesitate this time and Sarlana smiled warmly at them.

“We are in the presence of the mother of a *Dahakoan*. And soon three mothers and the fathers of two *Dahakoans*. Those who gave life to the ones who can wield the power of your people's vaunted Praetorians Conlar. We are safer here than anywhere else in the galaxy don't you think? No... it must be this way. If we are to discover what it all means then we must do so together. We all have pieces to the puzzle... and only together will they fit as one and give us understanding.” Sarlana turned back to Aricia and Dysea. “And I must try to... I must try to make amends for the sins of my people as well.”

It was Arzoal who stepped forward. *What... what do you mean Ancient One?* She asked.

Sarlana looked at her. “A deed so vile it makes me sick to even think of it. But if there will ever be forgiveness then it must begin with me. I am the last of the *Doraamar*, and it falls to me.”

PRALOR CORVETTE
UPDATED DESIGNATION
SPARTAN ONE

For'mya moved down the short flight of stairs from the cockpit and into the small galley. She quickly poured herself a mug of Aricia's coffee and made to return to the cockpit when she saw Isabella leaning against the port bulkhead door frame leading into the main gathering area of the corvette. This middle section of the ship on the upper deck as they were served as a small lounge. There was a large star chart table in the center of the large room, with several work stations along the bulkheads that were not occupied at the moment. The Pralor Corvette, at least this class from the *VORTEX*-Class Heavy Cruiser, was meant to be used for both tactical operations and transport. There were several couches along the starboard side of the ship, a four meter wide counter which spanned the interior bulkhead and held both types of food and drink dispensers as well as several computer consoles that could be linked to the corresponding work stations and used to display important data.

For'mya sipped her coffee as she stepped down into the area and moved to stand beside Isabella. “Bella... is everything alright?” She asked.

Isabella lifted her finger to her lips signaling her to be quiet and she motioned with her head to the opposite side of the room. For'mya's dark eyes followed this motion and her heart slammed into her throat at what she saw.

Martin sat slouched in one of the couches, his tall, muscular body taking up nearly the entire middle portion of the couch. On his left side, Zarah was curled into a ball beside him, her face tucked neatly into the crook of his shoulder and neck with her left hand resting on her father's chest. Martin's left arm nearly swallowed his daughter against the side of his body and was draped over her in a very protective manner. On his right side, Lucia rested in much the same position, her head positioned on his shoulder with her right hand tightly holding Zarah's left hand over Martin's heart. Martin's right arm was curled around Lucia's shoulders in a similar fashion as Zarah but not quite so tightly. For'mya stepped closer to Isabella and slipped her arm around the waist of her fellow Queen and lover.

“Do you know how many times he fell sleep like that with his daughters in his embrace when they were growing?” Isabella whispered.

“More times than I can remember.” For'mya answered softly, her voice broken.

Isabella heard this within her voice and turned to look at her. Her hazel green eyes grew a little wider when she saw the tears that threatened to fall from For'mya's beautiful dark brown eyes and she reached out to take her free hand and pull her close with the other. “For'mya?” She questioned.

For'mya looked at her. “I... I wish so much to give him a daughter Bella.” For'mya choked out the words.

“Oh *Kinsoaurgai*... you have given him a daughter! Eirene is so beautiful and she...” Isabella gasped.

“She is of Pusintin's loins!” For'mya hissed softly. “She is beautiful and intelligent and I love her with all that I am... but she is not Martin's daughter Bella. She is not part of him.”

Isabella took the mug from For'mya's hand and set it aside. She pulled her out of the main area and back into the galley and looked at her. “She is just as much a part of Martin as any of our children For'mya Leonidas.” Isabella told her as she took her face in her hands and traced her thumbs along the ridge of For'mya's elven ears in a loving manner. “She reached for and found his essence while within your womb. As did Fedor. They will forever be Martin's children. That is what swirls within them and you should never doubt that. Ever!”

“There are times when... when I remember how I acted under that rutting monster Bella. I acted like a *pomai*.” For'mya choked out the words. “I did not... I did not want it... my mind screamed for it to stop but my

body cried out for more. It was humiliating! My body wanted him to... to fuck me harder. To take me harder. I could not control it. I..."

"For'mya stop!" Isabella gasped. "You must let this go my love. You have no right to bear shame for this. None. You are wolf. It is... it is the way of things."

"For so long... for so long I wanted Martin to make me like him. Like Aricia and Anja and Dysea. So I could feel what they feel. When he did... I was so happy. So free and full of new life. The only day that surpasses that is when Arrarn and then Bryon came into this world."

"I remember." Isabella said. "They were joyous days for all of us."

"How can he still love me as before knowing that..." For'mya finally broke into tears and buried her face in Isabella's breasts. Isabella pulled her tightly to her, tears clouding her own eyes now. "How can he still love me as before knowing how I would act... how I did act under his brother?"

"He loves you more now than he did before *Kinsoaurgai*... he loves all of us more now, because Martin Leonidas is more than just his instincts For'mya my love. And you know that." Isabella told her. "He is not a disgusting brute like his brother! He loves each of us from within the very deepest reaches of his heart and soul For'mya. From within a place that none of us have ever seen. A place where he holds each of us on a pedestal. He loves each of us with everything that makes him a man. Every part of him." Isabella pulled her face away from her breasts and looked into her brown eyes. "He never wavered For'mya. His love for you, his devotion for you. Not for a single breath did he ever waver. His one purpose, our one purpose, was to return you to us where you belong. We would have scoured the entire galaxy if need be. You could have been taken by a hundred men and acted in the same fashion with each of them because of the burning of your wolf blood, and it would not have mattered to him. Or to us. You are a part of him. We are all parts of him. And we are parts of each other. We are what makes him who he is, just as he makes us who we are." Isabella took a breath.

"We could see the conflict within him, the rage and the veil of death's hand for what you had to endure. He blamed himself for this *Kinsoaurgai*." Isabella took a deep breath and pulled For'mya closer to her. "He made a vow one night during that time we searched for you... when he thought we were asleep and could not hear him... a vow to the Gods. A vow that he would hold nothing back from us ever again. That he would bathe us with his love, his aura and his devotion always and forever. Every waking moment." Isabella leaned over and kissed her softly on the lips, holding her face gently.

For'mya met her eyes. "He... he prayed to the gods?" She asked surprised.

Isabella nodded slowly. "When have you ever heard Martin Leonidas openly pray to the gods for anything For'mya? He keeps his faith close to his heart."

For'mya shook her head slowly. "I have never heard him do this." She said.

Isabella nodded her head with a smile. "Have our times with him since you returned to us not been more glorious than all of the years we have been together combined? Even I have been overwhelmed by the force of his aura at times and I can not truly feel it as you and the others can. You must feel it every time he presses his lips to yours? Every time he simply touches you now?" Isabella looked into her eyes as she spoke.

For'mya nodded her head slowly. "That is... that is why I feel as I do Bella." She said wiping her eyes. "It is beyond breathtaking and... that is why I still feel shame. That he could still love me in a such a way."

Isabella smiled as she gazed at her. "When has our Martin Leonidas ever done anything that can be construed as rational For'mya my love? When have we ever been able to predict what he will do? Or how he will make us scream his name to the heavens."

For'mya blinked several times and then she could not help but laugh softly. "Never." She said finally.

Isabella smiled as well and nodded. "Martin has had to learn everything about himself as he goes For'mya. What he is now, he has taught our sons and daughters. What is instinctive to them from the day they entered this world, he has had to learn all alone without someone to teach him. And sometimes he has had to learn it in the most difficult of ways possible. You must let go of this false burden For'mya Leonidas. It is not yours to carry. And it never was. You will give Martin a daughter. Do not ever doubt that. He wants more children... as do we all. But he does not need for you to give him more children to prove you love him. Nor for him to love you... to love us... with everything that he is." Bella told her warmly. "And know that Fedor and Eirene are now and always will be his children. They still bear the same blood as Martin within them, and it is his essence that flows through them. No one else's."

For'mya finally nodded. "I know." She said softly.

“Does Pusintin’s aura compare to Martin’s?” Isabella asked her. “Now that you are free of that foul inhibitor... does he come close to Martin in any way?”

For'mya looked at her with wide eyes. “Please Bella!!!” She exclaimed. “Not even... not even... Ohhhhhh!” For'mya’s eyes grew wider when she felt it and Isabella smiled. They both turned to see Martin come up behind them, his dark eyes alive with life and love. “Martin... Martin you must that... please... stop...”

“No!” Martin growled as he moved closer.

For'mya groaned in need when his powerful arms swept her off the deck and he kissed her with staggering ferocity. For'mya’s arms went around his broad shoulders without hesitation and her lithe elven body ignited in heated desire as his overwhelming aura crashed all around her and lit her senses on fire. Bella was right For'mya discovered in that instant. No matter what she had felt while Pusintin had his way with her, it could not even remotely come close to the astounding feelings that swept across her wolf senses at this moment. He drew back from the kiss quickly, causing her to gasp in gratuitous need. His eyes had changed now, yellow/gold orbs that all of them had come to love utterly.

“Think Endy can fly the ship without you for a couple hours?” He asked in a husky, eager and passion filled voice.

For'mya’s wolf eyes gazed at him with lust now, but she attempted to maintain her calm composure. It was rapidly failing though.

“Martin... Martin there are others on this ship!” For'mya finally gasped the only thing she could think of to say. She had always been the more reserved of his Queens and she knew it.

Isabella chuckled as Martin’s arm drew her close to them and she made it a point to press her large breasts against For'mya’s side as well as Martin’s. While his wolf aura could not affect her, his Etheric resonance had done essentially the same thing to her as his wolf aura had done to For'mya. Both of them were very moist and ready. “That is what is so exciting about it!” She rasped out the words before trailing her tongue along the outer edge of For'mya’s elven ear and hearing her breath come in delighted gasps.

“We... we can’t!” For'mya gasped trying to fight the crushing desire and lust rushing through her. “Not... not here!”

Martin’s arm tightened around her waist and he lifted her off the deck. “Yes... we can!” He growled in his Alpha wolf voice. His other arm lifted Isabella off the deck and he made straight for the door into the small bathroom and shower stall. For'mya could not remember when his powerful hands began to remove her clothing, only that within seconds she was utterly naked within his arm. In those same seconds Martin and Bella had somehow shed their clothing and they were all very naked now.

The last thing For'mya could recall before he lifted her off the steel floor of the shower stall and speared her completely in a single, soul robbing plunge was Isabella turning on the water just before her soft lips claimed hers. They both screamed in delight into each other’s mouths as their beloved husband and mate had his way with them.

It would be a very interesting and blissful three hours since they loved a man who could be so very inventive.

AMANUCE PROTECTORATE HOMEWORLD CAPITAL CITY OF LORENT

To say that he was stunned at what he had seen would be the understatement of the last four centuries of his life. Nothing had prepared him for the sights and sounds of what he had witnessed in the last few hours and Coren Re Mydala was not often surprised in any way. He stood on the sixth floor balcony basking in the bright sun as it rose higher into the sky and the city of Lorent came to life around him. Dutkne had certainly shown them where the finest food was the previous night. Coren could not remember a more delicious meal, nor more riveting company. He watched as Denali nuzzled and cuddled with Arduri not caring in the least who saw. He watched as Caliria laughed and joked with Dutkne and his sister and mother. The men and women who sat with

them were open and friendly and joked with Coren as if he had been friends with them for decades. Coren had not laughed like that in decades and it still resonated within him. Nirilo and his Lycavorian wife Lari answered even the silliest of questions he had and did so without hesitation. It was last night when Coren finally got a true glimpse of what it meant to be a member of a Lycavorian family.

Family meant a great deal to the Vanari, but often times the real things they should have been sharing were overshadowed by the ridiculous traditions and customs about property and assets. Last night everything like that was left at the door when they sat down. Coren found he much preferred that and he basked in the emotions that flowed through him and he had always suppressed. At least until last night.

The Diplomatic Center Suites were large, five room facilities in the center of Lorent and really quite comfortable. They were not as lavish as the SBR Complex where all political guests stayed on Austrova and Coren found himself liking that fact. They were furnished with elegant pieces of furniture, perhaps not as plush and overtly expensive, but very comfortable regardless. He had everything he needed, including a fully stocked kitchen, a huge Master bedroom with a large sized bed and connected bathroom. The sprawling living area had two different couches, a stone and granite fireplace in the center of the room and then this wide and spacious balcony. There was also a medium sized office and sitting area off the main living area that he could use as a private room if he wanted.

The sunrise was breathtaking and filled the living area with warmth and bright sunlight through the large sliding glass doors. Coren sipped the glass of sweet juice and simply stood under the warmth of the sun using this brief time to reflect and sort through everything that had been going on these last months. He was a very different man now he knew that and he found he rather liked who he had become. What he had seen and experienced in these last months had forced him to step back and evaluate old traditions and feelings and his own actions that had caused him to drive so many away from him. Those old traditions and emotions had driven him in the direction of those who he had despised when he first came into the political arena. He had let them almost destroy the most important things in the universe to him, and those were his children. His very own children had looked beyond what their Vanari upbringing had pounded into their heads and discovered there was far more to life than what the SBR preached. In many ways they had been stronger and wiser than he had. Coren Re Mydala had repaired the rift between his children and himself now and he vowed never to let them grow apart as they had. His children were his future Coren knew, and he would do everything in his power to protect and support them.

The door chime interrupted his musings and he turned to go into the huge apartment. He knew Dutkne was coming over early to escort him to the meeting that Denali had called and the reason they were all here. He crossed the living area quickly and went to the door activating the small monitor and saw Dutkne standing in the corridor with two Vanari females he had never seen before. Puzzled, Coren activated the door lock and it slid open easily.

“Dutkne.” Coren greeted him.

“Regent Re Mydala.” Dutkne spoke with a smile. “May we come in?”

Coren motioned him into the apartment as he turned. “By all means... this is one of your living spaces anyway. And I must say it is spectacular.” He said with a smile as Dutkne moved past him.

The two young Vanari females were very attractive woman to say the least Coren thought to himself and they looked remarkably alike in the structure of their faces and bodies. They also looked somehow familiar to him but Coren couldn't place it. One of them had long, billowing white blond hair as most Vanari females did. It reached well past her shoulders, cascading down her back ending just above a tightly muscular ass. She was the shorter of the two, the top of her head barely reaching Coren's shoulders in height, while the second female came up to his jaw, nearly matching his six foot height. The taller young woman had rich, thick dark brown hair and it shone with health and care. Her hair was also very long, but it was tied at the ends to keep it from blowing all over. Coren took notice that they were both wearing dark brown and green fatigues that had been cut and tailored to fit their very firm figures enticingly. The taller of the females had very firm, medium sized breasts and her fatigue pants wrapped around incredibly firm buttocks and long legs. She had amazing blue green eyes and sensuous full lips with an angular face and flawless Columbia blue skin. The shorter young woman had larger breasts and her pants also encased a firm and incredibly fit body and while her skin color was slightly lighter in nature, it was similarly flawless and she had matching blue green eyes that were alive with life. For just a split second the odd thought occurred to him that she was the most attractive Vanari female he

had ever seen. Coren blinked his eyes several times; unable to believe he had just had those thoughts given everything that was going on. He had always considered himself a handsome man and after his split with Devra there were any number of beautiful young Vanari women who were drawn to him because he was exceptionally good looking for an older man, and he had a reputation of being an incredible lover. Coren quickly set those thoughts aside and cut his eyes to Dutkne once more.

Dutkne turned to look at him and smiled. "Actually Coren... this Suite is now yours." He said.

Coren looked at him with wide eyes. "Excuse me?" He stammered, Dutkne drawing his full attention so that he did not notice the tall Vanari male who entered slightly after the two young women and who remained behind Coren while the young women moved around to the sides in order to keep his attention to the front.

Dutkne nodded his head. "As the Vanari Ambassador to the Lycavorian Union in the Beta Quadrant, Androcles wanted to make sure you had somewhere to work and stay and be comfortable."

"Ambassador?" Coren gasped aloud.

"I spoke with Andro last night after dinner." Dutkne explained with a nod. "He does not want someone appointed by the SBR, blind as many of them are, to be the Vanari liaison to our people in the Beta Quadrant. For lack of a better explanation sir, he wouldn't trust them as far as he could throw them. His words of course." Dutkne told him with a smile. "He does trust you however."

Coren glanced at the two younger women as they chuckled softly at Dutkne's words but did not react otherwise. He looked at Dutkne. "I... I did not think that was the case." He said.

Dutkne nodded his head. "Andro is a complex person sir. I'm sure you have realized that by now."

Coren nodded his head slowly. "Yes... but I did not think he trusted me enough to... not after the things I said to him."

Dutkne shook his head quickly. "That is not the case at all. He did not want you to take this position because of how he feels for Caliria sir, because she is now Princess; he wanted you to take it because you have awakened so to speak. You see things in a different way than most of the SBR now. That has made you considerably wiser and more open minded than the rest." Dutkne stepped closer. "He will understand if you do not wish to accept but he..."

Coren shook his head quickly. "No." Coren Re Mydala spoke firmly. He had made his decision already. "I would be quite honored to accept Dutkne." He answered stepping fully through the last doorway and into a new world and life.

Dutkne nodded. "Good." He said. "Andro did want me to warn you... it could very well get ugly at the beginning and..."

Coren shook his head dismissing Dutkne's warning. "Caliria has already told me some of what he is going to implement." He said. "I can't say that I disagree with any of it to be honest. After what I have seen... if this is what it takes to drag the Vanari screaming into the present... then I will support it fully."

Dutkne nodded. "In that case... I should make you aware of who my lovely guests are." He said motioning to the two young woman.

Coren looked at them once more. "I don't recall Denali saying we had more of my people as part of our party when we left Austrova." Coren said.

"We didn't." Dutkne told him with a smile. "Coren Re Mydala allow me to introduce Senior Lieutenant Ryana Val Ardwor, named for her grandmother." Dutkne spoke motioning to the taller dark haired female.

"And this is Senior Lieutenant Nyosa Val Ardwor." He spoke again, motioning to the shorter young woman.

Coren looked at Dutkne in surprise and then to the two young women. "Val Ardwor?" He asked softly. "I knew... I knew a Vanari Colonel by that name. Rinel Val Ardwor. He was... he was a very good friend of mine. My only true friend to be honest. We went through the Cadre training together. I haven't... I haven't had a friend like him since to be honest. He was a Senior Colonel of our Cadre Commandos before he was lost in a Enverr pirate attack." Coren said softly. "That was... prophets that was over a hundred years ago!" He looked at the two women now. "Are you relations of his? I did not think he had any children or family." Coren looked back to Dutkne puzzled. "I thought you said no other Vanari came from Austrova Dutkne?"

Dutkne shook his head. "None did." He replied.

Coren looked at the young women again and then back to Dutkne. "I don't understand." He said.

"We are relations of his Regent Re Mydala. Nyosa and I both. As well as our four older brothers and our younger sister." Ryana Val Ardwor spoke with a warm smile. "He is our..."

“He is our father.” Nyosa chimed in with a warm smile of her own.

Coren’s eyes grew wide. “Father?” He gasped. “Rinel... Rinel had no children. He was not even joined with anyone when he died. A tragedy in my opinion. We lost so much when he did not return. I have missed him for many years. You could not possibly be his children.”

“Are you so sure of that old friend?” The Vanari man who had been standing behind the completely unaware Coren spoke the words softly but with an equally warm smile.

Coren Re Mydala spun around as fast as his body allowed and his eyes flew open when he saw the tall Vanari behind him dressed in a similar uniform. The man had thick dark hair and the same blue green eyes as the young women. He was also broader and more muscular than the man Coren remembered. Rinel Val Ardwor had been an exceptional Cadre Commando, one of the most incredibly skilled and extremely deadly of his time. The glass Coren had been carrying almost dropped from his grip but the young woman Nyosa quickly stepped forward with a humorous look on her face and took it from him as he stared at the man.

“Rinel?” Coren gasped.

“It has been too long Coren my friend.” Rinel Val Ardwor spoke warmly. “Far too long.”

“Rinel Val Ardwor... how... how is this possible?” Coren stammered as he reached out and put his hands on Rinel’s wide shoulders and gripped his upper arms to make sure his eyes were not deceiving him in some way. “They... they told me you had... they told me you had been killed.”

Rinel nodded his head. “Yes... I am sure they did.” Rinel answered with a hint of anger in his voice. It was anger that was not directed at Coren and he quickly pushed it aside. “I did not die Coren. Our ship was attacked by Enverr pirates yes... but they took us prisoner. To sell in the slave markets.”

“What?” Coren almost shouted. “They... the SBR... they knew you were not dead?”

Rinel nodded his head slowly in reply. “The entire mission was a set up.” He told him as he reached up to grip Coren’s arms in a reassuring manner. “Our entire Cadre was captured with ease. They used gas on us while we were still within our landing ship. They knew that we were going to be there. When we woke up, we were prisoners. They used... they raped and used those females in my team for days. The men they simply tortured. I lost six of them before we even reached...” Rinel stopped talking and his grip on Coren’s arms grew tighter.

“*Medwan... joa.*” Ryana spoke softly as she stepped closer and reached out to put her hand on his arm.

Rinel nodded his head and looked at Coren. “Ryana is right. It is not something I think of often these days Coren my friend. Forgive me. I have put it behind me.”

“Forgive you?” Coren gasped in reply. “Rinel... I did not... I did not know! I would have demanded we...”

Rinel nodded his head. “I know.” He said. “You would have demanded we launch a full rescue mission and led it yourself.” He smiled. “You were not so cautious back then my friend.”

Coren could not help himself and in a manner quite unlike the Coren Re Mydala that so many people knew, he embraced Rinel in bear hug. He was not going to hold back any longer and this was the man he wanted to be now.

“By the Prophets Rinel my friend!” Coren exclaimed as he embraced him and slapped Rinel on the shoulders and back over and over. Ryana and Nyosa watched as their father returned the embrace with equal strength and they both smiled. “It is... it is truly wondrous to see you again Rinel! You do not know the happiness that courses through me right now.” He spoke happily before pushing him away and holding him at arms length. “You... you don’t look like you have aged at all!”

Rinel laughed at that and squeezed Coren’s arms. Ryana and Nyosa couldn’t help but smile brightly and hold back the tears they wanted to shed. They had not seen their father so completely and happily speechless since their mother had told him she was expecting their youngest child. They had seen their father lift their mother into the air that day and dance all around their home with her in his arms at this news. It was a now a moment of humor for their entire family since all of them knew their father could not dance a whit.

“Nor you my friend.” Rinel spoke with a wide smile.

“Hah!” Coren exclaimed. “You never were a very good liar!” He spoke. He shook his head for a moment and then looked at him. “I almost lost... I almost lost everything Rinel.” The words began to spill out almost immediately. Rinel Val Ardwor had been Coren’s closest friend for decades and when he thought he had died; Coren Re Mydala had lost the one person who he could share anything with. “I let my mistrust and anger

guide my actions and it cost me so much. It almost cost me what I care for most of all.” He said. “And all of it was based on a lie! A lie!”

Rinel squeezed his arms. “Yet you are here now my friend.” He said. “And you are here to finally try and correct the myriad of lies that the Vanari have lived under for so long. I am led to believe that your two oldest daughters have become wives and mates to the Princes of our Union?”

Coren looked at him and smiled. “All of them actually. My youngest Naesta... she is with the sisters of Queen Anja... and the Lycavorian who has claimed her. Joci is his name. A fine man Rinel. I have spoken with him and Ceuma. They...” Coren looked at him. “She has a husband and a wife and she is happier than I have ever seen her. And I could not be happier for her. For all of them. They have men who love them completely and will do anything for them.” Coren blinked as what Rinel had said finally hit him. “Wait... how did you... how did you know that?”

Rinel smiled brightly. “Let’s just say that their choices and who has claimed them has made some young women very unhappy here on Amanuce. Including my own daughters.” He spoke.

“*Medwan!*” Ryana exclaimed with wide eyes. “Could you be more forthcoming?” She scolded him.

Coren smiled as he looked at a smiling Rinel once more. “Between them and the men they have chosen to love... the blinders I wore for so long no longer impair my vision.” He said. “And I am very happy about that.”

Rinel smiled at him. “That is very good.” He said. “Very good indeed my friend.” He turned to Ryana and Nyosa and motioned to them with his hand. “And yes these lovely young ladies are my oldest daughters. Thankfully they both got their mother’s beauty. I’m as ugly as a boar.”

Coren gazed at them for a moment, not taking his arm off Rinel’s shoulder, unwilling to let this moment escape if it was indeed a dream. “It is a pleasure to meet you.” He spoke with genuine happiness. He looked at Rinel. “Was their mother among those...?”

Rinel met his eyes. “Their mother is Lycavorian Coren.” He said. “We have been mated for over eighty years now. Eighty-six to be exact.”

Coren Re Mydala did not blink at this revelation and everyone in the room knew without doubt he had finally turned the corner. He grinned and slapped Rinel’s arm. “So it took a calm, beautiful Lycavorian woman to finally tame that restless nature of yours huh?”

Rinel smiled. “Not so calm.” He told him. “And she outranks me.”

Ryana and Nyosa laughed at their father’s amused expression. “And she lets him know it whenever our *medwan* starts to get on her nerves.” Nyosa chuckled.

Rinel nodded. “That she does.” He said.

Coren looked at them. “All of your children are...?”

Rinel nodded his head. “My wife Tarnie... she was the one who led the rescue party from the Protectorate that found us.” He said. “We haven’t been apart since that first day.”

“We have... we have so much to talk of my friend.” Coren exclaimed. “Can you... can you stay? Wait... Dutkne we...” He turned to look at Dutkne.

“Coren... there is something else you should know.” Rinel spoke as he held out the pad to him while Coren turned back to face him.

Coren looked at him as he took the data pad. “What is this?” He asked.

“A list of names.” Rinel answered him calmly. “The names of two hundred and sixty-four thousand Vanari who now call Amanuce home. Men and women who have been rescued from the slave and rape pits through the decades and chose to remain here. They have built lives here Coren. Become welcome and honored citizens of the Protectorate and now the Union. They have friends and jobs and businesses. They have lives and families that they will not leave for anyone. Especially not the Vanari Board of Regents. Not after it has been confirmed what many of them already believed. Have believed for some time.”

Coren held the pad in his hand and looked at it with wide eyes. “Two hundred and sixty-four thousand.” He gasped. He turned to Dutkne. “You knew?” He asked.

Dutkne nodded his head slowly. “We have rescued scores of your people through the many years since our first encounter Coren.” He told him. “Many chose to return home and we gave them transport to the nearest colony world that the Vanari controlled. Apparently however, our actions are not as well known as we thought.

Apparently those who returned chose to keep our involvement secret in order to protect those who remained. As Rinel has said... many of the Vanari chose to remain here and make new lives for themselves because..."

Coren shook his head. "No! You do not have to explain why Dutkne! I know why!" He snapped angrily. "Why? Why keep this from us though?"

Dutkne shrugged his shoulders. "Trying to coerce an open and friendly reaction from the SBR because of this would have done nothing." He told him. "We rescued your people because it was the right thing to do. Slavery in any form is an abomination that my people can not and will not tolerate. It's abhorrent to us."

"Because of the Black Day and what happen after?" Coren asked softly.

Dutkne nodded his head. "Thousands of light years may have separated us from those in the Union Coren... but the morals and values that Elder Sumar, his son King Resumar and my ancestors began stayed deep within the blood of our species. We will mash out and destroy slavery whenever and wherever we find it. And those who take part in it." He looked at Coren. "It was decided we would not use this information to try and make the Vanari feel something or act differently than they normally would towards my people."

"But this knowledge..." Coren said. "It could have gone a long way to my people finally discovering what I have discovered in a few short months Dutkne."

Dutkne nodded. "Perhaps." He said. "I think you might be surprised at how the Vanari feel as a whole about my people. The SBR has just never asked them."

"But any Vanari who reached out to the Lycavorians were shunned and ridiculed through the years by the Board of Regents and the SBR. And we made sure that is was known to others! I should know... I was part of that idiotic group!" Coren spat.

"Coren..." Rinel spoke once more. He waited until Coren turned to look at him. "Most of these men and women have Lycavorian wives and husbands Coren." Rinel said calmly. "They have children who have been born through the decades. Including me obviously. There are many just like my daughters Ryana and Nyosa who are fully grown and are serving proudly in what is now called the Lycavorian Union Armed Forces. This is their home Coren. These men and women also have family members on Austrova or different colony worlds who they have reached out to quietly through the years. Most of those family members have already been here countless times to visit their loved ones." He said proudly. "We arrange all of it."

"How?" Coren asked in disbelief.

"We worked out a regular transport schedule. An Underground Network so to speak. Each month we bring several hundred Vanari here to visit with their loved ones. Some are here even as we speak. None have ever revealed what they know. I have a feeling that will change soon... but they are loyal Vanari citizens who think their government is wrong. And they do not care that their brothers or sisters or children have found lives here with us." Rinel said.

"By the prophets!" Coren gasped shaking his head.

"My sons command ships and men Coren. Ryana and Nyosa are Special Forces trained. We will not give up our lives here... what we have built and come to love... to the dictates of ancient old fools who cling to power and sell out our own people!" Rinel said.

"So many?" Coren said softly.

"The last census was six years ago." Ryana told him. "The pureblood Vanari and Vanari mixed population has grown to over half a million now. This is our home. This is who we are. We honor our Vanari blood and our heritage, we hold it close to our hearts, but this is the life we have chosen. The Union is now our home. It always has been. The dictates of a Vanari government we do not recognize mean nothing to us." She spoke as her eyes changed and she allowed her wolf fangs to extend. Coren glanced at Nyosa and saw her do the same and do so with pride.

Rinel looked almost embarrassed. "You will find that many of our mixed children have no love for the Board of Regents in general, or the SBR in particular." He said.

Coren looked at Dutkne. "Who knows this Dutkne?" He asked.

Dutkne shrugged his broad shoulders. "Everyone within the Protectorate." He replied. "It is very hard not to know when nearly three dozen Vanari and Lycanari are now members of the elected Council and have helped to shape us for the last half century."

"Lycanari?" Coren asked.

“Those of us who are half Lycavorian and half Vanari.” Ryana answered him. “It sounds much better than half breed.”

Coren met her dazzling blue green eyes. “So it does.” He said. Coren stepped away from Rinel and looked at the pad. “Does Androcles know?” He asked.

Dutkne nodded. “He knew the moment we became Praetorian and Praetorian Mage.” He said.

Coren looked at him. “And he still wished for me to take this position not knowing how I would ultimately feel or act?”

Dutkne shrugged. “Andro is more insightful than most.” He said. “He took a leap of faith I guess you could say. He’s done a lot of that recently and so far it has paid off. Don’t know how much longer our luck will hold out...” Dutkne shrugged. “But we’ll take what we can get.”

“You speak of him and you as one Dutkne.” Coren said softly.

Dutkne nodded. “In many ways we are. That whole Praetorian and Mage thing. Gives us fits some times.” He said with a smile.

Coren looked at him. “What... what do we do now?” He asked.

Dutkne smiled. “Now? Now we have a meeting with senior military officers. The reason that Denali here called this meeting. You will meet some of our political members and they can give you more information and answer questions for you. What they can not answer I’m sure Ryana or Nyosa can.”

Coren looked at them quickly and then at Rinel. “Why?”

Rinel smiled. “My daughters are now assigned to you Coren my friend.” He said. “Both are Special Forces trained as I said. They finished in the top one percent of their respective class and made their mother and I very proud. Nyosa also has an Educational Degree in History and Political Matters.”

Nyosa chuckled. “It’s called Political Engineering and Restructuring *medwan*.” She said with a shake of her head.

“She will be your assistant. Ryana is now assigned as your liaison to the Union branch here on Amanuce.” Rinel told him. “She will go where you go at all times.”

“Rinel... I don’t need a bodyguard.” Coren said.

Rinel shook his head. “No my friend... you do. I don’t think you truly realize how badly this could all go when it finally comes to a conclusion. There will be many who will be more concerned about saving their own *midaeus*. Killing you would solve that problem for them. I will not let that happen. And Ryana is not your bodyguard... Prince Androcles has seen to your protection. But she will respond to any threat against you. As will any of us.”

Dutkne moved closer. “Let’s worry about that when the time comes.” He said. “Right now we have a meeting to attend at the Defense Ministry Building.”

Coren nodded. “Of... of course.” He said.

“Don’t worry Regent Re Mydala.” Nyosa said as she looked at him with those incredible blue green eyes. “We will let nothing happen to you.”

Coren smiled at her but did not understand the look in her eyes that spoke of far more interest than a soldier protecting a charge. He nodded his head. “I will change quickly.” He said as he moved for the bedroom area of the Suite.

DEFENSE MINISTRY BUILDING WESTERN CORRIDOR OF LORENT

The building was unimpressive from the outside and only when you stepped through the main doors into the building foyer itself did you realize that you had stepped into an entirely different world. Coren had never been within the Defense Ministry Building on Austrova. His status as a member of the SBR insured that the military officers came to him and not the other way around. He did take note that they did not enter through the main entrance and Dutkne explained it was for security reasons. Why announce to everyone that Coren was here. Once inside the building Coren was quick to notice that there were many Vanari who moved about freely. All of them wore uniforms and were either Lycanari or pureblood Vanari who had chosen to make new lives for

themselves here on Amanuce. Coren drew many glances from them for most were very aware of who he was. They were also aware that his daughters were now the wives and mates to the two oldest pureblood Princes within the Union.

Coren didn't speak as he was led through several doors and finally onto an elevator lift. The men and women he had seen were far more professional than the Vanari Board of Regents ever expected. And Coren had no doubts they were far more organized than even the most generous intelligence report allowed them. There was still very little known about these men and women and the Protectorate... no... the Lycavorian Union now... Coren corrected himself. Coren had first hand knowledge of that when Dutkne had appeared in that ship while they were after Devra and Arduri in the Alpha Quadrant. This new branch of the Lycavorian Union had achieved far more than the SBR or the Board of Regents gave them credit for.

They exited the elevator lift some ten stories below ground if the elevator panel was correct and entered a slightly dimmed area. All around Coren could see massive wall mounted monitors and star charts as well as dozens of men and women moving from computer station to computer station. Dutkne looked at Coren as they walked.

"Coren... welcome to the Command and Control Center for our military." Dutkne told him.

Coren looked at him. "This is... this is amazing." He spoke softly.

"Not quite what the SBR would expect I imagine." Rinel spoke from Coren's opposite side.

Coren looked at him. "Expect?" He gasped. "Many of them still believe you are using Nuclear Fusion reactors for your ships!"

Nyosa laughed softly from where she and Ryana walked in front of them. "You always did say they were blind to their own arrogance *medwan*." She said.

Rinel watched as Coren looked at Nyosa's figure as she walked. He smiled when his friend nodded his head. "Nyosa Val Ardwor... speaking as someone who has had their eyes opened... I could not agree more."

Nyosa glanced back at Coren and her stunning blue green eyes twinkled at him. "Well... if we can open your eyes Regent Re Mydala... then there is still hope for the rest of the Board of Regents and the SBR."

Coren nodded. "Let us hope so." He answered. "Let's hope so." He watched as Nyosa and Ryana quickened their pace and moved up to the tall Lycavorian female several meters in front of them. They both leaned close to her and nuzzled her cheeks as he had seen so many Lycavorians do with others while in Union space and among them. They came to a halt only a few feet from them and Rinel stepped forward.

"Coren... my wife and mate Tarnie." He said holding out his hand for her.

Coren watched as the woman took Rinel's hand and pressed her lithe frame up against his lean and muscular body without the slightest bit of hesitation. She was just as tall as Rinel and her long blond hair flowed around her face and past her shoulders. Coren realized that Nyosa and Ryana got the thick richness of their hair from their mother. They also got her breathtaking facial features, but Rinel's eyes. He watched as she nuzzled his cheek affectionately and then turn to him.

Tarnie held out her hand to Coren and he took it within his in greeting without pause. He bowed his head to her. "It is an honor to meet the woman who was finally able to tame Rinel Val Ardwor." He said. "And I mean that with great affection and respect."

Tarnie Val Ardwor smiled and laughed softly at his greeting. "And it is taken that way Regent Re Mydala." She answered. "And I don't know about taming him so much." She spoke. "I kind of like his wildness." She said leaning over to nuzzle her husband once more.

"Mother please!" Ryana gasped. "We are in CIC!"

Tarnie laughed. "It is nothing they have not seen before." She spoke proudly.

"What... I do not know what to call you." Coren said.

"Tarnie Val Ardwor is a name I carry quite proudly Regent Re Mydala." She answered him. "My parents insisted... as it was a way to honor Rinel's Vanari blood. And that of our children."

Coren looked at Rinel quickly and then back to her. "I wasn't... I did not know that..." Coren shook his head. "Bah! I will say nothing for fear of making myself look like more of an idiot."

This caused all of them to laugh softly and Tarnie squeezed his hand and reached out with her other to take his hand. "Rinel has always spoken with such fondness of you Coren. It is truly a happy day to see you here and to see and smell the cheerfulness on my husband and mate." Tarnie stepped closer. "It is certainly an honor to have you here and to see that you are now on our side."

Coren smiled warmly liking this woman immediately. “Well... I am certainly glad that I am not so stubborn a fool as I thought myself to be. I would never have experienced what I have these last months... and perhaps lost everything I cared for most.”

Tarnie smiled as well. “Come... Prince Denali and your daughters are already in the main Conference room with some senior officers. We are waiting for you and Dutkne to arrive.”

Coren looked at Dutkne somewhat surprised. He chuckled. “I always hated titles. Never had much use for them. Now that I am not in charge anymore... well... I’m happier than...”

Rinel moved forward. “Yes... we know how happy you are. You have made that clear over the last few weeks.”

Coren and the others laughed at Dutkne’s expression and Tarnie motioned with her hand. “This way.” She said.

Still holding Rinel’s hand she led them down a long corridor to a set of large doors. They slid open at her approach and Coren followed them in to see Denali, Caliria and Arduri standing with half a dozen other Lycavorians around a large Star Chart table. Another door opened and two more Vanari entered the large room, both of them carrying data pads. Coren was not able to tell if they were pure Vanari or the Lycanari as Ryana had called them. It didn’t matter to him as Arduri and Caliria turned to greet him. He embraced them both tightly, first Arduri and then Caliria nuzzling his cheeks lovingly. This type of greeting was something that was completely common within Lycavorian society and those changed by them even a little. It was something he would need to get used too, but he did not shy away from it at all. He turned as Denali held out his hand.

“Good morning sir.” He spoke.

“Denali.” Coren responded as he took the hand. “It has been quite... quite an eventful morning.”

Deni chuckled. “Of that I have no doubt. You accepted I hope?” He asked as Arduri moved up on his right side and Caliria squeezed in between him and her father.

Coren nodded. “I did. How could I not knowing what I know now.”

“Good. Good.” Deni said pulling him closer to the table beside Caliria.

Tarnie stepped up to his opposite side and motioned to the four men and two women who also stood around the table. “Ambassador Coren allow me to introduce Senior Generals Hagoth, Darnal, Vula, Kleena, Astiua and Tusar. They will be coordinating the different strikes and the rescue operations from their Command Cruisers.”

Coren looked at her confused. “I’m sorry... what strikes? What rescue missions?” He asked.

Tarnie looked at Denali confused herself. “Milord?”

“I haven’t filled Coren in on the overall concept or purpose of what I presented General Val Ardwor.” Denali spoke evenly. “It is probably for the better since there seems to be some dissension among your officers here.”

Tarnie met his gaze. “Dissension?” She asked. She looked at the men and women around the table. “Explain please.” None of the men and women at the table spoke quickly enough to suit her and Tarnie focused her attention on one. “Darnal?”

“Hagoth and Tusar have voiced objections to what Prince Denali has presented.” He spoke in an almost disgusted tone of voice.

“I’m listening. That is what we are here for anyway.” Tarnie said turning to the two men who stood side by side to her left.

“Tarnie we are committing fully one third of our combined forces to this operation.” The first man spoke. He was an older Lycavorian, shorter than Denali but equally as broad. “It is... forgive me Prince Denali... but for lack of a better description... Tusar and I believe it is a vendetta. Tusar and I do not feel right taking part in this.”

“This is not an operation that we haven’t discussed in some way through the years past.” Tarnie said calmly. “You were all for it then... why the sudden change of heart Hagoth?”

“It is not the idea of the missions themselves. We do not disagree with them in principle, at least I do not.” Tusar spoke now. “It is the manner in which we are to conduct them however where I have issues.”

“I’m still not hearing an objection.” Tarnie said. “I am now Commander of Lycavorian Union military forces in this quadrant since Admiral Valen was promoted to his current position and left for Apo Prime. I have reviewed the plan and I don’t see anything wrong with it. So... enlighten me Hagoth. Tusar.”

“The operations call for orbital bombardments!” Tusar hissed gently. “Surgical strikes yes... but against known civilian encampments with the distinct possibility of casualties. It also states that we are to take no prisoners! Nor render any aid to those who might be hurt by our attacks! These are not the RoEs that we have operated by in the past Tarnie.”

“Our Operational Guidelines changed the moment the full Protectorate Council passed the Edict of Merger.” Tarnie said. “We operate under the RoEs of the Lycavorian Union, of which we are now part.”

“Why?” Hagoth demanded.

Tarnie looked surprised. “Excuse me?”

“Why do we have to be the ones to change?” Hagoth asked her simply. “We have had a working and functioning government for far longer than those in the Alpha Quadrant. They should be joining us and not the other way around!”

Tarnie leaned forward and placed her hands on the table. “It has been understood since the very beginning that we were always the branch of our people. That those within the Alpha Quadrant were the balance and heart of our species. That is where our homeworld is. Where we all came from at some point. Where our ancestors came from.”

“This is my homeworld!” Tusar spoke.

“You know what I mean Tusar! No one is asking you to uproot yourself or your family.” Tarnie snapped at him. “Wayonn... Dutkne’s father... even the entire Protectorate Senate Council... they have always held out that we would rejoin with our brothers and sisters within the Alpha Quadrant when the time was right. That time has come.”

“They have been at war for the better part of their existence!” Hagoth rasped. “And now they will bring their issues with the OSG and the Eridiani here! Their enemies will become our enemies!”

Denali looked at him. “Would you have preferred that our people simply roll over to the High Coven and let them rule us? Allow them to rape and murder our people as they were doing on a daily basis? They are the ones that attacked us General!”

“I do not need a history lesson Prince Denali. Not from someone who is more than six thousand years my junior!” Hagoth snapped at him.

“General Hagoth... you would do well to watch your tone and who you are speaking to!” Dutkne barked now. “Denali Leonidas is a Prince of the Lycavorian Union! He is your superior and no matter his age... you will treat him with respect.”

Hagoth took a deep breath, Tusar remaining quiet now as Hagoth was now taking the point. Tusar only had issues with the way the operations were going to be conducted. Hagoth it seemed had far deeper political concerns and he wanted no part of that. He knew his friend was pushing to become a member of the Senate and he had been pushing harder ever since they had discovered the Union existed and that a merger was going to take place. Tusar was a soldier... it is all he had ever wanted to be. He would die for his people and his family... but he wanted nothing to do with politics.

“My apologies Prince Denali. You must... you must understand what this looks like to me in the manner you have presented it.” Hagoth said.

Denali shook his head. “No I do not General.” He said. “Would you care to indulge me?”

“We have all seen and heard the reports about your brother. About your father.” Hagoth spoke. “Many from your own Netnews as you call them. I have been studying them for weeks. Since the day it was announced the merger was going forward.”

“Hagoth... you don’t want to go down that road.” Dutkne warned.

Deni held up his hand. “No... let him continue.” He said calmly. “I want to hear what he has to say.” Deni pulled his P1 from its spot at the small of his back and laid it on the table. He tapped the device and did a circular motion with his index finger on the small control pad. Only Dutkne, Caliria and Arduri knew what he had just done and Dutkne shook his head slowly. “You may continue General.”

“There are many of your own Netnews reports out there about the actions that your father and brother have taken through the years.” Hagoth told him. “Many vicious and brutal measures that were not, in my experience and my military opinion, appropriate responses to the events that had occurred. Your father... he destroyed an entire acknowledged government of our own people because, in his mind, the son of the leader, this Joric fellow, falsely claimed your own mother as his mate. The *Lunmai* is a recognized part of the history

and culture of our people. Your father took it upon himself to ignore that. Several hundred thousand Lycavorians then died fighting the Union in defense of what they believed and your father murdered them. And he did it again just recently when his brother claimed his elven mate after she thought he was dead. Her body reacted as any female Lycavorian would after the death of a mate and she accepted his brother as her new mate and husband. She even gave him children which should have bound them together forever. It seems your father didn't like that so he initiated a war to get her back."

Dutkne stepped closer to the table. "Hagoth... you tread in very dangerous waters. You... you truly do not want to..."

"Dutkne!" Denali barked looking at him. "I asked him... now let him continue."

"Just last year..." Hagoth charged forward intending to make his point regardless of what Dutkne wanted. "...your brother destroyed the Jump Gates around the Hadarian homeworld. Over three million innocent Hadarians died because the Union did not agree that the Hadarians wanted a new ruler and they wanted these Kavalians as their friends. Destroying the Gates was not a military action Prince Denali... it was murder. We all saw what he did to that man during your Senate meeting. What was that? Was that a military action? That too was murder.

"Your father, your brothers, even you have taken vampire females, females from the species that has been our sworn enemies for millennia, and you made them your wives and mates. This is the same species that butchered our people on Lycavore and for many millennia afterwards. Just as you yourself said not moments ago. Yet now they are our friends?" Hagoth continued speaking. "And now we are being ordered to conduct combat operations against the OSG and the Eridiani. Why? Because your brother took offense that the OSG captured the Vanari female that he was going to claim as his wife and they sold her into slavery. This has been happening among the Vanari for centuries! Even the Vanari accept it! They have learned to let it go and move on. Not your brother. He destroyed an entire government to retrieve her. Like father... like son."

Caliria bristled at the man's comments, especially in regards to Carisia, her green eyes changing and her fangs bursting forth. No one saw Dutkne reached discretely down and grip her arm. She glanced at him quickly.

[Do nothing Inamarno.] He told her within the heavily shielded Etheric connection. *[Let Denali handle this.]*

[But Andro will...?] She gasped.

[Andro trusts his brother. And Denali is far more capable than Hagoth believes him to be. You have witnessed this yourself.] Dutkne told her. *[I had an inkling that this would happen. Just let it play out. Hagoth is pressing for a seat on the Senate and is supported by those among my people who prefer talk rather than action. We have them as well... just like the Union. On a much smaller scale here thankfully.]*

[None of these things he has said are true! He does not know what he is speaking of!] Caliria gasped.

Dutkne nodded. *[And you know this because you have seen within Andro's thoughts and memories. Hagoth has not. I'm afraid he will discover this in a manner that he will not agree with in the least. Have faith Inamarno.]*

Caliria looked him for a moment and nodded her head. He was right. She was a Princess of the Union now and she knew the truth of things.

"I believe this is nothing more than a personal vendetta by your brother and he is using his authority as Crown Prince to order us to carry out his death warrants." Hagoth spoke evenly. "It is wrong and I will not be party to it. I will also make sure that others know about it if these missions continue."

Hagoth's rant had caught everyone entirely by surprise and that was easily seen on their faces. Even Tusar had no idea his friend had felt this way and he had moved several paces to the left away from him during his speech. Everyone was frozen in place and could only watch as Denali stood there for a long moment with his arms crossed over his chest and said nothing. He nodded his head after several heartbeats and looked at Hagoth.

"And you got all this information from our Netnews?" Deni asked him.

Hagoth nodded his head confidently. "Yes. As well as many Vanari rebroadcasts of your own news reports that they have been showing and even some Rothryn intercepts."

Denali nodded. "I see." He said softly.

Denali Leonidas took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. He was known as the comedian of their family, always trying to make everyone laugh no matter the situation. He was a warrior unquestioned, but he would

much prefer to laugh and have fun. It was one of the things that Lisisa and now Arduri found so very attractive about him. He was extremely slow to anger and without question the most tolerant of the Leonidas family. However... push him too far and Denali Leonidas was an Alpha Wolf without denial. Deni finally nodded his head and looked across the table at Hagoth.

Deni reached forward and tapped his P1 lightly ending the recording mode. "General Tarnie... is it common practice with the former Protectorate military to not release certain bits of information to the News hogs who seem to plague us wherever we go?" He asked.

Tarnie nodded her head hesitantly. "It is Milord." She answered carefully. "We do not release Mission details. Operational concerns. Not everything is within the releases we give to the Public channels. It helps to protect our Intelligence Assets."

Denali nodded his head. "I just wanted to make sure. That is also a practice we follow as well." Denali stepped clear of the table and turned around looking at the wall for a long moment before he turned back to look at Hagoth. "You quote our own Netnews reports General Hagoth. I commend you on your initiative... but your utter stupidity outweighs everything else."

Hagoth looked at him with wide eyes angry eyes. "Milord! You have no right to..."

"Shut up!" Denali barked angrily. "Shut the *nubous* up! You have spoken enough! Far more than I should have let you without beating you down like the fool you have made yourself out to be!"

Arduri moved up beside Denali without a thought and everyone watched amazed at the calming affect she had on him as she pressed her firm body against his side. She reached up without fear and turned his face to her. "Be at peace Denali my love." She spoke in a soft whisper.

They all watched as Denali took a deep breath and brought his hand up to cover hers and his other arm encircled Arduri's waist. His body visibly relaxed and Dutkne allowed a sigh of relief escape him slowly. He truly did not want to have to stop Denali from killing anyone here.

Deni nodded to Arduri and leaned over to kiss her softly. He released her hand and she stepped back beside Caliria as Denali turned back to Hagoth.

"I do not question your loyalty or your honor General Hagoth, only your common sense!" Denali spat at him but with much less fury in his voice. "General Tusar has valid points about how the missions are to be conducted. Had you kept your mouth shut, not gone off on this rant about things you know nothing about, those questions would have been answered. As for your ridiculous accusations about my mothers, nearly everything you just spouted to those in this room is the version that was released by the Union government to the Netnews. The parts you do not know..." Denali moved along the table to stand in front of him. "The parts you do not know General, are the parts that were never released to the Netnews. You have never met my father and brother yet you question their actions. Be glad they are not here General... you would not have liked their reactions to your false accusations in the least about our mothers. Neither would my mothers for that matter." Deni snarled.

"The parts about the *incident* with my mother, as you call it, there are only a few dozen men and women who know that Chetak and his son Joric injected my mother with a drug made from the inner lining of a dragon egg." Deni spoke noticing that nearly everyone in the room now was focused on him. "This drug had the effect of increasing the potency of the *Lunmai* to such an extent that it was not natural in any way. Chetak and Joric knew my mother was being affected by the *Lunmai* because of traitors within our midst that did not want to see my father take the throne of our grandfather. But they also knew that even in the grips of the *Lunmai* my mother would never betray my father willingly in such a manner. What you don't know General Hagoth, because it isn't your *nubous* business to know, is that my father claimed my mother under *Vada Assirina Cormunn*. The Centennial of the Moon. And that was consecrated in the blood they shared at the peak of their time together that night. This made them *Anomes*." Denali spoke angrily at the man and watching as his eyes grew wide in disbelief at what he was saying. He did not notice the eyes of the other Lycavorians in the room go equally as wide.

"My mother could not fight what her body was telling her because her mind was not her own. She could not fight it because she was drugged! Essentially they took away her free will and choice. As you so aptly stated General, the *Lunmai* *is* part of our culture and our history. However... does it completely remove all cognizant ability from the female that experiences it? Especially when she has already been claimed by a male and they have become *Anomes*?"

"Milord you..."

“Answer my *nubous* question!” Denali roared stepping right up into Hagoth’s face his eyes changing and his fangs bursting forth. “You will answer my question or I will fucking beat you into a bloody piece of garbage right here in front of everyone for dishonoring my mother with your stupidity!”

“No Milord!” Hagoth rasped quickly.

“*Macin Gravinolfgrek, hador Vada Assirina Cormunn fand hote dissa.*” Dutkne spoke in the ancient Lycavorian language, the words carrying much reverence in them. Denali and all the others turned to look at him. “*Anomes, magari un tur shahlekke son raanath jossas.*”

Coren looked quickly at Dutkne. “What...”

“Once consecrated in blood, honor The Centennial of the Moon above all others.” Dutkne spoke softly. “Soulmates, never to be parted by worldly means. There are four pairs of *Anomes* within the Union. Out of billions and billions of our people... there are only four. Three of them are within the Leonidas family. That alone should tell you something. The fourth pair is the only man who will ever carry the title of *fervon* to the King.”

Denali’s eyes turned back to look at Hagoth’s face. “Something that Chetak and his idiot son did not know before they began their doomed plan to rule the Union and kill my father.” He growled softly. “Chetak and those like him ruled with an iron hand. Our females were treated as property and slaves. They refused my grandfather’s attempts to bring them out of the violence of our past. So my grandfather Resumar banished them. When the High Coven struck our world in force they escaped and left billions to die! Billions! Do not take me for a fool General Hagoth for I have seen firsthand the memories of my father and grandfathers in my dreams. I know what happened there. You do not. You may be over six thousand years my senior, but you don’t know *sibfla!*”

Dutkne stepped closer to the table now seeing the look on Hagoth’s face. “Deni perhaps it might be...”

“No Dutkne! This fool wants the truth so I will tell him the truth!” Denali barked angrily. He turned back to Hagoth. “You think you know my father and my brother General? You think because you listen to some *igord* news person tell you things, that you know who my father and brother are? My uncle kidnapped and raped my second elven mother General! He implanted a device in her head that blocks all Etheric abilities. A device that is Pralor in origin. Therefore she could not feel my father’s Etheric resonance within her because of this device. It was then my uncle showed her live feeds of my first elven mother about to be raped by an Immortal! He lied to her! He used her for his own nefarious gains! I should know because I am the one who led the force to rescue my first elven mother. My mother only submitted to my perverted uncle because she thought she was saving the lives of those members of my family that he told her he would kill if she did not. And since we all know my father was not dead at the time, regardless of what my Uncle thought or did, what does that make my uncle?”

“The Kavalian government helped religious fanatics gain power by subverting the rightful rule of my Hadarian mother!” Denali hissed. “They tried to spread lies about her, to besmirch her honor by calling her a *pomai* and *sraap* and showing video of who they said was her laying with multiple men! When they were made to look like the liars they were in front of the entire Union they usurped her rightful place as the Queen of her people with force and deception. The Kavalians had built a secret Jump Gate that connected to those Union Gates around Hadaria. They began jumping in millions of troops and ships. Their intent was obvious, even to a child! From here they could have reached out to attack the entire Union with massive amounts of troops and ships before we could react to such an attack! Andro did the only thing he could to stop this flow of troops and ships. And do not doubt for a moment that he does not see the faces in his dreams of each and every life extinguished that day because he had to give that order!”

Denali jammed his finger into Hagoth’s chest. “The Kavalians blew up our government building, butchering over a thousand innocent men and women. Among the dead were nearly two hundred children! They murdered hundreds of our Drow people because they wanted to hide their invasion force from our eyes! Do not stand there and tell me my brother is a murderer General!” Denali’s arm snapped out and he pointed at Caliria. “You see that woman standing there! She is a Vanari. And she is now a Crown Princess of our Union! A wife and mate to my brother. A wife and mate to my brother long before we ever knew the Vanari or the Protectorate existed! That is what destiny and the gods had already decreed long before Caliria or my *fervon* ever joined this world. What crime has she committed general?”

“Milord... I...”

Denali turned. “Do you know why Caliria was taken by the OSG? Do any of you?” He demanded. “She was taken by the OSG because she had developed the precursor to a serum that would counteract the chemical the OSG uses against Vanari women. The chemical that forces them to do things they would not normally do! When they discovered she had successfully done this... they took her. What the OSG didn’t know was that they had already violated at least half a dozen laws in the Alpha Quadrant the moment they brought Caliria and other Vanari females there to be sold into slavery. To be raped and used by disgusting men who didn’t have the *nor* to go out and find their own woman! Men who thought they were protected by the same outlaw government that my brother obliterated.”

Every Vanari in the room had wide eyes at this information. Rinel stepped forward now. “Coren... Coren is this true?” He gasped.

Coren looked proudly at Caliria for a long moment, reaching out to grasp her hand tightly and then he looked back to Rinel and nodded his head. “Yes. Caliria developed the base serum in secret after many years of research and testing. The OSG discovered what Caliria had done, against the laws of the Vanari, and it was arranged with those Vanari who are helping them to take her. It is why Devra and my other children went after her. After she was rescued Denali’s Hadarian mother Anja and her sisters Ceuma and Sivana put the finishing touches on the serum compound.” He spoke. “There is now a working counteragent to the OSG drug. And Ardan and the SBR are sitting on that information.”

“But... but why?” Ryana gasped.

“Because many of them are working with the OSG Ryana.” Coren answered. “Just as your father and so many others have believed through the years. And not one of them believe for an instant that Androcles will sever all ties to the Vanari as he has threatened. He will do exactly as he has said he would. I have discovered Androcles Leonidas has very little tolerance for arrogance.”

“You think you know my brother and father General Hagoth?” Denali continued turning back to Hagoth. “You do not. And if either one of them were here, at this very moment, you would most likely be dead for questioning the honor of my mothers in such a way. You may not like them... even though you have never met them... but do not make the mistake of calling them murderers for their actions when you do not know the full details of events that took place and forced them to do what they have done.”

“Deni we should...” Dutkne began.

Denali shifted his body and looked at those in the room. “My brothers and I made a vow to each other many years ago. And we reaffirmed that vow when our *fervon* Dorian joined us in this life. I intend to keep that vow. I have presented a military plan that will accomplish that and free hundreds of Vanari prisoners who are now being held by scum in the process. It is a plan that you have been considering for years from what I understand. If any of you are unwilling to put this plan into action then you may join General Hagoth in retirement.”

“What?” Hagoth gasped.

Denali looked at him. “I thank you for your service to our people General; however, I will not abide an officer who speaks and acts without all the facts. And neither will my father or brother. You are officially relieved of your command... effective immediately.”

“You can not do that!” Hagoth declared.

“Yes he can!” Tarnie spat angrily now. “He is a Prince of the Lycavorian Union. Our Union now! And you have succeeded in giving all of us a black eye of shame that we will not soon recover from Hagoth! Sergeant Lengot!” She barked.

Denali watched the man push away from the wall of the room near the door. “General?”

“You will escort General Hagoth to his office where you will supervise while he empties his office of all personal items. You will then escort him from the building.” Tarnie ordered the guard. “I will have your resignation processed within the hour for your signature Hagoth. All of your command codes and access will be revoked immediately. It is time for you to move on Hagoth. Times are changing and this is no longer your place.”

The CIC was deathly quiet as the sergeant led Hagoth from the conference room still in shock at what had just happened.

Denali turned and looked at Tusar now. “General Tusar... you had reservations about the missions? If you will allow me... I will show you why your concerns are unfounded.”

Tusar looked at him with wide eyes. “Milord I...”

Denali held up his hand as he moved up beside the man. “You have legitimate questions General.” He said. “I will show you why they are not truly a concern. It only appears that way.” Denali then began to pull up several different maps and charts on the table. “My father calls this a Shock and Awe campaign...”

ALPHA QUADRANT LYCAVORIAN UNION NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE PROJECTS DIVISION DREAMLAND SHIPYARDS

They were lined up in front of every view window on the *SCIMITAR*, both port and starboard, from one end of the ship to the other. Pretty much everyone who was not on duty had turned out to witness something that very few individuals would ever see. All of them had heard the whispers and rumors of this place. All of them knew that it existed. Only a handful on the *SCIMITAR* knew where it was, or how to traverse the obstacles that led to the single hidden Jump Gate that brought them here. Kameka stood beside Sadi and Ne'Veha in the port lounge staring out the massive view window with perhaps a hundred other men and women. Lu'ria and Sehri stood with them, all of them holding hands. Kameka had a look of utter wonderment on her face as they gazed at the different class ships that were docked at the dozen or so absolutely colossal shipyards that spanned the distance as far as the naked eye could see. The *SCIMITAR* was moving very slowly towards a cluster of what appeared to be asteroids. Enormous asteroids that had bright lights spread all over them. All of them could hear voices over the internal ship's COM as Sa'sur was speaking to Dreamland docking control.

“...maintain present course *SCIMITAR*. Upon reaching Point Alpha, please transmit final recognition codes or you will be fired upon.”

“*SCIMITAR* acknowledges. Seven minutes to Point Alpha.” Sa'sur's voice answered.

Kameka could do nothing but shake her head in astonishment. “My people... the ship captains and pilots... we always believed that this place existed but we could never confirm the many rumors we heard.”

Sadi smiled next to her. “I have never been here... so don't feel left out.” She spoke.

“Nor I.” Ne'Veha rasped in reply.

“I... I can not believe I am here.” Kameka gasped. “That I am... that I am being allowed to see this.”

Ne'Veha reached out and squeezed her hand tightly. “You are one of us now.” She said softly. “Never doubt that Meka.”

Kameka looked at the deck. “I should be with my father. Fighting to free my... fighting to free my people.”

“You are where you belong Meka.” Sadi told her with a smile. “This is where you were meant to be. Being Daio's wife and mate; being our friend; this is where the gods meant you to be Meka. This is how you will fight for your people. By showing them all they could be.”

Kameka looked at her with her dark eyes and nodded her head. “And I will show them that we can be so much more.” She said.

“Look!” Lu'ria blurted out pointing. “One... no two of the *ARIZONA*-Class!”

Sadi and Ne'Veha cut their eyes as did many heads. “It has to be Miranda Lorian. The *ARIZONA*'s First Attack Regiment. That would be the *ARIZONA* itself and the *HORNET*.” Sadi said.

“Gods!” Kameka gasped suddenly. “What is that?”

All of the attention was then focused to the nose of the gigantic vessel that was coming into view surrounded by the equipment and girders of the largest space dock they had ever seen. As more and more of the ship became visible, no one could ignore it. It dwarfed any ship any of them had ever seen by a factor of five. The nose of the ship began to slope back as more of the ship was revealed and it became much thicker and wider. It was the most formidable ship any of them had ever seen in their lives.

“That... I believe that is our new home.” Sadi managed to finally stammer as they all gazed at the ship.

“*Son vada carians!*” Ne'Veha muttered in awe.

Sadi smiled and glanced over to the left of where they stood. Her eyes came to rest on Ulana and the other Senators where they stood only a few meters away. Ulana was watching her intently, having heard

everything that she and the others had said no doubt. Sadi also noticed that her eyes did not contain anger or hate as they had so many times before. Sadi then turned towards the doors into the lounge as she felt Andro's Etheric resonance. They slid open and he strode through the doors without pause. He slowed as he saw them all before the view window but came right up behind them. Sadi felt him reach out to her and the others with his aura and all of them returned it instantly. He moved up behind her and his powerful arm drew her close to him as he reached for Sehri and Lu'ria while Ne'Veha moved directly in front of his tall form and pressed back against him.

"So what do you think?" He asked with a smile. "Pretty impressive huh?"

"That is not exactly an apt description *Saradasaar*." Sadi said with a smile.

"It is just a ship." Sehri stated with unique innocence. "A very large ship yes... but still just a ship."

Andro laughed softly and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek while she leaned into him happily.

Ne'Veha turned and looked at him. "Have you been here before Andro?" She asked.

Andro nodded. "Quite a few times. With my father." He answered. "Mainly during the production stages of the *ARIZONA* Class."

"How long are we staying?" Sadi asked.

Andro shook his head. "Not long I'm afraid. Avatar 341 has had the ship ready to go for two weeks now. Once the *SCIMITAR* docks we'll transfer over while she takes on some last minute supplies Denali and Arduri requested. Once that is finished we'll depart to meet with Yuri. They should be back in the Alpha Quadrant within six hours. Dori and Sheva are already on their frigate and on the way to the rendezvous. Ben's Chief Engineer sent a message for you *KertaGai*. Something to do with a ship and that you and Ne'Veha would know what he means. It's finished and in one of the hanger bays on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Care to fill me in?"

Sadi shook her head with a smile. "Nope. *SirsanGai*, Meka and I will see to it. You'll find out soon enough. Don't rush us!"

"Ok. Ok." Andro said.

"*DuonGai* and I will see to our personal weapons and insure Elynth and the others are settled. I want to make sure everything I requested from my mother arrived safely." Lu'ria spoke. "There are some things that I asked my mother to send for Sehri."

Sehri looked at her. "Me?" She asked.

Lu'ria nodded her head and smiled her amber eyes bright and full of love. "I sent her your sizes and had several sets of our Drow light armor made for you. It is similar to the ArmorPly that we normally wear, but it is lighter and will allow you to wear it during our instruction."

Sehri's eyes grew wider. "Instruction?"

Lu'ria smiled. "When our *Enylarcopri* returns we are going to begin instructing you." She said. "*Saradasaar* wants us to train you."

Sehri looked at Andro. "Really?" She gasped excitedly.

"*KertaGai* and *SirsanGai*'s abilities are more latent in use." Andro told her. "It enhances their fighting skills yes... but it works more for their flying. You on the other hand *DuonGai* are manifesting your Etheric abilities in a more defensive nature. Your barriers and such are more advanced than either Lu'ria or Carisia and will be more use to us on the ground. And I want you to be able to protect yourself when we reach the Beta Quadrant."

Sehri looked at him oddly. "Protect myself?" She asked. "Why?"

Andro pulled her tighter to him. "Because I believe there are going to be far more who are very unhappy that we have claimed you as our wife and mate than we think. Things are not going so well within the Beta Quadrant and Deni believes that once we arrive we will become targets. Not only from the OSG and those Vanari and Lycavorians working with them, but also from the Rothryn Science Academy. That is what your mother thinks as well and I tend to agree with her and my brother."

"I won't let anyone take me away from you!" Sehri stated forcefully. "Any of you!"

"Nor will we *DuonGai*." Sadi told her with a smile. "Our Drow Mistress and Carisia are simply going to insure that if anyone tries this... they will not be happy with the outcome."

Sehri took a deep breath and smiled, trying to reach higher than her petite five foot three frame would allow. "Good." She stated.

Andro chuckled. “I believe you will have a very willing student Mistress.” He said to Lu'ria as he leaned over and nuzzled her cheek.

Lu'ria sighed in delight at his action and nodded her head. “That is good.” She said pulling Sehri tighter to her. “She will need the energy.”

SPARTA'S WRATH

Andro stood across from the towering Avatar 341 on the sprawling bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH*. The bridge rested atop the neck portion of *SPARTA'S WRATH* just at the beginning of where the ship's interior opened and then expanded into dozens of different decks and central compartments. Forty-three decks made up the interior of the *VORTEX*-Class Cruiser, with only the very top deck and the very bottom deck unable to accommodate the dragons that would now call this ship home. The Bio-mechanical nature of the ship allowed 341 to conform many decks and interior compartments into something resembling the interior of a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser. Since the vast majority of the crew had been pulled from other Strike Cruisers, it allowed them to quickly acclimate to the wide corridors and huge doors that now dotted the ship. With nearly a million crew members, the first living crew members that 341 had had on his ship, he wanted to insure their comfort and protection. Using the first week that *SPARTA'S WRATH* had been here in Dreamland's docks, 341 had reconfigured and redesigned much of the interior of the ship. There would be families on this ship he knew, and with this knowledge he made sure that all of the living quarters were comfortable easily reached from throughout the ship. Decks eleven through eighteen housed nothing but living quarters. Ranging in size from medium sized apartments for the families, to barracks like spaces for the single crew members, 341 had made sure they would want for nothing. There were eighteen Mess Lounges on the ship scattered throughout the many decks. Avatar 341 knew this was a warship and that would be its primary function going forward. He knew *SPARTA'S WRATH* would be used to project the Union's power and influence across the stars. It was a similar intent as the ships original Pralor builders. 341 had made many different improvements however. In two sections that the Pralor builders had intended to use for simple storage, 341 designed and implemented quartermaster stores for the crew. They would now be able to purchase nearly anything they wanted within the two stores, one forward and one aft. There were two dozen gathering lounges that could handle a thousand people each at any given time. Each lounge had massive armored view windows which could be opened to stretch the entire length of the room and reveal the vastness of space outside. The ship had no sprawling and lavish quarters for visiting dignitaries as the Pralor Builders had designed, instead 341 had chopped up those massive quarters into much more reasonable sized ones, again for use by the many families that were now his charges. There was a fully equipped school and one massive hospital, with two fully staffed medical clinics in the forward and aft sections. The school, clinics and hospital were heavily armored and shielded deep within the bowels of the ship.

341 had also created a huge additional engineering room three decks above the main engine room that now housed the 18 Mark Eight Whisper Class Shroud generators that could make *SPARTA'S WRATH* disappear completely. The 2 Seventh Tier Phased Quantum Fusion Resonance Main Reactors provided far more power than was needed to drive the massive ship. With four Fifth Tier PQFR, 341 easily had more than enough power to fully integrate many Union systems into *SPARTA'S WRATH* that made the ship even more lethal than its Pralor Builders had intended. With a full complement of 900 APOC Series Unmanned T9 Fighter Drones, 341 retrofitted one of the six main hanger bays to accommodate up to a hundred dragons comfortably. Sprawling areas for the dragons to stretch and even make short flights in order to work kinks out of their wings. Huge private pens that allowed for mated pairs to have their own personal areas and unmated dragons to interact with each other. This hanger bay was now as equally armored and shielded as the hospitals and clinics and all exterior launch tubes and hatches had been reconfigured and removed so there would be no accidents. The five other hanger bays now had two *TYPE-II* Dragon transports and thirty *STRIKER DT IIAs* assigned to them. Along with the five remaining Pralor Long Range Corvettes, ten *MENKLA*-Class armed transports and a full Squadron of *RAPTOR IIE3* Warfare birds on board, *SPARTA'S WRATH* had an Air Group that could conduct any mission.

Those were just the things that Androcles had detected as he made his way from Hanger Bay One to the bridge. To say that he was a little overwhelmed would have been the stupidest comment anyone could possibly utter.

Andro let his eyes take in the entire bridge before finally settling back on 341. "I see you have been busy 341." He spoke.

-There were structural changes that needed to be made- 341 answered. **-You placed me in command of SPARTA'S WRATH and I deemed them needed to accommodate our personnel and mission parameters. I determined that this configuration would work best for our missions going into the future. I have since activated the lock down protocols and permanently configured the Bio-Mechanical substances in my hull. SPARTA'S WRATH is now as she will appear going forward. No other changes are possible-**

Andro looked at him with some surprise as the mechanical sound of his voice was gone and he spoke with a deep baritone now. "You changed the sound and tone of your voice." He asked.

341 nodded his head. **-I deemed it was appropriate to adjust how my external voice sounded in order to put the crew more at ease. Do you not approve?-**

Andro shook his head quickly. "No... not at all." He said with a smile. "I was going to... I was going to ask you if that was possible."

-My Avatar Model is much more advanced than Avi Prince Androcles- 341 answered him. **- Though the interaction we sustained earlier has allowed his neuro pathways to since expand even more and allow for additional growth and changes like those I have instituted within myself-**

Andro stepped closer to him. "You are not a model number to me 341." He said looking up into the Avatar's face. "You are a person."

-That designation would not be entirely accurate Prince Androcles- 341 spoke. **-I am a fully...-**

"It is accurate enough for me." Andro interrupted him. "And for this crew. Avi has made it very obvious to all of us that you were designed to be far more than simple Avatars of the ships you represent. You are this ship yes... but you are also an individual. Have you given any thought to what I suggested?"

-I found your request odd at first- 341 answered. **-After further processing and...-** 341's eyes met Andro's. **-And thought... I have chosen a designation... a name that I would find suitable-**

"So you like it?" Andro asked him.

-Prince Androcles I...-

"Stop that." Andro said instantly. "You have done it before and I want you to call me Andro or Androcles from now on."

-That would not be, strictly speaking, appropriate for me to do- 341 answered.

"Yes... well as you have no doubt noticed I am not real big on the appropriateness of many things." Andro told him.

341 paused as he processed that statement. **-That would be an accurate statement-** He stated.

"Good. So then that is what I want you to do." Andro told him. "Now... what have you decided?"

-In processing the request...- 341 saw Andro's eyes narrow slightly. **-In thinking about the request I determined that a name to signify the heart of the Lycavorian people to be very suitable. I reviewed the history of the Lycavorian Spartans that occupied Earth in the time of your grandfather. When translated into the Lycavorian language I found that the tone of one word resonated well-**

"So you liked it?" Andro said with a smile.

341 nodded his head then. **-If that is the more appropriate description... then yes-**

Andro shook his head slightly and smiled. "I can see that this is going to take some doing." He said softly. He looked at 341. "What did you decide?"

-Armen- 341 answered.

Andro tilted his head to the side and looked at him. "Armen." He said. "Spartan."

341 nodded. **-Correct-**

"I think that fits rather well." Andro said. "Armen. I like it."

-Then I will make the necessary alterations within the ship logs and...-

Andro held up his hand. "I will do that." He said.

Armen nodded his head. **-As you wish-**

“How soon before we can depart Armen?” Andro asked.

-There is one more *MENKLA* transport in the process of transitioning to *SPARTA'S WRATH*. I believe the last member of your team and his wife and mate are aboard-

“Ridor and Cvea?” Andro asked. “Good.”

-I know you probably witnessed some of the alterations I have made since being here- Armen spoke. **-I can give you a full debriefing if you like-**

Andro nodded his head. “Yes... and I have some other things I wish to discuss with you.” He said. He held out the data pad. “I need to know if there are any Etheric Void chambers on *SPARTA'S WRATH*.”

Armen nodded as he took the pad. **-There are two that are fully functioning. Why?-**

“Can you can build what is on that pad to the exact specifications with the materials from one of the chambers?” Andro asked.

Armen took the pad and his eyes scanned it in milliseconds. He looked back up to Andro. **-It is possible yes. Why would you require something like this?-**

“I'll explain it as we go.” Andro said.

Armen held out his arm towards the elevator lift. **-This way-**

Cvea clung to Ridor's arm as they moved down the ramp of the *MENKLA* into the hanger bay. Her eyes were wide in delight and awe, as were Ridor's. Ridor had been concerned that Cvea might not want to leave Apo Prime but her enthusiasm about embarking on this journey had outweighed his own. She had sobered somewhat when Ridor explained what being part of the Crown Prince's personal team meant, but she was eager to experience it regardless. She had also instinctively known what it meant to him as a Lycavorian, a Spartan and a member of the *Durcunusaan*. There was no more honorable a calling within the Union than working directly for one of the Royal family. For a *Durcunusaan*, being part of a personal Direct Action Combat Team for the King or one of the Princes was the highest position that they could want or ask for. Each of the Princes had such a unit assigned to them, but only the King had ever truly utilized his, and most of the members of that team had fought with him for decades. Now that Andro would now begin to use the DACT team he had created, Ridor would never need to buck for promotion or assignment anywhere else. When you became a member of a DACT team, that is where you remained until you were promoted to command a Brigade size force.

“Ridor... it is so... so big!” Cvea gasped.

Ridor smiled as his wide eyes gazed around the utterly enormous Hanger Bay. “I do not think big is the accurate word *Anocahs*.” He said with considerable awe in his own voice.

“Then it is... enormous!” Cvea chimed in happily.

Ridor looked at her and saw the happiness in her eyes and he pulled her close to him to kiss her. Cvea's tail curled around his leg seductively as she melted into his arms and met his kiss with equal emotion.

“*Hyperetes* Ridor!” The deep voice carried to him and Ridor jerked suddenly, ending their kiss. He turned quickly and his eyes grew wide when he saw the Prince's *Durcunusaan* Captain moving towards him with Princess Eliani at his side and holding his hand. This sight alone was astonishing to him. He straightened up instantly, Cvea almost instinctively knowing that this was someone important. She had studied her beautiful husband's body language over the last weeks and she would act appropriately. Ridor waited for Jomann and the Princess to cover the last few meters to stand in front of him.

Ridor stood at attention as Jomann and Eliani stopped in front of them, Cvea holding his arm with one hand. “Captain!” Ridor barked out. “Princess Eliani! *Enomotarch* Ridor Lethon reporting for duty!”

Jomann shook his head as he held out his hand. “That is *Hyperetes* Ridor Lethon.” He spoke with a smile. “You really should start reading your dispatches.”

Ridor looked at him with wide eyes as he grasped the hand extended to him. “Sir... I... I don't understand.”

“You have been promoted Ridor Lethon.” Jomann said.

“Captain... I... I should not be qualified to reach *Hyperetes* for another ten years.” Ridor told him still in shock.

“Well... you are assigned to me now. To Prince Androcles’s personal team. I’m quite sure you will not disappoint.” Jomann said. “And who is this?”

Ridor blinked and pulled Cvea close to him, her long tail instinctively encircling his leg. “Captain... Princess... I present my wife and mate Cvea’Ortel Lethon.”

Jomann bowed his head to Cvea as she looked at him with wide eyes unprepared for such a greeting. “Welcome Lady Cvea.” He said formally.

Eliani rolled her eyes. “*Carians* my love... you are frightening her.” She spoke with a smile and stepped forward. She reached out her hands and took Cvea’s within their grasp. “On behalf of my brother we welcome you to *SPARTA’S WRATH*.” Eliani said. “Don’t let this big oaf frighten you. His bark is worse than his bite.”

Jomann chuckled as Cvea relaxed visibly. “Forgive me... I do tend to be more formal than I need to be.” He said. “How was the trip from Apo Prime?”

“Sir... it was... it was very fast.” Ridor spoke.

Jomann shook his head. “You will learn quickly that Androcles does not stand on formality Ridor. Especially among those who will fight and stand beside him. I am simply Jomann.”

“And I am just Eliani. Or Eli.” Eliani echoed him.

“But you... you are a Princess!” Cvea gasped.

Eliani nodded her head. “And more often than not, that title gets in the way of being normal.” She said with a smile. “I am Andro’s sister and I have the job of fixing him up when he and my mate do something stupid and hurt themselves.” Eliani said looking at Jomann with glittering green eyes of love.

“Mate?” Ridor gasped himself now. “You and...”

Jomann nodded. “It has not been made public knowledge just yet... but it will get out on its own I would imagine.”

Eliani smiled and leaned into Jomann’s side. “Sooner rather than later too I’m sure.” She said.

“You are Hadarian?” Cvea asked.

Eliani nodded as she looked back to her. “Half Hadarian.” She said looking around. “You have no bags except your carryalls?”

Ridor shook his head and looked at Jomann. “My father was going to send them forward but we have only these right now. We left rather quickly Captain. I don’t know how long they will take to reach us.”

Jomann nodded his head. “That won’t be a problem. Come... Eli and I will show you to your quarters. We can give you a quick tour on the way as well. We were exploring when it was announced your ship had arrived.”

“This ship Captain...” Ridor spoke with awe. “It is...”

“Pretty damn big!” Eliani chimed in as she curled her arm around Cvea’s elbow. “It’s gonna take us weeks to find everything.” Cvea couldn’t help but smile at the open and friendly manner of Eliani.

Jomann nodded in agreement as they began to walk for the exit. “There are Elevator Lifts that can take you forward or aft and up and down. They are all over the ship and easy to find. We’ll take the closest one to the living spaces and help you to get settled in.”

Cvea was stunned at the size of the quarters that belonged to them. It was nearly as large as their home on Apo Prime as she moved through the five rooms with Ridor while Jomann and Eliani stood near the doorway and watched. Cvea finally turned to look at her and moved closer to her once more. Eliani Leonidas had been an immediate calming influence on her as they walked and quite unlike any story or rumors about the Lycavorian Royal family she had heard since becoming Ridor’s wife. She was so open and friendly as they hung back from Jomann and Ridor while walking through the corridors and Cvea gushed over Ridor and the new life she had found. It was almost as if she did not notice that Cvea’s tail bounced happily behind her as she walked, or the brightness of her feline line eyes. No that wasn't it Cvea decided. Eliani didn't care that she was Kavalian.

“They are so big!” Cvea exclaimed again as she came back to where Eliani stood.

Eliani nodded in agreement. “Ours are nearly identical.” She said in reply. “It’s going to take Brendi and I weeks to decorate them.”

Jomann looked at Ridor and held out the two P1 Data Pads. “Your personal P1 *Hyperetes* Ridor. And one for your wife and mate Lady Cvea.” He said. “They are a new item being issued to all of us within Andro’s team. They are limited so do not lose them. Each is coded to you and Lady Cvea so no one else can use them. They should also help you to find your way on the ship until you begin to memorize where things are. I have mine glued to my head. When we meet everyone for dinner we can explain the uses further for the P1.”

Ridor smiled as he took the pads. “I understand Captain.” He said.

“Meet everyone?” Cvea asked shyly.

Eliani nodded her head and reached out to take her hand. “Don’t worry...” She said. “We are not as bad as the Netnews makes us out to be. Besides... I can hear his stomach rumbling from here.” Eliani said motioning with her head to Jomann. “All he and my brother will do is eat.”

“I haven’t eaten since breakfast!” Jomann complained.

Eliani smiled and looked at Cvea. “See.” She said. She squeezed Cvea’s hands in hers again. “I will be giving complete physicals to all of Andro’s team starting tomorrow.” Eliani saw Cvea’s face take on a concerned look and she stepped forward closer to her. “Don’t worry.” She said softly. “I know what is in your past Cvea.” She said in a whisper while squeezing her hands tightly. “You have no fears here. If you wish... we can do it here in your quarters or in mine.”

Cvea took a deep breath and shook her head. This was a new life for her, and these men and women were not who she needed to fear. She glanced at Ridor quickly and saw his eyes on her and pulsing her with his powerful aura. Since he had bitten her and the virus within his blood now raced through her own, Cvea had been able to experience things she never thought possible. One of those was feeling the warmth and love he projected to her through his aura. It wasn’t nearly as powerful as it could be because she was Kavalian as his mother had explained to her, but his mother had told her it would grow stronger through the years now that the virus was within her and Cvea’Ortel Lethon would bask in it forever.

She turned back to Eliani. “I do not wish to be... to be treated differently. I am not afraid of an exam.” She said.

Eliani smiled. “Good... then you are braver than most of these other babies.” She spoke. “They whine about medical exams all the time.”

Cvea smiled at her truly liking Eliani Leonidas. “I want... I want to do something.” Cvea said. “I want to help.”

“What would you like to do?” Jomann asked her. “This ship and what it can do is new to most of the crew Lady Cvea. And there are many things that you can do. I can adjust your ship access to accommodate whatever it is you want to learn and experience.”

Cvea looked at Eliani. “I want to help others.” She said softly. “But my... my schooling is...”

Eliani took her hand. “I’m short one medic.” She said immediately. “And until Inamarno joins us we’re down two. I could use the help.”

Cvea looked at her with intense interest but then her eyes shifted slightly and she looked at the deck. “I am not qualified to...”

Eliani did not let her finish. “No one is qualified when they first start.” She said. “It will mean a lot of listening to babies like him whine about having to take medicine or having to be poked and prodded. Think you can handle that?” She spoke motioning to Jomann.

Cvea looked at her with a huge smile. “Yes.”

“Good. Then as of tomorrow morning... you will have a new job.” Eliani said. “I can get the accesses for you and give you some reading material tonight at dinner.”

“We will meet in the Port side Senior Officer’s Mess Lounge on Deck nineteen.” Jomann said. “Nineteen hundred hours. Just use your P1 to find us.”

Ridor nodded. “We will be there Captain.” He said.

“Events will never be dull around us Ridor Lethon.” Jomann said. “I hope you and Cvea are ready to experience that?”

Ridor glanced at Cvea who stepped closer to him and folded into his arms with a brilliant smile of happiness. He looked back to Jomann as Eliani did the same thing with him. “We are looking forward to it sir.”

“Yes we are.” Cvea echoed his words with her own.

“Good. We’ll see you at nineteen hundred hours.” Jomann spoke taking Eliani’s hand in his and turning for the door.

“...to know is can you build it Armen?” Andro asked as he and Armen stood beside the large view window in one of the starboard lounges. The *ARIZONA* and *HORNET* were easily seen as smaller ships scurried about their superstructures.

-Yes- Armen answered without hesitation. **-It will require a quarter of the Worker Drones in order to disassemble the chamber, but it is easily constructed-**

“How long will it take?” Andro asked.

-If they begin right after we depart, they will have it disassembled within thirty-six hours- Armen answered.

“How long to build it?” Andro asked him.

-To the exact specifications you have presented here? Eighty-three point five hours- Armen answered. **-May I ask where you got these plans Andro?-**

“My Grandfather’s Tomes.” Andro answered softly.

Armen nodded. **-It is logical that Chief Elder Sumar would have had such detailed schematics in his files-**

Andro nodded his head in agreement. “Now tell me... will it work Armen? And I don’t want you to give me some sort of technical answer. Never pull punches with me. Just tell me.”

-I can only assume it is for one purpose? - Armen spoke.

“You would be correct.” Andro told him.

Armen nodded his head once more. **-Then it will work quite well. And it will be very permanent once sealed with the new Praetorian Command Codes your father, Wayonn and Murano established and sent to me-**

Andro looked at him. “I take it because they established new ones that they have a lot of questions about what will happen out there still?”

Armen nodded. **-I can only speculate that is the reason. Trying to predict why your father acts as he does is something I will leave to Avi-**

Andro chuckled. “That’s smart.” He said.

-The new Praetorian Command Codes will override any existing Pralor facilities that remain and are locked down with Praetorian Codes. Much like the Science Facility on Onterom.-

“Will the Scourge have left anything standing Armen?” Andro asked.

-During the initial phase of their final invasion that destroyed the Pralor homeworld they bypassed several border systems that had smaller planetary facilities. Research bases and shipyards. The majority of these odd facilities were then ordered locked down with Praetorian Command Codes by the Elder Council before they were killed in order to keep the Scourge from entering them- Armen explained. **-It is very possible that some of them remain. The Scourge are single minded in many respects Androcles. Destroying the Pralor people was their main goal. That meant destroying the homeworld. They may have overlooked some of the smaller facilities in that single minded process-**

Andro nodded. “Point taken.”

-That is not to say they have not evolved since that time- Armen added.

“Point taken again.” Andro told him.

-I will distribute the codes to Denali, Dorian, Deion and Nara when we rendezvous with them. Jomann has acknowledged his already, as have you-

Andro nodded. “Establish a secondary set of Command Codes with the baseline from my father and Murano. Use a Mutative Algorithm to be able to override any active set of the new Praetorian Codes.”

Armen looked at him oddly. **-Why?-**

“Insurance.”

Armen blinked. **-Insurance? Processing-** Andro watched his eyes flick back and forth faster than he could follow and several seconds later they stopped and focused on him. **-That is interesting Androcles-**

“If my father, Wayonn and Murano don’t fully trust them, then there is a reason for it. Once you have completed the secondary codes, download them to your neural net and to Avi’s. No one else is to have the Secondary Codes except for this person.” Andro told him as he typed on the data pad and handed it to him. “And this knowledge remains with my father, Avi, you and I.”

Armen looked at the pad for a long moment and then back to Andro. **–An interesting choice. I will process the Secondary Codes–**

“Good.” Andro said. “How soon before Praetorian Murano arrives?”

Armen lifted his eyes for a split second and then back to Andro. **–His Pralor Long Range Transport will be arriving at the entrance to Dreamland in one point two hours. Another twenty-three minutes to transit to our location–**

Andro nodded. “Transmit this information to him and the contents of our discussion about what I have planned. Discuss the Secondary Codes with no one else Armen. Once we have his ship in our hanger bay I want to depart.”

–I will make the necessary arrangements– Armen answered.

Andro looked out the view window and was silent for a long moment. Armen simply stood there waiting as if knowing that there was something else. “Armen?”

–Androcles–

“Once it is completed I want you to find me the most vile, decrepit, desolate and unholy place in the galaxy.” Andro looked at him. “That is where I am going to put it.”

Armen nodded his head. **–I have already begun this task–** He replied.

“You knew I would do this?” Andro asked him.

–The logic and statistical variables of what you would do were easily calculated. At least by me– He answered.

“So you guessed?” Andro asked him with a smile.

Armen blinked several times as he processed that and then he looked at Andro. **–Yes... I suppose I did–**

Andro laughed at this and slapped Armen on the shoulder. “I like to hear that Armen.” He said. “I like to hear that. Now give me a rundown on the systems we added and tell me about the other request I had. Did you discover anything in your archives about the image I described to you?” he asked as he began to walk/

–Yes. It was among the last of the data packages that I received before the Pralor homeworld fell and all contact was lost. I compared your description to relevant data streams and discovered it within a file on known species. Andro... Avi and I exchanged these prevalent data streams while we were connected so your father is probably very aware of it as well. And the odds of Praetorian Murano having this knowledge are very high as well– Armen told him as he followed beside him.

Andro nodded. “I know.”

–Shall I begin?–

Andro nodded again. “Go for it.”

MANNE UNION ADHOC COMPOUND

Sarlana watched from the doorway as shrieks of happiness echoed in the air all around the area. Conlar and Helen stood on either side of her while Arzoal, Teniri and Nekins were still within the huge building speaking among themselves. They were watching as Zarah and Lucia were practically swarmed by their mothers in tearful reunion. Conlar looked at Helen after a long moment.

“If I may ask...” He spoke softly. “Who is she?”

Helen watched with happy eyes as Zarah’s tear streaked face was animated and filled with such happiness. The nearly broken young woman was gone and Zarah Leonidas had her confidence and strength back. No doubt because of the love Helen could feel radiating from Zarah for Lucia, but also because of the family she was part of.

“Zarah.” Helen answered. “She is the youngest of the older Leonidas children... if that makes sense.” She said with a smile. “She was... she was brutally beaten and raped last year by some vile and twisted individuals. She came very close to death.”

Sarlana’s eyes never left the young woman as she embraces and tears continued. “I can feel the touch of the *Dahakoan* Androcles on her. A filament of life and power within her. She is resilient and strong.” She said softly.

Helen nodded. “Androcles and Zarah are very close.” She answered. “They...”

Sarlana looked at her. “No.” She said quickly and firmly. “There is no need for us to know the reasons behind the connection they have. Only that it exists. It is private and meant only for your family.”

“What... what happened to those who did this?” Conlar asked.

Helen took a deep breath. “The young woman you see with her...? That is Lucia.” She answered with honesty.

Sarlana nodded as her eyes went back to them. “They wear their love for each other where all can see.” She said.

Helen nodded. “Lucia killed most of those involved. She possess the Praetorian gene in a pseudo dormant state so she can manifest her Etheric abilities in almost the physical realm. The weapons she uses are... they are ethereal in nature really, but able to inflict much harm if fueled by her emotions as they were that day. Androcles and Elynth... they killed those that remained that day.” She answered. “One survived, but his days in this life are becoming fewer and fewer. Androcles will find him... and then justice will be done.”

“He will be tried?” Conlar asked looking at her.

Helen met his eyes. “The moment he laid his hands upon Zarah he was guilty. Andro is close with all of his sisters, but Zarah and Eliani are special to him for reasons which many of us do not fully understand. Dante Moran has been tried Conlar. When Androcles finds him... it will be with only one intent.”

Conlar turned back and watched Dysea embracing Zarah now, her hands stroking her dark hair. He nodded his head slowly. “Justice.” He said softly. “I understand... and I agree.”

Even Sarlana glanced at him with surprise in her eyes but said nothing. She turned back to gaze at them, her eyes settling on the figure of Martin Leonidas. One of his arms wrapped around the petite Hadarian Queen Anja while the other reached out and pulled the elven Queen Dysea close to him when she released Zarah. She saw a flash of movement from the side and then another young man and woman appeared from between the buildings. They skidded to a stop just outside the small group and Sarlana watched as a smiling For'mya whispered into Zarah Leonidas’s ear. She watched her eyes grow wide and then she was reaching for the young woman Sarlana now knew as Eirene.

“*Thric guulac.*” Sarlana whispered softly. “*Ergriff itov ios visidark.*” (No Doubt. Only love without question.)

“Excuse me?” Helen asked her.

Sarlana turned to look at her. “It is said... it is said that the *Dahakoans* would come from families who never doubt their love for each other. This love of family... this *navnik*... this spirit... it would define them and guide them in order to be able to find one another when they were all awakened.” Sarlana looked back and watched as Zarah laid a lip locker on Fedor and he lifted her off the ground and spun her around in happiness. “The emotion... the resonance and *navnik* of love within this family is something I have never felt before. It is without doubt, and it is completely absolute.”

Helen nodded in agreement. “It is why they are so special.” She said softly.

“It originates from him.” Sarlana said softly motioning to Martin with her head. “He is the center. The focus. It warps outward from within him.”

Helen nodded in agreement. “Yes it does.”

Conlar’s eyes now took in the massive form of the obsidian colored dragon resting on the ground a short distance from the group. This dragon was without question the most formidable of any dragon he had seen in his lifetime. He matched Arzoal in size, but the musculature and power that radiated from his body was nearly palpable. His resonance alone was staggering, but when combined with the Lycavorian Martin Leonidas it was blinding in its brilliance. His huge head was gently moving up and down the back and shoulders of the azure colored dragon Isheeni, and her wings were fluttering in delight.

“Sarlana?” He said.

Sarlana nodded. "Yes... I see him." She answered. "Two of the *Vrelvel Sargti*. The Talon Guardians."

"He is... he is massive." Conlar rasped.

"You know of them then?" Helen asked.

Sarlana nodded. "Oh yes. *Vrelvel Sargti* are revered within Darastrixi society by all. But there have not been any *Vrelvel Sargti* for nearly a million years. And never one who was not a Darastrixi."

"Well there are now." Helen said. "And they guard Dragonkind viciously. More so Andro and Elynth than their fathers. And that feeling is returned equally. They seem to be drawn to him in some manner. More so than his father." Helen chuckled softly. "In many ways it is almost as if Andro is..."

Sarlana looked at her. "A dragon himself?"

Helen met her gaze with an odd expression. "Yes."

"There is a reason for that. One that will be discovered soon enough. You... you do not seem to hold the same hesitation as the others when speaking to me." Sarlana said. "Why?"

"You are not our enemy." Helen said without hesitation. "And I don't believe you seek Andro and Dorian for an evil purpose. Not that you would be able to influence them to go against what they have been raised to honor and believe."

Sarlana smiled. "I have no doubts of that." She said. "I only wish to experience their journey with them. And to guide and help them in any way..."

"NO!" The deep voice barked out causing all of them to turn quickly. Sarlana gasped in fright at the visage of Martin Leonidas before her. His eyes were near glowing yellow orbs, savage looking dual fangs that could easily rend even her scale like skin to shreds were fully extended, his lips curled back in a cruel snarl.

No one had predicted the reaction from Martin. No one had ever seen him greet a new stranger in such a way unless that person was shooting at him or trying to kill him in some manner. Aricia, Anja, all of them were stunned at the resonance of anger and rage they could feel from the man they loved.

"I know who you are! *Doraanar!*" Martin hissed savagely. "I know what you did!" Martin stepped closer to her in a very menacing manner. Conlar saw this and acted to protect her.

"Step away from her! You do not..." Conlar began as he reached for Martin. His eyes grew wide when suddenly his body was struck by some unseen force and he was hurtling across the interior of the massive hall.

"Martin Leonidas!" Helen shouted.

Martin stepped closer ignoring her protest and shock. "*Wux geou ti clax sia deevdrus! Wux geou ti chian astahi lae wux tira asta torkah!*" (You will not take my sons! You will not betray them as you betrayed their ancestors.)

Aricia and the others were stunned at the fluency with which Martin spoke the Darastrixi language. It was almost as if he had been speaking it for years.

Sarlana felt herself lifted into the air as Martin raised his right hand and the soft blue glow of Etheric power shimmered around it. She felt pressure on her body, a force of some kind pressing down against her. Around the two of them a bluish white bubble of Etheric power burst into existence, pushing away all those who were moving towards them. Their voices were lost to her even though she could see their lips moving and Sarlana knew then. The light of peace and recognition dawned in her eyes when she saw the murderous fury in those wild and savage yellow/gold orbs and an odd peace filled her. She reached out her hands and covered his fist with both of them tightly.

You know! Sarlana gasped with wide eyes. She spoke openly in the Etheric connection. A connection that allowed everyone in the room to hear her words. *You know what yours sons are!*

NO! Martin snarled.

You do! I can feel the knowledge within you! I see it in your eyes! Sarlana rasped.

No! Martin snapped again.

Murano told you what happened didn't he? Sarlana asked him. Of course he did... as Praetorians he would have shared all of his knowledge with you by now. And soon he will share it with your sons.

Do you know how many died! Martin screamed. How many suffered and were tortured before the Scourge butchered them!

What took place was insidious and vile Martin Leonidas! Sarlana gasped. But it is not something I would have allowed had I been able. Many who perished were my friends!

Then why? Martin shouted with Mindvoice.

It was a decision made by others against the will of Zezhuanth! Sarlana gasped out. Many Darastrixi died in defiance of that order! You know this! And so does Murano!

Aricia looked at Helen as she came up next to her. "Helen?" She almost yelled.

Helen shook her head. "I have no idea what they are talking about!" She stammered.

Why them? Martin almost screamed. Why?

I was not the one who chose them Martin Leonidas. Sarlana spoke more softly now. That was done by Wer Zezhuanth millennia before you and I ever existed. He saw something in them. Deep within their souls.

I won't let them! Martin snapped. I will stop it!

You can not stop it Martin Leonidas. It has already begun. You know that just as I do. Sarlana said gently. The many dreams that Androcles told you about when he was a boy. That he shared with no one but you. Your ability to speak my language as if born to it. Your Anome Aricia as well. Isabella stands there knowing not why she can speak a language that she doesn't know. These are only the first signs Martin. It has begun already. Androcles and Dorian, Elynth and Ryner, they will not let you stop it. There is nothing any of us can do to stop it now. They will find them. The last two Dahakoan. They will not be able to fight the connection between them as Isthasyi vur Myvishi ar wer Iejir.

What do you want with them? Martin snarled.

Look at me Martin Leonidas. Look within my sepas. Sarlana told him. You and Torma, Androcles and Elynth, you are Vrelvel Sargti. The first to exist in over a million years. I know you have this ability. Look within my Sepas and tell me what you see. I am the last of the Doraanar Martin Leonidas. Could I ever bring myself to harm the Dahakoan? No matter what darkness enveloped me... could I ever hurt them?

Martin stared at Sarlana for a long moment, his yellow/gold eyes gazing deep within her. Sarlana held everything open to him, baring her entire being to his gaze. She would never be able to hide from the eyes of a Vrelvel Sargti, and she would not try. She felt the Etheric force holding her suspended in the air lessen slowly, but she did not release his hand. Martin finally blinked his beautiful eyes and gazed at her.

No. He said with a whisper.

My only purpose now... my only goal is to guide them and help them to understand. To help all of us understand. Sarlana spoke. I know you have felt it within you. The storm that is coming. Your sons feel it too. As do Wayonn and Murano. The Lorsvek ar Sepas is the way Zezhuanth chose to meet it. His vision of the future. He knew he would not live forever. Why would he do this if he did not care and hold all life sacred? What the Darastrixi did was wrong Martin. So very wrong. It was evil. But it was not done with evil intent. My people have lost their way. Just as you and your sons and your family and people have found yours. Zezhuanth knew this would happen. It is the only reason why I can think that he chose them. They are... they are incorruptible Martin Leonidas. Much like their father.

Sarlana felt Martin lower her gently back to the floor. Conlar instantly began to come to her aide but she lifted her hand and stopped him knowing he would not be able to penetrate the Etheric bubble that still encased her and Martin. When she saw that he would not move she turned back to Martin and returned her hand to his. His grip had tightened somewhat but not out of anger.

You fear what is coming. I can sense it within you. I fear what is coming. Only together will we be able to meet it face to face. Your sons and the two Dahakoans that have not yet been revealed... they are the catalyst. The center of it all. Only when they are together will we know what path to take. Only then will we have all the pieces of the puzzle. And only then will we know why it is happening now.

I can not... I can not lose them. Martin spoke softly.

Lose them? Sarlana spoke with wide eyes. By the will of Zezhuanth Martin... they are part of you! You could never lose them! It is not something they would ever allow!

Martin looked at her and she saw the amazing transformation as his eyes reverted back to normal and his fangs receded into his gums. *So what happens now? There is so much going on even as we speak.*

Sarlana shook her head. *Whatever is going on with the Pralor people is not something I can help with. I fear I can not return to Artaaya now. Many who survive know what happened and I would not have much influence at all. And it would only hamper Delnash's efforts to change the course of things with his people. That is something you must find a way to handle.*

And what of you? He asked her.

I will answer any questions that you may have. I will even show you why the Darastrixi among your people treat Androcles as they do. As they will treat Dorian. Sarlana said. *I believe my place... the only place I can truly do any good... with your permission of course... is with your sons. Given their propensity to be just like you... keeping them from going off and doing something incredibly stupid is what I must do.*

Martin looked at her and couldn't help the small laugh that escaped his throat. *They do tend to be unpredictable.* He said.

Sarlana smiled. *A trait that they have fully inherited from you.*

Predictable is boring. Martin said.

Sarlana joined in the soft laughter and felt his resonance as a *Vrelvel Sargti* sweep around her protectively. She watched with awe in her eyes as the Etheric bubble that had encased them dissipated until it was gone and then they both turned. Everyone in the main hall was staring at them with disbelief in their eyes. Dozens of others were also watching through the massive hole that was once an entire wall section of the building. Martin had blown it outward without so much as a blink and didn't even know it.

"Oops!" Martin said softly.

Martin saw Danny step from the crowd of people, his A4 clenched in his hands and only wearing his pants and boots. Julie, Kenny, Pablo and even Colin were all standing around with wide eyes. Anuk, Nayeca and Kesyla stood together, their skin flush and all of them smelling of each other. Martin met Danny's eyes then, seeing the displeasure of being interrupted in what he was obviously doing.

He propped his A4 on his hip and looked at Martin. "Forgive me for being the one asshole jerk to ask the obvious question." Danny spoke. "Maybe... *fervon*... maybe you could explain to all of us what just *nubous* happen. And why you damn near blew up the entire *nubous* building!" Danny shouted.

"Just out of curiosity of course!" Danny continued. "Since some of us were actually catching up on some much needed *alone* time! If you get my drift!" He barked loudly.

"Daniel!" Anuk hissed with a great deal of embarrassment while everyone in the area who had heard Danny began to chuckle and snicker.

Danny's eyes never left Martin. "Well? Start talking chump!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

SPARTA'S WRATH DREAMLAND

Murano had never been on a *VORTEX*-Class Cruiser before, and though he was a Pralor, even he was in awe of the sheer size and utter majesty of the ship. There were many such ships at the height of their war with the Scourge, but this ship was to be the first of its unique Class. It was packed with the very finest and most advanced Pralor technology, weapons and equipment to exist at that time as well as some things that had not even been introduced to the main fleets. These items made the other *VORTEX*-Class Cruisers pale in comparison.

Mari clung to his arm tightly as they closely followed the Lycavorian Security Officer along the huge corridors of the ship, her beautiful face showing her excitement and delight at what she was witnessing. This ship and the others that were intended to come after it were the most powerful and sophisticated warships the Pralor people had ever built, designed to meet the Scourge Hive ships force on force and come out victorious. Mari was enraptured with the ship and to some larger extent the Lycavorian people themselves. Murano knew that Mari had been reading from dozens of data and history scrolls given to her by Helen and Wayonn. He did not know what drew his niece to this knowledge but at this point in time she was probably the only Pralor among their people with the extent of knowledge and understanding of their cultures and traditions as she possessed. Kesyla had told him Mari was a voracious reader and had graduated tops in her class at the Advanced Spacial Physics University on Artaaya. Her delight at seeing Avi had been profound and he had seen her many times discussing one thing or the other with Martin's avatar on Manne. As they moved along the

corridors of the ship heading for the bridge both of them could not help but take note of the many different species that now called this ship home.

Of course Murano thought to himself... this was no longer a Pralor ship.

If what Wayonn had told him was true and he would never doubt a Praetorian Mage, least of all Wayonn, then Murano had to believe the Pralor Elder Council back then had specifically programmed this ship for a single purpose. That single purpose was that it would not respond to anyone who did not have the blood of Sumar within their veins. They must have known all was lost and those Elders, their lives at an end they knew, decided that the only true hope of their people was to program this ship as they had and pray to the ancients within the Rift of Time that Sumar had children. Children somewhere out there among the stars; and that would one day those children be drawn to this ship and discover its origins. Those men and women had not thought about or been concerned with what blood would flow through Sumar's descendants, only that they would be his descendants and only they would know how to use this ship. They had trusted in the belief and faith that if Sumar's blood ran within their veins then they would be like him in some way. Their belief, if that is what they all thought all those years ago, had certainly turned out to be true.

As they moved through the corridors, both Murano and Mari could detect the resonance of Pralor blood within scores of the Lycavorians on this ship. It may not have been prominent in many of them, but it was certainly there. Murano also noticed that many also looked at him with something akin to wonder as they passed him in the corridors. He could hear them whispering among themselves after they had gone by. They knew who and what he was and he could sense the reverence and awe many felt as they passed him. There were also more than a fair share of young Lycavorian men giving Mari more than just a passing glance. His niece was breathtaking in her beauty, Murano noticing she had changed her hair color on the ship here. He asked her about it and Mari had told him she simply returned her hair to its natural color instead of trying to be like Kesyla. Since she had returned her hair color to its natural state of a light reddish brown, Murano noticed that her beauty had become even more enhanced, but Mari possessed a bubbly nature that always made her glow even more.

These were, without question, men and women who had seen battle many times before for he doubted that Androcles Leonidas would crew this spectacular ship with new personnel fresh out their training academies. To know that and then sense their emotions about him caused new pride to flourish within Murano. Pride at what he was. Pride in who he was. Discovering that Martin and his sons existed had returned to Murano all he had thought lost. Knowing that he was not the last of his kind had revived his spirit and his resonance to new heights. Since his talks with Helen and Daniel, Murano had made it a point to look at events more openly and not judge so quickly. He had prided himself when he was younger on being more open minded than others and he had gotten away from that mentality. Now he found himself returning to his roots and he liked the way it made him feel. Helen and Daniel had been very correct in their words to him. These men and women, whether Lycavorian or Elf or Vampire, whatever their species was, they wore their emotions on their proverbial sleeves. They did not suppress what they felt inside them, they embraced it, and no doubt any who bore the Praetorian gene now would be just like Martin and Androcles. They were men or women who would embrace their passion, harness their emotions to fuel their new abilities, but they were also very different. There was no way to ever be sure Murano knew, but given what he had learned and seen so far, he doubted they would ever callously use their power against innocents. Indeed... they would die to protect them in any way they could.

Their culture was different than what he was used to though. Very different. There were few laws within Lycavorian society itself but they were very harsh in many ways. Far harsher than he was accustomed too, but after further thought Murano decided that these laws were very fair and no one was above the law within their society. He realized that most of these harsh laws stemmed from their millennia as slaves to the High Coven. The percentage of Lycavorians who abhorred slavery in any shape or form was astronomically high. They had those among their species who did not follow these laws, but they were considered pirates and mercenaries and treated as criminals. Rape was another crime that Murano found the Lycavorian people as a whole despised overwhelmingly, and the rape of a mated female was considered a depraved and immoral act punishable by immediate death. The parts of their history that Murano had read had made that fact very clear and now he understood at least some of what Martin must have felt having such an act touch the ones he loved and adored. And after what Daniel had shown him that day, Murano had no doubt that the six women who held his heart were far more important to Martin Leonidas than anything else in this universe. He had studied and read as much as he was able, the trip here had allowed him to do just that and he discovered many things that the

scientists of his people had never bothered to know or understand about these people. Helen had been correct, they were not Pralors, but they were one of the most honorable species he had ever come across.

He turned quickly when he felt the strong tug on his arm. "Uncle?" Mari gasped as she motioned with her head.

Murano cut his eyes and saw they were about to pass through a large set of double doors. His eyes grew wider as the doors slid aside and they entered the bridge of the ship. The bridge was shaped like a massive elongated U. There was an upper level deck that wrapped around the entire section and a short flight of four stairs that circled the entire bridge and dropped into the lower level. In the center of this elongated U was a wide, elevated platform and railing with six different stations towards the front of the bridge and a single chair behind them. They could see outside the sectioned view windows and they took in the magnificence of the other ships that dotted the area around them. Standing behind that chair were two figures that Murano recognized instantly. It was impossible to miss the size of Avatar 341, as he stood over a full head taller than Androcles Leonidas. The avatar wore a Fleet uniform similar to the other bridge crewmembers, dark gray in color and separated into pants, undershirt and short waist length jacket. This appeared to be the standard uniform for all Union Fleet members as he had seen it on Martin's ship as well. There did not appear to be any rank insignia on any of the crew who were moving back and forth across the expanse of the bridge, though the avatar did wear a gold sash around his waist with the ends dangling to one side.

Androcles Leonidas was far more imposing in person than he was within a simple holo transmission and Helen's words to him echoed gently in his ears.

That is what guides his oldest son Androcles, who you have only spoken to in a silly holo transmission, but who is far more unforgiving than his siblings and even his own father.

Androcles stood stoically with his arms crossed over his broad chest taking everything in. Like his father, this young man radiated staggering power within the Etheric realm. A power and resonance that was matched only by his father. The echo of their Etheric resonances made Murano feel as if he was standing once more beside his friend and mentor as he had done so many thousands of years before.

Androcles Leonidas could have been his father's twin brother if not for the shorter hair and neatly trimmed goatee that he sported, unlike his father's much longer shoulder length hair and meticulously trimmed beard. He was shorter than his father by an inch or two and did not appear to meet his father's incredibly defined two hundred and forty plus pounds of rock and granite like muscle. However, Murano estimated Androcles was perhaps two hundred and twenty pounds, but no less distinct in a muscular fashion. The superb definition of his Spartan trained body was evident even under the uniform that he wore. Like his father, he would be an imposing figure to stand before even without his Etheric abilities. When he thought about it for a moment, Murano realized that he had not seen one man or woman within Martin's entire command that was not in superior physical condition. Wayonn had told him that the Spartan way of life that Martin's father had grown up in was brutal and sometimes lethal, but it had forged both men and women to utter physical perfection. This practice took deep root within the Lycavorian Union when Martin's father gave his life for trillions of lifeforms that he had never known. Lycavorian, Elf, Algolian, even some of the minor species within the Union had taken up the mantle of this way of life. When Martin had returned to the Union and his people saw that he had continued this very tradition and way of life like his father without even thinking, it spurred an even larger number within the Union to perfect their bodies no matter what their age. While Murano had always kept himself in superb physical condition, he knew he did not come close to any of the men or women he had seen so far. He made the decision then to insure that he changed that fact for it appeared that Martin's children followed this same mentality without fail.

Androcles wore a similar uniform to the avatar and everyone else, yet around his waist he wore a crimson sash with two lines of gold trim along the outer edges and the figure of a golden dragon lifting off the ground gracefully embroidered into the ends.

The young Lycavorian guard that had led them here stepped closer. "Sir... would you care to be presented to the Crown Prince now?" He asked politely.

Murano looked at him. "What are they doing?" He asked.

“I believe we are preparing to get underway sir.” The young man answered. “We were only waiting for you to arrive.”

Murano shook his head. “I’m sorry... I never asked your name.”

“Gregan sir.” The *Durcunusaan* answered.

“Gregan... introductions can wait. I do not wish to disturb them. I do have a question however... the sash he wears. Does it have some meaning?” Murano asked.

The *Durcunusaan* troop glanced over to Andro and then back quickly. “Androcles abhors any type of pomp.” The young man answered him. “You will notice that none of the crew wears rank insignia. It is a tradition that he began on the *SCIMITAR* and it continues here. It insures everyone is treated in the same fashion as they wish to be treated.”

Mari looked at him with wide eyes. “You refer to him by name.” She asked. “Is that... is that allowed?”

The young *Durcunusaan* chuckled softly. “Only to the *Durcunusaan* Lady Mari.” He answered. “And only in private, among family or away from too many ears. He insists upon it, as do his brothers and sisters, the King, the Queens and Crown Princesses. It is part of the reason why any of us would give our lives for them without a second’s pause. Any of them.”

Murano nodded. “Yes... I noticed that from Martin and his people.” He said softly.

“To answer your question Lady Mari, I believe it was Princess Ne’Veha who had the sashes made several months ago.” The young man said. “It is the only thing he will wear now that sets him apart from others... and if I recall correctly... she threatened to kick his *mida* if he did not. Each of the Crown Princesses wears one now as well.”

Mari couldn’t help but chuckle. “She threatened to kick his ass Uncle.” She said. “I like her already.”

Murano grinned as well and squeezed the young man’s arm. “We will wait until we are underway Gregan.” He said. “There is no rush.”

The troop nodded his head and stepped back to the side just as the voices began to echo across the expanse of the bridge. They were coming through an intercom of some sort and Mari realized that each station member must have been wearing one of the head implants given to her, Kesyla and her uncle while with his father. Both of them lifted their heads as the voice of a woman filled the bridge intercom.

“*SCIMITAR* actual to *SPARTA’S WRATH* actual on Command Channel. We are ready to depart. What is your status?” The voice of Sa’sur asked.

-We have secured Praetorian Murano’s ship and are prepared to depart as well Admiral Sa’sur- Armen answered instantly.

“Very well. *ARIZONA* actual?” Sa’sur asked.

Miranda’s voice filled the bridge now. “1st Arizona Attack Wing ready and sitting on go.”

“Understood.” Sa’sur spoke. “We stick to the established plan. *ARIZONA*’s Attack Wing will join with King Martin and the *ARC ROYAL* at their present location. Admiral Lorian will then assume command of all ships in theater and establish Command and Control Directives with the King. *SCIMITAR*’s Strike Group, *ULU WASP* and the Dragon Brigade will proceed to the Beta Quadrant and rendezvous with the *ARCH DEMON*. I will assume command of all Union ships in the theater and begin the implementation of Prince Denali’s plan. *SPARTA’S WRATH* will proceed on course for the rendezvous with Yuri and Prince Dorian. Three weeks from now *SPARTA’S WRATH* will join with us in the Beta Quadrant and we will complete the merger of the Protectorate into the Union at that time. Once that is complete... we will depart for King Martin’s location and whatever the unknown wants to throw at us.” Sa’sur finished. “Andro?”

“Manda... what we spoke of before?” Andro asked softly as he looked towards the view window.

“If it is at all possible Andro... I will insure that it does not happen. I give you my word.” Manda answered just as softly.

“No matter the reasons Manda... he can not be allowed to do it. No matter what. I will not have him lower himself to the level of the animal he hunts. He will never forgive himself.” Andro said.

“I understand Andro.” Miranda answered softly. “I will make it happen.”

“Then there is nothing more to say.” Andro spoke uncrossing his arms. “Armen?”

-Initiate Fleet Wide COM- Armen spoke.

“Fleet wide activated sir.” The young elven woman called from her station across the bridge.

Andro moved closer to Armen. “This is Androcles. We are going to be stepping into the very heart of the unknown now. You all know the motto of my family. Never fear the unknown for you do not know what treasures you may discover. You are the finest the Union has to offer. All of you no matter your job or title. It is my honor to lead you and serve beside you. These ships are now our home away from home. And we are all family. I wish all of you the blessings of whatever gods you may covet. May they watch over us in our tasks and look upon us with wisdom and care. Look after those to your right and left and they will do the same. And no matter what, be proud of who each of you are. All of you matter. We will reunite in six weeks and show everyone that we will honor the Pralor blood that flows within many of us. *Aur taine and stali cuia fas forn innynne.*” (My trust and faith go with you always.)

Murano and Mari looked around the bridge as they heard the two women on the intercom and dozens of others on the bridge utter the same word simultaneously.

“*Avoi.*”

Murano looked at the young *Durcunusaan*. “What...?”

“My trust and faith go with you always.” Gregan said. “Amen.”

Mari shivered slightly but not because she was cold. The words Androcles had spoken were meant to be inspiring and the shiver that coursed through her had done just that. It was a sensation she had never felt before. She had been studying the Lycavorians as a people for weeks now. She did not know what drew her to them, but it was powerful and fulfilling, more so than anything in her life before now.

Andro’s arms dropped to his side now and he looked at Armen. “Armen... the ship is yours. Take us out and get us to the rendezvous.”

Both Murano and Mari were wide eyed when they realized that the avatar had a name and Androcles had just turned the ship over to him.

-Understood- Armen answered.

That was when Androcles turned to look at them and Murano and Mari got a first glimpse at his utterly amazing azure blue eyes. They seemed to glow in the dim lighting of the bridge and Murano felt Mari squeeze his arm tightly. Andro didn’t hesitate and crossed the short space between them in five long strides. He bowed his head to Murano with respect.

“Praetorian Murano.” Andro said holding out his hand. “It is a true honor to finally meet you.”

Murano was somewhat taken aback by the greeting but he gripped the hand regardless and felt the Praetorian power within the grasp and resonance that was Androcles Leonidas. As it happened with Martin, Murano felt a sense of brotherhood sweep over him that he had not felt for far too long. He reached out and placed his other hand over both of theirs and smiled.

“It is I who should be saying that.” He said. “You and... you and your father... you look so much like Sumar it is almost frightening.” Murano told him.

Andro smiled warmly. “I hope that is a good thing because Deni and Deion look very much like father as well. Though most of the ladies agree that our brother Arrarn got all the good looks. Though I dare say my younger brother Deion is attracting quite the attention now that the ladies know he will be on the ship.” He said with some humor.

“He is a ladies man?” Mari asked with a sly grin.

Murano looked at her. “Mari!” He exclaimed again as Andro laughed.

Andro shook his head with a smile. “No... a ladies man he is not. But like our brother Arrarn he seems to have gotten all the good looks. He told me once that he is going to save himself for the woman who will hold his heart and soul in her hands.”

“His *Anome*?” Mari said softly. “Like your father and you?”

Andro shrugged his shoulders. “My father raised us to cherish and love the woman we choose to spend our lives with. *Anomes* are rare among my people as I am sure you are aware. If it is meant to be for Deion then it will happen. If not... whoever he wishes to spend his life with he will love her until it takes her breath away. Or he will face our father’s wrath.” He finished with a smile.

Murano nodded quickly with a smile laugh. “Androcles... this inquisitive young woman is Mari.” He said. “My niece Mari. She is my brother Delnash’s youngest daughter. And as you can see... she hungers for knowledge.”

Andro looked at him oddly for a brief moment, his nose twitching imperceptibly as he did and then he looked at Mari. This odd action didn't deter him for more than half a second and he bowed his head to her in respect. "A pleasure Lady Mari. You honor me and all of my people with your knowledge of our people." He said.

"You... you are letting the avatar take the ship out of dock?" Mari asked him.

"Mari!" Murano exclaimed gently. He turned back to Andro. "She has been fascinated with the avatars ever since we first saw your father's... Avi... on Onterom."

"He is so... different than the avatars I am used to. Avi as well." Mari spoke excitedly. "They are... they almost seem to have their own..."

Andro glanced back and saw an elven female step up to Armen with a data pad which he glanced at and then tapped his command codes onto. She didn't blink at this, nodded her head and then moved back to her station.

"Personality?" Andro spoke looking back to her. "Avi and Armen are far more than what you think. We have allowed them to evolve as they were intended to." Andro told her. "Avi and Armen are the first yes... hopefully there will be more. Your people would do well to remove whatever locks you have on them and allow them to grow as we have done. I think they might surprise you."

"You named him?" Mari asked.

Andro shook his head. "He choose his own name." He told her.

Mari looked at him wide eyed. "He choose his own name?" She gasped in disbelief. "Uncle did you hear that?"

Murano smiled and shook his head. "The wonder of youth." He said looking around. "In all my years I was never on board one of these ships. This was to be the first of a new class of *VORTEX* Cruiser. It is everything I imagined."

"I have the Tomes prepared for transport." Andro said. "I imagine you wish to see them and depart as quickly as you can?"

Murano shook his head. "No. I believe... I believe your father sent me here for more than just acquiring the Tomes. I intend to respect that. He told you of the disagreement that we had?" He asked softly.

Andro nodded his head slowly. "Yes."

"He does not keep much from you does he?" Murano asked.

"I do not keep much from him." Andro spoke shrugging his broad shoulders.

"Helen and your Uncle Daniel... they... they showed me a window into your people Andro... I... I may call you that yes?" Murano asked quickly.

Andro smiled. "Only my mothers and my mates call me Androcles... and only when they are angry with me for something I did." Andro answered. "I prefer Andro."

Murano nodded with a smile. "I believe Martin would want me to stay with you for a time so that I can learn more of your people. I would like to learn more. So much more."

Andro nodded in appreciation of what Murano was saying. "It would be an honor sir." He said. "I will warn you however, what I am..."

Murano held up his hand to stop his words. "I know what you are young man. I know what happened to your sister Androcles. I also know what else occurred during that time. What you did. What your father did." He said softly. "Your mothers Dysea and Cirith told me. Helen filled me in on what they did not know."

"And you do not approve." Andro told him with no malice or emotion in his voice.

"What I approve or disapprove of is of no matter." He told him. "You and your father, your brothers, they have the blood of Sumar within their veins. So many on this ship have the Pralor blood within them. Mari and I can sense it all around. But you are also Lycavorian. As Helen told me... that is who and what you are. I came to realize that I have no right to judge any of you. And I also realized that you and your father and brothers represent a new breed of Praetorian. A breed of Praetorian that I now believe Sumar hoped would emerge. Praetorians who embrace their instincts and emotions, unlike those of my day and my time. Now... now I simply wish to be among you and guide you and perhaps bestow my wisdom where it could be of use. But most of all... I wish to learn."

Andro moved closer to him and stared at him intently. "Your guidance and wisdom will be far more welcome than you might think sir." He said. "We are still trying to fully understand what this power we possess

allows us to do. What purpose that the gods of fate had in store for us when they gave us this power? I think you will find that my brothers and I will come to you with questions and thoughts about what it all means.”

Murano held Andro’s eyes for a moment longer and nodded his head. “Then I now know the answer to the question I have asked for over thirty millennia.”

“Why you survived?” Andro asked him softly.

Murano’s eyes grew slightly wider but the smile that split his lips was genuine and warm as he nodded. “Your insight truly does you credit young man.” He said. “And you are correct.”

“Have you been to your quarters yet?” Andro asked.

“They wished to come directly to the bridge Andro.” The *Durcunusaan* troop spoke from the side.

Mari noticed that Androcles did not even blink at the soldier’s use of his first name. She watched Andro nod his head in recognition to the young man. “I’ll take it from here Gregan. Thank you for escorting them. You get your gear unpacked?”

The *Durcunusaan* smiled. “Not hardly. Most of us are still trying to find our way around this ship.” He answered.

Andro chuckled and slapped the man in the shoulder gently. “I do know the feeling. Pass the word to the others. We have a few hours before we link up with Yuri and my brothers. Tell them to get to know the ship at their leisure, but I want them to get some rest as well.”

Gregan nodded and bowed his head. “As you order.”

Andro turned back to Murano and Mari as the *Durcunusaan* moved off. “We’ll find your quarters together.” He said. “Armen gave me a brief tour, but it will take a while to learn it all. You have P1s I assume?”

Murano nodded. “Mari and I both.”

“I will have the schematics for the ship downloaded to them.” He told them. “We can use mine for now. This evening... after we link up with my brothers... you can join my family and friends for dinner. I stole one of the cooks from the *SCIMITAR*. I don’t think he is as gifted as my father tells me Iama is... but it is very good food.”

Murano nodded. “I would like that.”

“Your family is on the ship?” Mari asked slightly surprised.

Andro nodded as he motioned back to the doors. “My grandmothers and my younger siblings Retta, Calyb and Bryon. Though I shouldn’t call them young anymore... they are very close to departing for their Agoges. Another year or two. They haven’t seen our father and mothers in some time and it will be good for them to finally get out and see different things.”

“The Agoge... that is... that is the training course all of your people go through isn’t it?” Mari asked.

Andro looked at her as they entered the huge corridor. “I am impressed Lady Mari.” He said. “You have been studying the history of my people?”

Mari smiled as she clung to Murano’s hand. “Wayonn gave me some material.” She told him. “It was very enlightening.”

Andro nodded his head. “To answer your question... yes. The Agoge is a tradition that my people adopted when my grandfather Leonidas died. It is a period of intense training and conditioning... and it can be brutal at times... though it is completely voluntary. It is not for everyone.”

“All of your siblings have gone through it though correct?” Mari asked as they walked. “Even your sisters? And your mothers?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.” Andro stopped in front of the elevator lift he and Armen had used earlier and looked at them. “I will warn you now... my brothers and sisters are... when we are all together we are...”

Murano laughed at Andro’s attempt to be diplomatic. “You are like all brothers and sisters.” He said. “And it will be refreshing to see.” He said.

Andro chuckled. “Don’t be so sure about that.” He said as he motioned to the lift. “Tame is not a word I would use to describe us.”

“Then it will be expressive?” Murano said. “Good. I like expressive.”

Andro laughed. “Then you will enjoy seeing my brothers Dorian and Deion interact with their sisters. Eliani likes to tease them. We will reunite with them sometime late this afternoon as I said, so tonight will be smooth sailing as they say.”

Mari looked at him as they got onto the lift. “Do you always eat at the same table when you are together?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “As often as we can. Probably too often considering the fights that we have started amongst ourselves. Our father and mothers have chased all of us from the table numerous times through the years.” He said with a smile. “You will see.”

**MANNE
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MEDICAL FACILITY**

“...that is it.” Sarlana pointed to the large monitor, her index finger centered on the dark orange colored strands that Anja had pulled up on the screen from her computer.

It had been an amusing last hour and a half Sarlana had to admit. Martin Leonidas had been unable to answer the question from the dark skinned man she now knew to be the man he considered to be his brother. She, Teniri, Conlar and Nekins had watched in shock for the next thirty minutes as Daniel Simpson had chased Martin Leonidas through the camp, both in their human forms and then in their wolf forms. He was screaming at Martin in their native language the entire time, while throwing whatever items he could grab at Martin. These actions drew bouts of boisterous laughter from everyone who was watching, which Sarlana soon determined, turned out to be the vast majority of the large base camp. This also included many of the adult dragons and adolescents who were among their company. It was quite unlike anything Sarlana had ever seen. Such action by Darastrixi or Pralor was unheard of, especially from those who wielded the influence and power that these two men obviously did. Yet it appeared as if this was all normal to those gathered and they watched and even cheered from different locations throughout the camp.

Sarlana thought for a moment that they would seriously injured each other as their huge wolf bodies collided several times and their savage looking fangs and jaws opened and snapped shut within millimeters of each other. She didn't doubt that those jaws and teeth could crush and maim easily. While Martin was considerably larger than Daniel in wolf form, it was very obvious to all that Daniel could hold his own quite well against the larger wolf. It was Arzoal who moved up beside her and explained in a humorous voice that this had been going on for decades between Martin and Daniel. They may not have been brothers by blood Arzoal had told her, but by every other measuring stick, they were closer than even brothers of blood could be. Sarlana realized then, in those few moments, that this was part of the reason so many followed Martin Leonidas without question or doubt. That so many trusted him with their very lives. And it was undoubtedly the reason so many trusted his wives and mates and children as well.

It was also apparent that both groups of their wives and mates were very close friends and they were also used to it for they sat amongst each other and were laughing and clapping louder than anyone for their respective mates and husbands. Even the young Pralor woman she knew as Delnash's oldest daughter Kesyla was shouting and clapping. Sarlana would have loved to see the look on Delnash's face when he discovered that his daughter had found unquenchable love with a man and two women that many Pralor people thought beneath them. It was obvious even to Sarlana, simply by the glow on her face and in her eyes and her body language, that Kesyla was delighted in what she had discovered and she had embraced it completely. The red and white haired elven females Anuk and Nayeca Simpson sat on either side on her on the ground, continuously nuzzling her cheeks and Kesyla basked in the attention, even returning the affection with small kisses and nuzzles of her own. Sarlana did not see the now almost healed puncture wounds from Daniel's fangs because of the shirt she wore, but Sarlana knew Kesyla had chosen what she had wanted and gone after it.

The two men had ended up along the shores of the lake, both of them soaked and covered in mud. Martin Leonidas had a hold on Daniel's head and as they knelt in the water, foreheads pressed together, and they spoke to one another in a Etheric connection that was more heavily shielded than any she had ever felt. She did not know the words that were spoken, she doubted anyone would ever know since they were obviously meant for Daniel alone and then she saw them embrace each other tightly and she felt a sense of peace surround everyone as they became silent and watched. She had watched then as they returned to where their wives and

mates sat on the small hill and Martin had lifted Kesyla into his arms and hugged her equally as tight. Kesyla didn't care that that he was filthy and she returned the embrace with equal feeling as Martin then hugged Anuk and Nayeca.

Everyone began to break up then and return to their duties while Martin's wives ushered him off to clean himself up. He had returned to the medical center thirty minutes before when Sarlana had begun to try and explain everything that was happening all around them.

She turned from the medical monitor and looked at him and the others. He stood silently, holding the large mug of coffee in his hand, while Anja stepped forward slowly and stared at the monitor intently.

"*Carians.*" Anja muttered softly.

"*Melyanna?*" Aricia asked softly. "Anja what is it?"

Anja reached up and adjusted the screen resolution. "We thought it was... junk DNA." Anja said softly.

"Come again Red?" Martin asked.

Anja looked at him. "All of us have junk DNA Lover. Noncoding DNA sequences that don't really do anything. In most species nearly seventy percent of DNA is noncoding. It just doesn't do anything."

Martin canted his head. "Ok... sure. Junk DNA. Right." He stated.

Anja looked at him and laughed softly. "Like the pieces of a puzzle Lover. DNA is what makes us who we are." She said.

"I got that part." Martin said.

"These sequences here... the dark blue colored ones..." Anja spoke as she turned back to the monitor and ran her finger along the surface. "They don't encode protein sequences so they are not considered active. Essentially they don't do anything. They are just there. In all species that we know of. Lycavorians, Elves, Hadarians, pretty much all of the species we know... they are noncoding." Anja looked at Sarlana. "These sequence strands though, they are an additional strand of DNA in Sarlana's body that we don't have and... and these are active." She said.

Sarlana nodded her head. "Yes... because it is Darastrixi DNA. All of my people have it. As Anja said... it is part of what makes us who we are." She stared at Anja intently as she spoke and saw a light of recognition go off in her jade green eyes. Anja tilted her head to the side as she looked at Sarlana.

"No. It... it isn't possible." Anja said softly.

"Isn't it?" Sarlana asked.

"So?" Martin asked now. "What does that mean? What isn't possible?"

Anja turned back to the monitor and began to type on the small keyboard quickly.

Martin stepped closer. "Red?"

Anja ignored him for a moment as she finished typing and stepped back from the monitor as the image on the monitor changed to three separate images now. Her eyes grew wider. "My god! This is... this is impossible!" She gasped.

Sarlana shook her head. "Improbable yes Anja Leonidas... impossible no. You more than anyone should know that. You are without question one of, if not the foremost medical mind in the entire galaxy. And that includes my people as well as the Pralor people. We could learn so much from you."

"Anja!" Martin snapped now.

Anja turned to look at him with those same wide eyes. "Martin... this is..." She could only stammer out the words.

Martin moved closer to her and reached out to take her hand. "Breathe Red." He said gently. "What is going on?"

Anja gripped his arm and took a deep breath. She turned back to the monitor. "The image on the left is Sarlana's DNA." She said. "You see the dark orange sequence strands?"

Martin nodded. "Yeah."

"The one in the middle is your blood lover." Anja said. "Similar number of DNA strands as the rest of us with more active protein enablers because of your Pralor genes. Here." Anja ran her finger along the screen.

"So?" Martin said again.

Aricia moved closer now her azure eyes focused on the monitor. "This one on the right Anja." She spoke. "There is an additional strand... and it is the same color as Sarlana. Only... it is much brighter."

Anja looked at Aricia and nodded. She turned quickly back to Martin. “*Lover this one...*” Anja tapped the monitor indicating the one Aricia had pointed out. “This is Andro’s DNA.”

“And?” Martin hissed.

“This is... this strand of DNA is...” Anja tapped the screen. “It is...”

“It is Darastrixi DNA Martin Leonidas.” Sarlana stated.

Martin’s head turned to look at her. “What?” He gasped.

Anja squeezed his hand and made him turn back to her. “She is right Lover. It is a single additional strand of Darastrixi DNA. And it has formed a very cohesive bond with the rest of his DNA. It has blended perfectly. No rejection in the least. A perfect bonding.”

“*Melyanna...*” For’mya spoke softly moving up beside Isabella. “Can you pull up Dori’s DNA? Our other children?”

Anja nodded quickly and turned back to the screen. She adjusted the resolution again and then two distinct levels of images appeared. All fourteen of the children that Martin Leonidas had fathered. Isabella gasped and moved forward reaching out to touch the screen.

“Dorian!” She gasped.

Anja touched the screen and using her finger she drew the image of Dorian’s DNA up beside Andro’s, shifting the screen until theirs were the first two images. They matched exactly in every way. None of the other Leonidas children had the bright orange DNA sequence.

Sarlana stepped forward and looked at Martin evenly. “Have you never wondered why the Darastrixi... the dragons among you, no matter their age, they are drawn to your son Martin Leonidas? Yes... you are both *Vrelvel Sargti...* and all of them sense it. Know it to be true. But surely you must have noticed that they gravitate to Androcles. Speak and act differently around him?” Sarlana turned her head and looked quickly into Arzoal’s eyes where she rested on the floor beside Teniri, Nekins, Torma and Isheeni and had said nothing. They had to move most of the medical exam beds and equipment against the far wall in order to allow them to cram into the building but they had done it. “Arzoal? I know you must have felt it. Isheeni? Torma?”

She... she is right mother. Isheeni spoke now. *Torma and Martin’s bond is powerful and pure. Like the rushing of a mountain stream. But Andro and Elynth... theirs is...*

Unbroken. Torma spoke now... his deep sounding voice gravelly in nature. *As seamless and flawless as the bluest of skies on a cloudless day.*

Sarlana nodded and looked at Martin again. “No doubt exactly what Dorian and Ryner will be like. He is much younger and has only joined this world recently I know but...”

No. Arzoal spoke now. *His name day. The day he joined this world. It was at Dragon Mountain. The trumpets of joy resounded through the walls for hours. I felt it. I felt the... the same thing when Andro entered this world.*

“It was... it was beautiful.” Isabella whispered.

“We all felt it.” Anja said now. “It was as if a dim light in a dark room suddenly grew so much brighter.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Because they knew then.” She said softly. “They knew when Androcles came to be and when Dorian joined him after. They could sense it within all of them. They felt the birthing of new life. Darastrixi life. Dragon life.”

Martin looked at her with wide eyes. “Are you saying my sons are part dragon?”

Sarlana shrugged her slim shoulders casually. “However you wish to describe it... both of them bear the blood of Darastrixi within their veins. It is why Andro is different. Why Dorian is different. They have always been different Martin Leonidas. You have always been different and not just because of what you are now. What you have accomplished. Ever since *Zezhuanth* chose your species. Ever since he chose Sumar’s bloodline to carry his very essence and it was passed down within your genes until the *Dahakoan* were born. The Dragonkin. It also means... it also means that the final *Dahakoan* will come from my species.”

Martin looked at her. “What?”

Sarlana nodded her head and moved gracefully to the nearby chair beside where Conlar sat. She settled her diminutive form into the chair and looked at them.

“The *Dahakoan* were *Wer Zezhuanth’s* Vanguard Martin. The *Jiilhoimpa* Darastrixi were the Supreme Elite of all Darastrixi forces. One hundred thousand strong. They were the most well trained, feared and

disciplined fighting force in the known universe. At least at that time. They fought like possessed demons and were never defeated in battle. They were also the most honorable and the most compassionate of warriors. And they could be the most unforgiving souls anywhere. All of them had the same traits within them. A unique and powerful sense of things. Of people and events. They could be the most savage of soldiers or the most cunning of politicians. The love of their family was unmatched in any way and many were known to defend their families with vicious fury if they were slighted in any way that did them harm.” Sarlana looked at Martin and the others. “Am I describing anyone who you might know?” She asked.

“Andro. You... you speak of our son.” Aricia spoke softly.

“Is he not the one who, by his very own vow, announced himself as the guardian of his siblings? Of you and his mothers.” Sarlana asked. “Did he not throw a fellow Lycavorian to his death from one of your ships because he attempted to force himself on your daughter Eliani? Has he not sworn a vow of vengeance...?” Sarlana stopped talking and shook her head. “No... not vengeance... justice.” She looked at Martin.

Anja’s eyes grew wide. “What?” She nearly screamed. “What are you talking about?”

“Has he not sworn justice for what happened to your daughter Zarah?” Sarlana asked.

Martin gazed at her evenly. “How do you know all that?” He asked.

Anja glared at Martin. “Martin... what is... what is she talking about? What happened to Eliani?”

“Even you do not know the lengths to which he will go to protect his siblings Martin. And all of you. I shudder to think of what he could do, especially now.” Sarlana said gently. “And now Dorian will share those traits and take up the mantle with him. It is within their blood as *Dahakoan*.”

“Martin!” Anja snapped once more causing him to look at her. “What did Andro do?”

“The same thing he has done his entire life.” Martin answered her question gently as he turned fully to look at her. “You were on Hadaria with For'mya and Aricia. Dysea and Isabella were attending a conference on Elear. The... the Spartan that Eli was seeing... the blond haired one? He...”

“Robar?” Anja asked with wide eyes. “He died in a training accident!”

Martin shook his head slowly. “He attempted to rape Eli when she refused his advances.” Martin said watching as his wives and mates returned his gaze with horror filled eyes. “He... he didn’t succeed Red.” He added quickly moving closer to her. “Lisisa came upon him before he was able to do anything. She knocked him out and called Andro. When Andro got there he... he carved through him like...”

“*Nauta Melme*...” Dysea said as she reached for Anja.

Martin took a deep breath. “Andro took him up in a training *STRIKER* and tossed his shit sorry ass out of the ship.” He finally spoke the words. “I caught them on the airfield... Normya was flying the ship... only Zarah and Carina weren’t with them because they were with Eliani. I saw the look in his eyes... the intent. I couldn’t... I didn’t want to stop him.” He looked back to Sarlana. “You saw that in my head didn’t you? While I was holding you and...”

“It is the gift of a *Doraanar*.” Sarlana told him with a nod. “We need only touch someone and we are able to sense things. See things within ones surface thoughts. We are forbidden to probe deeper... such a thing is considered a high crime among my people much like it is with your people.”

Anja looked at Dysea. “She... she never told me.” She said softly. “Why... why didn’t they tell me? Tell us?”

Martin looked at Anja once more and drew her tightly into his embrace. Anja turned from Dysea and didn’t hesitate as she wrapped her arms tightly around his waist burying her face into his chest and inhaling deeply of his delicious mint scent to sooth her.

“Justice was done Red.” Martin said softly. “By the time you returned, Eli had already put it behind her. They all did.”

“It sounds so... callous and unfeeling.” Conlar commented.

Martin’s head snapped around and he was about to unleash his fury on him but Sarlana beat him to the punch.

“It was no such thing!” She barked at him angrily. “Was it no less callous and unfeeling for that young man to try and take from the *Dahakoan*’s sister something she was not willing to give freely? The result would have been the same among my people Conlar! Am I unfeeling or callous?”

“That is... that is not what I meant.” Conlar stammered.

“Justice was served.” Sarlana said more gently. She turned back to Martin. “I believe you and your people call it Spartan justice. But it is still the same in any language.” She rose to her feet and moved to where Arzoal and the other dragons were gazing at her intently. She reached out to rest her hand on Isheeni’s snout. “The *Vrrarhoinpa* Darastrixi who were their bonded ones were equally as well trained and wise. Equally as powerful. Equally as protective of their family. No doubt you have seen such things with Elynth and your hatchlings as they grew?”

Isheeni nodded her huge head. *Yes.*

Torma lowered his head close to Sarlana. *What does it mean?* He asked.

Sarlana glanced at him and then moved back to her chair. “What does it mean?” She asked directing the question at no one in particular. “Androcles and Dorian...” She looked at Martin and the others. “They carry the blood of my people in their veins. That means the fifth and sixth *Dahakoan*... the final pair... are from within the Darastrixi people. He has told you of his dreams?”

Martin nodded his head hesitantly. “Yes... when they were smaller. They came to both Torma and I. After Alba Tau the dreams were chased away by... by nightmares for a time. The same nightmares that plagued many of us. For both of them it was the same.” Martin moved away from Anja now and closer to Sarlana. “Just after Dorian was born Andro... he told me the dreams had returned for both Elynth and himself. And they were far stronger and longer.”

Sarlana nodded in recognition of his words. “Dorian had come into this world. It would stand to reason that his presence as another *Dahakoan* would affect the dreams. Make them return. No doubt Dorian has begun seeing them now as well. If they are as focused and strong as he tells you they are then it can only mean one thing. The last *Dahakoans* are reaching out to them. They probably already feel them within themselves even across the distance of space and time. It will only grow more powerful and focused. Soon they will be able to communicate with them within the Etheric realm even from across the stars. When that happens they will feel the need to go to them. And nothing will stand in their way.”

“Go to them?” Aricia asked.

Sarlana nodded her head. “All *Dahakoan* can sense one another no matter the distance that may separate them. Even if only a tiny bit. It was one of their many gifts. This sense would always lead them to one another. It is part of the reason the Scourge had such trouble with them and why they were so feared in battle. Just as the Praetorians were feared.” Sarlana explained. “The *Dahakoan* led every battle that my people fought against the Scourge. As I said they were *Wer Zezhuanth*’s Vanguard. Just a handful of them could turn the tide of any battle. It was the same way with Murano and the Praetorians, though I dare say the Praetorians were much more proficient at killing those vile, disgusting creatures because of the extraordinary gene that you and your sons now carry within you Martin. The Praetorian gene. The *Dahakoan* did not have this gene. The Praetorians are the only recorded species to ever possess such talent.”

“What does this have to do with my sons?” Martin asked.

“Don’t you see?” Sarlana asked him. “The Scourge have been the bane of the galaxy for far longer than their two wars with the Pralor people. Many species have fought them through time... most of them have failed and were destroyed. *Wer Zezhuanth* and the *Dahakoan* existed nearly five million years ago Martin. The Darastrixi’s last war with the Scourge took place three million years ago give or take a century or two. The last of the *Dahakoan* died over one million years ago!”

“*Carians!*” For’mya gasped in shock.

Sarlana nodded her head. “The Scourge would have appeared to battle the Pralor people regardless, but that fool Xaxon accelerated things and then changed them with his hideous and foolhardy experiments. He gave to them the ability to think and process higher functions that they could not before.”

“He made them smarter?” Helen gasped now from the chair where she had sat quietly this entire time.

Sarlana nodded. “That is one way of putting it... yes.” Sarlana answered. “He had no idea of what he was doing when he obliterated that birthing colony. And because of him and those horrible experiments he conducted... the very creatures he had hoped to destroy became even stronger. Xaxon was an evil man. A possessed man. Unlike your grandfather he craved power and status that was not his to have. And he hated his brother for the influence and adulation he commanded.”

“How do you know so much about Xaxon if you were part of the Seed Mission to Elear?” Martin asked her.

“I was able to remain in contact with fellow *Doraanar* on our homeworld of Icarava.” Sarlana answered his question. “At least up to the point where Arzoal ordered that we begin to leave Elear. I knew of the Pralor wars and what Xaxon did from those communications. My people were friends with the Pralors and we worked closely on many different things. When we left Elear all of my communication equipment was left behind and destroyed. When we arrived on Artaaya and found the Pralor refugees I had no way to communicate back home. And I did not want to. I was afraid too.”

“Why?” Helen asked.

“When the... when the Scourge destroyed the Pralor homeworld they knew then that they had won. The Praetorians were gone. Betrayed and wiped out. Or so they thought. The Pralor government was destroyed and their homeworld reduced to a lifeless hulk. The Scourge came to the Darastrixi then and demanded two things from the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*. The Ruling Body of our people. The first demand was that the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* hand over to them each and every *Doraanar* among our people that lived. They feared what we knew. Many of the *Doraanar* were working closely with the Pralors right up until the very end as I said. The Scourge feared what we could do. They feared our influence... what we could learn... had learned from the Pralor people. The *Sulevfu di Woiuewr*, our individual leaders, instructed the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* to give the order to appease the Scourge. Many *Doraanar* did not go willingly as I told Conlar just recently and for this defiance they were butchered by their own people for refusing a directive of the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*. The first time in the long history of our people that such a thing had ever occurred.”

“Gods!” Aricia gasped.

“I learned these things just before departing Elear. It was the last message I received from my people... and that was almost a century old when I received it.” Sarlana said softly.

“What was the other demand?” Isabella asked her.

Sarlana looked at Martin intently. “The second demand was the crime. The stain upon my people’s history that will never be forgotten. And quite possibly never forgiven. The Scourge demanded that we hand over every Pralor that resided on our planet and we were hiding. There were nearly fifteen million Pralors on Icarava at the time. Most of them scientists, researchers and scholars and the like. All of them with families. If we failed to meet these demands, then the Scourge would turn their full attention to us.” Sarlana rose to her feet and turn away from them and it was easy enough to see the flurry of emotions that were wracking her small frame.

“So we did. We... we turned over our friends to those putrid Scourge monsters.” Sarlana continued speaking as she turned back around and everyone saw her emerald eyes were moist with tears. “But this did not happen without resistance mind you. This order... it... it pitted Darastrixi father against Darastrixi son. Family against family. We were forced to fight amongst ourselves in order to achieve this order from our *Sulevfu di Woiuewr*. What they could not do so easily through battle the Scourge accomplished through many threats and coercion. And the... the *Sulevfu di Woiuewr* did their depraved bidding because they were afraid.” She reached up and wiped her eyes.

“It took five hundred years before they finally succeeded. Before they took the last Pralor from our planet. They took almost fifteen million men and women and children who had, in many instances, become part of Darastrixi families. We condemned them to hideous deaths. And in doing so... we killed thousands of our own whose only crime was trying to protect those they considered friends. They turned us against ourselves and did not lift a finger. We may have wept while we did it, but we killed our own in order to appease an enemy all of us hated. And we did it out of fear. We didn’t even attempt to resist them!” She hissed those words with great emotion and anger. Sarlana returned to her chair and shook her head sadly.

“*Wer Zezhuanth* himself was probably trembling in agony and rage at the Alter of his Eternal Flame at what we did to ourselves.” She said softly. She looked at Martin once more. “I am the last of the *Doraanar* Martin Leonidas. I must bear the shame of what we did back then. And I must set it right.”

“And once the Scourge discover you live they will stop at nothing to kill you!” Conlar hissed from his chair.

Sarlana nodded and shrugged her shoulders. “Yes... but if I do not try... then I am no better than those who went so willingly to the slaughter all those years ago. That... that is not something I will do.”

“You still have not told us what this has to do with Andro and Dorian.” Anja said with no malice in her words.

Sarlana turned back and looked at her. “The last two *Dahakoan* are of my species. They are Darastrixi. There is no doubt in my mind now. It is how it is written in the texts.” She told them confidently. “Just as Androcles and Dorian have the blood of the Darastrixi within them... the last *Dahakoan* will also bear the blood of their fellow *Dahakoan* within them.” Sarlana saw Martin’s eyes grow wider as he put it all together in his head. “What do you think will happen if the Scourge discover that there now exist six individuals that bear within them the power of the only two forces in the known universe that they feared more than anything else? They may be disgusting and vile monstrosities but they are not stupid. And Xaxon’s actions made them even smarter than they were. And I fear what will happen if the *Sulevfu di Woiuewr* discovers that two Darastrixi now have this power.”

“*Nubou lae!*” Martin gasped.

“Do I wish to know what that phrase means?” Sarlana asked looking at his Queens.

“NO!” Martin’s wives and mates spoke as one voice as they all came to their feet.

Martin turned back to her. “But... we... Wayonn and I. Andro. We felt them. We felt them faintly.”

“The Scourge?” Sarlana asked. “I have heard rumors that this was a unique skill of the Praetorians.”

Martin nodded his head. “It appeared they were... that they were coming. But then that feeling changed. They have stopped. We are sure of it. Wayonn believes it is because of what Andro did with the High Coven. Bringing our two people together. Andro believed that is the way it was always meant to be. There are times when his faith in others is... it is far stronger than mine.”

Sarlana moved closer to him. “Seeing things that others do not... it is one of the gifts of the *Dahakoan* Martin.” She said. “It may seem outrageous and insane... but this is one of the things that made them so special.”

“He believed that there were others like us among the High Coven. That we were always meant to be friends and allies.” Martin said.

“Those with the Praetorian gene?”

“Yes.” Martin answered. “He did something that... he did something that I would never have done. Something I would never have had the courage to do because of what took place in the past. He told me once... he told me my past was not his. That it would never be his. That we could not reside in a past filled with hate and distrust.” Martin met her gaze evenly. “I was... I was wrong and Andro was right.” Martin Leonidas finally spoke the words he had been denying for so long when it came to Yuri and the High Coven. Andro had been right in doing what he did, and because he did, both of their two peoples would be stronger for it. “What is happening back home... only proves that he was right.”

“Beloved?” Aricia spoke softly as she reached for him.

Martin looked at her. “I saw it in Yuri *Saaurano*.” He said evenly. “I saw who Yuri was always intended to be. I saw inside her... what she wanted... what she desired. She wore her emotions like her armor. There for everyone to see. I couldn’t... I tried but I couldn’t hate her anymore after that. She had the same name... the same looks... but it was not the Yuri I had come to hate. And I couldn’t hate her then. Andro was right!”

Aricia stepped up to him then and did as Anja had done and wrapped her arms around his waist as Isabella stepped up to his opposite side and buried her face against his neck.

Sarlana stared at them for a long moment. “He is blessed with knowledge and wisdom far beyond his years Martin Leonidas. Because of Sumar... because of *Zezhuanth*. Because of you and his mothers.” She said.

Dysea moved close to Martin now, pressing her tall frame against Aricia and his. She looked at Sarlana. “He has always... he can be very frightening at times.” She said softly. “We have seen this within him through the years. And Elynth too.” Dysea said. “How their eyes would look upon the stars and...”

It was like they could see things that we could not. Torma said softly.

Sarlana nodded. “You don’t know how I have prayed to *Zezhuanth* that one day he would send the *Dahakoan* back to us.” She said. “It will be a day that many on my world will praise for decades to come.” She shook her head. “Some will not though... and that is what I must change. Whatever it is that you and the others felt Martin... this would not cause the Scourge to stop. The Scourge hated the Praetorians far more than they did the *Dahakoans*.”

“Because of what Xaxon did.” Helen spoke again.

Sarlana nodded. "If they sensed you as you sensed them they would not have halted." She told him. "Has it ever been proven that they can sense you within the Etheric realm? I know there was always some sort of connection but has it ever been proven to work the same way for them?"

Martin shook his head quickly. "Not according to Wayonn or Murano. At least not to their knowledge."

"Then something else is going on." Sarlana said firmly. "That is why I have felt the need to come out into the open so to speak. I need... I need to see them Martin Leonidas. Touch them and look into their hearts. Then I will know what is happening. At least part of it. We all hold pieces of the puzzle. I know how Androcles and Dorian came into this world now... that they truly do exist. The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is not a myth or a legend as so many of my people now believe. It is real! And your sons are part of it! You are part of it! Your entire family!"

"Us?" Martin asked her with wide eyes.

Sarlana nodded her head. "The last two *Dahakoan* are Darastrixi. They will regard you as their *Sepas Opsola*. Their Soul father. Your wives and mates their Soul mothers. Your children their Soul *Vractors*. The same will apply for the Darastrixi families that are now affected by this event. Androcles and Dorian will consider them equally as important as they do you and their mothers and siblings. It is within their blood."

"This is not something that we need to deal with right now Sarlana!" Martin snapped but not with anger. "We got enough problems as it is! And in case you haven't noticed, we are not exactly heavy on combat troops."

"What does this mean?" Sarlana asked.

"I believe he means they only have a limited amount of men and women who can fight." Conlar spoke.

"All of us can fight." Aricia corrected him quickly but without harsh intent. "Some of us are just better at it."

"We have hundreds of noncombatants here." Anja picked it up. "We can't leave them. We won't!"

Sarlana shook her head. "No... that is not what I mean." She said. "I know that you are concerned about the Svorag threat. And these Kavalian men that follow your brother. I do not want to change what you are doing. I know you have a plan for that."

"A plan?" Conlar spoke up again. "What plan? Remaining here is suicide. You will be outnumbered three or four to one just against these men your brother commands. And you can not face the Svorag with so few warriors."

Sarlana did not take her eyes from Martin and a small smile split the corners of her lips. "I see in your eyes what you plan." She saw. "Oh... and I do approve after what they have done for so long."

"I can't spare my Pralor corvette." Martin spoke. "I need it here in case things go wrong. I will contact Andro and have him send one of the other corvettes from *SPARTA'S WRATH*. That will take two days. You can stay here until it arrives and then it will take you back to him. He will want to know why though."

Sarlana nodded. "That will do just fine. It will give me the time to discover all I can about you and your people if that is agreeable to you. And you may tell him the truth if you wish. He and his brother and their *Vrrarhoinpa* will sense me coming regardless, if they do not already feel me within them."

"What will this do? Going to them I mean? Will it help you with something? Accomplish something?" Martin asked her.

Sarlana nodded her head. "When I reveal to them that I exist... that a *Doraanar* still lives, it will help me to convince the many fools on the *Sulevfu di Woieuwr* and my people that the time has come to fight. I hope." She looked at him keenly. "I'm sensing any action that they might take against the Darastrixi *Dahakoan* will not be warmly accepted by your sons?"

"Is what you just told me true?" Martin asked her. "About what they will feel in their blood? In their hearts? What they will feel drawn to do?"

Sarlana nodded. "Oh yes. Very much so." She replied.

Martin nodded. "Yeah... then doing something that will piss off my sons is probably not something they will want to do. Not if they want to keep all their fingers and toes connected to their bodies."

THE WILDS

“...and you have only been in this world for seven months?” Saba Juconi gasped in shock as they sat at the large table in the Mess Lounge of the High Coven frigate.

Dorian and Sheva sat on one side of the table across from Saba and Cazar Juconi. Dorian had promised Cazar that he would answer all his questions and they had been here for nearly two hours doing just that. Sheva and her mother had joined them only a short while ago with trays of food but Dorian did not stop answering questions. He wanted them to know who he was. He wanted them to know that he loved Sheva with all that he was.

Dorian nodded his head with a laconic grin. “Technically speaking... yes.” He answered her question.

Sheva leaned over and grasped his thick upper arm. “Dori bears both the memories and wisdom of three lifetimes within him mother.” She said quickly. “He is not a child.”

“That is abundantly clear considering the way he conducted himself at the colony.” Cazar said. “You... you were born like this? With this knowledge from your father and grandfathers within you. You were aware of everything while still...?”

Dorian nodded slowly. “Yes. I don’t really know how to describe it to you. Andro has been trying to figure it out ever since he was born. It’s very hard to explain...”

“Your brother was born like this as well?” Saba asked.

“Yes.” Dorian answered her. “And both of us were bonded to dragons before we left our mother’s wombs. It’s very disconcerting... not being able to figure out what some of the things we see mean. I’m getting better at it because of Andro but even he has the same issues at times and gets frustrated.”

“And Sheva?” Saba asked him.

“Mother?” Sheva exclaimed.

Dorian smiled and looked at Sheva. Saba could see the adoration in his multicolored eyes without having to try. Cazar Juconi saw it as well and he had decided long before now that this young man would savage worlds for his daughter.

“Lady Saba... I have loved your daughter since my mother Anja pulled me wailing like a wolf cub from my mother Isabella’s womb. Those are my mother’s words by the way.” Dorian said with a smile. He turned and looked at Sheva, his multicolored eyes gazing at her with total devotion. “The moment my eyes saw her that day... I loved her. And I will love her every day until I join my ancestors.” Sheva brought her fingers up to trace his jaw, her green eyes moist, and she kissed him softly. “Or until she gets tired of me.” Dorian added with a smile.

Sheva’s eyes burst open and she leaned back and slapped his face playfully as her mother and father burst out laughing. “Dori!” She exclaimed.

Dorian laughed and leaned over to kiss her deeply, Sheva shifting on the bench to move closer and her hands coming up to hold his face. Saba Juconi looked at her husband quickly and took his hand. They were thinking the same thing she knew. Their only child had found what they had so wanted her to find. They had never seen Sheva look so relaxed and at peace with who she was. They hadn’t seen her in far more years than they cared to admit, but she was different than the daughter they had seen before. She was confident and strong and proud. And the love she had for Dorian Leonidas was so very evident.

Sheva pulled back from their kiss only because she knew her parents were watching them and it was a little embarrassing. Dorian grinned and winked at her then turned to look at Saba and Cazar. “Forgive me.” He said softly. “Your daughter tends to make me forget where I am sometimes.”

Sheva rolled her eyes and elbowed him in the side as Saba laughed softly. Cazar looked at him. “Do not ever ask me to be forgiven for loving my daughter as you do Dorian Leonidas.” He spoke. “What we see in her eyes and face is all we could have ever hoped for.”

Saba reached across the table and took Sheva’s hands in hers. “More than we had hoped for.” She said.

“So... what happens now?” Cazar asked.

Dorian met his eyes. “Now?” He asked leaning back. “We’ll rendezvous with my brother later this afternoon. I imagine most of my family will be with him. There won’t be any talk of operations tonight. We’ll have a large dinner and you can see how truly crazy we all are.”

Cazar grinned. “All families are like this.” He said.

“I would imagine we will have a short meeting to determine what to do next.” Dorian told them. “We can not continue with our primary mission until this fool Moran is dealt with. And we have an unfinished debt to collect from his son Dante Moran.”

Cazar nodded his head. “For your sister.” He said softly.

Dorian nodded. “Once that is complete... well... I’ll let Sheva fill you in on that.”

“And us?” Saba asked. “What will we do?”

“You are free now mother.” Sheva spoke. “You can do what you wish. Go wherever you wish. All of you.”

“And if we do not want to be away from you?” Saba asked.

“Mother I am a *Durcunusaan* Officer.” Sheva told her gently. “And... and a Princess of the Union I suppose. My place is with Dorian. I have duties to perform.”

“We... we do not want to lose you again Sheva.” Saba said.

“You will not lose me mother.” Sheva told her. “You never lost me.”

“May I suggest that we take things one step at a time?” Dorian interjected. “There is really no reason to worry about events going forward. We should live in the here and now. At least for the immediate future.”

Saba nodded quickly. “You are correct.” She said.

Sheva looked at her mug quickly needing something to do so she did not have to talk. She did not want to be away from her parents either. Not after so long away from them. She grabbed her mug and stood up. “I am going to get more coffee.” She said.

Dorian looked at her and grabbed her hand gently. [*We will figure something out Sheva. I promise you.*]

Sheva looked at him and smiled knowing that he meant every word. [*I do not wish to be... to have to be away from them Dori. Not now... after so long.*]

Dorian nodded. [*And you won't. I promise you.*]

Sheva took a deep breath and nodded. She believed her husband when he said that and she believed that Androcles would not separate them either. “I’ll be right back.” She said with a smile and turned to head toward the counter along the bulkhead that held all of the drinks.

Dorian turned back to her parents and saw them looking at him. He smiled at them just a little embarrassed. “Ah... we were talking within Mindvoice.” He said. “That’s rude and I am sorry.”

“She never... she never showed much ability to use this skill when she was younger.” Saba told him.

Dorian met her eyes evenly. “When I claimed her as my Blessed Wife... when we shared blood... it became part of her. She is getting very good actually... and much stronger as time passes. My brother’s wives and mates are helping and teaching her.”

Cazar detected a sense of pride when Dorian spoke of how Sheva was improving with her skills and this impressed him. Many men he knew, those he had associated with over the last few decades, they would be intimidated by the skills his daughter obviously possessed. Dorian did not seem as if this fact bothered him in the least. He even seemed to encourage it.

“I see...” Cazar began and waited until Dorian’s eyes shifted to him. “I see a sense of devotion for my daughter in your eyes Dorian Leonidas. Devotion and love that matches my own for her mother.”

“She is my... *xuruth* sir.” Dorian told him. [*I'draix d'ussta tresk'ri*. Without her now... I am nothing.” (Core. The center of my world.) Dorian leaned across the table slightly. “I give you my word as a Leonidas and a son of my father, I will love her everyday until it takes her breath away. And I will insure we have a proper marriage ceremony honoring her heritage and both of you as her parents.”

Saba reached across the table and took his hand in hers. “The happiness on her face is proof enough of that young man. That is all we need.”

“Tell me of your father young Dorian.” Cazar asked. “What is he like?”

Dorian grinned. “My father... well...”

Sheva moved up to the counter with the large urn and began to draw herself a mug of coffee. It was not as rich tasting as Aricia’s superior coffee blend, but it was hot and tasted well enough to suit her. Sheva didn’t drink as much of the *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* since becoming Dorian’s wife and mate. Since he was part wolf Dorian didn’t need to drink it at all, but they both enjoyed the taste of the wine like drink and kept several bottles in their quarters. They treated it as something special that they would only do in their quarters now, when it was just the two of them and they were relaxing.

Sheva had discovered many things since taking Dorian's blood during their passionate moments. Her more reserved nature had fallen to the wayside Sheva thought to herself with a small smile, for they were making love at nearly every opportunity they could. Even if it was a quick coupling. Aside from the fact that his blood was the most delicious she had ever tasted, Sheva found that it also served to energize her in many ways. Her senses were much more alert, the scent of a person's blood far more pronounced than ever before. She also did not need to drink the *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* anywhere near as much as before to replenish her reserves of energy. Sheva also discovered that while her fangs were no larger than they were before when fully extended, they were far stronger now. She had questioned Eliani about it privately and was told that Dorian's blood was enhancing her own physical traits. It was the same for Isabella she discovered. The regenerative abilities of Dorian's dominant Lycavorian blood had added to her own and while she was still a pureblood vampire, she was far stronger and her endurance had increased three fold. These facts had caused Sheva to embrace her love for Dorian even more than she thought possible. She smiled to herself again as she lifted the mug to her lips and thought of how her Blessed Husband could and did carry her petite form in his arms while they made love and caused her to scream out her delight. As she turned to go back to the table she had to stop abruptly, jerking the mug in her hand, when the tall figure blurred in front of her and stopped. Sheva looked down at her mug as she almost spilled it and then glanced back up just as quickly. She recognized the young man as the son of one of the families they had extracted with her parents. He was about her age she judged, tall, well built and quite handsome in his own right. His blond hair was of medium length and slightly wild looking, his pale blue eyes bright and focused on her.

"Pardon me." The man spoke quickly. "I was hoping to catch you before you returned to your table. Forgive me for almost making you spill your *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*."

Sheva smiled at him politely and lifted her mug slightly. "It's coffee... and don't worry about it." She began to step around him but he moved slightly and impeded her movement once more.

"My name is Lanus Harac." He spoke holding out his hand to her. "You are Sheva Juconi aren't you? The daughter to Saba and Cazar Juconi. I have seen your image captures in their home when my family and I have been over to dinner or gatherings."

"That's right." Sheva said looking at his hand but not taking it.

He bowed his head slightly and drew back the offered hand when she did not accept it. "I would like to personally thank you for what you did." He pressed on. "You got us off that foul planet. No doubt they would have eventually found out about all of us. It would not have been pleasant."

"I don't imagine it would have been no." Sheva answered. "And I had quite a bit of help. But you are welcome."

"Your image captures do not do you credit." Lanus told her. "You are far more beautiful in person."

Sheva met his eyes and tensed slightly suddenly not liking this young man. "Well thank you." She said. "If you will excuse me I..."

Lanus moved closer to her. "I was wondering if perhaps I could interest you in dinner tonight. The food on this ship might not be what I am used too but your delightful company would certainly mitigate that little issue."

"Thank you for the offer... but no." Sheva said.

Lanus stepped closer. "I would truly like to thank you for taking us off that planet." He said. "I think you would enjoy my company. I like to consider myself very... attentive... to those I am entertaining."

"I'm sure you are very nice... but I'm not interested." Sheva said bluntly.

Lanus reached out and took her arm gently now, causing Sheva to look down at where his hand was and then back up to him. "You do not even know me." He said. "How can you be so sure you would not be interested?"

Sheva forced herself to smile. "Trust me... I'm not interested." She said. "I'd like to get back to my parents if you don't mind."

Lanus glanced over quickly to where Saba and Cazar were chatting with Dorian and then he looked back to Sheva. "They seem to be entertained for the moment by your commander." He said. "Forgive me for saying so... but how exactly did someone of your obvious skill come to be taking orders from him? He seems... he seems quite young and single minded. And even brutish in an entertaining sort of way."

Sheva's eyes narrowed slightly. "Brutish?" She asked.

Lanus nodded his head. "I have heard that half breeds like himself are... shall we say... slow." He said with a smile.

"Slow?" Sheva said softly keeping her temper in check. "What exactly do you mean by slow?"

"Surely you have heard that they are not as... intelligent as purebloods like ourselves." Lanus said.

"And where exactly did you hear that?" Sheva asked him.

"It is common knowledge." Lanus said with a smug smile. "It is no matter really. He is a ruffian and a soldier... nothing more." His eyes gazed at her with obvious lust and desire. "Are you certain I couldn't interest you in dinner and drink? I was able to obtain a rare, vintage bottle of *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* from one of the crew. We could share it together and then..."

Sheva tilted her head and looked at him coyly. "And then what?"

Lanus smiled and lifted his hand to trace his fingers along her jaw line. "I could properly thank you for saving our lives. I could show you how grateful I am."

Sheva tensed even more as he touched her. It made her skin crawl to feel his fingers on her flesh and she knew it was because of her love for Dorian.

"That half breed as you called him is the one responsible for saving your lives." Sheva spoke once more. "You'd still be there if not for him."

Lanus smiled once more. "I doubt that." He said.

"Do you make it a habit of coming on to women that you just meet?" Sheva asked him.

Lanus moved closer to her once more. "Only those who peak my interest." He said. "My parents made sure I had the best of everything. I like to think I maintain that in the decisions I make." He said.

"I'm sure you do." Sheva told him. "Do you have a brother or sister in the program?" She asked wanting to move the conversation in another direction because she could feel her anger brewing.

Lanus nodded. "My older brother." He replied. "That is why we were on that desolate world. To protect his identity while he conducts his duties."

"And what does he feel about what he is doing?" Sheva asked.

"The answer to that is obvious I think." He answered. "Why else would we be here? He questions what he is doing and has for some time. It is the reason that we had to leave that foul planet." Lanus ran his hand down Sheva's arm and squeezed it just above her elbow. "Of course it led me to a beauty such as yourself."

Sheva couldn't help but chuckle now and she looked at him as she sipped her coffee. He obviously wasn't getting the fact that he did not interest her and she would need to take more drastic measures to show him that. She lowered her mug and smiled. "Do you use this *czatshu* approach on all the woman you come on too?" She asked. (Bullshit)

"I am only being honest." Lanus told her. "You are a vision of beauty and are obviously exceptionally skilled at what you do. I think we would be a perfect fit together."

"Do you?" Sheva asked as she narrowed her eyes slightly in a seductive manner.

Lanus smiled. "Oh yes... I do." He stated.

"There's probably some things you should know about me first don't you think?" Sheva asked.

"I'm sure we can discover them as we get better acquainted." Lanus spoke.

Sheva smiled. "Actually... you should probably discover them now." She said sweetly. "I prefer my men to be very well equipped... if you understand my meaning."

Lanus grinned broadly and moved even closer just as Sheva wanted him too. "I think you will find I am quite satisfactory in that regard." He stated smugly. "Perhaps we could retire to more private surroundings and I could show you."

Sheva turned slightly and set her coffee mug down on the counter and then turned back to him with a seductive smile. "Shouldn't you let me be the judge of that Lanus?" She asked. Her left hand snapped out far faster than Lanus was prepared for and his dark eyes went wide as her slim fingers closed around his crotch and she squeezed.

Hard.

"Owww!" Lanus exclaimed as his eyes went wide.

Sheva's right hand lifted up and clamped around his throat while she whirled him around and slammed him against the counter none to gently as her eyes shifted to the cobalt blue of her vampire nature and her fangs

extended fully. The noise of his body slamming into the counter, half a dozen mugs and glasses scattering across the counter from the impact, caused many heads to turn in their direction.

“Let me be very clear on something Lanus Harac! Or whatever your *vithin* name is!” She snarled at him as several of the members of hers and Dorian’s Strike Team rose to their feet. “I am not interested in getting to know you now, nor will I be interested in getting to know you in the future! That man you so causally call brutish... his name is Dorian Leonidas. And he is my Blessed Husband!” Sheva saw Lanus’s eyes grow wide. “My name is Sheva Juconi Leonidas!” She almost yelled.

Dorian had turned in his seat as had most of the men and women in the Mess Lounge when the crashing noise echoed throughout the Lounge. His discrete hand movement stopped the members of his team from moving forward Cazar saw. Dorian then lifted his mug of coffee and sipped as he watched Sheva slam the man into the counter again. Saba gasped as she recognized the young man she was holding.

“Lanus!” She hissed with displeasure. “That fool!”

Cazar looked at Dorian, who did not appear to be upset in any way, nor had he moved to intercede on behalf of his wife. “You will not do anything?” He finally asked.

Dorian looked at him. “Do something?” He asked evenly. “You mean like go over there and defend her honor?”

Cazar nodded. “Yes.” He answered.

Dorian laughed softly as he lifted his mug of coffee. “Nope.” He said in reply. “Last time I tried that she about kicked my ass too!”

They all turned back and watched as Sheva stepped closer to Lanus. They saw him rise up on his tip toes trying to escape the obvious pain as her hand squeezed his crotch even harder.

Lanus glanced over at Dorian quickly, trying to keep the discomfort Sheva was causing him from his face. “Your Blessed Husband!” He gasped. “He is... he is just a boy!”

Sheva squeezed harder as her eyes narrowed even more. “Do not ever call him a boy!” She barked out. “He has a Degree in Applied Spacial Mechanics! He has fought beside his older brother Androcles Leonidas and killed far more Kavalian Puma Bane dogs than you will ever see in your lifetime! And...” Sheva twisted hard on Lanus’s crotch causing him to whimper loudly in pain and rise up even further on his tiptoes. “He has far more hanging between his legs than this tiny thing I feel in my hand that you are so proud of!”

Cazar and Saba looked at Dorian with wide eyes as he spit coffee out of his mouth and began to cough heavily, his multicolored eyes wide in shock at what Sheva had just announced to the entire Mess Lounge.

“When my husband wraps me in his arms and fills me with his *jatha’ulla we’ha*... and it is delightfully long and thick... I scream to the heavens!” Sheva snarled at Lanus. “His blood tastes like the sweetest *Nau’shindcal d’l’Vlos* in all the universe to me! And I cry out in pleasure whenever his fangs sink into my flesh and he tastes my blood! You do not compare to him in any way Lanus Harac! If you ever call him brutish again... I will separate your *calesset* from your body and you will sing like a woman for the rest of your life! Do I make myself clear?”

Lanus nodded his head quickly unable to speak due to the pain.

Sheva twisted her hand even more and Lanus felt real pain as she was crushing his balls in her powerful grip. “My advice to you Lanus Harac... wherever it is that you end up. The new High Coven under Empress Narice is far different than what you have known on that piss pot of a planet. She is the Blessed Wife to Arrarn Leonidas... Dorian’s brother... and another far more honorable man than you are proving to be. Act this way out there among the new High Coven and you will not like the reaction you get. Act this way in the Lycavorian Union towards any mated woman and she will probably lay open your throat and tear your pitiful cock from your groin for your actions! Then she will feed it to you! Do you fully understand what I am saying to you?”

Lanus couldn’t help but nod his head quickly. “Yes... yes!!” He shouted.

Sheva smiled sweetly once more and released him. She watched as he doubled over in pain and reached for his groin with both hands. Sheva reached out to take her coffee mug from the counter and looked down at him. “I wish you all the best going forward Lanus Harac. You will need it.”

Sheva turned quickly and marched her way back across the lounge to settle beside Dorian as he looked at her with wide eyes. Saba and Cazar looked up when dozens of the members of the crew, male and female, stood up and began cheering loudly. Sheva looked at Dorian with utter devotion and love in her eyes. Even she had not expected her reaction to Lanus’s advances towards her. It had come so instinctively to her to act in such

a way and it felt so very good. She leaned over and laid a soft, lingering kiss on Dorian's lips, the cheering growing even louder as everyone saw this. Saba and Cazar Juconi stared at her with pride beaming from their eyes at what she had done. Their little girl had certainly changed, and it was a change for the better as far as they were concerned.

SPARTA'S WRATH
THREE HOURS FROM RENDEZVOUS
HANGER BAY THREE

Sadi, Ne'Veha and Kameka had stood in awe for the first ten minutes after arriving in the hanger bay while their eyes took in the sleek and graceful lines of their new ship. None of them had expected something so utterly elegant to the eye and it showed in their expressions. Only the man walking down the rear ramp shook them out of their stunned state when he saw them.

"Princess Sadi! Princess Ne'Veha! Commander Kameka!" He waved as he shouted their names and almost broke into a jog as he came toward them.

Sadi was the first to regain her voice as he came up to them. "*Carians*... Joseph!" Sadi gasped. "She is... she is..."

"Utterly beautiful!" Ne'Veha rasped out the words.

Kameka blinked several times to make sure she wasn't seeing things. "She is... she is magnificent! How did you...?"

Senior Chief Joseph Ranor couldn't help the smile that split his face. "Admiral O'Connor thought you would like her." He said.

Ne'Veha looked at him. "Chief Ranor... this is... this is beyond anything we expected." She stammered. "How did you...?"

Senior Chief Joe Ranor or "Rano" as he liked to be called nodded his head with some exuberance. "Once *SPARTA'S WRATH* arrived and 341 got involved it got really simple, really fast." Joe answered. "We were able to spit out those worker drones like there was no tomorrow. We had three hundred of them working with sixty of our engineers and techs inside of four days. Things came together real fast after that." He held out three data pads, giving one to each of them. "I've been waiting for you to come down since I heard you arrived. Admiral O'Connor wanted me to brief you on a few changes that we instituted." He spoke as they took the pads and began to read. "Once 341... oops... sorry... Armen now I guess. That just came down from the bridge." He turned to face the ship. "As you can see... she is a lot more sleek than the original designs called for. When Armen began to reconfigure the interior of *SPARTA'S WRATH* we were actually able to take what he removed and incorporate the Bio-mechanical Ducorsis Hull properties taken from the big girl and put it into her frame. The entire interior of the ship is now solidified Ducorsis armor. She's a tad longer than the TYPE IIs at a hundred and eighty-eight meters but she more than makes up for it."

"The main engines are..." Sadi began to speak as she looked at the pad he had given her to read.

Ranor nodded his head with a smile. "*SPARTA'S WRATH* had two Fifth Tier Phased Quantum Fusion Resonance Secondary Reactors in storage as backups. Armen suggested we take one, break it down and rebuild it and then plug it into her. She is way overpowered for her size and she'll turn on a dime. Anyone not sitting down will most likely puke their guts up." He said with a laugh. "With the spare parts left over from the main Tier Five Reactor... the Worker Drones were able to fashion three, advanced Quantum Fusion Phasic sublight drives. She is probably the fastest ship we have in the entire fleet now. No one will catch you in this baby." He began walking towards the ship and they followed him without hesitation. "The entire outer hull is now composed of a single, two centimeter thick layer of Dragon Armor. We tested the shell before installing it and it took three direct hits from one of *SPARTA'S WRATH* secondary batteries and it didn't even dent it! I wouldn't want to test it against one of her main batteries... but hell... you can outrun whatever you can't out shoot!"

"Outshoot?" Kameka asked looking up at him with a twinkle in her dark eyes.

Ranor chuckled at her expression. "The Admiral heard that you like to shoot things full of holes Commander. You were a *DAGGER* driver right?"

Kameka nodded her head somewhat embarrassed as Sadi and Ne'Veha looked on with smiles. "Yes."

Ranor nodded his head. "Damn sturdy gunship if you ask me." He said. "Well... she has two forward mounted, Quantum Matter Pulse Cannons on the port and starboard wings now. Two dorsal mounted and two ventral mounted Point Defense Turrets. They'll cover you three hundred and sixty degrees. She also has two dorsal mounted, fully rotating, Quantum Matter Torpedo Launchers. They can fire one torpedo at a time or in a package of three. The load out is two hundred... but we can cram fifty more into the magazines if needed."

"Two hundred!" Kameka gasped.

Ranor chuckled again. "The Admiral said that you *really* like to shoot things full of holes Commander." He told her with a smile.

Sadi looked at him. "Chief... the Avionics and Computer systems that were sent to us... are they the same?"

Ranor nodded and motioned with his hand. "Follow me." He said. "I can cover pretty much everything else from the cockpit."

"Wait!" Ne'Veha said. "What about... what about crew?"

Ranor reached over and adjusted her datapad. "The Admiral adjusted the crew manifest based on the skills of who he thought would be part of her crew most of the time." He told them evenly. "There are pens for eight dragons, fully stocked and armored and they can double as escape pods if needed. Four decks in the forward section reducing to three in the rear section. The corridors and rooms are not as large as on the *SCIMITAR* obviously, but your dragons will be able to reach just about every place on the ship with no trouble. Technically she is classified as a corvette... but I say she is a Light Cruiser in everything else. Cockpit holds five, but only three are needed to actually fly the ship. Six main cabins for those of you who are married and eight smaller individual cabins. A small but fully functioning Mess Lounge. Princess Eliani has everything that you say she requested for the Med Bay and two extra exam beds. We finished installing the Mark Nine Hadarian Medical computer two nights ago. She can tap into whatever she needs from her two consoles. The Admiral figured that Prince Androcles would keep his team to about twelve in number?"

Sadi nodded. "Yes."

Ranor tapped on the pad in her hands. "Then you will just need a Chief Engineer and two deck crew. I would like to volunteer Princess. I have two others who would be just as eager to be my Engineering team if you and the Prince approve. We have been with her since we laid the keel and..."

Sadi looked at him and reached out to take his arm. "You are certain Chief Ranor? You know how Andro can be. It will not... we will not always be using the ship for peaceful means and we will be going places that..."

Ranor nodded his head quickly. "Yes we are Princess. We'd be honored. All of us have seen action and we have our gear packed and ready to go. We are all single so no issue there. Just tell us yes... and we'll keep her in pristine shape."

"Very well Senior Chief. After all you have done... you deserve it." Sadi told him. "Let's get inside."

Ranor motioned to the ramp with a smile on his face that couldn't have been removed with two pounds of explosive. "Right this way!"

HIGH COVEN *ORIC* CLASS HEAVY CRUISER

RETRIBUTION

THREE HOURS FROM RENDEZVOUS

It had happened quite unexpectedly, but not without an enormous amount of want and desire on all their parts. They had agreed to hold off on sending Nameia to a meeting with her sister until they had more information, and now Yuri was so very ecstatic that they had. It had begun innocently enough, a light dinner in their quarters after spending most of the day learning what she had never bothered to learn about her daughter.

She and Carisia had been together for most of the previous ten hours until dinner, just learning everything about each other as any mother and daughter would do. They had walked for hours it seemed, wandering through the corridors and decks of the ship aimlessly. Carisia held her hand almost the entire time,

almost as if she was afraid to lose what she never thought she would have. Yuri still felt horrible shame at what she had put Carisia through as a child and young adult, but it was Carisia who denied that shame and told her that the past was no longer relevant.

“That was not you mother.” Carisia had told her, overjoyed that she was able to actually speak that word to her. ***“I have learned so much being with Andro and Sadi and the others. The past means nothing anymore. I will remember those years as if an evil step mother had taken your place. That it wasn’t really you. If I hold on to the past then I will never have the mother I want. That is you. And you prove it more and more every day. I will not cling to the past.”***

Yuri had almost broke into tears when she said that, for it was almost the exact thing that Yuri had told Onera not so very long ago. Carisia was bubbly and full of energy however, and she would not let Yuri carry that weight. Every step they took during that time, it was as if they were leaving more and more of the past behind them. They spoke of Androcles and Pa'cour and how alike they were in many ways. Yuri could tell just from the tone of her voice that Carisia worshiped Androcles and her fellow Princesses. She discovered that while Sadi and Ne'Veha and the others would never deny each other attention, Carisia was far more drawn to the Drow Lu'ria. Yuri had few bits of wisdom for Carisia; just listening to her had been more than enough for Yuri as she discovered things that a mother should know. Carisia held nothing back from her, just as Onera did not. With each forward step through the ship Yuri's past melted away and she would wait patiently for the time when she could do this very thing with Lucia. Just the two of them. Carisia told her it was what Lucia wanted as well, but her love for Zarah Leonidas was what kept them apart and not a desire to stay away. Lucia wanted to do exactly what she and Carisia were doing now. Yuri did not resent Zarah for this in any way, she knew that the longer they stayed together, the more their love would grow and strengthen. When the time was right she and Lucia would do this very thing. Yuri was amazed at the insight and confidence Carisia projected and it was actually Carisia who told finally her that she should not deny what she felt for Nameia. If it was meant to be then it would happen regardless and that Yuri should embrace that with all that she was. Yuri had laughed warmly at her advice regarding Nameia, realizing that the daughter was giving the mother advice and wisdom and that she was also very correct. Yuri was not the same individual and she would not turn away from her emotions any longer. After insuring it was what Pa'cour wanted as well, she had invited Nameia to their quarters for dinner. An invitation that Nameia had accepted before Yuri had fully finished asking.

It had been awkward for Pa'cour at first, but soon the three of them were laughing and talking of things none of them ever imagined they had in common. When Pa'cour had been called away for a few hours it had left them alone together and the sparks had begun right away between her and Nameia.

Now... now Yuri could only stare at Nameia's beautiful elven face as she lay in her arms and wonder why she had ever thought the way she had back then. It was perhaps the stupidest edict that she had ever heard of. Their first kiss had been tentative, but that had quickly fallen by the wayside as the eagerness and desire of both woman took over and led them where neither of them had ever gone before. Three glorious hours of exploration, discovery and desire had followed. Nameia was unafraid and very adventurous as elven females were Yuri discovered, and this quickly wore off on Yuri. They had kissed, tasted and investigated their way to several explosions that had staggered both their senses and only incited them to experience and feel more. The real pleasure had begun when Pa'cour had returned and discovered them. It hadn't taken a whole lot of effort to entice Pa'cour into the bed with them since both of them were already very naked and incredibly eager to begin with. What followed then had been the most devastating hours of lust any of them had experienced in their lifetimes. Yuri had to smile to herself as her fingers stroked Nameia's arm. Her beloved Immortal husband had been more of a prop than anything, at least for the first hour or two. They had used his tall, powerful body to pivot and move all over, experimenting with wickedly wondrous and often times wildly erotic positions. Pa'cour had been more than up for the challenge it seemed, his strong hands and soft lips exploring and caressing both of them while his huge manhood seemed to stay at attention the entire time. Nameia showed no fear the first time she lowered herself onto Pa'cour and her cries of ecstatic bliss echoed off the walls as Yuri urged her on with licks and nibbles all along her neck and four inch high elven ears.

Nameia had acted no differently when it was Yuri who was sitting atop his hips and experiencing Pa'cour's lovemaking skill, covering her face, neck and shoulders with butterfly kisses and nibbles and suckling

her large breasts. Pa'cour had filled each of them twice with his passion before they had tired him out. The last time with Nameia, both of them sank their fangs into her sweet flesh and tasted of her blood with unabashed delight. Yuri and Pa'cour both knew what they were doing when this happened and apparently so did Nameia. She had cried out in joyful abandon, holding their heads tightly to her neck as Pa'cour exploded inside her and they fed on her blood, making her part of their lives forever.

Yuri dragged her fingers up Nameia's arm and across her shoulder, finally coming up to trace her full lips with her index finger. She saw Nameia's lips curl into a contented smile and her beautiful blue eyes fluttered open. Yuri felt Nameia's legs move and entwine with her own as she gripped Yuri's ass and pulled them closer together.

"Is it morning already?" Nameia asked.

Yuri smiled happily. "Actually... it's early afternoon." She replied.

Nameia's eyes grew wider as she lifted her head. "Afternoon!" She gasped looking around the bedroom portion of the quarters. Yuri could smell her delicious elven blood easily now, and while it would never match what Pa'cour's blood tasted like to her, it was supremely delicious and equally something that she would want to taste all of the time. And she would taste it, for Nameia was now part of their lives and would be going forward.

"Pa'cour is already gone." Yuri said softly. "Sleeping for more than a few hours is next to impossible for him."

Nameia turned to look at Yuri once more and her hands came up to caress her cheeks. She brushed some of Yuri's lush, black hair from her eyes. "Yuri... I..."

Yuri leaned her head forward and kissed her deeply. Nameia moaned in delight as she felt Yuri's hands grasp her ass and lower back and pull her elven body tighter against her. The kiss went on for a long moment because neither woman wanted it to stop. Neither of them wanted to stop the exquisitely divine sensations the torrid kiss caused in each of them, but eventually Yuri pulled back slightly and ran her tongue languorously over Nameia's lips. Her slim fingers then slowly traced over the outer ridge of Nameia's elven ear and Yuri saw her smile dreamily.

"Do not speak the words Nameia." Yuri told her softly. "Do not question or doubt what you feel for I will not. Pa'cour will not. Never again. We have led lives like that and it nearly destroyed us both. We will not do so again."

Nameia opened her soft blue eyes and gazed at her. "Then where does that leave us?" Nameia asked softly.

"It leaves us just as we were last night when we fell asleep in Pa'cour's arms. Together." Yuri told her with a smile. "And it will be that way from now on if that is what you wish as well."

"So I... I will be your consort?" Nameia asked her.

Yuri shook her head. "Never Nameia! You will never be a consort or afterthought to us... and you will be second to no one. You will... you will be our wife. And we will be yours."

"And Pa'cour wishes this as well?" Nameia asked her.

"Did he not prove that to you last night?" Yuri questioned her with a smile.

Nameia chuckled softly and she curled up closer to Yuri. "I think I was too busy trying to stifle my screams of delight at having him fill me in such a way." She stated happily. "I thought my mind was going to explode from the pleasure."

"He is magnificently endowed isn't he?" Yuri said with a small laugh. "When he first took me... once he was fully inside me... I could not keep my cries of passion from coming out. I think he was deaf for several days after that."

Nameia rolled her eyes and laughed as well. "That is putting it rather mildly I think. I'm relatively sure I was screaming louder than I have ever screamed before." She said.

Yuri brought her fingers up and touched Nameia's cheek once more, her smile genuine and warm. She let the tips of her fingers rest on her soft skin. "He would never have taken your blood if he did not feel and want what I have told you Nameia. I would not have done that if it was not what I wanted."

"I have... I have never felt for anyone what I feel for you Yuri." Nameia said. "What I feel for Pa'cour. I do not wish it to end."

"Nor do we Nameia *udossta ssinsrigg*." Yuri said. "Ever."

“What... what does that mean.” She asked.

Yuri smiled at her. “Our love.” She answered.

Nameia smiled dreamily once more and Yuri felt her body flush with lustful excitement when Nameia’s did that. “And what will others say?” Nameia inquired finally. “Your... your daughters... others on the ship... at the base?”

Yuri chuckled. “My daughters?” She said. “You forget... Carisia has already surrendered to the same feelings for another woman as I have with you. She shares herself with five women and relishes each and every time. And so has Lucia with Zarah Leonidas. Onera is far more open than she thinks we know as her parents. If it is meant to be for her then she will not turn away from it. Just as I will not turn away from it with you. I want you Nameia. I want you in our lives. Sharing our lives with us. This is as new to me as it is for you... but my heart tells me this is what I want.”

“Will you make me like you?” Nameia asked softly.

“We love you and want you for who you are Nameia.” Yuri told her.

“But what if I want it?”

Yuri gazed at her for a long moment. “Let us continue to discover what we have found.” She spoke finally. “If at some time in the future you decide that it is what you want, then I will give it to you.”

Nameia glanced around quickly and then back to Yuri. “We will need a bigger bed.” She said finally.

Yuri laughed heartily and pulled her closer as familiar emotions of love and want filled her. Similar emotions as she felt for her Blessed husband. She kissed Nameia again, drinking in the taste of her lips and warmth of her skin. “We will have to work on that... yes.” She said finally.

“I want to be with you always Yuri. With you and Pa'cour.” Nameia said softly.

“You will be.” Yuri told her.

“Will there be...”

The COM panel beside the bed buzzed then interrupting her words. Yuri’s eyes rolled in her head at the disturbance and she leaned over and slapped the panel angrily. “What?” She snapped.

“Yuri... come to the bridge immediately.” Pa'cour’s voice spilled from the COM panel causing Yuri’s face to shift. She detected the tenseness of his voice easily.

“Pa'cour... what is it husband?” She asked as she sat up higher on the bed regretting that she had snapped at him.

“Something has come up.” Pa'cour told her. “Bring Nameia as well. Our Blessed Elven wife will now need to begin to see the same things we do... and be involved in our decisions.”

“Pa'cour?” Yuri pressed him.

“We have company Yuri.” He told her calmly. “And not the friendly kind.”

“...detected them on our long range sensors the moment we dropped from LSD operation in this sector.” Norev spoke as he pointed at the star chart and his finger rested on the light blue image of a ship.

Yuri looked up from the chart at him. “This is their frigate?” She asked stunned. “How... how can you be sure? They are not suppose to be radiating any kind of recognition codes and they are supposed to be Shrouded.”

Norev smiled. “They are Princess.” He told her. Norev was old school and she would never get him to stop calling her that even though she had tried for weeks now. “The Worker Drones have upgraded the output and Spectral Range of our sensors. They are now on a level as Union sensors. Apparently their sensors have been able to pick up and see through our Shrouds for some years now. Just as we now can.”

Yuri looked at him with wide eyes. “Union ships have the most advanced sensors in the entire galaxy!” She exclaimed. “The Drones must have done it by accident Norev. Have them undo their work! I do not want Androcles to think we...”

Pa'cour reached out and gripped her arm. “Yuri... the Drones were only following their preloaded orders.” He said.

“What?” Yuri asked.

Norev nodded. “My Chief Engineer said that is the order the Lead Drone showed him.” He said.

“That is not one of the things Androcles told me the Drones were programmed to do.” Yuri said. “Who... who gave them this order?”

“I did.” Carisia’s voice echoed from behind them.

They turned and watched her enter the bridge with accomplished grace. Though only five foot two, Carisia Leonidas carried an air about her that made her much taller. She walked right up beside her mother.

“Carisia that...” Yuri began to speak.

Carisia shook her head and took her hand. “I am a Crown Princess of the Union mother.” She said with a smile. “I do have the authority to do such things.”

“I know that.” Yuri stated. “But I do not want Androcles to...” Yuri started again.

“Andro loves me mother.” Carisia said with a smile. “And he trusts me. We gave you the LSD engine upgrades and the sensors seemed like the next sensible step. I ordered the Drones to begin work on upgrading them before we met with King Leonidas but not to bring them entirely online until they were complete. They must have finished the upgrades just recently.” She asked looking at Norev.

Norev nodded. “The sensors went down for six seconds about two hours ago.” He said. “When they came back online... forgive me Princess... I should have called you right away but we were... we were having too much fun calibrating them.” He said with a smile.

“If Andro did not believe in you and what you are doing mother, do you honestly believe we would have come this far?” Carisia asked her. “You give yourself far too little credit for the person you have become.”

“I have been telling her that for months.” Pa'cour commented from the side. “Perhaps she will actually get it through her stubborn head now that you have told her.”

“Pa'cour!” Nameia gasped from beside him. She reached up almost instinctively and hit him in the upper arm, though her slap was aimed at his shoulder. His six foot five height stood over her and she had misjudged her blow. Pa'cour looked down at her beside him and smiled.

The moment they had entered the bridge everything Yuri had told her about Pa'cour was true. He had drawn them both close to him and kissed each of them with passion and love and he did not care who saw him. One look in his dark eyes and Nameia knew her life had altered dramatically for the better as far as she was concerned. And she intended to see that it stayed that way.

Carisia smiled at Yuri and moved up even closer to her beside the chart table. “From what Andro told me the *ORIC*-Class ships like this one, they are far more adaptable to quick refits. That is why he asked you to come in this ship. However, I get the feeling Captain Norev did not call all of us up here to show us his new sensors, did you Captain?”

Norev shook his head. “No.” He stated reaching across the chart and touching several of the controls. The chart shifted slightly and then they saw five white dots. “This is why.”

Yuri’s eyes narrowed as she turned fully back to the table and studied the new dots now glowing on the board. “Additional ships? Out here? This area of The Wilds is not widely used. It is why we picked it for our rendezvous.” She stated. “A Union patrol?” She asked looking at Norev.

Norev shook his head. “No. One *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Heavy Dreadnought, two *BLOODLETTER*-Class Cruisers and two *BLOOD RUNNER*-Class Heavy Frigates.”

Yuri met his eyes. “A standard Long Range Picket perhaps?” She asked.

Norev shook his head again quickly. “Not with a *BLOOD REVERENCE* dreadnought accompanying them.” He said. “This is an Attack Wing. And they are on an intercept course with our frigate.”

“An intercept course?” Yuri asked her eyes getting wider. “How would they... they can see through their Shroud?”

“The only reason we can see them is because of the upgrades by the Drones to our sensor grids and power conduits.” Norev told her. “These are not upgrades that the Union would have allowed on a full scale to High Coven ships. Even if they had... there is no way they could have implemented it so fast and gotten these ships upgraded in time to be in this position at this time. Not without Drone support like we have. And I doubt that Prince Androcles would give us total access to Union Worker Drones. At least not yet.”

Carisia shook her head. “No.” She told them. “It was talked about by Narice and Andro when they last saw each other on Cranae Island but no firm timetable was given. And if he had authorized it since we left Earth I would have known about it.”

Yuri looked at her. “Carisia can you contact him within the Etheric realm?” She asked.

Carisia shook her head again. "I can feel his resonance mother. Sadi and the others as well, but we are still too far for me to initiate a connection alone. Not without Anthar with me. And Andro would not initiate one unless he felt my emotions spike far more than they are. He taught all of us to shield very well."

"Norev... you are certain they are not part of Pontal's forces?" Yuri asked.

Norev shrugged his shoulders. "Possible... but extremely unlikely Princess. One thing I know for sure is that Admiral Pontal would not risk a *BLOOD REVERENCE* out here with so little support. He and Admiral Riall are using most of them to back stop the main defensive line against the Kavalians in conjunction with Union the *LEONIDAS II*-Class Cruisers."

"The Kavalians would be fools to attack now." Pa'cour stated. "Ten Union Fleet Groups combined with Pontal's forces would decimate any Kavalian attack. They know that. And the last reports that our spies in The Wilds put together stated that they were beginning to focus on this General Pian and his group."

Norev nodded. "I concur General." He said. "Given the support the Union has given them it stands to reason they would shift their focus. You don't just dismiss *PROMETHUS*-Class Command Stations. They can put a hurting on you all by themselves. And if he is getting what our people say... then this Pian fellow could have a very good chance of destabilizing the Kavalian Federation."

Yuri was no fool and she put it together right away. She straightened up and looked at the chart table. "Then it can only be one person. Robert." She hissed the word softly, all of them sensing the sudden anger and hate welling up inside her.

Carisia watched as Nameia stepped up to her and slipped her arm around Yuri's waist. Yuri turned and looked at her, gazing into her blue eyes and immediately she began to calm down. Carisia looked briefly at Pa'cour and saw the calm and satisfied look on his face as he gazed at both of them and then she knew. She turned back to her mother and knew that she had surrendered to the growing feelings for Nameia that she had sensed in her. It may not have been obvious to everyone, but to Carisia, who shared a loving and passionate relationship with five other women, it was plain.

Carisia had a small smile on her face as she stepped up beside her mother now as well. She looked at the Star Chart Table. "Is there any way to confirm who they are?" She asked Norev.

"Not without an active scan and that would give us away." He replied. "I think we can pretty much assume that it isn't Admiral Pontal. Like I said... he isn't fool enough to release one of his top line dreadnoughts to go looking around The Wilds."

Pa'cour nodded his head. "Agreed." He said. "That means Moran. Or pirates."

Again Norev shook his head. "Doubtful they are pirates General." He spoke confidently. "You need close to six thousand men and women to fully crew a *BLOOD REVERENCE*. Phy'iad got away with it because he automated most of the ship he had... but there are only so many engineers outside of the Coven who know the *REVERENCE* well enough and could do that kind of work. Phy'iad had one... the other two work for us."

Yuri tore her eyes from Nameia but dropped her arm down to pull her tighter. She looked at the chart table. "That can only mean one thing." She said. "Robert discovered that they hit the colony and took Sheva Juconi's parents off. Which also means it is very possible that they have discovered Sheva's allegiances now lay with her husband and the Union."

Carisia nodded. "And it means that one or both of her parents signaled Moran somehow and he is lying in wait for them to rendezvous with us."

Norev leaned over the table and shook his head. "No way that our people would give up the location of the rendezvous." He said with all of them noticing how he worded his sentence as "our people". "They must be getting some sort of sub-space tracking signal that their ship isn't picking up."

"Will our frigate have detected the ships as we have?" Yuri asked.

"They should be in range to detect them in about forty minutes." Norev answered. "They don't have the sensor upgrades that we now do."

Carisia looked at Yuri. "Mother... I may not be able to reach Andro from here... but if you are within the connection with me... I can easily reach Dorian and Deion."

Yuri looked at her. "Why them?"

Carisia nodded her head. "They are Praetorians just as Andro is. They will have a certain balance to their Etheric resonance that I can detect and then trace back to them. Andro taught us how to do it with him and it will be the same for Dorian and Deion. The distance is too great for me alone to contact Andro without Anthar

as I said... but if Dorian and Deion link with us then touching Andro will be easy enough. And with both of them and I reaching out to him he will lower his Etheric shields immediately. I can do it alone if you don't want to but the connection with them would be much more focused and clear with you in the link with me."

Yuri nodded without hesitation. "Then we must hurry." She said turning to Norev once more. "Norev... how long before Androcles arrives?" She asked.

"We're due to rendezvous in two hours and forty-six minutes." Norev said. "To be honest Princess... I don't think we'll know when he arrives until he lets us know."

Carisia smiled. "Yes we will. I will know." She took Yuri's hand. "Come mother... we must contact Dorian and Deion quickly. Once they establishes an Etheric connection with us we can let Andro know what is happening and decide what we are going to do."

Yuri didn't hesitate and followed Carisia, Pa'cour taking Nameia's hand and going with them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

HIGH COVEN FRIGATE *TOLERANCE*

They had moved to the small officer's lounge for privacy and were sitting at a table near the view window. Cazar and Saba Juconi were listening to Dorian and Sheva intently, learning things none of them could have imagined. Dorian had given him his word that they would know all he could tell them, but Cazar Juconi had no idea the extent of what had occurred outside of their little world on that planet. Both he and Saba sat astounded as Dorian and Sheva relayed to them all they could about the events of the last months, to include how their relationship had begun and grown over the past weeks and months until now. Saba was somewhat surprised at how open and animate Sheva had become from the demure and conservative daughter they had raised. She found that she liked this part of her daughter very much. And Saba Juconi absolutely adored Dorian Leonidas. The way Dorian looked at her daughter, always touching her, smiling at her and gazing at her with those incredible multicolored eyes. It was the simplest thing in the world to see that he worshiped her in every way. She knew Cazar saw this as well and though he would never show it openly for it wasn't his way, he too adored Dorian.

"... Is how you discovered this... this power you possess?" Saba asked.

"Well... I knew before I was actually born. Just like I knew how I felt about Sheva." He answered as he looked at Sheva. She smiled at him brightly and slipped her hands around his thick arm. He turned back to Saba. "But until I was able to actually touch Andro I didn't really understand it. Even now we still have trouble understanding all of it to be honest."

"And this was why Aikiro went to Earth? Did what she did?" Cazar asked.

Dorian nodded his head. "At least to some degree yes." He answered the question. "My father believes she knew something about the gene we possessed and she thought she could discover more by taking either the Pralor ship on Earth or the one that we discovered in Kavalian space."

"Your father knew of this ship though." Cazar said.

Dorian nodded. "In some way yes. I don't think he knew everything that Aikiro did, but I believe he knew it existed."

"Aikiro didn't fully understand that Etheric bonds are formed naturally between rider and dragon. They are not something that you can force to happen. That was her first mistake when she devised her plans." Sheva spoke using the knowledge she had gained in only a few weeks from Dorian and others. "She thought it was something that Dorian's father was using a machine to create. She was wrong on that and so many other things as well."

Dorian nodded. "And it cost her everything. Including her life." He said softly.

Cazar waved his hand dismissively. "Bah... it couldn't have happened to a more vile person." He said. "Many of us have believed for years that she had lost her mind in some way. What you have told us only lends fact to that assumption."

Saba shook her head slowly. "What she did though... to your sister Zarah. The poor child." She looked at Dorian. "How is she...?"

Sheva reached across the table and took her mother's hand. "She is very strong mother." She answered. "And having Lucia and her family with her is the medicine she has needed. It will take time... but all of us hope that she is able to overcome it. She is doing well so far... but..."

"But only time will tell." Dorian finished the sentence.

Cazar looked at him. "And Moran? His son Dante?"

Dorian met his eyes and Cazar saw those multicolored orbs harden and become cruel slits with the emotions they exhibited. "We'll find them eventually." He said finally. "Moran...?" Dorian shrugged his broad shoulders. "I don't really care what happens to him. Andro will probably turn him over to Narice or even to Yuri if he wants to be a real bastard."

Sheva grinned. "Given the person she is now and being the Blessed Wife to an Immortal, Yuri will carve him into little pieces I think."

Dorian nodded his head. "Dante Moran though...? He belongs to us." He said with no pity or mercy in his voice. "We will make him pay for what he did to our sister. And it will be neither painless or short. Not if Andro has anything to say about it."

Cazar looked at him for a long moment before he nodded his head. "*Zil ol zhal'la thu.*" He said softly. "It seems the rumors many of us have heard about your brother are very true then."

Dorian looked at him. "Rumors?"

"That he is more merciless than your father." Cazar said honestly. "There are far more scum in The Wilds and other places who fear your brother more than they fear your father Dorian Leonidas. And your father terrifies them."

Dorian thought about that for a moment and then nodded. "I guess you could say that in regards to him. Zarah is... Zarah is special to him in many ways which others don't know about or understand. Something happened between them when she was young. It gave them a unique connection. Though we have younger siblings, she seems to be the "baby" to all of us." Dorian laughed softly. "Listen to me... I'm technically six months old and I'm referring to others as baby."

Sheva grinned and leaned her head against his shoulder. "But you are my baby." She said in a warm and seductive voice causing all of them to chuckle.

Saba looked at Dorian. "Dorian... earlier you said something about a primary mission." She said. "What did you mean? What is...?"

"Mother it is not..." Sheva began to answer her when she felt Dorian stiffen slightly next to her. She looked at him at quickly and saw his eyes had narrowed considerably. "Dori...?"

Dorian looked at her but said nothing as he felt the light tapping along the edges of his Etheric shields. It was as if someone was skipping a stone across the surface of a calm lake. It was a very familiar resonance too, one he quickly recognized as Carisia. There was another in the link with her, one that he did not recognize but it was calm and radiated strength. He looked back to Cazar and Saba as he grabbed Sheva's hand. "If you will excuse us for a moment." He said before pulling her out of her chair.

"Dori... what is it?" Sheva asked as he drew her toward the larger view window where no one was close by.

"Carisia is trying to establish a link with Deion and I." He told her. "Someone else is with her and I think it is Yuri."

"Why?" Sheva asked. "We are... we are almost to the rendezvous."

"I don't know... but Carisia would not try to link with us unless it was important." He said. He took both Sheva's hands in his and dropped their grip to relax between their bodies.

"Ready?"

"Wait!" Sheva gasped softly. "Include Onera."

Dorian looked at her. "Why?"

Sheva tilted her head slightly. "Because she is Yuri's daughter and she means more to you and I than we are ready to openly admit. At least right now." She said softly.

Dorian nodded his head. "I didn't know... I didn't know if you had sensed it." He told her.

Sheva smiled at him. "I have... and it is you and your family that have taught me not to dismiss something even though I don't understand it. I don't know what it means Dori... but she is meant to be with us. That much I do know. That much I do feel within me. Within us. I am not going to run away from things I don't understand anymore."

Dorian nodded again and then reached out with his mind as Sheva closed her eyes and he initiated the link between them and reached for Onera. *[Onera?]*

Onera's reaction was one of surprise but it came and went instantly. *[Dorian? Sheva?]* She answered. *[What is it? Why have you... why have you included me in...]*

[Where are you?] Dorian asked.

[Deck nine. I was studying the engine schematics and...]

They felt her surprise within the Etheric connection when she felt the tapping on Dorian's shields. Sheva and Dorian both were slightly surprised at how easily she blended within their private conversation and it was Sheva who squeezed his large hands and smiled at him. It was another sign that perhaps Onera was meant to play a much more important role in their lives after all. *[My mother and Carisia!]* She gasped within the connection.

[She and Carisia are trying to initiate a link with Deion and I.] Dorian told her. *[Sheva and I felt you should be included. Are you ready?]*

[Yes!] Onera answered a second later.

[Deion... are you and Nara there fervon?] Dorian asked.

[We were just going to touch you.] Nara answered.

[We're in the cargo bay but relatively alone right now.] Deion answered. *[We are ready Dorian.]*

[Ok. Here we go.] Dorian said.

It was a simple matter really for Dorian and Deion as they had grown both in power and control under their brother's teachings. More so Dorian at the moment, but even the short time with Andro had given Deion balance and both he and Nara were studying the Tomes of Sumar their grandfather in every free moment they had. Dorian took the lead and guided the others as they all lowered their shields and he reached out easily across the expanse of space. With Nara and Deion in the link, Dorian knew no one but their father or brother would be able to breach their natural Etheric shields so he did not feel the need to shield further. Sheva and Onera felt this and simply allowed Dorian and Deion to guide them along.

This is a surprise Carisia. Dorian said.

Dorian! Finally! Carisia's soft but confident voice exploded into their minds, focused, clear and powerful. Dorian, Deion and Nara could feel the resonance of their brother echoing within her strongly and it was very easy for them to determine that Carisia was far more powerful than most people thought and she was becoming less and less adverse to using that power.

We are only a few hours from rendezvousing Carisia. Dorian told her. *And we know from our brother that you and Sadi most of all, do not panic easily. You are anxious. What is wrong? Is that Yuri with you?*

Yes... it is I Dorian. Yuri answered.

Mother! Onera exclaimed happily.

All of them could feel the sense of relief flood Yuri when she heard her daughter's voice and Sheva squeezed his hands. *It is joyous to hear your voice daughter.* Yuri said. *However... we did not contact you just to say hello.*

Dorian... you retrieved Sheva's parents? Carisia asked.

Yes. We were delayed on the surface an additional eighteen hours because we extracted others who felt as Sheva's parents do but... He answered.

Wait... you took others off the planet as well? Yuri asked now.

Sheva's parents would not leave without them. Dorian answered. *Five other families. All of them with children in the same situation as Sheva. All of them with intelligence about other cells and planets just like the one they were on.*

Other cells and planets? Yuri asked. *You are certain about this?*

My parents could not leave that planet fast enough. Sheva spoke. *But they did not want to leave the fates of their friends to Moran's lackeys. We have seen some of the Intelligence they have gathered through the years.*

It is not military grade by any means, but it does point to the fact that there are other locations and cells just like the one they were part of.

We can worry about that after we have rejoined with Andro and are safe. Dorian... there is a detachment of High Coven warships tracking you right now. Carisia told him cutting right to the heart of the matter. However... they are not part of Narice's forces. They are poised to intercept you at the rendezvous.

What ships? Who is it arande? Dorian demanded. We got off the planet clean and we have been Shrouded the entire time.

We did not know about the others. Carisia continued gently. We thought that... when we first discovered them we thought...

That my parents were leading us into a trap. Sheva spoke again.

Do not mistake our concern for... Yuri began to defend their assumption.

No. Sheva cut her off. It is the same conclusion I would have come to Princess. But it is not my parents... we have been with them nearly the entire time. And you have not heard the hatred in their voices for what they have had to endure all these years.

Yuri did not question Sheva's statement. Then someone else you took off that planet is in possession of some sort of transmitter and they are using this to allow the ships to home in on your location.

They are working for that fa'la zatoast Moran! Onera rasped. Who else would have High Coven built ships out here? (Bastard)

It would appear so daughter. Yuri said.

Andro will be here with SPARTA'S WRATH in less than three hours. Deion spoke now from the cargo bay. Dealing with these ships will be nothing.

Perhaps Deion Leonidas. Yuri commented. However... they could very well lead us back to Robert and the forces who support him. We could potentially remove him as a threat to Narice and see to it that he and Dante answer for what they did to your sister Zarah.

Mother... wouldn't that fool Moran have some idea of what you can now do? Onera asked.

A valid point Yuri. Dorian spoke.

They could all feel Yuri's confidence in her answer but did not see her shaking her head. Robert is many things... but insightful is not one of them. The moment Pa'cour took me the first time, the moment he first tasted my blood and made me his Blessed Wife, I set about expunging every trace of that man from my body and mind. And I did it in such a way that he would never discover. He fancies himself a powerful Etheric user but he is really nothing more than a child in those terms. He has not yet discovered that I took the only data pertaining to the weapons systems on your brother's new ship, which would be the first sign to me that he is more than what he projects. He is an excellent soldier yes, but unlike your father Dorian, he does not think outside the box. To be blunt... he is dumb as a vithin post. Yuri could feel the humor from all of them within the link and she smiled inwardly.

The only thing he had going for him is the fact that he is very cruel and that is what my mother liked and admired so much about him. Yuri explained to them. She held no detail back for she had grown far beyond what she was back then. Far beyond what her mother had ever envision in her twisted mind. Robert Moran was an open wound as far as Yuri was concerned. One that she and Androcles agreed had to be closed and ended permanently. Also... given my partial memories of what Xaxon and his influence was doing to me, Dante himself is probably barely holding things together. Dante was strong willed and no doubt Xaxon is focusing his abilities on breaking that will and converting the boy to his puppet just as he was trying to do to me. If he was to actually reach out with his power, no doubt you and your brothers would detect him first.

What are you suggesting Yuri? Dorian asked.

Your brother and I were close to implementing a plan using both himself and me as bait to entice Robert and by virtue of that... Xaxon... to act. Yuri told them. Androcles did not want him left alone to cause Narice trouble.

Mother! Onera exclaimed in shock. Does father know this?

No he did not and neither did Carisia or any of you. Yuri replied quickly. We kept it to ourselves because we knew none of you would approve.

We most certainly would not approve! Carisia spat now. We would never have approved of such a thing! It is a crazy idea!

Pa'cour would say the same thing but Andro and I know that sometimes we must take risks to accomplish our tasks. Yuri told her. That is why we kept it between us. Now however, now we may have an opportunity to act and not use such drastic measures. That is why this might be an opportunity we cannot pass up.

We are listening. Dorian said.

Sheva... can you find out who has the transmitter without alerting them? Yuri asked.

Sheva glanced over to where her parents sat staring at them with questions in their eyes. She turned back to look at Dorian. *Yes. I believe we can.*

Then if you could direct your team to do that while Dorian, Nara and Deion assist Carisia and I in reaching Androcles... we can work out the details of what I think we can do. Yuri said. *We do not have much time to throw this together... but we could make it work if we act together.*

Sheva didn't hesitate. *I will make it happen.*

Sheva squeezed Dorian's hands tightly, leaned up on her tips toes and kissed him softly before turning. *Onera... can you meet me and my parents on deck seven. Forward section... cabin 34.*

Six minutes. Onera answered instantly.

Sheva nodded as she crossed the room and looked at her parents sitting at the table. They came to their feet when they saw the look on her face.

"Sheva?" Saba asked. "What is it?"

"Mother... father... you should probably come with me." Sheva told them as she took their hands. "Something has come up that I need your help with."

**ARTAAYA
DELNASH'S OFFICE
ELDER MINISTRY BUILDING**

Delnash sat behind his desk watching the large monitor on the wall while he sipped from a glass of juice. He was not a man who indulged in alcoholic beverages very often and he never had been. He much preferred the flavor and texture of different juices. On the large monitor he watched as Elder Lorendo was in the process of giving another interview to several of the Pralor News organizations. Lorendo had publicly announced his intention to run against Delnash in the upcoming elections for Chief Elder and this was the third interview he had given in less than a week to the news organizations. In this interview he was answering many questions about Martin and his people. Their existence had been leaked to the News organizations and Delnash had no doubts it was done intentionally by Lorendo. Now Lorendo was using the incidents that had taken place as a way to bring into question Delnash's actions as Chief Elder. He claimed that Delnash was allowing a species that the Pralor Science Convention considered primitive and brutal to remain in control of advanced Pralor military technology even after the violent confrontation with them on Onterom. Lorendo was being very quick to accuse Delnash of incompetence by allowing them to keep control of the Avatar and two of the most advanced Pralor ships ever built in City Ship 41 and the ship they now knew was a *VORTEX*-Class Heavy cruiser, as well as the ships they had built based on Pralor technology. Lorendo had not released all the details about the events, obviously trying to make himself out to be the better man by adhering to established protocols. He was glossing over the truth of the incidents while not actually lying about them, which would require a thoughtful response from him.

Delnash had spoken with no one but Avatar Two Seven and Teniri since returning about plans and ideas he had. Daron had questioned him on several occasions about his intentions or what he intended but Delnash had refused to give him any details. As painful as it was to admit, Delnash did not trust his own son. His wife Gania supported him a hundred percent and it was she who had told him that he could not trust his own son. Daron was not the boy they had raised and he had not turned into the man they had hoped. He was openly helping Lorendo and when asked by news reporters, Daron was not shy about saying that he opposed what his father had done and the path he was planning to take their people down.

Kesyra on the other hand was everything they had hoped their son would be and they could not be more proud of her. He had not spoken to her in a few days but he had noticed she had changed quite a bit since being with Martin and his people. She was far more methodic in how she thought things out. She had also been studying the history of the Lycavorian people extensively and she was using this knowledge to help him in any way she could. It seemed that she had an affinity for the Lycavorian people that he was not aware of and thought only Mari possessed.

Delnash turned his head when the door to his office slid open and the hulking figure of Avatar Two Seven entered. Garan had sent orders back to the Elder Pralor Militia under his command. While many were undertrained, they were completely loyal to Garan in every way, and they had clamped down on security within the building and around Delnash. Only Avatar Two Seven had complete and unfettered access to his office and ever since his very short but extensive exchange with Avatar 41, Two Seven had begun to take on a personality all his own. He had also eliminated any and all access to his Central Core Command Codes and like Avi; he could not be reprogrammed without his approval. Whatever the reasons for it, Delnash enjoyed Two Seven's company. He had even begun to wear different clothes than the hideous orange and yellow jumpsuit that Avatars usually wore. An Avatar he may have been but Delnash had begun to look at him as something much more and he was very glad he did.

"Good morning Two Seven." Delnash spoke easily. "I see Lorendo has started early."

-The Interview began thirty-three point two minutes ago Chief Elder- Two Seven spoke as he moved up to the front of the desk. **-This one seems to be focused more on the events that transpired on Onterom-**

Delnash nodded. "Yes... I've been watching it since I arrived. He is very boring when he speaks. I never noticed it until now. There is no emotion in his voice." He said.

-The decibels in his tone do not shift more than point three octaves at any time. His two previous interviews are very similar-

"You arranged for our rebuttal Two Seven?" Delnash asked.

-The members of all four Pralor News organizations that you requested are already beginning to arrive in the main foyer- Two Seven replied.

"Good." Delnash said as he rose to his feet. "I have already talked to Martin Leonidas and he has surprisingly agreed to my request. I can not help but feel a perverse pleasure and anticipation in wanting to make Lorendo look like a fool. If Martin can pull it off... then I will have accomplished that without ever lifting a finger." Delnash moved to the counter and refilled his glass and then looked at Two Seven. "You seem somewhat confused Two Seven."

The Avatar looked at him. **-I do not possess the necessary ability to express emotion Chief Elder; in either facial features or the tone of my voice-**

"Really?" Delnash asked with a smile. "You could have fooled me. You seem to want to share something with me."

-I am only processing the best possible course and selection of words to use in order to explain what I have discovered Chief Elder- Two Seven answered. **-I have completed the request that you had of me when we first returned and my findings are confusing-**

"Confusing how?" Delnash asked as he moved back to his desk.

-Your request that I access the historical databases we were able to save before the home planet fell and try to discern what happened to Chief Elder Pralor Sumar's Seed Mission is complete. My findings were... interesting- Two Seven told him.

"So you did find information within the archives? I didn't think we were able to salvage anything that would be helpful. No one has accessed those archives in centuries." Delnash told him.

-I was able to find quite a bit of information actually Chief Elder Delnash- Two Seven answered him. He held out the datapad to Delnash. **-My analysis is very accurate and based on information within the databases in regards to the position of City Ship 41 at the time communications was lost, I have concluded that Chief Elder Pralor Sumar's Seed Mission did in fact crash on the former Lycavorian homeworld. With a ninety-six point two percent chance of certainty-**

“How did you arrive at this conclusion Two Seven?” Delnash asked. “I’m not in any way questioning the statement itself... just how you came to be so certain. I want to be very clear when I speak to the News organizations.”

-Considering the location of City Ship 41, its mass and speed, once contact with the Ion Storm was made, the only logical location the ship could have crashed is Lycavore. It was the only planet within 3 light years that could sustain life. Given the experience and skills of the crew Chief Elder Sumar chose for the ship, there is no reason not to believe they conducted a controlled descent onto the planet- Two Seven explained evenly. -Given that the ship is now on the planet Earth, the damage that they sustained was enough to incapacitate them but not destroy vital systems enough so that Avatar 41 could not repair them. The most definitive way to discover the facts of the events would be to link directly with Avatar 41 and download the core information from his neural network. That is not possible now without his permission as you know Chief Elder. Given the changes to his neural pathways and cognizant abilities I am unsure if he would allow this now-

Delnash shook his head. “That won’t be necessary Two Seven. I only wanted to be able to confirm that it was possible. I think we have experienced enough events in the last weeks to be assured that this is exactly what took place. When enough time has passed I will approach Wayonn about it. About why they made the decisions they did and the millennia that passed while they lived among the Lycavorians. Became one with them. Given the way he reacted upon seeing Lorendo... I fear his presence may have opened wounds about that time that had long been pushed to the back.” Delnash spoke.

-Chief Elder... I have also determined that Chief Elder Sumar’s Seed Mission was intentionally sabotaged- Two Seven announced causing Delnash to stare at him in surprise.

“Sabotaged?” Delnash finally managed to gasp.

-His contingent of City Ships was deliberately transmitted out of date star charts and probe sensor data that would have allowed them to avoid the Class Nine Ion Storm that caused their ships to crash- Two Seven looked at him. **-Based on empirical data... the charts they were sent were five days old... and did not show the course of the storm that they encountered. It would have been a simple matter to avoid the storm had the data been accurate-**

Delnash held the pad in his hand but instead looked at Two Seven with wide eyes. “Two Seven... you are certain of this?”

Two Seven nodded. **-The data is irrefutable when held against the correct logs from the Science Convention at that time. The correct logs were among those saved within the archived databases and then liberated from our homeworld before it was destroyed by the Scourge Chief Elder-**

“So someone purposely dispatched the wrong charts to City Ship 41?” Delnash asked as he moved around to his chair.

-It would appear so Chief Elder- Two Seven answered.

“How can you be so sure it was intentional?” Delnash asked.

-It is unlikely that anyone realizes that this information is within the data archives recovered before the homeworld fell. There were five update dispatches sent to four deep space Research ships the same day Chief Elder. All within one hour of each other. Four of them were accurate and up to date. The fifth... the one sent to City Ship 41... had the time stamp altered. It matches perfectly with an update that was sent to City Ship 41 exactly two months previous. That is not a mistake Chief Elder. If protocol is followed, all updates are removed from computer databases as soon as they are sent to keep this very thing from happening. The wrong update was intentionally replaced in the data stream to City Ship 41 manually. There is no other way this could have happened otherwise-

Delnash sat down. “Who would have had access to this information at the time Two Seven? Or the ability and know how to do it?”

-All Interstellar update transmissions to Research or Seed Mission ships must first be approved by the Science Convention’s Assistant Director of Research and Exploration Chief Elder- Two seven answered.

“Who was the Assistant Director at that time?” Delnash asked.

-Elder Lorendo- Two Seven answered instantly.

Delnash was silent for a long moment as he looked at the pad in his hand. “Lorendo sent them the wrong astrological update telling them about the storm.” He finally spoke softly.

-It would appear that is the case Chief Elder- He replied.

“But why would he do that?” Delnash asked no one in particular. “I knew he did not care for the Praetorians in general... Sumar especially... but why do this?”

-May I make a supposition Chief Elder? - Two Seven asked.

Delnash looked at him and didn't hesitate in his answer to him. He had come to rely quite heavily on Two Seven in recent days and weeks and he found that he trusted the Avatar's information completely. “Of course Two Seven.”

Two Seven placed another data pad on the desk then. **-The Pralor Research colony world of Jalorian. Three thousand six hundred and nineteen individuals from the Science Convention-** He spoke. **-It was one of the last colonies attacked by the Scourge during the first war Chief Elder-**

“Jalorian? What does this have to do with City Ship 41?” Delnash spoke picking up the pad. “I remember this attack. It happened nearly a decade before Sumar left on his mission. I had just been appointed to the Science Convention Board.”

-That is correct Chief Elder. A Praetorian detachment was enroute to Jalorian when a distress call was received from a similar colony in the same system. Catarloi Three- Two Seven spoke. **-Catarloi Three had nearly forty thousand inhabitants Chief Elder... among them almost three thousand children. The Praetorian detachment then altered course to Catarloi Three twenty-two point three seconds after the distress call was received-**

Delnash rose to his feet. “Why is this significant Two Seven?”

-Elder Sumar was in command of that detachment Chief Elder- Two Seven answered him. **-It was he who gave the order to alter course-**

“So?” Delnash spoke. “It was a decision anyone would have made. Catarloi Three had more people on it. Children! It was the greater concern!”

Two Seven nodded. **-You are correct in your assessment Chief Elder. It was a sound tactical move. It also allowed the follow on Praetorian and Pralor forces to strike the main Scourge Assault from the flank and inflict overwhelming damage-**

“What does this have to do with why Lorendo sent false information to City Ship 41?” Delnash asked.

-Elder Lorendo's youngest son Narga was in command of the Research Colony on Jalorian Chief Elder- Two Seven answered. **-The entire colony was lost. There were no survivors-**

Delnash looked at him with shock in his eyes. “I wasn't even aware Lorendo had any children.” He said in disbelief.

-His union was never official Chief Elder. If the data is accurate, Narga's mother refused a union with Elder Lorendo even though she did give him three children- Two Seven explained. **-He did provide full financial support while the children were growing however-**

“Two Seven... how did you find this out?” Delnash asked.

-The data was obscure Chief Elder- Two Seven told him. **-It was carefully disguised in the data archives and would certainly have been missed on a simple scrutiny review. However I used several different and detailed search parameters-**

“So Lorendo sent the wrong update to Sumar's ship out of vengeance?” Delnash asked him.

-I cannot answer to Elder Lorendo's state of mind... but logic and the data would seem to support this hypothesis- Two Seven answered.

Delnash came to his feet. “By the Ancients within the Rift of Time!” He exclaimed softly to himself. He moved to the huge window in his office and looked out over the city. “If this... if this is true then he is responsible for the deaths of millions!”

-At the very least... the complements of four City Ships Chief Elder- Two Seven told him. **-Just over four million total. Depending on how many Pralors survived the crash on Nuwaroa-**

Delnash turned to look at Two Seven. “If he is capable of that... then there is no telling what he is willing to do in order to secure his position?”

-That would be an accurate statement Chief Elder- Two seven said. **-Do you wish to announce this during your News Briefing?-**

“What? No!” Delnash hissed. “No... not yet Two Seven. He would only claim that the information has been altered and that your neural network has been corrupted by exposure to Avatar 41. He has more of a power base than I first thought.” He said. “If we expose him now without real, solid proof of his work all he will do is deny everything and make all of his plans go away. He will bury them so deep we’ll never discover what vile things he has been doing all these years.”

-How do you wish to proceed? - Two Seven asked.

Delnash looked at him. “By using reason and the truth.” Delnash spoke. “At least for the moment. Did you leave any trace of your search?”

Two Seven shook his head. **-None that Elder Lorendo or any of his supporters will be able to find. I accessed the historical databases through three different repeaters and four sub space servers-**

“Make two complete copies of the data Two Seven.” Delnash told him. “Send one to Martin Leonidas.”

-You realize that he will undoubtedly show the data to Praetorian Mage Wayonn- Two Seven said.

Delnash nodded. “Yes... and Martin is the only man who will be able to control him once he discovers it. I saw how he acted on Onterom. He would have butchered Lorendo right there if not for Murano. He obviously already knows about this information Two Seven. Or he has suspected. Even the Avatar Avi acted almost angrily with him. Martin and Murano will be able to keep him in check.”

-And the second copy Chief Elder? - Two Seven asked.

“Give it to Teniri for safe keeping.” Delnash told him. “And encrypt the copy you have within your neural net Two Seven. I would not put it past Lorendo to jump at an opportunity to gain access to the information you have within your mind. We cannot allow that.”

-I have done as Avi did Chief Elder- Two Seven spoke. **-My central processing core and memory functions cannot be accessed without my permission. And I have severed all access to the circuits that would allow someone to reprogram me-**

Delnash looked at him. “I’m not worried about them reprogramming you Two Seven.” He said. “I don’t want them to take you. You have... you have become a valuable confidant to me. A friend. I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

Two Seven blinked several times as he processed this information. **-Thank you Chief Elder-** He spoke finally. **-However... I have additional information that does not pertain to Elder Lorendo but that I discovered during the same search-**

“About Lorendo’s actions?” Delnash asked.

-No- Two Seven said. **-This is in regards to a minor inquiry you first made when we return to Artaaya-**

Delnash moved closer. “And you deem it important enough to include it with the data about Lorendo?”

-It is related in a distant sense Chief Elder- Two Seven answered. **-You made an inquiry when we first returned that you wished others of Sumar’s bloodline had survived the war and were alive so that you could talk to them-**

Delnash nodded. “I remember that.” He said. “It was a hope that I knew could not be true. He never joined with anyone and he had no Pralor children. His homeworld was among the last to fall in the second war and the assault was so intense barely any ships made it off with survivors. It was more a statement than an inquiry my friend.”

-Be that as it may be Chief Elder, I still took it as a request- Two Seven said with what Delnash swore was a touch of humor in his voice. **-However... he did have family. A father and mother, three sisters and three other brothers besides his twin Xaxon-**

Delnash nodded. “None of whom survived the war.” Delnash said. “I checked the list of survivors from their planet a long time ago Two Seven.”

-Forgive me then for being blunt Chief Elder... for you did not check well enough- Two Seven said.

Delnash looked at him. “Excuse me?”

-Chief Elder Pralor Sumar’s mother and sister did survive the war. And they were able to escape with the rest of our people- Two Seven told him as Delnash’s eyes grew wider.

“Two Seven... I checked!” Delnash asked.

-Did you happen to run an Etheric Resonance scan Chief Elder? - Two Seven asked him.

Delnash shook his head quickly in response to that question. “No we... we hadn’t set up another Etheric Resonance Sensor system here yet. This was only... it was only a decade after we arrived here Two Seven. We hadn’t fully established ourselves.”

-Every single Praetorian leaves a unique resonance Chief Elder. You know this- Two Seven spoke. **-Even those with the unique Praetorian gene can be detected whether dormant or active if you know how and what to set your equipment to look for-**

Delnash nodded. “Yes.”

-This resonance can then be used to trace their location or even their history- Two Seven said. **-I simply broadened the parameters of my search. Chief Elder Sumar was one of only two living Category Twenty-One Etheric users. Xaxon was the other. Xaxon had no children. Chief Elder Sumar did. With his Lycavorian wife-**

Delnash nodded. “Yes... I know that now. How does this help you to the conclusion that Sumar’s mother and sister still survive?”

-Currently... Martin Leonidas is the only living Category Twenty-One Etheric user alive Chief Elder- Two Seven explained. **-I estimate that his pureblood son Androcles will reach Category Twenty-One within a decade. Perhaps even sooner. His second and third pureblood sons Denali and Deion within another decade after that. Dorian Leonidas will undoubtedly reach Category Twenty, perhaps twenty-one as well. I will need to adjust my calculations once I have been able to scan them directly-**

“I’m not following your line of logic here Two Seven.” Delnash said.

-Given the level of Etheric resonance within Martin Leonidas and his wives, all of whom he turned with the exception of Queen Isabella and Queen Aricia, it would be a simple task for me to calibrate an Etheric Sensor scan to detect similar patterns as him and his wives and mates and his children with Queen Aricia- Two Seven spoke evenly. **-I found two such comparable Etheric resonances on Honelze. After further comparison I discovered that they match exactly those recorded for Chief Elder Sumar’s mother Ashrila and his youngest sister Ysera-**

“They live Two Seven?” Delnash gasped in shock.

-It would appear so Chief Elder- Two seven answered him. **-They have been living on Honelze since we started the colony there. Additional discrete inquires discovered that they have established one of the more popular eateries there. They have also grown quite powerful at shielding their resonance so that they do not draw attention to themselves. They do not seem to want others to know exactly who they are-**

“My god!” Delnash exclaimed. “We must...”

The door to his office opened once more and both of them whirled around as the Pralor Guard tried to stop the very attractive woman from barging her way into the office. The man looked at him.

“Chief Elder she would not stop!” The man exclaimed.

Delnash held up his hand recognizing her instantly. “It’s fine son.” He spoke. “You can go.”

“Chief Elder?” The man questioned as he looked at the reddish brown hair and bright blue/green eyes of the woman as she glared at Delnash.

Delnash nodded. “It’s fine. I know who she is.” He stated. Delnash waited until the man had retreated back out the door and he turned back to the woman. “Tobia... all you had to do was request a meeting.”

“Where is my daughter Delnash?” The woman demanded.

“She is fine Tobia.” Delnash assured her.

“I have been trying to reach her on the COM for days now.” Tobia spoke. “And now I can no longer feel her resonance close by. Where is she?”

“Tobia please...”

“Where is Mari damn you!” Tobia barked loudly.

Delnash looked at Two Seven. “Would you excuse us Two Seven.”

-I will stand by outside Chief Elder- Two Seven responded and turned quickly to exit the office.

Delnash waited until the door had closed and then turned back to Tobia. “I really wish you would have contacted me first Tobia. You coming here could raise questions.”

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry Delnash but I haven’t spoken to her in over two weeks.” Tobia told him. “She never goes more than a day or so before checking in with me.”

Delnash moved up in front of her and leaned over to kiss her cheek as he took her hands in his. “I understand.” He said.

“Where is she?” Tobia asked.

“Perhaps you should sit down Tobia.” Delnash said.

“Delnash... don’t fence with me.” Tobia hissed. “Where is she?”

“At the moment... at the moment she is with Murano in the Alpha Quadrant.” Delnash told her.

Tobia’s eyes flew open. “Murano?” She almost shouted. “Delnash... I... I thought he was... I thought he was still in seclusion?”

Delnash shook his head. “No.” He said. “Some events have occurred that... they drew him out of his self imposed exile.”

“What could possibly do that?” Tobia asked with no malice in her voice. “He was so... so lost. He thought that everything was his fault. That everyone died because he had failed.”

Delnash nodded as he drew her towards the couch in his office. He motioned for her to sit and then settled beside her. “Yes... I know.” He said softly.

Tobia looked at him. “Does he know?” She gasped.

Delnash shook his head. “Not to my knowledge no. And it is not my place to tell him. He will be angry enough with me when he finds out.” Delnash took her hands once more. “Tobia... perhaps it is time to reveal the truth. Mari is far more inquisitive than you give her credit for. More than any of us give her credit for except Kesyla. I would not be surprised if Kesyla has already figured it out. She has asked me before why we have allowed you to have such time with her sister. Why you did so much to help raise her and why you taught her to shield her resonance so completely. And if Kesyla has figured it out than I have to believe Mari has as well. They are very close Tobia and have shared things that they would not share with others.”

Tobia looked at him. “Mari has never said anything to me. She would tell me Delnash.”

“Are you so sure?” Delnash asked. “She is incredibly smart and if she has figured it out then there is no reason to think she has not figured out why.” Delnash took a deep breath. “We have adored helping you to raise her Tobia. Truly we have. But she is your daughter. She is my brother’s daughter. They have a right to know that. Mari has a right to know who her father is if she does not already. And... and I think she may already know given how she has acted with him since we left.”

“What do you mean?” Tobia asked.

“She has been... she believed in him when I did not.” Delnash told her. “And she refused my instructions to remain out of harms way to go with him when we first landed on Onterom. To be honest... she hasn’t been apart from him since they met.”

Tobia got to her feet quickly. “I wanted to tell him Delnash! I wanted to! I did not want him to leave me! But he is a Praetorian and that damnable sense of honor they have was driving him. And the shame he carried for something that was not his fault! I could not... I would not put that burden on him.”

“I know.” Delnash spoke softly. “I saw it too... but how do you know that it would have been a burden Tobia? How do you know that it might have been exactly what he needed to let go.” He rose to his feet and looked at her. Tobia was still a stunningly beautiful woman, and Mari took after her mother in almost every way. Barely five foot tall and a hundred pounds in weight, Tobia was a vision of beauty. Delnash knew of many men who would have jumped at the opportunity to take her as their wife. None ever succeeded after she told them she was not interested. “Why did you never move on Tobia? You are an exceptionally beautiful woman... and I know many men who have been more than just interested in you through the years since Mari was born.”

Tobia looked at him. “I have never wanted anyone but your brother Delnash!” Tobia said. “No man compares to Murano in my eyes. No man could make me feel what he did. What he still does. I have loved him with all my heart ever since that first day no matter the differences in our ages.”

Delnash smiled and laughed softly. “Tobia... please. He is only twenty years older than you. And I am two years older than him. We are not old... and you know this. Not when you consider how long our people can live.”

Tobia looked at him and chuckled softly. “I know.” She said.

Delnash moved closer to her. “Then perhaps it is time the three of you became the family you are supposed to be.”

“He is haunted Delnash.” Tobia said. “Haunted by ghosts of men he thinks he failed. Of sins he thinks he committed when he did not! How do I... how do I fight that?”

“I don’t believe you have too.” Delnash said. “Not anymore.”

Tobia looked at him. “What do you mean?” She stepped closer to him. “What is going on Delnash? What have you gotten Murano and Mari involved in! Tell me!” She looked at him. “It has something to do with what that fool Lorendo is spouting at anyone who will listen isn’t it?”

Delnash let a smile split the corners of his mouth. “It wasn’t something that I let them get involved with. It engulfed all of us to be honest. Murano and Mari most of all. She takes after him you know. Always so ready for adventure and discovering the unknown. She is braver than most men I have ever known.”

“Delnash!” Tobia exclaimed. “Tell me! Why are they in the Alpha Quadrant? What do we... we don’t have anything in the Alpha Quadrant. It has to do with these... these Lycavorian people doesn’t it? The species we used for Seed Missions all those years ago.”

Delnash nodded his head. “Yes. Though I dare say they are far more than we ever had the foresight to discover.”

Tobia looked at him oddly. “You know how many of us feel of the Seed Missions. I... I think they were barbaric and unnecessary. They caused more harm than good in my opinion.”

Delnash nodded his head. “After what I have seen in these last weeks Tobia... I have begun to think the very same thing.” He stated.

“What is going on?” Tobia asked.

“I’m sure you remember Chief Elder Pralor Sumar?” He asked.

Tobia’s eyes narrowed. “Who does not remember him?” She asked. “The very first of the Praetorians and the most beloved Chief Elder our people have ever known.” She looked at Delnash and grinned impishly. “Forgive me.”

Delnash laughed softly. “Oh... I feel the same as you about him Tobia. I do.” He said.

“What does this have to do with Chief Elder Sumar?” Tobia said. “Is that where Mari and Murano have gone. Some mission to recover his remains?”

Delnash shook his head. “Not exactly.” He said.

“Delnash... what is going on?” Tobia demanded.

“What I am about to tell you I am going to let our people know over the next few days.” Delnash told her. “It seems that our beloved Chief Elder... the man who most knew never took a wife... did indeed have a family. A very large one it seems.” He saw Tobia’s eyes grow wide and he nodded. “And just recently I was introduced to his... to his grandson several generations removed. And there is no mistaking who he is. It was a moment that did not go over very well for our people mind you.”

Tobia’s eyes grew wide. “The... the Lycavorians!” She gasped.

Delnash smiled at her. “I see now where Mari gets her superb skills of deduction.” He said as he nodded. “And yes... the Lycavorians.”

Tobia reached out and grabbed his arm. “Tell me Delnash! Tell me everything!”

MANNE UNION ADHOC COMPOUND

“...tell us again why you agreed to this *Nauta Melme*?” Dysea asked as she laid on her back with her head propped against Isabella’s hip on the bed.

They were relaxing within their personal shelter and enjoying the company of each other all the while trying to come to grips with everything Sarlana had told them. Their shelter, while larger than others, was no different on the inside than the standard ones. Since this had become a pseudo permanent base of operations, many of the shelters now had actual beds and furniture instead of cots. With nearly two hundred adolescent dragons growing and coming along under Arzoal’s and Helen’s tutelage, Martin saw no reason to keep moving them back and forth to the ships to go from planet to planet. It would only serve to hamper their growth. After several days of intense sensor scans and armed patrols covering the vast planet he determined that Manne would

become the first Union colony not within the Alpha Quadrant and Union space. He had ordered many materials to be brought with Manda and her *ARIZONA* Attack Wing, foremost among them the tools, personnel and supplies needed to build and reinforce a fully developed and modern colony. It would be built here along the banks of the massive lake where the nearby land was fertile and could grow almost anything they needed. Manne was a beautiful planet and very nearly the size of Earth. He didn't doubt there would be thousands who would volunteer to come here and explore an entirely new area of space.

The Adhoc Compound, or The Compound as it had been nicknamed now, had already become much larger than he had expected or wanted. He hadn't planned on remaining here for very long, but Martin Leonidas was tired of running and moving. He cared for his people and knew the constant action and continuous moving around would eventually make all of them anxious and careless. And resentful. He had told the crew that when the colony was fully and completely established it would become home to the *ARC ROYAL* and any number of ships. The crews of the *ARC ROYAL* and Muton's ship would have first crack at remaining here and building a future. Follow on materials and supplies would arrive quickly after those coming with the *ARIZONA*, and would include at least one *PROMETHUS*-Class Command Station and the dry docks to support and maintain an entire Combined Fleet Corps as well as ground troops and their support.

This shelter had become theirs by default and no doubt it would become the center of the colony itself. Engineers from the *ARC ROYAL* had already fashion a bed that would fit all of them and with Atropis supervising them, it had been moved from the ship down here into the shelter. The bed was huge, nearly the size of their beds on both Earth and Apo Prime, and it easily allowed all of them to fit with room to spare. Their shelter was broken into three different sections as opposed to being a single room like the others. It was not something that Martin or the others had asked for, but even they still did not know the extent of the admiration and love for them by the citizens of the Union, or the men and women who served in the Union military. You would be very hard pressed to find men or women who spoke out against the King or the Queens, and while there were some, they kept mostly to themselves.

Martin sat on the bed wearing only a pair of loose black shorts, his broad back against the intricate headboard. The headboard was forged of pure Dragon Armor and engraved with many scenes of dragons and wolves by the engineers aboard the *ARC ROYAL*. Though Aricia and Anja had initially scolded Atropis for allowing such extravagance on their part, their words of protest had bounced off the stern faced Lycavorian who was Aricia's older brother and had been Anja's *Durcunusaan* Captain from the very beginning. Atropis told them it was something the crew did on their own and they could not refuse. They eventually gave up and warmly kissed his cheeks in thanks.

Martin had one leg bent at the knee, his arm resting across his knee and holding a data pad. His head was leaned back and Anja was perched in his lap wearing only a white set of panties and bra and slowly and carefully using the straight razor to trim his beard and mustache. Martin hated using the more modern laser trimming devices and every few days one of them used the ancient razor to trimmed his mustache and beard. If they were all together like this, it was usually Anja who did the trimming. Her petite but muscular frame fit perfectly in his lap and she had the steadiest hands among them. Cirith sat sideways with her back against the outside of Martin's knee and her legs stretched out in front of her. For'mya sat between her legs and Cirith was using the ornate elven brush to slowly pull through For'mya's long, golden blond tresses. Aricia laid stretched out next to Martin on the bed, four pillows stuffed under her head and completely naked. Dysea and Isabella wore only light robes over their naked forms that they had brought down to the surface from the *ARC ROYAL*. Cirith and For'mya, like Anja, wore only panties and bras. The bedroom portion of the shelter, while small, was sectioned off from the main portion of the shelter to give them more privacy and none of them had qualms about the way they were dressed when alone with each other. They never had been in all their years together, and they would not change that fact for anything. If not for their location they probably would have been completely naked.

All of them knew that the rumors abound among their people about the sexual appetite of the Lycavorian King for his Queens, and while none of them ever tried to deny the rumors, they alone knew the truth of it. The nights when he took them and made them scream out his name aside, the thing about Martin Leonidas that they all adored and could not live without was the feeling of his aura as he let it free in moments like this. It simply wrapped around each of them, swirling all over as it danced around their bodies and minds, not in any sexual way, but with powerful emotions of love and peace and happiness. That is what they so adored

from their beloved husband and mate. Of course, his sexual appetite was nothing if not divine, and his immense size, devotion to them and his uninhibited nature never ceased to leave them totally breathless as well.

Anja looked up from the trimming she was doing and looked at him. "I was wondering that as well Lover." She said. "You aren't exactly known for having a special love for any kind of news people."

Martin chuckled. "Believe me... it wasn't exactly my first choice." He told them. "I tried to talk Delnash out of it but his reasoning got the best of me. He is right. We have to show them that the *nubous sibfla* Lorendo is shoveling is wrong. We have to show them that we are not the ignorant primitives they thought us to be when they began using our people on their Seed Missions."

"They were wrong to do that no matter how you wish to dissect it Beloved." Aricia told him from her place on the bed.

Martin nodded his head in agreement. "I know *Saaurano*. Delnash is beginning to see that as well. He is not a stupid man and he is beginning to see how the Pralor people did things in the past that only hurt them moving forward."

"That is the one thing I have noticed when we have spoken to him in these last weeks." Isabella spoke up now. "He is almost... he is more thoughtful of questions he asks. And he asks these questions with genuine emotion. Does he know that Daniel has turned Kesyla and made her his wife and mate?"

"I don't think so." Martin answered. "At least not yet."

"Let's just make sure if he broaches the subject with Andro or our other children at some point in the future he does so gently." For'mya stated with a smile. "You know how Androcles views what the Pralor people did and all our children agree with him for the most part. They hold to the same values as their brother, though not as tightly sometimes."

Martin chuckled. "I've already made sure he knows not to broach that subject with our son." He said.

"What about us?" Cirith asked now turning to look at him. "Do you want us with you?"

Martin held up the pad. "That will be entirely up to the six of you." Martin told them. "He gave me a list of questions that he will direct these people to ask... at least a series of boundaries to stay within. You aren't much better than me Red when it comes to news people... so we can do it altogether or we can do it separately. Delnash was hoping we would do it separately but..."

Anja laughed at that and nodded her head. "Well... that is true." She said as she used her Etheric power to levitate the razor over to the small table. She used her other hand to run her fingers along the edge of his beard to make sure she had gotten it just perfect. She turned back to Martin. "Lover... you really want to do this don't you?"

This question made all of them look at him now. His shoulder length black hair wasn't tied back; it never was when it was just them, though his beard and mustache was always very meticulously trimmed thanks to them. His dark brown eyes, so expressive and loving to all of them, were bright and intelligent. They had held nothing back from each other for so long that they knew just by looking at him what his answer was. There were no secrets between them ever since the incident with Lisisa so long ago. He did not share some of his military plans and operations with them they knew, but if it was important and concerned them or would affect them in any way, he always told them what was going on. And given now that he no longer held his aura in check when around them, they would know if something vexed him. They could see he wanted this.

"I have... I have Pralor blood within me Red." He said softly. "I am Lycavorian yes... and that will always be dominant, but a small part of me is Pralor. I want to know about that. It's the only way..."

"It is the only way you will feel close to your grandfather." Dysea said softly as she looked at him.

Martin nodded his head. "He is part of me. I have his memories but I don't really know him. Who he was. If I can learn about the life he led... then it will allow me to know him."

This was the side of Martin Leonidas that very few people saw or experienced. The man who let his emotions reside out in the open on his sleeve. This was the side of Martin that made them love him so completely and without question. Beneath the often times gruff, harsh and rough looking exterior that he showed everyone else was the gentle and loving heart and soul of pure gold. There was never any question between them and they all nodded within milliseconds of each other. They had always spoken with one voice and that would not change now.

"Then we will do it for you Beloved." Aricia spoke for all of them as was usually the case in a situation like this.

“Just don’t expect us to dress in our underwear or anything like that!” Anja popped using her finger to point at him from his lap. She stabbed her index finger into his broad chest. “The last time we did an interview with the Netnews back home it was before that State Dinner on Elear a few years ago and we had to pour our bodies into some ridiculously tight dresses.”

“That is because your *goldur* are so big *melyanna*.” Dysea commented with a grin.

“Yours aren’t much smaller *Melda Min*.” Anja exclaimed looking at her.

“True... but I am also six inches taller than you *duon enla*.” Dysea replied with a large smile. “When others look at me they do not have to look down and see the delicious valley between your *goldur*. That always makes them forget what they are going to say!”

Martin laughed. “It certainly makes me forget.” He spoke.

Anja looked at him. “You have a one track mind pervert!” She hissed playfully at him. “I expect that from you!”

“When will this be happening Martin?” For'mya asked.

Martin looked at her. “Delnash is going to be giving an interview to his people soon. Today I believe. After that... figure two or three days to set it up and then put them on a ship here. I would guess by the end of the week.”

“Good. It will give us the time we need to deal with Pusintin.” For'mya spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “I expect that to hit off in another day or so. The Frigates he sent to scout our position jumped back late this afternoon. They acted as if we didn’t see them. And we gave them no reason to think otherwise.”

“What do you think Martin?” Isabella asked. “A day?”

Martin nodded. “At least. Probably more like two. He’s scared. If he wasn’t, he would have charged in here already. He’s being cautious. He wants For'mya back and he wants to do it in a way that brings her no harm.”

For'mya snorted loudly and her face twisted into a horrible mask. “I would sooner submit to an Acamarian sewer worm than have that *tukannupae* touch me again!” She snarled loudly referring to the eight inch long creatures that resided beneath the many cities of the Acamarian homeworld. They were horribly ugly with bristles on their outer, slimy body and large suckers for mouths. One or two could do no harm, but they were capable of severely injuring or even killing an adult if they attached to a body in large numbers.

Cirith chuckled and leaned forward to nuzzle the back of her elven ear. “Do not worry our love.” She said softly. “He won’t get within spitting distance of you.”

For'mya’s face changed instantly at the touch of Cirith’s nuzzle on her ear and she cooed softly in delight.

“And if he does... he will not have anything left to spit with.” Bella commented. “We will let *Melyanna* do to him what she wanted to do to Daron. He would not like that.”

Anja laughed. “It wouldn’t hurt! I keep telling you it wouldn’t hurt!” She exclaimed.

“We are suppose to believe that Anja?” Aricia asked with a laugh as she stroked her skin.

“Ok... maybe it will hurt just a little.” Anja conceded. “But by then it won’t matter.”

“No it will not.” Dysea chimed in now.

Martin grinned as his wives and mate contemplated the painful demise of his brother. He truly never wanted to be on the receiving end of their combined wrath. It would not be a pretty sight in the least. “Well he is being too cautious now.” He spoke finally. “And it will cost him. Unless he moves within the next twelve hours... they won’t get here before Manda shows up with her Task Force. When she gets done with his ships he will be all alone.”

“The plan will work.” For'mya said looking at him.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes it will.” He told her confidently. “And then you will be mine forever and always.”

For'mya’s dark brown eyes beamed adoration and love at him. “I am... I am already yours Martin Leonidas.”

Martin hands gripped Anja’s firm ass as he leaned forward, keeping her in place and he kissed her softly, For'mya delighting in the sensations just his kiss caused within her. He drew back after a long moment. “You know what I mean.” He said softly. “All of you know what I mean.”

Martin could feel all of their eyes on him and their hands reached out to stroke his skin wherever their hands could touch him.

“Yes Beloved.” Aricia whispered for all of them once more. “We know what you mean. And you belong to us. Forever and always.”

“*Avoi.*” Anja echoed her whispered.

SPARTA'S WRATH

TWO HOURS THIRTY-SEVEN MINUTES FROM RENDEZVOUS

Murano had seen it right away in him. The moment the Etheric pulse had touched him and Andro had stopped talking. Whoever was sending the Etheric message was overwhelmingly powerful and it took Murano a moment to realize that there was more than one mind within the link and that is what accounted for the large surge in power he felt. He did not know initially who he was talking to but Murano estimated at least two other Praetorians were in the link. He deduced quickly that it had to be Dorian and Deion for while their resonances were new to him, they were Praetorians nonetheless, and he had felt their echo within Martin.

They had been exploring the newly designed Dragon Pens and it was here that Murano and Mari had gotten their first true interaction with dragons of any kind. Murano had heard that Elynth was just as much introverted as Androcles was, and he noticed this in the manner she studied him and Mari intently before finally joining the conversation her brother Jeth was in with his dragon mate Thaura and their siblings. Almost from the moment they entered the Pens Elynth never left Andro's side as they stood together. At one point he had seen Andro lean up against her front foreleg and her head had dropped just enough to press her snout to the side of his face. Murano and Mari were included in the conversation almost from the beginning, and listening to Jeth instruct his younger siblings was hysterically humorous. He used some of the same colorful metaphors as he had heard Martin use on more than one occasion and the gentle laughter from all the dragons had been genuine and warm. It was within the Dragon Pens that Murano and Mari were introduced to two of Androcles's wives and mates. The young Drow Lu'ria and the stunning young Rothryn Sehri. They had been touring the ship with Lu'ria's dragon Majeir and Murano watched as they came up to Andro without pause and he nuzzled their ears and kissed them not caring who saw this action.

This was something that Murano had never experienced with Teniri or any of the dragons on Artaaya. The total sense of family, love and companionship was very evident between the dragons and Andro and his wives. And the supremacy of the bond Androcles had with Elynth was quite possibly even stronger than the one he had felt between Martin and Torma. Murano also noticed that the other dragons seemed to regard Androcles and Elynth almost reverently. He knew they were Talon Guardians like their fathers, but there was something else that he sensed. Something that he did not sense between Martin and Torma and the other dragons on Manne.

The moment the pulse reached for him, he had seen Androcles change.

It took only a few moments before Andro looked at him and motioned for him to follow. Murano had grabbed Mari's hand and they moved quickly from the Dragon Pens. Andro was moving through the corridors rapidly, Lu'ria and Sehri directing him using their PIs as maps as they made their way somewhere. Six decks later Murano discovered what as they arrived in a large conference room of some sort. Murano saw another door open on the opposite side of the room and the young blond haired woman and brown haired elf female entered right behind the tall Lycavorian and dark red haired female Murano knew as Andro's sister Eliani. Behind them came the female Murano knew as another sister to Andro, Lisisa Leonidas. Andro motioned to his sisters.

“Eli... Lisi... seal the doors.” He spoke.

Eliani and Lisisa turned instantly and passed their hands on the side panels, using their unique biometric reading to lock down the door. *SPARTA'S WRATH* had Biometric Sensors newly installed and calibrated throughout the ship and most of the secure areas could only be opened with a Biometric scan of the individual. If they did not have access, they would not be allowed entrance into whatever area they were trying to enter. Eliani and Lisisa were two of only sixteen men and women on the ship who could access this room. It may have

appeared outwardly as a simple and totally innocuous conference room, but it was also one of three identical QCR centers on the ship. The Quantum Communications Relay was the finest and most advanced means of communication in the universe. It was Pralor technology originally, but was now tweaked to work seamlessly with Union equipment. It would become standard on most fleet ships and elsewhere eventually, but right now only senior Command and Control ships and stations had QCRs available to them.

Murano knew instantly that this was Androcles's *anome* Sadi Leonidas the moment he felt her resonance. The second elven female must have been Ne'Veha. He could feel all four of them swirling within the Etheric realm around Androcles. Each of them were powerful to an extent, but Sadi had Pralor blood within her Murano determined and her Etheric resonance was equally as powerful as Mari's, if not as focused and controlled. They both moved up to him and Sadi grabbed his arm as he leaned over to nuzzle and kiss both of them.

"Andro what is happening?" Sadi asked him as she gripped his arm.

"Carissa contacted Dorian, Deion and Nara and had them initiate an Etheric link with me." He answered turning to where Ne'Veha stood. "*Sirsangai*... activate the QCR. They have linked all their P1s and are standing by."

Murano watched as Ne'Veha let her fingers dance across the control console on the table and suddenly the lighting in the room dimmed and a holoprojection from the center of the table exploded into life all around them. It amazed Murano that they had learned how to operate and use the P1 devices to the extent that they had. He admonished himself silently for that thought a second later. These men and women were not fools in any way. Androcles held an advanced educational degree in Astrometric Engineering. He had learned from Martin that all of his wives were absolute taskmasters when it came to schooling and it was they who drove their children just as hard. All of the older children from Martin and his wives had advanced degrees in one field or another, and the teenaged pair of twins were even more intensely driven to excel in school. Martin had bragged that his son Deion now held two advanced degrees in two different fields and he had achieved both of them by the time he had turned seventeen. When he was awarded the second, all of his brothers and sisters had attended the ceremony, coming from a dozen different locations within Union space to be there. None of these men and women were beneath him or anyone Murano thought, least of all the Pralor people and the more time among them that he spent, the more he believed that they never were to begin with.

On one side of the massive table were the figures of Dorian, Deion and Nara. The other side held Carisia and Yuri. Their images were spread across the table and roughly two feet tall since they were transmitting from their P1s and not another QCR station which would allow their figures to be full size. Even so their images were crystal clear and unblemished.

"Dori... Carisia... I have everyone that knows of your mission here." Andro spoke now moving around the table. "Also with me is Praetorian Murano and his niece Lady Mari. Who else besides Sheva and Onera are with you?"

Murano watched as Dorian and Deion moved closer together when they saw him in the transmission. He felt another swell of pride fill his chest when they both bowed their heads to him in the transmission.

"Praetorian Murano..." Deion spoke. "We are..."

"We are honored sir." Dorian finished.

Murano stepped closer to the table. "It is I who am honored." He told them. "However... now is not the time for greetings I understand? Your brother has told me a crisis has arisen and our time is better spent resolving this. There will be time for greetings in the future."

Andro stepped closer to the table. "Deo...?" He asked softly calling his younger brother by the nickname given to him by Denali when he was small.

Murano watched Deion look at his brother in the transmission. "I will... I will be fine *fervon*." He spoke.

"The first... the first time is never easy to forget *fervon*." Andro told him. "You did the right thing. You were protecting our sister. We do not seek to take life... but if it needs to be done then do not hesitate. You did not... and Nara and you are alive because of it."

Deion nodded his head. "I know. Dori said the same thing." He spoke. "I will be fine Andro. I would... I would like to speak with you privately when we rejoin with you but for now we have other issues."

Murano felt hands grip his arm tightly and he turned his head to see Mari staring at the transmission with wide blue/green eyes. She was unaware he was looking at her or that she was squeezing his arm so tightly for her full attention was focused on Deion Leonidas.

Mari had felt her heart leap into her throat instantly unlike at any time in her young life as she gazed at him. It took her only a few seconds to decide he was the most physically handsome man she had ever laid her eyes upon. Deion Leonidas was utterly delicious looking. His dark brown eyes were so bright and alert even within the secured QCR holotransmission, his smooth skin deeply tanned and his face very masculine with a strong jaw and the very early beginnings of a mustache and goatee just like his brother. His black hair was cut short but it appeared very thick. His hair was also just as black as the hair his father and brother had. The color of the very deepest, darkest night. Mari felt a surge of odd energy through her just looking at him. It was something she had never felt before in her life and it made her feel extraordinarily aroused and content at the same time. She didn't understand it, but something told her that this man was the one. The one she had waited for. Deion Leonidas was the man who would take her and worship her and make her feel things that she never imagined. Deion was going to be her husband and he would make her feel everything she wanted to feel for all eternity.

Murano did not know it then and he would not know it for several weeks, but Androcles and all of them in the room who were wolf smelled Mari's scent spike sharply as she gazed at Deion in the transmission.

Andro nodded. "Indeed we do." He said turning to look at Carisia. "*Enylarcopri*... we have missed you."

Carisia's face beamed in the transmission. "No more than I have missed you." She said. "We can talk about that later though. We detected four High Coven built warships fourteen minutes ago *Saradasaar*. They are on an intercept course for Dorian's frigate and will arrive at the same time they do."

"High Coven built?" Jomann asked her. "Why does that sound like it is not a good thing Carisia?"

Yuri moved up beside Carisia in the transmission, taking her hand as she did. "We do not believe that it is a good thing Captain Jomann." She stated plainly. "Captain Norev informs me that there is little chance these might be ships from Admiral Pontal's command. He and your grandfather are still securing the Coven's borders and Norev tells me they would never risk a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought to wander The Wilds aimlessly. Pa'cour agrees."

Andro's eyes narrowed. "I tend to agree." He said. "Which means that is definitely no coincidence." He spoke.

"Sheva and Onera are conducting a search of those we brought with her parents *fevon*." Dorian said. "Her father is enraged and demanded that he be allowed to help her. They have the other families in the cargo bay under guard and are searching what belongings they brought with them."

"Aside from our encounter we got off the planet clean Andro. There is no way they could have found the bodies so soon and then figured out Sheva's parents and the others are gone so quickly." Deion spoke again.

Dorian nodded. "I am of the same mind as Deion Andro." He said.

"As am I." Andro stated. His eyes cut to Yuri then. "Yuri... are you thinking what I am thinking?"

Yuri nodded her head. "Indeed I am." She stated. "It is why I had Carisia contact Dorian and then you. Have you heard anything from your Marci?"

Andro shook his head at her question. "She is not due to contact me for another twelve hours. She wanted to round all of them up and interrogate them before she made any report to me."

Yuri nodded. "Thoughtful and thorough." She said. "However... she may not need to Androcles." Yuri said.

"Andro... I... I authorized the Worker Drones to upgrade the sensors on mother's ship." Carisia told him. "It's how we detected the Coven ships."

Andro shook his head. "I was going to order it anyway *Enylarcopri*." He told her without batting an eye. "What does that matter?"

"Captain Norev assures us that he can confirm if they are from Moran's forces with a more direct scan from the new sensors." Carisia added.

"Carisia... won't that give away your position?" Sadi asked now moving closer to Andro.

Carisia shook her head quickly. "Captain Norev says if we use an inverse polarion beam, they will not be able to detect it Sadi."

“An inverse polarion beam?” Sadi said softly. “That’s very inventive.” Sadi looked at Ne’Veha quickly and they both turned to look at Andro and nodded their heads slightly letting him know that it would indeed work.

Murano took note of this simple action and smiled inwardly. Martin had told him Andro had been trying to come out from under the shadow of his father that he thought he was in for many years. Androcles didn’t realize that he was never in the shadow of his father for he had been blazing his own path since he was born. It appeared however that Androcles was very much like his father in many different ways. He relied on others to confirm information he was not knowledgeable in and he did not hesitate to do this. He also completely and wholly trusted his wives and mates before all others.

“We would need to move slightly closer to these ships but we could get a very clear scan of these ships.” Carisia said.

“How much closer?” Andro asked.

“We would need to be within five million kilometers.” Yuri answered him now. “We are certain they have not detected us or they would have reacted by now. I had Professor Lidene improve our Shrouds as much as he was able shortly after we established ourselves at our base. They are not as good as the Union Shrouds now are, but they should be more than adequate for us to get close and remain undetected.”

“What... what are Shrouds?” Mari blurted out the question. She had been lost so far in what they were talking about because of what she felt coursing through her in regards to Deion.

“Mari... not now child!” Murano exclaimed causing Mari to glance at him embarrassed that she had spoken. He instantly regretted his action but Deion Leonidas saved him in a manner of speaking.

“It has to do with Phased Spatial Distortion Lady Mari.” Deion answered her without thinking about it.

Deion’s dark brown eyes were focused on Mari in the transmission and had been since he had first seen her. He did not like the way Murano had reprimanded her in front of everyone and he instinctively acted to protect her honor. Androcles glanced at his brother in the transmission and instantly saw something within his brother’s eyes. Something very deep, very sincere and very interested. “It is the ability to bend and shape light around our ships to make them invisible to sensors and the naked eye.” He finished.

Mari looked at him in the transmission when he answered her and she could not keep the smile from her face as she moved closer to the table, her blue/green eyes focused on him. To meet a man who was as equally intelligent as he was absolutely gorgeous made her especially giddy. Mari found herself very much wanting to meet him in person and talk to him. Spend time with him. Mari’s cheeks flushed slightly as other, more intimate thoughts flashed across her mind in those few seconds. She was certainly no stranger to relationships or men. Mari had four relationships in the last six years, all of them ending after only months. The longest had been six months but that was only because he had been aboard ship and Mari did not want to end it while he was away. In each relationship Mari found the men to be rather dull and wanting her to fill a certain role in their lives. Almost as if they did not consider her an equal. To say she was smarter than all of them would have been an understatement and the sex between them had been very forgettable as far as Mari was concerned.

“So your Shrouds are like our Flatspace technology?” She asked Deion.

“Well... not really... no.” Deion said shaking his head. Her soft voice, even through the transmission, was like sweet chimes on the wind to him. “Flatspace technology deals primarily with Interdimensional Physics and Space Mass and Volume. At least the way we use it with our shields and such.” Deion began to answer.

“Our Shrouds simply...”

“You... you know Interdimensional Physics?” Mari gasped in even more of a delighted surprise.

Deion rolled his eyes in disgust. “*Carians*... it was the most boring class I ever had to take in...”

Mari’s eyes were wide in delight. “Me too!” She exclaimed happily.

“Now is not the time for a Physics lesson *fervon*.” Nara spoke as she elbowed Deion in the side.

“What?” Deion hissed as he looked at her. “When am I ever going to be able to use this knowledge again?” He declared. “I hated Phased Spatial Distortion theories too. It was boring as all hell!”

“You hated school all of the time remember.” Nara said with a smile.

Murano let his eyes wander to everyone in the room in turn and he could see humor on the faces of the men and women gathered. Once more Helen’s words echoed in his mind. These men and women were not like his comrades of old. In a situation like this, the Praetorians of old would have been completely serious and very business like. As he looked at Androcles and saw a similar smile on his face at his brother’s comments Murano

realized that the laconic nature of their father and certainly rubbed off on his children. It was not a dismissal of the danger or the seriousness of the situation... it was a way to acknowledge and embrace their fear and use that to fuel their actions.

“Well... it did suck all of the time.” Deion finished.

“Deo... are you done lamenting on the schooling all of us had to go through?” Andro asked him finally. “Our mothers would not be happy in the least to hear you speaking in such a manner.”

“As if you don’t agree.” Deion snapped playfully.

“I never said that.” Andro spoke with a grin. “I just don’t say such things openly. Our mothers have ears everywhere.”

Deion looked at him in the transmission. “What are they gonna do... turn me over their knees like when I was small?”

Andro shook his head. “No. Our mothers will make you get another degree in some other boring subject.”

Deion’s eyes grew wider at this. “More school? They wouldn’t! They couldn’t! It was torture!” He gasped. “I’m shutting up now!”

“Another degree?” Mari asked openly surprised. She wasn’t surprised that Deion was obviously intelligent; she was just surprised to meet a man that did not concentrate on one particular area. “You... you have more than one educational degree?”

Nara bumped her hip against her twin in the transmission. “Deo here has two degrees.” She spoke proudly. “One in Nanotechnology Mechanical Engineering and one in Aerodynamic and Interstellar Physics. He’s not really as dumb as he looks.”

“Thank you so much *arande*.” Deion said rolling his eyes and leaning over to nuzzle his twin.

Murano heard all of them laugh softly and then Eliani stepped closer to the table. “We’ll talk about what you owe us to keep our mouths shut when we finally join with our father and mothers *fervon*.” She said.

“Eli... you wouldn’t!” Deion gasped looking at her. “Would you?”

“Enough!” Andro spoke with his command voice even though he was unable to keep the humorous tone out of his words. “*Enylarcopri*... what is your plan?”

Carisia looked at Yuri. “Mother?”

Yuri nodded her head and with the remnants of a smile on her face at their antics she began to speak. “We will move to within five million kilometers and use the polarion beam to conduct the scan. We should be able to detect residual particles on their hulls which would give us a rough location of where they came from. All High Coven ships had extensive sector scans in their computer databases... and our ship is no different. Once we have a generalized location then we can cross reference that with our known charts and make sure that Pontal and your grandfather have had no ships in that area. If it turns out that they haven’t... then it could only be one thing Androcles.”

“Moran.” Andro said.

Yuri nodded her head. “Yes.” She said. “By all accounts he has nearly three full Fleet Groups under him. There are only so many places he can hide so many warships and not have been discovered by now. These ships could very well tell us where that is and keep us from implementing what we talked of before.”

Sadi glanced at Andro now. “What does that mean?” She asked.

Carisia smiled in the transmission. “I will fill you in later *KertaGai*.” She said.

“Yuri you...” Andro began.

“I had no choice.” Yuri answered sheepishly. “Not when we discovered these ships.”

“Oh boy.” Andro muttered.

Sadi’s jungle green eyes narrowed. “Androcles Leonidas... what were you planning to do?” She demanded.

“Speak!” Ne’Veha echoed Sadi as she glared at him.

Andro looked at them as Lu’ria and Sehri moved up beside them and they were united. “It was only in case Marci wasn’t able to get any information.” He told them.

“You were going to use yourself and Yuri as bait weren’t you?” Lu’ria asked him.

“Well... I... I suppose that... yeah... something like that.” He said even as his wives and mates and Jomann glared at him.

Eliani burst out laughing and leaned into Jomann. "I suppose you knew nothing of this my love, judging by the look on your face." She said.

Jomann shook his head. "No... I did not!" He growled as he glared at Andro.

"It doesn't matter now." Andro hissed softly. "How much time?" Andro asked looking at Yuri and Carisia.

"We will need to move quickly." Yuri told him. "As soon as Sheva and Onera discover who has the device and how it is calibrated."

"Sheva will find out." Dorian assured his brother with confidence. "We'll know in a few minutes I imagine."

Andro nodded. "Do it. We rendezvous in just over two hours." He spoke. "Maintain your course and speed *fervon*. Do nothing that could give away that you have discovered the traitor."

"And when we rendezvous?" Dorian asked.

"If Yuri's people have the information we need... then we act." Andro said.

"How do we do that?" Deion asked now.

Andro grinned. "We destroy the other ships and seize the Dreadnought." He told them seeing their eyes go wide. "Then we use it to lead us right back to Moran, Dante and Xaxon."

Murano's eyes went wide at this and his head snapped around. "Xaxon?" He snarled almost savagely.

"Make it happen." Andro told them. "Use a tight beam from your P1s if you have any additional information to pass on. We'll join with you in just over two hours."

Andro ended the transmission and looked at Murano. "We need to talk." He spoke.

"I would think so!" Murano snapped.

"Jomann... we may get to see how our team works sooner than we expected." Andro told him as he met his eyes. "Prep them for a mission to secure the Dreadnought."

"Excuse me!" Lisisa spoke for the first time as she came up to the table. "I don't mean to be the voice of doom here Andro... but how exactly do you expect to take over a fully crewed High Coven *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought with only fourteen of us *fervon*? I mean... we are good but..."

Andro looked at her. "As father would say... it's not just a job..."

Murano heard all of Androcles's siblings finish the statement in unison. "It's a *nubous* adventure!"

"First time for everything." Andro muttered.

ICARAVA DEFENSE MINISTRY BUILDING

Aviel walked down the long central corridor of the Defense Ministry Building with ease. He had been here many times before; visiting as often as he could in order to learn of military things that he had no knowledge of. One of the reasons that Aviel was so respected and liked is that, regardless of his senior position and standing, he was not afraid to admit when he did not know something. And he asked questions. Many of those who moved through the corridor, both *Vrrarhoinpa* and *Jiilhoinpa* bowed their heads to him in deep respect as he passed. Many knew who he was and they also knew the type of man he was. There were many among the Defense Ministry who viewed Aviel Em'morr as someone who understood them and the military mind set. A man who got it. The things he had done through the years had only enforced this ideal.

Aviel entered the large corner office unannounced and saw the *Kaliathie* (Lieutenant) of the man he was here to see look up from her desk. Her eyes grew wide as she came to her feet instantly. "*Koppentotz* Em'morr!" She exclaimed. "We... the *Inidra* (General) did not expect you today!"

Aviel held up his hand. "I know. Is he in?"

The young woman nodded. "He just returned from lunch. Shall I announce you?"

Aviel shook his head. "No... I will just go in. Thank you."

Aviel moved past her with a smile and through the archway into the large office with adjoining conference room and small bathroom. The office was truly massive, nearly as large as his own, which spoke to the importance of the man he was meeting today. One side of the office was nothing more than a floor to ceiling

window that offered just as breathtaking a view of the capital as his own office. The polished black granite desk was massive, with four chairs facing the front of the desk. Aviel moved to the window and admired the view of the northern part of the capital, and the wide river that cut through the northeastern corner. He could see dozens of *Vrrarhoinpa* adolescents diving to the surface of the river and then back up as they learned to hunt from high above.

“The last time you came to my office unannounced Aviel Em'morr, I ended up getting this job.” The deep voice spoke and Aviel turned with a smile.

The Darastrixi male before him was the embodiment of the soldiers he led in battle. He was easily over two meters tall and over two hundred pounds of nothing but muscle and bone.

Inidra Dytin Ueni.

The Supreme Commander of all Darastrixi military forces and a man who had been Aviel's friend since they were only five years old. Dytin was a year older than him, but since Aviel had nothing but sisters as he was growing, they had become like brothers. They had been part of each other's lives and in all the millennia that had passed since, neither of them had ever forgotten where they had come from or the bond they had. Dytin was wiping his hands with a towel, his dark green scales healthy and vibrant. Aviel noticed that his skin was slightly darker than the last time he had seen him and he correctly assumed his friend had been out with the men over these past weeks. Dytin hated to remain in this office for very long, and it was well known that he spent more time in the field with his men than he did in this office.

“And a very good visit it turned out to be.” Aviel told him. “I understand that our military forces have seen a forty-three percent increase in operational readiness and moral has soared since you took command.”

Dytin smiled as he tossed the towel onto the nearby couch. “I see you have been keeping track.” He said.

Aviel shrugged. “One only needs to look around to see that you have returned to our men and women under arms their pride. Something that had been sorely lacking since...”

Dytin nodded his head slowly in agreement. “It was a bad time for all of us my friend.” He spoke. He knew what Aviel meant. He had been one of the few senior officers among the Darastrixi who had refused to carry out the orders to capture and turn over their Pralor friends to the Scourge. Dytin was a soldier's soldier and betraying the friendships and trusts they had cultivated with the Pralor people was a stain upon their honor that would never be washed away as far as he was concerned. He moved across to stand in front of Aviel and placed his hand over his heart. Aviel did the same and they touched foreheads. “It is very good to see you Aviel.” He said with much warmth in his voice.

Aviel lowered his hand and gripped his arms. “The feeling is very mutual.” He said in reply. “How have you been? Where have you been?”

Dytin smiled and moved to his desk, motioning for Aviel to take one of the chairs in front of the massive desk. Unlike his predecessor, Dytin Ueni almost never sat at the desk. The man who had held this position before him had used the desk as a means to separate himself from those he commanded. Dytin had no intention of ever doing that. He pulled over the second chair as Aviel settled comfortably into another.

“I have been out among our Sand Strider Battalions in the Southern Desert.” Dytin told him. “They just graduated another class and their commander asked me to give the Ceremonial Promotion Blessing.”

Aviel's eyes grew bright. “Another Sand Strider Battalion?” He asked. “Dytin that is excellent news!”

Dytin nodded his head with a smile and got back to his feet. He moved to the counter behind his desk and poured them both half full glasses of Darastrixi wine. “It's a pleasure to speak with someone among the *Urkrisir Mamiss* who actually understands.” He said. “You need to come by more often.”

Aviel laughed as he took the glass Dytin offered him. “Perhaps so.” He said. “How is It'oru doing? Your children?”

“She is visiting her mother and father in Toreen. On the western coast.” Dytin answered. “Her youngest brother just took a wife and the ceremony was yesterday.”

“I'm sorry you couldn't be there my friend.” Aviel said.

Dytin waved his hand. “Believe me... four of her brothers have taken wives in the last century... and those parties more than made up for missing one.” He said with a smile. “And she has two more brothers still. I will go to them.”

“Your children?” Aviel asked. “I haven't seen them in several years.”

“And they miss the man they call uncle.” Dytin spoke. “My oldest boy Nalurn just took command of the Seventy-Ninth Regiment.” Dytin answered. “He will make a fine commander for them. Ashqua my oldest daughter has become a member of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu*. You should ask that question of It'oru, she is the only one who can keep track of what all eleven of them are doing at any one time.”

Aviel laughed heartily. “I do know the feeling. Nahko is the only one who can keep up with our children as well.” He said.

“How is Nahko?” Dytin asked. “Does she still insist you run every day?”

Aviel nodded his head with a smile. “The benefits of joining with a physician.” He said.

“Ah!” Dytin laughed. “I never did understand what she saw in you?”

Aviel grinned. “I am gifted.” He said.

Dytin chuckled. “More like deformed.” He stated as he leaned back in the chair. He sipped his wine and looked at Aviel. “So tell me my friend... what can I do for a member of the *Urlkrisir Mamiss*? Even one as ugly as you.”

Aviel laughed again and set his glass on the table to his side. He turned back to Dytin. “I am not here in an official capacity Dytin.” He said softly.

Dytin looked at him oddly. “I don't think I understand.” He said.

Aviel looked at the floor. “I need some advice from one I call my friend and that I trust. And I have some requests to make of that man.”

Dytin didn't flinch when Aviel spoke and when he finished he rose to his feet and moved to the archway quickly. “*Kaliathie* Ardal inform Colonel Oteg that we will need to reschedule for tomorrow when it is convenient for him.”

Aviel heard the female voice reply and then Dytin touched the wall beside the archway and twin doors rose from the floor, sealing the office. Dytin turned back to Aviel and moved back to his chair. He sat down and looked at his friend.

“Nearly one hundred thousand years we have been friends Aviel.” He spoke softly. “We are like brothers. Our wives are like sisters and our children have grown together through the decades. In all this time... you have never asked me for anything.”

Aviel shook his head. “I was the one who had all sisters Dytin.” He said. “It was I who have benefited more from our friendship.”

“And my father and brothers were *deevdruidiriika*!” Dytin hissed. “Why do you think fate put us together Aviel?”

Aviel nodded his head. “I am glad you feel this way. It is no less than what I have always felt.” He said.

“Tell me why you have come here Aviel.” Dytin asked. “Why has the man I call brother and who wields far more power and influence than I come here?”

“Dytin... do you remember when we were boys and we used to race around the *shripomn* (village) pretending that we were soldiers of *Zezhuanth*? The *Dahakoan* reborn?” Aviel asked.

Dytin smiled. “Like it was yesterday.” He answered. “And if I recall... we got into more trouble pretending to protect those in need than the original *Dahakoan*.”

Aviel laughed. “Yes we did.” He said. He looked at Dytin. “Do you still believe in them old friend. What they represent?”

“The *Sjir di Eluithol* predicts they will return one day.” Dytin said softly. “I have lived my life believing this. That will never change Aviel. Why?” (Scroll of Faith)

“Then you know of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*?” Aviel asked.

“Any true believer of the *Sjir di Eluithol* knows of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*.” Dytin answered him. “Why? Aviel... what is this all about?”

“My faith wavered for a time.” Aviel told him as he got to his feet. “Nahko saw to it that I kept to what I believed in my heart. What we believed. Nahko is a blessing that I cannot thank *wer ithquenti* enough for.”

Dytin got to his feet and faced his friend as he moved to the large window and looked out over the city. “Aviel... what is...?”

“Dytin... what if I told you the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is coming true.” Aviel said turning to meet his eyes. “That it is coming true right now. That it is taking place right now as we speak to one another.”

Dytin moved closer to him. “What... what do you mean?” He asked.

“The *Dahakoan* are among us once more my friend.” Aviel told him. “Just as *Zezhuanth* told us would happen in the Scrolls. I have seen two of them myself Dytin. Nahko is with them even now.”

“Aviel... you... do not jest with me.” Dytin told him.

“This is no *nibel* Dytin.” He said. “It is true.” (Game)

“Aviel... what...” Dytin stammered.

Aviel reached around behind him and pulled out the small holo emitter. He moved to Dytin's desk and set the emitter down and activated it. Dytin moved closer as he saw the image of Laren and Ladur appear. His eyes grew wide when he saw the shimmering black hair that flowed down from her head and well past her shoulders, but there was no mistaking she was Darastrixi. The soft green scales along her outer face and down her neck were unmistakable. As with all Darastrixi female, the center of her face around her mouth and nose and her eyes was soft skin, yet her skin had a much deeper tanned color to it. She was built slightly different as well with her chest being larger than normal Darastrixi that he had seen with moist and very full lips. The Holo Image Emitter blinked and then the image changed to that of a young man he had never seen before, a young man who was obviously not Darastrixi, and a large Darastrixi *Vrrarhoinpa* female with dark obsidian colored scales and bright golden eyes. She also looked very different somehow and Dytin could not place it right away. She was much larger than most *Vrrarhoinpa* females he had seen and much more muscular in nature.

The moving capture image showed her leaning over to press her large muzzle to the tall young man's cheek, her head dwarfing his own, but his arm coming up to wrap around her wide snout as much as he was able and his incredible azure colored eyes were almost glowing. The young man looked somehow familiar to him, as if he had met him before but once more Dytin could not place it. The image changed back to one of Laren and Ladur and Dytin looked up at Aviel.

“These are four of them Dytin.” Aviel told him quickly seeing the shocked look on his face. “Laren Ti'shara and Ladur. The young man is Androcles Leonidas... his *Vrrarhoinpa* is Elynth. We do not have images of the last two because Laren cannot transpose her images of them from her mind to the emitter. The last *Jiilhoinpa* is this one's younger brother, that much we do know.”

“I do not... Aviel... she has *nures!*” Dytin exclaimed. “Darastrixi don't have *nures!* And he is not Darastrixi!” (Hair)

Aviel nodded his head. “Yes... she has hair, but she is Darastrixi. I have seen her Dytin my friend... spoken with her. According to the *Sjir*... when the *Dahakoan* returned to us, they would bear the blood of each other within them. Nahko has already examined them for me and she has confirmed this. Laren has... she has the blood of her fellow *Dahakoan* within her Dytin Ueni. That is why she has hair... and fangs. *Kaldaka jeskic.*”

Dytin's eyes grew wide. “*Kaldaka?*” He gasped.

Aviel nodded his head. “The young man... he is Lycavorian Dytin. The third one... Dorian... he is also Lycavorian and equally Vampiric by his blood. They are brothers as I said. This one... Androcles... he and his *Vrrarhoinpa* have... they became joined together before he ever left the womb of his mother Dytin.”

Dytin's yellowish eyes grew wider. “They melded before he was born?” He gasped.

Aviel nodded his head. “This Elynth, she was only weeks old when this meld happened and Laren believes that they were speaking to one another even before she hatched. Just as she and Ladur were. I can only assume that this is also the case with the brother Dorian and his *Vrrarhoinpa* Ryner.”

Dytin turned back to the image. “She is unlike any *Vrrarhoinpa* I have seen. She is larger and more muscular Aviel.”

Aviel nodded again. “She is the product of crossbreeding my friend. The Ixen and Osear breeds.”

“The Ixen and Osear?” Dytin gasped. “They do not even like each other!”

Aviel nodded in agreement. “Somehow... the Darastrixi that we allowed the Pralors to seed on other worlds found themselves among the Lycavorian species. If what Laren tells me is true, they have become friends and family in many cases. Etheric bonds between *Vrrarhoinpa* and Lycavorian are many. Among Elves and vampires too. Our Darastrixi brethren have grown and prospered away from guidelines of the *Urllkrisir Mamiss*. That in and of itself will not make them happy.

“Lycavorian?” Dytin asked him looking at him quickly.

Aviel's eyes grew slightly wide. “You know of them? Their species?” He asked Dytin surprised. “How?”

Dytin nodded his head. "They are within the Defense Ministry's Database of species to be concerned with."

"What do you mean concerned with?" Aviel asked him.

"Species that are known to be extremely dangerous." Dytin told him calmly. "Species that should be avoided. In military reasoning and words... a species that could very well be our match in any conflict. If my memory serves me correctly... these Lycavorians can shift their forms to that of *Kaldaka* at will... and they are exceptionally hard to kill. They have some sort of regeneration properties within their body that allow them to survive wounds that would kill most other species. They are also very militant and according to the *Elbakiw Sulevfu*, they are unpredictable and barbaric."

Aviel shook his head. "The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* is wrong Dytin." He stated. "Laren has let me see a little of what she sees of them. What she senses of them. They are her *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*. And they are far from militant and barbaric." He stated.

"She can see them within her mind?" Dytin rasped.

Aviel nodded. "You know the skills of a *Dahakoan* just as I do. They can see each other within themselves. Detect each other from across great distances."

Dytin nodded his head. He looked at Aviel. "Aviel... this is not some kind of joke is it?" He asked quickly. "You are not playing a trick on me? How did these Lycavorians come to have *Vrrarhoinpa* among them from a Seed Mission? And the way she brushes against him... such familiarity... she acts if they are family."

"They are *Dahakoan*." Aviel said. "They *are* family. And so much more. The Lycavorian *Daar* is father to this Androcles and the other *Dahakoan* Dorian and he is also bonded to this one's father." He said motioning to the image of Elynth. "He is the largest *Vrrarhoinpa* I have ever seen in my life Dytin. This Androcles and his father, the *Daar* of their people... they are *Vrelvel Sargti*. Their Bonded Ones are *Vrelvel Sargti*."

"*Vrelvel Sargti*!" Dytin gasped. "Aviel... there have not been *Vrelvel Sargti* for centuries now! How..."

Aviel shook his head. "Everything I have told you up to now is the complete truth Dytin. Everything I will tell you going forward is the truth. I was... I was astonished Dytin. Shocked. Filled with disbelief." Aviel looked at the images on the holo emitter. "Until I met Laren. Met Ladur. They are barely more than children in our years Dytin, yet within their eyes and their minds they hold the wisdom of the ages." Aviel looked at him. "And also great power."

Dytin looked at him. "Power? What do you mean? Like the *Dahakoan* of old?"

Aviel nodded his head. "And far more." He replied. "Do you recall the Pralor Sumar? The very first and most powerful of the Pralor Praetorians?"

Dytin nodded his head. "I met him once here in the capital. He had come for a meeting with the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* in regards to the Scourge. He came asking for help from us. They refused him stupidly. The Praetorians and the Pralors ended up defeating them in the first war without our help."

Aviel nodded and reached out to switch the image to Androcles and Elynth and he froze it. "I give you one of the descendants of Sumar." He said. "Androcles Leonidas. He, his father, his brothers and sisters, they are all the descendants of Sumar. The how of it I do not know. The best of our knowledge states there is no record of Sumar ever taking a wife. We know his ship was lost with many he had chosen to train to reconstitute the Praetorian ranks after the first war but we never knew where his ship crashed. We thought him long dead. Until now that is. And his descendants wield the power of a Praetorian Dytin. Androcles, his father and three of his brothers. There may even be more of them."

Dytin's yellow tinted eyes were wide now. "Lycavorians with the power of a Praetorian!" He hissed softly. "The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *Urlkrisir Mamiss* will not like that one bit. The power of a Praetorian in a species as emotional and volatile as the Lycavorians will make them very nervous Aviel."

"The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* is wrong my friend. They are all wrong. Just as the Pralors were wrong about this species. I do not have an image of his brother Dorian or his Bonded One as I said, but they are also *Dahakoan*, and they possess the power and skills of a Pralor Praetorian my friend. A power that Laren and Ladur now possess." Aviel said.

Dytin's eyes grew wider still and he gazed at Aviel with open shock. "What?"

"They will bear the blood of their fellow *Dahakoan* within them." Aviel said trying to quote the scroll verbatim but knowing he didn't get it just right. "And by virtue of that... they will share the same talents and

power. I have seen it within Laren and Ladur. Seen them use it in tiny ways at my request. She is very emotional and guarded but she controls it extremely well as does Ladur. She almost killed one of Chalith's students for touching her in a way she thought inappropriate Dytin. In a way Lycavorians would consider inappropriate according to Dalis. There is no doubt in my mind Dytin."

"But the last of the *Dahakoan* died long before the Praetorians ever came to be!" Dytin spoke.

"Yes... that is what we have always thought. Did they truly die however?" Aviel asked softly. "What if they have lived on within others and guided the Praetorians in some manner."

Dytin looked at their images again and shook his head. "Aviel... do you... do you realize how insane this all sounds!"

Aviel smiled. "Only too well my friend." He answered. "Only too well."

"I want to meet them." Dytin spoke. "Both of them."

Aviel nodded his head again. "I assumed as much. Nahko and Dalis are with them now. They have been for almost two days."

"Dalis?" Dytin asked. "Dalis Sulryn?"

"You know him?" Aviel asked.

"I remember he was the worm who has coveted Nahko for centuries." Dytin hissed. "Why did you get him involved?"

"We needed information on these Lycavorians. He was able to provide it." Aviel told him. "He is at this moment securing a new download from our research probe reservoir. It will have a much more up to date history of these Lycavorians within the Alpha Quadrant. I may not like the man Dytin, but he is one of the most intelligent and thoughtful men I have ever met. And he knows what he is talking about when it comes to these Lycavorians. I need him. We need him."

"We?" Dytin looked at him.

"I have involved you when it was not my intent my old friend." Aviel said. "I will... I will understand if you wish to remove yourself now but..."

"Aviel... we are talking about the fulfillment of our most sacred prophecy and legend!" Dytin nearly shouted.

"A prophecy and legend that many no longer believe in." Aviel stated.

Dytin waved his hand dismissively. "Let them wallow in their foolishness!" He snapped. "Even as boys we believed Aviel... we have never wavered in that belief. Now you come to me and tell me what we always dreamed of as children is in fact coming true right before our very eyes! What do you think I will do!?"

"Dytin... this could very well put your family in danger. That is another reason why I came to you. My children and their families. Nahko and I need them protected. If you go down this road with me... then yours will be in just as much danger." Aviel told him.

"My sons and daughter adhere to the same ideals as It'oru and I do!" Dytin snapped. "As do their wives and families! There are many who still believe Aviel!"

Aviel nodded. "Perhaps... but I am not asking them to risk their very lives."

"Aviel do you know what the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* will do if they discover she and her *Vrrarhoinpa* exist? Do you realize what the Scourge will do?" Dytin asked. "The *Dahakoan* and the Praetorians were the only forces in the known galaxy that ever defeated them in battle! The *UrIkrisir Mamiss* will cower as they did last time when the Scourge come calling for her!"

Aviel nodded his head. "Only too well Dytin. Only too well." He answered. "That is why I have come to you. I have thought on this for nearly two days now. We have two months to get her off the planet. It's very possible the Scourge already have her name. Her birth is registered and this is the time when the Scourge come to chose their Interns that the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* allows."

Dytin looked at him keenly. "I do not like the way you say that Aviel." He stated. "That is a government program voted on by the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*. What do you know that I do not?"

"Something that will make your blood run cold and your anger to come crashing to the front." Aviel told him. "Just as it did with me."

Dytin looked at his friend and then moved to the chair. "Then perhaps you should fill me in." He said.

HIGH COVEN FRIGATE TOLERANCE

“...found it in a small bag.” Onera spoke as she handed the small transmitter to Dorian. “It is High Coven in manufacture... one of the tools used by the *Venorik Elghinn*. I do not know if they still use them.”

Dorian held the transmitter in his hand and looked at it for a long moment. He glanced up at Onera and Sheva who stood beside each other closely. “Sheva?”

Sheva nodded. “Onera would have more knowledge of this equipment than I based on who her parents are Dori.”

Dorian met Onera’s dark eyes. “You are sure *Duan Locarra*?” He asked.

Onera nodded her head without hesitation. “Yes. We have several dozen of these exact items on my mother’s ship. They are deactivated of course and she refuses to use them because they are...”

“They are what?” Dorian asked.

Onera focused her eyes on him. “She considers them vile and intrusive.” She answered. “She refuses to return to the ways of her old life Dorian. They are slotted for destruction but they just haven’t got around to it considering everything that has happened.”

Dorian nodded his head. “Who had it?” He asked.

Onera turned her head slightly and looked across the cargo bay where the five families who had been extracted with Cazar and Saba were all gathered and now under guard. “The blond one... third from the left. We discovered it in the bag she left the planet with.”

“It was sewn into a secret compartment on the inside of the bag.” Sheva spoke now. “We do not know if her parents are aware of it. My mother and father say Jitan and Niryn were the first to approach them. Their son is part of the program.”

“Where is he?” Dorian asked.

“Elear.” Sheva answered. “On the First Minister’s staff. My father says their son has been giving false or misleading information for years. He has married an elven female and they have two children.”

“Then why put her brother at risk?” Dorian asked softly.

“We will not know that until we confront her.” Onera answered.

Dorian nodded his head. “Yeah.” He said softly. “Let’s get this over with.” He moved around Sheva and Onera and strode toward where the civilians were.

Onera grabbed Sheva’s hand as she started to follow. “Sheva... what does... what does *Duan Locarra* mean?” She asked.

Sheva met her eyes and smiled. “Our flower.” She answered.

Onera’s eyes grew a little wider at this revelation. She blinked rapidly several times and looked at the floor quickly. She glanced back up at Sheva. “I... I thought I was hiding it so well.” She said softly.

Almost from the first moment she had seen Dorian, Onera had desired him. The attraction she had was unmistakable and when she had finally met them and seen Sheva that attraction had encompassed her as well. She had fantasized many times about them doing so many wonderful things in bed and the pleasure they could give to each other. Onera was not shy, but she knew Dorian and Sheva were newly married and did not know if they could even feel the same way. He was gorgeous to her, as was Sheva, and both of them could and did cause her to become very aroused just being around them.

Sheva stepped closer to her, pressing her petite form to Onera’s slightly taller but no less lush body. “That is not something you can hide Onera.” She said softly. “We... we might have missed it at first... but not anymore.”

“Sheva I do not wish...” Onera began to speak.

Sheva reached up and placed her index finger to Onera’s succulent lips. “Don’t.” She said. “Don’t deny or fight it. We are not going to. Whatever happens between us, if anything, then it will happen yes? We are still discovering our love for one another Onera... but if that love includes you... we are not going to deny it.”

Onera looked at her with bright dark eyes. “I wish it.” She said. “So very much.”

Sheva took her hand. “Then let’s not fight it and let things progress as they were meant to. Right now we have a mission. We can discover what the three of us feel for each other when we are in a safer environment.”

“Dorian?” She asked softly.

Sheva smiled and let the answer come out of her without hesitation. “Onera... you are... you are delicious looking. To both of us. So very... so very beautiful and sexy. I find myself wanting to taste you over and over and that is something that I have never felt or experienced. My love for Dorian made me leave all my misgivings in the past. You are meant to be with us. Part of our lives and we part of yours. That is not something that we are going to deny, not now, not ever.”

“That... that will make me very happy.” Onera said softly.

Sheva grinned. “Me as well.” She said. “And believe me when I tell you... Dorian has enough stamina for both of us... and there is more than enough of him for both of us.”

Onera blushed even under her exotic skin color. “Truly?” She asked.

Sheva smiled as she took her hand tighter and began to direct them across the cargo bay. “Oh yes... more than enough.” She stated. “And he is so very talented with his tongue.”

Onera’s eyes went a little wider. “His tongue?” She gasped.

Sheva laughed. “Well... he is half wolf you know.” Sheva told her. “And in case you haven’t noticed... none of Andro’s wives go anywhere without very large smiles on their faces. Or the Queens for that matter. It must be part of their animal nature.”

Onera couldn’t help it and she shared Sheva’s soft laughter with anticipation and want. Her mother was right... coming here... being among them... she was discovering many things about herself that she would not have discovered. And Onera was looking forward to every bit of it.

Dorian had the other four families drawn away from Jitan and Niryn as his team moved a little closer, their daughter staring at them with real fear in her eyes. She knew that she had been discovered and she seemed completely terrified.

“What is the meaning of this?” Jitan barked out as he looked at Dorian. He saw Cazar and Saba moved forward now as well. “Cazar... what is going on?”

“I could ask you the same thing my friend.” Cazar replied. “Perhaps you should tell us.”

“What do you mean?” Jitan barked. “Why... why are you treating us this way?”

Dorian held out the transmitter and looked at him. “We found this among your daughter’s possessions sir.” He said respectfully as was his nature. “This is a *Venorik Elghinn* transmitter. A *Venorik Elghinn* that has been broadcasting our location to several warships since shortly after we left the colony. Warships that are now waiting at our rendezvous with my brother, including a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought. Perhaps you could fill us in on the details.”

“What do you mean?” Jitan hissed. “I don’t know what you are talking about! I have never seen this before!”

“Your daughter does sir.” Dorian spoke.

Jitan looked at his daughter on his right with wide eyes. “Meyla? What... what is he talking about?”

“I don’t know!” Meyla exclaimed too quickly.

“I would come clean if I was you.” Deion spoke from the side. “If not... we’ll just vent you and your family out the airlock!”

“Meyla!” Niryn shouted. “What are they talking about?”

“He... he said he loved me!” Meyla sobbed openly now. “He...”

“What?” Jitan barked.

“Meyla... are you talking about that officer who came to the colony?” Niryn asked her quickly.

Meyla nodded her head. “He said he loved me!” She exclaimed. “He said I should keep that thing and contact him if anything unusual happened. He said he would protect us! That we would be together!”

Sheva moved forward and squatted in front of her now. She stared at her for a long moment. “You are pregnant aren’t you?” She asked softly.

Meyla looked at her with tear streaked eyes. “He said he would... that we would be together and my family would not be hurt! That my... my brother would be safe! That we would raise our baby together!”

Sheva looked at her. "He lied to you Meyla." She said softly. "He lied to you. The ships that you contacted are waiting at our rendezvous in order to destroy us. All of us. Including you and your family as well as your baby."

Nara and Onera moved up beside Sheva now as Niryn quickly moved to embrace her child. "She is not lying Sheva." Nara spoke first putting her hand on Sheva's shoulder. "Her scent is entirely truthful."

Sheva nodded her head slowly and looked at Dorian quickly. She turned back to her. "What did you tell them Meyla?" She asked softly.

Meyla looked at her from her mother's arms. "That we... that we had gotten off the planet." She stammered. "That we were meeting with... with more Lycavorian people. Very important people. I thought... I thought he would be happy! That he would come for us!"

"Not who?" Dorian asked now.

Meyla shook her head quickly. "I didn't... I didn't know at the time." She said. "I sent only a short... a short burst transmission when we got on board and then left the machine on so they could... so they could find us. Faren told me... he told me I would be saving my family! Our family!"

Sheva watched as she buried her face in her mother's chest as realization of what she had done and the reality of everything hit her. She slowly rose back to her feet and turned to look at Dorian. She watched him look at the *Durcunusaan* guard who had their weapons out ready to act and motion with his head. Both men lowered their weapons instantly. He turned back to Sheva.

"We can use that Dori?" Sheva said.

Dorian nodded for he was thinking the same thing. "Yes we can."

"She has betrayed all of us!" The male voice barked from behind them where the other families had been moved. "Kill her!"

Dorian turned and saw the vampire man who had tried to proposition Sheva as he moved in front of his family. His mother was trying to pull him back but he yanked his arm free of her grasp.

"They know where we are!" Lanus Harac shouted. "Kill her and destroy the transmitter!"

"Lanus be quiet!" His father hissed angrily.

"I will not be quiet!" Lanus shouted. "She has betrayed us! We are all going to die now because of her!"

"No one is going to die!" Dorian spat. He turned to Nara. "*Arande*... you and Onera take her to Medical." He spoke. "Make sure the baby is healthy and that she is well cared for. This is not her fault and I have no intention of holding her responsible for the actions of a *nubous tukannupae* who was only using her from the outset."

Sheva moved up next to Dorian as Nara and Onera helped Niryn get her daughter to her feet so they could do as Dorian wanted. Onera could see the relief on her mother's face and she glanced at Dorian. She was learning so much about him just from his actions. She and her mother would have done the same thing Onera knew. Meyla was the innocent here. She had been used and manipulated from the outset by this vampire officer.

"You can't just let her go!" Lanus screamed again.

Dorian didn't even look at him. "I can... and I will." He stated. "She is the victim in this."

Sheva nodded her head slowly in agreement as Deion moved closer to them. "What's the plan *fervon*?" Deion asked.

Lanus would not leave it alone and he shook away his mother's hands once more and moved up to Dorian. "You can't just dismiss what she has done!" He screamed. "Her actions will get all of us killed! We can not fight a *BLOOD REVERENCE*! It will have fighters and soldiers! We..."

Dorian looked at him. "This is not your concern." He stated calmly. "We'll handle this."

"Like you have done so far?" Lanus barked. He looked at Sheva. "I told you Sheva! I told you these half breeds were not smart enough. You are just as stupid to listen to him now when we have ..."

Sheva began to move towards him, her anger flaring but Dorian Leonidas was much quicker and now much angrier.

It was at this very moment where Sheva got a glimpse of the full power of her handsome young husband. He was three hundred plus years her junior yes, but that thought no longer even entered her mind. Dorian had the memories and experiences of three lifetimes within his body and calling him a child was the stupidest thing anyone could have done. Sheva had never seen him angry before, not even a hint of that emotion had ever leaked out in his actions or his words to anyone. She had heard many stories and rumors from among

the *Durcunusaan* of the famous anger that his father and brothers possessed and how they had always kept it very tightly under control. It was the anger of an Alpha wolf unleashed and it was not a pleasant experience for anyone to be the focus of that savage anger.

Sheva witnessed it now for the very first time in her life.

Lanus's words were cut off as Dorian's large hand closed around his throat and lifted him completely off the deck. With combined wolf and vampire blood flowing in his veins, Dorian's raw physical strength was more than a match for anyone except a very well trained pureblood of either species. When coupled with his growing Etheric power as a Praetorian, the combination was very lethal. Now Dorian allowed that anger to flow through him and his multicolored eyes narrowed to slits and were almost glowing as his hand cut off Lanus's words. His large fangs burst from his gums, the dual set of wolf fangs unique to his bloodline giving him a horrifying visage to any who saw them. With a growl of pure hate and anger Dorian lifted Lanus up and slammed him to the unyielding deck in a single, smooth and effortless motion. The sound of his body impacting the deck was very loud in the cargo bay and even Sheva winced at the sound. Dorian dropped to one knee beside Lanus as he rammed him into the deck, his fangs bared and his wolf and vampire eyes so very frightening to look upon. Lanus's groan of intense pain was easily heard and even as his parents moved to try and intercede, Deion was suddenly in front of them and bringing them up short.

Dorian glared at Lanus beneath him, his hand almost crushing the life out of the arrogant pureblood vampire. He felt his power flowing through him, coursing through his blood and feeding off his emotions. What his father had felt when he was rescuing their second Elven mother. Now he felt coursing through him what his brother had felt on that Icalro Alliance planet when he was rescuing Caliria. What his father had felt when he was rescuing their second Elven mother. His Praetorian power fueled by his passion. For a split second Dorian wanted to crush the very life from this man, but his sense of honor and duty held that last chain in place securely. He snarled at Lanus, the very wolf like growl deep and menacing, as he lowered his face closer to the wide eyed Lanus.

"You walk down a road you do not want to be on little man!" Dorian snarled at him. "I have the blood of my father and my mother within my veins, blood purer than any you have flowing in your egotistical body! Wolf blood! Vampire blood! You are a fool in a man's body! And you are a coward!" Dorian pressed his hand tighter and Lanus gagged for air as he tried to pry the vice like grip from around his throat. "If you ever utter another disrespectful word to my wife and mate, they will be the last words you speak in this lifetime! I will rip your tongue from your useless and foul mouth and tear open your belly with my claws. I will watch as you bleed out in front of me and then I will spear your body on a pike and leave it for all to see!"

"*Fervon.*" Deion spoke as he shifted closer to Dorian. Sheva looked at him with wide eyes and was stunned when she did not see worry on his face. She saw only acceptance and agreement for what his brother was doing. Sheva understood at that very moment what she meant to Dorian. What being Dori's wife and mate meant. Dorian had held back his wild and instinctive wolf nature earlier in the Mess Lounge because he knew what Sheva was capable of. He knew that she could handle Lanus with ease. But now Lanus had infringed too much. Now he had insulted her and that was more than Dorian's wolf blood and honor could tolerate. And when combined with the cold and calculating blood of his mother's vampire nature, it made Dorian one of the most dangerous men she had ever been close to.

And he was all hers.

"Do not test me further you sick excuse for a man!" Dorian growled. "You who let your father and mother bear all the risks while you benefit from their actions. From the risks your brother deals with every day of his life! I despise your kind. The lechers among us. Those who let others do the deeds that you feel are beneath you and then complain when they might put you in jeopardy!"

"*Fervon...* either kill him or let him up." Deion hissed. "We don't have time for this fool!"

"Deion!" Sheva exclaimed in shock.

Deion looked at her evenly. "For his actions towards you earlier he would already be dead if we were anywhere else Sheva. You know that." Deion told her calmly.

Sheva glanced at Dorian and knew Deion was right. She was a Leonidas now and there was nothing more sacred to them than the women they loved. Sheva realized just how very close to death's door Lanus was at this moment. She reached out tentatively and placed her hand on Dorian's shoulder.

“Dori... release him my love.” She said softly even as she felt an odd excitement and arousal at how Dorian was reacting to Lanus’s insult of her. How he was defending her honor.

Dorian didn’t look away from Lanus as Sheva’s touch caused much of the anger within him to dissipate quickly. “Consider yourself lucky scum!” He growled. “But you will remain in your quarters until we are safely back within the Union. If you do not... I might forget that we are trying to save your unthankful ass and tear out your throat!”

Dorian released his throat and Lanus rolled over to gasp desperately for breath as Sheva pulled Dorian up and away from him. “Mark my words *igord!*” Dorian hissed savagely. “If I ever see your face again I will kill you! And if you ever gaze upon Sheva again with anything but respect in yours eyes I will remove your ability to see for the remainder of your years!”

“Dori. Look at me.” Sheva spoke as she drew him close to her and pressed her lithe frame against his trying to draw his attention. She knew this would work and Dorian instantly looked at her with those beautiful multicolored eyes of his. “We have bigger issues than this fool to deal with my husband.” She stated.

Deion reached down and grabbed Lanus by the back of his collar none to gently. He hauled him sputtering to his feet and pushed him gently towards his parents. “Please take him sir.” He spoke to Lanus father respectfully. “Before his words and actions cause you to lose a son.”

Lanus’s father didn’t hesitate and he roughly grabbed Lanus by his shoulders. He began to drag him away, hissing at him angrily under his breath while his mother was chewing on his other ear. Deion smiled and looked at his brother. Sheva was holding Dorian’s arms and staring into his face while Cazar and Saba looked on with wide eyes.

Cazar had a grin on his face a mile wide and he looked at Deion. “Oh I like your brother Deion Leonidas. I like him a lot!”

“Cazar!” Saba said shoving her husband in his side but doing so with a wide smile of her own.

Deion chuckled and looked back at Dorian. “Can we finish this up quickly?” He said. “I would very much like to meet that young woman we saw in the transmission with Andro before I get too old.”

Dorian tore his eyes from Sheva and looked at his brother with a smile. “I noticed she caught your attention.” He said casually. This caused Sheva to shake her head in disbelief. As quickly as it had come, it was gone, leaving her with the memory of his actions but nothing except love and adoration in her heart and soul.

“Did you see her eyes *fervon?*” Deion exclaimed. “They were like shining stars in a dark sky! And the color... blue/green. I could immerse myself in those eyes for weeks!”

“Not to mention her other attributes?” Dorian spoke.

“Stop it!” Sheva exclaimed. “Both of you stop it! We have work to do!” Dorian leaned over quickly and nuzzled her cheek and the side of her ear causing Sheva to close her eyes in obvious delight. “Dori... stop it!” She gasped in delight.

Dorian slipped his arm around her waist and looked at Deion. “We must get this info to Yuri and Andro.” He said. “If I know our brother he will be planning something totally off the wall and unexpected.”

Deion nodded his head. “No bet here.” He stated. “He is probably planning for us to assault the dreadnought and take it over.”

Dorian chuckled as he pulled Sheva close to him and they began to leave the cargo bay.

Saba looked at her husband. “I do not want to leave her again Cazar.” She said softly. “Not now. Not after seeing what she has found.”

Cazar met his wife’s eyes. “I don’t think we will have to my wife.” He said. “If I had to guess... Dorian won’t allow us to. Come... let us see if there is anything we can do.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

SPARTA'S WRATH

FORTY-TWO MINUTES UNTIL RENDEZVOUS

QCR ROOM

“Armen built this?” Murano asked as he turned the device over in his hands for the third time.

Andro nodded his head. “He finished it two hours ago. Well... the Drones finished it. A lot sooner than he had expected, but with the Drones helping it went a lot quicker than he had projected.”

“Your father did not tell me that this was the problem you would be facing Androcles.” Murano said softly as he set the instrument down on the table. “He told me about this Yuri and what took place with your sister. I knew Xaxon’s essence was involved but I did not...”

Andro nodded before Murano continued. “To be honest... I don’t think he ever thought we would be as close as we are... this soon. It seems almost too easy really... but things have been going Moran’s way for a while now. Maybe it’s our turn. And I for certain can’t leave him behind with both my father and I gone. Those of my brothers who remain would act in a certain way. He might be able to take advantage of that. We can’t allow it.” Andro answered as he moved to the counter of his Ready Room and poured two mugs of his mother’s coffee.

His Ready Room was massive; fully one third the size of his quarters, and it was situated directly off the port side of the bridge. He had complained at first of the size until Armen told him he had intentionally made it this large based on Andro’s propensity for working very long hours and having a shift of his own on the *SCIMITAR*. There was a small QCR room off one side of the Ready Room and the main room with conference table that could seat a dozen men and women. His actual office was not very large, but he would not lack for anything. He turned back to Murano and held out the coffee mug.

“What do you mean?” Murano asked him as he took the mug. “A certain way.”

Andro met his eyes. “I know it is not the way of your Praetorians sir... but with both Dorian and Deion with me... the possibility of Moran surviving an encounter and living rises quite a bit.”

“I don’t understand.” Murano said.

“My brothers Resumar and Arrarn are formidable warriors Murano, don’t get me wrong. They are very skilled and exceptionally well trained and I would not hesitate to go into battle with either of them at my side. I have before and I will again.” Andro told him. “But for lack of a better way to explain it... they both lack the killer instinct of a pureblood wolf. They are half elf, and their elf blood will always play a role in the decisions they make. Besides... Resumar has his hands full helping Pian and Jalersi and needs to remain focused there. Pian’s people have grown to trust and accept him. Arrarn... when push comes to shove... Arrarn will protect Narice and Toria above all else. Dealing with Moran, Dante and Xaxon is not something they need to be concerned with.”

“Dorian is not a pureblood wolf.” Murano said.

Andro shook his head in agreement. “No... but he is a combination of pureblood wolf and pureblood vampire. He has the killer instinct from both sides of his blood. He may lack the raw power and experience of a pureblood from either species but he is more than a match for anyone of either species with his combined blood and Praetorian power.”

“Your intent is to kill them then?” Murano said softly. “This Moran and his son Dante. The one Xaxon infects with his essence.”

Andro didn’t blink. “Moran I am going to give to Yuri and Pa’cour.” He said honestly. “They have more right to judge him than any of us. He has caused Yuri far more pain and humiliation in her life than anyone should endure.”

“And Dante?” Murano asked again.

“Dante Moran... he belongs to me.” Andro told him plainly. “I’m going to inflict upon him every moment of pain and agony he made my sister suffer Murano. No matter how small. Then I am going to take his life. When I do... Xaxon will appear just as he did when he left Yuri’s body. He will not find so willing or unprepared a host this time however.”

“His power is nothing to dismiss Androcles.” Murano warned him quickly. “He may not have been an equal to your grandfather Sumar in terms of raw power and skill... but he was far more devious and cruel.”

Andro nodded his head in recognition of his words. “I am not dismissing his power. That is why I am glad you are going to be here.” He said. “That is why I am showing you this. You know more about him than anyone living and that knowledge will be needed.”

“If he has been doing this for so long... influencing and controlling members of Yuri’s family as he has been, then there has to be a reason. I never did anything unless it could benefit him.” Murano said. He was quiet

for a long moment and then looked at Andro. "I did not agree with his punishment. He was far too dangerous in my opinion. For what he had done he should have been executed and left to rot. Sumar... he was Sumar's brother and no matter what he had done I believe Sumar still loved him in some way."

"They were brothers. Twins." Andro said softly. "I know the bond twins have. I see it with Deion and Nara and Calyb and Retta. That bond is not easily dismissed. One only has to look at my father and uncle. No matter what he has done, Pusintin is still my father's brother. I will not allow him to stain his own honor to do what he knows he must do."

Murano looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"I have taken steps to insure that my father will not lower himself to the level of having to take the life of his brother." Andro said. "I will not have him carry that the rest of his life." Andro waved his hand slightly. "It is already in motion and not something that concerns us right now. When we confront Moran and Dante, Xaxon will be our concern."

Murano looked back at the device on the desk. "We never thought to make such a thing." He said softly.

"It was never our intent to not tell you sir." Andro told him. "I did not know you would be staying or that this would be happening while you and Lady Mari were here."

Murano hissed softly in disgust and waved his hand dismissively. "You will stop with the formalities Androcles. We are Praetorians. We do not refer to each other with such formality. It was never our way and I am happy to see that your father continues this." He looked at Andro intently as he sipped from the mug. "We are brothers and sisters in arms." He spoke again as he lowered the mug. Even he, someone who had never had this liquid known as coffee before, had grown very fond of Aricia's blend over the last days and weeks. The liquid was rich and smooth and when served hot or cold, it was one of the finest things he had ever tasted. Kesyla and Mari had both sworn their love for it and gotten him to begin drinking it. "We are comrades and friends. And in some cases even family. You and your father and brothers may be a new breed of Praetorians, but you have not changed that sacred bond we all have."

Andro moved to his chair and motioned for Murano to sit. "You seemed to have given this a lot of thought." He said.

Murano settled into the chair but shook his head. "Not initially no." He said. "I was... I wanted the old Praetorians back when I first sensed your father was such. I wanted it to be the way it was all those years ago. Helen... once she dressed me down in front of others I began to see so much differently. With Mari and Kesyla so enraptured by your people, and after seeing what your uncle showed me about your father, I could not help but realize that things are not like they were. That times are different now."

"You know my Uncle Daniel has taken Kesyla as his wife and mate?" Andro asked.

Murano nodded his head in agreement. "I suspected as much. The signs were there. She was quite taken by him before your aunts arrived and once they did it grew even more. More so than I have ever seen her taken by anyone and there have been many young men who have tried to sway her favor through the years. The emotion and feeling was returned quite openly on their part for her as well."

"What did my uncle Daniel show you?" Andro asked him.

Murano shifted in the chair slightly to get more comfortable. "He showed me a different side to your father. One that I do not believe many people see."

Andro smiled then. "Uncle Daniel showed you him alone with my mothers... didn't he?" He asked.

Murano nodded. "I have never seen anything like it." Murano told him honestly. "Even as far away as we were to keep him from smelling us, the peace that surrounded your father was unlike anything I have ever seen. He was... he was dotting over your mothers like they were precious charms... and his Etheric resonance was wrapped around them like a thick blanket. I imagine if I was wolf I would have sensed his wolf aura wrapped around them as well. They are... your father and mothers are interwoven in as intricate a tapestry as I have ever felt."

"My mothers are his source of strength and calm." Androcles told him. "Each of them hold a piece of his heart and soul within their grasp. Many do not understand it... some have tried to change that... much to their painful demise."

Murano looked at Andro. "As I sense that Sadi and Ne'Veha and your other wives and mates do the same with you." He said.

Andro smiled and nodded. "Yes."

“I believe Sumar knew exactly what he was doing when he made the decisions he did concerning your people. He saw something within the Lycavorians that no one else ever did. He saw something within your hearts and souls and culture that he embraced and made his own. It was something we as a people never stopped to try and discover.” Murano told him softly. “I believe he showed it to Wayonn and the others aboard his ship and that is why they chose the path they did. It is difficult at times, but I will no longer view events through eyes that are forty-thousand years old. I will have faith in what my friend Sumar did and I will alter my own perceptions and begin to see and experience things as they are. As I do this I will begin to understand what he did and why. I have already seen some of it with your father and mothers and the people surrounding them. In time I will understand all of it.”

“We are not that complex a people Murano.” Andro spoke. “I guarantee most of us would much rather sit at home and worship our wives and mates and play with our children. Work at normal jobs and live in peace. There are forces in the universe that will not allow us that. So we fight. We fight in the hope that our children do not have to. Because of the Spartan culture and blood within most of us, it just so happens that we are very good at it. It is a profession to those of us who serve, one we take seriously and dedicate ourselves to, but a profession nonetheless. We have other skills, education and trades, but fighting is all most of us have ever known. And we take it seriously. Many others form their perceptions of us based on that one skill.”

Murano nodded. “So I have noticed.” He said. “That is why many view your species as militant and...”

“Barbaric?” Andro said with a smile.

Murano nodded again. “It is not the mentality that anyone who spends any time among you will have Androcles. At least those with half a brain.”

Andro chuckled. “Good. Because I have some questions for you.” Andro said. “Questions that I think only you can answer.”

Murano nodded. “My knowledge is your knowledge.” He said. “Just as I told your father. It is what Praetorians do.”

“There is a ship coming to rendezvous with us.” Andro told him. “I had Armen dispatch one of our corvettes yesterday evening. It is going to my father’s location and returning with a passenger. A very different passenger.”

“I’m not following.” Murano said.

Andro leaned forward and set his coffee on the desk. “Tell me what you know of the species called the Darastrixi.”

Andro saw Murano’s eyes narrow and flash with anger which he quickly got back under control.

“Where did you hear that name?” He asked. “How do you know about them?”

“I don’t know about them.” Andro answered. “That is why I am asking you. My father was able to tell me a little of what you shared with him in regards to them. When he asked for me to send the ship he was very vague in details about why. My father is never vague with me about something unless he does not understand it, or he does not trust it. This is not something he does not trust or he would have warned me which means he does not fully understand what is happening. I want to hear from you.”

Murano shook his head. “My answers would be partly biased Androcles.” He said. “I do not know if I can be objective.”

“Indulge me.” Andro said.

Murano looked at him evenly. “The Darastrixi are... they are the origin species that all dragons descend from. Even those among your people.”

“So they do have a homeworld?” Andro asked softly. “I have always wondered about that. Where they came from? How they came to be among us?”

Murano nodded as he settled into the chair more comfortably. “Their planet is on the far side of what was once Pralor space. A massive planet really... easily three or five times the size of your world Earth. Trillions of people. They were scientists and researchers like the Pralor people for the most part. Peaceful and accepting, though rigid in their culture and traditions and much of what they believed. We were friends with them dating back as many years as I can remember. They allowed us to use what they call the *Vrrarhoinpa* breed of dragons, like those among your people, as part of two different Seed Missions many thousands of years ago. The second breed, or type if you will, are the *Jiilhoinpa*. Those who walk upright like us. Those who look

like us. How the *Vrrarhoinpa* came to be among your people I do not know. I imagine only Arzoal knows the entire story... and she will not share.”

Andro nodded in agreement. “My father and I know some of it but I also believe even the Elder Mother does not know everything. However... you are correct in that we guard their history viciously.”

“Yes... I have noticed this.” Murano said. “Those *Vrrarhoinpa* with us we discovered as we were fleeing the Scourge at the end of the war with any survivors we could gather. I believe Arzoal knew where to send Teniri, at least in the general area, because she was once Pralor and she would have been privy to such information as a senior member of the Science Convention. That is how the others of Arzoal’s Seed Mission were able to return to us on Artaaya. Their ship was able to home in on the many Pralor power signatures of those ships with us and finally return to us. When they arrived on Artaaya Teniri was made Elder Mother by those Darastrixi among the Pralor people for most of their Elders had been killed during our escape.”

“The tone of your voice tells me that you don’t hold the Darastrixi species in very high regard.” Androcles said.

Murano shook his head. “I know... and it should not be that way. Not completely.” He said. “At the end of the Second Scourge War, when we knew all was lost, the Scourge went to the Darastrixi leaders on their world and gave them an ultimatum. They had already destroyed our homeworld and were essentially just mopping up the last pockets of my people who had not escaped with us. They told the Darastrixi to hand over every Pralor they were hiding or when they finished with us, they would come for them. We knew many of our people had escaped to the Darastrixi homeworld to hide and the Darastrixi diligently hid them and protected them for centuries. For many thousands of our refugees.”

“I can only assume from your reaction that the Darastrixi leaders accepted this so called ultimatum?” Andro asked.

Murano nodded sadly. “Almost fifteen million Pralor civilians were on the Darastrixi homeworld by the time the demand was delivered. They had taken refuge there. Thousands of families. The Darastrixi would never turn them away. When the Scourge made their ultimatum it was not pleasant from what I understand. This directive caused many of the Darastrixi people to rebel and fight back against their leaders. Thousands of Darastrixi deaths were the result. We had forged many valued friendships with the Darastrixi as I said. Many of them died fighting to protect those Pralors on their world. It took nearly five hundred years to complete, but in the end the Scourge got what they wanted, even against the will of their people.”

“Did no one voice their outrage at this?” Andro asked.

“The Darastrixi people are very grounded in the belief that their leaders are always right.” Murano told him. “Our history with them dates back many hundreds of thousands of years as I said, but it has always been like that. We never understood it, we considered it unhealthy, but we accepted it. The only ones who openly opposed the Scourge demands were among those they called the *Doraanar*. Their religious elders or prophets, however you wish to refer to them. In order to silence them, the Scourge demanded that all *Doraanar* be seized and handed over to them as well. From what I understand many followed this order blindly, but many others did not. They were all butchered by the Scourge eventually.”

“Why?” Andro asked him. “What possible threat to the Scourge were religious men and women?”

Murano shook his head. “I do not know.” He answered. “Perhaps they feared the extent of knowledge the *Doraanar* had. Perhaps they felt the *Doraanar* would one day oppose them. The Scourge have never been predictable and it became worse when Xaxon’s Mage took her place as their Queen after he betrayed and conducted his vile experiments on her.”

Andro sat back in his chair and was silent for a long moment. “Well... they didn’t kill all of them.” He told him finally. “The passenger my father is sending is a female Darastrixi.” He said seeing Murano’s eyes go wide. “She is the Ancient One that the dragons among the Pralor people have protected for millennia.”

“She is... she is Darastrixi?” Murano almost yelled.

Andro nodded. “My father was not able to tell me a lot. I don’t think he knew a whole lot to be honest, which goes back to his vague request as I told you. But she referred to herself as *Doraanar*.”

Murano came to his feet. “She is a *Doraanar*!” He gasped in disbelief. “She is coming here? Why?”

Andro shook his head. “My father said... he said I would discover it when she arrived. But what he did know was that it has to do with the dreams I have had my entire life.”

Murano returned to his chair quickly. “Dreams? What dreams?”

“Ever since I was a small boy.” Andro told him. “I think they first came when I was only four. Elynth has had them too. Both of us.”

“Your father... he tried to describe to me the extent of your bond with Elynth.” Murano said. “It seems much deeper than the one he shares with Torma or your mother with Isheeni. Deeper than any I have seen so far among your people.”

Andro nodded his head. “We have never been able to figure it out either.” He said. “And believe me... we have tried.” Andro sipped his coffee. “Elynth and I... it is almost as if we are each other. If her scales itch, my skin itches. We see with each other’s eyes. We... we have learned through the years how to use this to our advantage, but we have never been able to understand it. The dreams continued on and off our entire lives until the nightmares of Alba Tau chased them away. They returned when Dorian was born however. Now that they have returned they are much more powerful and focused. And Dorian and Ryner are having the same dreams now as well.”

“Dorian is a Praetorian.” Murano said. “There is no doubt even with his duel blood. It could be a residual resonance from having you so close by.”

“You know... you know that I was fully aware while my mother still carried me in her womb? That I bonded with Elynth before I ever left that womb.” Andro asked him.

Murano nodded his head. “Yes.” He answered. “Your father told me.”

“What most don’t know is that we were bound together before she even hatched from her egg Murano.” Andro told him softly.

Murano looked at him with wide eyes. “Does your father know that you and Elynth were bonded before she even hatched? They believe... they believe this happened only after she joined this life.”

Andro shook his head. “We... we made the decision to never tell anyone. Sadi and my mates know now... and Elynth’s mate Anthar... but no one else. My father may suspect now, perhaps the Feravomir and the Elder Mother... but we have never confirmed it for anyone.”

Murano looked at him intently. “You honor me with this trust Androcles.” He said softly.

“We have always tried to discover the meaning and reason for this.” Andro said. “We have not succeeded and we no longer care.”

“I will tell you what I told your father. There is only one other instance in all my years where I have ever heard of this happening. A child becoming aware while in the womb of his mother.” Murano spoke.

“With my grandfather Sumar.” Androcles said softly.

Murano nodded his head. “Yes.” He said. “This did not occur with Xaxon and I believe this is one of the reason he hated his brother. Many of us attributed this information to the reason why Sumar was the most powerful among us. Why he could do things we could not.”

“Could there be another reason?” Andro asked.

“Another reason why he was like this?” Murano asked him. “I do not know. Like you... Sumar gave up trying to understand it after a time.”

Andro met his eyes now. “Dorian became fully aware while still in my mother Isabella’s womb Murano. And he bonded with Ryner before he was born. Just as I did with Elynth. Ryner was older than Dorian unlike Elynth and I... but they bonded before Dori was born, right in front of my mothers and Arzoal.”

“Your... your father did not tell me this.” Murano said softly looking at him with his blue eyes.

Andro chuckled softly and then sipped his coffee before he continued. “Well... it’s not exactly something we broadcast to all those that know us. We can not explain it and how are we suppose to enlighten others when we cannot explain it to ourselves. We did not want others to think of me or Elynth as... as oddities to be concerned with. The same applies to Dori now as well... and very few outside of our family know the truth.”

“And again you and your father have trusted me with this knowledge.” Murano said with much respect.

“We are hoping you could help us determine what it all means.” Andro said.

“Such things are beyond me Androcles.” He said honestly. “As I said... even Sumar did not understand it.”

“Then perhaps you could tell me who or what a *Dahakoan* is?” Andro asked.

Murano looked at him with wide eyes once more. “*Dahakoan*?” He gasped. “Where... where did you hear that word?”

“It’s been in our dreams.” Andro answered. “Until recently we have never been able to hear it clearly. Now we can... and somehow we know what it means. And we understand the language it is spoken in.”

“It means Dragonkin.” Murano said with a nod. “It is the Darastrixi language.”

“I assumed as much. What is a *Dahakoan*?” Andro asked.

Murano shook his head slowly. “I only know the meaning of a few words of their spoken language. Much like the Lycavorian language it is not easy to learn. I do not know much about the *Dahakoan*, only that they were an order of Darastrixi warriors much like the *Durcunusaan* are to your people. The elite of the elite. The very finest that the Darastrixi people could field. They were never defeated in battle. Any battle. At least that is what I have been told.” Murano shook his head. “To the best of my knowledge the last of them died out well over a million years ago. They are revered among the Darastrixi people though... much like my people placed the Praetorians on a pedestal.”

“That’s all you know?” Andro asked.

Murano looked at him. “I’m afraid so.” He answered. “I tried to avoid the Darastrixi for the most part. I always thought in many ways they suffered from the same arrogance as my people.”

Andro nodded his head. “Technology does that.” He said.

Murano looked at him. “It has not changed your people.” He said. “You still cling very tightly to the roots of your past and history, even with all the technology and knowledge you have gained from City Ship 41. All of your people no matter the species. Your bladed weapons for instance. There are very few species that I know of that still use bladed weapons and none of them can come close to matching the skill I have seen among your people. Many of your people could easily defeat men armed with energy based weapons and do so with just your *Nehtes* and bladed weapons. Many of your laws also require you to remain grounded in the history and lessons of where you came from.”

“There are those among us who do not adhere so closely to the laws we have.” Andro said. “Many still believe in the old ways. The Caste system among wolves. The old mating laws that we have done away with. They wear their arrogance on their sleeves like fools and refuse to understand that change is a part of the evolution of all species.”

“There are those types among every species. No matter how advanced.” Murano told him.

“True enough.” Andro said. He looked at Murano. “Dorian and I want to find out what these dreams mean. What the words we hear in these dreams mean. Something or someone is reaching out to us from across the stars, that much we do know. We have decided to try and initiate a communication link. We are going to include Sadi and my other mates, Sheva as well. Our wives and mates are our calm and strength and we hope their additional power allows us to make contact.”

Murano nodded his head. “Sadi is equal to Mari in her Etheric resonance. Using the Pralor method of measuring Etheric power I sense she is very close to Category Twenty. Much like your mother Aricia. I sense this from Carisia as well. Ne’Veha, Lu’ria and Sehri are not far behind them, and neither are your mothers. Mari has more focus and control, more than...” Murano stopped for a second as he contemplated what he was going to say. “More than she should really. Especially at her young age.”

Andro tilted his head as he looked at him. “Something?” He asked.

Murano looked at him. “Nothing... nothing important. I was just thinking how Mari’s resonance is very similar to someone I once knew. Clear, focused and controlled. And she shields even better than many Praetorians I once knew.”

Andro sipped his coffee. “This resonance... someone you knew well?” He asked.

Murano nodded his head. “Yes. Someone that... someone that I should never have turned away from.”

“Turned away from?” Andro asked. “A woman?”

Murano nodded again slowly. “I... I loved her intensely. I still do to be honest. And I will never seek to take another woman into my life. Tobia... Tobia occupies all of that space inside me. I... I turned away from her because I thought I was protecting her. I was still distraught over what had occurred at the end of the war. My perceived failures. When I met her some three decades ago she made me forget for a time. But as with this place Alba Tau for you, the horrible nightmares always returned. I pushed her away. I did not want to burden her with my faults. I heard she... I heard she became involved with someone else later and that they have a

child together. A daughter. Tobia is... she is a very powerful Etheric user and one who can shield almost better than we Praetorians were able. Mari told me she was receiving help from her in this regard and that is why she shields her Etheric resonance so well.”

Andro cocked his head to the side but remained silent as his suspicions were confirmed. “Have you never tried to contact her?” Andro asked finally.

Murano chuckled softly and shook his head sadly. “I doubt she would even talk to me now. When I left I did not... I did not give her a reason she could understand. Only that it had to be that way. She was very angry with me and that anger probably still exists. I can sense her teachings within Mari though. My brother was wise to send her to Tobia for schooling as his youngest daughter. He has always given his children every opportunity to improve. Only Daron never truly took it. Mari is... she is incredibly perceptive and far smarter than I.”

“And you never tried to make amends?” Andro asked.

Murano shook his head. “It is not important right now.” He said taking a deep breath. “As I was saying... you and your father have reached Category Twenty-one. The only ones since Sumar to have ever obtained such a level. Others might debate that in regards to you, but they have not seen what I have seen or what I sense within you. The Scholars tend to err on the side of what they can actually measure where I go with my instincts. Your mother Aricia, Sadi and Mari, they are Category Twenty easily. Your other wives and mates and your mothers are certainly Category Nineteen. Your mother Anja and Carisia seem to be the closest to reaching Category Twenty from what I have been able to sense from them.” Murano looked at him. “You are able to sense the resonance of this person even now when you are awake? The one you feel within your dreams?”

Andro nodded his head. “Not as strongly as when we are sleeping but yes.” He replied. “Since we can not link everyone when we are sleeping we will try to do it when we are awake. It was Lu'ria's suggestion really.”

Murano nodded in agreement. “Joining together is an excellent idea... it will allow you, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner to focus on this resonance and draw from the skill of your wives and mates just as they do from you.”

“I would like you and Deion present as well.” Andro said. “Nara and Mari too... if she is willing. At least monitoring us from the next room.”

“Why me?” Murano asked.

“Insurance.” Andro stated. “We don't know what we will encounter and having two other Praetorians, especially one with your experience and skill, and a Praetorian Mage backing us up as we trace this resonance back to its origin might be handy. And if Lady Mari is as strong as you say it couldn't hurt. Communicating within the Etheric realm in such a way is still new to us Murano. Well... newer to us than it is to your people.”

Murano nodded. “I see your point.” He said nodding. “If that is what you wish... I would be happy to help you. I would be very interested to know what a Darastrix *Doraamar* has to say to you.”

Andro sat forward. “Well... we will cross that bridge when we come to it.” He said. “Now we have to worry about the here and now.”

Murano looked at him. “Your sister Lisisa brought up a valid point Androcles. Just how do you intend to take over a ship of the size you say this one is and do so with so few men and women?”

Andro looked at him and smiled. “Capturing a *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought has always been one of my father's little projects. He came up with and devised half a dozen plans for doing it until he settled on one that he really liked.”

Murano looked surprised. “I have seen your father in action Andro.” He said. “He is a devastating force on the battlefield but he seems very straightforward in most ways.”

Andro sat back and laughed at that as he rose to his feet. “My father? Straightforward?” He motioned with his hand for Murano to follow him. “Let me show you how out of the box and utterly insane my father thinks Murano.”

“...Father came up with this Carina?” Lisisa asked as she leaned over the massive plot board with Jomann and the others.

Carina Leonidas was included in the transmission that was active on the side of the room. She was standing beside a matching plot board on Apo Prime. Carina nodded her head and smiled, her face animated and her eyes bright. “Pretty cool isn’t it *arande*?” She asked.

“Cool?” Lisisa stated. “Carina... this is so awesome!”

“Our mothers always told us father was very inventive.” Carina said with a smile. “And not just between the sheets.”

Lisisa and Eliani laughed at that and Eli looked at Jomann’s confused face. She bumped her hip against his upper leg gently. “It’s a girl thing.” She told him when he looked down at her.

Jomann smiled. “Ah... ok.” He said. “I think.”

Cowen Shan stood beside Jomann directly across from Lisisa. “We have... no one ever thought to conduct such a mission like this among my people.” He said shaking his head. “We always determined it would be impossible to assault a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnaught while it was out of space dock.”

Jomann smiled at that statement. “Welcome to the world of impossible things happening Cowen my friend.” He said. “I truly do not think the word impossible exists in the Leonidas vocabulary.”

The other members of Andro’s team all stood around the plot board and were studying different aspects of the overall plan, each of them with their own thoughts. They knew Andro would be joining them shortly and they would bring them up then, but for the most part, no one had an issue with doing the mission after looking at the plan his father had devised. They turned when the door to the secure room opened and Andro walked in with Murano beside him. Lisisa stood up straight and looked at him.

“Andro... how long has father been working on this?” Lisisa asked incredulous.

Andro grinned as he came up next to her. “Pretty off the wall huh?”

“*Nubous* insane!” Jomann commented from Andro’s left as he made room for Murano to slide in beside him. “Which is why it will work!”

Andro looked at Murano and motioned with his hand around the table. “My father told me not so long ago that I needed to form my own team. So I went out and gathered the most unlikely group I could. Murano... I give you my personal team.” He said. “You know Jomann and my rather excitable sister Eliani. She takes after our mother Anja and what she lacks in size she makes up for in attitude.”

“Piss off!” Eliani barked at him from next to Jomann and Murano couldn’t help but almost break out in loud laughter.

“See what I mean.” Andro said as the others laughed aloud. “Next to Eli is Ridor Lethon, former *Durcunusaan* and one of a handful of men who have actually been to the Kavalian homeworld for a visit. He was a member of the *Durcunusaan* unit that rescued several dozen young women from right underneath their noses.” Andro spoke.

Ridor bowed his head slightly. “I was only doing what was asked of me.” He spoke.

Cowen Shan chuckled now and looked at Ridor. “What was asked of you?” He said. “An operation that almost caused the Prefect to have a massive stroke because he was so angry from what I understand.” He spoke. “Just to see the expression on his face would have been worth the operation.”

Cowen Shan was becoming more and more at home among these men and women as each hour passed. He found that the Lycavorian and vampire people he had grown up hearing about did not exist in any way. These men and women, they valued honor and tradition above all else. As his father had taught him and his brothers, against the teachings of Kavalian leaders, that women should be considered equals in everything, treated with honor and respect since they bore the future of their family and species. Being here among these men and women he had met many Lycavorian, vampire and even elven females that would be more than a match for even the most seasoned Puma Bane warrior. Yet even as they were regarded as equals they were also worshiped and cherished as wives and mates. Androcles reaching him as he had within Mindvoice had been the catalyst for Cowen. He had discovered where he could do his Pride and his people the most good, and that was right here fighting beside those who held the same values and honor that his father had instilled in him. Sherice was working with him every day to hone his Mindvoice skills and while it wasn’t easy, he never stopped trying to learn. Of course, the half elf and half Lycavorian Sherice was the most stunning woman he had ever met in

his life. Not only was she the most delicious looking female of any species he had ever seen, she was incredibly smart. He didn't doubt she could probably kick his ass if it came to it. He also felt something else when she was nearby, something he had never felt for any woman.

"Ridor has since taken one of those young women as his wife and mate and she will be assisting Eli in the Medical Bay." Andro said. "You already know Lisisa, Denali's wife and mate and our sister."

Murano looked at Lisisa. "One day you will have to explain how that came to be if you don't mind." He said.

Lisisa grinned. "Makes you crazy thinking about it huh?" She asked.

Murano nodded. "Something like that."

"It's a long and not entirely happy story." Lisisa told him. "At least not truly happy until Deni came into my life. Perhaps one day."

"The man next to Ridor is Torian Cedaria." Andro said easily. "He is one of the foremost instructors of Union Recon and Scouts. He trained most of his life with the Drow. His father was among the first of our people to begin using a second name shortly after my father returned to claim the throne. He handles most of the light weapons and all the very nasty and special little goodies that we will be using."

Torian Cedaria bowed his head to Murano. "An honor sir." He spoke.

Torian Cedaria was a year older than Androcles and knew from the outset why he had been chosen for this position. He was not a stupid man and almost immediately after arriving he knew what was happening. Androcles was completely honest with him about why he had been chosen, but he also expressed great confidence that Torian could more than hold his own and that his skills would prove valuable to them. Andro had gone to great lengths to insure Torian knew that his honor and trust was never in question. He had been enraged at first about what had been going on and how the information he had talked of with someone he considered friend had been used against his Prince and the Royal family, but after speaking with Andro at length, Torian had come to the same conclusion. Ulana was into something that was far beyond her ability to see or understand and she was simply a pawn. Torian had been in love with her from the very first time he had seen her and now he would have the opportunity to pursue that as well as protect her. He had been assigned as her personal guard whenever they were off the ship, and while she hadn't liked that, she had to accept it. It also allowed Torian to insure that nothing she did put any of them in danger. He may have come from a family of Beta wolves, but they were just as deeply rooted in tradition and culture as any Alpha family and had served loyally for more centuries that Torian could recall. He would insure that did not change.

Since that first day Torian had take advantage of his new role to prove even Beta Wolves could be among the finest soldiers in the Union. Given Ulana's status and the position of her father he knew he would never have an opportunity to prove that he was just as worthy of her love as Androcles had been if not for this chance. He also knew just how arrogant and uppity her status had made her, though this had not changed his feelings. Torian also knew something had happened in the last weeks that changed Ulana. He suspected it had something to do with the confrontation she had had with Princess Sadi, and it had made Ulana far less prone to outbursts of arrogance and even more thoughtful in the way she spoke to people now. Torian was going to insure that he did his duty and got what he wanted. And what he wanted was Ulana.

"Torian has an advanced degree in chemical engineering..." Andro continued with some pride in his voice that Torian took note of right away. "Combined with the skills he learned from the Drow and then continued to improve upon, he has the uncanny ability to transform the ammunition for our weapons into extremely deadly projectiles."

"Which reminds me..." Eliani spoke now looking at him. "I need the chemical formula for that last batch of ammo you made up Torian. I have to formulate the counteragent."

Torian nodded. "I'll have it to you today."

Andro looked at Cowen. "Cowen'Shan is one of our heavy weapons specialists. He took his father's honored place as the leader of his Pride when his father was killed by Keleru's secret police forces. He has led them with principle and was among the first to join Pian's rebellion. I asked him to join my team and he accepted. My sister Normya and her Blessed Husband Tir'ut, as well as Daio and his wife Kameka you will meet soon. They are prepping the ships with Sadi and Ne'Veha."

Murano nodded to Cowen and then looked at Andro. "You have gathered quite the... diverse group of men and women Andro." He said.

Eliani laughed. "Just call us the Oddball Bunch." She said.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "I have to keep up appearances since my father's team isn't exactly a normal group either."

Murano nodded. "True enough." He said.

Andro stepped close to the table and looked at everyone. "Ok... I assume everyone has had an opportunity to review the plan. Carina helped father to put the finishing touches on it, but this is his baby. Sadi and Ne'Veha are prepping the *PREMONITION* with Meka while Daio is seeing to the weapons lockers and the canisters. We'll be six short until we link up with Dorian and Deion but they should be reviewing this same plan and with Normya flying their *STRIKER* they will hit from point Bravo. Thoughts?"

Lisisa looked up from the board. "Is using Carisia and Yuri as bait really needed Andro?" She asked.

"They won't be bait. Not anymore." He answered quickly. "Pa'cour will have a full detachment of their Immortals with them when we hit."

"You think he will be waiting for them?" Jomann asked.

Andro nodded his head. "Oh yes." He said. "I spoke with Marci twenty minutes ago. Just before Murano joined me in my Ready Room. She has confirmed from the Control Agents that Moran always took the reports from them personally. She was also able to confirmed that Moran's ship never made the rendezvous to get the reports from their agents on Earth and Apo Prime this time. Which means he has to know by now that the program is compromised. Once we have this ship we'll leak that it was Yuri who led the extraction from the colony. He won't pass that up, especially when he thinks Carisia will be with her."

"And when he contacts the ship to find out what their status is after taking Dori's frigate, we'll be in command of it." Jomann said.

Andro nodded once more. "More or less... yes."

Lisisa looked at him. "He'll come for them himself you know." She said.

"That is what I am betting on." Andro said. "With his ship and perhaps a few escorts. He won't bring a large force because he knows Admiral Pontal and grandfather will detect it. No... he'll come with a small force."

"And when he contacts us... we trace his COM signal right back to where his main force is." Ridor spoke. "And then we give those coordinates to Pontal and Riall and let them destroy his ships."

Andro nodded. "And we deal with Moran and Dante."

Eliani looked at Murano. "Will he be able to do to us what he did to father?" She asked him.

Murano met her eyes and shook his head. "No. He was only able to do that to your father because of your father's emotions at the time and the Praetorian gene within him. The only ones at risk of this now are your brothers and I."

"That doesn't really reassure me Murano." Eliani said. "Dante is a piss ant compared to my father or Andro. To Dorian and Deion as well. We don't need him taking control of one of them. The results would not be pretty in the least."

Murano nodded. "It is a risk for us yes... but if what Yuri has told us is accurate, than he will undoubtedly be focusing his will on breaking this boy Dante. He will not have the strength in an Etheric sense to attempt to control one of us. If he attempts it... he will lose his grip on Dante."

"And if that happens?" Lisisa asked.

Murano met her eyes. "He needs a physical vassal." Murano explained. "The black mist that Andro and Helen spoke of when he had infected your father will be visible but he will not be able to reach out as before. Even Xaxon has his limits. He is powerful and devious as I told your brother... but if he tries this he will leave himself completely vulnerable as well."

Eliani looked at Andro from beside Jomann. "And Dante?" She asked the question with a decidedly hate filled tone.

Andro met her eyes and those of his other sisters. "There will be no reprieve for Dante *arande*." He said immediately. "He will answer for what he did to Zarah."

"Promise us as you promised Zarah Andro." Carina spoke from within the transmission.

Andro looked at her in the transmission and nodded his head slowly. "I give my word to all of you... Dante's fate is already sealed. Nothing will save him."

“*Avoi.*” Eliani muttered softly.

“Yuri sent the plans for the Moran’s ship the *INQUISITOR.*” Carina spoke once more. “It is a standard *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought with only a few minor changes. We will have to make small changes to the overall plan... but we can iron them out easily enough.”

Andro nodded and looked at Eliani. “Eli... the delivery system?”

Eliani reached across the chart table and touched six different points on the plans for the ship. “Six canisters deployed to these locations. They will attach to the hull directly over the six major ventilation ducts, cut through and then activate the gas.”

“Gas?” Murano asked surprised. “You are going to kill the crew?”

Eliani looked at him. “It’s a neutron radiation based gas sir.” She answered. “Not enough to kill vampires, but enough to fully incapacitate them. My mothers Isabella and Anja refined the formula and it works perfectly. We have enough of it onboard to knock out the crew on three Dreadnoughts. Trust me... Moran’s crew won’t know what hit them.”

“Moran?” Murano asked looking between them. “I thought we were talking about the ship that will intercept Dorian and Deion?”

Andro looked at him and shook his head. “No.” He said. “That won’t be necessary. That ship will already be ours.”

“Why?” Murano asked.

“Lisisa... bring up the message from Deo.” He said. He looked at Murano. “We got this while we were in my Ready Room talking. It seems we caught a very lucky break. And I intend to make use of it.”

Murano turned to see Deion’s image appear on a small portion of the chart table.

“*Fervon*... you aren’t going to believe this but...” Deion began speaking.

HIGH COVEN FRIGATE

TOLERANCE

THIRTY MINUTES EARLIER

“...started pulsing two minutes ago.” Onera spoke as she held up the transmitter for Dorian. “Whoever he is, he is trying to contact Meyla.”

Dorian glanced at Deion who was next to him and then back to Onera. “You are certain *Duan Locarra*?” He asked.

Onera nodded. “My mother taught me how to use one of these in one of the classes as I was growing.” She answered.

“Where is Meyla?” Deion asked.

“Sheva and Nara are still with her in the Medical Bay with her mother.” Onera answered.

Dorian looked at Dorian. “We could get some valuable Intel *fervon.*” He said.

Dorian nodded. “Yes... but will she be able to hold it together?”

“Yes.” The feminine voice answered.

They turned to see Sheva and Nara on either side of the young woman Meyla and her mother. Dorian rose to his feet with Deion beside him.

“Sheva?” He asked.

“We heard it activate and then Onera left with it.” Sheva said. “She wants to help Dori.”

Dorian looked at her. “Meyla... I appreciate that you want to help but this man...”

Meyla met his eyes. “He used me!” Meyla hissed. “He used me like some cheap whore and now I carry his child!”

“That child is a blessing of life Meyla.” Onera spoke.

Meyla nodded her head and smiled gently. “Yes... she is.” She said softly as she rubbed her partially swollen abdomen. “But he will never know that. I want to make sure he knows he will never be part of that.”

“If you do this you can’t reveal to him that we are onto their plans.” Dorian said. “Or the ships waiting for us!”

Meyla drew herself up proudly. "I don't intend to." She said.

Dorian glanced at Sheva and then Deion quickly. All of them nodded along with Onera. "Do it!" He hissed. "Set it up!"

Sixty seconds later the transmitter was sitting on the table and Meyla was in front of it as she activated the beacon. The face of the handsome young pureblood vampire Faren appeared in the small cone of the transmission. He had light brown hair and glittering blue eyes and looked to be in superior physical shape. Sheva, Onera and Nara all could see why Meyla had fallen so easily for him.

"Meyla!" His voice echoed in the small room. "Finally!"

"I needed... I needed to get someplace private." Meyla stammered quickly.

Faren shook his head. "I understand *ussta ssinsrigg*." He said. "It is alright. We will be together soon. Your ship will reach the rendezvous in under an hour and then we all will be together and we can start our life with our daughter."

Meyla shifted her feet. "Where... where will we go?" She asked timidly. "I... Faren I do not wish to raise our daughter on a ship among those who follow Admiral Moran." She said quickly before Onera or Sheva could stop her. "He... following him will only give us death. I..."

Sheva was reaching for her when Faren answered and she froze when she heard his reply.

"Follow Moran?" Faren hissed. "I have no intention of following that war mongering fool!" He spat.

Meyla's eyes went a little wider at this and she saw Sheva quickly motion for her to continue. "What... I thought... you are an officer in his fleet. Are you not aligned against Empress Narice now? Isn't that what he plans?"

"Meyla... I... I am a member of the *Venorik Elghinn*." Faren told her softly. "Well... I was... before Empress Aikiro and Moran's fool plans nearly got us all killed. Many of us did not agree with their plans and we advised against it. We were ignored."

"Faren... I don't understand." Meyla said. "My brother... my parents..."

He looked at her quickly with wide eyes. "They will be safe *ussta ssinsrigg*. I promised you I would see to them. I have already dispatched a message to your brother on Elear. By now he has taken his wife and children and moved to the location I set up. He will be safe. Once you contacted me and told me that a Lycavorian Strike Team had appeared at the colony and were taking Sheva Juconi's parents off I set my plans in motion. I knew the colony you were on had been compromised... and perhaps even the others. The Lycavorian Union *Krypteria* is far more organized and efficient than that idiot Moran gives them credit for. I knew once you told me that they had somehow discovered the program and were probably already moving to capture and detain all those involved. I knew that if they were there to take Sheva Juconi's parents off the planet then she was no longer among the program's loyalists. She was always different than the others. Most of those who instructed her saw it."

Meyla looked at him. "Faren... my brother has..."

"Your brother has not reported to his control officer for months now. I know." He cut her off. "I have contacts everywhere Meyla. I know his loyalty is to the Union and his elven wife and children now. I sent him a message to get them and himself to safety as I told you. A place they could hide for a short time."

"Faren..."

"I can tell you now what I have held back from you." He continued without giving her time to speak. It appeared as if there was much she wanted to get off his chest to Sheva and the others watching. "There is much discontent among the crews of the ships Moran has with him. They are divided and confused and many have families and loved ones they want to return to. We have been getting many intercepts from within High Coven space about what Narice is now doing. The changes she is making. Many of them want no part in what Moran is planning to do. I was the senior *Venorik Elghinn* officer remaining after the escape from Earth. He has had those loyal to him watching me but I have played the good little agent and done as he asked. I informed him of what you told me because I knew he would send me to collect whoever took Sheva Juconi's parents from the colony. He is not as smart as he likes to think he is." Faren smiled. "Perhaps this is one of the faults Princess Yuri saw in him. Or she was just tired of his foolish ranting." He tried to joke. "Moran wishes to try and use those from the program, Sheva Juconi's parents as well, to find out where Yuri is. I..." Faren explained to her.

"So you have been using me all of this time?" Meyla hissed angrily.

“What? No!” He spat back in shock. “Never! I love you Meyla! My future is with you and our daughter! I want nothing to do with that fool Moran or his twisted son Dante! I told him because I knew he would send me. I have no intention of turning anyone over to Moran. He has lost his mind! His son is an evil monster. The men and crews of these ships with me are only seeking escape. They do not want to fight for Moran. They want to return home or escape to where they will be safe!”

“But... but where will we go?” Meyla asked as her heart lifted significantly and her face became brighter.

“There are many places in The Wilds where we can go.” Faren answered. “I know of at least two individuals who may even be able to point us in the direction of Princess Yuri.”

“Yuri?” Meyla asked. “Why?”

“I have heard rumors that she has changed since becoming the Blessed Wife to her own Immortal Captain.” Faren told her. “The Crown Prince Androcles... he lifted the bounty he had placed on her head. Most believe he did this because he had found and killed her. I believe it was because he saw that she had changed and she somehow convinced the Crown Prince to spare her life. I have seen the reports on him Meyla... and it would have taken an act of the *phraktos* for him to lift the bounty after what Moran and Aikiro forced upon his sister. It was one of the vilest things those in the *Venorik Elghinn* ever were forced to be part of and no one that I associate with agreed with their actions. Prince Androcles would never have given her a reprieve unless he saw something within her that others did not.”

“How can you be so sure?” Meyla asked.

“There are reports that she rescued an elven female from Immortal slavers and they are now lovers and this tells me there is truth to this. I think that she is secretly supporting her sister from the shadows. Now that the darkness that now engulfs her son is gone from her, I believe the real Yuri has come forth. Androcles Leonidas must have seen this and he is supporting her somehow from the shadows. It is the only way she could have remained hidden for so long. There are very few pirates and scum who wish to challenge Androcles Leonidas and those that do are insane.” Faren said. “At least that is what I firmly believe.”

He looked at her in the transmission, his eyes softening and filling with love that could not be faked. “I can not tell you that I have not done terrible things my beautiful Meyla, but I have never lied to you. I can't return to the High Coven, but I can try to find Princess Yuri and help her in her endeavors. And it will be safer for your parents as well. With her we can at least raise our daughter in safety and relative peace while I work to make the High Coven what it was meant to be. To at least try and return some honor to my life. So that... so that my daughter and any other children we have will not have to hang their heads in shame at what I have done.”

Meyla burst out in tears and they all saw his face take on a worried expression as he looked at her. “Faren!” She sobbed.

“Meyla... what is wrong?” He asked quickly. “Are you... are you hurt? Did you injure yourself leaving the colony? Are you ok? Our child?”

Meyla shook her head. “No... I...”

Dorian chose that time to touch the transmitter and expand the transmission cone to include himself and the others nearby. He stepped up beside Meyla as did her mother. “No... she is not hurt.” He spoke seeing Faren's eyes go wide. “I would say she is extremely happy... if what you are telling her is true.”

“Who are you?” Faren demanded. “If you harm her I will kill you! I will hunt you down and kill you!” He spat harshly.

“The name is Leonidas.” Dorian said calmly. “Dorian Leonidas.”

Faren's eyes grew wider still. “The first son by Queen Isabella and King Leonidas!” He gasped. “The... the pre-born like... like your brother Androcles!”

Dorian tilted his head slightly. “You are... well informed.” He said.

“You!” Faren gasped. “You took her off the colony? But... but how did...”

“Sheva Juconi is my Blessed Wife and mate.” Dorian told him. “She showed me the message from that fool control agent of hers.”

“I... I expected that is how you discovered the location of the colony.” Faren spoke. Dorian noticed that he seemed to almost relax. “That you somehow found one of the agents of the program and their control agent.”

Dorian nodded. "Why don't you answer a question for me now? How much of that *sibfla* you just shoveled out to Meyla here is true?"

Faren looked at him and his eyes narrowed. "I speak your ancient language Dorian Leonidas! Quite fluently." He snapped angrily. "And none of what I just told Meyla is a lie. I have never lied to her!"

"You didn't tell her everything." Sheva hissed as she stepped up next to Dorian.

"It was the only way to protect her. Protect our child." Faren answered her statement with complete honesty. "Wait! If you... if you know about the transmitter I gave her then you... you know that we are moving to the rendezvous coordinates that you have with whoever is escorting you out of The Wilds!"

Dorian smiled. "My brother Androcles is waiting at those coordinates." He said. "With a ship and enough firepower to blow you and your ships into leftover space dust before you are able to fart in the wind."

"No!" Faren hissed with wide eyes. "We are not the enemy Dorian Leonidas! I chose this ship and the escorts myself! All of them carry men and women who think as I do! Those who did not... they were dealt with. We are not the enemy!"

"How do I know we can trust anything you say?" Dorian told him calmly. "By now your ships are within range of my brother's ship. He is probably already jamming your long range communications. You won't be able to call for help. And you won't survive his attack."

"*Vith!* I do not want to call for help!" Faren exclaimed loudly. "Tell him to scan our ships right now! We are running without shields and our weapons are not powered. We want nothing to do with Moran and his fool son! Or what they are planning! These ships are filled with all those who I could spirit away and not draw attention to us! We do not... we do not want to fight anymore!"

"So you say!" Dorian spoke.

"Do it! Do as I tell you!" Faren almost shouted now. "Scan our ships! Tell him to scan our ships! We have to be less than an hour away for this transmission to be so clear! If we are talking then I know you can contact him! We will do anything he asks! Just tell him!"

"Stand by." Dorian snapped and reached forward again to silence the transmission.

"You can't hurt him!" Meyla cried. "He is telling the truth! I know it! I can see it in his eyes!"

Dorian looked at her and squeezed her arm gently seeing her eyes lock onto his. "I know that Meyla." He said softly. "So can I." He looked at Deion. "Get on your P1 *fervon*. Get this info to Andro and than Yuri and let them know what is happening Deion. I think we just caught a much bigger break than any of us expected or believed."

Deion nodded and pulled out his P1. "*Carians...* you think!" He gasped.

MANNE

UNION ADHOC COMPOUND

Martin squatted beside the base of the massive tree on the ridge above the Union Adhoc Compound, or Base One as it had come to be called. The crystal clear waters of the huge lake that backstopped the compound were reflecting the bright sunshine as the sun rose in the sky. The many portable shelters had become pseudo permanent homes to most of his people over the last weeks and some had even begun to replant a number of the brighter colored flowers among the many worn pathways throughout the compound. They no doubt had a sense that they would be staying for a long time and they were making things try to appear normal.

The mountains to the east and west and the one he squatted on to the north gave Base One a natural protective barrier against most of the elements that they knew existed on Manne. There was only one main avenue into the sprawling valley with dozens of escape routes into the surrounding mountains that only his people knew of. There was much activity within Base One, men and women preparing the different defenses of the base. There was no panic however. It was controlled chaos as military men had called it dating back centuries. Everyone moved with purpose and precision. It had become second nature to many of those below him and Martin felt a pang of regret for the life they had to lead. It was only a brief regret, for he knew that the men and women below would not change anything. Each and every one of them had chosen this way of life willingly, and all of them had served with distinction. They were true professionals and would do their jobs to

the very best of their abilities. There was no back down in any of them. Most were Lycavorian Spartans, but there were hundreds of elves, vampires and Algolians who had also chosen this life as well and all of them gave one hundred percent to their duties. They had adopted the Spartan mentality from the day his father had given his life in defense of them in that far away place most of them had never been too. And this mentality had carried onward in their children.

They were Spartans.

His father's selfless sacrifice for so many men, women and different species, without truly even knowing anything about them had altered the course of the history and culture of the Lycavorian Union. An obscure culture and mentality from what many still considered a back water planet had engulfed trillions of beings. Shortly after the death of his father, there had been a massive push to discover as much about the Spartan history and way of life among the many species that now made up the Union. His death and the death of his fellow Lycavorians at that lonely place on Earth had inspired so many. They had not known the true nature of their people, only that they were different. From the time the Ten Thousand had arrived on Earth among the Spartan people they had fit right in seamlessly. It was a sincere testament to Helen's powers of perception that she saw the similarities between the Spartans and the Lycavorians. The sense of honor and duty and family. If only the Spartan Kings who had come before his father had known what their culture and traditions would spawn. A galaxy spanning society that embraced the ideals of the Spartan people even as harsh as many considered the laws to sometimes be. Martin knew there were those who did not adhere to the Spartan way of life, different species and cultures, but they were welcome and accepted within the Union as equals and friends. The vast majority of Lycavorians chose to follow the Spartan laws and traditions that so suited their species, but they also welcomed and viewed different cultures with respect and honor. While the adoption of the Spartan way of life changed how many viewed the Chronicles of Law that were written by Canth and his grandfather, those laws had been the core of their society ever since the Union had been born. The Spartan way of life was absorbed into those laws and values and they had continued for over three thousand years now. And no matter how much they may have learned about what other forces may have helped to shape the Lycavorian people, Spartan culture was supremely dominant.

Martin lowered the datapad and coffee mug in his hands when he smelled him move up behind him. No matter what anyone said about his brother, Daniel Simpson could and did move like a ghost at times. He was not trying to hide himself in any way, Daniel had long ago given up trying to sneak up on Martin, but the absolute control and grace his six foot five body could muster would shame the ballerinas of centuries before. Martin Leonidas trusted two men utterly and without question in his life. Two men that he would share everything and anything with, no matter how dire or joyous. One was his first born son and the other was this man. The only man Martin had ever considered his brother. His one true brother. His head turned slightly as Danny settled to one knee beside him. Like Martin he was already attired in the standard Union Mark V ArmorPly Body Armor. His combat harness held several pouches, extra magazines for his A4, and half a dozen Plasma grenades. His personal *nehtes* was secured under one arm in a special holster and Daniel Simpson was more than lethal with the *Nehtes*. Daniel had been bald for his entire life, choosing to keep the hair from his head, though now he had begun to grown a neatly trimmed goatee and mustache. They had been through so much together. Life, death, sadness and joy. And through it all, their bond had only grown more tightly and more intense. When Moneus took Carina as his wife and mate, the connection between the two of them had been sealed for all time and nothing would ever drive them apart.

Martin turned back to look at the camp below for he thoroughly enjoyed the times he could just sit and watch things progress around him. It wasn't arrogance of any kind; it was a pride he felt at what they could all accomplish. Only Daniel or his wives would ever interrupt him when he was doing this, for they knew how much he enjoyed it.

"I see you're slacking again." Danny spoke as he adjusted his A4 across his knees.

Martin grinned and nodded his head. With the exception of Anuk and Nayeca and his eight children, Martin had never known Daniel to act serious about anything. Now Kesyla would join that small circle within his brother's life of the precious things he cared for more than anything. "One of us has too." He said.

"You been up here a couple hours." Dan spoke as his dark eyes swept over Base One. "I was beginning to wonder if you had grown roots or something."

“I was just admiring the view.” Martin said as Danny reached out and took the coffee mug from his hand and took a long pull from the steaming hot liquid. He looked at the insulated mug and shook his head.

“Man... Aricia sure got it right when she came up with this blend.” He said with a shake of his head. “You know how many of our people are addicted to this coffee now? You should keep her pregnant all the time *fervon*. Maybe if she stays pregnant she’ll come up for something to replace the extreme shit tasting combat rations we got right now. I am already missing Iama’s cooking and it’s only been since breakfast.”

Martin chuckled as he took the mug back and took a pull of the rich tasting coffee. “We’d have to keep her away from Red though.” He said. “Anja will have us eating healthy stuff and we won’t even know it.”

Dan laughed. “Ain’t it the truth?” He said.

“Manda in position?” He asked softly.

Danny nodded. “She sent the burst ten minutes ago. The last of the Battalion Andro sent to us is down and moving to their positions. Manda’s Raptor E3s have picked up the Kavalian ships entering the system on the far side of the system. From behind the gas giant’s moon. He thinks he’s being slick.”

“He’s trying to sneak in.” Martin said as his eyes looked over Base One.

“He sucks at sneaking then cause they are blundering about like fools.” Danny said with a smile.

Like Martin, Danny rarely let others see the extreme insight and intelligence he held within him. While most saw only the laconic and often times humorous side of Daniel Simpson, only a few knew of the skill and exceptional smarts of the man who everyone knew was their King’s brother. Only Anuk, Nayeca and now Kesyla had seen that side of him, and he liked to keep it that way.

“Koguth has his people in position west of Site 2. All the pieces are just about set then.” Martin said casually.

“You think he’ll take the bait?” Danny asked.

Martin nodded his head. “Oh... he’ll take the bait.” He said. “He’s too proud not to. And too stupid.”

“Well... you have to admit... if you’re going to be stupid about something, make sure it looks and smells as good as For’mya.” Danny spoke.

He was perhaps the only man alive who could get away with saying that and not have Martin rip his face off. Danny knew what For’mya and all his wives and mates meant to Martin. There had been many nights through the last years where the two of them had simply sat under the stars and talked of their better halves and the emotions they were able to elicit from them.

Martin grinned once more. “I have to agree with that.” He said. He looked at Danny. “I take it Kesyla is with Anuk and Nayeca?”

Dan nodded. “Nubian has the security of the Medical Tent. Kesyla is inside with Anja, Anuk and Duewa. I guess this Radra woman is there as well. Ready to help.”

“She’s a beautiful woman *fervon*.” Martin said. “I’m happy for you. All of you. Is she adjusting ok?”

Dan nodded as he took the mug from Martin again. “She’s got Anuk and Nubian to teach her. And what they can’t or don’t know, Aricia and your better halves do. She’s actually... she is making the adjustment much more quickly and easier than I thought.”

Martin nodded his head. “Helen told me once that those of us who have Etheric abilities will be able to better able to accept and tolerate the change.” He said.

Danny grinned. “Well... we went running last night and she is learning fast.” He said with a chuckle.

“What?” Martin asked him.

“She misjudged a turn and went ass over head into a stream.” Danny said. “When she got her legs under her again I was kind of standing there staring at her tail. She’s got a real nice tail *fervon*.”

“Bet she didn’t appreciate that.” Martin said with a smile.

“She cuffed me good right across the muzzle.” Danny said with his trademark smile. “Caught me completely unaware. Anuk and Nubian were laughing all the way back.”

“Sounds like Anuk and Nayeca are teaching her well.” Martin said with a matching grin.

“Almost too well.” Danny replied with a nod. Danny reached out and placed his hand on Martin’s shoulder. “You ok?” He asked softly.

Martin nodded his head slowly. “I’ve had a lot of time to toss this all around in my head *fervon*. No matter which direction I come at it from Danny, there is still one glaring basic truth.” Martin looked at him. “I have no feeling for him anymore Dan. None. Not after what he did to For’mya. What he forced upon her. What

he forced upon his own children. Add up all he has done through the years... trying to kill our mother... killing so many of our people. He stopped being Lycavorian a long time ago.”

“He’s still your brother Martin.” Danny said.

Martin shook his head. “The inescapable fact in all this is that you are the only brother I have ever known Dan.” Martin looked at him. “The only brother I want. You are my *Mard Fervon*. He’s a nobody. He had... he had an opportunity to discover what we could have. To learn about the blood we have flowing within us. He chose to be a scumbag rapist and murderer instead. Keleru may have had something to do with that when all is said and done but ultimately we are all responsible for the decisions we make.” Martin said turning back to look at Base One in the distance.

Danny nodded his head slowly. “Yes... we are.” He said softly.

“He chose to walk the path he has walked Danny.” Martin said softly. “I intend to treat him exactly like that. I’ve taken his remaining sons from him... showed them what they could have... what their blood calls for... and they have embraced that Spartan blood within them more than I ever thought possible. Pian has taken his daughter and from what I understand he dotes over her like a blossoming flower. When I see him Dan... when I see him I’m going to take what is left of his pitiful life. Then my father will breathe a little easier and my mother can hold her head high.” Martin rose to his feet, Danny following suit and they looked down on Base One. “I just might make this a regular vacation spot.” Martin said. “It’s beautiful here.”

“Can’t argue with that.” Dan said. Dan looked out over Base One. “You think it will ever end Marty?” He asked the question they had asked of each other many different times in the past. “You think the day will come where we can hang our guns up and be normal?”

Martin looked at him. “How many times have we asked each other that question Dan?”

Danny nodded. “More times than I care to admit I guess.” He replied.

“You want me to answer that from my hopes or from my heart *fervon*?” Martin asked him.

“I’ve never asked for you to bullshit me.” Dan said. “Don’t start now.”

Martin turned back and allowed his gaze to take in the scenery before him. “My heart tells me that for me... for you... for our children... no. We came into this world kicking and screaming and that is how we are going to leave it *fervon*. But when we go... we’ll go with the knowledge that our grandchildren and those who come after them will never have to fight again.”

“We gonna be around to see that?” Danny asked.

Martin looked at him. “I don’t plan on checking out any time soon. Do you?” He asked with a laugh.

“Hell no!” Danny spat. “Anuk, Nubian and Kesyla would kick my ass!”

Martin reached behind his waist and pulled out his P1. He handed it to Danny. “You seen the first recon drone footage?” He asked.

Dan nodded as he took the P1. “Yeah. Doesn’t look good.”

“Then let’s settle this so we can make sure if any of our people survived we can help them.” Martin said.

“Works for me.” Danny answered. “I was getting bored anyway.”

Martin took back his P1 with a smile and replaced it at the small of his back. He reached up and tapped the COM implant at the front of his ear.

“Spartan One to Admiral Lorian.”

“I am here Milord.” Manda’s voice replied.

Martin shook his head. “Manda... what have I told you about that.” He scolded her as he looked up into the brightening sky.

Miranda Lorian chuckled from her command chair on the bridge of the *ARIZONA*. “I will remember someday.” She said.

“You ready Manda?” Martin asked.

“Sitting on go.” She answered. “Raptors are reporting his ships are beginning to move from beyond the moon. Standard Kavalian attack formation. Troop ships randomly mixed in.” She gave him the brief rundown. “If they maintain course and speed they’ll be on you in sixteen minutes.”

“That’s it then.” Martin spoke. “Captain Akemi?”

“Here sire!” Akemi’s voice replied instantly.

“Go now Akemi!” Martin hissed. “Turn tail and run like the hounds of hell are chasing you! Just like they did in Hollywood!”

“Hollywood Milord?” Akemi asked from the bridge of the *ARC ROYAL*. “Where is this Hollywood?”

“Jeez! Never mind! Just go!” Martin hissed.

“Executing plan. Jumping in twenty seconds. Just so the record shows Milord, we are not running, we are simply advancing to kick him in the balls from behind. Good luck and we’ll see you all on the flip side!” Akemi answered.

“General Koguth...” Martin continued with a smile at Akemi’s comment.

“Kalis and I are in position and ready.” Koguth answered instantly. “Serale and Ceale have our triage unit set up and are very well hidden. The last of your Spartans has arrived and we await the arrival of Pusintin’s vaunted Puma Bane. We will show them who are the better warriors this day.”

“Kalis... as soon as things are in full swing you break for For'mya’s position. She’ll be waiting with Fedor and Eirene.” Martin said.

“Just as we discussed Uncle.” Kalis answered.

“Manda... you getting that signal?” Martin asked.

“It’s radiating from seventy-three ships.” She replied. “We have marked them all.”

“I guess that message we got was true then.” Martin said looking at Danny. “Keep an eye on them... and if they so much as twitch wrong blow them out of the stars.” Martin saw Dan nod his head in approval.

“Understood.” Miranda replied.

“Alright people this is it. Manda... as soon as his troop ships hit the atmosphere they will have reached the point of no return. Wait sixty seconds once they do and then de-shroud your Attack Wing and obliterate his task force.” Martin ordered. “No survivors on this Op folks. They opened this dance and now we are gonna finish it. No mercy. No surrender. May the gods go with us all! Spartan One out!”

SPARTA'S WRATH

There were six ships now. All of them with their Shrouds activated to avoid unwanted detection since they were within The Wilds, and all of them within firing distance of each other. Not that it would be much of a fight if it came to that. *SPARTA'S WRATH* dwarfed all the ships by a massive margin and would have been able to destroy them all in several eye blinks if need be.

It wouldn’t be needed.

Three transports had been taken into the starboard landing bay of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, and Murano had watched from a short distance away with Mari beside him as Androcles and his siblings greeted their brothers and sister. The obvious female squeals of delight and happiness were apparent as Eliani and Lisisa embraced Nara and then Sheva tightly since they were the first down the ramp. Normya was next and the sisters shared embraces with each other before they turned to their brothers. Andro had swept Carisia’s petite frame into his arms and kissed her with staggering intensity as Sadi and the others looked on with huge smiles. Murano then watched as Sadi and the others swarmed around them and as soon as Andro set Carisia down, Lu'ria was the first to pull her diminutive vampire lover into a similar embrace and kiss.

Murano could only continue to watch in wonderment at the out pouring of emotion and action for it was not forced in any way. They truly did feed off the physical contact and love they all had for one another. He had watched as Andro gripped Deion’s and Dorian’s head in his hands and the brothers shared silent words between each other and Deion nodded. To stand apart from them and watch their actions you could tell they were all genuine in their feelings. Martin and his wives had instilled an indestructible sense of family within them all and they had nurtured it as their children had grown. It was easy to see that Androcles was the center of it among those here. The peace that swept around him was similar to what he had felt when he watched Martin with his wives and mates. He had touched each of his brothers and sisters in some manner, sharing a soft word and smile before he stepped off to the side and up to where Yuri and Pa'cour were standing with Onera. Sheva was introducing her parents to Eliani and Lisisa, the other families standing respectfully to the side just watching, unsure of what was going to happen.

That had been an hour ago and now the principle parts of this plan they were following were sitting at the massive conference table in the briefing room. The young vampire officer from the High Coven ship was

talking and pointing things out on the star chart. Murano had seen this young man rush to the woman when she exited Dorian's ship and crush her to him. The emotion was very genuine and the tears she shed were tears of happiness. The Captain of the ship had come over as well and he now stood along the wall simply watching. Murano had always considered himself an excellent judge of character and his Praetorian abilities had never steered him wrong when reading others. He could detect no deceit from either of these men, and he was quite certain neither could Androcles with his incredible sense of smell.

Faren pointed to a large section of the star chart and looked at Androcles and Yuri as he finished speaking. "...will have moved from the last point we made contact." He was telling them. "We never remained in any one location for more than twenty-four hours. He will have shifted the forces with him to a new location by now."

"Numbers?" Androcles asked leaning forward.

"At last count two Fleet Groups Prince Androcles." Faren answered instantly. "With a mish mash of odd ships that deserted their old units. Total ships no more than three hundred and thirty at any given time. He knows it is hard to move a fleet of that size and he is deliberately staying out of the traveled areas to hide them."

"How many not with him are actually aligned with him?" Yuri asked this question. "And I don't mean just ships."

Faren shook his head. "I'm afraid that I don't have that information." He replied honestly to the question. "I would have to say at least one or two senior members of the *Ventash'ma*. It would be the only way for him to hide himself from Admiral Pontal without detection for so long."

Carisia leaned forward now, real concern for Narice on her face. "The *Ventash'ma* have all publicly stated their overwhelming support for her actions."

Faren nodded his head. "I'm sure they have. They do not want to be killed by the many Immortals she has guarding her. It is the only real explanation." He said. "Someone is helping him and they have to be well placed enough to at least have some military support. Admiral Pontal has been concerned primarily with securing our borders since the war ended. He has not even been back to the capital. Others are acting in his stead and I would not be surprised if they are also passing information to Moran's forces. It would need to be someone with the access to alter logs, journals and even star charts. I just do not know. I have been out of the loop so to speak since the events on Earth." He looked quickly at Androcles. "Meaning no offense Prince Leonidas."

Andro nodded. "None taken." He said.

"What the Empress and the others perpetrated upon your sister is heinous and even the most loyal members of the *Venorik Elghinn* advised her against such an action." Faren said. "They knew the kind of response it would incur and Intelligence agents they may be, they are still husbands and fathers and brothers. It was a vile and despicable thing they did. She would not listen to us however."

Murano leaned forward now. "If she was touched by Xaxon for as long as your father says Andro... then this is not surprising. His control and influence, even peripheral in nature as it was with her, would have been unbreakable after so long a period."

"He could control people like this Murano?" Yuri asked.

Murano shook his head. "Control is not the correct word. His Praetorian aptitude was the ability to influence others. Almost like sub conscious suggestions and manipulations. He could not control their minds directly, but he could weaken their mental barriers enough to make his authority and wishes overwhelming in nature." He met Yuri's eyes evenly. "As he did with his Praetorian Mage and as he did with your mother and as he was almost able to accomplish with you Yuri. He was the only Praetorian in recorded history with this ability... and it is not one we speak of openly."

"Andro we have to warn Narice and Arrarn!" Carisia hissed.

"I agree Androcles." Yuri said urgently. "If Robert has this kind of support still within the capital then Narice is not safe. Nothing can happen to her! Not now! Even if we find and destroy him, these men or women will still oppose her. They could cause all kinds of trouble that she is not prepared for."

"Arrarn and Cha'talla will let nothing happen to her." Andro told them. "And if we send word to her now, it may very well tip off Moran and Dante."

"Send me." Nameia spoke for the first time. She sat between Yuri and Pa'cour as had become her place and she relished in the attention both would show her. She looked at Yuri. "Send me Yuri. Just as we had

intended before. No one will suspect an elf female. They will think me part of the Union forces already assigned there.”

Yuri shook her head instantly though Pa'cour remained silent. “No! It’s too dangerous!” She spoke softly.

Nameia reached out and took her hand. “Yuri my love... I will not be in danger.” She spoke with that musical voice that Yuri and Pa'cour so adored and she did it with no shame or doubt. “Our Blessed Husband will see to that.” She spoke turning her head to Pa'cour. “Won’t you?”

Pa'cour met her gaze evenly and then cut his eyes to see Yuri looking at him. “T’loft... he gave me a private COM channel that would allow me to speak with Cha'talla whenever I wished too. I could contact him... let him know. He would never allow anything to happen to her.”

“Andro!” Carisia insisted.

Andro met her gaze and saw Sadi clutching her hand tightly. He nodded quickly. “That would work very well.” He said. “Cha'talla is more operationally inclined than Arrarn and if Nameia goes to him and provides him this intelligence he will act on it from the shadows. Tir'ut?”

Tir'ut nodded from his chair. “My brother Lynom and As'hia are in charge of Narice’s personal security detachment. My father would tell them... but no one else until he was certain that her safety was assured. Then he would act against those aligned against her.”

“Do it!” Andro spoke with hesitation. “Nameia... I will have a *STRIKER* take you to the capital. You’ll be shrouded the entire way. No one will know you have arrived.”

“I want two of our Immortals to go with her.” Yuri spoke up.

Andro nodded again without hesitation and Murano marveled at how quickly his mind assessed a situation and then acted upon it. He had heard from many others on Manne that Andro was nearly a clone to his father in the way he thought and how quickly he could process vital and important information and move to make meaningful decisions. Obviously they had not been exaggerating.

“Pick them... get them on a G9 over to here. By the time they arrive the *STRIKER* will be ready.” Andro looked at Faren. “Do you have any that you suspect Captain?” He asked.

“None that I can be sure of Prince Androcles.” Faren replied honestly. “We have only tidbits of information that points to this. Nothing solid.”

“Transfer that intelligence to a data pad and give it to Nameia.” Andro told him quickly. “Cha'talla and the others have been there among them and will know what to take seriously and what not too.”

Faren nodded quickly. “I will see to it.” He said.

Andro got to his feet. “*Enylarcopri*... take your mother and Nameia to the landing bay and make sure she is fitted with our finest equipment. Do not spare anything.”

Carisia got to her feet, Lu'ria following suit naturally, gripping her hand tightly. The love between them was obvious and Lu'ria had no intention of allowing her fellow princess and maya eyed lover to do this alone. “Mother... follow me.” Carisia said.

Andro turned and looked at the captain of Faren’s ship as Yuri and Nameia were leaving. “Captain...”

“Onrad Prince Androcles!” The man announced clearly as he stepped forward.

“You have had a chance to review the plan.” Andro said. “The *BLOOD REVERENCE* class is your ship. What do you think?”

Onrad stepped forward. “I have a question first.” He asked.

Androcles nodded. “Go ahead.”

“How do you know I am not here simply to learn these plans?” Onrad asked. “How do you know I am not a spy for Moran?”

Deion turned his head from where he sat beside Nara. “Because you would already be dead if you were.” He spoke matter-of-factly.

Andro looked at the man. “Many of your people still do not believe that you have unique scents.” He spoke evenly. “You believe that because you ingest blood on a normal basis that it somehow changes what your base scent is.”

Onrad’s eyes grew a little wider. “How... it is still taught in our schools.” He said.

Androcles nodded. “It is not true Captain. And it is one of the things that Narice will get around to changing eventually. You have a base scent sir... all of you do. And it is from that base scent that all of us who

are wolves can detect the hatred and rage that comes from your pores whenever Moran's name is mentioned." Andro motioned for him to come to the table. "He is responsible for something in your life that made you hate him I assume."

"How did you... how do you know that?" Onrad asked stunned.

"Your scent. Your body language. The way you jaw tightens and the way your right eye twitches whenever his name is mentioned." Deion spoke as he was still looking at him.

Andro smiled at Deion's comment. "Whatever he is responsible for is your business sir." Andro told him. "We have no right to know. Just know that he will face justice for all his sins."

Onrad met Andro's eyes. "Swear to me." He demanded. "Swear to me that he will not get away and that he will answer for his crimes against the High Coven. Against my... against my son and daughter."

Andro nodded. "That is the plan." He said.

Onrad took a deep breath and nodded. "Your father's plan is superior to anything I have ever seen." Onrad spoke as he stepped right up to the chart table. "We have trained for such a thing before... never as much as I and others thought we should... but we have trained for it. We never trained for something like your father has developed here however."

Eliani chuckled. "Our father isn't exactly mainstream." She said with a modicum of pride in her voice. "He likes to think of wild things to do."

"Will it work?" Dorian asked now with a smile at Eliani's comment.

Onrad nodded. "Yes... with two small modifications. Your entry points."

"Show us." Andro said motioning for Cowen, Jomann, Torian and the others of his team to move closer to the table.

Onrad stepped closer and began typing on the computer console. He looked at the chart now. "These two access points are closest to the power conduits that manage the secondary engine drive circuitry as well as the bridge maintenance accessway. The only way to truly knock out the LSD engines is to override one of these points and assume control of the main engines from the secondary panel. You will also need to hit the bridge. That is where Moran will be without question and you will need to take the engineering station."

"How many on the bridge?" Andro asked.

"Eleven... including Moran." Onrad answered.

Andro nodded his head looking at the schematic chart. "Ok... that is feasible." He spoke as he traced several lines on the chart. "Once the initial entry is made, Deion, Nara, Cowen, Sherice and Daio break off here and use this accessway to reach the hatch for the bridge. Once Dorian and I hit the aft section of the deck for Dante and Lu'ria and Carisia hit the forward section of the deck, *fervon* you and the others hit the bridge and secure Moran."

"That still leaves the secondary bridge control panel." Deion said. "Is it really necessary to take control of it?"

Onrad looked at Andro now. "Moran's bridge crew is superbly trained Prince Leonidas. I do not doubt that your brother would be able to subdue them; however one or more of them might realize what you are doing and attempt to activate an emergency jump. Take this control panel when you assault this deck and you remove this ability from them permanently."

"Not without being able to secure it first." Deion spoke now as he pointed at the plans of the ship. "These controls would undoubtedly be password protected. Even if we took control of them they would still be able to shift to another password from the bridge and use the systems remotely."

"Not if you change the password." Onrad said.

"And how would we do that in twenty-seven seconds?" Andro asked. "That is all the time we will have before Deion blows the service hatch and hits the bridge."

"An algorithm bypass." The female voice spoke up.

Murano turned when he realized the voice came from Mari beside him. "Mari what did I tell you about interrupting and..." He began.

"No!" Deion hissed cutting Murano's words short. "She's right!" He said moving over along the table and tapping the panel quickly. "Like this?" He asked looking down into her blue green eyes.

Mari looked at the formula he had typed and nodded. "Yes! Exactly!" She exclaimed.

Mari glanced up into his face and felt herself shiver in wanton delight once again. Deion Leonidas was far more deliciously handsome in person she decided and much larger physically than he had appeared in the transmission she had first seen of him. His dark brown eyes were liquid orbs of beauty as she gazed into them and just being next to him as she was now caused her to be more aroused than at anytime before in her young life. His Etheric resonance trembled against his shields but she could sense it easily enough and the power of it made her shudder in delight. Mari couldn't explain it and she did not want to try to explain it. She had never felt this way about any of the men she had serious relationships with in the past and that fact alone made her want to go explore these new sensations and feelings. Neither of them noticed the knowing look that passed between Nara and Lisisa from where they stood. To say that their brother was interested in Mari was obvious, but there was also much more to his curiosity than simply a beautiful woman standing in front of him. Even they could sense the pull between Mari and Deion. All of Deion's sisters could sense it, and no doubt Andro did as well, but Nara most of all because she was his twin.

It was Eliani who shook them all out of their almost trancelike state. "That's all well and good *fervon*... but you just typed in the formula for that in like three seconds. The rest of us block heads wouldn't be able to do it as fast as you and Lady Mari when we are there."

Onrad looked at Androcles. "Your Avatar could." He spoke.

Androcles shook his head. "I will not risk Armen on this mission." He said. "He is the heart of this ship and he will need to be here in case something happens that we can not plan for."

Mari tore her eyes from Deion and looked at Andro. "I will do it." She said.

"Mari no!" Murano almost yelled.

"I can do it fa... Uncle!" She exclaimed turning to look at him. All of those present in the room who were Lycavorian could instantly smell the spike in her scent when she spoke and all of them knew why but did not understand it.

"It is too dangerous!" Murano snapped shaking his head.

"And it will be even more dangerous without doing this!" Mari protested. "I can maintain an open COM link with Armen and he can assist me, but Deion's sister just said none of them have the skill to do this except for Deion and me. And he is leading the assault on the bridge! He will be in danger if this is not done! I can do this!"

And once more those in the room who were Lycavorian detected the shift in her scent when she spoke. This time of Deion. Her words may not have given it away, but the way her scent spiked and the inflection of her words as she spoke Deion's name was obvious to them all though it went right over Murano's head.

"I said no!" Murano barked at her. "I did not bring you with me to put you at risk Mari! If anything were to happen to you, your father would never forgive me!"

Mari turned back to Andro. "I can do this!" She insisted. "It is child's play. And the risk to the entire assault team would be much less if we do not change the plan now! Isn't that right Androcles?"

Andro shook his head slowly. "I will not go against your uncle's wishes Lady Mari." He said.

"I will guide her!" Deion spoke up now. "She can enter with my team. We will stage at her location and then conduct our entry when she has finished the bypass."

"The deck will not be secure *fervon*." Andro said. "It will still be a hot zone. Even after she conducts this bypass... who will remain to shield her? Dorian and I will be after Dante and Lu'ria's team will not even be close."

"We will have twenty-seven seconds from the time she executes the bypass until we hit the bridge." Cowen spoke now leaning forward and looking at the schematic. "Six meters from the panel to our access tunnel and another eight meters in the actual accessway." Cowen was figuring in his head and using his fingers on the panel to help him. They all watched as Sherice stepped forward and slid her smaller hand under his larger palm and added her fingers to his.

"Nine Cowen." She spoke softly, moving closer to him and pressing her body against his. She had worked diligently with Cowen over the last days on his new Mindvoice abilities and he was growing and learning far faster than she had first thought. Sherice really did not know what to expect of Cowen's Shan when she first decided to take the position offered by Andro and her mother. After what had happened, and the closeness she had with all of the Leonidas family, Sherice did not believe she could be objective enough. Her

mother talked her into it by telling her that Cowen'Shan and those like him were different. Just how different Sherice did not fully grasp until she had met him.

He towered over her in height and though his body was covered in a fine coat of hair, he was easily as well built as any Spartan she had seen. And quite to her astonishment Sherice found him to be very attractive in a wild sort of way. He moved with fluid grace, always sure of himself, and always checking the area around him. His long tail was always moving behind him, providing him exceptional balance and added strength. Sherice did not expect him to be so well educated and was stunned as he recited the different intricacies of Advanced Architectural Engineering and she discovered he had made the designs for his Pride's main home and then built the structure over the course of three years with his brothers. Sherice knew he had a very sharp mind when it came to tactics, for Androcles would not have selected him to be part of his team if he didn't, but she also knew from brief experiences with him that fast math calculations were not one of his strong points when working to compute something quickly. He was very meticulous about his calculations she learned and he just was not able to do certain things in his head so quickly. Sherice was also stunned at her body's physical reaction when she pressed close to him for this is the closest she had been since meeting him. She hid her expression very well, just as her mother had taught her and all of her sisters, but Sherice could not deny the wave of desire that being so close to him caused within her.

And that most of all caused Sherice to begin to think of Cowen'Shan in a very different light.

Cowen turned and met her gorgeous blue eyes with a smile taking no offense at what she had just done. "Thank you Sherice." He said surprising her with his reaction and the brightness of his own green flecked dark eyes. He turned back to Andro. "Nine seconds. We can do it." He said confidently. "Deion covers Lady Mari while she activates the bypass in the corridor, Deion then throws her up to me out of the corridor while Daio and Sherice cover our entry point and Nara focuses on the bridge access hatch. Then we proceed the last eight meters to the hatch and execute our entry. She will not be seen and will be safe once in the accessway and out of the line of fire. Nine seconds for us to cover the eight meters and execute our entry. Simple."

"I will do it!" Mari spoke forcefully turning to look at Murano. "I am not a child and if Armen and Deion can not do it than I am the only one left! You can't deny it Uncle!"

"Mari you..." Murano began.

"Can you do it Uncle? You will be with Andro and Dorian!" She demanded interrupting his words. "If you can do it then I will remain behind! I am not a child and I am not afraid!"

Murano stared at her for a long moment before he surrendered to her logic. She was right of course and he could not deny this. "You remain in the accessway!" Murano instructed her. "You are not to leave no matter what you hear! Is that clear?"

Mari smiled and hugged him tightly. "Yes."

"This is not a game child." Murano told her holding her at arms length. "This will be very fast and very violent. These people... they are not like those we have met so far. They will not hesitate to strike you down. People will die! You must do exactly as Deion tells you!"

Mari sobered at that and nodded her head slowly as she squeezed his arms. "As you say Uncle." She spoke softly.

Deion moved closer to Mari and she turned her head to see him towering over her from behind. "I will protect her with my life sir." He spoke confidently. "I will allow nothing to happen to her. I give you my word."

Murano nodded slowly still not liking it but he looked at Andro. "Her technical skills are unquestioned." He told him. "I do not like it... but even I must admit she can do this and make this mission smoother and perhaps less violent."

Andro nodded his head. "Very well. Nara... you will see to insuring Lady Mari has the proper gear and have the Master at Arms put together an electronics package for her and a weapon that will suit her physical stature."

Nara didn't hesitate and held out her hand for Mari. "This way Mari." She spoke.

Mari leaned up and kissed Murano on the cheek softly. "I will not disappoint you." She said softly.

"Disappointing me will never be an issue child." He said as he leaned over and kissed her forehead.

Mari smiled and turned. She glanced once more at Deion and saw his gorgeous eyes gazing at her intently. She could hardly tear her eyes from Deion as she moved around him and took Nara's hand. Murano took notice of this now and while his eyes narrowed he said nothing. The way they looked at each other... it

was so very familiar to him somehow. He shook his head as Andro leaned over the table and drew their attention back to him.

“The rest of us will talk our way through the assault and iron out any other issues. We have five hours before Faren will contact Moran’s ship. Let’s make the most of them.”

KAVALIAN LEUGERS COMMAND SHUTTLE APPROACHING MANNE

Normally he would have been in his personal Command Transport *LEUGERS*, but since his son had stolen that when he defected, Pusintin was left with this revamped ship and having to ride in it only fueled his anger. Finally they were going to strike. He was going to finish it this time. He was going to kill his brother and take For'mya back. She belonged to him and she would be howling under him again before this day was done. He had his brother outnumbered and outgunned. The vaunted King of the Lycavorian Union had been caught with his pants down and he had been the one to do it. This knowledge made Pusintin swell with even more confidence as they drew closer to the surface.

His head turned when Popal appeared next to him. “Marshall... the Union ships have jumped away!” He declared evenly. “We were monitoring on long range sensors and when they detected us they simply left three transports on their approach runs and jumped away!”

“Can you track them?” Pusintin demanded.

Popal shook his head. “No Marshall.”

Pusintin turned to another officer on his opposite side. The Commander of the Puma Bane detachment. “Do you still have the signal Golva?” He barked.

The Puma Bane officer nodded. “It is getting clearer as we approach Marshall.” He answered. “Exactly where it has been for the last 36 hours.”

Marshall looked back to Popal. “We could have used that ship.” He stated. “It was no doubt a treasure of technological advances. Detail four cruisers to break away from the attack plan and begin constant sensor sweeps in case it returns. If it does I want that ship!”

“Do you think Leonidas ran Marshall?” Popal asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “My brother is a dog... but he is a dog with courage. He would not run. He would remain to protect For'mya and his other whores. Golva... you and your men may have my brothers other whores. Use them as you wish but do not kill them. We need to be able to parade all of them before their people and have them see how easy it was to break their precious Queens and force them into submission.”

The Puma Bane officer grinned. “Thank you Marshall.” He stated.

“Popal... once we have touched down you will lead the second Assault Force.” Pusintin spoke. “Move directly for the main northern compound they have established here. It will only be a short distance as long as you follow the path I have laid out.”

“It is much rough terrain Marshall.” Popal spoke. “And most of those with me are not ground soldiers. I will use the Puma Bane as shock troops and have them lead the assault with your permission.”

Pusintin nodded. “Fine... but it will not matter. With the three hundred Puma Bane you have you will have superior numbers by far. We may lose some... but you will be victorious.” He told him. “As soon as I have secured For'mya I will detach a smaller part of my force of Puma Bane to assist you.”

Popal nodded. “As you wish Marshall.”

“Have three of our Frigates move into a high orbit above the compound in order to assist you Popal. If heavy fire is needed, do not hesitate to call it down on them. He was a fool to establish such a position knowing we would eventually catch him. Detail one to move into a similar position above this smaller facility where For'mya is.” Pusintin spoke. “I want them destroyed completely after we have stripped them. And make sure the T19 Dragon Killing missiles we have are evenly distributed. We will be facing at least six dragons, my brother’s beast among them. They must be precise when they target one. We don’t have the missiles to waste.”

“I will make it so.” Popal nodded.

“Two minutes until we hit the atmosphere Marshall!” The pilot called out.

Pusintin nodded his head. “Good.” He snarled. “I’m itching to get this over with.”

Pusintin did not see Popal reach behind him discretely and press the small button on the panel behind where he sat.

Popal had taken to heart what the other ship captains had told him and after much soul searching he knew them to be correct. This was no longer about the safety and advancement of the Kavalian Empire. It was a personal vendetta. Brother against brother. And it was over this female elf For'mya. She had never been the Marshall's property and he had taken her, lied to her and forced himself upon her. Popal was no fool, and he was even more well educated than many of those same ship captains. He knew the vast history of the Lycavorian Union and more importantly he knew the history of its King.

The Marshall had taken For'mya Leonidas from her husband and mate and for all intents and purposes, he *had* raped her. It didn't matter the circumstances of this action or what she was going through physically because she was now wolf and because of what Pusintin had done she was only aware of the supposed death of the King. Pusintin had forced himself on her enough times to impregnate her give then him two children, a son among them. Popal had done one thing as he mulled this over in his mind. He tried to imagine what he would feel if someone, another Kavalian male took his young wife against her will. If she had been forced to do what For'mya Leonidas had. The single most glaring emotion that had filled Popal then was rage. A deep seething rage that his wife had been taken from him and forced to endure this. Discovering how this made him feel propelled him over the edge of understanding and acceptance. For'mya Leonidas had been a pawn, forced to bear Pusintin a son whose only purpose was to be used to gain control of the Lycavorian Union through some fool claim to birthright.

The Marshall still clung to that twisted ideal Popal knew, saying that there were enough people within the Union to help him gain power this way. And that For'mya loved him now. That she wanted only him. Popal and the others knew better. The very moment it had become known that Pusintin had forced himself upon the elf Queen in the old ways of the Lycavorian people and that King Leonidas was still very much alive, it became rape. Any support he and Keleru may have had evaporated instantly upon that becoming known. The Lycavorian Union viewed rape as one of the highest forms of sacrilege within their society, even among the many different species, and the punishment for such an act was without question or doubt. Anyone party to this crime would suffer the same fate as the one who perpetrated it and that is why rape of any kind was essentially nonexistent within the Union.

Popal thought long and hard after meeting with the ship captains. He thought back to his own Kavalian mate once again and the children she had given him. In all the years he had been with her, he had never taken another into his bed even though his position and status allowed this. As he thought about these things he came to the realization he had never desired another female. His wife was openly affectionate with him in their home and equally receptive in their bed. He did not treat her as a piece of property as many Kavalian men did. Popal had come to a single and glaring conclusion quite easily; he did not view his wife as property and while he may not have treated her as an equal in many matters, he did love her. And he loved the five children she had bore him over the years. That more than anything made his decision easy. He wanted to see them again. He wanted to feel her blond fur against his once more and perhaps experience what it could be like to view her as not only his wife, but an equal. He wanted to see his children grow old and have children of their own.

He wanted a life without constant war and death.

Following Pusintin blindly would insure that never occurred. It would only insure that he died out here in the void of space on some unknown world following a man who no longer held his respect.

That was not something Popal would allow to happen.

MANNE
ALPHA SITE TWO
200 KILOMETERS NORTH OF BASE ONE

For'mya Leonidas squatted on the cool grass and allowed her wolf senses to expand and absorb all around her. Since the day Martin Leonidas had turned her, For'mya had embraced her new life as a female wolf

and the wife and mate to a Spartan. Not just any Spartan wolf, but the single most powerful Alpha male Lycavorian Spartan anywhere in the known Universe. Days and weeks and months training beside both Aricia and Martin had forged her into the female wolf she now was. For'mya was only slightly smaller than Dysea when in wolf form, though Aricia was the largest of all Martin's Queens when they joyfully ran together in their alternate forms. Anja was only a fraction smaller than her, but her wolf body was packed with nearly as much muscle as Aricia when she shifted to her stunning Persian red haired wolf form. Seeing the five of them running through the timber with Bella easily keeping up as she blurred was a sight that many had seen through the years, though none would ever truly understand. Having Martin as their husband and mate had brought all of them so much closer to their instincts and wild nature. Even Bella, though she was a pureblooded vampire, even she had embraced the wildness within her when they ran.

The endless hours of combat training with her fellow Queens had shaped her lithe elven form into physical perfection, as it had done for all of his Queens. All of the combined skill and knowledge the five of them possessed they had freely passed to each other over years of often rigorous and harsh training. When Cirith joined them that knowledge and skill increased even more. All of them now possessed female figures that could and did leave male wolves, humans and elves alike drooling over themselves in envy of their King. The quintessential combination of lush female curves and incredible muscular definition. For'mya and her fellow Queens were far more deadly than their beauty and grace allowed others to see. And it was very well known that King Leonidas worshiped those female figures in a way that left all of them completely breathless and utterly committed to him in every way. That knowledge and fact had grown even more pronounced in recent weeks and all of them knew there was nothing remaining in the Universe that could ever come between them again.

What had occurred with Pusintin was long behind her now. Cast away into the chasm of the past and left to rot and be forgotten where it belonged. As a Spartan female, and a female Alpha wolf, her much-loved mate would see to the retribution that would follow such a heinous act. The blinding love of Martin Leonidas and her fellow Queens had washed away all of the shame and humiliation she had carried within herself for her perceived betrayal. In many ways what took place with her mirrored what had happened to her beloved Aricia so long ago. It did not matter anymore. Not to her and certainly not to those who loved her in returned. Fedor and Eirene were now as precious to her as Arrarn and Byron, all of her children and perhaps even more so considering what they too had endured. They were loved by Martin as his very own children without question or doubt; viewed by Androcles and all the Leonidas children as their siblings without hesitation. Never in all her years of life had For'mya Leonidas ever experienced or been part of the sense of family and devotion that she felt now. For'mya's own father and mother had been swept up in this emotion and its sense of purpose. Anja's grandfather Fuleos, her sisters Sivana and Ceuma, Bella's brother Vonis, Dysea's mother Normya, and so many more that were close to them. Martin's half siblings from Gorgo and Riall had begun to take a more active role in their family for Martin had been the one to reach out to them, explained to them that they were his blood by virtue of who their mother was. Though they knew that Daniel and Julie, Tarifa and Aihola would always be Martin's true brother and sisters, he loved them no less. Jora and her mate were now living in Sparta as were two of Gorgo and Riall's sons. All of them had bought villas in Gytheio or in Sparta and when they all gathered at the Royal Estate in Sparta the love and affection and sense of family that swept the area was a palpable thing. All of them were now part of the Leonidas family and no matter who it touched, it remained with them forever.

The love For'mya carried for Martin Leonidas was beyond eternal. The love she carried for Aricia and Anja, Dysea and Isabella and now Cirith beyond endless. And it all centered and pushed outward from him. Even after so many years together, the hours upon hours she had screamed his name in unadulterated bliss, Martin still made her knees weak and her belly tighten in desire and anticipation just being close to him. He did it to all of them she knew and he truly did not understand or know how much he affected his Queens. They had talked of such things when it was just them and For'mya knew that none of them could ever look upon another man in the same way. No man could ever hope do to them what he did. His devotion to them was absolute as he had proven so often through the years, and while they all knew Aricia was his *Anome* and the closest to his soul; he loved them all with shameless abandon and did not care who saw this.

And their love for him was equal in every way.

They had made the decision all those years ago to never draw a distinction between themselves when it came to their children with Martin. They spoke with one voice as mothers and no matter whether they had given

birth to them or not, they were mothers to all of Martin's children. As the firstborn and by his own accord, Androcles had forever cemented this course and mindset in all of his brothers and sisters and it had only grown more powerful as their children had grown older. It wrapped around Fedor and Eirene now as easily as them taking a breath, passed to them through the link Andro had established with them while still within For'mya's womb. No doubt. No question.

Now she would have her retribution and her justice.

Martin had spent these past weeks drawing Pusintin further and further away from any kind of support that he could possibly receive. He was stalking his prey as only an Alpha wolf could. With cold, calculating purpose and aim, for she had seen this side of him once before in a far away place. For'mya Leonidas knew Martin's intent. It was no different than the oath their son Androcles had made to Isabella when it came to Zarah. An oath that he now held sacred to himself and no other. Martin had not spoken the words out loud but For'mya knew what was in his heart. All of his Queens recognized this within him. There would be no forgiveness this time. No last second respite from his dark vengeance. This would only end in one way and they all knew it. For'mya had heard Martin Leonidas called the foremost tactician that anyone had ever met many times through the years as his Queen and now she had seen it first hand in these last weeks watching him. He was savagely devious and cruelly cunning and he was completely and utterly without mercy for those who were his enemies. All of them had seen flashes of this type of ruthless emotion within Androcles through the years; however, for the very first time it was dreadfully apparent where this type of harsh, merciless mentality came from within their son. They could see it now in Martin's beautiful dark eyes every time his brother's name was spoken.

For'mya turned her head quickly when she smelled their sweet scents and her dark brown eyes watched as Fedor and Eirene exited the cave entrance a hundred meters behind her and made their way towards her. Love for them filled her being as they settled on either side of her.

"*Medwaw... wen forn talwyn?*" Fedor asked her softly. (Mother... are you alright?)

For'mya smiled brilliantly and took their hands within hers. "*Pendebrolfrinna aur keto.*" For'mya replied. "*Pendebrolfrinna.*" (I am fine my son. I am fine.)

"*Forn sava dyota.*" Eirene spoke. (You seen distant.)

For'mya nodded her head. They were only months old in real terms, but Fedor and Eirene held the knowledge and wisdom passed to them first by Androcles and then by their Bonded ones. They were twenty-five year old adults now, in every sense of the word, if not in actual years. Both of them had taken mates, first Miseo and then Iama had joined their family and they held the same devotion in them as their mates as the entire Leonidas family did for each other. It did not matter to For'mya or Martin and her fellow Queens that their mates were Kavalian, only that they were loved with the same commitment.

"I was thinking of what has transpired to bring us forward to this day." She said in reply to Eirene's questioning tone with a soft chuckle. "As your father and siblings are so fond of saying, it has been quite the ride."

"Do you... do you regret any of it mother?" Eirene asked her.

For'mya shook her head instantly. "Never." She spoke with conviction. "It has been the happiest time of my entire life. No matter what has occurred through the years to bring us here. We have Andro and Lisisa and Eliani... all of our children. And now we have you and Fedor among us. That only makes our family stronger. And so very happy."

"Will we... will we be accepted mother?" Fedor asked.

For'mya looked at him with wide eyes. "Accepted?" She gasped. "*Carians* Fedor... you have already been accepted. Both of you! There was never any question in that. Not one single moment!" She spoke looking at Eirene seeing the same question in her eyes. They were twins and she did not doubt their emotions and thoughts as they would share with each other without question. Deion and Nara and Retta and Calyb were the same.

"The moment you were conceived in my womb you were accepted and loved. Never doubt that for an instant! Either of you! I forbid it! Your mothers would forbid it! Your father would most certainly forbid it! And Androcles would turn you both over his knee if he knew you carried these thoughts within you. Especially after what he did!" She saw them both smile shyly at this. "I know it is not possible for you to touch your brother right now because of the distance between us, but I have seen within your father's thoughts and the

conversations they have had. Androcles never ceases to ask of both of you and your progress. All of your siblings do, especially Eliani and Lisisa. Andro has... when he was very young he declared himself the protector of all his brothers and sisters... and to this very day he has done just that without fail. He continued that role he gave to himself with the both of you the day he touched you inside me. They all ache for the day they can stand before you and hold you. You had to have sensed this within Zarah for she is tied more closely with Andro than your other siblings.”

Fedor nodded. “Yes.” He said. “It was... it was...”

“It was beautiful.” Eirene said with a smile.

“And that is just from Zarah alone.” For'mya told them. “When they join us here... you will be overwhelmed. That is our strength. That is what so many do not understand about us. What many will never understand. Sometimes what even we do not understand.”

“*Saan bruard hote sali.*” Eirene said softly.

For'mya nodded. “Blood before all else.” She repeated the phrase. She squeezed their hands tightly. “We will have time... you will have time to discover what this truly means once this is over with and Pusintin has been dealt with. We will be going to the different planets that hold our people and try to discover what happen to them. There will be time to learn from the *Feravomir* and your mothers and I all you wish to know. And you both should work closely with Zarah. Young though she may be, she stands behind only your father and brother as one of the foremost hand to hand combatants within the Union. You could learn so much from her. And from Lucia.”

“Will this be done mother?” Eirene asked. “After today... will this be done?”

For'mya nodded as her head turned back to look at the lush green timber and mountains all around her. “Yes.” She answered confidently feeling Martin’s aura and resonance sweep through her even from across the miles that separated them. “When this day is done our future will truly begin. Your future. When this day is done...” For'mya’s eyes changed quickly to that of her wolf persona and her long fangs extended forth past her soft lips. “... the past will have been fully swept aside and balance restored. To your father. To our family. And we will never look back.”

So intent on each other and looking out over the timber that they were none of them detected the slight shimmer of shadows and the imperceptible wisp of dust from the ground as it disappeared into the cave behind them.

KAVALIAN *DIEROY*-CLASS HEAVY CRUISER *SABER CLAW*

The Kavalian officer stepped up to his Captain and held out the data pad. “Captain... we have received the signal from Commander Popal.” He said softly.

Weoerr took the pad slowly and nodded his head. “Then it will begin soon.” He said.

“Captain... do we...?” The man stopped talking.

“You have been my second for over twenty years now Terru.” Weoerr spoke. “Now is not the time to hold back what is on your mind?”

“Do we do the right thing Captain?” The man asked.

Weoerr was silent for a long moment before meeting his eyes. “To answer that Terru, I will ask another question? It is a question I began to ask myself a week after we began this foolhardy chase. What have we gained as a people? Since we began the war with the Coven, what have we gained as a people?”

“I do not understand sir?” Terru answered.

“Nor did I until I went to my cabin one night not so long ago and looked at the images of my mate and my children.” Weoerr answered. “I have not seen them for two years now. I have not felt her fur under my fingers, felt the firmness of her body in my grasp, nor the way her tail curls around my legs at the peak of our couplings. I have never treated her badly Terru, never demeaned her in our home, never in public. The children she has bore me are strong and proud. Even my two daughters. She is stern when needed but also fair. She does her duty as our culture dictates, but only now have I recognized what the light in her eyes is. The desire for

more. The desire to openly be able to show me in public what she shows me in our bed. The desire for knowledge and hope. The desire for a future.” Weoerr stood up now and turned to face the man who had served him for so long. He didn’t notice the heads of his bridge crew as many turned to look at him and listen.

“I discovered as I looked back on the past that we have gained nothing.” Weoerr said. “All the lives we have lost; the battles we have fought and the friends and family we have had to bury, and we have gained nothing.” He shook his head slowly. “What have we gained Terru? Only misery and pain. Only the hate and distrust of most of the galaxy and the species within. And we brought this upon ourselves. Following Keleru and Pusintin blindly as we have has caused us to become pariahs across the stars. Their lust for power, the desire to have more, it has cost us far more than any of us stopped to realize. Until General Nruarani.” Weoerr turned slowly and saw the men on his bridge watching him intently now.

“Until one among us stopped to think about all that has happened. All that he desired.” Weoerr spoke more forcefully now, his voice carrying to all on the bridge of his ship. To a man they were all from his Pride. “And then he went out and took what he desired. Jalersi’Puat, a woman who we all know as tried for so long to make things better, being his primary goal. He did not do this by violence or deceit or coercion... but by trust and honesty and the belief that our people could be so much more than what we are.” Weoerr moved slowly across the bridge now. “What happened when Pian Nruarani did this I ask you? What happen when General Pian realized once he had Jalersi that there was so much more to gain? Dozens of Kavalian Prides flocked to his banner! Dozens! I have seen the reports myself. Not the one or two Prides that Pusintin and Keleru would have you think now follow him... but dozens! Among them some of the oldest Prides in our history!”

Weoerr turned slowly in the spot he now stood. “Change is coming! Change is upon us even now! If we do not drag ourselves from our past... then we will all disappear into the abyss of history! In order to survive we must change. I have come to discover that it is the basis for our very survival. As Pian Nruarani has proven, we do not need to abandon who we are in order to facilitate this change. Who among you would rather fight and bleed and possibly die when you can take a firm young woman in your embrace, treat her as if she is something much more than the dirt beneath our feet and make babies! To feel her tail as it caresses your own in not fear, but love and commitment! It will not be easy! Change is never easy! But without change, without hope, we as a people will die. By our own hand or by the hand of those we try and subjugate instead of befriend.”

Weoerr moved back to his chair and took a deep breath. “I will no longer allow my Pride to wallow in the past and die for goals that our not ours. I will lead Pride Mantsi into the future, kicking and screaming if I must, but I will insure we have a future to experience and take part in. Following Keleru and Pusintin only insures that many of us will die horrible deaths and never know why. It insures many of you will never know the warmth of a female who looks upon you not with fear as I said... but with love and respect and honor. You will never know the first cry of your child as they are pulled from your woman’s womb. I can no longer sit by and follow men who care only for what we can do for them. I will no longer blindly follow those who care not what happens to me or to my Pride. I act now for the future. The future of Pride Mantsi. I act for the future of the children many of you have not had yet. The additional sons and daughters I still wish to have with my mate.”

Weoerr looked around slowly. “Now you all know why we do what we are about to do.” He spoke. “Not for me. Not for personal gain. Not for glory in battle. But for the future of us all. It took me far too long to realize this... and I will carry the weight of the deaths that I alone must bear because of that... but I will not continue down this path of destruction and death for my Pride.” He settled into his chair and looked at the massive view window before him. “Terru...?”

Terru stepped in front of his Pride leader, a new gleam in his eye and a new purpose to his movements. “Captain!” He barked forcefully.

“Contact the others! Make sure our weapons and shields are powered down and begin to fall back from the rest of the fleet. Slowly now. We do not want the others to realize what we are doing until it is too late.” Weoerr said evenly. “Let them walk blindly into the ambush that Leonidas has undoubtedly prepared to greet them. And then let us pray that the Lycavorian King will heed our petition and not blast us into ashes for the crimes Pusintin has committed. It is most certainly not the way I would like to begin my future.”

MANNE
ALPHA SITE ONE
200 KILOMETERS NORTH OF BASE ONE

Koguth Juturi waited with the experience of a thousand years of fighting. His keen feline eyes swept across the ground before him, meticulously designed and built over the last weeks under the care of the Drow warriors Akor'dris and Bae'diraz. They had done an exacting job of it with the engineers from both the Union ship and his own people working in smooth concert. His men responded to the tall, muscular Drow female well, especially after seeing her dispatch four of his most skilled warriors in a training class without breaking a sweat. That action more than anything had cemented her status among his men. Aside from the fact that nearly all of them found her amber colored eyes fascinating. She had taught them so much about fighting a guerilla war. Tactics and skills that none of them had possessed before, but now that they were quickly mastering thanks to her knowledge. The weeks among these men and women had been like a gift from the heavens. He had found his beloved daughter Iama, seeing the beauty she had become inside and out. He had discovered the half elf and half wolf Prince who now owned his daughter's heart. A young man who worshiped the ground his daughter walked upon unlike anything he had ever seen. An affection that was returned by her ten fold.

Just two days ago his oldest son Mataen and his wife Corsa discovered that they would be bringing their first child into this world in seven months. It was an announcement that had Koguth loudly proclaiming this fact to all who would listen. And incredibly so many did listen. He and his family quickly discovered that the life of a child was something to celebrate. And then they congratulated him by the hundreds. It was the grizzled Lycavorian *Hyperetes* who stood to his left now that had even brought a large jug of Spartan Wine to his and Mani's shelter in Base One. They had drank and laughed and celebrated well into the evening, Iama wrapped within Fedor's grasp the entire time. And his son Nedoli holding the woman who had stolen his essence the moment he first saw her.

Koguth didn't know what had taken place, but not so long ago, Ceale had tossed all the horror she had experienced recently to the wind and embraced the growing love she had for his son. They hadn't been apart for nearly a month now, Ceale always touching Nedoli in some way, stroking the light fur that adorned his body. Her joyous cries in the dark of the night had kept many of them awake at times, but the brightness of her eyes and face in the mornings after pronounced to all that she was now his son's wife. Ceale had even gone so far as to come to him and request that she be allowed to take the Juturi name as her own. Koguth had told her this was not necessary but she had insisted. It was not a large ceremony, but Martin Leonidas and his Queens had attended as Ceale was officially and affectionately welcomed into the Juturi Pride. She made it a point to tell everyone who she greeted what her name now was.

Koguth's love for his daughter had brought his Pride out of the darkness. And now they were growing and embracing all they were learning. Even the young man he had brought and promised Iama's hand to had discovered a female Elvin engineer among the crew of the *ARC ROYAL*. He doted on her like a precious gem, just as Koguth had told all of his men how they should treat their women, and the affection was returned equally by her to him. Like Ceale she was always seen stroking his soft fur when they were together and taking great delight in being wrapped within his powerful arms.

"Thinking about everything that has happened in these last months General?" The voice broke into Koguth's thoughts and he turned to look at the man.

Hyperetes Jormal Pescneu had a smile on his face as he looked at him. This man had been by his side since their encounter on that moon. It seemed like so long ago when in reality it had only been a few months. This senior Lycavorian Spartan was as skilled as Koguth had ever seen a soldier. He had not intended to remain with Koguth, but after a few weeks Jormal asked to be assigned as an aide and liaison to the Kavalian General. They had hit it off immediately.

Koguth nodded his head with a small smile. "Yes I am Jormal." He replied honestly. "My only reason for beginning this journey was to find my daughter. And look at us. She is... she is back with her family now, as beautiful a flower as I have ever seen, with the love of a man who views and treats her as his very own Queen. My youngest son has discovered what he so wanted in Ceale and she has greatly honored my Pride by taking our name even when she did not have to. My oldest will give me my first grandchild soon. We have

discovered friends and comrades. This is not something I had ever dreamed of when I started this quest, and now I can not begin to imagine our lives without it.”

Jormal nodded his head. “It is the same for many of us General. Don’t doubt what you feel is not the same for us. The actions of the Juturi Pride, of General Pian, it has changed the views of many minds. Our people sit amongst each other now and laugh and joke. Elvin and Lycavorian females cling to the arms of many of your men because they see a future in them. A future they could have. Some of your females as well.”

Koguth looked at him surprised. “Truly?” He asked knowing that many of the females within the Juturi Pride had not undergone the biogenic procedures to remove the fine coat of hair from their bodies.

Jormal nodded his head. “Half a dozen of my men that I know of.” He answered. “As your people now do, we do not look at ones outward appearance in judgment. There are many Kavalian females who have not had their natural appearances altered by force. And their beauty is very fascinating because of their appearance. Many things led us as Lycavorians to gaze past what an individual looks like and see within them. As the Crown Prince has done with the High Coven, you and the King have done with your people. Hopefully many will begin to see this and take notice of it.”

Koguth nodded his head. “I intend to see that it does Jormal. To the very best of my ability.”

“It won’t be easy sir.” Jormal said.

Koguth shook his head slowly. “No it won’t.” He agreed. “But when is anything truly worthwhile easily accomplished Jormal?”

Jormal chuckled. “Never.”

“We are ready.” Koguth spoke. “And this day will begin the future and the path we should have started thousands of years ago. It will begin with us.”

“Yes it will.” Jormal spoke. “I’ve always wanted to kick the ass of a Puma Bane soldier.”

Koguth laughed heartily taking no offense in the least at his words. “Yes... so have I Jormal. So have I.” They turned when Kalis and Mata walked up to them.

“Kalis?” Koguth spoke to the young man who had secured their path for them and not even realized it.

“We just finished checking the perimeter sensors General.” Kalis told him calmly. “The defensive positions are perfect and all the minefields are active.”

“The Puma Bane will undoubtedly be in the lead and catch the brunt of the first barrage.” Mata spoke. “The more we take out in the first seconds the better we will be.”

Koguth looked at the former Puma Bane Commander officer. “You seem rather anxious to have this happen Mata.” He said.

Mata met his eyes. “The Puma Bane are scum General.” He spoke. “I was one of them once remember.”

“You are not Puma Bane now Mata.” Koguth told him. “You have proven that beyond doubt to all of us.”

Mata nodded his head. “Perhaps.” He said softly. “But until I can remove the blight they now cause upon our people I will not be at peace. I helped to train most of them Koguth. Their shame is my shame.”

“No Mata.” Kalis told him.

“Yes it is my boy.” He said evenly. “And I intend to see that shame erased from the very memory and past of our history. It no longer has a place in what we have begun to build. If it ever had a place at all. I will make sure that the stain the Puma Bane have caused to our history will be extinguished permanently. And I will do it with the honor I have learned from Kalis and you and so many others these last weeks.”

“*Avoi.*” Jormal spoke softly.

Koguth nodded his head. “As will we all.” He said. “As will we all.”

“Akor’dris and Bae’diraz are taking the western side of the compound with most of the Juturi Pride fighters.” Kalis said. “Mata and I will take the east with a company of Spartans.”

Koguth nodded. “Jormal and I will take the north with the remaining three companies of Spartans and Muton’s Watcher forces. Remember to break when you receive the signal from King Leonidas Kalis. Your presence will be needed with Queen For’miya and your siblings and Mata is more than capable.”

Kalis nodded. “Yes sir.”

“Ceale and Serale are quite secure within the new medical bunker to handle any serious casualties. Mataen and Nedoli are in command of the three squads of our Pride who protect them.” Koguth spoke. “A dozen Hadarian Field medics will be directing any immediate trauma from their position half a kilometer behind

us and then deciding when and who gets moved back to Ceale's position. They are the more experienced and they will have final say in that. I do not want any foolish heroic attempts made by anyone. We will have the element of surprise initially yes, but we will still be outnumbered perhaps three to one. Mata is very correct. We need to remove the majority of their force in the first minute. It will descend to personal combat very quickly and the fewer we have left alive the better for us." He looked at them. "As King Leonidas ordered, there is to be no mercy shown. They would not show it to us and we do not have the facilities for prisoners. We have all been given these COM implants and we know what command channels are to be ours. Maintain COMS at all times to keep each other aware of what is happening all around us. Should anything go wrong on either front, and you can not hold, immediately collapse back to the Field Medical area with the Hadarians, protect them and then we will call in assistance from Torma or the other dragons we have supporting us. If need be from the ships above as well."

"If they throw aside their weapons and give up General?" Kalis asked.

Koguth's feline eyes narrowed and became like dark flints. "Fuck them!" He hissed in reply. "They should have thought about that before the rise of this day." He looked at them. "To your positions! The gods be with us all!"

ULU ARIZONA

Admiral Miranda Lorian sat in her command chair and watched as her crew did their duties without hesitation. Watching them as she often did now, Miranda felt a swell of pride within her. They were the finest men and women she had ever worked with in her life, no matter their species. Her eyes cut to where Zaala and Chizz worked seamlessly next to one another at the engineering control stations. They would comment to one another in a soft voice and the other would nod or answer, their hands never idle as they flew across the consoles. Zaala and Chizz had a hand in building the *ARIZONA* and her engines and no one could make their ship sing like they did. Zaala and E'dira had become fast friends over the last weeks and she and Steven had been to their quarters often for dinner or just to relax. Ben had told her that even though she had found E'dira, not to dismiss the other relationships she could form with the rest of her crew. Miranda took it to heart but neither she or E'dira wanted to rush anything. Zaala and Steven were enough for now. They had joked and worked together ever since coming to the *ARIZONA*, and they had the most in common with them.

The *ARIZONA* and her crew had performed to perfection so far. The ship was unlike any ships within the Union fleet and had blown away all expectations by her engineers and the few designers at Dreamland who had held doubts. Miranda was no fool though and she hadn't got this far by being careless. She knew that things could go very bad at the worst possible time and she drove her crew just as hard as she drove herself. It helped that the vast majority of her senior officers were no different than her in many regards and they ran their departments from the front. They worked longer hours and were not afraid to jump in and get their hands dirty right alongside their people. When she walked the decks or sat in the mess lounge and just observed her crew, she could detect the sense of pride and purpose at what they were doing and what they had accomplished so far. Most of them knew their commander had a direct line to the Crown Prince and the King because of their history together. She had lived with the Leonidas family on the Royal Island for over a year by all accounts. They knew that no matter what they needed, all Miranda had to do was make one call and it was theirs.

Miranda's head turned when E'dira's voice sounded out. "Admiral?"

"E'dira?" She said.

"The Kavalian ships radiating the beacon are beginning to fall back from the main force." E'dira reported. "They are doing so slowly so as not to draw attention to themselves and it appears to be working so far."

Miranda nodded. "Maybe that message we got from this Popal character was for real." She said.

"The remainder of their Task Force is proceeding on a direct course to Manne." E'dira said. "Their troop ships have all dropped to a lower position and are beginning to break for the surface of the planet."

Miranda leaned forward in her command chair. "It's about to begin." She said.

"I estimate ninety seconds before they begin to enter the atmosphere." E'dira spoke.

“COM officer... get me the *HORNET*.” Manda barked out.

“Aye Admiral.” The voice echoed. A moment later. “Captain Janon responding.”

Manda looked at the holo disc in the floor of the bridge just in front of her chair as the figure of the Lycavorian man came into clear view.

“Admiral.” Janon spoke respectfully but with a small smile.

“Christ Janon... will you stop that!” Miranda exclaimed with disgust on her face.

The large Lycavorian had been with her since this all began and they were close friends. He smiled and bowed his head to her. “We are ready Manda.” He said.

“You and the *HORNET* take the port side, we’ll take the starboard.” Miranda told him. “All *WOLFPACKS* are to break the moment we begin firing. *RAPTOR* E3s will begin jamming the moment we attack! I don’t want that fucker Pusintin’s *GREAT SOUL* to be anything but a smoking hulk once we are finished.”

“Chop off the head and the body will die.” Janon spoke.

Miranda nodded. “Once we clear the first attack run, launch everything you got. We need to chop their numbers up quick in case those who are falling back are playing us.”

“You think they are baiting us?” Janon asked.

Miranda shrugged. “I don’t know. But let’s make sure if they are, we are ready. Akemi and the *ARC ROYAL* will be coming in from behind them in case they do, but let’s keep our eyes open.”

Janon nodded. “We’ll be ready.” He spoke.

“Thirty seconds!” E'dira called out.

Miranda got to her feet now. “Fleet Wide!” She barked.

The female COM officer had already anticipated this and stabbed her finger down on her panel. “Fleet wide open Admiral.”

“This is Admiral Lorian.” Miranda barked. “This is about to kick off people! We got our King and all of our Queens on the surface of Manne! I do not want to be the one who tells Androcles that we allowed his parents to get killed! Everyone on their toes! You are the best at what you do! Let’s kick the Kavalians in the balls just like we did at Kranek! The gods go with you all! Lorian out!”

“Ten seconds!” E'dira called out.

“Weapons! I want full broadside port barrage! Max yield on all weapons!” Miranda barked. “Port side turrets to max deflection! Starboard batteries to free roam. Lock them up people!”

“That’s it!” E'dira barked out. “All Kavalian troops ships have entered the atmosphere!”

“Here we go!” Miranda snarled. “*ARIZONA* Attack Wing! Commence attack! Commence attack! Let’s get some!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SPARTA'S WRATH

Mari watched her intently as Nara finished checking the Mark Five ArmorPly body armor she now wore and then stepped back and looked at her with those same azure colored eyes as her older brother Androcles. They drifted over her now armored form looking for anything that might be out of place it seemed, but finding nothing. Then Nara finally turned those amazing eyes on her own blue/green orbs once more. It seemed that the eyes of Nara’s mothers always seemed so bright and catching, just as Nara’s azure orbs were, but Nara’s azure eyes and those of her mother and brother were far more breathtaking in her opinion. She saw Nara smile at her warmly.

Mari was five inches shorter than Nara’s own five foot five inch frame, but Nara had to admit to herself, she was breathtaking in her beauty. Her breasts strained against the confines of the Mark V body armor, easily as large and as firm as her mother Anja’s *goldur*. There was no doubt that Lady Mari had many men chasing her back home simply for their size and firmness; for Nara knew that many men liked larger *goldur* on their wives and mates. Nara also knew for certain that many young wolves looked at her and saw the very same thing since

her *goldur* were slightly larger than her own mother's. Mari made the Mark V body armor look good on her, even though that was definitely not its purpose. Though barely five foot tall, the ArmorPly Mark V conformed like a second skin to the parts of her body that were not protected by the enhanced armor plating. Her taut legs were long for her small frame and Nara had to admit Lady Mari had an ass that was perfect in nearly all aspects. Her long, reddish brown hair, now wrapped tightly in a single pony tail, was lush and shiny with health pulled over one shoulder as it was. Her blue green eyes were wide and her hands were shaking slightly. Nara took Mari's hands in hers and squeezed tightly causing Mari to look at her once more.

Nara Leonidas did enjoy the company of men, but only Deion knew that she desired women far more, at least at this time in her life. She kept nothing from her twin no matter that he was a male, and they kept each other's secrets very close to their hearts. Nara did not doubt that Andro probably knew as closely tied as he was with all of their siblings, and he was far more perceptive than people gave him credit for. His insight was downright scary at times but she didn't think any of her other siblings were aware, and she knew Andro would never violate her privacy or speak of it for any reason. It would not matter to them she knew, but Nara didn't really know for sure herself at this time, so why openly state that until she knew for certain. Nara was not shy and since she had already gone through her Coming of Age fever only seven months ago, she was free to explore and she had done this on more than one occasion, with two different women and one man.

Lycavorian physiology was relatively simple, with most Lycavorians appearing older than they actual were. It had become a very common occurrence in the last few generations and while she was only a few months shy of eighteen years of age, Nara and Deion both appeared to be in their early twenties to most individuals who were not Lycavorian. Their scents gave away their real ages to their own people, but to those who did not have enhanced senses it often came as a surprise to those who discovered how old they really were. Her mother Anja had described it as a phase in Lycavorian evolution once, but it really did not matter since Lycavorian children were almost always imprinted with at least some form of the memories and knowledge of both their parents. Though this evolution had been happening for many years now, most young female wolves like Nara chose to experiment and discover new things once their fevers had come and gone. It was still seen as a heinous crime to take a female wolf before her Coming of Age but there were many instances of young female wolves who had only just passed through their Coming of Age fevers taking mates soon afterward, but still many more chose not to. Her father's return and the openness and adventurous nature of her beloved mothers had instilled a sense of exploration in the young generations of Lycavorians and nearly all the species within the Union, both male and female, and they had embraced that entirely.

Knowing who Nara was kept most of the casual male wolves at bay and for those Alphas and others who could not control their urges and allowed their cocks to rule their actions, Deion or one of her brothers had always been present and put that to rest right away. No male Alpha wolf in their right mind wanted to come into conflict with any of her brothers, let alone a pureblood one and that didn't even bring into contemplation of what angering her father would encompass. This mind set applied to pretty much all of the young males of different species across the Union. While the incident was never openly discussed or admitted by anyone, there were many rumors still filtering about of what had happened to the young man who had tried to force himself on Eliani shortly after her fever ended. No male in their right mind wanted to tempt the fates when it came to a Leonidas daughter anymore and risk the wrath of the Leonidas family. The single man who Nara had taken into her bed was sweet and attentive to her and it was a very nice experience, but both of them knew the emotion was just not there for either of them since he was still very young as well. He was still a treasured friend to both her and Deion but they knew nothing would come of it and parted as very close friends. They still spoke to one another on occasion but Nara just enjoyed the softness of another woman's body right now. While still very new to everything, she had experienced far more pleasure with the two woman than the one man.

As for Mari, Nara found her very attractive, but she knew immediately that her Etheric resonance burned only for her brother. It was also quite obvious to anyone who was even half Lycavorian for they could smell it in her sweet orange flavored scent as well.

"How does that feel?" Nara asked finally.

"It is... it is rather tight." Mari answered honestly.

Nara nodded her head. "It is always tight at first. It will conform to your body within the hour and you won't even notice it. After that it will remember. Besides... you aren't exactly undeveloped if you get my meaning."

Mari smiled and her cheeks blushed slightly. "I take after my mother." She spoke. "It is a curse sometimes."

Nara laughed softly. "It is a curse only if you find a man who doesn't know what he is doing." She stated with more confidence than actual experience.

Mari joined in the soft laughter and nodded her head. "I suppose you are right." She said with a smile. Nara Leonidas made her feel completely at ease and Mari found her to be witty and very friendly.

Nara stared at her for a moment as Mari inspected the armor on her arms with her eyes. "Are you ok? Truth now Mari." She asked softly.

Mari nodded her head quickly and met her eyes. "I'm just... I have... I'm terrified Nara." She stammered out the answer finally. "I have never done something like this."

Nara smiled at her. "Neither have we... so don't feel bad." She stated. "Andro wouldn't allow us to do this if he believed we could not pull it off. Trust me. My *fervor* is... he is no fool Lady Mari."

"Have you... have you been in...?" Mari began to ask.

Nara nodded her head slowly. "When we pulled Sheva's parents from that colony. Deo and I were..." "Deo?"

Nara grinned now. It was a simple thing, but it served to make Mari relax even more. "I couldn't pronounce his full name when we were babies." Nara said. "It only ever came out as Deo. The nickname stuck." She answered with a shrug. "We had a brief encounter with some vampire hunters. They got the drop on me. Deo fell upon them like a storm."

"He... he killed them?" Mari asked softly.

Nara nodded her head. "He saved me." She said. "They were not pleasant individuals and some of what they were saying they were going to do to me was vile. Deo is... he can be very protective of me. I have scolded him in the past about this but he does not listen. It is a trait prevalent in all my brothers. That day however... that day I was very happy he ignored me."

"You are twins." Mari said. "Praetorian and Mage. That is not uncommon from what I have heard."

Nara nodded in agreement. "Yes... I guess so."

"I can feel your Etheric resonance." Mari says. "And... and his as well. It is so powerful and clear."

Nara looked at her. "You are a Pralor. Isn't that normal for your people? To be able to feel the resonance of others."

Mari nodded quickly. "Oh yes... but his resonance is... it is not as resounding as your brother or father... but it is so..." Mari wanted to say delicious to her but she stopped herself. "It is so focused and pure. Much more than any of my people I have met except for my fa... my Uncle."

Nara smiled at her as she detected the slight spike in Mari's orange flavored scent. This young Pralor woman truly wanted her brother and it was so very obvious to her as a woman and a wolf. And it would be obvious to every male Lycavorian able to detect her scent. Something that would make it easier for her going forward Nara knew. "Yes... well father and Andro have had to beat Deo enough times to make him stop being so reckless. It hasn't worked for the most part."

Mari's eyes looked shyly downward. "He truly has two educational degrees?" She asked softly looking back up at her.

Nara chuckled gently and squeezed her hands again. "Our *medwaw* Dysea is a taskmaster when it comes to our schooling. You heard us talking about her." She said with a small twinkle in her eye. "Combined with our grandmother Gorgo, who just happens to be a teacher, through the years they have made sure all of us have at least two degrees. Education is a blessed gift to them and they have been rigid and unmoving about it as we all grew. Our sister Eliani has three degrees, though you wouldn't know it from the way she acts. Our sister Lisisa as well. They insist that we all have two avenues to fall back on when the fighting finally ends. We will not be fighting our entire lives Lady Mari. That is our hope anyway."

"Please... my name is just Mari." She stated. "I don't know how that started."

"It is a term of honor and respect." Nara told her. "You are Murano's daughter and you deserve such."

Mari's eyes flew open wide. "You... you know!" She gasped in disbelief.

Nara nodded slowly. "Every Lycavorian can tell. Your scents give it away."

“Please Nara...!” Mara gasped gripping her hands tightly and pulling her closer. “You... you can not tell him! I... please promise me! I don’t...”

Nara shook her head. “We may not understand the reasoning behind this Mari, but it is not our place to change that. He will not discover it from any of us.”

Mari’s blue/green eyes were wide as she looked at her. “All of you can...?”

Nara nodded her head. “Each member of a Lycavorian family has a unique scent, but they always retain the base scent of their ancestors within their blood. Or something similar to it. This is the same for any species for the most part really. Any Lycavorian would be able to detect this is your scents.”

“It is...” Mara looked at the floor. “I want to tell him... I do! I don’t think my mother knows that I have discovered this but... it is so very complicated.”

“Is it really?” Nara asked her gently. “Or does it just seem that way?”

“He... my father... he is haunted by horrible things.” Mari said softly looking at the deck once more but not releasing her hands. “After the war... he felt it was all his fault. That so many died because of him. What he had supposedly failed to do. It wasn’t true. None of it. But he couldn’t fight the feelings. He finally found peace in my mother’s arms for a time...” Nara saw the small smile cross her lips. “But the nightmares always came back. He did not want to burden her with such things and he did the only thing he could think of.”

“He left in order to protect her. Or so he thought.” Nara said.

Mari nodded. “He didn’t know she was pregnant with me. And my mother did not want to force him to stay with this knowledge.”

“Why hide who you are Mari?” Nara asked.

Mari looked at her. “My mother... Tobia... she is a Praetorian as well.” She said. “She was never listed among the official roles of Praetorians because of her skills and her location. My mother is... she is exceptionally skilled in shielding herself. You could be standing next to her and not be able to feel even a tremor of her resonance. Chief Elder Sumar wanted it like this... she never knew why... but I think it was because he saw something that no one else did. I believe he felt my mother was meant for something else. That she was meant for my father. There were many among my people who followed Lorendo’s fool ideology and blamed the Praetorians for what had befallen our people, and my mother did not want me subjected to such ridiculous things as I grew. Uncle... Uncle Delnash understood completely and he and my Aunt agreed instantly when my mother went to them. No one... no one knows the truth except Kesyla. Not even that idiot Daron. She does not think I know but she has always been in my life, always close by. It was just easier this way given her history and that of my father.”

“Does she know that you are aware of your history?” Nara asked. “That she is your mother? That Murano is your father?”

Mari nodded her head. “I think she does. I never hesitated to go to her about anything when I was growing. She was my very best friend. I believe she had to know I would figure it out sooner or later.”

Nara drew Mari’s hands up and pressed them against her chest. “Like I said... it is not our place to tell him. He will discover it though. And better it come from you. Or your mother.”

“I know.” Mari said softly. “I can sense her. She is worried about me. I think my Uncle may have sent her to Manne, but I’m not sure. She shields better than anyone I have ever known like I said. Even my father.”

“Well... you are Murano’s daughter... and you have no idea how much his presence among us makes my father and brothers feel.” Nara said. “All of us with this gene inside of us. To finally know and at least partially understand what we are and what we can do. It is very special for us. That is why you are referred to as you are. It is a title of honor.”

“Even though I don’t want it.” Mari asked her.

Nara chuckled now. “You should see all of us as we try to avoid being called Princes and Princesses.” She said. “Our father and mothers berate us all the time for trying to avoid our titles. Even though they do the very same thing more than we do.”

Mari smiled now as well, becoming once more at ease. “I saw this with your father and mothers on Manne.” She said. “It makes you uncomfortable? Your positions and titles?”

Nara nodded her head. “All of us. My pureblood brothers most of all. Arrarn, Resumar, Calyb and Bryon do not have to deal with it as much as Andro, Deni and Deo. They are the pureblood sons of our father and sometimes they hate the distinction this gives them among our people more than anything. There are many

Lycavorian families who think that we have grown too distant from the old ways. They believe, and are always attempting, to insinuate their own children into our family to try and garner status and power. Fortunately Andro and Denali no longer have to deal with it. Sadi or my sister would rip the face from any woman who tried to come between them. And I have no doubts that Ne'Veha and Arduri and the others would do the same. We do not wish to be looked at as something special. We are... all of us, Lycavorians and Spartans. That is all we aspire to be."

"He is... your brother Deion... he is so very handsome." Mari said even more softly. It was barely a whisper that was meant only for Nara to hear as a woman.

Nara tilted her head to the side smelling the desire for Deion once more in Mari's sweet orange flavored scent. And it was a powerful scent. Nara also detected another scent on her. It was vague and very old, but it was there. A unique Lilly flavored scent not unlike the beautiful flowers that dotted the Royal Compound in Sparta. Even as old as it was it still tickled Nara's nose delightfully.

"Well..." She said playfully. "Don't let him hear you say that. It will go to his head." Nara told her with a smile.

Mari lifted her eyes and gazed at Nara as she laughed gently. Nara Leonidas was so open and unrestrained, and even after what she had just discovered her resonance echoed with calm and peace. "Does he... is there someone in..."

"Deo?" Nara asked seeing Mari nod. She shook her head quickly. "No. There are females from many different Lycavorian families who have shown interest in him because of who he is, but he does not pursue them. Most only want to get close to him because of who our parents are and the perceived standing they think they will gain as I said before. And Deo is... he is like Andro in many ways. He does not like the attention because he only wants a woman to share his life with." Nara answered realizing what she was saying. There were indeed several Lycavorian females and a handful of elven females that she could recall that had shown great interest in getting to know her brother. Even as she thought back, she realized that none of them had made Deion even flinch with interest, until she saw him looking at this young woman in front of her only a little while ago.

"But your brother... he has six wives." Mari said. "As does your father."

Nara nodded in agreement. "Yes... but they are different pieces of a whole for Andro. For my father. My mothers, Andro's wives and mates, they all speak with the same voice and many times think with the same mind. Almost as if they are one. They were all meant for one another by a greater power than we can understand. Emotionally, for Andro and my father, there may be six of them but they are essentially one person. I think it is one of the main reasons we have never drawn a distinction between our mothers. They are all our mothers, as if each of them gave birth to us. That is what each of us feel within us." Nara looked at her and smiled. "It's very confusing isn't it?"

Mari shook her head quickly. "No." She answered without hesitation. "I... I understand it completely." This statement caused her to blink several times for she did indeed understand it. She could feel it within her and understood it all.

"You... you do?" Nara asked surprised. "Most people who we try to explain it to end up grabbing their heads in pain because they can't comprehend it."

"What is this about our parents?" The voice echoed from behind Mari and she turned quickly. Her stomach tightened as Deion walked up with the small bundle in his arms. His tall frame moved just past her and he leaned over beside Nara's face, nuzzling her soft cheek in a brotherly fashion. Nara smiled and relished in the attention of her twin. "Were you telling Lady Mari of our parents the Taskmasters?" He asked with a smile.

Nara grinned and reached up to slap his cheek softly with her hand. Mari noticed that this was common among Lycavorians and was meant more as a show of affection than anything else. "Careful... you know they have ears everywhere." She said.

Deion's eyes rolled and he nodded. "How true." He said. He turned to look at Mari now and she had to suppress the gasp that wanted to escape her lips when she looked into those amazing dark brown eyes. Once more Mari could not get over how much more handsome he was in person, or how well built he was under the ArmorPly. He held out the small bundle to her. "The Quartermaster put this together for you. Andro said that you already have a P9, but this one has the entire schematics for this ship and the Coven ships on it. It might be

easier to work with. At least for this mission anyway. I had your bio-signature encoded into its memory and your name engraved on the top.”

Mari’s hand brushed across where she saw her name in cursive letters across the front edge of the small P9. She looked up at him with glittering blue green eyes and smiled, feeling flush as she realized he had done this for her. “Thank you.” She said.

Deion held up the second item and Mari saw the small holster and sidearm in it. “I had him take one of our smaller KM14 Magnums and adjust the load somewhat. Your hands are smaller and this should fit perfectly now within your grip. And it won’t kick as much as our other kinetic magnums.”

“You are giving me a weapon?” She asked somewhat surprised.

“Our *fervon* may have brought peace to the Union and High Coven,” Nara told her as she leaned against Deion. “But these fools we are going to be facing do not wish that to continue. They cling to the old ways and hatreds. Most of them anyway. Having you go unarmed is really stupid. Our brother isn’t stupid.”

Deion chuckled. “However... if you ask our grandmother or tenna Deia they might say he is touched in the head since he continues to act as insanely as our father acts. It drives them *malda*.”

“Crazy.” Nara added quickly knowing Mari did not know their language just yet.

Mari watched as Deo leaned over and looped the belt around her waist. She had to once more suppress the shudder she felt building in her as his hands moved quickly. His shoulder and head came closer to her as he leaned over and she could almost feel the heat that radiated from his body. Not to mention that his musky, male smell was quite delectable. She waited until he had fully fastened the holster on her waist and then stood back.

Mari did not notice the struggle Deion was having at keeping his Alpha male aura in check. Her sweet orange flavored scent was nearly overpowering to him and she was not even wolf. Nara took notice of this right away and smiled inwardly. Yes... her brother had it bad... and he had only known her for a few hours.

Deion got his emotions under control and held out his hand towards the corridor he had come down. “We should probably get to the Shuttle Bay. Captain Feron has initiated contact with Moran and once that communication is done we will be leaving.”

Nara stepped forward taking Mari’s arm and causing her blue green eyes to tear away from her brother reluctantly. Nara felt Deion’s aura pulse her with love and thanks. He knew she could sense his intense interest in Mari and both of them needed to be fully concentrating on the mission. Her actions bought him the few moments he needed to center himself and for that he was grateful.

“...lost twenty-seven men capturing them Admiral.” Feron was speaking to the image of Moran in the holotransmission from the back of the G9. Yuri, Carisia and Sheva were kneeling behind him wearing hand restraints and all of them with blood stains and bruises on their faces.

“We disabled the frigate they were on and boarded her. The Immortal scum Pa'cour was killed during our assault. I must apologize for this Admiral. I know you wanted him alive but he... he killed four of my men before we could...”

Moran waved his hand dismissively. “He was an animal!” Moran hissed. “He got off easy! You have his body?”

“I will kill you for taking Pa'cour from me Robert Moran!” Yuri snarled viciously, her cobalt blue eyes filled with unrestrained hate.

Feron turned and watched as one of his men shoved Yuri to the deck none **too** gently and he nodded his head as he turned back to Moran. “In the rear cargo area sir.” He replied. “Your wife went crazy when he fell Admiral and...”

“She is not my wife Captain!” Moran barked. “Not after taking that foul monster into her bed!”

Feron nodded once more bowing his head in repose. “My apologies sir.”

“The ship?” Moran asked.

“We executed those of the crew who survived the assault Admiral. Just as you ordered.” Feron answered. “We then timed the engines to overload. The explosion erased all evidence that we were ever here.”

Moran nodded. "Good. The program has been compromised and that bitch Juconi is going to tell me how they found our people. Then I am going to give her to my men and let them rape and feed on her blood until she goes insane."

"I will tell you nothing! You... you killed my parents!" Sheva shouted in anger.

Moran chuckled. "When I get done with you bitch you'll be singing like a bird." He spat. He turned to Feron. "Nothing is to happen to Yuri or Carisia Captain. As long as I hold that stupid cunt, Leonidas won't do anything. He cares so much for her whoring body that he will not attempt any retaliation. And he will withdraw all his support from the Coven if I threaten to kill her. I may even let him watch as she is used in front of him to get my point across. He will know not to play with me."

"As you order." Feron spoke. "Shall we return to the former Fleet location once we return to our ship?"

Moran shook his head quickly. "No. I'm shifting our location. I'm waiting at the border now and I will bring half a dozen escorts to your location and you will transfer them to my ship then. We should arrive at your location in under two hours." Moran met Feron's eyes. "You have done well Captain. Once we retrieve Yuri and the others, considered yourself promoted to Colonel."

Feron's eyes grew wide and he bowed his head in acknowledgment. "Thank you sir."

"We'll see you shortly." Moran hissed abruptly and the transmission ended.

Feron looked at the pilot of the G9. "Clear?" He asked softly.

The man glanced at his instruments and then back to Feron. "No signs of a trace program. Or residual link. We're clean."

Feron nodded and turned quickly to see Yuri, Carisia and Sheva rising to their feet, two of his men helping Yuri and then slashing the restraints off. "Give them towels to clean the *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* from their faces."

Yuri took the towel that was held out to her as the ramp of the G9 began to come down. She looked at Feron. "A convincing act Captain." She said.

"Forgive my tone and words Princess." Feron spoke bowing his head slightly.

Yuri shook her head. "No forgiveness needed." She stated.

"Indeed." Pa'cour spoke as he came up to them with Andro at his side. "Your words may have given us an added advantage."

"Sir?" Feron asked.

"The inflection and choice of your words may have been just enough to make Moran lower his guard ever so slightly." Pa'cour spoke. "It might be just enough to make what we are going to do easier."

"He certainly has a large amount of vitriol in his voice for you mother." Carisia spoke as she pressed against Andro and his arm slipped easily around her waist. "I wonder why that is?"

Yuri chuckled softly now. "I may have said some things the day Pa'cour and I left." She stated as she met her eyes with a twinkle in her own. "Some rather crude comments in regards to his manhood and such. I don't think he appreciated them."

"You told him that he..." Onera began speaking as she moved up the ramp with Dorian.

"Onera!" Yuri gasped.

"It was very funny mother." Onera said.

"It does not need to be repeated however." Yuri stammered.

Sheva smiled now as well as she moved up beside Onera. "You'll have to tell us at some other time Onera." She said.

Yuri shook her head as she took Pa'cour's hand within hers. "We should launch within a few minutes Andro." She said quickly. "He will push hard to get here now that he thinks Feron has captured us."

Andro nodded his head. "Agreed. Eli will activate the gas the moment your G9 enters the landing bay." He said. "Sheva and Carisia will need to remain with you in case he wants to see you before you enter the bay. It's going to be a tight fit for Anthar... but he will tolerate it for the short run."

Yuri looked at Carisia. "Remember... only the immediate corridors outside the landing bay are large enough for Anthar *Dalharil*. You will need to move quickly to secure the weapons locker and disengage the landing bays controls so your *STRIKERS* can land."

Carisia nodded. "I know. Onera and Sheva will be with me. Don't worry. You are the one who is heading to the bridge through nine decks of the ship *ilhar*."

Hearing how freely that word came to Carisia now filled Yuri with a sense of happiness and peace she had not known until recently. It truly warmed her heart to know that at least part of her past was not as vile as the rest of her former life. Carisia and Lucia had made her see that and it gave her strength to know how they felt now. It helped immensely that Carisia, Lucia and Onera, though only half sisters to each other got along rather famously and had from the outset. "All of which will be empty of activity thanks to the gas." Yuri said. "We will have no issues reaching the bridge quickly."

Pa'cour nodded. "I will leave a detachment of my men in the landing bay to secure our ship with your force and we will move towards the bridge from there. Your brother should have secured it by then." He spoke looking at Andro.

"Deo will get it done." He said confidently. "He's young... but he thinks quick on his feet and Nara tempers his recklessness. Most of the time anyway."

"Well... as long as he does not use his Praetorian abilities to blast a hole in the hull or bridge view windows we should be fine." Yuri stated with a small smile.

"I'll remind him of that." Andro stated. He looked at Feron. "I advise you and your crew to remain in the ship until it is done Captain. No sense in having you get under foot. Onrad will hit Moran's escorts the moment he detects your G9 powering down. Armen will assist if he needs to."

Feron nodded his head. "I understand." He spoke.

"Just be prepared for the fact that his arrogance and anger might have him actually waiting for you in the bay..." Andro told them. "If that is the case, adjust the plan accordingly to secure the objectives."

Yuri nodded her head. "We will."

"My teams are forming by our ships." Andro said. He looked at Yuri once more. "Let's get this done and lay the past to rest Yuri. The future awaits."

Yuri met his gaze and nodded her head as she stood up a little straighter and prouder. "Yes it does." She agreed. "A future I will not let go of now."

Andro leaned over and drew Carisia tight for a sizzling kiss of love and devotion while Dorian did much the same with Sheva. They didn't care who looked on or saw them. "Be safe *Enylarcopri*." He said softly.

Carisia's maya blue eyes smiled as she drew her fingers across his jaw. "We will be fine my love." She stated. "I have no intention of allowing you to escape the hours of worship you have promised me."

Andro grinned. "Good."

Yuri smiled to herself as she watched holding tightly to Pa'cour's hand. Her eyes cut to where Dorian released Sheva from his embrace and then grew wider as he stepped up to Onera and leaned close to her. Onera did not back away and she gazed at him with bright dark eyes as he took her hand in his and whispered something to her that Yuri did not hear. It caused Onera to blush even under her dark tan but she grasped Dorian Leonidas's hand even tighter and nodded her head. Sheva stepped up beside her and took her other hand and pressed close to her as Dorian leaned closer and inhaled deeply beside Onera's cheek. Yuri watched her eyes close in obvious delight and then to Yuri's amazement Dorian kissed her ever so softly on her lips. Yuri turned quickly and looked at Pa'cour who stood beside her. His face was impassive but his eyes told her all she needed to know. He was Onera's father and he would always be protective of her, but his eyes told Yuri that whatever was happening between Onera, Sheva and Dorian, he approved of it.

Yuri looked back as Dorian squeezed both Sheva and Onera's hands and then followed his brother down the ramp of the G9. Yuri felt Pa'cour move away from her and step right up to Onera without fear.

"*Dalharil*?" He spoke as Onera looked at him. Yuri noticed that Sheva Leonidas did not attempt to release Onera's hand or move away.

"*Ilharn*." Onera replied looking at him with love and pride.

Pa'cour smiled and leaned down to kiss her cheek. "I approve." He said before turning and moving down the ramp to load their last of their gear.

Onera looked at Sheva with a wide smile and then to her mother. Yuri smiled as she stepped closer, but she would not question her now on what she had seen. That was for another time, but like her Immortal husband, Yuri approved wholeheartedly. "Come all of you..." Yuri said taking Carisia's hand as well. "Let us look over the schematics once more before we launch so that we know every detail." She said.

Andro looked at them as they gathered on the deck between the *STRIKER* and the *PREMONITION*. He had to admit to himself, they were an odd looking bunch for sure. Androcles had no doubts moving forward however. He knew he could trust them to look out for one another. Dorian and Deion knelt next to one another and were discussing something with Jomann; Cowen'Shan and Tir'ut were nodding to Normya and Sherice as they spoke within an Etheric connection making sure even now that Cowen continued to practice. Torian and Daio were checking each other's gear, while Eliani and Brendi were going over the items in Eliani's medical bag for probably the fifth or sixth time. Brendi Faith had come further than Andro had ever thought she could in so short a time. Her desire for Eli and Jomann was the driving factor in this he knew, but they were not pushing her and they were allowing her emotions and feelings to expand and grow on their own. They included her in everything they did now and to even the dullest individual, it was obvious that Brendi wanted them just as badly as they wanted her. Brendi had become Eliani's shadow, and with the skills she had possessed before, now combined with what she had learned from Jomann and Eliani in these last weeks, she was far deadlier than the OSG ever imagined. He spied Murano and Mari standing to the side of the lowered ramp, Murano ever calm and ready as a Praetorian and Lady Mari almost bouncing on the balls of her feet in a combination of anxiousness and excitement he saw. He could smell her fear but her pure Etheric resonance projected confidence in who she was and what she could do and this fear did not rule her actions.

He saw all of them turn to look at him as Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and Sehri came down the ramp of this new ship they would be flying. These young men and women... they may not have had the hundreds of years of experience that his father's team had, but they were no less lethal Andro was sure. The experience of working together would come, and given who they all were, Andro had no doubts they would be able to accomplish anything they set their minds to. All of them were part of a new generation just like him. A generation that would lead and serve their people, no more the species, well into the future.

Sehri was the first to reach him and she grasped his hand. *[I want to do more Andro.]* She spoke in the shielded connection. *[I can fight! I can help you.]*

Andro drew her close to him with his arm as Sadi and Ne'Veha also moved close to him, pressing their bodies intimately against him and one another. Andro looked into Sehri's bright blue eyes and nodded his head. *[Yes you can fight.]* He spoke softly. *[I have no doubts of that DuanGai.]*

[Then why make me stay on the ship?] Sehri asked.

[Because only you are able to project the Etheric shields outwardly that will protect our escape route.] Andro told her honestly. He wasn't lying to her and she knew it instantly. She had grown so much in just the few weeks with them and her latent ability allowed her to project Etheric shields outwardly that were very powerful. More so than she had ever been able to do before. She could wrap them around her body or expand them to surround a small group and even cover an area as wide as the rear of the ship. *[Your combat skills will advance as you train with our Drow Mistress DuanGai, but for the moment, only you can hold our rear. We may very well run into complications and may have to come running back to you like the hounds of hell are after us. I would much rather have your ability to shield guarding that route with Elynth, Caydren and Cinol after Sadi brings our ship into the landing bay. Anthar and Majeir will be focused on Carisia, Lu'ria and Sheva and you will need to guard two ships.]*

Sehri saw the love and truth in his eyes and she nodded her head knowing that he was right. *[I understand.]* She said softly.

Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and the side of her neck and her eyes closed in delight at the sensations this caused to course through her. Sadi moved around to Andro's other side and felt his arm instinctively pull her tightly to his side.

[Life is never dull with us DuanGai.] She stated with a smile. *[You will see.]*

Ne'Veha grinned and pressed tightly to Sehri's back. *[This also insures that no harm comes to you DuanGai.]* She stated. *[For when this is over... we are going to feast on you.]* She said nuzzling the back of Sehri's neck.

Sehri smiled brightly in bliss and the promise of more incredible physical pleasure. *[I will hold you to that.]* She said.

[And we will keep our promise.] Ne'Veha stated.

Andro turned and saw everyone looking at him. He moved a bit closer to them, stepping away from Sehri and his mates. The area around them had become silent now.

“What we do now, we do to insure the future.” Andro spoke. “To protect those we love and to exact justice for what was done to those we love. We have only been together a short time, but I have no doubts about any of you. You have all proven yourselves on more than one field of battle. Whatever else has happened to you in the past, each event that has taken place in your lives has brought you here to this point for a purpose. And from here we shall go forward.” Andro looked at Cowen'Shan, standing tall beside Tir'ut and Sherice. He also noticed that Sherice did not shy away from the hulking Kavalian anymore and in fact was pressed up against him without any concern in the least.

“This is the beginning and we are all now a family. Perhaps not by blood, but by duty and commitment and honor. As is the Spartan way.” Andro brought his armored fist up and pressed it to his chest. “I want no heroics from anyone. We all have our part to play and we must play it. No hesitation. No remorse. Moran and Dante are our targets. Remove any in your way, but do not kill without regard. That is not our way. If you do... if you do...” Andro took a deep breath and all of them could see his body relax as if seeing something for the first time in his mind. “Then it is no longer justice. They will answer for their crimes against my sister, against all those innocents they have hurt with their actions, but we must hold to our ideals or we are no better than them. May the spirits of my grandfathers and all those honored warriors who have gone before us, no matter their blood, may they guide us as we move forward. Strike swift. Strike hard. Strike true.”

Eliani was the first to answer as she usually was. “*Avoi.*” She spoke.

“Let's get this done.” Andro spoke. “The Beta Quadrant and the unknown awaits.”

MANNE

PRIDE OF PUMAS

As battles go, it would not be considered overwhelmingly important with the exception of one result and in time it would drift into the history books as more an end to a repugnant period in Lycavorian history and lore than anything else. As time and history moved forward it would become known more for three things that really had no bearing on the actual battle itself.

Which ended up being decidedly one sided for the most part.

The Second Officer of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* had held the position for the better part of three decades. Besiz'Kiat was his name and when the Marshall or Captain Popal were off the ship he was in charge. This event had never taken place during combat as he was lacking in the experience of the two men above him by a wide margin and his position was more a gift to his Pride for their service and loyalty. This fact did play a role in the outcome, but in truth it really would not have mattered.

The Kavalian Task Force moved in perfect formation as they closed on the planet in front of them. He could no longer make out the specs of the troop transports that had left their ships only minutes ago as most of them had already entered the atmosphere of the planet to begin their attack. Since the two or three ships the Lycavorian King was said to have with him were not present in the system, the Task Force was approaching in a spread pattern that allowed them to respond instantly to requests for aide from the surface. Besiz did not know why Captain Popal insisted on accompanying the Marshall to the surface, but Pusintin had not refused his request. The Marshall seemed to be in some sort of fog these last weeks and only Popal had the courage to approach and talk to him. Besiz certainly had no desire to speak with him. As Besiz took in the actions of the crew around him he noticed that the Sensor operator flinched slightly. He turned fully to face him from the command chair.

“What is it Ntowo?” He asked the man.

The Operator turned to face him. “Sir... sixty-nine ships have slowly fallen out of battle formation with the Task Force over the last two minutes. One entire flanking section.” He said. “And they have not powered their weapons or shields as the rest of us have.”

“How far back?” Besiz asked.

“Ten million meters now.” The man answered. “I didn’t think anything of it when the sensors first made me aware. I thought they were just moving into a better cover position.”

“Ten million meters!” Besiz snapped. “That takes them completely out of position to assist if the call comes from the Marshall! Who commands that Flank Section?”

“Captain Weoerr sir!” Ntowo answered.

“Get him on the COM!” Besiz barked to the COM officer as he turned away from Ntowo. He heard the soft beeping as he barked out his orders. “Captain Weoerr is far too experienced an officer to do this by accident! Find out what he is doing!”

“Commander!” Ntowo snapped as he gazed at his consoles. “Sensors are picking up massive surges of quantum particles all around us!”

Besiz turned back to him. “Quantum particles? From what?” He hissed.

“Unknown sir!” Ntowo answered.

“Where are they?” Besiz hissed.

Ntowo turned to look at him with wide eyes. “Port and starboard sir!” He snapped. “Five thousand meters distance!”

“Five thousand meters!” Besiz almost shouted as he came to his feet. “How...”

Ntowo’s console began to beep alarmingly fast and he turned back to it. His intake of horrified breath was heard by everyone on the bridge and many turned to look at him. “By the gods!” Ntowo almost screamed. “Commander... unknown ships are de-shrouding port and starboard!”

Besiz turned to the view window and his eyes grew larger as the black space that was off the port and starboard sides of his ship was suddenly shimmering as if his vision was blurred. In seconds those shimmers took the shapes of two massive and lethal looking ships. They looked so close he felt as if he could reach out and touch them. Something he would never get the opportunity to do. Besiz’s lack of combat experience was shining through as another more experienced man with ship to ship combat would have been dropping the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* out of the cone of weapons fire they knew each side of the nearby ships would have. It would not have mattered that none of them had ever seen ships like this before, though both appeared to oddly look similar to the ship that had attacked them near Enurrua, a more experienced Captain would have been reacting before the two ships had finished reverting back to normal space. That was not the case today however and though it hardly would have mattered, a more experienced Captain might have bought time for a few dozen of his crew to reach escape pods before the ship was blasted into oblivion.

“Union!” Ntowo screamed. “Lycavorian Union ships are de-shrouding all around us!” His hands were moving across his two consoles faster than he had ever moved before. “Shit! Over two hundred! They are all around us! Commander we...”

His words fell into an empty void as the sides of both the two massive ships moving down either side of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* suddenly lit up the immediate area like a small sun as they fired every weapon at their disposal. While not as heavily armed as a *LEONIDAS IIA*- Strike Cruiser in number of weapons for instance, Ben O’Connor had made certain that the *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carriers were more than capable of **putting the hurt on someone** as Endith had once commented. With their Quantum Resonance Field Reactors powering the ship’s advanced weapons designs, the armaments on all the *ARIZONA* class ships were capable of doing equal too, if not far more damage than their larger cousin ships. They were built for war from day one and Ben and Martin had wanted a ship that, in Ben’s words, **could bitch slap anyone and make them regret they were ever introduced**.

The first saturation broadside from the *ARIZONA* and the *HORNET*, a total of twenty Type 1 Terra Series Plasma turrets, thirty Type 2 Terra Series Plasma turrets, 4 Anti-ship Missiles Batteries, sixteen Photonic Torpedo Launchers and sixty Quad Pulse Cannons, struck the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* within three milliseconds of each other. Miranda and Janon had worked together for far too long and they could almost predict what the other would do. Their timing was, in a single word, flawlessness.

The *PRIDE OF PUMAS* bridge was instantly obliterated by the combined power of three Type 1 turrets and two Anti-ship M28 Havoc concussion missiles erasing the existence of all twenty-four lives and the command and control of the Kavalian Task Force from this world.

From there it was all downhill.

ARIZONA

There was a time, not so long ago, when Admiral Miranda Lorian thought she had lost everything. She was falling into the darkness of the abyss and she did nothing to stop this fall into the void. She pushed everyone away, not wanting to be around or talk with anyone. She had lost everything; all those she had befriended and came to care for. She had watched them all die; just as she had seen her mother and father die. Just as she had seen her adopted family die. She had no reason or desire to go on. At least that is what she had thought.

Not until she had been ordered by Ben to go to the Royal Island on Apo Prime had this changed. Not until she was among so many who had suffered and endured and lost exactly what she had. She had hated Ben for this action, just as she hated everyone else then. She should have known better. At first she had pushed Ben and Tina away because of their actions in having Isabella turn them so they could have a lifetime with the fiery red haired elf Endith who was now the core of their lives. Then something happened. Something deep inside her, a sliver of her past self, had seen two powerful hands reaching for her through the murkiness of the pain and hate that was threatening to swallow her whole. Something inside her, one last spark of the person she had been, that spark reached for those hands and grasped onto them. Grasped onto them out of fear and rage and so many more emotions she could not explain. Once those hands had taken hers, it was as if a light had suddenly come on in that dark place where she had been living for so long. She found total acceptance and understanding. She found love and wisdom and two other souls who had been tortured by the nightmare that was Alba Tau. Two other souls that would not let go of her. Two souls that pulled her kicking and screaming out of the abyss and refused to allow her to give up. Those two souls belonged to Martin Leonidas and his son Androcles.

Miranda thought back to those months on the island with Martin and Andro. They spent many days together just speaking about things no one else could understand. The emotions that coursed through them. Her days with them had been far more productive than any session with the Union she had been forced to speak with. Martin and Andro got it. They understood everything she was feeling and suffering for they were enduring it as well. Miranda Lorian had become part of the Leonidas family during those months. She ate with them, studied with them, learned about them. She could not remember how many times she had cried on Isabella's shoulder or had Aricia and Anja's arms around her soothing her. Denali, Resumar, all of them propped her up and were there for her. Without question. Without thought. They had accepted her into their family without query or hesitation. Those months on the island had begun her healing. As the weeks and months passed by, much of that time spent with Andro and Elynth, Miranda Lorian changed. She clawed her way back, stronger and more resilient than before. Alba Tau had taken their world and lives and shattered them like glass. Over the course of that time on the island, they rebuilt them. It would never be the same she knew. They all knew that. However, they could not let the horrors of what they had seen and done, they could not let that crush their spirit. The Leonidas family had swept her into its embrace and she had discovered the one thing she had lost as a child. She found family once more. She may not have carried the Leonidas name, but there were few who did not know that Miranda Lorian was just as much a part of the Leonidas family now as General Simpson or Governor Tarifa. This is what had saved her. This is what had allowed her to open herself and discover so many men and women who she now considered her family. Steven, Zaala, her beloved Drow lover and wife E'dira. They were just a few of those who Miranda now called family. And one of the things her time on the Leonidas Island had instilled in her was love of family. She was not about to let anyone take that from her again. Ever! Now Miranda Lorian acted in defending one of the men and the women who had the single most influence over her rebirth. She would not let anyone hurt them.

Miranda was typing madly on the small console on the right armrest of her command chair. She could feel the shuddering against their kinetic shields of the *ARIZONA*'s weapons and the horrific explosions they were causing on the Kavalian ship as they tore into the once proud flagship of the Kavalian Fleet with a single minded ferociousness. Almost as if they were alive and could understand and were acting out on her behalf.

“Helm!” Miranda barked out the word. “Prepare to alter course to three one five point six!”

“Helm aye!”

“COM officer! Inform Captain Janon to get ready to break!” Miranda continued. “Seven seconds!”

“*HORNET* has already signaled ready Admiral!” The woman shouted out her answer above the cacophony of the weapons batteries and the devastation they were inflicting.

“Stand by!” Miranda ordered. “MARK!”

“Helm answering! Three one five point six!” The human officer at the helm of the *ARIZONA* barked out in response.

“*HORNET* is breaking now!” E'dira spoke from her tactical station.

“Weapons!” Miranda barked once more. “Aft Photonic launchers nine through twelve! Alpha spread! Full yield!”

E'dira's head snapped around quickly and she didn't hesitate. “Rerouting emergency power from grids twenty and twenty-one to aft Refractive and Kinetic Shielding!”

“Fire!” Miranda spoke.

“Firing now!”

There was precious little that was not burning or utterly destroyed. Nineteen different hull breaches along either side of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* had already vented two thirds of its crew into space screaming out the last echoes of their lives. Most within the bowels of the ship never really knew what happened. They never knew what it was that had killed them. In the first few seconds of the *HORNET*'s saturation broadside, her weapons had completely severed one of the forward wing arms, its main guns savaging the ship's hull. The *PRIDE OF PUMAS*, flagship of the Kavalian fleet, was essentially dead within the first three seconds. Its Karon XI Tactical Network and Felonius Mark 4 Computer Core were incinerated in the first volley. The ship's secondary computers could not keep up with the massive damage or the hull breaches that were occurring every few seconds as both the *HORNET* and *ARIZONA* traveled down the length of either side of the ship firing at near point blank range. Most ships in existence now would not have been able to survive a full saturation barrage from an *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carrier even from extreme range. The *PRIDE OF PUMAS* was on the receiving end of two such barrages from so close that the crew could have literally spit out their window and hit the ships if that was possible.

The crews of the two *ARIZONA*-Class ships were made up mostly of humans and elves and Lycavorians hailing from Earth. Charles Taylor had brought them out of the past screaming and the natural resilience of the human species had come raging forth. The humans of this time had embraced what long ago so many of them had dismissed and thought were left to myths and stories. Now they were part of the future. What so many on the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* didn't fully understand was perhaps the easiest ideal to comprehend.

Change would find a way.

Admiral Miranda Lorian's final order signaled the end of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS*. As the *ARIZONA* turned radically away from the now broken and burning Kavalian ship, four Photonic torpedoes took flight from the rear of the ship. Small bright spots that sped quickly across the short distance and then buried themselves within the shattered hull of the Kavalian ship. Almost immediately there were four bright explosions and the once proud ship heaved outward in four different locations along the hull and the ensuing detonations tore the massive superstructure of the ship asunder from the inside. The *ARIZONA*'s shields flared brightly in the rear as they were peppered with the remnants of the Kavalian flagship, and then all that was left to signal that the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* had ever existed were scraps of hull no larger than an interplanetary shuttle.

KAVALIAN DIEROY-CLASS HEAVY CRUISER ***SABER CLAW***

The bridge of the *SABER CLAW* was as silent as a tomb. All of them had just witnessed something none of them had ever imagined they would see. Captain Weoerr had risen to his feet when he saw the two strange ships de-shroud so close to the *PRIDE OF PUMAS*. He knew what was coming, but he had never expected anything so brutally horrific. Pusintin's ship had never stood a chance.

He felt Terru come up beside him. “Cap... Captain!” He gasped his eyes wide in shock and disbelief. “I am...”

Weoerr didn't need to look at him. “I know.” He answered softly.

“Captain!” The COM officer barked. “Incoming transmission from Captain Cosa!”

Weoerr turned quickly. “Put it through. To all of those ships with us.”

The image of the older Kavalian shimmered into clarity on the large monitor to the side of the bridge. “Weoerr!” The man's expression showed his own disbelief had what had just occurred.

“We... we witnessed it as well Cosa.” Weoerr told him.

“We cannot let this stand!” Cosa snapped.

Weoerr looked at him with wide eyes. “What would you have us do? Fight that!” Weoerr roared back at him pointing to his main view window where they had just witnessed the fate of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS*. “I have had my people passively scanning those same ships since they dropped their Shrouds! Every one of them is powered by technology that we did not know the Lycavorians had Cosa! Our scans can not even penetrate their hulls in most cases! Look what they have done! Look what they are doing! They are smashing Pusintin's vaunted Task Force as if they were children! Pusintin and Keleru awoke the wrath of the Lycavorian King with their foul actions against the elf Queen For'mya Cosa! His vengeance will know no bounds now! They... they awoke the wrath of an entire species against us! Dozens of species! They opened a door that should have remained forever sealed!”

“They are killing our people! Our men!” Cosa snapped.

Weoerr shook his head quickly. “No! My men are here with me on my ship! My Pride! Just as yours are with you. They are killing those who chose to follow Pusintin and Keleru down the path of greed and damnation! Your Pride Cosa, they are one of the largest behind my own. Do you wish to see them extinguished in the flames of retribution because of something we had nothing to do with?” He asked. “Do you wish to see them erased from memory because of the actions of those who only wish more power for themselves and would see us shattered and broken to achieve that?”

“We...” Cosa began to speak.

“Look at what they have done Cosa!” Weoerr shouted at him. “In less than a minute they have obliterated Pusintin's ship! The Flagship of the entire Kavalian Fleet! They are tearing into the others with a ferocity we have never faced before! They are not the High Coven Cosa and they do not fear us!”

“So we... we do nothing?” Cosa asked.

Weoerr shook his head quickly. “No. We are the future my friend. And when this day is done it will be left to us to shepard in the future of our people. That is what we must see beyond the death.”

Weoerr saw him take a deep breath and slowly nod his head. “You are right.” He spoke softly.

“Cosa... it will fall to us.” Weoerr said. “I know Koguth'Juturi. When this is done we can meet with him. Talk with him. Perhaps even King Leonidas himself. We can be the bearers of the future of the Kavalian people Cosa. Just as Koguth now is. Just as General Nruarani now is. There has been too much war and death for our people Cosa. It needs to end.”

Cosa nodded again, this time more confidently. He looked at Weoerr in the transmission, his eyes now bright and focused. “Will they let us Weoerr? Will the Lycavorian King allow us to be part of this future?”

Weoerr looked quickly to the area of space where the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* had once occupied. He turned back to Cosa. “What little I know of him tells me he is a man of honor Cosa. We all know how he views his Queens. Pusintin and Keleru thought they could use that honor against him. They did not stop to think of the consequences of taking one of his Queens and incurring his anger.” Weoerr looked around his bridge. “Yes.” He finally said. “He will honor what we seek.”

“How... how do you know that?” Cosa asked.

Weoerr allowed the small smile to curl the corners of his mouth. “I know that Cosa, I know that because we are still here.” He replied. “If not... if not old friend, we would have already joined Pusintin's ship in the flames of vengeance.”

PRALOR VECTOR-CLASS ATTACK CRUISER

HARMONY

He was silent as he came to his feet and watched the stars return to normal as they reverted from Quantum Drive travel.

He was twenty-five thousand years old and had lived through the horror of their escape from the Scourge at the last planet they had called home. He was still a small boy when his father had been among the Pralor warriors and dragons who had fallen while they were protecting the shipyard where he, his mother and his four siblings were escaping. He had taken his father's sacrifice to heart and dedicated his life to the defense of his people. He was one of the most senior and experienced ship Captains within the small Pralor fleet now and very well respected. He had never found time to start a family as his siblings had; content to insure that his mother and they had the security they needed to do what he did not. His mother had always told him one day a woman would walk into his life and shatter all he had ever known.

Captain Kitor was still waiting for that day.

"Report!" He spoke.

"We have entered the Manne system sir!" His Tactical officer spoke. "Quantum Drive engines powering down and all systems report standing by."

Kitor nodded his head. "Excellent work people. As always." He said aloud so that his bridge crew could hear him. "Secure from Quantum travel and inform our passengers that we have arrived. We..."

"Captain!" The female voice echoed across the bridge.

"Junia? Something?" Kitor asked as he turned his head to look at his Tactical Officer.

"Sensors are picking up a huge battle Captain. In orbit of Manne!" She gasped aloud as she turned to look at him.

Kitor's eyes were wide as he bolted towards her station. "What?" He nearly shouted.

"I'm reading several hundred ships sir!" She told him as her hands flew across her two consoles. "Captain... I'm detecting over two hundred that have Quantum Matter Fusion Drive signatures sir!"

"Our engines!" Kitor hissed in disbelief.

"No sir." Junia answered quickly. "The quantum matter traces are very different... but they are definitely based on our technology! And..."

"What?" Kitor demanded.

Junia looked up at him now standing by her shoulder. "They are beating the other ships like a case of Ollarian Flu sir!" She told him referring to the lethal disease that could and had killed millions of their people through the years. And done so with brutal efficiency. She turned back to her consoles. "The other ships are using some sort of Tri-Cobalt power source and they are getting their backsides handed to them really badly."

"Go to Alpha Stations!" Kitor barked out the order. "Power weapons and shields! Prepare to..."

"I would not do that Captain." The voice spoke from behind him and Kitor turned quickly to see Elder Valael enter the bridge with two women.

Kitor straightened up. "Elder Valael... I must insure your safety and those of my ship and crew." He stated. "I..."

"Captain... if you power your weapons and raise your shields... Martin Leonidas's forces will take that as being hostile." Valael told him. "Believe me when I tell you that is not what we want to do."

"We can assist them!" Kitor spoke.

"I doubt very much they want or need our assistance." Valael spoke with a soft smile. "Tell me Sub-Lieutenant Junia... does it appear as if the ships radiating Quantum Matter Traces are losing the battle?"

Junia glanced at Kitor and then back to Valael. "Forgive me for being blunt Elder Valael, whoever they are fighting; they are getting their collective asses handed to them."

Valael nodded his head and moved closer to Kitor. "Trust me on this Kitor." Valael said. "We do not want to interfere. Whatever is happening does not concern us and Martin and his people might take offense if we intervened."

"They would take offense at us helping them Elder Valael?" Kitor asked.

Valael shook his head. "On the contrary... they would welcome that. This time however, this is something that has been coming for some weeks and months now. Some would say years. They have prepared

for it... expected it even. What is taking place is a matter of honor and justice with them and our intervention would only serve to confuse things.” Valael thought back to the few days on *Onterom* and nodded his head. “I would not be a bit surprised if they already know we are here and we are being watched right now.”

Kitor’s eyes grew a little wider. “One of their invisible ships?” He gasped.

Valael nodded. “No doubt we could detect them if we began to modulate our sensors, but we are not enemies and that is how Chief Elder Delnash wants to keep it.”

“They do not... they do not seem very trusting Valael.” Tobia spoke from her spot beside the large plotboard next to Kitor’s chair.

Valael shook his head quickly. “Do not mistake my words for an intent that is not there.” He said gently. “You both have read the reports of our encounter on *Onterom* that Delnash gave to you. We acted without regard and we conducted ourselves arrogantly. This resulted in the deaths of men under Martin’s command and severely injuring his son. Delnash and Martin were able to move beyond that and we must not do anything to damage the trust they have built since that time.”

“Then what Elder Lorendo spoke about is true?” The second woman asked now. “They have stolen our technology and are using it to make war.” Her voice was neither hostile or suggestive.

Valael looked at her and held out his arm ushering her forward. “Captain Kitor I don’t believe you have met Administrator Tinra.”

Kitor bowed his head slightly. “Administrator.” He spoke cautiously. Like most military officers, he had no use for News reporters of any kind.

Unlike within the Union, there was really only one news organization within Pralor society now. There were many different areas that men and women chose to report on, but this woman was in charge of it all. Tinra was another who had escaped the Scourge and the end of the Pralor government and way of life. She had been a promising reporter back then, fair and always balanced. There were many who worked for her that did not follow her ideals and values but she ran the News Division with an iron fist. There would be no lies and deceit handed out by anyone working for her.

Valael looked at her. “To answer your question Tinra... Lorendo is telling everyone who will listen everything but the truth.”

“But they are a Seed species Elder Valael.” Tinra spoke. “That much is the truth.”

Valael nodded his head. “At one time we used them as a Seed species yes. However... you know how many of our people view that distasteful practice. Myself included. Please do not refer to them in such a way when we are among them.”

“Then they did not steal our technology?” Tinra asked.

“That is why you and your comrades are here Tinra.” Valael told her. “To get the truth. We have...”

“Captain!” Another voice echoed from across the bridge. “Captain... we are being hailed sir!”

Kitor turned to look at his COM officer. “Source?”

“Unknown sir! They are using the frequency given to us by Chief Elder Delnash but we can not pinpoint the transmission origin.”

“Put it up Lieutenant.” Kitor spoke without hesitation looking at Valael and seeing him smile.

“I had a hunch.” He stated answering Kitor’s question before he asked it.

The main holo disc in the center of the bridge came alive with the figure of a petite female with long dark hair and four inch high ears that curved elegantly alongside her head. Her dark eyes were bright and alert. Tobia moved closer to Valael with wonder in her eyes.

“An elf?” She gasped.

Valael nodded. “Indeed.”

“I am Star Commander Ves’kimi of the ULU *HEART OF FIRE*.” The woman spoke. “Please identify yourself.”

Kitor stepped closer to the transmission his eyes wide. “I am Captain Kitor of the Pralor ship *HARMONY*. We...”

“Elder Valael...?” The woman spoke looking at him. “Is that you?”

Valael stepped forward next to Kitor. “I am Elder Valael yes.” He answered. “I do not... I do not believe we have met Star Commander.”

“No sir.” She answered. “King Leonidas told us that you would be leading the Pralor delegation though. He showed us your image.”

“My image?” Valael’s eyes narrowed and then grew slightly wider as he realized what she meant. “You can... you have Etheric abilities Captain?”

Ves'kimi nodded her head. “My husband and mate is a Lycavorian sir.” She told him. “The day he turned me is a day I bless even now.”

Valael nodded. “I understand.” He told her. “I believe we may have arrived at... at a most inopportune time Commander.”

Ves'kimi nodded again with a slight smile. “You could say that sir. Nothing we can’t handle though.”

“If our instruments are to be believed I would have to agree with you.” Valael said. “We thought... Martin did not think the attack would come before we arrived.”

“Neither did we to be honest.” Ves'kimi took something from someone outside the cone of the transmission, typed on the data pad and then gave it back to the unseen person. “It seems that the King’s *ronnus* brother grew a pair of *nor* recently and thought to surprise us.”

“*Nor?*” Tobia asked now as she came up beside Valael.

“Commander... I present Lady Tobia.” Valael spoke motioning to Tobia beside him. “And this is Lady Tinra.”

“You fight your King’s brother?” Tinra asked moving up to Valael’s opposite side.

“We’re kicking the *sibfla* out of them to be honest. At least up here.” Ves'kimi answered with a proud smile. “They have already put troops on the ground though. King Leonidas and General Simpson will deal with them roughly I imagine.”

“Commander we...”

“Forgive me sir... but this is not the time for small talk. I have instructions to put your communication through directly to Queen Anja in the Medical Command Bunker. She is the one coordinating all COMS. Standby.” Ves'kimi stated.

The image broke into white static and noise for an instant and then they were looking into what appeared to be some sort of massive command bunker with smooth rock walls and dozens of men and women moving about the area quickly. They were not running in panic, but moving purposefully and with little confusion. Valael was sure he detected several medical style beds in the background like those he had seen at their makeshift camp. They watched as the diminutive figure of the woman stepped into the transmission, her petite body encased in what appeared to be some sort of flexible body armor that ended high up on her neck. Her extremely long Persian red hair was pulled over to one shoulder and secured by strips of cloth. All of them could see the sidearm she wore on her right thigh and the tubular object secured to the shoulder of her combat harness. Valael recognized Anja instantly. He doubted he would ever forget the beating she gave to Lorendo or how she barely broke a sweat in doing so. They also saw the image of the massive man who stepped into the cone of the transmission and stood next to her. He wore similar body armor and carried a large assault rifle and made Anja look miniscule when held up to him. Anja was looking in another direction when she appeared and they caught the latter end of her statement.

“...Anuk and Radra will handle the immediate trauma!” Anja barked. “Duewa and I will take care of the more seriously wounded! Major Crit cases go to chamber four! All others to chamber two! And for *nubous* sakes, keep a *STRIKER* on standby to pull any critical cases from Ceale and Serale if they call for one! They are hanging out there in the wind for the moment and they will need immediate EVAC if they call for it!”

All of them saw a male in the background nod his head and then in a flash of silver/white light that drew gasps of shock from Tobia and Tinra, the man transformed into a large dark brown wolf and sprinted off down the tunnel.

“Gods!” Tobia echoed softly as Anja turned to the transmission.

“Elder Valael.” Anja spoke calmly, her jade green eyes alive with life as she turned back to the transmission. “It’s good to see you again.”

Valael was slightly taken aback by her warm reaction given what had taken place but he quickly regained his composure. “Queen Anja... it appears we have arrived at a singularly bad time as I told your Commander Ves'kimi. My apologies.”

Anja shook her head. “No worries. Pusintin grew a set of balls and decided he wanted to come visit before we thought he would.” She spoke. Valael saw Tobia’s and Tinra’s eyes grow wide at this statement and he smiled inwardly. He had seen first hand the blunt nature of Anja Leonidas and the humor at her words he held in for now. “Manda is blowing the *sibfla* out of his ships in orbit and soon Marty and the others will roll him up down here. I always prepare for the worse though.”

“Then their attack on the surface has not begun yet?” Valael asked.

Anja shook her head. “Their troop ships just touched down. Boy will they be surprised at what they find.” She said with a grin.

“Is there any way we can assist?” Kitor broke into the conversation.

Anja shook her head quickly but looked at Kitor. “Thank you... but no. Martin was very clear on what to do if you happened to show up when this was kicking off. He does not want you to get involved unless you are directly threatened. No offense... but our initial meeting was not pleasant and we want to avoid that happening again.”

Valael nodded. “Yes we do.”

“I’ve already dispatched two of our Strike cruisers to cover you. They’ll remain under Shroud, but they should be within range of you now. Just stay at the edge of the system until Manda cleans up the garbage in orbit around us.” Anja told him.

“Is Martin nearby?” Valael asked.

Anja shook her head. “No. He and Danny are setting up to open a whole lot of whup ass on that raping bastard Pusintin and his cronies. We have several VIDCOM drones set up at different points across Manne. I’m sending you the coordinates now so you can patch into them. We don’t expect it but if you see things begin to turn for the worse, Martin asked that you get Radra and Kesyla and the other Pralors out of Base One. As well as any women and children that are there.”

Valael nodded and looked at Kitor. “Captain.”

“I will prep a ground team.” He said. “What about... what about you?”

“No.” Anja said.

Valael stepped closer. “Queen Anja... you and the others are wives to a Praetorian.” He told her. “It is our duty to insure you and Martin are safe.”

Anja shook her head with a small, confident smile. “Martin Leonidas is a Spartan before he is a Praetorian Elder Valael. You should know that now.” She stated calmly. “We are his wives and mates. We are Spartans. We don’t retreat. And we don’t surrender. Ever. If we are meant to die today, then we will die beside the man we so love. And we will take as many of the sonsofbitches with us as we can.”

Tobia was the one to take note of the conviction within Anja’s voice. The total lack of fear or hesitation in her words and the emotion behind them. She blinked several times. Who were these men and women that Murano and their daughter had discovered?

Shouting voices from within the transmission caused Anja to turn briefly and Tobia stepped closer to him. “Valael... this is... this is the one who trounced Lorendo?” She asked softly. “The one who discovered the cure for the Svorag virus?”

Valael nodded his head. “Yes. In the brief time I was among them I got the impression that Anja is the one that Martin favors most after his Soulmate.”

“He has a favorite Queen?” Tinra asked with some disgust.

Valael looked at her now as well. “Perhaps my choice of words was incorrect Tinra. The pureblood Queen Aricia, she is his soulmate. The one who commands the most influence over him because she is pureblood Lycavorian like Martin. Make no mistake, Martin Leonidas loves and worships all of his wives and mates, but if my understanding of their history is correct, Anja Leonidas has known Martin longer than any of his Queens. Each of them hold a part of his heart within them yes; however many of their own people seem to agree that Anja holds a great deal of influence over him. Perhaps it is because she has known him so much longer that she has slightly more sway than his other Queens with the exception of Aricia.”

“The reports say she discovered the cure within days of encountering the Svorag.” Kitor said. “If this is so Elder Valael... she did something our own people could not do over many millennia.”

Valael nodded in agreement. “After what I saw on Onterom... I dare say she is probably the foremost medical mind in the entire galaxy.”

“She is... she is tiny.” Tobia said.

Valael smiled and looked back at her. “Do not let that fool you Tobia.” He said. “That was a mistake Lorendo made and he paid for it in pain.”

“I can feel her resonance even from here.” Tobia said softly. “All of them. So focused and pure. They are interwoven with the Praetorian Martin and each other in as intricate a tapestry as I have ever seen.” She said. “It is... it is refreshing!”

Anja finished her conversation and then turned back at Valael. “I must go Elder Valael.” She said. “This is about to kick off.”

Valael nodded as his gaze returned to her. “Go with your gods Anja Leonidas.” He said. “And we will see you soon.”

Anja smiled just as the transmission ended and Valael took a deep breath as he turned to Tobia and Tinra.

“She... she does not fear death Valael. I can feel that within all of those she is connected to. The other Queens.” Tobia spoke, her words echoing softly as she looked at him. “Did you see her eyes? No fear. No regret. No doubt.”

Valael nodded his head. “Yes.”

“Are all... are all of his wives like that Elder Valael?” Kitor asked.

Valael nodded in response to his question. “Yes... I’m afraid so.” He spoke turning to Kitor. “Let us begin to monitor the frequencies she sent to us and prepare your ground team to do what Martin has asked Captain.”

Kitor looked at him. “Do you think they will be needed Elder Valael?”

“No.” Tobia answered the question and they all looked at her. “They will not be needed.” She told them. “These men and women will not fail.”

Valael nodded in agreement at her words. “Prep your team just in case Captain. And make the VIDCOM feed available to Lady Tinra and her associates in the main conference room. We will monitor from there.”

Kitor nodded his head and moved across the bridge to where his Tactical Officer waited. “Make it so.” He told him. “Full Team with all their equipment. Strip whatever equipment they don’t need out of the ships in case we have to carry more than we think.”

Valael looked at Tobia and Tinra. “This way ladies.” He stated. “But be aware... based on what I saw on Onterom... what you will no doubt view is not going to be pleasant.”

“War never is.” Tobia said softly. “War never is.”

MANNE

MAIN KAVALIAN PUMA BANE DETACHMENT

Pusintin knelt on the soft ground along the perimeter of the clearing, the six transports behind him and powering down their engines. He lifted his face and let the wind play across his skin, his nose just detecting For'mya's orchid like scent. It was faint, but she had passed through this area recently. He turned his head as Popal and the senior Puma Bane Commander settled to the ground beside him.

“Marshall... we have lost contact with our ships in orbit.” Popal told him as he held the portable scanner in his hand.

“They must have jammers set up all over the place.” Pusintin spoke. “My brother is no fool. He will not want us able to communicate with our ships.”

Popal looked at him and nodded. “I will continue to try and burn through the interference. We are within four clicks of their main camp, perhaps that is why.” He said calmly though his heart was racing. He alone knew why they had lost communications and he did not want to think of what was going on above them in orbit. He had too much to worry about here on the ground now.

“Qallin?” Pusintin asked as he looked at the Puma Bane Commander.

“We are ready Marshall.” The man answered. “Our secondary force has landed and are deploying to target their auxiliary base. Initial scans as we were moving through the atmosphere indicate only light forces in the area even though it appears this is their power generating base.”

Pusintin shook his head in disgust. “The fool.” He stated. “He never anticipated a frontal assault as we are conducting. He left his power generating unit all but undefended.”

“Two hundred of our Puma Bane will handle the defenders roughly Marshall.” Qallin told him smugly.

“Take as many females alive as you are able.” Pusintin told him. “Your men will need distractions once we have secured this planet for ourselves.”

Qallin smiled his eyes cruel. “Thank you Marshall.”

Pusintin looked at Popal. “Popal... I will push ahead with the Puma Bane to their main base. Drop your people into support as we begin our attack.”

Popal nodded his head. “Most of those that will be manning the heavy weapons are not fully trained in their use Marshall.”

“That is why I want you controlling their fields of fire.” Pusintin stated. “We don’t need them shooting us in the back. My brother can not have more than a few hundred defenders here since his ships are not in the system. They will not be trained soldiers and we will make short work of them. The signal from For'mya?” He asked.

Popal nodded his head once more. “Still strong Marshall.” He stated. “Eight hundred meters beyond the main base in what appears to be a cavern of some sort.”

Pusintin nodded. “That is where she will be hiding.” He said confidently. “I want my brother and his other whores taken alive! I want him to watch while the Puma Bane pass them back and forth and fuck them senseless. Then I’m going to fuck For'mya and take her back in front of him before I gut him like a dog and watch him howl and bleed out.”

Qallin grinned savagely. “It will be glorious Marshall.” He stated causing Popal to glance at him.

That single statement caused Popal to cast aside whatever doubts he may have had up until this very moment. Weoerr was correct in everything he said. The Puma Bane were vicious animals and not warriors. Against the High Coven they were feared for their savage nature and cruel tactics. Popal doubted very much the Spartans under Leonidas would blink an eye before erasing them all from existence.

“Let’s move.” Pusintin hissed as he hefted his short barreled assault rifle and began to move forward.

Popal remained kneeling on the ground as he watched him and the Puma Bane begin to swiftly take the lead. They were spreading out somewhat, but still close enough to support each other if they came under fire. Popal turned his head when the senior Kavalian engineer from the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* settled to the ground beside him.

“Commander?” He spoke softly. His eyes were wide in fear for he and the other men with them had never actually served in ground combat. They were engineers and technicians for the most part, always looked down upon by the ground troops and especially the Puma Bane.

“Tinontu... as soon as they have moved out of sight... send three teams back to the ships and remove the power cores from all six transports.” Popal told him.

Tinontu looked at him. “What?”

“Return here when that is complete.” Popal spoke. “We will be moving to a prearranged point and stacking our weapons there.”

“Commander? What... what is going on?” Tinontu asked.

“Do you and your men wish to die this day Tinontu?” Popal asked him.

“I don’t... I don’t understand Commander?”

Popal held out the data pad to him. “The *PRIDE OF PUMAS* is gone Tinontu.” He stated calmly. “The Marshall has become so single minded and twisted in his views that he has walked us right into a trap. A very final and lethal trap. Pusintin has utterly dismissed reality for some perceived imaginary view he now has. And he will not live out this day.” He looked at him as Tinontu gazed at the data pad with wide eyes. “Union ships are at this very moment obliterating all those who chose to follow Marshall Pusintin on this misbegotten adventure. The *PRIDE OF PUMAS* is but a memory and any ship not aligned with Captain Weoerr and holding position outside effective combat range will suffer the same doom. I do not wish to be counted among the dead on this far away world Tinontu. Do you?”

Tinontu looked at and met his eyes. “They... they received reinforcements?” He gasped aloud.

Popal nodded his head slowly. “The Lycavorian King is no fool as the Marshall would have us believe. He did not build the Union into something even greater than it was in only a quarter of a century by being foolish. He has had someone tracking us the entire time as we blindly chased him thinking he was unaware of us. The Marshall came here with the intent of taking back something that was never his to begin with. The Puma Bane only fight so they can butcher and maim and rape more. I did not fully realize this until after Kalis left us. After what he said to his father that day. I will not see the hundred and twenty men with us die for nothing. They are not ground troops and they are being expected to fight hardened Union Spartans who would strike them down and ground them under their boots without so much as breaking a sweat.” Popal shook his head. “The moment we set foot on this planet, the Marshall’s fate was sealed. As were the fates of the Puma Bane who follow him blindly. I will not let my men; our men suffer this same fate Tinontu. I was unable to bring as many as I wanted...” Popal’s eyes fell to the ground in shame Tinontu saw. “And now their blood is on my hands. I have... I have received assurances that this will not happen to us if we do exactly as we are going to do.”

“That is why we have lost communications with the ships in orbit.” Tinontu said.

Popal nodded. “Whatever they are using, they have jammed all communications and sensors from orbit. Something similar to what they used in the Kranek system when they crushed our ships there. They have rendered the Marshall’s ships blind and dumb and they do the same to us here.”

“What... what are they facing?” Tinontu asked.

“I do not know and I do not care to discover it.” Popal answered meeting his eyes. “Do you wish to die here my friend?”

“I do not wish to die at all Commander.” Tinontu answered quickly.

“Neither do I.” He said. His mind thought of something and it made emotion well within his chest. “I... I wish to hold my wife in my arms once more. I wish to make amends to her for all that she has had to suffer.” He looked at Tinontu. “I have already arranged for the pilots to strip out any equipment that could be used to make one of the transports flyable. I need three teams of your engineers to return and insure the power cores are removed so that no matter what happens, the ships can not take off. Once that is done... we are moving to a location given to me. Far away from where the Marshall goes to his death. There we will wait until the end. And there we will have a chance to continue our lives with far more purpose than we have had these last years.”

Tinontu met his eyes. “General Pian?” He gasped.

Popal didn’t shy away from his gaze. “The is only one Kavalian alive right now who fights for more than personal gain and reward. For more than power. Pian’Nnurani is that man, no matter what Pusintin and Prefect Keleru label him as. Will you do as I ask Tinontu?”

There was really no choice as far as the Chief engineer was concerned. His mind was flung back to what Popal had just spoken aloud. He very much preferred holding his young wife in his arms than fighting any day. If his actions this day meant that he could feel her fur covered skin within his fingers and her slim tail wrapped around his leg in passion, then he would gladly do what was necessary.

“I will see to it Commander.” He stated without doubt or hesitation.

“Quickly Tinontu.” Popal spoke. “The Puma Bane dogs will soon discover that they have bitten off far more that they can chew and they will no doubt come running back here like the cowards they are. We must be long gone by then.”

Tinontu nodded his head, rose to his feet and bolted back towards where his men were. He began to issue orders in a raspy whisper and Popal felt relief when he saw the eyes of many of the men change from one of despair to one of hope. He watched as two dozen of them left their heavy weapons and began to sprint back towards the transports with Tinontu in the lead.

A future.

That is what Weoerr said they could have. And Popal now embraced that ideal without a second’s pause.

Danny lowered the macrobinos and looked at Martin lying beside him on the hard packed dirt of the ridge three thousand meters from the Kavalian landing site.

“They’re committed.” He said simply.

Martin nodded his head in agreement. “Yep.”

“Beloved... two dozen of the remaining Kavalians are moving back to towards the transports.” Aricia spoke from his opposite side as she lowered her set of binos and turned her azure eyes on him. “It appears that this man Popal was telling the truth. There are many who do not follow the twisted path of Keleru and Pusintin.”

“Good. I have no desire to kill men who are not fighters and have no idea why they are dying.” Martin said. “Not today anyway.”

“*Avoi.*” Danny echoed softly.

Martin tapped his jaw. “Bella... you and *Melda Min* copy?” He spoke.

“We are here Martin.” Isabella’s voice filled their ear implants.

“Company coming Bella.” Martin told her. “Have Jules send the signal. We’ll join you and Dysea shortly.”

“Lover... the Pralor ship has arrived in system.” Anja told him speaking from the main bunker. “I told them to hold at the outer marker just as you wanted. Valael wanted to help and he seemed very sincere.”

Martin shook his head slowly. “I will not involve them in something that is ours to deal with Red. This is our problem.”

“It ends this day *Nauta Melme.*” Dysea’s sweet voice echoed in their ears now, filled with stiff resolve. Martin looked at Aricia and saw the same fierce determination in her eyes as he would no doubt see in the eyes of all his Queens. Since For'mya had returned to them, the six of them had become nearly inseparable and they had become far closer than they had ever been in over twenty-five years together as his wives and mates and lovers to each other. While he knew that For'mya gravitated to Aricia and Anja more, the love his Queens held for each other was just as deep and committed as the love they held for him. As he held for them. “The trap has been laid...” He heard Dysea continue. “And when it closes there will be no respite from our justice.”

Martin leaned over quickly and kissed Aricia hard on the lips, sending out a pulse of his powerful aura within the Etheric connection they all shared. He felt it instantly returned from all of his beloved Queens.

Joa... ethoni gur tur joa isarna tlach. He spoke once more within their connection. (No... there will be no mercy today.) *Mercy for my brother left me the moment he took Kinsoaurgai from us and violated her so. Now... now there is only death. And justice for his actions.*

Then let us make it so. Aricia spoke confidently. *So we can move forward with the future in front of us and our desires before us.*

Martin felt a stirring of passion at her words and waggled his eyebrows at her, gazing into her stunning azure blue colored eyes. *Does that mean what I think it means Saaurano?*

Gods... you are such a perv Martin! Anja’s voice echoed within their minds as did the laughter from all of them. *You have a one track mind!*

But what a devious and delicious mind it is. Isabella spoke.

And it is all ours! For'mya chimed in.

All true. Martin replied as he grinned at Aricia and saw her blush under her deep tan. *Let’s make this happen ladies... I still have some ideas for further worship that I want to explore in great depth.*

See! Anja exclaimed in happiness. *Pervert through and through!*

Martin chuckled as he began to push back down the hilltop without rising and Danny and Aricia followed.

Qallin had sprinted the four hundred meters distance between the Marshall’s main force and his unit attacking the Secondary target. The power generating support base for the main Union encampment. Their scans showed many of the unique Union portable power generating nodes and they would be a boon to his forces. Union portable generators were coveted by many other forces because of their durability and advanced construction. Just one or two of them could power a battery of defensive measures for a small, advanced field headquarters. Their sensors showed only a few hundred lifesigns in and around the camp and Qallin did not doubt they would be victorious. Engineers and technicians were no match for his seasoned Puma Bane soldiers.

As he moved up within range of the rear of their file he gave the order to attack without preamble. Better to rush the defenders and overwhelm them quickly. They would be able to secure more female prisoners in this way, and Qallin had every intention of finding the finest looking elf female he could and fucking her until he was spent.

As he waited on one knee in the treeline, his men rushed forward, and the first thing that should have set his senses to screaming was the fact that there was no firing. He could see the makeshift tents and half built positions around the camp through his macro binos, but he could not detect any defenders. Qallin lifted his arm and spoke into the wrist mounted COM unit.

“Shonis!” He snapped. “Report!”

The Puma Bane Lieutenant pulled up quickly between two tents and tore one from its stakes as his Commander’s voice echoed in his ear. There was nothing under the plain white tent. No bed rolls, no equipment packs, no electronic gear. Just empty, hard packed dirt. His eyes swept across the first rows of tents as he saw his men doing the same thing and all of them looking confused as their searches revealed the same thing. The few half built positions were void of occupants and equipment and it appeared as if they had never been occupied before. No indents from boots or weapons platforms. He lifted his arm bringing the COM unit close to his lips.

“Commander... we have found nothing.” He hissed urgently.

Qallin’s voice boomed in his ears. “What do you mean nothing?” He barked out. “Our sensors show lifesigns. Several hundred at least. And over a dozen of the Union generator signatures!”

Shonis let his eyes sweep across the still camp suddenly very wary. “We have found nothing sir! The tents are empty! No equipment, no bedding! The fortified positions look as if they have never even been occupied!”

“Lieutenant!” The voice called to Shonis and his eyes turned to where one of his men stood roughly halfway through the camp. Shonis moved with purpose as every sense within him was telling him this was all wrong. He sprinted across the distance as more of his men crowded around and he finally skidded to a halt beside his man.

“You have found something?” He demanded.

The enlisted Puma Bane gripped the tent cloth in one hand and ripped upwards. The flimsy support poles gave way easily, another sign to Shonis that something was not right. The tents would have been more sturdily built had this been even a semi permanent base. His eyes fell upon the single piece of equipment inside the tent. It was a power generator yes, but not one for distributing power among different devices. He knelt next to the device, his eyes scanning the exterior and taking note of the soft pulses it was sending out every few seconds.

“Here!” A voice called as Shonis saw another of his men tear down the tent to reveal just the simple looking device.

Shonis turned back to the humming piece of machinery and lifted his hand. “Senior Technician at Arms!” He called waving the Puma Bane forward. “What is this device?”

The man covered the few steps towards his Lieutenant and lifted his portable scanner. He passed it over the device, his eyes taking on a confused look. “It is... it is a power generator sir.” He answered. “But it is not...”

Shonis looked at him. “What?”

“It’s not producing any significant power readings.” The Tech spoke.

“What does that mean?” Shonis demanded.

“It’s not providing powering to anything sir.” The tech spoke leaning forward to get a closer look at the Union generator. “It’s generating a power field but nothing strong enough to supply...” His eyes grew wider as he moved his portable sensor closer to the device adjusting the small panel of controls. “Shit!”

“What?” Shonis almost screamed.

“It’s generating a sensor dampening feedback field!” The Tech answered.

“What is this?” Shonis asked as the hair on the back of his neck began to rise.

“All of them are generating the same type of field.” The Tech spoke as he lifted his portable scanner towards where the other device had been exposed. “It’s bouncing our sensor scans back at us with false information.”

“What?” Shonis hissed.

The tech looked at him. “These two devices... and there must be more of them sir... they are causing our ground sensors to give false readings. They are masking the true purpose of this camp.”

“True purpose?” Shonis asked. “What purpose could...?” His eyes grew wider and he never finished his statement as realization flooded him. His eyes began to dart all over a she brought his weapon up to the ready position. “We have... we have walked blindly into a very carefully laid ambush!” He growled menacingly.

“Lieutenant... the camp is empty.” Another of his men commented.

“They are not in the camp.” Shonis declared. “They are... they are all around us.”

As those words left his mouth, the *Letha rie Jorbhe* opened, and the fires of retribution began.

“...Found the western scrambler.” Kalis whispered softly as he stood beside Koguth within the four foot deep trench line that stretched along the entire northern and eastern side of the camp and was hidden under several inches of thick leaves and branches.

“So it would seem.” Koguth answered.

“We should attack now General.” Kalis said.

Koguth shook his head. “Patience young Kalis.” Koguth told him calmly. “Let them draw closer. Not all of them have cleared the far treeline.”

“Their commander has positioned himself in the treeline to southwest.” Mata spoke now.

“Mata... when this begins... he is yours.” Koguth said calmly turning to look at him. “He must not be allowed to escape and return to Pusintin and inform him of what is going on. Akor’dris, Bae’diraz and the Juturi Pride fighters will move from their hidden holes on the west, but they will concentrate on any that remain within the timber. Any who attempt to escape to the west will be swept up by them.”

Mata nodded his head without doubt. He had thought his life over when he had assisted Kalis in escaping his father. The young man he had raised as he would have raised his own sons was now a man and he had chosen a path that provided him a future. Mata did not think that purpose extended to him. His wife and sons were long dead, taken from him by disease and uncaring leaders. He had no reason to live on. Until Kalis had showed him purpose once more. Kalis had showed him that there was no need to throw his life away, that he could once more have a family and a future. He showed him there was always purpose if you were brave enough to reach for it. So Mata had reached for it, and after these past weeks he clung to that ideal with vicious faith. He was here beside men and women who did not care that he was once Puma Bane. They only cared that he was with them and just as dedicated to their cause as they were. And Mata meant to see a new future for himself and his people take shape even if it cost him his life.

“It will be done.” He said simply.

“The order remains the same. Every man and woman is to fire a full magazine before leaving their position.” Koguth told them. “Be as accurate as possible and bring down as many as they can. Plasma grenades from every fourth soldier, anti-personal rockets from every sixth. Once they have exploded and wreaked more havoc... we will bring the fight to them. No mercy can be shown. No remorse. They are Puma Bane and they will show you none. And they must pay for the crimes they have committed through the years.”

Jormal Pescneu glanced at the Kavalian General he now served beside proudly and grinned widely showing perfect white fangs capable of tearing flesh from bone easily enough. “General... do I detect a hint of perverse joy at the pain we are about to inflict?”

Koguth turned his head slightly to gaze at the Lycavorian he now called friend and aide. “I suppose you do Jormal.” He answered.

Jormal’s smile broadened. “You and your Pride are more like us than you know General. And it will be seen this day.”

“They found the second one.” Kalis commented.

Koguth turned back to view the expanse of the camp before them. “Inform Nedoli and Mataen. Tell them this is going to kick off and have Ceale, Mani and Serale ready to receive wounded when they begin arriving. There will be wounded my friends, and we will lose men and women this day. Do not deter from your tasks. If they fall, allow our medical teams to sweep in behind us and see to them. Do not stop pressing the attack.” Koguth looked at Mata once more as he lowered his fingers from where he had tapped his COM implant.

“It is done General. Lady Ceale says they are as ready as they will ever be.” Mata echoed softly. “And Corsa stands ready with the *MENKLA* transport to evacuate any who need critical care from the small Queen Anja.”

Koguth nodded with an evil glint in his eyes. “Then it is time.” He said. “Kalis... if you would detonate the charges... it is time to send these Puma Bane butchers into the next life.”

Kalis lifted the detonator in his hand, looked at Koguth and mashed down on the handle with all of his strength.

ALPHA QUADRANT

ULU PREMONITION

“Can’t believe we are actually doing this?” Sadi muttered with some small humor as she scanned her eyes across her instruments once more.

Ne’Veha glanced at her out of the corner of her eye and flashed perfect white teeth. “Let it not be said that the man we love is without creativity.”

“Creativity is one thing...” Meka spoke from her engineering station. Three different consoles were wrapped around her petite form in the chair and her hands were adjusting different things every few seconds. “Insanity is quite another.”

Sadi turned her head with a smile and looked at Meka. It was amazing how the three of them blended so well together and did so with such ease. Kameka’Caleo had embraced her new life with Daio without even a pause, and the three of them were quickly becoming tuned to one another as a flight crew. “Welcome to our lives Meka.” She said.

Meka chortled in a soft laugh. “A life Daio and I seemed to have embraced. I guess that makes us just as insane.”

Sadi saw Andro moved forward into the cockpit with measured grace and he reached out to squeeze Meka’s shoulder as he settled to the deck between Sadi and Ne’Veha in their sunken seats.

“*KertaGai?*” He asked.

Sadi glanced out the main view window in front of her. Andro followed her gaze and they could see the expanse of the hull of the *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought stretching before them. His azure eyes grew a little wider at the view but he kept his heart from racing unchecked.

“We are in position my love.” Sadi told him. “Soft seals are holding. Dori’s *STRIKER* is also down and sealed. They are on the opposite side of the ventral hull thirty meters away down the main access corridor once you enter the ship.”

Ne’Veha glanced up into his handsome face. “You do realize that this has never been done before.” She stated. “This has never even been thought of before. No one in their right mind would think of something like this.”

Andro smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her elegantly curved elven ear. Ne’Veha’s eyes closed in blissful delight as his aura swept over all of them. “I did warn you life with me would be unique *SirsanGai*.” He said softly. “And my father is not right in the head anyway. My mother Anja says the salt water has corroded away most of what brain he and Uncle Daniel did have.” He looked at Sadi. “There are no signs they have detected us?”

Sadi shook her head quickly. “Passive internal scans indicate there is much activity in the lower decks near the landing bays, but that is because *Enylarcopri*’s ship is approaching. No significant movement out of the norm anywhere else on the ship. It appears they are very relaxed Andro.”

Andro nodded. "That could be a bad thing or a good thing." He turned when Eliani and Brendi moved into the cockpit, Jomann directly behind them. "Eli?"

Eliani handed a small device to Meka and looked at him. "All of the gas drones are deployed and awaiting activation." She stated. "Three of them forward of our location and four aft. Took me a bit longer than I thought to find the main coolant shaft. It was hiding behind a transmitter tower."

"And the gas will work right?" Andro asked her.

Eliani Leonidas looked at her brother with a scowl, twisting her beautiful face into a vision of disgust. "Are you kidding me? Now you ask me that?" She hissed at him. "We are attached to the hull of a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought filled with people who would just as soon skin us alive as say hello and now you ask me if the gas will work?" Andro grinned as Eliani's eyes changed and her fangs extended and she reached out and slapped him in the face lightly. "Yes you *riad aulved igord!* It will work. That has to rank as the stupidest question you have ever asked me!"

Rubbing his cheek Andro looked at Brendi. "You are ready?" He asked.

Brendi nodded and touched the P9 computer secured against her abdomen in the crush proof and projectile proof case. She wore a matching set of Mark V ArmorPly identical to Eliani's right down to the four small burgundy stripes on her shoulders. Andro doubted she knew the significance of those stripes just yet, but in time she would. She had already become part of Eliani and Jomann's life and while her scent and aura told him she welcomed it, she had not yet been able to fully embrace it. She was never very far from Eli's or Jomann's side now and Andro didn't doubt she would surrender to her feelings very soon.

"As soon as we breach I will find a computer terminal and begin hacking." She told him confidently. "I will cause them fits across the entire ship. At least those who are still awake once Eli's gas knocks out the rest."

Andro nodded with a smile and noticed immediately when Eliani beamed in pride and reached back to squeeze her thigh that Brendi didn't shy away or draw back. She actually moved closer to her. "Good."

The soft beeping caused Sadi to turn back to her main console. "Andro... Yuri and Carisia's ship is on approach." She stated.

Andro looked at Eliani. "Get to the breach point Eli." He said. "And try not to fall on Jomann like you did in the tunnel."

Eliani stuck her tongue out at her brother. "Ha ha... very funny. *Midaeus!*" She said grabbing Brendi's hand as Jomann smiled. They quickly moved out of the cockpit and Jomann looked at him.

"We are ready." He said.

Andro nodded. "Murano will lead us right to Dante." He said. "He can sense Xaxon's presence in a way we can not. At least not yet. I don't care what condition he is in Jomann, but he is not to be killed for any reason, no matter who finds him first."

Jomann nodded. "Agreed."

Andro turned back to Sadi and Ne'Veha and gave each of them a short, but blistering kiss of passion. "Do not be late you two." He said.

Sadi and Ne'Veha grinned as his aura swept over them. "Not a chance." She said.

Andro nodded and grabbed Jomann's arm. "Let's get this done." He stated as they moved out of the cockpit. As they moved Andro reached out within the Etheric connection he held with his brothers.

Dori? Deo?

We are ready fervon. Dorian answered.

Do not get killed. Either of you. Andro told them. *Father and our mothers will chop off my nor if anything happens to you.*

Sibfla! Deo echoed. *I got too much to live for now. Eyes like blue green gems and...*

Please! Dorian exclaimed. *No more.*

Andro chuckled and could sense Jomann's humor beside him. *Let's do this brothers. And take our vengeance for what was done to our sister.*

Avoi. Dorian and Deion spoke together.

I will see you both on the ship. Andro said.

Andro and Jomann stepped onto the lift that would take them to the lower deck and the breach point just aft of the engineering section.

They were huddled around the small chart table in the middle of the G9 as the ship closed on the *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought.

“Sadi says there is much activity in and around the landing bays but the rest of the ship seems unaware of what is happening.” Carisia told them.

Yuri looked at Pa'cour beside her and nodded. “That makes sense.” She said. “He will not want to raise too much commotion over our arrival. Most of the added movement is probably security troops.”

Carisia nodded. “That is what Andro thinks as well.” She pointed at the schematic of the ship interior. “I suggest we let Anthar and Majeir lead us out mother. With this much security it is better to strike first. Sheva, Lu'ria, Onera and I will follow them and draw what security there is towards us as we move for our objective. It will allow you, Pa'cour and your Immortal Strike team to slip out and make your way into the interior and eventually the bridge.”

Yuri shook her head. “They would concentrate on you!” She said quickly. “I will not have my daughters take such a risk!”

“We will stay wrapped within the shadows mother. Lu'ria and I have done this many times before. With Sheva and Onera assisting, we will be able to move right past them into the corridor.” Carisia said. “Anthar and Majeir can cover us easily and they will draw most of the attention. And unless they wish to fire off a T19 inside the bowels of their ship, nothing that they can bring to bear on Anthar and Majeir will pierce their Etheric shields.”

“Carisia is right mother.” Onera stated.

Just get me off this ship! Anthar protested from the rear of the G9. *I will be so happy to not have to act like a sardine I will take them all out!*

Majeir turned her head and looked at him beside her. They were crammed into the rear of the G9 near the ramp and neither of them had room to move more than a few inches. G9 Long Range Runners were not designed to carry dragons in any way. *Perhaps if you were not so fat we could actually move more than a quarter meter at a time.* She told him.

I am not fat! Anthar barked at her.

I will have to question Elynth on that point when she joins us in the landing bay. Majeir told him with some humor. *I believe you have added a few pounds since becoming mated to her. She spoils you too much.*

Bah! Anthar snapped. *What do you know?*

Yuri couldn't help but join the others as they laughed at the exchange between the two dragons. “I still think it's too dangerous.” Yuri said finally.

This caused Sheva, Onera, Lu'ria and Carisia to laugh even harder and even Pa'cour joined in this laughter. He took Yuri's hand and moved closer to her. “And assaulting a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Class Dreadnought while it sits in the middle of space and not dry dock is not dangerous my wife?” He told her. “Some would say we have all lost touch with our wits for doing such a thing.”

Yuri looked at him and couldn't help but smile herself now. She turned back to Carisia. “Do nothing reckless.” She demanded but instantly realized how ridiculous that statement sounded as well considering what they were about to do and they all laughed even more. Yuri reached to her belt and removed The Tears of Heaven and reverently held them out to Carisia. “Take these.” She said.

Carisia looked at her. “The Tears of Heaven. Mother... those... Uncle Vonis gave them to you.” She said.

Yuri nodded. “And now I am giving them to you. Vonis... he must have known what he was doing when he sent them to me. He knew... he knew they would be part of my rebirth. That rebirth has taken place and now they will better serve someone who can use them with purpose and skill.” Yuri looked at Pa'cour quickly. “Besides... Pa'cour has crafted a superior set of blades that I intend to use.” She looked back to Carisia. “Take them daughter. As they were the first step into a brighter future for me, now they can be symbol of what I have rediscovered with this new life.”

Carisia's eyes were moist and Lu'ria stepped closer to her, pressing her tall, lithe frame against hers and squeezing her waist. "Take them *Enylarcopri* my love." She said softly. "And use them with the intent that they are given."

Carisia reached out and took the dual blades from her mother's hands. They were among the finest forged blades anywhere, the bluish tint of the razor sharp metal reflecting softly in the light of the G9. Behind only the Dragon Armor forged blades of the elven Weapon Master Nehtes, anything forged within the blue fires of Paravin was very rare and very nearly priceless.

Carisia looked at her mother, the small tears rolling down her perfect cheeks. "I will... I will carry them always mother. And cherish what they have given to me."

"Princess! Three minutes!" The pilot called back from the cockpit of the G9.

Yuri looked at them now and took a deep breath. "Let us remove the last vestiges of my mother's foul rule and begin a new day. And none of you had better die on me!"

This caused all of them to laugh softly once more as they prepared to step into the fires of combat.

INQUISITOR

Moran stood to the side of the massive area, his face impassive, as the G9 began to enter the fighter bay and make its way to the landing area. He turned his head slightly when his XO stepped up to him.

"Admiral?"

"Something Commander Viror?" Moran asked him.

"All stations manned and ready sir." The man spoke. "Regular Duty Shift has taken their spots. There was a very brief disturbance in the Integrity Field but it has stabilized."

"Disturbance?" Moran asked him.

"Seven spikes in hull integrity in a one point three second span." Viror answered. "The Chief Engineer did an Integrity Field Diagnostic and found nothing. He believes we have been out so long that the equipment will need to be recalibrated soon. It hasn't been done since we came out of space dock."

Moran nodded. "When this is done he can do it." He told him. "See to it Viror. I want us in top shape."

"As you order Admiral." The man answered.

"Where is Dante?" Moran asked.

"The last I checked he was still in his quarters on deck two sir." Viror answered.

"He should be here." Moran spoke to no one in particular. "I do not want him out of my view for very long."

Viror looked at him. "You do not trust him Admiral?"

"You know of what we were doing with Yuri Commander. I shared it with you in order to be better able to protect this ship while she was onboard." Moran told him.

Viror nodded. "I do not understand it... but yes."

"Well... let's just say Dante is not as refined as Yuri was." Moran said. "The transition is not happening as smoothly as I had hoped. I want him watched Viror. If anything happens that might be odd I wish to know about it."

"I will see to it sir." Viror answered.

"I'm hoping that once Yuri is back in my control, that he may well switch back given the right incentive." Moran said.

"Is that... is that even possible Admiral?"

"I don't know." Moran replied. "I do know Dante is weak minded but strong of will. That is why the transition has taken so long and is still not fully complete. He's fighting it... losing... but still fighting it. Now that Yuri is back, things may change."

"As you say Admiral." Viror spoke.

"The Interrogators are ready?" Moran asked.

Viror nodded. "I had the cells reinforced as you ordered. Whatever skills she may have obtained from the dog son, she will not be able to employ them here."

“Just have your men be alert Viror.” Moran spoke. “She will resist when they come for her and she is far more skilled than when we first undertook this mission. She is not to be underestimated. Sheva Juconi should be easy to contain and control since we will have her parents as well, but Carisia is an unknown right now. Better to be safe than sorry.”

Viror nodded. “I agree.” He said. “We...”

All conversation was drowned out as the G9’s engines roared when the ship flared and came to a stop nearby and began to settle to the deck. The ship rotated slightly until the ramp was facing where Moran stood and he took a deep breath and puffed his chest out pleased with himself. He saw the additional security begin to form near where the ship was settling and let himself feel pleased. Yuri was foolish to allow herself to be caught he thought to himself. And if she was caught with Carisia in her midst then she must have been working with the Union and Androcles. It was the only way they could have discovered Sheva Juconi and the program she was involved in, or the coordinates for the hidden planet. Knowing that the Immortal Pa'cour was now dead gave Moran some peace of mind. He would not have to worry about an assault by Immortals to retrieve her.

Moran began to think as he stood there waiting for the ship to settle completely to the deck. He would need to discover what had occurred to make Carisia work with her mother. There was no love lost between them he knew and after she became wife to Androcles Leonidas there should have been even less contact between them. There were rumors floating about in The Wilds that she had built something with Pa'cour, but none of them could be confirmed. There were also reports from what few assets they still had on Earth of the remains of King Resumar and others being returned to Earth. None of it was really making any sense, and trying to get reports off world now was a hazardous affair for his agents. Moran blinked a few times as different scenarios ran through his mind. Why would Carisia be working with Yuri? How did they discover Juconi and the planet?

The engines of the G9 were powering down.

Robert Moran was many things... but he was not a fool. Yuri had to be working with the Union. It was the only way Juconi and Carisia could have come to be with her and the only way they could have discovered the planet. They went there not to destroy the planet, but to remove Juconi’s parents according to the report from Faren. That information could only confirm that Juconi had turned traitor and was working for the Union now. This would also indirectly match to the unconfirmed reports from their assets that she had been spending a large amount of time with the son Dorian Leonidas on Cranea Island. She had been witnessed entering his personal quarters on the island many times and not leaving until morning. And if Juconi was working with the Union that meant she had the blessing of Androcles Leonidas. Robert Moran knew that Androcles was even harsher and more militant than his father when it came to traitors and for him to not kill her outright for being a spy bespoke of something else. It also meant that Yuri certainly had to be working for the Union as well, and in order for Androcles Leonidas to put any faith in Yuri after what had happen to his sister... Moran blinked several more times. Androcles Leonidas would not trust Yuri in any way after what had occurred to his sister. He would rip her to shreds in an instant as he had done on Earth. He certainly would not allow Carisia to travel with her.

Moran glanced at the rear of the G9 as the ramp began to come down.

There was something else going on here Moran thought as alarm bells began to sound in his head for the first time since learning Faren had captured Yuri. There is no way Pa'cour would have allowed them to be caught. If Androcles Leonidas and the Union was involved he was absolutely certain there was no way they would have been discovered in their task. The *Venorik Elghinn* could boast all they liked, but they paled in comparison when held up to the Union’s Krypteria Intelligence. The Lycavorian Armetus ran that organization and they had been trying to kill that man for far longer than Moran had been alive. Something just didn’t add up. Juconi was seen staying in the quarters of Dorian Leonidas on a regular basis. It was said her status within the Durcunusaan had seemed to increase in importance. The last few reports indicated she remained for the entire evening. Why would she remain in his quarters for the entire evening? If she was using her charms on the youngest son, that would not require she remain the entire evening. Moran’s eyes grew a little wider. If she was somehow involved in a relationship with the younger son; a relationship that had nothing to do with her duties as an assassin and spy? That would explain why they had lost all contact with the other agents from the program. That could explain why Carisia was with her. It would not explain why they were working with Yuri

or in her company. Unless... but that couldn't be could it? There was no possible way that Androcles Leonidas would ever trust Yuri enough to allow her to live. He was far more unforgiving than his father and...

Dante.

A light of realization went off within Moran's head in that instant. The same moment the ramp on the G9 came fully to rest on the deck. His eyes grew wide in horror when he saw not Yuri and the others in chains, but two very large dragons burst from the rear of the G9 with roars of anger and death.

Moran turned and was beginning to blur the moment both of those dragons unleashed twin flames of flesh melting fire from a hundred meters away. He could feel the heat from their blasts; feel the burning as those streams of flame reached for him. His mind registered the fact that Viror's entire body was engulfed suddenly in flame and his screams began to echo in Moran's mind as he blurred in an attempt to escape the encompassing firestorm that was just beginning to be unleashed.

One thing filled his mind as he beat at the flames licking the back of his shoulder and the pain from their burning scorched his uniform and skin.

Death had arrived on his ship.

And it was not in a forgiving mood.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

HIGH COVEN BLOOD REVERENCE DREADNOUGHT *INQUISITOR*

"Go!" Andro hissed the single word as he turned away slightly from the small hatch of the docking ring and where it was connected to the hull of the *INQUISITOR*.

Senior Chief Joe Ranor slammed his hand down on the control box in his grip and the small, muffled explosion echoed only briefly. Ranor had volunteered to place the explosives to insure that no damage was done to his ship and that they did not lose seal containment. He was one of the new generation of Engineers within the Union Fleet, many of them humans from Earth. Many new ship captains within the fleet were specifically requesting human engineers from Earth for their commands due to the unique skill sets taught to them on Earth. While the schooling was essentially the same at both the Academy on Apo Prime and the Fleet Academy on Earth, the Earth Engineering Academy also taught extensive use of explosives and light weapons as well as theoretical quantum mechanics, giving their engineers more rounded skills for different postings throughout the Fleet and ground bases. Many of the newer skills that were taught at the Fleet Engineering Academy on Earth were being integrated into the Union Fleet Academy on Apo Prime and soon both schools would be uniform and turning out Engineers that would be more skilled than any in history.

As one of the newer Engineers, Senior Chief Joseph Ranor had a hand in creating what was taught, especially about explosives, and his skills were being used right now. The shaped charge of C9 compound was perfectly laid and did exactly as Ranor had intended it to do. The heavy sheet of ArmorPly canvas covering over the hatch directed the force of the blast and any debris straight down into the ship. It ripped completely through the five inches of solid Layered Ferro-Crystanium hull armor on the *BLOOD REVERENCE* dreadnought as if slicing through paper, the extreme force of the blast carrying with it pieces of hull armor into the deck of the ship and unwittingly killing three High Coven personnel that had the misfortune of walking under that portion of the hull at the most inopportune time. The C9 Explosive Compound, at least this type of it, was designed by Union engineers to be used specifically for the purpose of penetrating star ship armor. To this end it worked to total perfection.

Andro didn't pause and before the cloud of smoke had even cleared, he lifted his arms over his face and dropped through the newly created hole in the hull of the ship, crashing right through the armored canvas sheet. In his mind's eye Andro could see Dorian doing the exact same thing from his *STRIKER* only thirty some meters down the corridor he was dropping into. Jomann followed Andro a split second later, followed in quick succession by Torian, Daio and then Eliani and Brendi. Daio had joined their assault team when Murano stated with Yuri and her Immortals hitting the landing bay, Dorian and he would not need additional people. Dorian

agreed with him and Deion would break from their group with his Bridge Assault team and he and Dorian would move to join him.

Only thirty seconds before, Eliani had triggered the command to activate the Gas Drones that were anchored to the hull of the *INQUISITOR*. In seven different locations spaced across the hull of the *INQUISITOR*, the oval shaped Drones that were attached to the hull used a diamond core drill head to drive down a two inch diameter tube at nearly three times the speed of sound. Each tube penetrated the hull to a depth of sixteen inches, more than enough distance to punch through the hull and enter directly into the seven different main air filtration ducts that ran through the entirety of the ship. Exactly six seconds after punching into the large ducts, two cylindrical drums inside the drones began pumping the odor and colorless gas into the shafts at nearly five hundred pounds per square inch. The air circulating units did the rest of the work for them, carrying the gas to all portions of the ship in mere seconds.

The only two locations that operated on protected filtration systems were the deck they were entering now and the bridge itself. This deck housed the quarters for Robert Moran and his son as well as senior officers.

The Neutron Gas had been devised many years ago and then refined by Union engineers and chemical experts through the years since its discovery. There had been a huge debate about use of the gas when it was first discovered since it was technically considered a biological weapon and the Union did not use such weapons of war, especially since so many vampires called the Union home and were trusted friends and family. After two long years of debate and testimony however, all seventeen vampire Senators serving at the time voting for its use, it was allowed in this form only and it was heavily monitored. This was actually only the second use of the neutron gas since the return of a Leonidas to the throne of the Union and with any luck Androcles and Eliani Leonidas hoped it would be the very last. Only he and Eliani had used this gas before and it had taken them three days to make the hard decision to use it the first time against a group of brutal vampire mercenaries that had been loose in The Wilds shortly after the Evolli War and were targeting Union assets and civilian personnel. They had used it then to save lives, just as they were doing now.

In the dose that was being used right now, the neutron radiation gas was strong enough to invade the cells of any vampire, turned or pureblood, and for lack of a better description, shut down their bodies within seconds. It did no permanent damage to the targets; the composition of the gas no where near dense enough to be lethal in nature, but it was still considered a toxin. The neutron radiation isotopes in the gas invaded the many cells of any vampire and essentially slowed their bodies down in much the same manner as a body falling to sleep; only it acted within microseconds and not over many minutes. A heavier dose would have seen the radiation isotopes begin to break down the actual cell structure of any vampire leading to certain death, but Eliani Leonidas was far too good of a doctor to overlook that. One of her mothers was a pureblood vampire, two of her sisters and one of her brothers half vampire. She had friends and men and women who were like Aunts and Uncles to her, all of them vampires. Her former lover and still dear friend Nyla was a pureblood vampire. This was not something that Eliani would take chances with and the dose she using was perfect in every way to accomplish their task but leave no lingering after effects.

The crew of the *INQUISITOR* were among the finest that the High Coven had to offer and they were very good at their jobs. Within seconds after seeing the dragons unload from the G9 in the landing bay, an alarm claxon had begun to sound throughout the entire ship and many were rushing to their combat stations. The command crew on the bridge did not know of the other assaults or the use of gas. The claxon was falling on deaf ears for the most part, as vampires by the hundreds were entering the corridors and compartments of the ship and being incapacitated within seconds and the bridge crew would not realize this until it was far too late.

Andro's booted feet had barely touched the deck before he was stepping to the side to allow Jomann and the others to follow him. His Shi Viska flared to life on his left arm as he dropped into a crouch, the pommel of *Saar* filling his right hand, and the sizzle and pop of the blade appearing from Flatspace almost lost among the echo of their explosive entrance. Jomann moved up instantly beside him as Torian and Daio were next in quick order and then Eliani and Brendi followed. With the exception of Brendi, all of them had resorted to their partial changed forms, their eyes now those of wolves and their fangs protruding from their lips. Torian and Daio unlimbered chopped down versions of the P190. The P190A5s were identical to those weapons that Martin and Danny had been using out within Pralor space as they were better suited for close quarters combat. They were chambered for the much more versatile Kavalian 12.7mm round due to its stopping power. All of them had seen combat many times before with the exception of Brendi Faith. Their senses were on full alert for anything that

might be out of the ordinary or out of place. Brendi Faith for her part was doing exactly what she and Eliani had been training to do the last twenty-four hours. She held the K14 KM in her right hand, while her left hand never left Eliani's combat harness. Her dark eyes were wide in fear, but she was able to control it well enough to function. Their bodies were pressed close to one another and even in the midst of the situation they found themselves in, Brendi Faith could not deny the feelings that this caused in her.

Andro! We're in! Dorian's voice echoed to them within the Etheric Realm like a gunshot.

Breaking for the panel and bridge! Deion echoed his brother's voice. *Go get the nubous ronnu fervon!*

Moving now! Dori... you and Murano meet us halfway! Andro ordered calmly.

On our way!

Andro turned and looked at Torian and Daio. He pointed with his hand and instantly Torian hefted his A5 and began to move.

"Here!" Sherice called as they rounded the short corner, dodging the inert bodies of dozens of vampires and found themselves in the empty passage. Directly above them in the recessed corridor was the hatch that would take them up into the main maintenance shaft and from there to the bridge. Deion was gripping Mari's hand tightly as they came around the corner and his eyes found the computer panel.

"Mari!" He hissed.

All of them had chosen to wear the lightweight tactical headsets instead of normal battle helmets. It was a risk, as the headsets provided no protection, but instead had small sensors in the frame that fed them tactical data instantly through the small console in front of each of their left eyes. Deion determined they would be moving faster than his brothers as they had to get to the computer console in seconds. The helmets were heavier and would not allow for quickly and efficiently working on computer systems. After mulling over this for all of three seconds, Andro had agreed with him. As had Murano. It was like a shot of confidence in the arm for Deion and he swore not to let his brother or the others of their team down.

Mari's heart was racing beyond measure as she turned her head and with wide eyes she watched Deion reach up and simply rip away the covering of the computer console with his armored hand. Breathing deeply and using all of her mother's teachings to maintain her calm, Mari stepped up to the panel, pushed he tactical lens out of the way and flipped open the P9 Deion had given her and let it dangle from her midsection in the armored case.

"Cowen... Ridor... the hatch!" Deion rasped out the order as he dropped to his knee directly behind Mari. "Nara, Sherice cover! Lisi... watch our six!"

Lisisa nodded instantly and dropped beside him in a crouch. She was not about to be left out of this mission and Andro had assigned her to Deion only because of her experience in small unit operations. It was not because he did not trust his brother to complete the mission; it was because Lisisa's years and knowledge of doing these same missions during the Evolli War would give Deion an added advantage when they hit the bridge. On this mission Lisisa could use her abilities to wrap the shadows around her and blur, which were much more suited against fellow vampires. And it gave Deion's team an extra lethal asset with a personal stake in the success of this mission.

Their wolf ears caught the sound of shouting voices from further down the corridor and Lisisa looked at her brother. "Those on this deck are regaining their senses *fervon!* We must move quickly!" She spat quietly.

Deion looked behind him. "Mari?" He questioned.

"There is an extra level of encryption on the system!" She gasped in horror as her fingers typed madly on the small computer console. A thin cable ran from her P9 to the connection in the computer on the wall.

Deion stood up and moved closer to her as he could detect her excited voice and the fear pouring from her scent easily. He pressed the front of his body against her back in such a manner that it caused Mari to gasp in shock and barely disguised delight. Deion lowered his head next to her cheek as she worked and time almost seemed to slow for her.

"You are more than capable of doing this Mari." He spoke softly into her ear. "Be calm *Aur Locarra*. I have faith."

My Flower. He had called her his flower and just his soothing voice and warm breath next to her ear was enough to relax Mari completely and fill her with resolve. His formidable physical presence gave her a sense of peace that she had never felt before, not even in the arms of her mother. This allowed her to work far faster than even she thought possible as different codes flashed across her screen almost faster than the eyes could follow. Yet follow them she did. She had dedicated her young life to learning everything she could while in school, hours upon hours of study and practical application had forged her into one of the finest graduates of the Advanced Pralor University. Feeling Deion's powerful Etheric resonance surrounding her, calming her in a way nothing ever had, it allowed Mari to be better than even she thought she could be.

"There is no time to break the extra level of encryption! I am rerouting all Command Codes and Primary Control to my P9 through a secondary data uplink and securing them with Pralor algorithms!" She spoke confidently now.

"Disable the secondary uplink with a random, mutating coding variable so they do not discover how you did it!" Deion spoke. His attention was focused down the corridor looking for enemies and he did not see Mari's smile of delight at his obvious knowledge and skill.

Lisisa looked back over her shoulder, her forest green eyes wide. "*Carians*... I hope you two know what the hell you are talking about!" She rasped out the comment.

Mari tapped on her P9 twice in quick succession and the computer console in front of her went dark.

"It's done!" She exclaimed lifting her hands. "I've routed all primary and secondary control of their engines to my P9! They will not be able to alter our position or activate their engines subsystems even from the main consoles on the bridge or in their engineering section!"

Deion didn't hesitate. "Time to go!" He said as he reached up and yanked the cable from her computer and then smashed his armored fist into the screen itself, crushing the LCD readout and well as half the console.

His arm then encircled Mari's small waist and he and Lisisa blended even further into the recessed portion of the corridor. Lisisa went up first as Cowen leaned out of the upper hatch and grasped her hands, pulling her through the hatchway with barely any effort. Her petite form shot up into the opening and vanished from sight, just as Mari came under the hatch and looked up. Deion was lifting her up even as Cowen reached down once more and snatched her arm. Mari almost released an involuntary shout at the strength with which Cowen hauled her up, but then she was rolling to the side out of the way as he reached down once more. She turned her head and saw Deion's hand clamp onto Cowen's forearm and then he was lifting once more. Deion grunted as he rolled to the side and came to rest almost burying Mari under his large form. He looked down into her face and saw her blue green eyes staring at him so bright and beautiful, his chest pressed tightly to hers and his leg between her own. Deion Leonidas didn't know what possessed him to do such a thing, but her orange clove scent was nearly unbearable so close to him as she was and even in the life threatening situation they were in he could not help himself. He lowered his head quickly and covered her moist lips with his own. Mari's eyes went wide, not from her surprise at his actions, but at what his kiss ignited within her and the way her body reacted.

Deion pulled back quickly and flashed her a heartbreakingly gorgeous smile, flashing his long dual fangs at her. Vicious dual fangs that were utterly beautiful to her. "I'm sorry... I've wanted to do that since I first saw you." He stammered the words.

"Eight seconds!" Cowen called out in a harsh whisper as he secured the hatch.

Mari could only gasp once more as Deion lifted his powerful body from atop hers and was moving before she could draw in a breath. She felt Lisisa's hands grab her arm and pull her to her feet just as quickly and she looked into her eyes. Lisisa grinned at her from under her headset, her own dual wolf fangs so very evident.

"Their timing for such things is typically horrid!" Lisisa told her with a smile. "They take after our father! Come!"

Mari could only follow Lisisa as they began to sprint down the massive maintenance shaft. Horrid though his timing may have been, Mari could not deny the feelings Deion's simple kiss had caused to come rushing forth within her. His soft lips had ignited a fire within her and Mari decided right then she had no desire to resist the feelings rushing through her. No... she was not going to resist them in the least. She was going to embrace them and all that it brought to her.

The trip was amazing to say the least.

Sarlana had never been able to view the stars as she was now in her last voyage through them. She had been confined to the lower decks of a City Ship with those of her kind as they prepared for their Seed Mission. The Pralor Corvette was comfortable yet designed for combat she knew. The Flight Crew had gone out of their way to make her and Conlar feel at ease, but Sarlana knew their actions were by direction of the *Dahakoan* Androcles more than anything. Like his father, he was a natural born leader of men, and no doubt others followed him with little or no question. The *Dahakoan* Dorian Leonidas also had this trait she knew, and it would develop quickly now that he and his bonded brother Ryner were with his brother and Elynth. Sarlana had spoken their names over and over many times in the last few hours, delighted beyond belief to be able to speak them openly. The four of them were a dominant force within the Etheric realm, not only because they were *Dahakoan*, but also because they were Praetorian warriors. Their Etheric resonance was staggering even from this distance, as was their father's, for she could still feel Martin even as they drew further away from Manne. Their Etheric abilities had been one of the reasons that the Darastrixi and Pralor people cultivated such a close bond between them.

Sarlana didn't question for a moment that they could sense her own powerful Etheric resonance growing closer, and while they might not understand what she represented for them, the two brothers trusted in their father completely. Teniri had remained with Arzoal on Manne, not wanting to leave the side of the Elder Mother who had placed so much trust and faith in her all those years ago. There was still so much she could learn from Arzoal and Sarlana had agreed with her.

Sarlana turned her head from the long couch she was sitting on as she felt the ship revert back to normal space from its third and final Quantum jump. She held tightly to the steaming mug of the liquid they called coffee, not wanting to spill its contents. She had never tasted such a thing and it electrified her taste buds. The friendly elven pilot had told her what it was, and that it was a special blend made by the youngest Queen Aricia. Conlar had just entered the main cabin and he turned from where he was pouring himself of cup of the coffee as he too felt the very slight tug in his stomach. Sarlana watched intently through the clear view window as the stars became bright points once more and off in the distance she saw the reddish green cloud of some unknown nebula. Her emerald green eyes were wide with wonder and she turned back as Conlar settled to the couch beside her.

"We've completed our final jump." He observed as he looked out the view window. "We are now within the Alpha Quadrant. Something I never imagined I would ever think of let alone see."

"Such wonder." Sarlana stated softly. "I was with the *Vrrarhoimpa* all of the time helping them to prepare for the beginning of the Seed Mission. I was never able to see the stars like this. It is truly amazing."

Conlar nodded his head. "There were times during our escape when one could look out into the stars and for a fleeting moment forget what was going on all around us."

Sarlana reached out and placed her hand on top of his. "You seem much more relaxed than when we first began this trip my friend." She told him.

Conlar nodded in agreement and took a deep breath. "Delnash told me something before we left. He told me to forget everything we had been raised to believe. Forget everything that we grasp onto. He told me to open my mind." Conlar looked at her.

"He is a wise man." Sarlana told him. "Now that his eyes have been reopened he will be the leader he was always meant to be."

"I did not do that when we first arrived on Manne and I appeared just as arrogant as any other Pralor they had met." Conlar said.

"And now?" Sarlana asked him.

Conlar smiled as he looked at her. "Now? Now I have seen things that prove all we ever thought was a lie. Just as Delnash has seen." He told her.

Sarlana shook her head. "Not a lie Conlar my friend." She told him quickly squeezing his free hand. "A misconception. One which we can fix with but a simple decision to expand our minds. We as two species,

advanced though we may be with our technology, in some ways we think we can do no wrong and that makes us dim-witted beyond measure.”

Conlar nodded in agreement. “A choice. Something I decided to do the moment I boarded this ship. I have been reading of their history Sarlana. From before Martin Leonidas returned to them and after. It is... it is a grand story. Almost... almost magical in nature. It is filled with brutal violence and death yes, but never violence that they themselves began. And for all the many reports given by others supposedly so much smarter than all of us that said this species was barbaric and vile, I have seen dozens of acts within their own history that refute that notion bitterly. Even before Sumar joined with them. Acts of compassion and bravery that were often dismissed as irrelevant and nothing more than oddities.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “I have done much the same.” She told him. “My people are no better Conlar. We took much of your knowledge as explorers and Seeders of Life and used this to base our own thoughts and decisions on *because* we never left the world of our birth. It was a choice... as you said. We have ships, grand ships, but we never looked beyond what we as a species had. We never truly looked to the future. That is what I believe *Wer Zezhuanth* wanted us to do. We...” Sarlana’s eyes grew wide and she froze in her spot, her hand clamping onto Conlar’s arm with all of the strength in her small form.

Images flashed through her mind causing her to gasp almost in pain. The dark red blood and agony, the shame at the vile laughter as she was taken against her will. The pain of every touch, every bite that they had laid upon her. The devastation in her eyes.

Conlar gripped her tightly. “Sarlana?” He gasped aloud. “What... what is it?”

“Such... such pain and agony!” She echoed as she shook her head.

“Sarlana!”

Her head came up then, her emerald green eyes brighter than Conlar had ever seen. “We must... we must go to the where they fly this ship.” She stammered.

“What? Why?”

Sarlana rose to her feet in the next instant. “Come quickly.” She stated as she placed her mug on the small table and regained control of her emotions.

Conlar could only follow as she practically dragged him through the upper deck of the corvette and unerringly guided them to the cockpit. Within moments they burst into the medium sized cockpit filled with two elven pilots and a vampire engineer. All of them were female and all of them turned to look at her.

“Can we help you Lady Sarlana?” The vampire female asked as she came to her feet.

“Where are we?” Sarlana demanded.

“We have reverted to normal space.” The woman answered her. “Our present course will take us to *SPARTA’S WRATH* in just under fifteen minutes. They conducted a standard combat deployment while we were collecting you and have moved. Prince Androcles will greet you when they return from their mission.”

“Return?” She asked. “They are not on this *SPARTA’S WRATH*.”

The vampire female glanced at her pilots and then back to Sarlana. “No. If the reports are accurate, they have just begun their assault to bring the criminals Robert and Dante Moran to justice. Armen has directed us to land immediately in the Port landing bay.”

Sarlana shook her head. “No!” She barked. “We must go to them!”

“Lady Sarlana... our orders were to deliver you and Elder Conlar to...”

“I am not an Elder.” Conlar corrected her. “I...”

Sarlana grabbed the woman’s arms. “Listen to me!” She demanded. “I must go to them! They are the last hope of my people and...”

“Lady Sarlana...” The female elf pilot spoke now. “Their plan was perfect. And there is no one who could stand against Androcles, Deion and Dorian Leonidas except their father. And now that Praetorian Murano is with them...”

Conlar looked at her with wide eyes. “Murano is with them?” He almost yelled.

The elf pilot nodded. “Yes.”

Sarlana looked at Conlar. “I can see what they did to his sister Conlar. Their sister. I can see it within them as easily as I stand before you now. I can feel their rage and hate coursing through them. I must go to them!”

“Wait!” The elf pilot spoke once more as she became more attentive. “You can... you can see within the Prince’s mind from here?”

Sarlana looked at her. “You know what I am? Martin Leonidas told you what I am did he not?” She asked calmly.

The pilot nodded her head. “As much as he was able... yes.”

Sarlana met her eyes. “Child... if Androcles and Dorian Leonidas and their Bonded Ones unleash the full scope of what they are truly capable of... everyone on that ship will die. I must insure that does not happen. In order to do that I need to be with them... guiding them. That is my place... my purpose in this life now.”

“Lady Sarlana we... we don’t even know you.”

Sarlana stepped forward quickly and reached out her hand to touch the female elf on her shoulder. “I am not an enemy child. Most would consider me a religious icon among my own people. My only goal in this life now is to guide those you call Prince. I could no more hurt them or anyone close to them than I could hurt my own children. I know you can feel that within me.”

“Regardless of what I feel... you are asking me to enter what is no doubt a combat zone right now.” The elf pilot said. “One that *SPARTA’S WRATH* will surely have complete and total control of. Armen will see to that. The attack was to take place on the High Coven ship Lady Sarlana. There is no telling what conditions we will be entering. I can not risk your safety for anything, no matter how important. Those were Prince Androcles’s words to me before we left to come retrieve you.”

Sarlana blinked. “He told you that?” She asked.

The pilot nodded. “Yes.”

Sarlana looked at Conlar. “He knows what I am.” She gasped.

The elf pilot Mal’ita looked at Sarlana for a long moment without saying anything. This strange woman was so very different. She remembered well her classes in school about how the modern elf was descended from dragons. How over millennia of evolution they stood as they were now, but had lost none of the connection to the dragons that they had when they were first conceived. It was why no elf within the Lycavorian Union was afraid of any dragon. She could indeed sense that this woman meant no harm to the Prince. Any of them. All that flowed from her when she spoke their names was love. Mal’ita’s own life was full of unknowns that she had embraced, the first and most important among them the beautiful vampire that was now her wife and lover. They had been together for six blissful years now and had she not followed what her heart and intuition had told her, they would never have been brought together. She made her decision now based on that very same intuition.

“Leeta... engage Full Jammers and Whisper nodes.” She spoke looking at her vampire lover, wife and engineer.

“We’re going in Mal’ita?” Leeta gasped in shock.

Sarlana looked at the pilot once more as Mal’ita met her eyes. “Yes. We’ll sweep in under the starboard wing and if all seems stable we will hold position until we can contact Princess Sadi or one of the Crown Princesses.”

Sarlana looked at her. “His... his *Anome*. His wives.” She said.

Mal’ita nodded in answer. “I will not enter that ship unless she or another Crown Princess tells me it is ok Lady Sarlana.” She told her. “You must understand... my task is to protect you and Conlar... nothing else. Without permission from one of the Crown Princesses then we will not proceed.”

Sarlana nodded. “I understand.” She stated calmly. “What you are doing... as close as you are going against your orders... thank you.”

Mal’ita looked at her co-pilot. “Suraie... bring the sublights to full power. If something happens I want to be able to escape quickly. That includes the Prince’s wrath if he does not approve of what we are doing.”

“We’ll need more than sublights to escape him then.” The elf co-pilot said as her hands began to move over her controls.

Anthar pulled up short only fifty meters from the port entrance to the landing bay, light wisps of smoke lifting from his mouth. His head snapped back and forth looking for further targets and finding none. Majeir was twenty meters to his left unleashing a withering blast of flame down upon a dozen crew members trying to hide behind the body of several huge pieces of machinery as she moved for the starboard entrance. Anthar turned back to the G9.

Sister! Now! Go now! He shouted within Mindvoice.

Carisia was holding tightly to Lu'ria's hand on one side and Sheva's on the other. The instant she and Lu'ria heard Anthar's voice begin to speak they moved.

We go! Carisia spoke firmly just as she wrapped the shadows around herself and Lu'ria while Sheva and Onera added their own ability to their group, effectively causing all of them to disappear from sight.

Yuri whispered a short blessing to her daughters just before Majeir's voice boomed in her own head.

Yuri... I have cleared the path to the opposite entrance. Move now!

Yuri turned to her Immortal husband. "Let us bring this to an end my beloved husband! Forever!"

Pa'cour hefted the P190A5 in his hands and looked at their team of twelve Immortals. The best men he had, all of them having spent the last months training under both Yuri and himself. He turned back to Yuri and nodded.

"Let's." He stated.

Yuri pulled the small mask down over her nose and mouth to keep from being affected by the gas and they plunged from the back of the G9, turned to the left to see Majeir laying down another stream of fire to her right, and they broke into a dead sprint for the starboard entrance on the opposite side of the landing bay. It was a path that would take them to the only direct lift to the bridge from this deck and bring an end forever to a history that Yuri was rapidly leaving behind her in favor of a future so bright it brought tears to her eyes.

INQUISITOR BRIDGE

"Seal it!" Moran screamed as he continued to beat at his smoking jacket. "Seal the fucking bridge!" His eyes were wide in disbelief as he began to yank at the outer jacket trying to get it off to keep from burning him more.

"Report!" He roared once more as he tossed the jacket to the deck.

"Admiral... a massive battleship appeared on our sensors from Shroud only moments ago. It has... it has destroyed our entire escort! One volley and... it obliterated all of them!" A voice spoke from somewhere on the bridge. "Our sensors can not penetrate the hull of the ship but its weapons appear to some sort of Quantum based arrays that are off our charts in power output!"

"Shit!" Moran exclaimed. "The Mindvoice ship from Ritaah! They took it!"

"We received two brief reports of explosions on deck two!" Another officer offered. "The report was interrupted and we have not been able to raise anyone on deck two!"

"Seal all access to the starboard landing bay!" Moran snarled as he moved to the main chart table. "Deploy security teams to both entrances with heavy weapons!"

"To fight dragons sir?" Another man echoed in surprise.

"Hit them with enough firepower and it will overwhelm their Etheric shields!" Moran snapped. "They already killed the security I brought with me to secure Yuri! They were turning on the crew when I last saw them! Do we have visual into the landing bay?"

"Coming up now Admiral!"

Moran turned as a large monitor to the side lit up with internal feeds of the landing bay and they could see the massive bodies of two dragons still laying down blistering streams of flames in different directions.

"*Phraktos!*" A woman gasped. "They are killing everything!"

"Admiral... we are getting a report from deck two!" The man shouted from across the bridge. "Sir... Union troops are... Admiral... we have been boarded!"

Moran's eyes grew wide. "Boarded?" He gasped. "How... who the fuck is insane enough to board..." And the unthinkable with Yuri just became very real. "Leonidas! Yuri is working with Androcles Leonidas!"

"Admiral how?" The Officer of the deck exclaimed coming up to him. "I thought... I thought he wanted her dead!"

Moran shook his head. "I don't know damn it! But only he and his father are fucking crazy enough to attempt something like this! It was a set up from the very beginning! They set me up!" He turned. "Our escorts are gone?"

"Yes sir! We... Admiral look!" The man motioned with wide eyes to the feed from the landing bay and all of them saw the *STRIKER DT* and strange looking ship Corvette sized ship suddenly de-shroud and come to rest on either side of the massive fighter bay. Even before the strange ship was down, the ramp in the rear lowered and Moran saw three additional dragons burst from the interior of the ship, one of which was the obsidian beast that Androcles Leonidas rode.

"Fuck!" Moran hissed. "Emergency jump back to our Fleet!" He roared. "Get us out of here before they can land more dragons and troops!"

"Admiral! An *ORIC*-Class Heavy Cruiser and *DARK BROOD* Frigate are breaking away from the unknown ship! It has to be the ship from Ritaah! They are moving to take up station on..."

"Main LSD coils are off line!" The next voice screamed out and caused Moran's vampire blood to go cold. "Admiral... the LSD main drive has been powered down remotely!"

"What?" Moran screamed. "Get it back!"

"I have been locked out of the entire system!" The man exclaimed as he turned and watched as the bridge consoles all around him began to go dead as they lost power. "Fuck! Someone is rerouting control of all bridge functions! None of my command codes work! They are shutting us down!"

DECK TWO

"And that is that!" Brendi Faith exclaimed happily as she finished typing on her P9.

They had discovered a computer terminal only a few dozens meters from where they had entered the deck and with Andro and the others covering her, Brendi had immediately set to work. She noticed right away that Mari had not only disabled the main engine commands, but rerouted their control to her own P9 as a safety measure. Seeing this, Brendi used her P9 to attack and take control of the individual subsystems. Without the main computer control system that Mari had locked out, it was almost child's play for Brendi to remotely take control of and order all subsystems on the ship to shut down and answer only to command codes that now resided in her P9. She quickly reached up and pulled the terminal cable from her P9 and tossed it to the floor and looked at Eliani. "Once Mari overrode their main command codes I was able to begin shutting down their weapons and all main systems!" She gasped excitedly. "They are now effectively blind and dumb and the systems will only come back online with an directive from my P9 or Mari's!"

"You... you did all that?" Eliani gasped.

Brendi smiled brightly at her. "I thought... I thought that is why you brought me." She stammered.

Eliani reached out quickly and took Brendi's face in her hands happily. She laid a lip locker on her that Brendi Faith neither drew away from or felt repulsed by. Indeed... she relished in the feel of Eliani's lips on her own and was disappointed when Eliani pulled back, her fern green eyes wide and delighted.

"You beautiful... talented... devious person you!" Eliani told her.

Brendi smiled as new and very welcome feelings rushed through her and she turned to look at Androcles. His azure eyes were bright under his helmet as he looked at her. "Welcome Brendi Faith." He stated with a smile. "Welcome to our world."

She saw his face suddenly twist up and his head snapped around like he had detected something.

"Dante!" Andro growled viciously and then he exploded from his crouched position down the corridor.

Jomann's eyes were wide but he acted within a heartbeat. "Go!" He barked the order to Torian and Daio. "Go!"

STARBOARD LANDING BAY

“Elynth, Ryner, Caydren and Cinol are clear!” Ne'Veha barked as her hands flew over the two consoles that seemed to wrap around her body completely.

“Meka... activate the turrets!” Sadi barked the order. “They will no doubt be bringing additional security to both entrances and we must not let them overwhelm Carisia.”

“Charging belly turrets!” Kameka replied calmly. “Activating area ground shield and repulsor fields!”

“Sehri ...” Sadi called as she looked out her cockpit window at the rush of landing bay crew members scrambling to get out of the way of the two dragons that were loose within their work areas.

“I am moving for the upper turret Sadi!” Sehri’s excited voice answered. “To see better and cover them with the cannon!”

“No *DuanGai*!” Sadi told her quickly. “Direct Elynth and Ryner to the port entrance and have them link up with Anthar to cover *Enylarcopri*’s retreat! Have Caydren and Cinol form with Majeir and hold the starboard entrance! Then go to the ramp and standby with Bren! The ground shield and repulsor field will only work briefly if we come under attack and we will need you to shield the ramp entrance if they try to assault our ship directly! Only you can do this Sehri! Only you have the control of your Etheric shields to do this! Have one of Joseph’s engineers occupy the turret once you have reached the ramp!”

“They... they will listen to me Sadi?” Sehri questioned.

“You are wife and mate to Androcles Leonidas and a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union!” Sadi answered her with confidence and love in her voice and her tone. “They will listen to you *DuanGai*!”

The tone of Sadi’s voice and the resolve that her words carried caused Sehri to blink for a moment. Up until this point in time a very small part of her had questioned and doubted what she had found with Andro and the others. It was not because she didn’t trust or believe the feelings and emotions she felt within her, but because she didn’t understand them. She didn’t understand how she could feel for each of them what she felt. The unquestioned devotion and love that filled her being when they held her in their arms or when Andro nuzzled her ear and cheek. The physical desire she felt not only for Andro, but for all of them. At this very moment Sehri decided she didn’t need to understand it. It was all very real and to try and comprehend it didn’t matter anymore. As Andro had told her, understanding what they all felt for each other was unimportant. All that mattered was that they were together. It was part of her now and she would not question her role or position.

“Understood!” Sehri answered firmly taking that last leap into her new life.

“*SirsanGai* can you pinpoint the landing bay controls?” Sadi asked quickly detecting the excitement and fear in Sehri’s voice, but also the new confidence and resolve. The youngest of them she may have been, but she was rapidly turning out to be far more.

“I have them! The bulkhead directly in front of us, sixty meters! This is incredible Sadi... Lady Mari and Brendi have managed to reroute all command functions if what I am seeing is accurate! They have essentially shut down the ship!” Ne'Veha answered her dark eyes glued to her consoles. “Internal sensors indicate that the bridge is sealed. That must be where the scum Moran went to.”

“Leave Moran and his ilk for Andro and Dori.” Sadi directed calmly even as her own heart raced. “Meka... deploy the forward Point Defense Quad cannons and keep them directed on the landing bay controls! If anyone even blinks in that direction, vaporize the entire wall! It is overkill but we must insure they do not try and vent the bay manually!”

“That would not be a good thing!” Kameka called from her chair behind and to the side of them as her hands deftly deployed the dorsal mounted PDT and it swiveled around until it was pointed on the huge control panel along the far wall of the landing bay.

The huge explosion rocked the landing bay and caused a shudder to pass through the *PREMONITION* even as several fighters were lifted off the deck and fell back quickly, bursting into flames. Sadi’s eyes were wide as she gazed out her cockpit view window.

Majeir! She screamed out in Mindvoice.

Oops! Sadi heard Majeir answer immediately. *I think I may have ignited one of those fuel containers you told us to be careful of.*

Are you hurt? Sadi asked.

No... however the same cannot be said for those who were close to it. Majeir told her.

Nubous them! Sadi snarled. *Caydren and Cinol will be with you in moments! Do not let them reorganize Majeir! And be careful! If you injure yourself Lu'ria will be very upset!*

DECK TWO

The explosion from deep within the ship caused the entire vessel to shudder violently, throwing Dante into the bulkhead as a lieutenant staggered by him.

“...is going on!” Dante roared as he grabbed the arm of the nearest officer he found which unfortunately for him, was that lieutenant.

“We have been boarded sir!” The lieutenant shouted back. “Lycavorians and their dragons are loose in the starboard landing bay and on this very deck!”

“Lycavorians! Here!” Dante shouted in disbelief.

“There were dragons on the ship that we thought carried your mother!” The lieutenant stammered. “They poured from the G9 and began killing everyone! At least two of them. That explosion felt like it came from the landing bay! They must have destroyed the external fuel cells for our fighters to cause such an explosion.”

“That... that is not possible!” Dante hissed. “Who could assault our ship in the middle of space?”

“They are also loose on this deck sir! Somehow they breached the hull of the ship and are loose on this deck! We don’t know how many!” The lieutenant snapped right back. “We are trying to form a defensive position near section eleven!”

“Where is my father?” Dante screamed.

The officer shook his head quickly. “We think he made it back to the bridge, but all of our communications has been cut off. They have somehow seized control of most of our internal systems and shut them down! No other decks are answering calls for assistance! It’s like they are all asleep and do not know what is happening!”

“This is a *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought!” Dante screamed. “Surely even they are not stupid enough to...”

Dante’s eyes grew wide in horror when the officer’s chest blossomed outward in a spray of bright red blood, showering his face and neck as the head and at least twelve inches of the shaft of the *Nehtes* burst from his sternum. The man’s eyes were wide in agony as blood erupted from his mouth and his hands involuntarily grabbed Dante’s shirt. Dante blinked rapidly, his own wide eyes staring at the point of the *Nehtes* only inches from his cheek. He wiped the warm blood from his eyes as he tried to rip the officer’s death grip from his uniform and his own blood went cold when he heard the voice.

A voice from the deepest reaches of the dark abyss, a voice tinged with rabid hatred and the cold finality of death.

“Hello Dante! Retribution for your sins has arrived!”

Dante Moran stood in the corridor unable to move as fear anchored him in his spot and he watched as the body of the lieutenant dropped to the deck in front of him when the *Nehtes* was torn from his chest, revealing the figure standing behind him. Dante’s eyes grew even wider if that was possible and he saw those azure blue orbs behind the Dragon Armor encased helmet. The tall black plume announced to all who Androcles was, falling well past his shoulders. His eyes were glowing with the same intensity as a sun and they were filled not with soothing warmth, but frigid and terrible wrath and hate. The half dozen figures that were gathered behind Androcles Leonidas were but an afterthought as all Dante could see were those evil blue eyes and the pain they held within them.

Andro depressed the button on the side of his *Nehtes* and the *snik* sound of the bloody spear reducing in size was like a clap of thunder in the corridor. Standing before him was the man who had caused his beloved sister such agony and shame. The man who had taken from her, at least for a brief time, her innocence and her purity. Andro had never felt such anger well within him before and now he embraced that completely.

All thoughts of justice escaped Androcles Leonidas at this very moment as emotion took hold of him. He lifted his face slightly and barred the vicious looking dual set of wolf fangs that so marked the bloodline of Leonidas among their people. Andro stepped without thought into the head butt, channeling all of his considerable anger and power into the blow. Dante's nose and one entire side of his face crunched and shattered as his skin was torn open down to the bone. Blood burst forth and he was viciously slammed back against the bulkhead as if he had been hit by a fast moving Lifter vehicle. He saw only stars in his eyes as terrible pain lanced through his brain and blood from his crushed nose and lacerated cheek poured into his mouth and caused him to cough and choke. He looked up quickly as powerful hands grasped the front of his uniform and those azure orbs were only inches from his face glowing even brighter.

"I am going to take from you everything you took from my sister you sick, *nubous* excuse for a man!" Andro screamed the words directly into Dante's face. "And I'm going to take it piece by *nubous* piece! You will beg me for death! Just as you made her beg for her life!"

"Arghh!" The scream was unlike anything Eliani Leonidas had ever heard from her older brother and her green eyes went wide as Andro lifted Dante's two hundred pound frame like he was a ragdoll in his hands and then launched his body down the corridor as if he was nothing more than paperweight.

Murano had been involved in countless operations during the Scourge Wars with fellow Praetorians and even regular Pralor troops, yet he had never witnessed the precision that he had seen so far. The moment they had breached the interior of this deck, all of them became focused on their goals and Murano could only feel pride swell as the Spartan training all of them had undertaken from near birth came shining through.

There was no one in the corridor where they breached and within seconds Deion had grasped Mari's hand in his and his team was splitting away smoothly headed for their goal. He and Dorian moved in the opposite direction, heading to link up with Androcles. Four vampires had made the mistake of appearing in the corridor as they moved, rushing out of the room they were in with drawn hand weapons and unsure of what was happening. All four were now quite disabled on the deck and they would not wake for several hours at least. Androcles had been very clear that they were not to kill wantonly; indeed he wanted to avoid death as much as possible given what Faren had told them. Dorian hadn't hesitated when the four burst from a small lounge and he had unleashed a precise and powerful Etheric wave that crashed into the four of them before their eyes had even registered the two intruders loose on their ship. Murano had pounced on them then, using his Saberstaff to incapacitate each of them with crisp and powerful blows. Two of them would suffer from broken bones, all of them from severe headaches, but they would live. Three times they had dispatched crewmembers as they moved with measured speed down the near empty corridor. Each time they left unconscious men and women behind them. They were very close now as they sprinted around the last corner.

Then they heard the scream.

It was a scream of rage and hate unlike any Murano had ever heard and as they rounded the corner, their eyes went wide as they saw Dante Moran's body impact the bulkhead corner only five meters away with bone crushing force. Murano's keen brain instantly calculated the distance that he had been thrown based on where they saw Androcles standing and his eyes grew even wider as he realized the strength needed to launch such a large person so far. Dante Moran impacted the bulkhead with such force that they heard several of his ribs snap and his body left a significant imprint in the steel bulkhead before he dropped to the deck in horrific pain. His face was frozen in a visage of suffering and awash with blood from what appeared to be a shattered nose and deep cut on his face. It was then that they witnessed something neither of them could have predicted. Androcles's moved with such speed it actually appeared as if he blurred in motion like a vampire, covering the ten meter distance between him and Dante in a single blink of the eyes. His armored and booted foot rammed into Dante Moran's midsection with enough force to lift the young man off the deck a good meter at least and splinter any ribs that might have remained intact.

As Dante Moran howled in agony and dropped back to the deck, Andro fell upon him like a rabid wolf even as they stood frozen and watched. Androcles Leonidas was widely recognized as perhaps the most lethal hand to hand fighter in the entire Union. He had been schooled by so many different masters of warfare, his uncles, Lynwe and his aunt Aihola of the Drow, the cloned vampire Colonel Norris to name but a few. He had

taken all of their intense instruction and blended it into a fighting form that no one could match or hope to duplicate. Only one other person had begun to learn this style of fighting, because like his brother, Dorian Leonidas had been born fully aware and there was far more to the brothers than even they could understand. All of this training left Androcles in this moment and his armored fists began to pummel Dante without regard for where he was aiming his blows and with a speed that Murano had never seen before.

“My sister!” Andro screamed in rage. “My blood!”

Dante tried to fight back, launching a vicious punch directly at Andro’s face that never had an opportunity to connect. Andro simply snatched his wrist in his left hand before the blow even got close and he twisted Dante’s arm down with a savage jerk. Pureblood Lycavorians had always been known to have immense physical strength, far more than even a pureblood vampire could muster, and Andro’s blood, like his father and mother, was as pure as it got. Dante’s arm snapped like a dry twig and the bones in his forearm tore through the skin under his uniform sleeve and bulged against the fabric as his scream of anguish caused even Murano to cringe. His arm fell useless, blood quickly soaking his uniform sleeve and the floor beneath him, just as Andro grabbed the front of Dante’s uniform and lifted his body off the deck, glaring at him with glowing azure eyes and fully extended fangs. He rammed him back into the deck three times in rapid succession, each time his skull crashing into the deck with incredible force. The third impact crushed both of Dante’s shoulder blades, his eyes wide in horrific pain, but no sound able to escape his throat because of the blood in his mouth. Andro yanked him off the floor once more and brought his upper body to within inches of his face once more.

“My sisters are now untouchable to scum like you! My mothers beyond the foul reach of all who would do them harm! I will protect them all with every breath in my body!” Andro screamed into Dante’s torn, bloody and horrified face, the spittle showering his bloody cheek. “You are not worthy to even walk in their footsteps scum! And now you will pay for your actions in blood! Your death will be the herald to all of what to expect should anyone touch them ever again!”

“Mer...” Dante’s spit out blood and his ravaged and bloody lips tried to form the word. “Mercy!” He finally managed to croaked out.

Andro’s eyes grew even wider and angrier at this if it was possible. “Mercy!” He roared even louder. “I will show you the same mercy you showed to my sister you fucking monster! None! None at all!” Andro smashed another head butt into Dante’s face and then proceeded to continue to pound him with his fists.

“*Sibfla!*” Dorian gasped and made to move forward.

Murano’s hand snatched his arm and he shook his head quickly. “No!” He gasped softly.

“Murano... he will beat him to death, I kid you not!” Dorian protested trying to pull his arm free. “He’s... he’s never been like this!”

Murano held him tight and shook his head. “No!” He spoke. “Your brother is... he is in complete control of his actions! Do not interfere!”

“That is in control?” Dorian gasped.

“Do not interfere Dorian!” Murano ordered him. “Not yet!”

Everyone would forget the words they had heard Andro speak within a few hours. All but one.

Eliani Leonidas felt tears well in her eyes as her brother’s words filled her. It was at this moment in time where Eliani discovered just how dear they all were to her brother, and what he was willing to do in order to protect them. This was about justice for their sister Zarah yes, but in taking that justice, Androcles Leonidas was sending a very clear message across the stars that his sisters and his mothers, indeed all of his family, were just as he spoke.

They were now untouchable for those who valued their lives.

Eliani Leonidas would share this moment with her sisters and later her mothers and it was also a day that would forever see Androcles’s sister begin to view him in another light. It was a day that all of them saw the true nature of their brother come forth and part of what drove him. Eliani Leonidas would never forget this day and none of the Leonidas sisters would ever fear anything again after this moment in time.

It took them only twenty seconds wrapped within the shadows as they were to move to the main weapons magazine. There were seven vampire soldiers within the magazine when they entered, all of them

scrambling to arm themselves. Carisia, Lu'ria, Sheva and Onera fell upon them like a swarm of deadly insects. With the small masks covering their mouths and nose to protect them against the gas, Carisia used the Tears of Heaven to nearly decapitate the closest soldier to her, the blood from the two wounds on either side of his neck arcing into the air as he fell gagging on his own blood. Lu'ria's Glaive snapped out twice in quick succession and another soldier fell, trying to hold his innards in as they spilled onto the deck.

Sheva and Onera worked as a seamless duo, something they would explore in the future after they realized it. Sheva twisted the arm of one soldier to the side hearing him scream as his arm and shoulder dislocated while Onera stepped into the single swing of her sword. His scream ended quickly as her blade opened his throat to the air and she spun away sweeping her foot to the side and knocking the legs from two other soldiers out from under them. Sheva blurred instantly and fell on them with her dual blades, burying the dragon armor encased blades into their chests as she dropped between them. Onera turned her head and her eyes went wide when she saw Lu'ria holding Carisia's hands as she spun her around in midair, Carisia's booted feet meeting the heads of two of the remaining three soldiers. It was a display of her newfound wolf strength that Onera thought exquisitely beautiful. Her half sister's petite body was packed with muscle and the kicks she unleashed were instantly lethal. One soldier's head snapped around from the force of the blow and his neck popping was very audible in the room. The other spun with the force of the blow and his head and face smashed into the bulkhead with devastating force. He dropped to the deck like a limp noodle, unconscious and completely out of the fight. It saved his life as Onera turned her attention to the last soldier who had secured a rifle and was bringing it to bear on Lu'ria and Carisia.

Onera acted out of love for a sister she never thought she would know. She drew back the arm that wielded *Iphan rie Aellseleum* and heaved the sword at the remaining vampire soldier with all of her combined Immortal and vampire strength. The throw was perfect and the tip of the sword entered just above his left nipple. It struck with such force that it drove him back nearly three meters into the bulkhead as the pommel came to rest pressed against his uniform with the entire blade impaling his chest and sticking out between his shoulder blades. He stared at the pommel, his eyes wide and unable to comprehend the terrible pain he felt as his severed heart no longer fed life giving blood to his body. He slumped to the deck slowly, leaving a bloody stain on the bulkhead as he did.

Carisia turned blindingly fast and looked at her sister with a brilliant smile. Her maya blue eyes were now the cobalt blue of her vampire persona and she turned her head back to the door quickly.

"Mistress... the door!" She gasped her voice somewhat muffled by the mask.

Lu'ria was moving before she finished speaking. "I have it!" Lu'ria spoke as she slammed her hand down on the control panel.

"Sheva..." Carisia whirled around and looked at her. "Lock out all the weapons magazine vaults! There should be four of them on this deck!"

Sheva sprang to the computer console in the center of the room and began typing with practiced ease. "Gods!" Sheva hissed.

"What?" Carisia demanded as she moved up next to her.

"Brendi and Mari!" Sheva exclaimed. "They have shut down or rerouted all of the ship's main systems and many of the subsystems! The entire core is open to me!"

"Are you serious?" Onera exclaimed moving up beside her, her eyes going wide when she saw for herself.

Sheva nodded as she continued to type on the computer panel. "Yes! It appears as if they have reversed the Command Codes as well and no system will come back online without a direct command from one of their P9s!"

"Sister... we must take advantage of this!" Onera said turning to look at Carisia.

"Sheva... use your P9 and tap into their code!" Carisia said quickly as she was thinking the same thing. "It will make it easier! All of our P9s were coded for this mission! Use the same commands and seal all the weapons vaults! On all the decks!"

Sheva had already pulled her P9 from the pouch at the small of her back and she went to work instantly. Carisia heard the groan and turned as the vampire soldier who had been knocked out rolled over. Onera quickly went to the dead soldier who had taken her thrown sword and yanked *Iphan rie Aellseleum* free of his chest. She stepped up to the survivor and prepared to end his life.

“No sister.” Carisia said watching as her eyes turned to look at her. “Remember what Faren told us... what Andro’s orders were. We do not kill unless necessary.”

Onera gazed at her for only a second before nodding and with an elegant twirl of her wrist *Iphan rie Aellseleum* went to its sheath on her back. She reached up to the wall and ripped down some cable and began to secure the soldier’s hands and feet.

Sheva looked up quickly. “Done!” She shouted. “All magazines have been sealed!”

“Bring up whatever internal sensor feeds you can Sheva.” Carisia told her. “We need to insure that the crew is subdued before Eliani will order a purge of the air filtration systems and we can dispense with these infernal masks.”

“On it.” Sheva declared.

Carisia turned her head and looked at Lu'ria while reaching out to Sadi within Mindvoice.

KertaGai! We have secured the magazines!

The landing bay appears to be ours as well! I'm ordering in the follow on Durcunusaan and Immortal forces Enylarcopri! We need to secure the ship before Eli will order the vent of the filtration systems! Sadi answered immediately.

Carisia looked at Lu'ria as both of them finally felt it with the Etheric realm. Lu'ria stepped up to Carisia now. *Sadi... what is wrong? Saradasaar... the rage and hate we feel from him? There is something wrong!*

Have faith in our love Mistress. Sadi answered calmly. *He knows what he is doing. And he will reach for us when it is time for us to sooth him.*

Lu'ria felt Carisia take her hand and nod. “Sadi is right Mistress. Let us help Sheva as she monitors the sensors Mistress.”

“Here! Here and here!” Pa'cour ordered his men, pointing at the three different spots on the reinforced armored door and then he moved out of the way as they went to work. He quickly stepped up beside Yuri who was looking at a time piece on her wrist. The lift had brought them directly to the secondary entrance to the bridge only to find that it was sealed. This was exactly something they had expected and the Immortal engineers went to work quickly.

“We adjusted Deion’s assault time Pa'cour. He is standing by at the maintenance hatch! We have thirty-eight seconds my love.” Yuri told him. “Then Deion will execute his attack!”

Pa'cour nodded. “We will be ready.”

Yuri pulled the P9 computer from her side, flipped open the armored cover and looked at the screen, tapping on it quickly. That Androcles had given this to her was another sign of his faith and trust in her now. This new type of Pralor computer was strictly controlled and only members of his family and certain highly placed individuals had one. He had also given her and Pa'cour the smaller P1 data pads that were bio-encoded to them. This was not something Yuri had expected, but it told her that Andro trusted her far more than she believed. It was a trust she had no intention of ever violating.

“It appears that this Brendi Faith and the Pralor woman Mari have succeeded beyond all of our expectations.” Yuri told him as she worked the small panel. “They have locked out all the ship’s main systems and shut them down. Onera and Carisia have succeeded in locking out the main weapons magazines and Sadi has just ordered that our follow on forces begin to deploy.”

Pa'cour nodded his head in agreement at the steps being taken. “He grew complacent Yuri.” He said. “We must not.”

Yuri nodded her head. Nothing in her long life had ever prepared her for what she was doing now. Working so seamlessly beside Lycavorians. Children of the man she had hated for centuries for a crime he did not commit. A man she was willing to kill at every opportunity, but a man who had shown her mercy when his boot was pressed to her throat.

This was not a flunk Yuri thought to herself. This was as Androcles had said it was. It was fate and destiny correcting a mistake made long ago. “I don’t intend to.” She said firmly. She tapped her jaw where the implant was. “Sadi Leonidas?”

“Here Yuri.” Sadi answered instantly, her voice seemingly very calm.

“We must insure that all of the decks are under our control before Eliani Leonidas orders the purge of the air filtration system! We do not need them waking up while we are still in the process of securing the ship.” Yuri spoke. “We do not know how many are willingly following Robert.”

“Carisia and I agreed on that.” Sadi answered. “Our follow on force of *Durcunusaan* is already landing. I can have Armen deploy additional forces from *SPARTA'S WRATH*. They are on standby anyway.”

Yuri nodded in agreement. “Have the first group begin from the landing bay and sweep through decks eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen and the two decks above the landing bay. Eight and nine! Have them put a security lock on any who are unconscious in their quarters or work areas. We have effective control of the ship and they will be able to do nothing. When the others arrive, split them and have one group move immediately to deck seven and then sweep upwards to the bridge. The second group can begin on fifteen and sweep down to deck twenty-four!”

“Understood! I have Faren already standing by to intercept any transmissions that may come in from Moran’s fleet.” Sadi told her. “Just to be sure.”

Yuri looked at Pa'cour in surprise. “We did not think of that.” She said.

Pa'cour nodded. “She seems more tactically efficient than we first thought.”

“Indeed.” Yuri agreed. “We will execute our breach ten seconds after Deion begins his assault Sadi. I will leave the deployment of forces to you.”

“We’ll get it done.” Sadi spoke confidently.

“We are ready!” The Immortal engineer hissed as he turned from the door to face them.

Yuri looked at her beloved Immortal husband and reached up to place her hand on his cheek. “It is time to bring an end to a vile part of our past my beautiful Immortal husband.” She said softly.

Pa'cour nodded. “Yes it is.”

Deion’s eyes were glued to his timepiece as well.

Cowen was stacked right behind him in front of the hatch, Sherice next, with Nara and Lisisa behind them. Mari was leaning up against the interior of the shaft holding her P9 and watching with wide eyes.

“Eight seconds.” Deion hissed softly. He turned his head and looked at Mari, her eyes already focused on him. “Mari you stay right there until one of us calls for you.” He told her. Mari nodded her head quickly.

Sherice was staring at Cowen’s broad back and shoulders and made an instant decision that would prove to be a defining moment in her life. She leaned her head close to Cowen’s head, pressing her lush body against his back. “Do not get yourself injured Cowen'Shan.” She whispered. “I would not be happy in the least.”

Cowen turned wide eyes on her beautiful face and saw her pale blue eyes gleaming as they gazed upon him. He blinked rapidly as he saw her smile and then Deion’s voice jolted him back to the present.

“I’m left. Cowen right. The rest follow on as we discussed.” Deion looked at his sister. “Lisisa... take Moran down hard.”

Lisisa Leonidas nodded her head, jaw set firmly. “Count on it.” She stated.

Deion took a deep breath and plunged his finger down on the small panel by the hatch. “Go!”

“...get me a fucking report!” Moran screamed. He was pacing back and forth, concern etched into his face now, the skin of his neck and upper back burning in pain. The dragon’s fire had scorched him good, all along his upper back and neck. His skin was blistered and red, some of it even peeled away behind his right ear. The lower portion of the back of his head was missing all of the hair that once grew there.

“We are locked out of all major Command Systems Admiral! All control of ship wide subsystems has been rerouted!” One of his officers yelled. “All operational command codes have been altered and shifted to a remote terminal! I’ve never seen this type of coding sir! It’s far more advanced than anything we have! None of our codes work any longer! Engines are offline! Weapons and shields are offline! All of it appears to have been rerouted to three remote terminals somewhere on the ship!”

“Where?” Moran screamed.

“I don’t have control of internal sensors anymore Admiral!” The man yelled. “I can’t begin a search! And there is no response from security forces on deck two and all other decks appear to be silent!”

“We have over five thousand men and women on this ship!” Moran screamed. “We can raise no one?”

“All the internal sensors are reading lifesigns but there is no response from any deck sir! It’s like they are all asleep!”

“Asleep?” Moran snapped as his eyes grew a little wider. “Can we get Vid feeds?” Moran demanded as he moved up beside the man.

“Accessing security feeds from... *phraktos!*” The man gasped as the image came up on the monitor.

“Fuck!” Moran growled loudly as he took in the numerous bodies littering the corridors of the deck they were viewing. “What deck is this?”

“Six sir! Main security stations!” The man answered. “I don’t understand sir... how could they have...”

Moran stepped back as what Viror had said in the landing bay struck him. “Gas!” He hissed viciously.

“Admiral?”

“Viror said there were seven spikes in hull integrity just before Yuri’s ship landed!” Moran barked.

“Yes sir! A diagnostic revealed nothing. The Chief Engineer determined the internal sensors needed to be recalibrated!”

Moran shook his head. “There’s nothing wrong with the sensors!” Moran snapped. “They used gas!”

“Admiral? Gas?”

“Somehow they punched through our hull armor!” Moran said. “Where were the spikes? Show me!”

The man quickly brought up a schematic of the ship and Moran saw the seven red dots that the internal sensors had picked up earlier. He moved closer to the screen as his eyes narrowed and then he slammed his fist down on the console. “All seven are directly connected to our main air filtration ducts!” He snarled. “They pumped gas into the decks! Do we still have control of the medical biosensors?”

“Yes sir. Medical subsystems still remain under our control for all the good it does!”

“Scan for foreign substances! Anything not normal to the ship!” Moran spat as the officer was already in motion. “Maybe we can reverse whatever it is they did and...”

“Admiral... *shu!* I’m detecting massive levels of neutron radiation saturating all but deck two and the bridge!” The officer exclaimed with wide eyes. “Not enough to kill... but more than enough to incapacitate within seconds!”

“The bridge and deck two are the only areas not connected to the main air filtration and duct system!” Moran said. “Shit! They got us good! Can you purge it?”

“Negative! Main filtration systems are part of engineering! They were the first controls locked out! Admiral... who the fuck is crazy enough to try this out of space dock?” The officer asked. “This is insane! It...”

It sounded like a clap of thunder from a major lightning storm on the bridge. The noise was so loud it caused all of the bridge crew to reach for their ears in pain. The sound caused both Moran and the officer beside him to whirl around to look behind them. Time seemed to slow as they saw a large cloud of white smoke rising from the side of the bridge where the maintenance hatch was situated.

And then that entire hatch was rocketing at them at terminal velocity. Moran was able to duck in time to save his own life, but the one ton hatch slammed into the officer beside him moving faster than they could track it. The man died instantly from the impact and was saved from the agony of being crushed against the unforgiving bulkhead as the hatch proceeded past him and slammed into the far wall. Moran turned back with wide eyes just as two massive, black clad forms burst from the cloud of smoke, Lycavorian P190A5s spitting death.

Robert Moran knew instantly that all was lost then.

He knew of only one force in the entire galaxy that could execute such a breach into a secure area like his bridge with such timing and precision. Only one group crazy enough to even attempt something like this. He caught the flash of black body armor through the smoke as two more figures came out of the smoke immediately and from their size Moran knew they were female. They too had the Spartan close assault weapon and both of them were firing with exact movements and accuracy.

Robert Moran turned to move behind the console and try for the emergency hatch in the floor under the Tactical station. His only thoughts were for himself now, and only his survival mattered to him. He would not

make it. Moran felt the hand clamp onto his tore and burned uniform with surprising strength, stopping his forward motion.

“You will not escape this time murderer!” The female voice growled from behind him.

Moran twisted away and turned quickly, reaching for the knife he carried on his belt. His eyes fell upon the petite but muscular form of the female as the knife came up. Even under the Tactical Headset her features were very clear and he saw the long fangs and wide forest green eyes that were focused on him. Moran knew instantly who it was that stood in front of him and even as he brought the knife snapping up he knew he would not win.

Lisisa Leonidas held nothing back. All the pain this man had caused her beloved father and sister through the years with his actions. A father who had never considered her anything but his very own daughter even though his blood did not flow within her veins. A sister that had endured the emotional humiliation all of her life until finally finding those who had been in her dreams for so long. The horrific shame another dear sister had to endure by orders given and then supported by this man and carried out by his vile sons. No... Lisisa Leonidas held nothing back now and brought the knife edge of her hand down across his wrist with unfettered control and power and all of her combined strength. Moran’s wrist snapped in two, the bottom bone bursting through the skin and blood gushing forth. As he began to scream in terrible pain Lisisa swung the butt of her 190 with every ounce of the vampire and wolf strength her small frame carried. The crack of the blow rose above even the noise of the silenced weapons echoing across the bridge and there was nothing Moran could do to stop or dodge it. Not at the speed it was coming.

Lisisa’s 190 actually shattered when it connected with Moran’s jaw, the butt splintering into different sections and flying off in opposite directions, but having done what she intended. Robert Moran felt a moment of even more intense, searing pain and then his brain overloaded and he dropped into unconsciousness. He would awake some hours later to horrible pain in his back and shoulders from where his body had seemingly grown wings and launched him across the bridge to smash against the bulkhead and several computer consoles ten meters away. He slumped to the deck and did not witness the secondary bridge doors being removed by the expertly placed reverse explosion or the rush of Immortals that filled the smoke riddled bridge, their weapons out. He did not witness Yuri and Pa'cour sweep onto the bridge intent on death only to find that Deion’s team had already secured the bridge. All nine bridge officers were dead and sprawled across the deck, their blood leaking from precise and deadly holes in their heads or chests.

“Cowen!” Deion’s voice echoed like a another, milder clap of thunder in the confined space.

“Clear!” Cowen’s deep throated reply came.

“Clear!” Sherice echoed.

“Nara!” Deion yelled turning his head. “Sister!”

Nara got to her feet slowly her azure eyes wide but clear. “Clear... clear!” She softly stammered out the reply.

Deion moved up to her without hesitation, pressing his forehead to hers, Nara breathing deeply of his scent and using it to calm her racing heart. This was her first taste of combat and the actual taking of life. Deion knew what was racing through her for it had been racing through him after he had to kill the fools on the colony where Sheva’s parents were. Nara nodded her head quickly then, reaching up to squeeze his arm and meet his yellow wolf eyes. “I am fine.” She muttered. “I will be fine!”

Cowen moved up beside Sherice his keen feline eyes looking over her armored figure for any sign of injury. “You are unhurt?” Cowen demanded.

Sherice met Cowen’s eyes and nodded quickly. “Yes.”

Cowen didn’t really think about it, he just reached out and began to run his hand over her arms and shoulders to insure this fact for himself. Sherice couldn’t help the flush of desire that rushed through her as she realized this and let her A5 drop on its quick release straps and she reached up to take his hands. “Cowen...” She spoke softly seeing his beautiful eyes focus on her. Sherice squeezed his large hands and brought them to her chest. “I’m ok.” She said.

Yuri moved up beside Lisisa where she stood staring at Moran’s inert form a few meters away.

“Secure the bridge!” Pa'cour barked out the order to his men. “Insure that all remaining systems are locked out and under our control!”

“Lisisa?” Yuri spoke softly causing Lisisa to turn and look at her.

“That... that was for Zarah.” Lisisa said softly.

“Lisisa...” Yuri began.

“You have been given a second chance mother.” Lisisa told her gently, no malice in her voice. “A second chance to be someone different. To be who destiny and fate meant for you to be, just as Andro has told you. Do not betray my brother’s faith in you Yuri. For if he does not find you and make you suffer then I swear to you this day that I will.”

“I would expect no less from my daughter.” Yuri stated.

Lisisa turned to face her fully. “I sing with happiness at what Carisia has discovered with you. The person you are now. You are so very different Yuri... and I see the happiness it brings my sister and you and I welcome that... but you are not my mother and I can not...”

Yuri reached out and took her arm in her hand gently. “No.” Yuri told her softly. “You do not need to explain. Least of all to me.”

Lisisa lifted her hand and covered the back of Yuri’s fingers with her own and squeezed firmly. “Perhaps one day I will be able to forgive and put the memories behind me. Denali’s love has allowed me to feel so much more than I was able. One day we may yet be friends... and maybe after that who knows... but that will...”

Yuri shook her head. “I will not betray the chance your brother gave to me Lisisa.” She stated confidently. “Or the trust he has placed in me. When the day comes that you can call me friend... that will be a start. That is... that is all I can ask for and work towards. And I intend to see that day happen.”

Lisisa Leonidas saw the conviction in her dark eyes and nodded slowly. She looked at Moran’s unconscious form. “What fate do you have in store for him?” She asked.

Yuri’s eyes darkened and shifted to the cobalt blue of her vampire nature as she turned her eyes where Lisisa was looking. “One filled with as much pain as I can fathom for all he has done to me. And to so many people.”

Lisisa nodded. “Insure it is fitting.” She said softly. “Andro will leave Moran’s fate for you to decide... but Dante... he belongs to us.”

Yuri met her eyes now. “As it should be.” She said.

Lisisa looked at her. “He is your son.” She said.

Yuri shook her head quickly. “The day your brother killed me... that life ended Lisisa. He is no son of mine. I have found my true self with Pa'cour’s love. All that I care for from that past life is Lucia, Carisia and you.” She motioned with her head. “Take three of our Immortals and sweep back down the lift to insure no surprises plaque us. They will follow you without question Lisisa.”

Lisisa stared at her for a long moment and then nodded her head and turned to leave the bridge. Yuri only had to glance and motioned with her head once more and Pa'cour’s second officer nodded and pulled two others with him to follow her. Yuri then moved up and looked down at Robert’s inert form. Her cobalt blue vampire eyes held nothing but disdain and hate in them and she spit forcefully on his unmoving body as Pa'cour and two other Immortals came up to her.

“Take this piece of garbage from here and secure him. Make sure a medic controls his bleeding. I do not want him to die before he faces justice and I do not want Eliani Leonidas to waste her skills on one such as him.” Yuri spat. “And search him thoroughly... he will not escape our justice because we were lax.”

“Yuri?” Pa'cour spoke softly as his hand slipped around her waist. He had overheard most of the conversation with Lisisa.

Yuri leaned into his powerful form and relished in the sensations he could and did make her feel. “We are about to close a chapter on our former lives Pa'cour my love. And I will be so very happy when that comes to a conclusion.”

Pa'cour nodded. “As will I.”

Yuri lifted her hand and tapped her jaw. “Androcles... we have secured the bridge and Robert Moran.” She spoke calmly. “Deion and the others performed exceptionally and we will begin to secure the rest of the ship from here.” She glanced at Pa'cour. “You may cease with your diversion.”

“A diversion Dante will not soon forget.” Pa'cour spoke with a hint of humor as he moved to another bridge station.

Yuri nodded. “For however many days he has left in this life.” She agreed.

Mari hadn't moved through the entire assault, pressing back against the bulkhead in the shaft clutching her P9 in one hand and the K14 KM in the other. She could hear the shouts and weapons fire, each sound causing her to jump and shiver in fear, but just as Dante had told her, she had not budged. She had succeeded in her task however and she was very proud of herself for that. Real fear coursed through her veins at what was happening all around her, yet there was something very deep inside her heart and mind that told her she did not need to be afraid. It told her that Deion would take care of her. That he would always...

"Mari!" His voice startled her and she jumped slightly as her eyes sprang open.

"Deion!" She gasped.

He moved through the still smoking entrance into the shaft and stood in front of her a dazzling smile on his handsome face and his dual wolf fangs fully exposed for her to view. Small splotches of blood dotted his armor and cheeks, sweat and dirt mixed together on his skin but Mari had never seen so beautiful a man in all her life. She dropped her P9 and let it dangle on the straps and then she hit him with the slap and all the power she could muster in her petite body. It wasn't very much given the fact he stood just over a foot taller than her and she was barely over a hundred pounds soaking wet, but it served to cause his smile to vanish and his eyes to look severely injured.

"Do not ever leave me alone like that again Deion Leonidas... you... *forn mida!* Ever!" Mari shouted at him with more relief than anger. Her blue green eyes suddenly went wide when she realized she had just spoken a phrase in the ancient Lycavorian language just as fluently as she had heard others speaking it. She looked up into Deion's face and saw his own eyes, now returned to their gorgeous dark brown, just as wide as hers at the force and fluency of her words to him. His vicious looking dual fangs, though very beautiful to Mari in their own way, slowly retracted and then Mari did something she had never done before.

Mari took a leap of faith.

Literally.

Just as her mind and heart screamed out that he would, Deion caught her in his powerful arms just as her soft lips covered his and she kissed him with a zealous fervor that she had never felt in her young life. It raged through her like an unchecked storm and she embraced all of what it made her feel completely and without hesitation.

When his arms crushed her tiny frame even tighter against his... and he deepened their kiss... Mari was so very happy she had.

Murano was watching carefully the savage beating Andro was giving Dante Moran, one of his hands still holding Dorian back while the others could only watch in shock. None of them had ever seen Androcles so enraged and radiating with so much power with the Etheric realm. Not one of them had the courage to try and step between Andro and Dante, for while all of them knew how much family meant to the Leonidas clan, no one truly realized just how sacred it was to Androcles until this very day. None of them had ever been witnessed to such a beating as the one Dante Moran was receiving, and only Jomann knew of anything comparable in anyone's history. Jomann was a voracious reader of history and what he was seeing this day reminded him of a practice that the ancient Roman's of Earth's storied past had used for a time.

Decimation.

Dante's face was almost unrecognizable. His right eye was already swollen tightly shut, his left eye nearly so. His nose, or what remained of it, now resided in a crooked fashion at least an inch to the left of where it had once been. His upper and bottom lips were both very nearly shredded and several of his teeth were missing, including both of his main vampiric fangs. Both his cheekbones were crushed, the skin over that portion of his face looking much like mangled hamburger while his jaw had been broken within the first dozen blows Androcles had landed. Aside from his shattered arm, every rib within his body was now broken, two of them having perforated his right lung. Androcles was not using his Etheric power to augment his physical blows as they knew he could, there was really no need. Androcles was a pureblood Lycavorian, and dating back more

years than most could claim to have been living, pureblood Lycavorians were simply overpowering in their physical strength even when compared to vampires.

And Dante Moran was no pureblood vampire.

All of them heard Yuri's voice echo within their ear implants.

“Androcles... we have secured the bridge and Robert Moran.” Her voice spoke calmly. ***“Deion and the others performed exceptionally and we will begin to secure the rest of the ship from here. You may cease with your diversion.”***

The instant Murano heard those words he nodded to Dorian. “Now.” He rasped quickly and began moving forward.

Dorian didn't hesitate and they rushed up to where Andro had drew back his large fist for another punch but now held it angled high over his shoulder. Murano didn't hesitate and he placed his hand on Andro's shoulder immediately, Dorian matching this movement almost as if knowing this needed to be done.

Murano closed his eyes and reached for those who he knew would calm Androcles's racing blood.

Sadi! You and the others! Elynth! Now! Deion! Nara! Eliani! Lisisa! All of you! Reach for your brother now! Murano announced the command within Mindvoice so loudly that even Yuri and Pa'cour heard it.

It was something only he and Murano had talked about. A way to insure Xaxon's Etheric presence would not give away or impede their assault on the ship. They had to keep his full attention focused on Dante and keeping him alive. Androcles had told Murano of the berserker lust that Lycavorians could enter in the midst of rage, how they would focus all of their energy and force on one person or object until that person or object was dead or destroyed. He also told Murano that to keep him from killing Dante, Murano had to insure no one interfered until Yuri had announced the ship was theirs.

Now that Yuri's words had gone out, Murano acted and within a heartbeat he felt the staggering presence of Sadi Leonidas and her fellow Crown Princesses reaching for the man they all so adored. That was quickly followed by Elynth and all of his brothers and sisters, and as he watched with wide eyes, the effect was very telling. The unmistakable and eerie glow in Andro's azure colored eyes immediately began to fall away and as the love and warmth of his family surrounded him, filtered through him, caressed his senses and mind, Androcles Leonidas returned that feeling ten fold. He did not hear Sadi and his other wives and mates gasp in utter delight as his resonance swarmed around them with absolute devotion. He did not see the looks of peace surround the faces of his siblings as they felt the unquestioned love and commitment for them pour forth from his resonance.

Only one other person was truly included in this massive wave of emotion, for Mari was still quite securely wrapped in Deion's arms. It was unlike anything she had ever felt as Deion deepened their already sizzling kiss even more, his powerful arms pulling her closer as her body melted against his. The Etheric resonance of his brother passed to her without hesitation and Mari knew at that very moment where her life would lead and who would be in it. She had become, quite unequivocally, part of the Leonidas family and that knowledge made Mari's who being cry out in happiness.

Murano watched with wide eyes, and for the first time since meeting Martin and feeling his Praetorian resonance echo outwards, complete understanding came to him. He now knew without question why his dear friend and mentor Sumar had done what he did. Binding himself and their people so tightly to these Lycavorians. He could feel it within all of them now. And while he didn't understand why he could feel the full effect, it still filled Murano, swarmed around him and made him feel reborn. Murano didn't question it this time. No... Murano embraced it and relished in the sense of freedom and purpose it brought to him. Very soon he would discover why he could feel it as he could.

They watched as Andro slowly got to his feet and lowered his hands. His azure eyes had returned to their normal state, the thick black ring surrounding the pupil, and ever so gripping in their normal brightness. His dual wolf fangs were still fully exposed however, and Murano watched as he took a deep breath and exhaled heavily. In that final exhale of air, all the savage hate and rage and desire to extract vengeance upon Dante Moran left Androcles as liquid flowed over a waterfall and was carried away. It was as if a strong, cool breeze had swept across him in a still room and carried those emotions into the wind as it passed.

Andro looked up above him, not at anyone in particular, but his eyes stared at the ceiling of the corridor for a second and a small smile split his face confusing those who were watching him so intently. He reached for the one person no one else had yet detected.

[*Vinx*.] He whispered the words fluently in the Darastrixi language. [*Vinx*] (Thank you)

PRALOR CORVETTE HOLDING ON STARBOARD WING OF *INQUISITOR*

Sarlana smiled behind her closed eyes and felt the peace wash over her once more. She wasn't aware that Conlar and the others were staring at her intently, for she had been echoing soft words that none of them could understand while she stood in the cockpit.

[*We have... we have so much to talk of Dahakoan.*] Sarlana spoke. [*So much to reveal and so many decisions to make.*]

[*And we will make them.*] Andro's deep voice filled her mind causing her to lift her arms and clutch herself in happiness. [*I have... Dorian and I have so many questions.*]

[*And I will answer all that I am able. Just as I told your father I would.*] Sarlana told him. [*My only... my only purpose now is to serve you. Guide you. Though I dare say, after what you have just done, hiding your true purpose, my guidance many not be needed. It was a masterful performance Dahakoan.*]

[*No. You serve no one.*] Andro told her confidently. [*And your knowledge and guidance will be very welcome.*]

[*Then I will have this wonderful pilot you gifted me with take me to your ship and I will await you and Dorian and the other Dahakoan there.*] Sarlana said. [*We have time Dahakoan, but do not... do what you must to bring this to an end Androcles Leonidas, but there are others who need us as well.*]

[*I will remember.*] Andro said. [*And we will speak soon.*]

Sarlana's emerald green eyes opened slowly and the smile remained. His presence and that of Dorian's and the other *Vrrarhoinpa Dahakoan* were far more powerful than she had ever anticipated, and it filled her with new found hope and resolve.

"Sarlana?" Conlar asked as he reached out and took her arms.

Sarlana opened her eyes fully and smiled at him. "I am fine." She stated. She turned to Mal'ita. "Young lady... I have done what I needed. You may take us to your ship with your Prince's blessing."

Mal'ita's eyes grew wide. "You... you spoke with him?" She gasped.

Sarlana nodded her head. "They have succeeded in their task. I will trouble you no more child." Sarlana took Conlar's hand and urged him towards the rear, his eyes full of questions. "Come Conlar... let us remove ourselves so that they can do their job without our distraction."

Mal'ita shook her head quickly and looked at her flight crew as Sarlana and Conlar disappeared into the back. "*Carians*... sometimes those who are able to Mindvoice scare me to no end." She gasped.

Leeta couldn't help but smile and nod her head in agreement. "No arguments here." She stated.

"Suraie... get us to *SPARTA'S WRATH* before someone else changes their minds." Mal'ita said. "I just wish for this day to be over."

Suraie chuckled as she turned back to her controls. "Admiral O'Connor did warn us that serving with the Crown Prince and so many members of the Leonidas family would be an adventure beyond any we have ever had." She said.

"Insure we have that gold plated so we can hang it on our bulkhead." Leeta spoke from her station. "We can look at it and remind ourselves we *volunteered* for this posting every time something strange happens."

INQUISITOR

Andro dropped his head and looked at Murano. "It worked." He said.

"What worked?" Dorian asked as he looked between them. "What is Yuri talking about? What diversion?"

Murano nodded. "Given what Yuri told us concerning Dante it only made sense. Did you...?"

Andro nodded slowly. "And more evil a resonance I have never felt. I see and understand why grandfather did what he did." He said softly.

Murano gripped his arm tightly. "You... you and your father; Dorian, Deion and Jomann, you make me proud to call myself a Praetorian Androcles. As your father knew you would."

Andro nodded his head to him. "We have much still to do." He said turning and seeing Eliani step up to him, her green eyes alive with sisterly love and adoration.

Eliani reached up to place her hand to the side of his helmet. "Andro you..."

Andro smiled at her. "Do what you need to do to insure this *ronnus* does not die just yet sister. No more than that." He told her. "I will not have you soil your presence with his for very long."

Eliani looked down at Dante Moran. "As little as possible?" She asked.

Andro nodded. "Only enough to keep him alive for a few days longer."

Eliani nodded her head. "*Avoi*." She stated.

Andro tapped his jaw. "*KertaGai*... *Carisia*... *Sehri*... *Lu'ria*... *SirsanGai*... all of you are..."

"We are secure *Saradasaar!*" Sadi's voice answered instantly for all of them. And it was a voice filled with love and desire for the man they cherished. "All of us! The follow on forces from Armen are landing even as we speak! He had them holding in three *STRIKERS* and a *MENKLA* just outside the shield grid under shroud."

It was Normya's voice that broke into all of their implants and finally broke the tension and rush of combat that still surrounded them. "Andro... *fervon*... you really need to come up with something to call them that does not require you to say all of their names!" She stated ever calmly. "As with father... it takes too long when you inquire of them or their health."

This caused all of them to laugh gently and Eliani elbowed her brother in the ribs. Andro shook his head in embarrassment.

"Sadi... have a single detachment of *Durcunusaan* proceed directly to my position. Half to secure the rest of this deck. There are still those who are resisting. The other half is to take Dante Moran back to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and insure he is held in solitary confinement. Have Bren and Famus see to it as they have already been briefed. The rest you may deploy how you and Yuri see fit to secure the entire ship."

"Understood." Sadi answered instantly.

"Armen... are you monitoring?" Andro asked.

-Affirmative-

"The *STRIKER* that is carrying Yuri and Pa'cour's elven wife Nameia to the High Coven capital. Burst a secure transmission for them to hold their position. I have something I want to discuss with Yuri before they proceed." Andro ordered him.

-Done-

"Armen... set up a defensive perimeter with APOC Drones and *RAPTORS*. Any ship that enters your established perimeter without permission from you, and is not of Union designation, destroy them immediately. No warnings Armen. Just obliterate them completely. We can not risk that Moran's followers did not get some message and come to investigate." Andro told him.

-I am already launching APOC Drones. RAPTORS will join with them in three minutes- Armen answered causing Andro to look at Murano in surprise.

Murano shrugged his broad shoulders. "Avatar 41 was much like this. He could almost predict what Sumar would do. He is like this with your father now."

Andro shrugged as well. "Deion?"

"I am here *fervon*." Deion's voice answered instantly.

"Lady Mari?" Andro asked.

Neither Andro or Murano saw Deion look down at where Mari still resided within his embrace. "She is fine." He stated with a smile to her that they could not see.

"Mari?" Murano questioned as he tapped his jaw now as well.

"I am fine Uncle." She answered. "Just as Deion has said."

Andro saw Murano breathe a sigh of relief and he continued. "Set up a defensive position around the bridge with Pa'cour's Immortals and your team *fervon*." Andro told him. "No one is to enter the bridge without direct permission from you, myself or Yuri and Pa'cour. For any reason. Contact grandfather Riall on our secure family channel and give him the coordinates for Moran's remaining forces. He and Admiral Pontal will want to work quickly. And have Lady Mari download any information from their computer banks that she is able to access. Yuri... you and Pa'cour join me on deck two. Is there a lounge or conference room of some sort on this deck?"

"Yes." Yuri answered immediately. "If you are still near Dante's quarters then there is a large conference room on the port side near section nine." Yuri answered him. "What are you planning Androcles?"

"We will find it. You and Pa'cour meet me there in one hour and we will discuss what I have in mind." Andro said.

"And Robert?" Yuri asked hesitantly.

"It is his future, or lack thereof, that we will discuss." Andro told her. "For now... secure him in whatever bindings you feel are appropriate. His comfort or condition is not my concern as long as he lives for now Yuri."

"Well... he will not awake anytime soon after the beating that Lisisa gave to him... but I will make certain he is secure." She spoke with some humor. "Androcles... did we... did we lose anyone?" The change in her voice was noticeable by all.

"The gods were with us this day." Andro answered her. "We have done the unthinkable and did it with no injuries."

Once more they all heard Yuri sigh. "*L'phraktos dumo udossa*." She spoke. "Pa'cour and I will join you shortly."

Andro looked at Murano. "Will you assist Bren and Famus with this piece of garbage when they arrive?" He asked.

Murano nodded. "With pleasure."

Andro looked at Dorian. "Take Daio and Torian and search his quarters for anything that could be useful Dori. Moran's as well. Anything *fervon*... anything that could help us as well as Narice and Arrarn." He told him. "Then join with me, Yuri and Pa'cour. And bring Sheva and Onera."

Dorian nodded. "I'm on it." He said motioning Daio and Torian to follow him.

Andro turned to Jomann now. "Take Brendi to this conference room and have her work her magic on the computer in there. Same order as Lady Mari." He said. "Eli and I will join you there when we are done and Dante has been secure."

Jomann nodded and took Brendi's hand without question. Eliani stepped up to Brendi and brazenly leaned up on her tip toes and kissed her fiercely. It was a sensual kiss that Brendi Faith very much returned with equal emotion. Eliani drew back after a moment and looked at her with smiling eyes. "Watch out for him *Saarrieemeran*. He can be sneaky."

Brendi nodded to her, dark brown eyes alive with new emotions and feelings. "I will."

Andro turned to Murano as Jomann led Brendi off and Eliani stepped close to her brother once more. She looked at him as he spoke.

"Murano... there is something we need to speak of." Andro said. "This remains with the three of us. At least for now."

Murano instantly detected the cautionary tone in his voice and he also knew that if only his sister Eliani was included in this information then it was probably not very good. Or at least could mean problems in the future. Murano had come to discover that Sadi and his mates aside, Andro trusted his sisters Zarah and Eliani with information and knowledge that no others were aware of. It was not something that Androcles did consciously for he trusted all of his siblings completely. With Eliani however, it was because she was born in a very emotional time for their parents and like him, she had memories imprinted on her that their other siblings did not for their parents had not yet to learn to control what they passed to their children at the time. He knew

well why Androcles felt as he did for his sister Zarah for Andro had shown him all that had taken place during that time and the connection they now shared because of it.

Eliani and Zarah Leonidas alone, among all of their siblings, rarely if ever thought any differently about things than their brother. According to Martin and all of their mothers, Eliani, Zarah and Andro hardly ever disagreed with one another about how to conduct themselves in any given situation.

“Talk to me.” Murano told him.

“Our detachment was directed here by Crown Princess Sadi. I contacted you immediately Princess.” The Immortal told Yuri and Pa'cour as he stood in front of them. Yuri noted that he did not hesitate to share this information and this was only another sign that she and Pa'cour had come a long way from only a year ago. “She wanted us to insure that Moran did not hold any prisoners that we might not be aware of.” He turned his head back to the interior of the cell, the force field now gone. “We found her.” His dark eyes were hard when he turned back to her. “Princess... they... they fed on her like she was a piece of meat. Used her! And they filmed it all!” He stated motioning to the bank of monitors. “I ask... I ask that you do not... I wish to kill them all! I wish to...”

Yuri reached out and put her hand on his arm. “Calm yourself Em'cer.” Yuri said softly. “Their fates are already sealed.”

The huge Immortal, nearing six foot five in height and well over two hundred and thirty pounds nodded his head. “As you say Princess.”

“You are Ma'dur's oldest?” Yuri asked him.

The Immortal met her eyes. “Yes Milady.”

“I have asked your father to stop calling me that.” Yuri said with a smile. “I see he has passed it on to his sons.”

“While he stands as your Guardian he will always refer to you in this way Princess.” Em'cer told her. “As will we all.”

Yuri stepped closer to the open cell, fighting down the urge to vomit at the stench that assaulted her senses. Unwashed body odor and the distinct smell of old blood. The woman was curled into as small a position as she could get, her legs drawn up to her chest. She wore only the ragged remains of a fleet uniform that had been torn in almost every way and which she had managed to tie and cover herself as much as was possible. Yuri's dark eyes grew a little wider when she saw the long blond hair and the face of the young woman and she moved quickly to kneel in front of her.

The young woman tried to push further back against the bulkhead as she saw Yuri move closer. Her stunning green eyes were filled with undisguised fear and pain and Yuri felt a flash of anger within her.

“Please... please.” The young woman croaked out the words. “I'm sorry! I'm sorry! You... you were right! I... I don't want to hurt anymore! Please...”

Recognition filled Yuri as she realized this was the young woman Robert had taken into his bed even while she had been healing in a Blood Vat. No doubt she had done this with promises from Robert of advancing her career and power. It was not something uncommon within the High Coven, at least before. Pontal and Narice would see that it no longer was an issue in the future.

“What... what is your name?” Yuri asked her.

“I... please Princess... I am sorry!” The young woman stammered. “I don't... I don't want to die! I don't want to endure this anymore!”

“I am not going to hurt you child.” Yuri said softly. “What... what is your name?”

The young woman's blue eyes gazed at her. “As... Ashuna.” She finally spoke.

“Robert... Robert did this to you?” Yuri asked.

“He was... once he recovered from the wounds you gave him... he was... he was crazed with anger.” She spoke softly. “So... so violent and... he hurt me. When I... when I refused to... to let him have my ass he beat me! He beat me and then gave me to his sick, perverted son! I tried to... I tried to fight but...” Yuri's hand was shaking in rage as she reached out and placed it on Ashuna's shoulder.

“You do not need to...” She started to speak.

“He gave me to these pigs!” Ashuna screamed. “He gave me to them and he laughed when he did it!” The tears came then as she shook her head vigorously as if trying to rid the memories from her head. “He laughed... he laughed at me.” She sobbed as she fell into Yuri’s arms as a child would reach for their parent when in pain.

Yuri slid to her butt as she pulled the young woman into her arms and held her tightly while Ashuna’s entire body shook in shame and humiliation.

“Yuri my wife?” Pa'cour asked moving into the cell now.

Yuri looked at him with tears coming from her own eyes now. “Go husband.” She said softly. “Leave us. Tell Androcles I will join you as soon as I am able. This... this is my fault Pa'cour. What she has endured is my fault.”

“You can not hold yourself accountable for that animal’s crimes Yuri.” Pa'cour told her gently.

Yuri shook her head slowly. “No... this one I must. I... I left her here when I should have taken her with us.” She told him. “Go... I will follow shortly my love. Leave Em'cer with me. I will follow soon.”

Pa'cour was silent for a moment and then squeezed her shoulder in knowing fashion and rose to his feet. He stepped back outside the cell and looked at Em'cer, the young Immortal’s eyes filled with anger and something Pa'cour knew well.

“Remain with her Em'cer. She is now your charge.” He said.

Em'cer glanced back into the cell and then turned back to Pa'cour a new determination in his dark eyes. “I will see to it.” He spoke.

“When they are ready...” Pa'cour said. “When they are ready, take this young woman to one of Eliani’s Hadarian Healers. There is one in the landing bay setting up a triage center even now. No one is to see her like this Em'cer and no one else is to treat her.”

Em'cer nodded. “As you order.”

Pa'cour turned back once more and saw Yuri rocking her back and forth and he took a deep breath. Her actions only served to reinforce Pa'cour’s love for Yuri to new levels. And he would show this to her when they were once more alone.

BLOOD REVERENCE CLASS DREADNOUGHT
BLOOD OF HONOR
ADMIRAL PONTAL’S COMMAND SHIP
THREE LYS FROM UZU OZEIB 7

Pontal groaned as the intercom in his personal quarters continued to buzz insistently. He felt the weight of Victoria’s arm lift from his bare chest and her sleepy voice filled his ears.

“Answer it Pontal.” She told him. “It could be something important.”

Pontal turned his head and looked at her face, her dark eyes alive and always so bright. “You are important.” He said.

Victoria smiled at him. “As you showed me for five glorious hours last night.” She told him smacking her full lips in response. “Duty calls however.”

Pontal grumbled as he threw back the light sheet. “Sometimes I hate that word intensely.” He stated as he rose to his feet naked and padded across to the small desk that occupied their quarters. He stabbed his finger down on the COM panel. “I asked not to be disturbed OD.”

“Admiral... my apologies sir... but we are receiving an Alpha Priority transmission. It is encrypted sir... and it bears the Command Codes of Deion Leonidas.”

Pontal’s eyes grew slightly wider. “I will be there in three minutes.” He stated. He turned from the desk as he saw Victoria push herself up on the bed now.

“Pontal... why would the brother of Androcles Leonidas be contacting you?” She asked.

“I don’t know. Cloth yourself my wife. Let us find out.” He said as he reached for his uniform pants.

Pontal strode onto the bridge of his ship holding tightly to Victoria's hand. Since the day he had taken her as his wife and made her a vampire, she had become a frequent visitor to the bridge. Pontal's crew was handpicked and utterly loyal to him and Narice. Victoria may have been human once, but the crew of the *BLOOD OF HONOR* quickly came to regard her as the catalyst for the path all of them had chosen. She was treated like royalty on this ship and in most cases; her orders were followed as if they had come from their beloved Admiral himself. She had quickly asserted herself after becoming his wife and now she was in total charge of the entire medical deck on their ship. She cared for them as if they were all her children and this had earned her untold respect and honor.

"Speak to me!" Pontal declared as Victoria moved to the side out of the way as she always did.

"Deion Leonidas is standing by Admiral!" The OD spoke.

"Main holo disc!" Pontal barked. "Let's see it."

The disc came alive with the face of a handsome young man, one who looked remarkably like his father and brothers. His dark eyes were alive and all of them could see movement in the background. Among them several women and several Immortals. All of them were sitting at stations on a bridge that looked like their own. Deion's face shone with a thin film of sweat and Pontal was certain he saw blood stains on his body armor.

"Admiral Pontal?" Deion's voice echoed.

"I am Pontal Prince Deion." He answered respectfully.

Deion looked almost embarrassed. "My brothers and I send our regrets for having to disturb you at this hour Admiral. I know it is still very early where you are."

Pontal waved it off. "If you are contacting me on behalf of your brother then it must be important." He stated. "What can I do for you?"

"Actually sir... I am going to do something for you." Deion told him. They watched as he turned his head in the transmission. "Mari?"

"Transmitting." The female voice spoke from outside the cone of the transmission.

Deion turned back to look at Pontal. "Admiral... I am sending you an encrypted data burst sir. On it you will find the coordinates for the ships that follow Robert Moran. Androcles would like for you and my grandfather to put your heads together and remove whatever threat that they might pose. I have already spoken to my grandfather and he is standing by to receive your transmission when we are done."

Pontal's eyes were wide as his aide handed him the data pad. "I... I don't understand." He gasped. "How did you... how did you get this information?"

Deion's grin was infectious. "We sort of stopped in for an unscheduled visit with Moran and his *ronnus* son." He answered. "It wasn't pleasant. Well... at least for them anyway."

"I'm not sure I follow." Pontal spoke.

Pontal's aide stepped up to him with wide eyes. "Admiral... he is transmitting from the bridge of the *INQUISITOR!*" The man gasped.

Pontal's eyes darted back and forth between his aide and Deion who still wore that odd grin. "You... you have taken his ship?" He finally stammered. "How... how is that possible?"

"A little bit of luck and a whole lot of crazy." Deion answered. "Andro wanted me to tell you that Moran and Dante are now in our custody. You and our grandfather are free to roll up the remaining forces loyal to him. Word will spread quickly sir; Andro suggests you act within the next few hours."

"You... you conducted an assault of his ship while out of space dock!" Pontal exclaimed. "But... but that is unheard of!"

"For the moment Andro would like to keep the details to ourselves." Deion answered. "He will be making a full report to you and Narice as soon as he is able, but for the moment we will keep the details quiet as I said." Deion glanced out of the transmission once more, nodded and then turned back. "Forgive me sir... but I must go now. The data burst contains all the information you will need to bring Moran's forces to heel. Andro will be contacting you soon I'm sure."

Pontal blinked when the transmission ended abruptly and he looked at the pad in his hand. He felt Victoria's hands grasp his arm and he looked at her and saw shock in her own eyes.

"Husband?" She spoke in wonder. "Pontal... is it possible?"

"Admiral! Incoming transmission from Admiral Riall! Priority One!" The voice echoed.

Pontal felt the smile split his lips and he squeezed her hands. "Apparently it is my lovely wife. Apparently it is!"

INQUISITOR

"... truly lost your minds!" Deia raged within the transmission as she glared at Andro and her nieces and nephews in the room with him. It had been going on for the last few minutes and to Murano and Mari and the others who had never seen Deia worked up before it was very amusing.

"*Tenna*... we were successful and no one is hurt." Andro told her calmly.

"*Son vada carians* Androcles Leonidas!" Deia continued. "This has got to be the most *malda* thing you have ever done! Even your igord father has never done something so brash and reckless!"

Andro turned and looked at Eliani and Dorian sitting with Deion and Lisisa. "A little help here." He said.

Eliani held up her hands in mock defeat. "Nope! This is all you *fervon*." She told him with a smile. "This was your idea and..."

"And yet you went along with him Eli!" Deia barked silencing Eliani and making her look away sheepishly. "All of you! He has corrupted all of you! Your father has finally done it! He has succeeded in his efforts to drive me completely off the deep end by corrupting all of you and making you just as *malda* as he is!"

"*Tenna*... it was an opportunity that came up and we took it." Andro stated calmly.

Deia thrust her finger at him angrily. "Don't you... don't you dare preach to me about opportunity and need Androcles Leonidas! You are the Crown Prince of the Union! You cannot act as your father would act!"

"My father would have done the same thing given the intelligence we had." Andro said.

"That is the problem!" Deia screamed. "You are too much like him!"

"And that is why you love us so." Andro said with a smile.

Deia glared at him from within the transmission but his words had the effect on her that he knew they would. She settled back in her chair once more and took a deep breath. "This is going to... this is going to set the Netnews on fire *mandri*." She stated softly. "We... we never imagined we would catch them so soon."

"And we would not have..." Andro told her. "If not for Yuri and Pa'cour."

Deia looked at him. "What... what do you wish of me Andro?" She asked.

"Twelve hours *tenna*." Andro said. "Wait twelve hours and then release this information to the Netnews worms. By then grandfather and Admiral Pontal will have rolled up the forces that were aligned with Moran and I will have put together a full report and Dilaen will have sent it to you. She and Thomas were monitoring everything from our TAP cameras and no doubt will have extensive footage. She knows what she can send to you that can be released to the public."

Deia nodded. "What else?"

"I only wanted to make you aware *tenna*." Andro said. "The rest of my intentions you already know."

Deia gazed at him intensely. "You... you make him pay for every finger he laid upon your sister Andro." Deia snarled softly. "Make him feel every iota of pain he caused her before you send his cursed soul to *jorbhe*."

Andro nodded his head slowly. "That is my intent *tenna*."

Deia nodded her head. "I will inform everyone here what has taken place. You will be continuing on to the Beta Quadrant?"

Andro nodded once more. "I spoke with Deni just before we began our assault. Things there are tense at the moment. They are being watched and he has moved them from Austrova to the Protectorate homeworld. It is safer... but the OSG has fingers everywhere it seems."

"Are they in danger?" Deia asked.

"That is why I am going to finish up what I need to here within the next day." Andro told her. "I will contact you again just before we depart."

Deia stood up. "I have much to do." She said. "Dilaen's report will be forthcoming?"

"Within the next few hours I imagine. You know how efficient she is." Andro replied.

“Go with the gods *mandri*.” Deia said. “All of you.”

“And you *tenna*. And you.”

Deia ended their transmission and Andro turned to look at the others in the room. The conference room was medium sized, a dozen chairs surrounding the polished metal table. The air in the room smelled slightly of smoke, but Yuri and the other vampires were able to remove their masks on this deck and had done so eagerly.

“That went well.” Andro spoke with a grin causing his brothers and sisters to laugh softly.

“She rants at father just as passionately *fervon*.” Deion spoke. “You know that better than any of us.”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes she does.” He looked at them. “Ok... where do we stand?” He asked.

“The ship is ours completely.” Pa'cour was the first to speak. “The last two teams of *Durcunusaan* and our Immortals combined their forces and will finish sweeping the last deck within thirty minutes. Everyone who was outside of a room or work area has been moved into one and the doors sealed. All computer functions, no matter how small, have been routed to the main bridge or engineering. They will be able to do nothing. If there are any die hard supporters of Moran among them, they will be helpless.”

Yuri leaned forward in her chair in front of Pa'cour. “Androcles... what did you mean when you said this meeting pertained to Robert in some manner?”

Andro moved around the table and went to the counter where he poured himself a glass of cold water that had been brought in by several teams of Eli's medics. He lifted the glass to his lips and took a long pull before turning back and moving up beside Dorian.

“During my... encounter with Dante... several images flashed from his thoughts and I was able to detect them.” Andro explained. “I now know who among the *Ventash'ma* have been helping Moran, and they may lead us to others who plot against Narice.”

Yuri's eyes grew wide and she came to her feet. “We must... we must warn her!” She stated quickly.

Andro lifted his hand. “From what I was able to see... they have only provided peripheral support Yuri. And only because Moran's hardcore supporters on Uzu Ozeib 7 have threatened murder their families and to expose them to Narice and accuse them of crimes they have not committed.”

“You are certain?” Yuri asked more sedately.

Andro nodded. “Believe me... if it was something else or if their assistance had caused injury or death I would not be bringing this to you. Everything I saw... they were only trying to protect those close to them. I cannot find fault with that.”

Yuri returned to her chair and Andro could see her mind racing behind her dark eyes. The old Yuri would not have hesitated and she would have ordered them executed instantly. This Yuri was not the same woman and he knew that. She looked up finally and met his eyes. “Part of me... part of me wants to have them punished for even putting Narice in harm's way even a little bit. She is the only hope for the Coven to move forward.”

“And now mother?” Carisia asked her softly.

Yuri shook her head. “I can understand why they have been driven to do this.” She said meeting Andro's gaze. “To protect those I love from a monster... I would do the same.”

Andro nodded. “As would I. Any of us in this room. And so would my father.” He told her.

“What do you suggest Androcles?” Pa'cour spoke. “Moran cannot be allowed to escape... or go unpunished for his crimes! Any of them!”

Andro turned and took the data pad from Sadi and slid the pad across the table to Yuri. “And he won't.” He stated firmly. “This is what I suggest. If you and Pa'cour agree... I can make it happen within the hour and it will only delay Nameia by two hours at most. Everything will be ready when they arrive. And only Arrarn and Cha'talla will know everything.”

Everyone saw Yuri's face relax and the smile begin to form on her lips. Pa'cour was leaning over her shoulder and he too had bright eyes and a smile could be seen on his thin lips. Yuri lifted her eyes to his face.

“*M'ranndii*?” She questioned.

Pa'cour met her gaze and nodded his head. “I very much approve.” He told her.

Yuri looked at Andro. “So do I.” She said.

“It will require a message from you.” Andro said. “It is the only way to truly make this work Yuri... and allow Narice to lead them into the future.” He moved closer to her. “And I know that is what you want as well, for your first thought would not have been for Narice when I told you.”

Yuri nodded her head slowly. "I know." She said. "And it is what I want Androcles for I will say what is in my heart."

Andro nodded his head. "I will send for Dilaen and Thomas." He said beginning to turn away.

"And Dante?" Yuri asked watching him stop and slowly turn back to face her. "Xaxon?"

Andro looked at Murano who had pushed off the wall when she spoke his name. "You knew my intent going into this Yuri." Andro said firmly. "Your son's fate is already sealed. As is Xaxon's. Nothing will stop that."

"He is not my son!" Yuri told him just as firmly as she stood up once more. "I birthed a monster! I created that monster! And I will see that monster destroyed with the vile essence of the beast Xaxon who forced me to be someone I was not! Do not... do not take that away from me Andro! Not now!"

Androcles turned slightly and looked at Murano but it was Carisia's hands on his arm that turned his focus. He gazed into her dazzling maya blue eyes as Sadi, Lu'ria, Ne'Veha and Sehri surrounded her in unified support without hesitation.

"For the future Andro my love. A future for all of us. Free of the past and all the horror it brought to us." Carisia spoke softly. "For me."

"For me Andro." Lisisa spoke now as she stood up.

"For me *fervon*." Deion spoke from where he stood, Mari beside him.

"For all of us." Sehri said instantly as she gripped Carisia's arm tightly.

Andro watched all of them stand up with firm resolve in their eyes and on their faces. He turned once more and looked at Murano and Andro could see the pride swelling within his chest as he nodded.

Andro turned back to Yuri. "It will... it will not be pleasant Yuri. I cannot bring myself to show mercy for him. Not after what he did." He said gently.

"And I would not allow you to show mercy Androcles Leonidas." Yuri said firmly. "Not now."

Andro nodded slowly. "So be it. We depart for Ukwav in one hour and..." The wrist COM on Andro's forearm began to beep insistently and Andro lifted his arm. "Armen?" He answered knowing only he would contact him on this channel for they had already planned for it.

-I am receiving the signal Androcles- Armen told him. -It is nearly over and he has initiated the coded frequency-

Andro stepped away from Carisia and the others, surprising all of them. "Armen... you have my signal locked?" Andro demanded.

-Affirmative-

"Engage the STS teleport!" Andro barked. "Now!"

Gasps of stunned surprise erupted from everyone as Andro's entire body was engulfed within the bluish white field and in seconds he was gone. All of them turned quickly to where Sadi and the others staggered against each other.

Murano was the first to reach Sadi and he grabbed her arms to steady her. "Sadi... what is going on?"

Sadi gripped one of his arms and reached for Carisia with the other. She looked at him, her jungle green eyes wide.

"Something... something is happening where Martin and the others are!" She gasped. "We must... we must get back to *SPARTA'S WRATH!* Now!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

MANNE

GENERAL KOGUTH'S POSITION

Today... today my vengeance will be complete. General Koguth'Juturi thought within his mind as his eyes took in everything around him.

Koguth'Juturi was a pureblood Kavalian, a man who was extremely proud of that fact and had been his entire life. He was also a very different man as well as extremely intelligent. He knew that without change his people would never achieve their goals and they would never be free of the past. Never in all the years of his search for his beautiful daughter Iama did he ever imagine he would be doing what he was doing at this very moment. He had never thought it possible, standing beside and commanding not only Lycavorians, but also elves and vampires and so many more different species, ready to stand against tyranny and bring it to an end.

The Gods of destiny and fortune had proven their unpredictable will this day. It was also a will Koguth embraced without hesitation.

He had been only seven years old the night his life changed. He had heard his mother's cries of pain and had rushed from his room to help her. That was when he had seen his father taking his mother harshly, in the grips of a Tazli Root induced stupor. He was grunting like a beast upon her slim back, her cries of pain now only soft whimpers of humiliation. Koguth had seen her eyes that night. The tears of pain and shame as his father rutted above her like an animal, uncaring and unfeeling for the hurt and discomfort she was in. It was that very night that would alter the course of his life forever. Koguth'Juturi had sworn that night that he would never act as his father acted. He would never humiliate or hurt the woman who would give him his future children and be with him always.

Two hundred and nine years later when Mani had become his wife, he set about proving to her that he was unlike his father or the other older members of his Pride. The marriage had been arranged, as they usually were, and he was two centuries older than her, but Koguth was not unhappy in the least. Mani was very young and so very beautiful with her light brown fur and lush young body, but her eyes had captured him from the first moment he had seen her. He treated his beautiful wife as a jewel to be worshiped and cared for. She had been fearful of his actions at first, thinking them to be a trick so that he could punish her if she did not act as a typical Kavalian woman. Mani feared him Koguth knew, as she was still barely an adult herself at only twenty-three years old and Koguth was two hundred and fifteen at the time, and well on the way to making a name for himself within not only his Pride but the whole of the Kavalian military. As with all Kavalian females however, Mani knew well the price of defying her new husband anything he wanted.

Mani'Juturi discovered within the first week of their marriage that her Kavalian husband was very unusual indeed.

She had been walking among the market with other Kavalian females when a much older Kavalian male, one who had wanted her for some time and was very upset because he also had petitioned for her to be his wife and lost her to Koguth, approached her at one of the stalls and began to demean her in public. Mani could do nothing except stand there in shame among the other females and dozens of laughing males and listen to the foul words he had heaped upon her. What she did not know at that time was Koguth by then had become a very well respected and liked Kavalian officer among the Juturi Pride. Especially by the many younger males of the Juturi Pride and several other Prides. His name was also being spoken about within the senior Kavalian military ranks as a superior officer and tactician. He was stern and sometimes harsh with them, but the men he led saw that he actually cared for them and their well being. He took care of them and had gotten more than one of them out of trouble before. It was one of these men who had been shopping in the market at the same time and seen what was happening to his Commander's new bride. It was he who had gotten a message back to his Commander in the first moments of this older male's tirade against Mani. When the older male had struck her, Mani only had time to reach up and grasp her face where the blow had fallen before he lifted his hand to strike her again. Mani had closed her eyes and prepared for the beating, knowing she could do nothing to protect herself or risk her husband's position.

That blow never came, and as she opened her eyes and watched from the ground, Koguth had appeared almost magically and leaped upon the older man with ferocious rage. It was only a few seconds, but Mani had gazed upon her new husband in adoration as Koguth tore into the older and larger officer with savage and brutal violence, holding nothing back. Koguth was not a small man by any means and she witnessed firsthand what her new husband was capable of that day. When he was done, the larger Kavalian male was broken and bloody on the ground before her husband's feet, his body and face and fur covered in blood from dozens of vicious slashes of her husband's claws and immensely powerful blows from his hands and feet. When six others from

this man's Pride had moved to assist him, Mani watched as nearly twenty of Koguth's Juturi Pride and several men from other Prides appeared from all around them, ready to stand with their Commander and Pridemate. All of them were younger like him and they stood with him without fear.

In a display unheard of at that time, Koguth'Juturi turned from the beaten down officer after spitting on him and walked to where his young wife stared up at him from the ground. With all the tenderness of lifting a newborn child, Koguth had taken her into his arms and with his men surrounding him; he had carried his young wife the entire two kilometers back to their home. He had spoken no words during that trip, Mani's eyes focused on his face the entire time, but once inside the privacy of their home his words of apology had poured from his lips. He doted over her, though she was not really hurt in any way, and that was when Mani'Juturi knew he was very different. That was when she first stopped to look at him and she realized just how handsome he truly was with his well groomed fur and rugged features. That was also when she had first kissed him. Realizing that her action was inappropriate; her first instinctive reaction was to draw back in horror at the anger she knew he would no doubt shower upon her for what she had done. That was until his large hands had come up and taken her face within their grasp so very gently and he had kissed her back.

And what a kiss it was for Koguth'Juturi.

So vexed by her beauty that he was, Koguth continued to kiss her, pulling her small body against his and relishing in the myriad of sensations and emotions that came pouring forth from him. And Mani's reaction only spurred him on as she clutched at his shoulders in delight and urged him on. He had taken her to their bed that night and he had proceeded to worship her lush body in ways that were even more unheard of and taboo by Kavalian males. Mani'Juturi had been howling out her passionate enjoyment within moments as she clutched at him in bliss and he made her experience things that that no Kavalian male would ever do for a female's pleasure. Kavalian females were considered nothing but second class citizens among their people, only good for manual chores, fucking and giving birth to more Kavalian sons. They had practically no rights at all within mainstream Kavalian society. Koguth'Juturi had showed her that night that he was unlike everything she had been raised among. When he had locked groins with her that first night after giving her hours of unimaginable pleasure that she had never dreamed of; while she quivered in bliss and showered his face and neck with kisses; he vowed to her he would never disrespect her. Never hurt her. He vowed to her that he was different. And he vowed to her that one day he would be free to show everyone what she meant to him.

He vowed to her that they would be free.

That was the night the real Koguth'Juturi was born.

As he held his beautiful young wife in his arms and she purred against him, her delicious tail bouncing quite contently over their legs, he whispered to her what his dreams for the future were. They would have to hide their powerful affection and love in public he told her, but she would never be without someone watching over her from this day forward. He would apologize profusely when he had to speak sternly with her in public, for that was the Kavalian way and was expected, but his words were always carefully chosen so that she knew his true intent and love for her. He never grew angry with her over anything and together in their home, away from prying eyes, he would laugh with her and cuddle and joke with her. And he utterly dismissed the Kavalian mentality that females were stupid and not worth the effort to school, for he taught her everything that he could. By their law back then Kavalian females were not even allowed to read without first gaining the permission of senior Pride leaders and a government official, but Koguth had brought her hundreds upon hundreds of books through those first years together. Once he had taught her to read he brought her books on anything that he thought she would enjoy or could learn from. And Mani was a voracious reader. Many of the books were even outlawed by Kavalian law. By their tenth year together, Mani's education surpassed even that of many senior Kavalian males.

Mani was very careful as well, knowing that her husband's actions could get both of them killed, and she loved him with every fiber of her being now. She absorbed all of his teachings about security and protecting themselves like a sponge. Over the years she became even more fastidious than him when it came to hiding. Their home was their sanctuary and together they had built and hidden many caches of vast knowledge and such things that neither of them were allowed to have by law. Koguth shared everything with her and held nothing back. He came to rely on her insight and the vast knowledge she had come to acquire from the books she had read. They both decided not to have children right away so that they could build upon what they were doing and not worry for slipping up in some way and having their children taken from this life. He dismissed his father's

council to step outside their marriage in order to find a woman who could give him children. Koguth's reply was that he was building his career and their Pride up so that he would not have to worry when it came time for children. Mani was perfectly able to have children but he was waiting until he could teach his sons what they needed to in order to advanced their Pride's standing. His father had liked this answer, and he never questioned him again. He had no idea what Koguth was truly doing. Even after his father became Pride Leader of the Juturi Pride he never caught on to what his son was doing. This only served to reinforce his idea that his father was nothing more than a stupid monster. He now hated his father even more for he had taken his mother from him in another Tazli Root induced fever only eleven years after Mani had become his wife. His mother had seen the spark in his eyes for what it was and she had done everything within her power to encourage that and nurture his feelings. It was something Koguth would never forgive his father for and it made him love and cherish Mani that much more. His hatred for the man his father was would make it so much easier to kill him many years into the future after what he had done to Iama.

For over six hundred years this went on in secret. In that time Koguth' Juturi was the ideal Kavalian officer in all things. He was a masterful tactician, and leader of men. Even the cloned Kavalian soldiers who were assigned under him were far better trained and efficient than most. He was among the few more strategically sound leaders, a man who treated his cloned soldiers with the same respect as the purebloods of his Pride. This practiced was ridiculed and looked down upon by other Pride Leaders, but the Kavalian High Command could not argue with his results and therefore let him conduct himself as he pleased. During this time is when he and Mani began to build their power base within their Pride. While his father took all of the credit as Pride Leader for his son's successes, it was Koguth and Mani who drove the Juturi Pride forward in secret. They were very careful in what they did, selecting only Pride members who showed flashes of their true feelings in their actions and words. Those who rebelled against the hate filled speeches and false history of their people. At first it was only half a dozen. Kavalian males who turned out to be like Koguth. These were who they concentrated on. Exposing them to values and morals that older Kavalians did not have or were never taught. And it was these men who began the real foundation of the Juturi Pride, who acted just as Koguth and Mani did. And it was these men who began to sow the seeds of their future actions. All of them took wives from other Prides, young women with healthy figures and beauty and all of them treated their wives as treasures. As Koguth schooled the men, it was Mani who schooled the females. In the first quarter century of starting down this road, over a hundred males of the Juturi Pride had joined their small circle with their wives. All of their wives were as equally skilled as the men thanks to Mani and they were worshiped by their husbands. The males of the Juturi Pride embraced this mentality completely. These men treated their Kavalian wives as the bearers of their future and what they could one day have. They played the game in public yes, but in the privacy of their homes, their wives were equal in everything and had a say in all that they did. They had tossed aside the old ways and fully embraced the new, led by Koguth and Mani. And they were utterly vicious with their security. All of them knew to be caught would mean instant death. The Kavalian females knew that more eyes would be on them, but Mani's instruction was perfect in every way, learned from years of doing it all herself.

Their actions did not go unnoticed however.

It wasn't until they had been doing these things for a hundred and sixty years that they were discovered. The Shale Pride had taken the young wife of a Juturi Pride member in a night time raid. A woman they had arranged for the young man to take as his wife. They let it be known that they knew everything and they wanted to meet to discuss such things. Koguth had led a force of sixty of his Pride's men to the meeting place, ready to murder and destroy an entire Pride if need be to protect their secret. It would not be necessary.

When they found the young woman she was talking animatedly with many other females of the Shale Pride, the men standing around with their weapons stacked in a single place and waiting patiently for Koguth and them to arrive. The Shale Pride Leader, a much older man than Koguth, had dropped to his knees in front of him and then quite unexpectedly, expressed his desire to become part of Koguth's plan. This became even more obvious to Koguth when the young woman raced to her husband's arms and he embraced her tightly, kissing her without shame, while her much older father and mother looked on with happiness and hope in their eyes. The Shale Pride Leader had professed his loyalty to the Juturi Pride and him if only they would allow them to join their secret society. He no longer wished to see his Pride's daughters given to monsters, or their Pride's sons have to treat their mothers and sisters as if they were beneath them. That night, the Shale Pride became bound to the Juturi Pride in a way that nothing would ever come between.

And their numbers swelled.

When the Kavalian people announced their return to the galaxy with the attacks against the High Coven, Koguth had the unquestioned loyalty of nine complete Prides. They had spent centuries building and expanding and intermingling their Prides. Nearly two million men and women who wanted more than what they were allowed to have. Men and women who wanted to be free to live their lives and raise their children as they saw fit. Through the course of that time, the Juturi Pride had grown to be the largest in numbers and prestige and along with them, all the other Prides as well. Koguth's father basked in the new attention and stature that this gave to them and he never questioned it as foolish and blind as he was. All nine Prides resettled to one of the planets reclaimed by the Kavalians in the first year of their war with the High Coven. A fertile planet on the edges of the new Kavalian border, a place where they would have more freedom to continue their teachings and much better security. It was in this new area of space that they discovered that the Nruarani Pride, a nomadic Pride from the outskirts of the empire, also adhered to what they all now followed. The Nruarani Pride was very large, over three million members alone, and in even better position to assist them because of the standing Pian'Nruarani had established through the years, even while keeping the secret of their values. Mani had become the matriarch to them all as Koguth's wife and by then she had given him Mataen and Nedoli and then Iama. When Mataen was born thirty years before the war with the High Coven Koguth knew the path they followed was the correct one. When Nedoli became part of their lives only six years later, it only reinforced their position. And then when Iama entered this world ten years after that, Koguth swore she would know all her desires and he would insure she found love just as he and Mani shared.

The High Coven war was not something any of them agreed with, but in order to insure their secret was secure and to possibly set themselves up to turn away from the now excessively oppressive Kavalian leadership under Keleru, they fought. They fought not for Keleru or his grasps at power and revenge, but they fought for their future. While their numbers continued to swell back home, Koguth and the others insured that their men did not die needlessly or without cause. During the war, the Juturi Pride and those aligned with them suffered minimal casualties. They fought tenaciously and with honor, but they insured that no lives were thrown away for no purpose. And not one of the Prides aligned with Koguth had ever committed war crimes against vampire soldiers. When one of their nine Prides fell, their wives assumed the mantle of their homes and became the heads of their families. None were forced to marry again unless they discovered new love, and they were never without the support of each other. Mani'Juturi saw to this as the matriarch to them all and no matter what, her words and instructions were always followed to the letter. Mataen'Juturi fought beside his father while Nedoli remained at home and studied and grew strong. It was during the second of their High Coven invasions when Mataen discovered Corsa and became totally enraptured with her. He saved her from a life of endless rapes and beatings when the biogenic program failed to remove her tail or change her feline like eyes. When her Pride dismissed her, Mataen rescued her and made her his wife.

Then Koguth discovered what his father had done with Iama.

The flower and beauty she was growing into would bring Koguth to tears when he held her in his arms or bounced her on his knees. She had become the focus of why he had been doing this for all these years. When he returned with Mataen at the end of the second invasion and discovered what his father had done, Koguth went into a rage that...

"...Found the western scrambler." Kalis's calm voice broke into his memories and brought Koguth'Juturi back to the present.

"So it would seem." Koguth answered as he came fully alert once more.

"We should attack now General." Kalis said.

Koguth shook his head. "Patience young Kalis." Koguth told him calmly. "Let them draw closer. Not all of them have cleared the far treeline."

"Their commander has positioned himself in the treeline to southwest." Mata spoke now.

"Mata... when this begins... he is yours." Koguth said calmly turning to look at him. "He must not be allowed to escape and return to Pusintin and inform him of what is going on. Akor'dris, Bae'diraz and the Juturi Pride fighters will move from their hidden holes on the west, but they will concentrate on any that remain within the timber. Any who attempt to escape to the west will be swept up by them. The only way open to him will be south."

Mata nodded his head without doubt. He had thought his life over when he had assisted Kalis in escaping his father. The young man he had raised as he would have raised his own sons was now a man and he had chosen a path that provided him a future. Mata did not think that purpose extended to him. His wife and sons were long dead, taken from him by disease and uncaring leaders. He had no reason to live on. Until Kalis had showed him purpose once more. Kalis had showed him that there was no need to throw his life away, that he could once more have a family and a future. He showed him there was always purpose if you were brave enough to reach for it. So Mata had reached for it, and after these past weeks he clung to that ideal with vicious faith. He was here beside men and women who did not care that he was once Puma Bane. They only cared that he was with them and just as dedicated to their cause as they were. And Mata meant to see a new future for himself and his people take shape even if it cost him his life.

“It will be done.” He said simply.

“The order remains the same. Every man and woman is to fire a full magazine before leaving their position.” Koguth told them. “Be as accurate as possible and bring down as many as they can. Plasma grenades from every fourth soldier, anti-personal rockets from every sixth. Once they have exploded and wreaked more havoc... we will bring the fight to them. No mercy can be shown. No remorse. They are Puma Bane and they will show you none. And they must pay for the crimes they have committed through the years.”

Jormal Pescneu glanced at the Kavalian General he now served beside proudly and grinned widely showing perfect white fangs capable of tearing flesh from bone easily enough. “General... do I detect a hint of perverse joy at the pain we are about to inflict?”

Koguth turned his head slightly to gaze at the Lycavorian he now called friend and aide. “I suppose you do Jormal.” He answered.

Jormal’s smile broadened. “You and your Pride are more like us than you know General. And it will be seen this day.”

“They found the second one.” Kalis commented.

Koguth turned back to view the expanse of the camp before them. “Inform Nedoli and Mataen. Tell them this is going to kick off and have Ceale, Mani and Serale ready to receive wounded when they begin arriving. There will be wounded my friends, and we will lose men and women this day. Do not deter from your tasks. If they fall, allow our medical teams to sweep in behind us and see to them. Do not stop pressing the attack.” Koguth looked at Mata once more as he lowered his fingers from where he had tapped his COM implant.

“It is done General. Lady Ceale says they are as ready as they will ever be.” Mata echoed softly. “And Corsa stands ready with the *MENKLA* transport to evacuate any who need critical care from the small Queen Anja.”

Koguth nodded with an evil glint in his eyes. “Then it is time.” He said. “Kalis... if you would detonate the charges... it is time to send these Puma Bane butchers into the next life.”

Kalis lifted the detonator in his hand, looked at Koguth and mashed down on the handle with all of his strength.

They were another weapon of war designed, constructed and perfected by humans long ago. The Lycavorian Union and High Coven never used Anti-Personal Mines to great extent in their war. As wolves and vampires, many could move far faster than humans, making it very nearly impossible to inflict injury with directed minefields. They were also much less effective because Lycavorians could detect the faint traces of the scents of those who laid the minefields to begin with and vampires could almost certainly detect the residual body heat from a rapidly placed minefield. This was something discovered during the battle for Earth since the vampire artillery had effectively neutralized the minefields the defenders of Eden City had laid.

It was not the same now. The skill of the engineers within the Union, and the combined ideas of Ben and Martin, the Union had resorted to using far more mines in their inventory. Mines of every shape and size. The vast majority of them now with very small and very self contained camouflage generators. The most common of these mines was the Claymore. It was a name leftover from human history, and unlike his beautiful elven wife, Ben was not very good at naming things. He left it alone and simply added a Mark Two at the end of the name.

The M18 Mark Two Claymore Mine was unlike its very effective older brother in many ways. Where the original Claymore was horizontally convex, the Mark Two now stood 140 millimeters in height and weighed just over 5 kilograms, while being completely circular in shape. They were too heavy to carry more than two for any one person, but the Lycavorian Union had put them into primary use as a defensive weapon of unit field commands. Ben had combined the original idea of the claymore with the equally effective bounding anti-personal mine. The Claymore Mark Two was no longer a directional landmine. When tripped, the Mark Two would burst from the ground where it had been buried or hidden and lift exactly 1.5 meters into the air. Then a tiny pyrotechnic trigger activated and caused the main charge of 900 grams of plastic explosive to erupt, spraying out one thousand tiny, and razor sharp flechettes in a 360 degree area of destruction at nearly 5000 feet per second. Each mine had a kill radius of thirty meters and an injury radius of nearly triple that. Each mine also had a very small computer chip in its brain that caused the mine itself to take the coloring of whatever background where it was planted. This camouflage chip would then effectively hide it from almost all known detection by rapidly advancing infantry and also served to protect ADHOC bases from less than thorough sweeps by attacking forces.

This would be the first time the Mark Two had seen actions since the end of the Evolli War. It was also the first time that any Kavalian soldier in Koguth's command had seen it in action, and it made many of them speak silent prayers to whatever gods they worshiped that they never had to face these weapons.

The moment Kalis mashed down on the trigger in his hand, a single burst of energy went out down the nearly five miles of insulated and buried wire they had laid this minefield with. They had worked tirelessly for a full week to make this wide open clearing appear to be what it wasn't and that was the main Union base of operations on Manne. Base One was actually very well hidden by powerful Ground Shroud Generators similar to what Androcles Leonidas had used on Solmar, nearly one hundred kilometers from this location. This decoy base had been fitted with many electronic devices and hundreds of polymer tents and portable buildings that had been erected to enforce the illusion that this was their main base. Martin Leonidas had not been convinced that this idea would work at first, and was leaning towards using the deserted Science Station they had discovered returning from the moon where they had first met. It wasn't until Koguth, Kalis and even Mata explained to him that the High Coven did not use such trickery in battle and the Puma Bane believed themselves superior to everyone. Base Two was not nearly as large as Base One, nor as well constructed or hidden, and they were intentionally causing it to radiate openly. It only served to enforce the idea to the Puma Bane that they were facing inferior troops. Base Two had a perimeter size of three hundred meters by four hundred meters. There were one hundred Mark Twos buried within the soft dirt beneath the feet of the Puma Bane. There were two hundred and fifty Puma Bane in Lieutenant Shonis's detachment. They made up fully eighty-five percent of the shipboard complement of Puma Bane under the Marshall's command.

None of them would live for more than a few more minutes.

In the space of 4.5 seconds, one hundred Mark Two Claymore mines triggered and leaped into the air within that killing field. With a single, soft muffled explosion, each mine blew apart at a height of 1.5 meters and expelled one thousand flechettes at five times the speed of sound in a 360 degree arc.

No one was safe.

Each flechette was propelled at 4875 feet per second, providing 89 foot pounds of kinetic energy to the targets. Watching from the safety of their hidden positions Koguth and the others could only gawk in horrific shock as the Puma Bane troops were practically shredded into little bits where they stood. The light body armor they wore provided very little protection against the devastating force of the flechettes. To those standing within two or three meters of a mine, their bodies simply blew apart in red mists of blood and flesh, catching the force of the mine's deadly ordnance full on. While this served to save some of their comrades from the full force of the mine's lethal radius, none of the Puma Bane within the kill zone escaped injury. The screams of the mortally injured began to fill the air all around them, even as the remains of their Lieutenant Shonis dripped from the tattered remnants of two polymer tents.

And then the overkill began.

Koguth lifted his head from the bunker he was in his eyes wide in disbelief. Trained soldier that he was, this only lasted for several seconds and then he lifted his wrist.

"Now!" He screamed into his wrist COM unit. "All teams! Now!"

Five hundred Union and Kavalian troops rose from their hidden trenches and bunkers and the air around the clearing filled with the pops of missile launchers, and the buzz saw like sound of hundreds of Union P190A4s slinging lethal projectiles downrange. Even without being able to fully see their targets, plasma grenades and anti-personal rockets were launched into the maelstrom in front of them. It truly was as if the doors of hell had opened and invited the Puma Bane troops in. Those Puma Bane who managed to survive the initial havoc of the Mark Two mines relatively unscathed knew without question that they had been duped. They were trained and drilled to believe they were the finest troops anywhere in the universe, that no one could stand against them. This day many of them died wondering how this had happened. Out of the two hundred and fifty Puma Bane that had entered the killing field and its perimeter, only sixty-three survived the initial devastation of the mines being set off. None of them were without injury, some with minor cuts, and many with severe lacerations from the deadly flechettes. As they staggered about, trying to determine what to do, many attempted to move back for the tree line thinking this would save them. The rockets and plasma grenades dictated otherwise. A thin cloud of dirt filled the air all around them and most could not even see where they were going. They joined their comrades in this state of disarray as the rockets and grenades began to go off all around them and 12.7mm rounds began to punch through their light armor from every direction and kill them.

The Puma Bane commander Qallin was frozen in his spot just a hundred and fifty meters to the southwest, his eyes staring out on the slaughterhouse in disbelief. He could just make out the dozens of muzzle flashes through breaks in the cloud of dirt that surrounded his men. He witnessed the explosions of plasma grenades more numerous to count as they exploded among the ranks of his men. The initial blast of the mines had thrown him off his feet and three errant flechettes had reached as far away as where he sat, cutting through his light armor and fur even at the reduced velocity they were traveling. His blood dripped down his face through his fur as he watched his men being massacred. No force of vampires had ever stood against a Puma Bane unit and survived. The Puma Bane as a whole had lost less than fifty men during their war with the High Coven, reinforcing the idea that they were indestructible in many ways. In this instant, Qallin saw how wrong they were. In this moment, on this world so very far from their homes, Lycavorian Spartans under the command of King Leonidas had butchered more Puma Bane troops than twenty years of war with the vampire scum. The thought flashed in his mind for an instant that perhaps the many reports he had read from Kavalian Intelligence Agents who were far smarter than him were correct.

That thought vanished in an instant when he heard the snapping of the stick behind him and he began to whirl around and bring his rifle up. He grunted in horrible pain as fire lanced through his side beginning from his lower left abdomen and moving up. He felt the slicing of his flesh, the heinous sound of the blade opening his midsection to the warm air, yet there was nothing he could do to stop it. His rifle fell from suddenly useless hands and his eyes focused on the nearly feral expression of the Kavalian who squatted before him as he drew back the wickedly sharp and bloody Drow fighting knife.

“Ma... Mata!” He rasped out the words.

“Qallin.” Mata hissed back at him.

Mata knew then the path he would follow. Up until this very point in time he still had doubts as to where he could fit in and have purpose as Kalis had told him. He was accepted without question among these hundreds of men and women, many who had good reason to hate Kavalians more than anyone, yet they treated him with respect and as an equal. All because he now saw the future for his people in a different light. He saw what they could have under the caring hand of a leader who wished nothing more than to see them prosper. He could see the future of the Kavalian people in the eyes of every one of Koguth’s men. The burning of hope and freedom. The desire to be so much more than what they were now.

This is what filled Mata now. This is the emotion that swept through him as he glared at the Puma Bane commander dying in front of him. He had not hesitated in his actions, Qallin’s attention fully focused on the slaughter of his men taking place and it had been child’s play to sneak up on him. The faces of his wife and children, long dead now, appeared in his mind as he watched Qallin try and hold his innards inside his abdomen. He thought he could see his wife with a proud smile on her face as she lifted a hand and waved at him. Mata had never believed in faith or destiny, but seeing the brightness of her eyes in his mind, he knew what his destiny was to be.

Mata reached out and pulled the rifle away from Qallin and he lifted the Drow knife so that Qallin’s eyes could see it.

“Before you join your twisted comrades in death Qallin... know this.” Mata spoke. “I will now follow the path laid before me this day. I will remake the Puma Bane. I will purge their ranks and I will reshape them! They will become a force that our people will be proud of. Not live in horror of! A force that our people will look to with pride and hope, not fear and tyranny. With your death, that purge will begin Qallin. May you rot in the bowels of the fiery creatures of the abyss for all time Qallin... and do not worry. That sick fuck Pusintin will be joining you this very day.”

Mata rammed the Drow fighting knife forward and up, the tip entering just under Qallin’s jaw and plunging up into his brain. Mata yanked the blade free and rose to his feet, dismissing the animal before him as his body dropped to the soft earth with a thud.

“This day the future of our people has been born!” Mata hissed. “And I will see them walk into the future with their heads held high!”

Koguth wasted no time in his actions after the initial blasts had died away and he whirled on Kalis who waited beside him. “Go now Kalis!” He shouted.

“General we...”

“You are not needed here now!” Koguth shouted at him. “We will finish them! You are needed elsewhere! Now go!”

“Uncle Martin said to remain until...” Kalis continued to protest.

Koguth reached out and grasped his arm tightly. “They are finished Kalis! We can roll them up without you! They are your family boy!” He barked. “Now go to them!”

Kalis stared at him for a moment longer, indecision in his eyes, but then that changed to resolve. He nodded his head quickly and turned in the trench. Koguth saw a silver white flash of light and his eyes grew wide as the large wolf appeared right in front of him. With a powerful leap Kalis Leonidas cleared the trench and then sprinted off into the forest around them headed for one location. Koguth tore his eyes away as he felt and saw Mata settle beside him.

“It is done General!” Mata reported as he gripped his P190.

“Then let us finish this.” Koguth growled.

Mata reached out and took Koguth’s arm. “Leave none alive General.” He spoke coldly. “No matter how injured they may appear. These Puma Bane are a cancer that need to be removed.”

“These?” Koguth asked him.

Mata met his eyes without fear. “I will speak with King Leonidas. I will ask him to allow me to reform them General. As I have been reformed. And I will make the Puma Bane what they were always intended to be. Defenders of our people.” Mata motioned with his head onto the field before them. “These scum are no more than imposters and I would see them dead for defiling our people and the name Puma Bane.”

Koguth stared at him for a long moment and then nodded his head. “Then let us see to our business Mata my friend.” He turned back and looked up and down the shallow trench. “Now!” He screamed. “Charge!”

Kalis ran.

He ran with new life swelling within his chest. He was a large wolf, not as large as his uncle or cousin he knew, but still nearly two and a half feet tall at the shoulder and easily two hundred and sixty pounds of muscle and bone. The first night he had seen his uncle in wolf form he had been terrified, but that quickly passed as he ran alongside him through the timber. The nights studying and listening to Androcles coach him about what to do in his wolf form filled him now. The nights he and his uncle Martin had gone running here on Manne flashed in his mind. All they had taught him came to the forefront. The freedom he felt in his wolf form was beyond anything he had ever known. Androcles words echoed within his mind as he easily propelled his wolf form across the level terrain at nearly thirty-five miles an hour. Kalis took in everything around him, all of his senses alive and alert. The steady rumble of his chest as he breathed and the skittering of small animals as they raced from his path in terror. His coloring was more dark blond fur in wolf form and even the added padding of the parts of the magically conforming ArmorPly on his back and hips did not deter his movement.

The ArmorPly was an amazing thing he had come to discover, able to change its composition and shape in the midst of the change and make him an armored wolf. It did not slow him down however, as his large paws dug into the dirt and thrust him forward. He saw Serale's face in his mind, his beautiful and sweet smelling Serale. The emotions that came forth from him when he held her in his arms and smelled her scent or basked in her cries of delight as they made love, these are a few of the things that drove him. Fedor and Eirene were his brother and sister, and regardless of whether they recognized this or hated him, Kalis would now protect and shield them as he should have done for Nikkei and Leruk. He would allow no harm to come to them for any reason, and as he knew that Androcles protected his cousins, Kalis Leonidas would now protect those who were his brothers and sisters. His head perked up slightly as he ran, and he detected the faint scent of Eirene on the wind. She was just recently out of her Coming of Age fever and her scent was still more pungent than most. As he drew closer he could also detect another scent. A scent that caused anger and hate to swell within him and drive him forward faster.

He smelled his father.

Martin allowed his eyes to sweep over the terrain in front of him leading up to the cave where For'mya and the twins were. Aside from the company he had given to augment Koguth's Kavalian fighters, he had left the remainder of the *Durcunusaan* battalion Andro had sent to them to secure Base One. It was now the most secure location on Manne now, and anything short of a major attack would never breach its defenses. The crew of the *ARC ROYAL* and their Kavalian friends had put too much work into building the base up to what it was now and they would not leave it undefended. The many engineers and techs among both ships were standing shoulder to shoulder with regular Spartan *Durcunusaan* ready to defend the base. Base One had similar Shroud generators set up all along its defensive line and much like Andro's ADHOC on Solmar; it was invisible to known sensors. The Puma Bane would need to stumble across it by accident in order for them to discover it. Base One's western edge was backstopped by a massive mountain range and the entrance to a massive cave network within the mountains all around them. It was here that Anja had set up a huge medical facility over the course of the last few weeks. Working with Duewa, Muton, Radra and Anuk they were able to turn the many chambers of the cave network into an intricate hospital powered by four huge fusion generators located even deeper within the cave network. The network of tunnels had been painstakingly explored and mapped for they would also be the emergency exit for Base One should they ever need to abandon the place they now called home. At least out here.

Martin let his eyes sweep across the ravine to the opposite side but he could not detect any of his team. Colin, Kenny, Pablo, T'lolt and Tony had set up on the opposite ridge with two heavy chain guns while Colin and Pablo sported grenade launchers. Cody and Garan were ever further out in a small two man OP and keeping their eyes open from the only other path to the cave where For'mya and the twins were. It was the harder path to navigate but not impossible. He should have known he would not be able to spot any of his team. They had been doing these same things as long as he had been and they were experts at their jobs. They were like family to him and T'lolt had joined them and fit right in. As had Garan. The Pralor soldier had soaked up all they had taught him these last weeks and shed nearly twenty pounds in excess weight while adding an equal amount of muscle to his six foot frame. He was healthier now than he had ever been in his life and he had taken to the Spartan way of life easily. Garan also vowed to pass on this new knowledge to the Pralor security forces under his command for he knew the battles that lay ahead.

Martin's keen eyes caught the slight movement by Julie as she lifted her hand and pressed it tighter to her ear. She sat between Aricia and Isabella three meters behind where he and Danny rested just beneath the lip of the ridge. Dysea leaned against Bella's side, Cirith sitting between her legs and nibbling a ration bar. He saw Julie nod and look at him.

General Koguth reports they have broken the Puma Bane attack. They are sweeping the decoy base now while Akor'dris and Bae'diraz cover the timber with their men. Julie told him within Mindvoice. No casualties.

Martin's eyes grew slightly wider. *No casualties?*

Julie nodded her head knowing that all of them could hear her. Like the others around her, Julie only spoke on a Tier Six level within Mindvoice and only they could hear her words. *That's what he said. They bumbled into the decoy base like children and the mines blew them to shit.*

Martin turned back slowly to look over the lip of the ridge while his Queens all turned to look at him. *Fervon?* Martin asked softly.

Danny shook his head. *Doesn't seem right.* He answered instantly. *Two hundred and fifty Puma Bane. Their very best. And they walk right into an ambush without thinking and get blown to sibfla. Koguth is good Marty... but no one is that good and lucky.*

Agreed. Martin spoke softly. *Something isn't right.* Martin could feel Kalis within him. He knew he was racing across the terrain even now to reach the cave where For'mya was with Fedor and Eirene. His mind was open to Martin, Kalis had hid nothing from his uncle these last weeks and days, and Martin knew his purpose was true. There was no way he could feel for Serale as he did and have ulterior motives. There was no way he could have completed the tests he had if he had not truly changed. *Kalis?* Martin reached out. His mind's eye saw Kalis come up short in his sprint, his paws digging furrows into the ground and kicking up dirt.

Uncle?

Kalis... something is wrong. Martin held nothing back. *Koguth and the others have wiped out the Puma Bane sent against you. That is why he released you to go to the cave. The second force led by Pusintin has not reached us yet. It is too easy mandri.*

They did... they did seem to blunder blindly into our ambush Uncle. Kalis spoke honestly.

Could there have been more Puma Bane within the Task Force? Martin asked him. He was speaking openly and everyone on a Tier Six level could hear him. *On other ships perhaps?*

It was For'mya's voice that reached out now as they all felt Kalis's sudden fear that he had made a mistake. Even Fedor and Eirene, who were sitting beside her heard and felt the warmth of their mother's words as she reached out to Kalis. They also felt Kalis's emotions as well. *Be calm mandri.* She spoke to Kalis warmly knowing, just as they all did, that he was not a threat to them in any way. Not with everything he had discovered. *The fleet was large. Think back carefully. Could there have been more on other ships?*

I never left my father's ship Tenna. Kalis answered. *Standard Operational procedure is to have all Puma Bane on one ship.*

He's a rat bastard Lover. Anja's voice filled their heads now. *But unfortunately for us, he isn't a stupid rat bastard. He could have hid more that even Kalis or Mata did not know about.*

Martin saw Danny nod his head. *I have to agree with Red on this one. He used the others as bait. He threw them against what he thought our main base was knowing they would get slaughtered.*

And he led another force directly for where he knew we are. For'mya commented.

Only he went the hard way figuring we would be watching the front way in. Julie spoke now.

And I fell for it. Martin hissed.

You did what any Commander would do given the intelligence we had Beloved. Aricia chimed in now.

Nubou! Martin swore. *Cody! Cody... have you been listening? Do you and Garan have anything?*

Nothing yet Skipper. Cody answered. *Garan is set up about sixty meters in front of me and... wait... hold on.*

Cody stopped talking when he saw Garan lift his hand part way into the air with a closed fist.

Garan? He questioned.

I have movement to my front. Garan answered instantly. *I estimate two hundred meters away at most.*

Kalis... what direction are you coming from? Cody asked immediately.

I'm not moving right now Cody. Kalis answered. *I cut north and was coming in from the cave entrance from the northwest.*

Ok... well that ain't good. That means it ain't you. Cody spoke. *Garan?*

I can... I can just make out figures moving through the trees. They are moving slowly at the moment.

Whether from the terrain or trying to remain quiet I do not know. They are not members of our group Cody and they are making directly for the path that opens by the cave entrance.

Numbers? Cody asked him.

At least several dozen that I can see. Garan answered.

That's it Skipper! Cody barked out. We got bad guys coming in behind us!

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Martin swore. Shift! Everyone shift to secondary positions! They got in behind us! Martin didn't need to see his team begin to move for he knew what their actions would be without monitoring them. Cody you and Garan pull back and move to above the entrance!

We won't get there before they do Skipper! Cody hissed in disgust even as he was moving and covering Garan as he crawled rapidly back on the ground.

I know! Just do it! We'll come in from the east and flank them! Martin ordered. Kalis... get to the cave! Run mandri! Run like the hounds of hell are after you! Get there before them! Use the escape tunnel! It's closer to your position!

Martin didn't need to hear an answer from him for he could see within Kalis's thoughts and he saw his nephew explode forward, his large paws digging into the ground and causing him to act as if he had been shot from a gun.

Set up on the eastern side of the upper ridge! We'll come in behind them and hit them from above! Don't let that shit sorry fucking brother of mine into the cave! Martin spoke urgently even as he and Danny shifted their forms and began to follow Aricia and the others who had already changed to their wolf forms and were sprinting away. His eyes saw Bella blurring right beside Dysea as she bounded through the trees silently, her platinum colored fur flashing through the trees beside the raven black fur of Aricia and Cirith.

Pusintin's senses were all on alert as they closed on the cave where he knew For'mya was. He had kept the existence of the additional Puma Bane within his Task Force a solitary secret known only to himself. He knew he had to act differently to outthink his brother. He could not act as he had always done and bull his way to victory. His brother was the better tactician and he would slaughter them completely if this was tried. The explosions they had heard in the distance could only mean that the Puma Bane unit under Qallin had found contact. That he did not try to raise him on their radio told Pusintin that something was amiss. They must have found a larger force at the main base. Pusintin smiled to himself. In his attempt to safeguard those who were not combatants his brother had made his fatal mistake. He had left For'mya completely unprotected. His eighty Puma Bane would be more than a match for any light force left to defend her and his children. He could smell them clearly now as close as they were. Her sweet orchid scent was being carried to him as they approached from downwind. He could also detect the faint scent of Kalis as well. There was something different about his son's scent. It was more pronounced than it had ever been. Pusintin dismissed that as he thought of having For'mya beneath him once more and listening to her beg him to fuck her harder.

Pusintin came to a halt now and dropped to one knee beside the fallen tree as the Puma Bane detachment commander settled beside him.

"Our men have made contact to the west Marshall." He spoke. "Why have they not reported in?"

"They will report in when their mission is complete." Pusintin told him. "He probably left the majority of his forces there to protect their main base. Qallin will play with them before moving in fully."

The Commander nodded his head. "As you say." He spoke. "The entrance to the cave is only a hundred meters further. We should deploy now as we sweep forward."

Pusintin nodded. "I want three of your finest to go into the cave with me Kirr." He said. "The rest will establish a defensive perimeter around the entrance. Once my brother realizes we have fooled him... he will rush to try and save her. And fall into our trap."

"I will make it so." The Commander said.

Pusintin nodded and rose back to his feet. "Let's get this over with. Once we kill my brother then your men can have his other whores to entertain yourselves."

MANNE
BASE ONE MEDICAL TRIAGE CENTER
CAVE NETWORK

Duewa darted through the throng of men and women waiting for incoming wounded and found Anja standing beside Atropos near the bank of medical computers. She moved right up to her and watched as Anja turned to look at her. Duewa didn't hesitate and she instantly reached out and took Anja's hands as Thoti moved up behind her.

"Why are you still here?" Duewa asked.

Anja shook her head only half heartedly. "I... I can't leave here." She stated.

Duewa squeezed her hands tightly. "We heard what is happening Anja!" Duewa stated. "You need to go to them now!"

"My place is..."

Duewa didn't let her finish and grabbed her arms. "Your place is with your husband and your fellow wives and Queens!" Duewa snapped at her. Most everyone around stopped what they were doing since there were very few individuals within the whole of the Union that would dare raise their voice to Anja Leonidas. The smallest of the Union Queens though she may have been, Anja Leonidas's temper when arisen was legendary. As was her fiery nature and proven ability to stomp you into the ground. Apparently... Duewa had risen to such a stature in Anja's eyes that she was now one of them. "That is where you belong!"

"Duewa... I can't..." Anja stammered.

"Damn it Anja!" Duewa exclaimed. "I am here! Anuk is here! Radra is here! We all know what we are doing!"

"That's not it." Anja protested.

"Thoti may have changed me..." Duewa spoke. "But it is you who made me see what it means to be part Lycavorian and Spartan! A life that I have embraced completely! A life that you helped me to embrace and understand! Something you did not have to do! Now I am telling you that you need to follow the call of your blood and go to your mate and fellow wives. That is what you must do now!"

Anja stared at her for a long moment, her jade green eyes bright but hesitant. "What if..."

"We don't need you here!" Duewa almost shouted. "And with what is taking place... you would be no good to us anyway. Your fear and concern wafts from your pores Anja. Even I can smell that and I am only recently turned! You need to go to them!"

Anja glanced at Atropos who simply shrugged his broad shoulders. "I have only been waiting for you to lose your patience and go there anyway." He stated.

Anja looked at Duewa and squeezed her hands. "Hold down the fort." She stated.

Duewa nodded. "Of course."

Anja looked at Thoti. "You better make sure nothing happens to her Thoti." She ordered him.

Thoti grinned. "That will not be a problem." He said in reply.

Anja turned and scooped up the P190 that was resting beside the crate. "Atropos... let's move!"

"Finally." Atropos commented before taking the front and leading his fiery haired Queen out of the cave and pointing at three other *Durcunusaan* to follow them.

"Mother?" Eirene gasped.

For'mya looked at her and took their hands. "Stay calm. This is not something we did not plan for." She said confidently.

"They got in behind father!" Fedor protested. "They will be here in moments! Before the others are in position!"

"That is why your father chose this cave Fedor." For'mya explained to him. "It is smaller than the others and even if they reach here before him they will only be able to enter with so many. If you... if you do not wish to be here, I know it is so much to take in, just use the escape tunnel should the need arise."

"We won't leave you here!" Eirene nearly shouted.

“He will not hurt me.” For'mya stated. “If you are here though, I don't know what he will do. You must promise me to use the escape tunnel if you need to. I will not see my children put at risk! And neither would your father!”

Fedor shook his head. “No!” He spoke firmly. “No! I will not leave you! We will not leave you! Not ever!”

“No!” Eirene echoed her twin as she stepped up beside him. “Never!”

For'mya stared at him and saw the set of his jaw and then her dark brown eyes looked at Eirene where she saw the same look. They would not budge and she knew that. They would not leave her and For'mya felt loving warmth flood through her. It was no different a look than any of their other children would have given her facing a similar situation she knew without any question. They would not abandon their blood.

“Then take defensive positions and we will give him a very large surprise when he enters here thinking to reclaim what was never his to begin with.” For'mya said as she drew out her K14.

Her dark brown eyes changed then, the thick black ring expanding and encircling her dark brown pupil and the dual wolf fangs so common to the Leonidas bloodline and all those they turned extended and became much more prominent. For'mya Leonidas would take her vengeance for what he did to her, and there would be no forgiveness.

MANNE BASE ONE

Go to them father! Aradace exclaimed.

Torma gazed at his second oldest daughter from where he sat beside Isheeni, brushing his long, thick tail along her shorter one in a dragon show of affection and commitment. All mated dragon couples did this as it was their holding hands and showing their love to others in public places. Isheeni basked in the attentions of her husband. *No.* He said calmly. *We would only get in the way. They have not called for us to support them and we must not rush into a situation. We do not know if they brought T19s.*

That monster is almost upon my For'mya! Aradace hissed at her father. *I will never allow anyone to take her from me again! Never!*

Isheeni rose from her spot beside Torma and moved to Aradace and pressed her snout to her daughter. Behind only Jeth, she was the most outspoken and restless of their children. She was also very passionate and viciously protective of her Bonded Sister, especially after what had happened over the last months.

Do you believe Martin would allow any harm to befall his Kinsoaurgai daughter? Now... after what has happened? Isheeni asked her softly.

Aradace met her mother's eyes. *No. Never.* She answered in a softer tone. *But he would be the first to say he is not perfect and can not plan for everything.*

Isheeni nodded. *Yes he would. But that is why he has so many with him. That vile man will not lay his hands upon For'mya now daughter. If we leave here now and go to them, we leave Base One unprotected. We can not do that. Too many lives depend on us here. And I for one have no wish to experience what only your father and sister have survived when facing their missiles. Only they have survived such missiles daughter.*

General Koguth has destroyed the Puma Bane sent against him. Torma said confidently. *They may have gotten more down onto the surface than we thought... but if that is the case and we leave here without being called... then they could strike here with other troops that they may have landed without us detecting them.*

Aradace looked at her father. *They are not smart enough or skilled enough to out think us father!*

Perhaps not... but they did manage to land additional Puma Bane scum without us knowing about it.

Torma told her. *Our duty is not just to our bonded ones daughter... but to the whole as well. You know this. And I know For'mya trusts in you to help protect those here.*

“Your father speaks the truth Aradace. You must trust in his wisdom and knowledge of how Martin thinks.” Helen's voice came to them and they turned and watched her walk up to where they were with Arzoal and Wayonn in tow. They were a hundred kilometers from the actual fighting, and while there was still a sense

of caution and alertness permeating Base One, many still went about their duties almost casually. “Has anyone seen Zarah and Lucia? I have not seen them since Manda’s forces arrived. And Seyre is not here either.”

Wayonn walked up to Aradace without fear and placed his hand on her side scales. They all knew who he was and the respect he garnered from Martin and others. No dragon on Manne would ever refuse his touch for as with Helen, they had learned it could sooth them with but a caress. And it did just that to Aradace now as she felt his hand and the warmth of his skin against her scales and became less agitated and settled to the grass beside her mother. “Trust in Martin child.” He spoke with a warm and calm voice. “He will allow no harm to come to For’mya. As her Bonded One, you should know this better than most.”

Aradace met his eyes and nodded her massive head, butting him gently in his chest in a sign of thanks and reverence. *Thank you Val’istar.* She said softly.

The men and women with Martin could defeat four times the number they face. Arzoal spoke now as she settled to the ground across from them and Helen leaned against her side. *We have all seen their skill. They know what each other will do almost as well as Bonded Pairs. You know this Aradace, just as we all do. Have faith in their skills and love for For’mya. Just as they have faith in yours for her.*

Aradace looked again at her father. *How can you be so calm father?* She asked him.

Torma met her eyes and chortled to himself in humor. *Far more years than you doing this exact same thing daughter with Martin.* He answered. *When Martin begins to panic... then I will begin to panic.*

Isheeni laughed softly. *Martin Leonidas panic? Never. I do not believe I have ever seen that man panic no matter how dire the situation was.*

There was this time when...

It was Helen who saw Wayonn stagger slightly beside Aradace and she stepped away from Arzoal quickly and up beside him without thought. “Grandfather? What... what is it?” She asked reaching for his arms to steady him.

Wayonn? Arzoal questioned as well, having seen his stagger.

Wayonn shook his head as he reached for his temple. “I don’t know.” He said. There is something... I feel something.” He said.

More Puma Bane! Aradace exclaimed.

Wayonn shook his head quickly. “No.” He stated returning his hand to her broad side. “It is... I feel refined and unblemished power.”

“From Martin?” Helen asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “No... this is not Martin. Every Praetorian or Mage leaves a distinct resonance within the Etheric realm. I have only just begun to teach you how to sense this Helen. You are growing stronger, but as his Mage, Martin is what will supersede all others for you right now. I can feel it though.”

Helen gripped his arms tighter. “Every Praetorian leaves an impression upon a place or person yes. I remember your teachings grandfather.” She said. “What do you feel?”

Wayonn looked at her. “I sense Androcles.”

Helen looked at him wide eyed. “Grandfather that is not possible.” She said. “Andro and the others are in the Alpha Quadrant. He could not be here. He would not do such a thing and not tell his father.”

Wayonn shook his head once more as he looked around. “It is not Andro himself Helen.” He said as he reached out within the Etheric realm and gently probed what he felt. It was gone now... but he could just detect the very faint traces of that individual in the currents of Etheric power that swirled around Manne now that so many powerful Etheric users were on the planet. To Wayonn it was glorious to feel as a Praetorian Mage and Oracle. There were many Etheric currents on the Protectorate homeworld of course, but with the exception of the times he was with Dutkne, none of them could compare to the power and clarity he felt here on Manne. So many different and unique minds. Powerful minds. As it did with Murano... at times in made Wayonn giddy with happiness to be able to feel such a thing again after so many years.

“It was only a fleeting sensation Helen. A sensation of great skill, power and cunning.” He said softly. “And it has... it has been touched by Andro recently.” He looked at Helen with wide eyes. “There is someone on Manne who has been with Androcles very recently. Touched by him within the Etheric realm.”

“A crew member perhaps?” Helen asked. “Manda? She and Andro are very close.”

Wayonn shook his head. “No... this person is no crew member.” He said. “His resonance was...”

Wayonn? Arzoal questioned.

“It was darker than most.” Wayonn answered them. “And hidden in a way I have never seen. The Etheric shields, I felt them for only an instant, but they are among the most powerful I have ever felt. And they were being reinforced by at least one other.”

What do you mean by darker Val'istar? Isheeni asked.

Wayonn looked at her. “Filled with anger and hate.” He replied. “But anger and hate that was very carefully held in check and being channeled.”

“Towards Andro?” Helen asked now.

Wayonn shook his head again. “No. Towards Pusintin and the Kavalians.” He replied meeting her eyes. “Helen... I saw a flash of red eyes. Eyes like you once described to me. Large eyes with eyelids that flashed too quickly. Like a lizard. They were...”

“Evolli?” Helen gasped.

“Yes.” Wayonn told her. “Evolli eyes!”

“Here on Manne!” Helen almost shouted.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. It was male... and he has incredible Etheric shields. I thought you told me Evolli were not able to use Etheric communication.”

“They can not.” Helen answered.

They can not. Unless someone with enough power has gifted them with the ability. Arzoal spoke softly. *Someone like Androcles or his father.*

Helen looked at her suddenly. “Sister... you know that neither of them would ever give this ability to an Evolli. Not after what they did.”

Arzoal met her eyes evenly. *And who among us has picked up and befriended more who were once their enemies sister. Who has the compassion needed to forgive such acts?*

“They are Talon Guardians!” Helen exclaimed.

Torma nodded his massive head. *And part of our sworn duty is to show compassion Feravomir. To all species.*

Isheeni looked at Arzoal. *Mother... remember what the Ancient One Sarlana told us that day when she was here.* Isheeni spoke now. *About those she called Dahakoan. All of them had the same traits within them. A powerful sense of things. Of people and places. That they could be the most savage of soldiers or the most cunning of politicians. That the love of their family was unmatched in any way and many were known to defend their families with vicious fury if they were slighted in any way that did them harm.*

Helen looked between them. “But Andro and Elynth... ever since the end of the war they have avoided any contact with the Evolli. They have gone out of their way to avoid them. They despise them... even more than you and Martin. Torma you know I speak the truth.” She said looking at him.

Torma nodded his head. *Yes... this is true in part.*

They were also once part of the Union until the former government took power sister. Arzoal continued without noticing Torma’s vague answer. *And from all accounts... loyal and trusted members of the Union. Many of their finest scientists and previous government members defected when the war broke out. There were many who did not agree with what their past leaders did. How they became so tightly bound with Keleru and the Kavalians.*

What if... what if Andro and Elynth’s outward stance on the Evolli has been a ruse all of this time? Isheeni asked. *What if they have been concealing their true actions from everyone? She said... Sarlana said that even Martin would not know the lengths to which Andro and Elynth would go to protect their family.*

Would they do that mother? Aradace asked. *After Alba Tau... the horrors they endured there... how could they forgive... how could they forgive that?*

Androcles would not hold an entire species responsible for the crimes of a few. Arzoal spoke confidently now. *Nor would Elynth. They are far stronger than that. They speak with a single voice, just as you and Martin do Torma.* Arzoal looked at him once more as if she finally realized his statement from earlier was very odd. She tilted her head to the side and extended it closer to Torma on her long neck. *You have said very little Torma. Do you know something? What are you not telling us?*

Isheeni looked at Torma. *Husband?*

Torma looked at them and took a deep breath, his massive chest rising and falling with ease. *It will come out sooner than we had expected now that Pian’Nruarani has formed a new government. It was something we*

decided a year after Alba Tau. Martin and Androcles. Elynth and I. It took us many weeks to come to this decision but it was one we all felt we needed to make. He told them. Androcles and Elynth were the ones to reach out even before the last battles were fought. Androcles and Elynth have maintained their deception in order for the Evolli to evolve.

Helen's eyes grew wide. "That is how he got the Auramite!" She announced. "From Vekhin Three! It is the only location of the ore anywhere in the universe!"

It was a gift to him for what he did. Torma said. From the Evolli.

Vekhin Three is within Evolli space sister and... Arzoal's words died in her throat. She looked at Torma once more. Andro and Elynth have been working in secret and repairing the relations with the Evolli haven't they Torma? Helping them to rebuild their worlds and culture?

"And that is why Andro and Elynth disappeared for six weeks shortly after the war ended and only Martin and Riall knew where they were!" Helen said.

Torma nodded his massive head. *The trust was hard to build for obvious reasons, but Androcles would not be deterred. And nor would our daughter. Torma spoke looking at Isheeni. They were liberating several sites within Kavalian space of ancient and priceless Evolli artifacts the Kavalians stole from their capital before the rightful government led the coup that restored them to power. They did this under the guise of revenge against the many crime syndicates because of the T19s.*

"They were raiding Kavalian sites!" Helen exclaimed. "Inside Kavalian space!"

Torma nodded again. *They took half a dozen Durcunusaan, all of them sworn to secrecy, all of them veterans from Alba Tau. Among them were seven Evolli from their Shadow Brigade. They raided nine Kavalian storage facilities over that six week period and lay waste to the many criminal organizations that assisted the Kavalians to cover their true purpose. All of them were deep within Kavalian space or within The Wilds. Only Martin, Riall and I knew what they were doing and that is how we wanted it. Armetus had somehow discovered that Keleru and the Kavalians had prodded the Evolli government into war against us. Helped to fund the old regime through their criminal organizations in taking power from the rightful rulers. This was Martin's way of getting back at them.*

"Why does all this matter now?" Wayonn asked. "And what does it have to do with the man I felt here on Manne?"

Helen turned to look at him. "There is only one reason Androcles would send an Evolli here." She stated confidently. "They are the finest assassins anywhere within the known galaxy. A good portion of their culture is based on this sacred Assassin Society. It is why so many of us within the Union found it hard to deal with them while they were members of the Union. They were obsessively secret about it and never denied that it existed, but they also never confirmed it either. I do not know much of their history, only that this Assassin Quorum dates back many millennia. I did hear rumors that one school had reopened some years ago, but they were also teaching other things beside assassination skills. It was only a rumor and when I asked Martin about it he said he was aware of it and monitoring the situation. I never asked him about it again."

"I thought the Bo'yak species were considered the best assassins." Wayonn asked.

Helen shook her head. "The Bo'yak are nothing but brainless children when compared to the Evolli grandfather. It is one of the main reasons we had such a hard time in the first year of the war with them. They sent dozens of assassins against Martin, Andro and the Queens as well as Riall and many of our senior officers. One team even tried to reach Deia on Apo Prime. None of them succeeded in their goals but it wasn't until we had destroyed their ability to train new assassins, destroyed their academies, that we began to get the upper hand."

If there is an Evolli on Manne and he has the resonance of Androcles on him... there is only one reason for that. Arzoal said.

Helen nodded her head in agreement. "He is here to insure that Pusintin dies. He must have come from among Manda's forces. And he may not be alone."

The Ancient One was not entirely truthful with us. Isheeni said. Why would she not warn us that they would do something like this?

"She was truthful." Helen said shaking her head. "She just does not know Andro and Elynth the way we do. She does not know what..."

...What drives them. Or what they are capable of. Arzoal spoke now. *We saw this in them before. During the Talon Guardian ceremony. The reverence in their eyes when they were given the title and the brand. It became part of them.*

“We should tell Martin.” Wayonn said instantly.

“No!” Helen declared. “No! We can say nothing!”

“What?” Wayonn gasped. “Why?”

“If Androcles sent him here it is for only one purpose.” Helen told him. “We must not interfere. We do not know the orders Andro gave to this man.”

“He would not hurt anyone within Andro’s family if what you say is true.” Wayonn protested.

Helen shook her head. “No... but he may not allow himself to be taken alive either. He will not... one of the founding creeds of this Assassin’s Society was that they would never fail. And if they failed they would take their own lives. If we tell Martin, we will have the blood of this man on our hands because Martin will try to stop him.”

But isn’t killing his brother the reason we are doing this Feravomir? Aradace asked now. *The reason we have lured him here? To remove the stain upon the honor of King Martin’s family and met out justice for what he did to For’mya?*

Wayonn stepped closer to his granddaughter as realization came over him. “He is here to keep Martin from doing it.” He rasped.

Helen nodded her head slowly. “That is the way Androcles thinks.” She said. “*Carians*... I should have seen this before! I should have seen it in him when we talked before I left to come here. He has been planning this all along!”

You of all people should know that Andro and Elynth will never reveal what resides in their heads Feravomir. In the deepest portions of their minds and hearts. Torma told her. *I would be guessing... but I doubt even Andro’s mates or Anthar have any idea what my daughter and Andro are truly capable of. There is a stain upon the honor and integrity of the Leonidas name in Androcles’s eyes. That stain is Pusintin!*

Helen looked at him as he finished speaking and she finally understood. “But in Andro’s eyes there would be an even greater stain upon his father’s honor and dignity if he takes the life of his own brother.” She gasped.

Torma nodded his massive head. *Yes.*

“That is not a burden Androcles will allow his father to bear.” Helen said softly.

“So we do nothing?” Wayonn asked.

Helen looked at him. “Pusintin will die this day grandfather.”

“I don’t question that. Or the need for it.” Wayonn told her. “I have been Lycavorian for more than forty thousand years! It is what Sumar would have done. It is what I would do.”

Helen shook her head. “No... we will do nothing.” She said. “Pusintin... Pleistarchus... whatever name you chose to use for him, he will die for what he did to Andro’s mother... and the dishonor he has heaped upon the Lycavorian people and the Leonidas name with his actions through the years.”

“Then the only question is who will get to him first.” Wayonn spoke softly.

“Martin would give him a quick death...” Helen stated as she looked to the north and the mountains there. “Androcles Leonidas will not.”

MANNE DECOY BASE

Koguth stood in the center of the secondary base taking in the blood and death all around him. There was very little left of the men who entered the perimeter of the decoy base. The ambush had worked to perfection and the mines had done most of the killing for them. He could see the odd body part lying among the smoking ruins and the pools of blood and gore that were scattered all about. He felt no remorse for his actions or the actions of the men and women he commanded this day. There men were butchers of the worst kind. Kavalians who enjoyed the power and control they had over average people. They reveled in the fear that they

induced in men and women. Most of them had probably committed more crimes against their own people than they had against anyone else. Their deaths would not be missed in the greater scheme of things and Koguth gave their passing barely a thought. His keen eyes took in his men as they moved among the bodies and body parts to insure none remained alive. The order had gone out from Anja Leonidas that no Puma Bane soldier would be treated if found alive and wounded. They would be executed on sight and King Leonidas had not countermanded that order. This told Koguth that his Queens wielded far more power and influence than many gave them credit for and they undoubtedly spoke with Martin's voice.

Yet something nagged at him in his gut. He had fought far too many battles to take anything for granted. This had been far too easy. He shifted his P190A5 to his opposite arm and squatted in the bloody grass, his eyes sweeping the area around him. He looked at the severed leg that lay only a few feet from him intently. He looked up and watched as Akor'dris worked her way through the bodies with Bae'diraz at her side. The two beautiful Drow females had been a catalyst for many of the young warriors among his Pride. They saw the exquisite combat skills both female elves had, as well as the direct line to King Leonidas, and it only served to show his men that anything they desired was obtainable. When the Drow Akor'dris and Bae'diraz had begun training his men in skills they did not have, all of them absorbed their teachings without question. New skills and ways of doing things would only allow them to be better at what they did and they embraced this mentality.

"General?" Mata's voice broke him out of his thoughts and Koguth stood back up and looked at him.

"It was too easy Mata." Koguth said softly watching as Jormal came up beside him and Akor'dris and Bae'diraz moved within the small circle.

"The ambush was perfect General." Mata said.

Koguth nodded. "Yes. Too perfect. And they bumbled into it like untrained recruits."

"You did say that the Puma Bane had become overconfident and arrogant through the years General." Jormal told him.

"Yes... but this?" Koguth looked around the clearing. He turned and looked at Akor'dris as she stopped beside him. "How many did you chase down?" He asked.

"Seventeen made it out of the kill zone." Akor'dris answered. "None made it more than a few hundred meters before we caught them."

Koguth looked at Mata. "You knew the commander Mata? He was Puma Bane?"

Mata nodded his head. "Qallin. Scum of the worst kind. He liked to inflict pain on his prisoners."

Koguth bent over and carefully picked up the severed leg. The end was ragged with strips of skin dangling from the gory appendage. "Does this look like a boot that a Puma Bane would be allowed to maintain Mata?"

Mata looked at the limb and for the first time he noticed the scuffed and worn combat boot attached to the foot. He reached out and took the limb from Koguth and turned it over in his hands before beginning to unlaced the boot. He got it done half way and then peeled back the tongue of the boot. His dark eyes grew darker still and he looked at Koguth.

"Whoever these men were they were not Puma Bane." He stated simply.

"What?" Jormal gasped. "How do you know?"

Mata flipped over the tongue of the boot and showed it to Jormal. "Every Puma Bane had his identification number stamped on every part of his gear. The inside of the tongues of the boots for example. There is no stamp." He turned back to Koguth. "Whoever they were... they were not Puma Bane."

"Then who?" Bae'diraz asked quickly. "They moved and acted like well trained soldiers."

Koguth nodded his head slowly. "If I had to guess I would say he had more troops within the Task Force than he let on to others. At least a company of them, which would account for this number here." He said. "It is the only explanation. They must have joined us right before we left Nefoa and he has kept them hidden. He landed them as well to..."

"To what?" Akor'dris asked.

"To conceal what the Puma Bane are really doing." Koguth said meeting her eyes.

"He would not send a large force after Queen For'mya." Mata said. "In his twisted mind he thinks she wishes to be with him and he will not have trouble with her."

"Sucks to be him then." Jormal stated.

“Capturing King Martin’s main base on the planet would have been a priority. It would have infrastructure and already be established. But Base One is a hundred kilometers away from here and sitting under those Shroud fields. He would not know that this was only a decoy base.” Mata said.

“No... he would not know that.” Koguth said.

“If he did not send them here... then where are they?” Jormal asked.

Mata’s eyes grew a little wider. “Koguth?”

Koguth nodded his head. “Yes Mata. You are correct.”

“Shit!” Mata snarled.

“Jormal... please pass through our implants to all of our people that if they are out in the open... run for cover right fucking now!” Koguth told him.

“General?” Jormal looked at him.

Koguth fought down the urge to look around but he could sense the increased alertness of Akor'dris and Bae'diraz beside him. “Please issue the order Jormal. Quickly.”

Akor'dris looked at him. “We will take our force and sweep along the eastern flank.” She told him.

Koguth nodded his head. “An excellent idea. However... right now I think we should get out of the open. Right fucking now!”

“Run!” Mata screamed loudly to all within earshot. “Run for cover now!”

No one hesitated in their actions and the many Lycavorian and Kavalian soldiers began to scatter like roaches just as the buzz saw like sound of heavy cannons began to fill the air and begin to tear up the ground where they had been standing only seconds before.

Qallin’s Second Officer held back the scream of rage he wanted to release as their eyes detected the many figures in the center of the clearing scatter after several shouted commands, just as his men behind the light chain cannons began to open fire. He cursed under his breath now as he realized they had only caught a few in the open, watching as they went down, while the others disappeared back into their trenches.

“We waited too long!” He hissed angrily. “We waited too long! Fuck!”

“This is not their main base Lieutenant!” The senior enlisted Puma Bane snapped from beside him. “They butchered the Reactionary Company!”

“I can see that Marraon!” Gumat’Chialia growled savagely. “Shift the left section further north! Have them move up on their right flank!” He barked the order. “Have a five man team drop and sweep further west from our location! They must have some sort of support base nearby! They would not be out here alone without support!”

“How do we know that?” Marraon hissed. “We have never fought Union forces directly! We do not know how they operate!”

Gumat whirled on the man. “No force that large would be out here without a support base!” He snarled. “We must find it and destroy it. Then we can roll up their individual forces at will! They can’t have more than a few hundred men and women down there and we all know women are good only for fucking! Send the patrol and do it quickly! We have them pinned down for now and we must maintain the advantage!”

Koguth lay at the bottom of the trench with Mata and Jormal on either side of them as another intense volley from light chain cannons swept across the top of the trench kicking up dirt and bits of shattered logs.

“How many?” Koguth barked into his implant.

“...tell for sure General!” The voice echoed. “At least a dozen or so of our people were caught in the open and went down!”

“Fuck!” Koguth spoke savagely.

“They are directing their light cannons on both trench locations! We are pinned down for the moment!” The voice reported.

“Akor'dris?” Koguth spat.

“We made it out of the kill zone!” Her voice answered instantly and Koguth was impressed at the sense of calm he heard given their current situation.

“Location?” Koguth asked her.

“East of you, below the ridge!” Akor'dris answered. “General... we were in position to see a small unit break from their main force on the opposite ridge. They are heading north towards our support location.”

“How many?” Koguth demanded.

“At least four... perhaps more.” She answered him.

“They are looking for our support base.” Mata chimed in now. “If they find it they will attack in force. It is a standard Puma Bane tactic. Remove whatever support we might have and then they will concentrate on destroying us.”

“I don't much envy being destroyed today!” Jormal chimed in.

Mata couldn't help but grin at the almost causal way Jormal spoke. “Nor do I my friend.” He answered.

“Akor'dris... is Jothor near your location?” Koguth asked. He didn't see Akor'dris turn her head and look at the young Kavalian who had come here hoping to take Iama'Juturi as his wife and instead had found the attentions of a dark haired female elf much more to his liking. She was an engineer and Jothor found her to be not only ravishing in her beauty, but so much more intelligent than himself. They had spent every waking moment these last weeks together while she eagerly schooled him in anything he wanted to know. Their relationship had grown very serious just last week as they slept together for the first time and Jothor had showered her beautiful face and body with kisses and licks when he had locked groins with her. She had held him tightly whispering adoring encouragements into his ears for the entire two hours they were locked together until she had fallen asleep in his arms spent. Jothor had rolled over and held her to him protectively even as he too had drifted into sleep with the hopes of the future in front of him.

“He is right beside me.” She answered.

“Jothor!” Koguth spoke now. “Did you bring your special friend?”

The young Kavalian answered immediately. “Always General.”

“Then... if you would not mind... please remove the fools firing those heavy weapons on us.” Koguth spoke calmly.

“Understood general.” Jothor answered.

Jormal looked at Koguth. “Special friend?” He asked.

Koguth grinned at him. “Jothor is the finest shot I have seen in my lifetime.” He told him. “The boy bleeds distance, wind and impact points. Give him a moment and you will see what I mean. He has been shooting long guns since he was a boy. Taught to him by his father. He has a very particular hatred for Puma Bane after they took his father from him in a Tazli Root induced fever some years ago. He was a fine leader of men and a good friend. Jothor will “save our bacon” as I heard Queen Anja state several times since we have been here.”

“And then?” Jormal asked.

“Then we will do exactly what King Leonidas is so feared for throughout the stars.” Koguth told him. “We will ambush the ambushers!”

Akor'dris looked at Jothor as he pulled the canvas bag from his back with speed born of experience and skill. She watched as he unzipped it and she saw the matte black frame of the High Coven G21 Sniper Rifle. She instantly knew what Koguth wanted him to do. She dug in her own butt pack for the cylindrical scope and tossed it to Bae'diraz who sat a few feet away.

“Bae... spot for him.” She exclaimed and then looked at the two Kavalians, three Spartan soldiers and one female Lycavorian who were nearby where they had ended up. “Cover both corners of the ridge! Do not let any of them flank us!”

The six simply nodded and began to scramble to positions, dragging others with them. Akor'dris looked at Jothor as he finished attaching the scope.

“Can you hit them from here Jothor?” She asked. “They are uphill and nearly a kilometer away through vegetation.”

Jothor grinned at her as he chambered the first round into the G21. "Special loads." He told her. "I make my own ammunition and I have hit targets at three kilometers away in worse conditions."

Jothor rolled back over and crawled quickly up to where Bae'diraz was lying among the thin, eighteen inch high grass covering the ridge. "Bae'diraz?" He questioned as he slid the G21 out in front of him and settled to the ground comfortably behind the weapon.

"I can only see three guns." She stated confidently. "Two of them... two hundred and fifteen degrees and one point two kilometers. The third is at two hundred and thirty-eight degrees and one point four kilometers. He is the one putting the most fire onto the General's trench line."

"Then I will take him first." Jothor spoke as he settled in behind the weapon and brought his eye up to the scope. He felt Akor'dris settle beside him on the ground, pushing her P190 out in front of her. One kilometer for the P190 was not a far shot Jothor knew and as his scope came into focus and he saw the first gunner. He was semi prone behind his light chain gun, putting a four second burst into the area above the trench every few seconds. Jothor also took in the man beside him who was feeding him the large magazines of ammunition as quickly as he went through them. "I have him." He stated calmly.

Jothor took a deep breath and released it slowly as his scope centered on the side of the Puma Bane soldier's head. His father had been meticulous in teaching him how to shoot when he was a boy. It was one of the many things his father, a stern Kavalian who was cut from the same mold as General Koguth, had taught him before Puma Bane scum had taken him from his family. Jothor blanked out everything but his target and his finger went from the trigger guard to the button trigger. He preferred the High Coven Sniper Rifle for its built in buffers and less weight. The Union Sniper Rifle was much more powerful and had longer range, but it sacrificed the ability to be mobile for these things. The G21 also had an integrated silencer that would muffle most of the weapons report. Jothor depressed the trigger button with barely a thought and sent the first 14.8mm explosive tipped caseless round downrange. He was shifting his scope to the next gun before the Puma Bane's gunner's head erupted in a spray of blood, bone and fur.

Gumat heard the wet plopping sound above the roar of the three light chain guns and his head jerked around just in time to see the head of the gunner closest to him blow apart, bits of flesh and blood showering the man's assistant gunner with gore. His mind tried to process how this had happened even as the second gunner's head erupted in an explosion of equally violent proportions, his head suddenly just gone. Gumat whirled to scream a warning to the third gunner but as his mouth opened to shout that they were under attack, the man's body jerked and he was flung away from the gun, a gaping wound where his shoulder and part of his neck had once been.

"Sniper!" Gumat finally managed to scream. "Sniper!"

That one word sent many of the Puma Bane into a fit. Among Gumat's men were only two who had ever experienced the fear and unknown when being under fire from a sniper hidden far away. Both of them had died behind the guns they were manning. The High Coven had many sniper rifles in their inventory, however for some reason they were few and far between out in the field with the actual troops. Robert Moran had never used Sniper Teams against the Kavalians for reasons which no one would ever discover now.

The moment the third gunner died, the Puma Bane knew something was wrong and they began to look around for who was within their perimeter killing their men. They could see their leader Gumat shouting orders at them, but all any close to him could hear over the ringing in their ears from the constant hammering of the chain cannons was muffled sounds. Their eyes grew wide in horror when they all saw Gumat rise to his knees screaming at them and his head suddenly blew apart like an overripe Kavalian Balcor melon. The 14.8mm explosive tipped round fired from the G21 hit precisely where Jothor had aimed the moment he saw the Puma Bane leader foolishly rise to his knees. Jothor had shifted fire instantly and fired within half a second. The round entered just beneath the base of Gumat's skull and a tenth of a second after impact the round exploded. Gumat's head disappeared in a fine spray of blood and flesh and the Puma Bane lost their second officer.

And all pretense of control of their actions vanished with his death.

Jothor lifted his eye from his scope and tapped his jaw activating his implant. “General! I have taken out the guns and what appears to be the detachment’s second officer!”

He didn’t see Mata turn to look at Koguth from where they lay in the trench and then tap his own jaw. “Jothor... are you certain?” Mata demanded.

Jothor didn’t hesitate. “Maroon shoulder boards with white trim Major.” Jothor answered him with his recognized rank. “He was directing the guns and was trying to rally them.”

“Now general!” They heard Mata speak in their implants. “We need to attack now!”

Koguth didn’t hesitate either. “Akor'dris... leave two with Jothor and then break your people off and sweep back southwest to the support position. Intercept those Puma Bane scum who were moving there! Mataen and Nedoli are pilots by nature and while capable, they will not be able to stand against a full squad of Puma Bane!”

“Moving!” Akor'dris answered instantly Jothor saw. It was one of the reasons that those among the Juturi Pride had developed an intense respect for the Drow female warrior. She was without fear and acted without hesitation.

Jothor tapped his jaw again. “General... I will move to a more elevated position and cover your attack!”

“I will go with him!” Bae'diraz spoke immediately.

“Two minutes Jothor!” Koguth’s voice told him. “Then we will attack from the west!”

Jothor didn’t pause and pushed back from the lip of the ridge, seeing Akor'dris and at least two dozen others sprinting off into the timber to the southwest. “I saw an outcropping a hundred meters from here!” He exclaimed as he slammed a fresh magazine into the G21. “This way!”

Jothor moved with speed and grace considering his six foot three frame, Bae'diraz and two Lycavorians moving swiftly behind him.

Pusintin gazed into the mouth of the cave entrance, his weapon trained on the opening as the Puma Bane with him began to move into a defensive position around the entrance. There were natural defensive positions already in place. Rock outcroppings as well as fallen logs and it was these that the Puma Bane moved into.

“It was foolish to hide her here Marshall.” Kirr spoke as he knelt next to Pusintin. “It is a natural funnel of death because of the terrain and they have left prepared positions for us to use to defend.”

Pusintin nodded his head as he looked around. “My brother isn’t as smart as he likes to think he is. He didn’t have enough men to secure this location and was hoping I would attack the main camp first. He wanted to kill me there.” He said feeling full of himself. “Kirr... leave your second in command and pick four others to enter with us.” He said as he inhaled deeply and could easily detect For'mya’s sweet orchid scent from within the cave. Her delicious scent surged through his senses and he remembered well the moments she had been under him, her whimpers of delight filling his ears. Pusintin also could also detect the scents of what could only be the children she had bore him, including the boy child. “I can smell them inside.” He stated. “They are fearful.”

Kirr only nodded his head as he pointed at two others to come to him. He trusted fully in his Marshall and his skills. “As they should be. You will teach her to be a proper Kavalian female Marshall.” He said.

Pusintin grinned cruelly. “Yes I will.” He agreed. “Let’s go!” He stated as he began moving into the cave.

...like about sixty to seventy Skipper. Cody spoke in a whisper within Mindvoice even though he knew none of the Puma Bane troops below him could detect his words. Bunched up as all hell too. Me and Garan are above them about a hundred and fifty meters away on the west slope. They’re moving into the positions we left... stupid fuckers!

We’re almost there Cody! Martin answered him instantly.

Cody could detect that Martin was still in wolf form and sprinting through the timber in their connection. He could also sense the others of their team descending around the entrance of the cave quickly and without sound. They were moving urgently yes, but none of them were in panic mode just yet. All of them had

good friends back on Earth, but they had fought and bled with Martin Leonidas on more occasions than any of them could recall. All of them owed him their lives dozens of times over, and not just for changing them all those years ago. They would all die for him without reservation. Even through the years that had passed since they had come into the future, no matter the distance that was between them, Martin always stayed in touch with each and every one of them in one form or another. They were not just his team, they were his family, and he was theirs.

Have the two big guys set up just above the entrance Skipper. Cody told him calmly. *They'll chew them up with those chain guns and everyone else will have clear fields of fire.*

Danny! Martin rasped out the word.

Got it! Dan answered immediately. *Team Two... we'll take north!*

Team One on the east! Martin hissed.

Cody looked at Garan who pulled his eye away from the scope on his P190 and grinned. *Ready to party?* He asked.

Garan returned the infectious grin and nodded slowly.

Anja Leonidas was sprinting as fast as her four legs would carry her, her Persian red fur a blur through the timber all around them. Atropos's larger form moved beside her with ease. He had run with his Queen at many different times through the years and he was always impressed how completely she had taken to being a female wolf. She was nearly as large as his sister Aricia when in wolf form, which was unusual to say the least. Usually when they shifted, their wolf forms took on at least some of the proportions of their human forms when compared to size and weight. Anja Leonidas however, she gained nearly forty pounds of muscle when in wolf form and Atropos could only surmise it was because of her Hadarian genes. His dark eyes quickly took in the three *Durcunusaan* who were running on their flanks, maintaining tactical distance as they closed on the cave.

Lover! Anja broke into Mindvoice with a tone filled with more calm than Atropos knew she felt. *We are approaching the path and will come straight up it and draw their attention!*

Red! What the hell are you doing out here? Martin demanded.

The same thing you are doing you big oaf! Anja snapped right back. *Protecting what I love!*

Shit! Martin exclaimed.

Please no arguing my loves! For'mya's musical voice filled their heads now, her ever calm and elven nature coming forth no matter the danger she knew she was in. *We can punish Anja later in more pleasant surroundings and I would much prefer we kill these fools so that we can exit this cave. The dampness in here is ruining my hair.*

We will lick you dry Kinsoargai! Aricia echoed within their minds.

Well... that sounds very promising! For'mya answered with soft laughter.

Mothers! Eirene exclaimed now. *Do you mind? Fedor and I can hear you very well thank you!*

Anja laughed gently with her fellow Queens in the connection until they heard Martin's voice.

Enough! Martin's commanding voice brought silence to them. *Kalis?*

I am entering the escape tunnel now Uncle! Kalis's voice echoed though Martin couldn't see his wolf body squeezing into the one meter wide tunnel Torma had burned through the back of the cave with his superheated breath.

Twenty seconds! Martin hissed. *Kill all the shit sorry fuckers! No prisoners! My brother is mine though!*

EDGE OF MANNE SYSTEM PRALOR VECTOR-CLASS ATTACK CRUISER HARMONY

...No prisoners! My brother is mine though!

Valael heard the soft gasp and he looked at where Tobia and Tinra sat across the table from him. The three of them had been following what was happening with great interest. It seemed that there were dozens of

drones scattered all across the planet and they had witnessed the battle between Koguth and his attackers, as well as they counterattack that they had just launched against those who thought they had his forces trapped. They had also been utterly shocked to feel Martin and all those above a Tier Five Etheric level speaking quite freely. None of them had been around so many who commanded such a resonance within the Etheric realm and spoke with such clarity and force of will that they could be heard even where they were on their ship.

Tinra looked at him when they heard Martin speak that last phrase.

“No prisoners?” She gasped. “They will... they will kill them all?”

Tobia looked at her. “Every one of those commanded by Martin Leonidas’s brother and who landed on the planet knew what they were coming to do Tinra. How do you show mercy to men who have nothing but rape and murder on their minds?”

Tinra shook her head. “I’m not... I’m not saying it is not deserved Tobia.” She responded to her. “But to hear... to hear him give the order with such conviction. I have... I have never heard such a commanding presence in an order.”

Valael nodded his head. “I don’t believe any of us have.” He said. “Not since the... not since the Praetorians walked among us. He is merciless towards his enemies; we have seen that so far and read it within the information given to us. He has lost a few battles... but he has never lost a war.”

“He... he reminds me so much of Murano.” Tobia spoke softly as she remembered him with great love. His arms encircling her, his Etheric resonance filling the air around her. It was the most peaceful and exciting time of her life, not to mention the nights he had made love to her with breathless abandon.

They all turned when the door to the conference room opened and Kitor strode in with the data pad in his hand.

“Elder Valael... I have just received a request from someone called Admiral Lorian.” He spoke as he came up beside him.

Valael came to his feet. “That is the commander of his ships in this sector.” He said.

Kitor nodded. “Using her authority as Commander of this Sector of space as she put it... she has requested that we load as many combat troops as we have and move to Manne to reinforce their main position. This Base One they call it.”

Valael looked at him surprised. “She requested this?”

Kitor nodded his head. “She told me that the King does not want to get us involved, but since she is Sector Commander, it is better to be safe than sorry. Those were her words.”

“She countermands her King’s orders?” Tinra asked.

Kitor looked at her. “According to her... he would expect his senior officers to act on their own initiative. He encourages this in his officers. She also said that technically Martin Leonidas considers her a member of his family and she’ll will be damned if she allows any harm to come to them.” Kitor looked at Valael. “What does this mean? She will be damned?”

Valael smiled. “I believe it is a figure of speech Kitor. One that means she will do whatever is necessary to safeguard those she cares for.”

Tobia nodded her head as she got to her feet. “Something any family member of a Praetorian would do.” She said.

Valael nodded. “Indeed.” He said. “Kitor... how soon can you do this?” He asked.

Kitor met his eyes with something akin to disgust in them. “Please Elder Valael.” He stated. “My men have been waiting for just this opportunity! To say they were present to witness a Praetorian in action will be a story that they can tell their children and grand children about Elder Valael.”

Valael smiled. “Then we will accompany you. And we should leave now!”

Pusintin brought them up short just inside the cave entrance as their eyes adjusted to the much dimmer light. They could detect the glow from portable light globes further down the tunnel reflecting off the moistness of the cavern walls.

As with most times throughout his violent life, Pusintin got it wrong once more when he used his wolf senses. He had been away from his people for far too long and the simple nuances that all Lycavorians took for

granted in their lives, Pusintin had long since forgotten. He could detect For'mya's scent easily now, but he detected no fear or indecision in her scent which told him that she was waiting for him willingly. That she did desire him more than his fool brother. This caused his chest to swell in anticipation of feeling her lush body under him once more. He didn't know what it was about her that caused him to desire her far more than he had ever desired Jalersi, but the emotion was there, and it was being returned to him from what he could smell. He would enjoy claiming her in front of his brother, making her scream for more as his brother's life drained from his body and he could do nothing. The moment on Enurrura was long forgotten from his memory and it would be a costly mistake. One of the many he had made since agreeing and going forward with the idea that For'mya would return the throne of his father back to him.

He turned slowly to Kirr. "Leave two men to defend the entrance. They are to allow no one to enter without my permission. Any who attempt they are to kill."

Kirr nodded his head and motioned to the two Puma Bane in the rear of the short column and they nodded their understanding. He looked back to Pusintin. "Should I send the others to scout ahead Marshall?" He asked.

Pusintin shook his head. "That won't be necessary. She's waiting for me." He answered.

Kirr looked at him somewhat surprised at this statement. His combat instincts should have told him something was off about this, but he had never known the Marshall to be wrong.

"You... you are certain Marshall?" He asked.

Pusintin nodded. "I can smell her. And her scent tells me she is waiting for me."

"As you order." Kirr spoke.

"We will move into a spread as we enter the main cave Kirr. She may be waiting for us, but there is no telling how many traps my stupid brother may have left to stop me from claiming what is mine." Pusintin said. "Be alert."

For'mya Leonidas was indeed waiting for him.

Waiting with murder in her beautiful, dark brown eyes.

One of the many things her beloved Martin Leonidas and her fellow Queens and lovers had taught her through the years, since the very day Martin turned her really, was the innate ability to project indifference with her scent. Her natural elven calm allowed her to master this skill very early on, and even though fear and hate coursed through her veins at this moment, she held it in check by her will and did not allow it to filter into her scent. For'mya knew she could not pull this off if she was in Phase, nor could any female wolf; it simply saturated their scents no matter what they did. Eirene was the only female wolf she had ever known who could totally suppress her fever as she had done and that was only because of what Androcles had passed to her and her brother within her womb. Now though, now it was easy for her to do this. It was partly because of this skill yes, but more so because For'mya knew Martin and the others would allow no harm to come to her. She had utter faith in their total love for her, and their willingness to inflict destruction upon those who would do her harm. Or any they considered their children. For'mya had discovered that this violent but protective trait was far more prevalent in Aricia and Anja as female wolves, and this was the main reason she was drawn more to the two of them. Dysea and Isabella had this trait she knew, as Cirith now did, but it was much more pronounced in Aricia and Anja as it was within her because of the time they had spent together through the years.

For'mya Leonidas's life had come full circle now. Once a concubine and now a Queen of the Lycavorian Union. She had never imagined herself in such a position, but For'mya would relinquish it for no one now. The love she shared with her fellow Queens and lovers was nearly as brilliant as the love they all shared for the one man who could steal their breath away with a simple caress. They never doubted one another, were never jealous of one another and they always spoke with the same voice no matter the subject.

For'mya smiled gently as the thought echoed within her mind. If someone had suggested this is what her life would be like before Martin Leonidas had saved her from that High Coven prison all those years ago, For'mya would have laughed hysterically at that person, before trying to have them committed.

For'mya could feel Fedor and Eirene on either side of her, Fedor ready to call his knives from Flatspace in a simple blink, and Eirene ready to pounce like a she-wolf on her first hunt. She glanced first at Fedor and

then Eirene and could feel only love and pride swell within her at who they had become in so short a time. It was then she felt the overwhelming emotions that came from them and projected outward. Love and a devoted sense of family. Another of the gifts that Androcles had given them when he touched their minds and bestowed awareness to them while still in her womb. When For'mya thought all had been lost; that her beloved Martin was dead and she would never see her fellow Queens again; it had been Androcles who had never given up. It was now, through Fedor and Eirene, that For'mya could feel the horror at what he was driven to do. To attack one he had called mother all of his life, this For'mya knew must have been a sin above all others in Androcles's eyes. Yet it was the only way to insure that she did not give up all hope. That she remained strong and kept her wits about her even in the grips of the shame she felt. For'mya knew that Andro was the only one with the strength to do this, as well as the only one who could have awakened Fedor and Eirene in the fashion he did. All to insure that she was not lost to abyss. She could feel their brother within them; how they both felt for Androcles. He had touched them, given them awareness and the means to insure that they were strong for all of them. As they had come to find out in these last weeks, he also passed to them knowledge and skills that should have taken them centuries to master. All to insure that they survived until Martin came for them.

Martin did come and...

For'mya dropped her hands to her sides and gripped each of their hands in hers when the faint scrapping reached her wolf ears. She felt them squeeze tightly in return.

Remain in control always. For'mya spoke to them softly within Mindvoice. *No matter what happens, no matter what spills from his foul mouth, do not act until I give you the word.*

Fedor nodded his head slowly. *We understand.* He said.

Mother... are you and father sure he can not hear us? Eirene asked.

For'mya shook her head. *We would sense his Etheric resonance.* She answered instantly. *No... he never advanced his Etheric abilities past a rudimentary stage. Your father knew this when he tried to kill your grandmother all those years ago. And again on Enurrua. He is a brute and nothing more.*

There are three others with him mother. Fedor spoke. *Kavalian.*

Yes.

That is two more than we thought he would enter with. Eirene said.

Stay calm. For'mya told them. *Your family will allow nothing to happen to us.*

For'mya did not tell them she could sense Kalis close by in his wolf form. They may have been adults in physical and mental terms, but Fedor and Eirene still lacked the experience of age and the direct schooling of Androcles that Kalis had been given even if it was only a simple interactive holo program. For'mya was the only one who could detect Kalis she knew. He was remaining close to the escape tunnel so that his scent was carried out of the cavern and he could not be detected by even his father's sense of smell, though Pusintin's nose and skill was no where near as keen as Martin's. Knowing that Kalis was so close by gave For'mya added confidence. Pusintin had no idea the transformation that had taken place within his son Kalis. It was truly a wondrous thing to see knowing the life he had to live before Martin had showed him what he could have. Seeing Kalis holding Serale outside their shelter in the mornings, content to simply caress her cheek and neck and absorb her scent was all the proof any of them needed really. Even Helen was without doubt when it came to him, and she had spent quite a bit of time with him since he had joined them. The door was now open to a myriad of future life actions that Kalis now had the opportunity to experience. It was a life and a family that he had fully embraced.

For'mya's head jerked slightly and her eyes cut to the opening into the cavern they were in when she saw him cautiously poke the barrel of his weapon around the corner and come fully into view.

Coward.

It was the only word that filled her mind now as she saw him once more.

"So you finally decided to act." For'mya spoke out loud, her words dripping with sarcasm and contempt, as she knew Pusintin would expect. "I was wondering when you would grab your *nor* and come for me."

Pusintin felt his heart jump a little when he saw her standing there. The ArmorPly did nothing to hide her firm elven body and his eyes noticed that her chest had grown larger. It was something he had not noticed

on Enurrua, but something that he was happy with. The drugs had worked even on her as they had most Kavalian women who used the accelerated fetus growth hormone.

“So you finally decided to act.” Her voice reached out for him. “I was wondering when you would grab your *nor* and come for me.”

Pusintin felt Kirr break to his right and the other two Puma Bane soldiers to his left, their weapons and eyes sweeping the medium sized cave. He didn't take his eyes off For'mya, his assault rifle never wavering from the center of her chest. Her sweet orchid scent filled his senses now and was charging him with energy and lust.

“I see you missed me.” Pusintin finally spoke.

“I despise you!” For'mya hissed out the words. “You are a *nubous* brute and nothing more than that!”

“You weren't saying that when I was plowing your tight little pussy into the bed and hitting you with my aura For'mya.” Pusintin growled at her. “You begged me to do you harder if I recall.”

“The curse of being a female wolf.” For'mya stated flatly. “I hated when Martin did that to me and I could refuse him nothing. At least he put emotion into it however.”

Pusintin moved closer to her, his rifle staying on her chest, and he released his full male wolf aura directly at her. For'mya groaned in need and Pusintin saw the flush of her skin as she reacted to his presence. “How's that for emotion you bitch!” He snarled at her.

For'mya shuddered in sexual need and her brown eyes seemed to glaze over in unwanted lust. “Bastard!” She hissed out the words.

Fedor and Eirene were looking at her with wide eyes as she reacted in the manner she did and Pusintin laughed at their stunned expressions. “Guess you never told them how things work did you?” He said.

“Mother?” Eirene gasped. “What is wrong?”

“I fucked her real good, that's what's wrong!” Pusintin spat. “I claimed her when her mate was dead! Or she thought he was.” He laughed. “And when I squirted you two into her belly she became bound to me for all time! Doesn't matter that my fucking brother was still alive! Besides... he'll be dead soon enough!”

“You lie!” Fedor shouted as he looked at the Puma Bane soldier who got close enough to poke him with his rifle.

“What's your name boy?” Pusintin demanded.

“*Nubou* you!” Fedor spat at him.

Pusintin moved fast for a man his size and he stepped into the straight right cross that hit Fedor squarely in the jaw and pummeled him to the ground. To Fedor's credit he sprang right back to his feet, though somewhat dazed, his lips bloody and he reached for his right arm to draw out one of his knives.

“Don't!” The Puma Bane behind him barked as he jammed his rifle into Fedor's back.

Pusintin laughed when Fedor froze and he let his rifle drop lower. “I'll teach you manners boy. And who your betters are!”

“You will teach me nothing!” Fedor hissed back at him.

“I'll teach you how to be a man!” Pusintin spat right back at him. “Something my brother will never be!”

“*MedwanGai* is more of a man than you will ever be!” Eirene screeched.

Pusintin looked at her, her use of the ancient Lycavorian language lost on him, taking in her extensive beauty and how she looked so much like her mother. He glanced at For'mya, who was still reacting to his male aura so close to her now, and he smiled.

“She's nice and firm For'mya.” He stated. “My men will enjoy her for days. She looks really fuckable... and I understand she is already fucking a biogenic Kavalian. Muton's son isn't it?” Pusintin smiled. “So she is already used to big Kavalian cocks! Has he locked groins with you yet little girl?”

Eirene could not contain herself or her anger and she spit directly into his face with as much force as she was able. Kirr was the one who kept her from striking Pusintin as he stepped up to her and wrapped his thick arms around her tightly, effectively immobilizing her small frame. Pusintin wiped the spittle from his face and smiled at her cruelly. “You are spirited... I'll give you that.” He stated.

“I am not afraid of you!” Eirene screamed angrily.

Pusintin chuckled just before he lashed out with a backhand that hit Eirene and rocked her head back even though Kirr was holding her tight.

“Eirene!” Fedor screamed in rage, moving to defend his twin but stopping when he felt the rifle jabbed painfully into his back.

“Don’t move little boy!” The Puma Bane soldier grumbled at him.

Pusintin was smiling when he glanced at Fedor and then back to Eirene. “You shouldn’t be afraid of me elf bitch. I’m not the one who is going to fuck you every day for the rest of your life. By the time my men are done with you, you’ll be begging them to fuck you all the time. All you elf bitches, even the half breeds; all of you can’t get enough of big cocks. Just ask your slut mother! You’ll be a real nice addition to the brothels on Nefoa when we get back!”

“I would like her first Marshall Pusintin.” Kirr grinned as he spoke, his hands roaming around in front of Eirene and over her full breasts even though he could feel nothing through the ArmorPly she wore.

“Never!” Eirene screamed. “I will never submit to you!”

Pusintin was about to answer when the easily discernible sound of hand portable Union chain cannons split the air, followed half a second later by a massive volume of Union P190 fire and their distinctive buzz saw like sound. Three muffled explosions shook the very ground they stood upon as his COM unit suddenly came alive, as did all their individual COM units. They came alive with the terrified voice of Kirr’s second in command.

“...all around us!” His voice screamed. “Above us... like demons... all directions! The positions were... trapped! Half the men are... already! We...!”

Pusintin’s head snapped back around and this time he saw For’mya Leonidas’s lovely dark brown eyes glaring back at him, savage fury filling that gaze and no sign of the desire and lust in her face and skin that was there seconds ago. He watched as her eyes change in front of him and then her wolf fangs extended fully.

“My beloved Martin was right!” For’mya spat at him vehemently. “You really are as dumb as a *nubous* post!”

“You fucking bitch!” Pusintin screamed at her acting purely on savage instinct now. “Kill them! Kill them both! Now!”

For’mya’s eyes went wide at this unexpected reaction. “No!” She screamed.

Pusintin acted completely on instinct and he didn’t hesitate for a moment. He had been among Kavalians who held no regard for females for so long it was his first and only reaction. His back hand was vicious and struck For’mya fully in her face, sending her sprawling across the cave floor, clearly stunned at the power of the blow.

“If I can’t have you elf bitch... no one will!” He screamed at her as he drew his sidearm in a single, smooth motion and leveled it For’mya’s head as she looked up at him from the floor, her lips bloody and her cheek cut from the rough skin on his knuckles.

It was Kalis who decided the course of the next few seconds, seeing the brother and sister he had not yet been able to get close to in imminent danger and the elven aunt who had shown the most acceptance of his new self. It was also Kalis’s actions that would cause the Grim Reaper to finally make an appearance and alter the course of events going forward for all time.

A Grim Reaper with eyes the color of blood and filled with the fury, loss, hate of an entire species. And the promise of a new beginning.

“Now!” Martin’s voice echoed across the early morning air at the entrance to the mouth of the cave. “Do it now *fervon!*”

The voice drew the heads of nearly eighty Puma Bane soldiers that had been watching the lone cleared path towards them. Something or someone had been clumsily moving towards their position and whoever it was they were careless in their actions, making lots of noise and easily announcing their presence.

They didn’t understand that they were doing exactly what the diminutive Persian haired Queen of the Union and her hulking Durcunusaan shadow and those with them wanted them to do. It allowed Martin and the others to move into the positions they now occupied without issue and do so in silence.

Martin Leonidas was not recognized as the most brilliant tactician within the Union simply because he was King. From the moment he had returned to take the throne of his father men and women with far more

years of experience in warfare quickly saw that their young King was without equal. He could almost predict what others would do in a situation like he had been involved with their military operations planning. It was so uncanny that it frightened many of them, causing them to view him as something more than just flesh and blood. When his son had begun to show these same traits, it only confirmed for many of them that their King was very special indeed. The day that he held For'mya in his arms once more on Enurrura Martin had made a silent vow to no one but himself to never take the safety of his Queens for granted ever again. They were the women who held the very core of his being within their grasp and he would never allow harm to come to them again if it was within his power to stop. When it was decided to use this cave as the kill zone, Martin and Danny had returned here on two different occasions. It was just the two of them, for Martin trusted no one else more than Danny, and they were loaded down with explosives. It was something he would only share with his brother for he knew Danny would do the exact same thing, and insure he was defending Anuk, Nayeca and now Kesyla with everything at his disposal.

During those two trips, he and Danny had laid some very ingenious and extremely lethal booby traps among the several positions that they had left. They had spent hours hollowing out several larger logs and packing them with explosives and then returning them looking exactly as they had when they were pulled from the surrounding terrain. Only an explosives expert would have been able to detect the three different traps and only if they were looking for them.

The Puma Bane troops did not have such an individual with them.

Danny didn't hesitate at his brother's shouted command and his hand mashed down on the combat vest he wore just over the small pocket near his heart. Three deep explosions were the result and they watched as all three positions and the nearly fifty Puma Bane soldiers crowded around them vanished in a cloud of dirt, splinters and thousands of tiny steel shards. He and Martin had spent six hours each night building these traps and he watched with no small degree of grim satisfaction as he saw them work to perfection. Forty seven Puma Bane soldiers met a grisly end as their bodies were practically shredded into a fine mist of blood, flesh and fur. None of the forty-seven that were using the positions as cover survived the devastation as the steel shards were so densely packed it was as if they were hit by one solid wall.

"Fire!" Cody screamed into his implant from where he and Garan were observing. "Fire!"

It was nearly comical to see Senior Master Chief Anthony Winslow and T'lolt appear on the lip of the ridge, the two Havoc Chain Cannons looking fearsome in their hands. It was not comical to watch as both men, built like tall tree trunks, mashed down on their firing triggers and began to sweep the chain cannons slowly over the remaining Puma Bane soldiers not caught in the three blasts and staggering about as if in drunken stupors from the concussive force of the booby traps. Everyone else flopped onto the ground on the ridge, their P190s sending out lethal projectiles downrange, as they joined in on the slaughter. It could not be called anything else but a massacre. Pusintin could not understand the depth of his brother's love for the women who shared his life and were the mothers of his children. The mothers of the future children he would have with them. He could not grasp the sense of honor and duty that surrounded these men and women when it came to Martin. Pusintin had never experienced such emotion before and he had no idea the power that it could provide a person.

Martin could smell the two Puma Bane thugs just inside the entrance to the cave and using his command of his new Praetorian powers he clenched his fist and jerked it forward even as the cloud of dirt and debris began to clear. He didn't realize the strength of the power he used so intent on reaching For'mya and he watched as their bodies erupted out of the cavern and were literally thrown a hundred meters down the path. He did look on with adoration in his wolf yellow eyes as they sprawled before the advancing figures of the smallest of his Queens and her shadow Atropos. Like the man she so loved Anja Leonidas didn't hesitate in the least, her K14 kinetic magnum appearing in her hand as she rushed forward. She pumped three rounds into each of their heads without blinking either of her gorgeous jade green eyes and then moved passed them as if they were nothing more than insects under her feet.

It had taken them nineteen seconds to bring an end to seventy-four lives.

"Move!" Martin's voice echoed in their implants.

And then they were all rushing for the entrance into the cave.

The moment Kirr had put his foul hands upon his sister Eirene; Kalis made his decision and was drawing his powerful legs under him for the leap. The words of his cousin Androcles filled his mind now as he remembered the hours of instruction Andro had given him in the holographic tutorial about attacking in wolf form came rushing back to him.

Channel your power cousin. We are like... we are like the Dire Wolves of Earth's ancient times. Larger and more powerful yes, but we are also smarter. We can use our powers of reasoning and our intelligence even when in our wolf forms. Just as your mind plots your attacks when you fight in human form, if you must fight in wolf form, use your mind as well, not just your instincts. Plot what you will do and then do not hesitate when you act. But never forget... be aware of everything around you and always be conscious that you are stronger in wolf form, but also more vulnerable.

Kalis remembered well those instructions... but on this day at this time... because of the anger he felt swelling within his breast, he forgot the second part of his cousin's directions. The rage he felt at his father's actions; at the Puma Bane's open disrespect of the sister he had yet to discover, this all served to make Kalis act without following through. Fedor and Eirene still did not trust him or his motives he knew. In their shoes he would probably be the same way, but he desperately wanted to show them that he had indeed altered the course of his life, and he wanted to make up for all the wrongs he may have done. He would not know it until sometime later, but Eirene had already seen this very thing within him and she shared everything with her twin. She had been watching him in the mornings outside his shelter with Serale. Eirene had seen how he treated her. The peace that echoed around him and within his resonance whenever he held the beautiful young Hadarian woman in his arms was not something that he could fake. Serale was his mate now and Eirene had noticed how he doted upon her as if she was some precious gem, just as she had seen Fedor treat Iama, and just as her beautiful Miseo treated her. This was what Eirene had shared with Fedor and both of them were now beginning to see what their father and mother had told them about him was actually true.

EIRENE! DROP! Kalis screamed out within Mindvoice the instant he left his feet in the powerful leap.

Eirene heard his authoritative voice within Mindvoice and instantly knew who it was. She hadn't smelled him inside the cave with them but she did not question his order to her in the least. Eirene instantly commanded her body to go flaccid and in the blink of an eye she became like a limp noodle. Kirr could not move fast enough to compensate for his lost of control on her and Eirene watched with loved filled dark eyes as she dropped to the floor of the cavern and saw Kalis's large wolf body already in the air above her. He was slightly larger than Fedor in wolf form, perhaps sixty pounds heavier and at least three inches taller at the shoulder. Eirene saw his massive paw rip forward with unrestrained power and precision. Kalis's right front paw, nearly three inches across and equipped with black, steel like talons, slammed into Kirr's face and neck like a hammer and tore open the entire side of his throat and cheek in one swipe. As Kirr's body spun around, blood erupting from the mortal wound, Eirene snapped out with her leg and drove it into the side of Kirr's kneecap. His leg snapped at the vulnerable joint and his body began to fall instantly from the powerful blow. He would die within seconds for Kalis's blow had severed both of the arteries leading to his brain.

Kalis's forward momentum was such that he continued over the top of Kirr's falling body, his focus now on the arm of his father that held the sidearm on his *Tenna For'mya*. Kalis was a powerful young man to begin with and he was becoming a very powerful wolf. His leap carried him easily across the distance, his deadly blow to Kirr barely altering his course more than a fraction. He would not allow harm to come to the woman who had believed in him when others doubted. She had accepted him those first moments on that ship when she could have just as easily dismissed him and scorned him. All of his aunts had acted in a similar fashion towards him and this had helped him become accepted by many more people than otherwise would have believed in him at first. That was a gift that Kalis could never repay.

"Marshall! Look out!" The voice echoed in the cave.

One of the Puma Bane behind Fedor had seen Kalis leap and he began moving instantly. As he shouted the warning and imposed his body in front of his Marshall, he had no idea he had signed his own death warrant. Kalis was already committed and he did not hesitate in the least. His jaws clamped shut with nearly two thousand pounds per square inch of pressure, fracturing the Puma Bane's shoulder and tearing open his lower

neck like paper machete. As his wolf body drove the Puma Bane to the ground, he was shifting his physical form, but it was already too late.

The instant the Puma Bane behind him had brushed him aside to save Pusintin; Fedor had acted with all the speed and agility that his elven and wolf blood gave to him. He was spinning back, his right arm coming up and knocking the rifle away while he called three throwing knives from Flatspace. He had taken to wearing two Flatspace bands, one on either wrist, since he had become so good at using the knives in either hand. His skill didn't fail him this time as he drove his left fist forward and stabbed both of the razor sharp blades into the Puma Bane soldier's neck from only a foot away. The man's eyes bugged out of his head at the horrible pain and he dropped his rifle as his hands reached for his mangled throat. Blood immediately filled his throat from his severed artery, and nothing he could do would stop that. He began gagging on the blood as he staggered back wrenching one of the knives out of his flesh. This only served to cause more damage as the blade tore through his esophagus on the way out. He essentially helped to kill himself by his actions and Fedor watched him drop to his knees, his hands clutched around his throat, blood spilling from between his fingers in a river.

Then the three shots thundered in the enclosed space of the cavern and Fedor's eyes grew wide as he whirled.

"Mother!" He screamed as he saw For'mya falling backwards from where she had gotten to her feet. "NO!"

Eirene witnessed it all in slow motion even as she tried to move but knew she would not be able to stop it. She correctly screamed out Kalis's name as he slammed back into For'mya, three large holes appearing in his chest and the force of the rounds throwing him back into For'mya from the force.

"NO!" For'mya screamed as she caught him in her arms and slumped back to the floor of the cave holding his muscular body watching as his blood rapidly began to soak through his uniform. "Kalis! No!"

Pusintin glared at his son in shock but feeling no pity at the moment. "Stupid boy!" He snarled angrily.

"Bastard!" Eirene was screaming as she leaped at him without thinking.

Pusintin turned only slightly and lashed out with the sidearm and smashed it across her face, knocking her sprawling across the cave floor. "Sit down bitch!" He shouted even as he whirled around and leveled the sidearm at Fedor's face, pressing the barrel against his cheek. "I wouldn't do that if I were you!" He snarled viciously. He reached out and wrapped his arm around Fedor's neck, yanking him closer and keeping the sidearm jammed against his cheek. He snapped his head around and saw Eirene climbing to her feet, her wolf eyes and fangs now fully bared in anger. "Don't move little bitch!" Pusintin snapped at her. "Or I will ventilate pretty boy's head here!"

For'mya was tearing at Kalis's shirt, pulling open the fabric to reveal the three holes in his chest which were leaking blood at an alarming rate. Two were just above his left nipple and the third was slightly under his nipple. The entire left side of his body was soaked in blood and he gripped her arm tightly in pain.

"Kalis!" She rasped out the words. "Stay with us Kalis! Stay here with us *mandri*!"

For'mya saw his dark blue eyes staring at her and as tears filled her eyes she saw the most exquisite expression of peace come over his face. Kalis coughed several times, blood spilling from between his lips and he nodded his head slowly.

"I... I will die *Tenna*... I will die... die proud of who... who I have become!" Kalis choked out the words.

For'mya shook her head vigorously as she clutched him tighter. "You won't die Kalis!" She stammered as Eirene skidded to the floor beside her. "Not today! Do you hear me! You won't die!" For'mya glared up at Pusintin then. "You... you have killed your son!" She screamed at him. "You fucking monster!"

Pusintin barely blinked an eye as he saw Eirene try to stem the flow of blood from the holes in Kalis's chest by tearing parts of his shirt off and putting pressure on the wounds. "He was too stupid to stay on the winning side!" He growled. Pusintin jerked Fedor tighter around his neck. "Besides... I have got another son thanks to you! And you will give me more!"

"I will give you nothing!" For'mya screamed at him. "You are a vile beast and I hope you die in agony!"

Pusintin laughed at her. "It's time to go elf bitch!" He leveled the sidearm at her head. "We'll get out the same way Kalis got in! Now move!"

For'mya ignored him and began to help Eirene try to save Kalis. "I will go no where with you!" She hissed at him.

“You’ll go with me or I will blow his fucking head off right here!” Pusintin screamed as he placed the barrel of his weapon against Fedor’s temple.

“Kill us!” Fedor snarled at him. “We will never do anything you say! We will never go with you!”

“You want to live boy?” Pusintin spat at him.

Fedor glared into his eyes. “You raped my mother! You have killed my brother! I will never do anything you tell me! Never!”

“For’mya... tell him I will kill him!” Pusintin growled. “I will!”

“NO!” The male voice echoed all around them within the cavern. “The only death that follows now will be your own!”

For’mya’s eyes came up and grew wide as she saw the shadows just behind Pusintin begin to dissipate as if a vampire was revealing himself. Her eyes grew even wider as she saw first Zarah and then Lucia appear directly behind Pusintin and between them was a figure she had never expected to see in all her life.

Pusintin was tossing Fedor to the side even as he saw For’mya’s eyes go wide and he began to whirl around to defend himself. He would be far too slow as the tall and extremely well muscled Evolli standing between Zarah and Lucia struck twice with blinding speed. The short sword he wielded appeared to be forged from pure Dragon Armor, and with a powerful flick of his wrist it severed Pusintin’s right hand just below the elbow. The ARSOC sidearm went skittering across the floor of the cave, his fingers still wrapped around it. As Pusintin’s eyes went wide in shock and pain he felt the bite of the sword once more. The Evolli moved with finely tuned grace and speed, the blade slashing across Pusintin’s lower legs just above the knees and cleaning slicing through every tendon and ligament in both of his legs. Pusintin staggered slightly as he lost control of his legs and he dropped to the floor of the cavern his cries of pain echoing and his blood quickly beginning to pool around him. He groaned in agony as the Evolli moved gracefully to the side and motioning to Zarah and Lucia with his head. They didn’t hesitate and instantly blurred to where For’mya and Eirene were bent over Kalis. Lucia was pulling the small medical bag from her side as Zarah looked into For’mya’s wide eyes.

“Father is moments away!” She gasped. “Mother is with him!”

“Zarah?” For’mya questioned.

“Help us mother! We have to slow the bleeding until she gets here!” Zarah exclaimed as she began tearing away the last of Kalis’s shirt.

His name was Radem.

And this day he was the Grim Reaper.

A hair’s breath under six foot tall, and for an Evolli he was an oddity, as most of their species never grew taller than five foot eight. He was leanly muscular as all Evolli males were, belying the strength that his body held within it. He was six hundred and nineteen years of age and in the prime of an Evolli’s lifespan. He was the herald of all his people could become now and his life’s story was known to only one individual who he had sworn a debt of honor. A man who had put him in a position to take vengeance for so many of his people who had been led astray.

“The... great... Marshall Pusintin.” He spoke the four words slowly with scorn and hate dripping from his tone as he circled where Pusintin was struggling painfully to get to his knees. “The butcher of innocent women and children. The great deceiver. The vicious lap dog to the fool Keleru’Puat. Look at you now!”

Pusintin finally managed to push his body to his knees and slump back on the heels of his boots but for some reason he could not move the rest of his body. He could feel a slight tingle in his feet and legs but did not understand what was happening to him. Pusintin tried to focus his eyes on Radem and they grew a little wider as recognition finally came to him.

“You... you!” He gasped.

Radem grinned evilly at him, his blood red eyes flaring brightly and his lamprey like lips parting in a vicious snarl. “You remember me?” He said. “Good. I am glad you remember me. It will be fitting. Do not worry Marshall Pusintin... you will not bleed out just yet.” Radem lifted the glittering sword, the blade stained with his blood. “A gift from a wondrous friend who was once my most hated enemy. Forged from pure Dragon Armor by the Weapons Master Nehtes himself. It is the first time I have used it. And it will be the last. You see... the blade is laced with Axsomil. It is a unique compound that causes clotting of the blood almost instantly. It is why you have not already bled to death. A quick death would be far too good for you. One you do not deserve.

“My friend made me a promise not so long ago. He is known by many names among the stars my friend, but he is known to me only as one. It is a name that was once a curse in my people’s language and yet is now sung by our children with joy and honor. It is a name that he carries because of you and your actions. I believe you have met him once already. On Hadaria. Do you remember what he said to you that day Marshall? Do you remember what words Soul Slayer spoke to you that day?” Radem didn’t see For'mya’s head whip around when he spoke that name and gaze at him with wide eyes. “Do you remember what Androcles Leonidas said to you that day?”

Pusintin’s eyes grew a little wider. “Androcles?” He rasped out the word.

Radem smiled once more and withdrew a small holoimager from the small pouch he wore on his side. “Soul Slayer would like to speak with you Marshall Pusintin.” He stated as he placed the imager on the floor of the cavern.

For'mya came to her feet. “Andro!” She questioned. “How do you know Andro? What is going on? Who are you?”

Radem looked at her as he stood back up and bowed his head to her reverently. “Your questions will be answered my Queen.” He said respectfully.

For'mya’s eyes grew wide. “Queen?” She gasped. “You... you are Evolli! The Evolli do not recognize the Union leadership!”

Radem reached up to his wrist and tapped the small console that resided there. “If only you knew how wrong you were my Queen.”

The holoimager flared to life causing For'mya to stumble back somewhat in surprise. The glow of the imager encompassed nearly half of the cavern itself indicating great power from the generation point and suddenly standing in the cave with them was the nearly crystal clear image of her son Androcles. He looked agitated and wore his combat armor, which she could see was stained with heavy spots blood.

“Radem!” Andro’s voice boomed out echoing off the walls of the cavern. He seemed to be looking around until his azure colored eyes came to rest in front of him where the Evolli stood. “Radem! You sent the signal! Is it... is it done?”

“Nearly so Soul Slayer. Nearly so.” Radem answered with great respect.

“Androcles?” For'mya gasped causing Andro’s eyes to shift towards where she stood to the side.

Andro’s eyes grew wider. “Mother?” He gasped. “What... you are safe? Fedor and Eirene? They are...” Andro’s brow furrowed somewhat as he finally sensed the tremors within the Etheric realm and his eyes shifted to where Zarah and Lucia were continuing to work on Kalis with Eirene. For'mya gasped as Andro’s imager walked right through her as he stepped over to where they were and she turned her eyes to follow him. “Kalis!” His voice rasped.

Zarah glanced up at his image as if expecting this very thing For'mya saw which only added to her confusion. Eirene had shifted her body over and held Kalis’s head in her lap almost instinctively knowing that Zarah and Lucia would know more about what to do. Fedor was now beside his sister and looking down at him as well. “He’s hurt bad *fervon*.” Zarah spoke to his image. “Mother is seconds away but he is fading fast. One of the rounds must have nicked his heart!”

“Kalis!” Andro shouted his name causing Kalis’s eyes to jerk open and his head to come up slightly. They grew a little wider in confusion as he saw the holographic image of his cousin coming to rest on one knee beside him. It was an odd thing, for his arm and part of his shoulder disappeared inside Zarah’s upper body.

“An... Andro? Here? How can...” He rasped out the word his blue eyes confused.

“You are my family Kalis Leonidas.” Andro told him softly.

“I... I forgot the... second rule... rule you told me Andro.” Kalis spoke with bloody lips as they curled into a half smile. “They are... safe... yes? My brother... and sister are safe?”

Eirene had tears pouring from her eyes as she reached up and took his head in her hands. “We are here Kalis.” She said. “You saved us! You saved mother!”

Kalis’s eyes closed as if accepting his fate with that knowledge. “Then... then I have succeeded... succeeded in my... task.” As his eyes slowly closed.

Fedor reached out now. Even with what Eirene had been telling him, Fedor still did not want to believe that Kalis had indeed changed. All his doubts had been erased the moment Kalis had stepped in front of his

mother and imposed his body between her and Pusintin. In that split second Fedor had seen the determination and purpose in his blue eyes. he took Kalis's hand within his.

"There is... there is more to do *fervon*." Fedor choked out the words.

Andro nodded his head. "Our brother is correct Kalis." He stated calmly. "You have much still to do. Kalis... look at me *fervon*."

Kalis's eyes fluttered open once more. "It... it hurts Andro." He stammered.

"Kalis... open your mind. What... what gives you peace now my brother? What gives you the most joy?" Andro asked him.

"Serale." Kalis answered instantly.

"Then you grab onto her and don't let go!" Andro urged him. "Allow her resonance to keep you here *fervon*. She won't let you go Kalis. Stay with her in the light cousin. My mother Anja is moments away and she will save you... but you need to fight. You need to grab your love for Serale and wrap it around you! Stay within the light of her love for your cousin. Stay within the light of all those who love you. Fedor and Eirene are here with you and they won't leave."

"No!" Eirene cried. "Never! You can't... you can't leave us now! Not when we have so much to discover!"

"He was... he was always weak." Pusintin croaked out the words from behind him.

Radem didn't hesitate and hit Pusintin with a backhand from his clawed three fingered hand and sent him sprawling. "Be silent worm!" He screamed. "His actions this day show he is more than you will ever be!"

Andro's eyes closed in the image and he rose to his feet still looking at Kalis. "You have much yet to do cousin. And I will see you soon enough to thank you for what you have done." Andro turned and looked at For'mya who was still standing and looking shocked. He saw the blood on her lips now. "Mother... you are..."

For'mya lifted her hand and wiped the blood away. "This is nothing!" She answered him quickly. "What... Andro what is going on? How are you...? Who is he?"

Andro turned and looked at Radem once more. "He is a friend and the mechanism of my justice." He answered her before walking back over to where Radem still stood beside Pusintin very alert. "Get him up Radem." He said.

Radem didn't hesitate and jerked Pusintin back to his knees with a groan of pain from him. He looked at Andro in the image. "He saved them Soul Slayer." He spoke. "The boy Kalis and his actions... it gave me enough time to act. I wasn't fast enough though."

Andro shook his head. "Kalis will live Radem and it is not your fault." He said. "What does Manda report?"

"All those ships I orbit and aligned with this worm have been destroyed." Radem told him. "She left no survivors. Those that broke from him she is no encircling to insure they will follow their own oaths. Another force is on the surface and waiting for contact. The team Zarah sent to insure this should have reached them by now. They would have reported if things were amiss. There were far more than you first thought Soul Slayer."

Andro nodded his head. "I suspected as much from my father's reports." He said. "I have asked you to stop calling me that Radem."

Radem shook his head. "It is a name my people gave to you in a dark time and it is a name now spoken with great reverence. I will not dishonor that."

Andro allowed a long breath to release from his chest and he looked at his uncle. "You did not truly believe you could beat my father did you?" He asked softly. "You did not think you could fool him in such a way?" He spoke as he moved around where Pusintin knelt, his back finally moving around to face the entrance of the cavern. "You are nothing more than a cancer uncle. A lecherous cancer that destroys all it touches. A very large and shameful stain upon the name of our family."

"You... you and your father don't have... don't have the balls to kill me yourselves!" Pusintin spat at the image of Androcles, blood coming from his lips. "You have to... you have to get... this fuck to do it for you!"

"Did you truly believe that you and Keleru could hide what you have done?" Andro snarled at him. "My father discovered it less than a year after the war ended! He discovered what you did! The coercion, the threats, the payoffs! All so that you could set the Evolli against us! You financed the coup against the rightful government! You supplied them, funded them, and now sixty-five million of their people are dead! Their

planets in ruin! Their people having to scrap together an existence because of your actions! They were once proud members of the Union and you took that away from them! You took choice away from them! Just as you take choice from everything you touch! Radem... Radem has more right to be here than any of us!"

Pusintin glared up at Androcles, hatred fueling his actions as he struggled against the pain and climbed to his feet, slumped over slightly as he held his handless arm against his side. "The strong... the strong will always rule the weak!" He spat. "The weak shall... the weak shall fall!"

"And that is why you fail." Andro told him.

"You... you need to use trickery!" Pusintin snarled. "You have to use... deceit in order to... in order to succeed! You... you and my brother are cowards!"

"And what exactly have you done?" Andro asked him. "You used deceit and lies to push a people to war! A war that did not have to be fought! You used deceit and lies to force yourself upon my elven mother!" Andro screamed now. "You try to kill your own mother! Your own brother! What are these? Deeds of honor? They are actions of a man with no honor! And no soul! Grandfather Leonidas quakes with shame and anger within the heavens at all you have done!"

"You... you know nothing boy!" Pusintin shouted.

"That is where you are wrong Uncle." Andro said. "I know that you will no longer exist when this day ends. Your stench will be forever removed from the living when the sun sets. And I know that grandmother, grandfather and my father will be better for it."

"Who... who are you!" Pusintin screamed. "Who are you to decide my fate?"

Androcles didn't see the cavern entrance suddenly fill with bodies as Martin, Aricia and Anja were the first to burst into the cave. Martin's dark brown eyes instantly went to where he saw Pusintin and his first step was towards him. It was For'mya who stopped him, grabbing him around his waist and holding him.

"No Martin!" She stammered in a soft voice.

"*Kinsoaurgai*?" He gasped. "What is...?"

"*Melyanna*!" For'mya gasped looking at Anja's wide jade green eyes but holding Martin tightly. "Kalis is gravely wounded my love! Hurry!"

Anja didn't hesitate and sprinted to where she saw Zarah frantically motioning her over. Dysea, Cirith and Isabella filled the entrance to the cave room now, Danny and Julie almost knocking them over as they filled the entrance way as well.

"Fuck me!" Danny was the one to gasp as he saw the life sized image of Androcles and the Evolli standing on either side of a wounded Pusintin.

"Who am I?" Androcles's booming voice filled the cavern now, drawing all of their attention. "I am the first born son of my father!" Andro screamed at him. "I am Spartan! I am dragon! I am Dahakoan! The Eternal Guardian of my family! I am death incarnate to those who would do them harm! No more will my family suffer the likes of you and others like you! Your death and the death of the creature that defiled my sister will be the echo of what will happen should any attempt to harm them in such a way again!" Zarah's head came up from where she was beside Anja at his words, as did Isabella's. "My reach is infinite and it extends across the stars as you have discovered this day my dear Uncle! You will not leave this cave alive! And when you are dead... your soul will burn in the pits of *jorbhe* for all time because of what you have done!"

"I'm not... I'm not dead boy!" Pusintin laughed. "You... you and your father... you can't even get that right!"

Androcles smiled a cruel smile looking at his uncle. "Oh... but you are dead Uncle." He spoke the words. "Even as we speak you are dying! I told you on the planet of my mother's birth that I was not to be the instrument of your death. You were just too stupid to know what I was speaking of."

"You... don't have the balls to kill me!" Pusintin choked.

Androcles shook his head. "No Uncle... what you perceive as a lack of courage to spill your blood is actually honor. Blood before all else. That is what my father taught us from the moment we entered this world. Never take the blood of family for that is the highest form of dishonor we could suffer. That is the reason he did not kill you on Earth all those years ago you stupid man! My father has more honor in a strand of his hair than you have residing in your entire body! Honor! That is the only reason why you have lived since that day. And because of that honor he has bore a shame that is not his to bear! Because of that honor, it allowed you to take one of my mother's from her rightful place and it allowed you to taint another with your foul essence! He would

gut you where you stand for what you have done to my elven mother if he was here!” Androcles snarled not realizing that Martin and the others were watching in silence behind his image. “And in doing so he would forever bear the shame of having to kill his own blood. A shame that I alone will carry because of Leruk.”

“He... he was my son!” Pusintin screamed.

“He was a vile cancer!” Andro retorted. “Just as you are uncle. I was unable to hold my anger in check at what he had done to my Drow wife and I acted without thinking. I took his life from him for what he had done. I violated the most sacred oath to my father that I will ever make. To always watch over my blood. To never bring harm to my blood. I violated that oath because of you. I am tainted because of you. That is the shame I will now carry for the rest of my days. It is not however, a shame or dishonor I will allow my father to bear. Ever.

“I give you the instrument of your death Uncle. A species that you and so many others thought you could manipulate and control. A species you caused me to hate with every fiber of my being for what I perceived they had done. At least for a short time. Until the veil of hate and anger lifted from me and I saw them for what they are. What you and Keleru twisted!” Andro smiled to himself. “No... what my father has done is to take everything from you. The children you thought to use against us in your failed bid to reclaim the throne that was never yours, they are now among the only family they will ever need. They are my brother and sister. Karun has embraced his blood and even now fights to bring down that fool Keleru. Your daughter Nikkei, well she has been adopted by Pian’Nruarani and become a member of their Pride. And Jalersi... well she happily carries the first of Pian’s children within her womb. And Kalis... my father showed Kalis everything you should have shown him as his father. Everything you held back from him. And now he has embraced his family and his blood. And he will go forward without the shame or dishonor you inflicted upon him. You could... you could have been so much more Uncle. Now... now you will be nothing but a memory.”

Andro held out his hand and pointed to Radem. “You see the sword Radem carries? It is his signature weapon and his skill with it equals anyone alive today. I should know for I have trained with him on more than one occasion. I had it forged for him with but one purpose. To bring about your death. The further away my father drew you, the easier it became. You see... the blade is coated with Axsomil.”

This brought Anja’s head whipping around and the glow from where her hands had been positioned on Kalis’s chest vanished as she came to her feet.

“Axsomil is a particularly potent poison Uncle.” Andro continued. “There is only one cure for it and it must be administered within several hours of infection. Unfortunately for you Uncle, the only cure is within Lycavorian Union territory. Only one of our hospitals could save you. I needed something that my mother could not heal with her wondrous gifts in case my father could not bring himself to let you die such a death. Axsomil is part bacteria and part toxin from what my sister Eli tells me and the Lycavorian healing factor cannot counter its affects. It is probably why you already feel a tingling in your extremities. Taking your hand from you was enough, but I see Radem wanted to be very sure in his actions, and he removed your ability to leave what will now be your tomb. At least for a time.

“What will happen is this Uncle. Soon the bacteria in Axsomil will begin to eat away at your bones... it has a taste for the minerals in our bones. It will dissolve every single bone in your body until all that is left is powder. As the bacteria eats your bones, the toxin will slowly spread to every organ of your body and slowly liquefy it from the inside. It will be monstrously painful from what my sister tells me. You will be able to feel your life leaving you Uncle. Just as you have watched the life of millions leave them because of your hand, now you can bear witness to your own death and the pain you have caused so many others in a similar manner. And should anyone attempt to put you out of your misery by perhaps shooting you, Axsomil acts as a blood clotting agent as well. It is why you are not dead now from loss of blood.

“I have discovered many things about myself these last weeks and months Uncle. Some of it was because of your actions.” Andro spoke more softly. Andro turned his head slightly and for the first time he saw his father and mothers standing behind him with the rest of his family. He saw the look in his father’s eyes and but said nothing.

“Foremost among them is the burning hatred I have for those who would do my family harm!” Andro spoke as he turned back around and looked at Pusintin. “Dying in battle is one thing... a glorious thing... but what you and Dante Moran have done is beyond hideous. And now... both of you will reap the actions of what you have done. And soon Keleru will join you in *jobbhe* Uncle. Pian has far more support and loyalty among the

masses than you and that fool Keleru can begin to imagine. Your mistake was placing your hands upon one who I worship just as much as the woman who brought me into this world. Just as I worship all those I call mother. That was your mistake Uncle.”

Androcles didn't see For'mya burst into tears as Aricia and Dysea squeezed her between them, their arms pulling her close as Isabella and Cirith pressed close to them.

“I am my father's son!” Andro spoke forcefully once more. “I am *Dahakoan*! I am the eternal wrath of the Leonidas name towards any who would do us harm in such insidious ways. You Uncle... you are not even a shadow of the man my father is and will yet become! You are not worthy to even walk in that shadow! And when this day is done and your pitiful remains are collected and scattered to the stars, my father, my grandfather, my grandmother... and all who bear the blood of a Leonidas within their veins will breathe a little easier. They will breathe easier for the final stain upon our name will forever reside in the darkness of the abyss, where it forever belongs. And then... then we can begin to repair all your deeds have done.” Androcles watched as Pusintin could only meet his eyes for a few seconds before he slumped over in pain and settled to the ground. Andro shook his head in disgust and turned to the side and his bright azure eyes fell upon Zarah who was also standing now beside Anja. The near glowing of his eyes caused everyone to gasp softly. “Zarah... my sister.”

Zarah stepped forward. “*Fervon*?” She spoke softly.

“I am settling accounts now *arande*.” Andro spoke. “Dante Moran is ours now my lovely Zarah. We have taken the ship he was on and his blood is mine. Reach for the future *arande*... for tomorrow your past will join this monster in the abyss. And you will finally be free.”

Lucia stepped up to Zarah, her arm encircling her waist as tears flooded Zarah's eyes and she clutched Lucia to her tightly.

Andro turned back and looked at Radem. “Radem!” He said.

“Soul Slayer?”

“You will insure my Uncle's fate.” He told him. “When he is dead... contact Manda and she will send a ship. I will not have his remains tainting the first planet outside our galaxy that will be home to Lycavorian and so many others. Burn what remains and then scatter them to the stars as we discussed.”

“It will be done Soul Slayer.” Radem spoke bowing his head.

“Your debt to me is repaid my friend.” Androcles said. “If there ever was one. Return to your people and continue to help them rebuild what was lost. You will have my full support in all that you do. As will the ruling Quorum.”

Radem shook his head. “I am no politician Soul Slayer. You know this better than anyone alive. The Quorum is guided by those much wiser than me and with your *tenna* Deia working with them, they can push the Evolli forward. And perhaps regain the respect and honor we once held.” He said. “With the blessing and permission of the King and Queens... I will remain and assist in whatever way I can.”

Androcles turned and fully faced his father now. His image was still clear and he took a deep breath as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. At least for a time.

“Father?” He asked.

Martin Leonidas was not often a man without words and on this day, at this time he found he did not know what to say. He nodded his head slowly. “Ummm... ok.” He stepped forward quickly. “Androcles...”

“No father.” He spoke softly. “Take my mothers from this cave father. Take our family and friends from there and continue what you set out to do. It is done now father. It is done and now we can move into the future. I must... I must go now father. We will see you in a few weeks and then we can talk.” Andro met his father's dark eyes. “I love you father. I love all of you.”

Aricia came up next to Martin, pressing her body against his side as she usually did as she gazed at her son in the image. His azure eyes duplicates of her own.

“And we love you Androcles.” She stated with tears in her eyes.

They saw Andro nod and then he looked in another direction and saw him nod his head once more. The holo image vanished instantly as the feed was ended from its transmission point and then he was gone. Martin turned as For'mya stepped up to him now and he swept her into his embrace, inhaling deeply of her orchid scent.

“Martin?” She gasped softly.

Danny stepped up to Martin now and saw his dark brown eyes focus on him. “*Fervon*... what... what the hell just happened?” He asked. “Did you... did you know about this?”

Martin shook his head slowly. “I had no idea.” He answered honestly.

“Fuck... me!” Colin spoke slowly from beside Julie at the entrance to the cave room. “Jules... make sure you remind me often to never... ever... piss off the Skipper’s son.”

“Ain’t that the *nubous* truth?” Julie spoke in agreement.

“What the hell does *Dahakoan* mean?” Kenny asked now. “What did he mean when he said he was dragon?”

Julie looked at him. “You can bet that whatever it means... it can’t be good for the bad guys.” She said.

“Shit! You think?” Cody exclaimed.

Radem smiled to himself as he drove the tip of his sword into the soft ground and knelt beside the sword preparing himself to fulfill his duty.

“And Soul Slayer has spoken.” He said softly so that no one could hear him. “Soul Slayer has spoken.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ALPHA QUADRANT

SPARTA'S WRATH

Androcles Leonidas dropped to one knee on the floor of the QCR Room and took several deep breaths as Armen moved away from the small podium control station on the other side of the room and moved across the distance to stand beside him.

-Androcles?- Armen questioned. **-Do you require medical attention?-**

Andro lifted his head slowly and took one last deep breath as he felt the resonances of his wives and siblings echo from the bowels within their new ship. They must have just landed in the landing bay and all of them were sprinting to where he was, concern swirling around them. He rose to his feet calmly and shook his head as he met Armen’s eyes.

“No Armen.” He answered evenly. “For the first time... for the first time in a long time I feel like a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders. It feels... it feels refreshing.”

Armen looked at him oddly for a moment. **-You, your father and a few others, you carry a sense of duty and honor within you that many do not Androcles. All Lycavorians cherish this sense of duty and honor, but you and a few others use it as a shield at times. While others do not.-** He stated. **-It is much more than others know and understand. It is a duty most could not carry.-**

Andro nodded his head in agreement. “Perhaps we do.” He said. “My father told me once when I was a boy that it was ingrained in our blood because of my grandfathers and all they had to do before us. All they had done in their lifetimes. I am finally beginning to understand what he meant that day, but it also...”

-It makes you part of who you are.- Armen finished the statement.

Andro smiled warmly as his azure eyes gazed upon the hulking seven foot tall avatar that had become a unique and intricate part of his life in so short a time. “You... you sound very much alive when you say that my friend. And full of emotion.” He told him.

-Yet I am not alive.- Armen told him. **-I lack the necessary emotional and physical requirements that living beings exhibit.-**

Andro's azure colored eyes glittered in the light of the room and he stepped up to Armen without hesitation. "Are you so sure Armen?" He said with a smile seeing Armen's eyes blink several times in what could almost be a very confused nature.

"What is our status?" He continued quickly.

-The *INQUISITOR* is fully under our control.- Armen told him. **-Murano has started back with the prisoner Dante Moran and Robert Moran is being transported in a separate ship. They will be detained immediately and escorted to the holding cells.-**

"Their escort ships?" Andro asked.

Armen shook his head. **-They chose to fight.-** He answered. **-I was forced to destroy them.-**

Andro nodded his head. "There was no other option." He stated. "I want full security measures active from the moment they come aboard Armen. Constant visual surveillance and they are not to talk to one another. Moran won't be staying long anyway. Have a *STRIKER* prepped for transport as well. Once Yuri's people have replaced our own on the *INQUISITOR*, bring them all back and set a course for Ukway."

-You will allow her to keep the High Coven ship?- Armen asked.

Andro nodded his head. "They will need a command ship for when they are not at their base. I... I have a feeling that Yuri and Pa'cour will be playing a much larger role in the future than even they think. They will need a ship capable of projecting their influence."

-There are many who will not agree with that decision- Armen told him.

"Probably. Fuck them." Andro answered bluntly. "They don't have a clue what is going on and they never will."

-We will stay with the original plan then?- Armen asked.

Androcles nodded. "Am'uur and the Prep team have reported in yes?"

-Per your instructions everything has already been arranged.- Armen told him with a nod. **-Am'uur reported two point three hours before the assault began. I did not want to interrupt you. They are ready.-**

"Have *SirsanGai* choose the flight team for the *STRIKER* taking Moran to the rendezvous Armen." Andro told him. "I want no miscues on this."

-Understood.- Armen held up the small data disc. **-I transmitted the entire exchange to Dilaen's personal P1. And the designated coordinates as you instructed.-**

"She will know what to do with it." Andro said. "And burst Denali about what has taken place. He will want to know what is going on. He has felt the shift in my emotions over the last hour and no doubt our father. He will be worried." Andro turned when the double doors to the QCR room opened and Sadi led them all into the large room with looks of concern on their faces.

-I assume you did not tell them that the teleportation station was cleared by Admiral O'Connor and your mother's medical staff for full operational status.- Armen asked before they were within earshot.

Andro grinned at him. "I may have failed to mention that to them... yes."

Andro could have sworn he saw Armen smile before he answered. –**Then I will leave you to explain it to them.**– He stated and turned quickly moving for the other entrance.

Andro was about to reply that he was a coward when he felt Sadi's hands reach for him first, followed in quick succession by all of his wives and mates and then his sisters. All of them demanding to know what had just taken place and if he was alright, their voices hitting him all at once with different levels of concern. Andro pulsed all of them with his aura as they crowded close to him, Carisia and Sadi pressing to his sides and Sehri to his front as Lu'ria and Ne'Veha pressed close to the backs of Sadi and Carisia. All of them could feel his Etheric resonance and how clear and completely uncluttered it felt. It was bright, pure power and clarity the likes of which they had never felt from him before. It very nearly took their breaths away and they looked at him with questions in their beautiful eyes but they were content to know he was safe and did not flood him with questions. It was not something that his siblings missed either and as was usually the case, it was Eliani who spoke what all of them wanted to speak and did so in her usual blunt nature.

“What the hell was that all about?” She exclaimed. “You just up and disappeared into thin air! What's going on Andro?”

Andro nuzzled Sadi's head and then Sehri's cheek as he pulled them all closer to his body and held them. “Father has succeeded *arande*.” Andro told her seeing her green eyes grow wide in surprise as she moved closer to him, Sehri drawing her tight with her arm. “Justice for our mother and our brother and sister has been served.”

Lisisa stepped closer to him as well pressing between Dorian, Nara, Sheva and Deion, their arms drawing her close without conscious thought, even as her arms slipped around Sheva's waist and then Mari, who remained attached to her brother's side. “Then... Andro then...?”

Andro nodded his head. “Pusintin is dead.” He said softly.

Deion Leonidas was the one who spoke as he lowered his head and spoke softly, Mari's beautiful face turning up to look at him as he spoke what all of them felt. “And may his *ano* reside in the darkest pits of *jorbhe* for all time for what he has done.” Even though several of the words were spoken in their ancient language, Mari understood them fluently and it was only another sign to her that this is where she belonged. Understanding of and the ability to speak their language came to her in a matter of hours... not the years it would have taken someone else to learn. It was as if a door had been opened within her that had kept this knowledge locked away until now.

“*Avoi*.” Nara echoed her twin.

“Kalis was seriously wounded while protecting our *medwaw* For'mya. He stepped in front of three bullets fired by Pusintin that were intended to kill her when he realized he was not going to win.” Andro saw Lisisa's eyes grow wider than the rest of them at this news because of all his sisters and brothers she had been the most skeptical of Kalis and his ultimate intentions. “*Medwaw* Anja reached him in time and he will survive. We took casualties... our people took casualties... the Puma Bane did not act entirely as father predicted they would, but father and his team prevailed.”

“When can we...” Deion began to ask.

Andro took notice that Mari was beside him, clutching tightly to his hand and from her very clear resonance and scent, having no intention of being removed from his side. “We must let father and our mothers get control of everything again fervon. A day. Probably two. Then we can contact them on the QCR before we depart for the Beta Quadrant.”

“How did you...?” Dorian asked him softly. “You just up and vanished. Poof!”

Andro smiled at them feeling the love of family saturating the room as it always did when they were together. Only now it was different. Now it was as if a great weight and cloud of pain was lifting from all of them. He looked down and gazed into Sehri's bright blue eyes and leaned over to kiss her softly. He looked back up at his brother.

“I may have forgotten to tell everyone that the Teleportation System is fully operational and very safe.” Andro told them with a wry grin.

“May have?” Eliani exclaimed. “*Aur mida!*”

“That is something we can discuss at another time.” He told them. “And I don't mean your ass Eli.” He told her with a smile causing all of them to look at him shocked.

“Andro!” Lisisa exclaimed. “Andro... you just made a joke!”

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “I suppose I did.”

“My ass is not a joke!” Eliani protested.

Andro released Sadi and the others and scooped Eliani into his arms squeezing her tightly in a brotherly fashion and buried his face in her hair. Eliani didn't hesitate and hugged him back just as tightly as everyone looked on with wide smiles. They all knew Andro had a unique and special connection to both Eliani and Zarah but this did not bother them in the least. Andro set Eliani back down and looked at them. “Right now we... right now we have a debrief to attend.” He grinned even wider when he saw their eyes roll at that information. “Jomann, Torian and Ridor will conduct the brief. They'll make it painless and quick. It is 1030 hours and when that is finished we can clean up and I will fill all of you in on what has taken place over a very large meal. I promise. There is much we still have to do and if I do not let our grandmothers know we are all safe I will not remain healthy for long.”

Eliani and Lisisa laughed at that statement. It was a real laugh; a warm laugh. A laugh filled with emotion that they had not been able to feel in a long time. Justice had been taken care of, and now they could go forward into the future and see what the unknown brought to them.

Lisisa stepped up to her brother and slapped his face lightly causing everyone to chuckle at this. “You better be quick about it!” She snapped. “I can feel them demanding to know what is happening and we are not going to suffer through an entire debrief without you.”

Andro met her smile and all of them could feel the sense of peace emanating from him as he smiled. “I wouldn't think of it.” He said.

“*Rensibfla!*” Eliani spat as she snuggled happily in Jomann's powerful arms causing all of them to burst into relieved laughter.

MANNE

SIX HOURS POST BATTLE

Radem watched silently from the edge of the clearing as the shoebox sized container was carried into the rear of the *MENKLA* transport a hundred meters away under heavy guard. He had done what his self proclaimed oath to Androcles had required and he had remained with Pusintin until the monster had long passed into the dark beyond. When he was certain that the monster was truly dead, though he did not care if it wasn't so, he completely incinerated what remained of one of the butchers of his people. Androcles had been very correct in detailing how the great Marshall Pusintin of the Kavalian Federation would die, and it was not at all painless in the least. Half a dozen times Radem had waited and watched in the shadows as the monster known as Pusintin screamed and thrashed about on the cave floor in horrific agony as his bones and internal organs were eaten away and destroyed from within.

It had taken four long hours to complete, but in the end all that remained of the first born son of King Leonidas of Sparta fit in the box now being loaded on the ship. Radem felt no remorse or regret for his actions, and he was quite certain Androcles felt none in the least. They had grown close over these last three years and in many ways Androcles Leonidas was now a brother to Radem. A lone brother to replace the four that had died by the orders of men who were not even worthy to give them. Androcles had bestowed much history of his people and especially his grandfather to Radem in their travels, and while he would never know for sure, Radem felt that King Leonidas the First would have approved of their actions.

Androcles and Radem had remained in constant touch, at least once a week during these last six months given everything that had occurred. Androcles had sworn to him on that planet so far away that he would allow Radem to have vengeance for his people. In doing so, he would also provide justice for crimes committed against Androcles' second elven mother and hundreds of his people so recently committed by Pusintin and his cronies. He had gone to great lengths to insure that he kept that vow to Radem and now Radem would never question the resolve or the spoken word of Androcles Leonidas again.

And he would insure none of his people did.

Radem had been correct in what he told Pusintin as he was sitting there dying. The name Soul Slayer had been given to Androcles Leonidas during a time of war. He and his Bonded sister Elynth had claimed more Evolli lives during that war than any single other. It was a vile curse in the native Evolli language, yet now it was a revered name on their homeworld. It had been since the day when Androcles and Elynth had risked their own lives to save the lives of nearly two dozen Evolli children right in their very capital on the very first day they had arrived to try and begin the healing. They had acted without any concern for their own safety and he and Elynth had kept an entire section of a collapsing building from crushing the children. It was a building damaged during the war and it had chosen this time to finally disintegrate. Using the amazing powers that they commanded, Androcles and Elynth had imposed their own bodies between the crushing steel and concrete and protected the children and the civilians who had dashed forward to rescue them. They had done this in full view of thousands of Evolli civilians who had gathered to lay their eyes upon Soul Slayer and his Bonded sister and millions more who were watching across the planet on the news feeds.

That was the day that the rightful Evolli Ruling Quorum, now restored to power, and millions of Evolli had seen that perhaps not all hope was lost. If the two individuals who had claimed more lives during the war, who were feared by every Evolli soldier, if they could put aside their hate and anger at what had occurred and rescue the children of those who were thought to be their hated enemies, then there could still be hope for the future. That day had begun the rebirth of the Evolli as a people and a species, and none of them had looked back since. They turned their hatred and false anger towards who they now knew was responsible for a war that had cost too much on both sides. Over the course of the next six weeks, Androcles and Elynth, six *Durcunusaan* and six veteran Evolli warriors had blazed a path of destruction and death across The Wilds and Kavalian space. They had liberated hundreds of priceless Evolli artifacts that were the cornerstone of Evolli culture and history from the Kavalian animals and the pirate scum who had they had been sold to. Artifacts that would help to bring about the change so many knew needed to happen. Radem had been one of those six Evolli.

It was during one of these missions where Androcles had saved his life by taking a bullet intended for Radem's head. The projectile had merely stunned Andro after slamming into his Dragon Armor encased helmet, but this had been the turning point for their relationship. This is what had brought them together.

Over the course of the next few missions he had spent many hours with Androcles and Elynth both. They had gifted him with the ability to speak to them with his mind and Radem had proven a very talented learner. They shared their time with him, spoke of battles fought and lives lost. When they discovered Radem too had been at Alba Tau and had voiced opposition to such an action, it brought them even closer together. They discovered he had tried to stop the attack and then had spent the next three days trying to save as many Evolli soldiers as he could. He had tried to tell the leadership that it was a losing battle. That the dragons and riders would never give up the remains of their dead. Radem was a soldier yes, but he had far more respect and knowledge of the men and dragons that his leaders so causally dismissed. Not one of them had listened to him and finally he had deserted with a hundred of his best soldiers to try and rescue and pull as many of their people as they could from that vile killing ground.

Andro and Elynth in turn discovered that while Alba Tau had been a defining moment in their lives, it had also been a defining moment in the evolution of the Evolli as a species. It was that battle where thousands upon thousands of the Evolli had their eyes open to what was really happening, Radem among them. And what their actions had cost them. It was Alba Tau that had finally caused the Evolli people as a whole to step back and see just how badly they had been duped. Since that day Radem had been dedicated to seeing his people returned to the honor and trust they once held. He had been instrumental in ousting the false rulers who had led the initial coup against the elected government and he had been present to watch all of them executed. The unquestioned support of Androcles Leonidas and nearly two hundred *Durcunusaan* volunteers had insured that the rightful rulers were reinstated to power. This was an event that had never made the Netnews channels within the Union. The three hour long battle of the Evolli Quorum Council Building had been vicious and bloody, but Androcles and the *Durcunusaan* and Evolli troops under his command had held the Kavalian garrison troops at bay until Radem and his men had been able to wrench control back from those who had driven their people into pariahs of the universe. The Kavalians knew who had assisted the Evolli but were able to do nothing to stop them. The garrison troops were not Puma Bane and just Elynth's presence during the battle had frozen many of them in fear. Radem had taken great satisfaction when the overbearing Kavalian Ambassador who thought he was so superior and untouchable to the Evolli had finally fallen. Radem had seen to his fate personally. It was a

day that would now be forever cemented in Evolli history and only added to the respect and reverence many Evolli now felt for Soul Slayer and his Bonded sister.

There were many Evolli who did not feel this way towards Androcles and Elynth. They had become mercenaries and scum who had chosen a life of violence and crime shown to them during the war. They were fewer in number now, and whenever they were found they were annihilated.

Radem turned his head slightly when he saw Miranda Lorian move up to where he stood. He knew who she was, though he had never met her before coming onto her ship for the trip here. He knew her history thanks to Androcles and he had spent eight hours with her on her ship during the journey. It was a bonding of sorts, though what had occurred during the war would remain with them forever. It had been a time of further healing for both of them however, and while they would probably never become friends, at least there was now forgiveness and a good amount of understanding and respect between them.

And some measure of peace for both of them.

“I spoke with Andro before coming down here.” Miranda told him as she stopped beside him. “They had just finished their debrief and were setting course for Ukway.”

Radem nodded his head slowly as he looked at her. “The settling of accounts. Yes... he told me this was what he intended before I departed to come here. Eliminating as many threats to the peace and stability of the Alpha Quadrant before he left to come here was a major goal of his. It just so happens that it blended perfectly with obtaining justice for the crimes committed against his family and so many others.”

Miranda looked at him evenly. He was a man she should have hated, but found she could not. Not after speaking with him for four straight hours on the trip here, certainly not after what Androcles had told her, and most especially not now after what he had done.

“Radem...” She began.

“No words need be spoken Admiral Lorian.” He told her.

“Yes... I believe they do.” Miranda answered. “I... I hated your people. I hated them for what the war took away from me. Androcles and the Leonidas family... they took me in when I needed them. Even when the pain of their own wounds and memories was still fresh in their minds they... they made me part of their family and they did not have to. Their actions are what saved me.”

Radem met her eyes with understanding. “Much like Androcles and Elynth did with me and many of my people. They saved us.”

Miranda nodded in agreement. “Then you understand how much your actions this day have... you have helped me to defend and protect those I consider my family now. It is a debt that I can not repay.”

“There is no debt to repay Admiral Lorian.” Radem told her evenly. “If there is any debt to be repaid, it is the Evolli who owe it. And I have acted for them in part by my actions here this day. We have always been an insular species... even when we were members of the Union so long ago. The war... the lies we believed... I think it truly opened the eyes of many who did not realize our ways were old and useless. Androcles and Elynth saw something that first day they came to our world after the war. They saw what we were at our core and they knew then. Many of my people, those with what you religion in their hearts, they believe it is why they did not hesitate to save our children that day. That is the debt that can never be repaid Admiral. The debt of hope once more given to an entire species. A hope we may have never found without them. That is the debt that can never be repaid.”

“Well... once it gets out what happen here... that hope is going to explode into reality my friend.” Miranda told him.

Radem took the short sword from his back, now secured in the scabbard and held it out to her gingerly. “Soul Slayer wanted this placed with the monster Pusintin’s ashes as a sign to any who may discover them. A sign of death. No one must touch the blade Admiral. Without the medicines within the Union, even Queen Anja would not be able to save them if they suffer even a minor cut.”

Miranda took the sword and nodded. “I will see to it.” She stated. “You are not returning to the Alpha Quadrant I understand?”

Radem shook his head. “I will remain here. No doubt King Leonidas has many questions that I must now answer. Even he does not know what swirls within the mind of Soul Slayer. It is my place to explain to him what has happened these last months and years.” He looked at her. “It will no doubt be an adventure as you say.”

Miranda chuckled softly. “No bets here.” She stated with a smile of knowing. “You have my personal COM channel Radem. If you need anything... contact me directly. We’re here now and we’ll always be around.”

Radem nodded his head. “I... I do not think it will be necessary, but I thank you for the offer.” His eyes went to the transport. “Where will you take him?”

Miranda followed his gaze for a moment then looked back. “We found a planet much like Ukwav in the next system.” She explained. She held up the scabbard. “I’m going to put this and his ashes into a torpedo shell and then blast it into the ocean from orbit. Whatever part of his ashes that don’t burn up on entry will be lost in forty thousand feet of freezing water forever.”

Radem nodded his head slowly. “A fitting end to a monster who has caused so much pain to others.”

Miranda looked at him. “I meant what I said. Anything you need... contact me.” She told him.

Radem bowed his head to her in respect. “I wish the stars and the gods to guide you in your travels Admiral Lorian.” He said. “As they now guide me.”

Miranda nodded and then turned to head back to the *MENKLA* as its engines came online and began to power.

A few moments later Radem sensed him approaching from behind but did not flinch as the *MENKLA* began to reach for the sky. He turned slowly and watched as the young King of the Lycavorian Union stopped only a meter in front of him. He still wore his combat armor, but his shoulder length black hair was now free and blowing in the slight breeze across the area. He dwarfed Radem in size really and without doubt could end his life in a blink of his eyes, yet Radem sensed he was full of questions.

Standing before him was the father of Soul Slayer, and behind only his son and Elynth, the one who had been the dagger in the heart of his people. His people’s finest military minds could not outthink him, or outfight him. He seemed to be able to predict what they would do at nearly every turn, and he was equally as feared as his son by the vast majority of the Evolli military. Radem’s keen eyes and senses could detect several members of his personal team hidden from plain sight but watching no doubt. Not by his choice if Radem was a measure of character, but because they knew the worth of the King that they would so willingly follow into the darkest reaches of horror and death without question.

Radem dropped to one knee in respect, surprising Martin with this action.

“King Leonidas.” He spoke the words almost reverently.

Martin seemed taken aback as he stepped closer. “I think we need to have a talk.” Martin told him calmly.

Radem lifted his head and met his dark brown eyes. “As you order my King.” He stated.

“And stop with that my King shit!” Martin hissed. “Given... given what has happened here I think that is really stupid! You saved the life of one of my Queens and my children and nephew. You bow to no one! Now get up!”

Radem rose to his feet as the King he and so many of his people were terrified of moved even closer to him. Androcles had told him that his father hated royal protocol and anything like it. He also said his father would honor him in action and words for what he would do. It would appear that once more Soul Slayer had been correct. “Milord?”

“How... how long have you been here?” Martin asked him.

“I arrived with Admiral Lorian’s forces Milord.” Radem answered.

“My daughter Zarah knew you were coming didn’t she?”

Radem nodded his head. “You might be surprised at what Soul Slayer shares with his beloved sister Zarah Milord. I discovered after our time together that she is... she and his sister Eliani are conduits into his soul. One only needs to be clear of mind to see this. You have seen this before no doubt.”

Martin rolled his eyes at that and nodded his head. “Now that... that doesn’t surprise me in the least. He has always been closer with them.” He said. “Zarah and Lucia have been hiding you this entire time? That’s why they remained here and didn’t return? They knew that he was sending you?”

“I would expect that this is what Soul Slayer intended... yes. They met me on Admiral Lorian’s ship and have kept me wrapped within the shadows hidden until the time to strike was upon us. My sincere apologies for the injuries suffered by your nephew. I was too slow in my actions.” Radem told him.

Martin shook his head. "You saved For'mya and him." He stated. "And Kalis is tougher than he looks. They have kept you hidden this whole time?" Martin asked.

"I have never experienced... the way they can move about within the shadows is most thrilling Milord. I have never experienced anything like it." Radem said with a touch of happy adventure in his voice.

"What is your name?" Martin asked him. "Your true name. Your Evolli Spirit name." He finished in a whispered voice only Radem could hear as he moved even closer.

Radem looked at him and it was his turn to be surprised. He smiled slightly after a short time. "I see Soul Slayer does indeed share many sacred things with his father." He said.

"Not everything it seems." Martin said.

"My Spirit name is Radem Holnari Convoasce Milord." Radem answered the question without hesitation. The Evolli Spirit name was perhaps one of the most guarded secrets of the Evolli culture. Very few individuals outside of Evolli culture and territory knew of such a thing. When each child was born they were given a spirit name, to be used only by their dearest loved ones and most treasured friends and never spoken in public. Radem had told Andro his Spirit name on their last mission together. If Soul Slayer saw fit to tell his father the significance of an Evolli's Spirit name, then there was truly hope after all.

"And what does it mean?" Martin asked him.

"From the beginning." Radem answered.

"Then maybe that's where you should start." Martin told him after a second.

"It is a very long story Milord." Radem explained.

Martin nodded his head. "We all have long stories Radem." Martin spoke in agreement. "Perhaps now would be the time to start sharing them instead of having to do all this sneaking around crap."

"Soul Slayer once told me that you liked to sneak around." Radem said and he relaxed quite a bit when he saw Martin Leonidas's face break into a small grin and a flash of the child like playfulness that Androcles said resided in his father's spirit came forth.

"Yeah... well... that is true... but now I would like to know what my son has cooked up in that brain of his. What other surprises has he got planned?" Martin said.

Radem smiled slightly as well, revealing his sharp pointed teeth. "I bless that he now calls me friend Milord... but even I do not know what swirls within Soul Slayer's mind. I do not believe I want to know. I do not believe anyone would want to know. Not if they wished to keep their sanity intact. Nor do I suspect anyone would wish to know what resides within your mind either Milord."

"You continue to call him Soul Slayer. I thought the name your people gave to him was a curse in your language." Martin questioned.

Radem nodded in agreement. "It once was Milord." He stated. "Until the day you sent your son and Elynth to our homeworld on a mission of redemption and hope. Soul Slayer and his dragon sister. Their actions that day, and by extension your actions Milord, they changed it from curse to blessing."

Martin's eyes grew a little wider. "He... he never told me something happened the first day they were there."

Radem smiled. "Then I would be honored to share this with you Milord. And so much more... if you would allow it."

Martin stepped closer to him even still and looked directly into his red eyes. He reached up unafraid and placed his hand on the smaller man's shoulder. "After what you did here today Radem Holnari Convoasce... after today... you have my undivided attention for as long as you like. And you have earned a trust I reserve only for my son and brother."

Radem bowed his head deeply. "I... I am beyond honored King Leonidas." He spoke. "I vow to never give you cause to regret the trust you have placed in me. Nor will my people if they are given the opportunity."

"Walk with me Radem." Martin told him.

It would be spoken of to future generations of Evolli and Lycavorian in the centuries to come. The day the Lycavorian King and an Evolli assassin, once bitter enemies, walked side by side and spoke of the past and the future.

But most of all they spoke of hope.

**ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
NORTHERN CONTINENT
LIVAIJI SULEVFU FACILITY**

Aviel stood with Shalu and Chalith as they gazed at where Laren and Ladur sat utterly still in the courtyard below. Neither of them had moved a single muscle for over four hours now and Aviel was becoming concerned. He had arrived to visit with her and Ladur and fill them in on what he was working on. Nahko and Dalis stood with the small group and they all turned when the doors to the large chamber opened and Laren's mother and father entered with the huge form of Ch'teven directly behind them.

"*Usjalil* Robati..." Aviel stammered quickly. "Is there... what is wrong with them?"

Robati looked at her husband Yokra and then back to Aviel as they stopped a few feet from him. "We... I..." She fumbled with her words.

Yokra squeezed her arm and looked at Aviel. "We have... we have never seen them like this." He said quickly. "This is new. They have withdrawn so far into the Etheric realm that we can not reach them. It is almost as if..."

"They are communicating with someone." Ch'teven finished his statement.

Aviel looked at him with wide eyes. "What?" He gasped.

"I have nothing to base my conclusions on..." He stated as he lowered his massive body to the floor. "I believe that they are communicating with the other *Dahakoan*. At least in some fashion. Reaching out to them in some way."

"They are powerful enough to do this Ch'teven?" Nahko asked astounded.

Ch'teven nodded his head as Chalith came up beside him. "Yes."

"Perhaps not speaking directly..." Chalith explained. "But she has told us before that they can feel flashes of great emotion from the other *Dahakoan*. Even across the distance that stands between them. I do not know to what extent this ability has evolved but..."

"They have been somewhat agitated these last hours." Nahko spoke thoughtfully. "I... I asked her about it but she deflected her answer to something else quite skillfully."

"This was the first opportunity I have had to break away from my duties without raising suspicion and I had hoped to speak with her." Aviel said turning back to look at where Laren and Ladur sat. "Have you been able to learn anything since we last spoke?"

It was Dalis who stepped closer now. Since arriving here with Nahko he had become truly enthralled about what was happening. He was fascinated with Laren and Ladur both and had spent several hours each of the last few days just speaking with them. He had no doubts or reservations about whether the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* was indeed taking place. His total faith in the ancients had never wavered in all his years and now he would be present to see a prophecy unfold.

"I have been able to speak with her at length *Koppentotz* Aviel and..." He began.

Aviel held up his hand and looked at him. "Dalis Sulryn, given what we are all involved in now and the extreme danger it brings to all of us, I think you can dispense with formalities of rank and standing. At least when in this company. Don't you?"

Dalis met his eyes and nodded his head with a small smile. "It would seem rather out of place." He stated.

Aviel nodded as well. "Yes it would. Now... what have you discovered?"

"Her knowledge of the Alpha Quadrant and the species within is astounding." Dalis told him. "Laren and Ladur both can name species and places and planets that are only held within the walls of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* library. A facility that you well know is very restricted in who is granted access."

Aviel nodded. "Indeed. Something I have never been very comfortable with."

"Nor us." Chalith echoed.

"I have been able to piece together small amounts of information with Laren's help. She told me that the ones called Androcles and Elynth are bright beacons that she and Ladur can easily focus on. The other ones, this

Dorian and Ryner, they are growing more powerful by the day. As they grow in power, it allows them to focus with more clarity.” Dalis told him. “She told me the distance is still very great, but they can share images and single words. Not directly mind you, but through Etheric means. Like a waking dream state almost. She and Ladur believe the other *Dahakoan* are still trying to understand it all and that is why they have not reached for her openly.”

Aviel looked at him surprised and Nahko smiled as she took Aviel’s arm. “I believe Laren and Ladur have come to trust Dalis quite a bit in so short a time.” She told her husband looking up into his face. “They do not see him as a threat Aviel. They see him only as someone seeking knowledge. Just like themselves.”

Dalis looked somewhat embarrassed at this and shifted his feet. “It was not my intent to intrude...”

“No!” Robati spoke up now from beside her husband. She stepped closer to Dalis. “You have not intruded Dalis Sulryn. I have never seen my daughter smile as much as when she is speaking with you. And I have never heard Ladur bellow in laughter as I did the day you first arrived.”

“I... I have only inquired of them. Their thoughts and wishes.” Dalis said softly.

“That may be why.” Shalu spoke now causing them to look at her.

“Shalu?”

“Dalis is a scholar Aviel.” She continued. “A gatherer of knowledge. All of us... Chalith, Ch'teven, even me... we have been trying so hard to protect them because we know what they are; what they mean. This has come out in how we treat them. Dalis simply wishes to know them. Like her parents and brothers. He does not care that she and Ladur are the heralds of the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*.”

“That is not true!” Dalis spoke quickly. “I do care but I...”

“You do not allow that knowledge to override your keen mind and have it come out in the way you treat them.” Aviel put it all together as he turned back to look at Laren and Ladur. He turned back to Dalis. “That is a gift Dalis Sulryn. A gift many do not have.”

Dalis looked surprised at his words and it showed on his face. His feelings for Nahko aside, perhaps Aviel Em'mor was not as arrogant a man as Dalis first thought. He certainly did not act in such a way. “Perhaps... but my concern for them is there. The knowledge Laren and Ladur hold within them is far more detailed than any within the libraries Aviel Em'mor. It is broken and jumbled right now as I said, however I surmise that when they are finally united with the other *Dahakoan* this will change. Or if they are able to communicate directly within the Etheric realm somehow.”

Aviel looked at him. “You think this could happen?” He asked.

Dalis nodded. “Most assuredly.” He answered. “Everything that Chalith and the others have told me only supports this. And if I had to guess... the other *Dahakoan* will soon respond to their resonance... and once that happens the knowledge they have will be unlocked.”

“And this is... this is knowledge we do not want the Scourge to have.” Yokra spoke now.

Dalis shook his head quickly. “If I am correct... after speaking with them these last few days... I have come to the conclusion that buried within them is the knowledge of the ancients. Buried within the other *Dahakoan* is the knowledge of the ancients. All the vast knowledge that *Zezhuanth* himself obtained in his lifetime. He has blessed each of them with different parts of this knowledge and it draws them together from across the stars. When they finally are united, I believe when they finally are united, all of this knowledge will fall into place within each of them.”

“To include secrets the Scourge do not want us to have.” Ch'teven spoke now.

They all looked at him. “Ch'teven? What do you mean?” Chalith asked.

“Why else would they be doing this?” Ch'teven asked them softly. “Why begin to take our Maidens when for so many years we were ignored. They must have discovered something in the archeology site on Haradur. The ruins are the site of our original homeworld before we came here. They must have found something besides the missing scroll.”

Aviel looked at him. “But your people only found the scroll twenty-seven years ago.” He said. “The Scourge have been taking our Maidens for far longer than that.”

Ch'teven nodded his massive head. “Which means they found something else. Something related to why they began taking our females.”

“Your people found no Scourge among the ruins of the buildings where the Scroll was discovered Chalith?” Aviel asked.

Chalith shook his head. “No Scourge activity at all. The Team Leader said that the site appeared to have been abandoned for some time. Decades at least. He said it was quite odd.”

“And where did they find the scroll?” Aviel asked.

“The site had four chambers.” Chalith explained. “Three of them had already been open and they found nothing within them. The scroll was discovered in the fourth chamber. It was the deepest of the four and it appears the Scourge were preparing to enter it but then stopped. He said they had abandoned several caches of equipment.”

Aviel looked at Ch'teven as his eyes grew wider. “Because they already found what they were looking for?” He said softly.

Ch'teven nodded his massive head. “Or something of enough importance that it made them stop looking. It must concern the *Dahakoan*. Why else begin taking our females so soon after they abandoned this site. It has to be this Aviel. They must have found something that would eventually lead them to the chosen *Dahakoan* among our people. If they discover one set of *Dahakoan*... it leads them to the others. Buried within the mind and the blood of each of the *Dahakoan* is a secret or multiple secrets. Secrets that the Scourge fear. Secrets that the Scourge do not want us to have. It is the only explanation.”

“No... this is definitely not something we want to fall into the hands of the Scourge.” Chalith said softly. “Through the Maidens that they take they hope to find all of the *Dahakoan* and destroy them.”

Nahko shook her head. “No. I believe their intent is much more sinister and evil.” She told them.

Aviel looked at her. “Nahko?”

“I have reviewed all of the VID footage Chalith and the others supplied to you husband.” Nahko told him. “What they are forcing upon our Maidens is disgusting and vile and heinous, but it has purpose.”

Aviel shook his head. “I don't follow.”

Shalu moved up beside Nahko. “Tell him Nahko. Tell him what you believe the vile monsters are doing.”

Nahko met her husband's eyes. “I believe they are trying to discover the Darastrixi *Dahakoan* in order to breed her with Scourge Holy Elites.” She said seeing Aviel's bright eyes grow wide in horror. “Those same Scourge made to look humanoid by the Pralor Xaxon's fool interference in their life cycles.”

“For what... for what purpose?” Aviel asked his face and eyes showing the others how horrific he thought this action.

“To find a way to defeat them.” Nahko said. “Or a way to pass these skills to a Scourge Elite or Holy Elite within their genes so that they can use them against us.”

“*Ithquenti!*” Aviel gasped in disgust.

“We know that Xaxon betrayed his Praetorian Mage. What he did to her... to a Praetorian it was unconscionable. This is the primary reason their Chief Elder, his twin brother, disciplined him in the manner they did.” Chalith said.

Aviel nodded his head. “They separated his mind from his body, forever damning his spirit.”

Chalith nodded as well. “He experimented on her and essentially made her one of the Scourge. He was trying to find a way to control them and instead made them even more evil and malicious.”

“And far more intelligent.” Shalu added.

“We know she is now the Scourge Queen and holds a great deal of hatred for anything Pralor. She would have knowledge of such things, at least in some manner.” Chalith said. “If she is aware of the *Dahakoan*, then it would be her driving this taking of our Maidens.”

“But they have already wiped out the Pralors.” Aviel spoke. “What would be the reason for doing this now?”

“Have they wiped out the Pralor people?” Ch'teven spoke softly as they all looked at him. “Laren and Ladur are living examples that the Pralor blood is not dead. And not just any Pralor blood... but that of their most beloved Chief Elder and the leader and most powerful of their Praetorians.”

“Sumar.” Shalu gasped.

Ch'teven nodded once more. “The blood and Praetorian gene of Sumar would lose none of its potency even mixed with these Lycavorians and vampiric individuals as it has been. If anything... it would be even more powerful, driven by the passion and emotion that we know these species thrive on.”

Aviel looked at Dalis. “Dalis?”

Dalis nodded his head. "I told you they were a passionate species Aviel." He said. "After being able to speak with Laren and Ladur about them, it only confirms this for me. Can you imagine the power of a Praetorian and a *Dahakoan* driven by emotion and passion? Fueled by honor and duty? Those like she claims the other *Dahakoan* are."

"My daughter knows what she speaks of!" Robati defended her only daughter and would do so viciously.

Dalis looked at her quickly. "Please... that was not meant as a slight Lady Robati. I... I believe Laren and Ladur with all that I am."

"The Darastrixi are the only other species to ever fight the Scourge and defeat them." Ch'teven spoke once more. "If they were able to conquer us, there would be nothing keeping them from expanding their influence across the stars, destroying and enslaving life everywhere they went. They know they must defeat us first however."

Nahko nodded. "And finding the *Dahakoan* among our people and experimenting on them as they are doing to our Maidens... trying to breed them with their vile kind. Even if they were partially successful husband... making monsters with the power and abilities of *Dahakoan* and Praetorians to fight us... they would eventually wear us down and destroy us all."

"They are nothing if not patient." Chalith said.

Aviel turned away from them and cursed long and hard in their native tongue. Nahko's embarrassment at her husband's action showed on her face. None of them had ever heard him speak such things before and they were all wide eyed in surprise. Aviel turned back to them and saw their faces and suddenly he was very embarrassed as well.

"*Onelka ve.*" He stammered in apology. (Forgive me) "I have spent much time around my boyhood friend Dytin Ueni these last days."

"The commander of all Darastrixi forces?" Chalith asked. "You know him?"

Aviel nodded his head. "We grew up together. Nahko and I are High Guardians to four of his children."

Shalu laughed at this knowledge and nodded her head. "And boys will be boys no matter their background." She said. "Very inventive boys it seems."

Aviel looked truly embarrassed and his light colored scales almost turned red. He shook his head as Nahko pressed closed to him and wrapped her arms around his waist with a smile. "Just so you do not use such language around our children." She said.

Aviel leaned over and caressed her cheek scales with his nose in affection and Nahko leaned into him. It was a typical show of love between a married Darastrixi couple and not often done in public. It caused Nahko to look embarrassed herself. Aviel turned back to them. "Their foul reasons for doing what they are doing is secondary at the moment." He told them quickly. "We must insure Laren and Ladur are not discovered. Or hide them as best we are able. We can not allow them to suffer such heinous experimentation."

"You can not hide us forever *Koppentotz* Aviel." Ladur's deep voice echoed from behind them and they all turned to see them standing just inside the archway of the door. Laren stood in front of Ladur's broad chest and looked ridiculously tiny in comparison to him, yet for some reason it looked so perfect. Her fingers were stroking the scales under his thick throat as they watched them. "And the Scourge beasts would not find it so easy to take us."

Aviel's eyes grew bright and he broke away from Nahko's embrace. "Laren! Ladur!" He exclaimed almost happily as he stepped towards them. He came up short as he remembered how Laren reacted to the usual Darastrixi greeting but it was Laren who smiled. She stepped right up to him now and pressed her hand to his chest, took his hand within hers and placed it over her breast as she brought her forehead towards his. Aviel instantly lowered his head to hers and felt the peace emanating from both of them within the Etheric realm. Aviel drew back when the greeting was over as was the custom and he looked at them. "It is truly a pleasure to see you both again." He stated.

Laren smiled as well and reached out to take his hand in hers. She held it to her cheek and nodded. "We feel the same *Koppentotz* Aviel." She said softly.

"Please child..." Aviel said his eyes growing wider at this display of emotion from her and he stammered his words. "Please... both of you are not children and you did not need to address me in such a way."

Ladur lowered his head to just over Laren's right shoulder. "Yet we do *Koppentotz* Aviel. It is our way of showing that we respect and honor your position."

Aviel reached up without fear and placed his hand flat against Ladur's cool scales and smiled. "When I arrived you looked so... I feared I would not be able to speak with you."

Laren looked up over her shoulder at Ladur and then back to him. "Forgive us." She told them. "We... we began to feel great clashes of emotions from our *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* within the Etheric realm this morning."

"Has... has something happened Laren?" Aviel asked quickly taking her hands in his. "Now is not the time to hold such things in child. Given what we have come to believe just in these last few days... we..."

"Laren my sister..." Ladur spoke and shifted his eyes to gaze down at her as she lifted her eyes to his. "We are among family and friends. We must not keep what we have discovered from them. Why else would Androcles and Dorian allow us to see it?"

Aviel looked back and forth between them with wide eyes as the others crowded around. "What do you mean?" He asked. "Have you... have you spoken with them?"

Laren stroked Ladur's scales once more before turning back to Aviel and shook her head. "The distance is still too great for us to communicate directly unless they too are focusing." She told them. "They... they are still trying to understand what is happening. And they are growing stronger as we speak. We have felt great flashes of emotion from them as I said. It affected us as well... and we were able to see images from them. They know... they know that we exist. That we are out here. Yet they do not understand it all. None of us do. But they..."

"They trust what they feel from us enough to allow us to see images." Ladur continued for Laren. "Images are how they are communicating with us subconsciously. Something has been happening where they are that is keeping them from focusing their full power in order to communicate directly."

"Their full..." Chalith gasped as he moved closer. "Ladur... are you saying that they could communicate with you here, even now, if they wanted too?"

Ladur nodded his huge head. "If they were to concentrate enough... yes. Androcles and Elynth could reach us by themselves if they wished it... but with Dorian and Ryner within the connection as well it would be nothing for them to accomplish this easily."

"*Ithquenti!*" Nahko exclaimed. "Aviel... that would mean they are even more powerful than we first thought!" She said looking at him. "That Laren are more powerful than we first thought!"

Laren waved that off dismissively. "Whatever has been keeping them from focusing is now changing. We have sensed great relief and..." She couldn't find the word and looked at Ladur. "Brother?"

"*Filkiati.*" Ladur said. "Justice."

Laren nodded. "Yes... justice." She said turning back to Aviel and the others. "Whatever has been happening... in concerns our *Seoyl Svihelen*. Terrible actions committed against them. They are... they are insuring that *filkiati ui faestir.*" (Soul Family)(Justice is served)

"And they are succeeding." Ladur said.

"We have seen... we have seen some images of what has taken place and it..." Laren shook her head. "No... I will not speak of such horrible things." Ladur lowered his head to gently brush his snout against her shoulder in a reassuring action and her arm lifted to curl around his lower jaw as much as possible. "The emotion flowing through them has allowed us to see images of what has taken place. Events that have occurred as recently as the last few months. It is almost over now as I said... and soon they will reach for us. When they do... we must be prepared to act immediately *Koppentotz* Aviel. Their people have made tremendous technological advancements in just the last two decades alone. They discovered a Pralor ship on their former homeworld and brought it back to their world. Earth it is called. Just recently they discovered another left for the family by the Elders of the Pralor people before their homeworld was destroyed. They have been able to build many great and wondrous things from what they learned from this ship."

"A Pralor ship?" Dalis asked. "You never told me this."

Ladur shook his head. "We were not completely certain Dalis." He answered. "Androcles is very... he is very cautious. We saw it within them this time however."

Aviel looked at Dalis. "Are they... I thought... Dalis could they build something on their own from what they learn from the ship?"

Dalis nodded quickly. "From speaking with Laren these last days I can at least confirm that her Androcles and Dorian most definitely have the blood of the Pralor Chief Elder Sumar. Passed down to them from their father no doubt. All of them can tie their history and blood right back to Sumar himself. And as the first and by far the most powerful of their Praetorians, his bloodline would not have been diluted in any way through the millennia. Given their nature and the nature of many of the species that follow them, building something from what they learn from the Pralor ship would be an absolute given by now. They are not the barbaric and conquering species so many believe them to be."

Aviel nodded. "I believe you my friend." He said.

"Laren you are you and Ladur positive about what you have seen?" Ch'teven asked.

Laren nodded her face bright. "Oh yes. We saw... we saw the first ship among the many images passed to us. And another ship like it... but larger and far more powerful. We also saw and felt the reason why we know they will be coming soon."

"What... what do you mean?" Aviel asked.

Laren smiled even more and her face became brighter and even more beautiful. "There is a *Doraanar* among them now *Koppentotz* Aviel. She is with them even now. The last of the *Doraanar*. And soon she will begin to help guide them. And they will come."

That one word struck all of them as if they had been slapped.

"A *Doraanar*!" Chalith nearly shouted.

Aviel reached out quickly but took Laren's hands within his gently. "Laren... Ladur... a *Doraanar*? You are certain child? You must be certain!"

Ladur nodded his head once more. "We have seen her image briefly. We... we don't know how this came to be... but she is among them now and they know what she is."

"*Ini wer Ithquenti*!" Shalu muttered. (By The Gods)

"Laren... if ever there was a time to share with us what you know... it is now!" Aviel said. "You and Ladur... you know what this could mean. The existence of a *Doraanar*? Her presence with the *Dahakoan*? This could..."

Laren nodded her head after looking at Ladur and then turned back to him. "We will share what we are able *Koppentotz* Aviel. Until we can speak directly with them however, we cannot share everything. We will not."

Aviel nodded his head. "Anything more than what we have now is better than nothing child. It may help us to determine what the Scourge are doing and confirm why they are doing it. And it can only help us to protect you better."

Ladur nodded. "We should probably sit down." He stated. "This may take some time."

SPARTA'S WRATH **ELEVEN HOURS FROM UKWAV**

The main Operational Briefing Room on *SPARTA'S WRATH* looked more like a huge gathering hall than a military briefing center for the ship's senior officers. The OBR, as Armen had dubbed it, was easily sixty meters long, half that in width and high enough for even Torma to fit into the massive room through the two entrances. The enormous granite and oak table occupied fully one third of the room and was closest to the bulkhead. Nothing but stars could be seen through the room length wall of armored view windows that were divided into different sections and each could be sealed individually if need be. When the room was in use, three *Durcumusaan* Tech Officers were seated at the different consoles to immediately be able to pull up any information anyone in the room might need. These three officers had been chosen by Ben himself and held the highest security clearances known to exist within the Union military. They would be privy to information that most others would never know. At the moment they blended into the interior of the room as if they belonged.

On the aft end of the OBR was a complete food and drink dispensing station and counter. It was connected to the main Mess Lounge five decks below and anything already prepared and packaged that was requested was instantly provided through the three dispensers. The Mess crew numbered over five hundred

between the four main Mess Lounges on *SPARTA'S WRATH*, and they kept fresh fruit and warm bread stocked within the OBR when they knew it was going to be used. The Mess crew were from many different species to insure that all types of foods were made and offered. The fresh stocks of food would last for a full year before having to be restocked, while packaged rations they had enough of to last for five full years in space. Along the counter in the OBR were dishes and utensils for use as well as coffee and juice urns. A large refrigeration unit was a fixture on the end of the counter and was stocked with nearly any drink that was best served cold.

Along the opposite wall between the two entrances were glittering gold models of a dozen different Union Fleet ships, five on either side of the large holoscreen that continually cycled through a history of equally as many different Pralor ships and even some planets. The majority of the Lycavorian population had Pralor blood in them, even in minuscule amounts, and it was Andro's way of honoring that history as well as their own.

At the moment, only half of the huge table was filled, all of them sitting in comfortable high backed chairs near the aft entrance and closest to the food dispensing station. Most of them had grabbed a few hours of sleep and a much needed meal and looked rested and ready to go. The Leonidas family members onboard had joined collectively in the Mess Lounge briefly to be together and enjoy the comfort of family and friends if only for a short time. Gorgo had broken into tears in Andro's arms when he had informed her of what had taken place on Manne and after a long moment of holding his grandmother she had taken a deep breath and simply nodded her head. She took his face in her hands and kissed his cheeks before simply saying 'thank you'. Andro knew she would come to terms with what he had done, but he also knew that she loved him for insuring that Martin had not been the one to kill his brother. Their gathering was not complete since many of their family was still absent, but it had been Dorian who had them all laughing within minutes of sitting down at the table. This served to ease the tension and final ebbs of the combat high that all of them felt.

The huge table had been custom built for one of the briefing rooms at Dreamland, but Ben thought it would better serve them on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. It could seat forty men and women, each position slightly indented in the table and the chairs attached to the framework underneath. They could easily spin their chairs completely around if need be. Each position had a small computer screen in front of it that would rise from the table surface when called.

The word from within The Wilds was spreading quickly that Admiral Robert Moran had fallen and that Union and High Coven forces had moved quickly to engage those loyal to him. Reports coming out of High Coven space were speaking of a massive space battle along their border somewhere that was more a massacre than anything as the ships under Robert Moran who did not give up immediately were systematically obliterated by superior Union and High Coven forces. Word also spoke of a smaller but far more important engagement that had taken place and resulted in the capture of Moran. No one knew how these reports were getting out into The Wilds, but information had never had a problem moving about almost at light speed in The Wilds. Those same reports spoke of a massive Union ship, far larger than anything anyone had seen before and it was under the command of Prince Androcles. It was this knowledge that led Andro to forgo moving under Shroud as they headed for Ukwav. *SPARTA'S WRATH* would not remain secret for much longer and why try to hide it now. This also caused any ship within five light years of *SPARTA'S WRATH* and the small High Coven task force moving with her to avoid them like the plague and alter their courses to remain out of their way. No one in their right mind wanted to face the wrath of the Union Crown Prince and his famous temper. And if this new ship was traveling with High Coven warships, then it was safe to assume the peace he had brought to the two governments after so many thousands of years was solid and moving into the realm of complete and total cooperation.

Androcles sat on the end of the table, his back to the food dispensing station. The ends of the table angled inward and allowed two individuals to sit at the end on either side of his spot. When they entered the room it was almost like second nature for Sadi and Lu'ria to take spots on either side of Andro. Carisia sat to Lu'ria's left, while Ne'Veha and Sehri sat to Sadi's right. The only person to really take notice of this was Yuri and she had to smile inwardly as she watched. As with his mothers, Andro's mates had developed an almost instinctive knowledge of where to sit when near him and it almost never changed. They did not bicker or argue on who would sit closest to him at any given time. Yuri had seen his mothers act in a similar way when with Martin, almost always taking the spots they did by instinct. It was just another example of the woman being

totally comfortable with each other and the love they felt for Androcles. And the love he obviously felt for all of them.

Eliani, Jomann and Brendi sat to Carisia's left, followed by Dorian, Sheva and Onera, who had become their constant shadow much to their delight. Though nothing had yet happened between them, there hadn't been any free time up to now, all present knew that it was going to happen sooner or later and this did not seem to bother Yuri or Pa'cour in the least. Nara was next, sitting beside Onera followed by Lisisa and Murano. To Ne'Veha's right on the opposite side of the table Yuri and Pa'cour occupied the next chairs down that side, Tir'ut very happy to sit beside the uncle he was just getting to know and his Blessed Wife Normya happily beside him. The other members of his team were doing odd jobs across the trip and preparing for the final part of their mission onto Ukwav.

All of them were listening to Yuri as she was talking.

"... have already started back with the *INQUISITOR*." She was telling them. "Some of Lidene's people are already onboard and beginning to purge her systems. By the time she gets back to our base Lidene will be ready to do the final purge of her computers and reboot them with our command codes, programming and information."

"It appears as if Moran's supporters on Uzu Ozeib 7 have been backpedaling as fast as they can." Pa'cour added. "They are the ones undoubtedly releasing this anonymous information to contacts they have within The Wilds."

"Are you going to give this information to Narice?" Andro asked looking at Yuri.

Yuri shook her head. "Pa'cour and I agree. Robert was blackmailing these men and he had assets in place to kill their families if they did not do what he wanted. They were terrified of him Androcles. They were only feeding him minor information from what we know, but they do support Narice. Nameia will give this intelligence to Cha'talla and he will act on it if need be. And keep tabs on these men and women to be sure."

"How many of Moran's crew did not see things our way?" Andro asked her.

Yuri met his eyes from across the table. "Far more than I would like to admit to anyone." She replied honestly. "Robert populated his ship with hardcore hate mongers Androcles. Men and women who could not see that their path was wrong and would eventually lead to the total destruction of the High Coven. All they cared for was the power that they could grab and hold on to." She shook her head. "They were dealt with."

"Marux was not on the ship." Andro continued. "If he was... Elynth and I would have felt him."

"If Xaxon was fully in control of Dante as we believe..." Murano spoke up from his chair. "He would have had the dragon bonded to the boy Dante removed from the ship."

Andro looked at him. "Removed?" He asked.

Murano nodded his head. "He would not want the added problems being bonded to a dragon would have caused him. He was apparently having a hard enough time controlling Dante. He would have had the boy either send the dragon away or killed outright after severing whatever connection they had."

Andro's eyes grew a little wider and darker Murano saw. "Killed?" Androcles almost yelled.

"I told you the man was a monster Androcles." Murano said softly.

"Murano... could he do that?" Lisisa asked leaning forward. "Sever their connection? I thought only Andro, my father; Elynth or Torma could do that. They... they are the only Talon Guardians alive."

Murano nodded in agreement. "Normally I would agree Lisisa." He answered. "But when Xaxon took control of Dante he would have sensed the Etheric bond immediately. You told me that their bond was marginal at best Andro, Dante and his dragon?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"Then Xaxon would have been able to sever the connection easily." Murano said. "From what I have seen between your father and Torma and you and Elynth... others as well... a true Etheric bond as you and they have, he could do nothing about. Ever. However, if the Etheric bond was for lack of a better word iffy at best to begin with, then he could sever the bond in any number of ways."

Andro closed his eyes briefly and then opened them. "He isn't dead." He said. "I can still feel his resonance if only faintly."

Andro my brother! Elynth's voice echoed openly within the Etheric realm and everyone heard her. *We must find him.*

I know sister. Andro answered.

Yuri looked at him now. “Andro I... Marux was... he had become as twisted as Dante. Why would you...?”

“If Xaxon severed the bond then he is alone and lost.” Andro spoke. “Without Dante’s resonance echoing within him, his natural personality will reassert itself. I will not leave him to face his fate alone.”

I will look for him Andro. Give us a STRIKER and flight crew! Anthar spoke up now within the Etheric realm. *Elynth and I will go!*

As will I. Majeir echoed him.

We will too! Caydren chimed in, answering for him and Cinol both.

Andro reached out and activated the small COM unit built into the table top. “Armen?”

-Androcles?-

“I want you to scan for residual traces of small ships. Shuttles or transports most likely. Anything large enough to carry a dragon.” Andro looked at Murano. “How long before he would have acted Murano?”

Murano shook his head. “Not long. A day. Two at most.”

“Armen... extrapolate the mostly likely course the Coven ships would have taken when escaping Union space after the attacks on my sister and Dragon Mountain. Using that... scan for small ships that may have left their base course and gone elsewhere within The Wilds.”

“There is no need for this Androcles.” Pa'cour told him as he activated the computer in front of him. “I can give you the base course to work from. I may have spent all my time with Yuri when first leaving Earth but my men kept me apprised of our course and actions.”

“Armen... use the coordinates and course Pa'cour is entering and make your search off of that.” Andro told him.

-Understood.- Armen answered. -I will advise you shortly-

“Sister... use Anthar, Majeir, Caydren and Cinol and try to trace his resonance. Have Thaura and Jeth provide an event boundary to follow within the Etheric realm. Pull from them if you need to.” Andro spoke to the air. “Once you have found it... take our Mark II STRIKER.

We will start right away. Elynth answered.

Andro looked at Ne'Veha in her chair. “*SirsanGai...* get with the Wing Commander and select a Flight Crew for our STRIKER Mark II. Send three *Durcunusaan* with them. They can search for him while Shrouded and when they find him, call for support if need be.”

Ne'Veha nodded and rose to her feet. “I will see to it.” She said. She kissed Sehri and Sadi lovingly before moving quickly for the door.

“I’m sorry Yuri.” Andro spoke softly turning to look at her. “We have to do this.”

Yuri shook her head quickly. “No. There is no reason for you to be sorry. I know what you and Elynth are. It is just another life that has been affected by our actions.” She said in disgust. “We... my mother, my father, my grandfather. They did it to us. And it is my fault as well.”

“Mother... you can not blame yourself for others actions.” Carisia spoke up quickly.

“I was part of it all Risa.” Yuri told her softly meeting her eyes. “At least in some fashion and sense.”

Andro, Sadi and the others looked at her and saw her cheeks turn a soft shade of red. “Risa?” He asked with a smile.

Yuri grinned now in spite of herself as the happy moment returned to her. “When she was very young I tried to teach her name to her. All she could get out was Risa.”

Sadi laughed softly as Lu'ria leaned close to Carisia and nuzzled her cheek. “I like Risa.” She said as Carisia smiled warmly and squeezed her hand.

“So do I.” Sehri spoke up.

Andro leaned forward and looked at Yuri. “The past is the past Yuri and that is where it needs to remain as we go forward from here. If we can find and save Marux then I will save him. It is Elynth’s and my duty.” He told her gently. “The woman sitting in your chair however, that is the woman you were always intended to

be. Accept who you are now Yuri. The true Yuri to be sure. If you wish to atone for whatever sins you may have committed, then that is your decision, but do not let that rule who you are now.”

Yuri met his eyes once more. “There are many who will not see what you see Androcles. You know that.”

Andro nodded. “Yes. But we all know what happen Yuri. Everyone in this room knows what happen to you. What you endured. They may not understand it... but your actions now will prove to everyone what we already know. I told my father once that the past has no place in the present or the future. We only need to remember it as a guide to what our actions now mean and represent.”

“*Avoi.*” Lisisa spoke softly.

Yuri looked at Pa'cour and then Onera and knew he was right. Whatever she may have done while Xaxon controlled her was in the past. She had found true and unquestioned love with Pa'cour and their daughter together was proof of that love. As would be the children they would have in the future. She had begun to make amends with two of her other daughters and she had a chance to make it so with Lisisa as well in the future. It was not an opportunity she was going to pass by. She took a deep breath and nodded her head. “You are right.” She said.

Andro sat back in his chair. “Good. I was beginning to sound like the *Feravomir* and I hate sounding like her when she gets into one of her lecture modes.”

This caused everyone to laugh heartily and Dorian leaned forward. “I’ll make sure I tell her you said that *fervon.*” He said.

Andro rolled his eyes and Sadi leaned into him with a soft laugh. “You left yourself open to that one my love.” She told him.

Andro grinned and nodded his head. “Yes I did.”

Murano had remained quiet while they talked. He had grown accustomed to the almost laconic way that first Martin and now Andro and Martin’s other children acted in the face of great danger or large decisions. The gentle ribbing and what seemed like dismissive nature of the issues was not truly what it appeared to be. He had seen a small portion of what Androcles could do on the High Coven ship, and given his experience he had no doubts that both Martin and Andro would soon surpass even Sumar in what they could do. The instinctual nature and passionate emotion that always swirled through them was not a bad thing as so many Pralors and even some Praetorians once believed. It was a strength that could only add to their power and abilities.

Murano knew he would have to speak with this woman Shiria that Andro had spoken of. She was the one who was in the lead at finding others who possessed the Praetorian gene within them, and he would need to discover what she had found so far. Right now Murano had purpose he knew and could grasp onto. And he accepted that purpose without question or doubt now. He understood why Sumar had not taken him on that journey so long ago and he blessed his friend and mentor for knowing what role Murano would play in the future.

Murano leaned forward knowing he had to be the one who brought it up but he first wondered once again where Mari was. She was blocking him now with Etheric shields that were incredibly powerful. Like she did not want him to know where she was or what she was doing. That she could do this surprised him somewhat for he did not think she could have received the training from just anyone to do this. He could sense a sincere attraction to Deion Leonidas that emanated from within her resonance from the moment she had first seen him in the transmission. He also noticed right away upon entering that Deion was missing from this briefing as well. Murano did not know how he felt about that considering what he knew Deion was. There was something different about Mari but he just could not place it. He didn’t know how he felt about Mari entering into a relationship of some sort with Deion Leonidas. He did not fear Deion would hurt her in any way, just the opposite actually, but he did not know if Mari truly understood how sacred Lycavorians took their relations. He would speak with her about it when the time was right, but now he had to make sure everyone knew what it was they were going to do.

“Androcles... perhaps now is a good time to make sure everyone knows what we will need to be aware of once on this planet Ukwav.” Murano said.

Andro met his gaze and nodded his head. “Yes.” He said. “You know more about this than anyone Murano. Please... share that knowledge with us now.”

Murano nodded and stood up. "It will... it will be neither pleasant nor quick to view what we will see... but it is the only way."

At that moment... the only thing that occupied either Deion or Mari's mind was each other and the absolute exquisite pleasure they had been experiencing for the last several hours. The concentrated desire for each other had built throughout the entire debriefing and continued to grow even during the meal with his family, coursing through both of them unchecked. It had finally been too much for Deion and he had excused himself from the large table and made his way out of the Mess Lounge. Mari could not stand being away from him and after fidgeting for several moments she had also excused herself. Only Androcles and his grandmother Gorgo took notice of their actions and Gorgo had glanced at Andro quickly and silent agreement had passed between them. What had been radiating from both of them, it was not simply a passing interest in each other, that much was completely obvious to them both. There was a overwhelming and uniquely powerful draw between them, something far more than a simple physical attraction and both Gorgo and Andro knew where it was going to lead.

Once Mari had cleared the Mess Lounge doors, she immediately began looking for where Deion had gone, reaching for his resonance within the Etheric realm instinctively. She needn't have bothered for she had walked barely ten meters down the corridor before his powerful arms had swept her up and pulled her into the small alcove with the view window and stars as their backdrop. When his lips covered hers, Mari surrender to the raging emotions within her without a single doubt or question. As she wrapped her arms around his head and his kiss deepened, Mari could only whimper softly and meet his kiss with equal ardor. No man she had shared a relationship with in her young life had set her on fire as Deion Leonidas now did. His kiss was so fervent and consuming as their tongues danced together and his arms crushed her tiny form against him and he pinned her to the bulkhead. His very presence and powerful Etheric essence flowed all around her mind with powerful emotions of love and desire. Normally Mari would have tried to be much more discrete in her actions, but she didn't care right now. Deion's very clear and pure Etheric resonance pulsed only for her in a way that nearly overwhelmed her own senses. He was so powerful and warm and the emotion she felt pouring from him for her was utterly divine. And it matched exactly what she felt for him.

Mari didn't remember how they had made their way to his quarters, only that the next thing she remembered was being under the spray of hot water in the shower as their exploration began. She remembered the trail of clothes they had left, tearing at each other to rid themselves of the confining garments and finally her gasp of blissful delight as they practically fell into the shower under the hot water and his hand ripped away the panties she had been wearing. It was then that Mari had been on the receiving end of the most incredibly enchanting experience she had ever imagined. Under that invigorating spray of water Deion Leonidas proceeded to simply explore every possible curve that adorned her four foot eleven body. He had begun at her head, brushing aside her brownish red hair with the gentleness of a newborn child and dropped his lips to her cheek and neck. Mari had no choice but to grip his thick arms in sheer fascination as he proceeded to trace and lick every spot on her petite body. There was nothing sexual about his exploration, his hands and lips and tongue content to simply caress and taste her skin under the hot spray of the shower and attempt to dry her with his tongue even as more water covered her. It was the single most devastatingly delicious thing Mari had ever experienced and even before he had slowly dropped to his knees before her she was clutching his shoulders for support and crying out in ecstasy as she shuddered in the most intense orgasm she had ever experienced in her life. At the time she had no idea it would only become even more incredible. With her back against the shower stall and her legs thrown over his wide shoulders Deion Leonidas utterly devoured her. A multitude of colors exploded within her mind, her mouth open in a breathless scream of bliss as he teased, tasted and feasted upon her in a way Mari never imagined in her wildest dreams. His strong hands cupped and caressed her breasts as he feasted on her, adding to her delight in a way that would never have her wish for smaller breasts ever again.

As she shuddered in the aftermath of his ministrations, her arms and legs wrapped around his shoulders and waist while she covered his neck and face with kisses, Deion had carried her to the bed in the large room. She recovered quickly however and he laughed as she shoved him down on the bed and began her own vigorous exploration. Deion Leonidas was without doubt the most physically perfect specimen of a man Mari had ever

laid her eyes upon. She was far beyond caring about the suddenness and intensity of it all and she returned to Deion every bit of the emotion and sensation he had given to her. The tattoo on his left shoulder and arm was an image of his Bonded Brother she knew, and it was done with exquisite care and detail. His shoulders were powerful and broad, the muscles defined in excruciating detail. She spent many minutes tracing her tongue over his chest and abdomen, relishing in the power she had over him, as well as the delicious taste of his skin. When she had finally gazed upon what he offered her, Mari had felt a fleeting sense of fear as she watched it grow in her small fist. He was larger than any of her previous lovers by more than half and for a moment she doubted she would be able to take all of him within her petite body.

That fear quickly joined all the others when Deion quickly rolled over on top of her and spent the next twenty minutes watching her cry out in rapture and orgasm over and over as he sank into her. Mari had wrapped her arms around his shoulders and all sense of time vanished as Deion sank into her with staggering slowness, until her legs wrapped around his hips and her ankles locked together over his powerful ass and he could no longer hold back. Mari screamed as they both erupted in a mind blowing orgasm that stole their very wits from them.

Much to Mari's surprised but sincerely blissful delight, Deion's incredible manhood lost none of its steel like hardness buried within her as he was. His beautiful dark brown eyes found her blue/green orbs and for a moment he looked at her almost sheepishly while he furiously nuzzled behind her ears and licked her neck and cheeks, burning her scent into his mind. As Mari grew accustomed to his size, their passion once more grew and for the next three hours the world ceased to exist around them as quite unexpectedly, their Etheric resonances and minds joined in a kaleidoscope of colors, emotions and sensations that engulfed them both as they made love with a heat and desire unmatched by anything either of them had ever experienced. After their first explosion Deion had been like a child with a new toy in his eagerness. They had made love in positions Mari certainly had never heard of, however all of them caused her to clutch at him in some form and revel in the hurricane like force of the orgasms as they tore through her. Mari had not been idle either, tasting him just as he had tasted her and while she could fit only half of him into her warm mouth, if Deion's reaction was any measure it was more than enough for him. Even as her eyes rolled into the back of her head and Mari drank down his essence, she vowed to one day take all of him.

These were the thoughts that swirled through Mari's mind now as she settled her sweaty body atop Deion's broad chest, her breathing finally beginning to gain some semblance of normalcy. Mari dragged her tongue teasingly along his pectoral muscle before resting her head on his chest and feeling his hands hold her in place with their grip on her firm ass. Her breasts were crushed against his broad chest, their bodies touching in nearly every place they could. Had anyone seen them, Mari didn't doubt they would not have been able to tell where each of them started and ended. Mari did not want to move for fear of having his immense manhood, still buried deeper inside her than anything she ever anticipated feeling, cause her to shudder in small aftermath orgasms. Mari was stunned at how everything felt so utterly perfect, almost as if she was made specifically to fit into Deion's powerful embrace. Mari had never anticipated she could feel so content, yet it wasn't simply the physical fulfillment. She had never felt clearer of head and focused than she was right now.

It felt utterly celestial.

Mari lifted her head slowly and pushed some strands of her damp hair from her face and looked at his features. God he was beautiful she thought to herself.

"Deion?" She spoke softly.

"If you... if you are going to say that this has all been a dream and it's time to wake up then... then just run me through with my *Nehtes* now and be done with it." Deion lifted his head slightly and looked at her with a sheepish grin.

Mari smiled brightly at his words. "I was... I was going to say something similar." She told him. "If you... if you had doubts."

Deion reached above his head and grabbed the metal shelf on the wall above the head of the bed. Mari groaned softly as he shifted their position and even his semi hard manhood caused tiny tremors of pleasure to course through her as deeply buried within her as he was. He pulled them easily into a sitting position and then released the shelf to grab her firm ass, sit up and cover her lips with his own. Mari cooed in ardor and wrapped her arms around his shoulders once more as she returned his kiss.

After several breath stealing moments they parted and Deion lowered his head to firmly nuzzle the hollow of her throat and the valley between her large breasts causing shivers of love to make her tremble in his arms. "Doubts??" He rasped out the word. "*Carians* Mari... it was... that was absolutely, fantastically incredible!" He finished finally and looked up into her face with bright dark brown eyes and a heart stopping smile.

Mari smiled and chuckled softly. "That is not even a grammatically correct combination of words Deion Leonidas." She told him. "You should know better."

"Who cares about grammatically correct?" He exclaimed. "You are... you are the most breathtaking and perfect woman I have ever seen in my life Mari. You are incredible and beautiful and your scent is... it is the sweetest I have ever experienced." He told her in a more subdued voice staring into her eyes.

Mari's blue/green eyes shone with love and she felt her heart leap into her throat at his heartfelt words as she took his face in her hands. "I was... I was going to say it was utterly divine." She told him as she traced a finger down his cheek slowly. "Absolutely, fantastically incredible works too though!" She looked at him. "Can we do it again?" She asked with a delighted giggle.

"Yes!" Deion exclaimed. "Now? Here? Want to try someplace different?"

Mari couldn't help but laugh at his eagerness yet again but she placed her hands on his neck. "I want... I want you to tell me something first." She said.

Deion looked at her. "Anything."

"How many other women have you made feel like you have made me feel this night?" She asked.

"Well... technically it's not night and..." He began to answer.

Mari didn't hesitate and she slapped his cheek lightly as she had seen his sisters do and he grinned up at her happily. "Deo!" She exclaimed in protest.

Deion's face lost a little of his exuberance and he dropped his eyes for a moment. "I... I wouldn't know how to answer that." He replied softly. "There has..." He lifted his eyes to hers once more. "There has been only you."

Those five words caused Mari's eyes to widen in shock as she realized what he was telling her. "But... what you... Deo... what you made me feel? How...?"

"Did I hurt you?" He asked aghast. "I tried to go slow. I... *anse*... I wanted it to be... I wanted it to be perfect."

Mari shook her head quickly and grabbed his face in her hands once more. "No! Deo no! You didn't hurt me my love! Gods... what you made me feel is... I can't put it into words! It was perfect! It was beyond glorious! Beyond wondrous!"

Mari felt his hands tighten on her ass and he pulled her closer. "I'm glad. Does that mean we can do it again?"

Mari looked at him and couldn't help but giggle once more. She leaned over and kissed him deeply, relishing in the taste and feel of his lips. She drew back and let her fingers stroke his handsome face. "How?" She whispered. "How did you...?"

"How did I know what you would like?" He asked her. "What would give you the most pleasure and happiness?"

Mari nodded. "Yes."

Deion shook his head. "I don't know." He answered her honestly. "It just... your scent is... it is intoxicating to me Mari. It makes my... it makes my blood burn within my veins like lava."

"But you... you didn't bite me Deo." Mari said. "I'm not... I'm not even like you."

"You don't need to be wolf for me to want you Mari. Everyone has their own unique scent. Yours... yours drives me crazy!" He told her. "A Lycavorian will react this way to any woman whose scent does to them what yours does to me."

"But... how... what you made me feel Deo." Mari stammered. "It doesn't seem like it could be possible."

Deo gazed into her eyes. "Do you regret any of it Mari? Any moment?"

Mari's eyes grew wide. "By the Ancients within the Rift of Time!" She gasped grabbing his face tightly. "Deo no! Gods no!"

"Then why does it matter?" He asked her bluntly.

Mari gazed at him for a long moment, his eyes like dark pools of emotion that she could gaze into and see his soul. "It doesn't." She said finally. "It doesn't matter. Because I feel the same thing when I look at you."

"Never fear the unknown Mari." Deion spoke softly.

Mari smiled at him. "You do not know the treasures you could find." She finished his statement. "I have heard your father say that."

Deion grinned. "He did pound that into our heads as we were growing." He said.

"What... what do I smell like to you?" She asked wistfully.

"Like freshly picked ripe oranges." Deion told her. "Sweet and delicious. You will begin to notice this yourself soon Mari. And understand even more."

Mari looked at him confused for a moment and then her eyes grew even wider as she understood what he was saying. "I will... I will become like you?" She gasped. "Because we have... have you claimed me?"

Deion shook his head quickly. "I would not do that without your approval." He stated. "It would be dishonorable of me to do that to you without your knowledge and acceptance. There will be changes that occur within you now, small ones that you will notice, but you already knew that didn't you?"

Mari met his eyes for a moment but then nodded her head shyly. "Kesyla didn't think I noticed... but I did." She said. "She tried to hide them until your uncle claimed her completely but she could not."

"I intend to show you that I will worship you like no other ever will my beautiful Mari." Deion said confidently. "I will make you scream my name to the moon and the stars if you will allow me." Deion pulled her even closer now, her breasts pushing against his chest, Mari's still hard nipples like burning points against his skin. "What do you wish Mari?" He asked her ever so softly, his words carrying enormous feeling and love in them. "Tell me what you want and I will give it to you. No matter what it is or what it means."

Mari met his beautiful eyes and smiled as a single tear rolled down her cheek. He was so very right. It didn't matter to her. Nothing had prepared her for Deion Leonidas professing his love for her in such a way and it made her want to bawl like a baby in complete happiness. Truly, nothing had prepared her for what she had experienced these last hours. Mari now knew that she had made her decision the first time he had kissed her on that ship in the midst of battle. She wanted this and she wanted it with Deion Leonidas more than anything else she had ever wanted in her life. This was not merely a grasp at something that fascinated her. Deion's Etheric essence filled her mind and her being now, his resonance echoing within her openly, just as she now echoed within his. And it felt heavenly. Mari desired nothing more now than to know and experience what his scent was like, even in a small way, until the day came that he would change her and truly make her his.

Mari leaned over until her lips just grazed his and she ground her hips down upon his, feeling his glorious manhood begin to thicken instantly. "I think we should practice more." She whispered in a husky and seductive voice. "Because I intend to make you scream my name as I scream yours."

Deion smiled at her and Mari could not suppress the groan of delight that escaped her lips as he flexed his manhood deep inside her and quickly rolled over on top of her on the bed. She caught a flash of the tips of his wolf fangs and then he was staring at her with unbelievably gorgeous yellow/gold wolf eyes.

"Practice makes perfect." Deion told her just before he lowered his lips to hers and stole her breath away.

MANNE

BASE ONE MAIN HOSPITAL

EIGHTEEN HOURS POST BATTLE

Valael led Tobia and Tinra into the main chamber of the hospital behind the three very large *Durcunusaan* troops. Captain Kitor had insisted on coming with him and he followed just behind Valael with his First Officer and three others from his officer corp. Out of habit when dealing with non-Lycavorian species, the three *Durcunusaan* troops stopped just inside the entrance so that the eyes of their guests could better adjust to the bright medical clinic lights that were set up all over the interior of the massive main chamber of the cave.

Valael, Tobia and Tinra were stunned at what they found as opposed to what they saw in the transmission from Anja while on their ship. She must have been talking to them from some other room within

the mountain for the chamber they were in now looked like any hospital any of them had been in before. While it was quite obvious that they were in an underground cavern because of the rock walls, it was equally obvious that Anja Leonidas and those who worked for her took the needs of their patients as priority above all others. Sturdy portable walls had been placed throughout the cavern here and no doubt everywhere else in the mountain caves. Valael had seen those under command of Martin Leonidas at work before and they were tireless. There was actually a small counter and chair where a heavily armed female elf was directing soldiers and others to different parts of the tunnel and cavern laden mountain. They took her direction without question and Valael assumed she was a member of this Durcunusaan he had heard and read so much about since their first meeting. There was no shouting or yelling from wounded soldiers, of which there were many, and he could see what had to be dozens of combat medics moving among the wounded checking on them. The men under the command of someone called General Koguth had suffered several dozen severe injuries among their number and many of those men were now making their way here from the forward medical triage center near the decoy site. Valael and the others had seen the *STRIKER* transport ships as they were called landing in the same massive clearing their ship had landed in some two hundred meters east of the cavern entrance. A quick glance into the interior of one of them as they passed it revealed that it was obviously a medical transport from the specialized medical equipment they could see.

Valael and the others quickly got out of the way of the teams bringing more wounded in and they turned when the female voice rose above the din of work.

“Level Two trauma goes to chamber three!” Anuk barked out as she moved forward. Her red hair was pulled over one shoulder and wrapped in Drow silk. She had what appeared to be medical tools decorating the outside of her body armor, but they didn’t hinder her movement or actions. “Level Three to chamber five! Duewa is there to stabilize and treat them!”

The medical teams moving in didn’t pause in their actions and began to move past them with their charges.

Valael watched as Anuk’s cerulean blue eyes fell upon where they stood and she stepped towards them. As she came up to them another individual came to her side.

“Colonel... that is the last transport with Level Four critical patients.” The man spoke. He was much taller than Anuk, but his tone and body language told everyone he was speaking to a superior officer. “Lady Ceale and Serale Leonidas have broken down the FOB and are moving here with the last of the wounded.”

Anuk nodded her head. “Give Ceale and Serale chamber six when they arrive Odel.” She told him. “We have three critical head injuries and Anja says Ceale is a brain specialist. Serale can assist her. They are stable for now but make sure they are the first off the last transports.”

“Do we leave a trauma team at the secondary site?” The man asked.

Anuk nodded her head. “And make sure they have a full security team and at least one dragon with them. General Koguth is organizing teams to sweep the area for any Puma Bane scum that may have slipped away but I don’t want them left unguarded.”

“I will see to it.” Odea answered and then turned away quickly to implement his orders.

Anuk turned back to Valael and the others and smiled then. “You are Elder Valael?” She asked.

Valael nodded his head. “We were told to... we were directed here by your officer on the ship.” He told her. “Forgive us if we are... if we are in the way.”

Anuk shook her head. “You are not in the way.” She told him.

“Everything seems so... so chaotic.” Tobia spoke now.

Anuk chuckled softly. “Chaotic? This? No... this is normal around here.” She told them. “Each of these men and women know exactly what they are doing. They should... Anja and I have drilled them for years.”

“The officer said... she said Martin is here?” Valael asked.

Anuk nodded. “Martin has set up a temporary command center here.” She told them. “He is there now.”

One of Kitor’s officer stepped forward without hesitation. “I am our ship’s doctor.” He spoke immediately. “I have studied the files we were given on your species and others on the trip here. Put me to work. I was tops in my class in Battlefield Care and... and I want to help.”

Anuk smiled at him and turned her head. She caught the eye of the elf female by the counter and waved her over. The woman jogged over instantly. “Colonel?” She spoke looking at Anuk.

“Leeana... take...”

“My name is Etok.” The man said.

“Take Doctor Etok to chamber one.” Anuk said. “It has the majority of the Level Three trauma and he can assist Radra. She is handling all the lightly wounded and coordinating their transfer to beds.”

The female elf nodded. “Right this way sir.” She spoke motioning with her hand.

Anuk turned back to Valael as Etok followed the elf female without question. “His help will be welcome.” She said. “Radra already has most of our field medics with her and someone with more knowledge will be a godsend.”

“You have beds set up in here as well?” Tobia asked now.

Anuk nodded. “We’ve been preparing this mountain since we first arrived. We categorize the injured as levels. Level One trauma are minor wounds. Shrapnel, broken bones, things like that. Level Two are gunshot wounds bleeding laceration injuries from shrapnel.” She explained. “Level Three are the more serious and potential life threatening injuries. Duewa is handling that. Level Four and Five are the critical cases. Anja and I take care of those.”

“You are not Hadarian like Anja and Duewa.” Valael said very interested in that knowledge.

Anuk didn’t take offense and smiled. “I’m a fully certified surgeon Elder Valael. I just choose to work as Senior Field Medical Officer because it keeps me close to my husband and mate. He and Martin have a tendency to get into trouble. I am Second in Command of all Union Medical Personnel.” Anuk turned and looked at the *Durcunusaan*. “I’ll take them from here.” She told the *Durcunusaan* soldier, who nodded and immediately turned away to move for the entrance. “We have a two hundred bed facility set up two levels down. More cots than anything, but that will change in the future. We are going to make this the main hospital for Manne as soon as the engineers from the Union arrive. Anja doesn’t spare anything when it comes to the care of our people. And neither do I. Follow me.” She told them motioning for them to follow her.

“You refer to the red haired Queen by her given name?” Tinra asked.

Anuk nodded. “Why wouldn’t I? We have known each other from the very beginning. And as family we don’t mince words and use titles.”

“Family?” Tinra inquired.

Valael looked at her as they began to walk and interrupted Tinra’s question. “You are... you are not fully elf.” He said. “You have... you have been turned. Your Etheric resonance is bright and powerful.”

Anuk looked at him as they walked. “You can tell that just by looking at me?” She asked.

Tobia took Valael’s arm as they walked. “Your Etheric resonance is much stronger than that of an unaltered elf.”

“Unaltered?” Anuk asked her.

Tobia blushed slightly but Valael answered for her. “It is... we are still determining how to refer to many that travel with Martin Leonidas. All of you are unique and for lack of a more refined definition...”

Anuk smiled and shook her head. “It’s ok.” She said. “My husband and mate is Daniel Simpson... so yes that makes Anja and I family.”

Valael’s eyes grew slightly wider. “The man Martin calls his brother?”

Anuk nodded her head with a smile. “That’s him. You know him?”

Valael’s face took on a disgusted look. “Unlike Lorendo and the fools like him, I prefer to allow a person’s actions tell me who they are. I noticed their relationship when I saw them on that ghastly world. You... you were not present on Onterom?”

Anuk shook her head. “No... Nayeca and I arrived a few days later. Daniel shared what happened with us however.”

Valael smiled. “Ah... your Drow wife and mate.” He said. “I read everything that Martin gave to us and the information on the Drow elves as you call them. They are fascinating.”

“Your husband has two wives?” Tinra asked now.

Valael turned and looked at her but knew her question had been asked with no malice or prejudice just by her tone of voice. “This is Lady Tinra. She is the director of our equivalent to your Netnews.”

“I see.” Anuk answered. “Yes... Nayeca and I are both wives and mates to Daniel. We have been for over twenty very happy years and we have eight children to show for that love and happiness. And they will become even happier now that we have found Kesyla. You see why I say Anja and I are family.”

“Kesyla!” Tinra exclaimed. “The Chief Elder’s oldest daughter?”

Anuk looked at her with a seductive twinkle in her cerulean blue eyes. “Daniel claimed Kesyla a few days ago. She is our wife and mate now. And we are exceedingly happy about that.”

Valael and Tobia looked shocked as well and he looked at Anuk’s beautiful face as they walked. He had read in the material Delnash had given to him before leaving that elven females were exceptionally beautiful and many Lycavorian and vampire men took them as wives. Even the elven men were considered incredibly handsome by most standards and while there were not as many interspecies marriages with elven men, this practice was becoming more and more prevalent in Union society. If Anuk Simpson was any indication, he knew why. Her five foot eight frame was muscular yet definitely very feminine. She was stunningly beautiful as were all of the elven females he had seen so far.

“You seem to have taken more casualties than Martin thought you would.” Valael finally stammered out wanting to steer the subject away from Kesyla for he knew that information would have certainly have quite the impact when it was discovered.

Anuk nodded her head somberly. “The Puma Bane scum threw us some curve balls for sure.” She told them. “The trick they played on us cost us twenty-two lives... but thanks to Ceale and Serale no more have died.”

“I’m... I’m sorry.” Valael told her.

“They died a glorious death in service to their people, fighting beside their King and Queens and fellow Spartans. It is all any Lycavorian Spartan would want.” Anuk told him softly. “They would have been proud of their sacrifice. Their families will be proud. We are proud of them.”

Tinra glanced at Valael upon hearing Anuk’s words but she remained silent. The emotion in her voice when she spoke was real and the conviction sincere. Tinra had spent more than enough time around politicians to know how they could play at words, but this turned, elven female had meant every word she had just spoken. She looked around as they walked and saw not one person standing around idly. The men and women she saw stood beside one another, helping the wounded, giving comfort, or simply allowing their presence to be felt. She had been present for the first briefing Lorendo had given when they returned and his description of these men and women was in no way similar to what she was seeing now. The Chief Elder must have known this and that is why he requested she personally come on this trip. Tinra had never really cared for Chief Elder Delnash through the years but the few hours she had spent within him before departing had begun to change her attitude. Nearly everything Lorendo had spewed to anyone who would listen when he returned was turning out to be wrong. Just as Delnash told her she would see.

It seemed like a long time but they eventually wound their way downward around several spiral like tunnels and then Anuk led them into a massive cave chamber. What they had done within this cave was incredible to say the least. A perfect merger of very modern technology and the natural feel of the caverns themselves. Valael and the others stopped when they saw him, even as Anuk moved directly over to where Daniel stood to one side of the large chart table, Kesyla on one side, Nayeca the other. She stepped right up behind Kesyla and they saw the Chief Elder’s oldest daughter turn slightly and with bright eyes and a stunning smile she kissed Anuk openly and pulled her close. They were shocked somewhat when they saw her eyes change to wolf eyes and then the tips of extremely long and lethal fangs poked from beneath her full lips, but the kiss she shared with Anuk was very real.

Martin stood in the center of the group Valael saw, the red haired Queen Anja and the pureblood queen Aricia on his left, while the elven Queen he knew as Dysea, and his Queens Isabella and Cirith were on his right. Only the second elf Queen For'mya was absent. Half a dozen other men and women were at the chart table as well, two of them from the same species as the men they had been fighting. Martin and Delnash had remained in constant contact much to Valael’s surprise when Delnash had first approached him about leading this mission. He had read all of the reports Martin had sent to him during those weeks and he knew of these men in the room with Martin and standing casually. They were from a different faction of the Kavalian species, a Pride as they were called. They had followed Pusintin out here for an entirely different reason and that was to discover their daughter Iama, who was now the wife to Fedor Leonidas, the young man who had been injured during the base assault on Onterom. Valael motioned for these with him to remain quiet as they moved fully into the room and they all nodded.

“...want the teams sweeping north and west for as long as it takes.” They heard Martin speaking. “Five man teams and they are to report in every fifteen minutes. Have an alert bird on standby with a full squad. If one

does not report in... send the bird. No questions asked. I'm not taking any chances with these assholes." Martin looked at Koguth across the table. "General Koguth? How far out?"

Koguth nodded his head, blood staining a portion of his uniform and armor, but not appearing as if it was from an injury to himself.

"We know some made it clear of our counter attack." He stated. "Given the amount of time that has passed... I would stay within a medium range." Koguth turned to Mata beside him. "Mata?"

"Even if they are not injured..." Mata spoke. "They will not have the endurance of either Lycavorians or vampires. Given what I have seen since being among you here Milord... they could not compare to the elves among you either. Nor any of General Koguth's people since Akor'dris and Bae'diraz began training them. Training us." He said with a touch of pride for he had learned more than he ever thought her could from the two Drow females.

Koguth nodded his head in agreement. "Very true."

"I would start at five kilometers and extend out to fifteen. Anyone who has made it past that point..." Mata didn't finish his statement and looked at Martin. "We cannot chase them across the planet Milord. At least not just yet."

Martin nodded his head in agreement. "I agree. Dan... let's not overextend ourselves. Until Andro gets here with his forces, we are going to be short on legs."

"What is he bringing anyway?" Danny asked.

"The 82nd Cataphract Armor Orbital Drop Division. The *Durcunusaan* Ready Division and the First Dragon Brigade." Martin answered.

Danny smiled. "See... now that is why I love my *mandri*. He doesn't stick his ass out in the wind with little or no support. When that boy goes somewhere... he brings what he needs to kick someone's *mida*!"

"Bitch, bitch, bitch. Moan, moan, moan." Martin rattled off. "*Sibfla* Simpson... you give me a headache! Do you ever stop complaining?"

"Where would the fun in that be?" Danny quipped.

Valael and the others saw everyone gathered begin to laugh softly and then Martin touched the chart table. "Have the teams do a systematic grid search out to fifteen kilometers as Mata suggests *fervon*."

"K.I.S.S." Danny spoke nodding his head. "Got it."

Mata looked up. "What is... what is this K.I.S.S.?" He asked.

"Keep it simple stupid." Anja answered. "A rule we tend to ignore most of the time." She said looking at Martin with bright jade green eyes as Aricia smiled and leaned into her.

"What... you gonna call me names too?" Martin hissed at her.

"Who... little old me?" Anja gasped. She smiled brilliantly and leaned into Martin while looking up into his eyes. "I will call you many names you big lug... none of which I wish to repeat in present company however."

"That's only because you don't want everyone to know how perverted you really are Anja." Anuk spoke up from beside Kesyla.

Anja smiled widely. "Exactly." She admitted openly.

"She is such an incredibly inventive pervert however." Dysea said now.

"Thank you Melda Min." Anja said sweetly.

"Always Melyanna."

Martin shook his head with a sheepish grin and turned back to the table. "Back to business please." He said. "I want everything looked at. No matter how insignificant it may seem. Kick every branch and turn over every rock. We need to keep our pucker factor up on this one. I don't want these fools sneaking in behind us and taking our people out in small groups."

Danny nodded his head as he felt Anuk press close to Kesyla and nuzzle her neck and cheek. "I'll make sure." He said. "I also think we should let Torma and the others loose. None of the troopers we saw carried T19s *fervon*. They could cover a lot of ground out past fifteen."

Aricia leaned forward and traced the chart table. "I can take Isheeni and Cirith Beloved. We can sweep out twenty-five kilometers to the north. The terrain is light enough for Isheeni to detect anything moving with her vision."

Martin looked at the route she had traced and nodded his head. “*Melda Min*... take Iriral and Bella and do the same to the west.” He spoke. “If either of you spot anything... I don’t care if it is a bug farting... you call in support.”

“*Nauta Melme*... we are capable of taking care of ourselves.” Dysea said with a brilliant smile.

Martin nodded his head. “Yeah... yeah... I know. Indulge me will ya? Please.”

Dysea smiled and bumped her hip against his. “For you... anything.”

Martin leaned over and grabbed a fast kiss from Dysea’s lips, surprising her with the suddenness of the action, but not the intent. Martin turned back to the chart table quickly so as not to invite any other comments. “Ok... Zarah, Lucia and Seyra will remain on station to the east with the 4th Platoon covering the group of Kavalians that stacked their weapons. General... if you and Mata could make your way there and give them the once over. Explain to them what we intend and make sure no Puma Bane shit heads have tried to hide among them.”

Koguth nodded. “Of course.” He said. “And if we find any?”

Martin met his gaze evenly. “Execute them.” He stated flatly.

Koguth nodded once again. “It will be done.”

“Arzoal and Teniri will remain airborne for another three hours over Base One at which time Torma and Miath will relieve them.” Martin said spoke once more. “Garan and Aurith are running quick sprint runs around the perimeter of Base One just to be sure while For'mya stays with Kalis.”

“How is he doing Milord?” Koguth asked immediately.

Martin nodded. “He’s one tough cookie. You and Mata should stop and see him before you leave. It’s going to be a busy couple of days until things settle and you might not get the chance before things calm down.”

Mata knew enough of the King and Queens to know what to do and he turned to where Anja stood. “Queen Anja?” He asked.

Anja nodded her head. “It’s ok. Just don’t stay long. He still needs his rest. He lost a lot of blood before I got to him.”

Mata bowed his head slightly to her. “My Queen.”

His response caused many eyes to turn and look at him in surprise and Koguth chuckled at the reaction. He turned back to Martin. “My wife Mani... she took it upon herself to conduct a poll of sorts. It was a unanimous outcome... to include Mata.”

“What kind of poll?” Martin asked him.

“I would... on behalf of my Pride... I would officially be honored to ask for citizenship within the Union.” Koguth stated clearly. Everyone could see the pride in his face and eyes. “Given what has... given what Iama and...” He stammered for a moment but it was For'mya’s voice which answered his request.

“Granted.” She spoke confidently as she came up next to Anja.

Martin nodded. “There you have it.” He told him. “I never argue with my Queens.”

“Like anyone will believe that *sibfla*.” Danny muttered causing everyone to laugh softly.

“Manda... where do we stand upstairs?” Martin was smiling as he turned his eyes on the much shorter Miranda.

“The system is secure and locked down.” Miranda answered. “I’ve deployed my Task Force in System Protocol Three until we know for sure that all of the Puma Bane are accounted for here on the surface. Steven has the CAP patrols running twenty-four seven and they can respond to an emergency call from Base One in ninety seconds. I have one *TAUR’OHTAR*-Class Destroyer in low orbit and she will be our support platform for direct orbital fire if need be.”

“How long can she remain on station Manda?” Danny asked.

“Eighteen hours before she has to pull out of the lower atmosphere and realign her station keeping thrusters. Another *TAUR’OHTAR* will pull in right away so there will only be a gap of perhaps two minutes without coverage.” Miranda answered.

“Alright folks...” Martin said. “I am now officially declaring Manne as our first colony not in the Alpha Quadrant.” He said. “What the hell quadrant are we in anyway?”

“This is Echo *Nauta Melme*.” Dysea answered him with a shake of her head and smile. She knew that he knew exactly where they were..

“Manda... get your engineers rolling.” Martin spoke. “They tackle the hospital first. Red has got a list for them as long as my...”

Bella’s hand snapped out lightning quick and she slapped his face lightly at the exact time that Anja elbowed him firmly in the ribs.

“Hey!” Martin protested.

“Martin Leonidas we have visitors!” Isabella declared.

Martin glanced over to where Valael stood with those who had accompanied him and he suddenly looked very embarrassed as he turned away.

Manda shook her head as she joined everyone else in laughing again. “We’ll get it done.”

Anja looked at Martin. “Are we done here?” She asked.

Martin nodded. “Yeah... I think so.”

“Good! Now all of you carry your stinky asses out of here!” Anja popped. “Your stench is beginning to upset my patients! This is a hospital... not a barn!”

Tobia could not help herself and she gripped Valael’s arm and laughed silently as she saw both Martin and Danny, and several others as well, lean their heads to the side and appear to sniff themselves.

“I do not stink!” Martin announced to his much shorter red haired mate.

“I took a shower too.” Danny spoke defensively.

Anja didn’t back down from the glare of Martin’s dark brown eyes as everyone knew would be the case. “Why don’t you let those of us who have to sleep next to you decide that.” Anja stated calmly as she lifted her hand. In that hand she held the High Elf R4 Hybrid Fighting Knife given to her by Tarifa over twenty years earlier. And she was lethally skilled with that knife as she had proven in the past. “Anuk... we still need blood right?” She spoke openly while looking into Martin’s eyes with a dazzling smile.

Everyone turned to see Anuk pull an injector from her vest. “Yes... we do.” She said sweetly as she looked at Danny.

“Anyone here five seconds from now becomes a blood donor.” Anja spoke with a smile as she twirled the blade in her fingers expertly. “Willingly or not!”

“*Sibfla!*” Danny spat. “Time to go!”

Tinra looked horrified while Tobia and Valael could barely hold their full laughter in. They watched as Martin leaned over and stole a kiss from Anja while For'mya and his other queens were grinning from ear to ear and then Danny was pulling him towards the doorway.

Martin stopped and looked at Valael as they reached the door. “Elder Valael... it is good to see you once again.”

Valael canted his head in response and smiled. “A pleasure for me as well Praetorian Leonidas.”

Martin waved his hand dismissively. “None of that!” He hissed taking his arm. “Come on, let’s get out of here before my rather sadistic wife and mate starts taking more than blood from us.”

Valael glanced back and saw Anja standing with For'mya, Anuk, Kesyla and the dark skinned Drow female talking about something as Martin led him out of the huge chamber and expertly maneuvered them back to the surface within minutes. The beating and heat of the sun was refreshing after the coolness of the mountain caves. There was not much chance to talk as the rush of bodies and roar of incoming and outgoing transports filled the area around them. He saw Daniel Simpson reach out and touch Martin’s arm, saw both of them nod and then he broke off from their group. Martin expertly moved them across the open terrain towards a row of what appeared to be open topped ground vehicles that were being offloaded a short distance away. Martin turned to him as they came up to one.

“My son kind of overdid things with what he sent us.” He spoke motioning to the Light Y45 Lifter vehicle and the several dozen that were now scooting back and forth across Base One and their current location. “These arrived with Admiral Lorian’s Task Force. Along with just about everything from computers to underwear. Andro tends to be overprotective of his mothers and I. Hop in all of you. We’ll head over to the Command Center where Wayonn and Avi are monitoring the situation.”

Valael turned and helped Tobia and Tinra into the vehicle while Martin settled into the front seat next to the elven pilot. He waited until they were settled and then looked at her. “Ok Melia... take us to the Head Shed. And watch the bumps girl. I’m sore enough as it is.”

The elven female smiled as she fired up the engine and then they were lifting a meter off the ground and heading towards the collection of portable buildings they had seen as they came in for a landing.

ADHOC COMMAND CENTER BASE ONE

Wayonn looked up from the screens he was watching.

“Avi... the teams will be departing from the Secondary Site in four minutes.” Wayonn spoke as he turned to face the towering avatar. “COMS check out?”

-Communications with all teams has been confirmed Wayonn. All Team Leaders have acknowledged their orders- Avi replied as his hands flew over the one meter wide set of computers and monitors in front of him.

“Let’s get a few more drones up to monitor their progress Avi.” Wayonn said. “General Koguth is certain at least two dozen escaped their counter attack and we need to find them.”

-I will order the launch from the ARIZONA’s complement now- Avi answered him instantly. **-All drones assigned to Base One are already airborne over established sectors-**

“Good enough.” Wayonn spoke and turned as the door opened and Martin walked in with Elder Valael and two women and another man he did not know. He turned to face them as he moved away from the computers and screens and met them in the center of the large room. It was an instinctive reaction, keeping strangers from being able to view what their computers and screens revealed, but one that Wayonn did not shy away from. He had allowed the Lycavorian blood swirling within him to rule his actions and emotions far more in these last months with Martin than he had at any time in his life since being turned. It felt glorious to him.

“Martin?”

Martin stopped in front of him. “We good?” He asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “The Kavalian ships that chose not to fight have been directed to the outer system and are holding station. They have been very cooperative and appear sincere in their efforts. Manda has a Shrouded Wing watching them just in case. The man who directed them has requested to come to the surface at the first opportunity to discuss things with you and General Koguth.”

Martin nodded his head. “I have no problem with that. If they are sincere... their ships will only add to our overall strength. Let’s hold off a day or two to get things here back to normal though.”

“Agreed.” Wayonn said.

“You remember Elder Valael?” Martin asked motioning to him.

Valael stepped forward and bowed his head slightly. “Praetorian Wayonn.” He spoke almost reverently. “It is... it is a true honor to be in your presence once again.”

Wayonn almost snorted in disgust. “You are an Elder of the Pralor people.” He spoke. “And from what I understand... one of the more level headed and intelligent ones. I am happy to see Delnash saw fit to send you and not Lorendo.”

Wayonn saw Valael’s eyes narrow in real anger at the mention of Lorendo’s name. “I will not speak badly of a fellow Elder... but I will however say that Lorendo and I did not and do not see eye to eye on many things.”

Wayonn nodded getting the message. “Fair enough.”

“Please... allow me to introduce Lady Tobia and Lady Tinra.” Valael spoke as he turned slightly and motioned to them. “Lady Tobia is...”

Wayonn’s nose told him all he needed to know and he stepped right up to her. “You... you are...”

Tobia realized in that instant what he was going to say for she saw recognition all over his face just as she had Martin’s face not so long ago. Tobia didn’t doubt that they could detect the family similarity in her

scent as well as Mari's and Murano. Tobia had spent many hours on the flight here studying the Lycavorian people as a whole and this Leonidas family in particular. It was said that Martin Leonidas and his pureblood sons had devastatingly keen senses of smell, surpassing any known living Lycavorian. His children not of pureblood had senses that were equal to pureblood Lycavorians with lesser bloodlines if one had to explain it. Tobia quickly grabbed his hands knowing that he was going to say out loud what she did not want to reveal just yet.

"Yes." She spoke quickly. "And it is a distinct honor for me to meet Chief Elder Sumar's Praetorian Mage, no matter how many years have passed."

Wayonn noticed how she reacted and what she said and it became very obvious that the others did not know she was Mari's mother. Nor did they know that Murano was Mari's father. This was one of those moments where the Lycavorian sense of smell truly was a gift to have. He quickly adjusted his response.

Wayonn shook his head. "Not for very many years." He told her with a simple but quite innocuous squeeze of her hands. "I am simply Wayonn now." He told her. "And I have been a Lycavorian for far more years than I was a Pralor."

"You... you consider yourself one of them?" Tinra asked slightly taken aback.

Wayonn met her gaze while still grasping Tobia's hands. The inflection and tone of Tinra's voice was not one of contempt or arrogance, but simple curiosity. Wayonn smiled at her. "I considered myself completely Lycavorian exactly two years and three months after the day I was turned. The woman who turned me gave birth to our first child that day and when I held my son in my arms. I have considered myself Lycavorian ever since. So to answer your question... yes."

"Wayonn... Lady Tinra is in charge of what you and Martin and others would call all of the Pralor News Channels." Valael explained.

Wayonn did not release Tobia's hands and nodded his head to Tinra. "A pleasure Lady Tinra." He said. He turned and looked at Martin off to the side and Tobia felt him throw up impossibly powerful Etheric shields at that moment.

[Martin you do realize that she will discover what has happen between Deion and her daughter the moment Mari lowers her shields.] Wayonn said. *[Both of them are radiating within the Etheric realm like burning stars in their happiness.]*

Martin nodded his head. *[Much like it hit me and his mothers while we were having dinner I'm sure.]* Martin said. *[Not that we are complaining about his choice. Mari is one very beautiful and intelligent young woman and very spirited. As Deion will no doubt discover.]*

[Murano does not know Martin.] Wayonn said.

Martin nodded once more. *[Yeah... I figured that out right away when they were on Onterom.]* He said. *[I'm quite sure that will change before they get back here though.]*

Wayonn rolled his eyes. *[More than likely.]* Wayonn turned back to Tobia and saw her face and the way she was looking at him. "Forgive me... something to do with the Kavalians that have surrendered."

Tobia looked at him skeptically. "I see." She answered him though her tone told him she did not believe him.

"We did not meet you on Onterom." Wayonn said as he looked at her. "What exactly are you...?"

"Lady Tobia is a Special Advisor to Chief Elder Delnash." Valael answered quickly.

"Special Advisor in regards to what?" Wayonn asked.

"My specialty is languages." Tobia answered. "I have also become somewhat of an expert on the different species in the Echo quadrant. He thought... Delnash thought I might be able to help in assisting you after."

Martin stepped closer. "After what?"

"When you travel to the other planets where your people are." Tobia answered.

Valael's eyes went wide and he moved closer to her now. "Tobia... perhaps we could talk about that later."

"Wait!" Tinra asked now. "Other people. You mean there are other planets with your people on them out here?" She asked.

"Oops!" Martin spoke with a chuckle. "The cat is out of the bag."

Tinra and Tobia both looked at him oddly and he smiled even wider. “Ah... it’s an expression.” He said. “It means that something that wasn’t supposed to be known is now common knowledge.”

Tobia’s eyes grew wide and she looked at him horrified. “Oh! Oh... I’m so sorry!” She exclaimed.

Martin shook his head with a smile. “It’s not a big deal. I wasn’t exactly trying to hide it from anyone.” He looked at Valael. “Elder Valael... you haven’t introduced the military officer with you.”

Valael glanced at Kitor and then back to Martin. “This is Captain Kitor Martin. He commands the ship we arrived on.”

Martin stepped right up to him. “So I have you to thank for covering our flank?” Martin said. “I thank you for being ready to pull our people and yours out if everything went to hell.”

Kitor knew a military man through and through when he saw one and this Lycavorian King Martin Leonidas was such a man. He nodded his head. “No thanks is needed Praetorian Leonidas.” Kitor told him. “I was honored.”

Martin glanced at Valael quickly. “Elder Valael... I told Delnash I...”

“What you told the Chief Elder is of no regard to me Praetorian Leonidas.” Kitor spoke. “I can sense the resonance of a Praetorian within you... and unlike others of my generation... I am honored to be here and be among you. And I will treat you with the respect you deserve as a Praetorian.”

Martin looked at him. “I am not like the Praetorians you may have known or read about Captain.” Martin told him.

Kitor smiled and nodded. “Yes... I know. What is it you call yourselves? Spartans. You are a Spartan first. Fueled by emotion and duty and honor. And you hate politics. Which, for me anyway, makes it all the more honorable to meet you in person sir.”

Martin grinned. “Wow!” Martin explained. “You are only the third Pralor I have met and liked on the first meeting. The odds are looking up!”

Kitor laughed at that, knowing of the encounter Onterom and the aftermath. “Perhaps they are.” He said. “I... I understand that you have a *VORTEX*-Class Heavy Cruiser in your... in your fleet?”

Martin nodded his head. “My son Androcles commands it.” He replied.

“Most of us within our military have never even seen a *VORTEX*-Class Heavy cruiser.” Kitor said. “I would be honored if one day I am allowed to see this ship.”

“You just might get your chance soon enough Captain.” Martin told him. “Andro and *SPARTA’S WRATH* should be here in roughly six weeks.” He turned to look at Tinra as Kitor reveled in that knowledge and opportunity. “Lady Tinra... I understand you have some people that should be landing shortly?”

Tinra nodded her head quickly. “Several support staff.” She told him. “Technicians. I tried to prepare for... I did not know where we would be sitting down to speak and wanted to be prepared for everything.”

Martin nodded his head and stepped up to her and took her arm gently. “Elder Valael... why don’t you, Lady Tobia and Captain Kitor remain here with Wayonn. He can fill you in on what has been happening. I’m going to take Lady Tinra on a short tour and then we can get started.”

Tinra met his eyes as he looked at her. “Your... your Queens will not be with you?” She asked.

Martin shook his head. “You requested a separate forum with them and they agreed.” He told her. “I would give it a day or two though. Anja won’t leave her patients until she knows she has done all she can for them... and my other Queens... well... you heard for yourself what they are going to be doing.”

“You... you allow them to endanger themselves?” Tinra asked.

Martin laughed at that. “Allow them?” He said. “They don’t listen to me. Hell... most of the time they are yelling at me for doing something stupid.” He took her arm within his. “Let’s walk and I can tell you about my Queens. I like talking about them. I will warn you though... I don’t have the most stellar relations with our Netnews back home. To be honest... most consider me an asshole. Of course... I have called some of them some choice names but...”

Tinra looked at him as he held her arm and whatever fear she may have had seemed to vanish. That this man before her was a Praetorian was without question. His Etheric resonance dwarfed any she had felt in her lifetime and could only be that of a Praetorian. Yet there was also something oddly calming about this man. Tinra did not harbor the same mentality that many within the Science Division carried. She did not consider herself better than anyone and especially not a person she had never met before. There was something about this

man, a man many would consider beneath them. A strange feeling and aura that made her want to trust him. Tinra had always trusted her instincts and this is one time she allowed them to guide her.

“I believe I would like listening to you sir.” Tinra said.

“Really?” Martin asked her as they began to walk towards the door. “Careful... you might regret you said that.”

UZU OZEIB 7 PRIVATE MILITARY TERMINAL SIX KILOMETERS OUTSIDE CAPITAL OF YDARE

It was brutally early and Narice was certainly not in the best of moods at the moment. The military officer interrupting her peaceful sleep was the main cause of that. She may have been vampiric and therefore did not need as much sleep as say a human for example, but Narice still did enjoy her down time. And it was even better when she was wrapped within Arrarn’s powerful embrace under the sheets of their bed, with Toria nestled between them, just as they had been when the junior officer made the call. That it was Cha’talla who ordered him to contact Narice did not make it any better. Narice and Toria Leonidas both found that they treasured the moments in their bed beside their beloved Arrarn. Half elf though he was, his Lycavorian blood was certainly dominant, as was the heat put off by his body because of that blood. It was a heat that both Narice and Toria could not get enough of now when lying beside him. It had not been as noticeable on Earth because of the more temperate climate the planet now had since the Sky Fire, but here on Uzu Ozeib 7 it was very telling because of the lower mean temperature during the night time hours. Most of those nights they simply talked of what they had done that day, but there were also the nights that had been filled with torrid desire and lovemaking that went on for hours. It still amazed Narice what he could do to her, what Toria could do to her, what both of them could make her feel. It was also an attention and desire she returned a hundred fold for both of them. They both preferred when they were wrapped around his powerful body and he was making them cry out in ecstasy, but for the moments when Arrarn was not with them, they were not shy about expressing the love, desire and want for each other that had originally brought them together.

Narice and Arrarn had been working non-stop since their return from Earth and the conference with the Kavalian Rebels. Toria had travelled to fully a quarter of the planet in the last weeks coordinating the reorganization efforts of Admiral Pontal and Arrarn as they began the job of restricting the entire High Coven military. Toria had taken the point on this because of her skills and the fact that she was now widely recognized as the Blessed Wife to Narice and Arrarn. This unique arrangement had been fully accepted by the vast majority of the younger generation while the older generation of vampires had a harder time accepting it. This did not stop them from honoring her position and role for they knew that many of the old ways had no place in the future Narice was creating for them.

Narice found that while all of the Ventash’ma agreed with what she had done, a few of them were willing to offer even more in order to redirect the attention of the Kavalians away from the High Coven. Narice and a few others knew that their attention had been diverted long before she had offered the Kavalian Rebels any High Coven support and equipment. The Kavalians had lost interest in the High Coven the moment Pian had made his announcement of the forming of a Kavalian free government.

There were still those older High Coven families that were angered by her public decision to dismiss the long standing law in regards to succession. Her words had been simple but very much direct and to the point. Narice had made a very public statement that she was the wife and mate to Arrarn Leonidas, a name she now carried with immense pride and love and she had no intention of ever following the old High Coven law requiring her to take a Pureblood vampire as her husband in order to produce a pureblood heir to the High Coven. Toria was equally her wife and lover and would always bear the name Leonidas as well now. Narice would share her bed with no man who was not Arrarn Leonidas ever and any children that she and Toria gave birth to in the future would be Arrarn’s children and only his. And they would bear the name Leonidas proudly. Narice knew that this statement and her decision to help the Kavalians had not gone over well with many older pureblood families, but she also knew it needed to be done in order to help secure the future going forward.

Narice turned slightly as her three member Immortal security detachment parted and Toria stepped between them with a nod. Cha'talla had chosen all those who protected her and Toria personally and his son Lynom was head of that detail with his half elven wife As'hia. She did not like having all the security because she was as equally deadly as she was beautiful, but even she had to admit the precarious nature of things right now and the fact that Deneth and Arrarn would not always be around to insure her safety.

Toria came right up to her and Narice took her hands. "Did you find out anything?" Narice asked.

Toria shook her head. "No one is talking. The entire hanger is locked down and we are waiting for a ship to land."

"A ship?" Narice asked. "What ship?"

"It's a *STRIKER* Mark II." Arrarn's voice caused both of them to turn as he came up behind them with Cha'talla following close on his heels. "All we know right now is it is from Andro and it came from his ship. The Mark IIs have not fully replaced our regular *STRIKERS*, which means this must be something important."

Narice's eyes grew a little wider. "The new ship? *SPARTA'S WRATH*?" She stammered.

Arrarn nodded his head. "It has several passengers on it but aside from that we know nothing other than it is travelling with Andro's command authorization. Which means he knows who is on it."

"He did not contact you Cha'talla?" Toria asked as she stepped closer to Narice.

Cha'talla shook his head. "All Dilaen said was that I would understand when they arrived here." He told them. Cha'talla turned his head when they heard the mild gasp and saw several members of the *Ventash'ma* enter the hanger bay, drawing intent glares from both Deneth and Vollenth who rested by the entrance. Cha'talla had fallen quickly back into his role as protector and the thousands of Immortals who had remained on Uzu Ozeib 7 looked at him almost reverently now. He was the only living Immortal to have ever bonded with a dragon and that alone told them he was something far more than they had believed. Datarik led Anebal and Riara over to where they stood.

"Forgive us for being late Narice." Datarik spoke as he glanced back once more at where Vollenth rested. "Cha'talla... I must say... your dragon does not seem to like us very much."

Cha'talla smiled. "Have no fears *Ventash'ma* Datarik." He spoke. "If Vollenth thought he could not trust you... none of you would have been allowed into the hanger."

Datarik nodded his head. "I know." He said with a small smile. He turned to Narice. "Do we know anything yet?"

Narice shook her head. "No. Only that the ship was sent by Androcles with his command authorization."

"It's very odd for him to just do something like this out of the blue with no warning isn't it?" Anebal asked looking at Arrarn.

Arrarn shook his head. "Not really Lady Anebal." He replied. "Andro isn't exactly forth coming with all the facts at times. It is a trait that he inherited from our father and it drives our mothers crazy."

Anebal smiled. "Yes... I can see where that would do it."

They had refused vehemently when Arrarn addressed any of them by *Ventash'ma*, saying that he was true royalty and a Prince of the Union. Arrarn Leonidas had been raised far better than that however, and he simply began to refer to them as Lady and Sir whenever he spoke to them. He considered them to be his elders and deserving of his respect.

Words were impossible then as the alarm in the hanger bay began to sound and the main overhead doors began to open smoothly. All of them turned to watch as the sleek shape of the *STRIKER* Mark II lowered into view following perfectly the landing vector given to it by the ground crew in the tower of this hanger bay. It was Narice, Toria and Arrarn's personal hanger and held their own regular *STRIKER* off to the side as well as several Long Range G9 Runners. It was staffed around the clock by supporters of Narice and all she was doing and guarded by both Immortals and exceptionally well trained High Coven commandos under Admiral Pontal.

The *STRIKER* Mark II shifted slightly before settling gently to the hanger floor. The roar began to recede instantly as the ship's pilot cut power to the main engines and they began to power down swiftly. Cha'talla motioned with his hand and half a dozen Immortals took up cover positions directly to the rear of the ramp, with several Coven Commandos interspaced between them in case they had to wrap the shadows around them. These men and women had been training for weeks now for this tactic, enabling them to become a clear and unified fighting group. Both the Immortals and the Coven Commandos would now die to protect their comrades as well as their new Empress.

Narice and the other watched as an Immortal soldier darted up to their group and looked at Cha'talla. "General... it is a female sir. She is asking for you by name. She wishes to talk to you before they lower the ramp."

Cha'talla took the portable COM unit and activated it. "This is Cha'talla." He spoke.

"Ah... General Cha'talla." The female voice said pleasantly. "Pa'cour and Androcles instructed I ask for you first."

Cha'talla's eyes grew wider. "Pa'cour!" He gasped aloud.

"I have six Immortals under your brother's command with me General." The soft voice spoke. "I wish to insure that there is no confrontation with those Immortals among you. They have sworn to protect me and I do not wish to see any of them injured. We are not the enemy, nor have we captured this ship. Androcles sent us here to deliver a message. And give to you a gift."

"A gift?" Cha'talla asked.

"Have you wondered why you have not been able to reach Admiral Pontal recently?" The female voice asked.

"There has been no need to contact him." Cha'talla answered. "What is going on?"

"Then you don't know?"

"Know what?"

"Your assurance first General?" The woman spoke again.

"Of course!" Cha'talla answered.

"Is Empress Narice with you?" The voice asked. "And the *Ventash'ma* as Androcles requested?"

"I am here." Narice answered before Cha'talla could get her to stop.

Cha'talla shook his head at her actions and saw her grin at him in response. She was just as intrigued as the rest of them about what was happening. "The *Ventash'ma* are here as well." He answered.

"Good." The woman's voice answered. "Then if you will insure no one is behind the ship we will lower the ramp. You may wish to call for a medical bed... or restraining cuffs... it is up to you."

"What?" Cha'talla asked even as the ship's ramp began to hum softly and lower.

All of them turned to watch as the ramp came down smoothly to reveal three heavily armed Immortals standing openly at the top of the ramp. They could see three more behind them, two of whom seemed to be holding something between them. The first thing Cha'talla noticed was that all of these men had taken the serum and now looked as any of his men might look. A true Akruxian Immortal. He felt his heart jump a little for it meant that his brother had also embraced a new ideology just as T'lolt had told him he had. All of the Immortals also wore standard Union ArmorPly body armor, a surprise yes, but just another sign that perhaps one day their family could one day reunite.

Cha'talla's eyes grew wider, as did all of their gazes as the slim hand pressed against the shoulder of one of the Immortals and he turned his head and looked down. Soft words were spoken and he bowed his head and stepped aside to allow the exquisitely stunning, blond haired elven female to move in front of them. The others spread out quickly in a standard defensive posture, obviously intent on protecting the elven female whatever the cost to them. Though they did not know her name, Nameia made her way down the ramp confidently when she saw first Cha'talla and Narice, and then the others with them. The Immortals followed behind and to the sides of her. That they were very well trained was obvious to even the most unskilled soldier and Cha'talla quickly tapped the inside of his wrist three times signaling Lynom and As'hia to stand down from where he had them wrapped within the shadows and ready to pounce.

Nameia wore the standard Mark V ArmorPly given to her by the Union Quartermaster after tailoring it to fit her like a glove. Her long blond hair hung well below her shoulders and her blue eyes were bright and happy. Arrarn was the first to notice, followed quickly by Narice and Toria, that this elven female bore no indication in the least that she feared the Immortals she was with. She looked completely comfortable in fact. Exactly like those elven females Narice had seen on Kranek when they stopped there before returning here. She wore a Union K14 KM in a holster on her right thigh and though it looked odd on her small frame, she appeared to know it was there and how to use it.

Nameia strode across the short distance and stopped in front of Narice and Cha'talla. She bowed her head respectfully to Narice and looked at her.

"It is a true blessing to finally meet you Empress Narice." She stated calmly.

Narice glanced at Arrarn and Toria before looking back to her. "You know me?" She asked.

Nameia shook her head. "I know all about you." She stated. "But no... regrettably we have never met."

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" Cha'talla demanded.

Nameia did not seem intimidated in the least by his gruff nature and she only smiled up at him. "Pa'cour told me you did not like surprises." She said with a smile. "Apparently he was right."

"You speak of my brother as if you know him." Cha'talla said.

"Know him?" Nameia said seductively. "Yes... I suppose you could say that. My name is Nameia and I am the Blessed Elven Wife of both Pa'cour and Yuri."

Nameia knew the response this news would have and she was not disappointed. Their faces told her of the shock and disbelief they felt and she smiled even wider. She turned as the Immortal stepped up to her side.

"It appears Princess Yuri and Colonel Pa'cour were very correct in the reaction the news would have." He told her as he held out the small holo transmitter to her.

Nameia chuckled softly. "Indeed they were Al'ten. Indeed they were." She looked at Cha'talla. "Pa'cour and Yuri insisted that Al'ten and the others make the journey here with me. Being their Blessed wife does have its advantages I suppose. Al'ten and the others are very smart and well spoken."

"You did manage to beat all of us in Tolarian Squares." Al'ten told her with a smile.

Nameia chuckled. "I think you all let me win." She said.

"Yuri Moran is no Princess of the High Coven! She is a war criminal and I demand on behalf of the *Ventash'ma* that she be brought to justice!" Riara snapped as he stepped forward. "You will tell us where she is at once."

Nameia looked at him as did the young Immortal Al'ten and Narice could detect the ever so slight twitching of the elven female's jaw in anger. She was still trying to process what the young woman had just told them. She found it so hard to believe, but this elven female had spoken with conviction and confidence when she had told them. As if it was the most natural thing in the world to her. Narice knew from experience that elven females were exceptionally blunt and very forward when it came to their sexuality, but once they had found something that was dear to them, they defended what they had and who they loved with vicious lethality.

"You are correct in that she is no longer a Princess of the High Coven..." Nameia told him harshly, but keeping her anger under control. "However... she is a Princess to us. Whatever crimes she may have committed while under the control of that abomination Xaxon do not matter to me. She and Pa'cour saved my life and the lives of half a dozen others from a future existence of rape and sexual slavery at the hands of Immortal mercenaries. They did so at great risk to themselves and without hesitation. I remained when they returned the others who were with me to Elear. I eventually found love in their arms." Nameia glared at Riara now, her blue eyes showing simmering anger. "If you refer to her as a criminal in my presence again sir, vampire or not, I will tear out your eyes and feed them to you!"

Narice stepped forward and touched Riara's arm. "*Ventash'ma* Riara... please." Narice said. "She came under the orders of Androcles."

Riara sobered instantly when he heard that and he turned to look at Arrarn. "Arrarn... is this possible?" He asked.

Arrarn nodded his head still trying to grasp everything as it was happening. "The ship is a Mark II *STRIKER* sir. The only way they could have got it is if Andro released it to them."

Narice squeezed Riara's arm and turned back to Nameia. "Why are you here?" She asked now. "And why all the secrecy?"

Nameia smiled at her patiently, all the anger from a moment ago gone from her eyes. "I have a message for you... and a gift." She said. "Just as I said."

"A gift?" Narice asked. "From who?"

Nameia leaned over and set the transmitter on the deck and stepped back. "I will let my Blessed Wife explain it to you." She said as she tapped the holo disc and stepped back.

Narice and the others nearly jumped back as the holo disc flared upon activation and then the life size image of Yuri was in the hanger bay with them. Standing beside her, towering over her really, was the broad shouldered and heavily muscled Immortal.

"Hello sister." Yuri's voice echoed in the bay as all noise had ceased and everyone was staring at the image of her in shock.

“Pa'cour!” Cha'talla almost shouted.

“Cha'talla.” Pa'cour spoke as Yuri looked up at his face. “You are looking... you are looking well brother.” He said evenly, though it was obvious from his fidgeting that he was very nervous.

Narice saw it first obviously.

Yuri's eyes were so much brighter and filled with life. She watched her older sister smile up at the muscular Immortal and then take and squeeze his arm in her hands. The powerful aura of darkness that had permeated her being for so long, like a constant shadow on her face and body, it was now gone. Narice remembered Andro's words on Earth to her that night. He said that this was not the Yuri she had known. He told her to trust him, something that Narice had never questioned. Looking at her sister, Narice could see what he was talking about. This was not the sister she had grown up knowing. This was the woman she had seen in very rare and unpredictable moments when Xaxon's control of her must have slipped. This woman exuded confidence and calm, yet also the unfettered ability to hurt you in many different ways.

“Yuri?” Narice gasped now as she moved closer to the holo image of her sister.

“Narice!” Arrarn barked and reached for her arm.

Narice turned and looked at him. “It is a holo image Arrarn my love.” She told him. “It can't hurt me.”

They all saw Yuri smile and take a deep breath as she looked at Narice. “I do not have the gifts that your brother and father do Arrarn Leonidas.” Yuri spoke calmly. “To be honest... I do not wish to have them. Believe me... I am not a threat to my sister.”

“So you say.” Arrarn answered defensively.

“Arrarn please!” Narice insisted before turning back to the image once more. “Yuri... Yuri what is... what is this all about?”

“It is exactly as Nameia has told you.” Yuri said looking at Nameia directly. “We miss you our elven wife.”

Nameia smiled warmly at the man and woman she had come to worship so completely. “You and our husband can make it up to me when I return.” Nameia spoke proudly.

“We intend to.” Yuri told her.

“As do I.” Nameia said brazenly.

Yuri smiled at her and Narice knew then it was no act. They had been raised by their mother to consider such relationships unnatural and taboo even though they discovered that Aikiro had partaken of such pleasures in secret and never told them. The old Yuri would have hissed and spat openly, unable to hide her disgust at such a relationship, yet now her older sister stood and gazed at the elven female with a look of desire and love. A look that Narice herself knew very well, for it was the same way she looked at Toria.

Narice watched as Yuri turned back to gaze at her. “You look breathtaking sister.” She said softly.

“Yuri what is...?”

Yuri held up her hand causing Narice to stop speaking. “This is the only way we could facilitate this Narice. I knew that if I returned myself I would have been arrested and treated as the criminal I am.”

Riara opened his mouth to bark out that she was correct but stopped when he realized what she had said. He looked at Datarik and Anebal and saw both of them looking on with confused but interested expressions.

“I will not make excuses for my actions through the years... there is nothing I can say to take back anything I may have done.” Yuri said. “Truthfully... there are many things I do not remember doing because Xaxon had such control over me. Ultimately however... I am the one responsible. The only thing I can do now is try to atone for whatever sins I have committed in the past and try to live the life I have embraced now. I have found with Pa'cour and Nameia what you discovered and embraced with Arrarn and Toria sister. There are things I must do first before returning there and facing the music as your father has said in the past Arrarn Leonidas. I have to do them... if only to... if only to put my own demons to rest.”

“Yuri... Yuri I don't understand.” Narice said truthfully.

“I am not the Yuri you grew up seeing Narice.” Yuri told her evenly. “That woman died on Earth when Androcles killed me.”

“What?” Narice gasped in shock.

Yuri nodded her head. “I was foolish to think I could face him alone you know... well... Xaxon was foolish one to force that upon me. Between his claws and his teeth, Andro did a wonderful job of making sure I would bleed out in seconds. I died on that world and only Pa'cour's love for me saved me.”

“Mother you...” The female voice spoke from out of the cone of the transmission.

Yuri shook her head. “Yes I do Onera.” She said. She looked at Narice. “You should meet someone.” She spoke holding out her hand. They all watched as the equally stunning half Immortal and half vampire female stepped up to Yuri without question. Holding tightly to her hand was Carisia which made it even more surreal. “Narice... this is Onera. She is... she is the fruit of the love that Pa'cour and I share. She is our daughter.”

The bright dark eyes looked at Narice and she smiled. “*Ilninil* Narice. It is a joy to finally meet you. Even in this transmission.” (Aunt)

Narice could only gawk at the transmission in disbelief. “You are... that isn't possible.” She finally stammered.

Yuri smiled. “Not normally no.” She said. “But thanks to your mother Arrarn Leonidas... the infliction upon my body that would have killed Onera did not occur.”

“Yuri!” Narice gasped. “You had... you had Darpia Syndrome?”

Yuri nodded her head. “Yes. Anja gave to Nalavi the means to treat me much the same way she developed the treatment for Isabella. Using her work Nalavi was able to accelerate Onera's growth within my womb and she came to join us before my womb could no longer sustain her. The accelerated hormones however... well they caused her to grow far faster than normal. Much as they did to your brother Dorian I understand Arrarn Leonidas.” Yuri looked at Onera and lifted her hand to stroke her cheek. “This is the result. She is beautiful isn't she?”

“Mother?” Onera gasped and even in the transmission you could see her blush under her dark Immortal skin color. They all saw Carisia laugh and lean into her half sister affectionately.

“Narice...” Carisia spoke now. “Do you think I would be standing here if things were not so very different?”

Narice shook her head without question. “Never.” She said.

“I have found my true mother Narice. And so has Lucia. She was always here... but she just wasn't allowed to be herself.” Carisia told her. “Trust in me *Ilninil* Narice.”

“That... that is not something I will ever question Carisia.” Narice told her.

Carisia nodded. “Good. Come sister... we are almost to Ukwav and we need to prepare.” She pulled Onera out of the transmission.

“Ukwav?” Cha'talla asked. “Why are you...?”

“It is a rather long but very exciting story Cha'talla.” Yuri told him with a semi-smile. “Suffice to say I will give you the short version. Roughly thirty hours ago Androcles led a rather risky and completely insane assault against Robert's command ship. Pa'cour and I and many others took part in this assault. It was successful. If you have not yet heard from Admiral Pontal... it is because we gave the coordinates to him of Robert's remaining traitorous forces. Enemies of the High Coven that you lead sister. I imagine that he and Admiral Riall are still cleaning up the garbage as Androcles called it.”

“That's... that's not... *ussta yah* Yuri how...” Narice couldn't form coherent words at the moment. (My god)

“Nameia our love.” Yuri spoke again. “If you would have Al'ten deliver my gift to the Empress and members of the *Ventash'ma* who are present.”

Nameia didn't blink and she motioned with her hand for the two Immortals to come forward. That they were dragging a large man between them was now obvious. They moved directly in front of the transmission of Yuri and unceremoniously dropped the body to the deck with a thump. Nameia motioned them back and stepped up to the inert figure, reaching out to take hold of the black hood that covered the head and yanking it off. The collective gasp that followed was loud enough to echo within the hanger bay, as was Narice's rage filled scream of hate as she saw the bloody gagged mouth and dark eyes staring up at her. His once handsome face was deformed somehow now, his jaw and nose misshapen as if someone had beaten him severely, but those eyes glared at her with evil intent.

Narice didn't hesitate for a single moment and unleashed all her anger and hate in one exceptionally powerful kick. The kick was for all the pain he had caused so many people she had come to love as dearly as she did Arrarn and Toria. It was more instinctual than she was used to, but Arrarn's wilder and more instinctive nature was rubbing off on both her and Toria. The savage kick would have done far more damage had she been

wearing her normal combat boots, but as it was the kick slammed squarely into Moran's chest with a resounding thump. All of them heard Moran groan in agony and curl up into a ball on the floor of the hanger. Arrarn had to reach forward and wrap his arms around her petite form to keep her from continuing her assault.

"Narice no!" He hissed softly as she tried to pull away.

"I had Al'ten interrogate him on the trip there." Yuri spoke once more when Arrarn had Narice securely within his embrace. "Everything that was in his twisted and feeble mind now belongs to me. This is your gift sister. When I woke up in Nalavi's care and discovered that Xaxon's presence had left me... my eyes were opened Narice. Opened to everything that had been going on, to include what he and mother were forcing upon me and doing so willingly. I should have drain him dry that night so long ago... I have no one to blame but myself for that foolhardy action... but now I will leave it to you to insure he meets the fate he so deserves."

"What do you mean?" Cha'talla asked.

"Nameia has a data pad." Yuri spoke and they watched her draw it out of her small back pouch and hold it out to him. Cha'talla took it and handed it to Narice as Arrarn continued to hold her back from hitting Moran again. "On that pad are the details to much of what he, mother and father were collaborating in for the last several centuries. She confided in Robert their most secret plans and operations Narice. Far more than even I realized or knew about. Mother did not reveal everything to him, but I have her files and my people are doing their best to decrypt them as we speak. When we discover something new from her records and secret files I will have that information provided to you immediately. As well as any action that we will take to counter what it may be. Their combined conduct during the war with the Kavalians was treasonous at best... horrific at worst. They used the Kavalian invasion as a means to gain what they always wanted Narice. The Mindvoice ship on Earth or Martin's help in securing the one taken from Ritaah by your brother Arrarn. He was still plotting things right up until the hour we captured him. It is yours now sister. All of it. As you can see from his beaten physical condition Lisisa did quite the number on him. He was a fool for trying to fight her. Lisisa is five times more deadly than he ever was. She was with us when we assaulted his bridge and she acted as you just did... only I did not stop her then. It did not want to."

They saw Yuri smile in the transmission and a small glimpse of the cruelty that still remained within her came out. It was directed cruelty however; it was no different than what any of them would have exhibited in the same circumstances.

"It was extremely gratifying to witness to be quite honest." Yuri continued. "Androcles and I have the only other copy of the information Narice and that is how it will remain for now. We have already begun to put in motion things that will thwart what they began. And save the lives of millions across the stars. Pian'Nruarani's rebellion being the major event. When you and the *Ventash'ma* and your military commanders have gone through it... please contact me with whatever ideas or operations you wish to put in motion. It will be better to coordinate our moves."

Cha'talla looked up from gazing over Narice's shoulder at the pad. "Pa'cour... you did... you were part of this?"

"It is all true brother." He stated. "I have the forgiveness I always thought I would never receive from our brother Cha'talla. There is no reason to lie to you now. I will not hide who I am anymore Cha'talla. I do not wish to. I ask only that you allow me to regain at least some of the honor that our father instilled in us and I lost so many years ago."

"Pa'cour there was never..." Cha'talla began.

Pa'cour nodded his head. "I know... it is something T'lolt told me as well brother. I just could not bring myself to believe it until he was standing in front of me. As I said... there is no reason to lie to you now Cha'talla. We want nothing in return for this information brother... only the safe return of our Blessed Elven Wife. She is precious to both of us now." Cha'talla watched his brother's arm curl around Yuri's waist and pull her tight. All of them took note that Yuri turned slightly and pressed against him intimately without even a hint of unwillingness. Narice was the one who saw Nameia's face blush slightly but she was smiling brilliantly at his words. "I have everything I could have ever dreamed for now brother. And so much more. As Yuri said... we have much to atone for. This is only the beginning."

"Wait!" Narice stuttered. She looked quickly at Arrarn before turning back to meet Yuri's eyes. "What about Dante?"

Yuri nodded. "We have him in custody as well." She spoke somberly. "His fate... his fate is already sealed sister and that is why we are only a few hours from Ukwav. When Xaxon's Etheric resonance left me... he jumped to Dante because he was of my blood. Now we will bring about the end of two individuals who have so much to answer for."

"He is your son Yuri." Narice said softly.

All of them watched as Yuri shook her head sadly. "No. The moment that monster took control of him he ceased to be my son. Perhaps even before that happened, since I was very much influencing him while under Xaxon's control."

"He's... he's on your ship?" Arrarn asked.

Yuri nodded in response to his question. "Yes. Androcles asked that I pass a message to you as well Arrarn Leonidas. Dante's fate is already decided... that much you knew and in truth it is no different than what would have happened to him within the High Coven. He also wanted you to know that Pusintin, the traitor to your people and your family, the man who raped your mother, is dead as well. Your father and those with him were victorious. The man who defiled your mother is but ashes now Arrarn Leonidas. It was the most vile of his sins to be sure... but not the only one... and he has paid for them all. And soon... the others who took part in that plan will be as well. Just as your brother promised you."

Arrarn took a deep breath and felt a weight of worry and anger lift from his heart. "My father and mothers?" He gasped after a moment. "They are..."

"They are all fine." Yuri told him quickly. "I understand your cousin Kalis was seriously injured saving your mother... but he will make a full recovery."

"Andro?" Arrarn asked.

"He will contact you directly after we have concluded things on Ukwav and before he departs for the Beta Quadrant." Yuri told him.

Arrarn looked at her. "Thank you... thank you for telling me." He said.

Yuri shook her head. "Do not thank me Arrarn... if not for your brother and his often times frightening ability to see within people... I would not be here. I should be thanking you. All of your family. I have already spoken to your sister Zarah and..." Yuri choked up for a moment but Pa'cour pulled her tighter. "What was done to your sister I will forever bear the shame for Arrarn Leonidas. I do not ask for your forgiveness... I have no right... I only ask that you allow me the chance to show you and your family that it wasn't truly me."

"I think Andro has already decided that Yuri." Arrarn said. "I will... we will never doubt our brother again."

Yuri nodded slowly and turned her eyes back to Narice. "Narice... I..." Yuri waited until Narice turned from Arrarn and looked up at her. "You have no reason at all to listen to anything I say to you sister but take my advice and do not let him live. Do not give him the opportunity to rally those who still wish to hold onto the old ways and cause dissension within our people. You have united the Coven in a way no one ever has in our history Narice. Let nothing keep you from doing what you were always meant to do. Those unwilling or unable to change how they think... leave them behind to wallow in their own misery." Yuri took a breath and then continued. "I give him to you to decide his fate, but for his crimes against our people as well as me, blood is the only recourse and you know this. You are the Empress of the High Coven now Narice... but do what our mother never did. What I never did. Listen to our people."

Narice turned her eyes on Moran who lay still on the deck staring up at her. "I intend to." Narice hissed.

Yuri nodded her head and her face showed relief. "Then all that is left is my message to the *Ventash'ma*." Yuri spoke as she turned her dark eyes on where Datarik stood with Riara and Anebal. "I say to you on the record... the senior members of the *Ventash'ma*... I relinquish any and all claim I may have had to the High Coven, whatever it may be. I am not fit to lead our people... if I ever was. My sister Narice is now Empress of the High Coven, for only she can lead our people in the direction they must go. She is also a Leonidas and you must take that into account as well. I am no longer under the control of the monster that gripped me for so many years. I will leave Narice to explain to you what all of this means... but you are free to contact Androcles at any time to confirm what she tells you. He insists on this in fact if you have any questions at all. I know many things thanks to the information that bastard held within his head. I say to all of you now... you are utterly free to help Narice in building our people into what they were always intended to be. Nothing remains that could harm you or bring harm to those you love for your unquestioned support of her actions. You

may pass this message to all the other *Ventash'ma* as well for she will need all of you. But know that I will be watching from the shadows. I will protect my sister and what she is trying to do with all the viciousness you once knew and should any harm befall her... those responsible will not have to worry for what her Blessed husband will do. That will pale in comparison to what I will do.”

“You threaten us Yuri?” Datarik asked but in a neutral voice.

Yuri shook her head. “No *Ventash'ma* Datarik. I am merely stating a fact.” She answered. “I give you my word this day, to the three of you, for I knew you would be the ones that Narice would have summoned, exactly one century from this time I will return to Uzu Ozeib 7 to face the judgment of our people whatever it may be. I would hope by then I will have been able to make you see I am not the monster that had power over this body for so many years.”

Datarik stepped closer. “You would surrender to us?” He asked.

Yuri nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered.

“But why?”

Yuri’s smile was completely natural and honest. “Because I no longer fear the unknown *Ventash'ma* Datarik.” She told him. Yuri turned back to Narice who was looking at her intently. “Nameia has something she will give to you before she departs sister. Do not keep her too long Narice. Pa'cour and I miss her.”

“I won’t.” Narice said softly. “Yuri...”

Yuri shook her head. “Only you can do this Narice. Only you can lead our people now. Be strong sister. Be strong. Perhaps one day in the future we may yet come across one another among the stars. I love you Narice. I love you so very much sister.”

They watched Yuri touch her wrist and then the holo image faded instantly.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Arrarn exclaimed his voice carrying over the silence that gripped them all.

“That... that would be an accurate statement.” Cha'talla spoke finally.

Narice let her eyes return to where Moran lay on the deck still glaring at her. Her dark eyes narrowed considerably and she knew what she had to do. “Cha'talla?”

He turned his eyes to her. “Narice?”

“Cha'talla... take this... take this monster to the closest decompression chamber and put him in it.” Narice told him. “Lock the chamber and have a guard posted. No one is to come near him or even know he is here. I will not have that knowledge give fuel to those who still fight against the changes we are trying to make. Just as Yuri said.”

Cha'talla nodded his head without question. “I will see to it.” He said.

“He looks like he hasn’t fed in some time on fresh blood and I intend to see he never does again.” Narice snarled viciously.

“Narice... what are you doing?” Datarik asked moving up to her.

“I’m going to insure that this monster dies the most horrible death I can think of.” Narice spat. She turned her eyes on Moran and they all saw those dark orbs switch to the cobalt blue of the vampire inside her. “When the Blood Fever overwhelms you Robert Moran... when there is nothing left of your mind except the instinct to feed... then I will have your throat cut and hung upside-down while your remaining life drains from you. Then I will see to it your corpse is dismembered and cast into the deepest pits of darkness I can find on this world. None will ever know you even existed.”

“By the gods Narice.” Toria gasped as she took her arms.

“It will not be enough for what he has done.” Narice snarled. “But it will atone for some of the pain and anguish you have reaped upon others.”

Narice Leonidas spun around on her heels and began walking out of the hanger bay with over a dozen sets of eyes on her back. From this day forward no one would ever doubt the granite like resolve of their beautiful new Empress.

Nor would they doubt how cruel she could truly be.

STARBOARD HANGER BAY 2 ORBITING UKWAV

They were the first to arrive in the hanger bay, mostly because neither of them had slept. It wasn't an issue for Deion, for like all purebloods he required far less sleep, and Mari felt utterly reborn and full of energy and life. Her petite body was joyously sore, but she felt so wonderful it was beyond words. They both wore fresh ArmorPly uniforms and Mari carried the sidearm that Deion had given her. Deion wore his standard loadout which included his *Nehtes*, the K12 KM on his right thigh and the A4 chopped down version of the P190. They had stopped at the Mess Lounge on the way here and grabbed several Greek Loukoumades and two large containers of some sort of Berry juice and they were now happily feeding each other the honey dipped and cinnamon sprinkled fried dough. Mari had been quite delighted to find the Loukoumades in the Mess Lounge for she had developed quite a taste for them while among the Lycavorians on Manne. Aricia had apparently shown her how to make them at some point and now no one could stop eating them. They were traditional Greek food and part of the history of Deion and his family and their Greek culture and background that she knew they all worshiped and held dear to them.

Deion straddled the shipping crate while Mari sat lotus style on top of it facing him. As he chewed he reached out and drew a finger along the corner of her mouth, brushing away the cinnamon stuck there. Mari giggled and tried to bite his finger as he yanked it back. Deion noticed the landing bay doors open and his twin Nara was the first one through. He looked back to Mari, a sobering look on his face as what they were going to do came forth.

"Mari... you do not have to come with us." He said softly.

"We have been through this already Deion." Mari told him. "Or were you too busy gawking at me to listen to what I was telling you when I was dressing?"

"Gawking at you was much more fun." Deion told her with a smile.

"Deo... I want to be with you." Mari told him.

Deion nodded. "And I with you. More than anything. You taste much better than these Loukoumades." He told her with a twinkle in his dark eyes.

Mari blushed under her tan and snapped out with her hand to slap him lightly across the face. "Stop it you pervert." She hissed at him. Mari set her Danish down and reached out to take his hands when she saw the somber look return. "What is it Deion my love?" She asked softly.

"It's just... what we are going to do is justice for us." Deion told her meeting her gaze. "It may seem barbaric and cruel to others who do not know our ways. Who do not have our sense of justice and follow the same code of honor that we do. It is not going to be pleasant to witness and I don't want you to have to... I don't want you to see it and think that we are like that all of the time. That I am like that."

"I know you are not like that Deion." Mari told him. "You may not have bitten me and turned me but I know our minds were joined. It was unlike anything I have ever felt and it made me see you. The wolf within you is part of who you are Deo. I know that. I embrace that. And when you finally turn me I will know it completely."

"I just wish we could have met at a time when all this was not happening and..."

Mari placed a finger to his lips silencing his words. "You do not have to explain it to me." She told him. "This is part of who you are. Who your people are. I know that and I still want to be with you. I've never wanted anything more in my life."

Deion looked at her. "That's not entirely true." He told her.

Mari nodded her head knowing he meant her father. "I know... but that will come in its own time Deo. I have fallen in love with you Deion Leonidas. And it grows stronger by the minute. I want to be like you more than anything. To experience all that you are for myself. I want to know all of you... and that includes the parts that are not always the most pleasant to watch. Lycavorians are not the only species who have a... questionable and often times violent past Deo my love."

Deion looked at her and smiled. "You called me your love twice now." He said. "Does that mean you love me?"

Mari rolled her eyes. "No! It means I want to kick your *mida* across this hanger bay for asking so foolish a question after what we shared the last hours!" She exclaimed. "Of course it means I love you!"

“You are learning our language pretty fast.” He told her with that grin. “You know most people would call you insane for wanting to become part of my family.”

Mari laughed at that. “Then they don’t know what I know. They haven’t felt what you make me feel.” She said. “And they are fools!”

Deion was about to speak when Nara appeared next to them and plopped down on the crate beside Mari with a bright smile. “So... tell me Mari. Did he make you scream his name to the moon and the stars?” She asked.

Deion shook his head and rolled his eyes. “Oh... that is so subtle sister!” He growled at her.

“Don’t growl at me.” Nara spat at him. “Your barking is too high pitched *fervon*.”

Mari laughed at their exchange and leaned into Nara affectionately. “There were no moon and stars that we could see.” She answered honestly. “But I was screaming my head off.”

“Mari!” Deion exclaimed in shock as Nara laughed.

“What?” Mari demanded. “I’m not going to hide what you make me feel!”

Nara leaned over and kissed Mari full on the lips. It was an action that Mari did not shy away from for she already knew and had witnessed the closeness of Deion’s family. It was a very common thing for them. She leaned into Nara as she then nuzzled her cheek. “Finally... I have someone who will help me keep him on a leash. And our mothers will love you.” She commented with a grin as she drew away. “I hope you are ready to be rushed.”

“What?” Mari asked.

“Sister no!” Deion complained.

“Don’t look at me!” Nara snapped. “We all felt it the moment your Etheric resonances joined together! Remember... Eli is Jomann’s Mage as well. She is just as attuned to him as I am you dummy!”

Deion’s eyes were wide and he swore under his breath. “*Sibfla!*”

“What is wrong?” Mari asked.

Nara smiled. “Nothing is wrong... Deo just forgot to tell you that we would all feel your happiness and the joining of your minds. Not to mention that the entire deck reeked of...”

“Nara!” Deion snapped. “She doesn’t need to know that right now!”

Mari looked back and forth between them and then realization hit her and her eyes grew wide. “Everyone could smell that we were...” She gasped.

Nara nodded. “Yep!”

Mari blushed even more now. “Oh my.” She stammered.

Deion cut his eyes when the figures came through the open hanger bay doors and he saw his sisters heading right for where they were sitting. Right behind them were all of his brothers except for Andro. “Oh boy!” He hissed softly. “Mari I am so sorry!” He pleaded. “I...”

Mari looked at him with a brilliant smile of love and adoration. “I am not.” She said proudly grabbing his hand.

Deion looked at Nara. “Where is Andro?”

Nara shrugged her shoulders. “No one has seen him in over an hour. Dorian either.” She replied as she scooted over in front of Mari somewhat in order to protect her. “Brace yourself Mari.” She whispered.

Mari chuckled happily. “I am ready.”

“I’m not!” Deion protested.

“You baby!” Nara hissed.

SPARTA’S WRATH

DECK NINETEEN

ANDROCLES AND ELYNTH’S PRIVATE TRAINING GYM

It was much larger than either of them had expected when they first saw it but it allowed them to practice and train on many maneuvers that they could only do on the surface of a planet. Now however... now they were simply sitting in the middle of the massive room on the mat, Androcles on both of his knees and his

eyes gazing at the wall where there were a myriad of images and old paintings of Sparta and warriors from her past locked in battle. Soft light globes were placed in different locations within the small alcove casting eerie shadows over the images and making it appear as if they were almost alive. Elynth rested just behind Androcles, her head bowed low and her eyes gazing at the same wall. For the first time since coming on board the ship Dorian and Ryner had joined them here. No one, not even his siblings, were allowed access to this training room. It was their brother and Elynth's escape and sanctuary. The small lounge area near the back corner was decorated with many different items from the time in Sparta's history. Androcles had purchased them all over the years from the many vendors within Sparta and this was the first place he had ever displayed them. Weapons. Shields. Armor. A short but very telling account of Sparta's history and that of the Lycavorian people, now bound so tightly together as if they were one. Both Androcles and Elynth knew that Dorian and Ryner belonged here, just as they did. Whatever called to the four of them, here they would discover it.

At this moment however... all four of them were absorbed within their own thoughts as the music echoed throughout the entire training room almost louder than most people could bear to stand within. It did not give her pause or concern. She allowed the heavy beat and rhythm of the sound to cascade through her as it did them. To reverberate through her limbs and her mind. Never had she heard such a chorus of sound and while the beat was foreboding and she did not understand the words that were spoken, it flowed through her evenly and caused her skin to tingle. She could almost see and understand what it was that whispered within their thoughts as the music flowed through them.

Sarlana simply stared at them for a long moment. She had not expected to be drawn here as she was, nor had she expected the doors to open at her touch, yet now she knew why. They knew she would come to them. They were calling her and did not even know it. Or perhaps they did know and were simply caught up in whatever filled their minds at the moment. No doubt it had something to do with what they were going to do... but Sarlana did not feel fear coming from them. At least not for the justice they would hand out over what took place regarding their sister. Sarlana had seen it all within Androcles' mind as he was beating Dante Moran into bloody pieces. Normally she would have had to touch someone to see and sense their surface thoughts but not with Androcles. She could sense his rage and hatred for the man, but she also detected the precise control he was exhibiting by keeping his emotions in check and insuring that he did not kill the fool and unleash the monster she knew was within Dante Moran. That would have put his other brothers and sisters at extreme risk and that was something he would never do willingly. She could sense the power within them both easily. It was more pronounced with Androcles, more focused and clear and pure, but Dorian was rapidly learning and his Etheric resonance was becoming just as bright. Sarlana had never met a *Dahakoan* before but she had heard and read many stories and accounts of how their simple presence could stir untold confidence and bravery from other Darastrixi. This trait was very prevalent within Androcles' family for she had seen this same characteristic within Androcles' father on Manne. If she was any judge of character it was also ubiquitous within Androcles' own command here aboard this ship. He inspired others to reach for and succeed even against their own doubts and fears. And Sarlana knew this was something only a true leader of men and women could do. Someone both born and forged to lead others.

Thank you for joining us. Androcles' voice filled her mind and Sarlana felt peace sweep through her. She turned her eyes on where he knelt and watched as he rose to his feet and then Dorian. Elynth and Ryner shifted their positions as she stepped lightly across the map and came up to them both. So tall and powerful looking. Darastrixi men could be tall, but Sarlana had never seen the muscular definition on men of her species that she saw on Androcles and Dorian. Neither of them had yet changed into body armor and wore only simple clothes.

I will always respond to your summons Dahakoan. Sarlana told him with a smile.

We didn't summon you Sarlana. Androcles said. *And you do not serve us or anyone. We will not allow it.*

Sarlana shook her head at his words. *It is the way of things Androcles. Dorian. It is how it should be. Not anymore.* Dorian told her.

Sarlana glanced around the huge training room and allowed the music to cascade through her. *This music... it is so... it makes me shudder with the emotion carried within it.*

She watched Androcles turn and lift his hand slightly. The music, once so loud as to interfere with normal conversation, dropped to barely a whisper in the background. He turned back to her.

“My father and mothers used to tell me it would make me go deaf when I was smaller.” He said with a smile. “It is one of the reasons that they had the apartments built on the Royal Island on Apo Prime. Elynth and I would listen to this for hours.”

“I have never heard anything like it.” Sarlana said as she moved closer to them.

“I found several what were called compact discs in the ruins of one of the great cities on Earth.” Androcles explained. “My father used to take Elynth and I to the different city ruins to train. One day we wandered off and discovered a half buried vault filled with items like these. They found us six hours later listening to this.”

They told us they could hear the music through the vibrations in the ground. Elynth said with humor in her voice.

Sarlana looked at her and reached up to touch her head. Elynth lowered her snout without hesitation and felt Sarlana’s palm rest on her scales. “We will have to teach you quickly to manipulate your vocal cords so you can speak child. Your voice is beautiful.” Sarlana said.

Elynth blinked quickly. *We do not have the ability to speak as you do Doraanar.*

Sarlana laughed softly. “Yes you do child.” She answered. “All Darastrixi can speak as I am speaking now. You just have never learned how to use the vocal cords within your throat. It was forgotten along with so many things through the years.”

Elynth and Ryner moved closer to her. *You jest with us Doraanar.* Ryner spoke.

Sarlana shook her head. “Not at all. I will begin instructing you as soon as you return from your task. It should not take long at all given how advanced your Etheric abilities are.”

“What do you think of our... my task?” Andro asked her.

Dorian looked at him. “It is not just your task *fervon*.” He told him. “It is ours as well.”

Sarlana looked at Androcles and once more felt herself shiver under the gaze of those incredible azure colored eyes. “You did not wish for me to come here to ask me what I thought of what you are going to do Androcles.” Sarlana told him. “I think you already know that I approve of your actions and your intent.”

“Are you so sure?” Andro asked.

“All of you are *Dahakoan*.” Sarlana said. “It is part of who and what you are. You have no doubts about what you will do. Your other siblings perhaps... but not the four of you. And neither will the final pair.”

“What are we?” Dorian asked softly.

Sarlana looked at them for a long moment, four pairs of eyes glued to her. “You are the culmination of *Wer Zezhuanth* and his knowledge and wisdom. The holders of everything he had learned in his nearly four million years of life.”

“Dadrien.” Androcles spoke softly.

Sarlana looked at him. “Excuse me?” She stammered.

“His name...” Andro said again. “It was Dadrien.”

Sarlana gazed at him with wide eyes and felt her hands beginning to shake. “You... how do you know that?” She gasped. “His true name... his true name has been lost for millions of years. Not even the most senior scholars of the *Livaiji Sulevfu* can remember his name.”

Dorian shook his head. “Not lost *Doraanar*. Just forgotten.”

“How do you know this?” Sarlana asked.

Androcles shrugged his broad shoulders. “We just do.” He answered. “We have always known.”

Sarlana was silent for a long moment before looking at him once more. “Androcles have you never wondered why you and Elynth share such a unique bond. A bond that makes it feel as if you are truly one being. The same emotions and sensations both of you experience as if you are one person. Why Dorian and Ryner now share the same type of bond. Have you never asked why you can do so much more than your fathers? They are so very powerful together, your fathers, but they are not like you. They do not have what you have within you.”

“What is that?” Androcles asked.

“You and Dorian... you have Darastrixi blood running in your veins Androcles. Dragon blood. Elynth and Ryner have Lycavorian blood within their veins. Flowing freely within their veins.” Sarlana told them. “I showed this to your father and mothers before coming here. Once your mother Anja... and she is such a gifted woman... once she saw what I showed her she was able to point it out to all of your mothers. You are part

dragon Androcles and Dorian Leonidas. And you are part Lycavorian Elynth and Ryner. The final pair will carry the blood of both of you within them as well.”

How is... how is that even possible? Ryner asked.

Sarlana shook her head. “How is it possible that the sun comes up during the day? Or the moon rises at night? The rotation of a planet perhaps? Or because it was always meant to be by a higher power.”

“Are you saying we were... we were created by the gods?” Androcles asked her.

Sarlana shook her head. “I am saying that The Ancient... that Dadrien knew this would come to be.” She said. “The Ancient Scrolls say that one day others not of our species would be born with the blood of the Darastrixi within them. Not how or why... only that it would happen. Perhaps Dadrien had a vision and saw this. Perhaps he read it somewhere. What does it matter now? What he foresaw has come to be and you are the result. Androcles... you and Elynth have always wondered why it is you are so different. Ever since you were small. You felt it within you for so long until the demons of a place you both want to forget chased the questions and the dreams away. When Dorian was born these dreams returned even stronger than before. And now they ask the same questions you have asked for so long. Am I correct in what I say?”

Elynth’s golden eyes were wide in shock. *How are you able... how do you know that Doraanar? We told no one but our fathers.*

Sarlana nodded her head. “I knew that even before your father told me of the dreams you have on Manne. It is the way of the *Dahakoan*. They were all intertwined with each other. It is why no Darastrixi will ever question what you are... or deny your words. They will feel it within them! Just as the dragons among you feel it within them and treat you and Elynth so differently. Add to that fact that you and Elynth are both *Vrelvel Sargti*... they will quake before you.”

“There is something more though.” Dorian said. “Something that we are not seeing. This has happened for a reason.”

Androcles nodded in agreement. “Dorian is right.”

Sarlana nodded her head in agreement. “And that is what we will need to discover.” She told them. “That is why I felt the urge to come here when I discovered that you existed. To be with you. Guide you and teach you. Just as Murano feels that same need. This is what I told your father.”

“Will we discover it?” Androcles asked.

Sarlana nodded her head. “Yes. Something is driving all of this Androcles. And it is driving us ever closer to the truth of it all. I believe when you are together with the final pair it will all make sense. More sense than it does now. At least enough to help us determine what it is that is happening and perhaps why.”

“Laren.” Andro said.

“Excuse me?” Sarlana asked.

“Their names.” Dorian spoke. “They are Laren and Ladur.”

“You... you have spoken with them?” Sarlana gasped once more in disbelief.

Elynth shook her head. *Not openly... no. Only within images and emotions. They are like bright points of light in a dark universe to our eyes. When we focus enough we should be able to speak with them, but so much has occupied our minds these past months that we have been unable to clearly focus enough to reach out to them. And with Dori and Ryner now among us it should be even easier.*

Sarlana looked at all four of them in turn. “Then the four of you are even more powerful than I first thought.” She said softly. “And this Laren and Ladur equally so.”

“Then you do not have the answers that we seek?” Andro said softly.

Sarlana took his hand and then reached for Dorian’s as well. It helped to steady her and the quivering of her hands vanished the moment she touched them. She waited until Elynth and Ryner had lowered their snouts close enough to touch her shoulders and then she spoke. “Life is full of questions Androcles. The journey to the answers is sometimes even more eventful and enlightening than the answers themselves.”

Andro grinned. “Now you sound like the *Feravomir*.” He said.

“We will discover these answers Androcles. We will discover them together and you will know all that you wish to know.” Sarlana told him. “I promise you.”

Androcles met her eyes. “I do not know if I want those answers *Doraanar*.” He said. “Not if it changes who I am.”

Sarlana shook her head quickly as she gazed at them. “I will tell you again what you are Androcles. And you Dorian. And you Elynth and Ryner. You are *Dahakoan*. Dragonkin. You have within each of you the most incredible potential for compassion and love and the blessing of understanding. And also the most pure potential for devastating, savage and final power. Combined with the incredible gifts and the power you both wield as Praetorians because of your blood, there has never been anyone that I know of like you. Most certainly never among the Darastrixi or Pralor people. And that is why this Laren and Ladur will be in great danger until they are among us here. I know you have been planning to reach out to them... but know when you do... their existence will become known very soon afterward.”

Andro nodded. “We know.” He said softly.

Sarlana glanced between them. “This is what you are. Do not shy from it! Embrace it and all the good it can do! The how of it we will discover as we go forward I swear to you. I have... I have questions as well that need to be answered. Why I feel so drawn to all of you. Like I have known all of you for centuries. It is quite unlike anything I have ever felt in my four hundred thousand years of life and I find it... I find it so uniquely refreshing. I need you to trust in me. Allow me to teach you all I can. Let me...”

Androcles squeezed her hand, cutting off her words and suddenly Sarlana found herself sandwiched between the two much larger brothers as Elynth and Ryner drew even closer and swept their wings around her encasing all of them in the cocoon like ball. Sarlana looked up into their eyes, so very bright and animated and full of life and power. It made her shiver as they held her close, but it felt so very wonderful.

“I swear to you we will discover what is happening.” She told them. “I wish the answers to the same questions as you.”

“Together then.” Androcles said.

“Together.” Dorian spoke.

Together. Elynth and Ryner echoed.

UKWAV

EXTERIOR OF FORMER IMMORTAL BUNKER NUMBER 4

The ride down to the surface of the planet had been very quiet for the most part. Andro sat on one of the small lounge couches in the *PREMONITION*'s main cabin area between Sehri and Carisia while Lu'ria rested on the deck between his legs. All of them were touching him in some manner and at times he would lean over and nuzzle them or kiss them softly. Everyone was wrapped up within their own thoughts and there was no banter back and forth. Even Eliani was unusually subdued as she leaned against Jomann on another couch, Brendi leaning against her. Sadi and Ne'Veha settled the *PREMONITION* to the surface a hundred meters from where it appeared a small base camp had been set up. Their skills with their new ship were improving by the minute and the *PREMONITION* powered down completely within moments. Two Mark II *STRIKERS* were already on the ground a short distance away and the sleek Drow Guards *INTERDICTOR*-Class Corvette was now in orbit matching *SPARTA'S WRATH* and her own orbit.

Elynth, Anthar had departed from *SPARTA'S WRATH* at the same time as they had, Caydren and Cinol with them, as well as a small Durcunusaan team. Armen had discovered only two smaller ships that had diverged from the *INQUISITOR*'s base course as they escaped earth, both times leading to smaller moons barely capable of sustaining life. No one was in a real hurry as they began to move down the ramp and into the dazzling sunlight of the scorched world. Androcles had been here twice before with his father and brothers to train and never had he seen a more barren and inhospitable world. All of them wore sunglasses to block out the brilliant glare of the twin suns, Yuri and Carisia also wearing cowboy style hats to keep the sun off their exposed faces. They were both purebloods and could withstand far more direct sunlight that most people realized, but why take the chance. Andro could see at least a dozen Drow Scouts spread out across the entrance, most of them facing outward looking for any danger. Am'uur stood near the blasted out entrance to the bunker, Tastia and his father and mother beside him. Lu'ria didn't hesitate as they moved down the ramp and she sprinted to where they were, Carisia following close behind with Sehri. Lu'ria's entire Drow family now considered Androcles and each of his wives and mates as part of their family, just as they now were thought of

as part of the Leonidas clan. None of them had yet met Sehri and Lu'ria was insistent that some happiness come out of this trip and she would introduce Sehri to her new Drow family. They might not get another chance to do so before they departed for the Beta Quadrant and Androcles had agreed without question. He hung back with Sadi and Ne'Veha holding his hands as Sehri was greeted by Daba, Am'uur and Lu'ria's father with embraces and Drow kisses of greeting. The happiness on Sehri's face was genuine and warm, as they took turns holding her at arms length and bestowing their blessing in the Drow tongue upon her. Ne'Veha and Sadi stepped away to join Lu'ria and the others when Am'uur and his father Re'lon moved up to him. Andro didn't hesitate and embraced first Am'uur and then turned to Re'lon.

"*Ussta Ilythiiri Ilharn.*" Andro spoke as they embraced. (My Drow father) "*Ol zhah bwael ulu Kyorl dos h'uena mzild.*" (It is so very good to see you again)

Re'lon nodded his head as he held Andro's arms. His white hair was long than Am'uur's by quite a bit and tied into a single pony tail. "*Siyo ol zhah ussta ilythiiri dalharuk.*" He gripped Andro's arms tightly. (Yes it is my Drow son) "I hope you still intend to include us in your wondrous trip?"

Am'uur shook his head with a smile. "It is all he has talked about for days." He told Andro who was smiling.

Andro nodded his head. "I would not have it any other way." He said.

Re'lon nodded happily. "Good. Good."

"Everything is prepared?" Andro asked looking at Am'uur.

"The drones repaired everything that was damaged within hours." Am'uur told him. "We searched for and discovered three slabs exactly like those your father destroyed. We tested them just as you asked and you were right. They are impervious to any known energy weapon or explosive we have in our arsenal. We hit it with a full barrage from orbit and did not even scratch the surface."

Andro nodded. "My father thought as much." He said. "The equipment?"

"The Worker Drones had an easier time repairing and improving it than we did muscling those slabs here." Re'lon spoke with a grin. "They enhanced the shielding and inhibitor fields using the Secondary Pralor power core you gave us to use. It is a dead zone... just as you wanted."

Andro saw Tastia standing with Lu'ria and Sadi and speaking animatedly. "Tastia seems quite happy brother." He said.

Am'uur grinned proudly. "She carries our first child."

Andro looked at him surprised. "So soon?"

Re'lon elbowed his son in the ribs. "He has done nothing but assault her every chance he gets... the pig." He stated with fatherly pride. "Of course it would help if she refused him once or twice... make him work for it... but he has corrupted her already. She needs to spend more time with Daba... but there is occasion enough for that."

"Anuk's senior doctor says it will be a boy." Am'uur stated with a swelling of his chest. "His skin will be a darker blue than most Vanari... but she is fairly certain his hair will be as white as ours."

Andro smiled. "I am happy for you. Truly. When this business is over... we will have you to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and have a celebration during the trip."

"Good!" Re'lon announced. "We will need a good party." He saw Andro turn and watch as Murano began to walk over from one of the Mark IIs. "*Dos khaless nindol nesst ussta ilythiiri dalharuk?*" (You trust this man my Drow son?)

Andro nodded instantly. "He is part of our future." He answered. "He knew and fought beside our grandfather and he will be our teacher going forward for many things concerning these new skills some of us have."

"*Ji thlu ol. Usstan orn khaless ukta 'zil al.*" Re'lon said. (So be it. I will trust him as well.)

Murano's eyes cut to where he saw Mari standing beside Deion and Dorian near the bottom of the *PREMONITION's* ramp. She was holding his arm tightly while he spoke with Dorian and was talking with Nara, Sheva and Onera. He noticed right away that he had never seen her face so bright and happy and her eyes glowed in delight for some reason that he did not know. He turned back to Andro as he came up and removed the sunglasses they had given him. Andro immediately took his hand and shook it tightly while gripping his arm above the elbow.

"Murano." He said.

“I have reviewed the facility.” Murano told him. “It is impressive to say the least. The drones have improved it even more and it will do what we intend.”

Andro nodded. “Good.” He spoke.

Murano looked around. “Not all of your family is here.” He said.

Andro shook his head. “Normya and Tir'ut remained on *SPARTA'S WRATH*.” He said. “Normya and Zarah are like twin sisters and she has no desire to be here. She trusts us to take care of things. There is no need for my grandmothers, Retta, Calyb or Bryon to witness this. I don't intend to beat around the bush. I will do what we came here for and then we will leave this part of our history where it belongs. In the past.”

Murano nodded. “I understand.” He said. “And I agree completely.”

Re'lon and Am'uur nodded as well and Re'lon answered for them. “*Zil ol zhal'la tlu.*” (As it should be)

“Has he spoken?” Andro asked.

Murano shook his head. “No. That will change quickly when he realizes what his fate will be. He was always arrogant and deceitful.”

“Dante?” Andro asked.

Murano met his eyes. “I fear whatever may have been left of the boy is now gone after the beating you gave to his physical body on the ship.” He said somberly. He turned when Yuri came up beside them with Pa'cour. “My sincere apologies Yuri. There was nothing I could do for your son.”

Yuri gripped Pa'cour's hand tightly and shook her head. “He was lost many years ago, the moment I allowed Xaxon to infect him even a little.”

Murano reached out and took her arm. “That is not your doing. The others may have some understanding of what took place within you Yuri... but I know what he was truly capable of. When your mother allowed him to seize your mind there was nothing you could possibly do to resist his influence over your actions.”

“I could have fought more.” Yuri said.

Murano shook his head. “It would not have mattered.” He told her. “As I told Martin and Androcles... he was no match for Sumar in terms of raw power or skill, but he was a master of deceit and manipulation using his Praetorian power. There was nothing you could do Yuri.”

“The transition went far faster than you and my father thought Murano.” Andro told him. “Why so different than with Yuri?”

Murano nodded. “With Yuri he had to use subtle techniques at guiding her to follow his will. She is much stronger than Dante within the Etheric realm. It takes longer... but it insures a more cohesive transfer. With Dante he simply bulled his way to power and destroyed his mind. Whatever is left of Dante is now just as twisted and evil as Xaxon ever was.”

Andro took a deep breath. “Let's just do this and get it over with Murano. I want my sister to wake this morning and begin the day with the knowledge that this creature is dead.” He said.

Murano nodded. “I will bring him if you will make sure everyone else is ready.”

Andro nodded as well and turned to look at where Sadi and Ne'Veha were already staring at him.

KertaGai. Sirsangai. Bring everyone and let us be done with this business. Andro reached out to them.

Sadi and Ne'Veha nodded and quickly began to motion everyone in the right direction.

The short metal pole had been sunk into the hard packed bedrock slab nearly three feet, extending nearly eighteen inches deep into the surface of the planet beneath. The naturally formed, pedestal like rock slab was roughly eighteen inches off the ground and two by two in circumference. The metal pole was situated in the center of the slab. Andro was the first to take a spot next to the slab of rock, Dorian being the first to move alongside him, briefly touch his shoulder and then he moved to the opposite side across from Androcles. Jomann came next, also touching Androcles and then moving to his right, and lastly Deion who moved to his left. It was then when the four Praetorians were set that the others began to fill in. Sheva and Onera on either side of Dorian, Sadi, and Ne'Veha on Andro's left side, Lu'ria and Sehri on his right. Carisia was beside Lu'ria and Yuri and Pa'cour next to her. Nara and Mari took spots on either side of Deion while Eliani and Brendi did the same beside Jomann. Am'uur and Re'lon stood with Daba and Testia between them slightly behind Lu'ria and Sehri. All of them had moved into their spots after first touching Androcles ever so briefly. For Daba and Re'lon and the other Drow who were present it was the quintessential show of exactly where they stood within the ranks of the Leonidas family. Martin Leonidas had always been an ardent supporter of the Drow and all they

did, holding them in the utmost regard and this emotion being returned by the Drow with reverent like support from all Drow. When Androcles took Lu'ria as his wife and mate, this feeling and support reached proportions bordering on fanaticism among the Drow. Whatever else came of this day for the Drow; that they were here with one who called them family was all the honor and respect they had ever hoped for. No matter what had taken place in their past since Walter Carson had made them, their future was brighter now than any of them had ever dreamed of.

There was no humorous banter between the Leonidas siblings as they watched Murano lead two *Durcunusaan* troops towards them with the hooded figure slumped between them, the booted feet dragging in the hot sand. Andro took a few steps forward out of the circle around the slab, Sadi and Ne'Veha moving closer together as Murano and the *Durcunusaan* moved between Deion and Nara into the circle. The *Durcunusaan* moved up onto the slab and quickly dropped the figure to his knees and then secured his hands firmly behind the three inch wide pole. When they were done with that, one of them reached up and removed the black hood exposing Dante Moran's brutally disfigured face before they both moved out of the circle of Leonidas family members.

Dante Moran was no pureblood vampire, his father being a genetically enhanced genome soldier and when the bright sunlight from the two large suns above Ukway touched his badly mangled skin it caused him to scream in pain. While direct sunlight could not penetrate the first few layers of a turned vampire's skin in short durations, Androcles had done quite the number on Dante's face and damaged the skin cells for many layers. Eliani had only healed him enough to keep him alive per Andro's instructions and the sunlight on his damaged face and neck was enough to cause his face to begin to smoke slightly as it burned.

"It is time to pay for your crimes Dante." Andro snarled. "However much of you remains in that form."

"This... this is your justice!" Dante screamed through the pain. "I deserve... I deserve a trail!"

No one moved as the solitary figure moved from beside Daba and slowly between Sadi and Ne'Veha to stand beside Androcles at the base of the rock slab. When that figure was beside Andro the hands came up and tossed back the cowl of the long cape exposing the beauty that was their beloved Aunt Deia.

"You deserve nothing!" Deia hissed at him viciously. "You have been tried Dante Moran, in absentia, by the whole of the Union Senate. The outcome of this trial was without question... but you don't care about the vote do you? You have been found guilty of the heinous crimes of attempted murder and the brutal rape of a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. The sentence is the same for either crime. Death. And may your soul, whatever part of it remains, rot in *jorbhe* for all time for what you have done."

Androcles stepped up onto the rock slab and stared at Dante. "Know this before I send you into the abyss Dante... I will find Marux and I will insure he is taken care of. The monster within you forced you to abandon him like he was nothing and he severed your bond with him. It saves me the trouble of having to do it myself to be honest. And know that your mother has been saved and become the person she was always meant to be."

His face still smoking from the burning sun, the pain no longer impacting on his twisted features, Dante laughed through the agony of his skin peeling away from his bones slowly. "She... she was tight!" He spat hysterically. "Your sister... she begged... she begged for more! She was... she was a slut and whore! She...!"

Androcles moved with the same speed they had all seen him exhibit on the *INQUISITOR* only a few hours before. A speed that no Lycavorian should have had. A speed driven by the Praetorian and *Dahakoan* blood within him, and once more it stunned them all. There was a brief flash and sizzle of a weapon appearing from Flatspace and then the sound of steel biting through flesh and bone and suddenly Andro's sword *Cana* was protruding from Dante's skull through his right eye socket. Andro's hand was firmly on the pommel of the sword and he leaned close to Dante's face as the life quickly began to ebb away from his body, Dante's face frozen in a mask of horrible pain.

"The pestilence that is your existence is over now Dante Moran and my sister will know peace once more. I wanted to... to make you suffer for days because of what you did... to keep you on the edge of death while I heaped upon you all of the pain and the humiliation that you caused her. I have other matters that need my attention now and you are an insect when held up to the bigger picture." Andro growled at him savagely, his wolf eyes and fangs now fully revealed for all to see. This caused all those among them who were Lycavorian or turned to change as well, such was the power of the aura that Andro was radiating at the moment. Andro moved around in front of the dying Dante Moran and squatted down, his hand still holding the pommel of his

sword. "I curse your name and the memory of you in every way and in every language that I can speak! Now die... and tell my coward grandfather to come forth so that I may deal with him and send his misbegotten *ano* to the abyss!"

Andro stood up and with equal speed and strength he yanked *Cana* free of Dante Moran's skull, blood and brain matter splashing wetly on the ground as Andro stepped back. Yuri looked on from beside Pa'cour and felt nothing. No remorse. No sorrow. No anger. She knew then that she had indeed turned a corner in her life. As the remaining life of Dante Moran ebbed onto the ground around him, it took with it the last vestiges of the old Yuri Moran with it. She squeezed Pa'cour's large hand tightly and felt his grip constrict on her hand. She felt Onera's small hand clutch even more on hers and it filled Yuri with new purpose and hope for the future. They all heard the sizzle like noise as Andro willed *Cana* back into Flatspace and this brought Yuri's head up.

"Stand ready." Murano spoke firmly.

Dante Moran's body slumped even closer to the ground, only the restraints on his hands keeping him from falling completely. His blood was pooling rapidly around his knees in a copious amount as his life came to an end and his vampiric heart ceased its beating.

It started slowly, but did not go unnoticed by anyone. Dante's skin began to shift color and then turned almost completely black as the rippling mist began to take shape around him. It began lifting off his body, leaving his normal skin once more as it formed into an almost solid form above him. And then it laughed. A deep, evil laugh that coursed through all of them, but only served to increase their resolve. The black mist slowly took the shape of a man as it had when fighting Martin Leonidas at SODRAG. A thin filament still connected itself to Dante Moran's body until the figure had taken shape enough and it finally left his body entirely. It hovered above Dante's dead form and then turned its full focus onto Androcles. Twin orbs of red burst to life where there would normally be eyes and the creature spoke, its deep voice dripping with vile contempt and hatred and echoing like it was coming from all around them.

"This was a mistake boy!" The voice growled openly. "You are no match for me! You cannot resist me!"

Androcles Leonidas stood in front of the black mist creature and felt no fear. Only the love of family and friends. "You are nothing grandfather." Andro spoke more calmly than anyone expected. "And I do not fear you."

"You know who I am boy." Xaxon's spirit snarled at him. "Then you should fear me. This vassal... this boy was weak! Once I have control of you I will be reborn and nothing will stop me!"

Andro shook his head. "You will never control me." He spoke. "You feed on the weak of mind and body. I am neither. You are nothing more than a monster."

"I controlled your father!" Xaxon hissed savagely. "You will be mine as well!"

"You never controlled my father." Androcles stated almost defensively. "Your illusion of control was shattered the moment he understood who and what you are monster! Grandfather Sumar was wrong in what he tried to do. He should have left you to rot instead of trying to find redemption for your soul. You are beyond any hope of redemption. I will do what he was not able to do. And you will never harm another innocent ever again."

The black apparition that was Xaxon laughed bitterly. "How will you stop me boy!" He barked. "You are alone! I could take any of those standing with you so bravely and foolishly with ease! What will you do then boy? Kill your own blood?"

"You are not as powerful as you believe you are grandfather." Androcles spoke. "You are the weak one. Those standing around me are not weak of mind or body. We are Lycavorians and Praetorians and Drow!"

Xaxon's apparition snarled loudly and seemed to lazily drift to float in front of Yuri as if taking note of her for the first time. The red orbs glowed brightly as it glared at her, yet Yuri did not shy away from those eyes and glared back at them with defiance. "I will grant you a second chance Yuri." It spoke the words. "You enjoyed the power I gave to you! Join with me again and we will be unstoppable!"

Yuri's dark eyes narrowed and shifted to the cobalt blue of her vampire side. "You are a vile creature!" Yuri spat viciously. "You have nothing I want monster! You offer misery and hate and pain and death! I never wanted those things! I do not want those things!"

"I will take you by force stupid woman!" Xaxon's apparition spoke.

“I am not afraid of you anymore monster!” Yuri barked right back. “You hold no sway over me any longer!”

“You see grandfather...” Andro spoke as the black mist shifted inward upon itself until it was once more centered on Androcles. “You have nowhere to go.”

“I will leave this planet and find another host!” Xaxon gloated. “You cannot stop me!”

“I will not allow you to do that grandfather.” Andro said.

“You can’t stop me boy!” Xaxon roared.

“Yes... I can.”

“Dorian! Deion! Jomann!” Murano’s voice yelled out. “Now! Nara, Eliani, add your power to theirs! Now! Everyone! Do it now!”

Xaxon spun around and watched as Dorian, Deion and Jomann stepped forward slightly and an Etheric bubble grew forth from each of them, growing larger until it covered the entire group. Three layers of Etheric bubbles encased them, growing brighter as they merged and became one solid Etheric shield. Eliani and Nara added their own Etheric presence and power to the strength of the bubble that now wrapped around all of them. Deia, Mari, Sheva and all the others reached out with whatever power they could add to the shield which only seemed to make it grow even brighter and radiate more brilliantly. Am'uur stood holding tightly to Tastia’s hand between Daba and Re'lon just outside the bubble of Etheric power, all of them looking on in awe at what was taking place.

Xaxon twisted around in every direction seeing the seamless shield that now held him. The misted form tried to shoot up and penetrate the bubble four different times, each time being pushed back with ease.

“You will not escape this time monster!” Murano barked out as he came to stand beside Androcles now.

Xaxon’s shifting form snapped around to glare at Murano and it moved to float in front of him. “You!” He screamed. “Murano... my brother’s favorite pet.”

“I remember you Xaxon!” Murano barked. “And I remember why we punished you the way we did! You will not find that mercy among these Praetorians.”

“These children?” Xaxon laughed. “These children are not Praetorians!”

Murano allowed the smile to split his own face. “These children are far more powerful as Praetorians than we ever were! Sumar became even more powerful after he joined these people. I know that now! They taught him to embrace his emotions and it made him stronger than he ever was. They are his descendants! And together we will exact the punishment upon you that should have been done millennia ago!”

“You know nothing!” The apparition snarled at Murano.

“We have trapped you grandfather.” Andro stated calmly. “You have nowhere to go now. You can’t force yourself upon any of us for we are all better than you ever were! Just as our father was!”

“You don’t know what is coming fool boy!” Xaxon spat at him. “Only I know what is coming! And only I can stop it! Only I know how to stop it!”

Andro shook his head. “No.” He stated firmly. “Whatever is coming... we will face it as Spartans and Lycavorians and vampires. As Drow elves and all other species that stand united. We will face it as we have faced everything in the past and as we will face it into the future. We will face it together.”

“You cannot win fool boy!” Xaxon shouted now shifting his apparition back to face Androcles. “You need me!”

“We do not need your hate and anger.” Murano exclaimed.

“Bah!” Xaxon’s apparition hissed. “I will simply take you child! I will enjoy being within your body and I will do what must be done!”

The black apparition shot straight at Androcles with blinding speed. It was an unexpected move by most of those gathered and it was Sadi who yelled out Andro’s name at the same time as Ne’Veha and Lu’ria as they stepped for him.

“Joa.” Androcles spoke the simple word as he held up his hand in front of him. His azure colored eyes flared brightly until they were glowing like two luminous beacons on a dark night, and his hand clamped around the throat of the black apparition and squeezed. “It ends now!” Andro spoke firmly. “It ends today!”

The screeching sound erupted from the apparition of Xaxon and it caused all of them to cringe even as Murano withdrew the item from the small pack he carried. “Sadi... no! No!” He screamed as he moved between them and Andro. “Don’t touch him!”

“Murano... what... what is happening? Andro is...!” Sadi screamed as Ne'Veha and the others clutched at her their eyes wide.

The black mist that was Xaxon was spreading around Andro's armored hand, moving outward like a disease, the red orbs glowing nearly as bright as Andro's own azure eyes. The black mist reached Andro's elbow before the voice that was Xaxon made his mistake. It was a mistake that would cost him everything.

“I will take you boy!” Xaxon snarled. “And when I have control of you I will partake of the women you have chosen! They will serve me!”

Murano's head snapped around when the voice said that and he knew it was time. A smile split his face and he shook his head knowing exactly how the comment would echo within Androcles. He also knew what the reaction would be. “For all your intelligence Xaxon... you never were very smart! You have sealed your fate fool!” Murano extended his hand out and using his Etheric power he propelled the small box like object directly under where Xaxon floated, Andro's hand on his throat. “Now... do it now Androcles!”

Xaxon's red eyes grew wide when he felt the Etheric resonance that was Androcles Leonidas explode outward. He was Praetorian. He was *Dahakoan*. He was Lycavorian. But most of all... Androcles Leonidas was a Spartan. He had embraced that life with everything he was from the moment he understood what it meant.

It was like experiencing the burning of a new born star in its brilliance, just as it had been when he had lost control of Martin in their brief fight at SODRAG. The fingers of his power that had extended up Andro's arm were beaten back easily as he felt the overwhelming force of will being projected out by this young man. A force of will he had not felt since his brother lived. It was then that first Dorian and then Deion and then Jomann stepped forward as well and wrapped their fingers around Andro's arm, directing all of their own power as Praetorians into him just as Murano had showed them. Then it was Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Carisia and Sehri moving up behind their beloved husband and mate. That was followed by Eliani and Nara and without hesitation Mari joined them reaching up to firmly grasp Deion's forearm. Sheva and Onera beside Dorian, Brendi not really understanding what was happening and still in shock over what she was witnessing, simply pressed as close to Eliani's petite form as she could. And finally... there was Yuri who stepped forward, moving up beside Deia and laying her hand on Carisia's slim shoulder.

“Never will you harm another member of my family!” Androcles growled as his face took on a look of concentration. “Never will you be allowed to harm an innocent! I curse you Xaxon! I curse you and all you have done! By the blood that runs in my veins. My father's blood... Spartan blood! It ends today! It ends now! Forever!”

With those words echoing on the air, Andro squeezed his fist tighter around the throat of Xaxon's apparition and began to force the black mist down towards the ground. The red orb eyes began to panic and the black mist began to flail about.

“No!” Xaxon screamed. “You don't know what you are doing! I can help you! I know things! I know where they are!”

“You will know nothing but the abyss monster!” Murano screamed as he slapped his palms together and a silver white light burst from the small box he had thrown under the mist. The red eyes went into full panic mode now as the first fingers of the trailing mist were drawn into the box and began to pull even harder.

“No!” Xaxon screamed. “I will have my vengeance! I will...”

“No... you will not!” Andro growled loudly now and shoved down with his hand. Almost like a great broom, an Etheric scoop spread around the black mist completely and Andro pushed down harder with his hand. The words Xaxon was screaming into the wind were no longer understandable as the black mist was drawn into the box unshakably, until all that was left was Andro's hand resting atop the box. Murano moved forward quickly then and grabbed the edges of the box, wrapping his hands around the sides.

Andro's hands covered Murano's in the same instant as his azure eyes began to return to normal. “Dori, Deo, Jomann! Join with Murano and I! Use your Etheric Praetorian codes! Help us to lock it!” He spoke quickly.

The three of them didn't hesitate and they moved even closer, wrapping their large hands around Murano's and their brother, until nothing of the small box could be seen. None of them saw the looks of confusion on the faces of the others as they stood back and witnessed nearly forty thousand years of torment and horror come to an inglorious end.

It did not take long as each of them concentrated and added their own Praetorian codes to the Etheric lock that only they could see within their minds. Then it was done and each of them began to step back slowly while Murano kept the box within his large hands and simply stared at it.

“It... it is done.” He finally spoke the words softly. “It is done.”

That was when all the emotion that had been building came rushing forth as Sadi reached for Androcles a second after he turned for his wives and mates. He drew them all into his arms as best as he was able as they crushed each other to squeeze tighter against him, his Etheric resonance and wolf aura sweeping all around them. Dorian did the same with Sheva and Onera without hesitation, while Onera drew her mother into her embrace and Pa'cour simply placed his hands on Yuri's shoulders. Jomann crushed Eliani and Brendi in his arms and didn't hesitate to pull Deia into that same embrace as Deion did the same with Mari and Nara.

Sadi looked up into the azure eyes that had so captured her heart and soul all those years ago. “Andro... my love?” She questioned. “What did you... what did you just do?”

Andro didn't answer right away and he looked skyward into the cloudless sky, ignoring the bright sunlight that beat down on his face. They all felt him reach out using the last of the ebbing power from his brothers and Jomann, their heads turning to watch his face as his Etheric resonance and power reached away from the planet and across the stars as easily as if he was lifting a glass in a toast.

MANNE

Zarah Leonidas was sitting between Lucia and Eirene as they were enjoying the evening meal. All of them were present at the same table, Elder Valael, Tobia and Tinra joining them as well on the end. There was laughter and happiness at the table, a sense of family and warmth that drew even Tinra into its fold. It was unlike anything she had ever felt.

They all felt it arrive. It could not be missed by any present at the table or in the room for that matter. The Etheric pulse was staggering in its power and all of them saw Zarah's body go rigid as it was directed completely on her. The words thundered in all their minds however, and Zarah gripped Lucia's hand tightly as her other hand clenched on the edge of the table.

Zarah my beloved sister. It is done.

Andro's powerful voice echoed within the Etheric realm though Valael, Tobia and Tinra had no idea what the voice was speaking about. All they saw was Zarah suddenly burst into tears, followed quickly by Isabella and then For'mya as the other Queens reached for them.

“Andro!” Zarah gasped out, tears pouring down her cheeks as Lucia's arms quickly pulled her tighter.

It is done my sister. I made you a promise Zarah. It is done.

Andro's voice echoed once more and Tobia and Tinra could not understand why the young Leonidas daughter was crying so hard. Or why her mothers had begun to allow the tears to spill forth as well. They looked at Martin Leonidas and saw only a twitching of his jaw as if he was trying to hold it all in while the dark haired Aricia was leaning against him, tears also flooding her eyes.

Zarah my beautiful sister. Andro's voice spoke again. ***Now there is a promise I want you to make to me jonia arande. There is something I know about you that you may or may not already know about yourself Zarah. You have within you more resources of energy than have ever been tapped, more talent than has ever been exploited, more strength than has ever been tested and more to give than you have ever given. Whatever has happened in the past; leave in the past Zarah my sister. Take the hands of those you love and who love you and moved forward into the future now. Without hesitation. Without regret. And without looking back. That door you thought closed is open Zarah. All you need do now is walk through it. That is the promise I want you to make to me.***

Zarah turned and looked instantly at Lucia whose own dark eyes were flooded with tears. *Pen marvan aur elivonth fervon Androcles. Pen marvan.* (I promise my beautiful brother)

The feeling of happiness that flooded from Andro was almost a palpable thing and each of his mothers and his father could not suppress the gasp of delight when they felt that emotion from him. Andro had always

been the most guarded with his emotions and feeling this burst of happiness was a rare thing indeed. And it would be treasured.

Then I will see you all soon arande. I wish... I wish to hold my family in my arms once again. It has been too long.

I know. Zarah answered as she leaned into Lucia's embrace. *I know.*

Tell father that what we spoke of is complete. Andro said. *And will never bother us again.*

I will fervon. Come soon. Zarah spoke.

They all could hear Andro chuckle and it was then they realized he didn't know that all of them had heard his every word. *And face the wrath of our parents if I am late arande? Me? Never!*

Zarah couldn't help but burst into laughter as well even as the tears continued to roll down her cheeks. *Soon sister. Soon.*

UKWAV

"Andro?" Sadi pressed his once more and saw his face lower until his eyes were gazing at them with happiness that they could all clearly see.

"Anyone up for a trip to the Beta Quadrant?" Andro suddenly blurted out as he spun around holding Sadi and Ne'Veha in his arms.

"Jorbhe jainn!" Dorian bellowed. "It's getting to be boring as all hell here."

Sheva's slap was almost instantaneous and the laughter began. It became even louder and more pronounced when Onera did the same thing on his other cheek.

"Hey! No fair!" Dorian blurted out.

Deia smiled as a single tear rolled down her cheek. "And into the unknown they go." She said softly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

SPARTA'S WRATH **THE WILDS**

Androcles Leonidas leaned against the archway leading from the main room of their quarters into their bed chambers and simply let his eyes gaze upon them as he had so often in the past. He wore only a pair of fresh, dark gray fatigue pants and his combat boots while his upper body was bare. The lush, muscular bodies of his wives and mates were mixed together on the single, exceptionally oversized bed, their limbs thrown over one another haphazardly in every way. The two large sheets barely covered all of them, leaving parts of their bodies in full view and his azure eyes hungrily eyed Lu'ria's large breasts and the curve of Carisia's hips before moving to stare at Ne'Veha's exquisitely shaped and utterly perfect ass.

Androcles had not been able to help himself last night and for the first time in a very long while, he had utterly immersed himself in the smells and womanly delights of all of his wives and mates. Well... not all of them just yet he thought. Caliria was still missing, but she would be back among them soon enough and then they would be complete. As was usually the case, Sadi had been the first and last he had reached for during their tryst, but he had partaken of each and every one of them more than once and relished in their screams of delight and passion. He had loved each of them with all that he was, sometimes two at a time and holding nothing back from them, until they knew his love and desire for them was absolute. Their scents were like a fog of an addicting drug as they swirled around him and he soaked in their essence for hours.

Smiling to himself now, even proud of himself in fact, Andro turned and moved back into the main room and allowed the doors to slide silently shut. They were not needed for anything at the moment or in the near future and he intended that they sleep for as long as they desired. Andro didn't hear the soft groan of delight as Ne'Veha rolled over slowly once the door was closed and pressed against Sadi's back, burying her face into the back of her neck and within her golden blond hair.

“*Carians*... he is gone.” She gasped softly into Sadi’s ear. “It is safe.”

Sehri lifted her head from where it rested on Sadi’s abdomen and looked at the door. “Are we sure he won’t come back?” She stammered.

Sadi was the one who laughed gently as she lifted her head and glanced at the door. “I think we are safe.”

“*Phraktos*... he is a beast.” Lu'ria commented with a blissful smile.

Carisia couldn’t help the contented smile that she sported on her face as her head rested on Lu'ria’s shoulder. “Yes... but he is our beast.”

“Yes he is.” Lu'ria added.

“We certainly did not see that coming.” Sadi said with another smile as she stretched her arms above her head and basked in the joyful soreness she felt. That they all felt she knew, for Androcles had each of them multiple times last night and their cries of bliss had filled the room. Her arm slipped around Ne'Veha’s shoulder and she waited until Ne'Veha’s head came to rest on her breast before she tightened her grip.

“It was different this time though Sadi.” Ne'Veha spoke. “He was... he was so happy and joyful and eager.”

Sadi nodded her head in agreement. “I think... I think it is because he is truly happy that this business is done. That those who hurt his family have been dealt with.”

“I could see it in his eyes *KertaGai*. Whenever he kissed one of us, or just gazed at one of us. I have never... no man has ever looked at me like that. Just seeing the desire and love for us in his eyes made me...” Lu'ria spoke softly.

“Yes... I saw it too. I think we all saw it. He was so... he held nothing back from us. Any of us. It was glorious.” Sadi said wistfully. “I believe we will begin to see a new husband and mate now. And I am so happy that we are all here to see and feel it. And we will be complete when Caliria is back in our arms.”

“Will it always be so... so intense when we are together like this?” Sehri asked as she returned her head to Sadi’s stomach. “I know I have asked that question before but I could not tell where one of us began and the other ended. It was so sinful and decadent. There were lips and tongues everywhere...” She smiled and closed her eyes. “*Carians*... I loved it!”

“Luckily for us... yes... I think now it will be. And it will be even more decadent and sinful when our *Inamarno* returns to us and joins us.” Sadi answered with a playful laugh as they all chuckled. “Do any of you regret what he makes you feel?”

“Regret?” Lu'ria blurted. “The only thing that I regret is that I can not keep my wits about me long enough for it to last even more. His scent, his resonance and aura, it drives me...”

“Utterly insane.” Sadi spoke knowingly.

“Gods... yes.” Ne'Veha muttered.

“This... this was meant to be.” Lu'ria spoke softly. “All of us being together with him. Loving each other as well as Andro. Making each other sing while his aura dances all around us.”

Sadi closed her eyes and smiled to herself. This was certainly not what she had imagined the first night she had seen him as an eight month old infant all those years ago. Sharing her life and pleasure with five other women and Androcles. Sehri was right. It was decadent and sinful. And it was exactly how the gods of fate and destiny intended it to be.

“Hmmm... now that he is gone though, we can actually get some sleep.” Carisia spoke as she snuggled closer to Lu'ria. “I can hardly move I am so worn out.”

“I will be fidgeting for a full day.” Ne'Veha added letting her hand drop to caress her ass cheek as she laid there.

Lu'ria laughed gently. “You are the one who told him to do it *SirsanGai*.” She said as they all giggled.

“Beggd him was more like it!” Carisia laughed.

Ne'Veha grinned broadly. “And it was certainly divine!” She stated.

“*Pomai*.” Sehri hissed at her playfully from across Sadi’s flat, powerfully built abdomen. Now that she was fully wolf, Sehri had noticed right away that her body had become leaner and even more muscular. While Sadi was the largest among them while in wolf form, Sehri matched Ne'Veha and Lu'ria in size easily when running in her wolf form. The wolf metabolism within her now that it was fully active was exceptional and just the few short training classes she had with Lu'ria had begun to hone her figure into one of lean, lush and

powerful firmness. Now that Carisia was back among them her training would become even more strenuous and exhaustive she knew, but the payoffs were beyond anything Sehri had ever imagined. Sehri had never anticipated herself being so happy and knowing that it would continue forever made her beyond joyful. Ne'Veha smiled broadly at her before lowering her head and they shared a deep kiss of love and affection.

They all laughed even more as they cuddled closer together and allowed sleep to finally take them into its peaceful embrace. They knew Androcles would see to it that they were not disturbed in any way. The last thing they felt before drifting off into a fully contented sleep was Andro's staggering wolf and Etheric aura pulse all of them with his love. Even Sehri, new wolf that she was, even she felt the glorious nature of his wolf aura and Carisia basked in the aura of his Etheric resonance which swirled around her tightly and did the same to her that his wolf aura did to the others.

It was something that none of them could live without.

"...enter orbit of Austrova in just under twelve hours." Sa'sur was speaking from her Ready Room on the *SCIMITAR*. Andro sat behind the large desk in his own Ready Room as he sipped the large mug of his mother's coffee, his booted feet resting on top of the desk. "When we completed our last jump to get here, I ordered half our force to remain under Shroud. There is no telling how many of these OSG assholes might be about. Better to keep our full numbers hidden. No need to let them know we are here to clean up the trash."

Andro nodded his head. "Agreed." He stated as he sipped his coffee. "Have you had a chance to go over the plan Denali put together?"

Sa'sur nodded her head. "It's very sound. I would make only a few minor adjustments to the overall operational concept, mainly with disposition of forces. He's nearly as methodic as you and Resumar, though obviously not as reckless." She looked up from the pad and glanced at Andro in the holotransmission. He grinned at her for he knew she would never have allowed him to assault Moran's ship as they had.

At least not without her at his side.

Sa'sur saw the look in his eyes however and became serious. They had worked together and been friends for far too long for him to hide much from her and she knew something was up. "You are worried about something though?"

"They have returned to Austrova." Andro told her. "Deni pulled them to the Protectorate homeworld for a few weeks because he feared whoever is aligned with the OSG in the Vanari government would try to remove them and make it look like rogue Lycavorians. Those among my people who are working with them. Caliria and Arduri have begun to change slightly and *Inamarno* let this slip by accident when confronted with this Franklin *midaeus*. Deni pulled them off Austrova with Coren in order to protect them."

"Change slightly?" Sa'sur asked. "I didn't think the virus in your blood could change a Vanari."

Andro nodded his head. "It won't." He answered. "Not like elves or humans anyway. But it will alter their genetic makeup in such a way that there will be changes. Eyes. Fangs. Eli tried to explain it to me but like father... it gave me a headache."

"It worked obviously." Sa'sur said.

"It was a sound move by Deni... whatever they were planning they could not execute because of their location. Attacking them on Lorent would have opened up a world of hurt that they don't need right now. It appears as if the OSG obviously does not have as long a reach as they like to think nor do they have as much support among the Lycavorians there or they would have acted while they were on Lorent. Now that they are back on Austrova however... I'm not so sure. They seem to be very prevalent on Austrova."

"Which I find odd considering that the Vanari don't trust them anymore than they do us." Sa'sur said. "Or so they say."

"It is odd isn't it?" Andro said. "It makes me wonder just how many of the Vanari Board of Regents is working with or know of the ties to the OSG and what they are doing."

"You think they would do something so blatant as attacking Deni, Arduri and the others on the Vanari homeworld? That would mean Coren as well. Going after a member of their Board of Regents is no small affair from what I understand." Sa'sur asked.

“To save their asses and whatever profits they are making... yes. To keep the truth about what they are doing from the whole of the Vanari people... yes.” Andro answered her. “And so does Coren. *Inamarno*'s father has more steel in his backbone than even I first thought. Now that the fear of whatever plagued him is gone, he sees what is going on. An attack against Deni and the others by Lycavorians from the Protectorate would only reinforce the mentality that many of the Vanari have about my people. A mentality the Board of Regents has been nurturing for centuries.” Andro dropped his feet and leaned forward across his desk. “Sa'sur, I want you to assume command and control when you arrive. Denali is not comfortable being in charge of so many. He is a superior small unit tactician and that is where his specialties lie. He knows it and he acknowledges it.”

“You are sure? I don't want to step on Denali's command.” Sa'sur asked. “I won't screw around with fools Andro. You know that.” Sa'sur asked.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes... Deni even eluded to it the last time I spoke to him. I have it on excellent information that General Vengal and General Vistr are pushing father very hard to allow Deni to be transferred to their command. They want to groom him to take command of all the Union's Special Operations units so that Vistr can concentrate on his CFFG and Vengal can direct all of his focus on the *Durcunusaan*. I agree with them. Lisisa and Arduri are both small unit operators and this only enhances his status and knowledge.”

Sa'sur nodded her head in acknowledgement. “Very nice.” She said.

“I like Deni's plan as well.” Andro continued. “It's simple enough, yet broad in scope. It will allow us to hit as many bases as we can in the first few hours. Dutkne says they have more than enough forces to do it alone but with our ships now added into the mix we can do more far more damage.”

“I understand there was some disagreement with Denali's plan within the Protectorate ranks at first.” Sa'sur said.

Andro nodded. “A senior General did not like the way we do things.” He told her. “In essence he says we are trigger happy.”

Sa'sur snorted loudly in disgust and shook her head. “*Nubou* him!” She spat. “No offense against the Protectorate, but we've been getting by just fine without them for thousands of years thank you very much. We've been fighting for our very existence since the Black Day. Have they even fought anything bigger than a pirate engagement? We've been doing this for a whole lot longer than they have Andro. This is what we excelled at!”

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “My sentiments exactly. And no they haven't. Which is why Dutkne and their overall military leader gave this man the boot very quickly.” He said. “They are keeping him under surveillance. According to Dutkne there are far more of our people working with the Vanari slavers and OSG than he first thought. Not as many as he had first thought but far more than he hoped. When we move... we'll roll them up as well.”

“You realize that doing this might not change anyone's minds about us?” Sa'sur said. “I don't question our actions... you know how I feel about slavery and such... but even when we do this... it may well backfire.”

Andro nodded. “I know. It's a risk I'm willing to take.” He replied. “Given how many of these Lycanari there are on Lorent... that tells me that many every day Vanari do not feel as their government feels.”

“Are Deni and the others in danger Andro?” Sa'sur asked bluntly.

Andro nodded his head. “More so than when they first arrived I believe.” He said. “When you get there Sa'sur I also want you to cut loose the other *Durcunusaan* teams to Deni covertly. He'll know what to do with them. And give Paga one of the Drow Scout units. *Inamarno* is still a threat to the OSG and others within the Vanari government because of what she knows and what she can do and I will see to it that she is protected. Whoever is running things and is in charge is going to come after them sooner or later and I think they will try before I get there.”

“That means they will have to move within the next day or two.” Sa'sur said.

Andro nodded in agreement. “They still think I won't be there for another few weeks so perhaps not, but I'm willing to bet they have sources that know I am on the move and I believe it will happen quickly now that they are back on Austrova. If they were planning to do it before they went to Lorent then all the pieces are still in place. That is why I advanced our schedule as I did. Now that Moran and Dante are dealt with, which happened a lot sooner than I had ever hoped for, we can begin moving.”

“We were due some luck Andro.” Sa'sur said softly.

Andro nodded. "Yes we were. Imagine the surprise of the Vanari when we pop in and say hi."

"How soon before you begin jump prep?" Sa'sur asked with a smile and shake of her head knowing Andro was loving this game more than he let on to anyone.

"Armen says we can be ready to go by the end of the day today." Andro replied. "Our first jump is scheduled for zero nine hundred tomorrow. The second at fourteen hundred. We should be there by tomorrow evening. Armen says we could do it in one jump but he still wants to work the kinks out of the main engines before really spooling them up."

"Bastard!" Sa'sur hissed at him. "I just spent the last three days jumping through hoops as we traveled here. Do you know what a pain in the ass it is to keep three hundred and thirty-four ships in order while you are jumping a gazillion light years every nine hours?"

"Sa'sur... I have faith in you!" Andro exclaimed. "And I did get your husband and his ship transferred to your command. That has to count for something?"

"And you are damn lucky you did that. At least he can sate my blood when something screwy takes place." Sa'sur stated playfully.

"We have to wait for Elynth and Anthar to return with Marux anyway. They found him... barely alive and half starved. It took some talking for him to believe she wasn't there to kill him but without Dante's twisted mind and Xaxon's influence clouding his judgment I think he sees more clearly now." Andro said.

"Are you sure keeping him on *SPARTA'S WRATH* is such a good idea?" Sa'sur asked.

"He is safer here." Andro answered her. "The Elder Mother is with my father and Elder Syrilth already has too much to worry about on Earth. She and Uncle Ben's people are working on getting the adolescent dragons with father back to Earth so they can adjust properly. No... I will keep him here and we will help him to recover."

"Well... I won't argue with you about that." Sa'sur said.

"Has anyone contacted you since you entered the Quadrant?" Andro asked her.

"A Vanari ship met us just outside of their space within an hour of completing the jump." Sa'sur answered. "It's travelling with us now. It had a member of their Board of Regents on it. She transferred over quickly with a few military people... but she is a stuck up, arrogant *upaee*. At least that is how she comes across to most of us. She started out trying to tell me how to fly my ship as we entered Vanari space! Their military people just stood there and shook their heads."

Andro nodded his head. "That sounds like what Coren described they would do. He said to expect more of the same. At least until I arrive... and then they will turn all nice and happy to see us. It is an interesting signal from their military however. We may be able to use that in the future. Perhaps they do not agree on everything that the Board of Regents is doing."

"To save their trade contracts... no doubt." Sa'sur said. "You still plan on sticking to that I hope?"

Andro nodded his head. "The Union can replace whatever the Vanari provide to the Protectorate right now. If they force my hand then I will do exactly what Denali told them I would do. Dutkne is already working on setting up a travel corridor that will bypass Vanari space all together."

"And the Rothryn?" Sa'sur asked.

Andro sat back in his chair. "Sehri's mother and I had a long talk just before she left with you. She will talk with him when she arrives." He said. "And I will speak with Praetor Dyack when we get there and insure he knows the truth. I believe he was given the wrong information intentionally by this Circle Shaman that traveled with Sehri and not her sisters. This Shaman Harira person... she is more than she wants everyone to think she is and this Rothryn Science Academy concerns me."

Sa'sur nodded. "I read the report. You are thinking the same thing I am then I take it?"

Andro nodded. "They are not training those who show exceptional Etheric skills to better use them... they are controlling them. Perhaps forcing them to do the bidding of whoever is in charge of this Academy. Lady Aleatia has said they have almost absolute power in this area and even the government under Dyack really has no say in what they do."

"Religious fanatics." Sa'sur said. "Gods... they are the worse."

Andro turned when the door to his Ready Room opened and Jomann led Yuri and Pa'cour in. His *Durcunusaan* Captain and now closest friend was the only one outside of his wives and family that would dare simply walk in here unannounced. He turned back to Sa'sur.

“Sa'sur... advise when you have established orbit.” He said. “I'll keep you up to date on our status and if all goes well we should see you sometime tomorrow evening.”

Sa'sur nodded. “Understood. *SCIMITAR* out.”

Andro got to his feet and came around in front of his desk to stand in front of Yuri and Pa'cour. “You are departing?” He spoke.

Yuri nodded her head. “We need to get back to Veyera and finish the refit of the *INQUISITOR*. Removing Robert's stench is not as easy as I had hoped it would be.” She stated with a touch of disgust in her voice. “And you are getting ready to leave.”

“Carisia? Onera?” Andro asked.

“We said our goodbyes last night.” Yuri told him. “Onera is typically Akruixian when it comes to goodbyes and she is too excited about what she will experience out here among the stars with you and the others.”

“Yuri...” Andro began.

“No.” Yuri told him. Andro watched as she took Pa'cour's hand in her own and squeezed tightly. “Pa'cour and I made this decision knowing full well what it means Androcles. She needs to learn how to control what she can do. The only place she can do that is here among you and the others.”

“We will take good care of her.” Andro said. “And you have access to a QCR now. Do not be afraid to use it Yuri.”

Yuri's head canted to the side. “That was not expected Androcles. Your QCRs are some of your most secret and guarded military advances.”

Andro smiled. “Yes... but I don't think you will be selling it in The Wilds. Not that any of those fools could figure out how to work it anyway.” He stated.

Pa'cour chuckled softly and nodded. “True enough.” He said.

“We need to remain in touch and while the standard sub space channels are sufficient enough, the QCR is quicker and real time. I'd like you to keep me apprised of how Professor Lidene is coming with the weapons systems as well.” Andro told her.

“It's slow going but he is fairly certain he can come up with a few things now that the Drones are assisting.” Yuri said.

“If you need something that you can not obtain and that your contacts within the Union could get for you, my Aunt Deia has already suggested you contact her.” Andro told her.

Yuri looked at him stunned. “Deia?” She gasped.

“You and Pa'cour brought her sister home to her Yuri and allowed her to finally say goodbye. What you did after they died Pa'cour... to honor them... that can never be repaid.” Andro told them. “Regardless of what you think you may know... that one action earned you and Pa'cour more trust than you will ever truly understand. And it allowed my *tenna* Deia to know you have fully turned the corner in your life.”

Yuri looked up into Pa'cour's face which was usually stoic but she saw the hint of deep respect in his dark eyes now. “We thank you.” He spoke.

Andro nodded his head. “I imagine that you will also be working on what you had to see my father about?”

Yuri's dark eyes grew a little wider. “You...”

“Know what it is all about?” Andro said. “No.”

“Then...”

“I know my father well enough to know that it must not be good if he has not contacted me about it.” Andro said. “And if you felt the need to only speak with him, then it probably has something to do with what you found in your mother's files. About me. Or how I would react to something in those files. Which is to say... not well.”

“I wouldn't jump to conclusions Androcles.” Yuri said.

“I'm not.” He stated. “I'm merely deducing things given what I know. Which is nothing to be honest.”

Yuri felt a sense of relief wash over her but she hid it well. “When the time comes I'm sure he will tell you.” She said.

Andro chuckled. “I am not so sure... my father can be a closed mouth bastard when he wants to be. You should know that. That is something you and he had decided to deal with on your own so I will not concern

myself with it. I trust you both to know what you are doing.” He moved back to his desk and took the data pad from the surface. He turned back to them and held it out to Pa'cour. “I am having two dozen more Worker Drones transferred to you. With the extra power core from *SPARTA'S WRATH* powering their production line, we are building them as quickly as possible to assist our own engineers. Use them to help refit the ships you have with the new engine specs and the shield modifications that Carisia gave to you. Pontal and my grandfather are already working on doing the same with the High Coven fleet. You will need both of them going into the future. Treat them...”

“What?” Yuri asked him as she took the pad.

“They are not just machines even though we are building them.” Andro told her. “Like Avi and Armen they can think and learn and process on their own. Treat them as individuals and I think you will find they can do a lot more than you know.”

Yuri nodded her head as she looked at him. “Are you saying they are sentient?”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “I’m saying that Avi and Armen are not simple machines to be used. The Drones appear to be similar in nature. They kept nearly two hundred dragon eggs alive for over five thousand years with no guidance and directions except for their own. That ought to tell you something about what they are capable of.”

“I will see to it.” Yuri said.

Pa'cour looked up from the pad. “You are giving us the specs to your Body Armor.” He asked.

Andro nodded his head. “Neither of you is out of danger and you know it.” He told them. “With Moran and Dante out of the picture... our enemies will undoubtedly turn their attention not only towards my aunt and Narice... but also you and Pa'cour. You may not be a Princess of the High Coven any longer Yuri but I have a sense that you and Pa'cour have become even more important in the overall scheme of things.”

“That sense... your intuition... it is extremely frightening at times. You do know that don't you?” Yuri said.

Andro smiled. “It scares the hell out of me too. There will be others, even among the High Coven, who will believe if they take you and Pa'cour out of the equation, they can then move on Narice.”

“I will not allow that.” Yuri hissed.

Andro nodded his head. “I know. That is why I am doing this. And with the way things are developing between Onera, Sheva and Dorian... well I think you already know about that.”

“We approve Androcles.” Pa'cour said quickly.

“I was hoping you would say that.” Andro spoke. “It happened rather quickly for all of them... probably because Dorian is like me in many respects but I know my brother and Sheva are very happy it did. And they are not being shy about embracing it.”

Yuri nodded. “As is Onera.” She said. “And I could not ask for a man who will love and cherish her more than your brother Androcles.”

Andro looked at her and smiled a warm smile. It was an expression that made Yuri briefly think of what things would have been like if her mother and father had embraced these people so long ago instead of trying to destroy and enslave them. She had thought a lot about that recently and Yuri knew things would be so very different if they had.

“Things are not working out exactly as you had envisioned are they?” Andro asked her.

Yuri met his gaze. “*Phraktos* no!” She blurted out instantly. “I certainly never envisioned things working out as they have! Not once.”

“And do you regret any of it?” Andro asked.

Yuri took a deep breath and looked at Pa'cour with a brilliant smile of love and devotion before turning back to him. “Not one bit.” She answered firmly.

“Then let's keep building on that.” Andro said.

Yuri reached out and took Pa'cour's hand in her own. “We intend to.” She said.

Andro motioned for the door. “I will walk you to the landing bay. Since you gave The Tears of Heaven to Carisia... I have something I would like to give to you in return.”

MANNE BASE ONE

“...is maintaining its course and speed.” Martin spoke to the image of Delnash in the QCR.

Wayonn, Tobia and Valael sat with them at the table, both of them surprised at being included in this transmission as well as the level of sophistication of the QCR. It had been nearly three days since they had arrived and both of them were still in a state of shock at how easily they had been accepted among the Lycavorians and the other species that traveled with Martin Leonidas. Whatever had occurred in the past, the deaths of their comrades on Onterom, whatever anger or distrust that was felt was not directed at them in any way. It was almost as if these men and women knew that Valael and Tobia as well as the military officers and crew of the ship they had arrived on were friends and allies they could rely on.

“Yuriko and her ship are shadowing them pretty close. Closer than I would like really... but she is certain that they seem to lack the ability or skills to use the more advanced equipment some of those ships had on them.” Martin continued.

Delnash nodded his head in agreement from his office as he looked out the window over the city. He turned to face them as he answered. “I have had some people I trust completely begin going over the data that Anja gathered and they agree with this assessment. The Svorag are adapting... but it would appear that they still cannot comprehend higher functions. It would be much easier to determine what exactly is happening with the data that Lorendo undoubtedly has access too... but...”

“Do not risk yourself or your people in trying to find out Chief Elder!” Wayonn spoke instantly from his chair next to Martin. “Many of Lorendo’s secrets have to be on his computer and Avi will break the encryption eventually.”

Delnash shook his head. “I do not intend to Wayonn. Things need to change and I am not going to risk that by being foolish.” He replied. “You believe the original time table is accurate then Martin?”

Marin nodded as he lowered his mug of Aricia’s coffee. “We can be pretty accurate based on the data we have and unless something changes... they’ll arrive over Honelze in just under seven weeks.”

“Why not come directly for Artaaya Martin?” Delnash asked. “Why go after our colony world and not come right for our main planet, our seat of power, with the numbers that they have?”

“I’ve been asking myself that same question.” Martin said. “I think I may have an answer that neither of us is going to like very much.”

“Why do I sense this answer is neither helpful nor appealing to what we are trying to do here on Artaaya?” Delnash asked.

“That’s me.” Martin said. “The harbinger of doom and gloom.”

“What is your theory?” Delnash asked with a slight shake of his head and smile.

Martin leaned forward in his chair. “I think we have two different scenarios actually. The first is pretty remote if you ask me, but the head Svorag, their leader if you will, he is much more advanced than the others and he is keeping them from evolving by whatever means he has available. That is why we haven’t seen him or her so far in our encounters.”

Delnash returned to his chair as they saw Avatar 27 enter the office. “That would imply that the Svorag have some sort of advanced society that we have not seen Martin.” Delnash spoke as he sat down. “Their behavior so far to date does not support this.”

Martin shook his head. “No... it doesn’t.”

“For lack of a better definition they have always been more of a nuisance than anything else really.” Delnash said. “They have been more nomadic and scattered until recently. We have certainly never seen them in such numbers or using such advanced equipment or ships as we have seen in our last few encounters.”

“That’s why you are going to like the second scenario even less.” Martin told him.

“Oh please... indulge me. I just love bad news.” Delnash spoke sarcastically and this drew smiles from both Wayonn and Martin.

“The second scenario is that someone is controlling them.” Martin said. “Someone is giving them their orders and where to go and what to do.”

“By someone I assume you mean the Scourge?” Delnash asked with wide eyes.

Martin shook his head. “No. By someone... I mean Lorendo.”

“Lorendo!” Delnash gasped.

“That fat *ronnus* is the one who developed and perfected this virus as a weapon.” Martin spoke. “Anja has been able to confirm that without difficulty sir, just by going through the parts of the logs Avi has been able to recover from the science station and decrypt from Lorendo’s own P9. The only question, well the biggest one anyway, that we can’t answer right now is whether he intended it to fight the Scourge should they return at some future date, or use them for his own means.”

Delnash met Martin’s gaze directly. “His own means? You mean to... to take control.” He stated.

Martin nodded. “As much as it pains me to say... yes. Why else make something like this? He had to have a means of control if he was going to use them in a such a way.”

“Martin they are beasts!” Delnash exclaimed. “Operating on pure instinct!”

“Even beasts can be tamed sir.” Martin spoke.

“That... Martin what you are suggesting is incomprehensible.” Delnash stammered.

“Is it?” Wayonn asked with no malice in his voice. “Or is it just something that is so far out there that it is too hard to believe. That we don’t want to believe it?”

“You are suggesting that an Elder of the Pralor people is using his skills and talents to create and support a genetically modified army to turn against his own people!” Delnash stated. “I... I can not bring myself to believe that he is capable of such a thing.”

“Yet you are able to believe that he intentionally falsified critical star chart updates that our Seed mission needed to avoid a Class Nine ion storm. An ion storm that crippled five City ships and resulted in the deaths of millions of our people. An act that altered the very fabric of the society of hundreds of different species through the millennia within the Alpha Quadrant. And eventually cost more than a trillion lives. More than half of them Lycavorian.” Wayonn spoke.

“What?” Tobia gasped now looking at Delnash’s figure in the transmission. “Chief Elder... what does Wayonn mean?”

Delnash looked at him. “The evidence that 27 has procured provides substantial proof of this Wayonn... yes... but what you are suggesting is... it is even more monstrous than what he did on Onterom or what he perpetrated with the City ships.”

Martin nodded his head. “That goes without saying. And to be honest... I believe the body count is going to continue to climb until we figure it out and stop him.” He said.

They watched Delnash rise to his feet again and move back around his desk. He went to the large window in his office once more and gazed out over the capital city. “By all the spirits within the Rift of Time.” He spoke softly. “That would mean he has... he has been planning and supporting this for far longer than we believe.”

Wayonn nodded once more. “At least since the end of the war Chief Elder.” He stated. “More than likely since right after the Pralor people took up residence on Artaaya. Perhaps even during your journey there.”

“It also means he has more of a power base than we first thought.” Martin spoke. “You may have announced free elections, but don’t doubt for a second he is planning to counter that. He for sure does not want you elected freely by the people.”

“Are you saying he would resort to violence?” Delnash asked.

“I’m saying exactly that.” Martin stated. “But I also think Lorendo is realizing he has a major problem on his hands.”

Delnash looked at him in the transmission. “He has lost control.” Delnash stated softly.

Martin nodded his head. “Perhaps not locally... those he has around him and supporting him... but overall that’s a pretty safe bet. Why else act as he has acted since he discovered I was around?” He continued. “That is why he killed the men and women in cryo stasis. He did not want us finding out what they were really doing there, or that the Svorag are truly beginning to adapt and evolve more than he ever intended them too. As we used to say in the Teams... he is moving to cover his ass.”

“It is the only reason he would have locked the facility down with Praetorian command codes Delnash. You know that.” Wayonn said. “He did not believe there were any still alive with the Etheric power to trigger the station’s systems. He did not know about Murano and he certainly didn’t know or realize that Martin and the others existed.”

“How could he?” Valael spoke for the first time now. “All of our Quadrant monitoring probes and stations were destroyed by the Scourge. He had no idea that Sumar and you did what you did by merging our people with the Lycavorians Wayonn. If he had, he would have known that the blood of any of Sumar’s descendants would remain undiluted and very potent no matter who it mixed with. The same goes for you Wayonn and any Praetorians that accompanied you and their descendants among the Lycavorian people.”

“Jomann’s descendants for starters.” Martin said with a nod. “He’s the only one outside of my family who has the active Praetorian gene at the moment.”

“I would not expect that to remain so.” Tobia spoke softly.

Delnash, Valael and Wayonn looked at her but Martin sat back in his chair with a slight grin on his face. “I don’t.” Martin said.

“What do you mean Tobia?” Delnash asked.

“She means that as soon as Shiria and Deia get rolling on this program they have worked out to find those with the Praetorian gene, she is going to find quite a few among my people who have the active gene.” Martin said.

“We assumed that already Martin.” Wayonn said. “Why do you have the look on your face though?”

“Because Tobia is a Praetorian as well Wayonn.” Martin said crossing his arms over his broad chest. “And she is beginning to realize why my grandfather did what he did concerning her.”

“What?!” Wayonn gasped as his eyes went to her. “Tobia?”

Tobia looked at Martin for a long moment. “I should have guessed this would have been part of the skills passed down within Sumar’s blood. It is how he discovered me so long ago. How long have you known?” She asked him softly.

“Since the moment I realized you were Mari’s mother and I felt your resonance.” Martin said. He touched his nose. “It’s all in the nose.”

“What?” Valael gasped even louder.

“I should have suspected that your sense of smell would detect it when you met me. And that you would have felt the Etheric spike when Delnash told me where Mari was.” She said sheepishly. “I did not realize it until after Delnash had told me where Mari was and who she was with. I... I should have guessed that anyone of Sumar’s blood would know instantly.”

“Of course!” Wayonn gasped now as he gazed at her and realization hit him as well. “That is why her Etheric resonance is so powerful and how she knows to shield so well. You taught her.” He looked at Tobia now. “Mari is not only yours and Murano’s daughter; she is also a Praetorian as well isn’t she?”

“Wait! Wait!” Valael exclaimed. “Someone tell me what is going on here!”

“Tobia...” Delnash spoke as he returned to his chair. “... Now is not the time to keep things hidden. Is what Martin and Wayonn are saying... is it true?”

Tobia looked at him. “Yes.” She answered.

“How?” Delnash gasped.

“Sumar discovered me when I was only two years old.” She said. “Right before the end of the first war with the Scourge. He kept me and my parents hidden from everyone. My... my ability allows me to shrink my Etheric resonance to miniscule levels. Not even Murano could detect what I was. He wanted... he wanted me to teach this ability to all Praetorians when I became old enough. Sumar’s instructions to my parents at the time... instructions they passed on to me when I became of age... they were to keep me safe for I would be part of the future of the Praetorians. He left them a copy of the Tomes and when it was discovered he and you were lost Wayonn, they gave them to me to study and learn from.”

“He never told me you existed.” Wayonn said. “He must have done it for the same reason he left Murano behind.” Wayonn said now as he turned and looked at Martin.

Martin looked at him. “What?”

“To discover and teach the Praetorians of the future.” Wayonn said. “Even then... even back then Sumar knew you and the others would eventually arrive Martin. He mentioned it to me on several occasions but I always thought he was just hoping. He knew!”

“I believe he knew Murano and I would be drawn to each other when we finally did meet each other.” Tobia said softly. “It is the way of things between Praetorians. We will always be drawn to another Praetorian first. Or one who has the gene within them. At least in a romantic way. It’s almost as if the gene knows who

will be the most compatible for us. I did not fight it to be sure. I did not want to. Murano was... he is so handsome and proud. And Murano did not fight it either. At least not at first.”

“This is why you have never searched for another husband?” Valael asked.

Tobia nodded her head. “As I told Delnash so recently... Murano is the only man I could possibly love. Who I still love. With all that I am. I just could not let Mari be affected by the pain he was inflicting upon himself at his perceived failures.”

“That’s why he doesn’t know who she is?” Martin asked.

“I wanted to tell him Martin. I wanted to tell him so badly, but I also knew that unless he purged the inner demons that plagued him he could never be the father that Mari needed.” Tobia said.

Martin nodded slowly. “You don’t have to explain it to me. Or to anyone.” He said.

“Does Mari know what she is?” Wayonn asked.

Tobia shook her head. “I have never told her and I have never trained her in anything more than how to shield her Etheric resonance. Even from her father. He may suspect Mari is somewhat different after being around her so recently but unless she drops her natural shielding completely or tells him, he will not discover it.”

Martin leaned forward. “The situation with Mari will work itself out. It has already begun down that path.” He spoke.

Tobia looked at him. “What... what do you mean?” She asked.

“You should probably talk to Aricia and my mates sometime soon Tobia.” Martin told her. “Right now we have bigger concerns.”

“What do you mean?” Tobia asked again.

“Trust me.” Martin told her meeting her eyes from across the table.

“Yes.” Tobia said nodding in agreement as she looked at him with many questions in her eyes. That was something she sensed in Martin Leonidas almost immediately. She trusted him though she had never met him before coming here. “You are correct.”

“Anja, Duewa and Radra have been going through the files Avi has decrypted so far. All of them agree that somewhere along the line in his sick experimentations Lorendo introduced something into the Svorag DNA that has now caused them to mutate into something he can no longer control.” Martin spoke. “The ones he has lost direct control over have now spread and evolved into what they are now. Something far out of his sphere of control and he is scared. I believe it has something to do with what took place with Teniri and the ship she sent back to gather Arzoal and the other dragons from Elear.”

“So you don’t believe him concerning that?” Delnash didn’t phrase the statement as a question for he no longer believed that either.

“I wouldn’t believe anything that bastard has to say even if he was telling the truth about it.” Martin snarled. “Since Teniri is here... she and Arzoal are putting a timeline together on what took place back then. It is slow going since so much happened after Teniri and the others met up with you Delnash... but they will figure it out. You sent the two Pralors who survived the events of Elear and who knew Arzoal as a Pralor. They traveled with Teniri to finally meet you. They were overjoyed to see her again by the way and now they can hopefully get it done. Then we will have a base to work off of.”

“So you believe these Svorag headed for Honelze are under Lorendo’s control?” Valael asked.

Martin shook his head. “No... these are the ones he has lost control of.” He answered him quickly. “At least that is what Anja believes and I happen to agree. She may be a tiny thing and have a wicked temper as well as a sharp tongue... but she is by far the most intelligent person I have ever met and when it comes to this kind of stuff... I don’t question her. Period. She has forgotten more about this stuff than most of us have ever learned.”

I heard that you big oaf! Anja’s voice echoed within the Etheric realm and those in the room all smiled for she did not shield the comment.

“From what Radra has told me about her... I am inclined to agree.” Valael said.

“How do you suggest I proceed forward now Martin?” Delnash asked him now. “You are, tactically speaking, the most experienced person anywhere to be found in this quadrant of space by far. I’m quite sure Murano would agree with that assessment.”

“I want to cut lose a unit of my engineers Chief Elder. Most of those that Andro sent and came with Manda are from the 1st Elven Engineer Brigade. They are the very best that we have and they have been working with all the technology we learned since I brought City Ship 41 to Earth. Manda has a woman on her ship as part of her crew. Zaala Randall. She is the one who came up with the design of the Hyper Matter Fusion Engines that our ships are using. She is my adopted sister Tarifa’s younger sister and she has been working on this since day one. She is on the *ARIZONA* and working as her Chief Engineer Consultant. Her husband is the Air Wing Commander for Manda’s Fleet.”

“She is an elven female then? I remember from the information on your history that this sister you refer to... Tarifa... she is an elf.” Valael asked.

Martin nodded his head. “And she is just as drop dead beautiful as her sister.” He said. “Tarifa and I... this all began with Tarifa, Dysea, Anja and I when we returned to Earth after the passing of the Comet. We just... we just began to call ourselves brother and sister through the years and it stuck. There are a few Lycavorians and vampires in that group but they are our best and brightest like I said. Manda is my Sector Commander and she also wants to send some ships. We’ll need to begin working together with your ships to better coordinate.” Martin told him. “I want to send them all to Honelze to take stock of what we have and begin to prepare defensive fortifications and get a feel for the area of space we will be working in.”

Delnash nodded instantly. “Of course... I expected as much. Teniri and the Dragon Elder Council here on Artaaya have already chosen two dozen dragons to travel to Honelze to assist as I’m sure she has made you aware. They will be departing within the next day or two. I have also received Garan’s recommendations and will be sending a small force of men that are under his command. He wishes to have them trained as he has been training.”

“What do we tell the people Chief Elder?” Valael asked now. “They will surely begin to question what is going on when others from different species begin arriving on their colony.”

“I believe 27 has already come up with a plan for that.” Delnash spoke now. “Since Lorendo is the one who has made your presence known to our people Martin... we are going to use that as our jumping point. Tinra’s people here are still reviewing the information I provided to them as well as comparing it to what Lorendo told them. The settlers on Honelze are among the more... liberal and open minded of our people if you will. They are among those who did not agree with how the government was being run even before the war ended. Most of them were and still are dire hard supporters of your grandfather’s methods and teachings. I think you will find them far more accepting than those on Artaaya, at least for the moment. I understand that you gave your interview with Tinra yesterday. You are not wasting any time I see.”

“There’s no point in it.” Martin explained. “When things begin to happen it’s going to be fast and furious. I’d rather not have to deal with mistrust and arrogance then.”

Delnash nodded. “I agree. When are Aricia and the others doing theirs?”

“Later today I believe.” Martin answered. “I wanted Tinra to move quickly so that we can get our people to Honelze faster. If the interviews go out on your channels before they arrive... if the Pralor people see them... see that we are not what Lorendo says we are it might make things go more smoothly.”

Delnash nodded once more. “Again... I agree.”

“I’m going to send Wayonn and General Koguth’s people as well.” Martin told him. “The Juturi Pride handled most of the defensive positions here on Manne with the 1st EB and they did a bang up job of it. I’ve briefed Koguth on what the Svorag are capable of and he is ready to go. Hell... he practically begged to go. I’m sending Isabella, Cirith and Dysea as well. *Melda Min*’s bonded sister Iriral can coordinate the dragons you are sending. She has done this sort of thing before and has become an excellent leader and teacher.”

“You will send your Queens?” Valael asked surprised.

Martin nodded. “Trust me... they are more than capable of handling anything that might come up between the three of them.”

“And your brother Daniel? Will he be going to Honelze to help train the men Garan requested?” Delnash asked.

Martin shook his head. “Danny and my team stay with me.” He said. “We know each other as well as we know ourselves. We can predict what the other will do in pretty near any given situation. Garan will be going with a squad of *Durcunusaan* to train those men you are sending.”

“You are still planning on going to the Lycavorian colony then? That is why you are splitting up your forces?” Delnash asked him.

Martin looked at him for a moment before answering. “They are my people and I want to find out for myself why Lorendo and his people stopped monitoring them and what happened to them.”

“Then you will need Tobia’s skill as well. It is the other reason I asked her to join Valael on the trip.” Delnash said.

Martin looked at him. “Why?”

“She and Valael have traveled to the sector you will be going to. The Svorag are not just a threat to us. They are a threat to every other sentient species within this quadrant and I know they have attacked other colonies belonging to these species as well.” Delnash told him. “We are not the only group out here among the stars in this quadrant Martin, though we are quite spread out. There are nineteen other bipedal species like us that call this quadrant home. Seven of them have obtained working space flight ability. Of those seven species, four of them have built passable interstellar engine Drive Cores that allow them to leave their home planet and its system. Rudimentary engines to be sure... nothing like we or you possess... but still workable. Out of those four, three are not exactly fond of visitors. Two of them are involved in a border war of some sort and they even suspect we had a hand in creating the Svorag to begin with to target their people. They do not know how close to the truth that they really are. The sector that you will be traveling to is populated by one of these species.”

“What is the threat level?” Martin asked.

“Your ships and people are superior to anything they can put against you technologically speaking Martin.” Valael spoke.

“I am sensing a but coming.” Martin asked.

“But... we have encountered them before.” Valael answered. “Tobia knows them better than anyone else for she has studied them and dealt with them in the past. Let’s just say that you will not like their attitude towards us very much given how things worked out when we first encountered you on Onterom.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “Great.” He said. “Why is nothing I do ever easy?”

“The most militant of the three groups also has the largest fleet and army; though militant might be a strong word. Militaristic would be better I suppose. They have a heavy presence in the system where your people were.” Tobia spoke now. “They are called the Tasmor. A female dominated race to be sure.”

“Female dominated?” Wayonn asked.

Tobia nodded in response to his question. “Tasmor males are very much in the minority and considered second class citizens, at least in most cases. The Tasmor control seven planets, all well advanced and very well guarded. They are led by a Tasmor Sovereign Regnant. Her name is Saydia Daret. She is the ultimate power and word among their people. She isn’t exactly the most outgoing person either. The ratio of females to males is something like twenty to one. The females occupy all positions of power within their military and government. There are men within their ranks but none higher than a ship commander if the information I have is accurate. Their forces are well disciplined and very well trained. Not on a level of skill as your people as Valael said but still much more than any others we have seen. I have a full briefing that I can give once you decide we will depart, but aside from the basic information we never were able to obtain much in the way of how their culture and government works.”

“She means we never bothered.” Delnash spoke calmly in keeping with his new persona. He was not going to try and deny the mistakes they had made in the past any longer. He would face them head on and try to correct any that were within his power to correct.

“We’ll be leaving by the end of the week at the latest. Once I know everything here on Manne is secure and Anja is satisfied she has everything she needs.” He answered Tobia before looking at the clear image of Delnash. “I could guess and probably be very near correct right? When you first encountered them... it went pretty much the same way it did with us huh?”

Delnash could not hide the embarrassment in his smile. “Unfortunately... yes it did.” He replied. “Though in our defense, they demanded that we hand over some of our technology and we refused. It went downhill from there. Tobia has since dealt with their Sovereign Regnant on several different occasions through the years and relations have improved to a point, but there is still no love lost between us. Tobia was even able to broker a trade agreement with them. Aside from that... our two peoples do not get along very well.”

“What about the other species?” Martin asked.

“We have had little to no contact with them.” Delnash answered. “I believe the Tasmor have made contact with all those having space flight ability, but to my knowledge, the Tasmor and those other three species are the only ones able to produce interstellar Drive Cores allowing them to leave their home systems as I said.”

Wayonn shook his head. “Sometimes I wonder how we ever advanced to the level we did.” He said softly.

“Trust me Wayonn... over the past weeks... that very question has entered my mind at many different times.” Delnash spoke.

“Have you come up with an answer Chief Elder?” Wayonn asked.

Delnash nodded his head. “Oh yes.” He said. “I believe it is called blind, stupid luck.”

To say that she was equal parts amazed and stupefied would have been a very accurate statement. Even now, after almost three days here among these men and women she did not know what to make of everything.

Tinra had free reign within Base One. She could go anywhere she wanted almost without question. She had been friends with Delnash for more years than she could recall and she had jumped at the chance to come here. He didn't try to tell her what to do, or who to talk to while she was here, only that he wanted her to be truthful and report from the heart. This was always the Tinra had been no matter where she stood on an issue. That left her in a minority among her peers she knew, for most of those who reported the news and happenings of the Pralor society almost always let their personal feelings rule what they reported and how. Tinra had tried very hard to remain outside looking in for all of her life. Now she was having a very hard time doing that.

The mood in Base One was always one of hopefulness and determination. As she spent the last hours walking through the sprawling camp she saw men and women from nearly a dozen different species helping one another, eating with one another and sharing laughter with one another. She saw senior military officers just as dirty and sweaty as the men and women they commanded as they repaired something or put up a new portable building. Just this very morning she had been out with one of the Vid drones hovering only a short distance away and she came upon a group of men and women putting the finishing touches on a medical clinic in the center of Base One. What shocked her most of all was that she saw Martin Leonidas in the thick of it. He was shirtless, as were all the men working, and a dozen of them were holding what appeared to be a thick portable wall in place while four elven females scampered about the top of the building welding different points. Martin and the men were soaked in sweat and their bodies glistened in the morning sun, but none of them appeared to mind where they were or what they were doing. She could see them talking among themselves from where she stood and laughing. Martin Leonidas was the Lycavorian Spartan King of trillions of lifeforms across the Alpha Quadrant and yet here he was helping to hold up the side of a building with others who were workers or engineers from what she could tell. When the final weld was in place she had watched as the men stood back and admired their work and Martin Leonidas threw his arm across the shoulders of a much smaller elven man as they laughed about something.

Tinra was still a small girl when Chief Elder Sumar left on his ill fated mission, but she had heard hundreds of stories from her father and mother who had escaped the Purge of their empire by the Scourge. This was one of Sumar's most endearing qualities they had told her. He was not afraid to stepped in beside normal men and women and do mundane work. This is what had caused people to love him so because he didn't do it out of some alternative reason, he did it because he wanted to. Tinra could see these same traits in Martin Leonidas. That is what drove the men and women with him to worship him as they did. This is what caused them to worship their six beautiful Queens as they did. It was not something Martin Leonidas or his Queens were comfortable with, but it was something they could not change. She had seen the elven Queens Dysea and For'mya working on one of their ships with a group of other pilots just yesterday afternoon. Hardly anyone wore rank of any kind, yet they all seemed to know who was in command where they were. And even those who were in command of what was happening in a certain area were just as sweaty and dirty as the next. No one was adverse to throwing their weight into their duties and doing so with glee it seemed. This was the kind of mentality that Sumar exuded and the Pralor people embraced, her parents had once told her. It was so very prevalent now here among these men and women and it was almost a palpable thing within the very air she

breathed. Just three short days ago they were fighting for their lives and now they were back to work like it was the most natural thing in the world.

They were not afraid to speak with her about anything as long as it did not violate their security and they answered every question she answered without fail. They obviously knew their King had allowed her to be here and they trusted their King and Queens without question. They looked upon her with respect and honor and some of the men even... Tinra blushed as she thought about it... some of the Lycavorian men even looked at her with an interest that went beyond her simple questions. They appeared to look at her with desire in their eyes and while it should have made her uncomfortable... it actually made her have thoughts of passion and desire that she had never experienced. Tinra had never made time to find a man or make a family; her job was everything to her. Yet as she walked among them now, it actually made her want for a family. She had seen the way many of the men treated those that were their wives. When she asked them about it she discovered that Martin Leonidas had sent for the wives and husbands of those who were joined so that they could be together out here among the stars despite the risk of having so many non-combatants as she knew they were called. Not one among them had elected to return to the Alpha Quadrant, instead choosing to remain with those they loved. She had seen the young Prince Fedor and the hulking Kavalian she now knew was called Miseo chasing the two stunning young women around the massive Mess Lounge while the young women laughed in happiness. Young women that she later learned were both their wives and Princesses of the Union.

This was certainly something she had not foreseen when she told Delnash she would come here. She found men and women who were just as smart and inventive as any Pralor she knew back on Artaaya. They were most certainly not primitive to the Pralor people in any way. In many ways... in many ways they were better Tinra had to admit. They clung to the ideals that many Pralors had long ago forgotten or dismissed and they clung to these ideals viciously.

“Not what you expected is it Lady Tinra?” The voice spoke from behind her and Tinra spun around startled to see Delnash’s daughter Kesyla.

“Kesyla!” She exclaimed having not heard her move up behind her. “Ancients child... you frightened me.”

“My apologies. Since... since being turned I seem to walk rather softly.” Kesyla spoke. “I was returning to our quarters when I saw you standing here.”

Tinra noticed she carried a large mug of steaming liquid. “I was just... I have several hours before I interview Martin Leonidas’s Queens and I was just... wandering.” Tinra stared at Kesyla for a long moment but could detect nothing different about her from when she seen her last. She was perhaps leaner and appeared to be more muscular physically, but aside from that there were no differences. Unless of course you included the glowing look upon her face and the brightness of her dark eyes. “You are... you are looking well child.” She finally stammered.

Kesyla laughed gently. “No Lady Tinra... there are no outward signs that I have been changed.” She said.

“Forgive me...” Tinra sputtered. “I did not...”

“You were looking to see if I am different somehow.” Kesyla said. “I’m really not. I am the same person I was before Daniel turned me. I have the same mind and I like the same things that I did before. Though some food now does taste better. I just chose to... I chose to accept what my heart was telling me. And I am so very happy I did.”

“We... we met the young woman in the mountain when we first arrived.” Tinra said. “Her name was...”

“Anuk... yes I know. I knew the moment she met you.” Kesyla said. “Anuk, Nayeca and I... we do not keep things from each other. Or from our husband and mate Daniel.”

Tinra stepped closer to her unafraid. “You... forgive me... you are like them now?”

“If, by like them, you mean that I can shift my form and have taken on the traits of their species...” Kesyla allowed her eyes to change swiftly and her fangs grew out enough to be very visible.

Kesyla loved when the half change came over her. She loved watching it take place and the influx of additional scents that she could detect. Daniel had told her that first night, the night he had changed her after hours of exquisitely amazing sex between the four of them, as he held her in his powerful arms with Anuk and Nayeca pressed against them both. He had told her that until she grew used to it, the sights, sounds and smells would always be more prominent in her half changed or full wolf form. Kesyla did not question what she felt,

she never had. Daniel was the most physically handsome man she had ever laid her eyes upon, yet it was his jovial nature that had shocked her at first. He was large enough to squash most men but he was also the funniest man she had ever met. He could laugh at himself even easier than he laughed at others deeds. Even Martin Leonidas was the same way. That first night together with him and Anuk and Nayeca had been the most blissfully passionate night she had ever experienced in her life. The tastes of Anuk and Nayeca were like sweet candy to her, and Daniel's body was simply put, beautiful. They lavished her with pleasure and attention that she returned without question or pause. When they had finally collapsed and Daniel held her in his arms as the virus raced through her system, Kesyla knew she had found absolute love with all of them.

"Yes... I can." Tinra gasped slightly when she saw Kesyla shift but did not move away. "I am still learning the nuances of being a wolf... but it is glorious. And my loves are very patient teachers."

"I am... it is... I just..." Tinra stammered once more.

Kesyla chuckled softly. "You are stunned that it was I who found love and desire among these men and women?"

Tinra looked at her. "Whenever we interacted you always seemed so reserved and quiet." She told her. "Your father valued your words though."

Kesyla nodded. "I know." She said. "But I am still that same person. When I first saw... when I first saw Daniel, it was on Martin's ship. I had never seen a man like him. He was so tall and strong and handsome. I was in love with him even then. The color of his skin, his smile. When I discovered that he was already married, I was disappointed to say the least. Until Anuk and Nayeca arrived here and I met them. I realized within moments that I wanted them just as badly as I wanted Daniel. I did not know they felt the same and had before even meeting me. They are connected within the Etheric realm you know. We all are. They knew all about me before they even arrived here... and their desire for me matched mine for them. Daniel says it took Anuk hitting him with a board before he admitted that he felt the same." Kesyla said with a brilliant smile. "I would not change anything Lady Tinra."

"Does your... does Delnash know?" Tinra asked.

Kesyla shook her head quickly. "Not yet. I will be returning to Artaaya soon as part of a diplomatic group. I will tell him then. I do not know what he will say or do."

"I think you will find that your father will be most open." Tinra said. "He is a different man Kesyla. Since meeting Martin Leonidas and the others he is so very different than the man I have known."

Kesyla nodded. "I know. And that makes me very happy."

Tinra saw her cant her head slightly and then smile shyly. "What?" She asked.

Kesyla shook her head. "Nayeca is wondering where I have gotten off to." She lifted the mug. "I was bringing this back to our quarters so that we can wake Daniel and get him moving. He can not get enough of the Queen's coffee it seems and he is such a bear in the mornings. It is very good however." She said sipping it.

Tinra had to admit that she had never seen Kesyla so animated or happy in the years she had known her. She was exceptionally beautiful, Tinra had always known that, but now she simply glowed. "Forgive me for delaying you." She said.

Kesyla laughed softly again and looked at her. "It is nothing. Anuk says they will use other means to kick Daniel awake." She stated. "When is your interview with Aricia and the others?"

"In four hours." Tinra said.

Kesyla stepped closer and took her arm gently. "Then let me share with you what I have discovered here among these men and women. I may be Pralor but they are my people now as well. And it makes me sing with happiness."

Tinra smiled. "I would like that very much." She said.

AUSTROVA RE MYDALA ESTATE

"...Wish you would reconsider Caliria." Coren spoke to her across the table.

The bright sunlight was filling the main dining room of the home through the wall to ceiling glass window that overlooked the river. Caliria had often times sat on the adjoining deck in the mornings when she was younger, letting the sun bath her in its warmth and light. They had been back for two days and she had returned to her apartment with Paga and a Vanari Cadre security detachment once to retrieve most of her remaining clothes and items she wanted. That her apartment had been searched was readily apparent to her immediately. They had not stayed very long, many of the items in her apartment were part of her past and Caliria had no intention of ever reclaiming them. She had a new life now, one that she had embraced fully.

Her time on Lorent had been both a wonder and learning experience. She was not fully turned as Arduri was or born a half breed like the sisters Ryana or Nyosa, but she had rapidly absorbed all they had been able to teach her while there. The four women had become very fast friends, and Ryana and Nyosa had taken both her and Arduri on several tours through the city and into the countryside. Denali and Dutkne had joined them twice, but usually it was just the four young women. Caliria had never been to the Protectorate homeworld and she found it to be beautiful and so peaceful. As they walked among the streets and shops she noticed that she and Arduri were accepted completely. The Lycavorian virus swirling within their veins now made sure of that. She discovered that the Lycavorians could smell the potency of the virus within another and Nyosa told them that the virus that coursed fully through Arduri and Caliria's veins was the most potent that any Lycavorian had ever smelled. It would only grow in the years to come, especially after Andro finally bit her and made Caliria completely his.

Caliria missed him terribly. She missed them all terribly. All she could think of now was what she would do when they returned. How would they treat her? Would they accept and trust her fully after what had taken place with Franklin? She was worried that Androcles would never look at her the same way as he had that night in his villa on Earth. It mattered not to her now. She would spend however long it took in years and effort to convince them all that she desired nothing more than to be in their arms.

Caliria lowered the juice she was drinking and looked at her father. "Papa... I only have a week left of classes." She told him. "Once my exams are complete then it will no longer be a concern."

"I know... but for the next week I will worry for you whenever you are not here among us." Coren told her.

"I have Paga and a Cadre Commando detachment." Caliria said. "There is no telling who else Denali has watching my every move. It is silly."

"It is not silly!" Coren protested. "Not after what we have discovered these last weeks! You are a threat to them Caliria! We are all a threat... but you... you are the key. You are the only one within the Beta Quadrant who has the working formula for the counter-agent."

Caliria looked up fully from the pad she was reading and looked at her father. "What? What do you mean? Regent Ardan has a copy."

Coren shook his head as he rose to his feet. "No." He said softly as he moved to the large window.

"What do you mean?" Caliria asked.

"On the last leg of our return from Earth Denali and I spoke with Dutkne." Coren said. "We decided to insure that the formula remained under our control so Ardan could not corrupt it or exploit it. We only gave him ninety percent of the formula." Coren turned back to face her. "You are the only one who knows the entire formula. At least here in the Beta Quadrant. That will change when Androcles's sister Eliani arrives with him... but for the moment you are the key to all of this. The Eridiani Franklin's visit to you before we left for Lorent was proof of that. It is why Denali pulled us to Lorent so quickly after your encounter with him. He sensed they would act to take you and whoever else they could before more time passed. They know they don't have the full formula Caliria... but they also know from all the data we gave to them that it does work."

"Do you honestly believe they would come after me here on Austrova?" Caliria asked as she too got to her feet.

Coren nodded. "Now more than before. The bulk of Androcles's forces arrived early this morning. It caused quite the stir within the Vanari Fleet when over a hundred Union warships dropped in to say hello. Most of them are holding at the outer system marker, but several ships are now in orbit. Ships very similar to Denali's command ship." He told her seeing her soft green eyes grow wide as she came up to him. "That is where Denali and Arduri are right now. Meeting with the female elf Androcles has put in charge. Admiral Sa'sur I believe her name is."

“Andro?” Caliria gasped. “Sadi and the others?”

Coren shook his head. “No. They are finishing up some matters in the Alpha Quadrant that needed their immediate attention. Something to do with the High Coven.” He saw the look of sadness flitter across her face and he reached out to touch her cheek softly. Her green eyes settled back on his face. “Do not question that they are coming Caliria.”

“I... I long to feel their arms around me papa.” Caliria said softly. “It frightens me that it might not ever happen again.”

“Do not think like that!” Coren hissed strongly seeing her eyes grow a little wider. “What happen is not your fault!”

“Papa... I chose to sleep with Franklin when I returned. He did not force me.” Caliria said.

Coren shook his head quickly. “You were confused and trying to come to terms with your emotions! The Eridiani bastard took advantage of that! And...”

“And what?” Caliria asked him.

“It is Androcles’s fault.” Coren stated.

Caliria drew back from him, her eyes flashing instantly to that of her wolf persona and her fangs extending in anger. “Papa... how dare you!” She almost shouted. “That... that is not true!”

Coren reached out unafraid of his daughter. Fear is what almost cost him everything and he was not going to be afraid anymore. “It is the truth.” He continued. “Not... not in the way you think I mean however.”

Caliria glared at him. “Then what do you mean?”

Coren shook his head trying to find the words but a female voice saved him. “He means that Prince Androcles will undoubtedly consider what happened between you and this Franklin person to be his fault.”

Caliria spun around surprised and saw Nyosa Val Ardwor enter the dining room holding the sheet around her obviously naked figure. Her platinum colored hair was askew and flowed almost wildly about her face and well past her shoulders. She was shorter than Caliria by three inches, but she had several more pounds of muscle packed on her tiny frame. She moved right up to stand beside Coren and pressed close to him in a very intimate manner with no shame in her eyes whatsoever. Caliria’s eyes grew a little wider at this but she remained silent.

“What your father is trying to tell you is that any man of pure Lycavorian blood would think this way. And if everything I have smelled and heard about Androcles Leonidas is indeed accurate then this is exactly what he will think. He let you leave Earth Caliria Re Mydala. He let you leave Earth without ever showing you what you meant to him and to the others. Such a thing goes against the very basic instincts of our people. If he had done what his instincts no doubt called for him to do... shown you what you meant to them... you would not have left Earth. You would have remained and found your center there.”

“But... I... how could he...” Caliria stammered as her eyes changed back and her fangs disappeared.

“He knew the virus within his DNA would begin to change you.” Nyosa explained even more. “And to be honest, it has taken place far faster than it normally would have because of the pureness of the virus in his blood. I can only surmise that he went against his instincts because he did not want to lose you. He thought letting you return was the better way to make you see that you belonged with them. He was wrong and I’m quite sure his father... or another member of his family probably let him know that in rather blunt terms.”

“How... how do you know this?” Caliria asked.

Nyosa smiled at her brightly. “Because my mother is about as old fashion as Lycavorians come.” She answered. “Her grandparents are among those who first traveled with Wayonn when they left Lycavore all those years ago. You don’t get anymore old fashion than that. My mother told me one night while you were on Lorent with us. She said Androcles is probably flogging himself over letting you leave. And until he has you back it will remain his fault in his eyes.”

“But he has... none of them have tried to contact me.” Caliria said as her eyes became moist.

Nyosa nodded. “I know. But do not assume that means something it does not for you would be wrong. That is simply not our way.” She said. “He will act as a Lycavorian would act. They will act as Lycavorians. Nothing else will suffice for them until they can speak to you and hold you in their arms.”

“That... it seems so cruel... to act like...” Caliria spoke softly as she wiped her eyes of tears even as her heart began to lift.

Nyosa nodded her head. "And to many it is. But to us it is how things are. He punishes himself by not reaching out to you until he can touch you. Trust me, if he is as old fashion as Dutkne tells me, as I have seen and heard how his brother and father act with Arduri and our Queens... then this is the worst conceivable punishment he could possibly inflict upon himself Caliria. I do not doubt his blood burns for you... and not being able to hold you and show you what you mean to him... that is a punishment that no Lycavorian man wants to endure." Nyosa reached out and took her hand. "Trust me Caliria... you will experience his aura again. You will feel his arms around you once more. Just be patient."

"And I would not be surprised if it happens sooner rather than later." Coren spoke now. "I have had many discussions with Dutkne and Denali both and if what they tell me is correct; then he will not be far behind those forces that have already arrived. Apparently he likes to act as his father does and be unpredictable. If my guess is true, he will be arriving here far sooner than Ardan and the others think."

Caliria nodded her head slowly and wiped the tears from her eyes quickly. In the brief time she had known the Val Ardwor daughters and associated with them on Lorent, they had spoken of many things with her and Arduri and she knew neither of them would lie to her just to sooth her heavy heart. She took a deep breath and nodded again. "You are right." She said softly. "I will... I will be strong." She looked up at her father. "I need to change for class." She said.

Coren nodded. "Please be careful and be mindful of who and what is around you."

Caliria nodded once more and stepped forward to lean up and kiss his cheek. "Thank you papa." She looked at Nyosa and then leaned forward to kiss her directly on her lips. It was a statement of trust and emotion among Lycavorians Caliria knew and it showed Nyosa that she did indeed trust her words. "Thank you." She spoke softly.

Nyosa smiled and squeezed her hand. "Have faith." She said.

"I will. And I will not doubt anymore." She took another deep breath and smiled. "I must go before I am late. I will see you both for dinner." She said before turning quickly and leaving Coren with Nyosa in the room.

"Thank you." Coren said softly as he turned to the young woman who had reshaped him and stolen his heart.

Nyosa smiled up at him brilliantly. "There is no need to thank me my love." She stated.

"Nyosa..." Coren began.

Nyosa reached up quickly and put a finger to his lips. "Do not speak the words." She told him. "Do you think for an instant that I would be here with you, if I did not want to be Coren?"

"I would hope not." Coren replied. "That does not change the fact that I am quite a bit older than you Nyosa. Don't you wish to... to be with someone, live your life with someone that is closer to your age?"

Nyosa smiled brightly. "I have always been attracted to older men. My brother says it is a defect in my genes." She told him. "And you Coren Re Mydala... you simply make my wolf hormones giddy. Besides... no one my age has been able to do to me what you have done to me in our bed."

"Nyosa!" Coren exclaimed as she giggled and pressed her lush body firmly against his.

Coren had to admit to himself that it had all taken place rather quickly, but the attraction to Nyosa had been there from the outset without question. She was stunningly beautiful and full of life. She was also one of the most intelligent woman he had ever met. Nyosa was also quite uninhibited in their bed, which in turn made Coren act in a similar manner, surprising even himself. Nyosa made him feel youthful and reborn in a sense and as they laid together after their third tryst together on Lorent, he had spoken to her of things he had held inside all of his life and never shared with Devra or Tastia. She had rested on his chest and stared at him in wonder as he had finally opened the door into his emotions and inner self and shared it with a woman. Nyosa had wrapped her own heart around his in a protective manner for everything he had spoken of, everything he desired for the future, it was everything she wanted as well. After that night together Coren had vowed to hold nothing back when it came to his emotions for her.

In this young woman, who was over a thousand years younger than him, in her, Coren Re Mydala had finally found the meaning of love and commitment. He did not intend to ever let fear take that away from him. For the first time in his long life he felt complete.

Had Coren been able to see into Nyosa's thoughts he would have seen the same things. Nyosa was no stranger to men, she had taken half a dozen men into her bed since her Coming of Age fever, but Coren Re Mydala tickled her wolf senses like no man ever had. Her mother had always told them to follow their instincts

and their hearts. This had led her to their father and it would not lead them astray either. He may have been over a thousand years her senior, but Coren was a very handsome man and the most incredibly passionate and inventive lover she ever had. Coren had her singing to the moon longer and louder and in half the time than any man half his age. He was smart and thoughtful, and Nyosa could see the new resolve in his eyes to be as cruel as he needed to be in order to protect those he loved. No... Coren Re Mydala was the man she would go into the future with. And she intended it to be a future that included many nights like they had experienced as well as many children.

"It's too late." Nyosa told him as she placed her hands flat against his chest and looked up into his eyes. "I am yours Coren Re Mydala. I am Nyosa Re Mydala now. And you are mine as well."

Coren slipped his arm around her slim waist and pulled her closer, feeling her large, firm breasts press against him and flame his passions. "I am not afraid of that." He stated.

"Good... you should not be." Nyosa said.

"I have a meeting with the Board of Regents in a few hours." He said with a twinkle in his eye.

Nyosa smiled lustfully. "That is more than enough time." She said. "But if you prefer to be among stuffy politicians...?"

"Ha Ha. Very funny." Coren said.

"Are you not hungry Coren my love?" Nyosa asked sweetly.

"I'm not hungry for food." He stated confidently.

Nyosa let her hand slide down his chest to his abdomen seductively. "Then perhaps you should act on what you need to sate your hunger Coren Re Mydala." Nyosa pulled away from him, her green eyes flashing with desire and she turned and headed for their bedroom, the curve of her ass and hips swaying with volcanic like sultriness as she walked. "I assure you Coren Re Mydala... I taste much better than any food you could possibly have."

Coren set his mug on the table and smiled to himself knowing her words were so very true. "There is no doubt about that." He spoke to himself as he followed her.

"... So they are still locked in this ridiculous procedural debate Jokros?" Coren asked as he sat at his office desk going over the different reports from his most trusted advisor and aide. A man whose stock had risen in the last weeks and months because of his insightful approach when they first encountered the Lycavorians from the Union.

Jokros nodded from his high backed chair where he sat beside Rinel Val Ardwor. "Half wish to believe it outright Coren." He said. "The other half do not believe Caliria is intelligent enough to come up with the formula on her own when so many of our senior scientists could not. Ardan and his supporters are fanning this emotion among them."

"Yet to me he speaks positively." Coren said looking up at him. "He tells me they will see things my way."

"He always was a very good liar." Jokros said.

"What else?" Coren asked him.

"The Board of regents sent Galar Arn Del's daughter to greet the Union ships." Jokros told them.

Coren looked at him wide eyed. "Murie?" He asked in astonishment.

Jokros nodded. "Yes."

"Who is she?" Rinel asked.

"She is a Junior Regent who barely won the election in her district and only because of her father." Coren replied. "She also happens to be the most junior of the Regents and the one with the largest attitude. She can't stand Lycavorians and neither can her father."

Rinel shook his head. "That alone should tell you they are not taking this seriously." He said.

"Jokros... do you have any good news?" Coren asked.

"I'm afraid not and the next two items I have you will definitely not like." Jokros told him. "I was able to obtain this information from separate sources of my own within the Hall of Aides."

"Go on." Coren said.

Jokros reached out and handed him the data pad. "There is a petition going forward with the support of many senior Regents that will call for the arrest of Caliria, Arduri and Nirilo. As well as Devra and Naesta. Caliria is to be charged with treason..."

"Treason!" Coren almost shouted. "You must be joking?"

Jokros shook his head. "I wish I was." He said. "Devra, Arduri, Nirilo and Naesta will be charged with dereliction of their duties and assorted other charges that have not been decided yet. The petition is being kept very quiet right now because you have much more support than Ardan and the others believed and no one wants to be the one to charge a Re Mydala with such a crime... but the petition is gaining support as time passes."

"Who is the author?" Rinel asked.

"None other than Cruor Ahn Vernalo." Jokros answered with distaste.

"That worm!" Coren hissed.

"He put it forward originally in response to Arduri calling off the joining with Eyon. It states that officially what she did will cause irreparable harm to his family's assets and name." Jokros told him. "It has only ballooned from there."

Coren tossed the data pad down on his desk in disgust. "This!" He snarled. "This is what we have become! This foolishness! This lack of choice and emotion! Everything is done for profit now! And I was blind to it for so long!" He rose to his feet and moved to the window in his office.

"You can not put blame for this on your shoulders Coren my friend." Rinel spoke. "This began long before you ever were appointed to the Board of Regents. It has been going on for many centuries."

"I was part of it Rinel." Coren said turning to look at him.

Rinel shook his head. "No... you may have been unwittingly involved in it... but you were never part of it."

"Jokros... what can we do to head this off?" Coren asked.

"I do not think we can." Jokros replied frankly. "I am surprised that they have not acted before now to be honest. Charging Caliria with treason is only a means to silence her, get her in custody, and then interrogate her. Charging Arduri, Devra and the others is simply a way to heap more shame upon you, your name and your family."

"They will try to break you down Coren." Rinel said. "Caliria, Arduri, Devra. They will try to control you with these charges and think they can coerce you to do what they want you to do. Which is stop making waves and let things be."

Jokros nodded. "I agree with Rinel." He said. "Caliria is their true target... they will only go after the others as more leverage. Ardan must know by now that the formula you gave to him is not complete, but that the data is completely accurate. The many younger Regents who are skilled in such things will see this, as they are more attuned to advances in technology and will see that it does work. They will pass this on to others. His OSG contacts would have certainly confirmed this for him. He tells you one thing while saying the exact opposite to others. The arrival of the Union ships has also made them all very nervous."

Rinel nodded his head. "Do not be surprised if they begin to imply that they are here for nefarious reasons."

"I already counted on that fact." Coren spoke. "It is obvious to me that Ardan did not share the intelligence of how advanced the Union and Protectorate truly were. That is one of the items we used to keep some semblance of control."

Rinel leaned forward. "Coren... you need to stop referring to yourself as one of them. You are not... and you never have been."

"He is right Coren." Jokros spoke now. "This has been going on since we first discovered the Lycavorians existed. Labeling them as animals and beneath us because they could shift their forms was wrong. Many in the military do not like the fact that they treated Captain Arn Winier as a hero after he started the war to begin with. That he still actively serves is another bad taste in their mouths. You had a hand in none of this and you have always tried to be objective."

"I was still almost drawn in Jokros." Coren spoke truthfully. "If Caliria... if she had not been taken, if Devra had not done what she did in going after her... I would still think and act just like them. And it would only be worse."

“There stands the difference Coren.” Jokros told him. He had been working for Coren Re Mydala for over three hundred years and his loyalty was without question. “When shown the truth... you did not dismiss it as they have. Whether it is in regards to the Lycavorians or our own people. It is no longer about what is right or wrong... it is about who has the most assets, the most power and the most credits. They are selling our own people into sexual slavery and they do not care as long as it continues to keep them in power.”

“That is what needs to change.” Rinel said. “Any among them who had knowledge of this or were involved in it in any form needs to be taken down.”

“That will not be easy.” Jokros said.

“What about First Regent Alrerin Sha Harael Jokros?” Coren asked. “Do we have any indication that he is part of this?”

Jokros shook his head. “No. If he is involved then he has insured there are no ties to him whatsoever that can be traced.”

“I cannot believe he does not know what is going on.” Rinel said. “The OSG has been taking our young women for centuries. How can he not know there are men and women within our own government who are helping them?”

“When Caliria was taken he did not seem very sympathetic.” Coren remembered him in his office that day. “His suggestions were to approach the OSG Ambassador for compensation.”

“Alrerin Sha Harael has always been more concerned with keeping things as they are.” Rinel spoke. “Even when we were young Cadre Officers Coren. And he has shown in the past he does not care for Lycavorians.”

“Do we know that for sure?” Jokros asked. “Or is it a façade?”

“What do you mean Jokros?” Rinel asked him.

“Just as these attacks or abductions have been a façade for the Board of Regents allowing the OSG to take our females, perhaps his indifference is also a façade.” Jokros explained. “You must remember his oldest daughter Narlei was taken several hundred years ago. He has no love for the OSG, no matter what others say.”

Rinel’s head snapped around. “Narlei?” He asked. “Are you sure that is her name?”

Jokros nodded. “Yes. Why?”

Coren settled to the front edge of his desk. “Rinel?”

Rinel shook his head. “One of the Vanari females that we first rescued. It was shortly after Tarnie and I married. Her name was Narlei. She had organized the Vanari captives into very efficient work groups at the camp they were in. She tried to insure that they were well cared for as best as possible. She would even go so far as to take the place of one of the women who was either too sick or too young. All of those we rescued that day told the same story during their debriefings. If not for her, many of them would be dead. And when we conducted our strike she was the one they all looked to for guidance during the assault.”

Jokros was typing on his pad and he held it out to Rinel finally. “Is this her?”

Rinel looked at the pad and his eyes went wide. “Yes!” He exclaimed as he took it from him. “Gods! This is the First Regent’s daughter?”

Jokros nodded. “Yes.”

“That... this could explain quite a bit.” He said.

“I don’t follow Rinel.” Coren said.

“His distaste for the Lycavorians Coren? Has it grown through the years?” Rinel asked.

Coren nodded his head thoughtfully. “Now that you mention it... yes.”

Rinel nodded and got to his feet. “Narlei refused to return to Austrova when we offered to return them to their families. Since she was the spokesperson for those rescued, we allowed her to contact her family first. It was after this contact that she became adamantly opposed to returning. She is now the wife and mate to a senior Lycavorian Special Operations Colonel. His name escapes me at the moment but I know he is next in line for promotion to General and he has been the primary planner for our strikes against OSG facilities for years. They have seven children together. Five boys and two girls. A set of twins are the oldest. A boy and a girl. They are part of their father’s Special Operations Command now. He worships the ground Narlei walks upon Coren. I have seen them together when Tarnie and I have been to government events and such. They are never apart and their eyes hold nothing but devotion and love for each other.”

Coren was thoughtful for a moment and then stood up fully. “Perhaps she tried to tell him how it was back then. How they were taken by the OSG. How it was all planned?”

“I don’t know what was said to him... I am only assuming it was him she contacted. I do know she was adamant about not returning after speaking with him.” Rinel said. “This man was part of the team that rescued her and those with her. They were married within two years of her rescue. The twins followed within a year. She is among the most prominent Lycanari on Lorent and has recently been selected to sit on the Senate. That might change with the merger but I doubt it.”

“Jokros... can you find out anything?” Coren asked looking at him.

Jokros was silent for a moment. “There may be some things I can look in to.” He finally said. “It won’t be easy.”

“Do your best.” Coren said. “And do it quickly. This would explain a lot if it is true. He is... Alrerin Sha Harael is like I was before having my eyes opened. If his oldest daughter has refused to return here and tried to tell him it was our own government who sanctioned their capture... he would not have believed her. He probably thinks she is being held against her will.”

Rinel shook his head quickly. “Never.” He said. “Among the Lycanari she is perhaps the most vocal about not returning until things have changed. Now that she has a Senate seat... you can bet she will insure this does not happen until things change.”

“Can you contact her?” Coren asked. “Ask her to come here. Bring her husband. We need all the information she can give to us Rinel. And if she can help us to convince her father... that would prove invaluable.”

Rinel nodded. “I will contact Tarnie tonight. As a member of the Senate she will know what we are doing here and hopefully she will want to help.”

Coren nodded. “Good. Good. Work quickly on what you can discover Jokros. Find out what you can for I have a feeling that Androcles will arrive much sooner than we all think.”

Rinel looked at him. “Do you know that for sure Coren?”

Coren shook his head. “No... it is only a feeling that I have given what I have learned of him from Dutkne and Denali and my own experiences with him.” Coren sat back in his chair. “This young man is as predictable as the wind Rinel. He will do exactly as he has said he will... make no mistake. He is... he holds honor and the will of his people above everything except his wives. He will not barter or dance with the Board of Regents. And the only people who will be hurt are the Vanari.”

Rinel nodded. “That is the impression I got of him in speaking with them as well.” He said.

“That the First Regent has not come forward in regards to this is troubling.” Coren said. “He has always had a unique hatred for the OSG... but now he does nothing.”

Rinel met his eyes. “You think they have some leverage over him don’t you?”

Coren shook his head. “I don’t know. I don’t know what they could have on him that would make him remove himself from this situation altogether. His family is nearly as old as my own. In fact... they were beside the Re Mydalas from the day we began building this city. We did it together along with Ardan’s family. It would explain quite a bit though if they have something that he fears others will discover.”

Jokros rose to his feet. “Then I will get started right away.” He said.

Coren nodded. “Thank you Jokros... and please let me know anything you discover.”

Jokros nodded as he headed for the hidden door into Coren’s office. Rinel watched his boyhood friend get out of his chair once more and moved back to the window and brought the mug to his lips for a drink. He rose from his own seat and came up behind him.

“Coren?”

“I feel torn about all this Rinel my friend. The desire to protect my children is nearly overwhelming... as is the desire to protect our people. And I feel that I have betrayed your friendship Rinel.” Coren said as he looked at him.

Rinel smiled warmly. “If you are referring to Nyosa... you do not need to worry about that Coren. That is not an issue.”

“I am sleeping with your daughter Rinel... who just happens to be no older than Arduri.” Coren said. “You will stand there and tell me you have nothing to say?”

Rinel chuckled now. "I had plenty to say. As did Tarnie. All of which Nyosa promptly ignored in her quest for you. She has done things her own way as all of our children have done for years." Rinel shook his head. "Tarnie and I often wonder if they will ever do what we say. But we have also told them to always follow their instincts and their hearts."

"And you advised her against entering into a relationship with me?" Coren asked.

Rinel shook his head. "Quite the opposite old friend. When she told us you had been together the first night Tarnie and I were thrilled."

"What?" Coren gasped in disbelief. "She told you that?"

"Nyosa has always been the more adventurous and open of our daughters." Rinel told him. "And she has always been attracted to older men. None truly enthralled her as you did Coren. She knew that the morning we came to your suite. When we saw the look in her eyes and saw how she spoke of you... we knew she had chosen you."

"And you were not angry with me?" Coren asked.

"Angry with you for what?" Rinel spoke. "Nyosa told us she practically had to force herself upon you before you got the hint and let your own feelings take over. I have learned many things since being among the Lycavorians my friend." Rinel told him. "Foremost among that is the deep seated faith they have in their instincts and fortune itself. It is something I have embraced as well and it is something Tarnie and I have taught all of our children. If fate meant for you and Nyosa to be together... then so be it. It appears it did... and if she is happy... that is all that matters to Tarnie and I."

"And you do not care I am so much older than her?" Coren said.

"Do you love my daughter Coren Re Mydala?" Rinel asked. "Truly love her in a way that you can not find the words for?"

Coren was silent for a moment because at the moment he knew his friend was right. He could not find the words to openly speak about what he felt for Nyosa. It was far deeper and more intense than anything he had ever felt before. Not even Devra, in all her beauty and intelligence, had elicited such emotions from him as Nyosa had. He looked at Rinel. "There... there are truly no words that I know of that could explain what I feel for her Rinel. I have never felt it before in my life time." He said finally. "And it feels... it feels so very good."

Rinel nodded his head. "Just as there are no words that can explain my love for Tarnie." He said. "That is what matters my friend. Just do not plan on children too soon! I am much too young for that."

Coren could not help it and he broke out into laughter. "Nor could I!" He said. "At least not yet!"

Rinel nodded. "Good. Now lets get started so we can meet with this Rothryn Dyack when he arrives with Denali Leonidas. I assume you have a way into the Rothryn embassy so that no one knows I am yet among the living? I know all we learned together at the Cadre Academy has not left your mind."

Coren smiled at him. "As a matter of fact... I do."

"Good. No sense in spoiling one of our surprises for them." Rinel said. "It will be very rewarding to see the looks on their faces when they see me."

AUSTROVA ROTHRYN EMBASSY

"...Why?" Dyack spoke from behind his desk as Aleatia poured herself a mug of tea and got coffee for him. "Why send these false reports to me? Why lie?"

Aleatia moved over to stand beside him and held out the mug of coffee. "Dyack...?"

"She is already a member of the Circle of Shamans!" Dyack protested as he took the mug from his wife. "Why would Harira do this?"

"We do not believe she actually agrees with the Circle. Or is a member." Kelelm spoke from the chair in front of his father's desk.

Dyack looked at him quickly and then back to Aleatia. "What? Aleatia is this true?"

Aleatia nodded her head. “Yes. Kelelm saw it first after speaking with Androcles. Her... Harira’s reaction to Sehri becoming Andro’s wife and mate was not what any of us expected. She was angry and... she almost seemed worried She even tried to force Sehri to dismiss her union with them.”

“If she is not a Shaman of the Circle then...” Dyack’s eyes grew wider as he realized what he was about to say.

Aleatia nodded her head. “Yes. We now believe she is actually a member of the Rothryn Science Academy Leadership sent to infiltrate the Circle in order to learn what they are doing. And to see how many students they had and what their skills were.”

Dyack turned and sat down in his chair. “That would mean they know everything about Sehri and...”

Aleatia shook her head as she reached out and put her hand on his shoulder to calm him. “I have already been in contact with the Cleric Mother my love.” She said quickly. “She told me that they have suspected Harira for some time and nearly all of their true assets have either been moved or changed to keep them safe.”

Dyack looked at her. “She will inform them of Sehri.” He said.

Aleatia smiled openly. “Let them.” She said confidently. “If they wish to test Androcles Leonidas by trying to attempt anything with Sehri, they will not find the results very agreeable for them. Sadi and the others are lethal in their own right husband and they have already assured me Sehri will not be without one of them as well as an additional security detail the entire time she is on Austrova or even here.”

Dyack looked at Kelelm. “Are these *Durcunusaan* as proficient as I have heard Dutkne and Denali say Kelelm?”

Kelelm nodded his head. “Without question father.” He answered. “Especially those that are assigned to any of the Royal details.”

“Dyack...” Aleatia spoke softly waiting until he looked at her. “There is something else you need to know.” She spoke as she sat on the edge of his desk.

“More?”

Aleatia nodded. “Sehri... she can shift now.”

Dyack’s eyes grew wider and he came to his feet like a shot once more. “She can shift?!” He gasped. “Aleatia... are you saying she can change? Like... like our people were able to do so long ago. Like those from the Protectorate?”

Aleatia nodded her head. “Part of the joining for Lycavorians within the Union is that the male bites the female he has chosen to be his wife and mate... with her consent of course. He shares his blood with her and she with him during the pinnacle of an act of love between them. Androcles Leonidas’s bloodline is the purest bloodline within the Lycavorian Union Dyack. Just as his father and mother are and certainly far more pure than any of our people could ever hope to obtain. Most of these Lycavorians can trace their ancestry directly back to Lycavore, to the strongest packs dating back hundreds of thousands of years. But the Leonidas bloodline is the purest. A few other of the older Lycavorian families make up the next purest one percent within the Union population as a whole.

“When Andro bit Sehri, his blood, the virus within his blood raced throughout her body and replaced the core pieces of her DNA that were removed when our people were taken from Lycavore so many hundreds of thousands of years ago and were brought here by the Ancients. Who the Union calls the Pralors. We all have the core DNA strands within us; they are just no longer active. She is... she is so beautiful in wolf form Dyack. Her fur, her eyes... she is so powerful and beautiful.” Aleatia told him. “I watched her running with Sadi and Ne’Veha the morning I left to join the ship that brought us here. She is learning quickly. Almost as if the knowledge was inbred within her.”

“It could be like this for all of our people?” Dyack asked.

Aleatia nodded. “Androcles’ sister Eliani, she is Hadarian...”

“The Healers?”

“Yes... I saw several at work while we were there and Eliani is like her mother Queen Anja. She is considered one of the most powerful and gifted of their people.” Aleatia told him. “She told me it was possible to develop a base serum to use that will return the DNA strands to our people. A generic gene therapy she called it.”

Dyack spun around. "Damn it! These are the things I wished I had known weeks and months ago!" He exclaimed. "I have treated Denali and Dutkne like the plague ever since I got the message from Harira. Even after I discovered that our own people are taking part in this Slavery Ring."

"What?" Aleatia gasped stunned.

Kelelm came to his feet. "Father... are you... are you sure?"

Dyack nodded his head. "Yes. Before... before I acted so foolishly... we were working together to try and discover the extent of the OSG's reach inside the Vanari and outside. I have been approached in the past by them on several different business deals. Deals that I can only assume concerned Vanari females. I have always refused. In order to try and obtain more information I reached out to them with the hint I was now interested. I discovered that at least a dozen of our most powerful men and women have Vanari females as slaves. Hidden away at different locations here on our planet as well as many of our colonies."

"How did you discover this?" Aleatia asked.

Dyack looked at her. "You do not wish to know my love." He answered. "Suffice to say that some of our people are just as deeply involved in this entire affair as the Vanari and those from the Protectorate."

"What happened?" Kelelm asked.

"Recently Denali advised me to sever all ties because he sensed the OSG would come after them. Try to eliminate them and take Coren's daughter prisoner again. He said the end game was coming." Dyack explained. "That is why he moved them to Lorent for a few weeks. I did as he asked... but by then a few of my rivals caught the wind of rumors in the air and have been pursuing it."

"Barnak?" Aleatia exclaimed.

Dyack shook his head. "Surprisingly... no. Barnak has been quiet and unassuming since you departed. It is odd for him... but I welcome the respite from his constant badgering. Our son however..." Dyack shook his head. "Anroth is becoming increasing militant in his dealings and manner. But I don't think this stems from Barnak any longer. The Rothryn Governing Body is hesitant right now. They do not know if these rumors about what I have been doing are true or why. Some of them may even think what I was doing is acceptable."

"I will increase security on you!" Kelelm stated immediately.

"No Kelelm." Dyack said. "I do not believe I am in any danger. I think whoever among our people is involved in this are waiting."

"Waiting for what?" Aleatia asked.

"Waiting to see what this Androcles will do." Dyack spoke. "My concern now it seems... my concern is what exactly is the Rothryn Science Academy doing to those of our people who show advanced signs of Etheric use. That is what now concerns me more."

Aleatia reached out and took his arm. "Dyack... it can't be good." She said.

Dyack nodded in agreement. "Of that I have little doubt."

MANNE BASE ONE PRIVATE DINING LOUNGE

It certainly was not what she was expecting, but Tinra was rapidly coming to understand that these men and women were about as predictable as the wind. She had spent three hours just walking and being with Kesyla and to say she had learned far more than she imagined in that three hour period about these men and women was an understatement. The six Queens of the Lycavorian Union entered through the double doors of the smaller and private dining lounge that had only been finished yesterday. All of them were holding hands with each other and they were giggling like young girls about something that only they knew. All of them had chosen to dispense with their uniforms it appeared and they were now dressed in casual clothes. Clothes that did absolutely nothing to hide their firm, lush bodies or the deeply tanned skin all of them possessed. Seeing them dressed in this way, Tinra soon realized that all of them had exquisitely defined muscular female forms. Aricia, Anja and Dysea had more clearly distinct musculature, but Isabella, Cirith and For'mya were not far behind. Tinra had noticed that this physical trait was very prominent on Lycavorians and most of the species that

followed Martin Leonidas. When she asked about this, she discovered it was a holdover from the days of Martin's father and the Spartan way of life. When Martin's father died, this mentality and way of life exploded all across the Union as a way to honor his sacrifice. It grew even more pronounced when Martin returned to claim his father's throne. There were no obese or overweight individuals within the Union military she learned. All of them were in exceptional physical shape. It was a way of life for them, as natural as one lacing up their boots she discovered. It was not something she was accustomed to seeing, for there were many officers within the small Pralor fleet that looked as if they could lose a few pounds. She discovered that the majority of the Union's population was very fit, and even those men and women who could shed a few pounds here and there were healthy and fit.

Tinra watched as they came up to her and halted.

"Lady Tinra." Aricia spoke first as she expected for she had been told that Aricia was the unofficial spokesperson when they were all together. "A pleasure to finally meet you. For all of us."

Tinra bowed her head slightly. "Queen Aricia... a pleasure for me as well. I understand that as Queens you must all be very busy and..."

"Lady Tinra... we are not..." Dysea began interrupting her words. She stopped and looked at Anja. "*Melyanna*... what is the word?"

"Untouchable." Anja replied instantly.

"Yes... we are not untouchable." Dysea continued looking back to her. "We are no more important than any other person within the Union."

"There... there are many who would debate that with you it seems." Tinra said seeing all of them make what amounted to disgusted looks.

"Something that we do not like and try to avoid." For'mya said in response.

"We never seem to succeed however." Aricia finished.

"What... what should I call you then?" Tinra asked. "I wish this to be as comfortable for all of you as possible."

"Our names would be a good start." Bella told her. "We don't like the pretence of royalty when in private or secluded surroundings."

"But this will... this interview will be seen by millions of my people." Tinra said.

"But right now... it's just us." Anja said.

Tinra nodded with a smile. "As you wish." She said. She motioned with her hand behind her and saw their eyes light up in surprise. "Martin suggested couches as opposed to chairs. He had this brought from somewhere."

Tinra watched as they all smiled and moved to the single large couch. It was not really a couch per say, for it was much wider and allowed for more than one person to sit back to back. It was really more of a large bench with plush backing.

"This is the couch from our quarters." Cirith spoke as they began to settle to the furniture.

"That man is just plain eerie." Anja said as she settled in the front.

Aricia nodded in agreement as she sat beside her. "Indeed."

Tinra watched as they seemed to pick predetermined spots on the couch as if they always did this. If this was the couch from their quarters, she realized that they must have done this a thousand times before. Aricia and Anja sat in the front while For'mya and Cirith scooted behind them on the soft furniture and squeezed their shoulders between them. Dysea and Isabella took up positions on either end, fully sitting on the couch with their feet pulled up lotus style beneath them.

Tinra turned and quickly drew a single chair over in front of them and settled into it as they got comfortable. She saw them nudging one another playfully and she had to smile. So far this was turning out to be unlike anything she had imagined. They saw her watching them and all of them chuckled.

"Martin usually sits here." Aricia spoke as she patted the couch between her and Anja. "It is strange without him."

"Definitely more room without his big ass taking up space!" Anja declared. Her jade green eyes flew opened and she lifted her hand to cover her mouth as the others burst into laughter. "Oops!"

"Are you not the one who has always said Martin's ass is many things... but big is not one of them?" Isabella countered.

Anja rolled her eyes with a smile. “Ok... ok...” She said.

Tinra could only watch with a beaming smile as they laughed together once more. She had not yet been fully introduced to all of Martin’s Queens, but just seeing them interact with one another was extremely humorous. That they were obviously the best of friends was without any question. Even the biggest fool could see that.

“So...” Tinra spoke drawing their attention. “Where do we begin?”

They all looked at her. “This is your interview Lady Tinra.” For'mya spoke for all of them. “Aside from the obvious fact that I’m sure you are aware, none of us will comment on anything concerning military operational security or operations, you may ask what you wish.” She said with a half smile. “Whether we chose to answer those questions... well...”

Tinra nodded her head. “Of course.” She said. “I had... I had a prepared list of questions that I put together on the trip here but...”

“But what?” Aricia asked.

“After what I have seen these last few days I don’t think they will apply anymore.” Tinra told her. “They were... they were questions that were preconceived given what we knew of Lycavorians and others as a whole.”

“They do not apply any longer?” Anja asked her.

Tinra shook her head quickly. “No. Not in any way.” She answered. “I would like to... I would like to start with each of you. All of you. Who you are.”

“We are really very dull.” Dysea spoke.

Tinra smiled. “Somehow... somehow I sincerely doubt that.” She stated.

Anja laughed softly. “Told you it wouldn’t work *Melda Min*.”

Dysea matched her happy face. “It was worth a shot.”

Tinra found herself very relaxed in their company. They did not seem to be restrained or subdued in any manner whatsoever and this immediately put her at ease as well. All of them were exceptionally friendly and open it appeared. “I think we should begin with something simple.” She said. “It is a question that many of my people will ask I’m sure and it... it is rather extraordinary to be honest.”

“What is?” Cirith asked.

“How is it possible that... how is it possible that all of you are in love and married to the same man? That fact is completely and utterly without question, for it can be seen in your eyes whenever any of you are around him.” Tinra asked.

“If you perhaps have several thousand years... you will discover the why of it at the same time we do.” For'mya spoke with a warm smile. “We have not figured it out... nor do we care.”

“How is it that you get along with each other so seamlessly then? Is there no jealousy among you? No... how do I say this... no competition for Martin’s affection? It just seems that... frankly it doesn’t seem possible at all.”

“Competition?” Anja stated. “We don’t need to compete with each other... trust me there is plenty of Martin Leonidas for all of us if you get my meaning.”

Tinra couldn’t help the blush of her cheeks at this open, unashamed announcement and it showed on her face.

“*Melyanna!*” Dysea declared with a smile and slight blush to her own tanned skin.

“What?” Anja exclaimed. “It’s true!”

“You don’t need to embarrass our guest with torrid details of our love life with *Nauta Melme* however.” Dysea continued.

Anja smiled completely embarrassment free. “Torrid is good though. It makes very good news.”

They all laughed and Tinra noted that none of them disputed Anja’s comments in the least.

“I think the only thing we compete with each other in is who gets to the turbo wash first every morning.” Isabella spoke with a giggle. “Martin gave up fighting us for it over a decade ago. He goes to the officer’s barracks now.”

“True enough.” Anja said.

Aricia turned back to Tinra and smiled. “Forgive Anja’s... slip of the tongue...” She said. “We are... we are not shy about our feelings for Martin.”

Tinra smiled as well at her statement. "That is... that is quite obvious." She had a thought just then and she activated her drone with a small remote in her hand. "I would like to show you something. Then perhaps you can comment on it." They watched the small drone park just over Tinra's left shoulder. "This is from the interview I did with the King yesterday." She said. "He speaks of all of you."

"Oh boy!" Isabella spoke up. "Do we really want to know? We have given him many sleepless nights through the years."

Tinra smiled. "Yes... I think you will find it... well I found it quite profound."

"Marty? Profound?" Anja exclaimed.

Aricia looked at her. "Does he know what profound means Anja?" She asked playfully.

"I don't think so." Anja answered as they all laughed together again. "Martin isn't very good at expressing his emotions with words. She said to Tinra. "He is more of a hands on type man."

"Really?" Tinra said as she activated the drone and suddenly they were looking at an image of Martin. He was sitting in a chair aboard the *ARC ROYAL* in what appeared to be the main conference room. "I found his answer to my questions about all of you to be remarkably profound." She tapped the remote once more with her finger and the image fluttered then became active, noticing that they were looking at her oddly.

"...Ask you about your Queens." Tinra's voice could be heard easily though she was not in the picture.

"What about them?" Martin answered.

"You are mated... or married depending on your use of words... to six different women. Six very different women and very beautiful women. Many of my people will wonder if this is... many people will find it odd. Even demeaning in some ways. They will say that you can not possibly be in love with all of them. That they are nothing more than a harem? What is your answer to those who will think things like this?"

"Fuck them!" Martin blurted out which caused Aricia and the others to burst into laughter as well at his response. "*Sibfla!* I wasn't suppose to say that! Sorry!" He followed quickly with those words.

Tinra could be heard next, but there was a large amount of humor in her voice they noted. "It is quite alright Martin." She said. "It happens all of the time."

"Aricia and Anja always tell me I speak before thinking sometimes." Martin said with an embarrassed smile. "I apologize."

"It's fine... really." Tinra could be heard saying. "My people would be very interested to hear what your answer is though. Can you answer that?"

They watched as Martin was silent for a long moment looking at her. He leaned forward in the chair and rubbed his large hands together. "I don't make it a habit of caring what people think of me." Martin began. "I do what I think is right... whoever that may piss off. As for my Queens...?" Martin's eyes focused on Tinra and the drone obviously shifted its position for his face filled the small image and his dark brown eyes and face were all they were viewing. "I don't know how it came to be... or why. I don't particularly care at this point in my life. You and others see six different women. Six, exquisitely beautiful woman some may say I forced into my bed and my life. Nothing could be further from the truth regardless of what others say. When I look at them... at any of them... I don't see six women. I see one. They are the very best of friends you know. They share my life and my bed... but they also share everything with each other. Each of them hold... each of them holds a part of me inside them. A part of who I am. I would not be the man I am today without them. Any of them. They are my strength, my purpose, and my life. They are the reason I draw breath every day. Why I go on. The children they have given to me... and will give me in the future... it makes them all the more precious to me. I would glass planets and destroy stars for any of them because they are what makes me... well... me. You ask what I see when I look at them?"

"I see my future. My hopes. My dreams. All wrapped into one. If there are six souls that should be one... it is my Queens. I love everything about them. Their scents are like addicting drugs. Their bodies like temples. Their beauty like goddesses. Their minds... well they are a hell of a lot more intelligent than I will ever be. Though... I have often questioned what they see in me to be honest. Big, ugly scarred bastard that I am." Martin's eyes appeared as if he was looking directly into the drone. "They are me. I am them. When I look into their eyes, any of their eyes, I see the parts of my soul reflecting back at me. The man I am. The day when I don't see that anymore... that will be the day I draw my last breath and leave all this to my children." Martin leaned back in the chair and drew in a deep breath. "And believe me... my children will not be happy about that. Especially Andro." He said with a smile.

Tinra touched the remote ending the recording and turned to look at them on the couch. Though she did not know it at the time, there were very few things that could leave the Queens of the Lycavorian Union utterly speechless. Martin's words had done just that. Profound was not a word any of them would chose to describe what they were all feeling at this very moment. They knew without question that Martin loved each and every one of them without doubt or pause. He showed that to them each and every day and ever since For'mya had returned to them, he had held nothing back from any of them. Yet hearing the words pour from his lips as they had, hearing the sincere emotion those words carried within them, it left them unable to speak.

"*Carians Nauta Melme.*" Dysea was the first to speak, her emerald green eyes moist. She leaned forward and rested her head on Cirith's shoulder and Tinra saw all of them grip each other's hands tightly as they moved closer together on the couch.

Aricia finally looked at Tinra, her own azure colored eyes slightly red as she held back tears. "Forgive us." She said softly. "We... we can swim within Martin's thoughts whenever we wish. He shows us every moment of every day how he feels for all of us but we have just never, he is such a traditional Spartan man and we have never heard him speak it with words in a such a way."

"God... I want to bawl my eyes out right now!" Anja declared as she lifted her hand and wiped away the few tears that had rolled down her cheeks.

"So do I." Cirith echoed as she rubbed her cheek against Anja's from over her shoulder.

Tinra watched as they shared a soft, lingering kiss, unconcerned that she was there and the drone was recording everything. She smiled as she saw the love between them and the love for Martin. Perhaps they could not explain it in a way someone would understand, but it was very real to them and to Martin. That is all that mattered.

"I would say from your reactions that all of you just answered that question fully." Tinra said with a warm and friendly voice. "I suspect that it will leave no doubts in anyone's mind, regardless if any of you can explain it or not."

"Some things... some things only the gods of destiny and fate can explain." For'mya said softly.

Tinra nodded her head. "Indeed." She shifted in her chair. "I think perhaps we will move on to something else. That topic is quite settled in my opinion. I understand that each of you holds a type of governmental position within the Lycavorian Union. Could you explain what each of you does? It's quite obvious to everyone that none of you are idle for I have seen you directing different things within this very camp. And you do not act as any royalty I have ever studied... among any species. None of you are predictable."

This caused all of them to laugh softly as they regained their composure and clung to one another tightly.

"As our beloved husband and mate would say... predictable is boring." Aricia spoke with a bright smile.

Tinra laughed at this and nodded. "So it would seem."

Isabella took a deep breath. "Anja directs the Union's medical apparatus... Dysea has final say on everything concerning education... For'mya has Command and Control over most of the Union's logistical aircraft. Aricia, Cirith and I have command of separate specialized units within the Union military structure. Once more as our husband and mate would say... we all have day jobs."

"Yet you... all of you are out here now with him." Tinra said.

"We may be the King and Queens of the Lycavorian Union..." Aricia said. "However... we are not special in any way. No one in our family is. It is... it is the Spartan mentality within all of us I suppose. It is how we have raised our children. Martin leads his own units, though given his experience and skill, they are much larger. Our sons have their own commands, our daughters their own duties within the military or fleet operations."

"None of you... are any of you involved in the politics within the Union?" Tinra asked.

"Martin's aunt is the Prime Minister." Anja took it up now. "But the Union is made up of Senators from every species. There are over three thousand of them now."

"Three thousand..." Tinra gasped. "Exactly... if I may ask... exactly how large is the Lycavorian Union?"

"Over nine hundred different species and nearly thirty trillion people." Anja answered. "At least that's what it was at the last census five years ago."

Tinra was truly stunned at this news. This is one of the questions she had wanted to ask Martin but never got around to it. This news was going to shock many people she had no doubt there. "And everyone... everyone has a say in the government?" She asked.

Dysea nodded now. "Everyone. The number of senators directly reflects the population count of each species' total... but yes... everyone is represented. Each Senator is elected for ten year terms but because of the longevity of many of the Union's people, there is a ten term limit so that fresh ideas and such are filtering throughout the government always. The only position that had no term limit until recently is that of the Prime Minister but the Union will be holding an election for this position within a few months."

"Yet Martin's Aunt is Prime Minister and he is King." She said.

Anja nodded now. "And if she loses the election then there will be a new Prime Minister and we will work with them as we have Deia. The position of King is... how do I say this... the King of the Lycavorian Union has always been a member of Martin's family. From the moment of its inception millennia ago. Martin is also King of Sparta, on Earth. This position was held by Martin's father over three thousand years ago. When his father and brother died a Steward was chosen to rule until a descendant of Martin's blood was born. When Martin returned to Sparta, the Spartan Senate voted unanimously to insure that no one but a member of Martin's blood ever held the throne of Sparta again. It is now also written into our Chronicles of Lycavorian Law and the Union Charter that no one but a member of Martin's family will ever hold these two positions going into the future. That was decided by the majority vote of the people of the Union four years after Martin returned to claim his throne."

"How much of a majority?" Tinra asked with a neutral voice. "With so many people... there must be some who..."

"Don't agree with how Martin and we rule?" For'mya said with a nod. "Yes... there are many who think they can do better. However... they can not be King by the will of our people."

"How close was this vote of your people that passed this law?" Tinra asked them. "Sixty percent? Sixty-five percent? It must have been very close. How many of your people can vote?"

"Not really." Anja answered. "It was... Bella... you have the best memory. What was it exactly?"

"It was a Referendum of the people by the people. Ninety-eight point seven percent of the Union voted over a week long period." Isabella answered proudly seeing Tinra's eyes grow wide. "Of those that voted... ninety-six point three percent voted in favor of the law. It was passed by near unanimous vote of the Union Senate the next day."

"By the Ancients!" Tinra gasped aloud now clearly stunned at this news.

"He hates it..." Anja spoke again. "We all hate it... how so many people view us as so different. We aren't really. We just want to live in peace and watch our children grow in safety and happiness. Just like everyone else. We all want the same things for our future and we swore to each other that if we could have it... then everyone would have it. Everything Martin has done since he has been King has been to the benefit of our people and their continued livelihood and happiness. Everything. There have been some who wanted to take that from us..."

Tinra glanced up and looked at her. "And?"

Anja shrugged her slim shoulders. "They failed." She stated simply. "Nothing more to really say on that."

"You are out here now. So far from home. Why? Aren't you needed to govern?" Tinra finally asked.

Tinra was surprised when they all chuckled at this. "The Union government chugs along quite well without us." Isabella spoke once more. "We only get involved in something when it concerns major decisions. Martin is... Martin hates to be idle. He is quite adventurous despite what he lets everyone see. And he has a tendency to find trouble wherever he goes. Even when he is not looking for it."

"And that is why you came out here?" Tinra asked. "So far from home?"

Aricia shook her head quickly. "Oh no. Our trip here has purpose." She replied. "There are those among us who have direct links to the Pralor people. We discovered a map on a planet in the Alpha Quadrant. A map we have followed here. Part of the decision to come out here was to follow this map and discover the Pralor people. The dragons among your people are the ancestors to the dragon adolescents that travel with us now. Martin and his Bonded brother Torma, our son Androcles and his Bonded sister Elynth... they are Talon

Guardians of the dragon species. This is a revered position among dragons and it was their desire to try and reunite them.”

“You also said that there were men and women among your own people here now that have ties to the Pralor people.” Tinra asked the question though she was already well aware of the answer. She wanted this segment to have particular impact on the Pralor people as a whole. “How... how is that possible? To the best of my knowledge of our history... no Pralor has ever set foot in the Alpha Quadrant.”

Anja shook her head. “No... that is not quite accurate.” She stated. “There were several million Pralors who visited the Alpha Quadrant many thousands of years ago. Their ships crashed within the Alpha Quadrant. One of them on Lycavore. The original homeworld of Martin’s people.”

“There are many among the Lycavorian people who can claim blood ties with the Pralor people. Our beloved Martin among them. He wanted to... he wanted to discover his history. He wanted to learn of those who came before him.” Aricia stated.

It had been decided before hand that she and Anja would be the ones who answered these questions that Tinra would ask. Aricia and Anja had more direct experience with the history of the merger on Lycavore. They were surprised at how she had begun their interview, but given what they had heard, none of them were in the least bit upset. When they saw she was finally directing the interview in the direction that Delnash wanted it to go... Aricia and Anja took over answering the questions.

“You are saying that Martin Leonidas has the blood of Pralors within his veins?” Tinra asked.

“As do all of our children now.” Anja spoke.

“Do you know... has he discovered who these ancestors are?” Tinra asked setting up the answer she knew would send shockwaves through the Pralor people on Artaaya and their two colony worlds.

“Martin Leonidas is the Great-Great grandson of the former Chief Elder of your people.” Anja stated. “And he has come home to learn about his history. From those who are also his people. Your people.”

“Which Chief Elder?” Tinra asked. “There have been many in our history.”

“We discovered that before we came here.” Anja answered her. “Martin is the direct descendant of Chief Elder Sumar. If the information we have obtained is correct, he was the most popular of your Chief Elders. And he was also the very first and most powerful of your Praetorians.”

“Wait...” Tinra declared. “Are you saying that...?”

Anja smiled now, her jade green eyes bright. “Yes. It is the other part of why we came out here. Martin Leonidas, four of his sons and one of his daughters... they all carry this gene within them. The Praetorian gene as you call it. At least that is what Wayonn and Murano call it. They were quite ecstatic when they discovered Martin and our children existed. And so were we.”

Even though she already knew this... knew it before she ever came here... hearing Anja say the words so powerfully and with enormous pride... it made Tinra react in the way she did.

“By the Holy Ancients with the Rift of Time!” She blurted loudly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SPARTA'S WRATH

PORT LANDING BAY 2

THREE HOURS BEFORE FIRST JUMP

While the landing bay held a good portion of the Pralor APOC Fighter Drones that they could launch on standby, there were only a few technicians going from fighter to fighter doing daily checks on the systems of the remote piloted fighters. The APOC fighter Drones were not as large as a *TEMPEST* fighter, but they still required regular maintenance checks even though they were unmanned. All of the APOC Fighter Drones had been layered with a light coating of Dragon Armor which tripled their survivability in a fight. The technicians and engineers that were now assigned to *SPARTA'S WRATH* were proud of the work they had done so far and they weren't about to let it go to waste. They were now assigned to the largest, most advanced and lethal

starship within the entire Union Fleet, and quite possibly the entire universe. It was a dream assignment and they intended to make sure it stayed that way.

The Technicians and Engineers didn't take notice of the *STRIKER* Mark II that rested on the far end of the landing bay, nor the detachment of *Durcunusaan* troops that loosely circled the ship. What a few of them did notice was when the dragons began to disembark from the ship. Elynth was one of the most widely recognized dragons within the Union along with her father Torma, her mother Isheeni, her brother Jeth and Anja's dragon Miath. Normally if you saw one of them, it usually meant the King, Queen or Prince Androcles was nearby. In this case Andro stood a few meters away from the back of the ramp and Elynth moved directly to where he stood when she exited. Her large head came down and Andro's arms encircled her snout as much as he was able as, pressing his forehead to her warm scales.

"It is so very good to have you back sister." Andro spoke the words against her scales and Elynth's golden eyes closed in happiness.

I like doing missions such as this without each other... but we are happy we are back as well. Elynth told him as she canted her head towards him in affection. *And it is not nearly as exciting as when we are together.*

Anthar was the next to exit, followed by Majeir, Caydren and Cinol, all of them looking pleased with themselves if that was possible for a dragon. As Elynth turned her muscular body and settled gently to the deck beside Andro, he greeted the rest of them in a similar manner. When that was finished and Caydren settled beside his twin brother on the deck, Andro turned and looked at the last dragon that remained near the top of the ramp.

Marux had witnessed firsthand what Androcles Leonidas could do on that fateful day not so very long ago, and even though Elynth and Anthar both had told him he had nothing to fear, Marux felt that same fear gripping his stomach. Androcles was a Talon Guardian of his species. An almost mythical being to dragons and like Elynth, with far more power and control than Marux would ever have. He and Elynth had swatted Javier Moran's dragon Naruth from the sky like he was a child, and then ended his life in the very next moment. To say that Marux feared this much smaller Lycavorian would be an understatement of the century. He watched Andro turn to face him.

You are among friends now Marux. Andro's voice filled his mind easily and the warmth of the words was not lost on Marux. *You no longer need fear anything.*

Marux took several tentative steps forward down the ramp. He appeared thin and his scales were very dry. Dante Moran had obviously let his health suffer once they had left Earth. The musculature was still there, but it would be several weeks before Marux was back to full health with glowing scales and a rich diet.

I... I am shamed... Marux spoke timidly.

Andro moved up the ramp to stand directly in front of him unafraid. Had it been anyone else, Marux could have easily bitten them in half, even in his poor physical health. All he felt now was fear and he shied away slightly when Andro stopped in front of him. Andro held up his hands... palms out.

What happened was neither your fault nor your doing Marux. Andro spoke to him again. *I will not place blame when you could have done nothing to stop it.*

It is... it feels so empty. Marux told him softly.

Andro reached up without fear and placed his hands on Marux's snout seeing his eyes meet his intently. Marux lowered his body to the deck plating of the ramp as he felt the warmth of Andro's hands and the powerful emotion that flowed within them easily. That very soothing warmth grew outward from where his palms rested and for the first time in his life Marux felt true acceptance begin to fill him.

It will not be empty for long Marux. Andro told him. *Your bond with Dante Moran was never meant to be. If it had been... that monster Xaxon would not have been able to sever it so easily. If at all.*

Marux gazed at Andro. *Then where... where do I belong?*

You belong here. Andro told him. *Here among those of us who will help you to recover and where you will be welcome.*

Welcome? Marux spoke. *I will never be welcome anywhere after what I have done.*

Are you so sure? Andro asked him as he motioned with his head to the side. Marux followed his gaze and saw Jeth, Tharua and three other dragons moving towards where they were standing. He did not yet know they were the Bonded brother and sister of Deion and Nara Leonidas, Jeru and Mayla. The last dragon was

older but his rich dark brown scales proved her was in the same excellent physical health as the others. Marux had never seen him before and did not know this was the dragon that was now Jomann's constant companion. His name was Jenso, and though they were not bonded together, the life experiences of them both had brought them very close together very quickly. Marux looked back to Andro.

You are here now Marux. With those who will be your friends if you allow it. We can show you so much if you let us. No one will remove you. We won't let them. Here you can rest and be among those who care for you. Here you can learn what it means to be a dragon. A true dragon. And here you can grow into what you were meant to. We are going away on a long trip and you will have ample time to experience all you have missed. I also... when you are ready I also have a job for you. Andro told him.

Marux's eyes grew a little wider. *A job?* He asked.

I will tell you in time. Andro said. *For now... for now be among us. Learn from us. And share yourself with us. You will find peace and your purpose one day. Let it come to you.*

I will always carry what happen with me Androcles. Marux said softly. *I will never have the stigma of what Dante did lifted from me.*

Andro nodded his head. *We can not change the past Marux. And there are many things each of us have to do that we do not want to do. That is a stigma that all of us carry.*

Do you... do you have this stigma?

Andro met his eyes. *Marux... the stigma and shame I carry for what I have had to do in the name of good, it dwarfs any you might think surrounds you. You move on my friend. My brother. You move on and do not let it rule who you are or who you could become.*

Will... will I ever have redemption? Marux asked.

Andro smiled at him then and let his fingers spread out even further on his dry scales. *Vollenth found redemption and new life Marux my brother... and your redemption began the day Xaxon severed your bond with Dante. The moment his twisted and evil presence left you... your redemption began.*

Grab onto that Marux. Elynth's voice echoed and he lifted his head to look at her resting beside Anthar, his thicker and longer tail casually stroking her own in the manner of all mated dragons. *Grab onto that and never let go. We go forward Marux. Always forward and never back.*

Then that is what I wish. Marux said returning his eyes to Androcles. *I never want to go back. Never.*

Andro nodded his head. *Then let's get you fed and cared for. You look a few hundred pounds lighter than you should be and we need to return the health to your scales. And you... you need a bath my friend. Badly.*

Marux lowered his head slightly, his eyes dropping from Androcles' gaze. *I do smell don't I?*

Andro laughed. *Not as bad as some of us have smelled in the past I assure you. Jeth fell into the burrow of a Folcani desert Worgan once.*

Fell! Jeth announced as he settled to the deck now as well. *I rolled down the anse hill and right through a pile of sibfla bigger than me! Those foul creatures cannot even take the time to sibfla outside of where they live! It took a week before the smell wore off. Even Lisisa would not come near me.*

Jeth... I have told you about your language! Tharua spoke as she butted him playfully in his side with her snout.

Andro chuckled. *You see... He reached up and stroked his scales again. Leave your past where it belongs Marux. In the past. It's time to move on now my dragon brother. And all of us here will help you.*

...time to move on now my dragon brother. And all of us here will help you.

Sarlana stood far above the Landing bay surface on the simple catwalk like structure and simply watched and listened. She had first feared for the young Marux after hearing what he had taken part in but she had heard everything that Androcles had spoken to Marux and this more than anything else proved to her beyond a shadow of a doubt that, Lycavorian though he may have been, he was indeed *Vrelvel Sargti*. Androcles Leonidas and his father were the first non-Darastrixi *Vrelvel Sargti* in the entire history of their people yet no one but a *Vrelvel Sargti*, with Darastrixi blood flowing within their veins, would have been so compassionate to a dragon who had done what she now knew Marux had been involved in. He would have

punished very harshly if it was needed she knew without question, but if Xaxon had controlled his Bonded One even on a peripheral level, a *Vrelvel Sargti* would have taken that into account instantly just as Androcles had. He would have done exactly as...

“*Doraanar* Sarlana?” The voice spoke from behind her and Sarlana jumped just a bit in surprise as she whirled around and saw him.

“Murano!” Sarlana gasped in shock.

Murano moved closer to her. “I did not mean to frighten you. My apologies.”

Sarlana shook her head and waved her hand slightly in dismissal and she regained her composure. “You do not need to apologize... I was... I was distracted.” She looked at him for a long moment and finally took a deep breath. “The Praetorian Murano. I have wondered when you would finally come to confront me. I have read much about you from the archives on Artaaya. You are said to be nearly as gifted as Sumar once was.”

“And I know what you are.” Murano spoke as he stepped closer to the much shorter woman.

Sarlana caught the inflection in his voice instantly and nodded her head. “Yes... I’m sure that you do.” She met his eyes. “Have you come here to seek vengeance Murano?”

Murano looked surprised at this statement and he drew back slightly. “Vengeance?” He gasped. “No! I would not... I only wish... I only wish to know why? And why you are here now?”

Sarlana was not frightened of Murano in any way and it was she who stepped closer to him now. “What was done to your people on our homeworld was horrific Murano.” She began. “I can not answer the why of it for I was not there... I can only guess at what took place. I had many friends among your people and I mourned their loss for decades.” She dropped her head in grief. “I lost everyone whom I ever knew. You cannot imagine how that feels. You...”

“Yes... yes I can.” Murano said softly.

Sarlana looked up at him once more. “Yes... I suppose you do know.” She spoke. “I cannot understand all of it Murano. I would have fought the decision as so many of my caste did. If I had not been sent away... I would be among those who were killed by our own people for trying to stop it. I live... I live with that everyday. I have often questioned what cruel twist of fate sent me away so that I alone survived while so many did not.”

Murano lifted his eyes to her face once more. “My apologies *Doraanar*... I should not have... I should not have asked. It was wrong of me.”

Sarlana shook her head. “It is never wrong to question something Murano. You should know that. And my name is Sarlana Nephaon... though I have not used my full name in more years than I can remember.”

“You have survived for so long among my people and yet no one discovered you. How is that possible?” Murano said.

“When Teniri and the other dragons first joined with your people, they kept my existence secret.” Sarlana told him. “I asked them to do this because I did not want your people to turn them away because of what we had done on our homeworld. The *Darastrixi*... we contributed to the near extinction of the *Pralor* species and it fills me with shame and anger every time I think of it and remember.”

Murano shook his head at this. “There are so many among my people now who have... they have dismissed the mistakes we made in the past. Many more still do not even remember what occurred so long ago for they are young and adventurous. You could have... Sarlana... you could have been more open about your existence. If you had... if you had... you may have been able to help my brother from allowing things to become as bad as they are.”

“Perhaps.” Sarlana said. “There were still many who did remember. Among your Elders primarily. I did it to protect both our species Murano. I had to do it so that we survived.”

Murano moved to the railing and placed his hands on the smooth metal surface. “Yet now you chose to come forward. Why?”

“You would not ask me that question if you did not already know the answer.” She said.

Murano looked at her. “Androcles and Dorian.”

Sarlana nodded. “Elynth and Ryner as well. I know Andro has discussed this with you. At least in part.”

Murano turned to face her fully once more. “Briefly.” He said. “Something about your ancient *Dahakoan* and what it means. Sarlana I...”

Sarlana smiled up at him. “You think I am here to take them away from you.”

“They are... Androcles, Dorian, Jomann, Deion, their father and who knows how many more.” Murano said. “They are the future of the Praetorians. The new breed. If what I believe is truly taking place then there could be so many more among their people. Enough to rebuild and be able to face the Scourge monsters once more.”

“You have come to understand why Sumar left you behind haven’t you.” Sarlana said. “Truly understand.”

Murano looked at her. “I... I believe this is what he intended... yes.”

“And you fear that I will take them away from you?” She said again.

“The power I feel swirling within Martin, within Androcles and his brothers, I have only felt this when I stood beside Sumar. And within them is the potential to be even greater than he ever was.” Murano said. “I do not know how Sumar knew this would happen... it is far too frightening to even contemplate... but if that is the reason he left me behind, then I must fulfill what he intended for me.”

“And you will.” Sarlana told him. “Only you can.”

Murano looked at her. “But you fill their heads about these *Dahakoan*. These ancient Darastrixi warriors from millions of years ago.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “They have a right to know what they are Murano. I know you have sensed it within Androcles and Dorian. They have the blood of Darastrixi within them Murano. Martin and their mothers know this now as well. I showed it to them. I was just as shocked as they were... but once I met Martin I knew what I felt was true. I had nothing to do with that Murano... I... I can not even begin to imagine how it came to be.”

“Sarlana... they need to learn to focus and control the power within them.” Murano said. “Their emotions give them the ability to channel their power unlike any Praetorians of my time. We were... we were taught to reign in our emotions and not let them rule us. They can harness their emotion in a way I have never seen before.”

“That is not something they are capable of Murano. You know that. Their species is... they embrace their emotions instinctively.” Sarlana told him. “You will not be able to remove that from them.”

Murano nodded in agreement. “I know... and I do not want to. Not anymore. It took me some time to realize this but with Helen and Daniel’s help I have come to understand that their emotion is their power. That is why they... all of them have the potential to be more powerful than any Praetorian of my time ever was. I have seen it within Martin already... and within Androcles.” Murano looked at her quickly with bright eyes as if realizing something for the first time. “It was you!” He said.

“I don’t understand.” Sarlana spoke.

“On that ship.” Murano said. “I felt... I felt a massive influx of Etheric focus and control within Andro when he was...”

“When he was beating Dante Moran to death?” Sarlana smiled. “Xaxon was a fool to have that boy face him. I see now why you punished him in the manner you did. He was not very bright was he?” Sarlana said.

“It was you!” Murano said again insistently. “You helped him to gain the clarity and focus I felt within him.”

“I only assisted him. He and Dorian both are far more powerful than even you believe. The *Dahakoan* were not like your Praetorians Murano. They never were. Their abilities were more latent. The ability to focus and remain clear minded chief among them. The sense of things... of life all around them. Their ability to see and understand things through the fog that others could not. A small portion of this was passed to their father when they were conceived within each of their mother’s womb as you must have seen by now. Not on as concentrated a level as his sons... but from what I saw Martin Leonidas is so very special in his own right. The devotion to their family and people is another gift. And because of the inbred instincts within the Lycavorian species, it is even more powerful. This is the sway that they wielded Murano. The same influence that now flows through Androcles and Dorian and their Bonded ones. As it will also flow through the Darastrixi pair who are now their Brother and Sister of the Blood. As the power of a Praetorian flows through them.”

Murano looked at her wide eyed. “Wait! What! Are you saying...?”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Now you see why I could never take them away from you as you believe. The final pair that will make up the return of the *Dahakoan*, they will have all the same powers as Androcles and Dorian. Praetorian power. They will be just as powerful. Yet they are Darastrixi.”

“How is that... how is that possible?” Murano asked her. “Our scientists... they were positive that the Praetorian gene could be carried by no other species. That it was unique to Pralor born...”

“Pralor born men and women. I know. Yet Sumar passed it down within his blood to Lycavorians and now Laren and Ladur have Lycavorian blood within them. Just as Androcles and Dorian have Darastrixi blood and Sumar’s blood flowing within their veins.” Sarlana said.

“How?” Murano asked once more.

Sarlana shook her head. “I do not know Murano. And I would tell you if I did... but how it came to be is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. Even their mother Anja is stupefied in this regard, and she is the most intelligent woman of any species that I have ever encountered.”

Murano blinked several times as different scenarios flashed in his mind. “Sarlana... if there are Darastrixi who have within them the...”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Are you beginning to understand now what it all means?” She asked.

“If the Scourge discover them...” Murano began.

“Yes... if they discover that the Praetorians and the *Dahakoan*, the only two forces in the known universe who stood against them and beat them... if they discovered that they have been reborn within six individuals... that these individuals now wield both the skill of a *Dahakoan* and the power of a Praetorian...” Sarlana spoke.

“They will stop at nothing to kill them!” Murano gasped.

“That is why Androcles and Dorian work even now to pull the final pair from within Darastrixi space.” Sarlana told him. “The pull of their Brother and Sister of the Blood is too powerful to resist now. Laren and Ladur will only be safe here... with them. And they will need our help.”

Murano met her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Why do you think you are here Murano? Why do you think I am here? Why did we both survive all these millennia when so many others like us did not? When so many we knew and loved perished in the fires of oblivion. It was preordained. Sumar and *Wer*... and Dadrien... they both knew what they were doing when they positioned us as they did. You and I... we were the anomaly among both our kinds. That is why they chose us. At least that is what I now believe. To survive and be here now at this moment in time when so many of our friends and comrades are nothing but memories could only mean one thing. They meant for us to be here. For they must have known that this day would come.” Sarlana looked at him intently.

“They knew the Scourge would return once more Murano. More powerful than ever before. They must have known this and that is why there are six who wield the powers of both our species greatest warriors. And we... you and I... we are here to teach them. Guide them. So that they do not fail as both of our peoples did.”

Murano looked at her. “The Darastrixi did not... your people were not nearly wiped out Sarlana.”

“Weren’t we?” Sarlana said. “The day we allowed the Scourge to do what they did to our friends and our families... the day we turned against ourselves in order to appease those vile monsters is the day we lost ourselves as a species.”

“And what is our purpose?” Murano asked after a long moment.

“You know what our purpose is Murano. You can feel it within you.” Sarlana said. “We are the last of the old breed of *Doraanar* and Praetorian. It is our duty... it is our destiny to train and guide those who are now among us and the others who will no doubt be discovered. To guide and train them and insure they do not make the same mistakes we did.” Sarlana stepped closer and reached out to take his arm. “Androcles and his father may have some sense of what is coming because of Sumar’s memories... but they will need us when the time comes. You know as well as I, when the Scourge... once they discover what we now know... they will stop at nothing to destroy them.”

Murano nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“That is why we are here.” Sarlana told him. “Not to tell them what to do... but guide them and train them... for they are more powerful than any of us will ever be. And they may be...”

Murano looked at her. “What?”

“They very well may be the last chance any of us has to stop those vile monsters from eradicating any species that will not bow down to them.” Sarlana said softly. “And plunging the entire universe into darkness forever.”

Murano grasped her arms. “We must make contact with the Pralor Shiria that Wayonn told me of. It is she and Androcles’ Aunt who are spearheading the search for those with the Praetorian gene.”

“How... how many do you think there could be Murano?” Sarlana asked.

“I don’t know.” Murano answered her honestly. “The gene is so rare to begin with... but it is not unheard of, according to Wayonn, for one Lycavorian pair to have twelve or more children. Their longevity equals that of Pralor and Darastrixi. It grants them so many gifts and opportunities. Pureblood Lycavorian females can remain fertile well past the prime of their life, which is never really set.”

“And it will only spawn actively in a pureblood correct?” Sarlana asked.

“That is what Wayonn says Shiria first thought. Until Dorian was born. His blood is a mixture of the two purest bloodlines of two species. Lycavorian and High Coven. Which can only mean that there might be those of the High Coven who also carry this gene. We need to discover so much more about the gene and that is what Shiria is working on now. When we return we will need to sit with Anja and have her explain it. Her knowledge of such things surpasses any among my people for she has been studying the gene in detail since they first discovered it within Androcles when he was born. Then we can determine what to do.”

“Androcles and Dorian. Elynth and Ryner. Martin and those of his other children that have the gene. They must remain our focus right now.” Sarlana said. “As will those who have the dormant gene. You have seen what they can do?”

Murano nodded. “I saw it within Aricia and Anja openly. All of them really.” He said. “I don’t know how this came to be, for it is not something that happened with my people. The only thing I can think of is that Martin’s blood, pure Lycavorian blood like Martin’s, it somehow mutated the gene. It has allowed him to pass it to others within his bloodline even if it is not dormant. As with Aricia, those who have the dormant gene within them already will be able to do far more than Pralor scientists ever thought. Like Anja and For’mya and Martin’s other wives and mates, all of them have been affected in some way. Actively as in Anja’s case with her healing abilities and then those like Dysea and For’mya, where it gives them latent abilities.” He shook his head. “As I said... it is something we will need to speak with Anja about.”

“In the short time I have been here I have felt it within their wives as well.” Sarlana said. “They may not be passing the actual gene onto them... but whatever is happening it is certainly affecting those they take as wives.”

Murano nodded as he released her arms. “It is happening with Androcles and Denali as well. I’m sure with Dorian and Jomann. I spoke to Wayonn briefly about this. He told me that he noticed it right away when first meeting Sadi, Lu’ria and then Ne’Veha. And then again when he finally came together with Martin.”

It was Sarlana now who reached up and took his arm. “We must remain cautious in what we do Murano.” She said. “These men and women are unlike our two species. Their emotion is their power and we must not lose sight of that. They are not as constrained as our species were and still are.”

Murano nodded. “I know. That is their largest strength.”

“And it could potentially be their biggest weakness.” Sarlana said. “That is why we need to make sure we do not try and control them. Only guide them Murano. Teach them. The sense of compassion and good I have felt in all of them is beyond anything I have ever experienced. We must make use of that.”

Murano turned to meet her gaze fully. “We must prepare. If what you say is true about this Darastrixi pair... then Androcles and Dorian will act soon. Once this business with this Vanari species is complete they will move. Androcles is too much like his father and he will not tolerate the arrogance that these Vanari seem to possess for very long. Just as Martin did not tolerate the same arrogance when my brother first encountered them.”

“What do you suggest?” Sarlana asked. “They have asked me to help them contact the final pair. That will happen sooner than you think.”

Murano nodded. “Androcles asked me as well.”

Sarlana nodded in recognition of this knowledge. “Then he will do it before they arrive among these Vanari. Probably tomorrow before we arrive in the Beta Quadrant. He is like his father as you said and he is already thinking two and three and four steps beyond what we are doing now. I saw this within Martin during the brief time I was with him on Manne.”

“As did I?” Murano said. “Their minds are like computers. Always plotting and always planning. I have never seen two such tactically proficient minds in all my years. They look at things from perspectives that I and

others would never imagine. I dare say... I dare say if they were Pralors during our wars with the Scourge... it is quite possible we might not have lost everything. They can be very reckless however, but this... this may actually be a trait that is needed now."

Sarlana nodded her head. "Hold to that conviction Murano. We may have need of it in the future. They will undoubtedly contact them with one of those wondrous items that they have created."

"The Mark II Neural Booster." Murano said. "Yes. Just another reason why Lorendo is such a fool. Our own Science people could not think to make something like this device. A species they consider to be beneath them made it and use it with far more control than most of my people could muster."

"Can they reach that far Murano?" Sarlana asked.

"With all of us in the connection with them..." Murano nodded. "Easily. If what you say is true, then the four of them could probably sustain it themselves, but including all of us gives them an almost unlimited source of power to draw from. Do you know where they would be on your planet Sarlana? This Darastrixi pair? Would anyone have taken notice of them? Having an idea of where to target their connection would greatly increase the chances that it would go undetected by Etheric monitors that may be active and controlled by either your people or the Scourge. At least for a time."

"Oh yes." She stated confidently. "Laren would have some of the physical traits of her Lycavorian and vampiric blood. She would not look as I do for instance. If my people have discovered the significance of what this Darastrixi pair is then they would be protecting her." Sarlana told him. "I believe I know where they will take them... at least initially... and if Ch'teven is still one of their elders, they will want to protect them for as long as possible as I said. If they have been trying to communicate with them, then I know they are among those who will shield them. They will not be out among the general populous."

Murano took her arm gently. "Then let us begin to make our own plans." He said. "I have a feeling we will need them."

ULU SCIMITAR ORBITING AUSTROVA

"...is my daughter!" The Vanari demanded harshly as he stood in the corridor leading out of the port landing bay. "You will tell me where my daughter Murie is this moment!"

He was surrounded by six, heavily armed *Durcunusaan* whose weapons were ready to use but not pointed directly at the man and the half a dozen others with him. Another four of the *Durcunusaan* were behind them effectively blocking the corridor.

"Galar Arn Del... this is not helping." Ardan spoke trying to be reasonable.

"I wish to see my daughter!" The Vanari man shouted again. "I did not agree with the Board when they sent her to be among these... these animals! If they have..."

"What seems to be the problem?" The voice echoed and they turned to watch as the four *Durcunusaan* parted and Dutkne moved past them before they closed ranks again.

"General Director Dutkne!" Ardan exclaimed. "Thank goodness. We are..."

Dutkne held up his hand to Ardan stopping his words rather rudely and ignoring him as he looked at the senior *Durcunusaan*. "Lieutenant?"

"He came out of the side hatch after being told to exit through the ramp of the transport *Val'istar*." The man told him. "We yelled for him to stop but he ignored us. Talia's team caught him just as he came through the portside pilot's bulkhead hatch. He's been yelling about his daughter since."

Dutkne turned slowly and looked at Ardan and Galar Arn Del. "Just where exactly did you think you were going Regent Arn Del?" He asked.

"To find my daughter!" The man barked. "If she has been harmed I will..."

Dutkne shook his head. "Shut up you fool!" He shouted at the man stunning both Ardan and Galar with the force of his words. "Do you realize that your actions could have resulted in an incident that neither of our peoples want? You can't just storm on to one of our ships and begin demanding things you have no right to demand! I thought you would have learned your lesson from before Regent Vu Lamurrian."

Dutkne had dealt with the Vanari for decades and each time he found them to be arrogant and pompous and condescending to him and the Lycavorian people as a whole. Since becoming Andro's Praetorian Mage, since embracing what that meant and would mean into the future, his patience had grown much shorter when it came to such people. He knew it this was because of Androcles' influence and how Praetorian Warrior and Mage often took on the sometimes very different personalities of each other because of their deep Etheric connection.

"General Director... surely you don't mean..." Ardan began to speak.

"That's exactly what I mean!" Dutkne snarled. "And I am no longer General Director! When is that going to sink in? The merger has been completed and the Protectorate no longer exists. It is now part of the Lycavorian Union!"

Ardan looked at him wide eyed. "We... we did not know this!" He snapped.

"Frankly Regent Vu Lamurrion ... it's really none of your business." Dutkne told him. "We do not answer to the Vanari government and what we do is our own business. Androcles sent these ships as an envoy of goodwill and Regent Arn Del decides he is going to run off and search a ship he has never been on while not bothering to adhere to the protocols we have in place? He could have been injured since he has absolutely no idea where he is going or what he is doing. You would not tolerate it on board one of your ships and we will not tolerate it here! Is that in any way unclear to any of you?"

"These... these men and women began to act roughly with us." One of the female Vanari Regents who had accompanied them spoke up now. She was stunningly beautiful, even more so than most Vanari females Dutkne noted, and she looked vaguely familiar to him. Her beauty did not affect his answer however.

"You're *anse* lucky they didn't shoot you!" Dutkne barked still glaring at Galar. "Your daughter is perfectly fine and she is conferring with the Union senators who accompanied us to facilitate discussions you fool!" Dutkne spat at Galar. "I suggest you leave you attitude here Regents... you will not find it well received on this ship or anywhere else."

"You threaten us?" Another asked in shock.

"I am merely stating a fact." Dutkne said. "The Lycavorian Union does not look kindly upon those who will not treat them with the same respect that they themselves are treated with. Now... Regent Vu Lamurrion, if you and the others will follow me, I will take you to the main conference room. Denali and the others are already there!"

Easy Dutkne. Denali's voice filtered to him in the Etheric realm.

I will get your brother for doing this to me. Dutkne stated as he waved his hand forward and began to lead them down the corridor. *I hated dealing with them in the past and I dislike it even more now because we are Praetorian and Mage.*

Better you than Andro. Denali chuckled. *He would just vent them out an airlock.*

Dutkne couldn't help himself and he laughed softly knowing full well what Androcles was capable of. His laughter only served to make the Vanari Regents behind him fume in anger for they thought he was laughing at them and what had just occurred. *That is very true.* He said. *They are not going to like what we tell them Deni... you do realize this I hope. And they will not be as open to change as long as Ardan and those like him are in power.*

Probably not... but too bad. Denali answered.

Dutkne nodded. *Indeed. We will join you shortly. And be warned... he has brought Cruor and Eyon Ahn Vernalo with him.*

Dutkne are you serious? Arduri's voice cut into their connection easily now.

Arduri Leonidas had been working with her beloved husband and sister every waking moment to improve her Mindvoice skills. As with Caliria, Arduri would never be on a par with their husbands in terms of Etheric power because they were Vanari and having Etheric skills was not natural to their species, but because of the pureness of Denali and Andro's blood, they would be able to do far more than most normal Lycavorians and elves who did not advance their skills beyond the rudimentary level. Arduri had embraced her life now with everything that she was, finding complete happiness and unquenchable love within the arms of a man and woman. Nothing would ever take that from her.

I'm afraid so. Dutkne answered. *They can not seem to rattle your father Arduri... so it appears they will try to influence you.*

Then they are fools. Arduri stated simply.

Well... we already knew that. Dutkne said with some humor. *This might also give us some idea of what their future intentions will be.*

SCIMITAR

STARBOARD CONFERENCE ROOM

Dutkne moved to the chair beside Denali and Arduri as Galar greeted his daughter with a bear hug while Ardan and the other Vanari were ushered to chairs around the opposite end of the table. Ulana sat between the Elven Senator Ya'sur and the Lycavorian Senator Pyath. The Folcani Senator, Zarnia, sat to Pyath's right beside Sa'sur who had a typically stoic look on her beautiful elven face. Ya'sur stood up from his chair with a welcoming smile and opened his hands.

"Allow me to welcome you to the *ULU SCIMITAR*." He spoke warmly. "I am Senator Ya'sur of the United Lycavorian Union. To my left are Senators Ulana and Zarnia. To my right is Senator Pyath and the commander of this fine ship, Admiral Sa'sur. We welcome you and look forward to our talks."

"Is it habit to treat your guests in such a way?" The female Regent who had spoken in the corridor asked as she sat in the chair.

Ya'sur kept the smile on his face. "Our guests do not usually ignore our establish safety protocols and attempt to run throughout our ship unchecked. There are many hazards on a star ship as I'm sure you are all aware. That is the same on this ship as well." He told her. "May I know who...?"

"This is Regent Asay Va Eldost, a member of the Senior Board of Regents." Ardan spoke from his chair. "With her are Cruor and Eyon Ahn Vernalo, both members of the Board of Regents. This is Galar Arn Del... a member of the Senior Board of Regents as well. Murie Arn Del is the Regent who met you when you arrived in Vanari space and Galar's daughter. He was only concerned for her safety."

Interesting. Arduri spoke openly in the single Etheric connection so that all of them could hear her. They had agreed to keep their observations to themselves and each other within the Etheric realm during the meeting. It gave them an advantage that even Ulana had agreed with though her Etheric abilities were not as advanced as the others. While Denali was the most powerful Etheric user now within the Beta Quadrant because of his Praetorian blood, Ya'sur, Pyath and Sa'sur were easily low Tier Six users. Ulana was considered a Tier three while Zarnia needed to be assisted.

Princess? Ya'sur questioned without looking at her.

Eyon was not a member of the Board of Regents before we left to find Caliria. Arduri told them. *He is far too junior and the selection process to be considered for even a junior posting takes many years.*

Very interesting indeed. Pyath spoke. *This is the one who you were to be married to Princess?*

Arduri winced slightly at that memory but nodded her head imperceptibly. *Yes... though now I don't know what lapse of reasoning struck me to agree to that?*

A political move then. Zarnia spoke.

Oh yes... without a doubt. Ya'sur spoke.

"Is there a reason she would not be safe onboard our ship?" Ya'sur asked calmly as he looked at Ardan across the table now.

"We do not..." Galar began to speak angrily but both Ardan and his daughter touched his arms and silenced him.

"The news of... the news of the merger of the Protectorate and the Union already taking place has taken us by surprise." Ardan spoke. "We were not aware this had occurred already. We assumed it would take... longer."

"You did not discover this knowledge until you arrived here Regent Vu Lamurrion, I understand this comes as a shock." Ya'sur said evenly. "Regent Galar however, he acted in the manner he did before you had such knowledge. Is there something that we need to be made aware of before we begin these discussions? We are very flexible and would surely be able to accommodate anything additional that you might wish to discuss or make aware to us."

Galar glared at Ya'sur but said nothing as his daughter ushered him to his chair. "It is alright father." She told him softly though everyone heard her words. "They have gone out of their way to make me feel welcome."

Ardan waited for Galar to take his seat before looking at Ya'sur. "No... we have nothing additional to discuss." He said.

"I believe we do Ardan." Asay spoke up. She turned until her eyes were focused directly on Arduri. "Why is Arduri Re Mydala here?"

Ya'sur canted his head slightly. "I don't believe I understand the question." He said. "Is there some problem?"

Ulana had remained silent for the most part on this trip but her dark eyes now focused on the Vanari woman. Ulana had never expected Androcles to allow her to accompany the political delegation after what had happened between her and Sadi on this very ship. That she had been included was a surprise, however, Ya'sur and the others actively seeking her opinion on one thing or another was a total shock. They had included her in everything they had done, all of the meetings they had together, and even inviting her to dinner with them. This was not something that Ulana had ever expected.

Her father had raised her to believe that all Alpha wolves descended from their bloodline were superior to others in every way. Even the female wolves like her. That they were somehow granted status over the others because of the pureness of their blood. Over twenty years this had been pounded into her head. She had never associated with wolves who were beneath her and always went out of her way to insure she avoided them. They were beneath her status in her eyes. Ulana knew that her father was not well liked outside of their home province because of these views. This did not seem to bother him as he attempted to push his own agenda forward, trampling any who thought to get in his way. Even in their home on Apo Prime he was no different. Though the men and women who worked for them were well paid, they were treated as underlings by her father and brothers. No better than the dirt upon which her father walked. For years she had done the same thing, treated others the same way, because that is how she was raised.

The few short months she had been together with Androcles Leonidas had begun to change all that.

The Leonidas family had the purest bloodline of any Lycavorian within the Union, that had been proven many times over and was without question. Even the Queens that were not pureblood like Queen Aricia had blood more pure than most because the King had been the one who turned them. They were also the most unassuming and outgoing family that she had ever encountered in her life. The men and women who worked the Royal Estate on Apo Prime were treated as treasured friends and not underlings. She had witnessed the King himself standing in the kitchen with the *Feravomir* and the dozen or so kitchen staff as they cooked together. Once she had even caught him singing in this horrible voice, his arms draped over the shoulders of the main chef and his mate, his attempt at singing had the others laughing uncontrollably while Queen Aricia and Queen For'mya had looked on. The chef's wife finally had to stuff a biscuit in his mouth to make him stop and then she had shoved him out of their kitchen. If this event had occurred in her father's home, that woman would have been cast out and probably forced to leave Apo Prime to find more work because her father would have sent the word out among this many contacts tarnishing her reputation.

Ulana did not come to realize just how truly out of her world she was until Sadi had thrashed her. The little bubble her father had raised her in was not going to sustain her now that he was gone. She had discovered that she was not as high and mighty as she had been raised to believe. That she was not superior to others because of her bloodline and her education. When she discovered that Sadi's PCC was so much higher than her own, that had been the final straw. She now firmly believed that Icho had allowed her to make a fool of herself by making it all so public and then having the full reaction of the people of the Union directed at her. She had been used just as her father had always used her and her brothers. Ulana always believed she would have Androcles. That he should have been hers. Ulana now knew that had she been smarter and more observant, she would have realized that she never had a chance. In many ways, Androcles was far more a traditional Spartan than even his own father, and he embraced the ways of the wolf deeply. The same Lycavorian culture and history that her father had discarded and told her was beneath her.

Ya'sur was not a Lycavorian but he had risen from a common elven family to the position he was in now. Pyath had entered politics at his father's urging; a man who commanded vast numbers of ships filled with men and women who adored him because he cared for those under his command. She did not know much of Senator Zarnia, only that she came from a small, but influential family on the Folcani homeworld. None of

these fellow Senators had an arrogant bone in their body Ulana knew. They talked and joked with the crew while eating in the Mess Lounge and none of them acted as if they were owed something. Just being around them these last weeks had the effect that Androcles and Deia had secretly hoped it would, though Ulana knew none of this. What Ulana did know now was that she was different from before. She had begun to look at the world around her in a very different way. And Arduri Leonidas had been one of the most influential people in Ulana beginning to realize that not everything her father had taught her was true. The Vanari woman, though far more beautiful than Ulana considered herself, had begun to influence her without even knowing it. Ulana had done something she had never done before on the trip here. She had studied the history of the Vanari, from their culture to their politics. Some of what she discovered had made her sick, especially the parts that occurred to Vanari females on a regular basis. The fact that the Vanari government accepted this was quite appalling to her. Ulana had made it a point to try and catch Arduri alone when they arrived at the Vanari homeworld and she had succeeded in finding her just last night in the Mess Lounge. Some three hours later, they had parted ways, with soft kisses and Arduri's promise to show her more of Austrova when time permitted. This had been the life altering event that Androcles and Deia had hoped for and Ulana had awoken this morning and vowed to do things differently than her father had taught her.

When Arduri's name was mentioned Ulana looked up and took far more interest.

"Arduri Re Mydala, her sisters and her brother, they are under investigation by the Vanari Court of Regents for violating our laws." Asay spoke evenly. "They, along with their mother, broke nearly a dozen Vanari laws in leaving the Beta Quadrant to pursue their sister Caliria to the Alpha Quadrant. Trying to retrieve Vanari females is forbidden because it exposes those who go after them to further danger. And it risks retaliation from the OSG. Caliria Re Mydala is under investigation as well for violating one of the most sacred laws in our history due to her actions in trying to discover a counter agent to the OSG virus that the OSG uses. This is strictly taboo within Vanari society because of the cataclysmic consequences it could have."

Ya'sur was about to respond when Ulana's voice cut him off. This caused all of them to look at her in surprise, including Denali.

"Arduri Re Mydala is now Arduri Leonidas." Ulana spoke evenly but with a touch of force in her words. "She is a recognized Princess of the Lycavorian Union. Her sister is now Caliria Leonidas, a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union. You wish to bring charges against them?"

"Their status among your people does not concern us." Asay answered. "They broke our laws before they so conveniently hid behind the name of your supposed Royal family."

"Supposed?" Ulana charged on, Asay's words beginning to make her angry. "Now you are calling into question the status of our Royal family?"

Asay waved her hand dismissively. "The status of your Royal family is of no concern to us! And this will not stop us from investigating and bringing charges against them if we deem it prudent." She stated.

"The status of our Royal bloodline is without question!" Ulana snapped. "And if what I have read of your people is accurate, that Royal bloodline has been in power among our people for far longer than any of you have been alive! And they have thrived! You would do well to realize now that we will not be cajoled or intimidated by the Vanari people simply because you consider yourselves above us."

This outburst caught Denali by surprise and he glanced at Dutkne who shrugged his shoulders.

"We... I meant no offense." Asay spoke quickly. "I was only referring to an internal Vanari matter."

"And will your investigation be open to Lycavorian authorities and courts to review as is the case within the Union when dealing with non-Union citizens?" Ulana pressed her.

"Certainly not! This is a Vanari matter as I said!" Asay hissed.

"Then your so called investigation will mean nothing to us." Ulana stated openly causing Denali's eyes to widen even more. He was about to lean forward and interfere when Arduri discretely squeezed his leg under the table. Denali glanced at her and then to where Ya'sur stood. He also shook his head ever so minutely.

"I... excuse me?" Asay asked.

"The Lycavorian Chronicles of Law and our own Union Constitution specifically state that any investigation of a Union citizen by outside forces will be honored, however, all facts and information in regards to this investigation will be made available to Union representatives to review and respond to." Ulana spoke.

"She is telling us they will not honor our laws." Cruor spoke from his chair.

“Quite the contrary sir.” Ulana said. “If you are willing to make available to us whatever documents, witnesses and information you have in regards to this matter we would certainly honor your laws. However, if you are not, then our own laws are clear. We do not simply hand over Union citizens without proof of crimes committed. Most especially not members of our Royal family!” Ulana stated with determination. “Show us this proof and we will adhere to your laws, but we will defend our people.”

“They are not your people!” Asay declared.

“You are mistaken Regent Va Eldost.” Ulana said. “They very much are Union citizens.”

“And what will you do?” Asay pressed.

“The Royal *Durcunusaan* have specific instructions on what to do if any member of the Royal family is endangered in any way.” Pyath answered this question after looking at Ulana with a smile of approval. “Unless you plan on assaulting this ship, which I might add would not be the most intelligent of actions, or you are planning to share this evidence of guilt with us to review as Senator Ulana has stated... then your investigation will stop here. Exactly as she has said.”

“You can not tell us what to do!” Eyon shouted. “We are Vanari!”

Arduri openly snickered at that comment now. “Please Eyon... you could not tie your shoes without assistance.”

“Mocking me will not make things go any easier for you Arduri.” Eyon spat viciously. “How could you chose this... this man who can become a beast... how could you chose him over me?”

Arduri grinned and bat her bright green eyes while crossing her arms under her large breasts. “I can think of eleven plus inches to begin with.” Arduri answered sarcastically. This caused Deni to look at her with wide eyes. “And that is just for starters. Should I continue? I can...”

“Princess!” Zarnia spoke from her chair now. “I believe Senator Ulana has made our position clear. We should not make things worse by stating additional facts.”

Deni had lowered his face into his hand while Dutkne smiled and Arduri shrugged her slim shoulders. “Very well.”

“This does not help us! We did not come here to discuss the status of Arduri Re Mydala!” Ardan spoke finally coming out of his chair.

“No we did not.” Ya'sur replied. “I believe we have come together to discuss the events that will take place when the Crown Prince arrives.”

Excellent move Ulana. We now know at least some of their plans. Pyath spoke within their open Etheric connection.

Their arrogance is disgusting. Ulana answered without thinking.

Do not hold back if you sense something Ulana. Zarnia spoke now. Though the Folcani had no natural Etheric abilities, Ya'sur and Pyath had both established a strong Mindvoice link with her to insure she could participate. *Given the level of arrogance we have seen in just this short amount of time I think we will find the Vanari will not like much of what will happen in the coming days.*

Ardan returned to his chair. “There are some matters we need to discuss before his arrival.”

Ya'sur nodded. “By all means Regent Vu Lamurrian?” He said. “I believe it would be best if you began.”

“The Vanari Board of Regents, especially the SBR, would like to know what your Crown Prince has planned when he arrives?” Ardan asked. “What are his intentions?”

“His intentions?” Ya'sur asked returning to his chair. “I’m not sure I follow the definition of your question sir. The Crown Prince’s intentions are quite transparent. He wishes to officially welcome the Protectorate and our people back into the fold. Now that the complete merger has been finalized, we will begin to quickly establish open travel and trade corridors back to Union space within the Alpha Quadrant via Jump Gates that will be built for this purpose. The Crown Prince will wish to also establish political connections with the Rothryn government since Praetor Dyack’s daughter Sehri is now his wife and mate. If they are willing as well of course. The Rothryn are essentially Lycavorian just as we are, they just can not shift their forms. He will no doubt wish to go over and discuss current conditions between the Vanari and our people and...”

“The Vanari people will not accept anything outside of what we already have in the way of trade and commerce with the Protectorate.” Cruor spoke now.

“Regent Ardan... is this true?” Ya'sur asked looking at him.

Ardan nodded his head in response. “The Vanari government and the Senior Board of Regents has no intention of altering any established agreements or the Right of Way restrictions previously negotiated that are already in place. We have already told General Director Dutkne this. These agreements and the Right of Way restrictions have been in place for millennia and they are acceptable to us. As for this supposed cure to the OSG’s chemical addiction virus that our females must tolerate; the formula that Prince Denali gave to us when he first arrived is not even a workable serum. All of our senior scientists agree that it is not complete and could not work even if it were complete. Along with the additional information he gave to us when he first arrived, he actually manages to implicate your own people in the assistance and trafficking of Vanari females as slaves. This can be traced right back to the Alpha Quadrant where you come from and you can not deny that. I find it very hard to believe this was done intentionally.”

Ya'sur stared at Ardan for a long moment. He turned his head to either side and looked at his fellow Senators briefly before facing Ardan once more.

“Then I’m afraid that we have a problem Regent Vu Lamurrion.” Ya'sur spoke calmly. “The chemical formula for the serum we gave to you was not complete... no. We did this as a security measure. However... all of the data and information needed for your scientists to finish the serum was present.”

“That is preposterous!” Galar snapped. “If this was true... our scientists would have been able to finish the serum you say you devised. None of them were able to do this... therefore it is not true!”

“So now we are liars as well as animals?” Dutkne spoke up.

“May I suggest that your scientists review the information once more?” Ya'sur told him. “We have the final parts of the formula stored with several individuals... and if you would like assistance we would be more than happy to...”

“No!” Cruor said. “Even if this was true... which I doubt given where it came from... we would not do this. The horror it could wrought is beyond thinking.”

Ya'sur stared at him for a long moment before nodding his head. “If that is what the Vanari wish to do... that is entirely up to you. The intelligence information we supplied to you also implicates members of the Vanari government as well. The Lycavorian Union has already dealt with the mercenaries and pirates in the Alpha Quadrant who took part in this heinous scheme. They are no longer operating actively. Those that escaped... well... if they take up this same business again... we will find them.”

“Escaped?” Asay asked now.

Ya'sur nodded his head. “Yes... escaped. Slavery of any type or form is not tolerated anywhere within the Union borders. These groups knew this and chose to set up their business in what we call The Wilds, an area of space that is neither monitored nor controlled by any one government. We found their facilities and destroyed them. We managed to kill or capture most of those involved, but a few managed to escape. They will not be able to hide for long I assure you. After we are done interrogating those we captured and we discover the names of the others involved, we will also deal with those within our government if there are any, as well as those within the former Protectorate government that we have been informed of. We will also deal with any who took part in these acts.”

“What of those Vanari females you rescued in the illegal operation to recover Caliria Re Mydala?” Galar asked.

“What about them?” Ya'sur asked. “And the operation conducted was within the Alpha Quadrant and very legal under our laws. Unless you are now claiming Vanari law overrules Lycavorian law even as far away as the Alpha Quadrant.”

“Our laws should be dominant!” Galar snarled. “We do not know your people or what they are capable of. These females... they were not returned to us.” He stated sarcastically, as if he was talking to a child.

Ya'sur nodded his head holding his own building anger in check. Elves were well known for their emotional control... but even Ya'sur was having trouble tolerating the arrogance and air of superiority. “They chose not to return Regent Arn Del.”

“You mean you are holding them prisoner!” Eyon spat.

“No... I mean they chose not to return.” Ya'sur answered him calmly. “They were all offered safe passage back to Vanari space as soon as they were given a clean bill of health by Union physicians.”

“Your people... your so called physicians know nothing of the Vanari or what we need medically. How could you have treated them?” Eyon spoke now.

“We have heard of your so called Hadarian Healers with their supposed magical healing ability.” Galar added. “It is more than likely you were attempting to hide your part in all of this.”

“As I said... all of the Vanari females rescued with Princess Caliria are now free of the controlling effects of the OSG virus and all of them expressed a strong desire to remain where they were and to not return to Vanari space. They were then granted temporary status by our Senate and continue to remain within Union space. I do believe however that one did elect to travel with us here now. Princess Caliria’s friend Yssyla Vol Dumor... if I am not mistaken.”

“Are you saying you have one of those captured by you here on this very ship?” Cruor demanded.

Ya’sur shook his head. “No... we have one of those who was freed by the Crown Prince in the same operation that freed Caliria Leonidas. She chose to return with us now.”

“You will stop referring to her in such a way.” Galar demanded once more. “She is under investigation by the Vanari government and will be prosecuted should it be determined such action is needed.”

“She is a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union Regent Arn Del, as Senator Ulana has already stated.” Pyath spoke now as he leaned forward. “She will be called and treated exactly in the way she should be with her title and status among our people.”

“What your people think does not matter to us!” Galar snapped now. “If it is determined she is a criminal among our people that is how she will be treated!”

“Galar!” Ardan barked at him.

“Where is this... this Yssyla?” Asay asked quickly.

“If I am not mistaken, she is currently in the forward lounge with the Lycavorian officer who she has decided to marry. She contacted her parents when we first arrived in the system and they came aboard early this morning.” Ya'sur answered her. “She is quite healthy and very happy if my understanding is correct. You may ask your daughter about this Regent Arn Del, she spoke with her last night.”

Galar and the others looked at her. “Murie?” He questioned.

The young woman nodded her head. “I spoke with her at length father.” She replied. “She refuses to follow the instructions I gave to her to report to the main medical center in the capital for a complete medical examination and neural workup.”

“And this man... this Lycavorian... I suppose he was present with her when you spoke with her?” Eyon stated confidently. “Intimidating her no doubt.”

Murie shook her head. “No. We were alone in a small lounge room for several hours. Just the two us.”

“Then they have threatened her in some way!” Cruor followed his son’s train of thought. “Coerced her to do what they want.”

Murie shook her head once more. “I don’t believe so.” Murie told them all. “When she ended the meeting, I watched as she walked down the corridor. She greeted this Lycavorian man with...”

“With what?” Ardan asked.

“She greeted him with considerable passion.” Murie stated honestly remembering how Yssyla had practically leaped into his arms as he rounded the corner, surprising him utterly, and they shared a kiss that positively sizzled in the corridor of the ship. She watched him trace her cheek with his finger as he nuzzled her neck and she held to him tightly. They spoke in soft whispers for a moment before she nodded and laced her arms within his and they walked out of sight together.

“This means nothing!” Galar snapped. “She is probably frightened out of her mind and just waiting for the opportunity to be free.”

“You allowed her parents to come aboard this ship?” Asay asked.

Ya'sur nodded his head. “Why would we not. They expressed a strong desire to see their daughter and Admiral Sa'sur approved their transfer.”

“Who allowed this?” Ardan demanded. “Instructions were left with the main spaceport to not allow any Vanari to come up to your ships until we had met with you.”

“I believe Regent Re Mydala approved the trip.” Sa'sur answered him.

“Coren?” Ardan hissed.

Ya'sur shrugged his shoulders. “That is something you can discuss with Regent Re Mydala. Our protocol was followed exactly. You may question Yssyla Vol Dumor for yourself if you wish.” He told them

calmly. "Her status is not why we have come together however. Yssyla can decide for herself whether she wishes to remain on this ship or return with you. We have other matters to discuss I think."

"We have already stated that we will not renegotiate the agreements we already have in place." Galar spoke. "They have remained as they are for thousands of years and the Vanari are happy with them."

"Even though they are disproportionately prejudiced against my people." Ya'sur stated.

"You are not Lycavorian." Eyon spoke now.

Ya'sur met his eyes. "I was born within the Lycavorian Union young man. I have grown within the Union and I have bled for the Union. We do not draw a distinction between species within the Union sir. We are all Lycavorians as far as we are concerned."

"What you consider disproportionate we consider fair." Eyon continued.

"Fair?" Pyath spoke once more. "They are anything but fair. Lycavorians are restricted from leaving the embassy grounds without dozens of your Vanari Commandos tracking their every movement. They are forbidden to mingle with any Vanari except for those who work within the embassy walls. They are not allowed to tour your cities or visit other places on your planets. Our ships are limited to a single travel corridor into Vanari space that they must adhere to rigidly even though there are more efficient routes that can be taken. Our ships are subject to search at any time when within Vanari space and this has occurred on thousands of occasions through the years to my knowledge."

"This continues while Vanari who do travel to our space are treated with the utmost respect. They are not searched and they are not limited to where they can go." Ulana took it up now. "They can travel among the many planets that formerly made up the Protectorate freely and certainly without members of the military or security forces monitoring their every move."

Galar shrugged his shoulders dismissively. "How your people feel about the agreements is not our concern. That is what we agreed to and that is how it has been for millennia. It will not change."

"Yet the Rothryn have an embassy and private homes spread across the planet." Pyath took it up again. "They are Lycavorian Regent Arn Del. Just like us."

"Not like you." Galar spoke heatedly. "We did not fight a war with them!"

"A war that your people started." Ya'sur spoke once more. "Or will you now try to deny that... even though it is part of your very own history books and teachings."

"Your concerns are not our concerns!" Galar stated once more. "And things will not change!"

"You keep saying that Regent Arn Del. Am I then to assume that myself and my fellow Senators will be limited in the same way?" Ya'sur asked.

"You are Lycavorian by your very own words." Cruor spoke. "And the intelligence you gave to us so willingly implicates your own people in crimes against the Vanari people!"

"The intelligence states that mercenary groups and pirates made up of Lycavorians as well as other species in the Alpha Quadrant were involved in this." Ya'sur stated. "Not the Union as a whole. We have ended that practiced as I said."

"How do we know this is true?" Eyon barked.

"Would you like for me to send for the five hundred and nineteen bodies that we gathered in our operations to show you?" Ya'sur asked. "This information given to you, it also implicates members of your own government, which is stated very openly in those same reports."

"No one who has seen these reports believes them for a moment." Galar spat. "Our own intelligence people have presented no such information to us in this regard. Why should we believe you over our own people? We have no reason to trust you... and this intelligence only enhances that feeling among the SBR and others! Now you come here and do not inform us of this so called merger and you expect us to bend to your will?"

"I wasn't aware internal politics was something we had to report to the Vanari." Ulana spoke once more. "We are a sovereign government and do not report or answer to the Vanari. You... you seem to think we are all violent children."

"Aren't you?" Cruor snapped. "Is your history not laced with violence and bloodshed? Even among your own kind!"

"Our history is just that Regent Arn Del." Ya'sur spoke. "History. The past and the events in the past have allowed us to grow and helped us to evolve to what we are now. Isn't that the same for all species?"

“And you have grown into nothing more than violent adults!” Galar popped. “Your own Netnews broadcasts prove this. Your Crown Prince violently murdered two men while in your Senate hall and then he openly called for war! Which your Senate then passed.”

“The Senators are only extensions of the people’s will within the Union.” Ya’sur stated evenly. “And the Crown Prince murdered no one. Two men who were involved with the rape of one of his mothers and the deaths of thousands of Union citizens were executed.”

“Is that what you call what he did?” Asay asked slightly astonished.

“Justice was served.” Pyath said. “As over ninety six percent of the Union population voted on and decided.”

“The Vanari people will not be cowed by you or by anyone!” Galar barked out. “And we will show our people exactly what you are.”

“Yet you allow your own females to be taken and sold into slavery almost at will and do nothing.” Ulana said. “You allow this OSG to dictate to you what you will do and how you will act. What do you call that?”

“It is the way of things.” Cruor spoke. “It has been like this for hundreds and hundreds of years.”

“I wonder... do your people think of it in such a way?” Ya’sur asked.

“You know nothing! We do what is best for our people!” Galar spoke. “We know what is best for them!”

“And it doesn’t hurt that you and others are making millions of credits each year by selling our own people into slavery!” Arduri hissed angrily now. “Does it? And you would do anything to make sure that doesn’t stop!”

“You do not know what you speak of Arduri Re Mydala!” Galar shouted back at her.

“My name is Arduri Leonidas you bigoted *nubous igord!*” Arduri screamed coming to her feet.

Denali came to his feet instantly and reached for her. All of them watched as his arms encircled her small waist and his forehead went to hers. All of them saw the overwhelming anger in her green eyes simply evaporate instantly.

“What did she call me?” Galar demanded.

It was Ulana who spoke and her answer stunned everyone. “She called you a fucking fool!” Ulana spat across the table at him seeing his eyes go wide. “And that description would be quite accurate from everything I have seen and heard so far.”

Ya’sur reached out and let his hand grip her forearm gently and she looked at him with angry dark eyes.

Forgive me. Ulana said quickly. *I could no longer stand it.*

Do not apologize for saying what we all feel. Ya’sur said. He turned back to Galar and the others. Ardan had remained silent for most of the conversation they all took note of.

“My apologies.” Ya’sur stated. “May I suggest that we adjourn so that you can interview Yssyla and allow passions to cool? The *Durcunusaan* officer in the corridor will take you to the Mess Lounge where she is currently.”

“Will you allow her to return with us?” Asay asked.

“Yssyla will make that determination for herself.” Pyath spoke now.

“So that is a no.” Eyon snapped.

Pyath looked at him. “If you are asking if we are going to force her off this ship because that is what you want? No. She is free to leave at any time. She is also free to remain. She will make that decision.”

“And if we choose to take her?” Galar asked as he got to his feet.

“I would then ask how you think to do this.” Zarnia spoke now. “However... if that is your intent... you are welcome to try.”

Ardan stood up now. “We will not do such a thing. We will talk to her and then advise you as to what we will do.”

Ya’sur nodded his head. “Very well. I will be waiting to hear from you.”

They were all silent as the Vanari delegation rose and turned from the table quickly. They proceeded into the corridor and Ya’sur watched the door slide shut behind them. It was Denali who spoke next.

“Well... hell!” He declared sarcastically. “That went so much better than we had hoped it would!”

Ya’sur sat back in his chair as all of them allowed the joke to lighten their dark moods and he nodded his head.

“Yes it did.” He said. Ya'sur turned and looked at Dutkne. “*Val'istar?*”

“How soon before Andro arrives?” Dutkne asked.

“If everything goes well... they will be here early this evening.” Denali answered him. “Why?”

“I suggest we put added security on Caliria and Coren both.” Dutkne said. “She is in the capital for the next three days to finish her classes correct?”

Arduri nodded. “Yes.”

Dutkne nodded as he looked at the door the Vanari had exited. “They will move on her soon Denali. And Coren as well. They are vulnerable at least until Androcles arrives. They won't attempt anything once they discover he is here, at least I hope they do not, but until that time they are not safe and need to be protected.”

Sa'sur rose to her feet. “I'll see to it.” She spoke. “I need to clear my head of all the *rensibfla* anyway.”

“I will let father know.” Arduri spoke as she too stood up.

“Princess... if you would use the COM panel here.” Ya'sur spoke. “I believe we should let your father know what has taken place and what was said.”

“Then what?” Denali asked.

“Then we wait and see what they do.” Ya'sur spoke.

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“...Scans did not reveal much father.” Yuriko spoke from with the QCR image. “There are an awful lot of residual radiation particles saturating the planet's upper ionosphere. While not harmful... they do make a mess of the probe's long range sensor chips.”

Martin stood with Danny, Wayonn, Tobia and Valael around the large chart table. Aricia and Anja were once more on either side of him while For'mya sat along the near wall with Fedor and Kalis on either side of her. Fedor and Eirene, as twins, had become near inseparable from Kalis since he had taken the bullets meant to kill For'mya. His actions had proven beyond a doubt that he was a new person in every sense of the word and they wanted to discover their brother as much as possible. Joining them in that time were Miseo as well as Iama and Serale. The six of them had spent nearly every moment together; both Fedor and Eirene enraptured with the half brother that they had attempted to kill when he first arrived.

Martin looked at her image. “Nukes?” He asked.

Yuriko shook her head. “It's Alpha Radiation, Radium particles to be exact. If I had to guess I'd say it was from the remnants of some type of orbital satellites with nuclear reactor cores but our probe instruments didn't detect any in the upper or lower atmosphere.”

“Well... that at least tells us they were advanced enough to send satellites into orbit.” Danny spoke. “And power them with nuclear reactors.”

“What else Yuriko?” Martin asked.

“We programmed the probes to drop to an altitude of eighty-five thousand feet and then disperse on perpendicular courses.” She answered. “They scanned fifteen cities of medium to large size on the first continent, forty-one on the next and over a hundred on the final continent here in the north.” They watched as her delicate finger drifted along the Map Board from *OMEN THREE* where she was.

“Standard growth expansion.” Valael spoke up. “The northern continent is most likely where they originally settled.”

Aricia touched the Map Board over the image of a city. “Yuriko... they all appear to have been...”

“Destroyed or evacuated.” Yuriko said. “Yes mother.”

“By what? Or whom?” Martin asked.

“Hard to say without boots on the ground father.” Yuriko answered. “Life signs are indeterminate at best. There seem to be quite a bit of coal sources extending from the surface down into the planet's upper crust. Definitive signs of extraction based on the structures that were situated over the main sources. Natural resources are abundant. Wild life; minerals; all pretty much on a ratio with Earth as well. The planet is fifty-two percent oceans, seven large continents and a bunch of smaller archipelagos. Atmosphere is a little lighter than Earth but

very comfortable. Most of the planet also appears to be moderate in temperature with just this one area of arctic activity.”

Anja looked up at him. “Almost exactly like Earth lover.” She stated.

“Yeah.” Martin nodded. “Wayonn... how many of our people were brought here?”

Wayonn glanced at the data pad beside him on the Map Board. “The records Avi was able to obtain from City Ship 41’s memory banks indicate two hundred million.” He answered as he looked at him. “If the records are correct this planet was settled by Lycavorians a hundred and sixteen thousand years ago. It is the youngest of the four colonies where the Pralors used our people for Seed Missions.”

“Another of the mistakes of our past.” Valael said softly.

Danny shook his head. “That doesn’t matter anymore Elder Valael. What matters now is in the here and now.” Danny told him. “Are you sure about the numbers Wayonn?” He asked as he leaned forward using his finger to sweep across the part of the map section currently up. “Look at the spread of the city borders, the distance from epicenter to where it really begins to thin out. This one alone is easily twice the size of Atlanta and by the time the comet came, Atlanta had a population of over forty million people.” Danny moved his finger across the section of map that was currently visible. “Look... five more cities almost the same size within two hundred kilometers.”

“Danny’s right.” Anja stated now following his train of thought. “If you extrapolate the size... we’re looking at just two hundred million in these five city areas alone Wayonn.”

“My people came up with pretty much the same thing. They estimate the population at roughly just over four billion given the size of the cities father. They were using the same ratios Uncle Danny and mother are suggesting now.” Yuriko spoke from *OMEN THREE*. “Sensor scans of the soil and surrounding terrain indicate that the outlying cities were built within the last three to five hundred years.”

“Four billion?” Martin spoke softly. “So where are they?”

“Most of the city structures appear to be intact Yuriko.” Wayonn said. “Could the probes just not be picking up lifesigns?”

“Mother... switch to the last grid sweep.” Yuriko said and she watched as Aricia’s hand adjusted their Map Board.

“*Nubou lae!*” Martin hissed as his eyes grew bigger.

The many probes had obviously dropped their altitude in the last pass and their internal cameras had caught stunningly clear images of the now empty streets and what appeared to be thousands of Lifter like vehicles abandoned in those streets, some of which appeared overturned and destroyed. There was visible damage on some of the buildings, but nothing that would truly jeopardize structural integrity from what they could see.

“The Probes are programmed to drop to an altitude of fifty feet if no threat is detected.” Yuriko explained. “These images are what they captured. It’s the same from all twenty-four probes and what *medwaw* Aricia first saw.”

“They are deserted.” Tobia spoke now for the first time.

“The damage that you do see on some of the structures appears to be explosive in nature, but nothing that would cause the buildings to collapse.” Yuriko told them. “It almost seems to be intentional.”

“Intentional?” Valael asked. “You mean a war?”

Yuriko shook her head quickly. “No... then you would see collateral damage all over the surrounding area Elder Valael. Shattered windows, destroyed structures, signs of fire damage brought on by high explosive ordinance. This damage is focused... it appears almost surgical in nature father. Only certain buildings up and down the streets and again only in certain areas of these buildings. Mainly the first floor of the structures.”

“Like you were trying to exterminate something.” Danny spoke softly.

“Yes.” Yuriko echoed. “We won’t know for sure until we have people there.”

Martin looked at Danny. “How many boots can we put down *fervon?*” He asked.

“Leaving the majority of the forces Andro sent to secure Base One and scout the rest of Manne...” Danny did some fast figuring in his head. “Two thousand. Broken up into teams of fifty.”

Martin looked at Anja immediately. “Red?”

Anja nodded her head. "I'm leaving Ceale in charge here with Mani'Juturi. Twenty field medics and four surgeons. The rest with us. I can put two medics per team. Including Anuk, Duewa and I." She looked at Danny.

Danny grinned. "I've already been told what will happen if I try to leave them behind. No thank you. It wasn't pretty."

Anja looked at Martin as she grinned. "We can do it as long as you two lug heads don't find something to fight and start a frigging war."

"Me? Find something to fight?" Martin asked astonished that she would suggest such a thing. "I'm a lover not a fighter."

"Like anyone will believe that *rensibfla*." Danny spoke sarcastically as everyone in the room chuckled.

Martin smiled and tilted his head upward slightly not bothering to shield the conversation from those in the room since they all spoke on a level far above Tier Six. *Arzoal... not counting the adults that came with us... do you and Teniri see any of the adolescents coming along faster than the others?*

You wish to use them as support Martin? Arzoal asked from across the compound.

They can see things from the air that we wouldn't be able to make out on the ground. Martin answered. *I don't want to put a lot of our aircraft in the skies over these cities. It would pretty much announce to the entire sector that we were there snooping around.*

Teniri? Arzoal questioned.

Perhaps two dozen with the size and natural calm that you will need. She answered him almost immediately. *And I can include the two warriors that came with me when we returned. They are experienced and natural leaders Martin.*

I agree. Arzoal said.

Martin nodded. "Good enough." He said openly. He looked at the image of Miranda who had remained silent until now. "Manda?"

"*HORNET* stays here as Sector Command ship for Manne. Janon can handle anything that comes up, and I was going to promote him anyway." She spoke immediately. Martin had already told her Fleet Ops belonged to her and he would follow her tasking missions without question. "We take the *ARC ROYAL* and *ARIZONA* along with a reduced Strike Wing per ship. I don't want to take too many for a couple reasons Martin. If we're wrong about the Kavalians who were originally with Pusintin's Task Force and they try something... I want Janon to be able to blow them out of the stars without too much problem."

Martin nodded. "Agreed."

Valael and Tobia were silent as they listened, though both of them had the same thoughts going through their minds. He may have been King to billions of lifeforms and different species but Martin Leonidas did not let that power go to his head. Those close to him referred to him by his first name which was unheard of in any monarchy that Valael of Tobia had ever read about. That alone spoke volumes about the type of man he was.

"The second reason is simple numbers." Manda continued. "If we want to maintain as low a profile as we can because of these Tasmor folks being in the area... then twelve ships per wing is the lowest I will go. Since we brought only half the *ARC ROYAL*'s fighter complement, she can carry most of the *STRIKERS* and *MENKLA* transports we need. Half her complement is more than enough with Steven and the *ARIZONA*'s squadrons."

"What about early warning Manda?" Dan asked.

"I'll have my ELINT birds up the entire time." Miranda answered. "Four *RAPTORS E3s*. We'll be covered. Anything that enters the system and we'll know about it in seconds. One un-shrouded ship... a cruiser so it doesn't spook anyone and the rest remain hidden unless we need to flex some muscle."

Martin looked at Tobia and Valael. "Ok... now tell us about these Tasmor." He said.

"Everything is in the reports I gave to you." Tobia said.

"Yeah... now tell me what you think and feel." Martin told her. "You've met them. Dealt with them. I'd rather go with your gut instinct as opposed to reports written up by someone who never met them."

"They are a proud species." Tobia began. "Even the men... though heavily outnumbered and treated as they are... even they are equally as proud. There is a caste system of sorts. The merchants and workers and everyday people... and then the ruling class which includes those in their military. There is no dissension about

their positions in this system even though I did not see much of their internal workings while I was among them.”

“If their population is so weighted in favor of females, how do they maintain the numbers that they have and continue to grow?” Anja asked. “Simple birth mathematics would eventually dictate that the women would outpace the men exponentially.”

Tobia shook her head. “I do not know. That is not something we ever brought up.” She answered Anja honestly. “And the Tasmor never offered an explanation. As I said... there are men within their military and some who act as minor aides to the Sovereign Regent and other females who hold positions of power... but their numbers are very small. At least from what I saw.”

“That is odd to say the least Lover.” Anja told him. “If I had to guess with just the small amount of information that we have... I’d say selective breeding.”

“Selective breeding?” Valael asked. “What does this mean Anja?”

“It means that the men are used as tools or rewards for the women, depending on how you want to view it.” Anja answered. “It may be a status thing or some other ridiculous idea... but they are only allowing select woman to breed with the men in their population.”

“Is this possible?” Wayonn asked. “To have reached their level and still be doing this?”

Anja nodded. “It’s possible I suppose, though not conducive to long term expansion. The females will eventually squeeze out the males over the course of the generations until no males are born. However... the sheer numbers of their population now tells me there is something else going on as well.”

“Something else Anja?” Aricia asked.

Anja nodded. “It just seems odd that they have reached this population size if the ratio is so heavily weighed towards females.”

“What about this Sovereign Regent?” Martin asked turning back to Tobia. “What is she like?”

“Saydia is... she is unique.” Tobia answered almost shyly.

Martin looked at her oddly. “Tobia... now would not be the time to hold back. What aren’t you telling us?” He said.

Tobia met his eyes. “My personal interactions with her were... Saydia is a very smart and dominant woman. Much like the Drow within your society. A large portion of the Tasmor females are similar in their demeanor. They are very open about their sexuality let us say. Even more so than your own people in some things. Like you... they do not shy from same gender relationships among their populous. They encourage it even due to the large gap between males and females.”

“But... I don’t care about their sexual preference... I want to know about their attitude.” Martin prodded her.

“If you remove my people from the equation of forces, the Tasmor are the most militarily sophisticated and powerful species in this Quadrant. The Kintaur Hegemony are the second most powerful and nearly equal in terms of size, but they are openly hostile to those they do not know and will not hesitate to attack if they think they can win. The Tasmor are far better trained and equipped but also far less aggressive. The other space faring species can field warships and ground troops but not on the scope that the Tasmor or Kintaur can. Because of this sense of superiority... this has made the Tasmor believe they are... that they are entitled to do what they wish and demand what they want.”

“Why is it that I don’t like the way you said that.” Martin spoke.

“They are not wholly unreasonable Martin.” Tobia said quickly. “Just forceful in what they want when they see something.”

“And...?” Martin pressed her further.

Tobia took a deep breath. “This mentality includes men and women alike.” She finally said. “To refuse such a request is considered a great insult in their society.”

“Slavery?” Danny asked quickly.

Tobia shook her head. “No. They do not allow this within their society. That much I do know for certain. They follow a strict traditional culture that has been in place for millennia. A Code of Ethics if you will. Some of this tradition and culture will seem rather harsh... but it is the way of their people. This superiority... in many ways in makes them believe they are entitled to certain things when dealing with others.”

“And I’m guessing that this Saydia Daret wanted something in order to establish the trade agreement that you have with them?” Martin asked.

Tobia nodded. “Yes.”

Aricia stepped closer to Martin now and took his arm as she stared across the table at Tobia. “She wanted you... didn’t she Tobia?”

Aricia and Anja had seen it first in Tobia’s face and her body language mainly because they both had this type of relationship with each other and four other women. It was something Tobia was embarrassed about but not something she held anger or resentment for. Tobia finally nodded her head.

“Yes.” She answered seeing Valael’s eyes widen in shock out of the corner of her eye. “It was something I agreed to in order to secure the agreement and it was... it was not unpleasant or forced!” She added quickly. “It was rather... it was rather enjoyable to be honest. As I said... they are just very demanding.”

“You sound as if you are defending them.” Martin said.

“I’m not defending them. This is the way of their culture and society.” Tobia said. “I am merely saying that they are not bad people.”

Martin was silent for a moment before nodding his head. “Ok... we’ll go based on what you tell us. But just so that you are aware... I don’t take kindly to people demanding something from me that belongs to me or my people.”

“Lover no!” Anja said in mock surprise.

“You did not refuse us last night Beloved.” Aricia stated knowing that Anja was trying to divert attention from Tobia and going along with her. “We were very demanding and you were exceptionally open to this.”

“That’s not what I mean and you both know it!” Martin defended himself.

Danny laughed at his expression. “They got you boss man.” He said.

“Bah! You should talk!” Martin hissed at him waving his hand at him dismissively.

“At least I admit it!” Danny quipped in reply with a wide grin.

“Ok. Ok.” Martin said as Aricia and Anja snuggled close to him and For'mya simply sat and chuckled from her spot. “I’ll be nice! Jeesh!”

Tobia couldn’t help but smile as well at the antics of Martin’s wives and she silently thanked them for redirecting his attention from her. Tobia did enjoy her encounters with Saydia as she was not unwilling to give pleasure and she was quite good at it, though after the third time she had been sent to see her, Tobia did not wish it to go further because she felt she was betraying Murano. And in her mind, nothing could ever compare to his arms around her.

Fedor chose that time to stand up and move to the table. “Father... will Eirene and I be going as part of your team?” He asked.

Anja and Aricia stopped their playfulness instantly as Martin turned to him. He took a deep breath and shook his head slowly. “No Fedor. You and Eirene are not going on this Op.” he told him.

Fedor’s eyes grew wide and he moved closer to the table and the father of his heart. “What? Why not? We can do this! We have been training for this! We...”

“Fedor Leonidas...” For'mya snapped coming to her feet. “You will not raise your voice to your father! Ever!”

Fedor looked at his mother and felt shame fill him but he turned back to Martin. “Father why?” He asked more sedately. “We are ready for this. You know we are.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes... you are.” He said honestly. “And it is most certainly not because I don’t think you and Eirene are capable Fedor.”

“Then why?” Fedor asked.

“I’m sending you, Eirene, Kdan and Dnom to be with your brothers and sisters.” Martin told him seeing Fedor’s eyes grow wide. “Deion and Nara are going through the final stages of their Agoge under their brother. On the job training we call it. The additional training will be severe... but it will do you good and it’s time you met the rest of your family.”

“We... we will be with Andro?” Fedor gasped as his heart began to race. He and Eirene had dreamed of this day since they first entered this world. Since Andro had first touched them within their mother’s womb really. This is what they had desired since their awareness came to be from Andro touching them.

Martin nodded his head. “Andro and all of your brother’s and sisters.” He said. “Your grandmothers as well. You will remain with them until they meet up with us a few weeks from now. Something tells me your brother will need your help between now and then. He is always getting into trouble on his own.”

Danny snorted. “Like father like son.”

“When... when do we leave?” Fedor gasped.

“Avi is prepping the corvette now.” Martin told him. “If Andro is sticking to his plan they will arrive in the Beta Quadrant in thirteen hours and you should get there twelve hours later. Iama and Miseo go with you and you’re lucky I’m letting you take Iama boy. Once the crew finds out she isn’t making their meals I may well have a mutiny on my hands!”

“And me Uncle?” Kalis spoke as he came up beside Fedor. “I would like... I would like to see Androcles as well. If only to make amends for my actions on Hadaria.”

Martin shook his head. “There is nothing to make amends for and Andro has already made that clear to you. “This one I will leave up to you. You can stay with us or go with Fedor and Eirene and then rejoin with us when they arrive.”

“You were not going to let me go on this mission were you?” Kalis said.

Martin shook his head. “In all honesty... no. I was going to have you in a *STRIKER* watching over us in the sky. You may feel fully recovered *mandri*... but you still need time. I will not risk you just to prove to you that I trust you completely.”

Kalis nodded calmly and felt For'mya squeeze his arm in support. He was not angry at all. Kalis smiled to himself and everyone saw this. He had grown so much and he knew this. A year ago... had his father left him out of such an operation he would have been livid. Kalis had become a different man now and with Manne secured he wanted to see and experience so much more. He could do that with Androcles and his siblings.

“It will be... it will be interesting to see all of them.” Kalis said looking at Martin. “I will go with Fedor and Eirene.”

Martin nodded. “Good... I really didn’t want to have to deal with your young wife and mate chewing my ear off.” He said with a smile. “Hadarian females can be...”

Anja crossed her arms under her large breasts and glared at him. “Can be what?” She demanded as her jade green eyes narrowed.

Martin stared at her. “Pig headed.”

“Pig headed!” Anja snapped. “It might help you know... if the men we chose to curl our toes don’t act so recklessly stupid at times!”

“I do not act reckless!” Martin declared as he turned to face her petite form, towering over her five foot three height.

“In whose opinion?” Anja snapped right back at him unafraid. “Yours or ours? In this case your opinion is out voted six to one you big oaf!”

“Here we go again.” Danny quipped with a huge smile.

“Stuff it lug head!” Both Martin and Anja barked at him as they turned.

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
NORTHERN CONTINENT
LIVAJI SULEVFU FACILITY

Aviel stood on the balcony overlooking the courtyard below and watched Laren and Ladur going through some form of training regime he had never witnessed before. She had a solid staff of Balrian Oak, a wood found in the high mountains with the strength of the hardest metal known to exist on Icarava. She was going through elaborate motions with this staff while Ladur moved nimbly back and forth around her, at different points his massive wings snapping out to whistle through the air. Laren would duck or leap gracefully to avoid his wings and land cat like to go directly into another series of intricate motions. It was actually very

elegant and quite beautiful to watch as they executed these dazzling moves while her mother and father watched intently from the side of the courtyard.

“They do this every morning for hours.” Nahko’s voice echoed behind him and he turned to see her walk up.

Aviel smiled and pulled her close with his arm as she pressed up against him. “I have never seen anything like it in my life. Not even from our Sand Strider Battalions, and they are the most well trained forces we have.”

Nahko snuggled close to his side, enjoying the feel of his powerful body against her own as she always did. He had remained for two days, most of that time spent with Laren and Ladur just talking of things. She looked up into his handsome face. “You are returning today?” She asked him.

Aviel nodded his head. “I must.” He answered. “Others will begin to question why I have stayed here so long if I do not. We must be very careful Nahko.”

“*Svabol ui gethrisjir ekess shinalt jaka mrrandii?*” She asked. (What is going to happen now husband?)

“Dytin Ueni is working on that.” Aviel answered her. “He is secretly preparing two ships for our use. He must be very careful in who he chooses Nahko. They must all be believers like us or it will end before it begins. Once that is done, their families will slowly be shifted around and then moved to these two ships. Ours included. Hopefully by then... hopefully by then we will have a place where we can go in order to keep them safe.”

“If the Scourge discover what we are doing...” Nahko said softly.

“I am not concerned with those monsters.” Aviel told her. “Our own people are the ones we should fear most. At least right now. Knowing what we do now only makes this harder. So many have forgotten what took place... what we did. They have... they have forgotten what it means to be Darastrixi.”

Nahko looked up into his face once more. “What do you mean?”

“I have... since Chalith and the others brought this to me... since they made me see what has been going on; I have observed the other Ministers Nahko.” He told her. “So many of them are now concerned only with remaining in power and keeping things unchanged. If they were aware of the knowledge that the *Dahakoan* have returned... that among their number are four *Vrelvel Sargti*... they will not see this as a sign. They will begin to fear for their positions and their power.”

“But surely our people... there have to be more who feel as we do Aviel.” Nahko said.

Aviel nodded his head. “And I am sure that there are. Many more than we believe. But they do not know what we know and right now we can’t take the risk. The knowledge that Laren and Ladur exist would cause chaos among the Ministers and they would do everything within their power to keep this information from reaching the people.”

“Do you think they would... do you think they would order them executed?” Nahko asked not really believing she was asking such a question.

Aviel nodded his head slowly. “Based on what I have seen... I am ashamed to admit that I would not rule out that course of action. Nor would I discount them turning Laren and Ladur over to the Scourge scum in order to appease them. I would be powerless to stop them. Neither option would be advisable since Laren and Ladur would resist violently if need be and the death toll would be horrific, for I fear Laren and Ladur would hold back nothing then.”

Nahko looked at him. “Hold back?” She asked. “Aviel... what do you mean?”

Aviel looked back to where Laren and Ladur were slipping into another set of intricate, dance like moves. “They have fooled most everyone here Nahko... almost. Ch'teven... I believe he has some idea of what they are truly capable of but he has said nothing. We have spoken of this briefly. We think that Laren and Ladur are holding back from showing us what they are capable of. They are doing what Dalis has said the Lycavorians do. They conceal and deflect so that others do not see what burns within them.” He turned back to her. “If they feel threatened in any way, by anyone, they will unleash all of the power that they now wield. What little we have seen of them as they conduct these exercises is simply a ruse Nahko. If what Ch'teven and I believe is true then they have been pulling knowledge of skills from their fellow *Dahakoan* through the Etheric realm that Shalu says the Praetorians and *Dahakoan* manipulated so easily. Skills unlike any we have seen before.”

“Ch'teven believes the *Dahakoan* were able to use Etheric power like the Praetorians?” She gasped never having heard this before.

Aviel shook his head. “No... not in this manner. All of our history of them states their Etheric abilities were much more latent in nature. They could almost see what the enemy was going to do. It made them faster and stronger and more resilient. It made them very hard to kill in other words.” Aviel looked at her. “According to the reports from Dalis that he has retrieved from the probe download, Laren and Ladur have been learning from their *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir* and do not even know it. And all of these reports I have seen speak of the same thing Nahko. Her *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir* are warriors unequalled.”

“Aviel surely...”

The soft feminine cry caused them to turn back to the courtyard, only to see Laren on the floor of the courtyard holding her head, the staff forgotten beside her. Ladur’s massive wings were twitching madly as he kept shaking his head as if in pain.

“Something is wrong!” Nahko hissed loudly as she bolted for the doorway down into the courtyard followed quickly by Aviel. It took them all of two minutes to reach the courtyard, only to see Laren’s mother clutching her shoulders and rubbing her forehead, trying anything to make the pain her daughter felt go away. Chalith, Shalu and Ch’teven had already rushed into the courtyard with great concern.

“Laren... Laren what is wrong?” Nahko asked as she skidded to a halt on the floor beside her. “What is it child?”

Laren shook her head. “Something... something is happening!” She stammered out the words while trying to fight the pain in her head.

“Laren my sister!” Ladur snarled as he moved his massive bulk closer to her.

“Nahko make it stop!” Robati exclaimed. “They are in such pain!”

Nahko held Laren’s head in her hands but she could see nothing wrong. “I don’t know what is...”

Laren’s head came up with blinding speed and a smile split her face as her eyes grew wide. “Ladur!” she cried out.

“Yes!” He echoed her voice whirling around. “I can feel them!”

“Laren? Feel who?” Nahko asked. “What are you talking about?”

“They are here!” Laren exclaimed as she staggered to her feet while the others looked on with worry.

“They are here!”

Aviel stepped forward with Chalith at his side. “Laren... child it is just us!” He spoke reaching for her. “There... there is no one else here.”

“That would not be an entirely accurate statement *Koppentotz* Aviel.” The male voice spoke from behind all of them. “We have been here for nearly a minute.”

“By the Divines!” Shalu exclaimed as she staggered backwards upon turning and seeing the Etheric projections of the two men she had never seen before, as well as two sleekly muscular *Vrrarhoinpa*.

“What is this?” Chalith roared as he stepped in front of Laren and Ladur intending to protect them if needed.

“Protect them!” Yokra barked out as he moved in front of them, Ch’teven also imposing his bulk before the Etheric projection.

“No!” Ladur snapped.

Aviel hadn’t moved from his spot as he stared at the Etheric projection of two very large young men with hair as black as night and near glowing eyes. Laren pushed Nahko aside gently, rising to her feet and moving up beside her father and Ch’teven’s bulk. Her hands went to her face as she gasped in unrestrained delight and her eyes filled with tears.

Andro’s own face was animated and his azure eyes happy. “Forgive us our *Isthasyi* and *Myvishi* of the *Iejir*; we did not intend the pain we caused you. It took us a moment to adjust and then compensate within the Etheric realm for the distance.”

Ladur moved his bulk up beside Laren who reached out with her hands and placed them on his front foreleg. “Androcles... Dorian...” He gasped. “Elynth... Ryner... we have... we have waited so long to finally see you.”

All of them heard the intakes of breath from everyone gathered in the courtyard as this bit of information finally began to process. They watched as the Etheric projections of the four of them moved much closer to Laren and Ladur, their images as clear and precise as if they were standing in this very room with them. All

those present instinctively backed up as the massive and quite muscular forms of Elynth and Ryner pressed close to the side of Andro and Dorian and directly in front of Laren and Ladur.

“As have we.” Dorian spoke now as he looked at Laren. “You are so very beautiful our sister.”

“And you are so handsome Ladur.” Elynth stated from beside Andro. The Etheric projection allowed for her to look as if she was speaking just as Ladur and Ch'teven could even though Elynth had not yet learned to manipulate the dragon vocal cords to allow her to speak openly. Ladur knew this instantly and did nothing to indicate to anyone else that she was unable to do this.

“How?” Laren gasped in delight.

“It is a device we use. Something left for my people a long time ago that we have begun to use more and more as we discover our history.” Andro told her. “It allows us to communicate over great distances within the Etheric realm. We have... Dorian and I... Elynth and Ryner... we have wanted to do this sooner but so much was...”

Laren stepped forward unafraid even though her mother had moved up and held her arms tightly. “No. We could sense the emotions within all of you. You were not... you are so much more focused now Androcles. It is... it is wonderful to feel you.”

Andro's azure eyes turned to Robati and he smiled at her. “*Sepa dask* Robati... you cling to our sister as if we would hurt her yet... of all who are present... you and our *Sepa Opsola* know we could never harm our blood.”

Robati gazed at him with wide eyes but they rapidly filled with delight at what he had said and she felt her husband grip her arm and shoulder tightly in support. “This... this is all so...”

“Incredible.” Yokra hissed.

Dorian chuckled within the projection. “That's an understatement *Sepa Opsola*.” He said with a large grin.

Andro looked at Ladur beside Laren and stepped closer. “Your scales gleam with health Ladur my brother.” He said. “And you are... larger than we pictured you.”

“I am fit and strong... and we are ready brother.” Ladur spoke confidently.

Andro smiled up at him. “No doubt.” He said. “Laren... you and Ladur focus now and reach for the Etheric stream we are projecting to you. Join us so that you can see all of us.”

“There are others with you?” Laren asked quickly.

“Our wives and mates.” Dorian told her. “And some friends that we have made along the way. We did not know if we could do this alone so they added their own power to ours. We did not think it would be so easy.”

Laren and Ladur shut their eyes for a moment and focused their minds intently together. They found the Etheric stream almost immediately as brightly intense as it was and they merged their minds with that Etheric stream as easily as breathing. Suddenly, the Etheric projection in the courtyard widened to include over a dozen men and women who were sitting or standing around a single large table behind where Androcles and Dorian stood with Elynth and Ryner.

Nahko could not contain her intake of breath. “Gods!” She gasped aloud as she gripped Aviel's arm tightly.

“Laren our sister... Ladur our brother... *Sepa dask vur Opsola*... our family.” Androcles told them sweeping his hand back. “Well... a good portion of them anyway. Your family now as well.” (Soul mother and father.)

Laren was openly weeping as she held onto Ladur's front leg tightly, her multicolored blue eyes wide in delight and happiness. Robati held her husband's arm just as tightly as they witnessed something neither of them ever thought they would see.

“Sister... there is so much to... we will save our joy for when we can hold you both in our arms and touch you.” Androcles told her. “Right now there is much we must cover with you.”

“Wait... we have so many question?” Shalu stammered. “How did... how this all came to be... so...”

“They must wait I'm afraid.” Androcles told her. “Our only concern at the moment is the safety of Laren, Ladur and our family.”

“These men and women... they have protected us Androcles.” Ladur spoke quickly. “For many years.”

“Are they in danger as well Ladur?” Androcles asked.

Ladur nodded. "Equally as much as we are, if not more for the risks they are taking to protect us."

They all watched as Andro looked first at Dorian and then Elynth and Ryner. All of them nodded their heads and he turned back. "Then you will need to know what I am about to tell you." He spoke. Andro turned his head as Dorian reached out with his hand outside the Etheric cone of the transmission and they all watched as the hand took his and he pulled Sarlana up beside him gently.

Though Laren had told them a *Doraanar* was among them, none of them were prepared to see her walk gracefully into the transmission.

"*Doraanar!*" Chalith and Shalu gasped together as they all dropped to one knee. Even Dalis, who had remained silent up until now, dropped to one knee in shock. Androcles was everything he had imagined the Lycavorians were and so much more. He had not foreseen them as so well built and large, but everything else about them was turning out exactly as he had said.

"Stand up!" Sarlana barked softly. "You do not bow to me!"

"You... you are *Doraanar!*" Chalith spoke almost in awe.

"That does not make me a *ithquent!*" Sarlana stated. "Now stand up... all of you!" (God) She waited as they all got to their feet. "Now tell me... have... did any others like me survive?"

Ch'teven moved his frame forward slightly. "*Si mi bivai Doraanar.*" He said softly. "*Wux re wer anny.*" (I am sorry. You are the last.)

Sarlana took a deep breath and nodded her head in acknowledgement even as she took strength from Dorian and Androcles' presence beside her. "I feared as much." She said. She looked at them. "Before you stand the rebirth of the *Dahakoan*. And they are so much more than you ever imagined. They will need the faith that has stayed with you through the millennia and your guidance. Do not think to control them however... for they will do what is right to them. I will be here and we will talk more soon but for now we must make our plans." Sarlana turned and looked up at Androcles before pulling him down with her hands on his arm and planting a soft kiss on his cheek. This shocked those within the transmission for none of them could ever remember seeing a *Doraanar* acting in such a way. She turned to Dorian and did the same before moving out of the transmission.

Andro turned once more and looked at them. "There is one among you called Dalis... correct?" He asked.

Dalis looked up surprised and he moved slightly to the side so that they could see him. "I am... I am Dalis." He said.

"How long before it becomes known to others that you downloaded your probe data early?" Androcles asked him.

Dalis looked at him stunned. "How did you..." His eyes darted to Laren and Ladur and he nodded. "Of course! They shared this with you."

"How soon *Tilabil* Dalis?" Andro asked once more.

"I am not an Elder." Dalis commented.

"You are far older and wiser than I am *Tilabil* Dalis... that makes you an Elder to me." Andro said. "To all of us."

Dalis stared at him for a long moment before answering. "Just under... just under five weeks time." He stated. "That is how long we have before it is discovered."

"And there is no way they could discover it sooner?" Dorian asked.

Dalis shook his head. "No. They are rigid in how they do things and downloading the probe data is not a priority for them until it is time."

"Then we will call it five weeks." Androcles said. "With a few days buffer."

"We are coming for you our sister and brother." Dorian spoke now. "And nothing will stand in our way."

“...Suggest we all learn these plans intimately.” Murano was speaking from one end of the table as he swept his hands across the chart table before him. “The facility may be deserted but it is huge and we must know our way around in order to make the mission proceed without hazard.”

Andro stood beside Dorian on one side of the table, Carisia and Lu'ria beside him while Sheva and Onera were beside Dorian. Jomann, Deion, Nara, Eliani, Lisisa and Mari occupied the opposite side of the table, while Sarlana stood on the end opposite Murano. Mari was tucked quite intimately up against Deion's side, their fingers intertwined tightly while her other hand gripped the front of his shirt over his abdomen. This was something that Murano noticed almost immediately though he had said nothing. He could not remember her face being so bright and alive with life and this kept him from saying anything. He would need to speak with her soon however, especially if she was in the process of pursuing a relationship with Deion Leonidas.

Andro looked up from the table and gazed at Murano intently. “I did not think you would approve of us doing this Murano.” He said honestly.

Murano met his eyes. “I did not at first. It may result in a confrontation that we are not prepared for.” He replied just as honestly. His eyes cut to Sarlana and then back to Androcles. “It was then Sarlana who told me that Laren and Ladur could wield the same power that we can. That they would be Praetorians like us... but also like you and Dorian. After being among your father, among you and the others, learning what I have learned in this time, I will never refuse to assist a fellow Praetorian. You, your father, Deion, Dorian, Jomann, Nara, Eliani, all of you in this very room... you are the future of the Praetorian Vanguard Androcles, whether any of you choose to accept it or not. I can not deny that. I will not deny that any longer.” Murano took a deep breath, closing his eyes to focus himself. His eyes were clear, focused and determined when he opened them again. “This is the knowledge I have sought for so many years. The purpose your grandfather left me behind. He meant for me to be here... now... when the time came that the Praetorians were reborn. And I am coming to believe that he knew what you and Dorian would become and that is also why he brought Sarlana to me. So that we can do what our peoples should have done millennia ago.”

“The truth of things means just as much to our species as it does to the Lycavorians and Vampires.” Sarlana spoke now. “Murano and I both know we can not reside in a past that no longer has a place in our future. We have both chosen to let the past stay where it belongs. Now we will work for the future. You are that future Androcles. Dorian is that future. Elynth and Ryner. Your father and Torma. All of you in this room are what the future holds. And all of you will begin to shape that future.”

Dorian rolled his eyes. “*Carians*... now they are beginning to sound like the *Feravomir*.”

Sheva looked at him and snapped her hand up to lightly slap the back of his head. “Dori!” She exclaimed.

“What?!” Dorian echoed. “It's the truth!”

“He's right.” Lisisa said softly. “And it's scary true.”

“Avoi.” Nara echoed her sister.

Sarlana and Murano were actually smiling as they witnessed this and Sarlana nodded her head with warmth in her eyes. “I believe Murano and I will take comfort that we are in such good company.” She said.

“Indeed.” Murano agreed.

“I understand she had quite the role in helping to raise all of you.” Sarlana said.

Deion shifted his position slightly and cringed. “More like tanning our backsides red when we did not pay attention in her classes.”

“Some of us paid attention *fervon*.” Nara spoke with a smile as she winked at Mari. “She never tanned my backside.”

“Because she never had time.” Eliani spoke now. “She was usually chasing Andro and I around with a switch in her hand.”

Even Androcles laughed at that and nodded his head. “Remember the time she caught us both in that net and didn't even bother to release us before she began to beat us?”

“I remember that!” Lisisa exclaimed. “You two were covered in mud from crawling through the Estate Caretaker's muck dirt. Right after he planted the yearly crop of roses.”

“Why... why were you doing that?” Mari asked.

“Resumar dared us to body surf naked through the lower village.” Eliani spoke with a smile. “He said he would cover for us when we returned to the estate.”

“He saw the *Feravomir* walking the grounds and chickened out.” Andro continued. “We had to sneak back into the estate through our uncle’s defenses. We would have made it if not for Eli’s glaringly white ass sticking up out of the mud.”

Eliani blushed and shrugged her shoulders. “Father and mother’s genes hadn’t kicked in yet and I didn’t start tanning until I was thirteen. Two years later.”

“Not one of our prouder moments.” Andro said as he looked at Eliani.

“Not when we were buck naked and covered in mud... no.” She agreed. “But the body surfing part was fun!”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes it was.”

“It was the talk of the village for weeks.” Lisisa agreed with a smile. “Especially the part about Andro frightening half the girls to death because his... he was exposed and flopping all over the place.”

“Oh my!” Sarlana gasped as even she could not hold back her laughter now and she saw the look on Androcles’ face. She watched Carisia lean up and whisper something in his ear and Lu’ria pressed closer to them as she did. His azure eyes grew slightly wider and he grinned down at them. So much had been going on over the last months that had hidden his playful side deep down Sarlana knew, but now Androcles once more felt free and happy and this was showing in his actions every moment.

“Murano...” Eliani broke in now a few moments later, mainly because she knew Andro would want them focused on this information going forward. “Did the Pralors ever believe in building something that was normal in size?” She asked as she gazed at the plans of the station. “This Science Facility is not huge... it’s colossal!”

Murano grinned at her comment. “We are lucky... this is one of the smaller ones.” He told her.

“Smaller?” Eliani gasped.

Andro leaned over the table now. “You are certain that the Scourge would not have a presence here?”

Murano nodded his head quickly. “I confirmed this with the information Armen has in the records archives here on *SPARTA’S WRATH*. This particular science station was idle when the Scourge swept through this portion of Pralor space. It was inactive. It is on the very far reaching borders of what was Pralor space and was used primarily to conduct sensor scans of the neighboring system’s new sun and its corona. It does, however, sit only twenty-two light years from the border of Darastrixi space. If my average understanding of science terminology is accurate, then it was only used sparingly because it was so far from widely traveled corridors within Pralor space.”

“So it was not deemed as a threat?” Jomann asked.

Murano nodded. “We had many such facilities spread across the expanse of space. Many of them were not in active use when the second Scourge invasion began. All of them were either ignored completely, or searched and left as dead hulks in space. Armen can confirm that once he departed for the Alpha Quadrant from our homeworld, the Scourge had not returned to this sector of Pralor space in over fifty years. We’ll be able to confirm that even further when we get close. Armen has assured me he has tweaked the Shrouds enough that not even Scourge sensors will be able to see us and our sensors were always more accurate than theirs.”

Andro looked up as the doors to the lounge opened and Armen himself entered carrying two datapads and with the Senior Worker Drone clinging to his massive shoulders. The Worker Drones were broken up into three different sections for more cohesive repairs and any kinds of construction that was needed. This Worker Drone, known as Alpha Six, had a crimson stripe across the top of its oval shaped frame indicating that it was the Coordination Drone for all the three groups. Everyone had come to discover that this Drone was never very far from where Armen was anywhere on the ship.

“Armen?” Andro spoke as the hulking seven foot tall Avatar moved up behind him. He and Dorian moved slightly so that he could take up a position between them.

-Denali’s initial report indicates that their first official meeting with representatives of the Vanari government did not go well- Armen spoke as he handed Andro one of the pads.

“That doesn’t sound like Deni.” Nara spoke up.

-His actual words were... it went like *skelraini sibfla*- Armen added. (Smoking shit)

Lisisa laughed. "Now that is my beautiful Denali." She stated with warmth and love in her voice that they all detected. Lisisa missed Deni and Arduri and she made no bones about that.

Andro set the pad aside on the table and nodded. "I did not expect anything else." He said. "What have you and Alpha Six come up with?"

-We can reconfigure four of our long range probes and outfit them with Union Shrouds. In addition we can upload Praetorian Command codes to Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen that they can then use to activate individual sections of the station when needed- Armen told him.

"Wait a minute..." Andro said. "I never said anything about sending our Drones. It's too much of a risk Armen."

-It is the most logical course of action Androcles. Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen would be able to adjust and compensate for any unknown events that may occur. The Darastrixi will not be familiar with the station's equipment or use. They will also be able to counter anything that the Scourge may have left behind and repair whatever they may have done in order to sabotage the station- Armen stated. **-The Scourge are not the most unique thinkers Androcles-**

All of them saw Alpha Six rise up and down on its six legs twice as it chirped loudly and balanced itself easily on Armen's shoulder.

Andro shook his head. "I don't doubt they could do it Alpha Six..." He said quickly. "I just did not want to risk exposing our Drones to unknown dangers."

Murano shook his head in awe. "You know... it took decades for our technicians to be able to understand the Drone's use of sound as a language. You, Deion and my niece do it like it is nothing. Mari and Deion I can understand given their schooling... but you..."

Andro shrugged. "Just lucky I guess." He said.

"You should know by now that our brother isn't exactly normal Murano." Nara spoke with a grin.

"That is so the understatement of the month *arande*." Eliani said.

"I'm sorry... I will endeavor to..." Nara began.

"Be more profound in my words." Deion finished for her knowing that it drove Eliani crazy when they finished each other's statements.

"Hey! What have I told you two about doing that?" Eliani snapped. "*Carians*... it's so creepy!"

Andro shook his head with a smile as everyone chuckled. He turned to Alpha Six. "Very well." He said. "But they are not to risk themselves for any reason."

Alpha Six chirped three times in reply and Andro nodded his head.

"Now what can they carry?" Dorian asked.

-We will remove the internal long range sensor packages currently installed- Armen told them. **- Between the four Probes we can send enough equipment and supplies for fifty men and women-**

Alpha Six chirped half a dozen times now and Armen nodded.

-Alpha Six also recommends we pass on to the Darastrixi that they do not enter the station with any more than this number. Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen will only be bringing the station's power core to 10 percent in order to remain undetected by any ships that may be nearby. This setting will only allow for minimal life support- Armen continued.

“There won’t be fifty.” Androcles said as he looked at the plans once more. “Laren and Ladur will not allow them to taken more than twenty. Murano... the corridors are large enough to allow unfettered access to Elynth and the others? Ladur included?”

Murano nodded in reply. “Easily.”

Andro pointed to one side of the station. “How many landing bays?” He asked.

“Three. One main hanger bay and two alternates.” Murano answered as he zoomed in the plans closer by touching the table. “Here, here and here.” His finger touched three different locations on the table.

Andro lifted his head slightly. “Sadi?” He called out into the empty air.

“We will talk about your antics as a child later *Saradasaar*.” Sadi’s voice echoed with humor from the speakers and they saw Andro shake his head slightly. “The one on the upper tower is a no go. Our length is too much and we don’t want to risk going in perpendicular to the atmospheric shield and force field.” Her voice answered from the starboard hanger bay where she, Ne’Veha and Kameka were within the *PREMONITION* and monitoring the briefing. “We can fit in the lower one easily, but the upper one will have to be *STRIKER* Mark IIs only.”

“Normya?” Andro asked the air once more.

“Max of two *fervon*. Any more and we will have no room to maneuver inside the bay itself. Which I’m sure you want us to be able to do.” Normya answered from her *STRIKER* Mark II. “Tir’ut?”

“I concur.” His voice answered instantly.

Andro looked at Dorian first, and then Deion, both of whom nodded. “Then this is what we do...” He said. “Murano goes in one *STRIKER* into the upper bay. Deion and Nara with him to access the command terminals in the Control Center.”

“I am going too!” Mari stated quickly.

Andro looked at Murano and saw him nod without any doubts. “Her computer skills will be invaluable in powering up the station more quickly and downloading whatever information we can from the main cores. With both Mari and Deion doing this it will halve the time needed to accomplish the task. This is one time where I will welcome her help without question. We don’t expect any trouble and even if we detect Scourge vessels we can be gone long before they arrive.”

“Then Normya and Tir’ut will fly the Mark II with you, Deion, Nara, Mari and Jeru and Mayla. Primary objective is to secure the Command Center as quickly as possible.” Andro said.

“Why their Bonded Ones?” Murano asked.

“My people will not recklessly fire on any *Darastrixi*.” Sarlana explained. “As long as there is a dragon in each group, then there will be no accidents. They will have been there for at least several days before we arrive and there is no reason to suspect they will not want to spread out and explore.”

Murano nodded his understanding. “That will allow them excellent defensive positions while they are there, but they should all move to areas close to the landing bays by the time we arrive. It will make extraction proceed more quickly.”

Andro shifted his finger on the table to another portion of the Science Station schematics. “Cowen, Ridor, Torian and Sherice will be on the second Mark II with Caydren and Cinol. Their objective will be the Station’s Weapons locker here on deck ten.”

“What will this locker have in it Murano?” Torian’s voice spoke from all around them on the internal speakers. He was standing with Cowen and the others in an exact duplicate of the lounge they were in on the starboard side of the ship and four decks beneath them.

“Standard Security complement of weapons.” Murano answered. “Do not be concerned with trying to use them. Armen will be needed to unlock their genetic activation sequencers. But with actual weapons, the Drones should be able to reverse engineer them quickly enough to send to Martin so that the Drones with him can produce enough of them to supply those that will be defending Honelze.”

“Why not replicate the weapons you have on Artaaya?” Dorian asked him.

Murano shook his head. “They are only light weapons. The weapons on this station are military grade. One of the more unpopular decisions my brother made when we first arrived on Artaaya, at least with the few portions of the military that remained, was to not do exactly what we are going to do now. Take this information from an abandoned station on the edge of our border.”

“Wouldn’t the ships you escaped on have had these plans and weapons?” Deion asked.

Murano shook his head. “Most of the ships that escaped the Purge were civilian ships. This information would not have been in their files. The few military ships we did have were ordered to empty their archives before leaving Pralor space so that they could upload Scientific information that would help us to escape.”

“You purged this information without making back up files?” Jomann spoke now.

Murano nodded slowly. “There were many decisions made in those last days that were done without thought of the future or defense Jomann. Only escape. The Scourge were pressing all across what was left of our Empire and no one was concerned with fighting them anymore. Only surviving... in any way that they could.” He touched the schematics. “This locker will also have several hundred pounds of explosive that we will then need to place at five different points in order to destroy this station when we are done. It is very similar to your own man-portable explosive, albeit slightly more powerful. The points are all centrally located off the main lifts and can be reached easily and quickly.”

“Cowen... you and Torian will be doing that while the others secure whatever weapons you can on the saddle packs that Caydren and Cinol will be wearing.” Andro said. “Ridor and Sherice can direct that portion with whoever we decide to send with them.”

“I suggest at least six others.” Cowen spoke immediately from the second lounge. “Four to assist Ridor and Sherice and two to provide security and either end of this main corridor.”

They could all see his finger on their chart table as it indicated two different locations.

“I’m not going to try and micromanage this operation.” Andro spoke. “That never works out for anyone. Each of you will determine how best to accomplish the task and then return to your ships, but understand this... extraction of Laren and Ladur and those with them is priority over everything else. Is that understood by all? The secondary objectives are not more important than the lives we will be saving. Are we clear on this?”

Andro heard all of their voices answer in the affirmative almost exactly at the same time. He nodded his head. “Good. We will enter in the lower hanger bay and make our way here...” He stabbed down on the table. “...to this point. It is the single largest room on the station and is accessible by six different lifts.”

“What is it Murano?” Eliani asked.

“An artificially generated Amphitheater.” Murano replied. “It could fit the entire station crew if needed and is where most of the public announcements were made. If my memory of your history is accurate... it is the same in size to one of your Coliseums where you hold your yearly sports events in and around Sparta.”

Dorian whistled. “Wow... that’s big.”

“It’s the most heavily shielded area of the station and as your brother pointed out, the most accessible to the many lifts in the area.” Murano answered. “Five of the six Lifts exit directly to the main hanger bay and this is where life support will be focused even though most of the station will have minimal systems online.”

“Dorian, Elynth, Ryner and I will enter from this end, while Jomann will bring the rest of our force in from the opposite end.” Andro said as his finger glided across the board. “Once we have a handle on the situation, Normya, Sadi and the other *STRIKER* will lift off and converge on the main hanger bay to extract everyone at once.”

“We expect a Darastrixi transport of some sort to be waiting hidden within this small asteroid field.” Dorian spoke as he now leaned over the table and zoomed the image out to encompass the space around the station and he pointed to a spot. “Once we have secured all those with Laren and Ladur and are ready to extract, this ship will break from the field and move to *SPARTA’S WRATH* and be taken aboard.”

-I will drop the Shroud around the hanger bays for twenty-two seconds in order to receive the Darastrixi transport- Armen spoke now. -And only when our other ships are in position to make a simultaneous entry into the other bays. I will reengage the Shroud and jump out of the area ten seconds later-

“We don’t want to stay here any longer than we have to.” Andro spoke. “Getting in and out unseen is a priority. We’ll be getting updated intelligence from Laren over the course of the next few weeks... but as it stands this is the outline of the plan.”

“Armen is currently working on setting up some sort of covert communication channel to this *Koppentotz* Aviel we spoke to.” Murano added. “It should be ready in a day or so and will give us the ability to stay up to date on anything happening there.”

“Meaning no disrespect *Doraanar*...” Deion spoke looking at her. “Can we trust him?”

Sarlana smiled and nodded her head to him. “None taken young Deion.” She answered. “I believe it is safe to say we can trust him. Ch’teven trusts him... as do Laren and Ladur.”

“And if they are wrong?” Deion pressed her.

Sarlana nodded once more. “If they are wrong... then there are already plans in place to insure he does not leave the Darastrixi homeworld with them.”

Deion looked at his brothers. “Forgive me Andro... Dorian... I just don’t...”

Andro shook his head quickly. “Never apologize for being cautious Deo.”

Nara took Deion’s arm. “You two aren’t... so someone has to be.” She exclaimed.

“Hey! We are cautious.” Dorian complained.

Sheva elbowed him in the ribs. “By whose definition of cautious Dori?” She stated as he turned his eyes on her. “Not ours for sure.”

Everyone laughed softly once more which made Deion relax. He had not wanted to ask the question but he knew what this meant to his brothers and he did not want to see them be disappointed.

[It was the right question fervon.] Andro’s voice reached for him across the table and he met his brother’s azure eyes.

[Do not be angry with me Andro.] Deion spoke.

[Angry at you for asking the question all of us have thought?] He replied. [That will never happen Deo. Never.]

Eliani could almost sense they were speaking in a shielded moment and she acted. “What if we get delayed in the Beta Quadrant *fervon*?” Eliani asked sensing a change of topic was needed if only to put Deion at ease.

Andro met her eyes after smiling at Deion. “We won’t. I have already spoken to our father and mothers in regards to that. We are all of the same mind. We will not jerk around with the Vanari or the Rothryn in any way. If the Vanari wish to cling to their centuries old distrust and hatred, they are welcome to it. The Rothryn people are the bigger question mark because of this Rothryn Science Academy, but the Vanari who have sanctioned what is going on now will not be so easily flung from power. It needs to come from within... and that is something we do not have the time to wait for.”

Jomann grinned. “You are making friends wherever you go.” He said.

Andro chuckled in reply. “Aren’t I though?”

“When are father and our mothers leaving to investigate this planet?” Lisisa asked now.

“Based on our last communication... they will be departing tomorrow afternoon from Manne. He will be sending his Corvette to us in the Beta Quadrant with a courier and updated data on these Svorag that he does not want to send via COMs.” Andro answered her. “I want all of you to take the first few days after arriving in the Beta Quadrant to remain on *SPARTA’S WRATH* to rest and study these plans. Coren is relatively sure their Board of Regents will make us wait for any kind of official meeting with them. Lisi... I will leave it to you to fill Deni and Arduri in when you reunited with them.”

“You need to rest too *fervon*.” Eliani told him.

Andro nodded his head looking quickly at Carisia and Lu’ria next to him. “And I will... once *Inamarno* is back with us.” He said turning back to her.

“Yes we will.” Lu’ria echoed.

“We will have a public gathering and State Dinner on Lorent to meet everyone next week. *Tenna Deia* will be attending with grandfather L’tian.”

“What about the operation against the OSG?” Jomann asked.

“We will only provide support for the majority of it unless something comes up.” Andro said. “Denali and Dutkne are confident the former Protectorate forces can accomplish the mission without our direct aide. They have been doing it for centuries already and many of them have a particular dislike for anything OSG related.”

“Something will come up.” Lisisa said dismissively. “Something always does.”

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “That is why I want all of us rested. It might get very interesting... for I have no doubt that the Vanari will positively shit their pants when they see this ship.”

All of them looked at him with wide eyes. It was Eliani who spoke what they all thought. “Andro... did you just try to make a joke?” She gasped with a huge grin.

Carisia and Lu'ria were the first to burst out laughing, followed quickly by everyone else. Andro looked at them. “What? That wasn't funny?” He demanded.

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
DEFENSE MINISTRY BUILDING

“...Actually saw them?” Dytin gasped as he looked at Aviel from across the Darastrixi version of the chart table.

Aviel nodded his head. “They appeared like *arcanisstok* in the courtyard Dytin my friend. It was... it was awe inspiring! They were using some device that allowed them to boost their Etheric power so that they appeared as if they were actually among us. Their power is more than even Chalith and the others believed. I... we spoke to *Doraanar* Sarlana as well Dytin.” (Magic)

Dytin shook his head before looking at his long time friend. “An actual *Doraanar*.” He muttered softly. “*Ini wer ithquenti* Aviel! This is... this is more than we had ever hoped for.” (By the gods)

Aviel nodded. “It is indeed.” He stated as he held out the data scroll to him and Dytin quickly plugged it into the smallish chart table in his office. “Do you recall a Praetorian by the name of Murano?”

Dytin met his eyes evenly. “Yes... he was one of those who came here with Sumar when they requested our aide.” He answered immediately seeing Aviel's eyes look at him oddly. He smiled and shrugged his broad shoulders. “After you first told me I went back and dug up the recordings of their visit to study them. No small task I tell you. I spent four hours searching the archives for them.”

“I do not know how or if there are more of them... but this Murano was among them as well Dytin.” Aviel said.

“A Praetorian of old!” Dytin gasped once more. “Alive! And traveling with the reborn *Dahakoan*?” He pushed away from the small table. “Aviel... this is no coincidence. It can not be. This is a sign my friend.”

Aviel nodded his head. “I believe it is as well.”

“What are they... what are they like?” Dytin asked.

Aviel thought about that for a moment before answering. They had spent nearly as much time questioning him as they had learning of Laren and Ladur. “They are confident and fierce.” He spoke finally. “Not as physically imposing as I had imagined they would be, but there was... there was something about them... something that spoke of the capacity for great violence yet great compassion as well.”

“And the older one, Androcles, he and his *Vrrarhoinpa* are truly *Vrelvel Sargti*?” Dytin asked.

Aviel nodded his head quickly. “Without question. We could all feel it within us Dytin my friend.”

“This is almost too much to take in Aviel.” Dytin spoke softly. “All of this happening now. The return of the *Dahakoan*, discovering that the Praetorians are not long dead, that they both live on within a species our scientists would call barbaric?” He shook his head.

Aviel looked at him. “Do you question all that is happening now my friend?”

Dytin looked at him quickly. “What? No!” He exclaimed. “It only makes my resolve that much stronger knowing these things. You know of course that those in power will not believe. They will do everything within their ability to keep that power.”

Aviel nodded his head. “I know.” He said softly. “There are a few I could approach. Those who believe as we do.”

Dytin shook his head. “No... secrecy is our best ally now.” He stated. “The more who know of what is taking place the greater the risk to Laren and Ladur. And to us. Besides... they will be needed here after we depart.”

Aviel nodded his head. “What have you put in place so far?” He asked.

Dytin turned to the smallish Chart Table and activated it. “Five ships Aviel.” He began. “Two of our new *ITHAEL*-Class Heavy Cruisers and three Passenger liners. They are the only ones large enough to accommodate the additional personnel. I have already chosen the officers who will command. I mentored them in their early days and they have a deep faith that matches our own. All of them come from deeply faithful families... it is part of why I chose them. None of them question what we will do Aviel.”

Aviel looked at him. “Then they know what we do?” He asked.

Dytin shook his head. “Not all of it... no. Only the ship commanders know everything. Five men I trust implicitly. The rest of the officers, I would trust any of them with my life Aviel, but even they do not need to know it all. I can’t ask them to do this however and have them leave their families behind.”

Aviel nodded. “Of course not!” He stated.

“I have instructed them immediate family only.” Dytin said. “*Dask, opsola, isthasyi and myvishi only*. If they are joined they must be careful of their wives family, but I have been to each of their joining ceremonies and so far their wives’ families are no different from them in the strength of their faith.”

“You realize that many will call us religious fanatics.” Aviel said.

“I do not care what they call us!” Dytin hissed. “There are many things I could call them after viewing what you gave to me and allowing this to happen for so long! Not to mention many things I would like to do to them!”

Aviel nodded his head. “Indeed.” He motioned to the data scroll. “Androcles instructed me to give this information to you. I entered what he told me onto this pad and only I have seen it. I’m sure Laren and Ladur know the contents, I suspect they were communicating far more than we realize, but for now only we two know what is on here.”

Dytin looked at him. “You seem... you shaken somewhat when you speak of him Aviel. I have never seen this in you. He frightens you?”

Aviel met his eyes. “Androcles told me something just before the transmission ended Dytin. Something that only I heard for that is what he wanted.”

“What?”

“He told me that if anything happens to Laren and Ladur, if the Scourge discover them because of the fools within our own government, or if they are taken by members of our own government...” Aviel shook his head.

“Go on.” Dytin told him.

“Dytin... he told me if anything happens to Laren and Ladur... if they are betrayed in any way... he will come for us.” Aviel spoke softly. “He will come for all of us. And when he is done with the Scourge he will turn his full attention on the Darastrixi and unleash the fury of the *Dahakoan* from the beginning of time upon us. And he will not stop until all of us have seen his justice done.”

Dytin was silent for a long moment as he stared at his friend. He allowed the small grin to split his face finally and he nodded his head. “I like this Lycavorian Androcles.” He said with intense respect. “Oh yes... I like him quite a bit.”

“We must not fail Dytin my friend.” Aviel told him. “I saw the look in this young man’s eyes and I do not doubt his words for an instant.”

“What did you see Aviel?” Dytin asked.

“Death incarnate for any who stand between him and retrieving Laren and Ladur.” Aviel answered. “Death incarnate.”

Dytin stood up tall and nodded his head. “It is about time that death was on our side for once.” He stated forcefully.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

ULU SCIMITAR ORBITING AUSTROVA

To say Asay Va Eldost was teetering on the edge of not believing would have been an accurate statement as she entered the large Mess Lounge. Not believing anything about the Lycavorian people that she had been hearing for all of her life. Much of that was attributed to the night of wildly passionate lovemaking she had taken part in just the past evening with the tall, ebony skinned Lycavorian. Her own sky blue skin shone with vibrancy as it did in any Vanari female who felt fulfilled and so very happy.

Asay was nearing six hundred years old and had been a very good friend with Devra Re Mydala before being voted onto the Senior Board of Regents four years ago. The older woman had impressed Asay with her determination and fearlessness when it came to bringing issues to the forefront. Devra was also not afraid of the SBR as many of the junior Regents were. She had earned her position on the lower Board of Regents with hard work and the ability to make men and women both see her line of thinking. Asay on the other hand, she had assumed her father's position on the SBR when he died three years ago in a Lifter accident on his way to his office. He had been tutoring her along as a junior Regent, hoping one day she would rise to his position within their government. As was usually the case when family members were involved in the government and the senior family member died, Asay rose to fill his position.

The Va Eldost family was a very influential family among the Vanari elite, having been one of those who helped to found the capital city. Their assets were many and diversified and while they would never come close to the Re Mydala family and others in wealth, they were still powerful in their own right. Asay had unwillingly become the head of that family when her father died and she still mourned his loss every day since his death. Asay Va Eldost was the oldest of her father's four daughters, all of them with long, shimmering white blond hair and figures that did make most Vanari men drool at the sight of. Unlike her sisters however, Asay Va Eldost was still very much single and had to chase away suitors every day because of her beauty and now her position as a member of the Senior Board of Regents. Asay was also known to participate quite willingly in the Celebration of The Hundreds Ritual, and she had for decades in the hopes of finding a man who she was compatible with as well as one who would love her completely. While she was well known for being very adventurous and sexually desirable, she had never found a man who could keep up with her wants and passions.

That was until last night, when her world and her passions were swallowed whole by one man.

Ardan and the others had been allowed to remain aboard the *SCIMITAR* for the evening after speaking with the young woman Yssyla and her parents. Yssyla Vol Dumor and her very traditional parents were quite adamant about her remaining on this ship and not returning to Austrova to be examined by Vanari physicians. Ardan and Galar had mentioned the threat of repercussions should they refuse and Yssyla's father, a senior Vanari Cadre Commando leader, had told Ardan and Galar they would have to go through him to get to his daughter. Asay had remained silent for the most part, watching, as she had during their meeting with the Lycavorian representatives, for unlike the others her mind was not set. Her beloved father had always told his daughter to be observant and make up their own mind on issues. When she was elected to the Junior Board of Regents he had told Asay to never let herself be influenced by the older Regents who thought that they were superior simply by their age. Asay had remained true to this ideal all of her life and even more so after her father had died. Asay had sat, watched and listened while Ardan and Galar took the lead in questioning Yssyla, while Cruor and his idiotic son Eyon seemingly studied everything around them. Asay was also sick of Eyon continually making lewd comments to her in whispered conversations about how they should spend more time together. Asay was well known for doing wilder things during The Celebration of The Hundreds, but even she had her standards, and Eyon Arn Del was not a man she would allow to take her to bed. She was also the only one who noticed that Yssyla's father did not appear in the least bit upset that his youngest daughter and a Lycavorian were so deeply involved. He in fact had defended the man several times.

Asay could not sleep after the questioning was over and since it was still late afternoon, and she was hungry, she had left the large and spacious quarters assigned to her in order to find her way back to the lounge she had been in earlier in the day. Within several minutes she was hopelessly lost among the many corridors and different decks. The Lycavorians she saw in the corridors obviously did not feel threatened by them for she had no security outside her quarters and no one had stopped her as she made her way around trying to find some sort of map to assist her. It wasn't until the tall Lycavorian male with dark chocolate colored skin and wearing a form fitting uniform had approached her that anyone from the ship had come forward to assist her.

Asay was taken with him from the very first moment. He had very short, dark black hair with a perfectly trimmed mustache and goatee. His ice blue eyes were riveting to say the least against the background of his

dark, ebony colored skin. Ice blue eyes that had gazed upon her with equal parts unmitigated desire and true respect. His name she learned was Nellian Tyrine, a senior Captain with the Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* assigned to this ship and perhaps the most physically imposing man she had ever come across. He was far more muscular than any Vanari male she knew and considerably taller at nearly six foot four, yet almost immediately his supreme intelligence came shining through. He kept bowing his head to her as he talked, and she soon discovered he was only fifty years older than her own five hundred and seventy-two years. Asay was captured by his words and the way his voice flattered deliciously across her skin and ignited her senses. He did not treat her badly, something they had been told to expect when they first arrived, but was going out of his way to direct her to the nearest lounge closest to her quarters and then even suggesting some simple drinks that could help her to sleep. Asay didn't know why she did it, asking him to remain with her and talk, but she was never happier with a decision that she had made in her life.

Nellian Tyrine was incredibly well spoken and treated her with the utmost respect. He answered as many questions that he was allowed when Asay asked him, never once seeming to be hiding anything. It wasn't long before she was asking about Lycavorian culture and tradition and then his true self came shining forth. Asay discovered that his family had called Sparta home for centuries and they were among the first to take a second name when Martin Leonidas returned to claim his throne. It was something that had become commonplace now among the Lycavorian people as a way to distinguish each of their families, and more and more of the Lycavorian people were moving to add surnames to their families and packs. She could see the pride in his eyes and voice as he spoke of his family, a father who commanded one of the largest fleets within the Union, a mother who was a recognized scholar of Lycavorian history and friend to the King's revered mother Gorgo. She learned of his seven brothers and sisters as well, of which he was the oldest.

Asay learned more about the Lycavorian people in the three hours that they had talked and picked at the food he had suggested than she had in the previous centuries of watching others among her people interact with them. Nellian had taken the Vanari misconception of his people and tossed it out of the airlock in the space of the first hour. This openness also allowed her to talk of her family as she never had before to anyone. His presence filled her with trust and warmth unlike anything she had felt before. Asay had followed Vanari law as a member of the Board of Regents was expected to and she avoided contact with all Lycavorians if it was possible. Now however, being next to him and listening to him talk had enraptured her like nothing else had in her life. Asay Va Eldost had never been one to act on instinct and emotion yet she could not control her actions and this is what surprised and delighted her the most. It was early evening when, after the rather tasty selection of Lycavorian foods, he had escorted her back to her quarters. He had remained in the corridor while she opened her door and stepped into her quarters before turning to face him.

Asay acted without thinking then, the desire and passion had been building in her since she had first seen this beautiful specimen of a man. She grabbed the front of his uniform and pulled him into the large main room of her quarters, slapping her hand down on the controls to close the door. Asay heard the low growl from within his chest and then he was pinning her against the bulkhead of the ship and his warm lips came down on hers with ardent fervor. His kiss alone set her entire body on fire, her Alkay quickly seeping from her pores as her passion rose to a level she had never felt before, her body instantly responding and becoming warm. Nellian was hesitant at first, unsure of what she truly wanted, until her arms wrapped around his broad back and she pulled him against her lush body tightly while trying to get his uniform off him as quickly as possible. She didn't know how he knew that this had nothing to do with why she was here on this ship, but once he seemed to discover this fact, Asay dropped into a world of blissful abandon that she had never known existed before. It happened before his kisses stole her breath and her heart away, before his huge, pulsing manhood had filled her more than any man she had ever been with before, and before the most devastating climatic experience of her life rocked her world.

It was before all this that Asay Va Eldost had fallen utterly and completely in love.

Asay had stared at him earlier that morning as they lay in the bed, her light green eyes wandering over his broad and maddeningly delicious muscular chest. She was snuggled against his side, one of her long legs tossed across both of his, her firm breasts pushing against his ribcage as her fingers tracing the line of his strong, even jaw and her white blond hair wildly askew across his shoulder. She had awakened with both of his arms laced around her body and holding her tightly in a protective cocoon. She had never felt such warmth and peace as she had at that moment and she stretched her wonderfully sore body against his even more as she

looked up into his face and saw those beautiful eyes watching her. He didn't speak any words to her, his eyes told her everything she had always wanted to see in a man's eyes and he kissed her then with all that he was. Asay returned that emotion as she drew his face tighter and held him as he delighted her senses with his kiss. Asay remembered vividly their conversation.

She drew her finger across his soft lips, looking into those ice blue eyes. "What will take place now Nellian?" She asked softly.

His large hand came up and his fingers stroked her cheek as they had stroked her body only a short while ago. "I imagine that would depend on you." He answered her. "What do you want to happen Asay Va Eldost?"

"I don't know?" She answered honestly though her name from his lips delighted her ears and made her shiver inside.

"I don't imagine you came to our ship expecting this to take place." He said.

"Prophets no!" Asay exclaimed.

"Do you regret what happen between us Asay?"

Her soft green eyes came up instantly and she looked at him. "No! Nellian no!" She gasped forcefully. "Not for a single moment! It was... by the prophets... it was glorious!"

"It was for me as well." He told her with a smile. "Even without this..." His finger traced her upper arm. "What do you call this oil that comes from your skin again?"

"Alkay." She replied.

Nellian nodded. "Even without your Alkay, though you certainly did not need this oil to make me desire you Asay." Nellian said.

"It does not affect you?" Asay told him.

"We were told what it can do." Nellian told her as he met her eyes with those beautiful ice blue orbs. "This oil you secrete from your skin is why your females are taken from you. To harvest this oil that your body produces when you are... aroused. It is a sickening practice but no... it does not affect us as it does others. At least not in the manner your people are accustom to. The Lycavorian regenerative system is slightly different than those within what was once the Protectorate simply because of the area of space we live in. According to Queen Leonidas, we in the Alpha Quadrant have been exposed to far more genetic mutative gases and oils and have developed quite the immunity to such influencing factors."

Asay could attest to that. Even when her Alkay was seeping from her skin in copious amounts and coating both of their bodies in a glistening sheen, it only seemed to increase his desire for her, as well as his endurance and staying power. It didn't make him more susceptible to suggestion or coercion for she had been gasping in his ear nonstop to do one thing or the other because he was driving her insane with pleasure and he had ignored her completely and continued to make love to her in a way that had her senses screaming in ecstasy and had kept her on the edge of orgasmic paradise the entire time.

"Did your government really do what your Senator said they did?" Asay asked him. "Did they find the men who took part in this and kill them?"

"Slavery is an abomination to the vast majority of the citizens of the Union regardless of their species Asay." Nellian told her. "My father and mother were both born in Sparta, on Earth as I told you. This feeling is felt more deeply there because of Earth's own history with slavery. When added to the hatred of it among others of the Union because of our years as slaves to the High Coven, you will be hard pressed to find anyone who finds it acceptable in any fashion. There are those who do not adhere to this mentality, but their numbers are few. They are few because of the overwhelming attitude regarding this type of action. I was not involved with the three operations that removed this blight upon my people's honor, but I read the after action reports. Yes... we did exactly as Senator Ya'sur stated we did, though their numbers were far fewer than we had initially thought because of Prince Androcles' actions in retrieving Princess Caliria from those monsters."

"But the serum that..."

Nellian had rolled over atop her then, pulling her body tighter against his. Asay smiled happily at this action and responded to his kiss with equal happiness as his arms curled under her body and his weight upon her made her feel wondrous. When he finally drew apart from her, his eyes were alive with emotion and he traced the outline of her jaw and caressed the ridge of her ear.

“I am not a politician Asay.” He told her. “I am a soldier. I am honored to hold the position I have now. I do not begin to understand the intricacies of politics and I don’t want to understand them. They give me a headache. Was politics your motivation for your actions last evening with me?”

“Certainly not!” Asay hissed instantly.

“Nor were they mine.” Nellian told. “You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life and you smell like fresh blossoming daisies on a windswept morning. I will never want another as I wanted you last night and still want you even now. This is a choice that you have to make. I would much prefer that what we discovered last night continue for many more centuries to come... but I will... I will not like it... I will hate it... but I will understand if this is something you cannot do.”

“Nellian I...”

He kissed her gently once more, the emotion and passion openly exposed within his kiss. And then he was gone.

Asay looked around the lounge hoping she would see him but knowing she would not. He knew this ship and though she hardly knew him at all, she sensed he would not want to pressure her into a decision she could not make by seeing him. A decision she could not make just yet it seemed. She did, however, see Ardan and Galar sitting with Cruor and his son Eyon and after gathering a glass of the sweet tasting juice Nellian had introduced her to last evening from the counter and one of the fruit topped Danishes he had suggested, she moved to the table they sat at.

“...Do not know if they will allow us to remove her from this ship.” Galar was speaking to Ardan. “It seems they have somehow influenced her parents as well in this regard. This man Yssyla clings to is never far from her.”

“How were they able to do this?” Cruor asked quickly.

Ardan shook his head. “I do not know... but even if we wanted to do this and had the personnel to do it... I fear we would not succeed. This ship is just too large and our Intelligence people have not been able to penetrate the hull of Prince Denali’s ship for weeks. Even our most sophisticated sensors can not pierce whatever jammers they have operating.”

“Does not the size and scope of this ship tell you something?” Cruor asked. “It is a warship through and through. It is twice the size of our largest ships and bigger than anything we have seen within the Protectorate.”

“That we know of father.” Eyon spoke once more.

Cruor nodded. “That we know of yes.”

Galar looked at Asay as she settled to the table. “You should not eat or drink the food they provide to us Asay.” He told her.

Asay met his eyes as she purposefully bit into the Danish. “Trying to poison us in any way is not something they would do.” She stated with confidence as she chewed the delicious tasting Danish.

“We do not know that!” Galar insisted. “I’m quite certain our quarters were monitored in some way!”

“I found nothing.” Cruor spoke again. “I managed to bring a portable scanner aboard and since they did not search us when we first arrived, I used it when they gave me my quarters. It was not able to penetrate whatever composes the metal within this ship as you said Ardan... but I could detect no listening devices. I could not access the computer in my quarters either.”

“I expected that.” Ardan spoke.

“Why are you so certain that there were any monitoring devices Galar?” Asay asked him.

“They are Lycavorians!” Galar hissed softly. “Nothing more than violent brutes! We should not even be here talking to them!”

It was Eyon who picked up on the vibrant color of Asay’s skin and the brightness of her eyes as well as her hair, which seemed much shiner than normal. All of these were signs that were exhibited by Vanari females who were filled with passion and desire for man. Eyon had no idea that man was a Lycavorian that had stolen Asay’s heart.

“You seem... you seem different Asay?” Eyon finally said.

Asay met his eyes knowing that a pig like him would detect it, but shrugged her slim shoulders indifferently. “I slept rather well.” She answered.

“It’s obvious from what they told us yesterday that they will try and alter the Right of Passage Agreement as well as the many trade agreements we have with the Protectorate.” Galar stated now.

Ardan shook his head. “That will not happen. Alrerin Sha Harael has assured me that he will not allow this.”

“He has remained silent these past weeks for the most part Ardan.” Galar spoke. “Can we count on his support?”

Asay was not stupid by any means and she noticed out of the corner of her eye that Ardan glanced at her quickly before answering. “We will speak of his support with him when we return Galar.”

Asay made it seem that she was interested more in eating the Danish than listening to them, but she noticed that Galar glanced at her as well before answering. “Of course.” He said softly.

Asay had seen enough men and even some female Regents speaking in such hushed voices and she knew full well it was in regards to something that the vast majority of their fellow Regents had no idea about. Asay Va Eldost decided right there that something was not right. Ardan and Galar were trying very hard to hide something and a sick feeling began to seep into the bottom of her stomach because if it was in regard to what she thought it was, the shockwaves it would cause could very well bring down the Vanari government.

“We should...” Ardan began but his words were drowned out by the blaring noise of some kind of alarm. It echoed through the entire Mess Lounge causing the heads of the many men and women to lift upwards as the internal speakers came alive with a female voice.

“ATTENTION SHIP WIDE! ATTENTION SHIP WIDE!”

Ardan glanced up and saw the large Lycavorian moving directly for their table as the voice continued.

“SPARTA'S WRATH HAS ENTERED SCIMITAR'S GRID! SPARTA'S WRATH HAS ENTERED SCIMITAR'S GRID! ALL DUTY ROTATION PERSONNEL REPORT TO YOUR STATIONS! ALL DUTY ROTATION PERSONNEL REPORT TO YOUR STATIONS! WE WILL MAKE CONTACT IN FOUR MINUTES! REPEAT... CONTACT IN FOUR MINUTES!”

Ardan and the others watched as just over a dozen personnel sitting among the tables rose to their feet and began making their way out of the Lounge with measured and swift steps. His eyes shifted to the Lycavorian who approached their table and stopped beside him.

“Regent Vu Lamurrion?” The young man asked respectfully Asay noticed.

Ardan came to his feet. “What is going on?” He demanded.

“Admiral Sa'sur and Senator Ya'sur asked that I collect you and your fellow Regents and bring you to the bridge.” The young man said.

“Why?” Galar spat as he rose to his feet.

The *Durcunusaan* officer remained calm and in control Asay noticed. “I do not know the exact purpose sir,” He answered. “However I would imagine that is has something to do with *SPARTA'S WRATH* arriving.”

“What... what is this *SPARTA'S WRATH*?” Ardan questioned.

“It is the Command Ship for Crown Princess Androcles.” The *Durcunusaan* officer told him. Asay could almost see the delight in his eyes as he saw their expressions of shock and she had to hold in her sudden feeling of humor at seeing these powerful men so dumbstruck that they could not talk.

“Wait!” Ardan stammered. “Your... your Prince was not due to arrive for several more weeks!”

The *Durcunusaan* shrugged his broad shoulders. “Your information was incorrect sir.” He stated flatly. “If you will follow me... I will take you to the bridge.”

SCIMITAR BRIDGE

The bridge of this ship was not somewhere they had expected to be shown, but as they entered from a side entrance, they saw a beehive of activity that was extremely well organized and calm. They were all stunned at the complexity of the bridge and its computer systems and this feeling came out in their expressions. Since none of them had ever made a single attempt to discover how far the Protectorate had advanced technologically, they were not prepared for the level of sophistication on this ship. It matched and even exceeded Vanari

technology in many ways just from what they were able to make out around them. Asay had more experience than any of them when it came to technology, and once more Nellian's words to her last night came rushing to the forefront of her mind.

“We are not so barbaric and backwards as your people believe. And when your people discover this it is going to come as a very big shock.”

Asay Va Eldost and the Vanari people would not be able to deny the truth of his words now.

They saw the elven female Admiral Sa'sur standing on the upraised center platform with Denali Leonidas and Dutkne on either side of her. The four Union Senators they had met with yesterday were standing to the side conversing in quiet whispers among themselves but not afraid of being overheard. Ya'sur motioned to the officer and the *Durcunusaan* officer guided them across the width of the bridge behind Sa'sur and the others to stand with them.

“Good morning Regent Vu Lamurrion. I trust you and your fellow Regents slept well.” Ya'sur spoke.

“What is going on here?” Arden demanded right away. “This officer told us that your Prince is arriving now!”

Ya'sur nodded his head in recognition while Ulana's face creased in a scowl of disgust at his arrogance. “Yes... that is correct.” He replied.

“We did not know this!” Galar spat.

“I wasn't aware that we had to check with you before this took place.” Ya'sur told him. “You have always known he was coming.”

“We should have been notified that he was arriving earlier than expected!” Galar pressed angrily.

“We never gave a definitive time table as to when Prince Androcles would eventually arrive here Regent Galar.” Senator Pyath spoke. “He is much like his father in that it is next to impossible to predict his actions. He apparently finished whatever business he had to take care of in the Alpha Quadrant and then proceeded here.”

“I need to speak with my office!” Ardan demanded.

Ya'sur shook his head. “I'm sorry... at the moment Admiral Sa'sur has secured the COM array. She will unlock it when *SPARTA'S WRATH* is in synchronous orbit with the *SCIMITAR* so that no accidents happen. It is standard procedure for Union ships.”

Ulana did not allow it to show on her face but she reached for Ya'sur within the Etheric realm. *Ya'sur... this is no such procedure.* She said.

Ya'sur chuckled in the connection. *Yes... but they do not know that.* He answered. *Why let Regent Ardan spoil our surprise by warning his minions?*

All of them turned when Sa'sur's voice echoed above the others. “Look sharp people!” She called out. “Give me a status?”

“Helm is maintaining station keeping thrusters!”

“Communications is standing by!”

“Ops standing by! *SPARTA'S WRATH* is moving into position one hundred thousand meters off our starboard bow!”

“Tactical is good! Preparing to transfer Grid Control to *SPARTA'S WRATH* on your mark Admiral!”

“Very well... stand by Tactical.” Sa'sur answered.

“Incoming non-secure transmission from *SPARTA'S WRATH* Actual Admiral.” The COM officer spoke up.

“Main holo disc if you would Lieutenant.” Sa'sur spoke.

“Transferring.”

The disc came alive with a soft flare of white light and then the image of the extremely broad and tall form of Armen filled the transmission cone. He wore his newly tailored fleet uniform with red sash around his waist.

-Admiral Sa'sur... a pleasure to see you again- Armen spoke in his deep, gravelly but mechanical sounding voice.

Sa'sur nodded her head. "Armen... glad you could make it." She said with a smile. It was odd speaking to him in such a familiar manner being that he was a machine, but it was growing on Sa'sur quickly. A machine he may have been but he had more than proved his abilities in battle on several occasions and he was certainly like no android or machine she had ever seen. He had spent several hours quizzing her before she left on this trip, all in regards to Androcles and his tendencies. She could have sworn that he wanted to impress him as much as possible. "You are eleven hours and twenty-three minutes late Armen. Did something come up?"

Armen shook his head. **-A minor power fluctuation in the dorsal engine nacelle when we exited our last jump. We did not proceed so that we could investigate it. It was nothing to be concerned with-**

Sa'sur glanced at Denali quickly and then back to the transmission. *SPARTA'S WRATH* did not have a dorsal engine and the Avatar obviously had seen the Vanari on the bridge and was not about to reveal the true purpose they had been delayed. She nodded her head to him in a show of continuing the farce. "Glad to hear it." She answered. "I recommend that you drop your Shroud Armen. We don't want to frighten the Vanari Orbital Control officer."

-We have already been in contact with him- Armen answered. **-He seemed rather excited when I informed him of how much space we would need within his orbital grid-**

Sa'sur chuckled. "I have no doubt."

-Stand by... we are disengaging our Shroud-

Ardan, Galar and the others could only stare in unabashed shock as they watched the view window and the bulk of *SPARTA'S WRATH* began to appear, soon blotting out anything else in view as the nearly twenty-two thousand meter long ship un-Shrouded and came fully into view. None of them could hear the many alarms that were blaring all across the Vanari ships that were in orbit around their home planet, nor could they see the mass hysteria within the Vanari military command center on Austrova as the enormous ship appeared on their sensors in position with the Lycavorian Command ship just as they had instructed.

Ardan and Galar could not reach the view window quickly enough with Cruor and Eyon as they gaped in disbelief at what was now only a hundred thousand meters from the very ship they were on. Even at that distance it looked as if they could reach out and touch the ship right through the view window.

"By all the Prophets we hold dear...!" Galar gasped in disbelief.

Asay Va Eldost simply stood back slightly and gazed in open mouth awe at the enormous star ship now parked only a short distance away from them. It was easily five times the size of the *SCIMITAR*, which was itself larger than any Vanari warship that they now possessed she knew. Nellian's words filled her mind once more and this time Asay could not help the small smile that split her lips. Asay Va Eldost made her decision right then. A decision that would alter her life going forward no doubt but now Asay was not afraid of what that unknown could bring to her. Now she wanted to discover all of it.

-Austrova Orbital Control... our station keeping thrusters are active and we are locked in position- Armen's voice spoke from within the transmission.

All of them heard the voice stammer its reply and they could only smile. "We... we have you on... we have you *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Please... please maintain your... your current position."

-Understood Austrova Control. We thank you for the skilled direction and assist in moving into position- Armen commented.

None of them saw the three Vanari officers inside the orbital station look at each other and shake their heads in disbelief. They hadn't done a thing except watch as the massive ship had moved into position with exacting precision and not veering from course by even one meter.

“Nicely done Armen.” Sa'sur complimented him on his skill at maneuvering the massive ship so easily. “Nicely done indeed.”

-Androcles has just arrived on the bridge Admiral. I will turn it over to him- Armen spoke as he moved just out of the cone of the transmission and they all saw Androcles step into view.

It was only a moment before Andro's full six foot one frame filled the entire transmission and he was looking at them with those near glowing azure eyes. His bright smile was genuine and warm however, and this was something that all of them noticed right away, for it had been a very long time since his face had such a smile on it.

“Sa'sur... Dutkne... *fervon!*” He spoke quickly, his voice carrying a note of happiness in it that none of them had heard before either. “Top of the morning to you!” He declared.

Sa'sur let Denali move up beside her and speak knowing the brothers hadn't physically seen each other in months.

“You are a sight for sore eyes *fervon!*” Denali spoke with a large smile of his own.

“As are you.” Andro said reaching across space within the Etheric realm and touching Denali and Dutkne both. Though the Vanari Regents didn't know what it meant, everyone on the bridge certainly knew why Denali and Dutkne closed their eyes for the briefest of moments and then smiled as they reopened them.

“Andro... it is good to see you.” Sa'sur commented.

Andro nodded and turned his head slightly to look at her. “Sa'sur... you are looking very well?”

“I'm making due.” She stated with a smile.

“*Atle suila forn?*” Denali asked in their language. (What kept you?)

Andro smiled at the question. “*Nes intus gilde el jar.*” (They were waiting for us.) He replied. “*Nes intus gilde bucco aer nerveta eokre. Vada igords. Evell gur echta rie un poset.*” (They were waiting inside an asteroid belt. The fools. We will speak of it later.)

“*Evell devri dobar forn?*” Dutkne asked now. (They didn't detect you?)

Andro chuckled and shook his head. “Not hardly.” He spoke.

Ardan chose this time to intervene and he brazenly stepped up onto the center platform. “Prince Androcles... we... we were not aware you were arriving so soon! You did not inform us of this!” He stated in a tone of voice that suggested arrogance but did not cross the line.

Asay was the only one who noticed Sa'sur as she raised her hand subtly and quickly and stop the two burly *Durcunusaan* from moving forward.

“Regent Vu Lamurrion.” Andro said as he looked at the man. “I wasn't aware that I had to announce my arrival.”

Ardan shook his head. “Of... of course not. We... we could have prepared a proper welcome however.”

“I'm not real fond of proper welcomes Regent Vu Lamurrion... especially when I am not welcome.”

Andro said to him.

“That is not... that is not true!” Ardan spoke quickly. “There is just... there is much we need to discuss!”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes there is... however not at the moment. I have something I need to do first.”

Ardan looked at Denali and Dutkne. “I don't understand... you have only just arrived.” He finally said looking back to Androcles. “What could there be for you to do?”

Andro's azure blue eyes focused on him intently. “I have already received clearance to enter Mydala City Airspace Regent Vu Lamurrion...”

Galar chose this time to step up beside him. “We did not authorize this!” He almost shouted.

“You did not perhaps, whoever you are... however... Coren Re Mydala did.” Andro told him with little to no warmth in his voice. “He will be waiting for you at your main spaceport transport hub when you return to Austrova with Senator Ya'sur and our political delegation. Which will be as soon as this transmission is over I imagine.”

“You can not just come to our planet and go where you wish!” Cruor snapped from behind them now.

Andro nodded his head. “I do not know who you are... but your arrogance pours forth in your words and body language.” Andro spoke firmly. “I am aware of your laws regarding where and what my people are allowed to do on your planet... however I am only going to one place.”

“Where... where might this be?” Ardan asked quickly.

Andro smiled. “I think you know where that is Regent Vu Lamurrion. I am going to find my *Inamarno* Caliria Re Mydala. My Vanari wife and mate. I am going to find her and beg her forgiveness for ever letting her leave my world without knowing her place is with me. With us.”

“Prince Androcles this is highly irregular!” Ardan spoke. “We cannot simply let you roam our planet looking for one female. I must protest this action and...”

Andro reached up and touched his nose gently. “I know exactly where she is and what she is doing.” He spoke. “Her father has already cleared me for access to the University so that I may retrieve her... and that is what I intend to do.”

“There are more important things we need to discuss before you do this!” Ardan snapped now.

Andro shook his head. “Nothing is more important to me than having Caliria back within my arms. Within our arms. Where she belongs.” He told him. “You and your fellow Regents will be taken to the landing bay and brought to the surface with the Union Delegation. You will not however, be allowed to communicate with anyone on the surface, until after you reach your main space port. By then I will have retrieved our *Inamarno* and we can speak of other things.”

“I must protest this action!” Ardan barked.

“Protest all you like sir.” Androcles told him quickly. “I will not allow the OSG to move on Caliria before I arrive to retrieve her. Something that would do doubt take place if I allowed you access to ground communications. Why do you think I had Ya'sur invite you to our ship Ardan? I am not the fool you believe me to be sir... and the sooner you come to realize that... the better it will be. I look forward to speaking with you on the surface.”

“You can not do this! I will not allow this to take place!” Ardan shouted now clearly angry as he stepped closer to the holo transmission.

Andro met his gaze as his eyes grew wide and Asay gasped loudly as those azure orbs began to almost glow.

“I have already obliterated one supposed government in order to retrieve Caliria Re Mydala from the horror that the Vanari government allowed her to be swallowed up by old man!” Androcles snarled viciously at him, his fangs bursting forth and extending to their full length as the black rings surrounded the glowing azure pupils in his eyes. “Just as my father destroyed an Empire to retrieve my mother! Do not think for an instant that I will stop at that should anyone attempt to prevent me from retrieving her this time! My people do not think so little of our wives and mates Regent Vu Lamurrion! I suggest you keep that in mind as you return to the surface!”

Andro turned away from him and looked at Denali. “Full measures Deni.” He spoke. “I will see you both on the surface.”

Deni and Dutkne nodded. “*Cuia fas vada carians fervon.*” Deni spoke evenly. (Go with the gods brother)

“*For forn.*” Andro spoke before turning away from the transmission. All of them watched it fold and shrink back into the floor. (And you)

AUSTROVA MAIN SPACEPORT SECURITY CONTROL CENTER

“...By the prophets Regent Re Mydala!” The Senior Cadre Commando Officer on duty gasped as the transmission ended. They had monitored the entire exchange from this office above the sprawling spaceport. Androcles had contacted him directly on a secure channel only an hour ago. A channel that only five people alive knew and Coren had no doubts Caliria had given this direct conduit to him via Denali. It was something he would thank his daughter for in the near future, after Androcles picked her up from the University. Coren had

done most of the talking, surprising even Androcles with his eagerness to show that his mind had indeed been opened.

It was nothing for Coren to authorize a Lycavorian ship to enter Mydala airspace. Any of the three hundred members of the Senior Board of Regents could do this, but since he was also considered one of the top five Regents on The SBR, Coren could do just about anything he wanted when it came to making autonomous decisions. The *PREMONITION* was granted full access to Mydala airspace and given the exact coordinates to the University. The other three ships that were arriving on the surface from *SPARTA'S WRATH* were directed to one of the largest hanger bays at the spaceport by the men in the Control Center.

Coren smiled down at the officer. "He can be very intimidating." Coren said sheepishly.

"Or he is just devoted to his wife sir." The man spoke.

"Well... there is that yes." Coren answered.

"Sir... Regent Re Mydala... are they all like this?" The man asked.

Coren nodded his head. "When it comes to their wives and mates Colonel... yes they are." He looked at the man. "Does that bother you?"

The Colonel met his eyes. "Bother me sir? No. It makes me want to go home to my two daughters and insure that they find Lycavorian men like this Prince so that I know they will always be safe and loved."

Coren smiled and reached out to squeeze his shoulder. "Do not give up hope Colonel." He said. "That day may well come... especially if I have anything to say about it."

The Colonel nodded. "I will insure that internal communications in the main hanger bay remains disabled until you signal me Regent Re Mydala." He offered. "It is the least I can do for you after allowing me to view this."

Coren nodded. "Thank you." He told him. "Take care of yourself Colonel. Should you need support for anything... you may come to me."

The man nodded in appreciation and Coren turned to life his wrist as he began to walk for the exit. "Jokros... advise Rinel and Nyosa to meet me in Hanger Bay four. Also... contact the University Security Teams and inform them they are not to interfere with Androcles and the others when they arrive under any circumstance. He will hurt them if they try to impede him. And make arrangements for their ship to land nearby in the courtyard. It is big enough."

"Understood." Jokros replied. "Was this the right play Coren?"

"Once Deni contacted me and told me Androcles was only hours away it was the only play we could make." Coren replied. "They would have moved against her and possibly even me and the others in the next several days and even if they had not succeeded... the results would have been horrific my friend."

"I understand." Jokros spoke softly.

"Jokros... if you would... contact Praetor Dyack as well." Coren spoke. "It seems now that he has learned the truth about his daughter from Lady Aleatia, he is not only willing to help us in any way... he is insisting."

Jokros chuckled softly once more. "Yes I now. He has already discretely informed me that their embassy is ready to receive any who we feel may be in danger."

Coren nodded as he walked. "Good... I was hoping he would offer that. Even the OSG is not stupid enough to attack the Rothryn Embassy. Not if they want them to remain out of everything that is currently going on."

"I will see you in the hanger Coren." Jokros said.

ULU PREMONITION **ENTERING MYDALA CITY AIRSPACE**

"...Should be telling you this is a very unwise move." Jomann spoke as he stood next to Andro near the rear ramp of the *PREMONITION*.

Andro stood beside where Elynth rested on the skid free deck plates and looked at his Captain and closest friend. He wore his full Mark V ArmorPly uniform with the long crimson colored cape streaming from

behind his shoulders to lightly scuff the deck. His helmet rested on top of the saddle upon Elynth's back. The Dragon Armor was fully deployed over the Mark V ArmorPly, encasing him in glittering gold armor.

"That's what you should be telling me...yes." Andro answered. "But you aren't going to tell me that are you?"

"*Jorbhe lae!*" Jomann spat. "I would be doing the same thing."

And therein lies the trouble with today's youth. The deep voice of Jenso filled their minds as they turned to look at him as he settled to the deck behind Jomann. *You have the propensity to never listen to reason learned through experience.*

Andro and Jomann both smiled as Jomann reached out and stroked the scales of Jenso's muscular neck. *And what would you recommend Jenso my friend?* Jomann asked.

Jenso glanced at Elynth who was watching him. *I recommend that Elynth takes a deeper five degree slant as you descend. It will get you on the ground much quicker.*

They all laughed at this and Jenso butted Jomann in the shoulder gently with his snout. He had been severely wounded and lost his Bonded Brother at Alba Tau yes, but the gods of fate and chance had given to him another brother from that vile place they would never forget and Jenso had embraced this rebirth. They were not Bonded together within the Etheric realm, but in just four weeks they had become nearly as close as Bonded Ones could be. Though Jenso was nearing eight hundred years of age, Elder Syrilth knew he still had a wild streak in him, and that is why she suggested he become paired with Jomann. He jumped at this opportunity with no hesitation and now he was so very happy he had.

"You'll be on the ground four minutes after me." Andro spoke finally. "What could possibly happen in four minutes?"

They heard the decidedly female snort and turned as Eliani walked up with Brendi in tow and holding her hand tightly.

"*Sibfla!*" Eliani chortled. "In four minutes, knowing you like I do *fervon*, you could start and finish a small war." She told him.

Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek in a brotherly fashion and Eliani's fern green eyes closed in delight. She kissed his cheek quickly. "Just be careful." She told him.

"I am always careful." Andro said. "Sometimes careful does not like me."

"Ain't that the *nubous* truth!" Eliani blurted out.

Andro looked at Jomann. "I thought you were going to tame her sharp tongue." He said.

Jomann shook his head as Eliani's face beamed at him. "Oh no. I like her sharp tongue." He said.

Andro shook his head in mock disgust. "Pig." He muttered.

"Me? What about you?" Jomann declared.

Eliani stepped up to him and snuggled against his side. It was a silly image as the top of her head barely reached his chest, but it was priceless. "You are my pig though... Jomann my love." She told him in a seductive voice.

Jomann grinned proudly. "Thank you." He stated. He looked at Andro once more. "Normya and Tir'ut have broken off with Lisisa and will greet Denali and the others at the spaceport. The other two *STRIKERS* will deploy to the designated coordinates and remain Shrouded."

The design of the *PREMONITION* permitted only two working Lifter Tubes in the ship. There were ladders spaced all over the decks that many of them used more than the Lifts and it was from one of these ladders conduits that they saw Daio drop quickly holding to the sides of the ladder and then turn to come across the small flight area where they launched dragons and could launch small two or three person shuttles.

"Sadi has given control to Meka." Daio reported. "She and Ne'Veha will change and meet you on the surface with Carisia, Lu'ria and Sehri once we land."

Andro nodded his head. "Once you set down in this courtyard Daio... let Ridor and Cowen work the outside. You get up top with long eyes."

"You expect something Andro?" Daio asked.

Andro shook his head. "We are moving too fast for them to compensate, unless they are already in position. It never hurts to be ready though."

Daio nodded. "Fair enough."

“Have Meka keep the engines spooled but at their lowest setting so that...” Andro began but they all felt the tingle in their heads.

I have done this type of thing before you know. Meka’s voice, clear and confident, spoke in their minds. Andro smiled once more. *Forgive me Meka.* He said. *I will never be outspoken again.*

They all heard Meka snort in disgust now and Eliani could barely contain her laughter at this. *Yeah... like I will believe that.*

Daio couldn’t help but laugh now and he shook his head. “I did warn you once already that she is... Eliani what did you call her?”

“She’s a spitfire!” Eliani said. “She will keep you on your toes Daio, and tell my brother to stuff it when he tries to tell her how to do her job.”

Thank you Eliani. Meka spoke once more from the cockpit.

“Us women have to stick together with all the testosterone floating around on this ship.” Eliani said. “It makes the bullshit even thicker.”

Carians Eli! Sadi’s voice echoed happily within the open Etheric realm now. *You have such a wonderful way with words.*

We need to take more lessons KertaGai. Lu’ria’s voice chimed in.

Andro looked at his sister. “You are giving them lessons?” He asked.

“Of course.” Eliani answered him. “You don’t think I am going to leave your wives and mates without some very inventive ways to cuss you out when you piss them off do you?”

“Eli...” Andro began.

Three minutes Andro. Ramp coming down. Meka told him.

Andro nodded his head and reached for his helmet as Eliani grinned widely and pulled Brendi closer. “Deo and Nara are meeting the couriers father sent and then they will join us on the surface with Murano and Mari. We...” He was speaking as he held his helmet in his hands.

Jomann stepped closer and reached out to squeeze his arm. “Enough delaying Andro.” He said softly. “Stop being such a coward and go and get Caliria.”

Andro met his eyes with a smile and nodded. “Yes.” He spoke as the ramp cracked and the whistle of the swirling wind made almost all verbal conversation impossible. He lowered his helmet onto his head and climbed into the saddle upon Elynth’s back.

Ready Elynth my sister? He asked her as Elynth came to her four talon equipped feet and flexed her leg muscles.

I am always ready Andro my brother. Elynth answered digging her talons into the non-skid deck plating.

Andro looked out into the clear blue skies over Mydala city twenty-two thousand feet below and smiled. *I am coming for you Inamarno.* He whispered softly. *I am coming for you.* Andro commanded the Dragon armor leg braces into position and then smiled. *Sister! Go!*

MYDALA CITY ADVANCED STUDIES UNIVERSITY

“...He say from which direction he will be coming?” The Cadre Commando officer spoke as she and her Second Officer moved quickly down the main steps of the University, weaving in and out between the hundreds of students that were walking along the grounds and in and out of the University.

“No Senior Commander!” The Second Officer answered as he kept up easily. “Only that their ship would be landing in the Theater Courtyard and to insure it was clear.”

“Send two men to make this happen!” The University Cadre Commando Senior Officer barked out the order. “It will probably be mostly empty this time of the morning but just make sure!”

“The orders from Regent Re Mydala were not to impede his progress in any manner.” The Second Officer spoke. These two particular Cadre Commandos as well as the team of nine that they commanded had been assigned by the Senior Board of Regents to insure that Caliria Re Mydala did not go anywhere they deemed unnecessary. It was their way of watching her and protecting her at the same time. What most of them

did not realize was that this group of Cadre Commandos were among Nirilo Re Mydala's closest friends and comrades. They would allow no harm to come to Caliria for any reason.

"Impede his... prophets... I have no intention of impeding anything he wants." The female Officer snapped. "I saw the transmission from Earth and what he did to that man without even touching him!"

The man stopped as his eyes lifted skyward. "Senior Commander... look!" He gasped and lifted his hand skyward to point.

They both stopped and gazed skyward to see the small silver like speck in the clear sky. They continued to watch as another speck, black in color separated from the silver object and began a dizzying plummet to the surface. The man snatched his small macro binos from his belt and trained them up and he swore under his breath.

"Prophets!" He declared loudly. "It's one of their beasts! One of their dragons! And there is someone on its back."

The Senior Commander lifted her own binos. "By all that is holy... the creature is diving straight down!"

"The ship is pulling away!" The map announced.

"Get on the COM!" She barked out not taking her eyes from the speeding black spot in the sky. "Inform the rest of our team and Paga!"

"I am here Senior Commander." The female voice spoke and the woman cut her eyes to see Paga's tall frame beside her. She had not heard the Lycavorian woman approach. In the weeks that they had been working together the Senior Commander had come to like this woman quite a bit. She was equally as intelligent as she was beautiful and she treated the Vanari Cadre Commandos around her as if they were close friends. This made all of the team guarding Caliria relaxed and inquisitive and in the hours Caliria spent in the classroom they had learned much from this woman about Lycavorians in general and their culture.

"Paga!" She gasped. "Is this... is this normal?"

Paga's keen wolf eyes could detect the dragon continuing its dive easily and she smiled. "Oh yes." She answered. "For Androcles Leonidas... this is very normal Entia."

"They will crash into the ground if they do not pull up!" Entia hissed.

Paga smiled and shook her head. "No... that is not something that will happen."

Many of the Vanari students were now beginning to take notice of the rapidly increasing size of the black object in the sky above and more and more began to stop what they were doing to look skyward.

The dive was exhilarating, as it always was when they did this type of thing. Andro gripped the edges of the saddle and was slouched low in the saddle. Elynth's wings were folded over the top of his legs, her body a streaking missile of obsidian colored power. The wind was hardly felt against their Mindvoice shield, Andro's eyes wide and searching the ground far beneath them.

Gods! Elynth gasped out openly. I love it when we fly like this!

Andro grinned under his helmet. As do I.

You have been so very happy these last days Andro my brother. Elynth told him. It is a joyous feeling.

Those who harmed our family have been dealt with sister. Andro answered. I can feel all of their happiness within me now. It fills me with joy and contentment to know that they are so happy.

Yes... I can feel it too. Elynth spoke. And it carries over to us both. Though the joke you tried to make was horribly bad.

Andro chuckled within their connection. I will try to get better... but you know humor has never been my strongpoint sister.

It is... you just need to let it come naturally. Elynth told him. You have a dry humor my brother.

There! Andro called out. Alter three degrees north sister. There is the University.

Elynth acted without thought as she rotated her body with the simplest of twitches from her wing tip. What altitude do we pull out? She asked nonchalantly.

That depends sister... Andro answered. How adventurous do you feel today?

Three hundred feet. I do not want to knock anyone over. Elynth answered with a great deal of humor in her voice.

Three hundred feet it is. Andro spoke. *One pass over the entrance and then swing around and land in that small clearing by the entrance steps.*

I see it. Elynth answered. *Here we go!*

Many students were now anchored in their spots as they watched the obsidian colored dragon plummet towards them at impossible speeds. Some were beginning to shout out to others as the dragon was making no effort to pull out of its dive. Almost all Vanari now knew that a new branch of Lycavorians had been discovered. It had been all over their news channels for weeks now, with the different channels fighting over who could get images of them when they were outside Coren Re Mydala's Estate. They also knew that the newest branch of the Lycavorian people traveled with and rode dragons. A mythical beast that most Vanari never believed could exist, at least until now. They had seen Denali Leonidas on his dragon and the young woman who had come to Austrova all those weeks ago. Her dragon had been even larger but they had not been seen for some time now.

Ardan and his fellow members of the Senior Board of Regents were far out of touch with the rest of their people and had been for many years now. The younger generations of Vanari men and women were far more open minded and accepting than their parents and grandparents. Most did not view the Rothryn or the Protectorate as a threat to them or their way of life. They wanted closer ties to the different species within the Beta Quadrant, especially the Protectorate and the Rothryn and the vast majority of the younger generations all carried great distaste and hate for the Eridiani in general and the OSG in particular. The Cadre Commandos that were now graduating from their training Corps were among the smartest and deadliest Vanari Cadre Commandos to ever walk their planet. And to a person they wanted nothing more than to rip into the OSG and make them pay for centuries of humiliation and pain.

Like Caliria Re Mydala, who many of the younger generation of Vanari secretly admired and looked up to, many of the younger Vanari were of a different mindset than their much older rulers and this would soon begin to make itself known.

Hundreds of students were gazing skyward now as Elynth fell faster still, many of them shouting out in delight at the elegant nature of her muscular body. They were certain she intended to smash into the ground before them, so when her powerful wings snapped out to the sides with an electrifying pop that thundered across the immediate landscape, most of them screamed out and fell to the ground as her body shifted direction instantly and turned with gut wrenching speed and precision until she was blasting over the tops of their heads at only three hundred feet heading right for the University's main building.

Entia, Paga and most of her detail could only gape in unashamed awe as Elynth skimmed the tree tops as she rocketed over the top of them, the backwash of her passing buffeting their bodies like the winds of a small but powerful storm.

"Prophets preserve me!" Entia gasped aloud as she stood there and watched Elynth roll into another impossibly tight turn until she was pointed back at them.

Paga came up beside her as they watched Elynth flare her massive wings to the side and slow almost to a stop a short distance away from them. She closed on their position, dropping to only a hundred feet from the ground, and that is when Andro released the Dragon Armor leg braces and tossed his right leg over the saddle and simply dropped into open air. Hundreds of voices screamed aloud and hundreds of pairs of eyes watched in awe and saw him drop the last hundred feet to the ground and land with precise control over his body, causing the stone tile beneath him to buckle and crack under the tremendous force his landing generated. Paga grabbed Entia's arm tightly.

"He has her scent Entia." Paga told her quickly. "Advise the team members that he will find her now."

"Paga... the University has over five thousand students. How..." Entia stopped her question when she saw Paga smile. "His sense of smell is that keen?"

Paga nodded. "Yes. When it comes to our wives and mates... any Lycavorians' sense of smell is at its finest."

Paga watched Androcles as he strode past her with only a nod of his head. His azure blue eyes were brighter than she had ever seen them under his helmet and he appeared so physically imposing in the full Dragon Armor that Vanari students from the University were scrambling to get out of his way as he made directly for the main entrance. Entia was speaking rapidly into her headset to insure the others inside the building knew Androcles was coming.

**MYDALA UNIVERSITY
ADVANCED INTERSTELLAR MEDICINES
FOURTH FLOOR**

“...Can tell me the medical procedure for creating a base formula to treat Orlantium Fever if it has already reached Stage Four?” The female Vanari Professor spoke to the hundred and twenty students in her lecture room as she walked up and down the eight rows of slightly elevated stairs between the three hundred plus seats. As her eyes looked around the lecture room she shook her head when she saw only one student with their arm raised.

“I understand now why only one of my students was able to answer this question on the last test I gave.” Salarn spoke as she held out the data pad in front of the student who she stopped next to. “Very poor work young man.” She stated as she turned.

The Vanari man couldn't meet her eyes as she turned back towards the front of the lecture room.

“Is there some particular reason why only Caliria Re Mydala got the answer to this question correct?” The Professor asked as she began to walk across the aisle to the next row.

Caliria turned around in her chair surprised and saw she was the only one with her hand up to answer the question, which she quickly dropped in embarrassment.

“All she has time to do is study and dream of her imaginary Lycavorian Prince Professor Salarn.” The stunning young Vanari female four rows behind Caliria muttered softly, but loud enough for the four other Vanari females sitting with her to hear. They all laughed mockingly as Caliria glared at them from her seat.

The Professor appeared beside her and shoved the data pad into her face. “Perhaps less time spent on other matters and more on your studies will allow you to pass this course Tulia Arn Domel.”

The young woman glance dup at her with anger in her eyes for singling her out. “Why do we have to learn the medical formula for a disease that has been extinct for over a millennia Professor?”

The Professor looked at Caliria. “Caliria Re Mydala... would you care to answer that question?”

Caliria looked at her. “While Orlantium Fever may have been eradicated from Vanari society... we are still carriers of the disease. Interaction with other species may result in incidental transference of the virus to other species. Without a base medical formula, there will be no way to create a workable serum that will cure Orlantium Fever in another species based on their genetic makeup.”

“Exactly.” The Professor spoke as she headed for the front of the lecture room.

“Be careful then Caliria Re Mydala... you might infect your imaginary Prince.” Another of the Vanari females spat at her sarcastically.

“The Lycavorian Regenerative Healing system would eradicate the virus within thirty seconds of exposure!” Caliria snapped back at the young woman. “We could not pass it on to them!”

“How do you know that for certain Caliria?” Salarn asked her now, genuinely very interested in her answer since no studies of the Lycavorian Regenerative and Immune system had been done. Salarn knew all about Caliria Re Mydala and what had happened to her, there were few who did not. The Board of Regents was trying very hard to play down what had taken place, but more and more people within the scientific community were beginning to ask how it was she had been cured of the OSG virus and how had she become so closely tied to these new Lycavorians that had been discovered.

Caliria looked at her. “The rate at which the Lycavorian Immune System reacts to foreign bodies is nearly a hundred times faster than any other known species. Their red and white blood cells work in concert to attack and destroy any foreign substance introduced into their systems, unlike other species where their different type blood cells work opposite of each other.”

“How do you know this child?” Salarn asked her. “No extended study of the Lycavorian internal organs or regenerative system has ever been done.”

The five Vanari females with white blond hair laughed from their seats. “Didn’t you know Professor Salarn? Caliria Re Mydala believes she is a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. The new government of Lycavorians that was recently discovered by her father and Regent Ardan in the Alpha Quadrant.”

“According to her... she is the wife of their Crown Prince. One of six wives that this man has. He is probably deformed in some way if he needs six wives to sate his needs.” Another of the woman said.

“Even a Lycavorian... as limited in their intelligence as they are... even they would not choose a dark haired Vanari female as their wife.” Another said. “Defective genes right from the start.”

Caliria came to her feet trying very hard to maintain her anger. “I do not have defective genes!” She snarled. “And you are as stupid as the fool who shares your bed Tulia Arn Domel.”

“At least he is not from a race of animals!” Tulia snapped right back.

“Does Vumel know that you share yourself with others on a nightly basis?” Caliria spoke to her sweetly seeing her eyes go wide. “That you will spill your Alkay for any man who simply smiles at you.”

Tulia’s eyes darkened. “You know nothing bitch!” She shouted.

“I know you will spread your legs for any man with the wealth and influence that you so covet!” Caliria growled at her.

“You say that to me when you cannot even attract a real man!” Tulia spat. “You must maintain this fantasy that you are the Princess of a man who already has five wives! I have seen his picture... we all have... and he is very handsome Caliria. Why would he chose you over someone like me?” Tulia smiled sadistically at her. “By the Prophets woman... I could steal him from you in front of your very eyes and there is nothing you could do about it! I hear all Lycavorians have big cocks and they are ruled by their sexual desires. They will fuck anything that flashes them.”

“You don’t know half of what you think you do Tulia!” Caliria spat.

“Then tell us Caliria Re Mydala... where is this so called Crown Prince?” Tulia asked. “Why are you here while he is off bedding countless other females with far better genes than you? He has probably found another dark haired Vanari female willing to spread her legs for him on command.”

The Professor did not intervene in the exchange between them, mainly because she was still stunned that Caliria knew so much about Lycavorians. How could she know these things when no studies were ever commissioned by the Board of Regents? She looked up and saw that many of her students begin to rise from their seats and dash to the back of the lecture hall which overlooked the courtyard only a short distance away. “What do you think you are doing?” She demanded.

“Professor Salarn... something is going on outside!” One of the students exclaimed. “Look!”

This drew the attention of nearly everyone in the room as they began to move for the back wall and the balcony overlooking the courtyard. Caliria remained in her seat and turned back to the front doing her best to hold in her emotions. Tulia couldn’t be right. Androcles would not do that. Would he? He would not just dismiss her for what she had done and find another to take her place would he? Caliria felt small tears begin to form in the corners of her eyes as these thoughts raced through her mind and she gripped the edges of her desk.

“By the Prophets look! One of their dragons!” She heard one of the students shout. She turned her head slowly as another student called out.

“The Board of Regents has forbid them free access to the city!” The male voice said. “How could that thing be here?”

“It is different in color than the others we have seen!” Another student echoed. “And much larger!”

Caliria turned fully to the back of the room as she rose to her feet and was about to step towards the rear of the lecture hall when she gasped loudly as the staggeringly powerful Etheric essence filled her mind in a rush and a wonderfully dominant male aura swarmed her new but limited female wolf senses and made her whimper in want and desire.

Inamarno... do you truly believe I would dishonor you in such a way? Androcles’ voice filled her mind with such clarity it made her stumble against the chair and drop the data pad she was holding as she gripped the chair to steady herself. It clanged off the floor and rolled down the steps making noise the entire way causing others to turn back and look at her. Those who did turn saw something none of them had ever expected.

“Prophets! Look!” Someone gasped and then everyone began to turn and their eyes grew wide in disbelief. “It’s him! He’s here!”

Androcles moved into the lecture hall slowly, taking measured steps so as not to alarm anyone. His azure eyes were focused completely on Caliria and where she stood, ignoring all others in the large room.

Caliria turned slowly and her soft green eyes grew wider still and filled with tears when she saw him. *Androcles!* She gasped within the Etheric connection.

Andro was barely holding his emotions inside for not only did his own love and desire for Caliria flow through him, but he could also feel Sadi, Carisia, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and Sehri as they projected their own feelings into him. He could feel Sadi and Carisia more than the others for they were still fine tuning their Etheric abilities, but it was nearly overpowering with the five of them filling his being.

Caliria was frozen in her spot gripping the back of the chair tightly as he approached her. He didn't pause or hesitate and moved up to stand directly in front of her. He heard the gasps from the others as, with a simple thought, he retracted the Dragon Armor that incased his body. He could hear the murmurs from the other students as the armor retracted into it's hidden slots and then he was standing there in his normal Mark V ArmorPly. He reached up and removed his helmet and let it drop to the floor. His eyes were aglow now, bright orbs of azure blue as he gazed at her. The elegant line of her eyebrows, the vibrant color of her cornflower blue skin and the delicate, soft green eyes that stared at him.

Androcles... I... my love I am so sorry! Caliria cried within the connection. *I... I was so... I was so lost and confused and...*

Caliria gasped loudly now as he stepped even closer and took her face in his powerful hands. She had seen those hands bring death and destruction on a scale that would stagger the minds of most who saw it, yet they took her face now in the gentlest of caresses and his thumbs lifted to stroke her cheeks.

I have shamed you Caliria Leonidas. Androcles spoke to her. *All that has happened is my fault Inamarno. I should have never let you leave my embrace. Our embrace. I did not follow what my instincts screamed for me to do and...*

Caliria didn't hear anything within her mind after his first sentence. Everything Nyosa had told her was correct. She had thought Nyosa was only trying to make her feel better in her own way, but as the words spilled from Andro's lips, Caliria realized it was all so very true.

...love you Caliria Leonidas! His words came back into focus now. *We love you with all that we are! I... we...*

Androcles couldn't find the right words he wanted to say. He had practiced within his mind for days on what he wanted to say to her. She bore no guilt or shame for what had taken place and he wanted her to know that it was his fault. Andro knew that had his father been anywhere nearby, he would have come to Earth and soundly beaten his oldest son for doing something so utterly stupid. He shook his head finally and looked at her.

“Ah... screw it.” Andro hissed finally just before lowering his head and covering her soft violet lips with his own.

Caliria's body came alive and her hands came up in shock and absolute delight when his lips came down on hers. They shook terribly for several seconds, unsure of what to do and then she reached up and took his beautiful face in her hands and surrendered to his kiss. She heard him growl softly deep within his chest and he squatted down slightly, his powerful arms curling around her hips just under her ass and he lifted her into the air and crushed her to him. Caliria nearly screamed as she threw her arms around his broad shoulders and returned the sizzling kiss with every ounce of ardor she had held in these last weeks and months. She could feel him slowly whirling her around in his arms as he moved down the four steps to the lecture room floor and his broad back ended up was facing the other students in the room. Caliria gasped loudly as he tore his lips from hers and furiously nuzzled her cheeks and neck causing Caliria to lose all pretense of control. Her soft green eyes changed and her new wolf fangs extended until they were fully visible to everyone in the room. She did not hear the loud exclamations of shock from the students who saw this for her head and heart were pounding with unrequited passion and desire. As his lips returned to claim hers, Caliria tightened her hold on his shoulders, kissing him even harder and finally growling with unrestrained need into his lips as their fangs banged together and impeded their sizzling kiss, though not so much as to cause him to break their hold.

Caliria could feel his love and passion and devotion swarming all around her, wrapping her within a blanket of his wolf aura that enchanted her senses and filled her with such complete clarity and peace. Arduri

had told her she that would only be able to feel his wolf aura on a small scale until he had truly bitten her and the virus filled her body as Denali had done for her. Caliria's body shivered in unreserved lust, passion and absolute love because of his aura, and if it was like this now, she wanted to feel the full force of his aura upon her as soon as she could.

Andro finally drew back from their kiss and held her tightly just as she was, looking into her radiant face with those glowing azure eyes. "I am so sorry *Inamarno*." He spoke softly. "You should never have had to endure this and... I will love you until you can no longer stand it *Inamarno*. We will love you until..."

Caliria shook her head quickly, not bothering to let her fangs retract or her eyes change back. She kissed him once, stopping his words as she gripped his face with her hands. "You have... you have returned to me." She spoke with a brilliant smile. "That is all... that is all I care about Androcles my love. I have missed you so very much! All of you!"

"What is the meaning of this!?" Salarn's voice bellowed now causing both of them to turn their heads and see the Vanari Professor march fearlessly down the aisle until she was on the floor in front of them.

Androcles quickly returned Caliria to her feet, but did not remove his hands from her waist as he looked at the woman. "Forgive me Lady Salarn." He told her respectfully as he bowed his head to her slightly, which surprised Salarn quite a bit since she had heard all Lycavorians were uneducated brutes.

Salarn looked at him with wide eyes. "You... you know my name? How... how is that possible?"

Andro turned and looked at Caliria who was staring up at him with unabashed love. "I know everything about you Lady Salarn. I know everything about anyone who has contact with my wife and mate. *Inamarno* truly loves your class." He spoke as he looked back to her.

"You... you are not allowed here." Salarn stammered finally in shock at this revelation. "Lycavorians are not... your people are not allowed to go out into the city. How..."

"I received permission from Regent Re Mydala to come here." Andro told her. "I have only just arrived on your planet Lady Salarn, but I needed to collect that which is very dear to me." He looked at Caliria with shining eyes. "I needed to collect my Vanari wife and mate. One of the pieces of my heart and soul."

Salarn looked at Caliria with wide eyes. "Caliria is this...?"

Caliria nodded her head quickly. "Yes." She said. "Yes."

"This is... this is highly irregular!" Salarn spoke.

Andro looked at her. "I will wait until you are finished if need be." He said. "But I am not leaving without her."

"We... we were almost done for the day." Salarn spoke again. "I will... I will need to make sure that this..."

"You may check with whomever you like..." Andro told her. "But I am taking Caliria with me to..."

Caliria gripped his arms tightly. "Andro wait." She gasped quickly. "I must... I must do something first."

Andro looked at her. "What?"

He watched confused as Caliria stepped around him, once more making no effort to retract her fangs or allow her eyes to change back. She straightened her clothes with a simple brush of her hands and then she stepped right up to where Tulia stood in open mouth shock.

"You always were an arrogant, stupid bitch Tulia!" Caliria snapped. "Tonight I will be within the arms of my husband and mate. My Prince! I will feel his enormous manhood within me making me scream out in delight while I taste my fellow wives and Princesses over and over. And you... you Tulia will still be a cheap whore!"

Caliria Leonidas drew back her hand and using all of her training as a Cadre Commando and all of her new found wolf strength, she punched Tulia directly in her shocked face. The young woman's legs flew out from under her and she went over backwards into the row of seats until she landed three rows back. Caliria didn't pause and she turned back to see Andro's wide eyes staring at her. She wiped away the last of her tears and leaped into his arms once more knowing he would catch her easily.

"What was...?" He stuttered in shock.

Caliria smiled brilliantly at him as he whirled her around once more and tossed her legs up into his arms to carry her. "I was defending what is mine." She said simply.

He had taken it upon himself to be the one to watch Caliria. He wanted the opportunity to have her submit to him again. Franklin Adams was the epitome of perfection as far as the OSG was concerned. He was the very first of a new breed of genetically enhanced OSG soldier. Fast, powerful and very smart. His schooling was perfect, his training without equal. He did not understand how this could have happened though. His plan was perfect in every respect. He left no detail out, yet the moment he saw the flash of obsidian scales overhead he knew it was too late. He was running for the entrance of the University but was far too slow as he skidded to a halt when he saw Androcles enter and disappear into the building. The Vanari security detail on Caliria Re Mydala was on full alert now, as was the Lycavorian bitch who had been her shadow for so long. He had planned on giving that bitch to several of his more sadistic men and see how she tolerated that. It would have been an interesting experiment. Now all he could do was watch as within five minutes, the strange looking ship had landed in the nearby courtyard and then Androcles reappeared with Caliria in his arms. Five more of the enormous dragons exited the sleek looking ship, as did five other women and three men. Two of the men immediately took up very obvious defensive positions near the front and back of the sleek looking ship.

Two of the five dragons were slightly smaller in size than the other three, but they were still massive monsters that his men would stand no chance against. Franklin hung back from the row of stairs that led up into the main foyer of the University as he watched Androcles Leonidas put Caliria on the ground. They shared a kiss right there on the steps before she turned and sprinted for where the other women were moving towards her. He watched as the second man shook his head with a smile when Caliria flew past him and he came up beside Androcles who had settled to the steps to watch.

Caliria didn't hesitate for a split second as she reached for Sadi first and then they were laughing and crying as they bunched together hugging and kissing each other with intense and very real emotion. These were not the actions of friends Franklin Adams knew, their kisses too passionate, and their embraces far too intimate. Even the young daughter of the Rothryn Praetor took part as she and Caliria stood facing each other for a single long moment, staring at each other, and then they were sharing an embrace and kiss of long time lovers. It was disgusting as far as he was concerned, but there was nothing he could do right now as the five huge dragons quickly encircled the six women in a protective ring while they reunited with each other right there in the courtyard.

Franklin Adams was by no means a coward, and seeing the Lycavorian Crown Prince sitting with just the second man on the steps was an inviting target. He was also not a fool as his eyes scanned the area around the University grounds and surrounding area. There was no way that additional security was not already in place around the campus he knew now. There is no way they would have allowed him to come here if that was not the case. As he continued to watch intently, his patience and keen eyes paid off. He saw the shimmer of movement and then a dark skinned female, one of their Drow elves it seemed, appeared from the shadows of one of the large trees that Androcles sat near. He did not appear surprised and only looked up as she moved closer to him, parking her ass on the steps to his left while the large Lycavorian was to his right.

Perhaps this situation called for boldness Franklin thought quickly. He lifted his arm casually to brush it across his face.

"I'm going in. All teams hold position. Do not execute. Not now."

Andro tore his eyes from where his wives and mates were still hugging each other and speaking happily and he watched as the Drow elf female settled to the steps beside him.

"Illia... you are looking well." Andro said as she parked her firm ass on the step beside him.

The female Drow looked at Andro and smiled at him, her amber eyes bright and alert. "The shadows here agree with me." She told him.

Illia Ta'lab of the Drow House Ta'lab had worked under Androcles Leonidas and his command almost exclusively since finishing her training nearly a decade ago. She and her fourteen person Drow scout team were now assigned permanently to his Combined Fleet Forces Group and all of them had volunteered to come to the Beta Quadrant with him. They had been following and protecting Caliria Leonidas from the shadows since the

day she had returned to the world of her birth. While Paga was the public portion of her security detail, the person that everyone saw in the open, Illia and her team were the covert side. The Vanari government had relented in allowing Paga to accompany Caliria, but only because they were watching her as well.

“Report.” Andro spoke the single word as his eyes went back to where Caliria and Lu'ria were embracing and laughing as Majeir stuck her large head into their small circle.

“There are three teams in position around the campus.” Illia spoke. “They are well armed and well trained but they think they are invisible. We spotted them the first day they blundered into position. I'd say that they were getting ready to try and take her soon Andro.”

It was well known within the Union military that no Drow referred to any member of the Royal family by their title when they were alone or in private settings. Martin had forbid it many years ago considering the ties and trust he had in the Drow as a whole, as well as the fact that he considered the Drow Queen Aihola his adopted sister just as he did Tarifa. Aihola had direct links to the King and Queens no matter where they were and everyone knew that she acted with his approval regardless of the situation. This loyalty had carried over to Androcles and his children as well... and since Andro had taken Lu'ria as his wife and mate that trust and loyalty had become almost fanatical.

Andro smiled at that. “Bet my little surprise visit put a major kink in that plan.” He said.

Jomann chuckled. “No bet here.”

“And this Franklin character?” Andro asked.

“He hasn't approached her directly since the day at her apartment.” Illia answered. “I like to think Inamarno and Paga put the fear of the gods in him, but he has been here at least part of the time, every day since then. He has been trying to remain hidden, though not doing a very good job of it if you ask me.”

Jomann laughed softly. He had met with Illia and her team before they left Earth and to say he had been impressed was an understatement. He knew of the relationship the Drow had to the Royal family, there were few who did not, but there was definitely no questioning their skill in any way. “Do I detect a note of disgust in your voice Illia?” He asked.

The Drow grinned. “Just a professional observation.” She said. “He is watching us right now however.”

“I'm sure he is.” Andro commented. “What else?”

“They have one safe house nearby... another that we are certain is twenty blocks from here in an area they call The Boardwalk. It is close to the river that runs through the city and provides at least a dozen easy access points to enter and exit the city without detection.”

“No one has seen your people?” Andro asked.

Illia looked at him with an expression of disgust. “Please Andro... I said they were well trained... not equal to us. Your mother trained us.”

Andro grinned at her answer and bumped her shoulder with his. “And she would be very proud of you.”

“I have one two person team shadowing Coren... another set up in an office across the street from his building. Five plus me with Paga are always on *Inamarno*.” Illia continued with a smile of pride. “We have established a safe house three clicks from Coren's residence... ground and water access. The *Durcunusaan* Team that Denali added has since secured it even more and are monitoring all portions of the city from there. We have eyes and ears almost everywhere since Coren allowed us to tap into the city's internal VIDCOM network.”

“Who has the Safe House?” Andro asked.

“Arusk and Kintia Dinato.” Illia answered.

Andro met her eyes. “Marci cut them loose?” He asked.

Illia nodded. “They arrived secretly just over a month ago. According to her... we needed a level headed Control Action Team.”

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “I'll have to send her a thank you for that.” He said.

Illia nodded her head in agreement. “That you will... when they got to the safe house things really came together.”

“What about the Eridiani?” Andro asked.

“The city is infested with them.” Illia answered him calmly even though she saw Franklin approaching from behind them out of the corner of her eyes. “It is some sort of legitimate Joint Cooperation Deal that they have with the Eridiani. If I had to guess I'd say at least a third of them are OSG assets in one way or another.”

“Then it’s as you thought Andro.” Jomann said. “Part of their agreement with the traitors on their Board of Regents is to allow unlimited access across the planet.”

Androcles nodded. “It would appear so.” He said. “What better way to mark their targets and keep track of things.”

“It appears he is making a bold move Andro. A hundred meters and closing.” Illia spoke. “He is going to confront you it seems.”

Andro nodded his head. “They’ll hit us within two days once word gets out I am here, probably at Coren’s estate. They won’t attempt anything at the Rothryn embassy.” He spoke as he came to his feet. “Any Lycavorians?”

Illia shook her head. “Not that we have seen openly. It is easy enough to pick them out of the Rothryn who frequent the city with the scanner Eliani developed. If they are here, then they are probably remaining out of sight in their many safe houses.”

“That sounds right considering the restrictions on our people here.” Jomann commented. “They’ll spearhead the attack though.”

“So they can place blame on the former Protectorate and us.” Andro said in agreement. “Yes they will.” He looked at Illia. “Collapse your people back to Coren’s estate and prepare the defenses there Illia. And send two additional teams to cover Coren. Him they may attempt to hit at his office in order to make a statement to others. I will not allow any harm to come to *Inamarno*’s father. Not now.”

Illia nodded. “I will leave you to deal with the fool behind you.” She said before moving quickly away from him and back into the shadows of the large trees where she simply vanished from sight.

Andro took a deep breath and smiled as he rose to his feet casually. “Franklin Adams... I presume.” He spoke as he turned quickly causing Franklin to come up short in surprise.

Franklin recovered quickly though. “Crown Prince Androcles Leonidas.” He stated quite calmly. He was equal in height to Andro though far less broad and nowhere near as thickly muscled. “You have arrived sooner than everyone expected it seems.”

Andro smiled once more. “I like to be unpredictable.” He replied.

“Your arrival here will change nothing!” Franklin spat.

Androcles nodded his head. “Perhaps not.” He said. “It will not matter for you and the OSG however.”

The Cadre Commando officer Entia had remained nearby and when she saw the Eridiani move up behind the Lycavorian Prince she motioned several of her team closer. It would not do for the Lycavorian Crown Prince to be killed or injured in an attack here on the University grounds. She and her team members moved within hearing range.

“You do not know as much as you think you do Prince Androcles.” Franklin spoke.

“I think you’d be surprised at what I know.” Andro told him.

“You and your kind do not frighten us.” Franklin snarled softly. “There is nothing you can do to us. We are untouchable here on Austrova.”

“That may be so.” Androcles said calmly. “It will not change your fate as I said.”

“We are better than you.” Franklin spat. “Better. Stronger. Faster. We are what the fool humans on Earth could have been! We are among you even now, at the highest levels of your government and military!”

Andro smiled and shook his head slowly. “If you are referring to my Uncle Ben and Aunt Tina... just to name a few of the hundred and sixty three Eridiani that live on Earth and call the Union home...” Andro saw Franklin’s eyes grow slightly wider. “Then your supposed influence is for shit. They know what you and your friends are... and they would rip your heart from your chest before giving you the time of day. You have not kept up on current events have you Franklin?”

“Whatever information you got from that bitch Brendi Faith is no longer useful to you.” Franklin said.

Andro held out his hand and blocked Jomann from snatching the smaller man up and smashing him to the granite slab beneath them. “I’d be very careful how you speak of Brendi Franklin Adams. She has embraced her new life as my sister’s lover and has become wife to both her and Jomann here. And take my word for it... Jomann is very protective of his beloved wives and mates.”

Franklin’s eyes cut to Jomann and the cold gaze of death in his eyes while Andro saw the flicker of surprise in them. No doubt about it, this man was well trained. It would not matter in the end though.

“Let me give you a bit of information that you and your OSG minions and bosses do not know Franklin Adams.” Andro spoke as he moved closer to him. “Regardless of what happens between my people and the Vanari... the OSG will cease to exist as an entity when I am done with you.” Andro’s eyes became a little brighter and Franklin couldn’t help but take a step back at this.

“We have the cure for the vile poison you use on Vanari females and we will release this to the Vanari public in three days. Then you and the Vanari who are protecting you and your putrid organization will have nothing.” This incredible information caused the eyes of Entia and her Commandos to explode open in shock as they had heard every word Androcles had just spoken.

“When that takes place... I intend to give my Vanari wife the wedding gift of a lifetime. I will give her your head for violating her in the manner you did. Then I will give to her father and the Vanari people the heads of every OSG Regional Commander on a platter for what you and others have made her and so many other Vanari suffer for too long. I will come for you and your kind Franklin Adams... from every direction... from the darkness and from the light. I will come from the stars and from the earth. I will insure that every one of your vile kind is buried in the deepest, darkest hole I can find for them. When I am done... there will be nothing left of the Orionis Syndicate Group or its minions.” Andro allowed his fangs to extend to their full length and the black ring encircled his azure eyes as he stared at Franklin.

“And the Vanari people will finally be free of your wretched existence and your control of them as a people. And you Franklin Adams...” Andro stepped even closer to him, his azure eyes beginning to glow intensely. “You I will save until the very end... and for what you did to my Caliria I will crush you like the insignificant fucking cockroach you truly are. Then you will know the true meaning of pain.”

Androcles! What... what are you doing? Caliria’s sweet, musical voice echoed in his head and he turned to see her watching him. Sadi and the others were gathered around her and watching as well, but he could feel her concern for him and what was being said even though she could not hear him.

Androcles turned back to Franklin. “Pray to whatever gods you and your people believe in Franklin Adams. Pray that they will offer you mercy... for I will offer you nothing but death. When I am finished... Caliria will be free of your taint upon her soul... and the Vanari people will be free of your sick perversions forever.” Andro’s eyes returned to normal and he smiled at him.

“Tell your masters I am coming for them Franklin Adams. Tell them death is coming for them. And I will spare no one. I used up my forgiveness quota for this decade already.” Andro glared at him for a few more seconds before moving.

Androcles spun around without another word and began walking away from him. Jomann stared at Franklin for several more seconds with cruel eyes before he too turned and followed Androcles, quickly catching up to him.

[Andro... Brendi is not...] Jomann began to talk.

[He doesn’t know that.] Andro answered him. *[It will give them pause in making her a target Jomann. Besides... you and my sister need to stop tap dancing and act on your feelings for her.]*

[We do not want to push her Andro.] Jomann spoke.

[Push her into doing something her scent says she wants more than anything?] Andro told him. He turned and looked at him as they walked towards the *PREMONITION*. *[You two are so blinded by your feelings for her that you can’t see Brendi is just too scared to approach either of you. She doesn’t know how. Use your instincts Jomann... you and my sister need to use your instincts and then you will know what to do.]*

Andro slapped him in the shoulder with a smile. “C’mon... let’s get out of here. More fun awaits Jomann my friend. You know how much I love politics!”

“You hate politics!” Jomann said.

“Yes... that is why it will be so much fun!”

AUSTROVA MAIN SPACEPORT SECURITY AND BRIEFING ROOM

“You had no right!” Galar hissed at Coren. “You had no authority to do this!”

Coren glared at him as the echo of the *PREMONITION* landing in the background began to recede. “I am still a member of the SBR!” He snapped unafraid of the older man in front of him. “I had every right to do what I did Galar! And I had every authority to act!”

“I do not care that she is your daughter!” Galar continued. “She is under investigation by the Board of Regent Court for crimes against the Vanari people! As are your other daughters, your former wife and your son! And you should be too, as far as I am concerned, for how close you have become with them since your return!”

“And how exactly would you have proposed to stop him Galar?” Coren snarled. “You know what he can do! And you know how they view their wives! He would have gotten her no matter what we did, and our people would have paid the price!”

“They would have eventually secured him.” Galar snapped.

“At what cost in lives and injuries Galar?” Asay spoke now coming forward. “How many of our brave Cadre Commandos would have fallen to appease your vanity?”

“You facilitated this!” Galar spoke ignoring Asay. “The only reason they are not in holding cells right now is because they are your children Coren Re Mydala! That could very well change you know!”

Coren stepped closer to the much older Galar. “Do not threaten me Galar Arn Del!” He growled savagely and stepped even closer to him. “Do not threaten Caliria ever again, or any of my children for that matter!”

Ardan chose that time to intervene and he stepped between the two men. “This does not solve anything!” He barked at them. He looked at Coren. “I assume he retrieved her from the University already?”

Coren looked at him. “How did you know that is where she was?” He asked feigning surprise. “You have been watching her Ardan?”

“Only to insure that she does not try and recreate her failed experiments Coren.” Ardan stated.

“She was successful Ardan!” Coren hissed at him now. “You saw this for yourself in the Alpha Quadrant and yet you keep the facts of this bogged down in procedure! Why?”

“I don’t know what I saw.” Ardan answered as he turned away. “And the formula given to us by their people does not work Coren! You know this for yourself! Our own scientists say this very thing. It only makes them appear more culpable in what has occurred.”

“It doesn’t work because, as Senator Ya'sur told you, we were not given all the parts to the formula!” Coren said. “You know this!”

“Why didn’t they give us the entire formula?” Ardan stated turning back to look at him.

“We have not done much in the last millennia or so to earn their trust Ardan.” Coren told him. “Why should they trust us?”

“They are animals Coren!” Galar spoke more subdued now. “Why can’t you see this?”

“What I see... is a species of men and women who can change their outward appearance. That does not change who they are inside.” Coren answered.

Galar turned and looked at Ardan. “You see... they have corrupted him as well!”

“So when we receive the final pieces of the formula and our scientists go over it and discover that it does indeed work as they say... are we going to continue to say it does not work Ardan?” Coren asked.

“This is neither the time nor the place to discuss such matters!” Ardan spoke.

“When will it be time Ardan? You have been burying this information in procedure for weeks and months now, knowing that it is not true!” Coren said. “How soon do we tell our people the truth and then act on this knowledge? We can break the hold of the OSG on our people forever!”

Ardan glared at him. “Do not push me Coren!” He snarled softly. “We are friends yes... but do not overstep your place among us, or among the Senior Board of Regents Coren.”

“What do you mean my place among you Ardan?” Coren snarled right back at the man who he had always trusted with everything. A man he discovered was betraying and enslaving his own people for profit. “My place is insuring that our people are taken care of! My place is insuring that we do not facilitate or take part in something that does them harm! That is my place! That is your place as well Ardan. That is what we are meant to do!”

“Regents... they are here!” The Vanari Security officer spoke from the doorway.

Ardan met Coren’s eyes. “We will discuss this later.” He spoke before turning away from him and motioning for Galar and Asay to move closer to him as they turned to the doorway.

Coren looked at them and saw Asay watching him. He watched her shake her head with an imperceptible motion and his eyes grew slightly wider at this. He had thought Asay was on Ardan's side for many years. He had thought she was sleeping with the man. Apparently that did not appear to be the case.

MAIN HANGER BAY AUSTROVA SPACEPORT

No one interfered as the two brothers embraced with enough physical power to crack the ribs of normal men and women. Lisisa and Arduri stood with Sadi and the others, their arms around each other in happiness. Their reunion had been everything Arduri had dreamed of, once more tasting Lisisa's lips on hers and feeling her body pressed tightly to hers. Arduri and Deni had planned their first night back together very carefully and she had every intention of seeing that it happened. Now though, it was time for Androcles and Denali to reunite. Eliani and Zarah aside, all of their siblings knew Andro was closer to his pureblood brothers and sister. He never treated them any differently and he loved them all with equal devotion, but Denali, Deion and Nara were special to him because they were purebloods and because they all knew that they now carried the Praetorian gene. And this was something that bound them even tighter together than the blood that flowed in their veins.

Andro finally pushed Deni away and looked at him. His face was alive with that crooked grin he always had and Denali squeezed his brother's shoulders. "You don't know how good it is to see you *fervon*." Deni stated with happiness. "I have grown so tired of dealing with these *igords* by myself."

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "And you have done a superior job." He said.

Deni laughed. "Others would debate that with you." He said.

Andro shook his head. "No... I don't think so." He told him. "Once we are at Coren's estate we can talk more freely."

"You know that they will hit us soon now that you are here." Deni spoke softly.

Andro nodded. "I'm counting on it."

Deni nodded. "Good... I am getting tired of dancing around with these fools and I want to stomp some heads."

"Good... so do I." Andro told him. He turned his head and looked at Dutkne who stood beside Denali.

Praetorian Warrior and Praetorian Mage, brought together by fate and destiny, across the span of time and space. Andro released Deni and stepped up to him and Dutkne didn't hesitate as they shared a similar rib cracking embrace. Each of them placed a hand behind the other's head almost without thought and everyone nearby saw the tiny fraction of white blue light flare around those hands as they held their foreheads together. It was just as Murano had said it would be and it happened seamlessly as they shared with each other every relevant item of information that each of them had obtained in the months apart, as well as everything that had taken place. It was over just as quickly as it had begun and then they were staring at each other.

Dutkne gripped Andro's head tightly and Androcles could feel the thick emotion within Dutkne. "It was a fitting end for what he did to her *fervon*. I just wish I was there to..." He whispered and shook his head. "Thank... thank you."

All of the Leonidas children knew by now that Dutkne was hopelessly in love with their sister Zarah and Lucia both. It was not something he could keep from her family no matter how much he tried, and considering the acceptance and trust he had, Dutkne knew that all of them approved of that. They knew he would not push or pressure Zarah in any way and all of them knew that he would wait however long it took for her to realize it.

Andro squeezed his head as well and nodded. "Never give up on her Dutkne my brother." He said. "It will take time... but she will come to know what is inside you. Lucia as well. They will feel it... and embrace it."

"You... you sound so sure." Dutkne said.

Andro smiled. "I have seen it." He answered confidently. "And that is all I will say."

Dutkne nodded his head assertively. "Then I will endure until that day comes." He said.

Andro leaned forward and kissed his cheek. He turned to look at Deni once more. "They are here I take it?"

Deni nodded his head. "They are in the briefing room over there with Coren. And according to Ya'sur and Ulana, Ardan and his cronies are not in the least bit happy at your stunt. Ardan had steam coming out of his ears and Galar's face was so red it looked as if it would explode."

"Fuck them!" Andro spoke bluntly. "They will be even less happy when they hear what I have to tell them."

"No doubt." Dutkne said with a grin.

"Ulana?" Andro asked.

Deni nodded his head. "Surprisingly Andro... she has spent a lot of time with Arduri since getting here two days ago. Duri saw something in her right away and took it upon herself to take action. She is different *fervon*. She isn't the same Ulana we knew growing up."

Andro nodded. "I had hoped that would be the case by getting her away from her idiot friends and the inbred arrogance of their kind. *Duan Gai's* father Denali, will he be at the estate?"

Deni nodded quickly. "As soon as Lady Aleatia filled him in he contacted me. I had to tell him to shut up with the apologizing. They'll be there."

Androcles nodded once more and squeezed Dutkne's shoulders. "Then let's get this over with. Deni... I want you to take everyone to Coren's Estate. Dutkne, Eli, Jomann, Brendi and Caliria will remain with me."

"Is it wise exposing Brendi *fervon*?" Deni asked.

Andro grinned. "It was her idea." He said. "She has been hanging around our sister for too long it seems."

Deni rolled his eyes. "Then that answers that. She will be just as bird brained and utterly corrupted as she is."

"I heard that *igord!*" Eliani's voice echoed from behind them and they all laughed as she jumped onto her brother's back and tossed her arms around his shoulders from behind. Eliani bit down gently on Denali's ear like she used to do when she was small. "And I get it from my two brothers with the least amount of common sense!"

Denali laughed and spun her around and Eliani laughed happily as Sadi came up to Andro with Caliria holding her hand tightly. Her face was brilliant in its beauty and happiness and she made no effort to hide it in the least. Caliria now wore the same uniform as all of them, the standard Mark V ArmorPly with crimson cape that reached to the floor and the crimson sash that wrapped around her waist. Attached to the belt she wore was a *Nehtes*, which was more for show than anything else, and a KM14 secured in a holster on her thigh.

"I am ready." Caliria spoke.

Andro nodded and leaned over to kiss both of them. He looked into Sadi's jungle green eyes intently. "Make sure everything is ready *KertaGai*." He said softly.

Sadi nodded her head in acknowledgement. Since becoming Andro's wife, mate, and his *Anome*, Sadi Leonidas had been elevated to a position of influence and power that matched his mothers in every way. If Androcles was unavailable... everyone knew that Sadi was the one to go to for answers. "I will my love." She replied. "Now go and do what you need to do quickly and then bring *Inamarno* back to us. We have a full night ahead of us you know." Sadi finished that statement with a seductive overtone to her voice.

"We most certainly do." Caliria agreed happily with bright soft green eyes. "And I intend to make every single moment count for the rest of my life."

"So do we." Andro spoke as he pulled her against him tightly. "So do we."

Sadi leaned up and kissed him once more; drawing her tongue slowly across his lips as she knew he so loved her to do and squeezed his hand. "Be quick Andro our love. Don't play with these fools if they react as you believe they will."

Andro nodded. "I won't." He told her. "Don't worry."

"...Must apologize Prince Androcles." Ardan spoke as he motioned around the security briefing room they were in. "I had hoped to receive you in more comfortable surroundings."

"More comfortable surroundings would not have changed the reaction to my arrival I'm guessing Regent Ardan." Andro told him.

“I see that you were able to retrieve Caliria Re Mydala without incident.” Ardan spoke seeing Caliria pressed against Andro’s side intimately.

“I did tell you that all I wanted was my wife and mate Regent Ardan.” Andro said. “Once I had her... I returned here. Just as I said I would.”

“Caliria Re Mydala is not authorized to take part in such meetings as these!” Galar spat now. “These are matters of government and state. She does not belong here!”

“Caliria Re Mydala is now, and has been for the last nearly half a year, Caliria Leonidas Galar Arn Del. She is one of six Crown Princess of the United Lycavorian Union.” Dutkne spoke from just to Caliria’s left. “This position gives her every right to be here since it concerns the Union that she is now a citizen of and will have a hand in ruling one day in the future. Of course, if you still wish to claim you don’t recognize her Union citizenship or her marriage to Androcles, then here is the man to speak with that about.” Dutkne motioned to Andro with a large grin.

“We do not...” Galar began to speak but Ardan gripped his arm.

“I’m sure these are items that we can discuss in more private surroundings.” He spoke calmly.

“Let me be very clear on this. When it comes to Caliria... there will be no discussion on her status or anything else for that matter. Where that discussion be held publicly or privately.” Andro stated fully. “Eli?”

Eliani stepped forward and held out the pad to Ardan. “This is the last part of the formula for countering the OSG virus.” She stated. “It will allow your scientists to calculate and mass produce the serum.”

“Your serum does not work!” Cruor snapped softly.

“It doesn’t work because you did not have the last four equations that were used to make the serum viable.” Eliani told him sternly. “Now you have them.”

“We are supposed to believe this when you stand beside an OSG agent!” Cruor spoke more forcefully now. “You blatantly bring her here, knowing what she is? We would be within our rights to arrest her instantly!”

Eliani’s smile was anything but friendly. “You could certainly try.” She stated with utter confidence as she pulled the taller Brendi closer to her and pressed her body against hers. “You would not succeed.” She finished her statement feeling Jomann come up behind both of them and press against their backs.

“I no longer associate myself with the OSG!” Brendi stated as she moved even closer to Eliani, secretly loving the feel of their bodies against her own and relishing in the sensations it caused. “I haven’t associated with them in almost a year.”

“And we are just expected to believe this?” Galar barked.

“What you believe or do not believe will not change the facts as they are.” Andro spoke evenly. “Brendi Faith has worked and lived with us for nearly a year now and we trust her. She helped us to crack the OSG slavery ring within the Alpha Quadrant and bring it to an end. Her family has found new lives and purpose on Earth and with any luck Brendi will become part of my family soon enough.” Brendi looked at Andro with wide eyes as she heard what he said. “I do not care if you trust her or not. We do. Those are the facts.”

“Your involvement with her only lends proof to the information that your people were working with the OSG this entire time!” Eyon spoke now. “It is the same Intelligence that you yourselves gave to us if you remember!”

“I have already openly stated to you that the OSG was involved with certain citizens of the Lycavorian Union.” Ya’sur moved up next to Andro now. “None of them were part of our government however, and this was certainly not sanctioned by our government in any way. To suggest otherwise is an insult. The information we have given to you is clear and accurate, and those scum are now history. The Lycavorian Union does not tolerate slavery in any shape or form, period. This is something I have already told you.”

“So you say!” Galar spoke.

Andro shook his head. “Brendi is not the issue here.” He said. “You have the remaining parts of the formula to make the serum. It does work as Regent Ardan can attest too. Whether he chooses to or not is irrelevant to me. He saw it work on the young women we rescued from the slavers, one of whom is on the ship above you in orbit right now. I believe you have already talked to her.”

“She refuses to return to Austrova to be examined by our physicians!” Galar spoke.

Andro nodded his head. "So I understand." He said. "That is her choice however, not mine. She is the only one who offered to return here as proof that the serum does work and only because Caliria contacted her and asked her to come."

"You contacted her?" Galar gasped with wide eyes. "You were not allowed to have the access or the means to communicate off world!"

"I didn't use Vanari communications!" Caliria snapped at him. Andro's love flowed through her without shame, as did the love of her fellow Princesses. She could feel them within the Etheric realm as well as flowing through her because of the wolf blood that now flowed within her veins. Caliria also knew this would only grow stronger the moment Andro bit her and passed the virus into her body. This unquestioned love removed any and all remaining blocks to Caliria's inner psyche. It also allowed her own confidence and self worth to come pouring out, which made Coren beam in pride from behind the others where he stood. "I used Lycavorian Union COM channels on one of our ships! Yssyla is my friend and she agreed to come here in order to prove the serum does work. But I swore to her I would not allow anyone to turn her into an object for study and experimentation! Or risk her conveniently being taken by the OSG again!"

"You would not allow?" Galar almost shouted as he glared at her. "You have no..."

"And we are to graciously believe you are not influencing her in some manner?" Cruor spat now, coming up beside Galar and cutting off his words with the question. "Keeping her from being examined by our own doctors and scientists?"

"You mean keeping her from being experimented on don't you?" Eliani snarled at him now.

"Eli!" Andro snapped softly at his sister. Everyone saw her look at him and then they saw the miniscule shake of his head. Their eyes locked for a long moment and everyone who could use Mindvoice knew they were talking within a very private and heavily shielded connection.

Andro turned back to Ardan and the others after a moment. "Forgive my sister... she is a doctor and she despises what your females have had to endure."

"Your parents should have also taught her better manners when speaking to her betters!" Galar snapped.

Andro stepped forward quickly, even before Eliani could open her mouth to retort. He stopped directly in front of Galar who gazed at him with wide eyes and he took a step back when Andro's eyes changed and his fangs extended.

"Do not make the mistake of believing you are my sister's better Galar Arn Del." Andro spoke firmly, his dual fangs looking exceptionally deadly to almost everyone in the room who was not Lycavorian. "None of us in this room are her better! She is far smarter than you and I will ever be! You would do well not to insult her again in my presence. Nor our parents... for you are certainly not better than them. If my mother Anja was here... you would be picking pieces of your teeth from the floor for speaking to her in such a way."

"This gets us nowhere!" Ardan spoke. "Please Androcles... there are far more important items for us to discuss now that you are here."

Andro glared at Galar for a long moment. "Do not make the mistake of insulting my sister or anyone within my family again Regent Arn Del. You would not like the reaction you receive from me."

"Are... are you threatening me?" Galar gasped in anger.

"No sir... I'm merely stating a fact." Andro told him. He stepped back from Galar even as Eliani squeezed Brendi's hand and looked at her brother with adoration in her eyes. "You are right... there are more important things for us to discuss Regent Ardan. Eliani has given you the data you need to complete the formula. I will give you three days to do whatever tests you feel you need to do."

Ardan nodded his head. "Three days is certainly acceptable to us." He replied quickly, too quickly to suit Coren or Androcles in any way. "We can then meet in more formal and official surroundings to review what we have discovered and the political ramifications of your merger with the Protectorate."

Andro looked at him oddly. "There are no ramifications of our merger Regent Ardan. The former Protectorate is made up of Lycavorians and others who have finally come home to join their brethren. The wait has been too long as it is as far as I am concerned and the joy that spreads in the Union upon discovering that they exist is not something I can put into words." He stated.

"Your delegation has put forth changes to the many trade agreements and the Right of Passage that we had with the Protectorate." Ardan spoke. "These agreements have been in place for millennia."

Andro nodded his head. "And they are wholly unfair towards my people." He said. "That is going to stop."

"And you threaten us again!" Galar growled.

"I get the sense you do not know the true definition of the word threat Regent Arn Del." Andro told him. "I have made no threat. Once more I have stated fact. Whatever agreements are in place are made to benefit the Vanari people. I have read the dialogue in the trade agreements, as well as the Right of Passage. All of them are unfairly balanced in favor of the Vanari. All of them are catered to insure the Vanari keep my people at a distance."

"It is... it is the way of things." Ardan said.

"Not anymore." Andro told him. "As Crown Prince I act with the authority of my father and all six of my mothers since they are not here."

Eliani snorted softly. "Thankfully for you they aren't here." She muttered under her breath.

Andro looked at her and smiled before turning back to Ardan. "The status quo is no longer to the benefit of my people, if it ever was to begin with. If the Vanari government is not willing or able to make the changes that we feel are fair... then I will do what my brother told you I would do. I will end all trade and commerce between the Vanari government and the Union. I will declare all agreements null and void and I will turn our trading ships around. I will ask that all Vanari who are currently within Union space present themselves for transport back to Vanari space if that is their wish. Those who believe as we do, that the agreements and such are unfair; they will be welcome to remain. All travel currently allowed will be stopped and Vanari ships will no longer be allowed to enter Union space for any reason. You wish to keep us at arm's length, fine, we will do just that. All communications between our governments will cease and the only contact we will have will be between whatever ambassadors we may choose to appoint. I have already asked Regent Coren Re Mydala to act in this manner for us and he has accepted. No one else will be satisfactory to us."

"This is... this is outrageous!" Ardan did shout now.

"Outrageous to you perhaps... not to us I'm afraid." Andro said evenly. "In the Union we believe in fair and equal trade. That is something conspicuously absent from current agreements that are in place right now. That will change one way or the other."

"You can't seriously be thinking about this?" Ardan stammered.

"Thinking about it... no. I am done thinking about it... and I will not share with you what my father and mothers said when I told them." Andro told him. "Am I ready to implement it...? That will be up to the Vanari Board of Regents I suppose."

Ardan moved closer and opened his mouth to speak but Andro held up his hand. "Forgive me Regent Ardan. These are matters that we can discuss when you have been able to share this information with the entire Board of Regents. We will meet again in three days just as you have suggested. Coren Re Mydala has graciously arranged for us to stay on his estate while we are here. If this is not acceptable to the Vanari government in any way, then we will remain on our ship. However... it has been several months since I have had the scent of my Vanari mate in my nose and I would like to spend the next few hours doing nothing but ravaging her in our bed and showing her how much that I have missed her." Andro looked down into Caliria's sea green eyes. "And how much I love her. How much we love her."

Caliria's cheeks turned a bright shade of violet against her cornflower blue skin as she blushed, but she wrapped her arms tighter around his waist and smiled up at him with devotion in those eyes.

"We can not allow you to..." Galar began.

"That is quite acceptable to us." Ardan cut Galar off.

Galar looked at him with wide eyes. "You are going to allow them to stay outside the embassy grounds?" He gasped.

Ardan nodded his head. "Coren's estate is quite sufficient. I will insure we have an open liaison from his office to his estate."

Andro nodded and bowed his head slightly to Ardan. "Then I look forward to speaking with you again about the future we could have together."

Ardan forced a smile. "As do I."

Coren stepped forward now. "Androcles... I have transport waiting outside. If everyone will follow me?"

With that... the first and shortest meeting of the Union and Vanari governments came to an end.

ARC ROYAL

NINETEEN HOURS FROM VENTORI DESERTED LYCAVORIAN COLONY

“...Still cannot fathom what he had hoped to accomplish by making this virus.” Radra spoke from her chair.

The Medical Center for the *ARC ROYAL* was dark at this time of night, the examining beds empty. The on duty elven medical officer sat at her station on the far side of the center, reading through some sort of manual, while the opposite end of the Med Center was occupied physically by Anja, Radra, Duewa and Anuk. The four women sat around the medium sized table, data pads were scattered across the surface haphazardly, and there were several water bottles and coffee mugs near each of them. Ceale was joining them as well, her image from the office on Manne within the holo transmission disc on the floor.

This was Anja Leonidas’s element. She was sitting with others who had equally keen minds and knowledge that matched her own. This small group, only Eurin and Sivana were missing at the moment had grown by two with the addition of Radra and Ceale, but this group Anja had no doubts could solve any problem if they put their collective minds together. Anja did not consider herself smarter than anyone and she went out of her way to insure that credit was given to those who deserved it. Anja just did not take into account that her mind worked in ways other minds did not because of Martin’s blood flowing within her. It was the main reason why she alone had discovered treatments and cures for diseases that had been a way of life for some species in the Union their entire existence. Everyone could think outside the box as she did, and they were very creative in many ways, but Anja Leonidas was the only one who could make her mind look beyond what was proven and real and reach past what many considered impossible in order to seek an answer to what she sought.

“Understanding what he was trying to do would help us to determine what he was going to use it for. We know it was some sort of weapon... but we don’t know the purpose.” Ceale spoke from within the transmission. “Knowing the purpose... now that would allow us the ability to react accordingly... but it still would not give us the capability to effectively treat this thing.”

“Ceale is right.” Duewa spoke. “The treatment Anja and I developed will only work on select individuals. They would need to be men or women that we have in our custody who we can directly influence medically as we did with Jacina and Recia.”

“I understand... the base formula that you and Anja created will not work across the board because you were able to locally adjust for the added mutative nature of the virus within Jacina and Recia.” Ceale said. “This we cannot do on a larger scale, there are just too many variables and unknown to try and account for.”

Anja nodded her head. “And the delivery option that Radra and I decided on for Jacina and Recia is not exactly conducive with introducing a wholesale cure. We can’t directly inject over seven million Svorag in their necks for obvious reasons.”

“Becoming one of these things does not appeal to me in the least.” Anuk spoke now. “And most especially not in the way that they introduce this virus into the bodies of those they attack.”

“No argument here.” Anja said with a small grin.

“We need the virus’s original base formula.” Radra said leaning back in the chair. “It is the only way that we can then establish treatment vectors and make an antigen.”

“So then we are not trying to find a cure?” Ceale asked.

Duewa shook her head. “As much as it pains me to say... I don’t think we can. We must focus on developing an antigen as Radra has said. It is the only way to protect our people as well as anyone else from future attacks and to limit the Svorag from turning any more victims.”

Anja looked at Ceale in the transmission. “Ceale... you are more knowledgeable in the treatment phase than Duewa and I. What do you think?”

Ceale was silent for a moment before finally shaking her head. “There is too much risk.” She said finally. “I have to agree with Duewa and Radra. The only thing that we can do now is to develop an Antigen

that will stop the spread of this virus. Once that is complete and we are confident that they can turn no more people, then we can begin to work on a cure for those that are already infected.”

“I think as doctors and researchers we all know that there are just too many of them to account for right now.” Anja spoke. “We could turn loose the men we love and let them have at it... but they just would not be able to eliminate them all. Invariably some will survive and that is what we need to plan for.”

“So what *were* they doing on Onterom Anja?” Anuk asked.

“I think Lorendo’s people were doing exactly what we are going to try and do.” Anja answered. “They were using the research and experiments of legitimate scientists like Jacina and Recia as cover. That fat little rat fuck Lorendo lost control of them and he was using the facilities on Onterom to try and find a way to get that control back. Jacina and Recia and the others were only a means for him to hide his real work. And when he lost control of that... he left them to die and sealed the facility.”

“I might be able to discover who he was using on Onterom.” Radra offered. “If Avi or Avatar 27 can do a wide pattern search we may be able to discover who Lorendo had working on that project. He would have insured his people were pulled off first.”

Anja nodded her head. “That would mean accessing the main computer database on your homeworld. I’ll talk to Martin about that. He and Delnash may not be willing to risk Avi or 27 being discovered.”

Radra looked at her. “I assume that is why he has not acted already.”

“In a manner of speaking.” Anja said.

“You do not trust me?” Radra asked surprised.

Anja shook her head quickly and reached across the table to take her hand. “No!” She spoke forcefully. “No... that is not it Radra. Never think that... please. You could not be further from the truth if you think that.”

“Then what?” Radra asked more sedately. The relief she felt was very genuine for she truly enjoyed Anja’s presence and her wonderful mind.

Anja sat back in her own chair. “It’s hard to explain really.” She said thoughtfully. “The best way I could describe it is like this. Marty is... Martin is very methodical. His mind is like a trap. He thinks four, five sometimes six moves from what he is doing now. He is teaching Chief Elder Delnash to do this without even really trying.”

“I don’t follow.” Radra said leaning forward.

“He is giving Lorendo enough rope to hang himself.” Anuk spoke now seeing Radra turn to look at her.

Anja nodded her head in agreement with Anuk’s statement. “Lorendo is responsible for the deaths of millions of Pralors Radra.” She watched Radra turn back to her. “When he altered the Star Charts to hide the Ion storm from those City Ships, he sentenced millions to death. That alone dictates a very painful death in Martin’s eyes for no matter what anyone thinks, Martin considers himself at least part Pralor because of Sumar.”

Radra nodded her head. “As well he should.” She stated confidently. “He is the direct descendant of the most popular Chief Elder in our history and the very first Praetorian. There is no question with that.”

“He is also Lycavorian and a Spartan.” Anja said. “Lorendo gave the orders to attack us knowing full well we were using non-lethal ammunition. Lorendo ordered Sashan to use those grenades because he was trying to protect his secrets. He knew what Martin was... and once he realized this... he knew it was only a matter of time before his work on Onterom was brought into the light. He could not allow that.” Anja lifted her mug of Aricia’s coffee and took a sip before continuing. “When he killed those Spartans... when he almost killed Fedor... when he struck me... let’s just say Lorendo would have died a very long and painful death on Onterom had Murano and Helen not stepped in and stopped him.”

“That is not something that I find hard to believe.” Radra said.

“Well... when he discovered what Lorendo was really doing on Onterom... what he was trying to protect... Martin entered what Aricia, Bella and I affectionately call his Methodical Beast Mode.” Anja said. “He does it to us when we are all in phase together and it makes all of us scream to the moon in...” Anja looked at her and stopped. Her cheeks turned a slight shade of red even under her dark tan. “Ah... I think I will just let that hang out there for now.” She said with a smile.

“Anse!” Anuk swore. “I was hoping for details!”

They all laughed at this and relaxed even more.

“Anyway... as Anuk said... Martin is letting Lorendo do what he wants for right now, hence her figure of speech.” Anja said. “What Lorendo doesn’t know or want to admit is that Martin is far more intelligent than Lorendo believes and he is setting him up. I’m sure Delnash has some idea of what he is doing... Martin wouldn’t leave him out of the loop so to speak. He truly likes Delnash and he trusts him, which is no small feat when it comes to our mate. When all is said and done however, Lorendo is going to die a very brutal death for what he has done. Lorendo is living on borrowed time right now because Martin needs him alive in order for us to discover what he is doing and what he has done in the past so that we can try and correct it. That means we need to find out everything we can about what he was doing and eventually put together an antigen for the Svorag virus so that we never have to worry about it again.”

Radra was silent for a moment as she gazed at Anja. “He does seem rather severe at times.” She finally said.

Anja laughed softly and leaned back with a nod. “That’s true... but if you think Marty is severe... wait until you meet our son Androcles.” She said. “When those two get together and start plotting, then you know the shit is about to hit the fan. And it won’t be pretty.”

“I have heard you say that before...” Radra said. “What does this mean... when the shit hits the fan?”

Radra didn’t know why all of them burst out laughing. Even Ceale, who was the more conservative of the women, could not hold her laughter in. Anja flashed her an image of what the phrase meant through Mindvoice and Radra’s eyes grew wide in shock... before she too understood the connotation of the phrase and began to laugh just as hard as they were.

As Radra laughed with them, one thought swept through her mind and it made her so very happy. When the full influence of these men and women met the strict and controlled society of Pralor people, they would be given an instant jolt of life anew. A chance to become reborn and once more be the people they once were. There were many who would resist initially she knew, but the quick wit and intelligence of Martin and his beautiful Queens would win them over in the end.

Perhaps there was a future for all of them.

CHAPTER FORTY

SPARTA'S WRATH

Mari had heard Deion’s excited cry within Mindvoice from where he and Nara were meeting the couriers from their father in the landing bay. She did not hesitate or question his call for her and she burst from his quarters at a dead run. Mari knew that the changes in her body were beginning, just as they had with Kesyla, yet she did not fear them in the least. She and Deion had been making love every moment they could spare over the last few days; for it seemed that they could not get enough of each other. While Mari knew what was happening within her, she wanted to be sure.

She went to see Eliani.

Eliani Leonidas confirmed what Mari already knew was happening with just a simple glance and sniff of her keen wolf nose. Then Eliani happily told her what Mari so much wanted to hear. The virus in Deion’s blood, so much more potent because of the exceptional pureness of that blood, was already beginning to alter her DNA. And it was changing her far faster than Mari had thought possible, simply because of the number of times they had been together. Mari did not hold back from telling Eliani anything for she was the caretaker of all the Leonidas siblings among them and despite her brazen nature, she was one of the most thoughtful and intelligent woman she had ever met. She was so much like her mother Anja and Mari had come to adore Anja’s quick wit and intelligence. Eliani had locked the medical bay down for the next two hours and during the brief but very thorough exam, Mari had seen the more serious side of Eliani Leonidas and they had grown much closer. Eliani had taken the time to explain to her in detail that she was now considered a member of their family and unless, for some crazy reason she and Deion parted ways before he finally claimed her, Mari would be treated and thought of as such by everyone. No Lycavorian would dare approach her now with Deion’s scent in her blood as deeply as it was and the *Durcunusaan* would soon begin to see her in a different light as well.

Mari did not shy from this knowledge; Deion had already told her as much as they laid together, and instead she embraced it fully. Just as Kesyla had. When Mari left the medical bay after those two hours she finally had what she had always secretly desired for so long. A man who loved her without question.

Mari's sense of smell had expanded almost to the point of driving her crazy in frustration, until Deion had seen this within her and taken care of that. They had laid naked in bed just last night and he had been so patient and loving as he held her in his arms and talked her through the process of categorizing the many different scents and filing them away in her head in a very unique system. It had taken several hours and they had not made love, but just being beside him, her naked flesh against his own, this made Mari crave him that much more. Small, dual wolf fangs, unique to the Leonidas family alone she discovered, had begun to form now and she had spent hours simply running her fingers over them. Her blue green eyes could now change as well, a thick black ring surrounding the blue green of her pupil whenever she chose to allow the slight transformation to occur. Eliani had told her that when Deion finally did bite her, claim her for his own, the initial moment when the virus raced through her bloodstream was extremely painful, but it would be over very quickly because of the changes already occurring within her.

Mari happily admitted she could not get enough of Deion Leonidas, her petite and very firm body fit within his powerful embrace as if it was always meant too. She loved to curl up beside him in bed, her large breasts pushing against his side while her shorter legs entwined with his own much longer ones. He was the most physically gifted man she had ever seen, and certainly the largest who she had ever slept with, but that fact had never caused her fear. He was so caring and gentle, and even when they made love with untamed passion and increased physical intensity; it was far beyond Mari's wildest dreams. Deion could not seem to get enough of her, always exploring and caressing her body in ways that drove her crazy with ardor. When you added to this blissful fact that he was perhaps the smartest man she had ever been involved with, it made her mind and senses scream out even louder. He was not afraid of her intelligence in the least; indeed this fact seemed to only make him desire her even more. Mari knew he felt the same way for her because their minds were now linked in a way that could not be changed and she felt and saw everything he did just as he did with her. Their Etheric connection was so seamless and clear that at first it had frightened both of them. They had adjusted quickly however, and the many strands of Etheric power within their minds both mingled and mixed and finally became one. Mari had always known she was different, for she took to the lessons her mother taught her like they were second nature.

Now she understood why.

Her shameless love and desire for Deion Leonidas had answered that question within her almost from the very first night they had been together. This was how she knew that her mother Tobia felt for her father even to this day, for she could sense it within her mother still. And she could sense it within her father even more. Deion had agreed with her completely and given what they both knew it was the only thing that made any sense in the least.

Mari was a Praetorian.

Mari was like Deion and his brothers and her parents. She may not have been able to do what they could right now, that would take training and study Mari knew, but at least to her and Deion there was no question. This fact only made them love each other even more.

It felt so very strange to know what Deion thought, what he wanted for the future, and even stranger for him to know and see what she desired. Mari did not doubt what she felt for him in the least. It was absolute and without question. She sensed the very same thing from him and Mari knew that they would be together for eternity. This knowledge did not frighten Mari in any way, and young though they may have been, their love would only grow and become so much stronger as the years passed and that is what Mari had wished for her entire life.

Many men and women scattered as she sprinted as fast as she could from the Lift and into the massive hanger bay. What she saw made her skid to a stop quickly and a sharp tinge of pain shot through her heart along with a large chunk of intense jealousy. The stunningly beautiful blond haired female half elf was in Deion's arms and he was crushing her to him in a bear hug. The female elf's back was to Mari and she could not see her face but Mari could see that she was gripping his shoulders tightly and hugging him just as closely. Nara was in the embrace of the tall, blond haired elf male who also had his back to her, while another couple stood to the background and smiled. The two looked so much alike and somehow familiar. She calmed her racing heart and

slowed to a more sedate walk as she crossed the distance between them, trying desperately to keep her anger in check. Deion must have smelled her because he turned quickly and reached for her while still holding the waist of the younger woman. It was then that Mari saw who it was and she felt so utterly foolish in that instant.

Deion took her hand and without thought he pulled her close to him, wrapping his arm around her waist and lower back because he was so much taller than her. Mari felt his love for her pouring forth in his aura as it swarmed around and through her and she wrapped her arms around his waist. Eliani and Nara had taught her how to begin to detect the aura he could project to her right away and both of them told her it would only increase in effect when Deion finally made her his completely. Mari relaxed even more as she folded her body possessively against him for she could feel his happiness and she suddenly felt even more foolish for thinking what she had been thinking.

“Mari... this is... this is Eirene!” He spoke excitedly. “This is my sister Eirene!” Mari felt his powerful arm squeeze her even tighter and his next words made Mari smile brilliantly and mentally kick herself for being so utterly stupid. “Sister... this is... this is my Mari!” Deion spoke confidently.

Eirene, her own face animated, happy and full of tears, nodded. “I know who she is silly!” She stammered. Mari didn’t hesitate when Eirene opened her arms and they embraced tightly.

[Don’t worry Mari... I would have thought the same thing. He is so very handsome.] Eirene’s voice echoed in her mind in the shielded Etheric connection and Mari hugged her even tighter and laughed softly.

Mari drew back and smiled as she shook her head. “It is... it is so very nice to see you again Eirene.” She said as they squeezed each other’s hands tightly.

“So it *was* Mari!” The male voice boomed and Mari did not have time to react before Fedor’s arms scooped her up and spun her around hugging her tightly before setting her back down beside Deion. “I thought for sure father was pulling our leg!”

Mari laughed again as Eirene slapped her twin’s shoulder. “Fedor don’t be a *mida*!” She hissed.

Mari felt the warmth and love of family permeating all of them and she wrapped her arms around Deion’s waist again without shame or hesitation. She should have expected that Deion’s father would have sensed her Etheric resonance within Deion’s but it did not matter. “Yes... it was me Fedor.” She spoke.

“Wait!” Deion gasped. “Father and... father and our mothers know?”

Eirene laughed at his expression. “Did you honestly think you could hide that from our parents? Especially our mothers? They felt your happiness from across the galaxy you *igord*!” She told him. She looked at Mari smiling. “Did he make you scream to the moon Mari?”

Mari pressed her head to Deion’s chest with a brilliant smile. “That and so much more.” She replied happily and without an ounce of embarrassment.

Fedor turned and held out his hand now as the young woman came up behind him and he pulled her close. “This is Iama’Juturi Leonidas.” He spoke with a similar pride spilling over in his voice. “My wife and mate.”

Nara stepped forward and embraced Iama without hesitation. “We have heard so much about you!” She gushed.

Iama had long ago grown accustomed to the Leonidas family displays of affection and she hugged Nara tightly. “And we have heard more about you.” Iama said with a smile.

Nara laughed. “Probably about him.” She said playfully motioning with her head. “He’s the bad twin.”

“As if anyone with half a brain will believe that!” Deion spoke.

“You have half a brain *fervon*.” Nara spoke with a grin.

Deion shook his head as he looked at the hulking Kavalian male now attached to Eirene’s side. “And you must be Miseo.” He spoke.

“The last time I checked... yes.” Miseo answered happily. Miseo watched as Nara turned and looked at him as well. Deion moved forward and grasped his hand and forearm tightly.

“Sister... he is...” Deion started.

“...Very large!” Nara finished his sentence.

It was Mari who burst out laughing now and she stepped forward. “Stop you two!” She declared looking at Eirene and taking her hand. “They do that all of the time. It drives Eliani crazy!”

Deion stretched out on his tip toes several times and kept looking between Miseo and Eirene. “Wow! Very large!” He stated.

Mari looked at him and slapped his abdomen. “Deo... stop!” She hissed at him.

Deion grinned and tightened his hand on Miseo’s arm. “Welcome *fervon*.” He said with warmth and affection.

Miseo nodded his head as his tail encircled Eirene’s waist and his arm went around her lower back. “I look forward to meeting all of Eirene’s brothers and sisters.” He said.

“So do I!” Iama echoed happily as Fedor pulled her close.

“I don’t know...” Deion spoke as he stepped back.

“... We aren’t exactly normal.” Nara finished the sentence.

“And we are?” Fedor exclaimed.

Deion and Nara both laughed. “So true.” She agreed with him.

“Deion... Nara...” Fedor turned and moved back several steps to motion Kalis and Serale forward.

“This is...”

Fedor stopped in surprise when Deion moved past him and stood in front of Kalis. They were of equal size, with Kalis being slightly more bulky, but to his credit Kalis did not shy away. He needn’t have been concerned for Deion pulled him into a rib cracking embrace and took his head in his hands before kissing his cheek.

“We owe you more than you will ever know Kalis Leonidas.” Deion spoke with a soft and serious voice.

Kalis shook his head as he held Deion’s arms. “I was protecting my family cousin.” He told him proudly. “The only family that I have or will ever need now. There is nothing owed within family.”

Deion smiled as Nara came up to him and pressed her frame close to his, hugging him tightly under Deion’s embrace. She reached up and kissed his cheek tenderly. “No... there is not.” Nara said lifting her hand and caressing his cheek. “But your actions... they will never be forgotten Kalis.”

Kalis looked at both of them and smiled. “It is... it is so very good to meet you both.” He drew back and pulled Serale closer to him. “This is Serale Leonidas.” He spoke proudly. “My wife... my mate... my light.”

“Eliani will be so very happy to meet you!” Nara said as they embraced tightly. “With the exception of *Inamarno* and *Cvea*... all she does is complain to Andro about being understaffed and not able to do her job.”

“She complains about that all of the time.” Deion said.

“Where... where is Andro?” Eirene asked first with obvious excitement in her voice.

Deion looked at her as he moved back beside Mari and pulled her tighter. “He’s waiting for us on the surface.” He answered. “Mari’s father is... Murano is... *sibfla*...” He swore under his breath.

Mari placed her hand on his chest. “It is alright Deo my love.” She said without hesitation or embarrassment. “He does not hear as we do and he can not break our Etheric shields.” She turned and looked at Fedor and Eirene who had puzzled expressions on their faces. “It is a long story which I am sure you will discover and eventually see to its end. I am just too much of a coward at the moment.”

Eirene smiled at her brightly. “We knew already Mari.” She said touching her nose.

Mari rolled her eyes. “Yes... I should have known.” She said.

Deion lifted his hand. “Enough of that!” He said. “Murano, Jeru and Mayla are waiting with the ship. Andro wanted us to bring the couriers father was sending to the surface right away. Where are Kdan and Dnom?”

Eirene looked around. “They sprinted off the ship before we could stop them.” She replied. “We are always chasing those two.”

“Andro probably already knows it was you that father sent and just did not tell us.” Nara spoke. “He can be a closed mouth *ronnus* when he wants to be.”

“Our gear is already stowed... we can move to the other hanger bay and leave as soon as you are ready.” Deion said.

“This ship is... it’s huge!” Fedor spoke as he clutched Iama and they began to follow Deion and Nara.

Nara laughed. “Wait until you see the rest of it.” She exclaimed. “As Eli says... it will rock your socks off!”

“Blows your socks off sister.” Deion corrected her. “Blows your socks off.”

Nara waved her hand dismissively. “Whatever... let’s find Kdan and Dnom and get to the surface.”

AUSTROVA RE MYDALA ESTATE

Dyack watched from the balcony above the courtyard as the Leonidas family had a small reunion of sorts.

Dyack had felt like an utter fool the moment he saw Sehri jump from the dragon's back and into his arms. It was the first time he had seen Androcles Leonidas in person and nothing had prepared him for what he saw in his youngest daughter's face. Sehri had been riding in front of him when his massive dragon landed on the grass in the lower courtyard and Dyack had watched with Aleatia beside him as Androcles gracefully climbed down, immediately turning for his daughter. Sehri had practically leaped into his arm from the saddle and they had shared a passionate kiss right there as he spun her around slowly in his arms. Her face was so bright and animated with happiness, unlike any time he had seen in her life. As the kiss broke they shared whispered words he could not hear. Words that had Sehri's musical laughter drifting up to him on the balcony. Soon the other dragons had arrived and then five more women joined them, crowding around Andro and the Vanari female who was Coren's daughter. Dyack noticed right away that Sehri was always within physical contact with one of them as they laughed and moved among the dragons to greet the others that were landing. All of the young women who crowded around Androcles were in physical contact with each other and the contact was not one of a simple nature. The physical contact and kisses were what lovers shared and that knowledge did not affect him as he had thought it would when seeing it. Dyack had thought he might be repulsed by such a thing, but seeing Sehri and the others interact quickly pushed that out of his mind. They did it so naturally, like it was the most normal thing in the universe for them to act this way. Within moments, Dyack had no doubts about what Sehri had become part of, and his hand squeezed Aleatia's hand with happiness because of this. His youngest daughter, his baby, had found unquenchable love with Androcles and her fellow wives and that was as obvious as the sun in the sky above them. Sehri had become the future of their people and what they could eventually become and for Dyack that was what mattered most.

That had been an hour ago and now Dyack sensed someone come up beside him and he turned his head from watching Denali and Lisisa and Arduri talking animatedly with their sisters as Androcles moved up to the railing next to him. He turned back and looked at Sehri once more.

"I have never seen her so happy Androcles." Dyack spoke softly. "She glows with such life and energy."

"We love her sir." Andro said softly. "I love her."

Dyack looked at him now. "I will not ask you to explain how this could be Androcles Leonidas. Aleatia has already told me that it is not something you can explain. Only that it is and it can never be broken now."

Andro nodded his head. "As I told her... I gave up trying to discover the why of it many years ago. I am different... and for many years I hated that. When Sadi finally came back into my life the pieces began to fall together. Sehri is part of that. She always has been. It just took us this long to find her." Andro met his eyes evenly. "I will adhere to any marriage ritual that the Rothryn people might honor sir... I give you my word."

"Aleatia tells me you never break your word." Dyack spoke turning fully to face him.

"I try not too." Andro replied.

"Then your word to love my daughter and all of them with everything that you are will suffice Androcles Leonidas." Dyack said.

"That is a promise I will happily commit to sir." Andro said. "And I will honor it until the day I pass into the next life. And beyond."

Dyack nodded his head. "I can ask for nothing else." He said.

"My father and you are very much alike." Andro said. "When you finally do meet him I think you will get along famously."

"Coren tells me your father and mothers are in what would be the Echo quadrant." Dyack said. "Searching for answers to questions about the Ancient blood within you."

Andro nodded his head. "The Pralor blood, what your people call the Ancients, yes." He answered him. "It hasn't been an easy trip... but they are making progress now and my father is very hopeful and optimistic. They are moving to a planet that has more Lycavorians on it right now. Those that the Ancients transported from our homeworld."

“As they did us?” Dyack said. “You don’t seem to agree with that from the tone of your voice.”

Andro nodded again. “I don’t.” He answered. “I understand why they did it... but the manner in which it was done is abhorrent to me. It takes choice out of the equation. Choice is what makes each of us who we are.”

“Indeed.” Dyack said. “You have them among you now I understand. Two of them.”

Andro met his eyes. “Murano and his daughter Mari.” He replied. “Murano is... he was one of my great grandfather Sumar’s finest Praetorian warriors and a friend. He left him behind when he departed... and Murano did not understand why until now. Until my father found him. His daughter Mari... well she has quite unexpectedly fallen in love with my brother Deion. She is a Praetorian as well... but even Murano does not know that just yet.”

“He does not know his own daughter is one of these warriors?” Dyack asked.

Andro grinned. “He doesn’t know Mari is his daughter.” He told him. “Not yet anyway.”

“How can that be?” Dyack asked.

Andro shook his head. “It has something to do with the Etheric skills of her birth mother Tobia. Mari is able to shrink her Etheric resonance to levels that would not be detectable by normal Praetorians. My father only discovered what her relation was because of our sense of smell. You can not hide family in someone’s scent.”

Dyack turned back and looked down into the courtyard once more. “The Rothryn... we do not use the senses we possess as you do. It is something I have always tried to change but we have evolved to this point without them and I believe many think it is silly.” He turned back to Andro. “Sehri has...she can use these skills now? And shift her form?”

Andro nodded once more. “The way my sister Eliani explains it and medical terminology always gives me a headache... the Ancients or Pralors... they never removed the gene within the Rothryn that allows you to shift your forms as we do. They only suppressed it. When I... when I bit Sehri... the virus in my blood reactivated the dormant gene.”

Dyack smiled and reached out to touch Andro’s arm. “Do not be embarrassed for doing what your instincts called for you to do Androcles.” He said. “Aleatia told me a little of your customs... and I will learn more as time passes. It is a gift that you have returned to my people, starting with Sehri, and hopefully continuing into the future.”

“It must remain secret for now however.” Andro said.

Dyack nodded his head. “As much as it angers me to say... yes.” He stated. “If word of this broke to the general population, I fear that others who do not have the best interests of my people at heart would act to try and stop this from happening.”

Androcles nodded. “Among them this Rothryn Science Academy I take it?”

Dyack nodded as well. “They would be the largest voice against such a thing... but there would be others.” He looked at Andro intently. “These are issues for discussion at another time however. There is already much going on that does not concern the Rothryn people, though it could affect them.”

“It is important to me sir.” Andro told him.

Dyack nodded his head in agreement. “For me as well... but the issues with the Vanari need to be resolved first. We have not even made an official announcement that your people exist, though it is the talk of my world among everyone.”

“Whether you can shift your form or not sir... you are still Lycavorian.” Andro told him.

“And I believe this as well. Now more than ever.” Dyack replied. “How we deal with this crisis however, that will determine from which direction we approach the official introduction of your people to mine and how we proceed with the politics of things.”

Androcles rolled his eyes in disgust. “*Carians*... I hate politics.” He said.

Dyack laughed and nodded his head. “On that I believe we agree utterly Androcles.” He said truly liking this young man. His honesty was refreshing and he carried with him an aura of command and power, yet he was not arrogant or rude in any way.

They both turned when Dorian came up to them from the side. “Excuse me sir...” He spoke looking at Dyack.

Dyack nodded his head in recognition taking note of how polite these young men and women were. “Of course.”

Dorian looked at Andro. “Coren is ready.” He said. “He wants us to come to his office.” Andro nodded and looked at Dyack. “Now the fun begins.” He said motioning with his hand.

ARC ROYAL
FOUR HOURS FROM VENTORI
DESERTED LYCAVORIAN COLONY

Aricia Leonidas walked down the corridor carrying the mug of coffee in one hand and the data pad in the other without regard for where she was. The engineers on the *ARC ROYAL* had actually cordoned off this entire section of the deck with portable walls and two *Durcunusaan* soldiers at each of the three corridors leading into this section to keep others out. They had done this when it was determined this would be the deck and section where the quarters for the King and those of his family would be. It was far more of a privacy measure than anything else Aricia knew and that is why she didn't hesitate in walking down the corridor with nothing but thick, thigh high socks, white thong panties and her floor length white robe over her otherwise naked body. Fedor and Eirene's quarters were now empty, but they would return sooner or later, and she didn't doubt they would need to expand a little when Gorgo and her own mother Dasha arrived for they always stayed very close to them.

Aricia Leonidas had changed so much since the days of that young woman who had first greeted Martin Leonidas on Earth. Her love for Martin and her fellow Queens had not only saved her in so many ways, but it had altered her as well. Aricia did not think back very often on that time, for she was not that naïve woman anymore and the shame and pain of those few weeks and months had long ago drifted into obscurity. Martin's love for her, her fellow Queen's love for her, it had saved her. Martin's actions all those years ago had shown Aricia her path and what she was meant for. It was a path she had embraced and continued to embrace even to this day. She was Martin's *Anome*... the one who held the very center of his soul within her hands. She was the one who brought focus to the love and desire for Martin that she and her fellow Queens and lovers felt for Martin. Even Isabella and Cirith, who were far older than her in years and experience, even they considered her their center. Aricia had not wanted it this way, but it was a role Anja, Dysea and the others had given to her. A role she now relished more than anything. Aricia would be their combined voice when they were together. She would be the personification of the love and passion all of them had for Martin. Aricia was so happy when For'mya finally came back to them and was able to feel what only she and Dysea had been able to feel for years. When first Anja and then Cirith and finally For'mya were able to feel the full force of Martin's unshielded aura upon them as she and Dysea had for so long, it brought completeness to them all. Though Bella could not feel his wolf aura as they did, his Etheric resonance within her mind and on her body was equal to what his wolf aura did to the others.

Martin had never been very good with words, they all knew that, but his love for each of them was unquestioned because he showed them everyday what they meant to him in his actions. His affectionate nuzzles. The touch of his aura on them. The soft, fluttering kisses or the feel of his caress upon them. His words in the interview with Lady Tinra had touched a cord within all of them.

“They are me and I am them.”

Up until that moment Aricia did not think that any of them could love Martin Leonidas more than they already did. Those seven words had proven her so very wrong. Though it was well known that the Queens of the Union gravitated to each other differently, Aricia, Anja and For'mya to each other, while Dysea, Bella and Cirith had become nearly inseparable, it was also well known that each of them loved Martin voraciously. They had not truly known why Martin almost never questioned them or what they did. He had not in the past, and Aricia knew he would not in the future. They now knew why this was. Each of them were extensions of his will and he did not question the decisions they made for they were part of him and he part of them.

Aricia looked up as she reached the door to Zarah and Lucia's quarters and she touched the panel. “Come in!” Lucia's voice echoed from within.

Aricia tapped the panel once more and the door slid aside and she entered quickly. As the door slid closed behind her she saw Zarah and Lucia on the couch in the main room. Lucia was sitting between Zarah's legs sipping a glass of juice and reading from a data pad while Zarah skillfully pulled a brush through her long, silky raven black hair. Both of them were clad only in bra and panties, their bodies more muscular and lean than Aricia remembered, but that was not surprising. The time out here had honed all of them to new physical preparedness.

"Good morning mother." Zarah spoke happily as she saw Aricia come in.

Aricia smiled as she came fully into the room. What had happened to her had caused all of them shame and hurt, more so Androcles than anyone, but Zarah Leonidas had turned out to be far more resilient than even they could predict. Most of that was Lucia's love for her they all knew, but the other part was her connection to Androcles. His essence within her and Lucia's untainted love had given her the strength to push back the veil of darkness that could have enveloped her and it gave her the fortitude to begin anew. Finding the love she had with Lucia was a surprise, but Zarah had always been one to follow her brother's adventurous nature, and when Lucia had come into her life, she had not hesitated for an instant to embrace that.

"How long have you two been up?" Aricia asked as she settled to the couch across from them. "Your father and I told you to get some rest."

"We have only been awake for an hour." Lucia said with a happy smile. "We went to bed early enough... but I could not keep Zarah's lips from finding different spots that kept me from sleeping."

Zarah chuckled in delight and leaned forward to kiss her cheek. "I can't help it if you taste so good." She stated. "Blame my father for my wolf genes."

"Hah!" Lucia laughed. "I would rather thank him for your wolf genes!"

Aricia laughed with them for there was no denying the love between the two young women or how powerful it was.

"Why does it matter how much we slept mother?" Zarah asked as she continued to run the brush through Lucia's hair. "When we reach this planet the only thing father will let us do is watch from orbit." She finished with a touch of disgust in her voice.

Lucia turned her head slightly and ran her hand along Zarah's bare thigh. "*Udos xun naut zhaun nindel whol zhaunus ussta ssinssrigg.*" She said. (We do not know that for sure my love.)

Aricia held up the data pad in her hand. "I would not be too sure about that *fenneennum*. Just as Lucia has said." She said as both of their eyes focused on her. "That is why I am here now." (Daughter)

Zarah stopped brushing Lucia's hair as she sat up. "What... what do you mean mother?" She asked.

"Never think for an instant that your father does not trust in you or your abilities." Aricia told them. She looked directly at Lucia. "Either of you. Your father has only been holding you back until he had a better understanding of what your connection with Androcles has meant for your skills Zarah. And what you are truly capable of Lucia."

"What are you saying mother?" Zarah asked again.

"You have the dormant Praetorian gene within you Lucia, just as I do. Just as Sadi does." Aricia told her. "Your mother was able to confirm this for us when she met with Martin. You, Carisia and now Onera are the only ones who she passed this gene too. It did not pass to your brothers for some reason. It allows us to do things that others can not with the Etheric realm. Your whips are the perfect example. They are Etheric in nature and while not normally physical objects, they are fueled by the emotions within you and that is why they can be extremely deadly weapons that can be used to inflict serious injuries if your emotions are running high."

Lucia nodded her head slowly. "Yes." She stated thinking back to what she was able to do to her foul brother.

"While we cannot normally do this... because of the pureness of our blood... if our emotions are running very high... we can project our Etheric powers into the physical realm for the briefest of moments." Aricia told them. "We have confirmed this after talking at length with Wayonn and Murano. It is really the only explanation that we have come up with." She looked at Zarah. "When you took so much of your brother's blood Zarah... it did essentially the same thing. It granted you abilities that you would not normally have. This is the only thing that has held your father back when concerning you and Lucia. Being able to hide Radem for so long and so effectively only confirmed it for him."

"So what does that all mean?" Lucia asked.

Aricia set the data pad on the table between them. “Your father is putting both of you in command of the Scouts that will go to the planet with us.” She told them seeing their eyes go wide in shock as Zarah snatched up the pad and began to read. “You will have six of your Aunt Aihola’s Drow Vampire scouts under your command. They came with Manda’s group. Also... you will have two of your grandfather Vengal’s senior vampire *Durcunusaan* Scouts acting as your Lieutenants. Use their experience and knowledge... but your father has made clear that you and Lucia are in charge.”

Zarah looked at her, eyes still very wide in shock. “Mother... tell me this is not a joke!” She declared.

Aricia smiled and shook his head. “This is no joke *fenneennum*. The Command is yours and you will be among the first of us on Ventori. Your father loves you Zarah. And that love extends to you Lucia, because of what you share with our daughter. He also trusts both of you without question. He just tends to move rather slowly when putting his children in harms way. As do we all.”

Zarah screamed in delight and blurred across the small distance between them to throw her arms around her mother knocking Aricia back on the couch slightly. Aricia was laughing as she returned the embrace and held her tightly. She took Zarah's face in her hands and stared at her.

“Just remember all you have learned Zarah. Everything your brother has taught you. All we have taught you.” Aricia said gently.

“I will mother. I promise.” Zarah told her.

Aricia nodded her head. “Good. Now let me get back to your father before your mother Anja steals all of the warmth of his body. We only have two hours before we need to begin to prepare.”

Zarah moved back beside Lucia as Aricia got to her feet and moved for the door. She turned back once and saw both of them beginning to go through the data pad, pressing their heads together. Aricia smiled and exited the room.

VENTORI DESERTED LYCAVORIAN COLONY

“...Detected them three hours ago. I didn’t disturb you and the others because we were still too far out to really do anything.” Akemi told Martin who stood beside her chair in the center of the *ARC ROYAL*’s bridge. “The Cruiser *REPULSE* is remaining back from us as our front... and any active sensor sweeps we do may be detected.”

Martin looked at her. “*NOVA*-Class?” He asked.

Akemi shook her head. “*VANGUARD*-Class MkIII Interdictor. More versatility and firepower. Admiral Lorian likes to be prepared.”

Martin nodded. “Nice.” He said.

“How many ships Akemi?” Danny asked moving up beside Martin.

“Just the one right now.” She answered. “Heavy Cruiser type that is comparable to our *NOVA*-Class Refits though not as large. Admiral Lorian is breaking off her Wing and moving for the opposite side of the planet. Making sure no one is hiding back there or behind one of the three moons.”

Martin turned when the doors to the bridge opened and Tobia and Valael came rushing in. “Morning.” He said cheerfully. “We have guests it seems.”

Tobia and Valael came up beside him looking at the main view window which was at a hundred and ten percent magnification. Tobia gasped slightly and reached out to touch Martin’s arm. “That is not a Tasmor ship Martin.” She spoke quickly. “It’s from the Kintaur Hegemony.”

“I’m guessing that is not a good thing?” Danny asked.

“The Tasmor and Kintaur have been at war, off and on, for four centuries. They hate each other.” Valael spoke now.

“Of course they do.” Martin said as he rolled his eyes.

“Tobia... what is the lifespan of the Tasmor?” Aricia asked.

“Several hundred years.” Tobia answered. “I don’t know exactly but Saydia is just over a hundred and forty years old.”

Martin shook his head. "You know... there is no love in this quadrant of space. What happened to let's all just get along and be friends?" All of them heard the fit of coughing from the side of the bridge and they turned to see the elven female wiping her tea from her lips where she had just spit some out in laughter. Aricia and For'mya grinned at this and For'mya slapped his rock hard abdomen playfully.

"When I last visited the Tasmor four years ago, no incidents between the Kintaur and Tasmor had taken place in a decade." Tobia told Martin as she too smiled in amusement now. His dry humor was beginning to grow on her and there were times when he was hysterically funny and did not even know it.

"Why would they be here?" Martin asked. "If what you told me is accurate Tobia... they are a long way from home aren't they?"

Tobia nodded. "Yes." She replied. "Their area of controlled space is on the opposite side of the Tasmor Regime. At least two months travel with the technology of their current engine design."

Martin looked at Danny for a brief moment and Dan shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's not just a job..." He said.

Martin nodded his head as he turned back. "It's a fucking adventure." He muttered. "You know *fervon*... I've come to really hate that phrase through the years."

Danny chuckled. "You and me both."

"Captain! Incoming hail from Admiral Lorian on Secure War Channel Alpha!" The *ARC ROYAL'S* COM officer announced.

Akemi didn't hesitate. "Put it up. Main holo disc."

They all turned slightly to the left as Miranda's image shimmered to life, flickered and then became crystal clear from the bridge of the *ARIZONA*.

"Manda?" Martin spoke first. "What do you got? Happy news I hope."

"Two ships... holding position just inside the gas rings of the second moon." Miranda answered.

"Same make as this one?" Martin asked.

Miranda shook her head. "Smaller. Heavy Frigate Class to us. Tasmor ships based on the schematics Lady Tobia gave to us." She answered. "I have a ship moving closer to get more detailed scans but they definitely appear to be hiding. Using the rings as cover."

Martin looked at Tobia and saw her nod her head. "The Kintaur are not as advanced in many areas as the Tasmor. Their sensors for instance. Just one of the many sticking points between them."

"Why do I not like the fact that both of these species are in different orbits of the planet that was home to my people." Martin asked. "Have they detected the *REPULSE* yet?"

Akemi nodded her head. "If the information we have is as accurate as everything else Lady Tobia has given us then they should be coming into range of the sensors on this Kintaur ship within moments."

"Akemi... focus one of the ventral arrays on the planet and give me some sweeps of the surface. Tell me what is down there." Martin spoke as he moved around behind her chair and stood on her opposite side.

"Ops?" Akemi barked.

"Realigning forward ventral array now." The voice echoed. "Stand by."

"Manda... you think they can detect each other?" Martin asked his eyes never leaving the holo image of the planet and three ships shown in white colors.

Miranda shook her head. "Doubtful given the level of technology Lady Tobia has told us they possess, unless the Kintaur ship maintains a constant orbit with the gravitational rotation of the planet. Then the Tasmor ships will see them in about thirteen hours at the current rotation."

"Tactical?" Akemi snapped.

"The Kintaur ship is holding station over the northern most continent above the planet's equator." The TAC Officer answered instantly.

Martin nodded. "Ok... that answers that question."

"Ops... anything on that continent above their position?" Akemi asked.

"It appears they are holding station above one of the larger abandoned cities Captain." The Ops officer answered. "I'm detecting Kintaur lifesigns on the surface of the planet. They appear to be centered on the outskirts of this city. Looks to be about eighty of them."

"Tasmor signs?" Akemi asked.

“Not within the passive cone of the forward ventral array Captain.” The man answered. “An active scan would tell us.”

Martin shook his head quickly. “No... not yet. An active scan will give us away and let them know there is more than one ship out here. Have the *REPULSE* do it when they are in range.”

“COM officer... send the order to the Captain of the *REPULSE*.” Akemi barked out.

“The *REPULSE* should be coming into range of the Kintaur ship’s sensors now sir.” The TAC officer reported.

“Who’s commanding?” Martin asked Akemi.

“Captain Nemoa Or’sali.” She answered instantly. “Lycavorian. Four hundred years in command slots. Mated over a thousand years now. Her mate is her First Officer.”

“Janon chose her from the 14th CFFG Martin.” Miranda Lorian added quickly from the *ARIZONA*’s bridge. “She’s smart and witty. Alba Tau vet.”

Martin nodded his head in approval. Those two words alone were all he needed to know. Anyone who had fought on the ground or in the stars at Alba Tau was considered a notch above the average Fleet Officer. The space battles had been just as down right vicious and costly as the operations on the ground. Martin, Danny and Miranda were perfect examples of that.

“Let her roll with it.” Martin spoke seeing Danny nod in approval out of the corner of his eye.

Tobia saw this and turned to look at Aricia and For'mya just behind her. She took a few steps closer to them. “I have heard this name from others before.” She said softly. “Is this name... this Alba Tau... is it significant?” She asked them.

Aricia glanced at For'mya quickly and then back to Tobia. “Yes.” She replied simply.

Tobia saw the look in her eyes and turned her head back to where Martin stood. She glanced back to Aricia and For'mya when they didn’t continue. “You can not tell me about this?”

“No.” For'mya told her. “It is... it is not spoken of freely. I’m sorry.”

Tobia looked somewhat surprised as none of them had held anything back from her and Valael before now. She bowed her head slightly in recognition of For'mya’s answer and turned back to look at the holo map. This information was something she would have to discover at a later time.

“Captain! The Kintaur ship is breaking orbit and moving for the *REPULSE*!” The TAC officer barked out. “They are hailing them! Low band sub space transmission! Captain Nemoa is transmitting audio only for the moment.”

“Monitor it.” Akemi barked out the order. “Tap their feed!”

“On speakers and holo disc three!”

All of them turned to see the humanoid face appear within the holo image. The dark brown skin of the Kintaur male was weathered and drawn tight across his face. He had a wide forehead that formed two large ridges along where his temples would be and then extended back on the hairless skull. The skull was almost oval in shape, his nearly black eyes large and sunken into his brow. He had the outline of a nose but only two small slits above the lipless mouth.

“Whoa!” Danny muttered softly. “He’s attractive.”

This comment brought soft murmurs of laughter from those who had heard it just before the voice echoed from the internal speakers.

“Unidentified ship... you are approaching the Kintaur Hegemony Cruiser *BRIGHT STAR*.” The deep male voice sounded through the speakers on the bridge. “I am First Warrior Gars. You will stand to and prepare to be boarded! You have entered Kintaur Hegemony territory without authorization. Respond.”

“I am Captain Nemoa Or’sali of the Lycavorian Union Cruiser *REPULSE*.” The female voice filled the bridge now. “We are new to this area of space, but we have received confirmed reports of the existence of our people on the planet that you are orbiting. We would like to make contact with them.”

“You are female?” Gars spoke.

There was a pause before Nemoa answered. “The last time I checked... yes I am.” She answered, drawing soft laughter from almost everyone on the bridge of the *ARC ROYAL* at the sarcastic tone of her answer. It apparently did not register with the Kintaur.

“How many females do you have aboard your ship? I do not recognize the configuration of your vessel. What is your crew complement and where do you come from?” Gars demanded now.

“I have several hundred females among my crew.” Nemoa replied evenly. “And as I have already told you... we have confirmed reports of our people having settled on this planet. We would like to make contact with them.”

“What is a Lycavorian?” Gars hissed. “We have no knowledge of such a species. You will activate a video transmission immediately.”

The *ARC ROYAL*’S COM officer instantly split the holo transmission they were watching and all of them saw the face of Nemoa appear. She was an attractive Lycavorian woman with bright, light brown eyes and short, dark blond hair. Martin guessed her age to be roughly nine hundred to fifteen hundred years old. Showing just a small bit of her experience, Nemoa only revealed her face and upper body in the return holo transmission.

“I am a Lycavorian.” Nemoa answered him now. “It is a pleasure to be introduced First Warrior Gars.”

“Your ship is unknown to us.” Gars spat with noticeable contempt. “You have entered Kintaur Hegemony controlled space. I will speak to your senior officer at once and you will prepare to be boarded!”

Nemoa blinked several times. “That would be me.” She answered. “I am Captain of this ship.”

“You... you are a female!” Gars said.

Nemoa nodded. “I believe I have already stated that fact.” She told him.

“You are in command of that vessel?” Gars asked once more looking as if he did not believe what she was telling him.

“That would be an accurate assumption.” Nemoa told him.

“You will cut power to your engines and prepare to be boarded!” Gars spoke again.

“And why would I do this?” Nemoa asked calmly.

“I am ordering you to!” Gars replied as if it was the most normal thing in the world. “You have entered Kintaur space without authorization!”

“According to my information this area of space is not controlled by anyone.” Nemoa spoke. “We would simply like to make contact with our people on the surface of Ventori and ascertain their condition.”

“Did you not hear me woman!” Gars’ voice rose slightly. “This is Kintaur space! You will do as I command you!”

Nemoa couldn’t help but smile now. “You’ll forgive me when I tell you that I can’t do that. Our information of this area of space indicates that it is not controlled by anyone as I said earlier and I most certainly will not allow you to board my ship. We only wish to seek out those of my people on the surface and inquire of them if they need any assistance.”

“There are none of your people on the surface!” Gars growled at her. “You are violating our territory and you will do as I order you!”

Nemoa turned from Gars and to the side of her bridge. “Are we in range?” She asked the question to someone out of the cone of transmission. There was a subdued voice that replied and she nodded her head. “Begin active scan. All arrays.”

“What are you doing?” Gars demanded to know. “I have ordered you to cut power to your engines and prepare to be boarded!”

Nemoa returned her gaze to him and smiled sweetly. “Yes... I heard you the first time.” She spoke looking back to the side. “Route the active feed to them.” She spoke.

They watched as Gars turned his head now, someone in the background aboard his ship speaking to him. He turned back quickly and glared at Nemoa. “You are scanning the surface of the planet! You are not allowed to do this! I order you to stop immediately or we will fire on your ship!”

Nemoa met his gaze and this time her eyes shifted and her wolf fangs extended half way, clearly exposing the pointed tips just beneath her upper lips. “If you can produce some sort of documentation that proves this planet and system belong to you then I will abide by your request. As I have stated several times now, our information tells us Ventori and this entire system is free space, and I intend to search for our people.”

“The Kintaur Hegemony has claimed all of this system!” Gars shouted now. “To include all of the planets within it!”

“He didn’t blink.” Miranda spoke softly from the bridge of the *ARIZONA*.

“No he did not.” Martin agreed.

Tobia and Valael looked between the two of them quickly before Valael spoke. “What do you mean?” He asked.

“When Nemoa exposed her fangs.” Danny answered looking at him. “He didn’t blink an eye. He’s seen it before. Which means he’s seen our people before.”

Tobia moved closer to Martin. “Something must have happened in the last five years if the Kintaur have come into this area of space and begun claiming planets Martin. Ventori is far closer to Tasmor space and the Tasmor would never allow that ship to cross their territory unopposed.”

Martin looked at her. “How far out of the way would they need to travel to get around Tasmor space and come here without crossing into their territory?”

“The Tasmor have marked all of their borders with buoys of sorts. Beacons.” Tobia told him. “It would take a Kintaur ship months to move around the borders to get here. Every system with habitable planets between here and the Kintaur border is controlled by the Tasmor. As I told you... they are arrogant... but not to the extreme. They do feel that they are superior to most however, hence why they control most of the planets in this and the surrounding sectors. Ventori is among a dozen or so planets within this sector alone that no one controls but are relatively close to the Tasmor border.”

“They conquer these worlds?” For'mya asked with distaste evident in her voice.

Tobia shook her head. “No... not in a military sense. But they do manage to insure they are the ones who eventually gain control of these worlds, or insuring the populous supports them.”

“I’ve never heard of them coming this far from their space Tobia.” Valael spoke now.

“Neither have I.” She agreed.

“Manda... those Tasmor ships? Have they moved?” Martin asked now turning to look at her in the second open transmission.

Miranda shook her head. “No. We are detecting short range sub space COMS from one of the ships however. Directed at the planet’s surface. Can’t pinpoint exactly where, but its close to where the Kintaur are on the surface.”

Danny looked at Martin. “I don’t like that Skipper.” He said.

Martin nodded his head. “Neither do I.” His eyes shifted to Miranda. “Can those Tasmor ships pick up the COMS Manda?”

“Nemoa is broadcasting in the clear just like the Kintaur ship.” She replied. “Anyone within half a light year could detect that.”

“King Leonidas!” The Ops officer barked out causing all eyes to turn to where he was at his station. “Sire... I’m getting lifesign readings from the surface now! Captain Nemoa is using a multidirectional sensor band focused on the area around the city. The feed just began to come in. I’m detecting multiply Kintaur lifesigns, roughly eighty in total and at least seventy others. Contact is intermittent Milord... I can’t get a true number but...”

“Give me what you got son.” Martin spoke as he stepped closer to him. “Don’t hold back now.”

The Ops officer looked at him. “Sire... I am almost certain they are Lycavorian lifesigns. Mixed in with what appear to be Tasmor. At least two dozen of them.”

“How certain son?” Martin asked him.

“There are slight differences but...” The young man took a leap and met his King’s eyes. “Milord... they are Lycavorian. I am certain of it.”

Martin nodded his head. “That’s good enough for me.”

“Fucking right!” Danny growled.

“Cross deck that back to Nemoa.” Martin said turning to Akemi. “Let’s see what our fugly friend has to say then. Tell her to leave out the part about the Tasmor.”

“Sending data back to the *REPULSE*.” The Ops officer echoed as his hands worked his two consoles.

Martin turned once more and watched as Nemoa took a data pad from someone they couldn’t see and she read quickly. She looked up and met Gars’ angry eyes.

“First Warrior Gars... my sensors are detecting lifesigns on the surface that belong to my people.” She stated evenly. “We are also detecting Kintaur lifesigns. What exactly is your intent sir?”

“I do not answer to you woman!” Gars growled. “How... how can you detect them when the planet is so far away? This planet now belongs to the Kintaur Hegemony. Any who are on the surface will be taken into custody!”

Tobia reached out and took Martin's arm. "Do not let them do that Martin Leonidas." She told him urgently. Akemi slashed her hand down and the COM officer cut the audio feed they were listening to. "The Hegemony prisons and work camps are vile places. They have captured a few hundred of our people through the years... scientists and researchers mostly... and we never saw them again. The same can be said for the Tasmor as well."

Martin looked at her and his dark brown eyes narrowed considerably. "And you didn't think that this was something important enough to tell us!" He hissed at her.

Tobia shook her head embarrassed and took a step back in fear from him. "I... I had no reason to believe that we would encounter the Kintaur so close to Tasmor space Martin. I did not think it was important enough to mention since we would not be dealing with them."

Martin knew right away that Tobia was being truthful. He could detect no sign of a lie within her scent and she looked extremely concerned and embarrassed. Tobia had been totally forthcoming about everything since arriving on Manne and making friends with everyone she came across because of her calm and outgoing demeanor. Added to the fact that his son and her daughter Mari had entered into a very intimate, passionate and committed relationship from everything Martin and his Queens could sense, trust was not an issue with Tobia and he was not going to make it one. He covered her hand on his arm with his own and nodded his head.

"No worries." He said in a softer voice while squeezing her hand. "What can you tell us now that can help us?"

Tobia felt relief wash through her at his words and the way his resonance echoed around her. She berated herself for being so stupid as to not tell him more of the Kintaur but...

"Tobia... don't." Martin spoke and she met his eyes. "Stuff like this happens all the time. It's not your fault. Just give us what you can right now."

Tobia took a deep breath and nodded her head. "They are a violent and unpredictable species." She spoke confidently now.

Aricia and For'mya smiled to one another for they knew Martin had the uncanny ability to put someone at ease very quickly with his wit and charm.

"They hate the Tasmor with a passion, bordering on the fanatical. I asked Saydia once why this is but she told me she did not know. It had something to do with what happened long before she became Sovereign, during the time of her grandmother's rule, but she did not know what it was." Tobia continued.

"Why would they be here Tobia?" Aricia asked now.

Tobia shook her head and met her eyes briefly before turning back to Martin. "I don't know... but you can be assured it is not to be diplomatic." She answered. "I don't think they can spell that word."

"Given what we have seen so far... I tend to agree." Akemi spoke up.

"Does anyone else find it odd that they are both here now? Just when we happen to show up?" Martin asked turning his head back and forth and finally looking at Danny.

"Stinks to high heaven is what it does *fervon*." Danny agreed with him.

Martin moved closer to Akemi. "Give me ship-to-ship COMs with Nemoa Akemi." He told her. Akemi didn't pause and stabbed down twice on the arm of her chair.

"Secure. Go." She told him.

"Captain Nemoa... this is Martin Leonidas! Give me a full power active scan of their ship! Make sure none of our people are on that ship!"

Martin turned and watched as Nemoa motioned quickly to someone off screen as she heard Martin's voice echo from speakers on her ship and the Ops officer on the *ARC ROYAL* activated the audio link once more. It took only seconds before Gars realized what was happening.

"You are scanning our ship!" He shouted.

Nemoa met his gaze. "How very astute of you." She answered him calmly. "We have detected our people on the surface of this world and I want to insure there are none on your ship."

"You have no right to do this woman!" He screamed. "You will cease this at once! We are Kintaur!" He turned to look at someone on his bridge. "Well... stop it!" He snarled.

"I can not First Warrior!" The voice shouted back.

Gars turned back to the transmission. "I will give you only one more warning! Cease your activities and prepare to be boarded!"

Nemoa rolled her eyes before turning and looking at her sensor operator who was shaking his head. She turned back to Gars knowing that the King was listening. “Luckily for you, none of our people are present on your ship.”

Akemi turned when she heard the soft beeping and the COM officer went to the console behind his station. “Milord... incoming secure from *REPULSE* Ops officer!”

“Let’s hear it!” Martin barked.

“Milord... we detected no Lycavorian lifesigns on their ship but we did distinguish one Tasmor lifesign. Female from the looks of it.” The man reported. “It was faint... but there. From the scans it appears to be behind some sort of energy barrier and that is why I can not get a solid lock.”

“Man... this just keeps getting better and better. I will not be drawn into a conflict that is not mine!” Martin snapped.

Tobia stepped closer to him now. “The Kintaur are not known to be kind toward their prisoners Martin Leonidas. Any prisoners. They are especially brutal towards the Tasmor. They will... they will rape and torture her for days before they kill her Martin.”

“I did not come out here looking for a war Tobia!” Martin exclaimed. “They have done nothing to me except make silly demands that even that half wit Gars knows we won’t comply with!”

“What about those on the surface?” Tobia asked him softly.

Martin turned his head quickly to the sensor operator. “Report!” He barked.

“The Lycavorian and Tasmor lifesigns are intermingled sire.” The man answered. Martin looked at the *ARC ROYAL’S* Ops officer who nodded his head.

“And the Kintaur?” Martin asked.

“Our people and the Tasmor are in two different groups but they are moving together and moving fast. The Kintaur lifesigns...” Martin saw his brow furrow slightly. “Sire... they have broken into two groups now as well and seem to be pursuing them.” The man spoke.

“They’re hunting them.” Danny snapped becoming more alert.

“Fuck me!” Martin swore loudly. His decision was made almost instantly, shocking Tobia and Valael at the speed of this and even more at the orders he began to issue. “Avi?” Martin touched the arm of Akemi’s chair again.

-Standing by Martin- Avi answered instantly.

“The teleport pads?” Martin asked.

-The Worker Drones have finished the upgrades transmitted to us from Armen on *SPARTA’S WRATH* yesterday Martin. They are fully functional and completely safe-

“Anja?” Martin hissed out loud. “Give me a no shit assessment Red? Go or no go.”

Anja’s response was also very quick and without hesitation. “I don’t know what they did Lover... I’ll have to review the details later but Andro and Armen got the damn thing working perfectly. Avi has conducted four tests since the Drones finished their work and all of them were successful. As much as I want to say we need to do more tests... you have my Go as Chief Medical Officer.”

“Avi... how many can we send at once?” Martin asked.

-There are two main Teleport Pads in Landing Bay Two that can hold fourteen- Avi answered. – Three smaller pads throughout the ship can transport six personnel each. Three more are being installed currently but are not ready for activation-

Martin turned without hesitation and looked at Akemi. “How many on that ship now?” He asked.

“TAC Officer?” Akemi barked out as she turned.

“Sensors are picking up three hundred and sixty-four.” The man answered.

“How many around where this Tasmor is?” Danny asked now coming up beside Martin and knowing what he was thinking.

“Nine within thirty meters General.”

Martin looked at him and Danny nodded. “I’ll take T’lolt, Jules, the Master Chief, Kenny and Pablo. We’ll interrupt the power flow; grab the prisoner and teleport out. K.I.S.S. all the way!”

Martin nodded his head. “Go! How many of these Kintaur douche bags are on the surface again? Give me numbers!” He asked as Danny bolted from the bridge.

“Forty-two in one group Sire!” The man answered. “Thirty-eight in the other! The larger group is pursuing our people along a northern path away from the city while the smaller one is moving northeast in what appears to be an attempt to cut them off before they reach this large river.” He traced the landmark on the holo map.

“Avi... how soon before you come within range of the planet?” Martin asked.

-Two minutes Martin. I can transport each group twenty seconds apart or as fast as they can step onto the Teleport Pads. We will need to remain within range of the Kintaur vessel until Daniel returns but it will not strain our capability. I have already assigned officers to operate each Teleport Unit-

Martin reached for his daughter within Mindvoice without shielding. *Zarah?*

We are here father. She answered instantly.

This just got a lot bigger than a recon fenneenum.

We have been listening. We can do this Papa. Zarah spoke without reservation.

Then move to the landing bay Zar. As soon as your uncle Danny teleports over to that ship I want you and your team moving. Pick four additional Spartans to take with you in the first group Zarah. Eighteen more will come down from the other pads. I’ll send you another fourteen twenty seconds after that. I’m sending you to a point in front this northeastern group. Set up a standard ambush Zar. Hit them hard and fast! Your mother’s and I will hit the main force following our people. Once you are secure move to link up with us.

We are moving now! Zarah told him.

Watch your ass daughter. Your brother will spank you silly if you get yourself hurt. Martin told her as he sent an Etheric pulse of love and confidence to her.

Papa! Zarah exclaimed happily.

Zarah... these Kintaur appear to be really bad news fenneenum. Don’t jerk around with them.

Zarah paused for only a moment as the true meaning of her father’s words filled her. *I will not. I will see you on the surface father.*

“Anja... meet Aricia and I in Landing Bay 2.” Martin spoke openly now. He looked at For'mya. “Come in guns blazing if you need to *Kinsoaurgai*.”

For'mya nodded. “You can count on it.” She told him.

Martin turned to Tobia and Valael. They were both utterly stunned at how quickly they had seen Martin Leonidas change. He had just issued orders that would have taken their commanders hours to implement and not one person had batted an eye at these orders or even tried to tell him they were not prepared to do such things. They obviously had done things like this many times in the past.

“Elder Valael, I need you to remain here in case those Tasmor ships try anything stupid. Let them know we are trying to help. Tobia you are with me.”

“Milord?” Akemi asked causing him to turn and look at her. “What about the Kintaur ship?”

Martin paused for only a moment and then moved to her chair and activated the ship-to-ship secure COM.

“Captain Nemoa?”

“I am here my King.” She answered.

“As soon as you get the word from Akemi that General Simpson has returned here to the *ARC ROYAL*... do me a favor.” Martin spoke.

“Of course Milord.” Nemoa answered.

“Blow that ugly, loud mouthed bastard out of the stars.” Martin told her.

AUSTROVA RE MYDALA ESTATE

Whatever doubts or fears that may have been lingering in the back of Caliria Leonidas' mind had been dispelled within the first hour of being back within his arms. With Caliria urging him on, Androcles had taken her furiously in that first hour, his unshielded aura setting her body on fire in a way nothing that ever had and his huge cock making her sing to the moon above as it filled her to overflowing. When he had bitten her, just as his seed erupted within her depths, Caliria had descended into utter heaven. The intense pain had been so very brief as the virus in his blood rushed through her, but the changes that had taken place within her already only sped up the merger, and once the pain was gone it left nothing but unmitigated pleasure. Her soft cries of passion had filled the large room then as she clutched at his shoulders in ardor, and when Sadi and the others appeared on the bed beside them, Caliria discovered the true meaning of paradise.

It had been so shamelessly corrupt and wondrously lustful and Caliria was very nearly overwhelmed for she knew it would be like this for the rest of her life and she relished in this knowledge more than anything else.

A tangle of limbs, lips, tongues and hands that had not stopped for hours. Androcles was the center of it for all of them, twisting and turning and taking what they so wanted him to have. Her Alkay enchanted all of them, soon covering each of them in a fine sheen, which only served to increase their desire and endurance to new proportions. Caliria tasted all of them once more, reveling in the flavor and scents of her fellow Princesses almost as much as Androcles' lavender and pines scent. His wolf aura was pulsing madly for all of them and completely unshielded. Carisia may not have been able to feel his wolf aura, but his Etheric resonance was doing the same thing to her that his wolf aura did to them, keeping them on the brink of devastating and total pleasure, and then allowing them to experience it in irresistible waves and hearing them cry out in glee as they shuddered in release.

They filled her being now, and Caliria could not get enough of them, Lu'ria and Carisia most of all. The moment they settled to the bed with them, it began a night of exploration and blissful passion that none of them would ever forget. It did not matter who Androcles was taking at any given time, for they were all servicing one another with little thought of anything else. Even Sehri, though they had only met a few hours before, even Sehri was unashamedly taking part in everything. She had pleased Caliria two or three times, each time making her scream out her release before Caliria returned the pleasure with equal fervor. Androcles had taken each of them at least twice before he began to tire, and even when he did, his hands and lips and tongue remained so very active. There was not a single time where any of them lost physical contact with each other. They were always touching in some manner, their love and devotion for each other shining through like a blazing light in the darkness. All of them felt something within their beloved Androcles, he had laid open his soul for them and the absolute and unquestioned love that flowed from him for them was beyond words. All of them felt it however, something just on the edge of his perceptions, something new and unique and so very lovely. It filled them as well, for he held nothing back, and while the knowledge of what this was would come to them eventually, this night they let it slip back as their desires and passion for each other overrode everything else.

The sun rising outside the bathed their bodies now, warming their skin, but none of them wanting to move. Caliria was magnificently spent, her heart still racing from the hours of utterly decadent lovemaking. She lay between Androcles' long, powerful legs, her head resting on his flat abdomen and his delicious but now flaccid cock pressing between her breasts. Lu'ria's head was resting on the back of her shoulder, her shimmering white hair splayed across her back, her legs canted slightly to keep from dangling off the edge of the bed. A bed that was not nearly as large as it needed to be Caliria thought.

Caliria lifted her head when all of them began to laugh softly and she realized they had heard her open thoughts. Andro's face was so peaceful as he slept; the rise and fall of his broad chest calm and smooth.

"Well... it's true!" Caliria spoke openly completely unashamed of herself.

Sadi, curled up beside Andro with her head resting on his shoulder, laughed once more and reached out to caress her cheek. "Don't worry *Inamarno*; the bed on our ship is notably larger and much more comfortable." She said softly.

Caliria kissed Sadi's fingertips before dropping her head back to Andro's powerful abdomen. "Thank the prophets!" She exclaimed.

Ne'Veha was on Andro's opposite side with Sehri tucked between her and Andro's body, her blond head resting against Ne'Veha's ample and proudly firm breasts. Their legs were entwined together, Sehri's hands resting on Ne'Veha's exquisitely shaped ass.

"Can we... can we wait for a few hours." Sehri stammered. "I am so worn out I don't know if I want to move."

"If we move we will wake Androcles." Ne'Veha said softly.

"I'm already awake." His voice sounded and they all turned to see his azure blue eyes open and glance around. "It's kind of hard to sleep when my wives and mates are chattering like birds in the morning."

Sadi lifted her head in mock indignation. "We do not chatter!" She announced.

"No we do not!" Carisia added. "And it is your fault anyway."

"My fault?" Andro said lifting his head and looking at Carisia who was stretched out beside Sadi and spooned against her back. "How is this my fault?"

"If you were not so voracious and did not have such a delicious *celie* then we might have a chance at actually refusing your wonderful attentions." Carisia told him with a glint her maya blue eyes. (cock)

"Voracious?" Andro spoke. "If I recall... it is you and Sadi who took it upon yourselves to inspire me once I fell on the floor exhausted. I didn't have anything to do with that!"

"Don't blame us!" Sadi retorted. "We can not help it if you are irresistibly tasty! And you were just laying there!"

"Nope." Carisia agreed with her.

"Just admit that you are a demanding and insatiable beast our love." Lu'ria commented now with bright amber eyes and a wide smile.

"Fine!" Andro spoke. "It's all my fault."

Caliria smiled brilliantly and placed her chin on his flat abdomen and looked at his face from across the expanse of his mouth-wateringly muscle packed stomach. "Just continue to admit that our love... and there will be no reason for us to punish you."

Androcles Leonidas lay there and basked in the scents and auras of the six women he worshiped as they swirled around and through him. Sadi's sugar plume and spice scent was the strongest of them, but as each day passed, the sweet amaretto scent of Ne'Veha, Sehri's warm walnut scent, Lu'ria's honey melon scent, Carisia's rose blossom scent and Caliria's musky honey dew scent were growing stronger and stronger. His instincts told him he had found the six strongest females anywhere and those same instincts made him love them all the more. He had felt it last night, all of them had, but he had no idea what it was and he was not going to worry about it. They were together now and this is what mattered the most to him.

Andro lifted his head at Caliria's words and stared into her eyes. "Punish me?" He said with a smile. "Would punishing me involve anything like what Sadi and Carisia did last night? I would gladly submit to that punishment!"

Sadi's jungle green eyes went wide. "You pig!" She exclaimed.

Andro chuckled and pulled her closer to him with one arm, pulsing her with his aura and watching her eyes close in blissful enchantment. He allowed his aura to reach out to all of them and heard them gasp in delight.

"Stop you beast!" Ne'Veha exclaimed in happiness.

The laughter and happiness was all any of them felt at the moment and to them it most the most glorious thing they had ever felt.

Androcles entered the main sitting room of Coren's estate holding the mug of his mother's coffee in one hand and reading from the data pad. He stopped moving when he felt their combined presence and he lifted his head to see all of his brothers and sisters in the main room sitting around or standing. All of them focused their eyes on him.

His eyes touched nearly all of them before he spread his arms open wide. "What?" He exclaimed loudly.

Fedor and Eirene had arrived after Andro and the others had retired to their bedroom and could not see him. They stepped forward now and Andro saw them and quickly found a table to set his mug and pad on. Almost instantly after that they were both in his arms. Eirene had tears falling freely from her dark brown eyes and even Fedor was holding back the moistness as their brother crushed them in his powerful arms and nuzzled them both furiously. It was almost an impossibility to see tears falling from their brother's eyes, but everyone in the room saw it now as two streams of tears rolled down his cheeks from his tightly shut eyes and he absorbed the auras of his brother and sister.

Denali, Lisisa, Normya and Eliani looked at one another knowingly, for among those present, only they, Sadi and Andro's wives and mates were there and truly knew what Andro had done and what he had endured in order to touch Fedor and Eirene within their mother For'mya's womb. Only they knew the shame that their brother still carried for having to attack his own mother in such a way. Andro had granted Fedor and Eirene awareness before they had even been born, much the same as he had been, and it was this gift alone that had saved their mother and their family from experiencing so much more agony and suffering. They watched for only a moment before Eliani was the first to break from Jomann's arms and move across the large room and press up against Eirene from behind. Eirene's body was shaking, wracked with the sobs of very powerful emotions while Fedor's powerful arm was trying to pull his brother's head closer. Denali, Lisisa and Normya quickly followed their sister and then Dorian, Deion and Nara joined them while everyone else looked on.

This was a moment in time for the Leonidas children alone and no one wanted to intrude upon this, and while they may have been missing three of their brothers and four of their sisters, no one in the room doubted that this emotion was not being felt by them wherever they were.

Coren stood beside Rinel and he looked down when Nyosa gripped his arm tightly. He saw small tears flowing from her eyes, and she pressed close to him. Rinel reached out with moist eyes of his own and placed his hand on Coren's shoulder because he knew Coren did not really understand what was happening. He stepped closer to the man he had called friend for so many years.

"Rinel...? What is...? What is happening?" Coren whispered.

"I don't believe we will ever truly know or understand what took place Coren my friend." Rinel answered in a similar whisper as he moved closer to Coren. "Something very deep and very emotional happened between these twins Fedor and Eirene and their brother Androcles. It has affected them all quite profoundly, and that is why they act as they do now."

"It's beautiful." Nyosa whispered tucking her head against Coren's chest.

Coren's arm unconsciously curled around her slim waist as he turned back to see Andro lift his head from Fedor's shoulder, his azure blue eyes wet with tears. He looked around briefly and settled on the young man who Coren knew was called Kalis. He must have said something within the Etheric realm to him for Kalis stepped slowly away from the tearful red haired young woman beside him. Coren watched as this young man was pulled into the embrace of so many bodies, Androcles' arm drawing him tight and brushing his face against his, whispering in his ear before Kalis's arms wrapped tightly around all of them as best he was able. Coren would never know, but for Kalis this was the culmination of his transformation. As he pressed his head to Andro's, the tears came once more as the feeling of family and acceptance swarmed around all of them. The only task that remained for him was to find his mother, Karun and Nikkei and insure that they knew this was who he was now. This gathering continued for many minutes, none of them wanting to leave the mass embrace, even as Sadi and Caliria led Andro's wives and mates out of their bedroom and into the sitting room, moving to stand with Sheva, Onera and Serale. Words were not exchanged as Iama, Serale and Miseo were just as quickly pulled close and were sharing embraces with Sadi and the others with no hesitation.

Brendi stood close to Jomann and she looked up into his handsome face as he watched what was happening. "Jomann...?"

He looked at her immediately. "Yes?"

"Is it... is it always like this?" Brendi asked softly.

Jomann nodded his head. "Some say... some say the bond between the Leonidas family is something that cannot be explained... that its power transcends that of normal families. They would not agree... but yes... it is like this all of the time. With any Lycavorian or elven family, and for that matter, I imagine it is like this with any family... no matter their species." He answered her question as his eyes went back to the group.

“Jomann... I think... I think I may have fallen in love with Eliani and you. Both of you.” Brendi spoke softly once more. “I don’t know how or why but...”

Jomann looked at her once more, his ocean blue eyes bright. His powerful arm snaked around her waist and pulled her five foot nine body close to his. Brendi did not shy away from this action in the least and she actually pressed against him harder than he was pulling her. “We already know that Brendi Faith.” He told her. “Just as we love you.”

“What do we do?” She asked him.

“What do you want to do Brendi?” Jomann asked her even as his heart raced with new happiness.

Brendi Faith met his eyes without an ounce of fear or hesitation. “I want to experience it Jomann. I want to feel what you feel for Eliani. What she feels for you.”

“What we both feel for you?” Jomann said.

Brendi nodded. “Yes.”

“It will change your life Brendi... even more than it has already been changed.” Jomann told her. “Are you sure that is what you want?”

“Yes.” She answered instantly. “I have never been more sure of anything.”

Jomann leaned over and kissed her softly. Her hand came up and caressed his cheek as his soft lips sent shivers through her. He drew back slightly and stared at her dark brown eyes. “Then we will gladly show you what you mean to us Brendi Faith. In more ways than you could possibly imagine.”

Brendi felt her body flush and become aroused at his words and she smiled brightly. She could not deny it any longer. She did not want to deny it any longer. Her sisters and her parents had found a new life and new happiness and now Brendi decided that she was going to do the same thing.

That new life would include Eliani and Jomann, of that she had no doubts or fears, and that knowledge filled her with complete and utter happiness.

“...Returned to the Rothryn embassy.” Coren spoke as he looked across the small table between him and Androcles. Sadi sat to his right, Ne'Veha and Sehri beside her, while Eirene now sat to his left and her face glowed as she gazed at her brother. All of them had gathered in the Sitting Room now, whether it was sitting on the chairs and couches or the floor itself. Lu'ria sat on the floor between Andro's legs with Carisia and Caliria squeezed between her long legs. Coren had quickly noticed that no matter where they chose to sit, all of them were touching each other in some fashion. Denali and Lisisa and his daughter Arduri. Dorian, Sheva and Onera. Jomann Eliani and Brendi Faith. It did not matter how, they simply were. “Dyack thought it best.”

Andro nodded his head in agreement. “What is happening does not concern the Rothryn with the exception of Sehri, and it is better if they continue to stay out of it completely. We will have our own issues in the future I'm sure but right now... better that they sit this out and remain out of the line of fire.”

Coren held out the data pad to him. “I contacted my office this morning before everyone began to wake up.” He explained. “None of the other members of the SBR or the normal Board of Regents has heard anything from Ardan in regards to this. It appears he is either not going to present it to them, or he is waiting to see if the formula actually does work now that they have the entire thing.”

“Does that surprise you?” Androcles asked.

Coren shook his head. “No... but it does leave him vulnerable to leaks.”

“Really? Why?”

“Rinel and I talked of this last night.” Coren said. “There is no question he has men and women who work for him that are researchers like Caliria. However, if they find that this formula does indeed work, Rinel and I both believe he will not be able to keep it quiet for very long, if at all.”

Rinel sat casually on the arm of the couch holding the mug of Lycavorian coffee. “There are very few among the Vanari who have not been touched in some way by this chemical Prince Leonidas.” He told them calmly. “Whether it be within their family, or a family of their friends, whatever it is... all of them know what a discovery like this can do.”

“Ardan and those like him believe that our people have become so lax and detached that it is just a fact of our lives that we must deal with.” Coren continued. “I believe they count on this way of thinking and even

encourage it. Ardan has shown as much in the past and you have seen this for yourself. Rinell and I believe that if the existence of the Counter Agent is revealed to the general population then it will have a cascading effect.”

“Hasn’t this already been part of your own Public Channels for weeks now?” Andro asked him. “Surely everyone must know that your children are being investigated.”

Coren nodded his head in agreement. “It has been all over our News Channels.” He said. “But Ardan and his supporters have been very careful about what they intentionally release to the News. There have been no specific charges brought up in public, only rumor, conjecture and innuendo behind their words. And the only mention of the Counter Agent that they have made has been in reference to what Caliria was working on.”

[It is true my love.] Caliria’s voice filled his head in the private connection. Andro turned to look at her where she was sitting with Carisia and Lu’ria on the floor. *[Even at the University, all anyone has been concerned with are the reports that I was claiming to be your wife and mate. They made fun of me for weeks because of this and never brought up the rumors of what I was being accused of.]*

[Well... I think you settled that little debate quite convincingly yesterday.] Andro told her with a very large smile.

Caliria smiled as well and Lu’ria and Carisia both chuckled as they leaned into her. *[I suppose I did, didn’t I.]* She spoke.

[Quite convincingly indeed!] Sadi agreed with a grin of her own.

“The largest unknown right now is the First Regent.” Coren continued as Andro turned back to him. “Alrerin Sha Harael has always been an open and very liberal mind so to speak but in the last century he has become a vocal opponent of anything having to do with bringing us closer to the former Protectorate. He has always blocked such things in a vote regardless of the outcome especially in the last century or so as I said.”

Andro sat back on the couch now looking at him. “So he will take Ardan’s side without regard for the truth?” He asked.

Coren looked at Rinell and then back to Andro. “We are not so sure that this is not an act of some kind and has been for some time.”

“I don’t follow.” Andro said.

“Five hundred and thirteen years ago Alrerin’s oldest daughter Narlei was taken by the OSG.” Coren spoke. “It was shortly after Dutkne took the reins of power fully from what I understand.”

Dutkne nodded from his chair to Andro’s right. “That sounds about right.” He spoke up.

“Unlike Caliria, she has white blond hair and was taken in a raid that saw the OSG kidnap fourteen Vanari females with dark hair.” Coren continued. “It appears that they did not know she was on the ship they hijacked. Neither did Alrerin for that matter. She was traveling with a close friend of hers that had dark hair.”

“And this matters why?” Andro asked. “If anything... I would think this would make him more open to my people.”

Rinell nodded his head. “You would think so yes.” He stated evenly. “Alrerin’s daughter was among the first Vanari females that the Protectorate rescued when Dutkne ordered such operations like this to begin on a regular basis. By this time she had been a prisoner of the same Enverr Warlord for over four hundred years. It was shortly after my wife and I married as I told Coren.” Rinell saw Andro lean forward at this news, his interest very much peaked. “When they were offered the equipment to contact their families and let them know they were free, Narlei was the first to accept. She contacted her father. When the time came for us to transport them back to Vanari space... all but two refused to leave. Narlei among them. As I told Coren, I don’t know what was spoken between them, but she was extremely adamant about not returning after that conversation with her father and she convinced the majority of the others not too as well.”

“Where is she now?” Andro asked. “Can we talk to her?”

“Two years after she refused to return to Vanari space she married a Lycavorian officer.” Rinell told him. “They have had seven children and are a cornerstone and guiding hand for the mixed relationships that have begun among our two peoples. She and her husband have become the symbol of these relationships. The man worships the very ground she walks upon as I also told Coren. She has become a very vocal voice of the Lycanari that are among us and she has incredible influence. She recently won election to a seat on the Protectorate Senate... but I do not know how the merger will affect that.”

“It won’t affect that at all.” Dutkne spoke up.

“I contacted my wife Tarnie after speaking with Coren about her.” Rinel said. “I have not heard anything back from her as of yet.”

“Does Alrerin know all this Coren?” Andro asked.

Coren shook his head. “I don’t know. I have Jokros trying to find out as much as he is able, but Alrerin Sha Harael is a very private man and has been for as long as I have known him. Even when I was a boy.”

“When do you expect to hear from Jokros father?” Arduri asked.

“He should be making contact with me tonight.” Coren said.

Andro looked at him. “Contact him first.” He stated. “You will not be here tonight.”

Coren looked at him suddenly. “What? Why?”

Andro met his gaze evenly as he rose to his feet. “They will hit us tonight and I have no intention of even accidentally losing you, *Inamarno* or Arduri to these fools.”

“How can you be so sure?” Rinel asked.

“It is what I would do.” Andro said. “Give us a full day and night to settle in and become comfortable and then hit us when they think we least expect it.”

“Surely the OSG can’t think they can get away with that.” Coren stated.

“It won’t be the OSG who attack us. Not directly.” Andro said.

Rinel now rose to his feet as well. “The Lycavorians who are working with them.” He said seeing Andro nod.

“It fits perfectly with what Ardan and the others are trying to do.” Androcles said. “Place blame entirely on Lycavorians for supporting and even helping the OSG. He can say anything he likes about us, even that it was some sort of internal fight between my people on how to proceed with the slavery of the Vanari females. It would cause the Vanari to turn against us as an entire people and forever destroy what we could have.”

“And tighten Ardan’s grip on power. As well as those among the OSG who control him.” Coren said.

Andro nodded his head. “Pretty much.”

Caliria and Arduri had gotten to their feet now. “I will not hide!” Caliria snapped. “Not anymore! Not ever again!”

“Nor will I!” Arduri echoed her sister.

Andro shook his head quickly. “No. I will not risk your life or Arduri’s safety for any reason *Inamarno*. And I will certainly not risk your father. *Inamarno*... you will be with Eliani, Serale and Cvea preparing to treat any wounded. Arduri... you and Nyosa will be covering your father with a contingent of the Drow scouts we have on the surface. All of you will sneak out at different portions of the day because I’m quite sure they are watching the estate even now.” He looked at Denali. “The tunnels are finished?”

Deni nodded from where he sat beside Lisisa. “Yes.”

“Tunnels?” Coren asked. “You mean that is why you have had people under my home digging?”

Andro turned back to him. “Three tunnels. Two with exits to the river and the third that extends all the way to the edge of the city.” He told him.

“How?” Coren asked in disbelief.

Andro grinned. “Aradace was quite the tunnel maker when she was small.” He answered. “Between her and Cemath... they dug tunnels all over our island on Apo Prime.”

Coren looked at Denali. “That is why we have not seen your dragon? I thought you had sent her to your ship?”

Denali shook his head. “I did... for the first couple of days.”

Andro looked at Coren. “You will be in the safe house we have established in the city. Caliria and Arduri as well with the Trauma unit my sister will set up just in case. You’ll be able to see and hear everything... but the only people who will be here are those members of my team.”

“But you have told me that there are over forty of your people hidden within the city!” Coren spoke. “If all of them attack the estate tonight you will be outnumbered!”

Rinel shook his head slowly. “Not completely Coren my friend. Ryana, myself and four of our finest snipers will be positioned across the estate. Two of them have been in place for eight hours already. This will come down to a close quarters combat battle within the walls here Coren. We do not want to be inside when that takes place. No Vanari, no matter how skilled is a match for pureblooded Lycavorians, despite how much the SBR thinks they are.”

“Trust me it is better this way sir.” Andro told him. “If they succeed in even injuring you a little bit... Ardan will turn this against us. You must not be present.”

“I don’t like it damn it!” Coren snapped.

Caliria stepped up to him. “Papa... I want to be here as well but Androcles is right.” She told him.

“Ardan and the others do not yet know of the Lycanari Coren.” Rinell said. “While we are not full blooded... we are far more capable than normal Cadre Commandos.”

“They will not attack in broad daylight.” Andro said rising to his feet. “It would raise far too many questions among your people about why so many Lycavorians are wandering about the capital when the restrictions on my people are so well known.”

Coren met his eyes. “And you are certain it is this Franklin Adams who is running their operation?”

Andro nodded. “It is him.” He said softly.

“And what will happen to him?” Coren asked.

Andro glanced at Caliria before turning to her father and Coren saw the look of death in those azure eyes. “He won’t attack the estate with the others.” Andro spoke. “He will more than likely direct the operation from their own safe house. After speaking with him at the University, I believe he is very high up in the OSG pecking order so to speak. At least here on Austrova.”

“But he is not the one giving the orders?” Coren questioned.

Andro shook his head. “No.”

Coren’s eyes grew a little wider. “His father!” He gasped.

“You have met him?”

Coren shook his head quickly. “Not directly no. Ardan and some others have invited him to different functions over the years. He is the Eridiani Ambassador to the Vanari. Their senior official. Is has to be him!”

“He is the one pulling the strings then.” Androcles spoke with a nod. “Coren, how many Eridiani are there on Austrova?”

Coren shrugged his shoulders. “Aside from those who work at the embassy... and the three hundred or so enrolled at the Austrova University... several thousand I believe. Most of them have opened cafés or stores of some kind.”

“And how many of them are OSG?” Denali asked now.

“Our Intelligence has only been able to confirm a dozen establishments that have known OSG contacts.” Coren said. “We have always kept them under close supervision but we have never moved on them because of their weapon and their threats to use it as a weapon of mass destruction against every one of our colony worlds.”

“And the others?” Andro asked.

Coren shrugged once more. “I truly do not know. Many appear very forthcoming and friendly to be honest. Never trouble with the Vanari Security Police that I am aware of. They operate fair businesses and have many Vanari as customers or patrons.”

Andro looked at Coren, stepping up to him now. “You do realize that once they conduct this attack sir... things may well rapidly spiral downward from there?”

Coren nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“Are you prepared for that sir?” Andro asked him. “Any action you take that makes it seem as if you are supporting us in any way will cause you to become an outcast among your peers.”

Coren met his eyes. “Only until they have their eyes opened as I have Androcles.” He stated. “And that is something I fully intend to see happen. Jokros is on his way back here as we speak. He said he has discovered some information that could work in our favor.”

Andro nodded. “We can use every advantage we can get.” He said.

“What about us Andro?” Fedor spoke now from behind where Eirene sat. “We fought the Svorag and father did not send us here to sit on our hands! Eirene and I are ready and we wil not let you do this without us!”

Coren looked at Andro. “The Svorag?” He asked.

“One of the few very bad things my father and mothers are now dealing with in the Echo Quadrant.” He answered. “It is not something we need to be concerned with right now.” He looked at Fedor as Iama stepped up to him and wrapped her tail around his thigh as she pressed close to him.

Dorian moved up beside Androcles now. *[They are like us Andro.]* He spoke to him in a heavily shielded connection. *[At least somewhat. We will have a naturally stronger connection to them.]*

[They do not have our experience fervon.] Andro said.

Dorian nodded his head. *[Perhaps not... but with the depth of our connection to them, it could prove invaluable if they are spread out and monitoring things from locations that we deem important.]*

Andro met Dorian's multi colored eyes for a long moment and could not deny the sound tactical move it would be. He looked back to Fedor and Eirene and made his decision.

"Very well. Fedor... you will return to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and take command of the QRF detail."

Andro told him. "I will assign Famus as your Second. Use his experience and knowledge *fervon* for he can teach you so much. If things go bad for us down here I will expect you to come screaming in to save our collective asses. Normya and Tir'ut will be flying the *STRIKER* you will be on so you will have extra support there as well."

Fedor nodded quickly. "I will." He stated confidently.

"Ne'Veha and I will be in the *PREMONITION* providing high cover." Sadi told him. "If the call comes Fedor... we will cover your *STRIKER*."

Fedor nodded. "Understood."

Andro looked at Dorian. "Do we have enough sets of the new Mark VI Armor?"

Dorian nodded his head. "Sa'sur just sent down the last shipment from Uncle Ben."

Andro turned back to Fedor. "Once we are done here... you and Eirene get fitted with the new armor."

"I didn't know we had new Body Armor." Fedor spoke.

Andro nodded his head. "Uncle Ben's people shipped it shortly after we left Earth. It didn't catch up to Sa'sur until they arrived here. It's essentially a much lighter version of the Cataphract Armor wore by Josie and those in the 82nd. You'll see when we are done here. It probably arrived with father as you were transiting here." Andro turned to Eirene. "Eirene... you and Miseo will accompany Eliani and Cvea." Andro said. "Once you are there I want you to coordinate with Arusk and Kimtia and monitor all the VID feeds we have across the city now. If anything appears to be out of place or suspicious... contact me or Dorian directly within Mindvoice. No matter how minor it might be. It will be easier to link with one of us because of how we were all born and it will not distract us if we are otherwise engaged. Mother says she has never seen anyone who can multitask better than you. We will need your eyes watching us and directing us."

Eirene nodded her head with a smile. "We will make you proud." She stammered.

"We are already proud of you." Denali said. "All of us."

"Which means you have nothing to prove to us." Lisisa echoed him. "Just do what father and our mothers trained you to do and everything will be fine."

"We will." Eirene said.

Andro turned and looked at where Kalis stood and had remained very silent until now. "Kalis..." He spoke. "I told you there was a spot for you here with us. I meant it."

Kalis pushed away from the wall. "I... I did not know if I would fit in." He said softly.

It was Eliani who spoke and echoed what she knew all of her siblings felt. "Fit in?" She gasped.

"*Sibfla*... we are all misfits! You fit in just fine!"

Andro rolled his eyes at Eliani's comment but nodded his head after a second as the rest of them laughed. "While I would not have used misfits to describe us... Eli is essentially very correct. Surprisingly!"

Eliani looked at Andro. "Blow it out your ass *fervon*!" She popped causing more laughter among them.

Coren and Rinel stood there flabbergasted at the exchange between the brothers and sisters and only Nyosa had a smile on her face.

"You are making jokes?" Coren gasped. "Now? Knowing what we face?"

"Just little ones sir." Denali chimed in now. "You haven't seen Eli until she gets rolling. She can cuss at you in six different languages without breaking a sweat... and she isn't afraid to use some very descriptive uses of those same languages."

Eliani smiled brightly. "What can I say, I'm very talented."

"Yes you are." Jomann spoke from beside Brendi who was pressed tightly to his side. "In more ways than one."

Eliani saw them and felt her heart flutter and fill with joy. “See?” Eliani quipped as she began to imagine the three of them together.

“Oh get a room will ya!” Lisisa exclaimed.

Andro shook his head with a large smile as he looked at Coren once more. He shrugged his broad shoulders. “We should probably go over the small details before your man Jokros arrives.” He said. “You truly do not want to hear my sisters when they get wound up.”

AUSTROVA OSG STAGING AREA ERIDIANI EMBASSY

“How many?” The Lycavorian asked as he stared at the holo image of the Re Mydala Estate.

Franklin Adams stepped up to the table. Like his father he did not care for anyone who was not Eridiani. He thought them all to be inferior to his species and what they had been able to accomplish. However, unlike his father, Franklin knew that they could not do everything by themselves. Regardless of the amount of genetic enhancement the Eridiani had undergone through the years, or how well trained they were, they would not be able to stand toe to toe with a Lycavorian in close quarters. The Lycavorians possessed far too much strength and endurance to physically overcome them in battle. This had been proven countless times when captured Lycavorians had savaged OSG soldiers in personal combat even though hampered by injuries or drugs. There were experiments underway trying to determine if they could combine the natural abilities of the Lycavorians with the Eridiani but still leave his people pure. None of their work had come to fruition as of yet because of the enormous healing properties of the Lycavorian immune system. They could sustain incredible damage and injury and still function, and their bodies naturally attacked any foreign substance either ingested or introduced into their bodies unnaturally, destroying it within moments. Advances had been made, but so far none were even close to being able to help them.

“My people in place around the estate have reported that Coren and two of his daughters are present.” Franklin answered. “There is a small, three person detachment of their Cadre Commandos consisting of an older male and two younger females. His security most likely, as the one with blond hair is never far from his side. They have also confirmed that Androcles Leonidas and all of his siblings and their wives are present.”

The Lycavorian looked up from the holo image and met his eyes. “All of them?”

“That is what I am being told.” He answered. “Is there an issue with that Unnel?”

The Lycavorian shook his head. “It seems the boy Prince is not as smart as he likes to think he is.” He stated. “He’s pulled them all into one location. We will be able to destroy the Royal family in one fell swoop. It will throw the Union into chaos and allow us to move against the Protectorate and take control.”

“Are you not all one government now?” Franklin asked.

Unnel shook his head. “There are many who did not want the merger to take place. We do not consider ourselves part of what this Union has built. We have lived without them for all of these years and we do not need them. When we succeed tonight it will give us the single opportunity that we have lacked for centuries.”

“And perhaps allow us to become closer as working partners?” Franklin said.

Unnel nodded. “There is that possibility.” He said.

“Would you allow me to pass this on to my superiors?” Franklin asked.

“I would not have mentioned it otherwise Franklin Adams.” Unnel said calmly. “We have enjoyed the working relationship we have had with the Eridiani and the OSG. I do not see why that can not continue.”

Franklin nodded. “Interesting.” He said. He looked back to the holo image of the estate. “They have installed additional defenses on the estate but we expected this and just before your assault my people will cut power to the entire grid. If you include the Vanari security detail on Coren I estimate roughly twenty individuals.”

“And none of their beasts are there?” Unnel spoke.

Franklin shook his head. “The Vanari have refused to allow them to the surface after Prince Androcles’ stunt at the Austrova University. All of them have returned to their ships in orbit.”

Unnel nodded. "We will attack from two directions." He spoke pointing to the image of the estate. "One from the river, and then over this wall here along the bank. The other will come from the main entrance through the walk in doors. The main estate gates will remain locked so as to minimize any of them possibly escaping."

"How many?" Franklin asked.

"I have my entire force." Unnel said. "Sixty-three soldiers. We have them outnumbered and our experience will give us the advantage."

"All of them have combat experience Unnel." Franklin spoke.

"They have not fought us." Unnel told him confidently.

Franklin nodded his head. "Very well. I will have three ships standing by to lift off from this Vanari garrison seven kilometers across the river to the east. All of them will be piloted by Vanari Cadre Commandos loyal to us. Once you have confirmed the deaths, they will respond to your call and extract you by landing in the courtyard one at a time." Adams told him. "You will need to gather your wounded and dead and be gone within four minutes. That is how long it will take the Vanari to respond from this garrison to the north. They are part of the Vanari 64th Recon Regiment commanded by one of Coren Re Mydala's close friends and we have never been able to insert someone into their ranks. They will also come to full alert and expect the Eastern garrison to respond but they will only wait for so long. Our people might be able to stretch that timetable for another two, possibly three minutes with false communications issues but... four minutes is your true window and the one you should use."

Unnel nodded. "We can do it." He stated. "The time of our attack should put them all in their separate rooms either sleeping or fucking like animals. We will have complete surprise."

Franklin Adams nodded his head. "Caliria Re Mydala is not to be harmed." He stated. "And we want at least one of the other two pureblood brothers. Either Denali or Deion Leonidas or one of the brothers and the female twin. Nara I believe her name is."

"For what purpose?" Unnel asked.

"That is not your concern." Franklin told him. "If all else fails... you must secure at least one of the pureblood Leonidas children except for Androcles."

"You do not care for him." Unnel said. "I can smell your hate."

Franklin looked at him. "Let's just say he took something from me that I intend to get back."

"The Vanari wench?" Unnel asked.

"Yes."

"I will make no guarantees... but we will try." Unnel told him.

"Bring her back to me unharmed and I will increase your payment by an additional five percent."

Franklin told him. "She and her sister have exhibited signs of being affected by the virus that runs within your species. We wish to study that."

"And have her in your bed whenever you want." Unnel commented with a knowing glance.

"An additional five percent." Franklin told him once more.

"The others?" Unnel asked.

Franklin shook his head. "Kill them." He answered. "Kill them all."

ECHO QUADRANT

KINTAUR HEGEMONY MEDIUM CRUISER

BRIGHT STAR

The Kintaur were a humanoid species that claimed thirteen planets as their own. The vast majority of their species were of medium height and build but very few ever reached more than two meters in height. They were a militaristic society and everything was conformed to insure their government persevered above all else. If you were part of the military or the government Quorum then you were considered above the normal citizens. Every part of their society was regimented and driven. Every citizen in the Hegemony worked for the betterment of the whole. No one questioned the government or its leaders. The citizens of the Kintaur Hegemony wanted for nothing and crime within their strict society was nearly non-existent. The punishment for

most crimes was usually death, regardless of the type of crime and the sentence was carried out very swiftly. Most everything within the Hegemony was centered around keeping their military the strongest it could possibly be. New discoveries in any field were reviewed first for their military value and possible development as weapons or new technology for their ships and soldiers. There truly was no dissension within the overall society as a whole. Everyone knew their place and they accepted this as a fact of their lives.

The Kintaur military was very well trained and led. They had the finest equipment their government could develop and everything was centralized. While their technology fell just shy of the Tasmor, they were still an advanced species and not surprised by very much. Like the Tasmor they had tried on several occasions to bargain, take or capture Pralor technology in order to gain the upper hand over the other races that they deemed inferior to them. All of these attempts failed. They had gained some knowledge over the years through the torture of captured Pralor men and women, twenty-two of them total, but nothing that they could use to improve their military. Those Pralors they had captured were mainly Agricultural Scientists that were attempting to improve the growth rates of different plants from the planets they had been captured on. The thirteen men they had interrogated and killed within hours. The nine women they had raped and tortured for several weeks before sending them to their homeworld to be dealt with. Their final fate was unknown except to a few.

The Brig of the *BRIGHT STAR* was especially barren of any comforts. There were six holding cells, all but one empty at the moment. Three Kintaur were sitting at the small table playing some sort of board game, two more were resting on the uncomfortable looking bunks along the bulkhead, and two were standing at the view window trying to get a glimpse of what it was they were pursuing since their Captain had pulled them out of orbit. The last two men were the Brig officer and his Second. They were standing in front of the cell looking at the half naked body of the badly beaten Tasmor soldier they had captured from her ship yesterday. They had boarded the Tasmor frigate with a small force with one purpose and that was to take this female prisoner. It did not matter that they had lost nineteen of the twenty-four members of the boarding party; they had succeeded in their goal.

The Tasmor female's standard green patterned fatigues were nearly shredded from her body. They had taken her boots from her, and shredded the fatigue jacket she had been wearing. The flimsy shirt she wore underneath was torn nearly in half, exposing one of her firm breasts, while her fatigue pants she held together with one hand in some sense of dignity. Her entire body was badly bruised, small cuts on her breasts and a larger laceration across the back of her left shoulder. Her legs appeared as if she had been dragged through some sort of thorn bush and dried blood was evident all across her skin. Both of her legs appeared swollen and the wounds puffy and just beginning to ooze clear liquid from the open sores. Her breathing came in labored gasps, her long blond hair falling over her face and hiding her features. Unlike other Tasmor prisoners they had taken in the past, this one had been left unsullied. They had beaten her and subjected her to light torture, but First Warrior Gars had left orders insuring she was not to be violated. At least not yet.

The Brig officer turned his head to look at his two men by the view window. "Do you see anything?" He asked.

"No sir!" One man answered. "If we have moved to intercept a Tasmor ship we cannot see it from this side."

"Return to your duties then!" The man ordered. "We may yet have more prisoners to deal with and I want to...!"

There was a bright, yellowish/red flare of light behind him combined with a strange whining noise and the Brig Officer and his Second whirled around. His black eyes grew wide in stunned shock as seven humanoid figures appeared within the center of that light and instantly materialized into solid forms. Three of them were utterly huge individuals; easily over two meters in height, and all of them carried black weapons that seemed to be extensions of their bodies. All of them wore some type of conforming black and red armor that he had never seen before.

"Break now!" Danny hissed out the order as he stepped forward and lifted his silenced P190A4 and jammed it into the chest of the Brig officer, loosing a five round burst into the Kintaur's broad chest before the man had a chance to register shock on his face.

The five 12.7mm DA coated hollow points were specifically designed to do maximum damage on a target without actually leaving the target's body. This type of round had been the ideal choice for assaulting old world jet aircraft and for the Air Marshalls that sometimes rode those same aircraft back on Earth in the early

twenty first century. The lethal rounds traveled at incredible velocity but would not penetrate and exit a target's body and possibly puncture the skin of an aircraft while in flight. Martin had ordered this round back into production within the first two years of him returning as King and now they were the standard ammo used in all Union Special Operations. Union engineers had switched to the Kavalian 12.7mm round several years earlier for its added stopping power and when added to the Dragon Armor coating on the round, hence the DA identifier in the round's name, they were instantly deadly rounds. They had left Earth in a hurry for their search for For'mya, leaving without this specialized ammo but Andro's supply ships had been stocked to overflowing with these rounds and he knew how his father liked to operate.

The five round burst entered the Kintaur's chest at nearly four thousand feet per second and instantly upon entering his chest the lethal DA coated rounds expanded and then splintered, doing horrific damage to the chest cavity, shredding organs and shattering bones. The kinetic energy was instantly spent however and the Kintaur Officer's body was flung back two meters from the force of the rounds just as T'lolt and Tony broke from around his side lifting their own weapons.

Two five round bursts and the Kintaur who had been standing beside their view window were lifted off their feet and fell to the deck, both of them with accurate shots and pink colored blood leaking from those holes to pour over the front of their bodies. Kenny and Pablo had moved around T'lolt and Tony and both of them sprayed the two Kintaur who had been lying on the cots with accurate bursts. None of the men made it halfway up before the rounds perforated their bodies and destroyed vital organs. As Kenny and Pablo continued to track their weapons to the remaining three Kintaur, they watched as those men sitting at the table were all dispatched with lethally precise head shots from Julie and Anuk. It was over in exactly nine seconds and Danny's head turned to Kenny.

"Kenny! Pablo! Cover the door!" Danny hissed as he jammed the barrel of his A4 under the chin of the last Kintaur. "Jules... get on the power grid to this thing."

"On it!" Julie spoke as she blurred to the wall of computers.

T'lolt and Tony swept over the bodies of the dead Kintaur and tossed aside any hidden weapons just to be certain.

"T'lolt?" Danny barked softly as he moved to the side of the only active cell.

"They are all dead Daniel." T'lolt replied as he flung what appeared to be a hand weapon of some sort under the nearby bunk. The pinkish colored blood was beginning to pool on the floor. "I think."

"You think?" Daniel gasped.

"We have never encountered this species before Daniel." T'lolt complained.

"Don't think!" Daniel rasped. "Be sure! Better safe than sorry T'lolt my friend!"

T'lolt did not take offense at Daniel's urgent tone of voice and he simply drew out the silenced K12 KM and pressed it to the Kintaur's forehead, caressing the trigger once. He stood up and did the same with the three men in the cots. He turned back to Daniel. "Now I am sure." He stated.

Daniel shrugged his broad shoulders. "Works for me." He stated. "Jules?"

"Standard brig controls for the most part." Julie spoke as her hands drifted over the console.

"Can you open this cell?" Daniel asked. "We're burning daylight here!"

"The upload to our implants only let's us speak their language! I can't read their fucking language Simpson!" Julie declared.

Danny turned his yellow wolf eyes on the Kintaur and exposed his fangs. The Kintaur's eyes grew wide in fear when he saw this. He appeared younger than the officer, at least to Dan. "Hi! We're from the Interstellar Prisoner Exchange Association." Danny spoke. "And right now... we are here to exchange your prisoner from your custody to ours. You understand me right?"

The Kintaur officer bobbed his head up and down quickly. Danny grinned as he realized the language upload that Tobia had conducted on all of their internal implants had worked perfectly. "Which control to release the force field?" Danny asked.

The Kintaur motioned with his hand to the far console beside where Julie stood. "The... the blinking red one!" He managed to stammer.

"Jules?"

"Got it!" Julie barked as her hand came down on the button and the soft humming of the energy barrier in front of Danny ceased as the barrier disappeared.

Danny looked at the Kintaur. “Thanks. You’ve been a big help.” Dan caressed the trigger of his A4 and sent one round up into the skull of the Kintaur officer. His body leaped off the ground from the power of such a close range shot and then dropped like a bag of rocks to the deck. “Anuk baby!” Danny barked even as Anuk broke from where she was standing against his back and moved into the cell where the Tasmor woman was staring at them in unabashed awe.

Anuk held up her hands as she dropped to her knees in front of her, swinging her A4 around behind her body and out of the immediate ability for the prisoner to grasp it and use it against them. “We are here to help you!” She spoke. “I am a Field Medical Officer. Do you understand me?”

The Tasmor was staring directly at Danny, who had his A4 pointed at her, the small laser dot centered directly over the bridge of her nose. Anuk stayed out of her husband’s line of sight, knowing that he was using standard protocols and protecting her. She reached out to take the young woman’s beaten and bloody face in her hands. When she felt Anuk touch her skin her head moved instantly and was looking at her.

“You understand us yes?” Anuk asked her once more.

The woman nodded her head quickly now. “Yes... yes!” She saw the elegantly curved four inch high elven ears on Anuk and her eyes grew even wider. Whenever she conducted an operation like this, Anuk always pulled her rust colored red hair into a tightly bound pony tail that fell to the middle of her back, leaving her elven ears fully exposed. “What... what are you?”

Anuk opened her hands in a show of passiveness. “We are friends. I am a doctor and I want to treat you quickly so we can get you out of here. What is your name?”

“I am... I am Third Officer Emylea Daret.” She stammered.

Anuk smiled brightly at her now. Daniel and Nayeca both had told her for years that she had the warmest and most enticing smile of anyone they had ever met. Her smile alone could put a person at ease almost immediately and while she had heard others speak the same thing, Anuk never really believed them. In fact it was very true as the Tasmor woman saw that smile and the obvious intelligence of her cerulean blue eyes and this put her immediately at ease.

“I want to scan you quickly Emylea and then give you a shot that will increase your heart rate and give you an energy boost. A stimulant to be exact.” Anuk told her. “It will only take a few seconds... but it will allow you to shrug off the effects of any drugs they may have given you or the physical torture they forced you to endure.”

Emylea nodded quickly as Anuk brought the scanner up and she glanced once more at Danny as he had now lowered his weapon and turned to the others.

“Jules?” He called out.

“Running the tap!” Julie barked. “Avi... you getting this?”

-Affirmative Julie- Avi’s calm mechanical voice echoed in their implants. **-Elder Valael is reviewing it as you send it-**

“Twenty seconds is all you are getting and then we’re out of here!” Julie hissed.

-Understood-

Emylea’s eyes darted back and forth between Daniel, Tony and T’lolt where they had moved up beside him. She had seen the huge black man extend wolf fangs like those men and women she had seen on the planet below and his eyes had changed in color as well, now a bright yellowish brown color. She had never seen one so large as him before however, or the even larger black skinned man beside him who also had changed eyes and full fangs. The third man was completely new to her with his bronze colored skin, massive body and strange features on his face. He seemed to have spikes all along his jaw line that extended into the thick hair on his neck. She turned back to the female.

“Who... who are you?” She gasped. “I have...” Anuk looked up and Emylea’s eyes grew wider still when she realized that Anuk had changed eyes as well and the tips of her fangs were exposed just under her lip. “You are like them!” She gasped aloud. “You are... you are like the men and... you are Lycavorian!”

Anuk looked up quickly. “You know what we are?” She asked her sensing Danny’s head come around and look at them.

Emylea nodded. “Your kind... your kind is on the planet below. Lycavorians. But I have never seen one with ears like you. Or like him.” She motioned with her head to where T'lolt stood.

“How many of our people are on the surface?” Danny asked moving closer as Anuk passed the medical scanner over her chest now.

“Not many now. A few hundred at most scattered across the planet in the ruins of your cities.” Emylea answered almost immediately. “We have moved most of the survivors from this world. It is not safe here.”

“Survivors?” Anuk questioned looking at her before glancing up at Danny.

“You are them!” Emylea said. “How do you not know of...?” Her blue eyes narrowed somewhat and she looked back up to where Dan stood. “Who... are you?”

“We are friends.” Anuk said. “We came looking for our people and instead we found you and these men.” She lifted the hypo injector. “This is the medicine I told you of. I want to inject it so we can leave this ship.”

Emylea nodded her head quickly. If she had her strength back and she needed to, she could fight her way free, but not in this condition. They had beaten her badly, though they had not yet raped her, which was unusual to say the least and without a stimulant of some sort she would be utterly helpless. “We must hurry!” She stammered. “They will know what has happened here very soon. They are savages but they are efficient.”

“That’s all you are getting Avi!” Anuk heard Julie call out as she nodded and gently pressed the hypo against her neck and depressed the button. She saw Emylea grimace slightly but that quickly passed. She gripped her arm gently then.

“We are not the enemy Emylea.” She spoke. “We are here to get you off this ship and return you to your people. You must trust me.”

Emylea lifted her eyes. “Trust must be earned.” She said.

Anuk nodded and got to her feet holding out her hand. “Then let us earn it.”

Emylea didn’t hesitate for she felt she could trust this strange woman. She took her hand and saw Anuk smile. “Daniel... your space blanket!” Anuk called.

Danny turned slightly away from her, effectively blocking Emylea from other eyes and presented his back to her. Emylea took notice of this action regardless and she relaxed even more as she realized he was blocking any view of her near naked form. “In my pack Baby!” He told her.

Anuk flipped up the Velcro flap and pulled out the silver, light weight blanket. She turned back to Emylea and wrapped it around her shoulders tightly, covering her near naked body. “We are ready.” Anuk told him.

Danny nodded. “Time to go folks!” Dan barked as Julie dashed back over to him and stepped up to Emylea on the opposite side to help support her. Danny touched his ear implant.

“Ghost Two to *ARC ROYAL*. Avi... get us out of this stink pot!”

-Stand by. Activating Teleporter-

“Wait!” The strange voice echoed in their implants. “Wait! Daniel wait!”

Dan’s eyes narrowed somewhat as he recognized Valael’s voice. “Elder Valael... we are in a hurry here!” He snapped.

“Daniel... it was a trap!” Valael spoke quickly. “I am reviewing the logs we tapped. These Kintaur apparently knew who was on the Tasmor ships. They had orders to come here and take the young woman prisoner at all costs.”

Danny looked at Emylea between Anuk and Julie and her face showed confusion when she saw him react in such a manner. “Are you sure Valael?” Danny asked him.

“It is the reason Delnash sent Tobia and I with you. Both of us can read Kintaur and speak their native tongue. This First Warrior Gars was under orders to capture the young woman you have rescued.”

“Coincidence?” Daniel asked.

“I do not believe in coincidences Daniel Simpson.” Valael answered.

“Yeah... neither to I.” Daniel spoke. “Stand by!” Danny tapped his jaw twice, switching channels on his implant. “Ghost Two to *REPULSE* Actual!”

“Nemoa here General Simpson! Go!”

“Captain... I am remanding the King’s order to destroy this ship! Cripple it and make sure it doesn’t leave the system, but do not destroy it! Confirm.” Daniel stated.

There were perhaps a dozen individuals within the entire Lycavorian Union that had the authority to countermand an order from the King. General/Colonel Daniel Simpson was one of them.

“Confirming new orders! Incapacitate only!” Nemoa answered.

Danny switched channels once more. “Avi... execute!”

-Teleporting- Avi answered instantly.

In the same flash of light as when they had arrived, Daniel and his team vanished. They left nine dead Kintaur and many questions that the Kintaur would never be able to answer.

ARC ROYAL

MAIN TELEPORT STATION ONE

-...Have them- Avi’s voice spoke from behind the console. **-Strike Team One has returned-**

“Akemi!” Martin’s voice rang out as he entered the Teleport Station with Aricia, Anja, Colin, Thoti, Cody and eight other members of the *Durcunusaan*. “Break for the planet now!”

“Already done Martin!” Akemi’s voice filled the internal COM.

“Avi?” Martin questioned as he passed Avi at the controls.

-I will put you down four hundred meters in front of them Martin- Avi answered. **-At their current rate of advance they will be upon your position two minutes after you arrive. The other teams are standing by on Station Two’s pad and all three support pads-**

Martin nodded his head. “Forty-six will be enough.” He stated as he stepped onto the main teleport pad, one hand gripping his A4.

-Daniel has rescinded your order for the Kintaur ship Martin- Avi reported. **-Additional information was discovered-**

Martin watched as the others stepped onto the pad as well and moved around him. Aricia was on his right and Anja on his left. “Danny has that authority Avi. If he did it... then he has his reasons. Coordinate with him and let him run with it.”

-Understood-

Anja looked up at Martin with questions in her beautiful eyes. “It’ll be fun Red.” He said with a grin. “Don’t worry so much!”

Anja snorted in disgust. “Fun?” She stated. “Scattering your atoms into little tiny pieces and transferring them through some sort of sub space dimension onto a planet that is still three hundred and seventy thousand kilometers from where we are standing is fun to you?”

Aricia chuckled as Martin leaned over and nuzzled her cheek. “You’ll see.” He said. “Our son did it.”

“Our son is even more *malda* than you!” Anja spat. She looked away and gripped her A4. “I swear... one of these days I’m going to have both of you committed to a facility for those who are criminally insane.”

“*Melyanna*... we don’t have such a facility.” Aricia spoke from Martin’s other side.

“Then I’ll have one built for these two and wait for them to do something this stupid again!” Anja declared. “Then I’ll commit them.”

“C’mon... what happen to it’s not just a job it’s an adventure.” Martin spoke.

“*Sibfla*... that saying was meant for an ocean going Navy that didn’t even know life existed out here Martin!” Anja hissed at him. She looked up into his eyes once more. “Before you and your big cock ever came out of stasis and corrupted me Martin Leonidas and before I even got to Earth!”

All of them heard the others around them laugh softly at Anja’s words. They had heard it many times in the past and it never ceased to amuse them.

-Shall I abort the...-

“No!” Anja barked. “Just do it Avi! If I am going to...”

-Teleporting- Avi spoke as he pressed the console and Anja’s words vanished in the yellowish red flash of light. Avi turned when he heard the soft laughing from his side and he looked at the female Vampire Engineer who would control this station when he was not here.

“The King is going to have some serious body worshipping to do when they get back.” She said. “Queen Anja was just getting wound up.”

-Indeed- Avi spoke in reply knowing that she was very correct. **-Your assessment is quite accurate-** He turned to the other *Durcunusaan* who were moving on to the teleport pad. **-Prepare to initiate second sequence-**

VENTORI

This mission had been ill thought out from the very beginning and thrown together far too quickly she thought to herself as she stood behind the massive uprooted tree and watched with alert dark brown eyes as her people moved through the timber all around her mingled with the several dozen Lycavorians they had been able to find. She could see that almost half of the Lycavorians had changed their forms and were sprinting back and forth, yelping with short barks of encouragement and even urgency to the others. This was her sixth mission here and she knew enough of the Lycavorians and their people now to know that they had found two family packs hiding within the remains of the city. She did not know why her mother’s quorum had decided to help them three years ago, but once the decision was made they had begun to make weekly forays back to Ventori in order to take more and more of them off this dead world. Nearly six million Lycavorians had been relocated to seven different Tasmor worlds so far in the last three years and each trip here was becoming more and more dangerous. Word had leaked out somehow that they were doing this, and now the Kintaur had taken notice and had begun to come to this world as well looking for new slaves. The Kintaur cruiser had appeared from light speed travel within the planetary system and was upon them before they had realized it. She and her people were already on the surface and the last reports she had received from their ship was that they were under attack and the Kintaur had boarded one of the Frigates and taken her sister prisoner before they had been able to repel the attack. Emylea had been in overall command of the operation and her last order before being captured was to hide within the nebula on the far side of the planet and for her people on the surface to disappear into the deep timber.

The Lycavorian people who called this planet home had been very wary when they first arrived. The Tasmor Quorum had known they existed but had elected to not pursue first contact with them. They had a very stable government and while their technology as a whole was much lesser than the Tasmor, they had been well on their way to discovering space flight within the next fifty years or so. Their innate ability to transform their bodies into the shape of wolves had fascinated many Tasmor scientists and doctors and this had been studied for some time from safe locations hidden on the planet that the Tasmor had established. They had a large military

that was well equipped and very well trained, and when added to their obvious other abilities, it was decided to not pursue relations just yet. From what they had been able to determine through years of watching them, there had been no wars between the Lycavorians on Ventori in all of their history. They were hard working and committed to one another in a way that even the Tasmor people were not.

It wasn't until after the Svorag had come that things changed.

The Lycavorians had fought savagely and valiantly, but in the end it did not matter. Their military had been crushed within the first month of the invasion, swarmed over by numbers and superior weapons. Then the Svorag had decimated their cities, killing millions and millions of innocents while taking millions of prisoners, most of them female Lycavorians. It wasn't until the Svorag had finally left that they had begun to come here trying to discover if they could help whatever survivors remained. They had found far more than anyone had first thought and the decision was quickly made to relocate them. Now she was not so sure that had been a good idea. In the last year alone they had lost thirteen combat ships to the Kintaur Hegemony and another twenty to random Svorag patrols. Nearly twenty thousand of her fellow Tasmor and equal that number of Lycavorians. The Kintaur had developed new engines it seemed and were now able to skirt Tasmor space in much less time and come here.

They had scanned the area for two days before Emylea had decided to continue to the surface. Then the Kintaur had arrived. It had gone downhill from there.

She turned her head just as the large wolf skidded to a halt beside her and she watched as the graying brown furred wolf transformed before her eyes in a soft white explosion of light. Unlike many of her people, she did not look down upon the Lycavorians as inferior to them. They were a proud and strong species and while very different from her own people, they were not stupid. When the transformation was complete the much older Lycavorian squatted beside her. He was of medium height but lean and in excellent condition. His dark brown hair was wild and almost shoulder length, his beard trimmed. Gray flowed through his hair extensively, but this did not take away from his physical condition as it would with many other species. Gray in their hair usually meant they were old and frail. That was not the case with Lycavorians she had discovered. It was a sign of experience and age, something the Tasmor had revealed within the first weeks of beginning these missions. Lycavorians were very much like Pralors in that they were essentially immortal.

"They are closing on us Namiri." The man spoke urgently. "We must stop and face them while the women and children continue to the river or they will kill us all!"

"How far Nalmos?" She asked him even as her dark eyes turned to look back the way they had come.

"A hundred meters. Two at most. We must turn to face them." Nalmos spoke.

"Damn!" Namiri Daret exclaimed in a harsh whisper.

Namiri Daret, the youngest of her mother's six daughters at twenty-three years old and the one least respected and looked upon as a daughter of the Tasmor Sovereign Regent. Her dark brown and red colored haired was very long and now pulled into a pony tail and tucked within her light weight body armor. She had the full lips, high cheekbones and delicate brow bone ridges of her mother but the deeply tanned skin and large dark brown eyes of her father. The brow bone ridges of the Tasmor were what set her people apart. They could be sharp and severe or, as with Namiri and her sisters, delicately curved and sloping and quite attractive. Namiri was very petite, unlike her sisters, at only five foot three and barely a hundred and five pounds soaking wet, but she had long legs for her height, a slim waist and very firm and impressive sized breasts. She had made a decision when she was young to honor her Tasmor father by joining the ground forces of the Tasmor military. Her father was one of the few Tasmor men who had climbed the ranks into leadership roles and she had wanted to honor him for this. Her sisters, all but Emylea, had made fun of her for this. They considered themselves above such things and her mother did nothing to discourage how they treated her. She may have been the daughter of the Tasmor Sovereign Regent and held the title of Lady Regent like her sisters, but Namiri was very much alone in the great scheme of things. Only Emylea had ever shown her the love of a sister, and the two of them were very close. This frustrated her mother and older sisters but Emylea did not care and she had remained very close with her and made it a point for them to do many things together.

Namiri lifted the small MIC she wore on her combat harness. "Alpha and Beta teams break off into defensive positions now! Charlie Team continue to the river with the women and children! Execute!"

Namiri saw Nalmos stiffen beside her and she looked at him as he sniffed the air. "What is it?" She exclaimed.

“Some... something!” He rasped.

“More Kintaur from behind us?” Namiri gasped.

Nalmos shook his head quickly. “Something... something all around us.” He spoke in almost a whisper. “Something wild and pure!”

“Nalmos what are you talking about?” Namiri almost yelled. “We need to...”

The war scream cut off her words and caused both of them to whirl and watch in what appeared to be slow motion as the Kintaur warrior came charging over the massive log with his weapon raised. He carried the huge Kintaur pain stick, a large club like instrument designed to inflict horrible and incapacitating electrical charges into its victims. One full strike could render a fully grown man or woman almost helpless as electricity coursed through their bodies and the blunt end of the club broke bones or ruptured muscles. This was the Kintaur War Leader. The largest and most fearsome of the Kintaur ground troops, the War Leader commanded all of their ground troops in any given situation. Even as Namiri attempted to bring her weapon to bear, that pain stick came flashing forward and caught her a glancing blow on her arm. Thankfully it only connected with the barrel of her weapon and not her flesh, but as she watched her weapon sail away with horror filled eyes Namiri knew it was too late. Nalmos reared up with a savage growl but the Kintaur’s opposite hand flashed out and struck the older Lycavorian a solid blow to his head and sent him sprawling to the ground. The War Leader’s eyes returned to Namiri as she stared up at him frozen in fear.

“You are mine now Namiri Daret!” The Kintaur bellowed. “And I will enjoy our time together! I will...”

Namiri’s eyes grew even wider as she saw the War Leader’s eyes bug out of his head and his chest exploded outward, showering her torso with pinkish Kintaur blood. Namiri saw the glistening, almost invisible head of some sort of spear protruding from the War Leader’s chest almost a foot and she watched as the War leader looked down to stare in shock at the blood covered spear causing the agony wracking his body now. His Pain Stick fell from suddenly useless fingers and both his hands moved to grasp the protruding shaft. Namiri gasped in shock as the air behind the War Leader shimmered and the light altered as the form of a huge man in strange armor appeared behind him. She watched as he leaned close over the War Leader’s shoulder and then she saw the yellow/golden colored eyes and savagely barred fangs under the helmet. Long fangs not unlike the fangs she has seen on Lycavorians in the past but this set of fangs had another set of equally wicked looking teeth beside them and together the dual fangs were the most frightening thing she had ever seen in her life.

And then Namiri heard that apparition speak.

“Not in this lifetime motherfucker!” Martin Leonidas snarled savagely just before twisting and then wrenching his *Nehtes* out of the Kintaur’s chest with incredible strength.

Namiri heard the War Leader’s spine snap as close as she was and she heard the rush of air leave his lungs and they were shredded but she could not take her eyes from the massive armored form standing above her.

Then, as if from some ancient story of warriors that her father had read to her as a child, Namiri saw them begin to appear all around. Huge armored forms appearing all around them from thin air and lifting weapons like she had never seen and moving without fear or hesitation directly at the advancing Kintaur forces. She could hear the soft popping of weapons and as the armored forms moved directly for the Kintaur forces and with each popping sound she saw a Kintaur soldier fall. Namiri’s eyes turned back to the huge man in front of her and saw the multicolored plume extending down the back of his helmet as he touched the side of his helmet.

“Sweep and clear!” His voice barked out. “No prisoners!”

Namiri’s eyes filled with stunned shock as she saw the white flash of light so similar to when she saw other Lycavorians shift their forms. Yet the wolf that materialized in front of her now was nearly three times the size of any Lycavorian she had ever seen before, Nearly four feet tall at the shoulders and Namiri could actually see the bands of muscle flex under the raven black fur as that wolf sprang into the air and released a savage howl. Namiri kicked her way to where Nalmos was staring in disbelief at what was happening and she reached for him.

“Nalmos!” She barked. “They... they are Lycavorian!” She cried out.

“They are... they are Alphas!” Nalmos shouted out. “They are Alpha Lycavorians! Praise the gods in the stars! We did not... we did not believe any still existed!”

Namiri's head snapped around when she heard several shouts from her own people and then she saw what they were frantically motioning at. From the northeast timber another group of these new Lycavorians burst forth and fell upon the Kintaur with death in their eyes. Namiri caught the glimpse of motion and she could only gawk in disbelief as she saw the forms of two females moving so fast that they blurred in motion as they entered the melee, short blades flashing in the rising sunlight.

"Nalmos... how is this possible?" Namiri gasped aloud. "I thought... I thought you said all these Alphas of your people were long dead!"

"Well... the explanation is rather long." The female voice spoke from behind them and both of them whirled around to see the two figures behind them. Namiri was stunned at how close they had gotten without her keen senses detecting them. "But not entirely boring."

Anja reached up and lifted her helmet from her head as the massive form of Atropos covered her and Aricia from one knee slightly behind her. Anja shook her head gently and let her Persian red hair fall free.

"Anja... I will join our Beloved." Aricia spoke from beneath her own helmet, her hand reaching out to squeeze Anja's arm. Aricia's azure colored wolf eyes captured Namiri's gaze like a magnet and held her.

Anja nodded. "Go! He is angry Little Wolf... see to it that he does nothing stupid." She spoke. "Remind him he *is* King."

Aricia laughed softly. "He hates when we do that... but I will try."

Namiri could only gasp in shock as Aricia moved with incredible speed and sprinted away from them directly into the fray below them on the ridge. Her eyes turned back to Anja as she dropped to one knee in front of her and Nalmos. She appeared completely unfazed at the battle that was raging only a hundred meters away and her jade colored wolf eyes were simply incredible. Namiri saw the huge man behind her touch his helmeted head and nod.

"Anja... my Queen." He spoke formally as was his way when not alone with her or among family and friends. "Duewa and your medics are down and she is establishing a triage area four hundred meters from our location. Security is being established as we speak. We should begin moving the civilians out of the area while the King and the *Durcunusaan* deal with these fools."

"Que... you are a Queen?" Namiri gasped aloud.

Anja nodded her head as she looked at Nalmos and then back to Namiri. "We have ships landing as we speak and we have established a medical triage area behind us. You seem to be the one in charge of your people so if you would let them know to begin moving that way I would appreciate it." Anja turned to Atropos. "Give the order Atropos. Anyone not actively engaged... start ushering our people back out of the kill zone."

Anja saw Nalmos sniff the air slightly and gaze at her. "You are... you are not entirely Lycavorian... yet you... you are a female Alpha." He stammered the words.

"There is a story to that." Anja explained. "One which we can talk about later." She looked at Namiri. "We know of your people from the Pralor Tobia..."

"Tobia?" Namiri gasped once more. "You... you know of her? Of the Pralor people?"

Anja nodded her head. "She is with the medical triage unit. I would ask that you inform your people we are not the enemy and we are here to help... but if they do something stupid we will not hesitate to kill them. Our husband and mate is not in the best of moods since we arrived here. He gets upset when people try to hurt or kill our people. You saw that for yourself."

Nalmos stared at her in incredulity. "That... that was your husband and mate?" He rasped.

Anja smiled brightly. "Yep. Big, reckless lug that he is. We love him though." Anja's words caused Atropos to chuckle softly.

"You... you called him King." Namiri stammered. "And he..." She looked at Atropos. "He called you Queen."

Anja nodded. "We are from the Lycavorian Union." She spoke proudly and Nalmos saw Atropos's chest swell with pride at her words. "We've come to take you home."

VENTORI ZARAH'S AMBUSH SITE

Though it would not become known to Zarah Leonidas for many months, this day was the day that she earned complete and utter faith in her abilities from her father, the only man outside of her brother Androcles whose opinion mattered most to her. Young though she may have been, Zarah's connection to Andro had bestowed gifts upon her that she would not have otherwise had. Many who were close to the Leonidas family, mainly the *Durcunusaan*, took notice of this closeness and the extra training that Androcles had given to his sister through the years. It was these gifts that she had cultivated and perfected over the same years. Androcles already knew what his sister could do, he already trusted in her abilities, for Zarah knew he would never have put her in charge of training the High Coven riders in hand to hand combat had he not. Since those horrific moments, once Lucia had come into her life and saved her from the abyss, all Zarah wanted to do was show her father that she was not a broken child. That she was still the young woman she had been. His love for her was unquestioned, Zarah knew that, it was his faith in her recovery and her combat abilities that she knew worried him the most. Zarah Leonidas would lay her father's doubts about her to rest for all time today. And thanks to her adopted elven grandfather Vengal's senior *Durcunusaan* Scouts, the word would spread quickly that Zarah Leonidas, like her father and brother Androcles, had no mercy or pity whatsoever in her petite body for her enemies.

The moment they had materialized on Ventori, Vengal's senior men could only look on with awe and approval as Zarah and Lucia immediately flew into action. The two of them were like a single entity as they issued orders and men and women began to take up positions. When the second group materialized, Lucia was directing them to their positions almost before they had fully formed. There was no hesitation on their part in the least; they spoke with confidence and purpose and with a single voice. It was Zarah Leonidas who noticed Radem first and she moved right up to the Evolli assassin without regard as others looked on. They shared several whispered words and Radem bowed his head in respect to her at the end of their conversation. All of them noticed that Radem then became Zarah and Lucia's shadow.

While the information would never be made public nor would it be acknowledged in the least by anyone who knew the truth, by the Royal Order of King Martin Leonidas, Radem had been assigned as the permanent protector of Zarah and Lucia Leonidas. This role suited Radem just fine. New found faith and hope flowed through Radem as it now flowed through his people and at Martin Leonidas' request, Radem had sworn to teach Zarah and Lucia everything he had ever learned in his years of warfare, including his unequaled skills as an assassin. It would become known among the Royal family and all of the *Durcunusaan* as time passed, but those with Martin and the others right now already knew that Radem's actions had earned him a place of high honor. For the first time in the history of the Union, an Evolli would now walk the walls of power within the Union freely and forever have a place of honor and respect among the family that had once been so hated and feared among his people. This information would finally make its way back to the Evolli homeworld and the planets they claimed in the months ahead and it would forever seal the trust and loyalty of an entire people that had once been bitter and savage enemies. This knowledge would spur the Evolli to great things in the future to come and no matter where a Leonidas walked within Evolli space they would be honored and trusted friends. Also unknown to Radem or anyone else at this time, the moment he had killed Pusintin and fulfilled his sacred oath to Androcles, he had secured his own bloodline's future. From this day and for millennia to come, the bloodline of the Evolli Holnari Convoasce family would be tied to the Leonidas Royal family, never to be sundered or dismissed. Future generations of both families would walk together, fight together and call themselves kindred souls.

The moment the Kintaur soldiers rushing headlong through the timber came into the kill zone, Zarah Leonidas acted without hesitation and sprang their ambush. None of the Kintaur troops moving through the timber were rookies; all of them had seen some form of combat through the years. However, the last few years had seem them doing nothing but collecting prisoners and slaves who did not fight back and none of them had ever been on the receiving end of such a vicious and unforgiving ambush by forces with greater firepower and one thing that the Kintaur lacked.

Purpose.

The ambush was meticulously executed, regardless of the fact it had essentially been thrown together at the last minute. This was what the Spartans within the Union excelled at however, and this is why they may have lost battles throughout the years, but they had never lost a war. A full minute of sustained fire from over forty P190 A4s had shredded the Kintaur forces like so much Swiss cheese. Going one step further than what her father had wanted and pulling from her brother's knowledge and tactics he had used, Zarah had laid a perfect S type ambush. No matter which direction the Kintaur tried to run, they were slaughtered and chopped to pieces from hidden Spartans. It was over before the Kintaur truly knew what was happening and then Zarah rose to her feet and surveyed the smoky terrain before her.

"All teams report!" Zarah barked into her implant.

"Team One... no casualties."

"Team Two... we're good."

"Team Three... just peachy."

"Team Four... a little more resistance would have been nice."

Zarah couldn't help but smile and look at Lucia as Lucia rose to her feet next to her. "We did it." Zarah muttered softly not realizing that, also from this day forward, she had the combat unit she had always wanted.

"Do not delay Zarah and Lucia." Radem's voice echoed softly from behind them and Zarah and Lucia turned to look at him as he was changing magazines in his A4 smoothly and without conscious thought. "We must reunite with your father as quickly as possible. They will engage within moments. Surprise and speed is our friend at the moment and we must make every use of it."

Zarah nodded and began moving, lifting her hand and tapping her jaw implant. "Sweep and kill any survivors!" She ordered. "No prisoners people! They were hunting our kind and *carians* knows what they intended! Let us make a statement of our own! Thirty seconds and then we break for my father's position!"

The first true test of Zarah and Lucia Leonidas' combat ability and leadership capability had been proven. There would be many more in the future to come.

VENTORI ORBIT

ULU *REPULSE*

"...Heard the General!" Nemoa spoke as she rose from her chair. "Tactical... give me a place to shoot and kill all power on that ship except life support! What's their hull made of?"

"Standard Duetronium Captain! Guess they use it out here like we do back home!" The Sensor Officer barked out. "Still running with no shields!"

"Fucking fools!" Nemoa spoke softly.

The Tactical Officer was already prepared. "Here!" He announced as he brought up the holo image of the Kintaur ship. "Focused, tight beam shots from the five forward Type I turrets Captain! Take them in a tractor beam and then punch their engine core right out the bottom of their ship before it even has time to explode!"

"How many will that kill TO?" Nemoa asked.

The man looked up at her. "Forty-seven are currently in their engineering section." He told her. "None of them will survive."

"Captain!" The COM officer shouted. "Captain... I think they have figured out General Simpson stopped in to say hello and took their Tasmor prisoner!"

"*Sibfla!*" Nemoa hissed. "Ops...?"

"They appear to be channeling power to their forward weapons array Captain!" The man answered.

"That's it then!" Nemoa spoke. "Ops... hit them with a tractor! TO... bring turrets two through five to bear. Tightest beam focus we can obtain! Weapons officer...?"

"Standing by!" The voice echoed before Nemoa even got to finish her statement. She smiled to herself. She loved her crew.

"Captain... the Kintaur ship is hailing us!"

"Put it up." Nemoa spoke.

The face of Gars appeared and if Nemoa was any judge of character he was not happy.

“You have taken my ship within some sort of holding beam!” He screamed. “Release us at once or I will open fire and destroy your vessel!”

Nemoa chuckled. “Not likely ugly.” She told him. “We are about to punch your entire engine core out of your ship Gars. Prepare to engage your emergency power.”

“What?!” He screamed even louder. “What...”

“Weapons!!” Nemoa barked. “Fire!”

The forward section of the *REPULSE* came together in two points and on the edges of those two points were two of the five forward Type I batteries she carried. Two hundred meters further back were the next two, and it was these four Type I batteries that flared instantly and released the tightest configuration of plasma based beams that they were capable of. Powered as they were by the *REPULSE*'s Hyper Matter Fusion Core there was never any question in what they would do. Compared to normal beam operation, these were like firing four, torpedo thin beams of staggering power. The four beams struck the *BRIGHT STAR* about two thirds of the way back from the bridge and all of them saw Gars and his bridge crew stagger wildly. The hole image cut out then as the four tightly concentrated beams of plasma burned through the hull of the *BRIGHT STAR* almost instantly. They carved their way through the hull, directly into the main engineering section and struck the ship's main engineering core square on top of its mounts. The colossal force of the plasma weapons began to burn through the core shielding almost immediately, but their kinetic energy also served to rip the engine core from its mounts and rammed it further down into the ship's superstructure until it finally punched out the bottom of the Kintaur vessel six decks below them. Four seconds later, the plasma beams reached the still active core and the explosion that followed lit up the area of space for a full ten seconds.

“Report!” Nemoa barked.

“The Kintaur ship has established emergency power!” The Sensor Operator yelled. “They have activated emergency force fields in both hull breaches! They are well trained at least!”

“Imminent death has that effect!” Another crew member barked out.

“The core exploding has filled the area with Neutron Particle Radiation and I'm adjusting the sensors to compensate!” The SO announced.

“Neutron particle radiation!” Nemoa exclaimed. “Their core was nuclear?”

“No sir!” The Sensor Operator answered. “Not in the same sense we know of nuclear power! Whatever they have powering their ships is based in part on the much older nuclear plants of Earth's oceangoing ships! But it is not a full nuclear power system.”

“Argh!” Nemoa shook her head. “Spare me the details for now. Active scan of the entire area! Get as much information as we can on whatever they were using to power their ship! Queen Anja will want it for sure! Their emergency shields are holding?”

“Yes Captain!” The TO replied. “Tractor beam is solid as well!”

“Very well... helm... take us to a point halfway between here and the planet!” Nemoa ordered as she moved back to her chair. “Then we will maintain station until Queen Anja says we are safe. Make sure everyone onboard has updated radiological immunizations and make damn sure we are not being irradiated!”

“Chief Medical Officer has confirmed Captain.” The Ops Officer spoke.

“Very well. We are out of it for now people... but let's take up an overwatch of the system.” Nemoa spoke. “All sensors to active mode! Anything comes into this system and doesn't squawk from the Union I want to know about it! Our job isn't done folks... let's stay on our toes!”

VENTORI

Their Beloved was angry.

So much deep emotion flowed through him since they had rescued For'mya and she had returned to their arms. Unlike at any time since they had been together Martin now held nothing back from his Queens. Any of his Queens. His words to Tinra, words he thought none of them would ever hear; they were the embodiment of

his deep feelings for all of them. Now... now all of them could swim within his mind and feel his utter and complete commitment, desire and love for each of them.

He was them and they were him.

And the love and unrequited desire for him alone was returned by his Queens a hundred fold. There was one place within his mind that they would not go however. A place that he shared only with his son and his *mard fervon*. A place all of them had decided they did not want to go, for what was inside terrified them all. It was a place that held all of the horrors and power that he could unleash upon his enemies. A place that showed the lengths to which he would go to safeguard all of his family and his people. The destruction he would wrought if it meant that his family and his people were left alone to live in peace. Aricia Leonidas and her fellow lovers and Queens knew better than most that Martin Leonidas would be perfectly content to spend his days loving his Queens breathlessly and playing with his children. He would muddle through the more mundane tasks as King, make decisions that benefited all of their people and lead them by what his heart told him. There were very few however, that could possibly imagine the death and violence he would and could give free rein if it meant protecting that which he had come to love.

Aricia Leonidas was witnessing just a small portion of that this day.

All of the weeks and months spent searching for and finally rescuing their *Kinsoaurgai*, imagining the horrors and humiliation she had endured, and finally feeling her back within their embrace. It had been building in their husband and mate, and while he kept it tightly controlled they all knew it would come out soon enough. Coming out here to discover about their history, what had taken place on Onterom and now seeing his people being hunted by what were quite obviously violent and evil people had been the tipping point.

Martin Leonidas had had enough.

While they had not the time to set up a proper ambush because the Kintaur had moved faster than they thought, Lycavorian Spartans, truly anyone trained as a Spartan, could adapt on the fly instantly. When the Tasmor forces had begun to turn to face the advancing Kintaur, that is when they struck. Yet it was their beloved husband, mate and King that carried the day and the battle. Martin Leonidas had finally reached the end of his tolerance and the Kintaur suffered for it. Even as she moved along behind him, witnessing what he was doing, she could feel the thick emotion flooding through him and how it affected everyone around him. It made them act with perfect action.

Martin had shifted back to human form just before he fell upon the Kintaur troops, his yellow/gold eyes wide in savage anger, and his aura pulsing madly. The *Durcunusaan* troops with them had fought beside their King many times before for they were members of the King's personal 1st Spartan Attack Group. Androcles had sent men and women who he knew would not hesitate to follow his father anywhere. The *Durcunusaan* and regular troops of the 1st Spartan Attack Group were dedicated to their King in an almost fanatical manner. They had been at his side since their inception nearly twenty five years ago and none of them would willingly leave his command. They had fought beside their King before and they knew what he was capable of. These men and women, Lycavorian, Elf and Vampire, a mixture of other races as well, they moved far faster than the Kintaur could compensate for and before they could lift their weapons and react the battle was upon them in a very personal way. What she saw then, Aricia Leonidas would share with her fellow Queens without question. And it would give them an insight into the man who held their hearts and souls so tightly within his grasp.

His Etheric shield was fully active, encasing his form in a light blue and white glow that conformed to his body like a second skin over the new Mark VI ArmorPly Body Armor they all wore. He had shifted back to human form just as his massive paws touched the ground, right in the middle of a group of five Kintaur who were frozen in shock at the colossal beast that had just landed among their small party. Torma may have been circling the battlefield above in their *STRIKER* Mark II, but their combined Etheric shield was unlike anything that Aricia had ever seen with the exception of her son Androcles and Elynth. This had to be one of the skills they had taught themselves from the Ancient Tomes of Martin's grandfather Sumar. Something that all Praetorians appeared to be able to do.

The new Mark VI armor conformed to Martin's two hundred and forty pound body like a glove. Most of it was made from layers of flexible, tightly weaved material once referred to as Kevlar. In the many centuries since this material had come into existence, it had been changed many times she knew. Somehow, Benjamin's researchers at Dreamland had combined the best of both the Kevlar and the exquisitely weaved Drow Scout armor material called Tiriam. It was a simple material that the Drow had discovered in what was once Canada.

It was a fire resistant and shatterproof metal like substance that, when properly forged, was lighter than aluminum and very near unbreakable. Once this combination had been perfected, exceptionally thin layers of Dragon Armor were blended into the actual interlacing of the material and reinforcing the armor. Thin plates were then added to the chest area as well as the shoulder joints and shin area of the combat boots to provide additional protection. Aricia knew that this armor was now being mass produced on Earth and Apo Prime under the watchful eyes of Drow, Nodon and elven scientists for distribution as soon as it was ready. Several thousand sets of this armor had been sent to them and to Andro by Ben's people for use in the field. As with the earlier versions of the ArmorPly, the new armor conformed to its wearer within a matter of hours and retained this memory in its design. It was a snug fit for females, especially those who had larger than average chests like Anja and herself, but the discomfort was quickly forgotten when it was discovered that this armor allowed their bodies to breathe and move with far more freedom and relief.

Aricia reached her beloved mate just as he unleashed a roar of anger from under his full helmet, his dual wolf fangs fully extended and utterly terrifying to behold to the uninitiated. His yellow/gold eyes, such beautiful, expressive orbs to the women who loved him so, held nothing but death in them now. His *Nehtes*, extended to its full length before anyone even took notice, stabbed out with unerring accuracy and Martin drove it entirely through the chest of the closest Kintaur. Pinkish blood exploded out his back and Martin released the shaft as the Kintaur began to fall. What followed next wasn't like what they had witnessed on Enurrua, it was truly unlike anything Aricia Leonidas or the others had ever seen from their husband and mate, and it made her near glowing azure colored wolf eyes beam with unadulterated love.

The Kintaur had been chasing their people in tight groups spread out every ten meters or so. Martin had landed among the first group in the center of their formation and now he became a whirlwind of destruction. His armored hands came up and he snatched up the four remaining Kintaur soldiers in an Etheric wave and simply smashed them back to the hard ground with ghastly horrific force. The grunts and sounds of shattering bones and squishy flesh reached her ears as Martin turned instantly, forgetting the four now dead Kintaur in an instant. Ten meters away was another group of Kintaur and his left hand whipped out, a bluish Etheric wave of tight rippling outward and crossing the distance in two blinks of her eyes. She watched as that wave of Etheric power smashed into the group of six Kintaur and lifted them into the air. Four of their *Durcunusaan* then rose and lifted their A4s and sent deadly bursts of 12.7 mm rounds into each of the six Kintaur soldiers, killing them before they crashed back to the earth. Aricia could only watch in awe as her Beloved moved with almost magical grace and power. For a man of his size physically, he moved with speed most did not possess. He seemed to know where each group of Kintaur soldiers was without even looking across the expanse of the field. Etheric power rippled all around him, pulsing with life and devastating power. With each of his attacks, Kintaur died in groups. Whether he smashed them back into the unforgiving earth himself or he left them exposed for his men and women to kill with lethally precise shooting, it did not matter.

When Aricia saw their daughter Zarah lead her attacking unit from the flank she knew it was over for the Kintaur. Aricia and the others now knew of the connection that Zarah had with her brother Androcles. What he had done in order to protect her, and what he had passed to her in acting how he did. The Etheric power flowed around Zarah's arms and hands, Lucia's Etheric whips snapping out at different times fueled by her passion and emotion, as they moved as one entity to converge on where Martin was. They now knew that the Etheric power that flowed in all of them was fueled by their emotions and passion, and as it allowed Aricia to use her Etheric knives or less powerful versions of the Etheric diamonds, it allowed Lucia to use her whips as weapons. Though not actually within the physical realm, they appeared and acted as if they were and were just as lethal.

Martin had dropped among a final group of Kintaur by now and his sword was now in his hand. His Shi Viska burst into life, but remained on his arm as he used it like a shield. The front of the shield smashed into one Kintaur soldier's chest and even from her position a few meters behind him, Aricia's wolf ears heard the man's entire chest crunch as every bone in his upper body shattered. As his body lifted completely off the ground and sailed back, Martin brought his sword whipping around with blistering speed, totally decapitating another Kintaur in one powerful swing. He reversed his sword in a single blink and sent a lone pulse of deadly energy from the pommel, the thin yellow reddish beam of concentrated energy burning entirely through another's Kintaur's upper body. Aricia knew he had been training with the new sword ever since Enurrua and Avi had tinkered with the charge pack giving Martin another ten shots before he had to replace the small power

cell. Martin whirled around and drove the edge of his Shi Viska into the midsection of another Kintaur just as Zarah reached her father and saw the lone remaining Kintaur raising his weapon to shoot her father in the back.

Zarah's hands closed around the barrel of the weapon and she wrenched it from his hands with a snarl of intense anger, stunning the large Kintaur with the speed and viciousness of her attack. Zarah then reversed the weapon in her grip and used the butt to drive into his face with all of her wolf and vampire power combined. The Kintaur's face caved in with a sickening sound and Zarah dropped the weapon instantly and stepped into a ridge hand strike directly over his throat before the scream of pain ever escaped his lips. That one blow crushed the bones and cartilage in his throat and his hands reached for his neck as his pain filled eyes bugged out of his head when he could no longer breathe. It didn't matter for Lucia swept up beside him and drove one of her dual blades into his chest with all of her strength and then ripped it out to the side, spraying his purple colored blood over the ground around them.

Martin's head whipped around then and he saw his daughter and her devoted lover and wife Lucia beside him. His mouth split wide in a toothy smile, his fangs ever so prominent as he gazed on them in happiness. His yellow gold wolf eyes quickly turned and took stock of what was happening and he saw Zarah's men and women quickly mixing in with his *Durcunusaan* and sweeping the area of any and all Kintaur that had turned and fled. He turned back to face his daughter and the one he would call adopted daughter for millennia to come as half a dozen other *Durcunusaan* closed in around them and encircled their King, Queen and two Princesses, their weapons facing out and searching for any threats. Given what had taken place over the last months, no one among the *Durcunusaan* were going to take chances with the lives of their Royal Family.

"Bout time you got here!" He barked loudly just as Aricia moved up behind them, her *Nehtes* clutched in her hand but unused. "I thought I was gonna have to chase them all the way to the river!"

Aricia saw the light of love on Zarah's face as her father embraced her and Lucia in his arms. Aricia knew then that their daughter had almost fully healed now. She would always carry with her what had come to pass, but with Lucia's unquestioned love and the commitment of her family, she had beaten back the horrors and begun her road into the future. And Aricia, like her son Androcles, sensed that Zarah's and Lucia's love would open the door for both of them to find the one man who would love them both breathlessly and without regret.

Martin reached up quickly and tapped his jaw. "Colin!" He barked. "Report!"

Colin had been the only one of his personal team to accompany him to the surface and Martin began to search the field looking for his friend.

"What the fuck do you want me to report?" Colin's voice barked right back in the clear through their implants. "Why did we even bother coming down here? We could have sat on the sidelines and drank beer or drinks with little umbrellas while we watched you open the whup ass on these fools! That would have been much more fun!"

Martin's keen eyes finally found Colin Walsh standing roughly a hundred and fifty meters to his right and holding his A4 propped on his hip, several Kintaur bodies bunched on the ground around him and two other *Durcunusaan*, both of whom happen to be vampires. He grinned quickly.

"Give me eyes Colin!" Martin told him. "All the way back to where they had their initial camp! Make sure we got all of them homey."

Martin saw Colin nod his head even across the distance. "Rules Skipper?" He asked.

"If you find any others, take them out with extreme prejudice!" Martin hissed. "These bastards were here to take our people as slaves. That burns my ass!"

"Consider it done!" Colin snapped. "Be back soon!"

Martin watched him speak to the two others who were with him and then they blurred off into the forest, disappearing like the ghosts they were trained to be. He turned back and looked at Zarah just as Radem moved stealthily up behind them. He nodded his head to the Evolli who was now their protector. "Did you get them all Zar?" Martin asked Zarah.

Zarah nodded. "They walked right into our kill zone father." She answered as Aricia came up beside her and began to inspect her and Lucia for any injuries as any of her mother's would do. "None of them survived."

"Get your people in place and secure the landing zone for our ships then." Martin told her. "Make it a standard H perimeter Zar and have your medic make sure no one is hurt. Get them back to your mother if they are. We don't know what ugly little bugs might be on this planet that we have not been exposed to."

Zarah nodded. "We'll get it done Papa." She said.

"When you got them settled in, you and Lucia move back to the main perimeter they are establishing and find me." Martin said. "Something tells me we are going to be here for a few days and we'll need to institute more permanent Intel and positions."

Zarah nodded her head, leaned up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek and then took Lucia's hand. They both gripped Radem's arms and blurred off, carrying their Evolli guardian with them without question.

Martin looked at Aricia as he took his helmet off and he stared into her azure blue eyes as the high of combat began to slowly bleed off. She looked very imposing in her armor and helmet as did all of his Queens. She was looking at him intently and he lowered his helmet. "What?" He asked softly.

"Are you quite finished taking unnecessary risks?" Aricia asked him while trying to remain straight-faced and not let the fact that his display had stirred her wolf blood intensely, not to mention Anja's and For'mya's because they were so tightly bound together.

"I did what needed to be done!" Martin quipped.

"Oh really?" Aricia retorted as she stepped out his line of sight and motioned with her hand behind them.

Martin's yellow/gold wolf eyes saw where she was motioning and they grew wider. The path of destruction he had wrought extended back nearly two hundred meters, with at least six different groups of now dead Kintaur between where his rampage had begun and where he now stood. Martin finally turned and focused on Aricia's own beautiful wolf eyes.

"Oops." He managed to stammer.

Aricia couldn't help but laugh at his expression and comment as she took off her own helmet and the half dozen *Durcunusaan* soldiers who were within ear shot of them began laughing as well. She stepped into his embrace and nuzzled his cheek with devotion as relief began to spread outward now that the fighting was over.

Namiri Daret could only sit near the massive fallen tree and look upon the battlefield in utter disbelief with Nalmos beside her. They were ignoring the mass of bodies moving past them as Lycavorians from Ventori were being guided or carried by their kindred brothers and sisters towards where Duewa had already begun to set up the Field Triage Center. Most of them were still in a state of shock at what had happened and were simply going through the motions of following. Namiri however, she could not tear her eyes from the enormous Lycavorian after he had begun to cut his terrible path of destruction through the Kintaur soldiers. Though only twenty-three years old, Namiri Daret had seen plenty of battle with the Kintaur over the last five years. Never in all that time had she seen one man ravage them in such a way, using powers and skills she could not comprehend and had never seen before. She finally tore her eyes away and looked at Nalmos when she saw the two young women blur in motion away from where the Lycavorian stood with the reptilian man between them.

"Nalmos?" She gasped.

The Lycavorian looked at her, his turned wolf eyes were bright and clear. She could see the tips of his fangs protruding just beneath his upper lip. "I... I don't..."

"Nalmos... I thought you said there were no other Lycavorians! That you were the last of your kind!" Namiri exclaimed.

Nalmos nodded quickly. "That is... that is what we have always believed." He couldn't help but stammer.

"These others... they are not like you!" Namiri hissed.

Nalmos shook his head. "They are Lycavorians... but they are Alphas Namiri! Most of them that I can see anyway! There are many Beta wolves among them, but the majority of them are Alpha wolves! The most powerful of our kind Namiri; those we have thought long extinct!"

"How?" Namiri asked. "How can that... how can he do such things?"

Namiri Daret, unlike many of her people, had spent many weeks among the Lycavorians they had rescued before now. The long journey back to Tasmor space had allowed her to do this on many different occasions. She found the Lycavorian people to be proud and strong and in no way beneath them. Some of their scholars were just as intelligent as any Tasmor. She had developed several friendships among those they had

rescued and while her mother and all but one of her sisters frowned on this, Namiri had kept those friendships alive. She had been chosen to lead this ground mission because of these friendships and she had been the one to make contact with Nalmos and his people once they were on the ground. They had been speaking for two weeks before even arriving here and had developed a friendly relationship much like a father and daughter.

Nalmos shook his head. "I do not know Namiri." He told her. "All of our history and science has told us the Alphas died out long ago, before we even came here to Ventori. Only the Betas and the Omegas were left."

"Are you certain?" Namiri asked. "What... what about that one?" Namiri pointed to where Martin stood in the distance. "How is he able to do that? I have never seen one of your people able to do what he did Nalmos? He... I have never seen anything like what he was doing to the Kintaur."

"Namiri I don't know!" Nalmos exclaimed. "I'm not lying to you child. I... this is so... it's unbelievable! I would..."

Nalmos stopped talking and looked up, Namiri's eyes following his as the tall, thickly muscled Lycavorian stopped beside them. The strange looking full faced helmet covered all of his features except for his eyes and a small portion of his lips.

"Are you injured?" He asked as he looked at them. His voice was calm and carried a tone of respect and friendliness.

Nalmos shook his head quickly. "No." He managed to answer sensing right away that this was a young Alpha wolf.

"Though the battle is over, there may still be enemies in the area sir." The young Alpha told him. "I am *Enomotarch* Jontas Asear, third in command of the King's personal detail of *Durcunusaan*. We have established a secure area several hundred meters back. Please... I will escort you and your friend to safer surroundings. Queen Anja and Colonel Thoti's wife and mate Duewa will have already begun to give medical attention if it is needed and we will have food and fresh water very soon."

Nalmos glanced at Namiri and then back to the young Alpha Jontas. "The Tasmor... Namiri and her people... they have been helping us." He stated.

The young wolf nodded his head. "Yes sir... that has already been made known to us." He told them. "You... you are the leader of our people here yes?"

Nalmos rose to his feet, squeezing Namiri's hands as he did so. "They... they follow me yes." Nalmos answered.

Jontas nodded his head. "The King will want to speak with you sir."

"That man?" Nalmos asked. "That Alpha..." He motioned out into the field where Martin still stood with Aricia. "Who is he?"

"That is King Leonidas sir. He leads the Lycavorian Union with his Queens." The young wolf spoke proudly Nalmos noted, his chest almost swelling with pride under the incredible body armor that he wore. "We are his *Durcunusaan* as I said."

Nalmos looked at him with wide eyes as he just realized something. "You... you speak the ancient language of our people!" He gasped.

Namiri noted the young alpha looked delighted that Nalmos knew what he had said. "It is not so ancient anymore it seems sir." Jontas said.

"What... what does this word mean?" Namiri asked.

Nalmos looked at her. "*Durcunusaan*. In the ancient Lycavorian language... it means..." He looked at the young Alpha. "It means Wolves of the Blood."

The *Durcunusaan* motioned with his free hand. "Please... let us move away from the smell of death and have Queen Anja or one of her medical people look you both over."

Namiri noticed that the young man spoke to Nalmos with utter respect and gently reached out to take his arm when Nalmos almost stumbled as he began to move forward without question. Namiri took Nalmos's other arm as they began to move away from the field knowing she and her people had no real choice but to do what they were told at the moment. Whoever these new Lycavorians were, they were extremely well organized and trained and obviously did not see the Tasmor as a threat for all of her people still had their weapons. They had a right to think this way she knew, for they had just decimated an entire Kintaur platoon and had not even broken a sweat in doing so. Namiri glanced back quickly and saw the towering Lycavorian man standing beside the

stunningly beautiful raven haired female and speaking to her while circled by no less than six guards, all of whom were facing out and looking for danger.

As her eyes swept the area she saw other newcomers helping their fellow Lycavorians along and in one case she even saw one of the new Lycavorians carrying three children, one who was atop his broad shoulders and looking all around with delight, two others were in his arms, while their mother moved along just in front of him carrying the small baby. There was no hesitation on the parts of these new Lycavorians when it came to assisting their own people, and she even saw one carrying a much older woman in his arms. She could see her people moving along with them, still somewhat in shock had what had just taken place, for none of them had seen anything like it before. All of them smart enough to know however, that whoever these new Lycavorians were, they were no match for them and they were heavily outnumbered. Since these new Lycavorians did not seem to regard them as an enemy, that is the way the Tasmor wanted to keep it. They were helping the younger Lycavorian children as well as the older men and women right with the new Lycavorians. They would not act without orders from Namiri regardless and she had no intention of risking their lives in any way by attempting to do something stupid. These Lycavorians were obviously very technologically advanced, more so than even her own people and they were equipped with weapons and gear that she had never seen before. She doubted her small ground team would stand much of a chance against them if it came to a battle.

Namiri Daret had no idea her respect and knowledge of the Lycavorian people she had been helping for the last few years would lead her to wonders she never imagined she would experience.

ARIZONA

ORBIT OF VENTORI

“...Secure here Manda.” Martin spoke within the main holo disc on the bridge of the *ARIZONA*. “We’re establishing a hard base camp and perimeter now. You and Akemi prep whatever *MENKLA* transports you have and load them with spare uniforms, clothes, and whatever hot chow the Mess Chief can throw together. Tell Akemi to load up whatever Anuk feels they need in the way of medications and get them moving. I want them on the ground within the hour.”

Miranda nodded her head. “Consider it done.” She stated calmly. “Casualties Martin?” She asked knowing that only her bridge crew would hear her address him informally and they knew that their Admiral and her Drow wife and lover were two of only a handful who were allowed this.

Martin shook his head slowly. “Not among our people... but these Kintaur are wiped.” He answered. “Have your Wing G4 Officer come down Manda. I want the bodies of the Kintaur collected and treated with respect. Have him assign a detail to that. Whatever their reasons they fought bravely and well. Anja will give him a couple of her medics to do spot scans of their bodies and to make sure none of them are playing dead.”

Miranda nodded her head. “Done.” She spoke. “Captain Nemoa has taken the Kintaur ship under tractor and moved to the edge of the system. Apparently their engine core was based on some form of nuclear fusion and when they destroyed it, a cloud of radiation covered the area. Nemoa is playing it safe but she and her ship are secure.”

“Manda... de-shroud the Wing.” Martin told her. “Leave your flanking ships shrouded but I’m done sneaking around!”

Miranda leaned forward in her command chair. “I recommend against that.” She stated calmly not afraid to voice her opinion. “Three or four ships at most Martin but not the entire Wing. It could draw unwanted attention and put all of you at risk.”

Martin thought about that for a second then nodded his head. “Very well... I’ll let you handle it. Have the *ARC ROYAL* and three others de-shroud then and move closer to the planet. Deploy the Wing as you see fit.”

“Martin I...” Miranda began to speak.

“That is your realm up there Manda!” Martin told her. “It’s why Ben and I gave you the job. This is my realm down here. I expect you to tell me to stick it in my ear when I get stupid. Ben does all the time.”

Miranda chuckled as did most of the *ARIZONA*'s bridge crew. She didn't pause or reflect on the subject for she knew Martin would not. "Our guests up here still have not made any move to indicate they know what is happening."

"That's bullshit!" Martin spoke. "They know what is going on down here. Send out an open COM message Manda. Find their channel and let them know who we are and what we are doing. Inform them that we got their officer off the Kintaur ship and what has taken place down here."

"We'll reveal that we can see them." Miranda said.

Martin nodded his head. "That doesn't matter now." He stated. "There's about three dozen Tasmor here on the ground with us that were helping our people run from the Kintaur. If they haven't communicated with their ships before now they will shortly. Tobia just touched down in the last *STRIKER* with Torma, Isheeni and Aurith. She knows them... she can talk to them."

"Understood." Manda spoke.

"Now tell me why that big bastard countermanded my orders to ventilate that Kintaur ship Manda?" Martin asked.

Miranda smiled. "Apparently Elder Valael found something when Danny and the others were downloading their computer core during the snatch mission. It indicated that the Kintaur knew the Tasmor were going to be here Martin."

Martin's eyes narrowed. "Really?"

Miranda nodded her head as E'dira moved up beside her, the data pad in her hand. "Elder Valael is currently going over the intelligence we got, but he is certain that the Kintaur knew the Tasmor were going to be here and what they were doing." E'dira spoke. "The Tasmor officer we rescued is... she was beaten and tortured harshly but she appears to be resilient and proud and she will survive."

"E'dira... did they...?" Martin began to ask.

E'dira nodded her head slowly knowing that her answer would dictate how Martin Leonidas dealt with the Kintaur in the future. "Yes... several different times according to the officer Martin. Emylea Daret is her name; First Commander of the Tasmor Defense Forces. She is strong however and is already requesting to be sent to the surface or back to her ships. She is the overall commander of this mission it seems. Her sister... a Namiri Daret... commands the ground force."

"Daret?" Martin asked. "Isn't that the name Tobia mentioned? The name of their so called Sovereign Regent or something?"

"Elder Valael confirmed this yes." Miranda said.

"Why does that strike me as odd? She sends two of her children on a mission so far away from their space at considerable risk?" Martin spoke.

"Elder Valael thought the same thing." Manda told him. "He is going through the entirety of the Kintaur ship's logs but it will take him several hours."

Martin nodded. "Have Avi help him Manda." He spoke. "Then have him come to the surface once we are established. I want to hear this. Is Zaala there?"

Zaala looked up from her station. "I am here Martin." She spoke up.

"Zaala... I want you and Chuess to rig up some portable power generators that are strong enough to operate a combined ground shroud shield and jamming nodes." Martin told her. "Send the specs to the *ARC ROYAL*'s bunch of Worker Drones so they can put them together and get them to us. I don't want your drones pulled away from their tasks."

Zaala nodded her head as she came to her feet. "That should only take us about an hour." She answered.

Martin nodded. "Good enough. Red should be done with her initial exams by then. This will be our forward base Manda. From here we're going to initiate searches of the nearby city and others in range. There has to be more of our people here and I intend to find them and bring them in. Have Akemi start shuttling the remainder of the *Durcunusaan* down to the surface as well."

"Understood." Miranda spoke. "I can QCR back home and have Union Command send a couple more of the newer *MENKLA IIs*. They can carry twice the load and three times the passengers. It will take them a few days to get here but they could come in very handy. It appears we're going to need the transport capability."

"Route them through Manne first Manda." Martin spoke. "And give them a full Tactical Wing as an escort. I got a feeling we are going to need them. I want them moving like yesterday afternoon!"

Miranda nodded her head. "I'll see to it." She said. "The Tasmor frigates appear to have atmospheric landing capability if our scans are accurate. Do we let them land?"

Martin nodded his head. "If they choose to yes. But put them down several clicks from where we are now. I want to see them coming if that is the case."

"I'll let Daniel and the rest of your team know to bring the Tasmor officer as soon as she is able to travel." Miranda spoke.

"Good enough. I'm going to go talk to the spokesman for this group here and try and find out what is going on. Contact me if you need anything or we get any other visitors trying to make Ventori their vacation home." Martin spoke.

Miranda nodded with another chuckle. "Will do."

"Spartan One clear." Martin said just before he ended the transmission.

VENTORI ADHOC BASE

"...All the way back to their camp." Colin told Martin as they stood around the portable table that now held a holographic version of the entire area around them for fifty kilometers. "I dropped TAP cameras every few hundred meters and they are all online."

"Nothing?" Martin asked him.

Colin shook his head. "If there were any back at their main camp they aren't there now." He replied. "We detected probably half a dozen on the short range sensors, but they were long gone when we got there."

Martin nodded his head. "No worries." He stated. "I'll have Torma and the others find them." He stated.

Zarah leaned over the table from beside her father and pointed to several locations on the image. "I have established OPs at these four locations father." She told him. "Six member teams that have whatever heavy weapons we brought with us. The landing zone is completely secure at the moment. We'll need to add more when we get more boots on the ground father, but for now mother will have no worries landing whatever ships we need."

Martin nodded his head in approval. "Excellent." He spoke. "Colin... have four teams of four set up on this trail leading back here. I want a clean route from here to the landing zone. Our people have been running enough it seems and they are done running. These Kintaur assholes don't seem bothered at inflicting damage against innocents and I won't let them do that anymore."

"I'll see to it Skipper." Colin said.

Martin turned slightly as Jontas led the much older Lycavorian and Tasmor female up to their small group. He knew each of his personal *Durcunusaan* team and treated them a tad bit more casually than everyone else. "Jontas... what's up?" He spoke.

"Milord... this is Nalmos." The *Durcunusaan* officer spoke. "He leads these men and women and..."

Nalmos dropped to one knee in front of Martin, bowing his head in obvious deference. "I submit to your will as an Alpha of our people." Nalmos spoke clearly. He didn't see Martin's eyes, and the eyes of everyone else grow wide at this display and Martin quickly reached out and took Nalmos by his shoulders.

"What the hell?" Martin exclaimed loudly. "You are Lycavorian and you submit to no one." Martin told him firmly as he pulled Nalmos to his feet and the older man looked at Martin.

"But you... you are an Alpha." Nalmos stammered, not really knowing what to expect. All of their history scrolls and legends of the Alphas from their past told him that Alpha Wolves were dominant and aggressive in everything they did.

"And that doesn't make me any more important than anyone else." Martin answered him as he helped Nalmos to back to his feet and held the smaller man by his shoulders. "You make it sound as if we are somehow better than you."

Nalmos stared at him in shock. He glanced between Jontas and Martin several times before meeting Martin's gaze. "You... so many of you are Alphas!" He stuttered. "Alpha wolves are... they have never existed"

on Ventori in our entire time here! Almost a hundred thousand years our people have lived here and no Alpha wolf has ever existed in all that time. They are... they are only in our history books and... and our legends.”

“How is that possible?” Martin asked him with a stunned expression.

Nalmos shook his head quickly. “I was... I was going to ask you the same question.” He stated. “You are... you are the King of our people?”

Martin sighed heavily and rolled his eyes. “That is one of the names people use to refer to me.” He stated. “I hate it personally... but...”

Zarah elbowed her father in the side. “Father...” She gasped aloud.

Martin grinned and looked at her before turning back to Nalmos. “This is my daughter Zarah.” He said.

Zarah reached out and took Nalmos’s hands in hers and stepped close to him, brushing her cheek against his in the wolf form of greeting. Nalmos looked at her with wide eyes, clearly smelling that she was an alpha female, but also that she was not entirely wolf. It also thrilled him that they seemed to know many of the ancient customs of their people. “It is an honor to meet you sir.” Zarah told him. “We never thought to discover our people so far from home and it is a joy... truly.”

“Home?” Nalmos asked her looking once more at Martin.

“That’s a long story.” Martin said with a smile. “...One that I can explain later if you don’t mind.” He looked at Namiri. “And who is this?”

“I am Commander Lieutenant Namiri Daret of the Tasmor Defense Forces!” Namiri spoke immediately. “I demand to know who you are, what you are doing on Ventori and what are your intentions?”

“Namiri!” Nalmos gasped in shock though not seeing Martin smile as he took in her proud display and the strength she had for demanding such a thing. “You must show respect! They saved our lives!”

“We do not know why they saved us!” Namiri exclaimed. “We don’t know who they are or where they come from! We...”

“Should remember your mother’s teachings and follow her rules of conduct Namiri Daret.” Tobia’s voice echoed softly from behind Martin. He had smelled her coming and turned his head slightly to watch her walk up. Namiri’s eyes grew wide in shock as she saw her.

“Tobia!” Namiri gasped in sincere astonishment. She didn’t hesitate however and stepped right up to Tobia grasping her hands.

Tobia smiled warmly as she gripped Namiri’s hands tightly and brought her forehead to Namiri’s for a brief moment as was the Tasmor way of greeting friends and family. “It has been a very long time since I saw you last Namiri Daret. You are even more beautiful now than I remember.”

Namiri blushed under the tanned color of her skin and squeezed Tobia’s hands. “You are... you are looking well Tobia.”

All of Saydia’s daughters knew of the relationship Tobia had shared with their mother. Though it had been torrid and brief, all of them still thought of Tobia as a treasured friend and confidant.

“Your mother?” Tobia asked her bringing up a hand to touch her cheek. “Your sisters?”

“We...” Namiri began.

“Ah... Tobia?” Martin chimed in.

Tobia glanced at him. “Yes... forgive me Martin.” She turned back to Namiri. “Namiri... we need your help.” She told her. “Martin and his people are not your enemies. They are here only because we discovered that Lycavorians occupied this planet. We did not know you would be here. We were coming to investigate the ruins of the cities here and...”

“And any survivors we can find.” Martin said seeing Namiri’s eyes turn to look at him.

“You are... you are not from this quadrant of space are you?” Namiri asked.

Martin grinned sheepishly. “It’s that obvious huh?” He asked.

“You... you destroyed an entire Hunting Cadre of Kintaur warriors without a single loss of life.” Namiri gasped with wide eyes. “That... no one has ever done that before. Who are you people?”

Tobia squeezed her hands tightly causing Namiri to turn back and look at her. “Martin’s people rescued Emylea from the Kintaur ship...”

“Emylea!” Namiri gasped looking between Tobia and Martin and then back to Tobia. “She is...”

“She is safe.” Tobia answered. “And she is requesting to be brought here. As soon as the medical people on our ship clear her they will escort her down.”

Namiri looked at Martin. "You... how did you... you took her from their ship?" She asked in astonishment. "How did... how did you do this?"

"Does it matter?" Martin asked her. "She is safe. The Kintaur bastards used her badly if what I understand is correct... but she is strong willed your sister and..."

Namiri's eyes grew wide. "They took her against her will!" She almost shouted. "I must see her! I must go to her! Tobia you know what..."

Tobia pulled Namiri into her embrace. "It will be alright child." She said looking at Martin's questioning look. "If they... if the Kintaur were able to rape her... Emylea will lose her command and all rank and honor as an officer of the Tasmor Defense Force."

"What the hell for?" Martin snarled loudly, his anger surging to the front and causing Namiri to turn and look at him.

"It is a sign of weakness to the Tasmor." Tobia said softly.

"She only allowed herself to be taken in order to give us time here on the surface to get to a safe area where the Kintaur would not follow us!" Namiri pleaded. "To save her ships and her crews! My sister is not weak!"

"Namiri... why are you here?" Tobia asked. "I know enough of your mother to know that she would never allow both you and Emylea to come this far out from Tasmor space without a larger force!"

Namiri shook her head. "We have a Task Force two light years from here. Just across the border. We were training when this mission was sent to us." She looked at Tobia. "The orders had authorization from my mother's office. We were to come here, extract Nalmos and his people and then leave!"

Nalmos nodded his head. "We have been sending distress calls to the known Tasmor relays in this system with the equipment that others of the Tasmor left behind for us." He stated. "We received a response two weeks ago, and two days later Namiri contacted me and told me they were coming. I moved those who follow me here over the last week in order to evacuate and within hours of Namiri arriving, these Kintaur showed up."

"That's convenient." Colin spoke up now.

Martin met his eyes with a knowing look. "You think." He said.

Namiri looked between the two men. "What... what are you saying?" She demanded.

"These Kintaur ass wipes knew you were coming here." Martin told her evenly. "We downloaded their computer core when we rescued your sister. Elder Valael noticed something in their COM logs that indicated they knew you were coming here; not just your ships but you and your sister specifically."

"That... that doesn't make any sense." Namiri said. "How could they know that? The orders had my mother's authorization!"

Martin looked at Tobia. "I thought I left all the back stabbing and grasps for power back in the Alpha Quadrant Tobia." He stated.

Nalmos's eyes grew wide in shock. "The Alpha Quadrant?" He almost shouted.

Namiri gazed at Martin in shock as well. "You... you came from the Alpha Quadrant?" She gasped. "That... that would mean you have Interstellar Drive capabilities!" Namiri's dark brown eyes narrowed and she looked at Tobia. "Tobia... you travel with them. How... how did you not know that...?" Namiri stepped back from her. "What is going on Tobia?"

Tobia reached for her hands. "Believe me child... my people are not as all powerful as you seem to think."

Martin chuckled softly. "True enough. You should have seen how surprised they were when we showed up in their backyard."

"Surprised is an understatement Skipper." Colin said with a grin.

Martin shook his head and reached out to touch the small control panel on the portable table. "Spartan One Actual to *ARC ROYAL* Actual." He spoke aloud causing Nalmos and Namiri to look at him with wide eyes for very different reasons. He glanced between them. "What did I say?" He asked.

"You... you are called Spartan?" Nalmos asked.

Martin nodded his head. "We are all Spartans." He answered. "It is part of our history... ever since my father. Why?"

"That... the term Spartan is... it is used in our history scrolls." Nalmos told him.

“It’s a common enough term.” Martin said.

Nalmos shook his head. “Not... not in the manner in which it is used.” He stated.

Akemi’s voice stopped any response from Martin. “*ARC ROYAL* Actual!” She replied. “Now is not a good time Milord. Our sensors indicate that a dozen ships of Tasmor design are closing on the Ventori system at high speed! They will revert from LSD travel within our zone of operation!”

Namiri’s shook her head slightly to clear her mind. “Our Task Force ships!” She told him. “Emylea’s Second Officer must have gotten a distress call out to them!”

“Why does the way you say that make the hair on the back of my neck shiver?” Martin asked her.

“If she got a distress call out then they will enter the system prepared to do battle with the Kintaur!” Namiri told him. “They will see the Kintaur ship that you crippled and think you are helping them!”

“Your orders King Leonidas?” Akemi asked.

“Can you talk to them Namiri?” Tobia asked quickly.

Namiri nodded her head. “Yes... once they are in the system.”

“Once they are in the system is too late.” Martin said calmly. “If they come in blasting Tobia... my people will return fire!”

“Namiri... your communication codes child!” Tobia said gripping her hands. “Your ships will not stand a chance against Martin’s ships. The Lycavorian Union’s ships are based on our technology! They will swat your ships from the stars if they are fired on!”

“How could they have your technology?” Namiri demanded. “We have been asking for centuries for you to give us...”

Tobia shook her head. “It is a long story Namiri; one that does not have anything to do with the Tasmor or the Kintaur. It has to do with mistakes made by my people and directed at Martin’s people from long ago. Please child... you know I would never do anything to endanger your people. Especially your mother. Martin’s people are not like mine. They will not hesitate to defend themselves if your ships attack when they enter the system. And your people will not stand a chance.”

The console on the table beeped madly and Miranda’s voice erupted from the small speaker. “*ARIZONA* Actual to Spartan One Actual! Martin... we have inbound Tasmor ships and they appear to be in some sort of attack formation! The *REPUSLE* is the only ship de-shrouded at the moment Martin! We haven’t moved into position to de-shroud the others like we decided!” Miranda’s voice was calm but all of them could tell there was a sense of urgency in her tone. “They’ll focus on the *REPULSE* unless we act Martin!”

Martin looked at Namiri evenly. “I will order my people to defend themselves if you do nothing Namiri Daret.” He told her. “Don’t think for an instant that they have a chance against us. The moment your ships begin firing I will order them obliterated from the stars!”

“Namiri!” Tobia exclaimed.

Namiri Daret stared into those dark brown orbs for a moment longer before making her decision. These men and women were not a threat to her or her people. They had proven that already this day and she would not destroy the truce that was now in place. She stepped up to the table.

“I need... I need to speak with my sister!” Namiri spoke firmly. “Our combined Central Command codes will be enough to let them know there is no danger.”

“I’ll have her brought to the bridge immediately! Stand by! We can...” Akemi answered instantly.

“General Simpson is patching her through via Medical Captain!” An unknown voice spoke from the background.

“Link her up!” Akemi ordered.

“Sister?” The new female voice erupted from the speaker. “Namiri!”

“Emylea!” Namiri exclaimed as her face became animated and bright. “Sister... are you...?”

“I am... I am sore sister... but I am alive and very safe.” Emylea answered. “Thanks solely to these men and women. You... you should see this ship sister... it is... by all the stars it is glorious!”

“Emylea... our Task Force is about to enter the system!” Namiri spoke. “We need to contact them or...”

“Or watch them blown from the stars.” Emylea answered. “Yes... General Simpson has explained to me what is going on. Captain Akemi... can you tune one of your transmitters to Sub Space frequency 3459.28. It is one of the emergency channels that all of our ships monitor at all times. My Command code is...”

TASMOR DEFENSE FORCE
ALTIA FALCON CLASS-WAR CRUISER
TDF SAKAR

The pride of the seven hundred ship Tasmor Combat Fleet.

The *TDF SAKAR* was the flagship of the Tasmor people and the personal ship of their Sovereign Regent. The *ALTIA FALCON CLASS*-War Cruiser was the most recent ship design to enter service with the TDF, and the most heavily armed and armored. She carried all of the most advanced technology that the Tasmor had available to them. Two thousand meters long with a beam of six hundred meters, she was the largest ship the Tasmor had ever built. In the ten years since the first had joined the TDF, forty-three more had been built and were now in service, with another twenty-six within two years of commissioning. The ship had been built to combat the growing Kintaur threat as well as other enemies that may have been out there among the stars.

At the moment however, the Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people did not care about any of this and was instead raging openly at one of her staunchest rivals. That she was incensed was easy enough for any of the people in the private conference room to see and with good reason as far as most of them were concerned.

Saydia Daret had been Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people for the last twenty-three years since the passing of her mother. Her ascension to the highest seat of power within the Tasmor Empire had been looked upon with great happiness by an almost unanimous count of the Tasmor people for her mother had been a beloved leader for her eighty-three year reign. Saydia Daret had been followed for years as her mother's successor and it was no surprise when she rose to the Regent's Chair. As the oldest and most beautiful of her mother's daughters, Saydia had garnered most of the attention while she grew. Everything about her was public knowledge and this afforded her special attention wherever she went. It also allowed her to protect her sisters from the limelight and enable them to lead somewhat regular lives. When she became Sovereign Regent Saydia immediately named her four sisters to positions of great status and honor that allowed them to help her govern their people. Saydia had used her appeal among the people and her intelligence to her advantage and she learned all there was to know about everything she was exposed to before being named Regent. She was a supremely intelligent woman as well as an exceptional warrior in her own right. She had led over a dozen battles herself against Kintaur forces in key victories for the Tasmor Defense Forces. She was well liked by those within the TDF for she was one of their own, and she was well respected by the Tasmor Council of Governors.

Saydia Daret stood just under five foot ten inches in height and her hundred and thirty-five pound body was all muscles and curves. She had large and very firm breasts, a slim waist and exceptionally long legs. She had prided herself on her physical condition and even after giving birth to six daughters, she maintained the figure of a woman forty years her junior and was still a stunningly beautiful woman who most Tasmor men would kill for a night with. At the moment however, Saydia Daret was using her slight height advantage and her position as Sovereign Regent to tear into her most senior and powerful rival and The Chief Counsel of the Tasmor people.

"...Tell me what you were thinking Perlyea!" Saydia barked loudly now. "They are my daughters! You put them at extreme risk by sending them here knowing what could await them! How dare you decide this without my knowledge?"

"They are both members of the TDF Saydia." The woman answered her evenly. "And by all accounts they are among the best at what they do!"

"They are my youngest daughters!" Saydia screamed at her. "I do not care that they are the best at what they do! You do not have the authorization to sanction military missions! And certainly not one that sends two of my daughters off into unknown space without proper force and support!"

"My TDF Military Advisor does however." Perlyea answered.

"Your military advisor has never seen a day of combat against the Kintaur in her life! And nor have you! You are a politician Perlyea!" Saydia shouted. "She is just as ignorant as you when it comes to military operations! Ordering the Duty officer to transmit the orders to their Task Force is not within her realm of activity or authority!"

“As Chief Counsel to the Tasmor people I have a right to insure the preservation of our people!” Perlyea snapped.

“You do not have the right to endanger our people!” Saydia snapped right back. “Sending two Patrol Frigates to Ventori was beyond stupid!”

“We needed the mission to remain low profile and the amount of people we were extracting did not call for anything larger than a Patrol Frigate.” Perlyea spoke.

“Extracting Lycavorians from Ventori is not low profile!” Saydia raged. “It needs to be done properly! You should have come to me when you discovered this group! We could have planned an operation that would not have seen two of my daughters placed in danger without need!”

“As Chief Counsel I did not feel it needed to be brought to you for approval!” Perlyea said. “That is my right as well as Chief Counsel to the Council of Governors.”

Saydia stepped right up into her face. “I will tell you what is your right Perlyea!” She hissed angrily. “If my daughters have been harmed in any way, even one scratch, I will hold you responsible and I will insure you pay.”

“Are you threatening me Sovereign?” Perlyea asked her.

“Yes you bitch!” Saydia screamed at her.

It was then the near six foot tall Tasmor woman with light caramel colored skin and long black hair stepped forward from the wall near the door. She wore the standard light body armor of the TDF and the sidearm on her right hip with the long bladed knife on her left.

“My Regent...” She started to speak.

“Remove her from my presence Anthylea!” Saydia barked as she turned away. “I will deal with her and the Council of Governors when we return! We...”

The loud chime in the conference room prevented her from finishing and everyone looked toward the internal speakers.

“Sovereign Regent... our sensors are detecting a large, unknown ship within the Ventori system. It does not match any known ship configurations we have in our data base.” The female voice spoke. “We are also detecting a Kintaur Medium Cruiser in the system. Long range sensors indicate it is without main power but we are still too far to determine anything else.”

“I’m on my way!” Saydia snapped. “She pointed at Perlyea. “Bring her and her cronies Anthylea! If my daughters are dead... then I will insure they die ten seconds after I discover this.”

Saydia didn’t hesitate and headed out of the conference room for the bridge of her flagship.

BRIDGE OF THE SAKAR

“...Still can’t determine the configuration of the ship!” A voice spoke from one side of the bridge. “I’ve never seen anything like it!”

“Keep searching the databanks!” The Tasmor Captain barked from her slightly inclined chair on the right side of the bridge. “Status of weapons and shields?”

“Shields at full power!”

“Weapons standing by!”

The large double doors to the bridge opened and Saydia entered at a brisk walk. The female Captain rose to her feet as Saydia looked directly at her. “Speak to me Drenia!” She hissed in a more subdued and friendly tone of voice. “What is happening?”

“We don’t know anything yet.” Drenia answered immediately. “Our long range sensors cannot give us precise scans of the ship.”

Saydia looked at her. “We are in range.” She stated. “Why not?”

Drenia shook her head. “Something is scrambling the sensors. The ship matches nothing like I have ever seen. It is the largest ship I have ever encountered Saydia. If what scans we do have are accurate it is over two thousand five hundred meters long Regent.”

Saydia looked at her with wide eyes not even registering the fact Drenia had used her name. They were close friends and Saydia demanded Drenia act in this way. "Is it... could it be Pralor?" She asked.

Drenia shook her head. "Unless they have designed a smaller combat ship that we are not aware of... no. However it is..."

"What?" Saydia asked.

"It is radiating something very similar to Pralor Power signatures Regent Daret." Drenia answered.

"Similar but unlike them in any way that I have studied."

"The Kintaur ship?" Saydia demanded.

"It is operating on emergency power only." Drenia answered. "This new ship appears to be holding it in some sort of immobilizing beam. We are detecting no engines emissions from the Kintaur ship at all. But we have detected two hull breaches. One above their engine core and one below. Both have emergency force fields in place. It appears... it appears as if the Kintaur ship has been deprived of its main engine."

Saydia looked at her oddly. She was not unfamiliar with ship combat and operations and she had never heard of this. "Deprived?" She asked. "What do you mean Drenia?"

Drenia Corllor had been the Captain of Saydia's flagship for the better part of ten years. The Sovereign Regent was a taskmaster and demanded the finest from her ship and crew, yet she was also fair and even tempered. She trusted Drenia to train and lead the crew and maintain their readiness.

"It is unlike anything I have ever seen Sovereign." Drenia answered. "The engine core of the Kintaur ship has somehow been literally removed from the ship. It's as if some giant hand simply punched through the entire ship and took their main engine with it."

"How soon before we enter the system." Saydia asked.

"Fifty-three seconds Sovereign." Drenia answered.

"Target the Kintaur ship first!" Saydia barked. "Destroy it completely Drenia. Then break into Attack Pattern Domrae and we will destroy this new ship as well. And begin scanning for our frigates and any of our people on the surface when we enter the system."

"You... you wish to attack this unknown ship Regent?" Drenia gasped.

"If they have not destroyed the Kintaur ship then they must be helping them." Saydia spoke. "Our frigates must have disabled the cruiser and then they called for reinforcements! Why else would they have the Kintaur ship in a holding beam?"

"Regent... this ship is six hundred meters larger than the *SAKAR*." Drenia said. "It is larger than any ship we have in our fleet. We..."

"Captain Drenia...!" The female voice echoed from the opposite side of the bridge. "I am receiving an Urgent Situation Gamma transmission on Sub Space frequency 3459.28! It's the emergency channel!"

Drenia turned to face the woman. "From who?" She demanded.

"It bears the Command authorizations of both Emylea and Namiri Daret!" The woman answered.

Saydia's eyes grew wide. "Open the channel!" She ordered without hesitation.

"...Approaching Tasmor Defense Forces ships! This is First Commander Emylea Daret and my sister, First Legion Scout Commander Namiri Daret! You must respond!" Emylea's voice echoed on the bridge now.

Saydia heard the urgency in her daughter's voice and moved closer to the COM officer. "Can she hear me?"

"Yes Regent."

"Emylea!" Saydia blurted without pause. "Emylea!"

"Mother?" Emylea's voice echoed in surprise. "Mother is that you?"

Saydia wanted to openly weep in relief but she held her will firm and nodded her head even though Emylea could not see her. "Yes Emylea... it is I. Namiri is with you Emylea?"

"She is within the transmission mother but sending from the planet." Emylea spoke. "Can you... can you activate a holo transmission mother?"

Saydia looked at Drenia. "It is a risk Regent." Drenia spoke softly. "We do not know..."

"Mother... the First Captain is correct... it is a risk and not something we normally do... but Namiri and I are fine." Emylea's voice echoed in the speakers.

"Mother... Tobia is with me on the surface!" Namiri's voice chimed in now.

"Tobia?" Saydia gasped aloud. "Namiri how..."

“The ship you are detecting is not an enemy mother!” Emylea spoke once more. “It is a Lycavorian ship! It has disabled the Kintaur cruiser and they have killed those Kintaur on the surface. They are here for their people mother. They are not an enemy.”

“Activate a holo link!” Saydia exclaimed.

“Initiating!” The COM officer spoke.

The floor to the side lit up briefly and then Saydia was looking at her daughters in the transmission. She wanted to cry out in relief but she once more maintained her composure. It was obvious enough to see that Emylea was not on any Tasmor ship that they knew of and Namiri was standing outside with a great deal of activity behind her.

“Emylea! Namiri! What is going on?” Saydia demanded.

“Mother... if you enter the system and attack the Lycavorian ship you will be destroyed!” Emylea spoke quickly.

“They are protecting the Kintaur ship!” Saydia spat disdainfully. “They have it in some sort of holding beam!”

Emylea nodded her head. “They disabled the Kintaur cruiser’s power by destroying its main engine core mother.” Emylea stated quickly. “They are keeping it in a holding beam so the residual particles from its engine do not spread across the system. They saved me mother. I was a prisoner on the Kintaur ship and they just appeared and... and they rescued me!”

“A prisoner!” Saydia hissed in horror.

“I am fine mother!” Emylea quickly added. “Namiri... tell her...”

“Mother... the Kintaur forces here on the surface were chasing us.” Namiri began once more. “These new... these new Lycavorians appeared and... mother they destroyed an entire Kintaur War Platoon in under three minutes! I witnessed it with my own eyes! They left none alive!”

This news caused murmurs among the bridge crew as heads turned back and forth and eyes met. As a commander of ground forces Namiri Daret may have been young by Tasmor standards, but no one doubted her skill or bravery. She was a vicious fighter and had proven herself many times over in the past. She was also one of the foremost experts among the Scout Legions.

“Mother... they have other ships in orbit that you can not see!” Emylea spoke again. “They... they have a way to hide their ships from our sensors and visual reference! If you attack... they will stop hiding and they will destroy all of you! You must stand down and enter the system peacefully!”

“How... how do I know this is not all some elaborate hoax?” Saydia demanded. “Emylea, Namiri, the Kintaur have used our people like this before! You know that! We...”

Saydia saw Namiri looked to the side in her transmission and then the obvious form of the female moved into the transmission next to her. She was taller than her petite five foot tall daughter by a good five inches and Saydia Daret could not hold back the intake of breath at her exotic beauty. She wore very strange black and crimson body armor, armor unlike any she had ever seen before and her black hair was very long and pulled into some sort of pony tail. What was even more amazing were her eyes, astonishing azure blue eyes that almost glowed in their brightness. The blue colored eyes were encased by a thick black ring and it was obvious that whoever she was, she was Lycavorian, as the tips of her fangs were extended and protruding from beneath her full lips. Saydia also saw the tips of a dual set of fangs beside her main ones, something she had never seen in a Lycavorian before. Those eyes gazed at her intently now.

“Good day!” Aricia spoke casually. “Your daughters are telling you the truth Sovereign Regent Daret. They are in no danger from us. They were helping our people run from these fool Kintaur and were ready to defend them with their lives. They have nothing to fear from us. And nor do you.”

“You... you are holding them there!” Saydia stammered.

Aricia shook her head. “We are not holding them at all Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret.” Aricia smiled gently when she saw the surprised look on Saydia’s face. “Yes... Tobia has told us about you.”

“Who are you?” Saydia demanded.

“My name is Aricia Leonidas... I am one of six Queens of the Lycavorian Union.” She answered seeing the surprise on Saydia’s face once more. “My people do not run from the enemy very well Sovereign Regent Daret. Any enemy. It’s not in our nature. Your people stood with us bravely and we recognize this. Our mate’s brother is going to bring your daughter to the surface as soon as we are done talking. Your people are being

fed... though our combat rations are not the tastiest food they will ever have I'm quite sure. My fellow Queen and wife Anja Leonidas is seeing to their medical needs if any."

"You are... you are a Queen?" Saydia gasped in surprise.

"Mother... this is the Queen of the Lycavorian people. One... one of them anyway." Namiri declared.

"There is no Lycavorian Queen! There is no King! The Lycavorian government was destroyed when the Svorag attacked that planet!" Perlyea snapped from the side of the bridge now. "You are lying! You are lying to us! All of you lie!"

"Perlyea remain silent!" Saydia hissed angrily.

Aricia shook her head slowly in disbelief at the ignorance of some people. "Forgive me... I am not in the best of moods at the moment. We have come a long way to find our people and when we do... we discover these Kintaur fools trying to turn them into slaves! Our husband and King did not like this in the least and he made the Kintaur pay the ultimate price for their misconceptions. As our beloved husband is fond of saying... we can do this one of two ways. We have no desire for a conflict with you and we even assisted your people here on the surface. They are fine troops by the way, and very well led. You can see one of our ships on your sensors... but if you enter this system and attack that ship... the other forty will appear and our husband and mate will order them to blow your arrogant asses out of the stars." Aricia finished in a rather blunt and final tone of voice. "How is that for diplomacy and first contact? It's your choice to make."

Saydia could not see Helen rolling her eyes in disgust at Aricia's words as she stood just outside the transmission cone. She had arrived on the surface only a few moments before the transmission and helped Tobia convince Martin to allow Aricia to make the initial transmission since the Tasmor were a female dominated society. Helen should have known better though, Aricia Leonidas, like Anja and Martin, could be as blunt as a sledge hammer at times. This was one of those times.

"Drenia... what is on our sensors?" Saydia gasped.

"Nothing that we can see Sovereign..." Drenia answered. "There is still nothing on the sensors except that one ship and the disabled Kintaur vessel!" She exclaimed.

"Twenty seconds to entry of system!" The voice echoed.

Saydia returned her gaze to those beautiful azure blue eyes eyes in the transmission standing beside her daughter.

"I have twelve ships!" Saydia spoke.

Aricia nodded her head. "We have forty-one. And two of them are twice the size of the ship you can see on your sensors. We are not looking for a conflict as I said... but if you want one... it will be very short I assure you. And all of you will be space dust!"

"Mother please listen to her!" Emylea pleaded. "She is telling the truth mother. I am on one of the ships you cannot see! It is huge mother! Their technology is... it is beyond ours!"

"Mother... I told you Tobia is on the surface with me." Namiri spoke once more. "She urges you to be wise and use your intuition."

Saydia's mind raced back to the moments she and the Pralor Tobia had shared. Tobia was a soothsayer almost and could always say and do things to put Saydia at ease. She was also a very good lover in their bed and though they had parted ways it had been on excellent terms for Saydia realized Tobia was still very much in love with another and Saydia had feelings for someone else as well. Truly, Tobia was one of only three Pralors that Saydia had any faith and trust in.

Saydia turned to Drenia. "Drenia... give the order to power down our weapons." She stated.

"Sovereign Regent I protest!" Perlyea spat as she moved forward. "You can not allow them to dictate to us what we will do! We are Tasmor!"

Saydia ignored her. "Captain Drenia, please issue the order to power down our weapons and prepare to enter the system. Pass the word to all ships that we are dropping to medium alert. We do not know what is happening and I will not risk our people and ships against an unknown force."

Drenia nodded her head in relief and turned to begin issuing orders. Saydia turned back to the image of the man in the transmission. "I have done as you ask." She spoke. "I ask only that you do not hurt my daughters."

Saydia saw the woman smile now and bare those incredibly vicious dual wolf fangs unlike any she had seen before. However her eyes told Saydia a different story and she felt herself relax somewhat.

“We have no intention of hurting your daughters.” Aricia told her. “They and your other people helped mine. They were willing to die fighting these Kintaur fools in protecting my people. We don’t forget things like that. We have daughters as well Sovereign Regent, eight of them in fact. To show you that we are not an enemy I will even put your daughters on one of our transports and we will shuttle up to your ship when you obtain orbit.”

“And after that?” Saydia asked her.

“Our husband will allow you to maintain a defensive posture if you wish... and we will order a few more of our ships to appear so that you know what you would have faced would have been suicidal.” Aricia told her. “Then I suggest that we all return to the surface so that we can talk.”

“Talk?” Saydia gasped. “I want my daughters and our people back! We have nothing to talk about!”

Aricia’s smile was not pleasant this time and Saydia almost sensed that. “Oh... but we do have a lot to talk about Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret. We need to talk about where you have taken all of our people that survived the Svorag attack on this planet. We would like them back if you don’t mind; every last one of them. We will see you shortly. Spartan Two is clear!”

Saydia looked at the transmission in shock as it ended abruptly. What had she just opened the door into she wondered.

TDF SAKAR **OFFICER CONFERENCE ROOM**

“Five ships total. Four of which materialized out of nowhere just as we entered the system. One is nearly four thousand meters long! None of them match any known ship we have in our databases.” Captain Drenia spoke as she read from the data pad. “I have deployed our Detachment into a standard defensive diamond and we will come in range of the planet in just under an hour.”

“What about these ships?” Saydia asked.

“Our passive sensors are unable to penetrate their hulls, as they are made of some sort of material we have never seen before. My Chief Sensor Operator says even an active scan might not get through.” Drenia answered her. “We have never seen their configuration before as I have said. Visual sensors indicate what appear to be large, energy based turrets all across the surface of the largest ship and our helm officer says what looks like smaller launch bays on the ventral portion of this same ship.”

“Launch bays?” Saydia asked. “Launch bays for what Drenia?”

“I would have to say fighters or drones of some sort Sovereign.” Drenia answered. “If I had to guess... I would say this is a carrier vessel of some kind Sovereign. It is similar in theory to what we once considered but ruled out due to the size and cost.” She looked back to the data pad. “From what we have been able to determine, all of the ships have what appear to be some form of regenerative shielding and this same composition of armor and hull. All of them also have what appear to be Pralor Quantum Fusion power sources; at the very least based on their technology anyway. They are very different energy readings than what we have taken from Pralor ships but they are also very similar in some ways. They are all exceptionally well armed Sovereign Regent. That woman was right... given what we have been able to detect on sensors and the obvious advanced power source on all the ships... we would not have stood a chance against them.”

“Such defeatist’s attitudes are not needed!” Perlyea snapped from her seat.

“Chief Counsel Perlyea Kalrr!” Saydia snarled at the woman. “You will not berate one of the most senior ship officers within the TDF in my presence! Captain Drenia certainly has forgotten more about ship combat than you will ever understand Chief Counsel!”

“The Second Officer from your daughter’s Patrol Frigate forwarded a initial report as soon as we entered the system Sovereign.” Drenia said. “They only saw the one ship on their sensors the entire time. They fired on the Kintaur ship almost instantly after taking it within this holding beam. Within moments they detected the signatures of half a dozen smaller transport ships entering the atmosphere of Ventori. None of them came from this single ship. At least a dozen more have moved to the surface since the fighting stopped. Emylea herself

stated that they just appeared on the Kintaur ship and rescued her. These are things we just cannot dismiss as irrelevant!”

“We are Tasmor!” Perlyea barked. “We bow to no one, especially not to some male who pronounces himself King and uses females as his pawns!”

“How do we know he is not a King?” Another female spoke from the end of the table.

Saydia looked at the woman. “Major Remina...?”

“We have been assisting the relocation of the Lycavorian people from Ventori for just over three years now Sovereign Regent, but we do not know enough about them or their history to draw any definitive answers to many questions that we still have. They are not native to this system, which we do know without question. Even their own history scholars say this. How did they get here if those on Ventori have not even achieved space flight? They are a proud people, just as we are.” The woman answered. “Only a few among our people, including your daughter Namiri, have made any effort to learn about them and their ways.”

“They are beneath us!” Perlyea said.

“Those Lycavorians from Ventori are less advanced than us in technological terms Chief Counsel... but that does not make them less than us.” Remina answered calmly. “They stood against the Svorag without fear and with great skill before they were overwhelmed by sheer numbers. They killed hundreds of thousands of them before they fell. They are by no means stupid and their remaining leaders have insured they look after their people first and foremost in any dealings that they have with us concerning our agreements with the Polyplast mines.”

“We must not forget that these new Lycavorians are technologically far more advanced than us.” Drenia spoke. “Where did they come from?”

“It’s obvious they are pawns of the Pralors!” Perlyea hissed. “They even admit to Tobia travelling with them.”

“We already know what you think of the Pralor people Perlyea!” Saydia snapped. “Tobia has never lied to me or to us! I do not believe she is lying to us now! If she is with them, there is a reason that we do not know.”

“You only think this because she shared the warmth of your bed during her stays among our people!” Perlyea spoke.

Saydia lifted her hand to point at Perlyea. “Who I share my bed with is my business and mine alone Chief Counsel! Tobia was among our people for nearly a year and she did nothing but make friends and assist us in however she was able! You will not speak badly of her! Is that very clear?”

“Your judgment concerning her is clouded and...” Perlyea began.

“I do not think Sovereign Regent Daret’s judgment is clouded Chief Counsel Perlyea.” Drenia spoke thoughtfully, cutting off Perlyea. “If they did get their technology from the Pralor people, then it would be recognizable to us. These ships and the power sources my people are seeing are quite different. It may look like Pralor technology at first glance but it is most certainly not their technology. They built it to be very similar perhaps using some base designs and schematics, but it is definitely not Pralor tech.”

“Namiri said these new Lycavorians decimated an entire Kintaur War Platoon Sovereign Regent.” Remina spoke once more. “How can we just overlook that? We have fought the Kintaur for centuries and would never face a War Platoon with anything less than two or three to one odds.”

“The female who spoke to us Remina...?” Saydia asked turning to look at her. “She seemed different than other females I have seen from their species.”

“Much more confident and in control... yes I noticed that as well.” Remina spoke. “I have a theory Sovereign... if you will allow me.”

Saydia nodded. “Of course.”

“I have debriefed many of the Lycavorian leaders that were able to escape the Svorag attacks and who we then rescued.” Remina told her. “When I asked about their history... all of them were very open of what their history scrolls and data pads spoke of. We did not have to assist them yet you made the decision to do just that. They are very grateful to us Sovereign.”

“What did they tell you?” Saydia asked.

“They spoke of another entirely different caste of Lycavorians that was thought lost to the ages long ago. Alpha Lycavorians they called them; the most dominant males and females of their species. These Alpha

Lycavorians were the ones who usually had most of the positions of authority and who did most of the fighting. They were physically larger, much more aggressive and far less prone to bow to pressure. Hence why this female acted as she did. I would hazard a guess and say she is an Alpha Lycavorian female. And if she spoke of a King, her husband and mate, then he is undoubtedly an Alpha as well.”

“We know every portion of this Quadrant of space!” Perlyea spoke now. “There are no such Lycavorians anywhere like you speak!”

“I did not say they came from this Quadrant of space Chief Counsel.” Remina stated. “And it would be ignorant in the extreme for us to assume that we are alone among the stars with the exception of those species in this quadrant.”

Drenia and Saydia both looked at her with wide eyes as they understood what she was saying. “They have Interstellar Drive capability!” Saydia finally gasped.

“It would explain why we have never seen them before.” Remina said. “Captain Drenia has already said their technology appears to be based on Pralor technology... at least in some form. We already know that the Pralor people have Interstellar Drive capability...”

“Which they refused to share with us!” Perlyea spat.

“Just because they refused to share this knowledge with us does not make them bad Chief Counsel. Or untrustworthy as you believe.” Remina stated and Saydia held back her smile as she watched the Major stick it to the arrogant woman. “We will eventually develop Interstellar travel, just as we developed Interplanetary travel. Having it given to us by another species when we are not ready to face whatever is out there... that is foolish. It is also foolish to assume that the Pralors are the only species that has this knowledge?”

This statement caused even Perlyea to remain quiet while ideas and options raced through their minds.

Perlyea was the first one to speak. “Major Remina... would it be logical to think that if this Alpha caste did indeed exist, that they would be even more physically robust than those we are familiar with?”

Remina nodded her head slowly. “I would imagine so yes.” She replied.

Saydia looked at her now. “Remina do you still have the names of the Lycavorians you spoke to?”

“Certainly Sovereign Regent. As well as the planets we relocated them to.” She replied. “All of them went to our planets with the largest Polyplast mines in our territory. As I said it is one of the agreements they offered in return for us helping them. They insisted on this in order to keep their honor and work ethic. They would work the mines for us and in return we would provide housing and pay and medical care. As you know the Polyplast mines are deadly to our people but have no effect on Lycavorians due to their increased regenerative healing systems. It is my understanding the agreement has worked out rather well for both of our peoples and ore production has increased by nineteen percent since they began running the mines. They actually offered this to us in return for our help as I said. They are a proud species after all.”

“I want you to speak with them again.” Saydia said. “Transfer to one of our Battlecruisers and use our long range communications. Have them gathered and talk with them. Find out whatever you can about what they know.”

Perlyea glared at her. “You can’t seriously be entertaining the notion of allowing them to return to Tasmor space with us?” She almost shouted.

Saydia looked at her. “Yes I am.” She stated.

“I protest!” Perlyea spat.

“Protest all you like.” Saydia told her. “I will do everything within my power to protect our people whether the Council of Governors agrees or not!”

“You can’t be serious?” Perlyea gasped.

“I have six hundred billion Tasmor lives that rely on me to keep them safe and to insure that they have a future!” Saydia barked. “I assure you... I am most serious!”

The buzzing from the panel on the table started and Saydia reached out and tapped the panel. “Yes?”

“Sovereign... one of the Lycavorian transports has left the surface. They are requesting permission to land in our Port Landing Bay.” The female voice spoke. “They say that your daughters are onboard as well as the woman who spoke to you.”

“Allow them to land!” Saydia spoke. “I want a full security detachment in place in three minutes!”

“Their orders?” The voice asked.

“To observe for now.” Saydia answered. “Only observe.”

TDF SAKAR **PORT LANDING BAY**

Saydia and the others were circled by a ring of twelve TDF Regent Security. They were exceptionally well trained Tasmor females that were Saydia's personal guard. These twelve traveled wherever Saydia went, while another twenty-four secured her home and offices on the Tasmor homeworld of Maravina. They rotated over the course of months so that none of them became complacent in their duties. The tall, dark skinned and exotically beautiful Anthylea was their commander and she stood just to Saydia's right and slightly behind her. Anthylea was never very far from their Sovereign Regent's side and had been her personal RS Officer for over a decade now.

Activity in the landing bay had come to a halt as the *STRIKER DT MK II* had eased into the landing bay with the instructions from the Tasmor flight control officer and settled gently to the deck. The odd looking ship was nearly as large as some of the Tasmor military Frigates and from the way it maneuvered to enter the bay and then inside the landing bay, none one doubted the skill of the pilot. All of them stared at the sleek looking ship in awe. They had never seen anything like it before and many wondered just what was inside the more than one hundred meter long ship. Drenia stood beside Saydia and her trained eye took in the smooth way the ship hovered off the deck and moved within the confines of the landing bay. Whoever was piloting the ship was very, very good at what they did Drenia decided.

As the landing struts touched down and the engines of the strange ship began to ebb, Tasmor Security forces moved forward to surround it.

"Weapons at the ready but keep them pointed at the deck!" Anthylea called out.

It wasn't long before the rear ramp of the MK II began to lower and as everyone watched the interior of the ship appear, the first thing Saydia saw was her daughters standing just inside. Between them stood the woman she had spoken to in the transmission and as soon as the ramp touched the deck and was fully down, Emylea and Namiri jogged down the ramp holding hands directly for where she stood.

Saydia put aside all pretense of her position as she stepped between her security officers and met her daughters half way. She embraced them both tightly in her arms, kissing their heads and holding them to her for a bit longer than usual. This was a surprise for Namiri since her mother had really never shown her much affection as she grew, while her older sisters were showered with love and care. Namiri still loved her mother dearly and this display right now made her feel as if her mother did indeed love her just as much as her sisters. Her words and actions only confirmed this for Namiri, which made her heart sing.

Saydia hugged them both tightly, holding each of their faces in her hands as she inspected them, and then kissing their cheeks on both sides in the traditional fashion of Tasmor mothers. She then planted an additional kiss on each of their foreheads which indicated her deep love for her children as was also tradition in Tasmor society. This was something that Saydia had never done with Namiri, and having her act this way now made Namiri's heart sing in happiness.

Saydia held Namiri's hand in her right and Emylea's hand in her left as she looked back and forth between them. "You are both unhurt?" She asked with concern.

Emylea and Namiri nodded quickly in reply. "We are fine mother." Emylea answered her. "Really... we are fine."

Saydia looked back and forth between them and, as if for the first time in many years, she stared at Namiri and saw the stunning beauty she had grown into. Her flowing dark hair and stunning eyes belonged to her father yes, but Namiri had gotten her mother's delicious female figure as had all her daughters, and her features were definitely more like her own. Saydia realized at that very moment that she had not shown Namiri the love she had deserved through her life because of who her father was and the way they had parted, and she swore now to make amends as best as she was able starting now.

Namiri stared into her eyes and saw something in her mother's beautiful orbs that she had never seen before when she looked at her. She saw love and acceptance and this caused even more happiness to surge through her.

“We had a few casualties... but nothing serious.” Namiri told her.

Saydia looked up as she saw the figure of the woman begin to walk down the ramp now. She saw only the tall, helmeted man beside her, dressed in similar body armor as her and his eyes sweeping back and forth as if looking for danger.

Emylea and Namiri turned as Aricia strode up slowly and stopped.

“Mother... this is... this is Queen Aricia Leonidas.” Namiri spoke as she motioned to Aricia.

Saydia took note that while she was not as tall as her own five foot ten, this woman stood close to that and the body armor she wore did not hide the obvious female proportions of her body. Her raven black hair, still in the pony tail, was now drawn over to the front of her left shoulder.

Aricia smiled as she looked at Saydia. “I bid you welcome from the United Lycavorian Union Sovereign Regent Daret.” She stated.

“You will bow before the Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people!” Anthylea barked as she stepped forward quickly.

Atropos glared at the tall woman. “A Queen of the Lycavorian Union does not bow to anyone!” He snapped at her.

“You will be silent man!” Anthylea hissed at him. “And know your place among us!”

Aricia reached out calmly and placed her hand on her older brother’s arm before he sent the woman flying across the bay. Tobia had told them to expect this type of greeting and had recommended that Atropos remain behind. Martin and Anja had insisted however and Aricia agreed knowing her brother would not allow her to go alone.

“*Pen ur echta un el fervon.*” She told him gently. (I will talk to them brother.)

Atropos met his younger sister’s eyes and nodded his head. “*Evell alad ter pera oyln nes wen tulan arande.*” He told her. (We do not know if they are friend sister)

Aricia smiled up at him. [*Isn’t that what we are here to find out?*] She asked him within Mindvoice now.

[*That does not mean I will allow them to mistreat you Aricia!*] Atropos told her. Though he had never been a very powerful Mindvoicer to begin with, once becoming Anja’s Captain and a member of the *Durcunusaan*, Atropos had grown ten fold in ability and power. He was among those who were considered very high Tier Six Mindvoicers now, equal to Andreus his brother.

Aricia nodded her head. [*I know fervon. Just keep your temper in check. As many years as you have protected Anja, her utter lack of patience for arrogant fools has rubbed off on you completely.*]

Atropos blinked and then smiled slightly. [*Well... that is true.*] He answered.

Aricia squeezed his arm and then turned to meet Anthylea’s dark eyes. The exchange between them had not gone unnoticed by Namiri for she had seen other Lycavorians doing the same thing; looking at one another as if talking and it finally hit her standing there. She looked up at her mother.

“Mother... they are speaking with their minds.” She whispered though others who stood close by could hear her.

Saydia looked at her with wide eyes. “What?”

“I have seen other Lycavorians do this.” Namiri said. “They are communicating with their minds and using their native language in the open.”

Aricia’s eyes turned away from where Anthylea glared at her trying to intimidate her and having no effect and focused on Saydia just as she was looking back to her. “Your daughter is correct Sovereign Regent Daret.” Aricia spoke calmly. “My brother and I were talking with each other.”

“You... you can speak with your thoughts?” Saydia gasped aloud.

Aricia nodded. “In a manner of speaking yes.”

“What... what did you say? Speak now!” Anthylea demanded moving closer to Saydia.

“I do not bow to anyone.” Aricia stated evenly as she met Anthylea’s gaze. “I am one of six Queens of the Lycavorian Union and *Anome* to the King. Is that going to be a problem for you?”

“You will show respect where it is deemed!” Anthylea snapped once more.

“Your attempts at intimidation are sorely lacking whoever you are. They will not work with me.” Aricia stated.

“I am First Colonel Anthylea Tomar! I command the Sovereign Regent’s personal detail of Tasmor Regent Security!” Anthylea spat.

“An impressive title I’m sure.” Aricia told her. “However... respect is earned and not given simply because it is demanded.” Aricia spoke before she looked back to Saydia and met her eyes dismissing Anthylea. This dismissal infuriated Anthylea and she made to move closer to Aricia but Saydia’s discrete hand motion stopped her. “I have returned your daughters to you Regent Daret. Your ships are welcome to land on Ventori in order to retrieve your other people. We are grateful for their help and honor them for their actions. We in turn would like to meet and discuss the location of where you have taken the other survivors among our people so that we may retrieve them.”

“We have taken no one!” Perlyea snapped now as she came forward. “We saved your people from the Svorag!”

Aricia nodded her head. “To which we are extremely grateful.” Aricia said. “However... we are here now and we would like them back. All of them.”

“Now you make demands!” Perlyea spat.

“I’m making a request.” Aricia spoke.

“We are Tasmor and we do not answer to you!” Perlyea barked. “We do not even know who you are! Where you come from? Yet you threaten us with these so called hidden ships that you say you have!”

“Those ships are very real I assure you. Your forces were in an attack formation.” Aricia spoke calmly. “Your intent was to attack our ship when you entered the system without even trying to determine what the situation was. You thought we were helping the Kintaur. Is that not correct Sovereign Daret?”

“The Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people does not respond to individuals who claim to be Queen and threaten our people!” Perlyea snapped once more. “We do not know you! Why should we trust you! You do not even follow proper decorum when speaking to your betters!”

“Decorum?” Aricia asked slightly surprised. “And who exactly are you?”

“I am Chief Counsel of the Tasmor people Perlyea Kalrr!” She replied.

“And that is a position of some importance I assume?” Aricia asked honestly.

Namiri could barely contain the small laugh that threatened to escape her throat at Aricia’s comment. She saw Perlyea’s eyes widen in anger at this and out of the corner of her eyes she saw Emylea also trying to hide her smile. She stepped forward slightly.

“The Chief Counsel of the Tasmor people is second only to my mother in authority.” Namiri spoke to Aricia.

Aricia nodded her head. “I see.”

“That the Sovereign Regent even chose to meet with you is only because of her two daughters!” Perlyea continued after a moment and even more angry because of Namiri’s answer to Aricia’s question. “We are Tasmor and we are dominant here!”

Aricia looked at Perlyea once more. “Yes... you have already stated that. Quite bluntly I might add. I am not Tasmor however.” She spoke looking back to Saydia who had remained silent so far much to the surprise of both Emylea and Namiri. “Is this how it is to be then?” Aricia asked. “These two voices speak for you as the Sovereign Regent and leader of your people?”

“Mother!” Emylea gasped. “Mother they... they saved us!”

“We do not... we do not know them Emylea!” Saydia spoke for the first time now. “We don’t know where they came from or what they want!”

“We come from what normal star charts would call the Alpha Quadrant.” Aricia stated openly causing many of them to gaze at her in open shock. “And all we want is our people back. I believe I have already made that abundantly clear.”

“Then you do have Interstellar Drive capability!” Perlyea hissed.

Aricia ignored her. “My husband and mate had hoped that you would come to Ventori so that we could sit down in more comfortable surroundings and discuss things in a friendly and open way.” She said.

“Answer my question!” Perlyea barked at her.

“I do not answer to you... *upae!* And I am done talking to you!” Aricia snarled now as her patience began to wear thin and she allowed her azure blue eyes to shift to her wolf persona. The Regent Security force grew anxious and their hands tightened on their weapons as they inched closer to their regent. Aricia turned

back to Saydia. “You have your daughters Regent Daret... and you may collect your other forces on Ventori freely. Once that is complete... if you wish no further contact with us then we ask that you leave the Ventori system and make no attempt to return. We will find our people on our own and retrieve them, wherever they may be.”

“Are you threatening us?” Perlyea growled.

Aricia shook her head. “Not at all... I’m merely stating what we will do.” She replied. “We are new to this quadrant of space and we would have liked to seek out new allies and friends. I see that is not what you want as well.”

“Your people are within Tasmor space!” Perlyea spat.

“Then that is where we will go to collect them.” Aricia said. “Unless you are now telling me you will not allow us to do this.”

“You ally yourself with the Pralor people!” Perlyea spoke. “They are no friends to us!”

Aricia looked at her. “There are many among our people, myself included, who can trace our original bloodlines back within our history and discover Pralor bloodlines mixed in with that of our Lycavorian blood. Trust me... it was very much a surprise to the Pralor people when we arrived here. However... that is the reason we came out here.” Aricia told her. “We did not know what we would find.”

“But you do have Interstellar Drive capability?” Saydia asked finally speaking.

Aricia met her eyes. “I don’t see the relevance of that in our current situation.” She replied.

“We will decide what is relevant!” Perlyea spoke. “You tell us you have over forty ships hidden out here. We see only five! You demand your people back when you have not provided and cared for them for the last three years! We saved your people!” She snarled vehemently. “The Tasmor saved your people! What will you give us in return for what we have done?”

Aricia’s eyes went from Perlyea to Saydia slowly. “Are you saying that you will hold our people hostage in return for some form of reparations Sovereign Regent Daret?” She asked.

“Mother you can’t!” Namiri exclaimed. “Mother... they saved us!”

“Mother please!” Emylea protested. “They...”

“Be silent both of you!” Saydia hissed at them. She turned back to Aricia quickly. “You are... you are not like the other Lycavorians that we are accustomed to. Are there... are there more of your people?”

“The Lycavorian Union comprises over nine hundred worlds and some hundred and ninety different species.” Aricia told her. “Lycavorians are only part of the Union.”

“Nine hundred worlds?” Saydia gasped in shock. “How... how large is...”

“At our last census... our population was almost forty trillion.” Aricia answered her seeing the looks of utter astonishment from many of those standing around. “Lycavorians as a whole make up only about fourteen percent of our population.”

“Yet you are Queen.” Saydia said. “An Alpha female... yes?”

Aricia canted her head slightly as she looked at her. “The different castes of our people have long since been abandoned... but yes... to answer your question, I am what would be considered an Alpha female. As are all my fellow Queens.”

“No doubt your pig male uses you and the others at his whim!” Perlyea hissed. “You are pawns of his!”

Aricia’s wolf eyes narrowed somewhat. “Martin Leonidas is King of the Union. We are his wives and mates and Queens. We are mothers to his many children. He is many things... but he is most certainly not a pig.” She told Perlyea. “The tone in which you speak of our beloved husband is offensive to me. The entire tone of this meeting is offensive to me. I believe we will be leaving now. It has been a pleasure meeting you Sovereign Regent Daret... but our business is concluded. I will return to Ventori and explain to my husband that you do not wish to be friends or have friendly relations.”

“You cannot leave!” Perlyea shouted out stunned that this female would just dismiss them.

Aricia looked at her. “Oh yes... I can. Unless you plan on trying to stop me... or attempt to hold me hostage in some way. Either outcome would lead to violence and I can assure you, your people would not come out the victors.” She stated calmly.

“You think much of yourself little Queen!” Perlyea snapped moving closer to her now very angry.

Aricia met her eyes with no back down in her whatsoever. “And you think too much of yourself. If conflict is what you wish then I guarantee that my brother and I will kill most of those in this landing bay before we fall. And we will begin with your Sovereign Regent and you woman!”

“Enough!” Saydia barked now as she moved forward. “We do not want violence!”

“Your Chief Counsel seems to think otherwise.” Aricia spoke.

“Perlyea damn you step back or I will have you arrested!” Saydia growled.

Aricia waited until the woman had taken several steps back, the look on her face one of arrogance and anger. She turned back to Saydia. “Please contact our Command ship on the frequency that we gave to you in order to facilitate the return of our people. As for any sort of reparations that you expect...”

“Wait!” Saydia exclaimed loudly. Saydia Daret looked at Aricia intently as she moved closer to her. This woman was confident and strong, much more so than any Lycavorian female she had ever met. She did not act as if the Tasmor were beneath her in any way, but she was obviously not going to be pushed around. In all honesty, she was like a breath of fresh air to Saydia. There was also something about her that told Saydia if pushed too far she would react viciously and the one thing Saydia had noticed right away was that she was highly skilled, as was the tall man beside her who she called brother. If it came to a conflict, Saydia did not doubt that those in their immediate area would not survive the encounter. “I will accept your invitation Queen Leonidas.”

Perlyea looked at her as if she had lost her mind. “Sovereign Regent you can’t!” She gasped aloud.

Saydia looked at her. “I can and I will.” Saydia spoke harshly. She turned back to Aricia. “May I bring others?”

Aricia turned back to face her fully. “You are in no danger with us Sovereign Regent... and you may bring as many aides or security as you see fit. Our ship can carry fifty easily... though most will have to sit on the floor. This class of ship is more of a moving home if you will.”

“Sovereign you cannot!” Perlyea persisted. “You will be out of our reach! We will not be able to retrieve you should anything happen!”

“Do you foresee something happening?” Aricia asked her now. “We do not wish a conflict and we most certainly will not start one. Will you?”

“No... we will not!” Saydia stated firmly. “Anthylea... choose a dozen to accompany us. Drenia... some of your engineers and technicians I think as well.” Saydia looked at Aricia. “If that is alright?”

Aricia nodded. “Of course.” She said.

“Mother... Namiri and I wish to return.” Emylea spoke. “I ordered my frigates to land and that is where our people are.”

Saydia looked at her and then Namiri and saw both of them nod. She bowed her head in acceptance. “Very well.” She said.

“Can we bring weapons?” Anthylea asked looking at Aricia.

“All of your people on Ventori still have their weapons First Colonel Anthylea Tomar.” Aricia answered her surprising Anthylea with her tone of respect. “You will not need them but it would be foolish of us to expect you to be weaponless given the situation don’t you think.”

“And what if the Kintaur return?” Perlyea demanded. “What if they come here with more ships and men?”

Aricia met her eyes. “Then they will find my beloved husband and mate does not care for them in the least. And he will deal with them. Harshly.”

VENTORI

“...Came out of nowhere Milord.” Nalmos spoke softly.

The ADHOC base was rapidly taking shape as more personnel from the *ARC ROYAL* and other ships were shuttling down. Portable buildings had already been put up and the smell of hot food was beginning to filter through the afternoon air. Word had spread quickly among the people that their King intended to remain here and search for more survivors. Already teams were preparing to strike out to the nearest cities and begin

searching for more survivors. The Lycavorians from Ventori were still being looked after, many of them enjoying the first really good hot meal in months and for the first time in years feeling safe and secure. Duewa had been among the first down to the surface once the camp had been secure and she was now overseeing the medics as they moved among the people and examined and treated them. Duewa discovered that she, Anja and the dozen Hadarian medics were being viewed as almost godlike because of their healing abilities. Anja had done the initial exams and Duewa was now directing most of her efforts on those who Anja had singled out as needing special care. Most of the Lycavorians were in excellent health considering, but there were some elderly and children that needed specialized care and those were the ones Duewa focused on.

Anja and Helen had joined Martin, Danny and Nalmos on the grassy bank of the nearby river. Half a dozen *Durcunusaan* were situated at different locations all around them, all of them within fifty meters of their King, Queen and *Feravomir*. The arrival of Torma, Isheeni, Arzoal, Aurith and Miath had thrown the Lycavorians from Ventori and the Tasmor troops into a fit at first upon seeing the huge beasts when they exited the *STRIKERS* that landed. It took only a moment of seeing Martin standing in front of the obsidian scaled monstrosity and stroke his scales to calm the Lycavorians. As with their Alpha wolf brothers and sisters, the Beta and Omega wolves of Ventori adapted instantly to most any situation. The Tasmor had been another story as they huddled with each other and tried to move as far as possible from the dragons. It took only moments before the Ventori Lycavorians realized the dragons were just as intelligent as any two legged person walking the surface for they could feel and hear the tremors within the Etheric realm as Martin spoke to them and with nods of understanding they had taken to the skies above and begun searching out the area around them.

Nalmos lowered the ration bar after taking a bite and chewing for a few seconds. He had watched as the tiny, Persian red haired Queen settled between the King's legs and tucked her petite form intimately against that of his. It looked comical in a way because of the body armor they both wore but Nalmos knew instantly why Anja did this. Martin's Leonidas's mint like scent permeated her entire being and he judged she had been turned at least two decades ago, probably more. While he would never comment on it, her honey scent and female wolf aura called only for one man and that was the King. He could smell five other distinct scents on the King, all deeply imbedded within his blood. Two of those scents Nalmos had met and watched as they departed the planet with Namiri; the raven haired pureblood female Queen and the golden blond haired elven Queen. For'mya's ears, as well as those other elves among their group, had been something of incredible interest to the Ventori Lycavorians and the Tasmor for they had never seen elves before. Nalmos could also detect all of their female scents mingled deeply together which told him many things about the King and Queens now before him. He had watched as Martin reached into a small pouch on his belt as Anja settled between his legs and he pulled out what appeared to be a similar ration bar. He tore open the wrapper, and handed it to Anja who bit a chunk off before handing it back to him. It was a true Alpha instinct Nalmos knew. Always insure your mates ate first and had the choice pick of food. Nalmos knew Alphas adhered to this deeply from the many history scrolls he had studied growing up, and even now, at thirty-three thousand years old, to see that it was all actually true was a blessing.

Nalmos lifted his eyes back to Martin. "We had no warning. We had only just begun to build satellites that could see outside of our system. We had established a Space Program only the year prior to the initial attack. None of our satellites ever saw the monsters coming." He continued speaking. "I was... I was Chief Justice of Jorlari... the city most of us are from."

"Chief Justice?" Martin asked. "Like a judge?"

Nalmos shook his head. "I was the leader of Jorlari."

Anja glanced up at Martin's face. "Like a mayor Lover." She spoke.

Martin nodded. "Ah... ok. That's why everyone defers to you now?"

"They came out of the night sky in ships. Hundreds of ships." Nalmos spoke softly. "There must have been hundreds of thousands of them that landed in the first wave all across the planet. Five million died in the first day. Fifteen million the second. My city... my city had a population of forty-three million Milord." The pain in his voice was obvious to all of them and it showed in his face. "Those monsters butchered us in the streets like fodder! We fought valiantly but many of our most modern weapons were ineffective against them. On the third day we discovered they were taking thousands of our people prisoner and transporting them to their ships in orbit. Reports were coming in from all over the planet from other Chief Justices. They were reporting the same thing. Millions dead. Thousands taken prisoner. They were... they were transforming them and..."

“We know.” Anja said softly seeing his eyes look up at her. “We have seen what they do to those they take prisoner. They are called Svorag.”

“You... you have fought them my Queen?” Nalmos asked surprised.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes. Our weapons work a lot better... but they are still some hard *ronnus* to kill.”

“Please continue Nalmos.” Anja said softly.

“We... we broke into small groups... hundreds of small groups and began making our way into the timber and mountains to escape them.” Nalmos continued now. “Many were soon discovered and...”

“You had family?” Martin asked him gently.

Nalmos looked up into his eyes. “A wife and mate.” He answered with a gentle nod. “We had... we had nine children. She... my mate was killed on the second night along with our two youngest sons. Four of my sons were in the active army and my daughters all worked in City Common areas. The Medical Center and Communications Department. My mate... she was... she was Senior Surgeon at the main medical center. I do... I do not know what became of my other children. Survivors were scattered everywhere across the planet. It is... it is my hope that they were rescued by the Tasmor and taken to safety.”

“When did these Tasmor show up?” Martin asked.

Nalmos looked at him. “Six months after the invasion began they just... these Svorag just stopped looking for survivors and left. The first Tasmor ships began to land a month later.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “Wait... they just stopped and left?” He asked.

Nalmos nodded his head. “No one can explain it. We went to sleep one night and they were all around. That morning they were gone. Our cities were destroyed... our infrastructure devastated. The few groups we could talk to spoke of the same thing all across the planet. So much... thousands of years of growing and expanding our knowledge and our people and it was over in less than a year.”

“That seems awful convenient.” Martin said.

Nalmos shook his head. “They assisted us Milord.” He said quickly. “You must have seen their technology... they would have been no match for these Svorag. They would have died just as we did.”

“He’s right Martin.” Helen spoke now looking at him and knowing what was running through his head as his Praetorian Mage. “Not everyone has the will or determination of Spartans Martin Leonidas. Not all of us are willing to fight to the death. I know you recognize that.”

Martin nodded slowly. “I know.” He said softly.

“If everything we have seen is to be believed Lover...” Anja spoke now. “The Tasmor did what they were able to do. They did not have to come here at all... but they did. They have saved thousands.”

“They brought food and water and medicines Milord.” Nalmos affirmed Anja’s words. “They set up large camps for refugees and provided shelter and care from the elements. They... they treated our females better than our males obviously given their nature... but they never refused us anything.”

“How did they begin taking our people offworld?” Martin asked.

“The camps were becoming over crowded.” Nalmos answered. “The remaining Chief Justices gathered and we went to the Tasmor with an offer.”

“What offer?”

“By then we knew that much of their metal was formed from Polyplast.” Nalmos spoke. “We knew of this ore because there are massive deposits here on Ventori. We did not mine the mineral because we did not know what uses there were for it. When we discovered this, then we approached them about allowing us to mine it for them in return for their continued assistance. The mineral ore in its natural form is lethal to their people and they have been mining it with machines for centuries. Very inefficiently I might add. We offered to do this for them.”

“For what in return?” Anja asked.

“They have taken millions of our people as refugees and moved them to their planets with the largest mines.” Nalmos said. “They have given us homes and restored some semblance of what we once had. Namiri and her team were here to do that with my group here. I am the last Chief Justice remaining on Ventori that I know of. The others have been pushing for me to leave for the last year. I have been resisting because...”

“Because Ventori is your home.” Helen spoke gently.

Nalmos nodded his head. “Yes.”

“You can communicate with the others though?” Helen asked.

Nalmos nodded once more. “The Tasmor left caches of equipment at the former camps. Among the equipment was the ability to communicate with our people. Life is... life on the Tasmor worlds is not like it was here... but it is better than trying to survive on this now barren world.”

“Nalmos... how many are left?” Martin finally asked him.

“I do not know Milord.” He answered. “We do not... we do not have the ability to scan the surface of Ventori and discover this. I would not know where to begin.”

“You do now.” Martin spoke confidently. “How many of these Chief Justices remain?”

“Seven Milord.” Nalmos answered. “I was senior so I made sure all of them were among the first refugees to leave Ventori. In order to keep our people together as best as they were able and to insure the agreement we made with the Tasmor was honored.”

“And has it been honored?” Helen asked.

Nalmos nodded his head. “I have spoken to all of them over the course of the last year. The Tasmor are... they are a unique species... but they are not unfriendly. Our people have homes and safety once more.”

“And these Kintaur dirt bags?” Martin asked.

Nalmos shook his head now. “I do not know much about them.” He answered. “Until six months ago we had never seen them before. I know the Tasmor hate them and they are dire foes, but they also fear them.”

“They are fugly.” Anja stated flatly.

Nalmos watched as Martin grinned and leaned over to nuzzle Anja’s ear and cheek. He saw her eyes close in delight before she pushed him away embarrassed. Helen smiled now as well.

“Don’t mind them.” Danny spoke for the first time. “They aren’t exactly normal if you get my meaning.”

Nalmos looked at him and then swept his eyes over Helen and back to Martin and Anja. “You are Alphas. All of you are Alphas. You are not entirely Lycavorian my Queen but you are definitely an Alpha.”

Anja chuckled. “That’s his fault.” Anja stated with a smile. “Sometimes he can’t keep his fangs or his...”

“Anja!” Helen exclaimed knowing what she was going to say.

Anja looked at her only slightly embarrassed and then back to Nalmos. She smiled shyly. “Sorry.” She said. “But you are correct. I am also Hadarian. My people are Healers. We have been part of the Union since its inception by this big lug’s grandfather.”

“And... the one... the Queen with the ears... she is...” Nalmos asked.

Danny nodded. “Another species within the Union.” He replied. “Two of my wives and mates are elves. Tasty too.” He stated with a smile.

“Daniel Simpson!” Helen popped.

“What?” Daniel spoke right back. “It’s true!”

“I will make sure I inform Anuk and Nayeca of your description of them.” Helen stated.

Nalmos couldn’t help but laugh gently now. The first laugh he had been able to have in many years now. He shook his head. “Our history scrolls... you are so much like what they say Alphas are... but you are so unlike them in many ways as well.”

Helen leaned forward. “Yes... well these two have made a history of being strange.” She stated. “And their chosen wives and mates are no different!”

All of them heard the *STRIKER* flash overhead and begin its descent into the landing zone a few hundred meters away. Martin rose to his feet and pulled Anja up with him before reaching over to help Helen up. Daniel rose and assisted Nalmos by his arm and they all looked at him.

“Time to go meet the boss of this female dominant species.” Martin said.

“This will be interesting.” Danny spoke.

“If everything... my experience with the Tasmor tells me they will be somewhat taken aback by your nature Milord.” Nalmos spoke as Helen took his arm.

“You have no idea.” Helen spoke as she began to lead him away.

“I’m not that bad.” Martin protested.

Anja slapped his armored chest. “That’s open for debate Lover.” She said before following Helen.

Danny moved up beside Martin as they waited until they were out of earshot. “What do you have running through that head of yours *fervon*?” He asked.

“Something stinks Dan.” Martin said softly. “It stinks to high heaven.”

“You noticed that too huh?” Danny commented.

“The Svorag didn’t just happen to find this planet in a leisurely stroll out among the stars Danny.” Martin said. “They were sent here. Directed here. And why just up and leave overnight when they were wiping everything out?”

“You think these Tasmor are involved?” Danny asked.

Martin shook his head. “That I don’t know.” He said. “What I do know is that these Kintaur ass wipes showed up here when the Tasmor were trying to pull Nalmos and survivors off the planet. They knew that the Tasmor would be here. They got that information from someone.”

Danny nodded. “That’s what the computer logs seem to indicate.” He said.

Martin looked at him. “I told Torma to find those few that Colin says escaped Danny. He and Isheeni will find them and bring them to you. Have Nubian work her magic on them.” He said referring to Nayeca by the nickname Danny had given her decades ago. “I want answers to my questions *fervon*.”

“Rules?” Danny asked.

“None.” Marti answered him. “None at all.”

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

AUSTROVA

2.3 KILOMETERS FROM COREN RE MYDALA’S ESTATE

The lights of the city in the distance and the many homes along its banks reflecting off the river gave it a beautiful glow along its entire length Sherice thought to herself. It stretched for many miles outside of the city; Arduri telling her it began in the mountains far to the north and ended up nearly a hundred and eighty miles to the south. As she allowed her soft blue eyes to scan the banks of the river with her keen wolf vision, Sherice couldn’t help the feelings of contentment and happiness that filled her now, no matter their situation. As she glanced out of the corner of her eyes, the source of those blissful emotions lay on the hard metal roof beside her behind the massive sniper rifle. Given whom her mother was, and the closeness that she had with all of the Leonidas children and the Royal family as a whole, Sherice shouldn’t have been taken by surprise at the emotions that flowed through her now. Growing up within Sparta and seeing the unquestioned love of the Leonidas family as well as her own family and so many others within Sparta, it should have been expected. These particular emotions had taken her completely off guard however, and they had blossomed and grew too powerful to resist far faster than even she had expected. It had all been so confusing to her at first... that was until she had made the call.

Sherice remembered the conversation with her beloved Lycavorian father as if it was yesterday. It was something she would never forget.

“Papa... I... I was looking for mother.”

The stern but handsome face of her Lycavorian father filled the holo transmission from her parent’s home within Sparta. She had not expected him to be home at this time of the day considering his duties and she was hoping to speak with her mother Thr’won.

“Your mother is in Eden City assisting Deia with her upcoming speech there.” Dansel answered her question. “She won’t return until this evening. Aren’t you deployed with Prince Androcles Sherice? Why are you calling? Is something wrong?”

Sherice shook her head quickly. “No, nothing is wrong father. I was just hoping to speak with mother about something.”

That is when her father’s bright blue eyes narrowed and the corner of his mouth curled slightly upward as it always had when he knew she wasn’t being completely truthful as a child. Sherice adored her father and

always had. He was a stern Spartan yes, but he was the most loving man she had ever known. He worshiped the ground her mother Thr'won walked upon and even after over five hundred years together, it was like watching newly mated wolves when they were together. Dandel was a powerful Lycavorian Alpha wolf of very pure blood and the opportunity to take other mates had presented itself to him in the past, yet he had never stopped to consider them. He had once told Sherice that her mother Thr'won was the only woman who could cause his Alpha blood to burn as it did. The day he had turned her and made her his mate was the finest day of his life. Sherice also knew that her mother loved him shamelessly in return.

This was a love that they had showered upon their six children, four daughters and two boys, Sherice being the oldest. She had been born two years before the return of King Leonidas, a time when her mother was very active within Sparta as the senior mage and advisor. When it was officially known who King Leonidas was, her mother became even more important and her authority and influence grew. This only made her father even prouder of the woman he had chosen to spend his days with, and he encouraged Thr'won to be as active as she felt the need to be. It was often her father who doted on her and her sisters while her mother took care of business within Sparta and across Earth as the First Oracle's trusted Assistant and finally the Senior Oracle for all of Earth.

Sherice had grown up among the Spartan instructors just like her father and was every bit as skilled as any young male wolf. Her father and others had taught her everything they knew, preparing her for her Agoge for weeks until she was ready. Dandel was a traditional Spartan soldier and senior member of the Durcunusaan now and he adhered to many of the ancient customs, but he was not adverse to change and new things which made him very unique in many ways. Sherice had never been afraid to speak to her father about anything at all when she was growing. Her five siblings had arrived after the return of the King, two of her sisters within the first two years, but Sherice had always remained her father's favorite.

Dandel looked at his oldest daughter in the transmission and reached out to pull the chair closer to him as he sat down. "What is wrong Sherice?" He asked her.

"What makes you think there is something wrong?" She spoke trying to deflect the focus away from her.

"You are the oldest of our children Sherice." Dandel told her. "I have taught you all I know and held nothing back..."

"That is because I am the oldest Papa! My brothers are not yet of age for their Agoges." Sherice said with a smile.

"I am as proud of you as I would be of any son of mine that your mother has given me. You are my first born Sherice; the anchor that holds all of your siblings together." Dandel stated confidently. "Give your mother and I time Sherice, we are still young you know! We will give you and your sisters more brothers; to even things out as your mother says." He finished with a smile.

Sherice smiled and laughed softly. "I know Papa." She answered knowingly for her mother and she had spoken of that very thing before she had left. "Mother has been talking about it as well."

"What troubles you daughter?" Dandel asked. "I know my oldest child well enough to know that you would not call from half a galaxy away unless something troubled you."

Sherice took a deep breath. "Papa I have met someone." She told him. "He is someone who..." Sherice met her father's eyes. "Papa, he causes my wolf blood to sing joyously to the moon. He is someone who..."

"It is the Kavalian that Androcles wanted you to assist with his Etheric powers isn't it?" Dandel questioned. "The one that he touched and granted our Etheric gift of Mindvoicing to isn't it?"

"Mother told you what I was doing?" Sherice asked surprised. She shouldn't have been shocked she knew, for her father, like many of the older Alpha wolves that were born and raised in Sparta had educated themselves in dozens of different fields over the years. The better to be prepared to face whatever came their way he had always told her. Sherice knew it was a matter of pride with them however and her father now held an advanced degree in engineering and was considered an exceptionally powerful Mindvoicer, one of the strongest within Sparta and on Earth.

"Your mother and I keep no secrets from each other Sherice." He answered. "You know that. The Durcunusaan knew that Androcles wanted her to recommend someone and she chose you. Your Etheric skills are nearly the equal of your mother and selecting you was an easy decision for her. The Feravomir agreed."

"Papa, you know that I allowed Falo to scent me?" Sherice told him.

"I am your father! Of course I would know this!" He stated.

"I thought Falo... I thought he was the one Papa." Sherice said. "He is strong and smart and he smells nice but, carians papa, he does not compare to Cowen."

"Tell me what you feel Sherice." Dansel told.

"Cowen is wild papa; so very wild and delicious." Sherice said wistfully. "He is so different than what we have been raised to believe about Kavalians. He is smart and thoughtful and so very powerful. His scent is like, it is like warm, roasted walnuts and it fills my head and my blood even when I am not around him papa! I want to give myself to him but I do not want to dishonor you and mother."

Dansel's eyes grew wide. "Dishonor us?" He exclaimed. "Sherice you could never dishonor your mother and I! Why would you think such a thing?"

"I let Falo scent me Papa." Sherice said. "He believes we are a couple now. I thought we were a couple until I met Cowen. Now I don't know. You have... you are a traditional Spartan papa, and that is how you raised us to be. I..."

"What does your blood and your heart tell you Sherice?" Dansel asked his daughter. "You are half elf but you are still an Alpha female. What does your blood and heart call for daughter?"

"They scream for Cowen papa." She answered instantly. "They scream for him to the very heavens. It is not something I ever expected. I didn't even care for him in the beginning."

"Then you act on that daughter!" Dansel spoke firmly. "If this Cowen does this to you, then you act on it! Your mother and I have never questioned your instincts Sherice. I will not question them now over some silly notion that because Falo scented you, that you now belong to him. You are not mates! If another man stirs your blood enough to have you question what you feel for Falo then it is your right to explore this. And chose him if that is your desire!"

"He is the one Papa." Sherice said. "I know he is the one. I feel it in my heart of hearts."

Dansel nodded his head. "Then I expect you to act as the Spartan daughter I raised you to be." He told her. "I will deal with this Falo."

"Cowen is Kavalian father." Sherice said softly.

"I do not care if he is a green alien from across the stars!" Dansel replied with firm confidence. "If he has stolen the heart of my oldest daughter then he stands above all others."

Sherice smiled. "Thank you papa." She said.

Dansel laughed. "Do not thank me." He said happily. "You do not need my permission to pursue what your wolf blood tells you daughter. You never have. All I ask is that you are sure of your actions."

"I am sure father." Sherice said.

"Then I look forward to meeting this Cowen." Dansel spoke. "And we will share mugs of Spartan wine and talk of the future."

"I don't know when we will return papa." Sherice said.

"Then do your duty daughter and be safe." Dansel said. "I will tell your mother when she returns and we will pray for you out there among the stars."

"As I do for both of you Papa." Sherice said.

Sherice had done exactly what her father told her to do. She acted on what her wolf blood called for her to do. And she was so very delighted she had.

Last night had been the most incredibly erotic and pleasurable evening of her young life and what made it even better was that she knew it would continue for centuries to come. She had gone to Cowen's room, unable to contain the burning of her blood for the massive and very shy Kavalian. Cowen had been surprised yes, but that had not lasted long however. Apparently his emotions were running just as hot as hers. It had taken some nudging on Sherice's part, but what had followed had been the most explosive, passionate and fulfilling night of sex in her life. Cowen's Shan may not have been Lycavorian, but you would have been hard pressed to convince Sherice of that last night. He had practically torn her clothes from her and then proceeded to spend the next hour simply worshiping her lithe body in ways she had never imagined a man could. He had explored and tasted every curve of her body, leaving nothing undiscovered. His short, light brown fur was so very soft and Sherice couldn't keep herself from running her long fingers through his fur no matter where on his huge frame it was as his lips and tongue and hands explored every inch of her body. And his tail... what he had done to her with his tail was simply divine.

Cowen's six foot four body dwarfed her in size, the muscles bulging under his short fur, but for all his size, Sherice had never met a man so gentle but so zealous in his love making. There was nothing he did that came close to the many things she had heard about Kavalians and how they forced their females to be submissive. If anything, Cowen's Shan went out of his way to be the complete opposite. When it finally came time for Sherice to see and experience all he had to give her, she had descended into a world of decadent pleasure that shook her body and her soul right to its core. Sherice was no stranger to men but Cowen filled her in a way that no man had ever been able to do. He was so thick and so long and when she finally grew accustomed to his enormous size, he began to make love to her with a fervor that was unmatched by any wolf or elven man that had ever shared her bed. Her half Lycavorian and half elven body was wrapped within his powerful arms the entire time, as one earth shattering orgasm after another piled atop each other. When Cowen finally reached his own peak and the bulb at the base of his huge cock expanded and locked them together Sherice simply screamed in absolute harmony.

A full hour they had remained locked together that first time and during that time they had stroked each other's bodies and spoke in soft whispers of love and devotion. His soft lips showered her shoulders and neck with fluttering kisses even as his tail danced across her thighs and along her lower back. Cowen did not hold back from her, he didn't want to, for she had already seen the most private parts of his mind during her schooling of him. It was Sherice who began the next bout of love making between them, and Cowen had allowed her to take the lead. And for a glorious hour Sherice had ridden him, sweat adorning both of their bodies and his amazing cock never ceasing to cause rapturous orgasms to ripple through her, even as her whimpers of delight echoed softly in the room. When she sensed he could no longer hold back, Sherice slammed herself down upon his huge cock one last time and felt that wondrous bulb expand once more, locking their groins together as his hot passion erupted deep within her. Sherice had collapsed into an exhausted heap upon his chest utterly spent after that and while his hands and tail stroked her skin once more, she drifted off into a content filled sleep.

That is where she had awoken this morning. The warmth of his fur covered body and his powerful arms encircling her waist made her feel safer at that moment than at any time in her life.

"Archangel Team One is in position Angel Base." Cowen's deep voice jarred her out of her incredible memories as he spoke into his COM implant and she scooted closer to him.

It had been Cowen's idea to have a Sniper Team higher up than the others in an over watch position, which meant putting them across the river from Coren Re Mydala's estate on the roof of this building that had not yet opened to the public. Four other teams were lower to the ground and set up in different locations but only Cowen could see the entire estate from his position. This also meant a larger sniper rifle with more range and once more, only Cowen had the skill and experience in distance shooting to handle the Lycavorian Union's largest and most lethal sniper rifle.

The Union H21A CHAOS was designed and manufactured after King Leonidas returned because of his penchant for durable and reliable weapons. The H21A was the heaviest and longest ranged sniper rifle known to exist today. Cowen's eyes had lit up when he had seen the weapon and Sherice couldn't help but chuckle at his reaction. It was chambered for the ancient, human .50 caliber projectile round, but each and every bullet was hand crafted and loaded. Each round was tipped with a Dragon Armor casing wrapped around a tiny plasma explosive tip. In tests, the H21A had killed targets over four kilometers away with a one hundred percent success ratio. The action and barrel had been reworked when it was redesigned, the different materials used to manufacture it lighter than what they once were, but it was still a heavy weapon and looked nearly identical in looks to its grandfather, the .50 caliber Barrett Sniper Rifle. It had also been proven to be able to punch through thin layers of most known metal and light armor if used by a superior marksman. Cowen's Shan was such a shooter.

Cowen turned his head and let his eyes gaze at Sherice as he felt her press up against his side and lift the macro-binos to her eyes to scan the area. The sun was going down but the glow on the horizon made her skin shimmer in beauty. Cowen too remembered the night before and what it meant for his future. In all of his wildest dreams, never once did he imagine he would have a beauty such as Sherice. There were Kavalian females who were equally as beautiful but something about Sherice gave her the edge over them. She was his, of that he had no doubt. She had professed as much to him over and over while they pleased each other. He had done the same, whispering words of love to her while he allowed her to swim within his mind. Feeling her

lush body in his arms was all it took to prove to him that this was no dream and waking with her sprawled upon his chest and sleeping peacefully was all the reward he ever wanted. His life now rested beside him; his life and his future. Cowen had allowed the instincts his father had secretly instilled in him to come out, for he no longer needed to hide these values and ideals among these men and women. He had acted as his father taught him to act. Sherice was a precious gem to him now, one for which he would gladly kill or be killed. His heart belonged to her and she had made it abundantly clear just this morning as they laid in bed that he now belonged to her. He let his eyes wander over her delicately curved half elven ears and the curve of her jaw. Her blond hair was pulled into a tight pony tail as most of the female *Durcunusaan* and soldiers of the Union did.

“Visibility will be down to nothing in about an hour.” Sherice spoke softly. “You’ll have to use the Low Light Spectral Imaging scope.”

“I know.” Cowen said seeing her face turn to his as she lowered the binos.

Sherice saw his beautiful, feline like hazel colored eyes gazing on her and she felt a shudder of delight ripple through her.

“Sherice I...” He began to speak.

Sherice covered his lips with two fingers quickly and shook her head. She leaned over and replaced her fingers with her lips and kissed him lovingly. It was a slow, lingering kiss of total devotion and commitment. “I am yours Cowen’Shan. I am yours and you are mine.” She said softly.

“Are you certain?” He asked wanting one more confirmation.

Sherice smiled brilliantly. “I am more certain about us than anything else in my life.” She told him.

Cowen’s eyes glittered at her words. “As am I.” He stated.

“Good. Now let’s do this, so that we can have more nights like we did last night.” Sherice told him seductively. “Twice was not nearly enough with my new husband and mate, though it was absolutely divine.”

“Yes it was.” He agreed.

“***Archangel Team One, do you have eyes on the entire estate?***” The male voice sounded over their COM implants and Cowen smiled and stole a kiss from Sherice before turning his head back to his scope.

“Affirmative Angel Base.” Cowen answered. “I will be switching to Low Light Spectral Vision shortly.”

“Acknowledged Team One. Be advised... only secure transmissions from here on out. We will be using the newly issued communications designators. Confirm?”

“Confirmed Angel Base.” Sherice answered for them.

General Vengal had sent out the word from Earth and it had reached them only the night before. Admiral Sa’sur had passed it on to them in the daily briefing. The new Communications Designators had been designed in such a way that they were easy to remember, but it would not be simple to pinpoint who exactly was being talked about. Vengal had taken a page from the ancient Secret Service Agency that had once protected the President of the United States back when there had been such a country. Only the *Durcunusaan* or those close to the Royal family would have the official code words of each Leonidas family member, while their Spartan call signs would remain the same with only minor adjustments to add Fedor and Eirene to the list, as well as Kalis and Karun now. Their sister Nikkei had also received a similar number, but since she had chosen to remain with her mother and follow more the calling of her Kavalian blood, her call sign would remain inactive for now.

Due to his penchant for being so protective of his siblings and his family altogether, Androcles Leonidas would now be known as *Archangel* among the *Durcunusaan*. His Spartan call sign would not change from Spartan 11, with Sadi and his other wives and mates carrying a letter designator after the number 11. The King and Queens were Spartan One through Spartan Seven, while Gorgo was Spartan Eight, Deia Spartan Nine and Daniel Simpson Spartan Ten.

“Archangel Team Four is in position and Team Lead would like a description of the area while she aligns the cameras.” The voice stated.

Cowen settled behind the scope as Sherice lifted her binos once more.

“...Sniper teams are all in place.” Murano spoke as he reentered the room Coren had used for his office for nearly a hundred years.

He now wore Union Body armor but still carried his Saber Staff and an additional K12 Magnum on his left leg. He refused to carry a P190 A4, but that concerned no one. Androcles hardly ever used one anymore, and Murano had proven more than capable without the chopped down version of the rifle.

“Coren made it out as well?” Andro asked turning from the table they were using as a map tile. It had a holographic image of the estate on the surface, with Denali, Dorian, Deion, Jomann and Dutkne standing around it.

Murano moved up beside him with a nod. “He will act on the new information this Rinel and his friend Jokros were able to discover. It should be interesting what they find.”

“No bets here.” Denali quipped.

Andro nodded and turned back to the holo map. “I will leave that to Coren.” He said.

Murano looked at the detailed holo image of the estate and the grounds. “What is this?” He asked.

Andro motioned with his finger. “The two most likely routes they will take to perform entry onto the estate grounds.” He answered turning back to the map model. “...One from the northeast, the other directly from the west. They provide the most cover and concealment leading up to the estate and the least chance to be spotted by Vanari who might be awake.”

Murano nodded his head. “We have already covered this.” He spoke. He looked at Andro intently. “Now tell me what it is you feel boy, or what you two have seen with your *Dahakoan* sight.”

Murano and Sarlana had spoken many times since that first moment on the ship, mostly of Androcles and Dorian, but of other things as well. A grudging respect and friendship had formed between them and now they felt comfortable being with each other. It was Sarlana who had tried to explain to him why the *Dahakoan* of old had been so powerful and so successful against the Scourge even though they lacked the Etheric powers of the Pralor Praetorians. The *Dahakoan* had somehow been able to see into the future for short seconds and were able to almost always predict what the Scourge were going to do. It was like this in personal combat as well and that is why so few of them fell to Scourge warriors in one on one fights. It was sort of a living and moving precognition skill as Sarlana had tried to explain to him, and combined with their natural strength and speed as a species, it had been devastating. Not many people knew of this skill but as a *Doraanar*, it was one of the secrets that they held the knowledge of. Androcles, Murano knew now thanks to his father, had been exhibiting flashes of this skill all of his life, which would account in part for his incredible prowess on the battlefield. Dorian had showed signs of this as well in several different battles recently on Solmar. Murano had begun calling it their *Dahakoan* sight and even as he schooled them in Praetorian tactics and skills, he knew this *Dahakoan* sight made them far more deadly than any Praetorian that had ever lived with the exception perhaps of their father. Martin Leonidas was unique unto himself.

“It’s not that simple Murano.” Dorian spoke. “We can’t exactly control it.”

“We in this room are the beginning of the future of the Praetorians *and* the *Dahakoan*.” Murano spoke. “With Sarlana, Dutkne, Nara, Helen and others, we will be the Heralds of a new day. We will be hope for the future of my people as well as your own and the Darastrixi. This is not what I had envisioned happening, but it is what is taking place and we must accept it and embrace it.”

“Really Murano...?” Deni spoke up now. “No pressure huh...?”

Murano looked at him. “You believe it is different for me Denali? It is not. I have to learn new things just as all of you are. I am still learning, and I believe your grandfather Sumar knew this and that is why he insured I was left behind; so that I could be here and so we could learn together. Teach each other. This power we command is...” Murano shook his head. “We must remain ever vigilant over ourselves and what we can do my friends. I do not wish to change who all of you are. I am the one who must change to suit the times, and I have and still am, but we can learn from the past, just as we learn from the present and what the future could hold.”

It was silent for a moment until Andro met his eyes. “You have been hanging around with Sarlana haven’t you?” He said.

Murano grinned a crooked grin and shrugged. “Perhaps a little.” He answered.

“*Anse fervon*, for a minute there I thought he was going to go into a *Feravomir* rant like when we were small.” Denali spoke.

This broke the tension and they all laughed softly as they turned back to the holo map. Andro pointed to the northeast on the map.

“They will come from the northeast.” He stated moving his finger along the path. “From there, right up to the employee entrance of the estate and onto the main grounds.”

Dorian leaned closer to the map now. “They’ll split into two groups. Half will move for the residential rooms, while the others move into the main estate here.”

Murano looked at the map and nodded. “They are confident.” He spoke finally. “Too confident.”

“That is because they have never faced anyone like those in this room.” Dutkne spoke now. “You must remember, with the exception of the Enverr, no one has been brazen enough to confront us directly in this quadrant of space. Not after we had our encounter with the OSG and destroyed one of their colony worlds.”

“It will be full dark in three hours.” Andro said looking up and out of the patio doors into the setting sun. “They will hit us shortly after high moon. When they assume we will be in our rooms sleeping or entertaining ourselves.”

“Well... some of us would be anyway.” Dutkne spoke again with a grin.

Deion elbowed him gently in the side. “Your day will come Dutkne.” He stated already knowing, as did all of his brothers and sisters that Dutkne was head over heels for their sister Zarah and Lucia. It was only a matter of time before they realized that he was who they wanted as well.

“Before or after I am old enough to remember how it works?” Dutkne asked.

This brought soft laughter from all of them and Murano once more had to shake his head at the laconic nature of Lycavorian Spartans. Most especially those like Martin and his sons and daughters. They viewed danger as a challenge. And they never backed down from a challenge.

“Eirene has set up in Safe House One and is monitoring all of the Vid Feeds from the area. Mari is standing by with her in order to override any electronic measures they might put in place as well as mess with the Vanari systems.” Andro continued. “Eli, *Inamarno*, Serale and Cvea have the triage set up and standing by at Safe House Two. The tunnels connect them so they will never be out of touch.”

Jomann nodded. “And I won’t tell you the words she used to describe being left out of the fighting.” He spoke up with a smile.

“If this goes to *sibfla*... she will be up to her eye balls in fighting.” Andro commented. “She won’t have time to complain.”

“True enough.” Jomann said.

“Fedor and Famus will drop the QRF right on top of us if I call for them.” Andro told them. “Father and Uncle Danny say he is a little on the reckless side, but his tactics and skill are unquestioned. He will come in guns blazing if we need him too, and he won’t be concerned for property damage.”

“Let us hope we don’t need them.” Murano stated. “I spoke to some of Garan’s men after Onterom. Until the moment he was injured they said Fedor and his wife Iama were like ghosts. They took down two teams of Garan’s men before they knew what hit them.”

“Then we must keep the battle contained to Coren’s estate, inside the perimeter that Vanari Commandos loyal to Coren will set up the moment the battle starts. We must move quickly and decisively and keep the initiative.” Andro told them. “If the fight spills into the streets, you can damn well bet that Ardan will have his own Vanari Commandos ready to act. They won’t hesitate to fire on any Lycavorian they see. It fits perfectly with the picture he is trying to paint of our people. Denali and I now have Vanari wives and mates and we truly do not want to injure or kill their people.” Andro motioned to the map again. “Kalis, Daio, and Ridor will be set up on three points of the compass to insure none of them escape back the way they come in. With Cowen and Sherice directing them from the building across the river, none should reach the wall. We contain them, collapse them and then kill them.”

“Where’s Torrian?” Denali asked. “His speed would be welcome on the perimeter edges.”

Andro shook his head. “He is escorting Ulana and the other Senators to Lorent on Amanuce. It’s very low key and I want it to stay that way. They will review the final pieces of the merger and then brief *Tenna Deia* and the other members of the Senate back home.”

“Prisoners *fervon*?” Dorian asked.

Andro shook his head slowly. “Only one. I want the leader of this assault team, whoever he is.” He replied. “Cowen will try to mark him when they enter the estate, no doubt he will be directing the others. The rest do not leave the property alive.”

“What will you do with this man Androcles?” Murano asked now.

Andro met his eyes. "I'm going to give him to my Drow brother Am'uur and my Drow father." He replied instantly. "They are waiting on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. They will interrogate him."

"And when they are done?" Murano pressed him.

"Then they will see to it that he disappears." Androcles answered looking directly into Murano's eyes. "Forever."

After a moment Murano nodded his head. In the short time he had spent with Martin and Wayonn and even now among Androcles, he discovered his tolerance for criminals or dictators of any kind had grown non-existent. He thought perhaps it was because of their influence on him, or perhaps because he had never experienced such things within Pralor society. Finally he decided it disgusted his Praetorian honor to see such actions could be undertaken by one species against another, and the new found emotions that were coming forth from within him, that he wasn't afraid to keep in any more, they were causing him to feel like this. It was refreshing for Murano and felt so very free. Sumar had always taught them to guard their emotions and keep them held in check, but now he saw and was learning what Sumar obviously had learned and did all those millennia ago when he became part of these people.

Emotions were their strength and their power.

"So be it." He stated.

AUSTROVA WESTERN HEIGHTS RESIDENTIAL SECTOR HOME OF VANARI FIRST REGENT ALRERIN SHA HARAEL

Coren looked up at the rising moon as he exited the Lifter car on the private platform of Alrerin Sha Harael. His home was situated on the far edge of the city and set back against the base of the mountains to the north. He looked at Jokros as he exited the Lifter along with Rinell, Nyosa, Lisisa, Arduri and two Cadre Commandos loyal to him. Coren had to admit that Andro was far more politically adept than others made him out to be as he had sent his sister Lisisa along with them at the last moment in order to make a statement. His discussions and talks with Denali over the last months had made Coren come to see that Androcles knew intimately where each of his siblings excelled. Lisisa was the statesmen among the Leonidas children. There were no questions about her fighting skills, but Lisisa Leonidas was also able to put men and women alike at ease with her calm demeanor, incredible exotic beauty and soft spoken voice. Androcles had used Lisisa before in such a role and that is why he had sent her tonight, to show that the commitment of Andro and the Union to the Vanari was true and honest. Coren for one was very happy she was here.

"You are sure she is here Jokros?" Coren asked softly.

Jokros nodded as he saw the two Vanari security make their way towards them from the small security building. "Yes. These two Cadre are children of one of my best friends Coren. They would not lie to me."

Coren turned as the two Commandos walked up alertly but not with hostility. One was female and the other male and they stopped in front of Coren and the others.

"She is inside Jokros." The female Vanari spoke. "As well as her husband and children."

Jokros looked at her with wide eyes. "The husband came as well Ma'nia?" He gasped.

The Cadre Commando nodded. "He always does whenever he can break away from his duties in the Protectorate. Well... the Union now."

Coren looked at her wide eyed. "How long has this been going on?" He gasped softly in surprise.

Ma'nia met his eyes. "Since the birth of their first child Regent Re Mydala."

"How... how is that possible?" Coren gasped.

"The Underground System Tarnie helped to put in place." Rinell spoke now. "No wonder she has been so protective of it. She uses it herself!"

"We must go inside Coren." Lisisa spoke now. "If someone sees us even by accident, our gambit will be lost. Jeth is above us circling with Tharua and they are high enough to remain hidden from casual view but why press our advantage."

Coren nodded his head. "Yes of course." He stated. Coren had to admit he felt a bit safer with Lisisa Leonidas with them. Arduri was beside her, their hands clasped tightly together and he relaxed even more. He knew that Denali and Lisisa both loved Arduri more than he could ever imagine. And his second oldest daughter loved them both equally in return. He also knew that Androcles trusted his sister Lisisa without question when it came to security and other such issues. He was aware of the relationship Androcles had with his sisters and brothers thanks to the times he had spoken to Denali, and while Eliani and this Zarah, whom he had never met, seemed to be more attuned to him in many ways, he trusted Lisisa without hesitation.

"This way Regent." Ma'nia spoke as she motioned with her hand and began leading them down the path.

Alrerin Sha Harael's weathered face was absent of the strain and pressure of leadership as he laughed and bounced the small, blue skinned Vanari child on his knee in front of the roaring fireplace. This was his daughter's youngest child, the three year old boy with a head of thick dark hair and bright blue eyes. His small wolf fangs were extended in happiness as he played with his grandfather and he clutched at Alrerin's cheeks and pulled on his hair gently. It was a sight that not many Vanari had ever seen and one the vast majority would not believe. Alrerin She Harael had always been an avid supporter of the anti-Lycavorian members of the Board of Regents. He had almost never sided against them in political matters when hashing out the treaties and such and this had painted him as one who did not care for the Lycavorians of the Protectorate.

The reality could not have been further from the perceived truth.

Alrerin Sha Harael had been present for all but one of the births of his grandchildren with his oldest daughter Narlei and her Lycavorian husband. She was his oldest child and his only daughter and until ninety-six years ago he had thought her lost to him forever. They day she contacted him from Lorent and told him that she had been rescued, that was the day Alrerin Sha Harael became a changed man. His entire outlook on events and happenings within the Vanari Empire became different. His first act was to insist that his daughter not return to Austrova or allow the others who had been rescued to return either. Narlei had protested vehemently until her much more political astute father explained to her his reasoning. As he did this, he could see the set of her jaw and the hardening of stunning green her eyes as he allowed her to know all that he had suspected of happening within the government. Narlei reluctantly agreed and did as he asked of her. She trusted her father's wisdom and knowledge of how the Vanari government system worked implicitly. When the man who had carried her from that camp swore to him that he would keep her safe from harm Alrerin had taken him at his word. He knew far more of the many customs and society of the Lycavorian people than he let on to anyone and he knew the man's words were sincere. He spoke to Narlei every week for the next two years until the day that Riordian had contacted him directly. At first he thought something had happened because the man, whom he had spoken to quite often over those two years, appeared flustered and anxious. Alrerin discovered why when Riordian finally asked for his permission to take Narlei as his wife and mate.

Alrerin Sha Harael hesitated for all of two seconds before he blessed their union with every ounce of happiness within him. It was not uncommon for him to retreat to his personal estate for days on end with no sightings since Narlei's abduction, and he used this habit of his to insure that he and his wife were present on Lorent for their ceremony. Until that time he had never been to the Protectorate homeworld, indeed to any Protectorate world, and though his visit was known to only a very small group of men and women, he found it fascinating. He was surprised when he first saw Riordian in the flesh; the man was like a walking around tree trunk, so tall and thickly built, yet he could not contain the happiness he felt at seeing the look on his daughter's face, or the utter gaze of devotion Riordian held for her in his blue eyes. Riordian worshiped his daughter and the ground she walked upon and this is when Alrerin began to learn one of the true customs of the Lycavorian people, their devotion to their wives and mates, their family and to each other. The small ceremony was short but utterly beautiful, and the party lasted for two entire days. Alrerin met most of Riordian's family and was duly impressed with the intelligence and respect he was shown. He got along famously with Riordian's father, a much older Lycavorian who was so happy his son had finally taken a wife the man could not stop praising Narlei and all she had accomplished in just two short years among them.

He was right too, for Narlei had immediately begun to form the Lycanari Underground and within the first eighteen months had established a network of contacts within both governments that would allow her to do what she wanted to do. The Lycanari Underground would provide for ways that rescued Vanari could communicate with their families if they so chose. All of them who had been rescued with Narlei were now founding members of the Lycanari society. It had been small when they started, for there were only a few dozen Vanari and Lycavorian relationships before the Protectorate began to rescue those taken by the OSG, but it quickly grew and Narlei found herself appointed as the defacto representative of them. She embraced this role, as did Riordian, and she threw herself into her work and her new life as the wife and mate to a Lycavorian. Narlei possessed all the skills of a turned Lycavorian, but as with all Lycanari, she could not shift her form. The Vanari DNA makeup did not allow for this type of change, though Narlei discovered it mattered not to the billions of Lycavorians in the Protectorate. The Lycanari, as they came to call themselves, were equally as respected and welcomed as any.

Alrerin and his wife spent the last decades speaking to their daughter every week and seeing her as often as they were able to get away. They had been present for the births of all of Narlei and Riordian's children except for their last child, who Alrerin now held in his lap. It was during these trips that Alrerin learned more and more of the Lycavorian people and even their ancient language. He came to love Riordian as a son for the man doted over Narlei in every way possible and when he held any of his children in his arms, you could tell he did not see a Lycanari, he saw his flesh and blood no matter the color of their skin. Alrerin knew that his daughter had just been selected by unanimous vote of the Protectorate Senate to join their ranks and take part in their government openly. This would mean changes Alrerin knew, and new revelations, but the pride he felt for her accomplishments knew no bounds.

And so did his concern.

Alrerin did not doubt that Ardan had spies watching him and had for decades. He also did not doubt that Ardan and his OSG supporters undoubtedly knew about Narlei being alive and well and the wife of a Lycavorian. Alrerin knew of what Ardan and his cronies were doing and to counter this, he made it seem as if he hated the Lycavorians even more for his daughter's actions in not returning to Austrova. He sided with them on nearly everything through the years and began to make them believe that he was solidly in their pocket, all the while secretly meeting with his daughter and husband and his grandchildren. He had no intention of doing anything that would bring harm to his only daughter and the life she had built, but he still worried constantly for her. It was times like these however; times that made him forget those worries as he bounced his grandson on his knees and played with the small but strong boy. Five of his grandchildren had made the trip this time, three of them sitting at the table in the kitchen and eating their favorite Vanari foods while their older boy helped their father unload their equipment from the hidden Lifter that had brought them here. They would stay for a week this time and Alrerin intended to enjoy every moment of that time.

Fate however, Fate had other ideas.

Ma'nia stepped around the corner of the entrance hall and into the main room of the home and looked at him. Alrerin turned after a moment, sensing her presence, and he smiled at her. Ma'nia was one of a half dozen Cadre Commandos who knew what went on here and the relationship the First Regent had with his daughter and her Lycavorian husband. He trusted her and the others with their lives and he saw the look of worry on her face almost instantly.

"Ma'nia?" Alrerin asked as he turned in the chair. "What is wrong?"

Ma'nia met his eyes. "Forgive me First Regent... but I have... I can not let this go on any longer?" She spoke softly.

"What do you mean?" Alrerin asked.

Ma'nia looked to the side and nodded her head. That is when Coren stepped around the corner with Rinell and came fully into the room. Alrerin rose to his feet and lifted his grandson into his arms protectively as Lisisa, Arduri, Nyosa and Jokros quickly followed Coren into the room.

"I believe she means that we have much to talk of Alrerin my old friend." Coren spoke calmly.

"Coren!" Alrerin exclaimed aloud. His eyes grew even wider when he recognized Rinell instantly as well. "Rinell? Rinell is that... is that you?"

Rinell bowed his head out of respect. "It has been many years First Regent." He answered him.

Narlei had heard her father's intake of breath even from the kitchen with her wolf ears and she came rushing around the corner from another direction with her mother and Riordian in tow.

"Papa what..." Her voice stopped when she saw where her father was looking and she came up short as well.

Riordian however, he acted with all the instincts of any pureblood Lycavorian and he brought up his sidearm to level it at the small group. He would protect his beloved wife and family no matter the cost to him. Lisisa had expected this and lifted her hand instantly, and using her TK power, she ripped the weapon from Riordian's grasp easily. His eyes went wide as it slapped into her hand from ten meters away.

"There is no need for weapons." Lisisa spoke calmly as she handed the weapon to Ma'nia with barely a thought. "We are not here to do anyone harm."

"Princess Leonidas!" Riordian gasped aloud as he recognized her instantly from the many holo images and reports that had been floating around Protectorate space of the Leonidas Royal family and how they were the most beloved Royal family in anyone's history. Lisisa watched as he dropped to one knee without a thought, Narlei beside him, and both of them dipped their heads.

Lisisa shook her head in disgust. "Get up both of you!" She snapped moving around Coren. "No one saw us arrive and no one but my brother knows we are here! Everyone just relax and remain calm. We have only come to talk."

Coren waited before stepped up beside Lisisa and leaning over to kiss her cheek. "I bless your brother's decision to send you with me." He stated openly.

Lisisa looked at him and smiled. "What happens from here on out Coren Re Mydala, it means as much to him as it does to us all." She stated.

Coren nodded his head. "Indeed it does." He said as he watched Riordian and Narlei rise back to their feet slowly. Coren returned his gaze to Alrerin. "Lisisa is correct Alrerin, no one saw us leave my estate and no one knows we are here. Your secret is safe. However, I do believe it is time we had a long, overdue talk about things have come to be as they are. Please my friend, we can no longer keep these secrets from each other, for it will destroy our people from within."

Alrerin stood there holding his grandson for along moment. He turned his head and looked at his grandson's smiling face and how he still clung to his hair. Alrerin Sha Harael made his decision then. A decision he should have made decades ago. He turned back to Coren and shifted his grandson into a more comfortable position on his hip and his demeanor became one of welcoming warmth.

"There is much that I need to tell you Coren Re Mydala." He stated confidently. "Please, I welcome you into my home."

"...Began to suspect Ardan knew she was alive after a decade." Alrerin spoke softly. All of them were now sitting in the main room, Alrerin's wife of nearly two thousand years sat beside him with their grandson on her lap. Narlei and Riordian sat together on one couch, Lisisa and Arduri sitting on the second couch with two of their other children between them. Narlei and Riordian's children were fascinated with Lisisa and Arduri for they were old enough to know that they were both Princesses of the Union and Lisisa's half Lycavorian and half Vampire nature gave her an exotic look that they had not seen before.

Coren, Rinel and Jokros occupied the third couch that had been moved into the main room and were listening intently.

"Thankfully, getting information out of the former Protectorate government was next to impossible for a Vanari diplomat." Alrerin explained. "They were keeping the Lycanari a closely guarded secret. They did not want to cause undo political issues if the Board of Regents discovered that so many of our people had chosen to remain and make lives for themselves with the Lycavorians."

"When the Protectorate Senate finally held their secret vote on whether to continue the operations to rescue us, it was unanimous. There was not a dissenting vote among the three hundred plus who took part in it." Narlei picked it up. "Even after ten years among them and eight years of being Riordian's wife and mate, I still did not understand the intense hatred of slavery that is common to the Lycavorians."

"It carried over from the Black Day didn't it?" Lisisa said softly.

Narlei nodded her head. "Even though those in the Protectorate had not experienced the Black Day and what came after, we knew what had taken place and it resonated among our people deeply." She spoke. It was Lisisa who noted with some satisfaction that Narlei spoke the word Lycavorian with pride and used it to refer to both her own Vanari blood and now her Lycavorian blood. "Slavery in any shape or form is considered vile and just as heinous as it is within the Union; and it is eliminated without question whenever it is found."

Coren looked at Alrerin. "You knew then didn't you?" He asked.

Alrerin met his eyes and nodded. "I suspected yes." He replied. "Only after speaking with Narlei when she was rescued was I able to confirm it."

"Wait a minute... I don't understand?" Jokros spoke up now. "If Ardan knows she is alive why has he not moved against you before?"

"I believe he suspects Narlei lives, though I am not entirely sure." Alrerin corrected him.

"There are very few on Lorent that know I am the daughter to the Vanari First Regent." Narlei told them. "It did not seem like the sort of information I should be offering."

"Wise move." Coren agreed.

"Even if he does know for sure, I have cultivated the idea that her decision to stay among them was her idea. That she was betraying us." Alrerin answered him.

"Then all of these years," Rinel spoke now. "Your public position on the Lycavorians has been a ruse?"

Alrerin nodded his head. "It was the only way I knew of that I could keep her safe. Given what I suspected and what you have now only confirmed, if Ardan and those working with him knew that I was aware of what they were doing, they would have gone after Narlei and my grandchildren. I could not allow that."

Narlei rolled her eyes. "As if that was ever the case papa." She told him with a warm smile. "I sometimes trip over the security my husband and mate has around me."

"Knowing what we have discovered now it is better that he did." Lisisa spoke up. "The number of Lycavorians involved in this has my brother and Dutkne very upset. They will settle accounts harshly I assure you."

Coren rose to his feet slowly. "This cannot remain hidden any longer Alrerin." He said looking at him.

Alrerin met his eyes. "I will do nothing that puts my family at risk!" He barked out. "I thought Narlei lost to me once! I will not go through that again!"

"Androcles Leonidas will do exactly as he says he will Alrerin!" Coren snapped. "Even now he is preparing to defend us!"

"What... what do you mean?" Alrerin asked.

"We know that the OSG is working with members of the former Protectorate." Lisisa explained. "We also know that members of the Union were working with them as well. This has been going on far longer than you realize and it is much more involved than just Narlei and yourself Alrerin Sha Harael. The moment they brought slaves through Union space they made an enemy of my brother and my father. Our entire family. Now they will pay the price for breaking our laws and trafficking in slavery."

"I don't follow." Alrerin said.

"Those members of the Union who were involved in this are either all dead or have gone so far underground they will never resurface for fear of their lives." Lisisa told him. "Those from the former Protectorate who are involved are now all being watched carefully. Andro's arrival has caused them to act. They fear Caliria's discovery being made public. Until we arrived they did not know for sure if the serum she discovered actually worked. Androcles made abundantly clear that it did when he retrieved Caliria from the University. Ardan and others saw this for themselves on the *SCIMITAR* when one of the young women taken from the Beta Quadrant with Caliria returned fully cured and having no desire to return to the surface. She was Caliria's friend."

Narlei looked at her now. "Then... then it is true?" She asked. "She... she devised a serum?"

Lisisa nodded her head. "And the means to mass produce it with the help of my Hadarian mother and Aunts." She replied watching as Narlei took Riordian's hand in hers and squeezed it tightly.

Alrerin rose to his feet now as well. "I have been trying to do what I can to minimize how many of our females they take." Alrerin spoke. "I have been passing information to Narlei and others in order to make it harder for them to conduct their vile kidnappings."

Coren looked at him. “That is why?” He gasped. “That is why they have moved so close to the core of our territory?”

Alrerin nodded his head. “I haven’t been idle Coren. I have risked much through the years in trying to blunt their actions!”

“It is you that has been giving our ships the information.” Rinel spoke now.

Lisisa looked at him. “Rinel?” She asked.

Rinel rose to his feet now as well. “For decades now we have been receiving encrypted messages with the locations and travel corridors of Vanari ships which would be considered high value targets for the OSG. A high number of young Vanari females on board. In many of these cases we were able to have ships in the area along our borders that would have responded to any distress call or sign of trouble. Our presence kept the OSG from acting. It is why the OSG has moved further and further into Vanari space over the years. The information Alrerin has passed to us allowed us to thwart many of these abductions.”

Alrerin nodded. “But in response, Ardan has ordered Vanari ships to remain closer to the core of our territory and conduct their travels. This has enabled the OSG to begin resuming their abductions with little or no resistance. It is why so many have been taken in recent years. The OSG grew bolder because of Ardan and his actions.”

“Alrerin why did you not come to me?” Coren asked him. “To anyone?”

“With what proof?” Alrerin exclaimed. “Rumor and innuendo? I could not find any proof Coren Re Mydala! Ardan is not a stupid man, and those who are helping him are not stupid either Coren. Had I come forward with what I suspected, I would have been laughed at and scorned. He would have initiated a call of no confidence in my leadership and then all would have been lost, you know this!”

Coren stepped closer to him. “He would have lobbied to have himself installed as First Regent.” He said softly with a nod.

Alrerin nodded. “I knew the only way I could continue to help until I discovered a way to stop him was to remain First Regent and try to manage things from the shadows!” He said. “And doing this also allowed me to protect Narlei and my grandchildren.”

Coren looked at him now. “And your public support of anything anti-Lycavorian made it impossible to believe you were the one.” He said softly.

Alrerin nodded. “Ardan may think Narlei is alive, but as I said, my actions publicly have allowed me to maintain my façade that I hated the Protectorate and I would do nothing to hinder the OSG in their activities. My supposed dismissal of Narlei being the most powerful sign that I was not a threat to them.” Alrerin stepped closer to him. “My... my lack of support for you when Caliria was taken was... I was torn Coren. I am so sorry she had to endure what she did.”

Coren shook his head quickly. “It is not your fault.” He stated. “It is my shame to bear.”

Lisisa looked at him. “*Inamarno* does not feel that way Coren.” She told him. “Do not think like that.”

“None of that matters now.” Rinel spoke. “It is in the past. We need to act *now!*”

“To do what?” Alrerin asked. “I do not have the power I once had as First Regent. Ardan and others have seen to that discretely. You know this Coren. Much of the singular power I had has been delegated to the Board of Regents and more specifically the SBR. Many of whom are friends or have ties to Ardan in some way. They will not go against him. They fear him almost as much as they fear losing their hold on what power and influence they do have.”

“We will lose so much more if we cannot convince them.” Coren spoke.

Alrerin looked at Lisisa. “Your brother... he would actually do what he has threatened to do Princess?” He asked her.

Lisisa stood up now and nodded her head. “Yes sir, I’m afraid so.” She answered. “My brother is not the most forgiving of individuals and even till this day many question his resolve in different matters even though he has never gone back on something he stated he would do. He will not abide the one sided relationship that currently exists between the Vanari and the former Protectorate First Regent. They are part of the Union now and it is not something we would allow.”

“And your elected leaders would allow this?” Alrerin gasped. “Your Senate? Your Prime Minister? Your father the King and his Queens?”

“Androcles and we operate with the blessing of the Union Senate and my *Tenna Deia*.” Lisisa told him. “It is why we have a Union Senatorial Delegation with us. They are currently on their way to Lorent to inform the government members there of what is happening and to finalize any last minute details. As for my father and mothers, let me just say that in this circumstance, you would much rather deal with Androcles. It will save you a rather harsh and wholly inventive tongue lashing.”

“Alrerin, after tonight many hard decisions will need to be made!” Coren insisted.

Alrerin looked at him. “Coren I know what...”

Narlei came to her feet now looking at Coren. “You said something similar earlier Regent Re Mydala. What exactly did you mean?”

Coren glanced at her and then slowly back to Alrerin. “The OSG has unleashed their Lycavorian lap dogs Alrerin. Androcles and others even now prepare to do battle with them.”

“I don’t understand.” Alrerin said.

“The moment Androcles arrived here and reclaimed my daughter as his wife and mate, he set in motion events that cannot be altered Alrerin.” Coren spoke. “He has prodded the OSG to open action and he suspects they will send their Lycavorian minions to my estate in the hopes that they can kill all of us. They don’t know that we are gone or what awaits them, but Ardan must know of this impending attack and he will certainly use this action as the tip of the spear to dismantle any meaningful relations with the Lycavorians. In doing so, Ardan will cement his power base and then insure that our people will never be free of the OSG and their insidious actions!”

It was Narlei and Riordian who saw first Lisisa and then Arduri stagger slightly and grip each other tightly. Riordian moved instantly to support Arduri who he was closest to while Narlei reached for Lisisa.

“Princess!” Riordian gasped causing all of them to turn and look at her. “What is it?”

Lisisa gripped his arms tightly and met Coren’s eyes. “It’s too late Coren.” She rasped the words. “It has... it has already begun!”

As if to confirm her words, the deep, rolling thunder caused all of them to turn and look out the large glass double doors at the expanse of Mydala city in the distance. All of them saw the massive fireball rise into the night sky trailing fingers of flame as pieces of debris were tossed skyward.

“By the Prophets!” Alrerin gasped aloud.

No one saw Lisisa’s head tilt upwards. “Jeth?” She questioned aloud causing them to turn back to her.

Lisisa my sister! Jeth’s voice echoed in her mind as well as Arduri’s and Rinel’s.

“Jeth what is wrong?” Lisisa demanded.

Lisisa we are detecting at least twelve individuals moving up to the estate from the east! Tharua’s voice echoed now. We were sweeping back north when we spotted them! Lisisa they are all armed and we cannot reach them before they enter the estate.

Lisisa lifted her dark green eyes and looked at Coren. “Twelve unknown men are about to breach the perimeter wall here.” She told him.

Coren moved closer to her. “Lisisa, how by the prophets did they know we would be here?” He stammered. “That is not possible! We told no one that...” Coren stopped talking and whirled back to look at Alrerin.

Lisisa nodded her head as her hand dropped to her side and she withdrew the *Nehtes* that rested there.

“Yes Coren, you are correct in your thoughts.” She stated. “We are not the target!”

Alrerin was no fool and his own eyes grew wide at what Lisisa said. “Me!” He almost yelled. “Ardan has sanctioned an attack against me!”

Lisisa turned to Narlei. “Get your mother and your children to the safest room on the property Narlei!” She ordered. “Where is it?”

“My father’s office upstairs!” She answered instantly.

Lisisa nodded. “Then go. Coren, you and Alrerin as well.”

“I will not...” Coren began to speak but Lisisa cut him off.

“Whatever happens in the future Coren, you and Alrerin need to be alive to lead it. Andro would allow nothing to happen to you and neither will I.” Lisisa stated calmly. “We will handle the fools coming here, but we cannot do that if we are trying to protect you.”

“Go Coren!” Rinel declared. “First Regent... go now!”

Alrerin gripped Coren's arm. "They are correct Coren!" He hissed. He turned quickly and grabbed for his wife's hand. "Go to the room! Gather our other grandchildren as well Sertia my wife! Go!"

Narlei quickly laid a blistering kiss on her husband and then grabbed for her mother's hand. "Quickly mother!" She gasped as she took her son from her mother's arms.

Lisisa looked at Riordian as he took out the weapon that she had returned to him. "You should protect your wife and family." She stated.

Riordian met her gaze and took a deep breath. "And I will Princess." He specified proudly. "I will protect them by killing those who would do them harm! And I will do so at your side."

Lisisa smiled and the tips of her now extended fangs were very visible. She turned to Rinel. "Pull those Cadre Commandos back into the house with us Rinel. We will meet them in close quarters where their weapons will be more of a hindrance than an advantage."

"Do we take prisoners Princess?" Nyosa asked from beside her father. Her own Lycanari fangs were extended and exposed. While not nearly as large as the fangs on a pureblood, or a turned elf or Hadarian wolf, for their bodies seemed to adapt much better to the changes, they were no less dangerous and equally as intimidating.

Lisisa shook her head. "I am like my brother Nyosa. There will be no prisoners. Not this night. Not after what we know they have been involved in."

AUSTROVA SAFE HOUSE ONE

Eliani Leonidas and Brendi Faith moved back into the main room of the underground Spartan Safe House holding hands tightly. They had not been more than a few feet apart since earlier in the day and many of the personnel had caught Eliani and Brendi sharing soft, loving kisses with each other at different moments. While Brendi was still somewhat anxious, this did not stop her from kissing Eliani with as much passion and desire as she felt racing within her for the fiery tempered and petite red haired beauty that Eliani was. Brendi Faith had never even considered such a relationship at any time in her life, yet after meeting Eliani and being around her for so long, the overwhelming urge to experience it was beyond her control. As were the emotions that flowed through her for both Eliani and Jomann. Emotions that they returned to her in spades.

The Control Center was situated in an old converted sewer control center with branching tunnels all over the city. While most of them had long been sealed, three of them were still clear and passable. It was here that they had established the small triage center for any wounded that might come in. They were only a kilometer from the actual estate and one of the main tunnels allowed them unfettered access to the southern store room within Coren Re Mydala's home. Beneath the entrance to the storeroom, half a dozen troops from Andro's 9th Spartan Attack Division had set up two heavy weapon positions on either side of Elynth and Anthar who now occupied the center of the tunnel. Anything that came down the hidden stairwell and wasn't part of their force would die within seconds. Sehri rested between Elynth's front legs and listened intently as she and Anthar were instructing her in several very advanced Etheric training skills that would allow for Sehri to focus and direct her shielding ability much more easily.

The 9th Spartan Attack Division had a long and decorated history dating back almost six hundred years. They truly hadn't come into their own until the day Androcles Leonidas took command of them. They were part of the Androcles' 9th CSAFG along with the 21st Spartan Expeditionary Division and now the 82nd Cataphract Division. The 21st SED was still within a training cycle and had not deployed with the 9th CSAFG this time. The 9th SAD had many former *Durcunusaan* officers in it and nearly the entire Division had fought in some manner on Alba Tau. While not usually a normal occurrence, the former *Durcunusaan* members had requested transfers to the 9th when Androcles took overall command. These requests were granted almost immediately and their inclusion into the ranks of the 9th SAD made an already exceptional division of men and women even better. Since this operation was supposed to be low key, the 82nd had not deployed any forces to the surface of Austrova though the officers were monitoring the situation from the *KINDRED SOUL*'s main CIC.

Another half dozen members of the 9th were situated half a kilometer away guarding the tunnel that would take them directly to the river's edge if escape was needed. All three came together by the entrance to the Control Center which now had nine men and women sitting at different portable stations. Eirene occupied the largest station and spread out in front of her was five rows of fifteen inch video monitors that stretched six across. Her golden blond hair was tied tightly behind her head and she wore the new Mark VI ArmorPly, but her complete and utter attention was focused on the screens. She was using the dual keyboards in front of her to manipulate the different screens and was essentially tied into the entire video network of Mydala City. The towering Kavalian Miseo stood only two meters behind Eirene and was speaking in soft whispers with the tall Lycavorian. Eliani had to admit to herself that for a Biogenic Kavalian, Miseo was very handsome even with the two meter long tail that he sported. His skin was tanned and healthy and his facial features were not harsh in any way. Eliani also took note, as did all of her brothers and sisters, that Miseo adored their younger sister. That was obvious to all just by the way he looked at her.

She moved up beside the female Lycavorian and smiled as they shared a kiss on each other's cheeks in greeting. "It has been a long time Kimtia." She stated.

The blond woman nodded her head. "Almost three years." She replied.

"Arusk is tending to you I take it." Eliani said with a smile.

"Hah! Anymore tending and I will not have to wipe myself!" The stunning young woman answered her. Eliani saw her blue eyes dart to where her husband and mate stood with Miseo and they shone with devotion. "He is so very good to me Eliani." She stated. "And to our children."

Arusk and Kimtia were nearly celebrities, or as near to celebrities as anyone within the Kryperia were allowed to be. They were the very first husband and wife team that Armetus had recruited into the Kryperia so long ago, and now they were one of only five mated couples within the ranks of the Union Intelligence Agency. The Union's intelligence apparatus was modeled after the Krypteia of ancient Spartan, though Armetus had altered the spelling of their name somewhat, as well as their duties. They were not the Spartan Secret Police of the days of their beloved King Leonidas the First, but the supremely well trained and educated Lycavorian Union Intelligence Agency. An Intelligence Agency that was now feared and respected by everyone within the Alpha Quadrant for they were utterly ruthless in their pursuits, and had almost never failed since their inception. Arusk and Kimtia had worked with Androcles, Eliani, Lisisa and Denali in the latter portion of the last year of the Evolli War and all of them had grown close as friends.

"As it should be Kimtia." Eliani answered her.

Kimtia looked at Eliani and then Brendi. "And what about you... Eliani? First that gorgeous specimen of an Alpha Jomann and now this delicious woman Brendi Faith." Her words caused Brendi to blush somewhat even under in tan.

Eliani looked up into Brendi's eyes with a brilliant smile and nodded her head. "I have been blessed." She said turning back to look at Kimtia.

"We both have." Kimtia agreed. "We both have."

Eliani glanced over to where Eirene sat and then back to Kimtia. "How is she doing?" She asked.

"Her analytical skills are beyond impressive. She absorbs information like a sponge and she comes at problems from outside the box first. Armetus told us what Androcles did, touching them as he did. If anything, it increased whatever inherent talents she already had thanks to your mother's latent abilities." Kimtia answered. Everyone within the Kryperia who was close to the Leonidas family knew of the latent abilities of all the Queens, and while it wasn't spoken of openly, Armetus and others knew these skills could be passed to their children. "She's a natural Eli. Armetus is going to love her."

As with all of the Leonidas Royal Family, there were very few who were allowed to refer to any of them by their given names or nicknames. There were those whom, for one reason or another, were expected to call them their names because of what they had endured and then experienced together. Though they were very few in number, Kimtia and her husband and mate Arusk were two of those individuals. Nearly a full year of savage battles and planning those same battles had formed a bond between Kimtia, Arusk and the four oldest Leonidas children. A bond that would now never be broken.

Eliani nodded her head. "Andro suspected as much." She said softly. "I don't know how much our mother is going to like hearing that though."

“Well, if anything, she already has what most of our agents don’t have at the start? She has a walking around tree as her security and she is a *nubous* natural at what she does. I’ve seen the way her husband and mate looks at her. He would die before ever allowing anything to happen to her.” Kimtia said.

“Let her make her own decision Kimtia.” Eliani said. “I agree with Andro and you both in your assessment, but let it be her decision. Working for the Krypteria is no small affair and my father would not let Armetus put others at risk because of Eirene.”

Kimtia reached out and squeezed her arm. “Don’t worry. I know the risks and what the sacrifices are. It is not for everyone. I’m just telling you she is a natural and no doubt Armetus will see this the first time he meets her.”

Eliani nodded her head. “He is scary like that.” She agreed. “Being able to sense who will be a good agent or not. He scares my father sometimes.”

Kimtia laughed. “I can’t imagine your father being afraid of anything.” She said.

Eliani grinned. “You might be surprised.” She said. “*Inamarno* and *Cvea* are putting the last touches on the triage center in the next chamber. We’ll be able to effectively treat up to twenty before we run out of space and need to begin shuttling people to *SPARTA’S WRATH*.”

“That’s another one there.” Kimtia spoke. “This *Cvea* has picked up a lot more than you first thought she would hasn’t she?”

Eliani nodded her head. “I will have to look at the data my mother compiled during her research of the Kavalian Biogenic process, but I’m beginning to think that, at least for certain individuals, the Biogenic processes have the unintended side effect of making that person far more intelligent, at least in the sense of being able to obtain and then retain knowledge. She has already read through eight of the texts I have given her and committed everything to memory.”

Kimtia was thoughtful for a moment. “Interesting. That might be something Armetus would be interested in.” She said. Kimtia glanced over to the side of the room. “The *Pralor* woman, *Mari*, she is set up over there with that *P9* that she always carries. She’s tied into the entire *Mydala City* network and can manipulate nearly anything if we need it. I didn’t realize that *Deion* had scented her.”

Eliani nodded her head. “They have been drawn together since they first saw one another. They are both *Praetorians* and that might have something to do with it, but she is part of our family now.”

“No arguments here. She seems more than competent even for being such a tiny thing. It’s a wonder your brother doesn’t break her.” Kimtia answered with a smile.

Eliani nodded her head with a smile. “Well... her howls the first night she and *Deo* were together kept most of us awake but *Mari* helped us to take *Moran’s* ship and she has already proven that her skills are invaluable. I will put together a report for Armetus when this is all over concerning *Cvea* and *Mari*.” She said. “But we also don’t want to do what the *Kavaliens* and the *OSG* have done.” She looked at *Brendi* beside her when she said that.

Brendi nodded her head. “No it was not my choice.” She said softly. “But I would not change it now.”

Eliani squeezed her arm and nodded. “Perhaps not... but that the choice was not yours to begin with is what makes it important. We must not make the same mistakes if it ever comes to that.”

“I don’t believe your mother or you would ever make that mistake *Eliani*.” *Brendi* said confidently. “Not if you are any indication of what your mother is like.”

Kimtia chuckled. “Oh... you haven’t met *Queen Anja* yet?” She asked with a smile. “Trust me when I tell you, she will blow you away.”

Eliani couldn’t help but smile and nod her head. “She does have that effect on people doesn’t she?”

“I remember when she went up against that *Folcani* Researcher at the symposium on *Elear*.” Kimtia said. “Wow... she...”

“I have something!” *Eirene’s* voice interrupted her and brought everyone in the room to full alertness.

Kimtia and Eliani quickly moved up behind *Eirene* as her hands moved across the two computer consoles. *Miseo* and *Arusk* also moved up behind them.

“Talk to me *Eirene*.” Kimtia spoke softly.

“I thought I saw movement on the street just north of *Coren Re Mydala’s Estate*.” *Eirene* said softly though her voice carried a sense of urgency to it, almost as if she was terrified of failing. “I’m moving the cameras to compensate.”

Miseo reached out and placed his large hand on her shoulder and Eirene immediately relaxed with the warmth and gentleness of his touch. This did not go unnoticed by any of them and Kimtia tossed a knowing look at Eliani. "Your heart races my wife." He spoke to her in a soothing voice. "Be calm. We are all here. As your brother has told you... you have nothing to prove."

Miseo's voice had the desired effect Kimtia saw, and Eirene's body instantly lost all of the tenseness from seconds before. That told Kimtia quite a bit of things in fact, the foremost being that Miseo was an anchor for Eirene and perhaps the one thing that she had no fear of in any way.

"There!" Eirene snapped as she focused on one camera and lifted her finger to point to it, touching the image as she enlarged the. All of them could clearly see the shadows of at least a dozen men moving deftly through the deserted storefronts and café tables. They were moving efficiently and very much like well trained soldiers. "They are remaining among the shadows and staying out of the minimal lighting on the side street!"

"They are well trained." Arusk spoke softly.

"There!" Eirene declared once more as she pointed to a single figure in the middle of the column. "He just signaled to someone across the street!"

"Eirene are you certain?" Kimtia asked as she moved up next to her husband.

"Yes... his eyes and hand moved." Eirene replied adjusting the light level and trying to retexture the image for better clarity. "I have seen father and Uncle Danny use similar hand signals."

"Is there any way to turn the camera and see what we have?" Arusk asked.

Eirene shook her head. "The few cameras in this section are all on one side of the causeway. We can only see one side of the approach."

Arusk nodded his head. "Then we figure an equal number on the opposite side." He spoke.

"Here!" Kimtia hissed as she pointed to the back of the image. "...Another group behind the first!"

"Then they are coming from the northeast just as Andro and Dorian figured they would." Eliani spoke up.

"It would definitely look that way." Arusk said as he typed on the data pad. He looked at his beloved wife and mate. "Let Andro know Kimtia." He spoke. "Tell him this thing is about to kick off."

"...Have them." Cowen spoke softly in reply to Arusk's warning as his exceptionally keen feline eyes focused and he spied the approaching Lycavorians with the scope. "They are nineteen degrees east Sherice."

Sherice shifted her macro binos slightly and then the fast moving figures sprang into view. "I got them!" She hissed softly. "Range 3100. Two thousand meters from the northeast entrance and closing. Ninety seconds before they breach the wall."

Cowen's sight shifted slightly and focused on movement above and to the right of the advancing Lycavorians. He adjusted the focus of his scope and brought them into clarity. "Archangel Team Two to Base. I have three targets on the rooftop of the apartment building in grid two. They appear to be setting up what looks to be like some sort of launcher."

"Base confirms."

Sherice shifted her binos. "*Sibfla!*" She gasped. "Cowen it looks like a portable mortar or something like that."

"Base... it appears to be a mortar of some type." Cowen spoke calmly.

"Archangel Two!" This was a female voice. "You will initiate contact the moment they breach the estate walls! Do not let that mortar fire down onto the estate! I say again... do not let that mortar fire!"

"Archangel Two confirms!" Cowen spoke once more.

That is when they all heard it over their COM implants.

"Base to Archangel! The party is set! Forty-five seconds until it starts!"

"Archangel confirms!"

Unnel watched as his lead team halted just outside the entrance to the Re Mydala estate. The steel double doors were secured at the moment but that mattered not. In twenty seconds those doors would no longer

be there. He watched as they proceeded to place their explosives while his second in command settled soundlessly next to him on the ground.

“No security Unnel.” He whispered softly. “That is odd.”

“They feel secure.” Unnel answered. “This boy Prince is not as combat savvy as they say. He is probably entertaining himself with his mates. Royalty breeds sloppiness. He does not feel the need for security. He believes they have already accomplished their task. A major mistake on his part.”

“Set.” The voice chimed in over their own COM units and Unnel looked at his second. “Let’s help to shape the future shall we.”

“Execute!”

Cowen’s Shan did not let the flash of the explosion deter his aim or his concentration. Even as the double doors of the estate wall blew inward he focused his crosshairs on the single man behind the portable mortar. He watched him lift the portable mortar shell and prepare to initiate the bombardment. Cowan centered his crosshairs and allowed his finger to caress the trigger of the CHAOS and Sherice felt the heavy recoil of the biped equipped rifle beside him well before the soft boom of the silencer. Anyone more than twenty meters away would never hear the retort of the rifle, but next to him as she was it sounded like thunder. Cowen’s voice filled her head as he smoothly ejected the spent round and slammed home another with hardly any effort.

“Mortar team is dead.”

Sherice’s eyes went wide and she lifted her binos as the massive explosion above the estate blossomed into the night sky above them.

The single Dragon Armor encased round sped across the distance in less time than it took to form a thought. As the Lycavorian prepared to drop the plasma mortar into the tube, the large CHAOS round struck the plasma shell dead center and it suddenly blossomed into a fireball in the man’s hands and exploded. The night sky was lit up with the explosion and the subsequent follow on explosion of the forty additional rounds that were neatly stacked beside their position. The entire roof of the apartment building shuddered violently and the frame of the ten story structure shook right down to its anchoring beams as flames reached for the night sky and lights began to come on all over the street seconds later.

The few remains of the three men manning the mortar would be found over the course of the next two days scattered over several hundred meters and seared into the surface of the roof from the intense heat. All that remained were several blood red stains upon the once shiny metal surface mixed in with blacken metal and melted seams and the tattered remains of three limbs.

Unnel was rushing forward with his team when he heard the explosion and the frantic call over their COM units.

“Overwatch team is gone! Overwatch team is gone!” The voice echoed.

“What?” Unnel hissed.

“Something took them out!” The voice answered. “The entire roof of the building they were on just lit up the sky! Their position is gone!”

“Team Two move to designated coordinates!” Unnel rasped out. “Hit them now before they figure out what is going on! Move! Move!”

Eirene’s head twisted when she heard the garbled communication and she adjusted the cameras while typing madly on her console.

“Eirene? What is it?” Kimtia asked moving closer.

“I just... the cameras all have minor audio sensors in them!” She spoke. “The one closest to that first team just picked up some sort of transmission! I’m trying to focus on the signal. It’s still active!”

Kimtia turned slightly and looked at Mari who sat a short distance from Eirene. “Mari, boost the audio sensor output on all the cameras. Override the Vanari preset controls and reset their filters!”

“Bypassing Vanari presets! Boosting signal enhancers! There!” Mari called out in seconds.

“I have it!” Eirene declared as she hit a single key on her computer and the new voice erupted from their speakers.

“...Hit them now before the figure out what is going on! Move! Move!”

“That’s him!” Eirene barked. “That’s the leader!”

“Trace that signal!” Kimtia exclaimed.

“Transmission is being beamed to a location in the southern river market area!” Mari spoke quickly. “Localizing now!” She was stabbing keys on her P9. “I have it! It appears to be some sort of office building. Sub-Basement level!”

“It has to be their command and control center!” Arusk gasped. “*Sibfla!* We could take out their entire network on Austrova!”

“We don’t have anything to hit them with *Huor!*” Kimtia exclaimed. (Husband)

“We have the QRF.” Arusk spoke calmly.

Kimtia shook her head instantly. “They are in support and we’d announce to the entire planet that we are here playing war!” She stated. “Andro wanted this contained to the estate! We can’t attack them! We...”

“Are they coordinating this attack?” The new voice spoke and they all watched as Caliria moved gracefully into the room and came up next to Eliani. She was dressed in the new Mark VI body armor and it hugged her lush frame like a second skin it seemed. Her long black hair was tied into one thick braid and draped over her left shoulder.

Kimtia turned to Eirene. “Can you confirm the location Eirene?” She asked.

Eirene turned in her chair. “I already have!” She stated. “All intercepted COMS from the mercenary *ronnus* are being beamed to this location and the replies are originating from this location. No relays or repeaters.”

Kimtia turned back to Caliria. “I guess that answers that.” She said.

“Wait!” Mari called out. “I just detected another signal on the same carrier wave to a different part of the city! It’s mobile! Tracking it!” Mari looked up suddenly from her P9. “It was sent to a receiver within a hundred meters of Lisisa’s location!”

Eliani didn’t hesitate. [*Lisisa... is everything alright at your location?*] She reached for her sister within the shielded Mindvoice connection.

[*That depends on your definition of alright.*] Lisisa answered instantly. [*We have what appear to be several unfriendly Lycavorians about to assault the First Regent’s home. Coren believes it is an attack against the First Regent and not related to us being here. We are preparing to kill them now.*]

Eliani couldn’t help but smile at the calm and confidence in her sister’s voice. [*Then I will not trouble you any longer. Contact us as soon as you are secure.*]

Eliani looked at Kimtia who appeared puzzled. “What?” Kimtia asked.

“Another team of Lycavorians is preparing to assault the First Regent’s home where Lisisa and Arduri are.” Eliani stated. “They don’t know Lisi and the others are there so we can only assume they are after the Vanari First Regent. This is a simultaneous mission to take out whatever and whoever they feel is a threat to them.”

“Then you have my authorization to kill them!” Caliria stated calmly. “Take out this Command and Control center. It is obviously being run by the OSG!”

“Princess, an attack by the QRF on this position could very well set off a firestorm within the Vanari government and do exactly what we don’t want them to do!” Kimtia stated trying to remain objective while her very nature screamed for her to do exactly as Caliria told her.

“They are coordinating an attack against my father’s estate and visiting dignitaries Kimtia... with the expressed intent to kill them. Now we are discovering they are going after the First Regent as well!” Caliria told her. “We are simply doing what is necessary to insure our people remain alive.”

Kimtia looked at her husband and mate quickly. The two of them thought so much alike that it sometimes frightened their parents when they were all together. Arusk nodded his head to her. “It is your call my wife and mate.”

Kimtia decided rather quickly. “*Nubou un!*” Kimtia hissed. “Commit the QRF! Establish a patch to them and send them the data Mari! High Priority encryption! Instruct Prince Fedor that they are to eliminate or capture any OSG agents at that position and insure their ability to use that location is destroyed.”

Mari nodded her head. “Initiating the patch!”

Kimtia looked back to Eliani and saw her shrug her shoulders and smile. “Now it gets interesting.” Eliani stated. “Never a dull moment around my brother. “Eirene... use your link with Andro *arande*. Let him know what is happening.”

Eirene nodded and closed her eyes as she reached across the distance for her brother.

RE MYDALA ESTATE

STORAGE SHED WEST OF ENTRANCE TO LOWER LEVEL LIVING QUARTERS

“...Hit them now!” Kalis hissed softly, his blue eyes watching as the shadowy figures were rushing right by the shed not more than a hundred meters from their position.

Ridor glanced and Daio and smiled. “Daio?” He spoke.

Daio looked at Kalis as he turned back and met their eyes. “You will come to learn Kalis my friend, just as we did, that when Andro says he has a surprise for the enemy, they will be very surprised. He wanted us to wait until the signal.”

“We don’t know what the signal is!” Kalis complained.

Ridor smiled once more revealing the tips of his long wolf fangs. “We will know it when we see it.” He stated. “Of that there will be little doubt.”

“How can you be so sure? We are letting them move unopposed into the estate!” Kalis asked anxiously. He wanted to prove to Androcles and to everyone that he had indeed turned the corner on his life. He had proven this to his uncle he was sure, but Androcles was truly the one he wanted to convince, especially after the way he treated Sadi on Hadaria all those months ago.

“Trust us.” Daio told him. “And trust Andro.”

Kalis took a deep breath to calm his nerves and he felt Serale reach for him within Mindvoice ever so gently to sooth him. She had adapted to the changes his bite had caused in her body much quicker than they had determined she would and his *Tenna* Anja told them it was because of her Hadarian genes and the potency of the Leonidas blood that flowed through them both now. At first Kalis had cursed that blood because it belonged to his father and not his uncle, but it was his *Tenna* Aricia who had told him the blood was the same no matter his father but it was how Kalis choose to emulate that blood and the history it held which would make the difference.

“I will be ready.” Kalis spoke softly.

“Kalis...?” Ridor spoke waiting until his eyes focused on him. “Do not hold back, for Andro will not.”

Kalis nodded his head. “I don’t intend too.”

Ridor reached up and touched his jaw activating his COM Implant. “Ryana... have your sniper teams get ready. This is about to begin.” He ordered Rinel’s second daughter who was situated somewhere on the estate with four other Vanari sniper teams waiting for the attack to begin.

“Standing by.” Ryana’s voice answered.

“Ryana... we don’t take prisoners.” Ridor spoke once more. “The only one who survives this attack is the leader.”

Ridor heard the long moment of silence and then Ryana answered with firmness in her voice. “It is about time.”

They shared a very unique bond because of the way they were born and it was this bond that allowed them an uncluttered Mindvoice channel to each other. It was not something that others had, but because Androcles and Dorian were born fully aware and Eirene and Fedor very nearly fully aware thanks to Androcles, it was as if they had a single channel within the Etheric realm that was dedicated strictly to them. It was not

something Androcles would have done under any normal circumstance, biting his mother For'mya as he did in mock rage and hatred and reaching for the twins she carried within Mindvoice. He had actually carried a great deal of shame for acting in such a manner with one of the women who had helped to raise him and loved him without question; one of the women that he called and loved as mother. It was the only way that he could act to insure that For'mya did not give up all hope and to let her know that her family loved her without question.

Under any other context Androcles' actions would have been considered a vile sin to most Lycavorians and Elves, yet nearly all of the Union now knew why he had done this, and their respect for him had increased tenfold for having the courage to act in such way to save his family. Though the vast majority would never know the effect this action had concerning Fedor and Eirene, it still served to enhance the legacy Androcles Leonidas was building for himself and not even realizing it. Androcles had carried that shameful burden within him until just this very morning when he held both Eirene and Fedor in his arms and they shared with him all that they were within this special etheric connection. All that their mother For'mya was and what they all felt about what their brother had done to insure their survival. There was no anger, no distrust, and no hate; there was simply an overwhelming sense of love and gratitude for what he had done and the overwhelming courage it had taken for him to go against the very core of his beliefs in order to do it.

...Mari is sending the information to Fedor now! Fedor had the QRF already airborne in low orbit and they will try to time the assault with your retaliation but he and Famus make no promises. Eirene's voice echoed softly in both Andro and Dorian's minds. It was an Etheric connection that not even their father would have been able to breach and therefore they did not shield their conversations.

Understood. Andro answered her. *What about Lisisa? I did not want to reach for her when I felt her emotions spike.*

Eli spoke to her within Mindvoice. She did not seem concerned about what they were facing Andro. And they will have complete surprise on their side not to mention a few Vanari Commandos loyal to Inamarno's father. Eirene answered.

Androcles glanced at Dorian and saw him nod his head slightly. *Very well arande.* He spoke. *Continue to monitor things as best as you are able. You have far exceeded mine and father's expectations in so short a time. Both of you have. Do not feel it is necessary to do more.*

We are Leonidas. Eirene stated firmly. *We expect no less of ourselves.*

Indeed. We... Dorian began.

Andro... Dorian... they are about to breach the lower levels! Eirene exclaimed.

Then we will speak later. Andro answered her. *This is about to kick off.*

Go with the gods! Eirene told them before they felt her slip from the connection.

Dorian met his brother's azure colored eyes with his own multicolored orbs. "It's time *fervon*." He said softly.

"Yes... it is."

They both turned to see Murano, Jomann, Denali and Deion watching them.

"Problem?" Murano asked.

Androcles shook his head. "No. Not that Lisisa and Arduri can't handle."

"That's my Lisi and Duri!" Denali proclaimed happily. He was concerned about them yes, but his faith in their combined abilities was absolute and he knew what they were both capable of. "Beautiful and deadly."

"They are about to breach." Dorian spoke to the others.

"Then hold nothing back, any of you. Use all of your power and ability. There is much all of you still need to learn but you are far more advanced than any other Praetorian in history at this stage of discovery." Murano spoke now. "We are Praetorians but you are also Lycavorian! Now... now we will kick their asses back into the dark ages!"

Andro chuckled softly. "Murano... you have been hanging around our father and our mother Anja far too much." He stated.

"And Sarlana it seems." Dorian chimed in.

"Jeez! You think." Deion echoed.

Unnel heard the soft boom of breaching explosives from below and to the right signaling him that his second assault team was entering the lower living areas.

“Now!” He grunted loudly. “Blow it now!”

Unnel watched his man mash down on the triggering device and there was a brief flash of intense light and then the rush of air as they blew the doors inward. “Go!” He hissed in a frantic voice as the feeling in his gut began to turn cold. He couldn’t place it, but something told him that things were not going as he had planned. Something told him they had gotten involved in something that was far more than Franklin Adams and the OSG had led them to believe.

They had done this many times before and we experts at their jobs. Most of them were former members of the Protectorate military who thoroughly enjoyed having the extra credits and perks of being involved in the Vanari slave trade. Many of them even had female Vanari slaves that they used at their whim secure in locations outside Protectorate space. As a unit they had conducted several dozen raids themselves through the years in order to secure more Vanari females for the OSG slave auctions. None of them had any desire to see things change from the way they were and all of them were fully onboard with the OSG and those Vanari involved in the Slave Ring. They had the finest equipment and training that their culture and society could offer, as well as many Intelligence contacts still within the Protectorate military. None of that would help them this day for they truly did not comprehend who and what they were fighting.

Three minutes passed by in a blur, but to the men and women of Unnel’s assault team it seemed like three months. Their training guided them as they moved with precision through the lower living quarters with catlike speed and grace. As they cleared each room, the apprehension in each of them began to grow. There were twenty-four of them in the lower level of Coren Re Mydala’s estate, all of them with looks of surprise on their faces now as they reached the last room. The lower living quarters had primarily bedrooms and two different gathering rooms for guests and others to mingle. There was one small kitchen station against the north wall but aside from that it was not a complex operation and very straightforward. The leader of this assault team glanced around quickly as his men took up guard positions in the largest of the gathering rooms and he opened his COM unit as he dropped to one knee.

“Clear!” He hissed into his shoulder mounted COM unit. “We are clear! No targets! I say again no targets! We got nothing! What the fuck is going on Unnel?”

“Clear!” He hissed into his shoulder mounted COM unit. **“We are clear! No targets! I say again no targets! We got nothing! What the fuck is going on Unnel?”**

Unnel heard this within his own COM unit and felt his apprehension become barely controllable. He had known something was wrong when no one in his own twenty-eight man team was firing their weapons and they heard no gunfire from the lower levels.

“...rooms are empty!” Unnel’s head snapped around as the Lycavorian spat out the words while he and his team came back into the main room and took up guard positions.

“Our rooms as well!” Another group chimed in as they moved back into the main room of Coren Re Mydala’s home. The night sky was clearly visible through the massive glass doors and windows, the lights of Mydala city on the horizon. He glanced around the sunken main portion of the room where all the furniture was and that feeling of dread began to grow at an alarming rate. Their entry had been perfect. Their Intelligence had been perfect. The estate was quiet and their OSG spotters had given the ok for entry into the main estate. Coren Re Mydala’s security measures were child’s play. Unnel would have thought a ranking Senior Board of Regent’s member would have heavier Cadre Commando security. The OSG Intelligence did not indicate this nor did they put much stock in the military capabilities of the Union forces or this young Prince everyone seemed so concerned about. Indeed, their Intelligence stated he was not as skilled as others made him out to be and preferred instead to play with his mates rather than make war and learn tactics. Something was very wrong here and Unnel felt the hairs on the back of his neck begin to stand up and take attention.

“Assault Team to base!” Unnel hissed into his COM. “The Estate is empty! Adams... the fucking estate is empty!” He snarled.

“What?” Franklin Adams’ voice echoed in his ear. “That’s impossible! We have had eyes on the estate ever since the Union Prince arrived! No one has left!”

“I’m telling you the estate is empty!” Unnel growled. “There is no one here!”

“Actually... that is not quite accurate.” The unfamiliar voice echoed from all around them causing Unnel and his men to lift their weapons and begin searching the main room for the source of the voice.

There was a brief shimmering of yellowish/white light to their front and Unnel and all of his team whirled around to face it, their eyes going wide in disbelief, their weapons wavering as the shapes of six men appeared as if out of thin air and took substance only five meters away from where they were. Six men dressed in strange looking body armor and all of them with nearly glowing multicolored eyes in the darkness of the room. The voice that reached them was clear and powerful and reeked of confidence. It also carried with it one thing that made the blood in their veins go cold.

It carried the finality of death.

“Looking for us!” Androcles Leonidas snarled before he lifted his hands and they saw the wave of Etheric power swell in front of his palms.

That was when the pain began.

He had been recruited by Sumar nineteen years after his birth, his mother and father joyfully allowing this, knowing that their son was so very different. They lived with him within the confines of the expansive Praetorian facility on the homeworld, watching as he was taught so many things that they would have never been able to teach him. His family visited him often and all of them were beyond proud of what they now knew he was. He was one of the first Praetorians and through the decades and centuries that followed he became one of Sumar’s closest and most trusted leaders and friends.

Murano could remember every detail of every battle that they had ever fought together even to this day. Sumar was an inspiration to each and every living Praetorian, not to mention the most powerful and charismatic of them. He learned more things than he could imagine just by watching Sumar operate and this only allowed his own skills to grow stronger and more focused. They had stood on uncountable battlefields across hundreds of worlds and faced the Scourge down in every instance. They had not won all of the battles to be sure, but even those where they had to retreat the Scourge paid a dear price. Sumar had told him something during a lull in a battle on some world Murano no longer remembered the name to. It was something Murano had forgotten until only a few days ago, and it was a memory that he now knew was triggered by those he associated and fought with at this moment.

“There will come a day Murano my friend, a day far into the future when everything that has happened and will happen will become clear. You will feel lost and helpless then, probably for many centuries before that day comes, but only you will be able to survive that crucible Murano. None of our brothers has the fortitude or the will.”

“What... what will happen that day Sumar?” Murano had asked him.

“That will be the day the fog around your mind and heart will be lifted my boy.” Sumar spoke. “The day that you will see why I will have done what I will have done.” He finished his statement with a smile knowing it sounded odd.

“I don’t understand.” He has asked him. “What have you done?”

Sumar chuckled. “Nothing just yet... but I will. It is confusing I know Murano, you’re your faith must never waver. Others will see it and not understand. They will question what I have done. You must be the one to show them the purpose Murano. Only you will be able to do this.”

“Why?”

“Because only you will understand.” Sumar spoke. “Only you will understand.”

Murano did understand now. He understood everything.

Meeting Martin first had been the start of it, and now these last days with Androcles and the others had brought clarity to his mind that he had been lacking since Sumar had left him behind. He now understood what Sumar had told him all those years ago. And he understood why Sumar did what he had done. He had gone against the most sacred tenets of the Pralor people and the Praetorians when he merged the survivors of City ship 41 into the Lycavorian people. It was a mandate that he himself had put in place and then dismissed. Sumar had seen something within these people that no one else had. He had seen beyond the savage nature and sometimes brutal exterior and he had seen deep within their hearts and their very blood. In the memories that Martin had allowed him to see within his mind, Murano had seen a devotion to the beautiful young Lycavorian that had become Sumar's wife that was just as powerful as the one Martin had for his wives and mates. That was just as powerful as his sons Resumar and Martin's father had held for their wives and mates. Just as Wayonn had told him, Sumar was very different at the end. He was still a Praetorian yes, but through the millennia he had learned to balance the nature of the Praetorian with the sometimes wild and savage nature of the species with which he was now one of. He had embraced the emotions that he had often told them to push aside and repress in order to make the right choice. In the end Sumar had made the right choice. He had embraced his emotions and instincts unlike any other time in his long life and in doing so, he had released all the blocks to the power that a Praetorian could wield.

This showed now in his descendants. Martin, Androcles, Denali, Jomann and Deion were far more powerful because they embraced their emotions and their code and allowed it to direct how they used their gifts. Wayonn, Nara, Helen, all of them were so much more powerful and focused because of this fact. Murano knew that Deion Leonidas and his niece Mari had begun a relationship. He could sense their Etheric connection burning brightly. He could almost feel the complete and utter devotion to his niece that swirled through Deion Leonidas. He could feel the same emotions resonating from Mari as well. So open and without doubt or concern. The old Murano would have taken her aside and discouraged such a relationship immediately. He would have counseled her not to enter into an intimate union with him because of the ramifications of such a bond. That was the old Murano...

This was the new Murano.

He had felt it growing within him from the first moment he had sensed Martin out among the stars. New life. Rebirth. The passion to never back down and always see the good in things. He had felt it even more once meeting him on Onterom, and then it had fully blossomed on Twelve Alpha in their battle with the Svorag. Almost without thinking he had been swept up in that passion and honor. It was a rebirth as far as he was concerned. He could feel his love for Tobia even more pronounced now. She was everything to him, and he had let her slip through his grasp like a fool. When he returned he would try and contact her and try to explain it more than he did when he left her. He knew she was angry with him, and while part of himself cried for allowing her to turn to another for comfort, another part was sincerely happy that she had found the love he could not return to her. He would never love another as he loved Tobia, of that he was sure. He was content now to at least be beside Martin and his sons and any other Praetorians that they could find fighting for the greater good once more.

Murano had led troops on the battlefield before and he was no stranger to this. It was different now however, as he was filled with the same resolve and passion that cascaded over those surrounding him. Even his short association with Martin and the others had changed him for the better. His connection to his powers was so much more focused and cleared than ever before. He felt more powerful than he ever had and Murano knew it was because he had let go of the old and embraced the new. He stood among the first of a new breed of Praetorians and they would be so much more than anyone ever believed. He could feel their individual resonance echoing within him brightly, more so Androcles and Dorian, but all of them were like shining beacons of light within the Etheric realm and when he mingled his own resonance with theirs it was staggering to behold. He was filled with a confidence that was beyond anything he had ever felt, and an equally powerful attitude that they would not fail no matter the odds. Murano intended to embrace that emotion from now until the day he passed into the next life and joined so many of his brothers within the Rift of Time.

Until that day however, Murano intended to live with no more doubts and no more holding back.

Androcles and Dorian stood in front of them all, Jomann on his left, Denali and Deion to his right, while he stood behind all of them and took it all in. Androcles had told him he was to lead them for all of them were still very new to their abilities though they had been using them for years. It was a responsibility Murano

willingly grasped onto as he felt all of them join their Etheric resonances together and they heard Androcles' words.

“Looking for us!”

The new Praetorian Murano acted instantly.

“Jomann! Now!” He barked out the words clearly. “Denali! Deion! Execute!”

Five words sent all of them into action. Using the unique Praetorian power within him and feeding off of his brothers in arms, Jomann moved. Since his power allowed him to move in short bursts far faster than others could follow with the naked eye, Jomann moved to the side of the group of Lycavorian mercenaries even as his Shi Viska burst from Flatspace. The shield was leaving his arm even as he took up a position to the side of the mercenary scum and was bringing his KM12 up with his right hand. He watched as his Shi Viska streaked forward, not at the bodies of the mercenaries, but at their weapons. Since only Jomann felt as if he was moving at normal speed, his eyes watched as his shield sliced through the weapons of the front row of mercenaries as if they were butter, finally imbedding itself into the wall across the room as he brought the KM12 up and loosed two perfect rounds.

All of their KM12s had been retooled for the Kavalian 12.7mm high velocity penetrating round in order to cause more damage upon impact. This was certainly the case as Jomann watched both of his rounds strike the closest mercenary to him and the farthest away, both of the men outside the cone of Etheric power that Androcles and Dorian were about to unleash. As he turned his head after firing he saw Denali and Deion about to slam their fists into the floor of Coren Re Mydala's home and felt a momentary pang sadness at the damage they were about to wrought. That passed instantly as he reigned in his Etheric power and normal time once more took shape for him.

It was almost comical to see the expressions of the Lycavorian mercenaries when their weapons splintered in their hands and fell away leaving them utterly defenseless. That single expression lasted only a split second as Deni's and Deion's fists slammed into the floor and sent a devastating wave of Etheric power directly at the men and women even as the two men on the ends of their lines flew back and their blood splattered wetly on the wall behind them. Jomann watched like it was in slow motion, though he knew that was not the case, as the floor buckled and crumbled before his eyes, lifting up and rushing at the remaining thirty men and women that were crowded into the main room. Their training was not as good as they thought for no Union Strike team would ever bunch together in the same room as they had done, providing a group of targets so close together. None of them could do anything to stop the wave, nor could they avoid it. It smashed into them like an out of control lifted, rising their bodies off the floor, their arms and legs wildly flailing about as they fought to keep their balance.

And that is when the crushing surge of Etheric power left the hands of Androcles and Dorian.

It was not something either of the brothers expected, for neither Andro nor Dorian had truly unleashed their abilities without some form of control. This time however, driven by the emotions within them and guided by Murano's calm resonance and Sarlana's echo within their hearts, Androcles and Dorian Leonidas allowed their *Dahakoan* blood to guide their Praetorian power. The effect was devastating to say the least.

It did not appear spectacular in any way, just two young men standing shoulder to shoulder and releasing what could only be described as a wall of light blue Etheric power. Yet this wall of Etheric power took solid form within milliseconds of Androcles and Dorian releasing it. It crossed the short distance between them and Unnel's Lycavorian mercenaries in a single heartbeat and none of them could have foreseen the outcome. The Etheric wall was roughly six meters wide and three meters tall and it struck the mercenaries as they were still flailing about suspended in the air from Denali and Deion's Etheric Wave attack. Fueled by the incredibly passionate emotions within both of the Leonidas brothers, the Etheric wall became a runaway locomotive without mercy or remorse. As their father had done on Enurrua and then on Onterom, they let loose all of the chains that had bound them up until this point. The Etheric wall struck the group of mercenaries with unforgiving force, propelling the mercenaries back at terminal velocity. What followed was something no one had expected.

The entire north wall of Coren Re Mydala's main living room buckled outward, groaned in protest and then metal bent and twisted in protest, glass shattered and the north wall blew outward as if torn from the foundation by the hand of an angry deity. The bodies of Unnel's two dozen mercenaries were launched into the darkness while being peppered with razor like glass and pieces of the wall's building materials as they

disappeared into the night in front of them. Andro's azure orbs went wide, as did Dorian's multicolored eyes and quite comically, both of them looked down at their hands in shock. It was Murano, ever the calm warrior, who shook aside his disbelief first and reacted.

"Upon them!" He bellowed out. "Hold nothing back! Go now Praetorians!"

His voice struck all of them like a slap, wrenching them from their shock at what they had just done and then the Spartan warriors that all of them were came rearing forth. Without question or pause, all six of them leaped into the darkness before them to press their attack.

None were in the mood for games.

"*Saoi Sibfla!*" Sherice gasped aloud as she and Cowen watched the north wall of Coren Re Mydala's house blow outward in a shower of steel, granite and glass.

Cowen didn't removed his eye from the scope of the CHAOS. "That... that would be an understatement Sherice!" He spoke.

"That's it!" Sherice exclaimed. "That's the signal!" She lowered her macrobinos and tapped her jaw. "All teams this is Archangel Team One! The signal is given! I repeat! The signal has been given! Execute!"

Her directive was not questioned.

"*Son Vada Carians!*" Kalis muttered openly as his eyes took in what had just happened.

"All teams this is Archangel Team One! The signal is given! I repeat! The signal has been given! Execute!"

"Go!" Ridor exclaimed. "We hit the lower level now!"

Kalis surged forward from where he Ridor and Daio had been hiding within the small work shed. Ridor was the first out of the shed and he felt Daio and Kalis break to either side as they sprinted across the thirty meters to the side of the lower portion of the living estate. They covered the thirty meters in less than ten seconds using their wolf speed and slammed against the outer wall of the lower level living quarters.

"Bangers!" Kalis called out yanking the Flash Bang grenade from the combat harness he wore. He mashed his thumb down on the trigger and turned slightly to send the flash bang grenade smashing through the plate glass window of the first floor. Ridor and Daio quickly followed suit into the second window and Ridor into the main hall that led down the rows of large rooms.

The team of Unnel's mercenaries on the lower level were already addled because of the force of the structure being very nearly torn apart above their heads. All of them heard the single word echo out and the breaking of more glass but none of them saw the three flash bang grenades enter the lower living quarters. It really would not have mattered had they seen the grenades. Most of their ears were already ringing from the explosion like sound of the north wall being blown from the main building and all of them were still confused as to why their targets were not where they were supposed to be.

The three flash bang grenades, still very potent even after centuries of redesign and use, went off within two seconds of each other and sealed the fates of the twenty-four men and women that had entered the lower living areas of the estate. With ear plugs protecting their own wolf ears, Ridor led Daio and Kalis into the lower level, their chopped down versions of the venerable P190 hissing out death with every trigger pull. The grenades did their jobs perfectly rendering all twenty-four of the second mercenary team completely helpless as they reached for shattered eardrums in pain and began to stumble about completely disoriented. Kalis didn't hesitate and neither did Daio or Ridor. All three young men had seen the results of slavery and rape up close and personal. Cvea and Kameka with Ridor and Daio and his precious Serale's mother Ceale for Kalis. In truth Kalis had seen far more of such things for he had grown up in a society where this was commonplace. Now, after the events with his *Tenna* For'mya and his rebirth he held a particularly powerful hatred for such things. None of the three young Spartans were in a forgiving mood as they began to send out lethal bursts from their P190 A5s. Ridor and Daio may have questioned Kalis's experience before this day, for they had never seen him work, but they would not question him now. They also did not question his commitment to the values and morals taught to him by the King for one only had to view how he doted over the young red haired Hadarian

female who was his wife and mate now. They would not question anything about him after this night for Kalis did not pause or stutter in his actions. Every four round burst from his A5 left a dead mercenary in his wake as the three men swept mercilessly through the lower living quarters. Most of the mercenaries were on their knees still trying to regain their senses when the black clad apparitions appeared and ended their miserable lives. Most would never know or see the men who ended their lives for they did not understand the way Spartans fought.

Kalis heard the boom of the side arm echo even with his ear plugs and his head shifted instantly to the far door into the living quarters on the other side of the building. He saw the flash of blue skin and then the dark hair of the Vanari woman they knew as Ryana as she led one other Vanari, or Lycanari as they preferred to be called, out of the last room near the far door. The man with her carried a short barreled sniper rifle in his hands as Ridor motioned her forward.

Ryana didn't hesitate and sprinted the short distance to where they were. "Stupid fools all crowded into a single area!" She almost screamed, her own ears still ringing somewhat.

"We take no chances!" Ridor barked out. "Sweep back and double tap them! Make sure they are dead! Go!" The tone of command in his voice was obvious and Ryana deduced quickly that he knew his stuff. Leadership was in Ridor's blood because of who his father was and he didn't even think about it as he naturally took command of the situation.

Ryana didn't question the brutality of the order and simply nodded as she grabbed her fellow troop and turned back. Ridor turned his head just as he saw Kalis fire a last burst into one of the mercenaries on the ground. "Daio! Kalis! Check them all! No mistakes my brothers! If they even cling to life, end it permanently! There will be no reprieve from justice this night!"

That was all the order they needed and Ridor saw them both turn to comply. Ridor reached up to tap his jaw.

"Archangel Team Four to Angel base! Lower level is secure!"

"No prisoners Hyperetes Ridor!" The female voice spoke in reply.

Ridor nodded. "Already moving to insure this!" He spoke.

"Secure the lower entrances and stand by! Kill any who try to escape through the living areas!"

"Understood. Team Four clear!"

Ryana Val Ardwor and her teammate took up position by the opposite entrance of the lower level and looked out into the now smoky and dust filled night air. She tapped her jaw and activated the new implant she wore. This was something that the Protectorate had never thought of and Ryana was stunned at the clarity the internal COM units gave them. Being part of the Union definitely would have its advantages going into the future and Ryana knew that the vast majority of the Lycanari that called the former Protectorate home were simply overjoyed at the merger taking place. The Lycavorian Union was far larger than the Protectorate and there would be so much more to experience and see once things began to settle and they had taken care of business. The Lycanari also knew, as did Ryana, that they would never have to tolerate slavery ever again in their lifetimes.

"Team Three Lead to Team!" Ryana hissed. "Do you have shots?"

"Negative!" The first voice echoed. **"Too much dust! What the hell did they use on the wall Ryana? Explosives of some kind?"**

"No joy here. No visual on zone!"

"Same here Ryana. No visual!"

"All elements Team Three! Move to secondary locations and secure objectives!" Ryana ordered instantly. "Let Team One handled the long range shooting! Go! Go!"

"Moving!"

"Same here!"

"On our way!"

Ryana could almost see her three other sniper teams moving from their primary locations in her mind. Each of them would move to their secondary location and secure the three other entrances onto Coren Re Mydala's estate. Their job would be to keep any Vanari who let their curiosity overrule their brains from

entering the killing zone that the estate had now become. They would also insure that those Vanari who worked for Ardan would not set foot on the estate for any reason. Whatever else she took away from this night Ryana would never question the planning or skill of the Union Spartans in any way. Their plan had been daring and they were executing it to utter perfection.

Just as her Vanari father and Lycavorian mother had always taught her and her siblings.

SPARTAN QRF STRIKER

“Three hundred meters!” Tir’ut called out from the co-pilot’s seat.

Normya concentrated intently as she swept the *STRIKER* in low over the tops of the buildings. This was not something they had planned for, but Normya knew they were nothing if not adaptable. Normya shifted her head slightly, glancing out the side window and seeing the urban terrain all around them. It was still too early for most Vanari to be up and about she knew and this would allow them to move quickly and decisively.

“Target building in sight!” The voice of the female elven Flight Engineer who sat behind them echoed out, her eyes glued to the screens in front of her as she monitored the cameras that were mounted in the nose of the *STRIKER*.

“Tir’ut... reduce power to thirty percent and prepare to drop the Shroud!” Normya called out.

Tir’ut’s hands flew across the three consoles that surrounded his massive frame. He was an Akruxian warrior yes, but he was a far better pilot than most and once the engineers aboard the *SCIMITAR* had first realized this they had quickly redesigned Normya’s *STRIKER* so that he could better fit his large body in the co-pilot’s seat.

“Thirty percent power!” He echoed his beautiful wife. “Preparing to disengage the Shroud.” He turned his head slightly and looked at his Blessed Wife. “They will know we are here once the Shroud comes down Normya my wife. They will undoubtedly have spotters on the tops of buildings.”

“Can’t be helped!” Normya exclaimed. “We have to get them in as close as we can so that none of the *ronnus* escape!”

“Normya!” The female elf called out turning her head. “Let me get in the nose turret! I can cover their exit!”

Normya didn’t hesitate for even a second. “Go Ke’rai!”

Ke’rai Jenal was moving even before Normya finished her sentence. She was one of Ne’Veha’s closest friends and had jumped at the chance to become part of Normya’s flight crew. She was also among the new breed of elven females from Elear; those that allowed their sexuality and poise to reside out in the open and not be reserved about it any longer. Her father and mother were among the first elven families to take a second name when Queen Dysea and Queen For’mya began to use Leonidas as their surname so long ago. Both of her parents were ardent supporters of the elven Queens and all they had accomplished. Ke’rai Jenal also had an ulterior motive about accepting this position, one that she hoped would come to fruition in the future.

“Fedor! Famus!” Normya called out on the small headset she wore. “Ramp coming down! Thirty seconds!”

Fedor Leonidas waited in the rear of the *STRIKER* with the sixty member QRF and Famus. His heart was racing yes, but he had seen battle before beside his father and mothers and he was not afraid. He looked at the weathered face of Famus beside him as the ramp began to open.

“You are a Prince, a Leonidas and a Spartan!” Famus told him. “You have already proven yourself in battle, so do nothing foolish! Lead as your father and brothers would lead young Fedor! We will follow!”

“Shroud coming down!” Tir’ut called out. “Prepare to exit!”

“Let us send these slaving *ronnus* into the abyss Famus!” Fedor shouted over the roar of the engines. Thoughts of his beautiful wife and mate Iama filled Fedor as they felt the *STRIKER* shift slightly. No longer would she have to tolerate the life she had endured for so long, and this gave Fedor a personal stake in this mission. Iama had spoken to him just before they launched and whispered to him to insure that no woman, no matter their species was left behind to languish in that life. He had swept her into his arms, kissed her with intensity and passion and swore to her that he would see to it.

Fedor saw Famus smile brilliantly at him hearing his words. “Spoken like a Leonidas!” Famus told him. “Let us make it so!”

“And we... are... down!” Tir'ut's voice chimed out clearly as they felt the *STRIKER* touch down lightly. “Go! Go! Go!”

In the split second before his boots left the deck of the *STRIKER* Fedor felt his brother reach for him in their private Etheric connection. He and Dorian had been stimulating this Etheric bond with him and Eirene since they had come to the surface, strengthening it to insure they would always be connected. Being born almost fully aware of everything around you did have its advantages. The message was short and needed to reply Fedor knew. He would also try his best to make it so.

Fedor my brother. If you find Franklin Adams among those cowards, you save his vile carcass for me. I have a present I wish to bestow upon him.

OSG BUNKER

“...What!” Franklin Adams screamed.

“I don't know sir!” The agent stammered. “One of their ships just landed right in the fucking street! The spotters were screaming that they were offloading troops before they went silent! They have found us!”

“That's not possible!” Adams exclaimed.

“Colonel Adams! We have lost contact with our ground teams!” Another voice rang out in the bunker. “Our COMS are being jammed!”

Franklin turned. “We have the most sophisticated communications in the galaxy! No one can jam our transmissions!”

“We have lost contact with Team Two assaulting the First Regent's home! They went off line just after they entered his home! All COMS with Team One ended the moment their mortar support team was killed!” The man answered. “Colonel... we have been made! They were fucking waiting for us!”

Franklin Adams had not risen within the ranks of the OSG for being stupid. He made his decision quickly.

“That's it! Shut it down! Immediate evac to secondary location! Now everyone! Move!” Adams ordered with force.

It would not save them.

Of the thirty-two mercenaries under Unnel's command that were blasted from the inside of Coren Re Mydala's home, only twenty-seven of them survived the devastating Etheric blast that had sent them slamming painfully into the interior wall, only to have the wall blow outward driven by some unseen and crushing power. Two of the mercenaries struck the wall at odd angles and their necks were snapped instantly, mercifully killing them before they ever knew what had happened. Two more were tossed through the air being peppered by granite and glass fragments that sliced through the light armor they wore and nearly shredded their bodies into tiny pieces. When they did eventually land in the courtyard below, they did not feel the pain of impact for they were already dead. The glass fragments had severed most of the arteries in their bodies as they flailed about and they bled out in seconds. The fifth mercenary was alive when he landed, however he did not survive the three eighteen inch long decorative steel spikes that adorned the top of Coren's estate wall. All three spikes impaled him through his chest, spearing his heart and lungs clean through and the third puncturing his kidneys and liver. He died within seconds of landing.

The remaining twenty-seven mercenaries landed quite painfully on the courtyard expanse below them, some of them suffering shattered limbs and nearly fatal internal injuries, but all of them still alive and able to fight.

It truly didn't matter, for none of the surviving men and women had any idea of the enemy they had awoken or what they were capable of.

Sherice did know however, and she swept her macrobinos across the expanse of the courtyard searching for the one man that she knew Androcles wanted alive.

“Cowen?” She questioned.

“Searching.” He answered without removing his eye from the scope. “Still somewhat obscured because of the debris.”

“Find him husband!” Sherice urged him. “That is the one Andro wants alive. He will have the answers we need!”

Cowen knew she was correct as he swept his scope across the courtyard trying to spot the man. He had gotten a good look at him just before they had breached the estate’s upper level and was sure he could find him again.

“Nine to the left as they land Sherice!” He spoke calmly. He was no stranger to combat and remained calm and methodic. “Nine to their front! Hold on!” Cowen zoomed in his scope on one man who was still on his back but trying to regain his feet among the many flower planters where he had landed and shattered dozens of them. He was bloody and cut up badly but... Cowen zoomed in and got a clear picture of his face. “I have him! He is among the flowers directly to west! Near the river entrance!”

Sherice didn’t hesitate even though this was her first taste of actual combat. She had been involved in the Evolli War as had most her age in the military, but she had been part of a Command and Control Team as Intelligence Officer and had not seen actual ground combat.

“Androcles!” She announced over her implant. “Flower garden! Near the river entrance!” She spoke knowing that he would hear her but not respond. “Cowen... lessen the odds some my husband!”

Cowen nodded his head. “Done!” He spoke as his finger caressed the trigger of the CHAOS rifle once more.

Sherice felt the slight recoil and then the silenced boom of the rifle as he sent another round downrange. She had no doubts that whatever he had just aimed at was now dead. Sherice didn’t pause and shifted her macrobinos to get a better idea of where the rest of the mercenaries had landed within the courtyard. Her blue eyes grew wide when she saw the six of them land, their bodies encased in shimmering white/blue Etheric armor that surrounded each of them individually. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before and what followed Sherice would remember for the rest of her days.

Part of the power of a Praetorian was the conforming Etheric shield that all of them could project around their bodies. Essentially it was another layer of body armor to protect them for it would take massive damage for it to fail completely. It did not make them invulnerable to be sure, but it could and had saved many of his brethren from Scourge attacks through the many battles they had fought centuries ago. Murano also knew that the Etheric shields those with him could project were far superior to those of his or any Praetorian in history simply because of the Etheric bonds that all of them had with their dragons. It would protect them from all but the heaviest weapons that could fire projectile rounds as well as many of the lighter energy based weapons that the Pralor people used. This did not deter Murano from landing among them as an equal for he knew what he was capable of. All of them had been stunned at the force of the Etheric shockwave that Androcles and Dorian had unleashed. None of them expected to blow out the entire section of wall within the estate, for they had hoped to end things quickly in the confined space of the main room. That had quickly been tossed aside when Androcles and Dorian had blown a gaping hole in the house that you could have easily driven two heavy lifters through. As their superb training and instincts took over however, they adapted instantly.

“Pairs!” Murano shouted out. “And split!”

Deion didn’t waver as he broke with Murano to the right while Denali and Jomann broke to the left. Dorian and Androcles went straight ahead towards the flower garden where Sherice’s excited cry had directed them.

The Lycavorian mercenaries under Unnel began scrambling painfully to their feet as they too began to react. Most of them were several hundred years old and as with all members of their species, their regenerative healing systems began to work quickly. These men and women were not cowards by any stretch of the imagination. Many of them had faced the harshest and toughest opponents in the Beta Quadrant and come out

on top. It would not matter in the least now for they had never faced anything like the six men advancing on them. Deion and Murano struck first and did so without mercy or reprieve. As the man closest to Deion saw him advancing he rose fully to his feet and lifted the sidearm he carried. He began pulling the trigger, watching in horror as the projectile rounds began to impact Deion's Etheric shield and simply stop. His eyes could not believe what he witnessed as the rounds caused Deion to stagger only slightly from the force before he stepped into the main thrust and drove his *Nehtes* through the man's sternum. The spearhead burst out his back showering the ground behind him with blood as his fingers suddenly became useless. Deion lifted his left hand and let loose with two Etheric diamonds that crossed the distance to the next mercenary in the blink of an eye as he tore his *Nehtes* free from the first man's chest. Both of those Etheric diamonds punched into the next man's torso, his body doing a macabre dance as most of the left side of his frame was literally crushed from the force of the impact. The small Etheric diamonds entered his upper body cavity below his pectoral muscle and took most of his internal organs with them as they exited out his lower back. He was dead before he even fell back to the ground.

Murano saw another trying to bring his weapon to bear on Deion and Murano reached across the distance with his Etheric power and seized the man's arm. He screamed in agony as Murano twisted his hand downward and the man's arm and shoulder could be heard popping and shattering from the unseen force. Murano brought his Saberstaff up in a precise cross body thrust and removed his head, silencing his screams forever. His time among Martin and now Androcles and the others insured Murano did not hesitate. Until this night he had never fought anything other than the Scourge or Svorag. There had been a few disagreements with other Pralors through the many centuries of course, but he had never used his powers against those like him. His time with Martin and the others showed him that there were just as many very bad people among the stars and when dealing with them, you could not hold back. Once he came to this realization, Murano understood what his place was to be. The fight was anything but fair he knew, but these men and women had chosen their course in this life and now they would answer for their decisions. Murano reached out and grasped another within the grips of his Etheric power and squeezed his fist tightly together as the man wailed out his agony. It lasted only a few seconds before the pain overloaded his brain and he mercifully passed out before what little life remained in his body was crushed from him. Murano dropped his body and whirled to see Deion Leonidas smashing another man into the hard ground with no pity or remorse encased as he was in Deion's Etheric grip. The sounds of his skull cracking open were clearly audible in the night air even as Deion swept further to his left and brought his *Nehtes* around in a blistering circle strike. The razor like head of the spear, forged from pure dragon armor, bit into the necks of the last two mercenaries who had been foolish enough to stand shoulder to shoulder unable to really comprehend what was happening. The spear head opened their throats to the night air even as Murano sent forth two focused Etheric waves that struck both of their legs at the knees and snapped them like twigs. As they fell Murano turned quickly and took stock of what was happening. Denali and Jomann had dealt harshly with their group of mercenaries. Denali and Lisisa Leonidas had taken a Vanari woman as their wife and mate. A woman that they loved just as intensely as they loved each other. Denali would show no mercy to the men who had a hand in enslaving his mate's people. Murano had seen the signs with Jomann and Eliani almost from the outset. The Eridiani woman Brendi affected them intensely and being the wolves that they were, they pursued that until Brendi had admitted to wanting the same thing. Jomann would defend his wives and mates without question or regard. Between the two of them, they had more than enough power and skill to dispatch whatever mercenaries survived the fall from the house above.

It was then that Murano felt the massive surge in Etheric power and his eyes turned towards where he knew Androcles and Dorian would be. What he felt within the Etheric realm was utterly beautiful as far as Murano was concerned. It was so focused and pure and it radiated with unblemished clarity. It was also then that Murano got the first glimpse of the power that Sarlana had told him all *Dahakoan* possessed. A unique and uncanny ability to foresee what their opponents would do. Dorian Leonidas was a blur as he used his ability to wrap the shadows around him and blur to dance between the seven men arrayed in front of him. It was unlike anything Murano had ever seen as the youngest Leonidas in terms of years fought like a man with thousands of years of experience. He was never in one spot for more than a split second, the dual blades he carried slashing viciously into flesh each time he appeared. Each wound was fatal Murano took note, and he would blur to another who seemed to be ready to attack him or Androcles. It was completely unfair in many respects Murano thought to himself, Dorian's ability to blur and use the shadows and Andro's overwhelming strength effectively

canceling any advantage the mercenaries might have had. As Murano watched in awe, it was like a perfectly choreographed dance between the two brothers. Murano could feel the staggeringly powerful connection between them and their bonded ones, Elynth and Ryner. It was similar to what he felt between Martin and Torma on Onterom and that moon, but it was also much more focused and pure.

Andro's had pulled his two swords from Flatspace and as Murano watched they moved with a speed and power the likes of which he would never forget. Three times Androcles had used one sword or the other to actually turn aside projectiles fired by a mercenary at either himself or his brother. How he was able to do this was far beyond Murano's ability to even understand for he had never seen anything like it in his life. Their Etheric shields were putting off an eerie white/blue color brighter than the rest of them, and it caused the ground around them to glow unnaturally. As Murano watched, a mercenary to Andro's left raised the large sidearm he had managed to pull from its place and center it on Andro's back. Murano was about to scream a warning when the mercenary's chest suddenly erupted in a shower of blood and bone as his body was flung back from Androcles by the force of the impact. Murano cut his eyes quickly to the tall building across the river and knew that the Kavalian Cowen'Shan was also keeping a close watch on the battle below him. It went on like this for what seemed like hours but Murano knew it was only seconds. Androcles and Dorian dancing among the mercenary forces as if they were playing with them. Always sidestepping or shifting at the last moment before an attack and then brutally ending that mercenary's life with a swipe of their blades or a devastating Etheric attack.

Until there was only one.

Murano turned quickly to Deion who was making sure those they had taken down were indeed dead. "Deion... come." He hissed softly.

Deion looked at him and nodded as they began to move for where Andro and Dorian were standing before the lone mercenary. Murano noticed that Jomann and Denali were also stepping among the bodies of the dead and making their way to where their brothers stood.

Unnel held the sidearm centered on Androcles' chest as he watched him stab down with one sword into the chest of one of his men, hearing his man groan in pain as death took him into its embrace. Androcles pulled the sword free and spun it gracefully in the air before turning to face Unnel as Dorian approached from the other side. Unnel could only gawk at Androcles and Dorian as they stood there in front of him. Six men. Six men had decimated his entire team of fifty plus men and women. A team Unnel had spent years putting together for their skills and the beliefs they held. Unnel had witnessed two of his men blown backwards during the fight so he knew that there was a sniper out there somewhere with a very large rifle and the skill to use it so well. Above all else Unnel took note of the way the eyes on both young men appeared to be nearly glowing. The azure blue orbs and then the multicolored cobalt blue eye of the second man. Their armor was splashed with blood in numerous spots. The blood of his men.

"Don't come any closer!" Unnel screamed at them.

Androcles ignored him for the most part and reached out within the Etheric realm for his sister. *Lisisa?*

We're secure here Andro. Lisisa answered him confidently. *No casualties.*

Andro smiled for he had expected no less from his sister. Behind only Yuriko, himself, and their father, Lisisa Leonidas was perhaps the deadliest of hand to hand fighters in their entire family.

Fedor my brother! Andro spoke next.

We shut them down fervon! Fedor's excited voice answered almost instantly. *It looks like the mother lode here Andro. Plans. Computers. Everything.*

Franklin Adams? Andro asked.

He left his people to die fervon. He was gone before we hit the main bunker. Coward. Fedor hissed in reply.

He is a rat and we will eventually catch up to him. Secure the facility and remove everything that we may find useful brother. Then get out of there before the Vanari arrive. Andro told him.

Already on it.

Gods speed to you fervon.

And you.

Andro lifted his eyes to Unnel as Murano and the others came up on either side of him and Dorian. It was Murano who lifted his hand and using his Etheric power he ripped the sidearm from Unnel's grasp and guided it into his own.

"This will not help you." Murano stated flatly before tossing the weapon off to the side.

Androcles looked at Unnel. "Tell me... what the going rate is for selling out you own people and seizing Vanari females as slaves to your whim."

"I won't tell you *sibfla* boy!" Unnel screamed out. "Nothing!"

Andro moved with amazing speed and was suddenly only centimeters from Unnel's face. Andro bared his fangs in defiance and smiled at Unnel with absolutely no mirth in his angry expression.

"Oh... that is where you are wrong." Andro spoke. "You will tell me everything I want to know. Everything."

Andro sent his helmeted head rocketing forward into Unnel's face, crushing the man's nose instantly, blood erupting from the torn skin and splintered cartilage. Unnel dropped to the ground like a limp noodle from the blow as his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he passed out from the intense pain.

"Too easy." Dorian muttered softly.

"We had the advantage of surprise from the outset." Andro told him. "It will not always be as easy *fervon*."

"No it will not." Murano echoed. "As long as we keep that in mind then the learning never ends. I fear there are bigger battles coming to us in the future."

"No bets here." Androcles stated. He turned and looked back and above them at the wall to Coren Re Mydala's house. "I wonder how I am going to explain that." He said with an impish grin.

Jomann and the rest of them chuckled. "That one is all you and Dorian Andro. Leave us out of it."

"Coward." Dorian hissed.

Murano couldn't help it and then he was releasing a booming laughing from deep within his chest. A laughter that was soon infectious as the others joined in even among the death all around them.

And the fickle Gods of Fate looked on in silence for they knew that it had only just begun.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

AUSTROVA

WESTERN HEIGHTS RESIDENTIAL SECTOR

HOME OF VANARI FIRST REGENT ALRERIN SHA HARAEL

They were a team of Lycavorian mercenaries in the employ of the OSG, or themselves depending on who you asked. Their target had been a bold one for sure. The boldest plan they had yet undertaken for the OSG, and they had several dozen missions under their belt in the employ of the OSG.

The Vanari First Regent.

Take out the Vanari First Regent and butcher his wife and any who were on the estate with him in as brutal a way as possible. They were given older Lycavorian Union uniforms and weapons to accomplish this task in order to make it seem like the Union was trying to subvert the Vanari government and rid itself of the First Regent who was a known Lycavorian hater. The OSG and their Vanari supporters, namely Ardan and Galar, could then claim that Prince Androcles and his minions were behind it and forever put an end to any kind of future that the Vanari and the Union may have had together. The Vanari government might even try to arrest any Lycavorians who were on the planet, further making the situation worse, knowing that Androcles would not allow his people to be held for anything when they did not commit any crime. It was an audacious plan to be sure, and one that could have very well succeeded, had Ardan and the others within his organization known of Alrerin Sha Harael's true allegiance and the purpose behind his actions through the years.

And if they had known of the visitors that Alrerin was currently entertaining.

These two facts combined to make the operation a complete and utter failure in more ways than one. As with their comrades attacking Coren Re Mydala's estate, these Lycavorian mercenaries breached the main floor

through a side entrance with a small amount of explosives, but did not use stun grenades for they did not expect any opposition. This was the first of three mistakes they made.

The second mistake was underestimating the fighting prowess of Ma'nia and the Vanari Security detail assigned to protect Alrerin. The third mistake was the most severe for they had not obtained any current intelligence on the man or his home and no one had scouted the estate before the attack. If they had, they may have taken note of the two dragons that were circling high above.

The leader of this assault team charged into the lower level of the estate with barely a pause after the explosive blast, his entire team following him close on his heels. It spelled their doom that much quicker. With Jeth and Tharua providing them all the intelligence they needed from high above, Lisisa and the other quickly piled some large pieces of furniture near the side entrance of the home to protect against the blast. When the leader cleared the smoky hallway into the main room, Lisisa struck first and without mercy. She blurred past the man, her dual blades flashing briefly as they opened his throat to the night air. The man dropped to his knees, his hands dropping his weapon and lifting to his neck as blood fountained from the two fatal slashes. As the others piled into the room and ran into the body of their soon to be dead leader, Arduri, Ma'nia and Nyosa led the other two Vanari Cadre Commandos over the top of the stacked furniture and fell on them with savage fury. Rinel and Riordian leaped over the furniture and dropped upon the three men and one woman at the rear with no hesitation. Arduri and Ma'nia and the other three Vanari knew they were no match in a prolonged fight with a Lycavorian so they used their speed and agility to their advantage and struck exceptionally fast. Arduri buried the single blade she carried into the thick neck of one Lycavorian and in a stunning move of agility and control, she used her feet to walk up the body of another Lycavorian as she struck. Denali had requested the *ARCH DEMON's* Weapons Master to craft Arduri a combat blade that she could carry and use until such time as a proper Dragon Armor forged blade could be made for her. He had succeeded in making the lightweight but razor sharp curved angled blade. It was matt black in color and the pommel was made of solid oak from an Algolian High Oak tree, one of the strongest non-metal materials known to exist in the Union. The blade sliced through his neck like a hot knife through butter, severing his artery instantly. Arduri released the blade, knowing she had killed the man and that even if he shifted, he would not be able to stem the flow of blood from the wound. As she reached the apogee of her climb Arduri twisted her legs around the second Lycavorian's neck and wrenched her body to the side. Her momentum caused the man's body to twist in the same direction and his feet flew out from under him as his body did a complete flip and he landed painfully on his back with Arduri's legs securely wrapped around his neck. She hooked her heels together and twisted her body further on the ground, savagely snapping the man's neck without pause.

Nyosa was half Lycavorian and thus a bit more sturdily built than Arduri and Ma'nia. She simply kicked one Lycavorian's rifle from his hands and then proceeded to beat him into submission with quick, savage blows from her hands. Her wolf fangs were fully extended and her eyes changed and she did not hesitate in her actions. A back ridge hand chop finally ended the man's life as the force of the blow crushed his throat and dropped him to the floor gagging for air until the life left his body. Ma'nia stepped in close to a woman and used her sidearm to pistol whip her face causing the Lycavorian female to stagger in shock. Ma'nia stepped even closer, jammed her weapon into the woman's throat and pulled the trigger three times. This is how it went in those seconds. No mercy or remorse was shown.

Riordian and Rinel, far more experienced in combat and physically able to stand with the Lycavorians, made short work of the stunned men and woman they fell upon, all of them ending up on the floor with grievous wounds. Three of them would die within seconds while the fourth, a woman, was the only one who would survive the night. Riordian couldn't bring himself to kill a woman and he simply broke her collarbone and both arms before smashing the butt of his sidearm across her face and dropping her into unconsciousness.

The attack was over far quicker than the OSG funded mercenaries had ever expected, and not at all in their favor.

"Nubous fools!" Nyosa hissed angrily.

"Everyone clear?" Lisisa barked out the question.

"All of them are down!" Riordian called out as Rinel began to secure the woman. "I have one prisoner!"

Lisisa blurred up next to him and looked down at the woman. "You spared her?" She asked.

"I could not... she is a woman Princess. I could not..." Riordian stammered.

Lisisa touched his arm and nodded. "I understand." She told him. "Colonel Rinel... please insure she cannot escape. I will call for a Med Team from the *ARCH DEMON*."

"Lisisa!" Coren's voice echoed and they all turned to see him leading Alrerin down the last few stairs and into the main room holding the sidearm tightly but very much like he was prepared and knew how to use it quite well.

"Coren... you should have remained out of harm's way until we called for you." Lisisa scolded him.

"I am done remaining out of harm's way!" Coren snapped. "This attack is too much! The OSG strikes at our leader now! I am seriously pissed off at this moment!"

Coren didn't notice the look Alrerin gave to him over his shoulder, nor did he see the new hint of respect in those same eyes.

"We have one prisoner." Lisisa told him. "I will send for a *STRIKER* from our ship to remove her before more Vanari arrive to secure the grounds. We must discover everything she knows."

Coren looked at Alrerin. "First Regent?" He asked.

Alrerin was looking around his now violated home, seeing the destruction and the death and feeling the burning anger begin deep in his own gut. For centuries he had stood to the side and did nothing in order to protect his family. It had torn him apart inside to see the pain that other families had to endure, but in his mind it kept his family safe. Now Alrerin Sha Harael was discovering that was no longer the case, if it ever was. And now Alrerin had reached the end of his ability to tolerate the injustice to his people and his honor. He turned back to Coren and then to Lisisa. "You will discover everything she knows?" He asked in a voice filled now with conviction and strength.

Lisisa nodded her head. "Oh... yes sir." She answered.

"Then move quickly Princess Leonidas." Alrerin spoke. "It will be between seven and twelve minutes before more Commandos arrive to secure the grounds. Once they breached my estate in this manner, an automatic alert would have been sent to the local garrison. They will be moving now."

Lisisa nodded. "I will have Tharua and Jeth take her and meet the *STRIKER* in the sky." She said. "Do... do you want us to leave?"

Alrerin shook his head firmly as Riordian watched him. "No. I am done with the games I have had to play all of these years. You arrived with Coren to try and conduct discussions with me in a civilized and respectful manner and then these men attacked. They are obviously not your men correct?"

Lisisa snorted in disgust. "These fools?" She quipped. "They bumbled into the most basic of ambushes and were unprepared. It is not something Spartans would have done. Ever."

"Then as far as I am concerned... we were all targets." Alrerin spoke.

"You realize that everything will come out in the open *medwan* Alrerin." Riordian spoke now moving closer to Alrerin and referring to him as father in the Lycavorian language. When he had begun doing this after Narlei and he were mated it had moved Alrerin almost to the point of tears and had drawn them ever closer together. "About Narlei and all of us."

Alrerin met his eyes. "It is past time Riordian." He answered. "I may not have the power I once had as First Regent but I will no longer sit idly by while our people are offered up to the OSG and their minions and yours bear the complete blame. Not any longer."

"Ardan will try and crucify you among the other Regents." Coren said. "Minimize you just as he has done with me. Perhaps even make a play to become First Regent."

Alrerin met his gaze just as Narlei came slowly down the stairs holding their youngest child in her arms while her mother held the hands of their other children. "I have done nothing all of these centuries because I was protecting my own family. Look what that has wrought us Coren my friend. Nothing but more killing and enslavement of our young women. More distrust between our people and the Lycavorians. I can no longer tolerate this. I would not be able to look my grandchildren in the eye knowing I did nothing."

Jokros moved back into the home from through the breach point holding the weapon in his hand. "The area outside is clear. Additional Vanari Commandos are already moving up the hill road. Their reaction time is far better than I had thought possible."

Alrerin nodded his head. "Then they knew the attack was coming." He stated slowly. "Which means Ardan has control of far more than I had first thought." He looked at Coren and moved closer to him. "I believe

it is time that you and I began to meet him at every turn Coren Re Mydala. And take back our people's freedom!"

Coren smiled widely. "I believe you are right." He stated. "I believe you are right."

MYDALA CITY OFFICE OF ARDAN VU LAMURRION

"Failed?" Ardan gasped. "How could they have failed? Everything was perfect!"

The face of the older human shook his head in the encrypted transmission. "I do not know." William Adams replied. "Franklin was able to report only briefly before their position was assaulted as well. He has gone into hiding and will contact me when he is secure. At the moment all I know is that they were waiting for our force on Coren Re Mydala's estate. They used some sort of power we have never seen before and they devastated the team that conducted the attack. The same power we saw the oldest one use in the transmission from Earth. All of my men are dead if my information is correct."

"What power?" Ardan snapped at him. "How could half a dozen men kill your entire assault team?"

"We don't know." Adams answered. "I was hoping you could tell me. You did not tell me that there were others who could do what the oldest son did. Others who had similar powers to what he displayed in that transmission weeks ago."

"I... I didn't know." Ardan rasped out the words. "Others had this same power?"

Adams nodded his head. "That is what Franklin reported. There were at least five others with him if the cameras on their equipment are accurate." He answered. "Our men stood no chance. Have your people been able to discover anything?"

Ardan shook his head quickly. "Cadre Commandos loyal to Coren have sealed off his estate and several blocks all around. They are not allowing entry into the area unless ordered to by Coren himself or his aide Jokros."

"They had people waiting to secure the area?" Adams commented.

Ardan nodded. "My Commandos began to move in the moment the attack began but they were stopped and kept from entering. They could not press the issue further for they were badly outnumbered and Vanari fighting Vanari would have drawn far too much attention and was not something I felt we needed."

"An excellent decision." Adams commented. "We have another problem however, as we have lost contact with the team directed to assassinate your Alrerin Sha Harael as well." Adams stated.

Ardan's head came up. "What?"

"Their last report had them about to breach his estate and we have heard nothing since." Adams answered him. "We must assume they are lost as well."

Ardan came to his feet now. "This is a disaster!" He almost yelled.

"You must remain calm Ardan." William spoke softly. "We have lost nothing."

"You said they assaulted your command base!" Ardan barked. "Your main listening and intelligence post in Mydala city. They will have access to all of your computers and files!"

Adams shook his head. "They will not be able to break the encryption on the files or any of the computers." Adams told him. "They are not intelligent enough to do this. No one who is not OSG could even begin to break the encryption. We are safe."

"Are you sure?" Ardan hissed. "You told me this attack would succeed as well! They did not manage to kill even one of Coren's children or the others?"

Adams shook his head. "Franklin tells me only this group of six and a smaller team of well trained men was in the lower estate. They had snipers deployed at distance he was sure, but no one else was present. They must have been removed to somewhere else. I have others in my employ looking into this now. There is nothing to tie them to us Ardan. All anyone will know is that a rogue group of Lycavorians attempted to kill the boy King and others because they are against this foolish merger."

"And the attack against Alrerin?" Ardan asked.

"They were also upset about Alrerin's views of Lycavorians." Adams stated casually.

Ardan looked at his face in the transmission. “You realize that this is not what he actually believes?”

Adams nodded his head. “Of course... but he is also maintaining a façade just as we are. Only now we can use this against him where he has no proof against us. You have discovered that he has a daughter who is now married to a Lycavorian and has children by this man... that will destroy his credibility with the other Regents. You can use this information to further usurp his rule and eventually take his position as First Regent. This is what we have been working towards regardless. We can just make it happen sooner now.”

Ardan nodded his head. “Yes.” He spoke.

“You must remain in control at all times.” Adams told him. “They have nothing to tie us to these attacks, and we can just as easily turn it all on the Lycavorians. Act as you have always acted and we will be safe.”

Ardan looked out the window of his office and could see the light of the flames across the city from near Coren’s estate. “I must begin to inquire of what has happened.” He stated. “It will look odd if I do not announce something.”

“I will be in contact soon Ardan.” William told him. “Keep your wits about you and we will be fine.”

Ardan nodded once more and turned back to the transmission. “You know of course that I will do this William.” He spoke. “I will inform Galar and the others of what has taken place and we will speak again in three days. That should be sufficient time for us to get full reports on what has taken place.”

Adams nodded. “Agreed.” He answered. “We are still secure Ardan. Do not worry.”

“I must begin to make inquiries and contact the other members of the SBR.” Ardan said. “Until we speak again William.”

Ardan turned as the transmission ended and he remained in front of the window looking out over the city. They could make this failure work for them if he played his hand correctly. He could use this as just another sign that Lycavorians were savage animals and untrustworthy. Yes he could make this work. He turned quickly to his desk and activated his COM unit there.

“Send for Galar and Cruor.” He spoke. “Have them meet me in my office in half an hour. I do not care what they are doing.”

“Should I activate the security measures here Regent?” The male voice asked.

“No.” Ardan answered him. “The attacks are over with. We need to discover what has happened however. Send out investigators to both locations. I want their initial reports on my desk in three hours. And begin contacting all the members of the SBR. I want them in the meeting chambers in six hours! No excuses! This is a planet wide call.”

“As you order Regent.” The voice answered.

“And have someone bring me tea and Danishes.” Ardan said. “I will be remaining here.”

“Yes sir.”

Ardan’s senior aide quickly rose to his feet and made his way over to the computer console and began typing furiously. He did not take notice of the slight figure that stepped silently from the shadows, watching his back.

The Vanari female quickly made her way across the small hallway and through the open door to the stairwell. Her long black hair cascaded around her stunningly beautiful face as she hurriedly moved down the stairs with no sound in the least. What she had just heard shocked her right down to her very core and she was shaking in a mixture of rage and horror. The man she had been working for all of this time, a man she had respected and admired for twenty years now, he had just taken part in an assassination attempt of a fellow Regent on the SBR and the First Regent of the Vanari people. He was working with the Eridiani in the taking their people and selling them into slavery. He was betraying his own people for profit. And he had been doing this for longer than she obviously knew.

Ardan Vu Lamurrion had been like a father to her. He had taken her under his wing all those years ago when her own parents were killed in an OSG attack on a transport. Dark haired though she may have been, he had taken her into his family with no questions. He had schooled her in the fine arts of Vanari politics, taught her so much about how things worked. She had been loyal to him all of this time and she had never questioned the how of things. She had never questioned how he could know so much or how he had become so wealthy

through the decades. And she had never questioned when he asked her to join him in his bed or endure the sometimes vile things he asked her to do. She had never questioned when he asked her to use her womanly skills to discover things from other Regents or Vanari businessmen in order to advance his own agenda or status. She only thought it would make her more important to him and encourage him to raise her above the simple status she had now, or to help her improve the status of all dark haired Vanari females across the Vanari Empire.

Now she knew how. Now she understood how it had all worked. His personal aide recorded all transmissions the Regent took in order to protect him and this one was no different. She had stood in the shadows and recorded it all herself while her lush body shook with nearly unrestrained anger and new hatred.

Kinryn Aal Samaur was only twenty-nine years old but she was about to become one of the catalysts for change that the Vanari people, or their leaders really, had been avoiding for so many centuries. She was Cadre Commando trained and like the vast majority of Vanari females, she was exquisitely beautiful. Her five foot seven frame was lean and muscular and she kept herself in excellent physical condition with a demanding regime. Her status as Ardan's aide allowed her many perks that others did not have. Kinryn had been working for her own goals all of her life and what she had just heard had changed all that. There were many things that were about to change in her life and though she did not know it just yet, so many doors that had forever been closed to her would now be tossed open.

Kinryn Aal Samaur would walk through those doors holding the hand of the individual that she would come to love and cherish more than her own life. One soul that would show her that true love could lead her to so much more in the future ahead and finally restore to her the meaning of the word family that had been taken from her so long ago.

AUSTROVA
ERIDIANI EMBASSY
SUB-BASEMENT

Franklin Adams looked across the desk at his father silently as the transmission ended. He had escaped within seconds of the Lycavorians storming their Command and Control Facility, leaving his people to fend for themselves. He knew the Lycavorians would not be in a very forgiving mood. He had used his personal escape route to move quickly through the city streets undetected even as more of Mydala City began to wake at the sounds of battle in their area. He was still somewhat unsettled by the ferociousness of the attack and the speed with which the Lycavorians had moved. He did not know how they had discovered their location but it was something he was going to find out. He didn't care that he had left twenty-three others to face the Lycavorians and that none of them remained alive for all of them had chosen to fight. He considered himself more important than those technicians and engineers. Now he sat shaken in the chair and watched as his father rose from his own chair and moved to the wet bar behind his desk. He poured two glasses of ancient human whiskey, each three fingers deep and turned to face his son as Franklin rose to his feet. He handed the glass to him and watched as his son took an immediate gulp to calm his still frayed nerves.

"Are you alright Franklin?" William asked his oldest and most experienced son. He was a son who knew almost as much as he did and had operated magnificently through the last years and one who William trusted above reproach.

Franklin nodded his head. "It just happened so quickly." He spoke. "I've never seen such a thing father; the savageness of the attack, the surgical precision. It was beautiful in a way to be honest. They had to have known where we were this entire time father. It is really the only explanation as to how they found us so quickly." He wrongly deduced.

"I thought our Command and Control Facility was too well hidden for anyone to find?" William said.

"So did I." Franklin spoke.

"It is going to come apart son." William Adams spoke.

Franklin looked at him. "What do you mean Father?"

“Ardan will not be able to control it any longer.” William spoke moving back to his chair. “It’s all going to come apart.”

“Father no one can tie us to the attacks!” Franklin insisted. “As far as any Vanari will know it was conducted by Lycavorians against their own kind!”

William nodded his head. “And that fallacy will last all of a few hours before the truth begins to come out.” He said settling into the chair. “We have seriously underestimated these Lycavorians from the Alpha Quadrant Franklin. They do not act as those from the Protectorate act.”

“What do you mean?” Franklin asked as he too settled back into his chair.

“I did not see it at first.” William said thoughtfully. “They follow a code Franklin; a code of honor and respect that died a very long time ago. They will not relent and they will never retreat. They fear nothing. And with more of them having these special powers than we first thought, we are even more seriously outmatched than any of us truly understood.”

“I have never seen anything like it father.” Franklin spoke. “Imagine what we could do if we had such power; if our men had such power.”

William shook his head. “Trying to obtain this is out of the question, at least for now.” He stated evenly. “We do not understand it or where it comes from. We thought him to be some sort of oddity. That is obviously not the case and so far we have been several steps behind this Lycavorian Prince Androcles Leonidas.”

“He is an animal father!” Franklin spat angrily.

William met his son’s eyes. “An animal he may be, but he has just bested you by a very wide margin and utterly destroyed a critical asset we controlled. Unnel’s team was by far the most experienced and well trained. Better than even our own OSG teams. He just got done turning them all into hamburger.”

“He got lucky.” Franklin hissed as he downed more of his drink.

William shook his head. “No... this was not luck. What he did tonight was by no means luck. They are far more skilled than we first imagined and...” He stated calmly sitting back in his chair. “...And there is something about him and the others. Something we don’t understand. And until we do, we will not be able to stand against him.”

“So we do nothing?” Franklin rasped in shock.

“No my boy.” William answered. “We will be doing plenty, just not what you think. I need to discuss this with the OSG Regional Governors and the Home Council. And we will need the Eridiani government to act for us.”

Franklin leaned forward. “What are you thinking father?”

“We need to pull back our operations until such time as things settle here.” William told him. “These attacks are going to create a firestorm that not even Ardan will be able to contain. We should have just killed the dark haired daughter and been done with it. Selling her to slavers in the Alpha Quadrant was stupid. We thought to be rid of her and all we did was make it so that boy Prince could find her more easily. If we had killed her than these Lycavorians would never have come here.”

“Do we know that for sure father?” Franklin asked. “The merger happened almost immediately when they discovered each other. Something else must have happened to cause this. We did not know this was going on or that talks were even under way.”

William nodded. “You may be right there, but that is no longer an issue we can influence. We have never been able to politically direct the Protectorate in a way that was advantageous to us. Their sensibilities about slavery are too ingrained and their leaders too loyal to old ideals. Unnel and those with him were an peculiarity. You can be sure that now that these events have taken place, others of Unnel’s mindset will be flushed quickly from the ranks of the former Protectorate and dealt with harshly.”

“You are suggesting we run?” Franklin asked surprised.

“I am suggesting we cut our losses,” William spoke. “...At least for the time being. An attack against Coren Re Mydala, a senior member of their SBR and this young woman Caliria’s father we could have brushed aside. An attack against him and an attack against their First Regent in the same night we cannot just dismiss?” William shook his head. “Ardan is not going to be able to bury that. And the counter agent that Caliria Re Mydala and the Hadarian witches have made will become public for sure now. Ardan won’t be able to stop that either. No... the time has come for us to reign in our teeth and sit back and watch how things play out.”

“We should unleash our missiles now and punish them!” Franklin spat.

William Adams shook his head once more and looked at his son. “The Vanari may not have released the information about the counter agent but you can be assured that the Union has it. And they are ready to use it. They will move no matter where we send our missiles, and then they will come for us directly because of this blatant attack.”

“Androcles Leonidas does not care for the Vanari people father.” Franklin said. “His feelings for Caliria aside, he will not go to war over this.”

William looked at him intently. “Are you so sure?” He asked. “This boy is an enigma even to his own people if all the reports I have seen are correct. We know nothing about him except what we have been able to retrieve from their own news reports. He obliterated a recognized government in retaliation for them supporting the slavers who bought Caliria Re Mydala Franklin. This is something his father has done in the past. You have not read Corbin Faith’s report to the Home Council son; if they bring the full weight of their military against us... against the Eridiani... we would not survive. In truth... it would be a very short battle and we would lose everything.”

“Then we should prod the Kavalians to do more.” Franklin spoke. “Have the mercenary groups we control in the Alpha Quadrant align against them.”

“The Kavalians have their own problems at the moment.” William said. “This rebellion that has sprung up is far more than what they are telling us. And these rebels are supported by the Union. Keleru has his own problems and he will not help us with ours.”

“So we just give up!” Franklin came to his feet now. “We can’t! We are OSG! We are Eridiani!”

“No one said we are giving up.” William spoke. “We are going to realign our assets to insure that they survive. We already have an operation in hand to learn more of these new Lycavorians and how things are run within the Union.”

“Father we...”

William got to his feet once more. “No!” He stated firmly. “Begin to inform all of our assets they are to go to ground and cease all operations here on Austrova and anywhere within Vanari space. We must use our superior intellect now son. There is a storm coming and in order to survive a storm, you must prepare for it. This attack is going to become common knowledge very shortly.”

Franklin wisely kept his mouth shut and said nothing. He did not agree with his father on this at all. They needed to be proactive in order to succeed. His mind tuned his father out as he continued to talk as he began to formulate his own plans. Great plans. Plans that would cause him to rise to great heights within the OSG and the Eridiani people as a whole. He was going to be a star.

The thing he did not take into account was the fact that most stars burned out long before they actually ever accomplished anything.

**AUSTROVA
CITY OF CARNA
TWENTY KILOMETERS EAST OF MYDALA CITY
HOME OF ASAY VA ELDOST**

Asay Va Eldost was blissfully unaware of any attack and had been for the better part of two days now. Upon returning to Austrova she could not get Nellian Tyrine out of her thoughts no matter what she had tried. After several hours of being home she gave up and used the COM frequency he had given to her.

Using her status as a member of the SBR, Asay had been able to quietly get clearance for him to come to the surface and thirty minutes after he had arrived at her home, she was in his powerful arms and reliving the night in the quarters on his ship. Only this time it was far more pronounced and incredible. Asay wanted this man as she had never wanted another man in her entire life. This led her to be far more aggressive and passionate in her desires and what she wanted. While this might have turned the vast majority of Vanari men off, it only served to make Nellian love her that much more intensely.

Asay had begged him to make her his only hours into their lovemaking and Nellian had willingly done just that. His fangs had sunk into the succulent flesh at the base of her neck and almost instantly Asay had felt

the virus in his saliva sear its way into her veins. The pain had been intense for a few seconds and then what followed Asay could only now describe as utterly glorious. For the next twenty-four hours Asay had been swallowed up by this man's love and desire for her and her alone. He didn't just make love to her; he made her the center of the universe. Nellian made her feel things that she never thought were possible to feel, and as each moment passed, Asay Va Eldost fell deeper and deeper in love with this man who had made her his. He worshiped her for hours until she was collapsing onto her large bed exhausted. His stamina was incredible and she discovered her Alkay only served to increase this endurance. He could not get enough of her and he made it known to her very quickly that she would forever be his.

And for Nellian Tyrine it was no different.

This Vanari woman had stolen his essence the moment he first met her. Their first night together on the ship had been the beginning and now Nellian knew he would never be satisfied by another. When she had contacted him, he had remained calm outwardly as she spoke shyly, but he rejoiced inside. He was cautious at first, until Asay made her intentions known, however Nellian had made his decision long before she had begged him to bite her and make her his where this road was taking him. Her scent was heaven to him, her skin like fine silk and her taste like the sweetest wine. That any children they had in the future would not be able to shift their forms was not something that bothered him in the least. They would be part Lycavorian and they would be his children and they would be raised to honor both of their parents and their ancestry.

Asay was more than adventurous in their bed and she had feasted upon him more times than he could remember. This adventurous nature brought out more of the wildness in Nellian and was the reason both of them had cried out to the heavens in the grips of mutual release. It had gone on for hours and hours, neither of them able to get enough of each other; until they both were so spent they could hardly move. Then Nellian began to show her and tell her what would happen, and Asay relished in this knowledge to no end. She rested in his arms listening intently as he explained so many things that would change about her, her senses being just the beginning. It wasn't until very early this evening that they had finally drifted into a blissful sleep on the wildly disheveled sheets of her bed. Asay was wrapped within his powerful arms, their legs entwined together and she could say without a moment's hesitation that she had never felt more safe and loved in her entire life.

Asay finally lifted her head from Nellian's broad chest as the insistent noise of her COM kept breaking into her delicious dreams. She heard the deep rumble of his breathing as he chuckled softly and she lifted her head further until her eyes rested on his beautiful face.

"Answer it Asay my love." He spoke softly. "It may be important."

"You are more important to me." She stated with a blissful smile as she kissed his ebony skin and snuggled closer to his extremely warm body.

"I do not wish to see you get in trouble for ignoring your duties." He told her as his fingers stroked the skin of her shoulder. "I have no intention of going anywhere."

Asay let out a disappointed sigh and lifted her head once more to look at him. "I do not intend to let you go anywhere Nellian Tyrine." She told him confidently.

Asay tossed aside the sheet that covered her legs and rolled quickly away from him completely naked. She rose beside the bed and watched as his eyes drank in her naked form sending a warm flush through her skin. She didn't bother to pull her robe on and she moved to the desk in her room and stabbed down on the COM panel.

"Yes." She spoke.

"Regent Va Eldost!" The female voice echoed loudly. "Finally!"

Asay turned to look at the panel when she heard the excited voice of her senior aide. "I did ask to not be disturbed Fenia." She said.

"Regent... haven't you been watching the Networks?" The woman asked.

"No. Why would I?" Asay asked.

"Regent... there has been an attack on Regent Re Mydala at his home by Lycavorians! An attack on the First Regent's home as well!" Fenia exclaimed. "Regent Ardan is calling for an emergency meeting of the SBR!"

"Fenia... is this a joke?" Asay asked as she saw Nellian slide over to the edge of the bed. His eyes were equally as wide as hers at this information and Asay knew there was no way he could fake that.

“It is all over the Networks as I said Regent Va Eldost!” Fenia answered. “Information is still coming into the Networks, but the attacks have been confirmed by dozens of witnesses. Regent Ardan has dispatched a heavily armed Cadre Security force to Regent Re Mydala’s home and another to The First Regent’s estate in the mountains. He is ordering all Lycavorians found outside the Embassy to be arrested and questioned.”

Asay’s green eyes focused on Nellian then. “What else?” She demanded.

“There is still much confusion.” Fenia told her. “All we know for certain now is that Regent Ardan has ordered the SBR into session in the capital in four hours.”

“Coren? The First Regent?” Asay asked quickly.

“No word yet on their location or what their condition might be.” Fenia answered. “Many... many fear the worse.”

“Fenia... send my transport for me!” Asay ordered as the Regent in her came out. “I will be waiting. Bring everyone into the office and have them begin making inquiries as to what has taken place!”

“Regent Ardan has ordered a complete security lockdown on all information.” Fenia told her.

“A lockdown?” Asay asked. “Why?”

“He did not specify the reasons. Only that all information gathered is to come through him first.” Fenia answered.

“That is not normal procedure in a crisis!” Asay spat. “We have rules and procedures that need to be followed!” Asay didn’t hesitate in her next order. “Fenia you will tell our people to ignore this lockdown. I want our people gathering information outside of those assigned to Regent Ardan.”

“We are to ignore Regent Ardan’s directives?” Fenia asked.

“Ardan is not in charge!” Asay hissed. “Procedures in a situation like this explicitly direct that all information gathered be presented to a select Board of Security Regents! I am on that Board and Ardan is bypassing us against our laws! Do as I direct you Fenia and make sure our people know that it is I who ordered it.”

“As you order Regent!” Fenia answered. “Your transport is lifting off now. It will be to your home in twenty-six minutes.”

“I will be ready.” Asay told her before ending the transmission.

Asay turned to Nellian as he stood beside the bed just as completely naked as she was. Her eyes glanced down almost involuntarily, taking in all he had shared with her in the last hours before she lifted her eyes and met his gaze. She stepped up to him without fear.

“Nellian...?” She asked softly.

“I have no knowledge of this in the least Asay.” He told her. “Caliria Re Mydala is a Leonidas now; a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union! There is no way Androcles would ever sanction an attack against her father! He would die to prevent such a thing! He has never considered your people the enemy Asay! None of us do! We may not like the way we are treated but this is not something we would ever do!”

Asay didn’t hesitate in her actions and she folded herself into his arms, pressing her face to his bare chest and relishing in the feelings his powerful arms encircling her gave to her. His words were far too sincere for her not to believe him, not after what they had shared these last two days.

“What is happening Nellian?” She asked softly as she felt his hands stroke her back and hair. Her arms tightened around his waist and his six foot four frame swallowed her up protectively.

“I do not know Asay my love.” He told her. “I can tell you that Prince Leonidas would never do what these people are saying. I can only surmise that what he feared has finally taken place.”

Asay drew her head back and looked at him. “What do you mean? What did he fear?”

Nellian gripped her arms gently. “Begin to dress my love. I will explain as you ready yourself for your ship. I will return to the *SCIMITAR* and...”

“Nellian... no!” Asay exclaimed. “You will be arrested on sight. You must stay here until I can reach someone on your ship and have them send one of your ships. The invisible ones.”

Nellian thought about that for a moment and then nodded. His men knew where he was and if Admiral Sa'sur was not already acting then she would certainly move quickly when Asay contacted her. “Very well.” He said. “Come... I will tell you everything that I know while you dress.”

COREN RE MYDALA'S ESTATE

"... Downloaded everything that was on their computers *fervon*." Fedor spoke from within the transmission from the *STRIKER* as they were returning to *SPARTA'S WRATH* in orbit. "And we have one prisoner."

Andro looked oddly at his brother. "Prisoner?" He asked surprised.

Fedor nodded his head. "He was hiding under a terminal when we conducted our entry. He was unarmed and..."

Andro lifted his hand. "I will not second guess you Fedor my brother. You were on site and made the decision. Make sure he is kept apart from the prisoner Lisisa took and from the one we took here."

Fedor nodded his head. "Understood. He was screaming that this pig Adams left them all to die." He said.

"Franklin Adams is a coward and nothing more." Androcles stated. "He will answer to me for his crimes." He looked at Fedor. "You did well *fervon*."

Fedor smiled slightly and nodded his head. "I only acted as father and Uncle Danny taught me."

"Have Famus prepare your QRF for immediate turn around and have Normya load for ground support. We may need you later." Andro said.

"You suspect something?" Fedor asked.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. "I don't know. This obviously did not go as Ardan and the OSG had hoped. There is no telling what will take place now. Lisisa is returning here with the First Regent and Coren. I'm locking Coren's estate down tightly in order to protect them both. Just be prepared to come in and pull our asses from the fire if the need arises."

"I will be ready." He answered.

Andro nodded and turned his head as Ryana moved into the main room with another Vanari beside her. He looked back to Fedor. "We will speak again soon *fervon*. Again... well done. Well done indeed."

The transmission closed and Andro turned as Ryana Val Ardwor moved up beside him with no fear. Androcles and the others had made it very clear to them that all of the Lycanari were considered citizens of the Union and there would be no question in that regard. She found the young Prince to be very intimidating, but extremely intelligent and knowledgeable. He had also made it very clear that she, Nyosa and their father Rinel were to call him by his given name and dispense with any pretense of royalty.

"Androcles... this is Commander Entia Al Dasmal." Ryana spoke. "She and her team have been guarding Caliria since she returned."

Andro nodded. "Yes... I remember you from the University." He answered. "And I have not thanked you for helping to keep her safe. I thank you now." Entia seemed somewhat taken aback and she nodded her head.

"Entia and her team are the ones who secured the immediate area outside the estate. They also kept Regent Ardan's security forces from entering." Ryana continued.

Andro looked at Entia. "How long before they arrived once the attack began?" He asked her.

"Far too quickly to suit my tastes." Entia answered with disgust in her voice. "They had to have known the attack was coming. There is no other explanation for they arrived within moments of the first shot being fired."

Andro nodded. "We assumed as much." He said. "What is the problem now?"

Entia glanced at Ryana who nodded her head. "Tell him." She said.

Entia looked at Andro. "I just got word from a friend within Cadre Headquarters." Entia said. "Regent Ardan has dispatched another section of Commandos to secure the area and they are under the command of a Cadre General. Someone of the same rank I can bully... but..."

Andro nodded his head. "I understand." He spoke. "How soon?"

"They'll be here in roughly thirty minutes." Entia said. "The leading elements will begin arriving within fifteen if I had to guess. My... my loyalties are to the Vanari people Prince Leonidas and I can't keep a Cadre General from entering the estate and once they get here. No matter how much I want to."

"Who is this General?" Andro asked.

“General Ranter Ale Kimer.” Entia answered. “He is... he is a political appointee really. Regent Ardan selected and then pushed his promotion through nearly two decades ago. He... he will be under orders to arrest everyone.”

“So he works for Ardan?” Andro said. “And more than likely is part of what is going on?”

Entia moved closer to Androcles. “Do you... did Caliria really make a counter agent to the OSG chemical Prince Leonidas?” She asked. “Is that all true?”

Andro nodded. “My mothers and Aunts were able to finish the final components of the counter agent, but *Inamarno* is the one who made it possible with her work. Yes.”

“And Regent Ardan and the others have had this since your brother arrived months ago?” Entia asked.

Andro nodded once more. “Yes. We did not give them the complete formula until I arrived for we suspected something like this would happen. Ardan has seen the counter agent work however, so he has no reason to keep it hidden unless he himself is hiding something.”

Entia made her decision right there though she had known for some time now what she believed. “I will delay him as long as possible but...”

Andro shook his head. “You will not get involved Commander.” Andro told her. “I will not have you risk reprisals from others within your ranks for your actions.”

“He will be under orders to arrest all of you as I said.” Entia told him.

“No doubt.” Androcles said with a smile. “Do not worry. We will handle it.”

“What do you want me to do?” Entia asked.

“He is a General of your people.” Andro spoke. “You will follow his orders.”

“Even if I don’t agree with what he is coming here to do?” Entia hissed.

“Especially if you do not agree with what he is coming here to do.” Andro told her. “We will not be arrested Commander, of that I can assure you. I do not need you making enemies in order to protect us however. You are one of the few who knows what is going on for the most part Commander. I’d rather have you out there able to move around freely as opposed to in trouble yourself.”

Entia looked between him and Ryana. “This isn’t over is it?” She asked softly.

Andro shook his head. “Not by a long shot.” Andro told her honestly. “And when the time comes when we find and move on the OSG and send their vile corpses to the abyss, I would much rather know the Vanari are on my side.”

Entia took a deep breath and nodded her head. “We will be ready for that.” She stated confidently.

“Good.” Andro told her. “Because it will be happening much sooner than you think.” He told her seeing Kalis and Ridor enter the main room of the estate. Ryana saw this as well and took Entia’s arm.

“We’d better get you back to your people before this fool General arrives.” She said. “There is no sense in making anyone suspect you or others.”

Kalis and Ridor moved up beside him just as Murano moved into the main room with Deion, Dorian, Denali and Jomann. They came up to Androcles as well.

“Daio is just finishing up Androcles...” Ridor reported. “...But we have stripped the bodies of everything but uniforms.”

“They are wearing old Union uniforms Andro.” Kalis said.

Andro nodded his head. “We suspected this as well. It just confirms to us that they have more connections to the Alpha Quadrant than we first thought.”

“The uniforms are easy enough to get at any surplus supplier in The Wilds.” Denali spoke. “It doesn’t really mean anything.”

“But it is undoubtedly something that Ardan will try to use against us.” Andro said. “Elynth, Anthar and Sehri took the prisoner?”

Ridor nodded his head. “They took off a few moments ago to meet Sadi in the skies.”

“Cvea, Serale and the others are still secure?” Andro asked.

Jomann nodded his head quickly. “I just spoke with Eli. They are still monitoring all the camera feeds and watching as the city comes awake. Kintia has her people monitoring Vanari news sources right now. Trying to get a feeling for how it will begin to play out in public.”

“Fedor took a prisoner as well.” Andro told them. “Am’mur and my Drow father Teya are going to be busy.”

“Lisi and Arduri?” Denali asked him.

“They should be landing here about the time this Vanari General arrives.” Andro said. “Coren and the First Regent will be with them as I said. Armen is sending down a team of engineers to repair the wall and a team of *Durcunusaan* to secure the Estate. They should be here within five to six minutes.”

“Did you tell Coren yet?” Dorian asked with a grin looking at the wall.

“I haven’t figured out how I am going to tell him we blew the side of his home into the yard below... no.” Andro answered.

“You’re not actually thinking about letting them arrest us are you?” Jomann asked him.

Andro looked at Jomann. “And listen to my wives and mates, not to mention Eliani, Mari, Sheva and Onera call me the stupidest man alive? Not a chance.”

“There would be much more colorful in their descriptions however.” Jomann said with a smile.

“*Mideaus* comes to mind right away.”

“*Sibfla!*” Denali gasped. “That would be on the mild end Jomann... especially for Eliani. You’ve never seen her get really wound up. Man what a sight that is. She’s almost as bad as our mother Anja. You just do not want to be in the same sector of space when that happens.”

“So true.” Deion muttered with a laugh himself. “Nara is beginning to take after them.”

Jomann laughed softly. “I hope I never have reason to see it.”

Murano couldn’t help but shake his head with a smile at the obvious lighthearted tone of their conversation. The high of combat was bleeding off and all of them were using humor as a means to let the rush of the battle leave them. The Praetorians of his age would have gone directly for their Mages after a battle in order to connect and share their experiences and allow the combat action to filter from them. Murano was learning that this was not needed with these young men or Martin. It was a gift they all had and Murano had been swept up in it for he too was beginning to relax and allow the anxiousness and battle senses to return to normal all on their own. It seemed he was learning just as much from them as they would learn from him and once more Murano sent a silently blessing to his friend and mentor Sumar for allowing him to be here and experience this.

Andro reached out and grabbed Kalis’s shoulder seeing his smiling blue eyes focus on him. Kalis could not put into words the amount of pride and honor he felt standing among them and to know he might have never experienced it made it all the more important to him. “Kalis, when Daio is finished, I want the three of you to use the tunnels and link up with Eli and the others.”

“You’re sending us away?” Kalis asked confused.

Andro shook his head. “No... I’m giving us an ace in the hole.” He replied. “When you get to their position have the *Durcunusaan* team already there prepare for an extraction Op. The three of you will lead them.”

“Extraction?” Kalis asked even more confused. “Who will we need to extract?”

Jomann chuckled now. “Us.” He stated.

Kalis’s eyes lit up as he understood what Andro was doing and he nodded with a smile. “I get it.” He said as understanding came to him. “An Insurance policy as Uncle Martin called it once.”

“Exactly.” Andro told him. “Cowen and Sherice have pulled out of their location and will meet you there. Between the five of you and the *Durcunusaan* team you should be able to handle anything. Non-lethal ammunition is to be used. Ridor and Daio will coordinate things for the simple reason that they know the personnel better. At least right now. You will need time to get to know everyone and for them to know you.”

The old Kalis would have protested vehemently about taking such a position, but this Kalis knew the wisdom of the move. He was still an unknown to many and as he proved his loyalty and skill in the coming days and weeks he did not doubt Androcles would turn him loose. Uncle Martin had told him as much before he left and Kalis knew this to be true.

“I understand Andro.” Kalis said.

“And you need to calm Serale.” Andro told him. “I can feel her resonance echoing from here with worry for you. She is Hadarian and is now part of a family and life that view these things as almost normal. She will need to get used to it.”

Kalis smiled and nodded once more. “I feel her too.” He said.

“That’s really sick you know.” Dorian spoke. “That we consider this even remotely normal is just plain sad.”

Even Murano laughed at this and he reached out to put his hand on Dorian’s shoulder. “As I have heard your father say in the past Dorian... think of how boring things would be otherwise.”

Dorian met his eyes and smiled. “Good point.” He said with a grin.

“Kalis... you and Ridor get moving.” Andro said as he was still smiling. “There is no sense in having you get caught here when this Vanari General shows up.”

Kalis nodded as Ridor grabbed his arm and they both moved quickly for the exit. Andro turned back to the others as they looked at him.

“How do you propose to keep this Vanari General from arresting us *fervon*?” Deion asked now.

“Deo... I’m hurt.” Andro stated. “You have no faith in my diplomatic skills brother?”

“Which diplomatic skills would those be *fervon*?” Deion asked with a knowing twinkle in his dark eyes. “The ones where you stab them or shoot them when they try to arrest us?”

“I’m hurt Deion.” Andro spoke.

“You?” Denali spoke now. “Hurt? *Rensibfla*.”

Once more Murano could do nothing but shake his head and join in the laughter of his fellow Praetorians. If the others that Shiria and Deia were able to find were even remotely like Jomann and the brothers then perhaps things were not as dire as he first thought. Once more he found himself silently thanking his mentor and dear friend Sumar for leaving him behind and allowing him to be here at this moment and stand with these young warriors and the man who commanded them all. They were just like their father in every way Murano decided. And this laconic nature was rubbing off on him and freeing his soul in the process.

General Ranter Ale Kimer looked around the interior of Regent Re Mydala’s estate with wide eyes. Entia had been correct in that he was a political appointee. He had never served a day on board a Vanari ship or within a Cadre Commando posting. While he had gone through the training, he was for all intents and purposes untested and unbloodied. He had the support of Ardan Vu Lamurrion for the vast majority of his career and essentially owed him all of the influence and power he now had. Ranter commanded all Vanari Cadre forces in Mydala city and the fourteen surrounding provinces. This was a senior position of very high importance and influence within Vanari society and one he owed to Ardan Vu Lamurrion. Ranter Ale Kimer was also a man who was known to crush others beneath his boots if they did not agree with how he wanted things done.

Ranter had to make a conscious effort to hold down his dinner from earlier at the sight before him. Bodies were strewn across the estate grounds to include the lower courtyard. Many were still leaking blood onto the granite where they had been killed and some were even missing limbs. There were primarily four groups of bodies where it appeared battles had taken place on the grounds, but he could see no weapons or equipment. His eyes darted upward and he saw six figures watching him and his men enter the estate from above. They were all visible in the blown out portion of the wall of Regent Mydala’s home, allowing him to look into the interior. None of them seemed particularly concerned that he was there and he began to make his way towards the home’s stairs and upper level entrance in order to show them just how wrong they were.

“Have your men secure the grounds Lieutenant!” He barked out as he walked, moving swiftly and confidently and causing the Vanari Cadre Lieutenant to fall in beside him quickly. “A full team with us!”

“Yes sir!” The man spoke as he motioned with his hands to his officers and they began to spread out across the estate. “General... we should secure the grounds first to insure there are no other enemies.”

“The only enemies I see are those inside regent Mydala’s home waiting for us to come to them.” Ranter hissed as he moved up the outdoor steps.

“General... there are dead Lycavorians all over the estate!” The Lieutenant exclaimed. “Surely we should use more caution!”

“What is needed now is action!” Ranter brazenly replied as he drew his sidearm.

The Vanari Commando had no choice but to follow him through the door into home of Regent Re Mydala. Ranter brought his weapon up and leveled it at the first Lycavorian he saw, which happen to be

Androcles, as the men and women of his team rushed into the room now as well. Their weapons were up and leveled at the six men in the room, all of them extremely nervous given what they had seen outside.

“None of you move! You are all under arrest!” Ranter shouted in a voice that carried fear and anxiousness.

Deion, Denali and Jomann were kneeling on the floor with Dorian and Murano standing beside them. None of them moved and Jomann even shook his head in disgust at the way they had entered the main room of the estate without securing the grounds or more confined areas of the estate. Andro turned slowly from the gaping hole he and Dorian had created and looked at the Vanari General.

“General Ranter Ale Kimer I presume.” Androcles spoke calmly.

Ranter seemed taken aback that the Lycavorian Prince knew who he was. He of course knew who Andro was and he stepped even closer to him, lifting his weapon and focusing it on Andro’s chest.

“I said do not move!” He screamed out. “Drop your weapons now!”

“General Kimer... I am...” Andro began to speak.

“I know who you are boy!” Kimer barked out. “And do not think I will not shoot you dead where you stand for what you have done this night!”

Andro blinked. “What we have done?” He asked. “We defended ourselves. This is not something we are allowed to do?”

“I told you to drop your weapons!” Kimer shouted the order again.

“You told us not to move.” Dorian commented.

“Get on your knees now!” Kimer shouted.

Andro’s eyes narrowed. “Excuse me?”

“I said get on your knees Lycavorian scum!” Kimer snarled stepping right up to Androcles and pressing the barrel of his weapon into Andro’s armored chest. “I will not hesitate to cut you down like the animal you are!”

“This is how you treat a political delegation after they have been attacked?” Andro asked calmly.

“Do not take us for fools!” Kimer growled. “We know what you have done this night!”

“General!” The female voice echoed loudly. “What are you doing?”

Kimer turned his head and saw Entia enter the main room with two of her men. “I ordered you to remain outside with your unit Commander!” He barked. “We will secure the prisoners!”

“Prince Androcles and those with him were the ones attacked General!” Entia gasped. “They are the victims here!”

“They are Lycavorian!” Kimer spat with a large amount of distaste in his tone. “They will be arrested and interrogated just as Regent Vu Lamurrion has ordered!”

“General I protest!” Entia exclaimed. “We were here! We saw what happened! What you are doing is wrong!”

“Commander I order you to return to your post outside or I will have you arrested as well!” Kimer snarled turning back to Androcles. “I told you to get on your knees!”

Andro shook his head. “I have done nothing but defend myself.” Androcles spoke. “As have we all. I do not intend to kneel to you or to anyone. None of us do!”

As if on cue, Denali, Jomann and Deion rose slowly to their feet causing the Vanari Commandos close to them to raise their weapons higher. All of them knew that Lycavorians were hard to kill and none of them were going to take any chances.

Kimer then did something that he would regret for many decades to come. He brought the barrel of his weapon whipping across in a vicious blow that connected with Andro’s face and rocked his head back slightly. “I said get on your knees dog!” He screamed the words. “Or I will shoot you where you stand! All of you! You are criminals by order of Senior Regent Vu Lamurrion and you will be held accountable!”

Andro lifted his hand slowly and brought his fingers up to his face to trace the open cut that now resided on his cheek. He pulled his fingers back and looked at the few drops of blood there and then at Ranter Ale Kimer.

“What is going on here?” The voice roared from the side causing Kimer’s head to snap around and his eyes to nearly explode out of his head as he saw first Coren Re Mydala enter the main room from the side,

followed quickly by his senior aide Jokros and several other Vanari. Lisisa came in behind them and broke to the right quickly as she saw what was happening and readied herself to attack.

“Regent... Regent Re Mydala!” Kimer gasped aloud.

As with Alrerin Sha Harael, Coren Re Mydala had reached the end of his tolerance for what was happening to his people. He stepped right up to Kimer and moved in front of Andro, batting aside the weapon in the man’s hand.

“What the fuck do you think you are doing you incompetent fool?” Coren screamed now.

Kimer was very much unprepared for the arrival of Coren and it showed on his face. “We... Regent Re Mydala... we were ordered to... we were ordered to come here and arrest any Lycavorians on the estate! The order has gone out across the city. All Lycavorians are to be detained and interrogated if they are found outside the Restriction Zones!”

“My home is not a Restriction Zone General Kimer!” Coren snarled at the man.

“Regent... there are dead Lycavorians all over your estate grounds!” Kimer protested. “You... I did not know you were here! We thought... we thought they had killed you Regent! The First Regent’s home was also attacked by Lycavorians! We have not heard if they managed to assassinate him as well! Regent Vu Lamurrion ordered that...”

“That you come to my home and assault the man who kept those dead Lycavorians from succeeding in their task!” Coren screamed.

“Our information stated that this...” Kimer glared at Androcles. “That this animal and those with him are the ones who conducted the attacks Regent!”

Coren stuck his face closer to Kimer, his eyes angry and not at all forgiving. “Crown Prince Androcles Leonidas is the reason we stand here unharmed you idiot!” Coren shouted.

Kimer blinked several times. “Regent Re Mydala I am...”

“A colossal idiot in every sense of the word!” Coren snarled at the man.

“We did not know you were safe Regent Re Mydala!” Kimer barked back at him refusing to be demeaned in front of these men. “We don’t know if the First Regent is alive! All our information told us that these... that these Lycavorians were responsible! We...”

“What information would that be General?” The new voice spoke and even Androcles turned his head as Alrerin moved confidently from the corridor now with Ma’nia and two other Commandos on either side of him protectively. Andro noticed right away that he seemed utterly comfortable and confident and he glanced at Lisisa who nodded her head discretely.

If Kimer’s eyes could have grown wider they would have as he saw the Vanari First Regent enter the room. “First Regent!” He exclaimed as he bowed his head. “You are... you are alive! You are safe!”

“Yes General Kimer I am.” Alrerin answered. “Due in part to the man you just struck in the face with your weapon! You sound surprised General.”

Kimer’s head whipped around to glance at Androcles and then back to Alrerin. “First Regent... no I am... we were told you were dead.”

“Who gave you your orders General Kimer?” Alrerin asked calmly.

“They came directly from Regent Vu Lamurrion First Regent.” Kimer stammered.

“And did those orders tell you to assault a recognized representative of a sovereign government?” Alrerin asked moving closer to the man as Kimer’s eyes shifted and he saw several more men and women push into the room now.

“First Regent we were told the Lycavorians were responsible for this attack!” Kimer spoke. “There are dead Lycavorians all over Regent Re Mydala’s estate grounds!”

“Did you stop to consider that those dead Lycavorians are the ones that conducted the attack and perhaps those in this room stopped them?” Alrerin demanded.

“I... I was under orders First Regent!” Kimer stammered. “We acted only with the information given to us by Regent Vu Lamurrion.”

“Information that is sorely lacking in substance and truth.” Alrerin spat angrily now. “Where is Ardan now?”

“Regent Vu Lamurrion is at SBR Headquarters First Regent.” Kimer answered quickly. “He has issued a recall for all SBR members to meet in a few hours. His orders have locked down the planet and any Lycavorian outside the Restriction Zones are to be arrested and held for interrogation.”

“Who is First Regent of the Vanari people General Kimer?” Alrerin asked the man in a low, menacing voice as he moved even closer.

“You... you are First Regent.” Kimer stammered his reply.

“And I am very much alive General.” Alrerin snarled softly at the man. “No thanks to your bumbling attempts at protecting me. If not for Ma'nia and those on my personal Cadre Detail; if not for Princess Leonidas and those that came to my home with Coren Re Mydala I would be dead! My wife would be dead! My daughter and my grandchildren would be dead!”

Alrerin’s words finished several octaves higher than when they began for he was seriously upset now. They had tried to kill his beloved wife. His daughter. His grandchildren. Things had gone too far and now he would no longer stand back and allow them to continue.

“You and your contingent of Cadre Commandos will withdraw from Coren’s estate and pull back outside the perimeter that Commander Entia has established.” Alrerin spoke now.

Kimer looked at him wide eyed. “First Regent... you can’t be serious!” He gasped. “You must be protected at all costs! More attacks could be coming from these...” He motioned to where Androcles had stood silently.

Alrerin held up his hand quickly. “Speak that word in my presence again General Ranter Ale Kimer and you will find yourself commander of the most desolate outpost that the Vanari Empire maintains. There you can allow your false hatred to fester and boil and destroy you.” Alrerin glared at him for a long moment before continuing. “You will withdraw your unit from Coren’s Estate and secure the outer perimeter while Commander Entia and Ma'nia secure the inner perimeter.” Alrerin turned and looked at Androcles. “Prince Leonidas... would you be able to provide an additional force of security?”

Kimer looked aghast at this. “First Regent you cannot!” He almost shouted.

Androcles nodded his head. “I can have a section of our *Durcumusaan* on the ground within minutes First Regent.” He replied. “I would be happy to provide this. And if I may offer this as well... you can leave the order to have any Lycavorian outside your Restriction Zones arrested in place. My people would know not to be out where they are neither welcome nor accepted and any Lycavorian outside these Zones is not part of my crew.”

“First Regent I cannot allow you to entrust your security to these... these Lycavorians.” Kimer protested.

“You are not in a position to tell me anything General Kimer.” Alrerin stated looking back to the man. He turned his head and looked at Coren. “Coren... you have room for all of us here?”

Coren stepped forward. “First Regent... given everything that has happened in the last few hours I believe it would be better if we moved to my Summer Estate, Ember’s Cove, on the coast. It is large enough and provides for better security. I’m sure Androcles can shift his people there with Entia and Ma'nia’s direction.”

Andro nodded his head. “Of course.”

Alrerin nodded. “Then that is where we will be.” He replied looking at Kimer. “We will transport to the Re Mydala Summer Estate via secure transportation provided by Prince Androcles if he can offer this.”

Andro nodded. “Easily sir.”

Alrerin looked at Kimer once more. “There will be no meeting of the SBR unless I call for it!” Alrerin spat. “Ardan Vu Lamurrion is not the First Regent! I am! In twelve hours the members of the SBR Security Board will convene at Coren’s Summer Estate. We will decide what to do from there! Is that very clear to you General?”

“I must protest First Regent!” Kimer hissed vehemently.

“You may protest all you like General!” Alrerin snapped at him. “Things are about to change General Kimer, and Ardan is not going to like those changes. Nor any aligned with him.” Alrerin stepped closer. “When you pick your side General Kimer... pray it is the right one. I will not abide a traitor to our people any longer. No matter their position!”

Kimer was unaware of the smiles from Narlei and Alrerin's wife as they stood in the background. Smiles of immense pride and respect. Alrerin turned from Kimer and looked at Coren. "Coren we need to do some things before we depart for your Summer Estate. We will need your COM array."

Coren nodded and motioned with his hand. "This way First Regent." He spoke looking at Androcles.

Kimer could only watch as Alrerin and Coren moved out of the room with Ma'nia and the unknown Vanari female and male that Kimer didn't recognize. He turned back and looked at Androcles who was still staring at him. A small trickle of blood stained Andro's cheek as he stood there stoically and smiled at him. It was Denali who stepped forward slightly and looked at Ranter Ale Kimer.

"Man it sucks to be you!" Denali spat.

Even his dark blue color could not hide the flush of his skin and anger flooded Kimer as he watched the Lycavorians in the room begin to chuckle softly. He spun around and marched out of the room in order to keep at least some of his dignity.

At least for a time longer.

ECHO QUADRANT VENTORI UNION ADHOC BASE

The first thing that Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret noticed when she exited the rear of the ship was the level of organization. Four other ships like the one she had just ridden in were parked nearby in the huge clearing, men and women alike moving in and out of them efficiently and quickly, loaded down with many boxes and crates of supplies. Most of them appeared to be Lycavorians but there were other species that Saydia had never seen before mixed in among the Lycavorians. These supplies were swiftly put into the rear of several ground vehicles with open backs and six large, black tires. Once one vehicle was full it departed the landing area and the next backed up to the ship they were unloading. In all her life, nearly one hundred and eighty years, Saydia Daret had never seen ships like the one she had just exited or those on the ground around them. These ships were quite obviously much more advanced than any ship within the Tasmor inventory, as were the enormous ships that they had seen in orbit around Ventori as they approached the planet. Saydia Daret now knew why the Kintaur cruiser had been so easily crippled. The Kintaur were not as technologically advanced as the Tasmor, perhaps fifty years behind them in discoveries, and just from what she saw here on this landing field, they would be no match for any ship flown by these Lycavorians. It was clear to her that these Lycavorians had been out and traveling among the stars for far longer than the Tasmor or any species she knew of with the exception of the Pralor people.

Saydia had met and spoken to several of the Lycavorian Chief Justices from Ventori when they had been transported to one of the refugee worlds. They were an intelligent group of men, though Saydia was disgusted that there were no females among these so called leaders. She felt it beneath her to meet with male leaders considering how the Tasmor viewed men and it had taken all of her self-control to even listen to them. They were a different species and Saydia knew she had to be tolerant of their cultures and ways. What they had offered her in mining the Polyplast mines had been too good to ignore and they had been very sincere in their offers, and for the last three years their agreement had turned great dividends for both of their peoples. The Lycavorian females were not mistreated in any way Saydia knew, they were actually revered and well-guarded among the Ventori Lycavorians, but none of them held positions of power which is how it should have been in Saydia's mind. The Tasmor had been raised to believe that males just did not have the same control, intelligence and composure when in positions of power. Their intellect was limited and their ability to motivate people was almost non-existent. Since the dawn of the Tasmor, and their separation from the Kintaur, nearly five thousand years ago, no male had ever held a position of governmental power. There were many who had served and commanded the many Tasmor fleets and soldiers, but their number was few and they were not often put in harm's way because of their breeding potential.

Saydia watched as the raven haired Queen called Aricia stepped up to a tall male and spoke in whispers and then he pointed to the two similar vehicles that were behind him. Saydia also took note of the half dozen

men and women who stood a short distance away from them and were watching them intently. All of them wore armor similar to the Queen Aricia and all of them were armed, though their weapons were not pointed at them, and they were not taking part in the unloading of the nearby ships. Saydia felt the comforting presence of Anthylea come up behind her and she turned her head slightly.

“Anthylea... what... what do you see?” She asked in a soft whisper.

“I see extremely well organized individuals Saydia.” Anthylea answered. She saw Saydia nod at her response. Anthylea never used her title when they were alone or talking in whispers as they were now. Saydia had forbid her to do so considering what existed between them. “They have done all this in only a few hours!”

“They are motivated and confident.” Saydia spoke. “You can see this in their gait and their body language. They do not... they do not view us as a threat to them.”

“There is good reason for this from what I have seen Saydia.” Anthylea told her softly. “What we could do with just one of their ships is...”

Saydia nodded. “Yes... it is mind boggling.”

“Was this wise Saydia?” Anthylea asked her now. “Coming here when we know nothing about them? They are Lycavorians yes... but they are unlike those Lycavorians we have grown used to. They are...”

“They are much more dangerous.” Saydia finished her statement for her. Saydia turned and looked at her beautiful face, gazing into her stunning dark eyes. “Do you sense danger around us?” She asked softly. “Your... your skills would permit this Anthylea.”

Anthylea shook her head. “No.” She answered instantly. “It is strange really. There is... a sense of dedication and urgency in the air but none of danger. I cannot detect enough to make a determination that is useful to you.”

Saydia reached back discretely and took Anthylea’s hand in her own. “I am sorry that we ever...” Saydia spoke.

Anthylea shook her head quickly cutting off her words. “You have nothing to be sorry for. I volunteered for the enhanced treatments and I do not regret what they allow me to do. Or what they allow us to share.”

Saydia stared at her for a long moment and felt a faint tug in her lower abdomen as she always did when gazing at Anthylea like this. “Nor do I.” Saydia said squeezing her hand. “Nor do I.”

“We should remain aware and vigilant at all times.” The voice spoke from behind them and Saydia closed her eyes in disgust.

Perlyea Kalrr had insisted she be allowed to accompany them as Chief Counsel of the Tasmor people and Saydia could not really refuse her. Perlyea was, after all, head of the Tasmor Science Division as well as being Chief Counsel to the Tasmor people and essentially the third in line for power according to their Government Mandate. Her authority as head of the Science Division was far reaching and influential among the other Tasmor Counsel Ministers, though this influence was also tempered by the fact that she was a hard liner among the Tasmor. One of those who believed the Tasmor were the superior species among the stars and did not need allies or friends.

Saydia turned and looked at her. “We are well aware of what we should do Perlyea.” She whispered softly. “And you should be mindful of your place as well.”

“*Saaurano*... Martin is waiting for us with Anja and the others. They have set up a CIC building with tables and refreshments.” The female voice spoke from behind them.

Saydia, Perlyea and Anthylea turned to see the obviously female figure move past them quickly. They had not yet seen this female and Saydia quickly deduced she had been one of the pilots since she wore what appeared to be some sort of Flight suit with a similar sidearm and tubular object as the Queen Aricia did. This was attached to her right leg and on her waist which Saydia quickly took note of. She had long legs for her height, a small waist and the flight suit hugged an obviously deliciously sculpted ass. She carried a helmet under one arm and they could see For'mya’s four inch high elven ears in full view poking out of her long, golden blond hair. Saydia looked at Anthylea with wide eyes.

“Anthylea her ears are...” Saydia gasped.

“Yes!” Anthylea hissed. “They are pointed!”

They watched as Aricia reached out and took For'mya’s hand when she got near and they pressed intimately close to one another. Saydia and the other Tasmor with her all saw this and looked between one another as Aricia and For'mya shared a soft kiss. They watched as Aricia nodded to the man once more, who

didn't seem fazed in the least by their show of obvious affection and then they turned back to Saydia and moved the few steps back to her with For'mya holding her hand openly.

"It appears that our husband and mate has moved much faster than we thought. The welfare of our people has always been a large motivator for him." Aricia told her with a smile. "We have set up portable buildings in a clearing by the river not far from here. We can take these Lifter trucks and be there in a few minutes."

Saydia, Perlyea and Anthylea were staring at For'mya with clear surprise and For'mya smiled at their expressions. "I am an elf Sovereign Regent Daret." She spoke evenly, her voice like chimes on the wind as was usually the case. "I am one of the many different species within the Union that Aricia told you of on your ship."

"You... you know of what she said?" Anthylea gasped.

"You can hear each other's thoughts and words!" Perlyea echoed her.

Aricia squeezed For'mya's hand. "This is For'mya Leonidas Sovereign Regent." Aricia told her. "She is a Queen, wife and mate to Martin Leonidas just as I am. Just as we all are."

"We?" Saydia asked.

"There are six of us." For'mya told her. "All of us are Queens and all of us love Martin with every breath that we take. We are connected with our minds as Aricia explained to you briefly on your ship. Most of our people can speak in this fashion, as well as many who have been turned by Lycavorians such as myself and Anja, who you will meet shortly."

"Your... your King forces all of you to share his bed?" Saydia asked in shock.

This was unheard of in Tasmor society and in actuality it was the complete opposite. In Tasmor society the woman chose who she would bed and who she wouldn't. It was not at all uncommon for an older Tasmor woman, the head of a family clan, to have two or sometimes three female concubines that served her physical needs and when she decided to bed with a male she usually had several within her employ that gave her different options. Tasmor males did not have the same rights and privileges as Tasmor females among their species and for the most part were considered second class citizens, though they were not looked down upon or mistreated in any way. Tasmor females had always outnumbered the men by a huge margin in their society, something within their genes that usually produced female children as opposed to male children and most Tasmor males did not reject a female when they were chosen to be bed partners.

"Martin does not force us to share his bed Sovereign Regent." Aricia spoke with genuine passion and desire in her voice which Anthylea quickly detected. She glanced at the female For'mya and saw the same look in her eyes and on her face. "All of us do that very willingly. And with great relish and happiness."

"Yes we do." For'mya agreed with a wistful smile as they both felt Martin's aura reach for them across the distance and caress their senses now that they were back on the planet's surface.

"We can use these two Lifter trucks to move to where we have set up our headquarters." Aricia said motioning to the vehicles. "You will find Namiri's troops there. Emylea... I believe your ships landed several kilometers north of us but I can arrange for a vehicle to take you to where they have landed if you like."

Saydia shook her head. "My daughters will remain with me for now." She spoke quickly as both Namiri and Emylea moved up beside her.

Aricia nodded and stepped to the side motioning with her hand. "Very well. If everyone will climb into the vehicles we will move to where we have set up our base camp. I do ask that you keep your weapons shouldered however. There will be less chance of any type of accident occurring. I have ordered our men and women within the secure perimeter to do the same."

"You ordered them?" Anthylea asked as Perlyea kept herself from commenting.

Aricia nodded her head. "Yes. Please... Martin and our fellow Queen and wife Anja are waiting for us. It will only take a few moments to cover the distance there."

Saydia looked at Namiri and Emylea and saw the looks of fascination and interest in their eyes as they were taking everything in. She turned to Anthylea and then nodded as she looked back to Aricia.

"Of course." She said.

TWENTY-SIX KILOMETERS FROM THE CITY OF JORLARI

Saydia and her people were led into the building by Aricia and For'mya still in a state of shock at what they had seen as they approached. There were at least a dozen buildings that had been erected all around the area and now hundreds of Lycavorians and elves and other species they did not recognize were all over. The Lycavorians from Ventori they could see receiving what could only be medical treatment from one building while others sat outside another and were eating the first hot meal many had had in months. None of them looked in the least bit concerned and many had what would be the first smiles of years on their faces. They could see positions in the distance that were manned by troops and what appeared to be heavy weapons, but like Aricia had told them, anyone within the area around the buildings had their weapons slung over their backs as they moved about doing one task or another.

The portable building inside was much darker and very large and as their eyes began to adjust to the different lighting they all heard the deep male voice.

“...Start sending them out in the morning Manda.” Martin was speaking to the holoimage of Miranda being projected from the circular disc on the floor of the building. “We’ll begin with Jorlari while you work up a plan for the others. I don’t want to spread us out too fast so start dropping COM buoys across the planet. We can transport them here more easily than trying to go to them in force.”

Saydia felt Namiri press close to her side and take her hand. “That is him mother.” She whispered to her. “That is the one I told you about on the ship. The Alpha Lycavorian King. His name is Martin Leonidas.”

Saydia could only stand there in shocked silence as Martin ignored them and continued with his transmission. Saydia was taken aback by his size alone. The vast majority of Tasmor men didn’t reach her height, let alone the height of this man in front of her. There were a very few exceptions who had excellent breeding genes, but the vast majority of Tasmor men never reached taller than five foot eight or nine. This Lycavorian was easily over two meters in height and if she had to guess well over two hundred pounds, a good deal larger than any Lycavorian male she had seen before. As she thought about it, most of those Lycavorian men she had seen moving about outside were of similar builds and height. The strange body armor that he wore conformed to what could only be an exceptionally powerful body. His raven black hair, the same color as the Queen Aricia, was shoulder length but tied into a short pony tail behind his neck, and she saw the sides of the neatly trimmed beard and mustache that covered his deeply tanned skin. Saydia Daret had to admit, he was an incredibly handsome man and one she would not hesitate to take to bed had he been Tasmor. And she was only looking at him from the side.

Saydia’s keen eyes also detected the small splotches of what could only be Kintaur blood on the right side of his body armor. An small effort had been made to wash it off, but nothing too detailed obviously. Saydia saw the very petite form of the woman step up beside this man and press close to him without any thought. The top of her head barely reached his shoulder, but she wore similar body armor and weapons as Aricia and the elf For'mya Saydia saw. Her long, Persian red hair was tied into a single pony tail and fell to the middle of her back. Saydia could not see her face, but the body armor wrapped around what could only be a very lush, enticing and power packed figure if she was any judge.

“Manda... have Ceale use the QCR on the *HORNET* and contact Eurin back on Earth tonight.” Anja spoke as she leaned against Martin’s side. “I want another five million tons of medical supplies from our stores moving for Manne within thirty-six hours. Base serums and vaccines; the entire medical works. Eurin will know what I want. Have her select another hundred volunteers and have them deployed as well. Half to remain with Ceale on Manne and the other half to move onto our position here.”

Miranda nodded from within the transmission and then looked at E'dira beside her chair, Zaala occupying the area on the opposite side of the command chair. E'dira looked up from the data pad she was typing on. “Do you wish them to come with additional security Anja?” E'dira asked her.

Anja looked up at Martin and he shrugged his broad shoulders. “Your call Red.” He told her.

Saydia looked at Namiri with wide eyes. “He lets her make the decision?” She gasped softly.

Namiri smiled. “That is Queen Anja mother.” Namiri answered just as softly. “She is a doctor and I...”

“What child?” Saydia asked.

“I saw her working on Lycavorians from Ventori mother.” Namiri told her. “She is... she is almost magical in nature. A glow... it extends from her hands and around her body and she heals their wounds with no effort. It is almost like they were never hurt.”

Perlyea took note of this and moved closer. “You are certain of what you saw Namiri Daret?” She asked. Namiri looked at her. “Oh yes Chief Counsel.”

Anja looked back at Miranda. “Have Eurin make that call E'dira.” Anja finally spoke. “But tell her the direct threat to our Healers out here is negligible.”

E'dira nodded her head. “As you wish.”

Saydia watched as Anja reached into a small pouch on Martin's armor and withdrew something before she turned and moved directly to where Aricia and For'mya now stood. As she had seen Aricia and For'mya act outside the ship on the airfield, she now saw them greet this much shorter woman in the same fashion. And Saydia had been correct in her assessment, there was no mistaking that this new Queen had a lush figure under the body armor she wore and she was breathtaking in her beauty with her silky and radiant hair color and incredible looking jade green eyes and full, soft lips.

“We're secure up here for the immediate future Martin. We detected small objects in low orbit that appear to be satellites of some sort. None of them have power anymore and most are in a degrading orbit. They will cause no issues, though you might get a pretty decent light show in the next few days. We expect they will all begin to enter the atmosphere in the next 48 hours and begin to burn up.” Miranda spoke evenly as she leaned forward in her command chair on the *ARIZONA*. “Zaala is sending down the generators with the last supply run as you asked. There are twenty of them in total.”

Martin's eyebrows lifted slightly. “That many?” He asked surprised.

Zaala grinned from her spot next to Miranda's chair. “We have become quite proficient at putting them together Martin.” She told him. “It was especially easy with Avi and the Drones helping us to configure them to upgraded specifications.”

“Outstanding!” Martin declared happily.

“I have three *RAPTORS* out on the edges of the system.” Miranda said. “We...” Martin held up his hand stopping her.

“Manda... I have told you over and over through the years I don't need reports from you!” Martin declared. “That is your realm up there and you are to control it how you see fit. Jeez! How many times do Ben and I have to tell you that?”

Miranda chuckled and E'dira and Zaala grinned beside her chair. “I guess I'm just hard of hearing.” She spoke.

“More like pig headed.” Martin muttered under his breath.

“Captain Nemoa is requesting additional orders Martin.” Miranda said with a smile. “Her words and I quote... *Admiral Lorian... I am getting tired of having this stinking, Kintaur hunk of junk attached to my ship by tractor beams. Can't I just blow it the hell out of the stars and be done with it?*” ... End quote.”

Emylea Daret could not contain the laughter that burst from her lips at Miranda's words and this caused many heads to turn and look at her, including Martin. Saydia looked horrified at her daughter's actions and was turning to reprimand her when Martin smiled and turned back to Manda.

“Are they a threat Manda?” Martin asked.

“The radiation from their core has dropped to minimal levels.” Miranda answered. “We have hours of sensor scans and our people are going through it now. They have no engine core Martin. Even if they manage to repair their sublight engines, which I doubt, they aren't going anywhere without a main power core.”

Martin nodded his head. “Tell Nemoa to drop a tractor mine on it just to be safe and then take up an orbit of Ventori. Have her keep an eye on it though Manda. They got Emylea Daret off her ship by boarding it and if that ship so much as farts in the wrong direction, tell her to send them to whatever asshole gods they pray to.”

Manda nodded. “Will do.” She said. “I'll let Nemoa know.”

Anja looked at Aricia and For'mya and rolled her eyes. “He has such a wonderful way with words doesn't he?” She muttered causing them to laugh softly and Martin to look at her with a stern expression, which bounced right off her. Anja stuck her four inch long tongue out at Martin, which caused Aricia and For'mya to clutch her tighter and laugh even more.

Saydia Daret saw this and was stunned at the casual interaction between them in front of strangers and underlings.

Martin shook his head and turned back to Miranda. "We're going to lock it down for the night here Manda." Martin told her. "Hold all other resupply runs until morning. We'll hold the last ships here until then. We should be in a better position to know what we really need by then. Danny, Anuk, Kesyla and Nayeca have our team and Kasdan with him on the outskirts of Jorlari so keep a twenty-four hour sensor lock on their position just in case."

"Understood." Miranda said.

"And if my hard headed son ever gets around to contacting us and letting us in on what is going down with the Vanari, please let us know." Martin growled softly.

"You know Andro..." Manda told him with a smile. "He won't report anything until he has the situation well in hand."

"*Simparrayr riad con.*" Martin muttered. (Stubborn rock head)

"Gee... I wonder where he gets that from." Miranda spoke just before she ended the holo transmission.

Martin shook his head and looked at Aricia, Anja and For'mya. "Everyone has to be a comedian." He complained.

Saydia watched as first Aricia and then Anja and For'mya moved up to him and pressed their bodies against his. Aricia and For'mya were on his sides and the petite Queen Anja directly to his front. He didn't hesitate and obviously didn't care who was watching as he lowered his head to nuzzle their cheeks and their ears and Saydia saw an expression of exquisite delight fill all of their expressions. Aricia finally turned and looked at Saydia and the others with those incredible azure blue eyes.

"Beloved... this is Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret." She said.

Martin didn't hesitate and stepped up to stand in front of her and held out his hand. "It's an honor to..."

Martin never got the chance to finish his statement as Perlyea interposed herself in front of Saydia with an angry scowl on her face. "The Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people allows no foul man to touch her person!" She snarled. "You are beneath her!"

Martin drew his hand back quickly and looked at her with wide, dark brown eyes. It was Aricia who kept the two senior *Durcunusaan* in the building from moving forward at the blatant disrespect of their King as she stepped in front of them and stopped their movement with a raised hand. These two men were from Martin's 1st Spartan Division and she knew they would brook no disrespect of the King they all so adored.

"Beloved we..." Aricia began to speak but the different female voice interrupted her.

"Now would be a very good time to put aside your inbred and petty arrogance Perlyea Kalrr!" Tobia hissed with a good deal of heat in her voice from the distaste she felt within her. "It will not serve you well here and now."

Saydia turned when she heard that voice for she recognized it instantly. "Tobia!" She almost shouted as she moved from where she was to stand in front of Tobia with wide eyes and a huge smile. "Tobia!"

Saydia embraced Tobia tightly, drawing her close and squeezing her as hard as she could. Tobia was smiling as she returned the embrace and the memories of their nights together came rushing back. To say they were exceptionally pleasant nights in Saydia's arms would be an understatement. They were a much needed distraction at a time in her life when Tobia needed the companionship and warmth. Saydia had been dominant of course, as all Tasmor were, but Tobia had welcomed the new sensations and feelings until she had found her center. She would always love Murano, no matter what happened. She would always crave his touch and his eyes upon her and when she finally came to realize that, Saydia seemed to take note right away. They had parted on extremely friendly terms all those years ago and Saydia did not look any different now. She was still as beautiful now as she had been then.

Tobia looked at her as Saydia held her at arm's length. "You are looking as beautiful as ever Saydia." Tobia told her. "It is so very good to see you once more. I have seen Emylea and Namiri, but did not have the time to ask of your other daughters. Faydia, Kelale, Inara and Rena are well I hope."

Saydia's face was beaming as she embraced Tobia once more. She alone among the Pralor people they had met held Saydia's trust and respect. Tobia had always been honest and forthright with her, even to the point of telling her things that she should not have regarding the history of the Pralor people. "They do what all daughters do and test me and my patience all of the time." Saydia answered and finally pushed her back gently

and gazed at her with her brown eyes. “You look radiant Tobia.” She said finally. “Your face... it... happiness has returned to you?” She questioned.

Tobia squeezed her arms. “In a manner of speaking, yes, you could say that.” She replied. Tobia knew Martin and the others were allowing her to act now since she knew the Tasmor and she followed typical Tasmor custom and turned to Anthylea next. This took Aricia by surprise somewhat considering who she knew this Perlyea woman claimed to be and she watched as Tobia stepped up to the taller, dark skinned woman and held out her hands. She would have to inquire of Tobia about this when they were able. “Anthylea Tomar... your presence is very welcomed and honored.”

Anthylea smiled and took her offered hands as she lowered her forehead to Tobia’s. “It is pleasing to be among you once more Tobia of the Pralor people.” Anthylea said softly and with genuine warmth. There had been a point when Anthylea had wanted to kill Tobia for what she shared with Saydia, but Tobia had set her straight on that when she had allowed Anthylea to join her and Saydia. After that night Anthylea knew where Tobia stood and a friendship had quickly taken hold.

Tobia turned then to Namiri and Emylea and gave the same greeting before once more looking at Perlyea. “I see that you have not changed Chief Counsel.” Tobia stated as she saw Helen move up beside Martin from the corner of her eye.

“I am Chief Counsel of...” Perlyea started once more and Tobia held up her hand.

“Yes... I am well aware of who you are Perlyea Kalrr.” Tobia told her with more than a fair amount of disgust in her voice. She turned back to Saydia. “You should not have brought her Saydia.” She spoke.

“How dare you woman!” Perlyea almost screamed.

Tobia turned back to her with real anger in her eyes now. “I do dare because you are a fool!” Tobia snapped right back at her. “Had Saydia acted as you wanted her too, as Aricia told me you wanted too, all of you would be dead now! Do you hear me woman? Dead! And I would be mourning a friend and those she loves!” Tobia spat. “You have no concept at just how close to death you all came, do you Perlyea?”

Saydia moved up beside her. “Tobia what... what do you mean?” She asked.

Tobia turned to look at her. “Martin Leonidas and those with him came here searching for their people Saydia.” Tobia explained. “When we discovered the Kintaur and what they were doing, he didn’t hesitate to rescue Emylea from the Kintaur ship. He didn’t hesitate to have his people here on Ventori help Namiri and her forces trounce the Kintaur. He could have blown you and all of your ships into atoms and to be honest he would not have lost a bit of sleep over it for what he perceived was happening to his people.”

Saydia glanced quickly at Martin who had crossed his arms over his chest and allowed Tobia to take the lead for the moment. He smiled at Saydia and lifted his hand to wave at her. “That would be me.” He stated.

Tobia took Saydia’s hands making her turn back to face her. “I have told Martin and his Queens all I know of the Tasmor people Saydia. Your honored culture and values. Now is not the time for the superiority that many Tasmor seem to think they have to come out. Martin Leonidas does not deal well with the type of arrogance that Perlyea carries within her. None of his people do. They honor and respect the Tasmor for what you have done for his people, but now it is time to sit down and act as the even minded leader that I know you can be. You do not want these people for an enemy Saydia. You want them as your friends and allies. You saw what they did to the Kintaur ship. Namiri told you what they did to those Kintaur here on the surface yes?”

Saydia nodded her head and looked at her daughter before turning back to Tobia. “Yes.” She said finally.

“Then let us sit down.” Tobia spoke. “Martin may be a male Saydia... but he *is* King of the Lycavorians and he is not unreasonable.”

Martin’s eyebrows rose and he looked at Aricia, Anja and For'mya with surprise in his eyes. Aricia took his hand and Anja patted his chest so that he would say nothing. [*Just go with the flow Lover.*] Anja told him.

[*I am not unreasonable!*] Martin exclaimed as For'mya smiled and pressed closer to him.

[*You can be rather imposing and unmoving Martin our love.*] She told him.

[*I am not unmoving!*] Martin complained further.

[*Martin Leonidas...*] They all turned to look at Helen who stood just to their right. They had been shielding their conversation on the off chance that the Tasmor could Mindvoice, but they did this with everyone they didn’t know. Helen, Tobia and the *Durcunusaan* were among those they did not shield their words from

however. *[Outside of your son Androcles, who has become far too much like you in that regard, you are the most obstinate and pig headed man I have ever met!]*

[What is this? Gang up on Martin day?] He announced loudly which caused the two *Durcunusaan* officers and even Tobia to look at him and chuckle softly.

Saydia glanced back and forth between them. "Tobia...?" She questioned.

Tobia squeezed her hand and looked at Martin. "Martin... please." Tobia said. "I know what is in your heart and cooperation is needed now."

Martin looked at his wives and mates and then at Helen. He took a deep breath and nodded his head. "Nubou un. I'm game."

Saydia did not understand why Anja reached up and slapped his face and the older woman beside them simply shook her head.

"*Son vada carians.*" Helen muttered out loud. "Now I know where his children get it." She said. "It's a defect in their genes! It has to be."

As soon as Benjamin O'Connor arrived, their happiness factor, already extremely high at the return of their dearest friend and fellow pilot For'mya, went through the ceiling. Endith and Tina O'Connor had no qualms about loving each other as fervently as they loved their husband, but it was always so much better when he was with them, or at the very least nearby as he was now. He and Avi had set up a unique alternate Research Lab on the *ARC ROYAL* and they knew Ben was in his element when it came to figuring stuff out and designing new things. He hated being in an office and that was also one of the reasons Martin had sent for him. He wanted his intelligence and his ability to see outside the box with him out here and not buried in some office on Apo Prime. Benjamin also never missed a chance to talk with them and his voice filled the interior of the cockpit now as Tina was underneath the center engineering console with a selection of tools laid out around her body and Endith sitting in the pilot's seat going over calculations.

"...Talked to Konalye and the children are all doing fine." Ben's voice echoed in the cockpit from the *ARC ROYAL*.

Endith's mother and father had practically jumped at the opportunity to have their three grandchildren around them on Earth and when Ben had dropped them off before departing from Earth they were already spoiling them. It did not matter to them that three of their grandchildren were part human and part vampire, and three were human, elf and vampire. They loved them all the same. The man and woman who Endith had chosen to spend her life with had long ago won over Endith's parents and their actions over the years had proven that well beyond doubt. That Ben and Tina had chosen to have Isabella change them so that they could be with their daughter always was the first and largest sign of their love. They knew that one day one of them would change their daughter as well, but that did not matter to them in the least.

Their grandparent's home in Eden City was like the O'Connor children's second home and always had been. And given who their parents were, the O'Connor children were never lacking for men or women to look out for them. They had Drow and Dragoon security, as well as male and female pilots from Earth always willing to help Endith's parents if it was needed.

"They had no problems with the school transfers?" Endith asked as she lifted the data pad and typed on it while looking at the three consoles that surrounded her body.

"Your mother took care of it Endy." Ben's voice answered with a soft chuckle. "She wouldn't let me touch the transfers."

Endith heard Tina chuckle from under the engineering console and smiled herself and looked up at the small speaker above her head. "That's because the last time you tried it took us three weeks to straighten it out Ben." Tina spoke from beneath the console.

"You are not very good with paperwork Benjamin." Endith agreed with a smile.

"Yeah... yeah... go ahead and mock me." Ben spoke. "What are you two doing in your *STRIKER* anyway?"

"For'mya and I thought we detected a slight vibration in the lateral thruster controls while we were landing." Endith answered. "And the power flow dropped to ninety-three percent during our descent."

“Did you check the D14 Capacitor Board Endy? Damn things are acting up in all our *STRIKER* birds.” Ben asked.

“Tina is under the console now.” Endith replied. “We do know our own ship Benjamin.” She stated. “I know. I’m only trying to help.” Ben answered.

“You can curl our toes when we return.” Tina echoed from under the console. “How’s that for helping?”

“I can do that.” Ben spoke.

“And you do it so well Benjamin.” Endith said with a wistful smile. She turned when her main console beeped softly and her eyes scanned the instruments in front of her. “That did it Tina. Power flow is back to one hundred percent.”

“Damn board was completely fried.” Tina spoke as she gripped the edge of the console and slid her body out from under the console. “We should probably check the entire batch of spares Ben.”

“I’ll get on it.” Ben spoke up.

Tina began to get to her feet and looked up towards the entrance of the cockpit area and was staring down the barrel of a strange looking weapon being held on her by one of the Tasmor technicians that had come down with them on the *STRIKER*. There were two of them standing in the small corridor, one of them with her weapon leveled at Endith’s back.

“Ah... Endy. Baby, you had better turn around.” Tina spoke softly as she rose to her feet slowly.

Endith’s head whipped around and her blue eyes grew wide when she saw the two Tasmor behind them.

“Make the fool male be silent.” The taller of the two Tasmor hissed at Tina in a whisper. “And no tricks or we will fire on you.”

Tina lifted her hands slowly, keeping them in front of her. “Ok. Just relax.” Tina lifted her head slightly and looked at the internal COM panel above her head. “Benjamin... we need to let you go now. And if you don’t stop hitting on us I will inform Internal Security and have you arrested.”

“Tina... wha...”

Tina lifted her right hand keeping it in plain view. “Goodbye Colonel O’Connor.” She spoke just before she flipped off the open COM channel. “Ok... it’s closed.”

The second Tasmor dropped something on the deck at Tina’s feet. “You will download everything on your computer and memory cores to this drive. Do so quickly and we will not kill you.”

Tina looked at the small drive at her feet and then at the Tasmor female. “You’re joking right?” She asked.

The Tasmor female stepped into the backhand blow that caught Tina directly across the cheek and staggered her back. “Do I look like I am joking stupid woman?” She snarled. “Do as I say now!”

“You will not get away with this.” Endith spoke now. “There is no place for you to go where we won’t find you. And you won’t get off the planet.”

“Pick it up and give it to her!” The Tasmor female growled at Tina. “Do it now or I will shoot both of you dead and do it myself!”

“Ok. Ok. Relax!” Tina said as she bent over slowly and retrieved the small computer storage drive from the floor. She returned to her feet and slowly held out the drive to Endith. “Take it Endy.”

“I grow impatient!” The Tasmor woman hissed. “These are Kintaur weapons! They are crud weapons at best but very effective. They will think the Kintaur came here and killed you if we shoot you! Now do as I tell you!”

Endith took the small computer drive and looked at it. “This is... this is Pralor tech.” She spat. “Where did you get this?”

“No questions you stupid alien female!” The first Tasmor woman snapped. “Do it now!”

“Listen... just relax and we can...” Tina began to raise her hand in order to try and show that they were not threatening. Tina had already sent a Mindvoice call to the *Durcunusaan* troops who were guarding the airfield and they were seconds away. Unlike Ben, Tina had not trained with Isabella and the Drow in order to learn how to use and control her new vampire abilities. All that mattered to her was that they would be together with Endith for eternity. What happened next would make her reevaluate that position.

The taller of the two Tasmor females jammed the barrel of her weapon into Tina’s chest and pulled the trigger. The muffled sound of the weapon was barely discernible but to Tina it was as if she got hit in the chest by a fast moving lifter. She slammed back into the bulkhead violently, her head smashing into the unyielding

metal as she felt her blood begin to go cold. She heard Endith's scream, saw her beautiful elven wife and lover begin to rise from her pilot's seat, and she saw the second Tasmor female ram her weapon into Endith's chest stopping her.

"Stop!" The Tasmor snarled angrily. "Download the contents of your computer and memory cores onto the drive now or we will shoot you as well!"

"*Nubou forn!*" Endith screamed as she continued to try and struggle out of her seat. "Tina my love! Tina no!" She screeched as she watched Tina begin to convulse on the deck where she had slumped.

The second Tasmor smashed her weapon across Endith's head with enough force to drive her the remaining way out of her seat and to the deck. "Plug it in quickly!" The first Tasmor spat aloud as she kicked Endith in the head viciously, knocking her back up against the rear of her seat. "Do it now!"

"Hey bitch!" The male voice roared from behind them.

The two Tasmor females whirled around, bringing their weapons up, but they were far too slow.

Admiral Benjamin O'Connor had chosen to have Isabella turn him and Tina because of their combined love for Endith yes, however unlike Tina he was not afraid to learn about and use the new found abilities this transformation had given to him. Ben already knew that he and Tina were very different from other humans, that they were both the products of parents who they now knew were the Eridiani. Genetically superior humans. It was the only explanation for their skill and intelligence through the years of flying and being together. It was also one of the reasons that he and Tina had such a strong attraction to each other even before Endith had come into their lives. Benjamin had embraced this knowledge and had trained for a full decade under Isabella or one of the personal instructors she had assigned to him and he had become just as lethal on the ground as he was behind the controls of any ship within the Union.

Upon hearing Tina call him Colonel, Ben knew instantly that something was wrong. It was a personal code the three of them had worked out decades ago and never used. It was one of things that Martin had taught them that they took to heart. Ben, Tina and Endith loved Martin almost as much as they loved each other and if he offered this knowledge to them to protect themselves, then it was something they would use. Once Tina had spoken that code phrase, Ben was contacting Avi and had him use the *ARC ROYAL*'s new teleporters to transport him directly to their ship on the surface. Ben appeared directly in front of the two *Durcunusaan* as they were rushing up the ramp of the *STRIKER*, neither man pausing in their movement and Ben blurred in motion the moment he fully materialized.

When the two Tasmor whirled around at Ben's angry words he was already upon them far faster than they had seen anyone ever move before. Using his enhanced Eridiani genetic structure, now altered by Vampire DNA, Ben hit the larger of the two Tasmor females directly in the face with a powerful closed fist, sending her rocketing backwards to smash against the center computer console of the *STRIKER*. She was out before she hit the deck, Ben's perfectly aimed blow crushing her cheek as if it was paper. This stunned the second Tasmor enough that the two larger *Durcunusaan* were upon her before she could react and they held nothing back because she was a female. The two men pummeled her to the deck of the ship, ripping her weapon from her hands and one simply dropped his six foot two, two hundred and thirty pounds of muscle and bone directly on top of her while the other moved to secure the first Tasmor.

Ben gathered Tina into his arms as she continued to seize, foam now coming from her lips. Endith had gathered her wits enough, blood leaking from her lips and the side of her head, and she staggered slightly to slide over beside them and grab Tina's arms. "Tina!" She shouted in desperate panic. "Tina!"

Ben looked up at the senior *Durcunusaan*. "Have Avi teleport Anja directly here!" He screamed. "Do it now! She's dying!"

"No!" Endith screamed aloud.

Martin Leonidas knew something was wrong when he felt the urgent Mindvoice tremors within the Etheric realm. He didn't react right away because of the conversation that they were having with the Tasmor Sovereign Regent and her people, however the moment he felt Ben's resonance spike and suddenly come so much closer he knew something was very wrong. He was about to rise to his feet when the light yellowish/red

flare of light and the soft whining of the teleporter noise engulfed Anja from her chair on his left and she disappeared.

Saydia and the other Tasmor at the large table came to their feet and staggered back in shock at this as Martin tapped his jaw.

“Avi! Lock onto me and send me wherever you just sent Anja!” He barked out the order without thinking. No wife and mate of his would ever go anywhere where there was danger without him again.

Aricia and For'mya also knew something was wrong, as did Helen and Tobia as they could all feel Ben's frantic resonance within the Etheric realm now and they came to their feet just as Martin vanished in that same flare of yellowish/red light and whining noise. Helen was the first to put it together because of her connection to Martin as his Praetorian Mage and she stepped forward tapping her jaw as well.

“Avi... teleport Aricia and For'mya as well! Then issue a Fleet Wide Code Alpha!” She barked out the order and then turned to the two *Durcunusaan* officers who had stepped forward.

-Initiating now- Avi's voice filled her ear implant and Helen saw Aricia and For'mya vanish from sight and she met the eyes of the *Durcunusaan* as the door opened and half a dozen more burst into the room. They had been moving the moment they heard their King's order within their implants.

“Lock them down!” Helen snarled angrily pointing at Saydia. “Take their weapons and disarm every Tasmor on the planet! If they resist... shoot them!”

Saydia looked shocked. “What is... what is the meaning of this?” She shouted.

Tobia grabbed her arm. “Helen! What is going on?” She yelled.

Helen glared at Saydia from across the table, her dark eyes full of anger and distrust now. Helen may have been the calm counterbalance to Martin's Leonidas' more instinctive nature as his Praetorian Mage, but she was also Lycavorian. “Two of your people just tried to steal the computer storage and memory cores from the *STRIKER* you came down on with Aricia and For'mya!” Helen spat at her. “And in the process, one of your people shot a woman that Martin has known for more than thirty years! A woman who has been one of his dearest friends for all of that time! A woman who has saved his life more times than your feeble mind could imagine. She is dying!”

Saydia's eyes were wide. “I do not know what you are speaking of!” She stammered.

Helen stepped right up to the taller woman unafraid in the least and her eyes changed and her fangs burst forth causing Saydia to try and move back but only right into the unmoving bulk of the *Durcunusaan* trooper behind her. “Your scent tells me you are lying *upae*! I can smell the lie that you spill from your face!” Helen looked at the *Durcunusaan*. “Put them in a Lifter and take them to the airfield! I want every Tasmor on this planet disarmed in the next three minutes! Inform Manda what is happening and have her de-shroud all of our ships and go to Code Alpha Alert! Any Tasmor ship that tries to leave the system is to be crippled immediately! I do not care how many are hurt!”

“Helen!” Tobia almost shouted.

Helen looked at her. “If ever you have prayed to your gods Tobia, now would be a good time. If Tina dies... then every Tasmor on this planet will follow her into death.”

Helen took Tobia's arm and began to usher her out as Saydia and the other Tasmor were disarmed without care or status. When Anthylea tried to stop them from touching Saydia one *Durcunusaan* simply smashed the butt of his A5 into her head without regard and dropped her to her knees. Namiri and Emylea could only stand and look at their mother in shock for she was glaring directly at Perlyea.

Martin knelt on the hard packed ground several meters from the *STRIKER*'s ramp, his eyes focused on where Anja was straddling Tina's now inert body while Ben and Tina were on either side of her clutching her hands, Aricia and For'mya behind each of them trying to provide comfort and support. The glow around Anja's body was at its full brilliance now as she worked to save one of her dear friends. Martin ignored the two Lifter trucks as they screeched to a halt nearby, Helen and Tobia quickly exiting one while half a dozen heavily armed *Durcunusaan* troops began to pull Saydia and the others from the rear of the second truck without politeness. The ADHOC base was now on full alert and four minutes after Helen's order had gone out, every Tasmor on the planet had been disarmed without an incident. All of them were shocked at this action, not knowing what

was going on, but all of them were smart enough to know that these Alpha Lycavorians were not in a mood to be denied. Nalmos had shifted to his wolf form when he saw the Sovereign Regent and those with her forcibly put in the back of the truck and he began sprinting for where he saw the trucks heading. The thought did not occur to him as to why no Lycavorian Alpha tried to stop him as he ran. He did not know that his King's orders were very specific and very direct to the *Durcunusaan*.

“These men and women are our people! This was their home! They will be afforded every comfort we can provide to them no matter what we have to do!”

Martin watched as another, smaller Lifter truck appeared from over the horizon and kick up dirt as it skidded to a stop on the other side of where Anja was. His dark eyes took in Thoti as he lifted Duewa from the rear of the Lifter before it had completely stopped. Duewa didn't miss a single beat as she sprinted uncaring to where Anja was and fell to the ground beside her.

“Anja?” She gasped.

“Duewa... get under her head!” Anja hissed softly. “She was shot with some form of weapon that introduced a massive dose of neutron radiation into her body. We need to stop the breakdown of her cells and repair the damage. I am holding her stable now, keeping it from her heart and brain.”

Duewa didn't hesitate scooted back to a position where she gingerly lifted Tina's head from the ground and arranged it gently in her lap. She dropped her hands to either side of Tina's head and then her body began to glow nearly as brightly as Anja's. “I have her now as well.” Duewa spoke softly. Her eyes widened as she sensed the amount of poison within Tina's body. She also knew what neutron radiation could do to a vampire. “Gods Anja!” She gasped.

“I know!” Anja spoke. “Work quickly Dee! I will purge the radiation, just keep her heart and brain shielded.”

Duewa closed her eyes and reached within herself as she spread her healing powers out through Tina's upper body. Since becoming wolf and being around Anja Duewa had become much more instinctive in nature. Her love for Thoti and her blossoming and powerful friendship with had given her new strength and confidence. Duewa called on that confidence now as Anja's new nickname for her echoed in her head. Anja had taken to calling her Dee these last weeks and Duewa found she adored the nickname, mainly because it showed her just how far she had come.

The soft white glow encompassed Tina's entire body now as Anja and Duewa combined their powers once more. Anja was widely recognized as the single most powerful Hadarian Healer to have ever lived, eclipsing even her own father and mother, and over the last months Duewa had learned so much from her it didn't compare to anything she had learned in the years before and Duewa had now become quite powerful in her own rite. A much more powerful and confident Healer than she had ever been before and now they both worked once more to save a life together.

“I have her now.” Duewa stated softly. “Go Anja! And work quickly!”

Anja nodded and closed her eyes, concentrated intently, and she released the full force of her healing abilities. The Metaphysical Radiation within her body pulsed outward, becoming a cleansing wave as it engulfed Tina completely. The speculation that the virus in Martin's blood had somehow increased her natural powers to higher levels was something that Anja knew to be very true. She did not speak of it with anyone except her daughter Eliani and Eurin for obvious reasons of security, but she knew it to be true. Eurin had already suspected this was happening from the moment she had met Anja, simply because of how quickly she had mastered the skills it took decades for normal Healers to learn. None of this mattered to Anja Leonidas now. Her love for Martin and her fellow Queens was absolute and this love only served to make her that much more powerful and willful.

The neutron radiation was like a thin yellow stream to Anja's senses within Tina's body and her blood and Anja Leonidas attacked it as she would any other enemy trying to hurt her or one she cared for. With extreme prejudice. With Duewa's powerful healing essence, almost as bright as her own because she had come so far, shielding Tina's heart and brain from the poison and keeping it from insinuating itself into her vital body systems, Anja began. Starting at her toes and then slowly moving up her entire body, Anja localized the neutron radiation poison, exceptionally lethal to any vampire no matter their blood, and she began to eradicate it.

Martin ignored the *Durcunusaan* as they forced Saydia and the others to their knees beside the Lifter truck, their eyes wide as they witnessed what very few had ever seen. The full force of Anja Leonidas'

incredible healing abilities. A dozen more *Durcunusaan* appeared from all around the area and instantly they surrounded their fiery and petite Queen, their Shi Viska's erupting from Flatspace and forming a near impenetrable barrier around her.

It seemed to last forever, but in actuality it was only slightly more than a minute before Anja slowly lifted her hands from Tina's chest and opened her eyes. Her jade green eyes were fully changed to her wolf persona by now and her fangs were fully extended, adding to the ferociousness of her appearance. This did not frighten anyone in the area for all of them had seen her like this before, though the gasps from the Tasmor were quite obvious and loud.

"Anja?" For'mya gasped as she held tightly to Endith.

"Duewa... back off slowly now Dee." Anja spoke looking at her.

Duewa nodded knowing what she meant and slowly she began to withdraw the healing radiation shield from around Tina's heart and brain. Her hands glowed brightly beside Tina's cheeks until she too lifted them clear of her body.

The reaction was almost instantaneous as Tina's eyes flew open and she groaned out loud. "Ohhhh!"

"Tina!" Endith almost screamed as she leaned over and placed her lips to Tina's cheek and gripped her shoulder and hand tightly. "Tina our love!"

Tina's blue eyes fluttered open slowly and came into focus. She looked very dazed and confused and then she saw Anja straddling her chest and blinked several times in puzzlement. "What?" She gasped. "What... Anja? What is going on?"

It was then that Ben let go of the breath he was holding and dropped his head to Tina's chest beside Endith's in happiness.

Tina looked above her and saw Duewa's smiling face, her head still resting in her lap. Her blue eyes once more focused on Anja. "Anja... I have been telling you for years that I am already spoken for and you can't have me." Tina muttered. "What are you doing sitting on my chest?"

Anja burst out laughing and quickly moved to her knees beside Tina and leaned over, kissing Endith's head and gripping the back of Ben's collar as For'mya and Aricia moved closer as well, tears of happiness in their eyes.

Tina looked up once more at Duewa. "Jesus... what the hell hit me?" She gasped aloud.

Martin felt the worry leave him in a wave as Tina asked that last question of Duewa and he exhaled ever so slowly. He turned his head as Helen settled beside him, her hands going to his shoulders and her forehead dropping to his shoulder. The Data Dump, as Andro had coined it, happened immediately between them and Martin saw all that Helen had done and what she thought they should do now. She also saw the savage anger within his mind that this had happened at all given how they had treated the Tasmor since arriving here. She nodded her head to him, acknowledging this anger but cautioning restraint. They needed no words between them and she squeezed his shoulders before rising to her feet once more and turning to Tobia. Martin got to his feet as well just as Colin stepped up to him with the Kintaur weapon in his hand.

Though a part of his team, Colin had been selected to remain with Martin pretty much all of the time now because of his vampiric skills and because he was the finest tracker any of them had ever seen at work when he had been wolf, and now he was even better as a vampire.

Colin held out the rudimentary looking Kintaur projectile weapon. "It's similar to our old HKs Skipper." He spoke. "Crude by our standards now, but it's loaded with hollow points that are filled with a neutron radiation based poison. That why Tina began to seize. These two shit heads must have hid in storage closet sometime on the flight down. Tina wouldn't have smelled their blood because Tasmor blood is already too faint to detect. Must be because of their DNA, but even standing here I can barely smell the blood within them."

"They almost killed her Colin." Martin muttered softly.

Colin nodded his head. "But they didn't Skipper." He said standing in front of the man who had saved his life more times than he could remember through the years. He held up the Pralor Data Storage unit. "They had this as well."

Martin took the unit and turned it over in his hands. "This is Pralor technology Colin." He said. "Where did they get it?"

Colin shrugged his broad shoulders and motioned with his head to where the two Tasmor females were kneeling at the foot of the ramp with three *Durcunusaan* surrounding them. One was bleeding from the mouth

and nose, and the entire right side of her face was heavily bruised. "Ben hit her." Colin told him. "He wasn't real nice about it either."

Martin took the Kintaur weapon from Colin and turned his head to look and Saydia kneeling on the ground. His eyes changed then and his fangs extended instantly, the savage looking dual fangs causing Saydia's eyes to grow wide as he moved the few meters to where they knelt. Martin stopped in front of her and squatted down his now yellow/gold eyes glaring at her intently. Saydia had never seen a Lycavorian in this state before, his dual fangs, the outer set long than the inner set, looking as if they could tear her flesh to shreds in seconds.

"Why don't you explain to me exactly what you thought you were going to accomplish by doing this?" Martin asked her too calmly. "Nalmos speaks highly of the Tasmor and I have thanked both of your daughters for what they were trying to do for my people. I honor that. Then you do this?"

"Say nothing Sovereign Regent!" Perlyea hissed. "We do not need to explain ourselves to a man!"

Martin held up the Pralor storage unit. "Where did you get this?" He asked.

Saydia looked at the piece of equipment with wide eyes. "I do not... I do not know what that is." She barked.

"No?" Martin asked her once more. "This is a Pralor Computer Storage Unit." He spoke aloud, Tobia's eyes going wide when she heard him and this caused her to move closer to him. "Your two assassins had this on them. They were going to try and download the memory and computer core of our *STRIKER* weren't they?"

Martin smelled Nalmos finish sprinting into the clearing and shift back to his human form. A Beta Wolf he may have been, but his keen wolf sense of smell told him instantly what had occurred here. Nalmos moved promptly up beside Helen who took his arm and shook her head.

"Do not interfere Nalmos." She said softly.

"*Feravomir* I am..." Nalmos began but again Helen shook her head.

"This has nothing to do with you or our people any longer." She told him.

Martin turned as Tobia came up beside him now and he held up the Storage core to her. She took it in her hands with wide eyes, gazing at it for several seconds before lifting her head and looking at Saydia.

"Saydia... this is a portable storage unit." She said. "We make these on Artaaya. How did you...?"

"Sovereign Regent we are Tasmor and we do not need to tell them anything!" Perlyea spoke.

Martin looked at her now. "You do if you hope to get off this planet alive." He told her.

"You would not dare do anything!" Perlyea snapped at him.

That is when Aricia's head came up from where she still rested beside Benjamin. They were helping Tina gather her strength and wits about her once more as both Anja and Duewa were examining her. For mya and Anja felt it first, then Helen and Tobia. This time Tobia did not try to intervene in any way for she instinctively knew to do so would be quite painful to attempt. Aricia Leonidas crossed the distance between the two groups in three blinks and when she reached Perlyea; her azure blue eyes were burning brightly in anger, her own wolf fangs fully extended. She grabbed a handful of Perlyea's long blond hair and savagely yanked her head back causing Perlyea to cry out in pain as Aricia practically bent her body back and lifted her right hand. The Etheric knife exploded from her closed fist and she barred her vicious dual fangs.

"Our Beloved husband and mate may not wish to strike a woman, but I am not so limited *upae!* The woman your fool soldiers attacked is one who we consider our family! Our family! When you attacked her, you attacked us!" Aricia screamed at her, her fangs displayed so very prominently as were her black ringed azure eyes. Perlyea's own eyes were wide in real fear now as she saw the point of that Etheric knife inch closer to her face. "You will tell us what we want to know you stupid, arrogant fucking woman! If you do not, then I will plunge this into your brain and leave it so that you to babble your way to death on this ground beneath us! And you will have brought doom to all of your people!"

"Mother!" Namiri exclaimed from beside Saydia on the ground.

"I ordered it!" Saydia barked finally glaring at Martin. "I gave the order to them to take what was in your computer banks!"

Martin looked at Saydia and knew instantly that she was lying. The adrenalin dump that Lycavorians could detect when someone lied was even more pronounced in Tasmor it appeared. That adrenalin dump rushed through Saydia now but Martin remained silent and rose to his feet.

"*Saaurano...*" Martin spoke softly. "Release her."

"Beloved she is..." Aricia began for she had smelled the same adrenalin dump as well.

“I know.” Martin spoke reaching for her and touching her arm. Aricia turned to look at him. *[Something else is going on here Little Wolf.]* Martin told her in the shielded connection. *[She is protecting her but she did not know this was going to happen.]*

Aricia glanced quickly at Saydia and then back to him. *[Why?]*

Martin shook his head. *[Did you see the surprise in her eyes when I showed her the Pralor storage unit?]*

Aricia’s wolf eyes grew slightly wider. *[Elder Valael said the Kintaur knew they would be here.]*

Martin nodded his head. *[Do you smell it Little Wolf? Breathe real deep and search for it. I will guide you.]*

Aricia didn’t hesitate for an instant for she knew just how sensitive their Beloved’s nose was when it came to detecting scents. Whether it was because of their Praetorian bloodline or not, both Martin and their pureblood sons Androcles and Denali had senses of smell that were far beyond anything ever recorded among their people. Aricia inhaled deeply then allowing Martin to guide her with his mind, sifting through everything around them, including the smell of Tasmor blood which, while faint even to them, was still discernible. Her azure colored wolf eyes grew slightly wider as she finally detected it and she looked at him.

Helen knew they were speaking about something entirely different yet very important and she moved closer to them and reached out to touch Martin’s arm. Her own dark eyes grew wide when they passed to her what they smelled and within seconds of touching him Helen’s head immediately snapped around to look at the dark skinned Tasmor Anthylea.

“*Son vada carians!*” She gasped aloud.

Helen staggered slightly back and Tobia reached for her quickly. “Helen? What is it?” She gasped as Helen gripped her arms tightly, Nalmos coming up behind them to reach for Helen as well.

“*Feravomir?*” He stammered.

“You have no right to do this?” Saydia finally barked out. “I demand you release us! Your pilot is alive and you stopped us from taking your precious information! Now I demand you release us!”

Martin looked at her and shook his head. “I’m thinking not.” He stated calmly. “You have some questions to answer and you are not going anywhere until I have those answers!”

“We do not have to tell you anything!” Saydia snapped at him. “You have no reason to hold us any longer! I will discipline my people for their actions!”

Martin chuckled softly and had Saydia Daret known Martin Leonidas in any way she would have wet her pants right there. “I am Lycavorian.” Martin spoke calmly. Too calmly to suit those around him who knew what he was capable of doing. “Ventori is a Lycavorian planet. Which means it is my planet. These are my people and the one thing I swore to the spirits of my father and grandfathers when I became King was that I would find and protect all of my people. No matter what I had to do.”

“Your threats mean nothing to me!” Saydia hissed at him.

“Threats?” Martin said. “I’m not threatening you Sovereign Regent Daret. What I am doing is telling you exactly how it will be. You have over three million of my people scattered across your little toy empire. I want them back. All of them. And you will tell me where I can find them and where you got that Pralor tech.” Martin squatted down in front of Saydia again. “Then you are going to tell me what kind of sick experiments you and your people have been running on my people. Every single detail.”

Saydia’s wide eyes looked at him. “What... what do you mean?” She gasped.

Martin rose to his feet. “I want to know why your protector there has Lycavorian blood within her.” He said pointing at Anthylea. “I can smell it in her veins and you are going to tell me how and why.”

“How dare you threaten me?” Saydia screamed. “Who do you think you are? You are nothing but a savage, brute of a man!”

Martin moved far faster than anyone could follow and he shifted his body to the left. His right hand filled with the K14 Kinetic Magnum that always resided there and he leveled it at the Tasmor female who had shot Tina. The single boom echoed across the area, causing Saydia to jump in horror as she saw her soldier’s body flung back several feet from the impact of the devastating close range weapon.

“I am a man who is out of patience with the arrogance that seems to ooze out of the pores of everyone who lives in this fucking quadrant of space!” Martin turned back to her as he spoke. Saydia looked at him with

shocked eyes at what he had just done, real fear now showing on her beautiful face. “I want answers to my questions.” Martin told her as he lifted the K14 once more and leveled it directly at Namiri’s stunned face.

“I suggest you start giving these answers to me.” Martin growled. “You don’t want to see what I will do if I lose my temper lady.” He said. “And that temper is just about ready to explode. I suggest you start talking within the next five seconds. You won’t like the result if you don’t.” Martin jacked back the hammer on the K14. “Your time starts now.”

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

AUSTROVA

EMBER COVE

EASTERN COAST, 49 KILOMETERS FROM MYDALA CITY

RE MYDALA FAMILY SUMMER ESTATE

Alrerin stood on the balcony of the second floor, holding the steaming mug of tea in his hands as his eyes gazed upon the rising sun over the expanse of the teal ocean surface in the distance. He had never been to Coren’s Summer Estate, Ember Cove, and now he knew why he had heard so many speak fondly of it. It was slightly larger than his estate in Mydala City, with an incredible view of the ocean and the distant mountain ranges on both sides. The beach below the estate was large, extending as far as the eye could see in either direction and covered in fine white sand. A beach that was now occupied by his daughter, his grandchildren and men and women that he had once considered beneath him.

Alrerin Sha Harael knew the exact moment when his distorted views began to change on everything, and it was because of the man below him on the sand. Riordian’s devotion to Narlei had been nothing short of absolute. The man simply did not question who or what his daughter was and he loved her with everything that he was. They sat beside one another on the beach now, their youngest child in Narlei’s lap while their other children sat in and around Riordian as they watched the massive black wolf chase its tail in front of them. All of them were laughing hysterically at what Andro was doing. Caliria sat with Sadi and the other wives and mates of Androcles Leonidas, Coren’s next oldest daughter Arduri snuggled close to Androcles’ brother Denali and the exotic young woman Lisisa Leonidas who had a hand in saving his very own life not hours ago. It was Androcles who was in wolf form however, and chasing his tail in circles as Alrerin’s grandchildren laughed, merriment that even Narlei and the others were echoing. It was not often that you saw a wolf the size of Androcles Leonidas chasing his tail in circles and they were thoroughly enjoying it. Alrerin had seen many wolves when visiting the Protectorate homeworld, Riordian himself was as large as any wolf he had ever seen there, but Androcles was beyond massive and easily over three feet tall at the shoulders. Alrerin estimated he was close to, if not over, three hundred pounds as well. He had heard Riordian’s father once say that size ran within the bloodlines of Lycavorians and if Androcles was this large, Alrerin truly did not want to see the size of his father.

Alrerin turned his head slightly when he felt Coren come up beside him with a similar mug in his hands. This mug held a dark liquid in it that smelled rich and heavy with a faint walnut tinge to it. His eyes narrowed somewhat and Coren smiled as he lifted the mug slightly.

“It is coffee.” Coren answered. “Apparently it originates from Earth and there are many different blends. This blend is one of the most popular according to my daughters. Androcles’ mother created it while she carried him within her. It is the single most popular brand within their entire Union now it seems and it has made his mother exceedingly wealthy. All of their family really. I put walnut flavored cream in it and it is simply delicious.”

“It smells very good.” Alrerin stated as his head turned back at the sound of his youngest grandson’s excited squeal and the high pitch of laughter.

Androcles had apparently twisted himself into such a position that he had fallen over onto the sand on his side and his grandchildren and the others thought it hilariously funny.

“Were you able to get any sleep Alrerin?” Coren asked.

Alrerin turned and met his eyes once more. “Were you my friend?”

Coren shook his head with a smile. “No.”

“I was reviewing the information you gave to me when we arrived here.” Alrerin said. “The message that young man left for you even when he believed you hated him and his people.” He spoke indicating Androcles below them. “What made you begin to change your views Coren? In these last weeks and months your entire outlook has altered to a new course.”

Coren nodded his head. “Yes it has.” He answered. “I believe it was a combination of many things really, but none of it really made any sense until Denali told me something that I had never even considered.” Coren took a sip of the coffee before continuing. “He told me that perhaps I had misinterpreted what the Gypsy woman had told me all those years ago. That what I thought her words meant was wrong; that they meant something entirely else. When I stopped to consider this Alrerin, I discovered that he was right. All of these years I believed she meant one thing, when in fact, her words to me that day meant the complete opposite. I lost Devra and Tastia because I believed something entirely different. I will not lose Nyosa because I wear blinders. Not now. Not after what Caliria has been through and what she and Arduri and even Naesta have found. What Nirilo discovered so long ago about these people.”

Alrerin nodded his head as he turned to look out on the beach once more. “He calls me father you know.” Alrerin spoke softly. “Without hesitation or doubt. And his love for Narlei and their children knows no bounds. He truly does not care that they cannot shift their forms. Only that they are children of his blood; of Narlei’s blood.”

“You know of course that our scientists have been wrong for centuries.” Coren spoke. “We as Vanari may not be able to shift our forms if the virus within them is introduced into our systems, but it does change us Alrerin.”

Alrerin nodded his head. “Oh yes.” He stated. “Nyosa has bitten you?”

Coren nodded slowly. “I was shocked at first.” He said. “Angry even. Until I realized why she had done this. And what it means.”

“So you have become like Narlei. Like you daughters?” Alrerin asked.

Coren shook his head. “Not on as large a scale... no. Nyosa is not fully Lycavorian as Androcles and Denali and even Riordian. The virus within their bodies is so much more potent from what Caliria tells me. But I have embraced even the small changes within me that are beginning to take place Alrerin.”

“I cannot remain as First Regent Coren.” Alrerin spoke softly. “Not after what I have allowed to happen for so long because of my own selfishness.”

Coren looked at him. “Do not make that decision just yet Alrerin. We need you now more than ever.” He told him.

“How many have I allowed to be taken because of my inaction Coren?” Alrerin spoke. “How can I ever look our people in the eye and live that down.”

“You can do that by helping us to bring Ardan and those aligned with him down.” Coren said. “You have not seen all of the information that Dutkne and Jokros have discovered just in these last months Alrerin my friend. When we show it to you, when you see what Androcles has planned, then you may look at things differently.”

Alrerin met his eyes. “What do you mean?”

Coren smiled now. “Let us just say that even I was stunned at what he is going to do. And that was before I came to see what I believe now Alrerin. Now...” Coren sipped his coffee once more. “Now my friend, now justice will be ours for thousands of years of pain and humiliation. And we won’t have to lift a finger.”

“I don’t follow.” Alrerin said.

“Everything changed Alrerin.” Coren said. “The moment Androcles discovered Caliria, the moment Denali began to love Arduri, everything changed. And that change will very soon come storming to the front, and there is nothing Ardan will be able to do to stop it.”

Coren and Alrerin turned as they heard Jokros move quickly onto the balcony. Coren knew immediately that something was wrong.

“Jokros? What is it?” He asked.

Jokros held out the data pad to him. “Coren... we may have a problem.” He said as Coren took the pad.

Coren’s eyes grew wider as he read. “By the prophets!” He exclaimed. He looked up. “Does Androcles know?”

Jokros shook his head. "This Admiral Sa'sur asked that I inform him. She is too busy trying to arrange some sort of mission to get them back."

"How long before the other SBR members arrive?" Coren asked.

"Three hours exactly." Jokros answered as Coren handed the data pad to Alrerin.

"My god!" Alrerin gasped as he read.

"Get Androcles and the others Jokros." Coren told him. "Bring them into the main lounge in the basement level. All of us need to be there and we need to act quickly before Ardan discovers this."

"You think Ardan doesn't know?" Jokros gasped.

Coren shook his head. "No... this was done by the OSG." Coren said. "Ardan is not brave enough to do something like this alone. It would be too easy to tie it back to him. After last night he will not over reach his bounds. He thinks he is in excellent position."

"Coren is right Jokros." Alrerin stated now as he looked up. "And I may have a way to confirm that. Coren... I need your secure transmission codes."

"...My fault Andro." Dutkne spoke as he stood next to Andro while he read the data pad. "I thought it might look better if they used one of our ships instead of a *STRIKER*. I should have known better and..."

Andro looked at him and shook his head immediately. He reached up and placed his hand behind Dutkne's neck. "This is not your fault." He spoke firmly while squeezing his neck. "Put it out of your mind Dutkne. You are not responsible for this."

Everyone was in an upbeat mood as they began to enter the basement lounge even after the events of last night and Coren and Alrerin could once more only marvel at how quickly these men and women recovered and rebounded from dealing with different dire crisis. Their own daughters now acted in this way. Sadi was the first to detect that something was wrong as she walked into the lounge with one of Narlei and Riordian's daughters between her and Ne'Veha and swinging back and forth between their bodies hanging by their hands. Her jungle green eyes narrowed as Andro turned to face her and she instantly felt his resonance reach for her and Ne'Veha and then the others. As their laughter faded quickly, Denali and Dorian and the others began to take notice and it was Murano who stepped forward and spoke first as Sadi, Ne'Veha, and Sehri moved to Andro quickly, Lu'ria, Carisia and Caliria right behind them.

"Androcles... what is wrong?" Murano asked.

It had been Mari who had pestered him to take his boots off and enjoy the warmth of the sand and Murano was now very happy he had. He had sat beside Deion Leonidas and took note of how Mari sat between his long legs and her fingers stroked his arms and leg as they rested there watching Androcles. They were very possessive of each other and Murano knew well how Deion would now view Mari. He should have been upset about it in some manner; angry with himself for not cautioning Mari against such a relationship, but Murano found he was extremely comfortable with their relationship and even very happy. Deion was cut from the same mold as his father and brothers and it was already obvious that he worshiped Mari to no end. And Murano could not deny the brilliance of Mari's face or the happiness that permeated her Etheric resonance.

Andro turned to meet him and the others as they came into the lounge. There were chairs and couches spread all around the massive room and Andro could tell Coren had used it for meetings before.

"Everyone grab something to sit on." Androcles told them. "Our timetable has just been advanced."

Denali and Dorian stood beside one another while Sheva, Onera, Lisisa and Arduri settled on the couch directly in front of them. Eliani and Brendi squeezed onto a chair that Jomann stood behind, Kalis standing beside him with Serale. Eirene and Miseo moved to a single chair and Eirene sat casually on Miseo's leg when he sat on the foot rest, ignoring the chair. Cowan didn't ignore the chair however, and he pulled it out for Sherice, who settled into it without question. Ridor and Daio stood along the side wall closest to them with Kameka and Cvea tucked against their new husbands. Deion now stood beside the door into the lounge with Mari leaning up against him.

Androcles stepped forward and withdrew his P1 from the pouch at the small of his back and set it on the table in front of all of them. He tapped it once and the split holographic image of Sa'sur and Armen appeared.

"Sa'sur... we're all here now." Andro spoke. "Why don't you and Armen bring everyone up to speed?"

Sa'sur didn't hesitate and shifted her position on the *SCIMITAR's* bridge. She moved over in front of the huge star chart on the bridge and motioned to a sector of nearby space with her finger. "It appears that the OSG grew a set of *nor* while we were kicking their asses last night." She spoke. "Well... at least part of their organization did. As most of you know, our small political delegation left for Amanuce yesterday morning. They were going for a meeting in the capital of Lorent with the former Protectorate Council to sign the initial merger documents on Deia's behalf and then begin the main transition. They were traveling in Protectorate H9 Heavy Civilian Transport, the equivalent to our *MENKLAs*. Thirteen hours into the flight, just about the time the OSG began their attacks here on Austrova, they were attacked in open space and disabled by what appears to be a short squadron of Enverr Tactical Assault Craft."

Riordian sat forward now in his chair. "The Enverr?" He exclaimed.

-The pilots were able to compile a short emergency burst transmission- Armen spoke now from the bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH*. -They sent it three point two seconds before the main power core was disabled-

Dutkne lifted the data pad in his hand from beside Andro. "This was received at the Vanari Embassy on Amanuce six hours ago. We provide security to their embassy there and this was given to one of the exterior guards."

Dutkne set it on the table beside the P1 and activated it.

The crude holotransmission appeared to be taking place inside a dimly lit ship of some sort. All of them saw the tall figure, his dry, brownish skin very evident. With the exception of three tendrils of flesh that extended out on either side of his large head there was no hair on his face or head. He did not appear to have ears either. His reddish color eyes were large and widely spaced in the center of his head. He had no lips to speak of but a very blunt and flat nose was visible just above what was his mouth.

"*I am Commander Rotaxe of the Unified Enverr Consortium.*" The gravelly voice began. "*We have taken control of your ship and everyone on it. They are alive... for now.*" The Enverr stepped to the side and there were several gasps as they all saw Senator Ya'sur, Senator Pyath, and the Folcani Senator Rhauf and Ulana kneeling on the deck of the ship with their hands secured behind their backs. "*As for your soldier...*" Rotaxe motioned to the left and they saw another Enverr shove Torian into the transmission cone. His hands were securely bound as well and he appeared to have been severely beaten, his face bloody and bruised. "*He killed four of my men before we subdued him. His life is now mine.*"

"Torian! No!" Cowen barked aloud as he stepped toward the transmission.

It was becoming common knowledge among those on Andro's team that Cowen and Torian had struck up an unlikely friendship that was growing by leaps and bounds. Sherice reached out as she came to her feet and took his hand within both of hers.

"Cowen..." She spoke softly. "Be calm Cowen my love."

Cowen turned to look at her quickly and everyone saw him instantly relax as Sherice's hand reached up to stroke the soft fur on his face.

"*I speak to the boy Prince now!*" Rotaxe continued from the transmission. "*You will not act against the OSG assets any longer. We do business with them and you have disrupted this. This will cease immediately. We enjoy the Vanari females they sell to us and this will continue or I will execute each of your people here. After I have tortured them for all the information they have within their heads and then I will give the female to my men as a prize and let them fuck her until she goes crazy. The information they give to me I will sell to the OSG.*"

They watched as another Enverr stepped into transmission and bent over Ulana, his large hand squeezing her firm breast hard. Ulana cried out in pain and tried to move away but the Enverr grabbed her long, dark hair and yanked her head back as he continued to feel her up.

"Leave... leave her alone!" Torian screamed as blood and spittle flying from his lips as he turned.

Rotaxe also turned and savagely punched Torian in the side of the face so hard all of them heard Torian groan in pain and more blood splashed wetly on the deck as he dropped face first to the hard metal.

"*I want one hundred million Vanari credits, for each of these poor excuses for flesh. Your actions have robbed me of profit so I will take it from you instead of the Vanari.*" Rotaxe continued as he turned back to the

transmission. *“I also want six of those special ships that the Union likes so much... STRIKERS they are called. All of them fully fueled and fully loaded with their standard weapons. You can fill these ships with two dozen Vanari females and all of the medical supplies and Union ground weapons that can fill these ships, to include three of these Hadarian Medical Computers that you so covet.”* Rotaxe chuckled now. *“I will give you three days to gather these things and contact me so that you can deliver them to me. If you do not... then I will kill each of them just as I have killed the pilots. They were useless to me anyway.”*

Two more Enverr dragged the inert forms of the two Lycavorian pilots into the transmission and unceremoniously dumped their bleeding and broken bodies on the deck. It was easy enough to see that they were dead as each of them had no less than three holes in their heads from large caliber weapons, as well as several other wounds on their bodies.

“Three days boy.” Rotaxe spoke again. *“If you do not cease your actions against the OSG and give me what I want then I will send each of them back to you in pieces. Do not doubt my willingness to do this. Three days.”*

The transmission ended and vanished and the room was silent.

Murano moved around everyone as they sat there shocked and he stepped right up to Androcles and Dutkne. He didn't hesitate and erected an Etheric shield around the three of them for he knew Dutkne was Andro's Praetorian Mage. Andro looked at him.

[I will not allow this to stand Murano.] He spoke slowly and Murano could easily detect the distinct flavor of deep seated anger welling within him; within them both.

[Nor will I.] Dutkne hissed in anger.

Murano shook his head knowing he had to defuse the situation quickly or Androcles would act on instinct alone and that is not what they needed now.

[Nor should you... but I can sense the anger within you both. The others cannot... but I can. And so can Sarlana, even aboard SPARTA'S WRATH as she is.] Murano squeezed their shoulders. *[I have that same anger within me Androcles. In the short time I have been among you and the others I have been reborn and I have come to view all of you as the family that I never had. We were always taught to not give in to our emotions, that once released we would not be able to control them. That way of thinking is now wrong and I see it clearly within me. Your grandfather knew exactly what he was doing when he merged your people and ours Androcles. Embrace the emotion that burns within you... allow it to feed both of you... but do not succumb to it. That is what my time with your father and now you has taught me so far. And I welcome it. Let us keep our focus however.]*

Andro nodded his head and reached up to squeeze Murano's arm. *[Thank you Murano.]*

Murano tightened his grip on their shoulders and nodded his head to them both. *[Work as you are supposed to work now.]* He told him. *[Praetorian Warrior and Praetorian Mage. Use the strength this bond gives to you, to your brothers and Jomann. And let's retrieve our people.]*

Murano gave their shoulders one last squeeze before he turned and returned to his spot beside Mari near the wall. He noticed that Nara had moved over beside her brother now and as he looked quickly he saw that all of them had moved into an almost instinctive order. Lisisa, Eliani and Sheva were touching Denali, Jomann and Dorian in some fashion just as Nara was holding her twin's arm. They were The Praetorian Mages to their Warriors, and while Murano did not doubt that Arduri, Brendi and Onera played some role in this as well, it was the three sisters and Sheva who were the base of support.

It was Sadi who broke the silence in the room. *“Andro we have to do something.”* She spoke keeping her voice calm.

“How the hell did they know what we call our STRIKERS?” Ridor asked from the side. *“It took the Coven a thousand years before they discovered the designation of those ships. This spacer scum did not just discover this by accident in a few weeks! We have never even seen them before now! Have we?”*

“They have remained out of the overall scheme of things.” Dutkne answered. *“At least until now.”*

“And the Hadarian Medical Systems?” Eliani spoke up.

“Eliani is right. Hadarian Medical Computers are not spoken of openly Androcles. You know this as well as we do.” Serale spoke from where she stood beside Kalis. *“How did they get such information?”*

“My brother.” Brendi blurted out now watching as all eyes focused on her. *“Corbin has used the Enverr in the past Andro. The Regional Commanders and the Home Office gave him complete autonomy in running*

operations within the Alpha Quadrant. He had contacts with the Kavalians in the Alpha Quadrant and as long as he was in charge and had people on Earth, he would have discovered these things and passed them to the OSG. And his Enverr contacts obviously.”

“Brendi, could you break the decryption on the computer cores that Fedor downloaded from the OSG Command and Control center in Mydala City?” Andro asked her.

Brendi nodded her head. “Each OSG had their own encryption Algorithm, but given enough time I could probably dismantle Adams’ and find out what is on those drives.” She answered confidently.

Alrerin stepped forward before Coren could stop him. “Prince Androcles... I am not...”

Coren reached for his arm. “Alrerin no.” He stated too late.

“...I am not very comfortable with allowing a former OSG Operative access to these computers.” Alrerin spoke.

Eliani came to her feet and was about to tear into the older man but Brendi’s hand took hers and squeezed. “Eliani don’t.” She stated.

“I will not let anyone speak nonsense about you!” Eliani snapped. “Not when they don’t know you. I...”

“He is right.” Brendi said causing Alrerin’s eyes to grow wide at her words. She rose to her feet and looked at Alrerin. “I would feel the same in your shoes First Regent... but I was an Analyst and not an Operative. I was not given a choice in what I did because I was only trying to protect my parents and sisters. You can have someone assist me if you like, someone from Vanari Intelligence that you trust, but I can do this. I want to do this.”

Alrerin was taken aback somewhat by her honesty and it showed on his face but he looked at Androcles quickly. “I have someone in Vanari Intelligence that I trust implicitly.” He said as his keen political mind began to work. “If Brendi Faith is willing to do this then Ardan and his cronies would not be able to use this against us.”

“Andro they got the flight plan somehow.” Carisia said from the couch. “Which means someone from the Lycavorian Embassy told them. Not even the Vanari had that information.”

Andro held up his hand. “Everyone stop!” He barked out the words bringing silence to the large room. Alrerin looked taken aback by this display but this time Coren was beside him and took his arm.

“Wait Alrerin.” He spoke in a whisper. “I have seen him like this before. Give him a few moments to arrange his thoughts.”

“Coren we must act.” Alrerin protested softly. “This is... this must not go unpunished or left alone! Ardan could very well be part of this as well! We do not even know where they have taken these men and women.”

“I know exactly where they are.” Andro’s voice echoed softly and Alrerin looked at him in surprise.

“But how?” Alrerin gasped. “The space that the Enverr control is huge Androcles. Even I know that.”

Andro moved over in front of him and met his eyes. Alrerin had to admit to himself that he looked even more imposing without the unique Body Armor that he was wearing when they first met at Coren’s home in Mydala City last night. Alrerin wanted to step back when those bright azure eyes focused on him but he held his ground without fear. He would not be intimidated by anyone anymore. There was far too much at stake now.

“The past no longer matters First Regent Alrerin Sha Harael.” Andro spoke softly. “What matters now is how we move forward in the next days and into the future. Coren showed you the message I gave to him when he left Earth?”

Alrerin nodded his head. “He did.”

“I keep my word First Regent.” Androcles said. “I will not abide how things are right now. How my people are treated by the Vanari. I will do what I have told the others I will do sir. My father and mothers would expect it of me. What your people have had to endure for so long however...” Andro looked at where Caliria sat beside Carisia and Lu’ria and then back to Alrerin. “It sickens me Alrerin Sha Harael and I will insure that it does not continue for one day longer than needed regardless of what the Vanari people choose. These Enverr wish to stick their hands in the cookie jar as my mother Anja has said in the past, then so be it. I will give their hands back to them... gnawed off at the *nubous* elbow.” Andro turned away from him. “Armen?”

-I am here Androcles-

“Establish a secure QCR link to General Tarnie please.” Andro ordered him.

-Stand by-

“This fool Rotaxe has given us three days.” Andro said. “I only need two to bring their world down around them and get our people back. Sa'sur?”

“We are ready Andro.” Sa'sur answered him.

“Brendi... you will return to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and begin decrypting the computer cores taken from the OSG Command Center. Work quickly Brendi.” Andro told her meeting her gaze.

“I will.” Brendi answered confidently.

“First Regent... if you can send for your man or woman to assist her... they have thirty minute to get here.” Andro told him.

Alrerin turned his head and found Ma'nia standing quietly by the door near Deion and Mari. “Ma'nia... contact Colonel Yhis Ahn Urnuss at Cadre headquarters. Tell him he is to report here immediately and tell no one where he is going.”

Ma'nia nodded her head. “Yes First Regent.” She answered before leaving the room.

-Androcles I have General Tarnie secure- Armen's voice echoed from the P1.

Andro turned back to where his P1 rested on the table. “General Tarnie?”

Tarnie Val Ardwor appeared within the cone of the secure holotransmission. “I am here Prince Leonidas.” She spoke now and Andro saw her image appear.

“Your status with Denali's plan General?” Andro asked as he moved back to stand in front of the P1.

“All forces involved are standing by Milord.” Tarnie answered. “They are chomping at the bit to go.”

Andro nodded. “And OPSEC is intact?”

Tarnie nodded her head. “Completely Milord.”

“Then give the order and have all forces deploy to their LODs.” Andro told her. “I want you in your command ship directing operations from a central location. Denali, Lisisa and Arduri will rendezvous with you in the *ARCH DEMON* in eighteen hours. Admiral Sa'sur and the *SCIMITAR* will coordinate from their location here.”

“Understood Milord.” Tarnie answered.

“General Tarnie Val Ardwor... you are now officially the overall Commander of all Union forces within the Beta Quadrant. The order has already been signed and ratified by the Union Senate, the Prime Minister and my father. I was going to tell you when we met, but now is just as good a time, considering what we are about to do.” Andro told her seeing her eyes go wide. “Nothing that happens here in the Beta Quadrant happens without your approval. Is that clear?”

Tarnie nodded her head quickly. “Yes... yes Milord.”

“You have all targets confirmed?” Andro asked her.

Tarnie nodded once more. “We have been gathering this data for over a hundred years Milord. It's about as perfect as it gets. We already have eyes on nineteen objectives and I will issue the orders to begin recon of the remaining twelve as soon as we are finished here. Two hundred and nineteen thousand Lycanari are prepped and waiting with full back up. Twenty-three Vanari Heavy Cruisers, thirteen of their heavy Destroyers and thirty-three thousand Cadre Commandos have been in position for a week, hidden within the Pelkor Asteroid Belt. We have ample amounts of the serum that Princess Caliria and your mother devised and the last portion of your contingent of Hadarian Healers arrived two days ago. They are standing by at their kick off points with your two medical ships. Those ships will be located in pinpoint areas so as to make it possible to get wounded or critical care patients to them in one jump from all target locations. It is a solid plan Milord. With the additional Union forces we will have no trouble in executing it to perfection.”

“Additional Union forces?” Alrerin spoke as he looked at Coren in confusion. “Coren... what does he mean. Twenty of our cruisers and over thirty thousand Cadre Commandos! What is going on?”

Coren held up his hand as he listened to Androcles and then looked at Caliria and Arduri. Their faces were beaming in adoration, as were Nyosa and Ryana. Rinel's eyes were brighter than he had ever seen them

and Coren knew this was the moment. This is when all of his fears would be crushed under the boot heel of justice.

Andro took the pad from the table and typed on it quickly. "You have this target on your list?" He asked.

Tarnie looked at something on her end of the transmission and then turned back to him and nodded. "Yes Milord."

"Reallocate whatever team you have going here." Andro told her. "This is where they have taken our people. My team and I will deal with this target personally."

Tarnie nodded without questioning. "Understood." She echoed.

"General... you have sixty-six hours." Andro told her. "In sixty-six hours we will act. Denali's orders stand. I want nothing left of these facilities or the horrors that they perpetrate upon others. Is that clear?"

"*Pen iado forn aur aero* Milord Prince." Tarnie stated confidently. (I give you my word)

Andro nodded his head. "Then I will leave you to your work General. Good luck and go with the gods."

"All of you as well Milord." Tarnie spoke.

Andro touched the P1 and her image disappeared. He turned his head and looked at Rinel. "Colonel Rinel... when we return to *SPARTA'S WRATH* you can either rejoin with your wife and mate or help us to coordinate here."

Rinel smiled slightly. "Tarnie would expect our daughters and I to remain and see this through to the end Milord."

Andro nodded. "Then you and your daughters will accompany us. We will need you."

Rinel nodded his head. "Yes Milord."

"What is going on?" Alrerin finally roared out the words unable to comprehend what was going on. He looked at Coren. "Vanari ships! Cadre Commandos! Coren how...?"

Androcles turned to look at him as Coren smiled. "I have known about this plan for many weeks now Alrerin; ever since we went to Amanuce those weeks ago." He saw Alrerin's eyes widen. "I have been in contact with Cadre and Fleet Officers who I knew were loyal to our people and not to some ideal that Ardan and others like him profess. They all jumped at the chance to be part of this."

"Part of what?" Alrerin asked though a part of him already knew for he could feel a weight lifting from his heart that had been there for so very long.

Andro stepped back over to him. "In sixty-six hours First Regent... I am going to fulfil the promise I made to my *Inamarno* and her father. In sixty-six hours I am going to tear into the OSG and their Eridiani protectors and end the centuries of agony and pain they have caused the Vanari. When I am done, the gods willing, there will be little left of the OSG or their minions. Those that remain will get the message I am sending to them."

"What message?" Alrerin gasped as his eyes grew wide in disbelief.

Andro smiled at him, his azure eyes bright and alive and then he turned to Dutkne and the others. "We leave for *SPARTA'S WRATH* in twenty minutes folks. Time for us to go to work." He said watching as they all began to get to their feet.

"It's about time!" Dorian announced. "I was getting bored already!"

Andro was smiling as he saw both Sheva and Onera punch his brother in his chest at his remark. He turned back to Coren and Alrerin. "We may not meet again First Regent Sha Harael. No matter what your people decide, know that you personally will always have a direct line to me sir. Always."

"What are you going to do about this fool's demands?" Alrerin gasped.

Androcles bowed his head to him in a show of deep respect. "I'm going to give to him everything he is asking for First Regent; everything and so much more." Andro smiled once more but had Alrerin known him better, he would have taken note of the cruel way those azure colored eyes twinkled in the light. Androcles turned and reached for Sadi's hand. Sadi took it, pulling Ne'Veha and Sehri with her while Caliria took his other hand, pulling it tightly to her chest in happiness as Carisia and Lu'ria crowded around him.

Alrerin was stunned and turned to look at Coren who also had a smile on his face as the others walked out. "Coren what is... what is happening?"

Coren met his eyes. "Change is coming Alrerin my friend. Change for all of us. Whether we want it or not."

"If Ardan discovers what he is planning..." Alrerin began.

“Do you wish our people to be free Alrerin?” Coren asked him gently.

“What?” Alrerin gasped in reply. “By the Prophets you know I do Coren! It is the only way my... it is the only way my grandchildren will ever be free! The only way they will ever have a future.”

Coren nodded. “Then we must now act.” He said. “We cannot stop what is to come Alrerin Sha Harael. That has already been decided my friend. What we can do is to insure that it is shaped in a way that benefits our people.”

Alrerin met his gaze and once more felt the weight lifting from his soul a little more. He didn't have to think about this, not any longer. He was committed to this action and now he intended to see it through right to the bitter end. No matter what happened to him. He took a deep breath and nodded his head.

“We must prepare for when the others arrive but tell me this plan Coren.” He spoke firmly. “Tell me what we can do to help even more.”

Coren shook his head. “Their battleground is out there Alrerin. That is what they do best. That is who they are. Ours is going to be far more civil, but I fear no less as bloody.”

Alrerin turned to face him fully. “Then I will insure we have a good supply of bandages my friend.”

VENTORI ECHO QUADRANT UNION ADHOC BASE

Perlyea's head rocked back a second time in five seconds and this time she spun to the side, reaching for her face where Saydia's open handed slap had struck her. Saydia Daret was a tall and powerful woman, the epitome of what all Tasmor females wanted to be, and Perlyea had never felt the full force of her anger until this very moment.

At this moment Saydia Daret was livid with rage.

“...What you have done?” Saydia screamed at Perlyea. “I am Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people and I gave no such orders! You have made me debase myself before a man in order to save your pitiful life and those of my daughters and our people! How dare you woman! How dare you act without my direct orders against these people! Who do you think you are?”

Perlyea whipped her head back around in anger while still holding her cheek. Scarlett colored blood leaked from the corner of her mouth from Saydia's openhanded slap. “I am the Chief Counsel of the Tasmor people!” She snarled right back.

“So help me... if they had not taken our weapons you would be dead!” Saydia shouted at her. “If they injure so much as one millimeter of Anthylea Tomar's body Perlyea, I will hold you personally responsible and I will execute you myself!”

“You wouldn't dare!” Perlyea barked. “And they will not hurt your bed partner!”

“Argh!” Saydia growled and unleashed another open handed slap that connected with Perlyea's face and staggered her once more. “You arrogant fool! What is that thing they took! Where did you get it? Answer me now or I will kill you right here and leave you to rot!”

“It is exactly what they said it was!” Perlyea hissed angrily holding her face once more. “A Pralor Computer Storage and Memory Core.”

“You stole it from them?” Drenia gasped from where she had stood silent for the entire exchange.

“I did not steal it!” Perlyea barked. “One of our teams evacuating the Lycavorians from this foul planet two years ago found it aboard one of the Svorag ships that the Lycavorian air defenses shot down in the beginning of the invasion! They removed it and returned it to me, just as they have done with countless other pieces of technology we salvaged from the monster's ships. I have seen Tobia use one of these units before so I knew how to activate it! It was still fully functional and I have been working with it these last months! I determined it would be a perfect time to use it.”

“By using it to try and steal whatever is in their computer banks? By having your people shoot and almost kill one of their own? Wars have been started for less!” Drenia spat.

“The information in their computers banks and data cores is invaluable!” Perlyea barked. “Think of what we could learn! The power we could have as a species!”

“Why use it here, after what my sister and I told you?” Emylea asked now. “Why now? Namiri and I tried to tell you we should be open and friendly with these men and women! We tried to tell you they were not the same as those Lycavorians we are accustom too!”

“You know nothing child!” Perlyea barked at her.

Saydia moved to strike her again but this time Namiri grabbed her arm gently. “Mother... it will do no good.” She stated. “She acted stupidly and now we must try to repair the damage.”

“Do not speak to me in such a way!” Perlyea growled.

Saydia could feel nothing but pride as Namiri stepped right up in Perlyea’s face with Emylea by her side. Her two youngest daughters and they were unafraid and obviously much more informed about what was going on.

“I am one of six Regent Daughters!” Namiri spat at Perlyea. “As is my sister Emylea! We will speak to you in whatever way we wish! Especially now after what you have done and the danger you have put us in! Put our people in!”

“I have looked out for the interests of the Tasmor people!” Perlyea shouted. “More so than your mother herself!”

“You know nothing stupid woman!” Emylea hissed at Perlyea from beside her sister. “They saved my life! They saved Namiri! They asked for nothing in return except open talks and friendly relations! Your tactics may still get all of us killed!”

“We are Tasmor!” Perlyea barked out. “We need nothing from them! Only what they can give to us! We take what is deserved!”

“You stupid, egotistical woman! You deserve nothing! Have you grown so drunk with power as Chief Counsel that you deem our people superior to others who have already proven they can smash us under their boots? Do you remember nothing of what Tobia shared with us when she was here? You travel down the same path as the Pralor people did and look where it led them? They are a shadow of what they once were! Because of the same sense of self-worth and superiority that oozes from your pores” Namiri screamed now. “He put a gun in my face and would have killed me had not mother intervened! You have no idea who you are dealing with! None!”

Perlyea glared at Saydia now. “You stand there and allow your daughters to speak to me in such a manner!” She snapped.

“They speak the truth... so why not.” The female voice spoke from the side and all of them whirled around to see Tobia enter the portable building through the double doors. Three armed *Durcunusaan* encircled her, one of them a woman and they parted for a fourth to carry the inert form of Anthylea into the building.

“Anthylea! No!” Saydia cried out and rushed forward only to be stopped by one of the *Durcunusaan* and his rifle.

Tobia looked at Saydia. “She is unharmed Saydia. She would not allow herself to be examined her as her training dictates so Anja put her to sleep. She will awake in a few hours no worse than when she went to sleep.”

The *Durcunusaan* gently lowered Anthylea to one of the couches in the building, Namiri and Emylea the only ones to notice that he was very careful and respectful in his actions and then he backed up as Saydia knelt beside her and took her hand within her own.

“What have they done to her?” Saydia hissed angrily as she ran her fingers across Anthylea’s cheeks and across her lips. “You have betrayed me Tobia!” She snarled turning to look at her.

Tobia’s eyes narrowed considerably. “No... it was you who betrayed me Saydia Daret!” Tobia spoke evenly but her voice held no kindness to it now. None of the happiness that had been there earlier when they had first seen each other. “I never lied to you Saydia. I answered every question you put to me over the months I was among you as best as I was able. I never held back unless it was something I was not allowed to share. I was a friend and a lover to you and Anthylea both, and I enjoyed each and every time. I shared things with you that I have never shared with anyone! And now you sanction this foolhardy action in order to obtain technology that you would never have gotten off the planet with, let alone determined how to use.”

“I would have discovered how to use it!” Perlyea hissed.

Tobia turned to look at her. “You would have attempted to learn how to use it and in the process gotten yourself and whoever was helping you killed.” Tobia growled at her angrily, not holding her emotions in check any longer. “The Lycavorians that follow Martin and the Queens are not like Nalmos and the other Lycavorians you have met up until now! And they are nothing like my people! The moment you removed any data from that ship without the proper bio-scan and codes, every *Durcunusaan* on this planet would have descended down upon you like the plague! Had your two people even made it to your ships and managed to leave the system, the moment you accessed that data it would have triggered a failsafe within the data itself and erased itself before short circuiting every system on the ship carrying it. Essentially you would have killed everyone on that ship.”

“You lie!” Perlyea snapped.

Tobia reached for the small pouch on her belt and withdrew the Computer Memory and Data Storage Core. She held it out to Perlyea. “Then please Perlyea, by all means, see for yourself.” Tobia set the storage core on the nearby table. “There is a computer terminal in this very building. Go ahead and attempt to download what is on it. You will not succeed Perlyea, and you will kill everyone in this building with you in the process. You believe yourself more intelligent than everyone around you when in actuality you understand and have knowledge of so little.”

Saydia kissed Anthylea’s hands softly before resting them on her chest and rising to her feet. She turned and looked at Tobia and spoke before Perlyea could reply. “Tobia you must...”

Tobia took a step back from her now. “No.” She stated evenly meeting Saydia’s eyes. “I must do nothing Saydia. I owe you nothing and I will do nothing. My support of you and our friendship ended the moment you tried to steal information you have no right to have. I see now that it is not technology you have earned the right to have. It ended moment you so casually almost killed a woman who you did not know and has never done anything to your people.”

“How dare you speak to the Sovereign Regent in such a way?” Perlyea exclaimed.

Tobia turned and looked at her. “Save your blustering and banter for someone who does not you better Perlyea Kalrr.”

“My people Tobia? Are they...?” Namiri asked coming closer to her and speaking before Perlyea or her mother could respond.

Tobia looked at her. “Your troops are fine Namiri, as are your ships and personnel Emylea. Aside from being disarmed, they are not being treated any differently than before this happened. They were helping to defend them against the Kintaur and that is not something that Martin or the others will forget. Ever.”

“He was prepared to murder the Sovereign Regent’s daughter!” Perlyea snapped. “He held a weapon to her head! He is nothing but an animal and a male!”

Tobia looked at her. “At this moment Perlyea Kalrr, that male is the only thing standing between you and certain death. Were he to order it... or any of his Queens... all of you would be dead within seconds of that order leaving his lips. You have no concept of what has occurred with Martin and his people in the last months. And you would not understand it for you have no idea what honor is.”

“How dare you speak to me of honor?” Perlyea shouted moving forward. She stopped when the *Durcunusaan* to Tobia’s left lifted her K14 and pressed it to her forehead.

“Take another step and they will be scrapping your brains off the wall behind you.” She growled savagely, showing her fangs and changed wolf eyes.

“What you have done is inexcusable.” Tobia spoke after a moment as Perlyea backed up slowly. “Anthylea has Lycavorian blood inside her! Their blood! And that is not natural! How many other Tasmor have you done this too? How many Lycavorians have you experimented on in order to do this?” Tobia looked at them and when they did not answer she continued. “I do not know what Martin will do. I will speak to his Queens on your behalf, for they hold much sway over him, but ultimately it will be his decision what to do. And that decision can only be helped if you are honest and forthright in the answers that we now seek. Now is most certainly not the time for the Tasmor arrogance to come shining forth. You have seen how he reacts to such things.”

“You help this man?” Perlyea demanded. “This man who threatens to execute all of us?”

Tobia met her eyes. “I would gladly allow him to execute you Perlyea.” She stated flatly. “You are nothing more than a cancer among your people. You espouse bigotry and hate using your advanced education when what is needed is common sense and knowledge. You are far too much like others among my own people

who think that they are better than others simply because they are. Do not let your self-importance override your common sense woman. You will last all of half a second against even the most ill-trained among Martin's people. There are many species among the stars that you have no knowledge of Perlyea Kalrr, and they could swat the Tasmor down like children! They could eradicate your entire species in hours and yet you still cling to your idiotic sense of pride." Tobia looked back to Saydia.

"Martin's people could have been the ally you have sought for so many years against the Kintaur Saydia. Your actions this day have quite possibly destroyed that forever. What will happen now I cannot say; but I do know that if you make an enemy of this man, he will utterly grind you under his boots without remorse or hesitation." She stepped closer to her. "Do you remember the history that I told you of my people Saydia? It was the first night that Anthylea joined us in your bed. Do you remember what I told you of the Praetorians among my people?"

Saydia nodded her head quickly. "The ancient warriors of your people that could wield physical powers manifested from this Etheric realm that allows you to talk to each other with your minds."

Tobia nodded. "I told you then they were long extinct because that is what my people thought at the time." She said. "It turns out that we were wrong. Martin Leonidas is descended from the first and most powerful Praetorian to have ever lived among our people. In only a few short weeks I have seen what he and his sons are capable of."

"Sons?" Saydia gasped with wide eyes.

"Martin has seventeen children with his six Queens." Tobia told her. "His pureblooded sons with Aricia are just like him. They all command the same powers as the Praetorians of old among my people. He is not a man to be trifled or played with. His Lycavorian blood runs too strongly within his veins for him to allow that."

"What... what are you saying Tobia?" Saydia asked.

"No harm will come to you tonight." Tobia told them looking around. "They will bring food and drink for you shortly. You will remain locked in here for the duration of the night. Tomorrow, tomorrow however, I suggest you think about answering the questions that we are asking of you. He will get his people back Saydia. And make no mistake, if he has to obliterate everything that stands in his way he will. And that includes the Tasmor, who at this moment in time have shown they are not his friend, only another enemy. You do not wish to see what happens to the enemies of Martin Leonidas Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret. I saw what happens to his enemies only a short time ago and I will tell you he does not take prisoners or show mercy to those who wish to fight him."

"Tobia you..." Saydia began but was cut off as Tobia turned quickly and walked through the door without another word. The three *Durcunusaan* followed her out and the double doors were resealed immediately.

"...Can tell you how they came to have it Martin." Kasdan spoke from within the holotransmission. The floor of the corner of the Command Building was awash in the well-lit transmission and they could see Danny, Anuk, Nayeca and Kesyla sitting a short distance away with Julie and T'lolt.

Martin, Helen, Wayonn, Aricia and For'mya were in the ADHOC Command Building, five *Durcunusaan* occupying the various consoles in the building around the large room. Three more were posted outside each of the building's two entrances. Martin had decided against sending Wayonn to Honelze for he felt he could be of more use out here with him now that Murano was gone.

"Let it rip Kasdan." Martin spoke as he sat back in the chair. Martin Leonidas truly liked Kasdan for many reasons everyone knew, chief among them was that the man was nearly as smart as Anja in his eyes. The second and most reflective reason was because he had no pretense of arrogance within his body and this is what endeared him most to Martin Helen and his Queens knew.

Kasdan dropped a piece of equipment onto the ground in front of him so that they could all see it and Martin leaned forward quickly as he saw it. "This is a Pralor engineered Y19 Portable Quantum Power Generator. We build these on Artaaya Martin. The outskirts of this city are littered with the wreckage of ships your people must have shot down as they were trying to land."

"Svorag troop ships?" Martin asked.

Kasdan nodded his head. "We have already determined that they have taken our ships and people in the past. Anja and Dueva discovered this very thing. Given the amount of wreckage in the area, this is undoubtedly where the Tasmor found the Portable Memory and Data Storage unit. Or areas similar to this one near another city perhaps."

"They had people searching the wreckage even as they were helping our people to escape?" Wayonn spoke now looking at Kasdan.

Kasdan nodded his head. "Yes. At least several teams of people if I had to guess. And they were looking for technology. Any type of technology that they could use."

Martin looked at Danny in the transmission. "*Fervon*?"

"Kasdan, T'lolt and Pablo have been through every piece of wreckage in our immediate area." Danny spoke now. "Anything of use has already been stripped bare Marty. There are other fields of wreckage on the outskirts but I shut them down when it started to get dark."

"Whatever ground weapons our people were using appeared to be very effective in reducing the transport ships to rubble Martin." Kesyla spoke up now, everyone noticing her choice of words. "Given what we know already, if they came in without shields and with only a rudimentary knowledge of how to operate the ships after being altered by the Svorag, then it does make some sense."

"Nalmos said there were hundreds and hundreds of ships." Helen said.

Kasdan nodded his head. "Kesyla is right however. Most of the ships were probably not even designed to enter the atmosphere. I have seen pieces of escape pods forged together with crude engines and operating controls among the wreckage here. It appears they used whatever they could in order to put as many Svorag on the ground as possible."

"Kasdan and Kesyla say they probably found a lot more equipment that they took from the battlefield *fervon*. The vast majority of it is probably useless, but small items like the storage unit would have been salvageable." Danny said.

Kasdan nodded. "I have never met the Tasmor before now Martin, but I have read the contact reports. As arrogant as they appear to be, they are very intelligent and quite capable. If they had found technology that they could use and implement into their ships and culture they would have done so by now."

"Avi has done a full sensor sweep of their ships Martin." For'mya spoke now looking at Martin. "He has detected no Pralor based tech in use on their ships in the system."

"This supports Kasdan's theory that they haven't been able to figure out how to work whatever they did find Marty." Danny spoke. "Though we don't know if they have something that we haven't seen, or how close they might be to building something."

"That does not mean that they won't." Kesyla echoed Danny quickly. "They are a very resourceful people Martin and the most technologically advanced species in this quadrant after the Pralors. Given enough time they would be able to devise how a piece of equipment works and then implement something that they can use."

"Just like we did with CS41." Martin said softly nodding his head. "Well... I can't fault them for trying to better themselves, but just as we learned, it's better to figure it out for ourselves and then build things based on what we have discovered."

"Yes." Helen said. "But we had Avi and precedent had already been established by Shiria when she left the technology on Earth."

"Kesyla... you are Pralor." Wayonn spoke up unable to keep the smile from his face now.

Kesyla shook her head with a similar smile of pride and confidence. "Not any longer." She told him. "And I embrace that Wayonn with all that I am, just as you have done."

Danny grinned from ear to ear. "Am I good or what?" He quipped.

All of them heard Julie speak now from beside T'lolt. "Please... give me a moment while I vomit."

This caused everyone to chuckle softly.

"Elder Valael?" Martin spoke looking up slightly as if talking to the air.

"I have been able to decipher almost the entire set of logs from the Kintaur ship Martin Leonidas. They go back four months." His voice entered the conversation now from the *ARC ROYAL* above them in orbit and then the holotransmission shifted slightly and his image joined the others on the floor. "I am now very certain that the Kintaur were led here in order to capture Namiri and Emylea Daret. That is stated clearly in several of

the logs. Along with the Sovereign Regent's daughters, they were to take as many Tasmor prisoner as they could hold within their cells on the cruiser."

Martin turned his head as the door opened and he saw Anja and Tobia come in together. He waited for a few moments while they moved to the table and sat down. For'mya leaned over and nuzzled Anja's cheek and ear affectionately and Anja smiled and returned the loving nuzzle before they kissed each other softly. Aricia pulsed both of them with her female aura and they instantly returned that aura of love and warmth to her.

"What else?" Martin asked.

"I cannot yet determine the origin of the original message the Kintaur received. Whoever sent it hid their identity and position very well." Valael continued calmly. "I can tell you that the message is less than a week old however, and whoever sent it used Pralor Communication Protocols."

"Which means what exactly?" Martin asked.

"That they have at least a rudimentary knowledge of Pralor COM signals and how to manipulate them." Tobia answered now. "Which most likely means one of two things. That one of the objects they discovered was an intact Pralor COM relay and they already knew how to use it from watching or spying on me when I was among them. It would allow them to hide their transmitting origin even with a very basic knowledge of communications channels."

"That's just *nubous* wonderful." Martin exclaimed out loud as he sat back. "So not only did these Kintaur douche bags know Namiri and Emylea were going to be here..." Martin said. "... They had orders to take them prisoner along with our people. Boy, someone out there really doesn't like this Saydia Daret too much."

"Given their level arrogance and attitude I do not find that surprising in the least." Aricia chimed in now.

"It's Perlyea." Tobia said softly.

"Tobia I know you spent time with these people..." Wayonn spoke now. "But you can't expect us to believe..."

"She's right." Martin spoke up now.

Wayonn and Helen were among the few who knew of the senses that Martin commanded and they both looked at him. "Martin... what did you sense?" Helen asked.

"When Saydia Daret admitted that she is the one who gave the order to steal the tech from the *STRIKER*, I detected a huge adrenalin dump from her." Martin said. "She was lying. She had no idea that was going to happen, though she did know that this Anthylea Tomar had Lycavorian blood within her." Martin turned to Anja now. "What did you find Red?"

"She wouldn't let me examine her willingly so I had to sedate her." Anja answered. "She definitely has Lycavorian gene strands in her body, and lots of them. Obviously they are not natural so they were introduced into her body somehow. If I had to guess, I would say by some sort of gene therapy treatment."

"But why?" Tobia asked.

"For the same reasons we used Lycavorians as a seed species Tobia." Valael spoke once more. "Forgive me for using the term Martin."

"No worries from me Elder Valael. Just make sure to use a different term when around my son or our daughter Eliani. Neither of them is too happy about that." Martin told him. "Even less so considering what happened when we first met."

"I take it your daughter does not agree with what we did either?" Valael asked from the *ARC ROYAL*.

Anja snorted softly. "Eli has been around her brother since she was old enough to crawl and spit up." She said evenly. "She is closest to him in age and nearly as reckless. She has also taken on more of his mentality when concerning things having to do with our history and what we know the Pralors did. No... she does not agree with how things were done Elder Valael."

"You will find many of our younger generations have embraced the essence of what it means to be Spartan and Lycavorian much more completely Elder Valael." Helen spoke now looking at him in the transmission. "I dare say perhaps even more than the older generations of our people. We at least may understand why it was done, we don't agree with it, but we understand."

"There are far more among our people who do not agree with it either Helen." Valael said.

Helen nodded. "I know. And that is why the younger generations of our two peoples will embrace each other much more quickly than the older ones." She answered.

“Your longevity; your endurance and strength...” Tobia spoke now. “...And your healing abilities.”

Anja nodded her head. “It makes sense really. Lycavorian genetic codes are very easy to manipulate and they adapt almost instantly to changes. It’s why the Pralors did what they did to the Rothryn. They simply removed the genetic strand that allows us to shift our forms. Once Andro bit Sehri, he returned this strand to her body and now she can shift. It works the same on those they turn. When this big lug bit me and changed me, it altered my genetic coding.”

Martin grinned at her. “You were tasty too.” He stated.

“Pervert!” Anja hissed at him while everyone couldn’t help but laugh softly. “Anyway... the average lifespan for a Hadarian is roughly ten thousand years. Give or take a few centuries.” Anja told them as she continued. “When Martin bit me... his Lycavorian DNA overrode that part of my Hadarian DNA and now I will outlive normal, unchanged Hadarians by a factor of a hundred. I will be alive a hundred thousand years from now and...” Anja’s jade green eyes grew wider. “Did I just say that?” She gasped. “*Sibfla!*”

Even Tobia joined in on the laughter around the table this time and For’mya leaned into Anja. “Think of the centuries of pleasure we will have *Melyanna*.” She said.

Anja glanced at Martin and saw him waggle his eyebrows at her. “Well... I guess that is ok.” She said with a loving smile.

“Ah... hello!” Danny’s voice echoed in the room. “Can we get back to what we were talking about please?”

“Be quiet chrome dome!” Anja hissed playfully. She leaned forward as everyone laughed again.

“Anthylea is unique. If what I found when I examined her is accurate, and I am always accurate, then she has some of our abilities, at least on a much smaller scale.” Anja looked at Tobia. “What is the average lifespan of a Tasmor?”

Tobia blinked at the question. “I was never allowed to be present for an examination by Tasmor doctors but I have to say at least several hundred years minimum. Saydia herself is just under two hundred years old and she is still considered young among the Tasmor. She told me of a few that lived to be well over six hundred years old, but based on what I heard in casual conversation I can’t imagine their lifespan is more than a thousand years, if that.”

Anja nodded. “Well Anthylea will live far longer than that.” Anja said. “Not as long as one of us but if I had to guess, probably twenty thousand years at least. Perhaps more.” She looked at Martin. “And she is also like Lynwe and Akor’dris.”

Martin met her gaze but didn’t blink. “Is that because of this gene therapy?” He asked.

Anja shook her head quickly. “No, and unlike Lynwe, Akor’dris and the other Drow altered by the Coven, this is a very natural occurrence Lover.” She turned to look at Tobia. “How many of the Tasmor are like this?”

Tobia’s cheeks turned a bright red at the question as she blushed and she looked down at the table, her long, dark hair hiding her face. Anja reached out and took her hand.

“This is not something that is uncommon to us Tobia. We know of it and have many within the Union who are like this. They were altered by insidious High Coven experiments but they are the same.”

Tobia nodded her head slowly and looked up after taking a deep breath. “Perhaps one third of the female Tasmor population is like this.” She answered. “Most of those like Anthylea are the Matriarchs if you will; the most wealthy and influential within Tasmor society. It is part of the reason why men are considered a lower class but are not mistreated or oppressed in any way.”

“Come again?” Martin asked.

Anja looked at him. “Only the Tasmor males are fertile Lover. And from what I can determine, they are genetically inferior to the Tasmor females in many ways and that is why their female population is far more than the males. I can’t know for certain unless I examine one of their males and an unaltered Tasmor female and compare the results but I’m pretty sure.”

Tobia nodded her head in agreement. “Female genes are dominant among the Tasmor. There are so few men that there are not really marriages as our people know them Martin. Male and female couplings are usually planned and they generally result in a female baby. The ratio is like nine out of ten. Males are considered a lower level of society but they are still protected after a fashion. Most are not allowed to serve in the military or any position that puts them at risk.”

“This is done in order to protect the future of the species as a whole.” Helen said softly.

Tobia nodded her head. “Yes. It has been like this since their birth as a species according to Saydia.”

Anja nodded her head and sat back in her chair. “This leads me to my next discovery.” She said. “I compared Anthylea’s DNA to the Kintaur pukes that we wasted during the fight here. She has nineteen different DNA strands that match perfectly with the Kintaur.”

Tobia looked at her astonished. “You are joking!” She gasped.

Anja shook her head. “Nope.”

“Lady Anja... are you saying that the Tasmor and the Kintaur are the same species?” Valael’s voice asked.

“Not exactly Elder Valael... no” Anja said. “At one point along the evolutionary scale they may have been, but if what Duewa and I saw is accurate, the Tasmor evolved normally and the Kintaur didn’t, which may account in some part for their hatred of each other.”

Martin looked at Tobia. “Does Saydia know this?” He asked.

Tobia met his eyes and shook her head. “I do not know. She told me she did not know much of the history of the Kintaur. Only that they had been at war for centuries before she was ever born.”

“Nice.” Martin moving around the edges of the table. “I come to get my people and I stick my size elven boot into the middle of conflict between the same species that’s been going on for how many millennia?” He muttered as he moved around the table. “Why does this shit always happen to me? Man... you couldn’t make this stuff up! Nothing is ever easy.”

“The only easy day was yesterday *fervon*.” Danny spoke up from the holotransmission, reciting one of the age old SEAL phrases from their days back in The Teams.

“Hooyah!” Anja muttered.

Martin shook his head as his mind raced with scenarios. “Red... she is back with the others right?” He asked.

Tobia nodded her head. “I went with them while Anja studied the results of her exam. Saydia and Anthylea are... I guess the best definition of a term to use is a couple. They deeply love one another and I wanted to insure Saydia knew she was alright.”

“You have a history with them?” Martin asked.

Tobia didn’t blush this time and she nodded her head. “It was brief but very pleasant. At least until I realized that I could never love anyone but Murano. The three of us parted as very good friends. It is why I greeted Anthylea as I did when they first arrived.”

“I wondered about that.” Aricia spoke now.

Martin nodded his head. “Well it’s good you feel that way... because he loves you too.” He told her, watching her eyes grow wide in shock. “What about the one I shot?” Martin asked Anja before Tobia could ask him to elaborate on his words.

Anja looked at him and her beautiful eyes narrowed. “The *upae* will live.” She spat. “Ungrateful bitch is what she is! She’s lucky I didn’t send her into the long goodbye by sticking her with a poison or something.”

Tobia shook her head clear of the thoughts Martin’s words had triggered within her. “Martin you... would you have shot Namiri?”

Martin met her eyes. “Tobia I am many things, but I am not a monster.” He said calmly answering her question.

“Thanks the gods.” Tobia muttered.

“I would have offed that *upae* Perlyea in a New York minute... or whatever the hell her *nubous* name is.” Martin continued which caused both Danny and Julie to erupt into laughter in the transmission.

Tobia looked around the table quickly and then at Anja. “What is this New York?” She asked.

Anja smiled. “It was a city on Earth many hundreds of years ago.” She replied. “Martin just used a slang that means he would have killed Perlyea without thinking. This is how most people who lived in New York did things.”

Danny shook his head as he continued to laugh softly. “Same old Skipper... you’ll never change *fervon*.” He said aloud.

“Damn straight!” Julie added.

“We’ll let them sleep on things.” Martin spoke once more. “I got a sneaky feeling that this Perlyea character is a lot more than she wants us to believe. Or she knows a lot more than she is letting on.”

“I would have to agree.” Valael spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “*Fervon*... lock it down for the night on your end. Torma and Isheeni are certain that the Kintaur who survived our encounter are out of the area around you but post security just in case. Miath and Aurith will return in about an hour and I’ll update you but Torma is probably right on. They’ll find them tomorrow.”

Danny nodded his head. “That’s a done deal. You want us to enter the city tomorrow?”

Martin shook his head. “No... do a sweep of the area you didn’t cover today and recover any and all tech that Kasdan and Kesyla thinks might still be useable in any way. I’ll send out other teams in the morning to coordinate with you and then you can enter the city proper.”

“What do we do with the equipment we find Martin?” Kesyla asked.

“Package it up so Elder Valael can return it to Artaaya and have it examined.” Martin said. “It might give us a better idea of the Svorag and their capabilities. I’ll let Delnash know so he can keep it under wraps. Whatever the Tasmor already got is all they are going to get.”

“I’ll buzz you in the morning.” Danny spoke.

Martin nodded. “Watch your six *fervon*.”

“I always do.” Dan said just before he terminated the transmission.

Martin looked at the others around the table. “Elder Valael... continue with your work on those Kintaur logs. See if you can figure out where the origin message came from and who sent it.”

“I will try.” Valael said. “I thought you would want to keep whatever you find on the surface Martin.”

Martin shook his head. “No offense Elder Valael, but at this moment in time, I trust you, Delnash, Tobia and Kasdan. Anything else having to do with Pralors will probably try and kill me thanks to the fat fuck Lorendo.”

Valael could be heard chuckling as the others in the room smiled at Martin’s comment. “Very well.” He said.

Martin looked at Anja. “Tina is ok Red?” He asked.

Anja nodded. “She’ll be fine by tomorrow.” Anja answered. “Though I wouldn’t ask her to fly any Tasmor anywhere, she might kick them out of her ship at thirty thousand feet and see if they can fly.”

Martin grinned. “Noted.” He said.

“What are we going to do Martin?” Helen asked.

“Well... I’m going to curl up with three lovely ladies and get some shuteye. Maybe some sleep will get rid of this urge I have to kick someone’s ass.” He said. “In the morning, Tobia and I are going to have a long talk with Sovereign Regent Daret, after I apologize to Namiri and Emylea.”

Helen nodded her head with a small smile. Martin liked Namiri she knew. The young woman had spunk and was quite fearless. “Martin since they would appear to be more inclined to react better to females, having Aricia, Anja and For’mya get the information we want might work better.” She said.

Martin looked at his Queens and saw all of them nod their heads. “Ok... I’ll go along with that.” He answered.

“Then what will happen Martin?” Tobia asked.

Martin met her eyes. “I want my people back Tobia.” He told her. “If we can’t figure out a way to do that peacefully, then I will take them back! Especially after we have discovered the Tasmor are experimenting on them.”

“I did not... I was not aware of this Martin.” Tobia said.

Martin shook his head. “I never thought you were Tobia.” He told her and looked at Anja. “Red... how long?”

Anja shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. “I can’t be exactly sure without a more detailed examination of Anthylea and other Tasmor like her Lover, but I’d say within the last two years at least. The changes within Anthylea are nearly complete as it stands now.”

Tobia looked at her. “Complete? What do you mean Anja?”

“When someone is turned by a Lycavorian it takes anywhere from eighteen months to two full years for the changes to be fully complete at the molecular and cellular level.” Anja answered her. “The genetic changes within Anthylea, regardless of how they came to be, are nearly complete now.”

“And it has been three years since the Tasmor began helping our people.” Wayonn spoke.

Anja nodded her head. “Yep.” She looked at Martin. “One more thing Lover; when the changes are complete, Anthylea and anyone like her who underwent these treatments, they will be fertile and able to produce children.”

Martin’s eyes grew a little wider. “Really?” He said softly. “Now that would explain a thing or two.”

“Yes it would.” Helen echoed his words. “Yes it would.”

“Do they know that?” Martin asked.

Anja shook her head. “Doubtful... they don’t have technology capable of discovering that and they don’t have Duewa and I.” She answered with a smile. “It wouldn’t show up in any exam that I know of.”

“Anja you are certain of this?” Tobia asked.

Anja nodded her head. “Oh yes.” She replied. “It goes back to the Lycavorian genes being so resilient. Trust me, if it wasn’t for our Mindvoice abilities, all of us would be walking around pregnant all of the time. He isn’t helpful at all if you get my drift.” Anja said jerking her thumb towards Martin.

“And whose fault is that?” Martin snapped.

“Yours!” Anja, Aricia and For'mya all replied at the exact same instant.

“...Has that sleaze ball Lorendo been doing?” Martin asked the image of Delnash in the transmission cone aboard his *STRIKER*. He had been awake for an hour now and held the mug of coffee in his hand as he sat in Tina’s Engineering Station seat. His first mission was to check in with Delnash and fill him in on what they had discovered so far. He hadn’t wanted to extract himself from the arms, legs and scents of his mates but he knew he had a lot of work to do.

Aricia, Anja and For'mya were still curled up together in the smallish sleeping quarters of the *STRIKER DT*, Endith and Tina now onboard the *ARC ROYAL* with Ben at Anja’s orders. While the sleeping quarters had been built with the seven of them together in mind, it still was very small compared to what they were used to. Torma, Isheeni, Miath and Aurith had chosen to sleep beside the ramp of the ship and no one in their right mind would attempt to slip past four dragons to board the *STRIKER*.

Delnash smiled from his office chair and he lifted the glass of juice in salute to him. “Your interview and the one with your wives have made him change his tactics because he was caught in several lies. I commend you Martin.”

Martin grinned. “Happy to help screw that bastard over any way I can.”

“Election preparations are proceeding well and...” Delnash began but Martin leaned forward in his chair.

“Chief Elder... don’t hold anything back from me.” Martin spoke calmly. “Not after all we have been through in such a short time just to get here.”

Delnash looked up at met his gaze in the image. “That is not something I will do Martin.” He answered. “Not now.”

“What is it?” Martin asked him.

“I am fearful of what will happen.” Delnash spoke.

“I don’t follow.”

Delnash rose to his feet in his office and the image followed him as he moved to stand in front of the massive balcony window that allowed a stunning view of the city below him. “All of the projections Two Seven and others have done have me winning this election by a landslide Martin.” He spoke turning to meet his gaze again. “Nothing Lorendo has done have altered the polls either way in weeks.”

“I never had much use for polls.” Martin spoke evenly. “My *Tenna* Deia loves the damn things though I think. She has people who poll the pollsters.”

“I am fearful of what he will do when he comes to realize that he will not win Martin.” Delnash spoke. “There is so much we don’t know about what he has done in the past or what he is doing even now. We have

not begun to scratch the surface of what sinister ideas he has been working on. What if a victory by me causes him to react in a way that we can't predict?"

"I think we have always known that would be the case sir." Martin told him. "You may have done some things that your people did not like or agree with Chief Elder, but according to Murano this never stopped your people from supporting you."

"I took your advice in regards to Two Seven." Delnash said. "I removed all of the blocks to his neural net. He is certain about the people he has already vetted, but there are so many that even he cannot vet them all before the election."

"Then don't try." Martin said. "Have him begin to formulate plans to counter everything he thinks Lorendo could do. Begin to prepare."

"What if we miss something?" Delnash asked.

"Then we roll with the punches and react as best we are able." Martin said. "Lorendo is a scum bucket, but he isn't stupid sir. Whatever he does, you can be assured he will always make sure his fat ass is safe and sound. That is how we beat him."

Delnash looked at Martin in the transmission. "Take away his escapes." He said.

Martin nodded. "Or watch every possible way he could leave Artaaya. When he makes his move then we can act to squash him."

"Do you think he may be involved in some way with the Tasmor and what they attempted with your ship?" Delnash asked.

"It's too early to say right now." Martin answered. By Martin's order Delnash was now included in the daily reports that went out and he had read that report this very morning before Martin had contacted him.

"They were very persistent about obtaining our technology." Delnash said. "Some would say to the point of hostility. It's one of the reasons I allowed Tobia to be our conduit to them. To try and maintain and openness so as not to have this happen. I never suspected that they would strip Svorag ships and equipment while they were relocating your people."

"Well... they certainly have no qualms about how they obtain their tech." Martin said. "Which kind of makes me believe that they need it for some reason."

"They are already the most advanced species in that region of space." Delnash said. He returned to his chair. "Could they want it to come after us?"

Martin shook his head quickly. "No." He answered. "Their society and culture may not be something I would want to live in but they don't strike me as conquerors Chief Elder. I think it has to do with these Kintaur assholes. We don't know for sure and I don't want to guess without more information."

Delnash nodded his head. "I will have some of my people investigate what we have on them in our archives." He said.

"Anything would be useful at this point." Martin said.

"Martin... I need to ask you about your brother, his wives and Kesyla." Delnash began looking at him.

"What do you want to know?" Martin asked.

"Kesyla is our... by now I'm sure you know that Mari is not our child. That she is Murano and Tobia's child?" Delnash said.

"I do." Martin answered.

"Kesyla is my only daughter Martin. She has always been intuitive and adventurous." Delnash said. "Oddly I am not concerned that Daniel turned her. I find myself welcoming that to be honest. But I worry for..."

"Sir... Danny and I have been together since we were ten months old." Martin said. "He is the only brother I have ever known. The only true brother I will ever have. We have spilled the same blood in the same mud on more occasions than I care to remember. He asked me before he claimed Kesyla. He asked me if he was doing the right thing. I can tell you two things sir." Martin sat forward in his chair. "Daniel Simpson will love Kesyla just as breathless as he loves Anuk and Nayeca. Anuk and Nayeca will love her just as breathless as they love Danny. Anuk and Nayeca wanted this just as much as Danny did sir; just as much as Kesyla did. It was meant to be."

Delnash nodded his head slowly and Martin could see him relax slightly. "And what is the second thing?" He asked.

“As he lives and breathes sir, my brother would gladly endure all the pain in the galaxy if it meant that his wives and mates were safe from harm.” Martin said. “That now includes Kesyla. Did she tell you she was happy?”

Delnash nodded instantly. “Twenty-two times in the message she sent to me.” He replied with a small smile. “What I see on her face and hear in her voice is something I have never experienced and it makes her mother and I very happy.”

“Danny may act like a nut job Delnash... but he is anything but.” Martin said. “You’ll see this when you get to know him sir.”

“I can’t leave right now, too much is going on here, but my wife would like to travel to your location to see her.” Delnash said. “If that is alright?”

“That is a question you never have to ask sir.” Martin told him.

Delnash nodded his head and returned to his desk once more. “There is something else I need to tell you Martin.” He said.

Martin became more attentive as the tone of Delnash’s voice altered slightly. “You make it seem like I am not going to like this.” He said.

Delnash met his eyes. “Actually... quite the opposite.” He told him. “I had Two Seven run some searches when we first returned to Artaaya. He discovered something that no one ever imagined.”

Martin tilted his head in puzzlement. “Ok. I’m listening.”

“I hesitated at first not knowing how you would react.” Delnash said. “I decided I had no right to keep this information from you.”

“Keep what information from me?” Martin asked.

“Martin... Sumar’s mother and sister are still alive.” Delnash blurted out suddenly. “Your great, great grandmother and aunt are still very much alive.” Delnash saw Martin’s eyes widen at this information and he suddenly came to his feet.

“Alive?” He gasped loudly. “How? Where?”

“Martin they are... they are living on Honelze.” Delnash spoke.

HONELZE MAIN PRALOR COLONY FORTUNE

The twenty-two thousand meter mountain reached well into the clouds above the main colony as it did every day. The rising sun beat down across the snow covered peak and cast great swaths of near golden light across the valley and the colony far below.

Fortune.

Named because of the generous amounts of minerals and ores that kept the Pralor people busy and safe. Most of the ores were used in some way in building new ships and defenses to protect their people, while the minerals were a mainstay of the medical care provided by the many hospitals on the three planets the Pralor people now called home.

The largest of the colonies on the planet by far at nearly two and a half million men, women and children. Situated right at the base of the massive mountain and surrounded by the six meter high, two meter thick wall of steel and rock. While they were the only humanoid life on the planet, the indigenous animal life was very abundant, large and could sometimes be very dangerous. They had learned over the years here how to avoid confrontations with the animal life and there had not been a serious attack in over a century. There were half a dozen smaller settlements within a hundred kilometers of Fortune, mainly the work and mining camps, but all of them called Fortune their home. Most had grown up here and while they were all Pralor, this was their home and not Artaaya. It was a much slower pace on Honelze and had been ever since its inception. Though Fortune was large as colonies go, everyone seemed to know everyone. They had schools and hospitals and shopping districts. All of the luxuries they could provide for themselves but still keep a much more level and calm way of life away from the bluster of Artaaya and the capital. The Governor of Fortune had been re-elected

to another fifty year term by the vote of the people just two years ago. He had been at the head of this colony since they had laid the groundwork and foundation nearly ten thousand years ago. He was extremely well liked for his sometimes gruff, yet friendly personality and he held the interests of the men and women of Fortune before all others. His own wife and seven children lived within the colony walls and all but two of his children had been born in Fortune.

The Merchant Center occupied the middle of Fortune, hence its name. This is where most of the stores and eating establishments resided. Outdoor cafes that were almost always filled because of the incredible temperate climate of Honelze. Nine months out of the year the mean temperature hovered in the low eighties with almost no humidity in the air. For the other three months of the year, the temperature remained in the sixties, but eighty percent of the days were filled by sun and warm ocean breezes that swept in from the western seas only four kilometers to the northwest.

It was in the Merchant Center where their restaurant was.

It was the largest of the eating establishments in Fortune, yet the combination of modern and historic décor insured that its tables were always full. Not to mention that it offered the widest and most delicious pieces of Pralor cuisine as well as countless other types of food and all of it was home cooked. The staff was large, it had to be with the establishment's size and reputation, but they were very polite and always with a smile. Most of it was due to the two women who ran the restaurant. A mother and daughter team that had become among the most popular and loved of Fortune's residents. And even though the vast majority of men and women on Honelze were miners and researchers, no one got out of line in Jezima and Meral's place. It was almost as if there was an unwritten law that all disputes and difference were left at the door when they entered here.

Not one person had violated that unwritten rule in all the years they had been here.

Jezima and Meral had come to Honelze with the first settlers and had been a mainstay ever since. Jezima did the vast majority of the cooking with three other chefs that she had personally trained, while her daughter Meral handled pretty much everything else. To see them together you would think they were the best of friends as well as mother and daughter and this in fact would have been very correct. Both of them always had kind words for everyone, and they had helped several other establishments get started in Fortune with financial backing and assistance. Most of the merchants in Fortune, no matter their field of business, came for advice from Jezima. She was among the oldest Pralors on Honelze at nearly eighty-five thousand years old, and still as spry and active as a woman half her age. Meral herself was nearing forty-two thousand years old and since she was still single and exceptionally beautiful, many of the men on Honelze were vying for her attentions, though she usually paid them no mind. Her interests laid with a man she had seen only on the VID News reports at different times. He was the head of the Chief Elder's Security Force and his eyes had swept her off her feet the first time she had seen them. She was working up the nerve to travel to Artaaya and meet him at an event in three months where he was going to be one of the Speakers.

Fortune was large yes, but there wasn't much that happened that did not make its way around the colony very quickly. The talk of strange new visitors to Honelze had been the topic of conversation for two days now. Meral knew that there were now over two dozen ships in orbit, none of which were Pralor, but neither she nor her mother paid any mind to the news. As far as they both were concerned, their people needed allies and friends more than they needed to remain hidden. Though they had half a dozen large monitors within their restaurant tuned to the different News channels across Pralor territory, neither Jezima nor Meral ever watched them.

"Meral?" The male voice reached out to her from the side and she turned her head quickly, looking up from the data pad she was typing on. Her long black hair and deep, dark brown eyes were very evident and gave her an exotic look not often seen in Pralor women since many of them were fair skinned.

Meral's face broke into a wide smile and she set the data pad on the counter she was sitting at. "Roneh!" She exclaimed as she rose to her feet and embraced the man. "This is a surprise!" She continued as she held him at arm's length. "What brings the Governor's most trusted aide here? It's been some time hasn't it?"

The man nodded his head with an embarrassed smile. "Almost a year." He answered. "Tending to twin newborns can be quite taxing."

Meral laughed. "I bet." She said. "How are Oceera and the girls doing?"

"Growing faster than we can keep up really." He answered.

"Tell me... what can we do for you?" Meral asked him.

“Governor Menep wanted me to arrange for a large gathering tonight for our guests. A dinner to welcome them.” Roneh answered.

Meral blinked several times. “Guests?” She asked. “What guests?”

Roneh looked shocked. “Haven’t you been watching the News Channels Meral?” He asked. “It has been all over them for over a day now. Everyone is talking about them.”

“Talking about who?” The new voice asked and they both turned to see the older woman step from beyond the counter wiping her hand on the towel at her waist.

“Jezima.” Roneh spoke warmly and embraced the older woman tightly.

Jezima hugged him tightly back and lifted her hands to his face. “How are Oceera and the twins?” She asked.

Roneh nodded with a smile. “All of them are very well.” He said.

“Good. Good. I will send over some of them stuffed biscuits and green leafs that she likes so much.” Jezima told him. “It has been some time since we have seen you here. What brings you today?”

“As I was telling Meral.” Roneh spoke. “The Governor wanted me to arrange for a larger dinner tonight with our guests. A welcoming dinner I suppose.”

“What guests?” Jezima asked him.

Roneh rolled his eyes. “You are almost as bad as your daughter Lady Jezima. Don’t you ever watch the news?”

“What for?” Jezima exclaimed. “To listen to more rants from the stupid, fat man who is trying to unseat the Chief Elder?” Jezima hissed. “Bah... who needs news like that?”

Roneh shook his head. “No... not about Elder Lorendo.” He said. “About the nearly three dozen ships now in orbit filled with Lycavorians.”

Meral’s eyes perked up. “Lycavorians?” She asked. “You mean... the same Lycavorians that we used in the Seed Missions?”

Roneh nodded his head. “Not from the exact Seed Missions but from the same species.”

“Are we back to doing such things again?” Jezima declared. “It was wrong then and it is wrong now!”

Roneh shook his head quickly. “No Lady Jezima.” He replied. “These Lycavorians came out here in search of us. You truly need to watch the news more to remain up to date.” He reached behind her and tapped the control panel on the counter, activating the large monitor above their heads. “This is one of the interviews that were done with their King and his Queens only days ago.”

“Queens?” Jezima spoke up.

“Watch Lady Jezima.” He told her as the screen shifted to the image of six stunningly beautiful women all seated on a couch together and very intimately leaning into one another. All of them had such beautiful eyes and each of them looked radiant in their own unique way. Three of them had incredible colored eyes, one of a breathtaking azure blue, one with dazzling jade green eyes and another with riveting emerald green eyes.

“Mother... look... look at those two!” Meral exclaimed. “They have pointed ears.”

Roneh nodded his head. “They are elves.” He stated. “Listen.”

“...You tell us how each of you met Martin?” The female voice asked.

Jezima looked at Roneh. “That is Tinra!” She exclaimed.

Roneh nodded. “She is the one who did both interviews.” He answered. “Watch.”

“That could take some time.” The red haired woman answered. **“How we all met Martin doesn’t really matter to us anymore. What is important to us is how we all came to be together. Aricia, For’mya, Bella, Dysea and I have been together with Martin for over twenty-five years now, but we weren’t fully complete until Cirith joined us.”** They watched as the blond elven female with emerald eyes leaned over and nuzzled the dark haired woman’s cheek and neck.

“How very true.” The female with the azure eyes spoke.

“And now she has some catching up to do.” The red haired woman spoke again causing the dark haired woman who the blond elf had nuzzled to look at her with wide eyes.

“Anja!” Cirith exclaimed.

They watched as all of them laughed together. Jezima stared at the monitor almost as if she saw something no one else did. She ignored what was being spoken of as she gazed intently at all of the women. Each of them was confident and powerful, that much was easy enough to see just from their actions and how they spoke. The red haired female was quite humorous in her words and whenever they laughed they always seemed to lean into one another with a great deal of affection. Jezima also noticed that they were always in physical contact with each other no matter how they were sitting on the odd looking couch. There was an enormous amount of fondness between them, almost as if they knew each other quite intimately in some fashion. Their natural beauty was exceptional and Jezima noticed that none of them wore a great deal of makeup, if any at all.

Jezima nodded her head in approval as she reached for the small stack of plates on the counter. "It is about time we began to reach out to others." She stated simply. "We are not all powerful."

"Jezima wait." Roneh spoke. "They have been showing the interviews in segments and after each one they show this Lycavorian King. He is the one everyone is talking about."

"I have work to do young Roneh." Jezima said with a warm smile. "I will let you and the Governor deal with the politicians. Just give me the details to what you would like tonight and I will make it happen."

"I am them and they are me." The deep voice from the monitor caused Jezima's head to snap back around.

It was a voice from beyond time and it shook Jezima right down to the very core of her being and flooded her with sensations of love and warmth. It was a voice she never expected to hear ever again. Her dark eyes grew wide and she dropped the stack of plates as Meral's gasp of shock echoed loudly and caused heads to turn towards them from all around the interior. As the plates shattered against the floor, Jezima's hands went to her face in equal shock and disbelief. The voice and now the face caused mother and daughter to reach for one another in disbelief.

"By the Ancients within the Rift of Time! Mother look...? The Ancients forgive me... look at him!" Meral rasped out the words with utter astonishment in her tone and demeanor.

Jezima was looking and her dark eyes were rapidly filling with tears that she had shed long ago in a different time and place.

Roneh looked at them not understanding why they were reacting in such a way. Both of them appeared as if they had just seen a ghost. "Lady Jezima? Meral? Is everything all right?" He asked quickly.

He looked up as the image changed to the face of Lady Tinra who all of them knew so well from the major News Channels. She was the owner and operator of the five largest News channels within Pralor space.

"This is the last of our segmented interviews with the six Queens of the Lycavorian Union." Tinra's image spoke. **"As all of you can see, each of them are not only breathtaking in their beauty, all of them are incredibly intelligent and well spoken. I had wanted to do another interview with them but their duties did not allow them to allocate more time. They graciously have promised me future interviews and I intend to hold them to their offer."** Tinra shifted items around in front of her. **"I came here TO Manne at the behest of Chief Elder Delnash not really knowing what to expect. We once used Lycavorians as a Seed Species and all of the information that we have in our archives is so very old and so very wrong. I should know, for I checked before I left Artaaya to come here to Manne. What I found upon arriving here is so far removed from what our history scrolls tell us of this species. A species we once thought beneath us in every way and look at them now. They have reached into the stars and have traveled all the way from the Alpha Quadrant to find us. Led by one man. A man every single person I have talked to since arriving here adores in every sense of the word. It should not surprise me but it does, for many different reasons. He is the direct descendant of the Chief Elder so many of our own people loved and adored so long ago. His name is Martin Leonidas and he is the Great, Great Grandson of our beloved Chief Elder Sumar.**

My segment with him tomorrow night will begin to detail the history of how that came to be, at least what Martin knows of that history. It is the main reason he has come all this way from the Alpha Quadrant. To discover his history.

Which also happens to be our history, for he carries within him the blood of our people as well as his own.

Roneh did not understand why Jezima collapsed to the floor wailing as tears splashed from her eyes and Meral held her tightly to her body, her own eyes flooded with tears and not allowing her to see anything. Roneh reached for the COM on his belt and began to call for medical support.

HONELZE FORTUNE MINING COMMAND AND CONTROL BUNKER

Menep had seen much in his life but nothing had prepared him for this.

The moment Chief Elder Delnash contacted him and told him what was going on Menep knew that his life was going to become so much more interesting. He loved his duties here and had long ago vowed to insure that the men, women and children of Fortune and the other six mining sites here on Honelze would be safe and secure under his care. He had no political ambitions outside of what he already had. He was a man dedicated to this colony and everyone on it. He was also a man who was somewhat of a historian, dating back to the very beginnings of the Pralors as a people. The last two days among these men and women had showed him that perhaps history as he knew it was not entirely accurate.

Lycavorians. Elves. Vampires.

Species that his people had long considered inferior now roamed the stars and led great empires. He had been aboard one of their ships in orbit and to say he was astonished would be an understatement. Their ships and personnel were just as advanced as his own people. The Lycavorians especially impressed him. They had once been used as a Seed species, and no one thought they would advance past the primal stage of evolution. That Pralor historians had been wrong did not surprise Menep. That they had been so excessively wrong is what stunned him.

He stood with three Queens of this Lycavorian Union. An empire that was now vast and diverse in every way. An empire that, while much smaller than the Pralor empire at its peak, was growing and expanding and doing so in a way that encouraged other species and cultures to join them. And they were doing it peacefully for the most part, which is what stunned Menep the most. All of the records and history on these Lycavorians indicated that they were warlike and violent and savage in their ways. What he had seen in these last two days had blown that preconceived notion right out of the quadrant. Of course all of their records were over forty thousand years old and obviously so very wrong to begin with. No doubt written by idiotic members of the Science Convention who thought the Pralor people were the pinnacle of evolution. Menep chuckled gently to himself and wondered if those fools were looking down now and seeing just how incredibly wrong they had been.

“Governor, is everything alright?” The warm female voice asked and Menep looked up into the stunning face and shining emerald green eyes of the elven Queen Dysea.

Menep of course knew now who the Lycavorian King was, Delnash had hinted at it and these three stunning women had confirmed it for him within hours of being with them. He had been anxious and a little frightened when he had first boarded their massive ship, but these three women had quickly put him at ease with their calm and charming demeanor and the Etheric resonance that they all radiated. He could sense a much more powerful essence within each of them, swirling around them and embracing them, staggering in its power yet so very pure and focused. Menep knew that Delnash had been very correct he now knew.

So very correct indeed.

“Forgive me Lady Dysea. My thoughts wandered for a short time.” He spoke in an almost reverent tone of voice as he looked at her. He was speaking to one of the six wives to a Praetorian of their people; and not just any Praetorian, but the one who descended from the first and most powerful of them.

It was Isabella who smiled and looked at Dysea and Cirith before answering. "Governor we have asked you to not do that." She told him. "We are not all powerful beings and neither is Martin. He would be the first to tell you this."

"In much more colorful terms too." Cirith chimed in with a smile.

Dysea laughed and nodded her head. "Yes he would."

Menep looked at them and nodded. "I know, but to discover that the Praetorians are not dead. To know that they live on in the descendants of Sumar, the most powerful and revered of the Praetorians... it is awe-inspiring."

"You might change your tune when you hear Martin Leonidas cuss like a drunken sailor and throw a fit about something that has gone wrong." Isabella spoke.

Menep looked at them and moved closer to the Star Chart Table they were all standing around, his smile genuine and infectious. "It does not surprise me that our historians were so wrong about Lycavorians and so many other species. That they got it so utterly wrong is what strikes me so deeply. I always thought the Seed Missions were barbaric in a way, as many of our people now do, but to know that those stuffy fools who thought they knew everything could be so wrong... frankly it is hysterical."

Dysea, Isabella and Cirith all laughed with him now. He was quite unlike the Pralors they had first met on Onterom, for he did not have an arrogant bone in his body. He was like Elder Radra and Elder Valael and now Delnash himself as their eyes were opened and they began to realize that they were not all powerful.

Menep looked at them as they stood there side by side. "If I may ask... what is he like? The descendant of Sumar."

"You do realize that you are asking that question to three who love him beyond words." Dysea said. "Our answers would be bias in every way."

Menep smiled. "Those are the best kind." He told them.

"*Nauta Melme* is... he is far more intelligent than he lets others see." Dysea said. "He is passionate about what he believes. He strives only for the advancement of his people. And he positively hates being King."

Menep looked stunned by this. "You jest." He gasped.

Isabella shook her head. "No. Given the chance, Martin would scoop all of us up in his arms and disappear into the stars and leave it all behind. Of course, our son Androcles would not be very happy about that for it would leave him in charge. He hates titles almost as much as Martin does."

Dysea nodded her head. "Yes he does."

"I can sense his Etheric resonance within all of you." Menep spoke softly. "All of you are powerful alone, but your resonance echoes with him in the background and it is so pure and focused. He loves all of you without question or doubt, like the burning of the sun."

Cirith leaned forward slightly. "You can sense that?" She asked.

Menep nodded his head. "One of my rather odd quirks if you will." He told them. "I can detect the echo of someone's Etheric resonance within others. With the three of you, and your fellow Queens within you, I sense a devotion that surpasses anything I have ever felt. It is refreshing."

"Well... our devotion to him is equal in every way. As is our devotion to each other." Isabella said.

Cirith leaned into Dysea. "Yes it is."

Dysea looked at her with bright emerald eyes and they shared a soft kiss before Menep looked once more at the table before them.

"Forgive me for distracting us." He said. "We must continue."

"As Martin would say, distractions are not a bad thing unless they addle your brain and leave you unable to function." Cirith spoke up.

"Yes... like he does to us on so many occasions beast that he is." Dysea echoed her words.

"They are extremely pleasant distractions Dysea." Isabella said.

Dysea's smile grew larger. "Oh yes. No doubt about that."

Isabella moved back beside her and leaned over to touch the table. She was about to speak when the door to the Control Center slid aside and General Koguth, Garan and Lexi entered speaking with two of Menep's security force.

"General... we were just going to call you and ask for your report." Isabella spoke.

Koguth'Juturi moved right up to the table without hesitation. Menep looked at him intently for he had never seen a Kavalian before two days ago. The dark brown fur that covered his body was well groomed and dotted with spots of gray but he was an extremely large man who looked to be in superb physical condition. He apparently held the complete trust of Dysea, Isabella and Cirith so Menep did not doubt him in the least.

Koguth leaned over and touched the screen bringing up the schematic of the entire wall that surrounded Fortune. "Lexi, Garan and I have just completed walking this entire wall my Queens." He stated. "It has been some time since I have gone up and down so many elevators and steps."

"Did it wear you out General?" Isabella asked with a smile.

Koguth chuckled. "Mani would say yes." He answered referring to his wife. They watched as he and Garan adjusted the schematic and then stood up fully. "I think will begin doing this every day. It is invigorating. And now that Iama is returned to us and we are free, Mani and I can think of having more children to stop the snide remarks from my sons."

"Have you spoken to Iama since she returned with Fedor?" Cirith asked.

Koguth nodded. "Right after she arrived on your son's ship." He stated. "Never have I seen her face so animated and happy. She was telling her mother of the size of this ship and the cooking she would have to do and all of the other things..." Koguth raised his hand. "I was forgotten after the first five minutes."

Dysea, Isabella and Cirith laughed. "Yes... we have been scolded by Martin for doing that very thing with our children as well. Hogging the COM time as he called it." Bella spoke.

Koguth smiled. "Seeing their happiness is all that matters." He said. "Now... on to our report." He set his data pad down and touched the screen. "I must commend you Governor Menep; the upkeep of your wall has been impeccable."

Menep nodded his head. "Considering the size of some of the predators on this planet, it seemed like a prudent thing. Though all credit goes to the engineers assigned to that task."

"Garan?" Koguth spoke.

Garan leaned over now. "Akor'dris and Bae'diraz are finishing the sweep of the exterior portions of the wall with Governor Menep's Security Team and a detachment of General Koguth's men. They should be just about done but their preliminary report was excellent as well."

Isabella nodded. "Good... the wall was our biggest concern." She stated.

"We should begin installing the heavy turrets every hundred meters." Garan spoke. "A mix of your projectile heavy weapon guns and Pralor heavy energy turrets. We can also add a few of the mortar turrets that General Koguth said the Puma Bane were going to use on Manne."

Dysea looked at Koguth. "Koguth?" She asked.

Koguth nodded his head. "Popal is sincere in his wishes Queen Dysea." He told her. "The path Pusintin was guiding them down led only to death and despair. He now knows that in order to truly live this is what we must do."

"And you trust him?" Cirith asked now.

Koguth nodded. "He and those engineers from Manne were never really a threat to us." He said. "To begin anew they are willing to do anything to show you they are true in their intent. This could be the start of what they need to build a future. We have already confirmed that Pian and those aligned with him have begun moving the families of those who defected from Pusintin out of Kavalian territory. This is much easier since they have no contact with Pusintin or his ships. We are not so limited. If their families and Prides are safe then these men will fight for the chance to see them again."

Dysea nodded. "You know them and we will not question you." She said confidently. "We will need every advantage."

"Indeed." Koguth spoke. "Captain Neloy has air patrols scouring every portion of the valley and beyond looking for approaches that the Svorag can use. So far all we are seeing is a direct frontal assault through this valley."

Garan nodded his head. "The mountains are too high for them to traverse. They would freeze before they found a way through the many passes."

"Mine them anyway." Isabella stated. "Airdrop as many mines as we can through all of these passes. We must make certain there is no other way they can come at us. When it is over we can deactivate and retrieve them."

“We will need escape tunnels. Exits for the civilians if things go bad.” Garan said.

Menep leaned forward now. “The old mining tunnels.” He spoke pointing to the area along the base of the massive mountain. “They were what we originally began with when we first settled here. All of them have been deactivated but they are still maintained. Five tunnels, each of which lead directly to a large clearing roughly between six and eight kilometers in all directions from the mountain itself.”

Dysea nodded. “*Nauta Melme* will want to see them but yes.” She said. “Have a squad from the 1st EB work with Menep’s engineers to insure they are stable and clear whatever they need to clear to allow for transports to set down and extract large amounts of civilians if it is needed.”

“We should lay traps all along this area of the valley.” Lexi spoke now as she moved closer to Dysea. “Dig defilades and shallow trenches and fill them with mines and traps.”

Koguth nodded his head. “The more we slow them down the better off we are.” He stated. “And if we can kill them by the hundreds it may make others pause.”

Dysea looked at Menep. “Governor, we have instructors with us that can train your people in basic tactics. We can arm them and...”

Menep met her eyes. “The vast majority of the citizens of Fortune are engineers and miners Lady Dysea. They are not fighters. I must ask... when do you plan to tell them that the Svorag are coming?”

“This is your colony Governor Menep.” Dysea told him. “When you tell them is entirely up to you. The more they know; I believe the better off we will be. You must know that even with every transport ship the Pralor fleet has, that we have with us now; we will never evacuate everyone here in time. We could remove possibly a third of them, but then the Svorag would be upon us, and we will have to fight.”

Menep nodded his head. “I understand.” He told her. “There are others coming to help us yes?”

Isabella nodded now. “Martin and all of our forces in this Quadrant now will be coming here as soon as they finish securing the safety of the Lycavorian people on Ventori. Some may even choose to help us to fight. Martin could inspire rocks to fight for him.”

“Our children are also coming.” Dysea told him. “They will arrive in a few weeks with hundreds of ships and perhaps another fifty thousand Spartans. Our son is also bringing his 1st Dragon Brigade and Elder Teniri has already begun shifting dragons here from Artaaya to assist.”

“With so many engineers among your people...” Cirith spoke as she leaned across the table. “Could we not establish safe haven within the colony itself, enough to fit every citizen? We have time Dysea. General Koguth? We could turn many of these large holding facilities into complete fortresses with reinforced steel and rock and then connected by underground tunnels so that we can reinforce each other.”

Isabella looked at her. “Like the barracks on Ukwav.” She exclaimed.

Cirith nodded her head. “Yes.”

Dysea looked at Garan. “Is this possible with the equipment we have here Garan?” She asked.

Garan was looking at the map of the colony now and he spun it in several different directions. He nodded his head slowly. “Yes.” He answered. “Yes it is.”

Dysea looked at Menep. “Governor?” She asked.

Menep nodded his head. “We have a plan.” He said softly. “Now that I know what we will do I can tell them tomorrow. Tonight I would like for all of us to have dinner together. I sent Roneh to the finest eating establishment that we have. There has been much talk among our people about all of you since you arrived. Speculation and questions. With your permission I would like to try and put that to rest.”

Dysea looked at Isabella and Cirith. “A good meal sounds very nice.” Cirith spoke.

Dysea turned back to him. “We would like that Governor.”

Menep smiled. “Excellent.” He said cheerfully. “Excellent. I will have Roneh make the arrangements and we can continue here with our plans.”

“This is what I propose...” Koguth began.

Alive.

They were alive. Words that Martin imagined he would hear.

Since Delnash had told him this, Martin had kept his Etheric shields locked down very tightly in order to not alarm anyone. He felt such joy within him at this news. Joy and anxiety for he did not know if they would accept him for who he was. The first person he had spoken to was Wayonn. He had known them and he would know what to do and what to say. Wayonn for his part was ecstatic and filled with disbelief at the news. He had boarded a ship to take him to Honelze only ten minutes ago with a message Martin had recorded for his ancestors. He hadn't really known what to say but he had tried at least.

Now he was standing on one of the high ridges near the ADHOC base with half a dozen *Durcunusaan* from his Spartan Attack Division encircling him at a respectful distance. All of them knew their King's mannerisms and habits. He was deep in thought and when he was like this, he preferred to be alone to ponder whatever was on his mind. Only General Simpson, Helen or one of their Queens would dare interrupt him when he was like this. They saw him turn to watch as two of their comrades led Namiri and Emylea up towards their King. Martin tried to adjust the new body armor since he was still getting used to it and then he watched as Namiri and Emylea approached cautiously. They were hesitant and he was the one who had given them reason to be. Namiri was the ground fighter and he saw her dark eyes move back and forth all around them as they stopped in front of him.

Martin looked at the two *Durcunusaan*. "That will be all." He said evenly.

The two men nodded their heads and turned without question and headed back down the ridge a respectful distance. They did not fear for their King for he could squash both of these females without as much as a deep breath.

"Thank you for coming." Martin told them.

"Did we have a choice?" Namiri asked but she kept her voice calm and neutral.

"You do not have to be afraid of me." Martin said.

Emylea looked at him and her pale blue eyes narrowed. "You held a weapon to my sister's head!" She spat at him. "You threatened to kill her!"

Namiri took her sister's hand quickly. "Emylea you..." She began to speak but Martin's words cut her off.

"And now I am apologizing for that." He said softly. "After what you both did for my people, it was wrong of me to do that."

Emylea and Namiri both looked at him with wide eyes shocked that he would admit such a thing. Namiri tilted her head to the side as she looked at him for a long moment. "You... you had no intention of harming me did you?" She asked finally seeing Emylea look at her with wide eyes.

"Namiri what are you..." Emylea began to say.

Martin looked at her as well for a long moment. He liked this young woman for she reminded him of Eliani. She had a fire inside her that she would let no one distinguish. He shook his head finally. "No." He told her finally. "I was angry at what had happened. Tina has been... she is someone who I have considered family for a very long time. Even before I took this job." He looked directly at Namiri. "No... I would not have hurt you Namiri Daret, any of you. Not after what you have done for my people."

"Our mother did not know what the Chief Counsel did King Leonidas." Emylea told him realizing very quickly that this man was speaking true words. "They argued about it when your people brought us to that building. She was livid."

Martin nodded his head. "Yes, I know."

"You... you know?" Emylea asked shocked once more.

"My people can detect the chemical released in a person's body when they lie." Martin told them.

"When someone lies your body secretes a unique chemical into your bloodstream to help you attempt to cover up that lie. The scent of that chemical is very pungent to us, and we can detect it in just about every species we have ever come across."

"You smelled this in our mother?" Namiri asked.

"I did... yes." Martin answered. "My sense of smell is more keen than most. It's very uncomfortable sometimes, but very handy in others." Martin looked at them and motioned at the ground as he sat down. Namiri and Emylea glanced at each other surprised but after a moment they both settled to the ground in front

of him. "I have four daughters very close to your age you know." He told them. "I do not want you to view me as a monster because, had I been your mother, I would have tried to do the same thing and I would have been just as angry as she was that someone had gone behind my back. I am more concerned for the experiments that have been done on my people by yours. I asked you both here to apologize yes, but I also think you are more even tempered."

"We will not go against our mother!" Namiri stated quickly. "We..."

Martin held up his hand. "I'm not asking you to go against your mother Namiri." He told her. "This Perlyea person seems to have a real problem with me personally and men in general. Fine... that is her problem. I have no intention of doing anything to the Tasmor. I respect and honor what your people have done for mine. I just want them back. They are my people and I did make that vow to the spirits of my ancestors."

"You... you believe in faith King Leonidas?" Emylea asked.

Martin smiled and nodded. "Some would say no, but I have my own ways that I talk to whatever gods may be up there looking down on us."

"Is it also true that you have Pralor blood within you?" Namiri asked now.

Martin nodded once more. "Yes. As do many of my people who come from the Alpha Quadrant. That is one of the reasons we came out here. To try and find out about that part of our history. It didn't begin very well but it's not turning out so bad now." He replied thinking about what Delnash had told him only a short time ago.

"What do you mean?" Namiri asked truly interested now.

"Let's just say that I was informed this morning that it is very possible I may have living family among the Pralors. Family that I am descended from. That my children are descended from." Martin told them. "I did not come out here for conflict and I certainly do not want an incident with the Tasmor. How you live your lives is your business... but when it means that you experiment on my people I cannot..."

"We asked your people King Leonidas." Namiri blurted out.

"Namiri!" Emylea protested as she took her arm.

Namiri met her sister's gaze. "They will discover the truth sister, you know this." Namiri spoke. "Mother is being mother and all she wants is to protect our people and see them become better. Sometimes she is just too stubborn to see what is in front of her."

Emylea was silent for she agreed with Namiri completely. They had both told their mother the same thing over the last few years. She turned back to Martin. "We asked... we asked your people to allow us to take their DNA. To use it and to try and improve ourselves. Your healing factor alone could save millions of Tasmor over the years because of your resistance to diseases. It could extend our lives."

"No one was forced to do this?" Martin asked them.

Namiri shook her head quickly. "We thought your leaders would refuse the request but days after it was made, all of them came forward and said they would help us. Hundreds of your people volunteered and came forward to donate. Our doctors and scientists have been able to use your DNA to improve the Tasmor."

"Like Anthylea?" Martin asked.

Namiri nodded almost shyly. "But not just Anthylea and those like her." She told him. "Very soon we will be able to make it so the vaccines and serums made with the DNA of your people can be combined with the DNA of our people and diseases that have ravaged our species for millennia will no longer hang over our heads." She dipped her head and Emylea squeezed her arm in support.

"What?" Martin asked softly.

Emylea looked at him. "We are a proud people King Leonidas." She answered. "We do not hate males, nor are they mistreated, but because of the way our species has evolved there are few options open to us. We do not... we do not normally talk to our males as we are talking now."

Martin smiled at them. "Yes, I noticed that. You are talking to me now though. Why?"

"To be honest... many of them are not intelligent enough." Emylea answered. "There are exceptions yes, but many of our males have deficiencies when they are born. Our doctors and scientists have tried for centuries to discover why this is but they have had no success."

"The Pralor people have very advanced doctors and medical equipment." Martin told them. "Did you ask them for help?"

"They refused." Namiri said instantly.

“Did you ask or did you demand?” Martin asked them. Namiri and Emylea both were silent and after a moment they both looked away embarrassed. Martin nodded his head. “That’s what I thought.”

“They know of our plight.” Namiri spoke once more. “This information was given to them by our doctors. They refused to help us.”

“I have gotten to know Chief Elder Delnash pretty well over the last weeks and I find it hard to believe he would refuse such a request.” Martin told them.

“You... you know the Pralor Chief Elder?” Emylea asked stunned.

Martin nodded. “Yes.”

“Could you speak to him for our people?” Namiri stammered.

Martin looked at her oddly. “No one in your government has met with Delnash?” He asked.

“My mother herself sent a message to him.” Emylea said. “We both saw it. We witnessed as Tobia transmitted it. The reply did not come until after her and the other Pralor... Valael... it did not come until after they had left our people. It was refused.”

Martin reached back behind him and pulled his P1 from the small of his back. Namiri and Emylea both watched with wide eyes as he activated it and tapped on the screen several times. Their eyes grew wider when they saw the image of the older women appear within the small holotransmission.

“Martin?” Radra exclaimed surprised. “What? Is something wrong?”

Martin shook his head. “No... I have a question for you though.”

“Of course.” Radra answered.

“Who would receive an official transmission from a species requesting medical aide or assistance?” Martin asked.

Radra blinked. “I am the Medical Convention’s Lead Elder. It would have come to me. Why?” She asked.

“Has Delnash or the Elder Council ever refused a request for medical aide here in the Echo Quadrant? Regardless of that species technological capabilities?” Martin asked.

Radra shook her head instantly. “No. Never. And we have helped several in just the last three centuries alone. The only species we refused to assist were the Kintaur because they held several dozen of our explorers as their prisoners. We told them if they were returned to us unharmed then we would talk. We never heard from them again.”

“Nothing from the Tasmor?” Martin asked.

Radra shook her head. “No.”

Martin held up his hand quickly keeping Emylea and Namiri both from shouting at the holoimage of Radra. “You are sure?”

“Martin... my people may be arrogant and stupid in many cases, but we are not fools.” Radra told him. “We would have jumped at the chance to help the Tasmor in any way we could. Especially in a medical sense. Their temperament and self-absorbed attitude aside, having them as friends could have led to many things that we do not have now. If such a request had come to me, I would have taken it to Delnash immediately. He would have jumped at the chance to secure at least friendly relations with them. I assure you... nothing ever came to me from the Tasmor. Official or otherwise.”

Martin nodded. “Thank you Radra... I just wanted to be sure.”

“Certainly.” Radra answered just before Martin tapped the P1 once more and ended the transmission.

“She lies!” Emylea protested. “We saw Tobia and our mother do this! We were in the same room! Anthylea as well!”

Namiri was more astute when it came to the Lycavorian people and after hearing what he had told them only a few moments ago she looked at Martin carefully. “She was not lying was she?” She asked.

Martin shook his head. “No she wasn’t.”

Emylea looked shocked. “You... you can determine this even when she is aboard your ship?” She gasped.

Martin shook his head. “She’s not aboard my ship. At this moment she’s here on the surface with my wife and mate Anja.” He told them. He tapped his jaw implant. “Red?”

“I’m here Lover.” Anja answered instantly.

“You clear?”

“I just left the medical building.” Anja spoke.

“Did I miss something?” Martin asked.

“No. Not even a touch of adrenalin entered her system.” Anja answered. “She was telling the truth.”

“You heard everything else?” Martin asked her.

“Every word.” Anja said.

Namiri put it together then and her eyes grew wide. “She has... she has heard everything we talked of!” She gasped.

Martin met her eyes. “I don’t keep secrets from my wives and mates.” Martin told her. “Anja?”

“Based on what they told you Lover, I would have to say it is some sort leveled enzyme deficiency while within the womb. If not that then definitely something along the lines of Darpia Syndrome with Bella, but this disease attacks the synaptic patterns of the brain functions and not the mineral components of the mother’s womb. It’s probably hereditary too considering not all of their male babies are affected.” Anja answered. “Dee and I could probably figure it out in a few hours if we had their doctor’s research.”

“Are you headed to the meeting?” Martin asked.

“I’m going to pull For’mya off the *STRIKER* now. Atropos and Thoti brought them to the ADHOC right before you asked Namiri and Emylea to join you.” She answered.

“Ok... the two of you run with that for now.” Martin said.

“Do you care how?” Anja asked him.

“Anja?” Martin asked with a roll of his eyes.

“Ok. Ok. I just wanted to ask.” Anja answered with a small laugh.

“Aricia and I are going to take Namiri and Emylea for a little ride.” Martin said. “Let me know if you discover anything Red.”

“Always Lover.” Anja answered.

Martin rose to his feet as he tapped the implant once more. He held out his hands for them and after only a few seconds both Namiri and Emylea took his offer and he helped to pull them to their feet.

“I have one more question for you.” He asked. “Do the Kintaur know your names?”

Namiri looked at him keenly now. “The one... the one that you killed. He knew my name. That is why... that is why I froze. I was shocked.”

“So that is a no right?” Martin asked.

Emylea shook her head now. “Those we associate with know our names yes, but even our news people refer to us as the Sovereign Regent Daughters. That is our official title among our people.”

“So how did the Kintaur know that you two were going to be here and how did they know your names?” Martin asked them.

“They would not!” Namiri declared.

Martin held up the data pad and held it out to Namiri. “This is a transcript of their ship logs.” He told them. “Elder Valael decrypted and translated them. The Kintaur came here because they knew both of you were going to be here running the operation to help my people. And they knew you by name.”

“By the gods... how?” Emylea asked.

The gust of wind startled both of them and they looked up to see Torma’s massive body land only a short distance away, Isheeni right beside him with Aricia already in her saddle. Namiri and Emylea gripped each other tightly in fear.

Martin smiled as he walked up to Torma who lowered his head and butted Martin gently in the shoulder. “There is nothing to be afraid of.” He told them turning back and looking at them as he scratched the underside of Torma’s massive snout. “I have a proposition for both of you. This is Torma and Isheeni and they found the Kintaur pukes who escaped our little ambush this morning. They are hiding on the southern edge of the city. Five of them. I don’t suppose you would be interested in finding out how they got this information would you.”

“Yes!” Emylea and Namiri spoke at the same time.

Martin and Aricia chuckled at their reaction. “Then one of you can ride with Aricia and one of you can ride with me.” Martin told them. “See... I really hate traitors. And these traitors or traitor not only put you in danger, they put my people in danger. That just burns my ass to no end.” Martin nimbly leaped onto Torma’s back and settled into the saddle before turning and looking at them.

“How bout we find out together.”

Namiri and Emylea paused for only a microsecond before they were moving.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBITING AUSTROVA**

Androcles Leonidas squatted at the foot of the ramp leading up into the *PREMONITION*, both of his hands filled with the pommel and blade of *Cana rie Emanur*. The Hope of Eternity. The Light of Eternity was still attached to the combat harness he usually wore over his Mark VI ArmorPly, the blade hidden within Flatspace. The upper portion of his body armor rested on the deck next to the ramp waiting for him to rise and put it on.

The Dragon Armor forged blade of *Cana rie Emanur* shimmered in the bright light of the landing bay of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, allowing him to see his own reflection in the flawless blade. Nehtes, the High Elven Union Weapons Master, had done a masterful job with both swords, as he always did. They were extensions of his own body in every possible way, perfectly weighted and balanced for his own unique style of fighting. Nehtes and his three assistants, his two sons and daughter, were the only four individuals in the Union who could craft such weapons. They were the only ones allowed to manipulate the Dragon Armor in its raw, unrefined state. The four of them and the factory they ran in Eden City produced nearly eighty percent of all bladed weapons in the Union now. It wasn't so much the Dragon Armor blades they crafted, they were the only ones within the Union allowed to do such a thing, but their forging process had become legendary and blade crafters from across the Union had come to them to learn this technique. Since the Dragon Armor forged weapons were carefully controlled and only issued to Drow combat units and the Durcunusaan, the forging process they used had become the finest in the Union and now every bladed weapon forged used this same refining process no matter the material of the blade. Nehtes store and factory in Eden City was perhaps one of the most well-guarded and secure facilities anywhere in the Union now.

Andro ran his fingers along the side of the blade almost reverently, the bustle of activity in the landing bay shut from his mind completely. The one mind that had free reign within his thoughts besides his precious wives and mates reached for him now, filling him with peace and happiness even considering what was going on.

This is not your fault Andro my dear dragon brother. Elynth's soft and warm voice filled his mind.

Isn't it? He spoke now but with an undercurrent of anger or anxiousness. My actions, my orders are what made this take place sister. They are what caused others to react in such a way. They are what brought Torian and Ulana together.

Torian did not question what you tasked him with Andro. Elynth told him. *His feelings for Ulana aside, he knew this was important. And she is no longer the same pompous young woman she was a few short months ago. Her eyes have been opened to so much more that she never knew existed.*

I know. Andro replied.

Do you doubt yourself now? Elynth asked.

No. Androcles answered instantly. *That is not something I will ever do again sister. I need to make it right though.*

And we will. Very soon. Do you fear for Torian's life?

Androcles shook his head. *They will not kill him.* He answered. *He is too important to them alive no matter what this fool Rotaxe boasts.*

That is what I believe as well. We proceed as we have planned Andro and we will retrieve them. Elynth said.

Sister... do you ever regret what we share? He asked her.

Never. Elynth answered instantly. *It makes much more sense now that we have learned what Sarlana has told us. And we will learn so much more when we join with Laren and Ladur. We will have the answers that we have sought for so long Andro. That Dorian and Ryner have sought since joining this life.*

We knew that we would be different before we ever joined this world Elynth. Andro spoke softly. That we would never lead a normal life. Part of me wishes Dorian and Ryner did not have to experience that.

How do we know that the life we have now is not normal? Elynth asked him with some humor in her tone. *You know as well as I do that Dorian and Ryner have embraced what we are now that they know the answers are so close.* Elynth paused for a moment and then asked the question. *Do you regret it Andro my brother?*

Andro shook his head as he looked up to stare at the ceiling of the hanger bay so far above. *Not for a single moment.*

Whatever destiny that the gods of fate have planned for, us we will meet it together Andro. Just as we promised each other all those years ago. Elynth said.

Yes we will. He echoed her words.

Then we will talk no more of this. Sadi and the others are behind you and now you will do what you have planned for weeks. Elynth told him. *They are your strength my brother, just as Anthar is mine, as your mothers are for your father and my mother for my father. It is the way of things. How it came to be is of no matter now.*

No it is not. Only that it is. Andro said as he rose to his feet but didn't turn as he smelled them behind him.

We will join you shortly. Elynth spoke as Andro turned and saw them moving up behind him slowly. They could feel the tremors in Mindvoice and knew he was talking to Elynth, but he also saw the looks of concern in their eyes and on their faces for he had been blocking them for over an hour now and they did not know why. Sadi and Lu'ria walked side by side, Carisia and Caliria to Lu'ria's right, Ne'Veha and Sehri to Sadi's left. All of them were holding hands and pressed tightly to one another. Andro twirled *Cana rie Emanur* in his hand gracefully and the blade disappeared into Flatspace just before he returned it to the harness on the deck opposite *Saar* and stood back up.

Andro gazed at them with his azure eyes and he smiled as they stopped in front of him.

"*Saradasaar...*?" Sadi spoke softly. "You wanted us to come down before the others. What is wrong Andro?"

"Nothing." Andro answered. He motioned to the ramp. "Sit... all of you please."

The questions in their eyes did not go away as they moved around him and settled to the deck ramp, scooting close to one another as he knew they would. They were now tied so tightly together within in the Etheric realm it was next to impossible to tell their resonances apart, just as it was with his mothers. Once more it made Andro wondered how they were all his, part of his mind and his soul. He had resisted it at first, but the pull had been too strong and he had finally surrendered to the emotions within him just as his father had. Sadi would always call to him just a little bit more because she was Lycavorian, his *Anome* and her sugar plum and spice scent was so sweet to him, but what he felt for Ne'Veha and Lu'ria and Sehri and Carisia and Caliria was without question or doubt.

Andro squatted in front of them and looked at them, drinking in their scents and their beauty.

"We thought... we thought you were angry with us for some reason." Carisia spoke first. "You have been blocking us since we returned to the ship."

Andro nodded his head. "It is not you *Enylarcopri*, none of you. I just had to think some things through and center myself."

"We can help you Androcles." Sadi said. "You know this."

Andro nodded his head. "And all of you did." He told them.

"What is it our love?" Ne'Veha asked him reaching up to stroke his cheek with her slim fingers.

Androcles smiled and reached around to the small of his back and withdrew the long, velvet and silk encased box. "I had wanted to wait and do this when we were in more comfortable and private surroundings but as is usually the case with my life, I am not going to get that chance." He told them with a smile. "That is why I had all of you come down here before the others."

"Andro what is going on?" Sehri asked.

Andro lifted the box in the palm of his hand so that they all could see it.

"I do not know where this journey we have begun will end..." Andro spoke softly as he looked at them. "I do know that it began the moment the darkness lifted and revealed to me six beating hearts that were one; your hearts. I do not care how it came to be anymore... only that it is. I love each of you with every beat of my

heart and every breath that I take and I want you to know that no matter what happens through the years... no matter what... I will come for you. Even from beyond the veil of death itself if need be.”

Andro lifted his other hand and unwrapped the long, thin box from within the silk cloth and then flipped the box up slowly. Six pairs of eyes grew wide in astonishment and six gasps of disbelief echoed softly in the immediate area around the ramp.

Positioned perfectly in the thin box were six teal green rings. Each of them stuck into the velvet like interior of the box firmly, each with a glittering coral red center jewel, the jewel surrounded by white/gold leafs and delicate inscriptions. The rings were nearly translucent in nature, allowing for the color of the coral red Heart of Dragon jewel in the center to permeate the entire ring and give off an almost surreal glow.

“I had... I had these made for each of you...” Andro spoke softly. “...To symbolize my love and devotion to each of you.”

“Andro... they are made from Auramite!” Sadi gasped in shock.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes, for that is the depth of my love.” He lifted the first ring out of the box and held it out to Sadi. “Eternally...” Sadi’s hands were shaking as she took the ring. “Our...” The next one went to Carisia. “Hearts...” This one went to Ne’Veha. “Are...” Lu’ria took hers next. “Bound...” This went to Caliria. “Forever...” Sehri’s eyes were wide as she took the ring. “*Kertal duon gais wen roton elly.*”

Andro’s own heart was racing as he watched them stare at the rings, tears spilling from their eyes, holding them almost reverently. “You are supposed to put them on.” Andro told them with a small smile.

None of them hesitated in the least, all of them sliding the rings onto the ring finger of their left hands. Each ring was a perfect fit for each of them even though none of them had been measured for it. Though he knew of the custom of wedding rings from ancient Earth, Andro would not realize the significance of this until months from now and it would only confirm to him that indeed all of them had been meant for each other from the moment they entered this life. He looked at each of their faces, their scents and their beauty long since burned into his mind and his soul.

Sadi finally looked at him, tears spilling from her jungle green eyes. “Andro we... we have nothing to give to you.” She gasped.

Androcles Leonidas smiled and his azure colored eyes shone in their brilliance. “You have already given to me all I will ever need *Kertagai*. All I have ever wanted. All of you have. That is your love for me.”

Sadi reached out quickly and took his face in her hands. “You will always have that Androcles Leonidas our love! Always and forever.” She kissed him hard then, his lavender and mint scent beyond glorious to her.

All of them brought heads forward, moving around him in such a way so that they could all shower his face and lips with kisses. They were kisses that Andro returned with zealous fervor, drinking in their sweet scents and their Etheric resonance.

“Ahem!” The female voice echoed from behind them after a long moment and all of them turned quickly to see Eliani and Brendi standing in front of Jomann a few feet away with the others of their team all standing around her. Eliani had her arms crossed under her ample chest and her head was canted slightly to the side. “While the thought of watching you assault your wives and mates in the landing bay is not something I care to picture, gross would be a good word to use, could you please get a room!” Eliani blurted.

Denali, Lisisa, Dorian, Deion, Nara and all of the Leonidas siblings burst into instant laughter at Eliani’s statement for it was almost the exact same thing Androcles had told her and Jomann a few months ago when Eliani had surrendered to her feelings for Jomann in the landing bay of the *SCIMITAR*. While Fedor, Eirene and Kalis had learned of this event after only a few hours among them, since they were members of their family and all was shared with them, they now felt like they had experienced it as well. Andro was chuckling as he rose to his feet, Sadi and the rest of them crowding around him, wiping tears from their eyes but beaming with huge smiles and looks of adoration. Andro let his eyes linger on them for a moment longer and then looked up to the others.

His brothers and sisters, their wives and mates, Dutkne, Murano and Sarlana standing in the rear of the group. Androcles had never seen a more diverse group of men and women with such a large age difference, but damned if they did not work so very well together.

“*Carians*... we *are* such an unorthodox and odd bunch.” Andro said shaking his head.

“We emulate our leader!” Lisisa chimed in with the comment and this brought more laughter from everyone.

Andro shook his head with a smile, all of them sensing the happiness in their older brother easily now. It was a happiness that he had kept hidden from the eyes of everyone ever since the nightmare of Alba Tau. Slowly but surely it was reaching for and then breaching the surface of his demeanor, exposing more of the brother they had all grown up with.

“I have spoken with Coren and Alrerin.” Andro finally began. “We were going to try and move this along a little slower but we all agree recent events have taken away that option from us.” Andro looked at him. “In fifty-three hours we are going to unleash our brand of warfare on the Beta Quadrant. We no longer have the luxury of playing with these fools, for events with father and our mothers are growing tenuous. They are encountering far more obstacles and unknowns than we are and I will no longer play nice.”

Dorian grinned. “Kick ass time!” He quipped playfully.

Andro nodded his head. “A good choice of words *fervon*.” He said. “We are going to retrieve Torian, Ulana and the others first. We will then return here and I will present to the Vanari Board of Regents what will take place. How they chose to act I do not know and at this point I do not care. Once that is complete we will drop Ulana and the other Senators off on Amanuce where they will finish what they have begun. Armen has already deployed the deep probes to Laren and Ladur’s location. From Amanuce we will proceed directly there, while Sa’sur and the others remain here to support Coren and Alrerin. I believe both of them are angry enough now to do it without our support, but they will have it nonetheless. *Tenna Deia* is already arranging things from back home. She has officially moved her home to Sparta and that is where she will now be located.” Andro moved away from Sadi and the others a little.

“We are going into the unknown my family...” He stated. “...Further than we have ever gone before. Now is the time to make it known if you wish to remain behind.”

“That’s a joke right?” Denali asked now. “Jeez *fervon*... we really need to teach you about punch lines.”

Normya pushed away from Tir’ut’s comforting bulk and looked at Androcles. “We doubted you once *fervon*.” She said softly. “We will never doubt you again.”

“*Avoi*.” Lisisa echoed softly.

“None of us are going anywhere. It is far too exciting around you.” Kalis spoke now stepping closer as all eyes turned to him.

Eliani rolled her eyes. “Wow! We’ve corrupted him already.” She stated. “Father is going to be so pissed.”

“I say we stop all this mushy *sibfla* and get to the ass kicking part!” Deion called out.

Mari looked at Deion with wide eyes in mock outrage. “Deion Leonidas!” She exclaimed loudly. “Your language!”

Deion’s face turned slightly red. “Oops!”

Eliani Leonidas had no such compunctions about her choice of words. She was too much her mother’s daughter.

“Let the ass whupping begin!” She barked out.

AUSTROVA EMBER’S COVE

“...Had no right!” Ardan barked angrily at Asay from across the table.

Thirteen members of the Vanari Board of Security Regents sat around the table, all of them appearing flustered and confused at what had happened over the last few hours. None of the other Regents really seemed to know what was going on and this alone gave Coren and Alrerin a great deal of information that they did not have before. Ardan and Galar they did not trust in the least and both men had sat there watching as Alrerin’s senior aides disseminated the information they had to this point, the vast majority of which came from Androcles and his people, the rest coming from Asay Va Eldost’s office.

This was a surprise for both Coren and Alrerin as had they believed Asay Va Eldost was, if not part of the conspiracy, then at the very least aware of it. This did not seem to be the case as she presented the information gathered by her staff before coming here and they correctly reasoned that this is why Ardan was

beginning to try demean and browbeat the junior Regent into silence. Something that Asay was having none of Coren and Alrerin saw.

In truth Asay Va Eldost seemed to be downright angry and it showed in her expression and mannerisms. There was also something about her that Coren detected after a few moments. Asay Va Eldost was different than when they had last met before the Lycavorians had arrived. During that meeting she had been very tentative and had allowed Galar and Ardan to dismiss her words; an event she was obviously not going to allow this time. Nyosa had given a brief introduction into her world as they laid in bed the night before, neither of them really able to sleep, yet intimacy hadn't entered either of their thoughts. They had been content to simply hold each other and Nyosa told him of the changes that he would begin to experience. One of which Coren was detecting right now. Coren finally noticed it after she had been speaking for several moments but he said nothing. Two, barely discernible marks at the juncture of her shoulder and neck that now looked almost completely healed. They were nearly identical to what was very nearly healed on his body, in almost the exact same location.

"I had every right!" Asay snarled back at him. "You cannot just circumvent the security procedures that we have in place Ardan! No one can!"

"The First Regent was believed dead!" Ardan spat. "I was acting with my authority as his Second!"

"We did not know anything, and that authority does not apply unless his death can be confirmed by the Board of Security Regents! You know this!" Asay spoke undaunted. "You may be the Second Regent but having all information gathered by our forces in regards to these attacks funneled through your office is against our policies! And you know it!"

"I did what I felt was in the best interests of the Vanari people!" Ardan snapped.

"Did you?" Asay questioned him. "Ordering a blanket lockdown across the planet and having any Lycavorian who was outside the Restriction Zones arrested and interrogated like they were common thugs is in the best interests of our people?"

"The Lycavorians attacked Coren's home!" Galar shouted now. "They attacked our First Regent's home!"

"The Lycavorians from the Union did not!" Asay snapped right back at him. "They were the ones who saved lives last night! The lives of Coren and the First Regent, and how many untold members of our Vanari Security forces? Or does your hatred of them blind you to the facts presented here today?"

"They are all Lycavorians!" Ardan protested vehemently waving his hand dismissively at her. "How do we know that this was not some elaborate plan to make it appear as if they are innocent?"

"How do we know they are not?" Asay barked.

"They wore Union uniforms! The boy Prince had his people take their weapons before we could gather them! They conducted a military operation within our own city and they stole computer information from what they say was an OSG Safe House! Why have we not seen any of these things? Why?" Ardan demanded.

"Perhaps Ardan, perhaps because there is some truth to what they have been saying since they arrived! There is no record anywhere within our Intelligence Community of a Vanari safe house in the location they struck! The sub levels of that particular building were supposed to be sealed shut seven years ago!" Asay spat. "You and other Regents have given free passage to the Eridiani to wander our cities for decades with your votes! Why suddenly is it, that when there is someone who is openly aligned against the OSG and dares to fight against them, do you balk?"

Ardan glared at her. "What do you accuse me of?" He shouted. "I will have you removed from this meeting for such words!"

Asay Va Eldost was made of much sterner material it seemed for she leaned across the table and pointed her finger directly at Ardan. "You will not dismiss me Ardan Vu Lamurrion!" She snarled at him. "And you will no longer dismiss those on this Security Board!"

Galar stood up from his chair. "You will mind your place at this table Asay Va Eldost!" He growled at her.

"Or what Galar Arn Del...?" Asay asked angrily. "You will remove me? I dare you to attempt this! I challenge you to try!" She spoke loudly. "If you do, I will go right to every Vanari News Channel and give a briefing about what has happened and how you and Ardan are trying to cover up the truth of these attacks!"

“What truth?” Ardan barked. “The Lycavorians attacked the heart of our government! What more is there to know?”

“We have their bodies dressed in old Union uniforms! Nothing more! Androcles admitted this to me freely! The weapons they collected I saw personally and he has sworn to me they are outdated and haven’t been in use in over thirty years!” Coren spoke now.

“You believe them Coren?” Another Regent asked.

Coren nodded his head. “Androcles would not lie to me. He and Denali have taken my daughters as their wives and mates. That is not something they would do now.”

“So you say?” Galar spat. “You have been among them for too long!”

“And you have not been among them enough!” Coren snarled at him. “Not one of the Lycavorians that arrived with Androcles Leonidas has worn a uniform even remotely similar to the attackers since they came here. It will not be hard to determine where these men and women came from and I am having our doctors do just that.”

“What?” Ardan gasped.

“At this moment they are comparing the DNA and cellular structure of the Lycavorians who attacked my home and the First Regent’s home to those Lycavorians who come from the Alpha Quadrant.” Coren told him. “They will tell us where these terrorists came from.”

“You had no right to do this without consulting me! I am the Second Regent!” Ardan exclaimed.

“I gave that order, not Coren.” Alrerin spoke now. “He simply carried out my instructions to him. Or are you telling me that, as First Regent, I do not have this authority Ardan?”

Ardan paused for a moment his eyes blinking before he shook his head. “No... of course not First Regent, I did not...”

“I received full assurances from Androcles Leonidas that his people would supply to us any information we asked for within reason.” Alrerin told them.

“You believed him as well First Regent?” Galar looked at him in disbelief.

“His own sister Lisisa and Arduri Re Mydala took part in saving the lives of my family and me.” Alrerin told him. “If they had wanted me dead why not just do it themselves? Killing close to a hundred of their own people to assassinate Coren and myself? You think they would do this?”

“They are animals!” Ardan spat angrily. “We do not know what they are capable of First Regent!”

“Is this why you have not released the full information on the serum that Caliria Re Mydala... forgive me... Caliria Leonidas discovered, worked on and eventually had a hand in creating?” Alrerin asked. “You saw it work for yourself and yet you keep the knowledge of this serum bogged down in procedure. No one outside of this room knows for sure that it even exists Ardan. There are rumors all over, yet you have done nothing. Why is that?”

“Our doctors cannot confirm the viability of this so called serum!” Ardan snapped at him. “How did they know to create it? My personal physician tells me the only way they could have developed a serum is if they are the ones who developed it to begin with! They refused to even give us the full so called cure until their boy Prince arrived here!”

“And we all know the reason for that.” Coren spoke evenly.

“Bah!” Ardan rasped. “Telling us that our own people are involved with the OSG when Vanari Intelligence can produce no corroborating information? You will believe them over our own Intelligence people?”

“I believe what my eyes tell me!” Coren barked. “Over two dozen of our young women were rescued by Androcles and his people, three of whom had been prisoners of the OSG and their minions for over a year! I watched as these broken young women, our people, I watched as the hours passed and these young women grew stronger and more confident as the OSG serum was purged from their body. To include my own daughter! That is what I saw Ardan!”

“Did you see any of them injected with this so called serum?” Ardan popped right back. “I did not! They supposedly injected our females before they brought them to that ship! That was very convenient for them!” Ardan glared at him. “You shock me Coren Re Mydala. You have hated these animals for decades and suddenly you are on their side! Why?”

“My eyes have been opened Ardan.” Coren answered him.

“Your daughter broke our laws by even attempting to develop a cure!” Galar Arn Del snarled. “And then your former wife and your remaining children took it upon themselves to break even more of our laws in order to retrieve her!” Galar waved his hand at Coren.

Coren glared at the man from across the table. “Be very careful of where you tread with your words Galar Arn Del.” He spoke menacingly. “I have been on this Board for far longer than you and I have forgotten more about my Cadre training than you ever knew.”

“And now you threaten me!” Galar popped. “Devra Re Mydala refused to return to face punishment for her crimes! His daughter Naesta refused to return! His daughter Arduri mocks us openly with her presence on our planet when she should be in chains in a cell! All of your children should be! Devra Re Mydala too! And your former lover Tastia who now consorts with one of those dark skinned elves! Even now you have over a dozen Lycavorians on these very grounds when they should be in chains!”

Coren nodded his head. “They are coordinating with my own Cadre Security force in protecting those who are currently staying here. Apparently... this is required by Union law when it concerns the parents of a Crown Princess of the Union as Caliria is now recognized.”

“Caliria Re Mydala is a criminal!” Galar barked out the words.

“My daughter Caliria is a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union.” Coren spoke more calmly. “My daughter Arduri another recognized Princess of the Union. If you are feeling full of yourself Galar, then by all means, please try to arrest either of them.”

“Enough!” Alrerin shouted as he came to his feet. “I will hear no more!”

“First Regent you...” Galar started to press Alrerin but saw the older man glare at him angrily.

“I will hear no more of your drivel Galar!” Alrerin shouted at him. “None!”

“We will do nothing?” Ardan gasped in mock shock hoping that this is what Alrerin would say.

“Oh no...” Alrerin spoke. “We are going to do quite a bit.” He looked at Asay. “Regent Va Eldost... you and your office will take lead on this investigation. I want no stone unturned Asay, no matter where it may lead! You will operate with my authority as First Regent!”

Asay looked stunned but she quickly nodded her head. “As you wish First Regent.” She stammered.

“First Regent... you can't be serious?” Ardan spoke. “Asay is a junior member of the SBR and she was only appointed to the Security Board a year ago!”

“She also has an advanced degree in Vanari Statutory Law. Something no one else at this table does.” Alrerin spoke calmly. “She will lead this investigation and all efforts will be made to assist her.” He turned back to Asay. “You have three days Asay.”

“First Regent...” She gasped. “Three days is... the scope of such an investigation could take weeks! Months!”

“You have three days.” Alrerin repeated to her. “In three days the entire Vanari Board of Regents will assemble and you will present what findings you have at that time. I will draw up the order myself and you will have the full weight of the Cadre Commandos at your disposal. I have already received personal authorization from Prince Leonidas to conduct searches of his ships in orbit and the questioning of his people if our investigation leads us there. You will coordinate with this Admiral Sa'sur, who commands his ships. Pull what manpower you feel you need and make this happen. Is that clear?”

Asay nodded her head quickly. “As you... as you wish First Regent.”

“And will this boy Prince submit to questioning as well?” Galar asked. “He is not here on the grounds. He should be arrested for assaulting a Vanari General Officer at the very least!”

“You forget I was there Galar.” Coren spoke up. “Androcles was unarmed and he was the one assaulted by General Ranter Ale Kimer. Not the other way around.”

“Why assemble the entire Board of Regents?” Ardan asked now. “Surely there is no need to involve the entire Board of Regents. This Security Board can manage.”

Alrerin shook his head. “No. This matter is for the entire Board of Regents and any of them not present will be summarily stripped of their position and title. I also want every news channel we have in attendance. Everything will become known at that time.” Alrerin told them. “Everything will be exposed to our people and we will let them decide our course of action. Nothing is to be left out.”

Then Ardan Vu Lamurrion made his final and most damaging mistake.

“Will you also tell our people of your daughter First Regent?” He hissed. “How she is still alive and has been the wife of a Lycavorian for over seventy years! How she is even now preparing to assume a position on the former Protectorate’s Senate?”

“If my father will not... then I will.” The female voice echoed in the room and caused all heads to turn towards the doorway.

Narlei stood there proudly, holding her youngest son in her arms, her changed wolf eyes and fangs very evident to everyone in the room. This display brought gasps of disbelief from all those in the room except Alrerin and Coren and they all came to their feet. Alrerin watched with a father’s pride as she strode into the room without fear.

“I will tell them how I was captured by the OSG!” Narlei spoke. “I will tell them how they discovered the course of our ship! I will reveal everything to our people, but most of all I will tell our people how they have been lied too for centuries! Since the first moment we made contact with Lycavorians from the Protectorate so long ago!”

“What nonsense is this?” Galar barked.

“I can see the disbelief on all of your faces! The shock! Yes... we can be affected by the virus within Lycavorians.” Narlei told them as she moved up beside her father. “I am only one of over five hundred thousand examples!”

“By the Prophets!” One female Regent gasped in shock.

“This is my son.” Narlei spoke with a mother’s pride as she held her son. “His father is a pureblood Lycavorian. I have six children with my beloved husband, each of them healthy and exceptionally smart. Each of them looks like me but they carry their father’s blood within their veins as well as mine. They are Lycanari. And there are more of us than any of you can possibly fathom!” Narlei looked at her father as Alrerin took his grandson from her arms. “I am not afraid of what others think of me. Nor are those Lycanari who now currently live within what was once the Protectorate and is now the Union. We embrace our lives and each of us chose to not return here after we discovered the truth!”

“What truth?” Ardan stammered. “What gibberish is this?”

Alrerin took Narlei’s arm. “Everything will be revealed when the Vanari Board meets in three days.” He spoke.

“I cannot allow this Alrerin!” Ardan exclaimed quickly. “This is preposterous! You have obviously been influenced in some fashion by these... these animals! I will call for a vote of no confidence before the entire Board of Regents!”

Alrerin smiled as he looked his grandson in his arms and everyone saw the little boy reach for the familiar hair on his head with a baby’s cooing. “That is your right Ardan Vu Lamurrion.” He spoke evenly. “But until that vote is taken and I am removed as First Regent... we will do as I say! Anyone who refuses to cooperate in this investigation will be arrested and held for questioning Asay. Is that clear?”

Asay nodded her head quickly still in a state of shock. “Yes... yes First Regent.” She spoke once more.

“The truth of everything will come out Ardan Vu Lamurrion.” Alrerin spoke now. “And then our people will decide what our path is to be. Asay Va Eldost has my full authority and anyone who attempts to impede her will answer to the law. Any harm that may befall her or anyone working for her will answer to Cadre Commandos under my office’s authority. I am no longer afraid of what will be made known to our people Ardan Vu Lamurrion. Are you?”

“I... of course not!” Ardan stammered once more as Coren looked on with a smile.

Alrerin nodded. “Good... now if you will excuse me... I have five other grandchildren to play with. I have not seen enough of them for far too long. Regent Asay... Coren and I will be here ready to answer any questions that you or your staff may have.”

Asay nodded her head. “As you wish First Regent.” She spoke as her senior most aide came up beside her and began to whisper into her ear urgently. Asay turned to look at her with wide eyes. “Where?” She hissed.

Ardan and Galar were left to ponder what that was all about as Asay quickly left the room following her aide.

The future of both men had become very bleak indeed.

And they did not know the worst of it.

Asay looked at her senior aide as she directed her into a small foyer room within Ember's Cove. Two other Vanari were in the small room, one obviously a Cadre Commando as he was armed, the other a young dark haired Vanari woman standing behind him. Asay focused her gaze on the woman recognizing her from somewhere as her aide looked quickly out of the foyer and then closed and sealed the door.

"I know you." Asay spoke as she gazed at the young woman. "You are..."

The young woman stepped around the larger Commando and bowed her head slightly. "I am Kinryn Aal Samaur, Regent Va Eldost." She spoke.

"You work in Ardan's office." She stated. "What are you doing here? No junior aides were allowed here... Fenia what..."

"She came to our office not an hour ago Asay." Fenia spoke as she came up beside her. Asay had demanded that Fenia call her by her first name when they were alone together. Fenia held out the data pad. "She gave our people this."

Asay took the data pad. "What is this?" She asked.

Kinryn Aal Samaur did not hesitate and took her first steps into a future that she had never imagined.

"It is everything you will need to prove that Regents Ardan and Galar have been working for or with the OSG in the kidnapping and imprisonment of our females for profit for decades at least. Perhaps much longer. They are the only ones mentioned in the transmission but there are no doubt more." Kinryn spoke calmly.

Asay stepped closer to her and saw she did not back down or flinch. This young woman had chosen a path and she was determined to see it through. "You have worked for Ardan for..."

"Almost twenty years Regent Va Eldost." Kinryn spoke. "And until this very day I never believed that he could do such a thing. Until I saw it for myself."

"Saw what?" Asay asked.

Fenia reached out and activated the data pad. "This." She spoke.

Asay was taken aback and horrified in the six minutes of the message and this showed on her face even after it ended. She finally looked up at Kinryn as her racing heart began to calm somewhat and her mind battled with options of what to do.

"Why?" She asked Kinryn.

That is when Kinryn lost control of the emotions she had been holding in and she burst into tears and slumped to the floor. Asay acted more quickly than Fenia or the Commando and caught her lithe figure in her arms and the young woman folded her body against Asay's in what could only be terrible shame and hurt.

Asay looked at Fenia as she stroked Kinryn's silky, black hair in her hands. "Fenia... tell Coren and Alrerin I need to speak with them both right now!"

"Asay... they will want to know why." Fenia told her.

"There is something much more going on here than an assassination attempt Fenia!" Asay hissed softly. "Something tells me that Alrerin and Coren know exactly what it is. Go! Quickly! And insure we are not disturbed here! No one must know Kinryn is here! No one!"

VENTORI TWO KILOMETERS SOUTH OF THE CITY OF JORLARI

To say it had been the most incredible thing she had ever experienced in her young life would be a massive understatement as far as Namiri Daret was concerned. She had scrambled up onto Torma's back and settled to the saddle behind Martin without so much as a second thought, Emylea doing the same with Aricia and Isheeni. Unsure of what to do next and not really ever having been this close to a male before, Namiri was suddenly anxious and unsure. Until she felt Torma's muscular legs propel them into the sky and then a very feminine cry of surprise echoed in the morning air and she had wrapped her arms around Martin's waist in fear without thinking. It was a fear that was replaced by wonderment within five minutes as they swept across the

landscape below. The thin metal that encased their legs insured she was not going to fall out no matter how they turned, and this knowledge gave way quickly to Namiri's adventurous nature.

She felt the Etheric Shield encompass her as they rose into the air and she sat there stunned as she could feel the wind whipping by them as Torma's massive wings accelerated them away from the Union base. Wind that should have been tearing at her skin was nothing more than a light force against her body now as they sped over the treetops for a short time and then climbed high into the sky. She glanced quickly over to see Emylea looking around with wide, excited eyes as she held lightly to Aricia's body armor. Namiri quickly shifted her own hands and held to the back of Martin's armor knowing she would not fall. His hands rested on his thighs as they flew, not a care in the world it seemed, and when she saw Aricia flying in the same fashion, she removed her hands completely and did the same.

They covered nearly twenty kilometers in just over five minutes and Namiri was stunned at how fast these dragon beasts were. She didn't know that Martin, Torma, Aricia and Isheeni had been talking within Mindvoice the entire trip commenting how on quickly the two young women reacted to new things and how fearless they both seemed to be.

It was Aricia who had taken notice of how Martin acted around Namiri and Emylea and she, Anja and For'mya had quickly deduced what it was. Aricia turned her azure eyes on him as Isheeni and Torma flew side by side. Unless going into a known combat situation Martin never wore his Spartan helm when flying and today was no different.

[What do you feel beloved?] Aricia asked from across the distance of perhaps ten meters, Isheeni flying slightly higher than Torma because his wingspan was so much larger than her own.

Martin turned his head and looked at her. *[What do you mean?]* He asked.

They both heard Anja and For'mya's snort of disgust within their connection and Aricia smiled. Since For'mya had returned to them, they had sworn to each other that none of them would block the other in any discussion unless it was absolutely necessary. Their connection and their love was more open and focused now than it had ever been and that is how they would move forward into the future.

[Nice try you big lug.] Anja's voice echoed.

[We can all sense that there is something about Namiri and Emylea Daret that affects you Martin Leonidas.] For'mya stated now. *[You sense something within them don't you?]*

[It is a gift that only you and our son share Beloved.] Aricia continued. *[You don't need to keep it from us.]*

Martin's gaze didn't waver. *[They will be part of our family one day.]* He told them without pause. *[I don't know how... only that it will be. Emylea will welcome this without so much as a second guess.]*

[And Namiri?] Anja asked.

[Not at first.] Martin spoke softly shaking his head slightly. *[But eventually yes. Very much so.]*

[Something we need to be concerned with?] Aricia asked.

[No... I don't believe so Saaurano.]

[Good.] Anja echoed. *[She's got almost as much spunk as me. I like her.]*

[As do I.] Aricia echoed Anja's words.

[There will be a lot of pain that comes with that though.] Martin told them. *[Pain of the heart and soul.]*

This made all of them go silent for a moment. They knew that Martin and their son Androcles were special in that way. Like Dysea and For'mya with their skills, they could not actively control this pseudo Foresight ability, but for Martin and Androcles this perception also gave them extra fits because they could not understand it most of the time and they hated that.

[Pain of the heart and soul we can help her to deal with and get through.] Aricia said first.

[You like these Tasmor don't you Lover?] Anja asked him.

[They are... they are a lot like us.] Martin answered. *[Just too much the arrogance. Saydia is a powerful leader. She exudes confidence and intelligence and that sometimes borders on arrogant, but she is also hiding something that troubles her very deeply. Something about her people.]*

[A threat?] Aricia asked.

[Possibly.] Martin answered. *[She knows something the others do not, something that she carries within her.]*

[And that foul upaee Perlyea?] For'mya asked instantly. All of them could detect the anger and downright hatred coming from For'mya in regards to Perlyea. For'mya Leonidas was widely recognized as the most tolerant and patient of the Union Queens, but the vast majority of Union citizens also knew in order to anger her you had to have done something very bad. And if it was bad enough to get on the wrong side of For'mya Leonidas, that usually meant there was no recovering from it. For'mya may have been a female elf and now Lycavorian, but she was all Spartan in her heart.

Martin shook his head. *[She despises that woman deep down. That comes out in her scent easily, but no, this is something else entirely. Speak to Tobia and find out if there is anything else she can tell us about them.]*

[How much do we let her know?] Anja asked.

[Everything.] Martin answered. *[It will be a bit bumpy at first but she and Murano will reunite and then they will be complete. She is also a Praetorian and while she may not act like Murano, that fact cannot be denied. We can all learn a lot from her. Hold back if you feel you need too, but I have never questioned how you have done things and I won't start now.]*

[Smart man.] Anja quipped playfully and Aricia and For'mya chuckled.

Martin turned his head and saw them approaching where Danny had set up his small camp. *[You will not need what I am going to do distracting you...]* He told them. *[Red... you and For'mya block mine and Aricia's resonance for the next hour.]*

[Understood.] For'mya spoke.

[We love you big guy.] Anja told him softly. *[Keep him from doing anything stupid Little Wolf.]*

Aricia laughed gently now as well. *[I will certainly try.]* She turned her head back over her shoulder and looked at the wide eyed and smiling Emylea. "Hold on... we will be landing shortly!" She spoke.

Emylea nodded her head and gripped the back of Aricia's body armor once more as Isheeni dipped her wings and they plummeted towards the ground below.

There were five of them and as far as Martin was concerned none of them were any better looking than those he had killed on the field near the river. All five had their hands bound securely with unbreakable flexi-cuffs, two appeared to have been wounded, and none of them looked happy in the least.

"...Caught them napping." Danny was speaking as he stood beside Martin. Aricia stood slightly back with Namiri and Emylea on either side of her. "The two stupid ones tried to go for their weapons. Pablo and Cody ended that little movement."

"Find anything on them?" Martin asked.

Danny nodded his head. "Oh yeah... and you ain't gonna like it." He said as he motioned for Kasdan to come over from where he stood beside Tony and Kenny.

Martin chuckled softly as he watched Kasdan walk towards them quickly. "That seems to be the case about everything ever since we came out here *fervon*." Martin said.

"Ain't it though?" Danny agreed. "It has to be your charming personality."

Martin smiled as Kasdan came up to them. "King Leonidas it is..."

Martin held up his hand. "What have I told you about that Kasdan?" He said. "Don't do that. However it came to be, you are part of my team now."

Kasdan nodded his head and smiled. "Martin." He said.

Martin smiled back. "Good. Now hit me with it."

Kasdan looked at him confused and Danny smiled. "Tell him what you told me and the others Kasdan." He said.

"Ah... yes." Kasdan spoke. "Elder Valael sent down the core of their language syntax and I uploaded it to our implants last night. It is very similar to the Tasmor language with minor grammar and wording differences but they seemed to have smoothed out the harshness of the sounds for lack of a better explanation. Daniel says you do not like to hear fluff."

Martin looked at him with a smile. "He would be right."

"He also added some other things to my personal P9, schematics and such that he found within the logs of the Kintaur ship." Kasdan continued.

“Anything good?” Martin asked.

Kasdan nodded his head. “Information wise yes. Activity wise... no.”

Kasdan pulled his P9 around from the small of his back. Julie had shown him how to situate and place the P9 in such a way that it was within easy reach when he needed it and out of harm’s way when he did not. She also notched his combat harness to better be able to move with the P9 open and working which allowed him to pull up information even on the move. He had become very good at typing on the run. He did not know that Martin’s team had conducted several missions through the years with different Tech Heads in their ranks but he alone had been among them the longest and therefore all of them were looking out for him and making sure he remained alert and even picked up a few things along the way. Kasdan did not have a single arrogant bone in his body and this is what endeared him to Martin’s team. A team that he was now considered part of.

Martin looked at him. “What do you mean?”

Kasdan typed on his P9 several times. “These fools have been here to Ventori before.” He said causing Martin’s eyes to widen just a little bit at Kasdan’s choice of words. Danny laughed softly.

“He’s really taken to our more colorful way of expressing ourselves.” Danny told Martin.

Martin grinned. “So it seems.” He looked at Kasdan. “So they have been to Ventori before?”

Kasdan nodded his head. “Three of them had personal journals or logs among their gear or on their bodies. I have reviewed all of them in their entirety and afterwards I wanted to vomit. Some of the things they say they took part in were...”

Martin nodded and placed his hand on Kasdan’s shoulder. “No need to give me the details Kasdan. I’ll take your word for it.”

“Each of them have been to Ventori at least twice.” Kasdan said. “The War Master that you killed at the beginning of the ambush... he had been here four times. The Captain in command of the ship we disabled four times as well. All within the last eight months.”

It was Namiri who came forward now, stepping up beside Martin without fear. “That cannot be possible.” She gasped. “Only a handful of our senior leadership knew this planet was here. Most knew we were relocating your people, but not where they were coming from. It was not made public for this exact reason; to keep the other species in this sector from coming here and exploiting them.”

“Exploiting them how?” Martin asked her. Namiri looked at him as if she did not want to answer the question. “Namiri... I told you already you have nothing to fear from me. Neither you nor your sister are in danger.”

“My mother?” Namiri asked him.

“I will hurt no one who does not try to hurt me first.” Martin told her. “I’m not a monster Namiri.” Martin blinked several times. “Well... some might debate that with you but...”

Namiri gazed at him for a few moments and then shook her head with a smile at his attempt at humor. “No... you are not a monster.” She said taking a deep breath. “There are two other species within this sector that take slaves and use them as forced labor at the very least. The Kintaur are only the largest species in terms of numbers. These other species, the Naltur and the Aser, they are aligned with the Kintaur but nowhere near as advanced or powerful. Tasmor do not even consider them a major threat though they have taken a few of our people in the past.”

“Our information said there were seven species total within this sector, including the Tasmor.” Martin said.

Namiri nodded her head. “That is accurate.” She told him. “The other three species are pre-space flight. Two are still within the industrial stage while the third has just discovered fission.”

“You know a lot about them.” Martin said.

Namiri nodded once more. “Emylea and I have scouted all of them.” She answered. “All of them fall within Tasmor territory but our mother has ordered them off limits because they are still maturing. We do not want to interfere in their normal evolutionary cycle. We have secure locations from which we view their societies every few years, but we insure that we are not discovered.”

“Dang! We do that too.” Martin exclaimed. “How about that... something else we have in common.”

Namiri met his eyes thinking that he was mocking her but she saw the twinkle in those dark brown orbs and then she found herself smiling as well. She glanced at Emylea and saw that her sister was also smiling.

“I suppose we do.” She said finally looking back to Martin.

“The Kintaur do not target these pre-space flight species?” Aricia asked.

Emylea shook her head. “No.” She answered. “We do not know why but they leave them alone. Perhaps they don’t see them as a resource that they can exploit. At least not yet.”

Martin nodded his head as he turned back to Kasdan and Danny. “They say anything?” He asked.

Danny shook his head. “Aside from a few choice words about Kesyla... nothing. They knew she was a Pralor Marty.”

Martin met Danny’s eyes evenly. “Did they now?” He said. “Interesting.”

“Nubian about carved his eyeballs out because of what he said but Anuk stopped her.” Danny continued.

“Where are they?” Martin asked.

“Anuk took Kesyla and the first team that got here from the *ARC ROYAL* to the closest debris field. She said if she stayed any longer she would use their entrails to string them up.” Dan answered.

Martin cringed. “Ouch!”

Danny nodded. “Tell me about it. I haven’t seen Anuk that angry in a lot of years.” He turned to the side. “Nubian is just checking that hunk of junk over there with T’lolt.” Danny motioned with his head to a large pile of debris that appeared to be a section of some kind of ship about two hundred meters away from where they were.

“Which one is in charge?” Martin asked.

“They won’t tell us openly, but the one of the left was giving the orders when we woke their asses up.” Danny told him motioning with his head to the Kintaur on the far left of the line where they were all kneeling.

“Let’s see if we can change that.” Martin said as he began walking towards where they were.

Namiri made to follow him but Aricia reached out and gently took her arm. “Namiri no.” She said.

Emylea and Namiri both looked at her. “I thought you brought us to help you interrogate them?” Namiri asked.

Aricia shook her head. “We brought you to listen to what they had to say and tell us if they are truthful. Not to take part.”

“These men knew we were here!” Emylea spoke now. “We need to find out how they knew that! They took me...” Emylea stopped and Namiri stepped up to her sister, pressing her body close and taking her arms.

Aricia saw this show of affection and couldn’t help but smile. Maybe the Tasmor were not so different after all. “Emylea, did they assault you on their ship? Did they force themselves upon you?” She asked softly as she came closer to them. “You can tell me. It will not reach past my lips to anyone.”

Emylea looked up and met her gaze. She shook her head slowly. “Not like that.” She finally said. “They told me what they were going to do as they pawed my body but they never did anything. I... I think the Captain of their ship was saving me for himself.”

Namiri saw Aricia’s jaw twitch ever so slightly at this knowledge and her azure colored eyes narrowed somewhat. She squeezed her sister’s arms tightly in support. “Tasmor do not allow males to touch females openly in any way.” She explained to Aricia. “It is considered a very large crime and males have been punished severely for this. And some females.” She finished with distaste.

Aricia looked at her oddly. “Something in your history?” She asked. “We have many species within the Union back home but this action is not among the different cultural ways that we have seen. There is a reason for this I take it.”

Namiri nodded her head. “It dates back thousands of years.” She told Aricia. “I do not know exactly what this event was, most Tasmor do not, but it has been this way for centuries. A Tasmor female who allows herself to be taken and... and used by men without fighting it to the death is... she is considered weak and stripped of all her authority and status. It is why I reacted as I did when I discovered Emylea had been taken.”

Aricia reached out and took one of Emylea’s hands in hers and then took one of Namiri’s hands. “This is your way.” She stated. “We do not judge another on their culture or what they believe. This act... it is not something that we allow in within the Union. To take a woman, any woman, against her will is considered one of the highest crimes that there is. It is not tolerated in any way, nor is slavery of any kind, and if it is discovered, those who conduct themselves in such a way are usually executed.”

Namiri and Emylea looked at her suddenly with wide eyes. “Touching is allowed in public though?” Namiri finally asked.

Aricia nodded her head. “Between men and women who love each other, yes. Between friends and family, yes. There are some species that see touching as the primary source of communicating with others. Lycavorians, we are among those. We need the physical contact that those we love and call friend provide to us. It is a greeting as well in some forms. But it is never allowed to be forced upon another.” She finished with a hint of anger in her tone.

Emylea looked at her then. “You... you have experienced this?” She asked softly.

Aricia met her questioning eyes and nodded her head. “I have.” She stated simply. “It was... it was not pleasant.”

“What... what happened?” Namiri pressed her.

Aricia looked over to where Martin stood between Danny and Kasdan and a small smile came to her lips. She looked back to them. “My husband and mate rescued me.” She said wistfully. “And he destroyed the man who had done this with his bare hands. Then he destroyed this man’s society and government and he freed our people. It is a long story really.” She said. “Our son has done something very similar just recently. We do not tolerate such actions as I said.”

Namiri glanced over to where Martin stood and then back to Aricia. “You and the other Queens are...”

Aricia nodded her head. “We love each other almost as much as we love Martin. We share each other just as easily as we share him. There is no competition between us and Martin is more than capable of taking care of all of us I that way. Sometimes he can be a beast.”

“This is accepted in your society?” Emylea asked surprised. “That you share yourselves with each other and him?”

“Oh yes.” Aricia answered. “You saw our daughter Zarah briefly. She and the young woman with her are deeply in love. One day they will find a man to love them and who they will love, but they are very happy together right now.”

“But I heard... the red haired Queen.” Namiri said softly. “She said there were six of you.”

Aricia smiled. “Yes.”

“And all of you...” Namiri almost could not believe it.

“Yes we do.” Aricia answered with a wide smile. “You should see it when all of us are together and how we can drive him crazy. But as you both must know, females no matter their species, we always seem to last longer than the males.” Aricia saw both of them smile at her words and nod shyly.

“There are many among the Tasmor who...” Emylea began to speak.

Aricia squeezed her hands. “You see... we really are not so very different.” She said. “We can talk of this later if you wish. It would be so much more entertaining with Anja with us. She has such an amazing way with words.”

“What is he going to do?” Namiri asked.

Aricia shrugged her shoulders. “He is going to get some answers.” Aricia replied. “Our husbands and mates, they worship the ground their wives and mates walk upon. They are treated as precious jewels, for our men know that we can carry the future of our people in our wombs. We fight and command just as they do, just as you have seen, but only we can give them more Spartan sons and daughters. And that is why we are looked at as the bearers of our future.”

“And your children are like this?” Emylea asked.

Aricia chuckled. “Some more so than the others, but yes. Our oldest son Androcles, he is like his father in every way and even more fearsome in many respects.” She squeezed their hands once more. “Come... you can see for yourself.” She paused and looked at them. “It will not be pleasant I must warn you.”

Namiri and Emylea looked at each other and then back to her. “Whatever they get they deserve a hundred times over.” Namiri spoke forcefully.

Aricia nodded and held tightly to their hands and motioned with her head. “Then let us watch what Martin will do. I think you will find it is nothing that your own people would not do in a similar circumstance.”

Atropos walked in first, followed by Saydia and Anthylea and then Perlyea and then the last Tasmor, a woman named Drenia. Tobia had told them this was the commander of Saydia’s flagship in orbit and probably

one of their most experienced commanders. She was equally as intelligent as she was capable commanding her ship Tobia had said and Saydia relied on her input when it came to many things.

Anja and For'mya stood on one side of the table with Tobia and Helen as Atropos moved to the side.

"Please... sit down." For'mya spoke motioning to the chairs on the opposite side of the table.

Saydia was looking around the interior of the building and discovered that none of the sophisticated stations that were occupied yesterday were active. The computer screens were dark and the chairs were empty. She looked at For'mya and then at the red haired woman who had supposedly been the one to examine Anthylea. Her eyes narrowed somewhat in anger when she looked at Anja, but the look bounced off the much shorter woman.

"Where is he?" Perlyea growled softly.

For'mya looked at Anja and then back to the four Tasmor women. "Our husband and mate has gone to interrogate the Kintaur that we captured early this morning." She told them. "We told him we would speak with you in his stead."

"You have captured Kintaur?" Anthylea asked suddenly coming very much alert.

For'mya nodded her head. "Early this morning. Survivors of the ambush we set for them when we first arrived. Our mate has some questions he would like them to answer."

"They will tell you nothing!" Perlyea snapped. "They are Kintaur!"

Anja chuckled softly. "Martin can be very persuasive when he wants to be." She said. "He will get the answers he wants."

"And then he will release them back to their foul masters on their ship no doubt." Perlyea continued. "As any male would do."

"If they survive the interrogation..." For'mya spoke seeing them all look at her with some surprise. "Then they will be executed for their actions against our people. Against your people as well it seems."

"You... you will kill them?" Saydia asked.

"If we had not arrived they were going to enslave Lycavorians." Helen spoke now. "Our people as well as yours. Martin Leonidas does not like it when others enslave and commit atrocities against our people. They are lucky they have survived this long. Though it will not help them in the end."

"Please... I ask that you sit down." For'mya spoke once more. "Since it appears your people are more comfortable interacting with females, we told Martin we would speak with you and try to come to an understanding."

"You told him?" Saydia asked as she stopped in front of the chair. "I thought he was the King of your people. Your leader." She spoke with a touch of contempt in her voice. All of them saw Tobia shake her head slightly.

"He is King." For'mya said calmly. "We are his Queens. Well... three of them anyway. Our fellow Queens are leading an expedition somewhere else at the moment. We speak with Martin's voice and he with ours."

"So he will listen to you when you tell him to release us?" Saydia spat.

"He would..." For'mya answered. "If that is what we told him. However... we are not going to tell him that. At least not yet. We have questions of you Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret. Questions that we would like the answers to. Only then can we discuss your departure from here."

"I do not have to tell you anything!" Saydia hissed. "You hold my people against our will! You forcefully conducted a medical exam on Anthylea without her permission and against her wishes! Why should we believe anything you say?"

"Your people attempted to steal technology that is not yours!" Anja snarled right back. "Then you almost killed one of our people without as much as a second thought! Trust me when I tell you had Tina died, we would not be having this conversation."

"We do not fear you!" Saydia hissed.

"Then you are a bigger fool than I ever thought you to be Saydia." Tobia spoke now and seeing Saydia's eyes widen in disbelief as she looked at her. "I have told you before that there are other species out there among the stars that make the Tasmor appear as children Saydia! This branch of the Lycavorian people are one of those! They are not like the Lycavorians that you know! They are equally as advanced as my people Saydia and unlike the Pralor people, they will not hesitate to eliminate a threat to them! Any threat! At this moment you

and your people are a threat! You have lied to them, experimented on their people and tried to steal what is not yours! What would you do if another species you did not know acted in such a way towards the Tasmor people? Would you not act in a similar manner? Especially after you have shown nothing but a willingness to be friendly and open. Martin and his people saved Emylea and Namiri! They saved your youngest daughters Saydia! They did so without question and then they held them in a position of honor for what they were trying to do! You repay this by nearly killing one of them and trying to steal what is not yours to have!”

Saydia was silent for a moment as she looked at Tobia. She opened her mouth to answer but Perlyea cut her off.

“We are Tasmor!” Perlyea barked. “We bow to no one and we take what is rightfully ours!”

“Does this woman speak for you Sovereign Regent?” For'mya asked.

“She is Chief Counsel to the Tasmor people.” Saydia answered hesitantly.

“So be it.” Anja stated. “Then we have nothing to discuss it seems. Our husband and mate does not deal well with arrogance or ignorance.”

“You call us ignorant?” Perlyea shouted.

“I'd call you as dumb as a *nubous* rock!” Anja snarled right back at her. “We had a team of our people do a little sightseeing last night. They walked across the hull of your flagship until they found your main computer core and then we downloaded the information we wanted from it.”

Saydia's eyes grew wide in shock as did Drenia's. “Impossible!” Drenia declared. “There is no way you could have done this without being discovered!”

Anja tossed the Tasmor COM unit onto the table. “Check for yourself.” She spoke. “Go ahead.”

“Drenia... do it!” Saydia demanded as she glared at Anja once more.

Drenia scooped up the COM unit and turned away to move into a corner of the room.

For'mya looked at Saydia again. “You seem to have issues with any male that you meet.” She said. “Whatever the reason for this we do not care. All we want is our people back. Martin Leonidas is many things, but he is also unlike any male you have ever met. Had you conducted yourselves in this way without the benefit of your daughters and your people helping and fighting to save our people here on Ventori, Martin would have had all of you executed already and disposed of your bodies in the pits with the Kintaur. We want nothing from you. In truth you have nothing that we could possibly need. Perhaps in several millennia when you outgrow this childish arrogance, perhaps then we can speak. Now however, now you can wallow in your self-worth and arrogance. If it does not destroy you from within, then someone will come along who is not as patient as we are.”

“Sovereign Regent!” Drenia gasped turning back to look at her. “Our... our main computer core was accessed last night! The intrusion was undetected until my XO did a targeted search just now. All files on the Lycavorians from Ventori and their locations were downloaded and copied to an external system! She reports that... she says that no foreign life signs were detected on the ship at any time through the night. The breach was... it bypassed all of our most secure computer locks as if they weren't there!”

Saydia looked at For'mya and Anja with disbelief very evident in her eyes. Anja smiled at her astonished expression. “You wanted in with the big boys of the universe Sovereign Regent Daret. Welcome to the big leagues.”

“Justice Nalmos has already been in contact with the other Justices of our people on the three planets you have relocated them too.” For'mya continued. “All of them have expressed a joyous desire to return to Ventori and rebuild what the Svorag destroyed and they will inform our people of this fact. Word will then spread quickly among our people on your planets that Martin Leonidas, their King, has come to reunite them with their people after so many generations. You will find there will be very few who will choose to remain among you once this is discovered.”

“You lie!” Perlyea almost screamed.

“We don't need to lie in order to achieve what we want.” For'mya stated confidently. “I have already sent for several dozen of our largest transport ships from Union space in the Alpha Quadrant.”

“You?” Anthylea gasped.

For'mya nodded her head. “One of my duties as Queen, aside from the obvious, is that I command all of the logistical ships within our fleets. They will begin arriving in just over a week, along with five complete Fleet Groups of our most modern warships. At that time we will begin removing our people from the planets

you relocated them too and returning them here.” For'mya looked at Anja. “Along with those ships will be a dozen medical ships under Anja’s command since it is she who has control over them as Chief Medical officer of our people. They will be well cared for and soon after those ships arrive any medical problems that they might have will be gone.”

“You cannot do that!” Saydia exclaimed.

“We can and we will.” For'mya told her.

Anja leaned forward over the table and looked at Saydia. “We will not take any action against the Tasmor people but be assured, should any of your ships or your soldiers attempt to stop us then Martin or one of us will give the order to obliterate every warship in your pitiful little eight hundred ship fleet. You will not hold our people hostage and should any of them be harmed as a result of our actions, well let’s just say you will not be happy with the result.”

“When we have secured our people and they are returned here to Ventori then you and those with you will be allowed to return to your people.” For'mya spoke once more. “At that time, any and all contact with the Tasmor people will cease. Any intrusion into Ventori space by Tasmor ships or personnel will be considered hostile and we will take appropriate action. Within one year Ventori will become the most heavily defended planet in this sector and quite possibly this quadrant of space. We will leave you and Perlyea Kalrr to lead your people as you see fit.”

“You will hold us prisoner?” Drenia gasped in shock.

“Is that not what you were going to do?” Helen spoke up now. “Hold our people hostage unless we gave you what you demanded?”

“The Tasmor people will never accept this!” Perlyea barked.

Anja nodded her head and reached for For'mya’s hand. They stepped close to one another intimately and looked at Saydia. “Then you will have to explain to them why so many of your people will die if you want to keep our people hostage.” Anja said.

“Tobia!” Saydia exclaimed. “You will allow this?”

Tobia met her eyes. “This is purely an internal affair between the Lycavorian people and the Tasmor Saydia. I’m sorry but my people will not interfere on your behalf... no. I told you one day you would attempt to overstep your station and you would anger a species that could swat your people from the stars Saydia. That day has now come and there is nothing I can do for you.”

“Oh boy... that was the single dumbest thing I have ever seen anyone do!” Julie’s voice echoed from where she stood beside Kenny and Pablo.

“Oh hell yeah!” Kenny commented. “Now you have gone and done it!”

It happened almost faster than Namiri and Emylea Daret could follow and they could only watch in unabashed awe as Martin Leonidas struck. All he had done was ask the Kintaur soldier one question. His show of bravado ended up being his last breath in this life.

He made the mistake of spitting at Martin.

Namiri and Emylea could only watch as that soldier was snatched up in some sort of bluish white field and lifted six meters into the air. His body was smashed back into the very unforgiving ground once, the sounds of his bones shattering very evident in the calm air all around them. Martin swung his arm over and they watched as the Kintaur soldier was lifted once more and smashed unmercifully into the ground twice more in quick succession, until his limbs were flailing about like limp noodles. Upon the third impact with the ground he lay still and they watched as Martin stepped up to him, drew his *Nehtes* from its thigh holster, spun it gracefully in between his fingers and then drove it down with a mighty plunge. Half of the *Nehtes* extended in a blink and the spearhead drove through the left eye socket of the Kintaur pinning his head to the ground. Whatever life remained in his body was instantly snuffed out.

Martin stood back up calmly and looked at the cooling body of the Kintaur on the ground. His head lifted and both Namiri and Emylea could see his eyes were wide and changed into a yellow/gold color. His dual fangs were fully extended and his expression was one of vicious anger.

“Any of you other stupid sonofbitches want to spit on me!” Martin shouted.

Namiri and Emylea could only look on in astonishment as Julie and the others chuckled softly to themselves and shook their heads in pity.

Martin stepped right up to another Kintaur. "What's wrong big man?" Martin snarled. "You can't talk!" The Kintaur glared at Martin. "Release me Lycavorian dog! I will show you what I can do!"

Martin smiled at him. "Well... one of you has got *nor* after all!" He spoke. "Ok... tough guy..." Martin looked at Tony. "Master Chief... cut this *igord* loose."

Tony lifted the large blade and stepped up behind the Kintaur with a huge smile. Julie shook her head once more and this time she leaned into Kenny. "They got almost as much brains as you Kenny." Namiri heard her comment.

Kenny nodded his head as he and Pablo laughed. "Yeah... but I'm much better looking." Kenny said with a wolfish grin, showing his wolf teeth.

Martin watched as Tony sliced through the Kintaur's bindings and then shoved him forward. "It's your funeral asshole." He muttered.

The Kintaur stood up fully and looked at Martin. They were equal in height, but the Kintaur was easily fifty or sixty pounds heavier than Martin. This did not seem to bother Martin in the least Namiri and Emylea saw and they watched him intently.

"C'mon tough guy!" Martin taunted him. "What's the matter... can't decide what to do when you ain't beating up on helpless men and children or raping women!"

"I will crush you Lycavorian fool!" The Kintaur shouted.

Martin held out his hands to the side. "Here I am pretty boy!" He stated.

"Argh!" The Kintaur howled out his rage and charged Martin intending to grappled with him and use his superior weight to bring the Lycavorian down and pummel him to death in front of his own people.

He was fast for such a large figure, but not even in the same league as Martin Leonidas. Martin simply stepped to the side and hit him in the side of his large forehead with a heel strike. The Kintaur staggered drunkenly to the side away from Martin, almost losing his footing from the incredible force of the blow. He grabbed for his head as bright stars filled the background, yet he managed to stay on his feet. He whirled back towards Martin, shaking his head to clear his mind.

"You will pay for that!" He growled. "I will kill you!"

"Get in line motherfucker!" Martin spat at the man. "There are a lot of people better than who want me dead! You are just a lot uglier than them!"

At the sound of laughter from Martin's team the Kintaur charged once more in anger, reaching for Martin with his hands. At the last possible moment he halted his movement and shifted directions, attacking from the side, intending to catch him off balance as Martin moved to counter. This would have worked had he been fighting one of his own kind or one of the Tasmor. It didn't work on Martin.

Martin ducked under his outstretched arms and brought his own arm whipping forward in a ridge hand strike. The knife edge of Martin's right hand hit the Kintaur squarely under the two slits that passed for his nose with enough power to lift the three hundred pound Kintaur off the ground, his feet flying up into the air and over his body. The crack of breaking bone echoed in the air and he slammed viciously into the ground face down in the dirt, his heavy body having careened a hundred and eighty degrees around from the force of the impact.

"WHOA!" Danny shouted in response to this. "*Nubou lae! Sibfla...* that had to hurt!"

Martin didn't hesitate and stepped over the body. He reached down and grabbed the Kintaur's head. "You fucked with my people!" Martin screamed. "No one fucks with my people!"

Martin Leonidas twisted savagely with all of his tremendous wolf strength and the Kintaur's neck snapped and popped in three different locations. Martin dropped the upper body back to the dirt and Namiri and Emylea saw that the Kintaur warrior's head and been twisted nearly all the way around in the opposite direction. His eyes were frozen open in death because it had happened so fast. They watched as Martin moved with incredible speed and was in front of the three remaining Kintaur, all of them with looks of shock and fear on their faces.

"Now which one of you is going to tell me what I want to know?" Martin snarled openly, revealing his long, dual wolf fangs. "My patience is just about gone!"

“Our Captain!” The Kintaur on the left shouted. He was the one who Danny had said seemed to be in charge. “Our Captain knows what you want!”

Martin stood up without pause and turned as Namiri and Emylea watched. He reached up and tapped his jaw implant. “Avi?”

-I am receiving you Martin- Avi answered instantly.

“Can you determine which one of the scum bags on that Kintaur piece of shit is the Captain?” Martin asked.

-Yes, easily. Captain Nemoa’s scans were quite thorough-

“Good.” Martin spoke. “Lock onto that ugly fucker and teleport his fat ass to my location on the surface!”

-Stand by. Locking on- Avi answered. **-Teleporting now-**

Namiri and Emylea watched in nothing short of adoration as the yellowish/red flare of light appeared directly in front of Martin and the form of the Kintaur ship Captain, First Warrior Gars, fully materialized.

“Hi there!” Martin bellowed. “Welcome to Ventori motherfucker!”

Gars’ eyes grew wide but he could not stop the crushing blow that hit him squarely in the jaw and sent him flying.

Saydia Daret was beside herself.

This was not going as she had thought it would. She thought perhaps she could bluster her way through this encounter in order to get what she wanted. Perlyea Kalrr had told her these Lycavorians would acquiesce without resistance considering their people were spread over three Tasmor planets far from here. This was not what she had imagined happening. Saydia was not a fool and she knew without thinking that these men and women could do exactly as they said they could. Her people would die by the thousands if they tried to keep the Lycavorians as some sort of bargaining chip. She had thought when they first entered the building and the man was not here that she could intimidate the female Queens. They were made of far sterner material and not in the least bit afraid of using their authority. And they had quite a bit of authority if what they had told her was true.

Saydia looked up as she saw the red haired female Anja shake her head and motion towards the door. The elven female For'mya nodded and still holding hands they began to move around the table towards the exit. Tobia and the fourth woman began to follow without words.

“Wait!” Saydia exclaimed turning to face them. Anja and For'mya stopped just short of the door and looked at her. “I wish... I wish to talk.”

“Sovereign Regent no!” Perlyea hissed. “Do not debase yourself to these...”

Saydia glared at her. “I have listened to you too often!” She snarled. “Be silent now!”

“I will not allow this!” Perlyea shouted. “We are Tasmor and we will not bow to these people!”

“No one has asked you to bow Perlyea Kalrr.” Tobia barked.

“What do you call what they are doing?” Perlyea demanded.

Tobia ignored her words and moved closer to Saydia. “Were you not prepared to steal from these people? Did you not almost kill one of them in order to obtain something that is not yours? Were you not prepared to use the return of their people against them in order to force concessions? What reaction did you expect you fool woman?” Tobia turned her eyes on Saydia. “You are smarter and wiser than this Saydia. I know you are. Would you risk your people over some fool notion from Perlyea that you are so much better than others? Even those who have proven they could destroy you easily.”

Saydia looked at her, the memories of their nights together coming back to her briefly. She knew Tobia spoke the truth for she had never lied to her. Saydia made her decision then, for the future of her people meant more to her than anything else. She turned to Anja and For'mya.

“What do you want from me?” She asked softly.

“Sovereign Regent no!” Perlyea barked moving towards her.

It was Anthylea who acted, stepping forward and imposing herself between them. With a powerful and quick movement she unleashed a heel strike directly into Perlyea’s jaw. Perlyea Kalrr was no warrior and her eyes rolled into the back of her head as her legs buckled and she fell unconscious. Anthylea caught her before she hit the ground and lowered her gently to the floor before rising back to her feet beside Saydia.

Saydia looked at Anja and For'mya once more. “I will do whatever you want to protect my people.” Saydia told them.

“We do not want anything from you Sovereign Regent Daret.” For'mya told her causing Saydia’s eyes to grow wider. “But we are willing to sit and talk with you in regards to what we can give or do for you because of what you and the Tasmor have done for our people.”

Saydia looked at them in disbelief. “You jest!” She stammered.

Anja shook her head now. “Not at all. We are not unreasonable Saydia Daret. We came out here looking for friends and allies, not enemies.” She answered. “We just don’t take kindly to threats to us or our people.” She told her.

“We have... we have nothing we can give you except your people.” Saydia told her.

“That’s not true either.” Helen spoke now as she came up beside Anja. “You have answers to questions that we want to ask. Beginning with these experiments on our people.”

Saydia shook her head. “There were no experiments.” She replied quickly. “We asked your people for samples of their DNA in order to help us eliminate several diseases common to my people. Diseases that your healing systems can destroy easily. They gave us these willingly. With these samples we looked for ways to improve our people and make them healthier.”

“And Anthylea?” Anja asked.

Saydia looked at Anthylea with loving eyes. “As I said...” Saydia spoke turning back to Anja. “We only wanted to improve our people! Anthylea and hundreds of others like her underwent the gene treatments our scientists developed willingly. Your people even helped us to develop it. We did it in the hopes that we could advance the Tasmor as a whole. There was never any nefarious intent! Never!” Saydia looked at them. “My people are dying and I am trying to save them!”

This statement caught Anja and For'mya by surprise as well as Tobia. She stepped forward and took Saydia’s arm. “What do you mean Saydia?” She gasped. “How could the Tasmor be dying?”

Saydia was unable to respond as the doors to the Command Center opened and half a dozen *Durcunusaan* came in followed immediately by Thoti. The *Durcunusaan* moved to their stations and began to power on their equipment as Thoti stepped up to them.

“Thoti?” Anja asked.

“We have a situation.” He told them. “Admiral Lorian is waiting on the COM.”

Anja moved instantly to the table and activated the holodisc. Manda’s body appeared in the flash of light on the floor and then cleared. “Manda... what is wrong?” Anja asked her.

Miranda turned from the station she was standing behind and they saw E'dira speak to someone near her Tactical Console. It was obvious that the *ARIZONA* was at full alert.

“Anja... long range sensors have detected a Kintaur fleet closing on our position.” She told them. “Thirty-three ships ranging in size from Heavy Cruiser to Frigate. They are in an attack formation and will enter the system in just under an hour. They are going all out... or as fast as their backward engines will drive them at least.”

“You... you can see them that far away?” Drenia asked in shock.

Miranda ignored her and focused on Anja and For'mya. “I have Steven already launching fighters and they will take up station to hit them from behind they moon.”

Anja looked at For'mya as she moved closer. “Manda... how many of our ships de-shrouded before the alert order was cancelled?” For'mya asked.

“Nineteen.” Miranda answered. “The rest are still hidden.”

“Weapons?” For'mya asked.

“Our sensors indicate primary laser based weaponry, rudimentary plasma turrets and high explosive missiles. Nothing that will touch our shields... but they could put a serious hurting on the Tasmor ships.” Miranda answered.

Saydia was about to implore for them to allow them to escape, but For'mya's next words halted her plea. She stared at the elven Queen with wide eyes.

“Manda... form a protective ring around the Tasmor fleet.” For'mya said. “Prepare to defend them.”

Miranda didn't hesitate in her answer. “Will the Tasmor allow us?” She asked. “We can cover them no problem with the ships we have currently de-shrouded, but they need to maintain a tight formation.”

For'mya looked at Saydia. “Your ships will not be able to escape before they arrive.” She said. “Allow us to do this and you will see for yourself that our husband and mate is not a monster. That we do not want conflict with the Tasmor.”

Saydia Daret was no fool. The Tasmor ships would be heavily outnumbered and no match for the Kintaur ships entering the system if they had been alone. She didn't question this knowledge in the least and she turned to Drenia. “Drenia... give the order immediately.” She told her. “Pull our fleet in tight and allow them to face the Kintaur ships.”

Drenia nodded. “I will need to use a COM.”

Anja looked at Thoti. “Thoti.”

Thoti nodded and looked at Drenia. “This way.” He stated.

“Anja...” Miranda's voice drew their attention back to the transmission. “You may want to let Martin know. Once they see their ship is crippled, they probably won't be real happy.”

Anja nodded her head. “He's already on his way back with Danny and the others.” Anja looked at Saydia. “Namiri and Emylea are with him and Aricia.”

Saydia's eyes went even wider but she remained wisely remained silent. For'mya took note of this and met her gaze while moving closer to her. “Your daughters seemed to be more open and accepting of things that are different.” She explained. “He only wanted to apologize to Namiri for what he did and perhaps have the two of them talk to you.”

“Apologize?” Saydia asked.

For'mya nodded her head. “Martin Leonidas is a male yes... but he is not a monster and he is King Saydia.” She told her. “He could no more hurt one of your daughters than he could injure one of his own children. He only wanted to talk with them and tell them what we are seeking is not conflict.”

Saydia didn't say anything for a moment. “They... they are returning with him?” She asked finally.

For'mya nodded her head. “Aricia was with them the entire time because he knew it would have been inappropriate, at least to the Tasmor, to have them accompany him without a woman present.”

“He knew this?” Anthylea asked now stunned at For'mya's words.

Anja smiled at them. “He may look rather wild at times, have all sorts of muscles and crazy delicious body parts...” Anja said. “But he is far from stupid and he is the most honorable man we have ever met.”

Tobia took Saydia's arm now and she turned to look at her. “Anja is right Saydia.” She said gently. “Trust what your instincts are telling you Saydia. They have never steered you wrong before. Listen to them now... and not to Perlyea's words of hate and arrogance.” Tobia squeezed her arm. “In all the time we have known each other, the time we have shared, have I ever lied to you. About anything?”

Saydia shook her head. “No.” She answered instantly.

“Then trust me now.” Tobia told her.

Everyone turned when the doors to the building slid aside and the *Durcunusaan* moved aside for their King. Martin Leonidas strode into the building without pause, Danny and Kasdan right behind him. It was Anthylea who noticed it first. Gone was the savage anger from the day before and in its place was a very powerful man who was coldly calculating in his actions and intent. He was so unlike the Tasmor men that Anthylea knew. All of the males among him were the same. Most of them were taller than the average Tasmor by several inches and all of them were much more thickly muscled and appeared in excellent physical

condition. For the briefest of moments Anthylea thought how they would pass on exceptional genes to any children that they fathered. They were easily a match for the Kintaur foot soldiers and combined with the superior weapons she had seen them carrying, it was no wonder that the Kintaur War Platoon here on the surface when they had first arrived had not survived for very long against them.

Namiri and Emylea entered the building with Aricia right after Martin and Danny and they moved quickly to their mother's side. Saydia hugged them both tightly and then held them at arm's length while trying to put on a stern expression.

"We will talk later of this." She told them both.

Aricia stepped up to them now. "Do not blame them Sovereign Regent." She said softly. "I sent for them after you and the others left."

"Mother we are fine." Emylea said. "You should have seen it mother! It was..."

Namiri looked confused and turned her head around. "Where is Chief Counsel Kalrr?" She asked.

Saydia motioned with her head towards the rear of the building and they saw Perlyea stretched out on a single couch. "She was ranting like an insane woman. Anthylea ended her words of hate. At least for a time."

"And saved us from having our ears hurt for days." Drenia muttered from Saydia's other side.

Saydia smiled and gripped her daughter's hands even tighter. Her eyes flew open when two other *Durcunusaan* dragged the inert body of the Kintaur soldier into the building. His face was a mass of bruising and bleeding heavily, his arms secured behind his back tightly with restraints that did not appear could be broken. One of his eyes was swollen shut, his thin lips broken and split, leaking the pinkish color Kintaur blood.

"Gods!" Anthylea gasped as she looked at him moving instinctively to stand in front of Saydia in order to protect her. "A First Warrior!"

Namiri nodded her head quickly. "The one commanding the ship that attacked us!" She exclaimed. "King Leonidas had him... his people used some sort of teleportation device and took him from his ship. He..." Namiri looked at her with wide eyes.

"What?" Saydia asked. "Took him from his ship? How can such a thing...?"

"Mother, he... King Leonidas was beating him like he was a child!" Emylea stated the disbelief still evident in her voice.

Kenny and Pablo were the ones dragging the Kintaur in and Kenny looked at Martin as he moved around the table. "Where you want this piece of garbage Skipper?" He asked.

Martin turned. "Drop his shit sorry ass in the corner Kenny. Stick a K14 in his ear and tell someone to get in here with a bucket and soap and douse him! He stinks to fucking high heaven and if I gag anymore I might vomit on him."

Helen was standing beside Tobia now and she turned to Saydia and Anthylea who had looks of utter disbelief on their faces. In all the years they had fought the Kintaur, not one single First Warrior had ever been defeated in single combat. In fact, the only one to have ever been killed was by five Tasmor warriors who had teamed up on the much larger and violent man. He had still managed to cripple two of them before he fell.

"Forgive him Sovereign Regent Daret." Helen told her. "Sometimes he forgets that he is King and he reverts to the base Spartan within him."

"Manda... what do you got?" Martin's commanding voice stopped all conversation as he looked at Miranda's image in the holotransmission.

"Thirty-three Kintaur ships that are nine minutes out." Miranda answered him. "The Tasmor ships have closed into a tight formation and we have deployed around them. If we need to, we can extend shields around their individual ships. The Kintaur pukers are trying to scan us but they aren't succeeding. Must be driving them nuts too!"

"They are trying to hail us I take it?" Martin asked.

Miranda nodded her head. "Oh yeah, and their ship too. They keep mentioning some happy horseshit about how; if we do not surrender and prepare to be boarded, they will open fire on us. Same shit they shoveled with Nemoa. Not real high up in the overall intelligence factor to be honest from what I've seen and heard. I've been ignoring them."

Martin grinned at her cool attitude. Like her mentor and pseudo adopted father Benjamin O'Connor, there was very little that could get Miranda Lorian to worrying. One also had to take into consideration the ship that she now commanded and the crew that she had put together. The number of things that could make her

worry had definitely dropped significantly. Confidence oozed from her pores now, because of her ship and her crew, and what she knew they could do.

“Configuration?” Martin asked.

“Looks like four Heavy Cruisers, a little larger than the Tasmor Flagship, nineteen medium cruisers and the rest destroyer or frigate class.” Miranda answered. “Not really sure since their ships are uglier than sin.”

Martin chuckled openly now and turned his head as Zarah and Lucia unwrapped the shadows from around themselves and Radem. The Tasmor in the room, to include Namiri and Emylea gasped in shock when they just materialized out of thin air beside Martin and he did not flinch.

“Zar?” Martin asked.

Zarah nodded her head. “All positions are manned and ready *Alvva*.” She answered him, unafraid to call him by the name she had grown up calling him. Papa. All of his daughters did the same thing and Anja, For'mya and Aricia simply smiled knowingly for they knew he loved when they called him that. “If they decide to do something stupid like try and land troops they won't be very happy about the greeting they get.”

Martin smiled at her. “I'm going to have to have a talk with your brother about the time you spend with him. You are becoming very unsociable you know.”

Zarah laughed happily and leaned up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek. “And where did my brother learn that I wonder?” She told him.

Martin grinned and slapped at her bottom as she laughed and blurred out of his reach and right up beside Anja. Lucia moved over beside her as Radem stepped to the side in order to better be able to watch over them both as was now his mission in life.

Saydia could not believe they were acting in such a way and her eyes narrowed in anger as she stepped closer to the table in order to mention this but she felt Tobia's hands take her arm and draw her back while shaking her head. She leaned close to Saydia and looked at her as Anthylea also stepped closer.

“You once told me that you wished for allies Saydia.” Tobia whispered to her as Saydia met her gaze. “You wished for powerful allies that you could trust to stand with you against the Kintaur and whatever threats came in the future. These are the men and women you seek. Just watch Saydia. You will see for yourself.”

“Here we go!” Miranda announced. “They are hailing us again. They're nothing if not persistent. And they have begun to scan the surface of Ventori Martin.”

“COMS?” Martin asked.

“Doesn't look they have developed holoimaging like the Tasmor yet.” Manda answered. “Standard VID COM.”

Martin nodded his head and motioned to the female *Durcunusaan* at the nearest computer station. “Find the channel and put it up on the big monitor please.” He told the young woman.

“Transferring now.” She spoke.

Martin turned to the massive three by three monitor that hung on the wall of the building. It flickered and came to life with the image of the large Kintaur. This one had a lighter brown coloring to his skin though his features were very similar to those they had already seen. His nose was more fully formed, though still very small. He also had large blue eyes which were odd looking on his face.

“...Sector General Sulos of the Kintaur Hegemony.” The man spoke. “You are within Kintaur Hegemony space! You will stand to and prepare your ships to be boarded!”

Martin and the others turned when they heard Saydia gasp slightly. “Something wrong Sovereign Regent?” Martin asked her.

Saydia looked at him but Anthylea was the one who answered for her. She could sense Saydia's still lingering anxiousness and distrustfulness of males because of the relationship that they shared but Anthylea knew Tobia was right. The Tasmor needed allies and if what she had seen so far was any indication, these Alpha Lycavorians were just what they had hoped would come along for centuries. Perhaps the Tasmor needed to change and set aside some of the more rigid disciplines they followed.

“Kintaur Sector Generals do not normally leave controlled Kintaur space unless they are planning to do battle.” Anthylea answered his question. Martin's dark brown eyes narrowed somewhat and Anthylea thought he was going to ask why Saydia did not answer him. Instead he met her own eyes evenly.

“First Colonel Anthylea Tomar right?” Martin asked her.

Anthylea bowed her head slightly in recognition of this though she was surprised that he knew who she was. She glanced briefly at Aricia and remembered she had used her rank and full name on their ship and that his Queen must have told him as they were speaking with their minds.

“Yes.” She answered finally still somewhat taken aback herself at how casually he was speaking to her. No Tasmor female was used to a male speaking so openly to them in public and in some ways it was very disconcerting.

For'mya detected this right away and she moved closer to Anthylea, pulsing Martin with her female aura and feeling him pulse her back knowing what she was going to do. “This rank is significant in some manner?” She asked.

Anthylea looked at For'mya and nodded her head much more easily. It was obvious she was more comfortable talking to another woman.

“Kintaur ranks show how far up the chain of command they are. First Warriors are the senior ground commanders and senior ship commanders.” Anthylea looked at where Gars was unconscious in the corner. “Like him.” She spoke with distaste. “Kintaur Planetary Generals control individual planets while Sector Generals lead entire Sectors, including all the fleets and ground armies within that particular sector.”

“And this man being here is not normal?” For'mya asked.

Anthylea shook her head. “Sector Generals almost never leave the Sectors they control unless, as I said, they plan to do battle. They do not conduct raids as the First Warriors and others do. They also would not come to investigate why one of their ships has gone missing.”

For'mya looked at Martin and he nodded his head. “So he knew some high value targets were going to be here and he came to collect them himself.” He spoke.

“No one knew of Namiri and Emylea Daret’s mission here.” Anthylea insisted. “And they certainly did not know we would be here! We did not know we would be here until Saydia ordered us to leave.”

Martin motioned with his head to the screen. “This guy knew. He’s acting too confident and calm.” He spoke confidently. He turned to point at where Gars laid on the floor. “And he knew.”

“It’s true Saydia.” Tobia spoke now. “Elder Valael decoded the Kintaur logs from the ship we disabled. They knew Namiri and Emylea were coming here to Ventori. That is why they showed up so soon after they arrived.”

“How many people among your forces knew that they were coming here?” For'mya asked Anthylea.

“The Chief Counsel ordered the mission.” Anthylea replied. “I do not... I do not know how many within her office would have known of the mission.”

“Perlyea is many things...” Saydia spoke now. “She is not a traitor or a spy! Not for the Kintaur! She lost her mother and two sisters to those monsters!”

“One problem at a time.” Martin spoke turning back to look at the monitor. “Let’s see what ugly here has to say.” He motioned to the female *Durcunusaan* officer and she touched her computer console.

“Active.” She spoke.

“Good morning Sector General Sulos.” Martin spoke crossing his arms over his broad chest. “What can I do for you today?”

KINTAUR BATTLE CRUISER

SUN ARROW

COMMAND SHIP FOR KINTAUR SECTOR GENERAL SULOS

“...Can detect nothing?” Sulos asked.

“Our sensors cannot penetrate their hulls General.” The man to his left replied. “There appears to be some sort of localized jamming field around each ship. I cannot determine the type of metal in the ships either. I have never seen it before sir.”

“These ships are not Tasmor. No ships like these exist in our databases.” Sulos said. “Tactical report!”

“Two of the ships are nearly four thousand meters long General. Nearly double our size.” Another man answered now. “Seven others are equal in size to the *SUN ARROW*, while the rest are under a thousand meters

long. Sensors cannot penetrate their hulls but our high resolution image captures indicate what appear to be gun turrets all over the ships. They are deployed in what appears to be a defensive formation around the Tasmor ships.”

“Can we scan Saydia Daret’s ship?” Sulos asked.

“Negative sir. Whatever is distorting our sensors from the unknown ships is also hiding the Tasmor ships. Visual identification is confirmed however.”

“What about the *BRIGHT STAR*?” Sulos asked.

“Main power is offline, emergency power is active and keeping the repair shields in place. She has been heavily damaged sir. I’m detecting two massive hull breaches dorsal and ventral. It appears as if someone blew her main engine cores right out of the ship! There are several smaller hull breaches that could be from residual explosions.”

“Life signs?” Sulos asked.

“It’s hard to tell with all of the core radiation in the area but at least three hundred.” The tactical officer answered.

“A Tasmor frigate could not do that type of damage to one of our cruisers.” Sulos spoke. “The intelligence said only two Tasmor frigates would be in this area initially.” He turned to the Kintaur who stood off to the side and had remained silent up until now. “Political Officer Dynv, do you have anything to add? Was our intelligence accurate?”

The Kintaur pushed away from the empty science station he had been standing next too. “All the information we had was correct General. The two Tasmor frigates were here to remove a group of Lycavorians that had been found. Our plan was to secure these two frigates, which carried two of Saydia Daret’s daughters; the two youngest ones to be exact, Namiri and Emylea Daret. We correctly deduced the Sovereign Regent would respond with the force that she has once they received the distress call we allowed the frigates to make. Contact with the *BRIGHT STAR* was lost once this distress call went out.” Dynv reported.

“So we know nothing.” Sulos spat.

“None of the information provided to us indicated unknown ships were even in the area.” Dynv spoke. “As you said yourself... these ships do not exist in our databases. KIP is certainly not aware of them.”

“Was this information vetted Dynv?” Sulos asked.

“Of course.” The man answered.

“General...” The sensor operator spoke up. “...Sir we can detect slight power readings from many of the ships but...”

“Talk to me!” Sulos exclaimed.

“While it is very different sir, I would have to suggest that these ships are powered by technology based on Pralor equipment.” The man answered.

Sulos looked at him with wide eyes. “Pralor?!” He gasped.

“Yes sir.”

“How is that possible?” Dynv asked. “The Pralor people have repeatedly refused to share their technology with anyone! They guard their technology obsessively! Are you saying they have something to do with this?”

“I’m saying that the power readings we are detecting are based on Pralor technology sir.” The man repeated. “It is most definitely not Pralor engineered however. At least it doesn’t match any past scans we have made of Pralor ships.”

“You are certain of this Lieutenant?” Sulos asked.

The sensor operator nodded his head. “Yes sir.”

Sulos looked at Dynv. “Then we are dealing with another species.” He spoke softly. “They are another branch of Lycavorians that have found their way here.”

“We have never seen any intelligence that indicated there were other factions of their species General.” Dynv said. “Even the Tasmor have no such records and they have been helping those from this planet for three years now.”

Sulos nodded his head. “Perhaps... but what other explanation is there.” He said. “What is on the surface?”

“We can confirm that the two Tasmor frigates have landed on the surface.” The sensor operator spoke again. “Several hundred Lycavorian life signs but they are... they are different somehow from those we have in our database.”

“Different... different in what way Sensor Lieutenant?” Sulos asked.

“Our sensors are not calibrated precisely enough to intensively scan surface contacts General.” The man answered. “I cannot be completely accurate with our sensors but they are different from other Lycavorians that we have scanned in the past according to our medical journals. There are several hundred on the surface, localized twenty-two kilometers southeast from the city of Jorlari. Sensors also detect over a dozen Tasmor within this same concentration of Lycavorians. It appears to be some sort of camp. High resolution scans are showing at least a dozen intact buildings where none should be according to previous sensor scans.”

“The cities on this planet are in ruin! They have been since the Svorag left!” Dynv hissed. “Are you saying there are new buildings?”

“Yes sir.” The man replied.

“This is very strange as well General Sulos.” Dynv spoke. “Kintaur Internal Police is unaware of any new buildings or Lycavorians in this entire Sector. Our probe information is only one week old. How could anyone build buildings in only a week?”

“Well they are on the surface and we must assume the unknown ships belong to them.” Sulos said. “I do not like this Dynv... we risked much to put this mission together and...” “General! They are replying to our hails!” The new voice echoed across the dimly lit bridge.

Sulos looked at Dynv. “Now maybe we will get some answers.” He spoke. “Engage the communications grid.”

“***Good morning Sector General Sulos.***” The Lycavorian in strange body armor spoke from the surface. “***What can I do for you today?***”

“I don’t know who you are but you are occupying...” Sulos began to speak.

“...occupying Kintaur Hegemony space! I demand that your ships in orbit power down and prepare to be boarded for inspection! Your weapons and ships will be impounded and your personnel will be detained until such time as I determine what to do with you.”

Martin turned to look at Tobia and Helen who were standing outside of the visual cone of the transmission. “Is this guy for real?” He asked.

Tobia shrugged casually. “I did try to warn you Martin.” She spoke causing Saydia and the others to look at her in surprise at how casually she referred to him.

Martin nodded his head. “Point taken.” He said before turning back to the monitor. “Is this an open transmission?” He asked his *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant.

The woman nodded. “Yes Milord.”

Martin nodded his head. “Good.” He looked at the Kintaur General on the monitor once more. “As I told your First Warrior Gars when we got here, this entire area of space, to include the planet of Ventori, is Lycavorian space. All of the information that we have indicates that the Kintaur Hegemony borders do not extend this far out from your recognized area of control.”

“Then your information is wrong! We claimed this planet!” Sulos spoke angrily. “That makes it ours!”

“Wrong or not General Sulos, you cannot claim something that does not belong to you.” Martin told him. “This is a Lycavorian planet, which makes it my people’s planet, which means it is my planet!”

“I do not know who you are!” Sulos barked. “We claimed this planet after the Svorag left it in ruins! It is now a Kintaur planet!”

Martin shook his head. “My people are still on Ventori General.” He spoke. “They have been here for almost a hundred thousand years. I know for a fact that is far longer than you have been out trolling among the stars.”

Zarah and Lucia were among the first of those in the room who chuckled softly at his words. Zarah knew her father could get very colorful in his choice of words when he was wound up and he was certainly getting wound up now. Helen merely shook her head with a smile as Anja’s face beamed in delight.

“Who are you?” Sulos snapped. “I demand you tell me what is your title or rank? Are you in command of the ships in orbit and those forces on the ground?”

“You demand an awful lot for someone not in a position to demand *sibfla*. I’ll humor you though, this time. My name is Martin Leonidas.” Martin answered him. “My military rank is Star Admiral, but most people just call me King Leonidas though.”

Saydia watched Anja lean into Aricia beside her with that beaming face. “He is feeling his oats today Little Wolf.” Anja whispered just loud enough for Saydia to hear her.

Aricia nodded her head with an equally animated face. “Yes he is.”

Martin saw Sulos’s eyes grow larger on the monitor. “King?” He continued. “There was never a Lycavorian King! Not on this planet!”

“Well, as you can obviously see, I’m not from this neighborhood.” Martin answered him. “But I am Lycavorian and I am King. And you seem to know a lot more about my people than you are telling me if you know that there was no King on this planet. That doesn’t matter to me. What you and your people know doesn’t matter to me. Ventori and the Lycavorians on it fall under the protection and realm of the United Lycavorian Union. You can’t claim something that does not belong to you as I told you before. Now, if you would, please state your intentions for entering this system.”

“We are responding to our ship’s distress call!” Sulos answered almost too quickly.

Martin shook his head. “Want to try again sport?” He asked. “Your ship did not send a distress call. Your ship was in orbit of my planet and your troops were on the surface attempting to capture my people and the Tasmor forces here helping them in order to use them as slave labor, among other things. I don’t take kindly to others trying to enslave my people.”

“I demand that you hand over all of the Tasmor currently on the surface!” Sulos spat with some anger. “Do you have the war criminal Saydia Daret among you? We have confirmed her Flagship is in orbit of the planet! You will hand her and her daughters over to me, as well as any other Tasmor and all of their ships! You will do this immediately!”

Saydia Daret closed her eyes slowly. This is the moment she knew would come one day. This was the moment that would decide her future and whether she lived or died. She gripped Anthylea’s hand tightly in one of hers while Namiri and Emylea pressed close to her. This man’s words would decide their fates and so far nothing they had done since being here had shown him that the Tasmor could be trusted. Martin Leonidas had no reason to protect the Tasmor, not after what Perlyea had attempted to do, and when she heard his next words Saydia Daret’s eyes flew open in shock and she knew instantly where the future of her people lay.

Martin shook his head slowly. “I’m thinking not.” He answered Sulos. “The Tasmor people have been providing care and assistance to the surviving Lycavorians here on Ventori since the Svorag attack. They have relocated many of them to safety on their worlds. Given them shelter and care. Sovereign Regent Daret is indeed here on the surface and is conducting negotiations with my Queens in order to see that my people are returned here to Ventori as quickly and efficiently as possible. What you want doesn’t even register on my radar sport. Not after what I have seen.”

“You have seen nothing!” Dynv spat now from beside Sulos.

Martin rolled his eyes. “Another country heard from... great!” He spoke before turning and looking at where Kenny and Pablo stood. He motioned them forward and they lifted the still unconscious form of Gars between them. “What I have seen is the entirety of the logs from your ship... and from this shit bird here.” Martin motioned to the Kintaur that Kenny and Pablo held between them. Martin reached out and pulled the Kintaur’s head back so they could see his face. “You wouldn’t happen to know this douche bag would you?”

Sulos’s eyes grew a little wider. “That is First Warrior Gars! You will release him and any Kintaur you illegally have in your custody and you will do so immediately!”

“That ain’t gonna happen.” Martin said. “I’ve read the logs from this smelly fool and his ship. He likes to brag about what he has done to Lycavorian men and women in them! My people! Lycavorians from this planet! His personal logs go into great, disgusting detail about Lycavorian and Tasmor females he has assaulted! What he planned to do to Emylea and Namiri Daret and even their mother. You let twisted assholes like this command ships often do you?”

“They are war criminals!” Sulos barked out. “They have committed crimes against the Kintaur people for decades! You will turn them over to me and your ships will stand down! My men will board your ships to

inspect them for any Tasmor you attempt to hide! That is what you will do boy! I have you outnumbered in number of ships and troops! I will crush you and take them by force if need be!”

Now it was Helen who snorted softly and shook her head. “Oh my.” She whispered so that Tobia and a few others could hear her. “Now they have gone and done it.”

“General Sulos is several hundred years old.” Anthylea spoke softly looking at her.

Helen nodded her head. “I’m sure he is. Martin Leonidas is over three thousand years old however.” She told her seeing their eyes go wide in disbelief. “And he positively hates being called boy.”

“Are you really as utterly stupid as what you just let come out of that hole in your face?” Martin asked him shaking his head and drawing their attention back to him. “Admiral Lorian!”

“Standing by Milord.” Manda’s voice echoed in the background.

“Manda... please order Captain Nemoa to remove the Kintaur eye sore currently drifting near our planet.” Martin spoke calmly. “And don’t spare the expenditure of power.”

“Acknowledged.”

Martin stepped closer to the monitor. “Let me explain something to you oh great and mighty ugly one.” Martin snarled now his eyes changing and his fangs extending to their full length. “This is my planet! These are my people! The Tasmor people have shown themselves to be friends to my people and no one fucks with my friends. I’m not usually an unforgiving *ronnus*, I leave that to my son, and he does it far better than I ever will. I’m going to make an exception in your case lard ass!” Martin growled. “Manda!”

“Captain Nemoa is standing by!”

“Tell her to blow that ugly, hunk of *nubous* junk out of the stars please!” Martin barked.

“With pleasure.” Miranda echoed.

SUN ARROW

Nothing seemed to happen for the first half a minute, which led General Sulos to doubt what the Lycavorian on the surface had just said. That thought changed instantly when there was a massive flare of bluish white light from the port side of the ship closest to where the *BRIGHT STAR* was drifting.

The entire port side of the *REPULSE* flared brilliantly as 15 Type 1 Hyper Matter Plasma turrets, 15 Type 2 Hyper Matter Plasma turrets and six of the twelve Mark 22B Anti-ship Missile Batteries all erupted at the same time. Though Sulos would never know it, Captain Nemoa had opted not to fire her entire portside battery of missiles in case the Kintaur did something stupid.

What the *REPULSE* did fire was quite enough to do the job however.

With 4, Class Six Hyper Matter Fusion Cores providing the power, the beams of plasma were bluish white in color and carried with them horrific energy and destructive capability. The Type 1 Batteries did most of the damage, impacting along the entire hull of the *BRIGHT STAR* and ripping open the ship like it was an ancient soda can. The Type 2 Batteries continued the onslaught, automatically compensating for the shifting of fire and hitting pieces of the ship that were larger than a transport. The Mark 22B missile launchers fired normal RU22 Hellion high explosive Anti-ship missiles in this volley, Nemoa not wanting to expend her complement of ZMF missiles. The RU22 Hellion missiles were becoming the standard Anti-ship missile in the Union fleet for its superior performance and unerring accuracy. Not to mention the power that the missile could carry.

All of the weapons arrived at the *BRIGHT STAR* in just under three seconds and quite simply blew the ship from existence.

Sulos and those on the bridge of the *SUN ARROW* could only gape in shock at their large view monitor.

“General Sulos!” The sensor operator stammered. “General... the *BRIGHT STAR* is... General she is completely gone!” The man couldn’t believe his own words. “The only... the only wreckage that remains is no larger than two meters across!”

“Impossible!” Dynv gasped. “There must be more than that!”

“No sir!”

“Check your readings again!” Dynv snapped at the man. “General... we must prepare and execute a counter attack! They have destroyed one of our ships! We must...”

“That would be the single, most ignorant thing you have done today!” Martin’s voice filled their bridge for the monitor still had an open COM channel active with the surface of Ventori. ***“Manda... do it!”***

They all heard the female voice then. ***“Sections Two and Three! Execute! Execute!”***

Not two seconds later Sulos and Dynv heard the sensor operator inhale sharply.

“General!” He almost screamed. “Unknown ships are appearing all around us!” He screamed. “They match the size and configuration of the ships protecting the Tasmor fleet! Another twenty-four ships General! They have us surrounded!”

Sulos glared at the monitor and saw the Lycavorian staring back at him. ***“I’ll give you two choices.”*** Martin spoke. ***“The nanosecond one of my ships detects one of your buckets of bolts powering their weapons I will send all of you right straight to hell. And I won’t spare the bullets to do it. You just saw what one of my smaller ships did; go ahead and test me and find out how much patience I have left.”*** Martin told him. ***“Your second choice is to pull your ships out of my system and carry your asses back to whatever fucking hole in the ground you crawled out of!”***

“That ship had over three hundred men on it!” Sulos screamed.

Martin nodded his head. ***“And they paid the price for trying to enslave my people. I won’t lose any sleep over their deaths!”***

“You have signed your own death warrant by your actions this day!” Sulos shouted at him.

VENTORI

“You have signed your own death warrant by your actions this day!” Sulos shouted at him.

“I don’t know what problems you have with the Tasmor pal.” Martin spoke undaunted. “But they were trying to help my people, which to Lycavorians, makes them friends. When you enslave and hurt my people and my friends I get a really nasty case of the red ass and I want to kill shit!” Martin snarled. “You see those ships around you? One word from me, from one of my Queens, and all of you die! I will kill you so fast you won’t have time to shit your pants let alone think about it!”

“You have killed Kintaur soldiers! Kintaur citizens!” Dynv shouted now.

“And how many of my people have you taken off Ventori?” Martin shouted right back. “How many more have you killed trying to take them from Ventori? I can’t help those you have already taken, not yet anyway, but you will not take one more while I live and breathe! Don’t fuck with me Sector General Sulos or whatever the hell you call yourself! Your bluster and blathering doesn’t scare me in the least! I got bigger guns and bigger ships and I won’t hesitate to kick your sorry ass right back to the fucking dark ages! I’ll give you twenty seconds to alter your course and carry your ugly asses out of this system or my people start shooting!”

“And the Tasmor criminals?” Sulos barked. “You align yourself with our hated enemies! The Kintaur will not forget this!”

“I am aligned with myself!” Martin snapped. “But so far the Tasmor people have shown themselves more trustworthy than you and your people! We greeted them as friends and they did the same, which is more than I can say for you! They will be treated as friends, which means while they are here they are under my protection. You want them... you come through me! You’re running out of time.”

“I want Gars back!” Sulos yelled. “You will return him to his people!”

Martin looked at the Kintaur on his knees between Kenny and Pablo. He nodded his head. “Fair enough!”

Martin Leonidas’s hand closed around the hilt of his sword and with a snap and hiss the blade appeared instantly from Flatspace the moment he yanked it free of his harness. He didn’t hesitate and spun the blade gracefully in his hand before launching the sword the seven meters across the room with exquisite precision. The sword tip entered just below his right eye socket as Kenny and Pablo released the body and the force of the throw tossed the Kintaur back as the sword skewered his skull and anchored itself into the wall of the building behind him, pinning his now very dead body half off the floor.

The Tasmor in the room could only gape in unabashed shock at the callousness with which he had just killed the Kintaur soldier. Not one of them cared that he was now dead, the Kintaur had perpetrated far more

atrocities upon far more Tasmor in the past. None of them had ever seen anyone dispatched a Kintaur First Warrior with such ease and total conviction. Saydia Daret looked quickly at Anthylea, gripping her hand tightly and seeing the same look in her beautiful dark eyes that no doubt occupied her own blue orbs. A look of utter shock yes, but also a look of what the future could hold with such men and women as their allies. Not one Lycavorian had even blinked at what Martin Leonidas had just done and even Tobia had stood stoically and showed no emotion.

Martin turned back to the monitor and saw Sulos and Dynv staring at what had just occurred with similar expressions of disbelief. Martin's voice brought the attention of everyone in the room once again.

"You wanted him back...?" Martin spoke. "Well he's back. Back with those of his crew who tried to take my people! And he has been punished for the crimes against them that he had already committed!"

"You will die for this!" Sulos screamed now from his ship. ***"I will see you skinned alive and your body put on display for..."***

"You have ten seconds now asshole!" Martin barked. "Manda... order all ships to prepare to fire! I want nothing left of these dick wads except memories!"

"Acknowledged." Miranda's voice echoed.

"Reverse course!" Sulos shouted. ***"Reverse course!"***

"General we cannot let them..." Dynv began to protest but Sulos ignored him as he looked back to Martin.

"I will see you dead Martin Leonidas!" Sulos spat vehemently. ***"I will find you and I will see you dead for what you have done!"***

Martin nodded his head. "Get in line motherfucker!" Martin snarled. "I got way better men than you in this universe who want my ass dead and I'm still here! You're nothing but a bully! I hate bullies! Manda...?"

"The Kintaur ships are altering course and beginning to move away." Miranda answered.

"Detail a section to escort them out of Ventori space." Martin spoke. "If they flinch... blow their miserable asses to atoms."

"Done." Miranda answered.

"We will meet again!" Sulos barked savagely.

Martin smiled at him. "I look forward to that day." He said. "Then I can kill your sorry ass myself! Have a nice life cockbreath."

Martin reached out and killed the communication before Sulos could reply and he stood there for a moment letting the anger flow out of him. Saydia watched amazed as Aricia, Anja and For'mya immediately went to him, pressing their bodies against his in very intimate fashion and the tenseness that had been showing on his body simply vanished into the air around them. She watched Helen step up to him and stand in front of him. Martin met her eyes and she saw Helen nod her head slowly. Martin smiled at her before lowering his head and nuzzling all three of his Queens, Saydia watching as their faces became animated and almost aroused in nature.

Saydia Daret blinked quickly for suddenly Martin Leonidas had moved and was staring at her from across the table.

"I accept your culture and your customs Sovereign Regent Daret." Martin told her. "Many of your ways are foreign to us but we adapt pretty well. Everything you told my Queens I know as well now." He said seeing her eyes grow wide. "I am not the Pralor people, nor do I follow their way of thinking. Your actions in helping my people will not be forgotten and I am willing to offer you and the Tasmor people whatever I can within reason for doing what you have done." Martin stood up straight and took a deep breath before he continued.

"Anja and For'mya want to continue speaking with you Sovereign Regent Daret and to carry on conducting whatever negotiations you like. We may be different but I think you will find we can be very good friends. I like friends. We need friends out here." Martin told her. "I have only one condition."

Saydia looked at Anthylea and Namiri before turning back to Martin. "And that is?" She asked.

"Be honest with me and I will be honest with you." Martin told her. "Attempt what your friend there did again... and all gains that we could make as two species working together will come to a very abrupt end. You will find that I can be the best friend the Tasmor ever had, but try and fuck me over and you will learn that I can be the worst nightmare of an enemy you have ever come across. That means you need to keep your Chief Counsel under control and find out what else she has been cooking in her head when it comes to my people."

Saydia looked at him. “You would... you would give us your technology?” She asked not really wanting to believe him but his tone and his words were too sincere not to believe him.

“That can be discussed but as I said... it has to be within reason.” Martin told her. “Anja and For'mya know what I will and will not allow, but you might be surprised if you really want to have a relationship with my people. We can teach you and others quite a bit.”

Saydia Daret was dumbfounded. For the first time in her life she did not know what to say. This was almost beyond imagination. She glanced quickly at Anthylea, and then Namiri and Emylea. Their eyes were bright and full of promise at what the future could hold and that is what ultimately pushed Saydia over the top in her decision.

Saydia Daret, Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people, then did something she had never done before in her entire life.

“I give you my word that this will be done King Martin Leonidas.” Saydia spoke.

Martin grinned and stood to his full height. “Outstanding! I love it when a plan comes together!”

“Plan!” Anja barked now looking at him. “What plan you big oaf! You were flying by the seat of your pants the entire way!”

Martin nodded his head. “Hell yes... but that is the fun part!”

Helen could only shake her head in disbelief. “The gods preserve us, he has truly lost his mind now.” She muttered.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

AUSTROVA EMBER COVE

“...Trust her?” Coren asked Asay where she sat across from him and Alrerin. “She has worked for Ardan a very long time Asay.”

Asay nodded her head in agreement. “Yes she has Coren, but you did not see the look in her eyes. She broke down in my arms. Everything she has been raised to believe has been a lie. The man who was supposed to be a surrogate father to her has only used her, forced her to do things that she would not have done otherwise! All because she thought she was helping him. Because she thought he cared about her!”

“Asay there is far more going on than you realize.” Coren spoke.

“Then tell me!” Asay demanded. “I cannot conduct a full and thorough investigation without all of the facts! What are you holding back Coren? What are you not telling me?” Asay looked at Alrerin who had so far been silent. “First Regent I have to know what is going on if I am to determine what took place last night and who is responsible. This communication that Kinryn copied is pure fire! If this is true then...”

Alrerin lifted his eyes to her and met her gaze. “We already know who is responsible.” He told her. “And there are a great deal more facts than what this communication reveals.”

Asay looked at him in shock, her eyes going wide. “You already...” She gasped. “But what you said in the meeting? You...”

Alrerin got to his feet cutting off her words and he moved to the large double glass doors that looked out over the beach from Coren’s office. He could see his grandchildren on the beach once more, sitting with their mother while she schooled them in the classes they were missing being away from home. They sat attentively and listened to her without question. Alrerin had learned long ago that Narlei and Riordian were taskmasters when it came to the education of their children. Their children knew well the punishment for not listening to their mother or any of their teachers back home when in school. Their father had tanned the backsides of his two oldest children more than once for fluffing off in school. They had ample time for play and to do what children their age did, but all of them had learned the lessons that education came first. Alrerin glanced to the right and then to the left and saw several *Durcunusaan* alertly patrolling the beach on either side of his daughter and grandchildren. They may have been here to protect Coren, but Androcles had made it clear that anyone within the boundaries of Ember Cove was to be protected at all costs. Alrerin knew for a fact that that were at

least a dozen other heavily armed *Durcunusaan* patrolling the grounds and equal that number of Vanari Commandos loyal to Coren and himself. Androcles had left both of them direct COM links to this Admiral Sa'sur in orbit. She was an elven woman who he trusted with his life and some of the most sensitive secrets within the Union. If Androcles Leonidas felt this way then Alrerin knew he could trust her as well.

Alrerin turned back to Coren. "Coren?" He asked.

Coren turned from where he sat on the couch. The changes within him were progressing rapidly just as Nyosa had told him they would. While the Lycavorian virus in her blood was diluted somewhat, her mother had extremely pure blood and this made the virus even more powerful. He could feel Nyosa's resonance faintly from the next room as she worked on the details of the security for Ember's Cove with the *Durcunusaan* Officer and Senior Cadre Officer in the next room. Though several hundred years his junior in age, Nyosa Val Ardwor had opened his eyes to so much that he had been missing. She had shown him what true love and devotion was and Coren had embraced that completely. He could also detect that Asay now had the Lycavorian virus coursing through her own veins and Nyosa had told him that whoever had bitten her was of very pure blood just like her mother.

"Given how deep we believe this goes Alrerin, we could use all the help we can get." Coren told him.

Alrerin nodded his head immediately. "I concur." He answered as he returned to the couch.

Asay looked at both of them. "What exactly is going on here?" She demanded holding up the holomager. "Just with this communication alone I could begin a full investigation of Ardan Vu Lamurrion! I could..."

"No." Alrerin said.

"First Regent this information is... it is explosive! If this ever came out to the public it would..." Asay began.

Alrerin nodded his head. "It would cause untold chaos." He said. "It would essentially tear apart the very fabric of our government from the inside. That is not something we can allow to happen."

Asay looked between Alrerin and Coren quickly, her keen mind working rapidly. She leaned back in her chair. "By the Prophets... you knew!" She gasped. "You knew this was going on!"

Alrerin shook his head slowly. "I have suspected for some time but I have never been able to produce any credible evidence to support this. Ardan and those helping him have been extremely careful in their actions, and I have been preoccupied with keeping my daughter and grandchildren safe from the OSG and their agents. Coren discovered what was going on only a few months ago and with Androcles' help, he has been able to obtain a substantial amount of intelligence to support this. However this communication..." He looked at Coren quickly and then back to Asay. "...This could and will change everything."

"Are you willing to hear it all Asay?" Coren asked her.

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"You are different now." Coren spoke. "Just as Narlei is; just as I am. You have been bitten haven't you?"

Asay looked at him with wide eyes. "How could you... how could you know that?" She gasped.

Coren tapped his nose gently. "It is one of the first things that develops in those bitten by a Lycavorian and the virus is introduced into their system." He told her. "The sense of smell. Nyosa told me I would be able to detect others with the virus inside them first. I am not nearly as advanced as Nyosa is, she was born like she is, but I did detect something within you. She only confirmed it for me."

"A Lycavorian has claimed you Asay Va Eldost? He has made you his wife and mate hasn't he?" Alrerin asked her.

Asay couldn't meet their eyes and she lowered her face as her blue skin flushed ever so slightly. "I..." She began.

"A Lycavorian claimed my daughter and has loved her shamelessly for more than sixty years Asay Va Eldost." Alrerin said softly. "The brightness of her eyes and the sound of her laughter are because of him. Riordian taught me the true meaning of devotion. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

Asay looked up at them. "I will never be ashamed! Asay spoke confidently. "His name... his name is Nellian Tyrine." She spoke softly, her voice filled with newfound love. "I met him on the ship in orbit. He was so polite and smart and so very handsome." She shook her head quickly. "I do not know how it happened so

quickly but it did. I... I wanted him within the first hour of meeting him. What he makes me feel is... I can't put it into words."

Alrerin shook his head now. "And no words are needed." He told her. "If it is anything like what Riordian shows to my daughter every day then I already know."

"As do I." Coren spoke. "Androcles, Denali, and now Nyosa; believe me I understand completely."

Asay looked at them. "Why does this matter?" She asked. "What Ardan and Galar and others are doing is insidious! They..."

"We should probably give you the short version." Coren spoke. "The full file we can make available to you on a secure server. It will be Bio Encoded so that only you can access it."

Asay looked at him. "Coren we do not use Bio Encoded security protocols." She told him.

"We do not... but the Lycavorians do." Alrerin said. "It was the only way to keep what we know from falling into the hands of Ardan or the OSG. Riordian set up a computer server and file for me in this fashion. I have added Coren to it and now I will add you to it. You can go through it at your convenience, but right now we will give you a summary of what we know."

Asay nodded her head quickly as she sat back in her chair and Alrerin began to speak. It took nearly an hour as both of them would add things at different times, and most of the information was not substantial until Coren began to tell her what he had discovered since returning to Austrova with the help of Denali and Praetor Dyack of the Rothryn people. Coren had refilled her tea twice during this time as she listened attentively and the scope of everything began to sink in.

"By the Prophets!" Asay exclaimed as she came to her feet when they finally finished. She moved around behind the chair she was sitting in as she tried to wrap her mind around everything they had just told her. "How... how long has this been happening?" She finally gasped out the question. "How long have they been selling our females to the OSG!?"

Alrerin sat back on the couch. "That we do not know for sure." He answered her evenly. "I would guess several hundred years at least; probably far longer than that. The Lycavorians have been aware of it since my predecessor held office from what Riordian tells me; however they never acted on this information because of the status of our relations with them. At least not until the last century when Dutkne deemed it was happening far too often and too close to their own borders."

"Lies!" Asay hissed angrily. "So much of what we know has been based on lies!"

Coren nodded his head. "Yes they have been. First and foremost among those lies are the facts that the virus within a Lycavorian cannot affect Vanari. I think the three of us now know that is completely untrue, as are the reports that any children born from such a union would be deformed in some way. You have seen Nyosa and Alrerin's grandchildren; their existence alone proves that our scientists and doctors were wrong. They cannot shift their forms and any children born from the union of a Vanari and a Lycavorian will always have blue toned skin, but they will also have all of the traits of a Lycavorian as well."

"Wrong or told to be wrong." Alrerin said with a nod. "That doesn't matter now. It will all come out in the end."

Asay looked at them. "The Lycavorians...?"

Coren nodded his head. "Some of them are working for the OSG." He answered. "That is who attacked Alrerin's home and mine. We do not know exactly how many but Dutkne and his people have identified at least several dozen within the former Protectorate. They will be very surprised when they are arrested and brought to us for justice."

"And Prince Androcles?" Asay asked. "Can we trust him?"

Alrerin shook his head now. "Trust him?" Alrerin asked. "At this moment in time, I find myself trusting him more than many of our own people. Whatever elements of this slavery ring that existed within the Alpha Quadrant is now dead." He stated plainly meeting her gaze. "All of the major players were caught and quickly executed. Their leader died by Androcles' own hand. It appears that the Union, the Alpha Quadrant branch of the Lycavorians, has a particular and very nasty distaste for slavery in any form. Riordian tells me it is because of their years of slavery to this High Coven. Those that survived this purge will pose no problem for us, if they ever show their faces again that is."

"How can you be so sure?" Asay asked.

Coren got to his feet slowly. "Because I was there the day he rescued my daughter Asay. I saw what Androcles Leonidas and his siblings are capable of." He told her evenly. "I watched him destroy an entire government Asay. He wiped it out completely because they had allowed what happened to Caliria." Coren shook his head. "Never have I seen such power and death as I did that day. Until now that is."

"Now?" She asked. "What do you mean Coren?"

Alrerin also rose now. "There is a reason why I ordered the entire Board of Regents to gather in three days." He told her. "When we meet in the Regent's Hall, the attack will have been underway for twelve hours."

Asay's eyes flew open. "Attack?" She almost shouted. "What attack?"

"The attack that will free every Vanari female currently being held by the OSG and their minions."

Alrerin finished the statement. "The attack that will finally and forever set our people free."

Asay was stunned into silence as she stood there and she watched as Coren stepped up to her and took her arms. "Are you with us Asay?" He asked softly.

Asay looked at him and the answer came with no hesitation in the least. "Prophets... yes! Of course I am!" She exclaimed.

Coren nodded his head and looked at Alrerin. He turned back to Asay. "I will inform Admiral Sa'sur of this and she will arrange for you to work off the *SCIMITAR*. Kinryn is not safe on Austrova. Ardan will discover what she has done and he will stop at nothing to kill her to hide his involvement in this. He will also come after you I'm quite sure given what Alrerin has tasked you with. Especially when he discovers that Kinryn took that communications. And he will find out, sooner rather than later I'm sure. He is many things but he is no fool."

Asay shook her head quickly. "Nellian would... he would never allow anything to happen to me. Not now." She stated.

"Can he provide protection for you?" Alrerin asked. "It would look odd if Androcles were to provide this?"

Asay nodded quickly. "He is a *Durcunusaan* Captain." She answered. "Yes I...?"

"He gave you his COM channel?" Coren asked.

Asay nodded again. "Yes."

Coren turned and retrieved the secure Union COM unit that Androcles had left for him. He held it out to Asay after typing on it quickly. "Contact him now."

Asay took the COM unit with shaking hands and entered the COM code that Nellian had told her to use if she needed anything from him. He had returned to his ship in orbit and she had talked to him only briefly but his voice and his handsome smile was all she needed to put her at ease.

The small holo image of the tall, dark skinned Lycavorian appeared almost immediately when she activated the transmission. He appeared to be in some sort of corridor on the ship, men and women passing him by in the background, but he stopped the moment he saw her in the transmission.

"Asay?" Nellian gasped. "Asay my mate, what is wrong?"

Coren glanced at Alrerin and both of them knew. Even in his short experience with the Lycavorian people, Coren knew that no male would refer to any woman this way if he was not sincere and felt the same way.

"Nellian I... I think I may need your help my love." Asay stammered the words because she was rattled to some extent but not because she did not love Nellian Tyrine with every fiber of her being.

"Anything Asay! You know this! What is wrong? Are you in danger? Asay where are you? You are calling me from a secure Union COM unit! Where did you get this?" Nellian spoke.

Coren motioned to Asay to allow him to speak and she nodded. He tapped the COM unit once and then saw Nellian's eyes grow wider as he saw Coren and Alrerin in the transmission cone.

"Coren Re Mydala." Nellian spoke with a great deal of respect in his voice, though his eyes grew slightly wider. "You are Princess Caliria's beloved father. It is an honor sir."

Coren nodded his head. "Captain Nellian... it is my honor." Coren told him. "Your wife and mate is here with me and First Regent Alrerin at Ember Cove. You know of my summer estate?"

Nellian nodded his head. "Yes sir. Admiral Sa'sur briefs all of the *Durcunusaan*. Three of my men are helping to provide your security even now."

"Captain..." Alrerin spoke moving closer. "You know of course what is taking place in a few hours?"

Nellian nodded his head. "Yes sir."

"We have just briefed Asay on everything that we know is going on and what has taken place in the past." Alrerin said. "She had a young Vanari woman come to her this morning with information that could... it will be explosive knowledge. This young woman needs protection and though it shames me to admit it, Asay will need additional security as well. Security that we cannot provide because we don't know who we can trust. This disturbing information will very likely make her a priority target by those we will be attacking. In order to try and keep it from becoming common knowledge that she knows these things, I would like to request she be allowed to work off your ship and conduct her investigation from there with your security guarding her."

Nellian Tyrine nodded his head without pause. "She is my wife and mate First Regent! I will protect her with my life!"

"Nellian... Kinryn is... she has gone through so much." Asay told him. "She is... she has been forced to do many things. I need her protected far more than myself."

"Asay you are my wife and mate! I will allow no harm to come to you!" Nellian told her.

Asay nodded her head. "Yes, and I bless the prophets for this every hour my love." She told him. "But Kinryn is..."

Nellian shook his head. "I will be on a *STRIKER* with two of my finest men in fifteen minutes. I will pick you and this young woman up at Ember Cove."

Coren smiled knowing that this man would do what he said. "Thank you Captain." He told him.

"You are father to a Crown Princess of the Union sir." Nellian told him. "I will protect Asay with my life and my men will protect this woman. My Prince would expect this of me; of any *Durcunusaan*."

"Then we will see you shortly Captain." Coren said. "And we have some additional Intel that you may pass to Androcles when you return to the ship."

Nellian nodded his head. "Understood. I will be to your location in thirty minutes."

Coren's P9 went dark as the communications ended and he looked at Asay. "We have thirty minutes to brief you of what attacks." He said. "You must tell no one what we tell you and continue with your investigation like you know nothing."

Asay nodded. "I understand." She answered.

"You realize your relationship with Captain Tyrine will become public knowledge very soon after it is announced you will be working from their ship?" Coren told her. "Are you prepared for that Asay? Ardan will no doubt come after you in public and try to demean you. He will attack you personally in public."

Asay Va Eldost met Coren's eyes with steel in her gaze and her jaw set in stone. "Then let him." She spoke forcefully. "Nellian has shown me more love and devotion in just a few short days than I ever thought possible. If Ardan wishes to attack me... he will not find so meek a lamb."

Coren grinned. "Good." He said.

Alrerin moved up beside her now and took her arm gently. "We will brief you on what Androcles and our people are going to do." He said. "It will steal your breath away with the scope of this operation Asay. And it will succeed!"

CLASS M MOON UNION DESIGNATION DELTA FOUR ONE FOUR ENVERR BASE OF OPERATIONS

Ulana sat on the dirty floor not caring in the least that she had never been filthier in all of her young life. She had led such a sheltered and arrogant life thanks to her father; a life she had flung aside completely just over two days ago. Looking back on events Ulana knew without question that her entire outlook had begun to change after her confrontation with Sadi Leonidas.

Ulana had never been physically assaulted in any way as she grew, no one daring to even attempt such a thing because of the standing of her father. Ulana had been pampered and doted over her entire life with the exception of the short time that she dated Androcles. Ulana wrongly assumed that since he was Crown Prince and royalty that those who worked and lived on the Island Palace of Apo Prime would treat her like royalty. To

her astonished surprise, this was forbidden by order of the Royal family ever since his father had come to power. Those who lived and worked on the Island Palace and the Spartan Royal Estate on Earth were treated as dear friends in all things. They did not cater to the Royal family in any way or form and this had initially exposed Ulana to things she had never experienced growing up.

It had become even more obvious when her father had died in the attack on the Senate building and she had basically moved into his position without even trying. Ulana really had no idea what a Senator of the Union did, and she mistakenly thought her position granted her some status above others. She had quickly found out that this was not the case. Most of the other Union Senators looked down upon her for her ideals and her arrogance, which is what had gotten her tied up with Icho so quickly. He had taken her under his protective wing because he had worked with her father, and Ulana had accepted this without really knowing their history together. She had surmised she would make sweeping and radical changes to how the Union did things when she took her father's Senate seat but she quickly came to the realization that she was far out of her realm in this world. She had allowed Icho to play her like a puppet master.

That was until her confrontation with Sadi.

Ulana had known in the first seconds that she was no match for the much more powerful Sadi in any way. Her Alpha female pride and arrogance had made her think she could somehow steal Androcles away from Sadi and the others he had claimed as wife and mate. Ulana knew now deep down that she could never have done this, but her father's lingering upbringing and her own pride hadn't allowed her to admit this openly.

That was until Sadi had thoroughly kicked her *mida* that day.

Ulana allowed a brief smile to curl across her lips at that thought for there was really no other way to explain it. Her confrontation with Sadi and the conversation with Thr'won that had come a few days later when they had returned to Earth had finally and forever torn the blinders from her eyes. It was only then that Ulana had stood up and finally began to take notice of things around her. Not the silly and utterly unrealistic things she had been raised believing, but the true reality of how things were. Ulana was not unintelligent by any means, she excelled in school no matter the subject and it was this intelligence that finally shattered the façade she had always projected. Ulana sat up and began to take notice of everything around her and how they really worked. She began to listen when normally she would have been forcing her opinions to the forefront. She watched as other Senators besides Icho talked and moved within the halls of power, even those close to her own age, and she began to learn. She was quite shocked that Androcles had allowed her to come on this trip, but she knew the moment Icho approached her and wanted her to send him any information she could gather, that he had a different agenda far from her own. And it was an agenda she found she was not at all comfortable with.

And then there was the one thing that had tipped the scales for her forever. One person who had made it very clear to her what emotions she could feel if only she allowed herself to feel them.

Ulana looked down at Torian's inert form resting in her arms and she stroked his dirty hair and badly bruised face once more as she held him close to her body. Even in her wildest imaginations Ulana had never considered she could fall so quickly and so hard for any man, let alone a Beta wolf. Ulana had fallen however, and it was because of this man, a wolf and man that she would never have even glanced at a year ago. She was an Alpha female and Torian was a Beta male. While such a relationship was not by any means uncommon within the Union, it was not something her father would have ever accepted and honestly not something Ulana would have ever considered.

That was until Torian had selflessly and quite savagely protected her from their captors. Even though he was much smaller, Torian had used his superior training to kill four of the vile Enverr before they had taken him down. They had beaten him badly and were about to kill him when they were ordered not to by their leader. Ulana had tears in her eyes as she had watched him take the savage beating without uttering a single sound of pain. He had done this to protect her and the others. That had opened her eyes even wider, but what he had done after was what caused her to admit her feelings to herself and look at him in a new light. After they had arrived here, he had attacked another Enverr who had attempted to rape her in the dark of night, and even as beaten and broken as he was; he had managed to nearly kill him before being pulled off by two others.

Another, even more brutal beating had taken place and as Ulana screamed for it to stop she saw his eyes look at her with nothing but unabashed love. When their leader had finally stopped them, Ulana had ignored her other Senators' pleas to not interfere and she gathered Torian into her arms as if she could protect him. He had been in her arms ever since and she refused to let him go. Ulana had never felt the emotions flowing through her

as she held Torian in her arms. Even as badly injured as he was, just feeling his hard, lean and muscular body against hers caused her female wolf instincts to kick in and expand. His scent tickled her nose unlike any male who had ever courted her, even more than Androcles, and Ulana knew then where her path lay.

Ulana glanced up when she saw the movement and she watched Ya'sur settle to the floor in front of her on one knee.

"How are you holding up?" He asked her softly.

Ulana nodded her head slowly. "I... I will live." She stated with firmness in her voice that had never been there before. Ulana had never been this filthy in her life and now she didn't care. The smells of unwashed bodies and blood assaulted her wolf senses but she pushed them down as she continued to stroke Torian's face. He was quite handsome she decided, even under the blood and bruises. Her own face was bruised where the Enverr had slapped her, her long dark hair askew and unkempt and dirtier than it had ever been, but her brown eyes were still bright and alive. "I... I worry for him Ya'sur."

Ya'sur nodded and looked down at Torian. "He is a strong wolf Ulana..." He told her. "Have faith in him." They both looked at Torian's face when he coughed just then, a small dribble of blood leaking from his lips. Ya'sur watched as Ulana didn't hesitate for a second and wiped the blood away gently with a piece of cloth she had torn from her shirt.

"He is bleeding inside." Ulana told him. "He is too weak to shift and I think if he did it would only make it worse. He has internal injuries."

Ya'sur rested his hand on Torian's shoulder and nodded his head. "I know." He said softly.

"Are they coming Ya'sur?" Ulana asked. "He will die without medical treatment. I... I don't want to experience that after what he did. He saved us all! He saved me!"

Ya'sur nodded his head. "He loves you Ulana. He has for many years. It is one of the reasons Androcles assigned him to protect you. He knew no other would or could protect you as Torian has."

Ulana didn't hesitate for a second and shook her head. "I... I don't want to lose that Ya'sur." She spoke softly. "I have never felt these things within me and I don't want them to stop!" She looked at him again. "Will they come?"

Ya'sur shook his head. "I don't know Ulana. You know as well as I do that the Union does not negotiate with men such as these. We kill them. And they don't know where we are. I don't know if the fool here contacted Prince Androcles after that first time."

Torian coughed gently once more and this time he let out a haggard laugh which caused both of them to look at him and the pain he was in. He was indeed smiling however, blood staining his lips and chin, but a smile it was. "El... Eliani." He rasped out the words.

Ulana stroked his cheek once more. "Yes... she could help you Torian... but she isn't here." She answered him with an almost frantic tone of voice.

Torian forced a smile once more and shook his head slowly in Ulana's lap. "Already... already here. Eliani is... she is with him." He stammered.

Ya'sur's eyes grew a little wider when he said that and he leaned closer to Torian. "What do you...? Torian what do you mean?" He asked.

Torian reached up with his left arm, his right arm broken and useless and he touched his forehead. "Andro... Andro always knows." He said softly. "Already... he is already here. He will... leave no one behind. You must... you must be ready."

"*Carians!*" Ya'sur gasped aloud. He was one of only a few thousand elves who could speak the ancient Lycavorian language fluently, though there were thousands more who were taking it in schools across Elear. "You are serious?"

Ya'sur glanced at the timepiece he always wore, a gift from his mother. "We have two hours before the deadline." He spoke. "I will tell the others."

Moon R26.

Known only to this particular Enverr Clan. Or so they thought. It was a Class M Jungle moon, with thick vegetation and towering mountains. Their Camp was built near the base of one such mountain and couldn't really be considered a simple camp. It resembled more a small town than anything else. There were over a dozen large buildings that had been built through the years, and a massive stone and steel wall that blended into the jungle all around them to protect from the jungle predators, which were many and very deadly. Those who were brought her to the slave auctions were transported in black ships so that they did not see the moon from orbit and did not know where they were. Rotaxe and his clan were well known and considered one of the most brutal Enverr Clans. No one who did business with them wanted to cross them and they had never had any problems.

Of course, none of them had ever been hunted by the lethal predators that currently were positioned on all four corners of the compound and silently waiting to begin their attack. They were hidden in the deep vegetation and trees, their eyes deadly and their weapons ready to spill blood.

"*Carians!*" Eliani hissed softly where she lay on the moist jungle floor. "I forgot how much I hate jungles."

Jomann lowered his macrobinos and then lowered his body down behind the massive downed tree only a hundred and fifty meters from the west wall of the compound. He settled to his back and looked at her laying there in her body armor beside him, a layer of light and dark green camo paint splashed across her cheeks and exposed skin to break up the outline of her features. Her burgundy red hair was tied in a tight ponytail and actually blended with some of the more vibrant colors of the jungle around them.

Jomann smiled at her. "They do not rank among my favorite vacation places either." He said.

"*Sibfla* I hope not!" Eliani complained. "It will take me a week to get all this nasty dirt off my body now!"

"I will gladly bath you with my tongue and insure you are clean." Jomann told her.

Eliani looked up into his face, her fern green eyes growing bright and a smile splitting her face. "Every nook and cranny?" She asked.

Jomann smiled. "Every one." He told her.

"Hmmm... that sounds kinky." Eliani said with a smile. "What else will you do while you are licking me clean?"

"God!" Brendi's voice echoed softly and they both turned to see her lift her head from Jomann's opposite side where she had been dosing. "Is everything always so sexual between you two?" She asked.

"Yes." Jomann and Eliani answered together.

"If I recall... you didn't complain the other night." Eliani stated with a brilliant smile.

Brendi Faith couldn't help but grin as she looked at them, for Eliani was very correct. Brendi had never, even in her wildest dreams, imagined herself in such a situation. That had made it all the better as far as she was concerned. She had experienced pleasure beyond her craziest fantasies with Eliani and Jomann and it had left her wanting more and more. Jomann was by far the largest man she had ever bedded but he was so very skilled and willing to make her scream out in desire and passion. Eliani's naked body was utter perfection and Brendi had spent many hours just exploring that body to her heart's content. Brendi Faith had embraced this new life she now had with Eliani and Jomann and nothing was going to take it away from her now. None of them had gotten much sleep that night, but none of them were complaining about it either. "Well... that was different." She said trying to maintain her composure. "Do I get included in this tongue bath by the way?" She asked.

Eliani leaned over Jomann's broad chest and smiled at her. "We will make sure you are squeaky clean *Saarrieemeran*." She said. "Trust me."

Jomann lifted his hand and touched his jaw implant. "All teams report." He spoke softly.

"Team Two in position." Dorian's voice answered softly.

"Team Three ready." Cowen answered.

"Team Four sitting on go." Denali answered.

"Team Five set." Deion's voice was the last to echo in Jomann's ear.

Jomann nodded at Eliani. "Andro is eight minutes out. Be sharp everyone. We go the moment he enters the compound. Deo... you need to get Mari and Eirene plugged in quick."

“Oh really... no pressure Jomann.” Deion answered him over the implant and it caused all of them to chuckle softly.

The plan was simple but precise. Each of them would breach the wall of the compound closest to one of the four, three-story structures housing the Vanari prisoners. General Tarnei’s intelligence, gathered over weeks of painstaking recon, had confirmed that the Vanari were held on the second floor with at least five guards on the first floor and five more on the third. Four of their breach teams had sniper support being provided by Colonel Rinell and eight of his finest shooters situated high in the jungle tree canopies to provide pinpoint direct fire. Jomann, Eliani, Brendi, Ryana Val Ardwor, and three members of the permanent *Durcunusaan* detachment from *SPARTA’S WRATH* would strike the three story building closest to them as Team One. Denali, Lisisa, Arduri, Fedor and two *Durcunusaan* were Team Four. Dorian, Sheva, Onera and Caliria with two more *Durcunusaan* made up Team Two. Team Three consisted of Cowen, Kalis, Ridor, Sherice, Daio and four Lycanari Commandos from Rinell’s command. Team Five was made up of Deion, Mari, Murano, Nara, Eirene and three Lycanari Commandos.

Deion’s team would move and secure the Enverr Command Center, or what passed for one anyway, while the other teams would take the buildings. Mari and Eirene would tap into their computer systems and take control of all defenses and automated processes within the camp so the Enverr could not surprise them.

Murano rested six feet from Deion, Mari between them. Nara and Eirene were on Deion’s opposite side as they lay in the eight inch high thick grass only twenty meters from the wall. The wall looked imposing until you were up close to it and then the years of decay and no upkeep could be seen. There were metal, cell like doors all along the exterior of the wall that led into the compound, none of them being guarded. Murano’s trained and experienced eye could see that these Enverr had gotten sloppy in their upkeep and no longer patrolled the wall from the outside or they would have detected the decrepit shape of the exterior wall’s condition. Many of the doors were barely hanging onto their hinges and were rusted beyond repair. Not that it would matter for Murano had seen the strength of a Lycavorian and he had no doubts Deion would rip the door open with little problem.

Their insertion had taken place an hour ago via three Shrouded *STRIKERS* and had been perfect. To their credit, the usual banter that took place between the Leonidas siblings was kept to a bare minimum for all of them knew they needed to be alert and ready for anything. Their entire demeanor had shifted to one of calculated precision and Murano could once more only feel immense pride and awe at this, emotions that had been sweeping through him for many days now. With several thousand Praetorians trained in the fashion that Martin and his children and the Lycavorians were trained, the Pralor people would never have fallen. Sumar’s decision to merge their species together all those millennia ago was so far turning out just as he no doubt envisioned.

Murano watched quietly as Deion took something from his side, tore open a wrapper and held out the ration bar to Mari. His niece didn’t hesitate and took a bite from the bar and began to chew. Deion then offered it to his sisters on his other side and they bit chunks off before he put the rest into his own mouth. Mari and Nara had become very close over the last days and weeks and it was Nara who was insuring Mari learned everything there was to learn. Murano knew it was only a matter of time before Deion fully claimed his niece, and the changes that had already begun within her would be completed. Mari was already sporting wolf fangs, though they were less pronounced than someone who was fully turned, but they were definitely the dual fangs unique only to the Leonidas bloodline Murano knew. She had begun to use her senses more and more with Nara’s tutelage and her Etheric resonance had become much more focused and very powerful. As it had been since he had first seen her, there was something about Mari that he could not place. Her resonance was closely guarded and shielded with Etheric shields that he had felt only from other Praetorians. She guarded her resonance tightly and her Etheric aura was minuscule in nature. Someone had taught her how to do this and Murano knew it could have only been Tobia. Only she had the skill and power to shrink her Etheric resonance to levels that were very nearly undetectable. It surprised him that Delnash would allow Tobia to give Mari such schooling, but his brother was different now as well.

Murano watched as Deion shifted his head and gently nuzzled Mari’s cheek and ear with his nose and he saw her eyes close in what amounted to blissful delight. Mari, Murano knew, had utterly accepted what was happening to her. If she was not with Deion, she was with Nara or one of the other Leonidas children all of the time now. He was amazed at how seamlessly she had blended into her role and her life into Deion’s life, almost

as if she was meant to be here among them doing what she was doing now. Delnash would not be able to alter that course for Mari now, no matter what he attempted. Her Etheric resonance told everyone that she was exactly where she wanted to be and that she was delightfully happy with that. Murano also doubted strongly that Deion would allow anyone to take Mari from him based on what he saw between the two of them and what he knew Martin and his brother Androcles had done in very similar circumstances.

Murano had once heard Helen talking with Wayonn and something she had said that night stuck with him now. The Leonidas family bloodline loved completely and without any hesitation. Anyone who thought to come between that love; they would find nothing but pain and death in its most savage form.

Murano's thoughts drifted briefly to Tobia and he could not help but smile. Her reddish brown hair was so soft and long, her dark eyes incredible. Mari reminded him quite a bit of Tobia actually in both looks and...

Murano looked at Mari now his eyes growing slightly wider. That could not be. It was not possible. She was Delnash's daughter and...

"Heads up folks!" Jomann's voice echoed in their implants. "The *STRIKERS* are inbound. Time to go to work."

STRIKER 21

NORMYA LEONIDAS'S STRIKER

Andro knelt on the deck between Normya and Tir'ut watching as his sister guided them in over the landing zone carved out of the jungle below. Mated life agreed with his sister he took note. Tir'ut and she were never apart for very long, and they had become a superior flight crew because of their love for each other. They could almost predict what the other would do in almost any situation now. Andro glanced back at the female elven engineer sitting behind them and smiled to himself. Ke'rai Jenal did a very good job at hiding her feelings from his sister, but she could not hide it from him. Her scent called for Normya and Tir'ut both in a very powerful way and though they did not know it right now, Normya and Tir'ut would come to see it in the future and embrace it without question.

Andro turned back before Ke'rai noticed him watching her and he glanced at Normya. "*Arande?*" He asked.

"It's plenty big enough." Normya answered him instantly. "Not much room to maneuver with all six of us on the ground but that won't matter."

"No it won't." Andro said turning his head as Carisia, Lu'ria and Sehri moved into the cockpit from the rear of the *STRIKER*.

"We're ready." Carisia told him.

"All the other ships report the same thing Andro." Sehri told him.

"Sadi and Ne'Veha?" He asked.

Lu'ria nodded her head. "Holding position at thirty-two thousand feet above the clouds." She told him with a smile as she remembered their conversation with Sadi only moments ago. "The ramp is open they are standing by. Elynth and Anthar are challenging Caydren and Cinol to a contest on who reaches the ground first."

Sehri looked at Andro. "Elynth said they were talking smack." She said puzzled. "What does this mean Andro?"

Andro chuckled and pulled her close to him as he stood up. "It means the brothers are brash and confident."

Carisia laughed softly now as well. "Challenging Elynth and Anthar to a dive is not the brightest thing to do. No one catches them when they dive."

"Majeir and Marux are staying out of it." Lu'ria spoke looking at Andro. "Why did we bring him our love? He has..."

"Marux has his part to play in the future and it is with us." Andro said. "In order for him to fully heal and put the past behind him we must show him trust. He is not as skilled as the others but that will come in time and with the proper influence."

“You trust him?” Carisia asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

That was all they needed to hear and Carisia nodded her head. “Then so shall we.” She said.

Andro looked at Sehri. “You are ready?” He asked.

Sehri nodded and her blue eyes shone brightly in excitement. “Yes.”

“Do not hesitate *Duangai*.” Andro told her. “Your part is critical for the others to act.”

Sehri set her jaw and nodded. “I won’t.” She told him.

Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and then turned to Normya. “Take us in *arande*. If they are not intelligent enough to get out of the way, land on them.”

Normya laughed. “I like that plan!” She quipped as her hands flew across the three consoles and the *STRIKER* dipped slightly. “Here we go!”

PREMONITION

THIRTY-TWO THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THE ENVERR CAMP

Marux was silent as he listened to Caydren and Cinol playfully boast about their skills. He rested on the deck with his talons under him waiting to spring into action. He had been very surprised when Androcles asked him to come on this mission, but it was an opportunity to show everyone that he was very different. He had been training and sitting with Elynth and Anthar nearly every day now, learning all they could teach him, schooling him in things that he had never learned and should have. He was a different dragon now he knew, now it was just up to him to show that to all. Marux’s head tilted slightly when he felt the tingling against his Etheric shields and the now familiar resonance surrounded him. He lowered his shields immediately, just enough to allow Androcles to speak with him. Instinctively he reinforced the shields of the Talon Guardian who had believed in him the most, insuring no one would hear their private conversation.

[Talon Guardian Androcles?] He queried.

[Marux my dragon brother, you seem nervous.] Andro spoke from the other ship as it neared the surface.

[I will do my duty Androcles.] Marux answered.

[I have a different job for you Marux.] Andro told him.

Marux tensed his body slightly so that no one would notice. *[You are taking me off the mission?]* He asked.

[No.] Androcles answered. *[I’m just changing things around a little.]*

[You do not trust me.] Marux stated evenly though he felt shame fill him. What else could he feel? His actions in the past did not garner trust and he knew this.

[No Marux my brother.] Andro told him. *[You are different Marux. You are more like me than others think.]*

[I don’t understand.] Marux spoke.

[You have darkness within you Marux.] Andro told him. *[Just as I have darkness and just as my father has darkness. The events in your life have allowed you to see things others do not.]*

[And that is bad.] Marux told him. *[I don’t want this darkness in me.]*

[We all have darkness Marux my brother.] Andro said. *[It is how we use this darkness that makes us who we are.]*

[What do you mean?]

[This Enverr fool thinks he is going to outsmart me.] Androcles said. *[Dorian and I have seen what he intends. He is not doing this by himself Marux. He is receiving his instructions from someone else. He intends to try and take Sehri while we are distracted. That is what this is all about Marux. It has nothing to do with the Vanari.]*

[But why ask for the things he did?] Marux asked him quickly. *[Why... it is a ruse!]* He exclaimed quickly.

Marux felt Androcles smile in the connection. *[You see... you, Elynth and I are not so different.]* He told him. *[Do not let on that we are talking. No one else can know.]*

[But why let him do that Androcles?] Marux asked. *[He could... he could injure one of those who you worship.]*

[There are two reasons.] Andro told him. *[The first is because Sehri would never let me leave her on the ship. She would find a way, with Sadi and the others helping her no doubt, to accompany us on this mission. I won't do that for her skills are very much needed as well. Only she can project her shields as she can and protect so many.]*

[And the second reason?] Marux asked.

[She will never be alone Marux.] Andro said. *[You will be protecting her.]*

Marux was almost unable to keep his eyes from flying open and his wings from snapping out to the side in shock. *[Me!]* He gasped.

[Once you exit with the others I want you to break off and move to Sehri's location.] Andro said. *[They will be approaching from the north. I want you to stop them.]*

[I don't understand.] Marux said again. *[Why not one of the others? Why me?]*

[Because like me Marux my dragon brother, you will savagely protect what you feel to be yours.] Andro said softly. *[Or did you think I would not know?]*

[I thought... I thought I was...] Marux stammered.

[You thought I would never trust you to assume such a role.] Androcles said. *[That could not be further from the truth. It is not time just yet, but that will come Marux. Both of you need time to grow more, but it will happen. You are just more attuned to the Etheric flow as we are. Sehri is still learning how to use her skills and while she is powerful she is also inexperienced and sometimes reckless.]*

[How did... how did you know?] Marux asked.

[I knew the moment Elynth and Anthar returned with you Marux. Elynth too.] Androcles replied. *[I believe it is something to do with what Sarlana calls us. Dahakoan. We can... we can sense things. See them almost within our minds. I saw you and Sehri together just as Elynth and I. As Bonded Ones. You are not lost Marux my brother... you never have been. When the time is right it will happen and then you will know the meaning of being bonded so deeply with someone that it will fill you with happiness. Dante did not destroy you Marux... it prepared you for the future.]*

[Can she...? I do not want my past to influence the future Androcles.] Marux told him. *[If... if it is as you say I...]*

[Do you trust me Marux?] Andro asked him.

Marux's answer was without hesitation or conflict. Given everything that had taken place up until now it was the only answer that came into his mind. *[Yes.]*

[Then trust me now brother. Trust me now.] Androcles told him.

[What do you want... how do you want me to act?] Marux asked.

[See within my thoughts Marux.] Andro told him and Marux closed his eyes, reaching through their connection until he saw what Androcles was projecting to him. *[See what Dorian and I saw. How they will act. They have never seen or fought anyone like you or I Marux. That is your advantage.]*

[And when I confront them?] Marux asked.

[They are working with others, taking orders from someone that I will eventually find.] Androcles said. *[You know how I feel for my wives and mates Marux?]*

[They are your purpose for living.] Marux answered instantly. *[Your strength and your core.]*

[Yes, and I will allow nothing to harm them. Ever.] Androcles told them. *[When you confront them Marux my brother, insure that they know fear before you send them to the pits of jorbhe.]*

Marux paused for only a second. *[It will be done.]* He answered. *[On my heart, it will be done.]*

Rotaxe stood on the corner of the airfield as he watched the six *STRIKERS* begin to make their descent into the airfield. These six ships would make him the envy of all the Enverr clans out there and force them to recognize him as their leader. He would unite the Enverr and have all of them under his control. His contacts had told him these ships were the premier ground attack and support aircraft in the Lycavorian Union's Fleet and were almost always piloted by elven females. He did not really need the elven pilots, his contacts said the females would be more trouble than they were worth. They were not like the Vanari females and they would fight viciously to keep their dignity and honor intact. So far everything they had told him was true. He did not think the boy Prince would capitulate so easily to his demands, but what choice did he have. The dark haired female was one of his chosen wives and mates and Rotaxe had been told he would do anything to keep her safe. Besides, as tough as Lycavorians were, he doubted she would submit as easily as the Vanari females did, for they were almost conditioned to not fight when they were taken

Rotaxe turned slightly when the Enverr soldier moved up beside him. "The assault team is in place." He reported.

Rotaxe nodded his head. "Good. As soon as we have drawn the boy Prince into the compound to retrieve his people they are to strike. The young one is to be taken alive. The rest must die."

"Are we certain he will bring her?" The second Enverr asked.

Rotaxe nodded his head. "He considers her one of his wives, just as the one we hold. Our contacts say they go wherever he does. She will be among those with him and whether she remains with the ships or comes with him the team will be prepared to act."

"This act will make you famous Rotaxe." The Enverr told him. "It is said that this boy is a warrior unequalled. That he has never been defeated. You will be the one to end him."

"This act will propel our clan to the forefront Hemtar." Rotaxe said. "We will finally have what we deserve." He looked at him. "Has payment been received?"

Hemtar nodded his head. "Fifty million Vanari credits in advance. It has already been deposited into our account on Austrova."

"Five men per ship to confirm the females are on board." Rotaxe spoke. "They will secure the ships when we leave."

Verbal communication became almost impossible as the engines of six *STRIKERS* drowned out all sound in the immediate area. Rotaxe watched with some admiration at the skill it took to land the ships in a clearing this size and he felt immense pride at what he was going to accomplish. It was only a few moments before the engines were powered down and the sound began to drift away. Rotaxe motioned forward with his hand and then began to walk to the first ship that had landed. This would be the one that the boy Prince was on he was sure. The six men with him spread out slightly as they approached the *STRIKER* and once they got within six meters they heard the whine of hydraulic servos as the ramp in the rear of the ship began to come down.

Rotaxe let his eyes drift upward and he saw the tall, muscular young man standing at the top of the ramp with a dark skinned, elven female sporting shimmering white hair on his right and a very petite, dark haired female on his left. Rotaxe had to admit, whoever this boy Prince was, he had fine taste in women. The elven female was particularly enticing with her ethereal beauty, her four inch high ears curving elegantly alongside her head and her white hair framing a flawless face and soft pink lips. The armor they wore did not hide the fact that both of them had lush, young bodies.

"We cannot take his women and use them Rotaxe?" Hemtar asked now. "The dark skinned one is a wonder."

Rotaxe shook his head quickly. "No... our instructions were clear. If we violate the contract in any way we will not receive the balance of the credits. They are to be killed as if in battle. That is what we must do."

Hemtar nodded his head. "That is a shame." He stated. "Think of what we could do with her."

"When this is over and we have received payment, you can buy as many Vanari females as you want Hemtar." Rotaxe spoke. "Let them service your every need."

"I intend to." Hemtar answered.

Andro looked at the Enverr near the bottom of the ramp, his azure eyes emotionless. His senses were fully alert and he could detect dozens of different scents in the immediate area, his eyes drifting but his head remaining still as he saw Enverr troops moving to the backs of the other *STRIKERS* that had landed. He turned his head back briefly and looked at the thirty Vanari and Lycanari Commandos that were in the rear of his *STRIKER*. Commander Entia met his gaze and they shared an imperceptible nod of understanding. Entia had volunteered for this mission and she had complete command of the three hundred Vanari and Lycanari Commandos taking part in this operation. She had made it clear that she would follow Andro's orders no matter what they were however. At the moment all of the Vanari and Lycanari females were dressed in skimpy clothes, their uniforms and weapons stowed under the seats just behind them.

[Andro... we are in position.] Jomann's voice echoed within all of their minds heavily shielded so that only someone on a Tier Six or higher level would be able to hear them.

[Our people are not here Jomann. He must plan on having us return to the compound with him.] Andro told him.

[He's no fool. He has about a hundred soldiers within the compound, not including those he brought there to meet you.] Jomann spoke in reply. *[We have eyes on all target buildings in the compound Andro. Give us the go and we can secure them before he brings you back here. We'll be in position to cover the three of you once you get here.]*

[Where are the others?] Andro asked.

[Looks like a main barracks building.] Jomann answered. *[According to General Tarnei's intelligence, it is across the street from his so called audience room.]*

[Sister... do you see it?] Andro asked reaching out for Elynth who was flying above them within the clouds.

[We see it Andro.] Elynth answered instantly.

[Marux?] Andro asked.

[He has broken away just as you instructed.] Elynth told him.

[Androcles was it wise to...?] Anthar began to ask the question.

[He will do what he must to protect the future he could have Anthar. Just as you would. Just as any of us would.] Andro said without pause. *[And he wants that future more than anything right now. And he wants your approval and confidence.]*

[He had that the moment we discovered him and saw what he had suffered to survive by himself.] Anthar replied.

[Yes... he did.] Majeir echoed.

[If he needs help, Kdan or Dnom can leave the PREMONITION to help him. I doubt he will need help however.] Andro said.

[Andro our love...] Sadi's voice broke into the conversation from the cockpit of the *PREMONITION*. *[General Tarnei just updated us. She said that two of the OSG bases are prepping to move their operations! She has advanced the attack three hours! We have twenty-two minutes before the assault begins across the entire sector.]*

[Then our issue of time is solved. I will buy you as many additional minutes as I can.] Andro said. *[Execute Jomann!]*

Andro looked at Carisia and then Lu'ria. "When this kicks off Carisia, you and Lu'ria take down the Enverr next to this Rotaxe fool. Leave the ugly one for me."

"They are all ugly." Luria whispered to him, her expression bland so as not to give away her humor.

Andro was laughing inside but his face remained plain and he nodded his head. "Very well... let's get this over with."

Andro began to move down the ramp, Carisia and Lu'ria beside him. The Enverr had halted about thirty feet from the bottom of the ramp and they crossed this distance slowly until they were only ten feet from him. Rotaxe was much wider than Androcles, but the years had not been kind to him and he was overweight, the extra pounds most easily seen along his sides and upper legs. He still looked incredibly solid and powerful and Andro would take no chances when the time came.

"So you are the boy Prince everyone is so frightened of." Rotaxe began with bluster, pushing out his chest and trying to make himself appear taller than he actually was. "You don't look like much boy!"

Andro made a show of looking around. "I don't see my people." He spoke evenly returning his gaze to Rotaxe. "Where are they?"

"I have them in a safe place." Rotaxe answered. "Don't worry; I haven't killed any of them. Not yet anyway. And no one has touched your woman, though she is a fine piece. Many of my men wanted to take her and feel her legs wrapped around them."

[What is this fool speaking of?] Carisia exclaimed in their shielded connection.

[He thinks Ulana is one of my wives and mates.] Andro spoke with some surprise.

[He must be stupid to think you would ever choose her as a mate!] Lu'ria hissed softly.

"How do I know they are unharmed?" Andro asked quickly.

Rotaxe grinned and motioned to Hemtar. "Show him." He ordered.

Hemtar lifted the small, portable holo disc and activated it in his oversized palm. It flared to life instantly and showed them an image of Ulana holding Torian in her arms while the other Senators were crowded around slightly to her right. His trained eye detected three Enverr in the background and one who was obviously holding the holo transmitter.

[Jomann... there are four in the room with Torian and the others.] Andro said.

[Understood.] Jomann answered. *[We're moving. Almost to breach points.]*

"Now you have seen them." Rotaxe spoke as he pushed away the portable holo disc with his hand and stepped closer to Androcles. "Now what do you have for me boy?"

"Six *STRIKERS* just like you asked, all with full payloads and avionics packages." Andro answered. "There are thirty Vanari females on each ship. The credits are dispersed between the ships. The computers, weapons and medical supplies as well."

"And just how did you convince the Vanari government to give you so many of their females boy?" Rotaxe asked.

Andro met his eyes with cold death in his azure orbs. "I didn't ask them." He spoke. "My people are more important to me than a species that hates us. Now bring my people here."

Rotaxe held up his hand. "Not so fast." He said. "My men will verify what you say."

Andro nodded his head. "As you wish. You may send one man per ship." He stated.

Rotaxe growled at him. "I make the rules here boy!" He snapped.

Andro shook his head. "If you want these things you will only send one man onto the individual ships to inspect them. My people will insure he sees what he needs to see. If that is not acceptable to you then we will turn around and leave."

"And what makes you think I will let you leave boy?" Rotaxe snarled.

"You have no choice." Andro told him.

Rotaxe was silent for a moment and then nodded his head. "Hemtar... check the boy's ship." He stated.

Hemtar nodded and moved around him quickly, making his way up to the ramp of the ship. His eyes grew slightly wider when he saw the scantily clad Vanari females on the seats, their hands obviously secured behind their backs and most of them looking drugged in some manner. He lifted his eyes when he saw the nearly white blond hair of Sehri descend from the cockpit and motion him forward. Like the other females beside the Prince, this Lycavorian female was very lush and exquisitely beautiful. He wondered briefly what could cause their contact to pay such an enormous amount of credits to have her kidnapped and taken from the boy Prince. They were risking a war to be sure. He watched as she tossed back the canvas cover of a large grouping of crates, his eyes growing even wider and all other thoughts leaving him when he saw the weapons and medical supplies. A single large computer was against the wall, and five large chests of Vanari credit stacks in five dozen denominations of a hundred.

"Everything is here and on the other *STRIKERS*." Sehri told him.

Hemtar gazed at her for a long moment. "So it is." He stated with an unnatural smile that Sehri did not understand. He turned quickly and looked at the Vanari females once more before moving to the edge of the ramp. He lifted the small COM device in his hand.

"It is here Rotaxe." He spoke.

"It is the same here." Another voice echoed from the next ship and then four more echoed their affirmative as well.

Rotaxe looked at Androcles as Hemtar made his way back to him. “Your woman must be a really good fuck for you to give all this to get her back.” He said with a toothy grin.

“My people?” Androcles asked once more.

“I have them in my compound.” Rotaxe spoke. “It is a short walk from here.”

“When I have them... your men may begin moving onto the ships.” Andro told him. “Not before.”

“You are giving us your transportation out of here.” Rotaxe spoke with a smile. “How do you intend to leave this moon? You will have no ship.”

Androcles grinned. “That’s not entirely true.” He said. “You don’t need the details but know that if you break your word, you and every living thing on this moon will be destroyed by an orbital bombardment. Keep your word and you will live. Break it and you will be dead within thirty seconds.”

Rotaxe’s eyes narrowed. “You are threatening me?” He growled.

Andro shook his head. “Just telling you how it will be.” He said.

Rotaxe glared at him for a few seconds longer and when Androcles didn’t back down from his gaze he looked away and motioned with his hand. “This way.”

Had Rotaxe of the Enverr people been more intelligent he would have killed Androcles and the others right there and taken the young woman. He was not that intelligent however and he blindly began to lead the wolf into the sheep’s den without even knowing what he was doing. He thought he had succeeded in getting everything he wanted and this had clouded his mind with illusions of grandeur. In another few minutes he would have the target of his contract since there were minimal guards among the ships and it would be a simple matter to subdue or kill any who fought his men. His spirits began to lift as he walked back towards his compound. Their ground shield could withstand any sustained orbital bombing and the boy Prince’s boost was for naught.

At least that is what he thought.

SPARTA’S WRATH **IN ORBIT OF R26**

-Bring Category 1 Port Ventral batteries one through twenty-three to bear on the Enverr compound- Armen ordered as he stood on the bridge of *SPARTA’S WRATH*. -When we have received the all clear from Androcles we will initiate a saturation barrage and destroy the compound-

“Powering port ventral batteries one through twenty-three.” The elven female called out from her weapons station.

Armen stood stoically and watched the bridge crew work. While he could have done these tasks far more quickly because he was tied directly into the ship, at Androcles’ request he had begun to allow the crew he now had to do the duties they had been assigned, and for him to begin to act more like a ship’s captain. If needed he could assume control of any of the ship’s systems almost instantaneously, but Armen now understood why Androcles had made this request. As with Avi, he was not looked at as a cyborg or advanced robot. He was the Captain of this ship and these men and women from nineteen different species were his crew. He was an individual, just as Avi had now become and Armen found himself becoming more and more accustomed to this situation.

While he could not process emotions, Armen was advanced enough to become quite comfortable in a situation. He knew the limitations of his entire crew, their lives, family and even how fast they could do their jobs. The bridge crew that manned First Watch while he was on the bridge was made up of eight elves, nine Lycavorians, three vampires and four Algolians. He did not have to second guess these men and women for they knew their jobs. He had been training with them for the last three months now.

-Lieutenant Molar begin preparations for Second Squadron of APOC drones to launch as soon as we fire our first volley. They are to target the Enverr Assault craft currently trying to hide their position on the far side of the moon in the gas rings-

“Like we wouldn’t see them there!” Someone called out.

“Powering Second Squadron and moving to launch tubes.” The Lycavorian replied as his hands moved across the three tactical screens laid out around him.

-Inform Medical Clinic Three to be prepared for any Vanari wounded and freed prisoners. They are the closest clinic to Landing Bay Four where the ships will be returning. Princess Eliani and her people will have them loaded and sent to us in the order of needed care. Serale Leonidas will coordinate from the clinic- Armen spoke. -Insure activity in this section of the ship is limited to necessary personnel until the operation is completed-

“Armen!” The elven COM officer barked. “Prince Andro has sent the signal! They are entering the compound!”

Armen nodded his head. **-Very well. Then the party is about to begin. Let’s make sure we do not disappoint-**

The bridge crew of *SPARTA’S WRATH* could only smile amongst themselves and know that they had the best job in the entire fleet. How could you find fault with serving on the most advanced warship within the Union Fleet, under the command of an android that actually acted more like a human being than a robot.

MOON R26 TEAM FOUR

It was ridiculously easy to breach the door, all Denali had to do was yank on it very hard with his pureblood wolf strength and the thick metal door gave way almost instantly. The building was only twenty meters from the door and the streets and allies were practically empty with everyone’s attention now on the audience room where he knew Andro and the others had entered seconds before. They were using the same version of the cut down P190 A4 that those with their father had, only these were the silenced version. Their ammunition had been chosen specifically for this mission to do maximum damage upon impact but not penetrate through the bodies. To that end the armorer on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, an older human gunsmith, had hand loaded each and every round with a tiny explosive charge. The round would explode on impact, maximizing damage in a ten degree spread and blowing a one inch wide hole in the target but not penetrating completely through the body of its target. It was a devastating round and would put a hurt on even the Enverr with their size.

Denali and Fedor led Lisisa and Arduri into the first floor of the building their weapons leading them. The layout was simple and completely open, more of a barracks style setup than anything else and just as their intelligence had told them, five Enverr occupied the first floor. The two closest to Denali and Fedor died first, the brothers firing five round bursts into their backs as they were sitting in the chairs and watching something on the monitor from six meters away as Lisisa and Arduri swept to the side of them. The two Durcunusaan troops immediately entered after them and broke directly to the right side while Lisisa and Arduri moved up the left. The two Enverr pitched forward without a sound, five massive wounds in each of their broad backs and explosive leaking blood on to the floor all around their inert bodies. They never knew what hit them.

Lisisa and Arduri moved shoulder to shoulder down the left side of the ground floor holding silenced KM14s. The Kinetic Magnums were loaded with the same explosive rounds as the silenced A4s. Each of their weapons was custom made to fit their individual hands. Since both of them were very petite, neither of them reaching past five foot three, their hands were not as large and the grips were custom made to absorb the recoil

of the powerful handgun without robbing them of power. It really wouldn't have mattered anyway for both Lisisa and Arduri were superior marksmen. As they moved up the center of what appeared to be the bunk area they had a clear view of everything around them, their combined wolf senses encompassing all that there was around them.

They came upon the Enverr halfway across the expanse of the ground floor among what appeared to be a sleeping and recreational area. The first thing they saw was one large Enverr practically smothering a squirming and crying Vanari female on one of the bunks while his two buddies sat at a small table and were playing some sort of card game. Neither Lisisa nor Arduri were in a forgiving mood. The KM14s came up almost in the same thought and both of them squelched out fire and death. The heads of the two Enverr sitting at the table came up with enough time to register that they were not alone and see the flame from the barrels of both weapons and then their heads exploded like overripe melons as three rounds apiece blew apart what little brains they had all over the table and cards they were now done playing and knocked their bodies out of the two chairs.

The sound of the bodies of his fellow Enverr hitting the floor caused the third Enverr to turn his head from the Vanari female beneath him. It took four seconds for his addled brain to register that they were dead. Four seconds was an eternity for two trained women as Lisisa and Arduri Leonidas. As his head turned he saw the flash of both barrels and then felt the hammer like blows as three rounds punched into his upper chest, the explosive rounds doing maximum damage as well as tossing his body off the now stunned Vanari female. Lisisa blurred in motion without hesitating and came upon him as he hit the floor and rolled to his right in agonizing pain. He opened his mouth to scream out but never got the chance as Lisisa lifted her K14 and fired twice more directly into his mouth and blew his head apart.

Lisi! Denali's voice screamed in their heads as Arduri moved to the young woman's side, her eyes wide in disbelief. Duri!

We are fine Deni! Lisisa called back as she came up beside Arduri next to the woman. Three down here and we have one of the prisoners!

Fedor! Deni hissed as he turned to look at his brother. Secure the third floor with the others!

Prisoners? Fedor asked.

Nubou joa! Denali told him. We are sending a message this day and Andro will take the only two prisoners.

Fedor nodded his head. *Done.*

Duri... inject her quickly and then we need to move to the second floor! Deni ordered as he kicked away the weapons from the dead Enverr and under a far table just to be certain. *Eli says the faster we act the better off we will be and they will be able to move more quickly!*

Already on it! Arduri answered him as she looked at the Vanari female and held up the portable injector. She saw the woman's eyes go wide and she began to back away on the bed but Arduri took her hand.

"Listen to me." Arduri gasped. "I am Arduri Re Mydala! We are here to save you! To save all of you! This is a serum that will counteract the OSG drugs in your system! It will act quickly but I must inject you now!"

"A cure?" The young woman rasped out the question with wide eyes.

Arduri nodded her head. "Yes! And then we need to go upstairs and do the same for the others! How many are with you?"

The Vanari female scooted closer on the bunk. "There are thirty-nine of us in this building." She answered. "An equal number in the others! We must help them all!"

Arduri nodded her head as Lisisa knelt beside her and she pressed the injector to the young woman's neck. "We have other teams securing them as well." She stated.

"The Enverr will... their leader is a monster! He will not let you just take us." The young woman spoke.

Lisisa smiled and reached out to squeeze her hand. "He will not have a choice in the matter." She stated.

"You are... you are from the Protectorate?" The young woman asked her.

Lisisa smiled. "In a manner of speaking yes." She answered.

"How long have you been here?" Arduri asked her.

"Almost... almost a year."

"Many things have changed in that time." Arduri spoke.

The Vanari woman's eyes grew wide when Denali suddenly appeared from the side and knelt between them. "My beautiful wives and mates... time is wasting and we need to move now." He spoke while watching the door they had entered from far across the ground floor. "Bring her... we need to secure the second floor."

Deni began to move back toward the stairway that would take them upstairs and the young Vanari looked at Arduri. "He... he called you wives." She gasped.

Arduri smiled brilliantly, exposing her smaller, dual wolf fangs and willing the change to come upon her as the black ring encircled her green eyes. "Yes... he did." She answered and she began to help the woman to her feet. "Come. We need to get to the others."

Still somewhat shocked at what had just happen, the woman allowed Arduri and Lisisa to prop her body between them and begin to lead her across the ground floor towards the stairs.

TEAM TWO

Team Four secure!

Acknowledged! Andro's voice answered.

The call had gone out within Mindvoice from Denali's team and she knew the fight had begun.

Caliria had wanted to remain with Androcles on the ground but she knew where her skills were best used, and fighting was not one of them, at least not yet. Carisia and Lu'ria were far more deadly than any Cadre Commando she had ever known or seen and Caliria knew that as time passed she would become like them. They had already begun to train her alongside Sehri, Sadi and Ne'Veha and that would continue into the future she knew.

Caliria had covered their entrance into their target building with one of the Durcunusaan assigned to their team while Dorian, Sheva and Onera hit the Enverr on the bottom floor. Seeing how the three of them blurred across the room with such violent grace was amazing as they took down the three Enverr on the ground floor with precision and absolutely no mercy. As she and the Durcunusaan officer covered the entrance into the second floor, Dorian led Sheva and Onera and the other Durcunusaan up to the third floor where they found most of the remaining nine Enverr either sleeping or relaxing. Once more, none of them showed mercy or paused in their actions as they eliminated the threat in seconds.

Now Caliria! Dorian called out to her within Mindvoice. *We are secure up here! Go!*

Caliria didn't hesitate in the least and though her heart was racing, she triggered the door locks on the second floor and burst into the open second floor without doubt. The second floor looked much like a barracks with rows of bunk beds spread out on one side of the expansive floor, while the other side appeared to be some sort of lounging area for the Vanari prisoners to sit and rest. Many heads turned at the sound of the door opening, all but one of them Vanari and female. The lone Enverr soldier sat in the chair roughly five meters from the door, his duty to watch the Vanari females while they went about different tasks during the day. Caliria Leonidas to her credit did not pause in her actions. Her own dual wolf fangs burst forth, the black ring encircling her eyes and she lifted the K14 in a practiced motion.

Caliria let loose with four rounds even as she was jogging towards the Enverr and he began to rise. Two of the explosive tipped rounds impacted just above his abdomen and blew gaping wounds in his midsection. His face showed his surprise and the massive pain he felt until Caliria shifted her aim and sent two rounds into his oversized head. As his head exploded, his body flipped over from the force, thankfully shielding the view of his brain matter and bits of bone spraying the wall behind him from being seen by the majority of the Vanari females in the room. The *Durcunusaan* officer, a senior troop who had served within the Prince's unit for nearly a decade now, simply grinned. He would pass on to his fellow *Durcunusaan* and others that Caliria Leonidas was not to be trifled with for her aim was precise.

Caliria didn't wait for the Enverr's body to fall completely before she was turning to the Vanari females who were now all standing and watching her with wide eyes. Some of them held each other tightly for they did not know what was going on, only that Caliria was a fellow Vanari but also that she was very different.

"I am Caliria Leonidas...!" She hissed out the words. "...Daughter of Coren Re Mydala! We are here to take you all home!"

“Regent Re Mydala’s daughter...!” A voice called out. “Thank the Prophets!”

That was all that was needed to hear as they began to move towards her while Dorian and Sheva entered the second floor with Onera beside them.

“We have a serum to inject you with!” Caliria told them. “It will reverse the effects of the OSG drugs and release you! Who has been here the longest? I must treat them first!”

The Vanari females all pointed to half a dozen females who had not risen from the beds where they were resting.

“All of you... lift your sleeves and then gather whatever you can carry.” Caliria told them. “These men and women are my family and we will need to be ready to move!”

One Vanari female looked at Dorian standing with Sheva and Onera as they began to pull out their injectors. “It is true then?” she gasped aloud causing Caliria to look at her.

“What?” Caliria asked.

“You... you are a Princess of the Lycavorian people now!” The young woman spoke as Caliria lifted the injector and gently depressed it against her neck.

Caliria smiled brightly as she nodded. “Yes it’s true.”

“You are... you are taking us home?” Another asked.

Caliria nodded her head. “Yes we are.” She answered “All of you! Sheva! Onera! Split up and go among them! Insure you inject them in their neck. It will speed the flow of the counter agent more quickly and allow them to move when Andro calls for us!”

Dorian looked at the two Durcunusaan officers and nodded his head.

Team Two is secure! He announced in Mindvoice. I say again we are secure! Beginning to treat the prisoners now!

Understood. Dorian recognized Andro’s voice as he acknowledged his call.

TEAM FIVE

Team Three secure! Beginning injections now! No casualties! Deion recognized Kalis’s voice in Mindvoice as he moved along the side of the building. Denali and Dorian had already reported in and within seconds Deion heard Jomann’s calm voice echo Kalis.

Team One secure! Fourteen hostiles down. Beginning injections now!

Understood. Andro answered.

They had the furthest distance to cross, but only one floor to deal with. Intelligence stated that the Enverr Command and Control facility had a standing complement of eight inside that monitored the electronic sensors that did work, as well as all of the compound’s defensive systems. Deion and Murano would conduct the initial breach into the building, followed by the Lycanari Commandos and then Nara with Mari and Eirene. Though only weeks shy of his eighteenth birthday, Deion Leonidas, as with most Lycavorian males, had seen more action than many people realized. Though he and Nara did not officially finish their Agoge, it would be stated in their official personnel jackets that their training was finished on Operational Duty with their brother. Operational Duty with the Crown Prince was neither easy nor casual. The Crown Prince of the Union did nothing second rate, just like his father, and their Operational Duty was worth far more than normal training.

Deion only needed to glance at Murano when he reached the door. Murano nodded as he held the A4 in his hands. It had been many years since he had held a weapon like this but as with most things, you never forgot. Deion stepped in front of the door and drove his Shakur fighting knife into the locking mechanism of the metal door. The traditional Wood Elf fighting knife was still widely used among Lycavorian forces across the Union. The size and balance of the hand crafted weapons was nearly perfect, and when forged from pure Dragon Armor, in the hands of a powerful person, the blade could cut through practically anything. The locking mechanism sizzled and sparked quietly as Deion twisted the blade and then sliced outward, severing the wiring controlling the door locks with almost no sound. Murano touched his shoulder instantly and Deion lifted his A4 and slammed into the door with his shoulder and his full weight behind him.

Deion and Murano broke to the left upon entering the large command and control center, the three Lycanari commandos right on their heels and breaking to the right. None of them hesitated in their actions. There were eleven Enverr in the control room and all of them turned at the sound of the door breaking inward. None of them were prepared for such an event happening and their weapons were either out of reach or holstered. The room was large, but with the A4s it did not matter. The customary spitting sound of the weapons at high velocity filled their ears as Deion, Murano and the five Lycanari Commandos fired in short, controlled bursts with unerring accuracy. The heads and chests of the Enverr soldiers in the command center were easy targets, and the explosive tipped rounds did all the work for them. All of the Enverr fell within the space of six seconds with massive wounds in their bodies and venting blood at a mortal rate. Seven of them died instantly from head shots while the remaining four were dead within another ten seconds as the special operations rounds made certain there was no saving them from the devastating damage.

“Clear!” Three Lycanari voices echoed within milliseconds of one another as the two females and one male moved quickly to insure their targets were dead.

“Clear!” Deion spat half a second after that as he stepped over the Enverr who seemed to be the one in charge.

Murano lowered the barrel of his A4 and turned just as Nara led Mari and Eirene into the command center. The moment he saw his niece Murano began to relax. When her bright blue/green eyes fell on him and she smiled Murano nodded his head. “Clear here!” He called out.

It was then that the Pralor Praetorian Murano heard the word he never imagined himself hearing in his lifetime because of who and what he was. It was a word that would forever alter his life going forward from this day and thrust him into a position of some importance in the most influential family now residing within several different known quadrants of space. It was a word that would also allow the last vestiges of a troubled man, one who blamed himself for events that were out of his control, to fall by the wayside. A word that would allow him to grasp onto the one thing that had held his heart from the first moment he had seen her.

Murano was looking at her as Mari entered right behind Nara, Eirene on her hip. He was always looking for her to insure she was safe and it made Mari love him even more. As everyone began to echo clear she saw him turn to see her before he also spoke the word aloud. She watched as he began to let his A4 drop from the ready position and that is when the side door behind and to Murano’s right opened with a creaking sound that was deafening in the now silent room.

“Father!” Mari screamed looking directly at him with those stunning blue/green eyes. “Father... no!”

Murano froze in his spot when he saw and heard Mari utter those words looking directly at him, his blue eyes going wider than they had ever gone before in his life. His brain tried to process everything and he could not react fast enough as he now sensed the Enverr come out of the small closet and bringing his rifle to bear on the back of his head. Murano knew he would never be able to turn in time and he looked up at Mari so that he could see her beautiful face one last time.

It all happened as if it was taking place in slow motion. It was something he would always remember for it announced most spectacularly what Mari was and just how tightly she was now tied to the descendants of the man he had honored most in his life outside of his own father. Deion Leonidas sensed it instantly within their private connection, everything Mari saw and everything that was flashing through her mind. Since the first time they had made love and shared their minds with each other they held nothing back from one another. It had stunned them at first how deeply their connection went, and not just physically. They seemed to know exactly what the other liked and did not like in and out of their bed. Though Deion knew they were not *anomes* by the Lycavorian definition of the term, that could not be because Mari was not wolf, yet they were soulmates in every other sense of the word. Even though she was not yet fully wolf, Mari had embraced the changes that were happening within her completely and this allowed her to act almost without thought. Deion did not pause in his action and he used every bit of his strength and speed as a pureblood wolf to twist his body and leap towards Murano’s legs. He saw what Mari intended and acted on that intent, knowing his beautiful wife and mate would not miss and the fact that he would not allow her father to die this day or any other if it was within his power to stop.

Murano saw Mari lift her hands after she shouted and his own eyes went wider still when he saw those hands flare with bright, bluish/white Etheric power and form two glowing Etheric diamonds. Murano felt his legs swept out from under him even as Mari launched those two diamonds directly at him. He felt himself fall

onto the powerful body of Deion Leonidas just as those two diamonds sizzled over the top of where his head had been only milliseconds before. One of those diamonds struck the Enverr just above his jaw and punched clean through his face and head, effectively ventilating his large brain cavity all over the wall behind him. The second Etheric diamond struck just below his sternum and punched a fist size hole into his upper body that erupted out his back, taking most of his internal organs with it. The weapon in his hands was useless the moment the Etheric diamond had blown open his head, but his hands and arms still held the weapon in a firing position for several long seconds until the fact that he was now dead caught up with the rest of his body. Deion was rolling away, pulling Murano with him as the Enverr began to fall and struck the floor hard, his weapon clattering across the floor useless to him now.

Deion stopped their roll, coming up in a squatting position and he felt Andro reach for him and him alone.

[Deo! What is wrong?] His older brother barked and Deion smiled for he felt Andro's aura flow to him through the Etheric realm.

[We're fine!] Deion reported quickly. *[Command Center is secure. I will have Eirene and Mari online in three minutes!]*

[What happened ferveron?] Andro asked more calmly now, sensing Deion's resonance easily.

[Well... ah... Murano just found out what all of us have known since he and Mari arrived.] Deion told him.

[Sibfla!] Andro hissed. *[Their timing sucks!]*

[I have it ferveron. Mari couldn't help it... she...] Deion told him. *[Trust me.]*

[Understood. You are clear then?] Andro asked him.

[Give me three minutes and these igords will have no support from their defensive systems and you can act.] Deion told him.

[I'll give you four minutes. We are just entering this fool's audience chamber.] Andro told him.

Deion nodded his head but did not answer. He looked at Eirene and Nara. "Eirene get on their computers!" He ordered and then turned to look at the Lycanari Commando. "Sergeant, you and your people cover the entrance. Anything tries to enter, let them. Then kill them."

The female Lycanari nodded her head. "Done!" She spoke motioning to her two teammates.

Deion turned back as Murano scrambled to his feet staring at Mari in awe. Mari, for her part, was staring at her hands not really believing what she had just done. Murano moved closer to her slowly.

"Mari...?" He spoke softly and watched as her eyes came up to meet his.

"Father!" Mari gasped and threw her arms around his waist and buried her face in his chest.

Murano was taken aback and really didn't know what to do, but as her slim arms closed around his waist, he felt her Etheric resonance open up to him in a way that it never had before. He gasped himself when he felt the power within her, and the resonance of Deion Leonidas so deeply embedded in her psyche. He felt so many things pouring forth from her; foremost in his mind however was that her Etheric resonance echoed of him. It didn't just echo, it boomed of him and of... Tobia!

Tobia!

There was no mistaking what he felt within her and himself. Mari was his daughter. She was of his blood and his Etheric imprint; his and Tobia. She had lowered all of the shields she had held in place so tightly for so long and Murano could not help but bask in the love her resonance projected for him and for Tobia. He gripped her arms and slowly pried her away from him and he stared at her. She had small tears in her eyes as she met his gaze and she smiled brilliantly.

"Mari... I..." He stammered.

Deion stepped up to them. "I am truly sorry but we don't have time for this." He stated evenly.

Mari quickly wiped the tears from her eyes and nodded her head reaching for the P9 that was secured to the small of her back. "Yes." She spoke as she took a deep breath. She looked at Murano and smiled once more. "We will talk papa." She told him. "We will talk soon."

Murano watched her stunned as she reached out and ran her hand down Deion's exposed cheek before darting towards one of the computer stations. The poise with which she had just acted was incredible. Deion looked at Murano. "Sir... are you with me?" He asked.

Murano met his eyes. "You knew?" He asked in disbelief.

Deion nodded his head. "I won't lie to you Murano. We have known ever since the two of you arrived with us. It's in your scents."

Murano's eyes narrowed. "You did not think to tell me!" He asked him harshly. "Your brother did not think to tell me?"

Deion didn't let his reaction faze him and he shook his head. "It was not our place to tell you." He spoke. "And now is not the time to discuss this either. When we return to the ship you can yell at us all you like. It won't do any good, but if it makes you feel better, then you can yell at us."

Murano looked down and his hands tightened on the A4 as it dangled from the quick release straps. "I will have words with you and your brother when we return Deion Leonidas! And then I will have words with your father!"

Deion nodded his head. "Fair enough."

"I'm in!" Eirene called out from the computer station she sat at.

Deion turned and moved over behind her chair. "Shut down all of their internal sensors and any defensive systems *arande*." He told her. "Can you make it appear as if they are still active?"

Eirene nodded as her hands flew over the computer console. "I'm rerouting control from local stations to the main hub here." She stated. "All the systems will look as if they are still powered, but will not activate unless a series of fractal codes is used."

"You are locking them out with a Rotating Variable Encryption Algorithm?" Deion asked.

Eirene nodded her head. "Yes."

Deion looked up. "Excellent *arande*! Excellent! Mari?"

"Their encryption was childish." Mari replied instantly. "I'm downloading everything to my P9 now."

"How long?" Deion asked.

"Six minutes." Mari answered.

Deion turned and looked at Murano who nodded his head, his eyes still on the back of Mari's head where she sat. "That is more than enough time for us to extract back the way we came before Androcles brings the existence of this place to an end."

Androcles let his eyes wander around the inside of Rotaxe's audience chamber. It was a large, circular room with what appeared to be bleachers of some sort along one side of the chamber. On the other side was the massive transmission monitor and a dozen of the more senior Enverr within his clan apparently. All of them had Vanari females beside them wearing restraining collars, exceptionally skimpy clothes that barely covered their bodies and in some cases even light weight chains. Many of them appeared to be drugged as they were docile and their eyes distant. He felt Carisia and Lu'ria squeeze his hands in anger when they saw this and he sent a soothing pulse of his aura through the Etheric realm so that they knew this would not continue for very long.

Andro stopped walking when Rotaxe began moving for the large throne like chair against the wall. There were perhaps thirty Enverr in the audience chamber now, and that did not include the ones who were sitting along the sides. All of them were armed in some fashion and Rotaxe's guards were looking at him with hate in their eyes and lust for Carisia and Lu'ria. He could also smell their fear Andro took note. Rotaxe may not have been intelligent enough to act accordingly, but there were a few in the chamber who were being extra cautious.

Andro looked at Rotaxe as he settled to the chair. "My people." He stated. "Where are they?"

"In due time boy." Rotaxe spoke now. "We have other things to discuss."

Andro shook his head quickly. "I have brought you everything you required to obtain their release. I want them brought here now as you agreed so that we can leave this place."

Rotaxe shook his head. "I want more." Rotaxe spoke. "Spare parts and extra weapons for the ships. At least a dozen of these Hadarian Healers in order to treat my clan and run those wonderful computers you brought me. And I want the formula for the armor on those ships." He said leaning forward. "What do you call it...? Dragon Armor. I know it cannot be taken from ships already armored with it, so you will give it to me so that I can put it on my other ships."

Carisia turned her head quickly and looked up at Andro. *[How does he know that?]* She gasped.

[Andro... the forging process for our Dragon Armor is known only to the MENKLA Manufacturing Company.] Sadi's voice filled their minds from the PREMONITION in orbit. [No one who does not work in their Special Projects Division knows how it is done. How could he know this?]

[The file General Tarnei had on this individual spoke of deep contacts with the OSG.] Caliria joined in now. [They have been embedded on Earth for at least a decade.]

[And we know that they have proven ties to the Kavalians Andro.] Ne'Veha chimed in.

[And Laustinous worked for the Kavalians and we're pretty sure he has ties to Icho as well.] Lu'ria added.

[Laustinous would not have had access to what is entailed in the entire forging process Mistress.] Sadi spoke evenly. [Even pilots are not told.]

[No we are not.] Ne'Veha added.

[This is bad I take it?] Sehri asked.

[I believe then ladies that we are of the consensus that he is better informed than we first thought.]

Andro spoke. To most the rush of voices within the Etheric connection would have been overwhelming, even those who were powerful Tier Six Etheric users, but for Andro and the women of his life it was the most natural thing in the world. As with his father and mothers and a few dozen others, they were bound so tightly together that it was actually a gift for them.

[Carians yes!] Sadi exclaimed.

[Duangai... have Commander Entia and our people remove the Enverr blight standing by to take possession of the Vanari females.] Andro spoke to Sehri. [It's time we brought this little operation to an end.]

Andro shifted his Etheric connection. Cowen?

I am here Andro. We have succeeded and are standing by.

Cowen... take Kalis and Daio and move to the building where they are keeping Torian and the others. Leave Sherice and Ridor in charge of the others. Andro told him. I will buy you several minutes but wait for my signal to act.

What will that be? Cowen asked.

Andro chuckled in their connection. *You will know it my friend.*

[Lu'ria and I are ready.] Carisia spoke up.

"Are you paying attention to me boy?" Rotaxe barked.

"These are not the terms I agreed to." Andro spoke looking at Rotaxe.

The Enverr shrugged his shoulders. "I am changing the terms." He stated. "And to insure that you comply with these terms and don't try to back out on our deal, you will leave your red haired sister here to supervise the other Hadarian bitches while they treat my people."

"And if I don't agree to these new terms?" Androcles asked.

"You will agree." Rotaxe said. "You want your woman and the others back don't you? Or should I just tell my men to start using your woman as a fuck toy? They have wanted to stick it in all her holes ever since we captured her. Letting that happen is against the code of your people isn't it?"

"You seem to think that you are well versed in what I will do and not do." Androcles told him. "Indulge me for a moment. Your contacts with the OSG seem to run very deep if you have all of this information."

Rotaxe laughed. "Who said anything about the OSG boy?" He snapped. "They are just one group that I work with! I am not as stupid as some of the other Enverr clan leaders. I like to keep all of my options open."

Andro nodded his head. "So it seems." He said softly. "So it seems."

"I hold the entire deck of cards boy!" Rotaxe stated. "I have your woman, and now I have your ships and your weapons. I have three times the number of troops here and you have no choice but to agree if you want to leave here alive."

"What if I do not agree to these new terms?" Andro asked.

Rotaxe grinned savagely and rose to his feet. He crossed the small distance between them until he was standing in front of Androcles. "Well then boy... I will just kill you and take what I want. I will personally fuck all of your women before I give them to my men. Or did you think I didn't know the dark skinned elf and the vampire bitch beside you are not your wives as well?" He leaned closer. "Or the little blond bitch at the airfield. I understand she is Rothryn. I have never fucked a Rothryn woman before."

Andro's nose wrinkled somewhat at the foul stench of his breath but he didn't draw away. "You should probably know something first." Andro told him.

"There's nothing you can tell me that I don't know already boy!" Rotaxe stated. "I know all about you and your vaunted reputation. I'm more than prepared."

Andro met his eyes. "Really...?" He asked. "Then I'm sure that you know the woman you are holding... Senator Ulana... she isn't my wife and mate."

Rotaxe's eyes narrowed slightly. "You must take me for a fool boy!" He snarled.

Andro shook his head slowly. "A fool... no, but you are one of the most incredibly stupid motherfuckers I have ever had the displeasure of smelling. And you stink something fierce my friend."

Rotaxe blustered quickly and puffed out his chest in anger which really had no effect on Androcles. "What did you just say boy?" He growled.

"I recall a phrase from ancient Earth history that my father and my mother Anja liked to use on occasion as my brothers and sisters and I were growing." Androcles told him calmly. "It explains your situation quite well at the moment."

"And what is that?" Rotaxe demanded.

Androcles met his hard gaze with one of his own, his azure blue eyes becoming solid, black ringed emotionless orbs as Andro allowed the wolf within him to come out.

"You my friend... you are Fubar." Andro spat just before he moved. *Marux! Now! All teams! Now!* Andro screamed out within Mindvoice.

MARUX CIRCLING THE AIRFIELD

Androcles was right of course Marux knew.

Marux could feel Sehri's bright resonance from the airfield below him and it called to him more powerfully than anything he had ever felt with that monster Dante. It echoed within him like a drumbeat, pounding in his chest rhythmically, soothing him in a way he had never experienced before. She was far more powerful than Dante ever was, even before that monster took control of him. Marux had known Xaxon had taken control of Dante but there had been nothing he could do but sit by and let it happen. When Xaxon convinced Dante to banish him, Marux had been terrified at first. The planet they had sent him to was barren and nearly without any life at all. It had taken all his skills just to stay alive for those days until Elynth and Anthar had found him. Initially he thought they were there to kill him, but he quickly found out just how wrong he was. Elynth's calm and soothing demeanor as a Talon Guardian quickly put him at ease, for his instincts alone screamed at him to obey the Talon Guardian at all costs. He thought returning here would be a mistake, that perhaps they should have just killed him on that planet.

That was until he had arrived on their ship and felt her. She was like a beacon of brilliant light on a savage and dark night. He kept his shields clamped down very tightly around himself, not really believing that it could possibly be happening to him, but the moment Androcles had stood before him he had known. Marux should have figured it out sooner, for Androcles was a Talon Guardian and he would have sensed this right away. Marux did not know if Androcles struggled with this knowledge at first, knowing that Sehri was one of the six who he worshiped more than life itself, but if he did he never showed it in his actions with Marux. If anything it seemed to drive him to spend more time with Marux. Working with either Elynth or Androcles was enlightening for Marux. He had learned everything they had taught him at SODRAG, even excelled at it to some extent, but until Dante's dark influence was gone from him forever, Marux had never embraced that schooling. Marux had rededicated his life, focusing on who he was at his core, and not who Dante had expected him to be. While Marux would always carry darkness within him because of what Dante and he had shared, now he could control it and focus it and not let it control him as Dante had done.

Androcles was right about Sehri. They were meant to be together by whatever powers decided such things, but she was not quite ready yet. She had yet to master the nuances of what her power allowed her to do. Once she had mastered this, then she would be ready to bond with him and be one. When it came to feeling

others within the Etheric realm she was the weakest link of Andro's wives and mates, but she was gaining power and knowledge daily and it would not be long before she was truly ready. When that time came Marux knew that it would be the pinnacle of his life. The defining moment that would lay his path before him. A path he would walk proudly. Until that time Marux would protect her viciously from all enemies or those who would do her harm. Marux did not really understand why Androcles was different from so many others. He knew of course that he carried Darastrixi blood within him and therefore this could account for why Marux and other dragons felt such an affinity for him, but the wisdom Androcles carried within him was the wisdom of many lifetimes. He had sat with Elynth and Anthar and Jeth and the others on many occasions since joining them and now he knew the entire history of the Leonidas family and the first born son of the King. Androcles had spared him for a reason Marux decided and that reason he also now knew was Sehri. That he would trust him after what had taken place was all Marux needed to know. Marux knew this was where he belonged and he would prove that to everyone beginning this day. In the future he would go to Andro's sister and beg her forgiveness for being part of that past. A past that was no longer his.

As he circled among the thin clouds, lazily riding the thermal currents to stay within the cloud cover Marux waited patiently. His keen dragon eyes could see the twenty-two Enverr that had moved close to the side of the airfield. They were there for the purpose of taking from him the only hope for his future; a future that could hold so much promise and happiness.

Marux! Now! All teams! Now!

Andro's words were like a release as they boomed within the Etheric realm. A release from the shame and the pain he had endured in his life up until now.

Marux would step through that door now. And he would do so in spectacular fashion. He dipped his wing and dove for the ground with a single minded purpose.

AIRFIELD

Commander Entia had experienced many things in her life up until now. She was among the new breed of Cadre Commando that were coming up in the ranks. Those that called out to fight the OSG at every turn whenever they could. She had jumped at the chance to protect Caliria Re Mydala when asked by her father. Caliria had become a very public figure to those Vanari, young and old alike that did not like how their people allowed the OSG to do what they did. Even before she had become a Crown Princess to a Lycavorian Prince, Caliria Re Mydala had been a polarizing voice. Knowing what she did now, Entia had no qualms about accepting this mission the moment Androcles approached her on it. It was easy enough for her to rally almost a hundred Vanari Cadre Commandos who felt the same and were ready to be part of this historic day. They had been told what was going to happen across the entire Quadrant when they had gotten underway and to a person, not one of the Vanari females Commandos among the ranks looked unhappy in any way. That it was Lycavorians and Lycanari that were leading these charges was all the more important for it showed them that the Vanari were not alone. They had never been alone. Only their elected leaders had held them back from having what the Lycanari had.

Entia had been waiting patiently for the signal from Normya Leonidas. The Enverr had left the ships and the ramps had been raised once more in order to wait for the final word from Androcles that they had their people and the prisoners. It also insured the Enverr who were on the airfield did not know what was happening within the ships. The instant the ramps had come back up all of her people and begun pulling their gear from under the benches on the *STRIKER*. Within five minutes all of them were prepared to go into combat. The moment Normya stepped from the cockpit and motioned to her, Entia went to work. Entia signaled to the two Cadres who had taken up residence by the ramp entrance and nodded her head. All twenty-six of the Cadre Commandos took up position and got ready. The Enverr were in for a very big surprise when the ramp finally came down. They were going to discover just how lethal a pissed off Vanari could be.

Entia's hands tightened on her weapon, all of them now carrying the chopped down version of the Lycavorian P190 A4. The weapons were loaded with the same ammunition as the teams now in control of every Vanari prisoner within the Enverr compound. The tenseness was a palpable thing as the ramp slowly began to

open once more. The groups of Enverr waiting outside the *STRIKERS* began to rise to their feet as they had not received word from Rotaxe that they should take possession of the ships yet. The ramps should not be coming down, yet they were. Not really knowing what to make of it, none of the Enverr reached for their weapons in their confused state and this was all the opening the Vanari needed.

A single group of five Vanari Commandos burst from the interior of each *STRIKER*, their A4s spitting death with unerring accuracy and a large amount of hate. Enverr soldiers began to dance across the hard packed dirt as their bodies were on the receiving end of the explosive tipped rounds and the wounds they suffered were instantly fatal. Entia followed her team down the ramp at a jog, her green eyes sweeping over the now dead groups of Enverr.

“Finish them!” She barked into the implant she now wore under the skin of her jaw. She needn’t have given the order for she saw her people already moving among the dead Enverr and pumping killing shots into their heads to insure they were in fact dead.

“Realia!” Entia barked out watching as the head of the Vanari female closest to the road looked over to her. “Take your team and secure the approach! Kill any Enverr that you find!” Entia saw the young Commando nod her head and then turn to motion to her full team of twenty Commandos. Seconds later they were sprinting off into the distance.

“Section Two!” Entia ordered as she turned. “Put one each in the top turrets! Weapons free!” She ordered as she saw Sehri moving down the ramp towards her quickly. “Establish defensive positions around the ships!”

Sehri finished sprinting up to her and took her hand. “Denali and his team are bringing the first two groups of Vanari back through the timber to the east!” She hissed. “We need to be...”

The deep throated roar spun all of them around to the north of the airfield and they saw a massive burst of flame and the unmistakable roar of a dragon and then the screams of dying Enverr.

“Normya!” Sehri screamed.

“I don’t know!” Normya barked back on her COM. “There weren’t supposed to be any dragons to our north! I’m calling Jeth and Tharua to investigate!”

“That is a dragon that is fighting!” Sehri barked out. “There must be Enverr to our north!”

Entia tapped her jaw implant. “Section Four! Reorient your direction to the north! You hear the fighting! Make sure no Enverr come out of the timber to the north.”

“Sehri!” Normya bellowed from the cockpit. “Jeth and Tharua are coming down!”

Sehri Leonidas nodded her head, feeling the blood pounding in her veins, her fangs and eyes fully changed now. It felt amazing to her at this moment, so invigorating and full of life. The pureness of Andro’s blood had accelerated the process within her so that she could change to her wolf form at will. She felt so alive and empowered when in her wolf form and it was divine to say the least. The potency of the virus in Andro’s blood increased her own wolf blood to proportions not seen in any Rothryn in history. Sehri Leonidas now had wolf blood that was almost as pure as Sadi. Rothryn was just a name to Sehri now. They were Lycavorians by anyone’s definition and she intended to insure that all of their people knew what they could discover in the future.

At the moment Sehri felt a powerful surge of emotion through her that wasn’t coming from Androcles or any of the women she loved so completely. It was something else entirely and it was swarming through her senses as the resonance of a powerful mind swept around her defensively; a mind intent on keeping her safe and insuring that no harm came to her. This shocked Sehri to some extent as she had only ever felt such a thing from Androcles. It was very powerful but it held a different kind of emotion than Andro’s love in it. It was almost as if it was a sisterly love that swept up within her. Normya’s voice brought her out of her thoughts.

“Sehri! Deni is three minutes out!” She exclaimed. “They have no pursuit but Denali says be prepared to erect a shield around the airfield!”

Sehri nodded her head and looked around quickly until she spotted where she wanted to go. She sprinted to a point roughly in the center of the six *STRIKERS*, and came to a halt as she looked around. Sehri Leonidas was powerful, she knew this, but she also knew that Andro and Sadi and even Ne’Veha were stronger than her right now. She doubted she could ever match Sadi in power or will, but she would certainly insure that she reached the pinnacle of her power and abilities by training every day with those she so loved. They had told her to never hesitate and reach for them if ever she needed their strength and determination. Sehri did so this very

moment without hesitation or doubt and felt their love and warmth fill her as they all reached for her without question.

Sehri slapped her palms together hard and closed her eyes just as the bluish white Etheric bubble formed around her hands and then extended down her arms very quickly. She had been practicing as much as she was able with Androcles, learning to control and direct her shielding power and that was now paying off. He had told her that while the virus within him did not carry the Praetorian gene of his grandfather, it carried the blood that gene had altered to some degree and this is what allowed him to pass added skills and power to his wives and mates. It was the same for his father and mothers and now it allowed Sadi to do what she was able to do and it would permit her to better control her unique and wonderful gift. It came much easier now with the practicing she had been doing as she warped the Etheric shield outward into an even larger bubble that first engulfed her, then the *STRIKER* next to her, followed quickly by the other *STRIKERS* and then the entire airfield. At its peak the shield was thirty meters high and extended for two hundred meters all around. This would be the largest shield she had ever projected, but so far there was very little strain as she pushed it outward enough that it provided a barrier no Enverr would be able to pass through as long as she maintained her concentration.

“By the Prophets!” Commander Entia gasped aloud as she saw it, her eyes encompassing the area around them.

It was quite the sight as Entia looked up and all around at the bluish white barrier that now protected her and her troops. A normal ground shield would have done the same thing but she learned that a normal shield would not have prevented the Enverr from entering the shielded area. Sehri’s Etheric shield would do just that.

“Commander!” The shouted voice got her attention.

Entia turned quickly and her green eyes went wide as she saw the first group of female Vanari prisoners beginning to appear from the timber to the west led by Denali Leonidas and his Vanari wife and mate Arduri Leonidas. Their group had been closest to the area given where their target building was within the Enverr compound and Denali had wasted no time it seemed in getting them out.

“Go! Go!” Entia shouted out as Denali stepped right up to the Etheric shield and reached out his hand to touch it.

Seconds later, with his own Etheric resonance mingling with the shield and providing even more power and control for Sehri, an entire section of the shield dropped to allow access to him and the Vanari females with him. By now Lisisa was also free of the timber helping several Vanari along and then Fedor Leonidas was free of the timber carrying one Vanari in his arms while another clung to his combat harness. More were behind him helping one another as they left the timber and saw what was waiting for them. Entia could feel the tears rolling down her cheeks even as she sprinted towards them. This was really happening she determined. This was really happening and she only wished that her people could see this. She had no idea what was happening across the quadrant, but she would soon see for herself.

The Enverr who led this small twenty-two member team was third in command behind Rotaxe. They had been instructed to take the Rothryn female from the airfield the moment he sent the signal to them. His instructions had been clear, take the blond haired Rothryn female and kill any who got in their way.

The Enverr Goulán and his men would never get the chance to do anything like that.

Glimmering golden armor and dark green scales came plummeting through the jungle like canopy above them with a vicious tooth filled maw of teeth leading the way and before anyone knew what was happening, Marux’s three and a half metric tons of weight had landed upon three of his men and instantly crushed the life from them with barely a pause. With a roar of defiance and anger at what these men were attempting to do to the one who would be his salvation, Marux held nothing back. His right wing whipped forward almost without thought the moment his talons touched the ground and the dragon armor encased front ridge of his wing impacted two Enverr who were closest to him with the velocity of a gunshot. Their large bodies lifted into the air and rocketed through the thick tangle of trees and vegetation, but not before every bone in their upper bodies was instantly and forever crushed.

Marux spun nimbly around on his powerful hind legs, almost as if he was doing a dragon dance and his right front foreleg slashed out next and his Firespitter talons gauged flesh from two other Enverr, carving six

inch long furrows across the Enverr's chests and abdomens and their screams of agony echoing in the air all around them as their internal organs began to splash wetly on the ground before them.

Goulan was screaming for his men to shoot the terrible beast that had appeared within their midst and as they got their weapons up and began to fire, their eyes filled with even more fear. Marux's glimmering Etheric shield became peppered with the projectile rounds that bounced harmlessly off into the timber all around him. A group of four Enverr lowered their weapons just as Marux turned to face them and opened his muzzle. A stream of three thousand degree fire erupted from his maw and engulfed the Enverr in a fiery cloud as the ten meter long stream of flame reached for them and incinerated their bodies almost instantly. None of them had time to even scream before their lungs were seared shut and their bodies were reduced to near ashen piles of smoking flesh and what remained of their bones.

That is when the Enverr broke and began to run in all directions.

Androcles' instructions to him were clear. None of these monsters were allowed to survive and Marux instantly calculated the directions the remaining two groups of Enverr moved. He smashed through the thin trees around him chasing Goulan and his group of seven first. They had unwittingly headed towards the airfield in terror and Marux had no intention of allowing them near his precious Sehri.

There was something to be said for the sight of a three and a half ton dragon encased in armor smashing through small trees and bushes as he chased you. Marux was terror incarnate. All that he had learned while at SODRAG now came rushing back to him in this moment. All of the training about close quarters combat that Dante had ignored but Marux remembered filled his head now; terrain and direction, the feel of the earth beneath you and the awareness to sense the breeze across your scales and know what direction the wind was blowing. Marux felt truly alive at this very moment. The knowledge of what the future could hold for him made him draw upon all of his willpower and skills. As he sprinted forward he cut loose with a searing stream of flame off to the left. It sliced through the thick foliage as if it wasn't there and engulfed four of the Enverr who had split from Goulan. They died in the same fashion as their comrades as Marux dismissed them and increased his speed as much as he was able. He had long legs and a powerful body and he quickly closed the gap between himself and the Enverr who were running for their lives.

At the last moment before they would have broken onto the airfield Marux leaped forward with a powerful surge from his hind legs. A single flap of his immense wings carried him over the top of the remaining four including Goulan and he landed perfectly ten meters in front of them. His armor encased head whipped around and he snatched up three of the Enverr within the grips of his Etheric power and smashed them back into the hard ground with horrific force. Goulan skidded to a stop as his men impacted the ground in front of him and he heard the gruesome sound of their bones snapping and breaking before they lay still. Goulan looked up into the terrible maw of the beast before him, his eyes wide in fright and panic. They darted left and right trying to see if there was a way out for him but finding none. He turned his head back to Marux and saw those savage teeth barred under the glimmering metal helmet that adorned the top of his head and extended down his long, thick neck. Goulan had all of three full seconds to contemplate what he had done in his miserable life before Marux's muzzle snapped forward with lightning like speed and his jaws clamped shut on Goulan with a sickening crunch.

Goulan's muffled screams were only heard for half a second before Marux's jaws bit down and severed the Enverr's body in half. The lower half fell away almost immediately and Marux turned his head to spit out Goulan's upper body. He heaved several times and then spit twice more to get the foul taste of the Enverr out of his mouth before turning back to make sure he was dead. He needn't have bothered for Goulan's eyes were open in death, frozen in terrible pain at the moment when Marux bit him in half.

Marux! Jeth's voice thundered in his head and Marux whirled around to see Jeth's massive body settle to the ground along the path he had smashed through the timber. Tharua settled beside her beloved mate and they both looked at him.

The others! Marux barked out.

We caught them from above. Tharua told him as she moved closer. *Rest easy Marux.*

I was... I needed to protect Sehri. Marux muttered aloud. *Androcles told me that was my mission! Protect Sehri at all costs.*

Tharua looked back at Jeth with wide eyes. She watched as her mate maneuvered his massive body nimbly up to Marux who did not shy away from his enormous size. Jeth lowered his armored head to stare at Marux. *Andro told you to do this?* He asked.

Marux met Jeth's gaze without fear. He no longer had to fear those he was among. *She is... she is to be my Bonded One.*

Tharua moved up beside him now. *Sehri?* She gasped.

Marux nodded his head once more. *Androcles felt it. I have known since... I have felt her since I returned with your sister.* He told Jeth. *I will allow no harm to come to her Jeth! Not now! Not ever!*

In a move of surprising grace for a dragon of his immense size, Jeth moved even closer to Marux and butted him gently in the side with his huge head. *Be at peace my dragon brother Marux.* Jeth spoke. *You have done well this day! You have done very well!*

Tharua looked back down the path that Marux had carved through the timber and shook her own head slightly. *I'd say he just took out a large section of timber and a whole bunch of bad guys.*

Jeth turned to look where Tharua's eyes were lingering. His own eyes grew slightly wider at what he saw and he chuckled softly. *I may have to amend my earlier statement.* He looked at Marux. *Did you think before you decided to bulldoze fully four acres of timber while chasing them?*

Marux shook his head. *I assumed my armor would protect me. And the trees were in the way.*

Tharua laughed now as she turned back and looked at him. *Come Marux! I saw a nearby stream where you can drink and wash the foul taste of these idiots from your mouth, and sooth your muscles in the process. You will be bruised after your jaunt through the timber.*

Jeth brushed his larger body against Marux's with affection. *Trust me... it is best not to argue with her. She always wins... or she tells Eliani and then you have to suffer a full medical exam from Talon Guardian Androcles' sister.*

I have only done that once! Tharua spat at her mate. *And I was right!*

Jeth nodded his head. *Trust me on this Marux.*

Marux glanced back towards the airfield which he could just see through the timber. *She will be safe? Denali, Lisisa and little Arduri have arrived.* Tharua answered him gently. *Whatever threat these fools may have presented is now over. Dorian is fast approaching. She will be safe Marux. You have seen to that.*

Marux nodded his head. *Then that stream sounds very inviting indeed.* He spoke.

Does Sehri know? Tharua asked him.

Marux shook his head. *Androcles says she is not yet ready. But she will be soon and I will protect her until that time.*

Jeth nodded his massive head. *Then you will have us beside you Marux my friend.* He told him. *From this day forward.*

Marux! Now! All teams! Now!

All of them heard Andro's call within Mindvoice and Deion whirled around from his spot to look at Mari and Eirene.

"Mari! *Arandel!*" He exclaimed. "It's time to go!"

Eirene pushed away from the console she was sitting at. "Done!" She quipped. "All of their defensive systems are now offline! These fools won't be able to do anything!"

Deion stepped up beside Mari as she was typing furiously on her P9. "Mari?"

Mari stabbed down on one key of her computer and then looked up. "I have it all!" She exclaimed. "I also sent a mutating virus back through their network that will infect all computer systems connected to this system."

"Connected?" Deion asked.

Mari nodded as she rose to her feet. "I detected three other networks that were linked to this system that are not on this moon. Most of the information was encrypted but I downloaded all of it anyway. In about three minutes those systems will begin shutting down and deleting all of the information stored on them." She told him with a brilliant smile.

Deion leaned over and kissed her hard on the lips. "You beautiful, devious creature you!" He hissed at her in delight.

Mari beamed at him as his aura swept across her senses. "And don't you forget it." She told him as she slapped his face playfully.

"Let us go!" Murano spat from where he stood by the door. "We can join with Jomann's team as they extract! Move!"

Deion took her arm and reached for his sister. "Time to beat feet as Andro says!" He hissed as he pulled them for the door.

Rotaxe was so far out of his league that it wasn't even funny and he knew this within the first three seconds. He saw those savage looking dual fangs burst forth, saw the black ring encircle those odd colored blue eyes and he saw Androcles' hands come up to his harness in a single blink of an eye. What followed was unlike anything Rotaxe had ever seen in his lifetime and it would be something he remembered until the last breath of life left his body.

That would be far shorter than anyone would have guessed.

Andro's hands closed around the hilts of his swords and he was pulling them from his harness even as they began to appear from Flatspace. Two things happened almost at the same time. One of moments would stun even the women that loved Androcles so much.

Carisia and Lu'ria both whirled inward and hit Hemtar with vicious dual ridge hand strikes to his throat and face. What passed for his nose crumbled instantly and blood spurted from his nostrils as his eyes instantly became filled with tears at the intense pain. Half a second after that Lu'ria's blow struck his throat like a hammer and his hands came up to grasp his throat unable to catch a breath. Lu'ria spun in motion as Carisia leaped into the air catlike and wrapped her thighs around Hemtar's large head. As she twisted her body, Lu'ria's powerful kick struck the back of his legs and took his feet out from under him. Hemtar grunted painfully as he fell and he reached for one of Carisia's thighs but found his wrist gripped by two incredibly powerful hands. Those hands were attached to Carisia's body and she twisted brutally, using all of her pureblood vampire strength, snapping the bones in his lower arm and wrenching it to the side. As Hemtar opened his mouth to scream, Lu'ria's knee fell into the center of his chest, all one hundred and twenty-eight pounds of tightly packed muscle dropping directly over his heart. His eyes bugged open even further in pain until he felt the cold steel of Lu'ria's glaive jammed against his throat and her amber colored eyes, now encircled by a similar black ring glared at him from atop his chest.

"Continue to resist and she will snap your neck with her legs while I open your foul innards to the air on this moon!" Lu'ria snarled viciously, leaning close to his grotesque face and pressing her glaive even tighter to his flesh, drawing blood.

Hemtar knew he was beaten and he ceased all his struggles to get these two polecats off his body.

The howl of excruciating agony drew the attention of all of them.

Rotaxe could not move fast enough to get away from Androcles and as dozens of pairs of eyes watched, *Cana and Saar rie Emanur* struck downward in front of Rotaxe's body. The swords sliced through his clothes and light armor as if they weren't there and left five inch long gashes in his chest area that instantly began to spill blood profusely. Androcles didn't stop there, twisting *Cana* and *Saar* in his hands and slashing upward. This time the swords bit deeply into the flesh of Rotaxe's inner thighs, instantly severing the tendons and ligaments that allowed him to use his legs. His body dropped to the floor of his audience chamber like a wet noodle, his legs no longer able to support his body. What followed next Carisia and Lu'ria had never seen Andro do before and it was utterly devastating in nature. His hands whipped back and with a singular heave of immense strength he sent *Cana* and *Saar* rippling through the air in a wide bending arc. Each sword curved to a different side, aimed directly at the two groups of Enverr who had been sitting on either side of the audience chamber.

As stunned eyes watched *Cana* and *Saar* blazed through the two groups of Enverr and suddenly, six heads flopped to the ground around the bodies as they fell. Stunned eyes watched as those swords curved back around with blinding speed and slapped back into the hands of Androcles Leonidas.

Then he launched himself into the attack.

Androcles completely ignored the group of Enverr to his left and leaped for the group on his right without hesitation. He let his instincts and Dahakoan senses guide him in his actions. His movements were so graceful and smooth that one could almost see him dancing in a ballet until you took into account the copious amounts of Enverr blood that was splashing across the floor and other bodies as Cana and Saar claimed victim after victim. The swords were moving so fast that it was impossible to really keep track of them. Andro landed among the five remaining Enverr on the right, Saar plunging completely through the head of the only Enverr who seemed to be trying to react. As Andro twisted his body in motion he reversed Cana in his hand and slashed the sword to his left. An Enverr fell away screaming as both of his arms dropped to the bloodstained floor no longer attached to his body. He would die in seconds from massive blood loss. As he yanked Saar free of the Enverr skull, blood and brain matter came with it and Andro twisted the sword in his hand, leveling the hilt at another two Enverr. Two bright yellow flashes from the hilt of the sword sent two highly concentrated bursts of energy punching through the midsections of two more Enverr, leaving smoking holes that one could actually see through.

Andro executed a backflip away from the remaining Enverr troops stunning them with this move as he was suddenly gone from their weapons sights. He landed in the center of the audience chamber and with a powerful motion drove Cana directly into the floor of the chamber. The wave of Etheric power swelled up on the floor and then burst like a dam, rushing to all sides like a runaway lifter. The floor buckled and flew upward as it struck anything solid, including the fool Enverr troops who were too stunned to turn and run. As the Vanari female prisoners began to scream in fear at that onrushing wall of Etheric power coming at them, their eyes went wide as the bluish white light simply passed them by or curved around where they huddled leaving them untouched and without an Enverr anywhere in grabbing distance of them.

“Now sister!” Andro screamed aloud. “Now!”

Elynth heard Andro’s call even from five thousand feet above the compound and she reacted instantly. *We go! Now!* She barked out.

Elynth dipped her wing, rolled over and dove for the surface with Anthar and Majeir in hot pursuit. It took her only five seconds to swoop in over the Enverr barracks and her golden eyes began to see them exiting. Elynth screamed in and unleashed an unearthly roar before she opened her maw and let loose with a perfect stream of flame tinged super-heated breath. Two seconds later Anthar landed to one side and Majeir the other and added their own pure streams of Firespitter flame to the conflagration.

Thirty-two Enverr died in that initial incineration and three dozen more would follow as their barracks building instantly burst into out of control flames.

“Caydren! Cinol! Now!” Andro screamed from inside the audience chamber.

There was perhaps a millisecond pause and then the main chamber doors that they had entered through burst inward under the brutal combined power and weight of the dragon sons of Vollenth and Viera. Caydren and Cinol were fully grown for their age now and soon Sadi and Ne'Veha would begin riding them, but now the brothers acted as one and the usual competitive nature between them was lost as they worked together seamlessly. The brothers were not neat or concerned about their entrance and they split to either side of the huge, splintered hard wood doorway, crushing any Enverr who happened to be too stunned to move.

The female Vanari prisoners looked on in awestruck disbelief as two dozen Vanari Cadre Commandos burst into the chamber behind Caydren and Cinol. Directly behind them moved Dorian Leonidas who blurred in motion to where his older brother was, his dual knives flashing out once and nearly decapitating an Enverr soldier who was just beginning to rise to his addled feet. Sheva and Onera stepped into the doorway then with Caliria and all of them began to motion frantically and shout for the Vanari females to run. Most of them needed no further urging and broke into sprints for the doors. Three of the Vanari females could not move as quickly because they had been prisoners for far longer and it was these women that Sheva and Onera blurred to in an instant, gathering them into their arms and then blurring out of the main room. Carisia and Lu'ria

scrambled to their feet, roughly dragging Hemtar between them as they moved for the doors knowing what their beloved Androcles and his brother planned to do.

“Go! Go! Go!” Carisia screamed aloud, pulling the Enverr by his collar even as he screamed in pain from his wounds.

Androcles turned and looked down at where Rotaxe lay on the ground in his own blood and unable to fully move. His azure blue eyes were nearly glowing as he gazed at the foul man beneath him.

“Now you will feel Spartan justice!” Andro snarled at him. “Now you will experience how the Lycavorian Union deals with scum such as yourself!”

Andro turned as Dorian stepped up behind him and the brothers stood back to back. They stepped away several feet from Rotaxe and he watched with wide eyes as the bluish white Etheric power engulfed both of them. It surrounded Rotaxe as well though he did not know why and then he began to feel the shuddering of the ground beneath him. His eyes darted back and forth as the ground began to shake violently and the terrible screeching sound of tearing metal and snapping wood began to reach his ears. He looked all around and he watched awe struck as pieces of the building began to rise apart from the floor, walls snapping and breaking, steel beams bending at the hand of some unseen force. He glanced back at the two Lycavorians and his eyes filled with real fear as he saw both of them suspended off the ground by nearly a foot, the bluish white glow around their bodies blazing brightly enough to nearly blind him.

It was all Rotaxe would remember as he finally passed out from the pain and blood loss.

It was something that the freed Vanari females and those Cadre Commandos who had come on this mission would remember for the rest of their days. It would also begin the legend of the *Dahakoan* brothers and the diminutive sister that would soon join them.

They were gathering by the now sundered gates of the compound, Caliria, Eliani and other Vanari medics moving among the former prisoners and injecting them with the counter agent. Jomann was directing them entire operation and moving groups of Vanari females off to the airfield as they were injected. He turned his head as Kalis, Cowen and Daio approached from the direction of the prison building.

“Eli!” Jomann barked. “Torian!”

Eliani lifted her head and immediately sprinted to where Cowen gently lowered Torian to the ground, Ulana clinging to his hand tightly.

“He has internal bleeding Eliani!” Ulana gasped. “Five broken ribs that I could detect, and I think his lung has been punctured!”

Eliani settled beside Torian who looked up at her with a grin. “Princess.” He rasped out the word.

Eliani lifted her hands and they instantly began to glow with white healing power. “Are you about done getting your ass beat Torian?” She exclaimed as she lowered her hands to his chest.

Torian laughed somewhat, coughing in pain and nodded his head. “I think... I think perhaps I will say no next time Androcles asked me to do something like this.”

Eliani smiled brightly at him. “Smart move.” She told him. “Now hold still. I’m going to stabilize you and then get you off this stinking moon.”

“***Nubou Lae!***” Kalis’s voice rang out causing all of them to turn back towards the audience chamber.

Even Kalis, who was not as attuned to Etheric power because he had been apart from what was within himself for much of his life, even Kalis could feel it now. The vibration of the ground all around them as it shook. The building was folding in upon itself as pieces of it began to twist and ripple and shatter. The bluish white Etheric wall of power was center on the Enverr audience chamber and it appeared as if there was a small earthquake going on within that Etheric globe. There were gasps of shock as one entire wall was suddenly peeled away and crushed into oblivion, revealing the two brothers hanging motionless a foot off the ground in the center of what was once the audience chamber and standing back to back. The Etheric glow of their power was shimmering brighter than at any time in the past that they had seen as they literally were bringing the building down around themselves. The vibrations through the surrounding ground were very real and reverberated through all of those now watching what was taking place. All of them had seen Androcles do some

wondrous things in the past, things that even he could not explain, but none of them had witnessed anything like this before.

It was Sarlana's voice within Murano's head as he and Deion and the others ran up that answered the question all of them had. They had established a unique connection between the two of them in order for them to better communicate ideas and direction of how they would help Andro and Dorian and the other Praetorians among them train.

Murano you must move everyone back to the airfield! Quickly! Sarlana's voice echoed in his head as his eyes took in what was taking place.

Sarlana? Murano questioned.

I have been monitoring them throughout the mission. Sarlana told him. *I have felt it building within them.*

What do you mean? Murano asked her.

It is a Dahakoan move Murano! Sarlana spoke to him. *I have read about it within our history texts. It is similar to the execution of what your Praetorian warriors used to do in order to clear an area around them of Scourge. Only this is much more powerful than anything I have ever read. You must move everyone away from them. Back to the airfield. When they release the power building within them, it will obliterate everything around them that is standing Murano. Nothing will remain of this Enverr place. It will flatten everything!*

Murano didn't hesitate for an instant. He had come to trust Sarlana in so short a time for she had not lied to him about anything. In their talks she had been honest about all that had taken place in the past. At least that she knew of. Murano could feel that she had the best interests of Androcles and Dorian and all the others foremost in her mind and nothing else mattered to her. "Everyone back to the airfield now!" He barked out the order seeing them all turn to look at him.

"Murano what...?" Jomann questioned.

Murano shook his head. "Trust me... we do not want to be here when they release the power building within them!"

"Release it?" Carisia stammered. "What do you mean?"

Murano didn't hesitate once again and he bent down beside her and Lu'ria and hauled the unconscious Enverr Hemtar up to his shoulder. We must go! Now!" He spat. "They will join us when it is done!"

"When what is done?" Lu'ria screamed.

Murano met her amber eyes. "They are going to destroy this entire compound! They are going to bring it all down!" Murano explained letting his eyes sweep around to all of them now. "We must get the Vanari out of here and back to the airfield! All of us!"

Go! Andro's voice boomed within their minds and all of them turned to look at where he and Dorian were still hovering there off the ground. **Go my family and friends!**

We will join you soon enough! Dorian's voice echoed his brother.

"*Sibfla!*" Deion spat. "That's good enough for me!"

"Hell yes!" Daio exclaimed as he and Deion and others began scooping Vanari females into their arms in order to move quickly.

Cowen looked down at Torian on the ground. "Forgive me my friend." He spoke.

Torian shook his head. "Hell yes! Help me get out of here!" Torian stammered as Cowen pulled him painfully to his feet. Ulana had not left his side and she wrapped her arms around his waist not really understanding what was going on, but certain that she was where she was meant to be.

"Move!" Jomann shouted as he grabbed Eliani's hand. "All of us! Now!"

"Jomann they are my brothers!" Eliani protested. "I won't leave them!"

Do not fear for them Eliani Leonidas. Sarlana's voice echoed loudly within her mind and Eliani's eyes grew wide. *Fear for those who will stand against them now and in the future. You are your brother's right hand and will Eliani. You and your sister Zarah alone hold sway over Androcles, Eliani Leonidas, even more so than his beloved mates in many respects. Never doubt him for he has never doubted you. Any of you.*

Sarlana? Eliani gasped.

He is being born again this day Eliani. Sarlana told her. *Both of them are. Do as he asks you child.*

Eliani glanced back at the crumbling audience chamber and then looked at her beloved Jomann. She gripped his hand tighter and nodded her head as she reached for a Vanari female who was slow in getting to her feet.

“Let’s haul ass!” She exclaimed seeing Jomann grin and follow her while scooping up two Vanari into his arms.

It swirled around them seamlessly, building in intensity as it did. They had come to accept what they were long before they even realized it and now they were about to take the first step down that road. Elynth and Ryner rested on the ground only a short distance away, their own Etheric resonances combined with Androcles and Dorian. It filled their beings, their blood, and their physical bodies. A power unlike anything they had ever felt before. It coursed through them and felt so natural and wonderful, but also so dangerous and foreboding. The strands of Etheric power glowed brighter still, building wave upon wave. They were the channels of this power and the four of them reached for each other to direct and channel it.

Dori? Andro spoke the word.

Let’s bring it down.

Forever. Elynth and Ryner answered together.

Forever! Two other voices joined with them from across the stars and they were complete.

PREMONITION

ORBITING ENVERR COMPOUND

“*Carians!* Sadi look!” Ne’Veha exclaimed as she looked outside her cockpit window at the compound below them.

“*Son vada carians!*” Sadi exclaimed.

They were the only ones to actually see what took place and it would remain with them forever. The glowing bluish white Etheric bubble seemed to expand quickly and then it suddenly blew outwards. What followed Sadi would only be able to describe to others as something from one of the old videos they had watched in the academy science classes. The result of a fusion explosion to surrounding areas. It was as if some giant unseen hand came down and violently swept aside all in its swath of destruction. The entire Enverr compound seemed to heave off the ground and then steel and granite and other building materials simply shattered in place and became dust as it raced outward like an explosion of tremendous power. The cloud of dust and debris quickly obscured their vision from high above but only they were able to see and witness as what was once a large compound of buildings and defensive emplacements and walls became a thing of the past.

Sadi and Ne’Veha felt the enormous surge of love and warmth from Androcles then, his aura swirling around them tightly, caressing their senses and their minds and both of them nearly broke into tears at the strength and commitment that they felt within that aura. Towards them. Towards Carisia and Lu’ria and Sehri and Caliria. It was almost overwhelming to be able to experience it and they reached for reached other’s hands and basked in the emotion that swept through them. Sadi and Ne’Veha could feel the same reaction from their fellow princesses and lovers on the surface and both of them nearly began to weep at the sensations. They could feel the same things echoing loudly through Sheva and Onera as well, both of them holding one another on the surface and experiencing the total and absolute love of the man they both adored.

Then it was gone.

Fading from their minds but leaving the remnants of that emotion trembling through them.

It was something none of them would ever forget in their lifetimes.

The airfield was jammed packed with Vanari prisoners as Cadre medics went among the former prisoners and insured that no reaction to the serum was happening. The Vanari females and the few males that had been rescued were sitting on the ground stunned at what had just occurred, the elation of being rescued after so many years beginning to set in.

“Where is he?” Carisia demanded as she and Lu'ria stood beside Murano on the edge of the airfield looking back towards the compound.

All of them had heard the deep booming noise and then the massive vibrations through the ground before the dust cloud had rose above the trees in the distance.

You worry too much Enylarcopri. Andro's voice resounded in her head and they turned as Elynth and Ryner swept in over the airfield and landed only ten meters away.

Carisia and Lu'ria broke into a sprint just as Andro tossed the body of Rotaxe from the saddle in front of him and leaped down himself. Carisia and Lu'ria practically leaped into his arms as Dorian dropped from Ryner's saddle with a broad smile. He only had a moment to blink before Sheva and Onera blurred to him and almost knocked him over as they crushed themselves to him in happiness.

Murano simply smiled as he moved up to where Andro was sharing a sizzling kiss with Lu'ria and Carisia's head was buried in the side of his neck. This day had brought about many new discoveries that they would all have to deal with in the future. And so far, as far as Murano was concerned, not one of those discoveries was a bad thing.

“Well done!” Murano exclaimed to the brothers. “Well done indeed.”

As Murano knew it would be, Andro's first question was about others. “We got them all?” He asked.

Murano nodded his head. “Every single one.” He answered. “Some minor wounds were suffered by Commander Entia's people during the brief fight here but it seems a trio of dragons somehow knew of a group of Enverr who were ready to assault the airfield from the north and they stopped them. Well... annihilated them to be more precise.”

Andro nodded his head with a smile and looked at Dorian. At the moment he was holding a very stunned Onera and kissing her with every bit of desire and passion in his young body. Something that Sheva was enjoying with immense glee.

“We will need to move quickly.” Andro said. “The attacks have begun across the sector and I want to be back on Austrova with Coren and Alrerin in order to witness what happens.”

“You still think this action will flush their enemies into the open?” Murano asked.

Andro turned as Caliria and Sehri moved up to him and he swept them into his arms with Carisia and Lu'ria, kissing them just as intensely as he had them. When he pulled away he looked at Murano. “I'm betting on it.” He spoke.

“What then?” Carisia asked as she looked up into his face.

“Then we will see just how open the Vanari people are to change.” Andro said looking at Caliria.

Jomann moved up to him with Eliani at his side and they embraced like brothers. “Nice... if a bit overdone.” Jomann spoke.

Andro chuckled until Eliani's hand snapped out cat like and slapped him across his face. “Next time asshole... warn us about what you have planned!” She barked.

Andro reached up and rubbed his cheek where she had slapped him as Carisia, Caliria, Sehri and Lu'ria looked on with grins from ear to ear. “Sorry about that.” He answered finally.

“No you aren't!” Eliani hissed just before she threw her arms around him and hugged her brother.

Andro squeezed her back tightly as his eyes drifted all around. He found who he was looking for and gently moved Eliani from his embrace and crossed the distance to where Torian was quickly. Ulana looked up as he approached and tried to smooth out her appearance, but Androcles noticed that she did not release her grip on Torian's hand as he knelt down.

Torian held out his other hand which Andro gripped tightly and squeezed, bringing it to his cheek. “I am sorry *fervon*. I came as soon as I found out.” Andro whispered to him.

Torian nodded his head. “I knew you would.” He answered.

“Are you...?”

“I'm fit for duty!” Torian told him and Andro saw Ulana's eyes widen.

“No you are not!” She exclaimed. “Eliani says it will be at least two weeks before you are fully recovered!”

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “A true Spartan.” He spoke. “But we will have a while before you are needed my friend.”

Andro rose to his feet and let his eyes drift over the entire airfield seeing Vanari and Lycavorian moving among each other, helping one another and working together without pause. He nodded his head slowly as Murano came up beside him once more with Carisia, Lu'ria, Sehri and Caliria. Andro pulled Sehri close to him on one side and Caliria on the other as Carisia and Lu'ria squeezed up against them.

“Armen is sending down two additional transports.” Murano told him.

Andro nodded his head. “Have Denali and Lisisa see to getting everyone off the surface. I want to go back to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and check in with General Tarnei before we return to Austrova.”

“Why?” Carisia asked him.

“Something tells me that we have kicked a hornet’s nest with our actions here and there are going to be some very pissed off Eridiani to contend with.” Andro answered.

“*Nubou* them!” Caliria almost yelled.

Andro and the others laughed. “No thank you *Inamarno*.” He said leaning over to kiss her. “I would much rather play with you and the other loves of my life.” He whispered in her ear.

Caliria pushed him away with mock indifference. “You pervert!” She exclaimed as the others laughed.

“What’s your plan Androcles?” Murano asked.

“My plan?” Andro answered. “I intend to fulfill what I came here to do.” He spoke. “Then I have a sister and brother to collect.”

Murano shook his head. “Not you.” He said. “Us.”

Andro nodded. “And you are very welcome and needed Murano.”

Murano nodded his head. “Then let’s get off this rock. The stench is starting to get to even my not so sensitive nose.”

Androcles nodded his head. “That’s the best idea I have heard all day.” He said.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

SPARTA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Deia Leonidas

It certainly had a ring to it that felt wonderful to her ears and she chastised herself for not taking the name as her own sooner. Martin and his wives had been pestering her for over a decade to do this very thing and she had kept refusing, saying that it was a conflict with her position as Prime Minister of the Union. Now Deia realized just how utterly stupid that attitude had turned out to be.

Deia stood looking out the huge plate glass window at the Eurotas River as it wound its way through the center of Sparta. The city had grown since Martin’s return, now nearly five million men, women and children called this city home. The city limits had expanded several kilometers in all directions that allowed for expansion, but the city had remained true to its history and culture. The architecture remained almost unchanged from hundreds of years ago, though with all of the modern amenities and knowledge they now had, the city and its buildings and surrounding facilities were stronger than ever.

Deia should have been the one to see it right away upon Martin returning to claim the throne of his father and grandfathers. Sparta was where his heart and soul resided and nothing would ever change that. His wives and mates, his children, this was their home. Sparta was the heart of the Union now. Apo Prime may have been the capital planet, but Sparta here on Earth was their spiritual core. It was here that the famed Spartan lore was born so long ago, it was here that it thrived even when the Union did not know they existed, and here is where it was at its strongest. She should have seen it the moment word reached them of the death of Martin’s father and the Union military quickly adopted the Spartan way of life to honor a King none of them had ever met or even seen. It became so ingrained within the rank and file that within five years after the death of

Martin's father, she would never have been able to change it even if she wanted too. When Martin returned to them, that Spartan way of life took on even new meaning, for he embodied everything there was about the name Spartan. Nearly three thousand years of that Spartan training and mentality had allowed them to survive against the High Coven when they should have been crushed like insignificant bugs. When Martin returned that mentality tripled; that faith became unquenchable. Even many of the species within the Union who were not suited for combat were swept up and training programs specifically suited to their species and cultures were adopted, all based on the Spartan mentality. It was too big now, too ingrained in the psyche of so many across the Union, and now it would never die even if only one citizen of the Union remained.

Since Martin's return the Union had grown and prospered in a way it never had in its three thousand year history before him. Most thought of Martin as King and not really adept in any form of politics, and his Queens were who he spoke through. Many would never know that he liked it this way, and it was actually he who had secured the entrance into the Union of species whom had previously had reservations about becoming members. It was Martin who went to each of these leaders and over a period of years he had hammered out iron clad treaties and political agreements that strengthened both cultures and species and brought them even closer, while making the Union even more powerful. Very few knew of his role in these discussions and inclusions and he liked it that way. He hated the spotlight and he hated politics even more. She smiled as she remembered the battles she had with him through the years over one thing or another and it was only one of his Queens or Tarifa and Aihola or Selene and Charles who had made him see it was the right thing to do. He trusted those three women and Charles just as much as he trusted Deia, and through the years she had also come to trust and rely on their input in many matters. If all else failed, they would get Gorgo involved, for they all knew Martin would never refuse his mother. Gorgo always had a way to break it right down to the basics for him and he would finally see what they were all telling him. Martin was no fool however, he was perhaps one of the most intelligent and cunning men Deia had ever met. He took after his grandfather Resumar in that way, always thinking three and four steps ahead, though she could safely say that it was his son Androcles who inherited Resumar's darker nature when it came to defending his people and what was his. Resumar was willing to do almost anything to safeguard their future and the future of his people and while both Martin and Androcles had shown the same willingness to do everything in their power to continue this, Androcles was the one willing to take more chances and risks.

Part of that she now knew was because of who her great, great nephew was.

He had dragon DNA within his own blood, and this is what set Androcles apart. And now Dorian as well. She had only listened enraptured as Shiria had explained to her what she had discovered from Wayonn concerning Androcles and Dorian. Deia and Shiria had become fast friends over these last months and it was her Deia turned to for explanations into anything having to do with their Pralor history. Deia shook her head with a smile and lifted the steaming mug of Aricia's coffee and sipped the strong, smooth liquid.

"Something amusing?" The male voice asked and Deia smiled for she would recognize that voice anywhere. Not to mention his unique scent which she had detected several minutes ago when he entered the building.

Deia turned and looked at Armetus as he moved slowly into her office in the temporary Senate Building. This building was normally reserved for the local Spartan Convocation and all high level delegations to Earth. Since the bombing of the original Senate Building and the rapid but ongoing project to rebuild the old facility better and stronger, they had taken over this large complex of smaller buildings and offices. It was also now one of the most secure locations anywhere within the Union and would remain so for the foreseeable future. No one could just walk in off the street unless the *Durcunusaan*, the eight Hybrid dragons and the Elven Dragoons who viciously guarded the building knew who you were.

This man they all knew quite well.

"I was just thinking of the twists and turns on the path my family has taken in order to get here Armetus." Deia told him.

Armetus was Director of the Krypteria, the Union's Intelligence Organization and perhaps the most feared grouping of men and women anywhere within the confines of space. The Krypteria had grown since Armetus had been given the reins by her nephew so long ago. The Krypteria was now more feared than the High Coven's *Venorik Elghinn*, their Silent Death Division, ever was and not because of the torture and killings as the High Coven used to do, but because the Krypteria had vast amounts of knowledge.

And knowledge was power.

Armetus nodded his head as he moved to the chair across from her desk. He walked with a special cane now to assist him as he was not fully recovered from the injuries inflicted upon him by the Kavalians, but he could still shift his form and that is what mattered most to any Lycavorian in the end. "Yes... no doubt it has been a "Wild Ride" as Martin and Anja are so fond of saying."

Deia smiled and nodded her head. "Yes it has." She stated. Armetus had been at her side since almost the very beginning and outside of her own husband and mate and her family, she trusted him with her very life. "How are you old friend?"

Armetus looked at her as he settled into the chair. There were no secrets between him and Deia, well except for those the King did not want her to know in order to protect her Armetus thought with a hidden smile, and he never held anything back from her.

"That Hadarian Medical Officer Anja left in charge of the hospital here must be cut from the same mold as her." Armetus spoke. "She is a taskmaster who knows no mercy."

Deia chuckled as she moved to her own chair. "Anja would be no different and you know it my friend."

Armetus nodded his head. "I know." He spoke with a smile. "I am getting stronger every day Deia. Pretty soon I won't need this silly stick, though I might keep it, Marci says it makes me look distinguished."

Deia laughed at this as she sat down. "She would be right."

"We shall see." Armetus spoke.

"Would you care to tell me why you wanted to meet with me before our usual morning briefing with the others?" Deia asked him.

Armetus smiled and reached into the small pouch he always carried with him. It held his personal P9 computer, one of the first batch that Avi had built and Martin had authorized for distribution, as well as several data pads, one of which he gave to Deia.

"Andro has just sent a brief report. They conducted the rescue mission of our Senators and Vanari people being held prisoner by the OSG and the larger mission is now underway. They suffered no casualties and he will update us when more is known." He told her.

Deia nodded as she looked at the pad briefly. Dilean Roan had already contacted her directly and passed this information to her. The young female elf that Andro had appointed as his Information Officer was quite thorough. "This would not cause you to want to meet with me Armetus." She said returning her eyes to his face. "What is wrong?"

Armetus shook his head. "Nothing is wrong. At least not yet."

"I don't follow." Deia told him.

"If you scroll down to page three you will see what I am referring to." Armetus replied. "Androcles seems to think that the OSG and these Eridiani have more of a foothold here in the Alpha Quadrant than we first gave them credit for. They were able to download the contents of several computers that they liberated and I have my people in the process of decrypting them, but some things that were said openly has Andro on edge."

Deia lifted her eyes and met his gaze. "On edge?" She spoke. "Andro is too much like his father Armetus. If something has him on edge, then it usually does not bode well for others who might be around him."

Armetus nodded. "I agree. That is why I came here to see you." He stated. "We need to decide what to do about these discoveries."

Deia looked up suddenly. "Is this... is this accurate?" She gasped.

Armetus smiled and nodded his head. "She shot him four times at point blank range. Right in front of Androcles and Jomann as they were escorting him to the brig on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Thankfully her aim was not very good. The scum, Rotaxe I believe Andro called him, he will survive."

"*Carians!*" Deia rasped as she sat back in her chair. "I would never have imagined that. Once they discovered she had been taken, several of her idiot colleagues demanded I put them on a ship and send them out there. I did, just to shut them up."

Armetus nodded his head. "Something tells me they will find a very different Ulana." He said. "According to Andro's report she has not left Torian's side. He kept her from being raped several times and the beatings he took keeping this from happening were quite severe. I would hazard a guess and say that Ulana's eyes have been opened to a whole new world and she likes this world."

“You mean reality.” Deia spoke.

Armetus shrugged. “However you wish to describe it, yes. I believe Androcles will have a very powerful ally in Ulana when all is said and done. And he won’t even realize it.”

Deia shook her head. “His father, his mothers, Daniel Simpson, all of them are the same way.” She spoke. “They inspire near blind loyalty in conducting actions that to them are totally unrelated.”

Armetus nodded his head. “That they do.”

Deia held up the pad. “You think Icho is involved in this in some way don’t you?” She asked him.

Armetus met her eyes. “Let’s just say I do not believe they are unrelated.” He answered. “This OSG appears to have contacts back here within the Alpha Quadrant with much more information than they should have. It would appear that most of these contacts are limited to those among the human population for the moment, but I do believe that is slowly changing in many ways. The humans under Charles’ leadership have made huge strides forward since the end of the High Coven occupation, and far more of them are reaching outward to other worlds and even other cultures. They are almost as adaptable as Lycavorians are.”

“You think this is a concern?” Deia asked him. “That we have Eridiani among us?”

Armetus quickly shook his head. “Doubtful. We have already determined that Ben and Tina are the descendants of the humans that left Earth and came to be called the Eridiani. How this came about is still somewhat of a mystery, but we can only assume that at least a small portion returned to Earth after undergoing the genetic enhancements. Several thousand at least. I doubt we will discover the true story of how this took place unless we can access an Eridiani library archive of some sort. Those that did return apparently were not happy about the ways things were progressing wherever they were and they came back and blended back into normal human society. Ben and Tina and others are their descendants, as are several hundred others that we have discovered. Once the existence of the Eridiani in the Beta Quadrant and the their OSG lapdogs became common knowledge and it was discovered what they were involved in, all of those like Ben and Tina came forward to either my people or the *Durcunusaan* in order to let us know they were not involved in any way and nor would they tolerate such things as the OSG were obviously supporting.”

“And your people believed them?” Deia asked.

Armetus nodded his head. “There are only a few hundred of them that still survive as I said and like Ben and Tina, most of them are actively involved in the Union military or the government. They all check out.”

“You are certain?” Deia asked him.

“Ben and Tina have been with Martin for over thirty years Deia.” Armetus said. “From before he ever discovered his true history. There were quite a few of them assigned to EDEN and all of them are totally loyal to Martin. I’ve had my people studying reams of scrolls and information dating back to a hundred years before the Great Fire here on Earth. Aside from three dozen that managed to survive in bunkers after the Great Fire, all of these former Eridiani were assigned to EDEN Base. All but six of them are involved with the military or government. Charles is one of them Deia. Ben, Tina, Charles, they have always known what they were, if not the details to how that came to be. They have saved Martin’s life on more than one occasion. He has done the same in return.”

Deia nodded her head. “I know... I just want to be sure.”

“The six who are not involved with the military or government work for me Deia.” He told her. “Each and every one of them came forward when the Eridiani and the OSG were discovered and every one of them is loyal to us.”

Deia nodded her head once more. “Then I will trust your instincts and information on that.” She said.

“My people believe the OSG are working with normal humans here on Earth and in other places in order to obtain the information they have gotten; humans who are not descended from these Eridiani and who are not happy with how the things worked out after Tarifa, Aihola and Selene took charge when the High Coven were forced off.” Armetus explained.

“And you think Icho is also involved with them?” Deia asked.

“There are many things that Nessa and others cannot explain about Icho and his rather mysterious background.” Armetus said.

Deia met his eyes. “Please tell me you have not discovered he is not some distant relative to Chetak.” She spoke.

Armetus chuckled softly. "If only that were true." He said as he shook his head. "Dealing with him would be far easier and much more final."

"Your theory then?" Deia asked.

"I am not entirely convinced myself but..."

"Armetus... it is me you are talking to." Deia told him.

"There is almost no information on Icho prior to him getting elected to his original seat on Tuya's local council almost five hundred years ago." Armetus said. "What we have been able to discover is very basic and completely normal."

Deia leaned back in her chair once more. "I don't like the way you say normal." She said.

"And you shouldn't." Armetus told her. "It's too normal. His history is so unremarkable that it set off alarms within both Nessa's head and mine." Deia knew who Nessa was and she also knew that if there was a more intuitive or resourceful analyst working for Armetus, they had not yet been discovered. Nessa had been in charge of his Intelligence Gathering Team for decades now. "We have to be very careful in how we proceed however, if he were to discover that we are investigating him, it could cause you to lose a lot of support." Armetus continued.

Deia shook her head. "I do not care about support!" She snapped. "This man is dirty Armetus! You know it and I know it! There are far too many coincidences for it to signal anything else! And I trust my *oshye mandri's* instincts." (Great Nephew)

Armetus nodded his head. "As do I." He told her. "What we have to realize is that he has been doing this for far longer than we know. At least that is what I believe. He has been able to hide his activities for centuries and no one has even caught a hint of what he is involved in. He is very careful and we need to move carefully in response. Martin made that very clear to me once Andro gave him the full report on what happened here after they left. We are not to move on Icho unless we are certain and have proof to back it up. In Martin's words, and I quote him... "*When we string that fucker up by his balls I want to know he is getting what a traitor really deserves.*"... End quote."

Deia chuckled. "That is my *Mandri*." She said softly. She looked at Armetus. "You have a theory don't you?"

Armetus nodded his head. "I do... but I have no information to support it however. I believe he is part of the group of *arrya* who sided with the High Coven after the Black Day. The *Arrya rie Cafna*. Or at the very least descended from those who did." (Traitors/Traitors of a people)

Deia thought about that for a long moment and sipped her coffee once more. She was out of her realm when it came to things like that and she knew it. "The *Arrya rie Cafna*. I thought the last of them died out centuries ago Armetus?" She asked.

"So did we." Armetus told her. "I could be very wrong Deia."

"And you could be very right." Deia said.

Armetus nodded his head. "Yes. In which case we need to proceed carefully, as I said. Especially you Deia."

"I agree." Deia said finally getting to her feet and moving around the side of her desk. "The latest polls by my staff have me with a two thirds advantage in any rating and he is not happy about that from what I have been able to hear from different sources."

"Yes... eighty-four percent to his sixteen percent." Armetus said looking at her surprised expression. "Martin asked that I keep him informed." He said simply.

"What else has Martin asked you to do?" Deia quipped.

Armetus smiled at her and shook his head. "For all intents and purposes Deia, you and Gorgo are now the Matriarchs of the Leonidas family. You and she are the connection to the past that all of them revere. Since Gorgo is out there with them, Martin and Androcles both have insured that you will be safe no matter the cost."

"I suspected as much." Deia said. "Who?"

Armetus shook his head once more. "I do not know and even if I did, I would not tell you." He answered her honestly. "All Martin has told me was not to be concerned with your security and to concentrate on my job. He said Andro and he had it covered. I could guess and say that you are perhaps the most well protected individual in Union history. Most of it black."

"Black?" Deia asked.

Armetus nodded. "You will not know they exist until something happens that puts you in danger. Then all bets are off."

Deia was silent for a moment as she thought about that. "I do not like knowing that Armetus." She said softly.

"Perhaps not Deia, but now you do." He told her. "You have to know that you are now very synonymous with the Leonidas name. With their history. You are their *Tenna* and they will protect their family no matter what. Especially if what I believe is indeed true. It also means that this election will be a referendum on not only you but the entire Leonidas family."

Deia met his eyes. "Our people love them Armetus." Deia said. "You know that. Ever since he returned, no matter what he has done, what Aricia and Anja and the others have done, they have always had overwhelming support."

Armetus nodded his head. "Yes. But they have always had enemies as well. You know this better than anyone. Those who did not want him to return to begin with. And now that you have made your history and connection with Martin public knowledge, their enemies will become yours. Where Icho and others of his ilk could only guess at, now they have proof and they will use this against you."

Deia nodded her head in acknowledgment as she leaned against her desk now. "Going after Andro and what he has done in regards to Ne'Veha and Cranae Island."

Armetus nodded his head. "Those things are just the beginning Deia. Icho no doubt has people investigating everything Androcles has done, even back to before the Evolli War. That will now include Sadi, Ne'Veha and even Carisia. He won't go after Lu'ria, Caliria or Sehri... not enough is known about them, but the others are fair game as far as he is concerned. And I have no doubts he is using his position as a Senator to try and gather information on everything that the Queens and Martin have done since he took the throne. He will attempt to twist all of these things to make you look bad. Given the latest poll numbers, I expect things will begin to get very dirty, very soon."

"I agree." Deia said. "What do you suggest?"

"Me?" Armetus chuckled. "Deia I am no politician. I will leave that to you and Tarifa and Charles and the others more suited to that role. Personally I would do what Martin and Andro no doubt want to do."

"Which is?" Deia asked though she knew the answer already. "Though I dare say I probably don't want to hear this."

Armetus met her eyes. "Make the man disappear, never to be heard from again. Period."

Deia sat back with a smile now as well. "I will pretend I did not hear that." She said. "I will worry about Icho and his cronies. You continue to do your job, which you do so well, and leave him to me."

"That was my plan." Armetus said with a grin. He held out two more data pads for her to take. "Resumar's report on the ongoing operations Pian and his people are beginning to conduct within Kavalian space."

"Your insight?" Deia asked as she took the pads and set them on her desk.

"Keleru is unstable and becoming afraid." Armetus answered her. "After our very public announcement that we will be supporting Pian and Jalersi in every way we legally could get away with, Resumar says that an additional nine Prides have since contacted Pian and sworn their support and allegiance to a new Kavalian government. His government. Three of those Prides are among the largest within Kavalian culture it seems."

"Can they be trusted?" Deia asked.

Armetus shook his head. "Pian is no fool and he is very good at vetting his people." He told her. "He is also very good at inspiring others to see his views. According to Resumar, the younger Kavalian Prides are flocking to his banner faster than they can keep up. The older Prides are slower to react but they are coming around as more information that Keleru has kept hidden is being revealed. It appears that even Martin has one of these Prides with him. Fedor's young wife and mate comes from the Juturi Pride and her father has been working against Keleru for decades. Ortellian, the planet we designated as their safe zone, it is fast becoming flooded with Kavalian non-combatants. Families and older civilian Pride members while the younger men gather to fight. The Ortellian Militia Commander has reported that most of the Kavalian females are delighted to finally be free, and their husbands equally so. They are having to conduct daily runs to the Kavalian refugee camps to deliver transmissions from mates that are now standing against Keleru."

"The camps?" Deia asked.

“Hastily set up but quickly getting better and able to accommodate those who are now arriving.” Armetus answered. “Pian has people among the camps forming work groups and such and maintaining the coordination and laws that Pian has put in place. I have several teams helping them with the efforts just to insure that there are no traitors among the many refugees. Nothing so far Deia.”

Deia looked up from the pad. “Then it is working?” She asked.

Armetus nodded his head. “Once more you were correct.” He stated. “The Kavalian people as a whole were much more fed up with Keleru and his rule than they were allowed to show publicly it seems. His military is deserting him and his public support from the older Prides is eroding quickly. With any luck, if Resumar and Pian can string together several large and important victories once the fighting does start in earnest, then Keleru will be out of a job.”

“You sound very optimistic my friend.” Deia said to him.

Armetus met her eyes. “What was done to me was not done by the Kavalian people.” He told her. “If not for Pian and Jalersi and others we would not know just how deep this rebellion goes Deia. Helping them to remove Keleru from power and give freedom to their people is more than enough vengeance. It’s the best kind.”

“I know you too well to believe that Armetus my friend.” Deia said.

Armetus shrugged. “If you are wondering if I would like to have that *nubous igord* in front of me, then the answer would be a resounding yes. But it is much sweeter if I can chip away at the persona he has built for himself and tear him down. When we finally come face to face, if we do, then we will see.”

Deia nodded her head. “Fair enough.” She said. “What else?”

“I can safely report that our entire network has been swept and is now clean.” Armetus told her. “Whatever Laustinous was able to do we have discovered it and fixed it. All of the Gates are now on an entirely new network that is impregnable without proper bio-scans and codes. None of which Laustinous has or can duplicate.”

“Nothing is impregnable Armetus.” Deia said.

Armetus nodded his head. “That is why there are several failsafe and trapdoors now built into the system by Avi and those he trained. If Laustinous tries to access any Union system, no matter how low level, we will pick him up instantly.”

“When we find him...” Deia spoke coldly. “I do not want him injured in any way. I want him detained alive and unhurt. Question him all you want, drugs but no torture. I will not resort to that even after the crimes he has committed. Is that clearly understood?”

“I will make sure this is known.” Armetus said. “May I ask why?”

“I intend to give his carcass to Dysea.” Deia answered him firmly. “Anja has told me what she has planned for him and it will be Dysea who exacts the vengeance for all the lives he is responsible for taking. And the pain he has caused.”

Armetus winced slightly at that picture in his mind though he tried to hide it. He knew full well what Dysea Leonidas was capable of. A highly respected and admired diplomat and revered Queen too many she may have been, but Dysea Leonidas was also a warrior. Behind only Aricia and Isabella, she was considered the most physically gifted fighter among the six Queens of the Union. Though personally, Armetus thought Anja was far more deadly. The smallest in physical stature of all the Queens she may have been, but Anja Leonidas was one of the most lethal women that Armetus had ever met. She had an indomitable will and though she may have been Queen of Hadaria and a Healer by nature, she could just as easily slit your throat without blinking. “I will make sure that is known.” He said finally.

Deia looked at him. “Any other surprises?” She asked with a smile.

“No... I believe I have reached my quota of surprises for you today.” He stated calmly as he rose to his feet.

Deia laughed and pulled him into a warm embrace which Armetus returned without hesitation. “Be well my friend.” She told him as she pushed him to arm’s length and looked in to his eyes.

“Always.” He told her. “I will see you in the morning at our regular time.”

Deia nodded as Armetus squeezed her arms and then he was walking out of her office. He moved casually down the short corridor, no rush in his movements, to the elevator lift where two stern faced *Durcunusaan* moved onto the lift with him as the doors closed.

The instant the doors closed, the shadows shimmered and the half Drow half vampire female unwrapped the shadows from around her body in front of him. The two *Durcunusaan* did not flinch for they knew she was there.

“Have Aihola assign another squad of Drow Scouts to her Risiha.” Armetus said as the beautiful, short elven female looked at him.

The female Drow elf let her amber eyes settle on Armetus. “We could begin to stumble over those Andro and the King have assigned to her Armetus.” She spoke.

Armetus shook his head. “Unlikely. The team Andro assigned to her as well as those Martin directed to cover her will not be seen or heard from unless it is something you and your comrades cannot handle. Only then will they reveal themselves. They will not be as delicate as you and your sisters.”

Risiha smiled brilliantly. “Perhaps not, but it would be a sight to see.”

Armetus chuckled and shook his head. “That is something we want to avoid as long as possible.” He said. “One is a Zero Squad and the other is part of the Nexus Grid. When they strike it will be neither pleasant nor bloodless.”

Risiha looked at him as her face became serious. You did not assign Zero Squad or Nexus Grid personnel to a project unless you wanted to purge a cancer. “You believe this is bigger than everyone else don’t you?” She asked.

“Let’s just say my gut is telling me we are on the cusp of opening a door that should not be opened.” Armetus said. “A door that has not been opened for many millennia. Coordinate with Sator and Lendal here and advise them of the team assigned.”

Risiha looked at the two *Durcunusaan* who were in charge of Deia’s personal detail. “I can do that.” She said with a seductive smile.

Both men smiled at her. “You could not handle both of us little Drow.” Sator spoke.

“I’ll take that bet.” Risiha said happily.

Armetus smiled at the banter between them. The *Durcunusaan* were very comfortable and at ease working with the Drow in any capacity and the Drow were among the few who the *Durcunusaan* afforded the utmost respect and professional courtesy, especially when it concerned the Royal family or any of their charges.

“I will report when Queen Aihola has assigned them.” Risiha told Armetus just before the doors to the lift opened and she wrapped the shadows around her once more.

Armetus began walking once more as they exited the lift. “Sator... make sure General Vengal knows of the additional Drow I have assigned to Deia. He can adjust his protection to compensate.”

“As you order Director.” The *Durcunusaan* replied as they walked him to the door of the building and watched as he exited without another word.

Armetus moved directly to the Heavy Lifter parked to the side and he climbed into the armored Lifter. He settled into the soft leather seat and leaned back for a moment as the Lifter rose and merged into the traffic running along the outer borders of the city of Sparta. Lifter traffic was forbidden within the actual confines of the city and the Lifter lanes all along the outside ring of the city had become far busier over the years as Sparta grew.

“Armetus?” The soft female voice spoke and Armetus opened his eyes quickly and watched as Marci leaned forward from her seat across from him.

“I hate not being truthful with her.” Armetus spoke softly.

“You are only doing what Martin believes is the correct path Armetus.” Marci said. “If she were discover what we know...?”

Armetus nodded his head. “I know. We need her to be at her best. Icho will be her largest challenge in centuries and she is going to need to defend herself and her family in more ways than she realizes. She is the only one who can. I worry for her however.”

“You know as well as I do that Andro and Martin will allow nothing to harm her.” Marci said. “They will protect her... at all costs.”

Armetus nodded once more. “I know and that at least gives me peace.” He leaned forward. “Is he ready?”

Marci nodded her head. “He’s standing by at the secure *Durcunusaan* hanger and chomping at the bit to go.”

“Do we have anything else that may be able to help him?” Armetus asked.

Marci handed over the data pad. “This is everything that this Professor Lidene has been able to decrypt so far.” She said. “Nessa’s people arrived two days ago and hopefully they will have more when he gets there.”

“This stays among the three of us in this car is that understood?” Armetus spoke now. “No one else can discover this.”

“What if it has already been discovered Armetus?” The male voice spoke and Armetus looked at the figure of the man as he leaned forward out of the shadows of the Lifter. “What if the *Arrya rie Cafna* is back? It took us three hundred and sixty years to purge them from our ranks before and you know this. It cost me both of my parents and countless others, not to mention your first wife and mate when they came after you. If they have control of these clones then the situation is worse than we thought.”

“That is why you are doing what you are doing my old friend.” Armetus spoke. “Only you have the ties to make this work. And I shudder every day knowing the danger I have placed you in.”

The man leaned closer still and met Armetus’ eyes. “We swore an oath all those years ago old friend. An oath that we spilled blood in order to insure. I will not shirk from my duty to our Union or our King.”

Armetus reached out and placed his hand on the man’s shoulder. “And neither will I Icho my friend. None of us will. Ever.”

Armetus watched as the door to the Lifter closed once more and their pilot lifted them into the traffic lanes once more. They had just dropped off Icho in a little visited section of Sparta with almost no Lifter traffic or foot traffic. It was in the process of a long overdue rebuilding and the only personnel within two hundred meters were construction workers. The Krypteria driver had dropped from the Lifter lanes overhead expertly and directly to this position between two six story buildings that effectively hid them from view. Armetus and Icho had said their goodbyes and he left the vehicle to move to the waiting Lifter car fifty meters away. They waited until his vehicle was gone before taking off themselves.

Marci leaned forward then as she held out the pad to him. “Do we trust him Armetus?” She asked.

Armetus took the pad and met her eyes. “The *Arrya rie Cafna* are very real Marci.” He spoke. “And if they have returned they can cause untold damage to Deia and so many others.”

Marci nodded her head. “I don’t doubt that. I have read all of your reports on them.”

“We fought them together for nearly forty years.” Armetus said. “We knew we did not get all of them, they are a cancer that never seems to go away, but we decapitated most of their senior leadership and assets. It was not easy hunting our own people, but they were traitors of the worse kind. And it tore many lives apart. It changed many of us.”

“Did it change Icho Armetus?” Marci asked softly. “He seems almost fanatical about this now.”

Armetus nodded his head in response. “Something I understand completely.”

“But has it affected him.” Marci asked. “He appeared rather cavalier about going after Sadi and then Andro. He practically tossed Ulana to the wolves, and it does not seem to bother him that he will be butting heads with Deia. That he will be trying to tear down and destroy our Royal family. Our leaders.”

Armetus met her gaze for a long moment. “You think he has turned?” He said.

“You know him better than I do.” Marci answered. “It just seems he is getting some perverse joy out of doing this.”

Armetus nodded his head once again. “There may be some truth to that Marci, but that is what makes him so very good at what he does.”

“What about who we might hurt in the long run?” Marci asked him.

Armetus gazed at her. “Nothing he will do is not something that has not already been done Marci.” He told her. “Others have attacked Deia before, in this very same way. She has been Prime Minister for nearly a millennia and it is foolish of us to believe that others do not think they can do it better. She is not as helpless as you might think Marci and she has very good people around her not to mention very thick skin. She will weather this, as will the entire Leonidas family.”

Marci sat back slowly. “We should at least tell Androcles.” She spoke finally.

Armetus shook his head. "Martin was very specific that we do not tell him." Armetus said. "It was one of the stipulations when Icho and I first brought this to him five years ago that the *Arrya rie Cafna* could be making a comeback. Once he knew their entire history and what we wanted to do he told us not to inform Androcles. What Icho is doing must be made to seem real and completely legitimate. It is the only way to make sure we get all of them this time. They have possible ties to the Kavalians and to the Eridiani that we know of right now. Marci... Laustinous is only the tip of the iceberg."

Marci nodded. "I understand that but does Martin truly understand and know the risk he is taking by not telling Androcles?" Marci asked. "Given the recent information that we have discovered about Andro and Dorian, what they are, if this gets to a point where Andro feels Icho is more a threat than he is now, he will not hesitate to arrange an accident for him. Or take Icho out himself."

Armetus nodded his head in agreement. "I know." He said softly. "The risk is great. And it grows greater. I have discussed this with Martin and he believes the risks are still acceptable at the moment."

"The risk is unacceptable." Marci said. "Even for us. Especially if Icho has..."

"He makes you uneasy." Armetus said. "Why?"

Marci met his eyes. "He's not like you Armetus." She said. "He almost seems to enjoy the power, and the fact that he is facing the Leonidas family excites him. It almost seems like he wants to tear them down. To prove that they are something they are not. They have never been how he is going to project them. You know that as well as I do. *Sibfla*... they go out of their way to insure that is not the case. If what you believe is indeed true then he could be making the *Arrya rie Cafna* stronger by what he is doing and not even know it."

"You don't trust him do you?" Armetus asked.

Marci met his eyes without doubt. "No... I do not." She said.

Armetus sat back and was silent for a long time. He had brought Marci in as his deputy for the expressed purpose that she seemed to have an uncanny knack for this type of work. She was wise beyond her years and had a remarkable ability to think outside of the box. It was why she was so close to Androcles and Carina Leonidas. Armetus trusted her in a way he did not even trust himself. What if she was right? The cost to the Union would be catastrophic. He felt the Lifter begin its descent over the secure *Durcunusaan* facility outside Sparta and he finally looked up at her.

"Then follow your instincts Marci." He told her.

Marci blinked in surprise and looked at him. "What?" She gasped finally.

"I am not all knowing." Armetus told her. "The largest reason I made you my Deputy was because you brought balance to me. To see things I cannot or will not see. Or do not want to believe."

"What are you saying Armetus?" Marci asked.

"I'm saying that if I am wrong, then I expect you to make sure my blindness does not harm us." Armetus told her. "If Icho has indeed been turned or compromised us in any way, remove him. Permanently. Before any harm he is doing becomes more than we can deal with."

"Armetus I will..." She began to speak.

Armetus leaned over and grasped her head in his hand. He pulled her forehead close and softly kissed her skin. "Do not question what you feel child." He told her softly. "For I do not." He met her bright eyes and smiled. "Now let us see Apollo off and try to find these two clones that the vampire witch Aikiro thought to use against us."

Marci nodded her head. "Apollo has some ideas." She said softly.

Armetus chuckled. "Of course he does. He is me."

SENATOR ICHO'S HEAVY LIFTER

"What did he say?" Aleus asked.

"They are none the wiser." Icho told him as he poured himself a glass of Spartan wine from the side bar in the Lifter. He poured a second glass and handed it to Aleus. "We will proceed as we have laid out our plans."

"When do we start?" Aleus asked as he took the wine.

“Deia and I face each other in the first debate in two weeks.” Icho answered. “I think that should be a very good place to start.”

“I’ll make sure the arrangements are done.” Aleus said. “What about Ulana?”

Icho shook his head as he sat back in the plush interior seat. “Ulana is lost to us. Putting her in that situation and then not knowing about how this *Durcunusaan* Officer felt about her was a mistake on our part. One we cannot make again.” He stated calmly. “I told the others that dealing with the OSG now would be iffy at best. Coordinating with and then working together with the Rothryn Science Academy was stupid. Arranging for them to kidnap Ulana and then try to force Androcles to hand over his Rothryn mate was foolish and dangerous. They have done more damage to our contacts within the Rothryn and OSG by their actions than anything Androcles would have done.”

“At least she killed that fool Enverr before he could talk.” Aleus spoke.

Icho nodded his head. “Perhaps, but we cannot rely on the OSG any longer. Adams has already begun pulling his people out of Vanari society on a slow basis. He is attempting to save whatever assets they have remaining at the moment. His son will insure that he fails. I told him to keep a better leash on that boy.”

“We could divert some help their way if you wish.” Aleus said.

Icho shook his head quickly. “No. It would be a waste of good people Aleus. Androcles Leonidas has a larger plan. Rescuing Ulana and the others was only the tip of it. They are doing something else and the landscape in the Beta Quadrant will change because of it. Better that the OSG is weakened initially, it will allow them to learn and surge forth later in better position to affect change.”

“And the Rothryn?” Aleus asked.

Icho shook his head once more. “Even we do not want to be associated with those fanatic *igord* in their Science Academy. If the Rothryn leader does not expose them for what they are soon, then I have an idea that Androcles will remove them from existence himself.” Icho looked at Aleus. “The boy is predictable after a fashion. Much like his fool father.”

“So what do we do?” Aleus asked.

“We wait until events in the Beta Quadrant have played out.” Icho told him. “Once they have we will have a better idea of how to proceed. Have we heard from that idiot Laustinous yet?”

Aleus nodded his head and held out the data pad. “The unrest is growing.” He told him. “Since the public announcement that we would be supporting this new Kavalian government openly as they seek freedom, Keleru has lost much in the way of support.”

Icho took the pad. “Keleru is beginning to worry.” He said softly.

Aleus nodded his head. “He still holds the balance of power in a large way, but you are correct.”

“Where is he now?” Icho asked.

“He is heading to Hadaria.” Aleus replied.

Icho looked at him with wide eyes. “Hadaria? Is he insane? If the Union gets even a whiff of him on that planet he is a dead man.”

“I tried to express this to him but he says right now it is the safest place for him.” Aleus answered.

Icho shook his head. “Aleus my friend, in the future when I entertain the idea of taking the assistance of someone with a perverse and unhealthy obsession of a female Queen of the Union, hit me several times with a stick.”

Aleus nodded his head with a smile. “Only gently.” He stated.

“That fool is going to die a very painful death.” Icho said softly.

“Depending on who finally discovers him, I believe you are right.” Aleus said.

Icho shook his head. “Remain in contact with him but do not divulge any of our plans to him.” He ordered. “Once the fool reaches Hadaria we will be unable to help him in any way. He does not know our real identities and that is the way I want to keep it.”

“If he asks for assistance?” Aleus asked.

Icho shook his head. “His usefulness to us ended when his plan to have Dysea become his slave wife blew up in his face. Once we knew Leonidas still lived, Laustinous became a liability.”

“That is something we did not see either.” Aleus pointed out.

Icho nodded in agreement. “That was because the vampire bitch Armetus made his deputy took over when they did not think he would live. She has practically grown up with Androcles Leonidas and his siblings.

Her loyalty is to him. We escaped a very big explosion when the Kavalians went after Armetus. It was insane to send an assassination team after him. Had they killed him it would have made our lives and their future infinitely harder. Be glad they did not succeed.”

Aleus looked at him. “You sound almost happy when you say that.” He said.

Icho met his eyes. “We may be on different ends of the political arena Aleus my friend, but Armetus and I were once like brothers. We fought the same enemies. At least until I realized we were targeting all the wrong people. I respect him. He has faults, but he is utterly loyal to the Union. His only deficiency is that he plays fair. We do not.”

Aleus smiled. “No we do not.” He said.

“You have the reports about the boy?” Icho asked.

Aleus nodded his head and held out the stack of four data scrolls. “Everything dating back to just before he entered his Agoge. It wasn’t easy or cheap to obtain.”

Icho nodded his head. “I have no doubts of that. Still no luck in recruiting a member of the *Durcunusaan*?”

Aleus shook his head. “In my opinion it will not happen. You know how they are vetted. To push harder than we already have will only bring the attention of the *Hippeis Sedla* down upon us. That we do not want.” He said. “They are part of the *Durcunusaan* yes, but they are also much freer in how they do things if you get my meaning.”

Icho nodded his head. “Yes, I do.” He said. “And you are correct, we do not want them involved until it is too late for them to do anything. Cease whatever plans we have in trying to entice one of them to our cause. We need to start being more careful. Provoking the *Hippeis Sedla* is not being careful.” Icho looked up from the pad. “Is Captain Tarren on board?”

Aleus nodded his head. “Fully.” He said. “He knows we are the only ones who can protect him once he starts down this path that Ulana set him on. Now that she is no longer an option for him to find protection from the boy Prince, he knows we are his only hope.”

“Fear.” Icho said. “It is a powerful motivator.”

“Yes it is.” Aleus agreed.

“Insure the young Captain has his story straight.” Icho spoke. “He is still sticking to the same one?”

Aleus nodded. “He scented this Ne’Veha and gained permission from her father to take her as his mate, but when the Crown Princess came aboard the ship and talked with her then everything changed. He says she still carried his scent when the Crown Prince claimed her as his. If that is the case then he broke one of our most sacred laws dating back to before the Black Day.”

Icho smiled and nodded his head. “Something that I will point out very soon.” He stated. “And nothing you have found tells a different version?”

Aleus shook his head. “If there is anything that contradicts his story then only the *Durcunusaan* knows of it.” He spoke. “You saw how quickly he swept it aside as irrelevant.”

“What of the accusations that he was helping the OSG in their attack?” Icho asked.

Aleus shook his head. “Again... nothing that we can find says he did anything other than what he claims.”

“So not only did he steal his woman from him, they are trying to brand him a traitor.” Icho said. He smiled. “We could not ask for a better scenario Aleus. The fool boy handed it to us with his overactive libido.”

“Like father like son.” Aleus stated. “Records indicate that the King did almost the same thing where it involved Queen Aricia.”

“And we will use that as well.” Icho spoke calmly. “Soon my friend.” He said. “Soon we can begin the downfall of the Leonidas family and it will be because of their own actions. Then we can begin to rebuild the Union as we know it should be.”

“And it will be glorious.” Aleus agreed once more.

Twenty-four hours.

It had taken only twenty-four hours for the future and the path of the Tasmor people to be altered in a way unlike any she had ever envisioned. Saydia Daret stood sipping the steaming hot mug of what the Lycavorians called coffee. It was a dark liquid, but extremely rich tasting and quite delicious. After experimentation she had added a small bit of sweetener that they called honey and a dry, white powdered substance that altered the color of the coffee slightly. It also added to the incredible flavor and now Saydia had been drinking it for twelve hours. The sun was rising in the background, bathing the mountain range in an eerie glow of orange light that was exceptionally beautiful to gaze at. She could see dozens of Lycavorians moving around the temporary settlement going about their duty. It was a settlement that they had established in just two days and none of them appeared rushed or haggard in their appearance or their manner. The events of the last two days, fighting the Kintaur here on the surface and then confronting the large Kintaur fleet in orbit had apparently not fazed these men and women in the least. They acted as if this was all very normal to them. Saydia's eyes went to where she knew they had set up the medical facility and she could see a line of men, women and children already forming. Justice Nalmos had been able to bring nearly a hundred more of his people from the nearby surrounding mountains down into their camp last night and now they were beginning to receive the medical treatment that had been lacking for months and years.

Saydia heard the scuffle of feet behind her and she turned to see Perlyea move up behind her holding a similar mug in her hands. This mug was filled with Tasmor Mint tea however, something she had requested be brought down to the surface upon recovering consciousness. Her hands were wrapped around the mug just like Saydia's, as the warmth from the mug helped to chase away the slight chill in the early morning air. Saydia knew Perlyea to be a powerful woman and one not afraid to speak her mind. She was supremely intelligent and had helped the Tasmor Science Department develop many new things over the course of the last fifty years that were a benefit to their people. She expected Perlyea to march up to her and start demanding that Anthylea be brought up on charges. Saydia was stunned when she did begin to speak.

"Sovereign Regent, I must ask for your forgiveness." Perlyea spoke softly as she stopped in front of Saydia.

"Perlyea?" Saydia asked somewhat shocked.

"I have... I have allowed my arrogance and distrust of those who are not Tasmor to almost bring ruin to us." Perlyea spoke softly once more. "I cannot begin to offer enough words to..."

"Perlyea stop." Saydia spoke instantly.

Perlyea met her eyes. "My actions have... I could have brought total ruin to our people Sovereign Regent!"

Saydia turned slightly to face her. "This is not what I expected of you when you came up to me just now." She said honestly. "Is this another of your tests Perlyea? And do not address me formally Chief Counsel. I have never asked this from you and I will not start now."

Perlyea shook her head. "Drenia showed me the copy of the transmission from yesterday Sovereign Regent." Perlyea told her calmly. "This Lycavorian King is... he frightens me Saydia. What he did. The ease with which Namiri and Emylea say he beat the Kintaur First Warrior and seeing him kill him in such a manner. I... I almost brought the wrath of that man down upon our people."

Saydia nodded her head. "Yes you did." She spoke. "But so did I Perlyea Kalrr. We are both at fault because we were both blind. So many years of fighting the Kintaur, of thinking we were superior to all those around us? It made us both blind Perlyea, blind to things well beyond our control, or our ability to grasp."

Perlyea looked at her. "I will resign my position as Chief Counsel to our people." She spoke.

"You will do no such thing!" Saydia snapped at her. "You and I are going to stand together and usher in a new period for our people. We will meet with the King and his Queens in one hour and do just that."

"You would allow me to remain at my post after what I almost did?" Perlyea asked in shock.

"I would be a fool to let you go." Saydia spoke. "Your knowledge is beyond mine in many different ways Perlyea. I am not afraid to admit that. No matter how we have done things in the past, now we must do them differently. If we are to save our people, if we are going to insure that we go forward into the future, we must do that together."

Perlyea bowed her head slightly. "I am... I am in your debt." She said.

"No." Saydia was quick to tell her. "We have always been at odds Perlyea. We have many different views and ideas on how to do things. I believe now we should direct our energy in finding ways to discover common ground between us. We both want the same things Perlyea, now we must find a way to work together instead of against each other."

Perlyea was silent for a long moment before finally nodding her head. "You are correct." She said.

"It appears these new Lycavorians and especially their King; they require honesty in order to see us as friends." Saydia told her. "If there is anything that you have done in the past in regards to the Lycavorians from Ventori please tell me now. If I am right, these women and men could be what both of us have always wanted Perlyea. They could be staunch allies who will honor us and our ways and not look at us as objects of desire or dismissal."

Perlyea shook her head quickly. "No." She stated confidently and without hesitation. "The only research I have conducted is in regards to the gene enhancements. I abhor any type of experimentation Saydia, you know this."

Saydia nodded. "I thought as much." She stated. "And since I know it was not you who told the Kintaur that Namiri and Emylea were going to be here, someone in your department and who is close to you, is working for or with the Kintaur. It is the only way they could have gotten the information."

Perlyea nodded her head. "I agree." She spoke.

Saydia reached out and took her arm, squeezing it gently. "I never doubted you in that regard Perlyea. What happened to your mother and sisters, it would never allow you to work with the Kintaur no matter what they offered in return."

Perlyea met Saydia's eyes and felt relief fill her. She was right of course. Her mother and sisters had been captured and brutally raped and beaten for days by dozens of Kintaur before they were brutally murdered in front of her. She hated them to the extreme and no one could offer her enough to work with them against her own people.

"Thank you." Perlyea said.

"They will want to know how it is you were able to manipulate Pralor technology however." Saydia said. "At this juncture, honesty will gain us the most Perlyea. Surely you see that."

Perlyea nodded her head. "I do." She stated with a newfound firmness in her voice. "I gave the order for our people to extract any Pralor technology that they could find from the battlefields here. And we were able to determine how some of it worked on our own, some of the pieces were very general in terms of what they can do, and my people are very bright."

Saydia smiled, "No doubt." She stated. "What about equipment you could not figure out?"

Perlyea took a deep breath. "I have the COM channel of a Pralor." She told Saydia. "He made me a deal to release to him any equipment that we found on Ventori. In exchange he would provide me with details on lesser technology that the Pralor people hardly ever used. Among what he gave me, was the ability to use their computer storage units."

"What is this man's name?" Saydia asked.

Perlyea met her eyes. "His name is Lorendo, Chief Elder Lorendo of their Science Convention."

"...Lorendo... that fat little fuck!" Martin hissed angrily.

Saydia, Perlyea, Anthylea and Drenia stood silently as they watched him whirl and toss his empty coffee mug across the interior of the command center. The large mug shattered into dozens of small pieces against the interior metal wall and echoed loudly within the room. Anja and Aricia immediately reached for Martin while For'mya turned to the stunned group of Tasmor.

"Forgive him..." For'mya stated quickly. "We have had dealings with this Lorendo fool before and as you can see, our husband and mate is not very fond of him."

"You know... you know this man?" Saydia asked.

For'mya nodded her head. "He is responsible for almost killing our son Fedor when we first discovered the Pralor people in this quadrant. As it was, Fedor was gravely injured and if not for Anja's skill he would have

died. This Lorendo also managed to physically strike Anja, which to Martin Leonidas, truly any Alpha wolf among our people, it is an immediate death sentence. He was not happy about these things and the only thing that saved Lorendo's life is another Praetorian like Martin. His name was Murano. He is with our son Androcles and our other children now. They will be joining us in several weeks."

Perlyea's eyes darted back and forth between For'mya and Martin and she shook her head rapidly fear gripping her now. "I do not know what he wanted the technology for! I give you my word!" Perlyea declared quickly with wide eyes as she watched Anja place her smaller hands on Martin's broad chest and Aricia reached up to grip his shoulder. "He never told me what..."

For'mya shook her head and held up her hand. "Our issues with him are in regards to what he did to Fedor and Anja, and other issues that we have since discovered he is responsible for. We did not know he had contact with your people." She stated.

Perlyea shifted on her feet more slowly now. "No one did. He made contact with me directly as head of our Science Division. I never... I never told anyone else."

For'mya glanced at Saydia for a moment and saw her nod slowly. "Perlyea told me before coming here this morning." She said. "She has been working at the same goal of improving our people and their status but doing it from another direction. I believe she knows now that we may need to bend out stringent laws and customs in order to achieve what we both want. I believe that what we both have seen in the last two days is more than either of us ever truly wanted to admit. We are not alone in the universe and we are not all powerful. We are... we are still children among the stars it seems."

"I believe that is true for all of us." For'mya said returning her gaze to Perlyea. "That is not something to be ashamed of."

"But your technology and knowledge... you are equal to the Pralors and they are far more advanced than any civilization within this quadrant of space. They are feared by so many." Perlyea spoke. "I... I only assumed that you would view us as they do; that you would see us as beneath them somehow."

For'mya shook her head. "We are not the Pralor people." She said evenly. "And I believe once they return to their ideals and values you will see a different side to the Pralor people. It will take time but it is already happening on their homeworld."

"That is... it is because of you isn't it?" Saydia asked.

For'mya nodded her head, "Part of it perhaps." She answered. "It would have happened eventually, but I believe our arrival out here has sped things along."

"There is so much you can... so much we can learn from you." Saydia spoke softly.

"Then work with us." Martin's voice spoke now and they all turned to see him standing to the side, Anja and Aricia beside him now. He was much calmer and far less menacing now. Martin stepped away from his wives and moved closer to Saydia. He stopped a respectful distance away, seeing her tense slightly and smelling the slight fear in her scent. "As For'mya has told you, we are not the Pralor people. I want friends and allies. We need them out here. Can we move beyond what has already happened and worked together?" His eyes went to Perlyea now.

She looked at him defiantly for a brief moment before speaking. "At what cost to us?" She finally asked with a neutral voice.

"I have only two questions." Martin said evenly. "Tobia has given us copious amounts of information about the Tasmor people. We have been studying it for days now. I know how your society works in a very rudimentary way. Yours is a female dominated and run society, I understand that. I also understand many of the reasons for this, so my first question is, are the men in your society mistreated or abused in any way?"

Saydia's eyes grew wide, "Certainly not!" She exclaimed. "We may be female dominated as you say, but we are not monsters! Males in Tasmor society may not have the same rights and privileges as females but they are not mistreated! They may have to work harder to achieve something because of their status, but it is not out of their reach completely. We have always been a female dominated species and the females have always held the power in government and our military. The females of our species have just always been the strongest and wisest. That does not preclude males from achieving these things however. They know this and they accept it. They are also the only means by which we can..."

Martin nodded his head. "I understand that part." He told her seeing her eyes grow wider. "Tobia explained a little of it to me. I will not tell you that I approve or disapprove for I have not been to your world

and seen it for myself. To be honest it doesn't matter what I think." Saydia's eyes grew even wider at this admission and Martin smiled slightly. "I don't tell other people how to manage their lives. If I don't like it, if my people don't like it, then we just won't deal with them."

"King Leonidas, we have admitted to using your people's natural resistance and healing abilities but we have... I have never sanctioned anything that would intentionally hurt them. All of those who allowed us to use their DNA did so willingly when we asked them. I..." Perlyea spoke quickly but truthfully and this was detected by Martin and his wives immediately.

"I believe you." Martin told her meeting her gaze. "If I didn't, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Perlyea appeared flustered and Saydia stepped closer to her. "You said you have two questions?" She asked.

Martin met her eyes now. "Do you want to conquer others?"

Saydia looked at him aghast. "Conquer others?" She gasped. "What... what purpose would that serve? I am... my people are not the Kintaur. We only wish to live in peace and be left alone."

This was also a very truthful statement and Martin knew that the moment he smelled it. He turned and looked at Anja, Aricia and For'mya standing together now and he nodded his head slowly. This did not go unnoticed by Saydia and the others and they looked between them not really understanding what was going on.

Martin turned back suddenly and looked at Saydia. "Then this is what I am going to do." He started. "What took place with my pilot never happened."

"But it did happen and I cannot begin to apologize enough for my..." Perlyea began.

Martin shook his head. "No, we're going to act like it never took place." He said. "This is us with a fresh start. Like we just met and none of this ever happened. To honor this, and to show you that I will honor your customs, my wives and mates will sit with you and discuss whatever it is you want to discuss. I believe that is how it is among your species correct?"

Saydia glanced at Perlyea with wide eyes and saw she also had a look of astonishment on her face at this declaration. She turned back to Martin. "You would... you would do this?" She asked.

"I have no desire to conquer, influence or direct what another species and their culture is." Martin told her. "If we get along, then I can be a really good friend, if not then I will leave you alone as long as you leave me alone. What you did for my people, that cannot be repaid Saydia Daret, but I will damn sure try and make it up to you and your people. From this day forward I would like to consider the Tasmor people a friend, and I look out for my friends. These Kintaur idiots want to start something with you because of what I did here, let them. I am not the Pralor people and I'll clean their clocks so fast that they'll wake up in the next century wondering what the hell just happened."

It was Anthylea who couldn't hold back the soft chuckle, for while she may not have understood the words fully, she did understand completely the implication of what he was saying. Martin looked at her and smiled. "See... I made her laugh; I'm not such a bad guy."

"You do not act as any King that I have ever read about." Saydia spoke finally.

Anja came forward now and leaned up against his side. "You have no idea." She said.

Martin smiled once more and looked at her. "Work with me Saydia Daret, be honest and forthright with us and you can expect the same in return from us. That is my promise to you." He held out his hand for Aricia and For'mya and they quickly moved up beside him. "I will leave you in the very capable hands of my wives and mates. They speak with my voice and heart, much better than I do at times. I have some other business to take care of so I will just slip out the door. I hope to see more of you and your people in the future. Let this day begin something that could last for many years to come."

Saydia was taken aback by his heartfelt words and she was even more stunned when he bowed his head to her out of respect and then turned to walk to the door. He was bellowing to someone in the distance as the door closed behind him and she turned back to the Queens. She shook her head quickly.

"Forgive me, he is, your husband is a very different man." Saydia said. "He is unlike any man I have ever met."

Anja looked at For'mya and Aricia with a smile. "That is truth." She said.

“He is quite unlike the brutish and unintelligent person that he projects outward to others isn’t he?” Perlyea echoed and her eyes went wide when she realized what she had said. She had spoken like the scientist she was and didn’t think that his wives were in front of her. “Oh my... forgive me my words.”

Aricia and the others laughed and it was Aricia who reached out and took Perlyea’s hand in hers. “You don’t know how correct you are Perlyea Kalrr.” She said.

“He is our husband and mate,” Anja said now as she came closer. “He has three advanced degrees, two of which he earned after becoming King. He could build you a super computer in a week, or take the engines apart on one of our ships. He also speaks nine different languages fluently and pretty soon he won’t need to use the implants we all have to understand yours.”

“Truly?” Saydia asked with an astonished expression.

Anja nodded her head. “He has this amazing skill that allows him to learn languages very quickly, and acts the way he does because he doesn’t want people to think he is something more than what he really is.”

“But he is one of these Praetorians from the Pralor past.” Anthylea spoke moving closer. “We know what they are for we have heard Tobia talking of them. She told us they had long since died. That none of them remained.”

For'mya nodded her head. “Martin has the blood of Pralors within him; the blood of the very first Praetorian Sumar.”

Saydia’s eyes grew wide once more, “The very first of their Praetorians.” She gasped. “Tobia spoke to me of him. Your husband is descended from his line?”

“Yes... as are all of our children.” Anja answered, “Though only four of our sons and one of our daughters actually have the active gene within them.”

“Namiri and Emylea have told me there are six of you.” Saydia said. “Is this true? Are there really six Queens?”

Aricia nodded in acknowledgement. “Our fellow Queens are on a different planet at the moment.” She replied, “Isabella, Dysea and Cirith.”

“And you... all of you are...?” Anthylea stammered her question.

Anja grinned now. “Yes, we all share Martin’s bed.” She answered with bright jade green eyes. “Very enthusiastically I might add. There is definitely more than enough of him to go around.”

For'mya and Aricia chuckled softly and nodded in agreement. “Oh yes.” For'mya said, “More than enough.”

“And you...?” Anthylea continued.

Aricia nodded once more. “Yes, we are also lovers.” She spoke proudly. “All of us. We share each other as well as Martin and we have for over a quarter century. And will continue to do so for many more years to come, with equal enthusiasm.”

“*Avoi*,” Anja spoke as she leaned into Aricia affectionately.

“This is normal among your people?” Saydia asked.

For'mya shook her head quickly. “No. It is actually quite rare for an Alpha to claim more than one wife and mate. There are perhaps three or four dozen instances within the entire Union of this happening.”

“And how large... how large is this Union?” Perlyea asked, “If I am allowed to ask that question?”

“There are roughly thirty-one trillion citizens of the Union.” Anja answered seeing their faces show their shock at this admission, “Nearly nine hundred different species call the Union home.”

“By everything we hold holy.” Saydia gasped.

“You are being very... forthcoming in what you are telling us.” Perlyea commented.

Aricia nodded her head. “Why should we not be? We have nothing to hide.” She told them. “Nor do we have ulterior motives regarding the Tasmor or anyone else. And for the most part anything we tell you can be found out quite easily by anyone willing to look.”

For'mya motioned for them to move to the table. “Let us sit please.” She told them. “I’m sure there are many questions you have of us, and many that we have of you. Foremost among them is what Anja wants to ask most of all. How can we help you save your people?”

“This Lorendo lied to me!” Perlyea hissed softly as they moved to the table. “He told me if I helped him he would give me the means to...”

“Do not blame yourself Perlyea Kalrr.” Aricia stated as she settled into one of the chairs. She waited as all of them took chairs at the large table. “He has been deceiving his own people for much longer than any of us knew. I would hazard a guess and say that he is the one who intercepted your transmissions requesting medical aide. That is why the request was never received by the Chief Elder Pralor Delnash or the head of their Medical Division Radra. He has been lying to you this whole time.”

Perlyea looked at her with wide eyes. “He... he intentionally did this?” She gasped.

For'mya nodded slowly in agreement with Aricia's words. “It would appear so.”

“But why?” Perlyea asked.

Anja shook her head now. “That doesn't matter.” She spoke confidently. “His lard ass days are numbered in this lifetime. I am a physician and a Researcher. I have a rough idea of what the issue might be after reviewing the results of my exam of Anthylea; my apologies for having to do that by the way.” She spoke looking at the exotic, dark skinned Tasmor woman.

Anthylea bowed her head slightly in recognition of the apology. “It appears it may have been more helpful to us than anything else.” She answered.

“Regardless... I am sorry.” Anja told her. “I do not like to forcible examine someone who does not want to be examined. It goes against everything I was ever taught. But it did help me to ascertain, at least in part, what the Sovereign Regent was implying. It is part of the reason why you requested the DNA from the Lycavorians on Ventori isn't it?”

Perlyea nodded now. “Yes.”

“I can help.” Anja spoke.

“What do you want in exchange for this help?” Saydia asked hesitatingly.

“Your decision to help our people saved millions Saydia Daret.” Aricia told her now from across the table. “You are responsible for generations of future children yet to be born. That is not a debt that can ever be repaid. Just as Martin has told you, we are not the Pralor people. For what you have done, what your people have done, we will help you to save yours.”

Anja leaned across the table. “Come with us to our ship.” She said. “All of you. You can bring security if you wish. You can then establish a connection from our ship to yours and you can show me your medical files on what you have worked on so far. Let us show you that we want nothing but to be friends.”

Saydia looked first at Perlyea and then and Anthylea. They both nodded their heads when she looked at them and then she turned back to Anja. “If we are going to change then I suppose it can begin with us.” She told Anja.

HONELZE MAIN PRALOR COLONY FORTUNE

They were so much more beautiful in person Jezima thought to herself as she gazed at them from the counter. Their skin was so vibrant and tanned and their hair so lustrous and long. She and Meral had let others take care of them when they first arrived for neither of them knew what to expect or how to react. Jezima's hands had yet to stop shaking for she could sense him in each of them so deeply. He was wrapped within their collective psyche like the strands of a fine tapestry. So interwoven were those Etheric strands that it was difficult to see where he ended and they began and Jezima could sense that is just how they wanted it to be. His Etheric resonance was like a burning beacon within the darkest abyss. It resonated within the Etheric realm, pulsed so beautifully that for a moment Jezima thought it was him. She knew this could not be the case, but there was no doubt that he was descended from her son. There was no doubt that he carried within him that same Etheric spark of Praetorian power. Raw, untamed but controlled power that he held in check by force of will alone. Jezima had no idea how this could be, and she truly did not care.

The gods of fate and destiny had finally answered the prayers she had stopped praying centuries ago. They had given back to her at least a part of what they had taken. His image alone she had stared at for what seemed like hours after first seeing it. She had studied his face, so handsome and strong and it was like she was

gazing into her own son's face and eyes. The likeness was unnerving, but it only took her moment to overcome that and then she found her fingers tracing the image on the screen as more tears flowed and she realized that her bloodline had not died with her sons. It had lived on somehow and now it was so very close to her.

Before her were three of the wives he had claimed as his own, three of the six women that shared his heart and his bed according to the reports which she had gone back and reviewed with Meral. They had clutched each other tightly and cried while watching the interview he had given. His voice was the same, the corners of his eyes as he spoke, the way his lips moved when he smiled or laughed. It was him.

It was her son.

It was Meral's older brother.

It was Sumar.

It was easy for her to see him in each of them and the other three women who were his. She could feel them just on the edge of her mind, and she knew they had to be somewhere close by for her to sense them as she did. Their combined ability to shield their Etheric resonance was astonishing to say the least, by Jezima had learned a few tricks of her own through the many years she had been alive. The blond elven female and two of those who were not here with them echoed with Etheric power yet unrealized Jezima took note. One was a raven haired beauty with blue eyes unlike anything she had ever seen before and the other had hair the color of red silk. The three of them carried him within themselves more deeply than the others, but this made no difference apparently. She could feel their devotion to him and to each other in every way. She could feel his utter commitment to each one of them burning within their essence. The depth of the love between them was something Jezima had never felt before in her lifetime and its power was unquestioned.

They carried themselves with an almost regal like grace, talking with others and smiling and laughing softly as they ate. There was no doubt within them; no arrogance in the least though they all held the title of Queen. Jezima wanted to go to them and embrace them ever so tightly; to speak with them and be with them and ask them hundreds of questions that they probably did not have the answers to.

[Mother?] Meral's soft voice echoed within her mind in a tightly shielded connection they had shared and nourished for centuries.

[They are breathtaking Meral.] Jezima spoke in reply as she turned slightly and watched Meral come up beside her.

[Very much so.] Meral agreed squeezing her arm. *[Do you feel him within them mother?]*

Jezima nodded her head. *[Oh yes... so pure and so bright. He resonates as brightly as your brother ever did child.]*

[I feel it as well.] Meral said.

[They are very intuitive.] Jezima spoke. *[They sensed something when they first arrived you know. They have been looking over here ever since I came into the room.]*

[Is it wise to remain mother?] Meral asked.

[We have asked the questions for thousands of years Meral.] Jezima told her. *[Before us stand three who could answer some of those questions.]*

[They may not even know what blood they carry within them mother.] Meral said.

Jezima shook her head slowly. *[They know daughter.]* She said. *[They know.]*

[How though?] Meral asked. *[How is it possible they are here? How is it possible Sumar had children? They told us his ship was destroyed in an Ion storm.]*

[I do not know daughter.] Jezima said. *[Do you doubt what you feel?]*

Meral shook her head. *[No. Never.]*

Jezima looked at her. *[Then perhaps it is time to ask these questions.]*

[When I saw him on the VID Monitor I... for a fleeting second I thought...] Meral said softly looking away, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

[I felt the same thing Meral.] Jezima said. *[But there is one thing I know with complete certainty. If your brother still lived he would have found a way to discover that we too survived. He would have come for us.]*

Meral nodded her head. *[I know.]*

[I have been at peace with your brother's passing for many years.] Jezima said. *[Perhaps this is the way the gods in the Rift of Time have seen fit to give back to me. To us. Our blood Meral. It stands before us now.]*

[The blond one... an elf she is called.] Meral spoke. *[She is more powerful than the other two. At least in an Etheric sense. There are two others as well that are not here but I can sense them. They are equal if not more powerful than she is. The other three are strong in their own right however.]*

Jezima nodded her head. *[Just as I have felt. These three are tied to him more tightly than the others but their devotion to each other is beyond question, as is their devotion to him.]*

[And his to them mother.] Meral said. *[I can feel him within each of them, even those who are not here. His resonance echoes deeply within all of them.]*

[Yet we cannot sense him.] Jezima commented. *[That tells me he knows what he is and he has discovered a way to disguise himself that even we do not know. A way your brother did not teach us.]*

[That would mean he knows what he is.] Meral said quickly with wide eyes.

[Yes.] Jezima said.

[Could Murano know?] Meral asked.

Jezima shook her head. *[I do not know.]* She answered. *[I have not been able to sense Murano for weeks now. It is almost as if he just disappeared.]*

Meral stiffened slightly. *[Mother the blond one has taken note of us.]* Meral said. *[She is making her way over here.]*

Jezima shook her head at Meral's tugging on her arm. *[No.]* She spoke firmly. *[We have hidden for too long and now I will not hide any longer.]*

Meral was going to reply but suddenly the elven female was in front of them staring at them with bright emerald eyes. Her four inch high elven ears curved elegantly inwards towards her head but the tips poked through the strands of her silky platinum blond hair. She was tall and extremely well built from what Jezima could see. She was the perfect combination of muscular definition and feminine allure. All of them were to be honest. She had maneuvered through the throngs of men and women who were present in the large room easily, the other two women right behind her, and almost before Jezima could blink they were in front of her.

"Excuse me...?" Dysea spoke as she felt Bella and Cirith come up on either side of her. "Do we... have we ever met before? We feel as if we should know you somehow. Were you part of Chief Elder Pralor Delnash's crew on Onterom perhaps?"

Jezima couldn't help but notice that her voice was like musical notes in its tone, so soft and warm with a slight lilt. She glanced quickly to the two dark haired women on either side of her. All of them were nearly equal in height, and all of them shared exceptionally feminine but equally muscular forms it seemed. The angular faces of the two dark haired females were quite exotic in their own right, one of them with deep dark eyes and the other with bright hazel green eyes. She glanced at Meral quickly and then back to Dysea.

"No child... we have never met." She finally stammered out the words. "Can I get you more tea?"

Isabella pressed close to Dysea. "You are... you are the owner of this establishment aren't you?" She asked.

Jezima nodded her head. "My daughter Meral and I, yes." She replied.

[She is hiding something.] Cirith spoke. *[I sensed her heart rate elevate for a fraction of a second.]*

[Cirith is correct Dysea.] Bella agreed. *[I heard it too.]*

[She looks so much like... we should know who these women are. I feel that very deeply. We should know who they are.] Dysea said.

Dysea didn't take her eyes from the older woman as they conversed in the special Etheric connection the six of them had established ever since Cirith had joined them almost a full year ago. It was a special and very powerful connection that allowed all of them to speak with one another shielded or otherwise since none of them ever spoke within Mindvoice below a top Tier Six level. Even Martin would not breach this special connection his wives shared and cultivated just for themselves. They had formed this connection using each of their own Etheric strands within Mindvoice and then blended them together over the course of many weeks.

Jezima may not have been able to hear what they were saying but she knew immediately that they were speaking within the Etheric realm within a connection she could never hope to discover or breach. That fact alone gave her pause as she gazed at them.

[Dysea look at her deeply.] Cirith began as she gazed keenly at the two women and all the training she had undergone with her father came rushing back to her. *[Look at her eyes; the corners of her mouth, the shape of her nose. They are related yes but we have... we have seen these distinguishing features before.]*

[Mother, they are speaking within an Etheric connection more powerful than any I have ever felt!]
Meral exclaimed while maintaining a blank expression of pleasantness. [Gods it is so...]

[Powerful!] Jezima finished her daughter's sentence.

[Ussta Che do you feel it?] Isabella remarked.

Dysea nodded her head. [Yes... an Etheric connection almost exactly like our own. So powerful and...]
Dysea's emerald green eyes grew slightly wider as realization came to her. She knew those features that Cirith spoke of. They all knew them. And they knew them so very intimately, "Son vada carians!" Dysea gasped aloud now, drawing Isabella and Cirith's eyes to her face.

"Dysea?" Isabella questioned as she moved even closer.

Dysea's emerald eyes were wide in disbelief as she stepped closer to Jezima. "Can you not see it Bella?" She asked softly as she brought her hand up hesitantly. "I have... I have seen their faces before."

"Dysea where?" Cirith asked in awe. While Cirith knew she was loved by Martin and her fellow Queens unconditionally and she returned this emotion without pause, she also knew she was the newest among them. She had not experienced everything they had seen and done before she had joined them, and they were only able to share so much with her over time.

Dysea stared into Jezima's deep, dark eyes and it was like looking into those same eyes she had witnessed so long ago, the same eyes that Martin gazed at her with. "Almost thirty years ago." Dysea spoke almost reverently. "It was the night I stood beside *Nauta Melme* at Thermopylae and the vision of his father appeared to us. The very night that Martin began to discover who he really was!"

Jezima could no longer contain herself and she reached up quickly and took Dysea's outstretched hand and brought it to her face. As her palm went flat against Jezima's cheek, Dysea's eyes grew wider still as she saw flashes not of the future, but of the past. She gasped slightly, as Meral moved closer to her mother and reached up to place her hand over her mother's hand and the images became even more vivid and real. Isabella and Cirith had seen Dysea's sometimes eerie power in action before and they did not hesitate to move closer to her and press their bodies tightly against hers. The physical contact between them was more than enough and they both inhaled sharply and gasped aloud as those same images flooded their own minds now as well.

The men and women in the dining area began to take notice of what was happening near the counter and who was involved. They were all Pralors and all of them knew from the soft, blue Etheric glow fluctuating between the five women that whatever was going on was far beyond what they were able to comprehend.

Tears had begun to flow in five different sets of eyes as the combined experiences of the five women meshed perfectly because of who they were and what flowed in their blood. Images of childhood and adulthood flashed across the consciousness of the five most powerful Etheric users on Honelze by a very wide margin. No other Pralor could come close to the Etheric ability that these five women possessed and they knew it almost instinctually. It was the reason that their two separate shielded conversations slowly gave way to one, and five minds reached across the divide of time and came together. It was Jezima who reached up with her other hand and grasped Isabella's shoulder, even as Meral moved closer to her mother and used her other hand to draw Cirith closer to them.

Dysea's emerald eyes were wide in shock as she stared at Jezima and knowledge flooded through her. Her heart raced as Jezima's warm skin burned against her palm.

"You... you are *Nauta Melme's*... you are Sumar's mother and sister!" She gasped aloud seeing the tears flowing from Jezima's eyes once more. "You are our *Nauta Melme's* beloved family!"

"Show... show him to us child." Jezima stammered out the words. "You are three of the six most precious jewels that he holds dearest of all. Even I can sense that. You hold his essence within you. Show him to us, so that we may see what we had never believed or hoped could be." Jezima burst into a flood of tears and gripped Dysea's hand tighter. "Show him to me child, so that I may see everything that I never dreamed could be."

There was no hesitation or pause, both Isabella and Cirith crowding closer to Dysea, tears now flowing freely from their eyes.

Dysea blinked away her own tears and smiled brightly. "Allow us... see through our eyes who your grandson is; who your son was."

Lexi stood off to the side of the five women who were now clutching each other ever so tightly. She had taken up a position to protect her three charges the moment they moved over to the strange woman at the

counter. Lexi soon came to understand what was happening for Dysea and Isabella had never held anything back from her, and now Cirith was the same way. Lexi turned as her small detachment finished gently prodding the other men and women in the dining area to leave. The tall Spartan moved up beside her with the elven female. Both of them, along with Lexi, had been part of Dysea's *Durcunusaan* detachment since its inception.

"Lexi?" The Spartan asked, puzzlement showing on his face at what he saw happening with his Queens.

"Contact Captain Nelay on the *HEART OF FIRE* Menal," Lexi ordered referring to the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser they were using as their Command ship. "I want a full *Enomotiai* deployed to the surface within the hour. I don't care who they have to scrape together to fill it out, as long as all of them have seen combat. Have Captain Nelay send word back to Manne that we will need additional *Durcunusaan* forces moved here by the end of the day tomorrow."

"The *Durcunusaan* who deployed with us are stretched thin Lexi." Menal told her. "Most went with the King to Ventori. There are only a handful left on Manne and Queen Anja's orders were for them to guard Lady Ceale."

Lexi blinked and nodded her head. "I keep forgetting we are not with our full Strike Group." She said. "Menal, return to the *HEART OF FIRE* and contact General Vengal yourself. Explain what we have discovered and to send more *Durcunusaan*. I will speak with General Koguth and have him assign a squad of his men to them now."

"Lexi... who are these women?" The elven female asked now.

Lexi turned back to look at the five women now huddled together and were gripping each other very tightly. "They are the King's great, great grandmother and his great, great Aunt." Lexi spoke in reply as she looked back to them. "They are Lord Sumar's mother and sister." She finished the sentence and saw their eyes go wide at this knowledge. "They are the King's family, and they will be protected at all costs."

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBITING AUSTROVA**

Murano moved quickly into the large port lounge, his eyes searching the many men and women who occupied the lounge until he found her. Mari was staring up into Deion's face as they stood beside the view window, her arms wrapped tightly around his waist and his arm holding her tightly. Mari turned instantly when she felt him and Deion's eyes followed hers as they watched him cross the distance in long but hesitant strides. Murano could not believe what he felt within Mari's full Etheric resonance now. She had dropped all pretense of hiding who she was and her Etheric resonance burned so very brightly. Just as brightly as many of his fellow Praetorians had so many centuries ago. He could sense how deeply intertwined she was with Deion now and while she did not radiate as brightly as he did, when combined together as they were now, the two of them were beacons. He watched as Deion leaned over and Mari accepted his loving kiss and then he was turning to face him and walking towards him across the room. No words were spoken as Deion passed him and then suddenly he was beside Mari and she gazed at him with stunning blue/green eyes and that almost carefree smile.

"Hello Papa." She said warmly.

Murano blinked several times and shook his head slightly. He met her gaze finally. "Mari I... how... how is this possible?" He finally stammered.

Mari chuckled softly and reached out to take his hands. "It's simple really." She spoke in reply. "You and my mother had a wonderful few weeks together and I am the result."

Murano looked at her evenly. "That is not what I meant." He stated evenly. "Tobia... she never... she never told me! Why wouldn't she have told me about you?"

Mari shook her head. "I do not know what my mother was thinking back then." She answered him. "I know that she wanted me to have the very best life could offer and that is why she let *Tenne Delnash* raise me as his own. Why she let me believe I was their child."

"Delnash knew?" Murano gasped in shock, not noticing that she had used the ancient language of the Lycavorian people. He didn't realize that Mari's times with Deion were already changing her, though Mari knew exactly what was happening and she embraced every bit of it.

Mari reached out and took his hands. "Papa... you cannot be angry with anyone." She stated to him. Murano looked at her. "Do not call me that." He said softly.

Mari blinked in surprise. "You are my father, why would I not call you that?"

"I am not your father." Murano spoke. "I did not know you existed! I should have felt you! I should have sensed you but..." He shook his head. "I have no right to be your father. You..."

Mari stepped closer to him and squeezed his hands tightly. "You have been and always will be my father." Mari told him. "Sit with me and I will tell you everything I know. Even mother does not know I have discovered everything. Kesyla helped me, but I have known for over five years who my parents are."

"Mari, I didn't know!" Murano gasped. "By the Ancients within the Rift of Time, I didn't know!"

Mari reached up and put a finger to his lips. "And now that you do know, I want to discover everything." She told him. "Soon my mother will know what I have discovered. She will begin to feel it within me. She will feel within me, just as you now do, no anger, no distrust and only love. I want to discover my mother and father and who they are."

Murano looked at her. "Mari..."

"You still love mother, don't you Papa?" Mari asked him.

Murano did not answer for a long moment as he stared at her. She was the image of Tobia, so beautiful and intelligent. Though her hair was similar to Tobia's, the dark reddish tint in it set her apart. "I... I never stopped loving her." He spoke finally, his words like a whisper across the space between them.

Mari smiled brightly. "No more than she still loves you." She said.

Murano's eyes went wide at this. "What? I left her without... I left her without so much as an explanation as to why!"

Mari shook her head. "Mother knew why Papa." She said. "She did not tell you about me because she did not want you to remain when everything within you at the time called for you to punish yourself for what you perceived you had allowed to happen."

"Mari how could you...?"

"You no longer feel that way do you Papa?" She asked him. "Ever since we discovered Deion's father and his family, the weight you carried upon you is gone. The doubt and shame you had within you was never yours to carry father. Never. It was never meant to be yours to carry. That is why Chief Elder Sumar... that is why Deion's grandfather left you behind. He knew what was going to happen in the millennia to come. You discovered this the moment you touch Deion's father. When you made this discovery all the pain and anguish you carried for so long was lifted."

Murano gazed at her with wide eyes for her words described exactly what he felt and what he had discovered since coming to realize and know what Martin and his sons were. "How do you know that?" He finally asked her.

Mari blushed slightly. "There are advantages to being loved by Deion Leonidas Papa." She said with a shy smile. "Their family has such a unique and beautiful connection among them. They share everything with each other. Deion showed me what his father and brother sensed within you when you first realized who they were. He has showed me so much Papa. About you, about mother, about what they have discovered. I want to share that with you now, so that you understand and know, at least partially why mother did what she did. And when we are finally back together... I want us to be the family we should have been so long ago."

Family.

Murano had never once considered himself worthy to have a family. He reached up tentatively and place his large hand against Mari's cheek and saw her eyes glisten with tears. All he had thought lost for so long had never been lost at all. It had only been hidden behind a wall of shame and doubt that had clouded his perceptions for too long. Mari was right. His daughter was right. He now knew that Sumar had never intended for him to carry such a burden.

Murano reached out and pulled Mari into his embrace and squeezed her tighter than he had ever squeezed anything in his life and he allowed the tears to come. Mari was openly weeping in joy as she reached around and hugged him back, and she could feel Deion's aura sweep around her with love and happiness and support. Even now his aura could tell her so much about his mood and he had not fully turned her yet. Mari relished and looked forward to that day, but for now she would spend her time discovering her father, and soon

her mother. Then she would have the family that she knew was always meant to be. She closed her eyes in happiness as Murano held her close and buried his face in her hair.

Deion leaned against the doorframe of the lounge and smiled. He could feel Mari's delight and happiness and her love for him. This day had been a long time coming and he allowed the happiness he felt for her permeate his being so that his siblings could feel it as well and share in her happiness. Nara was the first to acknowledge this and he felt his twin pulse him with her sisterly aura from several decks down.

Deion turned when he felt the hand on his shoulder and he saw Dorian beside him. "I am happy for you *fervon*. For both of you." He said.

"It is long overdue." Deion spoke.

Dorian nodded his head. "Yes it is." He agreed. He squeezed Deion shoulder tightly. "Andro is waiting for us." He said. "Leave them to discover all they can."

Deion nodded and pushed away from the door frame and they turned to head down the corridor. "Something come up?" Deion asked.

"The Vanari First Regent and Coren landed a few minutes ago. They have two Vanari females with them that apparently have additional information about this fool Ardan. He wanted all of us to hear it before the Board of Regents meets tomorrow."

Deion grinned. "That should be interesting." He said.

Dorian nodded. "No bets here." He said.

"Then we go and get Laren and Ladur." Deion spoke.

Dorian looked at him. "Andro and I." He said softly shaking his head. "No one else has to risk themselves."

Deion shook his head quickly. "Oh no brother." He said throwing his arm over Dorian's shoulders as they walked. "If this Laren and Ladur are part of you and Andro, then they are part of us. It doesn't matter a damn about all that that funky DNA *sibfla* that mother knows so well. *Carians*, there were times when I would get a headache just listening to her try and explain the simplest things."

Dorian laughed and nodded his head. "I have seen those times remember, in father's memories. Andro's as well." He stated.

"Then you know what I mean." Deion smiled knowing that Dorian would understand simply because those memories were part of him. "This is family business *fervon*. And we always stick together."

Dorian nodded. "That we do." He said.

"...Moved up the meeting with the Board of Regents to this afternoon." Alrerin was speaking confidently now. The events of the last few days had infused him with new energy and hope for the future and nothing was going to deter him from his goals it seemed. "We cannot hope to hide what is happening for too much longer. The OSG personnel on Austrova will soon begin to reach out to those Vanari who help and support them and they will discover that their entire network is being attacked."

"Agreed." Andro spoke from his chair at the head of the massive conference table. Denali, Dorian and Deion were seated along the length of the massive table but were keeping quiet. Andro wanted them present to understand what was going on but the consensus of the three brothers was to remain silent and observe.

"You were successful I take it?" Coren asked.

Andro nodded his head. "We secured the release of seventy-three Vanari being held prisoner as well." He replied. "Eliani, Serale and *Inamarno* are still treating nine of them who were held the longest. The remainder are being taken care of in one of the lounges. I will arrange for them to be returned to their families if that is what you wish."

Alrerin shook his head. "No." He said. "Coren, Asay and I have talked of this already." He rose to his feet and moved to the massive view window that now held a view of Austrova that he had rarely taken the time to enjoy. The planet was beautiful from orbit. He turned back to where Androcles sat as his azure eyes remained fixed on him. "If they wish to be returned then yes, however, if they are hesitant in any way and do not want to return just yet they will not be pressured. They have had to endure heinous crimes against them and I will not force them to return unless this is what they wish."

Rinel looked up from his chair where he sat beside Coren and Nyosa. “The Union can provide for them until they wish to make a decision First Regent. There is ample room for them on Amanuce.”

Alrerin looked at Andro. “Prince Androcles?”

Andro nodded his head without hesitation. “If that is what you wish, then yes.”

“Asay is going to present all of the information we have discovered when the Board of Regents convenes.” Alrerin continued.

“How much support does Ardan have?” Andro asked leaning forward in his chair.

“Far more than we first thought.” Coren answered. “However, we don’t know if those who support him are aware of everything he has allowed in the last decades. Or his deep connections to the OSG and how far they extend.”

Asay looked at Androcles from her seat beside Nellian. She was gripping his arm tightly with her hands and hadn’t let go of him since they had first arrived on this ship. “What of Kinryn Aal Samaur?” She asked.

Andro looked at Nellian. “Captain?”

“I have two of my finest protecting her Milord.” Nellian answered. “Twin brothers who were born in Sparta. They have been members of my Durcunusaan detachment for eight years.”

“What she knows we cannot lose.” Asay spoke. “She must not be exposed for any reason. She is already beside herself with grief and shame for what Ardan has forced upon her through the years. Things she went along with willingly because she thought he cared about her. I will not see her dragged through the mud because she had the strength to come to me.”

Andro nodded his head. “Nellian... make room for her here on *SPARTA*’s *WRATH*. She will remain under our protection for however long is needed. Transfer your detachment here. We have six decks of living quarters that have not been assigned yet. Make it happen.”

Nellian nodded his head. “As you order.”

“And chose a set of quarters for yourself and Regent Asay.” Andro spoke seeing her eyes grow wider at this announcement. “Coren, I assume you will want her to remain as part of your staff.”

Coren nodded his head with a smile. “Yes.”

Asay glanced between them. “What is this?” She exclaimed. “I will not be hidden away or forced off my own planet Coren! First Regent I...”

“This is the safest course of action Asay.” Alrerin told her. “At least for the immediate future.”

Coren met her eyes. “I will be assuming the role of Vanari Ambassador to the Union Asay.” Coren told her. “You will be my Deputy.”

“Why?” Asay demanded.

Alrerin returned to his chair. “Regardless of what happens later today, you will be in extreme danger.” He told her. “Right now there are four of us who know everything about what Ardan has done. And I’m quite sure that is not everything he is involved in. The OSG and their cohorts may be severely injured after these next few days but they will not be without their means. I will not risk you, Kinryn Aal Samaur or Coren by having you remain here on Austrova to be targeted.”

“We don’t know how deeply our own people may be involved Asay, or to what extent they are willing to go to keep their involvement secret.” Coren picked it up. “We know that the OSG will do whatever is necessary, and there are just too many unknowns right now for us to plan for everything.”

“So we will hide?” Asay asked.

Alrerin shook his head. “Not at all.” He answered. “Coren, yourself and my daughter will be on the front lines of what we must do. You will just be in a place where the OSG dare not tread to go.”

“How long?” Asay asked more sedately.

“That will depend on the outcome of what happens today.” Alrerin answered. “When we reveal all of what we know about Ardan and what he has done that we know about, I am hoping this will be the catalyst for our people to seek the change they we have denied for too long.” He leaned back in the chair. “Ardan is clever and well connected but even he cannot fight an entire people. Today we will begin to erode whatever support he has and we will continue to do so over the coming weeks.”

“I will do what I said I would do First Regent.” Androcles told him. “It is what my father and mothers would expect me to do. What my people would expect me to do.”

Alrerin nodded his head. "I know young man." He spoke. "I would expect no less. Your actions will only serve to show others that we must change or be forever left in the past."

"What about you Alrerin?" Asay asked now. "You will be a larger target than Coren and I. For dozens more reasons."

Rinel nodded his head. "And that is why I will remain and take command of his Security Detail with my daughter Ryana." He explained. "I am Vanari with Union rank and privileges. I am a citizen of both cultures and worlds. That will make the OSG think twice before trying something."

"What can we expect the reaction will be from other species?" Asay asked.

"The Rothryn people will stand with the Vanari." The voice echoed now and they turned to see Dyack enter the conference room with Aleatia on one arm and Sehri on the other. They watched as Androcles got to his feet and moved around the table. He stopped in front of Dyack and the two men embraced tightly before Andro turned to Aleatia and lifted her hands to his lips to kiss her knuckles. Then they watched as Sehri leaned into him and they shared a sizzling kiss of love and passion in front of everyone and did not care who saw. Dyack turned to look at Alrerin and the others with a smile on his face at his daughter's actions. "First Regent, I pledge the support of my people to you in whatever form we can provide."

Alrerin looked surprised at this announcement. "I thought... I thought that many in your government wanted to keep a distance between our peoples."

Dyack nodded his head. "That is true, but after what Androcles and Sehri discovered in rescuing your people, things will change on Lentani much more quickly. And part of that change will mean assisting you."

Alrerin looked confused. "I don't understand." He said.

Dyack stepped up to him, taller and wider than Alrerin by a good margin. "We may be called Rothryn..." He spoke. "But we are Lycavorians by anyone's definition. We will do what our instinct and blood calls for us to do. Standing with those who are our friends among them." He held out his hand to Alrerin. "I have appointed my son Kelelm as our representative to you and Colonel Rinel. Should the need arise, you will be safe among the Rothryn people."

Alrerin took the offered hand. "We may need your help Praetor Dyack." He said.

Dyack nodded. "And you will have it." He spoke confidently. "Without hesitation or doubt."

Alrerin looked at Androcles as he stepped up to them. "This day will... it will be the beginning of a new future First Regent." He said. "We must have patience in our endeavors, but the ultimate goal is unchanged."

"No it is not." Alrerin agreed as Coren and Asay moved up beside him.

"Then let us move forward into the future together." Andro spoke.

Alrerin nodded his head with a smile. "A bright future my boy." He spoke. "A bright future for all of us."

HONELZE MAIN PRALOR COLONY FORTUNE

"...Ancients within the Rift of Time bless me." Jezima muttered softly as she shook her head.

Jezima had not been this happy and animated since the birth of Meral nearly forty-seven thousands years ago. She had also not been able to stop crying in the last two hours as she gripped Dysea's hand tightly in one of her own and Isabella's hand in the other. They sat at the large table where they had been having dinner, most of the plates and glasses still on the table but now moved to one end as the five women sat tightly together, unwilling to move very far from each other. Meral and Cirith were sitting beside one another, their shoulders touching and their hands clasped tightly.

This had been an enlightening experience for all of them, but more so for Cirith Leonidas without doubt. She knew, minus any question that Martin and her fellow Queens loved her as much as they loved each other. However, being able to experience this firsthand and not through the many memories they had shared with her within Mindvoice, it meant more to her than anything else. It brought her closer to Martin in a way nothing ever could and it made her see just how much she loved each of them in return. She may have initially believed that

she had been meant for Martin's father and Gorgo, but as each day passed her by she realized more and more that destiny and fate had always intended that she be with Martin and Dysea and Isabella and all of them. This is where she had always belonged.

Cirith looked up at Jezima's words and smiled seeing Dysea lean closer. "This is... we had never imagined this." Dysea spoke softly. "We had hoped... Martin had hoped that we would find someone who knew Sumar. Who knew his grandfather? Someone he could ask all the questions he has held within him for so long. Someone who could tell him what the memories mean."

Meral looked at her through tear stained eyes. "He has Sumar's memories?" She asked.

Isabella nodded now. "When he became, when Sumar took a Lycavorian wife, he became Lycavorian. One of the many traits that Lycavorians have is the ability to pass many of their memories to their children within Mindvoice. Within the Etheric realm using images and different memory engrams." Isabella laughed softly. "*Melyanna* would be able to explain it better than I but we know that Martin has these memories within him and by virtue of that so do our children."

"All of them?" Jezima gasped.

"They all have these memories within them yes, but only Androcles and our other pureblood children have the ability to actually see them." Isabella answered. "Only they are etherically strong enough to see them and make sense of them. Sumar passed the Praetorian gene to them within their blood."

Jezima's eyes grew wider now. "They are all Praetorians?" She gasped in disbelief.

"Androcles, Denali..." Cirith saw Meral and Jezima turn to gaze at her intently. "Deion, Nara, and Dorian. All of them pureblood. Anja believes that the gene can be passed to those who are not pureblood but it will never be active as it is within Androcles and the others."

"But even in a dormant state," Meral spoke excitedly but evenly. "Even in a dormant state it would allow them to do things that others cannot!"

Dysea nodded her head as her mind flashed with images of Zarah and Eliani. "Yes, this has manifested itself in different forms among some of our other children, and if they are bonded to a dragon it only makes it more pronounced."

Jezima shook her head. "Bonded to a dragon within the Etheric realm?" She spoke softly. "That is something that no one ever believed could happen."

"There is another..." Isabella told them. "Jomann... he is a pureblood who has now taken our daughter Eliani as his wife and mate. They are soulmates, *Anomes* in our ancient language. Jomann is from another blood lineage that dates back to when Sumar was on Lycavore. He is also Androcles' closest friend right now along with Dutkne, his Praetorian Mage."

"Dutkne?" Meral asked.

Isabella nodded her head. "Wayonn's great grandson."

"Wayonn!" Jezima almost shouted as she sat straight up. "Wayonn lives?"

"It was Wayonn who first put Martin and our children on the path to discovery." Dysea explained. "He has been with us ever since we discovered all of this. Almost a year now."

"By the gods!" Jezima stammered as she gripped Dysea's hand tighter. "How... how many more?"

Isabella shook her head. "We don't know." She answered. "There were two City Ships that crashed on populated worlds. The one on Lycavore and another on a different planet. A planet that held my people."

"You don't speak as if that was a good thing Bella?" Meral asked.

Isabella shook her head. "It wasn't." She replied softly. She looked at Jezima. "The ship that crashed on the planet with my people held the Etheric essence of Sumar's twin brother Xaxon."

Jezima's hands went to her mouth in horror and she shook her head. "No!" She gasped aloud.

Meral shook her head almost angrily. "His Etheric essence was purged from his physical body!" She spoke heatedly. "He was exiled from our homeworld for his crimes against our people! For starting the first war with the Scourge! He was responsible for billions of deaths! He was a..."

"He was a monster." Jezima muttered softly.

"We don't know the whole history of what happened." Dysea spoke now. "It led to thousands of years of war between vampires of the High Coven and Lycavorians. Through the millennia many vampires saw it was wrong and defected to the Union. It was our oldest son Androcles who ended this war only a few months ago."

"Ended it?" Jezima gasped. "How?"

Isabella smiled warmly. “He took a leap of faith.” She said.

Meral choked up slightly when she said that and they looked at her. “That... that is what Sumar would have done.” She rasped.

Jezima gripped Dysea and Isabella’s hands tighter. “I must... I must see him. I must touch him. Where is he child?”

“He is on a planet in another sector that held our people.” Dysea explained. “Ventori. It is a planet that the Pralor people used for one of their Seed Missions that included Lycavorians. Our species is very hardy it seems, and we adapt better than most to different climates.”

“Seed Missions!” Meral hissed in disgust. “They were an abomination no matter their purpose of new life. We had no right to do that. To act like gods.”

Dysea chuckled softly and looked at her. “Our son Androcles would tend to agree with you.” She said. “Though he would describe it in much more colorful and not at all pleasant words.”

“And Martin?” Jezima asked.

“*Nauta Melme* is...” Dysea looked at Isabella and Cirith. “It is not a topic he likes to entertain shall we say.”

“No.” Cirith echoed her words. “Not at all.”

“We must go to him.” Jezima said. “Meral and I have to see him.”

“I don’t know if he would want you placed in danger.” Bella spoke. “He is sometimes overly protective of those he loves and Ventori is not a secure location.”

Jezima shook her head frantically. “We must see him!” She exclaimed. “I have to... I have to touch him! He is so deeply embedded within all of you... but I cannot... I must touch him for myself to know that my prayers have finally been answered.”

“Jezima we...” Dysea began.

“I will take them.” The male voice spoke now and all of them turned to see Wayonn standing in the doorway of the building. “Martin has secured Ventori quite well. At least for now.” He continued speaking as he moved slowly into the building as Jezima and Meral came to their feet with looks of disbelief on their faces once more. He stopped only a few feet from them.

“Now that you have told them where he is Dysea, if Jezima and Meral are anything like I remember them to be, they would find a way off this planet to go to him and there is nothing any of us could do to stop them.” Wayonn finished. “And I think we all know that Martin would be very upset if we tried.”

“Wayonn?” Dysea gasped as she came to her feet.

It was as if they had been hit by a speeding comet twice in one day as they gazed at Wayonn standing before them. He appeared unchanged from the day they both saw him last standing proudly beside Sumar as they were waving from the lift taking them to City Ship 41.

Wayonn stepped closer to them, his own eyes tearing up somewhat as well.

“And the Ancients within the Rift of Time have once more have shown me that the path I travelled would one day reward me with happiness again.” Wayonn spoke softly. “When I first discovered the descendant and the bloodline of my dearest friend and fellow Praetorian and now he has led me back to you. Back to the one who called me son.”

Jezima lost it then and she wailed out her joy as she threw her arms around Wayonn and his arms went around her waist. Meral was within his grasp an instant later while Dysea, Isabella and Cirith moved closer together with smiles on their faces and tears in their eyes. This was a reunion that they would not interrupt for it was far longer in coming than anything they could imagine.

Dysea pulled Cirith and Isabella close to her, their bodies pressing together intimately as they watched.

[Cirith and I will remain here Dysea. Return with them and Wayonn to Martin.] Isabella spoke softly.

Dysea looked at her. *[Bella no.]* She declared.

[Bella and I are more suited to what must be done before the Svorag arrive.] Cirith spoke now. *[Jezima has an affinity for you. You put her at ease. And for what we must do there is no need for all three of us to remain.]*

[Cirith is correct.] Isabella agreed. *[And if Wayonn is accurate in what Martin has done on Ventori then you will not be gone long. You know how he secures a situation ussta che.]*

[You are certain?] Dysea asked them turning to look at both of them.

Isabella and Cirith nodded as they pressed closer to her. *[You are a calming influence on everyone you meet ussta che. Yes we are sure. And you can give Martin a firsthand account of what we are doing here. He will need that, for the Svorag are still coming according to Yuriko's last report.]*

Cirith nodded her head as she looked at Wayonn holding Jezima and Meral, tears now streaking down even his stern face. *[Yes they are. And then there will be no time for reunions.]*

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

SPARTA'S WRATH

SEPTEMBER 1ST 2575

TWO HOURS BEFORE VANARI BOARD OF REGENTS GATHERING

Sarlana moved up behind them slowly as they stood in front of the massive view window in the private lounge. She knew they had smelled her the moment she made her way onto this deck of the ship. This entire section of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, fully two-thirds of this entire deck really, was now what she had heard many of the crew refer to as Royal Country. This deck held Androcles' personal quarters as well as the personal quarters for Deion, Dorian and their wives and mates. It also held additional quarters for their father and mothers were they to ever be on this ship at the same time. There were also quarters for their grandmothers and perhaps four or five other family members if the time ever rose where they were all together. Sarlana knew that Androcles had intentionally placed his and Denali's quarters in different parts of the ship so that no one attack could claim all of them. Eliani, Jomann and Brendi also had their quarters in a different section of the ship.

This would be the unofficial chain of command on *SPARTA'S WRATH* for Sarlana knew that Androcles trusted Denali and Eliani more than any others because of the time they had spent together in battle and outside of battle. Eliani and Zarah held a very special place within Androcles heart and mind because of the connection he had to his two sisters, and the quarters directly across from his own were reserved for Zarah and Lucia when they finally came back together as a family. Denali had begun to think and act more like his father and older brother, but he still maintained the often times humorous nature of his personality which his family had come to expect and love.

Sarlana moved gracefully into the large lounge which was on the edge of the secure area of this deck. This lounge was connected to a large mess area through the massive double doors and she could just make out perhaps two dozen men and women sitting at the many tables eating and talking. She knew this was intentional on Androcles' part for it was something he had done on his former ship. They would always eat and mingle with their crew, and Sarlana knew that his father and mothers were the same way. It was the main reason that so many men and women within the Union adored their family. They never acted as if they were better than the next man or woman, and this mentality had earned their family near fanatical loyalty from everyone they came in contact with. Sarlana knew that they hated this sense of devotion from others, but she also knew they would not change who they were at the core of their family.

This entertainment lounge and the adjoining mess lounge were more well-guarded by members of the *Durcunusaan* she knew, but there was no hesitation on the part of other crew members when entering this area of the ship. The only exception to this was that the segment with their personal quarters was off limits to everyone unless they were family or had a direct invitation.

Sarlana moved up behind them now, both of them towering over her four foot eight height. She had always been much smaller than most she mused with some humor, and both Androcles and Dorian were over two meters in height and this fact made her chuckle to herself.

"It's becoming easier isn't it?" She spoke softly as they turned to gaze at her.

Dorian nodded his head as he reached for her hand. "Yes."

Sarlana took his hand without thought and he drew her between them where Androcles took her other hand. "So tell me." She spoke.

"They are proceeding as quickly as they can without drawing attention to themselves." Andro spoke. "So far they have done a very good job of keeping Laren and Ladur's existence hidden from everyone."

Sarlana nodded her head. “The *Livaiji Sulevfu* is very good at hiding things when they want to be.” She stated. “But it will not last.”

“We know.” Dorian said.

“The connection to them?” Sarlana asked.

“It grows stronger by the hour.” Andro answered her. “We can touch Laren now without Elynth or Ryner in the connection, but it is much more focused and clear with them and Ladur.”

Sarlana nodded her head in approval. “Good. From everything I have read in the history archives about the *Dahakoan*, the ability to connect with one another even over vast distances was one of their strongest traits.” She looked up into Andro's face. “You have a plan I take it?”

“We have been refining it with Murano and once our business here is done we will start to execute training on it.” He answered. “Armen is going to launch the probes in twelve hours. They will be filled with equipment and other things that Laren and Ladur need and enough of our standard gear to outfit twenty Darastrixi.”

Sarlana shook her head. “After speaking with them briefly, I got the sense from this *Koppentotz* Aviel that he is exceptional thorough. Can you send more equipment Androcles? I have a feeling there will be more than just the twenty.”

Andro shook his head. “Not without sending more probes. It took Armen and the crew this long just to break the probes down to the bare essentials to make the trip. How many do you think will be with them?”

Sarlana shook her head. “I do not know. Chalith and Ch'teven I have heard about only through others among the *Doraanar*; before they were all butchered by the Scourge. This Shalu I have never seen or heard about which means she is much younger than the others. I do know from what I could sense, that they take her safety quite personally.”

Dorian and Andro nodded. “We felt that as well.” Dorian agreed.

“And this is the only place where we can rendezvous with them?” Sarlana asked, “This old Pralor station?”

“It is not the only place but it is the most remote and out of the way.” Andro answered. “The other locations Murano showed us were too far within Scourge space to be of any use to us and it is too large a risk. This station is on the outskirts of what was once Pralor controlled space and it is the closest to the Darastrixi border. This area is now under Scourge control but it is so far out along the outer edges of their borders it is almost never traveled.”

“It's also much shorter a trip for Laren and Ladur to make.” Dorian told her. “The less time they are on board a ship the better. At least until we are with them.”

Sarlana shook her head slowly. “It makes me uneasy.” She said softly.

“You suspect something Sarlana?” Andro asked, “A trap perhaps?”

Sarlana met his eyes and once more shook his head, “No, nothing like that, at least not from the Scourge.”

“From the Darastrixi then?” Dorian asked.

“The impression I took away from speaking with Chalith and Ch'teven was that they feared the government more than the Scourge.” Sarlana told them. “It appears as if the *Urkkrisir Mamiss* has been appeasing the Scourge for millennia. Allowing them to take Darastrixi Maidens every few hundred years would never have been accepted during my time. If they are willing to do this now then I have to believe that they would not hesitate to give Laren and Ladur to the Scourge if they thought it would keep our people safe. Or attempt to seize her if her existence was revealed to them.”

“They don't see what doing that would mean?” Dorian asked somewhat surprised.

Sarlana shook her head. “I believe they are more concerned with keeping their positions and allowing things to proceed unhindered.”

“Do you think it is because of some other reason *Doraanar*?” Andro asked her.

Sarlana shook her head quickly knowing of Androcles' intense hatred for traitors. It was a trait that his father shared as well as most of those Lycavorians she had been around even briefly on Manne. “No. My people, the Darastrixi, we are very set in our ways, too rigidly in my opinion. It has always been one of our faults. The *Urkkrisir Mamiss* are elected for life and by now those who occupy these seats will have been there

for far too long.” She squeezed their hands tighter and pulled their arms closer to her. “And I have asked you both to stop calling me that.”

Dorian smiled at her. “It is what you are.” He told her.

“No. Not to you.” Sarlana answered him. “Not to any *Dahakoan*.”

“Appeasement is never the correct path.” Androcles spoke softly, squeezing her hand in acknowledgement of her words. “It always leads to more and more until there is no more left to give and you have to fight.”

Sarlana nodded. “I agree.” She echoed him.

“Allow me to talk with Murano once we are done here.” Andro told her. “Perhaps there is more we can do or something we haven’t thought about.”

Sarlana nodded. “I will leave that to you and Murano to work out.” She said. “I was able to use that wonderful tool you gave to me, that Mark Two Neural Booster, and I was able to pass on some additional skills for Laren and Ladur to study until we reach them. You do realize that no matter what you have passed to them, they will still be far behind you both in skills. The training regimes that you have developed over the years for your Bonded Pairs, it far exceeds any that the Darastrixi have ever used. It’s incredible to be honest. You will need to teach Laren and Ladur these methods for them to be as effective as the four of you. It should not take long given your ability to pass to one another through the Etheric realm other skills, but insure you do this almost immediately upon seeing them.”

“You are coming with us you know.” Dorian said with a grin and a twinkle in his multicolored eyes.

Sarlana immediately slapped his thick arm in response. She had spoken with Helen on more than one occasion and since being with them on this ship she had spent much time with their grandmothers Gorgo and Dasha. She knew that this is how Lycavorians showed affection and it was almost expected in a way. They may have had dragon blood within them, but they were Lycavorian and Dorian was also vampire. These things were normal to them and Sarlana had quickly determined that she needed to act in this fashion as well. It would allow them to trust and accept her even more, as well as so many other Lycavorians and vampires among their people.

“I know that Dorian Leonidas!” Sarlana snapped at him playfully. “I will not be there when you first greet them however, and I do not wish to scold you as Helen has done in the past when you forgot to do something she instructed you to do!”

Androcles laughed softly. “She has taught you all of our quirks I take it.” He said.

“Not all of them I’m sure!” Sarlana stated. “Even she does not know them all. But she told me enough of them.”

“We will not forget Sarlana.” Dorian said with a warm smile.

“See that both of you don’t.” Sarlana said in a playful but stern voice. She took their hands within hers again and squeezed them once more. “You have spoken with your mother Anja about Laren’s condition?”

Androcles and Dorian both became more serious now she noted. Laren had been very nonchalant about it, only saying that their mother could heal her. She had sensed that both Androcles and Dorian had taken it much more seriously during the conversation and had asked several pointed questions of Nahko. Andro nodded his head. “Yes. It was brief for they are busy with this new species the Tasmor.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “I have heard Nekins and Conlar speak of them, these Tasmor. A female dominated race, very proud and very stubborn. They are unique in many ways. Their males are so few that nature has allowed many of their females to take on male roles but still look female. Many of them are quite beautiful.” She looked at Andro. “Your father did not start something did he?”

“Thankfully no.” Andro said with a small laugh. “They actually have been helping the branch of our people that father found out there. Things became exciting when these Kintaur showed up but father gave them a stern talking to.”

Sarlana nodded. “Yes I know of them as well. The Kintaur are bitter enemies with the Tasmor. They have taken some Pralors prisoner through the years. They are not very pleasant individuals from what I understand. What he told them must have been very stern.”

Andro looked at Dorian quickly and smiled. “It was.” He said.

“And Anja can correct the imbalance in her body?” Sarlana asked once more missing the look between the brothers.

Andro nodded his head. “She sent Eliani a medical technique that she can use that will stabilize her and give us more time. Enough to get her to my mother so that she can correct it completely.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Your mother Anja is perhaps the most intelligent and gifted doctor I have ever known in all my years.”

Andro nodded his head. “She does not quit that is for sure.”

“I am here because of her and that attitude.” Dorian spoke.

Sarlana looked out the view window at the planet below. “When do you have to leave for this political grandstanding that these Vanari apparently love so much?” She asked.

“We are meeting Coren in just over an hour.” Andro replied. “He will escort us into the SBR Chambers.”

“And then?” Sarlana asked.

“Then a little stop on the Rothryn homeworld before we leave to retrieve Laren and Ladur.” Andro told her.

Sarlana nodded her head. “Good. These different men and women Androcles, they have no idea what you and Dorian can do. What you are capable of. They have no idea of the horrors that reside out there. It must remain that way for now.”

Andro looked at Dorian and nodded his head. “I know.”

“Murano is with Nara, Lisisa, Sheva and Onera. They are reviewing the copy of the Tomes from your grandfather. As Praetorian Mages they too must train.” Sarlana spoke. “I will join him as he instructs me as well. I have much to learn of these Praetorians and their ways and abilities. He seems to think that I can help those who will be your Mages. Return to us when you are done on the surface so that we can fine tune this plan of yours.”

Andro and Dorian both leaned over and planted soft kisses on her scaled cheeks.

“We will prevail Sarlana.” Andro told her.

Sarlana nodded her head. “I have no doubts of that. I just wish to insure that you do not kill those whose only intent is to protect Laren and Ladur now.”

“What do you mean?” Dorian asked confused.

“I will explain it fully when you return but suffice to say Laren is not happy about it. And neither is Ladur.” She said with a smile. “Stand proud and stand strong. Both of you. Dadien and your grandfather are always with you.”

ECHO QUADRANT VENTORI SOUTHERN OUTSKIRTS OF JORLARI

“...Was once a park here.” Nalmos spoke as he motioned with his hand over the area to their front, “Rows and rows of colorful flowers and plants from all over Ventori with a fountain as the center. Hundreds would come here every day just to sit and let the breeze blow across their skin and to smell the blossoms. I came here often myself.”

“It will be that way again.” Martin told him as his eyes searched the barren landscape in front of him. “I give you my word.”

Nalmos looked at him and found he could not keep the small smile from his face. He was rapidly discovering this young King was the epitome of a leader and also quite the optimist. He glanced at the two younger men who stood only a short distance away and were never far from their King’s side. Cody and Colin he had been told were their names. They were members of the King’s personal team and always within a half second from Martin’s position. “It will never be the same Milord.” He said softly.

Martin shook his head. “No it won’t.” He agreed. “But Jorlari will be the start of it.”

“The start of what?” Nalmos asked.

“The future.” Martin answered turning to look at him. “Nalmos there are no more castes among our people. Alpha, Beta, Gamma wolves... it doesn’t exist anymore. It hasn’t for many thousands of years. It began

to end when my grandfather and those Pralors who crashed on our original homeworld were turned and brought into the packs.”

Nalmos nodded his head. “I have heard others speaking of him, your grandfather.” He said. “They say he was a great warrior even before he became wolf.”

“He was a Praetorian.” Martin said with a nod, “Like I am; like my sons and daughter are.”

“But I have seen how you treat your mates.” Nalmos told him. “You covet them, all of them. You allow them to eat first, you defer to their judgment. These are all signs of a dominant Alpha. I and others have heard your people talking with those from Ventori. Your people say that you are; that you are the most dominant Lycavorian Alpha among our people. You are the most powerful to have lived since your father over three thousand years ago, and his father before him. That your bloodline is the purest of all bloodlines among our people.”

Martin smiled. “My people talk too much.” He said with some humor.

“But what they say *is* true.” Nalmos pressed. “All of us can sense it. We sensed it the first time we saw you.”

“That doesn’t make me a god or something.” Martin said. “I’m just a man and a Spartan.” He told him. “There are thousands of Beta wolves who have taken Alpha females as their wives and mates. Thousands more who have taken Beta Wolves as their husbands. My grandfather taught us that we needed to be as one species, one people. The Castes only served to keep the bloodlines constant. Had we not changed, we would have missed out on so much that other bloodlines can offer. And those bloodlines became stronger for it while making the purest of the bloodlines even stronger.”

“Our people in your Union... we are many?” Nalmos asked.

Martin nodded his head. “It is your Union now as well. Lycavorians make up the largest contingent within the Union. Part of it is because of our longevity and part of it is because we integrated the bloodlines as my grandfather suggested. It made us stronger and more vibrant as a people. There are some who still cling to the caste system, and there are differences between Alphas and Betas, but most of our people no longer follow that rule of thought.”

“How many of our people are in this Union Milord?” Nalmos asked now.

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t know exact numbers.” He replied. “My wife Bella would know, she likes to study statistics like that. She can rattle off statistics about the most obscure things. It drives me *malda* sometimes.”

Nalmos grinned now. “The Queens are, they are breathtaking in their beauty. Queen Anja is... she is the most intelligent person I have ever encountered. Her medical skills are like a gift from the gods. She was able to fix an old injury I had from hundreds of years ago and I watched as she slapped... she slapped a man three times her size in order to get him to allow her to treat him.” He stated.

Martin nodded his head with a smile and soft laughter. “She’s a tiny thing for sure, but she is my firecracker. She doesn’t take *sibfla* from anyone when it comes to the care of our people.” Martin said. “All of them are like that.”

“I can only assume the three Queens who are not here are equally as stunning.” Nalmos said.

Martin laughed and nodded his head. “Each and every one of them is breathtaking. I never have figured out what exactly they all see in me, but why look a gift horse in the mouth right?”

Nalmos looked at him oddly and Martin chuckled more. “It’s a common expression from the planet I was raised on. It means don’t question things when you don’t need to.”

“Ah!” Nalmos echoed with a smile. “I understand now.” He was becoming more and more comfortable being in Martin’s presence. Their history and instincts would have had him almost cower before an Alpha with the aura and power of the man beside him, but Martin’s nature made that impossible. The most powerful Alpha among their people he may have been, but he was surprisingly normal and had not one arrogant bone in his body. This knowledge was rapidly spreading among the Beta wolves from Ventori and many of them were beginning to converse more openly and casually with the many Alpha wolves that were on Ventori now, male and female Alpha wolves who did not consider themselves above anyone.

“What do you hear from the other Chief Justices?” Martin asked him now.

“The news of your existence and what has happened here is running rampant among our people on the Tasmor planets that we occupy.” Nalmos answered. “It has only been a few days and many are already clamoring to return here.”

Martin nodded his head. “That’s a good thing.” He said.

Nalmos looked at him. “There are also many who are not.” He stated. “I know of several hundred who have entered into relationships with Tasmor females Milord. Namiri has told me of them. They will not want to leave.”

Martin nodded his head. “That is their decision. I’m not going to force them to return here Nalmos.”

“The Tasmor have been good to our people Milord.” Nalmos said. “They did not have to help us as they did.”

Martin shook his head. “No, they did not, but they also had an ulterior reason for helping you.” He told him. “The natural healing properties of our bodies and our longevity will go a long way to saving their species.”

“Saving them?” Nalmos asked. “What do you mean?”

“That doesn’t matter.” Martin told him. “What does matter, and what impresses me the most, is that they asked and did not take. They gave our people the choice to help and we did. I have been told hundreds of our people lined up to help. That says quite a bit about them as a species and speaks volumes about their leadership. It says a lot about our people too.”

Nalmos nodded his head in agreement. “Yes it does.” He stated. “You will help them?”

Martin nodded his head. “Anja is doing that right now.” He stated. “We are not the Pralor people Nalmos. I know that you don’t have a lot of information about them, but let’s just say they were unwilling to help the Tasmor. Anyone for that matter. That has since changed but I am not like them. My people are not like them. We embrace others who want the same things we do. To live in peace. To prosper and see our children play and grow. I have a sense that the Tasmor only became arrogant and insular when they discovered what was happening to them and no one would assist them without wanting something from them in return. Something more than they were willing to give. Now that they know there are others who will help them and want nothing in return, they will begin to see not everything is as they thought. That is my hope anyway. We’ll see what happens over the next few weeks and months.”

Nalmos looked at him for a long moment. “There is something you are not telling me King Leonidas.” He stated finally.

Martin met his eyes and nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“Does it have to do with this Kintaur species?” Nalmos asked. “The ones who were here when you first arrived?”

Martin shook his head. “The Kintaur are not even a blip on my radar at the moment.” He answered. “I could take the ships and troops I have right now and spank their *midaeus* back into the Stone Age if I wanted to. No... there is something far more sinister and deadly out there.”

“These creatures that attacked Ventori then.” Nalmos spoke. “You know of them and what they are capable of. You knew before you came here for I saw the look on your faces when I told you what had taken place.”

Martin nodded his head. “It is a very long story that one day I will relate to you and the others, but suffice to say, they are the largest threat out here right now.” He said. “They are moving for a Pralor colony world in an adjoining sector of space right now. I believe their intent is to do exactly what they did here. I can’t allow that Nalmos.”

Nalmos was silent for a moment and let his eyes drift over the barren remains of what had once been a beautiful spot in his city that he had come to often. “We will fight.” He said softly.

Martin shook his head. “That I can’t allow.” He said.

Nalmos looked at him once more. “Train us in your ways. Equip us with your weapons. We will fight! We fought them before!”

“You were defending your world.” Martin said. “Anyone would fight for that purpose. But fighting for vengeance is not something I can allow. Those who fight with vengeance in their hearts make mistakes and those mistakes get others killed.”

“Have we not earned the right to seek vengeance?” Nalmos asked softly. “Over three billion of my people dead. I...”

“Our people.” Martin corrected him.

Nalmos nodded. “Our people my King.” He spoke softly. “Fathers. Mothers. Sons and daughters.” He met Martin’s gaze. “Have we not earned the right to seek vengeance and justice for what was done to us?”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes you have.” He answered softly.

“Then allow us to fight!” Nalmos spoke. “To return some measure of pride to ourselves.”

“Nalmos what you did, if what I see around me is any indication, you put up a hell of a fight.” Martin said.

“What would you do my King?” Nalmos asked him suddenly. “What would you desire?”

Martin was silent as he looked at him for a long moment. Finally he nodded his head slowly. “Then pass the word to the other Chief Justices.” He said softly. “If they are willing and able and wish to see true justice done, then I will allow it. True justice Nalmos, not vengeance.”

Nalmos closed his eyes briefly and nodded his head. “I will...”

Martin’s implant crackled in his ear and he saw Nalmos jump ever so slightly. He and those they had since found on Ventori had been fitted with COM implants almost from the outset to better facilitate their treatment and needs.

“Marty?” Julie’s voice echoed clearly in the COM.

“Go Jules.” Martin spoke instantly.

“Martin... you had better come to our position.” Julie spoke evenly but Martin could detect the tremors in her voice.

“What’s wrong Jules?” Martin asked as he gripped Nalmos’s arm. “Where’s Danny?”

“It’s better if you see this for yourself Skipper.” Julie continued. “You had better bring Justice Nalmos too. And Danny says to find Namiri and Emylea Daret if they are close by. This concerns the Tasmor too.”

“Julie!” Martin demanded.

“Just come to our position *fervon*.” Julie told him. “Now.”

Martin looked at Nalmos briefly for Julie almost never referred to him in the ancient Lycavorian language. She was fluent in the language but she only used it if the situation was bad. And she almost never referred to him as brother even though that is the emotion that flowed between all of Martin’s Team and himself.

“On our way!” Martin snapped turning to motion for Cody and Colin to lead out as he took Nalmos’s arm.

They moved perhaps a dozen city blocks into the city by Martin’s sense until they came up to the side of a half collapsed five story structure. Martin immediately detected several *Durcunusaan* standing near the entrance of what appeared to be an underground shelter or bunker of some sort and all of them with looks of horror on their faces. His eyes settled on Julie as she spotted him and blurred to his position before he could move any closer.

“Jules?” Martin asked her as he came up short with Nalmos in tow, Colin and Cody right behind them.

Julie held out her hand palm up to Martin and he saw the olfactory blockers. His eyes came to rest on her face now and he saw that her skin was a little whiter than her normally caramel colored skin. “Better take these Skipper.” She spoke. “Your sense of smell is a lot keener than Danny’s and his sense of smell is perfect. He was puking his guts out for the first few minutes. All of us were.”

Nalmos was looking around the area his eyes confused. “This is the Jorlari City Museum Center.” He spoke now. “I have been here hundreds of times but I have never seen that entrance there.” He said motioning to the bunker entrance.

Martin didn’t take his eyes off Julie and she shook her head ever so slightly. “Trust me Marty.” She said softly. “Namiri and Emylea arrived with that Tasmor ship Captain Drenia only a few moments ago. They already went inside.”

“What is going on Jules?” Martin demanded.

“We found something.” Julie told him. “This half of the building was hit pretty hard as you can see, but when it collapsed, it revealed the entrance to this bunker. T'loft was actually the one who found it. He was on our flank with his Havoc.”

“*Anse Jules*, just spit it out!” Martin snarled.

Julie motioned with her head. “It’s not... it’s not pretty Skipper.” She motioned to the olfactory blockers in his hand. “Trust me you will need them until we get the place aired out. It was vacuum sealed.”

Martin handed a set to Nalmos as Julie tossed Cody and Colin a pair of the scent blockers and she watched as they put them in. She turned and headed back towards the building and the caved in entrance. From first glance it looked like some sort of underground sewer entrance but as they got closer and climbed over the debris that had fallen from above them Martin quickly dismissed that as he saw the large door and computer panel beside it. The entrance was at the bottom of a man made ramp and looked to be like an emergency hatch from their ship. Julie grabbed the handle and yanked on the door, easily pulling open the half meter wide metal door with her vampire strength. There was no power to the computer panel or the door but it slide easily enough on the greased hinges. Martin heard the customary sound of air being released as the door opened and then Julie led them inside.

The stairwell was circular in design and the corridor well lit so they descended quickly to another door where Kenny and Pablo waited. Julie looked at them.

“Where’s Danny?” She asked.

“Still in the room with Anuk and Kesyla. The three Tasmor women are with them now.” Kenny answered. “We had to get out Jules.”

Julie nodded her understanding and looked at Pablo. “Open it.” She said.

Kenny pulled on a handle and the sound of hissing air hit them again and then he pulled on the equally thick door and it opened without pause.

“Skipper it’s...” Kenny began but Martin pushed past him into the corridor beyond the door Nalmos on his heels.

Kenny looked at Julie when she moved to follow. “*Nubou Jules*... he’s going to want blood in a big way!” He hissed the words softly.

Julie nodded and reached up to squeeze his arm. “Keep everyone else out Kenny.” She said. “We need to try and keep this under wraps for as long as possible. When Anja finds this she is going to blow a casket big time.”

Martin didn’t know what to expect when he moved through the door, but he was prepared for the worst. At least he thought so.

Even with the olfactory blockers in the smell was rancid and he had to fight down the urge to vomit. It smelled of death in the corridor. Rancid, putrid death. The smell of rotting flesh was very nearly overwhelming and had he not had the olfactory blockers in, Martin had no doubts he would have been heaving his breakfast before moving three meters into the tunnel. It was dimly lit compared to the stairwell that they had come down, but the rotting bodies of men, women and even some children were easily seen sprawled upon the floor in grotesque positions of death. The bodies were stacked sometimes three and four high along the walls, many of them missing body parts. The moment Danny and the others had broken the seal into this bunker, the air had caused the rotting flesh on many of the bodies to tear off the skeletal remains and scatter throughout the corridor.

“*Son vada carians!*” Nalmos muttered softly, his voice carrying in the silent corridor of death.

Martin stopped counting after he reached sixty bodies as he moved gingerly down the corridor being careful not to step on any of the remains. Dried blood seemed to coat the steel walls of the corridor, some of it looking as if it had been sprayed on to the surface. The tunnel grew brighter as they got closer to the first intersection, serving only to allow them to see some of the hideous wounds on many of the bodies. Images of Alba Tau flashed through his brain quickly and Martin had to shake his head to clear his mind, while keeping his Etheric shields clamped down tightly so as not to alert his wives and mates of the racing of his heart and the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“*Fervon?*” Danny’s voice reached him and Martin turned to see Danny move out of the well lit room and lean back against the wall trying to keep his breathing under control.

Martin moved directly up to him and grasped his arms.

“Dan?” He gasped.

Dan shook his head quickly. “It’s... it’s a nightmare in there Marty.” He gasped. “It’s like... it’s like Alba Tau all over again but...”

“What?” Martin snarled.

Danny motioned with his head into the room behind him. Martin followed that motion with his eyes, his heart now racing. He hadn’t seen Danny so disturbed by anything since that long night and if it did that to his brother than it had to be bad. Martin opened his mouth slightly and took a short breath before releasing Danny’s arms and stepping into the room without waiting.

And directly into a horrific nightmare just as his brother had said.

The large room was extremely well lit with bright white lights in the ceiling like in a surgical room. The ceiling however, that was the only thing not covered in blood. Rotting bodies occupied dozens of tables within the room, most of them not completely there. Huge meat hook like objects hung from the ceiling in one corner and the corpses of half a dozen people were stabbed through their chests and dangling from these insidious hooks. None of those bodies had arms or legs and the decay was so bad it was almost impossible to determine if they were Lycavorian. The floor was awash in dried blood in every corner. There was almost no place you could step without putting your feet down and leaving an imprint in the sometimes inch deep spots of dark blood ash. Almost all of the bodies were without clothes of any kind and all of them bore the telltale signs of unimaginable torture. Martin moved slowly, his eyes changing to the yellow gold of the wolf within him as his anger built. He kept it tightly walled off so as not to have Aricia, Anja or For'mya detect his heightened emotions but he would not be able to keep it from Helen. She was within the camp with Tobia going over information with Avi and Elder Valael and he quickly pulsed her within the Etheric realm to let her know he was fine but not to reveal what his emotions were. Helen pulsed him back knowing that whatever had caused him to react in such a way was not good and that he would let her know.

Martin sensed Danny behind him now as he let his eyes sweep across the interior of the large room. Most of the bodies he saw he knew were Lycavorian but he also detected at least a dozen Pralor bodies as well as five or six Tasmor. It was like walking through hell as he made for the room where he saw Anuk and Kesyla through the clear glass. He kept his eyes focused, not wanting to look at the death that surrounded him and finally he stepped through the door as it slid aside, Danny right behind him. He saw Namiri and Emylea sitting on the ground holding each other’s hands, their expressions one of horror and disbelief. As with all Tasmor it appeared both of them were deeply tanned, but now Martin could see that their skin had become slightly whiter in color because of the dreadful horror they had just walked through. The Tasmor Drenia was standing beside Anuk and Kesyla as they sat at the computer consoles, but the color of her skin was no different.

Danny waited for the door to close and seal behind him and then he nudged Martin to remove the olfactory blockers he wore. Martin did so immediately, he always hated wearing these things, and while he could just barely detect the faint scent of death in the room, the air was clear for the most part. This surprised him and Danny pointed to the ceiling.

“Air cycling ducts are still functioning.” He spoke as he took deep breaths. “This entire facility is being powered by a fusion reactor further down. Tony took Nayeca, T'lolt, Kasdan and the rest of our team down there to secure it.”

Martin nodded as he moved up to where Anuk sat in the chair. He placed his hands on hers and Kesyla’s shoulders gently and squeezed. Anuk glanced up at him and nodded while lifting her hand to cover his knuckles. “We’re ok.” She spoke softly.

Martin looked at Kesyla who finally turned her head to meet his gaze. “Kesyla?”

Kesyla nodded her head now as well. “I will be... I will be fine.” She stated.

Martin looked at Drenia. “Captain?”

Drenia was a different sort of Tasmor female. She was younger than most of the senior officers within the Tasmor military but had earned her position by being daring and fearless when fighting. Drenia was considered extremely well trained and intelligent by all who knew her and since, like Namiri and Emylea, she dealt with far more of their males within the Fleet, she was not as unaccustomed as Saydia and the others in speaking with them more openly.

Drenia took a deep breath and nodded her head. “I will be... I am maintaining.” She stated.

“How many of your people are...” Martin began to ask.

“Seven that I could recognize by what... by what remained of them.” Drenia answered as she swallowed hard.

“Stay strong.” Martin told her sensing that she would not care if he touched her. He took her arm gently and squeezed softly and Drenia nodded her head in thanks.

Martin turned to where Namiri and Emylea sat and moved to squat in front of them. “Namiri, Emylea...?”

Namiri looked at him as she and Emylea seemed to be using a breathing technique to keep from losing their breakfast. She saw the set of his jaw, and the firmness of focus in his eyes and was surprised. “You have... you have seen horrors like this before?” She gasped as Emylea looked at him now.

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Breathe in through your mouth and out through your nose evenly. It will help you to keep the contents of your stomachs inside.”

Drenia watched with keen eyes as he reached out to them with his hands and placed them on their cheeks. She did not know what occurred, but for a fleeting instant she thought she saw a soft glow of light filter from his fingers to touch their skin. This almost seemed to help Namiri and Emylea calm themselves even further. This physical action would never have been accepted within Tasmor society as a whole, but Drenia did nothing. Any Tasmor male who touched the daughters of the Sovereign Regent in such a way would have been very harshly punished and possibly even physically disciplined. Drenia however, was not one to question fate or destiny. She believed deeply in faith and these men and women had come to them for a reason. That reason Drenia believed, was to insure the continued existence of her people as well as their christening into a world among the stars that they had only dreamed of before. The Tasmor had an opportunity right now to step into a much bigger world and Drenia, the Sovereign Regent and even Perlyea were going to play huge roles in that future. Part of that meant that they would have to change somewhat to embrace new ideas and attitudes and Drenia was very comfortable with that.

Drenia watched as Emylea and then Namiri covered his hands with their own for a brief moment and then they both nodded. Martin rose back to his feet and turned slowly.

“Talk to me Anuk. Kesyla.” He said softly as he looked at them. He saw Kesyla reached across and point to something on Anuk’s screen and she nodded.

Martin turned as the doors opened once more and Julie led Nalmos into the room. He was deathly white and held tightly to her arm as he bent over and tried to catch his breath. Julie sealed the doors once more and turned to look at Martin.

“Anja, Aricia and For'mya took Saydia Daret and the others up to the *ARC ROYAL* about an hour ago.” She said. “T'lolt reports that there are quarters and other labs on the lower levels but nothing like this. They have secured the power source and Kasdan says it is a mini Pralor Quantum fusion core. It is similar to the one that was powering their station on Onterom but not as powerful.”

“There is no way the Pralors did this!” Martin hissed.

“No, we did not.” Kesyla stated from her chair. “But Julie is correct that this is a Pralor facility.”

Martin turned to look at her. “Speak to me Kesyla.”

“This is a Pralor Research Outpost.” Kesyla told him quickly. “My father outlawed their use shortly after we arrived on Artaaya but this facility has been here for far longer. If the timestamp in the data archives is accurate, it was built shortly after the Lycavorians on this planet discovered the Industrial Age. It was built to monitor their progress as a species.”

“So this place has been here from before the war with the Scourge?” Danny asked.

Kesyla nodded her head. “It would appear so, yes.”

“Kesyla please tell me that the Pralors had no involvement in this.” Martin spoke.

“This was not done by Pralors.” Kesyla said. “The computer logs all life signs entering and exiting the facility Martin. The last Pralor bioscan to be registered entering this facility was over nine hundred and seventy years. Nine hundred and seventy-nine to be exact.”

“That’s about the time Delnash said they stopped monitoring the planet isn’t it?” Danny asked looking at Martin.

“Something like that yeah.”

“Kesyla you said this facility was here before the Second Scourge War.” Danny spoke now.

Kesyra nodded her head. "Yes... but someone among my people, those that escaped the Scourge had knowledge that it was here, for it was being used to monitor our people on Ventori and in this system."

"Lorendo." Martin said softly noting how easily Kesyra stated 'our people'. She had fully accepted all there was about being turned and it came out in her actions now.

Kesyra looked at him and nodded her head again. "That would be my guess, yes." She told him. "

"From the decay of some of the bodies, what happened here was done in the last four to five years." Anuk spoke turning to look at them.

"There are Pralor bodies out there." Martin said. "And Tasmor."

Anuk nodded. "And they were dead when they were brought in here or the computer would have registered their bioscan." She answered him.

"Baby, it looks like they were cut up into pieces for a reason." Danny spoke now.

Anuk nodded her head. "They were." She said softly. She turned to the computer once more and touched the control console. The monitor changed to a video image showing several individuals in silver suits using crude objects to carve several bodies into sections. "This is the last entry in the logs that I could find. The rest are encrypted but this one wasn't. I don't know why."

There was only perhaps twenty seconds of video of the individuals severing the bodies and then all of their heads turned suddenly at something outside the video's cone of recording and it stopped abruptly.

"What the hell?" Martin gasped.

"It appears as if this level was used as some sort of processing center." Kesyra spoke softly.

"Processing center?" Drenia gasped. "For what? There are Tasmor bodies out there! We knew nothing of this planet before three years ago when we began helping the survivors!"

"Oh man," Danny said. "When Red sees this she is going to go *malda*."

"No bet here." Julie echoed his sentiments.

Martin looked at Nalmos. "Nalmos?"

The older Lycavorian met Martin's eyes, his face still pale and drawn at what he had seen. "I have... this is beyond depraved."

"No Lycavorians bioscans are in the computer Marty." Anuk spoke once more. "They didn't know this was here."

"Whatever happened here," Julie spoke. "The cave in of the entire wall of this building wasn't done during any attack. It looks controlled Skipper. Like someone knew this facility was here, where it was, and they brought the building down just enough to reveal the entrance and keep it reasonably well hidden in the rubble. If T'lolt had been five meters more to the east he would have missed it completely."

"The Kintaur?" Martin asked looking at Drenia.

Drenia shook her head as Namiri and Emylea got to their feet and moved up beside her. "I find that impossible to believe. Their technology is two hundred years behind what we have developed. It is one of the reasons they hate us so. This equipment is all, it is Pralor equipment. We have seen and been around more of it because of our interaction with them, but even Perlyea would not know how to use this equipment. The Pralors never associated with the Kintaur for any reason."

"These creatures King Martin?" Emylea asked now. "These Svorag you call them. Could they have done this?"

"Oh man... that is not a thought I want to have right now." Martin said.

"What other explanation is there?" Namiri spoke now. "There are no other species within this quadrant of space with the knowledge to use Pralor equipment. Half the species can barely obtain orbit let alone travel to different sectors."

Martin was silent for a moment and then moved to the console Anuk sat at. He touched the panel.

"Master Chief?"

"Go Skipper."

"Leave two men at the power core and then take Kasdan and the others to sweep the rest of the levels." Martin told him.

"I should stay here with the core Martin." Kasdan's voice echoed over the internal COM speakers. "I would be better suited to track their movements and assist them as they sweep the remainder of the station. I have already gotten three of the computer consoles working."

“Agreed Skipper.” Tony chimed in.

“Do it.” Martin spoke. “And find some way to vent the air in this place. Touch nothing else but I will not have Anja or the Sovereign Regent breathing this stink of death.”

“I will direct them to the ventilation controls Martin.” Kasdan spoke. “We will need roughly two hours to vent the entire facility if what I have seen is accurate.”

Martin nodded his head. “Good enough. I’ll wait to have Anja and the others come down here. She’ll know what the hell they were doing here. And who was doing it.”

“Moving now Boss.” Tony spoke.

Martin looked at Anuk. “You and Kesyla keep at it. Download and decrypt whatever you can. Establish a link with Avi and he can help.” Martin put his hand on Kesyla’s shoulder. “And find out if there are any more of these facilities on Ventori Kesyla.”

Kesyla Simpson detected the inflection of his voice easily enough and she nodded her head. “I already know the answer to that.” She spoke softly. “This facility is linked with the others.”

“How many and where?” Martin asked.

“Four others across the planet. Since Jorlari was the capital there is another on the far side of this city.” Kesyla answered.

Martin looked at Danny. “Prep a team. We’re going to check it out.” He said.

Drenia looked at Martin. “I wish to remain here.” She stated. “We have... Tasmor have Death Rites that...”

Martin reached out and took her arm once more. “I’ll send for more people to do the same. Wait for them.”

“We will go with King Martin.” Namiri said. “In case there are other Tasmor at these other facilities.”

“Yes.” Emylea agreed.

Drenia nodded her head. “Very well.”

“Kesyla... contact Manda and give her the locations of the other sites across the planet.” He said. “I want full teams moving within the hour. Drenia... can you contact your ship and have your people assigned to each team?”

Drenia blinked quickly stunned that he would suggest this so soon after what had occurred between their peoples. “I... you wish to work together?”

Martin nodded his head. “This affects both our peoples.” He said softly. “I’m not going to leave you out of it.”

Drenia nodded quickly. “I will see to it.” She said.

Martin looked around the control room and shook his head. “Man I ain’t going to like telling Anja this.” He said softly. “Whoever did this... she’s going to want their heads on a *nubous* platter.”

“No bet here Skipper.” Julie hissed in agreement.

“Let’s move people.” Martin spoke.

BETA QUADRANT AUSTROVA SBR MAIN CHAMBERS

The Anteroom was large and comfortable and easily able to fit all of them as they lounged around waiting for Coren to come retrieve them. Two monitors on either side of the room were focused into the huge Regent Chamber and the activity had been boisterous to say the least. Ardan and his supporters had been very active and passionate so far making their case about how the Lycavorians should not be trusted and how they had been lied to over the course of the years in what advances they have made, among other things, and this proved that they could not be trusted in the future.

So far Coren and Alrerin had not made their move, remaining silent for the most part unless another Regent asked a question. Andro could also see Asay sitting patiently in her seat waiting for the moment to pounce. Coren and Alrerin had decided she would present their case before the Board of Regents because of her

background in Vanari law and her personal stake in what was going on. In the few hours he had seen and spoken to the woman Andro decided three things about her. Asay Va Eldost was madly in love with Nellian and made no bones about that. She was incensed at what Ardan and other Vanari had been doing to their own people for so many centuries. And Asay Va Eldost was fearless.

A full squad of Cadre Commandos that were loyal to Ardan lined the corridor outside the anteroom they were in to insure that they did not leave. Ardan was the Chief Regent of the Chamber and his security was everywhere. It was not something that they could circumvent now if they wanted to accomplish their task, and Ardan was not stupid enough to try and attack them in their own governmental building. At least that is what Coren and Alrerin said. Andro believed them but took precautions of his own for he was not willing to trust the man and his deviousness. Armen had a sensor lock on each of them from *SPARTA'S WRATH* and would teleport them off the planet the moment things began to go bad.

Eliani and Jomann sat on a small couch near the door, Brendi between them and soaking up the love that poured from them for her. Her sisters and parents had found happiness and a new life within the Lycavorian Union and Brendi had now embraced fully the feelings for Eliani and Jomann that had been building over the last weeks and months. Dorian sat with Denali and Arduri on another couch watching the proceedings, while Deion and Mari shared a large chair and were speaking in soft whispers with Ne'Veha, Carisia, Lu'ria, Sehri and Caliria. Senators Ya'sur, Pyath and Zarnia were conferring in soft whispers on another couch.

Andro turned his head back to the monitor as he felt Dutkne come up beside him with Sadi. She didn't hesitate and stepped up beside him, pressing her lush body to his right side intimately and wrapping her arms around his waist. She wore the Union's standard Flight Suit now, which she had obviously tailored to meet her own tastes. It hugged her perfectly formed ass and legs and conformed to her full breasts and muscular upper body like a second skin. Ne'Veha wore a similarly tailored uniform while Carisia, Lu'ria, Sehri and Caliria wore the modified light armored version of the new Mark VI Armorpoly.

"Please don't tell me you find this interesting." Dutkne said with a small grin. He wore the same standard Mark VI Armorpoly as Androcles with his ever present *Ishon* secured on his right leg and the KM12A on his left.

Sadi chuckled as Andro rolled his eyes in disgust. "*Carians joa,*" He hissed. "It makes my head hurt just watching them."

Dutkne nodded his head in agreement. "It is amazing that they have gotten this far and become this advanced given all the squabbling they do in there."

"It works for them." Sadi said as Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and ear and caused blissful lances of delight to cascade through her.

He turned back to the monitor. "I am watching the expressions on their faces. The ones I can see anyway." Andro explained.

Sadi squeezed her arms tighter around his waist. "What do you see *Saradasaar?*"

Andro shook his head slowly. "Confusion. Disbelief. Shock." He answered her. "I also see questions in many of their eyes."

"Perhaps they are questioning how Ardan knows so much of this." Sadi spoke.

Andro nodded his head in agreement. "That would be my first guess yes." He said. "That works in our favor actually. Though how much support he is getting from what remains of the OSG here on Austrova is unclear."

"You think they kept agents here?" Sadi asked him. "They have to know that the Vanari will begin to question the presence of every Eridiani now."

Andro nodded his head. "Yes. I can't believe all of the Eridiani are going along with what their government and the OSG is doing however. There are undoubtedly some who remain and do not believe in what has been going on. I have to believe that."

"I never thought to ask Dutkne." Sadi continued. "How large are the Eridiani as far as a government and people?"

Dutkne shrugged his broad shoulders. "Their homeworld is Edanon. They have colonized perhaps a dozen worlds and last estimates put their population at roughly six trillion across those worlds. Ompar and Nasmon are their largest colonies. They have grown quite a bit in the last millennia because of forced birth rates."

“Forced?” Sadi asked.

Dutkne nodded his head. “Woman above the age of seventeen are married off quickly by their families. They are required by law to have a child within the first year of the marriage.”

“And if they don’t?” Sadi asked somewhat taken aback by this knowledge.

Dutkne shook his head. “I do not know what the exact punishment is, I have never asked, but if what I have heard is any indication, the penalty is not pleasant.” He replied. “The only exceptions are women who end up not being able to have children. The Eridiani have very strict population laws. You must have two children if you have been married for at least five years. If you have been married for ten years you must have four or more children. It’s all a numbers game with them.”

“Love does not factor into this?” Sadi asked.

Dutkne shook his head. “Not to my understanding of their laws. There have been rumors of those who rebelled against these laws, they disappeared, and we have never been able to discover what happened to them.”

“They do not want a repeat of what took place when my adopted Uncle Ben’s family left the fold.” Andro spoke softly.

Dutkne nodded his head. As Praetorian and Mage, there was very little they did not know about each other for they had shared their histories with each other almost without second thought. “Agreed.” Dutkne said. “That incident, what we know of it anyway, that appears to have cut their population out here very nearly in half.”

“I know father has talked to Uncle Ben and Aunt Tina about it, but they do not remember much of it. Their parents and other elders did not speak of it very often once they returned to Earth.” Andro said. “Most of those who returned to Earth have since passed on and among those Eridiani that remain, this knowledge is spotty at best.”

“Could they be involved in this in any way Andro?” Dutkne asked.

Andro shook his head. “Father and Armetus do not believe so.” He replied. “Most of the Eridiani that survive on Earth serve within the military or government. After the attack by the OSG on Cranae Island they very discretely began to come forward to the *Durcunusaan* or Armetus’ people to insure that they were not implicated.”

“Are we sure all of them came forward my love?” Sadi asked now. “The OSG seems to have quite the intelligence apparatus and they know far more about us than we do about them.”

“Armetus has taken steps to insure this.” Andro told her. “I don’t know what they are, but if there are any who are still loyal to those out here or the OSG he will eventually find them.”

“I have spoken with General Tarnei.” Dutkne said softly moving the conversation away from what they could not control. “Most of the extracting units are on their return legs now. Many should be returning to their ships within the hour.”

“Casualties?” Andro asked looking at him.

“Six dead.” Dutkne answered somberly. “Twenty-four wounded, three of whom are not expected to make it according to the Hadarian Medical Officer. She is doing all she can, but their injuries were too severe. They are all from the same Assault Force. The OSG facility had apparently been improved from the last intelligence reports that we received. They had set up an ambush. The Ground Commander believes they got a message somehow and knew they were coming. The Vanari Commandos in support acted with incredible bravery and were able to pull our people back and finish the mission. Most of the wounded refused to be evacuated and secured the extraction zone while our remaining forces and the Vanari finished off the OSG.”

“How many have we saved Dutkne?” Andro asked softly.

“At last count... Tarnei says over thirty-two thousand.” Dutkne answered him, “More than twice the number that even our best estimates suggested.”

Andro nodded his head and slipped his arm tighter around Sadi’s waist, filling his lungs with her sugar plume and spice scent and allowing it to calm him. “Then they died gallantly.” He spoke. “And they will not be forgotten.”

“*Magar.*” Sadi whispered the word. (Never)

They heard soft laughter and turned to see Arduri and Caliria playfully pushing at each other, their eyes changed and their fangs extended. Denali was smiling as he moved up beside Dutkne. “They are debating who

will have the largest fangs.” He told them. “I tried to explain to them since we are brothers; the virus within us is identical and it won’t matter. They weren’t buying it. *Inamarno* started to go all medical on us.”

Andro and Sadi smiled at this. Caliria had certainly blossomed since Andro had bitten her on their first night back together. And she absolutely relished that her sisters were so close to her and were experiencing the same things as she was. They had only spoken with Naesta via secure COMs since she was still on Earth, but they had shared everything as sisters should.

The door to the lounge area opened suddenly and they turned as Coren walked into the room. They could see the half dozen Vanari Cadre Commandos behind him in the corridor, all of them armed but their weapons not at the ready.

“We are ready Androcles.” Coren spoke as he came up to them. “They are asking that you be brought forth as leader of the Lycavorians so that they can hear what you will present. Asay will presenting all of the information we have thus far obtained. She is eager to bring Ardan down.”

Caliria and the others had come up off the floor upon seeing him enter and she and Arduri moved to their father’s side. “What is your sense Papa?” Arduri asked.

Coren nodded his head to her. “They are shocked and confused.” He told them. “Even many of those who we know support Ardan are stunned at what Ardan is trying to convince them has been taking place. He is attempting to discredit everything about the Protectorate and the Union that he can through his cronies. They will be even more stunned when Asay begins to reveal what we have discovered and how it implicates Ardan.”

“Will they believe it sir?” Dutkne asked now. “Or will it become nothing more than a stalemate between sides.”

Coren shook his head. “That I don’t know. And neither does Alrerin.” He spoke. “We are planning for this however. Asay and I will be returning to Amanuce once we are done here, and Rinel has already arranged for more security from his Lycanari to protect Alrerin. He refuses to leave and with his daughter in the position she is now with the Union, Rinel said he had to beat back the volunteers to protect him.”

Andro nodded his head. “Good.” He said. “After today any attempt against Alrerin will expose Ardan for what he truly is.”

Coren nodded his own head in agreement. “And he won’t be able to stop what comes after that.”

“Putting the First Regent in that position is risky father.” Caliria spoke.

Coren nodded his head. “I know and so does Alrerin. But he knows it is the only way to truly insure we are free of the OSG forever.” He looked around and saw everyone waiting for his word and he turned back to Androcles. “You did not bring everyone?”

“The fewer of us here if something goes terribly wrong the better it will be.” Andro told him. “Those of us here now, we are family, and we will know what the other will do in nearly any given circumstance. It is better this way.”

“Androcles...?” Coren began.

“Do not worry Coren, Ya’sur, Pyath and Zarnia are going to handle most of the talking. I will keep my mouth shut unless it is otherwise needed.” Andro answered him with a smile. Coren grinned in response. “If things regrettably become violent and they try to detain us we will not kill any Vanari. I cannot promise that some will not be hurt if they try to impede us from leaving however.”

Coren nodded his head. “Good enough.” He took a deep breath and looked at all of them. “Then shall we get this started?”

VANARI BOARD OF REGENTS CHAMBERS

Andro let his azure colored eyes sweep the men and women sitting all around them in the massive hall. Their chairs rose up at an angle from where he stood, some reaching as high back as thirty rows back. They stood on the presentation platform, the Vanari Regents making up a massive U shape around them in their chairs. It was similar to the Spartan Senate chambers on Earth but considerably larger. Asay Va Eldost was currently speaking to the entire chamber and the expressions on some of the faces present was priceless. To hear

that their own people were being accused of such actions was almost too much to believe. Ya'sur stood beside Androcles and he leaned closer to him now as the others stood behind them also gazing around the chamber.

[Are you sure you do not wish to speak Milord?] He asked within the confines of the shielded Etheric connection.

Andro nodded his head as he met his eyes. *[I'm no politician Ya'sur. You know that.]* He said.

[You are more accomplished than you give yourself credit for.] Ya'sur told him.

Andro smiled. *[Carrians I hope not.]* He stated as Ya'sur grinned. *[What is the consensus among you and the others?]*

Ya'sur looked around the chamber quickly and then back to Androcles. *[Regrettably, we do not think they will alter their views of us.]* He answered. *[At least not initially. The perverse mentality that we are somehow beneath them has fermented for too long and allowed to expand into the fabric of their society. While many Vanari that we have had contact with do not have this view, quite the opposite in fact, especially since Denali and the others arrived, those that are in power do unfortunately.]*

[And they are who make the rules.] Andro said.

Ya'sur nodded his head. *[Yes, they do.]* He looked at Andro. *[Was this the wisest course of action now Milord?]*

Andro looked at him. *[My father and mothers made this decision Ya'sur. You know how they are when it comes to situations like this.]*

Ya'sur nodded his head once more. *[Indeed I do.]*

[They were very pointed about what they wanted. If the Vanari do not wish to work with us as equals, then we will not work with them at all. Period. My mother Anja and my father used quite a few colorful metaphors that I will not repeat at this time. My medwaw For'mya simply shook her head in disgust.] Andro told him.

Ya'sur nodded as he chuckled softly. *[Yes, that would probably be good. I have heard your father and all of your mothers at different times. They do not mince words.]*

[No, they do not.] Andro agreed.

The internal speakers within the chamber cackled loudly for a second ending their conversation and interrupting Asay as a Vanari stood up from his chair. According to the seat he occupied, he was a member of the normal Vanari Board of Regents as the SBR members sat in different colored chairs in a section all their own, that was elevated slightly higher than the others.

“Forgive me Senior Regent Va Eldost, but this is all very hard to believe.” The man spoke now. “This is... what you are saying is completely the opposite of what Senior Regent Ardan has presented to us this day. Are you suggesting that... are you suggesting that Regent Ardan is lying to us?”

Asay looked at the man as Ya'sur leaned close to Andro once more. *[This is one of the lower Regents that Coren reports is working with Ardan.]* He said.

“I am not suggesting anything.” Asay spoke firmly. “I have presented facts which prove that is the case! Facts that demonstrate Senior Regent Ardan has been working with the OSG for decades at least. Working with them in the kidnapping and selling of our own people into slavery! And he has made a tidy profit in doing so!”

This brought a rush of murmurs from the gathered Regents as they turned to each other and were whispering back and forth.

“You have presented nothing but hearsay and false accusations!” Galar erupted now from his seat as he came to his feet. “You have no proof of anything you have just spouted! None!”

“No proof?” Asay demanded. She motioned with her hand to where Caliria stood beside Carisia and Lu'ria. “The proof stands before you Regent Galar! Caliria Leonidas, formerly Caliria Re Mydala! She herself was subjected to the chemical slavery that the OSG inflicts upon our females so that they can harvest our Alkay! She is free of it as she stands before you now. She is her own self once more! This is because of the counter agent that the Lycavorians from the Union developed! All the young Vanari who were prisoners with her are now free of the OSG chemical! Every one of them!”

“Where are they then?” Galar demanded. “Why have none presented themselves before us? And why have our own doctors and scientists not been able to make this so called counter agent?”

“There is a simple reason for that.” Asay spoke firmly. “They do not trust their own rulers!”

“That is preposterous!” Galar shouted.

“Is it?” Asay continued. “Yssyla Vol Dumor is right now on the Lycavorian Union ship the *SCIMITAR* in orbit. Her father and mother and her seven brothers and sisters have been with her since she arrived. She is one of those captured and broken by the OSG drug with Caliria Leonidas. She returned here of her own accord to prove that the counter agent developed by Caliria and later refined by the Hadarian Queen Anja Leonidas, does indeed work.”

“Then why will she not come before us?” Galar demanded once more.

“You interviewed her yourself Regent Galar.” Asay said in reply. “On that very ship. She told you and I and the others with us that she would not return to Austrova because she feared for her life. She feared being captured again and taken by the OSG since so many of those in this room are involved in this despicable practice of selling our own people to the OSG!”

“Now you accuse others as well?” Galar barked.

“I will accuse all those who have been proven to be participating in this vile act with the OSG!” Asay barked loudly. “Our enemy! An organization that has taken our females and males and broken them for profit! Hundreds of them! Thousands of them through the decades and centuries before this day! An organization of criminals that we have allowed to dictate to us what we will do!”

“This is absurd!” Eyon Ahn Vernalo spat now as he too came to his feet. “Caliria Re Mydala is the criminal! It is she who broke our own laws when she began trying to make this so called cure! Her sisters and brother are criminals as well for moving well beyond the authorized inclusion areas of Vanari space! Her own mother has allowed herself to become tainted by one of these... these Lycavorian beasts and he has taken her as his wife! She refused to return here and face punishment for her actions! We should be addressing these crimes and not insinuating that others are guilty of something you cannot prove!”

“You yourself have become tainted by these beasts!” Galar shouted now. “Or do you deny that you have taken one of these animals into your bed!”

Asay was prepared for this and she smiled proudly. “I will not deny that!” She stated firmly. “I embrace that! I have discovered a man who treasures me above all else! A man who treats me not as some form of a commodity but as a temple to be worshiped at!”

Andro turned his head and looked back to where Nellian was standing. The tall, ebony skinned *Durcunusaan* Captain shrugged his broad shoulders with a smile. [*She does taste and smell divine Milord. Even more now since I have turned her.*] He stated. [*We will have strong and beautiful children together.*]

Andro smiled and couldn't help but shake his head. [*Bravo Nellian. Bravo!*]

“You do not repudiate this?” Galar gasped in shock.

“Repudiate it?” Asay barked back at him. “By the Prophets, why would I deny something that I have found I cannot live without? I am proudly his wife and mate now! And we will have many beautiful children!”

Andro saw Nellian's face beaming with pride at her confident statement and he smiled himself as that pride filled him as well.

“You openly admit to violating our laws as well!” Ardan now spoke for the first time.

Asay looked at him from her spot in front of the Lycavorians behind her. “Do not dare to stand there and accuse me of violating Vanari laws Ardan Vu Lamurrion! I have studied and practiced Vanari law for far longer than you! You, who have been selling our people into forced slavery for decades, if not longer, and building your wealth because of that!”

Ardan rose to his feet now in anger. “You will be silent!” He screamed.

“I will not be silent!” Asay shouted back at him. “Not any longer! Not after what I have discovered you have allowed to take place for so many years!”

“You have no proof!” Ardan barked.

“I have all the proof I need!” Asay snapped. “And you cannot deny it any longer!”

“The word of these Lycavorian animals?” Ardan hissed at her vehemently. “These supposed communications between myself and the OSG? This is your proof? Where is Kinryn Aal Samaur? Let her come before us now and accuse me of this!”

Asay smiled calmly now and shook her head. “What she provided to me is more than enough! She is far out of your reach now Ardan.” She replied. “And far from the clutches of your OSG comrades.”

“Where is she?” Ardan screamed.

“You stand there demanding all of this Ardan Vu Lamurrion, but not once have you denied what I am accusing you of taking part in. Not one time have you repudiated what I have been saying?” Asay suddenly spoke. “Why is that?”

Ardan appeared flustered for a moment and Alrerin Sha Harael smiled from where he sat in his chair. Asay had just provided the first crack to the exterior shell that Ardan Vu Lamurrion had placed around himself all of these years in order to protect himself. Alrerin felt it now. He felt that the future was changing even as he sat in this chamber.

“Everything I have done has been for the benefit of the Vanari people!” Ardan screamed.

Asay met his gaze from across the distance between them. “You mean for your benefit.” She stated evenly. “For I am sure I can produce hundreds, if not thousands of Vanari fathers and mother who would dispute that claim fervidly!”

“You dare question me!” Ardan roared now.

“Oh yes, I dare!” Asay shouted right back at him undaunted. “You and so many who are assisting you have been blaming another species for centuries! Blaming them alone for crimes you have perpetrated! You blame others while you increase your standing and wealth! You lie to our people! Devra Re Mydala and her children may have broken our laws, but she was acting as a mother who loves her children! She was working to save her child while it was you who has been selling our children for centuries!” Asay blinked quickly. “And it was you who gave the order to have Caliria Re Mydala abducted in the first place! We have this knowledge Ardan! It was contained in one of the many OSG computers on the ship that was seized by Prince Androcles Leonidas when he freed his *Inamarno*! Do not blither and blather! Deny this all you like but we have the proof!”

Ardan’s eyes were wide in disbelief. “You lie!” He stammered loudly.

“I don’t need to lie in order to prove that you are a cancer among our people!” Asay spat at him. “And things need to change! Things will change!”

“Enough!” The deep voice bellowed and all heads turned to where Alrerin rose from his chair.

Ardan glared at him. “First Regent you allow this to happen in this very chamber!” He snarled. “You sit there and do nothing when you have been tainted by these beasts yourself!”

Alrerin heard the gasps from dozens of men and women near him and he met Ardan’s eyes unflinching and smiled. “If you have something to say Regent Ardan...” Alrerin spoke. He waved his hands outward in a circular motion. “Please, by all means enlighten those of us in this chamber!”

“Your own daughter is married to one of these animals!” Ardan blurted out in anger. “She has given him children! She has corrupted the Vanari bloodline with her actions! For decades you have sat there and agreed with everything we have done! Not once have you disagreed with how we conducted ourselves with the Lycavorians. And now we discover this!”

Alrerin nodded his head. “All true.” He stated confidently. “The difference however, the difference is that I was protecting my family Ardan.” He plugged a data pad in to the arm of his chair and touched several buttons. “I have just uploaded to the Regent’s Database every fact surrounding my daughter’s abduction by the OSG, as well as her subsequent marriage to Riordian. I have detailed every trip to the former Protectorate’s homeworld that my wife and I took in order to see our daughter and our grandchildren.” This information garnered even more gasps as men and women began to drop their eyes to the small computers on their chairs. “I have six grandchildren, all of them healthy and fit, and all of them Lycanari.” Alrerin smiled as he saw the expressions of the faces closest to him. “That is the name they use for themselves. Half Lycavorian and half Vanari. Something that our own doctors and scientists have said for centuries would be impossible. I stand before you now and tell you it is not only possible, it is a reality! Nearly half a million strong their numbers are now and living wonderful lives within the former Protectorate and now the Union. Men and women who chose not to return to their own people for it was our people that allowed them to be taken!” Alrerin let his eyes sweep across the gathered Vanari Regents. “Yes, I have lied to you and to our people! I have lied to protect those I love! I have allowed this to continue for too long! Too many have lost their sons and daughters because I was selfish and remained silent! I will be silent no more!”

“This is outrageous!” Cruor barked out now as he came to his feet. “I call for a vote of no confidence in the First Regent!”

Alrerin saw many heads bob up and down in agreement and he smiled once more. He nodded his own head. "And a vote we will have Regent Cruor!" He spoke shocking Ardan and Cruor. "But not before all the lies have been laid bare here today! However, right now we have other matters to attend too!" Alrerin stepped away from his chair further and looked down at where Androcles stood calmly. "We are here today, at this moment, to decide what we will do given the intelligence provided to us not only by our own people but by the Lycavorians themselves!"

"How can we trust anything they have given to us?" Ardan screamed as he also moved further away from his chair, trying to refocus the attention of everyone off of himself. "They have admitted to taking part in the abduction of our people! They have admitted to working with the OSG!"

Alrerin looked directly to Ya'sur. "Senator Ya'sur... I understand it is you who will be speaking for the Union."

Ya'sur began to step forward with a nod but Androcles took his arm. Ya'sur turned to meet his eyes. "Milord?" He asked, his voice carrying over the internal COM speakers within the chamber.

"I will address this." Androcles said after taking a deep breath. "I act in the stead of my parents as King and Queens of the Union."

Ya'sur looked at him for a long moment and then smiled slightly. "As you wish Milord."

Andro stepped away from where Ya'sur stood beside him and glanced back to where Sadi and his wives and mates stood. Caliria held tightly to Sadi's hand with one hand, and Carisia the other. All of them stood tightly grouped together, as they had begun to do recently. He saw all of them smile and look at him with adoration and love in their eyes. Andro pulsed them all with a small portion of his aura and turned back to Alrerin.

"I will speak for the Lycavorian people in place of my father and mothers who are King and Queens of the Union." Andro said confidently.

"It was you who gave us the intelligence you gathered implicating your own people in these acts Androcles Leonidas." Alrerin spoke once more, giving the opening to Androcles that they had spoken of in private.

Andro nodded his head. "It was taken from several OSG operatives captured during the rescue attempt of Caliria and other Vanari females from a prominent slave trader within The Wilds in the Alpha Quadrant, yes." He answered. "The information obtained from them led us to a number of individuals of Lycavorian descent that were actively involved in the trafficking of slaves within Union territory. Not just Vanari slaves, but others as well."

"Where are these individuals?" Alrerin asked them. "Why were they not brought here to us for justice?"

"The Lycavorian Union does not tolerate slavery of any kind within its borders. This has been one of the cornerstones since our founding over three thousand years ago. It is a result of our time as slaves to the High Coven." Andro answered him. "The OSG members who were captured were subsequently interrogated and then promptly executed for their actions. The information they provided to us resulted in our government seizing twenty-three other men and women of Lycavorian birth who were charged with crimes that according to Lycavorian law resulted in execution. This was carried out within one week of their discovery."

"Were any of these men and women part of your government?" Alrerin asked.

Androcles shook his head quickly. "No sir." He replied. "They were men and women who chose to live outside our laws and it ultimately cost them their lives. They will not be missed." Andro's words caused many of the Vanari Regents to gasp and stare at him in horror with the callousness of his words.

"And how do we know that they were not killed in order to protect your government's involvement in this?" Cruor barked from his chair.

Androcles met his gaze. "I will not begin to relate to you the history of my people Regent Cruor Ahn Vernalo." He answered. "You obviously do not care and I don't have the patience. I can provide to this body all of the logs made during the interrogations but I will not stand here and attempt to defend my people from someone who has built his wealth and power off the backs and suffering of his own kind."

Cruor rose quickly to his feet. "You accuse me?" He screamed.

"As one of my beloved sisters is so fond of saying, if the shoe fits, wear it." Andro stated bluntly.

"You deny any involvement in the recent attacks on Coren Re Mydala and our own First Regent?" Ardan now snapped out the question.

“The Lycavorians involved in those attacks also targeted me and my family.” Andro answered. “They were assisted by the OSG, who are amazingly allowed free access to your planet and all of your colonies. They are supported and protected by a government that this Vanari governmental body has diplomatic and commercial ties to Regent Ardan. The relatively few Lycavorians involved in these attacks were members of the former Protectorate. Men and women who chose to ignore the former Protectorate’s own laws regarding slavery of any kind. They did not succeed in their task and they paid the price with their lives. The First Regent survived thanks in part to another of my sisters and several Lycanari as well as his own security force of Vanari Commandos. The Lycanari exist, they have existed for over a century, and several of them stand among you right now and you don’t even know it.” Andro let that sink in for a second and saw Rinel and Nyosa smiled proudly out of the corner of his eye. “Dutkne, the former Director General of the Protectorate as you all know, informed me of others within the borders of the former Protectorate who were also taking part in the slavery of Vanari men and women. They have since been dealt with in the same manner as those in the Alpha Quadrant.”

“We are expected to believe this?” Ardan exclaimed.

“I don’t particularly care if you believe it or not Ardan.” Androcles stated bluntly. “My Hadarian mother and Aunts took the work done by Caliria and were able to finish the portions of the counter agent to the OSG chemical that they have used to break Vanari females for so long. A work Caliria herself would have finished had she not been taken by the OSG. You have known this for months, you saw it work for yourself, yet you stand there now questioning the reality of this counter agent. You have kept this knowledge from many of your fellow Regents as well as the Vanari people as a whole. Why is that?”

“Our doctors and scientists were not able to confirm the validity of what you claim!” Ardan shouted. “I trust them far more than I trust a man who kills so wantonly and without provocation. Everyone here saw what you yourself did to that man in the Alpha Quadrant. It was broadcast on open frequencies by your own ships!”

“That man you are referring to was complicit in the kidnapping, enslavement and rape of my elven mother For'mya!” Andro growled loudly. “He got what he deserved according to Lycavorian law and you truly do not want to tread in those dark waters with me Regent Ardan Vu Lamurrion. And you also did not answer my question to you.”

“I do not answer to you boy!” Ardan roared.

Andro stared at him for a long moment across the distance and nodded his head. “No, you do not.” He finally spoke. “Nor do I answer to you, or the Vanari Board of Regents!”

“You are within Vanari space!” Ardan barked. “You are on our planet! You will adhere to our laws on all things!”

Andro shook his head. “No, I will not.” He stated. “Dutkne has provided to me every bit of information and every iota of intelligence that has been gathered from the first moment the Vanari encountered my people. I have read it all. You call my people savage, when it is the Vanari who began the war with my people so many years ago by trying to subvert initial talks using the Alkay secreted by your people. When this incident was discovered by my people, you destroyed a ship with over three hundred men and women on it to protect this secret. That is what began the war between the Vanari and the Protectorate. How many of your own people know that Regent Ardan, or will you try to deny history?”

“That has no bearing on what is taking place this day!” Ardan barked.

“Oh, but it has every bearing on what is happening today and what will happen in the future.” Androcles stated. “Even when the war was brought to an end by brave men and women on both sides, the Vanari Board of Regents looked upon my people as beneath them. You have known OSG agents walking the streets of Austrova even while my people are confined to their embassy. You have dismissed important intelligence and other information given to you by the former Protectorate through the years because your own people did not obtain it. This was Intelligence and information that could have saved Vanari lives, yet you chose to ignore it because it was given to you by a species you consider beneath you because we are different.” There was a flash of silvery white light and then hundreds of Vanari Regents gasped in fear and came to their feet as before them suddenly stood the massive, raven black wolf with rippling muscles and blazing azure colored eyes. Just as quickly there was another flash of silvery white light and Andro returned to his human form.

“Yes, we can change our forms.” Androcles continued quickly. “But if that is how the Vanari judge an individual, not by our actions and deeds, but by the fact we can shift our forms to that of a majestic animal, then

that it is not something I will subject my people too. That is not something my father and mothers would subject our people too.”

“Now you threaten us?” Ardan shouted.

Andro smiled sadly and shook his head. “As with so many men and women who do not know the difference between a threat and a statement of fact Regent Ardan, you only confirm my first impression of you when we met on my ship.” He answered him. “I have admitted to members of my species being involved in the kidnapping and enslavement of Vanari men and women. They were not members of my government, and they never have been. All those who were revealed to be involved in this insidious practice, both within the Alpha Quadrant and here in the Beta Quadrant, all of them have paid for that folly with their lives. That is our law.” Andro stepped forward a little.

“I have also provided to your people the intelligence that implicates you and many others from your own species, your own government, who are also involved with the OSG and helping them to enslave the Vanari. You chose to dismiss this fact even after Regent Asay has provided you with the facts and the proof of Regent Ardan’s guilt.” Androcles spoke. “If those of you in this chamber are so blind to these facts that you will do nothing, you do not have the right to sit here and lead your people in any way.”

“How dare you denounce us?” A female Regent barked out as she came to her feet.

“But you have the right to sit there and judge my people because you hold the misguided perception you are somehow better than us?” Andro spoke. “I think not.”

“Prince Androcles perhaps we...” Alrerin began when other Regents began to come to their feet in response to Androcles’ statement. This was the moment they had waited for and now he would seize it.

“No!” Andro barked loudly bringing the entire chamber to silence. “My brother Denali explained to you what would happen when I arrived here if things did not change. He was not joking Ardan.”

“You wouldn’t possibly dare to end relations with our people!” Ardan barked.

Andro met his eyes and smiled. “Then that makes you a fool.” He stated plainly.

“You cannot do that!” Cruor shouted now.

Andro lifted his hand to reveal the small portable holodisc COM unit that fit into his palm. He tapped it with his opposite finger and the holodisc activated revealing the face and upper body of an older Lycavorian.

“Commander Dajyn, have you been monitoring?” Andro asked.

The man nodded his head. “I have Milord.” He stated gruffly.

“How many ships in your flight Commander?” Andro asked.

“Nineteen Milord.” Dajyn answered instantly. “We are fully loaded with trade goods. From spices to computer parts. Sixty-seven billion converted to the Vanari Rynis currency.”

Andro nodded his head. “Commander, I hereby instruct you to turn your Trade Flight around and return to Amanuce. No delays Commander, simply turn around and return to Union space.”

The man blinked several times but nodded his head finally. “As you order my Prince.” He stated. “Our Vanari escort Milord?”

“Inform them of what you are doing and where the orders come from and then execute.” Andro told him. “They need not know more than that.”

“It will be done sire.” Dajyn spoke.

“Thank you.” Andro said before disconnecting the COM unit and returning it to his belt. He looked up at where Ardan and the other Regents stood. “As of this moment, there will be no more trade between the Vanari and the Union.” He spoke. “All upcoming Trade Flights will be cancelled and all profits reimbursed to the Vanari government at the normal exchange. Also as of this moment, the sitting Senate members on Amanuce are issuing a directive to all Vanari within Union space. They will be asked to come forward and depart Union space. All Vanari civilian travel through Union space will cease as of this moment.”

“We have colonies on the other side of your borders!” A Regent exclaimed.

Andro nodded his head. “You will need to find a way to reach them that does not require you crossing Union space, I’m sorry. If you do not wish to change the way you treat and act towards my people, then on behalf of my father and mothers and as Crown Prince of the Union I am issuing these orders. These directives have been ratified by the Union Senate both here and in the Alpha Quadrant. You do not wish fair trade and commerce with my people. You only wish to let the status quo continue. We however, do not.”

“This is preposterous!” Ardan shouted.

“You may think of it however you like.” Andro spoke. “The embassy here on Austrova will be vacated by the end of this day and you may give it to whoever you find to fill the void. The Vanari embassy on Amanuce will remain open and all Vanari personnel assigned to it will keep their diplomatic status. They will not be hindered or restricted in their movements or activities as Lycavorians are here on Austrova. No additional personnel to the embassy will be allowed however, I am sorry.” Andro spoke. “The current Vanari Ambassador will return to Vanari space and Coren Re Mydala will replace him.”

“You dictate to us who we will appoint!” Ardan exclaimed.

Andro shook his head. “I am only stating who will be allowed to occupy that position. The current Ambassador is an operative for your Vanari Intelligence organization and has been for the last two hundred and sixty-three years. Or did you think we would not discover that?” This knowledge was new to many of the Regents Andro saw by the looks on their faces. “Coren Re Mydala has offered his services for this position in the interim and we have accepted. Given his recent experiences we believe he will have the interests of both parties foremost in his mind.”

“You are destroying centuries of work!” Another Regent shouted out.

“I am destroying centuries of a one-sided relationship.” Andro spoke calmly. “You treat my people as if we are beneath you in almost every way, when we have proven we are equal to you, if not more advanced in many areas. We have atoned for the crimes of a few among my people when it comes to the taking of Vanari. Those men and women have been dealt with according to our laws as I have already stated to you. We will not be treated like second rate people any longer. We have given you the means to mass produce a counter agent to the OSG serum that afflicts those Vanari injected with it. You can inoculate all Vanari and end the hold that the OSG has over your people. You have had this ability and knowledge for months and have chosen to not do anything with it.”

“We demand that the criminal Caliria Re Mydala be handed over to us!” Galar shouted quickly. “She must answer for her crimes! All of the Re Mydala children need to answer for their violation of our laws!”

“You consider attempting to rescue your child from a life of slavery a crime?” Sadi demanded now as she came up beside Androcles.

“You understand nothing of what you speak!” Galar barked out.

“I understand enough!” Sadi spat at him. “I understand all of you are fools! You allow a select few to sell your own people into slavery and you do nothing. I understand that action is despicable no matter the reason!”

“You will be...” Galar began to shout back but Androcles stepped forward even more on the platform.

“Do not finish that statement Regent Galar!” Andro snarled loudly. “Not if you wish to remain among the living!”

“You only give credence to what many of us think of your people by your own actions here today!” Ardan yelled now.

“What you think of my people does not concern me in the least!” Andro barked back at him. “You sell your own people into slavery and reap the profits from that in order to advance your own status! And no one in this chamber, save a select few, have the fortitude to stand up and speak the truth about that! How many of you have known this was going on! How many of you have taken part in it!”

“It has been this way for centuries!” Another Vanari Regent echoed.

Androcles shook his head slowly. “And it appears that the Vanari people will have to suffer for it for even longer.” He stated. “Caliria and Arduri Re Mydala are now Princesses of the Lycavorian Union. Caliria is my wife and mate! Arduri is my brother’s wife and mate! Any attempt to forcibly make them do anything by Vanari personnel will be met by force! Do not think that for political expediency we will surrender those we love and honor! Any Vanari who wishes to remain within Union space will be welcome. Any Lycanari who wishes to return here will be welcome to leave. Any Vanari parent who wishes to see their family members again will be granted permission.”

Ardan stepped forward to the railing. “What are you speaking of?” He demanded.

Andro turned to Sadi then and nodded his head. Sadi reached up on her toes and kissed him softly before turning and motioning with her hand to those who had gathered behind them. Immediately the Lycavorians and Lycanari standing behind Androcles began to turn and depart the way they had come in, even as other Regents began to rise to their feet.

“We are not finished here!” Galar screamed.

Andro looked at him. “Yes we are.” Androcles told him. “I have other, more pressing concerns to deal with. You wish to treat us as beneath you, so be it. We do not have to tolerate it however. As of this moment all diplomatic ties between the Union and the Vanari Empire are severed. We will be neither hostile nor friendly. Any attempt to cross into Union space by Vanari forces will be met by equal force. I would not make the mistake of testing us on this issue. You would not like the response you receive.”

“You cannot dictate to us!” Cruor shouted.

“I am not dictating anything.” Andro repeated. “I’m simply stating how it will be.” He turned and saw Sadi and his wives and mates trailing the group as they departed the main chamber and he turned back to them. “As for my earlier statement, have none of you wondered where the heads of your news organizations are? Why are there so few who report your news here in this chamber? I have noticed that many of you have been looking for them.”

“What nonsense do you speak?” Ardan barked.

Androcles shook his head sadly. “It is a shame that the Vanari people have to suffer the likes of you and those like you Ardan Vu Lamurrion. They deserve so much more.” Andro turned and began to walk away while many of the Regents looked on with disbelief in their eyes.

“We are not finished here Prince Androcles!” Ardan screamed. “You cannot just walk out on this Board!”

Andro stopped and those closest to him saw his shoulders rise and fall in a deep breath. Andro turned and reached behind his back to pull out the small globe like item. “I can walk out Regent Ardan. That is exactly what I intend.” He held up his hand, palm up and exposed the small globe like object.

“You turn your backs on tomorrow and the wonders that it could bring to the Vanari because you cannot forget the past and let go of the demons that plague you. Because you are content to sell your own people into slavery and worse in order to line your pockets and give you more power.” Andro spoke evenly. “I will not be party to that mentality and neither will my people. This... this is my parting gift to the Vanari people. This is what we have done to try and right the wrongs of a few. What you do with it is now up to you.”

“What are you doing?” Ardan screamed. “What is that?”

“This?” Andro said lifting the globe higher. “This is how it could have been.” His arm flashed upward and he heaved the globe into the air above him amidst the shouts and screams of the Vanari Regents who thought it was a bomb of some sort. Andro turned once more and began to walk out of the chamber as the globe activated and over a dozen streams of light burst from the globe and formed images.

As Vanari Regents began to regain their composure, they could see vast amounts of activity in all of the holo streams. The globe appeared to be picking up the transmissions of many different events that were taking place. As if on cue, one of the screens centered and became larger than the others and the face of a female Vanari became focused and clear and her voice began to resonate within the chambers own internal communications system. Many of the Regents present knew who she was for they watched her every evening on the Vanari news networks.

“...This is Aori Va Alsul reporting to you from the hanger deck of the Lycavorian Union warship called the *SPIRIT OF THE WIND*. Four days ago, I and two dozen of my fellow News Anchors were taken in the night by Vanari Commandos and brought to an undisclosed location. We were sequestered away and only told that we were going to be part of an operation that would have wide ranging repercussions across the entire Quadrant. We found ourselves split up and taken to both Vanari ships and Lycavorian Union ships like this one. I have been in contact with each of them in these last hours and what we are seeing happening is... it is simply beyond belief.” The entire Regent chamber became deathly quiet as the roar of a ship entering the hanger bay interrupted her words and she stopped talking. All of them saw several *TEMPEST* Fighters land in the distance and ground crews rushed forward to meet them.

“Thirty minutes ago I was brought here and just fifteen minutes after that I was told what was happening.” The Vanari reporter continued now. “Roughly nine hours ago, a combined Lycavorian Union and Vanari Cadre Commando Task Force began striking at OSG and Eridiani targets all across the Quadrant. Vanari Commandos and members of the Lycavorian Union’s own elite *Durcunusaan* forces began to attack OSG holding centers and auction houses and free Vanari prisoners all across this sector of space and the adjoining three sectors. We have been told this is happening across four different sectors of space as I have told you. A

huge fleet of Union and Vanari ships are in this fleet alone. We are currently orbiting the known OSG planet of Uardo! This planet is one of the largest OSG held planets and all estimates by Vanari sources have stated that there are thousands of Vanari being held here. This very ship began launching fighters three hours ago and they are now beginning to return from attack sorties on the surface. We have also received word that ships carrying Vanari prisoners have begun to land and... By the Prophets!"

All of them saw the picture change to the large ship in the background as the rear ramp touched down on the deck and a combination of heavily armed Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* and Vanari Cadre Commandos began to quickly file off the ship carrying other Vanari men and women even as medical personnel from both species rushed forward and began to inject the arriving Vanari with something. The images shifted to another ship in the distance and the same thing was happening, then two more that were even further away across the deck. Most of the rescued Vanari were wearing green and red jumpsuits for some reason. The image shifted back to the woman who had been speaking and she now had her finger pressed to her ear to block out at least some of the noise that was happening all around her.

"This is... it is unbelievable!" She gasped aloud with wide eyes. "I am getting reports from my fellow colleagues on other ships that this is happening everywhere! Union and Vanari ships and Commandos are beginning to return with hundreds of Vanari prisoners! OSG and Eridiani ships that tried to fight were obliterated from the stars and we're getting reports of massive casualties among OSG and even Eridiani ground forces from the surfaces of these planets. This is unprecedented in the history of our people! Combined Union and Vanari forces appear to have struck at every known OSG installation base across four sectors with the intent to rescue Vanari citizens being held by the OSG and destroying their holding facilities! I can count over a hundred freed Vanari just within my own view and there are ships in other landing bays that are arriving as well! I can't... this is amazing! All of these people... our people! By... By the Prophets this is a gift from the gods themselves!"

The Regent Chamber on Austrova was silent as they watched this woman break into tears at what was happening all around her. They could see other reporters urgently speaking in the other holo streams even as the images of returning ships and rescued Vanari were being beamed across the expanse of space.

The Vanari Board of Regents would not discover until later that these transmissions were reaching every Vanari news channel on the planet as well as their colonies. In fact, it was being beamed across the entire breadth of the Beta Quadrant.

They would not be able to contain the future any longer.

ARC ROYAL **ORBITING VENTORI**

To say that this morning had begun the first day of the rest of their lives would not have been appropriate, at least to Saydia Daret. The moment they had stepped foot on this ship all that her people had ever thought had been tossed to the wind. The ship itself was a wonder of technology that her people did not possess, sleek yet graceful. As Aricia Leonidas explained to her as they moved among the many different types of ships on the flight deck, this was an *ARIZONA-Class* Strike Carrier, which was its official designation. As she and Anthylea walked with her Saydia could not help but think that with the power of this one ship the Tasmor would never have to fear the Kintaur ever again.

She was stunned as they were received in the landing bay of this ship like visiting royalty. Even after what they had attempted on the surface Saydia could detect no hostility or distrust in the faces or the eyes of those she saw. She and Anthylea were both shocked to see men giving orders to females but then twenty meters away females were giving orders to men. There was no question or doubt among the many different species that they saw as they went about their way to carry out these orders. It was astonishing to say the least. Saydia knew that the Tasmor males who served in the Fleet were granted much more leeway in their actions and words to females simply because of their duties. There were very few male officers within the Tasmor Fleet, but the half dozen she could recall right away were very well respected and had many years of experience. Namiri's own

father was a ship Captain, a tall and well-built man by Tasmor standards, even the Tasmor females who served on his ship adored the man.

They had split up upon arriving with Perlyea departing the landing bay with Queen Anja while Aricia and the elf Queen For'mya began to show her and Anthylea around the ship. These Lycavorians were so unlike the Pralor people it was as if comparing night and day. There were parts of the ship that they were not shown understandably Saydia knew, but these two women were forthright and honest in everything else. They answered their questions, and Saydia had asked many she knew, without a hint of arrogance or deception that she could detect. They did not mince words and while For'mya seemed to be the word reserved of the two, Saydia could feel the pride they both felt as they showed off their ship. They were not shy either Saydia soon discovered, as shortly after they began to the tour, they took each other's hands and held them tightly. Saydia did not understand how they could all be the wives of one man. That they were lovers came as no surprise to her, nor was it strange in any way. There were thousands of such relationships among the Tasmor simply because there were so few males. Yet how these three women, and three other Queens that she had not even met, how they could share and love the same man was almost beyond her.

That was until Aricia and For'mya began to tell her and Anthylea about their beloved Martin Leonidas.

ARC ROYAL MEDICAL BAY

Perlyea Kalrr had been brought up believing that the Tasmor were the greatest and most important species within the universe. As she grew older she knew that this was a mentality that all species carried with them, but Perlyea truly believed that the Tasmor people, her people were something special. This is how she had lived her life and in over three hundred and fifty years of that life, nothing had ever made her think otherwise.

Until today.

Perlyea Kalrr felt the most comfortable with a computer and research tools. For the last decades she had been working almost solely on trying to change the Tasmor people's fortunes for the better. She had been trying to save them, and in doing so, Perlyea now recognized she had let so much pass her by. She had become far too focused and directed on that goal that nothing else mattered to her. After the horrendous death of her mother and sisters at the hands of the Kintaur she had turned exclusively to her work. She realized now that had been a mistake for she had dismissed so much that could have actually helped her. She was widely recognized as the most intelligent of their people in anything medically related because of her role and what she had accomplished up until this point, but that single minded focus had very nearly cost the Tasmor people their future and their lives. She had brought them to the brink of destruction at the hands of a species and culture that was very similar to their own in many ways. A species that could wipe them from existence and not even break a sweat. Perlyea always considered herself to be an excellent judge of people and this is why she had asked for volunteers from the Ventori Lycavorians in order to help her. She felt that they would respond positively when others did not and she was right. Hundreds had come forward in order to assist her by donating their blood and DNA in order for her to improve the Tasmor people. Many may have done it as a way to thank the Tasmor for saving them, but many more she sensed did it simply for the reason that they were helping others.

Perlyea now knew her obsession had almost been her undoing.

The moment Anja had led her into this Medical Bay Perlyea knew what path lay before her now. Anja Leonidas was without question one of the most astonishingly beautiful females Perlyea had ever seen before. Her Persian red hair and jade colored eyes were heart stopping all by themselves, but when added to her insanely fit and lush figure, Perlyea was quite sure she had never seen a more desirable female before. She was also far more intelligent than herself and...

"Don't do that." Anja's voice broke into her thoughts.

Perlyea turned to look at her, blinking several times. "Excuse me?"

Anja came up in front of her and held out the mug of steaming hot lightly colored liquid. "It's called coffee." She said. "It's a special blend that Aricia made when she was pregnant with our first son Androcles. It

has become the most popular brand across the entire Union now and it is very good. You didn't strike me as being a black coffee person so I added a light sweetener and some cream."

Perlyea took the mug and felt the heat through the material. The liquid smelled delicious and she brought it to her lips and sipped it slowly. Her eyes grew wide at the rich flavor and the way it warmed her insides as it went down her throat. "This is delicious!" She exclaimed.

Anja smiled and nodded her head. "Martin and I drink it by the bucket. Our sons Andro and Denali and our daughter Eliani too." She said as her jade green eyes twinkled in the light of the medical bay. Perlyea was without a doubt a very beautiful woman in Anja's eyes, and given the right circumstances she would undoubtedly have many wolves chasing after her for her warmth. She struck Anja as being a powerful woman of both mind and body and many Alphas would think it an honor to court her for her affections. "Never consider others to be more intelligent than you Perlyea."

Perlyea looked at her with wide eyes now. "How did..."

Anja smiled brightly. "I have been in your shoes." She answered. "On several occasions."

"You?" Perlyea gasped.

"Because you have not learned something or do not have the technology does not make you any less intelligent than the next person." Anja told her. "My dear friend Eurin told me that shortly after I met her. I was being introduced to all of this for the first time, just like you. She told me to embrace it, learn how to use it and then go after more." Anja smiled. "So I did."

Anja turned slightly and leaned against the empty medical bed beside Perlyea. "All these computers and knowledge are all good, but what really counts is what is in here." Anja touched her chest over her heart. "And I can smell that your heart is in the right place."

"You can smell that?" Perlyea asked stunned.

"You pick up on little things once you are wolf." Anja said with a shrug. "My sense of smell is nothing compared to Martin or our son Androcles. Those two can track someone across an entire planet if they wanted to, just by their smell, even if they are thousands of kilometers away when they start. It's scary sometimes what they can do. Aricia is almost as good as them, but I like to consider myself not so bad." She said with a smile. "Like the fact that you are like Anthylea. You took the gene enhancement as well didn't you?"

Perlyea looked somewhat embarrassed but slowly nodded her head. "I did not want to subject my people to something that was unknown. I tested it on myself yes. But it did not do what I had hoped."

Anja tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

"The L-Gene, that is what I called it, it improved my overall physical conditioning, my regenerative abilities, my strength and other things, just as it did for Anthylea and the others like us, but it did not do what I had hoped it would do." Perlyea said.

"Like you?" Anja asked.

Perlyea sighed gently. "Anthylea and I are among those Tasmor females that evolution chose to change. We are called Breeders. It is a stupid and vile term to me, but it is what we are called. It was nature's way, at least in my opinion, of improving the chances for Tasmor females to carry children. We are..." Perlyea looked shyly at the floor, which was saying quite a bit for Anja could smell her embarrassment.

Anja stepped forward and took her arm. "I understand." She spoke gently. "And it is nothing to be ashamed of. We have those within the Union who are like this. We call them Drow. They were subjected to some horrific experiments in order to make them like this, but all of them have found lives and a future. Many have even found wives and have children."

Perlyea looked at her with wide eyes. "Truly?" She gasped.

Anja nodded her head. "Their numbers aren't as large as the Tasmor by any means, and they were never meant to have children, but most of them have adopted children and built solid and lasting relationships and friendships. You will find that we are a very open people and what you have between your legs does not matter in the least to most." Anja blurted out and then her own eyes went wide and she looked embarrassed. "Oh forgive me!" She stammered.

Perlyea couldn't help but smile at this reaction and she shook her head. "You speak your mind and are direct with your words. I prefer this."

Anja chuckled now. "Yes, well if you ask Martin, my tongue usually gets me in trouble." She said with a smile. "And I don't mean when I am using it on him."

Perlyea now couldn't help the laugh that escaped her lips and it felt so very good to feel. She had not laughed in so long and it filled her with happiness. It told her that she was still capable of such feelings. She shook her head as she continued to smile. "You and your fellow Queens are not shy about your desire and love for him." She said finally.

Anja shook her head. "No, we are not." She replied. "He is the center of our world, of our hearts, and none of us could ever desire another like we do him. He may have changed all of us, well except Aricia and Bella, he passed his blood to us, but that isn't why we love him so."

"One day I wish to find love like this." Perlyea said softly.

"Keep the faith." Anja told her. "When it happens, it usually comes out of nowhere and hits you like a ton of rocks."

Perlyea met her eyes. "You bring me here, show me all of this, even after what I did. Why?"

Anja smiled once more. "Whatever your intent, it was never about conquering or hurting others. It was always about helping your people. Am I correct in that?"

Perlyea nodded her head. "I fear this single obsession clouded my intentions and I was willing to do almost anything to accomplish this."

"But you recognize that now?" Anja asked.

Perlyea grinned slightly. "Coming face to face with death usually does that." She said. "Your husband, he would have killed us because of what I did wouldn't he? If your pilot had died, he would not have hesitated and he would have killed us all."

Anja nodded her head. "Without a second's hesitation." She answered honestly. "He can be very protective of his friends and family. He has known Tina for a very long time and they have been through a lot together."

Perlyea shook her head in disbelief. "And I almost brought his wrath down upon my people with my obsession." She said softly.

"That's the past." Anja spoke quickly. "That is how Marty wants it to be. He was right in telling you what he did. We are not the Pralor people Perlyea Kalrr and we honor those who are our friends."

"Are we your friends?" Perlyea asked.

"I think having you here on this ship is answer enough." Anja answered.

Perlyea looked around the Med Bay and couldn't help but agree. What she had seen here so far this day was beyond anything she had ever imagined and to be friends with a species like this would have untold advantages. "Yes, it is." She answered.

Anja nodded her head. "Good." She said. "And I'll let you in on a little secret... you didn't fail Perlyea."

Perlyea looked at her oddly. "What... what do you mean?"

"The L-Gene as you called it is doing exactly what you wanted it to do." Anja spoke.

Perlyea's eyes grew wider now. "What?"

"There is something you didn't know when you began using the blood and DNA of the Lycavorians on Ventori. It's probably something they themselves did not know because they have never encountered different species." Anja explained. "The Lycavorian virus that changes a person, once that virus is introduced into another's bloodstream, certain changes take place almost immediately while others take much longer to complete."

Perlyea looked at her. "I don't understand."

"When did you began administering the L-Gene?" Anja asked.

Perlyea thought quickly. "I asked for the volunteers a month after they began arriving and within two months I had a viable sample to test. Once I realized it worked on me I began to mass produce it for the others like me."

Anja nodded her head. "I thought so. And that's exactly what I would have done. However, what you didn't know is that the Lycavorian virus in their blood works at its own pace. It will speed some changes, like the healing properties and increased stamina and strength and such, but more detailed changes need time. I was fully wolf three months after Martin turned me, but I could not have children because the changes had not completed their alterations to my physiology. That took much longer. Almost two years to be exact."

Perlyea's eyes became wider as she realized what Anja was saying, while Anja smiled as she saw the light of recognition and realized she had found someone just as intelligent as her and Duewa. Someone who thought out of the box just as they did.

"Then it... it will work?" Perlyea gasped finally.

Anja nodded her head. "Oh yes." She said pulling out her P9 and setting her coffee on the bed. She typed quickly on the console. "I ran some additional tests on Anthylea's blood when we first got here. Because of the composition of Tasmor physiology, it is just taking longer for the changes to become complete." She showed Perlyea the small screen and the computer model of the changing genes within Anthylea's body. "By my estimation, given the rate of change and when you say she was injected, the L-Gene will finish altering her DNA within two months. Then the changes will be complete and she will be able to... well, she will be fertile." Anja looked at Perlyea. "We would need to know when you injected the others for a more definitive report on the other Tasmor that took the L-Gene, including yourself, but I'd hazard a guess and say most are nearing that point."

"Gods!" Perlyea gasped as she stared at the computer screen. "I never... I thought it was a failure!"

"It was no failure Perlyea." Anja told her. "It was actually really good work. The protein and enzyme additions were perfect and adding the Tasmor central DNA core modules was brilliant. That will keep the Lycavorian DNA from becoming dominant."

Perlyea looked at her. "This means that..."

Anja nodded once more. "Yep. With a few more tweaks we can make it so this L-Gene works on all Tasmor." She said. "And it will not drastically alter the Tasmor in any way as a species. You will still be Tasmor, just a more robust breed of Tasmor. As will all the children born after the L-Gene has been distributed to your people."

Perlyea looked at her with wide eyes. "I... I never imagined that..."

The internal COM came alive and Anja turned her head as Duewa moved quickly into the Med Bay area where they were from her office.

ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ARC ROYAL IS NOW AT CONDITION TWO! ARC ROYAL IS NOW AT CONDITION TWO!

Anja looked at Duewa as she came up to them. "Dee... what's wrong?"

"Anja, Martin and the others have discovered something on the surface." Duewa told her. "Aricia and For'mya are bringing Saydia Daret and Anthylea to the landing bay. He needs you to bring your gear and Perlyea and then all of you move to the surface."

"Duewa, why do you look so pale?" Anja asked her with concern.

Duewa held out the data pad to her. "You aren't going to like it Anja." She said softly. "Not one bit."

JORLARI WESTERN EDGE OF THE CITY

Martin settled to one knee between Julie and Kasdan as they were scanning the large five story building on the fringes of the city. Most of the structures around them had been reduced to rubble in the fighting it appeared for only the shells of buildings remained now. Danny, T'lolt and Kenny were kneeling behind them with Namiri and Emylea between them. Though she was a ship's commander Emylea Daret obviously had been well trained in ground operations and this showed in her movement and handling of the weapons Kenny had provided to her. Martin already knew that Namiri was very proficient and was unconcerned about her skills. Though not as experienced as the other members of his team, she was very competent and skilled.

"Talk to me Kasdan. Jules?" Marin spoke softly.

"The facility appears to be underneath that five story structure to our front." Kasdan told him. "It is considerably larger than the other one Martin. My thermal ground scans are revealing different portions of underground tunnels but it appears to be intermittent at times. I am overlapping it with the initial scans we took of the surface upon entering the system but the scans are accurate. Julie?"

Julie nodded from beside him as she worked on her own P9. “Same here. Sonic scans are bouncing back in places where the ground either caved in on the tunnels below or was brought down intentionally.”

“Intentionally?” Martin asked.

“The entire area is saturated with explosive residue.” Kasdan spoke once more. “There was a large battle in this area. I’m detecting signs of more Pralor weaponry and traces of Pralor manufactured explosives.”

Martin turned his head as Namiri came up beside him on one side and Emylea the other. Danny settled to the ground just behind them as Kenny covered their rear. “Kasdan are you sure?” Martin asked.

Kasdan nodded his head. “Yes.”

“The Pralor people did this?” Namiri asked with a tinge of heat and anger in her voice.

Kasdan shook his head quickly. “No. Pralor weapons were used but my people did not do this.”

“How can you be so sure?” Emylea asked.

Kasdan turned to look at Martin and he nodded his head. “Show them.” He spoke.

Kasdan didn’t hesitate and shifted his P9 into a position that both Namiri and Emylea could view it. He touched the screen lightly. “Look at the composition of the elements here. This is the formula that is used to make our explosive.” He pointed to one side of the screen. “These are the traces of what I am detecting now.” He motioned to the other side of the screen.

Namiri reached out and ran her finger along the screen. She knew immediately what Kasdan was trying to show them for she had dealt with explosives before. “They are not the same.” She said softly. “Similar but not the same. It is... this formula is much cruder.”

Kasdan nodded his head with a smile. “And once more your people prove why we were stupid to not embrace the Tasmor when we had the chance.” He told her.

Namiri looked at him with wide eyes, Emylea’s face mirroring her sister’s in surprise. Martin chuckled aloud. “I told you not all Pralors are arrogant fools.” He said with a smile. “There are those among them that actually have an open mind.”

Kasdan smiled as he looked at Martin. “Thank you Martin.” He stated.

“Where’s the entrance to this facility?” Martin asked looking at Julie.

“Three hundred meters straight on.” Julie answered. “Looks like it’s a sewer entrance here. Nothing connecting to the building. Looks like a wall in the tunnel is actually a door into a part of the sewer that is not connected to the rest of the tunnel system either.”

“*Sibfla* Jules.” Danny spoke from behind them. “Haven’t we spent enough time in sewers up to this point in our lives?”

Julie smiled at him. “Can’t be any worse than smelling you twenty-four seven.” Julie spat at him. “I don’t know how Anuk, Nayeca and Kesyla do it.”

Martin grinned as he looked at Danny and he threw Julie the middle finger of his right hand causing Martin to laugh a little louder. “You left yourself wide open for that one *fervon*.” Martin told him.

“Yeah... yeah, fuck you too.” Danny hissed at him but with no malice in his voice.

Namiri and Emylea simply looked at each other, not believing the interaction between these men and women and the man who was their King.

Martin shook his head with a smile and touched his jaw activating his implant. “Colin?”

“Here Skipper.” Colin’s voice echoed in all of their earpieces.

“Location?” Martin asked.

“Pablo and I are in the shadows about a hundred meters north of you.” Colin answered. “We have eyes on what appears to be the front of this building. No movement or activity in the least that we can see.”

Martin nodded his head. “Sewer entrance to your two o’clock. Jules says that’s our way in.”

“Wonderful...” Colin echoed. “More sewers. I love sewers.”

“Meet you there.” Martin spoke with a smile.

“Moving.” Colin answered.

It took all of them under a minute to converge on the manhole cover that would give them access and almost without thought T’lolt reached down and yanked the cover from the ground with barely any effort. Colin and Pablo dropped into the darkness of the tunnel below with no hesitation followed quickly by Martin, Namiri, Emylea, Julie and Kasdan. Danny, Cody and Kenny were the last and both of them gasped at the stench that hit them when they touched the concrete floor of the tunnel.

“*Nubou lae!*” Kenny hissed in a whisper. “It smells like month old dead flesh in here!”

Namiri and Emylea were holding their hands over their noses, their eyes watching as the faces of Martin and the Lycavorians among them were twisted into masks of disgust. Julie quickly handed them new sets of olfactory blockers which they promptly put in. She smiled at them as she inserted the second one into her nostril and then they watched as the others quickly followed suit. Due to the fact that they were vampire and wolf, their eyes adjusted to the lighting change much more quickly than Kasdan and their Tasmor comrades. Both vampire and wolf preferred to fight at night anyway. Martin saw Colin and Pablo on either side of the section of wall ten meters further ahead of them, Kasdan running his scanner over the solid face of the granite and steel wall.

Martin looked at Namiri and Emylea. “Namiri you stay close to me, Emylea remain right by Julie! This place stinks and I don’t like it! Something ain’t right!”

Emylea moved closer to Julie as Namiri followed him forward. “What does he mean?” She asked.

Julie looked at her. “The Skipper has got the supreme nose of noses among his people.” She explained quickly. “He could sniff out a rat from thirty kilometers away if need be. He also has the finest instincts of anyone alive today. He senses something that is not supposed to be here.”

“That something is not good I take it.” Emylea asked.

Julie shook her head quickly. “It never is.” She stated calmly. “Trouble always seems to find us no matter how much we try to avoid it. Stay close to me.” She began to move forward down the tunnel.

Martin moved up beside Kasdan and knelt down with Namiri on his left and Danny now on his right. “Kasdan?” He asked softly.

“I have found the trigger to make the wall retract but something isn’t right.” Kasdan said.

Danny shook his head. “Fuck! One person says that and we might get lucky, two people say that and we are well and truly screwed.”

“Indeed.” T’lolt echoed softly.

“Talk to me Kasdan.” Martin said.

“I am detecting three intermittent life signs on the other side of this wall.” Kasdan said. “They are within the facility itself.”

“Lycavorian?” Martin asked.

Kasdan shook his head. “No. I cannot... I cannot determine what they are, only that they are there.” He spoke looking at Martin. “They are neither Lycavorian nor Pralor or Tasmor. They are not even Svorag. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“Man you are just a bundle of good news.” Martin told him. “How far in?”

“The facility appears to be six levels.” Kasdan spoke looking at his P9. “Perhaps half a kilometer square. I cannot get a lock on them because they are so intermittent, but my best guess is one thirty meters in and on the first level, slightly northeast of our current position. The other two are on the third and the fourth levels. Martin, I am also detecting active Pralor Etheric Security Protocols radiating from one of the doors on the fourth level. It appears to be the elevator down to the fifth and sixth levels. They are deeper than the first four.”

“Etheric? You’re sure?” Martin asked.

Kasdan nodded. “Yes.”

Martin made his decision quickly Namiri noted, and without hesitation. “Open the door. Colin, Pablo you two are with me and Danny. The rest of you hold here.”

“King Leonidas you...” Namiri began to protest but Martin looked at her and shook his head.

“You stay here.” He stated once more. “I’m not risking you or your sister regardless of what we may find. You two have a much larger role to play in the future than you can see right now.”

Namiri’s eyes grew wider at this statement and she looked quickly to where Emylea knelt and also wore an expression of surprise. She turned back to Martin. “What... what do you mean?” She asked.

“Trust me on this one.” Martin said before turning to look at Danny. “Let’s go.”

All of their considerable training and experience was in play now as they moved down the corridor with their weapons at the ready. Over a hundred years of small unit operations experience resided in these four men. They were Operators once more. Not King or General or elite troops. Just operators who knew what the other

would do in every given situation. Men who could speak to one another without uttering a word. Colin and Pablo had been the first that Martin and Danny had turned all those years ago, Pablo now holding the distinction of being one of the most gifted turned wolves in the Union. While Colin was a vampire, he retained all of the knowledge being a wolf gave to him back then and he had blended it perfectly with his vampire skills now. Julie and Kasdan were monitoring their progress from their P9s, Namiri and Emylea pressed close to her sides to watch.

“Why did he only take four?” Namiri finally asked in a whisper. “Wouldn’t it be better to enter the facility in force?”

Julie smiled and shook her head. “Back in the day, before all of this now, the four of them always worked together. We were all part of a larger team but we worked better with certain members. Kenny and I, Cody and the Master Chief Tony, we were another team within the team. We just meshed better.” Julie looked at them. “The Skipper, Danny, Colin and Pablo, they were and they are the epitome of entering by force.”

The corridor was dimly lit, only emergency power operating it seemed, but this did not hamper them in any way due to their wolf and vampire genes. Colin and Pablo inched along on one side of the corridor, Martin and Danny opposite them on the other side of the corridor, their chopped down P190 A5s held in the ‘ready’ position for use.

Kasdan? Martin’s voice reached out to them in Mindvoice.

Kasdan was watching them on the computer screen. *The intersection you are at, go left. He replied. The signal is still there and still intermittent. You will need to cross through what appears to be two labs and into the secondary corridor, but whoever it is, they are remaining still in that corridor.*

Martin looked at Colin, who was in front of Pablo and motioned silently with his finger. Colin nodded and dropped to one knee while extending his head around the corner of the steel wall. His head was exposed for all of two seconds and he pulled back to look at Martin. Using his hand and fingers he gave them the layout of the corridor to their left. Doors on either side twenty meters down the corridor. One sealed and one open. Martin had extended his head around the other corridor and saw in the first half second that it was a straight shot to a doorway with no other points of entry in the corridor. He relayed that same info and then held up four fingers and pointed to the left. They moved then, like four ghosts, completely silent without even a rustle in the stale air. All of their eyes were changed now to that of their wolf personas and Colin’s eyes had become the cobalt blue of his vampire nature now. Their fangs were out and exposed as they moved without even a whisper of noise down either side of the corridor. Martin glanced into the lab area behind Colin and Pablo, seeing nothing, while Colin and Pablo did the same to the room behind them. The glass partitions appeared to be nearly chest high and allowed them to move easily in their crouched positions without exposing themselves.

The corridor ended just past the two doors and Colin and Pablo waited for Martin to nod his head and they shifted to the same side of the corridor on the opposite side of the door. Both Danny and Pablo were facing in opposite directions to cover their rears as Martin and Colin both took a split second to glance into the darkened room with several dimly lit monitors and a sparking console on the wall.

Clear. Colin spoke.

Same. Martin echoed.

Computers appear active Skipper. Colin spoke. *And there is definitely power to this level given that the wall is sparking.*

Agreed. Martin answered. One door to the left. Five meters. Bunch of tables and all kinds of shit on the floor.

Looks like a struggle but no blood or weapons scoring anywhere. Pablo chimed in now. *I’m not liking this Skipper.*

Agreed. Martin said. *Danny?*

I’m not one to state the obvious, but something very bad happened here. Danny spoke. *We’re about to step into a pile of shit.*

I think we already have. Colin echoed.

That is when they heard it. The deep rumbling of a low growl, like the sound of a bear before it attacked.

What the fuck was that? Pablo hissed.

Whatever it is, it can’t be good for us. Colin commented. *Man, the shit just got real deep.*

Martin! Kasdan’s voice erupted with Mindvoice. *Martin it is right behind you! Move! Move!*

The unearthly roar cut off all speech then as the glass and wall section above where Martin squatted exploded outward and two massive, scale like arms wrapped around Martin's upper body in the blink of an eye.

"Fuck!" Colin screamed as he and Pablo staggered back lifting their weapons. "Skipper!"

"Martin!" Danny roared as he grabbed for Martin's arms just before another savage roar pierced the corridor and those scale like arms ripped upwards, carrying Martin and Daniel up and through the glass and steel frame as if they were weightless toys.

Then they disappeared into the darkness of the next room.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

LENTANI

ROTHRYN HOMEWORLD

CAPITAL OF LLON

SEPTEMBER 3RD, 2575, 1100 HOURS

He had never been to the Praetor's home in the nearly eight hundred years Dyack had held the position. The differences between the two men were too great. They had once been very good friends, but their ideology was different, and this eventually caused them to drift apart in words and actions. Dyack had many powerful friends who thought like he did, far more than he was able to muster against him. A new mindset had begun to creep into Rothryn society over the course of the last two to three hundred years and while he did not disapprove of this mentality, he was of the mind that things needed to move slower. He was a powerful man and exceptionally intelligent, but he was also very practical. He had done many things in the past that he had come to regret, but these were things that he had tried to make right through the years and they were mistakes that he learned from and never committed again. He did not hold a position of power within the government, he detested politics to the extreme, but he loved his people and what they had accomplished. His six foot two frame was solid and muscular and his dark brown hair was just beginning to gray on the edges, signifying his distinguished age of nearly five thousand two hundred years.

Dyack's home was elegant, yet modest. He knew the man from decades ago when they were close friends and he knew that Dyack hated any kind of pomp. There were half a dozen Security personnel outside the main entrance as his Lifter car stopped and he began to get out. He waited while one of those Security officers came up to his vehicle.

"Lord Barnak." He spoke.

"I do not like being summoned in the middle of the night." Barnak spat. "I am not one of the Praetor's lackeys!"

The security officer didn't blink or show any emotion and he simply motioned with his hand to the entrance. "The Praetor waits for you in his office sir." He spoke. "Please follow the Lieutenant."

Barnak huffed in discord as he began marching towards the entrance and the Rothryn Lieutenant fell in just in front of him. Barnak did not know what to expect to be honest, only that two of Dyack's personal guard appeared at his home and told him that the Praetor requested his presence. They had also told him this was not a request that was to be denied. Barnak had never know Dyack to be pushy towards others and this alone was a surprise. Over the last few months Barnak had been gathering information of Dyack's supposedly secret dealings with the Eridiani OSG. He was very close to discovering what it is that Dyack was trying to accomplish by working with the OSG criminals, and he was going to use what influence he had to bring this information to light and call for an emergency election to replace him. The OSG were nothing more than slavers and scum as far as Barnak was concerned, and the Praetor of the Rothryn people should not have any dealings with them in the least.

As they entered the large home the first thing Barnak noted was the lack of security inside. The six security officers outside were a common fixture and had been for decades, but there were none within the home itself that he could see. As Barnak suspected, the interior was stylishly decorated but there were no extravagant items to be seen anywhere. Dyack was not one for pomp he saw, unlike what some of their news reporters

suggested because he refused to allow them into his home. Barnak respected this for he was comparable when it came to his home. It was not for others to see, and while comfortably furnished, Barnak detested opulence in every form and his home was very similar in nature to what he was standing in now. While it did not appear so from outside, the activity within the home was very high given the hour at which it was right now. He glanced up and looked along the balcony that circled the main greeting hall and now he saw both military officers and security forces moving along the walkway. None were watching or making note of his arrival which told Barnak that something else was going on. The lieutenant led him down a side corridor lined with holo images of past events within Rothryn society. Most of them were of great historical importance to the Rothryn people and Barnak was surprised they were displayed so prominently along the walls. They passed through a large set of double doors and into an office area that was massive to say the least.

Dyack's desk was situated on the far side of the room near a set of double glass doors that exited onto a patio of sorts. Along one entire wall was a library of written books and countless scrolls and data pads, some of which looked to be thousands of years old. The center of the room was taken up by a blazing fireplace built into the floor and surrounded by couches and chairs. The opposite side of the office room held a huge chart table where he saw four men he did not recognize discussing something and motioning to the images on the chart table. They ignored him after quick glances in his direction and then Barnak saw Dyack rise from the plush couch where he sat with Aleatia and his son Kelelm. His son Anroth was not present though Barnak didn't question this. Anroth, like his own oldest son Denld, was reckless and more prone to violence in order to get what they wanted. Anroth and his son were very close and Barnak had spent many hours attempting to keep them out of trouble or trying to repair their mistakes. They were not the brightest of individuals and their actions usually resulted in more harm than good.

Barnak moved right up to the center of the room where Dyack moved around the second of three couches and looked at the Lieutenant. "That will be all Niac. Inform Major Tanif that we are not to be disturbed now."

The Lieutenant nodded his head. "As you order Praetor." He spoke before turning and heading back the way he had come.

Dyack looked at Barnak. "Thank you for coming. And welcome to my home." He spoke calmly and evenly.

"I was not given much choice!" Barnak barked angrily. "I am not some person off the street that you can just summon on a whim Dyack! Why am I here? Give me an answer before I turn and leave your home!"

Dyack met his angry gaze. "You are welcome to leave." He answered him. "In which case I will assume your guilt and have my men execute you before you make it to the front door."

Barnak looked at him with wide eyes. "Guilt?" He exclaimed. "What are you talking about? I am guilty of nothing! What is this all about? It is you who are guilty Dyack! Of far more than normal people know! You conspire with known criminals and savages! You dare accuse me of such things when your own hands are covered in the blood of hundreds of Vanari and you are tainted by actions our people consider to be vile! The OSG and their cohorts are a stain of corruption and crime, yet you work with them casually!"

Dyack smiled slightly. "I see you have been talking to my son Anroth." He stated.

"Your son told me of your secret dealings with the OSG!" Barnak spat. "Did you think this would not be discovered?"

"Anroth did exactly as I knew he would." Dyack spoke. "I allowed him to overhear what he did Barnak, I allowed this because I knew he would bring it to you and you would try to use this information to attack me. It was part of my plan."

Barnak blinked in surprise. "Plan?" He snapped. "What plan? What foolishness do you speak now? Once I reveal this information to the Rothryn Council they will call for your head! They will absolve your leadership and elect a new Praetor!"

Dyack nodded his head. "And I'm quite sure there are many on the Council who would jump at this chance! Including you."

"I have no desire whatsoever to be Praetor but many of your policies have catapulted our people into the unknown!" Barnak snapped. "We are moving too fast and dismissing too many of our values for the sake of advancement! This is wrong Dyack and you know it!"

Dyack turned and looked at Aleatia for a long moment and then he turned back to look at Barnak. "In many cases you are right." He stated calmly.

Barnak's eyes grew wide at this admission and he stammered, unable to form a response for a few seconds. He shook his head quickly. "What trickery is this?" He demanded.

Dyack turned and retrieved the data pad that Aleatia held out to him. He looked at it briefly and then held it out to Barnak. "Many events have happened in the recent past that have altered my outlook on things Barnak. Things that you can't begin to imagine. We were friends once Barnak, and it is because of that friendship that I brought you here now. I wish to know if you had anything to do with this..." Barnak snatched the data pad from his hand.

"What is this?" He spat.

"Your response to this..." Dyack told him. "It will determine whether you live through this night or not."

"You dare threaten me!" Barnak barked.

"They tried to take my daughter!" Dyack roared as he stepped right up to Barnak and placed his face only inches from the man. The extreme emotion and anger swelling within him caused his wolf fangs to extend instantly, something that Dyack had not allowed in more centuries than he could remember. "Sehri! The youngest of my children! They tried to kidnap my daughter to murder and conduct their foul tests on! Tell me you were not part of this! Tell me you had no knowledge of this Barnak! For if you did I will take your life from you one limb at a time!"

Aleatia got quickly to her feet and moved up beside him taking his arm. "Dyack my love..." She gasped as she pulled gently on his arm.

Barnak's eyes were equally as wide as the first taste of fear he had felt in decades filled his mouth and senses. He glanced down at the data pad and began to read, a sick feeling of dread filling his gut. His eyes grew even wider as he read, the scope of such an act hitting home for he had three daughters as well, two of whom he had been hiding for they too had begun to show much more talent within the Etheric realm than the Rothryn Science Academy allowed. The more he read, the more nauseated he became and the angrier he became. Everything he had been fighting for all of these years, all that Dyack had been fighting for these years, it suddenly dawned on Barnak that they had been enemies when they should have been friends. He looked up into Dyack's face, his eyes changed and his fangs still extended, the anger surging through him a palpable thing in the air now.

"Dyack, as we were once friends, I swear to you on the life of my youngest daughters who are like Sehri, I had no idea of this!" Barnak finally spoke.

Aleatia's eyes grew wide and she moved closer to him. "Chai and Ueri?" She gasped. "They have developed the same skills as Sehri?"

Barnak nodded his head, his heart and soul telling him that they were at a crossroads as a people now and what was needed at this time more than anything was truth and unity. "They began to show signs six years ago." He answered. "I have been hiding them ever since. They are only a few years younger than Sehri and I..." He looked at Dyack. "On my own life Dyack, I had no part in this! No knowledge of this!"

"You allowed your son to torture Protectorate prisoners Barnak." Dyack spoke. "They died because of this."

"Denld did that on his own!" Barnak snapped softly. "I gave no such orders! I am not a monster! They were injured from their crash and I only wanted to give them treatment in order to question them about their skills. Denld tortured them without my knowledge! I had no choice but to declare they had died in the crash! I was... I was only trying to protect our people by those actions. If the Protectorate had known what my son did they would have called for justice and whatever opportunity we as Rothryn may have had to learn of such things would have been lost forever! We have disagreed on how to bring our people into the future Dyack, I will freely admit this to you, but I have never, I would never sanction such actions! Against anyone!"

Dyack had calmed down somewhat for he had detected no lie coming from Barnak in his scent. Ever since Denali Leonidas had first come to Austrova and Dyack realized what he was, he had been working hard on relearning the skills their people had let fall to the side through the many centuries. This time also made Dyack come to realize that he too had been wrong.

"I should have listened to you old friend." Dyack spoke softly.

Barnak gazed at him with wide eyes. “What?”

“I should have listened to you. I have... I have pushed for change that our people were not ready for.” Dyack answered.

“Dyack, I am not against change!” Barnak declared. “It is a natural way of life and I embrace that, but you were...”

“Pushing us too fast and too soon.” Dyack finished the statement for him. “I have come to realize that Barnak. Much has happened in these last few months that you do not know and it has made me realize that I was wrong on many counts.”

“You have made us stronger as a people as well Dyack.” Barnak spoke. “I would be a fool to not acknowledge that.”

“But my actions have allowed the Science Academy to become much more powerful than I ever envisioned them to be. More powerful than they should be allowed. I allowed them to have that power and now they have twisted it to something evil that they use for their own corrupt purposes. Our people fear those monsters now when they should be looking to them for wisdom. How many of our people’s children have disappeared inside those walls to never be heard from again? Their deaths are on my hands.” Dyack spoke evenly.

Barnak shook his head. “No. Their deaths are on the heads of those monsters who walk the halls of power there!” He hissed. “You don’t think I see what they have become? Why do you think I hide my own daughters just as you and Aleatia have hidden Sehri from them for so long?”

Dyack stepped closer to him now, his eyes back to normal and his wolf fangs no longer exposed. “You know that Sehri has become the wife of Androcles Leonidas. The Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union.” He said.

Barnak nodded his head slowly. “It has been the talk of the planet for days.” He said. “Many sons among the powerful families were not happy. They had hoped to court Sehri and take her as their mate. There have been calls for you to absolve this joining, you must know that.”

Dyack nodded his head. “I do.” He answered. “That is something that will never happen however. Barnak, my daughter Sehri, she can now shift her form.” Dyack spoke softly revealing something that only a handful of Rothryn now knew.

“What do you mean?” Barnak asked.

“She can become wolf, just as our people were able to do over a hundred thousand years ago. Androcles has given this gift back to her.” Dyack replied.

Barnak’s dark eyes went even wider at this information and he felt his heart leap into his throat. “You... you are serious?” He gasped.

Aleatia nodded her head from beside Dyack. “Andro bit her Barnak. During their initial lovemaking when he claimed her after her fever had passed, he bit her. It is an ancient custom among the Lycavorians from the Alpha Quadrant. A custom that dates back to when our people were all together on the same world. It signifies to all that Sehri is mated and no male will approach her while she carries the scent of Androcles in her blood and scent. No male will ever do this to a mated female within the Union. It is considered a crime of the highest magnitude.”

“I don’t understand.” Barnak said.

“When Androcles bit her, he transferred part of his DNA to Sehri inside the virus within all of our bodies.” Aleatia replied softly. “He returned to her body the part of our DNA that the Ancients removed. The ability to shift our forms. She is beautiful in wolf form Barnak.”

Barnak looked away as he tried to absorb this information. This was not something that had ever crossed his mind, so concerned with gathering as much information on Etheric abilities as he could to push back against the Science Academy. “By the Gods Dyack, I never imagined that this could be so. Not even once.” He turned back to Dyack quickly. “The Lycavorians in the Protectorate could have done this?”

Dyack nodded his head. “Yes, but we pushed them away. We knew we were like them, but because we could not shift our forms we pushed them away. I am guilty of it as was my father before me. As are you.”

Barnak met his eyes. “The Ancients had no right to do that Dyack!” Barnak groused. “No right to change us to suit their purposes no matter the reason! Why do you think I have been trying to discover as much

as I could about our Etheric abilities? To one day be able to stand against the Science Academy and free our people from their grip!”

Dyack nodded his head with a small smile. “I know you have.” He answered. “I had my... I had my people break into your server and I have read many of your notes through the years.” He saw Barnak’s eyes go wide in disbelief. “It is why I am coming to you now old friend. And you would be very surprised to discover just who shares that very sentiment Barnak.” He stated.

Barnak did not care about his privacy any longer. If what Dyack was freely telling him was true there was so much more to be concerned about in the future. “Dyack we must explore this!” Barnak gasped. “We must discover more about this! If Sehri can now shift her form, think of what it could mean to our people!”

Dyack nodded his head. “And we will explore it and discover all there is to know.” He answered immediately. “The Lycavorian Union has men and women who make our doctors and scientists look like children in comparison Barnak. They are our brothers and sisters no matter where they come from. Androcles’ own sister Eliani, she is a Hadarian Healer, she has told Aleatia it would be a simple matter to make it so all Rothryn could have this skill given back to them.”

“Simple?” Barnak gasped.

Aleatia smiled. “You have not met Androcles’ sister.” She stated. “I do not think the word failure is even in their vocabulary.”

“Help me Barnak.” Dyack spoke now stepping even closer to him. “Help me to lead our people into the future.”

Barnak looked at him. “Dyack we do not...”

Dyack shook his head. “We do not agree on very much, I know.” He stated. “I dismissed this before but now I believe it is time I embraced it. The Union, the former Protectorate, even the Vanari; change is coming my old friend. Whether we want it to or not. Now I need someone who can help me to navigate that change for our people.”

“As what?” Barnak spoke. “An aide? An Advisor? I am none of these things Dyack! I am...”

“As Deputy Praetor.” Dyack spoke evenly.

Barnak looked at him in stunned shock. “Dyack, there has not been a Deputy Praetor since before your father! The Council voted to remove that position!”

Dyack nodded his head. “They did. One of the old ways that I now see we should have clung to. I am reinstating the position and I want you to take it. The Council will not fight me on it, not after what will take place soon. You and I, we have worked different paths of the same goal Barnak, but both of us with the future of our people in the forefront. I think in one way, you think in another. I think it is time we joined those divergent paths and take them into the future together.”

Barnak looked at him for a long moment. He could see the truth of what Dyack spoke in his eyes. “You are serious?” He finally asked unable to think of anything else.

“The paperwork issuing the order is already done.” Dyack spoke. “We can swear you in tonight if you like. I am not afraid to admit that I need help. I need a counter balance to me. You are that man.”

“What of your dealings with the OSG?” Barnak asked tentatively. “This knowledge has gotten around to many of the Council members but they are just too cowardly to question you on it.”

“That was a diversion in order to help Denali and Coren discover just how deep the corruption with the Vanari Board of Regents went.” Dyack answered. “I can give you all the particulars, tell you all of it, but I need you to agree first. I do not want someone to agree with me on everything Barnak, I want someone who will tell me something is a bad idea and not mince words. And then help me to find another solution. I can do it alone, but I would much rather have you at my side.”

Barnak was not a foolish man and he was a patriot to the core. He could detect the truth in Dyack’s words and he did not doubt them. Dyack may have been many things but he was also a patriot to the core and would do anything for his people. The two of them together could accomplish far more than either of them separately.

Barnak held out his hand after all of two seconds. “And you will have me.” He stated confidently.

Aleatia had been the one to convince him that this was the right course of action going forward. Barnak was just like Dyack but he was also different. He would bring a perspective that others would not. He could be a

powerful ally and once more a treasured friend. Dyack reached out and grasped his forearm tightly, ushering in a new era and way of doing things for the Rothryn people.

“That pleases me more than you know.” Dyack spoke warmly as he smiled. “We let... I let our friendship falter because of our differences. I will not make the same mistake again.”

“There is blame enough for both of us my friend.” Barnak spoke honestly. “I say we leave it where it belongs and move forward.”

Dyack nodded his head. “Indeed.”

“We must deal with the Rothryn Science Academy Dyack.” Barnak spoke as Dyack pulled him closer to the couches. “They cannot be allowed to persecute our people any longer. It must stop! And it must stop tonight!”

“I have already signed an Executive Decree abolishing the Science Academy.” Dyack spoke holding out the data pad to him. “It is my hope you will place your name beside my own in unity of this action.”

Barnak didn't hesitate and jammed his thumb down on the pad, putting his name, his influence and all of his power beside Dyack's. He looked at him. “How will we do this?” He asked. “The Science Academy has grown powerful Dyack. Too powerful. They will not simply lay over while we tear them down.”

Dyack smiled at this and squeezed Barnak's arm. “Perhaps my friend, but they made a very powerful enemy with their actions concerning Sehri. After tonight they will not make this mistake with your daughters, or anyone among our people ever again.”

“How do you know this?” Barnak asked him. “Even our combined influence will not be enough to overcome whatever horrors they have within their walls. They have their own army who have become drunk with their power and will not give up so easily. We would need to launch a full assault against their facility and many lives would be lost. How...?”

“You let me worry about them.” The deep voice spoke from the side.

Barnak's head snapped to the left and he stumbled back as his eyes grew wide watching as the shadows unwrapped from around the tall, muscular young man and the dark haired young woman.

“By the Gods!” Barnak almost shouted.

“Barnak, allow me to introduce the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union, Androcles Leonidas and one of his wives and mates, Crown Princess Carisia Leonidas.” Dyack said as the shadows fully drifted away revealing Andro and Carisia standing there holding hands. Both of them wore their ArmorPly uniforms and weapons.

Andro leaned over and kissed Carisia gently, her hand coming up to caress his cheek before he stepped away from her and moved up to stand in front of Barnak. At six foot one, Andro was slightly taller than Barnak and considerably more muscled and defined. Barnak took notice of how bright his azure blue eyes were.

“The Rothryn Science Academy conspired with the OSG and other criminal elements to kidnap my wife and mate Sehri Leonidas.” Androcles stated calmly. “Based on the information we received from those who were to carry out this abduction, I know full well what their many intentions were going to be. They were going to... they were going to experiment on her and eventually kill her so that they could dissect here.” Andro held out his hand to Barnak. “Tonight I will show them just how Spartans of the Lycavorian Union deal with such things. They will not be happy to say the least. Nor will any of them live through this night.”

SPARTA'S WRATH
ORBITING LENTANI UNDER SHROUD
SEPTEMBER 3RD, 2575, 1730 HOURS

“...No one can see us?” Barnak asked the question to no one in particular as he stood beside Dyack on the bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH*.

Dyack shook his head with a smile. “Amazing isn't it?” He spoke. “Our sensor arrays are not sophisticated enough to detect this ship or the roughly three hundred others that are now in the area.”

Barnak looked at him with wide eyes. “Three hundred!” He gasped.

-Three hundred and nineteen to be exact- The somewhat mechanical voice spoke from behind them and Barnak whirled around quickly to see the towering seven foot tall Avatar occupying the area directly behind them. **-Another forty-three of our ships are finishing their missions in securing the Vanari prisoners that we liberated. They will join with us when we depart-**

Dyack smiled again at the look on Barnak's weathered face as he stared at the Avatar in total wonderment. He had much the same reaction upon first seeing Armen, but he quickly grew accustomed to him. He may have been the most advanced machine Dyack had ever seen before in his life, but he had many qualities that were very Lycavorian in nature. Aleatia had told him that Armen was one of the Avatars that the Ancients, those they now knew were called Pralors, had used on their ships and that many of them took on the mannerisms of those they were meant to emulate. In Armen's case, it was Androcles.

"Armen commands this ship Barnak." Dyack said. "Armen, may I present Deputy Praetor Barnak."

Armen bowed his head slightly. **-Androcles told me you would be coming aboard-**

Barnak looked at Dyack. "A machine commands this great ship?" He asked shocked.

Dyack nodded his head once more. "Armen is far more than just a machine Barnak. For all intents and purposes he is this ship as its Avatar. He could run this ship by himself with ease."

-Ship functions operate at two point three percent better with my crew Praetor Dyack- Armen answered him. **-I am more efficient with them-**

Dyack was the one to look surprised now. "I didn't know that." He stated.

-With only two operational Avatars among the Union fleet this information is not widely known- Armen told him. **-As we advance and grow this will undoubtedly change for the better as more Avatars are introduced-**

"You are building more of you?" Dyack asked.

Armen shook his head. **-Based on information provided to us by Androcles' father, we have determined that twenty-nine percent of the Avatars among the Pralor people within the Echo quadrant are not in use. It is our hope that we can change that-**

Barnak looked at him. "The Echo quadrant?" He stammered. "Dyack, they have ships and people in the Echo quadrant? It would take us decades to reach the Echo quadrant with our engines."

-Thirty-nine point six years to be exact- Armen told him. He shrugged his massive shoulders. **-Give or take a month or so-**

"By the Gods." Barnak muttered. He looked at Dyack. "Dyack, what we could do with such technology is..."

Dyack nodded his head. "Yes, it is boundless. I believe that you and I are of the same mind however, and that whatever we discover must be integrated into our society slowly. There is much out there among the stars that we do not yet understand. The Lycavorians from the Union have been exploring the stars for far longer than us my friend. I have made the mistake of moving us too fast into the future already. You are to be the counter balance to that."

Barnak nodded his head. "You are correct but... will they share what they know Dyack?" Barnak asked.

"You may call yourselves Rothryn..." The female voice came from behind them and they all turned to see Gorgo and Dasha move onto the bridge with graceful movements. "But you are still Lycavorian."

Dyack smiled and motioned with his hand towards them. "Barnak, this is Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha. They are Androcles' grandmothers."

Barnak bowed his head slightly to them. He did not agree with women being put in harm's way when they were the bearers of whatever future their people had but he was also intelligent enough to know that this was changing even among Rothryn society.

"I am honored." Barnak spoke. "You are mothers to the King And Queen Aricia. I have heard you spoken about on our News channels."

Dasha waved her hand dismissively. "We are the ones who should be honored." She spoke. "To meet you and your people, fellow Lycavorians, out here among the stars is a gift."

"Indeed." Gorgo agreed.

"We are Rothryn." Barnak spoke looking at them. "We are not truly Lycavorian."

Gorgo reached out and took his hand. "You are Rothryn, yes. You are still Lycavorian no matter that you cannot shift your physical forms sir. You call yourselves Rothryn and we will honor that, you should honor that, but we all can trace our heritage back to Lycavore, no matter what we call ourselves now."

"This... this was our homeworld?" Barnak asked.

Gorgo nodded in reply. "Many millennia ago, yes. It is where all of us come from. We have evolved and spread out, and we may be slightly different, but we are all still Lycavorian."

Barnak thought about that for a moment and then smiled as he realized that this woman was correct. "I suppose we are." He said finally.

Dasha took his arm as Gorgo reached out and took Dyack's arm. "Androcles asked that Gorgo and I escort you both to the Command Center for ground operations." Dasha spoke. "I do not know the official name as I have always tried to ignore when our grandchildren begin speaking in terms Gorgo and I do not understand."

"Now that is so very true." Gorgo spoke as they began to walk off the bridge.

"You have asked if we will share." Dasha continued as they walked. "I think you will find that Martin Leonidas and those who follow him have a very special place in their hearts for those who want the same things for their people as we do. Deia is waiting to speak with both of you before this distasteful business with this group on your world begins. We also have several representatives of our government on board and you will be able to meet with and discuss anything you like with them. For now let me introduce you to my daughter's coffee, it is the finest anywhere in the universe."

Gorgo chuckled. "Dasha, you are biased."

Dasha smiled as well. "Indeed I am." She answered. "But it is exquisite and you will be able to meet more of our grandchildren. They drink it by the bucket."

Barnak looked at Dyack with a smile on his face as the two women led them down the corridor and a light of recognition and knowledge passed between the two old friends. They would need to proceed slowly for sure, but their future had found them, and it looked very bright.

SPARTA'S WRATH MEDITATION CHAMBER LEONIDAS FAMILY SECTION, DECK TEN

Jomann and Dutkne entered the Meditation Chamber through the hatch like door, the single *Durcunusaan* soldier reaching out and closing it behind them. Jomann carried the small, polished hickory wood case under his arm tightly. The interior of the chamber was very well lit to accommodate the ability to read from the many hand written texts that lined the walls from floor to ceiling along the right side as they entered. There were several couches and chairs in the large portion of the library like room, as well as a false fireplace that added to the atmosphere of the surroundings. It was meant to be a place to come to reflect and think and relax without having to maintain your Etheric shields in place. It did this very thing well as both Dutkne and Jomann lowered their shields upon entering and felt nothing. No surface thoughts, no echoes, nothing but peace and quiet. Jomann looked at Dutkne with wide eyes and Dutkne smiled.

"I told you." He said. "These chambers are incredible. It is why Avi enlarged them to some extent and made them into libraries of knowledge."

Jomann looked around at the many shelves. “All these are handwritten texts?” He asked softly.

Dutkne nodded his head. “Many date back thousands of years. I was stunned when he told me how old some of them are. Admiral O’Connor apparently spent a lot of years collecting books and such from the libraries on Earth and other planets. Many of them hand written and now displayed here.”

“The computer pads allow you to access those that are not hand written.” Andro’s voice echoed and they turned to see him come into the main room from the doorway. “Each chamber has four rooms just like this one.”

Andro wore the Mark VI Armorpoly without the crimson cape dragging along the floor, his hand holding the mug of steaming coffee. Dutkne reached out and grasped his forearm and the almost imperceptible contact of Praetorian Mage and Warrior took place as it always did. It was something that most would never detect but Jomann saw it for he too was a Praetorian and this had been happening with him and Eliani over recent days and weeks. Murano had called it a download of information between Warrior and Mage. An event that brought them closer to each other and made them more effective as a pair. It helped that Eliani was his *Anome*, one of only three known instances within the Union where someone of non-pureblood was recognized in such a way. Eliani’s Lycavorian blood was far more dominant than her Hadarian blood and this fact contributed to it. Jomann loved her and Brendi without reservation or doubt. Brendi had embraced her life with them, and while she knew one day Jomann would change her and she embraced that now after fearing it for so long, all of them were content right now to enjoy and build on what they had discovered.

“Everything is set?” Androcles asked.

Jomann nodded his head and held out the case to him. “This is not something you need to do alone Andro.” He spoke. “It’s not something I should let you do alone as your Captain.”

Andro set the mug down on the small table to his right and then turned back to take the box. “Sehri is my wife and mate.” He stated. “Yes I do.”

“They arrived this morning.” Jomann spoke tapping the top of the box. “Nehtes did an amazing thing here.”

Andro opened the polished box and smiled when he saw the two objects. Two circular Glaives rested on the crimson colored cushion in the box, each with an inverted V in the center. Crimson lines extended outward from the small center, and down across each of the three bladed wings. Andro took one out of the box and depressed the small indentation in the center of the glaive, extending the blades perhaps half an inch outward.

Dutkne watched with interest. “Fascinating.” He finally spoke.

Andro looked at him and nodded. “Lu’ria’s Glaive inspired me to come up with this idea. I wanted something a little less bulky than our fighting knives and more versatile.”

Jomann removed the other Glaive from the case and turned it over in his hands slowly. “It’s forged from Dragon Armor and Paravin Metal? I never thought Nehtes could combine the two.” He asked as he tested the light weight in his hand.

Andro nodded his head. “A very thin coating around Paravin metal forged in the blue fires of their world. Completely indestructible.”

“Impressive.” Dutkne commented as Jomann handed the glaive back to Andro and he secured one on either side of his Armorpoly combat harness.

“Dyack has his men in place?” Andro asked.

Dutkne nodded his head. “The last of them just moved into position. He and his new deputy are waiting to begin the transmission. Once they do, the Rothryn Special Operations teams will breach.”

“We should at least have a small force on the ground Andro.” Jomann stated. “We are trusting the Rothryn troops, who are an unknown.”

Andro shook his head. “The Rothryn have more reason to hate what those inside that building have become than we do. They have suffered under them for too long. Insure that Deni and Deion do not interfere unless it is absolutely necessary or the Rothryn call for aide. This is their fight more than it is ours and they harbor no good will to those within the walls. Sadi and Ne’Veha will be holding the *PREMONITION* just outside missile range and Dorian and Ryner will have my back as they orbit the facility. I don’t need all of the Praetorians that we have engaging in this. If it goes to *sibfla* then you move in, not before. Our team is standing by?” He looked at Jomann.

Jomann nodded his head. “Cowen is in overwatch with Sherice. Daio, Ridor, Kalis, Arduri and Lisisa are standing by just outside the west entrance behind the Rothryn troops. Serale and Cvea have medical support behind them. Mari has been masking their sensor readings from inside the facility for the last hour. It was ridiculously easy for her to crack in. If it goes to shit, Deion and Denali will join with them and they will breach the west entrance.”

Andro nodded. “Good enough.”

“Murano doesn’t like this.” Jomann said.

“He understands however, and that is why I asked him to remain here on *SPARTA’S WRATH* as opposed to airborne with Sadi.” Andro stated.

Jomann nodded his head. “I won’t tell you what Eli thought of this stunt.” He said with a smile.

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “Good.” He said. “I would not want to have to rinse my ears.”

Jomann reached out and placed his hand on Andro’s shoulder. “Do not hesitate Andro.” He stated softly.

“I won’t.” Androcles told him as he gripped his forearm. “I won’t.”

“Sarlana and I will have the last of the details worked out by the time you return.” Dutkne told him.

“Then we can begin to prep the ship. The probes are all on their way and Armen is monitoring their status. They should arrive at the station in two days.”

Andro looked at them. “We are truly stepping off in to the unknown you know.” He spoke.

Jomann laughed softly. “As if a little fact like that ever stopped us.” He said.

“I like the unknown.” Dutkne echoed. “It’s so... unknown.”

The three of them laughed and Andro shook his head. “My mother Anja would lock all of us up, you do know that don’t you?”

“She’ll have to catch us first.” Jomann answered. “Of course, she has her hands full with your father I’m sure.”

Andro nodded his head. “No bet there.” He stated. “My father and Uncle have a knack for stepping into the *sibfla* even when they aren’t looking for it.”

LENTANI ROTHRYN SCIENCE ACADEMY SIX KILOMETERS NORTH OF LLON

The Rothryn Science academy facility took up fully two square kilometers, its massive five story structure surrounded by the imposing black wall of granite and steel. It did not appear ostensibly to be anything other than some sort of government building, but most Rothryn knew exactly what went on within its dark walls and they had for hundreds of years. The dense timber surrounded the facility on three sides, the fourth side backed up directly to a large lake. There were four entrances off the wide road that encircled the Academy, each of them with a set of enormous double doors built into the ten meter high wall and reinforced with heavy duty steel supports. There were beautiful tall trees and perfectly planted flower beds around each of the entrances, but all Rothryn knew that they were only for show. The men and women who now occupied this facility were loathed all across the planet and anywhere within all of Rothryn space. They had been around since the dawn of Rothryn society and had set themselves up as the moral conscious of their people. They had spies in almost every aspect of society looking for those who were born with a much stronger Etheric connection than others. These children, men or women were then taken from their homes, many times against their will and most were never heard from again. They were entrenched in Rothryn society and powerfully influential, which had allowed them to remain nearly untouchable to the government. There had been many attempts through the years to close the school and stop what was going on within its walls, but ultimately all of them had failed for one reason or another.

While they had no formal security force, hundreds of former Rothryn soldiers had joined the Academy through the years for one reason or another. Most because they believed in what the Academy did, others because of the luxuries that they were provided. The leader of this Security stood now in the main control center for the Academy looking at all the monitors. His men and women were watching all of the entrances on the

many feeds, as well as the lower levels where all of the test subjects and prisoners were held. He was an older Rothryn, just past his thirteenth thousand year, with centuries of experience behind him. As his dark eyes gazed at the monitors and he saw the Rothryn troops massing at the four entrances, he was growing very uneasy. This night was different than times past when the government had sent troops against them. This was being ordered by Praetor Dyack who had never done something like this before. These men and women were forming up in such a way that showed the experience and tactical knowledge of whoever was leading them. He turned his head as the slightly rotund man entered the Command Center, his expensive robes wrapped around his body and an almost casual air about his arrogant body.

“What is so important that you had to pull me away from my chambers Senior Colonel Wilman?” He asked.

Wilman kept his look of disgust from showing. No doubt the man was abusing one or more of the young females that had been brought here through the years. Many of them were quite beautiful and were not etherically sensitive enough to rate being taken. They had been brought here for the sole purpose of entertaining this man and his vanity. There were close to a dozen young women in his stable now and he used them whenever and however he wanted. Wilman did not approve of this in the least, but he kept his council to himself. He had been mated to the same red haired woman for over six thousand years and he was very content with her attentions. She had given him seven strong children who he had intentionally kept outside the realm of the Science Academy in order to protect them and allow them to lead normal lives. Two of his sons and two of his daughters refused to associate with him because of the duties he held and the beliefs they felt were wrong. It was the price he paid for keeping them safe.

“You should probably see this Executor Garnot.” Wilman told him motioning to the screens all around the massive room.

The portly man’s eyes moved across the room looking at the monitors. “What is this?” He asked.

“Rothryn troops have moved into locations at all of our entrances. At least a full battalion at each of the locations.” He stated. “They are at the extreme range of our cannons but they are not advancing. They began moving into position an hour ago.”

“And you waited this long to advise me?” Garnot hissed.

“They have done this in the past Executor, but never at all four entrances. I did not feel the need until their numbers grew.” Wilman answered.

“What are they doing?” Garnot asked.

“Nothing.” Wilman answered. “That is why I am concerned.”

Garnot looked at him. “Concerned about what?” He spat. “They have done this many times in the past and nothing has ever taken place. This is only another show. A way for Dyack to direct attention away from his activities with the Eridiani OSG.”

“I don’t think so Executor.” Wilman told him. “Something is different now.”

“What?” Garnot demanded.

Wilman shook his head. “It is... it is simply a feeling I have Executor.”

Garnot looked at the screens all around the center. He was only a Tier Sixteen Etheric user by the standards that Helen had established, but he did not know that. He was secure in his position and of his power. He had ruled over the Rothryn Science Academy for nearly two thousand years and was just as ruthless as he needed to be. He had personally ordered the deaths of hundreds of Rothryns through the years in order to study their abilities and try to improve the use of Etheric powers in others. Men and women he could control. He had a small force of these advanced users who answered to him, who he controlled, but he knew the moment he saw that Union Prince on the Rothryn news that they did not compare to him. Garnot wanted that kind of power. He wanted to wield it and control it.

He had no idea that this power would be his undoing.

“I do not pay you to have feelings Colonel.” Garnot spoke. “This is nothing more than a show of force by Dyack as I said. Every Praetor has done this for centuries and Dyack has enough problems now within the Council to cause him to pull attention away from the rumors about him circulating. It is nothing.”

“I would agree in most instances Executor Garnot.” Wilman told him. “Except for this.” He reached out and took direct control of a camera and swung it around until it was focused on the Main entrance into the

Academy in the north. He zoomed the field of vision until it was focused on something he had never seen before this night. He saw Garnot's eyes grow wider and he moved closer.

"That is... that is a dragon." Garnot spoke softly. He glanced at Wilman. "Only this new branch of Lycavorians have dragons!"

Wilman nodded his head. "Now you see why I am concerned. There is one at every entrance with the Rothryn troops. They are not doing anything, only resting on the ground, but if there is a dragon here then there..."

Garnot nodded his head. "Yes, there must be a rider somewhere. A rider with advanced Etheric skills unlike any we have among our own people."

"Why would they be here Executor?" Wilman asked him. "What purpose would cause this new branch of Lycavorians to suddenly take sides so quickly? And they align against us so it seems. We have not even been formally introduced as governments have we?"

Garnot glanced at him quickly and then looked away. "I don't know." He answered far too swiftly to suit Wilman. "Where is Harira?"

"Director Harira arrived only a few hours ago." Wilman answered. "I would imagine she had retired for the evening."

"Well wake her and get her up here." Garnot barked loudly. "She has dealt with these Lycavorians before and I want to know what they are doing helping Dyack. He has been dealing with the OSG for months and they have been obliterating the OSG for two days now wherever they find them. Surely they cannot be on his side. Get her up here now!"

Wilman looked at one of his people across the Center and motioned with his head for the man to follow Garnot's direction.

"Get me a direct line to Praetor Dyack's office!" Garnot barked out. "I want to know what this fool thinks he is doing!"

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBITING LENTANI** **CIC**

Kelelm entered the CIC holding the data pad in his hand as Dyack and Barnak turned to look at him.

"Kelelm... are we ready?" Dyack asked quickly.

Kelelm nodded his head as he came up to the two men. "Strike Teams are in place and waiting your word father." He spoke.

"Strike Teams?" Barnak asked looking at Dyack. His eyes grew wider. "You are going after those they hold?" He gasped.

Dyack nodded his head. "Two hundred of our finest soldiers trained by Kelelm and several Vanari Cadre Commandos in tactics which we do not normally employ. With our joint command they will silently assault the prison levels and free everyone that worm Garnot is holding. Androcles people are making it so they will not even detect this on their interior security monitors. Both of us have known for centuries that the Science Academy is a blight upon our people Barnak. Separately we could never accomplish this. Together we can end them this night. Are you with me?"

"Are you serious?" Barnak exclaimed. "That is not a question you have to ask me! We should be down there leading our men!"

Dyack smiled and nodded his head. "I agree, but much younger voices overruled any action I wished to be involved in. That includes you old friend. It will be satisfaction enough to witness it from here."

"We have been refining the plan for three years Deputy Barnak." Kelelm spoke. "I can show you the highpoints."

Barnak looked at Dyack and couldn't help but smile. "You have been planning this for a while I see."

Dyack grinned and shrugged his broad shoulders. "Just bits and pieces. Recently we have gotten some incredible intelligence. Plans, troop strengths, patrols of the interior."

Barnak moved closer to him. "A spy?" He asked.

Dyack shook his head. "Someone who has had enough of what goes on within those walls." He answered.

"Who?" Barnak asked.

"He or she would not give us their name, only a code word." Dyack answered. "His information up until now has been thoroughly vetted old friend. This is a legitimate source."

"You have a plan in place if this is all a lie?" Barnak asked.

Dyack nodded his head in reply. "We do. But I have faith in whoever this person is. Their information has been spot on ever since they first contacted us and we have done just as you are now doing. Questioning and testing them."

"You trust this source?" Barnak asked.

Dyack nodded his head again. "We do."

Barnak nodded his head after only a moment. "Then what are we waiting for?" He asked. "Let us do this! We..."

"Incoming transmission from the surface!" The male voice called out from along the wall causing all of the men to turn. "It's being routed through the Praetor's office directly! Origin is the Rothryn Science Academy!"

Armen stepped away from the station he was standing behind as he allowed his crew to conduct their jobs. Over ten thousand years he had laid dormant, leaving space dock without the crew he was supposed to have and carrying the last vestiges of a race and culture that was all but dead now. He had not known of the millions that had escaped until learning of Martin's plan from Avi, but his focus now was on this ship and this crew. The decks were now full of men and women, crew members he was always intended to have, and while none of them were pure Pralors as was the original intent, fully half of his crew carried Pralor blood within them in some fashion.

-You are ready Praetor Dyack? - Armen asked.

Dyack looked once at Barnak and saw his nod. He met Armen's orange hued eyes and nodded himself. "Yes."

-COM Chief, send the transmission to the Praetor's station and bring it up on the holo disc-
Armen told him. **-Open frequency Chief-**

"Routing to CIC Command Station One." The man spoke almost instantly. "Transmitting in the open."

Dyack turned back to the table as the image of the Science Academy Executor appeared, shimmered for a moment and then became instantly clear. Dyack pulled himself to his full height and folded his hands behind his back.

"Executor Garnot." Dyack began. "It is rather early in the morning, but what can I do for you?"

"Praetor Dyack." Garnot answered with his smug and supremely arrogant voice. "I would like an explanation as to why there are Rothryn troops at the entrances to my Academy? They are trespassing on the Science Academy grounds and they are accompanied by those beasts from this new branch of Lycavorians that have stuck their unwanted noses into Beta Quadrant business."

Dyack nodded his head. "Yes, I believe they are." He answered. "They are here at my request. The request of my government. Your government."

Garnot smiled and shook his head, allowing his arrogance to show through brilliantly to every news monitor that was beginning to pick up the broadcast and just as quickly beginning to show it live.

"I am sure you are well aware that the Rothryn Science Academy does not answer to the government Praetor Dyack. We are a completely autonomous entity. We operate on our own without guidance from the government." Garnot spoke. "It has been this way for centuries. Long before you ever took office. Long before your father."

"I'm well aware of the history of the Academy Executor." Dyack spoke calmly. "The long history of taking men, women and children in the dead of the night because they show promise with what we now know are our Etheric abilities. How, more often than not these men, women and children are never heard from again."

“It is the way of things and has been millennia.” Garnot answered. “To a time well before you were ever born Praetor. This is how our founding members established it and that has how it has always been. You cannot change history, as much as it seems you would like too.”

Dyack smiled and nodded his head. “No, I cannot Executor.” He stated. “However, I can and will change the future. Beginning tonight.”

“Our laws state...” Garnot began to speak.

Dyack let the emotion that he had been holding in for some time finally come out and his wolf fangs burst from his gums and his eyes changed for second time in more centuries than he could recall.

“I am changing our laws you pompous little man!” Dyack barked forcefully and seeing Garnot’s eyes grow large in shock. Dyack held up the data pad. “I have in my hand an Edict of Official Governmental Action! It has been signed and affirmed by every sitting member of the Rothryn Ruling Parliament! The vote was unanimous Executor! Would you like me to read it to you?”

“This is preposterous!” Garnot barked. “The Science Academy has been and will always remain outside the realm of influence of the government! We...”

“Are hereby abolished!” Dyack snapped. “As of this moment, by order of the Rothryn government and the people we represent, the Rothryn Science Academy no longer exists! No longer will our people suffer your existence and what you represent! I should have acted much sooner in doing this, and the blame for that resides solely with me and my predecessors! Now however, now I will make things right!”

“Praetor Dyack you must realize that this means nothing.” Garnot spoke. “Our existence is...”

“An abomination!” Dyack almost screamed. “The moment you began to take our people and twist them to suit your perverted experiments and actions you lost everything. I have been a coward in not acting before now! We all have been cowards and we will have to live with that the rest of our lives! But no more!”

“This is pointless Praetor.” Garnot spoke once more. “The Academy is beyond the reach of you and your government. We know what is best for the people and...”

“You are a power mad fool who has run out of time and places to run!” Dyack barked. “You and your Academy buffoons will no longer terrorize our people! No more will be taken from their homes in the night! No more will be subjected to your insidious experiments and attempts to create only the gods know what!”

Garnot smiled in the transmission. “Is that why you have troops at our door now?” He asked smugly. “Do you think to attack us and take us by force? Other Praetors have tried this and they were shown the error of their ways. Do you truly wish to order men to their deaths this day?”

Dyack smiled now and Barnak moved into the transmission right on queue. Garnot’s face altered significantly when he saw him and his dark eyes began to dart back and forth between the two men.

“Our men will not die this night!” Barnak hissed with equal hate and anger at the man in the transmission. His only thoughts were of his children who he had to hide for so many years and the lives they would now be able to fulfill because of the actions they were taking right now.

“Lord Barnak?” Garnot gasped.

“That is Deputy Praetor Barnak to you Executor Garnot.” Dyack spoke proudly.

“Dep... Deputy Praetor!” He stammered. “There has not been a Deputy Praetor in over four thousand years!”

Dyack nodded his head. “Another item that has changed this night.” He spoke. “I have admitted my faults and turned to an old ally in order to bring our people together! He has accepted his role and he stands with me now with the full backing of the Parliament!”

Barnak grinned and for the first time in nearly a millennia he allowed the change to come over him and the fangs and eyes of his wolf persona burst forth and were easily seen. “And we will see your terror end this day!”

Garnot stuttered for a few moments but then his face hardened. “Your troops will die if they attack us here!” He snarled. “Hundreds of them will die!”

Dyack shook his head. “I don’t think so.” He stated. “Those loyal Rothryn troops are not there to attack the Academy Executor Garnot. Barnak and I are not so foolish. Those loyal and proud Rothryn troops are there to keep you and your minions from escaping.”

“What?” Garnot barked.

“You made a mistake when you targeted my daughter Sehri Executor Garnot!” Dyack snarled at him viciously. “When you ordered her to be captured dead or alive by your Enverr minions so that you could experiment on her and discover just how much her abilities have advanced and how she can now shift her form to that of a wolf! Just as our ancestors were able to do so very long ago! You made the mistake Garnot you fool! Our brothers and sisters within the Lycavorian Union have many ways to gather information from those who do not wish to give it freely.”

“What... you have no idea what you...!” Garnot stammered once more.

“It’s too late Garnot!” Dyack spoke. “We know everything! You have brought about your own destruction and you have chosen the instrument by your actions! My daughter Sehri is now quite happily the wife and mate to a pureborn Lycavorian Spartan! The Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union! A young man who wields power that you and I cannot begin to imagine! His enemies gave him a name during their war with his people Executor Garnot! They gave him this name for the number of lives he claimed in that war. You chose the instrument of your own destruction Garnot, when you attempted to take my daughter from *him*.” Dyack’s smile was nothing but pure evil and he said the next words with great emotion.

“His name is Soul Slayer!”

LENTANI ELYNTH AND ANDROCLES ORBITING THE ROTHRYN SCIENCE FACILITY 20,000 FEET

The early morning air here is cool. Elynth spoke as she glided along with her wings at their full extension, catching the thermal layers and using her wings only enough to remain aloft. The natural makeup of a dragon’s scales made them invisible to any known sensors, so she had no worries of being spotted by machines, and they were too high for the naked eye to pick them out of the night sky even with the half-moon that was up. I like it.

Better than Sparta? Andro asked with a slight tinge of humor in his voice.

Elynth chuckled softly. *There is no place like our home Andro my brother.*

No there is not. He echoed her words.

They both loved flying like this, coasting along on the wind currents and just being together. They had been doing this since they both were small children and at times because of their ages, it gave their mothers fits. They would steal into the night at different times and just fly among the clouds for hours.

Will we see it again soon Andro? Elynth asked.

Andro shook his helmeted head, the multicolored horse hair plume shaking gently. *I do not know sister. He answered. After we retrieve Laren and Ladur and then link back up with our fathers, I don’t know what will happen. He has not been entirely forthcoming with me about what exactly is going on out there. There are some things that he is keeping even from us, I can sense it within him.*

Perhaps even he does not know. Elynth chimed in. *Our fathers can be the most closed mouthed ronnus when they want to be.*

That could very well be the case. Andro spoke with small humor in his tone. *This new species, the Tasmor, they are an unknown that father cannot predict. He wants to trust them for he says they are like us in many ways, but there are still too many unknowns. And these Svorag are a bigger threat than I think he is letting on. At least to others.*

Sarlana says they remind her in small ways of these Scourge that she and Murano have spoken to us of. Elynth spoke as she dipped her tail slightly and changed their direction.

That is what troubles me about them. Andro told her. *I don’t think father has shared everything they have discovered about them or the Svorag. Even Murano avoids talking of them when I have asked. It is almost as if they do not want to remember or there is something else going on. And much of this vagueness comes from this man Lorendo that they spoke of. He has killed hundreds of his own kind in order to protect some dark knowledge that he has according to my mother Anja. Some purpose that they cannot yet determine.*

I have thought of that. Elynth spoke softly. Someone who is as skilled as your mother in certain ways is a danger that we cannot dismiss.

Those are my thoughts as well. And father hesitates in his actions to some degree because he does not want to jeopardize what they have gained so far. The trust and cooperation. Andro said in agreement. He took a deep breath and shook his head slightly. *It is not our concern just yet sister. We have much to do before we form up with father.*

True enough. Elynth agreed.

The implant in his ear beeped softly and they heard Denali's voice speak quietly but clearly.

"Phase one is complete. Phase one is complete. Nineteen hostiles eliminated inside. No casualties on our part. All targets accounted for *fervon*. They got them all. Nothing further." Deni's voice told them, knowing that they would not reply as per their operational plan.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. *The Rothryn seem to be far more capable than we first thought.* He spoke to Elynth. *Good.*

Sehri's father does not strike me as a man who does things half way. Elynth said.

No he does not. Andro agreed with her. *He is winding up.*

Elynth nodded as they both heard Dyack's voice over their receivers. *All this drama is really unnecessary you know.*

I tend to agree but Dyack wanted to make a point. Andro said.

Andro adjusted the volume of his implant slightly and Dyack's voice became much easier to hear.

A young man who wields power that you and I cannot begin to imagine! His enemies gave him a name during their war with his people Executor Garnot! They gave him this name for the number of lives he claimed in that war. You chose the instrument of your own destruction Garnot, when you attempted to take my daughter from him." Dyack's smile was nothing but pure evil and he said the next words with great emotion.

"His name is Soul Slayer!"

I believe that is our cue. Elynth commented.

Andro nodded his head. *Take us in sister. Right through the skywalk.*

On our way! Elynth barked out as she folded her wings back and tilted her tail down as she plummeted for the ground beneath them.

ROTHRYN SCIENCE ACADEMY COMMAND CENTER

Wilman and Garnot were staring at the monitors all around the perimeter of the Academy when Harira entered the Command Center still somewhat disheveled from waking up. Garnot turned to her immediately. "Harira... finally!" Garnot hissed.

"What is going on?" She asked as she straightened her hair and came right up to them.

"Dyack has massed troops at all of our entrances." Wilman answered. "Among them he has placed these dragons."

Harira's eyes widened slightly. "Dragons?" She gasped.

"Why would he place them there?" Garnot asked. "Are they as capable as your initial reports spoke?"

Harira met his eyes. "Their dragons are paired with a Lycavorian or other species as a rider." She explained. "They... they are bonded within the Etheric realm. It gives them unique abilities."

"Can they manifest them into the physical realm?" Garnot asked.

Harira shook her head quickly. "Aside from being able to use a form of telekinesis and being able to deploy an Etheric shield around themselves I don't think so." She answered. "I only saw them working together on that planet Solmar, and that was after most of the fighting was already over."

"So you do not know what they are actually capable of?" Wilman asked.

Harira shook her head. "Information about their dragons is closely guarded. I tried to discover as much as I was able from their computers but it was locked behind walls of security layers I could not infiltrate."

"What of this Prince?" Garnot demanded. "The one we saw in the transmission? Can he do these things?"

Harira looked at him. "You saw the transmission Executor." She answered. "The way he killed that poor man. He and several of his siblings have this ability. They can project their Etheric abilities in to the physical realm as weapons. Apparently his father as well. It is within their blood somehow."

"And since he bit Dyack's daughter she would have this within her?" Garnot asked.

Harira nodded her head. "It is why I contacted you when I first discovered she had been changed. I overheard Aleatia speaking of it in whispers and I contacted you immediately. What does this matter now? Did your Enverr contacts not succeed in taking her?"

Garnot looked at Wilman and then back to her. "They did not, they were unsuccessful." He stated.

Harira's eyes grew wide. "I hope they were all killed." She stammered. "They could reveal far too much of our..."

"It's too late for that." Wilman spoke. "Dyack already knows what we attempted. That is why there are now troops outside our entrances."

Harira looked at him. "Surely they cannot touch us in here. Our defenses are state of the art. No one has been able to breach our walls in millennia."

"Dyack seems confident in their ability to do just that." Wilman answered. "I have alerted our people within the walls to take up their security stations and prepare to defend the Academy but they are doing nothing except sitting there. They are making no attempt to enter the grounds and each of these groups has at least one dragon with them."

"Our defensive missiles could reach them even where they are and eliminate them." Garnot spat.

Harira's eyes grew a little wider. "No." She hissed softly.

Wilman looked at her. "What do you mean?"

"Their dragon pairs can project Etheric shields." Harira stated. "They will be able to protect all those nearby, especially if these dragon pairs are Androcles Leonidas' siblings. They are like him, at least in some way. Three of his brothers and two sisters at least. If they are there among the Rothryn troops then your weapons will not do anything."

"They can project Etheric shields strong enough to stop missiles?" Wilman gasped in disbelief.

Harira nodded her head quickly. "It is like an additional skin of armor over what they already wear. I saw... I saw projectiles from weapons bouncing harmlessly away. Your missiles might knock them out with concussive force if they were unexpected but their fragments will not penetrate the Etheric shields they can generate."

"They cannot breach our security!" Garnot spat. "We will simply..."

"Colonel!" The male voice called out causing Wilman to turn and look across the Center. "Incoming Priority Communication from Major Olya in the prisoner wings!"

Wilman turned to the command station beside him and stabbed down on the small control panel. "Major!" He barked out.

"Colonel we have a breach!" The man's voice was excited and out of breath.

"A breach?" Wilman hissed. "No alerts have gone out!"

"Colonel... the prisoners are gone sir!" The major exclaimed. "All of them! Nineteen of our men our down and all of the holding cells are empty!"

Wilman looked at Garnot who had an expression of horror on his face. "Confirm!" He snarled.

"Sir... I came down to the Prisoner Wing to reinforce our men down here!" The Major answered. "We entered the Security Wing and noticed that the power was fluctuating. Our men at the Security Station were down! We swept the entire Wing. All of the cells have been emptied and the prisoners are gone. Nineteen of our men our dead!"

"The security Wing held over two hundred prisoners!" Garnot almost shouted. "Are you saying they are all gone?"

"Yes sir." The Major answered. "It appears they entered through a tunnel that was cut into the supply room floor. It drops into the main sewer tunnels beneath the Academy and lead..."

Wilman looked at Garnot. “Directly out to the river, bypassing the wall and our security!” He gasped.

“How is that possible?” Harira barked. “All of our security measures are in place! How could they have gotten in? How did they know where to go?”

“The Security Wing has all of the research labs in it!” Garnot exclaimed. “All of the data we have acquired through the millennia!”

Wilman turned quickly. “Run a system wide diagnostic!” He shouted. “Look for piggy back signals into our system! And check our video feeds! Do it now!” He turned back to Garnot and Harira. “It’s the only way they could have done this! They blinded us! They got someone into our security system and bypassed our protocols!”

“We have the most sophisticated computer system in the sector!” Garnot barked. “How did they...?”

“Colonel! I found it!” Another man’s voice shouted.

Wilman ignored Garnot and rushed over to where the man was sitting. “Show me!” He snapped.

The man pointed at his monitor. “Here sir!” He stated pointing to the thin wavy line on his monitor. “A low band transmission signal. We don’t use them anymore but the old codes are still active in our computer database. Someone tapped that signal band and took control of all of our equipment with a very powerful computer. I’ve never seen anything like this type of coding Colonel. Whoever is operating this computer is a genius. And the computer is more powerful than anything we have. They have been feeding our system false reports for over two hours now! False security feeds! Everything!”

“Can you sever their connection and regain control of our equipment?” Wilman barked the question.

The man shook his head quickly. “Whoever is doing this has infected all of our systems.” He stated.

“The only way to purge them now is to shut down the entire network and do a reboot from archived templates!”

“Fuck!” Wilman snarled. “What about secondary systems?”

The man nodded his head. “Secondary systems are offline while primary is running.” He stated. “They are still clean as of now, but the virus will instantly take control of them once they come online.”

“How long before that takes place?” Wilman asked.

“Maybe five seconds before they detect the secondary network come online and then another ten seconds for them to target whatever virus they are using to bypass our control.” The man answered. “I think.”

“You think?” Wilman stated.

“Colonel I’ve never seen this type of sophistication!” The man gasped. “It’s like... it’s like a brand new computer code sir! Whatever it is, it is not Rothryn or any other kind of computer code that exists. At least that we know of.”

“Can you control the weapons launchers with the secondary systems?” Wilman asked.

“Yes sir. Until they take the Secondary Network down too.”

“Can you find the origin of this signal?”

“I can tell you it’s not ground based sir.” The man answered. “We’d pick that up right away. It’s airborne! So it has to be a ship of some sort. And it has to be within five kilometers in order to transmit.”

“Find me the source of that transmission Sergeant!” Wilman hissed. “Like yesterday!” He turned and hit a button on another computer console. “Major Ody!”

“Here Colonel!”

“Seal the Security Wing and begin deploying our security force throughout the Academy. All points of access and exit.” Wilman ordered. “Tell your men to prepare for an assault of some kind. I don’t know from where.”

“Understood sir!” Ody answered.

“And Major...” Wilman looked at Garnot. “Deploy the three Containment 567 Protocol Prototypes.”

“Understood sir.” He replied.

Wilman looked at Garnot as he moved closer to him. “They have not yet undergone full testing Wilman.” He hissed.

“It appears that this is the time.” Wilman spoke.

Harira looked back and forth between the two men. “What are Containment 567 Protocol Prototypes?” She asked.

“They are...” Garnot began to speak but the voice of the sergeant stopped him.

“Colonel... I think I have the ship!” he barked out.

Wilman turned to him. "You think?" He snapped.

The man pointed to his screen. "I was able to trace the signal back to here Colonel." He spoke indicating a spot only three kilometers off the east tower. "But no sensor readings and no visual ship is present."

Harira moved up to them. "It is hidden behind one of their invisible fields." She stated. "They call them Shrouds. It renders the ships invisible to sensors and the naked eye."

Wilman looked at her. "You are certain?" He asked.

Harira nodded her head quickly. "I have seen them in action." She stated. "It is amazing technology known to this new branch of Lycavorians."

"Sergeant... target that spot." Wilman told him. "Use the East Missile battery. You will have fifteen seconds once you bring the Secondary Network online. Don't miss."

PREMONITION
FIVE THOUSAND FEET
ORBITING ROTHRYN SCIENCE ACADEMY
TWO POINT NINE KILOMETERS

"...Sadi?" Ne'Veha spoke in almost a whisper as her helmeted head turned back and forth to scan the three consoles of instruments that surrounded her body in the left side pilot's seat.

"Everything is nominal *SirsanGai*." Sadi answered from the co-pilot's seat, her own head moving between the three massive consoles that surrounded her own body.

Their relationship had provided to them many insights into each other and both of them knew that Ne'Veha was the more instinctive pilot, while Sadi was the more tactically sound. While Sadi adored and loved each of her fellow Crown Princesses, she preferred Ne'Veha's lush, elven body and Sehri's firm lithe figure pressed against hers in their bed. Ne'Veha had discovered since Andro had turned her that she simply could not get enough of first Sadi's and now Sehri's sweet scent or the taste of their lips. Since Sadi and Ne'Veha were both pilots, this only added to their attraction to one another, just as Lu'ria and Carisia were so drawn to one another because they were warriors. Their minds thought very much alike in so many ways, and when Sehri had joined them, it had become even more delightful for each of them discovered something about each other that simply aroused them to no end. While they would deny nothing to each other, Caliria simply drifted towards Carisia and Lu'ria, while Sehri gravitated toward her and Ne'Veha. When they were all together in their bed with Androcles and the mood struck them, it did not matter who they grabbed to quench their desires, for they were never deny each other anything. They had been spending almost every moment together since Sehri had joined them and all of them were the very best of friends as well as lovers now. The delightful soreness of having Androcles love them breathless still coursed through them all and it was something that none of them would change for anything now. Though none of them had given it much thought at all, their lives had paralleled Andro's mothers, since they now almost always traveled in a group of three when away from Andro. Just as his mothers had begun to do when they were away from his father.

Sadi turned her head slightly and looked behind her and Ne'Veha. "Mari?" She asked.

Mari turned her own helmeted head to look at her and nodded. "The signal is holding steady." She answered from the chair.

It had taken Master Chief Ranor all of six hours to install a complete computer station behind the pilot's seat and opposite Kameka at the *PREMONITION*'s weapons station. Since almost all of the instruments on the *PREMONITION* were based in some fashion on Pralor tech, it was a simple matter for Ranor to removed two computer stations from an unused secondary engineering station and turn it into what Mari currently sat in front of. Two large monitors, with three smaller computer consoles in a slightly circular pattern right at her fingertips. Mari had jumped at the chance to work on the ship and had been simply amazed at what the Dreamland Engineers had built by combining Pralor technology and Union ingenuity.

Mari was also stunned at how easily she had fallen into the role she now held. She was now a Leonidas, Deion's wife and mate, for he had claimed her only two nights earlier during a night of incredibly passionate love making that still made her head spin. The pain from his bite had passed within seconds, the powerful virus

within his blood racing through her veins and changing her. It had not been as bad as she imagined, all the times they had been together prior to him biting her having served to prepare her body. Mari had never felt more complete in her life now. The love for Deion Leonidas that she felt was beyond words and now that she was like him, it made that love so much more powerful. She could not imagine herself with anyone but Deion, and the relationships she had been in before meeting Deion no longer registered within her memories. She could not imagine herself not being a Leonidas. It was as if she was always intended for this road in life and she embraced it fully. When she had discovered how much younger Deion was than her, even this knowledge had not deterred her emotions or intent. Had it been anyone else, Mari would have dismissed the relationship just as quickly as she could for it would have been like being with a child. Deion however, even barely eighteen years of age, Deion Leonidas was no child. He held within him the memories and knowledge of his father and grandfathers and his mother and he was the most incredibly intelligent man that Mari had ever met in her life. He was also exceptionally gifted physically in the male department and never ceased to leave Mari breathless before succumbing to his own pleasure. Deion did not fear her intellect either. Other men she had been with were intimidated by her intelligence, but Deion embraced it. He told her that it made her even more attractive to him in so many ways.

It was going to take some getting used to, being called Princess by so many, but Mari was ready for that portion of her life to begin. She had not told her father or mother just yet, she did not know if they would understand what she felt going through her, and they needed to discover each other once more. Deion had begun training her in small things, with the intent to approach Androcles in order to more officially train her. She was a Praetorian and that could not be denied by anyone, even her father. Mari knew that if her father did not wish to train her than Androcles would.

“Meka?” Sadi asked.

“The Rothryn Teams all made it out.” Meka answered instantly, her long tail absently waving back and forth behind her chair. “I wasn’t able to count all of them Sadi, but it appears as if they got all of the prisoners that we knew about, or close to it. Our weapons are hot but in standby.”

Kameka’Caleo was only another sign that Androcles and those around him were unique.

Meka was now quite happily the wife and mate to Daio and she had embraced her new life without a second’s pause. A fact that her father General Byka’Caleo could not brag enough about. Daio had looked beyond all Kameka had endured in her life and found the light buried deep within her. He had embraced that light and made it his and Kameka had surrendered all she was to him without hesitation. It was a decision she would now never regret for it had given her everything she had ever wanted. She was now free to live her life as she saw fit with a man who worshiped her publicly and privately in their bed. While she was Kavalian by birth, Meka now considered herself a citizen of the Lycavorian Union. She was proud of her heritage, but knew that change was needed or her people would fade from history. General Pian’Nruarani had started that change and her father would do his part in that battle.

This is where Kameka’Caleo belonged and she knew it with no doubts.

“Andro and Elynth are moving into position now.” Sadi spoke as she turned back to her own instruments. “In a few more minutes we can drop this charade.”

Mari’s head jerked slightly. “Whoa!” She exclaimed. “Another command signal! It just came on line! *Sibfla!* It’s their Secondary Command Network! I’m detecting missile activation! They are locking onto the low band signal and tracing it back to us!”

“Launch!” Meka called out. “I have missile launch! Eastern Battery!”

Sadi’s head jerked to look out her cockpit window. “Countermeasures!” Sadi barked out instantly.

“Deploying!” Meka answered as her finger stabbed down on her console.

The entire area around the *PREMONITION* became as bright as daylight as Kameka deployed both flares and electronic clouds of chaff. While not actually causing the Shroud to falter, the flares and chaff did outline the *PREMONITION* quite clearly to anyone who may have been watching from the ground. Which just happened to be every Rothryn soldier at the Eastern entrance to the Academy as well as Lisisa and Jeth.

“*Nubou* this!” Sadi snarled. “Andro is almost on top of the skywalk! Meka, target all of the exterior batteries on that facility and blow them into pieces! Mari!”

“I have jumped their signal and now have control of their Secondary Network!” Mari called out. “They won’t be launching anymore missiles but I won’t know if they have another network until it activates!”

“It won’t matter if they have another!” Sadi growled. “*SirsanGai*... shift five degrees to port and let’s give Meka a clear line of sight!”

“Five degrees!” Ne’Veha echoed as she caressed the controls.

“Locking them up!” Meka shouted. “I’m killing them now!”

Kameka stabbed down on her console sending out the command to the *PREMONITION*’s two forward mounted X1 Quantum Matter Pulse Cannons. The Pralor designed weapon, taken from Sparta’s Wrath many spares, dropped slightly from within its recessed compartment on the *PREMONITION*’s forward hull and unleashed four, controlled bursts of devastating Phased Quantum Matter particles. Each burst of the dual cannons slammed perfectly into the four corner mounted missile batteries that were in plain sight on the roof of the Academy. Each blossomed into a huge fireball as the bursts from the QMPC shredded both launchers and spare missiles into junk in the space of just three seconds.

“Hah!” Mari exclaimed. “Chew on that!”

Sadi touched her console then looked out in to the darkness while reaching for Andro within Mindvoice. *Andro our love, they know something is happening now. Go with the gods our beloved. Return to us uninjured and we will shower you with extra attention.*

“...Know something is happening. Go with the gods our beloved. Return to us uninjured and we will shower you with extra attention.”

Sadi’s warning was clear, precise and full of seductiveness and Andro felt his wives and mates pulse him with their auras and Etheric resonances as Elynth maneuvered over the top of the Rothryn Academy insuring that she kept clear of the now burning batteries.

A hundred meters Andro! Elynth called out.

Give me two minutes sister! Andro spoke as he released the Dragon Armor braces on his legs. *I will open the west wall.*

No mercy my dragon brother. Elynth called out.

No mercy my dragon sister. Andro echoed.

Now! Elynth shouted just as she rolled completely over and Andro dropped from the saddle and fell into the darkness below.

ACADEMY COMMAND CENTER

“...Gone Colonel!” The sergeant gasped aloud as he looked at Wilman. “All... all of the missile batteries were just destroyed!”

Garnot looked at Wilman with shocked eyes. “Destroyed!” He almost screamed. “How is that possible?”

Wilman looked at the sergeant. “A ship?” He asked.

The man nodded his head quickly. “It never fully was visible sir, but it cut loose with some sort of countermeasures that threw off our missiles and reflected against whatever shield they are using to hide themselves. I couldn’t track where the weapons fire came from but it is definitely not any weapon that is known to us or the Vanari! Some sort of Quantum Matter based tech!”

Wilman turned his head quickly to where Harira stood. “You did not tell us they have developed Quantum Matter based weapons!” He snarled.

Harira met his gaze. “Quantum Matter is only theoretical!” She barked back at him.

“Quantum Matter weapons just obliterated my missile batteries and their command crews!” Wilman shouted.

“Colonel... the Containment 567 Protocol Prototypes have been destroyed!” The Sergeant exclaimed.

“What?!” Garnot shouted. “How is that possible!?”

“Executor... it appears as if whoever took the prisoners also eliminated the Containment 567 Protocol Prototypes. All three of them were found with slashed throats!” An alarm began sounding in the Command center and the sergeant’s eyes grew wider. “Colonel! We have an intruder!”

Wilman rushed over to the man. "Intruder? Where?"

Garnot moved over as well now, standing in front of the sergeant's station. "How could they have gotten someone inside?"

Wilman looked at his sergeant. "Where?" He demanded.

The sergeant shook his head. "It can't be!" He gasped.

"Talk to me sergeant!" Wilman hissed.

"Colonel... internal sensors are reading a breach of the Skywalk ceiling and the entire Skywalk level!"

The sergeant spoke.

"The Skywalk level?" Wilman stammered. "How could anyone breach the Skywalk level from the ground floor?"

The sergeant shook his head. "They didn't sir." He spoke pointing to the monitor. "Look."

The tip of his finger indicated the image of the shattered glass from the huge Skywalk Skylight. The once decorative glass was now utterly destroyed, with only jagged edges remaining.

"*Sibfla!*" Wilman coughed. "Do we have feeds on that level?"

"Switching now sir!"

"By the gods!" Wilman muttered as the different camera feeds that the sergeant was cycling through all showed the same thing. Bodies. Dozens of bodies. His eyes lifted to focus on Garnot. "What have you brought down on us with your actions you fool?" Wilman growled angrily. "How many?" Wilman shouted. "Eliminate the life signs of all of our men! Tell me how many got it!"

The sergeant worked feverishly and then sat back in shock. "That can't... that can't be right!" He gasped.

"What?!" Wilman barked. "How many?"

The sergeant looked up at him. "Colonel there is only... there is only one unidentified life sign!"

Wilman's eyes grew wide. "One!" He gasped in disbelief. "One man is not killing our security force by himself!"

All of them heard Harira's sharp intake of breath and they turned to look at her.

"Harira?" Garnot demanded. "What is it?"

"It's him!" Harira stammered as her hands went to her throat in fear. "It's the one who claimed Sehri! It's Androcles Leonidas!"

"The boy Prince?" Garnot hissed.

Harira looked at him. "He is no boy Garnot!" She snarled at him.

SPARTA'S WRATH

CIC

"...Was that?" Barnak exclaimed as they were monitoring the situation from the CIC with dozens of monitors now showing different portions of the Academy on the surface. The monitor they were watching on the wider screen had just flashed in four different locations and they could see the explosions.

-The *PREMONITION* just destroyed their missile batteries- Armen spoke from the side. **-It seems someone inside discovered the low band signal we are using to infiltrate their systems and traced it back to their ship. They fired upon them. Sadi Leonidas responded in a manner consistent with her demeanor-**

Barnak looked at him. "By destroying their missile batteries?" He gasped.

-They are lucky she did not bring down the entire structure- Armen quipped.

The doors to the CIC slid open and Sehri led The Cleric Mother Ilossa into the CIC. The older woman had wide eyes as she clung to Sehri's arm, her head swiveling about like a top as she took everything in. Ilossa's eyes finally came to rest of Dyack as Sehri ushered her right up to the Command Table.

“Cleric Mother Ilossa.” Dyack spoke bowing his head slightly. “An honor to see you once more.”

“Praetor Dyack.” Ilossa stammered. “How did you...? She looked around once more. “This ship?”

“Amazing isn’t it?” Dyack asked her as he looked at Sehri step closer to him. She reached up on her tip toes and kissed his cheek.

“Papa.” She spoke softly and with a great amount of affection.

“Cleric Mother, I’m sure you know Lord Barnak.” Dyack said motioning to him. “He is now Deputy Praetor.”

Ilossa’s eyes grew wider at this information and she looked at Barnak. She quickly looked back to Dyack. “Then it has... it has begun?” She asked.

Dyack nodded his head. “That is why I asked Sehri to bring you here.” He reached over and squeezed Barnak’s arm. “The three of us have a decision to make right now.”

Barnak looked at him oddly. “What do you mean Dyack?”

“The prisoners have all been liberated Cleric Mother.” Dyack said. “According to our men, some of them are in rough shape physically and mentally, but they are alive. Androcles has assured me that he can have several of the Union’s Hadarian medical personnel dispatched here along with several of their medical ships and generous amounts of supplies that we just do not have. Once we inform him of our decision, those ships and personnel can depart and be here within three days. Then we can truly begin to pull our people from our past while balancing our future with that same past.”

Ilossa nodded her head. “As it should be Praetor.” She stated. “I do not... I do not know why you sent for me however. I am not... I cannot be a politician.”

Dyack shook his head. “Not a politician.” He told her. “A healing balm for all our people. As the Cleric Mother to the Rothryn people.”

Ilossa’s eyes went wide at this information and Barnak smiled. While he had never met the woman before just now he had heard of her through the many years of trying to hide his own children with Etheric abilities. He knew what his friend was attempting to do and Barnak could not help but agree with his actions.

“The Rothryn Science Academy would never...” Ilossa began.

“They no longer exist.” Barnak stated proudly. “We have absolved them of all their power and influence. It no longer exists. Even now we are seeing to their forces within their walls.”

Dyack chuckled. “In a manner of speaking.” He stated.

“I don’t... Praetor Dyack I don’t understand.” Ilossa spoke.

“We brought you here to answer a question for us.” Dyack said. “Barnak does not know all of the details but I’m sure he has figured it out by now.”

Barnak nodded his head. “Indeed and I approve.”

Dyack smiled and took Ilossa’s hands in his. “We need you to decide what to do with the Academy.” He stated. “Does it benefit us in the long run if we leave the facility intact or do we raze it to the ground and purge it from our future?”

Ilossa’s reaction was almost instant. “So much agony and death.” She stated softly. “All the things that have happened within those walls Praetor... they could never be forgotten if... if the facility remained.” She shook her head. “No. It must be destroyed. Right down to the last brick and piece of steel.”

Dyack nodded his head and looked at Barnak. “My friend?” He asked.

Barnak nodded. “I agree.”

“Then so it shall be.” Dyack spoke. He squeezed Ilossa’s hands tighter. “Did she make it back inside?”

Ilossa nodded her head. “Barely. She has risked much through these years Praetor. You must insure she makes it out.”

Dyack nodded his head. “I intend to.” He turned and looked at Armen. “Armen are we receiving that tapped feed?”

-I will bring it up on both side monitors- Armen answered. -Mari Leonidas was very thorough in her tapping of the system-

“If you would insure it is broadcast openly across the planet Armen. Our News Channels are standing by for your feed.” Dyack said.

“What feed Dyack?” Barnak asked.

“I asked them if it was possible to use the Academy’s own internal security system against them.” Dyack explained. “What we are about to witness will be what our own people will see across the planet.”

“What is that?” Ilossa asked.

“Spartan Justice.” Dyack answered seeing Sehri’s face positively beaming with love at his words.

The two holo monitors to either side of the large chart table came alive and everyone heard Barnak’s massive intake of breath. “By all that we hold holy!”

He had not made an appearance outside of *SPARTA’S WRATH* for two whole days, ever since delivering his message to the Vanari SBR. He had left all contact with the Vanari to Coren Re Mydala, Asay Va Eldost and those best suited to deal with it. He was no politician and he knew it.

Androcles Leonidas had spent those two days tangled within the arms, legs and sweet scents of his wives and mates during the evening hours and studying with Sarlana, Murano, Elynth, Dorian and Ryner during the day. He had re-committed to memory every single curve and erogenous zone on each of his mates, relishing in their cries of delight and fervor and much fun and pleasure had been had by all. They had returned the pleasure to him tenfold, and done so with great gusto and happiness, playfully fighting with one another on who would have him at that particular time, usually ending in whoever was closest to him at the time. They also were not shy about giving and taking from each other if the tangle of female flesh was any indication. Andro could feel the love for each other that they held as well as for him and this made him even more determined to love them more fervently than they could take. He had succeeded in this endeavor, of that he was confident.

His days were filled with learning, being taught by both Sarlana in the history and skills of the *Dahakoan*, and by Murano as he related to them more and more of the Praetorians, how they came into existence and the many skills that they had. It was not as difficult as he, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner first thought since Sarlana and Murano had obviously been working together on such a training program. They were seamless in their actions and their thoughts, and while Sarlana told them that they would not be fully complete until Laren and Ladur were with them, she was trying to give them an advantage until the six of them were together. Murano on the other hand had given them several skills to use in order to better harness their emotions and control and then channel that emotion into their abilities. Murano had dismissed the dogma of the Praetorians of his time, realizing and now embracing the fact that these men and women were not like the Praetorians of old. Discovering Mari was his daughter was the first step in Murano letting go of his past and embracing the future. He was pushing all of them hard, but none harder than Deion and Andro knew why. Though he did not yet know Deion had already claimed Mari as his wife and mate, Murano was doing what any father would do and insuring that Deion was worthy of his daughter.

These two days were like a brilliant light had been turned on inside their beings, and the connection and bond he shared with Elynth was so much more powerful and clear. It had been almost seamless before, but now it was as if they were one entity. This connection was carrying over to nearly everything they did and even more so now because of their heightened senses and state of mind. Andro and Elynth held nothing back now and the only ones they could spar with at full speed were Dorian and Ryner. Only Dorian had the same quickness and power that their blood allowed, their Lycavorian, Vampire and Dragon blood. While this was true, Androcles and Dorian made it a point to train with their brothers, Jomann and Dutkne, as well as Nara, Eliani, Mari and Sheva, Lisisa and Onera. All of them were Praetorians, whether it be warriors or mages and they would all need to learn to control and use the abilities that their Pralor blood provided to them.

As he dropped into the darkness below Androcles felt no fear, only a sense of balance and peace.

He felt anger at what the men inside this building had intended for his beloved Sehri yes, but that anger did not control him. It fueled him and his actions with purpose and intent. As he rotated his body slightly while he fell, Androcles prepared to unleash Spartan justice on those inside this building. Murano had taught them so much in so short a time and it was these skills that Andro now brought to bear. Once Murano had come to the realization that it was their emotions that fueled their Praetorian power, he was quickly able to adapt many of the powers he had knowledge of and begin to instruct them. He was also able to allow them to improve their existing abilities and make them much more effective.

And far more lethal.

Androcles extended his legs at the moment he touched the decorative glass of the Skywalk ceiling. His weight easily cracked, splintered and finally shattered the thick glass in a split second and he descended through the glass, focused his power downward and landed on the floor beneath him with enough force to crack the granite floor. The nearly two dozen Science Academy security personnel who had congregated under or near the glass ceiling had no time to prepare for what came next. Andro directed the force of his power down and outward all around him. His Etheric power was propelled outward like the ripples of a pebble being tossed into a calm pond. Only these ripples uprooted the Rothryn security forces, shattering limbs and rupturing internal organs as the concussive Etheric wave smashed their bodies in every direction until all of them came to painful halts with impacts of interior walls. Most were killed by the Etheric wave instantly, the massive concussive force doing all of the damage, and the impacts of smashing into the unyielding walls only adding to the enormous damage done to their bodies.

Androcles looked up quickly, the plume from his helmet still billowing in the wake of the drop and Etheric wave, only his changed eyes and fangs showing through the protective breaks in his helmet. None of the twenty-one men were moving, three of them still imbedded in the granite of the walls they had slammed into because of their proximity to the Etheric wave's origin point. He could hear alarms beginning to erupt all over the building and the shouts and screams of men on the same level as him. Then he heard Eirene's calm voice cut through the noise and fill his head through his receiver implant. She was situated at the West Academy Arch behind the portable P9 console in the rear of the Rothryn version of a Command Heavy Lifter with Miseo and Fedor providing her protection, along with the three other Rothryn techs in the back of the vehicle.

“Twenty meters north fervon!” She told him. ***“Left at the intersection and then thirty meters to the stairwell. Down one level and the west wall will be directly in front of you.”***

Androcles didn't hesitate and turned north while calling forth his Shi Viska and he began to march.

ACADEMY CONTROL ROOM

“...Contact with all forces on the Skywalk level!” The sergeant shouted. “The security station on Level Four isn't responding!”

“What about the Section leader?” Wilman barked out.

“Negative!” The sergeant answered. “All communications on the Skywalk level is being jammed Colonel! Whatever they are using I can't seem to burn through it! It's unlike anything I have ever seen!”

“I need contact with my men!” Wilman roared.

“I'm trying sir!” The man snapped back. “The only team we have contact with is the Southern Defense Unit!”

Garnot stepped forward. “Order them to attack the troops at the South Arch!” He shouted. “Kill their precious troops and they will call this monster off!”

Wilman looked at Garnot. “Without support from our missile batteries they will be slaughtered!” He barked out.

“I don't care! That is what we pay them for!” Garnot screamed.

“I will not send them to their deaths!” Wilman barked out.

“If you do not we are all dead!” Garnot screeched.

Wilman looked at the sergeant. “Are the forces moving for the entrances?” He asked.

The sergeant shook his head. “No sir! They are maintaining their distance just inside what used to be our missile range. Without the missile batteries we can't do any damage to them if they decide to attack!”

Wilman looked at Garnot. “You would order a full scale attack against fellow Rothryn?” He gasped.

“If it keeps me alive yes!” Garnot barked out.

DORIAN AND RYNER ORBITING AT 10,000 FEET

Like his beloved older brother, Dorian Leonidas was an enigma that many outside of his family would never understand. Very little was known about the son of Martin and Isabella Leonidas and to be honest that is exactly how Dorian liked it. Again, like his brother Androcles, Dorian coveted his privacy almost religiously. They now knew that this was caused because of the dragon blood within their veins; the *Dahakoan* blood that miraculously flowed within them. How this was possible they did not know, and like Androcles once more, Dorian did not care. He had questioned why he was like he was; the reason he came into existence as he had, just like Andro and Elynth. Just like his Bonded brother Ryner. Why were they always so different than others? They now had some of the answers to their questions and they had embraced the answers they had gotten from Sarlana. They had embraced the answers not because they knew them to be true, but because they felt them to be true. Sarlana had revealed to them everything that she knew, providing to them information they would never have gotten had their father and mothers not gone off into the unknown in search of their history.

The youngest in terms of how long he had been alive Dorian Leonidas may have been, but he looked no different than any other twenty-four year old Spartan. And because of who he was, he had the memories and knowledge of his father and grandfathers before him, as well as his mother and her ancestors. He ignored everything about Veldruk her father, and instead took in all he could of his great grandfather Dorian, his mother's grandfather and the man he was named after. Much had happened to him in the year he had been alive, and while it probably would have driven another man insane, it only served to strengthen Dorian's demeanor and will. He was a Praetorian like his brothers Androcles, Denali and Deion, like his sisters Nara and Eliani and Lisisa. Like his father. He was also *Dahakoan*. All of this combined allowed him to sense and know that Sheva Juconi would be his, even when he was but an infant. The five foot two vampire woman was three hundred plus years older than him, but she belonged to him heart and soul. And now they had found Onera, the half vampire, half Immortal young woman who was born in the same manner as he was in order to save her life. Her birth had been accelerated because of a disease and she had joined this world and grown far faster than any normal child. But she now belonged to Dorian as well, and to Sheva.

They had both claimed her only two nights ago in the midst of a blissful night of passion. While Onera was perched in his lap, his manhood buried deep within her, Dorian and Sheva had bitten her at the peak of their pleasure. This event opened their minds to one another within the Etheric realm like nothing else ever could and the three of them had basked in this knowledge. And then they had basked in the physical pleasure the three of them could have together for the next twenty hours straight, until none of them could find the strength to lift even a single limb from their bed.

Now Dorian and Ryner were riding over watch.

All of their combined skills were being used to insure that no surprises came at their brother and sister from the unknown. As only *Dahakoan* could do. They had a connection and bond to Androcles and Elynth that no one else had except for Laren and Ladur. They were attuned to their every thought and movement as if they were seeing and acting out themselves. It was certainly not something that they could explain but fate and destiny was guiding them now and that is why they were like this. Something that both of them embraced completely.

So far Dorian and Ryner were in awe of what their brother and sister had accomplished up to now and this made them even more intent to watch and learn and be alert to any dangers that may befall them.

Dorian felt more than saw Ryner's head snap downward and to the right as they cruised slowly above the Academy.

Brother? He asked relying on Ryner's superior vision from this high up.

I have a group of men exiting one of the roof entrances and moving across the surface. It appears they mean to intercept Androcles before he reaches the west wall. Ryner answered.

Dorian tensed in the saddle and nodded his head. *How many?*

Six. Ryner answered instantly.

Then let us make sure they do not break up the reunion. Dorian told him.

I was hoping you would say that. Ryner echoed as he folded his wings to his sides and dove for the ground ten thousand feet below them.

Androcles reached the corner of the corridor and pressed up against the wall. Just as he was about to take a quick glance down the corridor a Rothryn security force member came barreling around the corner, his weapon held ready. Andro acted before the man had even cleared the corner and his Shi Viska snapped up and struck the man full in the upper body. The Rothryn soldier came to an abrupt halt painfully as Andro smashed the Shi Viska into his body. He could not stop the pain or the cracking of most of his ribs, nor could he stop his body from launching into the air from the force of the blow and tossing him across the eight feet to the solid wall of the corridor where he impacted heavily, driving all the air from his lungs and snapping the remaining ribs in his body. Genetically he may have been Lycavorian, but like many others, he had never been on the receiving end of Lycavorian strength enhanced with Etheric power. It was devastating to say the least. As the man slammed into the wall, Andro looked down the corridor once more and saw a squad of Rothryn moving quickly and efficiently towards him. He moved back and reached down to his side, where he removed one of the glaives he now carried. He extended the short blades, stepped around the corner holding his Shi Viska up for protection and he launched the glaive down the narrow corridor. It happened so quickly that the Rothryn troops never saw the lethal blade as it sliced through the air at neck level and within four seconds all of the seven men were grabbing at their throats, blood erupting from deep and fatal cuts to their throats. Andro began to walk down the corridor towards them as the glaive returned to his hand like a boomerang and he shook it hard once, displacing any loose blood that now decorated the blades. He left the glaive extended and reached a short corridor to his left. He paused only an instant, and that was to turn his body while he walked and he whipped his hand out once more and sent the glaive whispering down the side corridor, completing his turn and continuing down the main corridor until he reached the top of the stairs.

There! Eirene's voice echoed in his implant. You are at the stairwell! Down the stairs and the west wall will be right in front of you! It will be large enough for Elynth to break to the south from there while you continue north.

Thank you arande. Andro spoke as he lifted his hand and the glaive rocketed around the corner and back into his hand, stained with the fresh blood of three more Rothryn troops who had been hiding in the short corridor.

Go with the Gods fervon!

There were thirteen Rothryn security troops waiting at the bottom of the stairs, the voice in the command center telling them that the intruder was at the top of the stairs. Six were in position at the base of the stairs while seven more were standing in different covering positions behind them. All of their weapons were focused on the narrow stairwell, all of them confident that they would shred the intruder with their weapons before he was even halfway down the stairs.

Only two of this group of thirteen would survive the encounter.

What they expected to come barreling down the stairs was not what they received. They heard a metal clang above them and then the armored figure of a man was speeding towards them riding some sort of shield down the stairs and holding his hands out in front of him, a large ball of bluish white Etheric energy residing in each hand. The first rank of six men were so stunned at the sight that they did not fire for the first three seconds after seeing Androcles. It was all the time he would need. Just as the men pulled the triggers on their weapons, Andro's feet snapped up propelling his Shi Viska forward at impossible speed. Using his exacting control of his Etheric power, he settled to the bottom step of the stairs just as he released the two glowing Etheric balls of energy. Only a few of their projectile rounds impacted off of Andro's Etheric shield before the Shi Viska smashed into that rank of men with unearthly precision. It struck the two men in the center of that line of six without the blades extended on the shield and with just the force of its momentum, promptly crushed their skulls before ricocheting off at an angle. The two Rothryn died instantly, but their bodies were also propelled to the sides against their fellow Rothryn which threw them all off balance, allowing Androcles to release the Etheric energy with devastating efficiency.

The Etheric balls of power accelerated right past the seven men behind the first rank and impacted the steel and granite wall of the Academy behind them. The seven Rothryn men could only watch in unmitigated

disbelief as the entire section of wall seem to buckle inward, return to its normal position and then it simply erupted outward in an explosive hail of stone and steel slivers, showering them with bits and pieces and filling the foyer area with thick dust and grime. Such was the trust of her Bonded Brother that Elynth had not even slowed down as she barreled toward the side of the academy wall and just as she reached out with her talons to begin a controlled braking maneuver, the wall exploded outward all around her. With a pulse of distinct approval to her beloved Androcles for his timing, Elynth was now in a position to pounce. Since her legs and talons were already poised to land on the wall, she now attacked as the rubble bounced harmlessly off her Etheric shield and she came out of the dust and grime inside the building like some avenging creature from the heavens and fell upon the seven men who had turned to watch.

Two men died instantly when her talons snatched them up and she crushed them as she landed, her muzzle snapping forward even before she was fully stopped and her massive jaws closing on another Rothryn and biting him in half before he really knew what was going on. As Elynth whipped her head to the side and tossed the upper body of the Rothryn to the floor, the screams of the Rothryn began to fill the foyer area as Andro and Elynth made short work of the remaining men, the few bursts from weapons that did get off deflecting harmlessly away from their Etheric shields.

The dust was beginning to clear when Andro stepped up to his bonded sister lifting his Shi Viska back onto his arm.

An excellent entrance sister. Andro spoke as he moved right up to her and Elynth lowered her head to press her muzzle to his forehead.

Your timing was perfect. Elynth told him. *Let us end this quickly now my brother.*

Andro nodded his head. *Agreed.* He reached up and touched his helmet activating his implant. *Eirene!*

Their Command Center is sixty meters north Andro! Elynth, moved forty meters south and then turn right and the entrance to their power facility will be there!

Andro looked at Elynth once more, her golden eyes focused on him. *Remember what we are Androcles my brother.*

Andro nodded his head. *I will sister.*

Then let us do this. Elynth echoed before maneuvering her four and a half tons of muscle and teeth around Androcles and beginning a half sprint down the corridor. Andro turned north and looked down the long corridor before drawing *Canarie Emanur*, the sword blade bursting into existence from Flatspace with a soft sizzling sound.

“Time to finish this.” Andro muttered before he began to run down the empty corridor.

SPARTA'S WRATH ORBITING LENTANI

“...All the gods in the heavens!” Barnak gasped in disbelief as his eyes were riveted to the two large monitors that showed what was happening both inside the Academy and outside.

Dyack had authorized one of their News organizations to release several Vid drones into the hole Androcles had made in the Skywalk and they were now following him, hanging back far enough where they could see everything and not get in the way. The feed from the drones was exceptionally clear and Barnak, Dyack and the others had just witnessed Androcles and Elynth split up after her dramatic entrance into the side of the building. Though they had not heard the words spoken between them, it was obvious that they were communicating on such a high Etheric level that no one would hear their words. Even Dyack, a man who thought he knew what Androcles was capable of after the way Aleatia had explained to him how he had rescued Sehri on Solmar, could only stand there in total incredulity at what they had witnessed.

Ilossa was in utter shock at what she had just seen and was clinging to Sehri in disbelief. She glanced at Sehri's face and saw the tears rolling down her cheeks slowly, her eyes bright however. “Sehri child?” Ilossa asked quickly turning to grip her hands as Dyack and Barnak looked at her.

Sehri shook her head slowly. “I did not... Cleric Mother I did not fully comprehend what he... how much...”

Ilossa smiled then and squeezed Sehri's hands. "You did not fully comprehend just what you mean to this young Prince and your fellow Princesses did you?"

Sehri shook her head again. "No." She stammered.

"Sehri?" Dyack asked his daughter waiting as she turned to face him.

"I never knew he could do these things father." Sehri said meeting his gaze. "I have seen him fight before yes, but this is... it is..."

"It is *nubous* beautiful!" Barnak exclaimed. "Dyack this is going out to our people?"

Dyack turned back to look at him, his own eyes wide. "I... yes. I authorized RNN to release the drones and gave them access to the entire news network."

"This is an opportunity we cannot let slip us by." Barnak continued. "This is what we need to rally our people! This could be the catalyst for our future!"

Ilossa turned and looked at Barnak from her spot, still holding Sehri's hands. "What do you mean Lord Barnak?"

Dyack nodded his head. "I know what he means." He spoke suddenly. "We use what Androcles is doing to show them a different path."

Barnak nodded his head. "It will not happen overnight, we cannot change things too quickly Dyack, you know that. This is what we can use to finally make our people as one. No more castes. No more segregation. This could make us all one people. Or at the very least begin us down that path."

"And we still keep our connection to the past." Dyack said softly.

"Is this not what this new branch of Lycavorians have done?" Barnak spoke. "They move forward steadily, but they still adhere to their instincts! They still honor and learn and guide by their past!"

"This path will require us to change much Barnak." Dyack said.

"I have already told you I am not against change Dyack old friend." He answered. "But it is change that we can regulate and guide and nurture. Change that is for the betterment of our people and their growth!"

"You know what we will have to do?" Dyack asked him moving closer.

"I do not question what we need to do old friend." Barnak told him. "My only question is will they help us?"

"That is a question you do not have to ask." The new female voice spoke and all of them turned to see the new holo image come to life opposite the chart table. The woman was very regal looking, well dressed and she appeared in excellent health. The cane in her hand was ornately carved and she only leaned on it slightly.

"*Tenna Deia!*" Sehri gasped as she turned and saw her image.

Deia smiled affectionately as she recognized Sehri. She had met Sehri twice in the short time she had been on Earth with Androcles and the others and she was a beautiful young woman. "You are looking beautiful Sehri. As always. I still wonder what my *Mandri* did to have all of you fall in love with him." Sehri couldn't help but laugh softly as she wiped the tears from her eyes. "Gorgo contacted me and let me know that events there had begun. I had a few moments and decided to check with Armen. He put me through here."

"Father... this is Prime Minister Deia. She is Andro's Aunt." Sehri explained.

Dyack stepped closer to the image of the woman. "Yes... my wife and mate told me of you." He stated. "I am Dyack... and this is Deputy Praetor Barnak and the Cleric Mother Ilossa. It is an honor to meet you."

Deia bowed her head slightly. "It is more an honor for me." She said with a warm smile. "I have read all the files Androcles gave to me on the Rothryn people and I must say that I am very impressed."

"So you will help us?" Barnak asked her.

"You may call yourselves Rothryn and we honor that." Deia spoke. "But you are still Lycavorians in your history and your hearts. Asking us if we will help you is never a question that needs to be asked. Tell me what you need and you will have it."

It was certainly something new for Murano, but by no means could he say he was not enjoying himself in a perverse sort of way. Had the Praetorians of his time been able to do this, they could have learned and passed so much information to each other in far shorter periods of time. As a Darastrixi *Doraanar* Sarlana had the ability to “piggyback” as she had called it, the Etheric wave and strands that were Androcles and Dorian and Elynth and Ryner. She could see all they could see and monitor their current emotional state as well as assist them if needed. The *Doraanar* were limited in what they could do by what the individual *Dahakoan* allowed them, and how tightly they were allowed to access the Etheric strands of each *Dahakoan*. Androcles and Dorian had allowed her to see everything about what they were currently doing, and how their emotions fluctuated, but the rest of their minds were like solid black barriers. Sarlana did not care about that, for she already knew how they felt about her and nearly everyone else, and their private lives and emotions were just that. Private.

Murano however, he had never experienced something like this and he found it extremely fascinating. He could feel every ripple within the Etheric realm that was Androcles, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner as they did battle. The ebb and flow of their Etheric streams and emotions were open to him and he could see everything they were doing. Their awareness of everything everyone around them was expanded to such an extent that nothing escaped their notice. It was like watching them from above as they acted out. When Andro and Elynth touched their heads together and then split up Sarlana’s soothing and wise voice filled the connection they shared.

This is what the Praetorians could have been Murano. What they should have been. Sarlana told him. *You feel how their emotions fuel their actions yet always remain controlled? How their awareness of everything is expanded?*

You are doing that. Murano commented.

Murano could almost see Sarlana shaking her head. *No, it comes from them, but when a Doraanar is in the connection with them it becomes even more powerful. It is the primary reason why, even without your Praetorian abilities, the Dahakoan never lost a battle with the Scourge.*

It is almost like a form of precognition. Murano stated. *It is amazing. They see four or five moves ahead of what they are currently doing.*

This is why they are so formidable. Sarlana spoke. *This is why their father is equally as formidable and he is not Dahakoan. He is something else.*

Something else? Murano asked.

Martin Leonidas is not a Praetorian Murano. Sarlana told him. *He wields the power of the Praetorian yes, but he is something much more. I know you have felt it within him. Seen flashes of it.*

Are you saying that Martin is like his sons? Murano asked.

No. Androcles and Dorian were chosen to be Dahakoan for a reason. Dadrien chose them for reasons only he and your friend Sumar know. Martin is something else entirely, with a potential equal to if not more than his sons.

I have... I have felt something different within him. Murano admitted. *I did not want to press too hard for he would have detected even the most minor intrusion against his Etheric shields.*

We must nurture all we can Murano. Sarlana said softly. *We must find Praetorian Mages who are powerful enough to act as I do for the Dahakoan. I know they are out there, but we have just not found them yet.*

Murano opened his eyes then and dropped from the Etheric stream waiting for Sarlana to do the same and meet his gaze.

“War with the Scourge is coming isn’t it Sarlana?” He asked. “No matter how much we try to avoid it, deflect from it, hope it does not occur. It is coming isn’t it?”

“You ask me a question that you already know the answer to Murano.” Sarlana replied. “I am only four hundred and fifty thousand years old Murano, and the *Dahakoan* died out long before I was ever hatched. I have never been able to do what I now do with Androcles and the others, but it comes so naturally to me. I understand now why the Scourge wanted those of my kind destroyed. Somehow they must have realized what we meant to the *Dahakoan* and wanted to insure we were no longer a threat to them.”

“And they were in a perfect position to demand that from the Darastrixi after they had destroyed my people.” Murano spoke softly.

Sarlana nodded her head. “That is why my people acquiesced to their demands. Out of fear. At least that is what I now believe.”

Murano nodded his head slowly. “That would explain quite a bit.” He said. “And it shames me to know how I acted towards you without knowing all the information.”

Sarlana shook her head. “There is no shame you bear Murano. No one is perfect and each of us has to learn this of our own accord. We have time Murano.” Sarlana said. “How much I do not know, but we have time before that war arrives on our doorstep no matter how much we don’t want it to. I believe Martin may have some idea, perhaps even Wayonn, but given how conscious both of them are of security measures and what they are dealing with now, we do not know for sure and they will tell no one. Our purpose, I believe our purpose is to train and guide the next generation of the *Dahakoan* and Praetorian as I have told you before. We must hold nothing back from each other and that is why I invited you here to experience this.”

Murano got to his feet and stood silent for a long moment, Sarlana staring at him. He finally held out his hand for her and she took it and allowed him to help her rise. He towered over her diminutive frame and looked down into her eyes. “How do we guide those who hold their emotions so close to their hearts and in many cases do not want to be guided?” He asked.

Sarlana smiled as she took his arm in her hands. “Carefully.” She answered. “And by becoming close to those who will always have far more influence over those we serve. Come now... Androcles will deal with the remainder of these fool Rothryn who thought to control Etheric power for their own gains. There are training regimes and skills that we will need to formulate and develop in order to do what we are meant to do.” Sarlana looked up into his face. “And I wish to hear from you how you feel now that you have discovered you are a father.”

“How did you...?” Murano stammered.

“The Leonidas siblings keep nothing from each other.” Sarlana stated with a twinkle in her eyes. “They have known for some time from what I understand. Their sense of smell is astounding isn’t it? Aricia and Helen told me before I departed to join you. I want to know how it makes you feel.”

“It is... it is new territory for me.” Murano told her honestly.

Sarlana chuckled softly. “Yes, I imagine it would be.” She looked at him. “Tell me about it.”

LENTANI ROTHRYN SCIENCE ACADEMY

It was perhaps the most beautiful event that any living Rothryn had ever seen. Brutal beyond measure yes, but beautiful in every regard. Two of the three Rothryn news channel Vid Drones were hovering up near the top of the high foyer ceiling outside the Command center entrance, their cameras focused on Androcles below them and broadcasting their feed to every Rothryn household across the planet that had access to the News channels. This made up about ninety-eight percent of the Rothryn people and word was spreading quickly across the planet about what was happening and more and more people across the many cities were beginning to tune in. It was an unprecedented event and the many News organizations on Lentani were turning to each other for help in widening their broadcast powers.

Androcles’ Etheric shield was radiating brightly as round after round impacted his shield and bounced away. Twenty Rothryn soldiers had descended upon him just as he reached the outside of the Command Center and attacked. They were quick to discern that their weapons were having no effect on the armored figure and most had drawn hand weapons and attacked, thinking to bring him down by sheer numbers. It was a fool’s gambit and this they discovered almost immediately.

The first two Rothryn to reach Androcles were the first to die as he simply bent down, allowed his Shi Viska to take their assault, and then lifted them into the air over the top of his head, adding a bit of force using his TK abilities. Their bodies were tossed almost ten meters down the corridor he had come and both of them landed at odd angles, bones breaking and shattering from the force. The moment Andro had lifted them clear over his head, he spun around to face the Rothryn, sweeping *Cana rie Emanur* around in front of him. The sword bit deeply into the neck of a single Rothryn, but did not pause and passed completely through his neck and the neck of two others, blood erupting outward and spraying the first rank of Rothryn troops with a fine mist of red. This cleared the area immediately in front of Androcles and he finished this move by sweeping his

Shi Viska around from the side and launching the shield in a curving motion. The Shi Viska sped away from his arm as if shot from a cannon, still bladeless along the edges. It was truly the only mercy Androcles showed this night. The Shi Viska stuck one man full in the chest, crushing his ribs and collapsing both lungs before it bounced away and slammed into another man only several feet away. The Shi Viska struck him in the side, instantly shattering his clavicle in three locations and propelling his body away to slam into two other of his fellow soldiers, all of whom ended tumbling away in a tangle of limbs.

Androcles stood there, sweeping *Cana rie Emanur* in front of his face as his Shi Viska returned to his arm and suddenly the Rothryn troops that remained standing were staring at him from five meters away. Andro willed his Shi Viska back into Flatspace and it disappeared from his arm. He crossed *Cana rie Emanur* in front of his body once more and then willed the blade back into Flatspace and returned the pommel to its place on his combat harness. The Rothryn were all wide eyed and terrified of this creature before them with blazing azure blue eyes that were nearly glowing inside his skull as they reflected from under his helmet. None of them had ever faced such a thing in battle and all of them knew that dozens of their comrades now lay dead, scattered across the interior of the Science Academy, killed by this apparition in front of them.

Andro lifted his hands in front of him and spread them about equal to the width of his shoulders. “No more of you need die this night.” He spoke slowly. “I have come for justice against those who ordered the attack against my wife and mate! They were going to take her so that they could kill her and dissect her like an animal! You fight for those in charge here, but do you really know what it is they do to your own people within these walls? Do you know what atrocities they commit against your people?”

Andro felt the vibration in the floor announcing the arrival of Elynth as she came up slowly behind him, lowering her body to the floor on top of her talons so that she could attack at any moment, and extending her huge head out to a place directly over Andro’s right shoulder. He saw all of their eyes grow even larger at the monstrosity before them, not knowing that Elynth had dispatched almost twenty of their fellow soldiers as she destroyed the main power grid for the building. There were splotches of blood crisscrossing her dragon armor, even across the helmet portion which protected her head and muzzle. Her wings slowly extended out half way, making her appear larger than she really was but having the desired affect as many of the Rothryn troops fidgeted on their feet and took several steps back.

“You cannot defeat us.” Andro continued. “Over a hundred of your comrades lie dead across this building at our hands. I will slay a hundred more if need be, you included, if you stand in my way. I will have justice and I will bring this vile building down to the ground, but you do not have to die here this night!”

WESTERN ACADEMY ENTRANCE ROTHRYN THIRD INFANTRY BRIGADE

“You cannot defeat us.” Andro continued. “Over a hundred of your comrades lie dead across this building at our hands. I will slay a hundred more if need be, you included, if you stand in my way. I will have justice and I will bring this vile building down to the ground, but you do not have to die here this night!”

“...Is he doing?” The Rothryn Colonel exclaimed in disbelief as they watched the large monitor from inside the temporary command tent.

“I believe he is giving them a chance to surrender.” Denali answered the man as he too watched the large monitor.

“Surrender?” The Colonel almost shouted. “They do not deserve to surrender after all they have been party too!”

Deni looked to his right where Deion and Nara stood with Fedor and Eliani. Kalis, Ridor and Daio were outside with Lisisa and Arduri watching the events with the lines of Rothryn troops poised to assault the Academy.

“Deni we should move now!” Fedor spoke quickly. “He is outnumbered! He needs our help!”

Nara and Eliani looked at their younger brother and grinned. “Outnumbered?” Nara spoke as she bumped her hip against Fedor in sisterly affection. “Andro and Elynth have them outnumbered Fedor. It won’t be much of a fight.”

“But they...”

“Fuck you!” A voice snarled out from the monitor and drew all of their attention.

“Then join your comrades in jorbhe!”

Androcles’ voice was death incarnate and all of them were riveted to the large monitor as they saw his hands flare with Etheric power and the fourteen or so Academy Security troops were lifted off the floor, many of them flailing madly to regain their balance. Andro thrust his hands back and then forward, feeling Elynth channel her own power into him and the Academy Security troops were sent hurtling through several layers of steel and granite walls until they were launched from the side of the building, most of them already dead.

The shouts of shock echoed from outside the tent and the Commander of the Rothryn 3rd Infantry Brigade bolted from the tent just in time to see over a dozen bodies coming sailing out of the side of the building three stories up. The screams of those that were still alive echoed in the night air for a few seconds until they too were silenced forever as the bodies began crashing into the surrounding timber.

“By the gods!” The Colonel declared openly in an astonished shout. His head snapped around as he saw Denali, Fedor and Deion come up beside him almost casually.

Denali turned and looked at Fedor. “Still think he needs our help *fervon*?” He asked as Fedor met his gaze with a sheepish expression.

“Perhaps not.” Fedor answered.

Denali smiled and turned back to the Rothryn Colonel. “Colonel... I suggest you get your men ready to move in.” He told him. “It’s almost over inside.”

“How... how do you know this?” The Colonel asked.

“Because I know my brother.” Denali told him.

ROTHRYN SCIENCE ACADEMY COMMAND CENTER

“...Do something!” Garnot screamed.

Wilman looked at him. “What do you want me to do?” He shouted back. “Our men are being decimated! He’s already killed over half our standing force! We...”

The tearing sound of metal and granite reached their ears and they all turned to the main door into the command center. Fully two feet thick with reinforcing steel rods and they could only watch in horror as that door bowed inward nearly six inches and the granite frame cracked and began to shatter. In the next instant, the entire door was ripped away as if by the hand of some angry god, dust from outside suddenly filling the vacuum sealed room. As they all stood there frozen in their boots, the dark form suddenly filled the area where the door had been. The sergeant had been closest to Wilman and he flung himself from his chair in order to protect his officer, bringing up the sidearm as he leaped at Androcles. The dust had cleared enough to watch as Androcles reached out with his left hand and caught the man in his left hand, his fingers closing around his throat, just as he was bringing his sidearm to bear on Andro’s head. Andro’s right hand snapped up with the glaive in it and the dual blades extended just before he released the weapon. The glaive whistled through the air directly at where Wilman was tearing at the holster that held his sidearm. He only had enough time to look up in horror, his own weapon barely out of its holster, before the glaive struck him in the left side of his chest with enough force to launch his body into the air and drive it back until he smashed into the wall three meters behind him with enough force to leave an imprint.

Garnot watched as Wilman’s body slid to the floor, blood flowing from the massive wound in his chest, his eyes open in death. He turned back quickly to see Andro gaze at the young sergeant in his grip. The man

was clawing at the armored hand that was crushing his throat with each beat of his heart, his eyes bugging out of his head as the air and the life was slowly squeezed from his body.

Andro pulled the young sergeant closer to him and stared into his wide eyes. "You chose the wrong side." He spoke with a trembling anger in his voice. "But you will survive this day." Andro flung the sergeant away from him, tossing his body clear across the Command Center to crash violently into the computer network. Sparks flew as his body smashed the delicate computer banks to junk and he fell to the floor and remained still.

Andro turned and looked at Garnot. "Executor Garnot I presume."

"No!" Garnot screamed as he brought the sidearm up and began firing. "Stay away!" he was back pedaling quickly, not really aiming though it would not have mattered. The four rounds that struck Androcles were like grains of sand against his Etheric shield and the Mark VI ArmorPly that he wore.

Andro dropped his left hand and the second glaive that he carried suddenly appeared in his fist. With barely any effort he launched that weapon across the space between him and Garnot and saw as the glaive curved and bit into the man's forearm. Garnot screamed in agony as his arm was severed just below the elbow and he could only watch as his hand and part of his forearm fell to the floor at his feet, still holding the sidearm. Andro caught the glaive as it circled back into his hand and he promptly replaced it in the small section of his armor.

Garnot gripped the stump of his arm, trying to staunch the flow of blood and his eyes saw Harira moving up behind the wild looking young man, her hand holding the sidearm. "Kill him!" Garnot screamed. "Kill him Harira! Shoot him now!"

Andro didn't seem to flinch at his words and he simply held out his right hand and called his second glaive back. With a sickening sound it tore free of Wilman's chest and zipped back into Andro's hand where he re-secured it to his armor in the same location on the opposite side. His head turned only slightly when he saw Harira move up beside him, her eyes wide and her hands shaking, but holding the weapon as if she knew how to use it.

"Shaman Master Harira." Androcles spoke. "I am glad you are unhurt."

Harira glanced out of the corner of her eyes at Garnot before meeting Andro's gaze. "It is a pleasure to see you again Prince Leonidas." She spoke calmly, though her body still trembled in fear and adrenalin.

Garnot glared at her in disbelief from the floor. "Harira shoot him!" He screamed. "Shoot him you stupid *upae!*"

Harira glanced at him and then looked at Andro once more. "May I?" she asked.

Andro allowed the small smile to split his lips and he motioned to Garnot with his hand. "Please... I insist!"

Harira didn't hesitate and stepped up to Garnot and using all the strength in her body she whipped the sidearm across his face just as hard as she could. The barrel of the weapon caught on his cheekbone with a resounding crack, shattering the bone and sending him sprawling to the floor.

"I am a Shaman Master of the Circle!" Harira screamed at him as she stood above him. "I am not now, nor have I ever been a member of this insidious institution! I only infiltrated the Academy in order to see this day come! To see the vile things you do here ended and to set our people with Etheric powers free!"

Garnot looked up at her from the floor his eyes wide in disbelief. "You..."

Harira's smile was cruel. "Yes executor. Four decades I have worked my way into your good graces so that I could bring about this day! Four decades I have had to endure you torturing and killing our people! No more! Now I will see you pay for every crime you have committed against our people. And when they find you guilty and they sentence you to death, I pray that all those who have suffered at your hands will find some small measure of peace!"

Harira lifted the sidearm and once more unleashed a vicious blow to his face, this time directly against his temple. It carried enough power to knock Garnot completely to the ground and drop him into blackness. As she heaved in anger, Harira stood back up and looked at the weapon in her hand.

"May the gods forgive all the sins I have been forced to do in order to bring this foul beast to justice." Harira muttered softly, though Androcles was close enough to her to hear every word. She turned and looked at him as his hand gently took her arm. "You had every right to... for what this man attempted with Sehri you had every right to take his life. Why didn't you?"

Andro shook his head. "Rothryn you may call yourselves, but no matter the name you use to describe yourselves, you are still Lycavorian in your hearts." He spoke softly. "I trusted that. My justice will be done because the Rothryn people will see that justice will be done. I cannot ask for more than that."

Harira reached out to steady herself, taking his arm and holding on. "It is... it is finally over." She gasped softly.

Andro looked around the interior of the Command Center, seeing terrified techs cowering in the corners of the room as far away from him as possible. "It will be over when this entire building and everything it ever represented is nothing but a memory." He told her softly. "Then the Rothryn people can truly move into the future."

"The future?" Harira said looking at him.

Andro nodded his head with a smile as he reached up and slowly removed his helmet and his sweat stained skin and bright azure eyes were fully exposed for all to see.

"The future." He said. "It's looking pretty bright right now."

Harira smiled and nodded her head. "Yes. Yes it is." She agreed. She looked at him. "When did you...?"

"That you weren't fully what you wanted everyone to believe?" Andro asked her with a smile.

Harira nodded. "Yes."

Andro shook his head slowly with a smile. "Now that would be telling." He told her. "I couldn't do that."

Whether from his humor, the sheepish look on his face, or the fact that what she had been working towards for over forty years was now complete, Harira didn't know. Perhaps it was a combination of everything, but she broke into a hearty laugh, and it felt so good that tears burst into her eyes as she held Andro's arms. All of this was caught by the Vid Drone that had parked itself in the upper corner above the door into the Command center and had recorded everything that had taken place. She would not discover it for several weeks, but what she had done here, what she had endured and worked towards for so long, all of it combined to make Harira an icon of sorts. It was not a role she had ever wanted, but it was one she would embrace going into the future for the sake of her people. Standing beside Dyack, Barnak and Ilossa, they would become the heralds for change for the Rothryn people. Changes that would be implemented slowly but surely, but changes that had begun this day, here in this building.

Harira had just become part of Rothryn history and future.

She would cherish that every day for the rest of her years.

Her future was at hand as well as her people.

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBITING LENTANI** **SIX HOURS LATER**

Dyack and Barnak stood beside one another in the lounge, Aleatia and Barnak's wife chatting away with Gorgo and Dustha. The lounge was full of off duty personnel and this is something that Barnak was surprised at. A Royal family that did not separate themselves from those they ruled was one of the rarest things a person would see in their lifetime. Barnak was witnessing it now as many of Androcles' siblings had returned to the ship and were mingling with the ship personnel that were here as if they were the best of friends.

"Never in all my years did I ever think I would be alive to see this day." Barnak spoke as Dyack turned to look at him. "The end of the science Academy."

Dyack nodded his head in agreement. "Nor I my friend." He stated.

"We let stupid things pull us apart Dyack." Barnak spoke. "Things that should never have affected our friendship. We let them pull us apart."

"Yes we did." Dyack said. "But that is now the past. We have a chance to lead our people forward into a future that could be very bright Barnak. And we can do it together."

Barnak nodded his head. "Yes we can."

They turned when the double doors to the lounge slid open and Androcles walked in with Sehri clinging to one hand, her face animated and bright. Sadi, Ne'Veha walked beside her with smiles on their faces while on his opposite side holding hands were Carisia, Lu'ria and Caliria. Andro had changed into a standard Fleet uniform now, with a simple gold trimmed crimson red sash around his waist. There did not seem to be any rank on the uniform and Dyack noticed for the first time that Sehri wore one of these sashes as well as all of his young wives and mates. As his eyes drifted over the men and women gathered in the lounge he noticed that his siblings also wore a similar sash and that no one wore any kind of rank on their uniforms. Dyack watched as Carisia and the Vanari Caliria broke off from their group and moved to where his sister Lisisa was standing with Denali and Arduri. Lu'ria grabbed Sehri's hand and Dyack watched them move to where two other male Drow elves were standing, one with a stunning Vanari woman pressed up against him intimately. The older Drow elf embraced Sehri tightly with happy amber eyes and held her hands as they began to converse.

Andro came up to them in several more strides, Sadi and Ne'Veha holding his hands as Ne'Veha had moved to his opposite side now.

"Praetor Dyack." Andro spoke respectfully. "Deputy Praetor Barnak."

Dyack held out his hand, and Andro's hand came out and they grasped forearms tightly. "We owe you... we owe you a great deal Androcles." Dyack spoke now.

Andro shook his head as he clasped forearms with Barnak in greeting. "You owe me nothing." He spoke. "It is I who am indebted to you for allowing me to seek justice for Sehri. And for allowing me to claim her as my wife and mate."

"When it comes to justice for my daughters... never." Dyack answered. "Nor for my people."

Andro smiled and bowed his head slightly. "We will be departing in a few more hours but I wanted to insure things between us were on solid ground."

Dyack nodded his head in agreement. "Barnak and I spoke to your Aunt very briefly and things are already beginning." He told him. "We will speak with her more at length in two days but for now she is sending a full political contingent to Lentani in order to establish an embassy and open full diplomatic relations. I understand the Senators that came with you from the Alpha Quadrant will be remaining here?"

Andro nodded his head. "All but one of them. Senator Ulana is going to remain aboard *SPARTA'S WRATH* for the foreseeable future. My mother's believe it is best if I have a political appointee onboard in order to keep me out of trouble." He said with a smile.

Barnak chuckled now and looked at Androcles. "Something tells me that does not always work out in the appointees' favor." He said.

Sadi couldn't help but laugh now. "Not by a longshot." She said in reply.

"You do realize that you and Harira have become cult heroes among the Rothryn people here on Lentani." Barnak spoke. "The Vid Drones were broadcasting to far more active signals on the surface than we realized they would be. Over half our population saw the entire event from the time you entered the Academy."

Sadi pulled on Andro's hand before he could answer. "*Saradasaar...* *SirsanGai* and I are going to speak with Mari and Meka about the modifications we want to make. We will see you for dinner."

Barnak and Dyack watched as Androcles shared a soft kiss with each of them before they moved off heading for another portion of the lounge. Andro's azure eyes followed them with deep love and adoration and it was something that both men saw. He turned back to them and smiled.

"They call you Beacon of Light." Barnak spoke solemnly. "That speaks volumes young Androcles Leonidas."

"It doesn't sound so good when they are angry with me." Andro stated with a grin, causing both men to laugh.

"Isn't that the case with any woman that we call wife and mate?" Dyack said.

"Mine just hits me in the head." Barnak admitted with a smile.

Dyack saw Andro smile but not as widely as he should have at Barnak's admission. He reached out and took Andro's arm. "You have something you want to say Androcles." He spoke softly. "What is it?"

Andro looked at him and then Barnak. "I spoke with my father before coming here and if things turned out as we hoped he wanted me to pass some information to you Praetor. Now that includes both of you I suppose."

"I'm guessing this has nothing to do with diplomatic relations." Barnak said.

Andro shook his head and held out the two data pads which he took from his belt at the small of his back. “It concerns who you and the Vanari refer to as the Ancients. The ones who are responsible for bringing the Rothryn here from our original homeworld. The ones who removed your ability to shift your forms.”

“They had no right to do that!” Barnak hissed softly. “They have altered the lives of millions by their actions!” Barnak stepped closer. “It is true that Sehri can now shift her form as you and the others do?”

Andro glanced at Dyack quickly, who nodded his head and he met Barnak’s eyes once more. “Yes. It appears as if the Ancients, Pralors as we know them, did not remove this gene from the Rothryn people, they only put it into a dormant state. When I bit Sehri, it became active again.”

“And this ability can... this can be returned to all Rothryn?” Barnak spoke.

Androcles nodded his head. “According to my sister, yes.” He replied. “She is the doctor and it would require intensive initial work, but it can be done by a gene therapy treatment.”

Dyack took Barnak’s arm. “I believe we can discuss that at another time Barnak.” He said. “I think what Androcles wants to tell us is far more important.”

Barnak blinked and then nodded his head. “Of course. Forgive me my boy.”

Andro smiled and shook his head. “I would be excited about it too sir.” He stated. “What my father wanted me to pass on to you is more a cautionary intelligence at the moment. It is something that he wants you to be aware of. Most of it is on the pads I gave to you and you should read them fully. Questions that you might have can be answered by the individuals my *Tenna Deia* will send or you can contact me directly. I have given my personal COM channel to both of you. I wanted you to hear it from me initially however, and it must not become public knowledge in any way. At least not now.”

The military man in both Dyack and Barnak took over then. “Speak to us Androcles.” Dyack said.

“We should probably sit down.” Andro told them motioning to the table to their right.

SPARTA'S WRATH **TWO HOURS LATER**

“...Quantum Fusion Drives standing by for full operation!” The elven man called out from the other side of the bridge.

Andro stood with Sarlana and Murano on the bridge of the *SPARTA'S WRATH*, all of them watching as the crew went about their duties.

“Refractive shielding go!”

“Weapons go!”

“Drone Control go!”

“All stations report standing by Armen!” The burly Lycavorian man barked from the opposite side of the bridge. He was the man that Armen had chosen to be his First Officer. Close to four thousand years old, with nearly a thousand of that fighting both the High Coven and the Kavalians and more recently having commanded an entire Fleet Group against the Evolli. The shift to *SPARTA'S WRATH* may have cost him a promotion to Fleet Admiral, but he was utterly thrilled to be here on the most advanced and sophisticated warship anywhere in the universe. He had literally jumped at the chance to be on this ship knowing what it would be doing and the places it would be going to. His wife of nearly two thousand years had joined him and had taken over as the head teacher in the single school on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. A warship she may have been but everyone knew the risks they were going to be taking on this ship and out of all the men and women Armen had conducted interviews with during his three month stint at Dreamland Engineering, only six had refused this posting. There were not many families with children on *SPARTA'S WRATH*, only twenty-six to be exact, but all effort was made to insure that the thirty-five children who now called the ship home would need nothing.

Armen nodded his head from his spot on the command platform in the center of the massive bridge. His eyes swept all around him and for a fleeting instant Armen would have sworn he felt the emotion of pride sweeping through him. “Very well! All stations prepare to jump the ship!”

Sarlana looked up at Androcles from where she stood between him and Murano. “How long will it take?” She asked softly.

“*SPARTA'S WRATH* has an extensive array of very powerful sensors.” Murano told her. “We are going to progress slowly so that we can insure that we don’t bump into any unwanted guests.”

“Armen estimates five days to approach the station in this way.” Andro told her. “We could do it in three jumps, but as Murano said, we need to be very careful.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “I understand.” She said. “Laren and Ladur?”

“Dorian has already made contact with her and told her that whatever they intend to do, they need to act on it now.” Andro answered. “Our window allowed for a two day grace period but I’d rather not have to use that.”

“With any luck, they will be moving on their end by the end of this evening or at the very latest by mid-morning our time.” Murano told her.

Sarlana’s brow furrowed and she looked at Androcles. “Wait a moment.” She said. “I was under the impression they thought we had more time. That we would take longer to get there. Another week at least.”

Andro nodded his head. “They did.” He told her. “Dorian and I do not want to take that chance. If they are as efficient as we suspect, they will be ready to go now.”

“But they will reach this station three days before we do.” Sarlana said. “You told me it is only a two day trip from Darastrixi space.”

“It is.” Andro told her with a glint in his eyes. “However, they will not be there before us.”

Sarlana looked between the two of them. “I don’t understand.”

“*SPARTA'S WRATH* is going to take five days.” Andro told her. “She will be insuring that we don’t have unwanted company. We on the other hand, we are jumping straight in on the station.”

“What?” Sarlana gasped.

“We are taking the *PREMONITION* and jumping directly to the station. With Mari’s help, Sadi and Ne’Veha have plotted four jumps that will take us right to the station.” Androcles said.

Sarlana’s emerald green eyes were wide in shock. “What? Androcles that is... that is completely crazy!” she exclaimed.

Murano nodded his head. “Something I tried to tell him as well.” He stated calmly. “He didn’t listen.”

Andro smiled. “It may be crazy, but it also gives Dorian and I the best chance to assist Laren and Ladur should anything unknown happen.”

“I won’t allow it!” Sarlana barked. “It’s too risky!”

Andro met her eyes and smiled. “Then you are welcome to stay here.” He told her. “I have already told my siblings this same thing. They all volunteered to go and told me where to stick my idea before I had the chance to finish my statement. Murano as well.”

Sarlana looked at Murano. “You are in agreement with this insane idea?” She asked him aghast.

“No.” He answered her honestly. “However, aren’t you the one who told me we can only guide them? That we will be unable to force our wishes on them. Why fight a losing battle?” He spoke with a straight face. “Besides... I am beginning to grow accustomed to these off the wall tactical moves that always succeed. It feels good to be on the winning side for a change.”

Sarlana looked at him with wide eyes. “You have been corrupted by them!” She gasped in disbelief and watched as Murano could only smile and shrug his shoulders.

“We are leaving the Beta Quadrant in three hours.” Andro stepped away from her and Murano.

“Armen... let’s get underway shall we.”

Armen nodded his head and turned to his XO. “Executive Officer, prepare to execute first jump to our staging area! Final preparations on the *PREMONITION* are to be finished before we arrive there.”

“Understood! Prepare to jump the ship!” The Lycavorian man barked. “Time to really visit the unknown people!”

“...What can you confirm?” The tall man asked as he stood in the shadows staring out the large window over the lake to the south of his home. While the sun was coming up in the area where the Rothryn Science Academy was, it was long past sundown here. The moon reflected magnificently off the shimmering surface of the lake. He would miss this location.

A man and a woman stood behind him as he gazed off into the night sky, both of them holding data pads. The man stepped forward first.

“The News reports are accurate Revered One.” He spoke swiftly. “But our contacts say much more was accomplished than what the News Channels are actually reporting.”

“How much more?” The Revered One asked again softly.

“It appears that they have at least one Pralor scientist working with them.” The young man answered. “From all accounts, a very gifted one.”

“They are all very gifted.” The Revered One spoke evenly. “Some more than others.”

“He or she was able to infect and then control a computer virus that essentially shut down the entire Academy Defensive Network.” The young man explained. “It was done from a ship that they could not see and controlled by a computer unlike any they had ever witnessed in use.”

The Revered One nodded his head slowly. “A Pralor P9 computer no doubt.”

“Yes Revered One, but we knew the Vortex Cruiser would have had an ample supply of these in storage, as well as the portable P1.” The young man said. “With two Avatars assisting them, learning how to use them would have been child’s play after the advances they have made in the last two decades.”

The Revered One nodded his head. “Yes indeed. But this computer attack was conducted quickly yes? With computer codes and algorithms they had never seen before?”

“Yes. Once their network was infected it happened within seconds.” The young man replied.

“Developing a computer algorithm to specifically target a network is no small feat and it needs to be done by a master.” The Revered One stated evenly. “As gifted as many of these Lycavorians and elves may be, I have yet to see one that could do this in so short a time. This only confirms for me that they have somehow made contact with surviving Pralors.”

“With their own Advanced Hyper Matter Fusion Drives invention and access to pure Pralor Quantum Drives, interstellar travel would be nothing to them now. They could be scattered all over the galaxy searching for them.” The woman spoke.

The Revered One nodded his head. “Yes they could, but only the father would send Pralors to assist the son. Which means he has found surviving Pralor colonies somewhere and they are helping him.”

“The father and his offspring are descendants of Sumar.” The young man spoke.

The Revered One whirled around in place, still shrouded in the shadows, but savage, dark magenta colored eyes flared in those shadows and they glared at him. “Never speak that foul name in my presence again! Never!!”

The young man quickly dropped to one knee and bowed his head. “I beg forgiveness Revered One. I forgot myself!”

Those magenta eyes softened somewhat but there was still a savage nature to them. “What of the son?”

“They have already departed Rothryn space Revered One.” The woman spoke now. “They engaged their invisible shields and we lost them just before they jumped from the system.”

“Even using the sensor advances installed in our satellite?” The Revered One asked her.

The woman nodded. “We were able to track them for several seconds while these Shrouds they used engaged, but once they were full deployed all trace was lost of them even on the advanced arrays.”

“Something that we did not predict or plan for.” The Revered One said softly. “A large advantage on their part.”

“Perhaps he is going to meet the father Revered One?” The young man spoke again now, almost trying to regain favor.

The Revered One shook his head. “Perhaps... but I don’t think so.” He spoke. “This son, he is as unpredictable as an Ion storm. The father as well. No, he came here to accomplish a task, and he did. Now he has something else he is planning to do and it does not concern the Rothryn or the Vanari. Is there any way to get this information from within Dyack’s inner circle?”

The young man shook his head. "It has always been very hard to infiltrate his inner circle Revered One." He answered. "Now with Barnak assuming the office of Deputy Praetor and the events with the Science academy, their security will be next to impossible to penetrate. The price if caught would be higher than we are willing to risk at this time."

The Revered One nodded his head. "In that you are correct Timlah." He said. "We are not ready and nor is the Queen."

"Your directives Revered One?" The woman asked.

"Sharna, you are certain the Prototypes were lost?" He asked.

She nodded her head. "The fool Garnot had them connected to the main network. When the virus infected the system it automatically triggered their self-destruct commands."

"And all evidence of our activity is gone?" He asked.

Once more she nodded her head. "Everything relating to our association with the science Academy was wiped and deleted Revered One. It was done with our technology and far quicker than the virus could detect."

The Revered One nodded his head. "Then our time here is done."

"Revered One surely we can do something?" Sharna spoke.

"No. We did not anticipate the reaction of the son towards the OSG. We did not expect him to intervene in the way he did." The man answered. "It is unfortunate, but we must follow the path of Franklin Adams and pull all of our remaining assets out and go deep." He looked up at her. "Give the order Sharna. I want everything cleansed in twelve hours and all our remaining assets are to rendezvous at the predetermined coordinates and we will regroup with Adams and his people."

"As you instruct Revered One." She told him bowing her head.

"I should like to return to this world when it is over." He spoke turning back to look at the lake. "Once it is eradicated of its infestation it would be a fine world to repopulate with my people."

"A fine world indeed."

CHAPTER FIFTY

VENTORI

CAPITAL CITY OF JORLARI

JORLARI CITY MUSEUM BUNKER

Martin knew his Queens well.

Anja had not gone more than six meters into the underground facility before her wolf blood was screaming out for vengeance. In all her years in practicing medicine, even dating back to before the Great Fire on Earth, she had never seen such a horrible scene as what was arrayed before her this day. Anuk and Kesyla had managed to vent most of the air within the bunker and the smell, while vile, was much fainter and at least tolerable. This did nothing to sooth Anja's famous and now growing anger and by the time Atropos led hers and Aricia's small, four person team of *Durcunusaan* fully into the facility and declared it clear, she was ready to explode.

No one really knew where Anja's fiery temper came from, the vast majority of Hadarians were exceptionally calm individuals even in the midst of major crisis, and Anja Leonidas was well known within the Union as being one of the most compassionate people alive. Helen had surmised once that the virus within Martin's blood when he changed her had somehow also altered her psyche as well, making her far more passionate about certain things than most of those Hadarians who had been turned. It was said that her father had such a passionate streak about him that he rarely showed and some surmised that this trait came from her father and since she was wolf she allowed it to show more often than he did. Whatever the reason, Aricia and For'mya both knew what was seething through their fellow Queen and lover and while Aricia gripped her arms tightly and held Anja close to her, both of them pulsed her powerfully with their female auras in order to keep her calm. For'mya had remained on their *STRIKER* in order to respond to any evac order that came from Martin's team, but since they were all of one mind she had seen what Anja and Aricia were seeing.

Anuk Simpson knew Anja as only the dearest of friends and cherished co-workers could and she quickly saw what was happening within her and stepped close beside Aricia to also help to sooth her. Drenia was speaking in soft whispers with Saydia and Perlyea while Anthylea stood with two other Tasmor who had come down from their ship, both of them doctors and they were talking with Kesyla. All of them turned to watch as Aricia and Anuk pulled Anja close to them. Atropos and the *Durcunusaan* were not happy about what they had seen and all of them were on very high alert mentally and looking for any danger to their Queens and those with them.

With those that she loved more than her own life and perhaps her closest friend outside of Eurin beside her, they succeeded in keeping Anja calm and controlled. Gripping Aricia's and Anuk's hands in her own, her forehead pressed to Aricia's, Anja nodded her head several times while taking deep breaths.

"Be at peace *Melyanna*." Aricia whispered softly a final time, knowing that her use of the name Dysea had given to her all those years ago would do the trick. It was their way of letting Anja know that they loved her completely and were with her. Both Aricia and For'mya knew that the only aura that would calm her entirely now was Martin's, but there was work to be done and they knew Anja was strong enough to tolerate it until Martin was able to wrap her within his loving aura and embrace.

Perlyea was the only one of the Tasmor in the room to really take notice of this event and her blue eyes watched Anja keenly. The look of peace that had come over Anja's features made her one of the most astonishingly beautiful women Perlyea had ever seen. It was a unique and touching moment. Unlike the Pralor people it seemed, Anja and her fellow Queens and even all of the Lycavorians they had come in contact with, they accepted the Tasmor without question. There were many differences between them yes, the largest being that they were led by a male King, but Perlyea knew these were issues that could be worked around or even accepted by the Tasmor. It didn't seem to bother Martin Leonidas in the least that Saydia Daret led the Tasmor people, he almost seemed to sense that they would respond better to his Queens, and that is how he had left it. This attitude alone set him apart from most males that Perlyea had come across in her lifetime, even Tasmor males, and it spoke volumes about what their future could be. It told Perlyea that this male, this Martin Leonidas, he did not feel threatened in the least that Saydia was a female. That nearly all of the senior members of Tasmor society were female. It told her that he was confident in himself to the point that he did not fear their power and position. It also helped quite a bit that Perlyea found Anja Leonidas incredibly beautiful and desirable and very nearly impossible to resist.

Anja squeezed Aricia's and Anuk's hands one last time and nodded. "I'm good." She spoke in a soft whisper. "I'm good now." She leaned forward and kissed Aricia lovingly on the lips before doing the same to Anuk. "Thank you."

This act surprised Perlyea as she watched until she felt the large man Atropos come up beside her. He seemed to move without any sound and though Perlyea would never know it, Atropos took in everything that was happening in a room where Anja and his sister were. And he had noticed the interest Perlyea had taken in his beloved Queen right away.

"Anuk is the wife and mate to Daniel Simpson. The King's true brother." Atropos told her seeing Perlyea's eyes meet his. "She and Anja have been working together since the very beginning. They are family."

"Do... do your people act this way with all family?" Perlyea asked.

Atropos nodded his head. "It is part of our culture, yes." He answered.

"What do you mean... since the beginning?" Saydia asked now taking interest in their conversation.

Atropos smiled warmly for a man with such a stern demeanor. "That is a very long story Sovereign Regent Daret." He answered her warmly and with respect that all of them took notice of. "If you become the friends that the King hopes you are, then you will probably discover it over time." He told her. "It is a very interesting story."

"You consider the Tasmor friends?" Saydia asked.

"That remains to be seen fully... but you are a proud and honorable species in my eyes." Atropos told her. "It is the hope of Martin that this is so, yes. You would not want to be his enemy, I assure you. He is not kind to his enemies."

Saydia couldn't help the small smile that split her lips. "I have gotten that impression." She stated. "You speak informally of your King. Why is that?"

"He is the husband and mate to my only sister." Atropos told her. "We are family before soldiers."

“I want to know what the fuck happen here!” Anja’s voice barked out now as she pulled away from Aricia and Anuk and caused everyone in the bunker to turn and look at her as she got her bearings once more. “Martin will want to know what happened here! From the top Kesyla!”

Kesyla turned back to the computer station she was sitting at. “Kasden left the main power core at eighty percent when he left with Martin’s team. I have been unlocking internal sensors and bringing systems back online slowly. The data banks are heavily encrypted Anja, but Avi is patched in from the *ARC ROYAL* and working on them. It will take time however.”

“It’s not Pralor encryption Kesyla?” Aricia asked now moving away from Anja and closer to her.

Kesyla shook her head. “It uses some form of Pralor algorithms, but they are entwined with others that I do not recognize. It would be faster here on the surface if Mari was here, she could access the databanks directly, but Avi is having to filter them so they do not possibly corrupt the systems on the *ARC ROYAL*.”

“What *do* we know?” Anja asked moving up beside her as well.

“I can tell you that the facility was last opened seven months and nine days ago.” Kesyla responded pointing to the screen in front of her. “The security protocols all seem to be online and working and that is the last time the hatch we used was opened. The computer however, it cannot determine who the Bioscans belong to. They obviously are not in the database. We don’t know who they were.”

Anja looked at her. “How could that be?” She asked.

Kesyla shook her head. “I don’t know.” She answered. “This is standard Pralor research equipment and would have all known bioscans in its database. I do not know why the bioscans don’t register.”

“This is what your people used to monitor the Lycavorians here?” Anja asked.

Kesyla nodded her head once more. “It is a standard First Contact facility. Built to observe their society but not interact. That is why the systems here are tapped into all of the main public and private networks. Civilian and military.”

“Well, I can tell you it’s definitely some sort of research facility.” Duewa spoke now as she came back into the main room from another side office area. All heads turned to her when they heard her voice as she walked right up to Anja. “This equipment is similar to parts of our lab on the ship Anja.”

Anja nodded her head. “Agreed. But research into what?” She spoke. “It’s like a butcher shop here. What could they have been researching? Who could do this to other sentient beings? What is out there in the corridor isn’t research, it is profane!”

Duewa held out the data pad. “Just from what I have been able to look over briefly, it has to be some sort of genetic research facility. I found this Anja.” She stated as Anja took the pad. “It is mutative in nature and very deadly.”

“*Carians!*” Anja gasped.

“What?” Perlyea demanded moving closer.

Anja looked at her as she held out the data pad for her to view. “This is Mutative Genetic Bonding.” She said slowly.

Perlyea looked aghast at this information and she looked up at Anja. “My people do not have the technology for such a thing. Is this... is this even possible?” She gasped.

“With the equipment I am seeing just in these rooms, yes.” Anja told her. “How many... how many bodies did we find Anuk?”

Anuk held out another pad to her. “Given the... the pieces that we have found, nineteen Lycavorians, seven Tasmor and at least eleven Pralor bodies are scattered in the corridor and the adjoining rooms.”

Drenia moved forward now and came up beside Saydia. “Sovereign Regent, if I had to guess, we could check our records and discover that the Tasmor here were probably reported as killed or captured.”

Saydia nodded her head. “Yes, but not here.” She stated turning to Anja and Aricia now. “We never lost any personnel helping the Lycavorians on Ventori.”

“They got here some way.” Anja spoke. “Can you identify them with DNA samples?”

Drenia nodded her head instantly. “Yes. It would just be a matter of taking the samples and...”

“Do it!” Saydia snapped.

Anja nodded in agreement. “Duewa, help the Tasmor doctors that came down. Get the DNA samples taken so they can send them back to their ship and check their records.” She looked at Saydia. “I must ask if your people can hold off until those results come back. I know you have burial rights that Captain Drenia...”

Saydia shook her head instantly. “No.” She spoke firmly. “I too wish to discover what happened here as well.” She stated turning to Anthylea. “Anthylea insure that the bodies are... insure that they are treated respectfully, but we must discover what took place here.”

“We have people coming down now to make certain this happens with all of the bodies.” Anja said.

Saydia nodded her head. “I would like one of our religious mentors to come down from our ship as well if that is alright?” She said. “To provide Tasmor Last Rites.”

Anja nodded her head without hesitation. “Of course.” She spoke. “Thank you.”

Saydia shook her head now. “This now concerns our people as much as yours Queen Anja Leonidas.” She said confidently. “Working together will only allow us to discover what has happened here that much more quickly.”

“We need to... whoa!!” Anja staggered slightly, as did Aricia and both of them reached for their heads.

“Anja! Aricia!” Anuk’s voice echoed and they saw her lean heavily to the side in the chair she had returned to. Kesyla was reaching for her without hesitation.

“Anja!” Atropos barked out as he moved forward in a rush. He reached Anja at the same time that Perlyea had instinctively reached out and caught her, Anja’s body pressing up against hers as another *Durcunusaan* caught Aricia in his arms and steadied her.

“Queen Leonidas!” Perlyea gasped aloud.

“Martin!” Anja stammered.

Aricia looked up with wide azure colored eyes. “Anja... something has happened with Martin! Daniel too!”

PRALOR LONG RANGE CORVETTE

HELIX-CLASS

DESIGNATION

VALISTAR ONE

“...Happen Wayonn?” Jezima asked softly. “Tell us what happened? How did... how did my son die?”

They sat in the passenger area of the *HELIX-Class* Corvette now assigned to the *ARC ROYAL*. It was by far the fastest ship that they had within the Task Force and Martin had been adamant about Wayonn taking it to Honelze once he discovered that Jezima and Meral lived. Wayonn sat across from Jezima and Meral, both of his hands holding theirs within their grasp.

Wayonn grimaced slightly but looked at them and shook his head. “I cannot answer that.” He said softly. “Sumar arranged for a mission back to Pralor space once the remaining transport we had was repaired. I led it. What we returned to was a warzone. Wasted planets and death. I can only assume it was after most of our outer defenses had fallen. The few reports that we were able to intercept spoke of Scourge within the core systems of our space. After a run in with a Scourge patrol craft I made the decision to leave Pralor space forever. We took damage from that Scourge ship but were able to jump away. Our ship was too damaged to make the entire trip back to Lycavore so we found a suitable planet to land and do repairs. When we discovered what had happened while we were gone we never returned to our homeworld Lycavore.”

“That is why you are here among us now?” Meral asked.

“I would have given anything to return and be beside him.” Wayonn spoke in a haggard voice. “He was... he was my brother! I...”

Jezima reached up and laid her palm across his cheek as Meral squeezed his hand even tighter. “I... he loved you as such too Wayonn.” She stated with fresh tears. “I did not mean to ...”

Wayonn shook his head slowly. “I know.” He said softly. “By the time we returned from Pralor space it was already over as I said. I sent my... we repaired the ship and I sent my two oldest sons and my youngest son Canth and a few hundred volunteers back with the ship once we had established ourselves on this world. I could not leave. There were over twenty thousand of us and we had families and...” Wayonn stopped talking and took a deep breath.

“So many on a transport?” Jezima gasped. “How did you survive in such a way?”

Wayonn looked at her and smiled gently. "We were all Lycavorian by then." He told her. "Survival is part of our nature."

"You took a bride as well?" Meral asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. "A beautiful young flower. She was three thousand years younger than me, but so willful and intelligent. She turned me our first night together and I never looked back."

"You had children then?" Jezima said.

Wayonn nodded once more. "Thirteen." He replied.

Jezima's eyes grew wide. "So many!" She gasped with a smile.

Wayonn couldn't help but grin. "Neria wanted a large family. That is what we had." He stated. He looked at Jezima. "Canth became to Sumar's oldest son Resumar as I was to Sumar. He was only able to send one transmission back to Amanuce where we had settled. All he was able to tell me was that Sumar died as a Praetorian. He went down fighting to keep his wife and children safe. Canth told me that he and Sumar's son Resumar would carry on in our stead. That they would make us proud and that their legacy would continue for millennia." Wayonn nodded his head slowly. "And they did."

Jezima couldn't hold back the fresh tears and she squeezed his hand even tighter. "Martin Leonidas." She said softly.

Wayonn nodded once more as his eyes grew brighter. "Jezima, he is so much like Sumar. You have seen his image and how much he appears as Sumar, but you have not seen within his heart. You have not seen how much of Sumar's blood pumps within his veins and the veins of his children. Lycavorian blood! Pralor blood!"

"Wayonn, you speak as if you are one of them." Meral said.

"I am Meral. I have been since the day my mate turned me." Wayonn answered her. "I have been Lycavorian for far longer than I was a Pralor and I feel nothing but joy and pride at that knowledge." He looked at her. "I questioned the souls within the Rift of Time for so many years Jezima. Why did they leave me? Why did I still live when so many of those I loved die? Why did I survive and not Sumar? I received the answers to all of my questions the day that I discovered Martin lived."

"Your wife?" Meral asked. "Your children?"

Wayonn shook his head slowly. "She died perhaps two decades after we settled on Amanuce." He answered. "Our children passed through the years from reasons beyond our control. I have only my grandson now. And my granddaughter Helen whom you will meet. They are the last of my family."

"Is he... is he like Sumar Wayonn?" Meral asked.

Wayonn smiled and nodded his head. "So much so that it will cause your stomach to tighten and your heart to believe that those same gods have given him back to us." He told her with a smile. "What they did give us is the next best thing. Sumar's spirit, his blood, his drive and his essence. All of these things are prominent within Martin, within all of his children. His oldest son Androcles more so than the others I think, but it is there in all of them."

"He has... he has six wives." Meral spoke now. "And so many children."

Wayonn nodded his head. "And he loves each of them just as intensely as the other." He told her. "They are what make him who he is. When you see them all together you will see it. Dysea, Aricia, Anja, all of them. They are like one person when they are all together. They speak with one voice." Wayonn gripped Jezima's hands in his. "We came out here looking for what we thought were only a few Pralor people and the dragons they had escaped with. We had no idea that we would discover so many Pralors had escaped the slaughter. How many?"

"Only a few million at first." Jezima replied. "Scattered over hundreds of ships. Delnash was the one who gathered us all together and the decision was made to run. He is a good man who tried to do what he thought was best for our people. He has made mistakes but recently he has reverted back to the man he was in the beginning. We have been watching from Honelze. Many are happy that his true self has returned. He was following the advice of those who have no right to be Elders of our people far too often. I do not know what changed him but..."

Wayonn couldn't help but grin and shake his head. "I do." He said.

Meral looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"He butted heads with someone who has a much stronger will and passion." Wayonn told her. "Someone the others could not control even on their finest day."

Jezima's eyes grew larger. "He knows of..."

Wayonn nodded. "They discovered us several months ago. Our first meeting did not go well for Delnash and those with him."

"I don't understand." Jezima stated.

"We..." Wayonn began.

"You do not need to regale them of *Nauta Melme*'s more base tendencies Wayonn." Dysea's voice interrupted them and they turned to see her approach the table with a tray in her hands.

Both Jezima and Meral's eyes grew happier as she settled to the chair beside Wayonn and set the tray on the table. Neither of them had met an elf before, they had heard or read of them in the many Pralor Science archives, but never had they met one. Dysea's natural intelligence and surreal beauty were stunning to them. She was also a powerful Etheric user, as were the two women who had remained behind on Honelze. Her body was tall, lean and muscular, with what appeared to be many exotic and colorful painted skin designs on her arms and poking just above the collar of the shirt she wore. This Dysea exuded confidence and she radiated peace within the Etheric realm which put them at ease almost immediately.

"I did not know what you would like so I brought a few choices." Dysea told them with a smile. "Elven tea, Aricia's coffee, or just plain Berry juice. All of them are excellent, but if you want something strong and rich then I recommend Aricia's coffee."

Jezima looked at her surprised. "You do not have... you are a Queen! Do you not have servants to bring these things to you?"

Dysea looked at Jezima, her own emerald colored eyes showing surprise. "Servants?" She gasped. "No, Martin and we would never allow others to serve us." She replied. "We do not need men and women to tend to our needs. We are quite capable of taking care of ourselves. Having servants is, it is too much like slavery to many of us and it is not something we would allow given our history."

"Your history?" Meral asked now.

"The Union that Martin is King of, that Dysea is Queen of, they have a long history of being slaves." Wayonn answered Meral. "It wasn't until Martin's own father, another of your grandsons, died in battle some three plus millennia ago for the right to be free that the rebellion truly began. Slavery to anyone who lived during those dark times is an abomination that is not tolerated in any way. This mentality has passed down to even the youngest generations of every species who call the Union home. It is one of their founding principles."

"I did not mean to offend you Dysea." Jezima stated.

Dysea looked at her and that warm, dazzling smile put Jezima at ease immediately. "I did not take offense." She spoke. "There is still so much that we have yet to discover of one another and I welcome it. Besides, *Nauta Melme* would never allow someone to cook for him. He is a better cook than most of us and it he who has cooked for our family through the years. Cooking relaxes him."

"What is it that you call him?" Meral asked. "*Nauta... Nauta Melme*? What is that?"

"It is elven for Bounded Love." Dysea answered with a smile. "It is a quirk of our family really. We all have names that we call each other. It brings us closer together. Though I hope you do not have to hear Martin and Anja having a disagreement. Or Androcles and his sister Eliani. Their language can become quite..."

"Colorful." Wayonn finished for Dysea and she looked at him with a laugh.

"Colorful." Dysea agreed.

"You can... you can shift your form as well?" Meral asked her. "Like Wayonn and his other...?"

"Meral!" Jezima exclaimed.

"Mother I was only curious!" Meral stated.

Dysea laughed and nodded her head. "Yes. The day Martin turned me is a day I cherish above all others." She responded. "Aricia is the largest of us in wolf form, then Anja and myself. Though I dare say behind Aricia, Anja is the strongest of us within the Etheric realm."

"And we will meet this Aricia and Anja when we meet Martin?" Meral asked.

Dysea nodded. "And For'mya." She told her. "She is an elf like me, but she is also our peace. A soothing balm for all of us if we ever need it."

"And an exceptionally gifted pilot." Wayonn said. "You will meet them Jezima, but I wish to know why you and Meral were hiding yourselves on Honelze. Why hide who you are from your own people?"

“There were many who came to disavow the Praetorians after our escape.” Meral spoke in reply. “Even on the Elder Council. And they are led by that fool Lorendo. Why Delnash ever put him on the Elder Council is beyond me.”

Wayonn glanced briefly at Dysea and then back to Meral. “Yes. We are well aware of what Lorendo is.” He stated with a hint of anger in his voice that Jezima heard and felt. She leaned forward.

“What is it?” She asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “Our issues with Lorendo are not important right now, but rest assured they will be addressed.” He answered. “What is important is that you will meet Martin soon.”

“Is there more you can tell us of him?” Jezima asked excitedly.

Dysea smiled. “What do you wish to know?” She asked. “I will tell you anything, as long as you are aware that my opinion will be biased of course.”

Jezima laughed softly and reached for her hands, taking them within her own. “Child, those are the best kind of opinions!”

The internal COM unit broke in then and Dysea reached for the wall panel and lifted her head as she touched the controls. “Yes?”

“My Queen, could you and *Valistar* Wayonn come to the cockpit?” The voice of the female elven pilot spoke.

The Pralor Corvettes, including those that were assigned to *SPARTA'S WRATH*, were piloted exclusively by elves because of their natural flying abilities and their talent to adapt to almost any given situation. This pair of female elves had been training on this very ship for months now, ever since it was assigned to the King's Task Force by Androcles. Both of them had finished in the top two percent of elven pilots within the Union fleet and both had seen combat in the Evolli War as a flight pair. The pilot had recently become mated to a Lycavorian officer within the *Durcunusaan* detachment assigned to the *ARC ROYAL*, while the co-pilot's husband was an Elven pilot assigned to the *ARIZONA's* Air Wing. The two men had become fast friends because of the relationship their wives shared.

Jezima saw Dysea's beautiful expression alter slightly and her body tensed in an almost imperceptible way. “What is wrong Ma'Lara?”

“You should probably see it for yourself my Queen.” The woman answered. “Balah has detected something on our long range sensor array.”

Dysea looked at Wayonn who was already rising to his feet. “We are on our way.” She spoke.

Jezima stood as well. “May we come with you?” she asked.

Dysea smiled. “Of course.” She answered.

The cockpit of the Corvette was very spacious, as was usually the case with Pralor built ships, and all four of them were able to fit easily behind the two pilots. The stars were passing by them outside at five times the speed of light, causing beautiful light streaks in the cockpit view windows.

Dysea watched as the pilot turned her head when they entered. “What do you have Ma'Lara?” She asked.

“Balah... bring it up on the overhead.” Ma'Lara said.

Dysea moved right up behind the pilot's seat for she knew both of these young females. With the advent of new technology after CS41 had come to Earth, Admiral Ben O'Connor had instituted new Flight School requirements. Any pilot who showed increased aptitude and ability were given the option to enter into a different sort of training. Essentially it was a new school to learn and master most of the Pralor based flight technology that they had discovered and then implemented within the fleet. It was a very rare pilot that was offered such an advancement, and both Ma'Lara and Balah had come out of their respective Flight Classes in the top half percent. When approached, both had volunteered without hesitation. This also meant that these pilots would undergo extensive ground training handled by the *Hippis Selda* Detachment of the *Durcunusaan* because all of them would be assigned to fly the Royal family around at some point in their careers. Martin and his Queens, as well as Androcles and Arrarn had gone out of their way to get to know all of the pilots in this program on a personal level.

“Transferring to overhead.” She spoke as her left hand adjusted some controls and the large screen dropped from the ceiling above between their seats and became filled with stars as the small chart appeared.

“Here.” Balah spoke as she pointed to a spot on the chart screen.

“You will have to forgive those of us who are relatively challenged when it comes to reading a star chart Balah.” Wayonn spoke with a smile. “What are we looking at?”

“Our long range sensors are calibrated for everything out to a hundred light years, but every five seconds we also send out a multispectral passive sensor burst within that same radius of our long range grid.” Balah explained. “It is primarily to warn us of any type of space debris that our main sensor grid has not detected.”

“You have multispectral passive sensor arrays?” Meral asked surprised.

The dark haired female elf pilot nodded her head, looking somewhat taken aback at the question. “We finished installing them just before Prince Androcles sent us out here. Why?”

“We stopped using them millennia ago. The power of our sensors grew too great.” Meral answered.

“Multispectral Arrays should never be retired.” Balah spoke. “They can pick up things that normal sensors do not no matter their power.”

Wayonn looked at Meral with a grin. “Let’s just say that all of the information that the Science Convocation gathered in regards to Lycavorians and other species within the Alpha Quadrant was not entirely accurate.”

“So it would appear.” Meral answered with a similar grin.

“What do you have Ma’Lara?” Dysea asked.

“There!” The second elf female spoke, pointing with her finger to the chart. “A contact.” Dysea and Wayonn leaned closer. “Balah, are you sure?” Dysea asked.

“Yes my Queen.” Balah answered her. “It has been on our screens ever since we left Honelze. At first I thought it was just an echo of some sort, or a reflection of us from the long range scans and the large amount of protonic particles in this area of space. Ma’Lara has shifted our course four times since we departed Honelze however and each time this contact has altered their course to remain just at the edge of the long range sensors. The passive array is what got the return hit.”

Dysea looked at the young elven female. “Balah, I am not going to have to report you to General Vengal am I?” She asked with a smile. “Just because we have guests with us does not mean that we act differently than we always do. Lady Jezima and Lady Meral our part of our family anyway, you know this.”

Balah smiled and lifted her hand to brush away some of her dark blond hair. “No Dysea.” She said impishly.

“Good.” Dysea said. Jezima and Meral looked at each other surprised but remained silent. Dysea’s emerald eyes focused on the star chart. “Debris does not shift its course nor match its speed to a ship, so we must assume that it is another ship.” She continued. “Can we identify it?”

Balah looked at Ma’Lara and then back to Dysea. “We already have identified it.” She told her evenly. “Since we are not in the Alpha Quadrant, and no one out here has the level of technology that we and the Pralors do, Ma’Lara had it run through our database of all known Pralor ships.”

“Pralor?” Wayonn spoke.

Balah tapped on her console several times. “Based on the size of the contact and the few scans that we have gotten with the passive sensor array Wayonn, it appears to be a Pralor *RONAR*-Class Frigate. Five hundred and ten meters in length, crew complement of just over three thousand. That is the configuration that it matches in our data base.”

Dysea looked at Wayonn. “Why would Delnash be using a ship to track us?” She asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “He wouldn’t.” He answered immediately. “He is many things as we have seen Dysea, but paranoid does not strike me as one of them.”

Dysea nodded her head in agreement. “I concur.” She echoed his words. “He and Martin have developed a very good relationship since Onterom. He would have no reason to have a ship tracking us. He would not learn anything that *Nauta Melme* has not told him of freely.”

“Delnash also would not have known that Martin dispatched me almost immediately after he told him of Jezima and Meral being alive.” Wayonn continued. “Nor what ship we would be on.”

“Then someone was waiting on Honelze.” Dysea said turning to look at Jezima and Meral. “You told no one that you were leaving?”

Jezima shook her head quickly. “No. We did not have the time.”

“Jezima, does anyone else know who you are?” Wayonn asked. “Who you really are?”

Jezima shook her head once more. “No. Meral and I were very careful.”

Wayonn and Dysea both smelled the adrenalin dump into her body when she lied and they turned fully to look at her. “You do not need to keep secrets from us Jezima.” He told her. “Dysea and I are wolf, we can smell the adrenalin that enters your system when you do not speak truthfully. It is quite potent.”

Jezima looked horrified. “You can... you can smell this within me?!” She gasped.

Meral took her mother’s arm. “Mother this is Wayonn.” She spoke. “And one of the wives of your grandson. If we cannot trust them, who can we trust?”

Jezima looked at her briefly and nodded before looking at Dysea and Wayonn. “Forgive me for... only one other knows who we really are.” She answered. “She is the one who taught Meral and I to shield ourselves within the Etheric realm.”

Dysea looked at her surprised. “Tobia?”

Jezima saw the look on Dysea’s face, her own expression matching Dysea’s. “Yes. Do you know her?”

“Tobia has been with Martin and our group for weeks now. She knows who Martin is. She has almost from the first day.” Wayonn spoke. “And she did not reveal to us that you lived. We had to hear that from Delnash.”

Dysea shook her head. “It was not Tobia.” She said. “She is Mari’s mother and her love for Murano burns brightly even after all this time. She knows how Murano felt for Sumar and she would do nothing that would bring harm to his family. Nothing.”

“Murano?” Meral gasped. “Murano is dead. He died many millennia ago near the end of the war. Before we all ran.”

Wayonn shook his head. “Murano is not dead.” He spoke. “At this moment he is in the Beta Quadrant with Martin’s oldest son Androcles and his siblings. Mari is with him.”

“The Chief Elder’s youngest child?” Jezima asked puzzled. “That Mari?”

Dysea smiled gently. “Yes, but she is not Delnash’s daughter. She is Murano and Tobia’s child, and she is now part of our family. She became the wife and mate to our son Deion only a few days ago. She is now wolf like us.”

Jezima and Meral looked at her with wide eyes. “Oh my.” Jezima finally stammered.

Dysea turned back to Wayonn. “Someone else knew who they were and they have been watching them Wayonn.” She stated.

Wayonn nodded his head. “Agreed.” Wayonn reached out and placed his weathered hand on Ma'Lara’s shoulder. “Ma'Lara... can we jump yet?”

Ma'Lara shook her head. “The QF Coils have not fully realigned.” She answered. “I did not think we would be leaving Honelze so soon before the realignment cycle was complete. I did not start the cycle until just before you returned to the ship. Even Pralor QF coils need to realign. We still have three hours and twenty-four minutes before we can jump again. I can bypass some of that and jump us sooner. Just over an hour, but I will need to override the safeties in order to do it.”

“Do it.” Wayonn told her seeing her nod in agreement. Wayonn looked at Dysea. “I do not like it.” He spoke as the wolf within him took over.

Dysea nodded her head. “Nor do I.” She echoed.

“Ma'Lara, how long before one of our ships could jump from Ventori to our location?” Wayonn asked.

“Admiral Lorian has the Task Force spread out in an SDP. A System Defense Pattern.” She answered. “All of our Task Force ships have the new Quantum Fusion Resonance Reactors, but they are not the same as Pralor ships. Or as efficient. We made it to Honelze in one jump because this is a Pralor ship. One of our ships, with the exception of the *ARIZONA* or the *ARC ROYAL*, would need two jumps at least, with a minimum of three hours in between jumps to realign. Admiral Lorian won’t release either the *ARIZONA* or the *ARC ROYAL* from their patrol stations around Ventori. Not after what happened with the Kintaur.”

“She would for us.” Wayonn protested but Dysea reached out and placed her hand on his arm.

“You have... you have met the Kintaur?” Meral asked surprised. “They are vile monsters who only wish to rape and kill. They...”

Wayonn looked at her feeling Dysea's soothing Etheric resonance flowing around him easily. "We encountered them on Ventori." He told Meral more calmly. "They were trying to enslave survivors of the attack there."

"Survivors?" Jezima asked. "Survivors of what?"

"The Svorag attacked the planet over three years ago." Wayonn told them. "They very nearly wiped out the entire population."

"By the Ancients with the Rift!" Jezima gasped. "We never knew of this!"

"Ma'Lara is correct Wayonn." Dysea said. "The situation on Ventori is still very fluid is it not?"

Wayonn nodded his head slowly. "Yes, more or less."

Dysea closed her eyes very briefly and then opened them again. "I cannot touch *Nauta Melme*. He is blocking all of us and he only does that if there is a problem. If need be I can touch Anja, Aricia or For'mya, but we have not got to that point yet and something else has *Melyanna* very worked up. Aricia and For'mya are trying to sooth her as best they are able."

Wayonn met her eyes with questions in them. "Everything was moving along according to plan when I left." He spoke.

"That may well be, but something is going on now." Dysea told him.

"Child, you can reach them from here?" Jezima gasped with wide eyes.

Dysea smiled at her and her emerald eyes sparkled in the light. "If I needed to I could, yes. The distance is too great for us to actually talk, but we have developed other means to let each other know something is wrong. I won't do that to Martin now."

"Your people have... you have built Quantum Fusion Resonance engines?" Meral asked with surprise in her eyes.

Wayonn looked at her. "Meral, you know about them?" He asked.

Meral gave an embarrassed smile. "I have been studying engineering concepts when I am not helping mother with the business." She shrugged. "I was bored."

Wayonn laughed softly. "The Union has built their version of Pralor Quantum Drives based on tested designs they retrieved from CS41. With Avi, Sumar's Avatar helping them to learn, they have developed their own engine designs and put them to working products. As Ma'Lara stated however, they are quite powerful but they are not as efficient as Pralor built engines."

"Dysea..." Balah spoke up now and tapped the chart bringing up another view. "We are actually closer to Manne than we are to Ventori." She told them quickly. "We received a fleet standard update this morning that Admiral Komirri, Admiral Omore and Admiral Thodias have all arrived at Manne with the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*, *NORMYA'S LIGHT* and *MJOLNIR'S HAND*." She pressed on the chart screen one more time. "If they jumped within the next thirty-seven minutes they could be here in just under an hour. We haven't yet reached a distance that puts them out of range of one jump. All of them have the advanced QRR's updated with data from the *ARIZONA*'s battles in High Coven and Kavalian space. They are just as good as the *SCIMITAR* now."

Dysea nodded her head. "That's even better." She stated confidently. "Open Command Channel 9679.5 Balah. That is mine and Thodias's private channel. He will answer within seconds when he sees who it is from."

Balah nodded and began working her console. "Opening channel and sending burst." She stated.

Dysea wasn't fooling and within five seconds the communications channel chimed and the incoming message alert sounded. "He's replying." Balah spoke.

Dysea smiled. "Pull him up on the monitor Balah."

Dysea's smile grew wider when she saw the worn but very familiar face of the older Lycavorian Admiral who commanded hers, Isabella and Cirith's flagship. He had commanded their ship since it rolled off the assembly line and she was Guardian to his youngest daughter. A gifted young woman in the field of Astrophysics. "Did I wake you Thodias?" She asked with genuine warmth.

The man's smile was equally as genuine. "Dysea my Queen." He spoke. "It is so very good to finally see you again. And no..." He held up the contents of his hands. "Morning reports." He appeared to have just woken and was holding a large mug of liquid in one hand and a data pad in the other.

"It is good to see you as well old friend." Dysea told him. "I understand you have arrived on Manne with Omore and Komirri and our Strike Wings?"

Thodias nodded his head. "Yesterday." He stated as he rose to his feet from the chair he had been sitting in. "Dysea, what is wrong? You do not contact me out of the blue, a day after we arrive here on our personal command channel just to say hello."

Dysea smiled. "And why not?"

Thodias grinned. "I know you too well Dysea my Queen."

"Indeed." Dysea spoke. "Wayonn and I are returning from Honelze to Martin's position on Ventori. You have been briefed yes?"

Thodias nodded. "Yes."

"Thodias we are being trailed by a Pralor frigate." Dysea told him. "It is remaining far back from us and trying to look like a reflection but our passive sensors detected it. I don't think the Pralors are aware of our passive sensor arrays."

Thodias nodded. "Most are not Dysea." He answered. "What do you require of me? I thought the Pralor people were supposed to be our allies out here?"

Dysea nodded. "That is how we are viewing them yes, but this ship is not acting as a Pralor ship would act. And Delnash would not have one of his ships shadowing our movements. It has... it has caused the hairs on the back of mine and Wayonn's neck to rise."

Thodias's face darkened somewhat. "Dysea, you do not panic." He said.

"And I am not." Dysea answered. "I would just like to be safe. Leave the Strike Wings there and you, Omore and Komirri come to our location. Let's see if we can cause our watcher to do something that would cause him to reveal himself to us. Balah tells me if you jump within the next thirty minutes you can be to us without having to realign your coils."

Thodias was reaching for something outside their view on the monitor. "Transmit your coordinates directly to the bridge in secure mode Dysea. I will have Komirri and Omore link directly to our NAV computer and we will be to your location in twenty minutes!"

"Thank you Thodias." Dysea told him. "And please do come in Shrouded. Just in case."

Thodias nodded his head. "Of course."

Dysea looked at Wayonn as the monitor fell dark. "Shall we surprise them?" She asked with a wolf's grin.

Wayonn matched her smile and the tips of his fangs could just barely be seen as his features changed. "I think we shall." He stated.

Dysea placed her hand on Ma'Lara's shoulder. "Ma'Lara, change course in any direction, proceed on that course for ten seconds then turn to face this ship and come to a full stop."

Ma'Lara smiled as she looked at Balah. "Executing."

Dysea turned to look at Jezima and explain to her what they were doing but she saw both Jezima and Meral with large smiles on their faces. She tilted her head slightly in confusion and looked between them. "What?" She asked.

Wayonn turned at her comment and saw Jezima and Meral. Jezima looked at him. "Tell me Wayonn, did my son's wife act in such a manner?"

Wayonn looked at Dysea briefly and then back to Jezima. "Sateia was headstrong and independent before she turned Sumar." He answered. "She became much worse once they were mated. She became like the man she so adored and loved."

Jezima's face twitched and Dysea could tell she was holding back tears once more. She was about to reach for her when Jezima beat her to it and took her arms in her hands. "Then that is why you act indifferent when the wives of my grandson do the same thing?" She asked.

Wayonn chuckled softly as he saw Jezima grip Dysea's arms tightly. "All of Martin's wives and mates are like Sateia." He told her. "It is one of the reasons that I knew Sumar lived within Martin."

Jezima smiled and this time could not hold back the tears. "Then I would have very much enjoyed her company; as I will enjoy the company of my grandson's wives."

Meral smiled beside her mother. "We both will." She said.

"You might question that when you are with all of them together." Wayonn spoke.

"Somehow I doubt that." Jezima said with warmth in her voice as she stared at Dysea. "Somehow I doubt that."

PRALOR RONAR-CLASS FRIGATE CENTENNIAL OF HOPE

“...Shifting course again!” The female Lycavorian barked out from her sensor console on the left side of the bridge.

The older Lycavorian male looked up from the data scroll that he was reading in the Command Chair on the frigate’s bridge. “Very well, just as before, match course and speed and maintain our current distance. We are a reflection remember, the Pralor pilots will deem us as such and ignore it.”

“Helm answers!” The male Lycavorian spoke now as his hands moved over his console. “We are matching course to 2345.6 and...”

“*Sibfla!*” The woman barked out once more. “Captain they have turned towards us and stopped!”

This announcement made the Lycavorian male come to his feet instantly. “Helm all stop!” He barked out the order.

“Answering helm all stop!”

The male turned to the side. “Kenia?” He hissed as he moved up behind her station.

The woman shook her head. “I don’t know Captain!” She stammered. “They changed course, stayed on that base course for ten seconds and then turned towards us and stopped almost instantly! I’ve never seen a Pralor corvette do that!”

“Nor have I.” The man agreed. “No Pralor pilot anyway.”

Kenia looked at him. “Captain?”

“Do we still have sensor confirmation on the tracking devices?” He asked aloud.

“Aye sir! Broadcasting signal is clear!” Another voice echoed from across the bridge.

“Kenia?” He asked once more turning back to the young woman.

She shook her head. “I don’t know sir.” She told him. “We should show as nothing more than an intermittent reflection with all of the protonic particles in this sector. I don’t know why they would do this.”

“What did the contact on Honelze report?” The man asked.

“That they boarded the corvette a few hours after Praetorian Wayonn arrived. One other person with them but they were unable to identify that person. They were wearing a cloak and hood. They were certain it was female however.”

The man turned when the door to the bridge slid aside and the attractive, blond haired Lycavorian woman strode confidently into the command area. She looked to be similar in age to the male and she didn’t back away when he moved very close to her and looked into her eyes. “Konlar, what is happening?” She asked.

“The corvette has stopped Lirana.” He answered.

“Stopped?”

The Lycavorian nodded. “They executed another course change and then turned to face us and stopped almost immediately.” He explained quickly. “Take your station and get me some information.”

“Yes sir.” She answered moving quickly to the main Tactical Station to the right of his command chair.

“Status?” Konlar barked out.

“The corvette is maintaining its position.” Kenia answered.

“Why would they stop?” Konlar questioned aloud. “There is nothing in this sector of space of any significance is there?”

“Aside from two Class Three Nebulas, no.” Kenia replied.

“Can you detect any increase in their sensor power?” Konlar asked.

“Negative. No change from flight mode.”

“Could they have detected us?” Konlar asked.

“I don’t know how sir.” Kenia replied. “We have maintained perfect positioning since we departed.”

“Lirana?” Konlar asked turning to look at her.

She looked up from the three consoles that surrounded her body on three sides. “The maneuver they executed was not done by a Pralor pilot.” She spoke. “It was too smooth. Too instinctual.”

“Not a Pralor?” Konlar spoke. “No Lycavorian did that Lirana.”

She shook her head. “No. The reflexive skills required for such a maneuver we do not possess.”

“Then what...” Konlar’s eyes grew a little wider. “An elf?”

“If I had to guess I would say yes.” Lirana answered. “The files we were given on the Elven species specifically mention highly increased reflexive skills and intuition. They would make superior pilots for any class ship.”

“Elves are indigenous to the Alpha Quadrant of space.” Konlar spoke to no one in particular. “If there are elves piloting that ship, then that would mean they have discovered Interstellar travel and have access to Pralor technology.”

“Konlar, elves being out here and associated with Praetorian Wayonn was not in our mission brief or any intelligence that we were given on this mission.” Lirana spoke looking at him from across the bridge.

“No, it was not.” Konlar stated. “*Nubou!*”

Lirana was adjusting her consoles. “I can also tell you that this is not a standard Pralor Corvette.”

Konlar looked at her now and moved over to where she sat at the Tactical station. “What do you mean?”

“I’m reviewing the few scans we got while it was in orbit of Honelze more closely.” She replied. “The configuration is odd Konlar. It doesn’t match standard Pralor corvettes. The ventral section has several odd bulges on it. Like something was added. It’s not something that would affect flight however.”

“Bulges?” Konlar asked. “Purpose?”

Lirana shook her head. “Unknown.” She replied. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“Guess.” Konlar told her.

Lirana shrugged. “If I had to guess, from its location and the slight bulging, I’d say it was some sort of additional sensor array.”

“What kind of sensor array?” Konlar asked.

Lirana shook her head. “Without an active scan of the ship I couldn’t say for sure.” She answered. “Like I said, it’s not something I have ever seen on a Pralor ship before.”

“Captain!” Another voice sprang out from among the bridge crew. “Captain we are receiving an open hail from the corvette!”

Konlar’s eyes grew wide. “Open?” He gasped.

The man at the COM station nodded his head. “Yes sir! It’s not directed at us but...”

“Let’s hear it!” Konlar ordered.

Half a second later the confident female voice with a slight lilting accent filled their bridge.

“...Queen Dysea Leonidas of the Lycavorian Union ship VALISTAR ONE to the unknown Pralor vessel we are now facing. We have detected your presence and would like to know why you are trailing our ship. Please respond to this transmission with your intentions.”

VALISTAR ONE

“...Not moving.” Balah spoke as her hands moved across her controls. “I think they are trying to make like a big empty hole in space.”

Ma’Lara chuckled. “And not doing a very good job of it either.”

“Contact on Long Range sensors is still spotty at best, but passive array has locked on definitively.” Balah continued. “Definitely a *RONAR*-Class Frigate.”

“How many aboard?” Dysea asked as the military side of her nature came out.

Balah shook her head. “Not a full crew Dysea.” She answered. “I’m only seeing about sixteen hundred lifesigns. Passive array can’t determine what they are.”

“That won’t be needed.” Dysea said. “Ma’Lara, how soon before Thodias and the others arrive?”

“Seven minutes.” Ma’Lara answered.

“If need be, do you think you can out maneuver this ship until they arrive?” Dysea asked her.

Ma’Lara turned her head with a look that amounted to disgust. “Please Dysea.” She spoke aghast that Dysea would even suggest something like that. “That is almost an insult.”

Jezima and Meral both couldn't help but allow short laughs to escape their lips as they sat in the two empty engineering chairs.

Dysea laughed as well and put her hand on Ma'Lara's shoulder. "Good. Then let's do something they won't expect. Open a channel in the clear."

Balah turned. "In the clear?" She asked.

Dysea nodded her head. "Yes."

Wayonn looked at her. "Martin will not be happy you are exposing yourself like this to the unknown." He stated.

"Perhaps, but what would *Nauta Melme* do Wayonn?" Dysea asked.

Wayonn rolled his eyes. "The same *anse* thing." He spoke moving for the secondary engineering console. "I'm going to try and contact Delnash."

Dysea smiled and didn't try to stop him. "Yes he would. Balah?"

"Channel open!"

"This is Queen Dysea Leonidas of the Lycavorian Union ship *VALISTAR ONE* to the unknown Pralor vessel we are now facing. We have detected your presence and would like to know why you are trailing our ship. Please respond to this transmission with your intentions."

Konlar turned instantly and looked at Lirana. "They can see us?" He gasped. "How?"

Lirana shook her head. "I don't know! A Pralor corvette should not have a clear picture of our ship at this extreme range of their sensors." She was working her controls insistently. "They are only calibrated for a hundred light years! Anything at the edge of that range should appear as nothing more than a reflection or white noise of some kind from the protonic particles in this sector!" Lirana's brow furrowed. "Wait!"

Konlar moved up next to her station. "What?"

"I am detecting a multispectral passive wave emanating from the corvette." She told him as she adjusted her controls. "The odd shape of the ventral hull Konlar! It is a Multispectral Passive Sensor Array! Much longer range and nearly undetectable when piggybacked on a standard long range navigation array."

"A Multispectral Sensor Array?" Konlar hissed softly. "Pralor ships don't use them."

"No, they do not." Lirana agreed.

"She said she is a Queen of a Lycavorian Union." Konlar spoke looking up from Lirana's station. "There is no such thing as a Union of Lycavorians!"

"How do we know that?" Lirana asked. "Elves are not indigenous to this quadrant of space but we have already determined that elves are piloting that ship!"

"We don't know that for sure!" Konlar hissed.

"What other explanation could there be?" Lirana stated. "Not even an Avatar could pilot the ship in such a way! Their maneuvers were too smooth, too well executed."

"Lirana we..." Konlar began, but that female voice interrupted him.

"We are not unfriendly, whoever you are, but your actions do not mark you as such." The voice spoke once more. ***"Please respond to this transmission so that we can speak more directly. Namely why it is that you are following our ship."***

"What are the armaments on a Corvette?" Konlar asked immediately.

"Nothing that could hurt us Captain." A man answered instantly from a different station. "Should I power weapons?"

Konlar shook his head. "Not yet." He answered.

"Our employer is not going to be happy they detected us." Lirana spoke softly.

"*Nubou* him!" Konlar spat looking at her. "He obviously did not tell us everything about this mission!"

Lirana smiled at him with those pale blue eyes. "At least you don't trust him as much as some of us thought you did."

“Trust that fat *ronnus!*” Konlar spoke aloud causing many on the bridge to laugh gently. “Not on my worst *nubous* day.”

“We could pull back Konlar?” Lirana said to him. “Reacquire them later when they get to Ventori. We know that is where they are going.”

Konlar turned and looked around his bridge. “No. COM officer. Open the channel. Audio only.”

Lirana’s eyes went wide. “Konlar what are you doing?”

“Trying to get some answers.” Konlar replied.

“Channel open Captain.”

VALISTAR ONE

“...Have to know we have detected them by now.” Balah spoke from her chair.

“They know.” Dysea said softly. “And they are probably very surprised considering they have not moved off by now.”

Dysea turned when Wayonn came up beside her. “Delnash was in a meeting with the Elders supporting his election.” He told her. “Avatar 27 told me that he never ordered a ship to watch us and no Pralor frigates are unaccounted for.”

“A mystery then?” Dysea said. “Balah, this *RONAR*-Class Frigate is still front line for them isn’t it?”

Balah nodded her head. “Very much so.” She answered. “Mostly Recon and Scouting like our *AUTUMN MOON* Frigates, but they also make up the flanking screens for Pralor Fleet Groups, or whatever they call them. At least that is what the briefs we got from their officers said.”

The deep male voice boomed through their internal speakers just then drawing their attention.

“This is Captain Konlar of the Pralor Frigate CENTENNIAL OF HOPE. You are in possession of a Pralor Corvette so perhaps it should be you who states your intentions.”

Dysea looked at Wayonn quickly. “Konlar?” She said softly. “That is...”

“A Lycavorian name. An old one.” Wayonn said with a nod. “A very old family name. From our time shortly after we arrived on Lycavore.”

“You are certain Wayonn?” Dysea asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “There were references to many members of the different packs with this name in the history scrolls on Lycavore. Many with honored histories as well.”

“It was a common name on Lycavore?” Dysea asked.

“Yes.”

“Could they be Lycavorians from Ventori?” She asked.

Wayonn shrugged. “Anything is possible Dysea. I think we all have seen that in recent months.”

Dysea nodded her head. “Yes, we have.” She said. “The better question is what would Lycavorians be doing with a Pralor frigate and how did they get it? How did they learn to operate it?” Dysea asked.

Wayonn met her eyes. “We could just ask.” He spoke.

Dysea snickered at him. “Now who is being reckless?” She stated with a smile. “Balah, have Thodias and the others arrived yet?”

“Ninety seconds before reversion.” She answered.

“Then let’s find out more.” Dysea spoke as she flipped the button above her head.

CENTENNIAL OF HOPE

“Konlar is a very old and strong Lycavorian family name Captain.” Dysea’s voice filled their bridge.

“It is a pleasure to meet another like myself out here among the stars. Perhaps a visual transmission would be permissible so that we can determine where each of us stands?”

Konlar’s eyes were wide at her words and he settled into his command chair. “How... how could she know that?” He gasped.

“Captain?” The COM officer asked.

Konlar looked up. “Activate Holo connection. Narrow beam.”

“Sir?”

“Do it!” Konlar snapped.

“Activating sir!”

Konlar turned towards the disc in the floor of the bridge and came to his feet slowly when the image of the woman shimmered into view. His dark eyes were wide as he stared at her, the Praetorian Wayonn beside her and the two other women sitting in the background behind them. Konlar took in the long platinum blond hair and stunning emerald green eyes, as well as the four inch high elegantly curved and pointed ears. Her face was flawless in its beauty and she almost did not look real.

“You are no Pralor!” Konlar snapped quickly.

He saw the woman smile and shake her head. **“No I am not. I never said I was. I am Lycavorian.”** She told him. **“And nor are you Pralor sir.”**

“You are no Lycavorian!” Konlar hissed. “You are Elven!”

“You know of my species? Interesting. Allow me to elaborate.” Dysea spoke. **“My husband and mate turned me almost three decades ago. I am an elf female yes, but I am also Lycavorian.”**

“Your mate?” Konlar asked.

He saw her nod. **“Yes. Martin Leonidas. King of the Lycavorian Union.”**

“There is no such thing!” Konlar snapped. “What you speak of is a lie!”

“Pen arne emer.” Dysea spoke almost sternly and Konlar’s eyes grew wide at her use of the Lycavorian language and the fluency with which she spoke it. (I don’t lie)

“Forn echta duan nimerd!” He gasped in shock. (You speak our language.)

He watched Dysea nod her head. **“Enhon fon tis inahin”** She answered. (Quite well in fact.)

Konlar turned his head when Lirana stepped up beside him and didn’t hesitate to press her body to his side intimately. She too was staring at the image of the elven woman in the transmission with wide eyes.

“You... you are an Alpha female.” She stammered out loud.

Dysea paused for a moment before nodding her head. **“We no longer adhere to the caste system within the Union, but I would be considered an Alpha female, yes. As would my fellow Queens.”**

“Queens?” Konlar exclaimed.

They saw her nod once more in the transmission. **“That would take a bit longer to explain.”** She answered with a wistful like smile.

“That cannot be!” Lirana gasped. “There have not been Alpha wolves since... for over a hundred and fifty thousand years!”

“I assure you that is not the case where we come from.” Dysea spoke. **“However, I am more interested in why you are following my ship. And how you came to be in control of a Pralor Frigate with the knowledge to operate it as well as you have. Our dealings with the Pralor people since we arrived here in this Quadrant have brought me to the conclusion that they do not share their technology with other species, and most certainly not their frontline warships. Would you care to shed some light on that?”**

“That is not your concern!” Konlar answered with more heat in his voice than he wanted.

“I’m afraid it is.” Dysea answered calmly. **“I would prefer we talked of different things but I cannot allow you to follow us unchallenged.”**

“We can go where we wish!” Konlar barked. “And we do not need to answer your questions!”

“Very true.” Dysea answered. **“In that case you will not mind if I make it difficult for you to follow us any longer.”** They watched her turn to someone out of the transmission and nod. **“Execute.”**

Kenia’s eyes went wide when the corvette simply vanished from her sensors. “Captain!” She exclaimed. “Captain I am no longer detecting the corvette! It’s gone!”

“What do you mean gone?” Konlar shouted as Lirana darted back to her tactical station.

“I don’t know Captain. It was there one second and then it just vanished!” Kenia answered.

“Confirmed!” Lirana barked. “It’s no longer showing on sensors!”

Konlar turned back to the image of the elven female in the transmission. “What have you done?” He growled at her.

“As Queen, I am insuring the safety of my people.” Dysea answered him. ***“And since you are unable to hide your ship as we can, the two ships now on station to your port and starboard will insure you do not attempt to find us again.”***

“What?” Konlar gasped.

Kenia’s eyes went wider when her sensors began to sound a loud alarm. “Captain! *Son vada carians!* Captain, two massive ships are materializing port and starboard! They are appearing out of nowhere! They are huge!”

Konlar rushed to Lirana’s station and his eyes grew wide when he saw the ships taking shape. “Lirana?” He shouted.

“Two ships! Unknown configuration but definitely not Pralor! Each over four thousand meters in length! I cannot penetrate their hulls with our sensors!” Lirana snapped aloud. “*Sibfla* Konlar, they are monstrous! They aren’t as large as a Pralor cruiser but they are enormous and they have weapons sticking out of every orifice! Hull composition is unknown but I’m detecting some sort of Pralor power source!”

“Pralor?” Konlar demanded. “I thought you said they weren’t Pralor?”

“They aren’t! Well, not exactly Pralor, but something very similar!” She told him.

Konlar looked back to the transmission and saw the elven female still watching him. “We are not an enemy!” He shouted.

Dysea nodded her head. ***“If you were Captain, your ship and crew would already be space dust I assure you.”*** She spoke evenly. ***“I do not know how you obtained a Pralor manufactured ship, but I can think of several options and none of them are good. Since you will not tell us the reason you were following us, and you will not tell me who you are or who you represent, then I can only assume it was not for purposes of making friendly contact. That will not make my husband and mate very happy, especially since you and I assume most of your crew are obviously Lycavorian and he loves his people. It is no matter now. We will take our leave of you Captain Konlar. If we meet again, I sincerely hope it is under better conditions. If I were you, I would not continue on a course for Ventori. You will not be able to outrun the ships you have on your sensors, and they will fire on your ship should you make an attempt to approach Ventori without authorization. If the ships already there do not blow you from the stars first. Those are the orders from my mate and King, and they will be followed. Good day sir.”***

“Wait!” Konlar exclaimed just as Dysea’s image faded from the transmission.

“They’ve severed the connection from their end sir!” Kenia told him turning in her chair.

“*Sibfla!*” Konlar spat. “Helm, reverse course! Come to 4583.9 and go to full power on sub lights!”

“We’re not going to go to Ventori after them?” Lirana asked from her station.

“And risk our ship and the people on it?” Konlar declared. “No.”

“What will we do?” She asked him.

Konlar looked at her. “Contact that fool Lorendo and tell him to meet us at the normal rendezvous. We will be there in three days! And tell him to bring answers!”

Lirana watched as Konlar stormed off the bridge ending any further conversation. She knew well that he would remain angry for a few hours, after all, she had been his mate and wife for over six hundred years.

VALISTAR ONE

“That was interesting.” Dysea spoke as she returned to the couch in the passenger area of the corvette.

“I would call it troubling.” Wayonn said.

“Come Wayonn, where is your sense of adventure?” Dysea asked as Jezima and Meral took spots on the opposite couch where they were sitting earlier.

“I left it with Martin on Ventori.” Wayonn replied sarcastically as he went to the small counter and poured himself a mug of coffee. “He is not going to be happy that there are a group of unknown Lycavorians running around in a Pralor warship. Or that they were obviously following Jezima and Meral.”

Dysea nodded. "That I will agree with." She stated as she touched the COM panel on the wall. A small cone of light appeared and the upper body of Admiral Thodias appeared. "Have they turned to Ventori Thodias?" She asked.

"No. Apparently they took your warning to heart." Thodias answered. "Komirri and Omore will track them but it appears as if they are headed in the opposite direction."

Dysea nodded her head. "Good. Thodias, may I present Lady Jezima and Lady Meral." She said.

Thodias looked at Jezima in the transmission and bowed his head deeply to her. "*Vada Medwaw rie cian hote*." He spoke almost reverently. "I am honored."

Jezima looked slightly taken aback by his actions but she smiled. "Admiral." She said.

"Dysea, with your permission I will keep you within our Shroud envelope until we reach Ventori." Thodias said.

"Thank you Thodias." Dysea spoke. "I will be returning to Honelze once we are finished on Ventori so stand ready."

Thodias nodded his head. "Always."

Dysea smiled as his image faded and she looked at Jezima and Meral. "Perhaps now would be a good time for us to try and determine who among your people know who you really are." She said.

"Tobia is the only person who we told Dysea." Jezima said. "I swear this."

"We don't doubt that Jezima." Wayonn told her as he sat beside Dysea. "But someone knows who you and Meral really are. These people certainly were not tracking us. They knew you were on Honelze and they knew you got on this ship."

Meral leaned forward. "Dysea... what your Admiral said to mother. What did that mean?"

"It is the Ancient Lycavorian language." Dysea told her. "It almost died out within the Union until Martin returned. I understand the Ventori speak it fluently and many thousands within the Union are now speaking it. Mostly within our military but more and more learn each year."

"But what he said to mother." Meral questioned again. "What did it mean?"

Dysea looked at Jezima. "You must understand, family is dearest of all to Lycavorians. Too many species within the Union. It is beyond sacred to our family, to our children and most especially to our son Androcles. It has already begun to spread among our military that we have discovered you and Meral. Within a few more weeks it will be known even back to the Alpha Quadrant." Dysea reached out and took Jezima's hands in her own. "Sumar is looked at among our people with reverence Jezima. He is Martin's grandfather and the one who began what we all are now. Your lives will change now. If I know my Nauta Melme, then the *Hippeis Sedla* are already bound for Ventori in order to protect you and Meral."

"What is the *Hippeis Sedla*?" Meral asked.

"The Spartan Royal Guard. Young men and women whose only purpose is to protect members of the Royal family." Wayonn answered. "You will never see them. Never hear them. They will only act if your lives are in danger. And then their only mission is to protect you. At all costs."

Dysea smiled as she held Jezima's hands. "What Thodias called you... you will be seen as *Medwaw rie cian hote* Jezima. It means... in our language, the language of wolves, it means Mother of us All."

VENTORI

SECOND SECRET BUNKER

There were very few things that Martin Leonidas feared in his life now. It was not that he was psychotic or without fear, he had just learned how to embrace that fear and use it to his advantage. Martin knew that death came to everyone eventually and this did not alter how he did things. His fear made him more powerful, heightening all of his senses and allowing him to operate in what he called hyper mode. The moment the creature's arms encircled him, Martin went limp. When he heard Danny scream his name and then his arms closed on his waist, Martin clamped an iron like grip onto his brother's arm and felt both of them lift off the floor. As the creature's roar filled the air around them and it spun around, pulling them through the remains of the lab's window and frame, it tossed them from its grasp. Martin and Danny didn't hesitate and pulled each

other's body tight to their own. Both of them shifted in such a way as they were flying through the air that their shoulders and backs slammed into the shattered computer console some thirty feet across the lab. Both of them grunted at the pain upon impact, their combined weight crushing more of the equipment beneath them, a few jagged pieces of metal stabbing into their body armor in places where the protection was not as solid. While it did not penetrate the armor itself, both of them would have large bruises if they lived through this day.

Martin grunted again as he hit the floor beneath the computer console and heard Danny echo his sound beside him.

"Fuck that hurt!" Danny hissed angrily.

"Danny move!" Martin roared, falling to his back and kicking out with both feet directly into Dan's shoulder.

The move enabled him to duck beneath the mammoth arms the creature had been lifting to bring down and crush them, and it allowed him to kick Danny to the side out from under the beast. The two massive arms crushed even more of the shattered computer station where they had been just milliseconds before as Martin and Danny rolled in opposite directions.

Martin rolled to his feet, his hand closing around the pommel of his sword since he had lost his rifle in the flight across the research lab room. The blade erupted from Flatspace with a sizzle and hiss and Martin didn't hesitate, driving the blade deeply into the body of the seven and a half foot tall creature just under its shoulder blade, or where he thought the shoulder blade should be. The monstrosity bellowed in agony, and far faster than Martin expected, it whipped its arm around and the massive hand slammed against his chest and sent him rocketing away to slam against the far wall. Pain lanced through his chest and back from the blow and impact and he dropped to one knee. Martin looked up as the creature turned to look at him, exposing its face for the first time, and letting out a sinister roar of rage and pain.

The creature's head was similar to the structure of a Svorag head, with jutting forehead and mandible like jaws that were now open and exposing jagged rows of razor like teeth. The musculature of the creature was beyond anything he had ever seen, thick and bulging with power. The gray white color of its skin was exposed in the eerie lighting of the research lab, and it was covered in scars from what appeared to be some sort of surgery.

"Good Christ you are one ugly motherfucker!" Martin muttered.

The creature took that time to let loose with another deafening roar of anger and pain as it arched its back inward in pain. Martin saw dark colored blood hitting the floor all around its feet and the whishing sound of blades as they cut deeply in to flesh. The creature whirled around swinging its massive arms and Martin saw Danny's body roll under the blow. He saw his opening and dashed forward as the creature turned to face Danny and his fingers closed around the hilt of his sword still embedded in its back. Martin wrenched it free with all of his considerable strength, hearing the creature bellow once more in pain and swing its arm around towards him. He was expecting this however and ducked under the swing, rolling to the side and coming up beside his brother.

"This is your fault!" Danny screamed above the roar of the monster and holding the two Khukuri blades in his hands defensively. The standard weapon of the ancient Gurkha Warriors. Danny had carried these same weapons for as long as Martin could remember. They were slightly smaller than the standard Khukuri, but forged from Dragon Armor Steel by Nehtes himself and honed to razor sharpness. Danny was a Master with these two blades and while he almost never used them unless times were dire, he had apparently concluded times were dire.

"My fault?" Martin screamed back.

"See the stars you said!" Danny roared at him. "Meet new people you said! You didn't say anything about fucking Godzilla looking lizard people and motherfucking space monsters!"

"So fucking sue me!" Martin roared back at him.

"Down!" Danny shouted yanking Martin down as the large chunk of metal table went sailing over their heads.

"Skipper!" Colin's voice reached their ears just as Colin and Pablo came skidding into the corner of the research lab where they were. Martin and Danny looked up to see the white colored creature's chest begin to erupt in bullet strikes as the P190A5s held by Colin and Pablo were spitting out lethal rounds as they strafed to the right and came up beside them.

Martin and Danny watched as the creature staggered under the barrage, bits of its flesh flying into the air and copious amounts of dark reddish blood splashing on the floor and equipment all around the monster. The four of them stood there watching with wide eyes as the wounds began to heal right in front of their eyes.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Colin gasped as he watched this while slapping in a new magazine.

“Skipper... I’m pretty sure the creature from the Black Space Lagoon was not on the fucking guest list!” Pablo snarled.

“Yeah no shit!” Martin hissed.

“Fucking space monsters!” Danny growled. “It’s healing itself!”

“You noticed that did you?” Pablo barked out.

“Where’s the exit?” Colin snapped. “Let’s bail while the bailing is good and drop a fucking bomb on this thing! Preferably from orbit!”

“The exit is behind the fucking space monster!” Danny barked.

Colin looked up. “Ok. That isn’t good!”

The creature roared once more and chose that time to charge at the four of them with surprising speed.

“Fuck!” Martin barked out as he ducked to the side shoving Danny with him while Colin and Pablo fell away to the other side.

There was a reason why Julie had described them as the epitome of entering by force. All of them were large men, Colin being the smallest at a mere six foot one and two hundred and thirty pounds. Between the four of them they had thousands of hours of combat and over a thousand pounds of muscle and grit. All of which they unleashed on the beast between them. Martin moved first, bringing his sword up quickly and quickly slicing two eighteen inch gashes in the creature’s side. As he twirled his sword defensively and backed away, Danny hit it with four quick but brutal slashes from his Khukuri, opening up several more deep and unforgiving wounds in its lower abdomen. Colin had preferred fighting knives back when he was a wolf and that had not changed even though he was now vampire. Two R4 Elven Hybrid fighting knives, each with five inch long blades appeared in his hands and he used his vampire speed to leap into the air and blur in motion. Two seconds later the creature was venting blood from half a dozen deep cuts at an explosive rate even as Colin rolled out of the way and Pablo struck. Like his Skipper he preferred a sword, a short Katana in this situation, and with powerful sweeps he managed to cut the creature with three deep slashes before the monster let out an inhuman, blood curdling roar and began to swing its arms blindly from side to side in pain. The creature appeared dazed and his movements were uncoordinated and this allowed the four of them to roll back across the room into the far corner away from the exit.

The exit was no longer blocked however.

The four of them could only stare in shock as the creature turned to face them, its near fatal wounds beginning to heal right in front of them just like before.

“C’mon!” Colin yelled. “Those were like our best moves!”

“Gonna need bigger weapons Skipper!” Pablo quipped. “Real big.”

“Fuck this!” Martin snapped. “Colin you got any G24s?” Martin asked.

Colin looked at him. “Does a wolf shit in the woods? Always skipper!”

“That’s bear dipshit!” Pablo spat as he hefted his P190. “Does a bear shit in the woods? I’m gonna tell Jules you fucked that all up!”

Martin laughed aloud as Danny shook his head. They had always been able to do this. Laugh in the face of death. Many people had thought them all crazy back then, but they knew the truth. All of them also knew that Colin and Julie were just beginning a relationship that held promise for both of them. “Then get ready to do your best Chapman imitation.” Martin spoke. “Right into its fucking mouth!”

“And how are you gonna get that thing to open its fucking mouth?” Danny shouted. “You gonna ask politely?”

Martin grinned. “Yes.”

“Marty no!” Danny snarled just before Martin rose to his feet and lifted his hands up.

“Hey Fugly!” Martin shouted as he moved quickly to the side of where Danny and the others were.

Just as the creature turned to face him, Martin formed two Etheric diamonds in his hands and let them fly. The small Etheric projectiles crossed the distance in an eye blink and both blew gaping chunks out of the monster’s lower abdomen. The instant he had released the first two he formed two others and let them go a

second later. These two Etheric projectiles struck the creature on the joint above its right leg and blew most of it completely off. Then two more Etheric diamonds struck its upper chest blowing two more yawning holes into its flesh. The creature was on one knee now and it reached for a loose piece of equipment to throw at Martin. He didn't give it the chance and two more Etheric diamonds struck the joint of its thick arm at what should have been its elbow. The arm joint exploded and nearly eight inches of hand and forearm were blown clear away in a spray of blood and flesh. This caused the monster to look at Martin and opened its armor plated mouth to roar out its pain and agony.

“Fuck you too ugly!” Martin roared back. “Colin now!”

Colin Walsh had always been a lover of the ancient game of Baseball on Earth. He could rattle off records and winners like it was nothing and had taken the time to watch all of the World Series games ever played. A man originally from Cuba, Aroldis Chapman, still holds the record for the fastest Fast Ball ever thrown in baseball, at least until the end of the world came. Colin stood up beside Pablo and using all of his vampire speed and strength he let fly with the G24 Tactical Plasma grenade. It was no bigger than a baseball from the game he so loved and had the game still been played, Colin probably would be playing. Though there were no speed guns to determine how fast he threw the G24 and no one would ever know what the actual speed was, the G24 flew straight and true and in the blink of an eye it slammed into the back of the throat of the creature.

The impact of the G24 caused the monster to stop its screaming almost immediately and stagger back even on one leg.

“Down!” Martin screamed just before the G24 blew.

The G24 could be fused for timed detonation and Colin timed it for three seconds. Just as Martin and the others hit the floor, the G24 exploded, taking with it the creature's head and half of its shoulders. Dark reddish blood and scraps of flesh sprayed all over the entire room, showering the four men over their backs and shoulders as they huddled on the floor. The explosion also blew out the remaining portion of the research lab's wall and filled the entire area with dust as well as collapsing part of the ceiling above on the creature as it fell. Its head had been so close to the ceiling that the concussive force had lifted a portion of the ceiling up, cracking its structure and then dropping almost a ton of steel and concrete down on top of it.

Colin rolled over spitting dust and grime out of his mouth. “And he strikes out the last batter and wins the World Series of 2575! Hoorah!!!” He screamed out. “Who's your daddy?! Who's your daddy?!”

Danny rolled over as well and looked at him. “Fucking comedian!” He spat as Pablo began to erupt into laughter and he slumped over on his back.

Danny got to his feet and looked at the deformed creature on the floor five meters away as he moved over to where Martin was rolling over. He bent down beside him as Martin looked up at him. “*Fervon?*” He asked.

Martin spit a mouth full of dust out and looked up at him. “I really hate fucking smelly ass space monsters.” He growled meeting Danny's gaze. “Fucking stinky bastard!”

Danny looked over at the pile of twisted and torn flesh. “I'm thinking a bath is out of the question now.” He spoke looking back to Martin.

“Not him! You!” Martin snarled.

Danny looked at him and pointed at him with one of his Khukuri. “I should have let that ugly motherfucker eat you asshole!” He barked.

Martin laughed as Danny flipped the Khukuri into his other hand and reached for him. Martin lifted himself up with Danny's help. “I'm bad for the digestion.” Martin chuckled.

Pablo was helping Colin up and looked over to them. “Eating the Skipper would have given that thing a bad case of the runs.” He spoke.

“That's cause he so full of shit.” Danny quipped as they heard the stomping of running feet and suddenly Jules was leading the others into what remained of the research lab.

Julie skidded to a halt, her eyes going first to where Colin was rising to his feet and then back to Martin. “Holy shit!” She gasped.

Namiri, Emylea and Kasdan stepped out from around the bulk of T'Lolt and Kenny, their eyes wide at what they saw.

“I'm thinking holy shit doesn't cover it Jules.” Kenny spoke his eyes looking all around the room.

T'lolt nodded his head. "I concur."

Martin looked at Kasdan. "Kasdan, please tell me that we didn't damage anything and those Etheric locks are still in place."

Kasdan nodded his head. "They are still secure Martin." He stammered. "This... this is what we detected?" He asked looking at what remained of the creature.

"Our P9s recorded the whole thing Marty." Jules said.

Martin looked over to the cooling flesh of the creature. "Yeah, ugly *ronnus*; what's left of it anyway."

"Fucking space monster!" Danny barked.

"Kasdan can you access the computers in this facility from in here?" He asked.

Kasdan nodded. "I should be able to yes."

"Then I want you to scan the interior and if our contacts are the only thing showing, seal the remaining floors and vent the oxygen that is in there." Martin spoke.

Kasdan met his eyes. "That will kill anything else that may be alive down there Martin." He said.

Martin nodded his head. "I know... but I'm not risking anymore people to take out this thing's brothers. No more space monsters for us today. Do it."

Kasdan nodded. "Very well."

"I'm going topside." Martin said. "I need some air before Anja, Aricia and For'mya get here and give me an earful."

ARTAAYA CAPITAL CITY OF ARTAAYA CHIEF ELDER'S OFFICE

"...Not know of this Dysea." Delnash spoke. "I swear to you."

Dysea had returned to the cockpit of *VALISTAR ONE* and that is where she sat now. Delnash knew what the interior of a corvette looked like and could tell right away when she contacted him.

Dysea nodded in the holotransmission. "I did not think so and neither will Martin." She told him. "You and he have come too far for such things."

"I had Two Seven run a background check on our shipyards at Nepneu." Delnash began. "All of our ships built there are accounted for. With the exception of those destroyed or taken by the Svorag, not one is missing."

"How many of this class were taken by the Svorag?" Dysea asked.

"Twenty-nine in the last twelve hundred and nineteen years." Delnash answered. "None before that."

Dysea's head tilted sideways in puzzlement. "You have dealt with the Svorag for much longer however, have you not?" She spoke.

Delnash nodded his head. "Yes, but they did not begin to attack or take our ships and people before then." He replied. "That was something new that took us all by surprise when it began."

"Then how did Lycavorians from Ventori come to have control of one of your Frigates?" She asked thoughtfully. "And the skill and knowledge to use it quite well according to my pilot. To be honest, she says if we did not have our multispectral sensor array we would not have detected them unless they had made a mistake."

"You are certain they were from Ventori?" Delnash asked. "I was under the impression we had stopped monitoring the Lycavorians there long before the Svorag began to intercept our ships."

Dysea nodded her head. "Wayonn is certain they are Beta Wolves." She spoke. "I was relatively sure but Wayonn has been wolf for far longer than I and he is certain they are Beta Wolves. They could only have come from Ventori. Could they have taken this ship from the Svorag?"

Delnash looked up as the hulking figure of Avatar 27 came up beside his desk. "27?" he spoke.

-The *RONAR*-Class frigate does not possess atmospheric capability Queen Dysea- 27 spoke to her image. –The only way to have taken the ship in the manner you describe is while it was in orbit. The Lycavorians on Ventori do not possess space craft capable of this-

Dysea nodded her head. “I assumed as much given what Martin has told us of them.” She said. “They were industrial but pre-space flight.”

Delnash nodded. “Yes.”

Dysea met his eyes. “Then the only explanation is that someone among your people gave them the ship and the training to use it.”

-That would be the likely hypothesis Chief Elder Delnash- 27 answered as Delnash sat back in his chair.

“Lorendo?” Delnash spoke as his eyes grew wide. “But why? He has always purported that Lycavorians were beneath us in every way. Why give them one of our ships and train them how to use it? And why have we not seen them before now?”

“These are questions that need to be answered.” Dysea said. “As well as who else besides yourself and Avatar 27 know who Jezima and Meral were. That will be the largest question that Martin has.”

Delnash shook his head. “Even I did not know who they were.” He replied. “Not until 27 found the data and told me.”

“Well, whoever these Lycavorians are, they were not watching Wayonn or I. We reacted only after you told Martin. They would not have known Martin dispatched Wayonn to Honelze from Ventori. They were already watching them there.” Dysea said. “They were already there or someone on Honelze told them that they got on our ship, which means someone on Honelze told them.”

-The search parameters that I used to discover their existence cannot be duplicated Queen Dysea- 27 told her. **–And I deleted all reference to any search I conducted. I was quite thorough in my actions-**

Dysea nodded her head. “I do not doubt that 27. This only means that Jezima and Meral were known to whoever is watching them and this person did not need to conduct such a search. Whoever is watching them knew who they were before you discovered them; they knew that they were alive and where they were living. This is something that *Nauta Melme* will not be pleased with.”

“I am not pleased with it.” Delnash snapped.

“This is not your fault Chief Elder.” Dysea spoke.

“All of this is my fault!” Delnash hissed as he came to his feet. “If I had been doing my job I would have known what Lorendo has been up to all of these years!”

“There is no blame to place here Delnash.” Dysea told him evenly. “It appears likely that Lorendo has far more secrets than any of us realize. And he has had many years to become very good at this. You are not like him and therefore you will not think like him. You are not capable of doing what we believe he has done. He still has people watching you?”

Delnash nodded. “They are trying to be discreet but to Teniri and her dragons they stick out like unwanted warts!” He retorted. “He has been very public these last weeks, mainly using this time to berate and distance himself from every decision we, as an Elder Council, made since coming to Artaaya. The lies he is spewing make me want to throttle him myself!”

Dysea chuckled at Delnash’s attempt at humor but she nodded her head. “That is what worms do.” She spoke. “My apologies about your son Delnash.”

Delnash shook his head and waved his hand. “That I have been blind to his actions all of these years is pain enough.” He said. “I never believed he was like this. Kesyla tried to tell me once but I did not listen.” Delnash looked at Dysea in the transmission. “Anja would have killed him if he had attempted anything wouldn’t she?”

“In many ways *Melyanna* is just as Spartan in nature as Aricia who is pureblood.” Dysea told him. “She may be Hadarian but she has embraced the Spartan nature of the wolf within her now. Far more than most

turned females. Yes..." Dysea told him honestly. "Anja would have killed him for his actions had we not been there with her."

Delnash nodded his head slowly. "And I can't seem to find any part of myself that finds fault in that." He stated softly. "Amazing isn't it?"

Dysea shook her head. "No. I believe it is because of what you have seen and what you have experienced in the past. You buried these things deep when you arrived on Artaaya, but now they are returning. And that is our fault."

Delnash looked at her. "No. Martin's arrival... your people's arrival... that may have hastened it somewhat but I would have seen the light so to speak eventually. The only real difference is that many more would have died until my eyes were opened had you not come when you did. I will forever be in your debt for that."

"Discovering Jezima and Meral as you have, that will erase any debt you may think you owe to us." Dysea spoke.

"Jezima and Meral?" Delnash asked.

"They will be under the protection of the *Durcunusaan Hippeis Sedla* shortly and it will not matter." Dysea answered.

"Ah... your Royal Guard." Delnash spoke as he returned to his chair. "Martin mentioned them to me briefly in one of our transmissions."

Dysea nodded her head. "They are our finest." She stated simply.

"I don't suppose you would care to elaborate on that would you?" Delnash asked her. "Martin was strangely offhand about it and he changed the subject quickly."

"If *Nauta Melme* did not than I will not." Dysea told him. "I'm sure you will discover it soon, so I would not let it trouble you. They are no threat to anyone who is not a threat to them first."

"And I would imagine that any threat that does present itself to them would not be one after?" Delnash prodded her.

Dysea smiled. "For perhaps two or three seconds." She replied.

Delnash shook his head. "Gods we have dismissed so much through the millennia." He whispered to no one in particular. "There is so much we could have learned."

"The learning never ends Delnash." Dysea spoke. "And you can be assured we are here for the long run."

Delnash looked at her in the transmission and nodded. "As are we." He stated confidently and with bright eyes.

"I will have *Nauta Melme* contact you when Jezima and Meral arrive on Ventori." She told him. "For now I believe we should try and discover who these Lycavorians are and if they are a threat to either of us."

"Agreed." Delnash said. "I am meeting with Teniri when she returns from her trip to Manne tomorrow. There is much we need to discuss. I will contact Martin after we have been able to put our heads together."

Dysea nodded. "Then I wish you well until we speak again." Dysea spoke.

"I wish you the same." Delnash spoke as he rose to his feet once more and watched as the transmission ended.

Delnash turned and moved to the wide expanse of the massive doors into his office. He looked out over the city they had built and let that beautiful sight calm him as it always did. He felt more than saw Avatar 27 come up behind him.

-Chief Elder?-

"Too much is happening 27." Delnash spoke. "We are letting Lorendo dictate how we do things. That needs to end."

-Agreed-

Delnash turned to look at him. "After the meeting with Teniri tomorrow inform Elder Sashan that I want a complete inventory of all ships and their crews. Numbers. Readiness. All of it. I don't care how long he has to work but I want it in one week."

-Elder Sashan will not be happy about that- 27 spoke.

"He will deal with it or find a new job." Delnash spoke. "He is the head of the Defense Convocation. It is what he is supposed to do!"

-And once he is committed to this task?- 27 asked.

Delnash looked at him. "You find out how they got one of our ships. With Sashan active and his attention drawn to other matters access to the defense mainframe will be easier. Do what you must but find out how these Lycavorians got our ship. And find out if they are a threat."

-This will require that I bypass several known Defense Convocation authorizations- 27 spoke.

"Whatever it takes 27." Delnash spoke. "I want answers and I want them before I begin to take Lorendo's lies and tear them down one at a time."

VALISTAR ONE

"... You believe him?" Wayonn asked softly as he entered the cockpit fully now.

Dysea turned quickly and saw him leaning against the doorframe. She smiled at him and rose to her feet from the chair. "Nauta Melme was right you know. You do move like a ghost at times."

Wayonn shrugged his shoulders. "It's my age." He stated simply as he held out the mug of Aricia's coffee.

Dysea laughed softly and took the mug. "Yes I believe him." She answered the question. "And so does Martin." She moved up in front of him. "Though I sense that he will need our help."

"How so?" Wayonn asked.

"He will need protection." Dysea answered. "I have a feeling I know what he is going to do... and when he does begin to make his move he will become a much larger target than he is now."

"Now?"

Dysea nodded. "We are still bumbling about in the dark Wayonn." She said. "Lorendo is playing a game of sorts and we are very behind in the score. He is also not working alone. There are others working with him Wayonn, protecting him. When that begins to change for him, he will certainly change his tactics. Part of that will be that he will go after Delnash in more direct ways."

Wayonn nodded in agreement. "We cannot be seen as getting involved in internal Pralor politics Dysea, you know that. Lorendo would turn it completely around on Delnash as soon as he discovered it."

Dysea smiled. "Providing Delnash protection is not involved in politics." She told him.

Wayonn saw where she was going and he smiled. "The Hippeis Sedla?"

Dysea nodded. "I will speak with Martin when we arrive on Ventori, but if he requested them for Jezima and Meral then Vengal will no doubt send more than needed. We might be able to put one or two on Delnash and attribute it to Teniri and the dragons."

"Ah... very smooth." Wayonn stated. "Very smooth."

"Jezima and Meral?" Dysea asked.

"They are still trying to process everything I think." Wayonn told her. "To discover that... after so long to discover that you have grandchildren from a son who you thought died long ago. To know that he led a life you were not aware of and now that life is suddenly saying hello? It is a bit much."

Dysea sipped her coffee and nodded. “No doubt.” She said. “It will be equally as much for Martin. He never once dreamed that anyone from his grandfather’s direct family could be alive. This had never entered his thoughts until Delnash told him. He is... he will be beside himself Wayonn.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “Probably more so than when I discovered he lived.” He said softly. “And I cannot tell you how happy that knowledge made me. It will be a sight to see.”

“Yes. Yes it will.” Dysea agreed.

VENTORI SECOND RESEARCH SITE LOCATION

To say that Saydia and the other Tasmor were impressed with how quickly so many had descended upon this area was an understatement. They discovered within seconds after Anja, Aricia and the others staggered as if in a daze that an attack was underway and their husband was heavily involved. Within moments of them boarding the ship flown by Queen For'mya Leonidas they heard broadcasts on the internal COM system of the *STRIKER* about dozens of different teams from across the city who were diverting for their King's location. Though it took less than ten minutes to reach their location on the other side of the large city, they could see different teams appearing from within the city and taking up circular positions all around what looked to be an open field with wreckage from a destroyed building all around the area. As spread out as she thought they were through the city, Saydia wondered just how they had managed to get here so quickly. Ultimately it didn't matter as Anja, Aricia, Anuk, Kesyla and For'mya were out of the ship before the engines had even died down and Saydia Daret quickly followed with Anthylea and Perlyea close on her heels.

Saydia discovered something that had not known before about Lycavorians as they made their way from the ship. The natural speed of a wolf apparently carried over at least in small part to their human forms as the Queens quickly outdistanced the Tasmor following them. They were just catching up and Saydia saw the five women split into two groups, the queens to Martin and the other two females to the massive ebony skinned man just to his side. Saydia's eyes grew wide when she saw Namiri and Emylea making their way towards her. She embraced her daughters without question, running her hands over both of them checking them for injury.

“You are unhurt?” She gasped finally, holding them close to her.

“We are fine mother.” Emylea stated. “We were not involved. Only King Martin and his team.”

Saydia looked at Namiri once more and could not help but feel a little saddened by the lost time between them. Saydia's relationship with Namiri's father had not been something Saydia had wanted, but Tasmor tradition demanded it and Saydia had endured his lovemaking so that she gave him a child. Saydia had resented this for most of Namiri's life and had not shown her the mother's love that she should have. Upon coming here and seeing what a beautiful warrior Namiri had become right under her eyes had altered her perceptions entirely. Namiri's hair was now a dark blond color, almost brown in many spots. She could change her hair color almost at will Saydia knew, most Tasmor could, though they very rarely ever did this. Namiri had been one of those few who had chosen to do this but now it seemed as she had chosen to remain with her natural hair color and it made her dark eyes so much more alive and bright.

“What happened?” Saydia gasped. “Were there more bodies of...?”

Namiri shook her head quickly. “No mother. This was something else.”

“Something else?” Saydia asked.

Namiri nodded her head and motioned to where three men were dumping a tarp covered body to the ground a few meters away. “They fought that.” She said with awe in her voice that was easy enough for all of them to detect.

Their heads came around when Martin's voice bellowed aloud in the still air. “...Damn sure they are dead Master Chief!”

Saydia and the others moved closer to where he settled to a large granite and steel barrier that looked to have been torn asunder from the building foundation. Anja and Aricia were pulling at the armor he wore over his upper body and Saydia watched as they finally got it unfastened and lifted it away as he sat down. He wore only a simple, tight solid colored gray shirt under the armor and Saydia had to hold back her gasp of shock at

the exquisite definition of his upper body. She watched as Anja lifted the shirt away to reveal something that looked to have been chiseled from marble itself. If Saydia was any judge, there was not an ounce of fat on his muscular form, or the form of the similarly defined ebony skinned man to his side. It also displayed the angry, purple and black bruise that covered the entire left side of his midsection. All of them heard Anja gasp and drop to her knees in front of him as he lifted his arm above his head and turn to look at the same massive form of the man carrying the huge chain gun.

“Kasdan says that he is no longer reading their lifesigns but don’t take any chances Master Chief.” Martin spoke to him around his upraised arm. “Take two grenadiers with you and if they show even a twitch of life you hit them with everything you got.”

“We’re on it Skipper.” The man spoke.

“Tony...” Martin barked. “No chances Tony. Sweep and clear.”

The Master Chief Tony Winston nodded his head in the affirmative. “We hear you Skipper.” He answered before motioning to four others to join him and they headed for the manhole cover in the street a short distance away.

Both of Anja’s hands were pulsing softly with white light as she directed them over his side and this caught Perlyea’s attention right away and she moved closer still. “You have four fractured ribs Lover!” She gasped in what appeared to be disbelief. “What did you find down there?”

“*Nubous gartas Llokel.*” Martin hissed softly but loud enough for Danny and the others to hear. (Fucking space monster)

“Damn straight!” Danny agreed. “Right out of a bad B movie Red!”

Anja’s hands flared even brighter now as she began to heal the damage to his side. Her small hands were pressed to his skin and slowly she drew them across the entire area almost intimately causing Martin to look at her.

“Anja?” He asked.

“I’m ok Lover.” She answered quickly.

Martin reached for her instantly with his aura and allowed it to swarm around her senses. He could feel her anger and unrest instantly at what she had seen in the first bunker and he knew this had her on edge. He pulsed her with his love and warmth and Anja basked in the sensations that gave to her even as she continued to heal him. It also caused her to move even closer to him and press her petite body tightly to him. This caused Aricia and For’mya to smile from Martin’s other side as Anja looked so tiny in comparison to him.

Perlyea took all of this in intently, watching Anja’s face and how she reacted to him. It was fascinating to witness and she would have to ask Anja about it more when they were alone. This thought stunned Perlyea for a moment for she knew without question they would be working together in the future and that combined with others they would make a formidable team. Almost from the outset Perlyea wanted to be around this small and diminutive woman for she radiated power and wisdom. She also exuded sexiness to Perlyea and she did not know what to make of that. It was something she would have to discover Perlyea knew and for the first time in her life Perlyea did not fear getting to know someone from another species.

“Lover... tell me what you found down there.” Anja told him as she finished her healing pulses and stepped slightly away from him. “What could do this to you and Danny of all people?”

“*Fervon?*” Martin called out as he began to pull his shirt back on.

Danny nodded as Duewa finished healing his injuries with Anuk and Kesyla watching. “I’m good.” He called out.

Martin looked at Saydia now. “You should probably see this as well.” He told her before beginning to walk to where the tarp covered form was resting on the ground.

Danny, Colin, Pablo and Julie followed with Julie holding tightly to Colin’s hand but both of them trying to hide this. It did no good really for everyone noticed but they said nothing. Martin bent over and threw back the tarp causing all of them to turn their heads and hold back their sudden desire to vomit because of the stench.

“Smelly bastard huh?” Martin said as he stepped back slightly.

“Gods yes!” For’mya gasped gripping Aricia’s arm tightly even as Anja held her hand over her own very sensitive nose and moved closer to the now very dead creature.

“Beloved... you and the others fought this?” Aricia gasped.

“Yeah... but it was about four feet taller than it is now!” Martin replied almost casually.

Anja looked at him. “How did you kill it?” She asked.

Martin chuckled now causing Saydia and the others to look at him oddly. “We got it to eat a G24.” He answered jerking his thumb toward Colin. “Courtesy of our resident Baseball wacko.”

Julie smiled and looked at Colin with desire in her dark eyes. “Nice work.” She told him softly.

Colin grinned. “It’s all in the wrist.” He said.

Namiri looked at her mother’s expression and grinned now. “An explosive mother.” She explained to her. “One that is thrown.”

“Ah...” Saydia said nodding. “I see. I think.”

Anja looked back to the headless monstrosity. “A G24 will certainly do it.” She spoke. She held out her hand and pointed to several other wounds. “I take it other weapons were not working? I count thirteen healed bullet holes and over a dozen slash scars.”

“Slicing and dicing it didn’t do the trick Red.” Danny spoke now. “We had to use more direct measures.”

Perlyea was also looking at the creature, or what remained of it, and something caught her attention. She moved closer to it directly behind Anja, who was squatting next to it, as the scientist in her took over. “Anja?” She blurted out causing Anja to look up at her.

“Perlyea?” Anja queried her.

Perlyea moved around to the other side of the creature and bent down now. She held out her hand and pointed to the portion of the chest that remained on the right side. Her finger was directed at the faint bone ridge across the chest. “Anja this is... this is Tasmor.” She said.

“What?” Anja gasped.

“Perlyea no!” Saydia gasped in horror.

“The slight bone ridge.” Perlyea answered. “This is indicative of Tasmor physiology. It is one of the defining characteristics of our species along with the ridges just above our brow bone structure.”

Anja looked at her across the disgusting form between them. Anja was impressed with her strength and determination to do the right thing for her people. It was her guiding principle it seemed and nothing Anja had noticed detracted from this fact. Even her actions in trying to obtain their technology was directed solely by her desire to improve her people. Just their short time together and Anja had learned she was an extremely intelligent woman and a very beautiful one as well.

“Perlyea... you are certain?” Anja asked her.

Perlyea nodded her head. “Yes.”

“What does that mean Red?” Martin asked now.

Anja rose to her feet and turned to look at him slowly, knowing how he would react to what she was about to tell him. “Lover...?”

Martin shook his head. “No way. I know for a fact that we found pieces of Lycavorian, Pralor and Tasmor in that other butcher shop! And I also know that Perlyea there is almost as sharp as you! What exactly is she saying Red?”

Anja nodded her head and took his arm. “I am relatively certain just from seeing the other lab and the remains here but... it appears as if someone... it looks like they combined the DNA from the three species and made... they made this thing.”

The look of horror and savage anger on Martin Leonidas’ face could not be an act by any definition of the word Saydia Daret knew. His dark brown eyes quickly changed to the yellow gold color of the wolf within him and his fangs lengthened into terrifying flesh shredding tools. Genetic experimentation of any sort was strictly forbidden within the Union and anyone who was discovered to be involved with such things was quickly put on trial and more often than not found guilty and put to death immediately. This mentality was left over from the days of High Cover experimentation on humans and elves on Earth. Martin, Anja and Dysea had seen first-hand what this sort of thing had wrought and the pain it had brought to some of their closest and dearest friends. Saydia looked around quickly at those who were standing with them and she saw the same looks of horror and brutal anger that this knowledge brought forth. Something must have happened in the past to make them hate this type of thing so much, but it was only another sign to her that the Tasmor people’s path into the future was with these Lycavorians who had been such a godsend to them up until now. Saydia could only watch

as Anja, Aricia and For'mya quickly put their hands on Martin's chest, arms and shoulders and pulsed him heavily with their female wolf auras in order to calm him. It worked she saw as slowly, his eyes returned to normal and his fangs retracted into his gums once more.

"Anja... Anja you find me who did this." Martin growled in a menacingly low voice. "You find them for me so I can rip their hearts out and feed it to them!"

"I will Lover." Anja answered softly. "I will. I will... Lover?" Anja saw the look on his face change from one of anger to one of surprised happiness and he turned his head.

"*Melda Min*?" Martin gasped softly with wide eyes as the sweet wildflower smell of his first elven Queen drifted to him faintly from downwind. The wind was blowing away from him but Martin Leonidas' sense of smell was perhaps the keenest of any living wolf within the entire Lycavorian Union. He detected her sweet smell and his dark brown eyes began searching for her as he stepped away from Anja and the others.

"Dysea!" Aricia gasped as she grabbed Anja's hand once more. "Dysea is here!"

They all turned to the direction Martin was facing, his face raised to the air and his nose catching her scent once more. He searched with his eyes even harder and then he saw her come sprinting around the edge of a building perhaps a hundred meters away. Dysea was moving fast and Aricia, Anja and For'mya felt her Etheric resonance wash over them and they gripped each other in happiness as Dysea covered the last hundred meters to their position in roughly four or five seconds.

Then she was leaping into Martin's arms and he was kissing her madly as he held her suspended off the ground and was spinning her around. Dysea whimpered in unabashed delight as his aura washed over her wolf senses and set her body on fire. They had been too long apart she knew and his lips upon hers was almost too much to bear as she met his tongue and quickly surrendered to his ministrations. Her arms were wrapped around his head tightly as he kissed her and then Aricia, Anja and For'mya were pressing up against them and relishing in the combined auras of those they loved so very much. They could feel the happiness and love of Isabella and Cirith even across the stars and this only added to their happiness now, especially at such a time.

After several moments of the toe curling kiss Martin pulled away from her delicious lips and furiously nuzzled her throat and cheeks causing Dysea to gasp in delight even more. A few seconds of this and he was staring into her emerald orbs with those dark brown pools of love and Dysea was barely able to keep herself from becoming wet at her center in her desire for him.

"*Melda Min* what... what are you doing here?" Martin gasped.

Dysea smiled at him brilliantly as Aricia leaned forward and firmly nuzzled her cheek. "I have... we have missed you so *Nauta Melme*." Dysea gasped.

"I know!" Martin exclaimed. "I was trying to figure out how I could..."

Dysea took his face in her hands and shook her head quickly. "No!" She told him. "This is where you should be! With our people!"

"Bella? Cirith? Are they with you?" Martin asked as he sniffed the air hoping to detect them as well.

"They remained behind." Dysea told him. "They wanted me to come."

"Why? What is wrong?" Martin asked suddenly concerned.

"Nothing is wrong *Nauta Melme*." Dysea told him with that dazzling smile of hers. "I... I wanted to surprise you."

Martin looked at her smiling but puzzled. "It's not my birthday *Melda Min*." He told her.

Dysea slapped him lightly in the face with her joyous laugh. "I know that you brute!" She declared.

"I sent Wayonn to Honelze to..." Martin stopped as he gazed at her face and saw her smile grow even larger.

"I know *Nauta Melme*." She said softly, her emerald eyes twinkling in the day light. "We had... Bella, Cirith and I had already discovered them when he arrived. They did not want to wait. They..." It was then that Martin and all of them felt it. Martin slowly lowered Dysea to the ground and he moved his head to look around her and his dark eyes grew wide.

Walking towards them and holding tightly to Wayonn's hands were Martin Leonidas' past and his future.

Very slowly Martin stepped away from Dysea as Aricia and Anja drew her into their arms and his hands fell away from her as they watched him. His head tilted slightly as he attempted to pick up their scents in the

slight breeze. The woman on Wayonn's right was older and moving a bit slower than the woman on the left, and Martin caught Wayonn's familiar scent just then.

Then the scent of...

Martin's eyes grew wider still and his stomach tightened almost painfully as the scents of Mountain and Ginger mint floated across his nostrils, enflaming his senses and causing the wolf blood within him to scream out wildly with only one word.

Family.

Something deep within Martin Leonidas took over then. Something deep and so very powerful in its drive. He took one step forward and hesitated for only an instant before he began to stride towards the three individuals with more purpose and determination than he had ever felt before in his life. His wolf senses focused and centered on the two women and he walked faster as he saw Wayonn pull up short and beckon them to stop. What was screaming out within Martin was much like what he had felt the day he discovered his true mother buried in that foul prison on their homeworld so long ago. A sense of powerful longing that had suddenly been fulfilled. An intense sense of family that was the true anchor of the emotion that he and his beautiful wives and mates had poured into their children as they grew. The scents grew more intense as he grew closer and with only ten feet between them Martin pulled up short.

In fear.

It was an emotion that was foreign to him in many ways, but now it flowed through him unchecked.

What if they did not accept him? They were his blood, all that remained of his pure Pralor blood and they held the knowledge he had coveted for so long about his history and his Pralor ancestors. His father and his father before him and beyond. What if they did not approve of him or what his Great, Great Grandfather Sumar had done? What he had to do in order to survive. He felt indecision fill him as never before and this was a feeling that Martin Leonidas was very unaccustomed to.

For the first time in his life his instincts failed him in a way they never had before. Martin Leonidas didn't know what to do.

Thankfully for him, it was a decision that had been made millennia before he was ever born.

It was perhaps the longest walk she had ever taken in her extensive life but with each step onward she felt younger. Each foot she put in front of the other only inspired her, drove her to keep moving forward.

Jezima clung to Wayonn's hand almost painfully and she had to stop and gasp when she first felt it, her hand going to chest in disbelief. She felt her only remaining child's heart racing almost out of control, just as hers was. They could both feel it. So beautifully powerful and bright within the Etheric realm. It felt so very familiar to them, so brilliant in its warmth and resonance. Each step brought them closer to something neither of them had ever imagined.

The war had taken so much from them. So much from so many men and women. It had deprived her of a loving and devoted husband. It had taken from her grasp three sons and two daughters in very different ways, but no less violently. Wrenched them from her very clutches without even being able to say goodbye or see their bodies given to The Rift of Time. If not for Meral it would have destroyed her as it had destroyed so many other lives. They had turned inward away from everyone else, both filled with the same loss and longing simply for a closure that never really came. Jezima's eyes were not as good as Meral's and when she heard her daughter gasp and Wayonn tugged on her hand to slow down, Jezima didn't know what to do. She slowed reluctantly until she felt that resonance spike even higher and the image of a tall figure stepped away from the others that were standing far away.

And then that figure began to walk towards them and Wayonn beckoned her to stop.

Jezima turned to look at him and question this but stopped when she felt it. Meral's eyes were wider than she had ever seen them before and they were rapidly filling with tears. More tears than she had seen from her daughter in far too many millennia. She turned back to see the figure moving forward with a confident stride and each step that figure made brought him into better focus for Jezima. Each step that figure made caused her pulse to quicken and as his features began to take shape. Jezima could only watch, her eyes growing wider as first the tall well-muscled body came into clarity dressed oddly in some sort of body armor from his waist down

but a simple shirt from the waist up. Then her tears began as the hair came into focus, shoulder length black hair, tied into a ponytail just as she remembered. Then the skin, so deeply tanned and beautifully stretched over that muscular frame. Her hand came to her mouth once more and rivers began to pour from her eyes as she saw the features. So strong and handsome. A confident jaw, masculine cheekbones and deep, dark eyes that caused her to begin to shudder and shake in disbelief.

It was her son.

No, it was not her son, the thought flashed across Jezima's mind.

It was the descendant of her son. So proud and beautiful to her.

Jezima gasped when he stopped only ten feet from them. She felt the indecision in him, the concern that he would not be accepted. He wore these things on his sleeve, unable to hide his emotions in this state. Jezima could feel the unconditional love for his beautiful wives and the children that they had given to him. She could feel the love he held for his people. His entire being was open to her and Jezima could only gasp at the level of emotion channeled through his being. It made him radiate within the Etheric realm like a supernova. The indecision was new to him she felt, something he was very unaccustomed too. Emotions radiated wildly within him and with one simple movement Jezima set free all of the doubts that clouded his mind at this moment.

One simple movement that brought millennia of not knowing to an end for her, and silenced the whispers of doubt from another forever.

Jezima pulled her hand free of Wayonn's grasp and reached for him. She reached for him while stepping forward with the same purpose and determination that had gotten her this far in life after losing so much.

It was such an unpretentious thing.

But it served to finally allow the emotions that had been building since he discovered who he truly was to come bubbling forth like lava from a volcano. His knees became weak and Martin found he could no longer hold his weight up and he dropped to his knees as that hand reached for him. He couldn't contain it any longer. He was unable to hold it in any longer.

And now he didn't have too.

For the first time in his life Martin Leonidas allowed it all to come forth. Unchecked and unequivocally. His dark brown eyes erupted into tears and he looked up into the face of his past and now his future. He looked up into dark brown eyes that matched his in every single way. He felt her hand touch his cheek and everything that Martin Leonidas was came out in one word that caused Meral to finally lose it and rush forward.

Jezima could not contain the emotions any longer and when his arms wrapped around her waist she heard the word that he uttered before his head was pressed tightly to her abdomen and her arms held him so very tightly. Heavy sobs wracked her body and she almost could not even comprehend the emotions that saturated the area around them.

Jezima did hear the word however. The single word that changed everything within her life and would change it going into the future.

It was a change she and Meral would embrace without a moment's hesitation no matter the outcome.

One simple word.

"Grandmother."

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

VENTORI

SECOND SECRET BUNKER

The only days that they could remember seeing him so happy were the days each of his children were born and the first birthday of his mother after he had rescued her from the hell she had been enduring. Everything that had been happening all around them suddenly became very secondary to Jezima and Meral. Aricia, Anja, Dysea and For'mya had stood there on the field, clutching each other tightly and watching with

tears flooding their eyes as he had dropped to his knees in front of Jezima and Meral and Martin Leonidas had begun to weep.

To those on the field with them who knew Martin and had been with him for so long, it was a moment none of them would ever forget. None had ever seen their King cry before, truly none had ever seen such a display of emotion from the man they all revered, yet now they all held within them a moment in history that they would keep close to their hearts and never tell anyone. It was a day and moment that would forever cement their undying loyalty to Martin Leonidas for he had become normal for that extended moment in time. They had witnessed him sobbing for what he had thought lost and now discovered and he had shown once more that he was no different than them. He loved and cared about the same things they all did. It affected Danny the most, for he had dropped to one knee and silently wept in happiness for the man who was his *Mard Fervon*. Anuk and Nayeca were beside him, Kesyla kneeling in front of him but not really understanding what was happening as Anuk and Nayeca did. She would come to learn over the next few days and it would make her love the life she had become part of even more. Julie had leaned into Colin without regard for who saw them now, tears in her eyes as he held her close. His entire team had dropped to one knee in happiness and reverence for what the man who had saved all of their lives more times than they could remember through the years had finally found.

When Martin let out a roar of happiness and scooped Jezima and Meral both into his arms and began spinning them around in glee as if they weighed nothing at all, it was Atropos who acted. He sang with happiness within for what his King had found, but he was also a Captain of the *Durcunusaan* and this area was not entirely secure. He began to silently issue orders to the others who had flooded the area with hand signals and soft whispers into his jaw implant and within minutes this simple field had become the most secure location on the face of the planet. Atropos was the Queen's brother and a senior *Durcunusaan* officer though still only a Captain in rank by choice. He was well known throughout the *Durcunusaan* and the regular military and no one questioned his orders in any way. He finally stepped up to his sister Aricia and Anja who were holding Dysea and For'mya between them with For'mya clutching Dysea's waist and whispered to her, prodding them all forward towards where their *STRIKER* was. Anja nodded her head through tear stained eyes and though it took an additional twenty minutes to finally get Martin to the ship with Jezima and Meral in tow; he kept pulling one of them close to him and speaking animatedly, they were finally able to get him on the *STRIKER* and two minutes after that it was airborne for the Adhoc base outside Jorlari.

Atropos turned back to the men and women who had gathered and moved directly to where Saydia and the other Tasmor were standing still somewhat in shock. This turn of events was quite eye opening even though they did not really know what had taken place. Anthylea and Drenia did not step around Saydia this time to block Atropos from getting to close to their Sovereign Regent knowing who he was and not wanting to cause a confrontation, but they also took notice that the large man stopped a respectable distance from her and bowed his head to all of them.

“Sovereign Regent I...”

“What... what just happened Atropos?” Saydia asked him directly. Saydia Daret was no longer frightened about what had taken place to get them here to this point. She had already decided her course of action in the coming days and weeks. These Lycavorian people were so very proud and honorable and perhaps the deadliest men and women she had ever seen before in her life. They had treated the Tasmor with respect and honor even after the earlier incident, and Saydia had no intention of allowing this opportunity to pass her people by. It seemed that everyone with her was of the same mind, for Saydia could feel the trust building between their two species as each hour passed. Atropos was slightly surprised that she remembered his name at all and the stock of the Tasmor rose even more in his eyes with this simple action. They were adapting to events that were changing right in front of them almost as easily as Lycavorians. He glanced quickly at where Namiri and Emylea stood and now understood what his King had told Anja and his other Queens. It appeared these Tasmor were going to play a very large part in the future and within their family.

“I apologize for...” Atropos began but stopped quickly. He shook his head with a smile and continued. “It is actually a very long and not entirely happy story Sovereign Regent.” He spoke. “Anja and my sister told you that the majority of my people out here with us can trace a portion of their lineage back to the Pralor people?”

Saydia nodded her head. “Your sister told us this when we were on your ship, yes.”

Atropos nodded his head with a smile. "Martin is... he is over three thousand years old and..." He told them seeing their eyes go wide at this information. It was obviously something none of them suspected or believed until now. "He is the fourth generation descendant of the Chief Elder Pralor who made the decision to merge with our people so very long ago. He is the Great, Great Grandson to Sumar of the Pralor people. We came out here never expecting to find much, certainly not what we have discovered so far. The two women you saw are the mother and sister to the man who we have begun to call the father of us all. Sumar. They are Martin's Leonidas' blood, his family, and there is nothing that is more important to Martin Leonidas than his family."

"He did not know they existed?" Perlyea asked stunned.

Atropos shook his head once more. "None of us did until a day or so ago." He answered. He stepped closer to them as a group but still kept a respectful distance. "Anja asked that I see to it all of you are brought back to the base. They would like you and your daughters, all of you to take part in this joyous time."

"Us?" Saydia gasped in surprise.

Atropos nodded his head. "What all of us have seen in these last hours is distasteful and horrific. Our people and yours with knowledge in these matters can take things from here and do their jobs, at least for now. A strong glass of Spartan wine or my sister's coffee and a few hours away from the death around us will help us to tolerate it and move forward."

Saydia took a deep breath and nodded her head after a moment. "I will agree with that." She spoke evenly.

Atropos nodded his head. "General Simpson has authorized you to bring more of your forces to the surface if you wish. This is now a Joint operation Sovereign Regent for it involves your people as well as ours and the King will not leave you out of the investigation. Not after what the Tasmor did here for our people."

"You are very well spoken for a man who tries to make it seem like he is nothing more than a soldier." Saydia said.

Atropos smiled at this and nodded his head. "My wife and mate Lilika." He said. "She believes education is a gift from the gods and she insisted that our sons and I take advantage of this."

"And you obeyed her?" Saydia asked somewhat surprised to hear his answer.

Atropos chuckled at her question and for a moment he thought he saw a flash of anger in her eyes at his reaction. "You will discover that there are many areas where the females of our species are the ones in charge Sovereign Regent. And in those cases, no, we do not defy our wives and mates. Not if we wish to remain able to move without pain."

Saydia Daret couldn't help the yelp of laughter that escaped her lips and her hand went to her lips in embarrassment but she saw Atropos still smiling at her. She could also see the small smiles of humor on both Perlyea and Anthylea's faces as well. This man was stern faced and looked ready to kill with a single word, yet Saydia found he was far more than his outward appearance projected.

"Forgive me." She said finally.

Atropos shook his head quickly. "There are differences between our peoples, yes." He told her. "However, many of us believe we are not so very different either." He motioned with his hand to one of the Lifters that were pulling up a short distance away. "Please... allow me to escort you back to the base."

UNION ADHOC BASE

When they had returned to the Lycavorian temporary base area Saydia was shocked to discover that it had expanded ever further than she thought possible. Apparently these men and women had done this type of thing before many times. She was also stunned to find out that separate, portable quarters had been erected for her and most of those with her. Large barracks type buildings had been established for the Tasmor troops as well as those Lycavorians who were on the ground. A number that was increasing with each hour it seemed. When they had returned to the ADHOC area as they called it she found King Leonidas, his Queens and their dragons all sitting along the edge of the lake not far from where they were. An open sided Mess building had also been erected closer to the lake shore and Saydia could now see dozens of Lycavorians and her people alike

sitting along the lake shore in different locations holding trays of hot food. Based on what she had eaten last night, their food was varied and compatible with Tasmor physiology and in fact it was quite delicious and many of her people were taking this chance to sample the food and drink. As she watched, Saydia saw that most of the Tasmor were younger in age, but there were quite a few older Tasmor females mixed in and enjoying the food and drink as well. It appeared as if her people had already decided they had discovered fast friends and allies and were making the most of it.

“Amazing isn’t it?” The female voice spoke from behind her and Saydia turned quickly to see Tobia step up beside her.

Saydia’s face brightened and it showed in her expression. “Tobia?” She gasped. “I did not... I did not think you would ever speak to me again.”

Tobia met her eyes and sipped from her mug of coffee. “I may have spoken more harshly than I intended before.” Tobia spoke softly. “I apologize for that.”

Saydia shook her head quickly in response. “No.” She spoke firmly. “It is I who should be apologizing to you for my words and actions. I did not heed the words you spoke to me two years ago and it almost cost my people a chance at a future we could not even imagine. I am so very sorry Tobia. I should have trusted you then and I should have trusted you the moment I saw you among these people.”

Tobia knew without question that Saydia spoke true words for she knew the women well enough. She had spent enough nights in hers and Anthylea’s arms to know what Saydia Daret truly desired for her people.

“Yes, you should have.” Tobia told her. “Especially after the times we spent together alone and with Anthylea.”

Saydia Daret looked suitably ashamed and she turned away, her near bronze like skin turning slightly red and her normally dark blond hair turning a noticeably darker shade. Tobia reached out then and took her arm softly. Most Tasmor could will the color of their hair to change within a few shades of their natural color but Tobia also knew that it also changed due to their emotional mood as well. The darker color of Saydia’s hair indicated shame and that is not something she was used to feeling Tobia knew.

“Don’t.” Tobia spoke gently. “You are a strong and proud woman Saydia Daret. That is what attracted me to you in the first place. And what happened is not something that can destroy what we had if we don’t let it.”

Saydia turned back and looked at her. “Your friendship is dearer to me than I allowed to show outwardly Tobia. To Anthylea as well.” Saydia said.

“As is yours to me.” Tobia answered. “Both of you. We can put this behind us and move forward however.”

“Can we?” Saydia asked.

“Do you want to?”

Saydia gripped her hand. “You know I do.” She answered.

Tobia smiled warmly. “I will always cherish the nights that I spent with you and with Anthylea, but I have discovered some things in these past weeks. Some things that have made my heart sing.”

Saydia nodded her head. “I heard whispers among these people that your man Murano had rediscovered himself. That he walks once more with his head held high.”

Tobia nodded her head. “He has.”

“Does Mari know?” Saydia asked.

Tobia smiled and nodded her head. “Many things have happened as I said. Mari had apparently figured it out many years ago. About Murano too. She is so smart.” She looked at Saydia with bright eyes. “She has become the wife and mate to Martin’s young pureblood son Deion. She has become like him.”

Saydia gasped and squeezed her hand harder. “Is... is that even possible?” She asked as so many different ideas and scenarios began flying through her head.

Tobia nodded. “Yes it is.” Tobia answered shaking her head. “The virus within their blood allows this. It is why you have seen elves and others who can shift their forms. I would have never believed it but it’s true. The happiness I have felt from Mari within the Etheric realm is beyond beautiful.”

“They can change someone?” Saydia asked in disbelief.

Tobia nodded once more. "Yes. You have seen this with the Gene Enhancements Perlyea was able to develop. It happens differently for different species, but those most closely like them physically and medically can be "Turned" is the word they use. My people can be fully turned like Mari."

"Are you happy for her Tobia?" Saydia asked her.

"How could I not be?" Tobia spoke. "She burns so much brighter now."

Saydia smiled and pulled her close for a hug. "Then I am happy for you." She said with genuine warmth. "Though Emylea will be very disappointed." Saydia spoke pushing her out to arm's length now. "She has taken no other into her embrace since Mari was among us for those few months."

"I will tell her if you wish. Explain it to her." Tobia said.

Saydia shook her head. "I will make this known to her. She will be saddened but she will be happy for her."

Tobia gripped her arms and looked at her. "These Lycavorians Saydia, they are stern and sometimes very brutal, but they are loyal to a fault to those they consider their friends. They are proud and strong just like the Tasmor. I have only been among them for a few weeks but I can say without reservation that Martin Leonidas will not turn his back on the Tasmor. Not after what you have done here to help his people."

Saydia nodded as her eyes swept back across the field around her where her people were sitting and eating with Lycavorians and elves and many different species they had never seen before, men and women who they were becoming fast friends with. "Yes, I am beginning to see that taking shape right in front of me." She answered.

"And Perlyea?" Tobia asked and Saydia turned to meet her eyes.

"She is a different woman now Tobia. Perlyea's only goal was to provide a future for our people." Saydia spoke. "That was the driving force for all she has done. She let that cloud her judgment and reason for a time but this Queen Anja has helped her to see the falseness of her ways. I do not doubt Perlyea's goals or her genuine desire to see our people grow Tobia. Not anymore."

"Good." Tobia said. "She is another strong woman, just like you and she can do more good if she is focused on things she can influence rather than things she cannot."

"Indeed." Saydia said. "And I believe she has found that balance again." Saydia looked over to where Martin sat once more. "This is... this type of reaction towards these new women. It is foreign to me. It seems like everything we have discovered this day just went away once they arrived."

Tobia shook her head quickly. "Do not worry. It did not." Tobia told her. "Martin's people and your own doctors and scientists are crawling all over the two facilities. It is not forgotten Saydia, Martin has just left this work to those who are trained for it. He is not shy about admitting that he does not understand something, and he allows his people to do their work and stays out of their way."

"And these women that arrived a few hours ago?" Saydia asked. "His family I have been told?"

Tobia nodded her head. "Yes. A family that he never thought he would discover. A family he never knew he had."

Saydia turned to look at her fully. "Tobia... this power Namiri and Emylea have told me he has." Saydia asked her. "It is like what you and your species can do is it not?"

Tobia shook her head. "Not in the way you have seen us use it no." She replied. "Martin, four of his sons, his daughter, a few others among their kind, they can manifest their Etheric power into the physical realm as weapons. It was a skill that was found in my people but on a miniscule scale."

"The Praetorians you told Anthylea and I about?" Tobia asked.

"Yes." Tobia replied. "Out of the trillions of our people, at our height of power, there were only a few hundred Praetorians. The gene was that rare. But within bloodlines it can be and usually is passed down in some form. Martin's ancestor Sumar, he was the first and most powerful of the Praetorians. The gene he carried passed down within his descendants as you have seen. As Namiri and Emylea have seen within Martin."

"Could this gene be passed to my people through the Gene Enhancements that Perlyea developed?" Saydia asked.

Tobia shook her head. "No. The Lycavorians on Ventori were gone from their original homeworld long before Sumar found his way there. The gene is not present in them."

Saydia looked almost relieved at this information as she gazed at where Martin and the others were sitting. "Good." She said softly. "That is not something I want to deal with."

“You can trust them Saydia.” Tobia told her. “Just as I know that you trust me.”

“And I do trust you Tobia.” Saydia said. “Never doubt that.”

Tobia squeezed her hands and caused Saydia to focus on her. “Then tell me why have you avoided joining with Anthylea in a Union?”

Saydia looked embarrassed once more and looked away shyly. “You know why.” She answered.

“Anthylea loves you Saydia.” Tobia told her.

“And I love her equally in return.” Saydia answered.

“Then why?” Tobia asked.

“The Tasmor Parliament would never allow this Tobia.” Saydia answered. “As Sovereign Regent I must remain able to bear children to our males if one presents himself and they deem he is worthy of laying with me.”

Tobia shook her head. “I so dislike that law of your people.” She said softly. “It does not give you the choice.”

Saydia nodded in agreement. “As much as I would like nothing else but to give myself only to Anthylea, even I cannot break that law of our people. I am one of the fertile Tasmor females and this has been our way for centuries.”

“I know but Anthylea is one of the Breeders among your females.” Tobia said.

Saydia nodded in agreement. “Yet none of them are able to have children Tobia. The enhancements Perlyea developed from the Lycavorians who allowed us to take their DNA did not give them the ability to be fertile as we had hoped.”

Tobia nodded her head slowly. “Knowing what I know now, I guess I understand that. You should have told me though. I could have helped somehow.”

“If this Queen Anja is as magical as Perlyea tells me, that time may soon come.” Saydia spoke. “I pray to the stars that it does. Every time I have to give myself to someone other than Anthylea hurts her more than I can put into words. And it takes a small portion from me as well.”

Tobia smiled. “Then go and be with her.” She told her. “Here, away from the prying eyes of the Tasmor Parliament. Here among the fresh air and beautiful scenery. Go and be with her and show her how much you love her.”

Saydia’s dark brown eyes became suddenly very bright. “I... gods I never thought about that.”

“Martin and the others will be occupied until tomorrow at least.” Tobia said. “And we all have people who are doing their jobs to discover the answers we want. Go and be with Anthylea and enjoy this time with her.”

Saydia leaned over and kissed her full on her lips. It was a kiss that Tobia did not shy away from for she had experienced it before. “Will... will you join us?” Saydia asked in a whisper that only she could hear. “I know where your heart lay Tobia, but until you are back within his arms, you do not need to deny yourself physical pleasure and the warmth of those who care deeply for you. Once you are rejoined with Murano then your love will pour forth for him alone I know.”

Whether it was because it had been so long, or because she had seen how Martin and his Queens were with each other, or just the newness and happiness of everything to come about these last weeks, Tobia smiled at her with a sultry upward curl of her lips.

“I think perhaps I will accept your offer Saydia Daret.” Tobia told her as she pressed her body tighter to Saydia’s lush form. “If it is to be our last time together, than we should make it memorable for all don’t you think?”

Saydia’s arm curled around her waist. “Yes I do.” She told her with a seductive smile. “Yes I do.”

“Then let us find Anthylea and then go to these quarters they have built for you.” Tobia spoke confidently. “I’m sure between the two of us we can succeed in tearing her away from whatever she might be doing.”

Saydia laughed heartily as they began to walk arm in arm. “I do believe you are correct in that.” She agreed. “I distinctly remember she could not think correctly when we both lavished her with attention.”

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE
NORTHERN CONTINENT
LIVAIJI SULEVFU FACILITY

Robati and Yokra were just sitting down to a small dinner when the open area beside the table suddenly lit up and both of them came to their feet in shock as the image of Androcles appeared next to their table. The image shimmered for several seconds and then became as clear as if he was standing in the room with them. Robati gripped Yokra's hand in shock and they watched as his head and eyes searched for several seconds and then focused on them.

“*Sia Sepa dask vur Opsola...*” Andro spoke as he bowed his head slightly out of respect. “Forgive me for causing you such a start.” (My soul mother and father)

“Androcles!” Robati exclaimed softly. “*Ithquenti usja!* You frightened me half to death!” (Gods lad)

Yokra was quicker on the uptake as a former military man and he knew immediately that something had caused Andro to contact them directly. They had spoken to him several times over these last weeks, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner as well, and he and Robati both had grown very fond of them and done so very quickly. It was as if they had always known them and seen them grow. It felt as if they were part of their family and had been for centuries. Even their sons had commented on how much they felt at ease with the four of them.

“Androcles... what is wrong?” Yokra spoke causing Robati to look at him in surprise. “You would not contact us directly unless something has changed.”

“It is time *Sepa Opsola.*” Andro told him.

Yokra became instantly alert. And concerned. “*Jaka sia sepa deevdru!?*” He gasped now. “The plan was to wait another week!” (Now my soul son)

Andro shook his head. “I have concluded what we had to do here and we are already enroute to the station. There is... something within Dorian, Elynth, Ryner and I says for you to move now. We do not question our instincts.”

“Do you think we have been discovered?” Yokra asked.

Andro shook his head once more. “We cannot determine what it is we feel, but we sense that things have changed where you are. If they have not discovered you, then someone is getting close. Closer than we would like. We have spoken with Laren and Ladur already and they are informing *Koppentotz* Em'morr. I need you and our soul mother to inform the others. You have three hours.”

“Three hours!” Robati exclaimed.

“*Sepa Opsola*, you must erase any trace that you were ever there before you leave that place.” Andro spoke. “You understand what I am saying yes?”

Yokra nodded his head. “Yes.”

“We have sent probes ahead of our ship.” Andro told him. “They will reach the station in two days. Once you arrive in three days they will be waiting for you in the landing bay closest to the command center. You will also find five Pralor Worker drones already there on site. They will be scanning the station for any devices that someone may have left behind. Leave them to their work.”

“I understand.” Yokra spoke as Robati moved up beside him and pressed against him.

“The probes will have uniforms and equipment inside them for Laren, Ladur, you and our soul mother.” Andro explained. “Also for General Dytin and Dalis as well as *Koppentotz* Aviel and his mate Nahko. I need you to insure this is given to them for each set will contain specific information for each of them and the armor has been made explicitly for them. The other thirteen sets of armor give to those you trust the most. Bring no more than twenty *Sepa Opsola*. That is all the equipment we were able to put inside the probes.”

Yokra nodded. “It will be done.” He spoke.

“Anything you cannot carry with you... destroy.” Androcles continued. “You will need nothing once you are among us. None of you will. I cannot stress enough that everything having to do with Laren and Ladur and yourselves must be purged from the facility you are in now *Sepa Opsola*. Everything. No matter how minor it seems. If it has to do with them or anyone helping them it must be disposed of.”

“You are concerned *sepa deevdru?*” Yokra picked up on that in his voice.

Andro nodded his head. "As I said, we do not know what it is we feel, but it tells us to have all of you get out now."

"You are *Dahakoan*." Yokra said. "This is part of what you are Androcles."

"I know..." Andro answered. "I'm still learning how to come to grips with that."

"It is destiny *sepa deevdru*." Robati spoke now.

Andro chuckled softly. "I do not like when destiny does not give me a straight answer however." He said causing both of them to laugh gently.

Their conversations with Androcles and all six of his wives and mates these last weeks had been enlightening to say the least. They had spoken to all of Androcles' wives and mates but they most enjoyed speaking with Sadi, Ne'Veha and Sehri. The three of them were the most physically beautiful to Yokra and Robati and the most open with their thoughts and feelings. All of his wives were incredibly intelligent and beautiful but they suspected that Carisia, Lu'ria and Caliria were rather introverted and more tightly held to their feelings. It was Sadi and Ne'Veha who were the most open and pleasant and Sehri was simply a joy with her bubbly nature and infectious smile.

"What is it you feel Androcles?" Yokra asked. "Hold nothing back from us *hesi sepa deevdru*." (Our soul son)

Andro met his eyes evenly. "We sensed death *sepa opsola*." He answered. "If you do not leave within the next few hours there will be much death as a result. That is all we saw."

"That is enough." Yokra stated holding Robati tight. "We will make it so Androcles."

Andro nodded his head in the transmission. "Then we will see you soon." He spoke.

PREMONITION

FORTY-SIX HOURS FROM PRALOR STATION

Andro slid his finger across the large star chart before them, Deion on his right side and Dutkne and Denali on his left with Jomann and Fedor. Murano stood on the opposite side of the chart table now sporting the Union Mark VI ArmorPly. He was breaking it in and getting used to the feel of the amazing armor. He had seen it in action and it was one of those things he had wished his people had thought up and built.

"...Right where we were supposed to be after our first jump." Andro was speaking. "Sadi and Ne'Veha will maintain a wide, crisscrossed course between jumps that will put us on our location in just over forty-six hours." Andro told them. "Armen is doing the same thing behind us but in a much wider pattern to maximize the sensors on *SPARTA'S WRATH* and keep us within her sensor range. He is sending the feed directly to us so that we do not need to extend our own sensors so far."

"He can do that?" Dutkne asked.

"He says that he can and I will trust him in areas I have no knowledge about." Andro replied. "Sadi once tried to explain to me how the different spatial variables factored into sensor range and I thought my head was going to explode."

"That's not hard to do." Deni spoke from where he stood. "Trying to fill that oversized hole you call a brain is not hard at all."

They all laughed at this with the exception of Murano. They turned to him when he asked the next question for all of them caught the inflection in his voice. "How... how soon before we actually cross the border into what used to be Pralor space Andro?" Murano asked.

Androcles met his eyes. "Thirty-seven hours until we cross the edge of what was once your border. Another nine to the station itself."

Murano was silent for a long moment and then he nodded his head slowly. "I never really thought... I never thought I would be returning to Pralor space in my lifetime." He stated softly.

"There was... there was very little that the Scourge had not touched in some way when we ran. So many planets burning. So many dead. Running was the only option for us really."

No one spoke as they all looked at him, his blue eyes off in another time that they could not imagine. This man was older than all of them combined and he had seen far more than any of them in this room. Murano

may not have known it, but they all looked to him as an icon of sorts. A Living Legend. Murano shook his head finally and leaned over the chart table more and touched the screen.

“Murano?” Androcles asked softly looking at him intently.

Murano met his eyes and nodded. “I am fine Androcles.” He stated confidently. “Thank you for asking. This area of our space was not very well traveled to begin with.” He continued as he cleared his head and took a deep breath. “This particular station was on the far reaches of our space back then and the archives that *SPARTA'S WRATH* carries indicate it was used only sparingly.” He adjusted the screen slightly. “According to the records on *SPARTA'S WRATH*, once the Scourge swept through this area in force they did not return for another five hundred years. And then it was only a patrol ship. It is like a finger of our former territory that extended out and met Darastrixi territory on one side and Emual territory on the other. Another species that bordered our own.”

“Do we dare ask what happened to these Emual?” Dutkne spoke up.

Murano met his eyes. “The Scourge wiped them out before invading Pralor space.” He answered. “It took them only a month to decimate their entire species. Forty-four billion lives extinguished.”

“Why?” Deion asked.

“They were our friends and they refused to bow to the Scourge.” Murano answered, his voice soft. “The Chief Elder Pralor at the time the Second Scourge war began tried to get them to distance themselves and disavow us but the Emual were a stubborn species and very proud. The few dozen Praetorians besides myself that remained behind could not leave the sectors we were tasked with defending in order to help them. They refuse to bow to the Scourge demands and they paid the price. Their military was only a few hundred ships, mostly lightly armed frigates. They were wiped out in the first hours of the Scourge attack. Twenty-two planets were glassed from orbit and another sixteen were invaded by Scourge forces. The Emual fought bravely and well, but in the end they were not warriors and could not hold against the tide. All for not bowing to the Scourge. This should begin to tell you what it was we were dealing with. What we will one day need to confront once more. They are the personification of evil. They cannot be bargained with and they do not have allies. If you do not bow to their demands, no matter how vile their demands may be, they will obliterate you and your entire species no matter how long it takes.”

The room was silent for a long moment as they all took in Murano’s words and let it sink in. “*Nubou lae*.” Deion finally muttered aloud voicing what all of them were thinking.

Murano looked and Andro. “I have spent many hours with Sarlana these last days and weeks. What you and Dorian represent, what all of you represent as Praetorians, this must be preserved. She has made me see this. I did not agree with this mission before, but I do now. It is vital that Laren and Ladur be taken out of Darastrixi space. If they were to fall into the hands of the Scourge given what they can do, it would be the single most devastating blow against every species within the universe.”

“That is our intent Murano.” Androcles said.

Murano nodded his head. “I know... but you must give me your word that once we have Laren, Ladur and the others they arrive with, once we have them, we leave immediately. We cannot remain for very long because the Scourge will eventually detect us in some manner.”

“We have no intention of remaining one minute longer than necessary.” Androcles told him. “On that you have my word.”

“Then we will speak no more of it.” He told them. “I just needed to be sure Andro. We are not ready to face them in force. Not now.”

“Understood.” Andro said.

“The only positive thing we can obtain from this station that we do not have now, aside from Laren and Ladur... are the weapons stored there.” Murano tapped on the screen several times and brought up one section of the station before them. “I have reviewed the archives on what this station had in its inventory and it could very well be a potential boon for us.”

“How so?” Jomann asked moving slightly forward.

“This station, because of its remote nature and distance from Pralor Core Space, had a large Praetorian cache on it.” Murano told them. “Very well hidden within the main engineering section to insure that if the station was ever destroyed the weapons would not be used against us. With the weapons in the cache, and the schematics to build more, the Worker drones that we both use can duplicate them quickly.”

“Are they like the weapons that you used on Onterom?” Fedor spoke for the first time.

Murano shook his head quickly. “Hardly.” He replied with a slight grin. “The weapons we used on Onterom, the ones you faced young Fedor, they are basically antiques. Used mainly by Elder Guards assigned to protect the Chief Elders. Delnash refused to even allow them to be updated or duplicated through the years. Something I counseled him against but he did not listen. I imagine that will have changed and once we can give these to our people on Artaaya, production can begin quickly.” Murano tapped the table a few more times and they saw several images begin to flash across the screens. “These are Praetorian weapons and explosives. X1 Particle Assault Rifles and MX4 Particle Magnums. Military grade and very powerful. They fire a small Vendurium round propelled by a Micro Particle Accelerator. Five hundred round magazines for the rifles and forty-five round magazines for the sidearm. We had just begun issuing them as standard weapons to our troops towards the end of the First Scourge War. It is what helped us to win it to be honest. There were so few of us at the end of that war we needed an advantage. These weapons gave us that advantage.”

“They’ve been sitting there for tens of thousands of years Murano.” Jomann spoke. “Are you sure they will still work?”

Murano smiled now. “Oh yes. And if this data is correct there will be enough weapons and ammunition to outfit the entire *Durcunusaan* Division you have on *SPARTA'S WRATH*.” He told them. “With the schematics, it should be easy enough for the Worker Drones, your Master Chief Ranor and Armen to replicate similar weapons with known materials to equip the other units we will have by the time we return to your father’s position. At least until Delnash can get our factories on Artaaya working full time.”

Andro grinned. “Oh... Josie Miller will like that.” He said.

Murano looked at him. “You told them they will be there before us.” He said. “Why? We do not need to broadcast our arrival.”

Andro nodded his head. “Better that they don’t know everything.” He told him. “How fast our ships are for one. We’ll get there roughly twelve hours after them, much sooner than they expect.”

“What have you and Dorian sensed Androcles?” Murano asked him. “Now is not the time to hold back from us.”

Andro shook his head. “We are not holding back.” He stated quickly. “We don’t know exactly what it was Murano. It was an odd echo within the Etheric realm. We have never felt it before, but it was powerful and it carried with it the sensation of death. It only just started a day or so ago, but it became more pronounced as we grew closer to the day they were originally supposed to leave Icarava.”

Murano was silent for a long moment and then nodded his head. “If I had to guess, I would say that it has to do with the Scourge. We are able to sense them to some degree and it was never pleasant.” He looked at Andro. “Whatever you may feel, no matter how insignificant it may seem, let Sarlana or I know from now on.”

Andro nodded his head. “Agreed.”

“So are we sticking with the same plan then?” Denali asked.

Andro nodded as he changed the chart screen now. “For the most part it is unchanged.” He told them. “Murano will lead Deion, Fedor, Kalis, Daio and Ridor to this cache with Mari and Eirene in Engineering. Mari and Eirene can access the main computer core from there with our Worker Drones while they prep the munitions. Eirene will be able to link into the cameras all over the station from there and also direct Armen when he arrives. Most of the station will remain dormant since we won’t be going into it. The less power signature the better.”

Murano nodded his head. “Armen will need to bring *SPARTA'S WRATH* in very close to the station and lower the Shroud. The Cargo Bay Teleporter Pads will not work through the Shroud and *SPARTA'S WRATH* will need to be within ten thousand meters of the station due the armoring of the Engineering Core.”

“Ansel!” Deion said. “That’s really close.”

“Without the Cargo Bay Teleporter Units on the ship it would take too long to load the weapons out.” Murano told them. “We would have to do it by hand and that would require hundreds of men and additional equipment. We do not want to remain here for very long after we arrive and have secured Laren and Ladur. We will be mysterious and unseen, for we will have APOC drones out covering our flanks and we will know when the Darastrixi enter the system. The Darastrixi however, they will be an unknown and they may bring company that we do not want to meet.”

“Company?” Dutkne asked. “You mean Scourge?”

Murano nodded his head. “Or other Darastrixi that are chasing them.” He replied. “We will be more than a match for any Darastrixi ship that may be chasing them, even two or three, but we do not want to engage them and make matters worse. And if the Scourge show up in force, we will be hard pressed to defend ourselves and the Darastrixi in any fashion. We should leave within twelve hours after we arrive Andro. Just to be safe.”

Androcles nodded his head. “Agreed. We work fast but we work efficiently.”

“If the Scourge do enter the system, we must take Laren and Ladur and however many others we can and leave immediately.” Murano spoke solemnly. “They were never able to recover the plans for this ship or others like it that we intended to build. When they destroyed our homeworld they were too efficient. They took out our main shipyards and Engineering Development Center before realizing it. The *VORTEX*-Class cruisers were a complete overhaul of the standard class and were... they are much more powerful. The longer we keep the knowledge of this ship from the Scourge, the better it will be.”

“Could a few Scourge ships hurt us that bad Murano?” Denali asked.

Murano shook his head. “Doubtful... but we don’t want to find out.” He answered. “The standard class of this ship could easily fight off a Scourge Squadron, and the *VORTEX*-Class would decimate them, but if one of their Heavy Cruisers or one of the Scourge Mother Ships enters the area, it will get very ugly, very quickly. And we cannot afford for them to get even remote scans of this ship before we are ready.”

“Armen understands this.” Andro spoke. “All of the personnel Teleport Stations will remain in standby mode while we are on the station. Worst case scenario, everything goes to *sibfla* and he teleports us back and we jump away.”

Murano nodded. “Good.” He looked around the table. “My caution has roots. It is not because I do not trust in your skills. Any of you. It is because so much time has passed that we do not know what the Scourge could be like now. That is partly why I agreed with this mission. Aside from rescuing Laren and Ladur, the intelligence we can gain from them is invaluable. And it will help us prepare. That does not mean we stick our noses where we should not.”

Denali chuckled at that but nodded his head. “As much as I agree Murano, trouble and the unexpected seemed to have taken root in our family. We just can’t seem to escape it.”

Murano relaxed somewhat now and nodded his head with a small smile. “Yes, that much I do know from being around your father.”

“Our father and our mothers are hanging out there in the Echo Quadrant without a lot of backup. And these Svorag are no walk in the park as we have all seen the reports from father. We know what our priorities are and what we must do. We are on a timetable with them that we cannot miss.” Andro spoke looking around at all of them and saw them nod. “Denali, Jomann Eliani, Sehri, Arduri and Lisisa will backstop Dorian and me when we enter the landing bay that we told Laren and Ladur to go to.” Andro continued. “That is where the probes will be. If they have not already changed, we give them twenty minutes to change into the armor we left for them and then we start moving to extract. Sadi, Ne’Veha, Carisia and Lu’ria will be with Nara in the Central Control room of the landing bay where we land. They will be monitoring everything we are doing while Anthar, Majeir and Marux cover them. Caydren and Cinol will protect the *PREMONITION*. Jeth, Tharua and Soren will cover Elynth and Ryner since they are the most experienced in close quarters fighting behind Elynth.”

Murano was impressed. Androcles had put together quite the plan once they had the configuration of the station. It used limited personnel, but also his most experienced people and those who knew what the others would do in any given situation. As with Martin and his team, they made a very deadly group that even the Praetorians of old would be hard pressed to defeat. Combined with their dragons and the way Androcles utilized them, it would be very close to impossible for anything other than a large, full scale assault to defeat them. Murano also knew that everyone was going over their part of the plan wherever on the ship they were and no one would be unprepared.

Andro stood up to his full height. “In and out in less than twelve hours.” He spoke.

“If all goes according to plan.” Deion said softly.

Denali looked at him. “Why do you always have to state the obvious *fervon*?” He asked.

“I’m just saying!” Deion retorted.

Denali’s hand flashed up and he slapped his younger brother in the back of the head playfully. “Don’t jinx us before we start *fervon*.”

All of them began to laugh softly as Denali caught Deion in a brotherly headlock and squeezed his head and allowed the humor to calm their nerves and prepare them even more.

All while the fickle Gods of Fate laughed in the background and began to shape the future.

ICARAVA

DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD

DARASTRIXETHE (DRAGONBLOOD) SPACE

DARASTRIXETHE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT *LEVXIERIV* (ENCHANTRESS)

The largest Darastrixian warship built and easily a match for the even new Pralor *VECTOR*-Class Attack Cruiser, though they did not know that ship existed just yet.

The *DARASTRIXETHE*-Class Dreadnought was nearly nine thousand meters in length and armed with the most advanced weaponry, shields and engines that the Darastrixian had ever developed. Only thirty-four of these ships existed due to an agreement with the Scourge to keep the manufacture limited to a set number. All of the senior Darastrixian military leaders knew that it was only a ploy to keep the Darastrixian as a minimal threat to them and they were stunned when their ruling government had endorsed and agreed to it. To counter that fool agreement, the Darastrixian military poured all of their vast knowledge and skill into building these ships to be able to combat any threat to their people and still survive. It would take a concentrated Scourge attack to think of destroying one of these ships and the cost to the Scourge would be very high indeed.

Much higher than they believed and *Inidra* Dytin Cadat had made them even deadlier during his tenure as Chief of the Darastrixian military. (General)

Dytin had handpicked each and every officer and crew member of this ship and the three *MALAKTA*-Class (ETERNAL) Fast Cruisers that were its main escort. He had trained all of the officers and many of the crews had served with him for centuries. They were also solidly loyal to him and followed the same philosophy that he and his blessed wife did. The same philosophy that made them almost outcasts among their own people. A philosophy that billions of their people followed in secret because it was considered old and fruitless in its teachings. Over the last weeks, thousands of family members of his crews had been secreted away to one location in preparation for this very moment. Dytin was a career military officer and always planned for the unexpected. When Aviel contacted him only ninety minutes ago to inform him that the time had come, Dytin did not hesitate. He gave the order that would send thousands of their people into the unknown and quite possibly make all of them criminals.

“...Status of our ships?” Dytin barked out turning his head as the doors to his bridge opened and he saw Aviel move onto the bridge briskly, Nahko clinging tightly to his arm a look of anxiousness on her face.

“All crew members are aboard General.” The voice responded. “They are awaiting our order.”

“And the transports?” Dytin asked.

“All of them have sent the signal and are awaiting the final order.” The voice replied again.

Dytin nodded his head in approval as Aviel moved up beside him. He had chosen his men well and now that was paying off in a big way. The six transports would be departing from six different locations to avoid drawing attention to them. It was not uncommon at all to see the Darastrixian military transports moving thousands of men and women in training drills and this would look to be just that to the unknowing.

“Just under two hours.” Dytin spoke looking at Aviel. “Better than I expected.”

“So we are ready?” Aviel asked

Dytin nodded his head. “Are you prepared for what we are about to do Aviel my friend?” He asked.

Aviel met his gaze evenly. “Are you old friend?”

Dytin took a deep breath and nodded his head without hesitation. “The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is upon us. All we have believed for centuries is here. Yes, I am ready. They could very well brand us traitors Aviel.”

Aviel nodded his head in agreement. “Or heroes. Depending on your point of view.”

Dytin looked at him and laughed softly. “Indeed.”

All of them turned when the doors to the bridge opened once more, but this time the two security officers always posted outside the doors were tossed back into the bridge and sent hurtling across the bridge to

slam painfully into the bulkhead. Dytin's eyes were wide until he saw the reason for this. Laren strode onto the bridge with barely a pause, her multicolored eyes blazing in anger. Dytin watched her and was once more struck by the almost surreal beauty of this child. She wore a simple tan jumpsuit that did nothing to hide the lush, womanly figure she had, her black hair pulled into a long braid and draped over one shoulder. Many members of his bridge crew were getting their first look at the *Dahakoan* and to say they were shocked was an understatement. They knew that she existed, but almost none of them knew Laren was a female. She did not appear fully Darastrixi and this was obvious by the soft skin that replaced and then merged with the even softer colored scales along the edges of her face and down her neck. With all eyes upon her, Laren marched right over to where they stood and it was Nahko who broke away and grasped her arms gently.

Dytin Cadat had met with Laren once, traveling to the *Livjiai Sulevfu* facility under the auspice of an historical records search for the Sand Strider Battalions. At first he was no different than Aviel, but soon he had warmed up to her and after only a few hours of speaking with her he too had become enraptured. Her eyes and demeanor, and that of Ladur spoke of wisdom and knowledge that they should not have had. Her physical appearance aside, her body was a combination of Darastrixi and something else, Lycavorian more than likely Nahko had told him and this was the first thing that others noticed. Besides her breath stealing beauty. Dytin had always believed deeply in the *Lorsvek ar Sepas*, it was the cornerstone of philosophy that he and his wife had followed and bestowed upon their children. Just as Aviel and Nahko had done. Just as so many others had done. Yet seeing Laren before him now, the rebirth of the *Dahakoan*, and after speaking with her and Ladur for nearly seven hours Dytin had become a true believer.

"Laren what is it?" Nahko gasped knowing that only she would be allowed to touch her in any meaningful sort of way. Aside from quick greetings with others in the usual Darastrixi fashion, Laren allowed no one who was not female to cling to her for any length of time unless it was something she wanted.

Laren was staring directly at Dytin and he suddenly became very uncomfortable by this. "I do not need a babysitter!" She snarled almost angrily.

Dytin looked stunned and he moved closer to her. "I do not understand." He spoke. "What is a... babysitter Laren?"

"The officer from your Sand Strider unit who met Ladur and I in the landing bay!" Laren hissed. "The pompous one!"

Dytin nodded his head. "Matum Dariel. A *Yobhalcho* within the Strider Battalions. His skills are unmatched and he is a fast riser within the ranks. Well respected and liked." (Major)

"He is arrogant and pompous!" Laren snapped. "He told me I was to do exactly as he said. That Ladur was to remain in the pens with other Strider *Vrrarhoimpa*. That he would accompany me wherever on the ship I went. Will he watch while I relieve myself as well? Or while I sleep? I will not be penned in as I was at the *Livjiai Sulevfu* facility. I wish to explore and see things that I have never seen! And no *nubous igord* will stop me!"

Dytin looked shocked at Laren's use of another language, one he did not understand, but the meaning was unmistakably clear in her tone. He glanced at Nahko with questions in his eyes.

Nahko grinned sheepishly. "As time has passed and she has grown closer with the others in the Etheric realm, her ability to use their language has improved immeasurably." She said.

"So it would seem." Dytin spoke. "Do I wish to know what name she used to call my officer?"

Nahko shook her head quickly. "Probably not."

Dytin chuckled and moved even closer to Laren now. "And where is *Yobhalcho* Dariel now if I may ask Laren Ti'shara?"

Laren calmed somewhat and lowered her eyes briefly. "I... I left him with the medical technicians outside the landing bay." She answered almost shyly. "He tried to restrain me and..."

Dytin then did something that Aviel would not have dared do without first asking her. Aviel had spent much time with them since discovering they existed and Laren had grown quite comfortable in his presence. She didn't hesitate now when he greeted her in the Darastrixi fashion and nor did he, but Aviel would always wait an extra second for her to initiate the greeting just to be safe. Dytin reached out and took Laren's hand from Nahko and placed it over his heart while at the same time he placed his large hand over her chest and leaned over to touch her forehead with his own. Amazingly, Aviel saw Laren's body relax somewhat, the

tension leaving her lithe frame as Dytin held the greeting until Laren relaxed completely and she looked at him shyly as they parted and their hands dropped lower but remained touching.

“Forgive me Laren Ti’shara.” Dytin spoke softly. “That is my doing.”

“I do not need someone to protect me *Inidra*.” Laren spoke now, her voice even and calm as she looked at him. Laren had spoken with her brothers and her father before meeting him and all of them had nothing but words of respect and honor for Dytin Cadat, more so her father who had actually served under his command several centuries ago. When they had spoken, after he had gotten over the initial shock of seeing her, he had spoken to her as an equal in everything. This had only confirmed her father and brother’s words and Laren had no doubts that she could trust him in every way.

“You and Ladur are *Dahakoan* Laren.” Dytin spoke, both of them hearing the soft gasps from many different men and women on the bridge. “You will be looked at differently. Now that you have come aboard, word will spread quickly that you are among us.”

“I am still me!” Laren protested. “Ladur is still himself! We wish to sit and watch the stars as they go by! We wish to walk and see this wondrous ship! I do not need some silly male who thinks he is better than me telling me what I can and cannot do!”

Dytin’s lips curled into a smile. “You did not hurt him too badly did you?” He asked knowing of the skills that she possessed.

Laren smiled shyly once more and shook her head. “More his pride than anything else.” She answered.

“He misunderstood my intent.” Dytin spoke. “I never meant to restrict you while here. I meant for him to escort you so that you did not get lost and so that others did not swarm you with attention. Your disposition when confronted with this is known to Aviel and Nahko and the others, but not those you are now among.”

“I have gotten better!” Laren defended herself and Dytin nodded his head with a small laugh.

“Yes you have child.” He spoke. “And for that I am thankful. I do not need half my crew going to the infirmary to treat their injuries.”

“I do not wish to be treated differently.” Laren told him. “I don’t want others looking at me as if I am an oddity.”

“You are *Dahakoan*.” Nahko spoke now. “You *are* different Laren. As is Ladur. That can never be changed now.”

Dytin saw her eyes and the brief sadness in them and he squeezed her hand causing her to look at him. “Once we are gone from here and I am sure that no one follows us, I will give you a tour of my ship.” He told her seeing her eyes light up in delight. “Ladur as well, and your parents if you wish.” He lifted her hand in his and squeezed it even harder. “I will make it so that you have as normal a life as you can while in my care Laren Ti’shara. And I will speak to the major about how to interact with you, but I must insist that he escort you. You can go where you wish anywhere on this ship, but allow him to come with you, if for nothing else, in case you get lost.”

“You would do this?” Laren asked.

Dytin nodded his head with a smile. “I’m sure your father would enjoy it and just being able to walk somewhere besides the halls of the *Livjiai Sulevfu* will please your mother to no end.”

Laren smiled now and nodded her head. “I would like that.” She spoke.

Dytin matched her smile. “Good. Then give me an hour. Two at most and I will join you in the forward lounge.”

Smiling brightly Laren nodded and turned around instantly and began to walk off the bridge. Aviel stepped closer to him and Nahko and nodded to his longtime friend. “You handled that well my friend.”

“Perhaps.” Dytin spoke as Nahko looked at him.

“She allows you to greet her in the manner of our people with no hesitation.” Nahko told him. “That is no small feat. Only with Aviel and Dalis Sulryn does she not hesitate.”

“*Dahakoan* she may be,” Dytin spoke softly. “But she is still a young Maiden who wants to experience all that she can. Yet she knows she cannot because of who she is. Of who Ladur is.”

Nahko turned to the doors Laren had exited and then back to Dytin. “It will be better when she is with them.” She said softly. “She will not feel so alone and out of place.”

“*Yobhalcho* Dariel is the finest hand to hand combatant that I have ever seen.” Dytin spoke once more. “No one has been able to best him in decades. And she defeats him as if he is but a child.”

“I believe she gets that from the other *Dahakoan*.” Aviel spoke now.

Dytin nodded his head. “And it makes me shudder to know that there are warriors out there who can do these things.”

“Frightened old friend?” Aviel asked.

“Terrified is a better word.” Dytin answered.

Aviel chuckled softly. “Then at least I know I’m not alone.”

Dytin shook his head. “No, you are not alone. We are ready and the unknown awaits, so you are not alone.”

Aviel nodded his head. “Then let us do what we came to do.”

VENTORI UNION ADHOC BASE 1.5 KILOMETERS OUTSIDE JORLARI

Being wolves, sleep was not something that was needed as often or as much so it was no surprise to Wayonn when he found Martin that morning by the shore of the large lake with an ever present mug of Aricia’s coffee in his hand. As with Wayonn, who had been addicted to the beverage ever since being introduced to it, Martin drank the coffee like it was water. He wore only his lower body armor now but Wayonn could detect the recent scent of mild soap in the air mixed in with the scents of honey and lavender and coco telling Wayonn that Anja and Aricia had shared the shower with him. Wayonn knew Martin had smelled him coming long before he got close but waited until he was settled to the ground beside him before speaking.

“Wayonn.” Martin spoke looking at him. “I can’t begin to thank you enough for...”

Wayonn held up his hand with a smile. “You would be thanking me for something which has brought me almost as much joy as it has for you Martin my boy.” He spoke. “Discovering that they lived was a dream I never imagined.”

“Me neither.” Martin echoed softly.

“They could not stay awake could they?” Wayonn asked with a smile.

Martin shook his head with an equally large smile. “Meral was babbling out questions that didn’t make any sense when I finally ushered them off to bed.”

“I wish to thank you for allowing me to be part of that.” Wayonn said.

Martin met his eyes. “You were like a brother to my grandfather.” He said. “There was never a question of whether or not you would be there. You should know by now that I consider you family. That we all consider you family.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “I have not felt this alive in millennia Martin.” He told him. “It is glorious.”

Martin nodded his head. “It sure is.”

Wayonn looked out over the lake. “You have not told them I take it?”

Martin shook his head. “I’m trying to figure out how to do that. It’s not every day you are told that you think a Pralor Elder is the reason they lost a son and a brother. And that you have some pretty good proof to back up that theory.”

“It is not a theory Martin.” Wayonn said. “He is responsible.”

“I know.” Martin agreed. “But I’m still trying to bask in the sensations that they are actually here and alive.”

Wayonn smiled at this and nodded. “I as well.” He replied. “They will have to be told however. About the Svorag too.”

Martin nodded once more. “I know.”

“You spoke with Dysea before she returned I take it?” Wayonn asked.

Martin looked at him and nodded. “Lycavorians from Ventori with a Pralor warship?” He said. “That can’t be good. What was your perception of them?”

“Confused. Shocked.” Wayonn answered immediately. “They were not expecting us to be on that ship. And they certainly were not prepared to see two who had been turned by Alpha wolves. As with those Lycavorians here, they appeared to believe all Alphas were long dead.”

Martin nodded. “That’s what *Melda Min* said as well. Which means they were expecting the corvette to be piloted by Pralors.”

“We left under cover of darkness and all of us were wearing cloaks. There is no way they could have known who or what we were.” Wayonn spoke. “They were being watched before we ever got there.”

“The question remains... why?” Martin said. “And who else knows who they really are besides Tobia.”

“Tobia would never tell anyone Martin.” Wayonn spoke quickly.

Martin shook his head just as fast. “No, I don’t believe she would either.” He told him. “Someone else knows who they are though and it wasn’t Delnash. We’ve come too far for him to play games now. He knows it and I know it. Our fates are entwined now.”

“To what end?” Wayonn asked softly.

Martin nodded his head. “That’s a good question.” He looked at Wayonn. “Nalmos said they believed that the Alphas had died out over a hundred thousand years ago. If the records you were able to inspect from *SPARTA’S WRATH* are accurate then the Pralors brought them here around that same time. These Lycavorians you and Dysea saw were shocked to see you for the same reason. What does that tell you?”

Wayonn met his eyes. “That Alphas were among them when they first arrived here on Ventori.”

Martin nodded his head. “And if that is the case, then where did they all go?” Martin said. “If they were here when our people were first brought to Ventori by the Pralors, then where did they all go? They didn’t just pick up and move away. Instinct alone would have made them stay here and protect and carve out a life with the Beta wolves.”

Wayonn nodded. “Agreed.”

“Who trained these Lycavorians to fly a Pralor ship?” Martin asked. “The Lycavorians here were barely into the industrial stage when the Svorag struck. A hundred years at most. There’s no way they trained themselves to fly that ship. And like Avatar 27 told you and Dysea, there is no way they took that ship while it was in space. Not to mention that this ship is one built at the shipyards on Nepneu according to what Delnash sent to Dysea after you spoke to him.”

“You are suggesting that Pralors gave them the training?” Wayonn asked.

“Who else could?” Martin said. “No one out here has the tech that you do, or the know how to use it.”

Wayonn met his eyes. “Lorendo?” He gasped in shock. “But why? For what purpose? He despises our people! This is evident in his actions and words.”

Martin nodded his head. “And more than one despot in history has used people they consider beneath them to accomplish their goals.”

Wayonn thought about that for a moment and then nodded his head slowly. “In that you are correct.” He agreed.

“There are far too many coincidences and they all point back to that fat fuck Lorendo.” Martin spoke. “He has his pudgy fingers in more dirt than anyone knows about.”

Wayonn looked out over the lake. “Murano should have let you kill him on Onterom.” He said softly.

Martin shook his head. “Then we would never have found out what he is responsible for.” He answered. “Or what he is still involved in. We...”

Martin felt the familiar tingle against his shields and recognized Anja’s resonance instantly. Each of his wives and mates had a unique resonance that he had burned into his memory and each of them could enter through his Etheric shields because of this. It allowed them to communicate seamlessly with each other.

Lover?

Anja, what’s wrong? Martin asked detecting the slight inflection in her voice.

Lover you had better come to the MED Building. We have discovered some things that you and Wayonn will want to see.

Martin looked at Wayonn who could detect the tremors in the Etheric realm of their very private conversation but not the content and he was looking at Martin intently. *On our way.*

“Anja and the others have found something.” He spoke as he rose to his feet.

Wayonn rose instantly. “Why do I not like the way you say that.” He asked.

Martin shook his head. "Something in Anja's voice." He told him. "I didn't like it."

Wayonn shook his head as they began to walk back towards the base. "We just can't seem to catch a break in any way, shape or form." He stated.

Martin grinned. "Welcome to my life." He said.

"...confirm the last DNA sequence Perlyea?" Anja spoke from the terminal in front of her.

The ADHOC Medical Building was standard for Union forces across the board, but the one they were now in had been transferred to the *ARC ROYAL* by Androcles' order from the stores on the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*. Andro knew very well his Hadarian mother loved to tinker and do off hand research and the ADHOC Medical Buildings assigned to the *SPIRIT* all had an additional section that was used strictly for scientific research and other medical needs. The Research Section had one solid wall of computer stations, several medical beds and a number of different Medical Research Consoles as well as just about every piece of medical equipment that existed. All of them had access to the single Hadarian Combined Core 1200 Series Medical Computer. Perlyea was standing beside Duewa at one of the Research stations while Anuk and Radra were sitting at two different computers a few feet from Anja's main station.

Duewa pointed to one of the smaller screens in front of where they stood and Perlyea glanced at the screen. She ran her finger down the smooth screen, adjusting something and then nodded her head and looked up.

"The last sequence matches! Ninety-nine point six percentile." Perlyea spoke up. "These instruments are amazing!" She declared with the look of a child with a new toy.

Anja spun around in her chair and looked at them. "Then that is all of them." She stated.

Perlyea nodded as she picked up and looked at the data pad and then stepped around the research station. "Yes. All of the Tasmor are confirmed to have come from a Light Pickett Frigate that was lost six months ago. We thought it taken by the Kintaur in an ambush along our border."

"Total crew?" Anja asked her.

"Fifty-three." Perlyea answered.

The main door to the MED building opened and they all turned to see the *Durcunusaan* officer lead Saydia, Tobia and Anthylea into the main room, followed quickly by Namiri and Emylea. Anja and the other wolves in the room could immediately detect the heavy scent of sex and Anja hid her smile. The three women looked tired and their clothing appeared to have been thrown on quickly, but much to their credit and poise however, none of them appeared ashamed in the least that it was obvious they had been enjoying each other's company. Anja was like most Lycavorians, turned or pureblood, in that it did not matter to them who a person chose to spend their nights with or what they did. Tobia was Mari's mother yes, and her love for Murano was still very powerful, but they were not mated and Tobia had the right to seek comfort wherever she chose to seek it until she could be with the one who her heart called for. Obviously she found that comfort with Saydia and Anthylea and this did not bother Anja in the least. When Martin was not with them, she and her fellow Queens found comfort with each other as often as they could.

The back entrance to the MED building opened now as well and Martin and Wayonn were through the door quickly, followed by Danny and Julie. Anja rose from her chair and moved over to greet him and he leaned over to kiss her warmly as his arm curled around her waist. For'mya had gone with Dysea to the *ARC ROYAL* very early this morning so that she could requisition more supplies and it left just her and Aricia with Martin this morning. They had shared a very loving few hours after For'mya and Dysea had gone, a few hours that Aricia and Anja were still quivering in bliss over. He could and did love them more thoroughly than they thought possible at times. They then shared a long, warm shower together, a shower where Martin had simply adorned their bodies with soft licks and kisses of love as he washed them. They then they had returned the same action to him, licking and kissing his powerful body all over as they washed him.

Martin drew back from their kiss and Anja ran her long fingers over his bearded jaw in affection while she stared at his handsome face. "What's going on Red?" He asked finally.

"You have to make me a promise first." Anja told him.

Martin tilted his head sideways when she said that. "I'm not going to like this am I?" He asked. "You only ask me to promise you something when I am not going to like what you are going to tell me."

Anja smiled. "No Lover." She answered. "Not by a longshot. Neither are you Wayonn."

"I feared that was the case." Wayonn spoke softly.

"Anja what is this all about?" Tobia asked from where she stood next to Saydia. Anthylea had moved over beside Atropos along the side wall.

Martin detected her scent at that moment but like Anja he didn't outwardly show that he could tell what she had been doing. It was none of his business and she and Murano were not married. At least not yet. Tobia had made it very clear how she felt about Murano and what she intended once they were reunited, but if she could find comfort with the two Tasmor women then Martin and no one else was going to begrudge her that.

"Everyone should sit down." Anja spoke calmly. "This is going to take a little while."

"Where's Aricia?" Martin asked.

Anja held his hand as she led him over to the table. "She will be joining us shortly. She is bringing down the reason that we discovered what we have so quickly." She saw the confused look in Martin's eyes and squeezed his hand. "Trust me."

It was still very early and most of the camp had not even risen yet, so coffee, hot tea and Danishes were already arranged on the large conference room style table. Anja waited until they had all taken chairs and then she sat on Martin's left side, the chair to his right empty for the moment until Aricia arrived. She looked over to Perlyea who sat beside Anthylea.

"Perlyea... you should probably start us off." Anja spoke. She glanced at Martin. "I gave full access to Perlyea to use our equipment and she and Duewa worked through the night on the information that our people were sending in from the two sites."

Martin nodded his head. He almost never questioned Anja when it came to medical matters or what she chose to work on. She could talk circles around him in that regard and he knew it. "Ok." He said with a nod.

Perlyea slid the data pad across to Saydia in front of Anthylea. "We have discovered where our people came from Sovereign Regent. All of them were part of the crew of a light frigate we thought ambush and taken by the Kintaur along our border six months ago. We have confirmed the identity of the seven Tasmor that have been recovered from the first site. King Leonidas' forces only just secured the lower levels of the second site a few hours ago. There are two teams of our people working with the Lycavorians to restore what information we can."

Anja looked at Martin. "Kasdan is working to restore full power to the second site. He had to remotely shut down the power reactor in order to deplete the oxygen within the lower levels. It needed to be restarted cold and that happened an hour ago. He should have it back up to full power by mid-morning."

Saydia looked up from the data pad. "If our people were not taken by the Kintaur then who took them?" She asked softly. "We received the automated emergency beacon but when we sent additional ships to investigate the frigate was gone. No traces of it were ever found."

"We don't know what happened to the ship Sovereign Regent..." Perlyea spoke. "But we do know who took our people."

Saydia looked at her. "Who?" She demanded.

Anja looked at Martin. "The Svorag took them." She told him. "All of them."

"The Godzilla looking lizard fuckers took them?" Danny spoke now leaning forward in his chair with wide eyes.

Saydia looked quickly at Tobia who shook her head just as quickly. "You do not want to know." She told her in a soft voice.

Martin leaned forward in his chair as well now and he looked at Anja. "Red, tell me you are joking." He said. "Taking a ground station on a planet is one thing. Bombing the cities on Ventori and then invading with ground forces doesn't take a whole lot of coordination, but you are talking about a precise, surgical operation to capture a ship while it is in space. That takes planning and the people with the proper skills to execute it."

"Androcles did it." Anja stated confidently. "And he took a ship five times the size of this frigate."

This news brought looks of astonishment from the Tasmor that were present, especially Anthylea, Namiri and Emylea since the three of them were among the finest trained Tasmor ground fighters that lived. Even they knew that to conduct such an operation, the planning and the skills needed had to be utterly perfect.

“You can’t compare what Andro did with this!” Martin protested. “He and I have been working on that plan for over five years. We had it refined down to the last second. We trained countless hours on the execution for it! The Svorag aren’t... they just aren’t capable of that level of execution. At least not from what we have seen.” Martin continued to look at Anja and saw the set of her jaw. “Are they?”

Anja nodded her head slowly. “And I would have agreed with you Lover.” She told him holding out the data pad to him as Perlyea handed one to Saydia and then Tobia. “Until I saw this. Kesyla left her decryption program running last night. It got to the security core data banks about five hours ago. This is what was discovered.”

Martin watched on the small screen as half a dozen Svorag moved through the entrance of what he now knew was the first research site. All of them were walking quite normally, not slouched over as all the other Svorag they had faced, and all of them held Pralor data scrolls and the miniature P1 Pralor computers.

“We were shocked as well Martin.” Kesyla spoke from her chair beside Anuk.

“There are logs as well.” Perlyea spoke now. “Logs detailing the assault and taking of our ship. Among other things.”

“I was right all along Martin. And this time I wish I wasn’t.” Anja spoke once more causing him to look at her. “Lorendo had no idea what he was doing when he made these monsters. And because of his pompous and holier than thou, attitude he lost control of the research being done.”

“I do... I do not understand.” Saydia spoke up now. “The Pralor people are responsible for making these monsters!”

“You encountered them before Saydia. Perlyea told me you have. They have taken your people before?” Anja spoke to her.

Saydia nodded her head slowly. “Almost two thousand in the last decade.” She answered with wide eyes. “This is one... this is one of the reasons that relations with the Pralor people were never truly pursued, aside from their other faults. We suspected that they had a hand in creating these monsters and unleashing them against us. Now you are telling me it is true!”

Tobia was about to answer when Anja shook her head instantly and kept Tobia from trying to defend her people. “No... not the Pralor people Saydia Daret. One Pralor man. One very fat little *ronnus* with a God power complex.” Anja told her quickly. “Delnash had no idea Lorendo was doing this.” She told her. “None of the other Pralor people did. This kind of work is banned in their society just as it is in ours.”

Saydia looked at Tobia. “Tobia this is true?” She gasped.

Tobia nodded her head relief filling her. “Any type of genetic alteration was banned from our society when we settled on Artaaya. The decision was unanimous.” She explained.

Saydia looked back to Anja confused. “But isn’t that what we did when Perlyea used the Lycavorian DNA?”

Perlyea shook her head. “I did not alter their DNA Saydia. I only enhanced it and made it compatible with our own on a more robust nature.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?” Saydia asked.

It was Anja who spoke first now, speaking up for the woman who she had grown fond of very quickly. In many ways Perlyea reminded Anja of herself and Duewa, and that is why they worked so well together.

“There is a huge difference between altering and enhancing genetic material.” Anja spoke. “It is a thin line I will admit, but ultimately it is the product that determines how it will be seen. I have reviewed Perlyea’s work Sovereign Regent, and to be honest it is brilliant work within the scope of what the Tasmor technological advances can give to her. And it worked.”

Anthylea’s eyes grew wide and she came to her feet now. “It... it worked!” She gasped. Her head snapped around when she felt Saydia grasp her hand tightly her own eyes wide.

“Perlyea?” Saydia stammered. “Is this... is this true?”

Perlyea nodded her head. “I can relate to you the details at a later time Regent Daret, but for now we must remain focused on this problem, for it does involve our people now.”

Saydia nodded her head. “Of course. Yes.”

Danny looked up from the pad that she had given to Martin, who in turn had handed it to him after looking at it briefly. “Anja, these are not like the fuglies we tangled with on Twelve Alpha or Onterom.”

“No they are not.” Wayonn spoke from where he stood just behind Martin. “Anja they are walking fully upright and...”

Anja nodded her head before he could finish. “They have evolved.” She spoke.

“Come again Red?” Martin asked now.

“It’s what Lorendo was afraid of and what he has been trying to hide Lover.” Anja said. “He lost control of the initial experiment, probably due to lax security and medical protocols, but he lost control of it. It may have taken decades or even centuries given the time frame we know the Pralor people have been dealing with them, but the ultimate conclusion is he lost control of at least a major part of the whatever idiotic experiment he was attempting and it got loose. Once he could no longer control it, he tried to cover it up and erase he had any part in it.”

“Onterom?” Wayonn asked softly.

Anja nodded her head. “If I had to guess, after viewing what logs Avi has been able to decrypt from the station, the infected Pralor scientists there had full knowledge of what they were doing. That is why he killed them.”

“Once he discovered Anja and Duewa had revealed the basis for a cure, he could not afford those in stasis on Onterom to reveal what they had been working on.” Radra spoke up now.

Martin nodded his head. “I got all that.” Martin said. “He’s a squirmy, rotten piece of *sibfla* and he’s so dirty I wouldn’t touch him with a ten foot pole. What does that have to do with this?”

“He admitted that some of the Svorag were showing signs of retaining their memories from before they were infected.” Anja said.

“Yeah so?”

“They haven’t begun to just retain their memories Lover.” Anja told him. “Like I said, they have evolved. They are evolving. And creating more of themselves.”

“Come again?” Martin almost shouted. “How the hell did we find all this out in just the last few hours?”

The soft buzzing sound caused the Tasmor to jump slightly as the soft bluish white light of a Teleporter filled the corner of the MED Center and then was gone, leaving Aricia holding tightly to the arm of the breathtaking blond woman. Jacina held Aricia’s arms and steadied herself while taking deep breaths. Martin stood up from the table and moved to them instantly, grasping both of their arms gently. “*Saaurano?*” He questioned her.

Aricia looked at him with those gorgeous azure blue eyes and she smiled. “Beloved, you remember Jacina.” She said.

Martin nodded. “Of course I do.” He answered looking at Jacina. Her long blond hair looked healthy and radiant while her dazzling blue eyes were bright and alert. The Fleet uniform didn’t do much to hide her incredible figure, and Martin knew Jacina had drawn the interest of many young wolves on the *ARC ROYAL* who found her enticing even after what had happened to her.

Jacina looked at him and smiled as best she could. “King Leonidas.” She said in greeting.

Martin grinned at her. “Takes some getting used too, I know.” He told her. “Deep breaths helped me get rid of the nausea pretty quickly.”

Jacina nodded and did just that, drawing in another half a dozen deep breaths slowly that made the nausea all but disappear. She glanced at him with happy eyes then and smiled. “Thank you.” She said.

Martin reached up and placed his large hand against the side of her cheek and hair. “What are you doing here?” He asked.

“I came to help.” Jacina answered.

Since her brazen rescue from the Svorag by these very men and women Jacina had found new purpose in her life with them. She steadfastly refused to return to Artaaya for fear of her life, especially after discovering what Lorendo had done to their comrades and friends. Both she and Recia had elected almost immediately to remain on the *ARC ROYAL*. Their recovery had been arduous, more so for Recia due to the extent of her transformation, but both of them were completely free of the Svorag virus thanks to these people. While Recia chose to remain alone most of the time, Jacina had spent considerable time with Aricia in these last weeks. They had become very good friends of a sort, both of them feeling a special connection that they neither understood nor cared why it had happened. Spending time with Aricia also meant spending time with Martin, Anja and For'mya and the other Queens before they had departed. When with them all together, Jacina felt an unnatural

sense of peace wrap around her. She felt so comfortable with them, almost as if they were her family. Her own mother and father had been to the ship several times to visit her, but overcoming nine hundred years of lost time wasn't easy and they were proceeding slowly so as not to overwhelm their daughter. The love they had for her was still powerful and without question and they spoke almost every day via the QCR, but at this moment Jacina felt far safer and more comfortable with Aricia and the others and both her parents agreed that she should stay on the ship for her own well-being and safety. Jacina had even begun to get back into working in the *ARC ROYAL*'s Research Labs and was thoroughly enjoying the new lease on life that they had given to her.

Martin looked confused and he looked at Aricia. "I don't understand." He said just as Anja came up alongside him.

Anja didn't hesitate and kissed Jacina on her cheek affectionately while taking her hand. "You want to know why we have the answers we do." Anja said. "She is standing right here."

"Now I am really confused." Martin said.

It was Aricia who now snapped out with her hand and slapped his face playfully while her eyes shown on him with love and adoration. "Then sit down Beloved and we will explain it." She told him. Everyone chuckled softly at this action and Helen couldn't help but shake her head from where she stood beside Wayonn.

Aricia had found something unique in Jacina. It was friendship yes, but not on such a deep level as she shared with her fellow Queens. This was different, almost as if Jacina was a member of their family but on a level like Sadi or Ne'Veha. Almost like a daughter in some ways. This emotion had passed to all of them over the course of a few days and it was not something that they had let slip away. All of them felt Jacina had been put among them for a reason, that reason had just not been revealed yet.

Martin returned to his chair still very confused and he looked at Danny who also had questions in his dark eyes. Martin shrugged his broad shoulders as Anja pulled Jacina over to the table beside her and Aricia took her spot to Martin's right.

"Sovereign Regent allow me to introduce Jacina." Anja spoke once more. "She is a Pralor as you have no doubt have guessed. We rescued her and another researcher from Onterom. She had been infected by the Svorag there but we managed to discover a cure for that strain of the virus that helped her to recover fully."

"You and Duewa found a cure." Radra spoke from her chair. "Take credit where it is due Anja."

"Will this cure work for everyone Queen Anja?" Saydia asked.

Anja shook her head. "Unfortunately no. The Svorag virus is very virulent and mutative in nature. In order to consider making a serum that will cure everyone, we would need the base formula that was originally used to create them. That we don't have. What Duewa and I needed to make the serum for Jacina and Recia was in the computer banks on the station. Combined with what we had from our other encounter we were able to fashion the serum. It was luck really." Anja smiled briefly as she ushered Jacina to the chair beside her. "Anyway... Jacina was assigned to the Pralor Research Station we discovered there. Not all of the Researchers that Lorendo had there were privy to what he was really doing, but all of them were working on the project in some manner."

"I was... I am a Botanical Molecular Biologist." Jacina told everyone in the room. "My specific field was Botanical Molecular Genetics and how to improve the genetic structure of different botanical species to make them stronger and healthier."

"Red?" Martin asked now looking at her.

"Jacina was in the MED BAY on the *ARC ROYAL* last night for a standard checkup." Anja spoke. "Duewa had returned prior and was working on the formulas we discovered in the computer cores at the first Research Site. She happened to see what Duewa was working on and recognized the genetic formulas and enzyme protein codes."

"So?" Martin asked once more.

"My work on Onterom was focused on one plant." Jacina told him. "This particular plant, a flower actually, was discovered to have different healing properties within its genetic coding that were unlike anything we had discovered before. I was tasked with breaking down the core DNA molecules and separating them. I was told it was to infuse the many different species of fauna on Artaaya with a more robust ability to survive and to help crops to grow faster and produce more."

Perlyea nodded her head. “We have done this on Danerav Sovereign Regent.” She spoke now. She looked at Martin. “To improve crops and such. We took aspects of certain plants and added it to the irrigation methods to improve durability and productivity of other plants. It was quite successful.”

Jacina nodded. “That was what we thought we were working for as well.” Jacina said looking at her briefly. “Recia, myself and others like us.”

Jacina felt Anja’s hand on her shoulder and glanced at her to see her smiling warmly. The touch of her hand was warm and it immediately put Jacina even more at ease. She took a deep breath and turned back to look at the others seated at the table.

“We did not know what was happening in the levels below us.” Jacina spoke. “All we were told was that additional experiments were being performed using our information and samples in order to make a viable compound that we could use on Artaaya and our other colonies. One that would work on all the different samples from the three worlds. When I saw what Duewa was working on I asked her about it. When Duewa told me, I realized what was really happening on Onterom and what we were doing.”

Martin leaned back in his chair shaking his head and he looked at Anja. He saw her nod her head in confirmation and he felt the pit of his stomach twist and become hollow. “Same old story Lover. Just different players.” She said softly.

“Fuck me.” Danny hissed knowing just what they were talking about instantly.

Almost everyone at the table were looking at them with confusion on their faces not really knowing what they were talking about or referring too. Perlyea was the one who leaned forward finally and asked the question.

“Anja? What are you referring too?” She asked.

Anja met her eyes. “It is something that humans and vampires from our homeworld Earth were fond of playing with a long time ago.” She replied. “Biological Warfare. Vampires used these weapons on Martin’s homeworld many millennia ago and killed billions upon billions of men, women and children. They brought this knowledge to Earth and humans found many more diabolical uses for it.”

Martin leaned forward once more looking at Jacina. “Jacina... what is so special about this plant you were working on. Why would they need it?”

“Once broken down into the base plant DNA, we called it the Teyalan Flower, it was in three separate components.” Jacina explained. “We were allowed to name these components since it was entirely new to the Pralor people. The first was Hecerkal. This was the medical component, the healing portion of the plant. A hundred times more powerful than anything the Pralor people had discovered before to assist in crop formation and seeding life. Even a plant that was nearly destroyed by fire could be revived and returned to its natural state within hours using this component. The second component was Ledralye.” Jacina leaned forward with worry on her beautiful face now. “King Martin you must understand we did not know what...”

Martin held up his hand quickly. “You are in no way the owner of any blame for what was created from your work Jacina. You, Recia, all of your colleagues, you were all victims and you were used.” Martin tilted his head slightly. “Delnash?”

“I concur completely Martin.” The voice spoke and the heads of the Tasmor whipped around when they saw the holo disc in the corner burst to life and the form of Delnash sitting at his desk appeared, shimmered and then became crystal clear.

“Chief Elder!?” Radra gasped from her seat.

Delnash nodded his head to her. “It is good to see you again Radra.” He spoke.

“And you Chief Elder.” Radra responded.

Delnash’s eyes turned to settle on Saydia. “Sovereign Regent Daret... I cannot begin to apologize to you and to the Tasmor people for the colossal failure of diplomacy that is the fault of the Pralor people. I was not aware of the challenges facing your people because I was never told of them. Radra was never told of them. It was kept from us by others when we should have known better. Please accept my pledge to you that things will be very different moving forward into the future.”

“I...” Saydia’s eyes were wide in shock. “I do not know how to respond.”

“No response is needed.” Delnash told her. “It is the Pralor people that need to make the first gesture and we will. As soon as we discover fully what is happening, for it now seems to concern all of us, which is why Martin included me in this transmission.”

Saydia nodded. "Of course."

Martin looked back to Jacina. "Jacina... keep going." He told her.

Jacina took a deep breath. "The second component, Ledralye. When separated from the other properties of the Teyalan flower, it is a hideously addictive compound and an extremely powerful psychotropic and mind controlling drug. The tests we ran indicated that the addiction rate was over ninety-eight percent after only one small dose. After the second dose, a hundred percent. Recia was working on that but I know she discovered that once in the bloodstream, a constant daily dosage was needed in order to keep the individual from going completely insane. These were only models that she ran, and it is the reason she flagged this component as totally unusable for our purposes. Or so we thought. She was in charge of destroying the samples that were taken from the plants; she would have one of Elder Lorendo's people from the levels below sign for them as pending destruction and then put that in the logs."

"We confirmed this with the logs we were able to recover from the station Martin." Duewa spoke now. "She signed over nearly three thousand five hundred samples for complete incineration to Lorendo's people in the lower levels over the course of six years. The records she kept match exactly the number to which Jacina separated."

"They were using it?" Martin asked. "For what?"

Anja shook her head. "Hold that thought Lover. Jacina, tell everyone what the third component was."

"We designated it as Tintor." She answered. "It is an extremely powerful stimulant. It is what allowed the Teyalan flower to flourish in even the harshest of conditions. It made the Teyalan flower so resistant to many natural forms of what would normally kill flowers of this kind. The extraction and separation of the components took months to fully complete even with our finest equipment because the elements were so tightly woven together. Once completed however, each Teyalan flower could produce over a hundred doses of each compound."

Anja lifted her P1 and typed on it. "Our people tested the space monster you, Danny, Colin and Pablo fought, and the two that were suffocated after Jacina told Duewa about this. All three of them were loaded with this Ledralye and Tintor. There was a self-releasing mechanism inserted into the shoulder of each one these things and each one was on a time delay. Given the amounts that were still within the capsules, had we not killed them, it could have lasted for at least a decade." She looked at Martin. "Their systems were also flooded with this Hecerkal."

Martin's eyes were wide. "I didn't authorize that Red!" He exclaimed.

"No, I did." Anja stated confidently.

"As hard as that thing was to kill, how do you know it was really dead?" Martin snapped. "That fucking Svorag wasn't really dead!"

"Its cells were regenerating Lover," Anja told him. "But it had no brain functions and they were not regenerating. You stick to what you are best at Lover, curling our toes in our bed and killing shit. Let the rest of us do our jobs."

Danny and Helen were the first to burst out laughing at this retort from Anja and that quickly became infectious. It served to release the tension in the room that was building and Martin sat there looking suitably sheepish. It was Wayonn who brought everyone back to reality.

"Anja, while all this information is very informative..." He spoke up. "What does it all mean?"

Anja took a deep breath. "That's the bad news." She stated. "Given what we have now discovered from the Research site logs from both stations we are certain of several things. The Svorag have evolved far more than that idiot Lorendo ever thought. They are retaining the memories and skills they had before they were infected and turned as well as their higher brain functions. They are able to use those skills now. They knew those research stations were here Lover." She looked at Martin. "And there is a reason why they came here and why the Tasmor are involved."

"Shit." Martin hissed.

"The Teyalan Flower is only found on this planet King Martin." Jacina now spoke up. "It cannot be grown off this world and from all the reports it has never been found anywhere else. We tried to grow it in our labs using dozens of scenarios and all the samples died. That is why new samples were delivered to Onterom every month."

“If I had to guess, and I’m pretty sure I would be accurate, many of those who were infected on Onterom were part of Lorendo’s group that knew what they were really doing there in that place.” Anja spoke softly. “Which means that they would have retained the memories and knowledge of their past lives and then passed that down to the next generation of Svorag. As everyone saw, they are walking upright now and obviously are able to use higher their brain functions since they were the ones who were conducting the experiments in these two sites.”

“And how does this affect the Tasmor?” Saydia asked.

Anja looked at Perlyea, who then turned to Saydia. “The Tasmor are immune to the addictive nature of the drug Sovereign Regent. It is why our people were taken as well Saydia, according to the logs we seized. We cannot become addicted to this drug due to our physiology but unfortunately we are not immune to its effects. It is also why so few Tasmor have been taken compared to Pralor and Lycavorian. The blood of one Tasmor could provide thousands of doses to counteract the addictive elements.”

“Gods of the earth Perlyea! They are... they are draining our people of their blood!?” Saydia gasped. “Are you certain?”

Perlyea nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered. “We don’t yet know why, but it has to do with what is being done to the Lycavorians and the Pralor people both.”

“As of right now there are no known Tasmor who have been infected and turned.” Anja said. “At least according to Perlyea. That is why we can only assume there is another reason they need the blood of your people.”

“Why only Pralor and Lycavorian Anja?” Delnash asked.

“I could take a guess.” Anja said. “It would only be a guess.”

“At this moment I would say I trust your guesses as opposed to most people’s facts.” Delnash spoke.

Anja looked at Martin. “Let us have it Red.” He told her.

“If, and I stress it is a big if, Lorendo was trying to develop a species just as vile and abhorrent as the Scourge, a species he could control that would help him to combat the Scourge, perhaps return and take back the Pralor Empire, then he would only use Pralor and Lycavorians as hosts. That is for the natural Etheric ability that we possess.” Anja spoke now.

“But only Praetorians have ever shown the ability to affect the Scourge.” Delnash spoke. “Normal Pralors and Lycavorians do not have the level of Etheric power or control to affect them.”

Anja nodded her head. “Unless he has somehow found a way to harness that Etheric level.” She said looking directly at Martin. “Or he knew of what Sumar did by merging the Pralors with Lycavorians and the benefits that could bring.”

“What?” Martin gasped. “Are you saying he knew where my grandfather was? That he was somehow monitoring him?”

“It’s possible Lover.” She told him. “If he knew what Sumar had done, if he knew that his blood would remain pure and be passed down through the generations? That our emotions are what fuel the Etheric abilities within us. If he knew this and is still trying to find a way, so that he could somehow regain control of what he has obviously lost control of, he would obviously come after the only place he knew where Lycavorians were and where no one would notice he is still playing God.”

“And this is why we stopped monitoring the Lycavorians here on Ventori.” Kesyla spoke softly. “We knew they were here when we arrived in Artaaya’s planetary system but we stopped monitoring them within a decade after settling there. On Lorendo’s orders.”

Anja nodded her head. “I don’t believe in that many coincidences.” She told them. “He was playing God even when you got to Artaaya. Trying to be a hero.”

“Anja are you saying he somehow let those on Onterom become infected?” Radra asked now with a look of horror on her face.

Anja nodded her head solemnly. “Yes, probably.” She replied. “And when he did, that is when he lost control of the overall experiment. Jacina and Recia and the other researchers who were not privy to the whole basis for their experiments probably told him of the danger that this flower represented but he was either too stupid to see it for himself or he chose to ignore their warnings and continue anyway. Now the Svorag are operating all on their own and he is trying to both cover it up and use it.”

“All of this still does not explain how he created the original virus.” Radra spoke. “If he even did.”

Anja shook her head. “He didn’t create this.” She said confidently. “In all of the samples that we took from Onterom’s computers that Duewa and I have studied, whether they were Pralor or Lycavorian, all of them had the same core gene enzymes.”

“What does this mean?” Delnash asked.

Radra was the one who leaned forward as realization hit her. “There is an originating donor species?” She gasped.

Anja nodded her head. “Or a single donor.” She stated. “I don’t care what his many degrees are in, Lorendo is just too fucking stupid to make something like this on his own. He got this from someone or something. And that is part of the reason why he has lost control of it. He’s got a serious God complex and he thinks he is smarter than everyone else.”

“They were creating those things here.” Duewa spoke now looking at Martin. “The three we found were left behind to protect that site. The Svorag plan to return Martin.”

“There are more of those space monster fuckers out there?” Martin snarled with wide eyes.

Duewa nodded her head. “Probably in very large numbers based on the bodies and the data we have been able to recover so far.”

“And they will return because of the flower?” Jacina said now. “When they next bloomed fully. In order to harvest them. Honelze is only a stop in order to take more hosts.”

Martin rose to his feet. “Fuck me!” He shouted loudly.

The room became silent as he paced quickly back and forth. No one would interrupt Martin Leonidas when he was like this for fear of incurring his wrath. Even his wives and mates would not interrupt his train of thought when he got like this. His mind was a beautiful thing and he could process information faster than any of them had ever seen. Anja and Aricia knew, just as Danny, Helen and Wayonn knew, his mind was now working overtime as it processed different scenarios. He turned suddenly back to Anja. “You said there is a donor or something.” He asked looking at Anja directly.

“Probably Lover.” Anja answered. “Something we haven’t seen yet.”

“Man this just keeps getting better and better!” Martin barked. “Is it something out here Anja? Some species here in the Echo Quadrant? Some infection or disease?”

Anja shook her head. “This is not a naturally occurring disease Martin.” She answered him. “This was created. It is a mutative infection designed to do exactly what it does.”

“Aside from the species we have in our databanks, we know of no others that exist in this quadrant of space. It is one of the reasons we chose to settle here.” Delnash spoke now. “We were quite thorough Martin. Sovereign Regent, the Tasmor have been here far longer than us. Have your people discovered or do you know of anything even remotely like this?”

Saydia shook her head quickly. “No. Never. Not in any History Cron that I am aware of.” She answered hesitantly looking almost guilty about something. “But we...”

“It doesn’t matter.” Anja spoke up interrupting her. “The Tasmor are just not capable of making this. Duewa and I have gone over everything with Perlyea the last few days in regards to their abilities Lover. They just do not have the technological capability that this thing would need to be created.”

Martin met her eyes. “Who does?” Anja glanced at Radra quickly and then back to Martin. “Red?”

Delnash leaned forward in his chair within the transmission. “Do not be afraid to answer Anja Leonidas.” He spoke. “As I said earlier, at this moment I trust you more than most of my own people.”

Anja sighed heavily. “This was made by a Pralor.” She answered finally. “Or a Scourge, but I don’t know enough about their scientific capabilities to make that determination.”

Martin looked instantly to Wayonn. “Wayonn?” He asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “Xaxon was very specific in what he was trying to do.” He replied. “He was a monster yes, but he was not trying to create them. We have seen the results of his earlier work and then his final attempts. We fought them both at the end of the first war. None of them resembled these creatures in any way and Xaxon’s Mage, the Scourge Queen, she did not have the knowledge that Anja says this would need to be made.”

Martin noticed it first because Helen was his Praetorian Mage. A slight tilt of her head and shudder of her body. He felt her throw up incredibly powerful Etheric shields around her mind as her dark eyes narrowed.

Aricia noticed it first with Martin and she followed where his gaze was, followed quickly by Anja and then Danny.

“Helen?” Martin asked softly.

Helen’s head turned slowly to look at him. “Martin this... this disease was created by a Pralor.” She spoke slowly and evenly as she met his gaze.

Anja looked at her now. “Helen how can you be so sure?” She asked.

Martin shook his head. “No.” He said softly, his tone of voice one of sadness.

Helen lifted her right hand and waved it off to the side. The Tasmor were the only ones to jump as the entire side of the building they were in with no computers along the wall began to retract quickly, exposing the interior of the building to the exterior. Bright sunlight filled the interior as the figures of three dragons appeared outside the wall now. Martin felt a sinking feeling in his gut when he spied Arzoal’s flame red scales and her bright eyes. Beside her was Teniri on one side and Isheeni on the other.

Arzoal moved closer to the now retracted wall and settled her massive body to the ground gracefully. She wore a dark brown collar like strap around her neck which held one of the devices Kasdan had made for the dragons on Artaaya. She had been practicing with Teniri for days now and had grown quite good at projecting her voice outward through this device. Her eyes settled on Martin as he moved around the table and moved up in front of her without the least bit of fear.

“Arzoal?” He asked her as he lifted his hand up.

“My talks with you and Androcles have done so much to rid me of the burden of shame I carried for so long Martin.” She spoke. The device created a soft voice with a slight lilt in it that reminded Martin of an English accent. “It is you and your son who made me see beyond the shame I accepted. I cannot keep it hidden. I felt Helen’s emotions while we trained with the dragon warriors that came with Teniri. I inquired of her what was happening and she allowed me to see with her eyes.”

“Are you certain?” Martin asked.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. “Yes.”

“Certain about what Arzoal?” Anja asked as she moved up beside Martin.

Arzoal met her jade green eyes. “You are correct Anja.” She spoke. “This vile pestilence was created by a Pralor. It was created a very long time ago and I had thought that I destroyed it forever. I was wrong. I recognized the genetic formula when I saw it through Helen’s eyes.”

Anja’s eyes grew a little wider. “Arzoal how can you be so sure?” She gasped.

“For one simple reason.” Arzoal answered. “I helped to create it.”

Everyone who was not in a command role was politely asked to leave and then Martin and Danny lifted the table and moved it closer to the open air side of the Medical Building. A massive tarp had been thrown up over the top and poles erected so that Arzoal, Teniri and Isheeni could rest and remain out of the direct sunlight. This also served to make Delnash’s image in the transmission much clearer. It took her over an hour to bare her past and her soul to those she considered her family.

“...So now you know.” Arzoal spoke softly. “Everything I told Androcles and Elynth that day on Cranae Island, I have now told you.” Arzoal’s eyes settled on Martin who had been pacing slowly for the last thirty minutes. “Martin?”

Martin stopped and looked at her for a long moment. “What possessed you to tell them that day?” He asked finally.

Arzoal shook her massive head. “I don’t know to be honest. Perhaps because even then I sensed that they are what Sarlana says they are. *Dahakoan*. Perhaps I could feel the dragon blood within him. That within his chest burns the heart of a dragon. Does it matter now?”

Martin shook his head. “No.” He answered softly. “I suspected much of what you just told us. I just never said anything.”

“Why?” Arzoal asked. “You of all I have known in my years, you deserved to know.”

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “I figured you would tell me when it became time for me to know. When you knew I had to know.” He told her. “I didn’t think it would be under these circumstances however.”

“Nor did I.” Arzoal spoke. “This thing I helped to create... it has touched so many lives. Taken so many lives.” Arzoal turned her head to look at Saydia. “I cannot begin to tell you how much I regret that it has now involved your people Sovereign Regent Daret.”

Saydia looked up at her and shook her head. “This is not your doing.” She spoke calmly. “I will not judge you, no one should judge you for decisions you made to respond to events that took place so long ago when we were not there to experience it ourselves.”

“I agree.” Delnash spoke up now as well.

“Arzoal you are sure this is the formula?” Anja asked her now.

Arzoal nodded once more. “Yes. The base formula has been altered in many ways but it still retains enough of its base genetic markers and coding for me to recognize it. How it came to be in Lorendo’s hands is beyond me. The mountain on Elear burned for three days. I sent the strongest Firespitters I had back twice to make sure it burned Anja. Everything was destroyed when we finally returned after the fires were out. Every piece of equipment he used, every data bank, every data storage unit. We destroyed everything Anja. Then we buried it.”

Martin looked at Anja. “Red?” He asked.

Anja looked at Arzoal once more. “Arzoal this was brilliant work.” She said with a touch of awe in her voice.

“Anja!” Helen exclaimed.

“No! That’s not what I meant!” Anja quickly retorted. “The basis for the work was brilliant! Not what he made from it! Not what he did to it! Something like this could have saved thousands of lives. It could have been the basis for any number of cures to any number of diseases!”

Duewa moved up next to Anja now. “She is correct Helen.” She spoke. “Arzoal’s base work could have been the catalyst for so much.”

“But it wasn’t.” Arzoal spoke. “Arete turned it into something so vile that it should be unspeakable. He was brilliant but he was a monster as well. We just did not see that until it was too late.”

“He was a disciple of Xaxon.” Delnash spoke now. “And we all fell under that man’s veil. Even Sumar admitted this during his trial. It is why we punished him the way we did. This is not your fault Arzoal. None of it.”

“Perhaps Chief Elder... but it still does not explain how Lorendo was able to acquire it.” Arzoal said.

“Our ship!” Teniri exclaimed now and all heads turned to her.

“Teniri, what do you mean?” Delnash asked.

“We set it to return to Arzoal and those left on Elear a year before you discovered us but it did not return to her for over nine thousand years!” Teniri spoke. “Long after we had settled on Artaaya.”

“What are you saying Teniri?” Arzoal asked her now.

“What if Lorendo discovered our ship?” She asked.

“How is that even possible?” Delnash asked. “We made countless jumps after we had discovered you on that planet.”

Teniri nodded her head. “Yes we did, but without a crew we were only able to program three jumps into the onboard computers of the ship. Those jumps were to take it back to Elear over a period of two years. The rest of the time it moved at sub light speeds. The four Pralors who returned with us are the ones who set the course.”

“That’s a bit of a reach Teniri.” Martin spoke.

“What other possible explanation is there King Martin?” She asked him.

“Teniri has a point there *fervon*.” Danny spoke up now.

Teniri looked at Delnash’s image. “Delnash... send one of your Guard to the Dragon Council on Artaaya. Have them speak with Nekins and tell him to retrieve the data scroll from my cave. It will contain the course we set for the ship. Have him bring it to you. If somehow Lorendo was able to speak with the four Pralors who returned with us, he could have discovered what took place on Elear. And how to find our ship.”

“Can’t we just ask them?” Helen spoke now.

Martin shook his head. “No.” He answered quickly.

Delnash nodded his head. “Martin is right. If we approach them directly then he might realize what we are trying to discover. I will send Garan’s second in command. Martin give me thirty minutes to see this done.”

Martin nodded his head. "We'll be standing by sir." He answered just as Delnash's figure disappeared from the transmission. He turned to face Anja. "Can you do anything with this info Red?" He asked.

Anja shook her head. "I'm afraid not Lover." She answered. "Arzoal could give us her work, what she is able to remember, but it would not do us any good without the mutative gene alterations that Arete performed after he tried to kill her and she was still within the egg waiting to hatch. Duewa, Anuk, Kesyla, Perlyea and the rest of us can give it a whirl but I wouldn't hold my breath."

"Give it a try." Martin said.

Anja nodded her head and turned to head out of the MED building through the doors behind them. Saydia took this moment to rise quickly to her feet and moved to follow her. She caught up with Anja by the doors just as the others exited.

"Queen Anja?" Saydia spoke.

Anja turned to look at her as she stopped and she smiled. "Sovereign Regent, I'm not real big on formalities. You can call me Anja." She said.

Saydia smiled in return and became even more comfortable. "Then I am just Saydia." She said.

"What can I do for you?" Anja asked.

"Before you... you did not allow me to finish what I was going to say." Saydia said to her softly. "I just need to make sure that you understand..."

Anja stepped closer to her. "That the Tasmor evolved from the Kintaur?" Anja asked her softly and saw her eyes grow wider. "That the Tasmor chose to go down another path and that is what caused the schism between your people?"

Saydia looked at her with wide eyes. "How did you...?"

"I'm pretty good at reading genetic markers." Anja told her.

Saydia moved closer to her. "No one knows how it happened." She said softly. "Perlyea says it was just the natural evolution of the Kintaur, and we were the result."

Anja nodded her head. "Perlyea is probably very correct from what I have seen."

"It took centuries but eventually those who had evolved into the Tasmor fought to leave." Saydia said. "We succeeded and the Kintaur have hated us ever since. As Sovereign Regent, only I know this part of our history. It has been this way since our inception. Even many of the Kintaur that live do not know the real history."

Anja nodded her head. "And there is no reason anyone else has to know. At least not right now." She told her. "It won't change what we think about the Tasmor people, and it certainly won't change what Martin thinks."

Saydia tilted her head to the side. "What does he think?" She asked softly.

"He wants you to trust him." Anja said. "There are many differences between our peoples but he doesn't care. He thinks the Tasmor are honorable and very capable. I think he has shown that no matter the differences we can still work together."

"He has." Saydia nodded.

"His bark is worse than his bite Saydia." Anja said.

"Excuse me?" Saydia asked with wide eyes.

Anja chuckled. "Forgive me." She said quickly. "It's an expression among our people. It means don't let his outward appearance frighten you. Martin is one of the most compassionate men you will ever meet." Anja took Saydia's hands in her own and squeezed them. "He will want you to remain here for the briefing, but know that this information about the Kintaur will not be made known by any of us. It is something that the Tasmor deserve to know I think. Perhaps not now, but at a time in the future when it will be accepted."

Saydia nodded her head. "You are right."

Anja smiled. "Whatever we are able to find Perlyea will let you know as soon as we find it out." She said.

"Thank you." Saydia said. "Thank you for everything."

Anja nodded and released her hands before continuing out the doors. Saydia turned back to look at those standing by the open wall. Anthylea was talking with the towering giant with ebony skin who they knew as Danny. Martin stood beside the huge dragon Arzoal with Aricia, Wayonn, Tobia and her daughters as they spoke. What Saydia saw before her was inspiring and she witnessed it then in that moment. The change had

already begun and if what was arrayed before her now was any indication, the Gods of her people had heard her prayers and this was their answer.

Saydia Daret didn't hesitate and moved back towards them and into the future without a moment's hesitation.

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
URLKRISIR MAMISS HEADQUARTERS
SULEVFU WOIEWR CHAMBERS

Ten *Vrrarhoinpa* and ten *Jiilhoinpa* made up the Commission of Twenty and the Ruling Body of the Darastrixi people. The *Urlkrisir Mamiss*. None of them had been a member of the *Sulevfu Woiewr* for less than twenty thousand years, eighteen of the twenty having been members for over fifty thousand years now. All of them were entrenched in routine and this meeting was anything but routine. The last time they had gathered under an Emergency Session had been a time that all of them wanted to forget. It was the time when they decided to betray their Pralor allies and friends under coercion from the Scourge. A time most of them wanted to forget.

There were two co-leaders of the *Sulevfu Woiewr*, one *Jiilhoinpa* and one *Vrrarhoinpa*, both of whom were conferring with each other as the remainder of the *Sulevfu Woiewr* took their spots around the massive chamber. It was in the shape of a half circle, all of them sitting on one side and leaving the area in front of them open allowing for the hundred or so seats and two different podiums that faced their table. They were becoming impatient and this showed in their mannerisms. They were not used to being summoned to their own chambers. It was a female *Jiilhoinpa* who stood up and looked at their co-leaders.

"Issver Draque, why have you summoned us here?" She spoke now. "There has not been an Emergency Session in over forty thousand years! What could be so important as to draw us away from our activities? And why is there an Emissary from the scourge in the anteroom?"

Issver Draque was nearing two hundred and eighty thousands years of age and was as intelligent as he was handsome in a Darastrixi manner. He had lost his wife of over a hundred thousand years a decade ago and now there were thousands of young Maidens vying for his attention in the hopes he would make them his next wife. He looked at this *Vrrarhoinpa* co-leader Tinoz Vors, his deep brown scales shiny and full of life, and his flame red eyes alert and full of intelligence. Tinoz nodded his massive head.

"Let it begin." He spoke in a deep voice.

Issver nodded his head and looked at the data scroll in his hand one last time before moving out in front of the table that held his fellow members. He waited until all of them had focused their attention to him.

"Yes, I called for this Emergency Session." He spoke evenly. "We have a grave situation that has arisen that needs our immediate attention. The implications of this could have dire consequences on the future of our people."

"What has happened Issver?" The woman who had spoken first asked. Her name was Yeren Ir'iss and she had been a member of the *Sulevfu Woiewr* for the last hundred and six thousand years. She was also one of the most outspoken of the Darastrixi anywhere.

"I awoke this morning to this message being delivered to my home by a senior military messenger." Issver spoke as he lifted his hand and they all saw the data scroll. "He told me it was most urgent and it came from *Koppentotz Aviel Em'morr*."

"Aviel Em'morr?" Another of the members spoke. "He is the senior *Koppentotz* under consideration to replace me when I retire next year."

Issver nodded his head. "That is correct. He sent this to my home and it is something all of you need to see. It relates directly to why a Scourge Emissary is now outside these very chambers."

"Issver... what is happening?" Another member now asked.

Issver held up the data scroll and plugged it into the podium. "I will let you all see for yourselves."

The image of Aviel Em'morr appeared in the holoimage on the main floor of the chambers and he began to speak.

“Issver Draque... it is with both a heavy heart and a sense of joy that I leave this message for you. A heavy heart for what I have discovered you and the Sulevfu Woieuwr have taken part in and allowed for so many centuries and a sense of joy for what I have discovered. I did not want to believe it at first, I did not think that our own leaders who are so revered would allow such a thing. Apparently that is not the case. You and the Sulevfu Woieuwr have allowed the Scourge to take our Maiden females for centuries. Allowed them to take our maiden females and conduct hideous experiments on them. Allowed them to be defiled in a way that does not even become believable until you see what I have seen. You and the others on the Sulevfu Woieuwr had to have known this is what they would do. And if you did not, all of you should be ashamed to even call yourselves Darastrixi.”

“What is the meaning of this?!” Another member of the chamber roared coming to his feet. “Issver... you bring this whelp before us immediately! He will answer for these foul and preposterous words!”

Issver looked at him. “If only that was possible right now.” He stated. “Sit down now and continue to watch.”

“The Sulevfu Woieuwr has allowed the Scourge monsters to take our future from us! To degrade them and turn them into experiments so horrendous it cannot be put into words! You and the others have allowed this under the auspice of a political exchange to try and better relations with these monsters, but you never took the time to ask why. Why would the Scourge want our maiden females?” Aviel shook his head in the recording. ***“The respect I held for you and the Sulevfu Woieuwr was without question. I, our people, we entrusted you to lead us. To make things better. All you have done with your actions is to secure your own positions and to ultimately bring the demise of our people into view without even knowing it.***

“The Scourge have been taking our maiden females because they were looking for something. They were looking for something in order to use it against us. To bring about our defeat. All of you are aware of the Lorsvek ar Sepas, the oldest myth among our people. It foretells of the return of the Dahakoan. Wer Arytissi ar wer Zezhuanth. The Warriors of the Ancient.” Aviel shifted slightly in the recording. ***“I tell you now... the Lorsvek ar Sepas is happening. It is taking place right now. I have known of two of the Dahakoan for several months now, a young Darastrixi Maiden and her Vrrarhoinpa. They are what the Scourge are searching for. They want them in order to experiment on them and find a way to use their gifts against our people and so many others across the stars. I will not allow this. We will not allow this. We have taken Laren and Ladur off Icarava in order to unite them with the other four Dahakoan who now exist, two of which bear the title of Vrelvel Sargti. Talon Guardians of our people. Bestowed to them by a Darastrixi Elder Council made up of those we allowed the Pralor people to seed on other words. Vrelvel Sargti Issver! Those souls given the sacred duty of safeguarding our kind for all time. They are also Dahakoan. I have spoken with them Issver! Seen them! And a more ferocious force I have never seen in all my years! They wield the power of the Pralor Praetorians of old, as well as the Dahakoan of our people! As do Laren and Ladur! That is why the Scourge wanted them! Can you imagine what would have become of our people had the Scourge succeeded? Can you imagine what you and the other Sulevfu Woieuwr would have brought down upon us if this had taken place? Untold death and misery! The same misery and death we allowed when we cast our Pralor brothers aside like so much trash all those years ago! Only this would have been directed at us!”***

They saw Aviel shake his head in disgust and look to the side as if he was talking to someone and then he turned back to the recording device.

“I am taking them away from you Issver.” He continued. ***“I will not allow you to bring about the demise of our people. I cannot. I am recording this for you in the hopes that you will see that the path you have laid before our people is wrong. We have forgotten most of what made the Darastrixi great, and I hold you and the Sulevfu Woieuwr responsible for this. I will take Laren and Ladur to be with their fellow Dahakoan Issver. Do not follow us, do not attempt to find us, for two of the Dahakoan are Lycavorian Issver,***

bonded to two Vrrarhoinpa that have not been raised among our kind, Vrrarhoinpa that have different values. Dahakoan that are as different from their ancestors as the night is to day and they wield a power we cannot begin to imagine. They will not abide what you and the others allow to continue and one day, one day they will return to set the Darastrixi free. Who will you and the Suleyfu Woieuwr follow on that day Issver? Will you side with your people or will you side with those who only wish to see us destroyed? The choice is yours Issver. Choose well, for the Dahakoan of this time, they will be unforgiving in their justice. Choose well my old friend."

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

VENTORI UNION ADHOC COMPOUND

"...Why Martin?" Jezima asked softly. "Why has he done these things?"

Jezima and Meral had woken near the end of the first meeting in the MED building and almost immediately began asking for Martin. Once Delnash broke off his transmission to gather what Teniri wanted Martin had left the building, feeling the powerful pull of his grandmother and aunt calling for him. Since it was still relatively early in the morning, he met them with smiles and hugs and brought them to eat in the Mess building. Jezima and Meral both noticed the looks they received from the others in the building and it was disconcerting for them both. Neither of them had ever been looked at with the obvious reverence they saw in the eyes of so many men and women. Reverence for them, for who they were. They both knew this carried over a great deal for how they felt about Martin, but neither were they fools. They knew that they were now considered icons of a sort among these men and women and so many more that they had never seen before.

It was after they had eaten when Martin drew them over to the lake shore and they settled to the ground on a large cloth tarp that had already been laid out. That is when he began to tell them everything that was happening. It took him nearly two hours to explain to them what had been going on for centuries apparently, and he held nothing back from them, which made it all the more horrific.

Martin shook his head slowly as he held her hand in his. "I don't know *Staania*." He told her gently but honestly. "I have thought about it. Maybe he wanted to be a hero. Maybe he wanted power. Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter anymore. Now he is simply a murderer of so many lives I cannot begin to count them all. What he created, he is responsible for what they have done. If not for him they would not exist."

"Why doesn't Delnash arrest him?" Meral snapped almost angrily. "Make him face these charges and answer for his actions!"

Martin shook his head. "If only it were that simple." He said. "Lorendo may be many things but he is also very smart. Delnash can't move against him directly because all we truly have in contrast is guesswork and some evidence. Nothing that directly shows he actually has done what we believe he has."

"The logs from the station on Onterom?" Meral gasped.

Martin shook his head once more. "I'm sure he ordered them deleted but we have no way to prove that. All he would need to say is that the commander of the station was working on his own. He was very careful to make sure anything that was found did not tie back to him in any way."

"You believe he has done these things?" Jezima asked him meeting his beautiful eyes. Her son's eyes.

Martin nodded his head without hesitation. "Oh yeah." He answered. "He's guilty as sin in my book. Unfortunately, many of the Pralor people still look at us as inferior to them. He's been adding to that dogma ever since he returned to Onterom. It's one of the major points he has been using against Delnash. And a lot of the Pralor people believe him. Many won't believe what we present because of this mentality, even with Kasdan, Radra, Delnash and others telling them different. That kind of takes away many of my options in dealing with him."

Meral looked at him and took his other hand now. "What would your people have done Martin?" She asked softly.

Martin shook his head. "You don't want me to answer that *Tenna*." He told her.

“Yes, I do.” Meral pressed him.

Martin took a deep breath. “Given what the evidence we have so far points to, the Union would have had him arrested and interrogated to discover what he had done and what he knew. If it was confirmed, he would have been executed within days of discovering this information. Justice is very swift in the Union. It is very thorough but also very swift and unforgiving.”

“Interrogated against his will?” Jezima asked.

Martin nodded slowly. “If that is what it took, yes.” He replied looking at her. “We have drugs that can be used. They are harsh yes, but they are very effective. Even someone with the Etheric power of Lorendo would not have been able to resist them. We would have tried to talk to him, get him to reveal what he knows, but we would have found out one way or the other.”

Jezima squeezed his hand tightly. “I understand.” She said softly. “The history of a people, what they have had to endure, this shapes their feelings and emotions. It hardens them so that they can do what they must in order to survive and prosper.”

“Our laws are harsh yes.” Martin agreed. “But we are a fair and honest people *Staanian*. We have no desire to conquer or enslave. We only wish to live in peace and raise our children. The children of the Union, no matter their species, they are taught to respect and honor others first. To look upon others as friends first, not as enemies. We only change our tune if it is shown that a person or a people do not have the same values that we do. Then we don’t deal with them at all. We don’t try to force our ways on them or stop them from living their lives, but we do not tolerate others telling us how we must be in order to suit them.”

“Are there people like this where you come from?” Meral asked. “In the Alpha Quadrant where you reside?”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes, a few. We leave them alone and they leave us alone. For the most part anyway.”

“What of the Svorag Martin?” Jezima asked now. “Our people on Honelze must be warned! We must prepare to fight them!”

Martin nodded his head. “They will be warned.” He told her. “And Dysea, Isabella and Cirith are there to see to the defenses. We have time right now and we are using that time to try and discover all we can.”

Meral tilted her head slightly and looked at him. “You do not like being King of your people do you?” She asked pointedly.

Martin chuckled softly and shook his head. “I hate it with every fiber of my being.” He told her with a smile. There are days when it drives me *malda!*” He saw their look of confusion and smiled wider. “It means crazy in our language.” He explained seeing their faces change and they both smiled.

Jezima scooted closer to him. “That was my son.” She said. “That was your grandfather. He hated having so many hang on his every word. Even when he became Chief Elder he wanted nothing more than to stay at our home and play with his brother’s children.”

“Yeah I can relate to that.” Martin spoke with a nod.

“What will we do?” Meral asked now.

Martin took another deep breath. “We are trying to determine that now.” He spoke. “I have more forces moving for Manne. That is where we have established our colony out here. I cannot pull too many from the Alpha Quadrant because of events back there, and not all of our ships are equipped with engines that can get them out this far in a few days. At least not yet. We are building more of the Worker Drones in a secret facility using Avatar 41’s specs and we’ll be able to move faster as more are made. My daughter Yuriko is shadowing the Svorag mother ship as it moves towards Honelze and Androcles and my other children will be here in a few weeks with a much larger force than we have now.” He told them looking around the camp. “We did not expect to discover what we have about the Lycavorians here on Ventori, or the Tasmor. These Kintaur thugs pose another problem, more so for the Tasmor than us, but I will not leave them to deal with it on their own. Not after what they did for our people here.”

“Argh! So many things!” Meral exclaimed. “I see what you mean.”

Martin laughed. “You want my job?” He asked her. “I’ll let you have it cheap.”

Jezima burst out laughing at his expression as Meral shook her head almost violently. “By all the souls within the Rift of Time, no!” Meral almost shouted.

Martin's smile was wide and genuine. "No one wants it." He spoke looking at Jezima. "I have tried to give it away dozens of times and no one seems to want it."

This caused Meral to join in the laughter with her mother as they looked at him. Jezima finally put her head to his shoulder gently and squeezed his arm now. "What can we do?" She asked him finally.

Martin shook his head. "I have only just found you." He told them. "I will not put you in any danger. I have men coming that will protect you. Two of them for each of you. They are *Hippeis Sedla*. The Spartan Royal Guard."

"What of these... these Wolves of the Blood that Dysea told us of?" Meral asked. "Are they not the Royal Guard?"

Martin lifted his hand and moved it back and forth. "In a manner of speaking, yes." He answered her. "The *Durcunusaan*..."

"Yes, that is what Dysea called them." Meral said.

Martin nodded. "That is part of their mission, yes. However, that is not their only mission."

"What do you mean?" Jezima asked.

"There are no better trained soldiers within the Union than the *Durcunusaan*." Martin told them. "All Spartans are supremely well trained but the *Durcunusaan* and the *Hippeis Sedla*, who are part of the *Durcunusaan*, they endure much more training than normal. It is more, how do I say this, it is more intensive, more deeply involved and far more dangerous. You must be chosen for the *Hippeis Sedla*. Of them few hundred that are asked each year, only three or four actually complete the training. The regular *Durcunusaan* conduct many different missions and varied other jobs within their purview as Wolves of the Blood, but the *Hippeis Sedla* have only one mission. They protect my family. That is their purpose. It is not something that I wanted or started, but it is what it is and I couldn't change it now even if I wanted too. No one would let me. Four of them should be arriving soon and their mission will be to protect you both. That will be their purpose, above all others."

"I do not wish this Martin." Jezima spoke.

Martin shook his head. "But I do *Staania Tenna*." He told them softly looking back and forth between them. "I have found you now and the moment I saw you I swore to grandfather's spirit that I would keep you safe. That is what I will do." He smiled as he rose to his feet and pulled them both up. "Don't worry, they are not huge, hulking brutes." He said. "You might be very surprised. Do this for me. Times now are unpredictable and I will leave nothing to chance when it comes to you both. Nothing. You are my past! My children's past! Our past! And our future! That is worth protecting at all cost."

Martin turned as Atropos moved slowly up to them from the side. "Atropos?" Martin spoke.

"Chief Elder Delnash has reestablished his link Martin." Atropos spoke. "They have found something."

Martin nodded and curled his arms around Jezima and Meral. "Then let's go find out."

"...Seems Teniri was correct Martin." Delnash spoke from his office once more. His eyes saw Jezima and Meral now standing beside Aricia and For'mya and he bowed his head slightly. "Lady Jezima. Lady Meral. It is an honor beyond words."

Jezima looked taken aback at this but she nodded her head. "Chief Elder Delnash." She stammered finally.

Martin leaned over the star chart table. The Command Building was also built like the MED building and now one wall was gone to reveal Arzoal and Teniri sitting side by side under another tarp that had been erected. "Ok, what are we looking at?" He asked.

"I have 27 feeding the information to Avi now Martin." Delnash continued from his office on Artaaya. "Your Admiral Lorian is tapped in as well."

"Avi, 27, talk to me." Martin spoke to the thin air.

Jezima looked at Aricia. "Avi?" She asked softly. "Sumar's..."

Aricia nodded her head. "Avatar 41." She answered. "We shortened his name many years ago and we have called him Avi ever since we discovered him."

"Avatar 41... that was... that was my brother's Avatar!" Meral gasped.

Aricia nodded her head with a smile. “Yes he was.”

“He speaks to them as if they are... as if they are alive.” Jezima commented.

For'mya nodded now. “To Martin, they are alive. Just as any of us.”

Jezima turned back as she heard the mechanical sounding voice begin to speak.

-27 was able to download the data scroll retrieved from Elder Teniri's cave Martin- Avi spoke now. -We have overlaid known star charts to compensate for linear and well as stellar drift and temporal shift. The charts before you are as accurate as we can make them-

“So enlighten me.” Martin spoke.

Jezima looked up at Aricia's face again and into her amazing blue eyes. *[He is different Aricia.]* She said softly speaking in a whisper within the Etheric realm. Jezima had never seen such expressive eyes as what Aricia and the others had and the color was simply amazing to behold, just as it was in Anja and Dysea's eyes.

Aricia smiled and nodded her head again. *[This is his element Staania.]* She whispered back just as softly. *[This is where he is at his finest. Everything else is pushed back and the leader that he is comes out. It is the same with our son Androcles.]*

-King Martin you will see the line I am tracing now- 27's voice spoke now. -This is the course that Elder Teniri's ship was to take in order to return to Elear. It was actively compensating for any inhabited systems and avoiding them. That is why it appears the ship is moving haphazard at times. The ship conducted its first jump here...- The Star Chart froze and a large orange dot appeared on the table. -It was a short jump to clear the main systems that were inhabited without drawing attention from those who could detect it. Only the Tasmor and Kintaur at this time-

-Though they had not yet attained space flight, both did have satellite systems that could have detected the jump- Avi added.

“Avi, 27, let's fast forward to the important stuff.” Martin spoke, his eyes never leaving the chart. “It was possible that Lorendo intercepted this ship you said. Where?”

-Here King Martin- 27 answered as he adjusted the chart until the light blue line that was the course of Teniri's ship intercepted with one that was a much darker blue. -The dark blue course is the one taken by a VECTOR-Class Attack Cruiser that departed Artaaya exactly twelve point six years after Artaaya was settled-

“Ok... first question.” Martin spoke. “Teniri, you said the ship left the planet you were on only a month before Delnash and the others arrived with the Scourge hot on their tails.”

“Yes.” Teniri answered from her position.

“Then how did the transport not make it out of the Echo quadrant before the surviving Pralors reached Artaaya?” Martin asked. “How many years before you reached Artaaya after discovering Teniri and the others Delnash?”

Delnash thought about that for a second. “Perhaps eight.” He answered.

-Seven point nine to be exact King Martin- 27 chimed in,

Delnash nodded. “Seven point nine then.”

“So we'll say eight years and then another twelve and a half years before Lorendo left with this ship.” Martin said. “Almost twenty-one years. Where was Teniri's transport for those twenty-one years before Fat boy found it?”

Meral could barely contain the yelp of laughter that she wanted to let out at Martin's words and she squeezed For'mya's hand tightly, who looked at her with an equally large smile.

-Without the ship's computer core to confirm it, there is only one hypothesis- Avi spoke from the *ARC ROYAL*. **-And there is no way to confirm it since the Elder Mother Arzoal says the computers were erased of all data when the ship returned to them-**

“What is that Avi?” Delnash asked now.

-Lorendo obtained the transport's Command Codes and was able to pause the automated navigation controls. It would have still been in range of the planet that Elder Mother Teniri and the others were on when they united with the Pralor forces fleeing the Scourge- Avi answered.

“Ok... if I was a mad scientist with a God complex, and I wanted to be a hero, that's what I would do.” Martin said. “Talk to the surviving Pralors, find out what they had done on Elear and discover they had made some really bad monster serum. A serum that could make me a hero if I found some way to use it. Then I would somehow get the Command Codes for the ship and order it to hold in place? Avi, 27, this sound doable to you?”

-There are numerous places within that sector of space where he could have powered down the ship King Martin- 27 answered. **-Several nebulas or large asteroid fields that would both protect and hide the ship-**

-Until he was ready to use it- Avi echoed his fellow Avatar's answer.

“And being the asshole that I am I wouldn't care about the thousands of dragons that ship was supposed to be saving.” Martin said nodding his head. “Yep... sure sounds like Fat Boy.”

“To a tee.” Anja chimed in now.

“Yeah... I'm not liking him even more than I already hate him.” Martin said. “Avi, 27 keep going.”

-This Pralor ship was under the command of Lorendo. He had been named an Elder only thirteen weeks prior-

Martin looked at Delnash in the transmission. “Why is that significant?” He asked.

Delnash had leaned forward in his chair. “It would have meant that his orders would not have been questioned in regards to anything. At that time we were still operating off of our emergency Protocols, which gave Elders absolute authority.” He stated. “It also gave him access to everything he did not have before that. Ships. Personnel. Everything.”

“Like a kid in a candy store.” Martin muttered.

-We are unable to determine if he boarded this ship Martin- Avi spoke now. **-The data suggests that he did and that he is the one that changed its course parameters, but there is no corroborating evidence to what we have-**

“Ok, but for what purpose?” Martin asked openly.

“I believe I can answer that question Martin.” The male voice echoed and they turned to see Muton entering the Command building with Anja at his side.

Anja looked at Martin as she moved up beside For'mya and they shared a soft kiss of love. “Muton was able to find the clues that got us out here Lover.” Anja said. “I figured he could probably help us figure all this out as well considering he has Pralor blood within him. Just like Miseo and all the others that came with him.”

Martin turned fully now and faced him. “*Nubou lae!* I forgot all about that!” He gasped.

Meral looked at For'mya and Anja. “What...?”

For'mya shook her head. “You don't want to know. She answered with a smile.

Meral's lips curled into a smile as she understood the implication and she looked back to Martin.

Muton moved right up beside Martin Jezima saw and no one did anything to stop him. This man was someone that apparently all of them trusted. She watched Martin place his hand on Muton's shoulder affectionately. Anja stood on the opposite side of Jezima and saw her look of puzzlement.

[Muton is the one who protected For'mya and the twins that we told you of. Fedor and Eirene.] Anja told her in that Etheric connection. *[He is Miseso's father.]*

[The one who married Eirene?] Meral asked now.

Anja nodded her head. *[We owe him a debt that we can never repay.]* Anja spoke warmly. *[He made sure For'mya was returned to us and his son has made Eirene happier than...]* Anja smiled as both For'mya and Aricia chuckled, knowing what she was going to say. *[Well... he has made her very happy.]*

"I don't know all the details of what took place, but during my free time since we began this journey, I have been trying to decipher more and more of my grandmother's journals." He spoke from beside Martin and set half a dozen data scrolls on the chart table with one hand while squeezing Martin's arm affectionately in return.

"Hit me with it Muton." Martin spoke now.

Muton picked up one data scroll and handed it to him. "I believe this Lorendo fool picked several hundred Pralors, mostly scientists, to go to Cabelir." Muton told him as Martin began to read. "At first I thought it was out of some sense of misplaced honor that they would return to try and fix what Arete had created. I was wrong. They went there to study them. To try and determine if they had anything useful within their genetic makeup. Something happened and they ended up being taken by these Kavgart. A few of them anyway. As I studied her journals I came to realize she wasn't one of those original Pralors, she was the child of one of the Pralors and a Kavgart. As time passed and more generations of us were born, we looked Kavalian outwardly but we retained the Pralor gene as well. We avoided the other Kavalians and their violence. We advocated peace."

"Bet that didn't go over well with the rest of them." Martin commented.

Muton shook his head. "No it didn't. However, nothing was done to counter the influence we did have until Keleru took power."

Martin looked at him. "Are you saying Keleru was one of you?"

Muton nodded his head. "I wasn't sure until only a few weeks ago. I did not want to come forward to you so soon after the battle with your brother those few weeks ago."

"You're serious about this Muton?" Martin asked him.

Muton nodded his head. "Almost one hundred percent." He answered. "He is not from my generation, but from a later one. Perhaps a generation or two after me. But his age right now is not consistent with a normal Kavalian lifespan. Normal Kavalians, those unaltered down through the generations and those who have not been subjected to biogenic alteration only have a normal lifespan of perhaps ten thousand years. Twelve at most."

Martin turned to look at Anja. "Red?"

"I would have to review the data that we have collected over the years about Kavalians but I'm not going to argue with Muton on this Lover. He is more familiar with Kavalian physiology than I am and I wouldn't second guess him." Anja answered.

Martin turned back to Muton. "How old is he?" He asked.

"I am sixteen thousand four hundred and nine years old Martin." Muton answered him. "Without the skills that many of us have in altering our outward appearance, our fur does tend to hide quite a bit you know..." He said with a smile. "We would never have been able to pass for Kavalians. Keleru has these same skills but he has also been touting our advances in the medical field that he claims keep all of us healthier. Those who have confronted him directly through the years have simply disappeared."

"My brother knew this?" Martin asked.

Muton nodded his head. "To what extent I don't know, but he had to have known there was something was different about him. He must have..."

Jezipa looked at Aricia once more. *[He did not... he did not tell us about this Aricia. A battle with his brother? His brother? Out here? When?]*

Aricia looked at Anja and then to For'mya quickly. *[They will discover it eventually Aricia. Better it come from us.]* Anja spoke softly.

[Melyanna is correct.] For'mya spoke now. She squeezed Meral's hands. *[When we are finished here... we will take you aside and tell you. I promise. You have a right to know and Anja is correct, better it come from us than from someone else.]*

[It isn't good is it?] Meral asked.

For'mya shook her head as her dark brown eyes fell on Martin. *[No.]* She answered. *[It both broke his heart and healed him for many years of sins. If not for our son Androcles and what he did, what he made sure happened even from across the stars, it may have also taken a piece of our Martin's soul.]*

[All of you speak differently about this son Androcles.] Jezima said. *[Why?]*

[Androcles is the oldest of our children and sometimes it seems that...] Anja began. *[It seems like Andro is...]*

[A gift from the very Gods themselves.] For'mya finished Anja's sentence with an almost reverent tone in her voice.

[Avoi.] Aricia and Anja spoke at the same time.

Martin's voice drew them back to the main conversation.

"...it's true, and I don't doubt it, it's probably why he's such an asshole, how does all this tie in with the ship?" Martin asked.

"My grandmother's journals say that two thousand went to this Cabelir..." Muton said lifting another data scroll. "But she only speaks of fifteen hundred being captured. I believe, and I stress I have no hard evidence to support this, I believe that the other five hundred left them on Cabelir and returned to Elear to search the mountain for anything they could find."

Arzoal's head came up now as she listened. "Returned with our ship Muton?" She asked him quickly.

Muton turned to look at her. "Yes, Elder Mother."

Martin looked at Arzoal as well. "Is that possible?" He asked her.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. "Yes! I moved our complete living and breeding caves to another continent entirely a year after we destroyed the mountain. The southern continent was the least populated and I forbid any dragon to return to our former caves or even fly over it. No one questioned this Martin, for we all knew the horrors it had wrought."

"So if these five hundred did return to Elear then no one would have known they were there and they could have found anything." Martin said.

"It's obvious they found something." Arzoal spoke again. "Something that we had not destroyed. Some samples or equipment. It's the only way Lorendo could have gotten his hands on the original serum in order to mutate it as much as he has."

Anja nodded her head. "I have to agree with Arzoal." She said. "They had to have found something Lover."

"But we don't know what!" Martin hissed turning to look at the chart once more. The room was silent for a long moment, no one really knowing what to say as Martin stared at the chart table. At first he just lifted his hand to brush aside the overlays that were in front of him, but then Danny saw it first. They had worked together so long he knew Martin's quirks and oddities almost better than his wives and mates. Danny rose to his feet and moved over to Martin's opposite side.

"What you got running through that head of yours fervon?" He asked softly as everyone looked at them.

Martin held up his right left hand but continued to move the overlays around on the table. He looked up finally. "Avi?"

-I am here Martin-

"Knowing that fat fuck like we do... it's safe to assume that he established some sort of facility to work on what they took from Elear right?" Martin asked.

Avi paused only a moment. **-Given that they had only just arrived on Artaaya within the last decade and that whatever he would have found he would want to keep secret... yes-** Avi answered.

"And he wouldn't have set it up on Artaaya for fear it would be discovered." Martin spoke to no one in particular. "Or that it could infect everyone and ruin his chances at being a savior."

Anja broke away from Meral's side and moved up next to him, squeezing in between Danny and Martin. "I think I see where you are going with this Lover." She spoke.

“What would you do Red?” Martin asked looking at her jade green eyes. “If you had your hands on something that could potentially kill everyone whose eyes you were trying to be a hero for?”

“Establish a base. An outside facility away from mass amounts of people.” Anja replied instantly. “For testing, and as far away from where it could do harm as possible.”

“Of course!” Radra exclaimed.

Delnash leaned forward now as well. “I think I understand as well Martin.” He spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “He also used the time he was gone to scout possible sites to put together this facility.”

“We’re talking about...” Danny looked at the chart. “Christ Skipper... you are talking about a whole lot of territory. Hundreds of light years. Thousands.”

Martin shook his head. “No.” He answered almost excitedly. “Manda you monitoring this?”

Miranda’s cool voice came through the internal speakers and her image fluttered to life from a secondary holo emitter disc. “So far Martin.” She spoke. “And I think I know what you are going to ask.”

“What are the chances they veered off into the unknown?” Martin asked. “A Quadrant of space you have never been in before, with only one ship and almost no chance of any back up getting to you before someone bounced your ass into the next life?”

“If the ship’s commander was any good?” Miranda spoke. “None.”

“All of our warship commanders back then had either fought the Scourge or at the very least out maneuvered them to escape. None of them were beginners Martin, and I find it hard any of them would have done this.” Delnash spoke again.

“Then they would have traced their course back!” Anthylea spoke now coming to her feet.

Martin pointed at her with his finger and a large smile. “Yes! Give that woman a cigar!”

Anthylea looked taken aback, thinking that he had just insulted her, but Tobia quickly took her arm causing Anthylea to look at her. “It is a statement of respect Anthylea.” She said quickly. “A slang that they use to compliment someone.”

Anthylea looked back to Martin quickly who now had a sheepish look on his face. “Sorry.” He spoke softly. “But I’ll hang with the Tasmor anytime. You guys get it!”

“True enough!” Danny agreed.

“That is still a third of the quadrant that he crossed Martin.” Delnash spoke once more. “There must be thousands of habitable planets that he could use.”

Martin shook his head. “Lorendo is a back stabbing, murdering *tukannupae*, but he isn’t stupid. He wouldn’t have set this up on a habitable planet. Too obvious. He would have used a dead planet, or something that would have killed this thing if it ever got loose.” Martin moved the overlays around once more. “Avi, 27, filter out any planet with even a remote chance that it could support life. Only along the course that Lorendo’s ship took and the transport as well until it left the quadrant. You’ve charted the quadrant right 27?”

-Extensively King Martin- 27 answered. –I am removing all designated planets or moons-

“Manda, how many SPIDER Stealth probes you got on board?” Martin asked.

“Forty-seven.” She answered instantly.

-Parameters met- 27 spoke now as the chart table in front of them shifted. –Three hundred and nineteen worlds match the requirements-

“Three hundred!” Delnash gasped. “We do not have the time or resources to search that many worlds Martin!” He told him. “Not to mention that Lorendo would discover this within days of it beginning.”

Martin shook his head. “You won’t be doing anything sir.” Martin told him. “You are just going to win that election.”

“I don’t understand.” Delnash said.

“Manda?” Martin spoke once more.

“E’dira is plotting the overlay now Martin.” Miranda replied.

Anja looked at Martin now, reaching up to turn his face to look at her. “What are you doing Lover?” She asked.

“I’m going to find this place.” Martin spoke. “I’m going to find where he made this thing and I’m going to blow it into fucking atoms!” Martin snarled passionately.

“Lover you can’t.” Anja said. “If you find it, whatever is in the computers of this place could very well save lives. The original base formula will be there.” Anja took his face in her hands. “With that formula, Radra, Duewa and I can make a cure.”

“What then?” Martin asked her gently. “How many of our people die trying to cure others? How many do we lose to the very disease we are trying to fix? The risk is too great! I’m not willing to make that sacrifice Anja. Are you?”

Anja stared at him for a long moment, the doctor within her struggling with the soldier. Finally she shook her head slowly. “No.” She answered him softly.

Martin pulled her into his arms, crushing her petite frame to his body and Anja wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in his chest, inhaling deeply of his delicious mint scent as his aura swarmed around her. She shuddered in the sensations of the unquestioned love for her, for Aricia and For'mya, for all of them that came out in his aura and his resonance. All of the men and women were silent as they watched and realized what this decision meant. They were essentially condemning any who had already been transformed into Svorag to death and all of them knew it. Aricia and For'mya left Jezima and Meral and moved up beside Anja and Martin, pulsing Anja with their female auras. The three of them were the closest of friends as well as devoted lovers and more than anyone, they and their fellow Queens knew just how passionate Anja was about others. She was the one who showed the most emotion in all things, fiery and seemingly out of control at times, but always with purpose. It is why they all loved her so.

Anja looked up into Martin’s face as Aricia and Anja touched her arms. “If you do this, you have to make sure you get it all Martin.” She told him. “Leave nothing to chance. Not even a small portion of this thing can escape.”

Martin nodded. “I’ll take care of it.” He said softly.

Anja reached up on her tip toes and kissed him deeply before pulling back and nodding her head with a deep breath. “Then we will try and work on something from Arzoal’s notes that could possibly inoculate those who have not been infected. Something to delay the infection somehow. At this point anything is better than nothing.”

“Agreed.” Radra said.

“Yes.” Duewa echoed.

Anja looked at Martin. “The *SPIRIT* is here now. She has a fully equipped Research Lab like the one I have on Earth and Hadaria. This includes the Tasmor now so I want Perlyea and her folks involved as well Lover. Anyone with any knowledge of this thing needs to be part of this now.”

Martin nodded his head, knowing not to argue with her. “Done.” He told her seeing the looks of shock from Saydia and the other Tasmor.

Anja took another deep breath and nodded her head once more. “When this is all over, when that fat *ronnus* Lorendo is finally cornered and caught, you give his carcass to me! I want to make sure he experiences all the pain and suffering that he has forced on so many through the years.”

“What are you going to do to him?” Martin asked softly almost not wanting to know the answer.

“I’m going to turn him into one of his creations and then I’m going to stick him in an airlock and watch as he changes and the air is drained out of the airlock and he dies.” Anja snarled savagely before spinning around and heading out of the building, Aricia and For'mya on either side of her.

Danny stepped up next to Martin as Delnash spoke from his office on Artaaya. “Martin, why do I sense that you are no longer the largest threat to Lorendo at this moment?”

Martin couldn’t help but smile now as he watched his three Queens move out into the sunlight. “I ain’t.” He spoke calmly. “He’s done pissed off the wrong person now. Anja’s got a mean streak in her that matches my son and Aricia. And she has the skills to make sure it takes him a long time to die.”

“This is... this is not our way Martin.” Delnash spoke.

Martin turned to look at him. “He’s killed my people now sir.” Martin told him with no malice in his voice. “And he is responsible for what happened here on Ventori. How many lives did the Svorag take here?”

Martin shook his head. “No... this is our problem now. We won’t move against him until all the facts are in, but when the time comes, Lorendo will answer to the Lycavorian people. To the Tasmor people and to the Pralor people.”

Wayonn nodded from his spot where he had remained silent until now. “Spartan Justice.” He spoke the words.

“Spartan Justice.” Helen echoed his words softly as she moved up beside him.

“*Avoi.*” Arzoal’s voice echoed in the air now. “*Avoi.*”

ICARAVA
DARASTRIXI HOMEWORLD
URLKRISIR MAMISS HEADQUARTERS
SULEVFU WOIUEWR CHAMBERS

Scourge Holy Elites. *Disise Ioth Kilnsiri* in the Darastrixu tongue. The right hand of their Queen. No one knew how many of them existed, but without fail they acted with their *Disise Daariv*’s full authority. (Scourge Queen)

Two of them, which was saying a great deal.

Normal communications with the Scourge was done on a regular basis with simple the Scourge Elites that maintained a compound on their largest orbiting station. They remained out of the way most of the time, knowing that the vast majority of Darastrixu hated them. The other species that visited Icarava for trading, pleasure or business hardly ever saw them since they rarely showed their faces outside of their large compound on the space station. This was very different Issver Draque noted to himself. It had been over three hundred years since he had last seen an *Ioth Kilnsiri* and this could not be good for them, so soon after receiving Aviel’s message.

They stood side by side, both of them reaching 1.7 meters in height easily. Each of them was muscular to an extent on their slim bodies, not an ounce of fat showing anywhere from what Issver could tell. He doubted either of them weighed more than 85 kilos, but it was all very solid. Their double skulls were no longer hidden under the helmets which they held under their arms, their heads in the shape of a curved triangle really, with two black eyes on each upper layer of their skulls. Eyes that were not pleasant Issver knew. Each side of their head had two, small finger like appendages that twitched from time to time. This was something left over from their time as an insectoid race, but it also served to set them apart from the simple *Kilnsiri* soldiers for they did not have these appendages. Both of them wore a combination of armor and dark reddish robes on their bodies, and while they had areas on their belts that normally held weapons, these weapons had been removed before entering this chamber. This was something that no scourge liked to do and it showed on the faces of the two *Ioth Kilnsiri*.

Their skin, like all Scourge, was a dark gray in color and very moist on the outside. It was as if they had a sheen of sweat on their bodies all of the time. Whether it was some sort of gland issue with them, or a defensive mechanism, Issver neither cared nor wanted to know. He did not care for the Scourge in the least, nor did he trust them. He had agreed to their arrangement only as a means to keep the Darastrixu from a war that they would eventually lose. Of course the huge amounts of Darastrixu *Hrekim* (coin) that the Scourge paid him and the other members of the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* helped to make him exceptionally wealthy even in Darastrixu terms, and this gave him incredible influence. Issver finally took a deep breath and leaned forward in his high backed chair.

“To what do we owe the honor of a visit from two *Disise Ioth Kilnsiri*?” He asked finally.

One of the *Ioth Kilnsiri* stepped further away from the other. “I am Holy One Vajol. We are here to tell you that Queen Shara is not happy.” He spoke his voice sounding choppy and his words delivered with somewhat of a hissing noise to them. “She does not believe that you have kept to the terms of our agreement properly.”

“In what way *Ioth Kilnsiri* Vajol?” Issver asked.

“She believes there are those among your kind that are hiding one of the names on our list.” Vajol answered him. “You provided us this list but when we were escorted to collect this Maiden female after no verbal response was received we discovered that her home is empty. After questioning several of your kind in the vicinity we discovered she had not been there for years. And that her parents had not been living there for almost a decade.”

“This is all news to us Vajol.” Issver said calmly. “Do you happen to have this maiden’s name? Her family name perhaps.”

The *Ioth Kilnsiri* looked at the data pad he held in his hand. “Ti’shara.” He answered looking back to Issver once more. “Laren Ti’shara.”

Issver kept his face blank and nodded his head. “Perhaps there was some missing information that was not provided. If you would allow us to review this, we will inform you immediately of what we discover.”

“This Maiden belongs to us.” Vajol spoke. “You will discover where she is hiding and you will turn her over to us.”

“As I said, we will review this information and forward it to you immediately.” Issver told him.

“We want a list of all Darastrixi currently assigned to your ships.” The second *Ioth Kilnsiri* spoke now as he stepped forward.

Issver looked at him. “I do not believe we have ever met.” He spoke to him trying to remain in control of his emotions.

“This is Holy One Rekile.” Vajol answered for him. “His position is one of military leader. He commands all forces within this sector of space.”

“I see...” Issver began. “But as a matter of law, you have no authority to review our military records in any form. Our agreement does not specify that particular area. I’m sorry.”

“You deny us this?” Rekile snapped.

Issver nodded his head. “I believe that would be the word, yes.” He replied. “There is no stipulation within our Charter Agreement that has anything to do with the Darastrixi military. I will certainly forward any information that we have in regards to this maiden to you when we receive it. Is that all?”

“Now you dismiss us?” Rekile almost shouted.

“Do you have additional business with us?” Issver asked evenly. “If so, please tell us, otherwise we are very busy”

“How soon will you be forwarding this information?” Vajol asked now.

“I will have someone discover what the error is and then give you directions to her new location as soon as we have it.” Issver answered.

Vajol nodded his head. “Do not make us wait long. The Queen is already upset.”

Issver nodded his own head. “Of course.” He stated.

“Then we will take our leave of you.” Vajol spoke beginning to turn.

“Wait!” Rekile snapped. “We...”

“Will take our leave.” Vajol told him as he turned. Rekile saw something in his eye and acquiesced to follow Vajol out.

The Scourge Holy Elite left the chamber and walked a short distance away where their voices would not be heard. “Vajol they...”

Vajol nodded his oversized head. “They are hiding something.” He interrupted his words. “Yes... I noticed that too.”

“They know of this maiden and her whereabouts.” Rekile said.

“Indeed.” Vajol agreed with him.

“Queen Shara would...” Rekile began.

“The Queen would want us to do what she put us here to do Rekile.” Vajol told him. “We are her Holy Elites for this sector of Darastrixi space. The dictators and executors of her divine will. Let us do our jobs. Do you have contacts high enough within your Converts to discover anything about this maiden?”

Rekile got a handle on his emotions and thought for a moment. “Perhaps.” He said. “I have never asked them to inform on other Darastrixi however.”

Vajol nodded his head. “Nor have I of my converts. But now we must. Something is going on and we need to find out what it is.” He said. “I hate these monsters but they have never done this before. Their actions warrant a closer look and investigation.”

Rekile nodded. “I will see to it.” He said.

“I will inform the Queen and what we are doing.” Vajol spoke. “We may need her divine guidance.”

Rekile bowed his head. “You will give her my undying love and service?” He asked.

Vajol nodded his head. “Of course, just as I will give her mine.” He replied. “She has gifted us both with fine brood offspring.”

“She has.” Rekile agreed.

“Then let us do what she bade us to do and perhaps we will find ourselves in her embrace for another night of decadence soon.” Vajol spoke.

“There is no greater place or service I wish to have.” Rekile said. “I will return in a few hours with what I was able to discover.”

Issver sat back in his chair and exhaled heavily. “This is not good.” He finally spoke aloud.

“How do the Scourge know more about our own people than we do Issver?” Nyso Mser spoke up now.

Issver rose from his chair. “Everyone remain calm.” He told them. “We do not have any real idea about what is going on.”

“I should think it is obvious!” Another *Vrrarhoinpa* snapped. Lenrak Letai had been one of the strongest advocates for this agreement for it meant the *Darastrixi* did not have to go to war and he could enrich himself without really doing anything. “They are searching for the same maiden that Aviel Em’morr took!”

“Calm yourself Lenrak.” Tinoz Vors spoke evenly, his deep voice sounding perfect from a dragon of his size.

“The Scourge will...” Lenrak started to say.

“The Scourge monsters will do nothing!” Another *Vrrarhoinpa* entered the discussion now. His name was Numalt Denran, the youngest *Vrrarhoinpa* on the *Sulevfu Woiewr* at sixty-three thousand years old and a former Sand Strider Battalion member. “This is our world and they dare not anger us while they are here!”

“We warned that this agreement was going to backfire on us.” Nyso commented.

“What were we supposed to do?” Lenrak stammered.

“Not agree to this!” Numalt snapped.

“Enough!” Issver barked out. “We all know where we voted on this.” He declared. “It divided this very chamber for three decades! We must... we cannot have that division again.”

Issver moved in front of them. “I made some personal inquires before we met with the Scourge. Aviel Em’morr did in fact leave this very morning aboard the *DARASTRIXETHE*-Class Dreadnought *LEVXIERIV*. If I am to understand correctly, General Dytin was with him as well, for this is his Command Ship. Two other warships departed with the *LEVXIERIV* as well as six Mark Eight military transports configured for passengers. Those left from six different port facilities throughout *Darastrixi* space at the same time.”

“The Commanding General of all *Darastrixi* Forces has deserted us as well?” Lenrak exclaimed.

“This does not help us!” Issver roared now, motioning with his hand to another side door and watching as his senior aide moved through the door into the main chambers. “You all know my senior aide Deit Roel. I had him asking questions of certain people while we were meeting with the Scourge. We all need to listen to him now, for he has information that we need to hear!”

All of them looked at Issver seriously now and even Tinoz took on an expression of surprise and hesitancy. “Issver... what is it old friend?” He asked him. “What have you discovered?”

Issver motioned the young *Jiilhoinpa* forward. “Colonel... please share with us what you have discovered.” The young male moved into the center of the chambers and looked at the members of the *Sulevfu Woiewr* nervously. He turned his eyes to Issver and saw him nod his head. “I have never asked you to not be honest and open with me Deit, now I ask the same for all of us.”

The *Darastrixi* Colonel nodded his head and took a deep breath. “I did not have much time to make the inquires that the *Sulevfu Woiewr* required of me but I was able to discover much more than what *Koppentotz*

Aviel's message revealed." He explained. "The *Ioth Kilnsiri* were correct about her name. Her birth was registered twenty-six point seven years ago by her parents, but shortly after that she disappeared. She was never enrolled for any schooling by any institution nor was she given any medical treatment by any Medical Facility. I was not able to check them all, but I did check those within the district she was born in. Her name is Laren Ti'shara, daughter to Yokra and Robati Ti'shara. And Ladur Peren, the youngest *Vrrarhoinpa* hatched to Chrap and Jarod Peren."

"What does this all mean?" Lenrak asked now.

"Let him finish Lenrak!" Yeren Ir'iss spoke for the first time.

"Both *Koppentotz* Aviel and General Dytin were raised together." Deit continued his report. "They were born only a half kilometer apart and lived only three homes away from each other for centuries. They were considered the closest of friends by those I was able to inquire of in so short a time. They were never apart and always getting into trouble together." Deit looked at the members. "They were, and still are from what I can determine at least, part of the Ancient Religious Sect that still worships *Wer Zezhuanth*. They still honor and believe in the Ancient Scrolls left to us by *Wer Zezhuanth*."

"Religious fanatics!" Lenrak exclaimed. "Perfect!"

"Simply because they still believe in the ways of *Wer Zezhuanth* does not mean they are fanatics!" Yeren barked.

"The Scrolls of *Wer Zezhuanth* have been considered obsolete for millennia!" Lenrak retorted. "No one even studies them anymore!"

The Colonel looked at the much older Darastrixi. "I still believe in the Ancient Scrolls." Deit spoke. "I still follow the teachings of *Wer Zezhuanth* as well as I am able. Does that make me a fanatic as well Tiichia Lenrak?"

Issver had returned to his chair beside Tinoz and he looked at his senior aide intently now. "Deit... tell us of this Scroll. The Prophecy of the Souls."

Deit shook his head. "I did not study the Scrolls as intently as others *Tiichia* Issver. I would not be the right one to tell you what the Prophecies mean."

Issver nodded his head. "Indulge us Colonel." He spoke.

"The *Lorsvek ar Sepas*, the Prophecy of Souls, it foretells of the return of the *Dahakoan Tiichia* Issver, just as *Koppentotz* Aviel told you. *Wer Zezhuanth* will bestow his essence to six individuals from across the stars, they will wield a power unlike any that have come before them, and it is they who will be the heralds of the Darastrixi and what is to come." Deit spoke calmly and evenly. "Now and into the future."

"And how many of our people still believe in these ancient teachings and myths?" Lenrak hissed the questions.

Deit met his eyes. "Far more still believe in the prophecies and myths than you might think *Tiichia* Lenrak." He stated.

"Then they are fools!" Lenrak shouted. "And fanatics!"

"There are many who would call you a fool for not believing *Tiichia* Lenrak." Deit spoke.

Lenrak came to his feet in a huff now and he glared at the younger Darastrixi. The look bounced completely off the military officer who glared back at the man unafraid of him. Issver stood up. "No one will question the dedication or honor of Colonel Deit in my presence!" He barked. "Not even you Lenrak. Now sit down!"

"What must we do to stop them and return them here Colonel?" Nyso Mser asked in a much more calm and respectful tone of voice.

Deit looked at him and his face and expression softened somewhat. "Stop them *Tiichia* Nyso?" He asked.

Nyso nodded his head. "Stop them from leaving yes. We need to speak with these children and discover what they know."

Deit looked confused. "Forgive me *Tiichia* Nyso, but *Koppentotz* Aviel's message clearly states that he has taken them to be united with the other *Dahakoan*. Two of which are known to be Lycavorian. If this happens there will be no returning so that they can be talked too. They will have far more knowledge than any in this room."

"What do you mean?" Nyso asked. "Who are these Lycavorian? I have never heard of such a species."

“They are a minor species from the Alpha Quadrant, but one that is on the military’s threat list because of their strength and warlike nature.” Tinoz answered.

“The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* states that *Wer Zezhuanth* has bestowed a piece of his essence to six individuals across the stars.” Deit told them. “When they are united, his essence will be complete and all six of them will receive his blessing and wisdom. His life experiences. They will know what path they will take when they are united together. At least that is what the prophecy states in my interpretation of it.”

“Issver we need to...” Lenrak began to talk quickly and Issver held up his hand to quiet him before he began.

“I have already dispatched three of our cruisers to intercept General Dytin and return these two individuals to Icarava. *Yobhakcho* Darrod Nilich is an excellent officer and I have worked with him before. (Major) General Dytin trained him. He will not fail us.” He spoke lowering his hand. “Those involved will face justice for whatever crime we deem they have committed when they are returned. Right now I suggest that we quickly discover why it is that the Scourge are so interested in this single maiden female. I want scholars from every branch of the government gathered and I want the offices and computers of *Koppentotz* Aviel, Chalith, the head of the *Livaiji Sulevfu* and all of his senior staff seized and gone through by these scholars for whatever information they can find. We will meet again in twelve hours’ time and go over what we have discovered, for at that time we will need to tell the Scourge something. That is all the time I can reasonably stall them.”

“And what if they do not like the answers we give to them Issver?” Lenrak asked.

Issver met his eyes. “Let us wait and find out what we need too and then go from there.” Issver told him. Lenrak paused for a moment and then nodded his head.

Issver rose to his feet. “Then we are done for now. We will reconvene in twelve hours my friends.”

PREMONITION

SEPTEMBER 8TH 2575 0500 HOURS

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO PRALOR STATION

Mari sighed in blissful delight as Deion’s lips and nose nuzzled the back of her neck and ears lightly while his powerful arms curled around her body to grasp her large breasts and pull her tightly against his equally naked body. The warmth generated by his body was incredible and now that he had turned her, she would also begin to exhibit a higher body temperature. This meant that unless it was very cold, they no longer needed anything more than a simple sheet to cover their naked bodies. Mari still could not believe the events of these last weeks and months, but she was sure of one thing. Having Deion’s arms wrapped around her was something that she could no longer live without. Her tiny frame fit against his like the matching pieces of a puzzle. He had chosen her, of all the females in the universe, he had chosen her. And she had chosen him. Now that she was also wolf, this meant far more to her than anything. Not only did their bodies mesh together seamlessly, but their minds had become almost one as well. Whatever else it meant, this fact told Mari that they were meant for each other by something that was far beyond their comprehension. A year ago this type of relationship would have terrified her, but now she embraced it. His kisses, his touch, his aura, it made her complete.

Now that she was wolf and his wife and mate, he had been schooling her in the intricacies of being wolf whenever they had the chance. The first time she shifted her form she could not get her four legs under her at all. She flopped around on the deck for nearly fifteen minutes, Deion trying to help her but knowing she needed to find her own way as well. She knew it had to be a laughable experience for any who saw it, and this made her feel embarrassment, but surprisingly, not one person laughed at her. Finally it was Deion, his brother Denali and Sadi and Ne’Veha who had stood around her on all sides in their wolf forms and steadied her as she got accustomed to standing on four legs. Once she had command of that, it was off to the races. Mari simply loved being in her wolf form because of the freedom she felt. Within hours she was running throughout the landing bay as gracefully as a wolf five times her age. She learned very quickly and this only added to the premise that she was meant for this. At least to her.

Also, now that she was wolf, her sexual drive was much higher. Her desire for Deion was so powerful and pure since he had turned her and they had been making love as often as time allowed, and doing so in places she would never have imagined. Even as large as his manhood was, it fit within her depths as if it had been made specifically to fill her. It helped that she was so tiny, barely reaching his shoulders with her head when they were standing next to each other, and he could and did carry her all around when she was impaled upon his manhood, loudly whimpering and squealing out her enchantment. She loved the feel of him, the taste of him, the smell of him, and when he pulsed her now with his male wolf aura Mari became almost wet at her center instantly. Her entire body would ignite with a desire and burning she had never felt before, her nipples becoming like hard nubs, her whole body becoming charged with sexual energy. Outside of their bed when he pulsed her with his aura, it was with the utmost love and respect and honor and it allowed Mari to bask in the knowledge that he belonged to her totally. Last night had been no different and they had made each other howl in delight for several hours before falling asleep in each other's arms. This is how he woke her up now, and it made her feel simply divine.

"Are you awake?" Deion whispered in her ear.

Mari chuckled playfully. "How could I not be with your lips dancing across my skin." She answered him.

"*Pen enyla forn* Mari Leonidas." Deion whispered into her ear.

His words, spoken with such emotion in them, caused Mari to shudder in bliss and she rolled over on the bed, folding her body against his as she took his face in her hands and stared at his beautiful face.

"*Pen enyla forn* Deion Leonidas." She told him with bright green eyes and a wide smile. "More than I could ever put into words."

This made Deion smile and his arms pulled her tighter. He reached up with his hand and used one finger to pull some of her brownish red hair from her cheek. "What?" He asked her. "You look like you have a question."

Mari shook her head. "No, not anymore." She answered. "I did... I wondered how I could feel for you what I do and feel it so completely. But I haven't since you turned me. I can feel it within you, smell it within you. Technically you are not even eighteen years old, yet I know within you is a wisdom far beyond such years. It makes me love you so much more."

Deion smiled. "Not if you ask my mothers or the *Feravomir*." He said playfully. "I'm trouble and always have been. Just like Andro."

Mari matched his smile. "But you are all mine." She said.

"Yes I am." He said brushing his lips over her forehead. "You... I know you have had relationships before Mari... but you only hide one from me. I have claimed you as my wife and mate, and you belong to me, you do not need to be afraid of what you share with me. I will not feel threatened if you had feelings for another."

Mari nodded her head. "I know. It's not what you think though." She replied. "No man, no one has ever done to me what you do Deion. It is beyond glorious."

Deion's eyebrow lifted. "No man?" He asked her with a sheepish grin. "Is there... is there something I should know about you Mari?"

Mari slapped his face playfully and smiled at him. "*Igord!*" She hissed at him. "There was a woman. A Tasmor."

"Like those my father and mothers are with now?" He asked.

Mari nodded her head. "I was with my mother for several months on their homeworld. There was a young woman, she was my age, and she was... she was beautiful Deion. She was the daughter of their leader, the Sovereign Regent. Her name was Emylea."

Deion rolled over onto his back pulling Mari with him. She settled on to his chest as he used his arms to pull them into a sitting position with his back against the wall and Mari settled her hips onto his lap and sat up. She could feel his soft, but still exceptionally large cock press against her center but Mari knew instinctively that nothing would happen now. She was his wife and mate now and he would be able to sense when it was time for them to give pleasure to each other, and this was not one of those times. His hands came to rest on her hips and he looked at her intently as she dropped her hands to his expansive and insanely muscular and well

defined chest and simply dragged her fingers across what was now hers completely. His skin, his abdomen, his chest, his entire being.

“It was strange really...” Mari continued then. “Almost from the first moment I met her I could feel that we would be together. She felt it too. She told me as much one night after...” Mari looked at him and saw that his face was genuinely listening to her without other typical male thoughts going through his mind. This was one of the many reasons that Mari found herself so utterly vexed by him. Most Pralor males of his age would have been concerned only with finding their own satisfaction any way they could and they wouldn’t have been able to carry on a cognizant conversation with any woman. Perhaps it was because he was wolf, and these normal late teen urges had no effect on him. He spoke and thought like a fully grown man of many years. Of course, it helped that he shared the memories and values of both his parents, passed to him through their Etheric bond as all Lycavorians did with their children.

“With her it was almost like it is with you Deo. It was passionate and intense and it made me feel free and happy. Emylea too. We talked of so much when we were together, we are very much alike.” Marti told him completely unafraid to share her feelings with him.

“Have you kept in contact with her?” He asked finally.

Mari shook her head. “Relations between the Tasmor and my people were not very good to begin with. They didn’t trust us and we really didn’t do anything to change that. For Emylea to continue a relationship with me after we had left would not have been good for her. Once mother and I left we only spoke once. As much as we hated it I think both of us realized that there could be nothing between us, no matter how much we may have wanted it.”

“You cared deeply for her then.” Deion spoke. “It comes out in your voice.”

Mari nodded. “Like I told you, we were so much alike it was scary sometimes. We became the very best of friends so quickly that it shocked many people. When other Tasmor found out we were sleeping together Emylea didn’t care. She even flaunted it more. I didn’t mind either.”

“Did she get into trouble? After you left?” Deion asked.

Mari shook her head. “No.” She answered with a knowing smile. “Kind of hard to get into trouble for doing exactly what her mother was doing?” Mari saw the confusion on his face and smiled. “My mother was sleeping with Emylea’s mother Saydia and her lover Anthylea at the same time. And Anthylea is a Tasmor Breeder.”

“Oh.” Deion said confused. “What does that mean?”

“The Tasmor are an almost entirely female species.” Mari said. “They have males but their numbers are very few. Over the generations some Tasmor females evolved into Breeders. They have male and female organs, but the male parts are the more dominant with the Breeders. My mother told me...” Mari blushed slightly. “My mother told me that Anthylea was quite well endowed and was exquisitely good at using it.”

“Oh... I see.” Deion stammered as he sat up a little straighter. “I think.” He looked at her. “Emylea was like this? One of these Breeders?”

“What? Oh no!” Mari replied her eyes going wide as she realized what he must have thought. “No!” She exclaimed. “Gods no!” She leaned forward and kissed him deeply. “No Deo my beautiful man, you are the most superbly gifted specimen of a man that I have ever had and I will never want more than that. Or desire another.”

“That’s good.” Deion told her with a shy grin. “Mari you did not need to hide this from me.”

Mari smiled and nodded. “I know.” She replied. “Part of me... I guess part of me did not want to let go of what Emylea and I shared now that I have found you.”

“Then don’t.” Deion told her causing her to look at him with wide eyes.

“What?” She gasped.

“Does this Emylea feel the same way for you Mari my love?” He asked her.

Mari stared at him with those gorgeous eyes and shook her head. “I... I haven’t spoken to her in almost two years Deo. I don’t know.”

“Did she make you happy Mari?” He asked.

Mari met his eyes as he sat up and his arms pulled her closer to him. She naturally encircled his broad shoulders tighter with her arms and stared in to his eyes. “Not as happy as I am now Deo.” She told him. “Nothing could make me happier than being with you now and forever more.”

Deion smiled. "I don't doubt that Mari. You tell me that in your scent and your aura and your resonance. Just as you make me happier than I have ever been or will ever be. But I am not so selfish with my love for you that I would take from you something else that makes you very happy. This Emylea is not another male, and it wouldn't matter even if she was one of these Breeders as you called them, she is still a female. Is she not?"

Mari nodded her head. "Yes, of course."

"Mari you are wolf now." Deion told her. "I am in your blood just as deeply as you are in mine. Neither of us will, we could not want another of the opposite sex. No man could make you feel as I do and no woman can make me feel as you do. Because we are wolves and mates this is not possible unless one of us dies and our bodies change once more back to normal."

Mari smiled at him and leaned close to run the tip of her tongue over his lips. "Desiring only you for the rest of my life? Never even considering another? Oh, I like that Deo my love. I like that very much."

Deion grinned. "Then if there is something still there when you next meet her Mari, do not be afraid to show it."

"And you... you would do nothing?" She asked. "You would not want to be with us both?"

Deion shook his head. "You are all I will ever need." He told her. "I know there are ways..." He looked away shyly. "I have heard my six mothers speaking in private when they did not know I was there. I have heard them say that they can make each other feel things that my father cannot. This does not make them love him any less, it makes them love him more."

Mari reached up and traced his jaw with her finger. "You are so very different Deo." She said softly.

"That is a good thing I hope." He said.

Mari laughed softly and kissed him once more, loving how his arms crushed her close and he quickly dominated their kiss, causing her blood to begin to warm. She could feel it clearly now and it never ceased to amaze her. He pulled away before his kiss could incite them both and he smiled at her.

"As much as I would love to feast on you now, both of us need food." He told her. "And we need to ready ourselves for our mission."

Mari nodded quickly and got her feelings and desires under control. It was one of the very first things that Eliani and Sadi had shown her once she became wolf. She could reign in her desires and keep them in check even when around Deion and his aura was swarming her senses in a non-sexual way. "You are correct." She said with a deep breath.

Deion shifted on the bed and threw his legs over the side and stood up easily with Mari wrapping her legs around his waist and smiling at him. "Then we must shower and go eat." He told her as he began to move across the small room carrying her as if she weighed no more than a feather. "When we are done with this mission I intend to have nothing but desert for days."

Mari grinned and squeezed him tighter. "As long as I am able to partake as well." She told him.

Deion smiled as he stepped into the shower. "That is very much my intent." He said. "Yes, indeed."

"...Do such a thing *Koppentotz* Aviel?" Andro growled out the words as he trembled with anger.

The Mark II Neural Booster was fully active in the cargo bay of the *PREMONITION* where they had the most open space. Andro, Dorian, Elynth, Ryner, Sarlana and Murano were present in the cargo bay together as Andro initiated the communication with Laren and Ladur. When it activated, they discovered that their soul sister and brother had also gathered a few others with them, among them *Koppentotz* Aviel and General Dylin. Laren had filled them in quickly on what had transpired so far, including what Aviel Em'mor had done, though neither she nor Ladur seemed particularly upset about this.

"Forgive me Androcles but I felt I had to." Aviel answered him honestly. "As a member of the government I felt it my obligation to let them know what was happening. I did not give specifics, but they had to know that all of you exist. That you have returned!"

"It was foolish and arrogant! What were you thinking?" Sarlana snapped now looking at him in the Etheric generated transmission. "They will be looking for you now!"

Androcles looked at Laren in the transmission, seeing her dual colored azure and cobalt eyes dancing in the light happily. "*Arande?*"

They saw everyone where she was turn to look at her with wide eyes as Andro spoke in the ancient Lycavorian language that none of them understood. “*Pen taine tye fervon. Ladur mornar pen fes.*” I trust him brother. Ladur and I both.)

“*Forn wen inniel arande? Fervon?*” (You are sure)

Ladur nodded his huge head this time. “*Evell wen, jainn.*” He answered. (We are yes)

Andro nodded his own head then. “*Eana pen gur taine inalo forn fes.*” He said evenly. (Then I will trust in you both)

That is when the young Darastrixi pushed away from the wall and moved closer to the group. They had seen him in the transmission but said nothing for no one made to introduce him. He seemed very fit, as had most Darastrixi that they had seen so far, but he appeared to be more thickly muscled than Aviel or Dalis for instance. He appeared to be in excellent physical shape and his movements were measured and careful. A military man if Androcles had to guess, and a well-trained one.

“Why do you speak in a language we cannot understand if you wish us to trust you?” He spoke looking at the image of Androcles in the transmission. His deep but even voice carried a tenor of suspiciousness and distrust in it.

Dytin looked almost horrified that he had spoken in such a manner. “*Yobhalcho* Dariel, you are out of line!” He spat. “You will stand down immediately!”

Dariel looked at his General. A man he worshiped and had for decades. “*Inidra* Dytin, you tasked me with a mission. I cannot do that mission if I do not know what is going on. Who are these individuals and why is there a Darastrixi among them? Why am I reduced to being the protector of a child maiden?”

Laren whirled on him. “I am no child!” She snapped. “Or would you like another lesson in objective reality?”

Andro looked surprised but it was Dorian who spoke now. “You assigned someone to protect her?” He asked. “I bet that didn’t go over well.”

“No, it did not.” Dytin agreed.

“*Inidra* Dytin, Laren does not need a protector.” Dorian told him not seeing Laren’s face light up in pride at his words.

Dytin looked at Dorian with what could have been a lopsided grin. “Yes, I am beginning to see that Dorian.” He answered.

In the few times he had spoken to the brothers he found them to be honest and very open. They would be considered children in age, at least to a Darastrixi, but Dytin Cadat knew the two young men before him had seen more combat than even most of the Sand Strider battalions. Their eyes betrayed far more knowledge and experience with death than most would ever know, the same eyes he saw within Laren and Ladur. It was Sarlana who settled things with the young Darastrixi *Yobhalcho*.

“*Yobhalcho* Dariel?” She spoke soothingly. “Are you any kin to Jaerl Dariel?”

Matum Dariel looked at the Darastrixi woman in the transmission with surprise in his eyes. Though seven hundred and thirty-nine years old himself, he was still considered to be what would amount to a teenager in most cultures. He had been orphaned at a young age, a mining explosion having claimed both of his parents. They were newly joined and he was their only child at the time. He had become a ward of the Darastrixi people and as with most wards of the state he was given to the military. Matum grew with the Darastrixi military as his family. He knew nothing else and he excelled at all he did. He didn’t know it, but Dytin had taken notice of him early in his career, and quickly had him transferred to the Sand Strider Battalions. It was here that Matum had truly come into his own and Dytin had watched as he had carved a name for himself. An officer with an exceptional record but one who was also very reserved. His men were his life and he took care of them, forsaking all other things. He had no life outside of the Sand Strider Units and this is what made him so rigid. It was his only failing.

“He is my... he was my grandfather.” Matum answered softly.

“And a finer example of a Darastrixi does not exist.” Sarlana told him.

Matum continued to stare at her. “My grandfather died many thousands of years ago in the Vile Time. I never knew him or my grandmother.” He spoke, his words holding an angry tone to them. “How could you know my grandfather unless...” His eyes went wide. “You are...”

Sarlana nodded her head. "I am the same as your grandfather was young Matum. And your grandmother. They were two of my closest friends. And I am over four hundred thousand years old. Four hundred and forty-two thousand to be exact. But don't tell anyone I said that."

"You are... then you are *Doraanar!*" Matum gasped in shock. "Only another *Doraanar* would have known my grandparents!"

"And know them well I did." Sarlana spoke. "Your grandparents and I would meet every three days on the Concourse for dinner."

"You are the last of the *Doraanar!*" Matum gasped aloud his face now more animated than Dytin had ever seen him. His dazzling Paris green eyes fell upon Dytin. "*Inidra* we..."

"Matum... did your parents trust in what your grandparent's role was?" Sarlana asked him.

Matum nodded his head. "Oh yes *Doraanar!*" He answered. "I was very young when... when my parents passed into the next life, but I do remember them speaking with great reverence of the *Doraanar!*"

"Did you trust in them?" Sarlana asked.

"Of course!" Matum answered.

"Then I ask that you trust in me now." Sarlana spoke. "There is much going on that you do not understand I know. This knowledge will come to you in time, but now is not that time. You trust your general?"

"Yes *Doraanar.*" He replied. "Without question."

"Then trust in what he is doing and what he is asking of you." Sarlana told him. "And when we are all together you and I will sit and speak of times past and I will tell you what is happening young Matum."

Matum Dariel nodded his head instantly. "As you wish *Doraanar.*" He said reverently.

Sarlana looked at Andro and nodded as she lifted his hand and placed it on his chest. "I will speak with Matum when the time comes." She said. "His grandparents were dear friends to me and he will know his history now. You and Dytin need to plan for the unexpected now."

Andro nodded his head. "Thank you *Doraanar.*" He said softly.

"It will be just as important to me as it will be to him." Sarlana said. "The time grows near Androcles and I feel odd now. Just as you and Dorian described to me. And it is growing more powerful."

"Like we are getting closer to it?" Murano asked her seeing her eyes shift to look at him.

"Yes." Sarlana said. "Exactly like that."

"Your continued interaction with us as Praetorians is bestowing to you our ability to sense the Scourge." Murano said. "The feeling is getting stronger because we are getting closer to their territory."

"It is not a pleasant sensation." Sarlana said.

"No, it is not." Murano agreed.

Sarlana took a deep breath. "Then do what you must, but Laren and Ladur come before all else. You know this. All of you." She watched the three of them nod and she nodded her own head. "I will be speaking with Sadi and Ne'Veha in the cockpit if you need me. They are such pleasant company along with your other wives and mates."

Andro watched as she walked out of the Mark II Booster's core and then he looked back to Dorian, who was smiling. "She got you *fervon.*" He said.

"I am pleasant!" Andro protested.

Dorian chuckled. "About as pleasant as a bad case of Folcani Avian Fever."

Laren's burst of hysterical laughter when she heard that drew their attention back to the transmission and those in it. All of them were looking very confused except for Laren.

"*Inidra* Dytin, what are the possible responses that the *Sulevfu Woieuwr* can implement." Androcles asked with an embarrassed smile.

Dytin stepped closer. "I have trained most of our officer Corps these last centuries Androcles. I know what they will do and who they will send after us. I developed most of the tactics that we now use." He told him. "Knowing them as I do, they will send two, perhaps three ships after us. They will need to push fast and hard with the advance we already have. All nine of our ships are now in a long range patrol formation but..."

"Wait... nine?" Andro gasped. "I thought you were only coming with one! Where did nine suddenly come from? Why do you have nine ships? How many people are we talking about here?"

"My three warships and six transports." Dytin answered him. "Each transport has roughly five thousand people on them."

“Thirty thousand!” Murano stammered.

“I could not ask them to leave their families behind!” Dytin barked. “We...”

Aviel touched his arm and moved up beside him. “Androcles, there are many of our people who believe as we do. We follow the way of *Wer Zezhuanth* and...”

“His name is Dadrien.” Dorian spoke now.

Aviel blinked his eyes. “What? You... how could you know this? His name was lost so long ago and we...”

“Not lost *Koppentotz* Aviel...” Dorian said. “Simply forgotten. We have not forgotten.”

Aviel was stunned into silence as were all of them as they stood in the transmission with the exception of Laren and Ladur. “And the *Dahakoan* will have his knowledge and will so that...” He said softly. He turned as Laren came up beside him and took his arm.

“So that we can return what was once lost.” She finished the statement for him.

Aviel looked at her intently. “You have known child?” He asked.

Laren nodded her head as Ladur moved closer. “It was not yet time to reveal this.” He spoke. “Now it is time.”

Aviel turned back to Andro and Dorian. “Dadrien?”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes.” He told him. “What were you going to say?”

Aviel shook his head gathering his thoughts. “I was... yes... there are many among our people who follow the Scrolls that Dadrien left for us Androcles. However, we are not looked upon in the same light as the majority.”

“You are oppressed?” Andro asked.

Aviel shook his head. “No, nothing like that.” He answered. “Most would consider us odd. We adhere to his teachings while balancing his word with the present and the future. We make others uncomfortable because they have forgotten most of what he taught us and left for us.”

“And the Scourge despised him.” Dytin added quickly knowing that Androcles would understand that above all else.

Andro met his eyes. “They would actually come after your families?”

Dytin looked at the deck where he was and then back to him. “I do not know for sure. Our leaders have capitulated to the Scourge for so long that they might not see it the same way we do. They either do not see what the Scourge are doing or they are turning a blind eye hoping to keep the status quo.”

“General... there is no status quo with the Scourge.” Murano spoke now. “You either become part of them or you are enslaved. Many of your own people died trying to protect mine. They will not forget this!”

Dytin nodded his head. “On that we agree Praetorian Murano.” He told him. “Aviel and I, many of us, we believe it is only a matter of time before the Scourge move against us in force. Next year, a hundred years, or a thousand years from now, it does not matter. They will come for us when they have the power and numbers to do so.”

“And they would have no qualms about coming after your families to discover what they know.” Andro said with a nod.

Dytin nodded. “We could not leave them Androcles.”

“I understand.” He said quickly. He lifted his P1 and began typing on it. “I will not have innocents put in harm’s way while we do this. Will they fire on their own ships?”

Dytin shook his head slowly. “That I do not know. I would say it depends on how much pressure the Scourge put on them. There is one of their Holy Elites based on our largest space station. So they always have a presence and can attempt to monitor what we do. He was usually the one who facilitated the transfer of our Maiden females.”

Murano moved up close to Androcles now. “Just the one?” He asked.

Dytin nodded his head. “That we know of. That have a detachment of normal Elites on the station but they rarely come out of the compound we allow them to use. Anything else they may have within this compound we do not know about. I have had my men watching it for centuries but now that I am gone...”

“Are they the same as...?” Murano began to ask.

Dytin nodded once more. “I know what you are going to ask and yes.” He told him. “They have changed very little since you fought them in the last war. Their looks are more refined and they seemed to be more

intelligent now but they are essentially the same. The normal Elites are more muscular now and they can operate as independent units as well.”

“Then they have evolved?” Murano asked.

Dytin nodded again. “From when you last fought them yes, but since discovering what Aviel showed me, the experiments they have been doing on those Maiden females that they take, I do not know.”

Andro looked up and focused his attention on Dytin. “General, send all the transports and two of your warships to the coordinates Laren is giving to you now.”

Dytin turned as Laren came up beside him and was typing on the data pad that she had. Androcles had passed her the information through their Etheric connection easily and she held it out to him. He looked at the pad briefly and then to Androcles. “For what purpose Androcles?” He asked.

“Those coordinates are across the border and out of Scourge space.” He spoke. “I will have added protection waiting there to meet them. When they arrive tell them to hold position for exactly one hour. My ships will be there first and they will not be able to detect them. They will use that hour to insure that you were not followed. Once they have determined it is safe, they will contact your lead ship and then escort you to a safe haven. All of your ships have Quantum Drive cores, yes?”

Dytin nodded. “Yes, of course.” He looked at Andro. “Your people have developed them as well?” He asked with some surprise.

Andro smiled. “We have come a long way since discovering my grandfather’s ship on our old homeworld.”

Dytin smiled. “So it would appear. Far more than what our scholars ever envisioned it appears.”

“They will escort you to where the rest of our main force is waiting.” Andro told him. “When we are done at the station, we will join with them and continue on to meet my father and mothers.”

“Wait... we must...” Dytin began to speak but Laren took his arm.

“I will explain to you what will happen Inidra.” She said softly. “There is much going on that all of you will be made aware of.”

Dytin didn’t hesitate Andro saw and this more than anything made him far more at ease. “So be it.” He said. “I will order them away within the hour.” He told Andro.

“We will talk in detail when we are together General.” Andro told him. “I give you my word.”

Dytin stood a little straighter. “And the word of a *Dahakoan* is his honor.” He spoke. “We will see you soon *Dahakoan* Androcles.”

Andro disengaged from the Mark II Booster and the holographic surroundings all faded to reveal the cargo bay once more. Elynth and Ryner rested on the deck only a few feet from them as he turned to Murano.

“Murano?” He asked.

“The Holy Elites are the conduit to the Scourge Queen.” Murano told them. “The normal elites are simply soldiers. They will be commanding whatever forces that they have near the Darastrixi homeworld. That they are maintaining a presence on one of their space stations tells me that their goal for the Darastrixi is the same as for all others. They intend to conquer them if they do not obey and do what they want.”

Then it is safe to assume that they probably have other forces waiting? Elynth asked.

Murano looked at her and nodded his head. “More than likely Elynth.” He answered. “If they have not taken their planet before now it is because the Scourge fear them. The losses they would incur trying to subjugate the Darastrixi are probably staggering. They are far less spread out than the Pralor people were, but most of their population can be drafted to fight if need be. This is something we do not have.”

“Then pulling Laren and Ladur out now was the correct thing to do.” Andro stated.

Murano nodded his head quickly. “Oh yes.” He said. “If they have been taking Darastrixi maidens and conducting experiments on them, it is for only one reason. Somehow they have discovered that Laren and Ladur exist or they believe that they exist. They know what they are, just not when they would arrive if this has been going on for some time.”

Andro nodded his head as he looked around. “We need to speak with my father and Wayonn.” He said. “Sister? You and Ryner?”

“Give us three hours Andro.” Elynth answered. “Both of us need to eat to replenish our reserves. We will need the extra energy if we initiate a Mark II Booster to your father from here. We have never tried one from so far away.”

Murano nodded his head. "As will I. I was only able to have coffee before we did this one."

Andro nodded his head. "Agreed then. Dorian, Murano and I will join you back here in three hours."

"Can we establish one from this distance Androcles?" Murano asked.

Andro nodded his head. "There is really no distance limit. You know how the Boosters work. Let's just hope the *Feravomir*, Wayonn and a few of my mothers are nearby when we activate it. It will be far easier to hold the connection if they are."

DARASTRIXETHE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT LEVXIERIV (ENCHANTRESS)

"...Pralor people are not as dead as the Scourge would have us believe." Laren told them as they sat in the forward lounge closest to the bridge.

This news brought everyone in the small lounge to attention very quickly. Dytin had summoned Nahko, Dalis, and Laren's parents to the meeting as well as Matum, Chalith and Shalu. Ladur was beside Ch'teven in the next room which was much larger and provided more comfort for the Vrrarhoinsa species of Darastrix. Most Darastrix ships were built in such a way, with the wall between the two rooms open so that they could partake in different meetings such as this.

"Laren what do you mean?" Aviel asked with wide eyes.

"The Praetorian Murano who you have spoken with is not the only survivor of the Scourge decimation of their species." Laren told them. "Towards the very end many survivors took to the stars and ran. They were able to gather over the next few months until there were many ships full of Pralor survivors. They wandered for many years until finally settling where they are now. The *Doraanar* has been with them for most of this time, among the surviving Darastrix of one of the seed missions that we allowed them to conduct with our people. They did not know who she was and she never told them, but they have been protecting her for millennia. And she has been helping to guide the surviving Pralors and our Darastrix brothers and sister for all of this time."

"By the will of Dadrien..." Nahko gasped. "Where?"

Laren shook her head. "I cannot reveal that information, I'm sorry. Not now." She told them looking at Dytin. "You understand *Inidra* Dytin of what could happen if this knowledge became known to the Scourge?"

"You do not trust us?" Matum asked almost indignantly.

Laren met his eyes with no back down in her. "I know everyone in this room and I have for many years or for several months, with the exception of you." She stated confidently. "I have kept this knowledge from them for all of that time. Do not misinterpret your importance Major. I do not need your protection nor do I want it. This information is a sacred trust that I keep with my soul brothers and sister."

Dytin looked at Matum and motioned with his head. "Of course..." He stated coming to his feet. "We do not need to know where Laren."

"When we are with Androcles and the others we will discover this for that is where we are going." Laren told them looking at Dytin. "Very far from here. You trust them *Inidra*?"

Dytin nodded his head without hesitation. "They are Dahakoan Laren, just as you are. There is no mistaking that. Yes I trust them. I wouldn't have come this far if I did not."

"But why?" Dalis asked now. "Why so far away? We will not be able to influence anything that happens on our world."

"She is safest with her Soul Family." Robati spoke now looking at her daughter. "At least right now. As are we all."

"The last of the *Doraanar* among the Pralor people for all of this time." Dalis spoke softly shaking his head. "They have been protecting her and done so without question or even the knowledge of who she truly is. It makes what we did... what we allowed to happen even more vile."

Laren nodded her head. "There are several among the Darastrix and a few Pralors with them now that know who she is but they are sworn to secrecy."

"We can do nothing to change the past and none of us had a say in what was done." Aviel spoke. "We must concentrate on the future now. Once the Scourge realize that Laren and Ladur now exist, that the

Dahakoan have returned to us and they now possess the power of the Pralor Praetorians as well as the power of the *Dahakoan*, they will stop at nothing to kill or capture them. For us, for our families, as far away from Darastrixi and Scourge space is the best thing right now. At least until we are ready and Laren is fully cured.”

“Cured?” Matum spoke now. “What do you mean *Koppentotz Aviel*?”

Nahko looked at the young Major. “Laren is dying.” She told him. “Her body’s cells are breaking down on a molecular level. Right now the only one who can save her is her *sepa dask*. Her Hadarian Soul Mother.”

Dytin nodded his head. “And that is why we will do exactly as *Dahakoan* Androcles has instructed us. It is obvious to me that these men and women, those with him, they have seen far more combat than any in this room, including myself. Now is not the time to question them or their strategies.” Dytin looked at Matum. “Major?”

Matum thought briefly of his conversation with Sarlana and then nodded his head. “On my honor *Inidra*.”

Dytin nodded his head. “Good. Matum... you will choose twelve senior Sand Strider. They will accompany us to the station. The *Dahakoan* has provided us with a new type of body armor but there is only enough for twenty of us. Once you have chosen the men, prepare a single transport for when we transit to the station. Everything must be perfect from here on out. I will deal with the ships if they come.”

“The station has been deserted for millennia *Inidra*.” Matum spoke. “Should we not bring more security?”

Dytin shook his head. “No. Twenty and no more. We will not need more.” He looked at everyone. “We must remain united now. For everyone’s sake.”

The internal COM unit in the lounge burst into life. “*Inidra* Dytin, we are being hailed by Darastrixi ships. A *Yobhakcho* Darrod Nilich is commanding.”

Dytin smiled. “Yes... exactly who I thought they would send. Very well... I am coming to the bridge.” He looked at them. “Now it truly begins my friends. Now it truly begins.”

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“...Says that the Tasmor blood provides the cure Beloved.” Aricia spoke from where she stood beside him in the Command Building with Danny, Thoti, Julie and Colin on one side of the chart table and Saydia, Anthylea, Drenia on the other side. “She and Perlyea confirmed it just before I returned to the surface. The molecular structure and genetic materials all point to this.”

Martin looked at her standing beside him and waggled his eyebrows at her. “You are getting good at this medical stuff you know.” He spoke to her.

Aricia beamed a smile back at him because of the praise and the way his aura made her body tingle. “Well... Anja does say that the more people with medical knowledge around you the better. You do have a propensity for getting into trouble Beloved and we would much rather you remain in one piece.”

“That’s only so you can use my body!” Martin hissed.

Aricia’s azure eyes glowed with happiness. “Of course... why else would we want you healthy? You do make us sing so Beloved.”

Martin looked at Danny. “You see this? No respect.”

Danny grinned and flipped his hand up to slap Martin in the back of the head. “Like anyone will buy that.” He stated. “Even after all these years I still don’t know what they see in your ugly ass.”

“My charming personality.” Martin said with a large, fake smile that he tried to stretch from ear to ear.

Danny shook his head. “Like anyone with half a baked brain will believe that.” He muttered.

Saydia and Anthylea could not help but burst into laughter at this display and the expression that Martin’s face was in. Despite centuries of upbringing and history, Saydia Daret found herself becoming very comfortable in the presence of the males in this room and around the camp. None of them looked at her as a potential bed partner in order to further advance their family or status. The men she had interacted with among the Lycavorians and the many other species she had seen had been nothing but respectful and honorable. They

honored her position as leader of the Tasmor and went out of their way to insure she was provided with everything she needed or wanted. Saydia also knew Anthylea was also rapidly becoming comfortable in their presence for she had let her guard down ever so slightly when around these men. Normally Anthylea was utterly possessive of her, a fact that made Saydia shiver in delight, but she also knew that these men and women were very different from what they were used to.

Saydia looked at Anthylea out of the corner of her eye and the memories of the previous night came rushing back to her. Ten hours they had shared with Tobia in their bed, the most time they had had together at one point ever. All three of them had been so passionate and intense, and it pleased Saydia to no end when both she and Tobia were servicing Anthylea, seeing her thrash on the bed before them or reaching for the pinnacle of pleasure while making love to one of them. Last night had been the most pleasurable of nights, for they had not been afraid to try things they had never thought of before. Tobia's excitement affected both of them for she had let all of her desires and inhibitions out and did not hold back one bit. This made Saydia and Anthylea even more intense and passionate as well and the three women fed off of this energy until they collapsed in Anthylea's embrace, her organ flaccid and all of them utterly drained. They had laid in each other's arms simply talking them, Tobia telling them of Murano and the future she now believed had been given back to her. Saydia and Anthylea could tell that this emotion is what made Tobia so passionate and they had smiled knowingly at each other for it was the same emotion that coursed through them for each other.

Martin waved his hand at Danny. "Bah... what the hell do you know?" He spat.

Aricia simply stood there and smiled while she reached across the chart table for a data pad and picked it up. "These are the details they put together quickly." She told him holding out the data pad. "Anja said it was a very fast workup of how they believe the drugs are being used. This Hecerkal infuses their bodies with a compound that heals them very quickly..."

Danny nodded his head. "Yeah we saw that in the fugly we fought." He said. "Even our blades weren't any good really."

Aricia nodded in agreement. "Anja and Perlyea agree that only massive damage will slow them down enough to actually hurt them. This is something our normal weapons will not do. Explosives are the best way to deal with them now but not everyone is as skilled as Colin at throwing grenades."

Colin looked up. "It's not really a big deal. Skipper, I can throw together some classes for our people and the Tasmor. We have lots of training rocks here and I can have our entire complement of G24s shipped down and get them distributed."

Martin nodded. "Do it." He said instantly. He looked at Aricia. "*Saaurano?*"

"The second compound, this Ledralye, this makes the beasts easier to control for short periods of time, but it also makes them very unstable." Aricia told them. "The third drug, this Tintor, its only use from what Anja can determine, is to make the creatures' metabolism work faster and speed the drugs through their systems quicker."

"And they need our blood because of its natural immunity to the effects of addiction?" Saydia asked.

Aricia nodded her head. "Yes. They have found trace amounts of Tasmor blood in all three of the creatures killed at the research site. Apparently, though it does not make it any less vile, it is not needed in large doses because of the way it is used and that is why far fewer Tasmor have been taken. However, it also requires a steady dosage so that these monsters do not become affected by the addictive nature."

"Christ we..." Martin began to speak.

The Command Center suddenly became alive with dazzling white blue flashes of Etheric power.

"Shit!" Martin declared as his senses lit up and he recognized the powerful Etheric resonance of his sons instantly. They had focused on him exclusively and the communication was coming through very fast. "*Saaurano*, its Andro and Dori... they are initiating a Mark II Neural Booster communication! And it's a powerful one too!"

"Martin...!" Aricia barked out as she began moving for where Saydia and Anthylea stood with looks of shock on their faces. "The Tasmor! They do not have natural Etheric shields! Andro does not know this and it will damage their brain synapses!"

"*Sibfla!*" Martin exclaimed as he realized it just as Aricia was yelling at him. He burst forward without question and reached Saydia just as Aricia reached Anthylea and Danny grabbed Drenia.

The three Tasmor woman were then engulfed in something that none of them had ever experienced in their lives. The Command Center became alive with the white bluish light and the images of four individuals and two of the dragon beasts came into view. The entire area around them began to glow in this same light and the room shimmered and changed even as they watched. The Etheric power needed to engage a Mark II Neural Booster was something that very few individuals had. Martin and Torma could do so easily on their own, as could Androcles and Elynth; their Etheric power could not even be charted by normal means. Aricia could engage a Mark II booster with one of her fellow Queens as long as it was a short range transmission. Aside from that, only Helen, Arzoal and their children could engage a Mark II Booster, and then only if they had added help from their dragons and others.

Saydia, Anthylea and Drenia could only gawk in astonishment as the figures shimmered once more and became as clear as if they were in the same room with those they now saw. Saydia's blue eyes were wide as she stared at the image of the two young men who could only be sons to Martin Leonidas. They looked so much like their father it was uncanny. Both of them had the same black hair and height, as well as the exquisite muscular definition from what she could tell. Both of them however, they had breathtaking blue eyes that truly shone within the Booster's cone and Saydia could not help but gasp at how incredibly handsome both of them were. The third man she did not know but he was older and obviously a Pralor by the uniform he was wearing.

Saydia's hands went up quickly to where Martin's were placed on her shoulders and she gripped them tightly as her head pounded and her heart raced. This was not a time for old habits she knew. Whatever was going on would have adversely affected her, Anthylea and Drenia and Martin and Aricia had taken steps to avoid this without thought.

"Breath evenly Sovereign Regent..." Martin spoke to her in a soothing voice. "I am shielding you from most of the effects but it will be a moment before the pounding in your heads clears." Martin could hear Aricia telling Anthylea the same thing as she had grabbed her arms just as the full power of the booster came to bear.

"Father? Mother?" Androcles asked with a confused look on his face.

Martin squeezed Saydia's shoulders. "Once initiated you need to remain unless you have the Etheric ability to leave, which you don't. Aricia, Danny and I will shield you while it is active but I'm sorry, you are kind of stuck in the loop now."

Saydia nodded her head quickly. "I... I understand!" She gasped. "Gods... can all of your people do this?" She asked in amazement.

Martin shook his head as his hands slowly lifted from her shoulders. "No." He stated flatly. "And my son knows better than to initiate one without checking first!" He growled at the image of his oldest son. He looked back to Saydia as he came around in front of her. "Are you ok?"

Saydia nodded her head quickly still holding his hands. "Yes... yes I think so." She stated with wide blue eyes. "The pounding is... it is almost gone."

Martin looked at Aricia who quickly reached out with one hand and placed it on Saydia's arm so that he could turn fully and look at his sons.

"Speak fast boy!" Martin snapped. "Why would you initiate a Mark II without checking first? Especially with your brother, Elynth and Murano in the loop! Do you know how badly that will zap someone who is not Etheric?"

"Forgive me father, I did not have the time to check if you were alone." Andro stated calmly his azure eyes settling on Saydia and Anthylea in the transmission. Martin detected a twitch in Andro's cheek when he focused on Saydia for a few seconds longer and then he knew for sure.

Martin looked back to Saydia and Anthylea. "Saydia, Anthylea, meet my oldest and youngest sons. Andro and Dorian." He looked back to them where they now stood directly in front of them within the Etheric projection. "Both of whom know better than to do what they just did." He said sternly. "This is Sovereign Regent Daret and her First Colonel Anthylea."

Andro bowed his head slightly to Saydia who was looking at him intently. "My sincere apologies Sovereign Regent. My father is correct and I did not check before initiating this type of communication." Andro looked at his father. "Father you..."

Martin held up his hand. "I'll deal with it." He stated knowing what Andro was going to say. "I'll explain it to them."

Saydia looked at him. "Explain what?"

Andro looked at his mother in the projection and his face broke into a smile as he looked into her matching azure blue eyes. “*Medwaw.*” He spoke affectionately.

Aricia’s eyes were just as bright and her smile just as dazzling. “*Aur Ketos.*” She said as Martin turned to Saydia once more.

“Are you open to new things?” Martin asked her almost casually a small smile on his face.

“What... what do you mean?” Saydia asked. “Will this affect us somehow?”

Martin sighed heavily. “Because of the way this happened and the power needed to do it, you, Anthylea and Drenia will now have a limited Etheric resonance and the ability to use it.”

“What?” Anthylea gasped with wide eyes. “You mean like you and the Queens?”

Martin shook his head quickly. “Not on as deep a scale, no.” He answered her. “That couldn’t happen unless one of us bites you and the virus within us floods your system. You will be able to...” Martin shook his head once more. “*Anse Andro...!*”

“Father this is important!” Andro told him. “We need your advice and you may wish to call for the *Feravomir* and Wayonn. This has to do with...”

Murano spoke for the first time now. “Martin this has to do with the Scourge.” He stated. “We need to speak with you.”

“...you sure Murano?” Wayonn asked.

Saydia and Anthylea were standing close to Aricia, still holding onto her arms. Her presence was a steadying balance for them since this was so new. Martin had indeed called for the woman they knew as Helen and Wayonn. The moment they entered the Etheric Booster Communication, they felt the massive influx of power and Aricia had gripped them tightly. She had apparently told Helen and Wayonn that they had been included in the transmission by accident and they had entered the Etheric projection slowly so as not to make too much of a disturbance. For Saydia Daret, it was the most fascinating experience she had ever been part of in her life. Nothing could compare to this, and while Drenia seemed to be tolerating it, she and Anthylea were relishing in this new and exciting instant. It was one of those moments in your life that you could never have imagined and Saydia was soaking it up. Whatever they were talking about was taking place far from here and did not concern the Tasmor, or so she thought, so instead she simply watched Martin Leonidas’ sons. Saydia had seen large predators on the worlds the Tasmor occupied, and both of these young men moved exactly the same way. There was a confident and lethal grace to their movements, a sense of purpose that told everyone around them that they would not bother you if you did not interfere with them. If you did, then they would kill you in a most violent way. They exuded the same confidence and the same aura of leadership that their father had and they were so young. She took note that Androcles was taller than Dorian, but only slightly so, but he was much more thickly muscled. The definition was exquisite even under the loose clothes they both wore, but it was Andro’s eyes that caught and held her attention. They were identical to his mother’s beautiful eyes, yet they were so much more alive and dancing with the light. For a fleeting instant Saydia found herself thinking what a Tasmor child with eyes like his would look like since most Tasmor were born with dark eyes. Her daughters Emylea, Rena, Faydia and Inara were exceptions to this rule she knew, as she was, but their eye color did not match the bright, near glowing eyes of Androcles Leonidas.

Saydia shook her head and pushed these thoughts aside and began to take more of an interest in what they were discussing. She watched as the older man in the transmission nodded his head.

“Yes.” Murano answered. “Our plan is excellent and so far we have seen no signs of any Scourge even remotely in the area. We are only a few hours from the station now. Armen has *SPARTA’S WRATH* shrouded and moving in a similar pattern half a light year behind us. We have the Darastrixi ships on long range sensors and just as Andro instructed they have broken off the transports and two warships to move for the new coordinates he gave to them.”

“The cache is intact?” Wayonn asked now.

Murano nodded again. “The Worker Drones we sent ahead have just started to broadcast back to us and they are seeing no signs of activity. They will not begin to power the station’s areas until we are almost there, but from the images Sadi and the others have seen, the station has been deserted for centuries. Even millennia.”

Martin looked at his sons. "You didn't tell me you were going to go into Scourge space boy!" He snarled looking directly at Andro.

"It was the quickest and most efficient way to retrieve Laren and Ladur." Andro replied. "You know that we could not leave them."

"I know that!" Martin snapped. "But we have felt them Andro. You know this. They seemed to have stopped for now, but we don't want to *nubous* provoke them! Not when we don't know why."

Andro nodded. "I know father." He told him. "Laren is reasonably sure they do not know anything yet. The Darastrixi elders protected her and Ladur viciously and they are certain that no knowledge of their existence came out. The Scourge don't know what they are father and if what Murano says is true then we still have a big advantage."

"The Queen was no military leader Martin." Murano spoke. "She was a Praetorian Mage. And to Xaxon no less. He would not have shared his military knowledge with her in any sort of fashion. Considering what he did to her, I don't believe that he even cared for her at all. He most likely considered her a nuisance. This could also account for her hatred for us."

Wayonn looked at Martin. "Murano is correct Martin." He said evenly. "He always had her doing ridiculous things in order to keep her away from him. Probably to hide what he was truly doing. Many of us scorned him for treating her in such a way, but no matter what we did he never changed."

"Where are you sending them?" Martin asked.

"That is what I needed to talk to you about." Andro answered. "I can't send them back to the Alpha Quadrant. There is too much turmoil there with the Kavalian War and *Tenna Deia* does not need the added pressure of hiding them."

Martin nodded. "Agreed." He said.

All of them felt the powerful Etheric resonance fill the connection and they turned as Tobia moved into the cone of the transmission. "Send them to Artaaya." She spoke calmly, though her voice faltered as she looked upon Murano.

Murano's eyes grew wide and he came forward. "Tobia!" He gasped.

Martin looked at her and motioned her forward with his head. "Go ahead." He told her.

Tobia stepped up beside Martin as she stared at Murano. He looked even more handsome than she remembered him and his features were even more lean and developed. She felt the tears well up in her eyes and then they were rolling down her cheeks as she smiled at him.

"Murano." She managed to choke out the word.

"Tobia... why did... why did you not tell me?" Murano stammered. His voice held no anger or discontent in it she noticed and this made Tobia's heart grow happy. She thought he would be angry for not telling him and that he would hate her.

"I did not... I did not want to pressure you into something that you could not commit too." Tobia answered. "You were so torn and filled with shame that..."

Murano moved closer, almost standing in front of her in the transmission now. "She is so much... she is so much like you Tobia." He spoke with a smile.

"She has your stubborn streak." Tobia told him.

Murano smiled now and they could all see his eyes were moist. "Yes, yes she does." He said softly. He blinked several times and looked back to where Andro and Dorian were watching. All of them saw Andro nod his head to him and smile. Murano turned back to Tobia. "I have never held to anything tighter to my heart than I did my love for you Tobia. I did not want to..."

Tobia stepped forward until she was almost touching the Etheric projection of Murano. "I know Murano my love." She said softly seeing his eyes grow wide at her words. "I know."

"Mari is... she is a Praetorian Tobia." He said. "She..."

Tobia nodded. "I know that too." She told him. "She is well?"

Murano nodded his head. "She has become wife to Deion Leonidas Tobia." He said and all of them could detect the note of pride in his voice. "She has become like him!"

"You knew?" Tobia asked in surprise.

“My own stupidity may have blinded me to my love for you, but once I discovered Mari was...” Murano stopped and he looked at Martin. “Her face and eyes hold a light within them that I have never seen before Martin. Your son loves her until it takes her breath away. Thank you.”

Martin shook his head holding up his hands. “I had nothing to do with that.” He stated with a grin.

Murano looked back to Tobia. “Tobia we...” He began. “I want what I never thought I deserved Tobia. I want to be... I want to be a family. If you... if you will have me.”

Tobia shuddered gently now and they watched as Saydia moved up behind her and took her shoulders. Tobia’s hands went to hers and squeezed as she looked at Murano. “I will have you Murano.” She said with a strangled voice. “I have never stopped wanting you Murano my love. Never!”

Murano’s face brightened when he heard that and he smiled more than anyone had ever seen him smile before. “We will be there soon Tobia.” He told her. “I will hold you in my arms once more and I will never let go again.”

“You had better not!” Tobia told him with an equally large smile. It took her a moment to regain her composure and she turned her head to share a kiss with Saydia not caring who saw. It was a kiss of thanks and friendship and caring. She looked at Martin once more. “Send them to Artaaya Martin. They will be safe there.”

“What about...?” Martin began to ask.

Tobia shook her head. “We have come a long way from those times Martin.” Tobia told him. “Most have learned to leave the past where it belongs, and many know of the deaths the Darastrixi suffered when they fought this order. Those who died trying to protect our people. This is not something that will ever be forgotten.”

Martin nodded slowly and looked at Andro. “Andro?”

“I will see to it father.” He said.

“Get Laren and Ladur and get here quick boy.” Martin told him. “We’re gonna need you son. Outnumbered takes on whole new meaning with what is coming at us.”

“Father, only the 82nd and the *Durcunusaan* Scout Ready Brigade is travelling with me on *SPARTA’S WRATH* and the *KINDRED SOUL*. I can send the *Durcunusaan* Division on to you now if you wish.” Andro spoke. “We won’t need them out here and all missions in and around Vanari space are complete.”

Martin nodded his head. “Do it son.” He said. “*MJOLNIR’S HAND*, *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and the *SPIRIT* arrived with their Strike Wings yesterday and I will pull their detachments.”

“Father...” Andro spoke again and Martin lifted his head to meet the eyes of his oldest son. “Why have you not hit this ship yet? I have studied what you sent to me, and a coordinated attack with the *ARIZONA* and the *ARC ROYAL* and their Wings could severely damage this ship enough to stop it. Or at the very least damage it enough to slow it down. If you combine the Pralor ships and the Strike Wings of *MJOLNIR’S HAND*, *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* you could do it.”

Martin shook his head. “The risk is too great.” He answered. “We’d have to fight off the forty odd warships that they have protecting this thing and then...”

“Father!” Andro snapped causing Martin to look at him once more. “It is not like you to let these monsters continue on unmolested or unchallenged. What are you not telling me?”

Martin felt everyone shift their eyes to him and he looked around slowly. Only Danny and Wayonn were not looking at him, they were simply looking at the floor. Everyone else was staring at him and he felt the tug on his arm and turned his head to look into Aricia’s beautiful eyes.

“Beloved?” She spoke softly. “What is it?”

Martin sighed and shook his head. He turned to look at Wayonn. “Tell them Wayonn.” He spoke.

“Martin...” Wayonn began.

Martin shook his head. “I should have known better than to try and hide it from him.” Martin jerked his thumb at Andro. “He’s too much like me. Tell them. It would have come out eventually when we started asking for volunteers.”

“Volunteers for what?” Murano asked now.

Wayonn looked at Murano and pushed off the table he was leaning against. “Your sister Yuriko discovered something during her scans.” Wayonn spoke now. “It was deep within the bowels of the ship and she did not have any idea what it was. She forwarded it to us in one of her reports several weeks ago. Kasdan knew right away what it was. Your father, Uncle and I have been fine tuning a plan ever since.”

“A plan for what?” Andro asked now as his face became concerned.

“The Svorag Mother Ship, for lack of a better definition to describe it, is using a Pralor engineered Reverse Fractal Quantum Dark Matter power core.” Wayonn told him.

Only Murano and Andro knew what he was speaking about and both of them stepped closer in the transmission. “Wayonn no!” Murano gasped.

“I thought... I did not think Dark Matter could be harnessed in any way.” Andro spoke. “When the WIMPS meet they destroy one another.”

Wayonn nodded. “Unless they were asymmetric. Our scientists discovered a way to alter Dark Matter WIMPS during the First and Second Scourge War so that they were asymmetric and therefore the WIMPS would not destroy one another when they collided. According to Kasdan and his history files it was tested once and the ensuing explosion killed over a hundred of our most promising scientists and wiped out the equivalent of three city blocks. The program was canceled and the materials destroyed. Or so they all thought.”

“Are you saying the Svorag completed the program?” Murano asked.

Wayonn nodded slowly. “We don’t know how they got the details to the program but they have managed to fashion a crude Asymmetric Dark Matter power core that is operating on that ship.”

“Lorendo?” Murano asked.

Martin shook his head. “No... Kasdan doesn’t believe this is Lorendo’s doing. If the records are accurate and we have no reason to think they aren’t, he wasn’t even part of the program on a peripheral level. They got it from somewhere else.”

“Where?” Andro asked.

“That doesn’t matter right now.” Martin said. “What does matter is if Yuriko’s sensor scans are accurate the thing is as unstable as all hell. If we attack that thing without shutting down the core first, it will probably cause an overload.”

“And if it overloads?” Aricia asked now.

Andro looked at his father with wide eyes. “It will cause a Black Hole to form within the ship. A massive Black hole and it will...”

Wayonn nodded. “Kasdan estimates it would be the largest Black Hole ever recorded in anyone’s history and it would be powerful enough to destroy every form of life in most of this Quadrant. The gravitational flux would be so powerful it would drag planets from hundreds of light years away into its core, destroying them and all life on them. Artaaya, Honelze, Nepneu, all of the Tasmor worlds, the Kintaur and most of the less developed species. Everything would be killed.”

“*Nubou lae!*” Andro gasped.

Martin nodded his head. “That’s about what I said son.” He told him. “Getting sucked into the largest Black Hole in the universe is most definitely not the way I want to go.”

Andro looked at his father. “A surgical strike?” He said softly.

Martin nodded his head. “Two teams, assault from two different sides, with the purpose of shutting the core down. Once it is shut down then I can blow it straight to hell. Danny, Wayonn and I have most of the details worked out and Kasdan has just about finished a way to shut it down. We’re close, but not there yet.”

“Father, send for more troops then.” Andro told him quickly. “We have time. If we need to do this before we destroy the ship then we need to hold Honelze.”

Martin shook his head. “Yes I know, but no, I won’t pull more troops from where they might be needed. Pian is going to occupy most of their forces once he ramps up the pressure, but Keleru is a sneaky bastard and I’m not taking any chances with his hairy ass.” Martin looked at his son. “Iama’s father is preparing the defenses around Honelze with his Pride and a whole bunch of Pralor security Forces. Akor’dris and Bae’diraz are giving them extra Drow training and they are taking to it like a fish to water.”

“How many can you field father?” Andro asked him.

“Including the 82nd with you and whatever else we can scrape together...” Martin looked at him. “Just over two hundred thousand.” Martin grinned. “With another five hundred thousand and our air power we could clean their clocks on the ground or at the very least, hold them long enough to shut down the core. As it stands now, it’s iffy.”

“Can the people of Honelze fight?” Dorian asked.

Murano looked at Dorian. “Most of them are simple miners and farmers Dorian.” He answered without any malice in his voice. He turned back to Martin. “But if you ask them Martin, they will fight. Honelze has become their home and we Pralors are tired of running away from our homes. Reach out to them now. Have people sent there to train them. Even a few weeks of training can be better than nothing.”

“I agree Martin.” Tobia echoed Murano’s words. “We need to tell them. We cannot wait until the last minute like when our Empire fell. Tell them what they are facing... what *we* are facing and they will fight.”

“I have gone over the defensive plan you sent father.” Andro spoke again. “Carina as well while she transits to Manne with Moneus and her Command Team. Murano and Lady Tobia are right and Carina would recommend it right away and you know this. Even if you are only able to train a few thousand of them, they can release our Spartans to fight and take over the security duties.”

Martin nodded his head. “I don’t really have much of a choice do I.” He said.

Aricia stepped up beside him now. “No we don’t Beloved.” She said softly.

Martin nodded his head again. “Ok... what ship is she on?”

Andro smiled. “*RAVEN’S WINGS*.” He answered.

“Imror’s ship?” Martin asked with wide eyes.

Andro nodded his head. “Admiral Ceneu cut loose his entire BIP. They should be getting to Manne by tomorrow sometime.”

“That man just does not know when to stay away from us does he?” Martin said with a shake of his head.

“His wife told Carina that he enjoys the excitement too much.” Andro said.

Martin nodded his head as his spirits lifted somewhat. If he was going to die fighting, then he would do so surrounded by those who thought like he did and would fight to the last breath in their bodies. “Ok... I’ll speak with Carina and see what other surprises we can put together. I’ll also send her what Danny and I have put together for the assault on this Mother Ship. Get your asses in and out without causing trouble son. I need you and your team with me and my group on this. We’re the only ones with the training to pull it off.”

Andro nodded his head. “As it stands now, we will have Laren and Ladur within thirty-six hours and then we will turn for your location.”

“Don’t stop to sight see you hear?” Martin told him with a smile.

“We won’t father.”

“Murano...” Wayonn spoke now. “If you... if you encounter any Scourge you can leave none alive to warn the others of us.”

Murano nodded his head confidently. “I know Wayonn.” He spoke. “And we won’t, you know that.”

“We’ll be bringing some surprises of our own father.” Androcles spoke again. “You will like them if what Murano tells me is true.”

“Do they go boom?” Martin asked with a twinkle in his dark brown eyes.

Murano chuckled. “Oh yes.” He said. “Very large booms.”

“I like big booms.” Martin said.

VENTORI SAYDIA DARET’S PRIVATE QUARTERS

“...Were concerned Sovereign Regent, for your safety, after we heard of the Kintaur attack and the subsequent...” The Chief of the Tasmor Defense Ministry spoke from the table. “Captain Drenia was not very forthcoming with details.”

Saydia nodded her head as she looked at the nine remaining members of the Tasmor Quorum, minus herself and Perlyea. “I ordered her to be vague for a reason.” She said. “And there was no attack after we arrived. The Kintaur found something that they liked more than battle.”

“What was this?” The woman asked.

Saydia smiled. “Living.” She answered simply.

The Chief of the Tasmor Defense Ministry was someone who Saydia had grown up with for many years. They were very close friends and had no qualms about sharing information and knowledge with each other through the years. Seran Echen was a truly loyal friend to Saydia and the two women were often seen about within the many markets in the capital of Visay on Danerav their homeworld. Seran was also one of the more forward thinking Tasmor. Someone who believed that the Tasmor needed to change with the times as they grew as a people.

“They do seem to care about this very much.” Seran stated. “The vile dogs.”

“I am sure all of you have seen the reports that Captain Drenia has been sending on my orders.” Saydia spoke. “It is time we made the first of many decisions in the upcoming weeks and months.”

“You should return to Danerav Sovereign Regent, so that we may properly debate these things that you have discovered.” Another Tasmor spoke now.

Saydia shook her head. “I will not be returning just yet Vesara Athcer.” Saydia told them. “I am still in talks with the Lycavorian Queens over many things and I cannot leave yet.”

“You are the Tasmor Sovereign Regent and you should not be mingling with these new Lycavorians.” Vesara spoke.

“I am in no danger whatsoever.” Saydia told them.

“How do we know that?” Another woman spoke now.

“Ardal Kaend, you have known me almost as long as Seran.” Saydia spoke. “You have served as the Tasmor Chief Engineer for over two hundred years. Do I look under duress to you? In any way?”

“Well... no.” The woman answered.

“Because I am not.” Saydia said. “I have been treated with the utmost respect and honor among these men and women. The building I am now in are private quarters built just for me. The other Tasmor with me have a large and spacious building as their own, nothing luxurious by any means but very comfortable and workable. You have not seen what these people have done in only a few short days. They have erected what amounts to a small city here on Ventori. Portable buildings, power, computers, it is quite amazing.”

“This brute and self-proclaimed Lycavorian King threatened to kill you and everyone with you!” Vesara snapped.

“That brute as you call him, he shielded us from the Kintaur when they arrived here in force looking to capture or kill us! He imposed his own ships in defense of ours! He told them if they wanted us they had to go through him! And there is nothing self-proclaimed about his status as the King of the Lycavorians. I have seen their history files and I have seen the way the Ventori Lycavorians have treated him.” Saydia looked at the nine women. “All of you know me. You know I am not easily impressed, but what I have seen here these last days is wondrous in nature.”

“They wish to take our entire Lycavorian work force.” Vesara spoke. “The ore from the mines will cease. We will have to return to automated mining and this is not as efficient. This is one of the stipulations we had with the Lycavorians from Ventori Saydia. You know this.”

“The Lycavorians who we rescued from Ventori offered this to us and all of you know that.” Saydia told them. “It was never a stipulation of us helping them. They wanted to repay us for what we did and this was the way that they could. I will not allow this selfless act to be used against them.”

“You...”

“I am Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people!” Saydia barked angrily growing impatient with them. “I will decide how we will proceed! That is how it has always been and that is how it will remain until such time as the Tasmor Quorum can vote to change our laws and do so successfully and with the full support of our people! As is our law!” Saydia moved closer to the monitor.

“Listen to me all of you, they have already offered medical knowledge and equipment decades more sophisticated than anything we have ever seen. Perlyea is now working with Queen Anja, she is only half wolf, and she is also Hadarian. A species of healers within their Union and her skill and knowledge is majestic to say the least. They have already discovered why our people have been taken by the creatures that have plagued us these last few years. They are called Svorag. In just five days here we have discovered more than we have in centuries!”

“You are among other species as well?” One Tasmor asked stunned.

Saydia nodded her head. "A dozen different species just that I alone have seen. Our people speak of others on their ships in orbit above that I have not seen. The Lycavorians are not the only ones within their Union my friends, and it is vast. Over nine hundred worlds and nearly thirty-three trillion lifeforms form their Union. And Martin Leonidas is their King!"

This news brought all of them up short for they had never heard of such an extensive Empire anywhere.

"Saydia what about weapons?" Seran asked. "Engines and shields for our ships? What about these things. These are what we need."

Saydia nodded her head. "I know Seran, and this can still be discussed, but first..." she lifted her hand and held up the data pad. "This is the first official medical report Perlyea has submitted since meeting the Lycavorians. It officially states that the Gene Therapy treatments she and her staff developed from the willing Lycavorian donors are a complete success. They worked!" Saydia saw their eyes go wide at this news as she knew they would. "Queen Anja has confirmed this with Perlyea at her side and conferring with her through the entire process. According to Perlyea, Anja said it was never a matter of if it would work, it was only a matter of when. It seems it takes different times with different species and their genetic makeup, but she assures me that the Tasmor will lose none of their dominance. The therapy is just that and any Tasmor who wish to take the treatment will be allowed to do so. Even when the treatment is complete, the changes that will have occurred will amount to only two percent of the Tasmor genetic framework. It is all very confusing for me but you will be able to read the whole report in full when you arrive."

"Arrive?" Seran gasped now.

Saydia nodded her head. "King Leonidas has graciously offered the use of one of his best ships to come to Danerav and pick all of you up and bring you here." Saydia told them. "I have accepted. I believe once you see what I have seen you will think as I do."

"Sovereign Regent this is highly unusual." Ardal spoke.

Saydia nodded. "I know, but it is also the only way to insure that you and I have the same information and make our decisions based on this." She told them. "If, for whatever reason, you chose not to get on that ship, which will arrive in eight hours roughly, then I will take that as your resignation of your position on the Quorum and move to have your replacement chosen as soon as possible." Saydia saw the looks of astonishment on their faces and she smiled at this.

"Someone tried to kill me; and not just me, but two of my own daughters as well! My youngest daughters! The Kintaur knew we would be here, and they knew we would respond to the distress call. I am going to find out how and who betrayed me and my daughters and was willing to hand them, and me, to the Kintaur." Saydia lifted another data pad.

"This is my first decision after receiving and reviewing Perlyea's full report on the Gene therapy treatments. As of right now, I am fully abolishing the Tasmor law that dictates to me who must share my bed. I will no longer take males who I have no feelings for into my bed simply to meet some archaic law about the advancement and continued dominance of our people. If you had seen what I have seen in just these last days you would see how laughable this law is in the face of what is out there among the stars."

This caused Anthylea to look at her with huge eyes and a stunned expression on her face as she listened to Saydia continue and her heart raced with adoration and love at the words that came from her lips next.

"I am also issuing this very same decision for every Tasmor Breeder among our kind, including my own daughter Faydia. They will now be able to choose who they take into their bed and have children with and love. This will no longer be dictated by some silly need to keep our species strong. Perlyea's report states that all Tasmor can take this Gene treatment as I have told you and we will never have to worry about the Tasmor vanishing from the stars. Do not fight me on this, for if need be I will take it directly to our citizens and you all know how they will respond." Saydia looked up at them. "My second decision based on this very same report is this... I am officially announcing my Union to First Colonel Anthylea Tomar. After what I have seen out here, I will no longer deny myself the love and emotion that is rightfully mine. That is the right of every Tasmor regardless if they are a Breeder or not. I have loved Anthylea with all my heart for years now and I will not hide this anymore. If you do not like it, I do not care. That is how it will be from now on."

Saydia lowered the data pad and looked at their shocked expressions. "There are many more changes that we will need to institute if the Tasmor are to survive the coming years. We can either make them together,

in the best interests of our people, or I will leave all of you behind and go directly to our people and do what they wish.” She told them firmly. “I will meet you when you all arrive for we have much to do.”

Saydia switched off the monitor before they could respond and took a deep breath before she turned to look at Anthylea who stood there dumbstruck. Saydia’s eyes filled with love as she looked at her. “Now we will see who is serious about the advancement of our people.” She told her.

“Saydia you...” Anthylea could not find the words and Saydia stepped right up to her.

“Did you think for an instant that once Perlyea discovered this and told me that I would let it pass?” Saydia told her. “This knowledge is huge Anthylea. It will have an enormous impact on our people.”

“I know but...” Anthylea stammered.

Saydia reached up and caressed her cheek with her long fingers. “I have loved you from the day you entered my life Anthylea Tomar. Now... now the only one who will share my bed is you. Now the only children I will bear will be our children.”

Anthylea did the only thing she could really think of at that moment and she pulled Saydia into her arms and kissed her with every ounce of passion and desire she had within her. Since meeting Saydia Daret, she had only ever wanted one thing and that was now hers. Saydia melted into her arms and responded to the kiss with equal fervor. It was a long, passionate kiss that lasted for several moments before Saydia pulled away with a flushed look to her cheeks. She reached up and traced Anthylea’s moist lips with a smile.

“We have more to do today my love.” She said softly. “But tonight I want you to take me in every way possible that your mind can imagine.”

Anthylea smiled sexily. “That is quite a bit you know.” She said lustfully.

Saydia laughed and kissed her quickly. “Good.” She slid her hands down and took Anthylea arms. “Come... it is time to usher in the future of our people and it begins with us.”

VENTORI COMMAND CENTER

“Exactly when were you going to share this information?” Helen barked at Martin from across the table.

Martin sat with Danny and Wayonn on either side of him, Anja, Aricia and For'mya on the right of Danny. Kasdan and Tobia were sitting beside Wayonn. The holographic image of Carina Leonidas was beside Kasdan on his right, the emitter allowing for them to see her sitting at whatever table she was sitting in front of on *RAVEN'S WINGS*. Yuriko was beside her, transmitting from *OMEN THREE* in a similar transmission cone.

“What was I supposed to tell everyone?” Martin spoke now. “Oh, by the way, we can’t destroy this planet killing ship because if we fire at it, the ship’s really nasty Dark Matter Core will blow up and form a Black Hole that will kill all of us anyways?”

“Martin you...” Helen began to retort but he leaned forward and looked directly at her.

“Helen, I didn’t tell anyone because I didn’t know what to do.” He spoke calmly.

This caused Helen to pull up short and stop her words, blinking in surprise. “What?” She finally gasped.

“I didn’t know what to do.” Martin said more gently now. “Jesus, I’m not all knowing! Do you think we want to go aboard that thing and wander around with all those fuglies trying to eat us?”

Everyone saw Danny shake his head quickly. “I know I don’t.”

“Of course not!” Helen hissed back. “But *anse un* Martin! You are King!”

Martin rose to his feet angrily. “I know that!” Martin barked out. “Someone reminds me of that every fucking day! I am no better than the next man or woman who picks up a weapon and fights! The day someone tries to put me on a pedestal, I am done!”

“Martin you...” Helen began but Wayonn closed his hand over her arm.

“He is right Helen.” He said softly.

Helen looked at the table and shook her head. “You are so much like your father that it drives me utterly insane!” She snapped.

“I’m going to take that as a compliment.” Martin told her with a grin.

“You are an insufferable *midaeus*!” Helen barked at him.

Martin nodded his head. “I know.”

Carina Leonidas took this moment to lean forward in her chair from the *RAVEN'S WINGS*. "*Feravomir*, it is a sound plan and it can be done. Androcles has already proven this and been successful."

"I know that child, but your brother is just as downright reckless and stupid at times as your father." Helen spoke. "Sometimes more so."

Carina smiled in the transmission. "Well, I can't debate that." She said causing Martin to look at her in the transmission with wide eyes. "But they are also the only ones who could pull it off."

"Is this really the only way Lover?" Anja asked him now.

Martin shook his head slowly and returned to his chair. "We've been tossing ideas back and forth for a couple of weeks now Anja. We just don't see any other way around it. If we don't manually deactivate that core, we can't touch the ship."

"There is no way to do it by remote?" For'mya asked now.

Kasdan was the one to shake his head and look at For'mya. "For'mya, I have run dozens of simulations and none of them have been successful. We can't predict what kind of security surrounds the core, what sort of defensive measures they will have in place around the core, and there is no way to guess what type of computer encryption we will encounter. The variables are just too many to attempt a remote shutdown."

"You can shut it down if you are in front of it though right?" Aricia asked him.

Kasdan nodded his head without hesitation. "Yes. And with Mari with us, bypassing security overrides will be child's play. She is a genius in Computer Algorithms and Mutating Numerical Viruses. From there it is just a matter of tapping into the core and shutting down the individual systems in the correct order. Yuriko has been able to get some very detailed scans of the core chamber and the equipment they are using. It is crude, but very effective, and only a brute force attack will work. I have designed the computer program already and now I am just tweaking it. Once Mari arrives we can determine the final activation sequences and the steps needed to initiate the shutdown." He looked around. "But we have to be plugged into the main engineering computer of the ship, and so far we don't know which Pralor Computer System is operating the engineering systems or if it is a combination of several. The only way to correctly determine that is to be in front of it."

"And we have to be correct." Martin said.

"If you aren't correct?" Helen asked.

Martin looked at her. "Then it won't matter, for any of us. No one will survive this thing if it overloads Helen. No one. Not even germs."

"What happens when you shut it down Beloved?" Aricia asked.

"We jettison it out of the ship." Martin spoke. "And then For'mya, Tina and Endy snag it with the *STRIKER*."

"Me?" For'mya gasped.

Martin grinned. "What... you didn't think I was going to do this without the very best people I have do you?" He spoke. "Anja and Aricia are part of our team and you, Tina and Endy are going to get us there and then grab this thing when we spit it out."

"What do we do with it when we have it?" For'mya questioned him with wide eyes. "I don't envy dragging a potential extinction level Black Hole along behind my ass you know."

"And a beautiful ass it is." Martin spoke with a grin.

"*Carians* Lover..." Anja declared. "We're talking about an extinction level event here and you are fantasizing about For'mya's ass!"

Martin looked at her. "Yours and Aricia's too, if it makes you feel any better." Martin told her with a wide smile.

"Pervert!" Anja exclaimed softly.

"Mother you would only need to get it out of the immediate area." Carina spoke once more a smile lingering on her face at their antics. "Half a light year at most. It will be enough so that our capital ships can move in and systematically take this Mother ship apart."

"We need to do this. We don't have a choice." Martin said now, everyone turning to look at him. "Even with Andro's troops and ships we are going to be hard pressed to hold them on the ground. The faster we take this thing down, the better off we will be, trust me."

Helen met his eyes. "Why do you say that?" She asked.

Martin sighed heavily. "It's going to be down and dirty on the ground. They *will* breach the walls. In order to do this, we have to wait until they begin to land troops. That way they will be distracted enough for us to get in almost unseen. The longer it takes us, the more troops they put down. It's not going to be pretty folks, I won't lie to you. We're going to be pretty badly outnumbered."

"I believe I may have a solution to your problem King Leonidas." The female voice said causing all of them to turn and see Saydia and Anthylea standing beside Atropos.

Martin looked at Atropos as Aricia came to her feet. "Brother?" She asked. "This does not have to do with the Tasmor people."

"Everyone needs to hear this *arande*." Atropos said.

"Hear what?" Martin said. "Forgive me Sovereign Regent, but Tasmor ships will not be anything but cannon fodder in this battle. They just aren't advanced enough."

"But this does concern the Tasmor King Leonidas." Saydia said. "If you fail, these monsters will eventually come for us, isn't that right?"

Martin blinked and thought about that for a second. He finally nodded his head. "Yes I suppose they will." He said. "I won't allow you to put you people into harm's way with those odds however."

Saydia shook her head as she moved further into the room at Atropos's urging. "I know our ships would not be of any use." She answered. "I was thinking more of something else."

"Like what?" Martin asked.

"One million seasoned Tasmor ground troops. All fully trained and tested in battle with the Kintaur." Saydia answered. "That is the amount you said you needed in order to insure you don't lose on the ground correct?"

Martin glanced at Anja and Aricia before moving around the table to stand in front of her. "Please don't take this question the wrong way, but why would you put that many of your people at risk to help us? You don't even really know us."

Saydia smiled brightly feeling happy and free for the first time in her life. "We... the Tasmor are not even close to you in technological advancements but..."

Martin held up his hand. "Sovereign Regent... committing troops to this battle will not encourage me to share our technology with you more than we already are. Too much new technology too fast is more often than not harmful to a people. It takes away the..."

"The satisfaction and purpose of discovering it for yourself." Saydia spoke. "Yes... I agree. I am not asking for technology in return for troops."

Martin glanced at Anja and Aricia before looking back to Saydia. "Then what are you asking for?"

"I have decided that I want my people to flourish." Saydia said calmly. "Anja already started this when she helped Perlyea to discover that the gene treatment she developed with the help of your people from here on Ventori does work for the Tasmor. This discovery will allow my people to go into the future when not so long ago I did not think we had a future."

"That doesn't answer my question." Martin said.

"I wish to petition you directly for inclusion into your Union." Saydia said evenly seeing his eyes go wide. "I wish a future for my people as I told you, and that future must begin with allies. Allies that will help us to grow, but not seek to control us. Allies that will stand with us in times of need and who we can stand with in their times of need."

Aricia rose to her feet now with equally wide eyes. "Saydia, pardon me, but I thought you said the Tasmor Quorum is not as open as many of those with you now. That they are more close minded and backwards than you and many of those who believe as you do. This is what you told Anja and I several days ago."

Saydia nodded her head. "Yes I did, and that is true. Many of them are too set in their ways and only a show of trust and commitment to us would convince them. But I believe I know something that will persuade them that an alliance of friendship, cooperation and trust with your people holds the brightest future for our people. If you agree to it of course."

"I don't like being blackmailed." Martin said.

Saydia shook her head quickly. "This is not what you think." She stated quickly. "I still offer our assistance to you, the troops and whatever else you may require, regardless of what you decide, but this is the one way I know of that will show my people and the Quorum that we will be looked at as equals and not

subordinate to a far away Empire.” Saydia said. “That we will have a say in everything just as your Union members do now. We are alone out here King Leonidas and we have had to become like we are in order to survive. That is not how I want us to go forward.”

“So what are you asking for?” Martin asked her in a neutral voice not sure what she was driving towards or if he would like it.

Saydia handed him the data pad. “This.” She replied.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

DARASTRIXETHE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT *LEVXIERIV (ENCHANTRESS)*

Dytin entered his bridge with Aviel and the others in tow. He ushered them over to the side and out of the way as he made for his command chair. “Report!” He barked out.

“*Inidra*, three *IKLISS*-Class Cruisers bearing 359 point 2 and closing.” The female voice replied immediately. “The *KAPRAL* is hailing us sir. This *Yobhakcho* Darrod Nilich is growing impatient.”

Dytin nodded his head as he sat down in his chair. “No doubt.” He spoke to no one in particular. “He always was intolerant of being kept waiting.” He turned to the woman who was his First Officer and perhaps his most trusted aide. “Nodra, did our transports make the jump?” He asked.

The female Darastrixi turned from the podium like control panel she stood behind and nodded her head. “Yes sir. Our escorts joined with them and then they all jumped away to the coordinates you gave.” She looked at her two monitors. “They should arrive within nine hours.”

Dytin nodded his head as he turned back. “Excellent. Let’s see what *Yobhakcho* Darrod has to say shall we. Put his communications through.”

“Stand by.” The male voice spoke now. “Transferring to main holo platform.”

The figure of the Darastrixi male came into existence then, his tan and brown scales healthy and stretched over a muscular figure. His orange hued eyes were narrow and slightly slanted inward giving him a stern look whether he wanted it or not. His eyes focused on Dytin as his end of the transmission came through to his ship. “*Inidra* Dytin.” He spoke.

Dytin smiled at him. “*Yobhakcho* Darrod, it has been a long time.”

“Yes it has.” Darrod spoke.

“What brings you all the way out here Darrod?” Dytin asked as he leaned forward in his chair.

“You know why I am here *Inidra*!” Darrod snapped. “The *Sulevfu Woiuewr* has ordered that I assume your command and return all of your ships to Icarava. *Koppentotz* Aviel Em'mor and all those with you will be arrested and detained for questioning. All members of the *Livaiji Sulevfu* on our homeworld have been detained and are being questioned. You will order your other ships to return from where you sent them and then you will relinquish your chair to me.”

Dytin shook his head. “That will not happen Darrod and you know it.” He said calmly.

“You defy the *Sulevfu Woiuewr*!” Darrod barked.

“I defy those who claim to lead our people with honesty and integrity.” Dytin spoke once more. “The *Sulevfu Woiuewr* have neither.”

Darrod looked at him with wide eyes. “What you speak of is heresy!”

“Heresy?” Dytin spat at him as he stood up. “Since when is it heresy to speak ill of the *Sulevfu Woiuewr*? When has it ever been wrong to question the decisions and dictates of your government? The government you trust to lead your people.”

“You do not question the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* General, you are inciting dissidence!” Darrod snapped. “You have stolen three warships and six transports! You have left Darastrixi space and are now within *Disise* space! You are in restricted territory! The treaty with the *Disise* states that we are not to enter any part of their territory! We...”

“Treaty? Dytin snarled. “The *Sulevfu Woiuewr* did not sign a treaty, they capitulated to the Scourge out of fear! Fear of losing their positions of power! We allowed the *Disise* to butcher millions of Pralor men, women and children! On our homeworld! Those of us who protested this action and resisted were butchered by our own people! That is what the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* ordered done!”

“General, whatever history...” Darrod began to speak.

“Do not speak to me of history boy!” Dytin roared cutting him off and shocking even those members on his own bridge with the emotion that his voice carried. “You were not even a wet spot on your parent’s sheets when the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* ordered thousands of our own people to be executed! Their only crime was trying to protect those we called friends and allies! Do not dare speak to me of history Darrod Nilich, for you know not what you spew with your words.”

“I am under orders to return you and the other criminals *Indira!*” Darrod spat. “Do not force me to use measures which would make me disrespect you!”

“So we are criminals now are we?” Dytin snapped.

“You act in disregard for the dictates of the *Sulevfu Woiuewr!*” Darrod barked. “What do you call that?”

“I call that freedom.” Dytin answered. “To believe in something more than what the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* tells me I can.”

“What nonsense is this?” Darrod barked.

“The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is upon us Darrod.” Dytin spoke. “The *Dahakoan* have returned and one day soon, the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* will answer to them for all that has happened.”

Darrod looked at him with wide eyes. “And you base this on the ramblings of priests from the *Livaiji Sulevfu* and the wild words of some insane Maiden female? Some child who thinks she is the reincarnation of mythical warriors from our history! Who is *repaiup* now General?” (Crazy)

Darrod was about to continue when he saw the petite female enter the transmission. His eyes grew wide when he saw Laren, her billowing black hair and astonishing blue eyes. He saw her uniquely scaled skinned and how it was unlike any *Darastrixi* he had ever seen in all his years. Her skin was enough to stop his words, but the fact that she had hair, that is what caused Darrod to blink several times in shock.

Dytin smiled at his expression and looked at Laren who stood beside him proudly. He turned his eyes back to Darrod and chuckled. “Be thankful you are not in front of us Darrod, for Laren here would probably not react well to being called a child.”

Darrod tore his eyes away from Laren and looked at Dytin. “*Inidra* Dytin, I implore you to reconsider what you are doing.” He stammered. “Whatever issues you have with the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* can be spoken of and resolved.”

Dytin shook his head. “No, they cannot.” He replied. “Not when they have those like you willing to do their bidding. Automations who do not think for themselves and have no faith. Those who will act on their orders no matter how wrong they may be. Not anymore.”

Darrod turned to the side in the transmission. “Prepare to fire weapons!” He barked angrily now. “You will target engines only!” He looked at Dytin once more. “I will stop you old man!”

Dytin shook his head sadly. “Ah... Darrod.” He said. “You were always so predictable.” He turned to look at Nodra. “Major?”

Nodra nodded her head quickly. “Ready sir.”

“Initiate.” Dytin ordered without pause as he turned back to look at Darrod. “When you have the years and experience to defeat this old man Darrod, please feel free to present yourself to me and we will test that theory. Now however, now you are still a child.”

Laren watched with smiling eyes and the lights on the bridge of Darrod’s ship began to flicker and the few control stations that she could see fluttered and went dark. Darrod turned back to look at Dytin as all power to his bridge went out and emergency lighting kicked in.

“What have you done?” He screamed.

“General...” Nodra called out. “All three ships have lost power to all systems except life support. They are adrift.”

Dytin nodded his head and returned to his chair with Laren standing beside him. “Very well. Helm, execute evasive pattern *Jashi* Five Two and then return us to our base course.”

“Helm confirms!” The voice barked.

Dytin looked at the transmission once more. “Your ships will regain power in roughly six hours Darrod. Long enough for us to leave you behind and continue on our way. Do not attempt to follow us Major Darrod. If by chance you bumble your way to finding us, you will not like the greeting you will receive should we meet again.”

“General you!” Darrod began to shout but Dytin touched the arm of his chair and the transmission went dark. He looked at Laren who was watching his face. “He always was an *sisargh hofiba*.” He said. (Arrogant fool)

“What did you do?” She asked in obvious delight.

Dytin smiled at her. “An old trick that was devised centuries ago that most of the younger generations never cared to learn.” He answered. “Every Darastrixi ship has its own command code. If you know the command code you can order the ship to do whatever you want remotely. It is quite useful.”

“You powered down their ships?” Laren gasped.

Dytin grinned. “Yes. Something that will positively drive Darrod insane with anger and something that will not work again I’m afraid. Let’s hope he is not smart enough to trace our course to the station. I doubt *Dahakoan* Androcles will be as delicate as I was.”

VENTORI PRIVATE QUARTERS SOVEREIGN REGENT DARET

“Me?” Namiri Daret almost shouted as she came to her feet. “I will do no such thing! Never!”

Saydia sat beside Anthylea on one of the couches in the private quarters erected for her and said nothing. The secure communications disc was active and there were three figures in the transmission that was currently operating. Seran Echen, Ardal Kaend and Vesara Athcer were those who sat in comfortable chairs in a private conference room aboard the Lycavorian Union *VANGUARD MKII*-Interdiction Cruiser. All of them still appeared somewhat in shock at being aboard a ship more advanced than any they had ever seen before, but this did not keep them from exploring what they could and asking as many questions as possible. As Saydia had found out, the only answers denied them were those of a sensitive military or technological nature, but aside from that they were like children in a new store. They were all treated as visiting royalty and Martin did not really know the respect this treatment brought to him among the Tasmor people. It was something that was natural for him to do anyway for he was not as politically dense as many took him to be. Though they had been on the ship for only a few hours, most of the Tasmor Quorum was still wandering the ship with their escort and taking everything in. Saydia had requested Seran, Ardal and Vesara to be in this transmission for the political nature. Seran was the Tasmor Defense Minister, Ardal the Engineering Minister and Vesara was the Chief Tasmor Law Minister. All of which came into play now with what Saydia had presented to Martin Leonidas and his Queens just last night.

“You are the youngest daughter to the Tasmor Sovereign Regent, Namiri Daret.” Vesara spoke evenly from within the transmission. “This was written into our law hundreds of years ago by your own Grandmother. She knew a political marriage must always remain an option for the Sovereign Regent. You have no say in the matter.”

“What?” Namiri gasped.

“It is true Namiri, though Vesara could have been kinder in her explanation.” Ardal spoke more gently knowing that this information did not sit well with her. Namiri and Emylea Daret had always been known as the two most popular, adventurous and forward thinking of the Sovereign Regent’s daughters.

“It is the law.” Vesara hissed. “What is there to be gentle about? If this is meant to be done, she must acquiesce and accept it.”

“I will not accept it!” Namiri barked.

“The advantages of a political marriage to the Lycavorian heir are too numerous to count.” Vesara spoke once more. “These advantages for our people as a whole far outweigh your personal feelings in regards to this Namiri Daret.”

“Then you marry him!” Namiri spat at her. “I have no desire to become the wife of someone who I have never met and have no feelings for!”

“I have heard others talking about him mother.” Emylea spoke now as she took Namiri’s hand. “He already has six wives. They say he is crueler than his father. Why does this need to be? Have we not outgrown such things?”

“This is for the good of the Tasmor people! This is for our future! It does not matter what...” Vesara began to speak.

Saydia chose this time to rise to her feet and turn. “Thank you everyone.” She spoke forcefully, ending Vesara’s comment.

“Sovereign Regent you...” Vesara began once more.

“Will speak to you and the other Quorum members when you arrive!” Saydia snapped. “Thank you.” She looked at Anthylea who quickly leaned over and ended the transmission before Vesara could get wound up.

Saydia looked at Namiri as she moved closer to her. “Mother please tell me you are not considering this.” Namiri pleaded.

Saydia reached out and took her hands. “Emylea... leave us for a moment will you.”

Emylea hesitated for a moment and then turned to exit the building. Anthylea stood up from the couch and kissed Saydia’s cheek before following her. Saydia turned back to Namiri and smiled.

“Sit with me Namiri.” She said.

“Mother you...”

“Please daughter.” Saydia told her pulling her to the couch. Namiri settled to the couch next to her slowly and Saydia turned slightly to face her. She reached up and brushed some of Namiri’s dark brown hair from her face. She had streaks of light blond in her hair now, mainly because of her emotional state. “I have not been the mother to you that I should have been Namiri Daret, and for that I am so very sorry.”

Namiri looked at her with wide eyes. “Mother you...”

Saydia shook her head. “No, listen to me.” She said meeting her eyes. “I never wanted to lay with your father Namiri. Even as successful as he was, I just never cared for him in the least. It wasn’t like with your sisters. I was given time to know the men who would be their fathers, but with your father it was more expected of me because of his victories against the Kintaur. It wasn’t something I was given a choice in.” Saydia gazed at her lovingly. “Part of me resented you for this and I have not treated you as I should have treated you. This was never your fault. When I look at you now Namiri Daret, I see such beauty and life. You have your father’s skills and my brains. A deadly combination to say the least.”

Namiri stared at her mother in stunned silence. These were things she had never expected to hear from her. She knew the relationship between her mother and father was tenuous at best, but she never really knew why. She never spoke of it until now and her father had always spoken of her mother in genuinely kind words.

“Mother you don’t...”

“You have grown into a beautiful woman Namiri Daret and I am...” Saydia spoke. “I am so very proud of you and what you have accomplished.”

Namiri felt the tears well up in her eyes and she squeezed her mother’s hands. “Mother, I have never laid with a man. Only Vinara those few times and she... we both knew it was not going to last.”

Saydia nodded. “I know.” She said softly.

“Are you asking me to do this mother?” Namiri rasped out the words.

Saydia met her eyes and shook her head. “No.” She answered. “I will not ask this of you Namiri. I have no intention of allowing you to be forced do this because of some ancient law. I have started changing things Namiri and it has already begun. I have taken the first steps with Anthylea and Perlyea and the Breeders among our people. I will no longer adhere to laws and rules that have no place in this time.”

“Then why allow the Quorum to know that you presented this to King Leonidas?” Namiri asked.

“Tell me something daughter.” Saydia spoke. “You and Emylea have been among them longer than I, do you trust them? Truly trust them?”

Namiri nodded her head without hesitation. “Yes.” She answered. “They had to do none of what they have done for us Mother. Especially after what Perlyea did.”

Saydia nodded her head. “I know.” She said. “And I agree. Just being among them these last few days, it is almost as if a great weight has been lifted from my shoulders. They are sincere in their actions and I believe

they genuinely consider our people friends.” Saydia smiled and her face became relaxed. “I believe Perlyea is also very infatuated with Anja. Almost as if she has discovered a kindred soul.”

Namiri looked at her with wide eyes. “You believe she has developed feelings for Queen Anja?”

Saydia nodded. “Possibly. She would never pursue anything without Aduna’s consent, Perlyea loves her too much, but Aduna has always relied on Perlyea in matters that concern both of them and if this is the case I don’t believe Aduna would disagree.”

“There could never be anything between them mother.” Namiri said. “Queen Anja, all of them, they are devoted to King Leonidas in a way I have never seen before. It is almost like…”

Saydia nodded her head. “Like they are all pieces of a puzzle that fit together perfectly.” She said. “I know… for this is what I feel for Anthylea as well.” Saydia shook her head quickly. “Perlyea would never do something, no matter what she may feel and I believe she has found a true friend in Anja and she knows it.”

“What do you want mother?” Namiri asked.

“I want our people to prosper and grow Namiri.” Saydia answered. “I want us to not fear walking among the stars or what we will discover. I believe we have found a future that could be so very bright with these Lycavorians and others who call this Union home. I want that future for you and your sisters Namiri and whoever you chose to share your lives with. Martin Leonidas and his people could be very powerful allies and friends and that is what we need at this moment.”

“So you want me to do this?” Namiri asked. “To become a wife to this Prince who I have never met? I would have to lay with him and his other wives mother. That is what the Queens do and I have heard his wives share a similar relationship.”

Saydia shook her head quickly. “No, I told you I will not subject my daughters to the same thing I grew to hate so much about our laws.” She said looking at her confidently. “That was never my intent Namiri, believe me. And trust me, after seeing the reaction from Martin Leonidas when I presented this to him, I believe it is not something they practice either. I offered the option to them because it was one of the strongest ways for me to show them that we are sincere in our actions. I want them to know we can be powerful allies.” She explained carefully. “It will also keep Vesara from bringing it up in meetings without me knowing she will go in that direction. I will not haggle politically with these men and women, they could have squashed us like bugs but they instead chose to be honest and direct with us. Just as I intend to be with them.”

Namiri felt relief wash over her and she quickly embraced her mother. “Thank you mother!” She gasped.

Saydia squeezed her as she had never squeezed her before, loving the feel of her daughter in her arms. She reached up and ran her fingers through Namiri’s dark brown hair, the blond streaks fading quickly. “I love you daughter.” Saydia whispered. “Never doubt that. And I will show this love to you forever more now. As I should have done for so many years.” She pushed Namiri back in her arms and saw the tears spilling down her cheeks. She reached up and brushed those tears away. “Once the Quorum arrives we will meet with King Leonidas. I want you to be there. He will dismiss this, we will dismiss this and then we can begin negotiations for our future.”

Namiri nodded her head quickly, her smile making her eyes glow with an almost surreal and unnatural brightness that Saydia loved. “Of course.” She stammered.

Saydia stood up. “Good. Now… now let’s gather Emylea and Anthylea and go to this Food Hall that they have established. I have not been there yet and I have heard our people say that the food is incredible.”

Namiri smiled brilliantly. “Emylea and I have eaten there every day. The food is very good.”

Saydia wrapped her arm around her daughter’s waist and they headed for the door. “Good.” She said. “Now that Anthylea and I are free to show our love for one another I will have to keep my strength up.” Saydia told her with a sexy smile. “She is very passionate.”

Namiri couldn’t help but laugh at the look on her mother’s face and she squeezed her tightly as they left the building. It was going to be an exciting life going forward and she relished the experiences to come.

“...Know what he will tell me to do with this?” Martin snapped as Anja, Aricia and For'mya all sat at the table together and watched him rant and pace back and forth. To say they had been flabbergasted when Saydia presented it to them was an understatement. Martin was so flustered that they quickly called for some time to reflect on everything and Saydia had left them. All of them knew Martin had been up most of the night weighing the offer but unwilling to say what he felt. “He will tell me where to go, how to get there, and where to shove it when I get there! And he will probably do it in five different languages too!”

“Seven Beloved.” Aricia said softly looking at him as Martin turned to face her. “He has finished learning two others since we last saw him if I understand correctly. The Nodon tongue and the ancient Folcani dialect from their southern continent. He does love his languages, as do all of our children.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “Is that supposed to be funny?” He asked.

“I’m just saying.” Aricia spoke with a smile.

For'mya leaned forward. “Martin, are you considering this?” She asked. “We promised to never try to direct our children’s lives and we have adhered to that since Andro was born.”

Martin looked at them and sighed heavily as he sat down. “I won’t lie...” He told them. “Yes, I have considered it. One million Tasmor ground troops, regardless of their training level, this would be a huge relief to us.”

“The Svorag numbers really concern you don’t they Lover?” Anja asked.

Martin nodded his head knowing he could not lie to them. He leaned forward in the chair now. “Danny and I have been doing the numbers for days, we are the only ones with any real experience in Defense Force Composition.”

“And?” Aricia asked.

Martin shook his head. “Even with the additional forces Andro has with him, there is no way we can hold Honelze.” He told them. “The numbers just don’t add up. Every simulation I have had Avi run always ends up with us getting our asses handed to us in a big way.”

For'mya reached across the table and gripped his hand. “This is why you have not been sleeping isn’t it?” She asked softly.

Martin threw her a lopsided grin. “Kind of hard to sleep when you are looking at the prospect of becoming one of the fuglies. And seeing everyone you know and love either killed or turned into one of them. Sleep doesn’t really help, no.”

“And if you factor in the Tasmor troops?” Anja asked.

Martin met her eyes. “Having them man all the defensive posts and freeing up our people and General Koguth’s Pride gives us the extra added punch that puts us over the top. We can hit harder and last longer than the Tasmor and if the Tasmor are as good at defense as I have seen Namiri and the others are at offense, then that could very well be the tipping point.” Martin slid the data pad across the table in front of Anja and Aricia. “Avi ran the simulation last night with the Tasmor troops included. Sixty-seven percent less casualties and we eventually win out over their numbers because of our tactics.”

“And if we don’t have the Tasmor?” Anja asked.

“Ninety-two percent chance we all die or become a Svorag.” Martin told them. “Pleasant huh?”

“Then send for more troops as Andro said Martin.” For'mya spoke.

Martin shook his head once more. “I won’t leave the Union thin.” He told them. “Keleru is just bold enough to try something even with Pian chopping at his heels. If that happens Deia already has instructions to turn General Vistr loose and have him kick the Kavalians in the balls so bad they run scurrying back to Cabelir. If he has to defend the Union he needs every Spartan he can get. I won’t pull from that.”

“Martin, at the very least you should discuss this with Androcles.” Aricia spoke now.

Martin rose to his feet as he was shaking his head. “No. I will not compromise my son’s integrity when it comes to the women he loves. I wouldn’t do it to my queens and I will not ask him to do it either. It would be an insult to each one of you if I did that and it would be an insult to Sadi and Carisia and all of them if I asked him to do it. Not to mention that Sadi and the others would probably want to cut my balls off for even suggesting it. I get the feeling they are almost as possessive as you guys.”

Anja smiled at him, her jade green eyes twinkling in the light. “Well, we know when we have a good thing and so do they.” She told him.

“Yes we do.” For'mya agreed with a smile as well.

“We don't do political marriages and I am not going to start now.” He looked at them. “When he gets here we'll figure something out. We'll put our heads together and figure something out.”

Aricia got to her feet and moved over in front of him as Anja and For'mya slid their chairs closer together and began to read more of the data pad. “Beloved, go and have breakfast with Jezima and Meral.” She told him. “We will take care of this.”

“Aricia I...”

Aricia put a finger to his lips and leaned forward to nuzzle his chest. “Trust us Martin.” She said. “Go.”

Martin knew better than to argue with them and even at the mention of food his stomach growled. He finally nodded without a word and turned to move out of the Command Center. Aricia waited for him to exit before turning back to Anja and For'mya.

“He's not telling us something.” She said softly as she moved back to the table. “And it has nothing to do with what is happening out here.”

Anja and For'mya looked at her. “Dysea said something to that effect before she left.” For'mya told them.

“It's also why he isn't sleeping well.” Anja told them. “Whatever he has got going on in there it's taking up a lot of his thoughts.”

“He promised to never keep anything from us.” Aricia said.

“I don't think this qualifies Little Wolf.” Anja told her. “Whatever it is, I don't think it is personal in any way. It's something else and I think he is still trying to figure it out himself before he tells us.”

Aricia nodded her head as she sat down. “And he would not tell us until he is sure of his mindset.” She added. She looked at her fellow Queens and dearest lovers and friends. “So what do we do about this?” She asked.

“Hold on a moment. I might have an idea.” Anja said as she reached for the small console on the table in front of her chair. She entered in a code and tapped it activating the small holo disc. “Perlyea?”

Perlyea's face appeared in the small image and she looked surprised. “Anja? I thought you were on the surface?”

“I am with Aricia and For'mya now.” Anja said. “I have a question for you.”

“Of course, anything.” Perlyea answered.

“How much of your law do you know?” Anja asked her. “The details I mean.”

Perlyea looked at her slightly confused. “It is not my field of study really, so I never bothered to learn much of it. Why?”

Anja plugged the pad into the table. “Saydia gave this to us last night. It should be coming through now.” They watched as Perlyea turned from what she had been doing and moved to the small station beside her. They saw Duewa and others moving in the background in the *SPIRIT'S* research Lab. They had discovered that Perlyea was a very fast learner and though she didn't know how to use most of the equipment in the *SPIRIT'S* Research Lab, she was picking things up very quickly. Anja had discovered a fast and loyal friend in Perlyea Kalrr, just as she had with Duewa and she had granted Perlyea almost unlimited access to the facilities on the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* and Perlyea was taking advantage of it. As Perlyea viewed the screen her eyes grew wider and she turned back to look at them.

“Saydia gave this to you?” she gasped.

Anja nodded. “Last night?”

Perlyea shook her head. “Namiri will never agree to this.” She said almost immediately. “Namiri and Emylea are the youngest and most headstrong of Saydia's daughters. The most likely to rebel against ancient Tasmor law like this. To my knowledge, Namiri has never been with a man either. There was... there was a young Tasmor woman who she spent some time with a few months ago, but never a male. I can't believe Saydia would try to make her do this.” Perlyea's eyes grew slightly wider and she looked at Anja in the transmission. “She is trying to show you that we are willing to do what is necessary for an alliance. It has to be!”

“I believe we have already established that Perlyea.” Aricia spoke now.

“Yes, I agree Aricia, but this must be an action by her to show the Tasmor Quorum that our commitment must be sincere.” Perlyea answered. “Using this would insure we are bound to the Union in a way no normal agreement or treaty would establish.”

“Perlyea, this is not something we practice.” Anja told her.

Perlyea blinked several times and shook her head. “But I thought, Martin has you and five other Queens. Your son has six wives. None of these... Anja are you saying that none of these were politically driven commitments?”

Anja shook her head. “No.” She answered. “Martin is very much against this type of politically driven agenda, as are the vast majority of our citizens.”

Perlyea looked embarrassed. “Forgive me, I did not...”

Anja laughed gently as did Aricia and For'mya. “Believe us, it is not something that we have not seen before Perlyea.” For'mya told her. “Most people who do not know us cannot understand how we could all love Martin Leonidas so completely. There are times when even we do not understand how it could be, only that it is. That is what matters to us.”

Perlyea nodded her head. “I believe I understand.” She said. “This is how it is with your son as well?”

Anja nodded her head. “Andro is so much like his father that it is scary at times.” She replied. “And to be honest, his wives are just like us.”

“Fascinating.” Perlyea said. “You will have to explain in more detail about this when we have the time.”

Anja looked at her. “Perlyea, will your Quorum allow this?” She asked. “The Tasmor committing troops to this fight?”

Perlyea shook her head slowly. “Without something in return, I doubt it.” She answered. “There are still a handful of hardliners on the Quorum that Saydia inherited from her mother’s rule. They have much influence. Saydia has battled them over many things and usually she has won out, but committing our troops without some sort of signed treaty or agreement with your Union will probably not happen.”

“Even though the Svorag would ultimately come for the Tasmor?” Aricia asked. “At least that is what we all believe, yourself included.”

Perlyea shook her head. “Yes, I do believe that Aricia, but without something material to show the Union’s commitment to the Tasmor people, no, they will not commit troops to this fight regardless of what Saydia, I and others might tell them or the proof we could produce. They are politicians and unlike Saydia, Anthylea and myself, most have never served or fought in any engagement with the Kintaur or their cronies.” She replied honestly. Perlyea thought for a moment. “Saydia had to have known this and she definitely knew Namiri would not accept this so I don’t understand why she would present this to you.”

“Can your Quorum force Saydia or Namiri to do this?” Aricia asked.

“Namiri is the youngest of Saydia’s six daughters and Tasmor law does state that the youngest daughter of the Sovereign Regent must be made available for politically arranged marriages if they will benefit the Tasmor as a whole.” Perlyea answered. “I do not know the specific details to this, but Aduna would?”

“Aduna?” Anja asked.

Perlyea smiled brightly. “She is my... she is my partner.” She answered with a large touch of warmth in her voice that Anja detected right away. “We have been together for nearly three decades now. She commands a small Tasmor Commando unit that provides security for Quorum members when they travel, but her secondary specialty is Tasmor law. Not in any official capacity, but she is very knowledgeable. She is arriving with the Quorum in a few hours.”

Anja looked at For'mya. “When do we meet with them?” She asked.

“They arrive in four and a half hours.” For'mya answered. “The meeting was set for sixteen hundred hours.”

“Perlyea can you arrange it so we can speak with Aduna and yourself before we meet with Saydia and the Quorum?” Anja asked.

“Certainly.” Perlyea answered. “Why?”

“We need your troops Perlyea.” Aricia told her honestly. “Without Tasmor troops we will not win this fight and if we lose on Honelze then the Svorag will be free to return here to Ventori and then strike out for Tasmor worlds as well.”

“Our forces are well trained Aricia but we are not in the same class as your own Spartan soldiers.” Perlyea told her.

“In open combat perhaps not.” Aricia told her. “But in support and defensive positions they would free up our Spartans to do the actual fighting and we are better suited to this sort of combat.”

Perlyea thought about that for a moment and though she wasn't a military person in any real way or purpose, the logic was very sound. She looked at them. "I will pull Aduna away when she arrives. Where should we meet you?"

"Martin will be with Jezima and Meral most of the day until the meeting." Aricia stated. "Meet us at our personal quarters an hour before we are supposed to greet your Quorum. If we need more time, no one will question us. Our quarters have the only other QCR Relay on the ground. And we will need that."

"Your communications relay?" Perlyea asked. "Why?"

"Because if we can't get Sadi and the others onboard for what we have in mind then we are dead in the water." Anja said. "They are just as possessive of Androcles as we are of Martin and they will need to agree with this in order for it to work."

Perlyea smiled. "Interesting. I will enjoy seeing what the three of you come up with. I will bring Aduna to meet you shortly after they arrive."

The transmission went dark and Anja sat back. "What do you think?" she asked Aricia and For'mya.

"I think we are treading in waters that very well may make us more enemies than we want if we are not careful." For'mya stated. "Among our own family too."

Aricia sat back in her chair. "Sadi will be the hardest to convince." She said. "She is too much like me, and I would be hard pressed to agree to something like what we want to propose if it concerned Martin."

"You wouldn't be alone Little Wolf." Anja said.

"No, you would not." For'mya agreed.

"*Carians* I hope this doesn't blow up in our faces." Anja said softly. She looked at both Aricia and For'mya. "Are we doing the right thing? Should we even get involved in this?"

"Do we want to see the man we love more than our own lives die?" For'mya asked softly looking at them. "Do we want to see our children and friends die? We have experienced this once before and not so very long ago. Look what that did to all of us." For'mya saw both Aricia and Anja shudder gently at the memories of what they had all felt when they thought Martin had been killed. "This threat is very real and as Queens of the Union and mothers, we must do what we can to avert a total disaster. And we must do so in a way that does not require we lose our husband and mate and our sons and daughters in a foolhardy attempt at keeping us alive." For'mya reached out and took Anja's hand in her own, while Anja took Aricia's hand. "You know that Bella, Dysea and Cirith will agree with us."

"I just don't want Andro or Sadi... any of them resenting us for proposing it." Anja spoke softly. "We've never tried to control the lives of our children and now we are sticking our noses into Andro's business in a big way. And this will turn our other children against us as well for they all love their brother and they will follow him anywhere."

Aricia looked at them. "He is our son and he will understand why once he knows what the risk is. We did not raise fools for children. If this is the only way then Androcles will do what he must. And I believe Sadi and the others will too."

"And if he says no." Anja asked. "If Martin shuts us down? Then what?"

Aricia met her eyes. "Then we will follow our path and our mate, wherever it may lead." She said. "There is no other path for a Spartan woman."

PRALOR SCIENCE STATION 489
COREWARD EDGE OF FORMER PRALOR SPACE
NOW SCOURGE TERRITORY

Dytin allowed his hands to glide gracefully over the helm controls of the Darastrixi Long Range Transport as he used the station keeping thrusters to remain unmoving as Matum sat in the co-pilot's chair and allowed his hands to hover over the secondary controls while studying the two monitors in front of him. Laren, Aviel and Dalis were behind them watching silently as they approached the massive, deserted Pralor station.

"They certainly did not believe in doing anything small did they?" Dalis commented as his head lowered to get a better look at the station.

They were only five thousand meters from the station and it filled the entire cockpit window now.

“No they did not.” Dytin echoed absently as his eyes drifted up and took in the colossal landing bay doors which were closed. “Matum?” He asked finally.

“Nothing yet *Inidra*.” Matum answered. “We’re holding at five thousand meters just as our instructions stated. No signal as yet.”

“Give it time Matum.” Dytin spoke. “Caution must become part of all of our actions right now, especially given where we are. We must trust in the plan.”

“It is a plan we had nothing to do with sir.” Matum reminded him.

Dytin nodded his head as he looked at him. “Do you trust *Doraanar Sarlana Matum*?”

“Yes sir.” Matum said instantly. “I could... I could do nothing else.”

Dytin nodded his head. “And she travels with four *Dahakoan* Matum. Do you believe a *Doraanar* and the *Dahakoan* could lead us astray? Bring harm to us?”

Matum shook his head instantly, surprising himself with the quickness of his own answer to the question. “Never.” He said.

Dytin smiled. “No.”

Aviel also smiled as he saw the revelation in Matum’s eyes. “And now you realize just how deeply you believe in faith young Matum. It surprises you doesn’t it?”

Matum turned and looked at him. “I... I never... yes sir it does.”

Aviel nodded his head. “Now you know how we felt when we first discovered Laren and Ladur existed. We never really knew how deeply we followed the teachings of Dadrien until the time came to push away all the simple things and look inward.”

Matum looked at him intently. “*Koppentotz* Aviel... it feels... it feels...”

“Like freedom?” Dytin asked him.

Matum nodded quickly. “Yes!”

“I like that feeling.” He said as he reached across his controls and touched another button. “*Nodra*? Anything?”

“Sensors are clear.” She answered from the bridge of the *ENCHANTRESS* which was also holding station five hundred thousand meters from the station.

Aviel looked at his friend’s head. “You expect *Yobhakcho* Darrod to find us Dytin?” He asked.

“I trained him Aviel.” Dytin answered. “If the *Sulevfu Woieuwr* has given him full reign to find and bring us back, then he would not hesitate to follow us out here.”

“How can you be so sure *Inidra*?” Matum asked.

“There are no habitable planets within a hundred light years of our position.” Dytin replied. “The Scourge decimated them when they swept through this area of space. The station is all there is.”

“But this station is not on any of our star charts.” Matum spoke. “How would he know it was here?”

“The same way I knew where it was once *Dahakoan* Androcles told me this is where we would meet.” Dytin answered. “I accessed the restricted Star Charts in the archives several days ago. The charts that the *Sulevfu Woieuwr* has deemed off limits to everyone and hidden away in the archives.”

“They don’t want anyone to know what is out here.” Aviel said softly.

Dytin nodded his head. “No, they do not.” He said. “At least not in Scourge space.”

Matum turned and looked at Aviel. “What do you mean?” He asked.

“This is former *Pralor* space young Matum.” Aviel told him. “This single sliver of *Pralor* territory separated our space and...” Aviel blinked with a surprised look on his face. “I don’t even remember their species’ name.” He gasped. “How sad is that?”

“It was another of the Scourge dictates to the *Sulevfu Woieuwr*.” Dytin spoke. “We had to remove all knowledge that the *Pralors* ever existed from our history books, our star charts, even our lives. All that remained after this occurred was locked away in restricted vaults that even the Scourge do not know we have.”

“I doubt they would be pleased to know of those vaults.” Aviel spoke.

Dytin chuckled softly. “I will not take that bet old friend.” He said.

All of their heads turned when the soft beep sounded from Matum’s console. He focused his attention on that console and his eyes narrowed. “It’s the signal!” He gasped.

“Easy now.” Dytin spoke. “Have them confirm with their number Matum.”

Matum typed on the console quickly and almost instantly there was another beep. He looked up. "The response is Alpha Nine."

Dalis was the one who turned to Laren. "Laren?"

Laren had been silent during the exchange but now she nodded her head quickly. "Alpha Nine is the Lead Worker Drone that Androcles sent in the probes." She answered. "It's correct." The console beeped four more times and before Matum could speak Laren smiled. "*Inidra*, they are opening the bay for us to enter."

Almost before she finished speaking the massive doors directly in front of them began to part to reveal a dark interior that they could not see within. As the doors opened further however, small interior lights began to come on within the landing bay. They appeared to be emergency lights of some kind, but it was more than enough for Dytin to adjust their controls and using his station keeping thrusters he began to move the transport forward.

"Clear right." Matum spoke as he watched his own instruments.

"Stand by." Dytin told them. "I'm going to set us down quickly so that they can close the doors. The longer they remain open the more power they use."

The transport jerked slightly as Dytin adjusted their position once more, moving past the doors now and into the main portion of the landing bay, but then he extended the landing struts and quickly brought the transport down onto the deck of the landing bay in the far right corner just where he had been told to land. The emergency lighting allowed them to see most of the landing bay's interior now and the many vehicles that were used to move different craft around were scattered about mixed in with different crates of equipment that had been left behind.

Matum was still monitoring his screens and he looked up finally as the ship began to power down. "Landing bays doors have sealed and the bay is now pressurized."

"That was fast." Aviel spoke.

"I have heard of the Pralor Worker Drones." Dalis spoke up. "It is said they were marvels of Pralor engineering and ingenuity. Every Pralor ship had them and they were the ones who handled most of the repairs and such during their war with the Scourge. They were much faster and more efficient."

Dytin lifted the arm of his seat and locked it back into an upright position as he turned to look at them. "*Dahakoan* Androcles said we must move quickly." He told them. "Let's get everyone moving Aviel."

Aviel nodded and headed out of the cockpit with Dalis and Laren in tow. Dytin turned back to Matum and put his hand on his shoulder. "Matum, secure your station and then arm the charges as we discussed. You maintain positive control of the detonator at all times Matum."

Matum nodded. "I understand General." He answered.

"We will wait for you at the bottom of the ramp. Be quick Major." Dytin told him before moving out of the cockpit.

Dytin moved quickly through the passenger section of the transport as he heard the ramp touch down on the deck. He stopped only long enough to pull two standard issue Darastrixi sidearms and a pulse rifle from the rack over the view window. He slung the rifle and moved forward with the sidearm in his hand, moving through the cargo section and up to the top of the ramp. Laren's father Yokra, still a military man at heart Dytin saw, had dropped to one knee at the base of the ramp waiting for him. The members of Matum's Sand Strider detachment had spread out in a half circle around the rear of the ship and all ten of them were crouched with their weapons at the ready. Aviel, Nahko, Robati, Laren, Chalith, Dalis and Shalu were behind Ladur and Ch'teven who stood back roughly ten meters from the perimeter the Sand Striders had made and looked as if they were ready to spring into action to support them if need be.

Dytin moved the two meters to where Yokra rose to his feet holding the rifle. Both of them turned to see Matum come from the cockpit and make directly to where they stood. Dytin handed him the rifle and other sidearm without thought.

"The charges?" Yokra asked.

Matum nodded his head as he charged his pulse rifle. "Set." He answered. "I have the detonator. It would be a shame to have to destroy such a new ship."

Dytin nodded his head. "Yes, it would. Better the ship than us if things go bad however."

Matum nodded his head. "True."

All of them heard chirping and turned to see the oval shaped Pralor Worker drone scurrying from out of the shadows toward them. Laren stepped up between Ladur and Ch'teven and dropped to one knee as the drone moved right up to the two large dragons as if it did not have a care in the world. Dytin moved down the ramp to stand beside Aviel as they watched.

“These Drones have been around our kind before Aviel.” He said.

Aviel nodded his head. “So it would seem.” He answered. “Come.”

Aviel led them forward now and all of them came up between Ladur and Ch'teven to see Laren squatting down in front of the drone and listening to it chirp away. After a long moment of this Laren nodded her head and stood up to face them.

“Alpha Nine says they have secured the Pilot’s Briefing room and we can move there.” Laren told them. “That is where they have moved the equipment Androcles and Dorian sent for us.”

Nahko looked at her stunned. “Laren you... you understand the noises it is making?” she asked.

Laren smiled and nodded her head. “Oh yes.” She replied. She waved them forward with her hand.

“This way.”

PRALOR SCIENCE STATION 489 PILOT BRIEFING ROOM LANDING BAY 12

Dytin stood silently as he ran his hand up and down his arm in fascination. The room that the drone had led them to was large and held nearly a hundred comfortable chairs arranged in a half circle. It was obviously a briefing room of some sort with several couches and tables along the walls. It also had three rooms adjacent to the main room which appeared to be smaller recreation rooms with more couches and tables and several large monitors along the walls. The monitors were dark and the rooms only dimly lit, but it was more than enough for them to see easily enough.

Dahakoan Androcles had been true to his word and the now empty containers that had once been probes were stacked against the far wall empty of their contents. They had contained twenty of these amazing uniforms as well as several small computers of Pralor design and a handful of light weapons. The uniforms were the items that facinated all of them. They were matte black in color, with several crimson colored stripes in different places, but the material they were made out of was something that the Darastrixi had never seen before. The uniforms were exceptionally light, but easily discernible as body armor of some sort. Each had extra plates along the forearms, chest, shoulders, thighs and shins, but an odd material along the joints that almost felt like armor itself, but was extremely pliable and allowed for near complete movement in any direction of their limbs. Each forearm held a small, two inch by two inch square control panel that operated the incredibly thin layer of almost golden like armor that extended from hidden sections along their arms, legs, chests and backs. The Sand Strider troops with Matum had been most happy about this when they discovered it and had spent the better part of an hour hitting each other with their weapons and fists and marveling how the armor was not damaged in any way, always reverting to its original state.

It had been Laren who had shown everyone how to don the armor and how to activate the thin, extra layer of metal armor. She knew instinctively how to put the armor on and what it could do and Dytin concluded she could have only learned this from her fellow *Dahakoan*.

Dytin looked up when he saw Aviel and Dalis come up to him, both of them with similar expressions of wonder on their faces.

“It is some sort of composite alloy material that I have never seen before.” Dalis spoke before any of them could. “And the metal armor that extends is amazing. I ran a spectral scan of it with my portable scanner. It is made of a material I have never seen before in any Table of Metals known to us.”

“It seems that this particular branch of Lycavorians are not as backward as our *Elbakiw Sulevfu* believes.” Aviel spoke looking at Dytin.

Dalis shook his head quickly. “No. Whoever designed and manufactured this should be working for us.” He said excitedly.

Dytin smiled at his enthusiasm as he looked at Aviel. “What else?” He asked.

“Two working Pralor P9 computers.” Aviel spoke calmly. “This was their most advanced portable computer when their end came Dytin. It equals or surpasses our own systems in every way even now, nearly forty-five thousand years later.”

Dytin nodded as he looked around the briefing room. “Based on what I have seen just in this room alone I dare say that we did not know the Pralor people as much as we should have.”

Aviel nodded his head. “I was thinking the same thing.” He said. “Nahko is on one of the computers now with Shalu and Chalith trying to determine what information is on it. There were half a dozen smaller computers, P1s Laren said they are called.”

“What about the station?” Dytin asked.

“Laren says the Drones have cleared these four rooms for us to wait.” Aviel spoke now. “Given what we have seen, or not seen to be more precise, I’d say they have not powered up the reactor core more than a few percent.”

Dytin nodded his head. “Less of a power signature.” He said. “Scourge sensors are not known for being precise and according to the charts out of the restricted archives, there have been no Scourge ships in this area of space for several centuries at least. Why give them reason to change their pattern.”

Dalis nodded his head. “That matches with information we have on them.” He added. “They cleanse a system and then return only so often to insure it is as they left it. If our data and information is correct they left many of these stations intact because they did not want or could not destroy them at the time.”

Dytin nodded as he looked around the main room. “Abandoned station on the fringes of Scourge space that they rarely come to?” He said with a touch of admiration in his voice. “This was a wise move on the part of *Dahakoan* Androcles. For one so young he is well versed in tactics it seems.”

“Could your *Yobhakcho* Darrod track us here Dytin?” Aviel asked.

Dytin shook his head. “That depends on how badly the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* want us back, or if they know what Laren and Ladur are.” He replied. “If they gave Darrod access to restricted charts then unfortunately yes. If they did not, I do not know. He is very smart Aviel. One of the finest officers I trained until he chose to become a member of the *Sulevfu Woiuewr* Guard.”

“If they know what Laren and Ladur are, do you think they will give this information to the Scourge?” Dalis asked.

“I’m willing to bet that they would not care as long as they keep their power and the Scourge do nothing against our people.” Aviel spoke. “The Scourge have pounded it into their heads for centuries that anything having to do with the Pralor people was strictly taboo. It should be reported to them immediately and they would take care of it.”

Dytin nodded his head. “Perhaps... but unless they have already dispatched ships to this sector, it would take three days before a Scourge ship got close to this station. Our sensors are better Aviel and we detected nothing within five hundred light years of this station. The closest point that has Scourge ships that are active in the system is nearly two thousand light years away. They would not get here in time to stop us.”

“But your *Yobhakcho* Darrod could?” Aviel said.

Dytin met his eyes. “He could possibly find us, yes.” Dytin answered. “But he will not stop us.”

“How can you be certain?” Dalis asked.

Dytin didn’t take his eyes from Aviel. “I will kill him first.” He replied softly. “The future is already in motion my friends and we cannot stop what is happening. Neither will Darrod. Not if I have anything to say about it.”

PREMONITION
UPPERDECK LOUNGE
FIFTY MINUTES FROM STATION 489

“Mari?” Androcles asked from over her right shoulder.

Mari turned her head slightly from the P9 computer on her lap and looked at him. “They have activated one of the P9s. The wife of *Koppentotz* Aviel is on it right now.” She answered from the chair she sat in. “The TAP camera you put on the face of the computers is sending a clear signal. Two others are with her, but she is running the computer.”

“What is she doing?” Andro asked.

“Nothing really. Just reviewing the core information.” Mari answered. “She did activate the power monitor and she is running it on the lowest setting.”

Andro nodded his head. “She is being mindful of the power output that they use. Good. That tells me they are being cautious and are sincere in what they doing.”

“That’s good right?” Mari asked.

Andro nodded his head. “Oh yes.” He replied. “That’s very good. Keep monitoring what she does and if any of the P1s are activated by anyone other than Laren let me know.”

Mari nodded her head. “Got it.”

“What about Alpha Nine?” Murano asked as he came up beside Andro.

“He’s keeping the station’s core at six percent power output father.” Mari told him. “Just enough to power the rooms they are in and life support.”

Andro looked at Murano. “Can the Scourge detect that?” He asked.

Murano shook his head. “Very unlikely. Shara was a Mage warrior and they did not delve into the technical aspects of ships. She did not have the practical knowledge to improve Scourge sensors. That was one of their biggest weaknesses. They may have improved them somewhat based on what Dytin relayed to us, but not enough to detect that station powering up. As long as we keep it under fifty percent, we should be safe. That is enough power to open the cache and begin extracting the weapons and equipment.”

“So far, so good yes?” Andro asked with a smile.

Murano met his eyes. “So far.” Murano said with a much more stern tone of voice.

Andro’s eyes glittered in the light. “Spoilsport.” He told him as he turned and headed for the cockpit. Andro moved through the smallish kitchen area and saw Iama securing whatever she could with Fedor assisting her. She wore a full set of the Mark Six Armorpoly Body Armor and a KM12 in a holster on her right thigh. While quite fearless, Iama had no formal training in combat operations and even though she had taken life to defend herself before, Nara had taken it upon herself to start giving her lessons with Fedor’s help. Iama turned out to be a quick learner with Fedor assisting her within their Etheric bond and she had volunteered to secure the ramp and hatchways of the *PREMONITION* while they were on the station.

Andro cut through the small QCR room and entered the cockpit area, taking the four steps into the upper portion in one short lunge. Then he was looking out the expanse of the cockpit view window and staring at the massive station in the distance. He reached out and squeezed Meka’s shoulder as he passed her station and she nodded quickly, her tail twitching behind her in a relaxed manner. Andro moved up between the two pilot seats and knelt down, both Sadi and Ne’Veha turning their heads to look at him.

“Status?” He asked.

“We got here quicker than we thought.” Sadi answered. “Armen says the station has drifted half a light year since it was abandoned by the Scourge.”

“How long?”

“If we maintain our current speed?” Sadi asked. “Forty-two minutes.”

“How long have they been there now?” He asked.

“Call it ninety minutes.” Ne’Veha answered now.

Andro nodded his head. “Long enough to get settle and put the new armor on.” Andro turned his head back to look at Kameka. “Meka... did the individual armor sets tagged for essential personnel come online?”

Kameka reached up over her head and flipped a toggle switch on her console. The screen to her right lit up with the bio signs of nine different individuals. “Affirmative.” She told him meeting his eyes. “All of them are reading normal Darastrixi life signs based on the data Sarlana gave to us. Should I cross route it to Eliani’s P9?”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes, please. She learns better on the fly anyway.” He told her. Andro turned back to look at the station in the distance, tossing ideas in his head. His right brow furrowed slightly and Sadi smiled at this.

“What are you thinking our love?” She asked him.

Andro looked at her. “What makes you think I am thinking about anything?” He asked her with a smile. Ne'Veha chuckled now. “Because we have seen that look before.” She said. “You are scheming in that demented mind of yours.”

“Demented?” Andro spoke with a fake look of hurt. “I thought you liked my demented side *Sirsangai*. You didn't seem to mind when I was licking...”

Ne'Veha's eyes grew wide under her helmet. “Stop!” She exclaimed.

Sadi laughed at this. “You did urge him on quite strongly *SirsanGai*.” She said.

Ne'Veha looked at her. “I seem to recall someone sticking their tongue down my throat because she could not keep from screaming while *Saradasaar* was bathing a certain part of her anatomy with his exquisitely talented tongue.” Ne'Veha told her smugly.

Sadi blushed under her own helmet. “Oh... that.” She said. “I couldn't help it. I was... I was weak.”

“Weak?” Ne'Veha gasped. “Sadi you are always weak!”

“Excuse me...” Kameka spoke from behind them. “If you don't mind, I'd like to be able to concentrate on my work here and not fantasize about what I will have Daio do to me. If you don't mind of course.”

Sadi and Ne'Veha looked at each other and began to laugh like little girls. Andro looked back and forth between them before leaning forward. “If all goes well, I will happily lick all of you in a very demented fashion once this is done.”

They looked at him with glittering jungle green and dark brown eyes. “We will hold you to that *Saradasaar*.” Sadi told him.

Andro smiled as he reached up and tapped his jaw activating his implant. “Deni. Murano. Cowen. Prep for insertion, we're going in now!” He ordered before looking at Sadi who had wide green eyes now.

“Andro we...” Sadi began.

“Take us in *KertaGai*.” He said. “Burst Armen and let him know. Early bird gets the worm you know.”

Andro was turning and heading into the rear before Sadi could respond and she shook her head.

“*Carians*, we will never be able to predict what he will do.” Sadi exclaimed.

“Early bird gets the worm?” Kameka asked. “What does this mean?”

Ne'Veha turned in her seat and looked at her. “It means we are about to jump into the *sibfla*.” She explained.

Kameka didn't say anything for a few seconds and then nodded her head. “Ah... I understand now.” She said. “This is a simple extraction however.” She added. “We should not have to deal with any shit.”

Sadi chortled as her hands began to move over her consoles. “You are hanging with us now Meka. Nothing we do is ever easy and it almost never goes according to plan.”

Ne'Veha shook her head as she too began to adjust her controls. “*Carians* ain't that the truth.” She commented.

Sadi lifted her head and looked out the view window to her left. “Talon One to Talon Two. Head's up Normya, we're going in now!”

“Understood.” Normya's voice was calm as she answered. “Andro got a bug up his *mida* didn't he?” She spoke.

Sadi chuckled lightly. “You could say that.” She answered.

“Patience was never one of his virtues our mothers always said.” Normya commented. “On your nine o'clock like glue. Tir'ut will take up overwatch in the overhead turret when we follow you into the bay.”

Sadi nodded her head. “Then here we go.” She stated.

DARASTRIXI *IKLISS*-Class Cruiser

“...Did they disable your ships?” Issver asked with a stunned expression.

Darrod shook his head. “It does not matter now sir.” He spoke. “What matters now is finding them. I need access to the Restricted Star Charts of this sector sir.”

Issver looked at him with wide eyes now. “Why? For what purpose?” He demanded.

“*Inidra* Dytin obviously knows where he is going.” Darrod spoke. “I must as well. We are in *Disise* space sir. Our normal charts indicate there is nothing out here in this sector of space! Nothing. If that is so, why would he be out here? As Commander of our military he would have access to the restricted charts for former Pralor space. Now I need that access.”

“Major Darrod, there is nothing out there!” Issver protested. “The General is simply running as far away as he can.”

“Sir! How badly does the *Sulevfu Woieuwr* want them returned?” Darrod snapped. “I have three ships full of crewmen willing to do their duty but you are risking us for nothing if you do not allow us to do our job.”

Issver thought about that for a long moment and then finally nodded his head. “Very well Major.” He spoke as his hands typed on a console in front of him. “I am sending the restricted charts to your ship now.”

Darrod glanced over to his Second Officer and saw him nod. He turned back to Issver. “Thank you sir.” He said. “I have another question however.”

Issver looked at him. “Yes.”

“Why would the Commander of our military abandon everything he has trained and fought for through the years because of one Maiden female that the *Disise* want?” Darrod asked. “Who is she?”

Issver shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t really know. She is on the list to be part of our Attaché Program with the *Disise*. Two of their *Disise Ioth Kilnsiri* appeared before us this morning demanding we turn her over. Apparently her mother and father did not want her to become a member of this program and they hid her with the *Livaiji Sulevfu*. That is all the information I have at this time.”

Darrod stared at the man for a long moment and then rose to his feet. “Thank you sir.” He spoke. “I will contact you again when we have them.” Darrod motioned curtly with his hand and the transmission ended abruptly. He turned to his Second Officer as the man worked the controls of his computer station. “Inelor?” He asked.

“Overlaying the charts now.” He replied as he touched one last button and they looked up towards the area in front of them as the holographic chart rose from the podium top. “There are no habitable planets within a hundred light year range.” He answered. “It’s just a large space field out here. Two fields of scattered ship debris, one medium sized asteroid belt, but not much else.”

Darrod shook his head. “He had to be close to his objective or else he would not have sent his other ships away.” He said to no one in particular. “Did we track them?”

Inelor nodded his head. “Their jump took them across the border here.” He said pointing with his finger. “Once they jumped, it’s anyone guess where they ended up.”

Darrod lifted his own hand and moved it through the holographic stars. “This area of space is somewhere we have never been before Inelor my friend. You don’t make a blind jump into unknown space.”

Inelor looked at him. “No, you don’t.” He looked at Darrod. “You think they knew where they were going?” He asked.

Darrod nodded his head. “Just as I believe Dytin knows where he is going. He has never run from anything in his life and he most certainly is not running now. He knows exactly where he is going as I said. The *Sulevfu Woieuwr* is hiding something from us. They are not telling us something and this is the reason the *Disise* want this female.” His eyes narrowed and he lifted his finger to point at an obscure position of light. “What is this?” He asked. “All the way out here on the edge of *Disise* space.”

Inelor typed on his computer console. “A Class Five Pralor Science Station.” He replied. “It’s been abandoned since the Pralor people were wiped out. Over forty thousand years now. This is not on our normal star charts sir.”

“It’s Pralor manufactured so I’m not surprised. The Restricted Star charts that the *Sulevfu Woieuwr* keep are from before the *Disise* wiped out the Pralor people. We were not allowed to keep any reference of them in any way so we made these. Only the most senior officers even know they exist. The *Disise* certainly do not. The station is a Class Five too.” Darrod spoke softly. “One of their big ones.”

Inelor nodded his head. “Yes.”

“Why would he be going to a Pralor Station that has been abandoned for over forty thousand years?” Darrod asked softly.

Inelor looked at him. “You believe this is where he went?”

Darrod nodded his head. “Yes.”

“How can you be certain sir?” Inelor asked him now.

“I’m not... but *Inidra* Dytin does not think conventionally Inelor.” Darrod said. “All of our ships have changed their Command Codes?”

Inelor nodded his head. “Yes. He won’t be able to do that again.”

Darrod nodded his head. “Set a course for this station. When we will be in sensor range?”

“If we move at maximum speed, three hours.” Inelor answered.

“Make it so Inelor.” Darrod told him. “We need to catch him. I need to know why our Military Leader and the man I have looked up to all of my life is risking everything that he is for some Maiden female.”

“Understood sir.” Inelor told him.

ECHO QUADRANT

HADOR

PRALOR DESIGNATION MOON 739

“...Lied to us!” Konlar snapped angrily at the holo transmission he stood in front of.

“I told you what you needed to know Konlar!” Lorendo barked right back at him from his home on Artaaya.

“Two days it takes you to return my message?” Konlar snarled at him. “You lied to me Lorendo! You told me there were no Alphas left alive! Why is it that I spoke with two of them? A male and a woman! They had both been turned, that much I could tell, but they were turned by Alphas and that makes them Alphas! She said she was a Queen. That her mate was a King! Is this true?”

Lorendo waved his hand dismissively. “They are not from this quadrant of space! They are from the Alpha quadrant and they are trouble! They are violent and barbaric and murdered dozens of my men when we first encountered them!”

“The Alpha quadrant?” Konlar gasped aloud. He saw Lirana begin to rise out of the chair she was sitting in and he shook his head quickly.

“When did you see them?” Lorendo asked now.

“I told you in my message.” Konlar answered him. “They took the two women you had us watching from Honelze more than two days ago now. The she elf said they were going to Ventori.”

“Green eyes or brown?” Lorendo asked.

“What? Green, why?” Konlar hissed.

Lorendo shook his head. “Ventori? Why would she take them to Ventori? And what were they doing on Honelze?” He spoke to himself not caring that Konlar heard him. Lorendo’s eyes grew wide. “He is on Ventori! He must have discovered who they are and he had them taken from Honelze to Ventori! If he is there then he... he will discover what happened there. He will have people on Honelze preparing.”

Konlar looked confused. “What happen there?” He asked. “What do you mean? The Svorag laid waste to the planet.”

Lorendo ignored him as Konlar saw him typing on a computer that he could not see. “I need leverage against Delnash.” He spoke softly. “I need him to back off until I have completed what I am doing.”

“What are you speaking of?” Konlar barked now as Lorendo ignored him.

Lorendo looked up. “I have a new mission for you.” He stated.

Konlar shook his head. “No!” He stated flatly. “We will do nothing for you any longer until you tell me what is going on!”

Lorendo’s eyes narrowed and he leaned forward. “I own you Konlar!” He snarled at him viciously. “I own those with you! I am the one who took you off Ventori all those years ago! I am the one who gave you a superior life and the training to make it even better. I am the one who gave you that ship! You will do what I say!”

“You do not own me or my people!” Konlar growled back at him.

“One word from me and everything you have will come crumbling down Konlar!” Lorendo continued. “I need only give the order, and the Pralor military will descend upon you in droves. They will take your ship

and everything you have derived from Pralor technology! They will imprison all of you and take your children from you. I will see to that! Do not test me fool!”

“*Forn nubous ronnus!*” Konlar spat savagely.

“Do I have your attention Konlar?” Lorendo snarled. “You will do my bidding boy, or I will see to it that everything your father started and that you have gained in the last ten thousand years will cease to exist! Do you understand what I am saying?!”

Konlar stared at the transmission trembling in anger but knowing that he was right. “Tell me what you want.” He growled in a low voice.

“I have it on good information that Delnash’s daughter Mari is right now with Delnash’s brother Murano. What they are doing I don’t know, but they will be returning to Ventori or Honelze soon.” Lorendo told them. “When she does I want you to take her. Take her and kill Murano.”

Konlar shifted on his booted feet. “How am I supposed to do that?” He barked. “They are Alpha wolves. The most powerful of our kind. We cannot meet them head to head!”

“Mari and Murano are not part of your disgusting species!” Lorendo snarled. “They are Pralors.”

Konlar looked at him with wide eyes. “You want me to kill a Pralor and kidnap another?” He gasped. “Are you mad? For what purpose?”

“I need time and you will buy me that time.” Lorendo snapped. “Killing his brother and taking his daughter will send Delnash into a fit. He will forget everything else and devote all his time and efforts into finding her.”

“What am I supposed to do with her?” Konlar barked.

“I don’t care!” Lorendo growled back at him. “Give her to one of your kind as a gift! Or better yet, give her too many! Turn her into one of your kind if you wish and force her to birth another of your disgusting species. Isn’t that how it works? Impregnate one of them and they are bound to you for all time? I don’t care what you do with her Konlar, just take her and kill Murano!”

Konlar glared at the screen. “If we do this... if we do this then you must release your hold on us and let us go about our way! This was our deal! You will honor that deal or by all I hold sacred I will find you and tear out your throat!”

“We will talk about your debt to me when you have completed the tasks I have given you Konlar.” Lorendo told him. “Not before.”

Konlar stared at his image for a long moment, his blood burning in hate and anger. “It will be done.” He said finally.

Lorendo nodded his head. “Good.” He spoke. “Contact me when you have executed this task and have her. Not before.”

Konlar was about to say something else when Lorendo cut off the transmission from his end and left Konlar standing there silently. Lirana rose to her feet now and moved up beside her husband. She pressed her body to his, feeling the tension and anger flowing through him, but also how his body reacted to her touch. After a moment he looked into her dark eyes and leaned forward to touch his forehead to hers as his arm went around her waist and he drew her tighter.

“I have failed us Lirana.” He said softly.

Lirana shook her head instantly. “No. You have done what is needed to keep what we have built.” She told him.

Konlar looked at her intently. “He is lying to us.” He said. “He is lying to us and there is much he is not telling us.”

“What does he mean when he says he needs time?” Lirana asked. “Do you know? Time for what?”

Konlar shook his head. “No, but whatever he speaks of cannot be good. He is trying to hide something, I can sense it in his words. He is concerned and these new Alphas, he fears them.”

“Yes, but why?” Lirana asked softly. “His words only seem to confirm what the she elf told us *huor*.” (Husband)

Konlar nodded his head. “A Union of Lycavorians from the Alpha Quadrant. How many I wonder? And with Alpha wolves among them. Countless Alphas if what she implied is true.” Konlar stepped away from her, his thoughts all over the place. “What does it have to do with our people on Ventori? We were able to save a

few hundred but I thought the Tasmor had taken all of the remaining survivors from the world after the Svorag attacked.”

Lirana looked at him. “Do you think... could he have had something to do with what happen there *huor*?” She asked. “He has never cared for our people Konlar. Even when your father led us, he always treated us as animals that were beneath him.”

Konlar moved to the large window that overlooked the lush forest moon they were on now. They had named it *Hador* when they first arrived. Honor in the Lycavorian language. It was meant to inspire them and help keep them anchored in their history. Their history stated that the Alpha Wolves among them had died out or disappeared in the first few thousand years on Ventori. No one really knows what happened to them. Apparently their history was wrong if there were now Alphas in the Quadrant now. Regardless of where they had come from. When his father was approached and given this opportunity by Lorendo all those years ago he had jumped at the chance. There had been many who did not agree with how the Lycavorians on Ventori were progressing and wanted change that the Justice’s did not want. Those are the ones who followed his father off Ventori when Lorendo had given them the opportunity. They had learned quickly that it was for his own nefarious desires, but the men and women who had followed his father had their own agenda as well, and they were not as stupid as Lorendo had always thought them to be. Konlar’s eyes swept over what they had built since then. Children filled the dirt paths below, playing in the forests all around them with happiness and freedom. The natural predators of Hador remained far away from their compound, learning very quickly that they were no match for those behind the walls of the compound. They had far outgrown the ability of the compound to support all of their people and his father had taken actions behind Lorendo’s back to insure that what they had continued and grew.

Lirana moved up beside him now and slid her arm around his waist. Konlar was far older than her seven hundred and nineteen years, nearly three thousand years older, but he had loved her breathlessly from the day he had claimed her as his wife and mate. Their four children played in the dirt paths below them and Lirana hoped that there were many more children in their future.

“What thoughts fill your head my husband and mate?” Lirana asked him softly as she nuzzled his cheek and side of his neck.

“It is time to shift everyone to Vesst.” The voice spoke from behind them.

Konlar and Lirana turned to look at the much older man who now stood in front of the communications disc. That he was part Pralor was obvious to any wolf who could smell him, but his scent also told them that he had been turned for far longer than many of them had been alive.

“Edrao?” Konlar spoke.

“Lorendo is frightened.” The man spoke as he moved up closer to them. “I have never seen him frightened before. I believe things may have exploded out of his control far more than we know.”

“The Svorag?” Konlar asked.

Edrao nodded his head as he moved to the window and looked out over the compound. “They are a large part of it yes, but something else has happened as well, and I believe it has to do with these Alphas that have arrived. You are correct that he fears them, but his disdain for our people has always overridden that fear. Something about these new Alphas, about who they are, this has suddenly become very important to him. And that is not like Lorendo.”

“These two women he has had us watching these last years?” Konlar asked.

“They are part of it, yes.” Edrao spoke. “I don’t yet know how, but things have become more urgent now. Over the past few months he has become more urgent. And it began when these new Alphas appeared in the Echo Quadrant. I took it upon myself to reach out to some old friends on Artaaya who know of us...” He held up his hand when he saw Konlar’s eyes go wide and he opened his mouth to speak. “Stay your words Konlar, for I know what you will say. There are only two of them and they are turned just as I am. Turned by wolves long before you were ever born. They are committed to us and volunteered to return to Artaaya at your father’s request.”

“You have had people on Artaaya all of these years and never told anyone?” Lirana gasped.

“Your father tasked me with insuring the survival of our people.” Edrao told them looking directly at Konlar. “And those Pralors like myself who have been turned, consider ourselves Lycavorian Konlar. Totally.”

Konlar nodded his head. “I have never doubted this.” He spoke evenly.

Edrao nodded his head. "Good." He said. "It was easy to walk among them and not have them discover us. All we had to do was be mindful of using our wolf skills. Several months ago they sent me a coded message about something that happened on the planet Onterom. It had to do with Delnash and it also concerned Lorendo and these new Alphas and Pralor Praetorian warriors of our history."

"Praetorians?" Lirana spoke with wide eyes. "The ones who fought the Scourge?"

Edrao nodded his head. "There is a connection somehow. I have not spoken to them since their message and they have sent nothing further since." He saw the looks on their faces and shook his head. "This is not unusual for them so do not worry. Our biggest concern now is what Lorendo has asked of you now. Taking Delnash's daughter? Killing his brother? He is crazed to ask such a thing of you. This tells me that whatever is happening outside of what we know is very bad. Asking you to do such a thing would expose our existence to the Pralor people and that is something that he has never wanted before. He is becoming desperate and if we are not careful we will be caught up in whatever he has lost control of."

Konlar's eyes narrowed. "The cure facility in orbit?" He asked.

Edrao met his eyes. "I have questioned this for many years given what he has told you, but his actions now are beginning to make me believe this is not a facility that is trying to find a cure for the Svorag virus at all."

Lirana's dark eyes grew wide. "You think he is involved with them?" She gasped.

Edrao shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know, and based on his erratic behavior these last years, I would not want to guess." He answered. "What I do believe is that we need to move everyone to Vesst as soon as possible. It is the only place they will be safe from the storm I believe is coming."

"Those on the station will know the moment we launch the transports we have built in secret." Konlar said shaking his head. "They will notify Lorendo immediately and kill those of our people who they are holding on that station."

Edrao nodded his head. "That is why we need to board that station, find out what it is they are really doing, and then move all of our people to Vesst. It is the only place they will be safe from Lorendo."

"We need to put people on Ventori and discover what is happening there as well." Konlar said. "If there are survivors on Ventori that we did not know of, it should be easy for them to blend in. Whoever this King is, Lorendo said he must be on Ventori. And that is where the she elf Queen said they were going with the two Pralor women."

Edrao nodded his head. "There is far more going on that we are not aware of Konlar my boy." He said. "And now I believe we need to start acting and discover what it is. If we do not, we could lose everything."

Lirana nodded her head in agreement. "I will select a small team to move to Ventori and act as survivors." She spoke. "I will lead them."

"Lirana no!" Konlar protested.

Lirana smiled at the concern in his voice and she pressed closer to him lovingly. He pulled her close and nuzzled her cheek and throat causing her to gasp in delight. He always did have a way with her, even before they became mated. "I have done this before husband." She said finally. "I will discover what is happening there."

Edrao nodded his head. "She is the most experienced in this action Konlar." He told him. "It is a wise move."

"You will do nothing out of the ordinary." Konlar told her. "Get in, find out what is happening and then get out."

Lirana nodded her head with a smile. "I know my husband. You have the hard part. Discovering what is happening on that station is going to be infinitely harder to accomplish."

Edrao shook his head. "Not as much as you might think Lirana." He stated. "Allow me to explain."

PRALOR SCIENCE STATION 489

Laren sat between Ladur's forelegs, her back against his broad chest and her knees drawn up to her chest with her arms wrapped around her shins. Her eyes were closed and she swayed slightly back and forth between

Ladur's front legs. Robati Ti'shara knew immediately what was happening and she had waited for several minutes before moving over beside her daughter and settling to the deck slowly beside her. This was one of the times that the molecular differences in her DNA caused her physical pain and the only way she had been able to suppress it through the years was to join with Ladur in this fashion and draw from his power and resonance. No one dared approach them through the years when they were like this, no one but Robati. As always Ladur shifted his front legs from the protectiveness of Laren to allow Robati to sit beside her.

"Laren my child?" She spoke softly as she laid her hand upon Laren's knee.

Laren's eyes opened slowly and she looked at her mother, a small smile touching her lips. "It has passed mother." She said softly.

Robati looked around quickly and then back to her. "The episodes are becoming more frequent child." She said.

Laren nodded her head. "As Androcles, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner grow closer yes." She told her. "They are... they are so much more powerful than I mother. Especially Androcles and Elynth. They are like a supernova when together within the Etheric realm. Sometimes I wonder how..."

Robati gripped her hands tighter. "Speak to me daughter." Robati said. "You have never held anything back from me child. Do not start now."

Laren looked at her mother. "When I feel them within... mother I am... I am so weak when compared to them." She said softly. "Why would Dadrien choose me?"

Robati reached up and brushed some of her daughter's raven black hair from her face. "He chose you for a reason my daughter. Your father and I have believed this from the moment you broke free of your shell and entered this world screeching louder than all of your brothers combined."

Laren's eyes grew wide. "Mother!" She exclaimed.

Robati smiled at her as Laren inched closer to her on the deck. "No one can guess as to why Dadrien chose you my daughter. Or Ladur." She said softly. "Nor why he chose Androcles and Dorian, or Elynth and Ryner. Only time will answer that question."

"I can feel the love they have for me mother." Laren said wistfully. "For Ladur. And not just Androcles and Dorian. All of their brothers and sisters. They don't even know us but yet they love us as if we have been part of their lives since Ladur and I were birthed."

"Perhaps you have." Robati told her seeing Laren's head turn fully to gaze at her.

"What do you mean?" Laren asked.

"This..." Robati waved her hand all around them. "All this is not happening by chance Laren. It is being guided by the gods for a greater purpose. There is a reason Dadrien chose you. All of you. Once you are together, that reason will become known over time." Robati brushed her fingers across her face. "And this pain within you, once your *sepa dask* Anja has fixed that, you will never have to endure that again for you will be complete."

"I am frightened of what comes mother." Laren spoke softly. "I am frightened of what could happen, what will happen."

"And you think you are alone?" Robati asked her.

"Androcles and Dorian are Lycavorian Spartans mother." Laren said with a smile. "Fear is not something that they feel."

Robati smiled and shook her head. "Oh my beautiful Laren." She said gently. "I have read everything I could find on Lycavorians once you revealed to your father and I who they were. I have just finished with the reports that Dalis was able to secure for us before we left. They are Lycavorian Spartans yes, and their history is storied and long, but do not mistake their strength and bravery as having no fear child. They know fear well, probably better than most, but they have learned to harness that fear. To use it so that it does not incapacitate them. They use that fear to make them stronger."

"I hope I become like them." Laren said.

Robati wrapped her arms around Laren's shoulders and almost broke into tears. "My child, you are so much stronger than you know. You have endured so much in so short a time." She said using her hands to caress Laren's feather soft hair. "You and Ladur both. There are times when your father and I weep because we cannot take this burden from you."

“We have accepted this *dask* Robati.” Ladur spoke now, his deep voice warm and sincere in its tone. “Sometimes however, sometimes it is much to bear without being able to share it with them.”

Robati nodded her head and lifted one hand to stroke the underside of Ladur’s muzzle. “I know Ladur. But soon that will change and you will never be alone in your souls again.”

Ladur nodded. “Yes, this is true.” He stated. “We...”

Robati sat back quickly as Laren’s head came up like a shot and she was staring at the ceiling above them. Robati glanced up at where she was looking and then back to Laren. “Laren my child, what is it?”

Laren scrambled to her feet now, this action drawing the attention of everyone else in the room. Ladur rose as well, his head now focused at the ceiling above them as he and Laren moved into the main part of the briefing room. Dytin, who had been talking with Matum and several other Sand Strider soldiers rose to his feet now as well.

“Laren?” He questioned her. “Laren... what is wrong?”

Laren’s head dropped to look at him and Dytin gasped when he saw her eyes. The different colored blue eyes were nearly glowing in the dimness of the briefing room, giving off an eerie bluish color throughout the entire pupil area of her eyes.

“They are here!” Laren gasped in delight, feeling her whole body become energized and full of life. “Androcles and Dorian are here!”

PRALOR SCIENCE STATION 489

LANDING BAY 19

SEVEN DECKS ABOVE LANDING BAY 12

The landing bay was once more silent as the *PREMONITION’S* engines spun down and were quiet. The ramp was down, Androcles kneeling at one corner with Murano to his right, Dorian on the other corner with Jomann to his left. Four sets of eyes swept the interior of the dark landing bay carefully, waiting for the time to move forward. As if on cue, powerful lights began to come on all over the bay, illuminating the massive interior slowly so that no one lost their night vision. Andro lowered his 190A5, the silenced barrel dropping to point at the deck as his ears picked up what he was waiting for. The chirps and beeps of the Worker Drones.

Andro smiled and rose to his feet, moving several meters away from the ramp with Murano while the others waited and they squatted down as Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen darted right up to them.

Andro listened to Alpha Nine, who was doing all the chattering, and then turned to Murano. “Murano, Alpha Thirteen will lead you to the engine core. Apparently the Scourge left lots of little gifts for anyone who happened to come here. They have cleared a single path for you and your team. Alpha Nine will take us to Bay 12 through a similar cleared path. That’s all they had time for.”

Murano nodded his head. “I told you to expect this Androcles. Sending the drones ahead was an excellent decision.” He said calmly looking around. “A single path is all we will need however. Insure that no one wanders once you secure Bay 12. I will contact you when we have safeguarded the engine room and begun to breach the Cache.” Murano put his hand on Andro's shoulders. “Trust all of your instincts now Androcles. Wolf, Praetorian and *Dahakoan*. As I believe your father would say, we are hanging out here pretty far, and we cannot afford to miss anything.”

Androcles nodded his head. “Understood.”

Murano nodded knowing he did not have to belabor the point. He turned back to the ramp. “Engineering Team with me!” He rasped out the command. “We follow the drone!”

No other commands were needed as Drone thirteen turned and began to scurry off with Murano right on his heels. Andro watched as Ridor and Kalis broke quickly from the ramp with everyone moving behind them as they followed Murano, Daio bringing up the rear. Andro cut his eyes just as Dorian and Jomann moved up to his position, followed quickly by Denali, Lisisa, Eliani, Sehri, Sheva, Onera and Arduri. All of them dropped to one knee behind him as Elynth and Ryner came up on their sides, Jeth, Tharua and Soren just behind them. Behind them Andro could see Sadi leading Ne'Veha and the others for the Interior Landing Bay Command station on the upper floor, while Caydren and Cinol moved into defensive positions on either side of the

PREMONITION'S ramp. Iama would be just at the top of the ramp, always within eye contact of either Caydren or Cinol. Normya's *STRIKER* was down a hundred meters from where they sat and Andro could just detect Tir'ut climbing into the large sniper turret on top while his sister would monitor all the sensor data that they were receiving from Armen on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Andro felt nothing but pride swell in his chest. Their insertion had gone perfectly and everyone was all business now, for they all knew the danger level was off the charts and they needed to be at the top of their game.

Andro looked at those behind him. "Alpha Nine has cleared a path through leftover nasties." He told them. "We follow him down to Bay 12 and no sight-seeing. I got point with Elynth; Jomann you and Soren bring up the rear. Everyone stay frosty, we don't know what could happen from here on out."

Andro saw everyone nod and he turned back to Alpha Nine. "Alpha Nine, you are it my little friend. Lead us out."

The Worker Drone beeped almost happily, turned on its six spider like legs and began to scurry across the deck towards what appeared to be a large lift of some sort.

No one hesitated and they followed Androcles as he took off after the Drone.

"Laren, are you sure?" Dytin gasped aloud as he squeezed her arms gently.

Laren nodded her head. "Yes. I can feel them on the station." She told him.

"They were not supposed to arrive for hours *Inidra!*" Matum hissed. "They could not possibly be here already."

"Laren?" Dytin prodded her.

Laren shook her head. "It is them but they are not trying to contact me." She spoke. "And I feel another group as well."

"Another group?" Dytin asked. "Where?"

Laren looked at him. "They are not moving with Andro and Dorian. They are moving in a different direction. They are above us, that much we are certain of. Ladur and I..."

Do not be alarmed arande. Andro's warm voice broke into her and Ladur's minds and they felt happiness flood through them. *The others you sense are with us. They have a mission of their own. We are coming down to you Laren. Insure no one leaves the Landing Bay you are in, the Scourge lefts traps all over and they have not been cleared.*

Laren looked at Dytin as she gripped his arms tighter. "They are coming to us!" She told him. "Andro says that the others Ladur and I sense are on another mission but we are not to leave the Landing Bay. There are traps all over and they have not been cleared."

"Traps?" Aviel hissed now. "What kind of traps?"

Ladur turned his massive head and looked at him. "Apparently the Scourge left measures in place on the station when they abandoned it *Koppentotz* Aviel. In case others tried to board it. Andro and Dorian sent two Pralor Worker Drones ahead of them to the station but they have not managed to clear all of these traps." Ladur explained to him.

"General we knew none of this!" Matum protested. "How do we know this information is accurate?"

Dytin looked at him. "Faith Matum my boy. Faith." He answered as he held Laren's hands within his. "But we will not be idle either. Matum, deploy our Sand Striders into a defensive perimeter around the entrance to these rooms. Prepare for an influx of personnel."

Matum nodded his head. "Yes General!" He barked and turned towards the troops who had risen to their feet.

Dytin turned back to Laren and looked at her intently. "You can talk to him?" He asked.

Laren nodded her head with a smile. "Yes!" She spoke excitedly. "He told me... he told me to tell you the defensive perimeter is not necessary, but it is prudent."

Dytin couldn't help but smile. "How soon before they get here?" he asked.

Laren didn't answer right away but then she looked at him. "He says they are following the Drone who cleared the path. They landed in another ship Bay seven decks above us and are making their way down to us now. A few minutes at most he hopes."

Dytin nodded as Robati came up beside Laren and took her in her arms. He turned to look at Matum who was directing their Sand Striders into defensive positions just outside the large double doors into the briefing room. “Matum!”

“*Inidra*.” He replied turning back to him instantly.

“A few minutes Matum!” He barked. “Defensive action only Major. We do not want to fire upon the *Dahakoan* please. They would not like that welcome.”

Matum Dariel nodded his head, his own heart racing at the prospect of meeting the only remaining *Doraanar* alive, and one who had known his beloved grandparents. Grandparents whose memory he had come to worship through the years because of their actions and their deeds.

“Understood General.”

SPARTA'S WRATH

-Colonel Taich? - Armen called from his command chair.

The Lycavorian Executive Officer turned from his spot behind the Tactical officer. “Two million kilometers and holding our position.” He spoke. “Sensors are detecting only one other ship in the area and it matches the configuration of a Darastrixi Dreadnought.”

-Very well. We will hold position here until Murano advises us they have entered the cache- Armen spoke.

“Armen, may I recommend we target batteries eleven through nineteen on the Darastrixi ship.” Taich Neulan said.

Armen looked at the man he had selected as his First officer. **-Purpose?** - He asked.

“With all respect to the Darastrixi Armen, we are out here with no back up.” Taich told him. “If this goes to *sibfla*, I'd rather we get the first hits in.”

Armen rose from his chair to his full seven foot plus height and looked at him. His neural networked processed what Taich had just proposed and Armen determined that this thought was a reaction he would not have had. He had dismissed the Darastrixi ship as a threat to their ship but had not considered the implications if the Darastrixi ship had actually been commandeered and was playing friendly. This is something that Armen learned at this very moment as was the purpose of his neural network. He was a learning Avatar and he found he was learning new things every day from his very own crew. This made his many circuits very happy. While he had never been meant to take command of this ship, and with a Pralor crew he probably never would have, but this was not a Pralor crew completely. They were something different. And they were teaching him as well as allowing him to lead. His answer was almost instantaneous as he processed what Taich had told him.

Armen nodded his head to Taich. **-By all means Colonel. Make it so. You do not need my permission to insure our ship and crew remains undamaged-**

Taich smiled and turned back to his station and began to issue the orders. Armen touched the arm of his chair activating the COM unit there. He could have just as easily used the internal COM that was built into his systems, but he wanted to act as normal as possible and his programming told him this was one way to do that and allow the crew to see that he was not just a machine.

-Bridge to Medical Bay. Lady Serale your status? –

“We are ready for whatever happens Armen.” Serale Leonidas’ voice came over the speakers. “Cvea and I have the main Med Bay ready and three of our portable clinics set up in the areas closest to the teleporters and landing bays.”

-Your plan should we have incoming injuries? –

“All wounded will be teleported directly to the clinics if possible.” Serale answered. “Cvea will assess them there and if needed we can use the internal ship teleporters to move them to the main Med Bay. All major trauma comes here, minor gets treated at the clinics. That is how Eliani wanted it set up.”

-Understood- Armen answered. –Should we receive wounded, internal teleporters will be placed at your discretion. However, all Cargo Teleporters will be directed by the crews assigned to receive our cargo. One of our priorities is getting the weapons systems to this ship-

“We shouldn’t need them Armen but I understand. We will make due.” Serale answered him.

Armen nodded his head and looked around. **–Now we wait-** He stated.

LANDING BAY 12

It had drummed within them their entire lives.

Who were they? What were they? Why were they so very different?

A constant pounding within their psyche; a hammering of knowledge not yet unleashed. At times it had been so very difficult to find their balance, but Andro and Elynth had learned how to do this very thing through the years and it was something that they passed on to Dorian and Ryner within hours of discovering that they were like them.

Who were they? What were they?

Though Dorian Leonidas was technically just over a year old, he bore the memories of his father, mother and grandfathers before him just as his brother Androcles did. Almost four lifetimes of memories. These same questions had coursed through him even stronger because of his accelerated birth and without Andro and Elynth to help them, he was certain that they would have driven him and Ryner insane. One of those questions was answered when they discovered their Praetorian history and now the answer too many of those remaining questions stood in front of them.

At least many of the answers.

They had entered Landing Bay 12 in typical commando fashion, spreading out from the door and covering each other as they half sprinted across the expanse of the massive bay. They were making for the Darastrixi transport when Andro spied her out of the corner of his eye and came up short, Dorian, Elynth and Ryner following only a split second later. They stood in the doorway of the briefing room, a defensive half perimeter of Darastrixi soldiers in front of them, but there was no mistaking who they were.

That just was not possible.

Andro stared at her for a long moment and finally took a tentative step towards where they stood, Dorian appearing beside him with Elynth and Ryner. He felt it once more screaming out within him right now. The same pull he had felt as a small boy, the same echo that Elynth had felt as an adolescent dragon. The same beautiful peace that they had discovered together deep within their minds in a place that they shared with no one else. This movement caught the attention of Jomann first and he brought the others up short and turned back to watch, Eliani coming up beside him as Deni and the others crowded around them.

“Laren? Ladur?” Andro’s voice was nothing more than a whisper, but Laren and Ladur heard it as clearly as if he had shouted it out at the top of his lungs.

Andro let his A5 drop from his hands to dangle on the quick release straps, Dorian following his movement a second later and the two brothers began to stride toward that line of Darastrixi soldiers with a

single purpose, Elynth and Ryner following them a split second later. And noting would deter them. For their part, Laren and Ladur heard it shouting within them just as loudly, and without a moment's hesitation they broke forward at a dead run.

"Laren no!" Robati shouted as Laren's hand pulled away from her.

Nothing in this universe could have stopped her or Ladur and her mother's words fell on deaf ears. Matum turned and was about to step in front of her but Laren simply lifted her hand and sent him sprawling to the side, passing the line of Darastrixi Sand Striders with barely a glance.

Jomann made to move from his spot but it was Eliani's hand on his arm that stopped him and he turned to look at her. "No Jomann." She said softly. Jomann saw the look on her face and cut his eyes to Denali and Lisisa and saw it there as well. It wasn't concern or fear, but a look of great happiness and peace. Jomann knew that Eliani was nearly as close to Andro as Zarah was. He was actually much closer to his two sisters than any of his other siblings simply because of events in their lives that brought them together. Eliani because she had been born, like Androcles, in a time of strife and high emotion for their parents. Zarah because of what had happened on that mountain so long ago. Androcles loved all of his siblings as he had shown so many times through the years, but Eliani and Zarah were the closest to him in an emotional way. Jomann knew this and held himself in check, moving closer to his *Anome*. Eliani pressed against him with a smile on her face and tears beginning to well in her eyes. She looked up into his face. "This has been... this has been a long time coming Jomann my love." She told him. "It needs to happen now."

Robati clung to Yokra as they watched with wide eyes, Aviel holding Nahko and Dytin standing behind his troops.

For everyone in the landing bay of the abandoned Pralor Science Station it was an event that none of them would ever forget in their lifetimes. All six of them stopped, only a few feet between them. Laren's hands went to her face in uncluttered happiness as she stared at them so close to her. So tall and powerful and so utterly handsome. This was a moment she had never dreamed would happen and the tears flowed freely now and then she was launching herself into their arms. There was not a single breath of pause as Androcles and Dorian held out their arms and caught Laren between them. Her wail of unfettered delight echoed in the bay all around them as their arms pulled her body close to them. It was a sight to see really, her petite form held off the deck nearly a foot, sandwiched between the two much taller brothers, their arms wrapped around her buttocks and each other while her arms flew around their heads and their faces came together. They were too busy to notice the light blue and white flare of Etheric power that engulfed them for a few seconds, though everyone else in the bay did, their eyes going wide at this.

It was no different for Ladur as he came together with Ryner and Elynth in a near twelve ton mass of talons and wings and muscle. It was like a reunion of brothers and sisters that had not seen each other in decades with all three of them playfully nipping at each other with their jaws and the sound of their teeth snapping together echoing in the bay. Elynth and Ryner were rubbing their snouts across Ladur's neck and sides while he tried to move his head back and forth between them to do the same but could not decide who to rub first. This was a sight that had Dytin and the others standing with open mouthed shock at. Such displays of emotion from a *Vrrarhoinpa* of their species was almost unheard of and to see it taking place with two others of equal emotion was astonishing, not to mention the size of obsidian colored female and the Sinopia colored male.

Laren had no such indecision as she rubbed her cheeks against both Andro and Dorian, nuzzling them fiercely and loving the feel of their skin against hers and delighting in the many sensations that Androcles' goatee caused her to feel. She had never seen hair on the face of any Darastrixi let alone felt it and it was sending little shivers throughout her skin and body. She drew her head back, the tears flowing down her cheeks freely and she placed her hands on their cheeks staring at them both. Laren knew of their Spartan culture, their history, and she knew that they did not openly show emotion on very many occasions, but now she saw the single tear careening down Androcles' cheek and Dorian's eyes were incredibly moist. She could also feel the incredible surge of Etheric power filling her now, radiating from the two brothers and sweeping through her, energizing her body and mind.

"I have... I have waited so very long for this moment in time." Laren stammered, her words coming out in a raspy tone.

“No longer than Dorian and I sister.” Andro gasped softly. “He may not have joined us until recently, but it was always meant to be him and Ryner with us. Always. I see that now.”

Dorian looked at his brother as the tears finally came and he felt an immense aura of love at Andro's words, his arm tightening around his back.

“*It is finally done.*” The deep voice bellowed from all around them, echoing with in the bay and causing everyone to whirl around searching for that voice.

“*And the six are now united as one.*” The second male voice resonated from all around them, causing Andro and Dorian to lower Laren to the deck as they turned quickly, looking for the source of the voices, but remaining in physical contact. “*And a new breed is born.*”

“*As it was always meant to be.*” The first voice echoed.

Andro looked around the bay, even his keen wolf eyes unable to detect anything. “Show yourselves!” He barked out the words as his right hand closed around his glaive.

The explosion of Etheric power to the side was spectacular to say the least. The bluish white light began as a small orb like object drifting several feet off the deck and then quickly expanded and took shape as the Etheric fingers danced all around like bands of electricity. Two objects took shape actually, one a man and the other, the other was the largest dragon form any of them had ever seen before in their lives. The dark, reddish green scales were stretched over an immensely muscular body of nearly twenty-five meters long and five meters in height. The dragon rested easily on the deck, the massive wings folded along its body in peace, and the glittering white colored eyes looking directly at where Andro, Dorian and Laren stood.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Dorian gasped aloud as his eyes took it in. The dragon was easily much larger than Jeth and his father, both of whom were recognized as among the three largest dragons in the Union. Only Arzoal was slightly longer but much less muscular than the father and son. This dragon dwarfed even them and caused Jeth to shift nervously on his feet as the others instinctively prepared to do battle.

The tall figure of the man moved slowly around the front of the Etheric projection of the massive dragon and Andro's eyes flew open in instant recognition. There was no mistaking the tall, powerfully built body or the wild, raven black hair. It was the eyes however, that gave it away completely for Androcles Leonidas and with his heart hammering in his chest and the voices of his wives and mates screaming out in his head about what was happening he dropped to one knee and lowered his head, unable to meet those eyes. Yellow gold wolf eyes that matched his father's in every way.

“Grand... Grandfather Sumar! Dadrien of the... of the Mountain!” He gasped aloud.

The obvious reaction among the Leonidas clan was perhaps the one thing that struck the Darastrixi most after they heard Androcles speak the names. They immediately dropped to one knee behind and around Androcles and bowed their heads in deep reverence. It was Aviel who had pulled Nahko and the others closer while Laren was embracing the young Lycavorians and now, with wide eyes of his own, Aviel Em'mor dropped to one knee as they gazed at the Etheric projections of the man and massive dragon. A dragon that could be only one individual.

“*Wer Zazhuanth!*” He gasped.

The Etheric image of Sumar, wolf eyes alive and almost glowing, moved closer to where Androcles knelt, Dorian and Laren next to him and his siblings spread out behind him. The Etheric projection was so powerful and clear that you could actually see the expression of his face and the edges of his mouth curl upward in a smile of genuine warmth.

“*My family.*” Sumar spoke softly. “*You don't know how long I have waited for this day to arrive. The joy that fills me cannot be put into any words that I know.*” Sumar leaned over slightly looking directly at Laren. “*And you child...*” He spoke watching as Laren's wide eyes rose to look at him. “*You are part of that now child. Just as Androcles and Dorian and all those around you have my blood flowing through them, you do now as well. I hope you are prepared for that.*” Laren had no words and her mouth opened and closed several times causing the Etheric projection of Sumar to chuckle. “*Get up! All of you! My family does not bow to me!*”

“*All of you rise as well!*” Dadrien barked as his huge head gazed upon the Darastrixi by the doors. “*You are all proud Darastrixi, and you bow to no one!*”

Eliani was clinging to Jomann's arm tightly, her green eyes wide in disbelief, Lisisa holding her waist as they all crowded together. Androcles could only stare at the image of his grandfather and Dadrien as questions swirled within his mind unlike at any time in his life. So many questions. He glanced at Dorian and Laren and then his siblings behind him before turning back to the image of Sumar.

"Grandfather... grandfather how is this possible?" He finally gasped.

Sumar smiled as Dadrien came up beside him and settled to the deck once more. ***"The how is a bit harder to explain than the why."*** He spoke. ***"Even Dadrien and I do not know all of the answers. I suspect no one does."***

"What... what do you mean?" Dorian asked.

"I died that day Androcles." Sumar explained to them. ***"On our homeworld, I died that day fighting beside my son, your grandmother and so many others. At least I thought I did. I woke with Dadrien staring back at me. It scared the sibfla out of me to be honest."*** It was Eliani who burst out in the small yelp of laughter at that comment, her eyes flooded with tears and Sumar smiled even more. ***"You see..."*** He continued speaking. ***"I am not the reverent figure so many have come to see me as."***

"I... I don't understand." Androcles spoke.

Sumar nodded his head. ***"And neither did we..."*** Sumar answered. ***"The universe is full of things that we cannot explain Androcles my boy, no matter how hard we try to figure them out. Dadrien and I are part of that now, and we have asked the same questions that you and Elynth, that Laren and Ladur and now Dorian and Ryner have asked. We still do not have many of the answers that we have sought together, but we do have many of the answers that you seek. We have existed now, in this form, for over forty millennia. How this came to be we do not know. I believe it has something to do with the Rift of Time among my people. The Pralor people, and what we have believed for so long. That our bodies become energy in some way and our consciousness survives in different forms. For some reason Dadrien and I took this Etheric form and time has had no real passage for us until now."***

"Now?" Laren questioned as Aviel led Dytin and the other Darastrixi slowly over to where everyone was as they listened.

Sumar nodded his head. ***"I will get to that in time."*** He said. He turned and motioned with his hand to Dadrien. ***"First, I must... we must apologize to you Androcles. To you, Dorian, Laren, Elynth, Ladur and Ryner. To all of you."***

Laren still clung to Andro's arm as she stood there, Dorian's arm around her slim waist. "Apologize?" She gasped. "But for what?"

"For what all of you have had to endure." Dadrien replied. ***"The pain you have had to endure not truly knowing who and what you were. The doubt you have had within yourselves and the doubt you received from others. The looks of disdain and fear from those who did not know what you were."***

"It is our fault." Sumar spoke now. ***"All of it."***

"How... how can that be?" Ladur gasped from where he sat between Elynth and Ryner just to the right of where Andro and the others stood.

"What you are Androcles. What all of you are." Sumar told them. ***"It is because of us."***

"You speak of the Praetorian gene grandfather?" Androcles asked.

Sumar smiled and shook his head. ***"If only it were that simple."*** He said. ***"No... that is not what I meant. The Praetorian gene is something that I always knew would be passed down through my descendants, and through the descendants of those Praetorians who accompanied me on that journey so long ago. That would account for the tall young man behind you who is holding my granddaughter so tightly."*** Eliani looked up at Jomann's face with adoration as she felt him tighten his hold on her waist and straighten his posture. ***"No Androcles, we are speaking of the six of you. What you are now is because of us. The dragon blood that flows within you and Dorian, and the Lycavorian blood that flows within Laren, Ladur, Elynth and Ryner. That is because of us."***

"But... but how?" Andro asked with wide eyes. "You are not... you do not..."

"We do not have physical form?" Sumar said. ***"Yes, I know. That does not mean that we cannot influence or guide. As I said, the how of it is exceptionally difficult to explain, but the why is very simple. The short version... in this realm of Etheric life that Dadrien and I occupy, we became friends. We talked of so many things and discovered so much about each other that neither of us knew."***

“When you are dead, there is not much more to do.” Dadrien added with an obvious tone of humor to his voice.

Sumar nodded in agreement. ***“True enough.”*** He agreed. ***“We did not know where we were or for what purpose we were there. Only that we were. We discovered that both of us agreed that the evil had not died. That it thrived in many more ways than what we ever could have imagined. The downfall of the Pralor people was only the largest sign that this was true. During one of these moments we came up with this mad scheme of what we could do if we were able to combine ourselves together.”***

“The power of a Praetorian and a Dahakoan.” Dadrien spoke once more.

Sumar looked at him and nodded his head as he looked at Andro and the others. ***“Such a combination of power within the right vassal could accomplish so much in the name of good. The next thing we knew, even from within whatever realm of Etheric power we reside, we felt the moment you were conceived within your mother Aricia’s womb Androcles.”*** He said looking directly at him. ***“And you Elynth.”*** He said turning to gaze at her golden eyes. ***“Then Laren and Ladur. And finally you Dorian. You and Ryner. Though your arrival proceeded much faster than we expected Dorian.”***

Dorian nodded his head. ***“Yeah... I get that a lot.”*** He said with a small smile.

“That is when we knew it.” Dadrien said.

Sumar nodded his head. ***“We knew that somehow... what we thought was only a fantasy had become reality.”*** Sumar told them. ***“A reality in you. In all of you.”***

“How?” Andro gasped.

Sumar shook his head. ***“That is the part of the answer that we do not know.”*** He told them. ***“I told you there were many things within the universe that we do not understand, cannot explain or have not seen. Dadrien and I believed that is what guided this event. Your creation. Was it a miracle? A process of life that would have happened anyway? I do not know and nor do I care.”***

“Grandfather, are you saying we were created by some higher power?” Andro asked.

Sumar’s image shrugged broad shoulders. ***“You are what you are no matter the cause Androcles. All of you. Isn’t that what you believe?”***

“How... how do you know that?” Andro stammered.

Sumar smiled. ***“How do you think?”***

“The Lorsvek ar Sepas!” Laren almost shouted.

Sumar nodded his head. ***“Yes.”*** He said. ***“The Lorsvek ar Sepas. To each of you, when you were born, Dadrien bestowed a portion of his Etheric resonance and essence. It has been part of you for all of these years. Just as the Praetorian gene has been part of you. Now that you are together, each piece will slowly grow within all of you until you know all that he knows, all that I know, and not just from the memories passed to you and your siblings from your father and mothers.”***

“We have seen all that you have done in your lives.” Dadrien told them. ***“All that you are and what drives you inside. It is part of the wolf and dragon blood that flows within all of you. All of you were put here for a purpose.”***

“To fight the Scourge.” Dorian said.

“Those vile monsters are only part of it, but yes.” Sumar said now. ***“At least that is what we believe. Your purpose entails so much more. You are the future, all of you, and the offspring that each of you will have. You will be the Heralds of a New Age.”***

“And what if this is not something that we wish for grandfather?” Andro asked him.

Sumar smiled and his image gazed at him intently. ***“Androcles my boy, you more than anyone among our family with the exception of your father know that you cannot outrun destiny. That no matter how much you try to outmaneuver it, fate and destiny will always find a way. You ran from your destiny for years my boy, until you finally saw that it would have you no matter what you did.”***

Andro lowered his head and shook it slightly. ***“I have always hated that phrase.”*** He said softly hearing Sumar and Dadrien laugh gently at his words.

“Don’t we all.” Dadrien said. ***“Don’t we all.”***

“We all will play a role in the future.” Sumar spoke. ***“Lycavorian. Pralor. Darastrixi. What that role will be is something we have to determine.”***

“You don’t know grandfather?” Dorian asked.

Sumar shook his head. *“No. We have never been able to see the future.”* He said. *“We have been able to influence some of the events that led up to this day, but the moment all of you came together, the moment you touched each other it was like what you call the Pralor download between Praetorian and Mage. Now all that is left for us to do is gift you with whatever knowledge we can before our time is finished.”*

“Finished?” Laren asked moving closer to their images.

“We were never meant to be like this forever child.” Dadrien spoke now. *“You and the others are the future and soon we will truly pass into memory. Then it will fall to all of you to continue on as you have.”*

“Our time will come soon enough.” Sumar said. *“We still have a few things to do before we join those who are waiting for us. We wish to speak with your father as well, but before we do that, I sense Murano is among you Androcles?”*

“And Sarlana?” Dadrien asked.

Andro nodded his head quickly. “Yes. Both of them. Sarlana is still on our ship and Murano is moving with others towards the weapons cache here on the station.”

Sumar nodded his head. *“Ah yes. Murano no doubt would have remembered that from our time together. He was among only six of us who knew the location of all the caches. Wayonn and Murano were my closest friends and I would like to explain to him why I chose him to remain behind. I know that he has struggled with that through the centuries, though I believe with your father’s help and now yours, he has begun to see his purpose once more.”*

“I think he has grandfather.” Andro said with a nod. “He is... he has become so much to all of us.”

Sumar nodded his head. *“Good. There is much we must tell you and our time among you is short. Things you need to know. For the present and for the future. There is a war coming and I believe all of you sense it.”*

Andro nodded in agreement. “Yes, my father and Wayonn believe such as well.”

“Then there is no time to waste.” Sumar spoke.

VENTORI UNION ADHOC BASE KING AND QUEEN’S PORTABLE BUNGALOW

“...Thank you for coming.” Anja spoke to Perlyea and Aduna as they stood just inside the entrance of the bungalow.

Aricia and For'mya stood beside the couch letting Anja take the lead because of her close working relationship with Perlyea. Whether it was their connection as lovers and friends with their fellow Queens or not they did not know, but both Aricia and For'mya could appreciate a beautiful woman. Perlyea and Aduna were both very beautiful woman regardless of the delicate bone structure along their eyebrows and the edges of their jaws. Aduna was incredibly exotic looking with long, dark brown hair and stunning dark brown eyes. She looked incredibly fit under her Tasmor uniform, Aricia estimating she was close to Dysea’s five foot nine height. Like Perlyea she had large, firm breasts and a slim waist with legs that seemed to go on forever. She towered over Anja’s five foot three frame, and was slightly taller than Perlyea as well. She also stood close to Perlyea, almost in a possessive sort of way and her scent gave away their relationship almost immediately to the three of them. They were lovers obviously, and it did not seem that Aduna was shy about this fact. Or Perlyea for that matter, for neither of them shied away from physical contact with each other.

It was quite obvious to Aricia and For'mya that Perlyea also desired Anja in a physical way and this seemed to radiate from Aduna as well, though they had only just met her. They were not men, so this desire they could smell on Perlyea and Aduna both was not something that bothered them in the least. The six Queens of the Union were the dearest of friends and they had joked of such things through their many years together. Anja was the most public of the Queens, always out and about the Union and therefore the most exposed. Even though she was the only one of them to ever have a separate lover, this was not something that interested her now in the least. She was quite content to have only them share her life and her bed. All of them agreed that Anja Leonidas oozed sexiness no matter how much she tried not to. It was something she just could not help.

Behind Aricia, she was also the most sexually adventurous and the most vocal among them. There had been many times in the past where other women had approached one or more of them and expressed obvious desire to be with them. All of the Queens were flattered at this, but even though many of these women were incredibly desirable in their own right, nothing had ever happened. The Queens of the Union were devoted to one another and would never step outside that bond of love and friendship just for physical pleasure. For'mya glanced quickly at Aricia seeing the way Perlyea and Aduna greeted Anja and she smiled knowingly.

[They desire Melyanna in the worse way you know. It wafts from their pores.] She joked in their private connection knowing Anja could hear them as well.

[Who wouldn't?] Aricia echoed with a smug humor. *[She is quite delicious.]*

[Enough of that you two!] Anja declared even as she shook hands with Aduna. Aricia and For'mya smiled as Anja directed them over to the couch. Anja moved between them and they stepped close to her, pressing their bodies against her and pulsing her with their female auras lovingly. Anja returned their aura pulses with one of her own and motioned with her hand to Aricia. "Colonel Aduna these are my fellow queens Aricia and For'mya." She spoke.

Aduna glanced first at her love Perlyea and then back to the three Lycavorian queens. She and Perlyea had been together for nearly three decades now, each of them with their own duties and positions but always together. It hadn't been that way in the beginning, as most Tasmor Breeder pairs were put together by decree of the Quorum. All Tasmor Breeders worked as pairs to better enhance the possibility of a child being conceived with whatever female they were with. Aduna and Perlyea had not known one another when they were paired together but they quickly discovered that unlike normal Tasmor Breeder pairs they had much more in common than anyone thought. It took several years, but soon a deep friendship and then scorching love affair developed between them. Since Tasmor Breeders had the reproductive organs of both male and female they soon discovered enormous pleasure with each other and then with the females that they were chosen to Breed. It had gotten to the point that the love they had for each other carried over to the Tasmor females who chose them for breeding. Saydia and the Tasmor Quorum, based on what they saw with Perlyea and Aduna, eventually decreed that any Breeder pair who wished to remain together for purposes of love would be encouraged to do so as long as they understood they would still be required to breed other females. This Decree had been readily welcomed among all the Tasmor Breeders and the last twenty years had seen many more children born, but even still, almost none were fertile males. Though the Breeder pairs were not supposed to know whether they had been responsible for children being born from one of their couplings with other females, Aduna was relatively sure that she had Perlyea had given at least two Tasmor female children. This was still not enough to keep their species alive over the centuries to come and that is why Aduna knew of the enhancements from Lycavorian DNA and had taken part in the first batch just as Perlyea and Anthylea had.

As their time together went by, they grew more deeply in love, to the point where they were now very selective in who they took into their bed and they relished the day when they would be able to have children together.

Perlyea had not been inaccurate when she had said the three Queens were astonishing in their beauty. All of them radiated confidence and dripped sexuality in a way Aduna had not seen from Tasmor females. The elven female was extremely attractive with lush golden blond hair and provocative dark brown eyes and her four inch high elf ears. The pureblood queen was exotic in her beauty, her hair extremely long and a rich black in color that reflected blue in some light. Her eyes were incredible and she had a lush body. It was the red haired one that caught Aduna's attention most of all, just as Perlyea said she would. Their taste in women was nearly identical and through the years Aduna had allowed Perlyea to choose who would share their bed, trusting in their love for each other. Anja's amazingly seductive jade green eyes, her large and incredibly firm breasts and her muscular body were exactly the things that she had Perlyea always become excited about in their women. They had even fantasized together about several of Saydia's own daughters at times, since all of them were absolutely breathtaking in their beauty and none had become joined in any way. Even Faydia Daret, though a Breeder herself, even she could incite passion in both of them.

Anja Leonidas however, she would be the finest of catches Aduna thought, and certainly a woman such as her would make Perlyea and her both commit to a joining ceremony without hesitation.

Aduna nodded her head to Anja as she shook hands with both of the other Queens and then they settled to the couches as one.

“Perlyea has told me... she has told me that there are six of you.” Aduna spoke as she took Perlyea’s hand in her own in a show of her love as she sat back on the couch.

Anja nodded her head. “Our fellow Queens, Isabella, Dysea and Cirith on are Honelze at the moment, helping to build their defenses up.”

“And all of you share each other as well as... this one man?” Aduna asked with surprise and almost disbelief.

All three of them smiled at this for it was not uncommon even among their own people. “Let’s just say that our husband and mate is very well gifted and only he can make us feel what he does.” Aricia said. “Emotionally as well as physically.”

Aduna looked at them and knew exactly what they were saying. Their words rang true in her ears and she knew exactly how they obviously felt. She looked at Perlyea and squeezed her hand. “Yes, I do know that feeling.” She said almost wistfully as she turned back to them.

Perlyea almost seemed to blush at the attention, but she was filled with similar emotion. “We have not seen each other for two weeks.” Perlyea explained. “This trip to Ventori was not planned and it has kept us apart until now.”

“Something I intend to rectify as soon as we are able.” Aduna spoke with a seductive smile.

Anja, Aricia and For'mya smiled knowingly at this. “Well, we will try to make this quick so that the two of you can have most of the evening together.” For'mya spoke.

Aduna looked at them once more. “This... our relationship does not strike you as...?”

It was Aricia who answered with a shake of her head. “It is very common in the Union to be honest. We have a species of elf that are like you in many ways. They are not born as you are, most of them were changed against their will in experiments conducted on them by a former enemy, but for the most part, all of them have now found love and desire with another woman. Our youngest daughter Zarah is in a relationship with another woman and our oldest daughters Eliani and Lisisa share similar relations with the men and women in their lives. So you see, we are not so different in how we view relationships and such. I think it actually gives us much more common ground than others.”

Aduna nodded her head at this reflectively. “Yes, I suppose it does.” She answered. “That is not something we are used too.”

“Nalmos tells us there that are Tasmor females who have developed relationships with many Lycavorians from Ventori.” Anja said.

Aduna nodded her head. “Yes, but in many ways this is frowned upon by the Quorum and many others.” She replied as she looked directly at Anja. “But then things might change for the future now if what Perlyea tells me is true.”

Anja smiled. “Oh it’s very true.” Anja told her. “The gene therapy that Perlyea developed is doing what she intended for it to do. It will increase the chances for all Tasmor Breeders and other females to have children. Many more children. What Perlyea didn’t realize until I told her was that Lycavorian DNA is very specialized and selective I guess you could say. Since Perlyea directed the gene therapy towards reproduction, that it what it will do, but Lycavorian DNA takes its time in altering other genes. Given what she has told me and samples from both her and Anthylea that I have seen, I would say that within the next several months those Tasmor who took part in the initial treatment will be fully changed and therefore able to succeed in what you are trying to accomplish.”

Aduna’s dark eyes grew brighter at hearing this knowledge and she looked at Perlyea quickly and then back to Anja. “Then we... we could have children with each other?” She asked.

Anja nodded her head. “Perlyea can explain it to you in more detail at a later time I’m sure, but the short answer is yes. Even as Breeders you have both sets of reproductive organs for your species. Your reproductive organs and parts are surprisingly very similar to our own in almost every way. If one of you was to become pregnant, that portion of your physiology would take over until after the child was born. Perlyea explained to me that is why your Quorum choose to have your Breeders work in pairs. To increase the odds of a pregnancy.”

Aduna nodded her head looking at Perlyea slightly surprised. She turned back to Anja and tilted her head slightly to her out of respect. “If my love told you this then she must trust all of you a great deal.” Aduna said. “I have always relied on Perlyea’s instincts and that will never change. You are correct Anja Leonidas. I

do not believe the Quorum ever expected that so many of their Breeder pairs would fall in love, but that has not stopped us from trying to insure the survival of our species.”

“And it shouldn’t.” Aricia spoke now. “Not in any way.”

“What about... what about those Tasmor that have taken Lycavorian females?” Aduna asked.

“Oh, they would be able to have children...” Anja told her. “It might take a bit longer for the Lycavorian system to adjust to the Tasmor genes, but it would not only be very possible but probably more likely than not. As I said, our physiology is very similar. It would be much faster if the Tasmor was bitten by a Lycavorian, for then they would have the Lycavorian DNA in their system directly needed to effect a full molecular change. Either way, you would have a child of both species who would be very robust and healthy right from the outset given our natural healing factor and the added Tasmor immunity to most known diseases.”

Aduna’s face was bright and animated in the face of this knowledge and she looked at Perlyea once more with love in her dark eyes. “That is... that is wondrous news.” She said finally turning back to Anja.

“Yes, it is.” Anja agreed.

Aduna took a deep breath then and nodded her head. “That is not why you asked me here though.” She said. “Forgive me for going off on my own tangent.”

Aricia shook her head. “Were we in your position we would be just as happy and excited. There is no doubt in that.”

“None at all.” For'mya agreed.

Aduna smiled at their honesty and the sincerity of their words. “Perlyea told me a little of what you wanted to know.” She said. “And I do agree with you and she about the consequences should we not assist you, but I know for a fact that the Quorum will not agree to send our troops to assist regardless of what the risks are unless their conditions are met. Saydia is well liked and respected, but the Quorum is still made up of Tasmor hardliners and they have the majority on the Quorum right now.”

“Saydia gave something to us last night.” Aricia spoke now. “In relation to an arranged marriage.”

Aduna nodded her head. “Yes, Perlyea told me this.” She answered. “However, like Perlyea, I do not believe Namiri Daret would ever accept this. And Saydia would never force it upon her daughter. She loves all of them too much to do this sort of thing.”

“Perlyea said your Quorum could force this upon Namiri.” For'mya said. “Something about the Sovereign Regent’s youngest daughter having to be made available for this type of thing?”

Aduna nodded her head. “They could do this yes, but I don’t believe they would do this for it would make an enemy of Saydia and many of the younger generations of Tasmor if they did. That is not something that they wish to do. Saydia Daret is perhaps the most worshiped leader in our history. Forcing her to do something not of her choosing would be very difficult and probably end their political career.”

Aricia leaned forward now. “Namiri and Emylea have garnered a special affection from our husband and mate for their actions here on Ventori in defending our people. This is not something he would allow her to be subjected too, and I know my son would never agree to this either. We do not have arranged marriages for political reasons anymore.”

Aduna looked puzzled. “Then why are we here talking about it?” She asked. “You are the Queens of your Union. Is this something that you are considering even against the wishes of your husband and son?”

Anja chortled at that and shook her head. “No. Believe me that is not something that we would attempt.” She replied. “Not if we ever want to feel our mate’s arms around us again. Or the love of our son.”

Aricia nodded her head. “Very true.”

“Then why did you need to see me?” Aduna asked.

For'mya held out the data pad to her. “To look at this and tell us if it would be workable and something your Quorum could stand behind without over reaching Saydia’s power as Sovereign Regent.”

Aduna took the pad and began reading, her eyes slowly getting a little wider the more she read. She looked up after several moments and looked at the three Lycavorian Queens. “This is... this is astonishing. You... you would offer this to us?” She spoke with a new tone of respect in her voice.

“Yes.” Anja spoke now.

“But this... it would still require Namiri to lay with your son would it not?” Aduna asked. “Perlyea must have told you that she would not agree to this. We have watched she and Emylea grow into the women they are

now and they are at the center of the new generation of Tasmor who are beginning to believe we need to discard these old laws. She would never agree to this.”

“Can we infer from your tone of voice that you do not agree with many of your older laws?” For'mya asked.

Aduna shook her head. “There are many who believe as Perlyea and I. Our people are not as self-sufficient and powerful as we believe. I should think the Quorum is beginning to see this considering the magnificent ship we traveled on to get here. There has been a growing call for many years now to change many of the laws that either do not apply to the present or just make no sense. However, we do not have the influence needed to press forward with such changes.”

“Androcles is second only to his father in the potency of the virus within his blood.” Anja said confidently. “Because of this, there are other ways that would accomplish the same thing, but not require Namiri to share his bed.”

Aduna looked at Anja intently for a long moment. “And these other ways, may I assume that they are not well known?”

“No.” Aricia answered her. “They would work, but they are not well known. We as a species do not believe in randomly turning people without major cause. It is heavily frowned upon actually. We would only turn someone out of love if they wanted this, or if their lives were in danger of being lost. If it was discovered that we came up with this idea and then supported it, let's just say it would not be received very well.”

“Yet you would be willing to support this now?” Aduna asked.

“We need your troops Aduna.” Anja told her. “We cannot win without them no matter what we do or the technology that we have. The numbers just do not add up. Once the Svorag have beaten us, they *will* come for the Tasmor. This is simply a means to an end for both our peoples.”

Aduna nodded her head. “I see your point.” She said. She looked at Perlyea for a moment and then back to them. “Then we must insure this does not become known.” She said. “I believe Perlyea and I could convince Saydia and Namiri to go along with this. Thankfully, both of them are completely practical. What about this son...” Aduna looked at the pad. “An... Androcles? He is the first born is he not? The heir to your husband. It will not work if that is not the case. The Quorum would not support it otherwise.”

Aricia nodded her head. “He is the Crown Prince and next in line for the throne, yes.” She answered. “He certainly wants no part of being a King, but he is like his father in that way.”

“You do not often meet someone who does not want the power that Martin obviously commands.” Perlyea spoke now. “Your son Androcles must be very unique.”

“Stubborn and pig headed, just like his father.” For'mya stated with a small amount of humor in her voice, but far more love in her tone.

“And he would agree to this as well?” Aduna asked.

Anja smiled weakly. “That is where we will need the help of his wives and mates.” She told Aduna. “Without them backing this plan, there is no way he would do this even if his father ordered him to do it. And Martin will not do that. Ever.”

“If we can convince Sadi and the others that this plan is the only way,” Aricia continued. “Then we have a chance.”

“And if you cannot?” Perlyea asked the question. “You told me yourself they are just as possessive of your son as all of you are of Martin.”

Aricia nodded. “This is true.”

“And if they do not agree?” Aduna asked the question again.

“Well... then we are pretty well fucked.” Anja blurted out in her usual blunt nature.

SCIENCE STATION 489

Matum paced back and forth in front of where Dytin and Aviel were sitting in the pilot's briefing room, his head moving to look over to where the Etheric images of Dadrien and Sumar stood speaking with Sarlana, Murano and the *Dahakoan*. He would then look over to where the Lycavorians were now sitting with the

Darastrixi from their group. The red haired female and Nahko Em'mor were speaking animatedly with each other since they discovered that both of them were doctors. Several of the Sand Strider troops were speaking with Jeth and the other dragons within the Etheric realm. While all Darastrixi had Etheric ability to speak with one another, hardly any of them used it unless it was necessary and none had the ability to speak on such a high Tier level as the new *Vrrarhoinpa* seemed to be able to speak. This fact itself Dalis found almost irresistible, but when added with the fact that almost all of the new *Vrrarhoinpa* were hybrid dragons, Dalis had been speaking with them for the entire time they had been in the room with them. Nearly all of the hybrid dragons were larger than normal *Vrrarhoinpa* and this made Matum nervous. The Sand Strider troops had moved over gradually and many of them were now were speaking with the new dragons and the other Lycavorians almost easily, their curiosity overriding their caution. All of them appeared very confident and quite friendly which caused Matum to be further on edge. A species they had never met before, one which was on their threat list, and they were mingling with them as if nothing mattered.

“You are beginning to wear a path on the floor Matum.” Dytin finally spoke as he looked up at him.

“Should we not be over there Inidra?” Matum finally hissed. “Should we not be included in whatever they are speaking of?”

Dytin and Aviel glanced over to where Laren sat between Androcles and Dorian leaning up against their shoulders, her hands on their knees. He could see Dadrien speaking to them now, Sarlana and Murano nodding their heads.

“If it concerns us, I trust we will be told.” Dytin finally answered turning back to him.

Matum looked at him. “You are a General of our people!” He gasped. “I am a Major with our elite forces! Does that not automatically grant us status to be included in whatever is being discussed?”

Aviel chuckled softly as he ate from his ration pack. He looked at Dytin. “You did say he was headstrong old friend.”

Dytin smiled and nodded his head. “Yes I did.” He agreed. He looked up at Matum once more. “If the *Doraanar* or the Ancient one Dadrien wanted us to be aware of something do you think they would not tell us Matum?”

“What about the Lycavorians?” Matum pressed him. “They have people in another part of the station while we are forced to remain here! What are they doing? They are dictating to us what we should do when it should be us who tell them!”

“This is a Pralor station Matum.” Aviel said. “And considering that they not only have the blood of Pralors within their veins but they have an actual Praetorian with them, I do believe that trumps any claim that you may think we have. I, for one, have no desire to be killed by a trap set many thousands of years ago by the Scourge. Do you?”

Dytin shook his head. “Not today, no.” He answered.

“We have equipment that can detect traps *Inidra*.” Matum insisted. “We should be there as well. It is our right!”

Aviel looked up at him now. “Our right?” He spoke. “The *Dahakoan* have been revered among our people for millennia Matum. What makes you think that you have a right to be with them?”

“We do not even know if they are *Dahakoan*!” Matum exclaimed now. “Nothing Laren or Ladur has done proves that they are *Dahakoan*. And I cannot believe that the Ancient One Dadrien would bequeath this sacred gift to those who are not even Darastrixi!”

“But they are Darastrixi! They have the blood of dragons within them! They are also *Vrelvel Sargti* Matum, at least this Androcles and Elynth. Or will you deny what your Darastrixi blood tells you.” Aviel spoke. “Just as it tells each and every Darastrixi no matter where they come from. And it was they who told us his name! Or do you now deny that this is not the Ancient One.”

“I do not deny this *Koppentotz* Aviel, I can feel this as well, which only makes it harder to remain over here when we should be over there, included in whatever they are speaking of.” Matum answered. “We are the military officers!”

“If my ears do not deceive me, we would not understand what they are saying.” Dytin spoke once more. “They are speaking in the Lycavorian language.”

“Which is another reason why I do not trust them!” Matum hissed. “How can Laren know their language? Why are they speaking that language and not a language that we too can understand? Are we supposed to believe that the Ancient One Dadrien knows this language? If so, how does he know this?”

Dytin glanced over to them. “I would say he does, since he is speaking it.” He replied turning back to him. “Matum, you are perhaps the finest officer I have ever trained, but you are far too suspicious of what you do not understand.”

“Perhaps because what I don’t understand could be a threat to us!” Matum retorted.

“Or perhaps because you fear what you do not understand.” Aviel told him.

“I am afraid of nothing!” Matum hissed almost angrily.

“Truly?” Aviel said noticing that Dytin was remaining silent now and allowing him to converse with Matum. Aviel had always been the more analytical of them while they were growing and Dytin had always been the more practical. They had learned to complement each other very well during that time and left many adults baffled at their reasoning for doing things. “If you are afraid of nothing Major Matum, then why are you so concerned about what they are doing over there?”

“I am concerned because it... because it may have dire ramifications for us!” Matum stammered out his reply and knew right away that it was a ridiculous notion.

“You are concerned because you feel left out.” Aviel spoke calmly seeing Matum’s face tighten. “You are concerned because you want to be involved and prove to others that you are a superior soldier. Something that we already know. A word of advice Matum, do not wish for something when that knowledge may very well terrify you in the end.”

Matum really had nothing to say to that and he turned around in a huff and moved away from Aviel and Dytin. Dytin looked at his friend. “He is a fine soldier Aviel.” He finally said.

Aviel nodded his head. “If you trained him, I would never doubt that.” He answered. “You cannot trach humility however, my friend.”

Dytin nodded his head. “True.”

“Something tells me that these young men and women we see all around us are far better trained then even your Sand Striders.” Aviel spoke softly as his eyes drifted over the room and he took everything in. “And this will be a painful lesson for Matum to learn if he lets his ego override his common sense.”

Dytin nodded his head once more as he ate a piece of his ration. “A lesson all of us must learn at some point.” He spoke.

“...Are we doing Major?” The Sand Strider soldier asked as he and one other followed Matum. “Our orders were to remain in the bay.”

Matum stopped and looked at him. “The General relies on my skills and I do not trust these newcomers.” He answered. “I wish to know what it is they are doing in another part of this station and I intend to find out.”

“You heard the reports sir.” The second soldier spoke. “This station has traps all over. We should remain within the area that has been cleared by these Drones.”

Matum held up the small, box like object. “We have our own technology for detecting traps.” He hissed. “I do not need these people to help me do my job! We are going to find out what they are doing and why. Now follow me. I have these other individuals on my portable sensor. They are fifteen decks above us and near where the power core for this station is supposed to be. We will find out what they are doing.”

Matum turned and began moving off down the corridor that led away from the landing bay and his two men shook their heads and followed him. They had moved off into the shadows without anyone really noticing and exited the landing bay into the dimly lit and empty corridor. Now they were moving off into a station that none of them knew anything about and this did not sit well with the two junior Sand Striders.

Not at all.

“That’s it! They are in!” Taich Neulan barked from his Tactical console. “They are in Armen.”

Armen came to his feet from the command chair and nodded his head. **–Very well. Helm, take us to within ten thousand meters of the station with the bow of our ship. No closer. That will put the two forward teleporters within the envelope of the station and allow them to begin transporting cargo over. And prepare to drop the Shroud when they are ready to initiate transfer–**

“Helm answers aye!” The elven helmsman barked out. “Moving to put our bow ten thousand meters from the station! Engaging port and starboard thrusters! Forty percent power!”

Armen looked at Taich. **–Colonel if you would move to Cargo Bay Six and insure we are ready to begin transferring the equipment. And be ready to move to the Secondary Command Bridge in case this goes to sibfla–**

Taich nodded his head with a huge smile at Armen’s use of the Lycavorian curse word. “On my way.”

Armen turned and looked at the main view screen as the station began to grow even larger. **–Now the fun begins–** He muttered to no one in particular, though he spoke loud enough for almost all the bridge crew to hear him.

SCIENCE STATION 489

“...Unable to influence events directly, but we discovered that we were able to guide them in a manner of speaking.” Sumar was speaking to them. Laren sat between Androcles and Dorian, her hands on their knees and their hands over the top of hers. Elynth, Ryner and Ladur were behind each of their Bonded Ones, Murano and Sarlana on either side.

“In a manner of speaking?” Sarlana asked.

“Subtle pushes within the Etheric realm mostly.” Sumar answered.

“Darastrixi are unable to manipulate this Etheric realm that the Pralors can.” Sarlana said. “We have never been able to.”

“That is not entirely true Sarlana.” Dadrien spoke now. **“Part of the power and abilities of a Dahakoan came from within the Etheric realm. Our unique ability of battlefield precognition for instance. This was just information that I never allowed to be known by those outside the ranks of the Dahakoan.”** Sarlana’s eyes were wide in surprise at this revelation. **“However, like with the Pralor people, this ability was extremely rare among the Darastrixi, which is why the Dahakoan were so limited in number. An Etheric bond did exist between Vrrarhoinpa and Jilhoipna, just not on so grand a scale as what we now see between Androcles and Elynth, Dorian and Ryner and Laren and Ladur. That is... it is not something that we foresaw.”**

“We believe the cause of that is because of what Arzoal did to all of the eggs on Elear.” Sumar spoke once more.

“Grandmother?” Elynth asked quickly her voice echoing just as it had for almost three decades within Andro’s mind. It was the same voice as it had always been, but now he could actually hear it with his ears. Dadrien had explained to them that the moment they physically touched Laren and Ladur, their combined knowledge merged and became one. This also included the knowledge on how to manipulate the vocal cords within their throats that had been dormant for so long.

Andro turned his head and looked at Elynth over his shoulder. “Elynth that new skill is going to take some getting used to.” He said.

Elynth's golden eyes grew a little wider and she lowered her head to engulf his entire shoulder in her muzzle. Sumar and Dadrien watched with some humor as she bit down on his armor gently and then butted him in the back of the head.

"It will allow me to better communicate with Sadi and your other beloved wives so that we may keep track of you more." Elynth told him.

Laren laughed out loud at this action and squeezed Androcles' hand. "I think you are in trouble." She stated.

Andro grinned as he looked at Elynth over his shoulder and saw the love for him in her eyes. "You have no idea." He said. He turned back to the image of his grandfather. "Why do you think the Elder Mother had something to do with that?"

"She was a Pralor before she became a dragon." Sumar spoke looking at Murano. "And I believe she was meant to join our ranks Murano my friend."

"A Praetorian?" Murano gasped.

Sumar's image nodded. **"Given time I believe we would have discovered her, just as I discovered Tobia and what she could do, but obviously events took that away from us. If what I believe is true, than as Arzoal manipulated the Etheric skills of every dragon born for millennia, she triggered a much deeper connection to the Etheric realm. Arzoal thought she was protecting them, when in actuality she was increasing their Etheric abilities to levels beyond what they would have had normally. When your father and others found them on Enurrua Androcles, well nature took its course. The Praetorian blood within many of the Lycavorians allowed for a deep Etheric connection to form. For those elves among the first to Bond with dragons, this came about because they evolved from dragons." Sumar looked directly at Androcles. "It is also why I believe she knew exactly who your father was when he arrived."**

"She could sense his Praetorian blood." Androcles said softly. "Your blood."

Sumar nodded his head. **"Yes." He answered. "It is also why Shiria kept her existence secret even from Wayonn. Shiria is a Praetorian Mage in case you have not already figured that out." His eyes shifted to Murano. "She is meant to be Tobia's Mage."**

Murano looked at him wide eyed. "Tobia?" He gasped.

Sumar nodded his head. **"They will be the ones to find and train those Praetorians yet to come Murano my friend. They are out there, they just need to be found and shown what path they could follow."**

"Descendants from City Ship 41?" Dorian asked.

Sumar nodded his head again. **"And City Ship 19."** He stated.

Androcles and Dorian looked at him with wide eyes. "City Ship 19!" Andro finally gasped. "Grandfather are you sure?"

Sumar smiled sadly. **"I was not certain until you... until you removed my brother's influence Androcles."**

Andro's face suddenly dipped and he became silent. "Grandfather I..."

"Do not regret what you did Androcles my staaniketo." Sumar said softly. "It needed to be done and only you had the will to do what... what I could not." (Grandson)

"You tried to save him grandfather." Andro said.

Sumar shook his head now. **"Some people cannot be saved Androcles." He answered. "My brother was one of them. When you removed his influence I was able to detect several future Praetorians among the High Coven. Those fools Veldruk and Aikiro were so corrupted by his influence that they never saw it. If I detected them, then there are most likely more."**

"So you knew that there were possible Praetorians on all of the ships?" Murano asked.

Sumar nodded his head. **"That is why I was so selective in their crews, yes."**

"Narice?" Andro asked.

Sumar shook his head. **"No." He said. "I would have sensed her the moment she tasted your brother's blood. Her role is no less important however, for only she can pull the Coven from the abyss that Veldruk and Aikiro were taking it down. Only she and her sister."**

"Yuri?!" Dorian asked.

“Yuri has become the individual she was always meant to be.” Sumar spoke almost fondly of her. ***“And she will have a very large role in helping her sister to bring about change for the High Coven and the future as a whole. She will find her path soon enough so I would not worry about her.”***

“Will there... are there any more like us?” Laren asked now.

It was Dadrien who chuckled now and shook his massive head. ***“Child, none will be like you and your brothers and sisters of the blood. You are unique in a way that can never be duplicated. Just as it was always meant to be.”***

“Can you see the future Ancient One?” Laren asked softly. “For us?”

Dadrien lowered his head until the image of his snout was only inches from her head. ***“You are the future Laren Ti’shara.”*** He spoke as her multicolored blue eyes lifted to look at him. ***“The six of you. For the Darastrixi, for the Pralors, for the Lycavorians and for all life across the stars.”***

“Ah really... no pressure right.” Dorian quipped.

“You are all Dahakoan!” Dadrien spoke firmly. ***“Darastrixi di wer iski.”*** He said with supreme confidence. ***“Dragons of the Stars.”***

Androcles noticed first as Sumar’s image lifted his head slightly as if looking up at the ceiling. “Grandfather?” He finally asked.

“Our time grows short.” He spoke. ***“We must speak with your father before our time is done Androcles. He is the key.”***

“Father?” Andro asked. He saw both Sumar and Dadrien nod their heads together.

“Your father is wer Irral.” Dadrien said.

“The First?” Dorian asked.

“The center from which all else evolves.” Dadrien told them.

Androcles felt it first and he rose to his feet quickly, his face puzzled but intently focused. Laren and Dorian stood up quickly and looked at him even as Sumar turned to look at Dadrien with a smile that only Sarlana and Murano saw.

“And it begins now.” He said softly. ***“Our time here is done.”*** Sumar spoke. ***“Go with the gods my family and friends. We will speak only once more before our time is complete. You will know when that is.”***

“Sumar wait!” Murano exclaimed just before their images vanished into thin air and the landing bay was empty except for them. “Damn!”

“Andro?” Laren spoke as she reached for his shoulder. “What is it?”

Andro shook his head. “I don’t... I don’t know.” He spoke. “Elynth?”

“I sense it too Andro.” Elynth replied instantly.

“Sense what?” Sarlana gasped.

“Murano!” Andro blurted before reaching for him and clasping his forearm. Murano didn’t hesitate and clenched Androcles’ forearm tightly, even as Laren and Dorian reached out and placed their hands on Andro’s arm. “Murano is this...”

Murano’s eyes grew wide as he felt what Andro was sensing sweep over him. It was easy enough to do with a fellow Praetorian but with both Dorian and Laren included it was far easier than he had ever remembered, something that he would remember in the future. It was also something he had not felt in millennia and it filled him with dread as his eyes grew wider.

Dorian turned and looked at him. “Murano is that...?”

“The Scourge! They are already on this station!” Murano gasped aloud.

SPARTA’S WRATH

Armen was silent as he stood in the center of the bridge allowing his crew to do their jobs and do them well. He had chosen all of them for their ability to adapt as well as their advanced skills. Even Admiral O’Connor had been impressed at the collection he had put together, but Armen knew what he was looking for from the moment Androcles had given him the ship. His neural network was the most advanced artificial intelligence ever designed by Pralor engineers and now that was paying off in droves. He may have been a

machine outwardly, and he was unaware that the crew did not think of him as a machine, but Armen had already reached the level of Avi in being recognized as something far more than a simple Avatar.

Armen's head snapped around the moment he heard the beeping sound and he saw the elven sensor tech lean over her dual consoles just as quickly.

"Whoa!! Power surge! A big one! Lower three decks of the station!" She exclaimed as her hands flew across the oversized consoles. "It's not tied into the main grid! It's something else!"

Armen was about to reply when her voice cut him off.

"*Sibfla!* Active contacts! They just jumped into the station's area of operation! Three Darastrixi ships! Looks like cruiser class!"

Armen's Neuraltronic Processor was already computing and he waited an appropriate time to what he thought a superior Lycavorian could process before he spoke.

-Tactical! Realign all forward sensors on the lower portion of the station! Find out where that power surge is coming from! Operations Officer, report!-

"Detecting a low power transmission from the *ENCHANTRESS* to the station! I guess whoever this General left in charge is contacting him about the new Darastrixi ships." The man answered.

-He did tell Androcles that he was being pursued but thought he had lost them. It seems that is not the case. What is their status?-

"No signs of weapons or shields but they are closing on the *ENCHANTRESS*'s position quickly." The OPS Officer replied.

-Very well. Contact the OIC of the *ENCHANTRESS* and have them close to within five thousand meters of our location. Once that is done extend our shield grid to envelope them-

"Raise the Shroud?" The OPS Officer asked.

-Negative. Colonel Taich is still transporting over the equipment we need- Armen answered. -He will require an additional thirty-nine minutes to retrieve what Praetorian Murano directed us to secure- Armen paused for only a moment. -Weapons Officer! Target the three Darastrixi ships with port side batteries nine through twenty-three! Shields and weapons only-

"Weapons aye!"

DARASTRIXI *IKLISS*-Class Cruiser

"...increased their speed and are closing on the unknown ship!" Darrod's Tactical Officer reported.

"Someone tell me what kind of ship that is?" Darrod snarled loudly. "Is it Scourge?"

"Unknown!" Another voice chimed in. "Twenty-one thousand plus meters in length! It has a beam of nearly four thousand eight hundred meters!"

"*Ithquenti!*" Darrod gasped aloud. "It's five times our length!"

Inelor moved up beside him and held out the pad. "General Dytin and the others are on the station." He told him. "Sensors are picking up additional lifeforms as well. One appears to be fully Pralor, while another is questionable."

"Questionable?" Darrod spoke. "What does that mean?"

"I've never seen these life signs before, sir." Inelor told him. "One of the signals is indicating a combination of these new signs and Pralor physiology combined. I'm having them pushed through our data base but... the others are clearly Darastrixi, but they are different."

“Different how?” Darrod almost shouted.

“*Meagear* Inelor! Coming through now!” (Commander)

Inelor tapped his pad and his eyes grew wide at what they saw as he read. “They were in the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* database! Lycavorian, Elven and Vampiric signs on the station. Darrod...” He looked at his commanding officer. “The Lycavorians are categorized as potential Level Three hostile.”

“Level Three?” Darrod gasped.

“If what the computer says is true, the additional Darastrixi we are detecting are hybrids.” Inelor spoke looking at Darrod. “Ixen and Osear hybrids.”

Darrod looked at him with wide eyes. “Hybrids?” He asked. “That is not possible Inelor, the Ixen and Osear breeds do not even get along with each other. And cross breeding is not something that is allowed.”

Inelor turned when the officer came up to him and handed him another pad. He glanced at it briefly and then looked at Darrod. “The Lycavorians are shape shifters. They can change their forms to that of a *Kaldaka*. Similar size to us, but the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* database has them listed as a priority threat because of their robust nature. They are very hard to kill it seems.”

“Were they listed as an interstellar species?” Darrod asked.

Inelor shook his head. “No.”

“Well, they are now! That is obviously a Lycavorian ship! It is nowhere in our database!” Darrod exclaimed looking at Inelor. “Prepare an assault team. Fully loaded and armed. I will lead them. Deploy in standard alpha combat positions and power weapons and shields!”

“Sir, is that wise?” Inelor asked.

“Always act from a position of strength Inelor.” Darrod told him.

“Sir, that ship, it is five times the size of ours.” Inelor said. “The weapons...”

“The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* database has listed these Lycavorians as a lesser species.” Darrod spoke. “The only logical solution is that they stole the ship somehow and use it to scavenge whatever they can find. They have more numbers than *Indira* Dytin and they are probably holding them hostage. We...”

“*Yobhakcho* Darrod! New power source! Not from the main station! Lower three decks!” The female Darastrixi turned in her chair. “Major... it’s *Disise*!”

Darrod’s eyes grew wider. “Damn!” He barked. “Have the Assault leader meet me in the bay! We need to get them out of there before the *Disise* find them!”

SCIENCE STATION 489

“...it’s Scourge Armen!” Androcles hissed into his implant even as he saw Dytin and Aviel moving across the deck towards him with several Sand Striders in tow.

Armen did not question Androcles for he knew what he was and if a Praetorian and *Dahakoan* said that the new power readings were from Scourge, then they were.

-We have not detected any Scourge life signs Androcles so that leads me to assess that they have hidden Cryo chambers in the lower portions of the station. That is the power readings we are detecting. The chambers must be activating and their lifesigns will become trackable momentarily. Our presence here has been compromised Androcles-

“How?” Andro snarled. “Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen only cleared select portions of the station and we have been inside those areas this whole time! How...” Andro’s eyes grew wider. “Armen scan the station for any signs outside the cleared areas!”

-Stand by- Armen replied. -Confirmed. Three Darastrixi life signs are showing on our sensors. They are currently on deck twenty-four and moving for Engineering. They are however, outside of the areas cleared by Alpha Nine and Thirteen-

“*Nubou!*” Andro swore loudly just as Dytin and Aviel stopped beside him. “Inform Ridor and Kalis Armen! Murano is on his way back to them with Deion! How much longer do they need?”

-At least thirty-five minutes to procure everything on Murano’s list- Armen answered instantly.

“The Darastrixi must have set off some sort of sensor trap as they were wandering blindly!” Andro snarled once more. “*Sibfla!* Armen, jam everything leaving the station. All transmissions except for our command channels. Inform *Inidra* Dytin’s ship of this and give them our command channels.”

-Three Darastrixi warships have also entered the Station’s Zone. A smaller transport ship has broken from one warship and is currently moving for the station. They will be within range of the emergency hatches adjacent to Landing Bay 12 in two minutes and ten seconds- Armen told him. **-I have instructed the *ENCHANTRESS* to move within our shield envelope and they are currently holding station off our starboard bow-**

“Can they bypass the security access codes and open the Emergency hatches?” Andro asked.

-Unknown. If they are good at what they do, it is possible. The Darastrixi have fine engineers Andro. And either Emergency hatch can accommodate a ship of that size- Armen told him. **-Androcles, we cannot let the Scourge on this station survive and inform the others that we were here. Permission to initiate Zero Option-**

Andro didn’t hesitate. “You do not need my approval to keep us safe Armen.” Andro told him. “Have Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen break off from Murano’s group and see to it.”

-Understood- Armen replied. **-I will keep you informed of anything new. I suggest you begin moving back to Landing Bay Nineteen and prepare for your extraction-**

“We’re on it.” Andro spoke. Andro turned to Dytin and Aviel as Dorian and Laren moved closer to him. “General, three of your people took it upon themselves to go sightseeing.” He told him seeing his eyes darken in anger.

“Matum!” Dytin hissed.

“It appears they set off some sort of motion detector or sensor and now there are Scourge Cryo chambers activating in the lower three decks of this station.” Andro told him seeing both his eyes and Aviel’s go wide.

“That’s why we can sense them now and could not when we arrived.” Laren exclaimed. “They were asleep!”

Andro nodded his head. “Well, they are waking up now and we need to move our asses out of here like pronto!”

“This position is defensible *Dahakoan* Androcles.” Dytin spoke.

Andro shook his head. “The three ships you said we chasing you just showed up.” He told them.

“Darrod!” Dytin spat. “He found us!”

Aviel looked at his friend. “You did say he was your finest officer Dytin.”

“Well, he is probably aboard the transport that is about to attempt to breach one of the Emergency Hatches on either side of this bay. We need to move and we need to move now.” Andro spoke. Andro turned and looked at Denali. “Deni... Lisisa, Arduri, Aradace and Jeth with you. Get *Koppentotz* Aviel and the other Darastrixi back to our entry point. *Inidra* Dytin’s Sand Striders as additional security. Sadi, Nara and Brendi will monitor you and direct from the Command Station there.”

Denali nodded his head. “Moving.”

“Deni?” Andro’s voice stopped him and he looked back at him. “Don’t stop for anything *fervon*. If it gets in your way, kill it. Zero Option is active.”

Denali Leonidas nodded his head. “Understood.”

“Dorian and Laren with me, Sehri, Jomann and Eliani.” Andro spoke once more.

“Where are we going?” Eliani asked as she came up beside Dorian with Jomann. Sehri moved directly between Laren and Andro and pressed against his side as Laren smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek. Sehri beamed in happiness and took her hand and squeezed. All of them had felt Andro’s happiness when he and Dorian had been holding Laren in their arms, but the fleeting moment of jealousy Sehri had felt quickly went away when she realized it was a brotherly love that swept through Andro and it was a brotherly love that was returned by Laren. Sehri felt no guilt for these feelings for she was a true Alpha female wolf now, just like Sadi and Ne’Veha and Lu’ria. Female Alphas put off a natural pheromone when around their chosen mate and this put off other female wolves if they were smart. This was a normal reaction for them Sadi had told her and it also served to keep other females who were not Lycavorian at bay when it came to their men. Having Lycavorian blood within her, Laren could sense this right away within Sehri and just by instinct alone she made it very clear with her scent that Andro was her brother.

“We’re going to get the General’s wayward children before they get themselves killed.” Andro spoke. “We...”

The bright flash of a teleporter sprang open off to their left and suddenly they were looking at two crates in front of them. Andro’s implant came to life once more with Eirene’s voice.

“Andro, I just had Armen teleport you two crates of the Pralor weapons!” She told him. *“Use them well and Fedor says if you get yourself killed he will haunt you for the rest of his natural life.”*

Andro smiled at her transmission as the link went dead once more. She apparently did not need for him to reply and they were obviously busy. He pointed to the crates. “Gear up.” He told them. He looked at Dytin. “General I assume you are coming with us.”

Dytin stood a little straighter. “If only so that I can cuff and curse Matum myself for doing something so utterly stupid!”

Andro nodded his head. “Let’s do it.”

SCIENCE STATION 489 LOWER ASTROMETRIC RESEARCH DECK 2

His eyes opened slowly as the cryo sleep gas began to bleed away and then he was sitting up slowly in the portable cryo bed chamber. His head appendages twitched slightly in the coolness of the air and he could hear the air circulators beginning to cycle faster as more of the chambers opened. This deck and the one above and below him had been tied into the portable Scourge power core that had been lying dormant and waiting for the command to bring the chambers to full readiness. Whatever had happened, the computer had detected some breach of the security measures they had left in place.

The Scourge Holy Elite swung his legs over the side of the Cryo bed and stretched his lean, muscular form by extending his four fingered hands and arms above his head. It had been six thousand years since he had been awake, and he hated Cryo sleep. His name was Dalet Nulai and he was among the most senior of Scourge Holy Elites within their entire empire, and certainly one of the oldest alive at nearly thirty-five thousand years of age. He had fought in nearly all of the Second Pralor War and was among the few Scourge Holy Elites to be able to boast that he had singlehandedly killed a Praetorian warrior. More than one in fact.

“Computer, status?” He spoke the command as he placed his feet on the cool floor.

{Multiple Security Breaches detected. Decks 12, 19, 24, 29 and 32. Main Engineering Core has been brought online and is currently operating at 43 percent power output. Detecting multiple life forms within Engineering.}

The mechanical voice replied from the many internal speakers all around this area of the Pralor Station. Every Pralor station that was left intact had a similar contingent of Scourge warriors and one Holy Elite to lead them left onboard in order to keep the station secure. All of them in Cryo Sleep, waiting for the moment when they would be awakened and called to do their duty once more. Stations such as these, while many had never been returned to once taken, were treasure troves of knowledge and data that the Scourge might need one day and they were treated as such. Each also had a Scourge computer to monitor and run the Cryo Chambers and

however many decks needed to house the chambers. It was usually between two and five decks that were needed to house the chambers and all of the Scourge equipment.

“Numbers?” Dalet asked as he saw his Scourge Elites beginning to rise from their beds and move to storage equipment lockers set up nearby.

{Main station sensor grid is still offline. Many of the areas are still dark. Active Power Draw has only been routed to two landing bays and engineering at this time. The remaining station is still operating at the lowest settings possible.}

“Life support has been activated?” Dalet asked.

{Affirmative. Life support is active station wide.}

Unlike most species when awoken from Cryo sleep, Scourge could recover very quickly from the after affects and were ready to go into action within minutes, not hours. Dalet pulled open the small locker and began to pull his equipment from inside.

“Lifeform analysis?”

{Sensor readings are intermittent. Lockdown protocols are in place but I have detected Darastrixi life forms as well as several minor species. Lycavorian. Elven. Vampiric and several of unknown origin. Physical composition indicates they have been altered in some manner.}

“Altered how?” Dalet asked.

{Unknown at this time. Internal Sensor access is extremely limited. Attempting to merge sensor streams. Warning. Warning. Pralor life signs detected. Pralor life signs detected.}

This brought Dalet up short and he lifted his head toward the ceiling. “Pralor?” He asked in surprise. “That is not possible. The Pralor people are extinct. We destroyed them.”

{Sensor analysis confirmed. Detecting one Pralor life sign as well as... error. Error. Recalibrating secondary sensors. Analysis is confirmed. Now detecting multiple life forms with Pralor DNA. Sub Species Lycavorian all have Pralor DNA within them.}

“Confirm that!” He snapped.

{Analysis is confirmed. Multiple life forms all registering Pralor DNA Base Code within their DNA strands.}

“But they are not Pralor? They are sub species?” Dalet spoke.

{Affirmative}

“Hypothesis as to how this occurred?”

{Unable to present hypotheses. Data not complete and sensor access is limited to portable units now. I have now been locked out of all sensor controls.}

“Not complete?” Dalet hissed. “How is that possible?”

{Unable to access secure database. Clearance level is not sufficient.}

“I am a Scourge Holy Elite Dalet Nulai, Administrator to the Queen Mother!” Dalet snarled. “Now unlock the databases!”

{Unable to comply. Insufficient Security Clearance.}

Dalet swore under his breath as he began to pull on his uniform and weapons. “Where is the nearest group of intruders to our current location?”

{Deck twenty-four, starboard section thirteen. Three Darastrixi contacts. They appear to be moving for Engineering but their movement pattern is erratic. It appears as if they are unfamiliar with this station}

“They do not know the station as we do.” Dalet spoke. “I want them taken first. I wish to question them as to why they are here. Dispatch a squad from the Deck Four chambers immediately.”

{Issuing order}

“Status of communications?” Dalet asked. “I want to call for reinforcements and the access codes for secure data storage.”

{Unable to comply. All access to communications relays have been disabled by unknown jamming signals and Pralor Security Algorithms.} The computer voice answered. **{Do you wish to deploy emergency communications buoy?}**

“Negative!” Dalet snapped. “I will find out for myself what is going on.”

{Helios Squad reports they are moving to intercept Darastrixi intruders.}

“Excellent.” Dalet spoke as he turned to face the Scourge Elite who was his Second in Command. “We will proceed to their location as soon as we are ready.”

SCIENCE STATION 489
MURANO’S TEAM
MAIN ENGINEERING
DECK 32 SECTION 9

“Scourge!?! Here?” Ridor gasped. “You’re shitting us!”

Murano shook his head with a slight smile at Deion in reaction to Ridor’s outburst. “No, I am not shitting you.” He answered. “That is not something I would shit you about.”

“Papa?” Mari asked from beside Deion now. “That is what...”

Murano nodded his head. “Yes, we all felt it too.” He answered her knowing what she was going to ask.

Mari shuddered inwardly and pressed closer to Deion’s powerful frame for comfort. It was the most malevolent thing she had ever felt in her lifetime and it sent chills through her body.

“We haven’t finished loading out all of the equipment Androcles and you wanted us to take Murano.” Kalis spoke now. “Daio and I estimate another twenty-five minutes at least before we get it all!”

Murano shook his head. “We do not have the time any longer so we will make what we have work! Zero Option has been instituted and now it is time for us to leave. Send over whatever you can in the next exchange and then prepare to set the charges to destroy everything else.” He told them turning to Mari. “Mari, can you and Eirene remotely monitor the station’s systems from your P9s?”

Mari nodded her head quickly. “Yes.” She answered instantly. “We are tied into all of the station’s command systems via Praetorian Algorithms I wrote over the last week. We can control every portion of the station.”

“Then disconnect from the main frame and begin monitoring all of the internal camera and biometric systems within four decks of us.” Murano said. “Any unknown lifesigns are to be treated as Scourge and avoided and I don’t want them sneaking up on us. And purge whatever footprint you and Eirene have left in the main computer since being connected.” Mari nodded and grabbed Eirene’s hand to move back to their consoles. Murano turned then to Ridor. “Pull Cowen and Sherice back to our location.” He ordered. “Then secure whatever Intelligence data you can. Deion and I are going to sweep the beginning of our route back. We will be no more than a few hundred meters from here at any given time. Hurry Ridor. We do not have much time before they begin to make their way here.”

Deion watched Ridor move back into the hidden cache room and then he looked at Murano. “Should we split up Murano?” He asked. “Mari and the others...”

Murano placed his hand on Deion’s shoulder firmly and looked at him. His fingers curled around the back of his neck and he smiled at him. “You have made my daughter happier than I have ever seen her Deion Leonidas.” He spoke. “I know you have turned her. I can see it in her eyes and her actions.”

“Murano we were going to...” Deion began to speak but Murano shook his head.

“No.” He spoke stopping Deion’s words. “I thought at first that I would be upset over this because of what you are. I am not. Mari is also Praetorian Deion my boy, you know this.”

Deion nodded his head. “Yes.”

“She does not have our experience and skill Deion.” Murano told him. “These are things we will need to teach her, you and I, your brothers and father. Her mother. I also know she will be more wolf in her actions and attitude. This does not frighten me either. What we need to do is allow her to do what she does better than anyone and that is her skill with computers. We must push back our need to protect her and let her do her job, for she is that good.”

Deion looked at him. “Yes she is.”

Murano nodded his head. “Then let us do ours.” He said.

Deion nodded his head confidently and smiled. The knowledge that Murano did indeed approve of Mari now being wolf was a great sense of relief within him. He did not know how Murano would act when he

discovered this. That he came to this knowledge all on his own told Deion that he had indeed turned a corner of his life and allowed himself to learn and embrace new things. He could feel Mari's happiness within him as she had heard everything her father had said and he pulsed her with his love. His sisters Nara and Eliani had taught her well in so short a time for he felt Mari pulse him back with her female aura and it was powerful and controlled.

Murano tugged on his arm and motioned to the cache room. "Deion, let us get different weapons. We will need to become familiar with them, for once your brother and father see what they can do I think they will become very popular."

"Sounds like a plan." Deion said. "Then what?"

"Then we must make our way back to Deck 19 and our ships." Murano told him. "That will be the tricky part."

SCIENCE STATION 489

MATUM'S TEAM

"...Lost again Major Matum." The junior officer spoke from behind Matum as they came to the intersection in corridors. In the dimly lit hallways everything seemed to be the same and no identifying marks were on the walls or deck as they were on Darastrixi stations.

Matum glared at the junior officer for only a second as he looked at his data pad. "There are no identifying signatures!" He spat. "Who builds their stations without deck numbers?"

"Here!" The second Sand Strider hissed from the wall. "Deck Twenty-Four, Section Thirteen. The markers are faint so they must be light based. Without full power to the station they must be on top of to see them."

Matum nodded as he tapped on his data pad. "That puts us eight decks below the main Engineering section. There is an elevator forty meters this way..." He spoke motioning with his hand. "It will take us directly to that deck and only thirty meters from the entrance into Main Engineering."

"Major, shouldn't we contact *Inidra Dytin*?" The junior Lieutenant asked. "They must have noticed we are no longer among them by now."

Matum shook his head. "He does not believe these Lycavorians pose a threat. I do not share this belief."

"They are *Dahakoan* Matum!" The officer pressed. "And you had to have felt that the large one and the obsidian *Vrrarhoinpa* are *Vrelvel Sargti*. We all felt that, it was unmistakable and it cannot be ignored."

"Do not always trust in what you feel Lieutenant." Matum spoke as he began moving in the direction of the elevator. "Often times your feelings and emotions can deceive you."

"Perhaps... but they are telling me we made a mistake leaving the landing bay." The Lieutenant spoke. "We should not be out here wandering about blindly. We do not know this station and it has been abandoned for millennia. We do not know what the Pralor people used it for or what could still be on it!"

Matum looked at him as they got closer to the elevator. "We are sand Striders Lieutenant. We do not fear what we do not know. We..."

The sound of the elevator opening in front of them caused Matum to stop talking in surprise and turn to face the wide double doors as they opened fully and an even dozen *Disise Kilnsiri* stormed off the elevator with their weapons at the ready and aimed at them. Matum and the others did not even have time to bring their weapons up before the Scourge had surrounded them completely.

"Wait!" Matum shouted. "We are Darastrixi and..."

"Drop your weapons!" The lead *Disise Kilnsiri* from Helios squad barked.

"We are not a threat!" Matum barked. "We..."

The *Disise Kilnsiri* stepped into the butt stroke of his rifle which caught Matum square in the side of the head. He dropped to his knees, bright stars exploding in his eyes even as his two men were driven to their knees and their weapons were stripped from them and tossed aside out of reach. Matum felt his own rifle wrenched from his hands and his sidearm pulled from its holster and he heard them clatter to the deck a second later. He shook his head to clear his vision and looked up slowly.

“We are Darastrixi!” He rasped out the words once more. “We...”

“Be silent!” The *Disise Kilnsiri* barked at him. “You are in restricted Scourge space, aboard a quarantined station! Why?”

“We did not know!” Matum gasped. “We were lost and...”

The *Disise Kilnsiri* pressed the barrel of his rifle to Matum’s temple. “We only need one of you alive to question.” He snarled. “Kill them! This one is the leader.”

“No!” Matum growled as he sprang to his feet, grabbing the barrel of the rifle with his right hand.

What happened next Matum and Dytin would remember for many years to come.

Matum had time to glance into the face of the *Disise Kilnsiri* and he saw a flash of intense pain in those cruel dark eyes just before gray white Disise blood showered the entire side of his face and neck and all the resistance against his hand holding the rifle disappeared. His eyes glanced down in time to see the silver flash of unknown metal and then the *Disise Kilnsiri*’s entire arm fell away just above his elbow. Matum’s eyes grew wider still as he saw this, for he had never seen any form of combat besides simulation and training in all his years. The wet, squishy sound that he heard was sickening as the arm fell away and landed with a plopping sound on the deck at their feet. He looked back up at the *Disise Kilnsiri* with wide eyes and saw the expression of pain and surprise. There was a loud metal upon metal thud and then the *Disise Kilnsiri* stumbled backwards and reached for his now missing limb in obvious horrific agony. Matum saw the strangely curved bladed weapon imbedded in the steel wall, blood dripping from the arched blades. Matum looked back to the *Disise Kilnsiri* to see him staggering back several steps, his black eyes wide in shock. Something yank back the double skull with savage force unlike anything he had ever seen and two armored hands gripped either side of that large head and ripped sideways. The sound of the *Disise Kilnsiri*’s neck snapping was like a gunshot echoing in an enclosed room and then the *Disise Kilnsiri*’s body fell away to reveal the armored form of the Lycavorian behind him.

It was the *Dahakoan*.

Androcles Leonidas sensed a power and confidence unlike anything he had ever felt in his life swirling through him now. It was a combination of what all six of them were feeling and it was coursing through them like a firestorm. His senses had never been more alive and acute, every tiny ripple in the air, every single scent, every sound, all of it combining in a kaleidoscope of sensors that were firing in his brain. His normally superior reflexes were beyond everything that he had ever known and the strength that flowed within his four limbs was far beyond that which any normal Lycavorian should have had.

Andro could feel it flowing through Dorian and Laren as well, through Elynth, Ryner and Ladur behind them. Cascading outward and swirling all around them like a powerful tornado.

They could see everything as if they were looking through all six pairs of their eyes at the same time. They took in every angle, every direction, every detail no matter how minor and it blended into one complete vision of the entire space and world around them.

This was the *Dahakoan* power flowing through him Andro realized, the ability to see all in every aspect and ratio and react to it before it ever happened. *Saar* appeared in his hand as if by some unnatural force and was exploding from Flatspace before the thought had even left his mind. The Dragon Armor forged blade snapped out with a speed that Androcles never knew he possessed and bit into the neck of the next closest Scourge, severing the triangular head in one smooth motion. There was no pause in motion as the blade sliced cleanly through muscle, bone and sinew and then Scourge Elite’s head fell to the deck with a thundering thud it seemed. In the same instant, the M4X Pralor Particle Magnum appeared in his opposite hand and leveled at the next two Scourge closest to him. The new Pralor weapon thundered in the wide corridor, two magenta colored flashes from the barrel and the heads of the two Scourge erupted in masses of flesh, blood and bone, blowing the bodies of the two Scourge back with enough force to launch their bodies two meters away from him. Andro was turning to the side but knew it was already over, he had seen everything Dorian and Laren had done, every motion and thrust of their weapons with their own eyes. It was a complete and utter clarity that filled him now. Filled all of them.

To Androcles Leonidas it felt as if he had been reborn.

To Laren, it was the most beautiful sensation and emotion she had ever felt in her young life. The love of her parents and brothers was absolute, this Laren had always known, but the love she felt flowing from Androcles and Dorian and Elynth and Ryner for her and Ladur was almost magically in nature. They swam within each other's minds as if floating in a calm ocean of color, seeing and feeling everything. Over the last months, as she began to feel them more strongly, their resonance echoed within her. Shaped her. Taught her all that they knew. Andro's skills in physical combat were unquestioned and while Dorian was still very young and without Andro's experience, his unique and lethal fighting style had already proven deadly. The moment they had touched in the landing bay, Laren knew all that they knew. She could not explain it, and she did not care. Everything about them had filled her being and finally and forever made her whole. Made Ladur whole. This was the skill she unleashed now without a moment's doubt or hesitation.

Androcles had given her the intricately carved *Nehtes* while sitting in the landing bay listening to his grandfather and Dadrien. It was perfectly weighted for her even though they had never actually met her, only another sign that destiny had always intended for them to come together.

Only the when was ever in question, and Laren Ti'shara had that answer now.

The words "*All of us, to the end*" were inscribed upon the pommel in the Darastrixi, Vampiric and Lycavorian languages. The two ends were ringed with dazzling sapphire gems and stones and it was from these two ends that the eighteen inch long, slightly curved blades extended and locked into place even as she leaped without thought into the fray, Dorian's Shi Viska exploding from Flatspace and then braced for her use. It was not something that had even formed in her mind when Dorian dropped to one knee and lifted his Shi Viska towards her lithe body. Laren was already in motion when she saw the shield and she used the powerful muscles in her legs to propel her up and forward, tucking in a tight ball as she executed a flip in mid-air and came down between two of the *Disise Kilnsiri*. The *Nehtes* flashed left and right, and both *Disise Kilnsiri* began screaming in agony as their legs were chopped from underneath them. Blood erupted from their now crippled legs as they went down and showered the sides of Laren's shoulders and neck. She didn't hesitate and lifted the *Nehtes* once more, one end of it retracting into a single sided weapon and she spun to her right, the *Nehtes* flashing out with savage power. One of the screaming Scourge became silent as his head was removed from his shoulders. Laren spun back in the opposite direction before the first Scourge head had hit the floor and drove the bladed end of her *Nehtes* in the back of the double skull of the second Scourge she had crippled. The eighteen inch blade exploded out the front of his head between the two black eyes and his screams of agony died with him. Laren's hand filled with one of the Pralor M4X Particle Magnums and two more thundering blasts echoed in the corridor, two of the *Disise Kilnsiri* in front of her watching as their innards blew out the front of their bodies and splattered over the remaining four of their comrades who were still alive.

At least for another six seconds.

Six seconds was all it took.

Dorian Leonidas embraced it all now, just as his brother had. Embraced it right down to the core of his existence. Even as Laren launched herself from the face of his shield Dorian was whirling around and then throwing his Shi Viska directly behind his Soul Sister. Laren had seen this within him and landed in a crouch just as Dorian's shield reached two of the remaining four Scourge and decapitated them with no effort in the least. The Shi Viska imbedded itself into the wall behind them even as their large heads gave off an eerie plopping sound as they hit the deck at the same time. Dorian was already blurring in motion the millisecond his Shi Viska left his arm, his dual daggers erupting from Flatspace already in his hands. There was a simple reason that vampires were so feared, and their ability to blur was part of that main cause. It made them very nearly impossible to hit with any kind of gunfire and able to dodge almost any blade strike. Only the Lycavorian people had taught themselves how to fight vampires and this secret they had held close to their souls for many reasons. Dorian used those abilities now as he appeared beside the only remaining Scourge who were alive and trying to determine what was happening with wide eyes. His six foot one height put him almost even in height with them.

Almost was more than enough.

The two daggers, curved almost like Androcles' glaives flashed three times in the light of the corridor, each strike a mortal one, and each opening the Scourge flesh to the cool air. Blood splashed wetly across Dorian and reached as far as where Androcles was standing, coating the walls and deck with the slippery grayish color of Scourge blood. Both Scourge dropped their weapons and reached for the now gaping wounds in their necks, even as Dorian ducked down and opened their abdomens to the station air. His finishing move was to flash both blades across their thick legs and completely sever all tendons and ligaments that connect their lower legs to the nerves in their brains. Murano's teachings about their anatomy had been very thorough and with Eliani providing the areas which were most vulnerable, the unsuspecting Scourge really had no chance in the least.

Eleven seconds.

Eleven seconds was all it took to announce that the *Dahakoan* and the Praetorians had returned to the universe. It was a message that would resonate across the stars for many weeks and months to come.

Dorian looked at Laren as he rose to his feet, Laren shadowing his movements and they looked at Androcles to their front. They watched their Soul Brother lift the M4X in his left hand and smile.

"I love this thing!" Andro barked out.

As Dytin, Matum and the other Darastrixi looked on with wide eyes, Dorian and Laren began laughing as if they were walking in a flowered park and basking in the sunlight.

Dytin Unel had never seen anything quite like it in all of his years of life as he lowered the Particle rifle and stared at the three *Dahakoan* in front of him. He had of course heard many stories of the *Dahakoan* and the Praetorians in battle, yet he never believed he would witness such a thing in the course of his life.

Twelve *Disise Kilnsiri* laid dead upon the deck in less time than it took for him to form the thought to shoot the first one. He lowered the rifle slowly as he moved forward to a wide eyed Matum.

"Matum!" He barked, getting hold of his emotions and shock much more quickly.

Matum tore his eyes from where Androcles stood beside him and looked at his General. "*Indira* Dytin!" He stammered out the words.

"Can you move boy?" Dytin barked at him once more. "Get up!"

Matum rose to his feet, unsteady for a moment as he watched Andro move to the wall, grip his glaive in one hand and yank the weapon free. He twirled it effortlessly in his hand and then returned it to its place on his harness.

"General..." Matum gasped. "General I must..."

Dytin didn't give him the chance and reclaimed his weapon from the floor and shoved it back into his hands. "We don't have the time to discuss your foolish and prideful attempts to impress!" Dytin growled at him. "Your bumbling about blindly set off some sort of alarm that activated Scourge Cyro chambers in the lower portion of this station! They are waking up now and coming after us!"

Matum's eyes were wide. "I did not know!" He hissed.

Androcles was in his face now and he stared at Matum with a disgusted expression. "No, you did not know! And that makes you a fool!" Andro shouted into his face. "Know that your actions have put my people and your people in grave danger Major." Andro snarled at him. "If any one of them is taken from me because of what you have done, if my *sepa svihelen* is taken from me because of your actions, I will insure that you die a very long and very painful death." (Soul family)

"I do not answer to..." Matum began to shout back when he felt the fingers close around his throat and his body was slammed against the bulkhead with no regard for his pain. His own eyes grew wide in fear as he was lifted off the deck a good twelve inches and then he saw those azure colored orbs staring at him. The bright blue color was saturating the entire pupil, making it seem as if his eyes were glowing. Matum's eyes darted to the side and he saw Laren's eyes were identical, as were the brother's eyes. Glowing orbs of a power he did not have and would never understand.

"You will do as I say!" Androcles roared into his face. "Or I will leave you here to die with these pigs surrounding you! Do I make myself clear?"

Matum's own hands were clenched around Androcles' wrist but he knew without question that he would never break the hold that hand had on his throat. He nodded his head quickly, smart enough to know that he was more than overmatched. "Yes." He said clearly.

Andro released his throat immediately and stepped back. "We have to move!" He spat. "They will come to investigate why these *Kilnsiri* have not reported in, if they are not already on the way!" He looked at Dorian. "*Fervon*, you and Ryner take point, Laren and Ladur in the center with the General and his men, Elynth and I will bring up the rear. Go now!"

Dorian didn't even blink and was already turning, Ryner moving up beside his Bonded brother as they headed down the corridor the same way they had come.

Andro reached up and tapped his jaw, activating his implant. "Murano, we are out of time!" He spat. "We leave now!"

"We are already moving!" Murano answered.

"Deni?" Andro barked next.

"Just getting to the bay now!" Denali answered instantly.

"Pull *KertaGai* and the others from the control center!" Andro ordered as he began to follow Laren and Ladur. "Tell Normya to leave her *STRIKER*! I want everyone on the same ship!"

"Done!" Denali answered.

SPARTA'S WRATH

"...Over a hundred of them now! One hundred and... wait... twelve just disappeared!" The elven woman at the sensor station barked out. "Here!" She said pointing to her large sensor monitor. It had a partial schematic of the station up.

Armen stood beside her and nodded his head. **-Those are Scourge lifesigns. And the twelve you just lost are now dead. Androcles and the others have killed them-** He spoke almost calmly as he pointed to the monitor. **-This is where Androcles was going to intercept the three Darastrixi who wandered off. Please inform Androcles of what you have Senior Lieutenant. Give him numbers and direction-**

The elven woman nodded and typed furiously on her console, bringing up the COM channel of Androcles' team, and beginning to relay the information.

-Tactical Officer- Armen spoke loudly as he turned. **-Begin countdown on Zero Option if you would. Inform Alpha Nine and Thirteen they have twenty-two minutes to complete the download-**

"Acknowledged!"

-Weapons Officer, prep forward missile tubes with ZMF Mark 22s if you would- He ordered.

"How many sir?"

-How many forward missile launchers do we have WEPS? - Armen asked him.

The Lycavorian's eyes grew a little wider. "Yes sir!" He exclaimed. "Loading all twenty-four forward missile tubes with ZMF Mark 22s!"

-Set impact coordinates that I am transmitting- Armen spoke as he sent the coordinates to the Weapons Officer's station via his neural pathways.

The Weapons officer turned back to Armen. "This is... sir we are targeting them all at one location."

-Yes that is correct-

“Sir that many Mark 22s impacting in one location will cause...” The man began to speak.

-It will cause a localized zero matter anomaly. Essentially a miniature Zero Matter Black Hole. I have calculated that we will need to be at least two million kilometers away when it forms or we will be dragged into the anomaly as well- Armen spoke. –Helm, prepare to come to course 3976.4 and engage sub light engines at full when I give the order-

“Helm aye!”

The Tactical Officer moved up next to the Weapons Officer since they were friends and he had no idea what Armen had just said. “What did he mean?” He asked his friend.

The Weapons Officer met his eyes. “Twenty four ZMF missiles targeted at the same location will cause a Zero Matter Black Hole to form. Basically, anything with two million kilometers of that station is going to die. Including the station.”

-Communications Officer, stand by to transmit a warning message to the Darastrixi ship holding position off the station. Inform them that we will be destroying the station using Zero Matter missiles and if they do not wish to be dragged into the anomaly they should withdraw to a safe distance. If they do not follow those directives then I will put two Quantum Matter Pulse bursts through their hull and force them to retreat-

“Ready Armen!” The COM officer declared.

-Very well. Send the message COMS- Armen ordered. –And patch into their COM channels and prepare to intercept them-

The COM officer looked at him. “Why sir?” She asked.

-My historical databases indicate that the Darastrixi are a very prideful species. In many ways they were like the Pralor people. They do not like to be told that they are inferior. If our message does not convince them then I will intercede directly. I estimate a nineteen point three percent chance they will take our word for it-

“Sucks to be them.” The human woman commented as she worked her consoles.

PREMONITION

“...Master Chief! We’re down two pilots so I need you to spool us up and monitor power levels until they get back!” Kameka called from the cockpit.

She sat in Ne’Veha’s co-pilot’s seat and her hands were flying across the three body hugging consoles. Meka heard her implant cackle and then the huff of exertion as Master Chief Joe Ranor was sliding down the short five step ladder into the engine room.

“I’m on it Commander!” Joe’s voice echoed in her ear. “Two minutes!”

“You have ninety seconds before people start pouring up our ramp!” Meka told him. “And they will be running Master Chief!”

“Shit! We’ll be ready ma’am!” His voice answered her.

LANDING BAY 19

Denali had his finger stuck in his right ear as they exited the elevator and began moving down the short corridor into the cavernous landing bay.

“Again!” Denali barked as he skidded to a halt. “Give it to me again!”

“One hundred and thirty-three left!” The Tactical Officer’s voice echoed in his implant one more time. “They are coming at you from two different directions! The Smaller group is five decks below you and moving up quickly. The Second group is larger and following Prince Androcles down.”

“Where is Murano’s team?” Deni barked the question.

“Entering the bay now on opposite side!” Murano’s voice cut in.

Denali looked up and could just make out the mass of bodies moving from far across the landing bay. It had to be at least three thousand meters across the bay and he could tell they were running full out.

“Prince Denali! The two freight elevators down the east corridors!” The Tactical Officer barked over the COM. “It appears as if they are headed for both of them and will converge on the deck beneath you and then come up in them!”

“Where’s my brother?” Deni barked.

“His team is just entering Bay 19 from the south west!” The TAC Officer replied.

All of them heard the screeching sound of steel as it twisted and snapped in the distance and then the landing bay lit up as multicolored lights began to come on and power across the entire bay began to rise.

“What was that?” Sadi screamed from up in the Control Center of the landing bay.

Denali looked up at the clear glass partition of the Bay Control Center forty meters above the landing bay itself.

“They appear to be Internal Pressure Alarms of some sort.” The TAC officer’s voice replied.

“Androcles just closed one approach into this bay!” Murano commented. “We must do the same. Denali the one you came up!”

Denali nodded without speaking. “Aradace with me!” He barked to his Bonded sister as he turned and began to run back the way they had come.

Murano looked at Aviel and the other Darastrixi, all of them still in somewhat of a state of shock.

“Arduri, Eliani, get them onto the ship and secure them!”

“We can fight!” Aviel protested.

Murano shook his head and looked at Eliani. “Not this enemy, no.” He stated plainly.

Eliani knew instantly what he was talking about and she nodded. She turned to Jomann quickly and leaned up to kiss his cheek. “Be safe my love.” She whispered before she turned back and took Aviel’s arm gently. “*Koppentotz* Aviel, please. This is not going to be a fight that we want to be in the middle of, trust me.”

Nahko took Aviel’s other arm and still holding Robati’s hand she helped Eliani and the blue skinned female towards the strange looking ship in the distance. Murano looked at the half dozen Darastrixi Sand Striders who had not budged and were prepared to do battle. Murano smiled at their courage in the face of the unknown. He had heard many things about the Darastrixi Sand Striders and all of it was excellent.

“Who is in command while your General is gone?” Murano asked.

“I am Praetorian.” The senior Darastrixi stepped forward.

“You know who I am?” Murano asked.

The Darastrixi shook his head. “Not your name, but what you are.” He answered. “We have heard stories of Praetorian battles with the Disise. We would be honored to fight beside you.”

Murano nodded his head. “Well this could definitely spill into the landing bay. I need you to set up a defensive perimeter around the ramp of our ship. They are going to try and stop us from leaving. We can’t let them.”

“Understood.”

Murano looked at Sehri who was still somewhat wide eyed at the pace of things but she was remaining calm due mainly to the connection she had with Sadi and the others. “Sehri, go with them and shield the rear of the ramp. None can get through. Even one of these monsters could do untold damage if they got onto our ship.”

Sehri nodded instantly and looked at the Darastrixi. “This way!” She barked before she began to sprint towards the *PREMONITION*.

Murano turned and looked at Mari and Eirene who were both kneeling and working furiously on their P9s. “Mari... can you slow them down?” He asked.

Mari shook her head. “No.” She exclaimed. “We have the station completely locked down! Nothing should be working without our bioscans! They must have some sort of override device! Something built by us to unlock any lockdown we try. They can’t stop us but we can’t stop them either.”

Murano nodded his head and looked at Deion and Jomann. “They have had enough years with our technology to do quite a bit.” He said. “That’s it then. Both of you on the ship. Keep trying from there but you need to get out of the bay.”

“Father...” Mari began to protest.

“No!” Murano barked at her. “This is a fight you cannot be part of!”

“Father there are over a hundred of them!” Mari complained.

Murano nodded his head. “And if we have to worry about you and Eirene we will be distracted. I know what you are daughter, but you do not have the training to be part of this! I will not lose you after just discovering you! I won’t! And I do not wish to explain to your mother how I allowed that to happen.”

Deion moved up to her and pulled her into his arms. He leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and ear causing Mari to sigh wistfully in delight as his aura swept around her. “Go Mari.” He said to her. “We will take care of these fools and then follow.”

Mari looked up into his dark brown eyes and could not help the emotions of love and adoration from coursing through her. “If either one of you gets hurt I swear mother and I will haunt you forever!” She exclaimed as she turned to look at Murano.

“Of course.” Murano said as she stepped up to him and hugged him tightly.

“Father you...” Mari began but his finger on her lips stopped her words.

“Do not fear for us Mari.” He said. “But whatever you and Eirene can do to perhaps help would be much appreciated.”

Mari nodded her head, then turned and grabbed Eirene’s hand. “We can do more if we plug into the *PREMONITION’S* computer system! Come Eirene.”

Deion turned and looked at Fedor and the others. Ridor, Kalis, Daio, Sherice and Cowen were ready and he knew it. Murano watched Mari sprint off for a few seconds more and then turned back to them. “Cowen, you and Sherice get on one of these equipment lifts towards the back of the bay. It should give you more than enough clearance to fire freely. The common Scourge warrior that we saw at the end of the war had a triangular shape head with two eyes. If you see one of these creatures with four eyes and you have a shot, you must take it Cowen. That is a Scourge Holy Elite. They are the core. Without him, the others will splinter.”

Cowen hefted his sniper rifle and nodded. “If I see one, he will die!” He said.

“Go!” Murano told them. He looked around quickly and then back to the others. “Ridor, you and Kalis get the rest of your team set up among the equipment crates. We will try to hold them in the corridor as long as possible, but it won’t last. Any who get past us will belong to you, Jeru and the other dragons.”

Ridor and Kalis nodded their heads. “Prisoners?” He asked.

Murano shook his head. “The Scourge do not surrender and we don’t want prisoners.” He told them. “If they make it past us, kill them.”

“Done.” Ridor replied as he hefted his Particle rifle and began moving off with Kalis and the others.

Murano turned to Jomann, Deion and Lisisa. “Lisisa, Nara is coming down to be with you but you must remain in the second line with the dragons and Nara. You are Praetorian Mage’s but it will distract Denali and Deion if you are in close battle. You and Nara direct the dragons and Ridor’s team from upon Jeth and Mayla and allow them to draw from your echo and resonance. Until there is time to train you more that is all you can do right now. Again, anything that makes it past us will fall to you. You will need to kill them quickly Lisisa.”

Lisisa nodded her head as she began moving for where Jeth sat on the deck. “I understand Murano.” She said as she leaped easily onto Jeth’s back and into the saddle. “We will handle it.”

Murano felt charged with energy, just as the others did. He had felt the massive surge of Etheric energy within both Androcles and Dorian during their brief fight in the corridor above them and a slightly less intense surge from Laren. Murano had once thought that he would never face the Scourge in battle again. He had hoped he had seen the last of them for all time. He should have known better than to believe that, but at least now he

would rejoin battle with them in a manner befitting a Praetorian. He would do battle with them with fellow Praetorians all around him and this made him swell with confidence and pride.

He turned when he felt Androcles and the others approach and he saw them. Grayish blood covered many spots on their armor and from experience Murano knew just how close they had come to the Scourge. His head jerked around when he heard a similar screeching and tearing noise and he knew then that Denali and Aradace had sealed the elevator that he and the others had come up on.

“They are gathering by the freight elevators one deck beneath us.” Andro spoke now. “Do they think we will allow them to assault this bay uncontested Murano?”

“I don’t think they know how many of us there actually are.” Murano spoke now. “Armen can scan them from *SPARTA’S WRATH* but Mari and Eirene have locked out all internal systems to include sensors. They are using some sort of bypass device to move between decks but they cannot tell how many of us there are. Did you see...?”

Andro shook his head. “No. I felt him though. He was close.”

“They are the conduit to the Queen.” Murano said. “That is why you felt him. He was probably going to meet with those he sent to intercept the Darastrixi.”

“He won’t like what he finds.” Andro stated almost casually. To anyone else it would have seemed the most insane statement but after his time with both Martin and then Androcles, Murano knew it was the laconic nature of the Leonidas family when in the face of the unknown. It was not that they were unafraid, it was how they dealt with that fear that set them above so many others.

“They appear as I told you?” Murano asked.

Androcles and Dorian both nodded now. “Somewhat different in the shapes of their heads but yes.” Dorian answered.

“They have evolved since you last fought them Praetorian Murano.” Laren spoke now as she came up between her Soul Brothers. “The Holy Elites more so.”

Murano nodded his head. “I thought as much. We will need to sit down and compile everything we have discovered and cross reference it with what you and your people can tell us Laren. Your insight will be key to me.”

Laren nodded her head. “Of course. And now?”

Murano lifted his Saberstaff in one hand and the particle magnum in the other. “Now we fight.” He stated. “None can survive to speak about us being here. None of them.”

NINE MINUTES EARLIER DECK TWENTY-FOUR SECTION THIRTEEN

Dalet Nulai was quiet as he stared at the bodies of his men in the now empty corridor. He was cursing under his breath as his personal squad moved among the bodies insuring that none of them still lived. The armored form of his First filled his vision and he looked up, bringing his mind back to the present.

“All of them are dead Holy One.” The Scourge spoke.

“They left their Cryo Chambers without putting their armor on!” Dalet hissed angrily.

“They wished to intercept the intruders before they escaped.” The First said in defense of the dead men.

Dalet knelt next to one of the headless bodies. “A bladed weapon was used here.” He stated. “There is no known metal substance that can cut through our armor! They were fools to begin the search without their full gear!” He placed his hand on the chest of the body. “Brave fools, but fools nonetheless.”

“There is particle scoring on the walls Holy One.” The First said.

Dalet turned back around and looked at him. “Pralor weapons?”

“They are the only known species to have built such weapons.” The First answered.

Dalet closed his eyes and shook his head. “I sense something else as well.” He said softly. “Something powerful and intelligent.”

“Holy One?” The First questioned.

“A presence.” Dalet continued as he stepped gingerly among the bodies. “Three such presences. Incredible power and focus. It is... it cannot be!” He gasped.

“Holy One?” The First asked once more.

“Praetorians!” Dalet gasped as he turned to face his First again and his eyes opened. “I sense Praetorians on this station!”

“Holy One, we destroyed the Praetorians.” He stated. “We butchered the last of them only a hundred years into our second war with them. That... that cannot be what you feel!”

“But it is!” Dalet gasped. “It is different somehow, but I do feel them! Their echo is faint, like they are somehow hiding themselves within the Etheric realm, but I can still sense them.”

“Holy One are you certain?” The First gasped now unable to believe this information.

Dalet nodded his head slowly. “Only Praetorians are capable of killing our kind with such precision First. They got off no warning to us. Darastrixi cannot do this.” He stated waving his hands over the bodies.

“How can that be possible Holy One?” The First asked him stepping closer to his figure. “We searched for over three centuries for any Pralors that may have escaped our purge of them. We found nothing.”

“The computer AI, before it lost the connection to the internal sensors, it stated it had detected one full blooded Pralor and many others with Pralor blood in them.” Dalet spoke. “All of them were on this station.”

The First shook his head. “I do not see how Holy One.” He told him.

Dalet lifted his wrist and activated his link the main core of his computer. “Do you have any access to the internal sensors?” He asked.

The small screen on his forearm blinked several times. **{Negative. All of the main and secondary systems have been locked out using rotating Pralor Algorithms. All I have remaining are the small Bio dampeners placed throughout the station.}**

“Can you use those to tell me where they have gone?” Dalet asked. “Check Bio readings and changes in the decks of the ship! Do it now!”

{Stand by. Scanning.} The computer answered him. **{I am detecting Activated Bio Dampeners in successive order indicates that intruders have all moved to Landing Bay 19.}**

Dalet looked at his First. “That is where their ships will be.” He stated. “Order all of our forces to converge on this Landing Bay 19! Do it now!”

{Transmitting new orders!}

Dalet looked at his First. “We will return to them.” He said. “For now let us capture those who are responsible.”

SPARTA’S WRATH

“Armen, I have that Darastrixi transport!” The COM officer barked as she turned her head to look at him.

-Kameka’Caleo your status please? – Armen spoke from where he stood.

“I have extended the radius of our local jamming field Armen but Sadi and Ne’Veha say the moment we engage our engines from standby mode it will drop.” Kameka’Caleo answered.

-Understood. A few moments is all I need- Armen answered.

“Well, if they are looking for them, they won’t see them now until the field comes down.” Kameka answered him.

-Thank you- Armen turned and looked at his COM officer. **-Transfer to main holo disc. Quickly now, for Androcles and the others are about to engage and we do not need this distraction now-**

“Activated! Go!”

MAJOR DARROD’S ASSAULT TRANSPORT

“No longer in the landing bay!” The co-pilot shouted as he turned his head.

Darrodd came up behind him. “What do you mean no longer there?” He snarled. “We are about to breach!”

“Their lifesigns have moved!” The man answered. “They were moving up but we have lost them. Something is jamming our sensors now. Something from within that station!”

“Some sort of localized jamming field!” Darrodd remarked. “It has to be.”

“What has that kind of power sir?” The co-pilot asked. “No ground based jamming device that we know of can completely block a signal.”

“We are not dealing with...” Darrodd began to speak but another alarm cut off his words and the co-pilot reached above him.

“Our COM system is being overridden!” He barked. “Someone is taking over our channels! I’m receiving a message!”

“A message!” Darrodd exclaimed “From who?”

Darrodd spun around as the small communications disc on the opposite console next to the engineer’s station came alive with the face and upper body of a strange looking, orange hued eyed figure.

-...Darastrixi transport ship currently about to attempt to breach the landing bay on Pralor Science Station 489. I am Commander Armen. Autonomous Avatar of Crown Prince Androcles Leonidas of the United Lycavorian Union and the commander of this vessel. If you continue your attempts to breach the landing bay you will force me to fire on your ship and destroy you. I ask that you respond within the next twenty seconds or I will order your transport terminated-

Darrodd immediately stabbed down on the communications panel. “I am Major...!” He began to shout angrily.

-I know exactly who you are Major Darrodd of the Darastrixi Home Fleet- Armen told him without pausing. **-This will not change the outcome of your situation should you choose to ignore my message-**

“There are Darastrixi aboard that station!” Darrodd barked. “I intend to land and retrieve them!”

-General Dytin and those with him will not be on the station for much longer- Armen answered him. **-We have initiated a core overload of the station’s internal power matrix. In eighteen minutes the station and everyone on it will be destroyed. I insist you pull back your transport unless you wish to perish with however many Scourge remain alive after my people have departed-**

“I do not take orders from you!” Darrodd growled at the image of Armen. “General Dytin and those with him are criminals of the Darastrixi Empire and you will hand them over to me! Then you will power down your ship and prepare to be boarded.”

-Major we are not in Darastrixi space and therefore any authority you think you may have does not exist- Armen explained. **-And there is nothing that would ever convince me to allow you to board my ship. I have given you the only warning you shall receive-**

“Who are you?” Darrodd barked. “Where do you come from? We do not recognize your ship class! I want answers!”

-What you want is of no concern to me- Armen told him. **-As I said, I have given you the only warning you will receive. When the station overloads, everything within half a million kilometers will be destroyed as well, including your three ships. We will already be gone. The choice is yours Major-**

The communications ended abruptly just as Darrod was going to say something and his eyes grew wide at the display of incredible insubordination.

“Major!” The pilot yelled now. “Orders!”

Darrod looked out the view window and saw that they were about to slip into the Emergency Bay.

“Major!” The pilot screamed once more turning his head.

“Abort!” Darrod shouted. “Abort the breach!”

The transport yanked sharply to starboard and began to pull away from the massive station.

“Back to the ship!” Darrod snarled angrily. “Back to the ship now!”

SPARTA'S WRATH

“...Are changing course and returning to their ship.” The TAC Officer announced.

“More bluster than balls.” The Elven Helm Officer commented, drawing chuckles from many on the bridge crew.

-Crude but accurate- Armen stated with almost a humorous tone in his voice.

“Armen!” The COM officer barked out. “We just received the signal from Alpha Nine and Thirteen. They have initiated the reaction.”

Armen nodded. **-Very well. Now the countdown begins-**

SCIENCE STATION 489

Murano lowered the particle magnum after firing into the ceiling four times and taking out more than half of the light fixtures. Sparks flew from the destroyed units and smoke began to drift lazily down in to the wide corridor.

“Better for us.” Murano stated as he saw Andro looking at him.

“Why don’t we just short out the elevator?” Deion asked from where he stood. “Drop it down like we did the others?”

“We don’t know if that will kill all of them and we have to be sure.” Murano answered him as he returned to his spot beside Deion.

“Blowing up the station will damn sure kill them all.” Deion continued.

“But how many will escape if we leave and realize the station is going to be destroyed?” Murano told him.

“Anse Murano!” Deion exclaimed. “You are just a bundle of good news!”

Murano chuckled softly as the levity of the moment hit him. It was that laconic nature again, using humor to mask and control the fear they all felt. It appeared as if even the youngest of Martin’s children possessed this skill, or perhaps because it was how they were raised, but whatever the reason, it served its purpose as Murano felt the tension among all of them lift just a little bit. All of them were Praetorians in this corridor, connected in such a way that they were able to sense each other’s emotions to an extent. They were feeding off of each other and this made Murano very happy. This is what Praetorians of his time often did when facing battle together and knowing that all of them were family made this even more powerful now Murano knew. They would fight and die for one another as only siblings could.

Laren had been watching the numbers on the door controls falling and when it reached their level she gripped her *Nehtes* tighter. "They are here!" She rasped out the words.

The humor fell away and what took its place were seasoned Spartan combat warriors all. She may have been Darastrixi, but Laren Ti'shara shared the memories of her Soul Brothers just as they shared hers and she knew all that they knew. Everyone understood this and recognized it for what it was. Something they could not explain but accepted as destiny and fate.

The doors opened to the two large freight elevators and nearly a hundred Scourge warriors filled the corridor then, all of them in armor of some sort and carrying weapons. That they did not come out firing was something that took all of them by surprise and this made it so they did not fire initially. They watched the Scourge take up positions covering one another since there was no actual cover in the freight corridor. It was a surprising move yes, and an even bigger surprise when the lone Scourge stepped into the center of the corridor and held up his hands. His armor was a different color, a darker gray than the others and he had no visible weapons, but there was no mistaking the four black eyes on his head.

"We do not wish to fight!" Dalet barked out the words.

"My ass!" Murano muttered under his breath causing Deion to look up at him with a lopsided grin. "He's stalling for time so that the elevators go down and pick up the rest of his men."

"Let him stall." Deion whispered back with a grin. "When the time comes it won't matter one bit."

Murano met his eyes and smiled. "No, it will not."

"He is an *Ioth Kilnsiri*!" Laren hissed the words vehemently as the hazy corridor began to clear somewhat in front of them.

They could see nearly three or four dozen Scourge warriors along the sides taking cover behind whatever they could find that had been left in the corridors. The lone figure became clearer as he approached slowly with his hands held out in front of him. His double skull was no longer hidden under the helmet which he had dropped to the deck. His head was in the shape of a delicately curved triangle, with two black eyes on each upper layer of his skull. Each side of his head had two, small finger like appendages that twitched from time to time. This made him very different from the simple Scourge soldiers they had been fighting for they did not have these appendages.

Androcles turned his head to the left slightly and looked at Laren on his right. She held the *Nehtes* in a defensive posture, extended under her arm out to the side. Her body armor was splashed with the grayish Scourge blood, as was all of their armor. Her bright, multicolored blue eyes were now nearly glowing as were Dorian's and Andro's own eyes, the blue filling nearly all of the pupil. Andro turned his head even more to look back at Murano who was crouching just behind Deion's shoulder. Jomann and Denali occupied the opposite side of the wide corridor and Andro felt pride swell within his chest. Though they had fought their way here through a huge portion of the station, none of them appeared winded in any way. All of them were splashed generously with Scourge blood, but he saw the set of their eyes and knew they would stand. A quick glance behind them and he saw Elynth, Ryner and Ladur poised by the massive opening into the landing bay, their dragon Armor fully extended and protecting their bodies.

"Murano?" Andro questioned.

Murano nodded his head quickly. "Laren is correct." He replied. "They are the Queen's Guard. Loyal to the core. He is the one who has been driving them. The others are just normal Elites. Soldiers. They look differently but there is no mistaking what they are."

"If you know what I am, then you know that you cannot win!" The voice boomed out causing Andro to turn back and see the Holy Elite stop only fifteen feet from him. "More of my warriors are waking even now. More are coming up to this level. We will overwhelm you by sheer numbers in moments. I am Dalet Nulai and if you surrender to me peacefully, you will all live. I guarantee this to you."

"I know you are a butcher of innocents!" Murano screamed.

"And I know you Praetorian Murano." Dalet spoke slowly, his eyes focusing on Murano. "I did not believe it when I first came to realize it was Pralor people on this station. We thought the Pralor people dead and extinct at our hand. Then I saw what you did to my men who were sent to take the Darastrixi. Then I knew. And your face is known to every Holy Elite Murano, have no doubts about that considering your actions."

All of them could feel the struggle within Murano not to lash out right then but they were impressed with his will and how he held it together. None of them had any idea it was their strength of will and purpose

that Murano was drawing on to control his own emotions. As he had discovered since finding Martin, their emotions were the fuel for their power and Murano had been learning every day how to harness that as they did so easily. He discovered it was their love of others and the closeness they shared that allowed them to do this and Murano had begun to embrace that more ever since he discovered Mari.

“Do not mince words monster!” Murano snapped at Dalet.

“The only reason you are not already dead is because of these fine young specimens you have with you Praetorian Murano. We had thought all the Praetorians dead. We thought your people extinct but it appears we were mistaken. My Queen will be most pleased when she discovers that there are more of you.”

Dorian looked at Androcles now. “Is this ugly fuck for real *fervon*?” He asked in an almost humorous tone of voice. “We’ve been dropping these fuglies all over the station.”

“We were measuring you, young Praetorian.” Dalet spoke once more as his red eyes fell on Dorian. He did not understand the lack of fear within them. He had always instilled fear in others when he faced them down, but he did not sense that within these individuals. The one who had spoken was different, as were the female Darastrixi and the strange blue eyed one. He did not know their species, and while he could sense the Pralor blood flowing within them, they were definitely not Pralor. “You are different from the Praetorians I have fought before, you, the one beside you with the strange eyes and the Darastrixi female, but I have prevailed against them all. It will be no different now I am afraid.”

“Oh really?” Dorian quipped once more. “He’s a cocky *tukannupae* isn’t he?”

Murano felt the curl of the smile touch the corner of his lips at Dorian’s comment. It was an evil smile that held nothing but malice and death and he felt the surge of power and emotion within all of them and he embraced that now as he never had before. “Trust me when I tell you that you have never fought anything like them.” He spoke loudly from behind Androcles.

Dalet’s four eyes grew wider as he saw the strange metal armor begin to extend and wrap around all of those in front of him. It was engulfing their entire bodies, wrapping over the black and red body armor they already wore. Dalet was fascinated as he watched, never having seen anything like it in his life. He took a slight step back, his hand dropping to where his weapon rested on his belt and he watched as the armor engulfed all of them fully, leaving only parts of their faces exposed. His eyes grew even wider when he saw the one in the middle lift his right hand with the strange looking blade in it. Even in the reflection of the dimly lit corridor he could see Scourge blood on the edges of that weapon. His eyes grew wider still as he watched as shimmering blueish Etheric shields activate somehow, wrapping around all but the old Praetorian and this encased their bodies like a form fitting skin. It was unlike anything he had ever seen. His eyes rose and he looked directly at the strange blue eyes of the one in the middle.

“It was you!” He gasped aloud. “You killed my men!”

“Elynth!” Andro shouted out the word.

“We are ready!” Elynth answered back instantly, the echo of her voice reaching across the landing bay and causing Jeth, Tharua, Aradace and all of their dragons to look at her with shocked expressions. She had spoken words. Actual words, and her voice sounded exactly like it did when she spoke within their minds. They had no time to contemplate this as in the next moment all hell broke loose. They did not see Sarlana smile from within the *PREMONITION*, for it was her guidance that prepared Elynth and Ryner for when they met Ladur. The moment they touched their Soul Brother, the vocal cords that had lain dormant within her and Ryner sprang to life instantly, filled with the knowledge they already possessed and allowing them to speak from the outset. It was a gift that every dragon among the Union and on Artaaya would soon learn and then pass on to their children in the future to come.

Andro touched the button on the side of the glaive and the curved blades extended. “Let’s dance!” He screamed just before he launched that strange weapon into the air directly at him with insane speed.

Dalet could only watch as that bladed weapon, designed unlike any weapon he had ever seen before, slammed into the head of his First directly between his wide spread eyes. It buried itself nearly eight inches in his First’s skull, Dalet hearing the sickening crunch of bone and the wet sound of flesh parting. Then his First

was on the deck at his feet, his eyes open in a lifeless stare, the glaive buried nearly three quarters of the way into his large skull.

“Now!” Elynth screamed out the word, seeing everything within Andro's mind as clearly as if she was thinking it herself.

An instant later, two streams of pure, three thousand degree flame erupted from Ryner and Ladur, followed by one flame tinged stream of super-heated three thousand five hundred degree air. All three of these cones of death shot straight down the corridor at the stunned Scourge with unerring accuracy and absolutely no remorse.

The Scourge soldiers all cringe and ducked out of instinct when seeing the flame and this served to do exactly as Androcles had hoped. It caused them to pause in their actions and seek shelter behind whatever crates remained in the corridor.

Andro was turning away from them even as those streams of flame reached for him. He simply looked at Murano before grabbing his arm.

“Androcles no!” Murano barked as Andro forced him in the other direction.

“Dori! Laren!” Andro snapped. “Do it!”

Murano was struggling against Andro's pull to no avail. “We cannot let them out of the corridor!” He shouted. “We will lose our advantage!”

Andro shook his head. “No!” He snarled. “Our advantage is out there!” He practically heaved Murano up on his shoulder and broke into a run even as Murano watched with shock as those streams of fire and flame tinged superheated air stopped just in front of the Scourge and disappeared. They hadn't reached far enough back to touch the Scourge and Murano was about to scream out once more when Andro opened his thoughts to him in that instant. Murano saw what he was going to do and Murano could do nothing but approve as they raced out of the end of the corridor between Elynth and Ladur, Andro lowering Murano without even stopping his movement and Murano falling into a run beside him. He saw Androcles reach back with his hand as if trying to grasp something and incredibly Murano witnessed the glaive he had thrown tear itself from the head of the Scourge Elite and flash through the air into his armored palm even as they ran.

The moment Androcles gave them the word, Laren lifted her *Nehtes* in one hand and drove it down into the floor of the corridor just as hard as she could. She channeled all of her power into the blow, directing a massive Etheric burst down through the *Nehtes* into the deck. She felt Dorian execute a similar move and their *Nehtes* struck the floor in the same instant, and their glowing eyes watched as the floor heaved upwards, buckling steel plates and then setting them on a collision course with the bunched up Scourge at the end of the corridor. The Etheric wave built up speed and power as it raced at the Scourge, buckling and shattering every floor tile in its path as it cascaded down the corridor.

Dalet could only watch in horror as that blade tore itself from the skull of his First and flashed away. As Dalet turned to watch it he saw it then. A wave of Etheric power, and that wave carried with it millions of pieces of steel in front of it as it ripped the deck apart in its motion. Dalet had expected a move like this by the Praetorian, as it was a standard combat move for them. They would send lances of Etheric power through whatever surface they were on to stun Scourge warriors and give them time to regroup. He and his men had been prepared for such a move, their new armor designed in such a way as to reflect the Etheric power back. What he saw coming at him however was not etheric lances, but tiny slivers of metal traveling at impossible speed. Never in all of his battles with Praetorians had he seen such a move and he had time for only one warning to his men.

“Down!” He screamed at the top of his lungs even as that wave slammed into them.

Dalet was one of the lucky ones, seven of his men getting caught upright in that wave when it smashed into them, lifting their bodies from the deck and tossing them around like so many pieces of trash, while million slivers of steel stabbed into their armor at blinding speed. First one, then another, then another, all of them were shredded to pieces of flesh and blood. Almost as if their bodies were simply torn asunder and disintegrated before his very eyes. Dalet continued to watch as that wave moved past his men and smashed into the elevator doors. He gazed on in awe as the doors were peppered by that same cloud and they too were disintegrated before his very eyes. Then Dalet knew what was going to happen and he was powerless to stop it. The four massive beams that acted as guides for the lifts bringing up the rest of his men were struck by that destructive

wave and Dalet could only sit there and watch as those beams were struck with such force that they snapped and curled outward.

Dalet Nulai watched in stunned shock as both of the freight elevators lost all power and began an uncontrolled free fall downward. He could only watch as over fifty of his men were killed outright in the blink of an eye by the impact of the elevators at the bottom of the nineteen deck plunge. Rage filled him then. Pure hate and rage and he whirled around to see the two figures moving back into the landing bay at a sprint. With an unearthly roar of anger and hate Dalet rose to his feet in the smoky corridor and pointed toward the landing bay.

“Kill them!” He screamed out the words. “Kill them all!”

Dalet Nulai did exactly as Androcles Leonidas had hoped he would do.

Praetorian and *Dahakoan* though he may have been, Androcles Leonidas was still a Spartan and second only to his father in tactical genius. The Scourge did not know them, did not know how they would fight. He quickly determined once the exchange between the Holy Elite and Murano had begun that this Scourge had no idea who he was facing. That would be his downfall.

Andro's father had never been predictable to an enemy in battle and more often than not this was always their advantage. He had learned these lessons from his father well and had used the Etheric connection he had with all of his siblings, Jomann and the members of his team to tell them what he was going to do. They were prepared within seconds. The moment Dorian and Laren cleared the corridor towards the elevators they felt the shudder of the elevators reaching the end of their death fall even nineteen decks up as they were.

They stood perhaps five meters apart, all of them facing the doors into the freight corridor. Laren and Ladur on his right, Dorian and Ryner on his left. Elynth was just behind him, Denali and Aradace on Dorian's left side, while Deion and Jeru were to Laren's right. Murano stood just beside him. Jomann and Soren stood off to the side not because they were not bonded brother, but because Jomann could use his skills far more effectively in a small group. Soren knew this and while they were not bonded together by way of the Etheric realm, they were both brothers in the forge of combat. No matter their species, Jomann and Soren were brothers of a different sense. Both had fought and lost during the Evolli war, on the foul planet of Alba Tau. That place had been the forge. A forge of blood and fire and sweat that had changed so many within the Union. They both had lost something special to them, yet they now had gained something far greater.

The instant the first Scourge cleared the massive double doors in a dead run, Soren launched Jomann into the air above the entrance with a powerful swing of his thick tail. Jomann's tall, powerful body went airborne in a precise trajectory over the top of the doors, the Pralor particle rifle dancing in his hands. Jomann's power was unique, even Murano never seeing the ability to warp time as Jomann did. To them he appeared to be moving at normal speed, but to Jomann himself it was as if everything was moving in slow motion. So clear and pure was his connection that everything came into focus for him.

What Murano did not yet understand fully were how the emotions play a role in this breed of Praetorian. Jomann's love of Eliani and Brendi, so utterly pure and uncontested in any way gave him a clarity of mind that few ever really knew. His devotion to them was complete, honest and flowed throughout his being in such a way that it allowed him to be pure of mind. This emotion and the power of it granted him the ability to slow time around him and act out in order to protect them. As Jomann was launched through the air by Soren's tail, he rotated his body upright, pointed his weapon down and fired seven shots as he rotated over the top of the double doors. Each shot from the particle rifle blew apart the head of a Scourge Elite as they exited the corridor, spreading grayish blood and brain matter across the deck all around them, their bodies coming to immediate halts in their momentum and dropping to the deck, causing their brethren to stumble over their corpses as they followed behind them.

Androcles counted to three slowly in his head and then *Saar* and *Cana* erupted from Flatspace and Andro twirled the swords effortlessly in his hands. He waited... feeling the pureness of Dorian and Laren beside him... and then he saw him. He emerged from the freight corridor, his face a mask of rage and hatred and Androcles Leonidas nodded his head.

“Go!” He screamed.

With no hesitation and Spartan war cries that would have made their father proud, the Leonidas family attacked.

SPARTA'S WRATH

“...have engaged Armen!” The Tactical Officer shouted from his station. “*Son vada carians!* It’s...”

-We can review the battle at a later time TO. We have our own job to do as well- Armen told him even as he stepped in front of him.

The TO nodded and his hands moved across his console. “Yes sir! Alpha Nine and Alpha Thirteen are back aboard the *PREMONITION!* Princess Sadi and Princess Ne’Veha are back aboard as well and with Commander Caleo they are powering her up! All data we were able to cram into the portable storage units has been teleported over and we took everything Praetorian Murano wanted plus a little more!”

-Status of the core dump into our data banks? – Armen asked.

“That will be complete in seven minutes! The station’s computers were filled to overflowing!” the TO answered.

-Androcles will not let this battle will not last seven minutes- Armen spoke as he turned to look out the massive view window at the station. **–Helm! Prepare to come about one hundred and eighty degrees and engage main engines! The moment we receive the signal from Princess Sadi that they are clear, execute a full power turn using all of our station keeping thrusters and go to maximum sub light speed-**

“Armen that will scorch the station pretty bad.” The Helm Officer told him.

-It will not matter. Anything left alive on that station will die in nine minutes regardless- Armen spoke. **–Let us be prepared for when we are needed-**

SCIENCE STATION 489

Murano knew within the first ten seconds that everything his dear friend Sumar had hoped to accomplish had indeed come true. The Praetorians had been reborn, and they were far more capable than the Praetorians of his time. As he took the head from a Scourge Elite with a powerful swipe of his Saberstaff, Murano knew where his place would be. These young men and women were faster and stronger than he would ever be. Their Lycavorian and Vampiric blood gave them that naturally. A sense of calm came over Murano as he began to slowly draw back from the others as they forged ahead. Sarlana had told him that they would be leaders and teachers for the future generations to come. As he slipped further back, Murano realized that generation had come. This did not upset him as he thought it would, it emboldened him. As he felt the Etheric power swirling all around him, Murano had never felt more at home in his entire life. Sumar had known this and that is why he had left him behind. He was to be the guide for the future generations, and the mentor that they could all come to for assistance. Androcles had said as much to him not so very long ago and he remembered those words vividly.

“I don’t know where we will end up Murano, but no matter what we are, Dahakoan, Praetorian, you and Sarlana are part of that which will make us whole. Never doubt that. We need you just as much, if not more, than you need us.”

Murano let these thoughts guide him as he drew back further and let them take the fight to the enemy. He had no dragon bonded to him, and while powerful, his Etheric connection was far less than those before him. He soon found himself beside Ridor and Fedor in a defensive U shaped perimeter around the rear of the *PREMONITION*. The Darastrixi Sand Striders were providing the inner perimeter for the ship, Sehri projecting a powerful etheric shield around the immediate rear of the ship. Murano smiled inwardly to himself. He felt powerful once more. He felt important. Not just for the hope of the future of his people and that of his life with Tobia and Mari, but hope for all life across the stars that would do battle with the Scourge in the coming months and years.

Murano turned back to watch the fight and only one thought crossed his mind.
This was only the beginning.

It truly was a glorious battle, at least to those Darastrixi and non-Praetorians who were able to witness it. Aviel and Dytin stood just behind Sehri, protected by the Etheric shield she was projecting, their eyes filled with awe and their expressions one of disbelief. Neither of them took note of Maruk's eyes which watched them intently as close as they were standing to his future Bonded sister.

What they were witnessing was a clash of titans as far as they were concerned. There had not been a battle between Darastrixi and Scourge forces for over a million years, and no other species in their quadrant would ever challenge the Darastrixi for their might was too much. This day they were witnessing the first challenge to the *Disise* dominance and it was not going well for the *Disise*.

While the Sand Striders rode their *Vrrarhoinpa* into battle, they did not fight as one unit as they were seeing now. What they were watching was nothing short of amazing. The three Lycavorian females moved along the peripheral of the actual fighting, sitting atop the three *Vrrarhoinpa* that they knew were Bonded to them. A light blue Etheric shield encased both the women and the dragons and they were wielding Pralor particle rifles with deadly accuracy, taking down any who strayed near the edges of the battle taking place. The meat of the battle was taking place far in front of them, five Lycavorians and a Darastrixi female and six dragons that were defying everything Aviel and Dytin had known throughout their lives. The dragons were in the thickest of the fighting with the *Disise*, their weapons fire glancing off Etheric shields that no other *Vrrarhoinpa* could ever hope to project. They witnessed amazing dexterity and power from these *Vrrarhoinpa* the likes of which they could never have foreseen. The unique and unusual armor allowed them to use their wings and battering rams, their heads as clubs, and their tails as instruments of death. The cross bred dragons, the two near obsidian colored ones were the most impressive, not just because of their size but because of the skill they were showing. It was quite unlike anything Aviel and Dytin had ever imagined they would witness.

Viewing this as they were, Aviel, Dytin and even Matum who stood just behind them, their reasons for coming on this mission were affirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt. This was truer for Matum who now had to make up for mistakes that could have cost others their lives. He allowed his natural arrogance to come forth in the face of men and women who were ten times the soldier he thought he was. Including the Darastrixi female who was rapidly beginning to mean much more to him than anything he had ever felt.

This was it.

The culmination of years of questions with no answers.

They had their answers now, and it was these answers that had successfully unleashed everything inside of them that had waited so long to come out. Everything was so focused and clear. No doubt. No hesitation. It came from within them as surely as the breath that filled their lungs. They had only one thought within them and that was to protect and love those they cared about. Six minds and souls merged together in one unyielding force. Six minds and souls that shared everything about each other without pause.

Each blow by *Saar* and *Cana* fell an enemy of the future. Each thrust by Laren's *Nehtes* took down an enemy of life. Each slash of dual daggers snuffed out a bringer of death. They were like six pieces of a perfect ballet, dancing among the Scourge with grace and power unlike anything the Scourge had witnessed before. Andro stood among the gore and slashed his swords across the broad chest of the Scourge with savage power,

opening the monster's chest and abdomen to the air of the landing bay. He ducked down low to the deck as Elynth's armored wing whipped over his head and smashed into two more Scourge who had attempted to come up behind him. As the edges of her wing cleared his helmet Andro was reaching up with his hand as he stood to his full height and he caught Laren's hand as she leaped into the air above him. He felt her fingers close around his wrist and then he was throwing her in the air towards another group of Scourge. As Laren twisted her body around in midair she extended her *Nehtes* once more and fell among the three *Disise* in a crouch. Using the power of her momentum and her natural strength she slashed forward and back with one hand, removing the legs of two of the *Disise* with barely any pause. She swung the blunt end of her *Nehtes* back across her body intending to smash it into the face of the third *Disise* but his large hands dropped his rifle and he caught the blunt end of the *Nehtes* between his palms.

"Darastrixi witch!" He screamed at her.

Laren didn't blink and depressed the recessed button on her *Nehtes*. The eighteen inch long, delicately curved blade extended out in an instant, punching a hole through his hand and directly into his face under one eye. The tip of the blade exploded out the back of his skull and Laren ripped sideways with her wrists, taking half of his misshapen head with her.

"I am no witch *Disise* monster!" She screamed. Laren felt him in her mind and braced herself as Dorian blurred to her, scooping her up in his arm and then they fell upon four of the last five Scourge. An Etheric diamond from Deion blew out the chest of one, while Denali reached out and lifted two others into the air with his own Etheric power. Dorian finished his blur with Laren in one arm and she leaped straight up to smash her *Nehtes* down across both of their bodies, driving them down with incredible force to crash face first into the deck, their skulls rupturing at the impact. Dorian lifted his dual blades and prepared to take out the last one when he heard the boom of the particle rifle. He was turning away without a second thought as Jomann lowered his rifle from behind him after sending the single particle round through the center of the Scourge's face.

Dorian whirled around as he came to his feet, searching for more targets, but seeing nothing but bodies all around him. His armor was generously covered with Scourge blood, his glowing blue eyes wide and alert. He and Laren found him first, Denali, Deion and Jomann next. Andro strode through the blood and gore on the deck of the Pralor station directly at where Dalet Nulai stood, his guards down around his feet their blood spilling all around. Never in his life had he experienced such a thing. Fear gripped his heart and mind as he stared at the savage monster that strode toward him with the two swords in his hands. Swords soaked with the blood of his Scourge warriors. Those glowing azure blue orbs were focused on him alone and Dalet snatched his weapon from the holster on his leg and brought it up to fire.

Andro didn't try to dodge or deflect the shot, he had seen enough of the Scourge weapons this day bounce off the Etheric shields to know that it might hurt, but it would not do serious harm. The shot was well placed and hit him square in the chest causing him to stagger slightly and wince from the pain, but his Dragon Armor plating held. Androcles lifted his hand and reached out with his Etheric power to grasp Dalet's hand holding the weapon. He clenched his fist tightly and Dalet roared with pain as the sidearm bent and twisted in his fingers. He had to throw it down to the deck or else it would have crushed his hand around it and he stood up to his full height staring at Androcles as he stopped only five feet from him.

"What are you?" He screamed. "You are no Praetorian!"

Androcles stared at him from across that small space and watched as he reached behind his back and withdrew two long cylinder like objects. He watched as the Scourge gripped them tightly in either hand and he realized they were fighting sticks like Dutkne used. Different of course, forged from some kind of metal, but Dalet obviously was well skilled with them.

"What am I?" Androcles spoke aloud even as his siblings closed in around him, moving to support him if needed.

It was Laren who held up her hand quickly and turned. "No!" She barked to everyone. "They are the chosen weapon of the *Ioth Kilnsiri*. The *Chidragi*! Wyverns! No one can match them! Only Androcles!"

Dalet looked at Andro. "You have Pralor blood within you but you are no Praetorian!" He snarled.

"Oh but I am a Praetorian *Ioth Kilnsiri*." Androcles spoke once more. "I am the rebirth of the Praetorians foul monster!"

Dalet lost it then and attacked.

Laren was correct in that the two steel rod like cylinders were the chosen weapon of the Holy Elite. They were masters of the dual sticks known in the Darastrixi language and the *Chidragi*, and for millennia had used them to inflict pain and suffering during battle and during torture. No Scourge Holy Elite had ever been beaten when using his *Chidragi*. That was about to change.

Dalet Nulai was famous among the Scourge population as a Master of the *Chidragi*. He had never been beaten in training or battle when using them. He always felt they made him invincible.

He was wrong.

Andro stood his ground with *Saar* and *Cana* in his hands. The Scourge was a blur of motion as he attacked, wanting to beat this boy into bloody submission for what he had done here today. Dalet Nulai soon discovered that he was not as good as he thought. The Scourge Holy Elites were much faster than normal Elites and this speed had helped them to win many battles, but this day Dalet Nulai had met his match. Their arms moved faster than the eye could follow, Androcles meeting each thrust with a counter thrust, each blow with a defensive form that blocked it. Even Ridor and Kalis who were standing in the line with the others began to gravitate towards the fight. It was unlike anything they had ever seen. Unlike anything anyone had ever seen, and it showed in the expressions of the faces of everyone around them.

Andro was more relaxed now than at any time in his life. He felt the overwhelming love and devotion from his wives and mates flowing through him, the unquestioned confidence and love of his siblings wrapping around him. He felt Elynth's power combining with his, coursing through his veins, the *Dahakoan* sense swirling within his mind as he saw everything the six of them saw, anticipating every move that Dalet could make. Dalet continued to attack, pressing forward and circling Androcles, who matched his every move. He was becoming angry and careless but it was just not...

-Androcles... we are ready- Armen's voice exploded in his head from his implant.

That was the trigger.

Andro brought *Saar* and *Cana* together in a clash of steel that drew sparks and caused gasps from everyone nearby. Dalet was pressing down with all of his strength against those two blades, not understanding how they could hold against his superior weapons. He glanced up into Andro's eyes and saw the glowing orbs staring back at him, but he also saw something else. He saw something familiar in the features, and it took only a moment for him to realize what it was.

"You!" Dalet hissed loudly into Andro's face. "I know you!"

Androcles smiled at him and it was anything but pleasant. "And you will contemplate that knowledge in the abyss monster!" Andro snarled at him.

Androcles twisted his wrist, turning *Saar* in his hand and flicked the blade up with savage strength. It overpowered Dalet easily and then the Scourge felt the bite of steel against the armor of his left wrist and his eyes went wide when that sword sliced through his armor as if it wasn't there. He screamed in pain and brought the arm back, which only enabled Androcles to flick *Cana* to the right and remove Dalet's right arm just below the elbow.

Dalet staggered back as blood gushed from the two wounds. His mind was awash with pain and knowledge but he could not focus and he dropped to his knees in agony and looked at Androcles who slowly lifted *Saar* and *Cana* and willed them back into Flatspace.

"Who... I know you!" Dalet screamed out the words. "You... you are dead!"

Andro smiled once more, his dual fangs becoming fully exposed as the smile grew. He stepped forward and looked down at Dalet. "You asked who I was." He spoke the words calmly in a voice that was not his own. "I am death incarnate monster." He leaned over closer to Dalet as he stared back at him. "We are the embodiment of the vengeance of a people long forgotten." Andro moved in a blur and gripped Dalet's head in his hands, twisting his body impossibly around until his head was facing away from him and he was looking down at his arched chest and legs in front of him.

"Pray to whatever gods you may have Scourge monster." Andro snarled loudly. "Pray for mercy! For I will have none!"

Androcles exerted all of his strength in one motion. Every ounce of Lycavorian and Darastrixi strength within him. Everything he had been taught. He channeled it all and twisted with all of that combined force. Dalet's head was ripped savagely to the side, the sound of his neck breaking in five different places echoing

loudly in the now quiet landing bay. Andro dropped the body immediately even as the last vestiges of Dalet Nulai twitched and jumped on the deck of the station.

Elynth was beside him in an instant and she lowered her head to touch his cheek, while Dorian and Laren moved up on either side of him. Andro and Dorian lowered their heads to hers for she was so much shorter than them, and then Ryner and Ladur finished the group, all of them touching in some manner.

“It is over my Soul Brother.” Laren whispered softly. “It is done.”

Androcles looked at her glowing multicolored orbs and smiled. He shook his head slowly however. “No my Soul Sister...” He spoke.

“It is only just beginning.” Dorian finished his brother’s statement.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

VENTORI

UNION ADHOC COMPOUND

LEONIDAS PERSONAL QUARTERS

“...No!” Saydia snapped softly. “I will not allow this! No!”

Perlyea leaned forward at the table and looked at Saydia. She, Aduna, Anja, Aricia and For'mya had spent the last three long hours hammering out what they were relatively sure the Tasmor Ruling Quorum and the Union Senate would accept. They had to contact Deia on two different matters, but she only confirmed for them what they had thought. This Deia Leonidas, Martin Leonidas’ Aunt, she had impressed Perlyea with her knowledge and words. It seemed that confidence and intelligence ran in their family among the women as well as within their people, which would make it easier to deal with the Tasmor Quorum in particular and the Tasmor people as a whole. Tasmor males were gaining more and more political clout every year, but even they did not seem to question the female dominance of their society. It was also something that had been ingrained in all of them for centuries and that was not something that was just forgotten in a day. Tasmor males knew this and were patient and understanding.

They had also spoken with the other three Queens of the Union who were currently on Honelze. Once more Perlyea had been more than impressed for Dysea, Isabella and Cirith were equally as extraordinary and Anja and the others. The vast knowledge and the attractive beauty of these six women was enormous and convincing. Each of them had an outer, physical majesty that was incredibly stunning to say the least. They had a natural physical beauty that was only enhanced by their exceptionally desirable physiques, but each of them was also a confident and powerful woman who could handle almost any given situation that they faced. They had finally brought Saydia and Namiri into the circle and that now included Anthylea as well since she and Saydia were now a recognized and bound couple by Tasmor law. Saydia had seen to that almost immediately after instituting the law regarding the Tasmor Breeders. Perlyea and Aduna were going to do the same thing as soon as they returned to Danerav.

“Saydia...” Perlyea began.

Saydia shook her head more forcefully now. “No. I made a promise to my daughter and I do not intend to break that promise Perlyea.”

“Mother you...” Namiri began but was respectfully interrupted by Aduna.

“Sovereign Regent, I have made discreet inquiries of my detachment.” Aduna spoke now. “They have told me that Vesara Athcer does not like how you brought the entire Quorum here. She feels that you have embarrassed them and over reached your bounds while intruding on their power. Several others are in agreement with her.”

“If I had not threatened them with the loss of their positions and titles, they would not have come!” Saydia protested. “If left to their sensibilities the Tasmor people would drift and fall into obscurity! They have no vision for the future beyond what their own personal needs are!”

“I don’t disagree Saydia, nor does Aduna. You know that.” Perlyea spoke once more. “But you also know as well as I do that Vesara will do whatever it takes to either discredit you directly or go around you.

Using this clause in our law regarding Namiri is exactly something she would do to try and diminish you and embarrass you. She knows how you feel for your daughters, and knowing you would not be able to stop her would only embolden her. We are just using it to our advantage for better reasons than she would and before she can use it against you.”

“I will put a Referendum to our people then!” Saydia spat.

Aduna nodded her head in agreement. “A Referendum that would undoubtedly pass with overwhelming support. However, you would not be able to do this in a timely enough manner for it to matter to our people in the long run. Or Namiri for that matter. By the time this came up for a vote of our people, the Svorag will have already overrun Honelze and removed the one force that could stop them.” She looked at Saydia intently. “They would be upon us before we could stop them.”

“I support giving Tasmor troops to the defense of Honelze.” Saydia complained. “I have already told King Leonidas this!”

“Which Vesara and the other hard liners would block just to make you look bad, and you know this.” Perlyea said. “They are so set in their ways, in Tasmor dominance in all things, that they would do this just to spite you. Even after what has taken place these last weeks they still think themselves superior. Especially to any male, including King Leonidas. That is why Anja, Aricia and For'mya are putting this forth with the backing of the other three Queens of the Union and their Prime Minister. It is why they included Aduna and myself in its creation. We know what we face and we certainly do not want the Tasmor to vanish into oblivion. Aduna’s knowledge of our law is what helped us.”

Saydia looked at Anja where she sat between Aricia and For'mya. They had remained silent up to now. “I thought... I thought your people did not practice arranged marriages.” She said.

“We don’t.” Aricia answered her. “This situation is different however, and this required a lot of ingenuity on our part to be honest.”

“And a small amount of dishonesty.” For'mya said with a grin as she leaned into Anja affectionately.

“More so to make it work within the framework of your laws.” Aricia continued with a smile at For'mya’s words.

“I don’t understand.” Saydia told her.

“This will only work if Namiri, our son and his wives agree to it.” Anja spoke now. “If they do however, then it will give you the clout and support you need to go around these hard liners in your government and allow you to support us with your troops.”

“What about Martin?” Saydia asked. “I do not wish to be on the receiving end of your husband’s anger Anja. I have seen what happens to those who anger him, and it is in no way pleasant.”

Anja shook her head. “Let us worry about Martin. As Queens we have always had a great deal of latitude in working out different political agreements. That is essentially what this will be, but we are just going to present it in another light, which is how others will see it. Martin doesn’t often question us, but if he does we can make him see our point of view.”

“So you will use your female influence over him?” Saydia asked.

Anja chuckled softly. “It’s more his influence over us really.” She replied. “But Martin is very different than most men. When we have him alone with us, without outside influence, he will usually see things our way once it is explained to him. We don’t manipulate him as much as get him to see it from our point of view. When he sees how it will be presented he will know it is for the best.”

“And how will it be presented?” Saydia asked.

“In a way that makes it appear as if it is something else.” Aricia said. “It very well may help you to see just who among your own Quorum is behind you and who is against you.”

Saydia glanced at Namiri beside her and then back to Aricia. “Now you have truly lost me.” She stated.

“My son is... our son Androcles is very unique. As are the six women who share his life.” Aricia began. “We would like to explain it to you, Perlyea and Aduna will comment on how it affects the Tasmor, but you have to be willing to listen Saydia Daret. As Anja has told you, Namiri must agree to this as well, or it will not work. But if she does, there will be things that are expected of her. Things that she will be exposed to and witness. Things that are very sensitive in nature to our people, but more importantly to our son.” Aricia looked at Namiri. “Namiri?”

Namiri nodded her head. “I will listen.” She said.

“This is not something taken lightly Namiri.” Aricia said. “If you commit to this then you will be committing yourself to our ways. Androcles is much more forward thinking than his father in many ways, but he is also much more grounded in tradition and our Spartan nature.”

“Namiri you don’t have to...” Anja began to speak but Namiri shook her head.

“I will listen Queen Anja.” Namiri said again this time more seriously. “I do not wish to see my people butchered by these Svorag monsters and if there is a way we can stop it then I will listen. And I also believe as my mother does that a continued relationship with your people is the only way we will survive going forward.”

“We will contact Sadi and the others once Namiri has agreed to this, and then they will convince Androcles that this is for the best.” Aricia spoke. “As we will convince Martin. Sadi is Androcles *Anome*, his soulmate in our ancient language. They met by fate and chance when he was only eight months old and he has loved her with every fiber of his being since that day. Just as he loves all of his wives and mates equally now. You see, Androcles was born fully aware of all life around him. He was fully aware even within my womb while I carried him and he used his Bonded sister as his conduit to the outside world. He...”

Saydia and Namiri Daret were utterly enthralled almost from the outset as Aricia began to explain what they intended. Perlyea and Aduna had heard some of it already but even they were drawn into the story as Aricia, Anja and For'mya began to weave a future for both their peoples just by their words.

ADHOC COMMAND CENTER VENTORI

“...Is Laren Ti’shara father, your *Sepas Hianag*. Your soul daughter.” Andro spoke from within the QCR communications transmission. Wayonn, Danny, Helen, Arzoal and Tobia were in the transmission with him, while Murano, Sarlana, Dorian and the young women none of them had ever seen were with Andro.

Martin could only stare at the stunning young woman. That she was Darastrixi was quite obvious, but that she was something else as well was equally as obvious. Her long, black hair matched the color of Andro and Dorian’s hair, her multicolored blue eyes matching the color of Andro's azure orbs and Dorian’s cobalt blue eyes. She had a combination of what appeared to be soft, normal skin and Darastrixi scaled skin, but it seemed to fit her perfectly and she did not look out of place at all. She looked at him almost shyly from within the transmission but even from across the stars Martin could feel her strength within the Etheric realm and how it filtered and flowed within his two sons. They were allowing him to feel her now for the first time, and to Martin she was another burning point of light within the realm that was their family and he sensed that somehow she had always been part of them.

Martin Leonidas did not often let his faith show through publicly, but he believed deeply in a higher power and that power had brought this young woman to them for reasons they had yet to determine. It was not something he was going to question however, not when his sons had accepted her without hesitation and his other children would no doubt do the same.

“I will welcome you to my family properly when I see you Laren.” Martin spoke with a smile. “Your parents and brothers as well. But know that I am so very happy to see you. Just don’t let these two knuckle draggers corrupt you before you get here.”

Laren chuckled softly as the small tears fell from her eyes. “I won’t *Sepa Opsola*.” She said with a brilliant smile and happy eyes.

“You are a vision of beauty child.” Arzoal spoke now causing Martin and the others to look at her on their end of the transmission.

“It is a blessed honor Elder Mother.” Laren told her bowing her head. “Andro and Elynth have showed me so much of you in their lives.”

Arzoal laughed softly in dragon fashion. “Yes, I am sure they have.” She stated with a knowing tone of voice. “I will need to tell you the truth when we can speak together.” Arzoal looked at Martin who was staring at her as Laren laughed on her end. “What?” She demanded.

Martin pointed at her and then back to himself, doing this motion several times. “That is going to take some getting used to.” Martin said. “Being able to... you know.”

Arzoal reached over with her head and butted Martin in the shoulder causing him to stagger slightly. “Be careful what you say Martin or I will have words with your wives and mates.”

“I’m just saying!” Martin spoke holding up his hands in defense.

“I see you have been practicing Arzoal.” Sarlana spoke now from within the transmission.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. “Only in private *Doraanar*, just as you instructed me. Helen and I have been working hard on it.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Excellent.” She told her. “We will have much help when we arrive. Several of the Darastrixi among those with us have already expressed great zeal for teaching these skills to you and those Darastrixi among you.”

Martin held up his hand. “Ok, ok, on to the point of this little call.” He told them with a smile. “Give me the skinny boy!” He spoke looking directly at Androcles.

“We put twenty-four Mark 22 ZMFs into the station father.” Andro told him. “Not to mention overloading the core. There was nothing larger than a fingernail when we finally were able to scan the area.”

“*Soi Sibfla*.” Danny muttered. “A little overkill don’t you think *Mandri*?”

Andro shook his head. “No *Tenne*.” He answered. “Not when you consider what was on the station.”

Martin looked at his sons and his eyebrows rose on his face. “We’re listening.” He said.

“Murano were there...” Wayonn began his eyes wide.

“Yes.” Murano replied. “Over a hundred of them.” He told them. “They were in Cryo Chambers on the lower three decks of the station. They would have remained in stasis had a Darastrixi soldier not gone off wandering. He triggered some sort of alarm that caused the computer they had operating to wake them. We must assume that any Pralor facilities that were not destroyed will be the same. We will need to inform Delnash of this so we do not attempt it again.”

“Murano did you...?”

“None survived old friend.” Murano told him. “We will need to gather all the Praetorians that we know of once we have returned in order to show all of you, but they are all dead and they were not able to transmit any messages. Armen made sure of this.”

“You fought them?” Martin asked.

Androcles nodded his head. “Yes. We had no choice. No one was injured father. I don’t think they expected us to be there.”

“There was a Holy Elite among them Wayonn.” Murano continued. “They appeared somewhat different than when we fought them in the last war, but they are essentially the same. He was... he was surprised to see us. He knew what we were and he was surprised. He said as much.”

“Then Delnash and the others are safe?” Wayonn asked.

Murano nodded his head. “It appears they are not aware of any Pralors that escaped the Purge, no. If they are not looking for us, then we are safe. For the time being.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “That is good. It will provide a little peace of mind for Delnash and the other Chief Elders. At least for the immediate future.”

Martin looked at Murano in the transmission. “Were you successful in getting to the cache Murano?”

Murano nodded his head once more. “Oh yes.” He said with a bit of pride in his voice.

“Armen has our detachment of Worker Drones reverse engineering the schematics we were able to take.” Andro told them. “We should be able to build replicas within several hours. After that it is just a matter of mass producing them. Our Master at Arms has already conferred with Nehtes back on Earth. After viewing the schematics Nehtes believes we can streamline the design to something we are more familiar with and begin mass producing them within a week on Earth. He will look at them more closely and begin custom work as soon as he is able for my mothers and any others who need it. Armen assures me that we have enough material here on *SPARTA’S WRATH* to build sufficient quantities for all of our forces there in the Echo Quadrant and still have at least double in reserve. I wasn’t even aware we had a weapons manufacturing shop on the ship until Armen told me.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “It was one of the improvements that we wanted incorporated into the *VORTEX*-Class Heavy Cruisers.” He said. “*SPARTA’S WRATH* was to be the first of her kind. She was the first of her kind. We just...”

“We ran out of time.” Murano added also nodding his head. “It is of no matter now. We have her now. She is Androcles’ ship and now we have the designs and we must convince Delnash to shift at least a part of their production and Worker Drone capability to building these weapons. We also took enough of the weapons and explosives as they are now to equip a full company when we arrive Martin.”

“Convincing him won’t be easy.” Martin said.

Murano shook his head. “He will listen to me.”

Martin nodded his head in agreement. “I’ll let you handle him then.” He said.

Androcles could not hold it in any longer. “Father... grandfather Sumar and Dadrien appeared to us.”

Martin’s eyes grew wider and he moved closer to the holo disc. “What?” He gasped not expecting this in the least. “Where? When?”

“Within moments of us meeting and touching Laren and Ladur.” Andro replied. “Father it was...”

“It was inspirational father.” Dorian finished. “It was as if we were...”

“In a dream.” Laren finished.

“Father, it has been grandfather and Dadrien guiding us all of these years.” Andro spoke. “They...”

“What!?” Martin barked. “How! Speak to me son!”

“They are the reason that Dorian and I are like we are. Who we are. Elynth and Ryner as well. Laren and Ladur. They are the ones who have been influencing events for centuries to make it so we could exist.”

Helen rose to her feet now her eyes wide and she stepped up to Martin, her hands going to his arm and squeezing. “Androcles are you sure?” She gasped.

Andro nodded his head. “We sat and talked with them for over three hours *Feravomir*. Right there in the landing bay. They told us so much father.” He told them. “And they said they needed to talk with you and Torma father. That they would do this soon.”

“Me?” Martin Leonidas gasped.

“You are *Wer Irral*.” Laren spoke now. “The First. The center from which all else will evolve.”

“Come again?” Martin asked with wide eyes.

“There is much we need to talk of father.” Androcles said. “All of us.”

“Yeah... I’m getting that.” Martin said.

“There is something else father.” Androcles spoke as Dorian and Laren got to their feet. “Something that we need to show you.”

“I’m not going to like this am I?” Martin said.

Andro shook his head. “It is just... odd.” He said as he began to unbutton the fleet fatigue top he wore. Dorian was doing the same and Martin and the others watched as they stripped out of their t-shirts as well. Laren apparently had no qualms about this either, though she held the t-shirt over her firm breasts. She knew instinctively that no one among those she was with would look at her in any sort of manner that wasn’t respectful.

As if on que, all of them turned around and Martin’s eyes grew wide in shock as he saw the intricately designed tattoo markings on their skin. They covered nearly all of their backs and shoulders, part of the carvings going up alongside their necks. Most of the ink was dark, but there were parts that were done in both red and green ink. It was the most detailed piece of tattoo artwork Martin Leonidas had ever seen in a tattoo, and he had seen enough of Pablo’s work to know he was a master.

“Holy shit!” Martin finally gasped as he felt Danny come up beside him.

“That’s... that’s some serious artwork there *Mandri*.” Danny spoke with some awe in his voice.

Andro looked over his shoulder. “It must have happened when we embraced Laren the first time. We did not think anything of it, but Eliani said she and the others saw a very brief flash of Etheric power. Like a living pulse. Carisia and Lu’ria saw them first as I was changing. Carisia said they almost felt alive beneath her fingers.”

“Sheva and Onera said the same thing father.” Dorian echoed.

“Jesus... what are they?” Martin gasped as he moved even closer and looked at the intricate markings intently.

“A key.” Sarlana spoke now as she moved up between Androcles and Laren. “They are a key Martin Leonidas.”

“A key?” Wayonn asked now. “A key to what?”

Sarlana shook her head. “That I do not know. I know they represent a key for some of the pictographs are in an ancient dialect of the Darastrixi language. A language only Dadrien and those from his time would have known and spoken.”

“Sarlana, can you translate them?” Martin asked.

“Oh yes, once I gather the relevant scrolls from Artaaya.” She answered him. “The other images and words, and I only assume they are words, they are in a language I have never seen before. If it is a language at all. Whatever it is... it is far more ancient than anything I have ever seen.”

“Christ we don’t need more questions!” Martin exclaimed.

“This is not something that needs to take away from what we must do Martin.” Sarlana told him. “We have scholars that can do this. I already have many images of these writings and we will figure it out. Their training with Murano must continue.” She smiled. “Since most of those with us are Darastrixi and among them are some wonderful scholars, this will be our task.”

Martin nodded his head and looked at Andro as he pulled his shirt back on. “How long until you get here boy?” He asked.

“We will rendezvous with the remaining ships of General Dytin tomorrow morning father.” Andro told him. “Twelve hours to take a full head count and load out and we will depart tomorrow afternoon. Figure four days to your location since the ships with us do not have *SPARTA’S WRATH’S* engines. I gather you want us to remain away from Honelze for now.”

Martin nodded his head. “Too much activity there and that fat *ronnus* Lorendo might figure something out.” He replied. “Come here to Ventori and we can decide what to do from there. Your mothers have a handle on things there right now and we are needed here more to help get the rebuilding going.” Martin looked at his son. “Did your mothers get in touch with Sadi?”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes. They got the message when they returned. What is all that about?” He asked.

Martin shook his head. “I don’t know but I imagine we’ll find out at the same time.”

“Why does that sound rather ominous?” Androcles asked.

Martin shook his head. “You have six mothers boy, never try to outthink them.” He told him with a grin. “That has never worked out in your favor in the past. Or mine for that matter.”

Andro chuckled. “No it has not.” He said. He looked at his father. “It will be... it will be very good to see you father.”

Martin met his eyes and smiled. “You have no idea.” He said with a small laugh. “Your uncle and I are outnumbered here you know.”

Andro laughed himself and nodded. “We will see you soon father.” He said.

Martin nodded his head as well and looked at them. “We’ll have a major head shed when you get here. Delnash and all of his senior folks too. It’s time we started to get the ball rolling.” He looked at Laren then and took a step closer to the holo disc again. “I look forward to seeing you in person *Sepa Hianag*. And holding you in my arms.”

Laren simply beamed at this and she nodded her head quickly. “As do I *Sepa Opsola*. As do I.”

Martin smiled at her and Laren saw that it took the sternness from his face instantly. She knew now why so many feared her *Sepa Opsola*. His presence alone, even in the transmission, was intimidating and just from his gruff manner you knew he was not one to be trifled with. Martin looked at Andro one last time.

“We’ll see you in a few days son.” He spoke. “Try not to get lost.”

“I will do my best father.” Andro answered. “No promises however.”

Martin laughed once more as the transmission ended and he turned slowly to look at those within the room with him. He looked at Arzoal first off.

“Arzoal?” He asked.

“I have left it to Teniri to decide who to send Martin.” She spoke once more. Her voice sounded exactly the same as when she spoke in their minds and to them it would take some getting used to, but adaptability was not an issue with most of the Union citizens. “She knows the dragons with her better than I. She says that only a hundred are truly ready for the type of battle we could see on Honelze.” Arzoal paused and shook her massive head. “What we will undoubtedly see. They are not trained to the level of our Bonded Pairs however, and Iriral does not have the combat training of Elynth, Isheeni or Torma.”

“Where are they now?” Martin asked.

“They have begun shuttling them to Honelze.” Arzoal answered him. “Twenty-five are currently on the planet, but we are keeping them sequestered away from the settlements to avoid raising eyebrows. The rest will arrive over the course of the next two weeks. Teniri says to rush their deployment will only cause Lorendo’s people watching them to become suspicious.”

Martin nodded his head. “Ok. I don’t want to give that *midaeus* any kind of advantage.” He spoke. “Once Andro gets here we can send Anthar and Majeir. They have superior combat skills and they can assist Iriral until more of us arrive. They won’t need Carisia or Lu’ria with them for that.”

Arzoal nodded her head. “Excellent. Anthar is more of an unorthodox persona and Majeir is the perfect complement to him.”

“If Armen and your Nehtes are correct and they can make weapons that are more familiar to us based on the particle design we developed the transition will be much easier for everyone involved.” Wayonn spoke.

Martin looked at Danny intently. “I want our teams outfitted first Dan.” Martin told him. “Whatever they come up with I want our folks to have it first. We’re going to be in the shit first with Andro's team and I don’t want us not knowing our weapons.”

Danny nodded his head. “Done deal.”

“We will need to perform a Praetorian meld Martin.” Wayonn told him now. “When they arrive all of us need to join and share everything that we have learned.”

Martin nodded his head in acknowledgement. “Wayonn... I’ll leave that for you to set up. You and Murano will need to guide us on that.”

“Dutkne has done this with me before and he and Andro will have shared everything about the battle by now. If I know my grandson he will already be preparing to direct the others when we get together. It will be much easier with the three of us guiding the others. We have the most experience in this sort of thing and until everyone is comfortable doing it, we will need to practice.”

“Did you do it often?” Martin asked him.

Wayonn nodded. “After every major battle.” He replied.

“Then I guess we are going to need to start.” Martin said. He looked at Helen. “You ready for that Helen. You have always wanted to get inside my head.” He told her with a smile.

Helen snorted in disgust. “The only individuals that wish to get into your head and the head of your son should be committed to a facility for the mentally insane for all time.” She spat causing the others to chuckle softly. “What sane person would wish to see what chaos looks like?”

“Hey! That’s not fair!” Martin exclaimed.

“I will need to talk again with Anja about this.” Helen said with sly smile. “We do not have any facilities to house such people. Perhaps we will need to change that.”

Martin looked at her as she spun around and left the room with a huge smile on her face. He could only smile as Wayonn shook his head in delight and Danny was holding back his snide comment.

Martin shook his head with a smile. “Well... at least everyone is in good spirits.” He said. “We’re going to need that.”

“Yes we are.” Danny agreed.

Martin turned to Danny now. “Nalmos is waiting for us.” He said. “About three thousand will be moving in from across the immediate area that he was able to contact. Anja and Anuk are going to meet us there.”

Danny nodded his head. “We got teams of medics and everything else waiting.”

“Just like Eden City all over again huh?” Martin spoke.

Danny smiled at him. “Building that city was the best time we ever had and you know it.” He told him.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes it was.”

“This is... will this even work?” Saydia finally asked after a few moments. Everything had been explained by the three Queens and Perlyea and Aduna and Saydia had to admit it was quite ingenious. It did require a bit of deception on their part, but deception was a large part of politics in many ways. And this deception would actually benefit both of their peoples in a way most people would never see.

“It will work if we want it to work.” Aricia answered her question.

“But this will look like an arranged marriage to your people.” Saydia said. “Something you have told me they will not accept.”

Aricia shook her head now. “No. It will look just how it has looked as Androcles has met each of his wives and mates over the last two years. He has seen each of them within him before he has ever met them. Only when he was old enough to actually love Sadi in a manner befitting a Leonidas did he reach out to claim her. Once he did that, each of them fell into place just as he had seen. Just as they were meant to in the greater scheme of things. This is what our people have seen in this time and it is what they will see again. They will not question it. Despite what you may see or hear about our son, he is very much like his father in that he believes deeply in faith and destiny. That is what we will use now.”

“Emylea has heard...” Namiri began to speak now but she was tentative because of what she was asking. “She has heard that he is terribly scarred from battle. That many cannot look into his eyes without turning away.”

“Really?” For'mya asked softly. She glanced at Anja and Aricia and saw the look of confusion in their eyes as well. “That is interesting.”

[Kinsoargai?] Aricia asked within their private connection.

[It may well be nothing, but I have heard talk among the pilots of a young elven female in Operations that has said these same things on the ARC ROYAL.] For'mya answered.

[Someone who has never met him?] Anja asked.

For'mya nodded her head. *[Yes. I will look into it soon enough. It seems too much like a staged event. Especially now.]*

[You want some help?] Anja asked her.

For'mya shook her head quickly. *[No. If this is what this young woman is doing I will set her straight.]*

Among the six Queens of the Union it was well known that Androcles held a very special place in For'mya's heart now after what he had done. His actions allowed For'mya to keep her faith and her hope alive. His actions returned to her all that she loved dearest in this universe, and his actions saved the two children she had borne in her womb. Her life would never have reached this point if not for Androcles and the love he carried for her as his second elven mother. Aricia and Anja knew For'mya would savage this young woman for talking bad about Androcles in any way if this was the case.

Anja returned her attention to Namiri now. “Fifteen percent of his body is covered in scar tissue, yes.” She answered Namiri honestly. “All of them earned in battle. But if you are asking if he is deformed in some way, no Namiri, he is not. Whoever Emylea heard that from is very incorrect.”

“Forgive me, I did not want to sound conceited.” Namiri spoke quickly hoping she did not offend his mothers.

“It is an honest question.” Aricia told her. “And one that most in your position would ask I'm sure. This will only work if you are willing to act the part Namiri. You must be a willing participant in the ruse in order for it to work. Sadi and the others will help you if they agree to this, but you need to be willing and able to do this. That is why we think it is best you meet them first via our COM relays.”

“Won't others begin to question this after a time and I do not... I do not show the signs of... of becoming like him?” Namiri asked. “Lady Perlyea has already explained that the virus in his blood must be transferred to me in order for me to show signs of changing. If he does not bite me and I do not sleep with him or the others, this will eventually come out.”

Anja shook her head in response. “Luckily, there are other ways to make that happen.” She said. “Albeit they won't be as effective, but they will work. And trust me, our son has a reputation of disdain for any sort of news organization. He thinks they are all vermin. They won't push too hard when it comes to that for fear of incurring his wrath. Being on Andro's bad side is not a very healthy proposition.”

Aricia and For'mya couldn't help but chuckle at this. “How true.” Aricia said.

“I will do it.” Namiri blurted out.

Saydia looked at her daughter. “Namiri you...”

“Mother you know as well as I do that this is the only way to insure that we have a future as a people.” Namiri stated. “If this agreement, secret though it may be, if it insures that we win this fight, then it is a small price to pay.”

“I know but...” Saydia began to protest.

Namiri shook her head. “We are involved now mother.” Namiri said. “For whatever the reason, whatever drove you to help them before, we are involved now. We cannot undo what we have done. I do not wish to see our people brought down by these monsters and I know you do not.” Namiri reached out and took her hands. “It is only for a year mother.” She said. She looked at Aricia. “Is that right?”

Aricia nodded her head. “Two years at the most depending on what is happening. The information we release will have to be done at certain times in order for it to look plausible but within two years definitely.”

Namiri nodded her head. “That is nothing when held against our people’s future.” She spoke turning back to her mother.

Saydia squeezed her hands tightly while Anthylea held Saydia’s shoulder in a show of support. Small tears rolled down Saydia’s cheeks and she smiled. “I never imagined that you would turn out to be the strongest of my daughters Namiri.” She gasped softly. “I am so sorry.”

Namiri allowed her to pull her into the embrace and she relished in the feel of her mother’s arms around her. She didn’t see Anja rise to her feet and look at the others.

“I’ll let Aricia and For’mya talk with Sadi and the others with you. I have to meet Martin and the rest of our team for the refugees that are coming in from the mountain ranges all around us.” Anja spoke. She looked at Perlyea and Aduna. “Want to come along?” She asked. “Field Operations are always so much fun with Marty and the gang.”

Perlyea glanced at Aduna surprised and saw her nod quickly. She turned back to Anja. “Of course.” She answered rising to her feet with Aduna.

Aricia looked at Saydia and Namiri as Anja led Perlyea and Aduna out of their quarters. “I will initiate the call and we will speak with them.” She told them. “Do not be shy Namiri Daret... Sadi and the others will surprise you. They are just as intelligent as they are beautiful.”

Namiri nodded as she looked at her. “I am ready.”

SPARTA'S WRATH **PRIVATE LOUNGE FAMILY DECK**

The six Crown Princesses of the Lycavorian Union were crowded around each other at the table still discussing the mission on the station. More to the point, they were talking about Andro's new tattoos and what had happened when first Carisia and then Sadi and the others had run their fingers over them. All of them were beginning to see just how very special the man who had claimed their hearts was. It was amazing to them that he could steal their breath away and make each of them whimper in delight in his own way. It was also so very amazing just how easily the six of them fit together. They were lovers, friends and sisters all wrapped into one and all of them loved Andro and each other more than their own lives. Even Sehri, who had been with them the shortest amount of time, even she had given up on trying to figure it all out and simply accepted it for what it was. It felt so very right and loving and trying to figure out why was pointless.

They had changed into casual clothes, and Sehri was detailing to Carisia and Lu'ria how she and Marux had held the bottom portion of the ramp on the station during the battle. Carisia and Lu'ria knew what she was describing, for it was exactly how they felt when fighting with Anthar or Majeir. Soon it would be time for them to truly bond and even they knew it now. Sadi, Ne'Veha and Caliria were discussing the mad dash from the control center back to their ship even as the Scourge were breaking into the landing bay.

All of them now wore casual outfits, mostly form fitting jumpsuits that Lu'ria had gotten all of them to wear and fall in love with. The jumpsuits were different in cut and material, but all of them were tailored to fit each one of them perfectly in order to accent their figures.

The COM panel on the large table chirped and all of their heads came up as Carisia reached out and tapped the panel.

“Yes.”

“The transmission from Queen Aricia and Queen For'mya is coming in Princess.” The Duty Officer spoke from the bridge.

“Very well lieutenant.” Carisia answered. “You can transfer it here.”

“Stand by.” The voice replied.

“Did Aricia give you any idea what this was about Sadi?” Lu'ria asked.

Sadi shook her head as she shifted in her chair. “None. Only that it was very important and we needed to speak with them without Andro present.”

“Which is surprising all by itself.” Ne'Veha commented.

Sadi nodded her head. “Yes it is.”

All of them turned to face the transmission as it synced and came into view on the table and then they were seeing Aricia and For'mya with three other women who they did not recognize.

“Aricia, For'mya...” Sadi began.

VENTORI

“...Looking as beautiful as ever.” Sadi's soft enchanting voice filled their ears and they both smiled.

There was a time, albeit a very brief one, where For'mya had contemplated killing Sadi Leonidas for what she had done. Fate had stayed her hand then and now she was so very happy it had. For'mya, Anja, Aricia and their fellow Queens had looked after Sadi through the years, though never actively intervening for any reason. Sadi was a powerful woman in her own right and they knew she did not need their assistance. Each of the women Andro had claimed were powerful, confident and so very beautiful. All of the men and women their sons and daughters had claimed were of equal stature and it made the Queens of the Union very proud.

“As are all of you Sadi.” Aricia answered with a smile.

Namiri Daret was somewhat taken aback to be honest. She did not expect to see such stunningly beautiful females sitting in the transmission. All of them were breathtaking to say the least, one of them having such delicious dark skin and incredible white hair which stood out right away. Namiri noticed she had the same kind of ears as Queen For'mya and realized she was an elven female. There was a second elven female with long, dark brown hair and bright, incredibly dark eyes. Namiri could tell just from looking at her that this elven female had the most proportionate figure of all of them, and it was ravishing to say the least from what she could see. Another was as exotic looking as any Tasmor female Namiri had ever seen with her long raven black hair and fetching Maya colored blue eyes.

“The mission went well I take it.” For'mya asked now as she leaned forward in her chair.

They saw Sadi nod her head. “A few hiccups, but nothing that we could not improvise our way out of.” Sadi answered with a nod. “I'm sure you will read the mission debrief in detail so I won't bore you.”

“Everyone came back, that is all that matters.” Aricia added.

“Yes,” Ne'Veha agreed. “That *is* all that matters.”

“Aricia, why have you asked to speak with us?” Carisia couldn't contain her inquisitive nature and she blurted out the question. “Without Andro and in a secure location?”

Aricia couldn't help but smile. Carisia Leonidas had been sure that Andro's birth mother would never accept her love for him or vice versa. Aricia had turned out to be the strongest supporter Carisia had and the one who had become her closest confidant shortly after it was announced that she was Andro's wife. A daughter of Yuri Moran, not the most popular person within the Union or on Earth for that matter. Carisia had been certain this fact would have destroyed any hope of people trusting her. That had turned out to be furthest from the truth in the end and her actions right after Zarah had been attacked had proven that to even the most skeptical man or woman.

Aricia looked at Saydia and Namiri briefly. “Thankfully our son chose women who like to cut through all the *rensibfla* and get right to the point.” She commented.

Namiri heard the blond one Sadi laugh and then all of them were chuckling in some manner while the dark haired exotic one looked embarrassed somewhat. Namiri blinked several times for she felt a flush course through her skin at the sound of their voices. It was almost like a musical sonata as seamlessly as they blended together.

“Carisia, Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Caliria and Sehri...” Aricia spoke as she motioned with her hand to where Saydia and Namiri sat. “Allow me to present to you Saydia Daret, the forty-ninth Sovereign Regent of the Tasmor people and her youngest daughter Namiri Daret. The woman behind them is Anthylea Tomar, First Colonel to Saydia and her bound mate.”

Sadi took point in the conversation as all of them expected her to do as Andro's *Anome* and the best speaker of them all.

“Sovereign Regent, we are honored and it is a pleasure to meet you.” Sadi spoke. “Andro has told us of the things his father and mothers have spoken of in regards to you. He was very impressed.”

Saydia blinked several times in surprise. “He was?” She stammered.

“To impress Androcles means you first have to impress his father and mothers.” Sadi spoke. “You have done that quite well according to Andro. And that is no small feat.”

Saydia was also taken aback somewhat. This young woman, indeed not one of them had blinked when Aricia had introduced Anthylea as her mate. All of them were astonishingly beautiful Saydia had to admit, and looked to be in incredible physical condition. She glanced quickly at her daughter and saw Namiri staring at them intently.

“You... you have me at a disadvantage young lady.” Saydia spoke now. “I... I do not know much about you.”

Sadi chuckled. “Good.” She replied. “That is the way we like it. The Netnews vermin won't bother us if we stay out of sight and out of trouble. Something that is exceedingly hard to do considering the man we all love is prone to trouble finding him even in the middle of space.”

Lu'ria rolled her amber colored eyes Namiri saw and then she laughed softly. “How true.” Lu'ria stated.

“As to the point of this transmission and why we asked you what we did?” Aricia started again. “We have a situation here. I don't know how much Andro has told you of what his father has told him, but we need something from you.”

Sadi didn't hesitate. “Name it.” She spoke quickly.

“Sadi you need to hear us out first.” For'mya spoke now. “This is not a normal request and it is more political than anything else and we want you to feel free to say no. All of you must agree to what we wish to do.”

“I'm not sure I understand.” Sadi spoke looking at Sehri and Ne'Veha quickly before going back to For'mya. “What do you mean?”

“I'm sure Andro told you, or you have read the reports that Martin will not pull any more troops from the Alpha Quadrant to support our operations out here.” Aricia said.

Ne'Veha was the one to nod now. “Yes. Andro suspects that Martin is wary of unnatural issues that might arise if we pull more troops away from home.”

Aricia nodded her head. “We don't know exactly what he is thinking, but essentially that is what he has decided. There is a way however, that we can accomplish what we need to do without more of our troops.” Aricia told them. “It requires the Tasmor to commit a million of their ground troops, which Saydia has already generously offered. However, the Tasmor Ruling Quorum is at odds with her over many things and this would be one of them. They will not allow this unless certain concessions are made.”

Namiri noted how Sadi's face twisted briefly into one of disgust and she suddenly liked this young woman more.

“Politics.” Sadi spat.

Aricia nodded. “Politics.” She answered.

“What can we do Aricia?” Carisia asked now. “We are not even there yet.”

Aricia looked at For'mya quickly and then back to Sadi, Carisia and the others in the transmission.

“Sadi, in order to keep everything we know and love from being absorbed or killed by these Svorag monsters, we need you to convince Androcles that all of you need to take Namiri as a wife and mate.” Aricia blurted out the words.

Sadi Leonidas blinked rapidly several times not sure she had heard her correctly. She looked at Carisia and Ne'Veha and saw the confusion on their faces as well and turned back to Aricia.

"I'm sorry..." Sadi said. "I don't think I heard you correctly. Did you say we need to convince Andro that we need to take this young woman as our wife and mate?"

Aricia took a deep breath. "Yes." She said.

This brought all of them to complete attention and they crowded closer to Sadi within the holo transmission. Six very beautiful and very dominant young woman who were extremely possessive of the man they all loved.

"Aricia, perhaps you should explain..." Sadi spoke calmly but the touch of anger in her voice could be detected easily. "Before we decide to end this very strange communication before it ever really gets off the ground."

"Bear with us please Sadi." Aricia told her. "Just listen..."

VENTORI NORTHEAST CORNER OF CITY

There were far more than three thousand Martin saw, and they were not coming from the direction they were supposed to be coming from. He was squatting on the ridge roughly fifty meters above the natural depression in the terrain that allowed the refugees to move down the mountain with relative ease. The slope was gradual and nowhere near as rocky and hazardous for the many elderly that Martin's keen wolf eyes could detect. Anja knelt beside him on his right talking quietly on her implant for she knew her husband and mate was deep in thought. Zarah, Lucia and Radem knelt on his left, both Zarah and Lucia looking alert and aware of almost everything around them. Radem knelt just behind them, looking confident and healthy for an Evolli. Martin had not seen them in nearly four days now but he knew Radem had taken them up into the mountains to begin what Martin had asked of him. They appeared as if they had slimmed down slightly, their uniforms hugging already well-muscled and very female figures, but both Zarah and Lucia were still very young and both had now lost much of their remaining baby fat in these last weeks. Their figures were beginning to take shape and looking just as their mothers looked. Very feminine, lean muscles that were becoming more defined as each day passed. Martin had shared a look with Radem when they first appeared and silent acknowledgement had passed between them. Zarah and Lucia were turning into two of the finest protégés that Radem had ever trained and that was only after four days of seeing what they could do. It would take many more months and possibly years of training, but Radem was certain the two of them would become the deadliest of their kind.

Anja was speaking with Perlyea and Aduna, who were kneeling on her opposite side, in soft whispers. They had been chatting of many diverse things the entire way here, laughing at different times, almost as if they had known each other for decades. It actually made Martin happy to see this because he knew that outside of the six of them, none of his Queens had very many close friends even though he encouraged this. Perlyea and Aduna were rapidly becoming accepted by all of them as friends and they were growing closer as each day passed.

Anja turned her head back to him and she nudged his arm to make him look at her. "Jules says there are at least another thousand still in the trees Lover." She told him. "Looks like close to six thousand total by quick count."

Martin nodded his head slowly looking into her jade green eyes. "You going to tell me what the three of you are scheming in your heads?"

Anja's eyes shimmered with delight as she looked at him and she smiled. "As soon as we have all the details worked out, yes. You know we will."

Martin stared at her further for an extra-long moment. *[Are you happy Red?]* He asked finally within the private connection they shared with each other. Martin Leonidas shared a similar private connection with all of his Queens and another connection that was just for the seven of them, which is the one they almost always used.

Anja looked at him confused for a second. *[Come again?]*

[Are you happy?] Martin asked her once more. [With me? With your life?]

Anja's eyes grew a little wider at this question and she scooted closer to him, pressing her forehead to his and reaching up with her hand to grasp the back of his neck and stroke the long black hair there. *[Why would you ever ask me a question like that after all of these years?]* She spoke softly. She pressed the back of her other hand against his cheek. *[Are you sick?]*

[Things haven't exactly worked out the way we envisioned them outside Eden City you know.] He told her with a grin. *[We...]*

Anja put a slim finger to his lips and stopped his words. *[I would not trade one day with you and the others for anything in the universe Martin.]* Anja told him. *[Not one hour. Not one moment. I am so happy with my life; with your love of me, my love for Aricia and For'mya and the others, our children together, everything that we have. I would not change one single thing about my life. None of us would. No other man could possibly make us feel what you do Lover, emotionally or physically. And the sex is... it is just out of this world good. We...]*

Martin snorted and grinned at her now. *[I get it.]* He said.

Anja smiled brilliantly and met his eyes. *[Well... maybe I would add a couple inches in my height. I'm so damn short.]*

Martin smiled once more and leaned forward, pressing his forehead to hers harder and he kissed her full lips softly. *[I like you just as you are.]*

Anja took his face in her hands and stared at him, almost losing herself within the depths of those dark brown eyes they all adored so much. *[Martin Leonidas, I love you more than I could ever put into words. We all do. And we love each other just as much. None of us would change a damn thing. Ever. For anything.]*

Martin closed his eyes as she kissed him, slowly running her four inch long tongue along his lips as she knew he loved so much. She looked at him with her jade green eyes, the sunlight reflecting just right and making them glitter in the light.

[I just wanted to be sure.] Martin told her softly.

Anja smiled at him. *[Well, be sure and stop with all these morose questions.]* She told him. *[Carians... you have the worst timing in the universe.]*

Martin chuckled softly and nuzzled her cheek and neck causing Anja to gasp ever so softly in delight. *[You, Aricia and For'mya seem to be getting along pretty well with Perlyea and this Aduna.]* He told her, staring in to her eyes. *[Even though she just got here, Aduna seems to resonate with you guys just as much as Perlyea. They appear to be very much in love and this resonates with you guys.]*

Anja nodded her head with a smile. *[They are good people Lover.]* She said. *[We have discovered quite a bit about them, mostly from Perlyea, but also from Aduna since she has been here. We have a lot in common with them.]*

[That's it?] Martin asked her.

Anja looked at him intently. *[Martin Leonidas...]*

[Their desire for all of you is obvious even to a newborn wolf Red.] He told her. *[But for you, it's very pronounced. And I'm not stupid Anja, I can sense that all of you are attracted to them.]*

[Yes, they are attractive.] Anja answered knowing she could never lie to this man who she so loved. *[They are very attractive in fact. All of us think so. We would be lying to you and ourselves if we said otherwise. That does not mean anything.]*

Anja heard him chuckled within the connection even though his face remained impassive and he gave no outward appearance he was laughing. *[Anja, it's me.]* He told her. *[They are very beautiful women, but they are not males, so you don't have to worry about me acting out like a possessive Alpha.]*

[But they are females who happen to have both sets of reproductive organs.] Anja told him bluntly. *[And while they are not anywhere as gifted as you Lover, they are impressive. Do you think we want to jump their bones? Is that it?]*

[That's not it and you know that.] Martin told her. *[I have been saying for years that the six of you need friends; outside friends that all of you can relate too. It seems Perlyea and now Aduna meet that criteria and I don't want any of you to lose that because you think I might not approve of them because of what they are packing between their legs. I would hope whether or not I approve doesn't matter to you guys.]*

Anja stared at him for a moment and couldn't help but laugh gently in their connection at his rather blunt way of saying things. *[Whether or not you approve of who we choose to call friend does matter to us Lover. Perlyea and Aduna have connected with us in a way no one else has, yes. They are confident, smart and drop dead gorgeous, but we have each other Lover. When you aren't around, we have each other to confide in and to keep each other warm.]*

Martin nodded his head. *[I know.]* He told her. *[I just want you to know that if it ever came up...]*
[Martin...] Anja said.

Martin shook his head quickly. *[Just don't discount it because of what you guys think I might feel about it.]* He told her. He reached up and ran his fingers along her cheek watching as her eyes closed in happiness. *[I want you; all of you, I want you to be happy Red. If being friends with Perlyea and Aduna, with anyone really, if this allows you to experience things with them that you can't with me, if that makes you guys happy, then that makes me happy.]*

Anja opened her eyes and looked at him with unabashed love. *[You are unlike any man that we have ever known Martin Leonidas.]* She told him. *[And that is why we love you like we do, and why we will always love you.]*

Martin smiled at her and leaned forward to nuzzle her nose and cheek. *[And that is a very good thing for me.]* He said.

"Ahva?" Zarah's voice broke into their private moment and they both turned to look at her. (Papa)

Zarah motioned with her head and they followed this motion to see Nalmos scurrying up the side of the ridge with another, younger Lycavorian beside him and Danny and Pablo right on their heels. And they were moving with determination. Nalmos had full blown purpose to his life once more and his physical form showed. His few medical issues had quickly fallen by the wayside, as had all the issues with those who they had already encountered. Anja and her team of doctors and medics saw to that from the outset. Though he was nearing a hundred thousand years of life, Nalmos had regained his youthful vigor it seemed, something the events of the recent years and months had taken from him. Martin watched as he navigated the ridgeline with relative ease and moved up to where Martin and Anja stood. The second Beta Lycavorian seemed slightly out of place and less sure. He had to be one of the refugees for he did not look as healthy as those they had already encountered. Even so he looked in excellent shape if a little under nourished, and very alert mentally.

"Nalmos... I don't suppose that you know where all these new folks are coming from?" Martin asked as he rose to his full height, Anja with him as Nalmos moved up next to him. "My people say there are almost six thousand total."

Nalmos nodded his head as he caught his breath. "Martin... this is Junior Justice Denrak of our port city Microu. It is roughly fifty kilometers east of here along the coast."

Martin nodded his head. "Yep." He spoke. "That was going to be our next stop once we got Jorlari situated."

Nalmos nodded his head. "Denrak had just begun his first term as Junior Justice when the Svorag attacked. He has been keeping those survivors of Microu alive for months now. I was able to contact him just yesterday and have him bring his people in. They have been moving all night to get here."

Martin nodded his head and held out his hand to Denrak. "A pleasure to meet you." He said.

Denrak looked at Martin in shock at his outstretched hand. He appeared to be just about Martin's age by his scent and still looked quite young, meaning he did not appear a day over twenty-five. "Milord... I cannot! You are... you are an Alpha! And King!" He spoke bowing his head.

Martin rolled his eyes in disgust at this. "I ain't God Denrak! I'm just like you." He hissed softly. Nalmos nudged Denrak to comply and the young man finally reached out and took the hand and shook it. Martin smiled and made a show of looking around below them. "Ok... I'm assuming all these other refugees are with you and that that would account for the additional survivors we were talking about when you came up." He stated. "How many in your group Justice Denrak?"

"Just under three thousand Milord." Denrak answered quickly and Martin saw he wasn't going to get him to call him by his name. He was too young and too inexperienced.

"You came cross country?" Martin asked.

"It was not far Milord." He answered. "We have been staying in the mountains outside Microu anyway."

Martin's eyes narrowed. "Why not in the city remains?" He asked. "At least there you can use whatever shelter endured."

"That is why I brought him up to see you right away Martin." Nalmos said.

"I'm not following." Martin said.

"I think there may be another bunker like the ones here in Jorlari." Nalmos said. "Denrak told me at night, from the mountains, they could hear strange noises and see different lights from parts of the city."

Denrak nodded his head. "They were like animal noises Milord." He echoed Nalmos. "I did not want to send any of my people back to investigate. I had few enough of our surviving military as it is to defend the civilians. We would go to the city to scavenge supplies and such but only during long, day light hours where we could see things coming."

Martin looked at Nalmos. "Another underground bunker?" He asked. "Our sensors should have picked it up Nalmos. We found the others."

Nalmos nodded his head. "Yes I know, but then I remembered that your Colonel Collins mentioned that your shipboard sensors could be affected by trace ores in the surface terrain or water."

Martin nodded his head. "Yeah."

Nalmos moved a little closer. "The coast all along this region of the continent is rich with high concentrations of Rubidium Ore pebbles. I checked with Colonel Collins and she says this is one of the elements that can affect your sensors from orbit."

"It would not give an accurate scan." Martin said to no one in particular.

Nalmos shook his head. "Not underground, no." He answered. "And this Ore is very prominent in and around Microu. Even as crushed dust in the streets and surrounding areas."

"We got a four member team in that area Marty. We can have them do a quick recon." Danny spoke up now.

Martin nodded and looked at Pablo. "Tell Jules to give the order Pablo. Not too close though, just in case. And check in every hour on the dot."

Pablo nodded his head. "Will do Skipper." He said before turning and jogging off.

Danny stepped up close to Anja and looked at him. "We are stretched real thin until Andro gets here *fervon*." He said seeing Denrak's eyes grow a little wider at his use of the ancient language and his casual interaction with the Alpha who was King of their people.

Martin nodded his head. "I know and it is driving me nuts." He said. He looked at Denrak. "How many soldiers do you have among your group?"

"Barely two hundred survived the attack on Microu Milord." Denrak answered. "The officer in charge has been keeping them together quite well. They saved many hundreds of lives in those first days. The Commander, he deserves awards that I cannot give to him. To this day he keeps his men ready to defend the civilians at a moment's notice. There are another hundred or so among my group that are armed and can fight."

Martin shook his head. "No, I want only the trained ones." He said. "Danny, once they get to Jorlari, pull this Commander aside and get him and his men seen by Anja's medics. Pull from our reserve stores on the *ARC ROYAL* and let's put them to work."

Danny nodded his head. "Done."

"There is something else Milord." Denrak said. "I don't know if it is important or not but..."

Martin looked at him. "Go ahead. Right about now, anything you can tell us is of use. We will discount nothing."

Denrak looked at Nalmos quickly and then back to Martin. "Once we began traveling here to answer Justice Nalmos's call, a group of new survivors joined my people in the last two days. About twenty of them. They just wandered into our group from all around as we moved through the timber and tried to blend in. Others have done this in past Milord and we never thought anything of it. Until now."

"Until now? Why is now so different?" Anja asked now as her own short hairs began to tremble.

Denrak nodded his head. "I know all of my people Milady." He answered her. That she was an Alpha female and Queen was obvious to Denrak even before he got this close to them and he called her Milady almost by instinct. Despite her diminutive size, her female wolf aura reeked of power. Her unique female scent was saturated with the King's scent marking them as mates to any wolf with half a brain. Her female aura projected indifference to any male wolf who could smell her, indicating that she was mated and had been for many years.

Denrak could taste her Alpha female aura and being a male he could sense right away that she was not an available female. He found himself briefly hoping that the many young Beta males within his group did not attempt to pulse her with their auras. He did not think it would turn out well for them. "We have been together since the beginning, and they are not part of my group. We have had to scavenge for food and shelter for three years now, yet these newcomers, they look healthy and fit. And their clothing is not as it should be after three years of hiding and running in the mountains."

Anja nodded towards him in acknowledgement. "Very perceptive Justice Denrak." She told him.

"And they are Betas Denrak?" Martin asked.

The young man nodded his head quickly as he looked back to Martin. "Yes. But none that I have ever seen as I said, and we have been together in the mountains for a very long time Milord. I would know them if they had been citizens of Microu."

Martin nodded his head then. "I figured as much. They landed on Ventori two days ago." He told the two men seeing their faces twist into utter amazement. "They tried to sneak onto the planet through what they thought were small gaps in our sensor grid of the Ventori planetary system. Big mistake on their part, they are thinking like Pralors and not wolves, but they don't know that. We've been tracking them since they landed about fifty clicks outside Microu. They left five on their ship, a short range Tasmor transport of all things, something that the Tasmor will be very interested in I'm sure. Fourteen of them moved to just outside where your people were camped in the mountains above Microu. Once Nalmos contacted you and they discovered their opportunity to act, they began to blend into your people as you moved here."

"You have known about them this whole time?" Denrak asked with a stunned expression.

Martin grinned at him. "Justice Denrak, you will come to discover that there is very little that escapes my notice when it comes to the safety and concern of my people. Like I said, they are thinking like Pralors, not knowing that I am one sneaky *tukannupae*."

Nalmos chuckled at that while Denrak looked at Martin with wide eyes. "I am... I am only a Junior Justice Milord." He stammered in reply.

"You were a Junior Justice." Martin corrected him. "I just promoted you. At least until we can get things situated here and we can hold new elections among the survivors. That will be a while since the Tasmor are still organizing ships to bring our people home here. It might take several months."

Denrak continued to stare at him in open mouthed shock. "*Carians!*" He exclaimed.

Anja laughed softly at his reaction. "He has that effect on a lot of people." She told him with a smile.

"Have they tried to do anything?" Danny asked Denrak now.

Denrak shook his head now, not only to clear his thoughts, but to try and get a handle on what was happening. "That's just it." He told them quickly. "They only seem to be interested in observing what is happening. They rarely talk to anyone not in their immediate group and they are much more alert than most of the others."

"They have got to be from the same group Dy ran into." Dan said without a hint of doubt referring to Dysea by the nickname they had given her all those years ago while they were building Eden City.

Martin nodded his head. "Sure seems like it. But why? Why spy on your own people?"

Anja looked up at Martin beside her. "They were tracking Jezima and Meral when *Melda Min* bumped into them Lover." She said. "They were Betas on that ship too and Dysea did tell them where she was going. Maybe they decided to put someone down on the surface to find out about Jezima and Meral."

Martin looked at Anja for a moment and she saw that same vicious protectiveness for his grandmother and aunt that she saw for her and his other Queens. The kind that did not bode well for those who were trying to hurt those that he loved. Martin didn't turn away from looking at her but his next words were directed at Danny.

"*Fervon*, put Colin and Jules on these new folks and tell the team we have following them to drop back some." Martin spoke firmly. "Watch them from the shadows and when they get back to the ADHOC we'll take them."

Danny didn't hesitate and nodded his head. "Done."

Martin looked at him this time. "And Dan... have Nayeca put a couple extra bodies on my Grandmother and Aunt. Discretely. I'll let Archer and Asa know so that they are aware."

Danny's face was emotionless as he nodded once more. "I'll take care of it." He spoke and turned to head back down the ridge.

Martin looked at Denrak, who appeared quite intimidated by Martin's very demeanor as an Alpha Wolf and King. "Denrak, what say we get down there and help your people through this last piece of timber?"

Denrak looked stunned. "You... you Milord?" He gasped in shock.

Martin looked indignant and Anja laughed at his expression. "Yeah." Martin finally answered him. "I do pretty well in the timber you know."

ADHOC COMPOUND ROYAL QUARTERS

"...is where we stand." Aricia finished explaining what their situation was. The one thing that Namiri noticed above all else was that each of them kept looking back to her with gorgeous colored eyes and they appeared to be looking right through her. "This is not something we came to lightly Sadi, but we felt it needed to be tried. We know that you and Ne'Veha and the others might refuse, as is your right. I know Anja, For'mya and I had a hard time reconciling this when we put ourselves in your positions. Androcles might refuse even if you do agree with us, but it is something we felt we needed to ask."

"Do not think less of us for this approach Sadi." For'mya added.

It was Ne'Veha who shook her head instantly in response to For'mya's words. "Never." She said. "That is not something we could do. Not when we now know all the details."

"Aricia, will this even work?" Sadi asked as she looked at the data pad in her hand. They had transmitted the details to them via secure COMs so that they could review them while they spoke.

"Only if it appears Namiri was meant to be with Andro and all of you." Aricia answered honestly. "We have spoken with Deia and she agrees that if it appears to have happened as it did with all of you, then our people will not question it. If our people do not question it, then Saydia is certain the Tasmor will not."

Saydia nodded her head. "As strange as it may seem, my people tend to look at other culture's beliefs in very honorable terms. What Aricia has explained to me about how her son has found all of you, how all of you found him, that is something that would be looked upon by my people as almost religious in nature and they would view this as very favorably for Namiri. Almost as a sign really. Even the Quorum would not question it because of how your people view it."

Sadi sat back in the chair she was in and exhaled heavily. Aricia noticed this and leaned forward in her chair. "Sadi, speak to us. What are you thinking?"

"Does Andro know about this?" She asked evenly. "He knows about the serious lack of numbers, yes, and Martin not calling for more troops? But this Svorag ship?"

"We don't know for sure, but knowing how he and his father communicate far more than we are aware of, I would have to say yes." Aricia answered.

Sadi nodded her head in agreement at that statement. "We don't know when or how he does it, but we are pretty sure he speaks to Martin every day."

Aricia nodded. "Anja, For'mya and I agree." She said.

"And if he knows about it and has not acted on it, then that means he shares Martin's view point on the issue." Caliria finished saying what they all were thinking.

Aricia nodded her head as well. "Very true *Inamarno*." Aricia spoke calling her by the name all of them had given their blue skinned wife and fellow Princess. "Neither of them will endanger the welfare or future of the Union for any reason. Pulling large amounts of troops when they feel they will be needed back home is not something they will do. They will try and solve the issue here or die trying."

Sehri looked at Sadi now. "That is why he has had trouble sleeping these last few days Sadi." She said. "He is trying to develop some sort of plan to act upon to counter this. It has to be."

Sadi nodded her head. "I think you may be right *DuanGai*." She said.

"Martin has had Avi running the numbers here for days Sadi." For'mya interjected then. "None of the scenarios are promising in the least. So far all of them have all of us being killed or transformed into one of the Svorag."

"What about the attack on the mother ship?" Carisia asked. "Won't that help?"

Aricia nodded her head. “It will keep them from being able to resupply the Svorag that they land, but that one ship has almost seven million Svorag on it Carisia. We don’t know how many they will be able to land before we destroy it. If we can destroy it.”

“Do you hesitate because you do not trust the Tasmor?” Saydia asked.

Lu'ria was the one to answer that question and put that issue to rest right away. “Lady Daret, if the Tasmor were not trusted, we would not be having this conversation and discussing what we are discussing.”

Saydia looked at the table sheepishly and shook her head. “Of course.” She spoke looking at Namiri as her daughter squeezed her arm. “That was silly of me to say.”

“It was honest.” Carisia added now. “Namiri Daret... may we call you Namiri...?”

Namiri stared into those Maya blue eyes of the raven haired vampire woman and nodded. “Of course.” She replied instantly.

“Are you certain you are willing to do this?” Carisia asked her. “Aricia, For'mya and Anja have told you that if we do this, you must act the part. And you must be convincing. We will help you in every way we can, but you must be willing to see and do things that you might not have done before. Things that Tasmor might not normally do.”

Namiri glanced quickly at her mother and then back to Carisia. “I know that I will need to act as the six of you act. As one of his wives and mates.” She answered her. “That I may need to sleep in the same bed as all of you. That...”

Sadi leaned forward next to Carisia’s head. “That’s not what she means Namiri Daret. You have been among our people Namiri.” She said evenly. “You know how we act with each other? How Aricia and Anja and For'mya act with each other?”

Namiri nodded her head. “Yes... I have seen it with Aricia, Anja and For'mya here.”

“You will never be asked to do something that you do not wish to do.” Sadi told her. “Ever. By any of us or Andro. As for the sleeping arrangements, our quarters here on the ship are on a private deck. We can arrange something comfortable for you while we are here, but the planet is far less private and...”

“I will do what is necessary Sadi Leonidas.” Namiri told her evenly. “I believe in the need for this for both our peoples to survive. And I also believe that I will not be forced to do something that I do not want to do, but I know I need to play a role. I can do this. I know I can do this.”

Sadi smiled slightly at her response, sensing the strength and intelligence in this young woman even through the communications. And Sadi had to admit, Namiri Daret was very easy on the eyes to look at. She could feel Sehri and Ne'Veha and the others agreeing with her in that regard just by the ebb of their Etheric resonance. “Yes, we believe you can as well.” She echoed Namiri’s words. She looked at her fellow Crown Princess’s and saw all of them nod their heads together. They were all in agreement as Sadi knew they would be after having all of the facts.

Sadi shifted her jungle green eyes back to Aricia and For'mya. “I think you knew we would see things just as you, For'mya and Anja do once we knew all of the facts Aricia.” She said with a smile. “We are too much alike.”

Aricia nodded her head. “I had a feeling, yes, but we needed to let you hear the details and decide for yourselves.”

Sadi smiled and looked first at Carisia, Lu'ria and Caliria and then Sehri and Ne'Veha on her opposite side. “We are *way* too much alike you know.” She said turning back to Aricia.

Aricia and For'mya chuckled heartily at this. “Yes, we certainly are.” For'mya answered. “And this drives Martin and Androcles *malda*.”

Sadi and the others nodded and laughed with Aricia and For'mya. “Yes it does.” Sadi spoke.

“I think perhaps we should get acquainted with Namiri since we have the time.” Caliria told them. “If it is acceptable to her, we would like to speak with her alone.”

“I would like that!” Namiri said with an unusual amount of excitement her mother saw. “I would like that very much.”

Aricia nodded her head as she began to rise. “Certainly. Take as long as you like.” She looked at Saydia and Anthylea and motioned them up as she turned to look at Namiri. “Saydia why don’t we leave them alone and we can work out the details of how you will present this to the Quorum.”

Saydia nodded her head. “Of course.”

VENTORI LIRANA'S INTEL GROUP

Whatever she had been expecting it was not what she was seeing.

Lirana had selected nineteen men and women to accompany her on this mission. All of them experienced fighters with ample experience. Many of them had far more experience and many more years in age than her, but because she was Konlar's wife and mate, that made her unique.

The sensors on their Pralor transport had allowed them to measure the gaps in the sensor cones of the many ships in orbit above Ventori when they arrived. They had remained hidden with the edges of the third moon's gaseous rings while conducting their scans and finding the best way down to the surface. There were very few gaps and they had to thread the needle in order to reach the surface undetected, almost getting caught once when a sensor beam swept over them inadvertently. They had finally made it to the surface and intercepted the calls of this Chief Justice Nalmos and their location. It was easy enough to make their way over land to intercept this group coming from Microu, which they did. What they found had stunned all of them since they believed that no survivors existed on Ventori after the Svorag attack. Lorendo had told them that those the Tasmor did not rescue were left to die and the planet was a dead hulk now. He had lied to them yet again and Lirana was beginning to share her beloved husband and mate's viewpoint of the Pralor Lorendo.

For over a day they listened and moved with this group of survivors from Microu, until finally they came face to face with those they had only heard about in stories as children.

Alpha Wolves. And lots of them.

Lirana and her group had been dumbstruck to say the least. These Alphas were unlike any of the stories they had heard. Alphas were supposed to be the most powerful and violent of their species. Yet what she had witnessed in the last few hours alone had most certainly changed all that. She saw one Alpha wolf, a hulking man well over six feet tall, one child perched on his shoulders and one in each of his arms as he walked them down the side of the ridge. The children were laughing in his arms, his tanned face bright and happy as he told them obviously funny jokes in order to make them laugh so. She had seen two other Alphas move to where four men were carrying a makeshift carryall between them and they took this burden from the men without question. Lirana saw many Beta wolves mixed in with the Alphas, all of them looking fit and more powerful than any Beta she had ever seen with the exception of her husband and those among her people. Several of the Beta wolves she saw giving instructions to Alphas, which were acted on almost instantly. She saw many other men and women who were not wolf, but Lirana could sense something about them was different. She saw at least four other species among the men and women alone, species that she had never seen or knew existed. What she did take note of right away was the fact that every form of burden that the Beta wolves from Microu carried was taken from them almost immediately when an Alpha or one of the other new people came close. She saw elder women being carried gingerly down the mountain, injured men and women were being swarmed but who she could only assume were medical people of some sort.

Lirana was jarred from her thoughts as she walked when one of the most senior men in Konlar's command appeared next to her. He was a grizzled old veteran and had been a close friend of their family for decades. He always made it his goal to insure her security whenever he was with her.

"Lirana?" He spoke softly as he fell in beside her.

"Neral... what have you discovered?" Lirana asked as they continued to move along the ridge towards the valley below.

"Whoever they are, they are far more organized than any I have seen in my lifetime." The seven thousand year old Beta wolf told her.

Lirana glanced at him. "What do you mean?" She asked him.

"Even as they help those around us, they have dozens more in the timber all around us providing security." Neral told her. "I can smell them, but I cannot see them."

"Do you feel it as well Neral?" Lirana asked.

He glanced at her quickly. “Yes. The aura of an Alpha wolf that surpasses all those we have seen and felt so far on this planet by a margin I cannot begin to explain.”

Lirana looked around as they continued to move. “I have never felt so many powerful auras in one place like this. So many Alphas... but so many powerful Betas as well.”

“They are extremely well equipped and well-armed.” Neral told her. “They move with the grace and effortlessness of seasoned combat veterans Lirana. Men and women who have faced battle before and been victorious. Lorendo did not tell us this.”

“No he did not.” Lirana said. “And I feel coming here was a mistake.”

“What do you mean girl?” Neral asked. “We have been very careful in our actions.”

Lirana nodded in agreement. “Yes we have.” She told him. “What we did not take into account because we have not been here since the Svorag attack, is how refugees would look. Our garments are not worn and ripped. We are healthy and well fed while the others are not. We stand out in too many small ways for it to be a coincidence Neral.”

Neral nodded his head after a long moment. “Yes, I see your point.” He spoke softly. “What do you suggest?”

Lirana shook her head. “I don’t know to be honest.” She replied. “We wish to see where they are taking the refugees and where the two women we were following have gone but I fear that if we continue further we will be discovered.”

“Do we give the abort signal?” Neral asked her.

Lirana was silent for a moment and then shook her head. “No. We need to discover why Lorendo wanted these women so badly. And the only way to do that is to find them in whatever camp they have put together. We will continue on but tell everyone to be extra cautious in what they do and say to others.”

Neral nodded his head and then slowly moved off. Lirana heard the excited squeal of several children and her head whipped around and her eyes grew wide. The single source of the overwhelming Alpha aura she and the others had been feeling was now only a few hundred feet from her. Martin Leonidas had hauled two children into his arms as they moved down the rocky ridge, another male carrying a third and the children were delighted in this. She saw the petite Persian red haired female, also incredibly powerful and with an Alpha female wolf aura that far surpassed her own, helping the mother of the children, for she appeared several months along in pregnancy once more.

Something inside her told Lirana that they needed to turn back now, that none of this felt right at all. Almost as if they had already been discovered. That couldn’t be possible she knew, at least not that she was aware of, and her husband and her people needed the intelligence that she could get them. She pushed her fear and doubt to the deep recesses of her mind and then continued walking along with all the others.

ECHO QUADRANT

HADOR

PRALOR DESIGNATION MOON 739

Edrao entered the medium sized bunker and saw Konlar standing by the computer station and the man controlling it. He turned at Edrao’s entrance and watched as the much older Pralor/Lycavorian elder moved to get a large mug of clear, mountain water and then moved over beside him.

“Lirana?” Edrao asked him.

Konlar nodded his head. “They made it into the system and onto the surface with no issues.” Konlar answered with a touch of pride.

Edrao knew that Konlar worshiped his wife, mate and mother to his children and while there were three thousand years between them in age, for their people age was really not a factor because of their longevity. Lirana had been smitten by the broad chested Konlar almost from the outset and their union had been seen many years before they actually became mates. Lirana was one of the most skilled and tested females among their Pack, and as Konlar’s wife she also was looked up to by many.

“Then my tactic worked?” Edrao asked.

Konlar nodded his head. “There were gaps in their sensor coverage of the system. Our Tasmor contacts say that this King has requested that all Lycavorians from Ventori be returned as soon as possible if that is their wish.”

Edrao looked at him with wide eyes. “He requested it?” He gasped. “He didn’t demand?”

“Apparently not.” Konlar said. “There are rumors from the Tasmor homeworld that there was a confrontation with a Kintaur fleet. This Lycavorian King killed a senior Kintaur officer in front of the fleet’s commander, a Sector General, then had their ship destroyed. The Kintaur fleet quickly departed Ventori space after this. He protected the Tasmor Sovereign Regent, who appears to be on Ventori as well.”

Edrao sipped his water. “You have been busy Konlar my boy.” He said.

Konlar nodded his head. “I don’t trust Lorendo. He is up to something and I will not have us dangling out in the open while he gets away free. We have many contacts within the Tasmor society, and we have always helped each other.”

“An arrangement that appears to be paying dividends now.” Edrao said. “What else?”

“They do not know very much because of the layers of security, but as you know it is not often the Tasmor Sovereign Regent leaves their homeworld.” Konlar spoke. “She is currently on Ventori with two of her daughters, the youngest ones. If the reports are accurate, they are working out some sort of mutual agreement. Part of that is bringing the surviving Lycavorians back to Ventori. The Tasmor fleet has already begun to prep for this, and there are a few Tasmor ships within the system that are transiting back and forth. That is why I had her use our Tasmor transport to land. Less chance they would be questioned if discovered.”

“The Lycavorians do almost all of their mining.” Edrao spoke softly. “Their mines are poison to Tasmor. How will this affect their production I wonder?”

“Our contact was not sure, but they were reasonably certain that the Sovereign Regent wasn’t given much of a choice, but that concessions were made.” Konlar said.

“Concessions?” Edrao spoke. “The Tasmor Sovereign Regent is not known to give concessions easily. That would be an interesting event to witness. What do these Alphas have that the Tasmor could want?”

Konlar motioned to one of the screens surrounding the man who sat in front of them. “Look.” He stated pointing to the screen.

Edrao leaned closer and his eyes grew even wider as he saw the many large warships in the image. He moved closer. “Warships?” He gasped.

Konlar nodded his head. “And lots of them.” He told him. “Lirana’s transmission before they went to the surface spoke of over forty warships of varying size within sensor range of the transport. Very large and very well armed from what she could make out. They didn’t scan any of them but she is reasonably certain they are using a power source based on Pralor technology Edrao. Your concerns about why Lorendo is acting as he is now may have just been answered.”

“*Carians*, Alpha Lycavorians with Pralor technology!” Edrao gasped.

Konlar nodded his head. “And if they are using it to bargain with the Tasmor, then it makes sense that the refugees from Ventori would begin returning soon if this King called for them. It is in our blood and instincts to follow the most powerful Alpha Edrao. You know this.”

Edrao nodded his head. “Yes.”

“If this Alpha is powerful enough of an influence to alter the Tasmor Sovereign Regent’s point of view...” Konlar said.

Edrao nodded once more. “I know.” He said. “Hopefully Lirana will be able to tell us more. There is no point in speculating until we know more.”

Konlar nodded now. “Agreed.”

“What about the station?” Edrao asked.

Konlar leaned over and altered the view of the monitor they were using by tapping the screen twice. “You were correct.” He stated. “The miniaturized Worker Drone pods that you developed are working perfectly. We were able to fly them right up to the facility and insert them via one of the exterior vent shafts. We are getting pictures of the inside of the facility that we have never seen before.”

“Why does the way you say that make my skin crawl?” Edrao said softly.

“It is as you feared Edrao.” Konlar told him. “Whatever it is they have been working on all these years is not a cure for the Svorag virus. They have been able to access several areas with the drones, keeping them out

of sight, but all they have recorded so far are extreme quarantine measures and vacuum sealed doors and hatches. They have only been able to enter a third of the facility. The other areas are sealed with force fields and security measures I have never seen.”

Edrao looked at him. “Konlar... do you realize what this could be?” He asked.

Konlar nodded his head slowly. “And I hope we are wrong.” He said softly.

VENTORI ADHOC BASE

They were selected very early on in the grueling eighteen month long *Durcunusaan* training regime. They were singled out for one thing or another, whether it be increased intelligence, reflexes, endurance or simple strength. Once this was completed, their standard *Durcunusaan* training was altered slightly to make the tasks and training even harder than they normally were, but done so in a way that it was never really noticed.

They were being tested further and did not know it.

Selection for inclusion into the ranks of the famed *Durcunusaan* was the single most stringent process anywhere within the Union military. The only possible exception being the Omega Teams, and the Nexus Grid personnel, but in order to be considered for them, you had to have been active military for at least ten years. The *Durcunusaan* candidates were the youngest and brightest of the many cultures within the Union as a whole and all of them were subjected to the exact same standards of testing. No difference were made for species or gender, this was one of the very first and most important controls that Vengal and Vistr had put into place from the onset of the program. While it was true that the *Durcunusaan* were mostly made up of Lycavorians, Elves and Vampires, there were nearly a dozen different species from within the Union who were members of the *Durcunusaan* and all of them had succeeded where so many failed. The failure ratio had improved slightly over the years since their inception, but it was had the highest drop-out level anywhere within the Union military. Perhaps one in five thousand graduated *Durcunusaan* training, and each class was roughly five hundred when they began.

Then there was the *Hippeis Sedla*.

Only three species made up the *Hippeis Sedla*, and that had not altered since their origins only months after the *Durcunusaan* were created. By decree, Lycavorians, Elves and Vampires were the only species allowed to hold positions within the *Hippeis Sedla*, mainly because of the species of their six Queens. Just recently, an addendum to their charter had been added and now two Hadarians were in the final stages of their training as full *Hippeis Sedla*. Out of over a thousand Hadarians that had applied, only two had been able to survive the training until now. Both were female obviously, but the lone male who had lasted until the just before the last phase, he was now undergoing additional training that would make him one of the most sought after surgeons within the entire Union military and rank him fourth in line to command the entire Union Medical Corp behind Queen Anja, Princess Eliani and Star Colonel Anuk.

The *Durcunusaan Hippeis Sedla* were a breed apart.

Each was approached after their graduation from normal *Durcunusaan* training when all the celebrating and ceremonies were over. Each was given one day to make the decision, none of those chosen to be asked had mates or children. All of them were single and in the peak of physical perfection. Those who volunteered after being given the opportunity were then spirited away to a remote *Durcunusaan* base. No one knew where this base was, but most of those who had graduated the schooling were sure it was not on Apo Prime where the main *Durcunusaan* training facility was. It was here on this base that they began three years of what would amount to the most grueling, cruel and sometimes humiliating training any of them had ever been subjected too. The training for the *Hippeis Sedla* was broken into six different phases of six months each. Fail one stage, no matter where it was in the order, and you were terminated from the program, never to be allowed to try again.

There were three requirements that were inescapable even before the individual was considered for the *Hippeis Sedla*. They had to be a Tier Six Etheric user, they had to have at minimum a Degree in one field or another, and the last requirement was that they spoke the ancient Lycavorian language fluently.

The First Phase was simple six months of survival and showing that you had what it took physically to endure hardships beyond any that were expected of normal soldiers. Very few candidates finished this stage without the scars to prove their worth.

The Second Phase of the training was six months' worth of becoming intimate with every known Union military weapons system and becoming experts with all of them. Assault rifles, handguns, heavy weapons, *Nehtes*, swords and knives. All of them had to be mastered in order to pass this Phase of the course. Fail one weapons system and you failed the phase.

Phase Three was a six month long field operation where you were dropped on a planet and you had to survive alone for that six months, all the while avoiding being captured by the many enemy forces that were looking for you. If you were caught, you were out of the program.

Phase Four was completely academic in nature. A six month stint at the Apo Prime University taking advanced classes in whatever field the candidate had excelled in during school. During this time, the candidate also had to learn an additional language to complement their use of the ancient Lycavorian language.

Phase Five was perhaps the most difficult phase since the individuals were paired with another candidate and they had to learn to work through the differences of their personalities to become a smooth operating team. This is when they learned that they would always be paired with another wherever they were sent and to guard whoever they were supposed to guard. It was during this Phase where many candidates washed out. They were unable to work seamlessly with another individual to the point that everything they did was almost second nature to them both. If they did wash out of this phase, each individual was given a glowing recommendation and a promotion and then placed within the normal Durcunusaan forces, usually leading to leadership positions within a year or so because of the advanced training they had received.

Phase Six is where these teams, usually down to four or five teams of two, brought it altogether and made it work. Phase Six was six months of real world missions that could take them anywhere in the universe and into any situation. Once in Phase Six you were considered an active member of the *Hippeis Sedla* and were treated as such. Essentially Phase Six was a probationary period that you had to pass in order to be recognized. Only one team had ever failed to complete Phase Six in the twenty years that the *Hippeis Sedla* had been in existence, and they had been killed standing back to back during the nightmare that was Alba Tau. Their names now resided on the *Durcunusaan* Wall of Honored Dead at the main facility on Apo Prime and the graduation grounds at Thermopylae.

Vengal had known immediately who he was going to send the moment he received the communication from Martin Leonidas and they now stood just inside the doorway of Jezima and Meral's quarters on Ventori. Jezima and Meral both had protested loudly when they had arrived and Martin told them who they were. After twenty minutes of ranting at Martin and finally seeing the set of his impassive face they both relented and were introduced to the two individuals who would die to ensure the protection of their charges, even if that meant letting innocents fall to accomplish that goal.

The *Hippeis Sedla* were not known for being gentle in anything they did. If it put their charges at risk, or it was a threat to them in any way, that risk and threat was eliminated without remorse or pause.

The pureblooded female vampire was barely five feet tall and was the picture of exotic and surreal beauty. Her black hair hung well past her shoulders, her normal pale blue eyes bright and ever so alert, and able to change to the cobalt blue of her vampire persona in a blink. The Lycavorian male was six foot three inches tall, with wild brown hair that was tied into a pony tail and stunning teal green eyes. When in wolf form he was close to the size of the Leonidas males and this was due to the purity of his Lycavorian blood and the fact that his ancestors were members of King Resumar's inner Circle.

Colonel Archer Elmand's own great grandfather had fallen the same day as King Resumar, fighting by his side. Colonel Asa Rakish was the daughter of purebloods who had come to the Union with Queen Isabella. Her mother and father were honored members of the City Council of Tuya on Apo Prime and her four brother and three sisters all served the Union in some capacity. Their parents had raised them to be what some would call super patriots, but they had always worn that term with pride. They were an odd pair when you looked at them in a relaxed position, but they had become the most effective team the *Hippeis Sedla* had ever produced in their twenty plus years of existence. Vengal knew what Jezima and Meral meant to his King and friend and only the very best he could send would suffice.

Martin Leonidas had approved immensely when he saw who Vengal had sent.

Jezima looked at them as they sat beside one another at the small counter that separated the small kitchen from the rest of the living area of the portable bungalow. She and Meral had spoken well into the evening hours the night before with them and Jezima found them to be fascinating to the extreme. Meral she knew was having a harder time adjusting to what it meant now that they had discovered Martin and the others and just what their roles would now mean to the billions of Lycavorians who descended from those Sumar, Wayonn and the others had helped to shape. She was coming around Jezima knew, but it would take her a bit longer to get used to it.

Jezima looked at Archer and Asa as they sipped the mugs of coffee as Meral came into the small kitchen behind her.

“So what happens now?” Jezima asked them.

Archer looked at Asa with a confused expression and then back to Jezima. “I don’t think I understand the question Lady Jezima.” He spoke.

“Do you limit what we can do and where we can go?” Meral asked. “That is what my mother is asking.”

Archer looked surprised at the question and glanced once more at Asa. It was she who took on that question.

“We are not here to impede what you choose to do Lady Meral.” Asa told her. “Only to protect you.”

Meral looked at her. “But protecting us is keeping us from doing what we want to do isn’t it?” Meral asked confused now.

Asa smiled brightly. “Perhaps in times past.” She said. “Not any longer. Not with Archer and I.”

“We were going to see the new Lycavorians that Martin was bringing into the compound today.” Jezima said.

Asa nodded her head. “Then that is what you will do.” She told them. “As I said, we are not here to restrict what you do, only to protect you should the need arise. You must understand, whether Martin or the Queens have told you...”

Jejima looked surprised. “You call him by name?” she asked.

Archer nodded his head. “He insists upon it for all the *Durcunusaan*.” He said in reply. “As do the Queens. They know many of us by name and both Asa and I have served with them before. It is not something that many of my comrades are comfortable with but my ancestors were part of King Sumar’s Inner Circle and Asa’s parents were with Queen Isabella when they first came to the Union. Neither of us seems to have an issue with it.”

“There are those who do not feel for the King and Queens what most of our people do.” Asa told them. “They feel they would make better rulers.”

Jejima looked at her. “That always seems to be the case.” She said. “A single individual or group who thinks they are better suited to rule over others and believe they should have the power to do so.”

Asa nodded her head. “Yes it does, no matter the form of government that rules. They would like nothing better than to see the King and Queens disgraced or dead. Too many have targeted those he loves to try and get to him in the past. After Queen For’mya was taken, it was decided by General Vengal that everyone who is a Leonidas or close family member or friend would have *Hippeis Sedla* protection. In your case, it means far more than you know for you are...”

“Essentially you are the mother to us all.” Archer told her rising to his feet and seeing Jezima’s eyes grow wider. “From you is where our Pralor blood began, you are King Sumar’s mother and sister! We honor all those who settled among our people so many millennia ago, and you will be loved just for who you are.”

“And hated.” Meral said but with no malice in her voice.

Asa nodded her head slowly. “Perhaps by those who crave power to subjugate and rule, but that is not for you to worry about. That is our job. And we are very good at our job.” She said.

“I don’t like all this attention.” Jezima spoke softly.

Meral stepped up to her and placed her hand on her shoulder. “Mother, we have hidden for so long.” She said after a long pause. “We cannot hide any longer. We must trust in Martin now. He is your son’s descendant, my brother’s descendant. He is our family. They all are. We never doubted Sumar. It is time for us to once more honor who we are. Who he was.”

Jejima looked at her and nodded her head after a long moment. “You are right Meral. Forgive me.” She said.

“There is nothing to forgive Lady Jezima.” Asa told her.

Jezima took a deep breath and nodded her head once more. She looked at Archer and Asa. “Then we will do what we want just as you suggest.”

Archer nodded his head with a smile. “Excellent!”

**VENTORI
ADHOC COMPOUND
PORTABLE COMMAND BRIEFING CENTER**

“...This true?” Vesara Athcer gasped as she lowered the data pad and looked at Saydia sitting at the head of the table, Aricia and For'mya standing just to her left holding hands, while Anthylea stood to her right.

Saydia nodded her head slowly. “Namiri informed me of this only this morning. Needless to say I was quite taken aback.” She told them.

“You expect us to believe this?” Vesara hissed as she leaned forward.

“I don't particularly care what you believe Vesara!” Saydia snapped at her. “You and several others on this Quorum still cling to the false ideal that we, as Tasmor, are the dominant species in this universe even after what you have seen here. There are species out among the stars that could squash us like insects and still you won't let this ridiculous ideal go. We are among one of those species even now, and yet all they wish is friendship and allies so far from their own home. They have but a miniscule fraction of the power they could bring to bear on any enemy with them now and you sit there unwilling to see this. This is happening whether we want it to or not! I was equally as surprised when Namiri informed me of this. She has always been the more introverted of my daughters, you all know this, mainly because of who her father is and the circumstances that put the two of us together. This is not something that I expected her to announce to me, but after what little I have seen, I am not going to question it. I do not understand all of it, and that is why I have asked for Queen Aricia and Queen For'mya to be here, in order to answer these questions. You can question Namiri herself if you choose, but I doubt very much she will tell you anything. When I left her, she was speaking rather animatedly with those she has been able to feel for weeks now. And she was quite happy.” This was not a lie for Saydia had stolen a look back into the COM center as she left and Namiri was indeed speaking with Sadi and the others in a very energetic manner.

“This is only a means for you to wrest control out of the Quorum's hands!” Vesara barked.

“I am wresting control of nothing!” Saydia snapped. “I am simply informing you of an event that will alter our relations with the Lycavorians.”

It was the Tasmor Defense Minister who put an end to the growing squabble between Saydia and Vesara. “Saydia... you have seen this... this power that they have?” Seran asked leaning forward in her own chair and making her voice rise above Vesara.

Saydia nodded her head slowly. “Briefly, yes. Namiri and Emylea have seen even more of it and what they can do. Tobia tried to explain it to me after she first came to be among us, but I did not listen.” Saydia turned her head and looked at Aricia. “Aricia...?”

Aricia smiled and stepped up beside her at the table. She lifted her left hand and all the Tasmor present at the table jumped in shock as the Etheric knife burst into existence extended from Aricia's closed fist.

“It is called Etheric power.” Aricia stated. “You must have seen it among the Pralor people even just a little.”

It was Seran who nodded her head quickly. “Yes... yes, but never so blatant and in such physical terms!” She gasped.

Aricia nodded her own head. “It is common among the Pralors and my people, Etheric abilities as a whole, but to be able to do this...” She lifted her hand and showed them the Etheric knife once more. “This requires a certain gene to be present in our bodies. For some of us, like myself, it allows us to do things others cannot. For others like For'mya, it is passed to them in a dormant state through a bite from one of my people that turns them. For'mya and Anja were not always wolves as I was and...”

Aricia went on speaking for nearly an hour, with For'mya adding things at different times to compliment what she was saying. Even to Saydia, though she had heard some of it, it was truly amazing to get a more detailed explanation. Aricia and For'mya Leonidas were very well spoken and extremely intelligent and this was quickly noted by the women on the Tasmor Quorum. They were also incredibly patient as they fielded questions that seemed silly, but that they answered nonetheless and with no arrogance in their tone in the least.

“...Do not consider ourselves better than another species simply because of our advanced technology.” Aricia was finishing. “We were just as you are now once; on the cusp of great discoveries that would lead us into the stars and beyond. We can help you to discover them, help you develop them, but we will not simply give it to you.”

“So you will not give us better weapons and technology to improve our ships?” Vesara asked rather indignantly.

Aricia met her gaze. “Simply give it to you? No.” Aricia answered her calmly. “Giving you technology that you are not ready for would be counterproductive.”

“Who are you to say we are not ready for this technology?” Vesara demanded.

“Your demeanor right now suggests that you are not.” Aricia told her. “Your scent speaks of arrogance and dominance. Several of you here at this table radiate this same scent. It is easy enough for us to detect it in your scent so denying it would be pointless I’m afraid. It is part of our nature as wolves. Working with your people to help you discover this technology would be much more beneficial in the long run.”

Seran leaned forward in her chair, holding up her hand to stop Vesara’s retort to the common sense answer. Seran had been convinced the moment they landed on this planet that Saydia had been correct. She was far more interested in seeing the Tasmor grow as a species than dominance of any form. If what was happening between Namiri Daret and the son of this Queen was an indication of the future, the days ahead would be so much brighter. “Excuse me Queen Aricia... unlike my Quorum colleague Minister Vesara, I am more interested in seeing our people thrive going into the future.” Seran ignored Vesara’s angry look and gazed directly at Aricia and For'mya. “What... what exactly does this mean?”

Aricia took a deep breath. “It means that Namiri Daret will become a Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union. She will become my son’s wife and mate.” She told them. “You must understand, this has happened with each of my son’s wives and mates. As they came together, they grew in power enough to detect others who would share their lives. Sadi, Carisia and Ne’Veha were the first, but then came Lu’ria and Caliria and then Sehri. They felt each one of them within themselves as they came together. Just as they now feel Namiri. And she feels them.”

“But Tasmor... our people... our species, we do not have this power that you and the Pralors have.” Another Quorum member spoke up now. “How could it be?”

For'mya nodded her head. “There is much even our own people do not yet understand about Etheric abilities. Sadi, Androcles’ *Anome*, she believes that because Namiri is not yet sensitive to Etheric abilities, they were unable to sense her until all of them were finally together.”

Vesara leaned forward once more. “Namiri Daret will have a say in your government?” She asked openly. Several Tasmor Quorum members rolled their eyes in disgust Aricia and For'mya both saw. It appeared all of them knew what Vesara desired most of all. Power and influence.

Aricia nodded her head. “She will have the ability to influence or support something, and because she will bear our family name, it will carry quite a bit of weight, but ultimately the final decisions will be made by Martin, myself and my fellow Queens, in complete conjunction with the Union Senate and Prime Minister.”

“So your... your King does not have the final say in political matters?” Vesara pressed.

“Martin is King of the Lycavorian Union, the Union military falls under his full authority, and he does have a major influence and vote in domestic and other political matters, as do we all, but no, neither he nor us are the final word on an item or agenda that will affect all of our people.” Aricia answered her, which was not entirely true. “We are not a true monarchy in the definition of the word.”

“And what would this mean for the Tasmor?” Seran asked.

“Namiri would be a member of our family.” For'mya answered. “This alone would tie the Tasmor to the Union as no treaty ever could. It would mean open trade between the Union and Tasmor, mutual agreements of defense and cooperation, the sharing of training regimes and the ability for the Tasmor to travel to the Union freely once trade routes and travel corridors are established.”

“And the Kintaur?” Seran asked.

Aricia smiled slightly. “Given what has already occurred here on Ventori and the Kintaur people’s enslavement of our people, they would become our enemies just as they are yours. As they already are.” She told them all seeing their eyes go slightly wider. “Our husband and mate has little tolerance for those who enslave others, and our son Androcles has even less.”

“What about mutual defense treaties?” Another Quorum member asked now. “Would your ships assist us if the need arose?”

“We would be allies.” For'mya answered. “As Aricia has already said, your enemies would become our enemies. Joint training and missions are things that can be determined and worked out in the future, yes. To answer your question directly, yes.”

“We would need to inspect him?” Vesara blurted out.

Aricia blinked as Saydia’s eyes went wide. “Vesara that is out of line!” She declared.

“It is our right!” Vesara proclaimed. “We have inspected all of those who have shared your bed! We will be the final say in this! Not you and not your daughter!”

“So you would dismiss what this could mean for an archaic ritual that is hundreds of years old?” Saydia demanded.

“Yes!” Vesara spat. “I will not approve this... this Union without it!”

“How dare you!” Saydia snarled now coming to her feet.

Aricia looked at Saydia. “I don’t understand.” She spoke. “What does she mean?”

Seran rose to her feet now reaching for Saydia’s arm even as Anthylea did as well in order to keep her calm. “It is an ancient Tasmor ritual Queen Aricia. Those chosen to share the beds of any member of the Sovereign’s family. The Quorum reserves the right to inspect them to insure they will be suitable... suitable reproductive material for the Tasmor.”

Aricia looked taken aback and she looked at For'mya quickly. She turned back to Seran. “You wish to physically inspect our son?” She asked.

“He will present himself to this Quorum for inspection. Questions will be asked of him and we will decide if he is a quality specimen for breeding with a Tasmor daughter of the Regent’s blood.” Vesara snapped. “That is our law.”

“Androcles Leonidas is a Crown Prince of his people!” Saydia snapped loudly. “He is not Tasmor and therefore not subject to that law! For you to demand this is preposterous!”

“It is even more important because he is not Tasmor!” Vesara quipped right back. Vesara looked around the table. “I believe I have the support of the majority on this issue!”

Saydia noticed that all but Seran nodded their heads in acknowledgement of Vesara’s words and this made her even angrier. Aricia and For'mya detected the spike in her scent because of her anger and Aricia moved up beside her.

“I will make the arrangements.” Aricia blurted out.

“This must take place before he arrives here.” Vesara continued. “Before he sees Namiri Daret in person! There can be no delay!”

Aricia looked at For'mya. “*Kinosaurgai*?” She asked.

“We can use the *HELIX* Corvette assigned to *ARC ROYAL*.” She answered almost instantly. “We have their coordinates and course, we can have them hold position and jump to them in perhaps twenty hours.”

Aricia nodded her head. “Then I suggest all of you rest for the remainder of the day. We will leave in the morning.”

“Aricia...?” Saydia began but Aricia shook her head.

“No, we will honor your traditions just as we ask that you honor ours.” Aricia spoke. “It is only fair.”

Vesara nodded her head arrogantly. “As well you should.” She snapped and then spun around and walked out of the building. The other Tasmor Quorum members rose and followed her out with the exception of Seran, who moved closer to Saydia Daret.

“I swear to all the gods in the stars I am going to see that woman fall!” Saydia snarled angrily.

Saydia turned to fully face Aricia once the room was empty but it was Seran who spoke first. “What is going on Saydia?” She asked causing her to turn and look at her. “We have been friends for over fifty years and I know you. What is going on?”

“Seran...” Saydia began.

“No!” Seran interrupted her. “I alone have thoroughly read the many reports submitted by Drenia and Anthylea. I know that these Svorag monsters are as large a threat to our people as to everyone else in this Quadrant. You obviously have a plan worked out with the Queens here. I know your daughter Saydia, Namiri is as stubborn as Emylea and she would not...”

Saydia looked at Aricia. “I don’t believe Namiri is the issue any longer.” She said. “Is she?” She asked.

Aricia shook her head quickly. “This is not something we anticipated.” She replied. “We did not know about this custom of yours.”

Anthylea stepped closer now. “Your son... he will not look fondly upon this I take it?” She asked.

For'mya moved up closer to Aricia and their hands came together and their fingers interlaced. “That would be an understatement.” For'mya spoke now.

Aricia looked at Saydia. “The last person who attempted to do something similar to this with our son, he was a member of what we call the School of the Mages.”

“Do we dare ask what happened?” Anthylea asked.

Aricia looked at her. “The man spent four months in a body cast and another six months recovering from his other wounds.”

“Your son beat him?!” Seran gasped in shock.

For'mya shook her head quickly. “No! Well... not really.”

“What do you mean?” Saydia asked.

“Andro only hit him three times.” Aricia answered.

UNION ADHOC BASE

NEW DESIGNATION *FOB DISCOVERY*

It was a testament to Union engineering skills really.

Miranda Lorian, ranking military officer in the Quadrant behind only the King and General Simpson, had re-designated the ADHOC command base as Forward Operating Base Discovery. Even in the few short weeks they had been here it had grown far larger than anyone really thought it would.

FOB Discovery now stretched nearly two miles long and half a mile wide alongside the clear waters of the lake shore. Using the lake as a major defensive wall, the base expanded outward. Hundreds of the portable buildings were now set up within the perimeter of the base to house the refugees and the Union troops that were on the ground. Two fully staffed Medical facilities, four massive Mess Lounges and a number of other buildings that housed equipment and power generating materials. The lakefront perimeter was used as a beach for swimming and relaxing, though you had to ignore the four foot deep trench line that had been dug around the entire perimeter and then reinforced with the six foot high, one foot thick Dragon Armor wall. It had become standard for a field operating base of this size to utilize the malleable Dragon Armor to help defend it. With so many uses for the incredible metal, it was only natural for it to be used in base defense. Light and nearly indestructible, elven engineers had devised an ingenious interlocking system that allowed the eight foot sections of wall to be anchored together and then sunk into the ground to make it nearly impossible to knock over. When it was finished, the perimeter wall was between six and eight feet tall encircling the whole base, making FOB Discovery the most heavily defended position on Ventori at the moment. Sensors of all kinds had been laid across the terrain all around the base, to include many in the water of the lake. Defensive positions were many, each of them with heavy weapons charged and ready to use. While not as heavily fortified as the base on Manne, FOB Discovery had become the center of Union Operations on this planet and would remain so for the foreseeable future. While they were not many Union troops left on board the ships above, many engineers and techs had volunteered to pull shifts on the perimeter as well as run patrols. Even so, it made many of the standard Union Spartans operate on a higher alert level to compensate until more troops arrived with Prince Androcles and his forces. They had not expected to find this on Ventori and were unprepared for all of the survivors, but as they did so well, Lycavorian Spartans adapted to their changing environment. *STRIKERS* and *MENKLA* transports were coming and going from the airfield on the far end of the base nearly every hour

rotating personnel, lifting off with patrols or bringing the more severely sick or injured refugees up to the advanced medical facilities on the *ARC ROYAL*.

This is what had Lirana's attention as they approached Discovery. Never had she seen anything like it in all her years. She saw a multitude of species that she had never seen before in her life, though predominantly it appeared as if the base and personnel were mainly Lycavorians and the long eared individuals. Neral had moved up to walk alongside her as they got closer to the base and he too was awestruck by what they were seeing. Many of their people had moved closer to them as they got closer to the entrance of Discovery, which was very well defended by heavily armed men and women. Two heavy weapons positions were posted just at the entrance but were not threatening in any manner. They were occupied by several stern faced Lycavorians who appeared to be exceptionally alert.

Had Lirana and Neral been better versed in military tactics they may have detected it, however they were dealing with Lycavorian Spartans, men and women far better trained than they would ever know. When the single word erupted above the voices of the refugees they were unprepared for the devastating quickness and precision.

“EXECUTE!”

Before the sound of the single word had finished echoing in the air, Lirana saw a strange shimmering of movement directly in front of her and her eyes went wide as the body of two young women and a large reptilian looking individual appeared right in front of her. Lirana never saw the leg sweep that Zarah executed with perfect precision and she felt her body lift into the air effortlessly as she lost control of her motion. She did not see Neral beginning to fall backwards in the same fashion, but because of his larger size Radem stepped into a ridge hand blow right behind Lucia's leg sweep and did not pull any power from the blow. A Beta wolf he may have been, Neral was still a powerful man, and Radem was taking no chances. Even as Neral fell back, the soft popping sound of PSGs deactivating surrounded the entire area, and Union troops rushed forward to disarm and push the men and women on Lirana's team to the ground while covering them with firearms and bladed weapons.

Lirana landed hard on the ground beneath her, but kept her wits about her enough to attempt to roll and rise to her feet. She got nowhere as Zarah spun completely around until she was facing Lirana once more and straddling her body. Her Shakur fighting knife glimmered in the morning light and Lirana froze as she felt the blade come to rest against the soft skin of her throat. Never had she seen anyone move so fast, and her dark eyes looked at Zarah Leonidas above her with stunned shock.

“Move one centimeter and I will open your throat to the air around you and you will die right here!” Zarah snarled at her, the cobalt blue eyes of her vampire side very easy to discern and her much thicker and stronger wolf teeth exposed completely.

“Hi there!” The deep voice bellowed and Lirana watched the man she had seen earlier move into her view as she lay pinned to the hard ground. He stepped up behind the young woman and leaned over her shoulder. “Beautiful work daughter.” Martin praised her as he kissed her head gently. “Absolutely brilliant.”

Zarah beamed at the praise from her father, but she kept her eyes on Lirana.

“Jules! Colin!” Martin called out as he looked up and down the line of refugees. Julie, Colin and Pablo each had a body pinned beneath their weapons, while a full squad had others surrounded and disarmed. Many of the refugees had scrambled away in the confusion and sat huddled on the ground as they witnessed the Lycavorian Alpha Wolf King they all had heard about.

“Secure!” Julie called out, her K12 KM jammed into the neck of the man beneath her legs.

“We're good Skipper!” Colin echoed his vampire lover's words, his P190A5 stuck under the chin of another man.

Martin saw Pablo and the others nod to him from where they were standing and then Martin looked back to Lirana as Helen came up beside him clutching the K14 KM in her smaller hand.

“What is your name?” Martin asked her.

Lirana cut her eyes to Zarah and then back to him but remained silent. She grit her teeth and shook her head slightly. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the older Alpha female kneel beside her head and look at her. Her aura was staggering to say the least, nowhere near as powerful as the Persian haired female she had seen earlier, but definitely more powerful than her or any female she had ever felt before.

Helen gazed at the attractive young female, smelling the fear coming from her and the others. She kept her face at ease and slowly returned her K14 to the holster on her thigh. All of them had taken to carrying weapons because of what had happened in the past and where they were.

“My name is Helen child.” She spoke very calmly and with a soothing voice that stunned Lirana. “I am the *Feravomir* of the Lycavorian people.” She saw Lirana’s eyes go wide at this and she smiled slightly. “You know what that means? Good. You have only one chance now child, for you and your people have been caught spying on us. Those of us from the Lycavorian Union, where we are all from, we don’t deal with spies in very kind ways. You have entered the domain of the King of the Lycavorian Union, Martin Leonidas. Given recent events, we are not a very forgiving people right now.”

Helen reached out and placed the back of her hand to Lirana’s cheek.

“We are however, your people.” Helen spoke. “We have secured those with you and we have taken your ship. We have been watching you since you entered this system.” Helen saw her eyes grow even wider. “That was very foolish trying to sneak into the system in what you thought were breaks in our sensor grids. We are not the Pralor people young lady, even though much of our equipment and ships is based on their technology, and we do not use their tactics.”

Lirana’s head turned slightly when she saw the second male figure move up beside the huge figure of the Alpha King. Her eyes narrowed when she realized that while the man was an Alpha wolf, he was also Pralor by his scent.

Wayonn looked at Martin. *[Their ship is ours. A standard Tasmor transport with a few Pralor modifications. Emylea Daret confirmed this.]*

[They try to fight?] Martin asked him.

Wayonn shook his head. *[They surrendered without incident.]*

Martin nodded his head and looked at Helen for she had heard their exchange. *[Good.]* Martin spoke softly. *[I sure as hell don’t want to start killing the people we came all this way to save.]*

[Perhaps we should show them that Martin.] Helen spoke.

Martin held her gaze for half a second and then nodded his head. He moved quickly, startling Lirana and her eyes grew wide in fear when he reached for her.

“Leave her alone!” Neral screamed from where he lay on the ground. “Do what you will to me but do not harm her!”

Martin ignored him and grasped Lirana’s arms as Zarah moved out of the way. To her surprise his touch was not forceful in any way and he pulled Lirana to her feet in front of him with hardly any effort in the least. Lirana’s head came only to his chest and she had to look up into dark brown eyes that seemed to bore into her very soul. Lirana could detect not only the sweet, honey like scent of the Persian haired female she had seen earlier upon him, but five other very feminine scents were buried deeply within his blood and on his person. Three of them were more pungent than the others, but she knew that was only because those three had been with him recently. These six different female scents were burned into his essence just as hers was burned into Konlar’s blood and resonance. They were all his mates and from his scent she could tell that the devotion to each of them was unquestioned.

Martin held her arms in front of her and met her wide eyes. “We can do this one of two ways.” Martin told her as he released her arms. Lirana was no fool however and she knew the young woman beside her would strike her down well before she attempted anything. “You are spying on my people. My family. I am going to assume you are from the same group that met my wife and mate Dysea, the tall, platinum blond with incredibly tasty ears.”

“The one with pointed ears!” Lirana blurted out before she thought about it and Martin smiled at her.

“Yep! That would be her.” Martin said. “You were following two Pralor women then. I want to know why. You came here to Ventori for a reason. I want to know why. You did not come here to try and attack anyone because you have limited weapons, but you came for a reason. Tell me that reason. You are Lycavorian, my people, and my kind regardless of what caste you belong to. You will not be injured and you will be treated with the utmost respect and honor.”

“If... if I answer your questions.” Lirana stammered.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.”

“And if I do not?” Lirana asked.

“Trust me that is not really an option.” Martin told her seeing the set of her jaw. “If you do not, then I will execute each one of you, discover where you came from with your ship’s computer and I will get my answers from whoever is there. And I’ll start with him.”

Lirana was shocked at the speed with which he moved and then K12 KM appeared in his fist in a single blink of her eyes. She saw the large weapon level at Neral beside her and then the tongue of flame and deafening boom as the weapon fired. She screamed as Neral was blasted back away from her, landing several feet away with the left side of his chest rapidly soaking with blood.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

VENTORI

FORWARD OPERATING BASE *DISCOVERY*

The portable CIC building conference room was partially filled once more, the wide transparent wall allowing them to look into the heart of the Union operations on Ventori. It was not something Lirana had ever seen before in her life, Konlar and others having a much smaller and less sophisticated base with nowhere near the level of technology and equipment.

Lirana had only heard stories as a child about the Alphas of their people and how they had disappeared over the course of several centuries after Lycavorians had settled Ventori. No historian had a really good idea of what happened to them, only speculation and rumor. Alpha wolves were the most intelligent and most powerful of their species and Lirana was very nearly overwhelmed at the utter strength of the many wolf auras she had felt since coming into this camp. Hundreds of Alpha males and females dotted the camp, as well as very powerful Beta wolves of both genders. Beta wolves that certainly dwarfed what she had ever felt among her own people with the exception of her husband and mate Konlar. Lirana also knew that Alpha wolves were the most violent and unpredictable of their species and when the Alpha King shot Neral with no hesitation or remorse, this knowledge was slammed home in a fashion she was unaccustomed to.

Screaming in horror she had wrenched free of his grasp and ran to where Neral lay on the ground bleeding heavily. As she pulled Neral’s limp body into her arms, she began to tell them everything while in the same breath begging them to save him. She didn’t see the slight nod from the King but she watched the red haired female move quickly out of the crowd and settle next to Neral. Lirana watched through amazed but tear stained eyes as Duewa easily dropped her hands to his chest, the white glow of her healing power flaring into view and she drew out the projectile and quickly healed the damage done to him by the 12.7 mm round while the King squatted by his feet.

Lirana glared at Martin in rage as he squatted next to her and Neral, a look that obviously had no effect on him in the least. She remembered his words to her then.

“That was only a demonstration.” He had told her. “I can and I will order your executions if you do not answer my questions, and I won’t lose a wink of sleep over it. I won’t want to do this but make no mistake. I will. It is my responsibility as King to protect my people and I will do just that, no matter what. You and your friends are Beta wolves and I have no desire to hurt any of you, but so far all you have done is sneak around and try to blend in like an enemy would do. I’m trying to repair and rebuild what was once here, but I can’t do that when there are others of my own kind operating against me and threatening members of my family.”

“We have threatened no one!” Lirana snarled at him.

“You were following two Pralor women on Honelze.” Martin told her. “One of them is my grandmother by blood. The other is my aunt by blood. My family.” Lirana’s eyes had grown wide at this information as she stared at him.

“You are... you are an Alpha Lycavorian!” She exclaimed. “How could they...?”

“That is a rather long and boring story.” Martin answered her. “What is your name?”

Lirana had stared at him for a long moment unsure of what to do or say. His presence alone frightened her terribly, especially after what he had just done, but his aura right then was radiating a soothing calm unlike anything she had ever felt. “Lirana.” She answered him finally. “My name is Lirana.”

“This is the situation Lirana.” Martin told her. “I want to know why you are here. I want to know why you were following my family. I want to know how you got a Tasmor ship and that Pralor frigate your mate was commanding...”

Lirana looked at him with wide eyes. “How... how did you...”

Martin smiled at her, a rather disarming smile considering that he could probably kill her before she knew she was dead. “You have four children don’t you?” Martin asked her. “I can smell each of them on you, and your husband and mate. He is a strong and proud Beta and I’d like to meet him in the future. We can do this civilly Lirana, we can sit and talk, or I can have each of your people interrogated. It would not be pleasant for them or for you and I’d rather not have to resort to such measures.”

“Do I have a choice?” Lirana asked him with some indignation.

Martin shook his head. “Not really. You and your people are here gathering intelligence for someone else. Technically you are spies and I don’t treat spies very well. I’d much rather we talk as Lycavorians and wolves.”

“My... my people?” She gasped.

“They will be placed in a separate building but they will be fed and treated with respect and honor.” Martin told her.

“Prisoners?” Lirana said.

Martin met her eyes. “Only if that is what you choose to be.” He told her. He looked at Duewa. “Dee?” He asked.

Duewa nodded her head. “Let me get him to the clinic to make sure he doesn’t have any adverse reactions to my healing power and then I will have Thoti bring him to the CIC.”

Martin nodded his head. “Good enough.” He turned back to Lirana. “It is your choice Lirana.”

That decision was easy for Lirana and now nearly an hour later she was sitting in what they called the CIC Briefing Room with a steaming mug of delicious, dark liquid in her hands and several different types of bread and rolls on the table in front of her. The bread had smelled delicious but she was still very wary of what was happening all around her. She didn’t realize that Martin and Helen could detect this easily and both of them tore off precut slices of the thick bread and began to eat them. The impulse was too great and her mouth was watering and Lirana soon did the same thing and was eating the almost wickedly divine tasting bread in great chunks because it was so good.

Lirana recognized the Tasmor Sovereign Regent sitting at the table, her First Colonel beside her, but she did not recognize Tobia aside from the fact she was a Pralor. The huge black skinned Alpha stood at the end of the table by the King and while their lips were not moving, it almost seemed as if they were talking to one another somehow, as their expressions and such changed from time to time. The attractive woman who had told her she was the *Feravomir* of the Lycavorian people sat beside her and while she looked young and in excellent health, Lirana could smell that she was well over four thousand years old. The woman had asked her a few questions about her family trying to draw her into a casual conversation and while Lirana was vague in her answers, they had not pressed her. They had yet to ask her any real questions and she didn’t know why until the door opened and she saw the tall Alpha leading Neral into the room with the Persian haired Queen behind them holding hands with two other females. Both of these females were also Alpha females with incredibly powerful female auras.

Lirana rose to her feet as Neral rushed to her and embraced her tightly at the end of the table. He looked at her, holding her at arm’s length as if inspecting her.

“Are you hurt?” He asked.

Lirana shook her head quickly. “No.” She answered. She looked at his chest and moved her hand to where he had been shot. “You were the one who was shot.” She said finally.

Neral nodded his head and covered her hand with his. “It is completely healed.” He told her. “As if it did not even happen.”

“I saw her...” Lirana began. “It was amazing Neral... her hands were glowing and...”

“Her name was Duewa and she is Hadarian.” Helen spoke now as she got to her feet and moved closer to them, both of them turning to look at her. “They are founding members of our Union and are they Healers.” Helen looked at him with a warm smile. “Lirana here has told me your name is Neral?”

Neral nodded his head warily as he glanced at Lirana and then back to Helen. “Yes.” He said in reply. “I heard you... you said you are the *Feravomir* of our people?”

Helen nodded her head. “Yes.”

“We... we read of the Oracles in our history scrolls.” Neral spoke. “You do not... you do not fit that description.”

Helen smiled now. “Were they all wearing body covering robes that fell to the floor and looked to weigh a hundred pounds?”

Neral’s eyes grew a little wider. “Yes!”

“Don’t believe everything you read.” She told him. Helen took his arm in her hands. “We are not your enemy Neral.” She said softly.

“You... your King shot me!” Neral quipped.

Helen nodded her head. “You are *anse* lucky he did not kill all of you outright.” She told him sternly which caused him to look at the floor. “He may be King but he is also an Alpha wolf who is very protective of his family and those he loves. Ever since we arrived in this far quadrant of space, people or creatures have been trying to kill us. We do not take kindly to that as I am sure you understand.” She squeezed his arm now. “Honesty is your weapon now. Prove to him and to us you are not our enemy and you have nothing to worry about.”

“Helen?” Martin’s voice echoed in the room from the other end of the table.

She looked at him and nodded ushering Neral to the chair beside Lirana. “Sit down with Lirana Neral.” She told him. “You have nothing to fear from us if you are honest. I give you my word as *Feravomir* that this is true.”

Neral nodded his head slowly and moved to the chair beside Lirana and settled into it slowly. He looked up at where Martin stood near the other end of the table and saw the three Alpha females all take chairs around him. The raven haired female behind him and the red haired female directly in front of him, while the blond female with pointed ears sat in front of her. All of them radiated power in their auras that like Lirana, he had never felt before.

Martin turned his head when the door to the CIC opened once more and he saw Jezima and Meral enter with Archer and Asa right behind them. Neral watched with surprised eyes as he went over to them and embraced them both in long, emotional hugs, kissing each of their cheeks.

Jezima relished in his embrace, feeling his power and strength not just physically but within the Etheric realm as well. She shivered in delight, for his essence and resonance spoke of her son in every way. She met his eyes and saw him staring at her adoringly. “We heard that you discovered those that were following Meral and I. We wanted to...”

Meral squeezed his arm now. “We wanted to know why.” She told him.

Martin nodded his head. “Of course.” He told them. “Grab a chair.”

Jezima and Meral looked to where Aricia and the others were and they were quickly drawn in to the embrace of Martin’s Queens and chairs were brought over to make room for them. Martin reached for Archer’s arm and they clasped forearms tightly before he leaned over and touched his forehead to Asa’s.

[*They understand?*] He asked both of them.

Archer and Asa nodded together as they erected additional Etheric shields around their conversation naturally. [*We explained it to them.*] Asa answered.

Martin nodded his head. [*Good.*] He said. [*You have no other priority. Just them.*]

Archer nodded his head. [*We understand Martin.*] He replied. [*We will not fail you.*]

[*I know you won’t.*] Martin answered. He turned back around and looked at Lirana and Neral who were staring at him. He stepped back to the table and moved up behind where Aricia sat, placing one hand on her shoulder and one hand on Anja’s shoulder.

“Let’s begin with where you got your hands on a Tasmor ship and how you acquired a Pralor Frigate and the know how to fly it. The Lycavorians here on Ventori were barely into the Space Age yet you obviously know how to control these ships.” Martin spoke to both of them now. “And know that lying to me about anything will only make things really bad for you.”

Lirana glanced at Neral and saw him nod his head. She turned back to Martin. “I can... I can only tell you what our history has been since we left Ventori.”

Martin nodded his head. “How is it that you left Ventori to begin with?”

“My mate’s father was approached by a Pralor.” Lirana spoke now. “He offered him a deal that would see several hundred of our people taken from Ventori and provided everything we ever dreamed for in exchange for working for him.”

“A Pralor?” Tobia asked now. “Are you certain?”

Lirana nodded her head. “He is a *ronnus* who hates us and treats us as if we are beneath him and...”

Martin chuckled softly stopping her words and shook his head. “That definitely sounds like someone we know so well.” He said almost casually before his eyes grew a little wider and he looked at Lirana. “Wait a minute, do you know his name? He is a fat little fuck with pudgy cheeks and a funky twitch in his eyebrows?”

Lirana nodded her head quickly, her own eyes wide. “Yes! He still to this day gives us our directions in what he wants us to do.”

Martin looked at Wayonn. “Lorendo.” He said.

Wayonn nodded his head as Lirana’s eyes grew wider in shock. “It has to be. And it would certainly explain quite a bit.”

“You know him?” Neral gasped now looking at them from his chair. “How... how is that possible?”

Martin pulled a chair from the wall closest to him and he moved it over beside Helen before lowering himself into it. “Tell me.” He told Lirana. “Tell me everything.”

“It began almost twenty thousand years ago and we...”

SPARTA'S WRATH

72 HOURS FROM EDGE OF ECHO QUADRANT

HOLDING POSITION UNTIL RENDEZVOUS WITH THE QUEENS

Whether it was the excitement from the past few days and weeks, the discovery of Laren and Ladur and the tattoos they all now wore, or simply because he desired his wives and mates as he always did, whatever the reason the six Crown Princesses of the Lycavorian Union had enjoyed an utterly debauched last ten hours that none of them would forget for a very long time. Or at least until he did it to them again.

Their lovemaking had always been intense and boundless, but in the weeks since he had dispatched Dante Moran, Androcles had been a different person in many ways. He was more humorous and not as serious outside of their bed, and he was far more playful and even more attentive in their bed. This night she and Ne'Veha had been the receivers of most of his carnal attentions to their ethereal delight, but Carisia, Caliria, Sehri and Lu'ria were by no means left out. Their cries of heavenly passion had filled their quarters each time Andro had taken them and he had taken them each twice, driving them insane with his touch and aura. Sadi had to admit that there was something simply divine about having seven sets of lips and seven tongues all exploring at once. It made for some very delicious pleasure.

Ne'Veha and her fellow Crown Princesses were now collapsed on the huge circular bed in their quarters, their limbs entwined together as they clung to each other completely spent and exhausted. Androcles on the other hand was still aroused and energized and he had taken her into the living area of their quarters and proceeded to have his way with her. Sadi could not have been a more willing participant and her soft gasps of delight and urging filled the room until finally they found themselves on the large couch just as they were.

Sadi’s naked flesh was plastered to Andro’s powerful body, his twelve and a quarter inch manhood buried within her velvety depths and causing her to shudder continuously as her climax built once more to a crescendo. His fingers danced across the flesh of her sides and back, sending electric jolts of rampant desire cascading through her non-stop. She was moving her hips atop him, simply grinding their loins together in circular motions and relishing in the shivers of pleasure that skirted outwards from her center. Her large breasts were pressed against the skin of his chest, her nipples enormously hard and responding to the sensations of his male aura flowing all around her. Sadi could feel every throbbing millimeter of his length within her, feeling his length begin to throb faster and hotter. She felt his hands come to rest on her firm ass and hold her tight and even as waves of her orgasm began to spill outwards, Sadi felt his body stiffen, his manhood become like steel inside her and then he was groaning aloud as his searing hot seed began to fill her as only he could. Sadi

whimpered in orgasmic delight as her own release followed his an instant later and she clutched at his shoulders, pulling his head to her breasts as her head lolled back, her jungle green eyes open wide and her dual wolf fangs fully extended. There were times when he could pummel her tirelessly and she wailed in unabashed delight the whole time, and then there were moments when he simply made staggering love to her barely moving a muscle. This was one of those times, and as always it was the most intense of their orgasms because of the slowness and love that they felt for each other. It is was what set Androcles apart in all of their eyes, and he never failed to show them that they belonged to him body and soul, and that he belonged to them in every way imaginable.

Sadi held a dreamy smile on her face as she felt the last of his explosions within her ebb and she pulled his head from her breasts and lowered her face to his. She nuzzled his cheek furiously, her lips parted in enchantment and she teased his earlobe with her tongue for a long moment before pulling her face back and looking into his gorgeous azure blue eyes. They were staring at her with ethereal brightness and it made Sadi shudder in happiness as she gazed into those beautiful orbs.

“*Carians pen enyla forn sarad inion* Androcles Leonidas.” She stammered still slightly out of breath.

Andro smiled at her and she saw his eyes twinkle in the light. “I love you more.” He told her softly. “All of you.”

Sadi smiled and drew her fingers across his cheek and through his goatee lovingly. “Why didn’t you tell us that you knew what vexed your father *aur enyla*.”

Andro blinked several times at her sudden question, his hands tightening on her firm ass and he pulled her closer to him as he straightened himself more on the couch. She did have a way of jumping from topic to topic at times, her mind always running circles, and that is one of the reasons why he loved her so. He shrugged his broad shoulders after a moment. “He did not have all the pieces in his head to make an informed decision.” Andro answered her. “We did not want to worry anyone until we knew for certain what we were up against.”

“And not pulling more troops from home?” Sadi asked him.

“He feels that *Tenna Deia* and Tarifa will need them.” Andro spoke softly. “To pull more troops out here would have gotten out eventually. The Netnews vermin would have reported it and our enemies back home may have acted on that information.”

“Kavalians?” Sadi asked.

Andro nodded his head. “They are one possible enemy that still could hurt us at home, yes. My father was thinking more internally than anything else I believe.”

“Internally?” Sadi questioned.

Andro stared at her beautiful face for a long moment and nodded once more. “I don’t know everything he is thinking but he believes there may be an internal organization that may cause *Tenna Deia* issues before the election.”

“Going up against your aunt would be very foolish for most anyone doing so.” Sadi said with a smile.

Andro grinned. “On this I would agree.”

“You put up far less of a protest against this plan of your mother’s than any of us thought you would.” Sadi told him softly, leaning over to caress his cheek with her own, relishing in the sensations it caused within her.

“It is kind of hard to protest when...”

Sadi laughed and put a finger to his lips stopping his words. “You dare not say that!” She said. “Do not blame this on *Enylarcopri* because you are so talented in that way! She could not help herself. None of us could.”

Andro reached up and stroked her cheek with a smile, running a finger across her lips as he did so. The way he smiled at her made Sadi shiver in delight for his features grew so much more handsome when he smiled. “For my mother’s to have even thought of doing something like this...” Andro answered. “...They had to have determined that father was not telling them everything. Or they wanted to relieve whatever stress they could from him. They know father and I will do anything to insure the survival of the Union and our people, no matter what it is. This is a means to an end *KertaGai*. Nothing more. I know that.”

“Then why would your father not pursue it?” Sadi asked him.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “He told me that he feels Emylea Daret will become part of our family very soon in the future. He does not know how but he has always been able to sense these sort of things.”

Sadi thought back briefly to that night on the island when Martin Leonidas had told her almost that very thing. She nodded her head slowly. “Your father is very unique in that way.” She said.

“He did not want the Tasmor to think he was asking them for this because of Emylea.” Andro said. “He did not think it completely through as my mother’s did, nor did he think to use the Tasmor laws in the manner they are using them. My father sees the Tasmor as we once were when my grandfather led them after the Black Day and during our time as slaves. He likes them *KertaGai*. And he does not like anyone quickly. These Tasmor have affected him in a way most do not. He likes their pride and their honor and does not care that most of their race is female or that they have females who act as our males do.”

Sadi chuckled at that and nodded her head slowly. “I think your father enjoys meeting new species regardless of what he says openly.” She told him.

Andro grinned. “I think you are right.” He agreed with her. “He says that my mothers have found fast and honored friends among the Tasmor. More so than at any time in their lives. He wants to insure that this continues and grows.”

“Namiri seems very similar.” Sadi told him. “She is very smart and proud of her people. We spoke with her for almost four hours Andro and we all found her captivating.”

“Do you think she can pull this off *KertaGai*?” Andro asked. “She will need to fool her people more than ours. My siblings we will never be able to fool, but everyone else must buy into this ruse if it is to work.”

Sadi nodded her head. “With our help, yes.” She answered confidently. “Even *DuanGai* seemed eager to do this. We all know what is at stake here my love, and we can do this.” Sadi tilted her head slightly. “Can you?”

Andro nodded his head slowly. Sadi knew that he had been against it when they first approached him. He was so much like his father when it came to hating politics and anything having to do with politic maneuvering like this. They explained to him their reasoning as well as the reasoning of his mothers and why they were suggesting it. It took them several hours but he finally caved to their rational thinking as Sadi knew he would.

“Yes.” He told her.

Sadi took his face in her hands. “You will need to act with her just as you do with us in public my love. In every way. I know that does not sit well with you because you think it is a betrayal of us. It is not, for we will be doing the same thing. We made a promise to each other that our people came first my love. We all did. This is something we need to do for our people. And Namiri does it for her people.”

“I know.” Andro told her with a nod.

“Then stop thinking and be yourself.” Sadi told him.

“Do you know why my mothers wanted us to stop and wait for them?” Andro asked.

Sadi shook her head. “No. The request came as a surprise for me as well.” She answered. “Especially after speaking with them not so long ago.”

“Well, we will just have to wait and see.” He spoke.

Sadi felt him shift on the couch and then his hands closed firmly around her ass. “What are you doing?” She asked with a smile.

“I’m going to carry my *KertaGai* to our bed and lay her among our wives and mates so that we can get some much needed sleep.” Andro said.

Sadi pressed her face to his neck as he stood up easily with her in his arms and she sighed deeply. “That sounds wonderful.” She spoke softly.

Andro smiled and made his way into their bedroom, seeing that Ne’Veha and the others were awake and looking at them. He didn’t hesitate and climbed onto the bed while Ne’Veha and Carisia made room for them. Each of them crowded around Andro and Sadi as they settled to the bed, Andro’s arms reaching back and pulling Ne’Veha and Carisia close while Lu’ria, Sehri and Caliria pressed tightly to them. Soon it was very difficult to see where one of them began and the others started, which is exactly how they all liked it. Sleep came easily to them and within moments all of them were once more sleeping soundly in the arms of those they all loved.

HADOR PRALOR DESIGNATION MOON 739

“...Any way to be certain?” Konlar asked his technician who sat at the computer console in front of him.

The female Lycavorian shook her head. “Control on any one drone is limited to say the least. Having one of them trying to access a computer station would never work.”

“You are recording all of this correct?” Edrao asked her.

“Oh yes.” She replied. “There is no way for one of the drones to penetrate the secured areas without setting off some alarm. Everything is vacuum sealed, with motion and bio-metric sensors everywhere.”

“So trying to get into the secured areas to find out what they are doing will not happen?” Konlar spoke.

“Without an access card of some kind, or the correct bio-metric reading from a senior staff member of researcher, no.” She told him. “We can’t duplicate an access card, we don’t have the equipment. And unless there are things I don’t know about, you can’t duplicate a bio-metric signal either.”

“We can send the videos to my people on Artaaya.” Edrao spoke. “They will know what this place is. And what they are doing. I will take them.”

Konlar looked at him. “What of my people on that station?” He asked.

Edrao put his hand on his shoulder. “Let us wait until we find out what it is.” He said. “Have you heard from Lirana?”

Konlar shook his head. “No.” He replied. “She was supposed to send the signal when they arrived at the Base Camp but nothing yet.”

Edrao nodded his head. “She is very skilled Konlar. Have faith in her.”

Konlar nodded his head. “I do.” He stated without doubt. “I just... I worry for her.”

“You chose well my friend.” Edrao told him and Konlar chuckled.

“I did nothing. She chose me.” He answered. “And to this day I do not know why. There were many handsome young wolves for her to seek the attentions of. Why did she pick me, old beast that I am?” Konlar looked at him. “Lirana and my children are my life now. I will do anything to protect them.”

Edrao grinned. “I know.” He replied. “And Lirana knows that and she loves you more and more each day. What about that fool Lorendo’s request?”

Konlar shook his head. “The ship that he sent us the specs to... they are not any good. We’d never be able to get them off a ship that size. We will need to do this when they get to Ventori or to Honelze. Depending on where they go.”

Edrao nodded his head. “The team we left on Honelze?”

“Still hidden and awaiting instructions.” Konlar replied. “Their last report indicated that the female Alpha with the pointy ears has returned and they seem to be going about and reinforcing the settlement’s defenses.”

Edrao looked at him. “Its defenses?” He asked softly. “That is odd.”

“I thought so as well.” Konlar told him. “It is a large settlement yes, but it has never been a strategic one. At least not to my knowledge.”

“Perhaps there are things that we do not know.” Edrao said thoughtfully.

Konlar looked at him intently. “Edrao... do you believe that there is any way Lorendo is responsible in some way for what happened on Ventori?”

Edrao met his eyes. “Why?”

“They are still our people Edrao.” Konlar said. “Those monsters... they almost destroyed my entire species!”

Edrao shook his head. “No my friend. Not all of them it seems. If these new Alphas are here now, perhaps they know...”

“Sir!” The excited voice interrupted Edrao’s words and both men turned to look at the technician who handled their COM array. “We are receiving an incoming transmission! It’s on a secure channel like I have never seen before! Origin unknown!”

Konlar and Edrao rushed over to the station. “Unknown!” Konlar demanded. “It is not Lorendo! He is the only one who has our transmit codes!”

The man shook his head. "This is not Lorendo. The level of encryption is far more than he has ever used! It's almost... I want to say it is a QCR burst but I have never seen one of those so I can't be sure."

"QCR?" Edrao spoke. "The only species capable of such a thing are Pralors. How would they know that we are...?"

The small command center was suddenly bathed in an eerie soft white glow and all of them turned as the small transmission cone opened near the side wall of the facility.

"Whatever it is, it's has penetrated our ciphers and jamming nodes as if they aren't even there!" The COM officer declared. "It is..."

There was a small flare of the white glow and then they were looking at the face and body of a tall, and very powerfully built man. A Lycavorian Konlar and Edrao knew instantly, and an Alpha wolf without a doubt. The transmission cone shimmered for several seconds and then it cleared to the point that it appeared as if he was standing in the room with them. The man was silent for several moments as the transmission cleared and then they took note of the black shoulder length hair and the deep, dark brown eyes. His skin was deeply tanned and they all saw the scar that started on his forehead and passed over his right eye and onto his cheek. It had to have come from a blade tip Konlar knew and that meant close in fighting. And if the blade had gotten that close and he still stood there, it could only mean that this man was not to be trifled with.

Konlar and Edrao stared at the transmission in stunned silence as did everyone in the room. Nothing like this had ever happened before in their history and none of them knew what to expect.

"Hi there!" The man spoke evenly. "My name is Martin Leonidas and I do believe we need to talk." He held out his hand and Konlar's eyes went wide in horror when he saw Lirana take that hand and move into the cone of the transmission.

"Lirana!" Konlar almost yelled. He glared at Martin in the transmission. "If you... if you harm her I will hunt you down and kill you slowly!" Konlar yelled at the transmission as his eyes changed and his fangs extended.

"Konlar my love..." Lirana spoke quickly now. "I am fine! We are fine!" She said urgently.

"Lirana!" Edrao gasped now.

"This is... Konlar this is King Martin Leonidas." Lirana spoke calmly. "This is... this is the King of the Lycavorian people my beloved husband and mate!"

"Lirana where is Neral?" Konlar stammered. "Your team... are they..."

He saw Lirana look up at the Alpha wolf beside her and he said something to which she nodded her head. Those dark brown eyes focused on him once more. "We need to keep this transmission short on the off chance that fat *ronnus* Lorendo or his cronies might detect it. Your wife and mate is here on Ventori, but you already knew that didn't you?"

"If you hurt her I will..." Konlar began to speak again.

"Husband no!" Lirana exclaimed.

"That's the second time you have threatened me." The Alpha Martin Leonidas spoke. "Don't let there be a third Konlar."

"Konlar listen to him!" Lirana spoke again.

"Your wife and mate and all of your people are here with us. They are safe and are being treated with the utmost honor and respect. They are guests after all." Martin spoke once more. "We have been talking, Lirana and Neral with me and my people. We have discovered some very interesting information these last few hours."

"What do you want?" Edrao asked the question now.

Martin turned his eyes on Edrao. "I am not talking to you sir, I am talking to him, so sit down and shut the *nubou* up!" Martin told him sternly his eyes changing and his dual fangs extending instantly. Konlar's eyes grew wide when he saw the vicious dual fangs, never having seen anything like it in his life. Konlar held out his hand and put it on Edrao's forearm at the Alpha's use of the ancient language, but he kept his eyes on the Alpha. Lirana stood too close to the Alpha to suit him but she did not appear in distress and he was not acting possessive of her in any way for this he would detect right away from his younger wife and mate.

"I ask that you do not hurt my people." Konlar began. "They are only there doing what I ordered them to do. They..."

The Alpha appeared confused and he shook his head. "Hurt them?" Martin interrupted his words. "I have no intention of hurting your mate or your people. They are my people as well."

"I will give you whatever you want for their safe return." Konlar told him.

Martin shook his head. "You misunderstand the purpose of this transmission Konlar." He spoke evenly. "I don't want anything for their return. They are in no danger and they are under the protection of my family."

Konlar blinked several times. "I don't... I don't understand."

Martin nodded his head. "That is why I would like for you to get on board your Pralor Frigate and come here." Martin said. "Tell no one where you are going and for sure don't let that slobbering fool Lorendo know what you are up to. We have some things to discuss and I would prefer to do it in person."

"What?" Konlar gasped.

Martin nodded. "You may bring whoever you like and you can come armed if you wish. I will have people as well however. We have mutual interests Konlar and one very bad and very smart mutual enemy."

"Enemy?" Konlar asked hesitantly.

"You don't honestly believe that you could have abducted Murano and my son's wife and mate do you?" Martin asked him.

Konlar glanced at Lirana quickly and back to Martin. "Mate?" He stammered.

Martin nodded his head. "Lorendo has tasked you with killing the brother of the Pralor Chief Elder and taking his daughter." He spoke. "What he failed to tell you is that the Chief Elder's brother is a Pralor Praetorian and that is not something you would have been able to do. He also failed to tell you that Delnash's daughter is actually his brother Murano's daughter and she is now the wife and mate to my son Deion." Martin grinned when he saw Konlar's eyes grow wide in disbelief.

"Lorendo doesn't actually know that yet, so if you could keep that to yourself that would be cool." Martin spoke almost happily. "He was sending you in blind Konlar. Now, the two most important things that he forgot to tell you are that Murano and Mari are with my oldest son Androcles, his siblings and roughly five hundred warships and upwards of a hundred thousand of my son's troops. He also forgot to mention that you would not have gotten within a thousand meters of Murano or Mari without either one of my children detecting you or one of those thousands of different troops. He was sending you on a suicide mission Konlar. He knew it too. He's a self-serving *tukannupae* who doesn't care who he hurts in order to get his way. "

Konlar looked at a wide eyed Edrao and then back to Martin with an equally shocked expression.

"Yeah, I figured he didn't tell you that." Martin said shaking his head. "Come here to Ventori Konlar. I didn't come all the way across the galaxy to kill my own people. I came out here looking for them. Come to Ventori so that we can talk. You will find I am not the man I'm sure Lorendo told you I am."

"And if I do not?" Konlar spoke.

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. "That is your choice, but that will also mean you will not see your wife and mate for some time. Your people will remain here with us for their protection. And it will also not stop me from blowing that evil, god forsaken station in orbit above you to tiny fucking pieces."

"Konlar!" Lirana spoke now. "My love please. I am not under duress. I speak to you as your wife and mate and the man I love with all that I am. Come here. Please."

"You are an Alpha!" Konlar snapped. "I have your word no harm will come to her or my people?"

Martin nodded his head without hesitation. "On that you have my word." He told him. "Though I can't guarantee that they won't become addicted to our food." He said with a smile as his eyes and fangs changed back to normal. "Your wife and mate has been eating me out of house and home of our bread."

Konlar saw Lirana blush almost immediately and he knew instantly that she was in no danger. Her reaction to the Alpha's comment was a shy smile and he had seen her make this same expression on many occasions.

"I can be to your location in eighteen hours." Konlar spoke.

Martin nodded his head immediately. "Eighteen hours it is." He said moving closer to the transmission and appearing to move closer to Konlar in the room. "I will protect your people as I would protect my own. There is far more going on here than you know Konlar and I would much rather we be allies than enemies. For the sake of our people's future. All of our people."

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE

Answers.

To say that the answers to so many questions came the longer Lirana and Neral spoke would have been the understatement of the millennia. For Martin Leonidas, they were answers to questions he had asked for many more years than he could remember. Thirty minutes after Lirana had begun speaking he had called Arzoal to hear what Lirana was saying. After a brief period where Lirana and Neral had scrambled back in utter fear at the size of the monster that appeared in front of them when the outer wall lowered to allow Arzoal to participate, Lirana began to speak again. Thirty minutes after that, Martin had initiated a priority QCR COM link with Delnash on Artaaya and then he too was involved in what they were hearing. They let Lirana and Neral continue for another two hours before both of them stopped and looked around the room at everyone who had remained silent up until now.

“By the Ancients within the Rift of Time...” Delnash finally muttered to himself as he sat back in the chair he was sitting in on Artaaya. He was in his office and Two seven had insured the room was secure.

Martin had been pacing the room behind Aricia, Anja and For'mya for the last thirty minutes as Lirana spoke and he stopped now and nodded his head. He looked at Lirana and Neral both.

“You are certain of everything you have told us?” Martin asked them.

Lirana nodded her head quickly. “Yes. Edrao has maintained detailed records of every single communications this man Lorendo has made since Konlar’s father lead our people. He does not know of course, for he forbid us to do such a thing. He did not know about Edrao and the other Pralor people who joined our pack in the beginning. Edrao made sure of this.”

“He was the one in the transmission with your mate?” Aricia asked.

Lirana nodded her head. “Yes. I noticed his expression when you said what you did to him. He will not be happy.”

“He will get over it.” Wayonn spoke before Martin answered. “This Edrao has files on everything?”

“Only he or Konlar can access them, but yes.” Lirana answered.

“Even concerning my ship child?” Arzoal asked from where she rested on the ground.

Lirana nodded quickly. The huge dragon had asked several questions as she was speaking and her voice was so soothing and warm that it put Lirana at ease almost immediately. That a creature of such size and power had such a beautiful voice amazed her. “Yes. We do not know exactly what he used the ship for prior to meeting Konlar’s father here on Ventori but Edrao is certain he had the ships for several hundred years at least before coming to find us.”

Arzoal’s massive head turned to look at Martin, but he was already gazing at her. Of all those in the room only Martin, his Queens and Helen knew the complete story and the results of that ship not returning to Elear when it had been programmed to. Arzoal’s actions when the ship did not return had set in motion of chain of events that had cost thousands of dragons their lives. She no longer carried that shame, Helen, Martin and Androcles insuring they saw to that. She had done what she needed to do in order for her species to survive.

“Probably using it to set up his little empire.” Danny spoke now. “No record of Arzoal’s ship still existed. It had been reported lost. No one would be looking for it and no one would question a Pralor ship out here when they first arrived.”

“True enough.” Martin echoed his words.

“Lycavorians are extremely adaptable and can endure far more than most species.” Helen said. “He knew those on Ventori existed so that means he had records going back from when the Pralors used us as a seed Species. He knew they were here.”

“And from what I understand Lorendo was one of the main supporters of settling on Artaaya.” Tobia spoke.

“Yes.” Delnash nodded his head.

“It also means he may have records dating back to before the Pralor Empire fell.” Aricia said now. “Records that could be used now. History Scrolls, anything.”

“He was part of the Science Convocation.” Tobia added nodding her head. “He would have had access to such things.”

“Lirana, how long has that facility been in orbit on Hador?” Martin asked.

“As long as I have been alive.” Lirana answered.

“It was finished when I was a boy King Leonidas.” Neral added now looking at him. “I am almost nine thousand years old. I remember my own father working in orbit with thousands of others to build it.”

“So he had someplace else he was working on the Svorag virus before having the station built.” Martin said. “They began appearing almost twenty thousand years ago according to Murano and others. He was working out of somewhere else then.”

“How many of your people did he take from Ventori?” Helen asked.

“At first we thought it was just those from Konlar’s pack.” Lirana answered. “We did not discover until later that he took thousands of our people.”

Neral nodded his head. “Single packs were spread out across the planet.” He said calmly. Neral had deduced very quickly, just as Lirana had, that these Lycavorian Alphas were unlike anything that they had read about as children growing up. Their auras radiated power and so much confidence, yet not once were they looked down upon in any way. Even the King treated Lirana with the utmost respect and he had even apologized for shooting him. A sincere apology that Neral had never expected. These actions endeared these alphas to him in a way that insured his honesty and hope going forward. “Before we began building the cities, many packs chose to remain solitary and alone King Leonidas. He could have done this easily. It was Konlar’s father Joreg who united all of us once we were relocated to Hador. That is where our schooling began for the Pralor equipment.”

Martin looked at him. “I think we can dispense with the King *rensibfla* while we are all together.” Martin told him. “It seems kind of out of place don’t you think?”

Neral looked at him for a long moment, a smile spreading across his face. “Yes I suppose it does,” he said.

“Lirana do you know how many people are on this station in orbit?” Martin asked.

“Edrao estimates several thousand at least.” Lirana answered.

“We still need the original location of where he began the work on the Svorag virus. And if it is still active.” Martin said. “Would the station have this information?”

Neral met his eyes. “It is possible.” He answered. “We are not allowed access to the inner station. Only the cargo bays in order to offload supplies and food for those working there. Over the years many of our people did not return and they were never seen from again.”

“He kept them to use as test subjects no doubt.” Anja spoke again. “That might explain what happen to the Alphas that were among the Lycavorians on Ventori when they first arrived here.”

Martin looked at her. “Red?”

Anja turned in her chair to look at him. “Think about it Lover.” She said. “The Svorag that jumped onto our ship on Twelve Alpha. It was a turned female Pralor. A turned Alpha female Martin.”

Martin’s eyes grew a little wider. “You didn’t say anything about that.” He gasped.

Anja shook her head. “I didn’t think it mattered up until right now.” She told him.

“Anja, Lorendo didn’t start dealing with the Lycavorians on Ventori until roughly twenty thousand years ago.” Helen spoke now. “Nalmos and now Lirana say the Alphas disappeared long before that.”

Anja looked at her and nodded. “That is true, but Lorendo created this virus. And it infected a turned Pralor Alpha female. That tells me he knows where the Alphas from Ventori are at the very least. And he has dealt with them. If not the Alphas from Ventori then some other Alpha Pack. How else would they have come in contact with the Svorag virus? And they need to be relatively close. Within this quadrant somewhere at least.”

“Could he have turned them all Anja?” Martin asked her with some awe in his voice.

Anja met his eyes. “I don’t know Lover.” She answered. “The Svorag we had on our ship was a turned Pralor and she was turned by an Alpha. She had to have been part of whatever team had interaction with them long enough for an Alpha to take her as his mate and turn her. That implies that Lorendo knows where another colony of Lycavorians exist. Quite possibly the Alphas that supposedly disappeared from Ventori.”

“*Carians* this man is like a cockroach.” For'mya muttered to no one in particular. “He infects everything he touches.”

It was Delnash who leaned forward now. “He pulled Arzoal’s ship off its pre-programmed course costing how many dragon lives! He used it to transport these Beta wolves off Ventori, interfering in their natural course of evolution! Then he used them as uninterrupted slave labor to do his bidding so that his hands could remain clean!” Delnash was wound up and all of them could see it. Even Tobia had never seen him so angry in all her years of knowing him. “I will see him taken into custody and punished like no other Pralor in the history of our people! I will...!”

“No!” Anja declared loudly as everyone turned to look at her.

“Anja he needs to be...” For'mya began to speak as she turned to look at her with wide eyes.

“He needs to answer for his crimes I know!” Anja declared. “All of them, in the worst possible way, but if we act too soon we will never know what else he has done!” Anja spoke. “What other species he has interacted with or used as test subjects! We need to find out!”

“Red...” Martin spoke putting his hand on her shoulder.

Anja turned her head to look at him. “Lover this is too important!” Anja protested. “We can’t just...”

“I agree with you.” Martin told her meeting her eyes.

Anja’s jade green orbs grew a little wider. “You do?” She asked stunned.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.” He spoke.

“Martin we need to act now!” Delnash protested.

“Anja is right.” Martin said firmly. “This *ronnus* made the Svorag virus! He has infected thousands of Pralors, Lycavorians and Tasmor alike! Thanks to Lirana here we know where the main orbital facility is, but how many other creature labs does he have out there? How many other species that we have not seen has he interacted with, or used as test subjects just like Anja says! So we squash out the Svorag here, and that is a big if, but if we do, what happens ten years down the road when more pop up! Or a hundred years! I will not risk everything we can rebuild here, everything that we can build together now on the hope that we discover everything! No... when the time is right, when we have reviewed these files that Lirana’s mate has, then we will act. Then we will take him.”

“He will not tell us anything willingly *fervon*.” Danny added. “You know that.”

“Oh, he will talk.” Martin assured them.

“How do you know this?” Delnash demanded.

Helen met Martin’s eyes from across the room where she now stood beside her Bonded Sister. “Because he is going to use drugs.” Helen spoke. “And he is going to give Lorendo to the Drow for questioning aren’t you?”

Martin met her eyes. “Yes.”

Helen nodded her head without hesitation. “I approve.”

“Who are... who are these Drow?” Delnash asked.

“The dark skinned elves!” Perlyea exclaimed from the side. “Like Daniel Simpson’s woman. With the white hair!”

“They will get the answers for us?” Delnash asked now. “These Drow?”

It was Wayonn who nodded his head now. “Oh yes. They will get the answers we seek.”

“How do you know this for sure?” Saydia spoke for the first time. “If what this young woman has said is true, he is responsible for the deaths of my people. They will demand justice be served Martin.”

“It will be served.” Martin snarled softly. “It will be served.” He looked at her. “Do you trust me Saydia Daret?”

Saydia was surprised by the question but all she had to do was look at where Perlyea and Aduna stood on the side of the room; all she had to do was look at where Anja and Tobia sat. All she had to do was think about what they had discovered as a people in the last week alone between the Tasmor and the Lycavorians. The values and ideals that they shared.

Saydia returned her gaze to Martin. “Yes.” She answered confidently.

Martin looked at Arzoal. “Lorendo will pay Arzoal. I give you my word he will pay for everything he has done. I promise he will answer for everything Delnash. We need to be smart about this however. There is too much at stake.”

Arzoal bowed her massive head slightly to Martin. “You are one of four Talon Guardians of our species Martin Leonidas.” She told him. “You and your son I trust without question or reluctance. Your word is your bond to us. You and your son. You have never broken your promise and nor has Androcles and if you say he will face your justice than I can be patient.”

Martin nodded his head to her and looked at Delnash in the transmission. “Chief Elder Delnash?”

“You ask much of me Martin.” Delnash spoke. “If what Lirana has told us is true, and I for one have no reason to doubt her word, not after what we already suspected, he is responsible for attempted genocide and so many more crimes that I cannot begin to imagine.”

“You’ll get no argument from me there sir.” Martin spoke.

Delnash took a deep breath and slowly nodded his head. “Swear to me Martin.” Delnash spoke looking at him. “Swear to me that he will not be the cause of another purge of my people. Your people.”

Martin took a breath. “I...”

“Swear to us my grandson.” Jezima’s voice rose in the room now and Martin turned to see her rise from her chair. “Swear to your Aunt and I as you swear to the Chief Elder, swear that you will not allow him to do what my son did. Swear to me that you will do what must be done as your grandfather did. As my son did, no matter how much it weighs on your heart and no matter what you have to do.”

Martin held her gaze for a long moment and he felt Aricia reach up and take his hand to squeeze it. He glanced down at her beautiful face and saw her nod her head. He cut his eyes to both Anja and For’mya and saw them mimic her action and he lifted his head back up to look at Jezima, Meral now standing and holding her mother’s arm tightly in support and confidence.

“I swear to all of you in this room now, on the lives of my children, Lorendo will face justice for what we know he has done.” Martin spoke the words slowly. “And it will be neither swift nor painless. On that you have my oath as King, as a Praetorian and as a Spartan.”

Wayonn nodded his head as he felt his wolf blood stir and he stepped closer to the table. “Then we will speak of it no more.” He said. “We need to focus on our tasks ahead now. This information will change how we will do things and we definitely need to put a plan together before Androcles arrives.”

“Because he has the troops?” Delnash asked from within the transmission.

Wayonn shook his head. “No. Because when he arrives here and discovers what Lorendo has been doing and what he has done to dragons, even Martin will be hard pressed to hold him in check.”

“This is true.” Arzoal echoed. “Now that we know what the cause of his affinity for my kind and theirs for him stems from, he will wish to act. And this is not something we want to happen. Not yet.”

“Why?” Saydia asked.

Martin looked at her. “Because for what he has done, my son will light fire to the stars until Lorendo is dead. And not just dead, but in lots of little pieces dead.”

“Is this not the ultimate goal?” Saydia pressed.

Aricia looked at her. “You will see for yourself when you meet him Saydia, but our son Androcles is unique in many ways.” She explained. “He loves his family without doubt or remorse and he...”

“If you are a friend to us, to our family, to our people, then Andro will go out of his way to help you in any way he can, including fighting beside you.” Martin told her. “If you happen to be on the wrong end of that emotion...” Martin lifted his hand and waggled it back and forth. “Not so much.”

“Meaning?” Perlyea asked now.

“Meaning that if you think I am an ugly, scary bastard...” Martin smiled now. “Get on the wrong side of my son Androcles and his siblings and the definition of frightening takes on a whole new level of meaning.”

“Do they even make a word for that?” Danny asked him with a small grin.

Wayonn nodded his head. “*Jorbhe*.” He said. “*Jorbhe*.”

VENTORI 0330 HOURS

Discovery Base was quiet.

Very few men and women moved around at night except for the ever present security that now covered the entire sprawling base. Thankfully it was dark enough near the lake's edge for Martin to sit and contemplate many things. He wore only his fatigue pants and boots, his upper body bare to the night sky and cool breeze. His dark eyes searched the stars above guidance. So many things were happening at once and on nights like these Martin would find a spot to be alone and work things out in his head. The stars soothed him in a way that the warm bodies of his wives and mates could not. Torma was with him in his mind, but he rested beside his beloved Isheeni in the large open air shelter where all of the dragons stayed. Martin smelled them long before they made their way to where he was, perhaps taking a meandering path to his location in order for him to focus his thoughts better.

He looked up to his left when Helen settled to the ground beside him and Arzoal just on her opposite side. She moved her powerful body with grace and precision considering her massive size but as with all dragons in an unknown area, she kept her talons bunched under her body in case she had to move quickly. Martin smiled as Helen sat beside him and held out the mug of Aricia's coffee she had in one hand while sipping the mug she held in the other. Since she had stopped using her Etheric power to disguise her features as that of a much older woman, her true beauty had begun to shine through more and more. She was barely four thousand years old and in Lycavorian terms she could still be considered a child, though no one in their right mind would ever call her that.

"We thought this might help." Helen told him finally.

Martin smiled and nodded his head as he sipped the steaming mug of coffee. "And it does." He told her.

They sat in silence for a long time simply staring at the stars, Spartan Praetorian and Mage, positions that neither of them had ever envisioned they would hold not so very long ago. Helen knew he would speak when he was ready and she simply enjoyed the feel of his aura and confidence within the Etheric realm as she always did. There was something so very different about this man, something that could not be explained in simple words. To this very day it was impossible to illuminate or to even comprehend what it was that drove so many to him to do his bidding. Trillions of men and women alike, from so many different species, they would die for him with but a single uttered word. They would die for him because they knew that he would stand with them to the bitter end no matter the result. Only deeds and actions could inspire such fanatical loyalty from so many Helen knew, and though he hated it to the extreme, Helen knew Martin was aware of this. He followed his father's words with everything that he did. Fight with your head, but lead with your heart. It was this same, almost simple mentality that he instilled in his children every single day as they grew and this action garnered even more loyalty to him. To his family. She knew those who served with Androcles practically worshiped him. They would follow him to the gates of whatever hell awaited them and they would do so willingly for they believed in him as they believed in his father. This ability, though they knew not how it came to be, it came from Martin Leonidas. It came from within him, radiated from him naturally and Helen knew that there were times when Martin feared it. He had grown so much since the day she had first met him in Sparta, and there was much growing still yet to come she knew.

"So what do we do?" Helen asked him finally as she brought her own mug to her lips and sipped her coffee.

Martin glanced at her. "That's a pretty open ended question Helen." He said.

Helen nodded in agreement. "It certainly is." She answered.

"Do you ever regret that day I first came to Sparta?" Martin asked her turning to look at her.

Helen shook her head without the slightest bit of hesitation. "Not for one moment since." She told him meeting his gaze. "Not for one moment since."

Martin looked up over her shoulder at Arzoal, her flame colored eyes staring down on him intently. "Arzoal?"

Arzoal blinked several times and then lowered her head closer to Helen's shoulder so that their faces were only inches apart. "Does the word "never" cover it?" She answered.

Martin chuckled softly and nodded his head. "Yes, I suppose it does." He told her with a smile. "Though I would have to say that both of you are slightly *malda* for the answers you gave."

Helen smiled. "Well... there is that to consider." She said with a twinkle in her eyes.

Martin turned back and looked at the stars once more. “We need to know what he has done.” Martin said. “Anja is right and she is a hell of a lot smarter than me. We need to know what he has done and how far his reach extends. It’s the only way that we can truly roll up everything he has put his filthy hands on.”

“You left very quickly after speaking with Lirana’s young husband and mate.” Arzoal commented. “And you said nothing to no one.”

Martin nodded his head. “I needed to work things out in my own head.” He replied. “I can only listen to people blither and blather for so long.”

“I assume then that you know Aricia and the others leave in a few hours to meet with Androcles.” Helen spoke. “You know why they are taking the Tasmor Quorum?”

Martin nodded and sipped his coffee once more. “Andro has already agreed according to Sadi and his wives and mates. She speaks for all of them just as Aricia does.”

“He agreed to this Martin?” Arzoal asked the tone of her voice with an inflection of surprise.

“I was surprised too.” He said.

“You shouldn’t be,” Helen told him. “His duty to our people and our Union is absolute. Just as yours is. He learned it from you, so you should not be surprised. Now tell us what you feel Martin.”

“They are part of our future Helen.” Martin said. “The Tasmor. Namiri. Her mother. All of them. My instincts tell me to pull them tight and give them as much help and protection as I can. That we will need them in the future.”

“And you told Andro this?” Arzoal asked softly.

Martin nodded his head. “Why do you think he agreed to this scheme of his mother’s?” He answered. “He loves them all but this is not something he would have agreed to no matter who they were.”

“Namiri is going to become a wife to him Martin.” Helen said.

Martin nodded. “For now.” He told her. “She is not meant for Andro and the others though. But she will have our name for the rest of her life.”

“Someone in our family?” Arzoal asked.

Martin nodded again. “I can’t see who clearly, but yes. She’s tough and smart, just like her mother and she knows it is just a role. Just as Andro and Sadi and the others do.”

“This is being done to get the Tasmor to help us with Honelze isn’t it?” Helen asked.

“In part, yes.” Martin explained. “Saydia offered it to us before we ever came up with the idea. I think she sees that their future lies with us. With the Union. And she will do whatever she needs to in order to see that happen.”

“I have noticed that the Tasmor woman Perlyea has become very close with Anja, Aricia and For'mya in a very short time.” Arzoal commented evenly. “It is a very strong attraction but there is something else that goes far deeper.”

Martin nodded in agreement. “I’ve noticed that too. Anja, For'mya and Aricia as well. They are not shying away from it as they have in the past. I encouraged them to embrace it and this time I think they will. The physical attraction is a small part of it, but I believe they all feel a deeper connection.”

Helen reached out and put her hand on his thick forearm. “Martin Leonidas you are talking to us now.” She said gently. “What weighs on your mind?”

Martin met her gaze. “The unknown.” He replied.

“Are you not the one who lives by the saying never to fear the unknown?” Helen asked with a smile.

Martin nodded his head. “The unknown that we know.” He said. “What worries me is the unknown that we don’t know.”

Helen and Arzoal both blinked at that statement. “Martin that does not make any sense.” Helen finally said.

“But in a way it does.” Arzoal spoke.

Martin nodded once more. “We know what Lorendo is capable of based on what we know he has done and what we suspect he has done.” He explained. “What we don’t know is what he has caused to happen based on his actions. That is what worries me?”

“Cause and effect.” Helen muttered.

Martin nodded. "He has directly influenced and changed the course of evolution for three species that we know of." Martin said. "What we don't know is how many has he changed that may not even have been directly affected by his actions."

"You are speaking of the Alphas from Ventori aren't you Martin?" Arzoal asked.

"Part of it, yes. What Anja said got me to thinking." Martin continued with a nod. "We don't know if he had anything to do with that or if it was just some sort of natural process of evolution in this quadrant of space. What I do know is that we are a very hard species to kill and we are not talking about a few dozen here. We are talking about an entire caste of Alpha wolves Helen. Our people. Where did they go? How did they die? Did they die?"

Helen was silent for a long moment and finally nodded her head slowly. "Yes, I see what you mean." She stated.

"Could these answers be found in what we will discover in the future?" Arzoal asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Yes, they could be." He answered. "Something tells me that we won't like those answers if we get them."

Helen looked at him intently. "I do not like it when you play the harbinger of doom." She said softly. "When you do such a thing Martin Leonidas, it is far too ominous."

Martin chuckled gently and nodded his head. "Tell me about it." He said. "It seems like that whenever I find an answer to a question, that answer only gives me more questions."

Has it not always been this way for us? Torma's deep voice echoed in their minds now and they turned as his huge body glided gracefully out of the darkness and he settled to the cool grass behind Martin.

Martin jerked his thumb back at Torma. "The voice of reason." He spoke sarcastically.

Torma's massive head, clearly twice as large as Martin's upper body, moved forward to butt him in the shoulder causing him to almost drop his coffee. *One of us has to be reasonable.* Torma spoke.

"Hey! Careful!" Martin exclaimed balancing the mug in one hand while shoving against Torma's massive head with the other. "This stuff is like the nectar of the gods ok!"

Helen and Arzoal smiled at their antics. Twenty plus years they had been doing such things and it never ceased to cause others to smile. Martin Leonidas held nothing back from only three people in the universe, things that he did not share with even his wives and mates or her, and those three individuals were his true brothers in Daniel Simpson and Torma and his son Androcles.

"So where does that leave us?" Helen asked him.

I believe Anuk says it best Feravomir. Torma answered. *Flying by the seat of our pants hoping our asses don't catch fire and drop out along the way.*

Even Helen could not contain the laughter that burst forth and it felt very good to say the least. Helen gripped Martin's arm and squeezed as her laughter softened. "Oh my...!" She gasped aloud. "I do believe he has been associating with you for far too long." She declared.

Martin grinned. "Yeah. We get that a lot." He said. He leaned back against Torma's foreleg which was just behind him, knowing that it would be there. "We'll find out some things once we take down Lorendo's floating nightmare show." He spoke finally.

"We may be able to impart more answers to your question if you will allow us." The voice spoke from behind them.

Consummate soldier that he was, Martin Leonidas was moving long before the last words were spoken, his Shi Viska flaring into existence as he spun in the direction of the voice. Torma was half a second behind him, his wings flaring and his muzzle turning back in a snarl. Helen and Arzoal were slower on the uptake of what was happening, but hearing the voice and not detecting any scent moving up on them could only mean trouble and both of them were moving three seconds after Martin had risen to his feet, Helen's own Shi Viska appearing from within Flatspace and Arzoal rearing back her massive wing to snap it forward in a killing blow.

Martin stared at the glowing Etheric projection in front of him over the expanse of his Shi Viska, his dark brown eyes wide. The size of the Etheric projection of the dragon was immense, a good one and a half times Torma's substantial size, but it was the image of the man that froze Martin Leonidas in his spot. There was simply no mistaking who it could have been, at least not for Martin.

The image of Sumar moved closer to Martin in the cool night air and held a wide smile on his face and what, astonishingly looked like tears, staining his cheeks.

“You do not recognize your own blood Martin my boy.” Sumar spoke with the same dark brown eyes that were one of Martin’s most prominent features. “I know Androcles told you that we spoke.”

“Grandfather!” Martin gasped aloud unable to fully believe that this apparition in front of him was actually the man who had started it all. “Grandfather Sumar?”

Sumar chuckled. “That’s not exactly the reaction I expected. You are usually more colorful.”

“Dip me in *sibfla* and call me *beven*.” Helen muttered aloud as she stared at him with eyes that did not appear to fit on her face they were so wide.

The Etheric projection of Sumar looked at her and burst out in uncontrollable laughter, joined in a second later by the deep rumbling of Dadrien just behind him. He turned back to look at Martin.

“Now that is what I expected from you!” He announced to Martin. “Close your mouth boy... we have a lot to talk about!”

“...She loves you.” Sumar spoke softly. “You know that don’t you?”

Martin cut his eyes from where they were watching Helen and Arzoal recede into the distance chatting away like school girls. He turned his head back to look at the Etheric image of his blood grandfather ancestor. The grandfather to his own father. “Excuse me?” He stammered.

“Helen.” Sumar spoke again. “She loves you.”

Martin shifted on his feet. “Grandfather we are not...”

Sumar chuckled. “Not in that way boy!” He told him. “But she does love you.”

Martin glanced back and saw her small form easily and he nodded his head. “And I love her.” He replied.

Sumar’s image nodded. “Good. As Praetorian and Mage should.” He responded.

“You sent them away.” Martin said turning back once more to look at him. “Why?”

“It is time that we spoke with you and Torma alone.” Dadrien answered that question.

“What happened to my sons?” Martin asked them.

“As we told Androcles, we don’t truly know how it came to be.” Sumar answered him. “Only that it did and we sensed it within you first.”

“Me?” Martin said. “I don’t have dragon DNA in my body like they do! How could you have sensed it from me?”

“We sensed it the moment Androcles was conceived. The moment Elynth was conceived in her egg with Lycavorian blood in her veins.” Dadrien told them. “You do realize they were conceived within days of each other. The moment Andro was conceived in Aricia’s womb he reached for Elynth and found her. We don’t know how it came to be Martin; only that it was.”

“It came as a surprise to us as well.” Sumar continued. “How the gene came to be in you we do not know. Only that it was carried by you and then passed to your son. You no longer have the gene, which is rather confusing as well. We don’t usually lose DNA in such a way.”

“And Dorian?”

Sumar nodded his head. “It happened in the same way. We felt it briefly in you as the conduit and then it was gone. Passed to Dorian. We felt it in Ryner and Laren and Ladur. All of them. As we told Androcles, we cannot explain it, for even we do not comprehend it. You must understand Martin, this was something that neither Dadrien nor I ever considered until after we had been together for centuries. It was only something that we spoke of once and that was only casually.”

“But it happened!” Martin hissed.

Sumar nodded his head slowly. “The hand of destiny or fate we do not know. But yes, it happened.”

“And no one heard you?” Martin asked.

Sumar smiled and looked at Dadrien. “I assure you... we have been quite alone for some time.” Dadrien answered.

“And you don’t know where or how. Yeah I got that part. *Sibfla*... this stuff gives me a frigging headache!” Martin said nodding his head.

“And you have guided my daughter and Androcles Dadrien?” Torma asked now.

Dadrien shook his head. “Not guided no. From the moment Androcles reached for her they have been of one mind. Just as Dorian and Ryner are, just as Laren and Ladur are. All of their choices have been their own. We have whispered to them in a sense, within the fabric of the Etheric realm, whenever they were torn. But we have never directly influenced them. Their connection makes that impossible. Just as it does for you and Martin. It runs too deep, and is far too intertwined. That is a power even Sumar and I combined could never hope to alter or influence.”

“That power, that connection, it was triggered by Isheeni and Aricia’s connection within the Etheric realm, but the power and depth comes from you two.” Sumar said.

Martin looked at him. “Us?”

Sumar nodded his head. “Laren called you The First. The center from which all else will evolve.”

“I don’t suppose you could explain that?” Martin asked him.

Sumar smiled and motioned with his hand along the shore of the lake. “Walk with us.” He said.

Martin looked at him. “You know grandfather, whenever someone has asked me to walk with them, they usually tell me a whole bunch of stuff that I either ain’t going to like or they tell me I need to kill someone.”

Sumar met his eyes. “Indulge us grandson.” He said as he began to walk.

Martin glanced at Torma who lifted his wings in a shrug and then they began to follow. Sumar waited until they caught up to them before he began speaking.

“You have always believed in a higher power haven’t you Martin?” Sumar asked.

Martin nodded his head. “For the most part, yes.” He answered.

Sumar met his eyes. “And so do I. As the Darastrixi do, and almost every known species in the universe.”

“So you believe this higher power is at work here?” Martin asked.

“In a manner of speaking yes.” Sumar told him. “It is something we do not understand or comprehend. This force, this higher power is directing events. Shaping them. At least where it concerns us.”

“Why?” Martin asked.

“That is a question both Dadrien and I have asked many times through the course of our lives.” Sumar answered. “How is it that he and I were brought together when over a million years separated our life experiences?”

“How is it that Arzoal chose the one dragon egg among the thousands in that chamber to transfer her consciousness to?” Dadrien asked. “The single egg in that chamber that was the last of my physical descendants?”

Martin’s eyes flew open and he looked at Dadrien. “Your descendant!”

“I did have children Martin.” Dadrien spoke with some humor. “One hundred and forty-three to be exact. One of them was chosen for the Seed mission by the Pralors that brought the Darastrixi to Elear. She was killed by the denizens of that world, but her legacy was the single egg that Arzoal chose.”

“Why didn’t you... why not tell her?” Torma gasped now.

Dadrien shook his head. “It is not my place.” He told them. “She will discover this in due time, at a moment where she will need to make the single most important decision of her life as a Pralor and then as a Darastrixi. Until that time she cannot be distracted and I ask that you do not tell her.”

“Dadrien that...” Torma began once more.

Dadrien shook his head. “No.” He spoke more firmly. “It must be this way Torma. It must be this way in order for the chaos that now grips the Darastrixi to be washed away. Only Arzoal can do this. It also means that your mate and your daughter are my descendants Torma.” Darien looked at him. “And now you must see this and what this means.”

Martin looked at Sumar with wide eyes. “Aricia and Isheeni. Androcles and Elynth.”

Sumar nodded his head. “The bloodlines of the two most feared enemies the Scourge have ever known brought together as one.”

“And you believe...?” Martin asked the question.

Sumar nodded his head. “Whatever the higher power, as we believe it to be, it is affecting events all around us, and it is doing so for a reason.”

“Then how could they...”

“Be gods?” Sumar finished his sentence. “Why not?” He asked his own question. “Who is to say that whatever higher power it may be, who is to say that they are not gods and thus directing events in order to face evil head on.”

“That is assuming that whatever higher power this is, that they are benevolent.” Martin commented.

“Or are they simply maintaining a balance within a fragile universe in order to keep the universe moving forward?” Sumar finished once more. “There is no clear answer, but there are many questions my grandson. Questions that Dadrien and I have been asking for millennia.”

“With no answers.” Torma spoke.

Dadrien nodded his massive head. “With no answers.”

Martin chuckled and shook his head. “Answers have been eluding me for some time.” He stated. “Answers to a whole lot of questions.”

“Indeed.” Sumar told him.

“The tattoos that Androcles, Dorian and Laren now wear?” Martin spoke looking at him.

“Sarlana is correct.” Sumar told him. “They are a key.”

“To what?” Martin asked.

“They are a key to something that Dadrien and I both have left for you. We recognized the markings.” Sumar told him. “But it is up to you to find it Martin.”

“Grandfather, I don’t have time for games.” Martin said rather testily.

“Oh it is not a game my boy...” Sumar answered not taking offense. “We simply cannot remember.”

“What?” Martin gasped.

Sumar nodded his head even as Dadrien answered. “It is the truth Martin.” Dadrien said. “Whatever it is, we no longer have the memories of what or where to provide to you. They have been removed. Perhaps as a means to keep this secret safe. The tattoos that Andro, Dorian and Laren now bear on their bodies provide the route and key.”

“So this higher power took it away from you?” Martin asked.

Sumar nodded his head. “It would appear so. Or we may have relinquished them willing. We do not know, hence why we still have so many questions that we cannot answer.”

“Well, that is just plain fucking stupid!” Martin hissed.

Sumar laughed now. “And we certainly agree, though we would have been a tad tamer in our description of it.”

“Why do something like that?” Martin asked.

“The only reasons that we can find sense in, is that you were not ready. That none of you were ready and only the journey to this knowledge will make you ready.” Sumar spoke. “That it is not the time for you to discover these things. Perhaps because there is still so much we do not know.”

Torma shook his huge head and blinked his golden eyes. “Now my head is beginning to hurt.” He stated aloud causing Dadrien to laugh.

“Now you know what we have felt for centuries as we have tried to decipher these very things.” Dadrien told him.

Martin shook his head. “How did you... how did you keep from going *malda*?”

Sumar looked at him and smiled warmly. “We focused on you. And then Androcles and Laren when they were born. And finally Dorian.” He told him. “When Dadrien and I first came together we could feel that you were the center of it all and now that feeling within is even more evident to us. Everything that is happening now, everything that will happen, it revolves around you and moves outward to swirl around Androcles, Dorian and Laren and those they are bound to. Within the Etheric realm that all of you inhabit are the answers to it all.”

Martin looked at his Etheric projection. “Really grandfather... no pressure. No pressure at all.” He said causing Sumar to smile. “Lorendo and these Svorag are going to be bad enough and now...”

“Lorendo is a worm!” Sumar hissed with an obvious vehemence in his tone. “The man has always been a worm and that will never change. He has never forgiven me for not saving his son all those years ago, and no doubt he took great joy in sabotaging our Seed Mission because he knew what I had planned. I sincerely doubt he ever realized how that would turn out, though I’m sure that he knew, and was powerless to do anything about it because of the Scourge and their invasion.”

“He knew?” Martin gasped.

Sumar nodded his head. “Of that I am quite certain. He knew exactly what he was doing and exactly where our ship crashed. My guess is he hoped the Lycavorians, our people, would solve his problem for him and kill all of us.” Sumar chuckled. “He was so very wrong and that is why he hates our people so.”

“Grandfather... the Scourge have...” Martin began.

Sumar nodded his head. “Yes, I know. You and Wayonn are correct in that the threat to the Alpha quadrant has stopped. For the moment.”

“Do you know why?” Torma asked.

Sumar shook his head. “No Torma, I do not. And that worries me. There is much we are unable to see happening and I fear Lorendo has only made things worse. His hatred of me and our people clouds his reason and judgment. If he ever had any to begin with.”

“The recent encounter Androcles and Murano had with them on old Pralor station is a clear sign though.” Dadrien spoke once more. “They are very much alive and active. Far more active than we believed.”

“Can’t you see them from where you are?” Martin asked.

It was Dadrien who shook his massive head now. “This place we reside, it has curtailed our ability to sense the Scourge as we were once able.”

“Curtailed?” Martin asked.

Sumar nodded. “We do not have the abilities we once had. Whether it is because we are no longer corporeal beings or something else we do not know. We could not sense Murano until he no longer shielded himself. The same can be said for Tobia, though I am very happy she survived. She will be a great asset to the Praetorians to come.”

“Shiria and my *Tenna* Deia are seeking out those with the gene. They have devised a way to discover them.” Martin offered.

“Ah yes, Deia.” Sumar spoke. “Another in the long line of powerful, confident females that my bloodline has merged into our own. Just as you and Androcles have done. All of my grandsons and granddaughters. Watch that boy Jomann though...” Sumar said. “He is powerful that one and he loves my granddaughter like a blazing sun.”

Martin grinned inwardly at this for he had sensed it in Jomann as well. As a father it was always nice to hear from someone else that his daughter had chosen someone who would love her senseless. And Androcles and her other brothers would never have let it carry on had they not felt the same about Jomann and his intentions with their sister.

“They are my strength.” Martin said softly.

Sumar nodded his head in agreement. “Just as my beautiful Gailina was for me.” He took a deep breath in the Etheric projection and nodded his head. “Back to important matters now.” He spoke. “As I was saying, our ability to sense powerful Etheric presences is now diminished. You and our blood we can sense, but anyone not within close proximity to you or those of our family, if they can shield well, we will not sense them. Even family, yourself or Androcles, if you chose to shield from us we would not be able to detect your essence. Tobia is a master with this skill, it is why even as a child I knew she would be important.”

“You appeared to her?” Martin asked.

Sumar nodded his head. “Her parents, in secret just before we left on the Seed Mission, so that they would know her importance.” He answered. “I also compelled them to forget that they ever saw me. Only to heed my wishes. Tobia’s father was Captain of one of the ships that escaped the purge of our Empire.”

“You know that Tobia and Murano...”

Sumar nodded once more with a smile. “Oh yes.” He stated. “And now, perhaps the most powerful of those who fought beside Wayonn and I is now tied to our bloodline forever because of Deion and Mari. An unexpected but pleasant turn of events to be honest. Since our abilities have been reduced to what they are now, detecting anyone of Etheric power is a questionable proposition at best if they can shield even remotely as well as you and Androcles can. As Tobia and Mari can. As I said, it is not something I expected but it also allows us to achieve our goals more easily.”

Martin winced slightly and Dadrien detected this. “You do not like what we have done through the years?” He asked. “We can see it in your eyes and on your face. Androcles had much the same manner when we spoke to him.”

Martin looked at him. "I think it has to do with not being in control." He told him. "I do understand, and given the circumstances I would probably have done the same thing. It's just difficult knowing that much of what we have done has been staged."

Sumar shook his head. "No, not staged Martin." He said. "All of your decisions Martin, all of the decisions made by Androcles, they have all been your decisions. No matter what they have been. I give you my word." He explained. "Dadrien and I simply gave you the means to see each decision from every aspect. Nothing more. We did not influence you one way or the other."

"But you have influenced others?" Martin said.

Sumar nodded his head slowly. "Not directly, but in a manner of speaking I suppose that we have, yes." He answered honestly.

Martin stared at him for a long moment. "Grandfather, you and Dadrien are among the few who have ever actually admitted to this throughout the whole of history."

"Perhaps." Sumar told him with a shrug. "You and Androcles are my blood, as are all of your children. Elynth is Dadrien's blood, as are all of Isheeni and Torma's offspring. We are not ashamed of anything we have done."

Martin nodded his head. "I suppose I would not be either." He stated softly. "Do you regret anything grandfather?"

Sumar was silent for a long moment before meeting his eyes. "The only thing I regret is not being able to say goodbye. Lorendo robbed me of that and my parents and siblings joined our ancestors within the Rift of Time never knowing."

Martin looked at him now. "Ummm... grandfather, perhaps I should tell you something before we go further."

SPARTA'S WRATH **ANDROCLES' READY ROOM**

It couldn't really be called a Ready Room. It was more like an apartment as far as Andro was concerned. It was situated just off the port side of the bridge for easy access and contained not only a small bedroom, but also a large conference room as well as office area. Androcles had refused such accommodations at first until Armen had told him he could not change the layout of the Ready Room without altering the structure of the entire deck. Armen had known Androcles would refuse thanks to Sadi, for she was the first one he showed it too. With her help they had transformed the Ready Room into a mini CIC and briefing center. They both knew that Androcles wanted to be close to the action and this is how they accomplished that.

The conference room portion now held a massive polished oak table donated by those at Dreamland with all of the toys built directly into the table that they could hope for. Portable computer screens and small consoles that could rise right out of the polished top. Along the outer portion of the wall that held the huge view window now stood a waist high counter with a small kitchen set up.

The huge table now held thirteen occupants, with another six involved from their ships via secure holo COMs. As was usually the case in meetings like this, plates of different kinds of food were spread out on the counter and table itself with pitchers of water, coffee and juice. To say it was one of the most amazing things Dytin and Aviel had ever seen would have been silly. Both of them were occupying chairs on one side of the table and neither of them could stop sampling the incredible food before them. Eliani and Jomann sat beside one another close to where Andro sat at the head of the table, Denali and Ridor beside them. Ridor had become the unofficial co-leader of Andro's personal team behind Jomann it seemed and this did not bother anyone in the least. Even Daio had begun taking direction from the young man, though they were the same rank. Ridor had the same drive and presence as his father and this was naturally evident to everyone around him, causing them to look to him for direction. Ridor took this in stride and had blended into the role without really knowing it. Cvea was happier than she had ever been in her life, fully embracing her role and status now without even a glance back to her past. Eliani found she was incredibly smart and Cvea was already light years ahead of normal medics in their training due to Eliani's guidance and her ability to retain information and learn so quickly. Ridor

would brief everyone on the team when he was finished here and they all knew it. Androcles didn't keep anyone out of the loop for any reason. They were blending very well as a team and it was almost scary to see them in action together. Rumors were already starting to make their way around how they were essentially a younger version of the King's personal team and everyone knew how lethal the King's personal team was.

Dorian and Laren sat beside one another on the other side of the table to Aviel's left. Sarlana and Murano beside them. Sa'sur sat to Androcles' right side as Admiral of the Fleet that they now had. She loved her new job but hated that everyone called her Admiral now. Armen stood directly behind and to Andro's left, choosing to stand as opposed to sitting. His large frame was not suited for one of the smaller chair that circled the table. Deion, Nara and Mari were finishing up some training classes in order for them to be awarded their Agoge graduation certificates. Sadi and all of the Princess of the Union to include Lisisa, Arduri, Iama, Sheva and now Onera were in the landing bay where the *PREMONITION* was docked and seeing to the ship. While Dorian had not yet claimed Onera in the manner of their people, the half Immortal and half vampire daughter of Yuri and Pa'cour had become a member of their family without question and most had already begun referring to her as Princess. Knowing his brother as he did Androcles knew Dorian was waiting until they saw Yuri and Pa'cour and he could ask for their permission and blessing. Andro knew it wasn't necessary for he already knew what Yuri and his father had spoken of those months ago, and they would agree immediately.

In the six holo images on the massive table were the senior officers of the fleet that now surrounded *SPARTA'S WRATH*, as well as the commanding officers of the two Spartan ground divisions that were currently bunked on the *KINDRED SOUL WASP*-Class Assault Carrier and the *DAGGER'S TOUCH*, another *WASP*-Class Assault Carrier that had joined them from Dreamland. They were the first two of an entirely new class of ship that had already proven its abilities in combat. Forty more of the *WASP*-Class Assault Carriers were due to be finished before the end of the year with another hundred and fifty planned by the end of next year. Josie Miller occupied one of those images, the other taken up by General Washington, Commander of the 82nd Cataphract Division and Captain Ron Patton of the *KINDRED SOUL*. Colonel Mosont represented the *Durcunusaan* Ready Division.

Andro had let them chat with one another for a few moments as they had just got done briefing each other on status and mission and readiness but now he sat forward in his chair to continue the briefing.

"Ok, we've covered all the standard reports so far and all of us have had a few days to see my father's initial reports and his own tactical assessments and recommendations regarding the situation on Ventori. Now we get to put our heads together since this planet is new to all of us and is completely different from our mission on Honelze. Open floor people, who wants to start?" Andro asked.

"Hell, I'll jump in feet first." Patton spoke from his holoimage. "Admiral Lorian has the planetary system locked up tight, as we all expected, but she is a fighter pilot by nature. She thinks like a fighter pilot. We need to position the *KINDRED SOUL* and *DAGGER'S TOUCH* where we can bore right in Andro. Once we drop, we go in and establish command operations centers. That is what we do. Sitting on the edge of the system does us no good."

Aside from the men and women in the room with them and those within the holoimages currently displayed, there were precious few in the Universe who would refer to Andro by his given name and they all knew it. It was an honor to be considered a friend and equal to this young man and they made sure of it.

Sa'sur nodded her head. "I concur Andro." She stated. "Manda is best when left to air to air. She knows her stuff and there is none better but when it comes to ground support leave that to the experts."

Androcles nodded. "Let's hear it."

"Your father doesn't want a big signature." Patton spoke again. "At least not on Ventori. So we go in fast, a high polar orbit, drop one brigade and half our complement of *KADEN'S* loaded for bear to set up a mobile Command Base in and around this Discovery Base. Not the ADHOC they have now, but a working Command Base. Then we take up a holding position in orbit with *DAGGER'S TOUCH* on either pole so that way we are always connected to the ground. Each of us will pull twelve hour shifts as Command Support Ship. That way our crews will be rested and ready to answer whatever call comes from the surface."

"Josie's Brigade I take it?" Andro asked.

Patton nodded his head. "You've worked with her before and she and her people know how you operate on the ground."

"You guys have worked on this I see?" Andro spoke with a grin.

Washington, Patton and Mosont just grinned devilishly and remained silent. Andro looked at Armen. "Armen?" He asked the hulking avatar. No one took offense at this for they knew how close Androcles had become with the Avatar and to be honest it was becoming harder and harder for any of them to refer to him as just a machine.

-It is a sound tactical plan- Armen answered. **-SPARTA'S WRATH will maintain orbit directly over Discovery Base and KINDRED SOUL and DAGGER'S TOUCH will use her as a pivot for all signals-**

"Exactly." Patton spoke from his holoinage.

"Two Brigades." Andro spoke rising to his feet and moving to the large Star Chart on the wall which currently showed the terrain around Jorlari for two hundred miles in all directions. "General, I want another Brigade dropped here." He pointed to a location roughly a hundred and thirty miles between the center of Jorlari and the remains of another city.

Washington nodded his head. "Can do. Their mission?"

Andro returned to his chair. "According to Manda's extensive scans of the surface, Avi believes that this is where the main facility on Ventori is for whoever was conducting the vile work we have all seen the reports on. My father wants it investigated and if there is any sign of Svorag presence you are to call in an orbital bombardment from Admiral Sa'sur."

The room was silent for a moment before Josie was the one to speak. "Androcles, there could be survivors in and around that city." She said softly. "An orbital bombardment will kill everything within five kilometers of the city limits."

Andro nodded his head. "My father has had scouts in the area for the last twelve hours. It's been kept very quiet. Only my Uncle Danny, the interim leader of the Beta wolves on Ventori and my mother Anja know about it. She is concerned that a facility of this size could very well hold hundreds of the creatures my father, Uncle and their team fought in the bunker close to Jorlari. If that is the case, they are not equipped to fight these monsters. At least until we arrive. My mother does not wish to take the chance any of them could get free from the facility. They are all in agreement that this facility needs to be taken out."

"They have two ARIZONA-Class ships with them Andro, plus over thirty refit ships with modified Pralor tech." Patton spoke now. "They could obliterate the entire planet if they wanted with the firepower they have. Why wait if they think it is such a risk?"

-The facility has power to it, though an attempt is being made to mask this power signature- Armen spoke now. **-This power source appears to be energizing a sophisticated sensor network built within the Ventori satellites in orbit. If it is active then they would be able to monitor all ship movements in orbit. King Leonidas does not wish to take the chance that they would release whatever abominations within the facility before we were able to destroy it-**

"If this sensor network is active, won't they know the jig is up when we enter the system and park right over their heads?" Ron asked.

-By then it will be too late for them to react. We will have already deployed the extra Cataphract Brigade and Admiral Sa'sur will be standing by to give the order to fire- Armen answered.

"I expect an updated report when my mother's arrive in twenty-eight hours, but unless anything changes let's move forward with this plan." Andro spoke. "Just be prepared to dance in the wind as my father says. In case anything comes up at the last minute." Andro saw all of them nod their heads in agreement. "We'll hold here until they arrive and then immediately make our last jump into the Echo Quadrant. From there it will take us another twenty-one hours to reach Ventori. Make sure everyone is well rested and updated on the plans. Dismissed."

Andro waited while the holographic discs grew dark and everyone in the room rose from their chairs and began to exit except for Dorian, Laren and himself and General Dytin and Aviel. When the room finally cleared

Andro moved up and locked the door to the conference room and then went back to his chair as Dorian and Laren moved to the two chairs on either side of him.

Dytin had seen this young warrior in action along with Laren and Dorian and their dragons in the cargo bay of that station and he had no doubts that they were indeed *Dahakoan*. The things they had done were beyond anything he had ever read about or see in his lifetime and that was saying quite a bit. He and Aviel both could sense that Androcles was a Talon Guardian within their blood. It was like an instinct within them, a powerful pull of nature and they did not deny it.

There had not been Talon Guardians in existence among the Darastrixi for almost a million years and being able to feel two on board this very ship was almost overwhelming to every Darastrixi that was here on the ship with them and among their own transports. It was perhaps the most revered of positions one could hold outside of the legends of the *Dahakoan*; two positions that were part of the cornerstone of Darastrixi history and legend that had been nearly forgotten and Androcles Leonidas now held both of them.

“I assume you wanted us to remain for a reason Androcles?” Aviel asked when Andro returned to his seat.

Andro nodded as he looked at the two men. “Yes.” He spoke.

Aviel looked at Dytin and then back to Andro. “What can we do?”

Andro leaned forward now. “Dorian and I have spoken with Laren and Ladur at length about the state of the Darastrixi government.” He told them.

“Androcles, our leaders are... they are not bad individuals!” Dytin spoke quickly. “They are...”

Andro held up his hand for him to stop, which Dytin did. “You misunderstand what our interest is General.”

“You are *Dahakoan* Androcles. Dorian. Laren.” Dytin spoke. “All of you. It is within the realm of your power as such to bring an end to those within our government if you deem them evil in any way. This is something that is part of our history and law and our people will not question it.”

“After what Laren and Ladur have told us, we don’t see them as evil General.” Andro told him. “We see them as apathetic and disingenuous. More concerned with appeasement and maintaining the status quo because that is what they have known for so long.”

“And not wishing to lose their power or control.” Dorian added.

Aviel nodded his head reluctantly. “Yes Dorian, in some respects you are correct in what you say.”

“And how long has that been going on?” Andro asked.

“For far too long.” Aviel answered softly.

Andro looked at them for a long moment. “Dorian and I have dragon blood in our veins. Laren, Elynth, Ryner and Ladur have Lycavorian blood in their veins. How it came to be and why is of no matter any longer. We are *Dahakoan*.”

Dytin and Aviel nodded their heads. “Yes, you are.” Dytin told them firmly. “There is no doubt of that. But you are so much more. All of you.”

“That is why we need you to teach us.” Dorian spoke now leaning forward.

Aviel and Dytin looked taken aback. “Teach you?” Aviel gasped after a moment.

“Teach us what we need to know.” Andro told him. “Teach us about our people, because that is what we are no matter where we came from. The dragon blood in our veins makes us such. Sarlana cannot do it for she has been away from her people for too long and she has stated this very thing.”

“I am no teacher!” Dytin spoke.

“No, you are a warrior General.” Laren spoke now. “And we need that.”

Dytin looked at them with wide eyes. “After what... after what I saw on that station there is not a Darastrixi alive that could stand against any of you in single combat. And together you would instill fear into the hearts of any who stood against you.”

“We don’t want to instill fear General Dytin.” Dorian said. “We want to instill hope.”

Dytin looked at his friend Aviel and saw him smiling slightly and he turned back to meet Dorian’s gaze. “You are serious?”

“Barring an unspeakable act of depravity General, we will not impose our will on the Darastrixi people.” Androcles said. “Or more accurately, the government. We need to show the Scourge for what they are and we can’t do that with violence.”

“Some of those men and women are complicit in the taking of our Maiden females Androcles.” Aviel told them. “Some younger than Laren. The Scourge have tortured them for centuries. Someone must answer for that.”

Andro nodded his head in agreement. “And someone will. But they will answer to the Darastrixi people as a whole.”

“We cannot go back!” Dytin spoke. “The history scrolls you speak of that could be used to teach you what you want to know reside within our libraries and museums. We would be arrested on sight! Anyone aligned with us would be arrested on sight.”

“We are not asking you to go back.” Andro said. “We are asking that you teach us. There are over thirty thousand Darastrixi among you now! Thirty thousand! Some older than Sarlana I have been told. That is who we want to learn from.”

“To what end?” Dytin asked.

Andro met his eyes. “One day we are going to return.” He told them as he rose to his feet. “It is on that day when we will act as *Dahakoan* and set our people free.”

“How?” Aviel asked.

Andro smiled and looked at Laren who had a decidedly dark twinkle to her beautiful multi layered blue eyes. “We have made a promise to each other. All six of us. On that day, we are going to return every Darastrixi Maiden ever taken by the Scourge to the planet of their birth.” Laren told them. “And woe unto the monsters who choose to stand in our way.”

Andro looked up from the huge table and saw his brother Byron enter the conference room just as Dytin and Aviel exited. Byron Leonidas was the youngest Leonidas child in actual years since Dorian, Fedor and Eirene had their births accelerated, and he was also the least well known. Their parents had kept information and even photographs of Byron, Retta and Calyb Leonidas very tightly controlled for many different reasons, foremost being their privacy as they grew. Though even at just under seventeen years of age, his half elven brother looked to be in his early twenties and was cut from the same mold as his father and brothers. His five foot eleven frame was tightly packed with muscle and extremely well defined in the same, ripped muscular fashion as his Spartan blood declared. His light blond hair was cut short and wavy but there was no mistaking his half elven ears and the deep brown eyes of their father. He had been eagerly undergoing his Spartan Agoge while on the ship with Retta and Calyb, the condensed classes far more structured and intense than normal, but something that all of them reveled in to be honest. The senior instructors who had been finishing Deion and Nara had now turned their full attention to Byron and the twins and they were advancing rapidly through the training.

Andro knew something was up the moment he saw the look on his younger brother’s face and He turned to Dorian and Laren who were standing beside the table. “I’ll see you two in the gym.” He spoke as he collected the data pads and pushed them aside as Byron came in.

Dorian understood the statement and look and playfully punched his brother in the arm while ducking to the side. Byron laughed and connected on an uppercut to Dorian’s shoulder. “Too slow!” Dorian barked as he held Laren’s hand and they exited the conference room.

Andro waited until the door had once more shut behind them and then he looked at his brother. “You look like you have a lot on your mind *fervon*. Care to share?”

Byron looked around. “I can come back if you are busy.” He stated.

Andro grinned and pulled out the chair for him. “Take a seat Byron.” He said as he settled into the chair. “Though, if you are looking for advice on playing the Kanare again you have come to the wrong place. I twisted the notes so badly when mother tried to teach me she never let me hold the instrument again.”

The Kanare was a multi stringed elven instrument of music much like the Cello from ancient Earth. Byron Leonidas was a master of the instrument even at this young age and many Master Elven Music scholars on Elear considered him a prodigy on the delicate instrument.

Byron chuckled as he sat down in the chair. “Mother forbid you from playing because you were too forceful and broke the strings whenever you tried to hit C note. We went through four Kanare before she gave up. And they were expensive.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “Ah well.” He looked at him. “What’s up brother? I know you did not come up here to lecture me on my pitiful skills with the Kanare.” Byron shifted in his seat and Andro noticed that his palms were sweaty. He leaned forward in his chair and looked at his younger brother. “Spit it out *fervon*.”

Byron looked at Andro intently. No matter what, their brother Androcles had been there for all of them throughout their entire lives. It did not matter what the problem was, what time of day it was, or where he was, if one of them needed him Androcles had always been there. None of their siblings feared telling Andro anything and Byron Leonidas took a deep breath.

“Andro I don’t want to go to the Fleet Academy.” Byron blurted out quickly. “I want to go to Elear and attend the Pi’liate Music Institute.”

Andro sat back in his chair while staring at his brother. Though half elf, Byron’s wolf blood was supremely dominant within him just as it was in all his halfblooded siblings. While the ancient Leonidas bloodline enabled him to match most pureblooded Alpha wolves evenly, purebloods with the original bloodlines of the five packs from Lycavore like Androcles, Jomann or their Uncle Danny, not to mention their father, they could defeat him quite easily. They were much stronger, faster and had far more endurance than most other wolves. Their senses were also much more acute and Byron thought for sure he detected anger in his brother’s scent and posture.

“Andro, I want our family to be known for other things besides war and politics. I want us to be remembered for the arts as well. All of us have a passion for music and art and culinary skills thanks to our parents, but none of us have pursued them. I didn’t come to this decision lightly *fervon*! I have been thinking about it for months now. I don’t want father... I don’t want father to be angry. I don’t want you to be angry. I just want to lead...”

“A normal life?” Andro interrupted him.

Byron met his eyes. “Yes.”

Andro rose to his feet and moved across the room to stand in front of the view window and was silent. Byron rose to his feet and followed him, standing behind him. “I know you are disappointed.” He began. “I know father will be disappointed as well. I just...”

Andro turned and looked at him. “Do you have so little faith in us *fervon*?” He asked him softly.

Byron looked at him with wide eyes. “What?”

Andro reached up and took his brother’s head in his hands. “Why do you think we do what we do *fervon*. Me, Eliani, Denali, Resumar, Arrarn, our other siblings and our father and mothers? Why do you think we do what we do every day?”

“I don’t understand.” Byron told him. “To defend our people. Our family.”

Andro shook his head. “We do it so that you and Retta and Calyb and the siblings that we will have in the future... we do it so that you don’t have to!” Andro told him. “We do it so that you can have the normal lives that you desire.”

Byron looked at him in shock. “I thought you would be... I thought you would be angry.” He gasped.

“*Carians* why would I be angry *fervon*?” Andro told him. “We have known since you were three years old that music was your calling, our entire family has known this. Why do you think we always had you play the Kanare at gathering and dinners? Why do you think I have had you make me the data tapes of your work? It is utterly brilliant *fervon*, and it is your music that brings me happiness and peace when I listen to it.”

“But father...” Byron stammered.

“Father?” Andro exclaimed. “Father has wanted you to make this decision for months! Ever since your time came to attend your Agoge.” He told him tightening his grip on Byron’s head. “Our mothers have kept him from talking to you about it because they wanted it to be your decision.”

Byron blinked several times in shock and his hands lifted to come to rest on his brother’s forearms. “Andro, you are serious?”

Andro laughed and pulled his brother into a rib cracking embrace. “Do you want me to bring Eli up here to confirm to you what I say *fervon*? She would just slap you in the head and cuss you for waiting so long to

make this decision.” He pushed him back just as quickly and looked at him. “Father has never wanted his children to follow in his footsteps. We have chosen to do this Byron, so that you and Retta and Calyb and any who come after do not have to. So that you would be free to choose whatever path in life made you happy. You have no idea how happy this is going to make our parents *fervon*. It’s about *nubous* time you know! Your sisters are going to throw a party because of this!”

Byron let Andro pull him into another embrace and this time he returned it as his eyes teared up and he held his brother with as much power as he was able to muster, which was considerable to say the least.

Andro pulled him back once more and looked at him with a smile on his face that Byron had never seen before. It actually softened his brother’s normally intense features almost to the point of childhood. “Have you contacted them? When can you start? What can I do?”

Byron’s face split into a massive smile as well then and he shook his head. “The next class begins in six months. I have already enrolled.”

Andro squeezed his shoulders. “Our mothers are going to *sibfla* when they find out you finally came to your senses.” He said with a grin. He pulled him close and headed for the door. “Come *fervon*... it’s time to tell our siblings. They have wanted a reason to have a party and you just gave them one!”

Byron Leonidas was all smiles as he held his brother when they exited the conference room. He knew as a half breed that there were many elves on Elear who considered him and any like him to be inferior. The natural elven superiority often overrode the common sense for many young elven males. Yet he had never been more proud of the name he carried and the blood that ran in his veins and the love he felt for his brother than at this very moment in time. That pride and love would nearly triple in the coming months ahead, he just did not know it yet, or the reasons behind it.

Yet he soon would.

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE

It was perhaps, the most moving reunion that Martin Leonidas had ever witnessed. Even though they were on this very planet, his Etheric abilities had been severely curtailed with his death and then his reincarnation as an Etheric representation and he could not sense them at all. Jezima and Meral were still shielding at extremely high levels that only Martin, Helen and his Queens could detect. Sumar had been filled with disbelief at the knowledge Martin gave to him that they were still alive, and even as he subjected him to a barrage of questions, Martin had reached for Aricia and the others to bring Jezima and Meral to where he was.

Jezima and Meral could not understand why Aricia and the others had brought them out here into the night until they came around the edge of the building and saw the clear Etheric projection of the son and brother they had lost so long ago. Dadrien had watched from beside Martin as Sumar moved over in front of them without question, Jezima and Meral collapsing into the arms of Aricia, Anja and For'mya, a tidal wave of tears erupting forth from their eyes. Sumar had not hesitated for an instant and squatted before them, reaching for them. There was no way he could possibly touch them physically, so Sumar did the next best thing. He used his hands to channel his limited Etheric ability now to wrap around his mother and sister. Aricia, Anja and For'mya moved over beside Martin, all of them gazing at the immense Etheric figure of Dadrien beside Torma. All of them had tears in their eyes and they pressed tightly to the man they all so loved. Martin didn’t remember how long they had sat there, and he didn’t care to be honest. First Isheeni had walked out of the darkness to settle beside her beloved Torma, both of them caressing each other’s scales. Then Miath and Aurith drifted out of the darkness to settle on the opposite side of Dadrien, staring at the Etheric projection of the very first of their kind with awe. The draw within the Etheric realm was simply too much and soon Helen and Arzoal had returned, followed by Zarah, Lucia and their dragon Seyra.

Soon there were dozens of Lycavorians and elves surrounding the area, all watching with utter reverence and respect. The commotion had woken most of the Tasmor guests and they too came out of their respective quarters to follow the Lycavorians as they made their way to the edge of the lake. Saydia, Anthylea, Perlyea and Aduna stood beside each other, many of the Lycavorians and elves having dropped to one knee in a show of

reverence for what was happening, allowing them a full view of the reunion that was taking place. All of them with wide eyes at the two Etheric projections before them. It was unlike anything any of them had ever seen in their lives. Namiri and Emylea stood together beside their mother taking it all in and unbeknownst to their mother, feeling every bit part of what was happening in front of them. They didn't know how, only that they did and it felt wonderful to say the least. To the many Tasmor that were watching it all seemed so magical and amazing and this only served to make each of them believe that perhaps what they had discovered here, what their Sovereign Regent was working to make permanent, perhaps this is what was meant for their people. Many began to drop to one knee as well in a show of respect for what they were witnessing, a movement that did not go unnoticed by the many Lycavorians and elves who were in the area now.

Martin turned his head when he felt Wayonn's hand come to rest on his shoulder. Aricia was tucked against his right side, For'mya and Anja on his left, all of them with tears in their eyes and Martin detected the hint of moistness in Wayonn's eyes as well.

"Martin it..." Wayonn stammered.

Martin nodded his head with a smile. "It feels incredible." He said.

"*Carians*... it feels perfect." Wayonn echoed his words softly.

"Go Wayonn." Martin said softly looking at him.

Wayonn shook his head quickly. "I cannot." He spoke. "It would..."

"You were just as much a brother to him as his own blood Wayonn." Martin told him softly. "Now go and do what you have longed to do for millennia. Go and say goodbye. I do not know how much longer he and Dadrien will be able to hold these forms and you will regret if you don't."

Wayonn met his eyes for a long moment and then rose to his feet. His whole body was shaking as he inched his way closer to the trio in the middle of the open field and then Jezima and Meral reached for him just as Sumar's face turned and saw him. Then it was too much and Wayonn moved forward to settle between Jezima and Meral who instantly leaned against him in love.

It was emotionally overwhelming for many who were witnessing it, a goodbye that was over forty thousand years in the making. It was something that everyone who witnessed it would remember for the rest of their lives. It was something that they would remember and try to live up to and emulate for others to experience.

It would never be forgotten.

For'mya shivered in delight as Martin's arms held her off the ground and his kiss stole her breath away. Her arms were wrapped tightly around his shoulders as they kissed and Anja and Aricia looked on. They held hands tightly, each of them having experienced the same sort of kiss from Martin only seconds before, leaving both of them flushed and exceedingly happy. His kisses always set their blood to churning, and for For'mya and Anja this took place even before they were fully wolf. Martin set For'mya down and leaned over to nuzzle her four inch high elven ear with his nose eliciting a gasp of intense delight from For'mya as she gripped his arms tightly. He held her close to his side and looked at them.

"You three try to stay out of trouble ok." He told them as Aricia and Anja moved up close to him, Aricia pressing up against For'mya's back as Anja tucked herself under his opposite arm.

"You should be one to talk Beloved." Aricia told him with a smile. "You need us to keep you out of trouble."

Martin grinned. "Now ain't that the truth." He said.

Anja placed her hand on his abdomen and squeezed him tightly. "Just keep in mind that you have three other mates who will want your undivided attention when we return to Honelze. And we already told them you will fulfill your duties as their Alpha and husband." She told him with a twinkle of happiness in her jade colored eyes.

Martin smiled and leaned over to kiss her full lips once more. "I have every intention of doing just that." He told her. "All of you need to keep an eye on these Tasmor Quorum folks. I get the sense that some of them don't like us very much."

Aricia nodded her head in agreement. “Do not worry. That is why Namiri and Emylea are coming with us as well. Saydia and Perlyea insisted that they both needed to go even when the Quorum demanded they remain behind.”

“You know Andro ain’t going to be too happy about this inspection thing.” Martin told them.

For'mya nodded her head. “Yes... that we do know.” She said.

“Make sure he doesn’t squash them or blow them out an airlock or something of that nature will you. It wouldn’t due for our joint relations if he did and you know how he hates political posturing.” Martin said.

“Don’t do anything with the information Lirana’s mate might tell you without checking with me first Lover.” Anja told him. “Dee, Radra and I are the only ones with the know how to contain this type of weapon.”

Martin looked at her. “I got this Red.” He said. “I’m reckless but I ain’t stupid.”

“That would be debatable by some Beloved.” Aricia told him causing Martin to lean over and nuzzle her neck firmly, making her gasp in delight.

For'mya placed her hand over his heart and looked up into his face. “We will be fine Martin Leonidas.” She told him. “Trouble follows you our love. Not us.”

Martin nodded his head sheepishly. “Yeah, tell me about it.” He said. “I’ll see you all in a few days.” Martin watched as they turned and took each other’s hands with For'mya in the middle as they made their way towards the *STRIKER* that was idling on the makeshift airfield. They would use that to transit up to the *ARC ROYAL* and then use the *HELIX*-Class Pralor Corvette to make their way to Andro.

He turned his head slightly when he felt Danny come up beside him. “They here?” He asked.

Danny nodded his head. “They just entered the system and contacted Manda as directed. This Konlar seems on the up and up *fervon*.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes he does, but let’s not take any chances Dan. They so much as twitch oddly, blow that ship out of the stars and execute every single one of them here on the ground. I will not allow Lorendo to find out what we are doing.”

Danny nodded his head. “I figured as much. So did Manda. She’s got eight main batteries targeting the ship and will maintain the lock until she hears otherwise from you.”

Martin turned to look at him as the *STRIKER* began to lift off. “Let’s go to work *fervon*. We got a lot to do before they get back and kick my ass.”

Danny laughed. “They are going to do more than kick your ass!” Dan said. “But you already knew that.”

Martin grinned widely. “Let’s go clean out some vermin shall we? I want Jorlari cleaned out and ready to receive refugees before my children get here. They’ll call me a slacker if it isn’t.”

Danny smiled again. “Nalmos is waiting for us on the west side of the city. The Master Chief has everything set up and Zarah and Lucia have their teams on the perimeter. Give the word and we’ll hit the last two facilities in the city and then clean it out.”

Martin nodded his head. “No time like the present.” He said.

SPARTA'S WRATH

Aviel and Dytin moved into the massive lounge on the port side of the ship and found Nahko and Dalis sitting with Laren’s parents and Sarlana. The lounge was perhaps half full with many different species to include Lycavorian, Elf and Vampire. Dytin was getting better at telling them apart physically, the elves were obvious really with their four inch high ears. He had learned that those who were half elf usually had much smaller ears but they were still pointed. Vampires for the most part were fairer skinned than the other species, their tans not as dark or deep. There were two reptilian species that he had seen himself as well as several bird like individuals. There were perhaps a dozen Darastrixi sitting at three tables and mixed in with several different species. Androcles had allowed the Darastrixi from the transports and other warships to shuttle to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and make use of the many different facilities on board. Dytin and Aviel were fascinated with the food types and had sampled everything they could in the days they had been here. Though he knew he did not have to tell the Darastrixi this, he had informed everyone that this was the ship of a *Dahakoan* and they were to maintain decorum at all costs. No wandering off to see parts of the ship they were not allowed into or asking too

many questions. The warning was not needed he discovered on the second day, for several of the engineers from the Union had invited their Darastrixi counterparts aboard for a tour of the ship and it had only grown from there. Many of his officers and crew were aboard the ship learning from their Union counterparts and there were many more families aboard than he had thought Androcles would allow. He had been meaning to ask Sarlana about this and now would be his opportunity as they moved up to the table.

Nahko looked up as they approached and took chairs. "Aviel, Dytin, we believe we have worked out a plan to begin instructing all of the *Vrrarhoinpa* among the Pralors and even back within their Union." She told them. "Once we begin, we can train them to use their vocal cords just as we do and they will be speaking within six months. Ch'teven, Shalu and Chalith are already beginning to select groups as teachers from the transports."

"The Union?" Dytin asked.

"Darastrixi are an integral part of the Lycavorian Union General Dytin." Sarlana told him. "They hold seats within the ruling body of the Union and they have a say in everything that happens."

Dytin looked at her. "The *Dahakoan* did this?" He asked.

Sarlana shook her head. "Androcles' father." She answered him. "He and Elder Mother Arzoal together almost three decades ago when our kind was first discovered. Martin's *Anome* Aricia, who you will meet soon, she is Androcles' birth mother and it is she who is the one who first discovered they could bond with our kind, but it was Martin and then Androcles who took that to the next level. The Darastrixi within the Lycavorian Union are free and happy and even better educated for their ages than those on our own homeworld. They needed to be in order to survive. Arzoal has done wonders as their Elder Mother."

Aviel looked at her intently. "*Doraanar*... this Elder Mother that you speak of... she was once a Pralor. She transferred her conscious mind into a Darastrixi egg. She allowed our kind to cross breed among species. Is it wise to refer to her in such terms? Her actions will not sit well with many of our people."

Sarlana tilted her head slightly as she looked at him. "As you well know Aviel, Darastrixi eggs do not form conscious thought until they reach full maturity. Indeed they do not truly exist until the egg reaches its full maturity, since our minds do not evolve until the fourth stage of egg growth. Arzoal transferred her mind into an egg that was still in the first stage of its growth. She was among those Pralors who cared for our eggs on Elear and she knew this. This is the reason it took over a hundred years for that egg to hatch. Since that egg hatched, she has done nothing but devote her life to the Darastrixi as one of us. Every decision she has ever made has been to keep those Darastrixi with her, under her rule and guidance, safe and alive.

"It is the members of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *UrIkrisir Mamiss* themselves who brought this about! We should never have allowed the Pralor Science people to use Darastrixi on Seed Missions knowing that no Elder Mother was among them. They should never have been allowed to leave our planet without the knowledge that Arzoal possessed when she did what she did!" Sarlana leaned forward at the table slightly irritated. "One of the *Dahakoan* is the product of that very cross breeding you speak of and she is a Talon Guardian. Do you question that? Do you wish to challenge that?"

Aviel shook his head quickly. "Of course not *Doraanar*. That knowledge is without question. I did not mean..."

Sarlana took a deep breath and calmed down knowing that Aviel was a good man and only wanted what was best. He would avoid confrontation at all costs, but if push came to shove he would fight savagely, just as any Darastrixi. "Many of those bonded to the Lycavorians and Elves and Vampires within the Union are cross breeds and they are among the most powerful and honored Darastrixi in this Union. Elynth's own father Torma, his name is spoken of with awe by all species within the Union for what he has accomplished. As has his son Jeth, Elynth's brother. Trust me when I tell you, given their size and prowess in battle, either of them would squash the most experienced Darastrixi warrior with barely any effort. You have seen the many history files that I gave to you Aviel; what they have accomplished through the centuries, what Arzoal has accomplished with no guidance whatsoever from the fool *Elbakiw Sulevfu* or the *UrIkrisir Mamiss*! What she alone has built without their fool dictates. Do you truly wish to drive a wedge between our people by denouncing Arzoal?"

"*Doraanar* that is not what I meant." Aviel said quickly. "I am..."

"He is only stating what the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *UrIkrisir Mamiss* will say when it is discovered." Dytin finished for Aviel as Nahko reached over and grasped her husband's hand in support. "I have read the files you gave to us *Doraanar* as well. Every single one of them and this Arzoal holds my utmost respect, as

well as Aviel's. What she has accomplished is beyond imagination. The *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *Urlkrisir Mamiss* will not see it that way however."

"I do not care how they see it." Sarlana spoke. "It is a fact. If the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and the *Urlkrisir Mamiss* truly wish to do something utterly stupid, something that will turn our people against one another, than that would be it."

"What do you mean?" Aviel asked.

"If the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *Urlkrisir Mamiss* choose to denounce her, or any of her many actions, there will be civil war among our people." Sarlana spoke plainly looking at them across the table. "They will be denouncing over five million of our own people. The actual number of Darastrixi within the Union is a closely held secret but Arzoal has brought them back from the brink. Where only a few thousand once survived, between the several planets they call home within the Union now, their numbers have grown to over five million. Most of them near the age of Elynth and Ladur and Ryner. Those who sit on her Dragon Council are the oldest among them as it should be, but none of them adhere to the simplistic rantings and dogma of old men who have been in power for far too long. They have done this without the ridiculous edicts of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *Urlkrisir Mamiss* to guide them. Arzoal's teachings fill their minds and their hearts. They are freer than any of our people have ever been in our history. Any attempt by the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and the *Urlkrisir Mamiss* to take this away from them will be met by force. Any attempt to persecute Arzoal for her actions will earn the ire of not only the *Dahakoan*, but Martin Leonidas and the entire Lycavorian Union. The Darastrixi of the Union do not fight alone General, Aviel. They are revered among many of the species within the Union." She said meeting each of their eyes. "They are part of a much larger whole. A whole that includes over thirty trillion lifeforms who will fight with them and beside them without question. And fight viciously if they have to. Trust me when I tell you, I have met Martin Leonidas and I have seen but a tiny glimpse of what the *Dahakoan's* father is capable of. You have seen for yourself what Androcles' siblings are capable of, what their normal troops are capable of. They are Spartans! A word that strikes fear into the hearts of their enemies. If the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* and *Urlkrisir Mamiss* think they will come out on top of that particular conflict, then they are some of the stupidest individuals I have never met in my life."

Nahko chuckled at the last part of Sarlana's statement. "Finally, someone who is not afraid to speak their mind." She looked around the table at all of them with a smile. "Present company excluded of course."

"She will need to appear before them at some point in the future *Doraanar*." Dalis spoke now. "For their blessing."

Sarlana nodded her head. "I know this. I only tell you what will happen if they act like the fools they appear to be."

Aviel shook his head quickly. "That is not a concern of ours now. I look forward to meeting with her and speaking with her at length." He said firmly. "Her experiences out here among the stars alone are more than any of us have ever seen. I wish to learn from her just as she can learn from us."

"She is an Elder of our people and my men and our people will treat her as such." Dytin added from his chair. "And the one who is called Teniri. She is also considered an Elder Mother I understand. Named such by Arzoal herself."

"And they have fought the Scourge." Aviel spoke once more. "Something that our people have forgotten how to do. Trust me *Doraanar*, there is more that they can teach us. Like Dytin, I have read all you have given to us on her and her past and I assure you, she holds nothing but my respect. And awe."

Sarlana smiled and nodded her head. "I know Aviel and forgive me my harsh words, but being among Androcles and these men and women has made me unafraid to voice my opinions and emotions. It is quite refreshing to be honest."

Dalis nodded his head from his chair. "Yes it is." He spoke.

"Is this part of why Androcles allows our people on his ship *Doraanar*?" Dytin asked now. "He has allowed hundreds of our people to come aboard and see how they do things and this is something I did not expect."

Sarlana nodded her head. "All of you must understand what I have learned in these last weeks among them. Androcles and Dorian, their father Martin, their siblings and mothers, they are Lycavorians and Spartans first and foremost. Family is the center of their universe, some would say even to a greater extent than the *Dahakoan*. Since his birth Androcles has looked out for each of his siblings as their guardian. There have been

times where he has defended them viciously as well. When it was discovered that he had Darastrixi DNA in his body, when he and Dorian discovered what that meant, the connotation of that, they embraced it fully and without thought. Just as he is Lycavorian, he is also Darastrixi, just as Laren is Darastrixi, she is also Lycavorian. We are his people. That is their mindset and focus. If ever there was a species that could help the Darastrixi to drag themselves kicking and screaming into the future, these are the men and women to do it.” Sarlana looked at them.

“They are a loyal people to a fault, they will do anything, go to any lengths for a friend or family, for that is how they are built. However, if you betray them, treat them as inferior or try to forcibly impose your will upon them, they will release *uoinota ias wer guawysverni* upon you. And there will be no respite from their *skriiod*.” (Hell among the heavens) (Wrath)

It was Dalis who said what all of them were thinking.

“Then so be it.” He said softly.

UNKNOWN SPACE

She was Lycavorian by birth.

One of the strongest Alpha female wolves to have ever lived among her species in their entire history and once considered to the most powerful *Yowa* to ever walk the green plains of Lycavore. There were many names throughout history for what she was and the many different species among the stars, but the most common and well known was surprisingly a human word.

Witch.

Her fascinating amethyst colored eyes were gazing over the clam, gleaming surface of the massive lake outside the wall sized window. The surface of the azure and jade colored water was glittering in reflection with the rising of the sun over the mighty peaks to her east. One of the many oddities of this beautiful world that she had long ago grown accustomed to. She smiled when her wolf ears picked up the telltale sound of hurried footsteps in the anteroom of her large and comfortable home. Far larger than she would have liked, but she had long grown accustomed to this as well. She didn't turn when she heard the four heartbeats enter through the sliding doors and she only lifted the mug of sweet tea to her lips and drank from its warmth.

“I could hear all of your hearts racing before you even entered my home.” She spoke the words still looking out upon the lake. “What vexes my dearest friend and our three strongest warriors so that they feel the need to rush here so quickly?”

“Revered Mother...” The tall woman spoke from beside the two much younger females and the single male.

“Nicha, how many times must I tell you in a single millennia to speak my name when we are alone?” She said with a smile as she turned slowly and looked at the blond hair of the woman.

The woman smiled and bowed her head. “Dynina.”

Dynina brushed aside the long, thick locks of her raven colored hair, and sipped her tea once more as her amethyst eyes settled on the two women and male. “And how are my favorite grandchildren this day?”

The two young women and male bowed their heads to her in response. All of them bore the raven colored hair of her bloodline, as well as the deep tans that Lycavorians usually had because none of them spent much time inside. They were different however, the black ring surrounding the vertical slit of their pupils. All of them with amethyst colored eyes like herself. The texture of their exposed skin was also different, though no less soft in its touch, with its scale like nature.

“Dynina... the crystal has activated.” Nicha spoke with excitement in her words. “The... the Heralds are among us!”

Dynina nodded her head and motioned with her hand to the side where they all saw the small, glowing multicolored blue crystal on the credenza. Its glow was bright and steady and cast a bluish glow on the wall behind it.

“I sensed them the moment they came together.” Dynina answered calmly.

Nicha looked at her with wide eyes. “You have known?” She gasped.

Dynina nodded her head slowly. "They are my blood Nicha, of course I have known. I have known for many years that they exist."

"Why have you not told anyone grandmother?" The young female asked bluntly. "Why have you not told us?"

Dynina moved forward and looked at them with a loving smile. "Because it was not time my beautiful Perlae." She replied. "Now however, now that they have finally united and come together, now it is time for the puzzle to be complete. Now it is time that you, Ishma and Awser join them. Only together will you be able to decipher and use the markings all of you carry. Are you prepared? Are your Bonded Ones prepared?"

Awser looked at his grandmother. "It is the day we have waited for *staania*." He told her with bright amethyst eyes. "The day we have prepared for all of our lives."

"Remember your tasks and your duties." Dynina told them. "They are more powerful than any who have come before them, including all of you, and they will need you to help them to focus this power. And you will need to deliver my message to their father, for only he will be able to act on it. Only he will be able to control and command them all."

"We understand grandmother." Ishma spoke.

Dynina nodded her head and turned to set her tea on the knee high table before turning back to them. She reached up and let her hands explore each of their faces as she smiled. "Your task is the most important that we have undergone since we arrived here. Soon it will be time to reveal ourselves and it is you who must guide them here and then on to our final destination wherever that may be."

Dynina watched as the three of them clasped their hands together tightly. "We will not fail you grandmother." Perlae said.

"I know you will not." Dynina said. "I have seen it. But even I cannot see what is beyond, so you must be wary. They must be wary." Dynina smiled and dropped her hands. "Go now. Say your goodbyes to your parents and then gather your Bonded Ones and make your way to the ship."

The three of them bowed their heads to her and then quickly turned and left the room. Nicha moved up beside her friend and adopted sister. "You worry for them?" She spoke softly.

Dynina nodded her head. "They are my blood." She answered. "I swore to my sister I would see them stay safe. She knew what they were born for from the moment they entered this world and she sacrificed her life in order for them to survive."

"Do you fear that they will be rejected?" Nicha asked. "We know that they do not trust easily."

Dynina nodded her head. "But when they do trust they do so utterly and without any question." She said. "Do I fear they will be rejected? No." She turned and reclaimed her tea from the table. "They are of my blood my friend, and once it is discovered who they are and where their blood comes from, Androcles and Martin, their family, they will embrace them as family as well. It is the nature of wolves."

"Can we succeed Dynina?" Nicha asked her.

"We have waited over forty thousand years." Dynina answered. "Waited and planned just as we were instructed. It is why we have remained hidden here for so long from everyone. My people. Your people. Kenroe's people. The darkness is upon us once more Nicha, and it will spread to every possible corner of the universe if we do not stop it this time. We have no choice but to succeed now my friend."

"But they have infiltrated so deeply." Nicha said.

Dynina nodded her head. "Yes they have. But they have never faced what will be arrayed against them this time." She looked at Nicha and smiled, her wolf fangs extending fully and revealing the savage, dual incisor fangs in the front. "They have never faced my bloodline in battle before. We will see how they fare against those who do not fear them or their vile kind. I would not want to fight us, and I am one of us, just as you are."

Nicha smiled. "Yes I am." She stated.

Dynina took her hand. "Once they have departed destroyed the portal completely Nicha." She said. "It must not be left active for anyone to find and trace back to us."

Nicha nodded. "I will see it done."

Dynina sipped her tea once more. "Now comes the hard part." She said with a slight smile.

"What is that?" Nicha asked her.

"Now we wait." Dynina answered. "Now we wait."

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

VENTORI JORLARI

Konlar firmly gripped Lirana's lush figure in his arms and crushed her to him, spinning her around in happiness where she greeted him at the bottom of the ramp of their transport. He had not known until this exact moment how much his much younger wife and mate truly meant to him and he made a silent vow to himself to never put her in danger again. Lirana's arms were wrapped tightly around his broad shoulders and she excitedly nuzzled his roughly bearded face in delight as his male aura swarmed around her. Even with all of the Alpha wolf auras she could detect since coming here, they did not compare to Konlar's wonderful scent and aura in her eyes and heart.

Edrao stood just to the side of them with a small smile on his face as he watched for a moment and then he turned his head to look around. The immense airfield they had landed upon was larger than anything he had ever expected to see and the odd looking craft were situated all around them. They had only been to Ventori once since the Svorag had attacked and they found it desolate and devoid of life. Standing here now he did not get that sense from the surrounding area. He could see several of the aircraft lifting off into the distance, the sound of their engines powerful yet muted from this distance. He could see heavy weapons placements all around the airfield to include very well-armed security. His head came back to the rear of their ramp when he detected movement and he saw the single, tall Lycavorian make his way forward, three very stern looking soldiers behind him. All of them were searching the area around them for threats and it was obvious they were there to protect this Lycavorian. Edrao's eyes grew wider when he realized that this Lycavorian was an Alpha, but he was also just like him.

He was a Pralor.

Konlar lowered Lirana to the ground finally and she gazed up into his eyes with an adoring smile and love.

"You are not hurt?" Konlar asked her once more, reaching up to caress her cheek under his fingers.

Lirana nodded her head quickly, relishing in the feel of her mate's touch upon her. "I am fine." She told him, squeezing his hands in hers. "We are all fine my love."

"I should never have let you come here." Konlar stammered. "I put you in danger!"

Lirana shook her head this time. "If you had not, then we would not have discovered what we have husband." She told him.

"How did they... how did they discover you?" Konlar asked.

"Does that really matter now?" The new voice spoke and Konlar turned to see the Alpha Lycavorian walk fully up to them. He had obviously been waiting patiently while Lirana greeted her mate which told Konlar quite a bit right away.

He tucked his arm around Lirana and pulled her tight to him, meaning to protect her as he saw the three heavily armed soldiers just behind this Alpha. Konlar also noticed instantly just what Edrao had noticed. This Alpha was also a Pralor, yet his scent also marked him as being someone who had been turned for far longer than even Edrao.

"Welcome to Ventori." Wayonn told him. "Though I dare say this was your planet long before it became ours."

"Yours?" Konlar exclaimed.

Wayonn smiled and nodded his head. "Oh yes. Ventori is now the second planet in the Echo Quadrant that has become part of the Lycavorian Union."

"And you would be?" Edrao asked.

"I am Wayonn." He replied evenly. "And we are certainly glad that you chose to come here."

"Who are you?" Edrao asked once more. "What position do you hold?"

Wayonn shrugged his shoulders casually. "I have no real title." He answered. "Though I imagine Martin and others are hard at work trying to think one up. Most everyone just calls me *Vali'star* Wayonn."

"Prophet?" Edrao spoke.

Wayonn nodded his head. "A silly name since I am anything but a prophet, but that is what they have been calling me. I can't get them to stop honestly."

"You are... you are Pralor." Konlar said softly.

Wayonn nodded his head. "I was a Pralor yes, just like your advisor Edrao here. Though I was turned many years before either of you were born."

"An Alpha?" Konlar asked.

Wayonn nodded once more. "My wife and mate was an Alpha." He replied. "It was she who turned me."

Edrao moved slightly closer to him. "How did you...?"

"How did I become turned?" Wayonn said with a calm voice and smile. "That is a story that would require some rather extensive time to tell, but it is one that you will discover over time I'm sure if you decide to remain among us. We are very fortunate you decided to come here. There is quite a bit that we need to discuss."

"Where are our people?" Edrao demanded. "We will not talk until we know our people are safe."

Wayonn met his gaze. "Your people are fine." He answered. "You need only ask Lirana here for the truth in that."

Konlar looked at Lirana and she nodded her head swiftly. "They are unhurt husband." She told him. "All but Neral are within a portable building at their base camp with food and beds and many comforts."

"Prisoners?" Edrao snarled as he glared at Wayonn.

Wayonn met his eyes. "They are no more our prisoners than you are." He stated before looking at Konlar. "If you wish Konlar, I will have them escorted here and then you may depart Ventori without further delay. However, that choice will require us to label you and the Betas that follow you as potential threats."

"Now you threaten us!" Konlar hissed.

Wayonn shook his head. "I'm not threatening you." He stated. "I'm simply conveying the facts to you. It was you who sent your wife and mate and others who follow you here to Ventori to spy on us; to gather intelligence on us. Not the other way around. Or do you now wish to deny that is what you were doing?"

Konlar glanced quickly at Edrao and then back to Wayonn who could see the questions in his eyes. "I..."

"We detected your mate's ship the moment that it entered Ventori's system." Wayonn told him calmly, interrupting his words. He looked at Edrao deciding to give a little information to them. "Our ships and equipment may be based on Pralor technology as you no doubt have discovered by now, however we are not Pralor in our tactics or our means."

"You... but you *are* a Pralor." Edrao spoke, his tone less hostile now.

Wayonn shook his head. "As I said, I have been Lycavorian for far longer than I was ever Pralor." He stated evenly. "Lorendo was the one who saw to that, though I sincerely doubt he ever envisioned the consequences of his actions."

"Lorendo again?" Konlar spoke.

Wayonn nodded his head. "His hands are far dirtier than even you imagine." He told him. "He has been using you and your people to further his own agenda, which is not something that would benefit you or any of our people should they come to fruition." He looked at Konlar. "As Martin told you, we are not the enemy."

"You would just let us leave?" Konlar asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. "If that is what you wished. Those were Martin's instructions to me." He replied. "The end result of that decision would be solely on your shoulders however. We will eventually discover what Lorendo is up to, with or without your help. When we do, we will act on that information accordingly. When we do act, it will be neither quick nor painless for those aligned against us."

"We are not aligned against you!" Konlar gasped.

Wayonn met his eyes. "Aren't you?" He asked tilting his head slightly to the side and meeting his gaze. "Lorendo has had you following two Pralor women. Two women who happen to be family members to the Lycavorian King. His grandmother and his Aunt." Wayonn saw Edrao's and Konlar's eyes grow wide at this information. "You are beginning to understand now aren't you? Martin Leonidas is very protective of his family as you no doubt understand being wolf."

Konlar nodded his head as he looked at Lirana quickly. “How is... how is that possible?” He answered looking back at Wayonn.

“That is a story for the ages.” Wayonn told him. “But it is fact. Perhaps one day you will hear it, but know that is what drives Martin Leonidas. If you wish to depart Ventori with your people, you will be allowed to leave without harm or pressure, but it would be you dividing our people. That is not something Martin wants. The only thing he loves more than his own people are his Queens and his children. He wants to speak with you and meet the man who has lead his people this far and obviously led them with purpose and care. It is your decision to make but before you do, know this...” Wayonn met his eyes intently. “If you decide to leave now and it is discovered that you knowingly took part in anything that happened here on Ventori, then he will hunt you down and there will be no place that you can hide in this entire Universe.” Wayonn stepped closer to him. “That is something that we do not want to happen.”

“We may not... we may not have been here,” Konlar spoke. “But these are my people! I would never do anything that brought them harm! Never!”

Wayonn nodded his head. “That is what Martin determined as well.” He turned slightly behind him and motioned to the closest *Durcunusaan* troop that was behind him. The man nodded and lifted his hand to his face, activating his jaw Implant. Within what seemed like mere seconds an odd looking hover vehicle came barreling up to their position and came to a halt. It had apparently been standing by just over the crest of the hill. Martin turned back to Konlar and motioned to the armored vehicle. “This is one of our Heavy Lifters. Our main ground transports. Please...” He spoke pointing to the Lifter. “We can stop at the barracks where your people are in Discovery Base and then I will take you to see Martin. They are currently on the other side of the city of Jorlari cleaning out the last nests of these Svorag vermin.”

Konlar looked at him with wide eyes. “He does this himself?” He asked in shock.

Wayonn chuckled softly. “Martin Leonidas does not sit back and let others do for him. He only waited until his Queens departed and now he is fighting in the thick of it with his men. His Queens would not have allowed him to do such a thing.”

“He sent them away so he could fight?” Edrao asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “No. They have a diplomatic mission that they are on with the Tasmor Sovereign Regent. But now that they are gone, Martin can act more recklessly than if they were here. Something he does quite well. Come... you will not be disappointed I assure you.”

Wayonn turned and began moving for the Lifter and Konlar felt Lirana nudge his side. He looked down into her face and saw her nod her head. He had come to trust her female instincts completely since they had been mated and he would not change that now. Squeezing her hand he began to follow Wayonn.

HELIX-CLASS CORVETTE
ASSIGNED TO ARC ROYAL
ENROUTE TO SPARTA'S WRATH
ETA THIRTEEN POINT 4 HOURS

They were designed and built for speed and quick strikes, and while they would never match the newly created and built *PREMONITION* in capability, the *HELIX-Class* Pralor corvettes were quite proficient. This particular Corvette had been tweaked by the engineers at Dreamland and while still retaining its speed and ability to fight, it was now used mainly as a transport vessel. Unlike the *PREMONITION*, the *HELIX-Class* Corvettes had only one main deck and two separate crawl spaces above and below the main deck. The central portion of the ship was configured in typical passenger carrying capacity with many comfortable chairs and couches spread out in the three different sections of the ship. The forward section was where Saydia sat with Namiri, Emylea and her four other daughters who had recently arrived on a Tasmor warship to be with their mother once they had heard of her union to Anthylea. All of them were overjoyed that she had finally fulfilled the one wish they all knew she had and that was to marry the beautiful and exotic Anthylea. The caramel colored Anthylea had been an anchor for their mother for many years and the adoring love they had for each other was without question. Faydia Daret was especially close to Anthylea for she was a Tasmor Breeder

herself, and she sat with Anthylea speaking in soft tones, always seeking advice from the older woman in how she should act and present herself. Rena, Inara and Kelale sat with their mother, Namiri and Emylea trying to discover all that they could on the Lycavorians and other species that were among them. Emylea and Namiri were excited about this trip for their own reasons, Namiri because she knew this was an important mission. What she was going to do was secret, only Emylea knowing what the situation was all about. She had spoken to Sadi and the others for quite a long time and found them to be extremely friendly and humorous. They were already planning to meet her when they arrived and begin the ruse that would bring the Tasmor people together with the Lycavorians for many years to come. Namiri learned much from Sadi and the others about Androcles, and to say that his sense of honor and pride impressed her would be only partially true. If everything they told her about him was true, he could very well be just the man she had been looking for all of her life.

Emylea Daret on the other hand, she wanted to see Mari in the worst possible way. The bubbly Pralor woman had smitten Emylea from the beginning and they had shared a beautiful and passionate relationship for several months while Mari was with her mother Tobia on the Tasmor homeworld. Neither of them wanted it to end, but they knew Emylea would not have been able to continue their torrid relationship once Mari left, for the Tasmor Quorum would never have allowed it. Emylea Daret was heartbroken when she discovered Mari had married one of the Lycavorian Princes, but she loved Mari and to know that she was happy would make Emylea happy. She didn't look forward to seeing her with another person, especially a male, but Emylea hoped she would be able to hold her one last time.

The center section of the ship held all of the Tasmor Quorum members, while the rear section held only four passengers, two of them Jacina and Recia. It was here that Aricia stopped when she caught Jacina's scent and her azure eyes found her easily enough and went wide when she saw her. She had caught the faintest taste of her scent when they began the journey but she dismissed it as an accident.

"Jacina?" Aricia gasped as she moved over to the small couch where she sat with Recia.

Jacina's face lit up when she saw Aricia and she got to her feet quickly. "Aricia!"

The two women embraced tightly, and Aricia pushed her back looking at her. "*Carians* Jacina you look beautiful! Your hair is...!"

Jacina smiled shyly. "It is a new beginning for us." She spoke evenly. "I felt it was needed. Anja's hair color is gorgeous and I tried to get as close as I could."

Aricia let her fingers trace through Jacina's long hair and smiled. "It's beautiful. You are beautiful." She said. Ever since they had first met her in that Svorag mountain horror, Aricia knew that Jacina would play a role within their family in the future. Martin and her fellow Queens knew this as well, but even Martin could not see how it would play out. She ran her fingers over Jacina's cheek. "Just don't tell *Melyanna* that... she will never let us live it down."

Jacina laughed and nodded her head. "I won't." She said.

Aricia looked at Recia and took the chair next to the couch where they sat. "Recia, you are looking beautiful as well." She said taking her hand as Jacina returned to her seat.

Recia had fully recovered and Anja had declared her free of the Svorag virus many weeks ago but because of advanced changes within her body due to the virus, there were still small portions of her body that retained the almost scale like skin of the Svorag. They were small and in places that no one would ever see, but they were very sensitive to the touch and Recia was still learning to control the urges these sensations brought out in her. One other thing that remained from her near transformation was the almost lizard like, eight inch long tongue that had not returned to normal. It was something Recia had come to terms with, but she was also still learning to speak normally once more.

Aricia had to admit that those reminders aside, Recia was a very stunning woman. Her body was lean and muscular in a very lush feminine and way, her breasts firm and perky. Her long blond hair was the color of fresh wheat and her stunning blue eyes were clear and alert.

Recia squeezed Aricia's hand and smiled brilliantly. "I have Anja, For'mya and you to thank for that." She spoke. "You and they saved me. Saved us."

Aricia blushed slightly, unaccustomed to the praise. "We only did what was right." She said.

Recia nodded her head. "Perhaps." She answered. "But you did not have to help me these last weeks and months as you have. None of you did. Remaining by my side while I came to terms with what happen to me. I will forever be in your debt."

Aricia shook her head. "There is no debt to be paid." She replied. Aricia took her hand in both of hers and looked at her intently. "How are you doing? Really?"

Recia smiled and nodded her head. "Better than I ever thought I would." She replied honestly. "I don't remember most of it to be honest, just brief images. They are fading for the most part thankfully. Anja has given me a treatment for the patches of Svorag skin that remain. They are still sensitive but she said this will fade as I become more used to them." Recia looked at her with a genuine smile. "On a brighter note, I can now lick my eyebrows."

Aricia's eyes grew wide as the long, eight inch tongue extended from her mouth and rose up to move slowly along Recia's eyebrows. Recia couldn't help herself and she began to laugh and this caused Aricia and Jacina to break out into laughter as well. After a moment Aricia regained her composure and looked at them. "I did not know you would be coming with us." She finally said.

"Anja suggested it." Jacina answered. "She said your son's ship will have the most advanced labs in this quadrant. Even more so than those on Artaaya. We want to work and that is where we will do the most good in fighting these monsters."

Aricia nodded her head. "I understand." She said.

"I want to... I want to eradicate all of them." Recia spoke in a low, harsh voice. "I want to make them pay for what they did to us. To others."

Aricia squeezed her hand once more. "That is perfectly understandable and accepted." She told her. "Direct that anger and desire in your actions Recia. Do not let it ferment inside you. And do not let it rule who you are inside."

Recia met her eyes. "I would not have been able to do that without you and Jacina and the others." She told her honestly. "Now, now I know I can."

Aricia smiled and leaned over without hesitation to kiss her cheek and nuzzle her skin in a friendly fashion. "You will always have us." She told her. "That is without question. Besides, Anja would never let such intelligent and gifted researchers like you and Jacina to escape her direct hand. She surrounds herself with the brightest and the best and that is why she is so skilled herself."

"What is this ship like?" Jacina asked now.

Recia nodded her head. "We have never been on a *VORTEX*-Class cruiser before. We've never seen one except in history files."

Aricia smiled. "Well then I guess we will discover this together for neither have we." She answered. "We can get lost together and have one of our children come to our rescue."

Recia and Jacina laughed at that as Aricia got comfortable. Jacina was to be part of their family in some way Aricia knew and the young woman, really only a few years younger than her though she had been in stasis for over nine hundred years, she fascinated Aricia. Recia was struggling to rebound from what had happened to her and being on Andro's ship was the perfect medicine.

Time would reveal all to Aricia and their family and no one would be unhappy to say the least.

The Flight Deck of the *HELIX*-Class Corvette held not only the two standard pilot seats, but also a third center seat that was slightly elevated and directly between the two pilot seats. The Flight Deck was larger than anything that Endith, For'mya and Tina had ever flown before, but all three of them were thoroughly enjoying the space. Tina sat behind For'mya in front of an immense computer console that monitored every aspect of the ship. Further back in the spacious deck was a refreshments counter and couch with a knee high table. It was on this couch that Perlyea sat with Aduna. Anja turned from the refreshment counter and handed each of them a metallic mug with steaming cinnamon flavored tea.

"I spoke quickly with my daughter Eliani before we left." She told them as she turned back and retrieved her large mug of coffee. "She told me *SPARTA'S WRATH* has four different main Research Labs and we are going to commandeer one of them." She spoke as she settled in the comfortable chair across from Perlyea and Aduna. "I have all the research and data we have gathered since coming out here on my P9 and once I download it to the computers in the lab we can get to work. Once this business with Androcles is done."

Aduna glanced at Perlyea quickly, Anja taking notice of the look that passed between the two women.

“What?” Anja inquired of them. “What’s wrong?”

Perlyea smiled and leaned forward. “There is nothing wrong.” She answered. “Aduna just has... she has questions about the Gene Treatment.”

“What questions?” Anja asked settling her eyes on Aduna.

“Perlyea has explained it to me.” Aduna spoke now. “It’s not that I do not believe her,” Aduna looked at her with a loving smile. “She is brilliant at what she does,” Aduna turned back to Anja after Perlyea reached out and squeezed her hand. “It is true then that we will be able to have children?”

Anja knew right away what was flashing through Aduna’s mind. After so long trying to have children together, Aduna was hesitant to believe that it could actually happen now. Anja smiled and leaned forward in her chair. “Yes.” She answered. “I have looked at all of her work and what she did in combining the needed parts of the serum. It was actually incredible work considering that technologically speaking Tasmor Medical Science is about a thousand years behind ours. That is a testament to her skill really.”

“I took the Gene Treatment shortly after Perlyea though.” Aduna spoke. “I know you told her it will take time but...”

“But it’s been almost two years and nothing?” Anja asked her.

Aduna nodded her head. “Yes.” She looked quickly at Perlyea. “Not that I don’t mind our time together these last two years. They have been glorious.”

Perlyea blushed slightly and smiled. “They certainly have.” She agreed.

Anja chuckled at their coy looks for one another and she set her mug down on the table. “The evolution of Lycavorian DNA is an amazing thing really.” She said. “It has been changing for millennia and it continue to change. It is adaptive to its environment. It does not matter that those on Ventori are Beta Wolves and you used their DNA; you would have had the same result with the DNA from an Alpha. When I told Perlyea the time frame of when the changes within your body will be complete it was a rough estimate. All the tests we have done since have proven this. Changes are occurring Aduna, in you and Perlyea and every Tasmor who took the Gene Treatment.”

“I know.” Aduna said softly. “I just want...”

“We want my love.” Perlyea said. “We want to start a family.”

Anja smiled at them. “And you will.” She said. “What is happening to you, within you; it is very similar to what goes on within our own people. Just in the last thirty years alone, among the Lycavorians within the Union, we have had to change how we view the things we grew up with because our females were coming into adulthood much sooner than they had in the past. Aricia went through her Coming of Age when she was barely over a hundred years old for example, but now our females are entering their Coming of Age in their late teens. Our males are moving into their own adulthood even sooner.”

“Sooner?” Aduna asked.

Anja nodded her head. “Just as it is with our young females, they look older than they actually are in years, because evolution of our species has made this so. Experiences and events have caused this to happen for whatever the reason, and our DNA changes with it. My theory, and there are many theories, is that because we can imprint our children in the Etheric realm, it makes them older than they actually are. Our physical bodies are finally catching up. It took exactly eighteen months for my body to adapt after Martin turned me. With For’mya and Dysea it took a few months longer. Duewa was bitten less than a year ago, but the changes in her are almost complete. It is no different for the Beta wolves that Perlyea’s serum was created with. They may not have gone through as many changes in the same time period as the wolves in the Alpha Quadrant, but that’s the amazing thing about Lycavorian DNA. It is always changing.”

“And it will not alter us?” Aduna asked.

Anja shook her head. “Like Perlyea has probably told you already, she only used enough DNA strands to create the serum. Whatever changes do take place within you, they will be on such a miniscule scale you probably won’t even notice them entirely. Some of them you might. All of you will be healthier, that is just part of the Lycavorian Healing Factor that you will more than likely notice. Aside from that, your senses might be a little more sharp, your endurance a little higher, but nothing that will alter you as a Tasmor. Essentially, over time, the serum will have fixed whatever the issue was that was keeping your Breeders from having children in more numbers. You will still be completely Tasmor.”

“And those Tasmor Breeders that... the ones who entered into relationships with females from Ventori?” Aduna asked. “I only ask because... my sister has taken a Ventori female into her bed and they are very much in love with each other.”

Anja nodded her head. “They will be able to have perfectly healthy children. I mean we could probably do a Gene Projection and see what a child of such a union would look like, but if they are healthy, what does it matter?”

Aduna shook her head with a smile. “It does not matter.” She said as she sat back on the couch and looked at Perlyea with a new twinkle in her dark eyes.

“Would they be able to shift as you do Anja?” Perlyea asked.

Anja shook her head. “That I can’t answer.” She replied. “Not until a child from a union like that is born. Then it can be tested and determined if that is plausible. I mean we could guess and probably be right, but we wouldn’t be completely sure. I don’t like to guess either.”

Perlyea looked at her intently, glanced at Aduna and then back to Anja. “You can smell that we desire you can’t you Anja? Aricia and For’mya as well.” She asked softly.

“Perlyea!” Aduna gasped in surprise.

“There is no point in hiding it any longer.” Perlyea spoke frankly. “Not if we are going to spend so much time together in the future.”

Anja stared at her, unsurprised by Perlyea’s candor. She was a very strong and intelligent woman and so was Aduna. She, Aricia and For’mya had detected this wafting from their scents just as Martin had said. It grew more pronounced in Perlyea once Aduna had arrived since they were already lovers and in a deeply committed relationship. That desire reflected in Aduna as well because of their feelings for each other. Anja had known this would come up sooner or later and that they would need to address it. Aricia and For’mya agreed to let Anja handle it since it appeared she was more of the focus for both women.

Anja looked at both of them with her jade green eyes. “Aricia, For’mya and I, Dysea, Bella and Cirith, we have loved each other for so long, shared each other and Martin for almost three decades.” Anja spoke softly. “The love we have for each other is no different than what you and Aduna have for each other. Martin is the only man any of us have loved or desired in all that time. He is the only man that any of us have wanted to love. He is a part of us, just as Aduna is a part of you and you part of her Perlyea.”

Perlyea looked at Aduna with adoring eyes and nodded her head as she looked back to Anja. “Yes.” She said.

“Ever since Martin first claimed each one of us, we have always had each other.” Anja continued. “No doubts, no regrets and no hesitation. In that entire time, because of who we are, we have never had those we could speak with, be with, that were what you would call true friends. That is what we have always desired to be honest and until we met you Perlyea and then Aduna, we did not fully see that for ourselves. Martin has known that all of this time, he is scary sometimes with what he can see in others.” Anja looked at them. “You are both such beautiful women, strong and intelligent, and yes, desirable. These are the exact things we all look for in those we choose to share our bed with. Were we any other people, I don’t think any of us would blink at the opportunity to be with you. Unfortunately, we are other people and our love for Martin is not something we take lightly. It is absolute. What we share with him we could not share with another no matter how much we cared for them. It is the same for you and Aduna isn’t it?”

Perlyea looked at her exotic lover and closest friend in the universe. She reached out and took her hand before turning back to Anja. “Yes, it is.”

“So you understand.” Anja told her, some relief in her voice. “We have discovered, all six of us, true kindred spirits in you and Aduna. True friends that we can have sister like bonds with. That is what we can have. What we want to have, if you and Aduna are willing.”

Perlyea was silent for a long moment and then she reached across the small table for Anja’s hand. “I think I would relish that friendship far more than anything else we could share.” She said honestly.

“As would I.” Aduna echoed almost immediately.

“We can be *malda* sometimes, and half the time we chase Martin around trying to keep him out of trouble, but it would be a glorious time.” Anja said.

Perlyea looked at Aduna and then back to her. “Then we accept.” She said quickly.

Anja squeezed her hand. “You don’t know how happy that is going to make us.” Anja told her. “You really don’t.”

Aduna smiled. “If it means we will see wonders throughout the stars that we never imagined, then it will make us equally as happy.” She said.

Anja laughed softly. “A lot of those wonders have tried to kill us recently.” She said.

“No one ever said it would be easy.” Aduna came back.

Anja shook her head. “No, they didn’t.” She said with a smile.

“Tell us of your children Anja.” Aduna asked her. “All of them.”

[You did not tell them what our Beloved told you Anja.] Aricia’s sweet voice filled Anja’s mind.

[What would be the point in that Little Wolf?] Anja answered. *[None of us would ever act out in such a way, regardless of whether Martin agrees with it or approves. He wants us to be happy no matter what, and if he thinks something will make us happy, he will agree to it. That is why he told me what he did about Perlyea and Aduna.]*

[This is very true. We have seen this in the past with him.] For'mya agreed from her co-pilot’s seat without turning around.

[They are beautiful and very desirable... and in another life I wouldn’t hesitate to jump their bones.] Anja said. *[But we are in this world and this life and I love my life. And they are not Martin Leonidas.]*

[Avoi.] Aricia spoke softly.

[Besides... the only gigantic slab of meat I want dipping into my honey pot is Martin Leonidas’ gift. That man plain nubous us until we are stupid.] Anja spoke with a large amount of humor.

Aricia and For'mya nearly lost it in hysterical laughter at Anja’s words but they were able to maintain their control in their respective areas and only laughed within their private Etheric connection with their fellow Queens.

[Oh... Anja Leonidas, you are so bad.] For'mya declared, her voice tinged with humor.

[She is so right though.] Aricia commented, still laughing in their connection as well.

[Stop!] For'mya hissed in laughter. *[I still have to help Endith fly the ship and I can’t do it if I am thinking of that!]*

Anja looked at Perlyea and Aduna and saw their confused looks and she smiled brilliantly at them. “Our children?” She said. “I should probably start with Androcles since he is the oldest of them. Well, technically Lisisa and Yuriko are the oldest, but they always defer to Androcles.” Anja lifted her mug of coffee and sipped it. “Androcles is...”

VENTORI NORTHEAST QUADRANT OF CITY FOURTH SVORAG BUNKER

Neither Konlar nor Edrao had ever seen anything like it.

Discovery Base was massive they soon discovered as they entered through the main gate area. They were directed to an area just off to the right of the gate where they exited the vehicle and then Wayonn led them through the paths of the base. Konlar was more of a space captain unlike his father, though he did manage to detect the many positions filled with heavy weapons along the perimeter wall that had been built. Everyone was armed inside discovery Base, even the Tasmor soldiers he had seen moving freely within the perimeter. Whatever was happening here Konlar decided, the Tasmor were now fully part of it. They had over two dozen warships in orbit around the planet, and their heavy transports were moving back and forth between those ships and the surface. They had detected the Flagship of Saydia Daret in orbit as well, which Konlar knew was not a usual sight. The Tasmor Sovereign Regent was approachable he knew, but she did not easily trust those who were not Tasmor. Apparently something had taken place here on Ventori that had changed all of that. The Tasmor troops he saw were working hand in hand with Lycavorians and at least half a dozen different species that he had never seen before.

Lirana's team was resting in the large, portable building he saw when Wayonn led him into the facility. Their gear was stowed in different spots along the many cots that dotted the floor but the largest thing that Konlar noted was that all of them had their weapons and they were within easy reach. That single fact told him all he wanted to know since no man of any common sense would allow his enemies, or those he thought to be enemies, to keep their many weapons in such close proximity. Konlar greeted each of them with Lirana and all of them spoke of the wonders they had seen just inside this base. They had been restricted to the interior of the base, but they were not limited to where they went inside the walls. Many of them had spoken with the different Lycavorians in the camp, Alpha and Beta wolves alike, not to mention the different species. After a longer amount of time than he thought they would be allowed Wayonn motioned that they needed to move on. Konlar didn't hesitate, for just being here had begun to bring out something in him that he had never felt before. It was almost like it permeated the air of the camp all around them.

Confidence, pride and hope.

Two emotions that were in short supply among his own people for they were always wondering what the future held for them and their children. Konlar had many questions when they reentered the interior of the Heavy Lifter and he didn't hesitate once the vehicle began moving.

"How... how many Alphas are there in this Union?" He asked. "Do they hold all the power?"

Wayonn turned in his seat slightly. "I don't have exact numbers." He told them evenly. "I know that Lycavorians make up about a third of the total population of the Union. Perhaps a little less. They are one of the four founding species for the Lycavorian Union."

"One of four?" Konlar asked. "I did not... our history scrolls told us that Alphas did not work well with others."

Wayonn nodded his head. "That may have been true when your ancestors were taken from Lycavorian and brought out here by the Pralor people, but it has not been like that for nearly thirty thousand years." He replied. "I should know, for I was one of those who helped to bring about that change."

"You are... you are him aren't you?" Edrao asked now with wide eyes. "You are the Wayonn who occupies Pralor history files alongside Chief Elder Pralor Sumar! You were his Praetorian Mage! You were lost millennia ago! How could this happen..."

Wayonn nodded his head once more. "Quite a bit happened actually." He said. "The short version... our City Ship crashed on Lycavore some forty thousand millennia ago. Instead of killing us, the Lycavorians absorbed the surviving Pralors into their packs. We did this willingly after discovering that the Scourge had all but destroyed our own people. Through the many generations that followed, Sumar's descendants took on a leading role in the future of our people and many changes were instituted over time. The caste system that existed between wolves was left in the past. There are thousands of Beta wolves in positions of influence and power within the Union, just as there are Alphas. You have seen for yourself in our camp that Betas or even Omega wolves are treated no differently. We are one people after all."

"Then Sumar is...?" Edrao began to say in shock.

Wayonn shook his head. "No." He answered softly, his mind flashing back to the Etheric projection of his dearest friend and how he finally got to say goodbye to him. "Sumar died defending what he had come to love, just as many did in that time. The man you are going to meet is his great grandson by blood." Wayonn told them. "And he is also the rightful King of the Lycavorian Union. All Lycavorians, wherever they may be."

"By the Ancients within the Rift of Time!" Edrao gasped. "If... if what you say is true then he is..."

Wayonn nodded his head. "Yes. He is a Praetorian." He told him. "And just as powerful as his grandfather was, if not more."

Konlar looked at Edrao. "What is..., Edrao what is a Praetorian?"

Wayonn looked at Edrao now. "You never told them?" He asked.

Edrao shook his head. "We have thought them long dead." He answered. "I did not see the need to tell them of history that no longer exists."

Wayonn nodded his head. "Understandable." He told him. "However, Praetorians do still exist, and even now Murano travels with Martin's children, four of whom are Praetorians themselves."

Edrao's eyes grew even wider. "Murano!" He gasped. "I have seen his name as well in our history archives! Gods..."

Wayonn smiled at him. “Now you are beginning to see what is taking place here. And also why Lorendo is leading you astray now and probably has been for quite some time. He...”

The Lifter’s COM unit came alive then interrupting his words. The male voice burst out of the COM panel speaking excitedly but still with a calm demeanor.

“CRIMSON WAVE! CRIMSON WAVE! SIX SVORAG ANIMALS HAVE BROKEN THE CONTAINMENT ZONE! I SAY AGAIN, SIX SVORAG ANIMALS HAVE BROKEN CONTAINMENT ZONE! SPARTAN ONE AND TEN ARE IN PURSUIT! SPARTAN ONE AND TWO ARE IN PURSUIT!! ALL UNITS CONVERGE! ALL UNITS CONVERGE! THEY ARE MOVING SOUTHWEST TOWARDS DISCOVERY BASE! CONVERGE! CONVERGE!”

UNCHARTED SPACE EDGE OF ECHO QUADRANT TWENTY-TWO HOURS UNTIL FIRST CONTACT

It was the fastest ship they had, built for speed and stealth as most of their ships were. It was no bigger than a Union *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Frigate, though somewhat thinner along the center fuselage of the ship. Normally crewed by forty-five personnel, the ship had only fourteen occupants now, including the four person flight team. The Flight Crew was the most experienced of their crews and the oldest. All of them had volunteered for this mission knowing that it could very well be a one way operation. They were entering into uncharted waters here, attempting First Contact in space instead of on a planet. First Contact with a species that all of them knew did not take kindly to surprises or unannounced approaches to their capital ships.

Ishma and Awser looked up from their positions on the couches within the main passenger compartment of their ship when Perlae came down the small flight of stairs from the cockpit.

“We are just about to enter the Echo Quadrant.” She told them as she moved to the couch beside her sister and settled next to her. “Once we do the pilot says it will be another day before we catch up to them.”

“They are still holding position?” Awser asked.

Perlae nodded her head. “Yes, and we don’t know why.”

“Why would they have stopped and remained stationary for so long Perlae?” Ishma asked. “It does not seem like something that Androcles would do based on what we know of him.”

Perlae shook her head. “I don’t know.” She replied. “But I agree, it is not something that he would normally do from what we know.”

“What if they begin moving before we catch up?” Awser asked.

“The pilot tells me we have more than enough speed to catch them unless they conduct a jump.” Perlae said.

“And if they do?” Awser pressed her.

Perlae looked at him intently with a stern face. She was the oldest of the three of them at nearly twenty-nine years old, each of them born exactly fourteen months apart, which is how long it took their eggs to mature. Their Darastrixi father and Lycavorian mother had shared a four century long romance before surrendering to their feelings for each other completely and becoming married. Due to their father’s Darastrixi seed, his DNA caused their mother to carry each of them as eggs within her womb until they were finally born. The moment they left the protection of her womb and touched the air, their shells fell away and they entered this world. Awser was the middle child at twenty-seven and Ishma the youngest at twenty-five and a half years old. Perlae had always been the more reserved of the three, the one who thought things through before acting. Awser was the comedian of the trio, while Ishma was the reckless and adventurous one. They had been inseparable as children, even more so after their mother was mortally injured in a mining accident. Their father had been distraught for several years until finally putting her memory to rest and moving on with his life. He doted over all three of them and worried for them, but he had trained each of them to be the finest warriors he could. When this was combined with their Lycavorian training, each of them was a deadly combination of speed and strength.

They are the only three children to ever be born of such a union.

They were also *Yowa*.

These skills passed down to them through their Lycavorian blood from their grandmother and her mother before her. No one had ever been able to explain how they could do the things they did, but no one really tried after seeing them in action. *Vaes* was a new and scary thing to the Darastrixi and it had taken many centuries for them to come to believe and then trust in its use. (Magic) Their Etheric abilities enhanced their *Vaes* skills and their Etheric bonds to their Darastrixi Bond Mates enhanced their magic pool, enabling them to cast many more magic skills that were much more powerful.

Their *Staanina* Dynina was widely regarded as the most powerful *Yowa* to have ever lived and they had studied under her for most of their lives. All of them knew of the vow their grandmother had sworn as she held her dying daughter in her arms, tears streaking her face along with the blood and soot from the mine explosion. They had dedicated their lives to the purpose of their people and what their existence meant in the grand scheme of the universe. While all of them well versed in healing balms and herbs, no *Yowa* could ever be any good without these skills, the balance of their training had taken place in Destruction and Alteration *Vaes*. Individually they were the most skilled and powerful *vaes* users behind only their grandmother simply because it ran deeply within their Lycavorian blood. Others who had this gift were well trained and schooled thanks to her, but the three of them had gotten the most intense parts of her training.

Perlae leaned more to the Alteration skills, and she had tricked even her *staania* on more than one occasion, while Awser and Ishma were devastatingly powerful Destruction *Vaes* users and could direct their power expertly. Their *Staanina* had been training them, preparing them for the day when they would be reunited with the blood they had left behind, and that day was almost here.

Perlae gazed at her brother with that stern expression, which she knew would bounce right off his thick hide.

“Then we will follow them Awser!” She snapped at him.

Awser held up his hands in a defensive manner. “Ok. Ok.” He replied with a grin.

Ishma smiled from where she sat and she picked up the scarf and tossed it at him as Perlae shifted on the couch, smiling herself. She could not remember a time in their lives when they could remain mad at one another for more than a few seconds. Awser had always deferred to Perlae’s benevolent nature, but the few times she had allowed her younger brother to unleash his fury in their defense, it had not been pretty for those who had insulted his beloved sisters.

“They will probably detect our ship on their sensors in a few hours anyway.” Perlae said. “They may have changed the name of this ship, but it is still the most advanced Pralor warship ever built and the most powerful according to Kenroe. It was built to fight back the darkness and it will have no problem detecting our ship I’m quite sure.”

“We will need to make sure we do nothing that they could interpret as hostile Perlae.” Awser told her.

Perlae nodded her head. “I have already made it very clear to our flight crew that they are very strict in their actions with unknown ships and people.” She told him. “Believe me, I made this abundantly clear. I do not wish to be blown out of the stars before our mission even begins.”

Awser smiled as he sat forward in his chair and held out the data pad to Perlae similar to the ones he and Ishma had been reading from. “These are the last intercepts from the Alpha Quadrant that *staania* was able to gather from our contacts on Icarava before the entire network was locked out.”

Perlae met his amethyst colored eyes as she took the pad. “Locked out?” She asked.

Awser nodded his head and sat back again. “Apparently a Junior Scholar of the *Elbakiw Sulevfu* by the name of Dalis Sulryn altered the files in such a way that it was not detected until very recently that he had accessed the data cores from the Alpha Quadrant several months ago.”

Perlae looked at the pad as Ishma met her brother’s gaze. “He was helping Laren and Ladur?” She asked softly.

Awser nodded his head. “That is what our Intelligence people say.” He answered. “He gathered this data, hid the fact that he took it, and then gave it to Laren and Ladur. Probably so that they could learn more about their fellow *Dahakoan*.”

Perlae looked up from the pad. “Then they did receive help from the Darastrixi?” She asked.

Awser nodded once more. “*Staan* believes so.” He replied. “And from much more powerful individuals than the *Livaiji Sulevfu* could give to them or that our people believed was possible. Our contacts could not discover much since the lock down took place but they suspect someone very high up in the *Urkrisa Mamiss*.”

“Members of the *Urkrisa Mamiss* helped them to escape Icarava.” Perlae spoke softly. “It has to be if they are now together with Androcles, Dorian and the other *Dahakoan*.”

“Our people on Icarava have always been limited in what they could gathered but that is what they suspect.” Awser said.

Ishma looked at her sister. “Perlae, how is it that we have all of this information about them? All of this, it could not have come from Darastrixi intercepts. There is no way they could gather such detail about them.”

Perlae shook her head slowly. “No.” She said.

Awser looked at his older sister intently. “*Staan* has a source within their Union doesn’t she?” He gasped. “All of these years she has had a source there. That is how she knows so much about them! Who is it sister?”

Perlae shook her head. “*Staan* never told me who it was.” She said. “Only that she had someone very close to them, to all of them really, someone who watches over them. Someone that was able to give her vital information when she needed it. It was this source that told her that Sumar’s great grandson had returned to claim his throne. Over the years she has discovered everything about him and his children and Queens. All of it to be able to better protect them when the time came.”

“She has kept this secret all of these years?” Ishma said softly.

Perlae nodded her head slowly. “She only gave me this knowledge a few months ago. She must have sensed that enlightenment had come to them.”

Ishma nodded her head. “Then we must stick to the plan *Staan* laid out for us. It is even more important now.” She said.

Awser nodded his head. “I agree.”

“As do I.” Perlae said as she looked at them. “Sadi and Androcles’ firstborn children will be twins. A boy and a girl.” She said. “*Staan* has seen this and they will be the beginning of a new future for all of us. But they will also be the target of our enemies. Now that the *Dahakoan* have come together, our enemies will rally and try to destroy them for they will see this as well.”

Awser leaned forward once more and held out his hand to his sisters. “We know our tasks Perlae our beloved sister.”

Perlae nodded her head with a shy smile. “I know we do.” She said. “You know me though. I worry about these things far too much.”

Ishma reached out and placed her hand atop Awser’s. “We all do sister.” She said. “You are not alone in that.”

Perlae didn’t hesitate in the least and placed her hand on top of theirs. Their hands twisted until they were grasping their fingertips together tightly and their hands curled into one large fist.

“Will they accept us Perlae?” Awser asked softly.

Perlae met his eyes and then Ishma’s amethyst orbs. “We are their blood.” She spoke confidently.

“When has our blood ever denied one another in our long history since *Staan* left Lycavore? Never.” Perlae nodded her head. “They will accept us *fervon*.” She said. “We are family.”

VENTORI SOUTHWEST OF DISCOVERY BASE

There were few things as magnificent as seeing two wolves running together in full stride. If you took into account that Lycavorians in their wolf form were, in some cases, even larger than the Dire Wolves of ancient Earth, then this made it all the more majestic. The raven black wolf and the dark brown wolf beside it were running stride for stride, their powerful legs propelling them at an astonishing speed for something so

large. Had anyone on Ventori had the presence of mind to have a speed measuring tool with them, they would have clocked these two wolves at just over fifty miles per hour.

As Wayonn's Lifter skidded to a halt and those inside barreled out, they could see the two wolves easily streaking across the open terrain after the five small and one larger human like figures. Konlar and Lirana stood open mouthed at what they saw. Lirana at least could and did recognize Martin as an Alpha and King while Konlar was seeing him for the first time. Neither was prepared for what they saw and both stood in shock. At no time in their lives had they ever seen a wolf the size of the raven black monster moving towards them now. Konlar estimated this wolf was at least four feet at the shoulder, perhaps a bit smaller and looked to weigh nearly three hundred pounds of muscle and fur. The brown wolf was not that much smaller, perhaps two thirds of the black one's size and probably weighing close to the same. What amazed Konlar was the fluid motion with which both wolves moved across the terrain almost as if they were gliding across the ground. Four inch wide paws dug into the dirt and grass, thickly muscled hind legs drove them forward, their chests low to the ground and their eyes narrowed to slits.

They had done this so many times in the past that neither could remember, though usually Julie had been beside them as well. They were brothers of the blood, which meant more to them than anything else except for the love of the women who occupied their hearts and souls. Today was no different as their hearts and minds worked as one. They knew each other's every nuance and quirk. The moment that the alarm was risen that six Svorag had incapacitated three of their men and escaped out of the underground facility, Martin and Danny were moving. By the time they reached the exit and got above ground, the escaped Svorag were already four miles in front of them and heading back to Discovery Base. Martin and Danny didn't hesitate for an instant and shifted immediately to give chase. Both of them trusted the others who remained behind to handle the rest of what needed to be done. They ran stride for stride, four inch wide paws hitting the ground at exactly the same time, their tails straight out behind them as they used them for pivoting and slight turns to adjust their direction. Their hearts rumbled as one, their muscles driving them forward, their eyes seeing everything. They communicated with sharp yelps and growls, twisting through the overgrown foliage until they broke into the clear and then they became heat seeking missiles as their eyes focused on the Svorag ahead of them with laser like precision.

"*Vali'star!*" The Lifter driver barked at Wayonn who had moved in front of the vehicle.

"On the gun Kamen! On the gun!" Wayonn barked. The *Durcunusaan* didn't hesitate and scrambled up into the gun hatch of the Heavy Lifter, charging the 30mm chain gun mounted there. Wayonn whirled to face him. "If Martin and Daniel do not stop them, open fire! They must not reach the base!"

"The King and General...!" The *Durcunusaan* began to protest.

"They would expect you to do your duty *Durcunusaan!*" Wayonn barked. "If they fail, you will open fire and keep firing until they are dead!"

The *Durcunusaan* nodded his head briskly. "Understood!" He replied not liking his answer but knowing it was the correct one to give.

Konlar looked at Wayonn with wide eyes. "You just told him to fire on your King!" He exclaimed.

Wayonn met his eyes. "Martin Leonidas' bloodline carries within it the largest wolves to have existed since his father and grandfathers lived! A bloodline that extends back over forty millennia! You can see that for yourself before you! He and his sons have no equal when in wolf form and Daniel Simpson is nearly as large as you can no doubt see. If they cannot stop those monsters then we have no other options! Martin would expect us to act if they cannot stop these creatures!"

While Konlar, Lirana and many among their small clan of people often enjoyed shifting into their wolf forms and running for the simple enjoyment and freedom it brought them, none had ever learned how to fight in their four legged persona. What they were about to witness was something none of them had ever seen and to say that it frightened them to their core was an understatement.

They could see what was happening three quarters of a mile away easily with their wolf eyes and they heard the sharp bark by the massive raven black wolf carry over the wind. A yelp of acknowledgment from the

dark brown wolf and the two huge beasts split apart. The two slow Svorag who were trying to outrun the two beasts from the rear kept turning to see where they were.

They turned one last time and it was far too late.

The two Svorag met gruesome deaths in the form of a four inch wide black furred paw equipped with steel like claws and a three and a half inch brown furred paw with similar claws. Both Martin and Danny didn't even break stride as they leaped into the air and one swipe was all it took and then they hit the ground and continued running. The two Svorag stopped rolling along a few meters later, both of them with half their skulls caved in and leaking blood and brain matter profusely into the ground around them. Martin and Danny accelerated together and caught up to the second two creatures. Once more neither of them paused in their actions and black steel claws flashed out once more, this time sprays of blood erupting into the air as the sides of their thick necks were torn wide open by those nearly unbreakable claws. Again, Martin and Danny accelerated past the bodies as they kicked up clouds of dirt and grass and rolled to halts very much dead. The much larger Svorag in the center roared out its rage as it saw the two wolves flash by him. It also caused the two Svorag in the front to turn their heads and see the massive beasts chasing them down. They did the stupid thing and turned to face the two wolves, who by now had put a hundred meters between themselves and the lumbering monster behind them. Turning to face them was as singularly bad thing to do and it ended up being their undoing. While they thought to fight the four legged beasts chasing them, Martin and Danny each leaped into the air and shifted while they were airborne and attacked.

Two sets of Svorag eyes went wide as one second they were bracing for an attack by wolves and the next instant there were two very large men coming at them. Martin grabbed the Svorag's head as he leaped over him and using his immense wolf strength he heaved the Svorag completely over his shoulder, the creature's neck snapping and popping in four different locations until its body slammed into the unforgiving ground and bounced like limp noodles for several seconds before becoming still. Even as Martin did this Danny simply snatched the foul creature's head in his hands and using his forward motion he dropped to one knee completely snapping every piece of cartilage and bone in the Svorag's upper body with his horrific strength and huge body. As Konlar and the others watched neither Martin nor Danny hesitated in the least, whirling inward and raising their left arms. Wayonn heard gasps of fright as two Shi Viskas erupted from Flatspace and within a split second were launched from their arms. The shields flew with unerring accuracy and precision, both of them extending the razor like blades around the entire curved edge of the shields milliseconds after leaving their arms of their owners. They covered the eighty meter distance to the single beast that remained as it lumbered toward them with a roar of rage. There was little in the known universe that a Shi Viska could not slice through with little effort. Thick steel and concrete could stop them certainly, but not after the shields buried themselves into these two materials so deeply they could often not be pulled out without a machine of some sort. The legs of this Svorag monstrosity bearing down on them was not such a material.

Martin's Shi Viska struck first, just above the right leg joint, and completely passed through the monster's leg. Danny's shield struck within half a second of Martin's and did the same thing with little effort. Even as the pain filtered to the creature's mind and he opened his mouth to roar as his legs flipped and rolled behind him, he began to pitch forward, his balance forever destroyed at the loss of his limbs. His roar lasted only half a second as his oversized head erupted in a ghastly spray of blood, bone and brain matter.

Konlar and the others could only watch in awe as the five hundred pound creature slid to a halt only a few feet from where Martin and Danny were kneeling. They were less than ten meters from where Konlar stood with Edrao in open mouthed wonder. They watched as the Shi Viskas whipped in from the side and settled to their arms as if they were feathers alighting on your arm and then they vanished once more.

"What the hell was that Jules!?" They heard the tall, ebony skinned Alpha bark as he rose to his full height. He seemed to know that the single shot had been coming by the tone of his voice.

Wayonn's head whipped to the side and his eyes searched for the voice as the female answered and his eyes settled on Julie Collins atop the building on the edge of the city some fifteen meters yards away. He had to consciously focus his wolf vision to compensate for the distance, but he saw her lowering the huge sniper rifle, a very competent smile on her beautiful face as she handed the rifle back to the Spartan beside her. Wayonn had learned of her history and past simply because of who she was. Martin and Daniel both considered her their dearest sister though she was no relation to either of them. He knew of how she had died, how she had been resurrected, and how all three of them now felt for each other and the other remaining members of their old

team. Daniel was his Mard *fervon*, and Julie Collins was his true sister and there was no debating that as far as Martin Leonidas was concerned.

“That my dear brothers...” Julie spoke her voice carrying over all of their COM implants. “...Was a deep penetrating, high explosive tipped round. Kind of like what Colin uses on me.”

“Oh, I love it when you talk dirty baby!” Colin’s voice echoed in their COMS now and Martin and Danny looked at each other.

“*Sibfla!*” Danny muttered shaking his head as Martin laughed.

“Nice shot Jules!” He told her with that crooked smile. “Hell of a nice shot!”

“Someone has to cover your sorry asses with Aricia and the others gone.” Julie answered him with humor.

Martin shook his head as he seemed to notice Wayonn for the first time, though Wayonn knew that was not the case. “Send a team to collect what’s left of the bodies Jules. I don’t want to leave anything to chance. Full gear and make sure they don’t miss any body parts.”

“On it Boss.” Julie answered.

Martin willed away his Shi Viska as he turned to face Wayonn ten meters away. He was instantly impressed with the Beta wolf Konlar. The man appeared to be in excellent shape and his demeanor was one of confidence and curiosity. The turned Pralor Edrao was a little more hesitant, but Martin expected that. Martin turned back to Danny.

“Pass this little stunt on to Kenny and Pablo so they are prepared for it in case the Svorag try it at the second facility.” He told him. “Burn them out if they have to Dan, but none of them make it out alive.”

Danny nodded and reached up to tap his jaw. “I hear that.” He said. “T’lolt and the Master Chief turned their barrels red on the northern tunnel because they were pouring out in groups. There were a lot more than we thought *fervon*.”

Martin shifted his upper body armor and nodded his head in agreement. “Let Kenny and the others know to expect greater numbers than we first thought. And make sure he knows not to worry about equipment damage. We can fix the gear, and it isn’t worth lives. Use whatever force he deems necessary.”

Dan nodded one more time and then reached up to squeeze his shoulder. “Anuk is calling me to come back. I’ll get this first site secure while you say hello.”

Martin looked over to Konlar and Wayonn. “We’ll be along shortly.” He told him. “And have Nubian contact Captain Drenia so that the Tasmor can have a team available in case any Tasmor remains are found.”

“Got it.” Danny answered before shifting back to wolf form and sprinting back towards the underground research facility.

Martin adjusted his armor once more and then moved over beside Wayonn. Wayonn looked at him. “More exciting than you first thought I take it?” Wayonn asked.

Martin grinned in response. “Depends on your definition of exciting.” He replied. “But yeah, something like that.”

“A definition I’m quite sure Aricia and the others would not approve of.” Wayonn told him. “Nor Helen, which is why you sent her up to the *ARC ROYAL* in order to organize the refugees when they begin arriving.”

Martin looked at him. “You going to rat me out?” He asked sternly.

Wayonn couldn’t help but laugh. “I won’t need to.” He said after a moment. “They know you too well.” Wayonn motioned to Konlar. “Allow me to introduce Konlar and Edrao.”

Konlar bowed his head deeply out of an almost instinctual deference to the Alpha wolf standing before him. “I am...”

“A leader of men!” Martin snapped causing Konlar to look at him with wide eyes. “And you don’t bow to me or anyone.” Martin held out his hand to him and Konlar glanced quickly at Wayonn with a stunned expression. Wayonn nodded without hesitation and Konlar turned back to Martin and slowly reached out to take the hand.

Martin smiled at the firm grip and he looked at Wayonn. “Got room for my big ass in that vehicle?” He asked. “We got a lot to talk about and we may as well get started.”

Wayonn nodded his head knowing that Martin Leonidas’ casual nature and his never ending humorous one liners could do more to put people at ease than anything Wayonn had ever witnessed. “By all means.”

Martin nodded his head. “Then let’s get started.” He said. “We still have lots of rats to exterminate and I don’t want to miss the party.”

Konlar could not help the slow burn of anger that had been building within him for the last hour at what he had seen. He could sense this from Edrao as well, and from his beloved Lirana he could sense the horror at what had taken place in this facility. It had taken all of his willpower not to lose the breakfast he had eaten before leaving the ship, while Lirana had dry heaved several times at what remained in several of the rooms in the underground research site. Edrao had lost the contents of his stomach very early on, but he was made from strong stock and he continued with them. When they finally exited the facility back above ground, all of them breathed deeply of the fresh, clean air as Martin led them over to a large half tent that had been set up. Inside was a large Communications Array with two female technicians monitoring whatever COM channels they were supposed to be monitoring. Several dozen crates of what could only be ammunition of some sort were scattered about and it was these that they finally settled on. Martin moved to the ever present urn of Aricia’s coffee and drew a mug for each of them, putting the tray of creamer and honey on a crate in front of them while he sat back on one. Whatever doubts or concerns Konlar had held inside him before coming here had vanished within the first thirty minutes. Even Edrao, who had been much more skeptical and concerned on the trip here, even he had become totally different. Given what they had learned so far and the way their own people were being treated, how could they not. Whatever they had known or read about when it came to the Alpha wolves of their species, it had been completely and utterly shredded into tiny pieces.

Wayonn had moved into the tent now and they waited while he drew a mug of coffee and then took a crate beside Martin.

It was Konlar who began speaking first for he wanted it known right away that he had no idea of what was occurring here on his former homeworld.

“King Leonidas...,” Konlar met his dark brown eyes and remembered that this man had practically demanded that Konlar call him by his first name while they were inside the facility. “Martin... I give you my word that we had no idea... I had no idea that this was taking place here. And I certainly would not have been party to it. None of my people would have assisted with this horror!”

Martin nodded his head quickly. “I figured that out in the first few seconds Konlar. No Lycavorian would have been able to tolerate this being done to our people. And any who did are not Lycavorians at all.”

“This is Lorendo’s doing?” Edrao asked.

It was Wayonn who answered with a nod of his head. “He developed the virus initially, yes. Though we don’t know or understand the full scope or intent of what he was trying to do, the virus got away from him. He lost control of it. The Svorag are the result. What you see all around you is the result.”

“*Carians!*” Lirana gasped in shock.

“When he lost control of it we don’t know.” Martin continued. “We don’t really have a lot of information to go on because he was hiding this even from his own people. That’s why the facility in orbit of your world is so important. It could be a wealth of information that could very well help us to eradicate this virus and the Svorag.”

“If what you say is true, then a cure could be found for it.” Edrao said.

Martin nodded his head. “Something that my wife and mate Anja is very capable of making.”

“And for the millions already infected?” Edrao asked. “There is no hope is there?”

Martin looked at Wayonn quickly and then shook his head slowly as he turned back to them.

“No. I won’t lie to you about it. We can inoculate people, maybe even save those who have been turned less than a year. Anja and her people are brilliant and they were able to save two infected Pralors that we found on Onterom, but it’s a crap shoot really. And far greater a risk than I am willing to take.”

Edrao nodded his head slowly. “My contacts on Artaaya said the same thing many years ago.” He spoke softly.

“These contacts?” Wayonn asked now.

Edrao nodded his head. “Turned, just like me.” He replied. “They returned to Artaaya many years ago. All three of them were captured by Kintaur and then rescued by us after several years of captivity. They

maintained their past identities and we developed back stories for how they had escaped the Kintaur. They send me information whenever they feel it is necessary. Lorendo does not know who they are. It is something that Konlar's father established before he was born."

"Exactly how many Pralors are there among your people?" Martin asked.

Konlar shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know to be honest." He told him in reply. "Our pack is perhaps eighteen thousand strong. Among them are many Pralors who we have rescued through the years from the Kintaur or Svorag. Several hundred at least."

"I was among the first." Edrao told them now. "Konlar's father led an assault against a Kintaur base. They were not there to save us, Lorendo had sent them there for another purpose, but he ended up saving all of us. Nineteen in total. We returned to their village and remained. My... my bride found me a year later. A year after that she turned me and we became married."

"No Alphas?" Martin asked.

Konlar shook his head quickly. "No. The Alphas that our history says were among us when we settled Ventori had been gone for millennia by the time Lorendo approached my father and they made this deal."

"There have been whispers through the decades..." Lirana spoke up now.

Konlar looked at her. "Lirana my wife, there is no way to confirm them and given who we heard them from, more than likely it is not true."

Martin leaned forward on the crate now. "What whispers?" He asked.

Lirana smiled shyly. "Konlar is right." She said.

"No... I'd like to hear them." Martin told her.

Lirana looked at Konlar and he nodded with another shrug. "You know more about them than I do." He said.

Lirana turned back to Martin. "I have spoken to several of the oldest elders in our pack. I have a love of history and such." She said. "In our conversations, all of them have spoken of different rumors and whispers that they had heard from others in their time. Some of these rumors were said to have come from different Pralors who worked with Lorendo, ones that we interacted with early on. The elders say there were a handful that did not full trust Lorendo even then. None of these rumors were ever confirmed and therefore none were ever really believed."

"What were they?" Wayonn asked.

"The most prominent was that there was a large planet on the far side of Kintaur space. Along the edge of the quadrant. The only ones even able to reach that far with their ships are Pralors." Lirana told them. "Supposedly it was also home to Lycavorians. Some believe that is where the Alphas with us disappeared to. Through the decades these rumors and whispers grew wildly exaggerated and that is why no one puts much faith in them. That and no one has ever been able to confirm it."

"Wildly exaggerated how?" Martin asked.

Lirana shrugged. "The whispers spoke of a large Empire. Powerful weapons and ships." She answered. "As I said, they are just whispers and rumors."

Martin looked at Wayonn. "Delnash did say there were two planets in this Quadrant that had been seeded with our people." He said.

Wayonn nodded his head. "Yes he did, but we sent probes to the second planet Martin. They detected nothing. Signs of an ancient civilization but nothing else."

"And we didn't explore it further because of our current situation." Martin agreed. "But what if that civilization was Lycavorian and they moved on. And you heard about the Svorag that Anja said used to be a Pralor. She was turned by an Alpha. Where did she come from?"

Wayonn met his eyes. "Are you thinking that Lorendo knows about them?"

"He created these monsters!" Martin snapped. "If one of them turned an Alpha female then they have had interaction with them before. It wasn't one of our people and if they had taken her from the Alpha Quadrant we would have known or heard about it. Which means Lorendo is involved somehow, someway. And that sleazy fucking bastard knows about them."

Wayonn nodded his head. "Your logic is sound Martin." He said. "But how do we go about discovering if it is true? We can't simply ask Lorendo."

"I give him to Nubian and he'll be singing like a *nubous* canary inside an hour." Martin growled.

Wayonn nodded his head. “Yes... and it could possibly destroy whatever trust we have built with Delnash and other Pralors so far. We can’t destroy that now Martin. We need each other and you know it.”

“You can do this?” Konlar asked now drawing their attention back to him. “You can tell just by going to this planet who lived there?”

Martin nodded his head. “We have equipment that can determine it, yes.”

“And you have people who can operate this equipment?” Konlar pressed him.

Martin met his eyes. “Yes.”

“Then give me these people and equipment and I will take them.” Konlar offered.

Martin shook his head. “I need your knowledge of that station.” He told him.

Edrao stood up. “I have been to the station more times than Konlar and I know nothing about commanding our ship. At the very least I can get you into the entrance foyer. No one is allowed past the security checkpoints after that but I can get us into the foyer leading to these checkpoints. After that, they have biometric sensors and security measures that we could not breach.”

“We can.” Martin said confidently.

“We have... we have people who have been taken through the years. They made supply trips to the station and never returned. If they are there we...” Edrao began to speak.

“You never asked what happened to them.” Wayonn asked.

Konlar rose to his feet. “We were always told by Lorendo or those who work for him on the station that they were needed elsewhere for work.” He replied. “We did not to question it at first, but then we began to suspect this was not true. We were never in a position to find out.”

“You realize that any of your people who were taken are probably...” Martin looked at him. “They are probably dead or turned into a Svorag.”

Konlar nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“Where are your people Konlar?” Martin asked bluntly.

Konlar looked at Edrao and then back to Martin without speaking. He opened his mouth to speak but then closed it again. “Martin I...”

Martin stepped right up to him. He was taller than Konlar by roughly four inches and easily had fifty to sixty pounds of muscle on him but to his credit Konlar didn’t blink. “No.” He spoke evenly. “That is a trust that I have not earned yet. That we have not earned yet.” Martin nodded his head. “I would do the same thing in your position. I am going to earn that trust. We’ll earn that trust, but right now, tell me about this mission Lorendo wanted you to conduct against Murano and Mari.”

“He wanted... he wanted us to kill Murano and take who he thinks is Delnash’s daughter. This young woman Mari.” Konlar answered.

Martin nodded. “Give me all the details he gave to you.”

“Why?” Konlar asked. “It is not something I will do now knowing who they are.”

Martin grinned. “Yes, you will.”

Konlar looked at him oddly. “We will?” He asked.

Wayonn chuckled softly and shook his head. “Welcome to the universe of out of the box thinking Konlar. You will find it just as exciting and *malda* as I do.”

ARTAAYA

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELDER

“...You certain Martin?” Delnash asked the image of Martin from Ventori. He had admitted to himself many weeks ago that he looked forward to these communications with Martin. His blunt talk and complete honesty was utterly refreshing to say the least.

“That’s the problem.” Martin answered him. “We aren’t certain and that is why I felt I should call you.”

Delnash nodded his head and motioned to the man beside him. “Martin this is Captain Dehov... pardon me, Admiral now since I promoted him. He will be in charge of the ships we are sending to Honelze. He will

also be your direct liaison to me. I trust him completely and that is why I have him here now. He has been fully briefed about everything.”

Martin nodded his head. “Admiral, a pleasure.”

Dehov smiled and nodded his head. “I assure you Praetorian Martin, it is far more an honor for me.”

Delnash saw Martin roll his eyes slightly and he grinned knowing that Martin was never going to get used to that. “I had Dehov pull whatever records he could without raising suspicion to what he was doing. Two Seven also helped to cover his tracks.”

“What did you find out?” Martin asked.

Dehov reached forward and activated the small holo disc on the table and the star chart came into view. “This is the area of space you are inquiring about.” Dehov spoke swirling his finger in the holo star chart. “And to be embarrassingly honest, we know nothing about it.”

“What?” Martin asked.

“When we first colonized Artaaya the decision was made to keep our imprint as small as possible.” Delnash told him. “Only the space around Honelze and our other colony world of Nepneu were thoroughly searched. The area of the Echo quadrant that you are inquiring about is vast and since we were not looking to...”

Martin nodded his head. “I get it.” He said. “Did you send any probes at least?”

Dehov nodded his head. “That we did do. Four of them to be exact. All of them stopped transmitting within a week of arriving in this area of space. All of them registered sub space anomalies just before they went off line. The Science Convocation determined that this entire area was essentially a sub space minefield. Likely due to a supernova that occurred roughly a million years ago.”

“Another mitigating factor is that in order to get to this area of the quadrant we would have to send a ship through Kintaur space.” Delnash spoke. “After our initial encounters and their continued hostility towards us for not giving them our technology, I did not want to risk sending ships across their space. One of our ships is enough of a match for three or four of theirs, but they patrol in large numbers now. They would have overwhelmed a single science vessel just in numbers.”

“How many Pralors have the Kintaur seized through the years?” Martin asked.

Delnash looked at Dehov quickly and then back to Martin. “One thousand four hundred and nineteen.” He answered. “None of whom have been returned. I bear the responsibility for that entirely. I was not willing to give them our technology for the return of our people. It would have altered the balance of power within the quadrant of space to the extreme. It is also why I have never given our technology to the Tasmor people, though after meeting and speaking with Sovereign Regent Daret, I should have looked at that avenue more thoroughly.”

Martin shook his head. “You did the right thing.” He said. “In your position I would have done the same.”

“Speaking of the Tasmor Martin...?” Delnash asked. “Exactly how much have you shared with them? The way you have adapted our technology with yours makes you just as advanced as my people. Perhaps more so in different ways.”

“Saydia knows what I am willing to give her and what I am not.” Martin told him honestly. “I will not share weapons or shield technology, nor will I share engine designs and schematics. I have authorized medical technology be made available to them based on Anja’s recommendations, as well as the means to take their engines to the next level. It doesn’t give it to them, but it makes them work hard on their own to discover these advances, which they probably will knowing them. Given their level of technology and the skill of the engineers they have now, I estimate that they will be able to make and build their own Interstellar Quantum based engines within two to three decades. Looking at their history as I did, most of my people agree that they would have discovered how to build this tech within fifty years anyways. So now they discover this technology perhaps two decades earlier than they would have and they do it on their own. I determined that was acceptable. The Tasmor are sharp Delnash, and I believe their arrogance only comes from what their conflict with the Kintaur forced them to become. Anja tells me that Perlyea and others are thrilled with the medical knowledge and equipment they are being exposed to and allowed to use. They are already talking about the diseases and afflictions that they can cure. In my book when people are more concerned about making cures than weapons, that’s a good thing.”

Delnash sat back in his chair and shook his head. “That is my mindset as well. And this is something we could have done many decades ago if we ourselves were not so arrogant and introverted. And in doing so we would have earned a powerful ally, for I too find that timetable you just described acceptable as well.”

Martin grinned in the transmission. “There’s an expression among my people for what you are thinking.” He said.

Delnash looked at him. “What is that?”

“Shit happens.” Martin told him.

“And what does this mean?” Delnash asked.

“Basically... get over it and move forward.” Martin said.

Delnash chuckled and nodded his head. “Interesting. Perhaps I will use this expression in the future.” He said.

“So your probes picked up nothing?” Martin asked.

Dehov shook his head. “Oh no. Each of them was able to scan quite a bit during their time there before they struck their sub space anomalies. The data was logged and filed.”

“Wait... no one ever reviewed it?” Martin asked.

Dehov shook his head. “No. Since we had no intention of operating in that area of space it was not given a priority. Eventually it was just filed away into the data archives. I retrieved and copied it before coming here.”

“Delnash... can I have that?” Martin asked.

Delnash nodded. “Certainly.” He answered without hesitation. “I will have Dehov bring it with him to the gathering. Unless you wish it sooner.”

Martin shook his head. “No sense in taking a risk that Lorendo might discover you sent me a secure transmission.”

“I am reasonably sure he already knows I speak with you frequently.” Delnash said.

“Yeah but he doesn’t know what about, which probably burns his smarty pants ass.” Martin said. “The man thinks he is smarter than anyone else. Let him guess. If you send me a secure data packet he will know something is up and I don’t want to tip our hand just yet.”

Delnash leaned forward. “When do you wish to meet?”

Martin met his eyes. “How soon can you plan a routine visit to Honelze?” Martin asked him. “My son and his forces get here in two or three days, the Tasmor have already begun moving the Ventori refugees back here, and with a little luck we can have Ventori stabilized within a week. We’ll clean out the Svorag on the planet and then meet on Honelze.”

Delnash nodded his head. “Then I will plan an election strip to Honelze to cover for our meeting.” He said. “It should be easy enough.”

Martin nodded his head. “Delnash... you had better watch your ass sir.” He told him knowing that Delnash would understand what he was inferring. “Lorendo has to have figured out by now that there is no way to beat you in a stand up election and he is going to become desperate. Hell he is desperate if he wanted Konlar and the others to take out Murano and kidnap Mari. He may be willing to go even further than that if he needs too.”

“And I am fully prepared for that.” He reassured Martin.

“I expect Andro here within three days.” Martin told them. “Once he arrives we can set the date to meet on Honelze and begin putting our final plans together. Yuriko’s estimates still hold and her ship is still shadowing the Svorag Mother ship. We’ll have about three and a half weeks to work out the details and prepare defenses.”

Delnash nodded his head once more. “Then I will insure that Dehov comes prepared.” He told him.

“Good enough.” Martin said. “I look forward to seeing you both.”

“And we look forward to seeing you.” Delnash told him.

Dynina let her eyes gaze upon the majestic mountains on the skyline as she had done so many times in the past. Forty-thousand plus years they had been here, all of them living within the same settlement. Dynina smiled outwardly for they could no longer call it a settlement. It was a complete city with over a million men, women and children who called it home. And each year they grew even more. Their city bore the name of the planet, all of them thinking it fitting when they first arrived here, and they had never attempted to expand and make other settlements across the lush world.

Luarus was situated perfectly in the valley between the two huge mountain ranges that stretched for hundreds of miles in either direction. It was built around and above the quarter mile wide river that flowed through the valley floor, providing protection from the elements as well as fertile growing land. Luarus stretched across the valley floor, the many buildings modest and plain to look at, but all of them completely modern. They had many diverse manufacturing facilities, but their lone shipbuilding plant was located a hundred and ten kilometers from their city, with a direct teleport facility that connected the factory to the actual shipyard in orbit above. The nebula that surrounded this sector of space provided the perfect camouflage and had been part of the reason why they had remained undetected by others for so long. While they did interact with the few other species in this sector of space, none of those species had ever been to their planet or their city and that is just how they liked it.

Ten thousand Lycavorians, ten thousand Pralors and ten thousand Darastrixi had begun this city all those years ago, and this is what they had grown into. They had spent all of that time preparing for a single moment in time, and that moment was almost upon them. Dynina turned from the view as she heard the voices of the others as they filed into the large conference room and began to take their seats. Her amethyst colored eyes took in the men and women as they talked, Lycavorian, Pralor and Darastrixi, all of them conferring back and forth with each other unburdened by the millennia of arrogance that permeated two of those species. They were all equals here, having been united behind one goal for their entire existences. Her eyes found Nicha as she made her way around the large table and moved up next to her.

Dynina pulled her close as she stepped up to her. She had been Dynina's right hand for so many years that she could not even recall. The Pralor woman Nicha had taken the place of her beloved sister, and they had shared everything since the day they boarded that ship together and it brought them here.

Nicha saw the question in Dynina's eyes and she nodded. "They are through safely." She stated. "I just received Perlae's last report. They were about to enter the Echo quadrant. The sensor buoys that we seeded along the border were tracking his ship. It was holding position, but she did not know why. Twenty more hours and they will be together."

Dynina looked at her puzzled. "Holding position?" She asked softly. "Why would he be doing that? I would have thought Androcles would want to rejoin with his father as soon as possible given what we know. It is not a lot of information for she did not have much to give to me, but these Svorag present a problem we did not foresee."

Nicha shook her head. "I do not know. Everything we know of him says this is unusual for him, Perlae even commented on it in her report, but she does not seem concerned Dynina. She also said no other ships appeared to be in the area which is also unusual isn't it?"

Dynina shook her head. "No. Androcles is very much like his father and they are both masterful tacticians. Perhaps the finest to have ever lived anywhere in the galaxy. There is purpose to everything that they do. It must be something that we are unaware of. We know they can hide their ships in some manner and if he has not revealed all of them where he is, then he is not worried." Dynina nodded to herself. "I have felt no sense of urgency from him or the other *Dahakoan* so I will not concern myself with it. It is very difficult to get an accurate sense of their resonance lately, almost if they have had additional training in masking their Etheric resonances by someone very powerful. It matters not, we will have the answers to many questions when Perlae and the other make contact. The portal?"

Nicha nodded her head now. "We destroyed the sub space power matrix at its location and tainted the remaining crystals with Torxlian." She stated. "It will never be active again."

Dynina nodded her head. "It was a shame to have to destroy it, but it was necessary. Martin and the others will know what to do with such technology, but we cannot allow it to fall into other hands. It can be replaced."

Nicha nodded. “The others are still hidden with your cloaking spells and only Perlae, Awser and Ishma know their locations. You are concerned about the other Lycavorians aren’t you?”

Dynina nodded her head. “They are an unknown.” She said softly. “They are on the far side of the Echo quadrant, far from Martin and the others, but his desire to safeguard our people is too strong within him. They will eventually cross paths.”

“And these are the ones who have maintain their ties to your past?” Nicha asked.

Dynina nodded once more. “And they have *Yowa* bloodlines among them.”

“Do they pose a threat?” Nicha asked.

“I don’t know.” Dynina answered honestly. “However, if they have maintained their ties to the history of my people then it will bring them into conflict with Martin and the others. We need to avoid that.”

Nicha turned her head when someone coughed and she saw the older Darastrixi motion with his head. Nicha nodded and squeezed Dynina’s hand. “Kenroe is signaling that everyone is here. We should begin.”

Dynina nodded her head and she looked up drawing her mind to the present. She moved to the head of the table beside Kenroe and the spot where Nicha always sat. “Thank you all for coming on such short notice. I know we were not supposed to meet for another two months.” Her hands rested on the ornately carved box in front of her. “However, we have discovered some things that will cause us to advance our plans.”

Dynina used her fingers to lift the cover of the ornate box and open it fully. The eyes of everyone in the room widened suddenly as they all saw the glowing azure colored orb that resided on the velvet covering inside the box. Several of the dozen men and women present came to their feet in shock.

“Dynina!” A Darastrixi male exclaimed, his golden eyes wide in disbelief.

“Can it... can it be true!”

“Now!”

“They are among us!”

Dynina smiled gently at their comments for all of them in this room knew the meaning of the orb and what its now bright glow entailed. She nodded her head. “They are not only among us, they have come together and found one another. The *Dahakoan* and the Praetorians have returned to us my friends, returned to all of us, and this time they are one.”

The Darastrixi who had first spoken looked at her. “Then it’s true Dynina? The *Lorsvek ar Sepas* is happening?”

Dynina nodded her head again. “I have suspected for many years now, felt each of them across time and space, but I did not know for sure until they came together. The *Dahakoan* Orb began to emit its glow only last week. I had to sure and that is why I did not tell anyone.”

“You have felt them Dynina?” The Pralor woman asked. “Why not tell us?”

“I have felt others in the past since they have all been of my bloodline.” Dynina answered her. “You all know this.”

“And we have gotten our hopes up before.” Kenroe spoke now as he came to his feet. The Darastrixi leader was tall for his species and exceedingly well built. His emerald eyes were bright and full of knowledge. “This is different however, the *Dahakoan* Orb has never become active. Now it is active and we must prepare. There is something else as well.” He said looking at Dynina.

Dynina smiled and nodded her head. “You should tell them Kenroe.” She told him.

Kenroe looked at them, specifically at the Darastrixi members of their leadership board. “There is a *Doraanar* with them.” He told them.

This news caused three pairs of eyes to grow even wider. “A *Doraanar*!” The female Darastrixi gasped. “By the gods above!”

Kenroe nodded his head. “If Dynina’s information is correct, she has been with them for many weeks now.”

“Dynina?” The Darastrixi man asked.

Dynina nodded her head. “This information is confirmed.” She told them. “I do not know much about her, there is very little to know right now. The *Dahakoan* appear to be protecting her viciously and my contact among them has not been successful in gathering this data, Aside from the fact that she does exist and she is among them now, we know very little else. But this does not matter to us.”

“No, it does not.” Kenroe spoke.

“We were brought here for a reason my friends.” Dynina spoke softly but loud enough for all of them to hear her. “All of us have questioned that reason at times through these many millennia, but that reason has driven us forward even in dark times. We have waited for the day when we would be needed once more. As Sumar and Dadrien knew we would. That day is almost upon us now my friends.” Dynina looked at all of them intently. “I have already dispatched the Heralds, my grandchildren. They will make contact within hours and then what was set in motion the day we came to this world will truly begin. There is only one reason why the *Dahakoan* and Praetorians have returned, and returned just as the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* said they would. As one entity. What many of us, myself included, may have questioned through the eons can no longer be questioned.”

“Do we tell our people?” Another asked.

“Of course we do.” Dynina answered. “They have just as much right to know what we all now know. Pass the word among the people, allow them to pass it along to others, but we must still remain focused on our duty.”

“We have had the Spartan and Sand Strider Manuals for centuries.” Kenroe spoke. “We should intensive our training efforts, for we still lag behind in many areas. And we should increase our daily patrols along the entire Tram Rail to the Shipyard.” He looked at Dynina. “We have no natural predators on Luarus, but the additional focus will be good. They will want to do it, knowing what we now know.”

Dynina nodded her head. “We all know our jobs and what we need to do. Things will not change until the *Dahakoan* and The First have arrived and only if they deem it necessary.” She told them. “Perlae and the others will keep us informed of what is going on and give us direct insight that we have not had until now. Perlae will also tell them of us here, and what we have been doing.”

“Darkness is coming isn’t it Dynina?” One of the Pralor members asked.

Dynina met his eyes and nodded slowly. “I fear it is already upon us, we just do not see it yet. The monsters have become very good at hiding their intent.”

“What do we do?”

“We do what Sumar and Dadrien always intended for us to do.” Dynina answered. “We provide to the *Dahakoan* and The First what was given to us to safeguard for them.” Dynina met their stares. “And then... then we fight!”

WOLVES AND DRAGONS OF THE BLOOD
REVELATIONS
PART 2

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN
ULU SPARTA'S WRATH
SEPTEMBER 21ST 2575
SHIFT CHANGE 0615

Armen sat in the Command Chair on his bridge going through the motions of reading the Shift Internal Reports as the members of the First Crew came on duty. He did not need to read the SIRs for he was always connected to the ship and knew everything that was going on and what had taken place on the previous night shift. His action was what a normal Commanding Officer would do and Armen determined that this very simple action provided normalcy to the routine. Soon the First crew would begin to call out their status to the OFD, or Officer of the Deck, while they situated their stations back to their personal likings. Unlike normal Union ships, the working consoles on *SPARTA'S WRATH* could remember the settings of each of its operators and could revert to them in seconds at the touch of a button. This was technology that was being refined and built into Union ships during new refits but for now, only *SPARTA'S WRATH* and the *SCIMITAR* had this technology already built in.

Armen sat patiently as his First Crew went about their routines. He had chosen his First Crew from the many dossiers provided to him by Admiral O'Connor. They were the finest at their positions even though many of them were still very young. Given whom he had chosen to emulate, Armen had taken a page out of

Androcles' book and chosen those who were both detailed and thought differently. He did not want those on the bridge, who could not process information and discover new and improved ways to do things, he wanted those who could think and act outside of the box. All of them men and women who served on the three shifts were tops in their respective classes when it came to learning about Quantum Matter and learning Pralor technology. All of them cut from the same mold as Zaala Randall, and now Armen would trade none of them for anything. They had already proven to him that his choices had been correct and that is all that mattered to him. He had begun to distance himself from many of the ship's systems in order to let his crew do their jobs. He found that this freed up processing power for him to work on other projects throughout the ship and it made his people better if they knew he was not looking over their shoulders at everything they did.

His people.

Armen looked up when that statement computed and it made him cant his head to the side as he thought about that. They were his people, each person on this ship was his people, and extraordinarily that gave Armen something he did not think himself capable of expressing.

Purpose.

He was about to have his neural processors begin to analyze that when the voice broke into the normal sounds of the bridge.

"*HELIX*-Class Corvette *Spartan 235* is on approach!" The main sensor operator sang out in a clear voice. "Vector authorization is approved."

"Confirm with IFF codes TO!" The Elven OFD barked out.

"Tactical confirms! Reading IFF codes of Queen Aricia, Queen Anja and Queen For'mya. Plus 28!" The Lycavorian Tactical Officer answered, "The Tasmor Delegation and additional Pax!"

The OFD turned to look at Armen, "Captain?"

Armen nodded without hesitation as he stood up. **–Send via secure COM burst, vector authorization approach. Docking Bay 9 is ready to receive them- He answered turning his head. –Current location of Androcles-**

"Starboard Training Gym on Deck eighteen." The reply was almost instantaneous. They tracked every member of the Royal Family when they were on the ship now using their built in bioscans. "All Royal Family members with the exception of Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha are present. I think they have started a morning routine. They have been there every morning this week so far."

Armen nodded his head. **–A new training regime Androcles worked up for each of them. All of them will be present in this location every morning that they are not on mission. Make a note in the ship's log if you would Lieutenant Sena and insure we have this location monitored beginning at 0500 every morning from now on-**

"Acknowledged." She answered.

-OFD, confirm with personnel that the quarters for the Tasmor delegation are ready and inform the Ready Officer to have escorts available while they are onboard- Armen spoke as he returned to his chair.

"Aye sir." The man answered moving for a console.

"Contact! Contact! Unknown contact!" Those four words brought everyone on the bridge to attention instantly and caused Armen to once more rise to his feet.

"Confirm that!" The OFD barked as he stopped moving for the console and stepped toward her station, his previous ordered superseded by this.

"Main sensors confirm! Unknown contact! Bearing 356.54! Extreme range! Right on the very edge of our current detection grid! Configuration unknown! We're picking it up via the *SCIMITAR*'s feed from the Fleet pickets! Extending Current Detection Grid!"

The Elven Major turned to Armen. "Hold that Lieutenant!" He barked out.

“Holding sir!”

The Major looked at Armen. “Sir?”

-Hold on extending the CDG. Excellent work Major DI'koa- Armen answered. **-Is the contact moving towards us TO-**

“Negative sir!”

Armen stepped up beside the Elven OFD, towering over his five foot ten height. **-TO, who is the closest picket ship?-**

“*ULU DAKE*. She is a refitted *AUTUMN MOON* Heavy Frigate! According to Fleet TOE she is the outer most picket.”

-DI'koa, your thoughts- Armen asked.

The Elven Major nodded his head. “The Admiral is shrouded on the *SCIMITAR* Armen. If we have picked it up you can damn well bet Admiral Sa'sur has already seen it.”

-Agreed- Armen answered.

“She'll send the *DAKE* to investigate so we don't have to extend out the CDG.” The man answered with a wide grin. “No sense in giving away our true capabilities.”

Armen nodded his head with what amounted to a smile for him. Most of the First Crew had begun to understand the sometimes-strange facial expressions his features could and did take on.

-Indeed DI'koa. Admiral Sa'sur has undoubtedly detected the ship as well and is sending someone to investigate- Armen spoke.

“Captain!” The COM officer spoke now turning away from her station. “Admiral Sa'sur on QCR secure!” This only served to reinforce Armen's standing once more as he predicted that she was taking the lead and now she was calling them.

-Activate- Armen answered.

A moment later Sa'sur's slim figure appeared on the holo disc of the bridge. Activity on the bridge of the *SCIMITAR* appeared to be as active as it was on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Sa'sur instantly found Armen's large form. “Armen have you seen it?” She asked.

-Affirmative Admiral- He answered. **-We are detecting it via the tap of your feed from our pickets-**

“Same for you? Nothing in your computer banks?” She asked.

-Negative-

“Andro's mothers are almost on board correct?” Sa'sur asked.

-Their ship will touch down in Landing Bay 9 in thirteen minutes- Armen answered.

“I'm ordering the *DAKE* to close in and investigate.” Sa'sur spoke. “We haven't detected any recognizable weapons or shield power readings but let's bring the fleet to Status Three Armen, just in case.”

Armen nodded his head. –**Agreed Admiral-** He replied. –**I will order the Status change from SPARTA'S WRATH so that you can maintain the focus on this new contact from the SCIMITAR-**

DI'koa nodded his head. Armen may have been a machine, but DI'koa had learned more than he could have imagined in the short time they had been together. “COM Officer!” He spoke turning to look in his direction. “Let’s get that order issued! Fleet to Status Three, but maintain shrouds and COM silence!”

“COMs aye!”

DI'koa looked at Armen. “Do we inform Androcles?” He asked in a softer voice so that only Armen would hear him but since they were standing next to the image of Sa'sur she heard it as well.

-Lieutenant Sena, still nothing in our databanks on the new contact?- Armen asked.

“Negative sir.”

Armen turned back to Sa'sur. –**My databanks were the most up to date when we left the former Pralor Empire Admiral. They may not be anymore. Lieutenant, extrapolate time to our location factoring in known Pralor engine designs-**

“CDG is at seventy-three percent Captain.” She answered. “Max speed with a seventh Tier drive system would put them here in two point 6 hours, unless they executed a combat jump of course.” She answered.

Armen looked at Sa'sur in the transmission. –**Androcles’ mothers will be board in thirteen minutes Admiral-** He shook his head. –**Unless we discover more, there is no need to inform him. This reunion has been a long time in coming and it needs to happen now. If the situation changes we will inform him-**

Sa'sur nodded her head, understanding Armen’s meaning all too well. “I agree Armen.” She replied.

Almost everyone within the Union knew of what Androcles did on Hadaria in order to save his second Elven mother. Most who were close to him or who had been on this ship since leaving Dreamland knew that he was hesitant about seeing her once more because of what he had done. Nearly all Elves and Lycavorians understood this, for attacking one who was called mother like he had was not something that Lycavorians or Elves would do. While most people did not know why he did what he had done that day, those on this ship did, and they knew the doubt their Prince still held within him no matter the wonderful result of his actions.

“TO!” DI'koa barked out as Armen returned to his chair. “Keep a constant track on that ship and if it so much as farts in the wind prepare to respond to SCIMITAR’s action!”

“TO, acknowledged sir!”

“I’ll leave this COM channel open,” Sa'sur told him. “If the *sibfla* hits the fan be ready to bring the pain Armen.”

-I always am Admiral- Armen answered.

SPARTA'S WRATH DOCKING BAY NINE

Gorgo and Dasha stood to the side of the massive landing bay as the *HELIX*-Class Corvette began to lower to the deck. A full Squad of *Durcunusaan* were positioned around the two women, mothers to the King and Queen, and nothing would be allowed to threaten them in any way.

Gorgo and Dasha had grown very close through the years, Aricia’s mother often joining her and Riall for dinners and weekends at their villa in Gytheio. Dasha was still a very beautiful female wolf, just as Gorgo was, and Gorgo had tried on a number of occasions to introduce Dasha to a man. Dasha had always been

pleasant and thankful, but nothing had ever come of it. Gorgo had feared that Dasha might have still been very much in love with her now dead husband. It was not until after the last time Gorgo had tried to set her up with a male friend that Dasha had asked her to stop. Dasha had explained to her that she was not still in love with her traitorous dead husband; she was just not ready for a relationship of any kind after all of that had taken place. She was very content to help to raise the children of Martin and his Queens, and she had done just that for almost three decades now. Gorgo respected her decision and after that, her friendship with Dasha had taken off. They spoke of everything with each other, unafraid to offend one another with their bluntness and honesty, almost like sisters to be honest. They had become somewhat of a popular fixture among Spartan society before leaving Earth, men and women alike coming up to them as they walked the streets of Sparta or Gytheio.

They were icons among the Lycavorian people now, whether either of them wanted to admit it or not.

“It has been far too long since we have seen them.” Dasha commented as she turned to Gorgo beside her.

Gorgo nodded in agreement. “Yes it has, far too long.” Gorgo turned to meet her eyes. “You know of course that Andro is terrified.”

Dasha chuckled softly and nodded her head. “I do.” She said with a smile. “As cunning and unstoppable a warrior as our grandson is Gorgo, the thought of his mother shunning him frightens him half to death.”

“His fear is unfounded, as For'mya blesses his existence nearly every day, and I have tried to tell him this.” Gorgo spoke.

“As have I.” Dasha agreed. “He has his father’s stubbornness you know.”

Gorgo smiled now. “Oh, don’t I know it.”

“What is this inspection nonsense all about Gorgo?” Dasha asked.

“It is a Tasmor ritual from what I understand.” Gorgo answered her. “Anja was not able to tell me a whole lot for she did not have the time, but from her tone I don’t believe she, Aricia or For'mya are happy about it.”

“These Tasmor will be even less happy if they anger our grandson over some ritual.” Dasha said.

“Andro will tolerate it.” Gorgo said. “He knows what is at stake and what it could mean.”

They were quiet as the ship began to power down its engines and several of the deck crew scurried about securing it. They watched the rear ramp come down slowly until it settled to the deck and then they saw them. Gorgo and Dasha could not help but smile in happiness as Aricia, Anja and For'mya started down the ramp of the ship hand in hand with Aricia in the center. The three of them had become such a fixture over the years, just as Dysea and Isabella had, with Cirith now joining their small triad. Gorgo often times wondered how her son had managed to have six exquisitely beautiful women fall in love with him and worship him the way they did. Neither she or Dasha had seen For'mya since before the Kavalians had taken her from Earth and while she had looked drawn and undernourished when they had seen her on the Netnews from Hadaria, now she looked as radiant as they had ever seen her. Gorgo and Dasha knew immediately that Martin had reclaimed her in spectacular fashion and For'mya had felt the full power of the aura he could radiate. As with Aricia and Anja, For'mya now looked utterly at peace and content in her life and when added to her natural elven beauty and allure, the Alpha female wolf in her shown ever so brightly.

Gorgo and Dasha moved forward quickly then and the reunion between them was ever so sweet as the women embraced right there at the end of the ramp uncaring of who saw them. Dasha embraced her daughter first, while Gorgo swept both Anja and For'mya in to her arms and squeezed them both tightly. Tears flowed slightly and then Dasha was wrapping her arms around For'mya and Anja as Gorgo held Aricia tightly.

Dasha ran her hands over Anja and For'mya’s faces as she smiled brilliantly. “*Carians*, it has been too long.” She gasped aloud.

For'mya nodded as she wiped the tears from her own cheeks her dark brown eyes simply ablaze with happiness. “Yes it has.” She stammered.

“Zarah?” Dasha asked Aricia as she held Anja’s hands. She was concerned for all of her grandchildren no matter whom given birth to them.

For'mya answered with a smile and nod of her head. “She has come so far and healed so much.” She replied. “You will see for yourself in two days but Lucia is her strength. You will not recognize her.”

“Where are... where are our children?” Aricia asked now as she looked around.

Gorgo smiled and shook her head. “Androcles has devised a training regime for each of them and they have been sticking to it every morning this week. They completely take over one of the training facilities on this ship for three hours every day.”

“He actually got them all in the same room together for an extended length of time?” Anja asked with a smile. “That’s impressive.”

Gorgo and Dasha laughed at that. “It is a large room.” Dasha answered with a chuckle. “Everything about this ship is large.”

For'mya nodded her head quickly. “Endith about wet her pants when she saw it. She said she wants to drive it.”

“Hah!” Gorgo laughed aloud. “Please, let us keep her away from the bridge then. She will simply love Armen.”

Anja saw Saydia and the others beginning to exit and she gripped Gorgo’s hand and gently pulled them back towards the ship.

Saydia and the rest of the Tasmor were still in a minor state of shock. None of them had ever imagined a ship as large and imposing as the one they saw when they got close, and then to be practically swallowed up by the superstructure as they made for the landing bay. Many of the Tasmor Quorum members were still at a loss for words, while Emylea and Namiri were bubbling and excited at exploring the ship.

“Sovereign Regent Saydia Daret,” Anja spoke. “I present Martin’s mother Gorgo and Aricia’s mother Dasha.”

Saydia smiled radiantly and bowed her head to them. “It is an honor.” She spoke.

Gorgo moved closer and took her hands. “It is our honor.” She told her as Dasha came up beside her and added her hands to Gorgo’s. “The Lycavorian people owe you a debt that we cannot repay Saydia Daret. What you and your people have done for our people is something that we as a species will never forget.”

Saydia seemed taken aback at this show of emotion and respect but she bowed her head in thanks. “Given the gift that your people have given to mine I would happily do so over and over.”

Gorgo took an immediate liking to this woman, as did Dasha. Her scent told them that she was a good person and her heart was pure.

“Well, if I know Deia she will be letting the Netnews vermin know what the Tasmor have done and you will have friends wherever there are Lycavorians.” Gorgo spoke.

Saydia could not help but yelp in amusement and she looked at Gorgo. “I see distaste for your news organizations runs deep.” She said with a smile.

Dasha grinned. “Not all of them.” She answered. “We trust some, but as a whole they are as useful as a case of Acamarian Flu.”

Anja snickered and took her arm. “Mother!” She exclaimed.

They all laughed gently, putting Saydia even further at ease. Gorgo and Dasha insisted that they all call them mother and for Anja and Isabella it was much easier since their mothers were long dead.

“Your son does not greet you when you land?” The new voice spoke from behind them and they turned to see Vesara Athcer move closer to them. Anja saw Perlyea and Aduna roll their eyes as she stopped beside Anthylea and she smiled discretely.

“Gorgo, Dasha, this is Vesara Athcer.” For'mya spoke. “She is a senior member of the Tasmor Ruling Quorum and will be conducting the inspection.”

Saydia took note that both older women took a different stance and attitude when looking at Vesara and she smiled inwardly. Though they looked like they were in their mid-forties in age, both Gorgo and Dasha she knew were several thousand years old, Dasha slightly more than Gorgo.

Gorgo chose to respond to Vesara’s comment. “While their mothers are the Queens of the Union, we as a family do not stand on pomp and unnecessary displays of gaudy royalty. It is unbecoming and our family hates it. Androcles and his siblings are in the training facility several decks above us. We will meet them there.”

Dasha curled her arms with Saydia and Anthylea for she already knew what the two women were to each other by their scents and the fact that Aricia, Anja and For'mya had briefed them thoroughly on who to trust and who not to.

“Come Sovereign Regent, many of us are still learning this ship, and I need the *anse Durcunusaan* to take me wherever I go. I swear I drive my detail insane with my questions.” Dasha spoke. “Without them I would be lost. Literally.”

Saydia and Anthylea could not help but smile at her words as they began to walk towards what appeared to be an elevator. Anja smiled and held out her hand for Perlyea and Aduna and they moved forward quickly to take her hand. Aricia reached for Jacina and Recia where they stood in the back with Tobia while Namiri and Emylea gripped For'mya's hands as they began to move for the elevator. Tobia had been a last minute addition, knowing that she had to see her daughter and Murano or she would be no good to anyone. She could not wait two more days knowing what she now knew. Everyone else fell in behind them.

“For'mya this ship is enormous!” Emylea commented in an excited tone.

For'mya nodded her head. “We have never been on it before either.” She stated. “It will be a learning experience for all of us.”

TRAINING FACILITY DECK EIGHTEEN

Armen had prepared well for his crew.

There were three such training facilities spread throughout the ship, each of them utterly massive in scope, and all of them able to be used by anyone. This particular facility Andro had chosen for its central location to all other areas of the ship. It was easily the size of an indoor coliseum, broken into three different sections with every piece of training equipment imaginable spread out across the facility. A huge section of the facility was covered in cushioned mats on the floor where all of the Leonidas children and their respective wives and mates were dressed in tight but comfortable workout clothes and in the cool down phases of their personal training regimens.

Eliani and Jomann focused on improving their *Nehtes* skills while making sure Brendi honed her more rudimentary hand-to-hand skills. Eliani was already regarded as a Master of the *Nehtes* and behind only her father and Andro there were very few who could meet her skill. Jomann had proven up to the task from the first moment they had met even before he had claimed her, and now they worked on honing that skill even more while studying techniques that Eliani could use as his Praetorian Mage.

Denali, Lisisa and Arduri concentrated on their individual skills, all of them at a very advanced level already, while Lisisa and Arduri used the Tomes of Sumar to better be able to channel their Etheric power as Deni's Praetorian Mage. While Lisisa was the recognized one who had this skill within her, she used Arduri as a conduit as well, drawing her into the fold.

Fedor, Iama, Eirene and Miseo were practicing their hand-to-hand skills, the hulking Kavalian using his Monitor training as a basis to add to Fedor and Eirene's already impressive skill set because of the knowledge Andro had passed to them in the womb. Iama for her part loved the training for it empowered her and made her budding confidence grow rapidly and she simply adored Fedor's increased attention to her firm and supple body and how it was being sculpted.

Kalis, Ridor, Daio, Cowen and Sherice were off on a different set of mats going through an advanced set of training skills, Serale, Kameka and Cvea taking part as well. Torian was still recovering in the medical bay and Andro would not let him participate until he was given a clean bill of health by Eliani.

Murano was pacing back and forth in front of his charges, which consisted of Androcles, Dorian, Deion, Mari and Laren. They had just completed a very complex set of skills from the Tomes of Sumar and Murano was explaining to them about each portion of the different set of maneuvers. Sarlana for her part simply walked among the small groups of the Leonidas family relishing in the sense of purpose emanating from all of them. They were all so different in their mannerisms and Etheric resonance but there was no doubt in any of them when it came to their training. It was something all of them took very serious. Even the youngest of them, Bryon and the twins Retta and Calyb were deeply involved in their training. While Retta and Calyb were finishing an accelerated Agoge training course, Bryon was taking part in intensive hand-to-hand skills. He had promised his brother to do this since he had chosen to attend this music academy on the planet Elear and not

follow the example of his father and brothers and conduct his Agoge. Sarlana had not been surprised really; she sensed a peaceful resonance radiating from the youngest Leonidas child, but also one that was not afraid to defend what he loved.

None of them was paying attention to the comings and goings of who came and went into the training facility and they did not take notice of their mothers entering with the Tasmor entourage. The humidity and the myriad of heavy scents within the training facility kept any new scents from becoming noticeable until they had been in the room for a period of time. That did not work for Etheric resonance and as soon as Aricia, Anja and For'mya dropped their shielding, the heads of all their children whipped around as if on free spinning tops. Eliani was the first to react with a squeal of delight, followed quickly by Retta and then Lisisa, Normya and Eirene. All of them rose to their feet within milliseconds of each other and were then running into the arms of their mothers. With the exception being Eirene, none of them had seen their mothers in almost a year and it was a reunion that was a long time coming.

Aricia, Anja and For'mya were buried under the weight of their children. Within seconds of the female Leonidas children reacting to the appearance of three of their mothers, the sons soon followed and the three Queens of the Union were caught up in the embraces and nuzzles and powerful grasps of their children while the Tasmor simply stood by watching with wide eyes. Tears flowed plenty, as did the hugs and laughter. All of them, Aricia, Anja and For'mya were shown equal love and devotion. It was a testament to their strength as a family for not once in their history had any of their children ever referred to them as anything other than mother. It did not matter who had given birth to them, all of them were their mothers and they all spoke with one voice and had their entire lives as they grew from childhood to adulthood.

Of them all, only Androcles stood apart from the reunion.

He felt great happiness at the sight of those he called mother, he could feel it radiating from them as well as his siblings. While he too felt happiness, there was one other emotion that once more washed over him. It was an emotion he was not used to and did not like, but it filled him nonetheless for what he perceived as something he did wrong.

Blood before all else.

That is what their father had pounded into their heads as they grew. Never cause harm to a member of your family intentionally. There was no greater sin to the Leonidas family than that. Androcles had done this twice now. He had killed his cousin Leruk, no matter his crimes. Killed him in a fit of rage for what he had done and would have continued to do to his beloved Drow wife Lu'ria had he not stopped him. Then he had attacked his mother. His second elven mother and perhaps the one who was second only to his birth mother in his heart of hearts. He had attacked her and drawn blood from her, and two things viler to him did not exist in this universe. The reasons for his actions did not matter to him, only the action itself, and for months Androcles had held this shame buried within him. He had dreaded this day, knowing it would come and not knowing if his mother could forgive him for his actions, no matter the beautiful result.

Murano saw him standing alone and was about to move up beside him when Sarlana grasped his arm. She shook her head when he turned to look at her and she pulled him back.

[No Murano.] She told him.

[Sarlana he...]

[I have told you in great detail of the sense of purpose a Dahakoan feels for his family.] She told him. *[The sense of devotion and love and trust. Now imagine that combined with what we know of Androcles' family and how they are with one another. What they have been raised to believe and follow all of their lives.]*

Murano nodded his head. *[Blood before all else. Yes, I know. Martin has instilled this in all of them.]*

[Imagine having to break that vow Murano.] Sarlana told him. *[Imagine having to break that vow not once, but twice. The second time against a woman you have loved as mother since the day you entered this world. No matter the reasons, or cause, it was you who had to break this vow willingly. Imagine the shame this would cause within you. Knowing you caused harm to one who you adore.]*

[For'mya does not see it that way Sarlana.] Murano said. *[You know this.]*

Sarlana nodded her head. *[Androcles does not Murano. It must be For'mya alone who releases him from the false shame he carries. Words will not help him now Murano. For all his strength and fearlessness in battle, his tactical genius and guile, Androcles Leonidas is still but a child in his heart. He may carry the memories and knowledge of four lifetimes within him, but he is still a child, and he has had to experience far too many*

horrors for his lifetime. Of them all, this is the one that shames him the most. Just watch Murano, just watch and experience why no power or entity will ever come between this family.]

Murano remained beside her and did indeed watch.

For'mya finally broke away from the tangle of bodies that surrounded her, loving children all of them. Her dark brown eyes, streaming tears now, found Androcles only a few feet away unable to move closer. He had sacrificed so much to save her, to save Fedor and Eirene. He didn't question what he had to do in order to accomplish this, he just did it. For'mya was well aware of the rule they followed as a family for behind Aricia and Anja she was the one who preached it the most. His actions that day had cost Androcles Leonidas, her son, it had cost him a little part of himself. To go against the very upbringing that made you the person you were was no small task, but he had not hesitated in the least. His actions had saved For'mya from taking her own life and the lives of the unborn Fedor and Eirene. It was a debt she could never repay in her lifetime, but it left her son with a shame he did not have the right to bear. A shame she was going to erase from him this very moment.

Androcles was unable to look at her as she moved right up to stand in front of him. He towered over her five foot seven frame, wearing only his customary loose fitting work out pants and his entire upper body was bare. For'mya looked at him and felt such pride and love swell within her. He was the perfect image of his father, so powerful and defined in his muscularity, so imposing to those who didn't know him, but he was also one of the most compassionate men she had ever met. His physical appearance alone could and did cause fear from others, but never from her and never from his family.

"Can you not look at me my son?" For'mya finally asked him.

Andro shook his head slowly, still unable to meet her eyes. "I am... I am not worthy." He spoke in a hushed whisper.

This statement caused more tears to burst from For'mya's eyes, an action that caused Aricia and Anja to begin to move for where she stood. Gorgo and Dasha both gently grabbed their hands and shook their heads as they pulled them back.

For'mya didn't hesitate and she reached up and grabbed his face in her hands. "Worthy?" She gasped aloud. "Oh Andro... my beautiful boy."

Androcles lifted his face to look at her and she saw those beautiful azure colored eyes gaze upon her. She saw them flood with tears and then Androcles dropped to his knees before her.

"I... my actions have shamed me *Medwaw*." Andro stammered. "No matter the... no matter the reason, I inflicted pain upon you. One who I call mother! That cannot be forgiven! I... I will carry that with me for all of my years and..."

"NO!" For'mya almost yelled. "You saved me my son! You saved your brother and sister! Your actions are what gave me... gave us hope!" For'mya held his face in her hands tightly now. "You will not hold this within you a moment longer! You have no shame to bear Androcles! None! I forbid it!"

"Mother you..."

"You will listen to me now Androcles!" For'mya barked at him through her tears. "You are the reason that I stand here now! Why Fedor and Eirene stand here now!" For'mya felt Fedor and Eirene come up on either side of her then, Eirene's eyes openly flowing with tears and Fedor's dark eyes moist. "Do you think for a moment that I care how you gave back to me the love of your father and mothers? How you allowed your brother and sister to grow and discover the wonders that they have? Without you we would be naught but a memory my beautiful son and I will not allow you to carry a burden that is not yours to carry and never was." For'mya pulled his head to her stomach and bowed her head to his as Fedor and Eirene dropped to their knees beside their brother and buried their faces against her abdomen beside his. "Let it go Androcles." She whispered to the top of his head. "Let it drift from you as if it was never there my son. Let it lift from you as it lifted from me the day your father took me in his arms again. It was never your shame to carry Androcles. It was never yours, just as it was never mine."

For'mya heard the soft whimper and then his arms reached around her waist and Andro pulled her even closer to him as Fedor and Eirene wrapped their arms around his shoulders. She looked up in relief, her dark eyes now changed and her dual fangs fully exposed as Aricia and Anja moved instantly up beside her, their own eyes flooded with tears. Within seconds, their entire family was crowded around them, reaching for each other and with not a dry eye among them. Gorgo and Dasha had tears in their eyes as well, but chose to remain beside Saydia and the other Tasmor. All of them had seen what had taken place and how they were all gathered in the

large group, their emotions flowing all around them for all to see. Saydia could see dozens of Lycavorians and other species standing all around the massive training room silently, many having dropped to one knee at what was occurring. Almost as if it was a reverent occurrence.

Saydia Daret felt it then, and it shook her right down to boots. These people shared the same values and morals. They may have been from different families and packs but they were the sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers of so many others, but they were all of the same mind. Moreover, they took their strength from the family that was in front of her now. This is what Saydia Daret wanted for her people. This is what she wanted for the Tasmor. With friends and allies such as these, the Tasmor could grow and prosper beyond any of their imaginations, and Saydia Daret intended to see that come to be no matter what.

Namiri and Emylea Daret gripped each other's hands tightly for very different reasons. Both of them were staring with wide eyes at what was happening in front of them but they were staring at very diverse things. Emylea was stunned upon seeing Mari once more. Her petite body looked even more slim and muscular and even more delicious than she remembered it to be. Mari looked even more exquisitely beautiful than she remembered and as the gods were her witness, the young man that Mari clung to tightly was the most divine specimen of a male as any she had ever seen. She watched as Mari turned her head, saw her mother, and then was almost running to embrace her where she stood beside Jacina and Recia. Emylea also felt her heart breaking as she turned her head back to the tall young man that had claimed Mari and she knew that Mari was lost to her forever.

Namiri Daret could not stop staring at him. His body was sculpted to utter perfection like nothing she had ever seen. He was tall and his upper body was deeply tanned. Each muscle stood out in exquisite definition and Namiri could not help but be excited wondering what it would be like wrapped in those powerful arms. The same thing that was running through her mind as was running through her sister's. He was the most delicious male she had ever seen in her young life and just for a moment before he had joined the rush of bodies to For'mya, those eyes had settled on her and made her shiver in utter want and desire the likes of which she had never felt before.

Sarlana leaned close to Murano now with a smile on her face. She nudged him gently, managing only to hit his waist because of her height. "I believe it is time for you to move forward as well Murano." She told him.

Murano looked at her confused. "Excuse me?"

Sarlana motioned with her head and his eyes followed seeing Tobia and Mari locked in an embrace. His eyes grew wide for a moment for even to this day, Tobia's beauty had always managed to make his heart jump.

"Go to them Murano." Sarlana spoke softly. "This is the day all things from the past must be made right." She told him. "Step into your future Murano my friend."

Whatever self-control Murano had within him he lost and he moved from beside her without hesitation. He crossed the distance between them quickly and then he was looking at Tobia as she hugged their daughter. Their daughter. A few months ago that word was as foreign to him as fear. He saw Mari's eyes grow bright when she saw him and she pulled away from her mother.

Tobia reached up and took her face in her hands seeing the brightness in her daughter's eyes and the love that shown from her face. Her Etheric resonance was so very powerful now, even more so than she remembered and Tobia knew the reasons behind that and she approved so very much.

"Mari you... look so beautiful." Tobia finally gasped.

Mari blinked away her tears, took her mother's hands in hers, and squeezed. "Look behind you mother." She said softly.

Tobia looked confused and she turned her head quickly, only to gasp in shock and bring her hands to her face in surprise. "Murano!" She gasped in blissful delight.

Murano had held it in all of his life. Even when he was with her, he could not bring himself to show her what she meant to him. He could not speak words that expressed his love for her. The shame he thought he bore had buried all other emotions deep within him until the day Martin and the others had shown him the way. Until

Sumar's Etheric projection had taken that shame and tossed it into the wind. Murano did not hesitate now. He didn't wait and he lifted Tobia into his arms, her yelp of surprise and delight causing heads to turn to her, but then she was throwing her arms around his broad shoulders and surrendering all she was to him as she had wanted to do for so many years.

Murano spun her around in place several times before staring in to her beautiful eyes and speaking the words he had wanted to speak for decades.

"I love you Tobia!" He spoke without doubt. "I have never loved anyone as I have loved you. Tell me you forgive me for being the fool Tobia. Tell me that you forgive me and love me as I love you."

Tobia burst into more tears and grabbed his face tightly. "Oh Murano!" She stammered. She nodded her head without hesitation. "I do! I love you so very much!"

Murano needed to hear no more and he kissed her. He kissed her as he had never kissed her before. Tobia groaned in blissful happiness, wrapped her arms tightly around his head, and kissed him back as Mari looked on with tears in her eyes.

Saydia Daret turned her head away from watching Tobia and looked at Anthylea. Both of them had smiles on their faces and Saydia squeezed her hand tightly as they looked at one another. Tobia had been a dear friend to both of them and even though they knew she enjoyed their time together, they knew her heart had always belonged to Murano. It was simply wonderful to see their friend so happy now.

Saydia turned back and leaned closer to where Gorgo stood. "Is it appropriate to ask what took place?" She asked softly. "For'mya said he holds no shame for his actions. What does she mean by this?"

Gorgo nodded her head and looked at Dasha quickly. Dasha nodded in response for she and Gorgo already knew what Martin and his Queens thought of the Tasmor. "In many ways Androcles is... he is much more anchored in tradition than even his father. Martin and his Queens have always raised their children with one major rule that must never be broken. Blood before all else. Honor your blood, your family, above everything else. Androcles did something that he thought caused him to break this vow. He has carried that false shame for nearly a year now."

"And it concerns For'mya?" Saydia asked softly.

Dasha nodded her head. "He thought he was harming her when in fact he saved her. And his siblings Fedor and Eirene. This day needed to happen in order for Androcles to let go of this false burden. Only For'mya could give that to him."

Saydia looked at them in the huge group for another moment. "Their emotion... their love for one another... it is a powerful image." She spoke. She saw the young man Androcles rise to his feet and those azure colored eyes, so much like Aricia's, were almost glowing in their intensity. Saydia gasped softly when she saw this and then he was embracing For'mya and lifting her off the deck as she laughed heartily and held his shoulders as he spun her around. Then he was embracing Aricia and Anja as well and doing the same thing. "A powerful image indeed."

Gorgo and Dasha looked at her and smiled together. Saydia had no idea just how much she was going to become part of that image, but they did not doubt that this strong woman was going to embrace it fully. Gorgo opened her mouth to speak but Saydia saw her grimace instead and then Dasha and she were staggering slightly.

"Lady Gorgo!" Saydia gasped. "Lady Dasha! What is it?"

"Andro!" Saydia heard the excited cry and she turned to see Androcles Leonidas also staggering slightly, his hands going to his head as he doubled over to his knees once more looking as if he was in pain. For'mya was holding one of his hands as Anja and Aricia were grabbing his arm, both of them with looks of concern on their faces.

Saydia watched for a few seconds as they moved closer to him, his siblings crowding around as well. It felt as if it lasted several minutes, but it was only a matter of twenty seconds actually.

That is when they heard it.

-ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ALL CREW TO THEIR STATIONS! ALL CREW TO THEIR STATIONS! SPARTA'S WRATH IS NOW AT CONDITION TWO! SPARTA'S WRATH IS NOW AT CONDITION TWO! UNKNOWN CONTACTS INBOUND! UNKNOWN CONTACTS INBOUND!-

UNKNOWN SHIP

Perlae sat just behind the pilot as they studied their instruments intently as they had been doing for the last few minutes. Her youth got the better of her after the extended time and she finally leaned forward.

“Anything yet?” she asked.

The pilot turned his head to look at her and smiled. “Nothing yet Perlae.” He told her. “Not in the three minutes since you asked me last. We would tell you.”

Perlae blushed slightly and looked down embarrassed. “Forgive me.” She told him.

“Don’t be.” He told her. “I think we are just as excited as you and your siblings. We have been training for this for months and years as well.”

Perlae nodded her head. “My patience escapes me.” She said. “It is not like Androcles to do nothing however. They had to have detected us by now Morlar.”

The man nodded his head. “We are within their sensor grid so I would have to agree.”

“A *HELIX*-Class corvette docked with the big ship twelve minutes ago.” The co-pilot spoke looking up. “Maybe that has something to do with it. I’ve also been running normal scans of the *VORTEX*-Class Cruiser and it is nothing like what our records indicate it should be.”

“What do you mean?” Perlae asked.

“Well... the configuration is slightly off for one.” The co-pilot spoke. “And the metallic composition of the hull is something I have never seen before. Definitely not standard Pralor ship armor.”

Morlar looked at Perlae. “They designed and built their own interstellar engines correct?”

Perlae nodded her head. “The basic design was based on City Ship 41’s engines from what I understand, but they built them from the frame up all on their own.”

“Impressive.” Morlar turned back to his co-pilot. “What else do you have out of the ordinary Jaroe?” He asked him.

“The altered configuration could be anything really, given the biomechanical nature of Pralor ship materials but she has what appears to be very advanced weaponry, Pralor in origin no doubt, but some of the turrets are in odd spots and I can’t tell what they fire. Not without an active scan anyway.”

“That would be taken as hostile.” Morlar spoke. “We don’t want to do that.”

“Perlae?” The soft female voice spoke from behind all of them and Perlae turned, her face brightening quickly as she saw the Merlot red colored scales of the adolescent dragon move smoothly into the cockpit.

The Darastrixi *Vrrarhoimpa* within their settlement did not mature anywhere near as fast as their brothers and sisters in the Union or even on the Darastrixi homeworld. It may have been because only three among their number who had actually bonded with dragons and those were Dynina’s grandchildren, but no one really ever bothered to discover why this was

“Ieri!” Perlae spoke with love and warmth as the adolescent dragon came up beside her in the chair and Perlae leaned over as her Bonded Sister brought her snout against her cheek and they both closed their eyes in happiness.

Ieri was the oldest of the clutch of three siblings. Gydal was bonded to Ishma while Quevor had bonded with Awser. As with Perlae, Ishma and Awser, they were almost never apart from one another or their Bonded Ones. Ieri sat back on her tail and draped one of her Firespitter talons on Perlae’s thigh.

“Gydal and Quevor have been pestering me ever since we stopped about when we were going to meet them.” Ieri spoke. “Will it be soon?”

Perlae nodded her head quickly. “We are certain they can see us but so far they have not acknowledged we are here.”

“Is this normal?” Ieri asked softly.

“Perhaps we just like to be cautious.” The unknown female voice boomed from their internal speakers causing all of them to look around quickly.

“*Sibfla!*” Morlar gasped aloud as he studied his screens.

“Indeed.” The female voice spoke again and Perlae noticed the slight lilt to her tone and the almost musical nature of her vocals.

“It’s a COM signal!” Morlar exclaimed. “They penetrated our COM signals and tapped into the frequency!”

“I am Admiral Sa’sur.” The female voice continued ignoring his words as if he had not spoken. “I am transmitting through the COM frequency of the ship we currently have tracking you. You have entered the Operational Control Zone of a Lycavorian Union Task Force and I would very much like to know your intentions since you have been sitting on the edge of our OCZ for almost thirty minutes and have done nothing.”

“You have a ship tracking us?” Morlar gasped. “How? We have detected nothing on our sensors!”

“And you won’t.” The female voice replied. “Please state your intentions.”

Perlae reached out and touched Morlar’s arm causing him to look at her quickly. She motioned with her head and he nodded instantly. “Admir... Admiral... my name is Perlae and my sister and brother and I would very much like to speak with Androcles.”

There was a slight hesitation and then the female voice answered. “I’m sorry I don’t know of who you speak. Who are you and where do you come from? There are no habitable planets in this sector of space.”

“Admiral Sa’sur... we can feel Androcles within the Etheric realm. We can feel all of our blood.” Perlae spoke once more. “We know he is on the very large, former Pralor *VORTEX*-Class Cruiser that is on the edge of our own sensors, along with nearly all of his siblings and from what we have felt just recently, three of his mothers have joined him.”

“I don’t know who you are!” The female voice spoke once more. “Or what you are speaking of. I will ask you again please state your intentions.”

“Admiral we only wish to speak with Androcles.” Perlae said again. “We are no threat to you in the least, none of us are. If you will let Androcles know that we are here, I know he cannot sense us because his Etheric shields are far too high, but if you tell him we are here, then we can explain everything.”

“Do you have Holographic COMS capability?” The voice asked.

Perlae looked at Morlar and nodded. “Yes. We are activating now.”

Morlar met her eyes. “Perlae is that wise?” He asked.

“We have nothing to fear from Androcles or any who follow him and his father Morlar, you know this.” Perlae spoke.

Morlar hesitated for only a moment before touching the panel beside his right leg and the small holographic COM disc between their seats came alive with the clear image of the very stunning woman with deeply tanned skin, beautiful pale blue eyes and sharply pointed ears.

“She is an elf!” Ieri exclaimed excitedly.

All of them saw the reaction on Sa’sur’s face when she saw them and they watched as she came to her feet from the chair she had been sitting in.

SCIMITAR

Sa’sur stood up from her Command Chair on the bridge the moment she saw the merlot scaled adolescent dragon in the COM link. Her eyes grew even wider when she saw Perlae and the texture of her skin, not to mention the color of her hair. Sa’sur had seen Laren on several occasions since she had arrived and talked with her at length. This young woman had the same texture of skin as Laren, a cross between Darastrixi scales and normal skin. The scaled area was much less defined and appeared even softer in comparison to Laren’s skin but there was no mistaking it. The young woman had incredible amethyst colored eyes and they looked at Sa’sur with relaxed ease and openness.

“Who are you?” Sa’sur demanded almost harshly.

The young woman looked taken aback at her tone for a brief moment, then realization flooded her face, and she reached up to touch her cheek.

“Ah... my skin.” She spoke quickly with a smile. “It is very similar to Laren Ti’shara’s skin I imagine, but we are not the same. *Wer Zezhuanth* has blessed Laren with his spirit and power, her Lycavorian blood comes from the gods themselves. My siblings and I are the product of our mother and father, and we are not so lucky.”

Sa'sur kept her reply in check and hid her surprise well. How did she know about Laren? “Who are you and what do you want?” Sa'sur demanded.

“Admiral I know this is very strange.” Perlae spoke evenly. “But if I could just speak to Androcles then there would be no questions.”

“Young lady, I don’t know who you are or where you come from.” Sa'sur told her. “You keep asking to speak to someone named Androcles and I have no idea who you are speaking of. You are in an unknown ship loitering on the edge of my Task Force and you refuse to answer my questions. That does not bode well for future relations if you get my meaning.”

Ieri nudged Perlae in the arm. “She is protecting him.” Ieri spoke softly as Perlae looked at her. “She is an elf Perlae; all elves are descended from dragons. She is protecting Talon Guardian Androcles.”

Sa'sur’s eyes grew slightly wider and she appeared to step closer in the transmission. “How do you know that?” She demanded.

Ieri batted her beautiful emerald green eyes and looked at her image. “Are all elves as beautiful as you?” She asked.

Sa'sur looked taken aback by the question and she shook her head slightly. “We... we do not recognize your ship in our databanks.” Sa'sur finally spoke. “I will ask once more... who are you and what do you want?”

Perlae turned as Ishma and Awser moved onto the bridge, the adolescent dragons Gydal and Quevor, both with dark green scales. Gydal had large orange hued eyes while Quevor had bright reddish eyes.

“Ieri! An elf!” Gydal exclaimed moving up beside her sister and staring at the image of Sa'sur who looked even more confused.

Perlae turned back as Ishma grasped her hand and Awser moved up behind her putting his large hand on her shoulder. “Admiral... please let me introduce my sister Ishma and my brother Awser. Ieri, Gydal and Quevor are Bonded to us and we to them. I know that you are aware of the significance of this for there are thousands of your Bonded Pairs in the Union are there not?”

Sa'sur’s eyes narrowed. “How do you know that?” She demanded. “Who are you?”

“Admiral I assure you that we are...” Perlae began to speak but Sa'sur’s Tactical Officer spoke from her station interrupting her.

“Admiral!” The young woman barked. “Long range sensors are detecting four spatial disruptions closing on the unknown ship! Range is two light years and closing fast at light speed! Estimate one point one!” She looked up at where Sa'sur stood. “Admiral, Tactical Profile indicates some sort of stealth ship! We’re tracking the spatial particles and fusion traces from their engines.”

“Quantum engines?” Sa'sur asked surprised.

“Negative!” The young woman answered. “They appear to be some sort of Plasma Matter fusion. Along the lines of our earlier Hyper Matter Test Engines. They were detected by our tertiary sensor array doing a particle scan of the system.”

“What?” Perlae’s young and now excited voice drew Sa'sur’s attention back to the COM holo transmission.

“Admiral I assure you that we are...” Perlae began to speak but Sa'sur’s Tactical Officer spoke from her station interrupting her almost at the same moment that the soft alarm began to sound in the cockpit of their ship.

“*Sibfla!*” Morlar exclaimed as his hands began to fly across his instruments.

“What?” Perlae asked him in an excited voice.

“Jaroe?” Morlar asked his co-pilot. “Talk to me.”

“Four contacts bearing 2764.9.” Jaroe answered quickly. “They are two light years out and closing fast! Anse! They are Coalition Long Range Frigates!”

Perlae’s eyes grew wide. “Coalition! Out here! How?” She gasped.

“They found us!” Awser hissed. “They must have been waiting for us once they detected the activation of the portal!”

“They could not have known the activation coordinates!” Ishma spoke. She looked at Perlae with wide eyes. “Unless they seeded this area of space with sensor probes and had ships already here!”

“So far from their own space?” Perlae gasped.

“After what grandmother told them the last time they stopped us, what did you expect?” Awser spoke. “She insulted them and made them look the fools. And did a masterful job of it too.”

“You want to fill me in now?” Sa’sur snapped angrily from within the still active Holo transmission. “Who are those ships closing on this location? No one knows we are here! Why are they after you?”

“Admiral Sa’sur we really need to speak with Androcles!” Perlae insisted. “If you would just allow me to speak with him. Just let him know that we...”

“Young lady, I don’t know who you are or what you are trying to find.” Sa’sur told her. “I will not put my people or ships in danger for someone I have never met before. You said those ships are coming after you... why?”

“We really don’t have time for this.” Morlar snapped. “They will be upon us in minutes!”

“I have all the time in the world.” Sa’sur commented.

“Enough of this *rensibfla*!” Perlae barked out now letting her temper show as she turned to Ishma and Awser. “We must channel our power together and reach for Androcles.” She told them. “It is the only way.”

“Perlae we will never be able to breach the Etheric shields he has.” Awser told her. “He and his father have shields that no one can touch.”

Perlae nodded her head. “I know, but we don’t have to breach them.” She told him. “We only have to let him know we are here. With Ieri, Gydal and Quevor in the link with us we can at least get his attention.”

“And risk him thinking it is an attack from someone and have him shred our minds!” Ishma spoke. “Perlae that is crazy! You know what grandmother has told us. Androcles and his father are the most powerful Etheric users to have lived since Sumar. They could kill us all with hardly any effort!”

Perlae nodded her head. “What choice do we have?” She spoke. “We are no match for four Coalition frigates and if they capture us...”

“What do you want us to do?” Awser asked her.

“We link and find Androcles.” Perlae spoke. “We don’t need to try and breach his Etheric shields, just... just shout loud enough for him to take notice.”

“Shout?” Ishma asked.

“I know what she means.” Awser spoke taking his sister’s hands, as the three adolescent dragons moved closer so that they were touching their Bonded Ones.

“He has to know who we are.” Perlae spoke. “We can hide nothing from him. He must know that we are his blood! It is the only way he will believe.”

“If he does not turn us all into babbling fools for even attempting this.” Awser spoke with a slight grin.

SPARTA'S WRATH

ANDROCLES!!! WE NEED YOU!!!

It was a harmony of voices that echoed so loudly against his Etheric shields that it caused him to lose his equilibrium momentarily, affecting those closest to him in his family as they felt a wave of power within them. He knew instantly that it was no attack for the voices did not try to breach his shields and they echoed powerfully with the sweet resonance of something so very familiar to him. Andro pulled that power back within him taking it away from his family, even now protecting them like it was second nature to him. Andro dropped to one knee, sensing his mother’s concern, reaching for him both physically and within the Etheric realm. He

ignored them and it was Eliani who was the first to get her body under his left shoulder and prop him up as best she could.

Elynth sensed this intrusion into his mind almost at the same time and was reaching for him within milliseconds of it happening, both of them almost subconsciously reinforcing each other's Etheric shields. The voices of his family were a hollow din of echoes as Andro took deep breaths and tried to ascertain what had just happened. The voices were still there echoing along his shields, not trying to gain access to his mind but most definitely trying to reach out to him. He had never felt them before, but their resonance was like a cool breeze on a summer's day on Cranae Island. They meshed perfectly and were filled with love and devotion for family. For him. For his siblings.

Family.

And they were all focused utterly on him.

To a Lycavorian there was perhaps nothing more important than family and pack. The wolf within all of them could sense family and pack with hardly any effort. These voices were not fully Lycavorian but they echoed with the resonance of family. His family. He could feel Elynth swimming within his mind, sensing the same things and feeling the same confusion at what she was feeling. What they were feeling.

LOOK WITHIN US ANDROCLES!! LOOK WITHIN OUR MINDS AND YOU WILL SEE!!

Androcles did just that, reaching out with fingers of Etheric power, touching all of the minds that were joined. Six of them. All of them acting as one, all of them committed and filled with purpose and love for one another. There was no malice, no evil intent, and no nefarious meanings. With Elynth sending him pulses of love and preparing to act to defend him if she detected anything Androcles Leonidas lowered his Etheric shields just enough to reach out to the six minds.

As his body stiffened and Andro heard the faint cries of his family Andro felt his world open up into something wonderful. Images flashed through his mind of faraway places, the faces of those he recognized, laughter, love and pain. The one thing that coursed through him with powerful intensity was the resonance of family. He found so many Etheric tendrils that were drifting and all of them radiated the same thing. Family. Blood. As he delved deeper he saw each of them enter this world; saw their parents and grandparents; and then finally he saw her and his azure eyes grew so very wide.

Eliani and his mothers and siblings thought he was in pain and they gripped him tighter. Anja and Eliani tried to use their power to discover what the problem was. Andro could feel their healing power sweeping through him, trying to discover what was wrong. He felt Sadi's hands upon him then, all of his wives and mates as they crowded around him on the deck. It filled him with resolve and Andro went deeper.

And he saw her one more time and felt the burning of family within him grow even more profound. The black hair and dark eyes so prominent in his father and his grandfathers. She was the cause. She was the beginning. In that fleeting moment Androcles saw everything and pieces of the puzzle he had been trying to put together with his father for years fell perfectly into place.

[Where are you?] Andro reached out to the six minds without hesitation.

Andro felt the wave of happiness and relief fill the six minds and he opened his mind further, lowering his Etheric shields more and encompassing those six minds as well within the scope of his abilities. He felt liberation and untold happiness when he did this and then six voices spoke as one.

[Androcles!] The six voices spoke as one. *[Bless the gods!]*

[You are so close!] Andro said. *[Where are you?]* He asked again still confused.

[Androcles...] A single female voice spoke now with their other five minds swirling around her in unison. *[We are just on the edge of your ship's sensors. Your Admiral is speaking with us but she would not let us talk to you.]*

[Who are you? What is wrong? Where did you come from?] Andro asked the questions quickly.

[You have seen some of it.] The female voice replied. *[We can tell you everything but the ships closing on our position now would prevent that if they were to capture us.]*

[Ships?] Andro asked. *[What ships?]*

[She sent us Androcles. She sent us to be with you.] The voice spoke again. *[My name is Perlae.]*

[She is... she is my... grandmother. Our grandmother.] Andro said.

Andro felt the happiness in the connection once more and almost saw the young woman nod her head. *[Yes. Her name is Dynina.]*

[She is... she is grandmother Sateia's mother!] Andro gasped his eyes going wide as the realization hit him. *[She is the... she is the beginning!]*

[Yes!] Perlae answered again and Andro could feel the happiness within them grow even more pronounced. *[Androcles these Lycavorians that are coming... that are after us... they are not...]*

[They are our people!] Andro spoke.

[No!] The female answered with almost a shout. *[They are not like us! They are not like you and your father and mothers. Androcles you must believe me!]*

The decision was easy enough for Androcles to make given that he was a Lycavorian, a Spartan and a Dahakoan. He made it with no hesitation.

[Come to me now!] Andro snapped. *[Do not hesitate! I will inform the others! Follow this course now Perlae!]* He ordered her, flashing her the course he wanted her to take through the connection they had established.

PERLAE'S TRANSPORT

[She is... she is grandmother Sateia's mother!] Andro gasped his eyes going wide as the realization hit him. *[She is the... she is the beginning!]*

[Yes.] Perlae answered again. *[Androcles these Lycavorians that are coming... that are after us... they are not...]*

[They are our people!] Andro spoke.

[No!] Perlae answered with almost a shout. *[They are not like us! They are not like you and your father and mothers. Androcles you must believe me!]*

[Come to me now!] Andro snapped. *[Do not hesitate! I will inform the others! Follow this course now Perlae!]*

Perlae felt relief wash over her, Ishma and Awser at his words and she saw the course in her mind. Tears flowed openly from her and Ishma's eyes and Awser was having trouble holding them back as well because of what they felt within Androcles for them.

Perlae turned quickly to Morlar, ignoring the image of Sa'sur within the COM signal. She reached out and touched his shoulder. "Morlar... go!" She spoke. "Androcles said straight to his ship! Go!"

Morlar didn't hesitate for an instant and pushed his engines to full power, the transport taking off like a bullet from a dead stop.

"Wait a minute!" Sa'sur barked out from with the COM channel. "I will..."

"I'm sorry Admiral!" Perlae spoke just before she ended the transmission on their end.

"Perlae, they could destroy us in a heartbeat!" Morlar spoke even as he shifted their course.

"They will not." Perlae answered confidently. She punched numbers into the computer between him and Jaroe. "Follow this course! Do not deviate from it Morlar!"

Morlar glanced at the computer and nodded his head. "Here we go!"

SCIMITAR

In all the years they had worked and commanded together Androcles had communicated with her via Mindvoice only three times. All of them in an emergency. She felt the tingles in her mind and then Andro's voice was filling her thoughts.

[Sa'sur! The transport! Do not hinder it!] Androcles ordered her.

[Andro... we don't know anything about it.] Sa'sur spoke.

[We would have if you and Armen had allowed them to talk to me Sa'sur my friend.] He answered quickly.

Sa'sur felt the slight tinge of anger and frustration in his voice but it was quickly gone. He knew they were only trying to do their jobs and not intrude on the reunion with his family and more importantly his mother.

[We wanted to...]

[I know Sa'sur and... thank you. Other ships are approaching as well?] Andro asked her.

[Four unknown contacts, yes. Our... guests... appear to know who they are but were not very forthcoming with the details.] Sa'sur answered. *[They said they did not want to be taken by them. They have some sort of Stealth technology Andro, we picked them up easily enough but we had to retune our main sensors. Heavy Frigate Class to us. Four of them bearing on the transport now. They shifted course and are definitely after whoever is on that ship. Whoever they are, they must be important.]*

[Sibfla!] Andro spat. *[I believe the time to remain hidden is now past us Sa'sur. We knew it would not last forever.]*

[Agreed.]

[De-shroud the Task Force and begin hailing these vessels.] Andro told her.

[Who is on them Androcles?] Sa'sur asked.

[Lycavorians.] Andro replied causing Sa'sur's eyes to grow wider. *[Moreover, according to Perlae, not very friendly ones.]*

SPARTA'S WRATH

With a huge intake of breath, Androcles shook his head clear and rose to his feet with a purpose.

“Andro!” Sadi exclaimed grabbing his face.

Andro looked at her, his azure eyes bright and so beautiful to her. Andro leaned over and kissed her passionately right there in front of everyone, surprising even Sadi and not caring that there were Tasmor gazing upon him with wide eyes. He pulled away quickly and looked at his three mothers and Eliani.

“Andro what happened?” Aricia asked as she grabbed his arm. “You... it was as if you went into shock!”

Andro nodded his head. “I know. I'm sorry.” He answered quickly. He reached up and tapped his jaw. “Armen?”

Armen's voice filled the internal speakers of the training room then. **-Androcles-**

“The transport that you and Sa'sur were tracking... it is moving towards us now yes?” Andro said.

-It is on an intercept course, affirmative- Armen answered. **-You gave them a course through the Task Force I assume-**

“Direct them to Landing Bay Six and have a security detail meet the ship. I will be moving there with my family.” Andro spoke squeezing Aricia's hand and pulling Sadi closer to him.

-And the other contacts- Armen questioned.

“Other contacts?” Denali asked now. “Andro what is going on?”

“Sa'sur is bringing the Task Force to Status Two.” He answered. “She will order them to de-shroud in seconds and...” Andro tilted his head for a moment. “Belay that order Armen. Maintain Status Two and keep the Task Force Shrouded for now. Inform Sa'sur and those ships are not to approach under any circumstances.”

-Affirmative-

“Andro?” For'mya asked him. “What is going on?”

Andro met her eyes with a brilliant smile on his face. “Our past is catching up to our future mother.” He told her. “Everyone change and meet me in Landing Bay Six. Hurry.”

They could only watch as Andro released Aricia’s hand, snatched Carisia’s hand to replace it and then he was leading his wives and mates out of the training room. Aricia turned and looked at Anja and For'mya.

“What is happening?” She gasped.

Anja shook her head and took her hand as well as For'mya’s. “Whatever it is, you can damn well bet it is going to be big.” She replied. “We must get Saydia and the Tasmor settled and then join him in Landing Bay Six. Where is Landing Bay Six anyway?”

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES (COLS)

COLS-CLASS LONG RANGE HEAVY FRIGATE

“Report!” The stern faced Lycavorian spoke as he sat in the Command Chair on the bridge of the ship.

His chair rested on a platform offset to the right of the bridge with stations behind him and to his left in the center of the bridge. Along the opposite side were also stations that were occupied by both men and women.

“Tri-Alliance transport is on an intercept course for the unknown ship! Range is sixteen million meters!” A voice echoed out.

“I can see that!” The man barked. “Tell me about this ship! Where did it come from? What flag does it fly?”

“It is just coming into range of our main scanning array sir! *Sibfla!* Captain it is over twenty-one thousand meters long!” Another voice chimed in.

The Lycavorian came to his feet, his instincts screaming for him to be cautious now. “Order the squadron to full stop! Conn, full stop! Do it now!”

“Full stop Captain!”

“Sensors!” He snapped. “Tell me something!”

“Some sort of localized jamming field is active Captain. Our sensors are unable to lock onto the ship or scan it!”

“Burn through the jamming field!” He ordered. “Tactical... are we still cloaked?”

“Affirmative Captain! Cloak is fully operational. The squadron is hidden.”

“Are there any other ships in the area?” He asked.

“No sir.” Another voice answered. “Sensors are clear. Just the lone ship. The Tri-Alliance transport executed some sort of evasive pattern and they have just now entered what appears to be a landing bay of some sort.”

“Range?”

“Range is down to eleven million, four hundred thousand meters sir.”

“Captain Nasso, Commander Balal is requesting instructions.”

“Tell him to stand by!” Nasso snapped as he moved to the sensor station to his left. It was being operated by his senior Sensor Officer and he trusted the man. “Gomar?” He asked less forcefully.

The man looked at him. They appeared to be the same age given their appearances. “I have never seen anything like it Nasso.” He spoke silently. “It is ten times our size and twenty times our mass. The configuration does not match anything in our databanks.”

“The jamming?” Nasso asked.

“It distorts sensors but it doesn’t jam them completely.” Gomar answered as he adjusted his controls. “Hull composition is unknown. It... it almost appears bio-mechanical in nature with traces of different metals that I have never seen before. That we have never seen before.”

“Power source?” Nasso asked.

Gomar shook his head. “Unable to determine at this distance given the distortion of our sensors by whatever that ship is radiating. It is some sort of polaron field that I can tell you.”

“A ship that size can’t possibly be a warship.” Nasso spoke. “Lifesigns?”

Gomar shook his head. “Our sensors are too distorted to be that accurate from this distance.” He replied.

“Keep trying to burn through this jamming Gomar.” Nasso spoke. He turned his head. “Weapons Officer, load torpedo bays with Class Four warheads. Full yield and lock them on that ship. And ready the Plasma turrets! If that ship attempts to leave I want it crippled! Order the other ships to do the same!”

“Weapons aye!”

“COMM Officer, prepare a probe to send back to Coalition space!” Nasso spoke. “Full security protocols and encryption. Launch when ready.” He moved to another station behind his chair and looked over the shoulder of the man there. “Anything yet on the portal opening?”

“They covered their tracks well Captain.” The man answered him. “Our relay sensor probes detected it just as they were designed too, but by the time the information was then transmitted to us, they had already collapsed it. We know they can move through these portals with ease but we simply were not prepared for this event and we were too far away to react quickly enough. I have shifted four probes into the sector where it was detected and I’m trying to determine its exact position.”

Nasso nodded his head and put his hand on the man’s shoulder. “Take your time and be thorough Lanar. This is why we brought you along. And if we can catch these Tri-Alliance people we can get you the answers to your questions and secure this technology for ourselves.”

“Yes sir.”

SPARTA'S WRATH **LANDING BAY SIX**

Perlae, Ishma and Awser stood at the bottom of the ramp of their transport, their hands clasped tightly together in both fear and excitement. Ieri, Gydal and Quevor bounced slightly back and forth on their talons as they stood behind their Bonded Ones, staring at the massive forms of Jeth, Elynth and the other fully grown dragons now watching them with wide eyes. A full *Durcunusaan* Security Team was spread out in a half moon line in front of the ramp, their chopped down P190A5s ready to deal out death if need be.

They saw him step through the rank of heavily armed men and all of their hearts jumped several notches. Though they didn’t know it, Andro had changed into standard Union Drow Light armor. Though it looked very similar to Mark V ArmorPly, the materials used were very different. All of the Leonidas children had taken to wearing the lighter Drow armor once Lu'ria had become Andro's wife and mate. It was much better for everyday use, and while it did not provide equal protection as the Mark VI ArmorPly that they wore into combat, it was better suited for day to day activities. It also served to accent the figures of all the Leonidas daughters and wives and this is something that all of them preferred. Aricia, Anja and For'mya wore the armor for the first time, but they would soon begin to do the same thing as the armor grew on them. Anja had already commented as they were changing how much more firm it made her ass look. Aricia and For'mya were laughing as they too dressed.

Perlae, Ishma and Awser could only stare at him with wide eyes. There were times when they had believed this day would never come. Only their grandmother’s faith had given them the will to hold on to that feeling. Now it was actually happening and they did not know what to do. He was taller than the images they had seen on pirated channels, and far more muscular. He was so imposing, both physically and within the Etheric realm. Their dragon blood could feel the echo of the *Dahakoan* inside him and the young man and woman that stood behind the row of guards. It was so powerful and unmistakable.

They could also feel the Etheric resonance that marked him as a Talon Guardian.

Vrelvel Sargti.

Beings that had not existed within Darastrixi society for well over a million years and now two among the four that existed were not even Darastrixi, which was unheard of in all of their history. And they were of their blood.

Androcles stared at them with wide eyes as he moved closer. Their scents were without question and for one with the sense of smell that Andro and his father had; it was the largest deciding factor. Andro did not hesitate and moved right up in front of them, his azure eyes bright. He reached up slowly and touched Perlae’s cheek causing her to flinch slightly but not draw back. He let his fingers slide across her skin and saw her smile

as the tears rolled down her cheeks. She reached up and covered his hand with her own, even as Andro looked at Ishma and did the same thing with her. The fingers of his hand caressing the skin of her cheek and her tears of happiness rolling across his skin. He turned and looked at Awser now, taking his hand and brushing it across his short black hair before coming to rest on the back of his neck. Awser moved closer, reaching up to rest his hand on Andro's arm, his dark amethyst eyes moist.

Andro turned his head back to Perlae and met her identical colored eyes. *[Staanian?]* He asked them.

Perlae nodded through her tears. *[She is well. It was she who sent us here Androcles. She has always known you and your father would come. She has never lost faith. She made sure none of us did. She has waited for the day when she could see all of you together. In person. Jezima and Meral too.]*

[How?] Andro gasped. *[You are...? How is this possible?]*

Awser smiled now. *[Our father is... he is Darastrixi.]*

Andro looked at him with wide eyes. *[Darastrixi?]* He gasped in surprise.

Elynth was the only one who would dare intrude on what was taking place and she moved up right behind Andro, lowering her head close to his shoulder. Ieri and her sister and brother had to crane their necks up to gaze at her, but look at her they did with huge eyes. That she was *Vrelvel Sargti* and *Dahakoan* was easy enough to tell for them, but she was also a hybrid dragon. This was something that none of them had ever seen before let alone believed was possible.

[How is that possible?] Elynth asked them.

Perlae smiled as she reached up and put her palm on Elynth's snout. This drew gasps from many who were watching. All of her siblings and the entire Leonidas family knew Elynth to be the most introverted of Isheeni and Torma's children and she would never allow anyone but Andro to touch her in such a way.

[Elynth.] Perlae said softly seeing her golden eyes go wide. *[You are just as beautiful as our staania said you were.]*

[You... you know my name.] Elynth rasped out.

[We all know your name.] Ishma spoke now as she too reached up and touched her snout. *[You are part of Androcles. There is not one without the other. We know the names of all our family.]*

Elynth looked at Andro. *[Andro?]*

[You can feel what I feel sister.] Andro told her. *[They bear the blood of my family within their veins. I can smell it as easily as I smell it within my siblings. Staania Sateia's blood.]*

Perlae looked at Elynth. *[Sateia... Sumar's wife and mate... she was the sister to our mother.]* She explained. *[Both are daughters to our staania.]*

[How?] Andro asked. *[How did she survive the Black Day? How did you come to be among Darastrixi?]*

[Pralors too.] Awser spoke causing Andro to look at him.

[It is a long and rather involved history Androcles.] Perlae told him. *[We can tell you everything but...]*

"Andro?" Eliani's voice interrupted them and Andro turned his head and saw his sister just behind him. As with all his siblings, they trusted Androcles implicitly; Eliani was just a little braver than the rest when concerning Andro. "Hum mm... we are standing here kind of stupid like."

Andro could not help but smile and he turned back to Perlae. He surprised her by his actions, but his arms closing around her filled her with blissful joy and then he was hugging her tightly. She felt his arms reach out for Awser and Ishma and then he was embracing all of them, his resonance and scent filling their senses and their minds and filling the one void that all of them had felt in their hearts since they were children.

The void of family.

Andro looked up and turned, none of them wanting to release him from their arms, and he looked at his three mothers and siblings looking at him strangely. He saw the looks on the faces of Aricia, Anja, Denali, Deion and Nara and knew that they were beginning to put together what was happening here. They would have the keenest senses of smell after him and his mother Anja could no doubt sense with her healing powers that they were related.

"Well!" Andro blurted aloud. "Don't just stand there! Come and greet your family." He declared. "Come and greet our *chrora*!" (cousins)

That was all the encouragement they needed and the rush of bodies forward was like a wave of emotion as Perlae, Ishma and Awser were swallowed up but the one thing they had lacked for nearly all of their lives outside the love of their grandmother and father.

The love of family.

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES (COLS) **COLS-CLASS LONG RANGE HEAVY FRIGATE**

“Gomar?” Nasso asked impatiently from his command chair.

“I have been able to retune our sensors somewhat, but the polaron field around this ship is very powerful.” Gomar answered. “Whatever is powering that ship is unlike anything I have seen.”

Nasso rose to his feet and moved up beside him once more. “It has been over thirty minutes Gomar.” He said. “Surely you have discovered something?”

“It is unlike the Tri-Alliance technology Nasso.” He told him. “I’ve never seen it before. The ship is just under twenty-two thousand meters long. It has a beam of nearly five thousand meters! If our instruments are accurate it displaces over 22 billion metric tons Nasso!”

“Then it must be a transport of some kind.” Nasso spoke. “No one builds a warship that large. What would be the purpose? It would not be able to fight.”

Gomar looked at him. “It would be helpful if we were closer.” He told him. “I could focus our sensors tighter on different portions of the ship and cut through the interference from the polaron field.”

“Are you sure?” Nasso asked.

Gomar was silent for a moment then shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t know.” He finally answered. “To manipulate a polaron field in such a way takes a massive amount of power generation, easily the output of all four of our ships combined, but a polaron field is not meant to make it impossible to scan through it. Just harder.”

Nasso thought about it for a few seconds and then turned his head. “Conn! Ahead two thirds on the sub-light engines! Take us to a distance of one million meters from that ship!”

“Conn aye!”

Nasso looked back to Gomar. “You are certain it was the *Yowa’s staaniachanvor*?” He asked.

Gomar nodded his head. “Without question.” He answered. “Their bio-scans matched perfectly to what was in our databanks. I also detected three of the *Sinuova* onboard before they sprinted for this ship.”

“Truly?” Nasso asked. “That is new for them. We have not seen them outside their territory on anything but their warships. Why risk them on a simple transport, even if it is their fastest?”

“It does make you wonder.” Gomar spoke. “Perhaps they are getting sloppy?”

Nasso shook his head quickly. “The *Yowa* is many things but she is not sloppy. She has been out thinking King Osrod for ten thousand years.” He squeezed Gomar’s shoulder. “If we can bring him her grandchildren he will reward us with whatever we desire Gomar.”

“I would settle for a better ship.” Gomar replied with a grin.

“If we can pull this off I will make sure we are given a cruiser!” Nasso said. He moved back to his Command chair with a delighted look in his eyes at what he could gain from this mission. “COM Officer, when we reach one million meters begin hailing the ship. Standard hail and have them prepare to be boarded!”

“COM aye.”

SPARTA’S WRATH

They moved into the starboard pilot’s briefing room, the *Durcunusaan* keeping all others outside, while the reunion continued. Perlae, Ishma and Awser were very nearly overwhelmed at the outpouring of family and love they received. As their *staania* had told them many times through the years, it would be much easier for those of pure blood to know the truth of it, and Aricia had proven this theory quite correct. She sat with Perlae

and Ishma on either side of her, gripping their hands tightly, while Awser sat beside Ishma with Denali, Deion and Nara crowded around him. The others packed around them, Anja and For'mya touching Aricia in some fashion, all of the Leonidas family touching one another in some way, while a barrage of simple questions beset the three of them. They were questions easily answered and did not require much thought given the emotion of the moment. Ieri, Gydal and Quevor were all resting on Jeth's massive back just outside the briefing room, all of the family dragons crowded around him and Tharua.

Androcles stood just inside the door of the briefing room, his back to the wall. Sadi and Ne'Veha pressed tightly against either side of him, Lu'ria to his front and Sehri, Caliria, and Carisia pressed up against them. All of them basked in the happiness that filled Androcles and they radiated it outward as well.

"You must contact your father *Saradasaar*." Sadi spoke looking up into his face. "This revelation is; it is beyond wondrous."

Andro nodded his head. "I will." He said softly.

"You did not sense them at all Andro?" Carisia asked him.

Andro met her Maya blue eyes. "Not even an inkling." He answered. "Not until they reached out to me."

"A power like Tobia and Mari have then?" Ne'Veha spoke. "Mari was able to shield her resonance even from Murano and he is her father."

Andro nodded his head. "Possibly." He said. "Their Etheric resonance is different though. It is not as pronounced as it is within us."

"Is that bad?" Sehri asked.

"No." Andro told her quickly. "They are blood. They are family and that is unquestioned. How it all came to be we will discover as time passes."

"This is nearly as wonderful as discovering that Jezima and Meral still live." Lu'ria spoke happily. "We are discovering so much about our history and our family." That was the Drow within her speaking for it was well known that the Drow were sometimes even more fanatical about their family and clans than Lycavorians.

Andro turned his head when the door to the briefing room opened and the Bridge Officer entered. He recognized Major DI'koa instantly. "Major?" He asked.

DI'koa turned and saw Prince Androcles beside the door. "Milord." He spoke bowing his head slightly.

Andro grimaced at DI'koa's formality and thought he saw him grin slightly in response. He would have a talk with Armen at a later time. "What is it Major?"

DI'koa moved closer. "Our other guests are becoming bolder Milord." He told him. "One of the ships has closed to one million meters and has begun hailing us in the clear."

"They lowered these stealth shields that they have?" Andro asked surprised.

"The one ship that moved closer yes. The others are still hidden, or so they think." DI'koa added with a smile.

"What do they want?" Andro asked.

DI'koa shook his head. "Standard hail in universal language translators." DI'koa gave him a lopsided grin now. "They want us to heave to and prepare to be boarded for inspection of what they call criminals."

Andro's eyes grew wide at this and he almost choked on his intake of breath. "You must be joking?" He gasped. His head turned quickly then and he looked at where Perlae and the others sat. "She said they were not like us." He spoke softly.

Sadi looked at his face. "Andro?"

"Perlae told me they were not like us." Andro repeated himself looking at her. "The crews of these ships are Lycavorian *Kerta Gai*."

Sadi's jungle green eyes grew wider now as well. "Lycavorian? Out here?"

Andro nodded his head as he turned back to DI'koa. "Have they tried to scan us?"

DI'koa nodded his head. "Ever since they got within range. Their sensors do not appear to be anywhere near as advanced as ours, nor their ships for that matter. The polaron field is distorting most of their scans but now that they have moved closer, they will be able to get some readings. Nothing major since our Dragon Armor shell resists most passive scans. If they get stupid and actually try to actively scan us, then they will get more information."

Andro nodded his head as his mind went over half a dozen scenarios. "Keep ignoring them for now." He replied. "And do what you can to keep them from being able to detect anything even if they do go active."

“The Task Force?” Dl'koa asked.

“Sa'sur will keep them under Shroud for now.” Andro answered him. “Only secure COMs between ships Dl'koa. I will join you on the bridge shortly.”

Dl'koa nodded his head and turned quickly to move out the door. Andro leaned over and quickly nuzzled Sadi and the others affectionately, each of them smiling and basking in the attention. He looked at Perlae once more and nodded. “Time to get some answers.” He spoke as he gently moved Lu'ria aside and walked over to the table in front of where Perlae, Ishma and Awser sat in the front row of seats.

Perlae and Ishma still had moist eyes from all the tears they had shed in the last hour and it showed even on their skin. Awser's face was very animated and happy, that much anyone could see. All of them were actually. They all turned to him as he sat on the edge of the table across from them. Aricia, Anja and the rest of their family knew right away that something was going on and they focused their attention on him.

“Andro?” Aricia asked him. “What is it?” Perlae, Ishma and Awser all looked at him when she spoke and they could feel the anxiousness within him.

“*Chrora*... I need to know who is on those ships.” Andro asked her. “You said they were Lycavorian.”

“Lycavorian?” Aricia gasped aloud.

Perlae nodded her head. “Yes.”

Anja looked at Andro. “The ones from Ventori?” She asked.

Andro dropped his eyes from his Hadarian mother and looked at Perlae once more. “Perlae?”

“They call themselves the Coalition of Lycavorian States.” Perlae began. “We simply refer to them as COLS. They control roughly forty habitable planets on the far side of Kintaur space. Along the outer edge of the Echo Quadrant.”

“Wait...” Anja spoke again. “You know of the Kintaur?”

Ishma nodded now. “The Pralor and Tasmor planets as well. *Staan*ia Dynina has been monitoring them ever since we discovered they existed. About a thousand years after we arrived on Lorenu.”

“Lorenu is where you are from?” Aricia asked. “Your planet? Where is it?”

Perlae looked at Androcles. “It is a hidden system.” She spoke again. “It is not within the Echo Quadrant. It is... it is within the old Pralor Empire.”

“The old Pralor Empire?” Mari perked up when she heard this and leaned forward in her chair beside Deion. “How is that possible? The Scourge control our old empire.”

“Not all of it Lady Mari.” Awser replied.

Andro moved off the table and knelt down in front of Perlae. He took her hand in his and looked at them. “You are with family now Perlae.” He told her warmly sensing her hesitation. “You know this, yes?”

Perlae nodded her head quickly with a brilliant smile. “Oh yes!” She answered.

“It is a day we have waited for ever since we were born Androcles.” Awser spoke now. “*Staan*ia has known all of you existed ever since *Tenne* Martin took City Ship 41 from the surface of Lycavore. She has told us of each of you when you were born. When she first... when she discovered *Tenne* Martin lived it was a joyous day without equal according to her.”

“*Son vada carians!*” Aricia muttered.

Androcles nodded his head slowly trying to wrap his mind around what they were saying. “That is... you have known we existed?” He said. “How? We...” Andro met her eyes with an expression of disbelief. “You have someone within the Union! Someone close to our family if you know all this!”

Ishma nodded her head slowly. “Only *staania* knows who it is.” She said quickly. “We have asked her through the years but she has never revealed this information to anyone. Nicha may know, she is *staania*'s closest friend and like a sister to her. We do not though.”

“Why not... why not come forward?” For'mya asked now. “Why not reveal this to us so that...”

Perlae shook her head. “We do not know what resides in *staania*'s thoughts.” She said. “Only she can answer these questions.”

Andro squeezed her hand and nodded. “Then that is knowledge that we will get to very soon I assure you.” He spoke evenly. “Right now however, these ships are still out there and they are after you. Who are they and why are they after you?”

Perlae took a deep breath. “The nearest that we can tell, according to the members of the Pralor Science Convocation that are among us, is that they are from one of the earliest Seed Missions that the Pralors

conducted with our people from Lycavore. Even before those on Ventori, so at least a hundred and fifty thousand years but probably more.” Perlae answered. “*Staania* first encountered them after our probes discovered the Pralor survivors of the war in this Quadrant of space on Artaaya. We did not approach the Pralor survivors as they were too busy trying to rebuild. We sent one of our ships to make contact with these Lycavorians, hoping to gain more allies; it did not work out as we had hoped.”

“What do you mean?” Aricia pressed her.

Perlae looked at her. “They are not like us.” She repeated the phrase. “In many cases they still follow the old ways of our people on Lycavore. Before the time of Sumar. They are quick to violence and they rule with absolute power. We know that they control forty odd planets as I said, more than half of them they conquered.” She looked back to Andro. “The different species in that region of space that they have not conquered avoid them at all costs. They are militant and they provoke easily.”

“It is they who probably took the Alphas from Ventori.” Awser spoke now. “We have never been able to prove that, but it is what *staania* feels.” He told them. “They still follow the old caste ways of our people Androcles. Alphas, Betas, Omegas. Each are broken into their own sub castes and that is how they live. Those who did not bend to their will were enslaved over time. Slavery and beholden debts are a major part of their society.”

“Debts?” Anja hissed softly.

Ishma nodded now. “Adults and children are sold into servitude in order to pay for debts that are owed. Sometimes from thousands of years in the past.”

“The people allow this?” Denali asked from behind them.

Awser nodded and turned to look at his cousin. “It is an accepted way of life to them.” He answered. “Many know nothing else. Trust nothing else. It is a way to advance their status among their people.”

“Do they have a government?” For'mya asked. “Elected leaders?”

Perlae shook her head. “Pack rule.” She answered. “And the senior pack leaders select a King.”

“King?” Andro said.

Perlae returned her gaze to him. “King Osrod commands them now. He has been King for the last seven centuries since he succeeded his father. He is not a nice man and neither was his father. His father tried to force *staania* to give him our technology. As you no doubt noticed they are nowhere near as advanced as you or our people in terms of technology.” She told them. “When we first encountered them they tried to act friendly and open, but *staania* saw through this quickly enough. It turned ugly when she refused to become the mate to King Osrod’s father and he tried to force himself on her. That is when their true intent came out. *Staania* soon discovered that they wanted our advanced technology, our people and whatever we could offer to them, and not for peaceful purposes. They wanted it for themselves. For power.”

“Thugs!” Eliani spat from the side.

Perlae shook her head quickly and looked at her. “No, that is part of the problem. They are not simple thugs Eliani. Osrod commands them as King, his word is law, but he listens to the leaders of the packs. They do things for the benefit of their people insofar as it benefits the Coalition as a whole.”

“They practice slavery!” For'mya hissed.

“Yes, but unlike other species in history they do not abuse slaves and their slaves are afforded at least some basic rights.” Ishma spoke.

“You sound like you admire them Ishma.” Anja said gently.

Ishma shook her head quickly. “No, never! Slavery is vile to me no matter the form! I’m just saying that, unlike how slavery is viewed in the Union, how the Tri-Alliance views it, this is acceptable to COLS and part of their society. It has been for millennia.”

“Why are they after you?” Andro asked her. “And I need to know everything Perlae. Keep nothing from me.”

Perlae nodded her head. “When the Svorag attacked Ventori, *staania* dispatched one of our cruisers to provide help to them. Before we even got a third of the way there seven COLS ships intercepted us.” She told them. “We do not have many warships but they are far superior to anything COLS has. *Staania* tried to reason with them, she even told them we were going to Ventori to assist them. They did not seem concerned about what was happening there and that is why *staania* believed they had something to do with taking the Alphas

from the planet. She says they knew of Ventori by the way they reacted to her words. She believes they have been there before. They may have even been there watching them when the Svorag struck.”

“For what purpose?” Aricia asked.

Perlae shook her head. “We do not know.” She answered. “These ships demanded that we surrender to them. *Staanian* refused and they began to fire upon us.” Perlae took a deep breath and stopped for a moment. Ishma reached out to her and placed her hand on her sister’s arm.

“*Staanian* refused to fire back on them.” Ishma continued now. “When they realized they could not penetrate our shields, they sacrificed one of their ships to damage our ship. It rammed our cruiser and was destroyed, but it did sufficient damage to our ship that our shields dropped.”

“*Staanian* had no choice but to order the Captain to attack with everything we had.” Awser picked it up now. “We destroyed the remaining six ships in minutes but not before the surviving Captain got a message off to COLS Command. He told them that we had attacked unprovoked and killed all seven ships without any warning.”

Perlae looked at Andro. “Ever since that day COLS has considered all of us criminals.” She finished. “This is not the first time we have encountered them since that day. We usually escape easily, they cannot match our speed, but this time they knew where we were almost as soon as we arrived. We believe they have seeded this area of space with sensor drones that can detect our Subspace Portal Generator and have left ships to try and capture whatever they can.”

“Subspace Portal Generator?” For'mya asked now.

Perlae nodded her head. “The Darastrixi and Pralor scientists with us were some of the finest minds among their people. Working together they developed them over a hundred years. They are installed on all of our ships.”

“You have this technology?” Mari asked in shocked. “We were never able to determine how to fix the power instability it caused within the core matrix of our Quantum drives. You have these engines? Truly?”

Perlae nodded her head. “Oh yes.”

Aricia looked at Mari puzzled and then back to For'mya. “*Kinosaurgai*?” She asked.

“Benjamin and others at Dreamland have been working on it for a decade. They have shelved it for the most part.” She replied. “It was still in the theoretical stage. We could never solve the power consumption ratio just as Mari said. A Subspace Portal Generator would allow you to open your own directed wormhole to... well to anywhere. Theoretically the range would be unlimited by normal standards. Jump Gates would become a thing of the past.” For'mya looked at Perlae. “And you... this is amazing! You actually have working engines?”

Perlae nodded her head. “It is our most guarded secret.” She replied. “Only a handful of our people even know how they work. COLS must have devised some rudimentary way to detect the activation of a portal within a certain range.”

“And that is how they came upon you so quickly?” Andro asked.

Perlae nodded her head. “We believe so, yes.” She told him. “As I said... we don’t know anything for sure.”

“Well, it’s pretty obvious they want you.” Anja spoke now looking at Andro. “And we aren’t going to allow that to happen are we?”

Andro was quiet for a long moment as different options raced through his mind. His silence made Anja’s eyes narrow and she moved closer to him.

“Androcles?” She pressed more firmly.

Andro glanced up at her. “A moment mother.” He spoke as he stood up to his full height and tapped his jaw. “Armen?”

-Standing by Androcles-

“Androcles you...” Aricia started now also rising to her feet.

Andro held up his hand to her. “In a moment mother!” He told her with a firm voice. Aricia was about to retort angrily at this seemingly casual dismissal when she felt For'mya’s hand touch her arm and then For'mya she reached for both Aricia and Anja in their private connection.

[No, my loves.] She said quickly. [We have seen this before with our beloved. You know how Martin's mind works. Andro is no different. He is his father's son. Let him continue.]

For'mya was right they both knew. Martin could and did drive all of them insane with the way his mind was so methodical and cunning. They could never predict what he was going to do even after almost three decades together.

"Armen, I want a full spectrum sensor sweep of this sector and the adjoining sectors. Concentrate on any abnormal lower range power readings you detect that could be part of an extended sensor grid. A sensor grid that could be using the same stealth technology that our friends are using to hide themselves." Andro told him.

For'mya smiled knowingly as Aricia and Anja looked at her. Perlae looked up at them. "He can do that?" She asked surprised.

-What would this sensor grid be searching for Androcles- Armen asked.

Andro looked at Perlae. "*Chrora?*" He asked.

It was Awser who answered as he rose to his feet. "Given their level of technology the only thing they might possibly be able to detect is the residual chronometric particles of a portal opening." He answered. "We use unique crystals to focus the portal strength and make it stable, but they do leave a miniscule trace for several hours after activation."

"Armen you catch all that?" Andro asked.

-I will begin the sweep- His voice answered.

Perlae, Ishma and Awser looked around at everyone confused and it was Lisisa who smiled from where she stood beside Denali and Arduri. "All of us have COM implants." She explained. "We can hear pretty much any official communication anywhere on the ship and we all have private channels."

"And Armen is the ship so that helps as well." Deni echoed.

"This Armen... he is the Avatar of this ship?" Ishma asked.

Deni nodded his head. "Though I wouldn't exactly call him an Avatar anymore. He seems to not like that term now." He said with a smile.

Andro looked at Perlae once more. "*Chrora...* how radical are these Lycavorians?" He asked.

"Radical?" Perlae asked. "I would not call them radical Androcles."

"Would they try to forcibly board my ship?" Andro explained further.

Perlae blinked several times as his meaning hit her and she came to her feet. "If they... if they thought it would allow them to capture us or any part of our technology, yes, I believe they would."

"Deni... low level alert. Have the *Durcunusaan* deploy teams to all of the landing bays. It is the only way they could get aboard." Andro said. "You take command of one of the two main landing bays with Lisi and Arduri, Dorian take the second with Sheva and Onera. Split our team among you but I want Kalis with you."

Denali looked at him puzzled. "Why?" He asked.

"He will learn more of leadership from you." Andro replied seeing his brother's eyes widen slightly. "Now go!"

"Deion, grab Murano on your way out and take him with you, Nara and Mari. Take Landing Bay Six where their ship came in. Divide the rest between our siblings but leave the *PREMONITION's* Landing Bay for Carisia, Lu'ria and Sehri."

"ROE?" Deion asked him.

"If they try to board our ship *fervon*, subdue them." Andro answered. "If they resist... if they resist, kill them."

Denali nodded his head. "*Aden.*" He said. (Done)

Perlae, Ishma and Awser could only stand there stunned as the Leonidas children turned into Spartan Warriors in the blink of an eye. They watched as Denali grabbed Deion and Dorian and they headed for the door, the rest of their cousins following without hesitation. Only Eliani, Brendi and Jomann remained once everyone else had exited.

Andro looked at his three mothers. Three of the six that he loved as if each of them had given birth to him. He looked directly at Anja. “Mother... Laren needs you now.” He said. “Her episodes are becoming harder for her to tolerate. Only you can fix that.”

Anja didn't pause and nodded her head. “Eli, you and Caliria are with me. And have Serale meet us in the Med Bay as well. This is going to take a few hours and we'll need her additional power. Retta and Calyb too.” She looked at Andro with those stern jade green eyes. “And you... no bumps or explosions or any other little things that your father so enjoys! You hear me!”

Andro grinned at her. “I will do my best *medwaw*.”

Anja shook her head. “Yeah... my *mida* you will.” She said taking Eliani and Caliria's hands and heading out of the briefing room.

Andro looked at Jomann. “Go with them Jomann. If these fools do happen to get aboard, I want you protecting my family. No one gets close to them Jomann. No one.”

Jomann nodded his head. “General Dytin has a security force with him. I could use them to augment the *Durcunusaan*.”

Andro nodded his head. “Do it.”

Jomann was moving before the words had finished leaving Andro's lips.

Andro waited for him to exit and then turned to look at Aricia and For'mya as he took Perlae's hand in one of his and then Ishma's in the other. “Shall the rest of us go to the bridge and see what we can see?” He asked with a smile.

For'mya stepped up to him and lightly slapped him in the face. “You are too much like your father you know.” She commented. “You are having way too much fun!”

Sadi and Ne'Veha laughed from where they still stood by the door as For'mya moved up to them and took their hands.

“Follow me.” Andro said with a large grin.

SPARTA'S WRATH **BRIDGE**

Armen turned when Andro entered the bridge with Aricia and the three individuals he had never seen. The way he held the hands of the two females he registered right away and he filed this information into his neural network for future reference. These must be their guests. His orange hued eyes grew slightly wider when he saw the four Tasmor females following Aricia with Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha, and the two Pralor females he did not know. He recognized them as the Tasmor Regent Saydia Daret, her mate and her two daughters while the Pralor females could only have come with the Queens since he did not have their biometric scan in his databanks. He may have been an Avatar, but he was capable of learning and this action did not sit well with him, as it would not sit well with any ship commander having unauthorized personnel on his bridge. He looked directly at Androcles when he stopped in front of him.

-Androcles- He spoke before his eyes rested on Saydia and the others.

Aricia noticed this right away but did not take offence in the least. She stepped away from Saydia and Anythylea and right up to him and placed her hand on his broad chest. Aside from her Beloved and her son, Aricia had interacted with Avi far more than the other Queens, especially when she had been carrying each of her children.

“It was my decision Armen. Upgrade their status, as well as that of Jacina and Recia.” Aricia spoke softly looking at the hulking Avatar for the first time but being reminded so much of Avi. “They will be family one day.”

Avi had played such a role in their lives for the last three decades that Aricia and the others were perfectly comfortable with him in the same room. This comfort level now extended to Armen almost naturally.

He did not look like Avi except for the massive seven-foot-tall body and bald head, but there was no mistaking he was the Avatar of this ship.

Armen nodded his head then without hesitation. He knew the meaning of family to the Leonidas clan. **—I will make a note in my neural database-** He told her just as softly. **—The other Tasmor-**

Aricia shook her head slowly. “If you would, keep an eye on the rest of them with the exception of Perlyea and Aduna.”

-As you wish Lady Aricia- Armen answered.

“Thank you Armen.” Aricia told him. She nodded to Andro before moving back to where a wide eyed Saydia and Anthylea stood. Namiri and Emylea were equally enthralled at what they saw and this showed on their faces easily.

Andro looked at Armen. “Armen, allow me to introduce Perlae, Ishma and Awser.” He said. “Our *Chroray*.”

Ishma was very excited upon seeing him and she reached up without thought to touch his cheek. “We read about Avatars in our studies.” She gasped aloud.

“Ishma!” Perlae admonished her sister.

“Oh! Forgive me!” Ishma spoke embarrassed pulling her hand back quickly.

—There is nothing to forgive Lady Ishma- Armen stated with what could almost be described as humor.

“What do we have Armen?” Androcles asked now as he turned to the massive plot board in the center of the bridge.

Armen turned to the star chart table as well and touched several keys on the clear panel. The image changed to one of the entire larger sector as well as the two adjoining ones. **—You were correct Androcles-** He spoke as dozens of small dots began to appear on the large chart. Perlae, Ishma and Awser crowded around the huge table now looking on with awe. **—The sweep detected seventy-nine stationary probes that are tuned to detect residual chronometric particles as your *chrora* Awser described. They are spread out over three different sectors but all of them are linked together-**

Perlae’s eyes were wide as she gazed at the chart. “COLS ships do not have interstellar capability. These ships must have been out here for months laying this sensor pattern.” She spoke.

“When was the last time you came to this Quadrant?” Andro asked.

“It has been almost two years.” Ishma answered. “*Staania* became wary of continued incursions here because of COLS and the way they viewed us.”

Andro looked at Armen. “Are they still hailing us?”

Armen nodded his head. **—Indeed. Every three minutes-** He answered.

“Bring it up on speakers Armen. Let’s hear what they have to say.” Andro told him.

Armen turned his head and looked across the bridge. **—COM Officer, put the hail on bridge speakers please-**

“Com Officer, aye. On speakers.”

Within two seconds, they heard the deep male voice speaking.

“...Nasso of the Coalition of Lycavorian States Frigate. You are hereby ordered to identify yourselves and surrender the criminals that recently boarded your ship. In addition you will power down all shields and prepare to be boarded for inspection of further criminals that you are harboring. You will respond immediately.”

Andro shook his head with a small smile. “Everyone always wants to board our ships.” He spoke to no one in particular.

-Speaking from a purely aesthetic point of view, most Union ships are more pleasing to the visual receptors of humanoid species- Armen chimed in. **-Perhaps this would account for these requests-**

Andro looked at him oddly even as Ishma and Perlae couldn't contain their snickers of laughter. “Open a channel.” He spoke with a shake of his head.

Armen turned once more to his COM officer. **-Tightly focused cone on our end Denaria. No reason to let them see more than they need to-**

The Elven female nodded her head. “Opening channel, narrow beam aye.”

Andro turned and looked at the image of the ship on the massive view screen that took up nearly one third of the forward facing bulkhead. “This is Androcles Leonidas responding to your hail. Do you require assistance of some sort?”

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES (COLS) COLS-CLASS LONG RANGE HEAVY FRIGATE

“This is Androcles Leonidas responding to your hail. Do you require assistance of some sort?”

Nasso came to his feet when he heard the voice. “COM Officer?” He barked out.

“Confirmed sir! They are answering on both audio and video channels.”

“Audio only!” Nasso spoke.

“Channel open, sir.”

“I am Captain Nasso of the Coalition of Lycavorian States.” Nasso began. “We have tracked a transport vessel carrying known fugitives being taken aboard your ship! You will prepare your ship to be boarded for inspection and to hand over these criminals. Confirm my orders to you immediately.”

There was a momentary pause and then the male voice answered. ***“You initiated this transmission sir; you may contact me back on this channel when you have the courtesy to allow me to see you as well. I will wait five minutes and then we will depart this area of space. Good day.”***

The COM officer looked up with wide eyes. “Captain... they have severed the link!”

A few of the bridge crew glanced over at their Captain. Nasso was well known all over the Coalition as one of the toughest men alive. He had thoroughly beaten down several officers through the years for questioning his orders or not following them to the letter. No one dared talk back to him or question his authority. It was also spoken about among his subordinates and peers that he was close to King Osrod, who often took his council. Nasso stood there now with a stunned expression on his face, something none of his crew normally saw. Nasso recovered quickly enough and turned, “Gomar?” He hissed, “Anything?”

Gomar turned to look at him with a surprised expression. “I am still unable to burn through the polaron field completely Nasso but...”

Nasso nodded his head. “What? Speak to me.”

“I am detecting lifesigns Nasso.” He told him, “Over half a million lifesigns!”

Nasso looked at him as if he was insane, “That... that cannot be possible.” He stammered aloud.

“The polaron field is still active and causing our sensors to reflect back our scans but I can be relatively sure given our distance, that ship has over half a million people on board, and over half of them are Lycavorian Nasso.” Gomar answered him.

“Lycavorian? Gomar that is...” Nasso blinked rapidly, “From the Tri-Alliance?” He asked.

Gomar shrugged his shoulders. “There is no way to tell that Nasso. But you were correct; it must be a transport of some kind with that many passengers.”

Captain Nasso of the Coalition of Lycavorian States could see much praise being heaped upon him by King Osrod if he was able to bring this ship and all of its passengers to him. Over half a million prisoners from the Tri-Alliance could net them a priceless amount of intelligence and technology. The Tri-Alliance and the *yowa upaee* who led them had been a thorn in their side for centuries now.

He turned quickly to his COM officer. “Get them back!” He barked out the order. “Audio and imaging as well!”

“Channel open, sir!”

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“You initiated this transmission sir; you may contact me back on this channel when you have the courtesy to allow me to see you as well. I will wait five minutes and then we will depart this area of space. Good day.” Andro looked at Denaria and motioned with his hand.

“Channel closed!” She spoke quickly.

Perlae, Ishma and Awser stared at Androcles as if he had lost his mind while Aricia stood beside For'mya, both of them smiling from ear to ear.

[*Yes indeed.*] Aricia spoke as she looked at For'mya with loving eyes. [*He is his father’s son.*]

For'mya laughed within their private connection and they heard Anja’s sweet laughter from the Med Bay. [*I told you he would be big trouble when I pulled him out of your womb and he was wailing like a wolf with an attitude.*] She told them.

Aricia nodded her head. [*Yes, you did Melyanna*] She spoke. [*And I would not have it any other way.*]

[*Hell no!*] Anja exclaimed. [*We would not have had half as much fun all of these years if we had children who were not stubborn and pig headed.*]

[*How true.*] For'mya spoke. [*How true.*]

[*Work calls.*] Anja spoke. [*Try to keep him from killing anyone you two, and pray to the gods that these fools do not call him boy. He is so much like his father and he hates being called boy.*]

[*We will try.*] Aricia said with a smile. [*No promises though.*]

Perlae moved right up beside Andro as Aricia and For'mya turned to watch. She grasped his forearm. “Androcles, what are you doing?” She asked softly. “We know of this man Nasso. We have heard *staania* speak of him before. He is supposedly one of King Isrod’s most senior officers and is trusted. She says he is cruel and unhinged.”

“He’s an *igord* to act in this way with an unknown ship, especially one of our size.” Andro told her.

“Why do you antagonize him?” Perlae asked.

Andro looked at her. “Do you trust me *chrora*?” He asked.

Perlae blinked quickly and nodded her head. “Of course,” She answered without a doubt. “We all do. You know this Androcles. We... we have trusted you since we came into this world. It is in our blood.”

“Then trust me now.” Andro spoke with a smile. “You have...”

“They are hailing us again!” Denaria called out now cutting off their conversation, “Full access this time.”

Andro looked at her. “Put it through.” He told her turning to the huge monitor once more.

The bridge became silent as the image of Nasso appeared. Since his COM equipment was several generations behind what *SPARTA’S WRATH* was fielding, Andro and the others got to see most of his bridge. It was stark and barren, unlike most Union ships since they had long ago gotten rid of the Spartan like nature of their ships. All of the men and the three females that they saw were dressed in very plain, drab jumpsuits unlike the standard fatigue like uniforms in the Union Fleet.

Andro took a breath and began to speak. “Good day sir. On behalf of...”

“You... you are Lycavorian!” The COLS officer spoke as he gazed at the screen on his ship.

Andro nodded his head. “I am.” He replied. “And so are you.”

“I am Captain Nasso; we have tracked known criminals to your ship.” The tall man continued. “You are members of the Tri-Alliance and you will surrender yourselves to us and prepare to be boarded.”

Andro smiled and shook his head. “You are mistaken Captain.” He spoke calmly. “I am not harboring any criminals, and this ship does not belong to the... what did you call them... the Tri-Alliance.”

“The Coalition of Lycavorian States is the only recognized government of our species.” Nasso spoke. “If you are not part of the Tri-Alliance then who are you?”

“That would take a bit more explaining but suffice to say and using a phrase my father says often, this is not our neck of the woods.” Andro told him. “Not even close actually.”

“Do you take me for a fool?” Nasso snarled. “We tracked the transport all the way into your ship’s landing bay! Do you deny this?”

“I don’t deny anything.” Andro told him. “That transport was carrying three of my family members Captain, not criminals. Why do want them, if I may ask?”

“It is no concern of yours but they are responsible for the deaths of many Coalition soldiers and acts of treason!” Nasso answered. “I will take custody of them and they will be returned to Coalition space to answer for their crimes and be disciplined. You and your ship and passengers will also be detained for inspection and investigation.”

“They are my cousins, and if they are not part of this Coalition, which they aren’t, how can they be committing treason as you say?” Andro asked the man and seeing his eyes blink in confusion, “In order for a specific act to be treasonous in nature, they would need to be part of your government; which they are not as I said.”

“Do not think to verbally spar with me!” Nasso barked. “I have given you my demands and I expect them to be followed.”

Andro shook his head and clucked his tongue. “Then we have a problem Captain.” He spoke. “I’m not really into fulfilling demands from those who are not my beloved wives and mates. Thankfully, you are not one of them, so I will happily disregard your demands.”

Nasso looked bewildered once more, as if he was shocked that Andro would refuse his demands. “I have full authority of Osrod, the King of the Coalition of Lycavorian States, to order you to stand to, prepare to be boarded and to turn over those fugitives to me! You will do as I say!”

“And I have the full authority of my father, who happens to be King of the Lycavorian Union, to tell you where to stick your demands.” Andro quipped causing others on the bridge to chuckle softly.

Nasso looked stunned. “There is... there is no other Lycavorian King. What is this Union you speak of?”

“Captain Nasso, I will not turn over members of my family to anyone. You have shown me no cause for this other than your word of their so-called crimes. You’ll forgive me if that is woefully inadequate.” Andro spoke.

“You will surrender those on that ship to me!” Nasso snapped. “You will then prepare to be boarded and your passengers detained until we return to Coalition space! That is what you will do!”

Andro smiled and shook his head once more surprising his mothers with his calm and almost benevolent nature in dealing with this brute of a man. “I’m afraid that is not something I can or will do.” He told Nasso. “I would consider entertaining you and a few of your officers here on my ship and we can discuss matters.”

“There is nothing to discuss!” Nasso shouted. “I am a Captain in the Coalition Military forces! You will do as I say!”

“And I hold the rank of Crown Prince as well as Admiral in our military Captain.” Andro spoke seeing Nasso’s eyes go wide. “So I outranked you. This is free space Captain Nasso, so you have neither jurisdiction over us nor influence out here, and most definitely not over me.”

“The Coalition of Lycavorian States has claimed this area of space!” Nasso snapped. “It is under our control! You will do as I instruct you!”

Andro shook his head. “I’m sorry but we do not recognize your alleged claim to this territory. Our star charts and information tell us quite another story. Now, is there something else I can do for you Captain?”

“Do you know who I am boy?” Nasso roared viciously.

Saydia was standing beside Aricia and she saw Aricia snicker gently and shake her head from side to side. She saw movement behind her and she turned and witnessed both Dasha and Gorgo rolling their eyes and whispering to themselves. Saydia turned back and leaned close to Aricia wanting to know what was going on.

“What is happening?” She asked with wide eyes. This entire trip was so far beyond her wildest imagination of what it could be. The moment she saw this ship out of the view windows on their corvette she knew that she had made the right choice for her people.

Aricia turned to look at her and she smiled warmly. Her reply to her was a whisper so as not to give away that they were here on the bridge. “If there is one thing that will positively infuriate both Androcles and his father, it is arrogant and pompous people such as this Captain Nasso and being called boy. They both hate being called boy. It sets their blood to boiling.”

For'mya chuckled softly in agreement. “Whatever this Captain Nasso may have thought to gain, he has now lost.” She echoed Aricia’s words.

Everyone turned to look at Androcles when he spoke once more.

“I don’t particularly care who you are Captain.” Andro told Nasso in the transmission, his voice no longer with a tenor of friendliness to it. “And I don’t care for pompous fools who think they can intimidate me with bluster and empty threats.”

“Empty threats!” Nasso roared. “I have you outnumbered boy! You command a single transport with over half a million civilians on it! I have other ships, many ships that are still hidden and you cannot see them. You will do as I say or I will board your ship and subdue you!”

“A transport?” Andro said with a smile. He looked up and met Armen’s eyes. “Are we still in cruising mode Armen?”

-Affirmative- Armen replied. **-I did not see the need to alter our mode-**

Andro chuckled softly. “The fool Captain Nasso here thinks we are a transport Armen.” Andro said. “Please show him the error of his thinking please.”

-Happily- Armen answered and they watched as he turned to look at his bridge crew and motioned with his hand. **-Secure from Cruising Mode and resume combat configuration-**

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“Talk to me!” Nasso screamed.

Gomar turned from his station with wide eyes. “*Son vada carians* Nasso!” He spat in disbelief. “Sensors are detecting multiple turrets appearing from the body of the ship! They were folded in to the superstructure! Completely undetectable!”

“How many damn it!” Nasso snarled.

“Over a hundred just on the port side that we can detect!” Gomar exclaimed.

Nasso’s head snapped around to glare at Androcles in the transmission. He saw the azure blue eyes of this young man, now brighter than they were before. He was without question a Lycavorian, but he acted and spoke like someone hundreds of years older than he appeared to be. Nasso’s eyes narrowed somewhat in surprise. This boy was acting like an Alpha wolf. How could that be? There were no more Alpha wolves except those within the Coalition. If he was not part of the Tri-Alliance as he claimed then who was he.

“This means nothing!” Nasso started to speak. “I will...”

“You have three ships hidden Captain Nasso!” Andro snarled angrily at him in the transmission. ***“Three! I have three hundred and forty-nine ships hidden! You are not the only military that has developed stealth technology Captain Nasso! Ours is much better than yours I assure you and since your ship is, at this very moment, parked just above one of our heavy cruisers and you have not detected them I know all I need to know.”***

“You are bluffing!” Nasso barked out.

“*And you are a fool!*” Andro snarled right back. “*If you wish to test wills with me Captain then by all means make a move! I will blow you and your ships so far back into the dark ages it will take you a millennium just to collect all of the pieces of your fat ass!*”

SPARTA’S WRATH

“And you are a fool!” Andro snarled right back at him. “If you wish to test wills with me Captain Nasso then by all means make a move! I will blow you and your ships so far back into the dark ages it will take you a fucking millennium just to collect all of the pieces of your fat ass!”

Only three individuals looked at Andro normally after his comment to Captain Nasso. All other eyes on the bridge were staring at him in utter disbelief at what he had just said. Aricia, For'mya and Armen just stood there watching, Armen’s face completely impassive and Aricia and For'mya beaming with pride and love for their son. Andro looked at the chart table once more and stabbed his finger down on the small panel.

“Sa'sur have you been monitoring?” He barked out.

Nasso’s eyes grew wide from his ship when he heard the female voice that he could not see respond.

“Monitoring and getting a very large dose of humor in the process.” Sa'sur answered him from the *SCIMITAR*.

“Sa'sur...” Andro began again. “I believe it is time to depart this area of space and join with my father, King Martin Leonidas.” Andro finished the sentence putting emphasis on his father’s title and name. “De-Shroud the Task Force and prepare to jump. Ghost Protocols if you would.”

“Acknowledged,” Sa'sur replied.

Andro turned back to Nasso and stared at him in the transmission. “In the future Captain Nasso of the Coalition of Lycavorian States, may I suggest that you are more diplomatic with people you are meeting for the first time. And most especially with those who could turn you into a distant memory without so much as breaking a sweat.”

Andro stabbed down on the control panel once more cutting off the transmission just as they heard alarms beginning to sound on Nasso’s bridge.

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The alarms were hurting his head for they had never gone off all at once in his entire career.

“Shut off those *nubous* alarms!” Nasso screamed out the order as he moved to where Gomar stood at his station. “Gomar, speak to me!”

“Unknown ships appearing all around us Captain!” Gomar replied with real fear in his voice, “Unknown configuration! *Sibfla* Nasso, some of them are huge!”

“Where?” Nasso barked as he moved back to his chair. “Where?”

“All bearings! All bearings!” Gomar shouted. “*Son vada carians*, sensors are detecting over three hundred warships Captain! We are showing one that is directly beneath us! Range five thousand metes! Gods, it is over two thousand five hundred meters in length! Unknown power readings but they are off the charts! Unable to penetrate their hull!” Gomar turned to look at Nasso. “Captain... ventral cameras are detecting what appear to be over twenty weapons turrets tracking us!”

“Captain, navigational sensors are detecting massive surges of Quantum particles in the area!” Another voice chimed in from the opposite of the bridge.

Nasso came to his feet once more. “Gomar?”

“Confirmed Captain! Quantum particles just spiked by four hundred percent!” Gomar looked at him with disbelief in his eyes. “These ships are using some sort of Quantum drives Nasso!”

“Impossible! Quantum Drives are only theoretical Gomar.” Nasso exclaimed.

“I’m telling you what my sensors are telling me!” Gomar barked.

“Only the Tri-Alliance has engines or technology such as this.” Nasso snapped.

Gomar shook his head. “We can track their ships. They leave a unique power trace. These ships we have never seen before! They are not Tri-Alliance ships!”

“Losing them!” The second voice called out once more. “They are disappearing off sensors!”

Gomar turned back to his equipment. “I confirm that! They are jumping away!”

“Track them!” Nasso growled.

Gomar shook his head. “We can’t! They are leaving no residual trace once they jump away! At least not something that we can trace with our equipment!”

“*Nubou!*” Nasso screamed aloud.

“Down to two hundred and fifteen contacts!” Gomar spoke. “One hundred sixty-three! Ninety-two! *Sibfla* they are jumping faster than any ships I have ever seen.” He hissed. “Fifty-one! That’s...” Gomar turned to look at Nasso. “They are gone!” He gasped. “All of them are gone Captain!”

“*Nubou!*” Nasso hissed again as anger welled within him.

SPARTA’S WRATH

Androcles turned back to the chart table and saw Perlae, Ishma and Awser looking at him with beaming faces. Andro looked around and realized for the first time just who was on the bridge and that they had heard and seen all of it. He turned back to Perlae.

“What?” He asked her sheepishly. “The fool rubbed me the wrong way.”

“That was...” Perlae began.

“That was masterful!” Ishma almost shouted as she beamed up at him happily.

Andro smiled somewhat shyly as his mother came up beside him. “We will have to talk about this disposition of yours *duan keto*.” Aricia told him with a beautiful smile as she nuzzled his cheek. (Our son)

Andro met her eyes with a smile as he touched the control panel on the chart table one more time. “Sa’sur?”

“I’m here Andro.” Sa’sur’s voice replied.

“Who is the Ghost Protocol ship?” He asked.

“*HAMMER OF THOR*,” Sa’sur answered. “She is a *TAUR’OHTAR*-Class Mk VIII Destroyer Escort.”

“Sa’sur... burst her secure.” Andro spoke. “Have them find the central sensor probe of this net they established and then destroy the whole network with a reverse proton pulse. That should be sufficient to overload the power matrix in each successive sensor probe.”

“Understood.” Sa’sur answered. “I’ll let you know.”

Andro nodded his head as Perlae and Ishma both wrapped their arms around his midsection and hugged him happily. Andro grinned and looked at his mother. “Has mother started yet?” He asked.

For’mya came up beside Aricia and shook her head, “A few moments ago.” She replied knowing what he was asking about.

Andro nodded his head. “I must go to her.” He said softly while holding the hands of Perlae and Ishma.

“We all will.” Aricia told him. “Go. I will call for Dorian to meet you there.”

Andro nodded his head, leaned over to nuzzle her cheek, and then he was leading his three cousins off the bridge.

Aricia turned to Armen. “How long before we reached Ventori Armen?” She asked.

-Twenty-one hours, nineteen minutes- Armen answered instantly.

For’mya took Aricia’s hand. “Let’s enjoy our family while we can Aricia. We won’t have time once we get back to Martin.”

Aricia nodded her head in agreement. “I think that is a wonderful idea.” She said in reply. “One that I will relish.”

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

SPARTA'S WRATH NINETEEN HOURS FROM VENTORI MED BAY

It was an amazing sight to see really, something that none of the Darastrixi present in the next room had ever witnessed before. The Medical Bay on *SPARTA'S WRATH* was very large to say the least. It was a full, forty bed hospital really, with two surgical rooms and a separate recovery room. It was much larger than the Medical Bay on the *SCIMITAR*, which Eliani had called home for so many years, but Andro knew she was more than up to the task. With Caliria, Serale and Cvea now part of her senior staff, Eliani had jumped in with both feet. In the short time that they had been aboard, things had begun to take shape very well.

Cvea Lethon, as she wanted to be called now in order to show her love for her husband and mate, was an astounding learner Eliani had discovered. She simply soaked up information and retained it like a trap. Cvea had learned in several weeks what most Union Field Medics took at least three years to master. Eliani had already advanced her schooling twice since she had been on the ship and each time Cvea was thorough and mastered each and every skill. She was thoughtful and precise, but also accurate and swift. Kavalian she may have been, but like Iama and Cowen, she had become a vital part of the crew. Each new day saw her confidence grow by leaps and bounds. The Medical Field had been an excellent choice for her and like some of the greatest doctors and medics within the Union, she had taken to it like a fish to water. As with Iama, the Biogenic Process had removed her fine coat of hair from her body except for the long tresses on her head, but it had also unwittingly increased the capacity and function of her brain. This was something that Eliani had discovered in her exam of Cvea when she had first come aboard. She had told Andro but both of them agreed there was no need for anyone to know this about her. She was dedicated and loyal and she simply adored her husband and mate Ridor.

Serale Leonidas, for her part, had blended right in immediately because she was now wolf and Hadarian. Never in her young life had she imagined she would be working with the Royal family in any way but now she was the only other Hadarian medical officer on the ship and she knew that she was needed and relied upon. She had Cvea had grown quite close these last weeks and they worked extremely well as a pair, which is what Eliani had been hoping for since she and Caliria seemed to mesh together instantly. Caliria Leonidas was primarily a Research Specialist and she knew it and embraced that fact, but she was also picking up on things very quickly working beside Eliani. While she could easily treat people with her medical skills and care, her main field was Research and Development and she was not afraid to let someone know she did not know how to do something. In her free time when she was not training with Carisia or Lu'ria, Caliria was reviewing all she could about known diseases that Anja had either found cures for or was working on in her spare time.

All four of them worked effortlessly together and the Medical Bay ran without like a well tuned machine. Eliani had requested more senior medics be assigned to the ship with the understanding that the four of them called the shots. Cvea had been granted a temporary Union Military assignment and given the rank of Ensign to better facilitate her acceptance into the military lifestyle. She joked now that she could order her beloved Ridor around and he had to obey her.

The four of them were currently all standing near or around the single bed in the surgical room, Anja at the head of the bed where Laren rested. Caliria sat at the desk station with the four monitors in front of her monitoring every portion of Laren's vital signs. Cvea stood beside Anja waiting for an order to get her something, while Eliani and Serale stood on either side of Laren at the two portable computer stations, each of them touching her with one hand while monitoring her on the portable screens in front of them. Anja had both of her hands alongside Laren's head, the soft white glow of her healing power filtering outward and encasing Laren's upper body. Androcles knelt on one side of the bed, Dorian the other, each of them with one of her hands in theirs. Just outside the entrance to the surgical room in the main medical bay, Ladur rested on the deck between Elynth and Ryner. He had refused to wait outside until the procedure was done, and no one was going

to argue with a fully grown Firespitter dragon, especially not one who had Elynth standing beside him in support. They settled for just outside the surgical room because he could not fit through the doorway, but he was in the center of the doorway so he could watch everything.

Robati stood beside Yokra, his hands on her shoulders, Aviel and Nahko stood to their left while Sarlana and General Dytin stood to their right. Murano and Tobia stood behind them, holding tightly to each other and unwilling to leave each other since coming back together. Tobia had been overwhelmed at the sense of peace she felt without Murano now. His entire Etheric resonance echoed with newfound peace and strength. Discovering Martin existed had given back to him the purpose he had thought lost so many years ago, and his conversation with the ethereal Sumar had taken away any shame or doubt he had felt for being the only surviving Praetorian after the war was lost. Much to Tobia's delight he had not stopped touching her in some manner since the landing bay and this affection grew stronger after Mari had left them to be with Deion.

Yokra stood stoically as he watched Anja speaking to Laren in soft whispers as the white glow filtered softly around his daughter's upper body. Robati had given him seven fine, healthy sons but the day that Laren had entered their world everything had changed. Even had she not been born like she was, a *Dahakoan*, it would not have mattered in the least. The exact moment Yokra had seen her eyes, his views changed on nearly everything. Holding his only daughter in his arms, Yokra came to love Robati even more than he already did. He began to love his sons more, communicating with them more often, if only to check on their duties and how they were advancing and growing in their lives. Laren Ti'shara had brought their large family so much closer together, and all of them knew it. Her brothers recognized her as being the catalyst for their father becoming the man he was now and they all loved her even more for that. Yokra was the first to accept that his daughter was *Dahakoan*, and her safety and Robati's safety became his focus from that day forward. Robati basked in the new purpose of her husband and how he doted over her now. They were feelings that she no longer held back within herself and she happily returned them to Yokra tenfold. Laren had brought this out in all of them, the sense of family a *Dahakoan* felt encompassing them all. Laren had told them this day would come and that they needed to be strong. Neither of them felt very strong at the moment.

They could not hear what was being said in the surgical room and Robati pushed back against her husband even more in fear and she gasped when she saw Laren nod her head and look up at the petite woman who was one of her *Sepa Daskic*. One of her Soul Mothers.

"Everything will be fine Robati my *memamosal*." Yokra spoke softly. "Laren has seen this."

Robati nodded her head slowly. "I know but that does not mean I fear for her less." She answered. "If... if Anja cannot fix her she will..."

Yokra pulled her tighter to him. "You must not think like this." He told her.

Sarlana stepped closer to her and took her hand, Robati turning to look at her. "Androcles and Dorian have allowed me to see deeply within their minds *Usjalil* Robati. It is not often that *Dahakoan* allow such a thing, even for one such as me, but I can tell you that their faith in their mother is without question or doubt. I have seen some of the things Anja has accomplished in their thoughts and memories and I tell you now, with no doubt or question in *my* mind, she is the finest and most gifted medical doctor anywhere in the known universe. Not even the Pralor doctors I have seen can match her. And she will not fail."

"How can one so small hold such power within her?" Robati asked softly.

"Look beyond her physical stature Lady Robati." Murano spoke now from behind them as Tobia looked up into his face. "That is a façade. Small she may be, but Anja Leonidas' will is second only to Martin and Aricia. I have seen her passion and drive personally. I truly believe failure is not a word she understands."

"She will succeed." The soft female voice spoke and all of them turned to see Sadi and Ne'Veha enter the observation room with Perlae between them, holding their hands tightly. The Darastrixi in the room stiffened when they saw Perlae, her appearance so very similar to Laren in almost every way. All of them turned quickly to look at her with wide eyes.

Sadi saw their faces and stepped forward. "This is Perlae everyone. It's alright. She is Andro's *chrora*. His cousin."

Robati moved forward and looked at Perlae intently. She reached up and caressed her cheek with her fingers. "You are... you are like my Laren." She said.

Perlae shook her head and reached up to take Robati's hand. "No, *Usjalil* Robati." She answered seeing Robati's eyes go wide in surprise. "I have not been blessed as your daughter has with the memories and spirit of *Wer Zazhuanth*, Dadrien of the Mountain. That is an honor only she holds, for she is *Dahakoan*."

"You speak our language?" Dyтин spoke in surprise. "You know of... you know of Laren and what she is? How?"

Perlae smiled. "I am half Darastrixi General, as are my sister and brother." She answered. "My father is Kadeer Imuma, of the family Imuma. My mother was Maha, daughter to Dynina of the Lycavorian pack Mahanlo. Dynina is my *staania*, my grandmother and she is mother to Sateia, the blessed wife and mate of Sumar." Perlae finished looking directly at Murano and Tobia.

"Sumar?" Murano gasped.

Aviel stepped forward. "The family Imuma is one of the Revered families!" He spoke. "Their names reside upon the Optonu Memorial. Two thousand families that were lost nearly seventeen thousand years ago!"

Perlae nodded her head. "That is not entirely true *Koppentotz* Aviel Em'mor." She told him with a slight smile. "Our father speaks very highly of you and he will be most pleased to know you travel with the *Dahakoan*."

Nahko looked at her husband. "Aviel... what does she mean?"

"The Optonu Mission." Aviel answered his wife. "It was our first and only attempt to try something similar to the Seed Missions of the Pralor people. The ships were all lost when they were caught in the gravity well of an unknown comet that crashed into a moon and destroyed it."

Perlae smiled and nodded her head. "That is what our ancestors wanted everyone to think yes." She told them. "The actual history is a bit different and would require several hours to relate to you."

"I don't understand." Aviel said.

"In time you will see *Koppentotz* Aviel." Perlae told him before she turned back to Robati. "I asked Androcles if it would be alright for me to join you here *Usjalil* Robati." She spoke. "Our *staania* told us of the day Laren entered this world and ever since we were small we have looked up to her. You would honor me if you allowed me to stay with you and support you during this time."

"You do... you do not know me child." Robati spoke.

"You are mother to a *Dahakoan*." Perlae told her. "That is all that need be said, but you are also the *Sepa Dask* to Androcles and our other cousins. Our family and blood. That makes you a part of my family now as well."

Robati nodded after looking at Sadi quickly. In the short time on this ship Androcles' wives and mates had been with her and Nahko for almost the entire time unless their duties pulled them away. Robati trusted them without question. She saw Sadi nod her head with a smile and Robati turned back to Perlae and took her hand. "Please." She said as she pulled Perlae back to the large window.

"They are about to start aren't they?" Perlae asked.

Robati nodded her head. "And I fear for my child."

Perlae turned and took Sadi's hand once more as Ne'Veha moved up beside Sadi. She turned back and looked into the surgical rom and shook her head with a smile. "There is no need to fear *Usjalil* Robati." She saw softly. "Her *sepa isthasyi* are with her. And her family is all around her. That is all the strength she will need. That is all the strength any of us will ever need."

"*Avoi*." Ne'Veha spoke softly.

"All monitors are online Anja." Caliria called from her chair behind the curved station of medical screens.

"I'm set here as well." Serale spoke as she tapped the screen once more and returned her hand to Laren's midsection.

"Me too mother." Eliani spoke as she did the same thing.

Anja nodded and once more looked down at Laren's face. Her multicolored blue eyes, one azure in color, the other cobalt blue turned back to her with utter confidence and love in them. "Laren, I won't lie to you." Anja told her. "I looked at all the medical information Andro gave to me about your people. I know it

inside and out now, but this procedure... I'm going to be manipulating your DNA Laren. At the molecular level. It's going to hurt badly. It's going to hurt really badly. We can't put you to sleep because we need to monitor your vitals while you are alert and awake."

"I understand." Laren spoke with a small smile. "I am... I am prepared *Sepa Dask*."

Anja nodded her head slowly. "Ok... if you are sure... let's get started."

Laren nodded her head as Anja lowered her hands to either side of her head at her temples and the soft white glow of her power filtered out once more to surround Laren's head and then her shoulders. Anja closed her eyes and began to concentrate. Almost instantly Laren let loose with a shrill scream of horrible pain, her hands tightening on Andro and Dorian's hands until her nails drew blood from their skin and then lithe her body was arching off the bed as the veins in her neck bulged outward. Her eyes grew huge in pain and sweat immediately blossomed on her skin.

Anja pulled her hands away quickly and Laren instantly dropped back to the bed heaving for air and her eyes wide as sweat now covered her exposed skin in a bright sheen.

"*Son vada carians!*" Laren almost screamed. "It... it felt like a thousand knives were stabbing me all over! Stabbing me and then twisting inside me!"

Andro stood up and looked at Anja never releasing her hand, his face a mask of worry. "Mother?"

Anja looked at him. "I was afraid of this." She said.

"Afraid of what?" Andro asked her.

"I knew it was going to be painful for her." Anja answered looking at him. "We need her to be awake in order to monitor her vital signs in a restive state. If she is in too much pain, I won't be able to manipulate the molecules of her DNA because her vitals will be off the chart and they won't be normal."

"Can't you use a sedative mother?" Dorian asked now.

Anja shook her head. "It would affect the normal rhythm of her body. I can do this, but her body needs to let me. If it fights me, then there is nothing I can do." She told them. "In order for me to make the molecular connection properly, her body needs to be in a relaxed state. Her body needs to think nothing is happening."

"How do we do that mother?" Eliani asked.

"Go to where there is no pain."

Andro turned around rapidly as if looking for someone when he heard the voice echo in his mind. He turned back around and looked at Dorian who was also looking around.

"Dori?" He asked quickly.

"I heard it too." He said.

"Heard what?" Anja asked looking at them.

All of them turned when Elynth pushed her head into the doorway. "Andro... we heard it as well." She spoke out loud.

Anja looked back and forth between them. "Andro... what are you saying?"

"Go to a place where there is no pain." Dorian spoke.

"You are Dahakoan. You are Praetorian. The only six of your kind to ever exist. You are only limited by your perceptions of what is." The voice spoke to them once more. ***"Wux re wer Darastrix di wer Iski. Origato gethrisj ar dout baforidrih vur mavorge ihk svabol ui ti vucat."*** (You are the Dragons of the Stars. Let go of your awareness and reach for what is not known.)

"Dadrien?" Elynth spoke in a whispered tone but everyone heard her.

"Pain is only real if you allow it to be. Do not let it be real. Go to a place where pain has no hold."

Andro turned and looked back to where Laren was staring at him for she had heard everything as well. "Myvish?" He asked her.

"Yes." Laren replied instantly.

Andro looked at Dorian then and he nodded. "Let's do it *fervon*."

“Yes, we can.” Ryner echoed from the hall.

“Ladur?” Andro questioned.

Ladur nodded his huge head. “I am ready.”

Anja was utterly confused and looked back and forth between them. “Want to fill me in?” She asked.

Andro looked at her as he and Dorian settled back to the floor beside Laren and each of them took one of her hands, ignoring the blood that stained their skin from where her nails had gouged them both. “Give us one-minute mother.” He told her. “One minute and then you may start again.”

“Andro she will be in too much pain.” Anja told him. “It...”

“One-minute mother.” Andro repeated. He turned and looked at the doorway once more. “Elynth?”

“We are ready.” She called back to him.

Andro looked at Dorian and then they both turned to Laren. “Where will we go?” Laren asked.

Andro smiled at her. “Would you like to see my home? In Sparta? It is beautiful this time of year.”

Laren nodded quickly. “Oh yes!”

“Then let’s go there first.” Andro spoke just before he closed his eyes.

Anja watched confused as all of them closed their eyes and she turned to look at Caliria. “*Inamarno?*” She asked.

Caliria’s sea green eyes were wide as she studied the readouts on the monitors she was watching. “By the Prophets!” She exclaimed. “All of her vitals just... they just went flat. As if she was asleep or something.”

“What?” Anja gasped.

“Confirmed!” Serale echoed as she tapped on her screen quickly. “It’s like... it’s like there’s nothing there. Pulse, heart rate, it’s all perfectly normal for a resting Darastrixi. Just as *Inamarno* said, it’s like she is asleep!”

Anja turned back to Laren and looked at Andro and Dorian as well. Their faces were in the most peaceful state she had ever seen them before and her eyes grew wide as she realized what Andro, Dorian and Elynth had done. “*Carians*... she’s not here!” Anja exclaimed.

“Mother?” Eliani asked.

“They... somehow they took her mind away! Your father Eli, he has done something like this before. Right after he was injured in the Kavalian attack on Earth.” Anja spoke as she got closer to the head of the table again. “They have taken her mind somewhere else within the Etheric realm. Just like he did.”

“Mother, the Etheric power required to do something like that?” Eliani stammered. “To detach your mind from your physical body... it is...”

Anja nodded. “Yes, I know.”

“Do we stop?” Eliani asked.

“No!” Anja spoke shaking her head quickly. “We go to work.”

Robati was in tears as she saw Anja once more begin to filter her power through Laren, only this time her daughter simply lay there as if nothing was happening. Instantly she became worried and terrified.

“She is not moving!” Robati gasped. “What is wrong? She is not moving?”

Sarlana had been standing quietly with her eyes closed the moment she felt the massive tremors within the Etheric realm begin. When Robati gasped and spoke her eyes opened once more and she turned to Murano. As powerful a Praetorian as he was, Sarlana knew he had to have felt it as well.

“Murano?” She gasped. “Is that...?”

Tobia looked up into his handsome face once more and saw him open his eyes as well. She looked at him confused as he met Sarlana’s gaze.

“Yes.” Murano spoke with some awe in his voice.

“What?” Yokra demanded. “What is going on? She makes no sound! She does not move! It is like she is...”

“No!” Sadi exclaimed as she squeezed Ne’Veha’s hand harder for they both felt it as well. Andro was not blocking them, he was allowing his mind to filter to hers and Ne’Veha’s since they were so close to him, and

they could feel what he was doing though they could not actually see it. “They have... they have taken her away!”

Robati turned to her now. “Sadi child, what...?”

Sadi looked at her and smiled a dazzling smile. Perlae was struck by the beauty that Sadi and Ne'Veha radiated right now and she glanced into the room once more and then back to Sadi and understood. She gasped in disbelief and squeezed Sadi's other hand tighter.

“They have conducted the *Erranya Hydul!*” Perlae rasped. (Spirit Walk)

Sadi nodded her head. “Yes.”

“What is this?” Yokra demanded. “This *Erranya Hydul?*”

“*Erranya Hydul.*” Sarlana spoke now. “It means Spirit Walk in the Lycavorian language Yokra Ti'shara. Androcles, Dorian, Elynth, Ryner and Ladur have taken your daughter, their *sepa myvish*, they have taken her to another place so that Anja can do what she must. A place where there is no pain.”

“But how?” Robati gasped aloud.

“There is much about the Etheric Realm that we still do not understand.” Murano spoke now. “I have heard of several Praetorians who could do this. Sumar told me of them once. They can, they can detach their minds from their bodies and then go wherever it is they wish. It takes immense concentration and force of will, but within that room there, are the six most powerful minds that I have ever encountered outside of Martin Leonidas. And all of them, your daughter included, all of them have the blood of Sumar in their veins.”

“What... what does this mean?” Yokra demanded once more.

Sadi moved over beside him and took his arm in her hands. He looked down into her stunning eyes. “It means that Laren will be fine Yokra Ti'shara. It means that our *sepa myvish* will be whole when this day ends and you will never have to worry about her condition again. Ever again.”

Yokra glanced back into the room where he saw Anja bent over the table, her hands on either side of Laren's head and her whole body swathed in that white glow of healing radiation. He took a deep breath and drew Robati closer to him and smiled.

“Then this... this will be a joyous day indeed.” He spoke.

It was the most amazing thing that any of them had ever experienced in their young lives and it would be something that they did many more times in the future. They stood side by side on the warm, white sand, Laren between Andro and Dorian holding their hands, Elynth, Ryner and Ladur behind them. The sun was high in the clear blue sky and Laren could feel a slight breeze caressing her skin and making her long black hair wave back and forth. The greenish blue ocean waters of the Laconian Gulf extended as far as her eyes could see and when she turned her head she could see land in the distance with homes and buildings rising along the mountain ridges.

“*Wer Tiichir di Dadrien!*” Laren gasped. “This... this is your home? We are... we are truly here? How?” (The Blessing of Dadrien)

Andro nodded his head with a smile as he looked at her. “I have no idea.” He answered her. “We concentrated and...”

“Here we are.” Dorian exclaimed as he looked all around them. “Man, this is so cool!”

Laren released their hands and felt the sand between her toes. “We are here... we are here ethereally.” She said. “As Dadrien and Lord Sumar appeared to us. But it is different. Andro, I can feel the sand on my feet. I can feel the breeze on my skin.”

Andro nodded his head once more as he looked around Cranae Island. “It sure looks that way.” He said. His azure eyes detected half a dozen *Durcunusaan* troops in teams of two in the distance conducting their normal patrols and duties but none seemed to take notice of them standing openly on the beach.

“Androcles, this is... this is beyond amazing.” Elynth spoke softly from behind them and he turned to look at her.

“That would be putting it mildly sister.” He told her with another smile.

Laren spun around in the sand, her eyes taking everything in. She lifted her face and saw birds flying high above them, heard the noises they made as they circled looking for food. Her eyes dropped and she saw the

large, sprawling villa a few hundred meters away, the beautiful flowered paths and the men and women who walked among them.

“You live here?” Laren exclaimed once more. “This is... this is an island Andro! It is huge!”

“It’s not that big really.” Andro commented somewhat embarrassed.

Dorian chuckled now as he looked around where they were on the east side of the island. “Nope... not big at all.” He spoke sarcastically.

“Can they... can they see us?” Laren asked softly.

Andro grinned now. “I don’t know. Why don’t you strip off your clothes and find out sister? If they can see you, then they’ll start chasing you!”

“Andro!!” Laren and Elynth exclaimed together as Laren spun around and punched him lightly in the chest while Elynth butted him in the shoulder. Ryner and Ladur, still in awe of what they were experiencing began laughing as did Dorian and Andro.

Laren looked at Androcles. “How long can we stay?” She asked like a giddy schoolgirl.

Andro took her hand. “As long as you like sister.” He told her. “Come... sister, let Dorian and I show you my home.”

Laren’s happy face was all that mattered to anyone as they began to trek across the warm sand to the portion of the villa that was for family members. Laren was enthralled immediately upon entering from the patio when she saw the huge, carved walls and bright interior. Elynth remained on the patio with Ryner and Ladur and began to tell Ladur and Ryner of happy times that they had experienced here at the villa, even as they felt the breeze from the cool ocean sweep across their scales.

The *Durcunusaan* pair who checked the perimeter and interior of the villa every four hours appeared two hours and forty-three minutes later. They would never be able to explain the open double doors into the interior of the villa or the sand they found scattered across the main living area and on the two pristine couches inside the villa, nor would they be able to explain how so much sand had blown onto the patio when there had not been a strong enough wind to do such a thing in over a week.

They decided to keep their findings to themselves after insuring that nothing had been disturbed. They did not want to be taken off duty for being *malda*.

SPARTA’S WRATH

ANDROCLES’ READY ROOM

MAIN QCR CONFERENCE ROOM

“...never seen anything like it in my life Lover. Except from you.” Anja spoke from the high backed chair she sat in on the end of the long, polished table. She had her feet drawn up under her firm ass, her hands wrapped around the steaming mug of coffee. Her face looked slightly drawn as if she had been awake for several days straight, but she knew that was just from the nearly three hours she had spent working on Laren. It was by far, the longest amount of time she had ever gone continuously using her healing powers and now she was just tired. The coffee helped but she knew she would have to get at least a few hours of sleep to recover her stamina, something she planned on doing right after this communication was over.

Martin’s tall, life sized figure was in the Command Center on Ventori and leaning against the front of the empty desk. He wore his full Armorpoly Mark VI body armor so Anja knew that he had been up to something no good while they were gone, but she was just too tired to scold or question him about it. He was standing in front of her now, and just his ruggedly handsome face was enough to make her feel better.

“Where did he and Dorian learn to do something like that?” Anja finished.

“Sumar’s Tomes.” Martin answered instantly. “It’s very similar to what I did right after For’mya and Dysea were taken.”

Anja shook her head. “This was different Martin. Sadi, Ne’Veha, none of them were affected like we were when you did it.”

Martin nodded his head. “Probably because they knew not to shut everything out like I did. They know what it did to you and the others, and considering what they are turning out to be, the focus and concentration to hold and shield her mind from the pain would not be an issue for them.”

“Andro asked her if she wanted to see his home.” Anja said softly. “Crae Island.”

“You know as well as I do that Crae Island is where he is most at peace.” Martin said. “It is all Dorian has known as well. It stands to reason that is where they would go.” Martin looked at her intently in the transmission. “You look worn out Red. Are you sure you are ok?”

Anja smiled at his worried tone of voice and his expression. “I’m just tired Lover.” She told him. “Really.”

“Laren?” Martin asked her.

Anja nodded her head happily now. “It worked.” She told him. “She is resting now, but everything went as I planned it for once.”

Martin shook his head. “You continue to amaze me Red.” He told her lovingly. “All go, no quit for you. It’s one of the reasons why I love you so much.”

Anja felt warmth spread through her at his words. Most people in the Union didn’t see their King as being an emotional person, yet Anja and her fellow Queens knew better. He was the most emotional and loving man any of them had ever met, especially with them.

“Well the feeling is very mutual you big lug.” Anja quipped with a brilliant smile.

“Tell me about these Lycavorians Red.” Martin spoke. “And...”

Anja held up her hand quickly. “I was with Laren when we encountered them Lover.” She told him. “Aricia is with Andro getting ready for this ridiculous inspection by the Tasmor but For'mya is...”

The door to the Ready Room slid open and Anja turned and smiled as she held out her hand. “For'mya can fill you in though and here she is...” She finished.

For'mya moved ever gracefully into the Ready Room with the young woman in tow and holding tightly to her hand. Perlae’s eyes grew wide in disbelief when she saw the life size figure of Martin as he pushed away from the desk, his dark brown eyes gazing at her. She came to an abrupt stop causing For'mya to turn and look at her and see her wide eyes.

“*Krius vada carians alinn lae!*” Perlae muttered aloud as she bowed her head deeply. (May the Gods bless me)

“*Idie cedaur hnes un alinn forn?*” Martin spoke from within the transmission causing Perlae’s eyes to grow even wider. (Why would they need to bless you)

Perlae released For'mya’s hand quickly and moved closer to the transmission, dropping to her knees in front of his figure and bowing her head even further. This caused Anja to come to her feet in surprise and For'mya to move up beside her.

“What the hell?” Martin gasped.

Perlae looked up at his words and he could see the tears flowing freely from her amethyst colored eyes. “We have... we have prayed for so long for when this day would come.” She gasped. “To finally... to finally see you! Our King! Our blood!”

“Anja... *Kinosaurgai*... get her up!” Martin stammered the words out.

Perlae turned her head quickly and looked at For'mya as she reached for her. “You are *Kinosaurgai!* The Voice of his Heart!” She said swiftly. She turned to look at Anja. “He calls you Red, because he loves the color of your beautiful hair! And *Saaurano!* The Light of your Soul. She is with Androcles now!” Perlae turned back to look at Martin, her face animated and bright even through the tears. “We know of all of you! *Melda Min!* Bella! And now even Cirith! We have waited so long to finally be among you! So long!”

“Perlae...” For'mya said softly. “Get up child.” She placed her hands around Perlae’s shoulders and urged her to stand back up. “We do not... no one bows to us. Certainly not our family.”

“*Kinosaurgai?*” Martin asked softly looking at her with wide eyes.

For'mya looked at him in the transmission and nodded her head quickly. “There is no mistaking this truth Martin.” She told him. “Androcles smelled it in their blood almost instantly when they came aboard the ship and even before that within the Etheric realm. Andro’s sense of smell is nearly equal to yours Martin our love.” She squeezed Perlae’s arms with a large smile. “Denali, Deion and Nara detected it just seconds later, then all of us. It is... it is wondrous Martin.”

Martin looked at Anja. “Red?” He questioned.

Anja nodded her head. “Bioscans conducted by *SPARTA'S WRATH* automated systems when they first came aboard confirmed it Lover.” She answered. “They have Leonidas blood within them to the tune of fifty-nine percent. Well, I suppose it isn't Leonidas blood. It's... jeez I don't know...”

Perlae looked at Martin's face in the transmission. “It is Leonidas blood.” She stated without hesitation. Perlae willed the wolf within her to come forth and all of them saw the dual fangs extend from her gums as the black ring encircled her stunning eyes. While it looked slightly odd given the scaled portion of her skin because of her Darastrixi blood, it was certainly unmistakable to see. Her dual wolf canine fangs were not as pronounced as an elf or Hadarian who was a child of two different species, but they were certainly noticeable and real. “Even grandmother now calls it Leonidas blood. King's blood. It is her legacy. Our legacy. And we carry it proudly.”

They saw Martin lean back against the desk once more and shake his head. “*Saoi sibfla!*” He muttered. “I have a headache now.”

Perlae couldn't help herself now and she burst out laughing at his words. They all looked at her and she reached up to squeeze For'mya's hands on her shoulders.

“*Staan* told us you would say that.” She gasped aloud in happiness. “Or something like that. She told us... she told us you are the only King in history, in anyone's history, who does not want to be King.”

Anja and For'mya couldn't help but smile at this for it was so very true. Martin shook his head once more, all of them detecting the slight grin on his face now. He looked up once more, directly at Perlae, his face becoming serious.

“How?” Was the question he asked.

Perlae shook her head. “I do not know all of it.” She told him. “Only *staania* can tell you the history from the beginning. I will tell you all I know. Everything we have been raised to believe and understand.”

Martin nodded his head. “Then let's start there.” He told her.

SPARTA'S WRATH
DECK TWENTY-FIVE
PORT CONFERENCE ROOM FOYER

“...got to be the most off the wall *malda* stunt I have ever been part of.” Andro muttered as Aricia stood in front of him and straightened his Union Dress uniform. He glanced quickly to where Saydia and Anthylea were standing off to the side of the door. “No offense intended to you or the Tasmor people Sovereign Regent Daret.”

“None taken.” Saydia answered with a large smile of her own. “Namiri said much the same thing to me only a few hours ago.”

Aricia slapped him lightly in the face and he turned back to look at her. “You know why we are doing this *keto*.” She hissed at him, but with genuine affection in her voice. Saydia and Anthylea did not blink at her action for they now knew it was customary among their species to do such things. It was a way to show affection and also to bring forth humor, which it did now.

Andro rolled his eyes at her. “I know why *medwaw*.” He stated. “That doesn't mean it isn't a crazy idea. And why do I have to wear this *piegn* uniform for this? What's wrong with standard fatigues? I can't believe someone actually shipped my dress uniform here.”

Aricia gripped his arms in her hands and looked into his azure eyes. They matched her eyes in color in every way, as did Nara's eyes, which made them all so very unique. In all her years, Aricia had never once come across someone within the Union with eyes even remotely the same color as theirs. Aricia tried to look at him crossly.

“You are the Crown Prince of the United Lycavorian Union Androcles Leonidas.” She stated. “In matters of Diplomatic State you at least have to act like it.” Aricia turned and looked at Saydia. “Forgive our son Saydia, he...” Saydia and Anthylea watched with wide eyes as Androcles stuck his tongue out at his mother while she was looking at them and without even glancing back at him, Aricia slapped him in the face once more

without ever breaking eye contact with them. This caused them to burst out laughing and Aricia turned her head back to him. "...he can be just as obstinate and pig headed as his father at times and it infuriates us."

Andro was smiling as he stared at her and without warning he lifted her into the air and hugged her tightly to him. Aricia sighed in happiness feeling her son's arms around her and sensing the happiness and love in his wolf aura and in the Etheric realm. She instantly passed this to Anja and For'mya without thinking and all of them felt it. It filled them with warmth and happiness as well for Androcles had always been the most guarded of their children when it came to emotions. Having discovered first Sadi and then Carisia and the others had begun to change him and they could all sense this within him.

The door to the Conference Room opened and Sadi, Ne'Veha, Carisia and his other wives and mates led Namiri into the large room. She walked between Carisia and Lu'ria and held their hands, a smile on her face. Andro set his mother down and turned as Sehri and Sadi moved up to take Aricia's place in his arms.

"We came via the secondary corridors Andro. No one saw us." Caliria spoke from beside Lu'ria.

Andro broke away from Sadi and Sehri and moved up in front of Namiri. He towered over her five foot six frame but she met his eyes without fear or question. Andro took her hand in his and bowed his head. "Namiri Daret... I welcome you to my ship. It is a pleasure to finally meet you."

Namiri smiled and nodded her head. "This is a pretty crazy thing we are going to do isn't it?" Namiri asked playfully.

Andro looked at his mother and rolled his eyes again. "See... she agrees with me!" He told her.

Namiri laughed softly. "Sadi told me what you said just before we came in." She said to him.

Andro looked at Sadi and smiled. "In much more mild terms I'm sure." He said turning back to Namiri.

"Nope." Sadi chimed in.

Andro shook his head and Namiri squeezed his hand which she still held. "We do this for both our peoples." She stated evenly. "My mother sees our people becoming inseparable friends and allies. So do I."

Andro nodded his head. "My father and mothers see the same thing. And so do I." He smiled at her. "So let's make this work. I'm getting hungry."

This time it was Sadi and Sehri who beat Aricia to the punch and both their hands hit the back of his head at the same time. Aricia could only look at Saydia and Anthylea and shake her head.

The door opened again and this time Jomann stepped in. "Andro, they are coming." He spoke.

Andro nodded his head and looked at Sadi. "*KertaGai*, take Namiri into the viewing room and wait for the signal." He said.

Sadi took Namiri's hand as Aricia looked at Saydia puzzled. "Signal?" She asked softly. "What signal?"

Saydia shook her head quickly. "I don't know."

Aricia turned back to Andro as he brushed his sleeve. "Andro what are you talking about?" She asked him as the door to the hidden Viewing room slid shut behind Lu'ria and Carisia. "What signal...?"

The double doors on the other end of the room opened and there was no more time for questions as Vesara led the other eleven Tasmor Quorum members into the large conference room, most of them turning to look immediately at Androcles where he stood proudly at the other end of the table. Andro smiled at his mother and then motioned to the end of the table with his hand as they crowded around.

"I welcome you to my ship. It is an honor to have the Tasmor Ruling Quorum aboard." Andro spoke calmly. "Please... please sit down and make yourselves comfortable. Would anyone like some refreshments?"

Vesara glared at him as Seran and the others spread out to the high backed chairs along their end of the table and began to settle into them. "We are here young man, to conduct an honored tradition among our people as the Ruling Quorum, not to be entertained. I was under the impression the Tasmor were considered an ally to your people, yet wherever we have gone so far we have had an escort. Why is this? Do you not consider us allies?"

"Vesara you..." Saydia began to answer as she sat down in the chair to Androcles' left.

"It is a fair question." Andro interrupted her, causing her to look at him as Aricia sat on his right side. "And one which I will answer with a question. Would you allow me to come aboard one of your ships and roam freely?"

"Certainly not!" Vesara replied quickly. Too quickly as she caught herself Aricia noticed and she realized how she had answered the question.

Aricia held her smile inward and looked at her son. [*Well played keto.*] She spoke to him. [*Well played.*]

Andro didn't look at her but she felt his aura pulse her with a son's love as he maintained eye contact with Vesara. "Most of us are new to this ship Lady Vesara Athcer, I myself have gotten lost three times in as many weeks. I would prefer this did not happen to you and your fellow Quorum members and that is why you have an escort. And also so that you do not wander into a portion of the ship that may be hazardous."

Vesara looked shocked that he knew her name and it showed on her face as she sat down in the chair. "You know... you know my name?" She asked.

Androcles nodded his head. "Sovereign Regent Daret was gracious enough to explain to me who all of you are and what your duties are." He answered as he settled into the chair. "It is very impressive."

"Given your answer to this escort issue then, it appears that you do not trust us." Ardal spoke as she sat down.

"It is nothing different than what you would do on one of your ships Lady Ardal, as Lady Vesara just stated." Andro told her as he sat down at the head of the table.

"This does not change our task here today!" Vesara hissed softly.

Andro shook his head. "Of course not." He told her. "I didn't expect it would."

"We are grown women and do not need escorts wherever we go." Vesara spoke. "We are quite capable of finding our way around a new ship."

Andro nodded his head. "I have no doubt that this is true." He answered. "However, this is my ship and I make the rules. The escorts will remain as they are."

"Queen Aricia..." Vesara spoke looking at her. "You are his mother and Queen, are you not?"

Aricia nodded her head. "I am." She answered calmly. "That does not mean that I will overrule my son when it comes to the policies and procedures on his ship. I'm sorry, even if I had the authority and inclination to do such a thing, which I don't by the way, I would not do so. It is standard Union Fleet procedure."

Vesara did not care for this answer and she finally shook her head. "Very well, we will tolerate this rule, given that we have no choice."

Aricia smiled at her. "No, I'm afraid you do not."

Saydia was the one to hide her smile now as she glanced at her friend Seran Echen and saw her rolling her eyes with a tiny smile on her lips.

Ardal Kaend leaned forward in her chair now and looked at Androcles. "You understand what you are about to do Prince Androcles?" She asked. "This is a Ritual Tasmor Inspection to determine whether you are fit to take the daughter of the Tasmor Sovereign Regent as your wife as you and she have declared."

Andro nodded his head. "I do."

"And you declare to be truthful in everything you answer this day?" Ardal asked.

Andro nodded his head again. "I will honor your custom, yes."

Ardal looked at Vesara. "Then I suggest we forgo any complaints we might have about having an escort on this fine ship and begin."

"Very well." Vesara snapped.

Ardal looked at one of the two data pads she had and began. "You are officially known as Androcles Leonidas; Crown Prince of the United Lycavorian Union, are you not?"

Andro nodded his head. "Yes."

SPARTA'S WRATH

ANDROCLES' READY ROOM

MAIN QCR CONFERENCE ROOM

"...Is where you are from?" Martin asked. "Where you have been all of these years?"

Perlae nodded her head. "The Pralor name of the planet is Luarus." She replied. "It is deep within old Pralor space and the system is hidden two light years within an Ionic Nebula. Staania says it was never listed within the registry of known Pralor worlds and that is why it was never colonized. At least until we came here. When we first arrived we called it *Lorenu* because of what we found. What Sumar found so long ago."

“Buried Paradise.” Martin spoke softly and Perlae nodded her head happily at his knowledge of the Lycavorian ancient language and the name of the planet.

“We use both names, but most prefer Lorenu for the meaning.” Perlae told him. “Once you see it you will understand why.”

“How?” For'mya asked. “Perlae, there is no know force that can safely travel through an Ionic Nebula for any extended length of time before the ships are rendered inert. All power is lost and the crew dies of exposure. How did you...?”

“We jumped directly into the planetary system.” Perlae answered. “We had the specific coordinates to bypass the nebula and jump right to the planet. Well... almost to the planet. The planetary system is quite large, and there are several moons that can easily support life, but we have remained on Lorenu for the most part. I don't know how we got the coordinates, I can only assume it was from Sumar.”

“Does Wayonn know about this?” Martin asked.

Perlae shook her head. “I doubt it. *Staania* has spoken of him fondly in the past, so I know who you are speaking of, but she also said he left Lycavore long before *staania* and the others.”

Martin shook his head. “Then when... when did all of this happen?”

Perlae met his eyes in the transmission. “Two days before The Black Day.” She answered seeing his eyes go wide. “*Staania* told us that somehow Sumar knew the Vampire Coven were coming, and two days before the Black Day the ships came and took them away. She didn't want to leave but it was something she and Sumar had agreed to long before.”

“Agreed to?” Martin asked.

Perlae nodded her head. “She was very close to Sumar *chrora* Martin.” She told him. “Especially in the final years leading up to them leaving. She has told us that Sumar had everything planned in detail and they followed this plan to the letter.”

“So you are saying Grandfather Sumar sent Dynina there? To Lorenu?” Martin asked her from within the transmission.

Perlae nodded once more. “I do not know all of the details as I said, *staania* is the only one who does, but that is what we have been raised with.”

“And these Darastrixi and Pralors, they just made *staania* leader when she arrived?” Martin asked.

“Apparently this is what Sumar had already arranged for.” Perlae answered. “I don't know how, I don't think *staania* knows how, but that is what it was when they arrived. There is a council now, elected by the people, but *staania* is the one they all turn to for final decisions on most everything important. It is not because of who she is, but what came after from within her bloodline. They follow her because of your grandfathers Martin my *chrora*. They follow her because of you.”

“Me?” Martin gasped.

Perlae nodded her head. “The bloodline of royalty. The bloodline of Spartan Kings.”

“How would she know that?” Martin asked her. “The Spartan way of life was only on Earth. It was begun here on Earth. I know how it made its way to Apo Prime and other planets within the Union after my father died, but how does she know about it? How do you know about it?”

“It is taught to all of us from a very early age.” Perlae answered. “Lycavorian, Pralor and Darastrixi alike. It is our history.”

“But how do you know this?” Martin pressed her. “How does Dynina know this?” His eyes grew wider. “You have someone close to us don't you? Someone who has been among us for a very long time!”

Perlae nodded her head. “*Staania* is the only one who knows who it is.” She answered honestly. Dynina had told her, Ishma and Awser to being entirely truthful about everything when they arrived here. She told them that Andro and his father would know instantly if they were deceitful. “She never gave this information to us.”

Martin rose from the chair he was sitting in on Ventori. “Perlae... I need to speak with her.” He stated. “Directly to her. I guess it would be stupid to ask if you have QCR ability, so I need the sub-space frequency to contact her.”

Perlae nodded her head. “She said that you would want this and that you would already know it.” She told him. “That it would be burned within your heart and mind. The place that you lost your father on Earth. She called it... it is a very strange name... she called it The Hot Gates.”

“Thermopylae.” Martin whispered.

Perlae nodded her head. “Yes... that is the other name she used. What does this name Hot Gates mean Martin? Is it in some way hot there?”

Martin was silent for a long moment, both Anja and For'mya almost seeing the wheels turning in his head over and over. For'mya squeezed Perlae's hands when she looked at her wondering why he said and did nothing to answer her. For'mya shook her head and held a finger to her lips indicating she should remain silent.

“Lover?” Anja finally asked.

Martin looked at her in the transmission. “The Hot Gates.” Martin spoke finally. “Only one other person alive would ever use that term besides me or someone in our family Anja. You know that.”

Anja nodded her head slowly. “Yes.”

“And only one person still alive actually saw it and was there when it was called that. No one uses that name anymore. No one but him.” Martin spoke.

Anja's nodded once more. “Walter!” She echoed the name in a whisper.

SPARTA'S WRATH

DECK TWENTY-FIVE

PORT CONFERENCE ROOM

Aricia had thought it was going very well but she should have known better.

Several of the Tasmor Quorum asked very simple and pointed questions of Andro in the beginning, which he obviously answered quite easily. Most of those questions pertained to his childhood and his experiences growing up. Aricia and her fellow Queens already knew how their children felt about their early years. Martin Leonidas and his Queens were very stern but exceptionally loving parents. The Leonidas children were exposed to as much as conceivably possible by their father and mothers in order to allow them to see things for themselves and make their own decisions on different topics. They were not coddled or pampered as many children of royalty were in history on Earth and many other planets. As with all of the Leonidas children, Androcles had two advanced degrees, one in Aerodynamic Engineering and the other in Applied Quantum Mechanical Physics. It was going quite well she had thought, until one of the women that Saydia warned her about, asked her first question.

While Ardal Kaend genuinely liked Saydia Daret, she had been recommended for her position by Vesara, and therefore tended to support her positions on the Council. She leaned forward in her chair and holding the data pad in her hand she looked at Androcles.

“Since these proceedings were arranged, your mother has given us generous access to your history young man.” Ardal spoke. “Your military record as well as enormous amounts of information concerning recent events that have taken place in your Union. I understand that most of this information was taken from your very own sources and then provided to us. The Netnews I believe you call them?”

Andro looked at his mother and rolled his eyes. “Yes, I'm sure.” He said with a smile. “Was there a lot of information mother?”

Aricia grinned in response. “Deia's staff sent over a hundred articles and she said that was just scratching the surface.”

Andro looked genuinely surprised. “That much, really?” He said. “I knew I should have stayed on Cranae Island. I always get into trouble when I leave the island.”

Ardal looked at him. “You find this amusing?” She asked.

Andro turned his head to look at her with a smile. “In some ways, yes. The Netnews and I do not normally see eye to eye on many things.” He answered her evenly. “Mainly because I try to avoid most of them like the vermin that they are.”

“But there are those you trust?” Ardal asked him.

Andro nodded his head. “One or two.”

“And why is that?” Ardal asked.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “Differences of opinion perhaps.” He answered her with that ever present smile. “I make it my business to remain away from those who will twist words and or deeds into something that they are not. Or something that *they* believe and want others to see in their view.”

“You don’t care how your people see you?” Another Tasmor Quorum member interjected before Ardal continued.

Andro shook his head. “I do not care how the Netnews portrays me, no.” Andro answered her. “They are usually wrong.”

“Usually?” She pressed him.

Andro smiled once more. “Occasionally they get something right.”

“I’m interested in two specific articles about your recent actions.” Ardal told him taking control of the conversation back.

“Which ones?” Andro asked.

“This articles speaks to an investigation currently underway in your Union that suggests you used your position as Crown Prince to coerce others to withdraw from an open auction in order to acquire a piece of property.” Ardal looked up from the pad. “An apartment complex on a planet called Apo Prime. This is your capital planet I understand. It is a piece of property that you then used less than two years later in order to present it as a bribe to the father of the woman you are now married too. Sadi Leonidas.”

Andro met her eyes. “That’s what it says?” He asked her. “They are calling it a bribe now?” He chuckled as he looked at Aricia. “I guess that is better than extortion.”

“The article goes on to detail how you obtained another piece of property with similar tactics.” Ardal continued quickly even as everyone saw Aricia smile and nod her head. “An island?”

“Craanae Island.” Andro told her with a nod. “That it is where my home is built.”

“Did you obtain this property nefariously using your position Prince Androcles?” Ardal asked.

Andro met her eyes from across the table and tilted his head slightly sideways. “It appears that you have already made up your mind about that Lady Ardal Kaend.” He told her. “Is that not true?”

“Certainly not!” Ardal exclaimed in reply.

Once more Androcles smiled and met her eyes. “As I am sure my father and mothers have told you, my species has a very unique and powerful sense of smell. It allows us to tell when someone is not being truthful by the chemicals dumped into their bloodstream when they speak a falsehood. The same chemical that just entered your bloodstream.”

“Are you calling me a liar Prince Androcles?” Ardal snapped.

“I don’t know.” Andro answered. “Are you? The chemicals in your bloodstream suggest that you do not believe the words you are speaking. That tells me that you have already made up your mind.”

“That is not true regardless of what you say!” Ardal hissed at him.

Andro nodded his head to her. “Then forgive me. I will have to have my sister run a test on my olfactory glands. They appear to be malfunctioning.”

The insult went right over Ardal’s head but not Saydia or Anthylea who had spent much more time around Lycavorians. It took quite a bit of willpower for them both to not burst into laughter at Androcles’ insult and Saydia also detected Seran and several others of the Quorum members containing their own smiles. Saydia and Anthylea were also the only ones who saw Aricia kick her son’s leg under the table. Oh yes, Saydia Daret thought to herself, the Tasmor people were going to enjoy being around these men and women going into the future.

“What is your personal wealth Prince Androcles?” Ardal asked.

Andro shook his head. “I have no idea.” He replied. “It is not something that interests me to be honest.”

“According to this article, the combined wealth of you and your six wives is now in excess of one hundred billion Riyal.” Ardal spoke. “That is in your currency isn’t it? That is second only to your father and the Queens.”

Andro looked at Aricia with wide eyes now, an amazed expression on his face. “Is that true mother?” He asked.

Aricia nodded her head sheepishly. “Your father has us keep tabs on family accounts.” She said. “Most has come since Voralis set up the fund for you, Sadi and Carisia. It has only grown as Ne’Veha, Lu’ria and

Caliria came into your lives. I imagine it will be larger now that Sehri has been added to the account as well. We have not checked since leaving the Alpha Quadrant.”

“That much?” Andro asked once more.

Aricia nodded her head. “Most of it goes to different public access funds for those in need, but even still, the profit margin year to year is substantial. Voralis maintains it all.”

[I believe that is the fault of Carisia and I our love.] Sadi’s voice spoke to him in the shielded Etheric connection that included Aricia now. *[We have included Namiri Daret in our private connection Andro. It seems that her interaction with Torma and your parents made establishing an etheric connection very simple. Do you remember that food court off the island causeway...? The one that you love so much?]*

[The one owned by Thanar and his wife Melina?] Andro asked.

[Yes. With the influx of Durcunusaan and others at the island they could not keep up with the business. Enylarcopri and I were there just before we left and saw their predicament. They said they could not afford to expand so quickly. We decided to invest some capital in their business in order to facilitate a much quicker expansion. They wanted to give us thirty percent of the profits each year but we refused. We finally settled on three percent, though they were not happy about it. We were going to tell you when we finally got around to returning to Earth. It seems the profit is much more than we first thought.]

[Vinn’ Sibfla!] Andro gasped. *[They have some of the best Giouvetsi outside of Staania Gorgo!]*

Aricia barely kept herself from laughing out loud at Andro’s reaction while Sadi, Carisia, Lu’ria, Ne’Veha, Caliria and Sehri all burst out laughing in the Etheric connection. Aricia could even hear Namiri as well, though her echo was less pronounced.

Andro looked back to Ardal as the thought of Giouvetsi filled his head. “Well... I guess the Netnews got something right.” He told Ardal with a smile. “I had no idea to be honest and as I said, wealth doesn’t interest me.”

“Your wealth doesn’t interest you?” Ardal asked somewhat aghast.

Andro shook his head. “Our parents established a trust fund after each one of my brothers and sisters were born. We all have them and I think you will find that none of them have any idea how much is there. Wealth does not interest our family. It never has. There are much more important things to be interested in.”

“And what of these accusations in your own media?” Ardal asked.

Andro shrugged his shoulders once more. “What of them?” He asked. “They are false, no matter how much others wish they were not. My *Tenna Deia* has access to all of my accounts for the purpose of this very investigation that you read about. Nothing I have done is illegal and it is all very public. If you wish to believe otherwise after meeting me, after what the facts state, that is your right.”

“And those concerning your wife Ne’Veha?” Ardal pressed even further. “What about them? This is the second part of what I wanted to ask. They detail a list of threats and smears against this man who says you took Ne’Veha from him even after he had already claimed her as his wife. Is this true?”

Andro shrugged his shoulders. “No.” He said calmly. “It is rumor and innuendo that those who don’t like me or my family latched on to in order to push their agenda. All anyone has to do is ask my *SirsanGai* to get the truth. Ne’Veha has no reason to lie. To this day no one has.”

“Perhaps she now prefers the life, wealth and power of a Crown Princess to one of a simple military man’s wife.” Ardal spoke smugly.

“Ardal!” Saydia spat angrily. “How dare you suggest such a thing!”

“I am only referencing what these articles state.” Ardal spoke quickly.

“You have no right to...”

“You don’t like me do you Lady Ardal?” Andro asked cutting off Saydia’s words.

Ardal met his eyes across the table. “Not really, no.”

“You don’t know me.” Andro said.

“And I don’t care to.” Ardal answered. “You strike me as arrogant and disrespectful. You have no knowledge of how diplomacy works given how you handled those of your own species only recently, and I don’t believe you can be trusted.”

“Trusted to do what?” Androcles asked her.

“To keep the faith with the Tasmor people.” Ardal answered.

Andro nodded his head. “That is an interesting perspective given that you have only just met me and you are basing this knowledge on what you have consciously chosen to read in the News reports that are plainly biased. You have dismissed those that are not bias haven’t you.”

“Are you accusing me of something Prince Androcles?” Ardal asked him in a harsh voice.

“Not at all.” He answered. “However, I do know my *Tenna Deia* and most of her staff. They would have sent a balanced set of reports on me from the Netnews. The ones who show me in a favorable light you have chosen to ignore.”

“How do you know that?” Ardal asked him in a smug voice now.

“It doesn’t matter.” Andro spoke. “However, there is something that does matter.” He looked at her across the table and spread his hands in front of him. “You may believe anything you like when it comes to me, however, do not begin to besmirch one of my wives and mates based on the ramblings of fools who do not like me or my family. You will find that a painful mistake.”

Ardal looked taken aback. “You dare threaten me?” She gasped.

“Call it what you will, but let it be known right now that I will not tolerate lies and rumors about the women who hold my heart and soul in their hands.” Andro told her. “Speak ill of them at your own risk, for you will not like my response.”

“Are there many people within the Union who don’t like your family Prince Androcles?” Vesara asked him now cutting off Ardal’s response before she ruined everything.

Andro smiled at this as he sat back and felt Ne’Veha, Sadi and the others pour their love and warmth through the Etheric connection that shared.

“Probably more than we think.” He told her. “The ones who remain silent and stew in their hate and misguided perceptions are those who prosper most and enjoy the fruit of the decisions my father and mothers have made the last three decades. They will say nothing because they gain from their silence. Those who are more vocal about their issues with my family and believe the lies told about them when they know they are not accurate are just plain lazy and stupid.” Andro looked directly at Ardal and her eyes grew wide in anger. Ardal was taken aback by his answer and the casual way he dismissed the issue and she was about to retort when Seran Echen took her arm and shook her head. Ardal sat back in her chair unable to counter his answer and Seran took that as her cue. She leaned forward and spread her hands over the open data folder that all the Quorum had in front of them.

Seran Echen looked directly at Androcles with a relaxed expression. “I have only a few questions Prince Androcles.” She spoke.

Andro nodded his head. “Of course.”

“I am Seran Echen and I am the Tasmor Defense Minister.”

Andro nodded his head to her. “Lady Echen...”

“I have gone through your military record as it was presented to us by your mother Prince Androcles.” Seran told him. “It is impressive for one as young as yourself.”

“I will let others with thousands of years more experience than me judge my deeds Lady Echen.” He told her.

“Indeed.” Seran spoke. “And I believe they have.”

Andro blinked several times. “I... I don’t understand.”

“My first question Prince Androcles, is this...” Seran leaned forward in her chair. “How many decorations for bravery in battle does your brother Denali Leonidas hold?”

“Thirteen.” Andro answered instantly.

“And your brother Arrarn Leonidas?” Seran asked.

“Nine decorations for Valor while flying and two for bravery on the ground.” Andro told her again without pause.

“And what about the young Captain there, who stands in the shadows behind us with an ever watchful eye over you?” Seran asked motioning to where Jomann had blended into the soft shadows in the corner of the room.

Andro smiled at her remark. “Jomann is harmless to those who mean him no harm Lady Echen.” He said evenly. “Jomann wears sixteen decorations for valor and bravery. I don’t think I understand where you are going with this Lady Seran. My father has been decorated thirty-three times for bravery and valor, my

grandfather Riall fifty-one times in his career spanning four thousand years. They are all true Spartans and Lycavorians.”

Seran smiled at him. “So they are. How many times have you been decorated for bravery Androcles?”

The question seemed to stump Androcles and he blinked several times and did not answer right away his eyes confused. He looked at his mother quickly and then back to Seran. “Why?” He asked her finally.

“It is a legitimate question Prince Androcles.” Seran spoke. “Can you not answer it?”

Andro glanced briefly down at his uniform and then back to her. “No.” He said rather sheepishly.

“You can tell me how many decorations for bravery and valor your brothers, your father and even officers under your command have, but you cannot recite to me how many you have earned?” Seran said. “Why is that?”

Andro looked at her across the table. “Why does it matter?” He asked her.

“Please just answer the question.” Seran asked.

Aricia noticed that this had caught the attention of at least five of the Tasmor Quorum members besides Seran and they were paying extra attention now. Aricia should not have been worried knowing who her first born son was and what he had done in his career, but they were trying to accomplish something here that, if discovered, could have untold repercussions. When he began to answer, Aricia felt her heart swell with love and pride.

“I don’t know, because I don’t care.” Androcles answered Seran’s question. “My solemn duty is to my wives and mates, to my family and to the people of the Union. In that order. I will do whatever is necessary to protect them and keep them safe from harm. I will die to fulfill this sacred oath, and it *is* sacred to me. Medals mean nothing to me. They are shiny trinkets meant to impress others, something I care little in doing. I will let my actions and my deeds speak for themselves, just like my father taught me. Just as he has taught all of his children. Just as he does every day of his life.”

Seran allowed the small smile to split her lips and gracefully she closed the data folder that rested in front of her. “Thank you very much Prince Androcles. I have no need to hear anything else. Just so that you are aware, you have been decorated twenty-one times for bravery and valor Prince Androcles. Twenty times more than anyone else in this room I would imagine. And in far greater circumstances than any of us have experienced as well.”

Andro blinked in surprised and leaned back in his chair as he saw five other Tasmor Quorum members also close their data folders. Saydia Daret sat in her chair quite impressed to say the least. What he had just said was not rehearsed or planned before hand, that much was obvious, and his words were spoken with true emotion in them. Saydia glanced at Anthylea and saw her slight nod of approval just before Vesara spoke and shattered all sense of decorum in the room.

“Prince Androcles... can you tell my fellow Quorum members and I how many innocent lives you are responsible for taking in your short career military thus far?” Vesara spoke from her chair.

Aricia’s eyes grew wide and her face tensed in anger instantly, but it was Saydia who came out of her chair in equal anger.

“Vesara Athcer how dare you ask such a question!” Saydia almost yelled the words to her.

“We have a right to know the full extent of what this young man is capable of Sovereign Regent!” Vesara snapped back at her. “If he is to be allowed to take a Daughter of the Regent as his wife, these are things we should know!”

“You have no right to ask such a question!” Aricia snarled as she came to her feet now. “You do not know the circumstances...”

“Three million, four hundred and nineteen thousand, six hundred and seventeen.” Andro answered the question calmly, his voice rising slightly above his mother’s voice but not close to being a shout in the least. This brought the room to silence and everyone stared at Androcles in shock. His azure eyes focused on Vesara now as he reached out and put his hand on Aricia's arm urging her to sit back down. “Is that the answer you were seeking Lady Vesara?”

“You... you admit this openly?” Vesara gasped in horror.

“I admit to doing what I needed to do in order to save a thousand times that number of innocent lives.” Andro told her softly. “I will live with that decision each and every day Lady Vesara. Had I not done what I did, the amount of dead Union citizens would have been far greater.”

“You don’t know that!” Vesara hissed at him.

“I know that every hour that passed, our enemy was shuttling thousands upon thousands of troops and ships through our own Jump Gate System, which they illegally hijacked, in order to support an outlaw regime that usurped my mother as the rightful Queen. I know that many thousands of our citizens were butchered trying to escape this outlaw regime.” Androcles spoke evenly. “I know that had I not done what I did, the chances that we would be able to return one day and take back the planet of a founding member of our Union would be infinitesimal without massive loss of life. Both militarily and civilian. Do not think to use this as some gage of my character Lady Vesara, you will be sorely mistaken in your actions. I did what needed to be done to save as many lives as I could. You may wish to speculate and guess, but you were not there, and neither were the men and women who wrote those Netnews reports you seem to like so much.”

“So you do not regret your actions?” Vesara declared.

“Every waking moment of every day. That is a burden that I must and do bear.” Andro told her softly as the others looked on. “And if I had to do it again... I would.”

“Vesara you are far out of line here!” Saydia spat angrily.

“I am well within my rights!” Vesara snapped right back. “We are allowed by our laws to ask any question that may bring into doubt the suitability of a male in a union with a Daughter of the Regent!”

Andro looked at Saydia. “Respectfully Sovereign Regent Daret, I knew what would take place here. I am not hiding anything, nor will I shirk from answering any questions this Quorum wants to ask.” He motioned to the chair. “Please?”

Saydia looked at him with angry blue eyes, not at what he had asked her, but at what Vesara was obviously willing to do in order to sabotage her plans. She should have expected this and warned Aricia and her son and she berated herself for not doing so as she returned to her chair as he asked.

Andro turned back to Vesara. “You obviously have other questions Lady Vesara.” He told her. “As I have said, I will answer any question you have, within reason of course.”

Vesara thought she saw an opening as Saydia glared at her in anger and she lifted another data pad from the table top and held it up. “I have been reading about what your people call the Evolli War. This war began over political disputes did it not?”

Androcles nodded his head. “The former Evolli leaders, those not elected by the majority of their people, took issue with my first elven mother Dysea when she cancelled several, rather one-sided, trade agreements that the Evolli were not fulfilling their end of.” Andro explained. “The Evolli leaders took issue with this and instead of using diplomacy to accomplish what they wanted, they instead chose to invade three Union planets in retaliation.”

Vesara nodded her head. “Yes, I was able to read that part. Many of the details to the conflict are spoken of in great detail. What interests me more are the details that are not public knowledge. The details of one particular battle for instance. The first battle that took place on this planet Alba Tau. This is the battle where the public and military records indicate you were recommended for and then awarded the highest medal that your Union military can bestow. Is this not true?”

Andro met her eyes. “Yes.”

“No details of the actual battle where you won this award are in the public domain.” Vesara said. “At least none that I can find among the materials that your mother generously provided to us.”

“And?” Andro spoke.

“Your own history states that the battle for this planet lasted for nearly seven months and involved fully one third, if not more, of your total Union ground forces.” Vesara spoke. “There are numerous reports on the many different battles that took place through those months. Yet no details of the first battle. The battle you and your father fought in.”

“I still do not hear a question.” Andro told her. “Is there one?”

“Tell us of this battle Prince Androcles.” Vesara said almost arrogantly. “Regale us on how you won your Union’s highest award.”

Andro stared at her for a long moment remaining silent. “No.” He finally spoke the single word.

“Excuse me?” Vesara asked surprised that he refused.

“What part of no was in any way unclear lady Vesara?” Andro asked her.

“You sat there and not moments ago told us you would answer any question that we asked.” Vesara told him. “Are you now refusing to answer this question?”

“I believe no is an adequate answer and covers pretty much all spectrums of how you could ask that question.” Andro told her evenly.

“So you are now refusing to answer our questions?” Vesara demanded.

“Not at all.” Andro told her. “Only the one about Alba Tau.”

“May I inquire as to why?” Vesara pressed him.

Andro shook his head. “No, you may not.”

“I would like to know the answer as well.” Ardal spoke from her seat.

“And again, the answer is no.” Andro spoke.

“This is a deeply personal event for my son.” Aricia spoke coming to her feet now. “You cannot expect him to answer questions that have no bearing on why we are here today.”

“The events of this day speak to your son as a person Queen Aricia.” Vesara said from her chair. “This award is the highest award given in your Union. It has only been given out nine other times in your history. This fact alone speaks toward the reverence that your own people place on this award. We simply want to know what he did to be recommended for and then awarded this decoration. It gives insight into your son’s character.”

“His character?” Aricia hissed.

“He was recommended for this award by a man who is his grandfather.” Vesara pressed.

“You want to now question the integrity of the man who leads the whole of the Union Military? A man you have never met before. Does your arrogance extend that far?” Aricia spat now as her azure eyes narrowed.

“All records of this battle were sealed by the King and this Admiral Riall.” Ardal spoke now in defense of Vesara. “No official public announcement was made of this decoration and no official public record gives the details of what took place.”

“Sovereign Regent,” Vesara began turning to Saydia. Her face too showed a very small amount of surprise that Androcles would not answer the question knowing what was at stake. “I must protest. If we are to make a proper decision here in regards to the union of this man and Regent Daughter Namiri, he must be forthcoming and answer all questions put to him. This is our law. This is how it is done. It is our right!”

“Your right?” Aricia snarled now as she became angry. “How is it your right to question something that you have no concept of? How?”

Andro reached up and took her arm as he rose to his feet. “*Medwaw.*”

Aricia looked at her son as her blood burned in anger. “Andro you...”

Androcles shook his head. “*Vinn’ medwaw.*” He urged her to back down, hitting her with the soothing aura of a son. When he saw that she visibly relaxed he turned back to Vesara. “You seem to think that you are in charge of this situation Lady Vesara, however, I assure you that is not the case.”

Andro stood to his full height and reached up to begin unbuttoning the studs on his dress uniform. Those in the room could only watch stunned as he quickly stripped out of his jacket and the shirt he wore underneath. Seran and several other Tasmor Quorum members came to their feet in shock when they saw the superb condition of his body and the excruciating detail of each and every muscle in his abdomen and chest. The Talon Guardian brand that he wore upon the upper left pectoral muscle of his exquisitely detailed chest seemed to be pulsing of its own accord. Andro turned around slowly and Seran and two other Quorum members gasped in horror when they saw the long, jagged scar that extended from just below his shoulder blade all the way down to just above his belt. Several other, smaller scars dotted his skin in different places along the length of that main scar, and then there were three scars in the upper portion of his back on the opposite side. Andro held out his arms as he turned slowly until he was once more facing Vesara who also wore a stunned expression.

He leaned forward, placing his hands on the table, and looked directly at her. “You wish to insinuate that there is something where there is nothing Lady Vesara. Perhaps that is how you operate where you come from, but it is not how I operate. Alba Tau is my burden and my curse. Just as it is a curse for everyone who fought there, Jomann and so many others like me. You do not have the right to that burden Lady Vesara. That belongs to us and only us. If you wish to use my refusal to answer your questions about that so that you may bend those answers to what you believe as grounds for not supporting this union, then by all means, do so. This union will happen regardless of what you want. It was done the moment that Namiri Daret boarded my ship.”

“What nonsense is this.” Vesara demanded.

That was the signal that Sadi, Namiri and the others had been waiting for but hoping would not come. It was Namiri who suggested this to Sadi and the others almost immediately after meeting them when she came aboard. Namiri suspected that Vesara and others would try to stop the union in order to hurt her mother and embarrass the Lycavorians. She was not about to allow that.

The door to the hidden viewing room slid open and Namiri burst out in a dead run. She practically launched herself into Andro's arms, throwing her arms around his bare shoulders as their lips came together in a positively sizzling kiss. The members of the Tasmor Quorum could only sit and stand there and gawk at this display of affection, though only two of them looked to be in the least bit angry. If anything, all but Vesara and Ardal looked relatively pleased with the display.

Vesara came to her feet in outrage. "Sovereign Regent I demand that you stop this right now!" She shouted. "I will not approve of this union and nor should you!"

Saydia looked at her feeling nothing but pride for Namiri at her actions. This is obviously what they had cooked up between them and now Saydia had no recourse but to let it stand as it was and be a proud mother. Her daughter, one of the two youngest of her daughters, only she had the clarity of purpose and strength of will to do what needed to be done.

"On the contrary Vesara," Saydia spoke calmly as she looked at Vesara. "I do approve of this union and I approve of Androcles Leonidas."

Namiri and Androcles broke their kiss and she turned her flushed face to look at the Quorum while Andro still held her close to his body.

"This is our destiny as a species." Namiri stammered. "This is what we were meant for as a people and I will not see it pass us by because of stupid rules and stupid people and archaic laws that have no place in the here and now! I will not! And there is nothing you can do to stop it now! Andro's father has seen our people together. He has seen our future mixed with the Lycavorians, and theirs with ours. I will not let you take that away from our people. I will not let you alter the future that is meant to be whether it be with Androcles or anyone else in the future that awaits us!"

Sadi, Ne'Veha, Carisia, Lu'ria, Caliria and Sehri crowded around where Andro held Namiri in his arms and they pressed tightly up against her and him in a show of solidarity and love. No one could say anything as if on cue, Namiri grabbed Andro's arm and looked at him as Sadi took his other arm.

"I think it is time we got better acquainted. Don't you?" Namiri hissed.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "By all means!"

Without even a glance back Andro led Namiri out of the Conference room, Sadi and his other wives and mates following right with them and chattering away with Namiri as if they had known each other for decades.

Aricia wanted to shake her head and smile at what her son and Namiri had just done. They had pulled the rug right out from underneath the Tasmor Quorum and done so with the ease of a master thieves. Someday she would have to ask him how they had done that, however Aricia was not in the mood for humor as she turned her head back to look at Vesara. Vesara and Ardal were urgently whispering with other Quorum members and Aricia had seen and heard enough arrogance for one day. Actually, for several decades.

"Enough!" Saydia Daret barked loudly causing all heads to turn and look at her and cutting off whatever Aricia was going to say. "I am ashamed!" Saydia exclaimed. "Ashamed at the actions here today of my people!"

"Sovereign Regent, we were well within our rights as the Quorum of our people to..." Vesara began.

"Silence!" Saydia roared aloud. "I have had enough of you Vesara!! Do you hear me... enough!?" Saydia glared at them even as Anthylea tried to take her arm in an effort to calm her. Saydia pulled her arm away from her lover and Bound One for life now. "Give me your answer right now! Give it to me so that I may go back to our people, show them what you have done, and then demand that all of you be replaced for dismissing the future of our people! The child among us, my daughter, she has the true sense of our people and she and her sisters are the only ones willing to do what is best for them! No matter the cost!" Saydia shook her head. "What is your decision? Make it now for I have no intentions of asking Androcles to submit to another inquisition of rumors and slurs."

Seran stepped forward. "Saydia... the union has been approved." She said softly.

Vesara's head snapped around at this information. "I did not approve this!" She quickly exclaimed.

Seran nodded her head. “No, you did not.” She spoke. “Thankfully, this is a majority vote Vesara. You and Ardal have been outvoted ten to two. This union will go forward and we will honor our commitments, just as the integrity of the young man who left this room tells me his people will.” Seran looked at Aricia now. “And perhaps one day we will be able to erase the stain you have left on our people with your actions Vesara.”

VENTORI FORWARD BASE DISCOVERY UNION COMMAND CENTER

Martin Leonidas sat quietly in the chair, staring at the now empty and silent QCR holo communications disc. He twisted the mug of coffee in his hands back and forth as his mind was awash with this new information and the revelations it brought to him.

All around him *Durcunusaan* and Fleet Technicians were monitoring the events that were going on in and around Jorlari. The cleaning out of the leftover Svorag bunkers was proceeding just as Martin had laid out to his commanders. Most of them knew their King was among them, sitting quietly, but nearly all of them had seen this in the past. There were few among this group of *Durcunusaan* and Fleet personnel who had not served with their King directly for less than a decade.

The more Martin thought about things, the more things fell into place, and the more he realized just how far reaching his grandfather’s plans extended. Sumar did not just change the face of Lycavorian evolution, he changed and in many respects, was still changing their future. Martin turned his head when he caught his scent and Wayonn entered the Operations Center. Wayonn’s eyes found him quickly and he maneuvered around several techs and into the back section of the center where Martin was sitting. It was less noisy back here and Wayonn moved to the ever present coffee pot on the counter along the wall. He poured himself a mug of the rich, delicious blend of Aricia’s coffee, added a small amount of cream and honey and then turned back to where Martin sat. He moved to the chair closest to him and settled into it looking at this young King who so many millions adored.

“You wanted to see me Martin?” He asked.

Martin finally looked at him and lifted his mug to his lips, draining the coffee in it before rising to his feet and going to pour more. Wayonn waited patiently as he did this knowing that whatever was going through his head was important.

“Wayonn, you and my grandfather were close right?” Martin finally asked as he turned back to him with a full mug of coffee.

“We were Praetorian and Mage.” Wayonn answered. “For us there could be nothing closer. If I had to compare it to something I would compare it to you and Daniel.”

Martin returned to the chair next to him. “Did you know grandmother Sateia well?” He asked him.

Wayonn smiled and nodded his head. “Sateia was unique.” He said. “Aricia reminds me of her the most. Exotic beauty and wit and extremely capable. Sumar was the last of us to merge into the Ruling Packs, but Sateia had already chosen him. She waited for nearly five hundred years until Sumar saw that the last of us were fully integrated and then he allowed her to change him. The Mahanlo Pack was the largest and one of the oldest of the packs at that time and the day Sumar became a pack member it solidified their place as royalty among the Lycavorians.”

Martin looked at him. “Does the name Dynina mean anything to you?”

Wayonn’s head snapped up and he looked at Martin with wide eyes. “Where did you hear that name?” He asked.

“Then you know the name?” Martin pressed him.

Wayonn nodded his head. “That is... that was the name of Sateia’s mother.” Wayonn answered softly. “She was the Matriarch of the Mahanlo pack. Dynina is where Sateia and her sister got their beauty. She was exquisite in every way. She was truly an Alpha female and quite the visionary Martin.”

“No mate?” Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “No.” He answered him. “If I understand correctly, he was apparently assassinated several years before they discovered us in a dispute of the lesser packs. Dynina rarely spoke of him but Sateia did tell me one time that Dynina loved him with all of her heart. He apparently was a rarity among the wolves of that time and Dynina was his only mate and he treated her much the same as you treat Aricia and the others. He was respected and feared by all for his size and his judgment. Come to think of it, I remember a time when Dynina told me that Sumar rivaled her mate in size and strength after Sateia turned him. You have good genes my boy.”

Martin smiled and nodded his head. “That I do.”

“You must remember that we crashed on Lycavore some fifteen hundred plus years before our first contact with them.” Wayonn continued. “It was not spoken of very often once the merger was done, but it was said he was ambushed by a lesser pack while hunting with his only son. They were both killed. Dynina did not take it very well for she was carrying their third child, Sateia's sister, and from what I understand she cursed this lesser pack and within months all of them were dead from one thing or the other.”

“Cursed?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “This is going to sound very strange...”

Martin chuckled and waved his hands around them. “Wayonn come on... strange?” He said with a smile. “You don't get any stranger than me.”

Wayonn also laughed softly and nodded his head. “Point taken.” He said as he sipped his coffee. “Sumar and Dynina were very close in many ways. Part of that was because Sateia and her mother were very close, but more so because I think Dynina reminded Sumar of Jezima in many ways. Dynina was very different to say the least. She had the most fascinating color eyes and she had a gift.”

“Gift?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded his head and sipped his coffee. “Lycavorians and Pralors are born with the ability to communicate etherically, you know this. Vampires as well. Dynina was different however, she could actually manipulate the different etheric strands to do her bidding in an almost mystical way.”

“What? You mean like *vaes*?” Martin asked.

Wayonn looked at him. “Do not discount its existence Martin.” He told him.

“Discount it?” Martin said shaking his head. “You have to be kidding me. With some of the *sibfla* I've seen in the last two plus decades, *vaes* would actually rank down at the bottom of the list of amazing things.”

Wayonn smiled at this and nodded his head. “Yes, I see what you mean.” He said. “Some of the things Sumar and I saw Dynina do were beyond explainable. She could do things that others could not and even we could not determine how. It was related to etheric power in a way for the resonance within the etheric realm would fluctuate whenever she used this ability, but it wasn't true etheric power such as you, Murano and your sons use. Every living thing is touched by the etheric realm in some manner Martin, you know this. We can feel it. Dynina could and did influence that.” Wayonn looked at him. “They called her *Yowa medwaw*.”

“Witch mother.” Martin said softly.

Wayonn nodded his head. “None of the Packs wanted to piss her off after what happened to her mate. They were deathly afraid of her.” He said with a smile.

“Even that fat ass Chetak?” Martin asked with a grin.

Wayonn nodded once more smiling as well. “All of them did.” He replied. “While I never had much interaction with Chetak or his pack before we left, Sumar knew he was going to be a problem in the future. You dealt with him harshly I understand? I never wanted to bring it up before now because of what happened.”

Martin shook his head. “It was a long time ago.” Martin spoke softly. “Let someone try and take Aricia or Anja or any of them from me now. What I did to Chetak and his sick little empire will pale in comparison.”

“*Avoi*.” Wayonn spoke nodding his head in agreement.

“I didn't know the packs had names.” Martin said leaning closer.

“In the early days only the largest ones did.” Wayonn answered with a nod. “By the time we came along, Sumar, the rest of us, this practice had dwindled to almost nothing, but the eight or nine largest packs still clung to it. The Mahanlo Pack was one of them.”

“Mahanlo?” Martin whispered the name softly. “So they... they are the beginning. For me, for my children?”

Wayonn nodded his head. “They were the largest and most powerful pack when we finished merging the survivors of our ship with the different packs. Your size in wolf form, that comes from them. They were very close knit as a pack, especially after Dynina’s mate was killed and she became matriarch. No one wanted to push them. Even the females were vicious if you crossed them. Dynina brought many Beta females and some males into the Mahanlo Pack even before we arrived and through the years they mated with Alphas and... well you can figure it out. By the time we had fully merged with the Lycavorian people, the Mahanlo Pack was the predominant pack by far among the seven largest that remained. Most of our people had merged with these packs and things began to change quickly. City Ship 41 became the center of our largest town and a huge trading hub. Dynina, Sumar and Sateia were at the forefront of this, but they always managed to keep our people close to our roots. And they did not tolerate petty *rensibfla*. Some of the old ways were hard to get rid of, the mating rituals for one. Resumar was born almost two hundred years after I had left, but I have read the ancient data scrolls that Deia kept from that time. That particular part of our history didn’t find its way into the abyss until after Resumar had taken Eliani back using the Lunmai. I asked Deia about that in the brief time I had to talk with her before meeting you and she said it was welcomed by celebration for over a week.”

“Grandmother Sateia and her sister were Dynina’s only children?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “As far as I know. What happen after I left I don’t know? I can’t remember Sateia’s sister’s name for the life of me though. I only met her a few times to be honest. Dynina and Sateia were very protective of her and this carried over to Sumar as well.”

“Maha?” Martin spoke.

Wayonn nodded and pointed at him quickly. “That was it!” He announced. “Maha! Just as beautiful as her sister and mother and...” He stopped talking and looked at Martin. “Wait! How do you know that?” Wayonn came instantly alert as his wolf senses began to fire up and he came to his feet. “Martin what is going on?”

Martin turned and touched the computer panel on the table. “That Mark II here yet?” He asked.

“Just setting it up in your quarters now Milord.” The male voice answered.

“Thank you Captain.” Martin spoke and turned back to Wayonn. “Come with me. We have a phone call to make.”

“What?” Wayonn gasped.

“Dynina is not dead Wayonn.” Martin told him. “Hell... she is my grandmother too. I’m finding them all over the place out here.”

“Not dead?” Wayonn gasped. “How is that possible? The Black Day... her name was listed among the known casualties Martin. I saw the list! Her and Maha!”

Martin nodded his head. “I’m sure you did.” He told him. “What I am coming to realize however, is that my grandfather Sumar, he was a sneaky bastard. He liked to hide things from people. I guess that is where I get it.”

“What do you mean?” Wayonn pressed him.

“Dynina is alive because Maha’s three children showed up on Andro’s doorstep and he could smell family in their blood the moment they stepped off their ship. Our blood.” Martin said. “And Dynina sent them there.”

LORENU COUNCIL MEETING HALL

Dynina was worried for them, and she missed them. She was not concerned for their safety for she knew they would be among blood and knowing who Androcles was, they would be very well protected. She worried for them because they had experienced so little of life itself compared to their cousins. They did not know war and conflict. They had been raised here in the shelter of this world and never experienced any of those things. She did not know how they would tolerate it to be honest. She had tried to raise them as best as she could after Maha had passed, and between her and Kadeer they had some of the most intense training of anyone on Lorenu. Dynina thought back for a moment on her daughter Maha and how she had fallen in love with the handsome

Darastrixi soldier. Kadeer was extremely well built for a Darastrixi, and very powerful. Maha had told her once that it was his eyes that made her melt. Kadeer had been so intent on Maha from the first moment that he learned every mating ritual that there was among the Lycavorians in order to impress her, not knowing that Dynina had already seen their love in her dreams. Her daughter had not lived to see her children grow nor did she know they almost lost their father to the grief he felt. It wasn't until Kadeer had come to her one night, a crushed man, a lonely man, that Kadeer had begun to heal. Dynina had shown him her daughter and the love she had felt for him. Dynina showed him that Maha would have wanted him to carry on without her, to raise their children as they had always talked of. It had taken them nearly ten thousand years until their doctors could medically make it possible for Maha to have his children, but once this was completed, Dynina had never seen her daughter so utterly happy.

It took them another twenty years before they discovered she carried Perlae, and then they had a party that lasted for two days. Kadeer doted over Maha to no end when she carried his children, often times making her angry with him for neglecting his other duties, but Kadeer never cared. The love they had for one another, as odd as it was, was total and absolute even after thirteen thousand years together. And neither of them had given up hope on having children. Perlae, Ishma and Awser were miracles as far as they were concerned. And Dynina shared this sentiment. After that night with her, seeing all that he had never seen before about his beautiful wife and mate, Kadeer was a changed man. He had totally committed himself to his children these last two plus decades.

"Dynina?" The deep voice broke her out of her thoughts and she looked up quickly.

Dynina saw Kenroe and the others looking at her and she shook her head. "Forgive me." She spoke with a small smile. "I was thinking of them."

Kenroe nodded his head. "Understandable." He spoke. He reached across the small space between them at the table and rested his hand over hers. "They are with their blood Dynina." He spoke. "The *Dahakoan* would never allow harm to come to them."

Dynina nodded her head. "I know." She said with a smile as well now. She shook her head quickly and covered his hand with her other one and lifted it to her lips where she kissed his knuckles softly. "Thank you Kenroe my friend."

Kenroe nodded his head. "We are all in this together. What affects one of us affects all of us. This is what Sumar intended when he came to me and to Nicha and this is how we have lived these last millennia together."

"Indeed it is." Dynina spoke. "So... what do we know about the encounter Orman?"

"COLS definitely has some sort of sensor net laid along the border if they were able to detect Perlae's ship so quickly." The Pralor man spoke from the end of the table. He motioned to the female Darastrixi beside him. "Amena and I have been trying to determine what it is they are using to track the portal openings, but so far nothing."

"Trying to mimic their rudimentary sensor technology is difficult." The Darastrixi female spoke. "We had to build a sensor platform that we think is based on theirs, but we don't know for sure."

Dynina shook her head. "We no longer need to worry about that. Perlae would have told Androcles this or they would have figured it out on their own based on what she told him. He handled them harshly according to her last report before they jumped away from this sector of space. He will undoubtedly leave a ship behind and have it destroyed."

Amena nodded her head. "To protect them, to protect us, the *Dahakoan* would do this, yes." She agreed.

"This action could provoke a reaction from Osrod, Dynina." Kenroe said.

Dynina nodded her head. "I did not expect the man to be so inventive and build this network." She spoke. "He is a brute, but he obviously has more intelligence than I first gave him credit for."

"They have never come that far from their own space in all the time we have known they existed." Kenroe added.

"I insulted his father when I told him I would not become his mate." Dynina spoke again. "Trust me, Lycavorians such as him would never forget that."

"They have wanted our technology all of this time." Kenroe added.

Orman snorted loudly and shook his head. "They would never be able to figure it out even if they did have it." He spoke.

Amena nodded her head. "I agree with Orman." She said. "While they do have excellent engineers and scientists, none of them have the knowledge to begin to understand our newer technology. It would take them centuries just to figure it out, let alone learn how to build something that actually worked."

Dynina nodded her head. "Yes, but that is something we don't want to happen." She told them. "At all."

"*Dahakoan* Androcles has already given them a glimpse at their technology Dynina." Another Darastrixi spoke now. "Was this wise?"

Dynina shook her head. "Androcles and Martin think unlike anyone that we have ever come across." She told them. "They are enigmas. Their minds do not work in the same way as ours do. When they do something in the here and now, they are already thinking weeks, months and even years into the future." Dynina shook her head. "It boggles my mind to even try and figure it out. They are so much like Sumar it is frightening and that man, as unassuming as he was on the outside, that man frightened me right down to my core."

Nicha chuckled at this and nodded her head. Sumar had been the one to approach her all those millennia ago and suggest this to her as head of the Pralor Exploratory Division.

"How true." She agreed with Dynina. "How true."

Dynina smiled as she thought of Sumar. "He did love my daughter Sateia unabashedly however." She said. "That overruled my fear of him." She looked at them around the table. "I believe Osrod will focus on them now. They are Alphas, and until now the only other Alphas of our people that he knew of were those of us here, but he could never discover us."

"Is that a good thing?" Kenroe asked.

Dynina nodded her head. "We are reasonably sure it was Osrod and COLS who removed the Alphas from Ventori and left the Betas to die all those years ago. They are the only ones capable of doing this given their level of technology. The Tasmor and Kintaur had not yet developed space flight when this took place. Only the Pralors had space flight and Delnash would never have shared this with Lycavorians. Especially back then."

"We are also reasonably certain they do not even know the Pralors exist." Orman spoke once more. "They have never gone into that far out of their own territory. At least until now."

Dynina nodded her head. "It won't matter." She spoke. "Martin and Delnash are of the same mindset in that regard. And if our sources among the Pralor people are correct, Delnash has come to be very good friends with The First in these last weeks and months since they first came upon each other."

Orman laughed softly. "How I would have loved being there for that introduction." He said bringing chuckles from everyone at the table. "It must have given him fits to know that a new breed of Praetorians had been born and they were from the species that we once thought so far beneath us we used them as a Seed species."

"No doubt." Dynina said with a smile.

"That was a despicable practice Orman." Amena told him.

Orman nodded his head. "You will get no argument from me on that."

"I have never understood how one could..." Amena began.

Dynina blinked her eyes and felt the tingling in her head increase. She looked around the room slowly as if sensing something while the others talked. It was unlike anything she had felt in thousands of years, but it was also somehow familiar. Nicha saw her expression and looked at her.

"Dynina... what is it?" She asked.

This brought everyone in the room to silence and caused all of them to look at her.

"Dynina?" Kenroe asked.

Dynina shook her head. "I don't... I don't know." She said softly as she rose to her feet. "I feel something. Something I haven't felt in nearly forty millennia."

"What is it?" Nicha asked her as she too stood up now.

Dynina looked around the room now as she moved away from the table. "It is so familiar to me." She spoke in almost a whisper. "I don't... it can't be!" She gasped finally.

"Dynina what is wrong?" Nicha spoke as she reached for her dear friend.

"It's him!" Dynina exclaimed. "It's Martin! I can feel him all around me!"

Kenroe came to his feet now. "How... how is that possible?" He asked quickly.

“I feel him Kenroe!” Dynina spoke looking at him. “He is reaching for me! He has... he has someone else with him. Two others. Oh my... ohhh.” Dynina staggered slightly and Kenroe moved to steady her with Nicha just as the entire room was bathed in the white/blue light of Etheric power.

“By the ancients within the Rift!” Orman exclaimed as he came to his feet.

All of them felt it now since all of them were able to at least sense Etheric power and it staggered them all in its power and focus.

“By the will of Dadrien!” Amena almost yelled as she stood and reached for Orman’s arm to support herself.

The entire left side of the room was bathed in the bright light and all of them quickly moved to the opposite side as it began to take shape. Take shape in the form of two, tall and well-muscled men and an exceptionally large dragon.

“No.” The deep voice boomed within the room. “Dadrien had nothing to do with this. This is all me.”

Dynina clung to Nicha and Kenroe as the shapes focused and became as clear as if they were standing in the room with them. Her heart nearly exploded out of her chest when she saw him and for the first time in nearly fourteen thousand years Dynina Mahanlo, Matriarch of the Lycavorian Mahanlo Pack burst into tears.

Martin stared at her across the room and as everyone gasped in utter shock he dropped to one knee, his eyes never leaving Dynina’s face.

“Hello *aur staania* Dynina.” Martin spoke the words with deep reverence. The same tone of voice that he used only for Jezima and Meral. “If this is a bad time... I can call back later.”

Dynina couldn’t help the wail of delight that escaped her lips and her tears came forth like a waterfall upon a clear river.

Tears of relief. Tears of love. But most of all...

Tears of rebirth.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

LORENU

“Hello *aur staania* Dynina.” Martin spoke the words with deep reverence. The same tone of voice that he reserved for his mother Gorgo, for Deia and for Jezima and Meral. “If this is a bad time... I can call back later.”

Dynina practically lost it all right then as the wail of happiness and love erupted from her and she grabbed Nicha’s entire upper body tightly. Tears continued to pour from her eyes as she gazed at the real time image of a man who was an almost exact duplicate of the man who she had grown so fond of in their time together.

The Pralor Sumar had loved her daughter Sateia shamelessly and with the intensity of a lightning storm that never stopped after she had turned him. There was never any doubt in his feelings or his actions with Sateia and it quickly became known among the many wolf packs on Lycavore that if you even sniffed at Sateia in an odd way, the rebuke would be very swift and very painful. Both of her daughters had inherited their mother’s flawless skin and exotic beauty with shimmering, deep black hair and deeply tanned skin. There were many suitors for them, and those who were also foolish enough to try and take them. Neither option worked out well for the male wolves who thought like that. Sateia had eyes for no one but Sumar and made that knowledge very clear to all who listened.

Shortly after they were mated, a union and celebration that all of the packs attended, two supremely young and arrogant Alphas from another pack who thought themselves superior to Sumar because he was recently turned, had challenged him for her. Neither of those two young males succeeded and when Sumar ended up brutally killing the second fool who had challenged him for Sateia, it never happened again. Sumar was a massive wolf in not only stature but also the aura that he exuded. In all her years Dynina had seen only one wolf of his size before and that was her own beloved mate. Her handsome mate had been an oddity among all Lycavorians because of his enormous size, nearly four feet tall at the shoulder when in wolf form, and it was

from him where the dual fangs in their bloodline came from. It was the only known occurrence of this genetic difference ever recorded in the past of their people. It was her own mate who had unofficially begun the changes within the packs on Lycavore with his treatment of her. Her mate loved Dynina so fiercely that it took her breath away at times and this showed in his public treatment of her with affectionate nuzzles and licks and not caring who saw him. This love was passed on to their daughters. Even after Sateia had turned him, for Sumar to be that size right from the start was unheard of in their history. And even with his colossal size, Sumar still doted over her daughter Sateia as if she was the most precious jewel in the entire universe. This action, more than anything else he did, had earned Dynina's unquestioned respect and loyalty.

Standing before her now was an almost perfect image of Sumar, right down to the almost wild, shoulder length black hair and piercing dark brown eyes. She had seen images of Martin through the years yes, but nothing ever like this, nothing ever so clear and so close she could almost reach out and touch him. Dynina felt her heart racing beyond control just as it had the day she left Lycavore and watched as the planet of her birth dwindled to nothing in size through the view window.

As Dynina stared at him, her eyes took in the face on the second man in the transmission and her eyes narrowed slightly. She knew this man she thought as she released Nicha's hands and stepped closer to the transmission.

"Way... Wayonn?" She gasped finally.

Wayonn smiled from beside Martin and bowed his head slightly to her. "To say that it is a surprise to see you Lady Dynina would be the understatement of the past thirty millennia I believe."

"Wayonn... *son vada carians*... how?" Dynina gasped aloud now. "How is it possible that you are there? You left... we feared you long dead."

"That is a particularly long answer." Wayonn answered her. "However, the more open and important question would be to you; how are you still alive Dynina?" Wayonn asked after briefly glancing at Martin. "Dynina, I saw the casualty lists from the Black Day. I saw your name, Maha's, all of you."

Dynina nodded her head slowly. "When did you see them Wayonn?" She asked him. "*Carians*, I have not spoken your name in thousands of years but it still is so familiar to me."

"I had... I made contacts within the moderate portions of the government for the High Coven after we returned and set up on a planet in the Beta Quadrant." Wayonn answered. "I..." Wayonn stopped as a rush of emotion filled him now as well.

Martin had remained silent up until now and he reached out and put his large hand on Wayonn's shoulder and squeezed. He looked at Dynina in the transmission. "Forgive us *aur staania*, it has been a week of revelations in so many ways."

"I don't... I don't understand." Dynina told him her eyes still moist and filled with tears.

Martin nodded his head. "Something for another time perhaps." He answered gently.

Dynina shook her head, her hands coming to up to her face. "You... You look so much like him." She gasped. "So much like your grandfather. It is... it is frightening *staaniketo*."

Martin smiled. "I get that a lot lately." He said.

Dynina looked at him oddly for a moment as she wiped her eyes and cleaned away the tears. "Martin... I..."

Martin shook his head slowly as he rose back to his full height. "No." He told her. "If I have learned anything in this life I have led, it is to never doubt my instincts again. My own son taught me that when I strayed from that path. I don't doubt my son *staania*. Not anymore. Not ever again. When he told me that... when he told me that they had arrived on his ship..."

Dynina moved closer to the transmission. "They are safe then?" She asked the question as any grandmother would ask.

Martin nodded his head with a smile. "They are safer nowhere else in the universe." He told her. "They are with their family. With their blood."

Dynina choked up once more and Nicha stepped up beside her again and took her arms, Dynina's hands moving to cover hers. Nicha looked at the image of Martin and smiled through her own tears. "You have no idea how long she has waited to hear those words *Vada Fera*." Nicha told him.

Martin's head tilted sideways and he looked at Wayonn beside him before turning back to Nicha. "Why do you call me The First?" He asked.

“That is what you are.” Nicha spoke, her tone of voice suggesting awe and disbelief. “To her. To all of us.”

“What I am?” Martin asked.

“*Vada Fera Revik rie Arve.*” Kenroe spoke in the Lycavorian language as he moved up beside Dynina. They had struck up a unique friendship almost immediately all those years ago, Lycavorian and Darastrixi, and he had been by her side all of this time. “*Wer irral daar ar fogah.*” He spoke in Darastrixi. “The First King of Three.”

“What does that mean?” Martin asked. “What three?”

Dynina looked at Nicha and nodded her head. She wiped away her tears quickly and looked at Martin. “That does not matter now.” She spoke. “You have many questions. I can see them in your eyes.”

Martin nodded his head. “That would be a good bet, yes.” He said.

Dynina’s eyes narrowed. “What does this mean? A good bet?”

Wayonn smiled and moved to stand beside Martin. “You will find your grandson has a very unique vocabulary Dynina. He can speak six languages fluently.”

“Six?!” A Pralor woman at the table gasped.

Wayonn nodded his head. “Most of the others in Martin’s family speak even more than that.” Wayonn told them. “It will take some getting used to, but you will find Martin and many of those among our people mix humor within our conversations. We have found it helps to put everyone at ease.”

Dynina’s eyes twinkled in delight when she heard this. She waved her hand all around them. “This... how you are doing this? This is a Mark II is it not? I knew they existed but I have never used one before now.” She asked. “Can you sustain this *staaniketo*? Your answers... the answers you seek will take time.”

Martin nodded his head. “Actually it was technology left to those on Earth by Pralors.” He told her. “Pretty cool huh?”

“All of you... all of you can do this?” Dynina asked surprised.

Martin shook his head. “No. Androcles and I are the only ones strong enough to initiate them alone. It always helps to have others within the connection though, especially those who are strong etherically. It would take more people if Andro and I are not in the communication but they could do it. Wayonn, Torma and I can hold this for several hours at least.”

“We all have information that answers your questions Martin.” Dynina spoke. “We can give you what you seek. Especially your first and most wanted answer.”

Martin’s eyes seemed to grow brighter in the transmission and he stepped closer to her in the transmission. “Then it is Walter?” He asked softly.

“Dymas? He goes by Walter now, yes?”

Martin nodded. “Yes.”

Dynina nodded her own head with a smile. “Your insight does you credit *staaniketo*.” She told him. “But do not find fault with Walter. He does not know and has never known that he is a vassal.”

“A vassal?” Wayonn questioned.

Dynina nodded her head quickly. “I must start from the beginning *staaniketo*, but know that Walter is and has always been loyal to you and to your father. That has never wavered. Not even for an instant. He could not be anything else, for he is of Nicha’s bloodline.” Dynina looked at Nicha and then back to Martin. “He has Pralor blood within him.”

Martin nodded his head. “Many of us do *staania*.” He said. “That doesn’t prove anything really.”

“No Martin.” Dynina said pulling Nicha close to her. “He has Nicha’s bloodline within him.”

“But she... she is with you.” Martin said. “Oh man...” They watched him pull a chair from outside the cone of the transmission and sit down. “I feel a humdinger of a headache coming on.”

Dynina couldn’t help but smile this time. “It is a very long story *staaniketo*, but one that you must now know.”

Martin looked up at her. “I’ve been getting nothing but long stories lately *staania*. I bet I got some news that even you don’t know about.” Martin waved his hand as if ushering her towards him. “Hit me with it. Let’s have it.”

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KING'S QUARTERS

“...came to me within a year of you leaving Wayonn.” Dynina spoke from the chair at the table. All of them had turned their chairs to face Martin and Wayonn in the transmission and all of them were paying rapt attention. While all of them knew most of the story, this was the first time they were hearing it in Dynina’s words. She had been their unofficial leader since coming here, but she was still a very private individual. She did not avoid direct questions, but she did not go out of her way to answer questions about her past.

“He... he regretted sending you away even though he knew it needed to be done. You were such a calming influence on him after he became wolf.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “I suspected as much.” He spoke. “I thought he might turn to Avi, Avatar 41, but I guess that is not the case.”

Dynina shook her head. “Oh no.” She commented. “Avi, as you call him now, he knew about all we talked of.” She smiled faintly. “I came to determine it was actually very comforting knowing that he was around. I am glad you discovered him *staaniketo*.”

“Why doesn’t Avi remember any of this *Staanian*?” Martin asked.

“Sumar told me he was going to delete these memories from his databanks to protect the knowledge that he had sent us away and to where. I can only assume that he did this since you know nothing.”

Martin shook his head. “He never said a word.”

“Avatar 41 would have told you all of this Martin, if those files were in his memory, but I digress away from your grandfather.” She looked at Martin. “He told me that he could feel them Martin.”

“The Scourge?” Martin asked leaning closer.

Dynina shook her head. “Not those vile monsters... no.” She told him. “He felt the High Coven. The Vampires. He knew that they were coming to Lycavore.” She said. “I believe it was because of some sort of link that he maintained with Xaxon his twin. He could feel what Xaxon was doing where he was, corrupting those he was near. He could not do anything to stop it but he knew the time would come when they would come for us because of Sumar and the others.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “That stands to reason.” He said softly. “The sick bastard wanted his body back and that was on CS41.”

Dynina nodded her head in agreement. “But Sumar could sense the darkness within him even then. What he had done to his Praetorian Mage was horrific to say the least, but the deaths he was responsible for... they are incalculable.”

“You will get no argument from us on that.” Martin spoke evenly. “I have seen some of Grandfather Sumar’s memories. They were only bits and pieces, but they were terrifying to see even on a good day.” Martin looked at her intently. “Thankfully, we will not have to deal with him ever again.”

Dynina looked at him oddly. “You have destroyed his Etheric essence?”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Andro, Murano and the rest of my children.” He told her. “Xaxon will never hurt anyone again. Unfortunately, we still have to deal with his actions through the millennia. That will take time. Andro and Narice have started it, they did something I would never have been able to do and it will continue, but it will take time.”

“You are much like him Martin.” Dynina spoke affectionately. “He never thought in the here and now, your grandfather. He was always thinking to the future.” She looked at Wayonn. “When you did not contact him back within the first century Wayonn, he knew something had gone wrong and he put the plans in motion for us. For our future.”

“What we found when we went back was terrifying.” Wayonn told her. “The Scourge were obliterating everything around them as they swept across our space. I decided not to remain but our ship was damaged as we tried to escape. We ended up in the Beta Quadrant and it took us nearly five hundred years to build a new ship. I sent my son back but by that time events had already been set in motion with the birth of Resumar.”

Dynina nodded her head. “Yes they were.”

“It was a painful decision, but I chose not to return to Lycavore and alter the balance of things.” Wayonn said.

Dynina shook her head quickly. “It would not have mattered regardless.” She told him. “And you may have fallen with Sumar that day if you had returned.”

“How Dynina?” Wayonn asked softly.

“Ten thousand Pralors. Ten thousand Darastrixi. And ten thousand Lycavorians.” Nicha spoke now. “All chosen secretly, all chosen by those Sumar had spoken to before he was lost to us *Fera*, Before Sumar and Wayonn ever left on the mission that brought them to your people.”

“Please don’t call me that.” Martin told her with an embarrassed shake of his head.

Nicha shook her own head. “Do not ask this of me *Revik rie Arvy*.” She told him. “Do not ask this of any of us. You are the reason we came here to begin with. And it is you alone who we will follow.”

“Me?” Martin asked with wide eyes.

“It is what Sumar asked of me.” Nicha told him.

“And it is what Sumar told me that Dadrien asked of us, of the Darastrixi.” Kenroe spoke now.

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. “Dadrien?” He asked shocked. “How could... I just found out about Dadrien from my sons. How could you...”

“He knew things.” Kenroe spoke. “Things that only Dadrien would have known about our people and our history..”

Dynina nodded her head now. “He told me of you Martin.” She said with a smile as she continued. “He told me that you would come, your grandfather did. A descendant of blood; his blood, Sateia’s blood, of my blood. A descendant with an unbreakable will, filled with justice and passion and a heart so pure that it would blind one to look into its center. He told me that you would not know who you were for many thousands of years, but that you would feel the call within your blood. He told me that you would never know your father, for he would fall in battle defending us before you were ever born, but that you would speak with him often for advice once he was gone.”

Martin stared at her incredulously. “How do you... how do you know that?” He gasped aloud.

Dynina smiled brightly. “Throughout time there have always been men who struggled against destiny in order to keep it from happening *staaniketo*, only to have it break them down to nothing. There have always been men who try to run from destiny’s hand, only to have it swallow them whole. And then there are men like Sumar, like Resumar, like your father, like my grandsons. These are men who embrace their destiny and do not show fear; and these are the ones who will change the very face of the universe forever. Your grandfather Sumar was such a man Martin. I saw that in him the day he took my beautiful Sateia as his wife and mate, and every day after that. You are such a man *staaniketo* and your son Androcles is such a man. You cannot escape this plain and simple truth no matter how much you wish it so.”

Martin looked at Wayonn and shook his head slowly. “I’ve known her for less than an hour and already she talks like you and Helen.” He said.

Wayonn grinned as he chuckled. “Perhaps now you will begin to listen to us.”

Dynina smiled as she continued. “Sumar told me that you and your children would see the Praetorians reborn into an image of something new. Something new to fight the darkness when it returned.” She leaned forward slightly in the chair she sat in. “He told me that his blood, that Sateia’s blood, my blood, it would all come forth in one of his descendants many thousands of years into the future. In that descendant he would pour all of his memories and knowledge. That he would be one of the first *Vrelvel Sargti* to ever hold this sacred title and not be born of Darastrixi blood. He told me that you and your son would hold this hallowed title of the Darastrixi people. You and your son Androcles. He knew this Martin, more than fifteen thousand years ago! You cannot deny your destiny, that descendant is you Martin Leonidas.”

Kenroe came to his feet. “Sumar spoke to me *Fera*. When he came to my world that day so long ago looking for help against the Scourge and we turned him away. He knew even then what would take place and happen. He knew that separately we had no chance against the vile creatures but together, united, we could prevail. We have believed this for millennia and to this day we have not given up hope. He told me that your sons would be the heralds to the return of the *Dahakoan*! And they would be even more powerful than their predecessors, for they alone with their soul sister, they would carry the Praetorian gene within them.” Kenroe returned to his chair. “And he knew the third *Dahakoan* would come from the Darastrixi! He could only know

these things if Dadrien was with him even then, speaking to him in a way we would never understand.” Kenroe spoke now from his chair. “Androcles and Dorian, and now Laren Ti’shara has joined them. It has come true. All of what we spoke of has come true. All Darastrixi here know this and believe.”

Nicha smiled at him as she held Dynina’s hand. “I don’t suppose you wish to hear what he spoke of to me to make me believe before he left on his mission?”

Martin held up his hand, shaking his head. “I get it.” He said with a lopsided grin.

“This is a destiny you cannot run from Martin my *staaniketo*.” Dynina said.

“I was hoping to give it the old college try though *staania*.” Martin told her seeing the look of confusion on her face and the others.

Wayonn smiled and placed his hand on Martin’s shoulder and then looked at Dynina. “How did you...?” Wayonn began to ask.

Dynina looked at Nicha with a smile. “We had been using City Ship 41 as the center of our largest settlement. I don’t know what Sumar had Avatar 41 do in order to activate a signal, but two days before The Black Day began, they arrived to take us. Nicha and dozens of Pralor and Darastrixi ships. We had rudimentary space craft by then, but I hid them while they were in orbit so that our people did not detect them.”

“You hid them?” Martin asked shocked. “How do you hide a fleet *staania*?”

Dynina smiled at him. “I am called by many names here on Lorenu, one of which is *Yowa Medwaw*.”

“Witch mother.” Martin said. “Wayonn tried to explain to me about you. How you were able to do things...”

Dynina nodded her head. “Ishma can explain it much better than I. There is a scientific description of it, well a theory really. I do not really understand it myself, I just know what I can do.” She told him. “Sumar and I had selected ten thousand men and women. Alphas and Betas both. All of them young and proud and mated. All of them were some of the most intelligent and forward thinking of our people at that time. Nicha and Kenroe oversaw the transports as they came to the surface and then our people left with them.”

“And no one noticed?” Martin asked.

Dynina shook her head. “You must remember, Sumar and I had been planning this for decades. All of those chosen were carefully relocated to one settlement over that time. I cast a memory *tryn* around the settlement when it became time for us to depart. Essentially anyone who moved through this barrier towards this settlement would forget that it was even there. If it was discovered after we left, this was quickly forgotten when the Black Day began.”

“Magic *staania*?” Martin asked her.

“You, more than anyone, you should know not to discount what you do not know or understand Martin.” Dynina told him.

“What is it?” Martin asked her.

“Ishma can explain it much better than I, as I said.” Dynina answered. “Have you ever heard the term Esotericism? Ishma says it is a human word that best describes it in layman’s terms.”

Martin’s brow furrowed somewhat. “Eso what?” He asked. “That sounds like something Red would give me to put on *aur mida* to get rid of a bad case of hemorrhoids.”

It was obvious then to Martin and Wayonn that everyone present in the room spoke the ancient Lycavorian language because all of them burst into hearty laughter that they could not control. Perhaps it was because what they had waited so long for was finally upon them, but the sense of happiness and relief that filled the room was nearly a palpable thing and both Martin and Wayonn could see it. They looked at each other with smiles as Dynina and the others roared with laughter. It took a long moment for all of them to finally get their laughter under control and Kenroe shook his head as he waved his hand.

“Oh... *Revik rie Arve*... we have; we have not laughed like that in centuries.” Kenroe spoke trying to catch his breath. “Red? This is the small Hadarian Queen Anja *Revik rie Arve*?”

Martin nodded his head. “That would be her.” He said.

“Our doctors have waited a very long time to meet her. I understand she is; they say she is the most brilliant medical mind anywhere in the known universe. And Queen Aricia, your *Anome* with the most fascinating eyes that I have ever seen. Eyes she has given to *Dahakoan* Androcles. She reminds all of us of Maha the most. So young and exquisitely exotic in her beauty.”

Martin turned his eyes on Dynina and motioned back and forth between her and him with his finger. “See... this is the very awkward part *staania*. What you all know.” He spoke evenly. “I have known Walter since I was a baby. How can you know all this and yet tell me Walter is not one of you? That he has no idea what is going on.”

“He does not Martin.” Dynina spoke now. “I swear this to you. He was never aware that I used him as a vassal. It is a form of this Esotericism that I spoke of. The closest term that I can think of that you might be familiar with is scrying.”

“Scrying?” Martin asked. “As in magical scrying?”

Dynina nodded her head. “As I told you, Walter is of Nicha’s bloodline.”

Martin nodded his head. “And how did that happen again?” Martin said.

“Walter is what you would call my great, great grandson Martin.” Nicha spoke now. “I... I married a Lycavorian within the first two years here. He is very handsome and...” Nicha stopped and smiled shyly. “He turned me and two years later I gave birth to our first child. A boy, Menoa. He in turn became mates with a Lycavorian girl many years later. Their first child was a girl. My granddaughter Jaclena. This took place over the course of perhaps a thousand years. Well, Jaclena became the mate of a Lycavorian. It was around this time that Dynina had devised a way for us to get several volunteers back into the Alpha Quadrant among our people. They were slaves to the High Coven by now, but it was a very simple plan and no vampire thought to question it when a few more slaves came back from a work detail than what left.”

“They volunteered for this?” Martin asked in disbelief.

Dynina nodded her head. “Every mated pair here volunteered for this *staaniaketo*.” She told him. “That ought to tell you how strong their faith is.”

“Jaclena and her mate met secretly with Resumar *Revik rie Arve*.” Nicha spoke. “Their first child... their only child... this was Walter.” Her voice had dropped several tones now and she looked at the floor. “He was sent to Earth with the Ten Thousand. With your father.”

Martin sat back in his chair quickly. The story of the Ten Thousand was legend among the Lycavorian people, both on Earth and Apo Prime. Many Lycavorians had recently taken to naming their new born children with a second name after a member of the Ten Thousand in some way through the years. It was where his father’s Spartan legend began. It was among the oldest and most revered legends in all Lycavorian history and had been since the inception of the Lycavorian Union. The Ten Thousand were why the Spartan mentality and way of life had found its way into the stars. “Grandfather Resumar knew this?”

Dynina nodded her head. “Yes.”

Martin looked at Nicha once more. “And your... your daughter and her mate?” Martin asked.

Nicha shook her head sadly. “They died when the rebellion began, fighting beside those they had come to call friend and family.” She spoke softly. She looked at him. “This is why you cannot ask me *not* to call you *Revik rie Arve*. They died fighting for what they believed. What we all believe. They died fighting so that you would come.”

Martin shook his head. “*Tefarie lae*.” Martin said softly.

Nicha met his eyes and shook her head with a warm smile. “There is nothing to forgive *Revik rie Arve*. We honor her memory every day, as do her eight brothers and sisters.”

Dynina watched him carefully as he sat there in silence for a long moment contemplating what Nicha had told him. He was looking at the floor and did not see the small smile and proud look on her face for he probably would not have approved. So far, he was everything she had ever dreamed he was, everything Sumar had told her he would be. Finally, he looked up at her.

“And Walter?” He asked finally.

“As with most of the Spartan women who our fetuses were implanted into, the virus in our blood changed them during their pregnancies.” Dynina spoke. “And with this came Etheric ability. The children absorbed their mother’s memories and they in turn absorbed the memories of their new babies. It was one of the main reasons Spartan women were almost as feared as their men.” Dynina explained. “Walter’s Spartan mother turned her husband, the man you know as Panos. They then swore to Walter when he was only six months old that they would honor his true mother and father and their sacrifice, and keep the secret. And this they did, from that day forward.”

Martin nodded his head for he knew this to be true personally. "That they have." He said softly. "That they have." He met her eyes. "So Panos and Hestia knew all along?"

"They knew what they were. Just as your father did. Just as all the Ten Thousand knew." Dynina told him. "And they accepted it without doubt. They just did not know the entire story. Nor did your Praetorian Mage Helen. On the journey here, Nicha and I became inseparable." Dynina continued. "She had lost a sister to the Scourge and I had lost a sister to disease many years before. This bond between us grew as the days and years passed and it was because of this bond that I could reach across the etheric realm and scryed Walter. Because he was of her blood I could follow his trace etheric essence to where he was. This allowed me to see and hear with his eyes and ears. All that he did. All that he saw. This is how we discovered your father had fallen." Dynina said softly. "This is also how we knew that you and your mother yet lived."

"How often did... how often did you do this?" Martin asked her.

Dynina shook her head. "Not very often at first. It was not a skill that I often used. It was very taxing for me."

"Dynina, it almost killed you the first few times!" Nicha exclaimed.

Dynina shrugged her shoulders. "Through the years I was able to teach myself several techniques that allowed the scrying to become second nature to me. It became much easier and I was able to remain with him for longer periods of time. Sometimes even weeks."

Martin shook his head and lifted his hand. He leaned forward once more and looked at Dynina. "And this is how you found out about me? About Aricia and Anja? Dysea. All of them?"

Dynina nodded her head. "Walter had no idea Martin." She told him once again.

"When was the last time you...?"

"Whenever Nicha felt a spike in his emotions." Dynina answered. "My scrying allowed her to be able to detect his essence within the etheric realm. When she felt his emotions spike I would scrye him. When I found him, I would decide how long to stay. Sometimes it was only a few minutes, other times it was days or weeks."

"You could stay connected to him that long?" Martin asked in awe.

"Each time I did it, it became easier." Dynina replied. "I have not scryed him since the attack in Sparta when your *tenna* Deia was injured. I have not needed to. As you grew and learned what you were, I began to feel you within me. As you know with our people, those of the same blood can feel passionate emotions even across great distances."

Martin nodded his head. "Yes."

"We have sensor probes seeded throughout the Echo quadrant because of those Pralors on Artaaya and their colonies, as well as the Lycavorians from the Coalition and Ventori." Dynina told him. "That is where you are now isn't it?"

Martin nodded his head. "You know of the Tasmor and Kintaur then?"

Dynina nodded her head. "We made frequent trips into the Echo quadrant in the last ten thousand years. We have curtailed that in the last few centuries because of those despicable Svorag monsters. We were able to avoid them for the most part and then several of our research teams on different planets were attacked and taken by those foul beasts."

Martin shifted in his seat. "Taken?"

Dynina nodded her head. "Yes." She told him sadly. "We were never able to recover them."

"How many *staania*?" Martin asked.

"We lost almost a thousand before the decision was made to stop sending teams to the different sites." Dynina answered.

"Any Pralor females that were turned by Alphas?" Martin asked.

Dynina looked at him oddly now. "Yes, of course. While Maha and Kadeer were the only pairing of Lycavorian and Darastrixi, there were hundreds and hundreds among the Pralors and our people. Just like on Lycavore. Why?"

Martin nodded his head. "I think we came across one of them when we first discovered the Godzilla looking mother..." Martin stopped himself before he finished the sentence and even under his tan they could see him flush in embarrassment. "One of them, Anja determined she was a turned Pralor female. One turned by an Alpha."

Dynina's eyes grew slightly wider. "She was alive?" She gasped.

Martin shook his head. "She was one of them *staania*. There was no helping her then." He told her softly. "I'm sorry."

Dynina nodded her head. "It is not your fault *staaniketo*." She said. "We do not know where they came from. We never wanted to capture one for we do not have proper containment facilities here on Lorenu. At least not those built to contain disease."

"We know where they came from." Martin told her. "And when I see that measly little *ronnus* again I'm going to squeeze his brains out through his ears and then feed him to his own creations."

"What... are you saying someone created these monsters?" Dynina asked.

Martin nodded his head. "A fat little *ronnus* named Lorendo. He is a Pralor."

"A Pralor!?" Nicha gasped in disbelief. "A Pralor created those vile monsters?! Did they not learn from the mistakes of the past? From Xaxon's deeds!?"

Martin shook his head. "It would seem that at least some of them have not." He told her. "*Staania*... these other Lycavorians you mentioned? The ones Andro has encountered that were chasing Perlae? They have never run across Delnash and the other Pralors out here have they?"

Dynina shook her head quickly. "No." She told him. "That we are certain of. They do not have interstellar engine capability or Jump Drive engines *staaniketo*." He saw Dynina pause. "It seems that may have changed as well now. Before it would have taken them decades to cross the whole of the quadrant and get to where the Pralor people are now. And we would have discovered them long before this happened due to all of the probes we have out there. We would have stopped them."

Martin canted his head to the side a little. "Your tone suggests you do not care for these Lycavorians *staania*." He said. "Why is that?"

"Perlae told you some of it, yes?"

Martin nodded his head. "She told me that some Alpha was feeling his oats and decided he was going to get frisky and try to make you his mate. I'm guessing that did not work out too well for him." Martin saw Nicha and several others in the room with her smile at his choice of words.

"We were among them for several months Martin." Dynina spoke. "At first they were open and friendly. They still adhered to many of the old customs of our people that Sumar and Sateia began to dispose of, as distasteful as they were. The mating practices and such. You must understand they were taken from Lycavore long before Sumar came to us. The people are quite normal, friendly even, but we soon began to see through all of this veneer. One large pack had claimed sovereignty over all others and it was that pack that ruled absolutely."

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Martin spoke softly.

Dynina nodded her head. "Indeed." She agreed. "I was able to read some of their history and this is how it has been since the dawn of their civilization. Or at least the one created when the Pralors left them there on a Seed Mission. It is accepted and even encouraged among their people and they are all very loyal."

"So what happened?" Martin asked.

"The fool King tried to force himself upon me!" Dynina exclaimed. "I waited for the right moment and then I bit one of his *nor* off."

Martin and Wayonn could not contain the look of astonishment on their faces when she admitted this so openly and it was Martin who could not contain his laughter now. "You... you bit one of his *nor* off *staania*!" He gasped.

"Yes!" Dynina spoke indignantly. "I was not offering myself to him, nor did I give the hint of being available. He simply decided to take."

"I bet he did not appreciate that." Martin spoke with laughter and he shook his head from side to side. "Man that hurts just thinking about it."

Dynina could not help but smile at his words now. "No, he did not."

"What happened next?" Wayonn asked thoroughly enthralled with this story.

"I told him his grasp at power and our technology would deprive them of everything we could offer them and I knocked him unconscious and then sent word to all of our people to get off the planet." Dynina said.

"Andro says they called Perlae and the others criminals." Martin spoke.

Dynina nodded her head. "They consider us criminals because we facilitated in helping several hundred of their people in leaving with us."

“You took their people!?” Wayonn gasped.

“No! Nothing like that.” Dynina retorted. “Only those who wished to go. I believe there were only a few hundred. They wanted to come with us and after thinking about it, I said yes.”

“So you made an enemy of this King.” Martin said.

“And they have been a thorn in our side for centuries.” She said with a nod. “They are always trying to discover ways to capture us, but this time, this sensor network that they have built...? It is very... different. They have never dedicated so much effort into catching us. Nor have they ever been out this far away from their home system in such numbers.”

“Well... it seems like they developed Jump technology?” Martin asked.

Dynina turned and looked at the two other individuals at the end of the table. “Orman?” She asked.

“I suppose it is possible.” The man answered. “Their engines designs were basic at best when we last ran across them a century ago.”

Martin nodded his head. “A lot can happen in a century, especially if you have a society dedicated to the whole as you think these Lycavorians are.”

Dynina nodded her head. “It is, yes.” She told. “All that they do is directed by the government for the government. The people are broken into the old castes of our people, the packs broken up across their homeworld and different planets. There are differences between the packs just as there were on Lycavore but for the most part they resolve them peacefully. The different species that they have conquered have been blended into their society but thought of as no more than second class citizens.”

“Yeah.” Martin spoke. “I’ve seen this type of government before. They implode upon themselves eventually, but if they have developed Jump Technology it makes them more of an issue.”

“If they have engineered their own engines, they would be the most rudimentary of Jump capable engines. It would only reduce their travel time *Revik rie Arve*. Days not weeks. Weeks not months. Months not years.” Orman spoke. “Not like our engines at all.”

“And to them that is probably a big deal.” Martin said. “And ships are only secondary if their troops are well trained and led. Well... as long as they steer clear of me, I will steer clear of them.”

“Osrod Aspion is King now. The son of the former King. He is a very powerful Alpha *staaniaketo*.” Dynina warned. “As are all those Alphas with him. Even the Betas are stronger than most. He is a better leader than his father and he holds the respect, if not the fear of the people, but he is a brute who only wishes more power.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yeah... well I got a few powerful Alphas too.” Martin said with a wide smile. “I have too many issues right now with these Svorag to be concerned with these Lycavorians unless they get in my way *staania*. I’m trying to clean out Ventori because the Tasmor are bringing our people home and then there is this god awful big ship full of these Godzilla looking monsters that is headed right for the largest Pralor colony. I don’t need to deal with a branch of our people with an ego problem right now.”

“They will report to Osrod what Androcles let them see.” Nicha spoke now. “This will be too much for him to ignore. He will come out in greater numbers.”

Martin nodded his head in agreement. “Yes, and hopefully, if they are smart enough to get the hint, they’ll take Andro’s warning to heart.” Martin looked at Dynina in the transmission once more. “*Staania* I will send a ship for you. I need the coordinates in order to jump directly to you.”

“Martin we have... you must come here.” Dynina told him quickly. “We have so much to show you. We have developed new technology and there is something that you need to see. Something that has been left for you.”

“Left for me?” Martin asked.

Dynina nodded her head. “Sumar had been to this planet before Martin. He left a message for those who would come here. There is a sealed chamber, an entire facility really. It is totally underground and our sensor scans show it is enormous. It is sealed however, and his message stated that only you and the *Dahakoan* can open it. Only you would know how.”

Martin shook his head. “I can’t right now.” He told her. “I have too much on my plate to leave here even for a day to try and figure out a puzzle that grandfather left for me. I was never very good at them to begin with. We don’t have much time before things here pop and I need to make sure the situation on Ventori is stable enough before I leave.”

“You do not wish to see what we have developed over the years?” Orman asked now very surprised.

“My people are more important to me than technology sir.” Martin answered without hesitation and he didn’t notice the smiles of approval that swept through the room so very far away. “I assume that you have ships capable of reaching me here then?”

Dynina nodded her head. “The vessels we came here on and a few we have built while here, yes.” She answered. “Nothing even remotely like what you have however. We never really had need for them”

“Can you come to me?” Martin asked. “I have someone that you need to meet here.”

Dynina moved closer to the transmission now staring at him intently. “Who?”

“It’s better if you see for yourself.” He told her. “Is it safe for you to travel here?”

Dynina turned to look at Kenroe. She saw him nod his head. “We have one cruiser.” He spoke. He looked at Martin in the transmission. “It is the largest ship we have built. The rest are too small to travel alone if confronted with a group of COLS ships. And they always travel in packs.”

“A warship?” Martin asked.

“Yes.”

Martin nodded his head. “I will have...”

Martin turned his head when the door to the CIC burst open and Danny came barreling in at a dead run.

“Marty! We got big problems! The Godzilla looking motherfuckers are springing out of hidey holes all over the place! Hundreds of them! Thousands of them!”

“What?” Martin gasped in shock as he stood up.

“They been hiding from us this whole time!” Danny rasped quickly. “A patrol found a tunnel four clicks north of Jarlori! They were checking it out and must have triggered some alert or something cause the next thing we knew they were pouring out of every orifice for ten clicks all around!”

“Fuck!” Martin hissed. “Pull everyone back now Danny! Get them back here now!” Martin turned to the transmission. “*Staania* I must go! We have an issue that has come up!”

“An issue!” Dynina almost screamed. “Those monsters are all around you!”

All of them saw Martin almost smile. “Then we’ll get to know them real personal like.” He said.

“Martin we...” Dynina began to speak but Wayonn cut the communication before her words left her mouth and the room returned to normal.

“Wayonn... get the defensive line up!” Martin snarled as he snatched up his P190 A5 from the table. “And make sure Jezima and Meral are secured in one of the *STRIKERs*. If this goes to shit they are to get them off the surface no questions asked!”

Wayonn nodded as he took the A5 that Danny handed to him. “I will see to it.” He spoke.

“Shit!” Martin cursed as he grabbed Danny’s arm. “We did not need this now *fervon*.”

Danny looked at him. “Ya think!”

LORENU LORENU CITY ADMINISTRATION CENTER COUNCIL MEETING HALL

Martin nodded his head in the transmission. “*I will have...*”

They saw Martin turn his head when the door to the CIC burst open and the huge ebony skinned Alpha came barreling in at a dead run.

“*Marty! We got big problems! The Godzilla looking motherfuckers are springing out of hidey holes all over the place! Hundreds of them! Thousands of them!*”

“*What?*” Martin gasped in shock.

“*They been hiding from us this whole time!*” The man rasped quickly. “*A patrol found a tunnel four clicks north of Jarlori! They were checking it out and must have triggered some alert or something cause the next thing we knew they were pouring out of every orifice for ten clicks all around!*”

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“An issue!” Dynina almost screamed. “Those monsters are all around you!”

All of them saw Martin almost smile. “*Then we’ll get to know them real personal like.*” He said.

“Martin we...” Dynina began to speak but the communication was cut before her words left her mouth and the room they were in returned to normal.

“What happen?” Dynina exclaimed looking around.

“They cut the communication!” Kenroe answered as he typed on the panel on the table in front of him.

“Dynina?” Nicha asked.

“The Svorag were there!” Dynina answered softly. “In far more numbers than they first thought.” She looked at Nicha and Kenroe. “I can feel it within him.”

“Dynina, I can have our ship loaded and stocked within the hour!” Kenroe spoke. “We have room for a full Legion of our Security troops. We can be there in less than a day!”

“And if Osrod has ships waiting for us out there?” Orman asked the question. “With all of you on the same ship... it could be a target he cannot ignore.”

“Let him come!” Kenroe barked. “I will blow them from the stars if they impede us in any way!”

Dynina looked at him. They had waited so long, endured so much. They could not wait any longer. “Do it!” She told him with a determined set to her jaw.

ECHO QUADRANT COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES CLAIMED SPACE CAPITAL PLANET JETANIA

Drinda.

Capital of the Coalition of Lycavorian States.

A sprawling city of nearly fifteen million situated on east coast of the largest continent on the planet. The deep blue ocean waters spread out for nearly three hundred miles in either direction along the coast and across the massive harbor, water going vessels moving in and out of the harbor easily. The city was massive, with towering columns of steel and glass stretching across the landscape but still pocked by areas of green where there were large parks and delicate fountains. Several large bridges connected the two halves of the huge city which was divided by a fresh water river a mile wide that emptied into the ocean. Drinda was considered the crown jewel of the Coalition, all of its most modern and advanced technologies incorporated into the city in some manner. To those in the Union who would see it in the future, it reminded them of pictures they had seen of the major cities on Earth just before the Great Fire.

Two towering mountains rose majestically on the horizon at the western edge of the city. At the base of one of those mountains resided the opulent palace of the Coalition King and his family. Fully twenty square miles in size, it was a miniature city all on its own. At the base of the second mountain stood the military headquarters of the entire Coalition. A monstrous ten story building a quarter mile wide and half a mile long. The heart of the Coalition military and its command structure.

At the moment, the main Communications Center for the Coalition was locked down and in use. The five thousand, six-hundred-year old King of the Coalition sat listening to the man on the main monitor with an impassive face.

King Osrod Aspion stood six foot four inches tall and nearly two hundred and fifty pounds of rock hard muscle and bone. While not as physically sculpted as the Spartans he had never met, he was still a very imposing and impressive man in physical stature. His skin was deeply tanned and weathered, but his light green eyes were bright and alert. His dark brown hair was cut short all around his head except for the back, where a single ponytail resided. His beard and mustache were full and reasonably well groomed though not neat.

“...Unlike anything I have ever seen Milord.” Gomar finished speaking after giving his report. “Whatever kind of energy surge it was, it took down the entire sensor network in under a minute. Each array will have to be manually inspected and then repaired.”

“Gomar, it took us six months to lay that network.” Osrod spoke now.

“Depending on what we find Milord; it will probably take that long to fix them as well.” Gomar spoke. “If we are lucky, it will just be a matter of replacing circuit boards and power cells. Given the strength of the pulse the arrays detected before they went offline, I don’t like what I think we will find.”

“So we will not know if they enter the Echo Quadrant.” Osrod asked.

Gomar shook his head. “Not until we repair the arrays sire.”

Osrod turned to a figure standing to his right along the wall. “I want engineers and ships moving to each of the arrays by the end of the day.”

The man nodded and bowed his head. “As you order Milord.” He spoke before turning and moving out of the room.

“How did they do this?” Osrod asked turning back to Gomar and Nasso.

“We don’t know that it was these new Lycavorians Milord. It could have been the *Yowa*’s people.” Gomar suggested.

Nasso shook his head. “Not so soon after our encounter with these new Lycavorians.” He said. “I do not believe in coincidences.”

“Neither do I.” Osrod echoed. “How many ships again?” Osrod asked.

“Our sensors registered three hundred and forty-nine separate contacts Milord.” Gomar answered him. “We were unable to effectively scan any of the ships because they appeared and jump away so quickly. Their cloaking technology is far superior to anything that we have. We did not see them until they were all around us.”

“You are certain they were not part of the Tri-Alliance?” Osrod asked.

Gomar shook his head. “No, Milord.” He replied. “After further reviewing our sensor logs, I determined that the power signatures between these ships and Tri-Alliance ships that we have scanned is very different, though both are based on some sort of Quantum Matter power source.”

“A Quantum Matter power source. If only that old *upaee* had listened to my father back then and done what he wanted, we would have that technology now.” Osrod spoke softly. “Imagine what we could do with such a power source.”

“They were definitely warships Milord.” Nasso spoke now. “We thought... I thought the largest one was a transport of some kind... Gomar was able to detect at least half a million life forms aboard. Not all of them Lycavorian. It only changed after I told that fool boy we were going to board his ship.”

“And he claimed they were from something called the Lycavorian Union?” Osrod asked.

Nasso nodded his head. “Yes, sire.”

Osrod looked at him in the transmission as it crackled, wavered and then cleared once more. “Nasso, we have been together for many centuries and you were at my side when I took my father’s place as King. You have earned the right to call me by name old friend.”

Nasso bowed his head briefly. “I do not wish to overstep Osrod.” He said.

Osrod waved his hand dismissively. “That is not something you could do my friend.” He told him. “He referred to himself as Crown Prince?”

Nasso nodded his head. “He said his father was King of this Union.”

Osrod was quiet for a moment. “The Tri-Alliance does not have that many ships.” He spoke softly. “We have only ever seen seven or eight at most and it is always the same ones for we have tracked them before.” Osrod came to his feet. “*Carians*... what I could do with a fleet of ships such as this.”

“The smaller ships match our Heavy Cruisers in size Osrod. The larger ones were over three and four thousand meters long. The command ship was over twenty-one thousand meters. It was massive.” Nasso spoke. “A ship that size would strike fear into our foes.”

“Yes, it would.” Osrod looked at him. “And they detected the other cloaked ships?” He asked.

Nasso nodded his head. “We have yet to determine how.” He replied. “They were running in full Combat mode. No unnecessary emissions”

“This suggests that their sensor technology is far superior to ours Milord.” Gomar added. “Only the Tri-Alliance has ever been able to detect our cloaked ships.”

“Do we have any idea where they jumped to?” Osrod asked.

Nasso shook his head. “We were not able to track their engine signatures.” He told him. “They left none.”

“How is that possible Gomar?” Osrod asked.

“Quantum Power matrixes would not leave any outward traces that could be tracked Milord. Theoretically anyway.”

“Theoretically?” Osrod asked.

“Milord, we have only just engineered our own Jump capable engines. And that was only after three hundred years of experimenting and failure.” Gomar spoke evenly. “To even begin to understand Quantum Power matrixes is beyond what we can do. Our scientists and engineers are dedicated to making the engines we have just begun building better and more efficient. It is all theoretical to us. At least right now.”

“He said he was going to join with his father.” Osrod spoke now. “That means there are others out here. Perhaps with other ships like those you saw. Where?” He spoke moving to the large star chart that took up one part of the wall. “Are there any habitable planets within range of your location?”

“I had Gomar check our star charts before contacting you Osrod.” Nasso answered. “There is nothing within reach of us.”

“But what about them?” Osrod asked thoughtfully as he gazed at the chart. “If they have these magical engines as you say, how far out could that extend their operational range?” He looked at Gomar. “Theoretically speaking.”

Gomar shrugged his shoulders after a moment. “To be honest Milord I do not know. If I had to guess, I would answer that there is nothing outside the limit of their range given how little we know of Quantum Power Matrixes. Theoretically there is no limit to the power they can generate but without being able to inspect their engines it’s the best I can come up with.”

Osrod reached up and ran his fingers over the star chart slowly, his eyes gazing at the many different planets that were on the expansive virtual chart. “We have only just begun to extend our reach with our new engines, going to places that our probes have already been. And if I am not mistaken, most of those sectors were devoid of habitable planets.”

“That is correct Milord.” Gomar told him.

Osrod tapped the chart over the small, bluish planet. “This is closest to your location right now. Ventori.” He said softly. “Why does that name sound familiar?”

“That is the planet that your grandfather discovered Milord.” Nasso spoke. “He was in command of our very first long range space craft. It took them a hundred and forty years to make their way into that area of this quadrant. The crew traveled in sleep pods back then. He discovered our people on this planet when they awoke from Cryo Sleep. A large number of Alphas were among them.”

“Ah yes...” Osrod spoke. “I remember now.” He brought his hands together behind his back and was silent for another moment. “He took the Alphas off this planet and brought them back here. By the time they arrived, many of those Alphas had become the mates of the men on board. As King, he granted them citizenship and they became part of our society here.”

“Yes, Milord.” Gomar said.

Osrod turned to look at him. “Then those Beta wolves that were left behind could still be there?”

Gomar looked at Nasso and then back to him. “They would be without the guidance of Alphas Milord. I don’t see how they could survive, but I guess anything is possible.”

“Indeed.” Osrod spoke. “However, we thought we were the only Lycavorians in the universe until those in the Tri-Alliance showed up.”

“Point taken Milord.”

“Father let me take my ship there and I will find out if that is the case. If it is true, I will take one or two of these new Lycavorians and get the answers we seek.” The new voice spoke and Osrod turned to the smaller bank of monitors behind him that had the faces of two of his six sons.

Osrod had thirteen children by nine different mates so far in his lifetime. He took a new, much younger mate every few hundred years. At the moment, only four of his mates resided at the palace, the rest he had allowed to be taken by other Alphas after he grew tired of them, as was their custom.

“Juyno?” He spoke.

“I can be to this planet in less than two weeks’ time father. I will burn out my engines if needed.” The young man spoke. “I can find out what we need to know.”

Osrod looked at the face of his other son on the monitor.

Lazar Aspion looked more like his mother than he did him and this had always bothered Osrod. His skin was deeply tanned like him, but he had his mother's exotic features and not the bullish features of his other sons. Lazar was the third oldest of his sons and tenth oldest of all his children. He was incredibly defined in a very muscular fashion, again unlike his other sons or even himself for that matter. Lazar's young mother had come from a pack that resided in the northern mountains where conditions were harsher and often times deadly. The children born to this pack and others like it came from very sturdy stock and most of them made exceptional soldiers, while the females were all incredibly exotic looking and fiercely independent and produced equally exotic children. Wives and mates of the Mountain packs were prized among the Alphas in the Coalition and most never took another mate if they had a woman from the Mountain Packs.

Osrod had been taken with Lazar's mother the first time he had seen her. Her black hair, dark eyes and light walnut colored skin had drawn him in and within a month of meeting her, he had claimed her during her Coming of Age fever. This had not gone over well with her father, for he had arranged for her to marry another from a different pack within the mountains. Osrod was King however, and her father could not refuse or do anything. Lazar's mother had not been happy about it either, but during her fever, her wolf blood burned hotter than her mind could control and she had submitted to him easily enough. She had remained his mate for almost a decade, until Osrod eventually bowed to the wishes of her father and pack and he allowed her to be claimed by the Alpha she had been promised to as a child. It was that or begin a civil war with the Mountain Packs, which was something Osrod did not want to do. The Mountain Packs were fiercely loyal to each other before the Crown and they would fight as one if it came to that. Most of the Mountain Packs followed a particular code of honor that most others found old and silly, but no one ever crossed them, for insulting one was tantamount to insulting all of them.

Osrod had kept his son however, and while Lazar honored her as his mother, he did not often see her, or so Osrod thought. Lazar was the most lethal of his sons by any definition of the word. He was nearly Osrod's equal in size when in their wolf forms, and he was a deadly hand to hand combatant and a superior ship captain, which was why he had command of one of the COLS Attack Frigates and was out among the stars exploring and enforcing his father's will on their subjects. He was also the less outspoken and violent of his sons. Juyno and his other sons were mostly boisterous and brutish in how they did things, while Lazar was more introverted and methodical in his actions and never failed at any task. His brothers all hated him because they knew he was better than them, and they never failed to mock him about one thing or the other, but most especially about his bloodline.

And Osrod hated him because he reminded Osrod of his mother every time he saw him, and the embarrassment that Osrod had suffered when he had to give his mother back.

"Lazar?" He spoke. "Your thoughts?"

"Do you wish me to agree with my brother father?" Lazar asked him. "Or do you want my opinion?"

"You don't agree with your brother?" Osrod asked.

They all heard Juyno laugh. "Of course not father. Lazar does not take chances. He does not take anything."

Osrod looked at his son. He may have hated his son because of his mother, but he was also no fool and he knew a leader and tactical mind when he saw one. Lazar was such a wolf and he never failed to listen to him. "What is your opinion boy?" He asked.

"I am on the far edge of our space now father." Lazar spoke quickly. "With properly aligned jumps I can be to this planet Ventori in five days not two weeks. And I will arrive there without burning out my engines or my crew. We already know these people can see through our cloaks so another manner of contact needs to be undertaken in order for us to successfully land on the planet. If that is what you wish."

"What do you propose?" Osrod asked him.

"If they are Lycavorians father, reach out to them." Lazar said calmly. "Tell them who you are and what your claim is. If they are Lycavorians then they will bow to you without us having to fight them. A fight that, given what we know, we would lose handily."

"We have only seen their ships! And this boy who calls himself a Prince! We do not know if they can even fight!" Nasso interjected now.

Lazar nodded his head. "All true." He said. "However, would it not be better to at least try to communicate with them in order to discover who they are, where they come from and what they can do?"

Otherwise we risk doing battle with an unknown force that, from what little we have seen so far, could handle us roughly given the differences in technology alone.”

“We are Lycavorian!” Nasso spat. “We bow to no one!”

“And we are also supposed to be smarter than our prey.” Lazar spoke calmly to his father. “The decision is yours father, but I recommend caution before action. They are an unknown and the unknown should be, at the very least, respected if not feared. At least until we discover their weaknesses.”

“Typical.” Juyno snarled. “You have never been one to seek glory Lazar. That is why you will never be anything more than you are now.”

Lazar nodded his head. “Perhaps because I am happy doing what I am doing brother. At least then I do not have to listen to you rant and bluster about things you have never done in order to impress the females.”

Juyno was about to respond angrily but their father interceded. “Enough!” Osrod spoke sternly looking at both of his sons. “In this circumstance, I believe Lazar is correct however.”

“Father I can...!” Juyno began to protest.

“No!” Osrod hissed. He looked at the image of his son. “Lazar... we will proceed with your plan. Make contact with these Lycavorians. Find out what you can and then report back to me. We will make decisions based on your information son. Be thorough in every way and leave nothing out.”

Lazar Aspion bowed his head. “As you order father.”

Osrod waited until the face of his son vanished from the monitor and then he turned to Juyno and Nasso. “Both of you return here to Jetania, best possible speed and do not spare your engines. I wish to discuss this with the entire Military Tribunal. If we can convince or force these new Lycavorians to give us their technology, I want to be prepared to implement our plans.”

“And if they do not?” Nasso asked.

“Then I will kill this so-called King and force them to follow me.” Osrod spoke. “That is our way.”

“My brother will not like that father?” Juyno spoke with contempt in his voice.

“What your brother likes or dislikes is of no concern to me.” Osrod said. “He will do what is ordered of him or I will have him killed, just as I had his mother and her *ronnus* mate killed a hundred years ago when she defied my orders.”

COLS FAST ATTACK FRIGATE *MOON RUNNER*

Three hundred and sixty-seven years old, Lazar Aspion leaned back in his chair as the monitor went black and he looked at his First Officer across the small table in his very frugal quarters. COLS Fast Attack Frigates were not known for their comforts, but they were also the most modern and advanced ships in the COLS fleet except for their Heavy Cruisers.

The *MOON RUNNER* had a crew of a hundred and sixty-seven men and thirty-three women and had been his ship for the last decade. All but twenty-seven of the crew were made up of Alphas and Betas wolves from the Mountain Packs, though Lazar knew he had spies of his father among those twenty-seven. This did not matter to him, for he was very meticulous in his actions and what he said with those he did not trust. The young man across from him he did trust with his life. They had grown up together, gone through their training together, and seen battle together.

Lazar looked at him. “Well?” He asked.

Rhaos Kyer met his eyes and leaned back in the only other chair in the quarters. “Leave it to Nasso to try and poke a hornet’s nest when he has no protection.”

Lazar chuckled and rose to his full height of six foot three and two hundred and twenty-four pounds. His black hair was cut very close to his head, with the single ponytail at the back of his head signifying royalty. He had a meticulously trimmed beard and mustache and cunning dark brown eyes. His schooling had been the finest anywhere and he held an advanced degree in Astro Physics and engine design. He was a superior fighter and had never been beaten in single combat. He was one of the largest Alpha wolves among his people, as most

of the Mountain Packs were, standing just over two and a half feet tall at the shoulder and almost two hundred and eighty pounds of muscle bone and teeth.

“Luckily for us, Nasso carries what brains he has pitifully little as it may be, in his *nor*; which is why he has no children yet and probably never will.” Lazar said as he moved to the small counter and poured two mugs of strong coffee as Rhaos laughed softly himself. He turned and gave one to Rhaos while he sipped his own. “What do you make of this?”

Rhaos sat back in the chair. “You know what Gargat says...” He spoke just after sipping the coffee.

Lazar nodded his head as he returned to his chair. “It is foolish to believe that we are the only Lycavorians in the universe, and even more foolish to think we are better than them.”

Rhaos nodded his head. “A wise Alpha is one who is open and willing to do everything that could improve the pack, but also smart enough to know how to approach each factor and know when to use their brains and not their teeth.”

“My grandfather’s arrogance and position as King thought that meant he could take what was not offered to him. That mentality cost him one of his *nor* and eventually killed him. Those within the Tri-Alliance could have been great allies and friends, not to mention a great influx of males and female wolves to improve us as a whole.” Lazar said evenly. “My father has this same mentality but even worse. As do my brothers.”

Rhaos nodded his head. “Our superiority to others in this Quadrant of space have made them full of themselves.”

“We have not met all of the species in this quadrant of space Rhaos.” Lazar corrected him. “And I doubt that every species we come across will just bow to our will.”

“I’ve always wondered how you came across classified Intelligence reports that your father has not released.” Rhaos said with a smile. “They did make for some very interesting reading however.”

Lazar grinned. “These Tasmor for instance are a female dominated society who are equal to us in technological terms. And they do not like to be pushed around according to what little Intelligence we have on them.”

Rhaos nodded his head. Lazar shared every Intelligence report with him regardless of the security level, even those he was not allowed to see because of his rank. He and Lazar had spent many hours in these quarters going over the classified reports that his father had not released to the military tribunal. No one knew why he was keeping them private, but both of them were of the mind that it wasn’t for good reasons.

“The Kintaur are nothing more than brutes, which should be easy enough to deal with when we do eventually meet up with them.” He looked at Lazar. “Twenty-two thousand meters long Lazar? And Nasso told this boy Prince that he wanted to board his ship? What an *igord!*”

“*Jainn.*” Lazar agreed. He looked at him. “Begin plotting the course for the jumps Rhaos. I want to be to this planet Ventori in three days not five.”

“You didn’t tell your father where we really are?” Rhaos said with a smile.

“Telling him we are further out than any of our ships have ever been is not really the most intelligent thing to do.” Lazar said with a grin. “Let him think I am being a good little wolf and obeying his every order.”

“He will find out from his spies on our ship.” Rhaos said. “Eventually.”

“I’m not worried about that.” Lazar said shaking his head. “I have always stretched his instructions and he knows this. He thinks I am predictable and I must act in this manner to appease his sense of vanity.”

Rhaos rose to his feet. “Have you spoken to your mother recently?”

Lazar shook his head. “No, but I am going to send an encrypted burst to her before we make our first jump and tell her what we know. Knowledge is power *fervon.*”

Rhaos nodded his head. “That it is. I will begin jump preparations.”

Lazar looked at him as he stood up now. “Rhaos?” He waited until Rhaos had faced him. “Have Laon keep an eye on my father’s spies.”

“You suspect something?” Rhaos asked softly.

Lazar shook his head. “No, not really, but Taique is a brute and he may try something stupid in order to gain my father’s favor.”

“And if he does?” Rhaos asked.

Lazar met his eyes. “Then I’m going to ventilate his carcass out the airlock.” He replied harshly. “He is still a member of this crew and I will not abide disobedience.”

Rhaos nodded his head. "I will let Laon know." He said. "Tell your mother I said hello."
Lazar smiled and nodded his head. "I will."

SPARTA'S WRATH
TEN HOURS FROM ARRIVAL ON VENTORI
MAIN GALLEY, DECK FIFTEEN

Emylea sat at the end of the table silently picking at the food on her plate, unable to shake herself out of the depression that she was in. She had seen Mari shortly after arriving, even attempting to go to her once, but the spectacularly handsome Lycavorian had spirited her away with the others before she could react. Emylea's heart was very heavy, for she realized now that she was in love with Mari and there was no denying it. Seeing Mari clinging to the young man's arm, no matter how delicious looking he was to her, made Emylea's heart sink in despair. She glanced over at the large table and saw Namiri sitting with Prince Androcles' wives and mates and laughing with them over something. Probably about how Prince Androcles had made the Tasmor Quorum look foolish. Androcles was also at the table and engaged in a conversation with his mothers and brother Denali. Emylea was beginning to regret she ever came on this trip. She should have known when her mother told her Mari had taken a husband that nothing could ever be like it was between them. She would have been better off remaining on Ventori and helping King Leonidas and others with the refugees that were returning even now. Queen Anja sat with Perlyea and Colonel Aduna at the other end of the table with her daughter Eliani and two others who were in the medical field and her sisters were conversing back and forth between themselves. She was about to turn to where her mother sat beside her speaking with Anthylea in soft whispers but froze when she heard the voice.

"Emylea?" The soft, sweet female voice from behind her caused Emylea to sit up straight and she felt a flood of emotions rush through her as she turned her head and saw Mari standing behind her.

"Mari!" Emylea gasped as she bolted to her feet.

Many things had changed about Mari since becoming a wolf and Deion's wife and mate. She found her confidence in everything had grown enormously. She was no longer afraid to speak her mind, nor express her emotions. The core of a Lycavorian was their emotions and they did not hesitate to express these emotions and Mari had embraced this mindset most of all. Emylea Daret had easily garnered the fiercest emotions Mari had experienced before meeting Deion. She was exquisitely beautiful and just as adventurous as Mari was. They had more in common than either of them had ever imagined and this had led to them becoming so very close over the course of a few short months. Deion's words to her only a few short days ago had allowed her to admit that she loved Emylea Daret in a way that almost equaled her love for Deion. They were kindred spirits and Mari wanted to share with Emylea the love she had found with Deion. Share it with her in the most intimate of ways because Mari knew that Emylea Daret wanted so much more from her life than what she had right now. Mari sniffed the air ever so gently and detected Emylea's flowery Calla scent and it made tingles course through her nerves.

Mari didn't hesitate and she stepped forward, not caring who saw her and she embraced Emylea tightly. Emylea was stunned for a few seconds but easily surrendered to the emotions that coursed through her. She wrapped her arms around Mari's waist and kissed her right on the lips. Her mind screamed out in happiness when Mari did not pull away, but instead met the kiss with equal vigor. It lasted for only a few seconds because of where they were and then Emylea was staring into Mari's bright eyes with a huge smile. She could feel the emotion in Mari during their brief kiss and it was exactly like it was when they had been together. Her heart was beginning to soar at this revelation.

"I have missed you so." Mari gasped in delight when she too realized that Emylea's feelings for her did not appear to have changed. She stepped back slightly taking Emylea's hands in her own. "I have missed you so much."

Emylea fought back the tears in her eyes and she squeezed Mari's hands tighter. "I have missed you as well."

Mari beamed and she leaned close to Emylea's ear. "I found him Emi." Mari whispered so that only she could hear her words and using the nickname that she had given Emylea when they were together.

Emylea drew back quickly and looked at her with wide eyes. She knew instantly what Mari spoke of for they had talked about it enough when they were laying in each other's arms. They spoke of a man that could love both of them breathlessly but who would not be jealous of the love they had for each other. A man who was confident and intelligent enough to accept this special thing they had found with each other and not try to come between them. A man who could love them both with equal fervor and passion and make them love him just as ardently back.

"You... you are serious?" Emylea gasped in a whisper as well now.

Mari nodded her head with a smile and bit her lower lip shyly. "Oh yes."

"I thought... mother told me you had found a husband and I thought..." Emylea couldn't believe she was hearing this.

Mari glanced back to where Deion sat beside Nara, smiling and talking with his twin and their other siblings. His beautiful scent was burned in to her mind and soul and filled her being. She turned back to Emylea. "He is beautiful isn't he?" Mari whispered once more.

"Mari... I..." Emylea stammered.

"Do you still wish to have what we talked about all those months ago Emi?" Mari asked.

Emylea looked at her intently. "You know I do." She spoke.

Mari squeezed her hands tightly. "Then come with me and see for yourself." She said. "Because I want that too."

"Mari he is..." Emylea stammered softly. "He is your husband."

Mari leaned close to her once more and brought her lips to her ear. "And he will be yours one day as well if that is what you wish. And believe me when I tell you Emylea Daret, you will wish for no other in your lifetime. You will need no other in your lifetime. He will fill your senses and make your mind scream out in delight always."

"But..." Emylea almost couldn't process what Mari was telling her.

Mari drew back and looked at her with a worried expression. "If you cannot... I will understand if..."

"No!" Emylea declared instantly gripping her hands even tighter and pressing back up against her even more firmly this time. "You... you love him Mari? Truly love him?"

Mari nodded her head with a blissful smile. "More and more with each passing day." She replied. "And I want you to share in that too, because I love you as well. Deion knows this. It was he who convinced me to not dismiss these feelings I have for you Emylea."

"My mother." Emylea said. "The Quorum? They will..."

"Reach for the unknown without fear Emylea Daret." Mari told her with that loving smile she always had when they were together. "You will not regret it."

Emylea Daret glanced over to where Deion Leonidas sat and then back to Mari. It was then that the future of the Tasmor people once more altered forever and she nodded her head confidently. She was going to reach beyond what her people thought her station to be and grasp onto something that she truly wanted more than anything else.

"Yes." She gasped happily.

Mari smiled in happiness and began to pull her towards the table where Deion sat while Saydia Daret turned and watched from her seat. Saydia was no fool and had known from the outset what her daughter's feelings for Mari had been. Saydia smiled to herself and leaned into the comforting body of her own blessed love Anthylea with a smile.

Yes, indeed. The future was set now and there was nothing she or the Tasmor Quorum could do to stop it even if she wanted to. Which she did not.

Once more Saydia thought that their future was looking so very bright.

Aricia, Anja and For'mya were very nearly overwhelmed as they sat at the table and just soaked up the emotion and love of having so many of their children together at once. It had been a very long time since so

many of them were in one room with them and the three Queens of the Union relished in the peace that this brought to them. Nara and Deion had very nearly completed their accelerated Agoge training now, Andro assigning four Agoge instructors to *SPARTA'S WRATH* just for this purpose. Retta and Calyb were halfway through their own accelerated Agoge and all of them had been overjoyed that Byron had chosen to attend the Elear Musical Academy. They also could not get over how fast they seemed to have grown though Anja knew it was their wolf blood.

Lycavorian blood always made children look older than they actually were, and with the evolution of the species over the past three thousand years, most children across the Union were showing signs of this. Whether they were half Lycavorian or Pureblood by birth, the ability of the parents to pass on memories etherically was changing them. It seemed that the species as a whole was beginning to take on the more feral nature of their kind when it came to aging. The more time they spent as wolves when they were children advanced the aging process enough that even teenagers appeared to be in their early to mid-twenties and were maturing that much faster. Lycavorian females and males were becoming mated at much earlier points in their life which provided a solid foundation for the future. Lycavorians mated for life, as did many of the different species within the Union, and this provided a strong connection to family. While there were instances of a mated pair ending their union after a time for different reasons, it was not as common as one would expect it to be, for far more Lycavorians within the Union had embraced their wolf nature since Martin had returned to the Union.

Looking around them at their children, they noticed that virtually nothing had changed in their time apart from them. Denali was still the jokester among them, Lisisa and now Arduri always seemed to be slapping him for saying something silly. Eliani had calmed and matured in many ways since Jomann had claimed her and they had become *Anomes*. Though she was still her wise cracking self the recent addition of Brendi Faith into the equation had made both of them complete. They were very protective of Brendi and though Jomann had recently turned her at Brendi's request, she was still a young wolf and not wise to the ways of the wolf. That would transform in time they knew.

Deion and Nara were unchanged in many ways, though Deion had begun to open up more because of Mari in recent weeks. Though Mari herself was very recently turned, she was very powerful within the etheric realm because of her parents and this would only make it easier for her to adjust. Retta and Calyb were full of energy, ready and willing to throw themselves into the flow of events with their siblings. Anja, Aricia and For'mya noticed that Androcles was holding them back only slightly in their training and involving them simply because they did not have the experience. Being around their siblings was changing that quickly however and soon they would be thrown in to the fire just as all the Leonidas children were. This did not frighten the Queens as much as one would expect because all of them knew that their father and siblings would make sure they were ready for whatever situation came up.

They had promised each other and Martin that they would not try and direct the lives of their children and that they should find their own way in life. This was why none of them were shocked when Zarah had embraced her love for Lucia without question and thrown all that she was into their relationship. The Queens of the Union had been both the dearest of friends and also passionate lovers for the better part of three decades. They had accepted this as part of who they were and they did not shy from this knowledge. It also made them very open in regards to relationships and that is why Aricia did not blink when Nara knelt down next to her mother and asked her the question.

“Mother?” Nara asked in a soft whisper. “Who is that?”

Aricia turned her head and looked into her daughter's azure colored eyes. Androcles and Nara had her eyes while Deion and Denali had their father's eyes. Aricia discretely followed where Nara was looking and she felt her heart jump a little when she saw that Nara was looking directly at where Jacina sat. She was sitting with Recia at the closest table to theirs. Aricia felt her heart flutter just a bit, enough so that Anja and For'mya both felt it however.

[Aricia?] Anja questioned her first. [What is it?]

Aricia turned her head slightly and looked at Anja and For'mya. *[Remember I told you that I felt Jacina would be part of our lives going into the future. Martin even sensed this.]*

For'mya nodded her head. *[Yes.]*

[*I believe I know how.*] Aricia spoke while looking at Jacina. She turned back to Nara. “We rescued her on Onterom. Her name is Jacina.” Aricia answered Nara’s question. “She and Recia both. They helped us to figure out many things about the Svorag.”

Nara gazed at Jacina from where she knelt beside her mother. “She is... she is beautiful *medwaw*.” Nara said softly.

Aricia knew of Nara’s physical desires and tastes, their daughters never held anything back from any of their mothers and she reached down and covered Nara’s hand with her own. The tone of Nara’s voice alone was all Aricia needed to hear to be honest. Nara’s voice held a combination of awe and desire in it that Aricia had not heard from her daughter in any of her other relationships, however brief they had been. Nara looked up into her face.

Aricia nodded her head. “Yes she is.” Aricia told her. “She has also been through quite a bit in her young life *fenneenum*. Far more than she should have had to experience and she has come out stronger for it.”

“She is Pralor.” Nara spoke softly.

Aricia nodded her head. “Yes.”

“She was... she was abused by these Svorag, wasn’t she?” Nara asked.

Aricia blinked in surprise. “How do you know that?” She asked.

Nara shook her head. “I don’t know.” She answered. “I just do.” Nara turned her head back to look at Jacina. “Just as I know we will be together.”

“Be certain Nara.” Aricia spoke softly.

“I am certain mother.” Nara told her. “Every butterfly emerges from their cocoon mother, and I am going to help Jacina emerge from hers. And she will be mine.”

Aricia watched as Nara rose to her feet and started to move toward where Jacina sat. She turned her head and saw Androcles looking at her across the table with a knowing gaze. Aricia’s own azure colored eyes grew slightly wider.

[*You knew?*] She gasped.

[*I suspected.*] Andro told her with a smile. [*Nara’s scent spiked when she first saw her in the training gym. And it was not a simple attraction spike either mother. Father told me of what you felt when it came to her mother. That she was different somehow and would be part of our family.*]

[*Your father is usually the one who knows these things keto.*] She told him.

Andro chuckled. [*You and my other mothers give yourselves far less credit than you deserve mother. Father is not the only one who can sense things. It is you and my mothers who will see more of this in the future.*]

Aricia looked at him oddly. [*What do you mean?*]

Andro shrugged from where he sat beside Sadi and Carisia. [*We shall see.*] He told her. [*We shall see.*]

VENTORI

Martin gazed out the back of the ramp of the *STRIKER* with wide eyes. The port city of Moncu was swarmed with what appeared to be thousands of Svorag, and more seemed to be coming from at least three different entry points beneath the city.

Martin lowered the macrobinos he was using. “*Nubou lae*.” He gasped.

Danny nodded his head. “That’s about what I said.” He echoed rising his voice to be heard above the whipping wind from the lowered ramp.

“Where else Dan?” Martin asked him.

Danny motioned him back into the interior of the ship as it began to lift away and they went to the command platform table on board every *STRIKER* Mark II. Danny began to stab down on the immediate map of the area around Jarlori. “So far, Manda has a positive ID on nine different locations so far! All within a hundred clicks of Jarlori!”

“Nine!” Martin almost yelled. “I thought we did a thorough sensor scan of the planet looking for subterranean tunnels!”

Danny nodded his head. “A large part of the coastal regions are comprised of the same material that we found near Moncu. It fucks with our scans and gives back false readings. All nine of these locations are in the coastal regions Marty. We just don’t have the people to scout out that far! We left most of our ground forces on Manne.”

“How many *fervon*?” Martin asked him.

Danny pointed to three different locations on the chart. “Manda has identified three major ones along the eastern coast. Roughly a hundred and sixty kilometers from Moncu. She is already spooling up airstrikes to hit them. They are appearing almost as fast as we find them!”

Martin looked at him from across the chart table. “They knew Dan.” He spoke softly. “Somehow they found out we were thin here.”

Danny nodded his head. “That is what I figured as well. Our buddy Lorendo?”

Martin shook his head. “I don’t know how.” He spoke. “Even if he figured out we were here, how did he know we were short people?”

“You’re also suggesting that he has direct control over at least some of these fuckers.” Danny spoke.

“Red always said that was a possibility.” Martin spoke dropping his eyes to the chart once more. “They aren’t moving for Discovery.” Martin spoke looking at the table and the real time feed from his ships in orbit. “Why?”

“That’s the worrisome part.” Danny said in agreement.

“It’s a distraction.” Martin whispered. “They are trying to get us to react. Popping up in all these locations.”

“And keeping us from finding where their main force is gathering.” Danny said. He looked at Martin. “That means there are a hell of a lot more of them than there are of us. And we haven’t found them yet.”

Martin shook his head. “They’re getting ready.” He said softly. “They’re getting ready to attack and these outlying locations are just to keep our attention focused away from Discovery. They want us to send what troops we have after all of them and leave Discovery unprotected. Then they would attack.”

Danny looked at him. “They can’t think we are that stupid.” He said. “Can they?”

Martin looked up at him. “Whoever is controlling them thinks we are.”

“Gee... that narrows it down.” Danny quipped.

“Pull all of our scout teams back to Discovery *fervon*. Use the *ARC ROYAL*’s teleporter if you have to on the teams that are further out.” Martin told him.

“We do that and we won’t have any real eyes on the ground Marty.” Danny said. “We’ll be blind if they stay in the areas where our sensors are iffy. We won’t know they are coming until they are right on top of us.”

Martin looked at him. “We won’t need them.”

“What? Why?” Danny asked with wide eyes.

Martin met his eyes. “I’m going to phone home.”

Daniel Simpson looked at him for a moment and then he grinned from ear to ear. “Oh... I like that.” He stated. “We...”

“King Leonidas!” The voice of the female *STRIKER* pilot burst into their COM implants. “Admiral Lorian Milord! She says it’s urgent!”

Martin tapped his jaw and activated his implant. “Manda go!”

“We got more problems Martin!” Miranda told him. “Long range sensors just detected a fleet of Kintaur Ships entering the sector!”

“You got to be fucking kidding me!” Danny exclaimed.

“How many Manda?” Martin asked as he looked at Dan.

“Three hundred of the fucking god awful ugly things!” Miranda answered him. “I get the scratchy, itchy feeling that we have been set up Martin.”

“Yes, I do believe we have been.” Martin agreed as he continued to look at Danny. “How soon before they get here Manda?”

“At their present speed, which is pitiful by the way, two hours nineteen minutes, tops.” Miranda answered, her voice calm and cool.

“Manda, hold all airstrikes.” Martin spoke. “Get all your birds loaded and ready to launch for ground support but hold them.”

“Why?” Miranda protested. “Martin we can take out at least some of the fugly *ronnus*! Less of them going after Discovery Base!”

Martin grinned at her words. Miranda Lorian was a spit fire that was for sure. She had no back down in her whatsoever. “They haven’t revealed their main force Manda.” Martin spoke. “All these little groups popping up now at the same time; whoever is directing them wants us to split our forces. It’s not a particularly bright scenario but it could have been effective. I’m not going do that though. I want the main body. When they show themselves, then I’ll cut your flyboys loose.”

Miranda was silent for a moment as what he said sank in. “Understood.” She spoke.

“Manda... is Steven listening?” Martin asked.

“I’m here Martin.” Steven Randall answered instantly.

“Steven... you take command of a *MENKLA* and a security team.” Martin told him with an even voice. “Contact Archer and Asa and on the surface and let them know you are coming down for Jezima and Meral. I want them off the surface of Ventori most ricki tick Steven. No doubt if this is Lorendo, then he has them listed as VIP targets.”

“I’ll be airborne in three minutes.” Steven answered.

“Steven... Archer and Asa will know this... but nothing stops you from getting them off the surface. Nothing.” Martin said.

There was a slight pause and then Steven answered. “Consider it done.”

“What about the Kintaur Martin?” Miranda asked him.

“Fuck them!” Martin barked angrily. “They want to stick their noses where they don’t belong... fine! If they are too stupid to mind their own fucking business then I’ll give their ships back to them in *nubous* pieces.”

“What are you going to do?” Miranda asked the same question Danny had asked just seconds ago. She too knew the proclivity of the King to get into dangerous situations. “Please don’t tell me you are going to go hunting.”

Martin smiled. “Nope!” He answered. “I’m going to make a call.”

There was a moment of silence until, like Danny, Miranda understood what he meant and she approved.

“Oh... that will be pretty.” She spoke. “*ARIZONA* out!”

Danny looked at him. “Can he get here in time *fervon*?”

“Well... if he doesn’t, then we are well and truly fucked.” Martin said.

Danny laughed and shook his head. “Man, there’s one thing that I have always loved about you.” Danny said. “And that is the incredibly annoying and positively innate ability you have to state the motherfucking obvious.”

Martin grinned. “That’s me.”

SPARTA'S WRATH **EIGHT HOURS FROM VENTORI** **ANDROCLES' QUARTERS**

It was times like these that Andro lived for.

As with his father and mothers, there was always talk of the Crown Prince and Crown Princess and what they did when they were alone in their quarters. The vast majority of men and women would be surprised to learn that more often than not, it was just as it was now.

All of them were on the huge, oval shaped bed in their quarters, none of them with much on in the way of clothing. Andro was naked, as he usually was since Sehri and Caliria had finally joined them. He was sitting in the center of the bed with his back to the headboard, Carisia’s tightly muscled, five foot two body resting between his legs with her back to his chest. She was naked as well except for the white panties she wore. Caliria sat between Carisia’s legs holding two mugs of coffee in a simple bra and panty set, while Carisia used a brush to run through Caliria’s lustrous black hair.

Lu'ria sat on Andro’s left, Sehri nestled between her legs, both of them wearing only panty and bra sets. Sehri’s lush, young form was definitely showing the results of her training with Carisia and Lu'ria for her figure

was much more muscular in nature and nearly matched Ne'Veha's exquisitely proportioned physique. She had a long way to go to reach the proportions that Sadi, Carisia and Lu'ria sported, but she was working hard and enjoying every bit of it. She especially enjoyed the extra attention Andro paid to exploring her body every time they were together.

Ne'Veha sat on Andro's right with Sadi stretched out beside Andro, her upper body covering Ne'Veha's lower body. Both Ne'Veha and Sadi were without clothes for they felt the most comfortable with each other when there was nothing preventing their skin from touching in every place.

Lu'ria was putting the finishing touches on the long, braided strands of Sehri's white blond hair. Each of them now sported four identical strands of braided hair that pulled back along either side of their heads and merged in a single long braid down their backs that mingled with the rest of their flowing locks. This was a tradition that they had started to not only honor Lu'ria's Drow heritage but to set themselves apart and have it be known that they were of one mind and love. They all knew Androcles loved long hair and this was another way for them to show their love for him.

"...think he noticed?" Sadi asked as she dragged her fingers down Ne'Veha's long, tanned thigh.

Andro chuckled as he took one of the mugs from Caliria's hands and took a long pull from his mother's rich coffee. "Byron?" He finally said. "I think he was too happy to see our mother to notice."

"Yes, he was." Carisia spoke. "Remember, he has not seen or talked to her for longer than any of us."

Andro nodded his head and leaned forward to nuzzle the back of her neck before pulling aside her own satin like black hair and planting a kiss on her bare shoulder. "That is also very true." He said.

"I think it is more a question of if Namiri noticed." Sehri spoke now and they all looked at her. She smiled at the attention. "What? I know my scent spiked when I first saw Andro, and it does every time I walk into a room and see him. I'm not afraid to admit that."

"None of us are *DuanGai*." Sadi said with a smile.

Andro smiled once more. "I'm flattered." He said.

Ne'Veha was the one who reached up and lightly slapped him in the back of the head. "Do not let it go to your head *Saradasaar*." She spoke with humor in her voice and all of them laughed.

Andro leaned over quickly and nuzzled Ne'Veha's four-inch-high elven ear causing her to gasp in delight before pushing him away with her hands. "No fair! Stop that!" She exclaimed as Sadi and the others laughed once more.

Andro leaned back and took another sip of coffee. "I think it is a matter of whether Namiri Daret admits to herself what she is feeling." He spoke more thoughtfully. "We don't know her well enough to make that determination."

"It won't be hard to figure out." Lu'ria spoke. "If she begins asking us of him then we will know."

"True enough." Carisia said.

Sadi looked up at Andro. "Do you think she will Andro?" She asked.

Andro shook his head. "I don't know." He answered. "My mothers and father told me she is independent and head strong. That she rebels against traditional Tasmor rules."

Caliria turned slightly. "Andro, if she does show interest in Bryon, we must help her."

"*Inamarno*?" Andro asked.

"*Inamarno* is right." Sadi said. "We all know that what we are doing is only for show." She told them. "If it does turn out that she is interested in Bryon as her scent tells us, and that attraction is mutual, we must make it so that they can pursue it."

"I know what it is like to be the rebellious one and not be able to express who I really am because of silly rules and laws." Caliria said. "We must insure that does not happen to Namiri."

Lu'ria, Sehri and Ne'Veha were the first ones to notice it as Andro began to speak. "If there is anything..."

"Andro!" Ne'Veha gasped aloud. "The... your tattoos!"

"What?" Andro asked as he turned his head trying to see.

"They are... *Saradasaar* they are... glowing!" Lu'ria exclaimed as Sehri reached out to touch his back.

"What?" Andro asked as he chuckled thinking they were playing a joke on him. "You guys are..."

Andro's eyes went wide when he felt the Etheric pulse reach for him. It wasn't something from a Mark II booster and it was focused directly and solely on him. His whole body stiffened when his father's voice erupted into his mind.

[Andro aur Keto!] His father's voice was clear and loud in his head and it caused his body to stiffen more and Sadi and the others to rise up off the bed.

"Andro!" Sadi almost yelled.

[Pen tiab forn ineen niob aur keto!] His father's voice thundered in his head and Andro could feel and almost see what his father was seeing. (I need you here now my son!)

Andro sprang off the bed as if shot from a gun, the mug of coffee falling from his hands as Carisia and Caliria rolled to the sides of his body. He tapped his jaw COM implant and began to bark orders as Sadi and the others scrambled for their clothes.

"Armen! Go to Condition One! Condition One! Inform Sa'sur and plot an immediate LSD combat jump directly into Ventori planetary space for the entire Task Force! Advise all ground forces to prep for immediate deployment and sustained action!" He was almost shouting as he reached for his pants.

-What is happening Androcles- Armen asked.

"The Svorag Keto monsters are forming for an attack on my father right now!" Androcles hissed. "He won't be able to hold them!"

Armen's answer was instantaneous. **-Understood. Calculating Precision Combat Quantum Jump into the Ventori planetary system-** He answered without hesitation. **-I will inform Admiral Sa'sur. We will jump in eleven minutes seventeen seconds-**

SPARTA'S WRATH **PORT LAUNCH BAY ONE**

Aricia, For'mya and Anja burst into the Launch Bay at a dead run, Perlyea, Saydia and several members of the Tasmor Quorum directly on their heels. Intermittent Amber colored lights were blinking in all of the corridors of the ship and the steady, buzzing alarm sounded every twenty seconds. The initial alarms had frightened the three Queens so much it had woken them from a sound sleep wrapped in each other's embraces and caused them to practically leap from the bed. They quickly dressed and exited their quarters, For'mya leading them with her P1 as they navigated the corridors heading for where they knew Androcles would be. They met up with Perlyea, Saydia and the other Tasmor just after arriving on the deck and found them wandering about trying to discover what was happening. The crew of *SPARTA'S WRATH* was moving around them without stopping to answer the questions that they were asking. Anja and Aricia quickly pulled the women along with them.

Upon entering Landing Bay One they began to realize what was happening as Saydia and the others stood there in shock and watched what was taking place with awe in their eyes. Ships were being loaded as far back as their eyes could see, and Landing Bay One was utterly massive in scope. Not one person that they could see was standing still. Crates of munitions and supplies were being hurriedly carried onto what could only be transport ships of some sort while groups of heavily armed troops could be seen boarding these same ships. All of them looked up when the mechanical female voice came over the internal ship intercom.

"ATTENTION! ATTENTION! SPARTA'S WRATH IS AT CONDITION ONE! SPARTA'S WRATH IS AT CONDITION ONE! COMBAT JUMP IN SIX MINUTES AND THIRTY-THREE SECONDS! ALL CREW TEAMS MAN COMBAT STATIONS! ALL CREW TEAMS MAN COMBAT STATIONS! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!"

Aricia found Andro standing at the base of the ramp leading up into the odd looking ship and she pulled them along towards him. He was speaking with Jomann, Deion, Murano and Denali, all of them in various stages of pulling on their Mark IV ArmorPly as they were looking at the P9 that Andro was holding. Aricia led them directly over to where they stood and caught the last portion of Andro's order.

"...Massing along the coastal plain here." Andro drew his finger down the map on the P9. "Father says they are swarming out of their holes by the thousands. They were hiding in areas that their sensors could not detect them. He has pulled everyone back to Forward Base Discovery and is digging in with what troops he and Uncle Daniel have."

"How many men does he have Andro?" Murano asked as he pulled on his chest piece.

Andro shook his head. "Not anywhere near enough. He left most of his detachment and General Juturi's Kavalian troops on Manne."

"Andro?" Aricia hissed as she grabbed his arm. "What is going on?"

Androcles turned to meet her eyes having smelled her and his other mothers entering the Landing Bay almost immediately. "Apparently the number of Svorag on Ventori was far greater than you first thought mother." He told her seeing her eyes go wide at this statement. "They appear to be massing for an attack."

"Your father?" Anja gasped in fear as she pressed up against Aricia.

"He pulsed me etherically." Andro told them. "We are jumping to him now."

"*Keto*... Androcles, you are going to jump right into the planetary system aren't you?" For'mya asked with wide eyes.

Andro nodded his head. "Yes mother." He answered.

"Can you... a ship this size?" For'mya asked.

"Armen assures me we have more than enough engine power to conduct such a jump mother." He told her.

"Andro you need to..." Aricia began to speak to tell him what he needed to do but he held up his hand cutting off her words. Aricia's, like Anja's and For'mya's first thoughts, were for their beloved husband and mate.

"This is my command mother and I know what I am doing." He told her almost sternly. "I'm not leaving you out either." He pointed toward a *STRIKER* Mark II a slight distance away. "That is Eli's Medical Command *STRIKER*. She is taking her FMT directly into Discovery Base with a reinforced detachment from the *Durcunusaan* Division. It seems that stania Jezima and Tenna Meral have taken a page from stania Gorgo's Field Manual. They told him where to put his idea of getting them off the surface, and in very colorful terms too." (Field Medical Team)

"How many Svorag Androcles?" For'mya asked now.

Andro shook his head. "I don't know *medwaw*, but if father has pushed the panic button then it cannot be good."

"Discovery Base is full of Tasmor and Ventori civilians." Anja said. "Not to mention our non-combat personnel. Andro if the Svorag are able to..."

Andro shook his head once more. "They will not mother." He told her. "Now go."

"Andro?" Aricia protested.

"Go *medwaw*! Let me do my job." He told her. "And take the Tasmor with you."

"It isn't safe for them there *keto*!" For'mya protested.

Androcles smiled then and all of them had seen that particular smile before. It was a sign that Andro was about to unleash "a *whole lot of hurt on someone*" as Eliani had once described it to them.

"These Svorag monsters will not breach Discovery Base mother." Andro told them once more. "Now go meet with Eliani. Her ship will be first off after the *PREMONITION*. The others will follow."

"Others?" Anja asked him.

"Trust me." Andro said before turning back to Murano and Jomann. "We must insure..."

Anja and For'mya pulled on Aricia's arms and began leading her and the Tasmor over to the *STRIKER*.

"Have faith in our son Aricia." For'mya spoke. "He will not allow harm to come to his father, or innocents."

Aricia nodded as she grabbed Saydia's hand and kept moving. "I know." She answered. "It just frightens me at the lengths he will go in order to insure this." She looked at Saydia and Anthylea as they kept up with her. "Saydia, we can leave you here or take you with us. We..."

"This is now our fight as well." Saydia spoke without hesitation. "Give us weapons Aricia. We will fight with you."

Andro turned once more and watched for a brief time as his three mothers made their way across the landing bay and then he turned back to Murano and the others. He knew his mothers would fight their way through the gates of hell in order to reach his father and protect what innocents there were in Discovery Base. He did not fear for them in the least.

"Father has not committed to any action. He believes that they were set up by someone among the Tasmor however." Andro finished.

Murano looked at him. "Not Lorendo?" He asked.

Andro shook his head. "You know he believes that Lorendo has lost control over at least a large portion of these creatures?"

Murano nodded his head. "Yes. I read the brief from your mother Anja."

"Why would he think that *fervon*? That these Tasmor are to blame?" Deion asked.

"Only the Tasmor knew how thin he is on Ventori in the way of troops." Andro told them. "And he knows none of our people or those survivors from Ventori sent the Kintaur a welcoming message. He believes it is one of the Tasmor from Perlyea's group that somehow got a message off from one of their ships in orbit. A three hundred ship Kintaur Fleet has now entered the system. You can rest assured their intent is not to establish friendly relations after what father did to them. Convenient don't you think?"

"Convenient *aur mida!*" Deion spat angrily. The penchant for hating traitors ran deep within their family. Betrayal had cost them the life of their grandfather.

Andro tapped the P9. "Sa'sur?"

"We are ready Andro." Sa'sur's voice echoed immediately. "I've already touched base with Manda on secure COMS. She has cleared the immediate area around Ventori. Once we jump in, I will split off with my force while Armen takes *SPARTA'S WRATH*, *KINDRED SOUL* and his full Wing right in. Miranda and the *ARIZONA* will close ranks behind us and provide support while we deal with these Kintaur."

"Sa'sur, handle these Kintaur roughly my friend." Andro told her. "We do not need them coming back at a later time."

"How roughly Andro?" Sa'sur asked.

"By my order Sa'sur, if they retreat, let them go. If they choose to fight, then bury them." Andro told her. "They threaten my family and our people. I will not be as patient as my father."

"Understood. See you on the other side. *SCIMITAR* is clear."

Andro looked again at Murano, Jomann and his brothers. "Father isn't reacting to these outlying groups because he believes the main force of Svorag has not revealed themselves yet. He fears their main force is hidden closer to Discovery Base than they thought. If that is the case, then it will be up to us to clear an area for Josie to drop her Brigade." Andro looked at Murano. "Are you up for this Murano?"

Murano fastened his Mark IV ArmorPly tightly and grinned. "You just try and keep me away."

Andro nodded with a smile. "Sadi will be dropping us at fifty meters."

Murano nodded his head. "I followed your grandfather out of a transport at a hundred and twenty-five meters Androcles." Murano said proudly. "I limped for a month, but I lived. Fifty meters will be a walk in the park as your father says."

Andro and the others laughed at this. Andro folded the P9 down and set it on the ramp and began to pull up and fasten the rest of his armor. "Lisisa and Jeth will come in right after we execute with Dutkne, Nara and Mayla. Dorian and Laren will break to the flanks with Ladur and Ryner while we go straight up the middle with Elynth, Ardace and Jeru. The area should be clear enough after the dust settles for Josie to drop right behind us. There is no holding back with these creatures. Everything is full out now." Andro watched them all nod their heads in agreement. "Cowen and Sherice will take position on the wall with *Tenna* Julie for overwatch with long eyes. Their targets will be any of the big *ronnus* that father and *Tenne* Daniel fought in the underground bunker. Kalis, Ridor and Daio will roll up one flank with *Durcunusaan* Heavy Weapons Company Talon while father's team rolls up the other with the bulk of their remaining force not on the wall. Father says there is only

one way they can come at him because the terrain is too rough even for these monsters. They are fast and strong, but they lack ingenuity.”

“Once we engage, do not let these monsters get close to you.” Murano spoke now. “They are limber and will look to shove their tongues down your throat to subdue you.”

“Not in this lifetime.” Deion hissed.

“Damn straight.” Denali echoed his younger brother.

Andro looked at Murano. “Tobia will be going in with Eliani and my mothers. Mari will be with them.”

Murano nodded in thanks. “Good.”

“She wasn’t really happy about that.” Deion said with a small smile.

Murano nodded his head. “I have no doubt, but she is not even remotely trained as we are. I know... I accept that she is a Praetorian, but until she is capable of defending herself properly, Tobia and I are not willing to risk her safety.”

Andro looked at his brother. “Deo?” He asked.

Deion nodded his head. “I agree.” He said. “She didn’t like that but...”

Jomann pat him on the shoulder. “Body worship works very well to get you out of trouble Deo.” He said with a smile.

Deion grinned. “I’m already planning on that.” He said looking at Murano.

Murano held up his hands. “Don’t look at me Deion Leonidas. I find myself having to do the same thing, and I have many more years to make up for.”

“Sheva, Onera, Carisia and Lu'ria will link up with Zarah and Lucia on the ground.” Andro told them as he was smiling with the rest of them. “Radem will be with them and they will be hitting targets of opportunity all up and down the line with their vampire speed. Keep your eyes open for them just in case.”

“And your father?” Jomann asked.

Andro met the eyes of his *Durcunusaan* Captain and now perhaps his closest friend. Moneus and he had been inseparable as they were growing, but now Moneus had another calling that he was following. He would go where Carina went no matter where that may be.

“Well... I imagine he and *Tenne* Daniel will join us on the field once we clear it. You know how they hate to be left out of the party.” He answered.

***“ATTENTION SPARTA’S WRATH! ATTENTION SPARTA’S WRATH! WE ARE AT
CONDITION ONE! COMBAT JUMP IN THREE MINUTES AND COUNTING! ALL CREW TEAMS
MAN COMBAT STATIONS AND PREPARE TO JUMP! ALL CREW TEAMS MAN COMBAT STATIONS
AND PREPARE TO JUMP! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!”***

VENTORI FORWARD BASE DISCOVERY

It may have appeared to be utter chaos to the uninitiated, but it was far from it.

Lycavorian Spartans, truly any member of the Union military, were renowned and feared for their ability to instantly adapt to almost any situation. There was no panic, no shouting or screaming, just hundreds of men and women from all species going about their duties with a single minded purpose. This mindset had carried over to the Union Military from the Spartan way of life that existed in the time of Martin’s father. It had been taken and refined to a virtual art by the military in nearly all aspects of life. Cooks, engineers, medics, it didn’t matter, all of them were locking items down and preparing for battle. Discovery Base had become huge in the few weeks that they had been here, and there were defensive positions set up all over the base. These men and women picked up their weapons and gear, set aside their cooking utensils and electronics gear and they prepared to do battle. All of them knew what kind of enemy they faced and no one was about to succumb to the monsters getting ready to attack.

The few dozen Tasmor troops that had been in the base were quickly outfitted with Union uniforms and weapons and willingly took up positions with Union personnel. All of them were experienced combat veterans

of battles with the Kintaur and they all knew kindred souls when they saw them. The Union troops cared not that they were female warriors for they had many of them in their own ranks, and quite a few that commanded other troops. The interaction between the Tasmor and Union troops had been growing by the day and both sides welcomed it with eagerness. The trust had begun to set in and neither side was about to let that go to waste.

While it may have seemed like a random act, Discovery Base was situated in on a plateau in a shallow valley on the end of the large lake. To the west side was a ridge that rose gradually several hundred feet into the air and was covered with sharp rock outcroppings that limited fast paced movement to a crawl. To increase the defensive nature of this natural terrain even more, Union troops had been mining the entire ridge with anti-personnel mines as well as natural traps that would kill or maim any who stumbled into it. Martin Leonidas was not afraid to use every trick he had ever learned in order to safeguard his people and the entire ridgeline was a death trap. To enhance this, nine heavy weapons positions were now manned and ready along the entire wall facing the ridge. Any who were not killed by explosive mines or the razor like rock outcroppings would be mowed down by the turrets set up. The east side of the base where the landing platforms had been set up was protected in part by the natural lake and the volcanic like field that extended out to where the opposite ridgeline began to rise into the sky. The ground was spaced with huge gaps and ridges of volcanic crevices that were impassable by any sort of ground troops even if they managed to breach the defensive wall that encircled the entire base. Only three heavy weapons covered this area of the perimeter because there was no natural ground cover and if you fell into one of the crevices, ranging in depth from a few feet to over two hundred feet, you were most certainly dead.

The main entrance into Discovery Base was fortified by two sections of thick, portable wall now sunk into the ground, effectively creating a double barrier with steel grating across the top allowing for gun positions and personnel to move along. Spread out before the entrance was nearly a quarter mile of open terrain spotted with massive trees that had long been torn asunder by the elements. The catwalk along the top of the wall allowed for an unimpeded view into the city of Jorlari some mile and a half away in the distance. A shorter, reinforced wall stood twenty meters out from the actual gates into Discovery Base, and behind this wall now waited all of the troops that Martin commanded. Six hundred Spartan and Tasmor troops were stacked along this defensive wall, all of them scouring the area in front of them and waiting.

Martin stood beside Danny right at the reinforced Dragon Armor gates and lowered the macrobinos from his eyes. His COM implant was alive with reports coming in from the three scout teams that he had allowed to remain outside of the base defensive perimeter in order to get proper human intelligence. Two *STRIKER ATs* were slowly circling the city at five thousand feet waiting for something to happen, while three more hovered out of sight on the other side of the lake waiting to conduct ground strikes.

Danny touched his ear implant and nodded his head. "Affirmative. Maintain altitude and continue sweep." He spoke. He turned his head and looked at Martin who met his gaze. "That was the *STRIKER* over Moncu. They report that all of the godzilla looking little fuckers have ducked back underground. Not a single one stayed on the surface. The *STRIKERS* further north are saying the same thing."

Martin nodded his head. "They figured out we aren't going to take the bait." He said softly. "And they know the entire lower portion of this continent is saturated with this fucking ore that kills our sensors and makes it so we can't track them underground."

"Someone has got eyes on us *fervon*." Danny commented.

Martin nodded his head. "Oh yeah they do." Martin looked at him. "Question is... who? And where?"

"Lorendo?" Danny asked.

Martin shook his head. "That shit bird wouldn't know the first thing about tactics. I told Andro that too." He said. "This is someone else. Someone with instincts."

Danny looked at him with wide eyes. "Are you thinking what I think you're thinking?"

Martin met his gaze. "Dynina did say that they had almost a thousand of their people taken. You tell me, if these things are retaining the memories of who they used to be, who is more likely to break Lorendo's control and start acting on their own? A Pralor, or one of us. A wolf with wolf instincts."

"Damn!" Danny cursed softly. "I was hoping you wouldn't say that."

"It's the only thing that makes sense." Martin told him. "And the more I toss the idea around the more it takes shape. It's jives why Lorendo hates us so much." Martin looked at him. "Sumar blows him off to take out a larger threat and unfortunately Lorendo's son dies as a result. He doesn't care that more lives were saved in

the process. He thinks he gets payback when he causes my grandfather's ship to crash on Lycavore. He gets even more pissed when he finally realizes what actually did happen and that he failed again. Now he is really riled up when a Lycavorian Alpha breaks his supposed control and begins to assert his own command over these creatures after he becomes one. And then I show up. Grandson to the man he believes let his son die on that planet. And to top it all off, I'm carrying the active Praetorian gene. What does that sound like to you *fervon*?"

"Sounds like a *nubous* personal problem to me." Danny quipped trying and succeeding in breaking the gloom of the situation that they were in.

Martin chuckled with him. "Yes, it does." He said. "But it also would account for why Lorendo is such a dickhead, and why he wants Jezima and Meral dead. And little old me right along with them."

"People been trying to take you out for years because of your charming personality and wit *fervon*." Danny told him. "They ain't been real successful."

Martin grinned at him. "There's always a first time."

Martin and Danny turned when Nalmos and Konlar approached them from the main gate, both of them armed and their faces set in determined expressions.

"Nalmos, I told you to get yourself and the other Justices up to my ship in orbit." Martin told the man.

Nalmos nodded his head. "Yes, you did Milord, however we will not run this time." He spoke firmly. "This time we will fight to the death in defense of our home from these monsters."

"You did that the first time Nalmos." Danny told him respectfully. "You have nothing to prove now."

"Then this time, this time it will be for vengeance for those they took from us." Nalmos stated.

Martin looked at Konlar then. "You siding with this character?" He asked.

Konlar nodded his head. "Lirana is safe on your ship sire." He answered. "The rest of us have decided that we have stood to the side for too long. We will stand and fight for our people now, as we should have done years ago."

"Edrao make it out ok?" Martin asked Konlar.

Konlar nodded once more. "He was not happy about it. These creatures have taken much from him through the years."

Martin nodded his head. "I don't doubt that." He replied. "However, he is much better suited to getting us on that station above Hador."

"Agreed." Konlar said. "He departed on your ship thirty minutes ago."

Martin nodded his head in approval as he turned back to look out over the terrain. "Good. Thoti will get him in and then we can get some answers to some questions." He said. "And maybe find out exactly where he has his main facility stashed. The Spider Drones we sent out haven't detected anything yet."

"Not all of them have run their courses." Danny ventured. "Maybe..." He snapped out with his hand and grasped Martin's arm as he became silent. "You feel that?" He asked as he looked at the ground beneath them.

Martin nodded his head. "Yes."

"It feels like... like an earthquake." Nalmos stammered.

Konlar shook his head. "That is no earthquake." He spoke as the vibration in the ground became more pronounced.

"No, it isn't." Martin agreed as he lifted his head and looked at Jorlari. "*Nubou lae!*" He gasped as he saw a huge plume of black smoke rise above the city and then the distance and unmistakable rumbling of a massive amount of explosives.

"*Saoi sibfla!*" The female voice barked out on their Com implants, obviously from the pilot of the *STRIKER* circling the city. **"*The entire center of the city just caved in! Five city blocks just fell into a huge crater! Massive detonations all over! King Leonidas do you read me!*"** The voice screamed out. **"*The entire center of the city just disappeared into the ground! Wait... son vada carians! The fucking lizard people are pouring out of the crater like insects! There must be thousands of them! King Leonidas do you read me! They are coming right at you! King Leonidas?*"**

Martin looked at Danny. "Time to get this party started *fervon*." He spoke.

Danny propped the butt of his A5 on his hip. "Good. Things were starting to get boring here."

Martin lifted his hand and tapped his jaw. "*STRIKERS* clear the airspace! Raptor Flight, you are cleared to engaged! Kill me some godzilla looking motherfuckers!"

“Raptor Flight acknowledges! We are inbound!”

“*This is insane!*” The voice echoed over their COM units. “*They are coming here to kill us! Martin we need to leave! We cannot hold them! They... they outnumber us a gazillion to one!*”

Martin grinned and looked at Danny as Kasdan’s voice filled their COMs and he tapped his jaw changing the frequency. “Kasdan, that is not a scientific accounting of their numbers.” Martin told him.

“*A scientific...*” Kasdan answered. “*This is madness! We will all die.*”

“No, we won’t.” Martin told him.

“*How can you be so sure?*” Kasdan yelled.

“I got a good feeling.” Martin spoke with a smile.

SPARTA'S WRATH

“...Should be remaining here.” Androcles told them sternly.

Perlae, Ishma and Awser looked at him and each of them smiled. “Laren is coming with you.” Perlae told him.

“Laren has already fought with Dorian and I.” Andro told them. “And she has received a clean bill of health from sister.”

“We do not need to be protected *chorray*.” Ishma spoke with a smile. “We are very much able to take care of ourselves.”

Andro nodded his head. “Of that I have no doubt.” He stated evenly. “And you mistake my intent for wanting to leave you here. It is not because I don’t think you can take care of yourselves, it is because I don’t know what you can or cannot do. You are an unknown at the moment.”

“Then we will show you what we can do.” Awser spoke.

Andro grinned and shook his head. “Just stick close to Sehri and *Inamarno*. They will be moving to link up with my *Tenna Anuk* at the main medical facility on the base. My mother and sister will meet you there.”

“And what are we supposed to do there?” Perlae asked him. “We can fight Androcles.”

Andro nodded his head once more. “Then take charge of the detachment there and insure my mothers and any wounded there are safe.”

Perlae looked surprised and this showed on her face as she gazed at him. “Truly?” She gasped.

“Until we can better understand what you and the others can do, it is best I believe, to allow you to work alone.” Andro told them.

“We won’t let you down Andro.” Perlae stated confidently.

Andro nodded his head. “I know you won’t.”

***“ATTENTION SPARTA’S WRATH! ATTENTION SPARTA’S WRATH! WE ARE AT
CONDITION ONE! COMBAT JUMP IN TEN SECONDS AND COUNTING! ALL CREW TEAMS MAN
COMBAT STATIONS AND PREPARE TO JUMP! ALL CREW TEAMS MAN COMBAT STATIONS AND
PREPARE TO JUMP! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!”***

VENTORI PLANETARY OPERATIONAL ZONE ULU ARIZONA

“...Talk to me!” Miranda barked from her command chair.

“All ships are clear of the POZ!” E’dira called out. She looked across the bridge at her lover and now Drow wife. “Miranda... can they do such a thing? Stop so suddenly?”

Miranda met her amber colored eyes and grinned at her. “Well... if they can’t, all of us will be eating an awful lot of space soup and playing bumper balls with a ship five times our size.”

E’dira shook her head with a smile of her own. “Perfect.” She muttered.

“Admiral... I am detecting a... Jesus... I’m detecting and unholy massive quantum surge field!” The main sensor operator called out.

“Confirmed!” E'dira echoed almost instantly.

“How large is massive?” Miranda asked.

The man turned to look at her. “Permission to speak freely?” He asked.

Miranda rolled her eyes. “On my bridge? Always.”

“Does, **“I don’t think we pulled back far enough”** about cover it?” He asked her.

Miranda came to her feet. “Are you serious?” She gasped. “How large is Andro’s Task Force? The brief said only about a hundred ships!”

The sensor operator shook his head. “No way Admiral!” He announced. “If what I am seeing is accurate, we’re about to have over three hundred ships drop in our lap and say hello!”

“*Nubou Lae!*” Miranda gasped. “Warn the others! Z-minus fifteen thousand meters! Full reverse on all engines! Pull back further!”

It would not have mattered in the least for Armen was too precise in his calculations. He knew exactly where Miranda’s ships were and he had adjusted for them in every way. It was a sight that not many would soon forget.

SPARTA’S WRATH

In a display of engine power that most of those witnessing had never seen before in their lifetimes, *SPARTA’S WRATH* appeared within the cone of Quantum Drive Reversion and came to an immediate and abrupt halt. The sheer size of the warship instantly dwarfed any ship in the direct area and many ship captains sitting on their bridges felt suddenly very inferior. The reaction of her shields on the atmosphere so close to the planet sent a ripple through the upper atmosphere that travelled into the lower atmosphere and shattered the day time sky with half a dozen bone vibrating claps of thunder across the landscape. Appearing directly beside her in an equally amazing feat of starship driving was the huge *WASP*-Class Assault Carrier, which appeared miniscule in comparison to the former Pralor warship. Three other ships appeared in that same instant, all of them brand new *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers, and all of them fielding the most advanced Union weapons systems based on Pralor technology. They were the hammer to *SPARTA’S WRATH*’s anvil, and between the four ships alone they carried enough firepower to decimate an entire planet in a matter of hours.

Armen was standing on the bridge the moment they reverted back to normal space and he instantly began barking orders.

-Secure from Combat Jump- He spoke, everyone detecting how his voice had changed a pitch or two. He had altered his programming in order to sound human and now that was playing out. **-*SPARTA’S WRATH* Actual to all landing bays. Execute! Execute! Execute!**- Armen turned smoothly to the side. **-Weapons Officer! All main batteries to cover the *KINDRED SOUL* on her descent! Once she has assumed overwatch position, reorient all main batteries in support of the *ARIZONA* and her Wing-**

“Weapons Aye!” The man announced.

-Tactical Officer begin launching APOC Drone Fighters from all portside launch bays- Armen ordered. **-Stand by to receive targeting information from the ground forces command-**

“Spooling up APOC Squadrons One through fifteen. Launching cycles in rotation in sixteen seconds.”

-Operations Officer pull up a full model of Ventori on the main holo chart and overlay all known positions of Union forces- Armen spoke. **-Add in marked enemy positions and lets start tracking-**

“Armen!” The voice yelled out across the bridge and he turned to face the female elven Com officer. “PREMONITION and COMMED One are away!”

Armen nodded his head quickly. –**The valley pass where King Leonidas has established Discovery Base is too small for an all out orbital bombardment. Tell all *STRIKER AT* craft to prepare for full scale Ground Support missions once Colonel Miller’s Brigade is on the ground-**

“The *SCIMTAR* and remaining Task Force ships are turning to port and outward towards the advancing Kintaur Fleet and they have gone dark!” The sensor operator announced.

–**Admiral Sa'sur will not toy with these Kintaur fools-** Armen spoke before realizing what he had said. He blinked several times before continuing on as if nothing had happened. Most of the bridge crew of *SPARTA'S WRATH* were grinning as they went about their duties and said nothing. –**Sensor arrays nine through sixteen to continue monitoring the system. Arrays one through eight bring to bear on the planet. If it moves I want to know about it-**

“Armen!” The voice barked and Armen turned to his Tactical Officer. “*KINDRED SOUL* is entering the atmosphere and boring in!”

Armen nodded. –**Very well-** He spoke. –**The fun is about to begin-**

KINDRED SOUL

The *KINDRED SOUL* was indeed boring in, and burning up the atmosphere in the process. Captain Patton clung to the arms of his command chair allowing his crew to do their jobs. All of them could just barely feel the sensation of explosive decompression bolts as the ODPs were shot from their launchers ten decks blow them and nineteen sections aft of their location.

The Tactical Officer looked up from his console. “That’s it Captain!” He shouted. “Third Brigade is away clean!”

“Malfunctions?” Patton asked.

“Negative sir! All pods burning in clean!”

Patton nodded his head. “Our turn.” He muttered to himself. “Now Kelly!” He barked out. “Turn and burn girl!”

“Aye sir!” Kelly turned back to her helm controls. “Prepare to extend ADUs! Full power to all drive units! Here we go!”

And once more the brainchild of Admiral Ben O’Connor and several other innovative Union engineers began a dedicated descent into the atmosphere of yet another planet. This time they were geared up for whatever came at them and their experiences at Solmar made them ready.

“Three! Two! One!” The Operations officer barked out. “And we are in! Extending the ADUs! Do your magic Kelly!”

Kelly did just that as she quickly maxed her engine power to the ADUs and yanked the *KINDRED SOUL* into a gut wrenching turn to starboard that a ship its size should not have been able to make, especially in the atmosphere of a planet.

“Do we have Discovery Base?” Patton shouted as his ship turned radically.

“Locked on sir!”

“Time?” Patton barked.

“One minute thirteen seconds!”

“Kelly! Drop us to one thousand meters!” Patton called out.

“Descending!” Kelly replied as her hands flew across her consoles almost faster than the eye could follow. “Everyone hold onto your lunch!”

All of them felt the *KINDRED SOUL* dip heavily towards the ground even as its engines screamed in power. The ship responded instantly to her commands as if she was the brain and her hands the instruments. Patton had never seen a more natural pilot than his helmsmen, and he silently thanked the gods out there that he had ignored the recommendations of senior officers to ignore her and pick a more experienced pilot.

“Fifty seconds!”

“Tactical?” Patton snapped. “Report!”

“Fuck me Skipper, it looks like someone dropped a smoke bomb into the middle of a nest of cockroaches!” The man answered. “The entire center of the city is gone! Five blocks have just vanished and the lizard looking bastards are pouring out!” The man reported. “Three *STRIKER ATs* from the King’s Wing just finished a second pass and they didn’t even put a dent in their numbers!”

Patton turned to look at him. “How many?”

The man shook his head. “Unable to get an accurate count! They are crawling all over themselves!”

“Then give me a guess!” Patton snapped once more.

The man looked at him. “Upwards of two hundred thousand sir! And all of them are heading right for Discovery Base!”

“Two hundred thousand!?” Patton hissed in disbelief. Patton turned his head to look at his Executive Officer. “Power all main batteries and get ready to kick the rest of them out Phillip! I don’t care how they get to the surface. Hell... blow all of the emergency hatches if they have to!” Patton came to his feet then. “Kelly! You park us right over the top of Discovery Base at a thousand meters! XO, I want a full GSB on target five seconds after Androcles and the others hit the ground!”

“Captain! That will be danger close!” The XO spoke.

Patton nodded his head. “Prince Androcles told me we would have a clear field to engage. He is going to knock them back.”

“Knock them back?” The XO gasped. “How?”

Patton shook his head. “I have no idea, but you can damn well bet if he says he is going to do something, he will!” Patton told him. “Full GSB XO! Ten second burst all batteries and then let Josie and her people take it from there. Then we go to EOT and direct Ground Support craft from the *ARIZONA* and *SPARTA’S WRATH!*”

The XO nodded his head. “Understood sir!”

“Kelly! Talk to me girl!” Patton barked out.

“Thirty-three seconds!”

“Alright people! Let’s prepare to enter this party!” Patton shouted. “Set Condition Red across the ship! We’re going in hotter than a fire brand stoker!”

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE

“*No joy! No joy!*” The pilot of the GA *STRIKER* snarled into his mic, Martin holding his finger to his ear in order to hear him clearly. “*We just blew our wad and didn’t slow them down sire! Spotters are seeing hundreds of bodies but they are just crawling over them to get out of the hole!*”

“You’ve done all you can!” Martin snapped. “Get out of there! Things are going to get real busy, real quick!”

“*Milord have the Admiral teleport you out!*” The pilot screamed. “*You can’t fight them!*”

“Negative!” Martin answered him. “Now pull your people out Major! We have help inbound!”

“Sire you...!”

“That’s an order Major!” Martin spoke. “Exfil now!” Martin looked up at the sound of engines and saw the *STRIKER* Mark II sweep in low over the landing zone but pass over the top of it into the base. He smiled when he felt the auras of Aricia, Anja and For’mya reaching for him, and then he felt Normya’s aura as well. His daughter with Dysea flared the *STRIKER* over the emergency pad by the Medical Building expertly and Martin could feel her confidence as she set it down like a feather. He could feel Tobia’s commanding etheric

resonance as well as Mari, now his son's wife and mate shining just as brilliantly as her mother and father. He also sensed the less pronounced etheric resonance of her half Immortal husband Tir'ut who was sitting beside her in the co-pilot's seat. He could feel his sons and daughters radiating within him, they were close by, but he just could not see them.

Martin turned back just as Danny and Kasdan moved up to his location.

"Martin this is insane!" Kasdan complained. "We must retreat to the ships in orbit! They are... they will overwhelm us!"

Martin grinned at him. "Persistent fuckers aren't they?" He quipped with his trademark smile.

"They will come here and they will... they will attack us and they will turn us into one of the them!"

Kasdan barked.

Martin put his hand on Kasdan's shoulder. "Kasdan take a breath my friend." He said with a smile.

"Things are going to get real interesting."

Kasdan looked at him as if he had gone mad. "You are insane!" He barked.

Danny rolled his eyes. "Kasdan, you don't know the half of it." He stated calmly.

Martin smiled and put his hand on the back of Kasdan's neck. He tilted his head upward and watched as Kasdan's eyes grew even wider. Dropping through the clear blue sky above them Kasdan could see the streaks. Hundreds of them falling through the atmosphere and leaving a blazing trail as they careened downward.

"What?"

Danny looked upwards now. "That's the cavalry."

Martin smiled and turned to the Spartans who were crouched behind the wall. "Shields!" He bellowed the order and Kasdan turned to see each and every one of them call their Shi Viska's from Flatspace. Martin looked skyward once more. "Come on son, where the hell are you?" He muttered to himself.

DISCOVERY BASE

Aricia, Anja and For'mya moved immediately inside the Medical Building to where Archer and Asa were standing outside the door into the small office. Jezima and Meral were inside and Archer looked at them sheepishly as they approached.

"They refused to leave." He told his Queens. "I wanted to force them but Meral threatened to shoot me and Jezima called for Martin. The danger is great with these monsters approaching my Queens. You should not be here either."

Aricia nodded her head and reached up to squeeze his shoulder. "We figured as much." She said. "And don't worry Archer. Our situation just got much better."

Archer glanced at Asa as Aricia moved past him and opened the door. Jezima and Meral saw who it was and nearly burst into tears.

"Aricia! Anja!" Jezima cried out as she rushed forward and embraced both of them as Meral hugged For'mya. "I told Archer I would not leave! I have only just found all of you and I will not lose my family again!"

Aricia smiled and nodded her head. "We know." She stated as she looked up and saw Tinra exit the room now as well. "Lady Tinra? This is a surprise."

Tinra looked at them. "I requested to come out here after leaving Artaaya. I did not... Aricia no one knows what is going on here!" She exclaimed. "The Svorag are coming here! Thousands of them!"

"They won't make it." For'mya spoke confidently.

"How can you say that?" Tinra gasped.

Aricia looked at Jezima and took her hand as Anja pulled Meral close to her. "Would you care to meet your grandchildren Jezima?" Anja asked her.

"What?" Jezima exclaimed. "They are... they are here?"

Anja smiled as they began to draw them towards the door, Archer and Asa following without hesitation. "Some of them will be arriving very soon. They figured it was time to come and get their father out of trouble." She told her.

For'mya chuckled as she grasped Tinra's arm and urged her to follow. "That is one way of looking at it." She said.

Thirty seconds father.

The deep, calm voice erupted in Jezima's and Meral's minds now as they were suddenly included in an etheric conversation that very few individuals would have been able to detect. Jezima squeezed Aricia's hands as they made their way towards the portable wall that had been erected around the camp.

"Aricia is that?" Jezima stammered.

Aricia nodded her head as they made their way up the short ramp which put them above the front entrance to Discovery Base. Below them they could see Martin standing with Danny and Kasdan only a hundred meters away by the shorter defensive wall. "Yes." Aricia told her as she pulled her close on the wall and Anja and For'mya squeezed Meral between them tightly.

They could see the wall of Svorag in the distance approaching quickly, the flat terrain between them and the advancing hoard providing no defense whatsoever.

"Jezima... allow us to introduce your grandchildren." Aricia spoke with a smile as yet unmatched by any Jezima had seen so far.

Martin saw it first, low on the horizon and approaching from the east over the mountains. He had never seen a ship like it before and knew instantly that it was the ship that Sadi and Ne'Veha had Ben and his miracle workers at Dreamland build for them. Martin narrowed his wolf vision and saw that the ship had a rear ramp, which was now down. His dark brown eyes grew wide then, for he felt his son reach for him and project to him what it was they were going to do. The ship came closer now, and dropped to perhaps a hundred meters off the ground.

Danny stepped up next to him, his own eyes focused on the ship now. "*Fervon?*" Martin looked at him. "Is he going to do what I think he is going to do?"

Martin glanced at the lines of advancing Svorag and then looked back to the ship as it was now upon them. He saw first one figure leap from the back of the ship as it moved across the terrain, followed quickly by six more figures.

"Holy fuck! Torma 21!" Martin hissed. He turned to the line of defenders without thinking as he grabbed Kasdan. "Brace! Brace! Brace!" He screamed out the words as loud as his vocal cords could project them, his voice carrying to all of them and then some.

He and Danny dropped to one knee right where they were, anchoring Kasdan between them and their Shi Viskas pointing towards the oncoming Svorag hoard, covering their bodies and that of Kasdan as well.

And then the world blew up.

Torma 21.

A simple name for a devastating maneuver that he and Torma had invented and perfected during their time together. It was similar in many ways to the maneuver that his grandfather had explained in the Praetorian Tomes he had left for his descendants. The difference here was that it was usually done from the back of a dragon and not from the back of a ship. Martin could feel each of his sons, Jomann, Murano and Laren. They were radiating within the etheric realm as brightly as he had ever seen any of them, pulsing with power and determination and purpose.

It started from his left, an Etheric explosion of power that blew outwards with unmatched force. It was followed in quick succession by six more identical explosions of etheric power before the first one had even begun. It was devastating power and force that smashed into the oncoming ranks of Svorag and literally pulverized anything in its way.

It was then that Panos' words to him so long ago rang clearly in his head now. The same words he had spoken to his son the day he had claimed Sadi as his wife and mate. They were not just Lycavorians and Spartans...

...They were forces of nature.

CHAPTER SIXTY

COLS FAST ATTACK FRIGATE *MOON RUNNER*

“Are you certain *keto*?” The image of the exquisitely exotic looking female gazed at Lazar from the monitor on his desk.

Lazar smiled at his mother’s question. If anything, since the attempt by his father Osrod on her life and the life of her Alpha mate all those years ago, she had become even more careful and security conscious than him in many respects. Lazar knew that his father had always hated the fact that after only ten years, he had to release his mother as his mate and give her back to her pack in order to keep the peace. Loras Athltin had been promised to another Alpha in the Ranev Mountain Pack when she came of age, a pact of honor that was held with the highest regard among the many Mountain Packs. The Athltin and Ranev packs were among the five largest of the introverted Mountain Packs and the only way for Osrod to keep a civil war against him from breaking out was to release her as his mate after only a decade. He may have been King, but even he had to follow long held traditions and culture or risk losing everything.

His mother Loras Athltin had returned to her pack and quickly became the mate of the Alpha who she had originally been promised to as a small girl. The Ranev Pack was one of the largest Mountain Packs and second in influence only to her father’s Athltin Pack. His mother had been overjoyed when the change came and Warim Ranev had taken her as his mate without doubt even though his father had taken her first. This did not matter to Warim Ranev, only that Loras was now his and would remain his for eternity. This arranged pairing had suited Loras just fine, for Warim had courted her in the time before her Coming of Age and they had gotten to know each other well. She had not been happy when Osrod had stepped in and claimed her for his own, but to save face and keep her pack safe, she had endured the decade of Osrod pawing and slobbering over her body. She had even given Osrod a son in Lazar, but Osrod had no idea where his son’s true loyalties lie.

Warim had continued the Mountain Pack’s tradition of allowing far more freedoms to female wolves than most packs in COLS after Loras had become his mate. The Mountain Pack females were treated much better as a whole and some had even risen to levels of importance that other Lycavorian females in the Coalition could only dream about. His mother Loras was such a female. He knew being the only mate to the Alpha of a Pack was what initially gave her this influence, but his mother quickly began to assert herself and make a following all her own. Warim had only encouraged her to do what she was doing and this made Loras love him even more. She had given him four strong children in the ensuing two plus centuries, three boys and a girl, and Lazar adored all of his half brothers and sisters and all of them looked up to him. Osrod was not aware of how often he talked to or even saw his mother, thinking that Lazar did not care for her in the least. He could not have been any more wrong. It was Warim who had secretly adopted Lazar more than a century ago, and it was Warim who had been more a father to him than his own, earning Lazar’s trust and loyalty to him and to the Ranev pack.

The assassination attempt on Warim and his mother a century ago had been well planned and thought out, made to look like an accident as it was, but it succeeded only in killing Warim. His mother had been seriously wounded but she survived and now the Ranev Pack leadership resided solely with his mother. Unknown to his mother, Warim had left instructions that Loras was to assume leadership should anything happen to him, and every Alpha within the pack agreed and pledged their loyalty to her when she had recovered. Since it was made to look like an accident, no retaliation could be taken against the King, and without hard evidence, no one could openly accuse him of ordering the assassination. Against the wishes of many senior pack members Loras had watched from a distance with six elder Alphas from the pack protecting her, as Osrod had gone to Warim’s Celebration Pyre acting as King of the Coalition. The Mountain Packs had to tolerate this blatant disrespect for they could not prove that Osrod had ordered the assassination, but in typical stoic Mountain Pack manner, no one spoke a word of discontent. It served his mother’s interests that Osrod thought her dead and he dealt mainly with the man who Osrod thought had assumed the role of Alpha after Warim had been killed. If only he knew how things really were and that Alpha answered only to his mother and was utterly devoted to her and the Ranev pack.

His mother had been the Alpha and Matriarch to the Ranev Pack for over eighty years now, and behind the scenes it was she who was the driving force behind the Mountain Packs continued rise and defiance of his father's rule. With her own father and the Athltin Pack solidly behind her, not to mention the eight largest Mountain Packs, his mother had held them together and seen them grow and prosper over the last eighty-seven years. Now, some thirty-four Packs from across the planet's many mountain ranges followed his mother without question. She was not someone you wanted to anger or trifle with, as she had taken out more than one Mountain Alpha who thought to usurp her role in those eighty plus years. His mother was not a very large woman, but she was definitely not one who you wanted to piss off, and when in wolf form she was nearly twice the size of most female wolves and could be devastating.

Lazar received his exotic and handsome good looks from his mother's genes and this was obvious to any who saw him. Loras had long, shiny raven blue/black hair and intelligent dark brown eyes. Like him, her skin was deeply tanned to almost a burnt umber color which only enhanced her exotic appearance. He knew that many Alphas had approached her in the years following Warim's death but she had rebuked them all. He did not know if it was because she still mourned for him or if she was waiting for something else to happen. Perhaps she just did not want to open her heart to another as she did Warim.

Lazar nodded his head in answer to her question. They had not spoken for several weeks, but this was information that he could not let slide by and advise her of when he returned to COLS space.

"I am certain *medwaw*." He replied. "Nasso may be a brute but he is no fool. And Gomar is one of the finest sensor operators and engineers that we have within the Fleet."

Loras nodded her head. "I have heard both their names in the past. Both are completely loyal to your father *keto*."

Lazar lifted his hand and waved it back and forth. "More Nasso than Gomar mother." He told her. "Gomar is dedicated to COLS as a whole, more so than directly to my father."

"And they were certain it was not the Tri-Alliance?" Loras asked him.

Lazar nodded once more. "Gomar was certain *medwaw*. We have not had any contact with the Tri-Alliance in over a decade and the sensor net we built to detect their ships has only been online for six months. We detected one of their smaller transports a few days ago and Nasso decided to pursue it. That ship led us to these new Lycavorians. All Gomar had on their sensors at first was the one massive ship they thought was a transport. It turns out that the ship was in fact a colossal warship and it was powered by what Gomar described as some form of Quantum Power Matrix." Lazar picked up the mug of strong coffee and sipped, holding back his grimace, and then he continued. "Nasso was his usual brutish self and he tried to intimidate the commander of this ship. The Commander of this ship, he referred to himself as a Crown Prince *Medwaw*. Apparently there is another Lycavorian King out there somewhere and Nasso tried to pick a fight with his son."

"More unknown Lycavorians." Loras said thoughtfully. "You have read our history *keto*. For millennia we have grown and prospered thinking we were the only Lycavorians in the universe. Now, in the space of roughly ten thousand years, twice we have come across others of our kind whose technology is far superior to our own."

"I would not give father too much credit mother." Lazar spoke.

Loras looked at him. "His methods are vile, and he only does what he does to gain more power, but you cannot deny that our people have grown and prospered under his rule. As we did under his father's rule."

"You sound like you admire him *medwaw*?" Lazar told her. "Tell me this is not true." Lazar spoke.

Loras snorted loudly in an unladylike fashion. "In order to remove his *nor* from his body when given the opportunity." She stated harshly. "But I am also not so foolish as to dismiss what he has done as King. And neither should you."

Lazar nodded his head. "You are right mother."

"What else *keto*?" She asked.

Lazar nodded. "After Nasso's threats, that is when this Crown Prince revealed their other ships. Over three hundred of them, and all of them with Stealth technology that far exceeds our own. This Crown Prince threatened to blow Nasso and his other ships into the dark ages, and told him it would take a millennium to find the pieces of his *nio mida*." He watched his mother laugh softly at this.

"I like them already." Loras said with a smile.

“The Tri-Alliance transport boarded the large ship.” Lazar told her. “This Crown Prince called the grandchildren of the *Yowa Medwaw* his family.”

Loras met his eyes. “Family?” She questioned. “Are you sure?”

Lazar nodded his head. “Yes. Why?”

“More Lycavorians?” Loras spoke softly. “With technology similar to the Tri-Alliance? They were Alphas *keto*?”

Lazar nodded his head. “Nasso was certain at least this boy Prince was an Alpha. This stands to reason because the *Yowa Medwaw* is an Alpha mother. If they are related as Nasso said. He said his name is Androcles Leonidas. An odd name for a Lycavorian mother, don’t you think?”

Loras leaned forward now her eyes growing a little wider. “Androcles you say?” Loras asked him looking at him intently.

Lazar nodded. “That is what Nasso and Gomar say he called himself, yes. Do you know this name somehow?”

Loras shook her head. “No.” She answered quickly making sure that her son did not detect her tone of voice or heightened tension. “What did your father do?” Loras asked.

“Naturally, his first thought was for what power he could acquire and expand if he gained control of these ships and other Lycavorians.” Lazar answered.

Loras shook her head. “And that will be his downfall one day.” She stated confidently.

“Well... he ordered a ship to proceed to Ventori, where he believes these Lycavorians are. I convinced my father to send me instead of Juyno.” Lazar told her.

“Ventori?” Loras spoke softly. “That is the planet that the first King Aspion went to and brought the Ranev pack from. Most of the Mountain Packs to be honest.”

Lazar leaned forward in his chair. “What are you thinking mother?”

Loras shook her head. “It doesn’t matter now.” She said. “What did your father tell you to do?”

“Make contact and report back to him.” Lazar spoke looking at her keenly. “Something else is on your mind *medwaw*. What is it?”

“Nothing that I can put a finger on right now *keto*.” She told him. “It is a feeling I have, nothing more. Like an echo that I have seen somewhere in the past. It is not relevant to what is happening now however.”

“Are you so sure?” Lazar asked looking at her on the monitor.

Loras smiled at her son. “Nothing is ever certain *keto*.” She told him. “What will you do when you arrive there?”

“Exactly what I told him I would do. We should arrive in the Ventori system in another thirty-six hours.” He told her. “We are actually much further out than my father knows. He will not expect me to report for some time and it gives me more options to consider what to do when we arrive there.”

“Why do you push him Lazar?” Loras asked her son. “His tolerance is not infinite my son.”

“He would expect it of me.” Lazar answered. “This is how I have always been and he expects me to be like this mother. If I were to act in another way, he would become suspicious of my goals.”

“It also puts you at great risk more often than not.” Loras told him. “I am your mother and I do worry for you.”

Lazar smiled at her. “*Medwaw* I am more than capable of taking care of myself.” He told her. “Though I do appreciate the sentiment mother.”

“What if these new Lycavorians are not friendly to us Lazar?” Loras asked.

Lazar shook his head. “I do not think that is the case mother. If it was, they would have insured Nasso and Gomar died when they first encountered them.”

“Be careful Lazar.” Loras told him. “Something... I feel something is happening and it will... it will sweep us aside if we are not cautious.”

Lazar nodded his head as he looked at his mother intently. She had never been so affected by her intuition before, not that he had seen anyway, and it was telling to say the least. Loras Ranev had always been very good at reading how events would take shape through the years. Whether it was by some form of instinct or special gift, it was one of the main reasons that the Alphas in the Ranev Pack and others followed her so devoutly. No one questioned her word or direction for she had the best interests of their pack as her main goal.

Lazar was not one to dismiss this from his mother when she so openly expressed herself to him in such a way. That would be very stupid..

“I will be cautious mother.” He told her.

Loras met his eyes in the transmission. “If those fool spies your father has on your ship do anything to jeopardize you my son, remove them from the equation. Quickly.” Lazar nodded his head. This was not advice his mother often gave out, but when she did advocate violence in any form, it was wise to take her at her word.

“Understood.” Lazar said. “I will try to reach you after I have made contact with these new Lycavorians mother.”

“The gods guide you my son.” Loras told him. “And return home safe, your brothers and sisters wish to see you.”

Lazar smiled at that. “Then I will make it a mission to do just that.” He told her.

“*Pen enyla forn.*” Loras told him warmly.

“And I love you mother.” He answered just as he reached out and deactivated the monitor and cut the transmission.

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES CLAIMED SPACE
CAPITAL PLANET JETANIA
NORTHERN CONTINENT
WESTERN TANTIA MOUNTAIN RANGE
RANEV PACK; MAIN SETTLEMENT OF WARIM

Loras sat back in the comfortable chair in her home as she contemplated her conversation with her son. She reached down and picked up the mug of harsh tea and sipped from it, hoping that it helped her to wake more fully than she was. She never knew when Lazar was going to contact her and it was better for his security if she did not know. This made it difficult for her and his half brothers and sister, but it was something they were now used too and accepted. For Loras this meant being ready to take a transmission from him anytime of the day or night just like right now. Thankfully their main settlement, named in honor of her late Alpha husband and mate, was still for the most part just beginning to wake up.

The Warim Settlement was perhaps the largest and most modern of all the Mountain Pack settlements spread across three continents. Warim Settlement was a strange mix of very modern amenities and cultural history that would never be lost to time. The Mountain Packs were the only Packs within the Coalition that had not fully lost touch with their past history and cultural. This was attributed to the fact that the Mountain Packs descended from those Lycavorians taken from Ventori. They were also the only Lycavorians that had actually removed many of the ancient and often times distasteful practices of the past and opened their eyes to change. The treatment of their females being first and foremost among the differences. While it was true Alpha females who were mated already could often be courted by other Alphas during their Phase, only those where both male and female chose to allow this were courted. The unions among the Mountain Pack couples most often resulted in a union for life since neither the male nor female chose to look for another mate. Even those unions that were arranged by their parents most often lasted permanently for the parents on both sides were always careful to select the best match for their daughters and sons in the way of compatibility. The same could not be said for the rest of the Coalition, for most females were taken during the high point of their Phase and they really had no choice in who took them because of the burning of their blood.

Loras had had her share of Alpha suitors since Warim had passed into the next life, but she had denied them all. Loras had been ashamed when Warim had first claimed her because she had surrendered to Osrod because of the burning of her blood. Warim had quickly shown her that while he may have been King, Osrod did not compare to him in any way. Loras had cried out for hours in delight when Warim had claimed her and she never doubted that emotion again. She had loved Warim, enough to give him four beautiful children, but Loras did not believe she had loved him as completely as she was capable. She had held back even with him. She did not know what type of Alpha male she was seeking, but she had no doubt when she discovered that male, if she ever did, she would know instantly.

Loras looked up when the door to her private office slid open and the older, but still very beautiful woman came in dressed in only a thin robe around her full figure. Loras knew her to be nearing sixty thousand years old, but she looked barely a day past fifty years of age and her figure told everyone that very thing. Rylin may have been the Elder Priestess of their Pack, but she was not without her means. The day Warim had been assassinated she had shown up to care for Loras and she had remained to this day. Loras watched as Rylin took the couch opposite her spot in her chair.

“You look as if you have questions Matriarch.” The older woman asked.

“Knowledge is power as Garget says.” Loras spoke.

Rylin nodded her head. “It certainly is...” She said. “And that old fool has been saying that very thing for millennia.”

Loras laughed softly. “Yes, he has.”

“So what troubles you Matriarch?” Rylin asked her.

“You heard what Lazar told me?” Loras asked her.

Rylin nodded her head. “Your son with Osrod Aspion thankfully does not share his father’s quest for more power or his stupidity. He has too much of you in him and that is why Osrod does not trust him. He fears him Loras.”

“I know.” Loras spoke softly.

“Only a *igord* believes that we are the only Lycavorians out among the stars.” Rylin spoke. “Osrod’s *amlia*n father discovered that painfully with the Tri-Alliance and ruined any chance that we may have had to improve our own people.” (Idiot)

Loras nodded her head. “I know.” She said. “But now he is putting my son into the same position. He undoubtedly has ulterior motives that he is not sharing with Lazar. I know him too well to not realize this.”

“Lazar is far smarter than his father Matriarch.” Rylin told her. “He will not do what his grandfather did.”

Loras looked at her. “But have I put him into a position where he must think and act like a person he is not Rylin?” She asked her. “In order to protect myself?”

Rylin gazed at her intently for a long moment. “You know that you have not, but that is not what concerns you is it? You have seen or heard this name he spoke before haven’t you. The name he told you. This Androcles?”

Loras met her eyes and nodded slowly. “In the *Vomir’s Tomes*.” She answered.

Rylin leaned forward. “Truly. And what did the Tomes say?” She asked.

“It was the Ninth Tome of Knowledge. *Vin gente vinn’ tryn arduis mornar mero shyron un vada darsam*.” Loras answered ever so softly, as if speaking a sacred oath. “*Mornar jen sha tor Androcles*.” (He came upon fiery wings and he brought death to the unjust. And his name was Androcles)

Rylin looked at her with suddenly very wide eyes. “You are certain of this Matriarch?” She asked.

Loras nodded her head. “I remember reading the passage several times in this particular Tome.” She spoke. “I thought it was odd because the Tome said he was an Alpha of the Highest Order and that his name came from a long dead race that had been reborn among the stars.”

“The Highest Order?” Rylin gasped. “That would... that would mean that he descends from the Six original packs of Lycavore.”

Loras nodded her head slowly. “Our mythical homeworld, yes. We do not know that this Lycavore even exists.”

“Even I... Even I believed this to only be legend.” Rylin stammered softly. “*Son vada carians*... if this is true?”

Loras nodded her head. “Yes.”

“What else did the Tome say?” Rylin asked her.

Loras met her eyes. “It also said that he would be the first born son, the heir and one of three Heralds of *Vada Fera Mard Revik*.”

“The First True King.” Rylin whispered the words, her face bright with energy and new wisdom. “The Prophecy of our people from before the time of Conformity, a hundred thousand years ago.”

Loras nodded her head once more. “You see what vexes me Rylin? What if this... what if this Androcles is... what if the prophecy is true Rylin? I have... part of me has never really believed it to be true.”

Rylin rose to her feet, setting her mug aside. “We must consult with *Vada Vomir* herself.” She spoke quickly.

Loras stood up as well at her words. “Rylin that is impossible.” She stated. “No one knows where the *Vomir* is. She went into hiding after Conformity because Osrod’s father put a price on her head.”

Rylin shook her head slowly. “I know where she is.” She stated.

Loras stepped closer to her. “How is that possible Rylin?”

The older woman smiled as she met Loras’s gaze. “Who do you think instructed me to remain close to you Loras Ranev? *Vada Vomir* is no fool. She knows who holds the values and prosperity of our people close to their hearts.” She squeezed Loras’s hand. “Change your clothes and meet me by the southern Tram. The trip to her will be quicker if we leave right away.”

PREMONITION

ENTERING ATMOSPHERE OF VENTORI

THIRTY SECONDS POST JUMP

The wind was whipping through the rear portion of the *PREMONITION*’s small cargo bay, the ramp fully locked into an open position and extending straight out into the warm, thin air of Ventori. They knelt just in front of the extended ramp, their arms extended around the shoulders of the those next to them. All of them wore the new Mark IV ArmorPly Body Armor, the black and crimson giving each of them a menacing like appearance in the glare of the sunlight pouring in the rear of the ship. Their helmets rested on the deck in front of each of them, the long multicolored plumes that signaled royalty of Androcles, Denali, Dorian and Deion rustling in the wind. Laren Ti’shara knelt between Andro and Dorian, Denali and Deion side by side with Jomann and Murano completing the small circle.

For Murano it was a glorious experience no matter that they were leaping out into battle in only seconds. He had not been among so many fellow Praetorians in more millennia than he cared to recall and to feel the Etheric power swirling within and around them filled him with a resolve he had not experienced since he had first stood beside Sumar in battle. This time it was different he knew, for he could feel the emotions coursing through each of them unchecked. This was what the Praetorians of his time had tried to avoid and what Sumar had discovered on Lycavore and then passed down to his descendants. Emotions were not a hindrance, emotions were a gift that provided power and purpose. Powerful emotions allowed Androcles and the others to do things that the Praetorians of his time would never have been able to accomplish and once he had seen the truth of this, Murano had embraced it completely and without doubt.

He had embraced these emotions where it concerned his love for Tobia and last night he had shown her just where she had stood in the center of his universe. Her cries of ecstasy had filled his quarters for four straight hours as he embraced his feelings and love for her and held nothing back. Murano did not doubt if not for this operation right now, he would still be loving the feel of her body beside his and hearing her words of devotion and love. Murano was a changed man forever now, and nothing would stand in the way of his love for Tobia or the love he held for Mari, the beautiful daughter they had created together. One day soon he would stand before his brother Delnash and embrace him and thank him for teaching and caring for Mari as his own for all of those years. Murano shook his head slightly and filtered everything else out as Androcles’ words once more filled his ears above the din of the wind whipping through the cargo bay.

“...Hold nothing back. This is our time now. This is where we see the rebirth of the legacy our grandfather left for us to embrace. The legacy of the power that flows within us.” Andro looked at Jomann across from him and then let his eyes move to Murano. “The legacy that will embrace and flow through others as well. Near and far.”

Jomann nodded his head with a knowing smile. “*Avoi.*” He spoke.

“Indeed.” Murano echoed Jomann’s word.

“***Andro! Thirty seconds our love!***” Sadi’s calm voice echoed through the internal Com system of the ship over the roar of the wind and they all felt Andro reach out to his father and tell him the same thing.

Andro grasped his helmet and lowered it over his head and face and watched the others do the same. “Jomann and Denali out first! Dorian, myself and Laren in the center, Deion and Murano right after.” He glanced out the rear of the ship and saw the terrain below them. “If we fail, father and Uncle Daniel fall. If we fail, our mothers fall. Our siblings already on the surface fall.” He turned and looked at them with blazing azure colored eyes. “Let’s not fail. Father will never let us live it down!”

“No he won’t!” Denali chimed in.

Andro turned back to where Elynth stood with Ryner, Ladur, Jeth, Aradace, Majeir and Marux. Caydren and Cinol book ended the line of dragons and family standing proudly. Lisisa, Arduri, Sehri, Lu'ria, Carisia, Sheva and Onera and Caliria all stood there as well watching them with adoration in their eyes. Dutkne looked stern faced and ready, falling easily into his role as Praetorian Mage and eager to get on the surface so that he could go about the business of claiming Zarah and Lucia.

“Do not be late sister.” Andro spoke.

Elynth snorted loudly as if offended by his statement. “I am never late.” She stated openly. “And I will not tarnish that record now my beautiful brother.”

“**Andro! NOW!**” Sadi’s voice erupted from the internal speakers once more.

“Into the hands of our grandfather’s spirits do we commend our souls.” Andro spoke loudly.

“May they guide our actions and thoughts and pick us up if we fall!” The bevy of voices echoed his.

“Deni! Now!” Andro shouted.

The was no hesitation in the least and Denali stepped off into nothing, followed quickly into the abyss by Jomann, Dorian, Androcles, Laren, Deion and Murano.

VENTORI

Martin saw it first, low on the horizon and approaching from the east over the mountains. He had never seen a ship like it before and knew instantly that it was the ship that Sadi and Ne'Veha had Ben and his miracle workers at Dreamland build for them. Martin narrowed his wolf vision and saw that the ship had a rear ramp, which was now down. His dark brown eyes grew wide then, for he felt his son reach for him and project to him what it was they were going to do. The ship came closer now, and dropped to perhaps a hundred meters off the ground.

Danny stepped up next to him, his own eyes focused on the ship now. “*Fervon?*” Martin looked at him. “Is he going to do what I think he is going to do?”

Martin glanced at the lines of advancing Svorag and then looked back to the ship as it was now upon them. He saw first one figure leap from the back of the ship as it moved across the terrain, followed quickly by six more figures.

“**Holy fuck! Torma 21!**” Martin hissed loudly. He turned to the line of defenders without thinking as he grabbed Kasdan. “**Shields and brace! Shields and brace!**” He screamed out the words as loud as his vocal cords could project them, his voice carrying to all of them and then some. He and Danny dropped to one knee right where they were, anchoring Kasdan between them and their Shi Viskas pointing towards the oncoming Svorag hoard, covering their bodies and that of Kasdan as well.

And then the world blew up.

Torma 21.

A simple name for a devastating maneuver that he and Torma had invented and perfected during their time together. It was similar in many ways to the maneuver that his grandfather had explained in the Praetorian Tomes he had left for his descendants. The difference here was that it was usually done from the back of a dragon and not from the back of a ship. Martin could feel each of his sons, Jomann, Murano and Laren. They were radiating within the Etheric realm as brightly as he had ever seen any of them, pulsing with power and determination and purpose. It started from his left, an Etheric explosion of power that blew outwards with unmatched force as his son Denali was the first to impact the ground.

It was followed in quick succession by six more identical explosions of Etheric power before the first one had even begun to ripple outward. It was complete and absolute devastating power and force. Two thousand

five hundred Newtons of force, or five hundred and sixty-two foot pounds of force moving at nearly two thousand feet a second. This is what smashed into the oncoming ranks of Svorag and literally pulverized anything in its way.

It was then that Panos' words to him so long ago rang clearly in his head now. The same words Panos had spoken to his son Androcles the day that he had claimed Sadi as his wife and mate. They were not just Lycavorians and Spartans...

...They were forces of nature.

Martin didn't need to look over the top of his Shi Viska and its shielding protection to feel the incredible force buffeting his body and he grit his teeth and gripped Kasdan's shoulder in order to keep him below the lip of the shield. He glanced across and saw the same look of determination on Danny's face as they braced against the massive force of the Etheric kinetic waves with all of their strength. Martin Leonidas could feel the power within them, he could feel it coursing through him and it felt glorious. He looked up quickly, just his eyes lifting over the top of his shield and they grew wide at what they saw. Seven figures standing in a single line perhaps a hundred meters apart, and the wave of Etheric power sweeping away from them like a tidal surge of overwhelming and utterly lethal power. It was literally lifting Svorag into the air and crushing their bodies in its wake. He saw the plumes on the helmets of his sons and Jomann being tossed about wildly in the wake of the that Etheric surge and he turned his head quickly to see the others in the defensive line beginning to look up over their shields, many of them with furrows in the ground behind them as they dug their boots in to withstand the power.

"*Fervon!*" Martin screamed out.

Danny gripped Kasdan's shoulder and nodded his head. "Go!" He barked.

Martin Leonidas stood up and with a war whoop he leaped into an Etheric assisted jump that carried him forward.

"...introduce your grandchildren." Aricia spoke with a smile as yet unmatched by any Jezima had seen so far.

The first Etheric explosion erupted just as Jezima turned her eyes and those dark brown orbs grew wider as each successive Etheric impact went off and they could only watch as the first ranks of Svorag were practically turned to crushed noodles in the wake of that power. Jezima's hands went to her face in shock, her eyes once more filling with tears as she bore firsthand witness to the ultimate legacy of her oldest son. Meral was shaking her head in awe while gripping For'mya tightly, tears also running down her cheeks.

It was Tinra's words that broke the moment. "By all the Ancients within the Rift of Time!" She gasped aloud. "They are... they are Praetorians!" She looked at the man who controlled the video drones that followed them everywhere. "Tell me that went out Mitra! Tell me that went out!"

The man was staring at his P9 and the two feeds from his drones. "I got it! I got it all! It's a live feed! I'm beaming it back to Honelze! Gods this is incredible!"

All of them heard the almost inhuman scream and they looked below them to see Martin rise to his feet and throw himself into an Etheric jump that took him out to the line that their sons, Jomann and Murano occupied.

"What is that noise!?" Anja barked as the almost deafening roar was nearly upon them.

All of them turned to the rear and if it was possible, their eyes grew even larger.

"*Saoi nubous sibfla!*" Anja muttered.

The port side of the *KINDRED SOUL* broke through the thin, low hanging clouds and appeared over Discovery Base barely a thousand meters above them like some angry god descending from the heavens above.

Martin Leonidas landed between his sons with a unique glint in his eyes. His chest swelled with enormous pride and love as he looked at Andro, Dorian, Deion and Denali. That look extended to Jomann and Laren as he touched gazes with all of them and he saw Murano with what could only be called a shit eating grin on his face.

“Murano!” Martin barked.

“Nice to see you again Martin!” Murano barked back.

Martin looked at Andro. “Bout time you got here boy!” He snapped loudly. “What the hell took you so long?”

Andro met his eyes with a smile. “That is your fault father! You are the one who gave me command of a ship as large as a small moon.” He commented. “We could not find a parking spot!”

Martin turned his head down the valley floor and saw the Svorag beginning to recover. The massive Etheric combo had stopped their initial advance in its tracks and the Etheric wave had probably killed thousands of the Svorag monsters as it tossed thousands more of them back nearly a quarter of a mile. “Now what?” Martin barked out. “That ain’t going to hold them back son! They are pesky little fuckers.”

Andro held the KM14 out to his father as he spoke. “You will need this father. A new toy for you.” He spoke as Martin took the weapon. “And don’t worry, I have a few more surprises up my sleeve.” He turned back toward Discovery Base and smiled at what he saw as the *KINDRED SOUL* filled the entire sky behind them. Martin was looking over the new weapon when he heard Andro’s next words and turned.

“Captain Patton... would you bring the rain please!” Andro spoke aloud.

Martin turned and his eyes nearly bugged out of his head. “Holy fuck!” He screamed out once more.

“It would be a pleasure Androcles!” The man’s voice replied over their COM units. **“Bringing the rain!”**

KINDRED SOUL

“...Bring the rain please!” Androcles voice thundered through the bridge.

“It would be a pleasure Androcles!” Patton answered as he rose to his feet. “Bringing the rain!” Patton turned to face his Weapons Officer. “Full GSB WEPS! Ten second burst on all batteries!”

“All batteries primed and ready sir!” The man answered.

“Prepare to go to EOT and to direct Ground Support Craft from the *ARIZONA* and *SPARTA’S WRATH XO!*” Patton barked.

“Standing by sir!”

Patton smiled. “You heard the man! Let’s bring the rain! Fire!”

VENTORI

“You may wish to cover your ears father.” Andro told him a split second before the horrible buzzing noise began, broken only by the deep thud like sound of the heavy Ground Support Rail Cannons.

Martin’s hands went to his ears instantly as the entire port side of the *KINDRED SOUL* lit up like a Christmas tree and was bathed in thick, white smoke as every Ground Support Battery on the port side of the ship opened up at the same time.

The *KINDRED SOUL* had been built specifically for this type of action from the moment of her inception in Ben’s often times warped and genius mind. To deliver the 82nd from orbit and then enter the atmosphere and act as a massive mobile ground support platform with a reach that no known enemy could touch. Since this was to be a very precise barrage, only the port side ship mounted MLRS units fired.

Six launchers with twenty missile tubes per launcher, each filled with anti-personnel cluster bomb like munitions, ripple fired off their missiles inside of three seconds. Four of the 45mm Paladin MK XII Plasma artillery batteries each fired five rounds apiece and twenty-two of the fifty-four port side 30mm Enhanced Rail Chain Cannons let loose with nearly twenty thousand rounds of Dragon Armor tipped Rail shells. As one *Durcunusaan* troop who witnessed it would later describe to his fellow Spartans when they landed, it was as if the heavens opened up and *yorbe* came through.

The valley before Discovery Base was nearly a mile across at its widest point leading up to the edge of the city of Jorlari. It had once been a serene valley with parks, trees and flowers dotting the landscape. The

initial Svorag invasion had shattered that valley as skilled and proud Ventori soldiers and their weapons tried to hold them off from reaching the city limits. Now it would be remembered by those Lycavorians from Ventori as the valley that began the rebirth of their people and their world. It would one day become what it once was, but today would not be that day.

Martin turned his head quickly to see the results of the ghastly ten second barrage as it was over just as quickly as it had begun. His dark brown eyes grew wide at the picture before him. Their crushing Etheric maneuver had thrown the Svorag back nearly a quarter of a mile from where he stood and the *KINDRED SOUL*'s weapons did the rest. With unerring accuracy, the barrage had begun at where they were once more massing to charge across the valley and in that ten seconds anything within an additional quarter mile was turned to, for lack of a better word in his vocabulary, hamburger. He could see Svorag bodies being tossed through the smoke and debris as the anti-personnel missiles struck and showered out even smaller bomblets that exploded on contact. The wildly powerful Paladin artillery shells landed with even more force, showering the surrounding Svorag with white hot, blue flamed plasma. The Dragon Armor tipped Rail shells punched through three and four Svorag bodies leaving gaping wounds that nothing could survive. Martin could see at least a dozen of the huge Svorag that he and Danny had fought in the bunker in the ranks of Svorag and he could only watch with happiness as the Rail Shells blew apart their oversized bodies like melons.

"Close ranks!" Andro barked the order and Martin's head turned quickly to see Denali, Deion, Dorian, Laren, Jomann and Murano step to within a few feet of him and Andro looked to the distance.

Now sister! He shouted out into the Etheric realm.

On our way!

Martin turned his head back to the valley and he saw them rise above the ridge in the distance and bore straight in. Elynth rocketed across the ground leading them, but Martin could see that Torma, Isheeni, Aurith, Miath and Seyra had joined them. He didn't recognize the two sleek and not yet fully grown dragons among them, but he knew Jeth, Aradace, Jeru, Maruth, Sorin and Tharua. Their Dragon Armor was fully extended across their bodies now and with trumpets of anger and retribution filling the air, fourteen dragons descended upon the battlefield with super-heated blasts of their breath and scorching hot lances of flame. In mere seconds they were among the Svorag and the ugly scaled bodies began to fly then as Heavyhorn tails and savagely curved talons began to shred the beasts. There was really no contest as Martin witnessed Torma's mace like Heavyhorn tail spin around and connect fully with one of the larger Svorag monsters like he had fought with Danny. He could almost see as that one blow pulverized the creature's entire upper body and turned it to jelly.

"Andro what..." Martin began to speak to his son as he turned but Andro held up his hand as he tapped the COM implant on his jaw.

"Josie... the LZ is clear." Andro spoke looking at his father with a crooked grin. "Would you and your Devil Dogs care to join the party?"

"Roger that Andro! Twenty seconds!"

Andro looked at his father. "You may want to stay close to us father." He said pointing up.

Martin's eyes grew wide and he looked directly up. "Holy jumping shit!" He exclaimed as he saw the pods descending through the sky directly over the top of them.

"You will enjoy this father." Andro told him.

82nd CATAPHRACT DIVISION
1st BRIGADE DEVIL DOGS
COLONEL JOSIE MILLER COMMANDING
MUSIC PLAYING IN BACKGROUND
MAGIC CARPET RIDE/STAPPENWOLF

"Josie... the LZ is clear." Andro's calm voice filled her helmet. *"Would you and your Devil Dogs care to join the party?"*

“Roger that Andro! Twenty seconds!” Josie Miller replied instantly. Josie quickly checked her monitor where she had been observing the battle on the ground since they had exited the *KINDRED SOUL*’s and descended through the atmosphere. “That’s it Devil Dogs! In we go! Freddie... spin it up!”

“Oh yeah! Magic Carpet Ride baby! Yeehah!!” The male voice echoed over their COMS and suddenly, through every COM unit in orbit and on the ground, the music erupted almost louder than most of them could tolerate, overriding every other signal on the planet. Only Josie Miller’s voice broke into the music.

“Close ranks by squad! Thruster burn now! Drop to deploy! And for fuck’s sake, no one land on Andro or the King!” Josie shouted out the order.

Even over the music and across the COM, the laughter from many different sources from within the 1st Brigade echoed, but it caused nearly every head on Ventori to turn and watch as those bright lights falling from the sky began to take shape into cylindrical like tubes. All of them seemed to be tightening into small groups of four and five as they fell and they did not appear to be slowing down in the least. Then as the woman’s words echoed over the COM everyone saw small thrusters ignite on the bottom of each pod just seconds before it impacted the ground. There was a momentary pause before hatches began to blow and the armored men and women of the 1st Brigade, 82nd Cataphract Division set foot on Ventori ready to do harm.

Martin could only watch in awe as the pods began to land all around them, some only ten meters away, all of them in groups of four or five and none of them even remotely close enough to harm them. The thud and vibration of their impacts rattled through the surface for a few seconds before the explosive bolts on the hatches began to blow and the rush of compressed air filled the area around them. Martin had seen many simulations with Ben about how the 82nd would enter combat, but he would never forget this day and experiencing it firsthand. There was no pause and no chaos as pods continued to strike the ground all around them, hatches blew and the armored soldiers of the 82nd appeared ready to do battle.

Their matte black Cataphract Armor was new in color, splashed in different areas with crimson red, no doubt to honor their Spartan training. Each member of the 82nd had to complete a Spartan training course similar to the Agoge in order to be accepted into the ranks. While nowhere near as long or harsh as the Agoge that most other members of the Union took part in, it was without a doubt, the harshest and most dangerous training that any human being had gone through in their history. If one could imagine the training regimes of every Special Operations Unit from old Earth meshed together in one program, this would be it. In order to operate the Cataphract Armor suits they had to be in perfect physical condition and able to do things humans would not normally do of their own free will. The men and women of the 82nd were a breed all their own.

They sprinted forward to obviously pre-determined distances and took up defensive stances without any orders being relayed over the COMs as the sounds of the song Magic Carpet Ride began to recede into nothing. Now arrayed in front of where he stood, in three separate lines, were three thousand men and women ready to do battle.

Martin turned as the armored figure approached at a trot. She was obviously female and she clearly knew his son.

“All down and accounted for Andro!” Josie spoke without removing her helmet. “Saw a line of fuglies off to the west and bearing in! Nothing from the east!”

“How many west?” Martin barked.

“Hard to tell King Leonidas.” Josie answered. “Several thousand at least! Turrets and minefields won’t stop these things it looks like. They don’t mind crawling over their dead!”

Martin turned back quickly and his eyes found Danny. He reached up and tapped his jaw. “*Fervon!* Colonel Miller says they are coming from the west as well! By the bucket load! The turrets and minefield won’t be enough!”

Danny answered immediately. “I got it!” He barked. “Give me a couple squads of those new armored freaks and we’ll deal with it!”

Martin turned to Josie to issue the order but she was way ahead of him. He saw her turn her head and her voice filled the COM once more. “Alpha Company stand to! Double time back to General Simpson! Hold the west side of Discovery Base Devil Dogs!”

“Hooah!” Martin heard dozens of voices rip out the word at the same time and then he saw over two hundred of the armored figures break ranks and begin sprinting back towards Danny, and they were moving far faster than any human normally could because of their advanced armor.

Martin heard the screeching of the Svorag and turned once more seeing Torma and the others still engaged with the hoard. “Now what boy?” Martin snapped. “These fucking lizard assholes have done pissed me off but we can’t take them with just this number of troops Andro! I taught you better than that!”

Andro looked at his father and rolled his eyes. “Have faith father!” Andro spoke with a grin under his helmet. “We only need to push them back to their hole!”

“What? Why?” Martin exclaimed. “I want them dead! Every stinking one of them! I want this planet clear!”

“Just stick with us!” Andro snapped as he turned to Josie. “Now is as good a time as any Josie!”

“Roger that!” She barked and moved off at a trot.

“Andro we need to...” Martin began to speak but Josie Miller’s next words caused his head to snap forward.

“Devil Dogs! Let’s cook us some fuglies! Charge!” Josie screamed out.

Martin watched as his son turned to the south and he felt him reach out easily within the Etheric realm and speak only two words. This was not something that Martin had expected nor even given any thought to up until this very moment.

Daurgo now!

Martin smiled to himself as he broke into a run beside his sons. Oh yes, things were going to get very interesting.

VENTORI TEN MILES NORTH OF JORLARI

It was their fastest deployment since they had been formed, but they were ready and had been for some time. They could only do so much on their ship because of its size, but the moment Androcles had come to them with the plan, hasty though it may have been, they were prepared to execute it. In reality, most of them just wanted to get off their ship and stretch their wings.

The Dragon Brigade was now fully in the sky, orbiting the forest and mountains below at a thousand feet waiting for the word. They circled the terrain in formation, Daurgo coasting on the thermal at five thousand feet keeping his eyes on his dragons. He longed to see Arzoal once more and feel her scales beside his but his duty and hers came first. He had accepted that long ago and in typical male dragon fashion he had never strayed from the goal of making Arzoal his. They were mates now, Arzoal seemingly even giddier about that fact than he was, and perhaps in the future they could have hatchlings of their own. Arzoal had mentioned this when they were alone before she left, but both of them knew it was not time. Knowing what they did now, even as old as she was, Arzoal would still be considered a very young dragon by her own kind, and Daurgo had every intention of insuring their future held children.

His head snapped around when he felt the tingle from Androcles and then his words burst forth.

Daurgo now!

There was no hesitation on his part. The day he and Elynth became *Vrelvel Sargti* was the day every dragon within the Union took a different view of Androcles Leonidas. It was well known even before this that he had an affinity for dragons that others did not. He could almost sense what other dragons were thinking as could Elynth. Discovering what they had these last weeks all made sense now. Androcles was dragon. He had dragon blood flowing within him, as did Dorian Leonidas. This made them dragons. This made them so very unique.

This made them *Dahakoan*.

Following them was never in question.

Dragon Brigade! Androcles has called! We go now! By formation!

The three thousand trumpets of approval echoed across the clear sky and the Dragon Brigade folded their wings and surged north into battle.

DISCOVERY BASE

“...Defensive positions by the MED building!” Anja snapped as she moved toward the door into the medical facility. It was the most reinforced and heavily fortified building within Discovery Base. “All non-combatants set up positions in the rear of the building! Give me three teams of four on all four corners! We need...”

Aricia was pulling Jezima and Meral along with For'mya and Tinra, her VID Drone operator scrambling to keep up while Archer and Asa were moving in front of them on high alert.

Jezima gripped Aricia's hand tightly. “Anja is...”

“Anja will direct operations here. She is far more knowledgeable in this way than either For'mya or I.” Aricia spoke as they walked briskly and Jezima saw that she was leading them toward the waiting *STRIKER* Mark II. “You and Meral must get airborne and out of danger now.”

“Aricia no!” Meral exclaimed.

Aricia stopped and looked at them, drawing For'mya close to her as well as Jezima and Meral. Tinra's drone operator focused one of his two drones on the small group of women without them noticing.

“We will not leave!” Jezima spoke firmly.

“Yes, you will.” Aricia spoke to her just as firmly and squeezing her hands tightly. “You are our Beloved's only connection to his past Jezima. The only link to the *staanio* that set him and our children on this path. You are his *staania* and he will allow no harm to come to you no matter what.”

“What about you?” Jezima protested. “Anja and For'mya? You will remain here and fight! And so shall we!”

For'mya shook her head as she pulled Meral close. “No. Aricia, Anja and I have been fighting beside him for decades. We know what he will do and he knows what we will do. What we are capable of. We cannot be at our best if we worry for you and Meral. Martin would be... he would be distracted if you remained. Torn between fighting these monsters and keeping you safe. It must be like this.”

“There is more to it than just that!” Meral complained. “We can see it in your faces!”

For'mya nodded her head slowly. “He does not wish you to see what he may have to do. What our children and our friends and our soldiers may have to do.” She answered her. “And neither do we.”

“I know what war is For'mya.” Jezima said.

Aricia shook her head now. “No *staania*.” She said softly. “You have not seen how we wage war. We are not Pralors, we are Lycavorian Spartans and we do not hold back or offer mercy. And we do not take prisoners.”

Tinra was standing quietly and she thought for a moment that Aricia's statement should have offended her or made her view them in a different light. Aricia's statement sounded so correct though, and she felt nothing but admiration for all of them. She stepped forward quickly.

“Queen Aricia... what if we were on your ship there and off the ground.” She offered. “We could just circle the area and not be in harm's way. If things... if events do not turn out, we will move to your ship in orbit.”

Aricia met her eyes for a long moment and then glanced at For'mya before slowly nodding her head. “Very well.” She spoke. “Archer, you and Asa see to it they get aboard the *STRIKER*. When the battle is over and we are confident we have prevailed then you may allow the ship to return.”

Archer nodded his head as he came up to them. “As you order my Queen.”

Aricia looked at Jezima and Meral once more. “Do this for us. For Martin. Please.”

Jezima nodded her head after a moment. “Very well.”

Aricia kissed her cheek quickly as did For'mya and she motioned to Archer. “Take them and get airborne. When this is over you may return.”

Archer took Jezima's arm gently and she gripped his hand willingly now as Meral took Asa's hand. "May the gods watch over you." Jezima spoke softly.

Aricia smiled and nodded her head. "And you."

Archer urged them to come with him and For'mya stepped up close to Aricia as they headed for the *STRIKER* in the distance. They slipped their arms around each other's waist.

"Now what?" For'mya asked her. "With them off the surface and safe, our Beloved will not hold back."

Aricia nodded her head. "And neither will we." She spoke. "We..."

"Aricia! For'mya!" The female voice spoke from behind them.

Aricia and For'mya turned and saw Perlae, Ishma and Awser move up to them at a jog, the three adolescent dragons scampering along behind them.

"Perlae!" Aricia exclaimed. "What are you doing here? You should have remained in orbit!"

Perlae shook her head as they stopped in front of them. "You are our family and if you fight, we fight!" She spoke. "All of us have been well trained by our father and others and we will stand with you!"

Aricia glanced at For'mya quickly and then nodded her head. "Perlae, remain at the Medical facility with Anja. It will be the last defensive position if these monsters breach the perimeter in any area. Awser, move to the west wall and report to Daniel Simpson. Ishma, you come with For'mya and I."

"Where are we going?" Ishma asked quickly.

Aricia took her hand. "You will see." She replied as she headed for where Normya's *STRIKER* was resting a short distance from the MED building.

"I have seen that look before Aricia!" For'mya commented as she moved along beside them.

Aricia glanced at her and smiled. "I know."

PRALOR SPACE

ARTAAYA

CAPITAL CITY ERENDA

Delnash walked back into his office from the balcony overlooking the city and saw Avatar 27 standing beside the huge wall monitor.

"27, what is going on?" Delnash asked. "Even from my balcony I can see the activity in the City Center. Much more than usual for this time of morning."

The massive seven-foot-tall Avatar turned to face him. **-A live transmission from Lady Tinra Chief Elder- 27 answered. -It is being re-directed from Honelze and beamed all over the planet. She left for Ventori several days ago as you know-**

Delnash nodded his head as he moved to his desk. "Yes, she wanted to conduct more of her interviews with Martin and his wives."

-Chief Elder Delnash you had better witness this. It is a live feed from Ventori- 27 told him gaining his attention. -It appears as if the Svorag have attacked them in force-

"What?!" Delnash gasped aloud as he moved over to the monitor.

"...Lifted off into the skies above what remains of this once great Lycavorian city! It was destroyed only a few years ago when the Svorag invaded this world. " Tinra's face appeared both drawn yet animated. ***"Only moment ago I witnessed something that I never in my life believed I would see. Mitra play it for them..."***

The picture shifted to a view of charging Svorag and then, startling everyone who was receiving and watching the transmission, from above came seven armored figures who dropped to the ground from out of the

picture and sent devastating Etheric shockwaves ripping outward to smash into the ranks of the Svorag with the force of a major hurricane.

“I knew what Martin Leonidas was when I first interviewed him on Manne.” Tinra’s voice began speaking once more. ***“A Lycavorian yes, but also a Praetorian. There was never any question of that just being around him. He is a Lycavorian. A member of a species that most of our own great scientific community considers inferior in every way to us.”***

Delnash detected the scorn in Tinra’s voice when she spoke those words and he had to smile to himself.

“Today, Martin Leonidas’ son Androcles, himself a Praetorian and descendant of our own Chief Elder Sumar, he returned with Praetorian Murano and five other Praetorians among them. Three of them Martin Leonidas’ sons as well. You have just witnessed their entrance into this battle here on Ventori. Praetorians! Bless the Ancients within the Rift of Time! Never did I imagine this could be. The Praetorians have returned to us!”

Tinra paused for a long moment as the recording showed them Martin leaping forward to land beside his sons and standing in the face of thousands upon thousands of charging Svorag. Tinra’s voice picked up once more.

“Martin Leonidas and his people were here on Ventori hoping to assist those survivors of the Lycavorians that once called this planet home. Lycavorians that one of our Seed Missions left here! Lycavorians that were prospering and growing peacefully until the Svorag came and destroyed their world killing millions in the process. Monsters that we created!”

Delnash shook his head. “Tinra no.” He gasped.

“I say that we created them because this is the truth. The Svorag are not some naturally occurring species within the universe.” Tinra spoke evenly. ***“They were created by one of our own scientists and now he has lost control of them. Elder Lorendo created these monsters for a purpose none of us could fathom. The Elder in charge of our own Science Convocation is responsible for their creation and the deaths of so many of our people and, as I have discovered, millions of others as well. And now a species we thought beneath us is out here fighting these monsters in order to protect innocents. We...”***

“Damn!” Delnash snapped as Tinra continued to speak. “27... we need to get ahead of this!” He barked. “Call for an Emergency Meeting of all Elders in one hour! Have Garen lock down all spaceports! Lorendo and his cronies will undoubtedly try to leave the planet if they are even here! Issue an immediate arrest warrant for Elder Lorendo and send security troops to seize all of his assets!”

-As you instruct Chief Elder- 27 spoke as Delnash continued to look at the screen.

“And 27?” Delnash spoke. “I want a chronological timeline of Lorendo’s activities dating back to before the fall of our people. It is out in the open now and I am going to make him the most wanted face in the universe. Make sure you include his actions and suspected involvement in Sumar’s crash and the deaths of millions of our people on those City Ships with him.”

-Understood Chief Elder-

“Once you have done those things... contact Dysea and Isabella on Honelze.” Delnash spoke. “We will need to coordinate out in the open fully now.”

-Do you wish to have Lady Tinra’s transmission interrupted- 27 asked.

Delnash shook his head. “No.” He replied. “I may have waited too long before but I will not hide any longer. Allow her to report everything and give any other agencies our full support if they begin asking questions. Her subordinates will undoubtedly come to us to confirm what she is reporting and I’ll be damned if I will throw her to the wolves for telling the truth.” He told him. “We will not hide any longer!”

“Wait... we are getting an image from the battle below us and...” Tinra’s eyes went wide at what she saw and the picture changed to one of utter mayhem. ***“By all that we hold holy!”***

SCIMITAR
TASK FORCE SPARTAN HAMMER
ADMIRAL SA'SUR COMMANDING

“Report!” Sa'sur barked from her command chair on the bridge.

“All Task Force ships have made the turn Admiral!” The TO replied instantly. “All Fleet Groups in Defensive Pattern X-ray one four and maintaining Shroud. The only one they see is us Admiral.”

Sa'sur nodded her head. “The Kintaur ships?”

“Still closing, course 2675.9.” The TO answered. “Looks like a standard attack formation Admiral. Man, they are some seriously ugly ships too.”

Sa'sur smiled as she rose to her feet. “Let's not discount them. Status of their weapons and shields?”

“All of them running with shields active.” The TO replied. “Rudimentary laser cannon point defense systems on most of them, some with what appears to be first generation plasma based beam arrays and light projectile turrets.” He looked up at her as she met his eyes. “None of it will even scratch our shields Admiral, not to mention our hull.”

Sa'sur nodded her head. “Very well, but let's be safe. Raise our shields and power all weapons. Andro said not to jerk around with these fools because they have been kidnapping our people from this planet and I don't intend to.” Sa'sur moved to the center of her command platform. “COM officer, open a channel to these Kintaur. Let's see if they are awake.”

“Channel open Admiral.”

Sa'sur took a deep breath. “This is Admiral Sa'sur of the United Lycavorian Union Command Ship *SCIMITAR* to the approaching Kintaur Hegemony ships. You have entered a recognized Lycavorian Union Planetary System and I request that you state your intentions. Please respond to this transmission or you will be considered hostile and we will fire on you. I will not be repeating this message. *SCIMITAR* out.”

KINTAUR COMMAND SHIP
SECTOR GENERAL SULOS
SUN ARROW

Sulos was watching his main monitor as the massive ship approached slowly.

“This is Admiral Sa'sur of the United Lycavorian Union Command Ship SCIMITAR to the approaching Kintaur Hegemony ships. You have entered a recognized Lycavorian Union Planetary System and I request that you state your intentions. Please respond to this transmission or you will be considered hostile and we will fire on you. I will not be repeating this message. SCIMITAR out.”

Sulos turned to the side of his bridge. “You can detect nothing?” He asked his main sensor operator.

“Negative General.” The man answered. “The same type of distortion field surrounds this ship as it did the others and the composition of the hull is very similar to the others as well.” The man lifted his eyes. “It is a metal that we have never seen before sir.”

Dynv stepped closer to Sulos from where he had been standing against the bulkhead. “It is only one ship General. The others have remained around Ventori. We should destroy it and move on to the planet.”

“General! New contacts!” His sensor operator barked. “Just coming into range sir! One massive contact is currently parked directly over the planet sir! General it is over twenty thousand meters long!”

Sulos looked at him. “How... how is that even possible!” He exclaimed.

“Three other ships matching the configuration of the warship approaching our location sir! All of them are maintaining positions over the planet in what appear to be low orbits!” The man barked.

Sulos looked at his sensor operator once more. “And you can detect nothing that would tell us how many other ships they have out there?”

The man shook his head once more. "I'm sorry General."

Sulos looked at Dynv. "Dynv?" He asked.

"Attack now General." The man answered. "It is only one ship and we may not get another chance like this."

"And how many ships can we not see?" Sulos demanded.

"This false King ordered the destruction of one of our ships!" Dynv spat. "We must respond in kind."

Sulos met his eyes for a long moment and then turned to the side. "Inform all ships to prepare to fire!" He ordered quickly. "Full weapons!" Dynv looked pleased with himself as Sulos moved to his command chair. "Open the channel to this female! I will speak with her first."

Dynv looked surprised and he moved forward. "General what are you doing?" He gasped. "You should attack now!"

Sulos looked at him. "I will not risk my men and ships against an unknown force!" Sulos snapped. "I..."

Dynv calmly withdrew the sidearm he wore on his belt, leveled it at Sulos's head and fired from point blank range. Sulos's head exploded like an overripe melon, showering the deck and parts of his chair with bits of skull and brain matter. The sound was deafening in the confines of the bridge and no one did anything because they stood there in shock. Dynv looked around the bridge slowly as he lowered the weapon, daring anyone to challenge him with his demeanor.

"General Sulos was required by our law to act!" Dynv barked. "He refused to defend Kintaur laws and has paid the price. I will be assuming command of this ship." He looked around the bridge. "Does anyone care to challenge me? You will meet the same fate as General Sulos here."

No one on the bridge moved and Dynv waited for a few seconds longer before pushing Sulos's now cooling body out of the chair to thump onto the deck unceremoniously. He settled into the chair, ignoring the blood stains and looked at the monitor. "Order the fleet to fire on that ship, destroy it and then prepare to move to the planet!" He barked.

There was a pause before the Tactical officer looked up from his station. "The... the fleet signals ready sir!"

Dynv had a smug look on his face as he spoke the order he had always wanted to give even as a small child.

"Fire!"

SCIMITAR

"Nothing?" Sa'sur asked looking at her Com officer.

"All channels silent Admiral."

Sa'sur looked at the Kintaur fleet in her holographic tactical plot. "I don't like this." She stated. "Are they still closing?"

"No change in course or speed Admiral." The OPS officer replied.

"Inform the Task Force to be prepared to attack." Sa'sur spoke now. "I am not..."

"Admiral! They are locking weapons! They are locking weapons!" Her TO screamed out.

"Evasive port! Evasive port!" Sa'sur shouted the order loudly. "Weapons free! Weapons free! Point defenses engage!"

Sa'sur gripped the sides of her chair as the *SCIMITAR* heeled over to the left side in a powerful turn to port.

"They are firing Admiral!" Her TO screamed out. "Point defenses engaging! Task Force requesting permission to engage!"

Sa'sur could feel the hammering of the *SCIMITAR*'s Point defense batteries as they began to fire at an unbelievable rate. The *SCIMITAR* shuddered violently as the Kintaur weapons from nearly three hundred ships began to impact all across her shields as she turned. The Point Defense Batteries were engaging faster than the eye could follow, the Nodon Engineering JCN Type 71 Tactical Network and NorthAm Mk X Aegis FCS providing the brains behind the system. The *SCIMITAR* was among the first of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike

Cruisers to undergo the refit to the *ARIZONA*-Class computer and fire control systems and now it would pay off in huge dividends. Developed by Nodon Engineers under the guidance of the Avatar Avi, they had built a computer system that could regulate and control the advanced weapons that the new Union ships would have. And control them it would.

“Tell me they did not just shoot their pip squeak guns at my ship!” Sa'sur snarled and she gripped the sides of her chair tighter as the *SCIMITAR*'s regenerative shields absorbed what hits the PDS batteries did not take out. “Report!”

“Shields at ninety-seven percent!” Her OPS officer barked out. “Minor buckling to port nose outer shell! Sections forty-two and forty-three! They took the brunt of the force! Worker Drones nine through twelve already moving to repair!”

Sa'sur looked at him with wide eyes. “They scratched my ship!” She barked aloud as she turned back toward the main bridge view window. “TO! Main Batteries two through fourteen on that big, ugly ass ship in the center! 1st Echelon of Task Force de-shroud and engage! 2nd Echelon to remain shrouded and support as needed! Scratch my ship will you? *Sibfla!*”

SUN ARROW

“Well?” Dynv snapped as he turned to the Tactical officer.

The man looked up from his station with wide eyes. “Sir! Sensors are... sir we did no damage to the ship!”

“Impossible !” Dynv hissed. “We hit them with a full attack from three hundred ships! That is not possible! That ship should be crippled at the very least and...”

“Sir! Lycavorian Command ship is coming about! I'm detecting other Lycavorian ships appearing to port! Gods, over a hundred and thirty ships have just materialized to port! I'm detecting power surges of some kind in all of the ships! Sir they are... they are firing!”

Dynv turned to the monitor at the front of the bridge and saw the enormous flare of strange light from the side of the Lycavorian ship. He was unable to process the source of the strange light because his brain was already dead by the time the information that the ship was firing finished processing in his mind.

SCIMITAR

Sa'sur watched with much satisfaction as her gun crews and computers brought her weapons to bear and unleashed a volley from the main batteries of the newer Type One MK9C Alpha Series Quantum guns. Thirteen Quantum powered Plasma Particle guns all fired at the same time, all targeting the *SUN ARROW*. The main batteries of the *SCIMITAR* tore into the starboard side of the *SUN ARROW* and effectively eviscerated the entire ship in one stroke. The Kintaur ships were in no way, shape or form a match for even an *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Heavy frigate's weapons load out.

The main batteries from the *SCIMITAR* went clean through the minimal shields on the Kintaur ship and blew great swaths of the ship's superstructure into tiny particles of space dust, venting the entire ship to space in the amount of time it took for a person to take two breaths. The *SUN ARROW* imploded upon itself then, it's engines going critical with the massive loss of power and coolant and the ship blossomed into a huge fireball, engulfing the two closest ships to it in the same fireball.

As soon as that fireball dissipated, the remaining Kintaur ships were just in time to see the First Echelon of Task Force *Spartan Hammer* de-shroud and tear into the Kintaur fleet with the ferocity of a pack of wolves on the hunt and smelling blood. Most of the ships of the First Echelon were made up of the *SCIMITAR*'s normal Fleet Group, all of them under the direct command of Sa'sur. Most of those men and women had served with Sa'sur and Androcles for nearly eight years, some even turning down promotions to remain with the Prince's Combined Forces Fleet Group. They had the same amount of respect and love for Sa'sur as they did for Androcles, and they tore into the Kintaur fleet with savage anger for attacking their Admiral unprovoked.

Quantum powered MK9C Alpha Series Plasma Particle guns began to pound the larger Kintaur ships before most of them had time to react and reload their own weapons. The smaller, but no less deadly *VANGUARD*-Class Interdiction Cruisers, *NOVA*-Class Mark III Medium Cruisers, *TAUR'OHTAR*-Class Destroyer Escorts and the venerable but still lethal *LEONIDAS I*-Class Heavy Cruisers ripped into the Kintaur Fleet without hesitation. All of these ships had extensive upgrades and refits in order to bring them in line with the new Union Fleet guidelines, all of them now fielding advanced Matter/Hypermatter Fusion Drives based on the *ARIZONA*'s own Quantum Hypermatter Drive.

The Kintaur fleet tried to fight back, over a dozen of their ships getting off second volleys that careened hopelessly off the advanced shields and armor that all Union ships now used as standard equipment. Those brave but misguided Kintaur ships died first as the *VANGUARD*-Class Interdiction Cruisers sprinted right up to within spitting distance of the Kintaur fleet and began to unleash their own brand of retribution. This was not a fair fight by any stretch of the imagination and the Kintaur ship captains began to sense it right away. The *TAUR'OHTAR*-Class Destroyer escorts were executing their Wolf Pack tactics to utter perfection as they would suddenly appear from under Shroud and four or five ships would rip into a Kintaur cruiser and then just as suddenly disappear from view. This was what one Union Captain would much later describe as a turkey shoot. It wasn't really fair in the least, the Union ships centuries ahead of the Kintaur in technology, tactics, and training.

This was not lost on the Kintaur Task Force Deputy Commander from his Heavy Cruiser. The moment their sensors detected that the barrage of fire from all of their ships had done no damage to the Union ship he began issuing orders for the Task Force to retreat. As his ship turned and began to run away at its top speed, over sixty other ships sprinted with him, leaving the rest of their fleet to be immolated and slaughtered by vastly superior forces.

SCIMITAR

“Admiral! Sixty odd ships are running! Bearing three, three, two nine five!” The TO barked. “I have lock on nineteen of them with Mark 22 missiles! I can...”

Sa'sur came to her feet. “Negative! Let them go TO.” She spoke quickly. She turned to face the man. “Clean up the ones in range! Any escape pods are to be immediately picked up and their occupants treated but detained. Have Security Teams stand by to execute this.”

“Yes sir!”

“Deploy the 2nd Echelon into Planetary Defensive Grid nine.” Sa'sur spoke. “They are to remain under Shroud but nothing enters the system unless they can prove they are part of the Royal Family. Nothing.”

“Understood sir!”

“Get Manda Lorian on the horn and route it to my Ready Room. We have some things to cover.” Sa'sur spoke.

The TO looked at her oddly. “Trouble Admiral?”

Sa'sur smiled and shook her head. “Manda has been out here a lot longer than we have and I want to tap her brain. We need to get up to speed real quick.”

“Understood.” The TO answered. “Kintaur wounded sir?”

“Bring them to us.” Sa'sur spoke. “Rig up one portion of the Dragon Den as a holding cell if you have too and put two companies on duty.” She turned and headed for her Ready Room. “Put Manda through as soon as she calls back.”

“Aye sir!” The TO answered.

The results of this first space battle in the Echo Quadrant would be really nothing more than a footnote in Union history in the larger scheme of things, but it would be marked as an historic day by one species in the Echo Quadrant. And there would be nothing anyone could do to stop it.

VENTORI

“Wait... we are getting an image from the battle below us and...” Tinra’s eyes went wide at what she saw below them as they circled the outskirts of the city. “By all that we hold holy!”

They appeared from underneath their *STRIKER* and drew gasps of disbelief from Jezima and Meral both as well. Dragons. Hundreds of dragons. Thousands of dragons, all flying in perfect formations at breathtaking speed. All of them with glittering light blue and white armor adorning their bodies. Dragons were not new to Pralors, but seeing three thousand of them flying together and wearing obvious combat armor of some sort was something none of them had ever envisioned.

“Are you getting this?” Tinra almost yelled. “I don’t know if anyone is seeing this but thousands of dragons just appeared from beneath the ship we are on orbiting the city! Gods... there must be thousands of them and they are... oh my! Mitra!”

“I got it!” The man answered as he typed away furiously on his P9 while trying to remain standing with the motion from the *STRIKER*. “I got their Com channel!” He exclaimed. “I’m tapping into it as well!”

“...*left side Josie!*” The voice Tinra did not recognized barked out the order. “*Roll them back with your people! We will take the right side! Push them back into the city proper! Daurgo and the Dragon Brigade will meet them there! No prisoners Josie! We do not have the means to treat them and none must remain alive behind us to go after my mothers at Discovery Base!*”

“*Understood!*” The female voice barked back. “*You heard the order Devil Dogs! Now let’s do this!*”

Tinra looked at Mitra with wide eyes of disbelief. “They are charging them when they are outnumbered so!” She gasped aloud. Another voice that she recognized instantly sounded over the COM now.

“*Fervon... what is your status?!*” Martin’s deep and clear voice echoed.

“*Fuglies coming out of the woodwork!*” Danny’s voice sounded back over the COM, the sounds of heavy gun turrets obvious in the background. “*Mines and turrets chopped them down to size and we are engaging! Looks like some snuck through and got past the wall Marty! Suicide bombers from what I could tell! Now stop bothering me and let me work my magic!*”

Tinra could only gape out the rear of the *STRIKER* as she heard them on the COM speaking as if they were out for a simple stroll in the afternoon. She could see thousands of the Svorag on the ground swarming around a large group of armored individuals with dragons all around them. Her eyes grew even wider when she realized who exactly she was looking at from a thousand meters above them.

“Jezima!” She exclaimed. “Is that...”

Jezima and Meral turned to look at her, both of them with unabashed pride in their eyes and on their faces.

“Yes!” She answered with tears rolling down her cheeks.

It was a sight that none of them would ever forget for however many years they had left in their lives. It was also a sight that was being transmitted live and in color to Honelze and then on to Artaaya and Nepneu.

A sight that would change the future of the Pralor people from this day forward.

VENTORI

Whoever Martin Leonidas may have thought was leading these Svorag, he was correct in one aspect. Svorag were not used to running away.

Whether it was because of the usual massive numbers that they had or the sight of their horrifying physical presence, these Svorag had never faced an enemy that refused to give any ground. They had never met an enemy that was unwilling to surrender territory that belonged to them. Most of the enemies they had faced up until now in their rampage across several systems had fought briefly and then turned to run in the face of overwhelming odds.

They had never face Lycavorian Spartans in battle. They had never faced Union troops of any species or culture in battle. Being outnumbered was nothing new to them. In all actuality, Union forces always went in to battle thinking they were outnumbered, for most of the time they were. The difference was that Union soldiers and especially Spartan trained Lycavorians and elves never surrendered and never gave up. They went in to

every battle thinking they could win or they would die in service to their King. This was certainly the case right now.

No matter what drove each individual soldier to enter into this way of life, it always came down to the camaraderie and sense of family that all of them absorbed and became part of upon entering into service. For Josie Miller and her men and women it was a fact that, along with Admiral Miranda Lorian and those humans on the *ARIZONA*, they were once more blazing a path among the stars and representing mankind in the process. A better mankind. A mankind that had finally learned from the many mistakes of the past and moved from its infancy into adulthood. Miranda Lorian, because of all she had lost through the years, now considered the crew of the *ARIZONA* her family. Josie and her Troopers considered each other family since they had been together, at the bare minimum two years, while most had been together since the inception of the program and that was seven years ago. Whatever the motivations of the men and women on the ground today, there was no back up in any of them, and retreat was not even in their vocabulary.

The valley had narrowed to half a mile across in their location now, the shore of the huge lake now on their left side and providing some measure of defensive bonus. However, no one was worried about defensive bonus at the moment. With the newly built Pralor UPPR1s now in the hands of every member of the 82nd, this one single human Division and the *Durcunusaan* Ready Division were the most well-armed force in the entire Quadrant. And they were certainly not above sending their enemies right straight to *jorbhe*.

Combined with their innovative training regime, and their Cataphract Armor enhancing their physical abilities, Josie Miller's 1st Brigade was advancing steadily on either side of where their King and Crown Prince fought side by side. Bodies of dead and mortally wounded Svorag littered the ground behind them as they relentlessly pushed forward toward the city. The deep throated boom of the close range M4X Particle Magnum sidearm was heard often and very nearly drowned out by the throated roar of the UPPR1s. The name was actually one that Armen had instituted as the Armory Master Chief and Worker Drones began to roll them out of the Weapons Fabrication Lab three hours after *SPARTA'S WRATH* had destroyed the Pralor Science station and begun its trip here. Fashioned to look almost identical to the Union P190A5, the WFL personnel and Worker Drones had incorporated the more powerful aspects of the Pralor Particle weapons into the more streamlined Union design. The result was the UPPR1s, or as the members of the 82nd and the DRD had begun to call them, PPRs.

"Advance!" Josie screamed out within her COM.

It was happening quickly, they would lay down blistering amounts of firepower for twenty seconds and then Josie would move them forward. The member of the 82nd would advance several dozen meters and then do it again. They were burning through ammunition as if it was endless. Shoulder to shoulder they advanced over the dead and dying bodies of the many Svorag, not caring who or what they may have been at one point in their lives. Most of them were covered in Svorag blood but they did not break ranks even in the face of the enemy that they faced. They may not have had Shi Viska's as their Lycavorian comrades did, but for every Svorag that broke through and reached their line, and there were hundreds, they were quickly chopped to bits by savage blades or M4X PMs. The order had gone out and there would be no mercy shown this day. Josie Miller kept close watch on the entire line with her helmet HUD, monitoring their movement to stay even with Androcles and his father. She did not look over at where the roars of dragons filled the air for Josie had seen Bonded Pairs fight before and it was a devastating thing to witness. The inhuman screech snapped her attention around and Josie saw three of the Svorag leaping from where they were, intent on breaching the line. It did not matter how they had made it through the barrage line of fire, only that they had.

"Breach! Breach!" Josie screamed out as she brought up her PPR on the Svorag coming right at her and held the trigger back.

Nineteen particle rounds, each tipped with a drop of explosive tore into the Svorag's deformed body, blowing ghastly wounds into its flesh. Josie dismissed the first one as her burst had taken its head off and blown apart its upper chest. She was shifting her PPR and saw the second Svorag almost upon her. She dropped the PPR on its quick release straps and snatched the ancient Khukuri from its sheath on her shoulder. The ancient Earth weapon of the long dead Gurkhas had survived well into this time and many of the 82nd carried these signature weapons of perhaps the fiercest group of fighters next to the Spartans of ancient Earth. The blades had all been forged from Dragon Armor and were razor sharp. Those members of the 82nd that carried them had gone through extensive training with the Khukuri, given by the only known surviving members of the Gurkha

culture. They occupied a small town in western Utah where they trained the 82nd in different tactics including the use of this weapon. Those who carried the Khukuri were some of the most lethal close in fighters the 82nd had within its ranks, Josie Miller being one of them.

Josie didn't hesitate for an instant and she fell upon the Svorag who landed closest to her. With a scream of effort, she took off the Svorag's right arm before it had even regained its balance. As the Svorag screamed in agony and opened its armored jaw to extend its thick tongue to attack, Josie drew back the Khukuri.

"Fuck you!" She screamed and drove the Khukuri deeply into the Svorag's brain right through its open jaw and wrenched it the side with all her natural and enhanced strength provided by the Cataphract armor. The Khukuri tore free sideways taking most of the Svorag's lower jaw with it. As the creature began to twitch its way to death Josie turned her head to find the last one only to see Freddie lowering his own Khukuri, the Svorag's head dropping to the ground beside the now dead monster.

"Not much for conversation are they Colonel!" Freddie barked out.

Though he could not see it, Josie's face broke into a huge smile under her helmet as she replaced her Khukuri on her shoulder and snatched up her PPR.

"Devil Dog actual from Wolverine actual!" The male voice broke into her COM.

"Go!" Josie snapped out.

"Where you want us Josie! The General didn't want you hogging all the fun! We're coming in hot girl!"

Josie spun around and saw the two dozen heavily armed *MENKLA* transports spread out in tight formation and roaring in from behind them only a hundred feet off the ground. It was easy enough to see the *KINDRED SOUL* holding above Discovery Base since it took up nearly everything in her view.

"Hell! You may as well join us right here!" Josie snapped out. "There is always room for Wolverines in this fight!"

"Ten seconds Josie!"

Josie touched her wrist and opened a command channel to Androcles several hundred meters away as she saw the *MENKLAs* dip even lower and begin to spin around in midair to offload the additional forces.

"Andro... follow on Brigade is here!" She barked out not expecting an answer since she could see the fighting was heavy where he and his father were. "We are executing Plan Alpha as soon as they are down!"

"We are executing Plan Alpha as soon as they are down!"

Androcles didn't answer her as he completed the spin move, his Shi Viska clearing out half a dozen Svorag who had gotten too close to him. The razor like blades on the edge of the shield were fully extended and doing massive damage to any Svorag stupid enough to get close to him. Without even blinking Andro ducked his upper body down just as Elynth's armored wing whipped over the top of him and slammed into two additional Svorag, crushing their upper bodies with the single blow and sending their bodies hurtling over the bodies of their fellow Svorag. Andro leaped up and across the saddle on her back, his right hand closing around the pommel of the *Cana* and wrenching it from his harness. The blade flashed into existence from Flatspace with a hiss and he brought it down upon another Svorag who was intent upon jumping upon Elynth's back.

None of them were holding anything back now, each of them using all of their skills learned from years of combat and more recently, instruction from Murano and the Tomes of their grandfather Sumar. Even Murano was not holding back, not drifting into the rear as he had on the Science station, now he was with them as Androcles and the others took the fight to the Svorag monsters. He had embraced his emotions just as his time with Martin and Andro had shown him, and now he fed off the very thing that he had repressed for so long. It gave him the added clarity and power that he was displaying now. He fought on the opposite side of Martin with Torma's massive bulk between them and providing both of them support with his huge wingspan and Heavyhorn tail. Dorian and Laren were nearly side by side, Ryner and Ladur on either side of them, their *Nehtes* sending Svorag to meet their maker with every swing. Denali, Jomann and Deion on the opposite side of Androcles with Aradace, Jeru and Soran stomping and burning Svorag all around them. The bodies that surrounded the eight of them could not be counted nor measured. The Svorag were throwing everything that had at the line of Praetorians and 82nd soldiers and so far, unlike at any time since the Svorag had begun to terrorize

so many across this Quadrant of space, their foe was not turning and running. There was no hesitation or confusion in their purpose or how they supported one another and they were standing their ground and advancing.

For those who had never seen such a thing, it was ghastly and brutally violent but also beyond beautiful. Mirta's Video Drone was hovering just above them at a hundred meters in the air, its many cameras taking everything in. These were the images being broadcast to Honelze and then onto the other Pralor worlds. This is what the eyes of men and women from hundreds of generations were seeing with their own eyes. The combat movements of all of them were as exquisitely graceful as any ballet dancer, the power with which they struck unquestioned. Even Lisisa and Nara had now entered the fray with Jeth and Mayla at their sides as they cleaned up those that their father and brothers had injured or tossed aside. Seven plumed helmets were moving among the mass of bodies and blood with seemingly no end in sight. Still this did not deter them in the least as they continued to push forward, blasts of superheated breath or pure flame lighting up the area all around them and skipping across the Etheric shields that protected them. Even some of the 82nd troopers were caught in the area that those blasts of death were directed but since their armor was rated at nearly four thousand degrees, it did not cause them to pause in any way.

The moment Josie's words echoed within Andro's helmet he looked skyward as he thrust his *Nehtes* into the chest of a Svorag, baring his savage dual looking fangs under his helmet.

"Sadi now!" He screamed out within Mindvoice.

DISCOVERY BASE

"Fuck you!" Anja Leonidas screamed as she fired point blank into the Svorag's deformed skull, blowing his upper body back out of the frame of the small window. She spun around, expertly ejecting the two now empty magazines from the chopped down versions of the KM12 that she had carried for decades. She jammed the butts of the weapons against her hips, the mag holders automatically dropping two new magazines into position from the holders on either of her hips. With a practiced effort that she had done on more occasions in her lifetime than she could recall, Anja reloaded her custom built KM12 Magnums and looked around the room. They had held the first Svorag charge easily, only a few having made it past the line Danny had thrown up outside the perimeter. The Svorag had charged and crawled over the bodies of their dead companions, most slaughtered by the minefield and even more taken out by the turrets, but their numbers did not seem to end and nearly a hundred had finally made it over the defensive wall and were now inside the perimeter of Discovery Base, and Danny could not pull anyone to help them.

All non-combatants had been pulled into the medical building for it was the most heavily fortified and built. Though it was truly a portable building, Union engineers from the 1st Elven Engineering Brigade had devised its unique and hearty construction. There really was no way to physically take the building down once it had been erected and anchored without a concerted effort of explosives and force. Anja knew this and had spent nearly two years with Martin, Danny and a few other of the most skilled Spartans in the Union devising ways to defend the building. Though there were really no non-combatants within the Union, nearly everyone had some training in the use of weapons and such, there were half a dozen wounded and several Tasmor doctors and Pralor Researchers that had arrived to help Radra. These were the ones they were protecting, but looking at them Anja could tell all of them would rather die than be taken by the Svorag beasts. They had taken up positions within the huge portable Medical Facility at the points that had been determined to be the most defensible and they were ready for what came through that main entrance.

"Anja!" The voice barked out above the distant echo of weapons fire outside.

Anja turned her head to where Atropos's huge form knelt by the main entrance with five other *Durcunusaan* soldiers. Atropos had been her Captain almost from the very beginning and there was nothing that would take him from her side no matter the odds.

"I'm hunky dory!" Anja called out to him with her trademark smile. She reached up and tapped her jaw. "Danny!"

“Red! We’re kind of busy here! What’s your status?” Danny’s voice echoed over the din of weapons fire.

“About two dozen tried to breach but we killed them all!” Anja answered quickly. “But I think they know where we are now!”

“About a hundred made it over the wall before we could seal the hole Red!” Danny barked. ***“They swarmed a turret position and broke through there. It’s back online now but we couldn’t chase them!”***

“We’ll handle it!” Anja snapped. “Danny, what about Martin?”

“You do what you were trained to do Anja!” Danny barked. ***“Martin is taking care of business just like he always does!”***

“Cowen Shan and I have eyes on them Anja!” Julie’s voice broke into the COM link. ***“You should see this! They are carving a path through the thick of the monsters!”***

Anja let out a brief sigh of relief but then took hold of her emotions. “We’ll deal with the ones inside the perimeter!” She barked. “Just make sure no more get over the wall!”

“Working on it Red! Don’t get all bossy now!” Danny barked back but with a playful tone to his voice that caused Anja to shake her head. Between Martin and Danny, she had never met two men who could be in the absolute thickest of fighting and still crack jokes.

“Anja, Cowen is shifting his field to inside the perimeter.” Julie spoke once more. ***“He will try to give you advanced notice if he sees any of them.”***

Anja’s head whipped around as the firing renewed at the fortified entrance to the Medical Building. “Too late!” She called out. “They are already here!”

Even over the rapport of a dozen P190s letting loose Anja still heard the growling sounds of the Svorag as they swarmed the Medical Building. She heard Atropos screaming out orders and then the ghastly sound of savage pounding on the side of the building. She turned just as two sets of massive hand like appendages grasped the frame of the shattered window and the entire wall began to peel away. Anja was frozen in her spot, her jade green eyes wide in disbelief and unable to move as two of the huge monstrosities that Martin and Daniel had fought in the underground bunker began to tear away the entire wall of the Medical building as if it was a can of sardines. Within seconds the whole of the ten-foot section was exposed to the open air and Anja could see dozens of Svorag waiting just behind. They had opened the facility to the outside air and Anja could smell the aroma of gunfire and explosives in the air. Her jade green eyes grew wider as the Svorag surged forward and she lifted her pair of KM12s.

“JOA!” The female voice screamed out above the din of combat and Anja whirled around and she saw Perlae move forward with her hands raised in front of her. ***“Forn gur ter serik aur nathos!”*** Anja watched with wide eyes as the area around Perlae’s hands flared with Etheric power. ***“Tureme un vada jorbhe arbet shaos forn gente llokels!”***

Perlae, Ishma and Awser had been waiting for this moment their entire lives. The day when they would be among those Lycavorians they called blood. Those they called family. When Androcles had embraced them on his ship with no hesitation, all of their dreams and hopes had become reality. There was no way Perlae was going to allow these hideous monsters to take from her what they had only just discovered.

Dynina was the most powerful *Yowa* to have ever existed among their people and while no one had ever been able to determine how she could do what she did, there was no mistaking what she was capable of. And she had passed much of this skill and control to her grandchildren for the road and the battles ahead of them. It was that skill and training that Perlae embraced completely now and she unleashed it all in one devastating attack. With Ieri standing beside her bonded sister and looking just as ferocious as the fully grown of her kind, Perlae acted in a single blink of the eye.

Perlae could see it within her mind, the multitude of Etheric strands of power within the very air itself, the way it filtered through nearly all kinds of life, from water to plants to the very atmosphere they breathed. While Martin and Androcles and the others like them could absorb these strands from all around them and within themselves and form physical manifestations of weapons, *vaes* was much subtler but no less lethal when applied correctly. It was these strands that Perlae manipulated and bent to her will. While she had concentrated more on a defensive form of *vaes* as she grew and trained, Perlae was by no means defenseless. She manipulated those thousands upon thousands of Etheric strands as easily as the conductor of a symphony and

just as her dual fangs burst from her gums in savage anger and she released a snarl of wolf fury, she brought her hands down forcefully as if she was striking something only she could see.

Anja's head whipped back around when she heard it, the ghastly sound of tearing and ripping flesh. Her eyes grew wide when she saw every Svorag in sight, including the two huge monstrosities that had torn open the wall begin to stagger about and roar in horrible pain as invisible objects began to shred their bodies to hamburger right before her eyes. Their blood erupted in every direction and they seemed to be unable to move from the immediate area outside the wall. Death by a thousand cuts was all Anja was able to think of as they began to fall and remain still, their bodies bleeding profusely from wounds that were ripping open almost of their own accord. She turned back to Perlae and saw her standing there, her hands out to her sides with her palms facing downward staring off into something that Anja obviously could not see.

"Anja!" Atropos's voice thundered in the building since all firing had stopped and she turned to look at him and saw the exact same thing happening to those Svorag at the entrance to the Medical Building. She could see six of them on the ground thrashing in agony, their blood spilling from their bodies in copious amounts onto the floor and those dead ones that Atropos and his men had already killed.

"I don't know!" Anja barked. She turned back to Perlae then and moved closer to her unafraid. That they were family was just as easy for her to smell as it was Aricia and Martin and Androcles, not to mention the dual fangs that only the bloodline of Leonidas carried. Anja did not doubt what they were or who they were. "Perlae!" She snapped as she moved in front of her.

The sound of Anja's voice broke Perlae from her frozen position and her amethyst colored eyes blinked rapidly, her dual fangs clearly visible. She glanced at Anja quickly, her hands slowly drawing back towards her body and then the strength left her and she collapsed. Anja reached for her at the same time as Anuk and Kesyla and they caught her between the three of them.

"Perlae!" Ieri exclaimed as she bounced closer to her bonded sister.

"Perlae!" Anja echoed Ieri's shout as she held her in her arms.

Perlae's eyes fluttered and she looked at Anja. "So tired." She rasped out the words. "So tired *Chrorra*."

Anja looked at Anuk and Kesyla as she pulled Perlae closer to her. "It's ok." She spoke softly. Her head turned to take it all in, the Svorag dead numbering close to a hundred and she had done it all without lifting a finger or a weapon. "It's ok." She spoke once more as Atropos moved up beside her.

"I have *Durcunusaan* beginning to sweep the area." Atropos told her. "It appears they are all dead. How?"

Anja shook her head. "I don't know." She spoke looking at him. "Atropos take her. Get her in a bed."

Atropos didn't hesitate and lifted Perlae as if she was a feather while Anja rose to her feet beside him. She looked around once more and then back to the unconscious Perlae. "Something tells me our lives are about to get a whole lot more interesting and unbelievable." She spoke softly.

"You mean more than they already are?" Anuk popped as she looked at her.

Anja took hers and Kesyla's hands. "Oh yeah." She spoke. "Oh yeah."

PREMONITION

"*Sadi now!*" Andro's voice filled her mind as clear as if he was standing beside her.

Sadi had been waiting for that call and instantly she activated her COM unit. They had been circling Jarlori since Andro and the others had exited out the ramp, Kameka using the Quad Pulse Cannons to shred large groups of Svorag wherever she could target them. Sadi and Ne'Veha let her do her thing for neither of them had ever seen a more natural gunner. The Quad cannons were like an extension of her body and at times she looked silly in her large chair with three banks of consoles surrounding her body. However, there was no mistaking her aim. Andro had ordered the skies above Jarlori cleared immediately upon exiting *SPARTA'S WRATH* in orbit and they were the only ship airborne above the desolate city now.

They alone knew why right now, but everyone would soon know.

"Sehri! Now *DuanGai!*" Sadi hissed into the air. "And tell them they had better all come back!"

Sadi didn't have to personally see what was going on in the rear of the *PREMONITION*, for like the Queens, Andro's wives and mates all had a private connection that they used just for themselves to share with each other. This was now open entirely so that Carisia, Lu'ria and Caliria, all on the surface of Ventori, could know what was going on.

Sehri knelt by the open ramp of the *PREMONITION* looking down on the deck at where Worker Drone Alpha Nine was bouncing on its spidery legs in front of her. Namiri squatted next to her, eyes wide and still trying to grasp everything that had happened so quickly.

Shortly after Androcles had made the Tasmor Quorum look foolish, he had led her to the private deck that held the personal quarters of his family. It was here where she discovered what they had done when it became known of this "political marriage". Their quarters were massive to say the least, and one portion had been built to be used as an office of sorts. That room, even larger than Namiri had imagined, that room was not a small apartment that was all hers. She would have to enter it through their quarters, but they had gone out of their way to show her that her honor and integrity would be safe. She could still come into the main quarters and sit with them, or eat with them, but the office area was now hers. She could tell right away that women had decorated the room's interior for the colors were soft and pleasant, the bed was large and very comfortable, and the small bathroom area held items that only a female would know to have. Namiri quickly learned with a smile that no matter the species, females were usually all the same. They had gone out of their way to make Namiri feel at home and welcome and this only endeared them to her as nothing else could. In the few short hours they had before deploying here, Namiri felt like she had found true friends.

"Stick to the plan and do nothing foolish!" Sehri spoke to Alpha Nine. Like all of Andro's wives and mates, all of them knew he had developed a fondness for Alpha Nine since the excursion to the Pralor Space station. Twice since then they had caught him returning to their quarters with Alpha Nine perched on his shoulder and chirping away madly.

Namiri watched as the Worker Drone bounced up and down several times and then turned to follow the six other Drones out the rear of the ramp without hesitation. Sehri and Namiri stood up and went to the rear of the ship, both of them harnessed in and unafraid to lean close to the ramp as they watched the Drones drop quickly out of sight before engaging the small thrusters each of them had.

"You understood that noise it made Sehri?" Namiri asked loudly over the din of the wind whipping through the rear of the ship.

Sehri met her gaze. "Not until Andro bit me." She answered equally as loud. "I don't know how, but Andro, Eliani and a few other of his siblings understand it as well. Sadi and I and the others understand it because Andro does."

"It sounds like gibberish to me." Namiri spoke.

Sehri nodded her head with a smile. "It did to me at first." She replied. "Now my brain automatically translates the sounds to words. I don't know how and neither does Andro but it is part of who we are now."

Namiri shook her head. "I am so far out of my element here." She stated.

Sehri laughed and took her hand in hers. "No more so than we are." She answered her. "No more so than we are." She reached up and with the other hand touched the COM panel beside the ramp controls. "Sadi, all Drones away!" She spoke. "All Drones away!"

Sadi turned her head to Ne'Veha at Sehri's words on the COM. "*Sirsangai*, let Carisia and Lu'ria know. They are standing by with Zarah, Lucia, Sheva and Onera at the designated coordinates."

Ne'Veha nodded her head. "They won't be happy about being left out if this works." Ne'Veha commented.

Sadi smiled and nodded her head. "A lot of people will be left out if this works." She told her. "If this works, it could possibly save many lives. I doubt they will complain."

"No bet here!" Ne'Veha echoed with a smile.

Sadi looked up and out the window of the *PREMONITION*'s cockpit over the city. Her jungle green eyes stared off into the distance for a long moment and she sent a combined pulse of love and devotion from all of them to the man they all so adored. She was the strongest of them since Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Sehri and Caliria were still adjusting to being new wolves and Carisia did not have a wolf's aura. To compensate for that, they had learned to use their Etheric connection to Andro just as the Queens had with his father. It was efficient, though it could not compare the being able to bath him in your female aura or wrap your body around his and

lavish him with kisses. Sadi did not expect him to respond given what was going on, but she knew he would draw strength from that combined pulse.

“Hold the line!” Danny screamed out the words as he bent down to reload his 190 A5. “Hold the line!”

Danny knew it was not something he had to yell, but given the situation he wanted to yell something. He looked up over the edge of the naturally formed ditch they were in and saw nothing but bodies of dead and injured Svorag. It seemed their numbers were endless, but he knew that was not the case. The two companies of 82nd and his and Martin’s team were putting a serious hurt on the Svorag and not giving an inch of ground, yet the creatures kept throwing their lives away. Of course, Danny had no problem sending them all straight to hell for the things he had seen they were capable of.

Danny looked to his left and saw Awser beside him, his eyes wide, but in control. Danny had been impressed for the young man had stood beside him in the thickest of the fighting and not faltered. It had also allowed Danny to witness something he had never imagined he would see in his life. Awser had actually frozen several dozen Svorag in place as they had tried to flank their group and this allowed the man commanding the 82nd companies to redirect some blistering fire onto their position and shatter their bodies to nothing. Whoever had trained him and done a superb job of it and he...

“Coming in!” The female voice called out causing Danny to turn at the familiar tone.

He watched sternly as Aricia, For'mya and Ishma sprinted the last few meters to him and then dropped into the ditch with them. All three of them were splashed with what appeared to be Svorag blood and it didn’t seem to faze them.

“What the hell!” Danny exclaimed. “You are supposed to be with Red!”

Aricia looked at him and canted her head to the side as if in a scolding manner. “You should know more than anyone that Anja can look after herself Daniel!” She hissed at him.

“What happened to you three?” He asked.

“We came in from the tree line south of here.” For'mya commented. “A Svorag patrol it seems. I think they wanted to flank your position here and were trying to slip through the timber to do it.”

Danny grinned. “I take it that didn’t go well for them!” He commented.

For'mya smiled back, revealing her dual wolf fangs. “You could say that.” She replied.

Ishma squatted across from her brother, using her hands to inspect him. “Awser?”

“I am fine sister.” Awser assured her with a smile.

“Danny?” Aricia asked him.

Dan shook his head. “I don’t know... I think they are massing for another push beyond that far depression. Awser here froze a bunch of them solid as they tried to flank us and I think it threw them for a loop.”

“Froze them solid?” For'mya asked as she looked at Awser. “Interesting. Your sister here actually burned one alive back there.”

“We can explain later *chrora*.” Awser answered sheepishly.

Aricia shook her head. “No need. We already know everything we need to know. You are family to us.”

“Can we talk about this another time?” Danny spoke up.

“Daniel we must...” Aricia looked at him and he met her eyes. He had been around Aricia enough through the years to know when she had something she couldn’t explain on her mind. Though young, she was far more intuitive than anyone gave her credit for, and Danny knew that is why Anja and the others loved and trusted her without doubt.

“Spit it out Rika!” Danny prompted her, using the name he had given to her many years ago. It seemed he had given names to all of Martin’s Queens on one deployment with him and they had stuck, though no one but Danny would ever dare call them by these names. As their beloved Martin’s *Mard Fervon*, he had earned that right.

“We must pull everyone back inside the perimeter of Discovery Base.” Aricia told him.

“We must do it now.”

“What?!” Danny asked with wide eyes. “Why?!”

Aricia looked at him intently. “I can feel my son within me Daniel. He is confident and he fights without fear or doubt. He knows he will prevail. There is absolutely no uncertainty in his surface thoughts or his emotions. Almost to the point of...”

“Overconfidence?” Daniel asked.

Aricia nodded quickly. “Yes.”

“*Sibfla!*” Danny spat.

“*Atle?*” Aricia asked him.

Danny looked at them. “It’s exactly how Martin acts when he knows he’s got you by the *nor* and right before he sticks it up your caboose real hard.”

Ishma looked at Daniel with horror in her eyes at what he had said about his King while Aricia and For'mya could only grin, for they knew how true Danny was. Their darling Martin was perhaps, the most deviously cunning and vile man when it came to fighting his enemies. He gave no quarter or mercy to those who were his true enemies and he asked for none. And he would use whatever means he could to bring about your demise. Androcles had learned from his father well, and even took it to another whole level.

Danny looked at Aricia. “When?” He asked her.

Aricia shook her head. “I do not know for certain but his emotions are building as if to a crescendo. And they are building rapidly Daniel.”

Danny nodded his head and looked over his shoulder. “That means he is about to open a can of serious whoop ass and he did learn from the best. Anja?” Danny asked her.

Aricia nodded her head. “She can feel it as well.”

Danny reached up and touched his jaw. “Captain Owens!”

The officer in command of the two companies of 82nd troopers turned from where he stood several hundred meters away. “Here General!”

“Prepare to exfil back to Discovery Base Captain! Two minutes!”

“General?” The young officer asked confused.

“The answer to your question is coming Captain.” Danny told him. “Wait for it. Just get ready!”

“Understood sir.”

Danny watched as Kenny and Cody settled to the ground beside them now. “What’s up boss?” Kenny asked.

“Time to go.” Danny said. “The Skipper’s boy is going to pull something and we don’t want to be here.”

“Oh, hell no we don’t!” Kenny hissed. “I’ll tell the others. Two minutes?”

Danny nodded his head and looked at Aricia. “Rika, you are sure?”

Aricia nodded her head without hesitation. “Oh yes Daniel. Very sure. And it is going to happen very soon.”

SPARTA'S WRATH

“Armen, we’re getting the feed!” The sensor operator called over her shoulder drawing Armen’s attention from the reports he was looking at.

Armen wasted no time and moved quickly to stand behind her.

-Bring it up on your main monitor- Armen told her lifting his orange hued eyes to the monitor above her head.

Armen looked up at the massive monitor as the elven female worked the controls. “Done!” The screen came alive with an expanded view of the city of Jarlori, almost as if they were viewing it from roughly a thousand feet up. “Signal is clean! *Anse...* they are moving fast!”

-Their top speed is approximately one hundred and fifty kilometers per hour- Armen told her as his eyes remained focused on the monitor.

The elven female looked up at his seven foot height. “*Sibfla!*” She exclaimed. Her console beeped softly and several blue lines began to appear on the monitor above her head. “It’s working!” She exclaimed. “Their Duridium chassis is cutting through the interference of the ore in the surface and we are picking up their Neutrino signals.”

-Map it Na’ria- Armen ordered. **-And find me the most focal and active points which would serve our purposes-**

Armen turned his head when Fedor and Eirene came onto the bridge with Miseo and Iama at their sides. They immediately moved over to where he was and looked at the monitors all around them.

“Armen... what is happening?” Fedor asked.

Both he and Eirene were not happy about being left out of the operation even though they understood the reasons. What had taken place on the Vanari homeworld aside, neither of them had the experience to conduct such a quick strike operation and not be a liability. They knew it as well, so even though they acted angry with Androcles they were not. They would be the advance group that departed as soon as the planet was secure.

-Admiral Lorian and your father determined that even the ARIZONA’s sensors could not penetrate the surface of the planet along the coasts due to a particular ore not found in the Alpha Quadrant. It saturates this portion of the continent- Armen told them.

Eirene looked at him. “So they could not get an accurate number of how many Svorag there really were?”

Armen nodded his head. **-Androcles asked that I devise a way to rectify that issue-**

“You did I take it.” Fedor spoke.

-Using the information gathered by your father I determined that a more direct sensor scan was needed. A site to site scan- Armen answered. **-Given the information we had it was discovered that the ARIZONA’s Worker Drones do not possess a Duridium exoskeleton as the ones on SPARTA’S WRATH do. They were all constructed at Dreamland while our Drones are original to this ship. Duridium can be detected through the surface ore using a neutrino based sensor scan-**

“What are they doing?” Eirene asked as she reached up and touch the monitor watching as the blue colored lines grew longer and longer and twisted and turned on the screen.

“They’re mapping the tunnels.” Fedor answered his sister’s question. “The ones the Svorag are using to move without being detected. Why?”

-There is only one way to insure that the Svorag threat on Ventori is eliminated fully- Armen answered.

Eirene looked at him. “Remove the threat at its source.” She stated softly.

Armen nodded his head. **-Yes-**

“Armen do we have weapons that can do that onboard?” Fedor asked him. “Everything I have studied about this ship indicates that is not something we can do. Surgical strikes yes, but the firepower we have or could bring to bear, even at its minimum, it would render whatever area we hit unlivable for centuries.”

-You are correct Fedor- Armen spoke. **-Even at the lowest spectrum of power we can generate our weapons are not as precise as Androcles desires-**

“Then how do we do it?” Fedor asked him.

Eirene thought she saw Armen almost crack a smile before he answered. **-We are not the only weapon your brother possesses Fedor Leonidas. I have also discovered that when it comes to saving lives, your brother and father will use whatever means they have at their disposal to save the maximum number of lives that they can-**

Eirene met his eyes. “Armen... why does that sound suspiciously like an admission of some sort of guilt.”

Armen’s orange hued eyes simply stared back at her. **-I have no idea what you mean-** He finally told her. **-You should make your way to Landing Bay Six. This will be over shortly and you will want to move down as quickly as possible. Your brother will not waste time-** Armen turned to the elven officer as Fedor and Eirene watched him. **-Na’ria... begin transmitting the data to the *KINDRED SOUL-***

KINDRED SOUL

Captain George Patton was monitoring everything and staying out of the way of his crew. Hovering a nearly three thousand meter long ship only a thousand meters from the surface of the planet beneath them was no small feat to be sure. Most everyone on the bridge and the ship were glued to whatever view window they could find and using high powered macro binoculars in order to watch the battle that was taking place nearly a mile to their south. To say that it was a riveting sight would be the understatement of the millennia as far as George was concerned. Svorag bodies were being tossed about, beaten, smashed, burned and crushed at almost every turn and the dragons and Spartans below were not letting up in the least.

“Captain?” His COM officer barked out. “Incoming secure COM from Armen on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Priority Channel Alpha Two One!”

George had been waiting for this and he nodded his head. “Put it up! And Overlay what they are sending to us onto our charts.”

The holodisc just to his left came alive with Armen’s hulking form and George Patton nodded his head. “Armen.”

-Captain Patton- Armen stated. **-The Worker Drones have completed their sensor sweeps. You should be receiving the results now-**

George looked over and saw his Sensor Chief nod and he moved over beside him. “We got it.” He spoke. “Holy shit!” He spoke as his eyes focused on the enormous area where the blue lines connected and extended.

-That was our assessment as well- Armen answered him. **-We have identified what appear to be three breeding caves four hundred and nineteen meters beneath the surface as well as an additional nine entry and exit points aside from the one they have opened up in the center of Jarlori. The furthest away is one point four kilometers from the eastern edge of the city-**

“Christ they are spread out over nearly four square kilometers!” Patton exclaimed.

-We can detect no other energy signatures on the planet like the equipment coming from the three breeding centers and we believe that is all there are- Armen continued.

“So they limited their little horror shops to this coastal region because of the ore?” Patton asked.

Armen nodded his head. **-It would appear so. Which lends even more credibility to the King’s assessment that whoever is leading these Svorag is some sort of former soldier and quite possibly even a Lycavorian-**

Patton nodded his head. “Not going to argue with that based on what we have seen so far.” He stated. “Armen you know what we have to use in order to do this?”

-Our directed sensors over the battle indicate that Androcles and his father and siblings and the 82nd troopers have eliminated over twenty-five thousand Svorag in just eighteen minutes of battle Captain Patton. They have lost no one as of yet but the fighting still rages- Armen stated. -The Dragon Brigade has secured all of the perimeters of the city and none of them will be escaping. I have also dispatched our findings to Daurgo and he is sending his warriors to each of the nine access points. They will not be able to keep up this pace with nearly two hundred thousand Svorag all moving towards this one exit Captain. Androcles understood and the members of the 82nd have prepared for it-

George Patton nodded his head. "Then lets do this."

-I am highlighting the points I believe will inflict the most harm and then vent into the atmosphere- Armen spoke. -The strikes on the breeding centers will vent upwards and join the others-

"Stand by Armen." George spoke and turned his head. "TO?"

"Sir?!"

"Spool up starboard launchers six through fifteen!" Patton spoke looking at the man. "Titan Mark IVs TO. Max yield."

The Tactical officer glanced at him with wide eyes for only a second and then nodded. "Ten Titan Mark IVs sir. Max yield. Loading now."

George turned and looked at Armen in the transmission. "Better put your UV filters on maximum for this Armen."

-Understood-

George turned from the transmission as it vanished. "Individual Target Reference Points TO!" He barked. "Each Mark Four on its own optimum course. Call off impact designators. I want them hitting within three meters of target TO!"

The young man nodded his head without responding as his hands worked the two consoles in front of him. He didn't appear strained or anxious, but was in fact all business. George smiled to himself and once more patted himself on his back for the time and effort he put into finding the right bridge crew for the *KINDRED SOUL*. All of them were far younger than his forty-five years, but damned if they did not meshed like the fingers of a well oiled machine.

The TO looked up just as George turned back to face him. "Captain! All coordinates plotted and confirmed! Launchers six through fifteen are primed!"

"Very well!" George moved to his command chair and settled into it. "Officer of the Deck, prepare to extend shields around Discovery Base! TO, lock all missiles into fire mode and stand by!"

"Weapons standing by sir!" The TO answered.

"Spool up UV filters and shields!" George spoke. "How far out will the blast extend!?"

"Four kilometers from each access point sir!" The TO answered. "Anything in that radius will burn!"

"Get that STRIKER on the edge of the city with the Pralor reporter on it down on the ground!" George snapped. "The *PREMONITION* is the only ship that should be airborne and she should be picking up her passengers!" George turned in his chair. "XO. Get me Androcles on secure COM."

At the moment, Sadi and Ne'Veha were settling the *PREMONITION* to the surface of Ventori three kilometers from the northern tip of the city. It was the only place they could find an open area large enough to accommodate the ship's corvette like size. Sehri was lowering the ramp before they were even down and she could see Carisia and Anthar leading the sprint to the ship. Majeir was beside him as they sprinted for the ship, Alpha Nine and the other six Worker Drones atop hers and Anthar's saddles chirping madly and bouncing all around in circles. Caliria was situated between Carisia and Lu'ria as they ran, still getting used to the abilities that being Lycanari granted to her but learning quickly. Sheva and Onera were right behind them while Lucia, Zarah and Seyra were trailing along slightly behind them with Radem situated between the two younger women.

Move everyone! Sadi's voice erupted in their minds. ***Captain Patton will be firing any moment! Move!***

Her words seemed to energized everyone even more and they doubled their speed if that was possible. Sehri and Namiri were waving at them frantically to keep coming and soon Carisia was dashing up the ramp

and turning to motion the others past her. Anthar and then Majeir burst past them to be met by Caydren, Cinol and Marux, the two slightly smaller dragons helping Marux to blunt the force of Anthar and Majeir's sprint onto the ship. It was then that the reunions began as Lucia and Carisia embraced tightly while Sehri was pulling Zarah into her arms. Sheva and Onera watched as Radem was the last one up the ramp and he turned to look in the direction they had come while tapping his jaw.

"Sadi Leonidas, *Anome* and Blessed Wife of my friend Androcles, perhaps we should haul ass now, as Zarah is so fond of saying." Radem spoke calmly.

Radem didn't see the smile that split Sadi's face but he heard her snicker in humor. Sadi looked at Ne'Veha instantly after Radem had spoken.

Ne'Veha punch it!" She snapped.

Ne'Veha didn't hesitate, drew her fingers down the long panel to her right, and engaged all her engines to full power. The *PREMONITION* exploded off the ground as if shot by a gun and Sadi yanked them into a stomach rolling climb that took them to ten thousand feet in just four seconds.

Sadi sent a very clear and direct pulse to Androcles that was heard by everyone over a Tier Five Etheric user, which was just about everyone on the planet at the moment.

Andro our love! We are clear!

Martin brought his sword down across his body defensively and turned to look at his son when Sadi's pronouncement thundered within Mindvoice. She hadn't just spoken the words, she had screamed them out as loud as she could.

"Keto?!" Martin yelled at Androcles a mere ten meters away.

Andro waited until he had caught his returning Shi Viska and then looked at his father across the short distance. His azure colored eyes were nearly glowing under his helmet. Martin watched as Andro touched his jaw.

"Josie! Execute! Execute! Execute!" Andro spoke almost calmly.

Too calmly Martin decided as he watched his son turn slowly and he followed his gaze. Martin's eyes grew wide as he saw ground based shields began to erupt skyward from the line that they were holding against the Svorag. As his eyes traveled up the line he saw every third 82nd trooper jamming the ground based generator onto the surface and activating it up and down the line. In less than twenty seconds a ground based shield array nearly a hundred meters in height was erected across the entire valley floor and Svorag were beginning to slam into it to no avail as they attacked. Martin's eyes grew wider when he realized that there was no way they were going to penetrate that shield and they would soon begin to climb over their own kind to reach the top of the shield.

"Andro they will..." Martin began to shout as he moved towards his son.

"Captain Patton!" Andro spoke into his COM. "You may fire when ready!"

Martin froze in his spot when he heard the deep, rolling rumble and he turned his head to look back towards Discovery Base. His brown eyes grew wide as he saw that the *KINDRED SOUL* had extended its shield grid around the base and he saw seven, no eight, and nine and then ten smoke trails screaming away from the ship's superstructure right toward Jarlori. He watched three of them veer off in another direction slightly but then they remained straight and true. As Martin watched they screamed in right over the top of his position at nearly four thousand miles an hour right above the top of the ground shield, drawing the attention of thousands of Svorag as they too took notice.

Then the missiles were gone into the city.

By this time Martin had moved up beside his son and he turned his head to meet his eyes.

"Andro what..."

"Exactly as you taught me." Andro answered. "I'm applying the maximum amount of firepower to bring about the success of the mission father."

Martin felt the first explosion deep in the ground and he turned towards the city as he staggered slightly. He could feel the massive concussive force of the blast underground as it rolled beneath them and he saw a massive flash of light from the area where he knew the Svorag had broken through. His eyes grew wide when

he realized what it was and he turned to look at his son once more. The fleeting moment of disappointment drifted into nothing and it was then that Martin knew his son would never intentionally destroy when he did not have to.

“FAEs.” Martin asked him.

Andro nodded his head. “It was the only way to be sure.” He replied.

Martin felt several more detonations and turned once more to the city as the ground beneath their feet trembled horribly. His dark eyes grew wide when he saw it and he now knew the reason behind the ground shield. “Sibfla!” He barked out.

Andro turned to where he was looking and nodded his head. “Yes, that was the only thing I could not predict.”

“Predict!” Martin snapped. “It’s coming right for us!”

The enormous wall of fire was indeed moving right for them. Rolling outward at nearly a thousand feet a second.

“Brace!” Martin screamed. “Brace! Brace!”

The first Titan Mark IV struck exactly where it had been programmed to strike, followed in almost perfect unison by the other nine missiles.

FAE.

Fuel Air Explosive.

An ancient weapon by definition, but still a considerably effective one. Each warhead a MAC warhead, or Metal Augmented Charge filled with aluminum powdered coated with PTFE and the Union’s MX254 explosive charge mixture. When mixed together the three compounds create the explosive force of a two hundred kiloton nuclear warhead that traveled outward at tornado like velocity and carrying with it death on an unimaginable scale. When detonated above ground FAEs can easily wipe out entire sections of a battlefield depending on how large the weapons are. When detonated underground the effect is magnified five fold. Every Svorag within forty meters of the detonation point of each missile was instantly incinerated. When the chemical mixtures mixed with the oxygen in the tunnels it caused an enormous and unyielding fireball to expand outward and ripple through every portion of the tunnels beneath Jarlori. No tunnel was spared, no portion of the intricate design left untouched. Five thousand degree flame and heat moving at nearly a thousand feet per second did not discriminate in the least. Svorag were instantly fried before a conscious thought could enter their minds.

Each Titan Mark IV FAE acted exactly as it was supposed too, and with ten of them going off underground in the space of five square miles, the devastation was complete. The air was sucked from the tunnels and the Svorag burned to ash by the thousands within seconds as the fireballs proceeded to sweep along the tunnels looking for a way to expend their energies. Those not in the vicinity of the point of detonation had the oxygen ripped from their lungs, suffocating within seconds. Other had their internal organs crushed by the concussive force of the fireball storm as it raced throughout the tunnels or simply a combination of all three events took place. The tunnels under Jarlori, previously unable to be tracked or mapped due to the high concentrations of Rubidium Ore, extended for several kilometers in all directions, usually ending at one of the underground bunkers that Martin and the others had found. These bunkers died as well as the collective force of the explosions blew them wide open, as well as the building or sewer systems they may have been hidden in.

Soon, nine columns of fire and smoke blew skywards across the horizon of Jarlori as the tempest created by the FAE weapons finally found their exits from underground. Nine columns of fire and smoke, each roughly a mile high reached into the sky above and announced to anyone within eyesight that the Svorag threat on Ventori had come to a very abrupt and inglorious end.

Since they were still about three kilometers outside of the city proper, when the wall of flame and crushing force slammed into the ground shield it had abated quite a bit to some extent. For the Svorag on the other side of the shield however, it was lethal. Hundreds upon hundreds of Svorag were thrown into the ground shield without mercy, the force of the impacts killing them instantly. Others were simply obliterated by the

concussive forces and the intense rolling wave of flame and debris. Nothing in the wake of that storm was spared.

Martin Leonidas stood behind that ground shield next to his son and watched with an impassive face. He felt no remorse for what the Svorag had once been or what they had become. He knew it was not their fault in any way, and Martin blamed only one man for that. He could hear constant chatter in the background on his COM unit as men and women from Discovery Base began chattering away as the storm of fire and heat began to subside quickly. His eyes wandered over where Laren stood beside Dorian and Murano. Deion on his opposite side with Denali and Jomann. All of them staring at the one hundred meter high ground shield and then turning to look behind them at the path of destruction that they had carved. He saw many of the 82nd troopers doing the same as they began to realize that the battle was very nearly over. Lisisa and Jeth and Nara and Mayla had closed the distance now and were moving up to where their line was. Martin could see Dutkne moving calmly with Lisisa and Nara and upon seeing him Martin realized that they were all here. With the exception of two of his sons, Resumar and Arrarn, and his Aunt Deia, his entire family was now here. This filled Martin with a sense of peace that he had not felt since the last time he was in Sparta and that seemed like a lifetime ago. Martin turned and looked at Andro, saw him reaching for his face and then he tapped his jaw. The COM channel came alive over the open frequency.

“Armen?” Andro called out looking up in to sky above him as if he could see *SPARTA'S WRATH* in orbit. “Report!”

-Your assessment was accurate Androcles- Armen answered. -The tunnels were full and all of them were focusing on reaching that single breach point near you. Initial reports are still coming in, however it appears as if the FAE weapons did as you determined they would. The sensor readings we are now getting from within the tunnels indicate that no Svorag remain alive inside the tunnels. Daurgo already has parts of his units prepared to enter the tunnels to confirm but we have succeeded-

“Casualties?” Andro asked next.

The was a slight pause. **-Androcles we suffered no casualties. Admiral Sa'sur reports all of her units active and in order and I have detected no fallen members of the 82nd. All of their beacons are active-**

Martin Leonidas watched as his son nodded his head to no one in particular, saw him look round at everyone, and then Martin watched as his oldest son broke into a dance right there on the field of battle and did not care who saw him.

“Keto?” Martin asked him.

Andro looked at his father and shrugged. “I did not think this would work.” He answered him. “I promised Elynth I would dance a jig if it did.”

Martin Leonidas threw back his head and roared in laughter as Elynth immediately joined her Bonded Brother in the dance and it was instantly contagious as first Dorian and then Laren began to dance with him. Within seconds even nearby members of the 82nd, dressed in their Cataphract armor were dancing a jig on that open field.

Martin turned his head and looked at Torma beside him.

“Ah... fuck it!” Martin spoke.

And then Martin Leonidas broke into a dance right there beside his children and fellow warriors.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE

It was a testament really, to the way both Martin and his Queens had raised their children. Once the battle was declared over, security had been set, and their men and women taken care of, the only thing that Androcles and his siblings wanted was to meet Jezima and Meral.

The moment their *STRIKER* had landed, Aricia and Anja had spirited her and Meral to the Command Center expecting just that, and they were not disappointed. For Jezima and Meral it was as if they had been reborn for the second time in as many weeks, the first meeting Martin and now his children. Their blood descendants, the family they never knew they had up until now. This was compounded further when Dynina's ship arrived in the system and was quickly ushered to the planet. To say that the reunion was so sweet would have been an understatement.

To physically meet the mother of the woman who had claimed the heart and soul of her son Sumar meant more to Jezima than she could ever put into words, and from the moment they were introduced, it was as if Jezima and Dynina both had discovered long lost friends that had been apart for centuries. For Dynina it was a welcome she had not expected, and it had brought her to raging tears once more. Even after Martin had put her down from the bear hug he had held her in for many minutes, Dynina had then been swarmed by his children doing the same; her beautiful Sateia's grandchildren, and her grandchildren. It was a moment in time that would remain with her forever, seeing Perlae, Ishma and Awser mixing with their cousins as if they had grown up together, recanting the battle that had just taken place. The utter sense of total commitment to family that permeated all of them was more than she had ever imagined she would feel again. She could sense it all stemmed from their father Martin, just as it had once radiated from Sumar and Sateia. Nothing mattered to them more than family, just as it appeared nothing mattered more to Martin and his Queens and their children. When you added Gorgo and Dasha to the mix, the four women could just not stop talking or wanting to be around one another. Together they had combined more generations than any other in their long history and from this day forward into the future each of the four women would be recognized as the mothers of them all.

Meral had developed a connection with Zarah and Lucia right away after meeting them and she gravitated to her niece, Lucia and the siblings she chose to stay close to. Meral already knew of Zarah's unique relationship with Androcles and was completely fascinated by it, but she knew Zarah and Andro would come together to talk when things were calmer and less hectic. It was how both of them were Meral knew and now it would be no different. With the three Queens present as well as their children, it was a joyous reunion all around, even given what had taken place only a short time ago. What struck Dynina the most, the reunion and the joy it brought was not limited to just their family. Everyone partook in the happiness and the mood of every Lycavorian and dragon on Ventori was upbeat and their confidence unmatched. Dynina realized that they drew strength from the source of the happiness. From their King and their Queens.

From the Leonidas family.

No one was left out of the happiness. Even those who had to remain at their posts and do their patrols were not forgotten. Food and drink were conveyed to them without question so that they too could take part in the happiness at least on a small scale. This is what Sumar had brought to the Mahanlo Pack when Sateia had turned him Dynina knew. He exuded confidence and warmth when he wanted to and it was this that drew others to him like flies. It was this that made so many others follow his example and begin to change the way Lycavorians related to each other. It was this trait that made others do whatever he asked of them, not because he asked them, but because they wanted too. It was this that made millions believe that they could be better than what they were and want more. And it was this mentality that made Sumar and her daughter so beloved among their people. And now Dynina knew it was the reason so many followed and adored Martin Leonidas and his family. They were the same, shaped from the very same mold and clay and forged within the very same fire.

Tinra and Mitra were there to record it all, beaming the aftermath of the battle for Ventori to every Pralor channel that was out there. Unbeknownst to them, they had begun a movement on Artaaya pushing for the outright election and then the confirmation of Delnash as Chief Elder immediately. His actions and his knowledge regarding those all of them now known to be Praetorians was beginning to hit the news fully. The fact that he did recognize the error of his ways when they first encountered Martin and the others and had come to accept what was happening, this had pushed Delnash over the top in popularity. The Pralor people had needed something to rally them past just getting by, they had needed something to push them to try and achieve their full potential once more. Delnash had given that to them by dismissing the fact that the Praetorians they now knew existed were supposedly from a species many Pralors had long thought beneath them. The times had

changed and most of those same men and women began to realize that not everything was as it seemed and they needed to look beyond what they knew and reach for the truth.

Delnash had shown them this and in doing so he had solidified his role as the leader to take them into that future.

The reunion had gone on long into the early morning hours until the days' events took their toll on everyone and sleep came to them all. Most Lycavorians and Tasmor had chosen to remain outside under the clean air and stars knowing that Ventori was finally and forever free of the Svorag disease and would remain so in the future. As was usually the case however, sleep did not hold Martin Leonidas long and after only four hours in the arms of his Queens he was extracting himself from their limbs and up and moving for the Mess Shed to grab a mug of coffee. Once in hand he found his sons, Danny and several others already awake as well, and after some bantering back and forth, they got down to the work all of them knew needed to be done before they left.

So along the edge of the calm lake, Androcles set up a portable star chart table and they got down to business.

"...Something you said about the tunnels father, and the ore that permeates this area of the continent." Andro was speaking as he held the mug of his mother's coffee in his hand. No one was wearing their armor, most in fatigue pants and t-shirts to be honest. Andro wore his standard fatigue pants and combat boots but no t-shirt, his brothers choosing to mirror this style of dress as they all sat around on the ground, most of them drinking their mother's coffee. Martin, Danny, Wayonn, Murano and the others wore t-shirts and fatigue pants with their boots, though all of them were still very much armed. Josie Miller wore a standard tank top, her firm breasts pushing against the fabric of the shirt, but Josie knowing that no remarks about her sexually would ever be made in this company. She was a fully recognized warrior in this group she knew and she held their respect. No one among this group of men would ever make such comments towards any woman anyway Josie knew. The chart table had four holodisks on it and Miranda Lorian, Sa'sur, Captain Patton and Armen occupied these four transmissions. Elynth, Torma, Daurgo and the other dragons within the Leonidas family and beyond all rested around this group of men and women.

"You said they were moving around in tunnels that appeared to be part of the old city's infrastructure and those they had dug after." Andro continued. "I put it to Armen and we came to the conclusion that if this was indeed the case, there would need to be other entrances and exits for they still needed air to breathe and circulate as well as vent the heat from their breeding centers. All of those tunnels leading here to Jorlari from the surrounding area."

Martin nodded his head as he sipped his own coffee. "It's the only way they got around without us picking them up on ground sensors. The damn ore." He said.

"Armen came up with the idea of using Alpha Nine and the others to get in and map the tunnels." Andro continued. "We could track their Duridium exoskeletons with a Neutrino based scan. The Drones you and Manda have with you were made at Dreamland. They aren't made out of Duridium."

"Very nice catch Armen." Miranda commented from within her transmission. "Very nice indeed."

-Thank you, Admiral Lorian- Armen answered.

"Then it was just a matter of using Alpha Nine and the others to fully map the tunnels as quickly as they could and then hitting them at critical points." Andro finished speaking as he sipped his coffee. "Mainly wherever they were keeping these breeding hives that you thought were here."

"And that's why the FAEs?" Martin asked.

Andro nodded his head. "I did not want to use them knowing what they could do if one hit wrong, but it was really the only weapon we have that would not have contaminated this entire area for centuries and still guaranteed we got them all."

"We are very thankful to you for that young Androcles." Nalmos spoke from where he sat on the ground beside the Junior Justice from Microu, Denrak.

Andro looked at the man. "My apologies for the damage the weapons did cause sir." He spoke respectfully. An Alpha wolf speaking respectfully to a Beta wolf, no matter his years, did not go unnoticed by Denrak. "It could not be avoided and we needed to be sure all of them were caught in the kill zone."

Nalmos almost found himself laughing for he had not been this happy in years. "My boy, the damage your weapons caused is miniscule compared to what we can now do. Infrastructure can be replaced, however hard it is, lives cannot."

Andro saw Denrak nod his head in agreement. "*Avoi*." He spoke softly.

"We did get them all right?" Wayonn asked the question.

-I believe I can answer that Martin- Avi's voice echoed in the transmission where Miranda sat.

"Go Avi." Martin spoke.

-Admiral Lorian and Captain Akemi approved a linking of our sensor grid on the *ARC ROYAL* with *SPARTA'S WRATH* late last night- Avi explained. **-With her expanded spectrum and more powerful arrays we were able to scan the entire planet, even though there are parts where the ore is prominent. We have been able to determine, with a ninety-four percent ratio, that no Svorag remain-**

Martin nodded his head. "Now that is what I like to hear." He said. "Now, I want to make it a hundred percent."

"I have Ordin sending out his Spiketail detachments to those areas with tunnels King Leonidas." Daurgo spoke in a deep and gravelly voice. Most agreed that it suited him though everyone was still trying to get used to the fact that their dragon brothers and sisters could now actually speak. "Their size is the key here because they can enter all but the smallest tunnels. They will search the tunnels to be sure, and if any do remain they will finish them."

Martin nodded his head again. "Manda, Sa'sur, what about the Kintaur?"

All of them saw Miranda chuckle. "I'll let Sa'sur handle that. She is just as protective of her ship as I am it seems."

"They scratched my ship!" Sa'sur complained. "I had to send out two DCTs to bang out the dent and repaint it!"

"Was that during or after you laid down that whoop ass on them?" Captain Patton asked with a grin.

Sa'sur couldn't help herself now and she shook her head. She would take a ribbing from her fellow fleet officers for a while she knew. She looked at Martin. "Two hundred and twenty-nine Kintaur ships were destroyed King Leonidas. The rest ran like the *nubous* cowards they are. Per Andro's orders, I let them go.

"Survivors?" Martin asked her, smiling slightly for he had already heard about how Sa'sur had reacted when they Kintaur opened fire on her.

"Four hundred and sixty-seven pulled from escape pods." Sa'sur answered. "I have them under guard in the Dragon Den on the *SCIMITAR* at the moment. They are a pretty motley bunch and the dozen dragons we had on board from the adolescent training brigade on Elear has all of them about to *sibfla* in their pants. They're docile enough now."

"That won't last." Martin spoke softly. "Jesus, I didn't expect that many. Ideas?"

"Admiral Lorian and I were talking about that this morning." Sa'sur continued. "There is what appears to be a large Kintaur wreck floating around up here. It was hit by two HAVOC missiles that amazingly ripped through the ship and exploded after they had passed through the hull. Most of the crew were sucked into space through the hull breaches, but the ship is pretty much still intact. If we repair the damage to the hull, we can repurpose it as a prison ship. At least temporarily."

"How long?" Martin asked.

"I can put a portion of my worker drones and a dozen engineers on it. Say four to five days." Sa'sur answered.

Martin nodded his head. "Do it. I don't want them on one of our ships any longer than necessary. And double the guard on them Sa'sur. Don't take any chances."

Sa'sur nodded her head. "Milord."

“And enough of this Milord *sibfla!*” Martin exclaimed in a disgusted voice. “You guys are giving me a freaking head ache!”

“How does pain in the ass sound then?” Danny quipped and then everyone was roaring with hearty laughter.

Denrak looked at Nalmos with wide eyes and Nalmos could only smile and laugh as well. It was a first in anyone’s history as far as he was concerned. A King who did not want to be King. A King who regarded all around him as equals.

“We’ll have to keep *SPARTA’S WRATH* and her escorts in close to the planet Martin.” Miranda spoke now as the laughter subsided. “Captain Patton kind of bumped into a few of the old satellites in orbit as he was playing Calvary. You were right about them being used by someone else to track our movements, but unfortunately when Captain Patton ran them over, it caused them to explode against his hull. Whoever was using them against us had added an additional Tachyon power matrix source to their fusion cores. Probably to keep anyone from detecting the added sensor equipment. The explosions caused a Reflecting Tachyon Wave to emanate outward from Ventori nearly half a light year. The entire planetary system is now saturated. It overloaded most of our Tachyon Induction Coils to the point where it will be a couple of days before they can purge the excess particles. Only *SPARTA’S WRATH* and her escorts are inside that ring and were unaffected.”

“They were in low orbit and powered down.” Patton spoke now. “We didn’t see them until it was too late. My apologies King Leonidas.”

Martin waved his hand dismissively. “Christ I ain’t perfect. I don’t expect anyone else to be. You saved our bacon when you dropped in over Discovery Base. Hell, you scared the piss out of me George!”

“How does that affect you and the others Manda?” Andro asked now.

Miranda shook her head. “We have four CAPS up round the clock. Our sensor abilities are cut by roughly half, but I have four *RAPTORS* on the outer edges of the system as extended eyes and ears. They can cover the system well enough for early warning. Armen has realigned *SPARTA’S WRATH* and her escorts in mid to high orbits in order to cover the system, but with the residual particles floating around, it will be hard to get clear scans. They don’t have to purge their Induction Coils but even their sensors will be limited by the excessive remnant of Tachyon sources.”

“What about ships coming in?” The new voice asked and they all turned to see Anthylea move up to the command group holding the data pad in her hand. “Refugee ships will be arriving shortly.”

Miranda shook her head. “They were not in the system when the burst happened so they are safe. Armen can act as their beacon and direct them when they enter the system. As long as they maintain normal speed they’ll be fine.” She answered quickly. “And even at this reduced output, we could still pick up any Kintaur ships the moment they entered the system. Those fugly things radiate so brightly, even a blind mute could see them.” This brought chuckles from all around as most everyone knew how Miranda viewed the Kintaur and their large, blocky looking ships.

“No... tell us how you really feel Admiral.” George Patton spoke with a smirk, causing everyone else to once more chuckle softly.

Anthylea held out the data pad to Martin. Unlike her beloved Saydia, Anthylea found herself completely comfortable being around Martin Leonidas and other males among the Lycavorians and other species here. As many of the Tasmor had discovered since being here, they didn’t care that the Tasmor were primarily a female species and culture. If you followed the same ideals and values and you fought, you were a friend to them. “The first six Tasmor transports will be arriving in three hours with the first load of refugees who decided to return.” She spoke. “Eight thousand all told.”

“That many?” Martin asked surprised.

Anthylea nodded her head. “Your presence seems to have inspired your people.”

“You let Saydia and your Quorum know this?” He asked.

Anthylea nodded her head. “With the exception of a few, they know this is the future for our people and they are embracing it as each day passes. Vesara and the others will come around eventually.”

Martin held the pad for a moment. “Ok... this changes things.” He spoke. He looked around at the gathered men and women until he found the person he was looking for. “Lirana?”

“The coordinates you wanted the emergency buildings set up in is large enough Milord.” She answered. “If we bring them down in shifts we should be able to erect the buildings as we go. Do we have enough of these portable buildings?”

Danny chuckled as he sipped his coffee, Martin not being the only one who detected that Lirana had said we. It was infectious as Martin knew it would be. The need to help others of their kind no matter what. The desire to be part of that overall, the pull of such a commitment for a Lycavorian no matter their caste, it was just too great. “Hell... we got enough of those to set up a small city.” He stated. “You tell me how many you need initially and I throw together a detail and get them down.”

“Queen Anja says the first one to be erected is to be the medical facility. In the center. We work outwards from there.” Lirana spoke.

Danny nodded his head. “Done deal.” He spoke. “I’ll handle it *fervon*.” He said looking at Martin.

“King Leonidas... your communications people have also told me they are beginning to receive calls from all over the planet from survivors.” Lirana spoke. “Queen Anja told me I needed to ask you for permission to go after them.”

Martin looked at her surprised. “Really? When it comes to matters like that she usually tells me to shut up and let her handle it.”

“I had a moment of weakness. It will pass soon enough.” Anja’s voice came from behind Martin, though he had said what he did because he had smelled her sweet honey scent the moment she exited their personal quarters. He knew Aricia and For’mya were up now as well, but Anja had always been an early riser and she could be up and moving within minutes.

Martin turned as Anja’s comment brought soft laughter from their children and the others gathered. With a mug of coffee in one hand, Anja wrapped her other arm around his waist and they shared a soft kiss of love right there in front of everyone, the powerful emotion between them automatically being felt by Aricia and For’mya as they dressed. It was something the six Queens of the Union did now without even thinking about it and it made them so much closer because of it.

“I checked with COMS before coming over here.” Anja told him as she sipped her coffee and looked at him. “At least seven calls from within three hundred kilometers. Anywhere from twenty to a hundred and fifty in size.”

“What do you need?” Martin asked her.

“Several of our *KADEN* transports and four teams of people to assist. Endy has already agreed that she and Tina will fly us around on our *STRIKER*.” Anja answered. “Those that came with Lirana and those that stayed behind when Konlar and Thoti left have already volunteered to help as well. Dee will run things here. I have also drafted Tobia, Mari, Calyb and Retta. It will be good field experience for them. Retta told me that they have passed their accelerated Agoge.” Anja looked at Androcles now for confirmation and he nodded his head.

“Calyb got superior ratings in hand-to-hand as well as the *Nehtes*. Yannis said he hasn’t seen anyone better since Eli went through her Agoge.” Androcles told his mother.

Anja tilted her head to the side knowingly. “And Retta?”

“She did well enough to pass with an above average rating in combat skills and a good rating in everything else *medwaw*. Yannis said she excelled at Theoretical Tactics.” Androcles replied. “Which is better than I did to be honest.”

“That’s only because you spent more time helping your father and Uncle Danny write the damn course then actually going through it!” Anja hissed at him.

Androcles looked at her with a grin. “Her skills are solid enough mother. She needs field experience so that she can hone them.”

Anja nodded her head then, trusting in her son’s assessment of his sibling’s skills. She knew Androcles would never put them in harms ways if they were not at least as well prepared as they could be.

“Ok...” Anja said turning to look at Murano with a smile. “Tobia wanted to help because she said she needed to get away from you for a few hours. You are wearing her out.” Anja jerked her thumb at Martin. “You’ve been hanging around Andro, who pesters Sadi and the others endlessly, and this big, oversexed lug too much.”

Martin looked at Murano as well as he turned his head and everyone laughed heartily as both Murano and Andro looked at the ground totally embarrassed.

“Thank you mother.” Andro muttered which brought even more laughter to the group and caused Denali to elbow his brother in the gut.

Martin couldn't help but smile for he was not embarrassed in the least and he nodded his head as he leaned over to kiss the top of Anja's head while pulling her closer to him. “You'll have them.” He stated. “We will need to...”

Dynina stood quietly outside the building she had slept in last night, not that sleep came to her at all. Dynina could not recall when she had felt such complete happiness flowing through her. The smell and feel of family filled her senses once more, just as it had when she was among Sumar and Sateia. It was very nearly overwhelming, and the few hours she had spent in the small building she was weeping in joy. So much of what Sumar had told her in their time together had come true, was still coming true, and Dynina welcomed it completely. She could feel the emotions of glee within Perlae, Ishma and Awser inside the camp as they mingled with their family and others. It was a day that Dynina had waited nearly fifteen thousand years for, at times wondering if it would ever happen at all. Now that it was here, her feelings were beyond what she thought herself still capable of.

Though she smelled Jezima, Gorgo and Dasha easily, she waited until Sumar's mother announced herself for she could sense that Jezima was not yet completely comfortable around those who knew she was approaching before she could see them.

“Dynina?” Jezima spoke as she came up behind her with Gorgo and Dasha on either side of her.

Dynina couldn't help herself and she turned quickly and embraced Jezima tightly, her eyes becoming moist once more. Jezima seemed surprised at first, but then the same emotions that were coursing through Dynina were filtering through her as well. Jezima pulled back slightly and looked at the women, both of them rather close in age, and she squeezed her arms tightly.

“Thank you Jezima.” Dynina spoke softly.

“For... for what?” Jezima asked confused.

“For bringing Sumar into this life.” Dynina spoke. “For raising him as you and your husband did. For making him the man he was.”

Jezima held back the tears as well and she smiled. “Then I should thank you as well. Sateia did something that no one else was ever able to do. She captured the heart of my son, and she made him complete. She loved him and I know he loved her. Wayonn showed me some of his memories of them and it was beautiful.”

Dynina looked back to where she had been watching Martin and the others. “And look what that love has given us. What we thought lost so long ago was never really lost Jezima, it simply needed time to evolve.”

Jezima nodded her head. “Yes it did.”

“Dynina?” Gorgo spoke now holding out the mug of coffee with a smile. Gorgo knew exactly how Dynina and Jezima felt, for she had experienced the very same thing all those years ago when she discovered Martin still lived. “Aricia made this blend of coffee when she carried Androcles in her womb. It has become quite popular across the Union and most of our *nathos* is addicted to it now.”

Dynina took the mug gratefully and sipped it slowly. Her eyes grew a little wider when she tasted it and she looked at Gorgo. “This is delicious!” She gasped in delight. She glanced at Dasha. “I see that your daughter is just as gifted as she is beautiful.”

Dasha chuckled. “She has her moments.” She stated with a smile.

Dynina looked back as she heard the laughter behind them and she saw the red haired Queen Anja now clinging to Martin's side and everyone laughing at something she had said. “Tell me... how did... how did he...?”

Gorgo laughed softly herself. “How did he get six such strong willed and beautiful women to love him?”

Dynina smiled at Gorgo's expression. “Yes.”

Dasha laughed softly now. “We have been asking ourselves that for many years Dynina.” She answered. “We still have not come up with an answer that makes any sense.”

Dynina couldn't help but laugh and she turned back to where they were all gathered. “How does he do it?” She asked another question. “He was... just hours ago he was a hardened soldier in a life or death struggle, all of them were. Now they, I sense only peace among them.”

Gorgo turned her head and looked at her son. “He has always been like that.” She answered. “It is like he flips a switch inside. His father Leonidas was able to do the same thing. From what I understand Resumar had this gift as well. He draws people to him like moths to a flame. All of them do. Androcles is more like his father, but they all have that gift.”

“This is... Sumar had this gift.” Jezima spoke calmly.

Dynina nodded her head. “He did. I saw it many times through the years. He united so many packs on Lycavore. They flocked to him, put his trust in him. And then his son Resumar.” She turned back to Jezima. “He was just like his father you know.”

“You mean stubborn as a rock?” Jezima asked with a smile.

Dynina laughed aloud once again feeling happy and welcome. “Oh Jezima! You never met Sateia!” She said with joyfulness. “There did not exist two more stubborn and pig headed individuals than your son and my daughter. Talking to one of them was like talking to both of them so identical were they. It is no wonder that they loved each other so intensely. They were so much alike.” Dynina turned back to watch them and she saw Martin lean over to kiss Anja's head. “Tell me... tell me of this tiny Queen. This Anja Leonidas. She is so small yet there is... there is something powerful about her.”

“What do you mean?” Gorgo asked now.

Dynina canted her head slightly. “She is... she is different somehow.”

“You mean because she is only half Lycavorian?” Dasha asked.

Dynina shook her head quickly. “Oh no. That she was turned is obvious to any pureblood wolf, though to be honest, I have never seen a more powerful turned Alpha female in all of my years. No one can disguise that. This one though... she has a powerful pull over him that his other wives and mates do not.”

Dasha glanced at her now intrigued. “In what way? Aricia is his *Anome*.” She said.

Dynina nodded her head. “There is no question of that Dasha. The connection and love between them is pure and unbreakable. It is exactly what I saw between Resumar and Eliani. Nothing living or dead could ever sunder their love for one another. That is what I see between Martin and Aricia as well, but this Anja. It is different with her.”

“Anja is the first woman that Martin ever truly loved.” Aricia's voice carried to them and they all turned to see her and For'mya walk up holding hands and each of them with their own coffee.

Dynina watched as Aricia and For'mya greeted everyone, including her, and then Aricia stood between her mother and Jezima while For'mya stood beside Gorgo. Dynina looked at Aricia once more. “I don't understand. He did not discover you first?” She asked.

Aricia shook her head. “Oh no.” She replied. “Martin found Anja many years before he claimed me, Dysea and all of us. He found her before he ever knew who and what he was. He loved her before he had this knowledge.”

“I don't understand.” Dynina said.

“It is a long and complicated story, how our Beloved discovered who and what he truly is. Someday, when we have several weeks, we will share it with you. How he discovered all of us. Claimed and loved all of us.” For'mya answered her with a smile. “It is quite the story.”

“Anja is... there are many among our people who have tried for years to determine who Martin will reach for most after me as his *Anome*. Who he favors most after me they say. They agree it is Anja.” Aricia continued now. “We always tease him about it and it is quite funny to be honest, but our people are very smart and they are very correct. He would never admit it, I don't think he even realizes it for the most part, but we all know the answer to that.”

“First love is always a very powerful thing.” Dynina said with a nod.

“Yes.” Aricia said.

“This does not bother any of you?” Dynina asked.

“Anja is so much more than that to all of us.” Aricia said shaking her head. “She always has been. She is our first love as well in many ways. She is our confidence and our compassion. She gives without question and asks for nothing in return. She will deny it, dismiss it, and make jokes about it, all because she doesn’t believe it or does not want to believe it.”

“Why?” Dynina asked.

Aricia shrugged her shoulders. “It does not matter now.” She replied. “Not after we have been together for so long. I may be Martin’s *Anome yes*, and For'mya his *Kinsoaurgai*, but Anja is... she is our *apria*. Our core. We all know this, and we all love her more for it.”

Dynina turned her head and looked at Anja in the distance. “Does she know how all of you feel about her?” She asked softly.

“She may.” Aricia said. “But like I said, she will never admit it because she does not wish it to be this way. In many ways she can be just as silent and unmoving as our Beloved. Martin Leonidas would sacrifice all he is for any one of us, take any risk, remove any obstacle and kill any who stood in his way. We all know this. But for Anja, for Anja I believe the toll taken from those who would attempt or succeed in harming her would be so much more, for it is she who opened his heart to love for the very first time.”

“*Avoi*.” Dasha spoke softly.

“Then embrace that.” Dynina said softly. “Embrace it and hold it tight just as you have.”

For'mya nodded her head. “Our love for each other, the six of us, it knows only one thing Dynina.” She motioned to where Martin stood. “That beautiful specimen of a man right there, he is why we can do what we do. Why we feel what we feel for each other. That is all that matters to us.”

Aricia and For'mya smiled at Dynina and then moved away from the four women. She watched as they moved quickly down to the large clearing by the lake and joined Martin and Anja. Dynina watched them share deep, emotional kisses with Anja and then Martin and then she saw them pull Anja between them as they got down to the business at hand.

Dynina watched them for a long moment and then turned to Jezima, Gorgo and Dasha. “I have never felt such a connection between women. And Martin is the focus. It... his son... Androcles, he is the same with his wives and mates?” She said softly.

Gorgo nodded her head. “Sadi, Ne'Veha and the others are the same way with Andro, yes.” She told her. “It is almost identical to what his mothers share with each other to be honest. Talking to one of them is like talking to all of them. Many have tried to explain it, none have succeeded. It’s almost as if they have blended into one distinct individual.”

Dynina looked back when she heard more laughter. “If what Aricia says is true, then I fear for anyone who wishes to do harm to her, or any of those he calls mate.” She turned back to Gorgo and Dasha. “I get the feeling that recent events of which I am unaware of have made my grandson Martin quite unforgiving when it comes to the welfare of those he calls wives and mates.”

Gorgo looked at Dasha quickly and then back to her. “Unforgiving would be a mild term to describe what my son would do to any who brought or intended to do them harm.”

“A truer statement than that has never been uttered.” Dasha spoke softly.

COLS FAST ATTACK FRIGATE MOON RUNNER

Lazar moved onto his bridge and directly to where his Operations Officer stood at his station. Laon Kavar looked up as Lazar stopped beside him. Like Rhaos Kyer, Laon had grown up with Lazar, a member of one of the only two Mountain Packs that were allowed to reside in the capital city. Also like Rhaos, Laon was completely loyal to his pack and their people, and not in the least bit loyal to Lazar's father the King. Lazar waited until Rhaos moved over beside them before he began speaking.

“How soon?” Lazar asked.

“Nine minutes twenty seconds.” Laon answered without hesitation. When Lazar didn’t answer right away Laon looked at him intently. “Lazar?” Laon asked looking at him.

“I have been studying the intelligence we have on the Tri-Alliance from their time among us all those years ago.” Lazar told him in a soft voice so that it did not carry even to wolf ears.

Laon nodded his head. “There isn’t much.” He spoke.

“I thought your father had sealed all of that information?” Rhaos asked.

“He did.” Lazar said softly. “Most of it none of our people could understand anyway, but it is where we got the ideas for advancing our engine designs and studies.”

“We should have been studying it more.” Rhaos said. “Not locking it away.”

“Makes you wonder what was in it.” Laon said.

“Tell me about it.” Lazar agreed. “Laon, how fast would it take you to completely power down the ship once we revert from our jump. Nothing but minimal life support and enough power to use our thrusters and keep the Stealth Screen in place?”

“Why would we want to do that?” Laon asked him.

Rhaos met his eyes. “Lazar, you have that look in your eye.” He said.

Lazar looked at him intently before answering. “Humor me Laon.” He spoke finally.

Laon looked back at his instruments and then returned his gaze to Lazar. “If I prep the shutdown, perhaps seven seconds.” He answered.

“And how detectable would we be?” Lazar asked.

Laon shrugged his broad shoulders. “If we were talking about our people, I would say none. Given out Intelligence on these Tasmor and the Kintaur that we know exist in this sector, I would say we would be a hole in space.” He answered. “If our intelligence is accurate they are only a few hundred years ahead of us in engine technology, our instruments and our shields are a match for theirs and our weapons slightly better. At least from what our Intelligence says.”

“If our Intelligence is accurate.” Rhaos said.

Lazar nodded in agreement. “Yes, if.”

“If we are talking about these new Lycavorians like that look on your face tells us you are; I can’t answer that.” Laon continued evenly. “Nasso says his other ships were running full EMCOM Lazar. No unnecessary emissions at all and they saw right through them. I don’t know.”

“Could we do a low band sensor burst into the system before we revert?” Lazar asked. “Get an idea of what is there?”

Laon nodded his head now. “I can use a low frequency EM burst. It would look like a normal spatial anomaly.”

“So no one would detect it?” Rhaos asked.

Laon shook his head. “Not unless they were of the mind to trace its origin.”

Lazar was silent for a moment then nodded his head. “Do it.”

Laon turned quickly. “Deflector Officer! Re-tune Deflector harmonics to low band 234.971. Prepare to initiate a sensory EM pulse.”

Lazar turned slightly when he saw the movement to his right and the large Lycavorian at the Secondary Operations Console rose to his feet. This was Sibot It’om, one of the three spies his father had on his ship. Osrod trusted no one, and nearly every ship had spies such as Sibot on them. Those who reported directly to his father on all activities. Sibot, like all of the others, was nothing more than a brute who thought his position gave him status and control. Lazar, like many other officers in their fleet had made things very clear when they discovered who these men were. They commanded the ships they were on and they would not be challenged.

“Commander.” Sibot spoke. “May I inquire as to what you are doing?”

Lazar looked at him fully now. “If I wanted you to know I would have told you Senior Lieutenant.” He replied. “However, since you seem so inquisitive, I am having Commander Laon initiate a low band EM pulse into the system in order to get a better idea of what we may be facing.”

“Sir! That could reveal our position.” Sibot spoke.

Laon looked up from his station and shook his head. “Sibot, shut up you fool!” Laon snapped. “You have no idea what you are talking about!” Laon pressed several touch buttons on his console. “Pulse away!” He announced. “Seven minutes until reversion.”

“How soon?” Lazar asked him.

“We should start getting data back instantly.” Laon answered as he watched his screens. Lazar noted that Laon’s brow furrowed and he stepped closer to him.

“What?” He asked.

Laon shook his head. “The planetary system. It is saturated with tachyon particles. The only clear part is the planet itself out to several hundred kilometers.”

“Tachyon particles?” Rhaos asked moving slightly closer to his friend. He looked at the instruments and his own eyes grew slightly wider. “How is that possible Laon?” He traced the screen slowly. “This gradient indicates an outward pivot from the planet.”

Laon shook his head. “I don’t know. An explosion of some sort in the atmosphere maybe. That would push it away from the planet.” He replied. “I’m picking up a lot of debris as well. Metallic in nature. If I had to guess, I’d say it was ship debris of some kind. Some of it right near our reversion point.”

“How soon?” Lazar asked.

“Four minutes ten seconds!” Laon spoke.

“Make your modifications Laon.” Lazar spoke as he moved to his Command Station and settled into the chair. “Rhaos, adjust our reversion point to just behind the third moon here.” He pointed to the chart. “This should provide us natural interference.”

“A tachyon surge this large would surely knock out any ship board sensors Lazar.” Rhaos told him.

“Why take the chance?” Lazar told him. “If they are as advanced as Gomar’s report suggested, how do we know a tachyon surge would knock out their sensors? Perhaps it only degraded their abilities. I would rather take every advantage I can use.”

Rhaos nodded his head. “Point taken.” He said. “I’ll bring us in as close to the moon as I can.”

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES CLAIMED SPACE

CAPITAL PLANET JETANIA

NORTHERN CONTINENT

WESTERN TANTIA MOUNTAIN RANGE

RANEV PACK; MAIN SETTLEMENT OF WARIM

Loras Ranev was very well known and respected within Warim. In truth, most everyone in Warim would die for her in an instant. She was the recognized Matriarch of their people, at least those Mountain Packs who adhered to her word. There were some Mountain Packs in the far reaches of the third continent who had yet to recognize her status, but they were not hostile and they all hated Osrod and his rule. Loras had no intention of forcing them to follow her, that was not her way. If they did not trust her enough yet to lead them or follow her word, then she would earn that trust with her actions. Loras had no worries about walking the streets of Warim and having it discovered that she lived. Since Warim’s death, Osrod had tried to get agents into the city four different times. All of them were discovered within hours of moving into the city and either shown very quickly to the city gates, or they disappeared quietly and forever.

Osrod had stopped sending agents after the fourth attempt for he did not want to push the Mountain Packs to open rebellion against him. He had numbers and ships and weapons, but the Mountain Packs knew their land and everything on it. Their young warriors were in far superior physical condition than most of the packs who resided within the lower cities, and they adhered to a code of honor that did not allow much leeway. Any civil conflict between the Mountain Packs and the Plains and City Packs would result in casualties that no one was willing to suffer. In truth, Loras knew that even if he discovered that she still lived, her position as Matriarch to the Mountain Packs would stop him from attempting anything. The Mountain Packs were steeped in honor and tradition, and any attempt against the one they considered their Matriarch would incite open warfare and unite all the Mountain Packs across the planet.

That did not mean that precautions were not taken and the men and women of Warim did not take her security seriously.

There were many times when young warriors from the City and Plains Packs would venture into the mountain lands in order to test their mettle against the sturdy beasts that lived there, and for the most part they

were left alone to succeed or fail. More often than not, these warriors were hoping to catch a Mountain Pack female who was in Phase and had strayed too far from their settlements. Mountain Pack females were prized for their exquisite beauty and resilience, and their devotion to their mates and Packs. On the rare occasion when a male Alpha stumbled across a female in Phase and was able to claim her, the young male had to present himself to the young woman's family. Mountain Packs were very different from the City and Plains Packs. They cared nothing for material possessions and their families and packs were the most important thing to them aside from their honor. A young City or Plains male who thought he could claim a Mountain Pack female and simply offer a dowry of credits or gifts was quickly shown the error of his ways and unless the young female wished otherwise, he was escorted from the Mountains with a thorough beating and told never to return. Most of the Mountain Pack's young females did not think otherwise for they had been raised in the honor bound and sometimes harsh life and they wanted an Alpha who was devoted to them and them alone. This had occurred a few dozen times in their history and only four of these times had the Alpha male succeeded in impressing the fathers of the young females. All four of them were now honored members of the Mountain Packs, being quickly indoctrinated and accepted into their unique way of life and committing themselves to the young females. Of those four instances, Loras knew of at least sixteen children between them, and the young males worshiped their wives and mates completely.

Loras made her way down the wide street, allowing the scent of the mountain flowers to filter through her senses as she moved through the crowd towards the Southern Tram building. Warim had an extensive Tram system built over the last decade because of its size and now that Tram connected fourteen other Packs throughout the Mountain Ranges to the South and East, all the way up to the Southern Coast. It was a marvel of Lycavorian engineering and something that Warim's father and then Warim had dedicated their lives to. Loras had seen to it that it had been completed and it had served the Mountain Packs for over a century now and provided many of the jobs that kept Warim and most of the settlements prosperous and healthy. Four new Tram lines had been built that connected directly to the capital city Drinda, one linking here in Warim, though it was closely monitored by Warim's Security Forces. Loras saw Rylin by the west entrance easily enough and she moved up to her with graceful strides.

Rylin looked around Loras, her eyes searching for the security that usually followed the Matriarch wherever she went. "You left them behind?" She asked.

Loras nodded her head. "I told them I was going to be with you."

Rylin chuckled softly at this. "Ah... that explains it."

Loras smiled and nodded her head. All Lycavorians knew who Rylin was and the role she played as Priestess to their people. There were rumors that went back millennia about the strange powers that the Priestess had and while they respected and honored her position, most chose to avoid contact with her because she was feared.

"I assumed, given what you said to me, that security would not be an option." Loras spoke.

Rylin smiles and took her arm. "You would be correct." She said as she began to pull her along. "But you will be quite safe with me."

"Are we going somewhere?" Loras asked. "The Tram entrance is above us."

Rylin shook her head. "We are not using that Tram." She spoke as they came around a corner into a secluded area of the outer building and Loras saw two cloaked figures by what appeared to be a maintenance doorway. Loras was not a fool and she was always cautious knowing that Osrod would want her dead if he knew she lived, but she detected no danger in the air and she trusted Rylin completely. They moved right up to where the two cloaked figures stood and Loras knew immediately that they were female.

"Omrad is waiting Lady Rylin." One figure spoke and Loras was stunned at the voice for she recognized it instantly.

"Taris?" She gasped aloud.

The slim figure reached up and drew back the cowl of the cloak and Loras was then looking at the utterly captivating ice blue eyes and luscious blue black hair of Garget Ranev's youngest daughter. Loras gasped aloud and pulled her quickly into a warm embrace that Taris returned with equal emotion.

Taris Ranev was only twenty-three years old and just a few weeks' shy of her very first Coming of Age fever. Loras had been present at her birth, was her Guardian Alpha and had last seen her on the day of her joining Rylin's secretive Black Watch. A group of young men and women whose only duty was the protection

of the Oracle's sacred Scrolls. As Loras stood there looking at her, it all made sense. The Black Watch did not safeguard Scrolls, it safeguarded the Oracle herself if what Rylin told her was true.

Taris Ranev was five foot four inches of muscular femininity. Her luxuriant hair fell to the top of her incredibly firm ass and had three braids on either side that were drawn back into the lush thickness. The simple tan outfit did not hide her womanly figure in the least, her breasts firm and high, her waist slim and her overall musculature incredibly defined. Her cheekbones were prominent as were her full lips, but it was her eyes that could capture and hold you. Ice blue and able to hold you in place with their beauty. She was Garget's youngest child and his only daughter after eleven boys. He had doted over her from the day she was born, and while he did not fully believe in the Prophecy, he would do anything for his only daughter, as would all of her brothers. Garget knew that the Black Watch underwent intense schooling and training with the Priestess and he wanted to insure his daughter was capable of defending herself against any male because he knew her beauty would draw the fools like flies. He had agreed to her joining the Black Watch for it made Taris happy and he and his wife and mate saw her quite often.

"It is very good to see you Lady Loras." Taris spoke with a dazzling smile and a unique glint to those ice blue eyes.

Rylin motioned to the door with her hand. "Before you enter Loras you must understand that the protection of the *Vomir* is our foremost duty." She told her. "If you step through this door it will become yours as well."

Loras looked at her. "Of course Rylin. I know the importance of the Oracle and what she means to our people even if most do not. I believe in the Prophecy. How... how have you kept her existence secret for so long?"

Rylin nodded her head. "Keeping that secret is second nature to us. If you step through this door Loras, you will believe in far more than just the Prophecy of our people. It is far larger than you can imagine."

Loras looked at her confused. "What do you mean?"

Taris reached out and took her hand. "Lady Loras, do you trust me? Do you trust my father?"

"Without question." Loras answered instantly.

"Then trust in me now." Taris spoke as she motioned to the door.

Loras nodded her head once more and Taris turned to the door, touching something on her wrist. Loras heard the door unlock and slide open and still holding her hand, Taris led her into the interior. Loras's wolf eyes adjusted quickly to the light change and she found herself in what appeared to be a section of the Tram's piping and controls. She was silent as Taris led her forward and the door slid shut behind them. It was a true maze inside yet Taris maneuvered them through the mass of pipes and steel beams with elegance and grace. They came to a second door after walking for several minutes and it opened before they reached it. Taris led her inside and Loras saw the tall Alpha male waiting by the plain, seamless wall in front of them. Loras turned as the door shut behind them again and she looked at Rylin. The light in the room grew as the door shut and Loras squeezed Taris's hand tightly.

"All is ready Rylin." The male spoke and Loras looked at him as he bowed his head deeply to her. "It is a true honor Lady Loras."

"Thank you Omrad." Rylin said as she looked at Loras. "Omrad has served the Oracle the longest of any Black Watch member. He commands all of the Black Watch."

Loras looked surprised. "I thought... I thought the Black Watch Commander was a female Alpha?"

Omrad nodded his head with a smile. "My wife and mate Lady Loras. She is the public face of the Watch and the Co-Commander. I am the shadow face."

"Loras... you will need to contact Tingren and inform him you will be with us for the next several days." Rylin told her. "So that he does not begin a search for you that will draw attention."

Loras looked at her. "Several days!" Loras gasped. "Where... where are we going?"

"This is how it must be Loras." Rylin said. "You must trust me. The *Vomir* did not send me to watch over you all those years ago just so that we could remove you at our whim. Your role in what is to come is vital Loras, as is Taris's role. That is why she is here with you."

"I don't understand." Loras spoke.

"A new world and future is about to descend on our people here Loras." Rylin spoke. "And it will bring about sweeping change in how we think and act. You and Taris are part of that future. Please."

Loras could sense nothing but truthfulness in Rylin's words just as she always had. She could sense nothing but peace radiating from Taris as well and Taris she had known since she was born. Loras reached to her belt and drew up the small personal communicator and activated it. The response was instantaneous.

"Loras." The voice of the male echoed in the small room and then his face appeared on the small screen.

"Tingren... I am going to be occupied with Rylin for the next few days." Loras spoke. "I am safe my friend and have ample security. I wanted to inform you so that you do not worry."

The man's face crinkled in dislike. "Loras this is highly out of place." He spoke.

"I know... but it is something I must do." Loras said. "I will be fine."

"What do I tell others who come seeking your counsel?" Tingren asked.

"Tell them I have gone to a retreat to consult with the Priestess." Loras answered. "They will not question this."

"And Garget?" Tingren asked.

Loras looked briefly at Taris, saw her nod and then back to the communicator. "He will know where I have gone. Go and be with your wife and mate and your new son for a few days Tingren my loyal friend."

The man seemed to hesitate for a moment but finally nodded his head. "As you wish Loras but if I don't hear from you every day at this hour I will come looking for you!"

Loras looked at Rylin who also nodded her head. She turned back to the communicator. "Very well Tingren. Each day at this hour. I give you my word. Now go and be with your family."

Loras ended the communication before he could answer and she looked at Rylin. "He will do as he says." She spoke.

Rylin nodded her head again. "Indeed he will." She spoke. "He is loyal to you and our people." She looked at Omrad. "You may open the door Omrad."

Loras watched as Omrad touched something on his arm and her eyes grew wide when she saw the large section of wall behind him simply disappear from view and reveal an entirely new chamber. Omrad stepped to the side and Taris led her into the large circular chamber with odd looking floor and ceiling.

"What is this?" Loras asked as Rylin moved up beside her and Omrad stepped into the chamber and touched his wrist again. The wall appeared in front of her once more, just as solid as it was when they had first entered the outer room.

"This is the future." Rylin spoke just before Omrad touched his wrist once more and the room was filled with a bright orange like light and the four of them vanished as the Teleporter activated.

COLS FAST ATTACK FRIGATE

MOON RUNNER

THREE HOURS NINETEEN MINUTES AFTER ENTERING VENTORI PLANETARY SYSTEM

Lazar sat quietly in his command chair as his crew did their jobs and he was content to watch. He had chosen his crew carefully, making sure to put more Mountain Pack members on his crew than City or Plains Packs. Warim had taught him not to trust easily, and after his father had Warim killed that sense of security had grown four fold. He could do nothing about the spies his father had planted on his ship, but he knew who all of them were thankfully. Sibot was just the most vocal and foolish. They had exited their last jump just where he had planned, behind the medium sized moon orbiting Ventori. The entire system was saturated with tachyon particles indicating something had indeed exploded in the upper atmosphere of Ventori and sent the particles out into the system in a circular pattern. Lazar had waited for ninety minutes with his engines and weapons on standby to make a quick exit while they floated in the upper gravity of the moon and made like a hole in space. When no ship made to come close to them, Lazar ordered their systems online at their lowest output so they could scan the surrounding area. The upper gravity of the moon provided some natural stealth and he kept their power output at extremely low levels in order to remain hidden as long as possible while he allowed his crew to do what they were trained to do. Lazar was thinking about his mother in Warim when Rhaos motioned him over to Laon's station. He rose from his chair and moved there in eight strides.

"What do you have?" Lazar asked.

Laon looked at him. "Way more than I ever thought we would or could get." He replied.

"What do you mean?" Lazar asked him.

"Now that we are in system I can tell you that it was a tachyon pulse that emanated from the planet." Laon spoke. "Probably high up in the atmosphere. If I had to guess, I'd say some kind of older satellites that someone added tachyon power matrixes to in order to hide them. It spiraled outward and affected all the ships in the inner system. It's why they haven't found us yet."

"Come again?" Lazar asked. "And speak normally Laon... Rhaos and I don't understand you when you get excited."

Laon chuckled and nodded his head. "It has to be affecting their sensors as well or they would have been all over us the moment we entered the system even with our Stealth Screen in place. I looked over Gomar's report again, saw what their ships were doing and if they found our ships while under full EMCON then their sensors are far superior to ours in every way. This is why I know for a fact that they have been affected by this tachyon burst. They would have found us by now if they weren't."

Rhaos nodded his head. "It makes sense Lazar." He told him. "If a big guess."

Laon gave Rhaos a light punch in the arm. "The more advanced a system is, the more it is affected by things beyond your control." Laon stated.

Lazar nodded his head. "I agree it's a big assumption to make but I'm with you. How long will this last?"

"The tachyon particles per meter is slowly going down, so I estimate we have about eighteen hours before they can detect us." Laon replied. "If their sensors are as good as I think."

"Eighteen hours, I can work with that." Lazar spoke quickly. "Can we scan the planet and surrounding area with our passive arrays?"

"I already have. The wreckage dotting the system is definitely Kintaur." He replied. "It matches up with what our Intelligence told us. From the amount of wreckage, I would estimate the remains of at least two hundred Kintaur ships, probably more. I can detect one hundred and sixty-nine of these Union warships in the system, not including the fighters and smaller ships. Probably transports."

"Fighters?" Lazar gasped.

Laon nodded his head. "I'm guessing the big ones that we can detect, nineteen of them right now, ranging in size from thirty-five hundred meters to forty-four hundred meters. Those have to be carriers of some sort Lazar. Capital Class and larger than our biggest ships by fifteen hundred meters easy, probably more. The big *ronnus* that Nasso and Gomar encountered is in a low orbit of the planet with four other ships."

"Gomar said there were over three hundred ships that he was able to scan." Lazar said.

Rhaos nodded his head. "Which means the others are still hidden or not in system." He said. "I am leaning towards still hidden."

"So over two hundred Kintaur ships came here and they attacked?" Lazar asked.

"Doesn't look like it worked out too well for them." Rhaos spoke flippantly. "They must be stupider than we thought."

"Maybe..." Laon said. "But they left a treasure trove for us."

"What do you mean?" Lazar asked.

"I was able to scan the nearest wrecks to our location." Laon told him evenly. "Lazar, their engine technology is at least two or three hundred centuries ahead of our own. The general design is similar from what I could scan, but they are far more efficient and provide far more power."

"Seriously?" Lazar asked.

Laon nodded his head quickly, and with an equal amount of excitement. "If I could get aboard one of those wrecks I could download their engine schematics and within months we could improve our own engines five fold."

"Can you do that?" Rhaos asked.

Laon nodded his head. "The one closest to us is still relatively intact. The entire aft section is vented to space but it looks intact. There is a computer port just inside this hole in the hull here that I have pinpointed. I can power it up manually and then download what I need. This has to be the engineering section and the computer network would be connected to every system on the ship."

"Won't they detect it?" Lazar asked.

Laon shook his head. "Not a portable power source." He spoke. "We may even be able to get weapons data."

Lazar looked up and out of the view window at the front of their bridge. "Their weapons didn't seem to help them a whole lot." He spoke. He turned back to Laon. "What about on the planet?"

Laon shook his head. "Harder to tell." He answered. "There seems to be some sort of large, localized jamming field radiating from this continent. A lot of the transports that I've tracked in the system are going back and forth into this field."

"A base?" Rhaos said.

Laon nodded his head. "Pretty good bet."

"Can we get to the surface undetected?" Lazar asked.

Rhaos looked at him with wide eyes. "What?"

"We came here to get intelligence." Lazar said. "If we can get that information without them ever knowing we were here?"

"That's a big if Lazar." Rhaos said. "If we are caught we don't know what they will do. They could just kill us and be done with it."

Lazar shook his head. "If they were of that mindset, wouldn't they have just taken out Nasso and his ships in order to keep it secret?"

"He's got a point Rhaos." Laon stated. "They had our ships dead to rights. They could have blown Nasso's *nio mida* out of the stars and been done with it. We'd have never known they existed."

Rhaos thought about that for a moment and then nodded his head. "Ok... I'll concede that point. But going to the planet? We know nothing about these Lycavorians Lazar."

"Can you think of a better way to get that information?" Lazar asked him. "Can we scan their ships from here?"

Laon shook his head quickly. "An active scan would be detected instantly even through the tachyon particles in the system. I tried passive scans but whatever their hulls are comprised of, it's not something I have ever seen before and our passive scans won't penetrate it. It's a mixture of metals that don't exist in our data banks. Hell, I don't know if an active scan would penetrate it, but that would certainly lead them right to us."

"Is it possible to get the surface undetected then?" Lazar asked once more.

Laon adjusted his two monitors and pointed at one. "One of our two shuttles could plot a precise course through the thickest parts of the tachyon particles still in the system to the upper atmosphere and then down through the atmospheric layers. This area here, exactly sixty-seven kilometers from this dampening field, it is unusually hot and it is reaching four hundred and twelve kilometers into the upper atmosphere. We could hide in that and make our way down to the surface. We'd have to cover a lot of ground once we got there though, just to get close to this base we think is there, but it is doable."

"Where is the heat coming from?" Lazar asked.

Laon adjusted his monitors once more. "Looks like some sort of seismic event. Residual heat from an explosion maybe? Can't get a lot of details from here."

"That far up into the atmosphere?" Rhaos asked.

"It's possible." Laon said. "No telling how long it will last though. We don't have any information or charts on this planet to base seismic estimates on."

Lazar was silent for a long moment until Rhaos met his gaze. "What are you thinking Lazar?" He asked his friend.

"Two things actually." Lazar answered. "That the intelligence we could gain would go a long way to giving the Mountain Packs more leverage against my father and his many cronies. Including the City and Plains Packs that support him out of nothing more than fear."

Rhaos nodded his head. "I'll give you that one, but we don't want to incite a civil war Lazar." He stated.

Lazar nodded. "I know."

"What else?" Rhaos asked him.

"That we could be sticking our noses into something that is so far beyond us and our ability to understand or cope with it, that we'll get our asses handed to us in a very large way." Lazar finished.

"Exactly my thoughts." Rhaos said.

"There is no gain without risk." Lazar said.

“You are going to quote Garget?” Rhaos gasped. “Now? That isn’t fair Lazar! Not by a longshot.” Laon nodded his head. “I agree, that’s not fair.” He stated with a smile. “Now, when do we go?” Lazar grinned at him and Rhaos shook his head with a smile. “How many do you need to get this data from the Kintaur wreck?”

“Three.” Laon answered.

“Take one of the shuttles.” Lazar told him. “Rhaos put together a ground team and make sure Sibot is on it.”

Rhaos looked at him with wide eyes. “Why?”

“I intend to leave his sorry carcass on that planet and be done with him just as my mother told me to do.” Lazar answered.

Rhaos looked at Laon and nodded. “Works for me.”

Laon nodded as well. “Me too.”

Lazar grunted and turned. “Let’s get started then. We got a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it. We need to be gone before this tachyon field clears completely or we will be sitting ducks.”

VENTORI

“...Still have not answered my question.” Duewa leaned against the portable computer console, her arms crossed over her ample chest and she watched as Anja was putting different things into the Field Medical Bag. “Anja!” She declared forcefully.

Anja turned to face her. “Yes!” She answered trying to keep the smile from her beautiful face. “Ok? Yes... they have already Ascended.”

“I knew it!” Duewa declared. “How did you...?”

Anja turned to face her fully and leaned back against the table. “Eliani was able to sneak them in last year when she went for her Ascension. Before everything happened on Hadaria.” Anja told her. “Vana’s oldest as well. They were... they were advancing at such a complex level that we had to do it.”

“How did you get them into the Ascension Temple?” Duewa asked. “My mother always had guards posted at the entrances to...” Duewa rolled her eyes. “Never mind... that is a stupid question. My mother only ever went there for her own Ascension. She never cared about the Temple when she wasn’t there.”

“The Hadarian Militia, at least that part of it, was loyal to me.” Anja told her. “They only played along with your mother when she was there.”

Duewa shook her head slowly. “The more I discover, the more I realize just how ignorant my mother was. And how close I came to becoming just like her.”

Anja shook her head. “You were never like her Dee.” Anja said. “That is why you were able to break the hold she had on you.”

“Well... Thoti helped with that as well.” Duewa said with a smile.

Anja nodded her head. “Strange how a big cock and a man who knows how to use it can help you see things you would never have seen before isn’t it? Especially if they love you until you can’t stand it.” She spoke.

Duewa burst out laughing and waved her hand dismissively at Anja. “*Carians*, you are so bad!” She stated.

Anja winked at her. “That’s why Marty loves me.” She told her with a wide smile. “I’m his bad girl!”

They laughed together for several moments and then Duewa moved across the small distance and added something to the bag Anja was packing. She looked at her as they stood there together.

“Are you worried about them?” She asked more seriously.

Anja nodded her head slowly. “A little.” She replied honestly. “I trust the Agoge process though and I trust my son more. If Androcles says they are ready and just need field experience, then I accept that. Yannis is one of the finest instructors we have, and he does not give out free passes to anyone. Especially not anyone with the last name Leonidas.”

“Anja, not to change the subject, but have you given thought to those who will need to Ascend soon?” Duewa asked. “Without being able to access the Temple on Hadaria many will begin to lose their effectiveness. Myself among them.”

Anja looked at her and nodded. “That is why I always advocated for all of our Healers to teach themselves the skills that Yuriko’s husband Filrain taught himself over the years. He was able to go almost three decades and he only Ascended four times Dee.”

“I have begun his lessons myself but that will not...” Duewa spoke.

Anja cut her off with a nod. “I know.” She said. “That is where Sivana comes in.”

Duewa looked confused. “Your sister? How?”

“Ever since Buonau usurped us, Vana has been working on a plan to take away the one thing that your mother can hold over us.” Anja said.

“The Nebula.” Duewa commented.

Anja nodded her head now. “If your mother does not control it then she loses whatever leverage she may have over the Kavalians controlling Hadaria. She loses that leverage, she loses her power and influence.”

Duewa nodded now. “Yes, this is true.” She echoed.

“Vana may have come up with something.” Anja spoke. “I did not bring it to you because I wanted Marty to run it through that beautiful military mind of his and see what he said. It’s reckless and could potentially be a disaster, but if it succeeds it could wrench control of the nebula from your mother and there wouldn’t be a damn thing she could do about it.”

“How do you control a naturally occurring nebula from doing what it has done for thousands of years?” Duewa asked.

“Not control.” Anja said. “Direct.”

“I don’t follow.” Duewa said.

Anja smiled and reached for Duewa’s belt and took her P1. She lifted hers from her own belt and Duewa watched as she snapped the ends of both together making one pad. Anja typed quickly on hers and then Duewa heard several chirping sounds and finally a single beep. At that point Anja disconnected them and held Duewa’s back out to her.

“This will need your approval as well Dee.” Anja said holding her pad out to her.

“Mine?” Duewa gasped.

“I signed the order and sent it back with the last group of dispatches.” Anja told her with a nod. “You are now second in command of all Union Medical Forces and Projects Dee. Anuk did not want it, she loves the field too much and she said a Hadarian needs to hold that position. It’s been vacant since Eurin stepped down a decade ago.” Anja met her wide eyes. “It’s yours if you want it.”

“But you... you already put me in charge of Research Anja.” Duewa stammered aloud. “Why... why this? Why now? What about Eliani? She should be the one to...”

“Anuk is right.” Anja said with a shake of her head. “And Eliani already told me a long time ago that she does not want it even if I asked her to take it. The likelihood of her accepting now that she had found Jomann and Brendi is even less. A Hadarian needs to hold this position Duewa. And I need someone who can tell me like it is. Someone who will back me if she thinks I am right, or tell me I am a nut job if I am wrong. Someone who wants to see our people back within the Union as much as I do.”

Duewa needed no urging after that for she desperately wanted to see that, not only to prove that her mother was wrong all along, but because after experiencing everything she had since Thoti had turned her, Duewa knew it was the best for all Hadarians. Duewa took the P1 Anja held.

“I accept.” Duewa spoke confidently and she saw Anja’s face light up in happiness.

“Really?” She asked.

Duewa nodded her head. “You are right; I do want to see us back within the Union. I truly believe now that it is the only place for our people. Has been the only place for our people. And I relish the closeness that this will bring to you and I.”

Anja took Duewa’s hands within her own and squeezed them. “I feel the same way.” She said warmly.

“Did Thoti know?” Duewa asked.

Anja shook her head. “Just Marty, Aricia and the others and Atropos.” She answered. “It will mean you have to switch back and forth between Earth and Hadaria like we do. Well... at least like we used too.”

Duewa nodded her head. “A prospect that entices me more and more.” She said. “I saw very little of Sparta while I was there and I regret that. Thoti began to show me more, but there is much I have not seen. And he promised me a villa by the sea.”

Anja smiled and shook her head. “You hooked him good girl!” She spoke with a knowing smile. “A villa by the sea! Wow! Thoti hates the ocean.”

Duewa nodded with a grin. “I know.”

They both turned when Retta and Calyb came into the Med Center with Atropos, Tobia, Mari and Emylea in tow. Anja nodded her head. “Look over the plan.” She told Duewa. “Martin said to come to him if you have any questions about the military aspects of it you don’t understand. Take your time Dee. If we are going to do this, then we have to get it right the first time. We won’t have a second chance.”

Duewa nodded her head. “I understand.”

Anja looked at Atropos as he finished securing her bag and then tossed it over his shoulder. “We’ll be gone tonight but back by the end of the day tomorrow.” Anja said. “You need anything you just call.”

Duewa smiled. “We’ll be fine.” She told her. “Just don’t get too cozy out there.”

“Cozy?” Anja gasped. Anja leaned close to her ear. “The only place I have ever been cozy is snuggled between Martin and Aricia, with both their tongues doing wondrous little things to me.”

Duewa couldn’t help it and she laughed again and hugged Anja tightly. “Call if you need any more supplies.” She said. “I’ll have them sent out right away.”

Anja nodded as she tucked her P1 away and reached down to grab her personal Hip Pack. “We’ll see you tomorrow night.” She stated as she began to follow Atropos out of the Med Center.

Duewa looked at the P1 in her hand and came to realize that the future of her people, hers and Anja’s people, it now rested with the decisions they made. Her mother may have been in charge right now, but knowing Anja as she had come to know her, those days were numbered. She would do whatever she needed to do in order to see the day come where the Hadarian people were once more part of the Union and free.

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE ADHOC COMMAND CENTER

“...Can do it then?” Martin asked the image of Thoti and Edrao in the image.

Thoti nodded his head. “Edrao has obtained detailed plans of the station Martin.” He answered. “His contacts on Artaaya must be very high placed.”

Martin looked at Edrao and saw him nod. “We have known for some time that Lorendo could not be trusted King Leonidas. We have been gathering data on his activities for years. The plans to this station were a risk worth taking. We have had them for over a decade now, but no means to use them. Until now.”

“Casualties Thoti?” Martin asked.

Thoti shook his head. “Minimal. The station is serviced by three primary ventilation systems. We’re going to approach as a standard supply delivery ship, a team will space jump to each system and flood the station with Anestine Gas. Once we have confirmation that everyone is out, we will move in and secure the station.”

“Is there any way to confirm whether or not there are Svorag on board?” Danny asked from his chair at the table where he sat with Androcles, Wayonn and Murano.

Thoti shook his head. “Not until we get aboard.” He answered. “We will wait until the *STRIKER* arrives with the new particle weapons you are sending and then hit the station in roughly twenty-three hours.”

“Konlar?” Martin asked.

“He is coordinating the movement of our settlement to Ventori.” Edrao spoke now.

Martin blinked quickly. “What?”

Edrao nodded his head. “We discussed this on the trip here King Leonidas. Our place is with our people. There on Ventori. We no longer have to hide ourselves because of Lorendo and we want our people to be free once more.”

“Can you get them here unseen?” Martin asked.

Edrao nodded again. “We have transports to move them all, but what we don’t have is someone to protect them. The transports are not very fast. We built them from scratch, but securing engine components was not easy or cheap.”

“*Sibfla!*” Martin exclaimed. He turned to the large table and stabbed down on the control panel. “Manda?”

Miranda Lorian’s face appeared in the small communications holodisc on the table. “Go for *ARIZONA* actual.” She spoke.

“Manda... I want a Full Strike Wing of ships prepared to depart in one hour.” Martin told her. “Coordinate with Sa’sur, but pick from those ships that are still Shrouded. No sense in giving away positions to unwelcome eyes.” Martin looked at Edrao. “Have Konlar send the coordinates directly to Admiral Lorian Edrao. You will have your escort.”

Edrao nodded his head with a smile. “Good.”

“Thoti, contact me when you have the weapons and you are prepared to strike.” Martin told him. “Let me be clear though, if for any reason you feel that things are going south Thoti, you blow that damn station and everything on it clean out of the stars. You hear me?”

Thoti nodded his head. “Yes Milord.” He spoke.

“Good luck my friend.” Martin spoke. “And don’t get your ass shot or anything cause then Duewa will blame me.”

Thoti chuckled. “No worries.” He said before reaching out on his end and terminating the transmission.

Martin turned back to those in the room and moved to the chair and sat down. He was about to begin speaking when the door opened and the Durcunusaan Officer entered and moved directly to where he sat. He whispered into his ear and Martin nodded quickly.

“Of course. Always.” He said as he rose back to his feet and watched as Dynina came into the Command Center with Nicha, Kenroe, Orman and Amena close behind her. Martin didn’t hesitate and neither did Androcles. Both of them rose to their feet to greet her and Dynina was quickly pressed between the two of them as they nuzzled her affectionately. Dynina basked in the attention while Nicha stood to the side and smiled. Nicha knew that Dynina would be greeted as family when they finally got here, she just didn’t realize how much that meant to the Leonidas family. Nor did Dynina for that matter. They did not care who saw these displays of affection which was very out of character for an Alpha wolf, but Nicha suspected that Dynina did not realize just how far the Lycavorian people had come from her days on Lycavore.

Dynina reached up finally, tears rolling down her cheeks, and she put her hand to Martin’s cheek while drawing her other hand up alongside Andro’s head. “I know there is so much going on but we need to talk of things.” She spoke calmly.

Martin nodded his head. “I know.” He replied. “Now is as good a time as any I suppose.” Dynina looked briefly at where Danny, Murano and Wayonn sat and then back to Martin. He nodded his head once more. “They are among those I trust most of all.” He told her. “Whatever you need to say can be spoken of in front of them.”

Dynina nodded and Martin ushered her to the chair. She watched as Kenroe, Orman, Amena and Nicha settled into chairs around the table before she sat down. Martin and Andro joined her on either side, Dynina reaching out to them almost instinctively and taking their hands. “I... I have dreamed of this day.” Dynina spoke softly. “For so very long. You have your grandfather’s features and your grandmother’s eyes.” She told Martin. “Yellow gold in wolf form. The most beautiful eyes.” Dynina turned and looked at Androcles. “And you... it is not easy understanding how your father managed to secure the love and devotion of such beautiful females, but you, that is easy with you. Your *cahs* are utterly breathtaking. Your mother’s eyes entirely.” Dynina squeezed their hands tightly and shook her head quickly. “*Vada carians alinn lae.*”

“*Vada carians alinn lae staania.*” Martin told her. “I came out here hoping to find out the history of my family, my blood. I have found far more than I ever imagined.”

Dynina looked at him and smiled through her tears. “And so many questions as well.” She said.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.”

“You do realize that even Jezima and I will not be able to answer all the questions that you have *staaniaketo.*” Dynina told him.

Martin nodded again. "You will be able to answer most of them." He stated. "The rest I can live without. For now, anyway."

"And give the rest of us some peace of mind." Danny spoke from his chair.

Dynina looked at his handsome ebony face, the extremely powerful body and then the perfectly white teeth. A tall and powerful Alpha that deserved the title he carried. Dynina had noticed in her short time here that all of the males, whether they be Alpha or Beta, all of them were in superb physical condition. Beyond superb. Just as it had been when his grandfather led their people.

"Martin's *Mard Fervon*, Daniel Simpson." Dynina spoke with warmth in her voice and a smile on her face. "You have saved each other more times than either of you can recall and this has formed a bond that marks you as brothers and one that shall never be broken." She said causing Danny to look at her oddly. "It is in your auras."

Danny looked at her for a long moment. "He told you to say that didn't he? To freak me out right?" Danny quipped quickly. This caused Andro and the others to chuckle softly for they knew Danny was not very much into fate and destiny, though he did believe in both.

Dynina smiled and shook her head. She looked at Martin. "I can see now why this bond exists between you. He is very much like you."

"I'm better looking though." Martin said quickly.

"Better looking?" Danny gasped in mock disbelief. "*Sibfla* son... you really need to get your eyes checked! Better looking than a two headed, shit house Acamarian rat maybe!" Danny chimed in just as quickly. "No... I take that back. They are better looking than you! Pointy ass noses and them beady little eyes! What Aricia, Red and the others see in you I have no idea! You are just plain, honest to the gods fugly!"

Dynina couldn't help herself and neither could Nicha and both of them burst into hearty laughter as Kenroe, Amena and Orman looked on confused. Even the gravity of the situation all around them did not dull their spirits or the Etheric resonance Dynina took note. They were true brothers in every sense but blood, however, blood stopped being a factor a long time ago in the love these two men felt for each other she suspected.

Kenroe leaned closer to where Wayonn sat. "Do they... do they always act like this?" He whispered the question.

Wayonn nodded his head with a smile. "This is actually very mild in comparison to most times." He answered him, seeing all their eyes go wide.

Martin leaned back in his chair with a smile on his face and shaking his head knowing that Danny had bested him again. He squeezed Dynina's hand and saw her turn to look at him. "So tell me *staania*... what do you want to talk about?"

Dynina nodded and shifted in her chair. "There is so much." She spoke softly.

"Why don't you start with these COLS individuals *staania*." Andro suggested. "They seem to be very interested in you and our family. They have to know we are here by now."

Dynina glanced at him and nodded. "Yes, but first, I must tell you of the chamber on Lorenu."

"The chamber?" Martin asked leaning forward now.

Dynina nodded her head. "It was already there when we arrived on Lorenu, the center portion of our city as well. We have built around it through the years, but the main part of our city was already there, and it was a very advanced city. At first we thought perhaps Sumar had been the one to have built the chamber given the outer shell surrounding it, but our sensor scans of the surrounding terrain and minerals indicated that the interior predates Sumar by several hundred thousand years at least. Perhaps more. Just as the main portion of our city does. He only put in place the security measures."

"Someone else built it?" Martin asked. "Who? And why abandon it?"

Dynina shook her head. "We have never been able to determine that *staaniaketo*." She answered. "And we have tried."

"A temple of some sort then?" Andro asked. "From early in Pralor history?"

"It is not of any Pralor manufacturing capability that we know of." Amena spoke from her chair causing Andro to look at Wayonn and Murano.

Wayonn and Murano shook their heads as well when Andro looked at them. "The Pralor people do not have a known recognized deity or religion that they followed. At least none ever listed in our entire history. We

have always given thanks and blessings to the Ancients within The Rift of Time. This has never changed.” Murano answered.

“There is also a holo message from Sumar within the outer chamber, one he must have recorded before ever coming to Lycavore. He is younger in the message and he speaks of strange things.” Dynina spoke once more. “I have listened to it hundreds of times, especially after we first arrived. I missed him and Sateia so much. He speaks vaguely of what is held inside and that only someone of his blood would be able to deactivate the security measures he put in place and then enter the actual chamber. There is a single window that looks into the main chamber but all we can see are three distinct symbols of some sort placed on the wall directly across from the door in a vertical fashion.”

Martin was very interested now and he leaned forward. “Symbols?” Martin watched her nod. “What else did the message say *staania*?”

Dynina looked at him intently. “Only that the chamber holds items which will be of supreme importance in facing what will come. What the future to come will be like, he said. He speaks directly to me at the end, telling me that you would come to us one day and that I must insure you enter the chamber with the keys. It was if he already knew me when he made this message *staaniaketo*. As I said, it was very vague and it references these keys that would unlock what has been hidden away for us.”

Martin stiffened slightly and looked at Andro. He turned back to Dynina. “Keys?” He asked her. “He said keys?”

Dynina nodded her head. “We were not able to copy the message because of security measures he put in place but he mentions the keys several times. Three keys that will unlock the fourth, and then all four would be needed to begin the journey.”

“What journey?” Martin asked.

Dynina shook her head. “We don’t know.” She replied. “That is why you must come to Lorenu. Nearly fifteen thousand years this has been twisting our minds and only you can unlock it. You and the three keys. Do you know what he means?”

Martin sat back in his chair and looked at Androcles once more. Dynina took notice of this look between father and son now and she turned her head to see Daniel, Wayonn and Murano had become silent as well. She turned back to Martin.

“You know something!” She gasped. “Tell me *staaniaketo*!”

“*Staania*, Sumar appeared to father and I both just recently. He and Dadrien.” Androcles spoke now seeing her eyes go wide in disbelief. “Somehow they were projecting Etheric images of themselves. He spoke to us. To me on a station within Pralor space, and to father right here on this very planet.”

Dynina’s hands rose to cover her mouth in shock. “*Son vada carians*.” She stammered.

“Dadrien appeared to you?” Amena asked in equal disbelief. “Truly?”

Andro looked at her across the table. “Yes.”

Kenroe nodded his head slowly. “To speak with the reborn *Dahakoan*.” He said softly. “His sacred warriors.”

“Andro... show her.” Martin told his son.

“Show me what?” Dynina asked and then watched as Androcles stood up and began to remove the fatigue top he was wearing. Her eyes grew wider still when she saw the exquisite definition of his thick, powerful body and the scars dotting his skin. Dynina gasped when he turned and she saw the intricate design of the tattoos that covered his back and shoulders.

“Oh my!” She gasped as she came to her feet. She reached out to touch the tattoos and traced the beautiful lines on his skin. “This is... it is beautiful!”

“Do you recognize any of these symbols *staania*?” Martin asked.

Dynina nodded her head quickly and moved her fingers over the back of Andro’s left shoulder. “This one.” She stammered tracing the triangular symbol with three separate circles entwined within it. “This one is on the wall within the chamber. It is one of three.”

Andro turned back around and began to put his top back on as he looked at his father. “I’m willing to bet that Dorian and Laren have the other two distinct symbols father.” He spoke.

“No bet here.” Martin echoed his son.

Kenroe and Amena were looking at Andro from where they sat and it was Kenroe who spoke next. “The words on your skin. That is... that is a Darastrixi language dialect. I have never seen it before but the writing and script is unmistakable.”

“That is what Sarlana said as well.” Andro spoke as he buttoned his fatigue top.

Dynina looked at Andro and then Martin. “Who is this Sarlana?” She asked.

“She is a *Doraanar*.” Andro answered.

Kenroe came to his feet now. “You have... you have a *Doraanar* among you?” He almost shouted. “How... how is that possible? How...”

Martin held up his hand, cutting Kenroe off before he could continue. He reached across the table and touched the small control panel on the surface.

“Milord?” The female voice answered instantly.

“Caleia... patch me through directly to *SPARTA'S WRATH*.” Martin spoke. “You have a channel for Sarlana?”

“Yes, sire. She is working in the Archive Library with several of the Darastrixi that arrived with Prince Androcles.” The female answered.

“Connect the Archive Library to this frequency if you would.” Martin said.

“Stand by.” There were a few seconds of silence and then she continued. “Connection made sire.”

Andro appeared to lift his head skyward. “*Doraanar*?” He spoke.

“*Dahakoan* Androcles, I have consistently asked you, Dorian and Laren to refer to me by my given name.” Sarlana’s voice answered instantly. “Do you make it a habit of disregarding what your elders ask of you?”

Andro couldn’t help but grin in embarrassment as his father and Uncle grinned even wider. “He has been doing that for years Sarlana.” Martin spoke now. “I could never break him of the habit.”

Everyone in the room heard Sarlana laugh softly. “Given who his father is, I am not surprised.” She answered which caused everyone but those who had arrived with Dynina to laugh now.

“Sarlana are you near a holo terminal?” Martin asked.

“Yes.”

“Would you mind activating it.” Martin said. “We have some information.”

Several seconds passed by and then the small holo imager on the table activated and they were looking at Sarlana’s petite figure. She was holding a Pralor P9 computer in her hands and they could see the second Darastrixi in the background who Andro recognized as Dalis. Kenroe and Amena grabbed for each other instantly with gasps of disbelief when they saw her.

“By Dadrien’s spirit.” Kenroe gasped loudly.

Sarlana turned in the imager and looked at them when she heard this phrase. “Ah... the Darastrixi that arrived with your *staania*.” Sarlana said quickly.

“A *Doraanar*!” Amena stammered. “We... we believed all of you had been killed by...”

Sarlana nodded her head. “That is not the case as you can see.” She spoke pleasantly.

Kenroe bowed his head deeply to her. “It is... it is a blessed honor *Doraanar*.” He spoke reverently.

“Oh please!” Sarlana gasped. “I have just gotten Aviel and the others to stop speaking to me as if I am some sort of religious icon! I do not wish to have to do this again!”

Martin smiled and looked at Androcles. The tiny Darastrixi *Doraanar* reminded them both of Helen in not only her diminutive size but her demeanor. “Sarlana... I know I said I wasn’t going to pressure you but...”

“But you are now going to pressure me.” Sarlana said with a smile as she turned back to him in the transmission.

“Kinda sorta.” Martin said with a sheepish grin.

“Well, it is insightful that you contacted me now because I was going to come to the surface today and show you what we have discovered.” Sarlana said.

“Then you have made progress?” Andro asked.

“Yes indeed.” Sarlana spoke with a smile. “I had Conlar and Nekins transfer the contents of my personal library to *SPARTA'S WRATH*. I was certain I had seen the dialect before and I was correct.”

“Sarlana hold on for one moment.” Martin spoke as he tapped the control panel once more. “Armen... teleport Sarlana and Dalis to my location please.”

-Understood- The reply was instant.

“Now wait one...!” Sarlana began to protest but even as they watched her figure was engulfed in the orange/white flare and she disappeared from the holo transmission along with Dalis Sulryn.

In the blink of an eye she reappeared standing beside Androcles in the Command Center and Martin got to his feet as the last vestiges of the teleportation matrix vanished leaving her and Dalis in the large center.

Sarlana glared at Martin. “I swear by Dadrien’s will if you do that again I will have a long talk with your wives and mates Martin Leonidas! I positively hate doing that! It is not natural!”

Martin looked at her sheepishly as Wayonn and Murano shook their heads. “Sorry.” Martin muttered softly.

Kenroe and Amena rushed around the side of the table and dropped to one knee in front of her, bowing their heads deeply.

“*Doraanar!*” Kenroe gasped in what could only be described as awe.

Sarlana turned and looked at them. “Stand up! Both of you!” She announced almost sternly, seeing their eyes go wide as they got quickly to their feet. “I am not some sacred figure to be worshiped and adored. All of us are equal here, and all of us have a role to play. After speaking with Aviel and Dalis I now know why the Darastrixi have fallen so low as to kowtow to those monsters.” Sarlana bowed her head to them. “It is a pleasure to meet you and to learn of what you have done.”

“Kenroe and Amena have been anchors for all of us on Lorenu.” Dynina spoke now.

Sarlana nodded and smiled at her. “As you have from what I understand Dynina of the Mahanlo Pack.”

Dynina looked surprised. “You know me?” She asked.

Sarlana smiled and looked at Androcles. “Only what the Dahakoan have allowed me to see.” She answered. “I know that it is from your blood that these two characters descend.” She said jerking her thumb and Androcles and his father. “Perhaps more time spent with you will teach them humility.”

Dynina couldn’t help herself and she laughed softly as Sarlana turned to look at Martin who still wore an embarrassed expression. She took a deep breath.

“Now that I am here, where can we sit?” She asked. “I need to get off my feet while my molecules reform from that hideous form of travel.”

Andro quickly motioned her to where he had been sitting and Sarlana smiled at him with warmth. She grazed her fingers across his arm as she settled into the chair, feeling his Etheric resonance within her, swarming around her affectionately. As *Doraanar*, this was a gift that he, Dorian and Laren had granted her. The ability to feel them within the Etheric realm, and also the ability to experience how they felt about her. She was their mentor and teacher. To Sarlana however, to be thought of in the same manner as their grandmothers Gorgo and Dasha was the ultimate honor. Martin motioned Dynina into his chair so that she could sit beside Sarlana.

“Very well...” Sarlana spoke evenly. “Shall we begin? Dalis, Aviel and Nahko have been invaluable in their assistance and once the contents of my library archives was transferred to that wondrous ship above, we went right to work.” Sarlana looked at Martin now without the stern glare. “We have discovered quite a bit to be honest Martin. This may take some time. Arzoal and Helen need to be here as well.”

Martin nodded his head. “I’ll have food and drinks brought here.” He said to her. “We have time.” He blinked and lifted his head as he called for Helen and Arzoal within the Etheric realm.

Sarlana looked at Andro now. “Androcles, you should call for Dorian and Laren. They need to hear this too.”

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES CLAIMED SPACE CAPITAL PLANET JETANIA

Loras was clinging to Taris tightly as they reappeared in another circular room. She had reached for the young woman in surprise and fright when the orange/white light had engulfed them under the Tram. As the

light dissipated from around them, the room became clear and Loras looked around quickly, defensively, seeing Omrad and Rylin and then allowing her eyes to move outward. She gasped in shock as she saw the massive school of fish move by the clear window all around them and she spun around quickly seeing that they were indeed underwater.

“*Carians!*” She exclaimed.

“There is nothing to fear Matriarch.” Taris spoke as she took her hand. “We are quite safe here.”

“Where... where are we?” Loras hissed softly, partly in fear and partly in a defensive manner again.

“Two thousand four hundred and nineteen meters beneath the Northern Ocean.” Omrad answered her calmly.

Loras looked at him. “What?” She gasped.

“Do you trust us Loras Ranev?” Rylin spoke now causing Loras to turn and look at her. “Do you truly trust us?”

Loras looked first at Taris and then back to her. She realized that what she felt was not fear of what could happen to her, but fear of the unknown. Rylin she trusted completely and without doubt, and she was *Sehise* to Taris Ranev, Guardian of Garget Ranev’s only daughter. A position held sacrosanct among their people.

Loras took a deep breath to calm her racing heart. “Forgive me.” She managed to stammer.

“There is nothing to forgive.” Rylin told her. “Believe me, my reaction was much the same as yours the first time I came here.”

Loras looked at her. “Where is here?” She asked once more.

“Just as Omrad told you.” Rylin answered. “We are twenty-five hundred meters beneath the Northern ocean. This is the Oracle’s ship. Her home.”

“Ship?” Loras spoke. “We are on a ship?”

Rylin nodded. “Yes.”

“Rylin, this is no Coalition ship.” Loras stated. “Even I can tell that.”

Rylin shook her head. “No, it is not.” She replied with a smile. “Come.”

Loras watched her move forward and the section of wall in front of them simply slid aside to reveal a long corridor. Loras gripped Taris’s hand as she stepped into the corridor. The ceiling above them was clear and gave her an incredible view of the ocean waters above them, as well as the numerous species of aquatic life that lived in the oceans of Jetania. The corridor was well illuminated and Loras could see the doorway at the end of the hundred-meter-long corridor. Through that clear tubular corridor ceiling, Loras could also see the superstructure of a massive ship unlike any she had ever seen in her lifetime. It stretched nearly ten stories above them and several hundred meters in either direction from what she could tell.

“The teleport pad is out here for security reasons.” Taris spoke to her now as they began to walk. “It can be disconnected from the main ship and strand anyone who uses the pad without permission. There are three others like it all around the exterior of the ship.”

“You have been... you have been here before Taris?” Loras asked her.

Taris nodded her head. “Twice... but never to see the Oracle.” She answered.

“What was... what was that?” Loras asked looking back at the teleport pad as the door slid shut behind them.

“It is a Teleporter.” Taris answered her. “It can move people and material over great distances in the blink of an eye. It is amazing isn’t it?”

“Taris that... that is not... the Coalition does not have technology like that.” Loras spoke.

Taris nodded her head. “No, they do not.”

“How... how many know of this place?” Loras asked.

“Six of us.” Omrad answered from behind her where he walked casually. “My mate, me, Rylin, Taris and the other young Black Watch female you saw at the Tram. She is Anoria. The youngest daughter to Lasun, leader of the Mountain Pack Vesrak.”

“The Vesrak Pack?” Loras spoke. “They are the most introverted of the Mountain Packs. And the most anchored in our old traditions. Lasun told my envoy that he will not recognize me as Matriarch but he would stand with the Mountain Packs if the need arose.”

Omrad nodded his head. “He did Matriarch.”

“That is only five Omrad.” Loras spoke looking at him.

Omrad nodded his head. “We do not know the identity of the sixth Matriarch. Only the Oracle knows this.”

“Please tell me it is not Osrod.” Loras exclaimed.

Omrad chuckled softly as he shook his head. “Osrod?” He asked. “The Oracle would not give to King Osrod even a single stick to keep from drowning. She does not like to be hunted as his father did to her. It was he who forced her to return here to hide. That is when she formed the Black Watch.”

“The Oracle formed the Black Watch?” Loras asked with wide eyes. “I thought our own people did this. To keep the memory of the Oracle alive and to protect her sacred sites.”

“They did... with the Oracle’s guidance.” Omrad answered her. “But as I said, the Black Watch that you know and see among our people, they are only the public face. The public face that Osrod and others like him see and dismiss. Loyal though they may be, they are not the *Mard Brutu Stros*. My mate, myself, Taris, Anoria and a few others that you know, and many that you do not, they are the True Black Watch. We await the coming of the three *Tarivous*, those that will signal the arrival of *Vada Fera Mard Revik*.”

Loras stopped walking and looked at him. “The Heralds. You know the Prophecy of the First True King?” She gasped.

Omrad smiled and it softened his usually stern features considerably. “All of the Black Watch knows of the prophecy Matriarch.” He spoke. “And the role each of us play in his return. You as well Loras Ranev.”

“Me?” Loras gasped. “What do you mean?”

“Anoria and I...” Taris spoke now. “We have seen the faces of those who will claim us as their wives and mates in visions Matriarch. I have seen the Alpha who will love and cherish me as no other ever could. He had eyes of the deepest brown and sparkling with green gems. So tall and handsome and powerful. He will save me and he will be *fervon* to *Tarivu* Androcles.”

Loras looked at her with wide eyes. “You... you know his name?”

Taris nodded her head. “Anoria as well. She has seen her love and life in a vision as well. She shared her vision with her father and now she is here.”

Loras looked at Taris. “But Lasun is... he is among the strictest of the Mountain Pack leaders. He has never openly supported the Oracle or the Prophecy. He is closer to the old ways than any of us. It is one of the reasons that Osrod trusts him. Are you telling me he allows his youngest child and daughter to be here willingly because of a vision she had?”

Omrad nodded his head. “This is all true.” He answered her. “When was the last time you visited Naweci Matriarch?”

Loras shook her head quickly. “Never.” She replied calmly. “They do not allow strangers into their main settlement and it is further into the deep timber than any Mountain Pack city. Even the military patrols avoid the area because of the unpredictable nature of the winds and the weather that far up into the mountains.”

Omrad nodded his head. “Indeed they do.”

“There is much you do not understand yet Loras Ranev.” Rylin’s voice spoke from the end of the corridor and Loras turned to see her standing by the door. “Yet you have believed in the Prophecy your entire life and your faith has never wavered. Why is that?”

“Rylin, I have believed because...” Loras started to speak as she moved up to where Rylin stood.

“You have believed for one reason and one reason only.” Rylin told her cutting off her reply. “You want more. For yourself and our people. More than what this life offers. You want to see things that you have never seen; you want to experience things that you have never experienced. You want to love and be loved so fiercely that it takes your breath away.” Loras looked quickly at Omrad, her skin turning slightly red in embarrassment even under her dark tanned skin. “There is nothing to be ashamed of Loras Ranev. You want to feel the wonders of what is out there. Just as we all do. And there is far more out there than even we can know. The Oracle has seen some of them, and that is why Osrod’s father banned her worship and ordered her death. It is why he drove her into hiding a hundred and thirty thousand years ago. To keep us docile and under his control. Just as his son continues the same control.” Rylin pressed the small panel beside the door and smiled.

“But they are not really in control.” She spoke softly. “You can deny Fate, you can fight Fate, you can delay Fate...” Rylin motioned with her hand through the doorway. “But you will never hold Fate at bay for very long.”

Loras Ranev stared at her for along moment and then did what she had always done throughout her two hundred and sixty-seven years.

Loras Ranev took a leap of faith once more.

Loras Ranev was speechless to say the least.

The interior of the ship was mainly wide open, with green hedgerows along the lower promenade that they were walking on. A small stream ran the entire length of the ship from what she could see, trees and stunning floral arrangements scattered between the many crystal fountains. Soft lighting filtered brightly from high above like the sky of Jetania on a day when the sun was partially obscured by high clouds. As they walked Loras could see dozens of Lycavorians moving among the promenade, most of them in small groups of twos and threes, and many of them carrying computers of some sort. They bowed their heads to her when they passed, gazing upon her with respect and in some cases awe. All of them referred to her as Matriarch as they passed.

Loras saw many rooms on either side of the promenade as well. Inside these rooms she saw Lycavorians, young and old alike, sitting and being instructed in things she did not know. The classrooms were not large, only a dozen or so in each, but all of them were full. She saw what appeared to be physical gyms that were also occupied by her people, all of them involved in intensive physical training that they appeared to excel at. They were using staffs of some sort, with blunted ends that looked like spears. Loras gripped Rylin's hand tightly as they walked and she saw all this. Far above she could see at least three additional levels, all with the lush green hedgerows along the edges of the railings. At different intervals there were elevator lifts that were open and she could see male and female wolves moving up and down with them. The one thing that struck her was that there were nearly as many male Alphas as there were females, but the young males studied and trained beside the females as equals. This was not something that took place openly outside of Mountain Pack territory, yet quite a few of the wolves she could smell were not from Mountain Packs.

"Rylin I smell Plains and City Packs." Loras spoke. "The majority are from Mountain Packs but they are mixed in as well."

Rylin nodded her head. "The Oracle's reach and influence is not limited to just the many Mountain Packs Loras."

"How many... how many are here?" Loras asked.

"Just under a thousand." Rylin answered her. "Most are in the final term of their training. Taris, Anoria and twelve others that are scattered throughout the Mountain Packs were the first to complete the Black Watch training. Fifty were chosen to go through the initial training. Only fourteen succeeded."

"What happened to the others?" Loras asked.

"It is my understanding that they chose to remain here and go through the training again after additional schooling." Rylin answered her. "All of them are preparing to join Taris and the others as full members." Rylin turned to Taris. "Next month is it Taris?"

Taris nodded her head. "Yes, Lady Rylin."

"What schooling?" Loras asked her.

Rylin looked at her. "Far greater schooling than is allowed by Osrod and those who make the decisions." She answered. "He keeps the knowledge we have as a people limited to those he can control, and it is far more than he leads everyone to believe."

Loras looked out over the promenade once more. "Lazar has said something to that effect before. He thinks Osrod is hiding knowledge that his father gained from the Tri-Alliance. That he is not using it for the good of our people."

"Osrod is no different than his father and his father before him, albeit he is far more cunning and intelligent than they were." Rylin said. "The Oracle believes as your son believes, that is why she began the Black Watch and why she has them go through the schooling that they do."

Rylin motioned for her to step onto the elevator and Loras did without question. She was enraptured with what she saw, and excited beyond belief. She watched as Taris and Omrad stopped and did not join them on the lift.

“Rylin I must check on the status of the new recruits.” Omrad spoke. “I will join you when it is time to depart. Lady Loras, my mate returns this evening, perhaps you would join us for dinner in our temporary quarters here?”

Loras smiled and nodded her head. “Of course Omrad. I would be honored.”

Omrad bowed his head to her. “It is we who would be honored.” He spoke before turning and heading off down the promenade.

Taris bowed her head to Loras as well. “I will see you when it is...”

Rylin shook her head. “No Taris.” She spoke stopping the young woman’s words. “What is happening now, what will happen in the near future, you will be just as much a part of it as Loras. It is time you met the Oracle.”

“Lady Rylin!” Taris gasped in disbelief.

Rylin nodded her head. “A storm is coming.” She spoke softly. “And for those of us who will be within the eye of this storm, knowledge is our power. The Oracle requested that I bring you as well Taris. *Nathos coi sivos un vada Fera Mard Revik Taris Ranev. Forn gur tur shahle rie lon nathos.*” (Family is strength to the First True King. You will be part of that family.)

Taris looked hesitant at first but she quickly took a deep breath and stepped onto the lift with them.

Loras looked at Rylin now as she took Taris’s hand in her own. “Are you the only one to have ever seen her Rylin?”

Rylin nodded her head. “And the three High Priestesses before me. There are rumors that she has met with one other, an Alpha male, but this is not confirmed and his identity is not known. It is not my place to question her.” She answered. “It is safer this way.”

“The sixth one who knows of the that machine?” Loras asked.

Rylin nodded her head and met Loras’s eyes. “I see now, more than ever, what Warim Ranev so loved about you. You have an incredibly sharp mind and you are always seeking knowledge.”

Loras chuckled. “Warim told me one day it would get me in trouble.” She said.

“What... what is she like?” Loras asked.

Rylin smiled and looked at her once more as the lift finally stopped and she stepped off. “Why don’t you find out for yourself?” She spoke motioning with her hand.

Loras looked around and her eyes grew wider as she realized they had ascended to the very top of the center of the ship, almost to the massive bubble like windows above. The circular platform was wide and firmly anchored by the massive beams that extended from the sides of the ship. As with down below, this area was also full of stunning floral decorations and three fountains. Trees dotted the entire outer ring of the platform, making it nearly impossible to see who was on the platform from below. The air up here was fresh and clean and smelled of fragrant Jetania Tulips. In the center of the circular platform Loras saw the cloaked figure sitting on one of the many benches and reading from a data pad. She could not tell the size of the figure but her wolf nose detected something different about her.

Something very different.

Loras looked at Taris who held her back when she tried to step off the lift. “Taris?”

“I am... I am frightened Matriarch.” Taris stammered. “This is the Oracle’s realm. It is... it is forbidden to all but the High Priestess.”

Loras was about to speak when the musical female voice echoed from the center of the platform as if it was right beside them.

“You have no cause to fear me Taris Ranev.” The female voice echoed. “Nor you Loras Ranev. You are the future, and the future will always prevail. I welcome you to my small piece of comfort. And to a new world.”

Loras had spun around wide eyed when the voice first spoke and she gazed once more at the figure which had not moved from the bench. She looked at Rylin once more and she only smiled and motioned once more.

“You have always waited for the day when you would know your path Loras Ranev.” Rylin spoke. “You have always known what that path is, deep inside you, but it has remained hidden. Now allow it to come forth.”

Loras looked once more at Taris and she nodded and gripped her hand tightly. Together they began to walk towards the center of the platform while they heard Rylin step onto the lift once more and begin her descent. Loras watched until she was gone from view and then she turned back to the cloaked figure, who had now risen to their feet. She was of medium height, and while sitting down the cloak hid her physical build, now that she was standing Loras could tell she was of a partially muscular build.

“I have waited many centuries for you to arrive Loras Ranev.” The voice spoke, turning to face them but the cowl still hiding her facial features. “Your beauty was spoken of by many, even when you were a small child and now you have taken your place as leader of the faithful.”

“I do not lead them.” Loras spoke as she moved closer. “We speak together.”

“Really?” The figure spoke once more with a touch of humor to it if Loras was not mistaken. “That is not what I am told or what I have seen.” Her head tilted slightly to look at Taris. “And Taris Ranev, only daughter to Garget and Ashon Ranev, the jewel of the eyes of her family.”

Taris bowed her head deeply. “Oracle.” She spoke in barely a whisper.

“Ah child... you do not need to be timid around me.” The figure spoke. “Not the Taris Ranev who defeated her instructor with the staff in her first attempt.”

“You... you know of that?” Taris gasped.

The figure laughed softly. “I know of everything that happens here.” She answered with a slight lilt to her voice. “Most especially to those who will one day soon be part of the family of the First True King.”

Loras looked at her intently, sniffing the air once more and feeling the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. Not in fear for some kind of danger, but for the unknown.

“Your wolf nose tells you to be cautious in the face of the unknown.” The figure spoke as it turned and moved to the railing and looked out between the trees to the undertakings going on below her. “An excellent trait. I have heard from Rylin and others that your sense of smell is much keener and sensitive than a normal Alpha female. Does it tell you to fear me?”

“It tells me that you... you are not... that you are not Lycavorian!” Loras blurted out causing Taris to look at her with wide eyes.

“*Pinnos allon gweifalleni forn?*” The figure asked. (Does this frighten you)

Loras blinked several times. “*Joa.*” She answered honestly.

“Then you are ready.” The figure spoke. “And my name is simply Nilantha.”

“Ready? Ready for what?” Loras asked her.

“As Rylin has told you... there is a storm coming Loras Ranev.” The figure spoke. “A storm that will sweep us aside like pebbles of sand if we are not ready.”

“You speak of... you speak of the Prophecy.” Loras said as she moved a little closer to the figure.

“There has only ever been one true royal bloodline among your people Loras.” Nilantha spoke. “It is not Osrod as you no doubt know. It began on your homeworld, far away from here. And no, your homeworld is not a myth or a legend. It is very real, for I was there.”

Loras’s eyes grew wide. “You... you have been there?” She gasped. “How?”

“Do you think this ship has always resided at the bottom of the ocean child?” She asked. “I have seen many things. Experienced many things before coming here with you and your people as what you call *Vada Vomir*. Though you are also my people as well now.”

“What do you mean coming here?” Taris asked now. “We have always been here.”

Nilantha shook her cowl covered head. “No Taris. That is what you have been raised to believe since the dawn of Lycavorian culture on this planet. However, it is not the truth. Osrod knows it is not the truth and that is why he hides whatever it is his father took from those of the Tri-Alliance. Your ancestors were brought here by another species. A benevolent species who believed in repopulating worlds to continue the chain of life. We knew them well. Once the knowledge of this makes it to the people, things will change.” She told them. “The course of events has already been set in motion and it cannot be stopped now.”

Loras looked at her with wide eyes now. “The *Tarivu* Androcles.” She gasped. “*Vin gente vinn’ tryn ardu mornar mero shylon un vada darsam. Mornar jen sha tor Androcles.*”

The figure nodded slowly. “One of three *Tarivu* that will announce the arrival of *Vada Fera Mard Revik*. And he is, perhaps the one *Tarivu* that it would be wisest not to anger. He is *fera keto* to the *Revik* and his wrath would be unspeakable because of what he is.”

“What he is?” Loras asked.

Nilantha nodded once more. “You said it yourself did you not? You told Rylin. He is a Lycavorian of the Highest Order. Of the purest blood. He and the others of the Royal family are Alphas that make Osrod and his ilk look like children. Even those who are turned.”

“Turned?” Loras asked.

“The *Revik* has six *Gelleenats*.” Nilantha told them. “Only one is pureblood. She is his Anome. Three others are turned females, one is a half breed and one is from the species known as *Unysi*, though that name no longer is used in the Lycavorian language. It was stricken from the ancient tongue after the *Brutujur*. Now they are simply called vampire.”

“The Black Day?” Taris spoke now.

Nilantha looked directly at Loras now. “Are you ready to understand Loras Ranev? You and Taris will have important roles to play in the future. Your roles in the Prophecy.”

“The Prophecy?” Loras gasped. “I have no role in the Prophecy.”

Nilantha chuckled. “Oh my child... you think so little of yourself.” She moved closer to Loras now, her hands going up to the edges of the cowl she wore. “Taris will find love in the arms of a man who will steal her breath away Loras... but you my child...?” She tossed back the cowl and Loras and Taris both gasped in undisguised shock.

Her features were unlike anything they had ever seen. Soft skin around her cheeks, but what looked to be soft, pliable scales extending outward from her hairless head and covering the rest of her skull and down her neck.

“I am Darastrixi... and you Loras Ranev... you will one day be Queen to a King who will make you shudder in his embrace and make you desire nothing more in life but his touch and his love. Which you will have.” Nilantha spoke with a smile and bright, deep emerald green eyes. “Of course... in order for that to take place... the darkness must be defeated. And that will not be as easy as I had first hoped.”

Nilantha smiled at Loras and tilted her head to the side. “Welcome. Welcome to my world child. It is wonderful to have you both.”

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

OMEN THREE

SHADOWING THE SVORAG MOTHER SHIP

Yuriko Leonidas stared at Filrian’s face as they laid on the bed in their quarters. Given the nature of *OMEN THREE*’s mission, their quarters on the ship were the size of one room of their villa on Earth. And a small room at that. Yuriko was naked, her lush body firmly pressed up against her Hadarian husband’s side, her chin resting on his shoulder as she gazed at his handsome face. He was still asleep she could tell because of the even rise and fall of his chest, and it was these moments Yuriko and grown to cherish more than anything else in their years together.

Nearly five centuries this man had been at her side protecting her, following her, and healing her with never a harsh word at what she had done. During their search for Lisisa he had seen her act in many ways. He had seen her take life, spare life, and he had witnessed her bed far too many men in order to gain information that she needed. Her goal had been singular and she did what she needed to do in order to find where her adoptive sister was being held. Seeing these things had not dimmed Filrian’s love or devotion to her in all that time. Yuriko could barely remember how they first met or how he became part of her crew, to Yuriko he had always just been there. Once Lisisa had been found by their father, her life had become much easier, but it had taken a Lycavorian and Hadarian woman to show Yuriko that the love she sought then had been right in front of her all of that time. So dedicated to the cause of finding her sister that she was, Yuriko had never seen it. She probably would never have seen it without the help of two who she called mother now.

Their first night together Yuriko had surrendered all she was to this man, and he had loved her with such intensity it still took her breath away. Every relationship she had been in prior to Filrian had been washed away

that first night in his arms and they became memories that drifted into oblivion over time. They had been married within a year of first being together, her father insisting that they wait that long, discover each other all over again and plan the perfect ceremony. And they had done just that.

She had turned Filrian their second year together at his request, his explanation that as a pureblood vampire she would live far longer than him and he did not want her to see him grow old. Hadarian lifespans, while greatly extended now, could still not match those of a vampire or Lycavorian. Her mother Anja's grandfather was one of the few exceptions and he was now one of the oldest living Hadarians and still going strong with new technology and fitness programs that her mother had devised through the years. Filrian looked now as he would look for many centuries to come and Yuriko simply could not get enough of drinking him in at moments like these. She belonged completely to him and he to her. He knew her almost as well as she knew herself, and while that had frightened Yuriko in the beginning, now she relished in that fact. Once she had turned him, an Etheric connection had also been established and while she had never been a very powerful Etheric user before, constant classes with her father and the two women she was closest too in Aricia and Anja had quickly pushed her and Filrian both to well above Tier Six. Yuriko could not remember her real mother and father; Martin Leonidas had been all she had ever known as a father. Surprisingly, she was closest to Aricia and Anja more than she was Isabella, who was a pureblood like herself. This never bothered her or them, each of her adoptive mothers loved her as they loved all of their children. As the Leonidas family grew, Yuriko found that her siblings looked to her and Lisisa quite often. She was closest to Andro and Eliani she knew, but they were all family and this made them stronger.

Family.

It was something that Yuriko had never experienced until she had found Lisisa and then family became the focus of her life. Once Androcles joined this world, family became all there was. Filrian, her father and mothers and finally her siblings. Very few people knew Yuriko well outside of her family and that is just the way she liked it. As the years passed, her time spent with Andro and Eliani caused her to think and act like them in many ways, but it was the man who hadn't hesitated for a second in calling her daughter that she idolized and adored. He had never turned his back on her, never doubted her and never once thought of her as anything but his daughter.

Filrian stirred and smacked his lips as he began to wake up and Yuriko smiled at this. He may have been vampire now, but he hadn't changed a bit. She lifted her hand and laid it flat on his warm chest and drew her finger down his pectoral muscle. His build was lean and muscular and he was exquisitely defined in physical dimensions, right down to his deliciously above average sized manhood, which Yuriko unashamedly worshiped as often as she could. His dark brown eyes opened and Yuriko reached up to push aside some of his brown dreadlock style like hair.

"Good morning." She spoke warmly.

Filrian lifted one hand and rubbed his face and the three-day old growth of hair on his cheeks. "We really need to find a replacement for this horrible thing they call a bed." He spoke looking at her. "It has a higher probability of killing us than any enemy we may face."

"I'll make sure I pass that recommendation onto Admiral O'Connor the next time we are at Dreamland." She answered with a smile.

Filrian chuckled. "Yeah, that will go over well." He said looking at the ceiling.

Yuriko shifted her body under the thin sheet. They never wore clothes to bed and his warm skin against her own was heaven to her as she slid seductively onto his chest and settled on top of him. His hands dropped to her perfect ass cheeks and he stared at her with a devious glint in his eyes.

"Are you trying to excite me for a morning frolic Yuriko Leonidas?" He asked her with a smile

Yuriko grinned again. "Maybe I am Filrian Leonidas." She answered. It hadn't taken much convincing for Filrian to add Leonidas as his last name. Until recently the vast majority of Hadarians only had one name. With the return of her father to the throne of the Union and so many Lycavorians adopting second names as was the custom of old Earth, this practice had begun to spread to many different species, Hadarians included.

"It's working you know."

Yuriko settled onto his chest and brought her hands up to his face to stare into his eyes. "I have something I want to tell you." She spoke even as her heart raced in excitement.

"I'm all ears." Filrian answered. "Hit me with it."

“I am pregnant.” Yuriko blurted the words she had wanted to speak for many years since they had married. They both wanted children, but given what they had done for so long, neither of them were ready. Five years ago they had decided to let nature take its course and now it had. Yuriko saw him blink several times as her words sank in and then his dark brown eyes lit up and turned to the cobalt blue of his vampiric nature. Yuriko yelped as he used his vampire speed to flip her over on the bed until he was resting on top of her, his arms encircling her waist.

“I... you will have to repeat that.” Filrian spoke softly. “I’m not quite sure I heard you correctly.”

Yuriko chuckled and spoke the words once more. “I’m pregnant.”

With a yelp of happiness that Yuriko had never heard from her husband she watched him spring off the bed and right there in their quarters he began to dance naked on the cold floor. His dreadlock hair was whipping back and forth and she sat up laughing as she held the sheet over her breasts.

“What are you doing fool?!” She exclaimed as warmth and happiness at his reaction washed over her.

Filrian looked at her even as he was shaking his hips in a disgusting imitation of a dance. “I told your father and Androcles I would dance a jig the day you told me you were pregnant! I’m keeping my promise!”

“Well stop it!” Yuriko laughed. “It’s a terrible jig!”

Filrian blurred in motion, wrapped her in his arms and suddenly she found herself sitting in his lap on the edge of the bed. He kissed her passionately, Yuriko wrapping her arms around his shoulders tightly and returning his kiss with equal passion. His hands came up and brushed through her long black hair and finally took her face in their grasp as he looked at her, his fangs now openly showing and his eyes still changed. This caused Yuriko’s eyes to change and her own vampire fangs to extend.

“You... you are certain?” Filrian asked her. “How long have you known? I need to do an exam. You need to...”

Yuriko laughed and kissed him once more, silencing his confusing sentences. She drew back from him and smiled, her eyes moist with tears because of the happiness she felt and his reaction to the news.

“You don’t need to do an exam my beautiful husband.” She told him. “Stop being ship’s doctor right now. I am certain and I had Moranna conduct an exam two days ago. I am perfectly healthy and ten weeks along.” Moranna was *OMEN THREE*’s assistant Medical Officer and she was also Hadarian. She had been part of their crew since Yuriko had taken command and was almost as reckless and brash as her beloved husband.

Filrian looked at her. “That is why your blood tasted sweeter.” He spoke.

Yuriko nodded her head. “Apparently it is a side effect of being pregnant that my mother Isabella never told me about.” Yuriko said with a smile. “Probably in the hopes of insuring that we would get pregnant.”

Filrian looked at her intently and gripped the sides of her face. “Yuriko...”

Yuriko shook her head. “No. We made a vow to each other all those years ago. A vow not to change who we were at our core, even when children came to be part of our lives. I do not want to change that husband. That is not who I am.”

Filrian shook his head. “No, it is not. And I have always kept that vow. But we also said when the day came that this... that children became a reality for us that we would be conscious of our actions going forward.”

Yuriko nodded her head. “And I intend to.” She told him confidently. “I want this child Filrian.” She told him while holding his face in her own hands. “I want our child and so many more. Moranna has already put me on my mother’s dietary regime and I intend to stick to it faithfully.”

Filrian dropped his hands to her hips and pulled her closer to him. “And you want me to act like a husband instead of a doctor.”

“I don’t want this to change who we are my love.” Yuriko said.

Filrian was silent for a moment and then nodded his head. “You are right.” He said finally. “We have spoken of this often enough and now that... now that the time is here, I will be who I said I would be.”

“Filrian my love, you know that...” Yuriko began.

“Does this mean no more sex until the baby is born?” Filrian asked suddenly and Yuriko looked at him with wide eyes and then burst out laughing. She wrapped her arms around his head and pulled his dreadlocks tightly to her chest as tears came forth fully now. They had sworn to each other that the day children became a part of their lives that they would remain true to the people they had both become and his question told Yuriko that he had every intention of sticking to that pledge.

Yuriko lowered her cheek to his head and sighed happily. “Gods I love you so much.” She whispered the words, feeling his strong arms pull her tighter. “And no... this does not mean no sex.” She continued. “That would be unbearable.”

Filrian began to laugh as he lifted her into his arms and stood up to spin her around in their small quarters. Both of them heard the chipping of the COM panel and he stopped spinning her around and they both looked at the panel.

“*Sibfla*... always at the most important moments.” Filrian swore and Yuriko laughed again as she leaned over still within his arms and touched the panel.

“Captain.” She stated. “Go.”

“Yuriko...” The voice of her First Officer Kyne filled their small quarters. He was a member of the *Durcunusaan* and because of his dual training as ship’s officer he had been Yuriko’s *Durcunusaan* Captain for more than a decade. Kyne and his elven mate were hers and Filrian’s closest friends since Kyne’s elven wife was the Chief Engineer of their ship. Kyne also never called her by her first name unless there was a problem. Yuriko and Filrian both came to instant alertness.

“Kyne... what is wrong?” Yuriko asked as Filrian lowered her to the deck but still held her close to him.

“You and Filrian had better get up her to the bridge.” Kyne spoke. “We have an issue.”

“What issue?”

“The Svorag Mother Ship has slowed down Yuriko.” Kyne answered. “Almost to a complete stop.”

Yuriko looked at Filrian quickly. “We’ll be there in three minutes.” She stated.

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE ADHOC COMMAND CENTER

“...derives from the Naami dialect of the Darastrixi language.” Sarlana spoke to them as they all looked at the large monitor behind her. “Just as I originally suspected.”

The number of them in the Command Center had grown now, all of them focused entirely on Sarlana and Dalis. The Command Center had become overcrowded so Danny and Martin to say the least given how many of the Leonidas family were on the surface so Martin and Danny had lowered one entire side of the Command Center. Only Dynina and Jezima watched this with delight in their eyes for it was only another sign to them that Sumar and Sateia were truly alive in their grandson. They clutched each other’s hands in Jezima’s lap and only beamed in happiness. Both Dynina and Jezima had seen Sumar and then Sumar and Sateia do this very thing to include family and close friends in whatever they were doing, however neither woman realized at the time that this sense of family would also extend to the dragons that now gathered around the Command Center building. Arzoal, Torma, Isheeni, Elynth, Ryner, Ladur and Aurith were resting on the ground close to one another and even Miath had joined them since Anja was with Atropos and the only one who Miath trusted enough outside of himself to protect his Bonded Sister was Atropos.

“The Naami dialect?” Kenroe was the first to speak. “*Doraanar* are you certain?” He asked the question causing Martin and a few others to look at him.

“You do not sound sure.” Aricia commented from her seat beside For'mya. Martin stood behind them both his hands resting on their shoulders.

Kenroe looked quickly at Aricia and then back to Sarlana. “Forgive me *Doraanar*.” He said humbly.

“We are all equal here Kenroe.” Sarlana spoke with a small smile. “Martin and his family demand this very thing.”

“Damn Skippy.” Martin quipped causing For'mya to reach up and slap his hand on her shoulder playfully. “Oops. Sorry.” He quickly added causing Gorgo and Dasha to shake their heads and Dynina and Jezima to chuckle openly.

“Forgive us.” Amena spoke now resting her hand on Kenroe’s arm where he sat at the table. “We have been among your kind for many thousands of years and many of us have become inseparable friends. Dynina has told us how Sumar and Sateia were, it is just hard to imagine that and yet we are seeing it right now. We just

are not use to how... you are a King... so many follow you and would give their lives for you just as Dynina has told us it was with your grandparents. And yet you trust and give so easily and you do not act... you do not act like a King.”

Martin stood up straighter and grinned. “What can I say, I’m charming.” He spoke with a large smile.

“Do not complement him too much Amena of the Darastrixi.” Gorgo spoke up now. “It will go to his head and he will become unbearable.”

“Ain’t that the truth!” Danny muttered under his breath from where he stood beside Martin.

“Hey!” Martin snapped looking at him.

“What?” Danny snapped back. “I didn’t say nothing!”

This exchange brought laughter from everyone gathered, even the dragons among them and finally Helen stood up from between Wayonn and Murano. “Let’s get back to why we are all here.” She said almost sternly. “Before this descends into another insulting match between Martin and Daniel.”

“I didn’t start it!” Martin protested.

Danny was about to reply when Helen’s voice stopped him. “Daniel Simpson if you utter another word I will have Anuk, Nayeca and Kesyla punish you.”

Danny looked at her from across the table knowing exactly what she meant. It was well known now that since General Simpson had taken Kesyla as his third wife and mate, the desire for each other had become overpowering between the four of them and they had been together nearly every night making each other scream to the stars before the Svorag attack. Helen’s eyes narrowed as Danny stared at her and he finally raised his hand in defeat.

“Ok. Ok.” He spoke with a grin.

“*Burech*.” Martin hissed at him. (Wimp)

“*Midaeu!*” Danny hissed right back. (Asshole)

Laren sat between Andro and Dorian on the opposite side of their mothers and she looked at Andro now. “*Wen hnes innyne brey allon?*” She asked in fluent Lycavorian loud enough for everyone to hear her. (Are they always like this)

Andro and Dorian were trying very hard not to break into hysterical laughter and Andro nodded his head slowly. “*Jainn*.” He answered.

“Enough!” Helen barked forcefully and everyone in the room sat up straighter and was silent. Sarlana was the one smiling now, for she knew there were very few in this room or on the planet for that matter that would not listen the First Oracle of their people. Helen waited for several moments and then looked at Sarlana. “My apologies for the children Sarlana.”

Sarlana kept herself from laughing and shook her head calmly. “As I was saying...” She continued. “To address Kenroe’s concern, I am certain of the dialect.”

“Why does he doubt this Sarlana?” Dynina asked now.

Sarlana looked at her. “The Naami dialect of the Darastrixi language died out nearly four million years ago.” She answered the question. “It was exclusive to one breed of the Darastrixi species. The Onkmet. The Winter Dragons they were called. They are the only ones who spoke using this dialect. They were a very reclusive breed of our species, avoiding contact with other breeds unless absolutely necessary. Very little is known about them for they never allowed any scholars to reside in their settlements to learn about them. They were not overtly unsociable but they were not very open either. The continent they occupied on our homeworld was destroyed in the eruption of a large volcano. When the volcano struck they did not call for assistance and by the time help did arrive, nearly half the continent had been wiped out, including their four settlements and all of their egg centers.” Sarlana looked at Androcles, Dorian and Laren now. “It was also Dadrien’s breed. He was the only survivor of the disaster... and after that day it became the private language of the *Dahakoan*.”

“Private language?” Martin asked.

Sarlana nodded her head and met his eyes. “The last of the original *Dahakoan* died just over a million years ago. The Naami dialect was one they used to communicate with each other on the battlefield and in private when they wanted no one to understand what they were saying. When the last of the original *Dahakoan* passed on into the afterlife, all of the Darastrixi scholars thought the dialect had perished with them. It did not.”

“I don’t follow.” Martin said.

“One morning a *Doraanar* like myself awoke to a pounding on his door.” Sarlana said. “When he answered it, no one was there. However, at his feet were twelve scrolls. On these scrolls was the entire Naami dialect.”

“So the last of the original *Dahakoan* was able to transcribe the scrolls and give them to the *Doraanar*?” Dorian asked.

Sarlana shook her head. “No Dorian... the Twelve Scrolls did not appear until nearly five hundred thousand years ago.” She told him. “More than half a million years *after* the last of the *Dahakoan* had passed on. They were enshrined in the *Doraanar* Temple after that, at least until the time the Elder *Doraanar* came to me on the day before I left with the Seed Mission to Elear. He placed them in my possession, with my solemn oath, my *inglata* in the Darastrixi tongue... my promise to keep them safe.”

“You’ve had them all of this time?” Martin asked her.

“Yes.” Sarlana answered. “With the hope and dream that one day the *Lorsvek ar Sepas* would come true. And it did.”

“That is a good thing then correct?” Aricia asked. “You can translate the markings that Andro, Dorian and Laren wear then?”

Sarlana nodded her head. “I can.”

“I sense a but coming.” Martin spoke now.

Jezima looked at Dynina. “What does this mean? A but coming? Is this not how some of your people refer to their backsides? I have heard Martin use word this to describe Aricia, Anja and For'mya in some way.”

Dynina shook her head. “I have no idea.” She answered.

Martin lowered his head in embarrassment as others in the room once more did their best to not break out in laughter as Aricia and For'mya looked up at their beloved mate and shook their heads sternly. “That does not matter now *staania*.” Martin finally spoke. “Sarlana... please...”

Sarlana smiled at him. “I do know the correct meaning of this phrase Martin, do not worry. And yes... there is a but coming.”

Sarlana turned to the large monitor behind her and tapped on it several times. An image of the tattoos from Andro, Dorian and Laren appeared on the screen for everyone to see. Danny shook his head and slapped his hand against Martin’s shoulder.

“I’ll say it again *fervon*... that’s some seriously superb artwork.” He told him.

Martin nodded his head as he looked back to the monitor. “Damn sure is. Better than Pablo for sure and he’s the best I’ve ever seen.”

“Agreed.” Danny echoed.

“So what is the issue Sarlana?” Martin asked her.

“I tried to begin to interpret the markings.” Sarlana told them once more. “Only to find out that they made no sense at all. There were added lines and symbols to the dialect that I had never seen before and these inscriptions... they were not in the Scrolls that I had. Though all seven dialects of our language were merged into one several million years ago, our main language now, no single dialect of the Darastrixi language has ever had symbols in it.”

“That’s a bad thing I take it?” Martin asked.

“Well... it kept me from translating the writings at first.” Sarlana said.

“At first?” Andro asked.

Sarlana nodded her head and motioned to Dalis now. “Dalis is actually the one who discovered what we have found.”

Dalis moved over to stand beside her and looked at Martin. “The tattoos as you call them are actually three different languages superimposed perfectly over each other.” He turned to the screen and typed several times and everyone watched as the monitor split into different sections and then divided. It took several moments and then the monitor was divided into three sections and filled with the writings that formed the complete tattoos on the backs of Androcles, Dorian and Laren. “Three very distinct languages.” He motioned to the monitor. “As you can see one is the *Dahakoan* language, one is...”

“Lycavorian.” Martin spoke softly moving forward and staring at the monitor.

Sarlana nodded her head. “Yes.”

Martin reached up and ran his fingers along the Lycavorian words slowly. "This is written in the old style." He said finally. "Mother? Grandmother?" Martin spoke looking at Dynina and Gorgo.

Gorgo and Dynina both looked at him oddly and then moved up beside him. They looked at the monitor as well and both sets of their eyes grew slightly wider since they had been sitting on the side and did not fully see the entire monitor. "He's right." Gorgo said.

"I have not seen this in many thousands of years." Dynina commented reaching up to do the same as Martin and run her fingers over the screen.

"What does this mean?" Sarlana asked. "Old style?"

"The writings..." Dynina answered her. "Our language was originally written in a very distinct style. Large, graceful lines and waves just like this."

"This is significant?" Sarlana asked.

Gorgo nodded her head now. "It has not been used since the Black Day." She answered. "The High Coven wanted to destroy every aspect of our society and the scholars and historians who used this style of writing were all gathered and killed through the thousands of years of our enslavement. Every one of them, until none survived. Much like the Oracles of our people."

"Yet you know of it now? What it is?" Dalis asked her. "How?"

"We have Resumar and Eliani to thank for that." Gorgo answered him. "It was said that they were able to safeguard several volumes from the library in our main city during the attack on Lycavore. He hid them when he and Eliani were captured, first on the ship they traveled on and finally on the planet where the High Coven had them detained. They were thought lost when Resumar and Eliani were killed during the exodus of the Ten Thousand and when he and Eliani were killed, it was said no one ever knew where."

"Why would they do such a thing in the middle of fighting for their lives?" Dalis asked.

Gorgo shook her head. "I do not know." She answered honestly. "The volumes appeared on the steps of the Apo Prime University one day and were brought to me by several students who had arrived early for class. I immediately took them to the Overseer of the University and they were locked away in the archive vaults for study. By this time our written language, while unaltered in meaning, had become simpler in style."

"And these volumes just appeared at your University? And they were brought to you by these students?" Sarlana asked softly.

Gorgo nodded her head. "At that time I had become the Lead Professor of History. An investigation was conducted of course, but we were never able to determine how they just appeared on the steps that morning or who had safeguarded them for so long."

"When was this?" Sarlana asked.

Gorgo thought for a moment and then she lifted her face to Sarlana and looked at her with wide eyes. "It was June; the second week of June to be exact. I remember now because it was in the middle of Tuya's Festival of Orchids. The year was... the year was 2036 as we relate time in Earth years now."

Helen stood up from where she sat at the table now. "Gorgo... are you certain of the year?" She asked softly.

Gorgo turned to face her. "Oh yes. I remember vividly for Riall and I attended a State Dinner that evening and we walked among the orchid fields after." She replied.

Sarlana looked at Helen. "*Feravomir*?" She spoke. "What is it?"

Helen looked at her for a long moment. "The second week of June in 2036 is when the earthquake on Earth damaged Martin's cryo chamber. It could not sustain him any longer and I had to remove him from the chamber. The second week of June in 2036 is the time that Martin truly joined this world."

"Do you remember the day?" Sarlana asked excitedly now.

"I remember it brilliantly. The twelfth of June." Helen answered.

Martin turned quickly to look at Aricia and For'mya at the table, both of them with wide eyes. Sarlana and Jezima took note of this first and Jezima came to her feet.

"The twelfth of June as you say, that is the day that we were informed Sumar had been lost on the Seed Mission." Jezima stated.

"It is the day that we left Lycavore!" Dynina almost shouted.

"Beloved?" Aricia gasped.

Sarlana glanced between the two of them. "Martin, please share with us." She asked him.

Martin turned back to look at her. “The twelfth of June is...”

“My birth day.” Androcles spoke in a whisper.

“Mine too.” Dorian echoed with wide eyes.

Laren looked at Sarlana with wide eyes as well. “That is... that is the day I was born as well *Doraanar*.”

Sarlana looked at Martin as she took all of this information in. “Something tells me that if I checked Martin, the twelfth of June as you call it, this is also the day that the Scrolls of the Naami dialect were delivered to the Elder *Doraanar*.”

“*Nubou lae*.” Martin muttered.

“Martin?” Arzoal’s voice reached out to them and he turned to look at her. “Martin... this day... this twelfth of June. It is also the day that my Pralor body died and I became a dragon.”

Martin stepped back and pulled the chair out from the wall and sat down as everyone watched in silence. He lowered his head into his hands and did not speak as he began to rub his temples. No one moved. No one spoke. Murano made to move towards him but Wayonn took his arm and shook his head. The inside of the Command Center was like a tomb until the only man who could, stepped toward Martin.

Danny reached out and placed his hand on Martin’s shoulder. “*Evell wen ineed fervon*.” Danny spoke softly.

Martin’s hand came up instantly and grasped Danny’s forearm in an iron like grip and he rose to his feet. The room watched as the two men embraced in what could only be described as a bear hug that would have crushed normal men.

Martin put his hand behind Danny’s head. “To those of us who have gone before...” Martin whispered in his ear.

“They are forgiven their worldly sins!” Danny answered against the side of Martin’s head.

“To those of us that remain...” Martin echoed in that same whisper.

“We shall be known as the Unforgiven! Until we join with them!”

Danny finished the words of the oath they had all sworn to each other many years ago in time when everything had seemed so simple as he squeezed Martin’s back tightly. Martin nodded his head and then pushed him back, holding his arms and looking at him. He nodded once more without speaking and then turned back to Sarlana. He saw that Andro, Dorian and Laren had now risen to their feet and moved in front of the monitor behind Sarlana.

“What do we do next?” Martin asked.

“I will need several hours to translate the Naami dialect and then we need to determine what the third language is.” Sarlana answered. “We need...”

“*Doraanar*?” Laren’s soft voice echoed in the room and everyone turned to look at her. There were gasps as everyone in the room either sat back in their chairs or came to their feet in stunned shock.

“*Carians!*” Dynina gasped as she gripped Gorgo’s hands and Jezima moved between them.

Laren’s eyes were nearly glowing, as were Andro’s and Dorian’s, but what caught everyone by surprise was that their eyes had altered shape and now the black ring that usually surrounded wolf eyes, now it surrounded dragon eyes. Thick, black slit dragon eyes that were surrounded by cobalt and azure blue coloring and completely blocking the whites of her pupils. Andro’s eyes were no different, except completely azure in color, while Dorian’s eyes were pure cobalt blue, his usually brown eye now gone to be replaced with cobalt blue.

“*Sibfla!*” Martin muttered as he looked at his sons and Laren.

Laren turned back to the monitor and lifted her hand to run it slowly across the screen where the Lycavorian words were written.

“*Rynvor vada daanth coi regovar hnes gur chevsh*.” Laren spoke the words reverently as she ran her fingers over the words on the screen slowly. “*Arve Tarivuos, Vada Ardorm Sinuovas echum. Arve essos un cikor vada rebeth*.” (When the time is right they will come.) (Three Heralds, the Winter Dragons reborn, three keys to unlock the fourth.)

Dorian moved around Androcles to stand beside Laren and he lifted his hands to the monitor where the Naami dialect was written. Sarlana moved to intercede when Martin reached out and took her arm.

Sarlana looked at him. “Martin I have not translated the words.” She spoke.

Martin shook his head. “Something tells me you won’t have too.” he told her.

Sarlana turned back to where Dorian was and saw Laren now standing between Andro and Dorian, gripping the hands of both of them tightly as they stared at the screen. “No one has spoken this dialect in nearly three million years Martin. They could not...”

“*Three keys to unlock the fourth...*” The three of them spoke in unison, Laren gripping their hands with hers while Dorian and Andro traced the words with the fingers of their free hands. “*So that the journey may begin. Hear these words and have faith... have faith...*”

“*Joa!*” Gorgo almost shouted as her hands went to her face and tears burst from her eyes. Jezima and Dynina grabbed for her as everyone stared at her in open shock at her outburst.

“Gorgo!” Jezima gasped. “Gorgo what is it?”

“*There is no mountain too great! He lives in you! He lives in me! He watches over everything we see! Into the future, into the truth. In your reflection... the path you will see. The Mountain of Stone and Light. Three keys to unlock the fourth... reveal the First King of Three and begin the journey. Atop the Mountain of Stone and Light. Only here will the journey be revealed. Only here can the journey begin.*”

“Martin the words!” Gorgo gasped loudly. “The words!”

Sarlana looked from Gorgo to Martin quickly her face a mask of confusion, not really knowing what was happening.

“Whoa!” Danny exclaimed and he moved for where he saw Andro teetering to the side, Dorian and Laren also appearing as if they would fall over. He reached Andro just as he toppled over and Martin moved within milliseconds as well, catching first Laren and then Dorian in his arms as they collapsed.

“Androcles!” Martin shouted looking at his oldest son while holding his youngest son and his soul daughter in his arms. “Dorian! Laren!” Aricia and For'mya were beside him an instant later, both of them reaching for Dorian and Laren.

Androcles screamed out and suddenly sprang to his feet as if ready to do battle his azure eyes once more ablaze and nearly glowing and Danny quickly lifted his hands in front of him. “Easy *Mandri!*” Danny spoke. “It’s me Andro. It’s Uncle Danny.”

Andro blinked several times, his head moving from side to side and everyone saw his eyes return to normal right in front of them. “*Tenne.*” He gasped aloud. His azure eyes blinked several more times and then he saw his father holding Dorian and Laren. “Dori!” He screamed aloud and moved to drop to the floor beside Aricia. “Laren!”

Andro fell to the floor beside his mother and scooped Laren into his arms just as she was shaking her head and rapidly blinking her own eyes as they ceased glowing and returned to normal. “Andro?” She called out. “Dori!”

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Dorian groaned next. “What hit us?”

“Dori?” Andro hissed reaching across and taking his brother’s hand.

Dorian’s eyes focused now and he looked at him. “Andro?” He looked around quickly and saw his father holding him. “*Medwan?* What... what is going on?”

“By the word of Dadrien!” Laren exclaimed as she clung to Andro and he rose to his feet his hands moving over her body to insure she was uninjured while Laren did the same to him. She looked at him once she was fully up, her hands stopping on his arms. “Andro... what... what just happened?”

Andro looked at his father. “How long have we been gone?” He asked as Laren turned quickly to Dorian and was checking him as he began to check her for injuries.

“What?” Martin asked him as he rose to his own feet, allowing his hand to drop from Dorian as he and Laren checked each other. “What do you mean?”

“Father, how long have we been gone?!” Andro asked once more even more urgently.

“*Keto...* you haven’t gone anywhere.” Martin told him as Aricia and For'mya moved in now. “You have been here all of this time!”

Andro turned and looked around several times. “That is not... it’s not possible!” He said. “We saw... we were there! We were there! We saw them... we saw them in the distance!”

“Andro what are you talking about?” Aricia pressed him as she reached for his face. “Saw who *aur keto?* Who did you see?”

Andro looked at his father now. “We saw Dadrien! We saw grandfather Sumar! We saw grandfather Resumar! We saw... we saw grandfather Leonidas!”

Sarlana stood between Wayonn and Murano while Kenroe, Nicha, Amena and Orman were gathered around them in a small group. Her eyes were on the table where Androcles, Laren and Dorian now sat, their family gathered around them tightly to include Dynina, and Laren's mother and father Robati and Yokra. They were speaking in soft whispers, Gorgo pressed close to her son on one side, while Dynina and Jezima stood close to him on the opposite side.

Sarlana finally turned to Wayonn. "Wayonn... what is the significance of these words that they spoke. It has obviously affected them all deeply. This is not something the *Dahakoan* shared with me."

"It has affected Dynina as well." Nicha spoke.

Wayonn nodded his head. "It is very personal for all of them." Wayonn spoke softly. "The words they spoke; these are the same words that are engraved upon the memorial of Martin's father on Earth. Almost exactly." He looked at her. "Leonidas is revered among the Lycavorians on Earth, and throughout the entire Union. The Elves, humans and other species as well. It was his death, his sacrifice for those he had never met and did not even understand, that was the catalyst for the formation of the Lycavorian Union over four thousand years ago. That is what bound them all together. That is what still binds them together."

"Walter..." Nicha said softly. "He... he loved him as he loved his own brothers."

Wayonn nodded his head once more. "Leonidas was the one who forged most of the true Spartan lore and history in battle. They were feared by all. He was the Spartan King that drove them to the heights they reached in ancient Earth history, even with the yoke of the High Coven around their necks. When Martin freed Earth, when he discovered who and what he is, when the people of Earth discovered this, Leonidas was elevated to perhaps the most sacred individual in their history short of the Gods they worship. You have heard what Androcles speaks before he goes into battle?" Wayonn looked at Sarlana.

Sarlana shook her head. "Not heard no... but I have seen it within his resonance."

Wayonn nodded again. "Leonidas' memory and spirit is sacrosanct to their family. Every one of them. To all those close to them. None of them would do anything that they believe would dishonor his name or spirit in any manner. No matter the reason. It is why Martin's brother was dealt with in the manner he was."

"What do you mean?" Kenroe asked. "How was he dealt with?"

Wayonn shook his head. "Let's just say that his end was anything but quick and painless. His punishment was... to our people it was a just end."

"These words Wayonn?" Sarlana spoke now. "Who engraved them upon this memorial for his father?"

"No one knows." Danny's voice spoke from behind them and they turned to watch him step up to their small group.

"Daniel?" Sarlana asked. "What do you mean?"

Danny lifted the mug of coffee he was drinking and took a sip. "The inscription for the memorial was being voted on by the people of Earth at the time. There were like nine choices being debated. The night before the final vote was to be taken, the inscription appeared on the monument. No one knows how. No one claimed responsibility and no one was seen doing it. The next morning it was just there. When Martin saw it, when he saw it the only thing he said was "It stays"."

"*Ithquenti*." Sarlana gasped softly. "No wonder they did not share this with me."

Danny nodded his head. "Yeah. Very spooky stuff." He said. "And now to have the same words, almost exactly as they are on the monument, tattooed on their skin? Wow."

Sarlana looked at him. "You do not believe do you?" She asked with no malice.

Danny met her eyes. "I believe in my *mard fervon*." Danny said in reply. "Too much has happened to us; we have too much history together for it to be anything other than what destiny meant for it to be. Believe *Doraanar*?" Danny smiled warmly. "I believe in that family right there, I believe that destiny and fate has already written their path. And no matter where that path may lead, or what that path entails, I will be where I am supposed to be. Right next to him."

"*Avoi*." Wayonn whispered the word.

"It is no coincidence that these same words are on that memorial Daniel." Sarlana said. "These... these events have occurred hundreds of thousands of years apart but they are all tied together. It is being driven."

Daniel shook his head. "After seeing what I saw today, I would have to agree with you wholeheartedly. What do you think Andro meant when he said they had been there? Where did they go?"

Sarlana shook her head slowly. "The abilities of the *Dahakoan* were a mystery to all Darastrixi Daniel. Even the *Doraanar* did not know the full extent of what they were capable of. My discussions with Murano also lead me to believe that the Praetorian gene within them is also a mystery, as it is with your brother. Murano says he has never seen or felt the kind of Etheric power he feels from the four of them. Even Sumar did not have such a resonance he says."

"So it's... it's possible we have not seen what they are truly capable of?" Daniel asked.

"If I had to guess...?" Sarlana replied. "No we have not."

Orman turned back to the monitor which still held the inscriptions on it in the three different languages. "We still do not know the third language." He said. "This is the key. It has to be."

"Perhaps the temple on Lorenu can answer this puzzle." Amena said now. "The symbols in the tattoos from the third language are somewhat similar to those on the wall in the chamber that we can see through the door."

Kenroe nodded his head in agreement. "It is worth the attempt." He spoke.

Sarlana nodded her head. "Perhaps, but there is too much going on here right now." She told them. "I doubt Martin would agree to just leave for even a day in order to discover this. I know Androcles, Dorian and Laren would not."

"*Doraanar* we can't just dismiss this." Amena spoke again. "We have been preparing for him to come for thousands of years! We have so many things to show him! So many things that he will need going into the future!"

"Are you talking about this new type of Engine drive?" Danny asked seeing Amena's eyes go wide.

"How do you...?"

Sarlana chuckled softly. "There is very little in the way of information that Martin does not share with his brother Amena." She spoke. "There are no secrets between *Mard Fervons*."

Amena looked at her quickly and then back to Daniel. "Well... yes. The Subspace Portal Generators are part of it."

Daniel nodded his head. "Our people on Ventori come first." He spoke evenly. "And then there is the problem with this big assed Svorag ship that is headed for Honelze."

"More creatures like the ones you fought here?" Kenroe asked.

"Abominations!" Orman hissed.

"No argument here." Danny said.

"Nor here." Amena chimed in.

Danny's eyes moved to the open wall when he spotted Kasdan rushing forward with Avi in tow. He knew instantly that something was up for Avi would never have left the ship if it was not important. He stepped away from Sarlana and the group just as Wayonn saw him and then Kasdan and he followed. Danny moved to the open wall and motioned Kasdan to him. Kasdan's eyes lit up when he saw Danny and made a direct line for him. He didn't hesitate or pause when he passed Torma and Isheeni or the other dragons gathered around the Command Center.

Daniel looked at Kasdan as he came up pseudo out of breath. Like Martin, and the others of their team, Danny had come to like Kasdan quite a bit. He was a certified straight shooter and somewhat naïve, but he had more courage than most gave him credit for, and he was the most intelligent person that Danny or Martin had ever come across.

"Kasdan... what's up?" Danny asked as Wayonn stopped beside him.

"Daniel I..." He was out of breath.

Danny smiled. "Take a breath big guy." He told him. "What did you do, run from the landing pad?"

-He did- Avi answered.

"Why?" Daniel asked. "Avi?"

-I will let Kasdan relate to you what we have discovered- Avi spoke.

Danny looked at Wayonn quickly and then back to Kasdan as Sarlana moved up next to him on his other side. "Please don't tell me you have found more of the fuglies on the planet." Danny said.

Kasdan shook his head quickly. “What? No!” He declared. He held out the data pad. “I have discovered what the last language is.” He said looking at Sarlana.

Sarlana’s eyes grew wide. “*Ithquenti!*” She gasped moving closer to him. “How?”

“This first symbol...” Kasdan spoke reaching out to touch the pad he had given Danny and activating it. The small screen showed the separated languages. “It struck me as odd once we had separated the different languages.”

“Odd how?” Sarlana asked as Danny handed her the pad.

“Hold that thought Kasdan.” Danny spoke grabbing his arm and pulling him fully inside the Command Center. He moved right over to the table and watched as Martin and the others looked up at him. “*Fervon*, you and Andro need to hear this.” He said.

Martin and Androcles rose slowly to their feet. “Kasdan?” Martin asked.

“I have discovered what the third language is Martin.” Kasdan told him.

“*Joa sibfla!*” Martin barked.

“*Jainn sibfla!*” Kasdan blurted. He had been studying the Lycavorian language for several weeks under the tutelage of Pablo and Kenny and he was becoming very fluent in its use. He shook his head quickly when he realized what he had just said and the others standing around couldn’t help but smile. This also served to break the mood of reverence that had been hovering over the table with the Leonidas family and everyone could tell that it was a welcome respite. “*Joa! No... I didn’t mean that!*” Kasdan barked.

Martin smiled broadly and nodded his head. “I know my friend.” He told him. “You are getting good though.”

Kasdan looked at him and smiled as he turned and took the pad back from Sarlana, who held it out to him. “This symbol.” He told Martin handing him the pad and them moving to the large monitor pointing at the symbol in the upper right corner of the last section. “This oval with the triangular points inside the oval. I have seen it before.”

Martin looked up. “Seen it?” Martin asked. “Where?”

Kasdan waved his hand over the monitor and moved the three images of the language into a smaller portion of the screen and then typed several times on the lower portion of the monitor bringing up the image of what appeared to be a plain, brownish book with a different symbol on the cover. At first it appeared as if it was just black lines across the face of the cover but if one stared at it long enough you could tell it was purposefully done in order to form a flame like symbol. He turned back to Martin. “In this?” He replied.

“What’s this?” Martin asked.

“This is a book Martin.” Kasdan answered with a tone that came out as if he was saying ‘how could you not know this?’ “This is a very old, hand written book.”

Martin grinned and looked at him. “Yeah, I can see that. They’re good for reading. I like books.” He said.

Kasdan blinked quickly. “What? Of course they are good for reading.”

For’mya reached out and touched Kasdan’s arm now. “I believe Martin is trying to say he does not understand what you mean. None of us do.”

Androcles looked at his father and his brow furrowed in puzzlement. That the man was obviously nervous and excitable was obvious, Androcles had just never seen his father rely on someone with his personality. “I believe that would be an understatement.” He said. “He is part of your team father?”

“Hey! Don’t you mess with Kas!” Martin announced as his mood became lighter. “This man saved our bacon on Onterom.”

“Well... not really.” Kasdan said.

Martin smiled again. “You ignore him Kasdan. What have you got?”

“This book was in the main museum on our homeworld.” Kasdan spoke once more. “It was one of thirty-three books in a collection and was the main attraction for all of our Science Convocation students for over twenty-two thousand years. Even during the years of war with the Scourge. This particular book and several of its pages were on display in an indestructible clear case just as it was found among the ruins. Each week a new Book of the group was laid out for presentation.”

“Ruins?” Martin asked. “What ruins?”

“That does not matter now.” Kasdan told him with a dismissive wave of his hand. “What does matter is the date this book and the others like it were ultimately discovered by a Science Convocation Archeology Team.”

“June 12th.” Laren spoke now.

Kasdan nodded his head. “Yes. Exactly! June 12th, precisely forty-three years after Chief Elder Sumar was declared lost to us. Between the first and second Scourge Wars.”

“Ok...” Martin said. “And...?”

“Martin, this book was found on the planet Enol Three.” Kasdan told him cutting off his response. “It was the third largest colony world of the species that created the Avatars!”

Murano stepped forward now. “The Onab?” He almost shouted. “Kasdan are you sure?”

Kasdan nodded his head and pointed to the monitor. “If what our known history of them says is accurate, then yes. This is one of thirty-three language texts of the Onab species! If this symbol on the cover is correct, it is the ninth book of the thirty-three. This symbol...” He then pointed to the oval symbol on the monitor. “It is in this book. Page ninety-four. It is said that the thirty-three books contained the entire written history and language of the Onab. There were over a thousand of our history and language scholars studying these very books right up until the day the Scourge came to our homeworld.”

Martin was standing straight up now, staring at Kasdan. “Kasdan are you absolutely sure about this?” He asked after a long moment repeating Murano’s question.

Avi moved forward now. **-I can confirm Elder Kasdan’s findings Martin- Avi told him. -I was not created by the Founding Creators, but there are still bits of code that are embedded in each Avatar that refer to our origins-**

“You never told me that.” Martin spoke.

Avi blinked several times and then shrugged his broad shoulders. **-You never asked-** He answered. **- And the code is inactive-**

Sarlana came forward now. “Avi... the Darastrixi knew of the Onab as well. They were an extremely reclusive species. They avoided contact with everyone right up until their end.” Sarlana’s eyes grew a little wider. “They were just like...”

Kenroe came up beside her. “Just as the Onkmet Breed was.” He stated.

Sarlana looked at Kenroe for a long moment. “You are correct Kenroe.” She spoke and then turned back to Martin. “Our account of them states that the Darastrixi only had contact with them three times in our entire recorded history. The supernova that destroyed their system and their species took place over forty thousand years ago and it is said to have destroyed their entire system in a matter of hours. Nothing could be done to save any of them.”

Avi nodded his head. **-You are correct Doraanar Sarlana, but their technology and knowledge surpassed that of even the Pralor people. Technology that they shared with the Pralor people on a very limited basis. This sharing of technology however, it became the basis for most of our own advancements. It did not allow them to save themselves from their own destruction however-**

“Avi are you saying they could have prevented the supernova but chose not to save themselves?” Murano asked.

Avi nodded his head. **-It is a theory that Chief Elder Sumar held, yes-**

“Why would they to that?” Orman asked now.

Martin shook his head and waved his hand. “That is all well and good.” He stated almost dismissively but everyone knew that was not true. Martin Leonidas did not dismiss anything out of hand. “How does that help us? Where are these books?”

Kasdan looked at him and his eyes dropped. “They were... I assume they were destroyed in the Scourge evisceration of our homeworld. The Scourge glassed our homeworld for days. They left nothing untouched.”

Murano nodded his head. “He is right Martin. When the last ship departed the home system, all that was left of our homeworld was a poisoned wasteland. The Scourge obliterated every city. They left nothing untouched.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “I’m sorry Murano. Truly I am, but if we don’t have these books then no one can translate the tattoos and I do not see the relevance of trying to discover the language. At least not now.”

Murano nodded his head. “I agree.” He spoke.

“So do I.” Danny added his feelings. “We have too much on our plate now.”

Kasdan looked at Martin. “I did not say that it could not be translated.” Kasdan spoke quickly. “There is someone who can translate the tattoos. Someone who made a complete copy of all the volumes and knows the Onab language.”

Martin looked at him oddly as the hairs on the back of his neck began to rise. “Kasdan... why do I get the distinct feeling you are about to drop a hundred-ton thermonuclear bomb right on my head my friend?”

Kasdan took a deep breath. “That would be an understatement.” Kasdan said softly in reply. He met Martin’s eyes. “It is Lorendo.”

SPARTA'S WRATH **LOW ORBIT OF VENTORI**

It was Miranda’s and Sa’sur’s first visit to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and both of them were extremely impressed. They had been around Avi enough times through the years to be very comfortable in Armen’s presence as they took the short tour he gave to them before they made their way to the bridge. Though they said nothing to him or each other, both of them took note of his nearly human mannerisms and interaction with the crew. In some ways he had surpassed even Avi when it came to his actions and how natural they were. Now they stood on the bridge on three different sides of the massive Star Chart table that occupied one corner of the massive bridge. The large image of Ventori occupied the center of the holographic overlay, with all of the un-Shrouded ships mapped out in the system, as well as Miranda’s four *RAPTORS* that were on the edges of the system providing early warning. Byron Leonidas occupied the fourth side of that table with Namiri Daret beside him. He had remained on board *SPARTA'S WRATH* at his brother’s request on the off chance that none of their family survived the battle on Ventori. Bryon had been incensed at this perceived slight until Androcles had explained to him that if the unthinkable happened, he would be acting as King until such time as Resumar could assume that role. That would require returning to the Alpha Quadrant, which Androcles knew Bryon would not do until those who had taken his family from him were dealt with viciously. Now Bryon was acting as the Operations Officer for the entire Task Force, a role that he found he was excelling at to be honest.

Namiri Daret had elected to remain on the ship for her own reasons, unaware that Andro and everyone who was Lycavorian already knew what this was. He stood beside her now, a place she had rarely left in nearly three days. Most of the crew of *SPARTA'S WRATH* had already figured out what the relationship between Namiri Daret and Andro was; a political match that made much sense. The Tasmor had become close allies in only a few short weeks and the rumors that King Leonidas truly enjoyed their company and their values only made it that much easier for the crew of *SPARTA'S WRATH* to accept Namiri in the role she was playing. What Namiri did not know, what even Byron did not know, the crew of the ship they were on, his brother’s ship, they were like Androcles in almost every way and they despised politicians in almost every form. The attraction between Byron and Namiri was growing, all of them could see that, and the crew had already made it their intent to protect whatever might occur between the two of them as they would protect their Prince’s privacy.

It was Namiri who was speaking now as she drew her hand along the edge of the chart table.

“...entered the system here and are proceeding on course as Flight Operations instructed them.” Namiri said. “They should be arriving in orbit in just under twenty-three minutes and will begin preparations to receive transports for disembarking to the surface.”

“The report said eight thousand?” Sa’sur asked looking at her.

Namiri nodded. “Yes Admiral. Seven thousand eight hundred and eighty-seven exactly.”

“We’ll need to know when the last of the refugees clear the ships.” Sa’sur told her. “We have ships and engineer crews standing by to refit your transports and transfer the supplies.”

Namiri blinked several times. “Excuse me... I... what do you mean refit and transfer supplies?” She asked. “We... we were told nothing about this.”

Sa’sur looked at Miranda and they both chuckled softly. It was Miranda who answered her question. “You don’t know Byron’s father very well just yet Princess Daret, but you will come to see a little of how he thinks as time goes by.”

Sa'sur nodded her head. "Indeed."

"I don't understand." Namiri spoke looking at Byron. "Byron, what does she mean?"

Byron Leonidas looked at her and smiled. Every ounce of his wolf blood called out for Namiri Daret in the worse way. He should have known his brother would detect it right away, and give him the space and the means to follow that instinct. Byron could smell Namiri's desire for him wafting from every pore in her body and her scent was so very sweet to him, but he also knew he needed to be discrete for all their sakes. Though he knew the crew of Andro's ship would protect them, most of them probably knew of the arranged marriage anyway, if it was to happen between them, it needed to be done with great care so as not to embarrass his brother and Namiri's mother.

"A dozen Worker Drones will refit your transports with much more advanced engines and navigational equipment. It will allow them to make the trip from your homeworld in half the time. The supplies Admiral Sa'sur speaks of are the first several hundred tons of medical supplies my mother released, and roughly nine thousand tons of spare material in order for our Worker Drones to refit and upgrade a dozen of your front line warships with Refractive Shields, upgraded navigational systems and a very early model of our Phased Fusion Drive Cores. This will increase the range, power and defensive abilities of your ships by a factor of a hundred. It will also give you the means to then reverse engineer them and begin to build and improve upon the design all on your own. My father is sending several engineers who volunteered to teach and advise you."

Namiri's eyes were wide at this knowledge for she simply could not believe it. "But I... I thought your father would not share this technology with us!" She exclaimed.

Byron shrugged his broad shoulders. "My father can be very tricky when he wants to be." He said with a smile. "But he will not ever abandon those he considers friend and ally. Ever."

"Does... does my mother know?" Namiri gasped.

Miranda smiled. "My Tactical Officer E'dira was going to inform her today when she went to the surface." Her dark eyes saw the crew member move briskly from the station across the bridge and she followed him as he went right up to Armen and handed him a data pad. She turned fully to look at Armen. "Armen what is it?"

Armen looked up at them. **—Apparently we have lost one of the transports from the Coalition ship that jumped into the system several hours ago—**

"Lost?" Sa'sur asked as her eyes narrowed. "How?"

Armen looked at the officer beside him and nodded his head. The man leaned over the table and adjusted the images. "We have been tracking them since they arrived as you and Admiral Lorian are aware Admiral Sa'sur. Their Stealth Shield is at full power and they entered the system under full EMCON control, but we detected them easily enough. They simply sat there for a few hours and then slowly brought their power levels up when we did not respond to their intrusion, likely because they did not believe we had detected them."

Sa'sur nodded her head. "Andro's orders were clear and King Martin agreed. Do nothing unless they make a direct act of communication or violence against us. So far all they have been doing is attempting to scan our ships or the surface."

The officer nodded. "Until now." He spoke touching the table and they all saw two objects light up near the ship and begin moving in opposite directions. "Forty-nine minutes ago two transports disengaged from their ship. One headed for the surface, using the large tachyon particle clouds to try and stay hidden, while the other moved directly for this large piece of Kintaur wreckage."

"Why?"

"We detected a low power surge from the aft portion of this wreckage. It appears to be coming from what is left of a Kintaur Battle Cruiser." The officer answered. "Probably a secondary terminal that is operating on battery power. It's exposed to space so it wouldn't be much trouble to plug into the terminal and download what information they can."

"And the other ship?" Miranda asked.

"It descended into the atmosphere easily enough. Whoever was flying it is an excellent pilot by the way." The man continued. "We lost them here." He punched in the coordinates on the table and the image from the ground came up from high resolution cameras. "This is one of the entrances to the tunnels the Svorag were using. When the FAE weapons detonated, the heat and concussive wave exited at this point. The plume extends to the lower ionosphere and is still very hot."

-Why?- Armen asked. **-Sufficient time has passed for dissipation of the aftereffects of the FAE weapons-**

“Yes, sir, until we did a thermal scan of the surrounding area.” The officer answered. “The entire seismic plate is made of this sensor distorting ore. It appears that it is also highly volatile when exposed to heat. It ignites at three thousand two hundred degrees. The FAE basically set fire to the entire tectonic plate. The entire plate has heated to over five thousand degrees now. The temperature is dropping, but only by ten degrees every twenty-four hours. The COLS transport flew right into the center of the heat plume and off our sensors. By the time we adjusted for the heat, the ship was gone. Like I said... whoever was flying this ship is an excellent pilot and knew exactly what he wanted to do.”

“The surrounding area?” Sa'sur asked.

The officer shook his head. “We are continuing to scan, but with all of the tachyon particles still in the system and the added problem of this heat from the tectonic plate, it's iffy at best to find them. At least until the particles dissipate further.” He centered the image on the small dot and brought it into focus more. “The ship appears to be some sort of short range transport. I estimate no more than twenty to twenty-five passengers based on its size.”

“Just over sixty clicks north to Discovery Base.” Miranda said shaking her head. “Neither Martin nor Andro are going to like that. Not with the refugees returning. They are wolves, and they could cover sixty clicks in probably fifteen minutes going all out.”

-Send a coded message to Androcles- Armen ordered quickly. **-Keep it off the main COM channels-**

“Armen I can reach him from here.” Byron spoke up.

Sa'sur shook her head. “No Byron, Armen is right. They are Lycavorians and we don't know how far they have advanced their etheric abilities. Coded and secure Sub Space Armen. Do it now!”

Armen didn't question her order, for while he may have been Commander of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, Sa'sur was overall Commander of their Task Force. Miranda Lorian was of the same mind and she looked at Sa'sur.

“Sa'sur?” She questioned.

“Based on our first contact with them Miranda I'm not so sure that they are of the friendly type.” Sa'sur spoke looking at her.

“Roll them up?” Miranda asked.

Sa'sur nodded her head. “Yes. Send two *STRIKER ATs* to where this transport or shuttle is, and have three of your Wolf Pack secure their main ship here. Take it under tractor if you have to.”

Armen turned from the officer he had been talking too. **-Sadi and Ne'Veha are returning to the ship as we speak-** He told them. **-The *PREMONITION* would be better suited to maneuvering within the wreckage and she is perfectly capable of securing the transport ship on her own-**

Sa'sur nodded as she stood up straight and looked around quickly. “I know what Sadi and Ne'Veha can do. Contact them and issue the order Armen. And send the Wolf Pack ships to secure their main ship. I'm going to contact Captain Patton and have him get some of his boys and girls out looking for our guests.”

“Martin and Andro will send out folks too. Dragons will be faster.” Manda said.

Sa'sur nodded her head. “Indeed.” She spoke. “Then I will have him put a standby force on alert. We need to get back to our ships Manda, and hope we find these Coalition fools before they do something utterly stupid.”

Sa'sur could not have known that it was already too late for that.

VENTORI FIVE KLICKS SOUTHWEST OF DISCOVERY BASE PERIMETER

“What do you think they are?” Rhaos asked as he lowered his binoculars and turned his head to look at Lazar beside him. The ridge they were on provided an excellent vantage point from which to view the huge base in the distance and once here, he and Lazar had remained in the thick grass and moved up to the edge. They had been studying the base for the last ten minutes and both of them were stunned beyond what they had ever expected. Mainly due to the massive winged beasts that were moving about the base freely.

Lazar lowered his own binoculars and looked at his oldest friend. “Do you remember the stories your mother told us as boys Rhaos?”

“*Sinuovas*?” Rhaos gasped.

“Do you have a better explanation?” Lazar asked him. “I certainly do not.”

“They have real, live *sinuovas* as pets Lazar?” Rhaos exclaimed softly. “That is... that is almost too much to believe.”

Lazar lifted the binos to his eyes once more. “I am not so sure they are pets.” He spoke. “And I have counted at least three different species that we have never seen before as well as the *nubous entia endra* they have currently hovering over the base.” (Fucking massive ship)

“How many guns do you think?” Rhaos asked.

“Over a hundred at least and that is just on the side of the ship that we can see.” Lazar answered him. “And I would estimate two or three thousand troops within the base perimeter.”

“They are wearing some sort of body armor and many have what would appear to be assault weapons.” Rhaos spoke. “Though there are quite a few who seem to be wearing just normal clothes.”

“At least five towers along the wall.” Lazar said. “All of them, even the civilians, seem to be armed in some manner.” He shifted his binos to the desolate city in the distance. “Blacken ground leading up to the edge of that city in the distance. It appears advanced in its design.”

“Defensive positions along the wall. They fought a battle here.” Rhaos said.

Lazar nodded. “But with whom?” He commented.

“Whoever it was, they do not appear to have succeeded.” Rhaos commented. “Look at the outer perimeter of the wall. A mine field and fully equipped bunkers with heavy weapons. Whoever put this defensive line together is a Master tactician. Anyone who massed against the defenses would break upon the mine fields and then the walls. And that does not include the portable shielding that they have been activating before the transports come and then leave.”

“Which begs the question where are those ships going?” Lazar spoke. “Are you recording this?”

Rhaos looked at him. “Are you kidding? *Jorbhe jainn!*”

“There!” Lazar hissed. “Four of those beasts just took off and headed for the city! And they carried men on their backs!”

Rhaos shifted his binos. “*Sibfla!*”

“I count at least nine more beasts over the city on the far side.” Lazar spoke trying to focus his binos to compensate for the distance.

“There are Tasmor among them.” Rhaos spoke. “They match the description that we have in our intelligence files. All of them appear female however. And do you see the number of Alpha females Lazar!? There must be hundreds of them! And the armor they wear does not hide how healthy they are!”

Lazar dropped his eyes and looked at Rhaos with a grin. “Do you always think with your cock?” He asked.

Rhaos grinned broadly. “Not all of the time.” He replied.

“Considering how heavily armed they are, would you like to go down there and introduce yourself?” Lazar asked him.

“Never let it be said that I turned down a good challenge.” Rhaos told him.

Lazar smiled and elbowed Rhaos in the side. He turned back to the binos and focused on the camp. “That building there in the center. The one with only three walls. That appears to be the Command Center.”

“Looks like a gathering of some sort with all of the people there.” Rhaos spoke moving his own binos to that location. “It is too dark from this distance to see inside, but there are at least eight of those beasts outside. Do you think he is there?”

“I would be.” Lazar answered.

“Do we move closer?” Rhaos asked.

Lazar thought about that for a moment and then shook his head. “No.” He answered. “We have no idea of their capabilities. Moving closer puts us further from the ship and we are on a timeline.”

“They seem very casual Lazar.” Rhaos spoke. “Maybe Nasso was wrong about them.”

Lazar looked at him now. “Remember Garget’s lesson when we were fifteen?”

Rhaos rolled his eyes. “Which one? All of them if I recall, involved us getting our asses handed to us.”

“The most dangerous one is the one that looks weakest.” Lazar said.

“Oh, that one.” Rhaos said. “Still, all I really remember is getting my ass kicked.”

Lazar brought his finger to his ear when his COM device chirped in his ear and he recognized his private channel. It was one that only those he trusted on his ship had and they only used it in emergencies. He pushed gently on the earpiece. “Go.”

“Lazar... you had better get back here quickly!” The voice spoke. “We have a problem.” Lazar recognized the voice instantly as Kitas, a trusted Lieutenant of security that he had left in charge of their remaining eighteen-man force at their shuttle.

“Kitas... what is wrong?” Lazar hissed.

“Our ground sensors detected a gathering of Lycavorians six clicks northeast of us a few minutes after you departed. I didn’t contact you because they did not move closer. Lazar, one of the unknown Lycavorian ships just landed there.” Kitas answered. “Sibot disobeyed my orders and took nine of our remaining force, all of them wet behind the ears Alphas looking for glory, saying he was going to do what your father sent us here to do. Capture whoever he could and get information.”

“*Nubou!*” Lazar cursed loudly under his breath. “Send me the grid Kitas!”

“Lazar I am sorry.” Kitas continued. “He would have forced me to shoot him in order to stop him. That would have given away our position.”

Rhaos saw Lazar shake his head as he was listening as well. “You did the right thing Kitas.” Lazar spoke. “Send me the grid and prepare to depart. We will need to make a quick exit from this world.”

“Understood.” Kitas spoke.

Lazar looked at the small screen on his forearm and saw the coordinates come up and then zoom in on the location. “*Nubous Sibot!*” Lazar swore. “I should have killed him a long time ago.”

“His Pack is one of the most influential City Packs Lazar.” Rhaos said. “That is why and you know it.”

“That won’t stop me this time if he exposes us Rhaos!” Lazar snarled looking at the small screen.

“Straight east and then cut south along that stream bed. It will take us directly to these coordinates.”

Rhaos said looking at his wrist screen and seeing the same thing.

Lazar nodded his head. “Let’s hope we get there before he does something fucking stupid.”

Two soft, white flashes of light and then the two, large and quite muscular wolves were sprinting off east.

AD HOC COMMAND CENTER

“...*Chevsh alee fenneenum?*” Martin gasped staring at the image of Yuriko on the monitor.

“The Svorag mother ship has slowed down *medwan*.” Yuriko told him again. “It took them nearly nineteen minutes to do it, but they are now moving at one quarter of the speed that they were.”

Andro was beside his father and he looked at his vampire sister on the monitor. “Are you safe *arande?*”

Yuriko smiled warmly when she saw Androcles and they watched as she lifted her hand and ran it across the monitor she was speaking on. “*Ol zhah ji ves bwael ulu kyirl dos ussta dalninuk. Dos inbal thus lle’warinil.*” (It is so very good to see you brother. You have been missed.)

“*Nau mzild taga usstan inbal lle'warinil dos ussta dalniril.*” Andro replied to her. (No more than I have missed you my sister)

Dynina was standing with Jezima and Aricia when she heard them exchange their greetings and she looked at Aricia quickly. “Aricia... what is the language they are speaking?” She asked.

“It is the ancient High Coven language.” Aricia replied. “It is also the language that the Drow Elves from Earth have adopted as their own. They are saying that they have missed each other. Brother and sister.”

Jezima looked at her now. “How many languages do all of you speak?” She asked with wide eyes.

Aricia chuckled softly. “You must thank our *Melda Min* for that when you see her.” She told them. “Dysea is an absolute Task Master when it comes to education. She has guided all of our children in their education. All of them have at least two advanced degrees and can speak numerous languages fluently. Androcles and Martin speak the most of any of us. At last count it was eleven for each of them I believe. There are so many that even we have lost track of the number. Everyone thinks it is a contest between father and son. In the quiet moments that we do have you will see one or both of them with some language file in their hands.”

“This is the Yuriko that Walter thinks so highly of?” Dynina asked now as she gazed at the monitor and Yuriko’s image. “He says that she is part of why Martin has discovered all that he has.”

Aricia nodded her head. “One of the reasons, yes.” She answered. “She is just as much a daughter to all of us as Eliani or Nara or Normya, no matter her blood or species. It has always been this way. We know nothing else.”

Dynina slowly nodded her head, her thoughts to herself. She was thrown back in time to a conversation with Sumar on Lycavore in the weeks leading up to her departure.

“He will have many children Dynina, my descendant.” Sumar had told her. ***“Not all of them the same as us. But they will be his children no matter their appearance or design. And they will honor their father and mothers as those like us honor those who brought us into this world. Perhaps even more.”***

Dynina could once more feel the warmth of family filling her as she remembered those words and she saw how easily they had accepted Perlae, Ishma and Awser. Dynina Mahanlo was no more she realized. Now she was Dynina Leonidas to all those around her. To her family. And while Dynina knew they would always honor their heritage and the history of the Mahanlo Pack, this is what they had now grown into. And Dynina could not have been more proud.

“I am glad that our mothers and I now have additional support in keeping our father under control.” Yuriko continued drawing Dynina’s attention once more. “Oh wait... I must have been thinking of Resumar. You are just as *malda* as our father!”

Andro chuckled and shook his head. “I see Filrian has not yet tamed your tongue sister.”

“I like her tongue just how it is, thank you!” Filrian’s voice shouted from out of the cone of the transmission and this caused Andro to grin and look at his father.

Martin was smiling too, feeling a little bit better after all of the talk of prophecies and destiny. “You pulled back Yuriko?”

Yuriko nodded her head. “As per your directives father.” She answered. “Their course has not changed but we have an adjusted timeline for them to reach Honelze if they maintain this speed. Do you know what may have caused them to slow down?”

Martin nodded his head. “Oh yeah. If my theory is correct, whoever the head cheese of these Svorag is, he is on that ship. Ventori was a major breeding colony apparently, possibly their largest one. Your brother arrived yesterday and kind of put an end to that in a rather unceremonious way.”

Yuriko looked at Andro. “Did you come in guns blazing brother?” She asked.

Andro grinned at her. “In a manner of speaking.”

“*Elg’ga rilbol...*” Yuriko said looking at Andro. (Kill everything)

“*Lu’ori’gato l’ phraktos s’enar mina doeb.*” Andro finished. (And let the gods sort them out.)

It was a phrase that Yuriko had taught to Androcles when he was very young and now they used it only between each other. Yuriko had taught Androcles far more than even their father and mothers knew as he was growing and this had brought them very close to one another during that time.

“Good.” Yuriko spoke nodding her head. “*Nempori vithin slanos.*” (Ugly fucking creatures)

“You will get no argument on that here sister.” Andro commented with a laugh. “One of them tried to kiss me during the battle. I tried to explain that it wasn’t my type.”

Yuriko looked at Androcles with wide eyes. “Andro my brother... did you just try and make a joke?” She exclaimed.

Andro rolled his eyes. “Ha, ha, very funny.” He snarled affectionately.

“So you think this loss has caused them to slow down and re-evaluate their position *medwan*?” Yuriko asked her father while still trying to keep from laughing openly.

“If they have slowed, then I would have to say yes.” Martin told her calmly. “I believe the bastard leading these Svorag is an Alpha Lycavorian Yuriko. One that was captured and changed but somehow managed to keep his instinctual predatory nature.”

Yuriko nodded her head once more. “Hence why they have been bolder in their actions than Chief Elder Delnash and others realized.”

Martin nodded. “Yep.”

“It makes sense, but that is a good thing and a bad thing.” Yuriko said. “That means they will be predictable to an extent... but they will also be harder to kill.”

“Exactly.” Martin said. “Especially if this Alpha is the one doing most of the changing. Your mother believes he can change others with a bite instead of the old fashion way.”

“That is problematic.” Yuriko answered.

Martin nodded his head. “Just a bit.” He answered. “I was going to fire off an update to you later today but since we are talking... Ventori is secure now. We are starting to get refugees from the Tasmor and we’ll begin to start the rebuilding very soon. What is the new estimate of time to Honelze?”

“If they maintain the speed they have settled on... another five weeks at least. I can give you a more precise time estimate in a few hours if they remain at this speed.” Yuriko answered. “I’m going to maintain this distance from now on father. Space equals time to react.”

Martin looked at her. “You have concerns?”

Yuriko shook her head. “No... I’m just going to take a page from your book in case I do have to haul my ass out of here.”

Martin nodded his head. “Fair enough.” He told her. “Yuriko let’s start regular check ins beginning today.” Martin told her. “Every six hours *fenneenum*. No more of this lone wolfing it *sibfla*, you hear me?”

Yuriko nodded hearing the command tone of his voice. “Understood.”

“So what else have you got?” Martin asked her.

COALITION OF LYCAVORIAN STATES CLAIMED SPACE
CAPITAL PLANET JETANIA
NORTHERN OCEAN
DEPTH 2419 METERS
DARASTRIXI LONG RANGE MEDIUM CRUISER

“... Was chosen by the spirit of Dadrien to accompany your people on this Seed Mission.” Nilantha was speaking, her voice warm and even. “The Pralor people who believed as Dadrien did assisted in this and kept me hidden on their City Ship and then insured that I made it to the surface with your people. They believed an Oracle of their people had accompanied them, but I had taken her place as was Dadrien’s plan. It was customary for an Oracle of your people to remain aloof from others and no one questioned why I was never physically seen. I chose the first High Priestess from among those on that ship. This ship around you was attached to the Pralor ship’s outer hull and when we arrived here it was remotely piloted to where it is now. It was difficult at first, staying hidden and trying to insure that I kept the Prophecy alive. Your people have a strong faith, but once Osrod’s grandfather came to power, this began to waver. He did not have the influence to drive me into hiding until Osrod’s father was born and then took his place. He was much more cunning and cruel than his father. To avoid conflict and the deaths of those who believed, I went into hiding and had the High Priestess leak the story of my death. She was killed by Osrod’s father for her faith in me.” Nilantha spoke softly and looked at the floor for a long moment.

“I retreated here, studied and trained myself and I observed. When Osrod’s father sent out the mission to Ventori and they returned with the Mountain Packs I knew it was time to begin. Garget’s father was a fine Alpha, and Garget followed in his footsteps so I chose the Second High Priestess from among the Ranev pack and had her form the Black Watch. Each High Priestess after the first came from your people within the Mountain Packs. Those who were brought here from Ventori. They were Alphas would not be denied their faith no matter what Osrod’s father demanded and many were not happy that they had been unrooted from Ventori. He had no choice but to allow them this faith in order to avoid civil unrest and the vast majority of them retreated into the Mountain Ranges in order to start again.”

Loras and Taris Ranev had all but forgotten everything around them as they sat and listened to her enraptured. No one had come up the elevator in the last four hours and they were not disturbed in any way. Neither Taris nor Loras saw anyone bring the food that now occupied the short legged stone table that they sat around. The floor was covered with large, colorful soft cushions and this is what they had sat on, politely picking at the food and drink which Nilantha had insisted that they do. She had removed the long cape and cowl and Loras had taken note of her womanly figure and decided this was not someone unfamiliar with exercise. Her body was lean and muscular for her size, her exposed soft green scales soft and slightly shiny in different lights. Her eyes were fascinating however, a deep emerald green like those of the very ocean they now resided at the bottom of, always shifting in the different light.

“We know very little of Ventori.” Loras finally spoke. “Only that it is the planet from which the Mountain packs came from.”

Nilantha nodded her head. “Osrod’s father sealed away everything but the name of the planet from which you were taken. He wanted to insure that in the future none of you would attempt to go back.”

“He left... he left our people there?” Taris asked with surprise.

Nilantha nodded her head again. “He took only the Alphas from Ventori, and he left the Betas and Omegas to fend for themselves. He wrongly assumed that without the guidance and leadership of the Alphas that they would not survive for very long. He was wrong. Men and women stepped forward from among the Betas and they did survive and they prospered. Until the Svorag came that is.”

“Oracle... how do you... how do you know all this?” Loras asked. “About these Pralor people you speak of. About what took place on that planet?”

Nilantha smiled gently. “That planet is Lycavore Loras Ranev, and it is the homeworld of your people. It is where all of you originate from, no matter your age. It is where all of your bloodlines were born and created. Your packs and your families. Lycavore is your history.” She told her. “As for how I know all this, I have already told you, I was there.”

“What you speak of, you say it took place almost three hundred and fifty thousand years ago.” Taris said with awe in her voice. “That would mean that you are...”

Nilantha laughed heartily now and she nodded her head. “Yes Taris, it would.” She spoke as she flipped a piece of red fruit into her mouth. “I was but a child when Dadrien chose me. I was nineteen years old and to my people, still considered very much a baby. I do not know why he chose me, only that he did, and as the years passed and I saw everything that he told me begin to come true, I believed even more. If you wish me to be more specific, I am three hundred and twenty-seven thousand years old, give or take a year I suppose. I never really kept track.”

“So these... these Pralor people took us from our true homeworld and brought us here?” Loras said. “Our ancestors?”

Nilantha nodded her head. “They used your people to seed new life on five different planets before war brought ruin to their Empire. Three that I am aware of, including Jetania and Ventori. The third that I know of was in the Beta Quadrant of space, far from here, but that has already been discovered by the *Mard Revik* and his *Tarivuos*, just as the prophecy predicted. Vada Tarivu Androcles also discovered his sixth and final mate from among these Lycavorians. It surprised him, but as he has done throughout his young life, he embraced it and moved on.”

“How did those among the *Mard Revik* evolve so much more quickly than us Oracle?” Loras asked her. “You say they have advanced ships and can travel great distances? How did they acquire these things?”

Nilantha nodded her head with a smile. “That would take a great deal of time to fully explain but I will give the short version to you. I have already given you some sense of how it all came to be. They came from the

Alpha Quadrant searching for answers to these questions, and they have discovered far more than they thought.” She answered. “It would take perhaps a thousand years for a Coalition ship to even reach the outer boundaries of their Empire there with their current technology.”

A thousand years!?” Loras gasped.

Nilantha nodded her head. “I do not know exactly how long it will take, for that particular knowledge is not something I cared to study. Quantum travel and Light Year calculations were never a favorite study of mine.” She said with a smile.

“They have Quantum technology?” Taris gasped aloud as well.

Nilantha nodded once more. “It was acquired recently, in the last thirty years, but their people are so amazingly intelligent. They developed their own engines within a decade and have improved them to the point now where they are standard aboard all of their ships. Their Empire is vast however, and it is an Empire. A great and beautiful and peaceful Empire with many species that live there and call it home.”

“They do not... they do not conquer?” Taris asked.

Nilantha shook her head quickly. “Oh no.” She replied. “They have had wars in their brief history, but none that they started. They did, however, finish them. Their Spartan training is absolutely superb. Any one of them is a match for three of Osrod’s brute soldiers. If Osrod thinks to bully them, he will find himself picking his *mida* up off the ground from where the *Mard Revik* plants him.”

Taris thought that hysterically funny and she laughed out loud catching herself after a moment and looking embarrassed. “Forgive me.” She stammered.

Nilantha smiled at her. “For what child?” She asked. “You will discover that humor to the family of the *Mard Revik* is like a soothing balm and they use it as such. They are unlike any Royal family in anyone’s history.”

“How did they advance so quickly when we did not Oracle?” Loras asked.

“A single, galactic event took place that eventually changed everything on your original homeworld.” Nilantha told her.

“The man you spoke of earlier?” Loras said. “His name was... it was Sumar.”

Nilantha nodded her head once more. “Chief Elder Sumar, of the Pralor people. The same species that used Lycavorians to seed other worlds with life. He was their leader for a time, and he was also known as Praetorian. The very first and greatest of their warriors.” She explained. “I will forgo the details of how he came to Lycavore, these you will learn in time when the *Mard Revik* and the *Tarivuos* arrive. His appearance on Lycavore changed everything however, and it altered the path of your people, changed them, until they became the Lycavorians that exist now in the Alpha Quadrant. Sumar and those who traveled with him on that journey were turned and taken into the different packs on Lycavore. The female Alpha that chose Sumar, she was the daughter of the last remaining Alpha of true royal blood in ancient Lycavorian culture and history going back nearly half a million years before the Pralor people ever took notice of them.”

“And he was the Spirit Warrior?” Taris interjected.

Nilantha nodded her head. “A Praetorian. Yes.”

“And he used this... this Etheric power?” Loras asked her.

Nilantha nodded her head again while looking at her. “You do not believe do you Loras?” She asked with an even voice, neither condescending nor surprised.

“It is... it is so much to take in Oracle.” Loras told her. “So unbelievable.”

“Do you believe that there are things out there among the stars that we do not understand, could not understand?” Nilantha asked her.

“Yes, of course.” Loras answered.

“Do you believe simply because we have not seen them or experienced them ourselves that they do not exist?”

Loras looked at her. “That would be arrogance of the highest sort Oracle.” Loras replied.

Nilantha nodded her head. “Yes, it would.” She said softly. “Yet, you question what I am telling you simply because it seems so unbelievable. Because you have not seen it for yourself and you have no personal knowledge of it.”

“I do not!” Loras hissed angrily. “I simply... I...”

Nilantha smiled now. “And now you find yourself in the same trap that still snarls Osrod and those like him. The trap that makes them believe that they are the center of the Universe we live in. That they are the most powerful and therefore should rule.”

Loras was silent as she sat there now and she realized that everything Nilantha had just said was true. All of her life she had prided herself on being open to new things and what she did not understand and know and now she was dismissing that because she was being told these things do exist and she had not seen them.

“You... you are right!” She finally gasped looking at her.

Nilantha smiled gently once more and lean across the short table. “Do you think I have not experienced the same things child?” She asked her. “When Dadrien first appeared to me in Etheric form, I thought it was simply a dream. I believed this until what he told me in these dreams actually began to come true. We all doubt Loras Ranev, it is part of what makes us who we are.” Nilantha leaned back. “The Lycavorian Union does exist.” She said. “They exist in part because of Sumar. They evolved because of what Sumar and others showed them. They have what is called a Prime Minister, the second most powerful figure in their government. She is an Alpha female. They have hundreds, if not thousands of Alpha females, Beta females, females of other species, all of whom hold positions of power within their Union. Just as you do Loras Ranev, but they do not have to deal with the discourse this causes here. They do not judge a person simply by the coloring of their outer skin or where their reproductive organs might reside!”

Taris could not help herself and she burst out in soft laughter again at this comment. This time however, Loras was affected as well.

Nilantha shook her head with a smile of her own. “Forgive me.” She spoke with a small wave of her hand. “I can be passionate about things at times.”

“Please do not be angry with me Oracle.” Loras spoke quickly.

“Angry?” Nilantha gasped aloud. “Gods child, I could never be angry with you! You are the future Loras Ranev! You and Taris and Anoria and so many others! Simply because you do not yet fully understand what I am saying does not make me think or feel less of you.”

“I have always tried to be realistic and fair Oracle, and I do have faith.” Loras said to her.

Nilantha smiled then. “Oh I know you do child. If you did not have faith, then you would never have seen the vision that you did.”

Taris looked at her with wide eyes now. “Matriarch... you have had a vision?” She gasped excitedly.

Loras looked at Nilantha with wide, disbelieving eyes. “How... how do you know this?” She stammered.

“How do I know that in this vision you saw your own future Loras Ranev?” Nilantha spoke. “That you saw the face of the man who would one day be King and who would hold your very essence within his hands? Just as you would hold his? How do I know this?”

“I have... I have never told anyone of this!” Loras stammered again. “How could you... how could you know that?”

Nilantha rose to her feet now and she held out her hands. “Let me show you something. Both of you.”

Loras and Taris rose to their feet and took her hands without hesitation. Nilantha closed her eyes and both Loras and Taris let out small screams of shock as the teleportation light engulfed them instantaneously and they disappeared. It was only a split second and then they reappeared in a long promenade like corridor similar to the ones they had seen before, but this corridor was lined with paintings and drawings by the hundreds. They held Nilantha’s hands tightly as she led them down the low rows of exquisite color paintings and what appeared to be hand drawings of superb workmanship. Many depicted scenes of battle, many reflected scenes of beautiful, towering cities of steel and glass and light. They saw men and women dressed in strange armor and holding what appeared to be glowing swords and spears of light and shields with a strange symbol emblazoned on the front.

“Oracle... what is... what is this place?” Taris gasped in awe. “I have never seen this place on the ship!”

Nilantha smiled. “I call this the Archive of Knowledge and Hope.” She answered. “What you see all around you are images of the past and some of the future. Images of war, of peace, and of prosperity.”

“Where... where did they come from?” Loras asked softly.

“I brought them here from the Sanctuary.” Nilantha answered. “Mainly for their own protection should anyone that followed Osrod and his father and grandfather ever find them. Each image depicts an event in history that has already occurred. And some that have not.”

“The Sanctuary?” Loras asked her.

Nilantha nodded her head. “It is a place that the *Tarivuos* and the *Mard Revik* will come to begin the journey.”

“Journey?” Taris asked her. “What journey?”

“That knowledge will come to all of us in time.” Nilantha answered. “I brought you here to show you something. All of these images, these drawings and paintings, not one of them is less than two million years old. Some are much older. I will let you date them yourselves if you like.” She waved her hand all around.

“They are exquisite.” Loras said softly. “So detailed and expressive.”

Nilantha nodded her head. “I know.” She said. “I have spent many days and weeks down here just studying them.”

“*Carians!*” Taris gasped aloud and she broke away from them, moving directly to a color painting a few meters away. “Oracle... Lady Ranev... this is... this is me!”

Loras moved up beside her and quickly took her hand as she looked upon the painting with wide eyes. It was indeed an exact image of Taris Ranev right down to the twinkle in her ice blue eyes. She was pressed tightly to one side of the tall, powerfully built young man with dark brown and reddish hair and large expressive eyes that were flecked generously with light green. His face was bright and happy and his arm was wrapped possessively around Taris on his side as well as around the waist of the other young woman on his opposite side. Taris and the young woman held their hands together over this young man’s heart and both of them were beaming in what could only be described as blissful happiness.

Taris’s hands went to her face in shock. “Oracle... I am... I am ashamed!”

Loras looked at her. “Taris... what are you talking about?” She exclaimed. “What have you to be ashamed about?”

Nilantha moved up behind Taris and rested her hands on Taris’s shoulders. “Taris had a vision as well Loras. A vision of what her future would hold. In that vision she saw this man. This man who would be her husband and mate. This brother to *Tarivu* Androcles. She however failed to mention that Anoria would also be her wife and mate.”

Loras looked at her with wide eyes as Taris turned to the Oracle with tears streaming down her face in shame. Nilantha took her into her arms quickly and squeezed her tightly. “Do not be ashamed of who you are Taris Ranev. Or what the future may hold for you. Or who for that matter.”

Taris looked at her. “You... you knew?” She gasped.

Nilantha smiled. “I knew before you were ever born Taris.” She answered her with a smile and then she leaned forward to kiss her forehead. “Just as I have known that Anoria would also hold part of your heart, just as you would hold hers. Just as I knew that this young man would claim both of you and make you sing to the moon. That he would fight to the death for both of you and that he would love both of you with every fiber of his heart and soul. Just as his father taught him to love his wives and mates.” Nilantha took her face in her hands and smiled brightly. “Never hold back Taris Ranev. Anoria has already seen this and she embraced it. Just as you will. The love you have wished for is almost here Taris Ranev, do not be afraid to reach for it.”

Taris nodded quickly as she turned back to look at the painting. Nilantha dropped her hands from her shoulders and looked at Loras. “You know this is frowned upon among our people Oracle.” Loras said.

Nilantha nodded her head. “You do not.” She said.

Loras shook her head. “Affairs of the heart should never be hidden or oppressed.” She said.

“I agree.” Nilantha said. “In the case of Taris and Anoria, they will overcome this stupid ideal and they will have each other. As well as the man they both have dreamed of for years. They are young enough to resist such petty things and the pull of their love will be too great.”

“You knew this?” Loras asked.

Nilantha nodded her head. “As I said, each of these images is at least two million years old, some even older. The last is dated some hundred thousand years ago. I just brought them here from the sanctuary.”

“Nothing more recent Oracle?” Loras asked.

Nilantha shook her head. “That is not possible.” She said.

“But why?”

“All of these images and paintings were created by a single species of scholars and what we would consider holy men and women.” Nilantha answered her. “There are none like them in the entire galaxy.”

“Again... I ask why?” Loras spoke softly. “That painting is of Taris and Anoria. They are only eighteen years of age. They must know of us, been among us without us knowing.”

Nilantha shook her head. “No. None of them ever saw us. They did not know we even existed. They simply drew and painted what the gods showed to them.”

“How?” Loras gasped once more. “And why are there not more recent ones?”

“They were called the Onab... and their species has been dead for over forty thousand years. Their star system was destroyed by a supernova that claimed all life within it. These are their depictions of the future. What they saw coming.” Nilantha motioned with her hand. “This is one of their last images. Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Loras Ranev turned to look at the one she was indicating and her heart nearly burst from her chest when she saw it. It was her.

Loras was in the arms of a young man clearly much taller than her, for her head only reached his shoulders. Her hands were flat against his broad, armored chest, and she stared up into his face with adoration. A face that was adorned with a dark beard and powerful, handsome jaw. A figure with a small scar on his right cheek, and a figure that gazed upon her with eyes that made her knees weak. She wore an elegant red dress in the painting, a long flowing crimson colored cape with gold trim identical to the man’s touched the floor behind her. As her own eyes dropped lower, she saw the images of the children at their feet. Seven children of varying ages, but all with the exact same features as Loras and the man who held her so very lovingly within his powerful arms and gazed upon her as one would gaze upon a precious jewel.

“*Son vada carians!*” Loras gasped aloud now, unable to hold the emotion in.

Nilantha smiled to herself and leaned close to Loras’s ear. “The fingers of time and fate and destiny move of their own accord Loras Ranev.” She whispered. “They can be delayed or ignored for a time, but never doubt that they will one day have their way.” Nilantha leaned closer and kissed her cheek ever so softly. “You and Taris remain here and discover all you can. I have unlocked the archives for you both. You have but to touch an image or a painting and you will know the history of it. Hold onto that strength within you Loras Ranev, for with the arrival of the Heralds and the True King, comes true change. And this will not be welcomed by many.”

Nilantha then stepped away and Loras barely discerned the flare of the teleporter that engulfed Nilantha. And then she and Taris were alone.

Alone within the halls of knowledge that they never could have imagined existed before this very day. Knowledge that was now theirs to see and experience. Knowledge that would prepare them for the future that was coming.

VENTORI
REFUGEE CALL LOCATION
SPARTAN ONE
FIFTY-THREE KLICKS SOUTH OF DISCOVERY BASE

Anja Leonidas stood on the upper portion of the *STRIKER* Mark IIs ramp, leaning against the thick interior struts as she watched Tobia, Mari, Retta and two of her medics moving among the twenty-three Lycavorians now resting in the small clearing. *SPARTAN ONE* was roughly fifteen meters longer than normal Mark IIs, mainly because it could carry five dragons and Anja had it equipped with a small, but powerful medical treatment bed due to Martin’s propensity for finding trouble. It could act as a field trauma unit if needed and *SPARTAN ONE* carried a larger than normal cache of medical supplies of varying degree. Anja Leonidas was not just the Chief Medical Officer of the entire Lycavorian Union, she was also an experienced and exceptionally lethal fighter as many in the past had discovered painfully. In the beginning many had mistaken her petite size as weakness, claiming that their King needed a pureblood like Aricia. This way of thinking quickly fell by the wayside as they saw the inner strength and skill of their smallest Queen. Of course,

watching her thoroughly beat down two Spartan warriors in the first year had given them a glimpse of what Anja was made of. No one questioned or doubted her skills or her resolve after that.

Watching Retta, Anja knew right away that Androcles had been correct in his assessment of his younger sibling's skill and he would never put them at risk unless they could defend themselves. While Retta was quick move among the Ventori Lycavorians she did so with an alert mind, always taking in the area around her and what was happening. Several times she made eye contact with her twin brother Calyb who was helping others and never more than ten meters from his sister, but she never dropped her guard. Retta was like Eliani in that she had inherited her mother's captivating beauty, her dark red hair, shiny and healthy and pulled into a long pony tail. She had high cheekbones like her mother and while Eliani's eyes were more of a forest green in color, Retta's eyes were more like her mother's jade colored eyes, only a slightly darker jade in color. The lightweight Mark V ArmorPly was form fitting and like the rest of her daughters, Retta had decided much earlier that she preferred the more lightweight and less restricting nature of the Mark V ArmorPly as opposed to the Mark IV or the new Mark VI style. This armor conformed to her lithe figure like a second skin, showing off her physical assets which were ample. While her breasts were not as large as her mother or sister, they were high and firm and very proportionate to her five foot five body. Watching her Anja said a small thanks that she did not have to deal with the issues of larger breasts. There were times when Anja hated her larger chest, and she knew Eliani was of the same mind, but neither of them complained much. Eliani had told her once that Jomann paid far too much attention to her breasts, but he could make her sing just by doing that. Anja had to smile at this thought for it was no different for her with Martin and the others.

Anja smelled him easily enough and she turned her head as Atropos moved around the side of the *STRIKER* and looked at her. His 190A4 dangled from quick release straps and he pushed it around to the side as he stepped up onto the ramp and moved up next to her. Anja knew that there were very few men who would dare speak normally to her and her fellow Queens, but Atropos, his brother Andreus and Danny were in that small group.

"Ok... I worry too much." Anja spoke as he stopped beside her. "I admit it."

Atropos grinned at her knowing what she was referring to without having to ask. It had taken Anja several years to get used to him being her constant shadow, but now after over a quarter of a century, there was very little she kept from him in regards to anything.

"Then I will not say I told you so." He told her as he lifted his hand and placed it on her shoulder and squeezed gently. "There are very few who will be truthful when it comes to the training someone has received. Thankfully, my *mandri* Androcles is one of those. He is like his father in that way and he will tell you how it is, whether you want to hear it or not, no matter how painful it is. If they were not ready Anja, he would have said so."

Anja reached up and squeezed his hand on her shoulder. "I know." She spoke. "They are just so young Atropos."

"That is the mother in you speaking." Atropos told her. "As it always should and will speak. They will reach their seventeenth birthing day in three weeks. It was you who discovered that our people were maturing much faster since our time on Lycavore because of the Pralor blood within us. They are fully matured wolves now Anja, and Retta will soon come into her first phase yes?"

Anja looked at him and nodded. "It is beginning to assert itself now. Another week to ten days and it will be in full cycle." She answered unafraid to speak of this with Atropos, even though this sort of talk was usually done between women. He was a member of their family as Aricia's older brother and he had been part of the births of all of their children no matter who had carried them.

"Are you concerned for her because she is out here with us?" Atropos asked softly. "That she will be courted and claimed by a Spartan out here so far from home?"

Anja shook her head quickly and with a little snort of humor. "That is something that I'm not afraid of. Anyone who survives the gauntlet of Calyb, Andro and the rest of her brothers will have to face Martin. If he isn't true, he will be running with his tails between his legs real fast."

Atropos chuckled and nodded his head. "It has been very hard to impress Martin when it comes to his daughters. Even when they survive their brothers. Lilika has told me to prepare for such a thing because she is certain our next child will be a daughter. I'm not so certain I am able to prepare for that."

Anja looked at him. “Well don’t ask Martin for advice.” She said with a warm laugh. “He will tell you to clean your weapons, add new locks to your home and insure she does not leave the house until she is a thousand years old.”

Atropos laughed now as well. “Yes... that does sound like Martin.”

“You know... he asked me if I was happy with my life not so long ago.” Anja told him. “It took me by surprise.”

“What did you tell him?”

Anja looked back out the *STRIKER* and her eyes fell on Retta once more. “I told him the truth.” She said. “I could not imagine myself in any other place Atropos. Belonging to any other man. I would not trade who and what I am for even a single day and all the tea in China.”

Atropos chuckled. “I know this reference.” He said. “But you hate tea anyway.”

Anja looked at him and laughed once more. “I do.” She looked around again. “Being out here with him though... with Aricia and For'mya, with Dysea, Bella and Cirith... it has brought us so much closer together. Our love has grown even more since we have been out here, no matter what has happened along the way. Discovering new things and helping new people. No matter what he says, he is loving this, just as we are.”

Atropos nodded his head. “That has been evident in his mannerisms since beginning this trip.” He said. “Within all of us. What we are doing symbolizes the wolf nature within all of us. To discover and learn and experience things we have never experienced before. That is why I have never accepted a position away from you Anja.” He smiled when Anja met his eyes. “As your Captain I get to experience this... all of it.”

“Well I’m happy you feel that way.” Anja said.

Atropos grinned at her. “Of course... the occasional beat down that you inflict on some unsuspecting fool does always make things much more entertaining.”

Anja burst out laughing at his expression and she grabbed his arm and shook him gently. “I am going to tell Lilika you said that you know!”

“She already knows.” Atropos told her with a laugh as his eyes swept the area outside the ramp and settled on Calyb. He detected something different about Calyb’s stance and he looked at Anja. “How much longer to you think?” He asked her while keeping the smile in place on his face.

“Thirty minutes to finish initial assessments and then we can bring them on board for transport back to Discovery Base.” Anja told him.

Atropos nodded his head. “Then I will conduct one more walk of the perimeter.” He said. “Signal me if you need something.”

Anja nodded as he began to walk down the ramp and her eyes went to Retta. Atropos made his way casually to where Calyb was finishing his assessment on the older Lycavorian man and stopped behind him.

“What do you smell Calyb?” He asked.

Calyb turned his head and looked up at him. “I... I don’t know Uncle Atropos.” He answered.

Atropos dropped into a squat beside him. “Your father and your brother have the keenest noses of any wolf within the entire Union Calyb my boy. It is in your blood as well, just as it is Eliani and Retta. You just need to trust your instincts. You are half Hadarian yes, but you are more wolf than Hadarian Calyb, and you always will be because of who your father is. Embrace that as well as your healing abilities. Combined them both and use them together and you will become stronger for it.”

Calyb looked at him. “I smelled hate *Tenne*. Adrenaline and distrust. It was... it was there for a millisecond and then it was gone.” He told his uncle.

“Do you sense an Etheric presence?” Atropos asked.

Calyb shook his head. “Just mother and you, and Retta, Mari and Tobia.” He answered. “No one else.”

“Svorag?”

Calyb shook his head more quickly this time. “No. Andro showed Retta and I what to detect etherically from them before we left. It isn’t much but it definitely was not them.”

“What do your instincts tell you?” Atropos asked him.

Calyb met his eyes. “That it was coming from a Lycavorian.” He answered. “And not one of those in this group.”

Atropos turned when he heard Anja call out and he saw Retta, Mari and Tobia begin to motion for everyone to move for the *STRIKER*. As he turned his head back to Calyb he caught the scent too with his experienced and keen nose. He looked at Calyb.

“It appears you were right *Mandri*.” He spoke. “I am scenting at least ten Alphas nearby. They were staying downwind of us to keep their scents clear, but are moving closer now and the wind just shifted.”

Calyb nodded his head as his heart began to race. “They are not Spartans *Tenne*.” He spoke.

Atropos nodded his head while still remaining calm and unassuming. “No they certainly are not. No Spartan would dare move on us in this fashion once they sensed your mother, you and Retta.” Atropos looked at Calyb. “Call for your brother and father Calyb. They will get here before anyone else. We need to...”

Atropos never finished his sentence and Calyb heard the four deep reports of a firing weapon and the sick sounds of those rounds striking flesh as his uncle pitched forward with a loud groan of pain and was still. Calyb’s eyes flew open even as his wolf instincts lit off and he began coming to his feet.

“Uncle!” He screamed as he reached for his own weapon. Calyb turned his head towards the *STRIKER*, his first instincts firing off, and those were to protect his twin and his mother. “Retta! Mother! We are...”

Calyb never finished the words as he felt a great force strike his chest three times, an immense pain shoot through his upper body unlike anything he had ever felt before and then he was tossed back a meter from his uncle’s inert form and blackness washed over him. The last thing he saw before darkness claimed him were the figures of ten large soldiers bursting from the tree line, their weapons beginning to shoot flame as weapons fire erupted all around them. Calyb Leonidas heard the screams begin and then nothing but silence as he sank into the abyss.

VENTORI SYSTEM KINTAUR WRECK

Laon heard the soft beep indicating that the download was done and he grunted. “It’s about time!” He hissed to himself as he reached for the computer terminal to remove the power coupling and small computer core he had attached.

The Environmental suit he wore was bulky and very uncomfortable and unfortunately he had to sit here and wait for the download to complete fully and not in the semi comfort of the transport a hundred meters away from him. The pilot and co-pilot were not Lazar and Rhaos, who were two of the finest pilots he had ever met, and therefore they did not feel comfortable coming closer. Laon didn’t complain and simply donned the suit and space walked to his current location. As his gloved and bulky fist twisted the computer coupling counterclockwise and he pulled the core out he smiled.

“Got you.” He spoke freely not thinking that anyone had or could hear him except those on the shuttle. “I have the data core and I am returning. Begin power up sequence.”

“Laon... Laon I don’t think that is a good idea.” The pilot’s voice stammered in his helmet.

“What?” Laon snapped. “Why?”

“Laon... turn around!”

Hearing the urgency in the man’s voice Laon spun as fast as the suit would allow. His dark blue eyes went wide when he saw the space in between him and the shuttle shimmer very unnaturally and then the form of a sleek and menacing looking ship appeared.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Laon gasped aloud.

Laon’s helmet COM filled with static for a few seconds and then he heard the distinctly female voice speak directly to him.

“Hello. I will give you one opportunity to follow my instructions without bloodshed.” The female voice spoke. “You will use the thrusters on your suit to move to the hatch that you see on the starboard side of our ship. I will give you ten seconds to comply and you will not be harmed.”

Laon looked quickly to where he could still see his transport and then back to the side of the ship. He could see the dark haired female in the forward window of the ship looking out at him. “You aren’t really

giving me a chance to get to know you.” Laon spoke the words now as whoever this was had already overridden his COM signals.

“I’m now giving you six seconds to do what I have told you.” The voice answered.

“And if I don’t?” Laon pressed.

“Then your remains will be floating beside the space junk that currently surround you.” The female answered. “And you will no longer matter.”

Laon blinked his eyes several times. “I... I see your point.” He spoke.

“Three seconds.” The female said.

“Ok! Ok! I’m going!” Laon replied urgently. He reached down to his side and pulled up the thruster control panel and engaged the small thrusters on his back, pushing him towards the hatch on the ship.

PREMONITION

“...*Going!*” The male voice echoed.

Ne’Veha turned her head and looked at Sadi with a nod. “He is moving for the hatch.” She confirmed.

Sadi nodded her own head and touched the panel above her head. “Nara?”

“We’re here Sadi.” Nara’s voice answered.

Sadi smiled and looked at Ne’Veha quickly, both of them catching the “we” reference. Since two nights ago on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, Nara and Jacina had been inseparable with the exception of the battle yesterday. While Jacina had spent the better part of the last nine hundred years in stasis as a Svorag prisoner, technically she was only barely over three hundred years old. That Nara desired her in the worst possible way was evident to any wolf on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, for her female aura seek reeked of this craving and only for Jacina. Sehri had laughed as she said that all of the males on the ship were now completely crushed for Nara dismissed them without as much as a second thought now that Jacina was with her. Sadi had caught glimpses of them over the last two days, especially after the battle on Ventori and she could tell instantly that the attraction worked both ways. Jacina clung on Nara’s every word, their heads close together when they were talking and neither of them ever more than a few feet from each other. They had been holding hands tightly when they caught Sadi and Ne’Veha as they were boarding *PREMONITION* to return to the ship to gather clothing and other items for an extended stay on the surface. Nara told them they wanted to do the same and she was going to take Jacina to the Quartermaster in order to get her some additional uniforms and then some civilians clothes from the ship’s civilian tailor.

“He is proceeding to the airlock hatch now.” Sadi told her. “Would you be so kind as to meet him with Master Chief Rano?”

“On our way.” Nara answered.

Sadi looked at Kameka in her seat behind them. “Have they done anything?” She asked her indicating the COLS transport out the port side of their ship.

Meka flashed that ever present “gnarly” grin as she said Daio called it. The grin that meant she was thoroughly enjoying herself. “They haven’t twitched since I swung my cannons on them.”

“*Sirsangai?*” Sadi asked turning to look at her fellow Princess, lover and wife.

“Admiral Lorian’s Wolf Pack has taken their main ship under tractor beam.” Ne’Veha answered. “They did not resist.”

Sadi tossed her head from side to side. “Ok... maybe they will go quietly.” She spoke aloud. “Meka... have the transport prepare for us to tractor it. We will return to *SPARTA’S WRATH* and turn this fool over to the *Durcunusaan*.” Sadi adjusted her controls. “*Sirsangai* give me quarter power on all thrusters. Let’s make this quick.”

Laon stared at the face of Master Chief Joe Ranor, who had the P190 A4 leveled at his head from three feet away. The male in front of him was not Lycavorian, Laon could tell that right away, but he was solidly built and he did hold the weapon. Laon probably could have disarmed him easily enough, but he did not envy being

shot once or twice in the process. The man also did not seem in the least bit frightened that he was staring at a pureblood Lycavorian, which was unusual for Laon to experience. Most species that he knew of were cowed by the knowledge of what he was. The airlock was small but Laon knew instantly that the technology was far beyond what COLS had. He had never seen a ship such as the one he was now on and his engineering intellect was very peaked to see if he could discover anything.

Joe motioned with the barrel of the A4. "Drop the portable core and slide it over there." He ordered.

Laon looked at him as he held the portable storage unit in his left hand. "I really don't want to do that." He spoke casually.

"It wasn't a request sport." Rano told him sliding his finger forward on the stock of the A4 and charging the weapon. "Do it now!"

Laon lifted his arm slightly and let the strap fall off his forearm to the deck. He leaned over and went to push the data core to the side, knowing this would be his only chance. Laon moved then, thrusting his arm forward and sending the portable data core rocketing across the small space as he exploded off the deck even while still wearing the environmental suit.

Laon's eyes went wide when his body froze in midstride towards the Master Chief and the core went sailing by the man's head by a wide margin. Laon suddenly found himself unable to move, all of his limbs stuck as if he was held in some sort of force field. He saw the flash of movement to his right and cut his eyes just as he saw the two females appeared in the doorway.

The raven haired pureblood was an Alpha female beyond anything Laon had ever felt in his three hundred and twenty-seven years of life. The red haired female, while not Lycavorian, was the most delicious female he had ever seen who was not Lycavorian. The young, black haired female he put in her early twenties and based on her scent had just recently gone through her first Phase and not been claimed by an Alpha. Laon did not know how this was possible because her aura and coca mint scent were filling his head and senses in a wave of vibrations that he had never experienced before. Instinctively Laon Kavar reacted to this stimulation in the only way he knew how. He unleashed his full, Alpha male aura at the raven haired goddess, not realizing who he was pulsing with his substantial male aura, or the consequences that it would bring.

Nara had smelled Laon's intent before he had executed his move and she reached the doorway just as he had made his move. Nara hadn't even blinked, lifting her hand and engulfing him with an Etheric field that was far more powerful than any she had ever generated before. Nara felt power course through her, power and focus, just as she had felt it swirling around her father and her brothers. Only now it was coursing through her unchecked.

Nara Leonidas had perhaps three seconds to contemplate this new power racing through her body before the Lycavorian's full male aura smashed into her female senses and set her body on fire. Her azure eyes went wide and she glared at the man from across the distance and watching as his eyes went wide in shock.

Laon knew something was very wrong when he realized that his aura had not frozen her in her spot and turned her into a babbling female willing to do anything for him. So soon out of her first Phase, she still should have been affected by his aura, but the only thing Laon saw was a pair of blazing azure blue eyes grow wider and angrier. Laon had no idea that he had pulsed a Lycavorian female with Leonidas blood running through her veins. A pureblood daughter of the most powerful pureblood Lycavorian living right now. He had no idea of the evolutionary changes the Lycavorians with the Alpha Quadrant had undergone through the millennia and therefore he was unprepared for Nara's reaction to his actions.

"*Forn nubous gostina!*" Nara snarled with savage fury, her dual wolf fangs bursting from her gums and her wolf eyes becoming burning points of azure blue.

Nara felt the power coursing through her, felt it flare within her and she lifted her left hand and sent a controlled Etheric pulse wave out from the palm of her hand that crossed the distance between her and Laon in two blinks of an eye. That wave struck him with enough force to lift him off his feet and send him rocketing across the small airlock to impact the far wall with a grunt of pain. As he slumped to the floor in stunned shock, with pain wracking his upper body from the impact, Laon looked up and saw this exquisite looking female fall upon him like the wrath of the gods themselves. He could not stop the first two open palmed blows that rocked his head back with enough force to smash his head into the bulkhead, and he barely got his hands up to partially block the knee she sent whipping up with unerring accuracy. Part of that blow caught on his left shoulder and Laon felt his collarbone almost snap in half from the force. As Nara drew back her hand and prepared to send a

ridge hand into his face, the Etheric knife exploded from her knuckles pulsing with power. Laon's pain filled eyes went wide and the only thing that was going through his mind at that time was that he had certainly bitten off way more than he could chew and that this female was going to end his life.

"Nara no!" Jacina screamed from behind her and Laon saw those savage azure blue eyes blinked in recognition of the voice.

"Nara!" The new female voice echoed in the small airlock and Laon blinked once and then saw what he could only describe as a blur before the very petite female appeared beside the wild Lycavorian and grasped her wrist with both her hands. Then on her opposite side Laon saw the dark skin and white hair of another female beside her. A female with long, elegantly curved pointed ears that had to be at least four inches high alongside her head.

"Be at peace Nara." Lu'ria spoke as she gripped Nara's wrist right below where Carisia held her. "We are here."

Laon watched those azure blue eyes blink several more times and then suddenly the near glowing orbs that they had become vanished and all that remained were stunningly beautiful wolf eyes unlike anything Laon had ever seen before. That pointed knife like aberration that had formed above her closed knuckles disappeared and then the red haired female appeared beside her, taking her arm.

"Nara?" Jacina gasped as she held Nara's arm tightly, truly concerned for her. What she had discovered in the last two days with Nara Leonidas surpassed anything that Jacina had felt in her life. The similarities between her and Nara were too many to count and Jacina wanted to explore this thing that they had discovered drew them so tightly together so easily.

"Jacina?" Nara whispered the word and Jacina felt her body shudder at the way her name sounded coming from Nara's lips.

"Jacina take her." Carisia spoke now. "Lu'ria and I will handle this fool."

Jacina looked at the petite vampire female she now knew to be Androcles' wife and mate along with the dark skinned elf beside her. "Carisia... what...?"

Carisia turned her head and looked at Laon who was slumped on the deck barely able to remain conscious and looking up at them. "This fool must have pulsed her with his wolf aura." Carisia stated with some contempt in her voice. She turned back to Jacina. "Nara reacted as any Alpha female would if a male did this to them. She perceived it as an assault and she acted."

Laon was looking up from where he sat listening. He had pulsed her with his male aura and she thought it was an assault? His full aura did not even cause her to blink in a manner that was normal to the Alpha females he had seen in his lifetime. Laon watched as the red haired female wrapped her arms around the other and began to lead her out of the airlock. He glanced up to see the Maya blue and amber colored eyes of the other two females.

Carisia turned her head. "Rano?" She asked.

Joe Ranor looked up from examining the data core that Laon had downloaded. "It's pretty much everything that was left on that Kintaur ship's computer core Carisia. It must have activated safety measures when the ship was gutted and secured all this information in one location. Makes it easier to recover."

"Secure that Joseph." Carisia spoke. "Lu'ria and I will secure this fool. Something has happened on the planet and we are returning."

"I'm on it." Rano answered as Carisia and Lu'ria bent to pick up Laon.

VENTORI

Lazar and Rhaos burst into the clearing where the ship was and skidded to halts in their large wolf forms, their eyes wide in horror and shock. Lazar quickly shifted back to his human form from the two and a half foot tall dark brown and black wolf, Rhaos following a second later. Neither of them could contain their intakes of breath at what they saw all around them. There were at least twenty bodies strewn around the rear of the ship in a wide area, all of them appearing to have been shot several times at least. The bodies of five

children were among the remains. Lazar heard the shouting coming from inside the ship, the screaming and then the heavy thuds of someone being struck very hard. It was then he heard the bellow of Sibot's voice.

“Upae!”

Lazar felt the savage anger well up within him and he raced up the ramp of the strange ship to find one of his men lying on the deck, his eyes open in death and the hilt of a blade protruding from under his jaw. Whoever had killed him had rammed the blade of the knife clean through his lower jaw and into his brain. Lazar tore his eyes away from the body and moved further into the ship until he saw Sibot's hulking form. The brutish man was standing over the petite red haired female, holding the front of her uniform with one hand and punching her with his other. Her face was already bloody, her cheek split open and her lips torn in several places. Four of the men Sibot had brought with him were standing around a small group of woman who had tears in their eyes while four more were standing around another two females. Several of his men had blood leaking from different facial wounds and the two lone females appeared to have been mishandled. He saw the last one of his men with his arm around the waist of another female who was slumped over in his grasp wailing almost uncontrollably. Lazar stared at this in horror for only a split second before he moved with utter fury in his stride.

Sibot was about to lift his hand to once more punch Anja in the head when he felt the hand clamped onto his wrist with surprising strength. He whipped his head around in anger only to see the large fist just before it impacted his jaw and sent him sprawling into the side of the bulkhead heavily. He snapped back up to look at Lazar savagely.

“What are you doing you fucking moron!?” Lazar screamed at him.

“I am doing what your father ordered you to do!” Sibot snarled back at him as he brought his hand up and wiped the blood from his now bloody mouth.

“My father did not order me to butcher innocent civilians!” Lazar screamed once more as he stepped into another blow that Sibot saw coming but could not avoid. Lazar hit him once more with a trip hammer like knuckle punch that rocked Sibot's head back, drawing more blood from his mouth. He snatched the front of Sibot's uniform in his hands and slammed him against the bulkhead. “You killed our people!”

“They were Betas and...” Sibot began to reply blood spilling from his mouth.

“They are Lycavorian!” Lazar screamed in rage his wolf fangs bursting forth and his eyes changing to those of his wolf persona in an instant “They are like us! Do you feel powerful beating a woman a third of your size Sibot you fucking animal!?”

“She is a half breed and she killed Kagar!” Sibot roared as he reached up to grab Lazar's wrists.

Lazar snapped his head forward in brutal anger, his forehead impacting Sibot's nose and smashing it into oblivion. Sibot roared in pain and his eyes filled with tears as he grabbed for his face.

“You expect me to believe a half breed female less than half your size killed one of my men!” Lazar roared right back.

“It is true Commander!” One of his men spoke up from where he stood holding his weapon on Endith and Tina, both of them looking as if they had been roughed up. “These two came from up there and the half breed made to run out of the ship! Kagar tried to stop her and she had a knife and she shoved it into his jaw and killed him!”

Lazar whirled on them now. “I should execute all of you for following this fool and disobeying my orders!” He snarled at them. “We were here to gather information! Not kill our own people!”

“Commander we...”

Lazar saw Rhaos come running up the ramp and into the portion of the ship they were in. “Lazar... I have lost communications with our transport! Someone is jamming us! They know we are here and no doubt they know where this ship is!” He hissed as his eyes took in the area around them. “*Sibfla!*” He moved up closer to Lazar.

The coughing sound drew Lazar's attention and he turned as the female on the deck rolled over to her side and blood spilled from her lips as she coughed heavily onto the deck. This movement caused the second female to react and she began to struggle insanely with his man holding her.

“Mother!” Retta screamed out as she twisted her body back and forth trying to get free. “Let me go! Let me go!”

Lazar could only watch in stunned shock as the young female, no more than twenty years in age, reared up in the soldier's arms and raked her nails across his face with savage fury. Lazar's eyes grew wide when he saw the dual wolf fangs burst from her gums and her sea green eyes change to those of a female wolf. Her scent spike incredibly high and hit Lazar full in the face. Honey and mint washed through his nostrils causing his own wolf blood to flare up in intensity. As his soldier dropped his weapon and reached for his face in pain Retta reared up even more and grabbed his rifle, swinging it like a club somewhat awkwardly. The blow had enough power in it, as awkward as it was, to strike the side of his head and knock him away from her and releasing her from his grasp. She immediately released the weapon and dove for the floor where the second woman was lying.

Lazar Aspion, whether it was because he had used his keen nose more than anyone other than Rhaos, or simply because he was more attuned to different scents, instantly made the connection when he smelled the scent from the woman on the floor. The relation was there, mother and daughter, as was the similarity in their looks. Lazar didn't know what made him do it, but the moment another of his men lifted his rifle to shoot the young woman in the back Lazar drew out his sidearm, aimed and fired in a single blink. The report of the weapon was deafening in the confines of the ship, but the COLS soldier was blow back by the force of the bullet because of the close range. Lazar stood there for a moment, shocked at his own actions even as Rhaos grabbed two of the men closest to him.

"Stand by the ramp and tell us the moment you detect anyone moving this way!" Rhaos ordered one. "You climb up on top of this ship and do the same! Move!"

Rhaos turned back as the two men moved off to follow his orders and he stepped up close to Lazar. "Lazar we need to leave." He hissed softly. "They are bound to find us easily and we cannot be here when they do."

Lazar wasn't listening as he watched the young woman gather the injured woman into her arms. She settled under her upper body, adjusting her head gently. Lazar saw her injuries and felt fresh anger flare within him and he glared at Sibot for a long moment feeling hot rage filling him once more.

"*Saoi Sibfla!*" Rhaos gasped looking at the two women on the deck now. "Look!"

Lazar cut his eyes back and saw the soft white glow flowing around the young woman's hands as she drew them across the injured woman's head and face. Lazar's eyes grew wide as he watched those harsh wounds begin close and heal instantly. It was unlike anything he had ever seen before.

Rhaos turned when he heard his ear COM unit cackle. "Lieutenant!" The excited voice spoke. "Sir, there are five of those flying creatures heading directly for us! I see many airships lifting off as well!"

"Fuck!" Rhaos hissed as he turned back to Lazar. "Lazar! We need to go! Now!"

"These are the pilot's Commander!" One soldier announced as he nudged Tina in the arm. "They came from the cockpit of this craft!"

Lazar turned to look at Tina and Endith. "You can fly this machine?" He barked.

"We ain't flying you anywhere shithead!" Tina snarled baring her vampire fangs at him.

Lazar's eyes grew wide when he saw them and he stepped closer. "You... you have fangs yet you are not Lycavorian!"

"Wow... you are a bright one!" Endith spat viciously, her blue eyes filled with hate and fury. "You and your little bunch of killers are so dead when the Skipper gets here!"

"I did not... I did not mean for this to happen!" Lazar rasped out the words.

"You killed my brother!" Retta screamed from where she held Anja in her arms. "You killed my brother and my uncle!"

Lazar looked at her, suddenly filled with the resolve he didn't comprehend, a resolve to convince her that he did not do what she said he did. "I did not order that!" He barked at her.

Rhaos was the one who acted and he stepped over to where the other prisoners were and he yanked one to her feet. Unfortunately for him, it happened to be Mari and she screamed out as he grabbed her hair. Tobia bolted to her feet only to be struck by a COLS soldier between her shoulder blades, knocking her to the deck as Rhaos pulled Mari over to where Lazar was still staring at Retta.

"Do not force me to kill her!" Rhaos barked now as he held a fistful of Mari's long reddish brown hair in his fist tightly. The pain was keeping Mari from thinking straight as he yanked harder and tears formed in her eyes. "You will take off now! And you will activate the stealth shield this ship has!"

“I don’t know what you are talking about *midaeu*.” Endith growled.

Rhaos yanked harder on Mari’s hair. “Do not push me woman!” He shouted. “I will kill her! I saw the ships like this leaving your base and they were activating a stealth shield. You will do the same and take us off this planet!”

“Endith!” Anja rasped out the word holding Retta’s hands on her chest. Endith looked at her with wide eyes. “No... no more deaths Endy.” Anja spoke in a whisper filled with a mixture of pain and anger.

“Anja they...” Endith began to protest but Tina took her arm stopping her words.

“Fine.” Tina snapped softly. “Just don’t hurt anyone else.”

Rhaos released Mari instantly. “Take them to the cockpit and watch them!” He ordered the three men watching her and Tina. “Go now!”

He waited until the three men had pulled Endith and Tina to their feet and were taking them forward before turning to Lazar who had not moved or spoken. His eyes were still focused on the two women, both of them now clutching each other and silently crying their eyes out.

“Calyb.” Anja whispered ever so softly as she pulled Retta tighter to her. “Calyb my beautiful baby boy!”

Rhaos grabbed Lazar as Mari scrambled back along the deck until she was with her mother. “Lazar!” Rhaos barked loudly jerking Lazar out of his trance like state. They heard the engines of the ship come to life and gain power quickly. “Lazar what is wrong with you?”

Lazar ignored Rhaos and settled his eyes on Sibot as they felt the ship begin to rise off the ground. He rose to his full height and his wolf eyes narrowed in anger once again as he stood over Sibot.

“You brought this upon us!” He growled.

“I was doing what your father demanded!” Sibot shouted back. “He wanted one or two of these people to question!”

Lazar bent over and grabbed the front of Sibot’s uniform and yanked him to his feet with vicious strength. “Then I hope your devotion and bootlicking to my father’s orders are enough to sustain your life Sibot!” Lazar snarled as he began to drag him towards the back of the ship. He stopped at the rear of the ramp as it was beginning to rise.

Sibot looked into Lazar’s wild eyes now. “You wouldn’t dare!” He barked at Lazar.

“For the blood you have taken this day... I will allow them to have yours in return!” Lazar spoke harshly just before he gave Sibot a mighty shove and sent him sprawling out the back of the ramp.

Sibot could be heard screaming as the ramp finished closing and the ship began to rise into the air. Lazar turned back to see Rhaos and his men looking at him intently. “Our ship and friends are lost to us.” He stated now. “Your actions with Sibot may well have brought about the deaths of us all! Be certain that I will see to it that all of you die first for your actions this day!”

None of them could meet his eyes as he strode past them and moved forward into the cockpit. Rhaos however was not so limited and he looked at the men around him with disdain. “Move them all together!” Rhaos barked. “Help them to their feet and move them together! You will harm none of them!”

The COLS soldiers sprang to comply with his orders for they had just witnessed what their commanding officer had done and none wanted to press that man’s First Officer. Lazar was in the cockpit of the *STRIKER*, his eyes and mind marveling at the most technologically advanced equipment he had ever seen in his life. He dismissed his men with a shake of his head and slowly moved between the two seats where Endith and Tina now sat, his sidearm in his hand but not pointed in a threatening manner at either of them. As he looked out of the view window in front of them he saw the atmosphere of the planet beginning to fall away. His eyes grew wide at the speed with which they had cleared the atmosphere.

“We... we climbed so fast!” He finally gasped out. “Can you show me my ship?”

Tina looked at Endith and then adjusted the controls between the two seats. The small monitor came alive and Lazar saw his ship was now surrounded by five others that were much larger.

“You will execute them?” Lazar hissed.

Tina turned her head now. “We are not like you!” She snapped angrily. “We don’t kill innocent men and women.”

Lazar met her eyes. “Sibot acted without my knowledge! I did not give him orders to kill those men and women or to assault your friend.”

“Our friend?” Endith hissed. “You have no idea who your asshole buddy just beat half to death do you?”

“We were here only to gather information.” Lazar answered defensively.

“Well whoever you are, your friend just succeeded in making you and everyone else back there walking around dead men!” Endith snarled. “Anja Leonidas is a Queen of the Lycavorian Union! Your friend killed her youngest son! Retta’s twin brother! The King’s son! Your friend killed a man they considered their Uncle! You’ll be lucky to live out another week for what you have done!”

“I did not give him authorization to do that!” Lazar protested once more.

“You are his Commanding Officer?” Endith asked bluntly.

“Yes, but...”

“No buts buddy, you own it.” Endith said. “Now are we just going to ride around up here? Sooner or later they will find us. Sooner I hope, so you can answer for your crimes and I can watch them hang you by your *nor*.”

Lazar stared at her for a long moment, taking in the long elegant ears and rust colored red hair. There was something odd about her scent that he could not place but she was fit and obviously very capable. “Set course 4675.87.” He spoke finally.

Tina punched in the coordinates and looked at Endith across from her. “I hope you can make peace with whatever gods you worship out here.” Tina told him turning her head to look at him. “They won’t save you no matter where in this universe you go to hide.”

Anja’s upper body resided in Retta’s lap, while Tobia and Mari were now on either side of her in a protective manner. Retta’s head was lowered beside her mother’s and both of them were weeping softly when they felt it. The powerful surge of Etheric power that could only be coming from one person. Though Tobia and Mari had not known it before this day, Martin had considered both of them as members of his immediate family from the moment Deion had taken her as his wife and mate. This naturally meant that they were included in the surge of power and Tobia gasped softly as she felt the clarity and resonance for the very first time and it felt utterly beautiful. For Mari, she had felt it before and it made her smile in hopefulness and love. Martin was reaching for them from Ventori and he had found Anja’s etheric resonance easily and he was focusing on it intently. Tobia could feel three other minds adding their power to his own, though given what she felt, Martin did not need such additional power.

Martin Leonidas knew his Queens as he knew himself and he began speaking by telling them what would instantly change things.

[They are alive!]

[Papa!] Retta rasped in overwhelming happiness.

[Martin... Martin...] Anja began but the relief she felt overwhelmed her momentarily and she squeezed Tobia’s hand tightly because she could not say anything. Mari grasped Retta’s hand, tears in her eyes and Retta looked at her and nodded, the same overwhelming sense of happiness filling her as she heard her father continue.

[Duewa is with them. Atropos took one in the upper back. Slipped through a seam in his armor, but he is ok. Calyb took three in his chest armor. One bounced off and clipped his jaw and neck but he is fine.] Martin paused for a moment, all of them almost feeling the sigh of great concern in Mindvoice. *[Anja? Carians Red, how many times have I got to tell you to stop looking for trouble?]*

Anja couldn’t help herself and with tears running down her cheeks she burst into soft laughter that only caused her to cough in mild pain which made her turn her head into Retta’s lap further and Retta caressed her forehead with her fingers and put her mother to sleep.

[Red? Anja?] Martin spoke once more.

[I have put her to sleep Papa.] Retta answered. *[They... he beat her badly medwan. She killed one of them when we saw Calyb get shot and he beat her so...]*

[I need you to be strong fenneenum.] Martin spoke gently to his daughter. *[Can you do that?]*

Retta took a deep breath and drew upon her inner reserves. The blood within her veins. *[Yes.]* She answered firmly.

[*That's my girl.*] Martin answered her with genuine warmth and fatherly affection.

Retta looked around quickly. [*Their leader is in the cockpit with Endith and Tina. I felt us jump father, but I do not know to where. Their leader is... he is not the one who led the attack. This one was furious with the brute who did and who was beating mother. He... he tossed him off the ship just before we took off.*]

[*The distance is too great to hold this now.*] Martin said. [*Try and remain together and remember we are coming for you. We...*]

Retta looked up at Tobia when her father's presence was pulled from her. "The distance is too great." Tobia spoke softly. "Not even your father could hold something like that forever."

"What do we do?" Mari asked. She was fearful yes, but not anywhere as much as she thought she would be. Once more the Leonidas blood within her was coming forth and giving her more presence of mind and courage to deal with this situation.

"I healed her wounds but she needs rest." Retta spoke now caressing her mother's cheek. "She will wake in a few hours and she will know what to do. For now, we do not resist and we try to stay calm."

"And when she wakes?" Tobia asked. "What then Retta? We do not even know where we are going? How will your father and the others find us?"

Retta met her eyes and smiled through her tears and her own fear. "My father and my brother Androcles will find us Tobia. You do not yet understand what they are do you?" She said almost wistfully.

Tobia looked at her oddly. "What they are? I don't understand what you mean?"

Retta looked at Mari beside her and she saw the glint of knowledge in her eyes. "Deion showed you?" She asked softly.

Mari nodded as she squeezed Retta's hand tightly. "Our first time together." She replied. "It was... it was glorious Retta."

Retta smiled now and pulled her mother closer to her chest. "My father and my brother Androcles are beautiful enigmas Lady Tobia. Paradigm shifts to the next level on the Etheric evolutionary scale." Retta said with a small smile. "They can no longer be considered among the normal Etheric categories or Etheric sciences for they have evolved past that now. They are no longer Praetorian or even *Dahakoan* Lady Tobia. They are something far more. As are my brother Dorian and my *ano arande* Laren. It is what destiny meant for them to be. What destiny meant for all of us whether by blood or association. You are a part of that now Lady Tobia. You and Murano as Mari's mother and father." Retta stroked Anja's cheek softly with her fingers.

Tobia's eyes grew slightly wider as she remembered what was spoken in the Command Center. "The Mountain of Stone and Light." She said softly.

Retta nodded her head. "My father and brother will find us, no matter where they take us." She said calmly. "Of that you can be absolutely certain. For what my mother has suffered, my father, my mothers and my siblings will revisit that pain upon these men and their masters a thousand fold. They will not show mercy or pity, and they will not hold back. Now... now they will begin to teach others what it means when someone of our family is harmed in such a way."

Tobia glanced at her daughter and saw her gripping Retta's hand with a similar, almost glowing expression of peace and knowledge. She looked back to Retta. "What does it mean?" She asked finally, not sure if she wanted to hear the answer. Tobia looked at Retta and her daughter for a long moment and then her eyes grew wide when, for a split second, her mind filled with the image of a clear field surrounded by trees. In that field she saw them, father and son standing beside one another, surrounded by sons and daughter, brothers and sisters. All of them were staring off into the sky at something Tobia could not see. All of them with dual wolf fangs openly exposed, all of them with wolf eyes filled with rage and hate. All of them prepared to take up the hunt. Tobia shook her head and the vision cleared and was gone. She glanced at Retta only to see that same look in Retta Leonidas' green wolf orbs and her daughter's own blue green wolf eyes.

Retta met her eyes. "*Shylon.*" Retta told her with an even, cold tone of voice that made Tobia shiver in terror. "*Quvor shylon.*"

"*Avoi.*" Mari whispered.

**JETANIA
NORTHERN OCEAN
DEPTH 2419 METERS
DARASTRIXI LONG RANGE MEDIUM CRUISER**

“Who is he Oracle?” Loras asked.

Nilantha turned from the large potted plant that she had been trimming, one among the rows along the edge of the empty Promenade of the Archive of Knowledge and Hope. The Teleporter was on the other side of the row of plants sitting idle Loras saw. Nilantha brushed her hands together several times and looked at Loras.

“Who is who child?” Nilantha asked her.

“You know who I speak of Oracle. I...” Loras began to speak.

“Loras Ranev, my name is Nilantha.” She spoke reaching out to take her arm. “I am not The Oracle to you and I would ask that you use my name.”

Loras shook her head quickly. “I could not.” She said softly.

“Why? You wield far more influence among our people than I ever will Loras.” Nilantha told her. “You have ascended to a position that no female, Alpha or otherwise, has ever held among the packs here on Jetania.”

“Among the Mountain Packs perhaps, but not all of our people are like the Mountain Packs.” Loras said.

“Perhaps. Perhaps not.” Nilantha answered. “Those who resist change are the ones most likely to be swallowed up and passed by when that change occurs.”

“You... you say our people.” Loras spoke evenly. “But you are not one of us.”

Nilantha smiled at her, her emerald eyes twinkling in the light. “I became one of you the day that I came to this world with your people Loras.” She spoke almost proudly. “And I would not change that for anything in the universe now. My people, the Darastrixi people, we were overbearing and arrogant at times because of the technology we wielded. We were also very rigid in our ways. We probably still are. Very much like the Pralor people once were. Being here among our people, among all of you, it changed me forever. I may not have Lycavorian blood in my veins Loras, but I am Lycavorian in every other manner one could possibly think.”

Loras stared at her for a long moment. “I suppose that is true.” She finally said. “How could... Nilantha how could all this exist?” Loras asked. “These images? These paintings and drawings?”

“Do you doubt what your eyes tell you?” Nilantha asked.

“I have never... I have never told anyone about my vision Nilantha. No one.” Loras spoke in almost a whisper. “I was... I was only nineteen years old.”

“And how many times did you have this vision?” Nilantha asked her.

Loras looked at her. “Three times.” She said softly. “The night... the night that pig Osrod claimed me. I was nineteen then and that was the first. The night Warim claimed me and...” Loras’ eyes grew slightly wider. “The night I gave myself to Hagoth for companionship. I was lonely and...”

Nilantha nodded her head. “And why do you think you have only had this vision three times?”

Loras shook her head. “I do not know.” She answered. “It was only those three times. Never again.”

“And how many men have shared your bed in that same time Loras Ranev?” Nilantha asked her.

“There have been only... only three!” She gasped her eyes going wide as she looked at Nilantha realizing what she was saying.

“And what do you think this means child?” Nilantha asked her with a gentle smile.

Loras looked at her. “What... what you are suggesting is...”

“What do you think I am suggesting?” Nilantha asked with that twinkle in her emerald eyes. She took Loras’ hand in hers. “Let me ask a different question.” She said. “*Lon gostina* Aspion aside, for everyone knows you did not care for him, did you love Warim Ranev Loras? Truly love him? The same love that I see from your eyes in that painting for a man you have never met?” Loras looked almost embarrassed and she did not answer for fear of giving away her true feelings. Nilantha smiled for Loras’ silence told her all she needed to know. “You cared deeply for Warim Loras, this was obvious to everyone. Deeply enough to give him strong and healthy children and be a loyal wife and mate to him. But in your heart of hearts, in your spirit and resonance, did you love him completely?”

Loras finally shook her head as she met her eyes. “No.” She answered in a whisper.

“This young man in the painting, he was the reason?” Nilantha asked.

“Each... each time I had the vision was when I was taken by another... and what I felt was beyond anything that I have ever experienced.” Loras told her wistfully. “An aura that made me shudder in uncontrollable desire, but an aura that did not affect my mind. It did not cause me to... it did not cause me to lose control of what I wanted and revert to the base instincts of our people. It... it swarmed around me, protected me, and showered me with love so... so staggeringly powerful that I have always...”

“You have always held out a part of yourself in the hopes of discovering that one day?” Nilantha said.

Loras nodded her head. “Yes.” Loras looked at her. “You know who it is don’t you?” She asked.

Nilantha met her eyes and nodded her head after a few long moments. “I do, yes, and you know exactly who he is as well Loras Ranev. You have always known Loras. Since the day you entered this world child.” She told her softly smiling at her. “I know because of what Dadrien of the Mountain has told me when he has appeared to me, and recently the spirit of Sumar himself. And no, I will not tell you his true name for you already know his name. You have already had it whispering in your mind since you were a child. A powerful and honored name, with a rich and diverse history that goes back millennia.”

Loras looked at the deck of the ship as that name popped into her head once more. The same name she had heard since she was old enough to remember. Loras lifted her head once more and looked at Nilantha. “Achilles.” Loras whispered the name.

Nilantha nodded her head and she took both of Loras’ hands in hers. “And I will tell you why you must never reveal this to anyone or let them hear you speak that name.”

Loras shook her head now. “No. I know why. I know... because if I know, I may do something to facilitate finding that... finding him before it is preordained. Before it was meant to be.”

Nilantha smiled once more. “Simply put... but essentially accurate, yes.” She said. “But there is also another reason, one far more sinister in nature that I will tell you now. You must understand Loras Ranev, the *Mard Revik*, the *Tarivuos*, his family, they care nothing for the trappings of power. They resist it at every turn of the clock. They want nothing to do with it. If it was within their power, they would throw it all away without a second thought. The entire family is like this Loras, the *Tarivuos* and the *Mard Revik* most of all. Yet this is the very same reason that so many follow them without question. Without doubt. You will see this for yourself in the coming days.”

Loras looked at her intently. “Those who do not wish power or control are most often the ones that can change the face of everything that we know Nilantha.” She said softly.

Nilantha nodded her head. “Yes they are. There are those, even among their own Union, who do not want the *Mard Revik* and his family in power. They fear them. They fear the *osan* and *ekino* that they wield so easily. They wrongly believe that it should be theirs. Just as Osrod and those who follow him believe.”

“War is coming isn’t it Nilantha?” Loras asked softly.

Nilantha shrugged her shoulders. “Again... perhaps and perhaps not. It will depend on what Osrod does I think. Those who follow the *Mard Revik* have fought injustice since their very inception. They will not tolerate it on any level. Slavery, the archaic abuse of our females in many ways, the ridiculous notion that half breeds are an abomination, all of these ideals they have fought and crushed beneath their boots as they have built their Union. If Osrod thinks to bully or cajole these men and women, he will find them to be very unresponsive and they will push back, violently if necessary. As I have told you before, any one of them is worth three or more of Osrod and his fools. Their training is brutal and sometimes deadly, yet they embrace it as part of who they are. It *is* part of who they are.”

“This Spartan culture you spoke of?” Loras asked.

Nilantha nodded her head. “Family, honor, love and their people. These are what matters most to the *Mard Revik* and those who follow him. That is where you come in Loras. You and your son and so many others that follow you.”

“Me?” Loras asked her with wide eyes. “Lazar? What do you mean?”

“The Mountain Packs are the closest to the *Mard Revik* and what those who follow him believe and how they act.” Nilantha said. “You will see this for yourself soon enough. They are unyielding in their core beliefs Loras. The true reason you must never speak of your vision to anyone besides me or Taris is because, should our enemies discover this, there are those who will do everything within their power to stop it, in their Union as well. Including but not limited to killing you.”

“But why?” Loras pressed her.

“It is simple really, what your son begins, you will seal forever.” Nilantha told her. “The day he enters this world you will feel him, this young man in your visions, and this will seal the unification of every Lycavorian in the universe as one. No matter where they may be.”

“You said he would be King.” Loras spoke softly.

“And one day he will be King. And you will be his Queen.” Nilantha spoke with a nod.

“I do not wish to be a Queen Nilantha.” Loras told her.

Nilantha chuckled softly and squeezed her hands tightly. “And you will have that in common, for he will not wish to be King.”

Loras rolled her dark eyes. “*Carians allon coi sy malda.*” She commented. (Gods this is so crazy)

Nilantha laughed softly and nodded her head. “It certainly is.” She said. “Do not fear Loras Ranev, the day that he comes for you is nearing. As I said, when he enters this world you will feel it, and he will feel you Loras. Even from across the stars. It is all he will feel, until the day he arrives here and claims you as his.” Nilantha said.

Loras Ranev felt a warm flush cascade through her body when Nilantha said that and it was wonderful to say the least. To know such love and devotion was something she had always dreamed of. She blinked several times as she realized what Nilantha had said and her eyes grew slightly wider now. “Enters this world?” Loras spoke softly. “Are you saying he has not been born yet?”

“Does this knowledge make a difference to you?” Nilantha said.

Loras shook her head without even thinking about it. “No. Why should it? Warim was a thousand years older than me.”

“Just know this Loras Ranev.” Nilantha said. “He will come for you no matter how long it takes, and nothing will stand in his way. Just as his father will be the one to insure that this happens and not even know it. This young man will take you and make you his and you will scream to the moon and heavens in happiness. He will worship you beyond anything that you can understand now. Just as his father worships his mothers. He will...”

“Nilantha how do you know all this?” Loras asked her. “How could you know all of these things?”

“The Etheric Realm is all encompassing Loras Ranev. It surrounds us everywhere.” She spoke evenly waving her hands all around her. “Every living thing is touched by it in some form or manner. However, the gene that allows those who can manipulate it, control it, this is beyond infinitesimal. That is why I was blessed by Dadrien and then Sumar in what they allowed me to see and share with them. They granted me this gift in a fashion. I am nothing when held to the *Mard Revik* and the Heralds and many of those within their family but I am able to sense flashes of immense power within the realm. The Pralor Sumar was the most powerful Etheric user in the entire universe until he passed on and his direct descendants have surpassed him in many ways because of the passion and emotion within them, that fuels them, and they will teach you and the others to experience this as well.”

“Are you saying all Lycavorians have this ability?” Loras asked stunned.

Nilantha nodded her head. “The Etheric ability yes. The Praetorian gene as they call it and the knowledge to recognize and use it, no?” She answered. “The gene is so rare that it is a wonder it still exists, and given what I know, no one among our people here on Jetania have it. We have had no interaction with anyone who carried this gene for our people left Lycavore long before Sumar ever went there. It is stronger within you, within Taris and Anoria, this Etheric resonance. A few others among our people here. That is why you and they are able to have these visions. I would guess that there are many more who have had such visions but are fearful to talk of them because of the society that Osrod’s bloodline has cultivated. One of fear and deceit and self-empowerment at the expense of others. The Lycavorians of the Union, they have long outgrown such childish tendencies. Their Union is vast Loras, trillions of lifeforms of countless species. Since the return of the *Mard Revik* to them, even before, they have worked to improve the lives of their people. All of their people. That is why they will not tolerate it.”

“They will force their ways upon us?” Loras asked defensively.

Nilantha shook her head quickly. “Oh no.” She replied squeezing her hands. “They will force nothing on any others, but they will choose not to interact with those like Osrod and any others who willingly think like him or follow him. If Osrod forces a confrontation, if he does something to provoke them, they will respond.

Many of them, they are the foremost warriors in this galaxy Loras. They have fought since their inception and they are so very good at it. They have never started a war Loras, but they have finished them. Osrod Aspion will regret the day he joined this world if he acts in this way.”

The soft beeping alarm began to sound drawing her attention away from Loras and up towards the ceiling of this level.

“Nilantha?” Loras prodded her as she began to look around and see lights beginning to blink all up and down the seemingly endless level. “Nilantha what is going on. What is that noise?”

“Taris Ranev!” Nilantha hissed out just before Taris appeared beside Loras like a ghost with almost no sound, startling Loras to a small extent.

“I am here Oracle.” Taris exclaimed.

“Take my other hand child.” Nilantha spoke and Taris complied instantly. “Hold your breaths.” She said just before they were engulfed by the Teleporter and instantly appeared in another part of the enormous ship.

Loras was looking around in utter wonder at the transition and did not sense Taris break away from her. She took in the many screens and monitors and computer stations and kept turning until she saw Rylin and Omrad sitting at two different stations and Taris moving into a third. Two other stations were also occupied and filled by a young man and woman that Loras did not recognize. It appeared to be some sort of Control Center Loras thought to herself, like the bridge of a ship. Loras watched as Nilantha moved to a massive holographic image of the stars.

“Rylin, is that what I think it is?” She asked.

“We are checking Oracle.” Rylin answered as her hands flew over the controls in front of her. They were controls and computers that looked so foreign to Loras but that Rylin, Omrad and Taris were now using without thought.

“Contact confirmed!” Omrad declared finally. “Small transport craft! Still several hours away but...”

Nilantha turned to face him. “Omrad?”

He looked up at her with wide eyes. “I’m detecting a Phased Quantum Fusion power source *Vomir*.”

Taris looked up from her position. “I confirm that Oracle. A Phased Quantum Fusion drive.”

Nilantha looked confused. “That doesn’t make any sense.” She said quickly. “Such a small craft?”

“What is happening?!” Loras spat. “Quantum Fusion Drives are not possible! Even I know that! What you speak of is impossible.”

“This is the Oracle’s ship Loras.” Rylin spoke looking at her as her hands continued to work the console in front of her. “Would you have believed that this ship existed without seeing it for yourself? There are sophisticated sensor nodes scattered throughout the planetary sector designed to detect ships or personnel with advanced technology or Etheric abilities when they enter this area of space. These sensor nodes have detected such a ship entering the sector. The *Mard Revik* and *Vada Tarivuos* have very advanced ships and star drives Loras. They have come from the Alpha Quadrant.”

Loras’ eyes nearly exploded from her head when she heard this. “The Alpha Quadrant!” She gasped in disbelief.

Omrad shook his head now. “This ship is not showing up on sensors.” He stated quickly. “It triggered the Etheric detectors Oracle. It is hidden from even our sensors.”

Rylin looked at him. “Omrad, in order to trigger the Etheric sensors, the individual or individuals would have to be above Category Seventeen.”

Omrad nodded his head. “I know. I only telling you that it was the Etheric detectors and not the normal sensors that picked up the ship.”

Rylin looked at Nilantha. “Oracle... there are only a handful of Etheric users classified as above Category Seventeen. All of them are among the *Mard Revik* and his family. That would mean...”

“Omrad can you determine what Category?” Nilantha asked him.

“Based on the strength of the signal, Category Eighteen easily.” Omrad answered. “And there is more than one of them.”

“More than one?” Nilantha gasped.

“The Etheric Sensor Grid does not discriminate Oracle.” Omrad said. “You know this. Based on the strength of the signal there are at least two Category Eighteens on this ship and another two or three Category Seventeens.”

“It is wrong.” Nilantha spoke once more shaking her head.

Loras looked at Nilantha now. “Nilantha? What is wrong?”

“Something isn’t right.” She said. “It is not enough.”

“What do you mean Oracle?” Taris spoke excitedly. “This means they are coming! We have detected one of their ships! Members of the *Mard Revik’s* family!”

Omrad shook his head. “No Taris. It is too small to be a scout ship. And we have always known they would arrive in great numbers with large ships, with the *Mard Revik* and the *Tarivuos* at the head of this fleet. This is something else and it involves members of his family.”

Nilantha turned slowly as she stared at the holographic star chart. “Something is not right.” She said again. Her head moved around looking at each of them and her emerald eyes came to rest on Loras. “And it centers on your son Loras.”

“Lazar!” Loras gasped aloud.

VENTORI

The clearing had filled with the *PREMONITION*, two *STRIKER DTs*, one *KADEN* transport, and at least a dozen highly pissed off dragons. Most of those dragons were, at the moment, attempting to keep two of them calm in the midst of their rage. Miath had been among the first to arrive on the scene, Mara only a few seconds behind him, both of them having detected the horrific emotions from their Bonded Ones. It had taken Torma, Isheeni and Elynth to keep them at bay, added support coming when Ryner and Ladur arrived on scene seconds later, and finally the whole of the Leonidas family on the planet descended upon the clearing.

SPARTAN ONE had taken to the sky only a few minutes before and quickly jumped out of the system, engaging its Shroud Shield while it was climbing into the upper atmosphere. *SPARTA’S WRATH* was the only ship capable of tracking it for the few seconds it had been in the atmosphere and then it had jumped away, leaving no trail to follow. Aricia now rested on the ground, Atropos’s upper body in her lap while she stroked the head of her older brother, For'mya only a few feet away with Calyb in a similar position. Duewa was slowly moving her hands over Atropos’ upper body, the white glow of her healing power very active.

The *KADEN* Heavy transport had been carrying the seventy-three *Durcunusaan* from the Reactionary Division on board the *KINDRED SOUL* when it diverted here at the first alarm that was sounded, and now those *Durcunusaan* troops had encircled the clearing on high alert while the medics among their group were moving among the bodies trying to save any of the twenty plus Ventori Lycavorians that had been gunned down.

Those among the first to arrive would later comment that it was an eerie calm they all felt in the small clearing. All of the Leonidas family were standing very close to one another, all of them staring at the sky above where the *STRIKER* had disappeared from view, with Androcles, Dorian, Deion and Denali touching their father in some fashion as if giving him added strength. No one spoke, for their officers had been very clear in their orders, a Queen and two Princesses of the Union had been taken, and heads were going to roll for this fuck up. Unknown to the men and women now in the clearing, they had nothing to fear in the least, for the two men who they most feared would unleash their anger at this complete and absolute lapse in security, they only blamed themselves and no other.

Daniel Simpson however, he knew exactly what to do. He stepped off the ramp of the *STRIKER* before it had even touched the ground, Anuk and Nayeca exiting the ship right after him. Danny carried the large, cylindrical tube like item in his right arm as two *Durcunusaan* officers moved up to his position as his long legs carried him towards his brother.

“General we...” The officer began to speak but Danny waved him silent.

“Captain... you lock this entire area down as tight as a virgin’s prize!” Danny hissed at the man angrily. “I want *Durcunusaan* on all four corners of a twenty kilometer box with this clearing as the center and I want it done five minutes ago! Once the corners are set, you pour as many troops into this box as you need to in order to sweep the entire grid. Turn over every *anse* stone! Look in every *nubous* cave! Under every bush! There are others in this box and I want them found! Including the ship that they came in on.”

“Rules General?” The Captain asked.

Danny stopped walking and looked at him. “Do I have to answer that question Captain?” Danny spoke. “Whoever they were they took one of our Queens and two of our Princesses! You move heaven and motherfucking earth and you make this happen!”

The man nodded his head and his chest swelled with purpose. “Consider it done, sir!” He barked before sprinting off in the other direction.

Danny felt the hand on his arm and he looked to his right to see Anuk beside him. She looked up at him with her cerulean blue wolf eyes, the tips of her fangs exposed just under her upper lip. “You find these men Daniel.” Anuk told him sternly. “You find them and you show them that what they have done was the biggest mistake they could have ever made.”

Danny drew her tight to his side, Nayeca pressing close behind her. Daniel and Nayeca knew how tightly bound Anja and Anuk were. They had been family and close friends for over two decades now and working closely together they had built the Union Medical Corp into the single largest, most advanced and most efficient organization of its kind in anyone’s history. As Daniel Simpson’s wives and mates, Anuk, Nayeca and now Keslya were just like their beloved husband, and they were considered part of the Leonidas family and they were spoken of in the same breath.

“Help Duewa Baby.” Daniel told her as he leaned over and nuzzled her elven ear. “Calyb and Atropos trust you and they will listen to you. Do what you are good at and let me and Nubian do the dirty work.”

Anuk nodded and stretched up on her booted feet to kiss him lovingly. She turned quickly and jogged over to where For'mya sat with Calyb in her arms. Danny turned to Nayeca and her amber eyes lifted to meet his. “Keslya?” He asked.

“Keslya is our wife and mate now and she is no fool Daniel my love.” Nayeca told him with a smile. “She knows what our skills are, she knows what we do, and she loves us more for it.”

Danny nodded his head. “I know.” He said softly. “I just don’t... I don’t want her to see what we do if we can avoid it.”

Nayeca smiled and kissed him now as well. “Do what you must.” She told him. “I will see about helping the *Durcunusaan* here to search the surrounding area. Reports are that they saw a body fall from the ramp before it lifted off completely. That means there has to be a body somewhere. Maybe we can learn something from it.”

Danny nodded and watched his beautiful Drow wife turn and moved for the nearest group of five *Durcunusaan* troops. She would take command of that group of men and women and they would go hunting. Nayeca Simpson was a Drow and a wolf, and while she was not a pureblood Drow as Lu'ria was, she had all of their skills and she was lethal. Daniel turned once more and looked back to the small gathering of Leonidas children standing around their father. It had grown by one he saw, as Murano had now arrived and he did not look in the least bit happy. He turned briefly as he heard another transport *STRIKER* come in low and he watched as it flared above the ground and set down gently and then Gorgo, Dasha, Dynina and Sarlana exited the craft. Once they had moved far enough away, it rose back into the air and sped off in the direction of Discovery Base. He turned back to where Martin stood and then covered the shorty distance to where Duewa was working on Atropos and Anuk was now scanning Calyb. He knelt on the ground at Atropos’ feet and he turned his head to look at him.

“They came from downwind Daniel.” Atropos spoke sitting up a little higher in Aricia’s lap. Lilika would arrive in minutes and take her place Atropos knew. “The opposite direction of where their ship was. Calyb detected them first. A hint on the wind when it shifted.”

Daniel nodded his head. “We didn’t expect this.” He spoke looking out over the clearing and the bodies. “This fucking stunt took a special kind of stupid to attempt.”

“They succeeded Daniel.” Atropos pointed out.

Danny met his eyes. “And now they are going to pay for that.” He spoke.

“How many Uncle?” Calyb asked now, for he was only a few feet from him. “There were twenty-nine in this group.”

Daniel shook his head. “Seventeen dead, five wounded if the reports are accurate *Mandri*. The rest must have already made it onto the *STRIKER* when they hit.”

“Their training is good.” Atropos spoke. “With only Calyb and I checking the perimeter at different times they got too close for us to react.”

“They shot you in the back Atropos! In the back with no warning!” Aricia gasped angrily. “They shot Calyb in the chest! If not for your armor you would be dead! They acted like *nubous* morons to do this!”

“Andro did warn us their arrogance was extensive sister.” Atropos answered her. “We should have left the normal security for Anja in place.”

Danny shook his head. “We will not second guess ourselves now! We all agreed that this was the way to do it.” Danny spoke now causing Duewa to look at him oddly. “We knew the risks. Martin and Anja most of all.”

“Our own arrogance and overconfidence is the reason for this.” For'mya hissed now. “Once the Svorag were defeated and Andro’s forces were here, we shifted our focus too quickly to helping others. This is the result.”

Duewa was no fool by any stretch of the imagination and she realized what they were all talking about. “Wait a minute!” She snapped. “You knew this would happen? You allowed Anja to be taken?!”

Danny glanced at her quickly and then back to Atropos. “Back to Discovery Base for both of you.” He ordered them. He lifted his hand as Calyb began to open his mouth to speak. “No discussions boy!” He growled. “We’ll take it from here and then make a plan! Your father and brother are on it and believe me, they are not taking this well at all.”

“Answer me Daniel!” Duewa barked again. “You knew this would happen?”

Danny met her eyes. “Duewa you are...”

“Go Daniel.” Aricia spoke now. “For'mya and I will answer her questions. *Kinosaurgai* is correct. We acted impulsively and with our own arrogance. That will not happen again.”

Danny nodded his head and rose to his feet immediately. As nearly everyone across the Union could attest to, the number of individuals who could walk right up to a gathering of the Leonidas family and act as Daniel did could be counted on one hand. Daniel Simpson was the most beloved Uncle of all the Leonidas children for he was their father’s *Mard Fervon*, and while Daniel would never admit it was so, Atropos and Andreus would say them same thing. He was family to them, and to those who bore the name Leonidas, family was all important.

When Daniel burst through the rank between Andro and Martin all heads turned to look at him as he jammed the end of the Mark Two Neural Booster into the ground and he looked at his brother.

“Do it *fervon*!” He snapped. “This is not what we expected but now we adapt! You let me handle this! You ain’t the only one that loves that fiery little, potty mouthed red head! There’s a whole lot of us who love her! Now you and Andro do your thing, find out where they are taking her and the others, and then let’s go kick us some ass! How long?”

“We will need at least an hour to focus and center on them *Tenne*.” Andro answered for his father.

“You got two.” Daniel said in reply with a nod. “Then we need to have Manda and Sa'sur fill everyone in before this gets out of hand.” He said no more and stepped back between father and son and kept walking towards where he saw a small ADHOC portable Command Table being set up. He didn’t need to say anymore he knew and now he would stop being brother to the King and become a General of Spartans.

Which was also something the Coalition of Lycavorian States should not have set in motion.

Dynina was holding tightly to Gorgo and Dasha’s hands moving between them as she was, Sarlana in stride with the taller women on their right. Dynina was watching intently and she saw Martin and Andro kneel down before the strange item Daniel had thrust into the ground in front of them. She saw them lift their hands and place it over the clear, oval shaped crystal and she came to an abrupt halt when the blue/white pulse of Etheric energy erupted out of the tube like cylinder engulfing all of her family.

“*Son vada carians!*” Dynina gasped as Dasha grasped her other arm in reassurance.

“It is a Mark Two Neural Booster.” Dasha told her. “It focuses their power and allows Etheric communication over much greater distances. It is of Pralor design, something that Sumar built long ago. Surely you have seen one.”

Dynina looked at her and nodded. “We have... we have seen the designs for such a thing in the computers on Lorenu but we never built one because we had no one who could activate it.” She answered.

“The Etheric realm is infinite as you no doubt know given your abilities.” Gorgo spoke.

Dynina nodded her head. “Yes... but my abilities are passive in nature. They always have been. I have never actively been able to manipulate the Etheric realm such as this device would allow.”

“Martin discovered the first one on Earth many years ago.” Gorgo explained. “He used it to contact those within the Union. They were very limited in number until he discovered CS41 on our homeworld of Lycavore. On the ship he found a small warehouse of them. Martin had them placed strategically throughout the Union and in other areas in case of emergency. He and Androcles always travel with one or two however...”

Dynina looked at her. “What?”

Gorgo shook her head. “It... thinking about it right now, it just seems odd that Daniel would arrive here with one so quickly. Almost as if he expected they would need it.”

“All of you can use these devices?” Dynina asked.

Gorgo shook her head quickly. “Oh no.” She replied. “The only two individuals who can even activate one individually are right there. Only Martin and Androcles can activate and use them on their own, for only they possess the necessary Etheric power. However, the more of those in the connection, the stronger it is and the longer they can hold it” She motioned with her head as she saw her grandchildren crowd around their father and older brother, all of them linking their arms in some fashion with each other. Murano joined them as well, he and Deion standing beside one another. Gorgo urged Dynina forward. “Come Dynina... you are part of this family now as well and we always stand united.”

“*Avoi.*” Dasha spoke as they moved to join the small circle of bodies.

SPARTA'S WRATH

Armen looked up when his XO stopped at the chart table beside him, his face filled with questions. –**Something XO?**

“May I speak freely Armen?” Taich asked.

Armen blinked several times as he stood to his full height, all of his attention on Taich. –**I believe I have made this very clear to you-** He answered.

Taich turned slightly and motioned the young officer over to the table now. “You know Lieutenant Commander Fancari of the *Durcunusaan* Forward Team?”

Armen nodded his head. –**Yes-**

Taich looked at the elven officer. “Show him what you showed me.” He said.

The Lieutenant Commander moved closer and plugged the data pad he was carrying into the chart table. “Sir, as you know, part of our duties as the DFT is the active monitoring of all family members and their location. It is updated every ninety seconds.”

Armen nodded once more. –**Yes-**

“When we arrived in system sir, that monitoring was expanded to include all of the family members in theater.” Fancari continued evenly. “Including the King and Queens. We do a Theoretical Threat Assessment every five minutes based on their current location and known possible threats. General Vengal was very specific in our duties and our training sir. They may not have direct *Durcunusaan* protection, as you know, all of them have refused it, but the TTA is still conducted.”

–**Trying to protect those who do not want protection-** Armen spoke. –**I am aware of this trait among all of the Leonidas family, not just Androcles and his father-**

Fancari nodded his head. “And we have learned to work around it for the most part sir.” He spoke. “The King and the Queens especially, but even Prime Minister Deia and Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha. They may not

have direct *Durcunusaan* protection other than their Captains, but outside of their ships and the Royal Villa on Apo Prime and the Spartan Estate, there is always a *Durcunusaan* Strike Team within three minutes of their location no matter where they may be.”

-I am fully aware of the *Durcunusaan*'s standing ROE Lieutenant Commander- Armen answered him. **-Is the Royal Family aware of this?-**

Fancari looked confused for a moment. “No sir. General Vengal was very insistent that they be kept out of the loop so to speak. At least directly. Keeping tabs on the King and Crown Androcles is especially difficult because of their innate ability to discover and dump whoever is assigned to protect them.”

-Have you tried to adjust to compensate for this penchant of escaping their security- Armen said.

Fancari nodded his head. “Yes sir. No matter what we have done they always discover them within minutes and disappear.”

-Interesting- Armen spoke.

Taich looked at the officer. “Just tell him what you told me son.” He spoke.

The Elven officer nodded his head nervously. “Yes sir.” He plugged the data pad in to the chart table. “The *Durcunusaan Strike Team* uses code words sir. These code words are signals to engage or not in the event of a situation. Any situation.”

-I understand- Armen spoke.

“The DST was on standby in a Shrouded *KADEN* monitoring Queen Anja’s movements and shadowing *SPARTAN ONE*.” Fancari explained. He adjusted the information in the Chart Table and looked at Armen. “We were monitoring all COM traffic within the fleet sir, and we detected a single, highly encrypted COM burst to *SPARTAN ONE* three minutes before the DST received the code word that indicated Queen Anja would be returning to base.” Fancari adjusted the screen once more. “The DST acknowledged the code word and began returning to base as well. Ninety seconds later *SPARTAN ONE* shifted course without prior clearance or warning and moved to the location of these refugees. The DST called for confirmation, but the code word had not changed so they continued back to Discovery Base.” Fancari adjusted the Chart Table once more. “The DST Commander pushed further and he discovered the COM bust came nine minutes after it was discovered that this COLS transport had been lost while descending to the surface. When he...”

Armen held up his hand stopping Fancari. **-The code word was sent from *SPARTA'S WRATH-***

Fancari looked at him with wide eyes. “Yes sir! How...?”

Armen reached across the Chart Table and touched the panel twice. Both Taich and Fancari watched as the faces of Admiral Sa'sur and Admiral Lorian appeared in the two small holo projections.

“Armen?” Sa'sur spoke from the *SCIMITAR*. “Have you been tracking *SPARTAN ONE*?”

-We are receiving the signal clearly Admiral- Armen answered her calmly. **-I believe we have another situation however-**

“What’s that?” Sa'sur asked.

-It would appear that the *Durcunusaan* are more inventive and resourceful than King Martin and Androcles thought- Armen told her. **-I have Lieutenant Commander Fancari in front of me now-**

“*Sibfla!*” Sa'sur hissed in the holographic transmission. She was silent for a moment then looked at him. “We knew it wouldn't last.” She spoke finally. “Armen, go ahead and fill the Lieutenant Commander in on our plan and inform him he can forgo any further investigation into the cause.”

“I told Androcles and Martin that Vengal was smarter and a lot more devious than what they thought. He trained the *Durcunusaan* too well.” Manda spoke from within the secure transmission. “Let them deal with the blowback. We have a job to do.”

“Agreed.” Sa'sur spoke. “Armen, we'll meet you on the surface after Martin and the others have made contact. Given what happened, it's time we start operating with them in the loop.”

-Agreed- Armen answered.

Fancari waited until the transmissions had ended before looking at Armen. “Sir?” He asked. “With all due respect sir, you should probably explain what that was all about.”

Armen nodded his head. **-Indeed-**

SPARTAN ONE
COLS SPACE
TWO HOURS FROM JETANIA

After leaving two of his men in the cockpit with Endith and Tina, Lazar moved back into the passenger compartment of the *STRIKER*. The ship was utterly amazing and even though he knew nothing of its systems, he was thoroughly going to enjoy studying the ship to learn those secrets. He was trying to stay busy and he barely looked over to where those Sibot had captured were sitting on the deck. He couldn't look, for the scent of the young, red haired half breed wolf was torture to his senses. No female's wolf scent had ever set his senses into overdrive as they were when the sweet honey and mint aroma filtered to him. In the confines of the ship it was even worse for no matter which way he turned, it seemed to follow him and swirl around him. Lazar Aspion was no fool when it came to female wolves. Many had approached him hoping to win his favor and become his wife and mate. While none had succeeded in doing that, Lazar had no trouble finding a female to share his bed. While he did not know it, he was considered the most attractive of Osrod's sons, and the most well equipped. He was also known as a very attentive lover among those he had bedded.

Yet none had affected him as this half breed female had.

There were cross species relationships on Jetania, though they were very few indeed and looked down upon in the worse possible way. Those few wolves involved in such a relationship were rarely allowed within the city limits of any city on Jetania. Most of those involved in the cross species relationships remained far from any Lycavorian city, barely forging their own existence, and unable to go anywhere else. No spaceport or ship would take them off world, and there was no place to go within COLS space where they would be accepted. All of these cross species relationships involved a Lycavorian and a member of the Krorr species. They were a red skinned bipedal species, very adept in engineering skills, and their females were prized among the male Knorr for their beauty and sensual nature. COLS had conquered their world many decades ago, and a handful of Alpha Lycavorians had taken their females as pets. All of them had eventually taken the Krorr females as their mates and even had children with them. When his great, great grandfather had seen what the children looked like he immediately banned all such interaction and chased those families away, sometimes violently. That he held back and did not kill them all outright surprised Lazar because he was not a man known for accepting the unknown. That they still existed was a testament to the survival nature of their Lycavorian mates and the resilience of the Krorr females. It was said that the Krorr females defended their husbands as viciously as any female Alpha and they did the same in return. Lazar didn't know how many of them still survived, but contact with the Krorr species was kept limited, except to keep control of their world and the resources that they provided to COLS.

This red haired, green eyed female however, she was affecting him in a way that he had never experienced before.

Lazar could tell that the Lycavorian blood in her was purer than any he had ever smelled. Even his father's blood did not match the scent that Lazar detected in the mother and daughter and the other petite female. Whatever other species they were, the Lycavorian blood within all of them was far more dominant. Lazar could tell that the mother had been turned, as had the second younger female, but the young red head had been born the way she was which made the wolf within her even more potent.

Lazar shook his head quickly as he moved out of the passenger area and into the rear of the ship where Rhaos was standing over the body of two of their men in what appeared to be a large pen area of some sort. There were two other, smaller areas like this across from them by the ramp but this is where they have moved the bodies. One of these bodies Lazar himself had killed in reaction to what he was going to do. Lazar had not been able to stop himself at that moment, every sense and nerve in his body screaming for him to protect the young half breed.

And he had. Just not in a way he would ever have predicted.

"Rhaos?" Lazar spoke as he came up beside his oldest and closest friend. "What have you discovered?"

Rhaos nodded to him. "You will want to see this for yourself." Rhaos spoke as he bent over and pulled back the blanket covering the body.

Lazar winced slightly when he saw the young COLS soldier. The hilt of the knife was buried fully into the meat of his lower jaw, his eyes open wide in a frozen expression of horrible death. There was very little blood that Lazar could see and he knelt next to the body with Rhaos beside him. He shook his head slowly. "May Sibot burn in the pits of *jorbhe* for allowing this." He hissed harshly.

"*Avoi.*" Rhaos spoke in agreement.

His emotions aside, Lazar's keen soldier's eye detected something odd and he reached up to gently push the soldier's head higher. The hilt of the blade was so deeply imbedded in his flesh that it was pulling on the surrounding skin tightly. He glanced at Rhaos quickly. "The tiny one did this?" He asked in surprised.

Rhaos nodded his head. "I questioned each of the others in turn. All of them saw it. They said she whispered something to him just before she rammed that into his jaw. None of them saw her draw it, none of them saw her wearing any weapon."

Lazar turned back to the dead soldier. "No half breed would have the strength to do this to a pureblood Rhaos." He said finally looking at him. "All of our doctors and scientists agree that the Lycavorian blood would be too diluted to gain the strength and other benefits that our species has. We saw this in the Krorr females."

Rhaos nodded his head. "That is what I said as well." He spoke softly. "At first."

Lazar returned his gaze to him. "What do you mean at first?" He asked.

"You know what I mean Lazar." Rhaos told him. "We read the same teachings of the Oracle as we grew, or has your time around your father made you forget?"

Lazar glared at him. "I have forgotten nothing Rhaos!" He growled menacingly.

Rhaos reached up quickly and placed his hand on Lazar's shoulder. "I know you haven't my friend." He spoke. "But ever since we got on this ship you have been acting odd. And it has to do with the younger half breed with the red hair doesn't it?"

Lazar was silent for a long moment as he looked at the deck. He reached up and placed his hand on Rhaos' forearm and nodded. "I can smell the wolf blood within her veins Rhaos. It is more dominant and more potent than any blood I have ever smelled before. Even from my father. It is... it is intoxicating Rhaos."

"*Estves reull tia sey terr hiper gur carry vada saan rie vada Allsknesi vorevor hel.*" Rhaos spoke softly. "*For henes gur tur cova osanas awyth camerra jar.*" (Even those who have been turned will carry the blood of the ancients within them) (And they will be more powerful than any among us)

Lazar looked at him and nodded. "That is the phrase." He spoke. "In much more general terms."

Rhaos nodded his head as well. "I could not remember it exactly." He said. "We both know the meaning however."

"Are you saying these half breeds carry the blood of the *Allsknesi* in their veins?" Lazar asked him. "The blood of those from a homeworld that most of our people now believe is only a myth?"

"I'm saying that no half breed should be able to do this." Rhaos spoke motioning to the body. He reached down and unceremoniously wrenched the knife from the soldier's jaw. There was a sick sound of the wicked looking five-inch blade being withdrawn from flesh and then Rhaos held it up. "Yet that tiny thing back there had the strength to overpower a pureblood and his attempts to stop her and drive this into his jaw. And he

did try to stop her according to what the others say. He failed.” Rhaos looked at him. “Sibot was beating her savagely when we got here Lazar. No half breed could stand a beating from Sibot of all people, *nubous igord* that he was. They would have died within the first few blows. She did not. And you saw after, what the young one did?”

Lazar nodded his head. “The light from her hands and then her wounds were healed.” He said. “I have never seen something like that before.”

“Your father sent Sibot out here with a different mission Lazar.” Rhaos spoke. “A very different mission than what he told you. Which leads me to believe he knows more than he is telling us. More than he is telling anyone. And now three of our crew are dead and probably Laon and the rest of our crew as well.”

Lazar looked at him. “We don’t know that.” He said quickly.

“Look around you at this ship Lazar. It is obviously set up for long range travel. Small quarters on either side of the cockpit, the main area with eating facilities and couches. These pens back here, perhaps for cargo or those beasts. What appears to be some sort of medical bed across the cabin there. This ship has technology and equipment that we could not begin to even understand yet they operate it at will without thinking. She may be tiny and a half breed, but she is obviously someone of great importance.” Rhaos said. “At least the four of them are. The three half breeds and I don’t know the species of the fourth, but they are all important. The Betas do not matter in the larger scheme of things. I did not know any even survived on that planet. No one did.”

Lazar shook his head. “The pilot said she was a Queen.” Lazar told him.

Rhaos shook his head. “What kind of Alpha would make a half breed his wife and mate?” He asked.

“You can sense her aura just as I can Rhaos.” Lazar spoke.

Rhaos nodded his head. “Yes, I will admit that.”

“My grandfather... he must have left the Betas and Omegas here to die.” Lazar said softly. “There have been rumors that this is what he did, but no one ever confirmed it or spoke of it.”

“You saw how the pilots of this craft reacted when the small one spoke to them. They did not blink or question her orders. Small she may be, but I will admit that this half breed is an Alpha female with an aura that equals or exceeds many of the Alpha females on our world and she wields power and influence Lazar. If someone took your mother, if they beat her senseless, what would you do?” Lazar met his eyes and Rhaos saw the look in those dark eyes. “Yes, I thought so. Exactly what any of us would do.”

“What are you suggesting Rhaos?” Lazar asked.

“If we turn them over to your father as Sibot intended, they will disappear Lazar.” Rhaos spoke. “You know that as well as I do. If they are important as I believe they are, as I think you believe they are...” Lazar turned and looked at him intently but did not deny Rhaos’ words. “We risk retaliation from these Lycavorians and their advanced weapons and ships if we allow your father to have them. Nasso can boast all he likes, but we saw the ships in orbit of that planet Lazar. We saw the troops and the *sinuova* beasts. Do you wish that unleashed upon our people? The ships alone could lay waste to the whole of Jetania’s Home Fleet with little effort.”

“And again... I asked what are you suggesting?” Lazar asked again. “We cannot just offer an apology for our actions Rhaos. That idiot Sibot killed the woman’s son! He killed *her fervon! Her Tenne!*”

Rhaos held up the knife. “Then I suggest you get control of what this young half breed makes you feel within your blood and try to find a way out of this for us.” He spoke. “Your mother and Garget will not be happy in the least that we may have brought the doom of our people down upon them and this young half breed is going into Phase, and it is stronger than many of our females’ experience. I can smell it on her. She is suppressing it very well, better than any female I have ever seen, but it will begin to affect our men if we do nothing.”

Lazar took the knife slowly and nodded his head. “On that we agree.” He said. Lazar glanced back towards the main portion of the cabin. “How is it not affecting you Rhaos?”

Rhaos shook his head quickly. “I can smell it my friend and it is affecting me, but for some reason it is affecting you more than us and I don’t know why that is. Somehow she seems to be unconsciously directing it completely at you.”

Lazar took a deep breath. “Let’s get some answer Rhaos.” He spoke as he rose and moved in that direction.

With Tobia and Mari helping, they had gotten Anja onto one of the couches in the main area of the *STRIKER* and now they sat quietly, Retta stroking her mother's cheek, Anja's head resting on her leg. They had remained silent, watching as the soldiers moved about the interior of the *STRIKER*'s main cabin area, investigating the advanced technology that surrounded them, but none of them with the courage to touch or push any buttons or switches. Two of their number were in the cockpit of the ship, leaving five in the rear of the *STRIKER*, not including the two Alphas that were further back in the dragon pen that Torma and Isheeni normally occupied. All five of those young Alphas had looked towards Retta and Mari on more than one occasion and it was beginning to make Tobia nervous. Tobia could finally stand it no more and she reached for Mari and Retta in the Etheric connection being very careful to shield their conversation.

[Why do they keep looking over here?] Tobia asked. *[It is making me nervous.]*

[It is me.] Retta answered quickly. *[I am coming into my first Phase and they can smell it on me.]*

Tobia looked at Retta. *[Your first Phase?]* Tobia asked her calmly. *[What does this mean Retta?]*

[Mother!] Mari exclaimed. *[Please!]*

Retta hid her smile. *[It is alright Mari.]* She spoke evenly. *[I am not ashamed of what I am. Every female wolf goes through it Lady Tobia. A time of instinctual fertility I guess you could say. When the female hormones to mate are almost too powerful to resist. During this time, females put off increased pheromones in their scent to entice males. This is my first Phase and the first is always the strongest. Lycavorians in the Union have evolved and learn to harness their passions during these times. It is apparent that these wolves have not.]*

[They are acting on instinct when they smell Retta and I mother.] Marti told her. *[Deion told me since I am newly turned, it is almost like a First Phase for someone born as a wolf like Retta. But they also smell Deion on me, in my blood, and it confuses them.]*

[Why?] Tobia asked.

[Because from what I can smell, none of these fools have an aura even remotely close to what my father and brothers project. Or many of the Alphas in the Union for that matter.] Retta answered. *[I swear on the gods, if one of them pulses me I will rip his eye balls from his skull and hand them to him!]*

[You will do no such thing young lady!] Anja's voice joined the conversation and all of them turned to see Anja open her jade green eyes and slowly sit up on the couch.

[Mother!] Retta exclaimed reaching for her as Anja groaned softly.

[I'll live.] Anja told her as she grimaced slightly. *[A little sore for sure, but I am ok.]*

[Medwaw, he was hitting you so hard.] Retta protested. *[He...]*

Anja took Retta's hand in her own and squeezed. *[I'm ok, baby girl.]* Anja spoke looking at her daughter with a half smile. She was very tender in many spots and she knew that if she still felt this way, then the bruising would be extreme. *[Your father has always said I have a hard head. I guess this just proves that.]*

Retta's eyes narrowed at this comment from her mother. *[That is not what father meant and you know it.]* She spoke.

Anja grinned gently. *[I know. The bruises Retta? Did you remove them all?]*

Retta nodded her head knowing what her mother was asking and why. *[I used a slow acting pulse. They will be gone completely in another few hours.]*

Anja nodded slowly. *[Good. If your father saw them...?]* Anja shuddered ever so gently. *[I don't want to think of what he would do.]*

[He already knows what was done to you mother.] Retta said. *[I could sense his rage even in the brief time he touched us.]*

Anja nodded once more. *[I know... but your mothers and I can control and urge him enough to not lay waste to everyone.]* She answered as she let her eyes drift around the interior of the ship. *[They have made no attempt to communicate with you?]* She asked.

[No.] Retta answered.

[This is not exactly how we expected this to go Anja.] Tobia spoke now. *[Them shooting all of those people. Calyb and Aricia's brother.]*

[I know.] Anja said sadly looking around the interior slowly. *[Where are the others?]*

[Two are in the cockpit with Endith and Tina Lady Anja.] Mari answered instantly. [Ever since we lifted off. The last two are in the rear at the dragon pens.]

[Where is that big tukannupae that used me as a punching bag?] Anja asked lifting her hand and rubbing her neck.

[He was not the one in charge.] Tobia added quickly.

[What?] Anja looked at her.

Tobia shook her head. [The male who is apparently in charge threw him out the back of the ship in rage as we were leaving. The ramp was still open and he just tossed him out the back in anger.]

[Anger?] Anja pressed.

[He was not happy about what the man had done mother.] Retta continued. [He... he also...]

[What?] Anja asked looking at Retta.

[When I broke free and injured the one holding me, and then I went to you, he shot the Alpha who attempted to shoot me in the back.] Retta answered. [They moved his body into the back with the one you killed.]

[I do not believe he expected his men to act in such a way.] Tobia commented. [I don't know how high up we were when he tossed him from the ship.]

Anja shook her head. [It won't matter.] Anja replied softly. [As soon as Martin, Andro or one of our family or the Durcunusaan smell my blood on him, he is a dead man. Tobia I am so sorry for getting you and Mari involved in this. We did not expect...]

Tobia shook her head quickly. [Murano, Mari and I agreed to this Anja.] She replied. [I may not be used to how things are done among your people, but there was no reason to believe it would be something like this. This is not your fault. This seemed like a feasible way to gather the Intelligence that we needed.]

[The one who is the leader was very angry Anja.] Mari spoke. [The big man who was hitting you, the leader was beating him just as badly and he was not holding back. That fool was saying something about his father and what he wanted and the leader was screaming back at him.]

Anja looked at her. [Really.]

[Mari is right mother.] Retta spoke. [I do not think he was aware of what this man was doing. They were not together. He showed up after that pig took you by surprise and began beating you. His actions were...]

Anja turned her head to her daughter. [Baby girl?] She spoke affectionately.

Retta met her eyes and Anja could see the struggle going on within her because of the wolf blood in her veins. Every Leonidas daughter had experienced it so far. Their father's blood was so pure that it actually enhanced the sensations from the normal Coming of Age Fever for Lycavorian and turned females to the point of barely being able to control it. For some reason it was more pronounced in Eliani and Retta than Normya or Carina or Zarah, and Anja suspected it had something to do with the Hadarian blood in their veins. Retta's Coming of Age Fever was also arriving sooner than they had expected because the Alphas in this ship were radiating their auras without regard and Retta was feeling it against her Etheric shields.

[Retta?] Anja asked her again.

Retta took a deep breath and nodded her head. [I am holding it back mother.] She spoke. [I will be fine. The one...] She looked at her mother. *[The Alpha who is the leader... his aura is so strong medwaw. So pure.] Retta shook her head to clear her thoughts. [His actions were enraged. He had no idea his men were going to attack us as they did.]*

Anja sensed there was more to it than just that and she stared at her daughter for a long moment. That was how long it took for her to see through her daughter's brave façade and take note of how much this Alpha was affecting her. Anja knew from experience there were very few Alpha males alive who had enough purity of blood to affect a Leonidas daughter even during their Phase, and those like Anja herself, For'mya, Dysea, Sadi, Ne'Veha or any female mated to a Leonidas were practically immune to all but the most powerful of auras once they had been claimed by a Leonidas. This Alpha obviously was having an effect on her daughter and it was telling, which meant this young Alpha was very powerful and his blood was very pure. Anja could sense that these Lycavorians did not maintain control of their male auras to the extent of males within the Union. This could only mean that they were so used to using them they didn't really take notice, or it was common for them to use their auras as Chetak and his ilk did when it came to the females. Or a combination of both. Whatever the reason, it did not sit well with Anja that Retta was experiencing this.

Retta squeezed her mother's hands tightly as if sensing what was going through her mind. *[I will manage mother.]* She spoke confidently. *[Eli, Nara, Sadi and Eirene gave me pointers to help contain it. I can do this.]*

Anja nodded her head. *[I have no doubts. Draw from me if you need too.]*

Retta nodded her head. *[When do you think father will try to...]* Retta saw her mother's jade green eyes grow slightly wider and then fill with unabashed love and desire. Seconds later she felt it as well as her father's staggering aura rushed through the Etheric Realm and engulfed them both. The connection was overwhelmingly powerful and Retta realized all of her siblings and Murano were also included causing a bubble of Etheric power that was unmatched in the history of the Lycavorian or Pralor people.

[Lover!] Anja gasped out wistfully.

[Murano!] Tobia gasped as well now as she felt Murano's Etheric resonance reach for her. Tobia felt Deion reaching for her daughter and his wife and mate and for a long moment it felt as if everything was just as it was supposed to be. Retta smiled to herself as she felt first her brother Androcles reach for her and then the rest of her siblings to include her twin Calyb who had joined the Etheric communication from Discovery Base.

[Calyb!] Retta almost cried out in joy.

[I am ok arande.] Calyb spoke to his twin. Retta knew she could never hide anything from her twin and it was no surprise when Calyb instantly detected her increased physical and emotional state. *[Retta?]* He questioned.

[I am fine fervon. You are the one who they shot!] Retta reassured him.

[Use what we showed you sister.] Eliani now commented for she could feel Retta's anxiousness and the why of it.

[I already am.] Retta replied to her older sister.

[Jonia hara?] Retta heard Andro's deep soothing voice in her mind and even as the Etheric resonances of her siblings surrounded her, she felt Andro reach even further and caress her senses in a way only an older brother could, putting her completely and utterly at ease. *[You remember who you are and where you come from sister.]* Andro told her. *[And the blood that flows in your veins.]*

Retta felt her chest swell with love and purpose and she nodded. *[I will.]*

[Red, what is your status?] Martin asked her.

[They have us in the main portion of the cabin with the female Betas from Ventori.] Anja answered immediately. *[I only just woke up Lover, but Tobia, Mari and Retta say they do not appear very well organized, like they are just winging it. Two men with Endy and Tina in the cockpit.]*

[Anja... are you ok?] Martin spoke now directly to her and everyone knew it.

Retta saw her mother smile and nod her head as his resonance once more swept through her. *[I'm a little sore Lover, but I am good to go. It was my fault Martin. When I saw Calyb get hit I just lost it.]*

[Well... we did not think they would do something so utterly stupid mother, so the blame is not yours. It is ours.] Andro spoke now. *[Father and I should have seen it coming.]*

[And I will tell you what we always tell your father when he wants to take the blame for everything Keto.] Anja replied instantly. *[Neither of you is infallible Androcles and we all make mistakes. This is not something that you or your father can claim ownership of, this was something that we all missed.]*

[Your mother is correct Androcles.] Tobia spoke now. *[We all agreed to this plan and we all knew the risks. The loss of life was unnecessary and brutal and they knew it, and this gives us some insight as to at least a portion of their people. It will need to be addressed at another time for it cannot go unanswered. Right now however, right now we are accomplishing what we wanted to do in the first place.]*

Tobia heard Andro chuckle in the connection. *[Lady Tobia, you have spent too much time around my mothers. You sound just like them.]* He told her.

Tobia beamed at this response. *[Thank you Androcles.]*

[Anja... can we assume that your additional security is uncompromised?] Martin asked.

Anja nodded her head. *[Yes.]* She answered now. *[They would have brought them out by now if they had found them.]*

[Any idea on where you are going?] Martin asked.

[The tracker Endy installed doesn't work?] Anja asked in return.

[It's working fine, I just wondered if you had an idea of where they might be taking you. They left their ship in orbit with over a hundred personnel onboard. That doesn't include the ones still on the surface.] Martin spoke. *[It seems like there are two agendas moving here, and they are going in opposite directions if what you told me is true.]*

[Alvva... I could smell no hostility towards us from this man who is the leader or the other one with him. They both entered the ship after events had already taken place and were very angered.] Retta spoke.

[I agree with Retta, Martin.] Mari spoke for the first time now. *[They were not prepared for what they discovered and were enraged beyond normal. He stopped the man from striking Anja further and was screaming at him about killing their own people. Then he tossed him out of the back of the ship as we were taking off. He also killed one that was going to assault Retta when she injured him.]*

This information caused Martin to become silent for a long moment. Almost too long to suit Anja and she fidgeted on the couch. *[What are you thinking Lover?]* She asked him finally. Retta watched her mother's eyes looked beyond her and she turned her head as the two Alphas they had seen move in to the Pen area of the *STRIKER* came from the back and began moving directly for them. *[Martin... we need to go.]* Anja spoke quickly.

[Red wait!!] Martin began to speak but he could not stop the Etheric transmission from collapsing in upon itself as Anja Leonidas severed the connection, Retta, Tobia and Mari quickly following suit as the two Alphas stopped in front of the knee high table across from them.

Lazar stood there and looked at them for a long moment and he suddenly realized that the young woman with the reddish brown hair was the daughter of the woman with the black hair who sat beside her. He had not detected the similarities in their scents until just now. There was no mistaking the connection between the two red haired women on his left, that was just not possible. The scent was there and the physical traits were so close that there could be no other realization.

Lazar settled his eyes on the older female. Her scent told him that she was at least two hundred years older than him, perhaps slightly older. Her honey scent was saturated with the mint scent of the Alpha who had obviously turned her and that mint scent was more powerful than even his father who was the largest and strongest of the Alphas on Jetania. He had never smelled the scent of an Alpha so embedded in the blood of a female as it radiated from this one. The armor she wore conformed to her petite body like a second skin and Lazar took notice of the large breasts, tightly muscled legs and near perfect waist and ass. Her face was flawless; though faint bruising could still be seen from the beating Sibot had given to her. His blows should have fractured the bones in her face and jaw but only succeeded in cutting her skin and lips. Lazar realized this may have had a part in why he was hitting her so hard. It did not appear to him that he was hurting her and stupid fool that he was, Sibot never stopped to consider why her scent was so much more powerful than any other Alpha female they had ever encountered. Her full lips, stunning jade green eyes and Persian red hair were something that he had never seen on a female before and combined with her obviously deeply tanned skin, this made her one of the most incredibly beautiful woman he had ever seen next to his own mother. This Alpha female actually rivaled most of the Mountain Pack females in that regard, including his mother.

Lazar kept his composure as his eyes turned to the younger female and he tried to breathe evenly as close as he was to her. He was barely able to fight down the fire that burned in his blood being so close to her and the urge to take this exquisite young female Alpha and claim her as his mate was very nearly overwhelming. Her hair was nearly the same color as her mother, but her eyes were a darker green. As with her mother, the armor she wore conformed to her lithe body with every contour, and there were many of those. Her breasts were not as large as her mother's by any means, but they appeared high and quite firm under the armor. She had high cheekbones and sensuous lips that quivered slightly at the corners as she gazed at him with those angry dark green eyes. Her lush hair was long, like her mother, and tied into a single pony tail that cascaded over one shoulder. Staring at those eyes almost made Lazar lose himself in their magnetism, as the flecks of yellow gold flickered among the dark green background.

Lazar pulled his eyes away quickly when he felt Rhaos move up beside him and he centered them back on Anja. He held up the bloody R4 Hybrid Fighting knife that Anja had carried for decades and he slowly lowered it to the knee high table in front of them. He also took note that not one of the four women even flinched when he lifted the knife to show them and then set it on the table. These women were not afraid of him or Rhaos, that much was very obvious.

Lazar held his finger on the knife for a moment before standing back up. “You killed one of my men with this knife.” He told Anja meeting her eyes. “I want to know how you did this, how your daughter healed you so quickly, who you people are and where you come from.”

“That is an awful lot of demands from a man who kidnapped me and my friends, killed our people, stole my ship and is now holding us hostage.” Anja responded to him. “You must think pretty highly of yourself for killing helpless men and women.”

Lazar seethed as he looked at her. “I did not give those orders!” He snarled angrily. “He disobeyed my orders and went off on his own!”

Anja shook her head quickly. “If he was your crewman, then you own his actions!” Anja popped right back at him, the pilot’s words from the cockpit ringing in Lazar’s head. She had said almost the exact same thing. “You can’t just dismiss them as if they didn’t happen! He shot my son and his uncle as if they were nothing more than animals! He shot those people, our people as if they were just animals!”

“He was not following our orders woman!” Rhaos jumped in now stepping forward slightly and pointing his finger at Anja. “And you would do well to watch your tone with us. You will answer our questions!”

Anja looked at him as she came to her feet. “You and your partner here don’t frighten us Mister Big Bad Alpha Lycavorian!” Anja quipped at Rhaos. “*For pen arne sey un neval forn sibfla forn ronnus!* All of you are just walking around dead men for what you have done! You just don’t know it yet!” (And I don’t have to tell you shit you bastard)

Lazar’s eyes opened wide at her obvious fluency in their language. The dialect was one he had heard before, but the meaning of the words was the same no matter the dialect used by the different packs. This female’s dialect was one he had heard used only three times in his entire lifetime of three hundred plus years, all by Mountain Pack Elders who had made the trip from Ventori all those millennia ago and to this day hated his grandfather for removing them. It was said to have come from the homeworld of the Lycavorian people. A homeworld that most now thought was nothing more than a myth as he had told Rhaos. How could this tiny female know that dialect?

Rhaos lifted his finger again to point it at her and Anja brazenly slapped his hand away watching as Rhaos’s eyes grew wide in stunned shock. “You point that finger at me one more time boy and I will give you your hand back minus one digit.” Anja snarled viciously, this time her jade green eyes changing to that of the wolf within her and her dual wolf fangs exploding from her gums to become fully exposed. “And you can stop pulsing me with that pitiful little aura you got. The wolf who claimed me and made me his wife and mate smells way better than you ever will, and he has got far more than you ever will hanging between his legs. Your aura doesn’t even come close little boy.”

Lazar glanced quickly at where Retta stood and he saw those same savage looking dual fangs exposed on her and the other younger female, as well as those large dark green eyes now heavily filled with yellow gold flecks of color.

“*Upaee!*” Rhaos gasped as he stepped forward quickly, his anger rising to the forefront. Rhaos was an emotional wolf yes, but he was not one that would strike a female for any reason. His Mountain Pack mother and father would see his hide tanned for taking part in something like that. Rhaos had only thought to make the much smaller female Alpha back down in fear and instead did the complete opposite.

Lazar reached out and put his hand on Rhaos keeping him from continuing. “Enough Rhaos!” He spoke. “You will no more strike this female than I would. Our mothers taught us differently.” Lazar turned his eyes on Anja. “He was under my command, you are correct. And I am responsible for his actions, whether I ordered them or not.” He spoke trying a different tact with this female. One that he used when speaking with his mother who was Matriarch of the Mountain Packs and held in the highest regard by all wolves of the Mountain Packs. Even the males. He did not know who this female half breed was, but she was obviously someone of great importance given her mannerisms and the treatment of her by the others, and her female wolf aura surpassed any Alpha females he associated with by a very wide margin. Only his mother and Rylin came close to this female and they were purebloods.

“That man, Sibot, he was an agent for my father.” Lazar spoke. “King Osrod Aspion.” Lazar thought perhaps the mention of his father and title would somehow impress these females but he couldn’t have been more wrong as attested to by Anja’s next comment.

“*Eana terit medwan coi a revik nubous amlian.*” Anja snarled instantly. (Then your father is a king fucking idiot)

“He is King of the Coalition of Lycavorian States!” Rhaos snapped still smarting from the challenge to his manhood that this female had laid down on him.

Anja looked at him and rolled her wolf eyes. “You can call him whatever you want but he is still a fucking idiot.” Anja barked. “To try and kidnap people from a force that is obviously far more technologically advanced than yourself and then kill men and women under their protection? I don’t know what Academy of Military Tactics you went to, but where we come from that is called just plain *nubous piegn.*”

Lazar looked at Anja now. “What... what will happen to my ship and crew?” He asked. “What will your people do to them?”

Anja Leonidas met his eyes. She had always considered herself a good judge of character and something in his scent and his Etheric resonance told her that this young man was very honorable and had a good heart. He was trying to reach out to her, communicate with her and try to make her see he did not have anything to do with what Sibot did. Anja had already made that determination; however, she was not going to be tricked or manipulated in a direction she did not want to go. Anja also detected something from this tall, young wolf that made her worry as well. He was very tall, easily matching Androcles in height and he was powerfully built, but his Etheric resonance was active and not used. Anja doubted he even knew what he could do if he applied himself. The problem she saw was that his male aura, nearly on a par with Jomann from what she could sense, was calling out for Retta in a way he had never experienced before and it was confusing him. He was holding his aura back by force of will, but he obviously did not understand why her daughter affected him so.

“If they... if they do not resist they will be taken in to custody and held until such time as contact is made with your government for their release.” Anja finally answered him.

“And if they resist?” Lazar pressed her.

“Then they will die.” Anja stated flatly. “Especially after what you have done. Now if you turn this ship around and take us back I’m sure we could figure something out.”

Lazar shook his head even as Rhaos laughed contemptuously. “Go back?” He gasped.

“We cannot go back.” Lazar spoke. “Not now.”

Anja shrugged her shoulders. “Then whatever happens will happen. They live and die on their own now.”

“That does not seem to bother you very much.” Rhaos spoke almost defensively.

Anja turned to look at him, her jade green wolf eyes flashing in anger. “You *midaeus* come to Ventori, one of your men shoots my son and one of my dearest friends in the back, your other toy soldiers here kill over a dozen men, women and children and then you kidnap the rest of us! You really expect me to give a fuck about your people?”

Rhaos inhaled sharply, his anger growing even more and Lazar touched his arm in order to calm him. “You try my patience woman!” Rhaos barked.

Anja grinned at him, baring her dual wolf fangs once more. “What are you going to do boy?” She snapped. “You going to grab me and try to hurt me like you grabbed Mari and yanked on her hair until it caused her pain? You caused her pain fool, and when my son Deion finds you, he will make certain you pay for doing that!”

“I did not want to do that!” Rhaos hissed. “We needed your pilots to do what we told them! They forced me to act in such a manner!”

Anja shook her head. “That might be ok in your world pal, but it’s not ok in our world.” She told him harshly. “You inflicted pain on the wife and mate of a Spartan. That does not go unanswered. Ever.”

“I do not fear your son!” Rhaos spat. “No half breed could defeat me!”

Anja laughed. “Deion Leonidas is no half breed fool.” She told him causing Lazar’s eyes to cut sharply to where she stood and go wide. “He is a pureblood Alpha and he will wipe the floor with your ass but you are just too stupid to know it!”

“You try my patience woman!” Rhaos barked.

“And you don’t scare me worth a damn!” Anja retorted.

Rhaos, for all of his upbringing and calm, he could no longer tolerate it and with a growl of anger he lifted his hand to strike Anja. Lazar’s eyes went wide and he reached for his friend’s arm, but was far too slow.

Events may have shattered their initial plan but Anja Leonidas was determined to get the upper hand back. Anja moved far more quickly than Rhaos would have thought she could and she batted his arm aside with her right hand like swatting a fly. Stiffened fingers of her left hand drove forward like the thrust of a knife and struck Rhaos squarely in the throat with enough force to bring him up short and cause his eyes to bug out of his head. While he was staggering back, Anja's right hand snatched the R4 Fighting Knife from the table and then she snapped it forward in her fist. Rhaos' eyes grew even larger and he screamed in pain as Anja buried that knife in his shoulder. Rhaos began to fall and Anja leaped onto him to press her attack, riding his body to the deck.

“*Niob!*” Anja screamed out the word.

Lazar was too stunned to react quickly when the petite female attacked. He had never seen a female move with such precise military movements and training. He heard Rhaos scream in pain and this is what shocked him out of his surprise. As his own senses began to act, Lazar Aspion became the first to feel the wrath of Retta Leonidas.

This Alpha wolf was so very gorgeous, and he smelled more delicious than Retta had ever found in a wolf. His scent made her blood burn nearly out of control and only the teachings of her sisters and Andro allowed her to suppress her raging hormones and act. The take down was perfect, the movements almost perfectly in sync as Retta swept her leg forward and then back, hooking her ankle around the back of the much taller Lazar's leg even as her mother Anja was dropping onto Rhaos's chest. Retta brought her right hand across her body and hit Lazar square on the edge of his jaw with the heel of her palm in a perfectly timed Heel Strike. Lazar was unprepared for the force or the strength that the blow carried and it snapped his head around painfully even as he began to fall with Retta's body weight dropping on top of him. The air rushed from his lungs as he hit the deck with all one hundred and nine pounds of Retta's firm, lush body dropped on his chest. Retta nearly lost it right there, her beautiful green wolf eyes going wide when she felt the broad, hardness of his chest against her firm, medium sized breasts and then the bulge of his huge manhood pressed against her lower abdomen. With a supreme effort she reigned in her female hormones even though his scent was driving her mad and she lifted her hand, activating her healing power and she grabbed the space between his neck and shoulder.

“*Pen bro! sorgur.*” Retta spoke to him as Lazar's eyes grew wide in agony and he felt enormous pain lance through his upper body. Lazar's whole body went rigid as the dreadful pain moved outward from where she was touching him. It was so intense that he could not even lift his other hand to push her away. The muscles in his thick neck were bulging outward in misery, straining under the effects of his muscles wanting to rip through his skin. Retta released her grip on him as thin red and blue lines began to stretch outward from where her fingers had first touched him, the blood in his veins feeling like it was boiling inside his body. It was a pain unlike any Lazar had ever experienced and he was no stranger to pain. With the delightful scent of the half breed filling his senses while she perched on his chest and lower abdomen, Lazar Aspion groaned loudly in pain.

Retta Leonidas had turned her healing power into a weapon just as her mother had mastered and then shown her two daughters. Anja had passed this knowledge to Calyb and Duewa as well for right now they were the only ones with the necessary power and skill to reverse the healing properties of the radiation in their bodies and turn it in to a weapon. Retta had essentially turned Lazar's molecules inside out all around the area where she had touched him. While not permanent in any way at this stage, any of them could simply adjust what the radiation would do and they could kill easily. Right now all Retta wanted to do was incapacitate Lazar and she had succeeded brilliantly, though her heart was not really into it. Retta wanted this man, she wanted to feel his aura wrapped around her, wanted to feel him buried inside her lithe body and making her scream out his name. The pain she was causing him made her heart ache, but one thing echoed in her mind.

Blood before all else.

Anja Leonidas, petite and sinfully gorgeous as her beloved Martin had called her through the years, was anything but right now. Anja had taken Rhaos down with the same ease as Retta had taken Lazar down, and she had dropped all of her one hundred and three pounds on his chest. The air had rushed from his chest, unprepared for such an action and now that blade was buried in his shoulder and Anja held a fist full of his dark blond hair in her left hand. She was splayed across his body in what could be described by some as a sexual nature but the only wolf body or aura that affected Anja in any way now was Martin's. Her jade green eyes were fully

changed and her dual wolf fangs were extended fully and it was the most frightening thing Rhaos had ever seen in his life and this is what froze him from trying to throw her off him.

That and the blade she had savagely yanked from his shoulder and was now pressed to his throat.

There were six others in the rear with Rhaos and Lazar and none of them were prepared for the attack that came when Anja shouted that one word. Lazar and Rhaos could only watch in the midst of their pain as the air and light in the ship shifted and shimmered in front of them and five figures appeared like *vaes* from the thin air. Zarah Leonidas, Lucia and Radem struck with brutal efficiency. Zarah and Lucia had been training every spare moment with Radem over the last weeks, absorbing all of the vast knowledge and skill that he was willing to bestow on them. Radem did so enthusiastically and to the very best of his ability for he had found a new niche in this life. Androcles had given him the opportunity to regain his honor and the honor of the Evolli people and Radem had taken it and never looked back. Three times he had been able to communicate with those of his family still alive on the Evolli homeworld and they spoke in hopeful terms for their future. Lycavorians, Elves, even Algolians were now openly working on the planet and helping the Evolli to restore their cities and their culture to what it had once been. This was something Radem could never repay Androcles for and so he had chosen to remain with Soul Slayers' father and train his daughter and one who he loved as a daughter. This was something Radem took great pride in. He afforded them no respite because of who Zarah and Lucia were, his vow to Martin Leonidas always foremost in his mind, but they were advancing far faster than Radem had ever expected and he was impressed with them.

The one thing that had been made clear before ever leaving Ventori, there was to be no killing.

That however, did not mean that Zarah Leonidas could not take out her anger on the fool in front of her for what had happened to her mother. Zarah jammed stiffened fingers into the Lycavorians' throat, just as Anja had done, causing him to gag horribly and drop his weapon as he reached for his throat with both hands unable to breath. Zarah Leonidas didn't pause and simply put all of her considerable combined wolf and vampire strength into the next blow which took him directly over his cheekbone. His cheekbone shattered, his legs buckled, his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he dropped to the deck like a limp noodle.

Lucia had released Radem's arm as the shadows she and Zarah had been holding fell away and she wrapped her arm around the neck of another Lycavorian and basically dropped to the deck right where she was. With her right arm supporting the rear of his neck so that it did not break, Lucia tightened her left arm around his throat and dropped straight down. This gave her the added pressure to effectively cut off the man's air flow and since he had no leverage to try and throw her off, he dropped into unconsciousness within twenty seconds. Radem waited until the shadows had fallen away from him completely and he brought the short pair of thick Evolli fighting sticks down into the Lycavorians' face with vicious power and superior agility. The blows landed before the man knew what was happening and cut both sides of his cheeks open to the bone. As he shifted his body to meet the attack, Radem brought both the sticks across the man's face with brutal power and he watched as his body went limp and he dropped to the deck beside his companions.

The second group of three were just a little further behind the first group and they were unlimbering their weapons when Tir'ut dropped the shadows away from him and Kalis and they both attacked without compassion.

Tir'ut used his superior size and massive strength and simply snatched two of the Lycavorians in his large hands by their throats and lifted them off the deck with his enormous Immortal strength. He blurred forward and then slammed them into the bulkhead with barely harnessed power. They had killed innocents and then stood around and did nothing as another of their kind nearly beat one who his precious Normya called mother to death. Tir'ut was not in the mood to play games with these fools and he would have happily done anything to get out of the cramped space behind the small pilot's quarters where he and Kalis had been hiding with Normya sandwiched between them.

For Kalis personally, it had been a request from Androcles that he had answered without even thinking. He had said yes before Andro had even finished asking him to do this honestly, as had Serale and now she and Normya were in the cockpit helping Tina and Endith to secure the two idiots with them. He was truly a Leonidas now Kalis knew, for they showed this to him and Serale nearly every day. Several couples on *SPARTA'S WRATH* had begun meeting him and Serale for breakfast in the Mess Lounge and they were beginning to build relationships across the massive ship. It was a sense of peace and purpose that Kalis felt now that he was among his true family and blood. For'mya and Anja most of all had been the ones to help him and

Serale first and to know what they had done to his *Tenna* did not sit well with his wolf blood in the least. Kalis didn't hesitate or pause in his actions, much like Tir'ut. He was angry about what had happened but he knew that killing was not an option. He did however, much like his cousin Zarah, not have a problem inflicting as much pain as he could. As Tir'ut dropped the shadows from around their bodies he dropped to his knees and slid forward on the deck. His first punch was directly to the third man's groin and he howled in agony as Kalis' punch smashed into his testicles with no mercy. He dropped his weapon and reached for his groin leaving his upper body unprotected. Kalis ended his howling with a simple uppercut fueled by his Lycavorian and Kavalian strength. It was a blow that lifted the man completely off the deck in place and then dropped him back to the deck, out for the count.

Anja felt nothing but love for her pulsing from her family as Mari and Tobia moved quickly to secure the weapons the COLS troops had dropped. She snarled once more and stared evilly into Rhaos' eyes.

"*Pen enar flana forn regovar niob for forn enar ter narte lae!*" Anja growled viciously right into his face, her lips curled back in a savage expression and only a mere three inches from Rhaos' cheek. "*Pen caoira tonvar terit nytas el flanalyng duan cafna brey forn ineir!*" (I could kill you right now and you could not stop me. I should spill your guts for killing our people like you did.)

"Wait!" Lazar shouted in a herculean effort against the pain ravaging his senses and he held out his hand towards her, ignoring the horrible pain coursing through him from where Retta had touched him. "We...!"

Anja struck with the speed of a Rock Spider and she wrenched the blade from Rhaos' neck and stabbed the blade down into Lazar's palm, the blade striking deep and penetrating entirely through his whole hand before the tip of the blade hit the deck. Anja was pulling it out and placing it to Rhaos' throat before Lazar began to scream.

Retta chuckled from atop his chest even though she almost felt the pain he felt in her own body. "Oops!" She spoke. "*Pen osdra un neval forn ter un sheos.*" (I forgot to tell you not to move.)

"You will be dead before they move." Anja growled into Rhaos' face now. "Your friend will be dead one second after that. And your souls will go to the pits of *jorbhe* for your actions in killing innocent Lycavorians. There were children among them!" Anja almost screamed.

"We were only there... we were only there to gather information!" Lazar hissed out the words as his blood continued to burn and spill onto the deck. "I am in command and Sibot's actions are my responsibility! I did not order him to do what he did! He was operating under different orders! Orders from my father that he did not tell me! You... you may be half breed but..."

Lazar was unprepared for the slap that Retta smashed across his face and this caused his cheek to hit the deck none to gently. His dark eyes came up and he glared at her through his added pain.

"Call my mother a half breed again and I will melt the skin from your face very painfully *igord.*" Retta snarled at him now as she moved her fingers and the glow in her hand became slightly more powerful.

Anja's eyes never left Rhaos as she began speaking again. "We were tracking your ship the moment you entered the system fool boy." She snarled. "Did you think our son would not tell us about you and your pitiful ships and stealth abilities?" Rhaos looked at her, his eyes growing wider. "We planned for you to find my ship idiot! We wanted you to take us so that we could make our own discoveries about you, initiate contact with your government and then make peaceful overtures. Your actions have all but ruined that now. You killed men, women and children under the protection of the King of the Lycavorian Union. He will not be happy in the least and he will want blood for what your men did." Anja gripped the pommel of the R4 tighter and gave it a slight twist and push against the flesh of his neck causing Rhaos to hiss in pain. "Nothing to say now *igord!*" Anja growled.

"I would have... I would never had allowed him to do such a thing had I known what he was planning." Lazar rasped out the words. "My father has spies everywhere! He trusts no one! Sibot was one of those spies and he was acting under different orders! I would not order the killing of our own people even if they were Beta wolves! It is against everything my mother taught me as I was growing! Everything Rhaos' mother taught him!"

Anja cut her eyes to where Lazar was on the deck and he could see those jade green orbs almost glowing like those of her daughter's dark green ones. "So what was your plan big boy?" Anja snapped. "Hand us over to your father?"

"What?" Lazar barked. "No! I was going to take you... my mother is Matriarch to the Mountain Packs! She would have protected you!"

“If your father is King, wouldn’t that make your mother Queen?” Anja spat. “Do you think we are fools?”

Lazar shook his head quickly causing pain to lance through his shoulder and neck from where Retta had her hand on his shoulder now. “No!” He gasped. “They... my mother hates him! He tried to have her killed! And she is not... she is not Queen!”

Anja looked up when she saw Zarah touch her finger to her ear and then look at her. Zarah moved towards her and squatted near Rhaos’ head. “The two in the cockpit have been subdued mother.” She spoke. “The ship is ours once more.”

Anja nodded and looked down at Rhaos beneath her. Anja Leonidas was a fire brand and always had been. It was one of the reasons Martin and her fellow Queens loved her so dearly. She was also a superior soldier however, and many put her just below Aricia when it came to fighting skills. Anja Leonidas, though she would never admit it to anyone, was also one of the most compassionate and intelligent individuals alive. She pulled the R4 from Rhaos’ throat and dropped it to the lightweight shirt he was wearing. She sliced open the shirt where she had stabbed him and then brought her left hand forward and covered the very deep, and painful wound. Rhaos’ eyes grew wide as he saw her hand begin to glow white and he then felt the warmth surge through his shoulder and the pain was gone instantly. He glanced down to where her hand was and saw the soft, glowing white light over the wound and he could actually feel the flesh of his body knitting back together. Within seconds the wound was gone as if it had never been inflicted and he lifted his eyes to Anja’s face.

“How did you...?” He gasped. “What are you?”

Anja rose to her feet after wiping the blood from the R4 on his shirt. She looked over at Retta and nodded her head. Retta instantly reversed her power once more and poured forth a healing pulse into Lazar’s shoulder healing whatever damage she may have done and instantly the pain was gone. Lazar exhaled in massive relief and watched her with wide eyes as Retta sat up on his chest and held out her hand.

“Give me your hand.” She spoke.

Lazar hesitated after seeing and feeling what she could do and Retta rolled her eyes. “*Atle a jonia.*” She commented as she reached out and took his large hand in hers. Fighting to keep her raging hormones in check Retta held his hand on both sides and sent a healing pulse through his flesh, quickly knotting the flesh back together and healing completely any damage done to his hand. “My father and my brothers have experienced pain on a daily basis that is far more than what you just felt. Be lucky they are not here, for you would not be alive to experience anything if they were.” She told him playfully as she tossed his hand down on to his chest and leaned over close to his face seeing his eyes go wide. Retta couldn’t help herself and completely by instinct she inhaled deeply of his wild apples and cinnamon scent right next to his cheek. It was the most devastating scent she had ever smelled and Retta Leonidas nearly became wet at her center as it filtered through her senses and her body. (What a baby)

Thankfully for Retta, even though Lazar was just as confused and consumed with her honey and mint scent and what was raging through him because of it, Zarah and Lucia took note of what was going on and Zarah instantly acted to help her sister. She pulled Retta to her feet and away from him and gripped her hand as Lucia took her other hand and they moved close to her.

[Draw from Lucia and I sister.] Zarah told her in the shielded connection reaching up to caress her sister’s cheek.

[He is so... Zar he is so delicious and he smells so good!] Retta exclaimed. *[Why does my blood call for him so? Why?]*

[It is our instincts sister.] Zarah told her now. *[Our father’s blood is so potent it will always seek the same in return.]*

[Pull from Zarah and I Retta.] Lucia told her even as she and Zarah pressed closer to her. *[Pull from us what you need. Zarah and I have found each other and only one man can affect us now. Take our peace and use it to help you control the storm of emotions within you.]*

Retta didn’t hesitate and she closed her eyes and reached for her sister and Lucia and she found a wall of calm and serenity which she immediately let swallow her up. The effect was very telling and she suddenly became calm and very much in control once more.

Anja looked at Kalis as he stepped up to her while Tir’ut and Radem kept their weapons trained on the conscious COLS soldiers.

“*Tenna?*” Kalis asked with much concern in his voice for her. Anja smiled and reached out to squeeze his arm as she took several deep breaths and nodded.

“I am fine *mandri*.” Anja told him.

“What do we do now?” Kalis asked her.

Anja looked at Lazar on the floor. His eyes were focused on Retta and Anja could detect his heightened state of arousal and how his male aura was leaking outward. Whoever he was, his blood was very pure for she had only ever seen this sort of reaction for a female wolf from a pureblood of at least 180 or above in his PCC count. He was controlling it quite admirably Anja thought, but it was most definitely affecting him in a way he had never experienced before and he didn’t seem to understand it. This was not going to sit well with Androcles or Calyb or her other brothers for that matter Anja knew. And after what had taken place, Anja knew for certain that Martin would not be happy in the least.

“That is up to our friend here.” Anja spoke drawing Lazar’s attention to her. He rose to his feet slowly, obviously embarrassed that he had been taken down by a female half his size and strength and concerned for what he now saw arrayed against them. His friend Rhaos was no different and Anja needed to reach across that divide now. “I think it might be time to stop and get to know one another before we move forward.”

“Do we have a choice?” Rhaos asked evenly but Anja could detect the slight anger in his tone.

Anja nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered. “Choice number one, we sit and talk before we go any further. Which is what I think both our sides wanted to begin with until some asshole idiot did something stupid.” This statement was something Lazar was surprised by. This woman acted just as his mother would have acted. There were certain Lycavorians on Jetania who were famous among the different packs for being able to help others put aside differences and come to peaceful resolutions of problems even after decades of fighting. His mother had done this very thing with dozens of Mountain Packs and now this woman was reaching out in the same manner.

Lazar nodded his head. “Yes.”

“And choice number two?” Rhaos asked as he looked at Tir’ut and Kalis nervously. Both of them appeared ready to shoot him dead if he even sneezed inappropriately. The massive one was unlike any species he had ever seen, easily six and a half feet tall and broader than Rhaos’ own father. The smaller one was not fully wolf, but as with the half breed females, the wolf blood in him was far more powerful and he had been born the way he was. Not turned.

“Choice number two is I order my pilots to turn around and take us back to Ventori.” Anja told him as she replaced the R4 back in its hidden sheath at the small of her back. “There you will find my children waiting for you. If you are lucky enough to survive your encounter with them, and you won’t survive given what my son Androcles will do to you, then my mate will definitely kill all of you for what this Sibot did.” Anja looked at Lazar.

“Then... then you are a Queen?” Lazar gasped aloud. “But you are a half...” Lazar’s eyes quickly went to where Retta was staring at him with those incredible dark green orbs. Lazar looked away quickly and then back to Anja. “You are not fully wolf.”

Anja shrugged her shoulders. “I am one of six Queens and Martin Leonidas is King and he is not real forgiving when it comes to those who kill our people. Especially women and children.” Anja looked back to Rhaos. “It’s your choice. Make it now. I’m not the patient type.”

“I like choice one.” Lazar spoke quickly.

Rhaos nodded his head. “Definitely choice one.”

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He groaned softly in pain even as he dragged himself another several meters along the tall grass. His legs were broken he was sure and probably several of his ribs since he was spitting up blood. Sibot cursed Lazar under his breath, never suspecting that he would have the courage to throw him from the ship as he did. The fall was nothing, perhaps a hundred meters, but he had landed awkwardly and both his legs broke instantly upon hitting the ground and as he rolled to the side, he came down across a large log which broke his at least two of

his ribs. The pain was intense, more than anything he had felt in his life he concluded, but he could not let it affect him. He was on a hostile planet and his own kind was hunting him, no matter who they were. The only way to remain alive was to get as far away from the clearing as he could. With a herculean effort he fought down the pain and began to crawl away as quickly as he was able. He needed to find a place where he could shift and reset his bones so that they could heal.

He thought he had seen a ridge nearby that appeared to drop into a ravine with small caves. If he could reach one of those he might be able to avoid the patrols which would be filling this area quickly. He would get to this cave, shift to heal his wounds, rest for a day or two and then find a way of this planet. He did not care who he needed to kill in order to achieve that, all that drove him now was finding Lazar Aspion and killing him in the most painful way he could imagine.

King Aspion had suspected that Lazar was not fully loyal to him for some time. He spent far too much of his down time on Jetania with the Raney Mountain Pack and almost no time in the capital city seeking out females to mate with or drinks to consume. Juyno, the King's oldest son, hated Lazar. They were complete opposites, Juyno using his position to force others to give him what he wanted, especially the young females coming into Phase. Lazar showed no interest in the many females who frequented the capital city and the many Mating Clubs where many found their mates. The clubs were many, they were loud and boisterous, the young wolves, male and female going to them in order to seek partners. Most were saturated with the mating pheromones from both male and female wolves through the air circulating system, allowing both genders to be more free with their actions. It was not uncommon to see male and female wolves mating right on the many dance floors, their naked flesh slick with sweat and effort. Sibot had gone to enough of these clubs to know that Lazar never set foot in one even though many of the females would have done whatever he asked of them in order to gain his favor. He may have been Prince, but he was so very different than his brothers and sisters. And Sibot knew he had ulterior motives for almost everything he did. Osrod thought him to be another young wolf thinking with his cock and not his head but Sibot knew otherwise. Lazar was always up to something, though after two years on his ship he could not find anything to use against him. Lazar's senior officers were young wolves he had grown with, all of them from the different Mountain Packs, and even those wolves from the City and Plains Packs aboard the ship were completely loyal to Lazar.

These were the thoughts going through his head as he crested the shallow ridge and saw the ten-foot drop into the creek bed below. Sibot groaned in relief and took a deep breath to endure the pain as he pushed himself forward and down. He cried out in pain as he began to roll down the shallow embankment and this did not stop until he came to rest with his upper body in the running waters of the creek. Groaning in agony Sibot reached out and cupped a handful of water into his mouth, wetting his parched lips and enjoying the cool liquid sliding down his throat. He stuck his entire face into the creek and drank heavily, the cold water refreshing him and almost making the ache from his broken ribs disappear.

Sibot looked up quickly when he heard the splashing and found himself staring at the two pairs of armored legs and feet.

"Naltai medwaw nubouur!" The voice from behind him growled. (Hello mother fucker)

Sibot screamed as he felt the piercing pain stab down through his leg and into the ground. His legs may have been broken but he could still feel the pain as the shaft of something metallic in nature sank into the earth four inches, impaling his leg to the ground. Through his pain Sibot saw two more sets of armored legs and he lifted his head further to see four massive figures standing in a semi-circle in front of him. All of them wore a strange type of full body armor and helmets that hid the majority of their faces, leaving only thin slits where their eyes and mouths were. Sibot could see the fangs though and he could now smell the scents of three powerful Alphas and a Beta wolf who had an aura unlike any Beta wolf he had ever seen on Jetania.

"Forn dervi endina forn enar vorshy orlye corlay for nyek ineir forn?" The female voice spoke now and Sibot lifted his head further up and saw the long legs and feminine shape of the dark skinned female as she moved closer. The armor conformed to her very shapely figure, her white hair long and rich as it spilled over her shoulders. Her breasts were high and firm and her waist narrow. Her legs seemed to go on forever and they ended at the shape of her woman's mound. Sibot's eyes grew wider when he smelled her scent and the blood of the Alpha who had claimed this turned female. Then he saw the four-inch-high, pointed elven ears and his eyes grew wider still as Nayeca stopped walking towards him, two of the men parting a little for her to squat in front of his face. (You didn't think you could actually crawl away and hide did you?)

Nayeca tilted her head slightly and looked at the man, his face scratched up from his trek through the tall grass and rough terrain. She watched the man's dark eyes fill with confusion as Nayeca allowed the change to come over her and her wolf fangs extended fully and her amber colored eyes were encircled by a thick black ring.

"I am Star Colonel Nayeca Simpson." Nayeca began to speak once more. "Drow wife and mate to General/Colonel Daniel Simpson. *Mard Fervon* to the King." Nayeca lifted her hand and motioned to the four men standing around her. "These men you see around you; they are the *Durcunusaan*, the Wolves of the Blood. Guardians of the Royal Family. Unfortunately for you, they are not in a particularly good mood today. They would know the scent of their Queen's blood anywhere, and they could track it across the face of this very planet if need be. They smell her blood on you *igord*. You must be the *nubous amlian* who thought he could lay his hands upon one of our Queens and live to tell of it."

Sibot screamed once more in sheer agony as the *Durcunusaan* who had impaled his leg grabbed the *Nehtes* and twisted the shaft viciously.

"We have your ship in orbit." Nayeca continued. "We have captured those who were here on the surface as well."

"I will... I will tell you nothing!" Sibot screamed out the words.

Sibot's head rocked back from the trip hammer like blow that Nayeca hit him with. A heel strike with all of her combined wolf and elven power and Sibot's nose crumbled and broke, blood spurting from the wound as his nose cartilage burst from below the skin.

"You will sing like a bird for me." Nayeca growled as she rose to her feet. "And it will be neither painless nor short I promise you!" Nayeca nodded her head and the *Durcunusaan* on her right drove his armored fist down into Sibot's head with devastating power, the blow knocking Sibot into blackness. "Call for a *STRIKER* Rstev. Priority extraction. Inform Daniel we have the man who assaulted Anja." Nayeca spoke turning to look at the *Durcunusaan* to her left.

"Lady Nayeca." The man bowed his head and lifted his hand to tap his helmet COM.

Nayeca looked at the others. "Two of you drag his stinking carcass to the clearing we passed a hundred meters back. Do try to not get any of his blood on your armor. Once there, stabilize him so that he does not die, then have one of our Hadarian medics heal his legs. They appear to be broken. Martin will want to speak with him."

One of the *Durcunusaan* grunted. "I doubt speaking is on the King's agenda." He said. "Breaking his legs again is more like it."

"None of this is the *Durcunusaan*'s fault and I want you to make sure all of them know it." Nayeca spoke once more. "Martin and Andro hold only themselves to blame for this. They should have informed you of what they had planned and we could have kept this from ever happening. They know this."

The *Durcunusaan* looked at her and Nayeca saw one of them grin under his helmet. "What?" She asked.

"We know of the King's penchant for risks Lady Nayeca." The *Durcunusaan* spoke in reply. "Queen Anja as well. We cannot prepare for everything. Our officers may be *rezza* that the King and Androcles left them out of the loop, but we know different."

"What do you know?" Nayeca asked.

"Whoever these *igords* are, once Queen Anja unleashes her temper and her tongue on them, they will be begging us to take her back. Who in their right mind would want a *ackny sibfla malda* female wolf in their midst. Especially one as skilled as Queen Anja." The man spoke and Nayeca heard the other *Durcunusaan* chuckle softly in agreement. (Bat shit crazy)

Nayeca laughed softly and nodded her head feeling the anxiousness and anger over what happen bleeding away slowly. "Yes, they will." She agreed. "Yes, they will."

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DISCOVERY BASE

“...Told you what they were capable of!” Dynina shouted as she paced back and forth in the Command Center obviously very angry. “Why did you not listen?! Perlae and Ishma told you who they were and what they were capable of! You ignored our many warnings and acted *piegnos!*”

Gorgo, Dasha and Jezima were standing behind her as Dynina ranted at Martin, none of them wishing to interfere for they did feel the same way. However, Gorgo knew her son well and Dasha knew the man who worshiped her daughter well, and both of them knew Martin did nothing without a carefully thought out plan. Martin, Androcles, Murano and Daniel were at the main chart table going over the reports that were coming in and seemingly not listening to her which only enraged Dynina more. Gorgo saw it coming first but she was unable to stop Dynina from reaching out and finally grabbing Martin’s thick arm.

“You are not listening to me!” Dynina barked once more as she yanked his arm. “You need to listen...”

Martin Leonidas was a patient man and he could tolerate quite a bit, but given everything that had happened up until now, he was at the end of that patience. He whirled around, his eyes changing and his dual fangs exploding from his gums and he growled savagely and snapped his jaws together. This action caused Dynina’s eyes to go wide and she staggered back in fear at the look in those beautiful yellow gold wolf eyes.

“Enough *staania!*” He bellowed.

Dynina was made of stern material however, over forty thousand years of experience and loss fueling her desires. She stepped closer to him now, her own dual fangs extending and her eyes changing to that of the Matriarch wolf within her. In nearly thirty thousand years, no one had barked at her in anger as Martin just had. Dynina was unprepared for it but she did not back down in the least. No one moved to interfere, for no one wanted to come between them.

“Do not bark at me like some handmaiden Martin Leonidas!” Dynina snarled at him. “I am...”

“I know who you are!” Martin growled stepping closer to her. Dynina looked into those eyes and for a tiny fraction of a second she could almost feel the power within him, coursing through him, and it was terrifying to behold. “You are my *staania*, and I love you, but I am King!” Martin shouted at her. “I will decide what we will do and not do with my Queens at my side!”

“I have told you everything you need to know about the Coalition!” Dynina snapped right back. “You chose to ignore it and now look at what has happened! You should have listened to me!”

“I did listen to you!” Martin growled once more, his eyes never leaving her gaze. “And I decided to gather more information! They are Lycavorian *staania!* I will not just dismiss them out of hand!”

“They are not like us!” Dynina barked. “They are cruel and savage! They conquer others! Osrod rules out of fear and his lust for power! And he is always seeking more power, just as his father and his grandfather did! You dismissed what we told you and now look at what it has caused!”

“I dismissed nothing!” Martin shouted. “I cannot good make decisions based on one or two opinions! Opinions that are tainted by events that occurred in the past!”

Dynina’s eyes grew wide and she looked at him. “Tainted!” She gasped. “How dare you! What happened to me has nothing to do with this!”

“Doesn’t it?” Martin hissed. “What happened to you, as vile and horrific as it was, it has shaped your view of these Lycavorians for centuries now! You see nothing else *staania!* You feel nothing else! I cannot do that *staania.*”

“You do not believe me?” Dynina gasped in shock.

Martin shook his head. “That is not what I said and you know it.” He spoke a tad more calmly now. “I am King. Aricia, Anja, For’mya, they are three of my Queens. We will decide which direction to pursue and we will do so with all of the intelligence that we can possibly gather! In whatever manner we can gather it! I will not simply give up on our people based on one or two individual opinions formed millennia ago. I cannot do that. They are my people *staania.*”

“They are not your people!” Dynina barked angrily. “They are savages who have never evolved past what we once were on Lycavore! They do not deserve what you give them Martin Leonidas!”

Martin stared at her for a long moment and then nodded his head. “Maybe not. But I will give them that opportunity.”

“Why?” Dynina barked. “After all I have told you about them? Why?”

“Because they are my people.” Martin said softly. “The day that I stop believing in my people is the day that I will take my Queens and I will leave all of this King shit behind forever. I never fucking wanted it in the first place.”

“Destiny is...” Dynina began to speak.

“Destiny!” Martin barked angrily now as he glared at her. “*Nubou Aldom!* You think I am doing this because it’s supposedly my destiny? I don’t give a rat fuck about destiny!”

Dynina looked at him with wide eyes, shocked at his words. “But... if you are not... if you are not here because of this, then why are you here?”

Martin stepped closer to her. “I came out here looking for my past.” Martin spoke softly. “I wanted to discover my history. Our people’s history. I wanted to discover everything I could about the people I have only seen in my dreams, waking or otherwise. Grandfather Sumar most of all.” Everyone saw Jezima bring her hands to her face as her eyes flooded with tears at his words, Gorgo reaching for her as did Dasha. “What I am doing right now, I am doing because it is the right thing to do! It’s the right thing to do *staania*, and you know it is in your heart. *Pen gur ter hipe aur bara oia aur cafna covi. Covi. Gur forn?*” (I will not turn my back on my people ever. Ever. Will you?)

Dynina stared at him for a long moment wrestling with her inner emotions but found she could not deny what he was saying. The call of the wolf blood within her was just too strong to ignore. She finally shook her head slowly. “*Joa.*” She answered.

Martin’s fangs and wolf eyes returned to normal then and he nodded his head before pulling Dynina into his arms and hugging her tightly. Dynina sighed heavily and returned the embrace, wrapping her arms around his waist and relishing in the sensations of family and love that engulfed her.

Dynina drew her head back but did not release him as she looked into his eyes. “What now?” She asked. “We must go after her. She is your wife and mate Martin.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes, she is.” He answered. “You don’t honestly believe that I would send one of those who holds my heart and soul in their hands on a mission like this without support do you?”

“I would never have believed you would do such a thing to begin with.” Dynina told him. “So obviously I do not know what you would do.”

Martin grinned. “Predictable is boring.” He told her.

“*Carians* I hate when he says that.” Gorgo spoke openly now, rolling her eyes in disgust and drawing soft laughter from those in the room.

“What of those who were taken from us today?” Dynina asked. “This act will cannot go unpunished Martin.”

Martin nodded his head. “And it won’t.” He told her. “*Pen marvan forn.*”

“What is this support for Anja that you speak of *aur keto?*” Gorgo asked now.

Martin glanced back at Androcles and saw him smiling back at his father because of the question. He turned back to his mother. “One very large, half Immortal half vampire wrecking machine; one large, half Kavalian half Lycavorian who worships his *Tenna* Anja; a pair of young, shadow ladies who positively hate violence, and one Evolli assassin who knows more ways to kill someone than I do.”

“What mother’s temper does not do, Radem, Kalis and the others will finish.” Androcles stated with that smile. “*Tenna* Endith has already sent the signal that they have retaken the ship *staania.*”

“Wait!” Dynina said. “Retaken the ship!? The reports... they said almost a dozen COLS soldiers got on the ship before it took off.” She said.

Martin chuckled. “Against my little Firecracker...” Martin said with a smile. “*Sibfla*, they should have brought more. Trust me, you don’t want to be in the same zip code when Anja gets wound up.”

Danny shook his head. “Nope. No way.” He chimed in. “Not if you got half a brain and like your *nor* where they are and still able to function.”

“Daniel Simpson!” Dasha blurted out.

“Oops!” Danny said. “Sorry.”

All of them turned when the door to the Command Center opened and Archer stepped into the large room. Martin turned to face him but kept one arm around Dynina holding her close.

“Archer?” Martin asked.

Archer met Martin's eyes as he moved a little closer. "Milord... a *STRIKER* is returning with Colonel Nayeca and her *Durcunusaan* detachment. They found the one who was thrown from the ship as it was taking off." Archer moved closer still. "He is the one responsible for beating Queen Anja Milord. Her blood was still on his knuckles. He is also the one responsible for shooting Atropos and Prince Calyb and the one who ordered shooting the civilians. Colonel Nayeca already confirmed this with the survivors at the clearing."

Everyone in the Command Center fell silent as they looked at Martin Leonidas. His smile had disappeared and his dark eyes had narrowed slightly. He didn't take his eyes off Archer but his words were directed at his grandmother.

"Andro... find Nalmos and those Justices who have arrived from the Tasmor homeworld. Bring them to the south pad. And bring the one Sadi captured as well." Martin spoke. "You said this act cannot go unpunished *staania*." He continued as she looked up into his face. "It starts now." He said coldly and then he began walking out of the Command Center.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

SPARTAN ONE

.5 LYS FROM JETANIA

Lazar watched from the couch that he and Rhaos sat on as Anja and Retta made sure the four Beta females who had been on the ship were comfortable and calm. He had watched them both use their healing abilities once more and though he wouldn't understand what they were doing until later, he could see the soft white glow of their hands as they ran their hands over their bodies while whispering to them all of the time. The same pair of hands that had caused him such intense pain were now being used to heal. It was unlike anything that Lazar had ever seen.

The two of them put off a soothing and calm veneer that radiated confidence and warmth. Lazar glanced quickly into the rear of the ship and could see his men within the cargo pen that held the two bodies, a powerful force field of red energy keeping them inside the pen. While they had plenty of room to move around, most chose to just sit on the floor away from where the bodies lay and stare through the field at the two large men who were guarding them. Several of them were injured after the severe beatings they had received, but neither Anja nor Retta had made any attempt to heal them as they had Rhaos and himself. Given what they taken part in, Lazar doubted he would have acted any differently than this woman. Neither he nor Rhaos would have ever believed anyone who told them they had seen a species that could move so fast as to be nothing more than a blur of vision, yet they had witnessed it themselves and they could not help but believe. How they had not detected these others by their scents was something that Lazar had been trying to determine but was at a loss to explain.

Lazar cut his eyes when he saw the black haired female approach the one who had called Anja mother. He had heard her called Zarah by the woman beside her now. Lazar didn't know what other species she was but she was exquisite in her beauty and her scent was filled with the same blood that the one called Retta had. What he could tell was that the wolf blood in her, like it was within Retta, was incredibly pure and so very potent. They were sisters, he could tell that from their scent, but Lazar's nose could also detect an orange clove like scent coming from the front of the ship with a similar hint of the very same blood within Retta and this other female. Another sister if his nose was accurate. The male wolf in the back had the same hint of blood but it was also different somehow. A close relation perhaps, not that it mattered really, for while Lazar and Rhaos were large and powerful Alpha wolves, the half breed in the rear and the other hulking species with him, they were not ones that Lazar wanted to confront. His senses told him those two men were dangerous in so many ways that he could not understand, along with the black haired female and the sister with the dark brown hair. They were warriors and predators, they moved like warriors, and they gazed at Rhaos and himself as little more than prisoners, which they were Lazar mused as he looked down at the shackles that wrapped around his and Rhaos' wrists.

All of his life he had been raised and believed that they were the strongest species in the universe. That no other species could do what they did. He was proud of this fact, but Lazar, because of his Mountain Pack heritage, did not use this knowledge or power to force others to do his bidding. The Coalition had not had a war in over three centuries now, everyone in this sector of space who they had not conquered now remained as far away from them as they could. Lazar was actually happy about this because he did not believe he would be able to lead his men in the subjugation of another species simply because they could. Lazar believed this ultimately hurt the Coalition, for without allies and friends you could not survive. The last few hours had shown him quite clearly that there were other species out among the stars that could and did make the Coalition look like children.

He just never believed fellow Lycavorians would be part of that.

Lazar Aspion didn't know what to make of everything right now but he did know that whoever the Alpha male was that had fathered these young women and the male in the back, he was without a doubt, extraordinarily powerful. His blood was far purer than even Lazar's own father given the scent of that blood in those around him, that was for certain, and his father was perhaps the most powerful Alpha wolf on Jetania.

Lazar had never smelled the blood of an Alpha so deeply embedded in a female as it was within this woman called Anja. Her diminutive stature was a clever ruse he now knew, for she was far more vicious and skilled than Lazar would have ever thought. No female Alpha wolf on Jetania held the blood of their Alpha mate mixed so deeply with their own. That blood and scent was also mixed just as deeply with five other feminine scents and this was something he had not expected. Even among the Mountain Packs, same sex pairings were frowned upon heavily for they would not produce children and to smell this upon her was not something Lazar was used to. Given the extent of how deeply she carried the scent of his blood within her, as well as the other females, Lazar estimated they had been together for at least three decades and the aura of another Alpha would have no effect on her as it would others. As he watched, Lazar's eyes grew slightly wider when he saw the two young women share a very open and loving kiss, a kiss that he would consider reserved for those who were mated, and then they were nodding to each other several times as if they were talking to one another without words, and then the one with the black hair moved back toward the front of the ship. Lazar watched as the half breed turned her dark brown eyes back on him and he looked away quickly.

The third half breed, the one called Mari, she was sitting at another computer station on the other side of the ship, her mother standing beside her as the younger one worked on the two computer consoles, her hands moving across the panels like a master. They obviously were not concerned that Lazar and Rhaos could see what they were doing, and to be honest, the only person who might be able to comprehend the equipment they were using was Laon. He had always been the one to explain and show Rhaos and himself about the more detailed equipment. Now though he feared for Laon and all of his crew. He had chosen most of them himself and he had made certain that they were loyal to him and to their ship and not to his father. It helped that most of them were from the many different Mountain Packs and that is why his father put so many spies on his ship Lazar knew.

"Wen forn hinvor?" The female voice spoke. (Are you hungry?)

Lazar's head snapped around and he saw the woman they called Anja standing beside the couch holding two trays in her hands. He had not heard her approach and this shocked him. The scent of meat and vegetables filtered to his sensitive nose however and Lazar looked at the trays she held. Two steaming slabs of sweet smelling meat, obviously cooked with many seasonings, a large pile of green vegetables of some kind and another heaping pile of what his nose told him were some sort of potatoes. Lazar looked at the tray and then up into Anja's face. Half breed or not, he had to admit she was an exceptionally beautiful female wolf.

Anja set the trays on the table in front of them and then reached out with her hand. Her fingers waved delicately over his wrists and the unique shackles that had been binding his wrists fell away. She did the same with Rhaos and he watched those shackles drop to the deck. They watched her move to the couch beside them and settle into it with a large mug of steaming liquid in her hands. Lazar and Rhaos looked at her for a moment and then at the trays of food in front of them. Lazar heard the mocking snicker and he looked up to see the dark red haired female standing in front of them now. She held two, tall metal glasses of water in her hands and she was staring at him with those incredible dark green eyes.

"Atle a jonia." Retta spoke as she set the glasses on the table and lifted the tray in front of Lazar. She stabbed into the white pile of potatoes with the utensil and brought it to her mouth where she quickly ate it. She

put the fork back on the tray and thrust the tray into Lazar's hands. "*Forn tiab un aldi.*" Retta spoke once more. (What a baby) (You need to eat)

"If we had intended to kill you..." Anja spoke from the couch. "You would be dead already. I would not waste the time or effort it would take to poison your food. I would just kill you and be done with it. And I think you know we could do this easily if we wanted too."

Rhaos was the one who didn't hesitate now, reaching forward and grabbing the tray and stabbing the fork into the meat. They had not had a decent meal since before leaving the ship and he was starving. As the first scoop of meat hit his taste buds, Rhaos was hooked and his eyes grew wide as he began to eat quickly. Lazar lifted the fork and followed suit just as Retta settled to the couch beside her mother. Being able to pull from Zarah and Lucia's strength was a godsend for Retta at this time. Their combined strength in the etheric realm was huge and being bound together in a way that many would never understand or know the reasons for was the explanation. Whatever the cause, Lucia was right when she had told Retta what she had. They had found each other and nothing would ever come between them now, but they also knew that only one wolf would ever call for the both of them equally. Dutkne would be joining them soon enough, and while they had only seen him once since Andro had arrived, there would be time for what they shared to fully blossom. Only Dutkne could affect either of them in any way and both Lucia and Zarah knew this and it made them even stronger. It was not the same as being able to pull from her twin Calyb or from Androcles, but it was enough to push back the burning of her wolf blood for this godlike Alpha wolf that Retta felt.

Lazar looked up at Retta first as he chewed and then he looked at Anja. "Will you feed my men?" He asked.

Anja nodded her head. "They are getting our standard field rations." Anja answered as she sipped her coffee. "They are not as tasty as what you are eating, but they are rather good as far as field rations go."

"Then you will kill us?" Lazar spoke.

Lazar saw Retta roll her eyes in disgust and Anja smiled as she looked at him. "I have no intention of killing you or your partner here." Anja spoke.

"Our men?" Rhaos asked now.

"Your men are responsible for the brutal deaths of almost twenty Beta Lycavorians from Ventori." Anja told him. "Innocent men and women. Their fate will be decided by the families of those they killed. If no family members are alive to pronounce punishment, then a court and jury of Ventori Lycavorians will decide what to do."

"Beta Wolves." Rhaos spoke. "Deciding the fate of Alphas?"

Anja looked at him now. "You consider yourself better than Beta Wolves, young Alpha?" Anja asked him with a neutral voice. "What is your name?"

"Rhaos Kyer." He replied.

Anja looked at Lazar. "Lazar Aspion." He told her.

"Prince Lazar Aspion." Rhaos spoke quickly.

Anja looked at him and her eyes narrowed slightly. "Oh yes... I will have to remember that won't I?" She answered. "So Rhaos Kyer, you consider yourself better than Beta wolves?" Anja asked.

Rhaos was no fool, and like Lazar he could sense the power within this female wolf. Half breed she may have been, but she was much stronger than nearly every Alpha female Rhaos had ever come across on their homeworld, even Lazar's mother who was the strongest Rhaos had ever met. "I will... I will fight to defend those who are not my equal, that is part of what an Alpha does, but yes, Alphas have always been superior to Beta and Gamma wolves. Omegas too. You are wolf, you should know this!"

Anja nodded her head. "We do not adhere to that long dead and silly thought process in the Lycavorian Union." She stated evenly. "That is how it was on our original homeworld yes, but we have evolved far beyond that now."

"That is what you call where you are from? This Lycavorian Union." Lazar asked now.

Anja nodded her head. "Yes." She replied. "And in the Lycavorian Union, there are Beta and Gamma wolves that serve in our government and military. Even many Omega wolves. All of them are held in the same regard and esteem as any Alpha would be. In many cases they even command Alphas."

Rhaos laughed at this and then saw that Anja's expression had not changed. "You are serious?" He asked.

“Yes.” Anja told him.

Rhaos was still shoveling the delicious tasting food into his mouth, unable to resist the smell and flavor. It was unlike any food he had ever eaten. “This Union of yours must not be very large.” He said while chewing. “Not with Beta wolves commanding Alphas.”

Anja smiled once more. “The Lycavorian Union comprises nearly nine hundred different species and totaling, at our last census, nearly thirty-one trillion citizens.” She told them as she sipped her coffee calmly. Anja saw the looks of disbelief cover Lazar and Rhaos’ faces and she couldn’t help but smile as Rhaos nearly choked on the mouthful of food he was chewing. “How big did you say your Coalition was again?” Anja sent out the jab.

“How... how is that possible?” Lazar finally blurted out.

“It is a rather long and very involved story but the short version is that many like minded people came together with the same ideals and values and formed the Union. It has grown from there.” Anja told him.

“You... you are Queen of this Union?” Lazar stammered the question as his eyes darted to Retta who he felt watching him intently.

“I am one of six Queens.” Anja answered. “We all speak with the same voice so we are essentially one I suppose.”

“You are a half...” Lazar stopped his words and looked at Retta once more remembering her words to him. He cut his eyes back to Anja. “You are not fully wolf.” He finished.

Anja shook her head with a smile for she knew exactly what Retta had told him and Anja could sense this Lazar did not want to incur her daughter’s wrath, and not because he feared what she could do to him. “No. I’m half Hadarian.” She answered him now. “We are a founding member of the Union. One of four founding members.”

“Half breeds are not welcome within the Coalition.” Rhaos blurted out and Anja saw Lazar wince at his words. He had not spoken the word harshly, only stating a fact, which told Anja and Retta both that he did not fully believe in what he was speaking.

“Well that’s a loss for the Coalition I suppose.” Anja said. “The Union embraces them.”

“Have you come out here to conquer us?” Lazar asked Anja.

Retta snorted in undisguised anger now and Anja let her daughter speak, knowing she could not stop her either way. “You shoot my brother and my Uncle like dogs!” Retta snapped at him forcefully. “You murder innocent civilians, beat defenseless women and kidnap us and then you have the arrogance to sit there and ask that question?”

Lazar met her eyes. “Sibot’s actions were not my actions!” He spoke. “I would not have done what he did?”

“Yes... yes! You already told us they were your father’s orders!” Retta snapped. “What if he had given you those same orders?!” She growled at Lazar. “Would you have done exactly what that other fool did?”

“No.” Lazar answered her honestly and without hesitating, his voice angry though. Anja sensed her daughter become less agitated at his answer and she calmed somewhat. “I do not kill innocents! Nor do I beat those who are not my equal.”

Anja rolled her eyes at his choice of words sensing that is not what he had intended to say and knowing what Retta’s reaction would be.

“Not your equal!” Retta snarled as she rose to her feet. “If I am not mistaken, I am a half breed! My sister and cousin are half breeds! And we just handed you and your superior Alpha attitude your collective asses! How does that compute for you?!”

“That is not...!” Lazar began to speak.

“You may be the most delicious Alpha I have ever smelled in my life, but you have to be the stupidest man I have ever come across as well!” Retta spat stunning Lazar with her words. She turned to her mother now. “*Medwaw*, I’m going to go sit with Normya, Endith and Tina. At least there, the superior Alpha hormones won’t affect me!”

Anja nodded her head silently and then watched as Retta glared at Lazar for a moment longer and then moved quickly out of the main living area of the *STRIKER* and up the short flight of stairs into the cockpit. Anja looked back to Lazar who was sitting there with wide eyes. Rhaos looked confused as well but he was also chewing his food. Anja could sense the turmoil within Lazar when it came to Retta, his aura was conflicted

about what he felt seething through him and what he had been raised to believe. Anja also believed that Lazar was different from what he had been raised to think was right, for he showed this in his questions about his crew and his reaction when he thought Anja was going to kill Rhaos. Lazar finally turned his head to look at her.

“She misconstrued my words!” He spoke quickly.

Anja shook her head. “No, she didn’t.” She answered. “You just chose the wrong words to use. I get the sense that Coalition females are not afforded the same rights as Union females. They are not considered equal to male Alphas?”

Lazar met her eyes. “I do not follow that ideal!” Lazar hissed in defense of himself. “My mother is Matriarch to all of the Mountain Packs. They honor her and look to her for leadership. It is the City and Plains Packs that follow this fool mentality!”

“Led by your father.” Anja asked.

“I had no say in who my father was.” Lazar told her. “And I do not follow all of his views or ideals.”

Anja smiled at him. “Then the question remains, which ones do you follow?” She asked.

Lazar met her gaze and his eyes grew wider. “You are trying to trick me!” He hissed at her. “You wish me to reveal information that you can use against my people!”

Anja chuckled now and leaned forward putting her mug on the table. “I am not trying to trick you Lazar Aspion.” She spoke calmly holding out her hand to Zarah who stepped away from the bulkhead after a nod to Radem who was sitting at the doorway into the rear Dragon Pens. Zarah held out the data pad.

“*Allon coi covieycle lon Endith for Normya sey kinchas sy nison medwaw.*” Zarah spoke never taking her eyes from Lazar or Rhaos. (This is everything that Endith and Normya have discovered so far mother)

Anja nodded her head as she took the pad. “*Cyn forn fenneenum.*” Anja looked at Lazar and activated the data pad and placed it on the table in front of him. “I already know so much more about you than you do about us.” (Thank you daughter.)

Lazar looked at her confused and lowered his tray to the table and picked up the data pad. His eyes grew wider as he realized he was looking at news reports from Jetania. These news reports quickly switched to secure military communications and he looked up at Anja. “You have... you have decrypted our secure military communications!” He exclaimed. “How... how have you done this?”

Anja reached out and took the pad from his hands. Lazar attempted to stretch out and snatch it back but before he could even blink, Zarah had blurred to his side and now held the wickedly sharp blade of the knife to his throat. Rhaos had stopped chewing and was leaning back as he stared down the business end of the very large barrel of, at least to him, the Pralor Pulse Magnum that Radem had leveled at his forehead. Once more Lazar had never experienced or seen anyone move so fast in his life and he froze as Anja sat back on the couch calmly.

“If you wish to continue using that arm...” Zarah snarled into his face, her dual fangs now extended fully and her warm breath on his cheek. “...I suggest you lower your hand back down. I am not my beloved sister Retta Alpha wolf, and your scent and aura does not make my blood burn for you, but if you move another millimeter towards my mother, I will not hesitate and I will end your life where you sit.”

Lazar did just as he was instructed and lowered his hand back into his lap very slowly. Anja lifted her mug from the table once more and sipped the coffee.

“You strike me as being very intelligent Lazar Aspion.” Anja told him. “I instructed my pilot to only monitor civilian channels and those trivial military use channels that were mildly encrypted. See... the biggest mistake this *igord* Sibot made was shooting my son and killing those innocent people. I was willing to be very open had things gone as we had hoped they would. They did not and now because of what he did, I am going to be somewhat of a *upaee*.” Anja sipped her coffee again. “You don’t want to see me in full *upaee* mode Lazar Aspion. I guarantee it will not be a pleasant experience. I want our discussions to be civil and intelligent. My husband and mate would much rather be friends with a group of our own people. And trust me when I tell you, having Martin Leonidas as an enemy is perhaps the most suicidal position to be in.” Anja sat back. “I will leave it to your decision. We can have constructive dialogue, or we can do things your way. You can puff out your chest and espouse whatever you like, but considering that our technology is easily a thousand year or two more advanced than yours, that would not be the most productive of positions to be in don’t you agree?”

“And if I refuse to tell you anything?” Lazar questioned her.

Anja shrugged her shoulders. “Then we will deposit you and your friend Rhaos here at a remote location somewhere on your planet and we will leave you there to find your way back to your father and leaders.”

“My men?” Lazar asked.

Anja shook her head. “They will remain with us and face our justice for what they have done. After that, they will be buried honorably on Ventori, which in my opinion, they do not deserve. The Lycavorian Union has laid claim to Ventori and the Beta wolves in positions of power there have aligned with us. The planet is now under our protection. We will not allow any harm to come to them ever again and we will not seek relations with your Coalition ever again either.” Anja met his eyes. “But rest assured if we ever do meet again, it will not be as friends and you will not survive that encounter.” Anja rose to her feet and looked at him.

“I will allow you to think about that and talk with your friend here while we continue to monitor your planet for a time. After one hour I will ask you again if we can conduct ourselves as equals and if not, I will then have my pilot hack your main military database, which for her will be painfully easy, and she will take whatever information that is in it. We will then depart after leaving you on the surface.”

“You do not... you do not give me much leeway.” Lazar told her.

Anja chuckled and leaned close to him her eyes changing and her wolf fangs extending fully. Lazar’s eyes grew a little wider as those dual fangs became fully visible. “*Igorda haro.*” Anja snarled into his face. “If my son was dead we would not be having this conversation. My husband and mate, my son Androcles, all of my children and all of our military might would right now be laying waste to your father’s kingdom in retribution. That would not matter to you however, for you would be floating somewhere in space with your friend here.” Anja smiled once more, her fangs making the smile look more like a dangerous sneer than anything else. “Think about it.”

Anja’s head snapped around when they heard the beeping noise and she saw Kalis appear from the rear cabin quickly and go to where they had deposited all of the gear Lazar and Rhaos had been wearing. He reached down and picked up the small cylindrical object from among the objects there.

“Some sort of COM unit *Tenna* Anja.” Kalis spoke rising to his feet once more as he inspected it and then moved over next to her. “It appears short range however.”

Anja took it from Kalis and turned it over in her hands. She looked at Lazar. “Your fool father?” She asked.

Lazar shook his head slowly knowing as powerful as she was she would detect his lie instantly. “I was not due to report to my father for another two days. I do not know what Sibot intended once he had taken you. That is a private COM unit that only my mother has access too. I don’t know why she has activated it; she believes me to be out of the system.” He replied.

Anja blinked several times. “Really? This should be interesting then.” She handed it back to Kalis. “Plug it into the COM *Mandri.*” She said. “It will convert the signal automatically and then activate a holo-transmission. Let’s see if we can have a more productive conversation with Lazar Aspion’s mother.”

JETANIA
NORTHERN OCEAN
DEPTH 2419 METERS
DARASTRIXI LONG RANGE MEDIUM CRUISER

“Omrad?” Nilantha asked moving up beside him at the control station.

Omrad shook his head. “They are not moving.” He told her. “They entered the system and were moving for Jetania but they have stopped now and are holding position half a light year away.”

“Stopped?” Nilantha spoke softly. “Are they showing on normal sensors?”

“Taris?” Omrad lifted his head and looked at her.

Taris shook her head quickly. “No. All of the Coalition ships in the area are still at their standard positions and no alert has been sent via normal COM channels. All Coalition ships are maintaining their positions. They cannot see them Omrad.”

“How is that possible?” Loras asked now moving up to stand in front of the station where Taris stood. “We can see them but Osrod’s ships cannot? The Home Fleet is the most advanced of our ships.”

“This ship is equipped with an Etheric Sensor Grid Loras.” Nilantha answered her as she came to stand beside her. “It is one of three pieces of Pralor technology that was incorporated into this ship. The Teleporter is the second. Believe me it was no small task either if what I was told is true. The Pralor people regarded these two pieces of their technology to be very secret. Only their most advanced ships had either of them let alone both. How Dadrien of the Mountain succeeded in convincing those Pralors who followed him to do such a thing is beyond me.”

Loras met her eyes. “Then they have cloaking technology as the Coalition does?” She asked.

Rylin nodded her head now. “Yes, but it is far more advanced than anything COLS has operating now. These Lycavorians have technology that in some ways is even more advanced than what is on the Oracle’s ships. We cannot pick the ship up on normal sensors, no one can it appears. We are only detecting them because of the Etheric Grid established within the system and linked to this ship.”

“*Carians*.” Loras exclaimed in frustration.

Nilantha reached out and took her hands and squeezed them tightly. “Remain calm Loras Ranev.” She spoke calmly. “You have only just been exposed to all of this while Rylin, Taris and others have had years to learn it.”

“This is all so... it is unbelievable.” Loras rasped out the words.

Nilantha nodded her head. “Indeed it is. Do you trust me Loras?”

Loras looked at her with those captivating dark brown orbs and took a deep breath before answering with confidence in her words. “Yes.” She replied.

Nilantha smiled and squeezed her hands once more. “You will learn it all Loras. I make you a promise now. You will come to know and understand all of it over the next few weeks.”

“How Nilantha?” Loras asked her.

“Just as first Dadrien and then the spirit of Sumar granted me the ability to sense and communicate within the Etheric realm, the more you are exposed to it, especially at the levels you will see, it will stimulate the Etheric resonance within you and you will understand. I have told you that all Lycavorians are born with this ability, but the number who advance it past the initial levels are extremely rare among the COLS Lycavorians. Those who come from your original homeworld, from Lycavore, it was natural for them to use this skill. Especially after the Pralor Sumar and those who followed him were taken into the population.”

“Lycavore.” Loras whispered.

Nilantha nodded her head. “It is no more a myth or legend than I am.” She spoke. “Just as I told you earlier.”

Loras met her eyes. “*Vada saan rie vada allsknesi*.”

Nilantha nodded. “The Blood of the Ancients. Yes.” She said softly. “Rylin, Omrad, Taris and Anoria are only a few who have discovered this because, just like you, they carry the blood of the ancients within them as well.”

“How?” Loras asked with wide eyes.

Nilantha shook her head. “That I do not know.” Nilantha answered. “Only that it is within you. There were ancient Packs on Lycavore, those with the purest of wolf blood. One Pack was the purest of all and they were who ruled with the other ancient Packs as equals to them. I do not know what took place through the years after I left with your ancestors, but Sumar told me that when he arrived on Lycavore there were only six of these Ruling Packs left. The largest and the most powerful. The strongest and most dominant of these six Packs had dual wolf fangs and this is what set them apart from the others. This oddity in their bloodline, this is what made their Pack stronger, larger in size and far more ferocious, but it also granted them the ability to lead others and do so in such a way that others wanted to follow them. This only grew after Sumar and the Pralors with him were taken in by the Ruling Packs as I said. That is how you have had the visions like the others. Those with the blood of the ancients were always tied more closely to the Etheric realm. I can only surmise that those of you with this skill are descended from the Ancient bloodlines from before your ancestors left.” I have instructed Rylin, Taris and the other to the best of my abilities, which are infantile when compared to the *Mard Revik* and his family. To those who follow him.” Nilantha shook her head now turning away with an expression of confusion on her face. “This is not going as I had foreseen.”

“Nilantha?” Loras questioned seeing the puzzled look on her face. “What do you mean?”

“I was meant... I was hoping to have more time with you.” Nilantha told her. “To teach you some of what the others know. Your latent ability would have made it much easier as it did with Rylin and the others. They were not supposed to arrive here for months.”

Loras looked at her. “You knew they were coming?” She asked in surprise.

Nilantha nodded her head quickly. “I felt them the moment they arrived in this quadrant of space.” She replied. “Well... was overwhelmed by them is a better phrase. I was barely able to react quickly enough to hide my presence from them with the instruments on this ship.”

“Why would you want to hide your presence from them?” Loras asked.

“If they had sensed me here, especially the *Tarivuos* given what they are, then they would have descended down upon this area already.” Nilantha answered her. “This ship has an Etheric Void Shield which is the third piece of technology equipped that is Pralor in design and then engineered by them. It keeps all Etheric resonance within the ship and the surrounding area of the ship. It was experimental at the time, unlike the Teleporter and Ether Sensor Grid and my ship is the only surviving ship to have it. It is also why you and the others on Jetania who have an advanced Etheric resonance did not sense it before now. You would have been drawn to it without this shield. Even those among Osrod’s followers, including that brute himself.”

Loras’s eyes grew slightly wider. “He has people like... he is... Osrod is like Taris? Like Anoria?”

Nilantha shook her head quickly. “*Carians joi!*” Nilantha exclaimed. She pulled Loras closer, holding her hands. “Why do you think he chose you Loras Ranev?” Nilantha reached up and stroked her cheek and then ran her fingers down her arm. “Your obvious physical beauty and lush attributes not withstanding Loras Ranev, which has caused more than one Alpha to drag his tongue along the ground hoping to win your affection I might add, Osrod detected this difference in you.”

Loras looked away shyly, clearly embarrassed at her words and Nilantha and Rylin smiled knowingly. “As I explained, Etheric ability is a characteristic of all Lycavorians, but without the proper training and knowledge to expand it beyond the lowest possible level, as the Pralor people had, the use of it is spotty at best. Osrod has a few among his fool advisors that have a rudimentary ability to use it. You must have seen it when you were Queen.”

Loras’s mind was flung back to her decade in the palace and the capital. She nodded finally and met Nilantha’s gaze. “I thought it was just *vaes*. Parlor tricks.” She said finally.

Nilantha nodded her head. “Which it is essentially, without the proper training and skill. Many millennia ago other Lycavorians came here to Jetania.”

“Other Lycavorians?” Loras gasped with wide eyes. “There have been others who have come to Jetania? How? When?”

Nilantha nodded her head. “These are the things I wanted to speak of you with.” Nilantha hissed softly. “I will tell you of them Loras, I promise. Right now however, we have other issues.”

“Nilantha?” Loras pressed her.

Nilantha smiled. “Given what the future holds for you Loras my child, these are things you need to know. Do not worry. I will tell you everything child. Everything.” Loras stared at her for a few seconds then nodded her head in agreement. Nilantha turned to Omrad. “Can we determine how many are on this ship Omrad? And we must begin using the correct terminology used by them. Can we convert the Etheric sensors?”

“I have already finished entering the data Nilantha.” Rylin spoke. “I wanted to check with you before I had Taris program it into the databanks.”

Nilantha nodded her head. “It is given. Taris... program the new variables if you would.” Taris nodded her head and began working on the station she was at while Nilantha looked at Loras. “The *Mard Revik* and those with him use a different measuring equation to classify Etheric users in the Lycavorian Union. The Pralor fashion was too bloated with unnecessary information and categories.”

“How...?”

Nilantha smiled at her. “You have more questions than your mind can form right now, I know. About me, about everything.” She said. “I will answer as many as I am able Loras my child. But the answers to some will only come with time and exposure.”

“Exposure to what?” Loras asked.

“The future.” Nilantha answered her.

“New variables entered.” Taris called out.

Nilantha turned once more to Omrad. “Omrad?”

“This... this can’t be right Oracle!” He exclaimed.

“What do you mean? Are the variables not correct?” Nilantha asked.

“I was very precise Omrad.” Rylin echoed.

Omrad shook his head. “No Rylin.” He continued. “The variables are all correct. They are perfect.”

“Then what is wrong?” Nilantha asked.

Omrad looked at her. “Oracle, if these readings are correct, then that ship is carrying at least five Tier Seven Etheric users. I can’t get an accurate reading because there is something distorting the actual scans themselves.”

“Distorting how?” Rylin asked.

Omrad shook his head. “Almost as if it is reflecting the scans back somehow. Something in the hull composition of the ship.” He looked up at Nilantha who was staring at him with wide eyes. “The readings we are getting however; they indicate the presence of at least five Tier Seven users on that ship. Very high level Tier Seven users Oracle.”

Nilantha looked at him while Loras stared at her. “You are certain Omrad?” She asked.

Omrad nodded his head. “Yes. I’m detecting an additional four that would rate a Tier Six Level, but definitely five Tier Seven users.”

Loras hadn’t taken her eyes off of Nilantha and she turned slightly to face her. “What is the significance of this Nilantha?” She asked quickly. “What does it mean?”

Nilantha met her eyes. “It can mean only one thing.” She stated softly. “That ship is carrying members of the *Mard Revik’s* family on it.”

“How do you know this?” Loras gasped.

Nilantha met her gaze. “When I had Rylin configure the variables of Etheric conversion I had her add an additional level to the Six Tiered level system that the Union uses. Tier Seven is this new level. Most of the *Mark Revik’s* family cannot be considered Tier Six any longer. They are the only ones who would register at this new level given their power and skill. The *Mard Revik* himself and the *Tarivuos*, especially Androcles, they would not even register on any known scale now. They have reached far beyond any configurable measuring system.”

“What does this mean?” Loras asked.

Nilantha looked at her. “This... this centers around your son Loras.” She spoke. “That much I am able to sense. He is involved somehow. Can you contact him?”

Loras reached to her belt without hesitation and pulled out the small data pad and handed it to Omrad. “This has his personal communicator frequency on it.” She told him. “But it is only short range. He would contact me when he entered the system to let me know he was home. It will not work beyond the boundaries of this system. It is secure and no one can trace it.” Loras told her. “He is not in the system Nilantha. He is weeks away at this planet Ventori. He could... he could not...”

“Frequency locked!” Omrad exclaimed causing Loras’s head to snap around and look at him.

“What?” She almost shouted. “How is that possible?”

“Incoming response!” Taris barked from her station. “Transmission is secure Oracle. It is originating from that ship and it is synced with a holo-transmission!”

Nilantha looked at Loras and smiled, her bright emerald green eyes twinkling in the light. “Perhaps there is more to your son than I first thought Loras Ranev. Taris... please insure the communication cannot be tracked. We do not know what things Osrod has up his sleeve and he cannot find out about this. Not yet.”

“Already done Oracle.” Taris answered. “I have...”

The holo communications disc to the right of Taris sprang to life causing all of them to react with shock. The Coalition had not yet discovered holographic transmission technology and the Holo Discs on Nilantha ship had remained dormant for thousands of years.

Until now.

They could only watch in awe as the head and shoulders of the petite, red haired female appeared in the transmission, shimmered slightly and then cleared instantly. Nilantha was the one to gasp in shock, her hands

going to her face as the incredible, jade green colored eyes of the woman in the transmission focused on her and grew wider.

“*Son vada carians!*” Nilantha muttered softly causing Loras to look at her.

“Nilantha?” She gasped as she gripped her arms tightly. “What is it?”

“*Vada tryn gelleenat!*” Nilantha gasped. (The Fiery Queen.) “The *Gelleenat* the *Mard Revik* covets most after his *Anome*.”

“You know her?” Loras asked in surprise.

Nilantha shook her head. “Only... only what the Archives tell me.” She answered. She turned to Omrad. “Why is there no sound Omrad?”

“The Communications relays are syncing the audio now Oracle.” Omrad answered. “They have never synced with such an advanced relay before.”

Nilantha nodded as she turned back to the screen. “Pralor technology, yes.” She spoke holding tightly to Loras’ hand. She could see the surprise on the face of the beautiful female in the transmission as she looked at Nilantha from her ship. Nilantha did not know her name, only that the Queen with fiery red hair was the Queen that the archives foretold the *Mard Revik* yearned for most after his raven haired *Anome*. A female who was a turned wolf, but was more powerful than any female Alpha residing on Jetania right now with the possible exception of Loras Raney, who had not yet realized her own power. The Archives on her ship spoke of the Fiery One with red hair, filled with such intense compassion, yet equally or more fearsome when aroused in anger. The Archives spoke of each of the Queens, the raven haired *Anome* and most lethal of the *Mard Revik*’s beloved Queens; the pair of serene elven Queens with supreme intelligence and grace; the vampiric Queen with superior skills and devotion to her husband and fellow Queens and then the half breed Queen, so skilled and quiet. The most dangerous one if pushed. Nilantha had studied them all yet now one stood before her, and it was like a dream.

“Audio synced!” Omrad exclaimed.

Nilantha watched as the red haired Queen moved closer before she had a chance to speak.

“To say this is a complete surprise would not be entirely accurate at this moment.” Anja spoke from *SPARTAN ONE*. “Perhaps you could enlighten me as to how a Darastrixi female is standing with Lycavorians?”

Nilantha’s eyes grew wide. “You... you know what species I am?” She gasped aloud.

Anja nodded her head. “Oh yes.” She replied quickly. They watched Anja turn to the young woman who appeared next to her and took the data pad. They watched Anja’s eyes as she read what was on the pad and then look up at them once more. “What is infinitely more confusing to me right now, is how there is a Darastrixi Medium Cruiser sitting at the bottom of your northern ocean surrounded by an Etheric Void Shield.”

Omrad’s eyes went wide. “They can detect us!” He exclaimed as his hands flew over the controls before him.

“Impossible!” Rylin stammered.

Nilantha saw Anja smile as she answered. “The impossible only takes a little longer as Martin is so fond of saying.” Anja stated.

“Where... where is my son?” Loras demanded now, unable to hold back. “You have his personal communicator! Where is he? If he is injured I will...”

“Loras!” Nilantha gasped.

Anja canted her head to the side as she looked at Loras in the transmission. She was silent for a long moment as if sizing her up for something and then she spoke. “Your son is here.” She stated motioning with her hand behind her as the view of the holo-transmission expanded. Loras gasped as she saw Lazar and Rhaos now standing to the side, both of them with shackles of some kind on their wrists. Her dark eyes narrowed and cut back to Anja.

“Why are my son and Rhaos shackled like animals!? Release them this very instant or I will...!” She hissed angrily, her eyes turning to that of her wolf persona and her long wolf fangs extending.

“Loras no!” Nilantha rasped out the words.

Loras’ eyes went wide, Nilantha and Rylin both gasping in shock as Anja’s eyes changed and her dual wolf fangs burst forth. It was something none of them had ever seen before and it was certainly frightening.

“*Carians!*” Rylin almost shouted. “*Via cerleri vada saan rie vada allsknesi vorevor tya!*” (She carries the blood of the ancients within her.)

“You will do what?” Anja growled menacingly as she moved closer to the transmission point where she was. “You are in no position to make any sort of demands of me woman!” Anja snarled back at her viciously. “Your son is the one who brought us here! The men under his command attacked and butchered over a dozen Ventori Lycavorians because they were in the way! They shot my youngest son and one of my dearest friends in the *nubous* back! Then they kidnapped me and others and brought us here! We retook our ship a short time ago. You are very lucky he is not a corpse!”

“Retook the ship?” Nilantha gasped.

Loras looked at her son with wide eyes, disbelief filling her. “Lazar?” She gasped aloud.

Anja was going to turn and encourage him to speak the truth but Lazar was way ahead of her and took a few steps forward.

“It’s true mother. It was Sibot.” Lazar told her. “Father sent him out here with another mission entirely. He told me one thing, investigate these new Lycavorians and report back to him. Sibot was there to do something else. He took command of a small team of men loyal to him and they assaulted this ship. Father wanted him to capture whoever he could so that he could interrogate them.”

“*Pen toic forn un esto aer hin’mor el lon llokel bash blon!*” Loras snarled angrily at her son. (I told you to arrange an accident for that monster long ago!)

Lazar nodded his head. “*Pen pera medwaw.*” (I know mother.)

“What have you done my son?” Loras exclaimed. She turned quickly to look at Anja. “Please... my son is young and reckless and...”

Anja held up her hand. “You don’t need to make excuses for him.” She stated. “I have nine sons who are exactly the same. Your son Lazar and his friend Rhaos here actually stopped what this man Sibot was doing. He panicked however, and stole the ship we are on. Not the most intelligent of things to do since this is the King’s personal ship but that is...” Anja moved closer again in the transmission. “...That is secondary right now.” She spoke.

“Secondary?” Loras gasped. “My son is not secondary to me!”

“Perhaps not, but you have stuck your collective noses in business that has nothing to do with you and you have done so in a way that all but ensures my husband and mate will retaliate in similar fashion and believe me, that is not something you want. Our son Androcles told your fool Captain that we do not answer to you or your government. You should have listened to him and remained out of our business.”

“Son?” Loras exclaimed when she heard that name again.

“You have no sway over us, and no claim of leadership over us. My husband and mate is King of the Lycavorian Union, and only someone of our blood will ever rule! You should have left it at that and stayed away.” Anja spoke evenly while staring directly at Loras in the holo transmission. “Right now however, I am far more interested in how a member of the Darastrixi species came to be on your planet.” Anja spoke trying to remain calm. “I would also like to know how you are onboard a Darastrixi ship that your Coalition and its idiotic leader obviously does not know exists, and exactly what else might be hiding in plain sight?”

All of them looked at her as if she was insane in the way she referred to Osrod without regard. Osrod had people killed for less throughout the years, yet this tiny woman held no fear in her eyes, her manner or her action.

SPARTAN ONE

Anja stared at the women in the transmission intently. This exotic and beautiful female was a very powerful Alpha female, that much Anja could detect even from here. Her Etheric resonance was untrained and barely restrained and while no woman could ever entice her away from her fellow Queens, Anja Leonidas had to admit this woman’s beauty was stunning in every way. There was obviously a rift of some sort within this Coalition. Lazar and this woman spoke of the COLS King as if they hated him, and based on their comments there was obviously much discord within the ranks of the military and the people.

Anja knew there was a reason that Martin and their family agreed to this mission. While it had not taken place as they had hoped, ultimately Anja was right where they had planned for her to be. Of all his Queens,

Martin trusted Aricia and Anja the most when it came to unknown situations such as this. Not because of their diplomatic skill, for Dysea and For'mya were far better diplomats, but because Aricia and Anja had an uncanny knack for reading people and their wolf instincts were almost never wrong. Anja had spent many years reading Lycavorian and Spartan history, and with Aricia's constant help and guidance since Seanna's death she had trained herself to let her wolf instincts take over and guide her in so many things. It had also forged a unique bond between Aricia, her and For'mya. When combined with the intense training and tools she had acquired as a Navy SEAL officer all those years ago, Anja and Aricia Leonidas were the perfect agents for this type of mission. For'mya had been doing this as well for the last decade, and this was the reason the three of them worked so flawlessly together.

Nilantha stepped closer beside Loras now. "*Forn wen gelleenat un vada Mard Revik?*" She asked in fluent Lycavorian. (You are Queen to the True King.)

Anja nodded her head slowly before choosing her words very carefully. The Darastrixi woman's fluency in their language came as a surprise because, of all the Darastrixi she had met and interacted with these last weeks, only Laren Ti-Shara had the gift of their language with such perfection.

"*Jainn. Aur sha coi Anja Leonidas. Pen brol ared rie berim gelleenats.*" Anja tilted her head to the side again. (Yes. My name is Anja Leonidas. I am one of six Queens.)

"*Vada tryn gelleenat.*" Nilantha spoke the name once more. "The one whose disposition matches the color of her hair. And the one who is the finest healer in all the universe."

"How do you know that? And why do you call Martin the True King?"

"Martin?" Nilantha whispered the word almost reverently. "This... this is his name?"

"Martin Leonidas." Anja spoke in reply. "Yes. Who are you, and how do you know about us?"

"You... you know of my species?" Nilantha asked. "How is this possible?"

Anja blinked several times unsure of how much to tell her, but she quickly decided that truth was what they needed now. "We have had the Darastrixi among the Lycavorian Union for almost three decades now. The *Vrrarhoinpa* caste. We did not discover there was a *Jiilhoinsa* caste until we met the *Doraanar* Sarlana on Manne. We..."

"A *Doraanar!*" Nilantha almost shouted.

Anja nodded her head. "Sarlana. Yes. It was she who explained what our sons Androcles and Dorian are. What Laren Ti-Shara is."

"The *Lorsvek ar Sepas.*" Nilantha said in almost a whisper. "Then it is true. Everything is so true. They are so much more than *Tarivuos*. They are the *Dahakoan* reborn!"

Anja nodded her head seeing the animated expression on her face. "Given what we have seen our sons and Laren do recently, most of us are hard pressed to deny it I suppose." Anja said honestly.

Nilantha took a deep breath, having waited millennia for this day to come. It was upon her now, before she was fully prepared for it, but she needed to adapt and insure everything took place.

"My full name is Nilantha Ma'Carr." She began to speak. "Yes, I am Darastrixi as you can see. I was sent here as the Oracle to this Seed Mission of Lycavorians by the spirit of Dadrien of the Mountain."

Anja stepped even closer to the transmission. "Dadrien!" She gasped in surprise.

"I know of the True King and the *Tarivuos*, the Heralds, because of him and because of the Pralor Sumar." Nilantha continued knowing that this would definitely have a reaction and she was not disappointed.

"What do you know of Sumar?" Anja demanded as her wolf eyes grew even wider. "How is it possible that you... who are you?"

Nilantha smiled knowing that the time had now come. "I have spoken to both of them." She stated calmly. "They told me that you would be coming. They told me that the *Tarivuos* would be coming. They told me that *Vada Mard Revik* was coming, and everything as we knew it would then change. They told this to me many millennia ago and I have been waiting for the day when you would arrive. When he would arrive. We all have."

"*Saoi sibfla!*" Anja gasped aloud. "Martin was right... crazy does follow us around."

Nilantha couldn't help herself now and the tears came forth as she burst into laughter. Loras looked at her like she was crazy to laugh in a situation like this and Nilantha squeezed her hand. Nilantha got control of her laughter quickly however and she looked at Anja in the transmission. "From your reaction, I assume that you are still discovering things as you go." She spoke. "Ever since you arrived here in the Echo Quadrant."

Anja looked at her in the transmission. "You seem to know an awful lot about us." Anja spoke.

"I am no enemy to you Anja Leonidas, and I could never be an enemy to the *Dahakoan*." Nilantha answered her. "If you know of my people, if you know a *Doraanar*, then you know it is not within my blood. They are *Dahakoan* and they are the Heralds for... for your husband and mate. *Vada Mard Revik*."

Anja looked at her. "Why should I believe anything you have to say?" Anja finally asked.

Nilantha smiled and looked at Loras. She squeezed her hand tightly and pulled her closer to her body. "Because what you seek is here on Jetania Anja Leonidas." She answered her. "I know what you are looking for. I know what the *Mard Revik* is looking for. What he has always been looking for even though he did not know it."

"And what is that?" Anja asked.

"The Mountain of Stone and Light." Nilantha replied seeing Anja's wolf eyes go even wider. "*Vada Dirrie Hal for Saar*."

VENTORI DISCOVERY BASE ADHOC COMMAND CENTER

"...Said that?" Martin asked the transmission of Anja from the holodisc. Her entire figure was visible within the transmission sitting on one of the couches with Retta beside her and though no one else detected it, Martin, Aricia and For'mya did. Her petite body was relaxed and calm and they could tell just from her motions that she was in control and not worried about her current position. Retta was the same way as she sat beside her and this only reinforced what they felt from Anja.

Anja nodded her head. "It about floored me too Lover." She spoke in reply. "We spoke for nearly an hour before I ended it and told her I would speak with you and then decide what to do."

"*Koppentotz Aviel*?" Androcles spoke now turning to the second holo transmission that was active in the Command Center. Delnash was in the third transmission and remaining silent at the moment with Avatar 27 beside him. Laren and Sadi sat on either side of Andro, while Dorian, Dynina, Jezima and Gorgo sat to Laren's left. Ne'Veha, and the others sat behind Sadi and Andro while Sheva and Onera sat just behind Dorian. Danny, Aricia, For'mya were seated on the opposite side of the table with Helen, Wayonn, Kasdan and Murano. Deion, Eliani, Lisisa and Denali stood along the only wall not covered in computer stations.

"Dalis is searching other databanks that we have on our ships *Dahakoan* Androcles, but the amount of data is massive. My people are, to be blunt, we are overly retentive, and we keep detailed records of nearly everything. So far the only *Darastrixi* that we can find with the name Nilantha Ma'Carr was a Junior Intern for the *Livaiji Sulevfu*. Her entry date into the *Livaiji Sulevfu* Academy is listed as nearly three hundred and twenty-eight thousand years ago."

"That fits with how old she says she is." Anja spoke from the transmission.

"She was nineteen at the time," Aviel continued. "...And for her to be accepted at such an age she must have been very special."

"Must have been?" Aricia spoke now looking at him in the transmission.

Aviel nodded his head. "She is listed as having been killed in a transport accident thirty years after her entrance *Daariv* Aricia. She would have been considered still a child by all accounts. A baby really." (Queen in *Darastrixi*)

Aricia turned back to look at Martin. "*Cukim*?" She asked. (Coincidence)

"*Tis duan nathos? Joa shyos*." Martin answered. (In our family? No way)

"*Aretor*." For'mya echoed with a smile. (Agreed)

“She was put there by someone.” Dynina spoke now looking at Martin as her eyes grew wider in realization.

Sarlana nodded her head now. “By someone who obviously was influenced by Dadrien.”

“This is all before Sumar’s time Martin.” Jezima spoke now. Jezima had refused to return to Honelze, unwilling to leave her grandson just yet. Meral had returned to continue to run their business on Honelze but also to get to know the three Queens of her nephew that remained on Honelze and were helping to prepare its defenses.

Dynina nodded her head in agreement. “Yes, it is.” She spoke now. “How could this Darastrixi woman know all of this?”

“Because it is not before Dadrien’s time Martin, and it is apparent now that even within the afterlife, he had far more influence on events that have taken place than what we truly know or have believed.” Sarlana spoke now as she moved gracefully into the Command Center.

Andro rose instantly and motioned for her to take his seat. Sarlana smiled at him and did so, immediately taking Sadi’s hand in hers as she settled down into the chair. She may have been Darastrixi but Sarlana had quickly taken note of how those among Martin’s command and the Ventori Lycavorians treated her. She was looked upon with the same awe and respect as Helen as the *Feravomir* of their people and Arzoal as the Dragon Elder Mother. This treatment did not sit well with her but Sarlana knew that there was little she could do to stop it. However, with Sadi and Ne’Veha and Andro’s wives and mates, with Dorian’s wives Sheva and Onera, Sarlana felt normal. And she adored being around all of them.

Martin nodded his head. “Yeah, I am beginning to see that.” He said in reply as Sarlana got comfortable at the table. “I also get the feeling that there was more to Dadrien than what the Darastrixi knew.”

Sarlana nodded her head in agreement. “So do I.” She spoke. “He obviously had a much higher command of the Etheric realm than anyone ever knew. His history before the *Onkmet* Darastrixi were wiped out is not well known and very little written history existed about him until he became our leader.”

“What about the *Onkmet* dragons themselves *Doraanar*?” Dorian asked.

Aviel shook his head from within the transmission and answered for her. “Again, very little was known about them *Dahakoan* Dorian. As Sarlana has already told you, they were the most reclusive of Darastrixi breeds and they...” Aviel stopped talking as he began thinking.

Sarlana looked at him. “Aviel?” She asked. “What is it?”

Aviel shook his head quickly. “I would need to speak with Dytin to be sure, but I am sure that I read something about the *Onkmet* as a boy that would indicate a much more evolved connection to this Etheric Realm that you speak of. It may explain, at least somewhat, why the *Dahakoan* of Dadrien’s time were able to do what they could do when no other Darastrixi alive could.”

“You are speaking of their abilities *Koppentotz* Aviel?” Laren asked now.

Aviel nodded his head. “Yes Laren. Before Dadrien formed the *Dahakoan*, no Darastrixi had ever been able to manipulate the Etheric realm before. We knew it existed, we believed in it because we saw the Pralor people using it so often, but up until the *Dahakoan* were formed as I said, no Darastrixi of either caste ever exhibited these skills. They could not manipulate it as you and the others King Martin, and correct me if I am wrong, the skills they did have manifest themselves from within the Etheric Realm.”

“Who chose the first *Dahakoan*?” Andro asked now.

“Dadrien of course.” Aviel answered.

“Precognition? The ability to sense others like them? To speak within the Etheric Realm? These are all rudimentary Etheric skills, yes.” Helen spoke now.

“But yet we had these abilities. Even from before I became a dragon, those Darastrixi on Elear had these abilities. I would not have been able to do what I did if they didn’t.” Arzoal spoke now from where she rested in the nearby pen with the two dozen adolescent dragons who had come from Manne to reinforce those already here. Since she was outside the building she wore one of the devices that Kasdan had developed for the dragons on Artaaya and her voice carried through the internal COM units in the Command Center.

Aviel looked at Martin. “My point exactly Elder Mother.” He stated having spent much time with Arzoal over these last days learning about her history and what she had accomplished. Needless to say he had never been more impressed by anyone’s history and he now looked at Arzoal in a new light of respect and partial awe.

Martin looked at Delnash in the transmission. “Chief Elder, the Pralor people were huge explorers and you have charted far more star systems than any of us.”

Delnash nodded his head. “Most of that information was lost with the destruction of our homeworld but yes.”

“In all of those explorations, who besides the Pralor people, Lycavorians and vampires, and now obviously the Darastrixi that were part of the Seed Mission to Elear, who else are naturally born with Etheric ability that you have come across?” Martin asked him.

Delnash shook his head from his office. “None that I am aware of Martin. Not unless one of our kind granted this ability to others or those that your people have turned as you call it.”

Martin turned to Sarlana now. “Who chose the dragons that went on the seed mission with you Sarlana?”

“I do not know.” Sarlana answered in almost a whisper. “The selection process was very secret and only a few within the *UrIkrisir Mamiss* knew who the candidates were until they were chosen.”

Martin looked at Androcles and saw his son’s eyes upon him. They were thinking the same thing he knew.

[You know?] Martin spoke to his son.

Androcles nodded his head slowly, everyone in the room realizing that father and son were speaking to one another in a shielded conversation that no one would ever be able to breach unless they allowed it. *[His last physical descendant is among those who are chosen to go to Elear.]* Andro spoke now. *[And the Elder Mother just happens to chose that egg to transfer her consciousness too?]*

[What are the chances of that happening do you think keto?] Martin asked.

[Without a guiding hand of some sort... slim to none father.] Andro answered.

[Yeah, my thoughts exactly.] Martin spoke. *[It is being driven.]* Martin said evenly. *[All of it. Everything that has happened through the millennia has taken place for a reason.]*

[For what purpose father?] Andro asked. *[And by who?]*

[Dadrien is only one part of it Andro. He was the last surviving Winter dragon, he chose or guided those who chose the dragons to go to Elear] Martin answered him. *[These things happened too far apart in both time and space for him to effect all of it. Sumar is another part, but there are still unanswered questions concerning him as well. The question remains who?]*

“Martin?” Anja spoke from within her transmission. “What’s wrong Lover?”

Martin shook his head and looked at her. “Nothing.” He answered quickly. “I was just thinking.”

Anja did not press him on the subject for she knew he would share it with Aricia, For'mya and her when they were alone.

“So what is our play then?” Anja asked.

Sarlana looked at Anja in the transmission. “Was she clear in whom she spoke of Anja?”

Anja nodded her head quickly. “Oh yes, she was very specific in stating that Dadrien was the one who began her on this path. She only met Sumar etherically and that was not until much later.”

Sarlana looked at Martin now. “That would explain why it is a Darastrixi ship we are detecting and not a Pralor ship.”

“A Darastrixi ship with Pralor technology Sarlana.” Martin interjected.

Sarlana nodded her head. “Which indicates that Dadrien had already contacted and was working with the Pralor people.”

“Which is amazing given that Avatar 27 can find no instance in our entire history where an exchange of technology took place with the Darastrixi.” Delnash spoke once more. “The Teleporter, the Etheric Sensor Grid, these were things that we shared with no one Martin. Hardly anyone outside of our military, as small as it was, knew of them. And the Etheric Void Shield was still only in a theoretical stage when the first Scourge War began.”

“Did Sumar know of it?” Martin asked.

Delnash nodded his head. “As Chief Elder of course he did.” Delnash asked. “But by the time he became Chief Elder the project had been long abandoned because of the need for those assets to go towards our war with the Scourge.”

“The readings from your ship indicate that it is a much older class Darastrixi vessel King Martin.” Kenroe spoke now moving up beside Aviel. “Approximately two hundred and fifty-six thousand years old. It is still in pristine condition for such an old ship, which tells me it has not seen any action of any prolonged kind.”

“Perhaps because it built exactly for this particular mission.” For'mya spoke now. “To come here with the Pralor Seed Mission of these Lycavorians and park itself at the bottom of the ocean. This technology was obviously integrated into this ship completely. That takes time and personnel. *Melyanna*... she did tell you the Lycavorians on that planet do not know that she is Darastrixi, yet they refer to her as Oracle?”

Anja nodded her head. “Yes. A few know what she is according to her, but that number is miniscule when compared to the population of the planet, and she really only truly revealed that to others in the last few millennia.”

“What is the population Anja?” Aricia asked.

“Upwards of sixteen billion here.” Anja answered. “The planet, Jetania, is roughly the same size as Apo Prime. Eighty-seven major cities that we have scanned, with an equal number of large and modern settlements in the many Mountain Ranges. Hundreds of smaller settlements across the planet, but all of them modern for the most part. It is nowhere near as populated as Apo Prime, which is surprising to some degree, considering how long they have been here.” Anja leaned forward. “From intercepted COMS we have been able to determine that there are nine large colonies on other worlds within the system itself, and if the population numbers are even semi accurate, there are an additional twenty-four billion total among those nine cities, at least by the last census this Coalition had on record. So forty billion total. Mari was able to crack their low level history archives with little trouble. Their technology is slightly better than what we have seen on their ships, but it appears they have just not got around to integrating it into their fleet.”

Deion's face beamed at this news from where he stood beside his brother and Emylea. All of them had taken notice of how she had clung to his arm when they entered the Command Center, yet no one would question him or her about it, or the fact that Emylea's blood now carried his scent as well as Mari's within it. They would announce this when they felt the time was right, but it would essentially free Namiri and Androcles of having to maintain the façade that they were showing and allow Namiri and Byron to fully be open about what they now felt for one another. And the one who would soon join them much to their own shock but delighted surprise.

Helen nodded her head. “The numbers match up relatively speaking.” She spoke now. “They were obviously here before the Ventori Lycavorians, so a population of this size does reflect how prolifically our people breed.”

Martin looked at Anja in the transmission. “The Alphas from Ventori went there Red?” He asked.

Anja nodded once more. “That is what she told me. Many were not happy about it from what she says, but they were misled by this fool Osrod's great grandfather.” She replied. “They thought they would be free to return to Ventori after learning new skills and technology in order to advance their own lives and those of the Betas and Gammas they left behind. It was done very hush, hush Lover. Taken from Ventori in the night.”

“Which would explain why Nalmos and the others say they just up and disappeared.” Martin said.

Anja nodded her head. “Yes.” She leaned forward. “They obviously thought the Betas and other castes would die out over time without Alpha leadership.”

Martin shook his head quickly. “Not with the caliber of leaders like Nalmos and the other Justices that were chosen. They jumped in almost immediately and kept that from happening.” He commented.

“Martin, let me go there.” Anja spoke now as she looked at him. “This Darastrixi woman Nilantha has guaranteed our safety among the other things she has told us. She has kept the ship she is on hidden for thousands of years and nothing this Coalition has that we have seen so far in the way of technology could begin to detect it. This may well be a chance to discover things we never knew about our people and your history Lover.”

“I'm not willing to put you, our children or our family at risk for my history Red.” Martin said quickly. “No matter how important it is. Not to mention that there is obviously some sort of internal political discord between the Packs on that planet. I don't want to get involved in that. That could get really messy really quickly.”

“I'll go anyway.” Anja told him. “You know that.”

“*Sibfla* Red!” Martin snapped. “It's too dangerous and once you are on the planet COMS will be...”

“Three days.” Anja spoke. “Give me three days and if we don’t respond every day at predetermined times you can come rushing to my rescue. You know I like it when you sweep me off my feet.”

“Anja...” Martin snapped once more. “This...”

“She is right *staaniketo*.” Dynina spoke softly.

Martin looked at her now stunned. “*Staania*... you are the one who chewed my ass for letting her go in the first place!” He spoke exasperated.

Dynina nodded her head. “And as you correctly pointed out to me, I was being driven by my own experiences with them, my dislike of them and what was attempted with me. All of which was unpleasant. This is an opportunity that we never had Martin. And it may reveal more answers to the questions we already have. Maybe about the temple on Lorenu.”

“*Fervon*, we are forgetting that these *midaeus* knew what they were doing.” Danny spoke now. “They knew who they wanted to take and it wasn’t any of the Ventori Lycavorians. It was our people.”

“Daniel is correct Martin.” Murano entered the conversation now.

“Which begs the question how they knew?” Sadi spoke now.

Sarlana nodded in agreement. “Indeed.”

Dynina looked at Martin now. “That well may be our fault.” She spoke.

Martin looked at her now. “*Staania*?”

“I have told you that several hundred of their people left with us after our first and only encounter with them.” Dynina said.

“Yeah.” Martin said.

“We left a dozen couples there as well Martin. Hidden among those we made friends with.” Kenroe spoke now. “With the equipment to relay reports to us on Lorenu.”

“I’m not going to like this am I?” Martin spoke.

“Eighteen months after we left, they stopped reporting back to us.” Dynina told him calmly. “Given how events turned out and ended between myself and Osrod’s grandfather, we assumed that they had been discovered and killed. The last orders given by the COLS military over the channels we were monitoring as we left the system were that any of us captured were to be executed immediately. Perhaps... perhaps this is not the case.”

“You never attempted to find out Dynina?” Aricia asked her.

Dynina shook her head slowly in shame. “No. I did not want to risk a larger confrontation between us. As it turned out, I was correct because when we tried to move to Ventori to assist them after the Svorag attacked, COLS ships intervened and forced us to turn back. Perlae told you of this?”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.” He answered remembering what Perlae had recounted to him when he had first spoken to her.

“Do you think they survived *Staania*?” Androcles asked now.

“I do not know. However, if they did survive, it could then account for what limited knowledge that they do have on us.” Dynina spoke in reply.

“What did they know?” Martin asked.

Dynina shook her head. “They were mated couples. Most of them were engineers or doctors and such. Kenroe and the others had not begun the intense schooling that all of those on Lorenu go through now, but their knowledge was far more than what COLS had at the time. This could explain how they have advanced so rapidly in the last few decades and how they built the sensor array that would detect our use of the Portal Generators.”

“If that is the case, how are they not more advanced then?” Martin said.

“Simple.” Dynina answered. “Resources. No matter what they may have learned from those we left behind, they did not have the resources to build such things. At least not to the same level as what we had at the time.”

“They also did not have the advantage of Sumar and the other Pralors integrating into their society as those on Lycavore did Martin.” This caused Martin and the others to turn and look at him. “Had Sumar not done what he did, society on your homeworld might not have advanced much past what this Coalition is now.” Delnash spoke from his holo link.

“The Ion storm and Lorendo’s actions forced us there Delnash.” Wayonn added quickly.

“Did they?” Delnash questioned causing all eyes and heads to look at him. “I have given this much thought over these last few weeks Martin.”

“Go on sir.” Martin told him glancing at Andro once more and seeing the same look that told him Delnash was thinking like they were.

“What we have learned up until now, what we are still learning, who is to say this was not all part of whoever was directing this plan? Are you not the one who likes to think outside the box as you say Martin? All of you do this. I am only just starting to think this way myself and having Avatar 27 with me has only made this easier. There are far too many coincidences for this to be just random acts throughout the millennia Martin.”

Martin nodded his head. “That is a scary thought Delnash, but I agree with you.” He said in reply.

“It is scary yes, but given what we know now, all of it seems to be directed at one thing in some way, shape or form.” Delnash said.

“The Scourge.” Andro whispered the name.

Delnash nodded his head in agreement. “Yes, Androcles. They are on the peripheral of this in every way, but what we have discovered so far seems to be directed at giving us the means to confronting them on more equal terms. The fact that the Praetorian gene, as rare as it is, was passed from those among Sumar’s ship and into the Lycavorians and even the vampires. That is something that none of us ever considered. In essence, and I am sure Murano will agree with me on this, in doing what Sumar and Wayonn and others did, integrating into Lycavorian population as they did, they created a different breed of Praetorian. A better and more powerful breed.”

Murano nodded his head. “This is true.”

“Are you saying that Sumar himself knew these things before all of this began?” Martin spoke.

Delnash nodded his head. “How else would he have known just when to send Dynina and the others away? How would he have known to contact the Darastrixi and Pralors, who were obviously already working at Dadrien’s direction, and have them send ships to Lycavore? Now we have discovered what Androcles, Dorian and Laren truly are? It seems to be...” Delnash stopped for a moment and Martin turned to face him fully.

“Brother?” Murano spoke now. “Speak what is on your mind.”

Delnash looked up at his brother in the transmission and then at Martin. “It seems as if someone is trying to unite our three species in some way Martin. Dynina and those with her are the largest sign of this. Ten thousand from each of our species that no one ever knew about except Sumar and Dadrien. They have come together, lived and worked together for thousands of years now. It is as if... to me at least, it is as if someone is attempting to atone for some sort of imagined mistakes they committed and this is their way of doing so. Bringing together the only three species in known history that ever resisted the Scourge and were successful.”

“Now that is an even scarier thought.” Anja chimed in.

“I agree Anja.” Delnash spoke softly. “But what if it is... what if it is true?”

“You are speaking of the Onab Delnash.” Wayonn said.

Delnash looked at him. “Maybe Wayonn.” He answered honestly. “I just don’t know. My people had more interaction with them when they existed but even that was limited in many ways. They were even more reclusive than how Aviel and the others describe these *Onkmet* dragons as being. We don’t really know what the Onab were capable of as a species. They were technological geniuses, that much we do know. They were the ones who helped us to develop and then build the Psionic Transference Chambers like the one Arzoal used. Like the one we used to punish Xaxon after what he did. This piece of equipment was not standard issue for Seed Missions Martin, yet there was one on Elear. And Arzoal discovered it.”

This brought everyone in the three locations to total silence as they contemplated what Delnash had said. Many ideas and scenarios were running through so many different minds that no one would have been able to keep up with it. It was the smallest of them that broke the silence after several long and reflective moments.

“We don’t really know what knowledge COLS has?” Anja stated from *SPARTAN ONE*. “Which is why we need to do this Lover.”

Martin looked at her intently and then turned to Aricia and For'mya first, both of them nodding their heads immediately. He looked at Danny and he nodded after a moment. He turned to Androcles, his oldest son and perhaps the one-person Martin Leonidas relied upon more than even his wives and mates and his brother, and Andro nodded as well. Finally, he turned to look at Dynina, Jezima, Dasha and his mother. All four women grasped each other’s hands and they nodded their heads. Martin looked back to Anja in the transmission.

“I don’t like it Red.” Martin told her.

Anja nodded in response to his words. “I know Lover.” She told him with a loving voice. “But you also know it has to be done. I will be careful Martin. I will not do anything that will risk our family, you know that.”

Martin nodded after a moment. “The first check in you miss, I’m coming for you Anja.” Martin told her. “And I won’t be coming to shake hands and kiss babies.”

Anja Leonidas had to smile where she was sitting. It was one of the many things that she and her fellow Queens all adored about Martin so much. He worshiped all of them and he made no bones about it. They belonged to him and since For'mya returned to them, he would allow no one to stand between him and his wives and mates.

“I know Lover.” Anja told him. “And that makes my hormones giddy.” She told him with a twinkle in her jade green eyes, causing Martin to blush slightly even under his dark tan. “Use Delta Protocols if you want Lover, but you and Andro and the others go to Lorenu and find out about this temple. Everything we have talked about right now seems to start at this temple. Find out what is there and then come here.”

Martin met her gaze. “You’re certain?”

Anja nodded her head. “Nothing is ever certain, but I am pretty sure this Nilantha and those with her are not our enemies.”

“And if you are wrong Anja?” Aricia asked her.

“Then we will put a hurting on them and E&E until you get here.” Anja responded with confidence. “Between Kalis, Tir’ut, Radem and Zarah and Lucia, we have more than enough power and skill to clean house short term if need be.”

Martin knew that to be true and he glanced at Androcles with a nod. It was his idea to send Kalis, Tir'ut and Radem and wherever Radem went Zarah and Lucia went with him. Between the five of them and the power and skill they could bring to bear if needed Martin felt secure. When you added Mari’s astounding computer skills and Normya’s piloting skills they had nearly every facet covered. Martin turned back to Anja. “Go with it Red.” He spoke now.

Anja nodded her head. “If I call you’ll come running right?”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “With guns blazing. You know that.”

Anja beamed as she nodded her head. “I will see you in three days Lover.” She spoke. “Aricia, you and For'mya keep him under control.” She said looking at her.

Aricia smiled and nodded her head. “You know we will.”

Anja took a deep breath and nodded once more. “Ok. *SPARTAN ONE* is clear. Seeya soon.”

Martin watched as the transmission ended and he instantly turned to Danny who had risen to his feet in preparation of the order he knew his brother would give. “Delta Protocols *fervon*.” Martin spoke quickly. “Two ships. Have Manda pick them, but they need to have ground support capabilities. She’ll know what to send. You give the orders though.”

Danny was nodding his head and was already moving for the door. “I’m on it.” He replied.

Martin turned to Dynina. “*Staanina* how long to install one of these Portal Generators aboard Andro’s ship?”

Dynina looked at the active transmission with Aviel and Kenroe in it. “Kenroe?” She asked.

Kenroe shook his head. “A few hours at most, especially with the Worker Drones helping to align the matrix.”

Martin turned to look at his son but he was already lifting his hand to his jaw and he tapped the implant under his skin. “Armen?”

-I have been monitoring Androcles- He answered instantly. -I will make whatever they need available as soon as they come on board-

Andro nodded and looked at his father. “What about the ones we have outside father?” He asked. “They are being held near Pad Three.”

Martin nodded and exhaled heavily. “I can’t hold them all responsible for what happen.” He spoke. “And Red has the *midaeus* who actually conducted the attack. We...”

Martin looked up as Danny stuck his head and shoulders back into the Command Center. “*Fervon...* Nubian and her team just landed.”

Everyone saw Martin’s eyes narrow intensely and he nodded his head. “Take him to where the others are being held. He belongs to me.” Martin growled as he began heading for the exit.

Everyone in the room began rising to their feet to follow him, Gorgo and Dasha reaching out to stop Jezima from following. She looked at them puzzled.

“Jezima...” Gorgo spoke softly. “Perhaps it would be best if...”

Jezima shook her head quickly. “I will not.” She said firmly. “He is my blood. Would Sumar have dealt with this man any differently after he joined your people?”

Gorgo and Dasha looked at Dynina now and she shook her head slowly. “If someone had assaulted Sateia in this way... there would have been no mercy or respite. Not from Sumar’s wrath.” She answered.

Jezima nodded her head. “Then I will accept whatever punishment my grandson deems necessary for this foolish man who struck Anja.” Jezima spoke. “I do not fear what he is, for my blood runs within him as well Gorgo.”

Gorgo nodded her head. “Then steel yourself Jezima.” She spoke knowing exactly what her son would do for she had seen it before. “And justice will be done.”

Laon Kavar knelt on the ground in the front rank of the crew of the *MOON RUNNER*. They were gathered in the large open field not far from what was obviously a landing pad of some sort as he saw two different types of aircraft resting on the pad there. Incredibly advanced aircraft that he had never seen before in his life, much like the one that had brought him to the surface. Much of what had taken place after he was attacked by the captivating raven haired beauty on the ship was a blur. The white haired, pointy eared female with the amber colored eyes had taken charge of him. That she was not fully wolf was obvious to Laon, but the scent of the wolf blood within her was unlike anything he had ever smelled. More potent and pure than any wolf scent he had ever smelled, even Lazar’s father did not have such a scent and he was the most formidable wolf on Jetania.

The azure colored eyes of the female still haunted him though, and her deliciously sweet coca and mint scent was maddening to Laon. Never had a female affected him so, and never had he seen one so well trained and lethal. The amber eyed female and the one with Maya colored blue eyes who was not wolf had overseen his placement in a secure portion of the ship and then escorted him to the surface here. He had seen four other females on the ship as he was being brought to the surface, the jungle green eyed blond female was one of the most powerful Alpha females he had ever smelled before in his life. There was another blond with stunning blue eyes, another female with pointy ears and one with sky blue skin. All of them reeked of the scent of an Alpha male so deeply embedded in their blood that Laon could almost picture what this Alpha looked like. His mind kept returning to the azure blue eyed female wolf however, and what she made him feel and he found himself looking all around for her even in their current predicament.

The stern faces of over a hundred Lycavorians in black and crimson armor surrounded him and his crew however, and he was unable to look beyond where they were all kneeling. The armor, the weapons, the ships, Laon Kavar could not help but think they had stumbled upon something that Lazar’s father had not told them about. Whoever these Lycavorians and the other species among them were, they were vastly better trained than any Coalition forces Laon had seen in action. Their ships and equipment alone meant they were far more advanced in their technology than anything that COLS could field. Laon could detect dozens of half breeds among their ranks, yet the wolf blood within them was very dominant and even among those he could mark as Beta wolves, it was pure and potent. Laon looked at Kitas, who knelt beside him and had been part of Lazar’s ground team.

“Lazar escaped?” Laon whispered to him.

Kitas turned his head slowly and looked at him. “I don’t know. That *nubous* fool Sibot took half our security and went after one of their ships. He said he was going to take whoever was on it and bring them back to the King so that he could interrogate them. I informed Lazar and he said he would take care of it and that I

should prepare to leave.” Kitas looked at him. “They were upon us before we even knew they were there Laon. They appeared like *iquees* from the night already within our ranks.” (Ghosts)

Laon looked around at the Lycavorians around them. “It would appear that they have adapted their Stealth technology for personal use as well.” He told Kitas trying to remain calm. “It is the only explanation.”

“I don’t care about explanations!” Kitas hissed softly. “My men and I were on the ground and disarmed before I had a chance to fucking blink. Sibot went after one of their ships! What do you think they will do to us? The Officer of the Deck said one minute everything was fine, and the next people began to disappear from all over the *MOON RUNNER*. White orange flashes of light and entire groups of our crew vanished!”

“Vanished?” Laon gasped.

Kitas nodded his head. “They have some sort of teleportation system. It has to be. The *MOON RUNNER* was empty before he could send out an alert or put the shields up. Less than a minute Laon! What did Lazar get us into?”

“This is not Lazar’s fault Kitas!” Laon told him quickly. “He knew none of this! This is the King’s doing! He sent us here blind, while Sibot had his own mission!”

“They have *sinuovas* that fight with them Laon! *Sinuovas*! The same beasts from stories that we were read as children and they fight beside these Lycavorians! And they talk!” Kitas rasped out the words still not believing that he was saying it.

Laon blinked and looked at him. “Talk.” He gasped.

Kitas nodded his head. “I heard one of them speaking with those who captured us as we were exiting the ship.”

“*Carians*.” Laon whispered to himself.

“What did our fool King send us into Laon?” Kitas spat softly.

“The unknown.” The voice spoke from directly in front of them, both Kitas and Laon snapping their heads around when the two figures materialize directly in front of them squatting down on their level.

“Fuck!” Laon gasped aloud leaning back in stunned shock.

The two figures, both of them exceptionally powerful Alphas which was setting Laon’s own wolf senses on alert. Whoever they were, their aura surpassed his in a way Laon could not yet understand. His brain was working however, and Laon instantly detected the pines and lavender scent, the mint and coca scent, and he promptly made the connection. The female on the ship, she had the same scent as one of them but all three of them were tied tightly together and Laon knew instantly that these hulking men were her brothers. Laon also remembered the scent on the amber eyed female as well as the others on the ship and it radiated from this very large Lycavorian in front of him. This is the one who had claimed all six of them. The larger of the two, clearly the older one and much more thickly muscled motioned to the second male who squatted beside him. “This is *aur fervon* Deion Leonidas. I am Androcles Leonidas. Deion is the twin brother of the female wolf you rudely pulsed with your aura on our ship. She is our sister you see.” Androcles spoke evenly. “We are very protective of our sister, especially Deion here.”

Laon never saw it coming and Deion’s fist connected with his jaw like a sledgehammer, rocking his head back painfully and knocking him over onto the ground. He bit his tongue viciously and Laon felt warm blood splash across his taste buds. Laon Kavar was a powerful and proud Alpha however, and he twisted his body on the ground, quickly rising back to his knees even as the pain washed over his head. He had not been hit that hard in his entire life and he knew he was going to feel it. His fangs burst forth and his eyes changed to that of his wolf persona as he turned back to Androcles and Deion, but he knew instantly it was the wrong thing to do.

“Foolish.” Androcles said and then his fist snapped out and smashed into Laon’s cheek with even greater power and his entire upper body spun around, his eyes exploding with bright stars all around and he was barely able to maintain consciousness. No one was in a position to help him or break his fall and he hit the ground hard enough to have a small cloud of dust erupt from around him.

“Andro! Deo! *Joa cova!*” The female voice barked out and Kitas turned his head quickly to see the young, and exquisitely beautiful raven haired Alpha female with azure colored eyes move between the two large Alpha wolves. She was an Alpha female herself Kitas took note and she imposed her body between the two Alphas and Laon. Kitas immediately smelled their relation and he looked up at them as they rose to stare at her.

[Arande?] Andro spoke to Nara as she put her hands on their chests. He sniffed her scent gently and both his and Deion's eyes grew a little wider. Deion stepped closer to his twin and Nara smiled happily as she felt his brother's aura wash over her.

[Nara you have... your blood no longer burns... you have... you have claimed her!] Deion gasped.

[Jacina?!] Andro gasped now stepping closer to her as Deion had done and Nara couldn't help but bask in the love of her twin and older brother.

[It... it was glorious Deion!] Nara told him happily. *[I was helpless after this fool...]* Nara turned to see Kitas and another trying to assist Laon back to his knees. She turned back to her brothers and both Deion and Andro noticed that her azure colored eyes, identical to their mother and Andro's, were bright and clear and focused. *[We were meant for each other Andro.]* Nara continued looking at her older brother. *[Jacina felt it too. From the moment we met. When he... when he...]*

Andro reached up and cupped her cheek in his hand, Nara smiling as both of them pulsed her with their auras. *[You do not need to explain it to anyone sister.]* Andro told her. *[Least of all to Deion and I.]*

Nara looked at him, her identical azure eyes gleaming and bright. *[This man is... let me deal with this fervor. He is different Andro. And he affects both Jacina and I. She could feel it too after I showed her how to...]*

Andro shook his head. *[Nara enough... we do not need to know how or why. Only that it is.]* He told her.

[Avoi.] Deion said leaning over to nuzzle her cheek firmly and hearing Nara giggle in delight as her twin's aura floated all around her and danced across her senses. *[Do what you will sister, but be sure. Both of you.]*

Nara nodded her head and took their hands. *[Trust in me.]*

Andro smiled at her. *[Always.]*

[I will take care of this fool.] Nara said.

Andro and Deion nodded and Andro turned to look at Jomann who stood a few feet away with a look of approval on his face. Eliani and Brendi stood on either side of their beloved husband and mate, an equal look of approval on their faces.

"This one Jomann." Andro spoke now. "And the one beside him. They are officers. Make sure they are separated from the others when father is done."

Jomann nodded his head. "Done."

Nara turned slowly, her azure eyes falling on where Jacina stood between Sadi and Ne'Veha, holding their hands tightly. It had taken place so quickly and so completely that in truth it had stolen their breath away.

Jacina met Nara's gaze from across the short distance and her smile held nothing but love and adoration. Jacina had taken Nara back to the main cabin of the *PREMONITION* to get her away from the male who had affected her so. At the time she had no idea what had taken place between them, but these last days with Nara Leonidas had been unlike any in her young life. Jacina was over three hundred years older than Nara, but to her it felt as if they were two buds of the same plant. What they had in common had stunned her beyond anything she had ever experienced and even in the first hours after they had met, Jacina had felt her emotions and connection to this exquisite woman growing stronger by the minute. They had not been apart since they had met, and slowly Jacina had felt that connection grow into desire. A deep and powerful desire that threatened to sweep her away at times. She could not explain it, only that it had felt glorious from the outset.

In the main cabin of the ship she had held Nara close to her while she shook in her arms, the vibrations of her body lessening somewhat as the minutes passed, but this only served to increase Jacina's own desire. Jacina did not know how it happened, and now she did not care. Their lips had come together somehow, and the world for both of them had changed right then. Somehow, they had found themselves in one of the empty guest cabins on the ship, and then the world for Jacina exploded into brilliant white lights of pleasure as Nara's lips and tongue and hands had explored her lush body with urgency and ardent fervor. It had gone on for nearly three hours, their passion and blood pounding in their heads and drowning out even what had taken place with her mother Anja. Neither of them felt anything else but each other, they saw no one else but each other, and the pleasures they had given to one another had both of them screaming out their passion. They could not get enough of one another, tasting and loving one another in more ways than Jacina thought could exist.

Their bodies were entwined, their skin slick with sweat and passion, their breasts pressed together and their centers touching in very intimate fashion. Nara had been staring into her eyes and Jacina had only nodded

once knowing without question it was what she wanted more than anything. The pain was sharp and quick, but it was soon followed by a burning pleasure that swept through her body and ignited a fire within her unlike anything Jacina had ever felt. Nara had held her body crushed to her own, her fangs buried deep in the hollow of her neck, as the virus rushed through her system and even then began changing Jacina into something so very different. Since her Etheric abilities were already so advanced, the transition was much faster and far more thorough. The pureness of Nara's blood saw to that. Three and a half hours of unmitigated passion and lustful sex and without one single doubt or question filling her mind, Jacina felt herself blossom into the woman she had always known she would be. The powerful Lycavorian virus had changed her quickly and completely and soon the voices and scents of so many new people and things filled her mind. Nara had wrapped her mind within a protective cocoon and within moments she had shown Jacina what she needed to know in order to tame those voices and begin to sort through the myriad of new scents. The one thing that filled her mind and senses more than anything was the coca and mint scent of her sweet Nara, and the love that flowed through her directly onto Nara. She could feel the same being reciprocated back from Nara and this is all Jacina needed to feel in order to know this is where her future lay. This is what she wanted her future to be.

Sadi had been the first to detect the scent of their loving making and then Jacina's change. As Nara and Jacina had laid in that bed, stroking each other's flesh and basking in the new sensations that coursed through them, it was Sadi who had come to the quarters quickly explaining what had taken place. Jacina had been horrified and Nara had almost been beside herself in shame, but Sadi had quickly set them right. It was Ne'Veha and then Sehri who were next to enter the room, filled with happiness and love for what had occurred between them. With their added power and ability, it was a simple thing to instruct Jacina in how to manage the new abilities she would have, at least initially. More instruction would come they had told her, probably from Nara's mothers and more than likely Androcles, but what they had shown her was enough to at least allow her to not shut herself in a room and try to hide until she had better control. This was most important to Jacina for she had not wanted to leave Nara's side for anything and she insisted on going to the surface with her. Now she stood with Sadi and Ne'Veha on either side of her and Sehri just in front of her, each of them extremely powerful Alpha females in their own right, and all of them were focused on shielding Jacina from the burning of her new and developing wolf blood because of the man Nara stood in front of. It was nearly unheard of for this to take place in two separate female wolves for the same male, which to Jacina only confirmed the knowledge that she and Nara had always been meant for one another. They were one person and mind now really, and Jacina's turning had made that very possible and utterly complete.

Whoever this male was, his aura caused their blood to burn for him and only the fact that they had taken each other over and over in the last few hours; and Sadi and Ne'Veha were now helping them to resist that calling, allowed Jacina to be this close to him and maintain control. Nara would show her how she did it later when they were wrapped within each other's arms and tasting each other to their heart's content.

Nara tore her eyes from Jacina's delicious face and body and looked at where Laon kneeled in front of her. She took a deep breath, inhaling the potent aroma of his Red Oak scent and feeling it want to set her wolf senses afire. Nara knelt before Laon and he leaned back with wide eyes as she reached around and withdrew the wickedly curved, razor sharp fighting blade of the Shakur Fighting Knife. Nara looked at him, his soft blue eyes making her want to jump his bones right there.

"I apologize to you for my brother's actions." Nara told him seeing his eyes go a little wider. "They are very protective of me and all of their sisters."

Nara could tell he was holding his aura tightly in check by force of will. His scent told her that his instincts were calling out for him to pulse her over and over and take her but he was resisting this instinct admirably. He was powerful Nara decided. His blood was pure and wild and his scent tickled her female senses like no other Alpha male ever had, and Nara Leonidas had been respectfully pulsed by dozens of Alpha males since her Coming of Age had passed. This man however, this Alpha wolf, Nara Leonidas wanted to lose herself within his aura. She wanted to taste his hard body in every way, to feel his naked flesh against her own and feel him thrusting deep within her body. Jacina's new female aura was also pulsing and flowing through her and she was feeling the same things, which made it even stronger.

Never fear the unknown. That is what their family lived by, and Nara Leonidas was about to take that leap of faith.

Nara looked at Laon, his eyes still wide and wary of her. She reached up with a piece of cloth she pulled from her belt and slowly drew it across his lips, wiping away the blood from his skin and chin. She then leaned close to Laon, bringing her lips and nose right up to his cheek and causing him to tense slightly but unable to move back because of his awkward position. Nara inhaled deeply of his Red Oak scent and gasped softly when that scent filtered through her and ignited her senses. She drew upon Sadi, Ne'Veha and Sehri without question, fighting the sensations within her and then did something that would make certain Laon did not forget her or Jacina. Nara leaned closer and pressed her cheek to his, rubbing her skin against the soft growth of his facial hair and making sure that the scent glands along the back of her ear rubbed against his skin firmly.

Nara drew back her head and looked at him. "My name is Nara Leonidas." She spoke softly so that only he could hear her. Nara looked back at Jacina. "That is Jacina Leonidas, my wife and mate." She turned back to Laon who was staring at her with wide eyes. "We are one and the same and our blood screams for you. My father and mothers have raised us to be strong and independent and to go after what we want. We want you. We want to taste your aura, we want to feel you within us, and we want to give you more pleasure than you have ever imagined existed. But know this..." Nara held up the Shakur fighting knife so that Laon could see it clearly.

"The next time that your aura and scent washes across our senses, your intent had better be to take us and claim us as your wives and mates and make us scream your name to the moon. If that is not your intent, then I will use this..." Nara showed him the knife once more as her other hand snapped out and she grabbed his crotch in her free hand. Laon stiffened as her small hand closed around his cock and squeezed tightly. Nara gasped slightly when she closed her fingers around his cock and she barely suppressed the groan she wanted to let out feeling the impressive size and thickness in her hand. She heard the soft gasp that Jacina let out when she felt what Nara was feeling in her mind and Nara blinked quickly and met his wide eyes once more.

"I will use this blade here and I will cut your wretched cock from your body and watch as you scream and bleed your way unto death." Nara told him. She looked down at where her hand was holding his cock through his pants and then she looked back up into his wide eyes, her own azure colored eyes now almost glowing in desire and suppressed want. "*Lon cedaur tur a nubous rasam.*" (That would be a fucking shame)

Laon heard the female laughter and he looked up to see several of the Lycavorian females nearby laughing softly with each other as they glanced at one another. His instincts and senses told him they were not laughing at him in a derogatory fashion, only at the stunned look in his eyes at Nara's words. They correctly deduced that Laon had never had an Alpha female wolf express her desire for him so completely or so forcefully.

"Think about that." Nara told Laon as she released his crotch and rose back to her feet, her wolf blood yearning to feel this powerful Alpha take her and Jacina. "Jomann?" Nara spoke turning her head.

Jomann looked at her, a smile on his face. "Princess?"

Laon looked up at Nara with even wider eyes when Jomann called her that. Nara looked at him. "Do as Andro said, but insure he is kept from harm please."

Jomann looked at Eliani now and she squeezed his arm and nodded her head. Eliani pulsed him gently with her own aura and Jomann felt a small portion of what Nara was experiencing because of this male wolf. He turned back to Nara and stepped away from Eliani to move up beside her. Nara met his eyes.

"I will see to it Nara." He spoke softly and he leaned over to kiss her cheek as Nara reached out and squeezed his arm in thanks.

Nara then did the only thing she could do and she moved directly to where Jacina was and embraced her tightly while their lips came together unashamedly in front of all of the prisoners. Jomann glanced at Laon now and he turned to face him fully.

"I am the Crown Prince's Captain." Jomann spoke sternly now looking at Laon intensely. "Whatever happens in the future, you must know one thing." Jomann shifted his body and then he squatted in front of Laon. "If you hurt Nara or Jacina in any way wolf, physically or even emotionally, there will be no place you can hide from the wrath of her family and me. We will find you, and it will take you three very long and painful days to die."

"I do not fear death." Laon boasted to this dominant Alpha wolf.

Jomann smiled at him, his eyes changing and his fangs extending fully. "You should not fear it." He said. "If you hurt them in any way, death will be a release that you beg for. You should remember that."

It was something that the crew members of the *MOON RUNNER* would never forget and this action, unbeknownst to Martin Leonidas, would begin the wave of utter loyalty to him that would reach fevered proportions in the years to come.

Nayeca walked behind the two *Durcumusaan* as they dragged Sibot between them. She stopped when Danny moved up to her and they shared a loving kiss. The Hadarian medic had healed his wounds though her heart had not really been in it and though he was now shackled securely Sibot felt powerful again. He would escape and he would wreak havoc among these fools before getting off this planet and seeking his vengeance against Lazar he thought to himself as he moved along between the men. He looked at the crew of the *MOON RUNNER* all kneeling on the ground, took note of Laon as the black haired female embraced and shared a passionate kiss with the red haired woman. He grimaced in disgust at such a display but he had no more time to think as the two large Alphas toss him down in front of the first rank of his ship mates. Almost directly in front of Laon Kavar.

“*Sibot forn nubous igord!*” Laon snarled angrily, his voice carrying over the open area and drawing attention from everyone. “You have done this? Our mission was to observe, not attack!”

Sibot looked at him as he rose to his knees. “You are weak Laon!” Sibot growled. “We do not observe! We are Lycavorians! We take and conquer! Lazar is weak, just like you! That is why his father gave me my mission!”

“And look what that got you *midaeus!*” Laon barked. “You killed our own people! You butchered them!”

“They were Betas!” Sibot spat. “They are beneath us! Just as all of these half breeds and fake Alphas around us are! You should have fought them! Killed them! Instead you let them take you prisoner like children!”

“Lazar was right about you!” Laon growled. “We should have killed you long ago and given your carcass to the cold of space!”

Sibot chuckled. “And that is why you will always be weak.” He snarled. “You cannot do what must be done! I am a true Alpha! I am...”

“A true Alpha?” The deep voice echoed in the still air cutting off Sibot’s words as his head snapped around trying to find out where the words had come from. The murmurs of shock and awe rumbled forth from the crew of the *MOON RUNNER* as they saw the air shimmer beside Sibot and then the body of the tall and incredibly muscular wolf appeared. This shock and awe turned to downright fear as the aura and dominance projecting forth from this wolf was staggeringly powerful. It was more powerful than any aura any of them had ever felt before. More powerful than even the oldest and strongest of the Alphas from their many different Packs on Jetania.

And far more powerful and dominating than the wolf they called King.

Sibot’s head lifted and he looked up into the bearded face of the Alpha in front of him his eyes wide. He too could feel the intensity of the aura being projected from this wolf. It was raw, pure and unrefined Alpha power unlike any he had ever felt in his lifetime. It permeated the air around him, thick and more potent than even the man Sibot called King. He saw those yellow gold wolf eyes and the savage looking dual fangs that were now fully extended. Long, dual wolf fangs that he had heard about only in legends spoken of by old fools. Sibot’s eyes bugged out of his head as he felt the vice like grip close around his throat. He never saw the large hand move towards him and now he began to feel fear creep quickly into his body as that hand tightened on his neck. Fear the likes of which he had never experienced before.

“I smell the blood of my Queen on your foul body boy!” Martin snarled loudly, his voice carrying without him even trying. “My Queen you fucking maggot!”

Martin felt the power well within him. The anger at what his beautiful and cherished Anja had endured at the hands of this fool. The pain she must have suffered. The lives that had been taken by him personally and by the orders he had given. Martin Leonidas did not hold back and the Etheric power swelled around him in a bluish white glow that no one had ever seen before. No one but Androcles, and that was only in his dreams. He squeezed tighter with his left hand causing Sibot to gag horribly as he tried to suck in air to fill his lungs.

“My name is Martin Leonidas...” Martin growled with a savage tenor in his voice as he leaned over slightly and stared into Sibot’s wide eyes. “I am King of the Lycavorian Union! I am a true Alpha of our people! You are nothing but a fucking worm!”

“I have fought enemies so vile they would make you shit your pants in fear! Across more star systems than your meager mind could ever know exists! I have killed men that make you appear as nothing more than a fucking stain upon the ground that they walk! I have led millions of true Alphas and warriors of all species into battle with everything from knives and swords to star ships and weapons more horrific than anything you could possibly imagine! I have seen places in this universe that are beyond your feeble comprehension and I have met species that others have never seen! I have seen places so beautiful and innocent that you would weep at their perfection, and I love only six women with a zealous passion that a fucking flea like you could never begin to understand! And you dare put your hands upon one of them!!”

Martin lifted his right hand and the Etheric knife exploded from his clenched fist. Eight inches of pure energy and power that seemed to glow with a life of its own.

“I am a true Alpha of our people!” Martin screamed into Sibot’s face. “A protector of our kind whether Alpha, Beta, Gamma or Omega! That is what I am, you disgusting creature! You are no Alpha! You are not fucking worthy to walk among the men and women who surround you now! Of any species! They are true Alphas! You are beneath them!”

Martin heaved Sibot off the ground, his left hand tightening around his throat and now causing him to gag and wheeze as air was cut off from his lungs and his face began to bulge in a painful effort to breathe. Painful because Martin’s powerful, iron like grip and already crushed his windpipe. The crew of the *MOON RUNNER* could only watch in horrified awe as this huge Alpha wolf held Sibot’s large body completely off the ground with one hand, nearly a complete foot, a feat no Alpha should have been able to accomplish so easily, that blazing Etheric knife almost sizzling in the air around his clenched fist.

“You laid your foul hands upon one of my Queens fool! You caused her pain!!” Martin snarled savagely into Sibot’s face. “No one causes them pain!” Martin clenched his fist even tighter around his throat. “You killed our people without regard! **OUR PEOPLE!**” Salvia was beginning to foam at the corners of Sibot’s mouth and his legs had begun to twitch as his lungs were starved for air. Martin leaned close to the dying man’s face. “Let me show you how a true Alpha dispenses justice for what you have done! No one kills my people without retribution! No one! And no breathing creature like you lays their hands upon one of my Queens and lives to speak of it ever again! To the pits of *jorbhe* with you worm! May you scream and rot in the fires of justice for all eternity so that none have to suffer your pathetic life again!”

Martin rammed his right fist forward and that Etheric knife drove straight through Sibot’s left eye and fully into his skull. His body began to jerk uncontrollably as smoke from his now burning flesh began to fill the air. Martin twisted his fist harshly and solidified the Etheric knife in a single instant, searing away nearly half of Sibot’s brain. His body twisted twice in its death throes before it became still and went limp. Martin jerked the Etheric knife out of Sibot’s head, and with a howl of utter rage he dropped the body and snapped out a front kick that struck Sibot’s body in the chest, crushing all of his ribs in that single motion and launching his body across the landing pad with devastating power.

To the astonished gasps of the crew of the *MOON RUNNER*, Sibot’s body flew almost twenty meters before it slammed into the landing strut of one of the ships parked on the pad with a sickening crunch of more breaking bones that carried the distance to where they all knelt.

Danny pulled Nayeca close to him as silence reigned supreme over the landing pad and she folded her lithe body against his lovingly. Nayeca looked up into his face with adoring amber eyes and saw him smiling. “What is it Daniel?” She asked him.

Danny didn’t take his eyes from Martin and his smile only grew wider as he watched first Andro and Denali and then Nara and Eliani and then all of Martin’s children move forward, crowding around him, reaching for him.

The Leonidas Pack.

Danny didn’t know it on this day, and he would not know it for centuries to come, but Carina and Moneus had started it and now it would only grow. They would grow over time and become the largest and most influential Pack in the entire Union. There would be more unions between Simpson and Leonidas children in the future and that would suit Daniel Simpson and his *Mard Fervon* just fine.

The Leonidas-Simpson Pack.

“Now things get interesting Nubian. Now things get really interesting.”

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

SPARTA'S WRATH ANDRO'S READY ROOM

“...She be safe *Nauta Melme*?” Dysea asked the question from within the life-size holo transmission in Andro's Ready Room.

Martin sat on the large couch looking at the image of his three Queens who he had not seen in far too long. The mug of Aricia's coffee was in his hand, with Aricia sitting on one side of him and For'mya the other. Martin let his eyes gaze upon Dysea, Isabella and Cirith for a long moment before he answered and once more, as he had done many times through the years, he silently asked himself how six such breathtakingly beautiful women could love him as they did. Dysea's emerald green eyes were bright and alert as they always were, Bella and Cirith sitting close to one another at a table in whatever building they were using as a Command Center. He missed them terribly, they all did. They hadn't been apart for this long in nearly a year and Martin had gotten used to waking up smelling all of his wives and mates beside. He wasn't worried, for when they were back together the reunion would be very sweet indeed.

Martin finally nodded his head in response to Dysea's question. “She is reasonably certain *Melda Min*.” Martin answered her. “You know Red, she's got good instincts and she won't back herself into a corner.”

Dysea nodded her head. “Yes, this is true.” She spoke.

“The man who hurt her Martin?” Isabella asked now. “What of him?”

Martin met her hazel green eyes and nodded his head. “It was taken care of Bella. He paid for his mistake in touching her.” He answered her. “He will never harm her or another again.”

Isabella nodded when he told her this. “*Zil ol zhal'la tlu*.” (As it should be) Isabella whispered in the ancient vampire tongue. Martin felt rather than saw Aricia and For'mya nod their heads on either side of him.

“*Zuch* Bella.” Aricia commented from beside him in the vampire language. All of them were fluent in the ancient vampire tongue.

Bella looked at him now, her hazel eyes twinkling in the light. “Things are becoming very lively where you are it seems *Du'ased M'ranndii*.”

Martin chuckled and nodded his head. “Tell me about it.” He said playfully. “And all I ever want is peace and quiet.”

Dysea and Cirith were the ones who burst out into soft laughter at this while Isabella, Aricia and For'mya only shook their heads in humor.

“What word do you have of the Svorag ship Martin?” Dysea asked him with a smile on her face.

“I spoke with Yuriko before contacting you.” Martin said. “Their speed and course has not changed since they slowed down. Her new figures put them as arriving at Honelze in a little over five weeks. If they do not increase their speed again. Apparently our victory here threw them for a loop in many respects.”

“Do you still believe your theory Martin?” Cirith asked now.

Martin nodded his head. “It makes the most sense as we discover more. Thoti and his team should have hit the facility late last night, so we should be getting a report within a few hours. We'll know more then, but the more Andro, Danny and I put our heads together about this, the more it comes together.”

“And you think it is one of those Alphas taken from Dynina's group?” Isabella asked.

Martin nodded his head. He had kept all of them advised of what was happening on Ventori, he always did, even if it was just in simple secure flashes of information.

“It would explain how they have begun to use the technology they have taken. Anja and Duewa agree that they are retaining more and more of their memories because they have broken from Lorendo's control. Everything that has happened up until now is almost exactly what an Alpha wolf would do if faced with destruction. He would try and build his people back up no matter the cost.”

“And without the control measures that Lorendo put in place, they are free to follow those same instincts, only now they are beginning to remember higher function skills.” Cirith commented.

Martin nodded his head. “Bingo.” He echoed her words. “Our Spider Probes haven’t picked up anything so far looking for Lorendo’s main facility, but six of them still have yet to flash us data. He has covered his tracks well.”

“Not well enough if he has lost control of more than half the Svorag he created and they are now operating without whatever control measures he implemented on them.” Dysea spoke. “How do we know he will not lose control of the others he has influence over?”

“We don’t.” For'mya spoke now. “Which is why we are hoping Thoti’s mission brings us some new information.”

Dysea nodded her head as she moved back to the table where Isabella and Cirith were sitting and stood between them. “Preparations here are progressing well. General Koguth and Akod’dris are handling most of the training and... it is amazing to see *Nauta Melme*. The Pralor people seem to be almost like a soothing balm to the Kavalians that Koguth chose to come with us. They are reaching out to the Kavalians in friendship and openness and the Kavalians are jumping at the chances they are receiving. We have seen many budding friendships beginning to form and you know how hard it is for them to develop true friendships. They are learning that they can be so much more than what Keleru allowed them to be and it is infectious.”

Martin nodded his head. “I had a feeling Koguth would have that effect on them. He opened the door and they just needed a nudge to walk through it. Good, Ceale is reporting the same thing from Manne and Komirri reports that the few drills they have run since returning there have all been productive. The Kavalian ships that defected to us are coming around quite well and their officers are soaking up knowledge like a sponge.”

“It is knowledge that Keleru would never allow them to have because it took away from his control of them.” Dysea said. “Now that they have been exposed to it, they will not be denied the future all of them can see.”

“The three of you are secure?” Martin asked her. “And *Tenna Meral*?”

Dysea smiled and nodded her head. “We are tripping over our security *Nauta Melme*.” She told him.

“Well, better safe than sorry. Lorendo is just desperate enough to try and come after you there now. Delnash has exposed him for what he is on Artaaya, and from what he tells me, his own people want to hang him by his *nor*.” Martin replied. “I not willing to take that risk.”

“You cannot kill him Martin, you know that.” Cirith spoke now. “He is the only one who can translate the tattoos on Androcles and the others.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “I know and that burns my ass.” He replied.

“Is there any way around that?” Isabella asked now.

“Dynina’s engineers and the Worker Drones will be finished installing one of these Portal Generators on *SPARTA’S WRATH* in four hours.” For'mya answered leaning forward. “Then we will jump to Lorenu. Perhaps we will find something there in this temple that sheds light on everything and will allow us to not have to rely on Lorendo.”

“What does Andro say?” Bella asked now.

Martin chuckled softly. “I would have to relay that information to you in seven different languages. And none of it in very pleasant words.” He replied. “Andro hasn’t even met him and he dislikes him more than I do I think.”

“I doubt that.” Isabella commented with a smile.

Martin sat forward now. “Sit down *Melda Min*.” He said softly. “As much as I hate to do this, we have some decisions to make and we need to make them together.”

Dysea nodded her head and moved to the table and sat beside Isabella. “I know. We are putting it off aren’t we?”

“Only because we don’t want to face the possibility of it.” For'mya spoke.

“*Avoi*.” Aricia commented.

“It needs to be done.” Martin echoed softly. “No matter who it pisses off and no matter how much we don’t want too.”

The room was silent for a moment before Isabella nodded her head. "Then let's get it over with." She said.

JETANIA
HIDDEN AIRFIELD
SIX KLICKS NORTHEAST OF WARIM

It was one of the most closely guarded secrets among the leadership of the Mountain Packs. An airfield completely hidden from Osrod's eyes and realm of control. Nestled at the bottom of a deep, three-thousand-foot ravine northeast of Warim, you could pass right over the top of it without ever noticing it was there. The thousand-year-old trees grew tall on either side of the ravine and their canopies were almost interlocked together over a thousand feet into the air, with very few openings. Only someone who knew the terrain as well as the Mountain Packs would be able to navigate down through the openings in the canopy with enough skill not to crash their ship. Lazar had made this descent dozens of times and was one of the few pilots who had the skill to do so, yet as he and Rhaos watched with awe in their expressions, Endith and Tina were dropping *SPARTAN ONE* through the canopies as if it was the easiest operation in the universe. Anja stood beside them, Kalis directly behind his Aunt, unwilling to leave her alone with the two Lycavorians for any reason. Normya was sitting at the engineering station where Tina usually sat when For'mya was with them, monitoring their power output and also their weapons systems. Should anything go wrong, Normya had her fingers poised over the weapons console to her right and would lay waste to anything beneath them as they escaped.

Anja Leonidas had invited them into the cockpit for the descent, and Lazar instantly sensed the blood within the exquisitely beautiful pointed ear young female. For a split second he asked himself if all of this Alpha's female children were so stunningly beautiful. She was a daughter of the Alpha that he smelled on nearly all of them and within her blood he detected the scent of the massive, bone faced giant who was guarding his men. They were obviously mated and just from her sweet orange clove scent he could tell they were deeply in love. Lazar blinked quickly as visions of Retta filled his mind and he chased them away with a shake of his head and returned his gaze outside the cockpit view window. Most COLS ships had much smaller cockpits with fields of vision that were not so expansive. This did not go unnoticed by Anja however, and she looked at him intently.

"What?" She finally asked watching as Lazar's head turned to look at her.

Lazar Aspion shook his head dismissively in nature. "Nothing." He lied without caring if this Alpha female detected the lie. "We... our ships do not have such large views. It is odd to see all of this as we descend. Can you see this much from the cockpit in all of your ships?"

Anja canted her head to the side slightly but she knew the real reason he had lied and she said nothing.

Tina turned her head and looked at him with her hand over the throttle control as Endith guided them down. "No." Tina answered after receiving the nod from Anja. "We train on much smaller ships with smaller cockpit fields of vision. You have to graduate to this class of ship. It is pretty neat though, isn't it?"

"*Nubous tiadala!*" Rhaos muttered without thinking. He blinked in shock and looked at Anja with wide eyes. "Forgive me!"

Anja smiled and shook her head. "It is pretty amazing." She said. "I was stunned when I first experienced it."

Lazar looked at her surprised. "This... this was new to you?"

Anja nodded her head. "At one point, oh yes."

"How is... how is that possible?" Lazar stammered.

Endith snorted from her pilot's seat. "If I remember correctly, you blew chunks all over the inside of my *RAPTOR* the first time Anja."

Anja chuckled and nodded her head. "That was not a pleasant experience."

Tina laughed. "The Skipper was pulling it out of his hair for two days!"

Lazar looked between them. "What is this? Blew chunks?"

Anja smiled once more. "I lost my breakfast." She told him seeing his eyes get large with recognition.

“You admit this?” Lazar asked shocked.

“Why not?” Anja replied with a shrug of her shoulders and a smile. “It happened and we have laughed about it many times over the years since.”

“That we have.” Tina agreed. “That doesn’t compare to the Skipper though. Remember Lacora Five?”

Anja shook her head with another smile. “Well... in Martin’s defense Tina, you were flying upside down for nearly three minutes and he and Danny had just conducted a hundred kilometer sprint to the extraction.”

“Bah! Don’t make excuses for him!” Tina quipped. “It took us a week to get rid of the smell.”

“Five hundred feet!” Endith called out now as she glanced out of the cockpit. “Looks like we got company at three o’clock.”

All heads turned to the side and Lazar’s wolf eyes smiled as he recognized his mother. “It is my mother and Garget.”

“Lots of armed men mother.” Normya spoke from her console as she scanned the area below them. “Upwards of thirty.”

Lazar turned quickly to Anja. “This airfield is one of our most closely guarded secrets.” He told her. “They are the standard security detachment we leave here. This is not a trap! I give you my word!”

Anja stared at him for a long moment and unlike a few seconds ago, Anja detected not even a wisp of a lie in his words. He was being completely sincere. “And I will take you at your word.” Anja told him. “With one condition.”

Lazar met her gaze, glancing quickly at Rhaos and then back to her. “What is that?” He asked.

“If there is to be any sort of trust between us, a trust we can build on, you will not use the signals that you gave to your mother during our conversation.” Anja said.

Lazar looked shocked at her pronouncement. “How... how did...?”

Anja smiled at him. “We may be from different quadrants of space Lazar Aspion, but we are wolves as well. And we also have a unique, and soundless way to signal and talk with others that we know, much like the one you were using. We have no ulterior motives here Lazar Aspion. Trust needs to begin somewhere, correct?”

Lazar stared at her for a long moment and then nodded his head. “Yes it does.” He spoke.

“Good.” Anja spoke before looking at Endith. “Take us in Endy.” She told her.

Endith nodded her head. “Here we go.”

Garget stood beside Loras looking skyward into the opening of the canopy above them. “I don’t like this Loras.” He spoke.

Loras looked up into his face with an expression of insult marring her exotic and stunning features. “Do you not trust Lazar anymore Garget?”

Garget turned his head and looked at her with a stern expression. Garget Ranev had been the first of the elders among the many Mountain packs to endorse Loras as their leader after his nephew Warim had been assassinated. Warim and he had spent many hours simply talking after Warim had claimed Loras, Garget taking the place of Warim’s long dead father and Garget’s brother. Warim had always been praising Loras on her intelligence and inner strength. That her love for their people knew no bounds. Garget had seen it himself many times through the years and he had never doubted her for a single moment. He truly believed, as did Loras’s mother and father, that she was meant for greatness.

Garget had also been the one to take Lazar under his wing when he would come to visit them while Loras was Queen, and even after Lazar would sneak away from the palace to see his mother when she returned and became Warim’s mate. He and Warim had given the boy many years of instruction that Lazar would never have received with his father, and among that knowledge was the history of their true people and how they had

come to Jetania. Garget knew that Lazar hated his father intensely, but the boy had enough intelligence to hide it better than anyone he had ever met.

“How can you ask me that Loras?” Garget hissed at her softly.

Loras quickly lost the expression she had and she reached up to take his arm. “Forgive me Garget.” She said softly. “He... Lazar sees you as the father he was denied for most of his life.” She commented looking at the ground. “He has warmed to you more than he ever did with Warim.”

Garget nodded his head slowly. “Warim knew this and he did not resent it.” He spoke. “I would never question your son’s loyalty to you or to our people. That would be like questioning my own loyalty. But bringing them here? To our most secret facility anywhere on the planet? Not even Osrod’s finest trackers have ever been able to find this place and he knows it exists.”

Loras met his eyes now. “Speak your mind old friend.” She told him.

“Where have you been these last two days Loras?” Garget asked her now. “Your Security Commander told me you were with the Priestess, but none of our local sensor scans detected your life signs on this continent or anywhere on the planet for that matter. There were many among us who were beginning to worry about you. Some even feared Osrod had managed to abduct you. Then you suddenly reappear with my youngest daughter and others and tell me to meet you here. That Lazar is bringing potential allies here, to the most secret of our bases anywhere on the planet. What is going on Loras? Who are these people and how do we know they are not agents of Osrod?”

Loras continued to meet his eyes and she took a deep breath. “I have been with the Oracle Garget.” She spoke finally meeting his gaze. “I have been to where she has been hiding for centuries and helping to train the Black Watch.”

Loras watched Garget’s eyes grow wide in disbelief as he looked at her. “The Oracle?” He finally sputtered in disbelief. “She... Loras she lives?”

Loras nodded her head. “And she is unlike anything that I... that I believed Garget.” She answered.

“What... what do you mean?” Garget asked her.

Loras squeezed his thick arm. “There is much I must tell you Garget, information that Nilantha wants me to share with you and the other Pack elders. I don’t really know where to begin. I have... I have discovered so much these last two days. So much that even I cannot believe it all.” She looked at him.

Garget shook his head. “We have... we have believed she was gone for so long.” He stammered. “That Osrod’s father succeeded in finding her and killing her.”

Loras nodded her head. “That is what I believed as well. That is how she wanted it to be in order to protect us and herself.” She told him. “I believed it until Rylin and Taris brought me to meet her.”

“Taris?” Garget gasped as she spoke the name of his youngest daughter. Taris had been a surprise to his mate and him, for they had thought they were done having children. When it was discovered she carried Taris, all things changed for Garget. When he first held her wailing body in his arms seconds after she was pulled from her mother’s womb Garget knew things would be different. Even as she had grown, and her beauty surpassed that of her mother and her sisters, Garget knew Taris was meant for something far beyond his understanding and he had embraced that. Her mind was like a trap, taking everything in and absorbing it completely. When she announced she wished to become part of the Black Watch, Garget did not hesitate in giving her his blessing. She continued to make his mate and himself proud of her every day. He looked at Loras intently. “Taris has known she was alive?”

Loras nodded her head. “There is more to your daughter than meets the eye Garget.” Loras said.

“So it... so it would appear.” Garget said softly.

“Did you know that the Betas, Gammas and Omega wolves on Ventori survived Garget?” Loras asked him.

Once more Garget’s eyes grew wide. “Impossible.” He gasped. “My father told me that they would not survive without the Alphas among them. It is why he and so many of the elders hold such disdain for Osrod and his bloodline, excluding Lazar of course. His ancestors forced them to leave and then refused to allow them to return. How could... how could they survive without Alphas.”

Loras shook her head slowly. “I do not know, but I have discovered that they did indeed survive and they built a thriving world of many, many millions. Only to see it destroyed by another species a few short years

ago. Several of them on are this ship that Lazar arrives with.” She looked at him. “And there is something else Garget.”

“What?” He pressed her. “Loras... now is not the time to keep things from me.”

“*Ethoni wen reull oia allon endra lon cerler vada saan rie vada allsknesi vorevor hel Garget.*” Loras spoke softly. (There are those on this ship that carry the blood of the ancients within them.)

Garget pulled back from her slightly in disbelief. “*Vada saan rie allsknesi!*” He gasped aloud causing the heads of several of the nearby guards to turn towards them.

Loras looked around quickly and squeezed his arm tighter. “Garget!” She exclaimed to him softly.

Garget quickly reigned in his emotions and stepped back closer to her. “Loras you cannot be serious.” He stammered. “That is only... that is only a myth. A legend that we tell our children as they grow.”

Loras shook her head quickly. “No.” She spoke. “It is only a myth and legend because that is what Osrod’s father and grandfather wanted our people to believe in order to consolidate their power. It is why they chased the Oracle into hiding Garget. I have discovered so much in so short a time as I said Garget. Our ancient homeworld exists, the Oracle has been there. Those that carry the blood of the ancients within them exist.” Loras looked at him. “And the *Fera Mard Revik* exists. I have seen the distinguishing sign of Royal Blood Garget! I have seen it in one who I have spoken to myself Garget. Just hours ago!” She took his other hand. “A Queen. One of six Queens that...”

“What?” Garget asked.

“She is one of six Queens to the *Fera Mard Revik.*” Loras told him. “The First True King of our people. The King that our ancient writings and even our myth and legend have told us would one day come to walk among us. He lives now Garget! The First True King and *jen Tarivuos*. His Heralds.” Loras squeezed his hand and arm tighter. “I have seen her Garget! I have seen the distinguishing signs! On her! On her children with her! I have felt her within me Garget, even over the distance we were talking! And through her I have felt the other Queens. She is a beautiful wolf Garget, with dark red hair and amazing green eyes!”

Garget Ranev stared at Loras for a long moment. He was one of the few who had read the many Ancient Scrolls given to their people by order of the Oracle after they had arrived here on Jetania. The Priestess back then had told them they had more in common than they believed and the Scrolls had told them exactly that. Though they were locked away in a secret location much like this base, there were still those who read the Scrolls and what they contained. That those of ancient blood did exist, that they populated the stars far away, and that their original homeworld did in fact exist. The Ancient Scrolls spoke of many different things, all of them amazing to say the least, but they also were very specific in that those who carried the powerful and Ancient Lycavorian Royal Blood within them, the line of the First True King of the Lycavorians, that they would be most distinguishable by the dual wolf fangs that only the Royal bloodline would carry.

“*Emdar delhims?*” Garget asked her in a whisper. (Dual fangs)

Loras nodded her head. “Yes.” Loras answered with a nod. “She is... she is also not fully wolf Garget.”

“What do you mean?”

“She has been turned.” Loras told him. “She is a half breed, but she is more powerful than any pureblood Alpha female that I have ever sensed. Including myself and my mother.”

Garget’s eyes went a little wider at this for it was well known that Loras and her mother were among the strongest Alpha females anywhere on Jetania. Loras descended from a strong bloodline, both of her parents having some of the purest blood among all of the Mountain Packs on Jetania. The Ranev Pack was very similar and this is why Garget had pushed hard for Osrod Aspion to honor their ways and release Loras from her commitment to him in order to fulfill the arranged marriage that his brother and Warim’s father had agreed to when Loras was born. An arranged marriage between the Athltin and Ranev packs would surely cement the leadership of the Mountain Packs for many centuries to come since they were the largest and most influential of the packs. This Union between Loras and Warim had done just that. Loras’s father was the most senior Alpha on the Mountain Council at nearly two hundred thousand years of age, and he was anchored in the tradition and culture of their people from long before Garget was ever born. He was also one of the few remaining Alphas who had protested vehemently to Osrod’s father to allow them to return to Ventori. He was a hardened and experienced wolf, having survived several “accidents” that everyone knew had been assassination attempts by Osrod’s father, and he bore the scars proudly.

“Loras, how is that possible?” Garget finally asked.

Loras shook her head. “I don’t know for certain and the Oracle was vague in her answers to me but it is true Garget. This *Gelleenat* told me that being a half breed does not carry the same stigma within their empire as it does here. She was very open about this fact and she was very honest. You will see for yourself.”

“How... how large is their Empire?” Garget asked hesitantly.

Loras met his gaze. “She referred to it as a Union.” Loras answered. “She says it has over thirty trillion citizens within it and it spans hundreds and hundreds of light years.” She saw Garget’s eyes nearly bug out of his head. “Our people make up only thirty-five to forty percent of that population. She says she doesn’t know the exact number because that is not something that concerns them. All of their citizens are equal.”

“*Son vada carians.*” Garget gasped softly. “Where... where have they been hidden all of this time?”

Loras shook her head. “They have not been hiding at all Garget. They are not from this Quadrant of space! They come from the Alpha Quadrant!”

Garget gripped her arms tighter. “The Alpha Quadrant! Then they have... Loras are you saying that they have Interstellar Engine Technology? That... Loras that...”

Loras nodded her head. “Lazar did not speak much, he was sitting with her, but I saw the look on my son’s face Garget; and the body language he was using. Everything she was telling me was true Garget. Lazar signaled me that there was much he had to tell us. And given what I saw when with the Oracle, I don’t doubt it one bit.”

Garget looked at her oddly. “What... what did you see Loras?”

Loras smiled at him. “I will tell you everything Garget, all of it. You will be just as shocked as I was. And you will also be just as awed.”

Garget looked up just as Loras did as the soft whining noise filtered to their keen wolf ears. It was growing louder and Garget let his eyes move among the towering trees seeing nothing out of the ordinary. He turned to one of the nearby Landing Pad technicians.

“What is that noise?” He demanded.

The man was moving his hands over his podium control panel and he shook his head. “I do not know, sir!” He stammered. “We are detecting a two hundred percent increase in wind vortex within the area but...”

“Garget... perhaps you and my mother would be so kind as to move back a few dozen meters!”

Lazar’s voice boomed from all around them like an echo. **“This ship we are on is rather large and the pilot does not wish to land on you.”**

“Lazar!” Loras gasped as she clutched Garget’s arms.

A strange new noise filled their ears and both of them stood in open mouthed shock as the Shroud Shield on *SPARTAN ONE* lowered smoothly, revealing the huge ship directly above them and the source of the high pitched whine they heard.

“*Saoi Sibfla!*” Garget heard the technician’s voice near them as he stared at the ship. “Sensors never picked it up! We never saw it come into the lane!”

The ship was easily over a hundred meters in length and perhaps twenty meters in height from what Garget could see quickly. It was very sleek and almost beautiful in its design with a blazing black and crimson shield emblazoned upon its side near the rear. There appeared to be a hatchway on the side close to the nose of the ship, and also what could only be a ramp in the rear of the ship to allow access. His wolf eyes could detect people moving in what appeared to be the cockpit in the front of the ship and then they grew wider as he recognized Lazar looking out at them through the large cockpit view window over the shoulder of the pilot with rust colored hair.

Loras could only stare at the ship in silent awe. A smile slowly split her face and she gripped Garget’s arms even tighter.

“Garget my friend...” Loras Ranev spoke. “I believe our future has just made itself known to us.”

Anja stood beside Retta holding her hand tightly just behind Lazar and Rhaos at the top of the ramp. Zarah was on Retta's opposite side holding her other hand and while Anja could smell and sense Retta's fever and the burning of her blood for the tall, powerful wolf in front of them, Zarah, Normya and Lucia were helping her to hold it back and resist it. With the three of them combined helping her, Retta was in complete control of her actions and mind. Though barely seventeen years old by human measuring standards, Retta Leonidas was fully grown by Lycavorian principles and as Anja had stated before in many reports and findings published in the Union's Medical Journals, Lycavorian females were now coming of age sooner because of the natural evolution of their species.

Normya and Zarah were scarcely past twenty-two and both of them had already gone through their Coming of Age. Nara, because of the pureness of her blood, had already been through her Coming of Age and she was only a year older than Retta. It varied for Lycavorian females now, whether pure blood or half Lycavorian, but the purer the blood, the sooner the Coming of Age fever would present itself.

Anja looked at the broad backs of Lazar and Rhaos. She had never been on a first contact mission before, so this was going to be new to her as well. Anja Leonidas knew she had a quick temper and she had gotten better through the years at reigning in her more volatile nature when confronted with arrogance and stupidity, and she would have to be on her best behavior here. There was definitely something about these Lycavorians that had the short hairs on the back of her neck standing at attention. It wasn't a threat she felt so much as it was the unknown and possible answers to questions that Martin had held within him for his entire life.

Anja Leonidas could not even begin to imagine loving a man more than she loved Martin. It wasn't possible as far as she was concerned. It wasn't possible for any of them to love any man in such a way. Martin Leonidas was everything to her, to Aricia and For'mya and Dysea and Isabella and Cirith. He could make them laugh on a whim, and turn them to putty in his hands with just a simple caress. He worshiped the ground they walked upon as he had proven so many times through the years, and while the wolf within them made this impossible as long as he was alive, it was their minds that had come to that conclusion many years ago. Anja remembered something Gorgo had said many years ago.

“When a Leonidas loves, they love unconditionally, without doubt or shame. They love with all of the passion within them, all of the emotion, all of themselves.”

Anja had to admit that this statement was so very true, for she and her fellow Queens lived that statement every day. Their children who had taken wives and mates lived that statement every day. Anja looked at Retta and smiled at her daughter. All of their children would live that statement. And it all was because of the tall, handsome Alpha who made her whimper in utter bliss just being in his arms. If she could bring about the answers to some of the questions her husband and mate had carried within him for decades, questions they all knew he desired the answers too, Anja would do all she could to accomplish this.

Anja saw movement out of the corner of her eyes and watched Tir'ut and Kalis move up on either side of Lazar and Rhaos.

Kalis turned his head to look at Lazar, Serale standing beside Radem and Lucia behind Anja and watching intently.

“Know this...” Kalis told him in a low voice, but one that carried to where Anja and Retta stood. Kalis waited until Lazar and Rhaos had turned to look at him. “If this is a trap, or any of your people attempt to harm my *Tenna* and my *nathos*, Tir'ut and I will ensure that before we fall, you and your friend will die very painful deaths. There will not be anyone who will save you from this fate if you betray us. On that oath, and the oath I gave to my cousin and uncle, I swear.”

“As do I.” Tir'ut echoed his words.

Lazar and Rhaos both glanced quickly at where Tir'ut stood on their opposite side, even taller than them. His dark eyes twinkled in the light and they saw him bare vicious looking vampiric fangs in the small smile he produced. Lazar turned back to Kalis.

“This is no trap.” He spoke more calmly than he felt. “I give you my word.”

Kalis nodded his head as he checked his P190 A5. "Then as long as you keep your word, you will live a full life." He stated turning back to Lazar. "And possibly discover what it is that makes your blood burn in your veins."

Anja's smile beamed when she heard that statement and she glanced at Retta who also was smiling widely. Kalis had come a long way in so short a time and it was because he was among a part of his family that he knew loved him without question. He would discover soon enough that the love of a mother and siblings that he had thought lost so long ago was only weeks away and then he could go forward knowing he had come full circle. Anja glanced up when she heard the ramp unlock and begin to lower.

"Here we go!" She stated.

SPARTA'S WRATH **STARBOARD OFFICER'S LOUNGE**

"...Never been able to determine what is powering the Temple." Dynina was explaining to all of them as they sat in the lounge waiting for the Worker Drones and ship's engineers to finish installing the Sub-Space Portal Generator. "Through the years we have tried to gain entrance by many different means, but the material surrounding the temple is unlike anything we have ever seen."

"It is neither Darastrixi nor Pralor in origin." Kenroe chimed in now as he adjusted the monitor they had set up for him. "It encircles the entire Temple area, fully five kilometers in diameter. All of it underground."

"Five kilometers!" Martin exclaimed. "*Sibfla!* That is not a Temple, that is a... hell I don't know what that is!"

Dynina smiled and nodded her head at his words. "I have had this same feeling through the years as well *staaniaketo.*"

Amena spoke up from her seat at the huge table. "We have tried to burn it, cut it, just about anything you can imagine. Not a scratch on it. Nothing. It appears to be resistant to energy and projectile weapons of every kind that we have tested. Essentially it is impervious to all of our combined technology."

"Even the Pralor Pulse Magnum weapons that we have now?" Androcles asked from where he sat.

Amena nodded her head. "Yes." She answered. "If I had to compare it to something, I would compare it to this wondrous Dragon Armor your people manufactured, though we cannot even determine the minerals used to create it, as we can with your dragon Armor. We've never seen them before."

Martin turned his head and looked at Kasdan where he sat beside Murano and Wayonn. Martin Leonidas was no fool and he used every bit of knowledge he had at his disposal. Though Kasdan would never know it, Martin viewed him as second only to Anja in intelligence. That fact alone endeared him to Martin in a way that nothing ever could. He was what Martin would affectionately call a "geek". "Kasdan... could it be these Onab that you mentioned?"

Kasdan nodded his head. "It is possible." He replied. "With the exception of what little technology they shared with us, we know painfully little about the Onab as a species, or their technology."

"Unfortunately, Kasdan is correct and the same can be said for our people." Aviel spoke now from where he sat beside Dalis at the end of the table. "We only encountered them perhaps half a dozen times in our travels and if memory serves me, the last contact we had with one of their ships was nearly two million years ago." Aviel looked at Dalis. "Dalis is that correct?"

Dalis nodded his head now. He had become an almost constant companion to Aviel now, his knowledge and skill set something that Aviel made great use of. Dalis had finally come to terms with the fact he would never have Nahko, her love for Aviel was too powerful, and he returned that love to her equally. Dalis had also come to see that Aviel Em'morr was nothing like the politicians he was used to. This man actually cared about those around him and he used his emotions and feelings to base all of his decisions on. Dalis had also become somewhat of a teacher to Laren, Andro and Dorian as well at Sarlana's request, giving them knowledge of the Darastrixi people that went beyond what their soul sister could provide to them. Nahko had remained on Ventori with the rest of the Darastrixi for many of them had volunteered to help begin the process of defending and rebuilding the planet.

“That sounds correct.” He agreed with Aviel’s statement. “Without a direct link access to our archive libraries however, I could not be more specific. We lost that link the moment we left Darastrixi space. I dare say with the exception of Kenroe and those with Lady Dynina, no Darastrixi has ever been this far from our homeworld.”

“That goes without saying for many of us.” Dorian spoke up.

Andro and Laren nodded their heads. “Indeed it does.” Laren spoke.

Martin turned once more to where Armen stood behind Androcles. “Armen... do you think you and Avi could determine if this is Onab tech for us if you had the opportunity to examine the materials?”

The huge Avatar nodded his head. **–Like Avi, I was not made by the creators, but the inactive code is still within my neural network. Avi and I are among the first generation of Avatars King Martin. Those that were built by the Pralor Scientists directly from the Creator’s technical specifications–** He replied. **– Given enough exposure to what materials are on hand and with the information within Pralor databanks available to us, we should be able to answer this question –**

“You don’t know for sure?” Martin asked.

–Nothing is certain King Martin– Armen answered.

Martin looked at Andro. “That’s what you would say *keto*.” He hissed at his son. “He’s hanging around you way too much.”

Andro crossed his arms over his broad chest. “Forgive me for not being as reckless as you father.” He spoke with mock indignation.

“Reckless?” Martin protested now. “What was that little stunt on Vania Six? A carefully thought out response?”

Andro’s azure eyes narrowed. “And Bogota City was what?” He snapped.

Martin held up his hand to respond but stopped himself just as he was about to respond. “Ok... you have a point there.” He stated.

Danny leaned forward from his chair beside Martin. “That was a sweet Op though *fervon*.” He said. “It was perfect all around.”

Martin looked at him and smiled. “It was, wasn’t it?” He said.

“You dropped a thirty story building on one man in order to kill him father.” Andro spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “Yeah... but he was a real asshole. He was killing innocent men and women in his mines. And he was a big guy too boot.” Martin replied puffing out his cheeks with air and posing with his arms and shoulders to make himself appear larger than he was.

“Popped him like a pimple!” Danny echoed with a grin. “Can’t get much deader than that! Like I said, it was perfect!”

“Yes, it was.” Martin agreed.

Andro and Dorian couldn’t help but laugh at their antics while Laren looked back and forth between them. Finally, she looked at Andro. “What does this mean Androcles?” She asked. “Popped him like a pimple? What is a pimple?”

“Enough!” Sarlana exclaimed from her chair causing Martin and Androcles to look at her and become quiet. She turned back to Dynina. “Dynina... continue.”

“There is really not much more to cover.” She spoke in reply. “We stopped trying to gain entry into the Temple, or whatever it is, several thousand years ago. We built a pseudo place of meditation over the entrance and it has remained this way since. It is on the edge of the city we have built on Lorenu.”

“But you have seen similar symbols on interior walls?” Sarlana asked. “Those like what Andro and the others carry on their skin?”

Dynina nodded as she returned to her chair. “There is only one entrance that we have been able to find. Double glass like doors, directly beneath the Meditation Hall that we built. They are on the wall directly across from these doors. Three symbols very similar to what they are wearing. The same type of symbols of this *Dahakoan* language that you recognized.”

Andro saw the look on her face and he leaned across the table. “*Doraanar?*” He asked causing Sarlana to lift her eyes and meet his gaze. “What is it?”

Sarlana shook her head. “I have never read anything in our written history or heard even a single hint of the *Dahakoan* ever leaving Darastrixi space and coming out here.” She told him slowly. “They fought the Scourge across all of our space and the surrounding systems during our conflicts with them yes, but as Dalis and Aviel have both said, our people were meticulous in our record keeping. Everything was written down. Every order. Every mission. Every decision made by the ruling body. I have been gone from Darastrixi space less than a hundred thousand years and I cannot believe this has changed.”

“It hasn’t.” Aviel chimed in.

“Then there has to be some meaning for this place.” Sarlana spoke. “I find it hard to believe that Sumar brought Dynina and the others here without knowing that this Temple was there.”

Dynina shook her head. “Impossible.” She said quickly. “Sumar was... he was perfect in everything he did. Every action he took was planned out right down to even the tiniest of details. Everything.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Our history says this is exactly how Dadrien was as well.” She looked at Martin. “An unknown Temple, built with materials that we cannot identify, on a planet that has been hidden behind an Ionic Nebula deep in former Pralor space for at least fifteen millennia. Probably much longer given its location and that the Scourge have never discovered it. Sumar either knew of this planet before he was lost on Lycavore, or someone told him about it after he was turned by Dynina’s daughter.”

“Dadrien.” Andro spoke softly.

Sarlana nodded her head. “It is the only explanation that makes sense given that this Temple has symbols from the *Dahakoan* language on its walls.”

“I get the feeling there is quite a bit that Dadrien and my grandfather did not tell us when they appeared to us.” Martin spoke leaning back in his chair.

“Perhaps they were not able to.” Sarlana said. “They did say many of their own memories were lost somehow. Or removed.”

“The question remains as to why.” Martin spoke.

“To protect.” Dorian spoke now.

Martin looked at his son. “Dori?”

“To protect what they had built.” Dorian continued. “Is that not what we would do father? Perhaps not remove our memories, but to ensure that a secret we do not want discovered is kept, we would make sure that no one person or persons knew everything.”

“The removal of memories is much more thorough.” Dalis spoke again.

Andro leaned forward once more. “Father, Arzoal transferred her consciousness, her essence to a dragon egg using the Psionic Transfer Chamber.”

“Yes, so?” Martin pressed his son.

Andro looked at Murano and Wayonn. “Could this device be used to remove memories from one’s Etheric resonance Wayonn?”

Wayonn looked at Murano and then back to him. “I suppose.” He replied. “I cannot think of it every being used in such a way however.”

“What are you getting at *keto?*” Martin asked his son.

Andro returned his gaze to his father. “As Kasdan discovered, the third language blended into the tattoos we wear is Onab.” He spoke evenly. “Who gave the Pralors the technology of the PTCs?”

Murano’s eyes grew wider when he realized what Andro was saying. “The Onab!” He gasped aloud. “They... well they gave us the means and material to build them!”

“Murano is correct!” Kasdan spoke excitedly now. “That is in our history archives! The day this event occurred. There are, perhaps only a half a dozen of our people still alive from when that took place. It was a day of great celebration because it allowed us to release the Etheric essence of those who had passed on into the Rift of Time just as our belief tells us. It was what your people would refer to as a mass Memorial service.”

“How long ago was this?” Martin asked.

Kasdan shrugged his shoulders. “At least a million and a half years ago.” He answered. “Much of our older population was centered on our homeworld and the core worlds ring so that they could use their wisdom to teach our younger population. It worked well for us through the years, but it also allowed the Scourge to

eliminate most of them when they broke through into our core worlds ring. Only a handful made it out of the CWR. With the exception of the six that still live, the rest perished on our flight away from the Scourge. That is why most of our population on Artaaya and our colonies is under half a million years old. And Delnash insisted that we do not group our people by age any longer.”

Martin nodded his head solemnly. “Delnash did the right thing when he gave that order.” He said finally. “But it still doesn’t leave us with any answers to the questions we have now. If anything it leaves us with new ones to add to the old ones.”

“And collectively we have no information on these Onab?” Dynina asked.

Kasdan shook his head now. “Aside from basic entries in our historical archives, no.” He answered. “Whatever information we did have was within the thirty-one texts that were lost in our main Science Research Museum when our homeworld was destroyed.”

“Copies were never made Kas? Aside from the one that fatass Lorendo made?” Martin asked.

Kasdan shook his head. “I do not know Martin. I don’t even know how or when Lorendo managed to make the copy he has before our world was destroyed. He was nowhere near our homeworld in the weeks leading up to the attack.” He answered. “Much of the time after its destruction is filled with chaos and the jumbled journals and ramblings of those who survived.

Andro turned in his chair. “Armen anything in your archives?”

Armen lifted his head slightly to look at the far side of the room, his eyes moving back and forth almost faster than anyone could follow. They stopped after three seconds and he looked at Androcles. **–My databanks have nothing more than what is already within Pralor archives Andro- He answered quickly. –However, there appears to be a large file that was entered into my archives and labeled as Onab core root. The contents of this file was deleted exactly twelve point four hours before SPARTA’S WRATH departed the Pralor homeworld-**

“How long after *SPARTA’S WRATH* left did the Scourge hit?” Martin asked.

-The Scourge attack on the Pralor homeworld began nine hours and six minutes after SPARTA’S WRATH departed space dock King Martin- Armen answered. –It came as a complete surprise-

Martin shook his head as he sat back in the chair. “No, it didn’t Armen.” He said softly. “Someone knew it was coming and they erased that file in order to protect the information on it in case you didn’t make it clear of the attack.” He said.

“Coincidence father?” Andro asked.

Martin grinned at him. “I’ll tell you like I told your mother. No way.”

Wayonn shook his head. “These are not coincidences.” He spoke now. “This *Dahakoan* language surviving as it did through the ages? The Temple on Lorenu? And what was written in the Ventori Archives.”

Martin looked at him. “The Ventori Archives?” He asked. “You keeping secrets from us Wayonn?”

Wayonn chuckled. “No... our time together has shown me that is not a healthy practice.” He looked across the table at Martin. “I had the opportunity to speak with Nalmos and three of the other Chief Justices that recently arrived from the Tasmor homeworld. Nalmos questioned you about it when he first met you but events kept you from answering.”

Martin leaned forward now. “I don’t remember any questions.” He said.

Wayonn looked at him. “The more we discover about past events, the more it all comes together. Each piece we discover fits into the puzzle of our combined history. The archives of Ventori history speak of Spartans Martin. Alpha Spartans, warriors of unmatched training and honor, warriors that would one day come here to Ventori and unite our people.” Wayonn looked at Martin.

“That could mean anything Wayonn.” Martin said.

Wayonn shook his head. “No. The last sentence of this legend or myth, or whatever you choose to call it, it says these Spartans will be led by an Alpha wolf with dual fangs and eyes of yellow and gold. The last time I checked, the only wolf in existence right now with yellow/gold eyes is you Martin.”

“*Sibfla*.” Martin muttered as he sat back in his chair once more.

“Someone or something is driving everything that has occurred through the years Martin. No matter where it is. Even events that were confined to our individual species, all of them have connections to the rest of us.” Wayonn spoke.

Martin nodded his head and looked at him. “You’ll get no argument from me Wayonn.” He said.

“The question remains as to why *Vali’s star*.” Andro spoke now.

“And who?” Helen spoke. “Though I am beginning to believe that these Onab, dead though their species may be, they are far more than what those who met them really thought.”

Murano nodded his head in agreement. “I concur Helen.” He said.

“As do I.” Sarlana spoke.

Armen lifted his head slightly and then stepped forward next to Androcles.

-The modifications have been completed- He told them. -Kenroe’s engineers have reported we can jump whenever you are ready Androcles. Alpha Nine concurs with this assessment-

Andro looked at his father. “*Medwan?*”

Martin nodded his head. “Let’s do it.” He spoke as he rose to his feet. “I really hope we can find some answers to what is going on in this Temple. I don’t like leaving Anja hanging out there with her ass in the breeze and I certainly don’t envy having to turn to Lorendo to try and translate this language. I’ll be lucky to keep the hordes of all our peoples who will want his head on a platter at bay long enough for him to do it.”

“If we find him.” Murano stated.

Martin met his eyes. “We’ll find his fat ass.” He stated confidently. “I have faith.”

JETANIA HIDDEN AIRFIELD SIX KLICKS NORTHEAST OF WARIM

It had been far too long since she had held him in her arms and Loras Ranev took advantage of this opportunity to squeeze her son as tightly as she could as he held her off the ground and embraced her just as tightly. She fought back the tears as she held him and inhaled deeply of his scent, detecting the difference in him almost instantly. She detected the scent of a powerful female Alpha on him, swimming within his own scent, almost as if she had already chosen her son. She pulled her head back quickly and took his face in her hands as he lowered her to the ground, but she said nothing about this. He would tell her in due time she knew.

“*Aur keto.*” Loras spoke in a whisper.

Lazar smiled as he held his mother and touched his forehead to hers. “It has been far too long mother.” He said softly. “I have missed you.”

“What trouble have you gotten yourself into this time?” She asked him with a bright smile.

Lazar rolled his eyes at her with a smile and then turned toward where Anja stood beside Retta. “Mother... may I present Lady Anja Leonidas, one of six Queens of the what is known as the United Lycavorian Union.” He said holding out his hand to where she stood.

Loras looked at Anja from several feet away and could not help but think that she was far more beautiful in person, and not nearly as she imagined physically. She was much shorter than Loras imagined, but she could tell quickly that she was in excellent physical shape. Her scent was very pronounced and it was mixed heavily with the mint scent of an Alpha male more powerful than Loras had ever felt. An Alpha male that made Osrod a child in comparison. Loras also detected the scents of five others mixed in with her own, five Alpha females. This was a stunning realization to Loras. This woman and five others had been claimed by the same Alpha male, yet they also had laid claim to one another as well, their blood deeply blended with each other as their scents were mingled together. This female wolf did not try to hide this fact, nor the fact that she was a half breed. The Lycavorian blood coursing through her was perhaps the purest blood she had ever smelled in her lifetime, and that was no small feat considering the pureness of the blood of many of the Alphas on Jetania, hers included.

This Anja Leonidas was, simply put, exquisitely beautiful.

Loras let her dark eyes take in those around her, letting her nose take in the scents of the gorgeous young woman beside her, as well as the two other females behind her. All of them carried the scent of that powerful Alpha blood in their veins, marking them as children of this Alpha, though not fully Lycavorian either. The one with platinum blond hair had two-inch-high pointed ears, something that Loras had never seen before. Something their people had never seen before. Loras gazed at Retta for a long moment, easily sensing that this was the young woman whose scent was mixing with her son's. Loras could detect that she was the daughter of this Queen, but she was equally as beautiful as her mother, just with a different build. She was slightly taller, her breasts not as large, and she had long legs for her height. That they were mother and daughter was unmistakable however. Loras glanced at Lazar quickly and knew he was avoiding her gaze intentionally. She turned back to Anja and stepped forward. They had spoken for nearly an hour on the Oracle's Communications Relay and Loras knew this woman was as intelligent as she was beautiful.

"Allow me... allow me to welcome you to Jetania." Loras spoke.

Anja smiled and held out her hand in order to greet Loras and that is when Garget acted.

"Echelon deploy!" He barked the words loudly, his voice echoing across the airfield.

The twenty odd men who were standing all around appearing to gawk at the crowd and the ship suddenly brandished weapons and came charging forward with those weapons leveled and Anja and the others. Loras's eyes flew open in shock and she whirled on Garget as half a dozen of the men broke for the ramp of *SPARTAN ONE*. Endith and Tina were at the top of the ramp this time however and before any of them made it within ten meters of the ramp she had slapped her hand down on the interior side wall and the silver blue force field exploded into existence, effectively sealing off the interior of the ship. The three closest men to the ramp ran directly into the shield and were flung back almost five meters from the force even as Tina was blurring in motion back to the cockpit.

Anja hadn't moved a muscle, one hand going to Retta's arm as two men suddenly were beside her and stuck their weapons in her face. It had been a large point of contention with Kalis, Tir'ut and Zarah, for all of them had voiced objections to this very scenario. They thought it was too risky and too many bad things could happen. Anja had insisted and all of them had eventually bowed to her decision though they did not like it in the least. Anja felt a swell of pride within her when she saw them restraining themselves as they were surrounded by the dozen plus men with weapons out and ready to be used.

"Garget no!" Lazar's voice rose above the rest as he imposed himself in front of Retta without even thinking, his arms held up in the air. He saw Rhaos mimic his move out of the corner of his eye, stepping in front of Zarah, Kalis and Lucia.

"Garget what are you doing!" Loras almost screamed as she saw now that he too was holding a weapon and it was pointed at Anja and the others.

"Loras let me handle this!" Garget barked now. "Step back! We will subdue and question them on our terms!"

"You will do no such thing!" Loras growled now, her eyes changing and her fangs bursting from her gums in anger as she stepped directly in front of him.

Garget stared at her. "I am the military commander of the Ranev Pack!" He bellowed now his own eyes changing and his fangs coming forth as well.

"And I am the Matriarch!" Loras shouted back at him. "You will stand your men down this instant! I have told you who these men and women are!"

Garget shook his head. "Your son was among them Loras!" He spoke to her. "Your judgement was clouded because they held him prisoner! We do not know who they are and you allowed them to come here! To our most secure facility! This is not something you would have done!"

"I am no prisoner!" Lazar barked. "Sibot attacked their people first! They could have killed me and Rhaos and they did not! Stand down Garget!"

"I will not!" Garget barked.

[*Endy?*] Anja reached out to Endith on *SPARTAN ONE*.

[*We are ready Anja. Tina is in the dorsal turret and I will deploy it first. Serale is in the side turret!*] Endith responded instantly.

[*Zarah?*]

[I will take the six closest to me.] Zarah answered. [Lucia and Radem will take the eight on your opposite side mother. Kalis and Tir'ut the ones on Retta's left.]

[No killing!] Anja stated firmly. [Move quickly because I sense more men coming. Endy execute now!]

It happened in the blink of an eye. Endith hit a switch inside *SPARTAN ONE* and the high pitched sonic pulse erupted from the belly of the ship. The sound was piercing and extremely painful and instantly caused every Lycavorian in the immediate vicinity to cry out in pain and reach for their ears. All except Loras and Lazar.

A split second before the pulse hit Retta leaped onto Lazar's powerful back and closed her hands over both of his ears.

Trust me! Retta projected with all of her etheric ability directly into Lazar's mind and his body froze in mid motion, his hands covering Retta's over his ears as he felt the most incredible sensation wash over him. A sensation of desire and passion wrapped within the sweet essence of Retta's female aura. He could see Anja reach his mother a micro second after the pulse began and do the same thing to her, dragging her back slightly as Loras's hands came up to cover Anja's.

Lazar could only watch in unmitigated awe as the others moved. Using their vampire speed, Zarah, Lucia and Tir'ut blurred among the Jetania Lycavorians and slapped their weapons out of their hands sending them skittering away as the men staggered and dropped to their knees in agony as the sonic pulse pummeled their sensitive wolf ears. Kalis was less gentle in his actions and simply used his combined Lycavorian and Kavalian strength, something he could now make use of fully, and punched four different men as hard as he could. They dropped to the tarmac unconscious.

Lazar realized that they must have had some sort of filters protecting their own ears so that the pulse did not affect them. He could hear and feel the pulse even through his and Retta's hands, but she had effectively sealed his sensitive wolf ears from the outside world and his hands only reinforced this, keeping the vibration and pain from reaching him. He pushed his hands tighter against hers to keep the pulse from affecting him and saw his mother doing the same thing. It took only eight seconds total, but in that eight seconds, they had disarmed twenty-two men as they staggered on their feet and their knees all around them. Amazingly, the half breed aside, they did not have to strike anyone and then they were standing back exactly where they had been all around him, but now their weapons were out and ready to use.

The sonic pulse ended at that very instant and Retta released her hands from his head, Lazar turning quickly to look at her with wide eyes. She smiled up at him shyly and then he turned to see Anja helping Loras to stand up fully. Lazar turned to Rhaos' large form now and saw him struggling to get to his feet, still holding his head with one hand. He moved to help his friend as Loras turned and looked at Anja in astonishment.

"How...?" Loras gasped.

Anja smiled at her as she stepped back slowly. "You pick up a few things when your husband and mate is the foremost tactical genius in the galaxy." She answered.

Loras turned her head to where Garget was struggling to get to his feet and she marched over to him and jerked him up angrily. "You fool!" She screamed at him.

"Shoot them!" Garget barked the order as she shook his head. "Shoot them!"

All of the Jetania Lycavorians were looking around trying to find their weapons and act on their order but none of them had their weapons anymore and they looked at the small group of strange Lycavorians and saw their side arms in a pile at their feet.

Loras grabbed Garget's shoulders and jerked his head around to look at her. "You will be silent Garget!" She shouted at him. "You are acting no better than Osrod right now! You are acting like the monster we all loathe!"

Garget looked at her wide eyed, his head still ringing in dull pain. "Loras we must..."

"You have acted stupidly!" Loras barked at him. "For all your years and wisdom you have acted more the fool today than at any time in your life!"

"Excuse me?" Anja's voice broke in and Loras turned to see her step up to where she squatted beside Garget.

"Be silent half breed!" Garget rasped angrily.

Anja chuckled. "Half breed?" She commented. "Wow... that's original." She jerked her thumb back toward *SPARTAN ONE*. "You should probably look on top of my ship." She told them.

Garget finally rose to his feet with Loras beside him and they both directed their eyes to the ship and saw the now occupied protrusion on top of the ship. It was not there before and it was obviously some sort of weapons turret. Garget's eyes went wide and he instinctively moved in front of Loras when he saw the gun turret come to rest pointed directly at him.

"Loras get..." He began to speak but Loras shoved him out of the way and remained in front of Anja.

"*Ata uvenn Garget!*" Loras snarled looking at him. "*Aellsel ata uvenn!*" (Shut up)

"You have more men about to enter this area." Anja spoke now looking at Garget. "Tell them to stand down or they will die. Just as you and everyone else here will die. I don't know what your problem is, but you will not succeed here. I will not allow you to take us prisoner."

"You will not allow?" Garget snarled at her.

Anja Leonidas was known throughout the Lycavorian Union as perhaps the one Queen that you did not want to test. Her combat skills were unquestioned as was her distaste for those who thought themselves superior to others. Her temper was famous and many had been cowed by her verbally through the years when they thought to challenge her. She was also known, along with Aricia, as being fearless. Anja stepped closer to Garget and allowed the wolf within her to come out. The black ring encircled her jade green eyes and her dual wolf fangs burst from her guns fully as she stared at Garget without fear.

"I will not allow!" Anja growled at him. "We came here, we brought Lazar and Rhaos back, even after your people attacked mine! Your people shot and almost killed my son!" Anja glared at him now, Garget's eyes wide as he saw the dual fangs and the ferociousness of this Alpha wolf. Half breed she may have been, but he could feel her aura pulsing with more power than he had ever felt from a pureblood in all his thirty thousand plus years. "We came here in friendship! You obviously don't want that friendship! We have nothing to do with that dipshit you call a King and your own arrogance and fear will ensure that doesn't change! We are going to board our ship now and leave you to wallow in your own ignorance!" Anja poked Garget in the chest hard, unafraid of him in the least. "You want to try and stop us *vorat avan*, go ahead! You will not succeed!"

"Anja no!" Loras pleaded.

Anja looked at her now. "I would have truly enjoyed getting to know you Loras Ranev, all of us would have, but we will not remain where we are not welcome. And Martin will not come here if this attitude is so prevalent. He has less patience for ignorance than I do."

"Anja please... we..."

Two large flashes of white orange light appeared on either side of Garget and Loras, Anja's head snapping around as suddenly a dozen men and women in light weight black and red body armor appeared on either side of them. All of them carried staffs of some sort and they immediately moved to take up positions surrounding Retta and the others, but facing outwards as if protecting them.

Loras looked around at them in shock. "*Vada Brutu Stros!*" She exclaimed.

"*Tenna!*" Kalis barked out as his hands tightened on his rifle, his eyes darting all around them as he made ready to dash forward and scoop her into his arms. He had been among them the least amount of time but he was also the most tactically sound and experienced and Anja knew it. And if he chose to act, Anja knew she would not be able to compete against his sheer strength in getting her to safety.

"*Nysil Mandri!*" Anja snapped quickly knowing what Androcles and Martin must have told him. Protect her at all costs. Kalis would do so even at the cost of his life Anja knew. (Hold Nephew)

Another flash of orange white light and suddenly Garget's wide eyes were focused on where Taris, Anoria and Rylin appeared as if by magic directly to his right. The Lycavorians in the landing area were also stunned into non-motion, unbelieving of what they had just seen take place.

"Taris!" Garget almost shouted when he saw his youngest and most cherished daughter twirl the staff she carried in her hand and move to stand beside Lazar with Anoria Vesrak next to her. Rylin stepped forward and looked at Garget shaking her head as if in disgust.

"Have we fallen so far into fear and mistrust that we no longer trust our own instincts Garget?" Rylin questioned him. Garget was about to respond when Rylin turned and looked at Anja. She bowed her head deeply which stunned Garget and those around them for the High Priestess of the Oracle never bowed to anyone. "Lady Anja, Queen Anja, it is with great hope and happiness that I greet you on behalf of the Oracle Nilantha."

Anja smiled and looked at her, Rylin's own eyes and fangs now openly displayed. They had spoken very briefly on the COM, most of her conversations having been with Loras, but she struck Anja as a capable and extremely intelligent woman. "Thank you." Anja spoke evenly. "Though I dare say there are some who do not share your sentiment."

Rylin looked at Garget quickly and then back to her. "Garget Ranev has led the Ranev pack with honor and a calm hand for many centuries Queen Anja. His only goal is to keep our people and Loras safe ever since she became Matriarch to the Mountain Packs. There are times when his devotion to his duties blind him to other things."

Anja looked at Garget then, bending over to retrieve his fallen and discarded sidearm and she stood back up. "I do have some experience in witnessing that very trait. Martin tends to be very overprotective at times."

Rylin smiled at this. "*Vada Mard Revik* is like this?"

Anja rolled her eyes slightly and her smile grew wider. "You have no idea." She said. He looked at Garget and held out the sidearm to him, seeing his eyes grow wide at this action. "This *nubous igord* King Osrod gave the order to shoot my youngest son and one of my dearest friends, Garget Ranev. We have no connection to him and given the opportunity, I will happily serve you his shriveled *nor* on a plate if that is your wish, if my husband and mate doesn't catch him first. That would be even more unpleasant for him I assure you."

Garget's eyes went wide at her words and even Loras and Rylin could not help the laughs that escaped their lips. Garget reached out slowly and took the weapon from her fingers, his eyes never leaving her face. He had not detected even the hint of a lie in her words, her heart calm and her words true. This Alpha female, half breed though she may have been, she had ice in her veins.

"Then... then it is true?" He gasped aloud. "It is all true?"

Anja glanced at Loras and Rylin. "Is what true?" She asked.

Loras reached up and put her hands on his broad shoulders. "Yes, Garget my friend. It is true."

SPARTA'S WRATH

The bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH* was very crowded even with the immense size of the bridge itself. Martin stood to one side of the bridge with Aricia, For'mya, Jezima and Dynina. Asa and Archer stood closer to the bulkhead, ever present shadows to Jezima and now Dynina, per their King's instructions. The two women were their only concern now. Danny had returned to Ventori with Wayonn and Murano to prepare to jump to Jetania in COLS space if Martin or Anja called for him. There was no discussion Dynina noticed right away, only a few odd looks between the brothers that Dynina did not understand. She had questioned Aricia and For'mya about this as they made their way to the bridge and Aricia's answer had been very blunt and honest.

"Martin and Daniel do not need to speak to one another openly in order to know what the other is thinking Dynina. They do not even need to communicate etherically. That is why they are true Fervons rie vada Saan. They have a link that only brothers forged together in the fires of combat can have. If it is needed, and Martin or Anja calls for him, Daniel will jump to this planet Jetania with half our force of ships and Spartans. He will then lay waste to everything, opening the Letha rie Jorbhe upon them until Anja is safe or Martin orders him to cease."

Dynina really had not had much of a response to that statement and she had shuddered involuntarily at the cold way Aricia had replied. It was spoken with hardly any emotion at all, a simple declaration of fact. No doubt, and certainly no hesitation.

Dynina had immersed herself in the long history and lore of these Spartans that rose to greatness on Earth under Martin's father after her times connecting to Walter. Their code of honor, both as wolves and as men, was nearly unbendable. Dynina now fully understood why Helen had chosen the Spartan men and women to host the Ten Thousand in that dark time. They were extremely formidable even before the Lycavorian blood was introduced into their culture, and now they had blended their two cultures together so seamlessly that it was

impossible to tell them apart. Dynina also knew that even among those many species in the Union that were not Lycavorian, the Spartan culture and way of life had taken deep root.

As they stood on the bridge now, only hours from fulfilling the goal Sumar had tasked her with so many years ago, Dynina let her dark eyes wander to where Androcles stood beside Armen across the bridge. Dorian and Laren were on standing on his left, his *Anome* Sadi on his right. Perlae, Ishma and Awser standing on the opposite side of the towering Avatar. They were speaking to one another in whispers but Dynina could see the animation of their faces and the joy that filled their eyes. The day she had wished to be upon her grandchildren was now here and they would have a hand going into the future.

Dynina could only watch as the spider like Worker Drone Alpha Nine moved from Armen to Androcles, crawling easily between their wide shoulders and all the while bouncing animatedly and singing out with brief chirps and whistles. It did not seem to bother Androcles in the least and he would often nod his head to the metal creature. Dynina had often heard of the Pralor Worker Drones from her friends on Lorenu but she had never witnessed them in action until she had arrived among these men and women. The plans to build these Drones had not been included in the information on the Pralor ships that they had arrived on Lorene with. She had seen them skittering all across the decks on this very ship, as well as others, and men and women acknowledged them even as they moved among the same corridors. It was almost as if they were treated as crewmembers.

Dynina reached out and touched Martin's arm seeing his head turn to look at her. "He actually understands all those noises that machine emits?" She asked.

Martin glanced over and saw Alpha Nine move from Andro's shoulder back to Armen and he smiled and turned back to look at her. "He always has been an oddball." Martin spoke.

For'mya snorted softly in humor. "And I wonder where he gets that from." She stated as Jezima smiled and squeezed her hand.

"Father!" Andro called from across the bridge causing Martin to look at him. "We are ready."

Martin nodded his head. "Let her rip Armen." He spoke loudly.

Andro looked at Armen and nodded his head. Armen stepped away from Androcles and moved to his command position in the center of the bridge.

-Helm... is your course locked in-

"Standing by sir!" The male voice echoed out.

-TO, ensure defensive systems are activated the moment we revert to normal space. All Refractive Shield Banks to full power and prepare all batteries for saturation fire-

"Defensive grids online and ready. Weapons powered and prepared to initiate saturation barrage sir." The female voice called out.

Dynina stepped closer to Martin. "*Staaniaketo*, these measures are not needed." She spoke softly.

Martin nodded his head. "I know, but this is standard procedure for us when jumping to an unknown location *staania*. And it keeps our people sharp."

-Very well. Helm Officer... engage the Subspace Portal Generator. Let's go where we have never been before-

Martin Leonidas rolled his eyes and shook his head while laughter carried across the bridge. "Great!" He muttered. "Another movie quoting Avatar. As if Avi wasn't enough."

Andro laughed at his father's reaction and all eyes turned to the main view window. The stars were beginning to distort and stretch in front of them, becoming white streaks of solid light and then *SPARTA'S WRATH* became the first Lycavorian Union warship in history to use the SPG Engine Drive. Those men and women watching from other ships above Ventori saw the white streaks engulf the massive command ship, like small lasers hitting every centimeter of her hull. and then the enormous ship was gone.

SPARTA'S WRATH
LORENU

The planet was beautiful to look at as it appeared in the view window and then the stars returned to normal and before them was a sight Dynina had seen many times. No one spoke as they all were staring at the planet before them. Perlae was closest to Androcles and she saw the look of astonishment on his face and she laughed softly. It was Martin's comment that brought loud laughter from those on the bridge.

"*Nubou lae!*" Martin gasped as he stared at the planet in front of him.

"Martin Leonidas!" For'mya barked as she slapped him hard in the shoulder.

"We are being hailed from the surface!" A female voice barked out from the side. "Secure QRC channel!"

Andro turned to Armen with wide eyes. "Armen, how far did we travel?" He gasped.

Armen's eyes moved back and forth quickly. **-Overlaying known star charts-** Armen spoke. **-Fascinating. We are...-**

Andro looked at him as he paused. "Armen?"

-We have traversed forty-seven thousand three and hundred and nineteen point nine light years- Armen answered his voice carrying with it something Andro had never heard before. He heard awe. **-We are currently on the extreme edge of what was once known Pralor space. Sensors cannot penetrate outside the surrounding system due to the highly unstable Ionic Particle Nebula that encircles the Lorene planetary system-** Armen looked at Androcles directly now, his eyes wide. **-There is no way to determine how large the nebula is or how far it extends around the planet and surrounding system Andro, but essentially we are completely invisible to any known sensor arrays-** Armen saw Androcles' eyes widen even more and his internal sensors detected an increase in his heartrate and that of Dorian and Laren.

"They will expect me to answer *staaniaketo*." Dynina spoke to Martin.

Martin looked at her still stunned and he nodded. "Andro... open the channel."

-Opening secure QRC channel- Armen spoke.

The main holodisc on the bridge flare to life with the image of several figures, Pralor, Darastrixi and Lycavorian in the background. The Darastrixi male was in the forefront and he looked at them with wide eyes as Dynina stepped forward.

"Kadeer." Dynina spoke very affectionately. She could speak no other way to the man who had loved her daughter with such fervor and dedication.

"Dynina!" Kadeer exclaimed.

"Father!" Perlae, Ishma and Awser all spoke as one.

Everyone on the bridge saw the Darastrixi's jaw twitch slightly as he saw his children and he smiled. "My children." He spoke calmly though his voice wavered ever so slightly. He turned back to Dynina. "We have been waiting eagerly Dynina. Do you..." His eyes shifted once more and he saw who his children stood next too. "*Nomag wer navniki ve*." He gasped in his native Darastrixi tongue. "*Vada Tarivuos!*" He switched to very fluent Lycavorian as he gazed upon Androcles, Dorian and Laren. His orange hued eyes snapped back to where Dynina stood and he saw Martin. "*Wer irral Daar ar Fogah!* Dynina you have... you have found them!" (May the spirits preserve me) (The first king of three)

Dynina nodded her head. "We have my dear friend." She spoke. "Please have..."

"Dynina... the Temple..." Kadeer interrupted her. "The Temple has come alive! It had... it happened only moments ago! It is continuing to power up. Our readings suggest that the entire facility is waking up!"

Dynina's eyes were wide. "Kadeer are you certain?" She gasped.
"Yes!" Kadeer answered. "It is..."

-Andro-

All heads on the bridge turned to see Androcles stagger slightly, and then they saw Dorian and Laren also teeter and grab for one another.

"Andro!" Sadi gasped aloud as she reached for him.

"Do you feel it?" Dorian echoed her words.

Andro reached out to grasp the computer station beside him with one hand and grip Sadi with the other as Awser reached for him. "Cousin?" He asked. "What is wrong?"

Andro shook his head. "I don't know." He answered softly. "Something... something is reaching for us!"

Martin did not hesitate and he moved across the bridge in half a dozen strides, his hands going to his sons and Laren without regard. "Andro?"

Andro gripped his father's arms. "We can... we can feel a presence father!" He spoke. "It is getting stronger and..."

Martin felt the surge of power through his son's hands and his own eyes grew wider. "*Saoi sibfla!*" He gasped aloud feeling the powerful etheric energy source swirling around them.

Directly to their right there was a bright flash of white light and then suddenly hovering before them was a ball of pure white light. Several crewmembers jumped out of their seats and drew weapons, leveling them at the ball of white light. And then they all heard the voice. A female voice, like the smooth gentleness of running water from a mountain stream.

Come to me. All of you. It is time. It is time for the Dahakoan Heralds and the True King to take their places. Come to me. All of you. The time has come for the Prophecy to be fulfilled.

As quickly as the ball of white light had appeared it was gone. Aricia and For'mya rushed across the bridge to join Martin and reaching for Androcles and the others.

"What the hell was that?" Martin barked.

-Unknown- Armen answered. **-It did not register on internal sensors-**

"We must go there Andro!" Laren hissed softly as she gripped For'mya and Ishma's arms. "We must go there now!"

Dorian nodded his head as he held onto Awser and Perlae. "Andro!"

"Yes!" Androcles spoke right after her.

Dynina was the one who acted decisively now. "Kadeer!" She barked out seeing his wide eyes come to rest on her.

Everyone in the control room on Lorenu had seen what had just taken place and their eyes were just as shocked as those on *SPARTA'S WRATH*. "You and the others meet us at the Temple entrance with all the information we have gathered through the years! Waste no time my friend! We will be coming down in haste!"

Kadeer Imuma glanced at his three children and then nodded his head. "We will be waiting!" He barked.

**JETANIA
HIDDEN AIRFIELD
SIX KLICKS NORTHEAST OF WARIM**

Rylin and Loras had led Anja and the others into the main airfield facility that was built into the side of one of the mountains that the airfield was hidden between. Endith, Tina and Serale had remained with

SPARTAN ONE, the shield still in place covering the rear of the ship. Tina had told Anja they were not worried, nothing that they had seen so far suggested that these Coalition folks had anything that could breach the force field, let alone the Dragon Armor on *SPARTAN ONE*. They would maintain open COM channels from their implants and be ready for a quick departure if it was needed.

Garget found himself continually glancing at Kalis, Tir'ut, Normya, Zarah and Lucia. Two of them had the scent of this Alpha that was so powerfully prominent on the red haired Queen, which indicated they were his children. The young man he now knew was Kalis, the Lycavorian blood within him was very potent as well and smelled faintly of the same blood within Anja and her children Garget concluded. He must have been a relative of some sort in order for it to be so powerful. The huge one with bone spikes on his face had the blood of the platinum haired young female within his blood, and the black hair female also had the same with the other daughter. He did not understand what this meant, smelling them together like he did, but one thing he did recognize was that the young daughter, Zarah was her name, and the other one called Lucia were lovers.

Garget knew this was against the law among COLS, and while most of the Mountain Packs ignored this and many other laws they thought stupid, it was not a common thing at all. Garget personally did not have an opinion of this, it neither bothered him or pleased him. His take was the same as most of the Mountain Packs. Respect and honor those among you the same way you would want them to treat you. Garget knew of a few relationships such as this within all of the Mountain packs across Jetania, but they were not shunned and they were protected by their Packs from COLS law. As far as he was concerned, if two souls were meant to be in such a way, who was he to say otherwise. Garget blinked as Loras finished asked the question regarding Ventori and he looked at her quickly and then to Anja.

“...Betas and Gamma are still alive then?” Loras spoke. “Truly?”

Anja nodded her head. “What is left of them yes. As I told you before, they had built a great society and many cities through the years, but it was all lost a little over three years ago.”

“By these... by these... you called them Svorag?” Rylin asked.

Anja nodded once more. “Yes.” She leaned forward in her chair now. “Forgive me for being blunt, but that is not a concern right now.” She spoke. “What will be more of a concern for my mate Martin is why this Sibot person did what he did? Why did he try to kidnap us? The encounter our son Androcles had with your ships when they first entered this system should have given your leadership pause at the very least.”

Garget snorted in disgust now. “Osrod Aspion may be King, but he is no leader.” He stated with loathing in his voice. “He is a rudimentary tactician at best. His only concerns are cementing his own power and influence and acquiring more.”

Lazar looked at his mother and saw her nod. This did not go unnoticed by Anja and the others but Anja waited patiently. Lazar turned to look at her then. “When Nasso first reported the encounter with your ships to my father... he was not surprised.” Lazar told her. “It was almost like he knew about you already.”

“That’s not possible.” Anja said. “We have only been in this quadrant of space for a few months and we have not encounter other Lycavorians except those on Ventori. How could he already know about us?”

“The Tri-Alliance.” Garget said.

Anja met his eyes now. “I have heard that term before. Your ship’s commander accused us of being part of that. What is that?”

“Many millennia ago when Osrod’s grandfather was still King, there was another encounter with Lycavorians we had never seen before. They were with two other species that we had also never seen before. They were very technologically advanced, just as you are, but Osrod’s grandfather chose to try and force them to give up their technology to us and become part of COLS.” Rylin spoke now. “They refused. They were led by a woman. A Lycavorian woman of great beauty and intelligence. Osrod’s grandfather welcomed them into our society and for weeks they were among us, making friends and mingling with us. Osrod’s grandfather then chose to betray them in order to take the technology they had. He tried to force this woman to become his mate even after she rebuffed his advances. She injured him badly and somehow she managed to warn all of her people here on Jetania and told them to get off. How they managed this is unknown, but most of those who were here managed to escape before Royal Security Forces could capture them. A handful did not make it and were captured, but most got off the planet and back to their ship.”

“How many is a handful?” Anja asked.

“Rumors say half a dozen, perhaps more.” Garget spoke now. “No one knows for sure. They were declared enemies of the Coalition within hours. Those that were captured were... they were never heard from again. Osrod’s grandfather was mutilated physically by this woman... she...”

“*Via ceit jen nor stasi.*” Anja finished his sentence. (She bit his balls off)

Rylin and Garget looked at her with wide eyes. “How do you... how do you know that?” Garget finally asked in shock. “That is not... that information is not common knowledge!”

Anja nodded her head. “I don’t imagine it is.” She said. “I know that because the woman who committed this act is my mate’s *staania*, several times removed, but she is... she is our blood. As are her grandchildren, who your Captain Nasso wanted to capture. That is why our son Androcles did what he did.”

“Never surrender your family.” Loras whispered softly. “Not when they are innocent or persecuted.”

Anja nodded her head. “Exactly.” She stated.

“Then you are members of the Tri-Alliance?” Lazar asked now.

Anja shook her head quickly. “As I said before, we had never heard the term before this Captain Nasso accused us of being part of it.” She spoke. “And Dynina Mahanlo only came to be among us within the last three days. She arrived on Ventori the day before this *igord* Sibot attacked us.” Anja sat back in her chair now.

“Mahanlo?” Garget spoke with wide eyes.

Anja nodded her head. “Yes. Do you know the name?”

Loras looked at Anja. “It is... the Oracle has told us that the Mahanlo Pack is where it all began Anja. Where the Prophecy began on our original homeworld.”

“Lycavore.” Anja stated evenly.

“Then it does exist?” Garget almost yelled.

Anja nodded her head. “Oh yes.” She answered. “I have been there.”

“You have been there as well?” Rylin gasped now. “Truly?”

Anja nodded her head. “Many years ago to retrieve one of our children that had been separated from us. It is deep within High Coven space but now that Androcles has brought peace between us, we were hoping to take all of our family there one day.”

“This High Coven...?” Lazar asked now from beside Retta. “They are the ones who caused *Vada Brutu Dur*. Just as the prophecy foretold?”

Anja nodded her head. “Yes, but there were many among their kind that did not believe as their leaders did. Through the years many defected to be with us. Millions of them are now family and close friends to all of our people.”

Garget glanced at where Lucia and Zarah stood together, Radem just behind them. “And more it would appear.” He stated.

“Those of us within the Mountain Packs... that is what we have believed for millennia.” Rylin stated now. “The Oracle has tried to maintain this but it became very hard when Osrod’s father tried to murder her and ban our beliefs.”

Anja nodded her head. “Well... she is certainly not wrong.” She answered. “Though I personally believe it goes far beyond what she knows. Martin does too. We left the Alpha Quadrant in the hopes that we would find the answers to many of the questions that have plagued Martin since he was a little boy. We have discovered many of those answers, but the answers have brought far more questions.”

Rylin nodded her head. “As most answers do.” She replied. “The Oracle will be able to answer more of your questions Anja, but even she is not all knowing. While the scrolls she has mentioned this Mahanlo Pack in many important verses and statements, they do not go beyond them.”

Anja nodded her head. “I thought that might be the case.” She said. “But you knew about Martin, and you know of our sons and Laren. And you knew we would eventually come here?”

Loras nodded her head. “Not when exactly. Only that it would happen one day. *Vada Mard Revik for vada Tarivuos gur ared jur chevsh.*” (The True King and the Heralds will one day come.)

“*And henes gur sey vada saan rie allsknesi vorevor hel.*” Rylin finished the statement from the Oracle’s Scrolls. (And they will have the blood of the ancients within them.)

Anja looked at both of them for a long moment. “And you... you have believed this all of this time?” She asked finally.

Rylin nodded her head. “Yes.”

“It has been the cornerstone of our purpose.” Garget told her now, and his words caused him to go up several notches in Anja’s book. “At least those of us among the Mountain Packs. Those who follow Osrod, the Coastal, City and Plains Packs, they have drifted away from what the Oracle has been teaching for as long as any of us can remember.”

“Not all of them Garget.” Loras spoke. “There are some who still believe. And I think there are far more than what we know of.”

Garget nodded at her words. “Yes, you are correct Loras.”

“So this pinhead Osrod wanted to capture us, any of us, to get information out of us?” Anja asked. “That is what Sibot was ordered to do?”

Lazar nodded his head now. “I do not know what his exact orders to Sibot were.” He spoke. “Most likely that was part of it. More than likely he also wanted prisoners to barter to your mate for technology or other things. Anything to enhance his power base and make him stronger.”

“He would have been sorely disappointed.” Zarah spoke for the first time from where she stood. They all saw Retta grin beside Lazar and nod her head silently at this. “Our father and brother would have come for us. They would have brought ruin to this fool Osrod. Our *fervon* especially.”

“*Mard astia.*” Retta echoed her sister’s words. (True Enough)

“You are not fully Lycavorian child.” Garget spoke but he did so with respect and no malice in his voice.

Zarah looked at her mother. “*Medwan?*”

Garget looked surprised. “You refer to her as mother?”

Anja nodded her head to Zarah and she looked back to Garget. “My mother is a vampire. Queen Isabella. I am half vampire as are my sister Carina and my brother Dorian. And I do call her mother. We do not differentiate who our birth mothers are however, we never have. My brothers and sisters and I see all of them as our mother. They speak with one voice and always have, just as if they were the ones who brought us into this world.”

“Fascinating.” Rylin spoke looking at Anja. “You are...”

“I was Hadarian before Martin turned me.” Anja replied. “It is one of the many species within the Union.”

“But your blood...” Garget spoke softly. “Your aura... it is more powerful than almost any pureblooded Alpha female that I have smelled in my lifetime. I dare say only Loras comes close to matching your aura. How is that possible?”

“*Una coi vada saan rie vada allsknesi Garget.*” Rylin spoke. (It is the blood of the ancients.) “It flows within the True King and therefore any who are turned by him. The purest of any bloodline among our people no matter where we reside. *Vada mard saan.*” She looked at Anja now. “We have... we have always believed that we are descended from those who once lived on our true homeworld Queen Anja. We... oh my... what do you wish us to call you?”

Anja looked confused. “Call me?”

“You are Queen, one of six Queens to the *Mard Revik.*” Rylin spoke. “We must honor this.”

Anja shook her head. “Be that as it may be, you will find that we do not... we do not adhere to the usual decorum. Anja is just fine. We don’t consider ourselves any more important than the next person.”

“But you are... you are royalty.” Garget spoke. “By virtue of your blood.”

“We will refer to you as Lady Anja.” Rylin spoke putting an end to that conversation. “At least until we received new directives from the Oracle or from the *Mard Revik.*” All of them saw Anja smile and they heard Retta chuckle very softly. They looked at her with surprise and some distain but Retta shook her head quickly.

“Forgive me. I do not find you or your words humorous...” Retta quickly explained. “I just think my father will surprise you.”

“In what way child?” Garget asked.

“My father, our father...” Retta motioned to Zarah and Normya who stood behind her. “He is unlike any King that you might think of. In all the time we and our siblings have grown, he has done more to not be King to our people. He hates the job. He says that all of the time.”

“Retta!” Anja cautioned sharply causing her to meet her gaze. [*Be careful what you say Baby Girl. We don’t yet know if we can trust them fully.*]

Retta nodded her head quickly. *[I'm sorry mother.]* She spoke. *[But I think you feel that we can trust them completely. It is what I feel.]*

Anja nodded her head. *[Perhaps... but your father would want us to be cautious Retta. You know that. Andro as well.]*

Retta's face changed instantly and she nodded her head without hesitation. Anja smiled at this reaction because it was a simple fact among all of their children. None of them wanted to do anything that would dishonor their father, they would die before doing that Anja knew, but ranking right up there with that knowledge was the fact that none of them wanted to look foolish to their older brother. Androcles had been there for each and every one of them during their lives and he had taught them many things, far more things than even their parents knew about, as Anja and her fellow Queens were discovering as time went by, and none of his siblings would do anything that they knew Androcles did not find prudent or smart.

While Garget sat there in his chair and saw only Anja staring at her daughter with an almost stern expression, Rylin, Loras and Lazar felt the faintest of tremors within their minds. Like tiny whispers upon a wind that were gone almost before you could recognize them. Rylin knew what it was from almost the moment she felt the whisper, and while she had cultivated through the years what the Oracle had shown her in regards to her Etheric ability, Rylin now knew that what she could do was infantile compared to this woman, her children and the *Mard Revik*. Rylin quickly decided to move the conversation back the way it had been going. Now was not the time to get into a discussion about Etheric abilities, for Garget and Lazar would not understand fully what Loras and she already knew.

"As I was saying before..." Rylin began again. "Osrod's grandfather and father began to diminish this belief until it was no longer our history, but a myth and legend. They even had official history and records altered to reflect this. Many among the Plains, City and Coastal Packs have forsaken this history as gibberish, but those from the Mountain Packs, the Alphas taken from Ventori and brought here, we have always believed and our faith has never wavered. No matter what Osrod and his ancestors did they could not beat this out of our people. It is one of the main reasons we, while not shunned by the others, are avoided. We are allowed to go everywhere within COLS, serve in the military and such, all under the stipulation that we do not preach or try to convert others."

"Who taught you this?" Anja asked her.

"Our Oracle from Ventori did not survive the return trip here to Jetania, but her writings and teachings have been the basis for us for millennia." Rylin answered. "When we came here and discovered the COLS Oracle spoke and taught the same thing, it was one of the reasons we decided to remain. And the fact that Osrod's grandfather would not let us leave. Nilantha combined what our Oracle taught us into what she taught, they were essentially the same thing you see, and it was almost as if we did not leave Ventori."

"And how long have you been here?" Anja asked.

Rylin shrugged her shoulders. "No one really knows anymore." She answered honestly. "The Oracle I'm sure has the exact number of years, she was there to greet many of the senior Pack members when they first arrived, from a distance anyway, but for most of us it no longer matters. At least two hundred and fifty thousand years or something like that."

"And how long have the others been here?" Anja asked her.

Rylin shook her head slowly. "Long before we arrived here. Perhaps an additional hundred thousand years or so. Mountain Pack history begins when we arrived here, but the history of COLS goes back another hundred thousand years at least."

Anja nodded her head to herself. That timetable fit roughly with what information Martin and the others had been able to put together. She looked at Rylin and Loras. "When can we meet with Nilantha?" She asked.

Rylin nodded her head. "She will be arriving shortly. Taris and Anoria went to retrieve her. I..." Rylin turned when the door to the secure conference room opened and a young Alpha male moved in quickly and went right to Garget.

"Something has come up that needs your attention sir." He spoke to Garget.

Garget looked across the table at Lazar. "Lazar... you and Rhaos join me." He spoke coming to his feet. "Rylin we will be in the Command Center when the Oracle arrives. I would like to meet her Rylin, given what is happening all around us now."

Rylin nodded her head with a smile. "I believe it is time for just that Garget my old friend." She replied. "Finish what you need to take care of and return here." She said.

Anja watched intently as Lazar rose to his feet, glancing at Retta for a long moment, her green eyes looking up into his face before he turned and followed Rhaos and Garget out of the room. She turned back to Anja and the others as Zarah moved to take Lazar's vacated seat beside her sister, and Normya moved a chair from the other side of the wall to take up position on Retta's opposite side. Lucia simply stood behind Zarah, her hands on Zarah's shoulders.

Rylin watched this with interest for she could tell instantly that the young, red haired female was coming into Phase. Her first Phase if Rylin's nose was accurate, and it was going to be a powerful one if she was any judge, but amazingly she was suppressing it unlike any female wolf she had ever seen before. She was drawing strength from her sisters in the room and also from her mother in doing this Rylin was sure, any female wolf could do that to a degree, but this young female was suppressing her fever almost to the point that it did not hamper her mentally or physically in any way. Rylin did not know how she was doing it, but she was, and she also noticed that Lazar Aspion was the focal point of this young woman's interest. Rylin had seen desire in a female wolf before, yet what she saw in Retta's eyes for Lazar was pure, unbridled passion, deep longing and ardent desire. And though Lazar was fighting it very well, she knew he felt the same attraction to Retta, for he would never have sat beside her at the table otherwise.

"He doesn't trust us yet." Anja's voice drew Rylin out of her thoughts.

"Lady Anja?" She asked looking at Anja. Rylin didn't know it but she had just coined what everyone among the Mountain Packs would begin to call Anja and her fellow Queens now and into the future.

"Garget." Anja spoke sitting back in her chair and looking at Loras. "He doesn't trust us completely. I could smell that on him easily. And pulling Lazar and Rhaos out of here as if I would not know what he intended was a dead giveaway as well."

Loras leaned forward. "Anja, he is one of the most loyal men I have..." She began to defend him but Anja shook her head.

"No, I understand. Believe me I do." Anja spoke quickly. "In his shoes I would probably be the same way. I respect that. He cares deeply for both of you, that much is obvious." Anja looked at Rylin. "Does he know that Nilantha is not Lycavorian?"

Rylin shook her head. "Very few of our people do." She replied. "With you being here and the *Mard Revik* and the Heralds not far behind you, I believe it is time to change that."

Anja nodded her head. "That would probably be a good thing." She spoke. She looked at Loras once more. "You realize that once this fool Osrod finds out about her, he will use that knowledge to discredit her. Or try to anyway. Maybe even attempt to kill her if her knowledge is as extensive as I think it is."

Loras nodded her head. "Yes. We have always known that, but we are prepared for it." She answered. "She may be a different species, but as I have learned so very recently, there is no way she could know what she knows without being Lycavorian at least in her heart." Loras met her eyes. "And she is."

Garget drew Lazar and Rhaos into the separate room down the corridor as the young Alpha moved to the massive wall bank of monitors in the room. This was the main control point for the city of Warim and its defenses as well as the surrounding two hundred square kilometers of territory around Warim. Nothing living gained entry into that area without being detected by someone in this main control room. Thousands of hidden cameras and sensors of all kinds were spread all over the two hundred square kilometers and it was very nearly impossible to traverse more than a few hundred feet within the control area without some sort of sensor detecting your movements. Every Mountain Pack city was set up in such a way, and it was one of the reasons Osrod had never been able to extend his reach into their territory.

"What do you have Odak?" Garget asked him.

The young man sat in his chair and pulled up something on the huge monitor in front of him. "They came in through the western tunnels sir." Odak answered pointing to the monitor. "Half a dozen Alphas on what appears to be a hunting trip. You can see for yourselves who leads them."

Garget, Lazar and Rhaos all looked at the monitor as the picture tightened on the face of one wolf.

“Juyno!” Lazar snarled angrily. “*Lon nubous lytor!*”

“They continue to use the Western Tunnels thinking that we cannot see them when they enter our territory.” Odak spoke. “This is the third trip he has led into our lands in the last eight months.”

Lazar and Rhaos both snorted in obvious disgust at this information and Garget smiled in response to their reaction. “Hunting trip my *mida!*” Lazar snarled angrily. “If my dog of a half-brother is leading them, they are searching for any Mountain Pack females that may stray from the main travel corridors or ones they can snatch from a small village.”

Garget nodded his head. “Their forays into our lands are becoming more frequent since the two of you and Laon have been out among the stars playing hero these last years.” Garget told them. “Three of them have been successful in the last five years alone.”

Lazar looked at him. “The females?”

“Two from the Gorlet Pack and one from the Sinsal Pack.” Garget answered. “It took all of your mother’s will to keep the Sinsal Pack from openly wiping out the Plains Pack that took her. Loras’ proxy lodged a formal complaint with your father’s staff but they laughed it off as they always do.”

“Did they retrieve them?” Rhaos asked now.

Garget shook his head with a sly grin. “Surprisingly, all of the young females chose to remain. The Alphas who claimed them treated them well and have been committed to them to a fault since they were taken. None have taken other mates and the three females have garnered the trust of those around them now. They make excellent intelligence sources. All of them have children now, and when the Alphas bring them back to their Packs to visit, all three return with them and they act with honor and integrity. It took Melkot Sinsal longer to accept it, it was one of his daughters that was taken, but now even he is satisfied with the young wolf. He has proven his dedication to Melkot’s daughter, which is no small feat.”

Lazar nodded his head. “No it is not.” He agreed.

Rhaos looked at Lazar. “So there is still some hope for them.” He stated.

Garget nodded his head. “Perhaps. They are the only three that have been allowed to remain mated however. The other females they have taken have all been returned to their packs. Most of the COLS Alpha have no stomach for a Mountain Pack Alpha female. They want their women submissive and meek.” Garget looked at Lazar now. “That young half breed burns for you Lazar.”

Lazar looked up quickly and met his eyes. “And I for her Garget.” He answered honestly. He would never lie to this man, who he regarded as more a father to him than his own blood. “I do not understand it... I have been in the presence of other females in Phase. Powerful Alpha females, but none of them have affected me as Retta does. It’s almost as if my blood yearns to be with her. It burns to be with her. Her blood calls to me like nothing I have ever felt Garget!”

Garget nodded his head. “Half breed though she may be Lazar, if she truly does have the blood of the ancients within her, the blood of the *Mard Revik*, then no pureblood on Jetania will be like her. Her aura reeks for you Lazar. She wants only you. Even an old wolf like me can smell that. Do what your blood and your instincts call for you to do my boy.”

Lazar looked at him. “If the *Mard Revik* is even half as frightening as this tiny Queen he has chosen; I will do no such thing!” Lazar exclaimed. “I wish to keep my cock right where it is!”

Garget laughed now with Rhaos, who pounded his friend on the back. It lasted for several moments and then Garget looked at them. “Now tell me.” He spoke, his voice turning serious. “What did you see?”

“They have my ship.” Lazar spoke somberly. “My crew. After what Sibot did I don’t know what will happen to them. I failed them Garget.”

Garget shook his head quickly. “You did no such thing.” He retorted. “You acted as any good commander would have done when faced with what you told me you saw.” Garget turned and looked at the screen for a long moment. “After what I have seen this tiny Queen do, the power she commands and she is only half Lycavorian, no I do not believe they will harm your crew Lazar. It would give them nothing and if this is the *Mard Revik* he would know that.”

Lazar and Rhaos looked at him, Rhaos nodding his head and reaching up to squeeze the shoulder of his oldest friend and confidant. “Garget is right Lazar.” He said turning to look at Garget. “We did not see much before we left orbit of Ventori Garget.” He replied.

Garget nodded his head. “But what did you see?” He asked.

Lazar looked at him now. “Power.” He replied. “Power the likes of which none of us have ever imagined Garget. Ships that make our largest and most powerful warship appear infantile in comparison. Their troops are extremely well trained and heavily armed and as you have seen for yourself, not all of them are Lycavorian. We saw dozens of species, though the actual number who acted as warriors was limited to perhaps half a dozen. Their weapons and tactics are far superior to what we have. Lady Anja and those with her on that ship took us down without so much as breaking a sweat.”

Rhaos rolled his eyes. “You had to remind me didn’t you?” He spoke under his breath and reached up to rub his shoulder where Anja had stabbed him.

Garget smiled once more. “Never be ashamed of being bested by someone who is better trained and equipped than you Rhaos. We are not all superior as Osrod would have so many of our young troops believe.”

“Garget they fight beside *sinuovas*!” Lazar spoke.

Garget looked at him with wide eyes. “Impossible. *Sinuovas* are nothing more than a myth! Tales from books that we tell our children!”

“We saw them for ourselves Garget.” Rhaos spoke again. “They are massive and these Lycavorians ride them into battle! They wear armor of some kind and have vicious claws and teeth!”

Garget looked at Lazar and saw him nod his head. “He is not lying Garget. They are very intelligent from what we could see and it is almost as if they can talk to these Lycavorians.”

“Talk to them?” Garget asked.

Lazar nodded his head. “I don’t know how to explain it, but that is what it appeared like to me.” He shook his head. “We were not able to observe them for too long because of Sibot’s fool actions, but that is what we saw.”

“What the dark haired half breed woman did.” Garget spoke softly. “The other woman and that bone faced one. I have never seen someone move with such speed. They were only blurs in my vision.”

Lazar nodded his head. “That is how they got the upper hand on the ship.” He said. “They must have been hiding somewhere with powerful scent maskers waiting for the right moment. Were it not for Retta’s mother... had she given the word we would all be dead Garget.”

“Half breed or not, the blood within her is more powerful than any I have ever smelled with the possible exception of your mother.” Garget spoke softly. He moved to a chair and settled his large frame into it deep in thought. Lazar and Rhaos both watched him and remained silent for a long few moments. Finally, Lazar stepped forth.

“What is it Garget?” He asked.

Garget met his eyes. “All of my life I have believed what the teachings of the Oracle have told us, yet a large part of me would always push it aside as fantasy and that we needed to be ourselves.” He spoke. “Now... now the very prophesies that we have always whispered and hoped would take place, even though many of us never truly believed them, now it seems they were all true.”

“What does that mean?” Rhaos asked.

“It means that things are about to begin changing.” Garget answered. He looked at Lazar. “And I don’t think your father will be happy.”

“*Nubou tye!*” Lazar spat.

Garget laughed heartily now. “He is not my type young wolf.” He spoke causing both Lazar and Rhaos to join in his laughter. “Come, let us make sure that wondrous ship on our airfield is secure and then return to Rylin and the others.”

LORENU TEMPLE SITE

It had been a very quick exit from *SPARTA'S WRATH* to be sure. Sadi and Ne'Veha had the *PREMONITION* prepped and ready for departure before they were halfway to the landing bay. All of them had experienced the flash of great Etheric presence within Andro for he kept nothing from them now. The bond that Sadi and the others shared was an almost exact copy of the connection that Aricia and the Queens shared. The

six of them were so tightly bound together now that it was a simple matter to talk and send their emotions to each other. It had taken some getting used to at first, but they had quickly grown in both strength and power. Even Carisia, who could not sense a wolf aura, was no longer left out. Whenever Andro pulsed one of them, it instantly translated within the Etheric realm to Carisia, who could then feel exactly what his aura did to them and almost exactly what it felt like. It was utterly glorious for Carisia Leonidas because now she truly felt whole in her love for Androcles and his for her.

The *PREMONITION* dropped quickly to the surface of Lorenu, flying over the city center and drawing many gasps and shouts of surprise. Kadeer was true to his word and several land vehicles were arriving just as Sadi and Ne'Veha brought the *PREMONITION* in for a landing in the lone, large clearing only four hundred meters from the entrance to the temple.

Androcles led Dorian, Laren and their father out of the ship quickly, leaping onto Elynth's back for the short, almost casual leap it took her to cover the distance to the flower covered entrance way into the Temple. Ryner, Ladur and Torma all followed without pause, causing everyone else to try and play catch up. Whatever it was that the four of them were feeling, it was being felt by their Bonded sister and brothers as well. By the time Aricia and For'mya made it off the ship Kadeer was running around the rear of the ship and looking up at the ramp to watch Dynina rush down and stand beside them.

"Dynina!" Kadeer gasped.

"Something appeared on the bridge of our ship!" Dynina gasped at him, reaching for his arm.

Kadeer nodded as he saw his children moving down the ramp quickly, their Bonded Ones matching their steps. All three of their dragons had grown in size immensely, something that no one thought they would do. The *Vrrarhoinpa* caste of their species were not abundant on Lorenu and those that did live here were much smaller than their Darastrixi kin from Icarava. It appeared that being among their kind within the ships of the Union had stimulated the growth of his children's dragons and they were now twice the size of when they had left.

"We saw it too!" Kadeer exclaimed as his children surrounded him and he embraced them tightly.

"Where are they going?" He gasped.

"Dynina we must follow them!" Aricia stammered as she clutched For'mya's hand tightly. "Whatever they are feeling within them it is growing."

Dynina nodded her head and grasped her other hand. "Kadeer, this is Queen Aricia and Queen For'mya, my *staaniaketo*'s wives and mates."

Kadeer bowed his head formally. "My... my Queens."

"This way!" Dynina spoke urgently, grabbing Aricia and For'mya's hands. "The path is this way."

Martin and Androcles stood side-by-side, Dorian and Laren on either side of them as they stood there staring at the entrance to the Temple only a few feet away. The walls appeared to be polished rock of some sort that blended almost perfectly with the surrounding natural terrain. The double doors were in the shape of an arch, and much larger than normal doors, easily able to fit Torma through them if needed. Down the center of each door was a clear material that allowed them to look inside from where they stood and they saw the solid ivory metallic wall within with the symbols that Dynina, Nicha and the others had spoken of. All of them could feel the Etheric power radiating from the structure. Elynth and her father rested nimbly on the hard ground directly behind Martin and Androcles, their talons pulled under their bodies as if waiting to spring into action with Ladur and Ryner on either side of them behind their Bonded One. They could hear and smell the others begin to clear the trees and move into the large clearing behind them. The area had been turned into sort of a flowered garden like area with benches and tall lights all around. High above the face of the cliff in front of them they could see the back of the temple that had been built on the surface of the plateau where the city was.

Laren stared at the entrance, her heart racing almost out of control, along with Andro and Dorian's. She could hear her soul father's more measured heart beating, but almost equally as excited as hers. She turned her head and looked up into Martin's face.

"*Ano medwan?*" She asked softly.

Martin nodded his head slowly and gripped her hand within his. "*Pen echea una kos ano fenneenum.*" (I feel it too soul daughter.)

Without really thinking about it, Dynina, Aricia and For'mya stopped about ten meters behind where they stood and the others fell in all around them. Kadeer was holding the hands of his daughters tightly and he looked at Dynina with confusion on his face.

"Dynina... what do they feel?" He asked all of them having heard Martin and Laren speak.

Dynina shook her head. "I don't know." She answered. "It... it does not feel any different than the other times I have been here." She looked at Aricia. "Aricia? For'mya? Do you feel anything out of the ordinary?"

Aricia and For'mya both shook their heads and looked at her. "No." Aricia answered for them. "We can sense the Etheric resonance just as you, but nothing else."

"We have never seen Martin or Androcles act in this way." For'mya spoke now. "It is... this is beginning to..."

Her words were cut off as all of them saw the white flash of light to the right of the entrance and the sphere of white light appeared once more, just as it had on the ship. Kadeer began reaching for his weapon but Dynina quickly grabbed his arm. "Kadeer no!" She exclaimed.

"*Son vada carians!*" Aricia muttered as she and For'mya suddenly staggered and dropped to their knees.

Helen and Sarlana had finally caught up to them just as Aricia and For'mya dropped and Dynina turned to look at them, reaching for Aricia. Sadi, Ne'Veha and Andro's wives and mates were right behind them with Sheva and Onera.

"Aricia!" Dynina almost yelled.

Helen was beside For'mya in the next instant and the moment she touched For'mya's arm, her eyes grew wider and she too gasped. "Oh... oh my god!"

Dynina fell to her knees instantly as Aricia gripped her tighter, and Sarlana moved up beside her reaching for her. "What..." Sarlana's emerald eyes went wide. "*Ithquenti tiichi ve!*" She gasped. (Gods bless me)

"Helen!" For'mya almost shouted. "Helen do you feel it? Dynina!"

The five women were crowded around one another now, the others from Kadeer's detachment gathered around watching with wide, and confused eyes. They could only watch as Sadi led the others right up to them, reaching out to touch them in some manner, not caring what was happening and soon there were twelve women all crowded together. Kadeer watched with worried eyes even as he squeezed Perlae and Ishma's hands within his own. "Dynina!" He barked out. "Dynina what is wrong."

He watched her eyes turn towards him and he inhaled sharply when he saw the amethyst color of her eyes shining back at him and almost glowing. "Oh... oh Kadeer it feels glorious!" She gasped aloud as tears flooded her eyes.

Kadeer's eyes snapped up when the white sphere moved quickly to hover in front of Martin for a long moment and then Andro, Dorian and Laren in turn. It returned to its position in front of Martin, pulsing with light and Etheric power. It was power and warmth that Martin and Andro had never felt before, Dorian and Laren not having as much experience with the Tomes of Sumar to truly expand their power and abilities as Martin and Androcles had. They could feel it the most however, basking in the warmth and overwhelming sense of knowledge, of power and the most of all, of family.

"Father..." Andro whispered almost reverently. "Father we have... Dorian, Laren and I have been here before."

Martin glanced at his son. "When you blacked out for those few seconds?"

Andro nodded his head. "Yes."

"I remember the doors most of all." Dorian echoed his brother's words.

Laren nodded her head. "Yes. The doors. When they opened we..." She looked at Martin once more. "It was... so much poured into us then, but it was gone when we woke."

Martin turned back to the white sphere which was hovering in front of him still, silent, as if measuring him in some way. Torma, Elynth, Ladur and Ryner had moved closer to them the moment the sphere appeared and now they were only a few inches behind their Bonded Ones. The sphere rose slightly, hovering just above Martin's head to seemingly stare at Torma's massive head and golden eyes. It shifted to Elynth for a long

moment, and then Ryner and finally Ladur before returning to Torma and finally lowering back down in front of Martin.

“Ideas anyone?” Martin asked openly. “Because at this very moment I’m kind of fresh out of what to do.”

“We should...” Andro began to speak but the white sphere pulsed, and began to speak in that female voice from the ship, silencing his words.

Four million, six hundred and nineteen thousand, four hundred and twelve years and Revelation has finally come full circle. The Beginning has reached its End. And the End has brought forth The Beginning. The Bloodline of the True King is all but complete. The True King and his Heralds stand before the Temple once more. The Unification is just over the horizon. Now it is time to shape the invisible. For the future depends on it.

“Who are you?” Martin finally asked.

The sphere centered on Martin and moved closer still, within inches of his face.

Who? Not what?

“Not what.” Martin spoke evenly shaking his head as Canth’s words to him all those years ago resounded in his mind at this exact moment.

“You need to step beyond the power that you wield... step beyond the boundaries of what your eyes and your senses tell you. Everything is not always as it seems son of Leonidas.”

“I can... we can feel you. Whoever you are.” He said. “This... this sphere is merely a projection of you.”

The sphere hovered for a few seconds more.

You have learned well and taught better. You have honored your bloodline like no other before you Martin Leonidas. You are the True King reborn.

“Who are you?” Martin asked once more.

The beginning of your answers lay inside these walls Martin Leonidas. It is here where you and the Heralds will be bestowed a gift. A gift that you must accept for it will lead you to the Beginning of it all. The Mountain of Stone and Light holds the final item and the final answers that will signify to all that you have returned. And bring about the Unification.

“What is this Unification?” Martin asked.

The sphere seemed to hesitate and then it turned to Androcles.

You have not revealed the gifts to the one who gave life to you?

Androcles shook his head slowly. “How do you know that?” He demanded but with no malice in his voice. “We only just... we only just discovered it two days ago!”

Discovered it? Do you think me foolish Herald Androcles Leonidas? You, the only Herald that rivals your father in power? You and she felt their blessed conception the moment it occurred. The sanctified life that your beloved Sadi carries within her is the Reunification of your people on the grandest of scales. They will be the culmination of millions of years of separation coming to an end. And

the children that follow with your other beloved wives will only serve to reinforce this and make that Reunification even stronger.

Martin looked at Androcles with wide eyes now, his head whipping around to look at Sadi who was now crouched beside For'mya with what amounted to a sheepish grin of utter embarrassment on her beautiful face, while Ne'Veha, Carisia, Caliria, Sehri and Lu'ria all stared at the hovering sphere with open mouthed shock at what the female voice had just announced.

“Sadi is... Sadi carries a child?” Martin gasped at his son even as Aricia and For'mya were suddenly swarming Sadi and nuzzling her cheeks with happiness and love.

Andro looked at his father with that same sheepish grin he had used his entire life when caught doing something he wasn't supposed to do. “Two actually.”

“Twins!” Martin almost shouted.

“I was going to tell you but things got...” Andro began but the soft feminine laughter cut his words off and they all looked at the sphere once more.

As it has been told, so now shall it be. It is time now. Time for all of you to take your places. Only those who carry the blood of Mahanlo within them may enter the Temple. Inside you will find what is needed for you to shape the future. Inside you will find me.

Martin looked at the sphere. “Find you? What is... what is in there?” He asked
The sphere moved closer to him, as if staring deeply into his eyes.

**The answers you have sought for most of your life Martin Leonidas. It is time now for you to know everything. Your entire history, and where it all began. It is time for your sons Androcles and Dorian and for Laren Ti-Shara to know what they are and why.
It is time for you to know what you are.**

The sphere moved away from them, gliding over to the double doors and positioning itself to the side before turning back to look at Martin and the others.

Enter you must.

Martin turned and held out his hand for Dynina and Aricia and For'mya, Androcles doing the same for Sadi and the others. The sphere darted forward away from the door quickly.

No. Only those born with the blood of Mahanlo may enter. Your beloved wives and mates must remain here.

“Eli?” Andro spoke reaching for his sister's hand. Eliani stood between Jomann and Brendi and had not expected this, her green eyes going wide.

“Andro I... I don't...” Eliani began to speak as the sphere drifted over closer to him.

Your oldest offspring with the fiery haired Queen Anja, Martin Leonidas. Born with the blood of Mahanlo in her veins. She may enter.

Eliani didn't hesitate then and she took Andro's hand, allowing him to pull her closer where she also took hold of her father's hand.

“Never fear the unknown sister.” Andro spoke as Eliani looked at him.

Eliani snorted at him softly. “Whenever you say that I end up having to patch up your *mida*.” She spoke turning back to look at Jomann. She saw her beloved husband and mate nod his head proudly and pull Brendi closer to him. She turned back and looked at Andro and then her father. “Oh, what the hell.” She said.

Martin chuckled. “That's my girl.”

They heard the soft female chuckle come from the sphere once more and they all looked at it.

There is Mahanlo blood within her for certain. As it flows within all of your children. Come. Do not be afraid.

The sphere moved to the doors once more and turned back to look at them.

The future awaits.

Martin Leonidas watched as the double doors closed behind them and they seemingly disappeared into the face of the mountain that this Temple was built into. Martin had to admit that he was more frightened now than at any point in his life. This was truly the unknown now, and Martin Leonidas had no idea what was going to happen. They could have just walked into a very elaborate trap for all he knew, and they had done it willingly. He turned back and saw Androcles, Dorian and Laren move up to the wall in front of them where the three symbols resided. They were large and etched in some type of bold ink directly into the wall. He watched as first Laren, then Andro and then Dorian reached up with their hands and caressed the symbols on the wall almost reverently. His eyes narrowed as Andro's fingers brushed the wall and a layer of dust fell away, Dorian and Laren doing the same and finally revealing a fourth symbol beneath the three. This symbol was unmistakable and known to them without doubt. It was the inverted letter V emblazoned on what could only be the etching of a Shi Viska.

Andro looked at his father with wide eyes now. "Father this is..." He gasped as Martin stepped closer with equally wide eyes.

"My shield!" Martin finished his son's words.

As it was passed to you. And will be passed to every King in your bloodline when the time is right.
The sphere spoke from the side.

Dorian and Laren were brushing more and more dust away, revealing connecting symbols and shapes moving up and down on the broad expanse of the wall. Some of the symbols and shapes, each of them encased in its own circular shape or fist size coin, had the letter M engraved into the upper right corner. All those that Dorian and Laren were revealing beneath Martin's shield had this same letter, while two of the three above it had the M. The third had the Darastrixi letter T engraved into it. Several lines branched out from that symbol, containing both the letter T and M. Eliani moved forward quickly, squeezing in beside her brother Dorian and Laren and she reached up to touch the wall directly over the circular symbol with dark red writing in the center and the letters M and Y.

"Father this symbol..." Eliani looked at him with bright eyes. "I have seen this before! At the palace on Hadaria. It was engraved into the columns on the Reliquary in the library! M and Y. Mahanlo and Yelu! It's grandfather's symbol! It has to be!"

Martin turned his head quickly to look at the sphere. "How is that possible?"

The Wall of Connection tells the story.

Andro was now reaching above his head and Dorian followed suit as they brushed away centuries of dust and revealed symbols and lines that reached across the face of the massive wall, up and down and to either side.

"*Ithquenti!*" Laren gasped aloud as she saw the symbols, reaching up to touch the one with the M and T on it, several lines extending away to the side which branched off into a dozen others. "This is the crest of my family!"

Andro's fingers traced the lines from their family down and to the side, brushing away the dust. His eyes narrowed slightly when he saw the slightly larger crest and the lines that branched away from it to the right of where his father's shield crest resided. He looked up at the sphere. "These crests?" He asked. "They bear the letter M but they are not connected to the others except by my father. Why?"

This way.

The sphere spoke as it moved around the end of the massive wall and disappeared. Martin and the other followed without thought now and they entered into the enormous cathedral like room just on the other side of the thick wall.

There were benches all around the single massive crystal fountain that resided in the center of the room. Clear water flowed from the top of the fountain and into the huge pond all around it. Pure mountain water if Martin's nose was correct. Several tunnels branched off from this main room, and there were murals of some sort on all of the surrounding walls mixed in with some incredibly advanced machinery of some kind and several of what could only be computer stations, complete with high backed chairs and small side tables. Huge flower planters were spread out all over with stunning and colorful floral of different patterns and kinds.

"*Carians!*" Eliani gasped. "It's... it's beautiful!" She moved forward and reached out to caress one of the huge flowers at the base of the fountain. As her fingers touched the silk like petals, Eliani gasped again, the petals seemingly curving towards the touch of her skin.

The Hall of Knowledge. The centerpiece of this facility. Within this room and others like it throughout this facility are the archives containing the history of our people from their inception.

"Our people!" Martin hissed as he looked at the sphere.

The sphere moved to one portion of the room that extended slightly out from the circular nature of the surrounding walls with all of the murals on them. There was a low rumbling sound and they all turned to watch as one entire section of the wall lifted away revealing a chamber of some sort. The sphere flared brightly and then it was gone and they were staring at the vision of an older woman in a form fitting white dress that fell to the floor. She looked to be in her early fifties by visual reference, with long flowing black hair and deep brown eyes. It appeared to be a very powerful Etheric apparition just as Sumar and Dadrien had appeared to them, but much more focused and clear. The woman appeared to be in the room with them.

This is me. The apparition spoke with a small smile.

Eliani moved forward now, all hesitation gone from her as she viewed the chamber and the surrounding equipment with a trained eye.

"Eli?" Martin asked his daughter.

"*Alvva...* this is... this is the most advanced life support chamber I have ever seen!" Eliani almost shouted out the words. "Nothing we have comes close to this! This could..." She turned to look at him with wide eyes. "This is a Cryo Chamber father!"

"What?" Martin almost yelled. "Are you sure?"

Eliani nodded her head. "It has all of the proper systems installed around the pod itself." Eliani moved over beside the large computer console. "Systems to monitor and regulate power output. There are some things here that I have never seen before, but this..." She pointed to the large chamber next to the computer. "This is... this looks like some kind of Neural Booster. I recognize some of the designs in comparison to our Mark IIs. This is ground based, though whatever is powering it is beyond what I can see." Eliani studied the console in front of her for several more moments and then she whirled around to look at her father. "Father, whoever is inside this chamber is Lycavorian! The life sign readings are unmistakable and..."

"*Atle arande?*" Andro asked her.

Eliani looked at Androcles with wide eyes. "If... if these instruments are correct, this body has been here for over four million years!"

Martin whirled around and looked at the image of the woman. "You?" He rasped out the question.

They all saw the Etheric projection of the woman nod her head. "My corporeal form, yes. The sphere is simply a means for me to project myself to other places as I did on your ship."

Eliani turned away from the consoles and looked at the woman. "This body is perfectly preserved! No physical degradation at all!"

"How?" Martin spoke. "Who are you?"

"My name is Reva." She answered them. "Reva Mahanlo."

"Mahanlo?" Martin gasped. "How... how is that possible?"

"The how of it is much more involved to say the least." The projection answered with a smile. "The technology you see, the Temple all around us, and the three others like it across the universe, they were built by the Onab in preparation."

"Preparation of what?" Androcles asked.

The projection of Reva Mahanlo smiled once more. "The future." She replied.

She waved her hand slightly and the lights in the massive room dimmed lower, the ceiling then coming alive with the depictions of stars and nebulas stretching across the entire area above them. Laren was the first to react and she released Dorian's hand, which she had been holding tightly and moved across the room to point up at several bright points.

"This is... this is Darastrixi space!" She gasped. "This is my homeworld! I recognize the star reference points!"

Andro moved up beside her now, his head canted upwards. "This is Earth!" He spoke pointing upward. "The Milky Way! And Apo Prime!"

Martin was staring at the image of the woman, her dark brown eyes focused on him now. He stepped closer to the Etheric projection. "It was you." He said softly. "You said that Sphere thing allows you to project yourself to other places. Based on what we have seen, I'm guessing that the confines of time and space and the Ion Nebula surrounding this system does not limit where you can go."

The Etheric image of Reva Mahanlo smiled and shook her head. "It does not... no. It has been quite enlightening to be honest."

"You are... then you are our ancestor?" Dorian asked now, turning from looking at the stars above.

They all saw Reva smile and nod her head. "Several hundred generations removed, but yes."

Martin reached up and rubbed his temple. "Man this is; this is out there. This is way out there."

"How?" Androcles asked moving up beside his father now.

"As I said, the how is far more involved than you could possibly imagine." Reva replied. "I have waited a very long time for this day to arrive. To see all of you standing within these walls now, the wait has been worth the journey." They watched as her figure walked over to one of the many benches surrounding the fountain and she settled onto it. "Allow me to fulfill my role and give you the knowledge that has always been meant for you."

"Knowledge?" Martin asked.

Reva nodded her head. "The how. The why. The answers to so many of the questions you have sought for your entire life Martin. The true history of your people and those who came before you."

"Are you saying that what we have been raised believing in is wrong?" Androcles asked now.

Reva shook her head. "Hardly." She answered with that gentle smile. "It is just not complete."

"Complete how?" Martin asked her.

"The knowledge that was stricken from our history by mutual decision over four million years ago." Reva answered. "Stricken from history by the leaders of the Onab and your very own ancestors Martin. This decision changed the course of events for the entire galaxy, and some of these events were not pleasant. It had to be done however, to preserve the future."

"You keep speaking of the future." Martin spoke as he sat down beside her now. "Do you know the future?"

Reva chuckled softly as Dorian, Laren, Eliani and then Androcles settled to the floor beside the fountain in front of her. Reva smiled as she saw Eliani lean against her older brother while Laren leaned against Dorian.

“Do I know the future... no.” She answered him. “Have I had a hand in shaping what has led up to this moment... yes.”

“So... the *Dahakoan* Scrolls and language?” Laren asked. “The Lycavorian Scrolls? You saved them?”

Reva looked at her and nodded. “I took steps to ensure that they were safeguarded and brought to safety throughout the many years, yes.” Reva held up her hand as Martin was about to ask her another question and she looked at him as he stopped his words. “To give you the complete history that was hidden away will take some time Martin *aur saan*, even in the very condensed version that I will give to you now. Within these walls and spread among the other three locations is the complete and unredacted version. When we are finished here, you will know their locations and then the many historians among our people and the different species it involves will have their content to study for centuries to come. It must be protected at all costs Martin. This knowledge must never be lost to the winds of time and change.” Reva looked at him intently, and for the first time Martin saw in her dark brown eyes what he saw every time he looked in the mirror. “And you will also have the knowledge to make the decisions that will shape the invisible.”

“Your eyes.” Martin spoke softly.

Reva smiled and nodded her head. “Yes.” She told him. “I know you can see it. Sense it within me. Only you would be able to do this.”

“You... you were there.” Martin spoke almost reverently. “You lived it.”

Reva nodded her head as she gazed at him, even as she heard Eliani gasp and Andro’s azure eyes grew wide. “You defy all of the expectations that we had ever hoped for Martin Leonidas. All we had hoped to create and see in the future. You continue to shatter all the conceptions of that which we wanted to save.” Reva turned and looked at Androcles. “And you have passed this trait to your first born son. To all of your children.”

Martin blinked several times and then shrugged his broad shoulders. “Predictable is...”

“...Boring.” Reva finished his statement with a small laugh. “Yes, I know.”

Reva took a deep breath and then lifted her hand. The stars above disappeared to be replaced by lush green forests and towering mountains and oceans. Spaced among the forests and mountains were shining cities of glass and steel that blended perfectly with the natural terrain and life all around them.

“It begins here.” Reva spoke softly. “Lycavore is your homeworld, it will always be your homeworld. Our people’s homeworld. That is what they wanted for all of our people, even those who have never been there. At least not yet. It all began here, however. This is where the true Royal Lycavorian Bloodline was founded. This is where it all began. This planet is where you, Androcles, Dorian, Eliani, all of your children, all of your wives and mates, even Laren Ti’shara, this is where the blood that flows within each of you started. This is... this is where hope was born. And this is where the journey begins.”

“What is its name?” Laren gasped as her dual colored blue eyes gazed at the images all around them.

“Cerath. It was called Cerath.”

“...Thought you had decided to wait?” Aricia questioned Sadi as they sat around the area outside of the Temple Doors.

The area had filled up quickly with both *Durcunusaan* security and members of the Tri-Alliance forces under Dynina. Kadeer took no chances with the safety of those who now sat in the sacred area around the Temple and he gave Jomann a full briefing and quick tour of the area so that he could secure the area. Lorenu was a very temperate planet and as the sun began to fall, the temperature remained at a very pleasant level with a cool breeze from the north. Dynina knew nothing would pull Aricia and the others from the entrance to the Temple and she had food and drink brought to them here. She was now sitting with the Leonidas women near the majestic fountain. Jezima, Dasha, Gorgo, all of them were here along with the wives and mates of every Leonidas male. Dynina had never felt more at home than she did now. Perlae, Ishma, and Awser sat with their cousins as if it was the most natural thing in the world and this caused Dynina no small amount of pride and happiness. None of them were treated differently in any way, and Kadeer took note of this as well very quickly, the same pride and happiness swirling through him. They had always been different growing up, the only children of two different species, but they had never really fit in until now. With Martin, Androcles and the others inside the Temple, none of them were leaving. Dragons now sat around the entire area, though Elynth,

Torma, Ryner and Ladur were still off by themselves, closet to the Temple and seemingly in a deep trance. Tharua remained beside the massive body of her mate Jeth, Anthar resting beside him, his head always glancing to his beloved Elynth. Aurith, Isheeni and Aradace sat with Caydren and Cinol between them with Mara, Endeem, Jeru and Mayla now joining them not far from where the women had gathered. Denali, Deion and Calyb sat with Aviel, Nahko and Laren's mother and father Yokra and Robati. As Byron Leonidas was the youngest child, he had accepted the fact that he would remain on the ship for the most part as a last chance security measure. He did not mind in the least for it allowed him and Namiri to explore and discover each other in a way that brought them closer and closer together. Byron had claimed Namiri in the way of their people and while the information had yet to reach the Tasmor Quorum, Saydia Daret and a few others knew that Namiri was now truly a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. The fact that now two of her daughters were members of this family of Lycavorians was far more than Saydia had ever dreamed about. Emylea was already being referred to as Princess in the same breath as Mari, for Deion had claimed her their first night together with Mari. Saydia had always known her youngest daughters were so very different and now she was beginning to understand just how much.

Sadi sipped the water she held in her hand and nodded her head in response to Aricia's question. "That is what we decided yes, but when he came to us the other night he..." Sadi looked at Carisia and Ne'Veha quickly and then Sehri, Lu'ria and Caliria. "He was full of more passion and desire than we had ever seen from him before. He had all of us screaming his name in..."

"He was a beast." Lu'ria exclaimed with a small smile while Sehri and Caliria looked on with somewhat embarrassed expressions.

"I don't think he realized it." Carisia spoke now. "It was... gods it was glorious!"

Aricia and For'mya looked at each other knowingly and smiled. "His father has... he has done this before to all of us." Aricia finally admitted.

"He laid himself bare to us Aricia." Sadi spoke softly. "No shields, no barriers. His full aura swarmed around all of us in such a way that..."

"It was so powerful I thought I could feel his aura around me." Carisia told them. "My senses were so much more alive and..."

Aricia nodded her head. "You do not need to explain Carisia." She said reaching out and taking her hand. "Especially to us. And do not discount what you feel simply because you are vampire."

Carisia smiled and squeezed her hand. Aricia had always been the strongest supporter of her ever since she came into Andro's life and that had never wavered once.

"It was at the end..." Sadi spoke again. "He took us with such passion that..." Sadi looked at her. "We were looking into each other's eyes when it happened. He has never taken any of us as intensely as he did that night. When he filled me... when he filled me with his essence it... we felt it Aricia!"

Aricia and For'mya smiled brilliantly. They knew exactly what Sadi and the others were describing. All of them had dropped all pretense of shielding anything from each other and opened their souls to one another. Whenever Martin had done this to them through the years, one of them had ended up pregnant. There was no shame between the gathered women talking about this or the men who held their hearts. Even Carisia, who was pureblooded vampire and probably the most reserved and shy of all of Andro's wives and mates, when speaking with any female within the Leonidas family, they shared everything. It was one of the reasons that the family was so tightly woven together.

"It was so powerful it roused Ne'Veha and the others." Sadi said as she dropped her hand to her abdomen reverently. "They felt it too, and they came to us on the couch and we basked in the feelings."

"A boy and a girl?" For'mya asked.

Sadi nodded her head quickly. "And they are so powerful and pure For'mya." She told them. "We felt it the moment life was granted to them and..." Tears fell from her eyes suddenly and Ne'Veha scooted closer to her on one side and Carisia on the other.

"We have never felt such love." Ne'Veha spoke softly.

"We did not feel them?" Aricia said.

Sadi nodded her head. "We wanted... we wanted Eli to examine me first." She replied. "We are shielding them even now. They..."

Aricia's eyes went wide. "Sadi, they are... are you saying that they are aware!" She almost shouted.

Sadi met her eyes and nodded her head with a stunning smile. “We... when we woke the next morning... we were all wrapped with Andro’s arms and they made themselves known. I don’t know how but... they have taken from each of us Aricia. They have each of us within them.” She said. “They made themselves known to all of us. Quite loudly in fact.”

“Androcles fell out of our bed in surprise!” Carisia spoke with laughter in her voice. “He took Sehri and Lu’ria with him.”

“He almost crushed the life from me!” Sehri gasped happily. “The big brute!”

“But he is our brute *Duangai*.” Caliria spoke with equal happiness in her sea green eyes.

Sehri nodded her head instantly. “Yes, he is.” She echoed.

Aricia looked at Sadi and the others and could only feel great contentment. Each of her son’s wives and mates were absolutely stunning in their beauty and intelligence, as well as their physical attractiveness, which was heart stopping to say the least. What she noticed most of all was how they interacted with each other, spoke to each other and those around them. It was as if they were one person, just as she, For'mya, Anja, Dysea, Bella and Cirith were.

One mind. One entity.

Dynina, Gorgo, Dasha and Jezima had been sitting quietly listening and reveling in the same feelings of love and family. Dynina spoke now when she heard what Sadi said.

“You are all part of him.” Dynina told her softly. “All of you make up a unique part of Andro. Just as each one of those he calls mother, make a part for his father. In all my years I have never seen something so complete however.”

“Nor I.” Jezima spoke softly.

“Many times we do not see what fate and destiny have in store for us.” Gorgo spoke. “It will do what it wants, in whatever manner it deems necessary to fulfill what the gods have in store for all of us.”

“*Avoi*.” Dasha agreed.

Aricia looked at her. “You have said this before in the past Gorgo.” She said. “That you can hide from it for a time, run from it for a time, but it will always have its way.”

Gorgo nodded her head. “I believe this more and more each day.” She spoke. “All I need do is look at you Aricia. At Anja. At Sadi. At Carisia. At Eliani. Each of you, all of us, we all have a role to play, and now the pieces to that puzzle are coming together.”

Jezima reached out and took Gorgo’s hand. “Yes, they are.”

Kadeer moved up then and knelt beside Dynina and all of them looked at him. “Dynina, should I send for more security?” He asked. “Our people are asking questions. Many saw the ships come in over the city and know they aren’t ours. They are... concerned.”

Dynina glanced at the entrance to the Temple and then back to Aricia and For'mya. She looked at Sadi and the others and then back to Kadeer. “No.” She spoke.

“We do not know what is happening within the Temple Dynina.” Kadeer reminded her.

“You are tied to your children just as I am Kadeer.” Dynina told him. “They are tied to this family. Do you feel anything within them?”

Kadeer was silent for a long moment, almost as if he was reaching out and sensing his children’s moods. “Happiness.” He spoke softly. “Happiness and discovery.”

Dynina nodded her head. “Just as we all feel.” She told him. “There is no danger here or in there Kadeer my wonderful friend and adopted son. What is happening in there is... it is our history taking shape.”

It was Aricia who reached out and placed her hand on his arm. “Sit with us Kadeer.” She said with warmth. “Tell us of yourself and be with your family.”

Kadeer looked surprised and he opened his mouth to deny this but For'mya stopped his words. “You are the father of Perlae, Awser and Ishma.” For'mya spoke. “Our blood flows within them, as does your blood. That makes you our family now as well. Sit down and tell us of yourself.”

Kadeer looked at Dynina and saw her beaming face looking up at him. There was not a moment that he could remember that Dynina did not support and encourage the love that he and her daughter Maha had with one another. She had always been a pillar to both of them. Kadeer Imuma had arrived on Lorenu a single soldier, having left behind his only remaining family on the Darastrixi homeworld. He regretted the pain his parents must have endured knowing their only son had passed on, but he believed deeply in the mission and the

reasons behind what they were doing. Discovering Maha had taken away the loneliness he had felt, and exploring their love for one another had been glorious to say the least. Maha had whispered to him to continue to live and find happiness once more just before her life left her, but until this day Kadeer had never followed her wishes for him. Perhaps now was the time to relish in the memory of his beloved wife and truly begin to move into the future just as she wanted him too.

Kadeer settled to the ground beside Dynina and began to talk. He didn't notice as his children and all of the Leonidas family moved closer to listen to his words.

LORENU TEMPLE HALL OF KNOWLEDGE

"...Lived in wonderful harmony." Reva was speaking as the images floating above them shifted and constantly changed. "The Onab did not consider us beneath them in any way, even though their technology was beyond wondrous."

"Did they... did they look like Avi and Armen? Avi told me when I was a child once that they were built in the image of their creators." Andro blurted out the question.

Reva chuckled but nodded her head. "Yes, they did Androcles."

"I was just curious." He spoke somewhat embarrassed by asking the question.

"And that is a good thing. The Avatars were numerous on Cerath, but they came to be viewed as sentient beings because of their ability to learn and grow. Something which you discovered soon after meeting Avi Martin." Reva told him with a gentle smile.

Martin met her eyes. "There was... there was too much showing through in his eyes to be just a simple machine."

Reva nodded her head. "And you were right." She smiled warmly as she looked at each of them. "We lived in perfect balance on Cerath. As our species evolved and grew, the Onab encouraged us to expand our horizons and views. They welcomed us into their many cities and homes freely. They provided advanced education to our people willingly, sharing all that they knew. We welcomed their wisdom and knowledge, often times using them as mediators between Pack disputes. For thousands of years this relationship grew and became stronger and more interwoven than anyone could have predicted. Our people were peaceful and happy. Cerath was a massive planet, and we could hunt in our true forms without worry of upsetting the delicate eco balance. On Cerath, our people held the seamless balance between our instincts and our minds." Reva looked at Martin and Androcles. "After many millennia, the Onab invited us to form a joint government and begin expanding. Cerath was largely unexplored even as large as our populations were, and the Pack leaders all jumped at the opportunity to explore and discover new territories."

"So the Packs had leaders?" Martin asked.

Reva nodded her head. "Oh yes. A Council of Fourteen Elders, Alphas that were formed just after the Onab were discovered. Wise men and women who made their decisions based on the benefit it had for all of our people. And for the Onab, since we considered them an ally and friend."

"So the castes did exist even then?" Eliani spoke from where she sat between Dorian and Laren.

"That is the nature of our species Eliani. It is not something that can be taken out of a species." Reva answered her. "In that time however, much like you have done within the Union Martin, caste meant very little for one's advancement. Within five hundred years of the Council being formed, four Beta Wolves sat proudly on that Council of Elders and all were treated as equals."

"There were no disputes?" Martin asked stunned.

Reva smiled and laughed softly. "There were always disputes. That is the nature of things. Packs often moved to make themselves better by marrying into a more powerful or influential family. No one stepped across that unseen line however, for they knew punishment was harsh. Our people were focused on insuring that we grew and expanded our knowledge and ability to provide for the whole. Anything that put that in jeopardy was dealt with very quickly and very harshly. The Onab were aware of this and over time came to view things as we did. I was just a small girl then, and times were so much easier back then."

“What changed?” Androcles asked now.

Reva’s face became somber and her eyes drew narrow even in the etheric projection of her. She finally met Andro’s gaze and took a deep breath.

“Those who you refer to by their Pralor name Androcles, the Scourge, they happened.” She answered. “The true name of their species is the Iais’Kai. Their appearance has changed through the millennia, especially after the vile things that Xaxon did, but they are all Iais’Kai. They are the personification of evil in its purest form. Those with black hearts and even blacker souls. They live for one purpose and one purpose only, to conquer and destroy. To enslave and dominate.” Reva took another breath before continuing, her chest rising and falling. “We don’t know where they came from, the darkest reaches of the galaxy perhaps, but our initial encounter with them was anything but pleasant.”

Reva stood up and waved her hand slightly, the images above them changing to one of a planet that looked desolate and utterly barren.

“This is Delum.” She spoke softly. “By this time in our relationship with the Onab, we had begun traveling the stars with them, discovering new planets and species. Forging alliances and relationships with other species. We had settled nearly a hundred worlds by the time the Iais’Kai revealed themselves. Delum was the farthest colony away from Cerath. They struck here first.” Reva took a deep breath and they could see this was difficult for her. “They struck early one morning without warning. The colony on Delum had grown in size and was now over forty thousand strong. The Iais’Kai landed their foul soldiers expecting to pillage and take, but they found something else instead.” Reva returned to the bench and looked at Martin. “Our people, all of our people but especially the Alphas, our instinct is to protect and ensure the survival of our people at all costs.”

Martin nodded his head. “It is one of our most pronounced instincts.”

“The Onab were not fighters.” Reva said with an even voice. “They were scientists and doctors and researchers. Most would not even reach your shoulder in height. Instinctively, our species became their defenders. The Iais’Kai must have been watching the Onab from afar, but they did not take into account their relationship with our people and how far that had evolved. There were some ten thousand of our people with the Onab on Delum when the Iais’Kai struck. Many were good friends and some had even been given honorary Pack status. The Iais’Kai attacked without warning thinking to overwhelm the Onab and instead they found us among them. They were unprepared for how we can shift our forms and at first this confused them allowing us to slaughter their first few thousand soldiers. Losses were great, fully a third of the colony was killed in the attack, but if not for our people it would have been devastating and complete.”

“What happened?” Martin asked.

“They tried two more attacks, but by this time we had enhanced what tools we did have into weapons.” Reva answered. “Both times we threw them back with massive losses. We even captured several of their kind to discover why they were attacking us. As I said, the Iais’Kai did not realize how evolved our relationship with the Onab had become. They were only after the Onab and their advanced technology. They did not consider us a threat to them. That changed the day we took up arms in defense of the Onab on Delum. In defense of the way of life we had chosen to have. The Iais’Kai ships in orbit, when they realized they did not have the numbers to take Delum by force, they... they bombarded the planet from orbit. They obliterated whole continents in five days of constant destruction. They spared no one. Those that had survived the ground assaults died in the bombardments. We did not have the structures necessary to protect against such a thing. At the end, the Iais’Kai launched six planet killing missiles into the core of Delum that cracked its planetary crust and destroyed the planet from the inside out. Nothing survived this destruction. Not even bacteria.” She looked up at Martin and the others after a long moment.

“That began *Vada Zin sarakoa vyen ils.*” Reva told them. “The Ten-Thousand-Year War.”

“*Atle untinaa?*” Eliana asked now.

Reva turned her head and looked at her. “Those on Delum were able to contact us on Cerath before they were destroyed. They were able to pass on what they had learned in their sacrifice. Even the Onab had never heard of the Iais’Kai before this day. The Council of Elders and the Onab leaders did not know what to do.”

Martin looked at her. “Something must have been decided if it started a war that lasted for ten thousand years.” Martin said.

Reva nodded her head. “Something did happen.” She spoke softly. “Your ancestors rose up from among the billions and billions of our people and truly united us as one! The birth of the Mahanlo Pack began that day.

The one true Royal bloodline came into existence that day. And to this very day it remains more potent and powerful than any bloodline before or after it. As it did that day on Cerath. Even more so now with the addition of the Praetorian gene within the bloodline thanks to your grandfather Sumar.”

“Tell me!” Martin exclaimed now, his blood pulsing and racing as the discovery of his heritage was right there in front of him.

“They were... they were twins Martin.” Reva spoke softly. “Twin brothers, born only seconds apart, each of them larger than any Lycavorian before them. Each of them with an aura of dominance that all recognized. By this time, they were nineteen years old and were already making a name for themselves. The love they held for one another was matched only by the love they held for their younger sister, born exactly two years later. They were imposing in human form, but they were devastating in our natural forms. If you ever wondered where the size in our bloodline comes from, it comes from them. The original of us. Some say they were the very first Lycavorians to have evolved to the next level among our species. No wolf could match their size, much like it is now with you and your bloodline. Daniho and Ashten. They were perfect together. Daniho was the passionate one, always using his instincts to drive him, filled with purpose and determination. Ashten, the cerebral one. Logical, compassionate and driven. Never have I seen such a love between brothers... I never thought I would again...” Reva looked at Martin. “Until I saw you and Daniel Simpson. Daniho was Ashten’s instinctive nature and Ashten was Daniho’s logic and compassion. Two pieces of a perfect puzzle. They spoke and thought and acted as one. Just as you and Daniel do.”

“Daniho.” Martin whispered the name reverently. “Ashten.” He looked at his family and then back to Reva. “My family.”

Reva nodded her head. “Yes.”

“What were they like?” Martin asked her.

“They were never apart.” Reva told him. “They did everything together. They took mates on the same day, from different packs, but their union day was the same. They loved their mates more fiercely than I have ever seen an Alpha love. By age nineteen they already had one child apiece. Each had a son, born only a week apart. And they loved their younger sister Kelia just as fiercely as they loved each other. No wolf would go near their sister if their intentions were not honorable in every way. They included her in everything they did, every aspect of their lives and Kelia was never happier than when she was with her brothers. For both of them, she was their hope and happiness. She was the future.”

“Reva... you speak... you speak as if you know them well.” Laren commented now.

Reva smiled and nodded her head slowly. “Yes. I did know them well. I should. I was the one who brought them into this world.”

Martin looked at her with wide eyes. “You!” He exclaimed.

“I gave birth to them and I raised them.” Reva spoke. “I watched them grow into the men and the woman that they were. That they became. It is why I have paid such close attention to you Martin, and to your children. What they had together as twins, that balance to one another, you have both within you Martin. It is how you have always been able to balance your instincts and your logic through the years. While they had each other to learn from, you have done it all on your own, and that makes you even more powerful.”

“I don’t want to be powerful.” Martin spoke. “I don’t...”

Reva nodded her head. “I know. And neither did they.” She spoke softly. “Yet you do every day exactly as they did all those millions of years ago. They took a stance for all in order to see everyone achieve their desires.”

“Do we... do we call you *staania*?” Eliani asked.

Reva chuckled and shook her head. “No Eliani my child.” She replied. “Dynina, Gorgo, Dasha, Jezima, they are the only ones who you and your siblings should call *staania*, for they have earned that title and honor by virtue of everything each of them have sacrificed and suffered up until this day in order to achieve what is happening now.”

“What is happening now Reva?” Martin asked her.

Reva turned back to look at him. “Revelation Martin my boy.” She told him warmly and with a brilliant smile. “The day that the one true Royal bloodline of our people rises from the ashes of history to once more lead and guide those of similar values and morals. The same way it did back then. It is your day now. See for yourself.”

Reva waved her hand once more and the scene all around them changed to a large room full of Lycavorians and Onab men and women. Hundreds of them gathered in what appeared to be some sort of meeting. It was taking place outside in what appeared to be an open air stadium like those back in Sparta. This time however, this time they could hear voices, all talking over one another, young voices, old voices, male and female.

“Enough!” One male voice rose above the others and then they saw him break from the cluster of men and women to move into the center away from the others. Beside him was an exact duplicate of himself. His twin.

Daniho and Ashten.

They were imposing figures to say the least, physically and radiating auras that Martin could almost feel. His eyes were wide as he stared at their image, Andro rising to his feet along with Dorian and Laren and Eliani to stare at them. Martin and Andro and to a great extent Dorian were almost mirror images of them two men in the Etheric projection. Right down to their height and muscled forms. They watched as the female now broke away from the crowds of people and the two brothers each reached for her hand and drew her close to them. Her hair was the color of crimson, long and fiery and falling almost to the top of her firm buttocks.

“I am Ashten Mahanlo!” The young man, barely twenty-one at this time, and far younger than most of the men and women present. “You know me and my *fervon* Daniho Mahanlo! You know our sister Kelia! You know our parents Reva and Jacar Mahanlo!”

“We recognize you Ashten Mahanlo.” The Onab male spoke now rising from his chair where he sat between two elder Lycavorians. “You and your twin are the first of your bloodline and the only Lycavorians alive today along with your sister who have dual fangs. This is an oddity that even our doctors and scientists cannot discover the why too. We know who you are. You and your brother and sister are spoken of quite differently than others. Most agree that there are great things are in store for you in the years ahead.”

“Yet we will not have those years if we sit here and do nothing!” Daniho exclaimed passionately.

Ashten looked at his brother and as they watched in the Etheric projection he reached out and touched his brother’s arm. The reaction was instantaneous and Daniho became instantly calmer. It was almost as if they were communicating etherically on a level that no one else could detect. Martin glanced at Reva.

“They are talking to one another.” He spoke.

Reva nodded her head. “They were born with very advanced Etheric abilities, as was their sister Kelia. Far more than what our people are usually born with. I do not know how, but some have said it is because of our exposure to the Onab and their advanced technology. They say it somehow affected my children. I have never believed this, for I felt them grow within me. I watched them grow through the years. It was just their nature.”

Martin turned his eyes back as Ashten began to speak once more. “These Iais’Kai have slaughtered our people. Lycavorian and Onab alike. We have done nothing to illicit this action. By their own admission their only goal is the technology that our Onab friends possess. And because they have shared this with us, the technology that we now possess. We have lived together, grown together for well over fifty thousand years now here on Cerath. Each year we grow closer together, more friends have been made, more relationships begun. Even now, there are over five thousand Onab and Lycavorian unions among our two peoples, even though no children can be made. This was done because of the love we have within each of our species. It transcends everything else and we have all accepted it.”

“You speak truthfully young Alpha.” The elder Lycavorian man spoke now. “And with far more wisdom than someone of your age should have.”

“I speak from my heart Elder Pengot.” Ashten answered. “As do my brother and sister. It is how our mother and father raised us to be. It is all we know.”

The elder Lycavorian nodded his head. “As you and your family have proven countless times since you joined this life. The Mahanlo Pack has risen in not only numbers but influence under your father and mother’s guidance. We will mourn the passing of your father for many years to come. It has been only a year, yet you stand here when you should be mourning.”

“We stand here because our future rests in the balance.” Daniho spoke now. “We cannot sit by and watch it slip away.”

Pengot nodded his head. "Indeed." He glanced around the semi-circle of men and women that sat to either side of him, Lycavorian and Onab. He turned his head back to Ashten. "This Council of Elders recognizes Daniho and Ashten and Kelia of the Mahanlo Pack. The Onab Elders agree. Speak what you came to say."

Ashten looked around and then finally rested his eyes on his brother and sister. He turned back to face the hundreds of men and women who had gathered and could see even more Onab and Lycavorian people moving towards the outdoor coliseum from the city. Everyone around them had grown quiet.

"We do not know who they are or where they come from, these Iais'Kai." Ashten began to speak. "But they have shown what is in their hearts and souls. Blackness. Forty thousand of our families and friends lie dead now. Butchered by a species who came from the abyss and is surrounded by darkness. They told us they would be returning. We don't know when. We don't know how. We don't know where they will strike again. Millions of Onab and Lycavorians reside out there among the stars on planets that we have claimed together. We cannot sit here and bicker about what to do. We must act now before these monsters return."

"We do not know if they will return." A voice spoke up.

"Do we wish to base our future on that?" Daniho spoke now, picking it up beside his brother. "I do not! My wife and mate cares for my three-year-old son as we speak now. Within her womb she carries our daughter! My brother's wife and mate carries twins! In the stead of our beloved father, who resides now among the stars, Ashten and I have given the blessing of our family to our sister Kelia and the one she has accepted as her future husband and mate. A proud and fine Alpha from the Kirek Pack. Lylor Kirek loves her without shame even though he is five centuries older than her. We do not wish to base our future and the future that Lylor and our sister could have on what we don't know! We do not wish to base the future of our people and the Onab on what we don't know!"

Martin, Andro and the others could hear the murmurs of agreement and the nodding of heads from dozens and dozens of voices surrounding them in the coliseum.

"The twins of Jacar and Reva Mahanlo speak with one voice." Pengot spoke once more. "This has been known to the Packs since you were born. Only you, your brother and your sister have the dual fangs so unique to your bloodline. Do not mince words young Daniho, speak what you and your brother and sister came here to say."

Daniho looked at Ashten and Kelia and nodded. "Tell them." He said.

Ashten looked at Pengot and the other elders. "We must change. We must adapt what we know. What we have known these past millennia. Our governments, until now, they have been separate but working entities. If these Iais'Kai return, if they return to do more harm, we must meet them united as one. We must unite under one leader. One banner. And we must prepare for them. Weapons. Ships. Tactics. All of these must be things must be developed and refined. We cannot wait until they return and do nothing. Next time they may come here in much larger numbers than what they struck Delum with. How many more of our people must die before we, as two peoples, unite and say enough. How many wives and husbands and children must perish before we make a stand to say we will not be meek in the face of these monsters! That we will defend what is ours! That we will protect what is ours!"

"That we will not surrender those we love to the dark chasm and the void of death!"

There was an eruption of loud cheers and agreement that rocked the outdoor stadium as hundreds of Onab and Lycavorians rose to their feet clapping and cheering. They could see Pengot and the other Elders and the Onab looking around as the cheers rose even louder. Even in the Etheric projection they could see hundreds, if not thousands of people in the distance still moving towards the stadium.

"*Saoi sibfla!*" Eliani Leonidas blurted out.

Martin and the others heard Reva chuckle softly as the image faded from view. "They did so have a way with words, my sons." Reva spoke with love and warmth in her voice. "You and Androcles have spoken some similar words in the past Martin. And you will again."

"Did they return Reva?" Androcles asked now.

Reva took a deep breath and nodded her head sadly. "Yes."

"What happened?" Martin asked moving closer to her.

Reva looked at him. "I will show you Martin, have patience." She said. "What you are seeing is history that has never been viewed by eyes other than my own. History that was utterly stricken from all written files and data archives in order to protect what was to come."

"What was to come?" Martin asked her.

Reva nodded her head. "This was the task that my children offered to me and that I accepted. The preservation of our history and the ability to ensure that it never died. To ensure that our bloodline never died."

"Then it has been you who was behind all of these events throughout our history and the history of the Pralors and Darastrixi?" Martin spoke to her. "The *Dahakoan* archives, the ancient Lycavorian language. All of it."

Reva met his gaze. "Yes. Either directly or indirectly." She answered him. "I loved my children Martin, just as deeply as you love your own. They are gone now and I am all that remains from the beginning. I will finish what they started, what they asked me to accomplish and then I will join them among the stars."

"What did they ask you to accomplish?" Laren asked her now. "How could you have been in so many places?"

Reva's Etheric projection smiled. "You have seen the Sphere Laren Ti'shara. It is not as it appears. It is not metal and glass as it appears to others. It is pure energy, for lack of a better scientific explanation. It allows me to go where I must in order to do what I must."

"Your consciousness... your Etheric resonance is inside that?" Dorian asked now.

Reva nodded her head. "To put it simply... yes." She answered. "It is similar to the Onab technology given to the Pralor people in order for them to join their ancestors within the Rift of Time."

"You know of the Rift of Time?" Andro asked in surprise.

Reva chuckled once more as she looked at him. "I could boggle your imagination with all that I have seen and experienced through the millennia Androcles. It is a blessing and at times it is a curse."

"Then you know of Dadrien and grandfather Sumar." Androcles continued.

Reva nodded her head. "It was I who guided first Dadrien and then Sumar here, to this very planet. It is where Dadrien and Sumar met and became friends while Sumar still lived."

"Grandfather knew Dadrien before he died?!" Martin exclaimed.

Reva nodded her head. "Oh yes." She answered. "It was Dadrien and Sumar who came up with the idea of the six of you." Her eyes moved to Andro, Dorian and Laren. "It was here that they devised this plan."

"What plan?" Laren demanded.

"The rebirth of the *Dahakoan* in you, Dorian and Laren." Reva answered. "The rebirth of the Praetorians within our bloodline and our people." She spoke turning to look at Martin. "Your friend Wayonn spoke true words only a few days ago, though he did not know how true they were. He thought he was referring to Androcles encounter with the Iais'Kai on that Science Station, when in fact he was far closer to the actual truth than he knew."

"Something was drawing together the three forces in the entire universe that fought the Scourge and won." Martin spoke softly.

Reva nodded her head. "If only he knew how close to the truth he really was." She said. "He will discover this when all is revealed, but for now it must remain with us here in this room and with those you are bound to outside."

"Why?" Andro spoke. "This is... Reva this is knowledge that all of our peoples should have."

Reva nodded once more. "And they will. In time." She shifted her body on the bench and looked at him. "The Iais'Kai you fought on that station wasn't just any Iais'Kai Androcles Leonidas."

"What do you mean?" Andro asked.

"Do you remember his words to you?" Reva asked.

Andro nodded his head. "He said he knew me." He answered. "I thought... I thought he meant that he had seen grandfather Sumar before."

Reva shook her head. "His name was Dalet Nulai." She spoke softly. "He commanded the Iais'Kai forces that returned to our space back then. And viler a monster there never was. He butchered millions upon millions of Onab and Lycavorian people during the war, but the one thing he could not do is defeat Daniho. He was their most skilled warrior in battle, the most vicious and well trained. They met in battle four times and each time my son bested him." She looked at him. "I must thank you Androcles."

“For what?”

“Dalet Nulai is the Iais'Kai monster who butchered Daniho's beloved wife and three of his children.” Reva spoke with great pain in her voice. “He did this for simple pleasure. It very nearly broke my son and if not for Ashten and Kelia it would have. The last time they fought, Daniho was his equal in every way. Their battle lasted for nearly an hour and covered nearly a hundred kilometers of land on Cerath. In the end Daniho was able to strike Dalet with his sword, what should have been a mortal wound, but Dalet was a cunning monster. Just before Daniho would have plunged his sword into that creature's head, Dalet had three of his men attack from hiding. They could not match Daniho, but they managed to drive him back to the edge of a cliff. It was here that one of their ships fired into the cliff side and caused it to collapse. Dalet watched and laughed as my son fell.” Reva looked at him. “This is why he said that you were dead. He did not recognize your grandfather Sumar, he saw in you my son Daniho, who he thought long dead. Do you wonder why you spoke the words you did that day. He was one of the foremost Iais'Kai warriors to have ever lived and you bested him with barely any effort. Did you ever ask yourself why you spoke those words?”

Andro shook his head. “It... they just came out.” He said. “I don't know why. It just seemed like the right thing to say.”

Reva nodded her head. “And it was.” She said. “You were speaking for those that monster destroyed. And I thank you, because with your actions that day, ending that beast's life as you did, vengeance and justice that had been building for nearly four million years was finally done.”

They watched Reva rise to her feet and move around the bench. She lifted her hand and the image above and around them changed to one of an interior gathering. A massive hall filled with men and women, both Onab and Lycavorian. Reva turned to look at them.

“His death will have been felt by the Iais'Kai Queen.” She told them. “All of the Holy Elites, as they call themselves now, they are linked to her in an odd mental telepathy of some sort. They cannot communicate as we do within their Etheric realm, but she will discover he is dead, if she has not already. And she will investigate. She will know that no mere soldier could have killed Dalet Nulai. If even a tiny fraction of that station remained, all she will have to do is touch it and she will know what happened there.”

“Nothing remained Reva.” Andro told her. “It was completely vaporized.”

Reva nodded her head. “Let us hope so.” She spoke. “Until the unification of our people is complete we are still vulnerable.”

“You used that term before.” Martin said. “What do you mean by that? Unification?”

Reva smiled at him. “I will get to that.” She spoke. “For now... allow me to show you the beginning of it all. The day our bloodline became Royalty.”

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

LORENU HALL OF KNOWLEDGE

“...Do you think they will do?” Ashten Mahanlo tossed the question out to those sitting at the table.

The image all around Martin and the others was now the interior of a medium sized home that was well lit and appeared to be built into the side of a mountain for parts of three of the walls were made up of solid rock. Daniho was seated in a chair at one head of the huge table, the stunningly beautiful dark haired woman sitting casually on one of his legs. His arm was around her waist firmly, both in a protective manner so that she would not fall, and one of deep love. His opposite hand rested on her slightly swollen abdomen, both of her delicate hands over the top of his. Ashten sat at another table, the equally beautiful young blond haired female wolf beside him and sitting slightly back from the table for she was very pregnant, Ashten's hand resting on her swollen abdomen as his brother's did with his wife and mate. Kelia sat beside the very large man who looked to be in his mid-twenties with long, almost wild dark brown hair and bright blue eyes. Kelia had both her arms

wrapped around his left arm in a very affectionate manner and his large hand covered hers on the table, his fingers caressing the backs of her knuckles.

“They will do what they must.” Reva’s voice filled the room as she came into the image from a side room carrying the toddler in her arms. Daniho’s first born son. She looked almost the same as she did in the Etheric image right now, albeit much younger. “They have always been wise and they will not dismiss this. They cannot.”

“Who do you think they will select medwan? The vote was three days ago.” Ashten asked her.

Reva Mahanlo moved to the lone empty chair and settled into it, shifting her grandson on her lap. “It will need to be someone who everyone respects. Both the Onab and our people.”

“Kesas Pengot is a good man.” Daniho spoke. “And he is the leader of the Council of Elders.”

Reva shook her head. “The others might put him forward but he will refuse.” She spoke again.

“Kesas Pengot is not a leader and he knows this. He is a brilliant advisor, but he does not have the spirit to lead so many. He knows where his skills reside and he is the perfect Chief Advisor to whoever they select.”

“It would need to be someone from one of the nine major Name Packs.” Ashten spoke. “The people will not follow an Alpha from a lower pack, as stupid as that is. It is just not in their nature.”

“As long as it is not one from the Chetak Pack.” Lylor spoke up now. “I could not bring myself to follow one from the pack that tried to steal your sister from me.”

Kelia looked at him with adoration in her eyes and she lowered her head to his shoulder. “You do not need to worry about that my love. No one could do that.” She stated wistfully. She leaned over and nuzzled his cheek and neck in a very affectionate way that caused him to blush and look embarrassed.

“You did an admirable job ending that little fiasco Lylor.” Ashten spoke. “And in doing so you earned the respect of our family.”

“Avoi.” Daniho nodded his head.

“The next Assirina Cormunn is in two weeks.” Reva spoke again. This time it was almost a stern voice. “I expect you will claim my daughter under that moon and make it official Lylor Kirek. I believe we can cut short the courting right given how Kelia feels.”

“Mother!” Kelia exclaimed defensively as Daniho, Ashten and their wives laughed softly.

Lylor did not take offense and he smiled. He had learned through the months that he had courted Kelia that the Mahanlo Pack did not suffer fools and those who beat around the bush. “I already have the evening planned Lady Reva.” He replied.

Kelia’s head snapped back around to look at him. “You do?” She gasped.

Reva smiled at the young man and nodded her head. “Good.” She said. “Good. I knew there was a reason that both my husband and mate and my sons liked you.”

“I would like...” Lylor began to speak but stopped. Kelia looked at him oddly for she knew he could not find the words to express what he wanted to say. He had always had this problem, and while he was getting better thanks to her, Lylor was still a man of few words.

It was Ashten who leaned forward in his chair. “You are already a member of this family Lylor Kirek. You have been since the moment my sister decided that she wanted no other. Speak your mind my friend.”

“I wish to have... I wish to have the official ceremony beside the eternal flame of your father.” Lylor spoke softly. “With your permission Lady Reva. To have his spirit looking upon us would mean more to me than anything but Kelia’s love. My father and mother agree with this request even though it goes against tradition.”

Reva looked at the young man who had stolen the heart of her daughter and then her head turned to look at her sons. She nodded slowly. “You have my permission Lylor Kirek.” She replied finally. “And I speak for my sons in this matter as well. I believe they both would be proud.”

“That we would.” Daniho nodded his head as he answered. “That we would.”

“I will speak with my mate’s brothers and parents, but I think they would be most impressed as well that you are asking for this and they will agree.” Reva said.

“Your family and pack does know that once you become part of the Mahanlo Pack you will be considered just as crazy as the rest of us.” Daniho said. The others chuckled when his wife slapped him affectionately in the face.

Lylor was looking at him with a wide grin as Kelia smiled up at him. "We are looking forward to it." He said.

The door chime rang and Daniho's wife rose from his lap to move to the door in the other room while they whispered among each other. She was back in moments with the older Lycavorian man and they all turned to look at him as Daniho and Ashten rose to their feet.

"Atut... what is it?" Daniho asked.

"The Council of Elders have reconvened and they have asked for you, Ashten and Kelia to attend." The man spoke. "They have tallied the sum of votes and a decision has been made."

"So soon?" Reva gasped as she too came to her feet.

Martin turned and looked at her Etheric image. "Chetak?" He gasped aloud. "They were a Ruling Pack back then?"

Reva nodded her head. "Yes." She answered softly. "They were a founding member of the Council of Elders on Cerath."

Martin came to his feet slowly and shook his head. "And I am the one who wiped them out." He muttered to himself.

"You did no such thing!" Reva's image snapped.

Martin looked at her. "I killed the two most senior members of their pack! I ordered the others to be tried for their crimes and they were all executed! The only member of that family who lives is Isra. I destroyed his family! His pack!"

"I will not relate to you the many crimes and indiscretions that the Pack of Chetak is responsible for through our long history Martin. That alone would take days. You will see the reason for this soon, but you did the one thing that needed to be done. The only thing that could be done."

"Is that what I tell Isra when he asks me about what we saw out here?" Martin asked her. "He is a founding member of *Mjolnir's Hand*! He is one of my closest friends! He will find out about everything that has happened out here. I will not lie to him to protect myself."

Reva's image shook her head as she rose to her feet and she moved over in front of him and looked up into his face. "You do not need to lie to him." She told him softly. "The Chetak Pack was not always like what you know Martin. They were proud once."

"That doesn't make me feel any better." Martin said. "They were a Ruling Pack from the beginning!"

"And your blood was their King!" Reva snapped. "And they betrayed that King on more than one occasion!"

Martin looked at her with wide eyes. "What?"

Reva waved her hand once more and the images and scene around them returned to the outdoor coliseum from earlier, only this time the coliseum was filled beyond overflowing. Thousands upon thousands of men, women and children were crowding into the facility, both Onab and Lycavorian alike.

"...Made our decision and the votes have been counted from all across Cerath and the colonies we have settled." Pengot was speaking as he was the only one within the coliseum standing at the moment. The podium had been set up in the center of the open area and he looked around at the thousands of faces that were present and the billions that watched via holo discs across their planet and from their many colonies. "Our Onab brothers and sisters have done similar votes among their leaders and their people and the outcome was equally unanimous. Let it be known that as of this day, we have united as one people, one entity and henceforth we shall be known as the Ardorm Kys. The Winter Entity, given how half of Cerath is among the winter months at any given time and how both our peoples view this season and its beauty."

The cheers that erupted were deafening to say the least and they continued for several minutes as Pengot stood there proudly. He finally raised his arm for silence and over several minutes the coliseum once more became silent.

"In order to further unite our two peoples and bring about something greater we have chosen one leader." Pengot spoke once more. "From this day forward, we will follow him and the passion for life that he exudes. These last three days have not been easy, but ultimately that name kept returning to the forefront. As the representatives of the people, both Lycavorian and Onab came forward and gave us the decisions of their

people, it became more and more clear. As of this day, the Ardorm Kys will be led by a King. A person dedicated to seeing our future in as bright a fashion as any that exist. The Onab people, by their very nature have never been involved in this form of government. By their own admission they are happily not leaders, but followers and doers. Our own people have never seen fit to have this form of government but most of us now believe it is time.” Pengot looked around. “Given the nature of the threat that we now face together, all thoughts of selfishness and personal gain must be put aside. We must unite as one as spoken only a few short days ago. We, as the Lycavorian Elders, the senior Onab leaders, we believe that this is the right way. His name was submitted by his brother, who told us that he would not want the position we are about to impart to him. He is from one of the nine Major Bloodlines among our people. The only truly unique bloodline.”

Martin and the others saw nearly every head in the stadium turn to look at where Daniho and Ashten sat. Daniho had an astonished look on his face, squeezing the hand of his beloved wife and mate, while Ashten sat calm and with the slight curl of a smile on his face, his own wife beside him sitting proudly.

“In all the years of their existence, none of our people has been able to determine the why of this uniqueness in their bloodline. Only that in every generation since their inception they have produced those who push for the betterment of our people and the protection and love of everyone around them. The Mahanlo Pack of the Lycavorian people has been an anchor for all of us throughout our history, and they are the only Pack among our people that carry the unique bloodline of dual fangs! We once thought this an oddity, but now many have come to see it as a sign. A sign that they were meant to lead us forward. To guide us into the future and beyond and whatever that may hold.” Pengot stepped around the podium. “The Onab people have made their choice! The Lycavorian people have spoken and the Council of Elders has ratified this decision by a 13-1 majority vote! Henceforth, we decree that the bloodline of Mahanlo to be Mard Hippeis Saan! Vada ared mard saanigaro! His brother and sister will now be known as Crown Prince and Princess! Their mother as Royal Lady Reva. I ask... we the people of the Ardorm Kys ask... will our new King, Daniho Mahanlo please step forward and receive the blessing of his people so that he may lead us into the future!”

Martin and the others watched as an obviously stunned Daniho slowly stood up to the uproarious cheers of the thousands gathered in the stadium and beyond. What he did not hear were the thousands of voices from across the stars joining in from every colony world they occupied. Slowly Daniho moved up beside Pengot, looking at the senior elder of their people. He leaned close to him.

“Pengot... I do not... I do not wish to be King.” He stammered the words, just barely audible over the deafening sounds of cheering and clapping.

They all saw Pengot smiled and nod his head as his hands came up and he took Daniho by his shoulders. “And that is why you were chosen young Daniho Mahanlo.” He spoke. “Fight with your head young Alpha, but lead our people, lead them with your heart.”

Martin spun around wide eyed and looked at Reva. “That is what... that is what my father told me!” He almost yelled.

Reva’s Etheric image nodded her head slowly. “And that saying from Pengot has been a phrase that has guided our bloodline for millennia. Passed down within our blood as a sacred memory. Just as your father’s statement on that field of battle now swirls within our bloodline. They will never be lost.”

Eliani was gripping Dorian’s arm tightly as she looked at Reva. “Then this is the day...?”

Reva nodded her head and smiled warmly at her. “This was the day that our bloodline became royalty, yes dear Eliani.” She answered turning back to Martin. “Now do you see Martin? You cannot escape destiny no matter how hard you try. You and Androcles have tried to do this for so long, yet all you succeed in doing is leaving your indelible mark on others in a way no one else can.”

“What are you saying?” Martin asked her.

“They say that leaders are not born, they are forged.” Reva told him, her etheric image moving closer to him now. “In your case Martin Mahanlo Leonidas... in your case, in your son’s case, and all of your children,

leaders are both born and they are also forged. And it began this day. Our bloodline... out of dire need yes, and most definitely against our wishes... we were elevated to Royalty by the will of our people.” Reva spoke evenly. “Daniho certainly did not want this as you just saw, yet it was given to him. It was given to Ashten. To Kelia. To me. To our descendants. This is a call and a duty that you cannot turn away from. You can feel it burning within you every day, and you have since the day you were born. Just as Androcles feels it, as he also feels the call of the *Dahakoan*. As Dorian and Laren now feel the call of the *Dahakoan*. It is in your blood. Woven into the very tapestry of who all of you are. Of who we are.”

“*Staanian*... what do you mean by that?” Androcles asked her. “What do the *Dahakoan* have to do with what took place among our people? Are you saying the Darastrixi were somehow involved?”

“I do not have the right for you to call me that Androcles.” Reva told him, settling her dark eyes on him.

Andro stepped up next to his father and placed his hand on his shoulder. Martin looked at him and nodded his head. He turned back to Reva. “However many generations and millennia that have passed, you are still our bloodline. This is our history, is it not? The history of our people, of our family? You are where it all began.”

Reva nodded her head. “Yes.”

“This is what my father’s blood has called for.” Andro spoke. “For as long as he can remember, as long as I can remember. You and the history that you tell us now is the piece that has been missing from all of us.”

Eliani moved up beside Andro now, pulling Dorian and Laren with her easily since they felt it as well. “*Avoi*.” She spoke softly.

“Do not ask us to dishonor you, and our bloodline by treating you as if you are some sort of outsider. You are not. You are part of us!” Andro finished.

Reva stared at him for a long moment and if it was possible, all of them thought they saw tears in her eyes. She finally turned and looked at Martin. “Martin?”

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “He takes after his mothers. They have always been better with words than me.” He said.

Reva’s smile was broad as she laughed heartily and nodded her head. “So they have.” She said. “So they have. Your actions speak far louder than your words ever will, and that is why so many have come to adore you.” Reva turned back to Androcles. “And to answer your question Androcles, yes, the Darastrixi are involved, but not for many, many millennia.”

“But how?” Laren gasped.

“I will come to that child.” Reva answered with a smile.

“They came back didn’t they *staania*?” Martin asked her finally. “The Scourge?”

Reva was silent for a moment as she appeared to be collecting herself, then she nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered softly, almost a whisper really. “The Iais’Kai made their return exactly one hundred years later, and this time they came in force.” She looked at Martin calmly. “However, they were not prepared for what greeted them, and this was both a blessing and a curse to all of us.”

“Tell us...” Laren spoke as she stepped close to Andro and took his other hand.

JETANIA HIDDEN AIRFIELD SIX KLICKS NORTHEAST OF WARIM

It was decided that they would remain on the hidden base for the foreseeable future, for Garget and Loras could not guarantee that they would not be detected if they went into Warim. While Loras walked the streets freely, the vast majority of the citizens of Warim were from the Ranev pack and those packs that were the most closely aligned with them, Loras and Garget both suspected that there were those within Warim who still reported to Osrod. Both Loras and Garget also suspected that Osrod was probably aware Loras still lived and that she was actually the power behind the man he dealt with normally, but there was really no reason to confirm this. How he had kept Lazar out of the way was a clear sign that he knew she still lived. Osrod was no

fool however, and he knew that to attempt to kill her again would ignite a firestorm that he would not be able to control and it would lead to all of the Mountain Packs uniting against him in civil war.

To say that Garget, Lazar and the others had been stunned when they finally met Nilantha would have been the understatement of the millennia. To his credit Garget remained calm as she spoke and he asked intelligent questions. Anja watched him through it all, and she came to the conclusion that Garget was indeed a man that she could trust. He was a typical Alpha wolf, but he was also smart enough to know that there were things he could not explain but that he could not deny existed. It appeared that like the Lycavorians within the Union, being able to adapt came easily for those within COLS. Apparently it was part of being Lycavorian. They had spoken for nearly four hours before Loras, herself stunned at some of the revelations that Nilantha had given them, called for them to rest and come together once more in the morning. The quarters they were assigned to were standard it appeared, comfortable but not lavish. A typical military facility. Anja and her people had slept in far worse and while they could not detect any danger, Tir'ut and Kalis took no chances with her safety and that of the others and maintained a constant watch throughout the night so that Anja could sleep. They didn't know that Garget had already made the determination that Anja and those with her were exactly who they said they were. His orders to his men were to protect them at all costs and keep an even more alert eye to the surrounding area for Garget knew Osrod would attempt something if he knew Anja was on the surface of Jetania and that Nilantha was alive and not a Lycavorian.

Anja had slept soundly for four hours, knowing and trusting that Tir'ut and Kalis were about, but she had also learned something from Ventori and she would never be caught unaware again. While Aricia and Isabella were widely considered the more militant of the Lycavorian Union's Queens, Anja was recognized as the more tactically sound because of her experience as a Navy SEAL all those years ago. Anja knew that they had become overconfident and careless and that it had very nearly cost her Calyb and Atropos on Ventori. She swore that would never happen again.

It was early morning, the sun not yet having risen above the horizon and she was sitting on the ramp of the *STRIKER* sipping a large mug of coffee and basking in the knowledge that she and her fellow Queens would soon be grandmothers. She had spoken to Aricia via uniquely secured communications developed by the Darastrixi and Pralor scientists on Lorenu. The QCR scrambler essentially took their words and distorted them to the point that you could not understand them unless you had the proper receiver. It was basically a much more advanced version of their communications scramblers. Endith and Tina had maintained a constant vigil through the night and were able to establish the link and work out the details with Armen while Anja slept. With Serale now awake and monitoring the instruments in the cockpit, they had gone to their cabin to sleep. Since becoming wolf, Serale Leonidas had shown an even greater interest in becoming a better pilot than she already was for she wanted to command her own Medical Triage ship. Kalis had encouraged this without question and bragged about her skill whenever he had the chance to anyone who would listen and Serale had spent the last few weeks working closely beside Endith and Tina whenever she could.

Anja felt Tobia and Mari move up behind her and settle to the ramp on her left. Tobia's spirit had opened up the moment Murano had taken her into his arms, and they had become what she had always wanted. A family. Anja knew they were already talking of more children and Mari's mating with Deion only made this more pronounced. Tobia's Etheric resonance was radiating powerfully now, free of doubt and indecision, and Anja could sense why Sumar had chosen her to help carry on his legacy. Tobia and Mari were easily able to sense her Etheric resonance and they detected the bubbling happiness within her.

"Your... your aura radiates happiness Anja." Mari spoke softly.

"As does your Etheric resonance." Tobia added as she sipped her coffee. "What has taken place?"

Anja looked at them and smiled warmly. "We have discovered that we are going to be grandmothers." She told them with a smile. "Sadi carries twins."

Both of their faces lit up in happiness and Tobia reached out to grasp Anja's free hand and she squeezed it tightly. "Oh Anja... that is wonderful!" She gasped.

Anja chuckled and nodded her head. "We thought it would be awhile before... before anyone decided to have children. Aricia, For'mya, Dysea, Bella, Cirith and I, we are not ready to be grandmothers."

"Because you want more children." Mari spoke knowingly.

Tobia looked at her daughter. "Mari!" She admonished her in a gentle but humorous voice.

Anja laughed now. "She's right though." Anja spoke with a twinkle in her eyes. "And we will. Making babies with Martin is so much fun!"

Tobia grinned knowingly and nodded her head. "They are on Lorenu I take it?" She asked finally.

Anja nodded her head. "Martin, Andro, Eliani, Dorian and Laren have gone into the temple there. I can't sense his emotions over this great a distance, but Aricia and For'mya are calm, so I'm not worried."

"What do you think they will find?" Mari asked.

Anja shook her head. "Answers I hope." She replied. "Nilantha has provided some of those answers, but it still doesn't explain how it all ties together. Marty hates loose ends. And so do I."

"And those we have seen so far?" Tobia asked.

Anja met her eyes, sensing the purpose of her question. She nodded her head. "Loras, Garget, all of those we have seen so far, I believe we can trust." She answered. "They want the answers just as much as we do. This Osrod character, those who follow him, that is another story altogether given what we have heard. And there..."

Mari detected the hesitation in her aura now that she was wolf. Her transition had been much smoother than many who were turned simply because of the pureness of Deion's blood and their Etheric connection. Mari had learned so much from his sisters and from Aricia and Anja herself that she was years ahead of someone who had been turned.

"What is it Anja?" Mari asked.

"Loras." Anja answered. "There is something very special about her."

"In what way?" Tobia asked.

"You are a Praetorian just like Murano. You must have sensed that her Etheric ability is far more advanced than what she has shown." Anja said looking at Tobia.

"Oh yes." Tobia answered instantly. "Almost as if it is lying dormant within her."

"I felt that from her too." Mari spoke.

Anja nodded her head. That didn't surprise her. Deion and Nara were extremely powerful in their own right and Deion passed this to Mari when he bit her. "I think she is meant to be part of our family." She told them. "That she is already tied to us in some way. If what I feel within her was actually active, I would put her on a scale as a match for Sadi and Aricia. The two of them are closest to Martin and Andro in skill and power now."

Tobia shook her head. "Do not discount yourself Anja." She told her. "I have seen and felt great power within you. Your Etheric connection seems to have somehow intertwined with your healing abilities, but you are no less powerful."

Anja shrugged her shoulders. "Power doesn't concern me." She stated. "I am what I am and that is that."

Tobia chuckled. "Indeed you are." She said.

"So everything that Nilantha told us is truthful?" Mari asked.

Anja nodded her head. "I could detect no lie in her resonance, and her Etheric capability is on a par with Sarlana. That is not normal for a Darastrixi and they both have said this. I would have to say that she has been touched by Sumar, just as she said. There is no reason to doubt her at this point."

"Something tells me that there is much about Sumar that we do not know." Tobia said softly. "The man was an enigma."

Anja nodded her head once more. "Martin believes that as well, and after meeting him and Dadrien on Ventori, even in Etheric form, he believes it even more. There was much he was not telling Martin. Perhaps because Marty needed to discover it on his own or perhaps because Sumar did not remember it. They did say that they didn't remember quite a bit. Given the level of technology the Pralor people have, the ability to transfer a conscious mind into your Rift of Time, there is no telling what you could have done."

"Or someone else." Tobia said. "You must remember that quite a bit of the technology for such things we received from the Onab people. Well... they taught us how to build such things anyway. They were the true technological masters."

"And that is another interesting point that we have wondered about." Anja said. "I have a feeling that these Onab have a lot more to do with what is going on than what we know. It's no coincidence that their influence keeps coming up at odd times, and at many different points in history. These images in this Sanctuary that Nilantha told us about? Foreseeing the future? Our future. The possibility that the Temple on Lorenu is

built with Onab materials? Since coming out here, we keep running into signs that these Onab were something different than what the Pralors believed and their influence is more far reaching.”

Tobia looked at her and nodded. “I have given that some thought as well, and I agree with that.” She said evenly. “It would also suggest that there is some greater connection to your people. Something that goes back further than anyone realizes. It just seems that each new discovery we make draws a further link between your people and the Onab.”

“Exactly.” Anja said in agreement. Anja truly loved Tobia’s mind. It worked just like hers and did not dismiss anything. “No one among your people ever tried to discover more about them?”

Tobia shook her head. “Not to my knowledge.” She answered. “Reclusive would be a mild word to describe them. We did not even discover their true home planet until after we detected the supernova that destroyed them. The meetings before that were brief but friendly. Our history states that in exchange for information they would give us the knowledge to expand our own technology.”

“Wait a minute, their true home planet?” Anja asked. “I thought the planet where you found their books and texts was their home planet?”

Tobia shook her head. “Oh no, that was a colony world of theirs. But the texts that we recovered from the colony apparently described another world. A lush and beautiful world with mountains and oceans and where half the planet was always covered in fresh snows. Not an arctic type land with bitter cold but something more seasonal and mild.” She tilted her head slightly. “I believe I remember someone say it was called Cer... Cerath. Yes, that was it. Cerath. It was far outside the borders of our empire and that may account for the infrequency with which we encountered them.”

“What information did they want from you exactly?” Anja asked her.

Tobia shrugged her slim shoulders. “Data about our Etheric skills and ability. Our people and culture.” She answered. “We never really complained about the one sided deals. Back then, anything that allowed us to advanced our technology was welcomed.”

“And this took place before the Scourge?” Anja asked.

Tobia nodded her head. “All of our encounters with them occurred before we came into contact with the Scourge as our history relates. Our first contact with the Scourge was...” Tobia turned and looked at Mari. “What do the history texts say now Mari?”

“Our first contact with them came three hundred years before our first war with them.” Mari answered. “That was half a million years ago, give or take a few centuries. I don’t recall exactly. History wasn’t one of my favorite courses.”

Tobia smiled at her daughter and saw Anja doing the same thing. She turned back to Anja then. “Murano or Delnash might know more, I’m only relating to you what I have heard or read myself. As you know from Kasdan, most of our written history and texts were destroyed when our homeworld was wiped out. Once our ships lost the direct link to the database archives on our homeworld, all they were left with was what was in their databases. Fragmented periods of our history. What we are teaching in our schools now comes mostly from the memories of the oldest among us and what few texts do remain.”

“That is interesting.” Anja said softly as her mind raced back and forth with different ideas and scenarios.

Anja smelled them long before they came into view, and once more she blessed that Martin’s blood flowed within her and had shaped her once he had turned her. Anja’s sense of smell, while not as keen as Martin’s, Aricia’s or their pureblood children, was extremely powerful. It easily put her on a scale with Loras and the other purebloods here on Jetania. She sipped her coffee again, relishing in the rich flavor as her jade green eyes detected them walking from the interior of the base. Loras, Garget and Nilantha appeared to be speaking freely, Garget fully engaged with the Darastrixi woman who he had believed was Lycavorian for so many centuries. Anja could sense the excitement of discovery in his demeanor, and he was not trying to hide it. All of them held mugs of what would pass for coffee if Anja’s nose was accurate. She smiled to herself, for she would have to get them to try Aricia’s blend and gain more converts. Anja, Tobia and Mari rose to their feet as they approached.

Garget bowed his head deeply to her. “Lady Anja.” He spoke.

“Good morning.” Anja said looking at him.

“I hope the accommodations were alright Anja.” Loras said as she stepped closer. “The base is not exactly meant for entertaining guests.”

Anja dismissed that with a wave of her hand. “Trust me, after three decades of following Marty around and the trouble he gets into, the accommodations were just fine.”

Garget looked surprised. “The *Mard Revik* gets into trouble?” He asked.

Anja laughed softly. “If only you knew.” She spoke. “Lead, follow or get out of his way. That is Marty’s motto. One of them anyway.”

Garget shifted on the balls of his feet and Nilantha smiled and shook her head. She then stepped up next to him. “Garget is too much of a coward to ask you outright so I will.” She said. “He would like one or two of his engineers to perhaps get a look inside your ship.”

Anja looked at Garget. “Lazar and Rhaos did not tell you everything that they saw while they were inside?”

Garget suddenly looked very embarrassed and his eyes darted back and forth to Loras and Nilantha. Anja saw Loras’s dark eyes narrow even more while Nilantha’s emerald eyes had a distinct twinkle in them, almost as if she was getting some perverse joy out of seeing Garget fidget.

“Garget has not been to my ship Lady Anja.” Nilantha spoke now. “He is not aware of the technological advances that my people and yours have made throughout the years.”

“Yet you told me that you are certain Osrod has at least some of the technology that he took from Dynina’s people when they were here. And the men and women he was able to capture.” Anja said.

Nilantha nodded her head. “That is what we believe, yes.” She answered. “However, since we have not seen great strides in our technology in the last few hundred years, aside from those made by our people here, I can only assume that he either killed them while trying to get information from them, or those scientists and engineers he has working for him just have not been able to determine how it works. Or how they can employ it.”

Tobia nodded her head. “If what Dynina told Martin is accurate then that may well be the reason Anja.” She said.

“He is a fool you know?” Anja spoke. “Have you thought about what you could have done as a people if only his father had worked with Dynina and those with her instead of trying to force their cooperation?”

Garget met her eyes. “I believe you already know the answer to that question.” He spoke in an almost defensive manner. “We are not...”

Anja held up her hand again. “I know that Garget.” She told him. “If you were, we would not be having this conversation.”

“Anja... we...” Loras began but Anja reached out and took her hand drawing her closer to her.

“No.” Anja spoke. “There is nothing to explain or try to defend. You are our people Loras, and you and those in the Mountain Packs are more like us than you know.” Anja looked at Garget. “No more than two Garget. No recording devices or weapons. Endith and Tina can answer whatever questions they have, but as a leader, you must understand that the influx of advanced technology into a society can do more damage than good if it is not controlled.”

Garget straightened up and nodded his head. “Yes.” He spoke. “Will... will the *Mard Revik* share what you know with us Lady Anja?”

Anja looked at Nilantha and saw her nod her head slightly. She looked back to Garget. “I think you already know what he will do Garget Ranev.” She replied. “And whatever Osrod may think he has, he won’t have it for very long once Martin gets here. Osrod and his father stole it from Martin’s *staania*, and they took her people against their will. If they are dead, he will answer for that.”

“*Avoi.*” Nilantha spoke in the Lycavorian language and everyone nodded in agreement.

“When will he get here? And the Heralds?” Loras asked now in an anxious voice that Garget did not understand but that Nilantha did. Anja also detected this anxiousness and what it meant. Loras knew something that Anja did not, something that caused her scent to become a tiny bit sweeter. It wasn’t something that Garget or any male wolf would detect, but it was something that a female would.

“We can proceed to my ship if you like?” Nilantha said.

Anja looked at her and then at Loras before she shook her head. “No.” She answered. “The knowledge in your ship of the future and what it brings, that should remain with you Nilantha. No one else should see it, other than those Black Watch members that already have.”

“There is so much knowledge there Anja.” Nilantha said. “Knowledge that I have hidden and protected for centuries. Knowledge of the future.”

Anja nodded in recognition. “And you can share that knowledge with the other scholars among our people when they arrive. I do not wish to know the future. Martin won’t either. We are strange like that. We like to discover things for ourselves. All of us do.” Anja looked at Loras. “And some things I can already feel.” She said with a warm smile.

“You... you know!” Loras gasped aloud with wide eyes.

Anja squeezed her hand. “I can sense it. I don’t know how or with whom, but you are meant to be part of our family Loras Ranev. And it will happen sooner than you think.”

Garget looked between them with wide eyes, not knowing what Anja meant but knowing that it was something that neither would tell him. It was a female thing, but if it bound Loras to the True Royal Family of their people, it could only be good for all of them.

Anja looked at Nilantha. “You know?” She asked.

Nilantha nodded her head. “I allowed Loras to view what I saw only a few days ago.”

“Then we should talk about that.” Anja spoke. “Right now though, I’m starving.”

“We have arranged for breakfast to be served.” Loras told her with a laugh. “The one thing you can always be sure of is that there is food wherever Garget goes.”

Anja laughed as his embarrassed expression. “Do not be ashamed of this Garget. You are going to be fast friends with Martin and our sons. They love to eat!”

LORENU HALL OF KNOWLEDGE

“...Was utterly amazing what we accomplished in that brief respite.” Reva was telling them as the moving images all around them depicted the same cities on Cerath but now they were built up and even more fantastic than any Martin and the others had seen before. Several massive space stations now resided in orbit of Cerath and they were surrounded by hundreds of ships that varied in size from several hundred meters to easily the size of *SPARTA'S WRATH*. “What we built was simply magical and through it all Daniho brought us together even more. He was our passion, our desire, our drive to succeed. He appointed Pengot, Ashten and Kelia his Senior Advisors for life. Ashten was his caution, Pengot his reason and Kelia, she was his purpose.” Reva’s face, even in the Etheric projection was animated and bright as she talked. “The members of the Council of Elders served as what you would call a Parliament or Senate. The Onab selected an equal number of their people and the First Council was born. Half of each were chosen to direct their attention to our people and colonies while the other half worked on the military portion. Every quarter century they switched so that new ideas were always brought forward and implemented. Some we used, some we did not.”

Andro pointed to an image above them. “The Avatars we knew... we knew the Pralor people did not build them, but the Worker Drones?” He spoke. “You made them! Not the Pralor people!”

Reva nodded her head. “We needed assistance in building what we wanted. The Drones and Avatars were the first thing that we created. The Onab had already been working on them and Daniho simply accelerated the project to completion within that first year. Within five years we had over a thousand Avatars and ten thousand Worker Drones. That number doubled within the next five years.” Reva looked around the massive room at all the images and they could tell the pictures were making memories flood through her even in the Etheric projection. “Within fifty years we had over two thousand ships. Most were warships, but many were very advanced transports that we used to reinforce many of our outer colonies at the time. We brought them weapons and built defensive systems around each of them. Daniho was a tactical genius, his mind was always working, always figuring, trying to determine from where they would come and what they would do. He never thought in the here and now Martin.” Reva looked at Martin affectionately. “Now you know how and why you

and your son were blessed with this gift. To see signs and details that others cannot. When Sumar's blood was introduced into our bloodline this skill became even more pronounced because of the Praetorian gene within him. Resumar had it, your father and now you and..."

Martin looked at her image. "Wait a minute!" He spoke. "You speak like..."

"Like this was all scripted somehow." Andro finished for his father.

Martin nodded. "Yeah... just like that."

Reva looked at them and slowly nodded her head. "In a manner of speaking, yes."

"In a manner of speaking?" Martin hissed. "What exactly does that mean?"

Reva's image moved closer to Martin now and her dark eyes stared at him intently. "I know what you are thinking." She spoke softly. "And you misunderstand the meaning of my words Martin. Everything that you and your son have done, every decision that you have made over the course of the years, each of them has been your decision to make and yours alone. These decisions have made you who you are. Each of you. Androcles, Dorian, Laren, Denali, Eliani, Resumar, all of your children."

"You just said it has all been scripted." Martin spoke once more.

"No, that is how Androcles described it." Reva answered. "And he is correct to an extent. However, there is much more involved in what had occurred through the millennia prior to you joining this world Martin. And that is why it was wiped from the records. That is why it only exists here and in the other temples across the stars."

Martin shook his head. "Now I'm confused." He said.

Reva smiled and nodded her head. "Then let me continue and help you to see the purpose of it all."

Martin Leonidas stared at her for a long moment. All of his waking life he had desired the answers to these questions. How? Why? Who? The answers about himself, about his family, his history and his people. Each of his children were so very special in a unique way and he had seen that in their eyes the moment each of them entered this world. He couldn't explain it, could not put his finger on it, but now all of those questions were here in this one spot.

And finally all of those answers as well.

"*Alvva?*" Martin turned as Eliani reached out and put her hand on his arm, her voice soft and even. He looked into her fern green eyes, so much like her mother in her beauty and her intelligence. "*Evell sey chevsh allon nison Alvva. Una coi daanth un kincha una hote.*" (We have come this far Papa. It is time to discover it all.)

Martin reached up and stroked her cheek seeing her smile at his touch and the fatherly aura he pulsed her with. His eyes cut to Andro and he saw his oldest son nod his head, and finally they moved to Dorian and Laren who stood side by side. Laren, his Soul Daughter, part Darastrixi and part Lycavorian. He had accepted this almost from the moment he saw her in that transmission. She had too much of Androcles and Dorian in her to deny it, and now he was finding out they had much of her in them. She clutched Dorian's arm in both her hands and he saw her nod her head along with Dorian. His youngest son, and the product of the love he had for Isabella and her for him. Vampire and Lycavorian. Yes, all of his children, born of his blood or not, all of them were special. Martin looked back to Reva finally as so many revelations of his life filled him and he nodded his head to her.

"You are our blood." Martin spoke.

Reva nodded her head slowly. "I suppose I am. Many thousands of generations removed, but yes."

"Then do not ask us not to acknowledge this." Martin told her. "There is nothing more important than family, and that is what their mothers and I have raised them to believe. You are our blood... our family. And you will be treated just as they treat my mother and Jezima and Dynina and Meral."

"That is hardly important now given my current form and..." Reva began.

"It is important to us!" Martin snapped. "All of us! If you have been watching us for all of this time *staania* Reva, then you know this to be true!"

All of them saw her look at him and once more they could almost see the moistness in her eyes even as an Etheric projection. Reva Mahanlo may have been an Etheric projection right now, but her connection to her physical body was still present and she could still feel emotion. Right now all she could feel was happiness and love. She nodded her head finally and met his eyes.

“I do.” She spoke softly. “It reminds me of... of the closeness that Daniho, Ashten and Kelia shared with me all those millennia ago. And it feels wondrous.”

Martin nodded his head. “They are our strength and our purpose. This is their history just as much as it is ours. It has been from the moment that we brought them into our lives and our blood now flows within them. Sadi carries the next generation of our blood *staania*. How much more important can that be?”

Reva met his gaze. “She carries far more than that Martin. Within her... within her she carries the reunification of our people.”

Andro knew what his father thinking and he stepped closer to him. “Then they should be here with us *staania*. Learning all of this, just as we are. We will share it with them anyway, isn’t it better if they learn it with us?”

Reva looked at him now and she nodded her head. “The time for long held secrets is now passed. You are correct.” She said softly as she closed her eyes.

The moon was full outside the Temple, the camp quiet. *Durcunusaan* patrols stood guard all around the perimeter with Darastrixi and Lycavorian and Pralor security from the city. They were conversing as if they were long lost friends who had been reunited and laughter could be heard among the small groups from time to time.

Aricia and For'mya were curled into each other’s arms on the bedroll near the large fire, Sadi, Ne'Veha and Carisia spooned with Sehri, Lu'ria and Caliria between them. Dynina, Gorgo, Dasha and Jezima lay sleeping only a few meters away. Jomann was the only one who was awake at the moment, Brendi curled into his arms. Jomann nearly jumped out of his boots when the figure of Reva appeared by the fire and he sprang to his feet in an instant. His sharp movements brought the others instantly awake and the image of Reva could only smile as she realized that none of them had left the small clearing around the entrance to the Temple. She watched as all of them moved from the shadows around the fire to stare at her. All of her blood family no matter how it had come to be, just as Martin and Androcles had told her. It only took a simple nod of her head to deactivate the security measures within the Temple and eyes went wide as they heard the doors to the Temple begin to open a short distance away.

“*Carians!*” Gorgo muttered as she clutched Dynina’s hand.

“It is time.” Reva spoke. “The love of this family, this bloodline, it knows no distinction of species or race. It did not in the beginning and as my grandsons have shown me, it does not now. Come, all of you. There will be no more secrets among family. Come.” Reva’s image waved her hand toward the double doors.

No words were really needed among the Leonidas family, and all of them broke for the doors at the same time, including Laren’s parents Yokra and Robati. Reva’s eyes were bright and smiling when she saw this and she turned her head to see Kadeer standing there silent, Perlae, Ishma and Awser beside him.

Reva’s Etheric form moved closer to them. “You carry the blood of Mahanlo within you, no matter how it came to be.” She spoke. “You are family Kadeer, as are your children with Maha. Set aside your role now and follow your family.”

Perlae and Ishma gripped their father’s hands and Kadeer Imuma did something he had not done since the day Maha had come into his life.

He took a leap of faith.

Reva Mahanlo had watched them all with a beaming face as they entered the Hall of Knowledge, their faces full of discovery and happiness. She watched her grandson Martin’s mates go to him first of all, how he nuzzled them and his aura put them at perfect ease. How the beautiful Sadi, carrying the future of their people in her womb, how she was enveloped within Androcles’ arms, his other wives and mates crowding around him without hesitation as he nuzzled all of them, his own aura pulsing them with love. Reva had been amazed, as she had watched through the years as the love between the Queens her grandson had claimed grew and developed. There was no competition between them in the least and their love for each other as well as Martin was unquenchable. Just as it now was with Andro’s wives and mates, and Denali and Deion and all of her

grandsons who had claimed more than one wife. There was no doubt, no rivalry. While she knew it was not uncommon for a powerful Alpha to take more than one wife and mate, her bloodline had taken that to the next level.

She allowed them to wander the large room for a time, looking at the many murals on the walls and ceilings, always glancing up to the ceiling at the images that were flashing by and what she had already shown Martin and Androcles. There was no hesitation or inkling of uncertainty within any of them. This is where they all belonged and this was their history. This knowledge showed on their many faces and in their hearts and minds and though she could not get a true sense from Robati, Yokra or Kadeer because they were pure Darastrixi, the amazement and sense of purpose was completely evident on their faces. Kadeer and Maha's union of marriage was the only one like it in their history so far, and their three children would be paramount in the future to come. She knew that Laren Ti'shara would find love with a Lycavorian who would worship her as no other, but she did not know who or when she would meet him. If she ever would. Reva was content in the knowledge that in order to take and hold her heart, that wolf would first need to pass the devastating gauntlet of her bloodline, for Laren Ti'shara was *Ano Fenneenum* to the Mahanlo Pack as a whole and the Leonidas family in particular. Just as the elaborate tattoos on her body announced to all who would see them. Reva was sure that she would not want to be the wolf that attempted to claim Laren, for facing the Leonidas family was daunting enough, but facing Laren's father and all of her brothers as well, that would take a special kind of wolf.

The Bloodline tattoos on her body, on Andro's and Dorian's, and soon those on Martin's, they would never fade or dull. Any children born in the future would bear these same tattoos, and soon the rest of Martin's family would begin to show the sign of these tattoos forming on their bodies. Perhaps not in as elaborate a mural as the four of them, but they would begin to take shape now that they had entered the Temple. All of them were connected more deeply within the Etheric realm than Reva had ever felt with the exception of her own children. And now, Martin, Androcles, Dorian and Laren would be even more powerful because of the Praetorian gene within them, passed down by their Blessed Pralor ancestor Sumar. Really, any of their children with this gene would be more powerful, even as those without the gene would also begin to shape the future.

Eliani Leonidas had already done this and she had not even realized it.

Reva had not sensed it right away, but now, seeing her beside him, the way they touched one another, the way they held each other and the second red haired female, Reva Mahanlo knew. The tall Lycavorian Jomann, whose own blood was pure and powerful, he descended from the Kirek Pack. Reva did not know how this was possible for the decisions after the war had separated the Kirek Pack from the others that survived. She would need to delve into the archives at the other sites in order to discover how this had happened, but there was definitely no mistaking this now as she saw and felt them so close. Jomann carried himself in the same manner as Lylor had, proud and powerful and devastatingly protective of Eliani and this Brendi that shared their lives. His resonance within the Etheric realm was similar to Lylor in many ways and if she was able to detect his scent, no doubt she would detect the similarities as well. Reva had taken note through the years of the unique closeness that Androcles shared with his sisters Eliani and the beautiful young Zarah, as well as the adopted vampire female Yuriko. Somehow this closeness between them would play a role in the future she knew, but for now it would develop on its own.

Now they had to continue.

Reva turned her head in the Etheric projection and found Martin's eyes looking upon her intently. He sensed something Reva knew, and once more she blessed the gods for what he was. She nodded her head to him and Martin turned to look around.

"Everyone find a spot and park it!" Martin barked out the command and Reva laughed gently as the others reacted to his command. Within seconds everyone had either sat on the ground or the several benches that were scattered about and Martin looked back to her.

"*Staania?*"

Reva looked at all of them around her. "There is so much to cover." She spoke softly. She settled her eyes on Martin. "There is an easier way Martin." She spoke.

"Let's hear it." Martin said.

"I can... I can channel through you, and your pureborn children Androcles, Deion and Nara." Reva told them. "Their connection to our bloodline is strongest because of you." Reva explained. "I can activate the

Etheric boosters within this Temple and use the four of you as the anchors for everyone because of the Praetorian gene within you. It is something that Sumar taught to me and to Dadrien.”

Jezima perked up. “Wait! You knew... you knew my son Sumar!?” She asked stunned and squeezing Dynina’s hand who sat beside her.

Reva nodded her head with a smile. “Yes I did, Jezima Mahanlo.” She answered. “And a finer man I have never met.”

“Why do you call me that? I am not... I am not Lycavorian.” Jezima spoke shyly.

Reva shook her head. “That is not entirely true.” She spoke in reply. “Whether you wish to believe how it came to be, all of you in this room have been touched by the blood of the Mahanlo Pack. You may be Pralor and Darastrixi, but you have interacted and been part of our lives in some manner. Perhaps not directly Jezima, but when Dynina’s daughter Sateia turned Sumar, he became Lycavorian. He became Mahanlo blood. Just as Dynina was. Just as her daughters were. Just as you now are. Why do you think Martin and his children treat you in such a way? It is in their blood.” Reva cut her eyes to Kadeer.

“So you see Kadeer Imuma... Maha Mahanlo loved you with every fiber of her being... and the moment she bit you in the manner of our people, you became part of this family. An integral part, for it is your hand that has guided your children to this day. Your hand that kept Dynina in their lives. Your oath to Maha, who you loved just as fervently as she loved you. Your role is not done Kadeer, you have much still to accomplish, for you are family. Never doubt that Kadeer. Never. In many ways, that oath you swore the day she passed into the next world, that is as Lycavorian as it gets.”

Martin turned to look at Kadeer and nodded his head. “*Avoi.*” He spoke softly as Perlae held her father’s arm tightly, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Reva turned her head and focused her gaze on Wayonn, who had so far remained silent and out of the way as if he did not belong. “You were the brother to Sumar that his twin never was Wayonn Mahanlo. He loved you Wayonn, more than you will ever know. And now you must put aside whatever doubts you may have in regards to your place here. You belong here, just as each of you do. And to those who are not here, through Martin and his children I can reach them as well.”

“Anja? *Melda Min?*” Martin asked her now.

Reva nodded her head. “All of them... including your brother Daniel.” She answered. “Through you. The pureness of the blood within you and your pureblood children is beyond what any Lycavorian will have no matter where they reside in the universe. Any touched by you will be the same, albeit not as powerful. You know all this Martin; Anja has told you this before many times. The Purity Coefficient that your friend Eurin developed, it is a good system, but it cannot take into account our blood. That is why it cannot be measured. Even the Onab were never able to determine the why of it. Your beautiful Anja, “Red” as you affectionately call her, she is perhaps the most intelligent individual alive in the universe right now Martin. Even the Onab and all of their technology could not do what she has done. What she will do in the future. Even she could not determine why our blood is so potent. It is a rare oddity that will never be discovered I think... but that is not important now.” Reva looked around once more.

“What is important are those in this room right now.” Reva continued. “And now all of you must know why we did what we did all those millennia ago. You must understand the why of it, or you will not be able to shape the future.”

“What... what did you do?” Gorgo asked now.

Reva smiled and lifted her hands. “Let me show you. Let me show you all of it.”

With that, a soft white light extended from her hands to engulf Martin, Androcles, Deion and Nara, and this white light quickly spread to everyone in the room and their minds came alive as they could feel one another within that Etheric bubble.

And Reva began to talk.

“They returned exactly one hundred years after our first encounter with them.” Reva’s voice began. “This time however, this time we were ready for them.”

HIDDEN AIRFIELD SIX KLICKS NORTHEAST OF WARIM

“...Is wrong?” Garget asked with genuine worry in his voice for a multitude of reasons. “What is going on Oracle?” His eyes were focused on where Anja sat lotus style on the ground near the bottom of the ramp of their *STRIKER*. Around her, sitting in similar positions, were Retta, Normya, Zarah, Mari and Kalis.

“I don’t know.” Nilantha replied. “I felt a surge of Etheric power and...”

“I felt it too?” Loras spoke now from beside Lazar. “It was fleeting and warm and...”

“It is Martin.” Tobia’s voice echoed from behind them and they turned to see her walk up with Tir’ut and Lucia beside her.

“*Vada Mard Revik?*” Garget gasped in shock.

Tobia nodded her head. She knew what that phrase meant for Aricia and Anja had been schooling her in their language for weeks now. “Yes. He must have discovered something that he needed to share with them. With his family.”

“He can... he can reach across the stars like this?” Rylin gasped. “He can touch them from where he is?”

Tobia nodded her head again. “I don’t know where exactly he is but yes. Etherically speaking he and his son Androcles are the most powerful Etheric users in existence right now. Their abilities and potential are untapped. If it was important enough to include Anja and his family, then yes, he would find a way. They would find a way.”

“Can we... can we do this?” Loras asked her.

“My people, all Lycavorians are born with this ability but most never advance it past the lower tiers.” Tobia answered. “Most do not have the concentration to control it as my people do, as Martin and those with him do. It requires a particular gene within our bodies that is so rare only one in a trillion have it now. Without the gene, we can only use Etheric abilities to a certain extent. Nothing like they are capable of.”

“You have this gene Tobia?” Rylin asked.

Tobia nodded her head. “My husband, Murano and our daughter Mari. Yes. Mari is wife and mate to one of Martin’s pureblood sons, Deion. His blood now runs through her.”

“*Sibfla!*” All of them heard the soft curse word and turned to see Rhaos beside Lazar now.

Tobia smiled and shook her head. “You have no worries Rhaos.” She told him.

“I hurt her. On their ship right after...” Rhaos stated.

Lucia shook her head. “You did so in an unknown situation created through no fault of your own.” She told him stopping his words. “Trust me, Mari has already made this known to Deion. You need not worry.”

“What is he showing them?” Nilantha asked looking at Lucia now.

Lucia shook her head. “I don’t know. Zarah will share it with me after, and Normya with Tir’ut here, but we do not carry the blood of their family in our veins. Tir’ut and I felt it at first but it was for their family only because of the Etheric connection. We just need to wait.”

“How long?” Garget asked.

“That we cannot answer.” Tir’ut replied. “I have seen Androcles hold such a connection by himself for several hours, but with his father and others with him, there’s no telling how long it could last.”

Nilantha turned back and looked at where Anja sat. She nodded her head slowly. “Lady Anja has been nothing but forthcoming since their arrival.” She turned to Garget. “Garget?”

He nodded his head without pause. “Yes.”

“Then we wait.” Nilantha said. “We are only just beginning to learn how closely tied we are with those of the True King. We have waited for millennia and we can wait for a few more hours if necessary.”

Loras wasn’t listening to Nilantha speak because the pull within her was more powerful than anything she had ever felt. She was staring at where Anja sat, the tingling of her mind alive like it had never been before. No one noticed as she moved closer to where Anja was, her eyes wide at the sensations that were racing through her. She felt more alive than at any time in her life and she did not know why. And then the voice filled her mind, a powerful yet gentle male voice that whispered within her mind like a cool breeze through the mountain valleys all around her.

“*Enler jar aur valiath. Allon coi terit livca kos.*” (Join us my wife) (This is your history too)

Loras felt such a wonderful sensation sweep across her that it shook her right down to her core. A sensation of love, desire and passion mixed with respect and honor. Without any doubt or hesitation in the least Loras Ranev crossed the last few meters' distance and saw Anja and Retta reach for her hands. She took them without pause and settled to the ground between them.

And on this day Loras Ranev entered a whole new world.

HONELZE

“...Sure there is nothing wrong?” Koguth asked as he stood beside Lexi in the small room inside the restaurant.

Lexi turned her eyes to him and nodded. “The King reached for them.” She replied. “It was a very powerful Etheric connection meant only for the four of them.” She motioned to where Dysea, Isabella, Cirith and Meral sat at the small table, all of them holding each other's hands. To Koguth they appeared to be in a deep trance of some sort.

“You are their Captain Lexi.” He spoke. “I do not begin to try and understand this ability that your people have, but if you believe they are safe?”

Lexi smiled and nodded her head. “They are fine General.” She said. “And there are many among our people that do not understand how they can do what they can do, so don't feel left out. I am among them.”

Koguth looked at her and smiled. These last weeks and months they had become good friends and Koguth was assured a direct line to any of the Queens when he needed their council. “I will take your word for it.” He said with that feline smile. “I was going to report that we have finished the eastern defensive positions and will start on the final positions along the north wall tomorrow. We should be done within the week.”

Lexi nodded her head. “I will tell them.” She spoke. “I'm sure they will want to cover the last portion with you when they are finished here. Isabella and Cirith most of all. They seem to have a more complete grasp of defensive fortifications.”

Koguth nodded his head. “I will return when they call for me.” He spoke.

Lexi watched him walk out and then turned her head back to where her Queens sat. She pulled a chair away from the wall and settled into it, knowing that this could be a long wait. She had seen the surprise on their faces when they felt Martin reach for them, the joy and love and the confusion. Whatever was taking place, for him to reach for them in this fashion, it must have been very important.

LORENU

HALL OF KNOWLEDGE

The images swirling all around them held their rapt attention while Reva's voice filled their minds like the narrator of a story. It was her voice, but it wasn't as she spoke, but no one really noticed.

Ship and ground battles from at least a dozen different worlds that they could tell. The Iais'Kai ships were massive in size, the smallest that they could see was equal in size to a *LEONIDAS-IIA* Class Strike Cruiser. There were thousands upon thousands of odd transports that carried the ground troops very similar to those Androcles, Dorian and Laren had fought on the Pralor Science station. They witnessed wave after wave of these ships attacking planets, hundreds of them obliterated by planetary defenses.

The ships of the *Ardorm Kys* gave as good as they got however, matching the Iais'Kai in firepower if not size. Their losses were heavy in the beginning for most of them were learning as they went, never having had to fight for their very survival. This is when the most telling aspect of the Lycavorian people came shining through.

Their ability to adapt.

Daniho was a masterful tactician it seemed, for he never made the same mistake twice. He cared for those who followed his orders and as the battles progressed, Daniho, Ashten and even Kelia became worshiped by both Onab and Lycavorian. Daniho may have been King, but Ashten and Kelia fought just as viciously

alongside him. Kelia refused to leave the side of her brothers, and Lylor fought beside his beautiful wife and mate without question. The Kirek Pack became synonymous with the Mahanlo Pack through these first years. Where the Mahanlo Pack fought, the Kirek Pack was never very far away. Daniho Mahanlo was no fool and he used his people's skills and abilities to the best of his ability. Onab fought beside Lycavorian and vice versa, for there was no special consideration. All of them knew that their survival depended on each other. The Onab had a knack for commanding ships, almost an instinctual nature, which made them the logical choice to command the fleets, but Daniho insured that Lycavorians were among those who were in a position to learn from the Onab. The main shipyards at Cerath were turning out warships at an astounding rate once the Worker Drone program had been instituted, and soon after that the Avatars began to come online.

Cerath was the most heavily defended of their planets, something the Iais'Kai discovered in the first weeks of the war, much to their painful disappointment. Daniho was not about to leave their homeworld undefended for any reason. The entire planetary system had been turned into a no man's land as the Iais'Kai found out. Nearly four thousand massive planetary batteries protected Cerath, all of them shielded by the advanced regenerating shields developed within the last fifty years of preparation. When the Iais'Kai fleet arrived here first, intent on crushing their homeworld and making short work of their government and destroying all command and control, they were unprepared for what greeted them.

Nearly four thousand planetary batteries and almost five thousand *Ardorm Kys* ships met the Iais'Kai fleet when they entered the system. Ten thousand Iais'Kai ships boldly entered the Cerath system, the battle lasting for three straight days, until the Iais'Kai withdrew with barely two thousand ships left in their force. All but a few of the huge transports they had set upon the planet were destroyed before they ever made it into the upper atmosphere. Those that did land were met on the surface by overwhelming force. Daniho had been very clear in his orders, the Iais'Kai would offer no mercy or surrender based on their actions on Delum, and we would offer none either. It would be a fight to the death and the Lycavorians and Onab would take no chances or prisoners.

"...Suffered losses as well." Reva spoke once more as her Etheric form turned to face where Martin sat enthralled, Aricia and For'mya tucked between his legs. "We lost nearly half of the fleet guarding our home and a third of the defense batteries, but they ran. They were able to land fourteen transports on the surface, vile and savage warriors much like those you fought on the science station Androcles." Reva spoke looking at him now. Sadi was sitting lotus style between his legs, Ne'Veha and Carisia sitting on either side of her, their hands resting over the top of Andro's hand on her abdomen. Lu'ria and Sehri leaned against Andro's sides while Caliria sat tightly against Lu'ria.

"Thousands of them made it to the surface, but Daniho had forces ready for them. Their numbers were reduced by the planetary defenses and many were wounded but we spared no one. It was almost as if, they fought as if no one had ever stood up to them before. They were stunned at the ferociousness of our attacks on the ground and at how hard our people are to kill. Within a day, we had killed all those who landed, none survived to leave the areas where their ships landed and our population centers were never threatened."

"It was a great victory for us. The first of many in the coming years," Reva told them now. "But it would not last. Daniho and Ashten were suspicious to say the least. Others among our people were of the mind that our first victory on Cerath forced the Iais'Kai to rethink their invasion. They tried to bring others to their way of thinking. That we should reach out to the Iais'Kai and try to find out what it is they wanted. To make peace."

"I'm guessing that did not turn out well." Martin spoke softly now.

Reva shook her head. "No. Daniho was adamant, and within days we were rebuilding what we had lost while sending out scouts to follow those Iais'Kai ships that had left the system. They struck again within a month, utterly wiping out two Research colonies of substantial size, butchering over thirty-five thousand men, women and children and then we all knew as Daniho had suspected. It was far from over." Reva looked up at the images that were playing all across the ceiling and walls now. "They fortified these planets and gained a foothold in our space. That was all they needed. We did not know where they came from, where their home was, but they were very capable and organized. Pengot advised Daniho to strike the colonies and retake them quickly, as did many others. Daniho refused. He sensed something was not right and he was not about to leave Cerath undefended. Ashten and Kelia agreed, as did I. Three months later we discovered it was the correct course of action. One of our scout vessels was patrolling the outer edge of our system and they detected another fleet of Iais'Kai ships. A much larger fleet, and they were spreading out."

“The attack against Cerath was only a diversion.” Andro echoed his father’s thought just before he spoke the words.

Reva looked at him and her Etheric projection nodded. “Yes. They threw away hundreds of thousands of lives and thousands of ships attacking Cerath so that they could move larger forces into our space with no resistance.”

“How?” Andro asked softly. “Where did they come from *Staania*? A force that large had to have been detected as it was entering the quadrant.”

Reva nodded her head. “And they were.” She answered. “But the Iais’Kai, they had ships waiting for our scouts and they destroyed them before they could report to us. They then sent their own reports on our channels, which they obtained from the wreckage of the ships they destroyed.”

“That was smooth.” Martin spoke grudgingly. He looked at Reva. “I bet that never happened again.”

Reva nodded her head. “No, it did not. We instituted strict guidelines after we discovered what they had done.”

“What guidelines?” Martin was quick to ask.

Aricia was the one to pull on his arm. “Beloved, let her speak.” She admonished him lovingly.

Reva smiled as she saw Martin lean over and nuzzle Aricia’s cheek affectionately. “The details of the many battles fought through *Vada Zin sarakoa vyen ils* are well documented here and in the other Temples. As of today, you will have the ability to enter any of them to discover these things and so much more that I cannot cover with you right now. Any of you here, it will be encoded into your DNA, is being encoded as we speak. All of you will see a tattoo begin to take shape on your body, most often behind the shoulder as I have...” Reva turned and slipped the shoulder portion of her dress off her skin. Even the Etheric connection did not take away from the intricate detail or design of the tattoo. While not large in any way, the detailed image was unmistakable in its depiction. A large wolf with night black fur was shown standing on its hind legs and having dragon wings unfolded along its sides. The coloring was breathtaking and it almost seemed to bring the tattoo alive with its vibrancy. Reva released her dress and turned back fully to face Martin and the others.

“I do not know how it came to be, or who is responsible for its creation, all I know is that it will begin to appear on all of those present in this Temple and those connected to us within a few days. For those with our direct blood within them, it will appear much more quickly. And it will never go away. I have grown quite fond of it over the many years to be honest.” Reva turned and looked at Martin. “And it is something that the Onab foretold over four million years ago.”

Martin looked at her with huge eyes. “What?!!!”

Reva nodded her head slowly. “There is so much about the Onab that was known to only a few Martin. Daniho and Ashten among them. Things that you must know now.”

“How do... how do you know them *staania*?” Dorian asked.

“I was... I was the only one who Daniho and Ashten told.” Reva answered softly. “The Onab agreed to this arrangement so that I could... so that I could act in this manner through the many years to come. As the Harbinger of what was to come. To keep alive what they foresaw and to guide as much as I was able.”

“What they foresaw?” Martin asked softly. “*Staania*, you volunteered to... to act in this way? Why?”

Reva took a deep breath within the Etheric connection. “There were hundreds of battles during the *Vada Zin sarakoa vyen ils*; thousands of them if you include the smaller battles across many different planets. They are yours to read about as you will, but you must know the true events that took place in order to understand what we did, the mistakes that we made.”

“You were defending your homes!” For'mya interjected. “Your worlds! Those that you loved! That is no mistake!”

Reva smiled and shook her head. “No, it is not.” She agreed. “However, it is the reason the future was shaped as it was.”

“What do you mean?” For'mya pressed her.

“The *Vada Zin sarakoa vyen ils* changed us.” Reva spoke softly. “It changed all of us.”

“I don’t follow *staania*.” Martin spoke now. “War changes everyone by its very nature. It makes us different people because of what it forces us to do.”

Reva nodded her head. “This is true *staaniketo*.” She answered calling Martin grandson for the first time. It felt right to her as she spoke the words and it gave her no pause at all in speaking them. This only

confirmed to her the truth of what Martin and Androcles had said to her a short while ago about blood. “Up until the Iais’Kai appeared we had never fought before.” Reva spoke. “Certainly there were disagreements between Alphas, between Packs, but never anything that caused us to... never anything that caused us to embrace the baser instincts of our people. It changed the Onab as well.”

“You are not making sense.” Martin told her.

Reva nodded her head. “As the war progressed, things were not going well for us at all.” She told them. “The Iais’Kai seemed to be everywhere, almost as if they had an unlimited supply of ships and troops. We had colonized nearly a hundred worlds when they first arrived, thriving centers of commerce and trade with dozens of other species in that quadrant of space. We had... the Iais’Kai went after them first. They utterly obliterated nine different species, over ten trillion lives lost, because of us. The Iais’Kai are cunning and shrewd. The others we had befriended abandoned us to save themselves. Some of them even turned on us and they thought by doing so they could survive, but they were wrong. The Iais’Kai came for them as well in time. By the war’s end we were alone. It was not until the war was near its end that we finally discovered the why of it.” Reva met Martin’s eyes. “We started the war Martin. We caused them to attack.”

“What?” Martin gasped.

“I have told you the Onab were technological geniuses.” Reva said.

“Yeah, so?” Martin hissed.

“A hundred and fifty years before the Iais’Kai first attacked, the Onab were finishing testing on what they called Portal Drives.” Reva told him. “Engines that could allow a ship to transverse from one quadrant to another in the blink of an eye. This could allow their ships to go almost anywhere in the universe instantly if they had the proper coordinates.”

Dynina’s eyes grew wide. “Like... like what we developed here on Lorenu!” She gasped. “We... the specifications were in the computers here! It took our scientists two thousand years to figure them out but...”

Reva nodded her head. “The plans for the Portal Drives were left here on purpose Dynina Mahanlo. They were left here by the Onab for those who followed you here to discover and begin to develop on your own.”

“They saw *staania* Dynina coming here?” Androcles asked now.

Reva nodded once more. “Yes.” She replied. “The Onab... The Onab had the gift of foresight. They saw things that would happen in the future. Not in any real order or sense but those who had this skill most often were artists and designers and they put their visions in paintings and drawings. Other scholars would attempt to put them in some semblance of direction but nothing was ever set in stone. The future never is.”

“So they... they saw us... one of them saw us sitting here and having this conversation?” Martin asked stunned.

Reva shook her head. “Nothing so exact *staaniketo*, no.” She replied. “They foresaw the end of the war, but not how. They foresaw we would meet the Darastrixi, but not how. They foresaw the Praetorians and Sumar’s rise to power but not how. They foresaw the end of the Pralor Empire at the hands of the Iais’Kai, but not how. They foresaw your birth Martin, and the birth of Androcles, Dorian and Laren, but not the how or when.”

“You said they made paintings and drawings.” Sadi spoke. “I don’t recognize anything on these walls or among the images we have seen Lady Reva.” She said.

Reva shook her head. “And you won’t dear Sadi. At least not here.” She replied. “All of the contents of the archives, paintings, drawings, even holo depictions, all of them were stored in one place. They have been hidden away for millennia. The last one, the last one is how I know that the children you carry within you are the reunification of our people.”

“Nilantha’s ship!” Martin exclaimed. “Anja said Nilantha told her that the history she carried was indispensable!”

“Your insight truly serves you well, Martin.” Reva told him. “She was chosen by Dadrien to be the guardian of this knowledge, yes.”

Martin looked at her. “Dadrien was a lot more than we think he was isn’t he?” He asked her.

Reva smiled warmly. “More than you can possibly imagine. As was your grandfather Sumar.” She said. She lifted her hand before Martin could continue. “Allow me to continue *staaniketo*. Your answers will come.”

Martin looked at Aricia and For'mya as they squeezed his arms and nodded their heads. He turned back to Reva. "Forgive me." He said.

Reva shook her head. "There is nothing to forgive." She told him. "The research was stopped on the engines after a particularly large phase of testing the Onab conducted. They actually stopped all research into them after this event."

"What event?" Dynina asked.

"The Onab arranged a test of three ships with these prototype engines." Reva spoke. "They were all remotely controlled and directed with the barest of systems installed in order for the ships to operate. They were given a set of specific coordinates in what we then thought was uncharted space. We were wrong."

Martin looked at her. "It wasn't uncharted was it?" He said softly. "It was Iais'Kai space."

Reva nodded slowly. "Yes." She answered.

"What happened?" Aricia asked.

"Two of the ships had catastrophic failures when they arrived at the set coordinates they were provided. They emerged in the middle of a radioactive nebula that we did not know was there." Reva told them painfully. "The ship's shields could not compensate for the radiation quickly enough and they exploded. What was the main travel corridor for Iais'Kai space; very near to what was their homeworld, traveled past this nebula."

"Oh boy..." Martin muttered softly. "This is not going to be good."

Reva shook her head. "No." She agreed with him. "The resulting explosions set off a chain reaction throughout the entire nebula. I don't know the scientific references to what happened, but the explosions caused the nebula to increase in size by a factor of one hundred. The lethality of the radiation within the nebula increased by a factor of a thousand. Within two days it had moved and engulfed four Iais'Kai worlds, including their homeworld."

"*Carians!*" Gorgo gasped in horror.

Reva nodded her head at Gorgo's reaction. "Yes." She spoke softly. "Every living thing on those four planets was killed within a week. Billions upon billions died."

"How do you know all this?" Jezima asked her.

"The third ship was undamaged. It had exited its jump outside the nebula and further away from the Iais'Kai homeworld." Reva answered. "When the Onab realized what had taken place they kept the third ship in position for as long as they could, taking sensor readings and trying to do anything they could think of to stop it. When they realized that nothing was going to survive and they could not stop the nebula from expanding, they brought the ship back." Reva looked at Martin. "What they did not realize was that an Iais'Kai ship detected them as they spooled up the Portal engines for the return trip. It was able to fire a tracking device of some sort onto the hull just before it jumped."

"They tracked the ship back to you." Andro said.

Reva nodded her head. "It took them a hundred and fifty years to come, but yes."

"The Onab knew all this could happen?" Martin asked.

Reva shook her head quickly. "*Joa! Carians joa!*" She exclaimed. "They assumed, we assumed that the planet was uninhabited from long range probe information. The probes were able to detect the nebula immediately upon entering the system but what we did not know was that the radiation from the nebula was something we had never seen before and it was affecting their long range sensors. The sensors did not give accurate information."

"A new form of radiation?" For'mya asked.

Reva nodded her head. "Something we had never seen before." She answered. "The Onab called it VerTech Radiation. Astonishingly lethal, and one hundred percent deadly to anything it touched."

"If you knew the nebula was there, why send the ships into it?" Aviel Em'mor asked now from where he sat beside Yokra and Robati.

"We didn't." Reva answered. "Or at least we thought we didn't. In the hundred years it took for us to plan and execute the test of the ships using the probe information, the Nebula moved."

"Moved?" Martin hissed. "Nebula's don't move! Do they?" He asked looking at For'mya who had more knowledge in this area and he knew it.

For'mya nodded her head. "It is very rare Martin *duan enyla*, but yes." She answered him. "We have one within Union space that moves half a light year every thousand years. It causes a beautiful light show for

several weeks within the system from what I understand. Many of our astronomers make the pilgrimage to Nodon space to view it.”

“Wow!” Martin spoke genuinely surprised. “Learn something new every day.” He looked back to Reva. “And you didn’t confirm the information because everything you had told you it was a dead system.”

Reva nodded her head once more. “The explosions within the nebula limited any active sensor readings to very short range. The third test ship could not detect any life signs on their homeworld or the other planets. No Iais’Kai ships were detected either. The third ship exited outside the fringes of the nebula where its shields held against the radiation but the sensors were reduced to very short range as I said. When the two other ships exploded it cast a cloud out that engulfed the third ship but did no harm to its shields. The Iais’Kai ship must have been outside the edges of the nebula and this cloud and saw our ship visually.”

“How could that be possible?” Martin questioned.

“We only discovered all this after we captured a very high ranking Iais’Kai officer near the end of the war. One of the Iais’Kai Queen’s senior advisors.” Reva replied to the question. “No larger Iais’Kai warships were in that area because they were all supporting an invasion of a planet in another sector of their space. Only smaller planetary ships were in the area and that is what put the tracker on our third ship.”

“They viewed it as an attack.” Martin said softly.

Reva nodded once more. “Yes. And given their nature, their response was predictable. However, without our advanced technology it took them a hundred and fifty years to finally arrive and exact their retribution.”

“What happened?” Andro asked.

“You must understand; by this time, they were so close to defeating us.” Reva spoke and her words were obviously hard and pain filled. “The war had already... it had already claimed Daniho’s beloved wife and six of his children. Dalet Nulai was personally responsible for killing Daniho’s wife and three of his children. The youngest of them, two girls and a boy. And he did so in a vile and savage manner. If not for Ashten and Kelia, it would have broken him. In a small way I suppose it did.” Reva looked at the floor for a long moment but no one pressed her. Finally, she looked up and continued.

“Daniho ordered that the Iais’Kai officer be interrogated by any means necessary.” Reva said. “He wanted every bit of information that could be obtained from him. All of it.”

“What did he do?” Martin asked.

Reva met his eyes. “He had him tortured beyond imagination for days until the Iais’Kai broke.” She answered. “By this time, Daniho was barely holding on to his sanity. His beloved wife and mate, all but two of his children, they were gone. Ashten and Kelia and his two sons that remained were all that kept him going. He became obsessed with ending the war before any more of our people, any more of his family, before any more were taken from him. From all of us.” Reva’s words were spoken with great emotion and all of them could tell it weighed heavily on her mind. “By this time, our family, we were looked upon as saviors Martin. Daniho, Ashten and Kelia, even me, our people and the Onab viewed us as something more than we were. They would have done anything we asked of them, anything Daniho asked of them as their King.” Reva moved to one of the nearby benches and her Etheric form sat down. “We discovered that the Iais’Kai had brought nearly their entire industrial apparatus with them in their search to find us. They had conquered three planets twenty years before they came for us, in an area of space that we had not yet explored. That is why we did not discover how they were able to continue to make ships and fight as if they had endless supplies. Millions of their kind had come with this great fleet and they were now occupying three planets and providing the Iais’Kai Forces with all of the support they needed.” She looked at Martin.

“They essentially uprooted what remained of their entire species and came after us. We also discovered from this officer that they were preparing to send another large force to enter the battle from these planets. This would have made it possible to overrun what remained of us.”

“What did... what did Daniho do *staania*?” Eliani asked now after sitting silent for this entire time.

Reva opened her mouth to answer but her father beat her to it.

“He did the only thing he could do in order to insure their survival. He went after those planets.” Martin said softly.

Reva met his eyes and nodded her head slowly. “Yes.” She took a deep breath and stood up once more. “He had the Onab reactivate their Portal Drive archives and he equipped six ships with these prototype engines. With one enhancement.”

“Dark Matter Cores.” Androcles said softly.

Reva nodded once more. “Yes. Enormously dangerous and unstable and completely unsafe confined in a starship engine core. Even though the Onab knew of this energy source, they did not want to experiment with this type of power because of what it could do. The destruction it could wrought if misused.”

“What happened *staania*?” Andro asked now.

“Part of the information we got from this officer was where they would stage their forces for the final push. He sent one of these ships to where the Iais’Kai were staging this fleet.” Reva answered the question. “The ship only needed to be in the same sector as the fleet in order for it to do its damage. It was destroyed quickly by Iais’Kai warships, but in destroying it, they also detonated the Dark Matter Cores. And when combined with the Portal Drives, it created a mini Black Hole. The effect only lasted for several hours but in that time nearly ten thousand Iais’Kai ships and five million of their warriors were wiped out.”

“By the gods!” Kadeer Imuma muttered now.

“Another ship was sent to the largest of the worlds the Iais’Kai had conquered, and again, their warships destroyed it quickly. The result was the same. The world and everything on it died.” Reva told them. “We do not know how many were killed, but it was by far their largest science, construction and research center according to the officer we captured. These attacks caused Dalet Nulai to react just as Daniho had hoped.” Reva continued. “He came after us with everything that remained at his disposal here on Cerath.”

“But why draw him... why bring him here?” Dynina gasped now. “Why bring him to your world?”

Reva turned and looked at Martin then, his eyes watching her intently. He shifted on the floor and looked at Andro quickly before turning back to Reva. Aricia and the others took note of this and glanced between themselves before looking back to Martin.

“Beloved?” She asked softly.

Martin turned and looked at her, those azure colored eyes always able to penetrate to his very heart. He looked back to Reva. “Daniho baited him.” Martin spoke softly then. “By using those weapons he did the one thing that would make this Dalet Nulai blow his casket and do something stupid.”

“He made him come to you where you were the most powerful.” Androcles finished his father’s statement.

Reva nodded slowly. “We had built massive underground facilities on Cerath and that is where our people went.” She continued. “When Dalet arrived all that was waiting for him and his forces was death. We had turned the cities into death traps. Everything that could be used to kill them was used. Buildings, traps, mines. Daniho wasted nothing.” Her head turned to look at where Kadeer sat with his children and she smiled slightly at him. “And it was here that we were introduced to the Darastrixi people and our futures became intertwined.”

“What?” Aviel gasped aloud in disbelief. “How? My people... we never... we never ventured that far from our homeworld! Kadeer and those with him have come further than any of our science ships in our entire history! And we thought them destroyed and lost!”

Laren’s eyes went wide then and she reached for his arm. “*Koppentotz Aviel!*” She gasped aloud as she looked at him. “*Wer Naushindtor Sjiri!*”

Aviel glanced at her and then his eyes cut to where Sarlana had been sitting quietly, her eyes now closed as realization spread on her face. It was Andro who shifted on the floor and looked at her.

“*Doraanar?*” He asked gently.

Sarlana’s eyes opened slowly and she looked at him warmly. “*Wer Naushindtor Sjiri*, the Forbidden Scrolls. There have been rumors for hundreds of thousands of years that there is a series of Scrolls that exist that tell of a schism of our people. They have been sealed away in the *Urkrisa Mamiss* Archive vaults for nearly four million years. Very few among our people have actually read them, the *Urkrisa Mamiss* considers them to be extremely taboo, but they were unwilling to destroy them. Even the *Doraanar* were not allowed to read them. I... I just never made the connection until now.”

“You... you have read them *Doraanar?*” Laren asked in shock.

Sarlana shook her head. “Not the scrolls themselves, just the collection of writings of what many scholars believe was in them.”

“What connection Sarlana?” Martin asked.

“It is the reason the Darastrixi have always been so introverted Martin.” Sarlana told him meeting his eyes. “It is said that The Forbidden Scrolls tell the story of a large group of our people, scientists and researchers and military that wanted to leave our homeworld and explore the stars and what was held beyond what we knew. They date back to the very founding of the Darastrixi government. The *UrIkrisa Mamiss* forbid it of course, but after many years this group was able to steal several of our largest ships and leave our homeworld behind. The Forbidden Scrolls apparently tell us that they were lost many years later, their ship destroyed by something unknown. Apparently that is not the case.”

Laren’s dual colored blue eyes grew wide now and she looked at Sarlana. “*Doraanar!*” She gasped aloud. “They... they were the *Onkmet* Darastrixi!” She stammered in shock. “The Winter Dragons!”

Sarlana looked at her. “That isn’t possible Laren.” She spoke gently. She cut her eyes to Reva. “Is it?”

Reva nodded her head with a smile now. “Laren Ti’shara is correct in her words Sarlana.” She answered.

“How?” Aviel asked in disbelief now, stunned at this revelation. “How is that possible if...”

Reva held up her hand slowly. “Allow me to explain Aviel Em’mor. Cerath was nearly as large as Icarava and given the natural resistance to sensors that Darastrixi skin gives them, they were able to remain undetected even from us for millennia. They lived and they prospered in a region of the planet that we had no interest in and frankly we thought was unlivable.”

Martin looked at her. “Let me guess.” He said. “Impassable mountains and storms that could peel your skin off.”

Reva blinked several times as she looked at him. “How do...”

“We have seen it.” Andro spoke now before his father could answer. “Dorian, Laren and I *staania*. We have seen it within our minds ever since...”

“Ever since we were born.” Laren finished his statement.

Reva looked back to Martin. “They... they shared this with you?” She asked.

Martin nodded his head. “There is very little my children keep from me *staania*. You should know that.”

Reva nodded her head. “Yes. Of course.”

“You said the battle came here *staania*.” He spoke. “That this Iais’Kai fool Dalet Nulai that Andro killed, you said that he and Daniho fought here.”

Reva nodded now. “Yes. The Iais’Kai attacked in full force, but we were waiting for them. Once more they were able to land thousands of troops and running battles erupted across Cerath. The battle between Dalet Nulai and Daniho carried them up into these mountains while it raged above them. All around them. Dalet Nulai’s cronies saved his life that day and thought they had killed Daniho by pushing him off that mountain. It was a fall that would have killed him.”

“Dadrien saved him didn’t he *staania*?” Andro asked softly, a whisper of reverence that all of them detected. “He was there. On Cerath.”

Reva met his gaze and slowly nodded her head. “Dadrien’s father Arnor... but Dadrien was with him that day, yes. Young and so very powerful and full of vision.” Reva answered him. “Arnor snatched my son from the jaws of death only a hundred feet from crashing into the frozen ground beneath him. Daniho later told us that he had accepted his fate as he fell that day, and that he would join his beloved wife and children in the heavens. He told me that he saw Pria moments before Arnor grabbed him and that she was standing there holding the hands of his children and smiling at him, shaking her head. ‘It’s not your time my beloved.’ He told me she said to him. ‘It’s not your time.’ And then Arnor grabbed him as he fell.”

There large room was utterly silent as that shiver of disbelief and awe swept through them all. They could all sense it as they lifted their heads and Reva’s memories came into focus of that day and they saw the massive black and white dragon descending to the ground carrying Daniho’s limp body in its savage looking front talons. All around him were other dragons, many with two legged Darastrixi upon their backs, all of them landing in the clearing with hundreds of Lycavorians and Onab watching. They saw Reva run from the crowd even as others tried to hold her back, as Arnor gently lowered Daniho to the ground in front of her. Sarlana, Laren and Robati had tears rolling down their cheeks, Gorgo, Jezima, Dynina and Dasha clinging to one another on the verge of crying as well.

“Battles were still raging across the planet but in that one clearing time stood still.” Reva spoke as the images and Etheric memories showed them.

They watched Kelia and Ashten run up to their brother, Ashten embracing Daniho so hard it was painful, then both their arms were encircling their sister and pulling her to them. Finally, Daniho Mahanlo turned and looked with awe upon Arnor and the hundred other dragons and Darastrixi that had landed in the clearing. Dragons of similar color but varying sizes.

Daniho stepped away from his brother and sister slowly, moving closer to Arnor as he lowered that massive head to within inches of Daniho’s head and shoulders.

“Your spirit weeps with pain Daniho Mahanlo.” The deep gravelly voice came from Arnor’s muzzle shocking all the Lycavorian and Onab present.

“You... you can talk!” Daniho gasped in shocked and all of them saw the huge upper body move with gentle laughter.

“We have watched for many millennia from our hidden mountains where you would not go.” Arnor spoke once more. “We have seen your successes and your failures. We have seen your love and your anger. Both are formidable to behold Daniho Mahanlo.”

“You... you saved my life! Why?”

“You know why.” Arnor answered. “You saw her did you not? The one who holds your heart within her grasp. She spoke to you from the afterlife.”

“How do you... Pria...”

“We can see within. The Etheric realm is all encompassing Daniho Mahanlo. The spark within you, within your blood and your family cannot be denied any longer. It grows and it will become even stronger in the many millennia before you.” Arnor spoke gently moving his snout forward and pressing it to Daniho’s chest.

“What...?” Ashten had moved up beside his brother now, Kelia right behind him, none of them showing the same fear that the other Lycavorians and Onab showed openly on their faces.

“What do you mean?” Ashten asked.

“She was correct you know. It is not your time.” Arnor spoke. “My son has seen this as well.”

They watched the dragon beside him move closer now. Also black and white in color and slightly smaller in size, but still enormous in every way, even larger than Torma.

“I was not fast enough...” Dadrien began to speak and all of them recognized his voice now. “I tried to stop him... and my heart weeps with yours. I remained behind to ensure that your people got there before the animals and elements claimed their remains. For this failure I devote myself to you and your cause.”

Daniho looked at him with wide eyes. “What...?”

“The battles still rage across our world Daniho Mahanlo.” Arnor spoke once more. “It is past time for my kind to get involved. Their leader believes you dead, he is wounded but he will try to press this advantage now. I have fifty thousand Darastrixi warriors ready to assist you in defending what is our home as well. It is time that these vile creatures, these Iais’Kai, it is time that they felt the wrath of the *Onkmet* Darastrixi as well for invading our homeworld. We stand beside you and your people now Daniho Mahanlo. Let them feel our combined fury. Harness your pain and your anger young Daniho, grip it tightly, control the wrath that burns within you. Focus it, let it fuel you, but do not let it consume you.”

They all watched as Dadrien turned sideways and lowered his huge body completely to the ground. They saw what could only be a brown colored saddle uniquely strapped to his shoulders between the two large spikes that protruded from his shoulder blades where his wings connected to his body.

“A gift from those of my people who walk on two legs.” Dadrien spoke as he settled. “Allow me to carry you while we cleanse our world of this stain. It is not your time Daniho Mahanlo, just as your beloved mate told you. And one day, you will know happiness again.”

Daniho Mahanlo did not know it then, but Dadrien’s words would ring true. Now all he wanted was vengeance and he turned to snatch the helmet from a nearby Lycavorian before leaping up on the saddle and settling onto the shoulders of the massive beast before him without fear.

“Now it begins!” Arnor barked out before releasing a deafening trumpet into the skies and his legs launched him into the air. Dadrien followed his father’s actions and soon they were pulling away in to the sky as Reva and the others watched.

It was silent in the large room once more for a long, enduring moment and then Dorian's voice broke the silence.

“*Saoi nubous sibfla!*”

“...Waged across Cerath for another month.” Reva was speaking once more, all of them riveted to her words. “The Iais'Kai were unprepared for the ferocity of our defenses. The first attack on Cerath that Dalet Nulai led three years before this was a surprise. We were not ready for such a blatant move while our forces fought elsewhere. He was able to kill Daniho's mate Pria and his three youngest children before having to withdraw. This attack however, this attack we were ready for. He retreated to his ship, for the wounds Daniho had inflicted upon him were grave. He knew he wasn't safe there, and he had to withdraw out of the system and leave his forces behind to be slaughtered. And slaughter them we did.” Reva spoke, her voice filled with a perverse pride really. “We destroyed their ships, leaving their troops on the ground without support. For three weeks we fought pitched battles across Cerath, Dadrien and Daniho always at the front. Finally, only a few hundred were left, cornered in a valley that they could not escape. We were prepared to crush them all... but something happened.”

Martin Leonidas had risen to his feet while she talked and was walking among them, his head lifted up as he watched her memories in the Etheric projection that filled the ceiling. No one really knew what was going through his mind as he moved among all of them, for he said nothing, spoke no words and simply took it all in. Androcles might have known what his father was thinking, so much alike as they were, but he said nothing. Martin stopped beside Dorian and Laren now when Reva said that and he looked at her.

“He let them go.” Martin spoke softly. “Didn't he?”

Reva nodded her head now, smiling gently as she looked at him. “Yes.” She answered. “He ordered a ship be given to them, and he allowed them to leave. It was the only act of mercy he showed in those last days. Daniho ordered three of the remaining four Portal ships be used. They targeted the remainder of the Iais'Kai fleet forces and the next largest planet they had taken control of twenty years prior. After he did...” Reva stopped for a moment and took a deep breath. “After Daniho did this, he had Ashten and Kelia send a message to the Iais'Kai forces that remained on the final planet. Leave this area of space, leave every one of our planets that they had conquered, or he would unleash the *Nyads rie Jorbhe* upon them until all of them were dead.”

Gorgo and Dynina gasped in disbelief at this and Jezima glanced between them before pulling on Dynina's arm for a translation and Dynina looked at her. “What... what does phrase this mean Dynina?” She asked.

“The Hounds of Hell.” Dynina spoke softly. “To our people this... this phrase means...” Dynina couldn't bring herself to complete the meaning so Dasha spoke for her, and being the traditional Spartan woman that she was, it was very blunt.

“To our people... to unleash the *Nyads rie Jorbhe*... it is essentially a call to war that every Lycavorian will answer. Man, woman or child, no matter where they may be. It is... it is part of our blood. It says our enemies will die. No mercy or quarter will be shown for anyone, young or old. We will not pause, we will not stop, we will not relent. Every Lycavorian man, women and child, we will attack our enemies until none remain.” Dasha looked at Reva's image. “But it has never been used before in our history or the history of those on Lycavore. I studied that history thoroughly Reva; even Resumar did not utter this phrase though he had the most cause to after what the Coven had done. At least... at least until now.”

Reva nodded her head. “No. It has never been used thank the gods. Daniho did not have to go through with that order.”

“They left then *staania*?” Nara spoke from where she sat beside Deion. Jacina was beside her, holding tightly to her hand, the wolf changes within her already very evident to those in the Hall with them.

Reva nodded her head. “They did Nara.” She replied with another one of those gentle smiles. “Within a month they had abandoned all of our colonies that they had control of. What was left in their wake was horrific. Very few of our people survived and after ten thousand years, little remained of what we had built on them.”

“Did you follow them?” Martin asked.

Reva nodded once more. "For a time." She replied. "They abandoned the third planet they used as a staging ground, and what remained of their fleets and forces began the trek back to where they had come. It was then we discovered they were led by a Queen. It was she who gave the order to retreat even though Dalet and other military leaders wanted to continue the fight. A year after they left, Daniho sent a team to explore the world they had abandoned. What they found was... it was beyond imagination. Breeding cells unlike anything we had ever seen. Vile contraptions used for growing more of their kind. If we had explored the remains of the two planets we destroyed, we probably would have found the same thing." Reva rose to her feet once more, her Etheric image moving gracefully under the images flashing across the ceiling. She stopped next to where Martin still stood. "But what we found on that planet told Daniho one thing." She spoke looking at Martin.

Martin nodded his head slowly as he looked at her Etheric image. "It told him they would be back." He said softly causing everyone to look at him in surprise.

"Yes." Reva said just as softly.

"Wait!" Wayonn spoke now. "Martin how could you... how could you know that?"

Martin looked at him. "Because it is in my blood Wayonn." He said softly. "What... what they saw that day. I have... I have seen it too. Bits and pieces of it anyway."

Reva nodded her head. "No one knows what they discovered, an intact computer terminal perhaps, or something of that nature, but Daniho and Dadrien saw what was on it. The two of them had become inseparable over the weeks and months together, and they only shared what they found with Ashten, Kelia and Dadrien's father." Reva looked directly at Martin now, their dark eyes meeting and locking together. "Whatever they found Martin, it was the basis for what we did over the course of the next several millennia, and why it was purged from our history, from everyone's history. Over the course of time, since that day on that planet and what they found, only twelve individuals have ever held the knowledge of what they discovered. Only two remain that have it within them now."

Martin turned back to her. "Me and my first born son." Martin said softly.

Reva nodded once more. "It is within you, what they saw, within both of you, but you have just not pieced it all together. In time, you will."

"They never told you Lady Reva?" For'mya asked.

Reva shook her head turning to look at her. "No." She answered. "Given what I could see on their faces and in their eyes, a large part of me is glad that they did not."

"What happened then *staania*?" Androcles asked now as he gently leaned Sadi forward and rose to his feet now as well.

"Daniho called for a meeting. In this meeting were himself, Dadrien, Arnor, Ashten, Kelia and the two Onab who were looked to as their leaders." Reva told them as she moved back to the bench and her Etheric projection sat down once more. "They locked themselves away for nearly three weeks while everyone else began working to recover and restore what the war had taken from all of us." Reva took a deep breath within the Etheric projection. "When they came out of this meeting, Daniho waited a single day and then he addressed all of our people, across Cerath and what remained of our colonies and our ships."

Reva looked around at all of them. "It was at this time that he told us what would happen over the course of the next millennia. What he and the others had come to decide for all of us and our future. It was not an easy decision to come too, but for our future, it was what was needed in order for us to survive. Looking back, I believe Daniho and the others would agree that it was the wrong choice, but it is what they decided back then."

Reva looked up and let her eyes wander across the room once more, before settling on where Martin and Andro now stood beside one another. So tall and powerful, just like her sons when they were together. They exuded confidence and power and their auras projected this to all who could sense them, and even those who could not in different ways.

"Our people, we threw ourselves into these tasks that Daniho gave to us without question or doubt." Reva spoke. "Over the next two thousand years we built more ships. Great ships that could carry millions. As these ships were built, the Avatars that were among us evolved as well, to what you see today. Avi, Armen, others like them, they were built to be able to fly these huge ships on their own, for their passengers would be in suspended animation, much like you see my body now."

"For what?" Eliani asked.

“Daniho and the others made the decision that we needed to separate.” Reva told them. “It was not made lightly I assure you, but based on what they saw, to them, at the time, it was the only way to keep our people safe.”

“I don’t understand.” Dorian asked now. “You won.”

Reva looked at him. “Did we Dorian?” She asked. “Or did we just delay the inevitable.”

“The inevitable?” Jezima asked now.

“There is so much that we do not know about the Iais’Kai.” Reva spoke. “So much that we never discovered because we were fighting for our lives. These are some of the things Daniho and the others saw. This is what drove them.”

“Why not share it with everyone?” Aricia asked.

“Fear.” Martin answered for her. “Fear that it would cause many to give up hope.”

Reva nodded. “Yes.”

“So you made the decision to leave Cerath?” Laren asked.

Reva nodded again. “Yes. The Darastrixi and the Lycavorians. The Onab would remain with a contingent of Lycavorians and Darastrixi in order to maintain watch and as early warning against the Iais’Kai return. Things did not go as they had originally planned however because of unforeseen circumstances and adjustments were made to the original plans as time passed.” She held up her hand as more questions were about to come and everyone remained silent. “We sent out dozens of ships across the stars in search of a world where the Lycavorians could settle. It took three hundred and fifty years, even our propulsion technology, though far more advanced than any species in the galaxy at the time, was limited, but finally they discovered one.”

“Lycavore.” Dynina whispered the word.

Reva nodded her head. “Yes. It was a young world, lush, beautiful and perfectly suited for our people. It was also during this time that we discovered your people Wayonn.” Reva spoke looking at him and seeing his eyes go wide.

“My people!” He gasped. “But our history says that we did not encounter the Onab for a least another two and a half million years!”

Reva nodded her head. “I’m sure it does, however that is not the case. And nor is it the case with the Darastrixi.” She said turning to look at Aviel and Kadeer.

Aviel was less surprised than Wayonn at finding this out and he looked at Reva with calm eyes. “They came back didn’t they?” He asked softly. “That is why the *Wer Naushindtor Sjiri* has never been made public isn’t it?”

Reva nodded her head once more. “It took nearly six hundred years, but Arnor reached out and was finally able to strike a deal with the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* of that time. An agreement that allowed them to return to Icarava. The solitude of the continent they settled on when they returned was a large portion of the deal, but the *Onkmet* Darastrixi had been surviving and even thriving in a far less hospitable portion on Cerath so it was actually an upgrade for them in a sense. They were restricted to minimal interaction with the other breeds of Darastrixi and definitely no say in the government. Arnor told them of the Iais’Kai, he left nothing out, but it was not until the Darastrixi first encountered the Iais’Kai that they believed him. They had no choice but to turn to Arnor and use the knowledge that he had and the knowledge given to him by the Onab. And that is when Dadrien formed the *Dahakoan*.”

Aviel nodded his head. “They did not want the dissent from their rulings that Arnor and others would no doubt provide if given a seat within the *Urlkrisa Mamiss*.” He stated as his mind began to race. “I knew they... I suspected that... they knew all of this time! They knew!”

Reva nodded her head. “All of your leaders have known since Arnor and the *Onkmet* Darastrixi returned. Each new member was given a briefing and sworn to utter secrecy. You would have been required to take this same oath Aviel Em’morr, had events not led you to Laren and Ladur and then us.”

Aviel looked at her. “But why?” He gasped.

“The *Urlkrisa Mamiss* blamed Arnor for bringing the Iais’Kai to your doorstep.” Reva answered.

“That would have taken place regardless given everything you have told us this day!” Aviel exclaimed.

Reva nodded her head. “More than likely yes. But only Arnor, Dadrien and the *Onkmet* dragons knew what took place out there on Cerath. The *Urlkrisa Mamiss* did not want to believe or listen to them. Arnor told

them to prepare but they ignored him. If not for Dadrien and his *Dahakoan*, the Darastrixi would not have survived the first conflict you had with them. And this is the only reason that they allowed Dadrien to begin searching for *Dahakoan* within the other breeds after the destruction of their island on Icarava by the volcano. He was the only survivor as you now know, and they needed him. They did not predict what effect he would have on their people as a whole and soon they lost control of him, if they ever truly had control of him to begin with.”

Reva saw Laren rise to her feet with Dorian and move up beside Androcles with Dorian beside her.

“They did not.” Laren spoke confidently.

Reva smiled at her. “I suspected not.” She said.

“You... you spoke with Arnor and Dadrien after they returned?” Kadeer asked.

Reva nodded her head. “Once I assumed this form... yes.” She replied. “The technology that the Onab built into the Sphere that appeared to you is quite astonishing. Far more advanced than anything existing today, even after as long as I have used it I still do not understand most of it. Even the Portal Drives that Dynina and her people discovered here on the computers and then built here on Lorenu, that was left for them to find and to refine and then build.”

“*Staanian* how did you...?” Martin began to ask.

“How did we know all this?” Reva finished his question.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.”

“I told you the Onab had the gift of foresight.” Reva answered. “A tiny portion of their population, less than a thousand, had this gift. All of our time on Cerath and all they did was write and draw and paint what they saw. It wasn’t until after we had defeated the Iais’Kai that these Seers if you will, they came forward to Daniho, Ashten and Arnor. It was then that we took notice of what they had drawn and wrote. This is part of what they based their decisions on Martin. What they saw in these writings and drawings.”

“And all of these... these predictions came true?” Aricia asked softly.

Reva looked at her and nodded slowly. “They even foresaw how Daniho would end the war.” She stated. “They foresaw so many things and they either wrote it down or captured the images in their paintings and drawings.” She lifted her head once more and looked at Martin. “They foresaw your birth my *staaniaketo*, the return of the *Mard Revik*. They foresaw the birth of your firstborn son Androcles, Crown Prince and heir to our family’s legacy and the first of the three Heralds.” Reva looked at Androcles. “With blue eyes that could look through to your very soul. They foresaw the birth of Laren, of Dorian, so many things that have since altered the course of history in the past or have the power to shape the future as we move forward.”

“And my people Reva?” Wayonn asked now.

“The Pralor people were the key.” Reva told him. “The Seers had seen the coming of the Praetorians, the power they would wield, but they also foretold of their downfall. They saw the birth of Sumar...” She spoke turning to look at Jezima. “And the man he would grow into.”

“Sumar knew?” Jezima gasped.

Reva nodded her head. “When he became Chief Elder.” She answered. “Every Chief Elder of the Pralor people has known the entire history, or nearly all of it, and that is why each successive contact with the Pralor people that the Onab had, they gave them new pieces of technology that they could use and shape into something better. All of it was kept very secret, only a handful among any of the races knew what was truly happening.”

“You manipulated us.” Kadeer spoke now. “All of us.”

“Father!” Perlae exclaimed as she looked at her father with anger in her eyes.

Kadeer heard the inflection of her voice and he looked at her. “No Perlae... I do not mean that in a bad way.” He stated quickly turning back to Reva. “You... you used your knowledge to try and direct how things would take place. To make it easier for us to react events during our history.”

Reva nodded her head. “Not directly Kadeer, but you are correct.” She answered. “I cannot influence someone to go against their nature or what their minds tell them, but I can make sure that they see everything from different perspectives.”

“Like *Tenne* Ashten.” Deion spoke now. “This was his gift *staania*.”

Reva nodded again as she smiled at him. “Yes.”

“You could not see the results of our wars with the Scourge?” Wayonn asked.

Reva met his eyes and shook her head. “No. Nor those that they had with the Darastrixi. The Onab Seers could only see events and times in history and the future that did not include the Iais’Kai. For some reason their inherent darkness prevented the Onab Seers from seeing anything about them. They were able to deduce and translate from what they could see how events took place, or will take place.”

“Will take place?” Martin asked.

Reva nodded her head. “We are nearing the end of what the Seers saw Martin. What they could predict.”

“I don’t understand.” He pressed her.

“What is happening now, these are among the few events that the Onab predicted would take place.”

Reva told him. “There are perhaps another hundred years of predictions left. They were unable to continue their work on Cerath because of the supernova that destroyed Cerath and everyone left there.”

“They didn’t see that taking place?” For’mya asked now. “The end of their species?”

Reva shook her head. “It was not a naturally occurring event child.” She answered. “The supernova that destroyed Cerath was caused by the Iais’Kai For’mya. It was not something the Onab could prevent, even with all of their technology, and they did try in those last hours. This coincided within a few millennia with what Xaxon did during his experiments and...”

“Everything changed.” Martin said softly. “Because the Scourge changed.”

Reva looked at him and nodded her head. “Yes.”

“But why separate?” Andro asked now. “Why divide when you would have been stronger together.”

Reva shook her head this time. “I do not know what they saw Androcles.” She replied. “It was enough for Daniho and Ashten and the others to make their decisions as they did.”

“You say that my son and daughter, that our children...” Andro moved back to where Sadi still sat and placed his hand on her abdomen. “That they are the reunification of our people. What does this mean?”

“Just what I say.” Reva spoke.

“But Canth told me I would find the Lost Ones.” Martin said.

Reva nodded her head. “And you have Martin.” She answered him. “You found those left on Lycavore after the Black Day. Those of our people within the Beta Quadrant, and now the Echo Quadrant. All of the Seed missions that the Pralor Chief Elders before Sumar planned and executed.”

“That is why they used Lycavorians?” Aricia asked. “Because they had this knowledge within them.”

Reva nodded her head. “Ultimately, they believed they were prolonging what was to come. What they had been told was coming.”

“By spreading us across the stars?” Dynina hissed almost angrily now, though everyone could smell the frustration in her that was acting as anger.

Martin moved over to where she sat and squatted down behind her. He placed his hands on her shoulders as Gorgo and Dasha took her hands and all of them saw the tenseness leave her body. “So when you speak of reunification, what do you mean?” He asked Reva. “If all of our people moved to Lycavore then...”

“All of our people did not go to Lycavore Martin.” Reva answered him.

“What?” Martin asked now, his dark eyes becoming infinitely more interested and he rose back to his feet. “What do you mean?”

“By the wars end, the Lycavorian population had been reduced by a full third.” Reva explained. “The war had claimed so many lives. When the war started there were thirty-eight different Packs. There were fifteen packs remaining on Cerath when we finally chased the Iais’Kai away.”

“Gods!” Jezima gasped in horror even though she didn’t really know the number of Lycavorian lives that had been lost.

“Daniho, Ashten and Kelia knew that we could not remain together.” Reva spoke. “The Iais’Kai had somehow developed a way to track us when we were together because of the resonance we put off within the Etheric realm. It is how Dalet Nulai found Pria and Daniho’s children here on Cerath during his surprise attack. It hurts the Iais’Kai, but it also allows them to track someone with a strong enough Etheric resonance. This is why Sumar kept Tobia out of the fighting and nurtured her upbringing as he did. It is also why he made certain she survived the fall of the Pralor Empire before he was lost.”

“Wait!” Jezima exclaimed again. “Sumar... Sumar knew that we would fall?”

Reva met her eyes. “He knew they would attack again, yes.” She answered her. “It is why he chose to take those he could find with your Praetorian gene away to train them. So that they would not be discovered. He

knew from Dadrien that he would discover where our people went after we left Cerath, and that our bloodlines would become one, but he did not know when. He thought he had more time and he certainly did not foresee what that *nio ronnus* Lorendo would do.”

Martin chuckled then even with the seriousness of everything they were learning about right now. “Anja is going to love you.” He muttered under his breath causing all of his children and the others of his family to grin.

Wayonn looked at her. “Then that he why he waited so long to merge with our people on Lycavore. He was... he was waiting for Sateia to find him.”

Reva nodded again. “Yes. Sumar was so much like Daniho and Ashten. As I have said before, his mind was like a maze, plans within plans. Lorendo’s fool actions only hastened what Sumar already had planned for himself and those Praetorians among his group. The vast majority of those he had chosen that carried this gene were with him on City Ship 41, but he had placed others among the different ships. One of those was discovered by your Isabella’s people Martin. Those you call vampires.” Reva waved her hand slightly. “I will not go over what you have already discovered on your own. That would be pointless. However, what Tobia can teach others, what she has passed on too many of you within the Etheric realm because of Deion and Mari’s union, this is the gift she has that can save so many.” Reva told them. “Sumar knew this and that is he why he kept Murano and her behind.”

“He knew they would come together?” Jezima said.

“And that they would have Mari.” Reva continued with a nod. “He did not foresee, and nor did the Onab, that Mari and Deion would come together as they did. They did not predict everything.” She turned to look at Sadi. “They did not foresee that it would be you who would carry the unification of our people my beautiful Sadi, only that it would come from somewhere within our bloodline.”

“Why does that matter?” Sadi asked.

Reva looked at Martin. “You still do not see it do you?” She asked softly.

“See what?” Martin asked her.

“You, Androcles, your pureblood children, even your children who are not pureblood, you are the closest to Daniho, Ashten and Kelia Martin.” Reva told him. “There is no purer Lycavorian blood anywhere in the universe. The measuring tool that your friend Eurin made was excellent, but as I have told you, even that cannot measure the pureness of the blood within you. There is no purer blood Martin, none. And every wolf alive, no matter where they might be, they will know this. The children that Sadi carries, your grandchildren, it will bring the bloodline of our family full circle.” Reva smiled. “She listens even now; I know you can feel her Androcles, Sadi. She has joined Anja and the others where they are. You can feel her within you for your son has already chosen her. Just as his father chose you Sadi, chose all of you, before he was ever born.”

Sadi’s head turned quickly to look up at Androcles with wide jungle green eyes, Carisia, Ne’Veha and the others staring at him with equal expressions of disbelief. “What?” She gasped.

Reva looked at Androcles who stood there sheepishly and she smiled. “You have not told them?” She asked.

Andro looked at her embarrassed. “Well... I suppose... in a manner of speaking...”

“A manner of speaking?” Reva asked with a smile and a small laugh as she shook her head. “You are too much like your father young Androcles.” She turned back to Sadi and the others. “The moment that he was conceived and became aware within Aricia’s womb he knew who he would love and search the galaxy for. He knew each of you. Just as his father knew each of the woman who would hold his very heart and soul in his hands the moment he entered this world.”

It was Aricia and For'mya’s turn to look at Martin with wide eyes as Sadi, Carisia, Ne’Veha, Caliria, Sehri and Lu'ria all were crowding around Androcles. “Beloved?” Aricia stammered.

“Huh?” Martin looked at her with his best *I got caught with my hand in the cookie jar* expression.

“Is this... is this true?” Aricia asked as she and For'mya rose to their feet.

“Well...” He stuttered.

“Martin Leonidas!” For'mya hissed.

“Jeez... do you know what Walter would have done to me if I told him that back then?” Martin exclaimed defensively. “He would have tossed me into the looney bin for sure! Walter... by the way... I know

each and every woman that I will take as my wives and mates. I've seen them in my mind and my dreams." Martin rolled his eyes. "Yeah that would have gone over really well back then given what was going on."

Aricia and For'mya stepped up to him and threw their arms around him before he knew what was happening and they squeezed him harder than they had ever held him before, tears rolling down their cheeks. Reva smiled as she saw Sadi and Carisia holding Andro in much the same fashion, his arms wrapped around all six of his beautiful wives and mates, the eyes of their remaining family happy and moist.

"Do not discount the power of our blood." Reva spoke. "It will always know and it will always be correct. Just as it does now this very moment."

Andro finished kissing Lu'ria, running his hand through her satiny white hair and he looked at Reva. "You said *staanio* Daniho knew that you could not stay together. So what did they do?" Androcles asked.

Reva took a deep breath and looked at him. "They made a decision." She answered him. "That decision was to separate the remaining Packs."

"Separate how?" Martin asked her, holding Aricia and For'mya in his arms.

"He divided the remaining packs." Reva answered. "Of the fifteen that remained, twelve went with him and Ashten to Lycavore. The other three took to the stars with Kelia, Lylor and their six children to a location that only they knew of. With them they took the remainder of the Kirek Pack, the Arhtai Pack and the Nenay Pack. I was able to..." Reva stopped speaking for a moment and Martin looked at her intently.

"*Staanian*?" He asked seeing the pain on her face.

Reva looked up at him. "I do not know where they went, but I could feel my daughter within me. My grandchildren. That connection ceased over two million years ago, so I can only assume that they are gone. Just as Daniho and Ashten are gone. Now all I can feel is one."

"One?" Martin asked.

Reva nodded her head. "The one who your grandson has chosen." She replied. "She is with Anja and your family, and she must be protected Martin. At all costs. She is the last of my Kelia's bloodline. I do not know how this came to be, but I can feel her within me as surely as I feel all of you."

While they would never know for sure, and they really did not care, all of them assumed it was because of the Etheric power that swirled within the Hall of Knowledge. The male voice reached out within the Etheric realm for everyone to hear however.

"*Staanian ehtas vada marden staanio Martin.*" (Grandmother speaks the truth)

Sadi's hands immediately dropped to her abdomen, her green eyes wide. "Achilles!" She gasped aloud.

"*Pen ado tye ter un ehta medwaw. Vin cedaur ter vo un lae vada igord.*" The female voice followed instantly. (I told him not to speak mother. He would not listen to me the fool.)

"Neesia!" Carisia and Sehri gasped together.

Jezima's eyes went wide as did Robati's. "*Ithquenti!*" Robati rasped aloud.

Andro simply dropped his head and shook it slowly while his father and mothers looked at him sternly. "You named them!" Martin barked loudly. "You named them and didn't tell us that either!"

"Father I..."

"We're going to have a talk boy!" Martin snarled openly. "You and me! A really long talk!"

It was Eliani who burst out laughing at the expression on her brother's face. "Andro is so in trouble now!" She spoke which caused her brothers and sisters and Laren Ti'shara to join her in laughter while everyone else looked around confused. It served to truly break the veil of intensity within the temple and Reva could only smile as everyone relaxed even more.

Gorgo and Dasha had huge smiles on their face and they looked at Jezima and Dynina's confused expressions. Gorgo took their hands and they looked at her. "Dasha and I will relate to you at a later time of the significance of this." She spoke. "Needless to say, Androcles had his backside turned red far more times than his siblings."

Dasha nodded her head with a smile. "Usually because he was protecting or covering for one of them." She stated as she glanced at Eliani, who looked embarrassed, but could not stop laughing regardless.

Reva felt it then, the warmth of love and family as it filtered even more within the temple itself. No matter how dire things became, this family would always find something to laugh about in order to relieve the tension and despair. That too was in their blood. Martin looked at Reva after a long moment.

"How is that possible *staanian*?" Martin finally asked her.

Reva's Etheric image faced him. "I do not know." She replied honestly. "Just as I cannot explain how a member of the Kirek Pack found their way to Lycavore."

"Lycavore?" Martin asked. "You just said they went somewhere else."

Reva nodded. "They did... but the Alpha that has claimed your daughter... Jomann burns with the blood of the Kirek Pack."

"Me!" Jomann hissed as Eliani's head whipped around to look at him in shock.

"Oh yes." Reva spoke. "It is there within you as surely as all of you sit here now." She shook her head once more. "This must have been Daniho and Ashten's doing. Somehow... they must have done this, but I do not know how. I will have to review the journals when we are finished here."

"Why?" Martin asked.

"The Kirek Pack has always been aligned with the Mahanlo Pack. Throughout our entire history they have been beside us, not as underlings, but as equals and guardians to our bloodline through history." Reva explained. "Daniho and Ashten must have known that they needed a member of the Kirek Pack to come with them, and in doing so they..." Reva stopped talking and looked at Androcles. Her eyes moved between Andro and Jomann and realization dawned on her. "It stands before me and I did not even see it." She spoke. "They knew the role you would play Jomann Kirek. They knew what your purpose was to be. The Shield to Androcles' sword."

Jomann looked at her with wide eyes. "That is what... that is what Deia told me in the rubble of that Senate building." He gasped. "Not those words, but the meaning was the same, at least for her."

Reva nodded her head. "No doubt." She spoke. "Deia knows many things that no one else does. She has a knack for remembering things that few people would even pick up on. It is a gift she has had since she was a child. Why do you think it was she who first went to Resumar and told him of the Lunmai that Eliani was entering? She is a very resourceful and supremely intelligent woman. Never underestimate what she is capable of."

"I don't understand something..." Wayonn spoke up now as he rose to his feet. "If our people were so very advanced... why then, when we crashed on Lycavore as Pralors, why did we not see any signs of this Reva. We are talking about millions of years here, why did they not build great cities and ships after arriving on Lycavore?"

Reva shook her head. "The decision was made before we left Cerath." She answered. "When they reached Lycavore they would resort to the core of our instincts and upbringing. The ships that brought them to Lycavore were remotely piloted into the system's sun after everyone had gone to the surface. Very little advanced technology was kept and it was tightly controlled. Through the millennia Daniho and Ashten saw to it that this was also destroyed. Since the Iais'Kai were so interested in technology, Daniho and Ashten wanted nothing that would draw the Iais'Kai to them. They resorted to the old ways. This decision did not sit well with a few of the Packs that went to Lycavore with us. They wanted to begin building new cities and personal amenities and modern advances but Daniho and Ashten refused." Reva looked at him. "I could only watch as the schism began. Daniho and Ashten were the only ones who knew where this technology was hidden and they told no one. No one could challenge Daniho physically for rule of the Packs, none alive were able to defeat him in open combat and they knew it, and Ashten stood beside his brother always. The Mahanlo Pack was still the largest among them and they could not challenge us for rule because none would side against us. Daniho had ruled for over twenty thousand years by now and he had saved our people from certain death numerous times. Our people loved him. Loved them. The vast majority of our people understood the why of these decisions and they did not care. They had peace once more, on a beautiful new world and they had a future to build and nurture. Of the twelve Packs that went to Lycavore, four of them broke away within a thousand years of arriving on Lycavore and they formed their own government on another continent." Reva took a deep breath. "Well... Daniho forced them to break away really."

"Why?" Martin asked, now once more fully enthralled with what she was telling them.

All of them were actually. Sadi had returned to sitting on the floor lotus style, this time however, Eliani, Nara, Lisisa, Arduri, Sheva and Onera had moved closer to her, crowding around Ne'Veha, Carisia, Sehri, Caliria and Lu'ria. Androcles remained standing as well, while Wayonn and Jomann had moved closer to where Aviel stood. Yokra was standing now as well, Robati just in front of him, while along the wall of the Hall of Knowledge, Kasdan and Dalis stood beside one another silently, taking it all in. Neither of them had spoken so

far, so amazed at what was going on that they could not find the words. Both of these men, from two very different backgrounds, were scholars and scientists and they were experiencing a part of history that had been stricken from all known texts of every species that was represented here this day. It was, to put it mildly, a ground shaking influx of knowledge that they were now privy too. Knowledge that could very well change the face of the universe as they knew it.

“They hatched a fool plan to kidnap Ashten and force Daniho to give them the modern technology that did remain.” Reva spoke. “They did not know of the connection between my sons because they were twins. Their Etheric connection was very powerful and while Ashten was severely injured, Daniho put down this revolt harshly and without question. He was... he was without mercy for they had injured his brother. In the end he gave them the choice to relocate to another continent or he would see all of them executed for their actions. They chose exile.”

“The Chetak Pack?” Martin hissed and everyone could hear the hatred in his voice.

Reva nodded her head. “They were the masterminds of it, but they allowed the others to take the fall. They did not find this out for many years and by then it was too late to banish them as well.”

“They should have!” Martin snarled causing Aricia to reach out and take his hand and squeeze it. Most of those in the Temple knew why the vitriol was in Martin’s voice at the mention of this name, but Jezima and others did not. Jezima looked at Gorgo and Dasha with many questions in her eyes.

“A conversation for another time.” Gorgo told her in a soft whisper.

“Regardless...” Reva spoke again. “Once the Packs were banished... life became simple again and moved on. And Arnor’s words to Daniho came true. Daniho found happiness again. A beautiful young female wolf from the Urnal Pack, with jet black hair and eyes of violet that could stop your heart.” Reva smiled then as she remembered. “Visha knew she could never replace Pria in Daniho’s heart and she did not try, but she was strong and proud and she loved my son without doubt. Daniho came to love her deeply as well and in time they found happiness together. She gave him five proud and beautiful children, three boys and two girls, and his sons with Pria that had survived the war and come with him to Lycavore, they looked over them and their step mother with ruthless and savage protectiveness. Just as their father did.”

Reva rose once more and began pacing the small area around her.

“Things did not go as they had planned however.” Reva continued. “As the years passed by, our people began to fall back onto our baser and feral instincts. Daniho and Ashten tried to counter this but they were... they were stopped.”

Martin’s head tilted to the side. “Stopped how?”

Reva turned and met his eyes. “By those who thought if they could kill my sons, they would end our bloodline.” She took a deep breath once more. “It happened over the course of many centuries, the plans within the plans, but eventually they struck. In one fell swoop they struck. My sons, their wives and mates, my grandchildren, all of them were assassinated over a three-day period. All but one of them.”

“*Carians!*” Dynina exclaimed softly as her hand went to her chest in shock.

Reva’s eyes never left Martin as she spoke.

“They were unprepared for the tenacity of the Mahanlo Pack however, and they paid the ultimate price for their betrayal.” She spoke firmly. “I... I wept for days, unable to do anything but watch and I cursed myself for agreeing to allow myself to become what I am now.”

“*Staania...*?” Androcles began as he stepped towards her.

Reva shook her head and looked at him with a smile. “I made peace with these events and myself a long time ago *staaniaketo*. I rededicated myself to what I had become, especially after I discovered who had survived.”

“What do you mean?” Martin asked her.

Reva smiled at him once more. “A grandson of Daniho had survived. His youngest son with Visha. His name was Arnor, named in honor of Dadrien’s father. He had taken a young mate that was a granddaughter to Ashten. A beautiful blond wolf with fire in her eyes. This was their only child before the Purge. So you see, in him, in this wolf that survived was the essence of both Daniho and Ashten. The perfect combination of each of them.”

“He was... he was the personification of both *staanio* Daniho and Ashten.” Andro spoke almost reverently.

Reva nodded her head. “Yes.” She said. “Daniho’s instinctive nature and Ashten’s calm intelligence. So while our enemies thought to destroy our Pack, our family, they only succeeded in bringing out the best of us. The Mahanlo Pack protected him viciously for many thousands of years, looking to him for guidance and leadership, while he learned all he could and he studied the journals of his grandfathers and their history.”

“He never took over the Packs?” Martin asked.

Reva shook her head. “No. However, he paved the way for the future, as was his intended purpose.”

“In what way?”

Reva’s eyes fell on Dynina then and her face was bright and happy. “He found a striking young female he took as his mate. A very young, female wolf with black hair and surreal and beautiful amethyst eyes. And a stubborn streak within her that stretched forever.” She said seeing Dynina’s eyes grow wider as she reached for and gripped Gorgo’s hand tightly. “She is a proud and strong female who did not hesitate when this wolf claimed her, even though he was a hundred thousand years older than her. He loved her insanely and she loved him just as deeply.”

Dynina’s eyes flooded with tears now. “Makeb!” She whimpered loudly as Gorgo and Dasha reached for her in comfort. “You are speaking of my Makeb!”

Reva nodded her head. “Your Makeb, yes.” She said softly. “Into you he poured all of his love. He knew what his fate would be Dynina, and so into you he poured everything that was our family. Into your daughters he poured everything that was our family. Our bloodline. He knew he did not have the strength to lead as his grandfathers did, he did not have it within him, but in you my dear Dynina, in you he saw the future.”

“He...” Dynina stammered. “He never told me.” She rasped. “I never knew who or... or where he came from. He just appeared one day in the city. There were... there were whispers that he was Mahanlo and he was feared, but I did not care. He was... he was beautiful to me.” Dynina buried her head in Gorgo’s chest now as she wept softly. “He... he never told me everything. I knew he was... he was keeping things from me. Things from deep within his heart and mind but he... whenever I asked him he would... he would just love me until I could not think of anything else. He did this on purpose?”

Reva nodded her head. “Yes, but it was not because he did not love you my dear Dynina. He did not want you to have the burden of his knowledge at that time. He knew it would come to you one day, the day that it was you who would guide the return of the *Mard Revik*, this day Dynina; but not then, for it would have weakened you for what lay ahead. And no doubt he would have wondered why you have never taken another husband and mate in all these years since his passing.”

Dynina shook her head instantly. “I could... I could never love another as I loved him.” She said as fresh tears clouded her eyes. “Not as I loved him.”

Reva smiled gently. “Oh my child Dynina... you stand with Gorgo, Dasha and Jezima as the Four Matriarchs of our bloodline now. *Vada Rebe Issyera*. Those who have had a hand in bringing us to this point in time. The rise of the *Mard Revik* and the *Tarivuos* of our future. Just as the Onab Seers foresaw it. You will find love again one day Dynina. It will hit you from the most unexpected of places and it will take your breath away. Just as it did for Gorgo and as it will for Dasha and Jezima in the years to come.”

Dynina looked at her with wide eyes. “How... how do you know this?” She gasped as Dasha and Jezima also looked at her with wide, stunned eyes.

Reva shrugged her slim shoulders in the Etheric projection. “As it has been for our family since the day Daniho and Ashten were born and then Daniho became King... destiny and fate will always find a way. It will not be denied.” She said softly. Reva stood up slowly once more and raised her hand. “There is much still for you to discover, and you will, but right now... now it is time for you to realize why this Temple was built here.”

Martin looked at her. “What do you mean *staania*?”

“This Temple has a dual purpose, which is why the Onab built it here.” Reva answered as her Etheric image moved slowly to where a large vase sat on a podium next to one of the larger flowered bushes. “Beneath this Temple are vaults.”

Dynina came to her feet now. “We... we never detected anything but this level.” She said quickly.

Reva nodded her head. “And you would not have detected them. They are hidden by a very advanced Etheric shield that only four people in the entire universe can open. And they must open them together.” Reva looked at Martin. “You, Androcles, Laren and Dorian.” She told him. “Only the four of you can open them Martin.”

“What’s in them?” Martin asked her as he moved closer to where her image stood.

Reva met her eyes. “Your birthright my *staaniaketo*.” She replied calmly. She turned her head to where Androcles had moved beside Laren and Dorian. “And the birthright of the future *Dahakoan*.”

“How did... how did we become like we are *staania* Reva?” Laren asked her now.

Laren Ti'shara had fully accepted what and who she was. She was Darastrixi yes, but she was also Lycavorian, and the Lycavorian blood that flowed within her made her part of this family without doubt or hesitation. She embraced that, did not distrust that fact, but the why of it had always escaped her. Escaped them all.

Reva smiled warmly as she looked at Laren. “The Onab Seers saw so many things Laren Ti'shara. They saw the coming of your Soul Father and they saw the birth of each one of you as it happened. You are wondering, each of you, you are wondering if the Onab had something to do with the Lycavorian blood that flows within you, the Darastrixi blood within Androcles and Dorian? A mix of blood that should not be possible.” Reva shook her head. “No.”

“Then how?” Dorian asked now.

Reva looked at him. “Evolution?” She answered. “A gift from whatever gods inhabit our universe perhaps?” She spoke. “Does it matter now? You are what you are Dorian Leonidas.”

“And what are we *staania*?” Androcles asked now.

Reva waved her right hand beside the vase on the podium and all of them began to hear the deep rumbling. All of them looked down at the floor tile beneath them as the large crack appeared in the once seamless floor. All of them scrambled quickly to step off of the large tile as it began to separate and reveal a winding staircase into a very dimly lit circular tunnel downward. The Etheric shield that covered the staircase was very evident as it shone with a light blue, almost glowing resonance.

“What are you Androcles?” Reva spoke once more. “You are the future. The four of you are the future. All of us in this room are the future. We only have to choose to embrace it.” Reva waved her hand once more, this time indicating that each of them should step onto the Etheric shield that covered the winding stairwell down.

Andro turned and looked at Sadi, meeting her jungle green eyes. Sadi dropped one hand to her abdomen, the other holding tightly to Ne'Veha's hand and she nodded her head. Carisia stepped closer to her on the right, Sadi's hand going to grip hers, and she nodded as well. Andro touched the eyes of all of his wives and mates, and in turn they moved into a tightly packed group, all of them touching one another, and Caliria nodded, followed by Lu'ria and Ne'Veha and finally by Sehri. Andro turned back to look at the floor and he took the first step onto the Etheric dais.

Laren was next as she looked at her mother and father watching her, Robati with tears flowing down her cheeks. Yokra took a deep breath and nodded his head, his chest swelling with pride and love unlike any time in his life before this moment. Laren turned back and saw Andro holding out his hand for her and she stepped forward, taking that hand without hesitation and moving up beside him.

“*El vada falyne*.” Laren spoke softly looking at Andro with those amazing dual colored blue eyes and smiling brightly. (For the future)

Andro turned his head and looked at his brother. “*Fervon*?” He asked softly.

Dorian turned and kissed Sheva hard on the lips, pulling her tightly to him. He then did the same with Onera, placing an equally blistering kiss upon her lips. They clung to him for a few seconds and then he turned and took Laren's hand, stepping onto the dais beside her as Sheva and Onera pulled each other tight.

Andro looked at his father then, holding out his other hand while Laren stretched out her free hand as well. “*Medwan*?” Andro spoke. “*Magar tanor vada vochan medwan*.” (Never fear the unknown father)

Martin met his son's eyes. “*El forn arne pera vada panuro forn gur aley*.” (For you don't know the wonders you will miss)

Martin turned and looked at Aricia and For'mya, each of them holding the other and he saw both of them nod. He felt each of his wives and mates within him, each projecting their love for him within their special bond. Martin Leonidas turned back and stepped forward with no hesitation and took Andro and Laren's hands, completing the circle on the Etheric dais.

Reva's face within the Etheric projection beamed proudly and she lowered her head in an almost reverent nature.

“*For sy pinnos una ami.*” She spoke softly. (And so does it begin)

Everyone saw the Etheric dais begin to glow brighter and then fingers of Etheric power began to reach out and up, engulfing all four of them as they held hands tightly. None of them wavered in the least, their faces set in determination as the Etheric fingers moved higher up their frames until in encompassed their entire bodies. In a brilliant flash of bluish white Etheric light, the dais flared quickly and then all four of them vanished from sight to the gasps of Aricia and the others gathered.

The Etheric shield over the staircase flickered, disappeared and then reappeared even brighter than before.

“Reva!” Aricia almost shouted.

Reva lifted her head and smiled at them. “We must wait for them outside.” She spoke the words.

“Where... where are they? Where did they go!” Dynina gasped now.

Reva’s smile grew wider. “They have gone where no one else could.” She replied. “Do not worry, they will return to us when it is complete. That is why we must wait outside.”

“Why?” Sadi challenged her. “When what is complete?”

Aricia opened her mouth to speak once more when Isheeni’s voice exploded in her head. *Aricia my sister! Something is happening! Torma is... Elynth... they are...!*

Isheeni!

Aurith! For'mya barked out for her Bonded sister.

For'mya come quick! Aurith responded. *Something is happening to father and Elynth. To Ryner and Ladur too! Hurry!*

Aricia and For'mya didn’t hesitate for a second and they broke for the doors with everyone else sprinting to keep up with them. The Etheric projection of Reva remained behind as the Hall of Knowledge emptied quickly. Her head looked around the Hall slowly, the smile never leaving her face and finally she nodded her head once.

“My duty is almost done my beautiful children.” She whispered to no one in particular. “And then I will join you in the beyond.”

Reva’s head snapped up when the voice answered her. Martin’s voice, so deep and so very commanding.

“No grandmother.” The voice echoed around the room. “It is not your time. You have much to do still. So much to teach and so much to savor. It is not your time.”

Reva’s eyes were wide as she heard the voice, felt it course through her, and then in a simple flash of light her Etheric projection vanished and the Sphere returned. And then it darted for the entrance into the Temple, following the others.

Martin, Androcles, Laren and Dorian looked around the massive room they now stood within, Laren holding tightly to Dorian’s hand. It was dark within the room, but as soon as they appeared they watched as lights began to come on from the ceiling, easily a thousand feet above them, and from the smooth steel walls that surrounded them. They were in the center of the room, an arena really, with the smooth walls a hundred yards from where they stood. They could see six doors all around them exiting from the arena they stood in, all of them leading in different directions.

“Father what was that?” Dorian asked.

Martin looked at his youngest son. “I have no idea.” He replied. “A teleporter of some sort. It brought us here. Wherever here is.”

“An Etheric teleporter?” Andro asked. “That would be new.”

All of them heard the footfalls then and they turned to one door in particular as the shadow approached and took shape into a man. A man of medium height, but well-built and with dark brown hair.

“No scent.” Andro spoke softly.

Martin nodded his head and moved closer to his son. “Something tells me this is not a man.” He said.

The figure strode up to within five feet of them and stopped. “Welcome.” He spoke his voice deep but warm. “Welcome to The Circle.”

Andro stepped closer as he realized that this figure was similar to Armen in many ways, just not as tall or broad. “You are an Avatar!” He gasped.

The Avatar nodded his head. “I am Lord Androcles.” He replied.

“I am... I am no Lord.” Andro spat.

“You are the direct descendants of Lord Daniho, Lord Ashten and Lady Kelia.” The Avatar spoke. “The first of the Royal Bloodline. As their descendants, the title is required.” He moved closer now. “I am Chiron, Avatar of The Circle and Keeper of the Temple. I have been waiting for a very long time for you to finally arrive.”

“You have been waiting for us?” Laren gasped.

“Indeed Lady Laren.” Chiron answered. “For two million, three hundred and fourteen thousand, two hundred and nineteen days, and fourteen point two hours.” Chiron told them. “Though I no longer keep exact time. Lady Reva told me it was unnerving for her so I ceased this practice.”

“*Staan*ia knows about you?” Martin asked him.

Chiron nodded her head. “Of course... there is very little about this facility that your grandmother does not know.” He lifted his hand and waved it around. “This portion however, this portion of the Temple she was unable to access. This portion of the facility is under my direct care.”

“You have been... you have been up there then?” Dorian asked pointing up towards the ceiling.

Chiron nodded his head. “Many times, yes.” He answered.

“Where are we?” Martin asked.

“Currently you are standing in the entrance arena to The Circle.” Chiron answered him. “Exactly nine point two kilometers under the Temple.”

“Nine kilometers underground!” Dorian hissed loudly. “Jeez... I’m really glad I’m not claustrophobic!” He glanced at Andro. “I’m not right *fer*von?” He asked.

“I certainly hope not.” Andro answered with a slight grin, knowing the question was his brother’s way of dealing with the nervousness inside him and attempting to put all of them at ease.

Martin put his hand on Dorian’s shoulder as he moved closer to Chiron. “What is The Circle?” He asked.

“The Circle is the training facility for the Temple above.” Chiron answered him. “It encompasses four square kilometers under the Temple.”

“Training facility?” Martin pressed him. “For what? For who?”

Chiron smiled then. “The future.” He replied. “I was placed here by the Onab in order to facilitate and assist Lady Reva as we waited for you to arrive. I am also charged with the total upkeep and the defense of Lorenu and this Temple. There are three thousand Worker Drones, as you call them, assigned to this facility and the Temple above.”

“The defense?” Dorian asked him.

Chiron nodded his head. “Lady Dynina and those who follow her have not and never will discover the defenses of this planet and the Temple unless I activate them. However, through the years they have built many formidable additions to the defense grid I already have in place and we are quite impenetrable, even if the Ion Nebula fails” He told them.

“Wait!” Andro rasped. “The Nebula! You are controlling the Nebula?”

Chiron nodded his head. “It is our first and most valuable line of defense.” He answered.

“How?” Laren asked. “How do you control a Nebula?”

“I can answer whatever questions you might have, but now you are here to claim your birthrights. I have been waiting for this day. Follow me.” He turned instantly and began to walk towards the door he had entered through.

Andro looked at his father and Martin shrugged his shoulders. “I guess we follow him.” He said.

They moved quickly to keep up with him, falling in behind his even gait as they walked.

“Why do you look different from...” Dorian began to ask.

“From Avi and Armen?” Chiron finished the question.

“You know about them?” Andro asked surprised.

Chiron nodded his head. “Of course.” He replied. “During his stay here, Lord Sumar added many terawatts of information to our databanks. Avi and Armen are Third Generation Avatars, designed to monitor

and control Pralor warships they were assigned to. Warships that were designed to be partially crewed by those of your species Lady Laren, which is why many of them are exceptionally large. I understand you have begun to manufacture your own ships in this way King Leonidas?"

"What?" Laren gasped. "My... my people were meant to fight with the Pralor people?"

Chiron nodded his head. "That was the ultimate goal yes, however, unexplained events kept this from happening when it was supposed to and Dadrien had to significantly alter our plans."

"You... you know Dadrien too?" Andro asked.

Chiron stopped and looked at him. "Lord Sumar spent considerable time here before he passed on. Dadrien and he conversed here on many occasions afterwards. There are seventeen thousand Etheric nodes within the Temple and this facility and they are meant to channel and focus all Etheric power. It allows for many things that cannot be achieved without a substantial amount of raw energy. This we have since it comes from this planet's core."

"You don't speak like Avi and Armen." Martin said. "Why?"

"I am a First Generation Avatar." Chiron answered. "We were built initially in the image of the Lycavorians on Cerath and some of us in the image of the Onab. We were designed to be almost exactly like them for the purpose of interaction and cohabitation. The Onab did not foresee that such closeness and interaction would eventually grant all First Generation Avatars sentient life status and when they discovered it, they embraced it and so did the Lycavorians, unlike how so many other species would react." Chiron looked at Martin. "You have done this with Avi and Armen have you not? And they continue to evolve as they are exposed to so many different events. I predict that soon enough they will become Second Generation Avatars."

"They are more than just machines." Martin answered him. "I'm discovering just how much as time passes."

Chiron nodded his head as he began to walk again. "And this is why I know you are the descendants of Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten. They too embraced this ideal and they treasured the Avatars that were assigned to them. As did Lord Sumar with Avi, as you call him now. I was hesitant at first when the Onab gave the Pralor people the knowledge on how to build my kind, but Lord Sumar and a few others relieved this concern of mine with their actions."

"This... this Circle place is really huge." Dorian commented as they turned a corner and continued down another corridor, the ceiling lights coming on as they walked. When the corridors were fully lit they could see doorways and other corridors that led off into different portions of the facility.

Chiron nodded his head. "Four point four square kilometers in size, with another three levels beneath this one." He answered. "It will be able to serve the new Praetorians well when they begin arriving."

Martin stopped walking now. "How do you know about that?" He asked.

Chiron stopped also and turned to look at him. "You have Elder Shiria among you now." He replied. "This was listed as one of her duties when she left Pralor space. To search for and then discover new Praetorians. They would then be brought here to train. Lord Sumar was very specific in his directions."

"Grandfather Sumar knew about Shiria?" Andro asked with wide eyes.

Chiron shook his head. "Not her specifically, no. Only that someone would be guided to the Alpha Quadrant with this goal in mind." He replied. "Since we have monitored intercepts from the Alpha Quadrant for some time, I only determined what Elder Shiria's mission was after her actions on the Kavalian homeworld were made public." Chiron turned and began walking once more and they fell in behind him. "Lord Sumar knew that the new Praetorians would need a secure facility to begin training those that Elder Shiria finds, and because of our defenses, this facility was the most logical choice. Lord Sumar knew that and he made certain arrangements to facilitate that when the time came."

"Where are we going?" Laren asked now.

They came to the end of the corridor in front of a set of double steel gray door. The corridor branched right and left but the double doors in front of them appeared sealed tight. Chiron turned to face them. "We are here." He answered.

"And where exactly is here?" Martin questioned.

Chiron motioned to the double doors. "Each of you will need to place your hands on the doors in order for them to open. It must be done together. The biometric sensors will confirm your identity and the doors will open to an elevator. Step onto the elevator and it will take you to The Sanctum."

“The Sanctum?” Andro asked him.

Chiron nodded his head. “I had much time to come up with different names. After a million years simply referring to them by their number was tedious.” He replied. “Lady Reva approved.”

“And then what?” Martin asked him.

Chiron smiled then. “The future of course.” He spoke motioning with his hand to the door and stepping out of the way. “Please...”

Andro looked at his father. “Father?”

Martin looked at each of him and then nodded his head. “We’ve come this far.” He stated. “May as well see it through.”

With those words, all four of them reached out and touched the doors. Two hands on each door. The surface of the doors glowed a bright blue where their hands were placed and after several seconds they all heard the soft beep and the double doors slid completely open revealing a very plain looking elevator directly in front of them a few meters. Martin looked at Chiron then.

“Are you coming?” He asked.

Chiron shook his head. “Entry into the Sanctum is forbidden to any who do not have the Mahanlo blood within them. The Sanctum is what you would call the heart of this entire facility and where your birth rights have been waiting for you to claim. The biometric sensors detect Mahanlo blood, no matter how small a trace, and act accordingly. If an attempt is made to force or fool the sensors, the elevator will not operate and the Sanctum will be locked out from any type of access. The Temple will go into a lockdown and the defenses will activate automatically and go into a standby mode. If a second attempt is made within a five-minute period, then the Temple defenses will go active and anything within the interior of the Temple not in designated areas will be terminated. No exceptions will be made. If a third attempt is made within fifteen minutes, or if forced entry attempts are detected, then the Temple will activate its auto-destruct sequence. Twenty minutes after that takes place, this Temple, every living being present and everything within it will be destroyed by Directed Thermal Fusion Explosive Detonators.”

Martin blinked several times. “Wow!” Martin spoke. “Not taking any chances are we?”

“No.” Chiron replied.

“But *staania*’s city above?” Andro asked.

Chiron shook his head. “The city built by Lady Dynina and those that follow her will be quite safe.” He answered. “The directed explosions will spread out and down but not up. Aside from some minor shaking of foundations, the city will be quite safe.” Chiron motioned with his hand once more. “Please.”

Martin and Andro, the more cautious of the four of them looked around the interior of the room before following Dorian and Laren to stand on the elevator. They turned as Chiron appeared in the open doorway and the doors began to close.

“He lives in you...” Chiron spoke causing their eyes to go wide. “They all do.”

The doors closed just as the elevator began to descend.

“*Sibfla!*” Martin hissed loudly.

“I don’t suppose anyone else is as creeped out as I am.” Dorian commented.

Martin looked at his son. “If I have to scrape out my shorts I will let you know son.” He stated. “So far... the odds of that are looking pretty good.”

“Agreed.” Andro stated.

“Indeed.” Laren echoed all of them. She looked at Andro when she spoke and then she broke into soft laughter. The three of them followed in quick succession and they relaxed a bit more.

The elevator moved quickly and smoothly and soon it came to a halt and another set of double doors opened revealing a dimly lit corridor with four lines of light laid out on the floor, and then separating about halfway down the corridor with one going to the left and three going to the right.

“Ok... that’s subtle.” Dorian spoke as he looked at the lines of light on the floor.

“Well... the hairs on the back of my neck aren’t standing up so that is a good thing. I think.” Martin spoke as he stepped into the corridor fully. “Let’s do this.”

They moved down the corridor slowly, unable to see very much because there really was no light except from the floor. Finally, they moved up to the doors where the lines in the floor split. As they did, the two sets of double doors slid open to reveal not much else. The interiors of the adjoining rooms were dark.

Laren took both Dorian and Andro's hands in hers as she gazed into the darkness. "I am ready." She said softly.

Androcles looked at his father. "Well?" He asked.

"What have we got to lose?" Martin said with a shrug. "It's not just a job..."

"It's a *nubous* adventure." Dorian finished the sentence.

Andro shook his head. "I truly hate that phrase." He said.

Martin grinned. "Me too." He looked into the darkness before him and took a deep breath. "I'll see all of you on the other side." He stated before moving through the door without hesitation.

Andro looked at Laren and Dorian and shrugged his own shoulders. "Let's do it." He said and stepped off with Dorian and Laren beside him. The double doors quickly closed once they had passed through them.

"...Ahhh... maybe this wasn't such a good idea *fervon*." Dorian's voice echoed in the room. "I can't see shit!"

"Same here." Andro spoke as he tried to get his wolf eyes to focus even more, but the blackness was complete and not even a strand of light was present.

"Do not let go of each other." Laren spoke, her voice quivering slightly in the room and it echoed softly as well.

"Wait!" Andro hissed softly. "It's getting... it's getting brighter I think."

And that is when they heard the voice. It was unmistakable for all of them had heard it before on that Pralor Science Station.

"All of your lives you have wondered what you are. Who you are." The gravelly voice of Dadrien of the Mountain echoed within the room. "Each one of you has questioned your very purpose in this life. I have not."

Laren gasped as the massive etheric projection of Dadrien appeared off to the side in the room. His size alone caused all three of them to shiver involuntarily, but not in fear. Andro tilted his head slightly to the side. "It's a message." He spoke. "It's not him."

"If you have made your way here now, then I have already spoken with you and told you of your purpose." Dadrien continued. "Your reason for existing. I crafted this message for you in a gentler time, a brief time of peace, knowing that when you received it, war would not be far behind. This thing has already been set in motion, set in motion long ago by actions and deeds that were not controlled but not done out of hate or fear, and nothing can stop it now. It will be altered or diverted over the passage of time, but it cannot be stopped. By now you have already discovered and spoken to Lady Reva, your ancestor Androcles and Dorian and always a friend to you Laren Ti'shara. You now know more of the history of both your peoples. More than you ever have before and more than any among the *Urlkrisa Mamiss* would have allowed. Never have two species been more intertwined than ours. You will discover far more in the future to be sure, Lycavorian and Darastrixi history, but you are here now. Androcles, Dorian, Laren. Elynth, Ryner, Ladur."

In a bright flash of light that blinded all of them momentarily, the figures of Elynth, Ryner and Ladur appeared in the room with them by use of the same Etheric teleporter that had brought them here. None of them hesitated and soon their hands were upon their bonded ones in a soothing fashion. Elynth looked up first from where she had been laying on the ground above, outside the Temple, shuddering slightly as she absorbed everything they had seen and been told. And then, just a few moments ago, white light had begun to shoot through her brain, blinding her vision and causing her to bury her muzzle between her talons.

"Andro!" Elynth almost cried out.

Andro placed his hands on either side of her huge head, spreading his fingers out over her scales as he always did when soothing her. "I am here sister." He spoke the words next to her snout.

Elynth relaxed instantly, her golden eyes closing in happiness at his touch and then she lifted her head to look around the brightening room.

"Andro where are we?" She asked.

"We were just... we were just on the ground above with the others!" Ladur exclaimed.

"I have known your names for so long, spoken them in my dreams, seen what you look like, and my spirit felt you grow since you entered this world. I am truly gone now, joining my family and friends in the

afterlife.” Dadrien’s image drew their attention once more as it continued speaking. “Androcles, Dorian, Laren. Elynth, Ryner, Ladur. Brothers and sisters of the Blood. *Durcunusaan. Kaldakai vur Darastrixi ar wer isk.*” (Wolves and Dragons of the Stars)

“You are the only six individuals of your kind in the universe. Each one of you born fully aware of everything around you. Able to sense and see things others could not. And as you have no doubt already discovered, this will be passed to your own first born children. Within each of you I placed a piece of my heart and soul. A piece of my essence. Now, now it is once more whole again. In time, you will pass this on to your offspring, your legacy. They will continue what you have begun. At least that is our hope.” Dadrien continued. “I regret I cannot be there to look upon you with my own eyes, but all my knowledge is now yours. Everything I have ever known is now yours. Use this knowledge well.”

“The *Dahakoan* will rise once more under your guidance and leadership, reborn and more powerful than ever before. It has already started. They will be needed just as much as the new breed of Praetorians they will fight beside. And a formidable force they will be together. To that end... I have left a gift for each of you. I have passed on the mantle to you, and in order to make you strong enough to carry this burden, you will need to be prepared. I give you *Wer Dahakoan Litrix.*”

The seamless wall in front of them opened in that instant, separating into three different sections. They watched as three massive pedestals began to extend outward from the wall and on each of these pedestals was a white, black and crimson set of body armor unlike anything they had ever seen.

“The Onab saw your coming...” Dadrien’s voice continued once more. “They saw what you would need. This armor has been forged from an impossibly rare Onab metal found only on what was once our homeworld of Cerath. The metal is named for the region on Cerath where it was discovered. *Onkmeti Naami.*”

“Winter’s wisdom.” Laren spoke reverently.

“How the Onab were able to do with it what they did is beyond my knowledge, but it was used to armor our warships in battle with the Iais’Kai.” He spoke. “It is impervious to any sort of projectile weapon and superior to all other known metals against energy weapons. It also has one very special gift that I felt was needed in order for you to be at your finest. It is a fitting armor for the reborn *Dahakoan*, and for the *Tarivuos* of your people Androcles, for we are forever linked.”

Dorian was beside the pedestal in front of him and he ran his finger along the length of the body armor, watching as the crimson color began to glow slightly. He jerked his hand back quickly and the glowing stopped.

“Wow! That’s so cool!” He spoke.

“There is a cost however.” Dadrien’s voice spoke causing all of them to look at his image in the recording. “As *Dahakoan*, it will become etherically bound to each one of you. It will become part of each you, part of who you are. This cannot be reversed. Once you have taken your place, there will be no going back.” Dadrien shifted his body in the recording and then continued.

“None of you have asked for this burden. It was placed on you long before you were ever born or hatched. You had no choice.” They watched him take a deep breath. “I give that choice to you now.”

They turned and watched as the pedestals shifted once more and three very odd looking devices extended from the rear of the pedestals. Each was identical and was shaped in the form of a human body.

“You each are etherically bound to your brother or sister of the blood.” Dadrien spoke once more. “Each of you must make your own choice, but each of you must agree in order for it to work. If one of you does not wish it, then it cannot go forward. When you are ready, if you are ready, simply move onto the platforms, be calm and it will begin.”

Andro turned immediately to where Elynth rested on her four legs, ready to spring into action should it be needed. “Sister?” He asked softly.

“This is the answer we have always sought my beautiful brother.” Elynth answered him. “What are we? Who are we?”

“We still don’t know the full why of it?” Andro reminded her.

Elynth lifted herself up and moved closer to him. She stretched out her snout until it was touching his forehead. “Don’t we?” She asked softly.

Andro reached up with both hands and placed them alongside her golden eyes. “Yes, I suppose we do.” He said softly.

“I am ready.” Elynth said confidently.

Andro looked at Laren and Ladur who were now next to each other, her diminutive body looking silly against his huge bulk. “Laren? Ladur?”

Laren looked at Ladur with a beaming smile and then turned back to him. “Like you and Elynth, we have waited for these answers Androcles. Yes, we are ready.”

“Yes.” Ladur agreed.

Andro turned and looked at Dorian and Ryner. “*Fervon?*”

Dorian and Ryner looked at him. The youngest of the six of them in every way, but Andro would dare say, the most contemplative of them. “We are the youngest of...” Ryner began to speak but Laren quickly shook her head.

“That matters not to anyone in this room Ryner.” She hissed. “We are all equal here. Just as it was meant to be.”

Dorian met Andro’s eyes and nodded his head. “Yes.” He spoke.

“We are ready as well.” Ryner finished the statement.

Andro looked back to the odd machine and nodded his head. “Then into the future we shall go.” He spoke before climbing up into the machine and settling into cushioned seat as Laren and Dorian did the same thing. “And we won’t look back.”

Martin stood like a rock in the dark room, his wolf eyes trying to adjust, but the darkness was thick and complete. He shifted on the balls of his feet expecting action of some kind, preparing himself to move.

“Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.” He muttered to himself thinking he was alone.

“Always the realist my boy?”

Martin spun around when he heard the soft laughter and words and he saw the Etheric image begin to take shape behind him. The dimness in the room began to brighten as the image took the shape of a man. Martin’s dark eyes grew wide in disbelief as he recognized the figure before it had fully formed.

“Daniho!” He gasped.

Martin saw the image clear and focus and before him stood his ancestor Daniho Mahanlo. He watched as the head moved and the dark eyes looked around the massive room as it grew even brighter now, small light fixtures slowly coming on. Finally, that head stopped moving and those eyes focused on him.

“How... how is this possible?” Martin gasped.

“The how of it I never understood...” Daniho spoke as he looked at him. “Though Sumar did try to explain it to me once. I was never really interested in the different Etheric abilities of our people until I saw what Sumar could do. I even doubted that this ability was within me. I was wrong.”

Martin dropped to one knee and lowered his head. “Grandfather.” He spoke the word almost reverently.

The image of Daniho clucked his tongue in disgust. “Get up my boy!” He hissed. “You do not bow to me, or to anyone!”

Martin looked at him as he slowly got to his feet. “How... how are you here?” Martin gasped. “Now... after all this time?”

“A last gift from our Onab friends.” Daniho answered him. “Chiron told you of the Etheric nodes placed within this facility. With the assistance of the Pralor people who knew of us back then, the Onab devices here have kept my Etheric essence alive in a restive state since the day I died.”

“Why?” Martin asked.

Daniho moved up to stand directly in front of him. “As with your sons and Laren, to give you a gift.”

“A gift?” Martin gasped in stunned shock. “I don’t need a gift. The... the knowledge of you and the others that *staania* has given to me... our history... my history... that is all the gift I will ever need.”

Daniho smiled and nodded his head. “Yes, I know.” He spoke. “Do you hate me Martin?”

“What?” He rasped out the words.

“A part of me hated myself for so long.” Daniho told him.

“What do you mean? How could I... how could I hate you?”

“We are at this point in time partly because of our actions.” Daniho told him. “My actions are what began all this.”

“*Duan julyings iada jar tia evell wen staanio.*” Martin told him. (Our actions make us who we are grandfather)

The image of Daniho smiled and nodded his head. “*Jainn henes alad.*” (Yes they do) Daniho shook his head slowly in the image and he smiled once more. “I am not here to lament over my actions. We have... we have shaped events through time Martin... trying to make amends for the sins of our past. And in doing so, we have placed the burden of what we did back them on you in the here and now. On you, on your sons, on Laren Ti'shara. Your sons and Laren have accepted their roles in all of this. It was easier for them, they have always felt it within them and even though they did not know why, they embraced it. You on the other hand, you have felt it within you, but because of events we could not predict, you are not discovering the why of it until now.”

“*Staanio I...*” Martin began.

“You truly hate being King don't you?” Daniho asked him.

Martin met his eyes for a long moment. “*Una idrao etany cutius.*” Martin finally said. (It sucks donkey dick)

Daniho's Etheric image burst out in hearty laughter as he stood in front of Martin and after a long moment, Martin couldn't help but join him. After a few moments Daniho nodded his head while the laughter left him and he looked at him once more.

“Now you know how I felt.” He spoke. He smiled at him. “Unfortunately, I was chosen. And because of my blood, my descendants have been chosen to continue this. When Sumar merged his bloodline with ours, that became even more pronounced and powerful. You have within you the very best of myself and... my beloved brother Ashten. He would be proud of you, because I am proud of you. You have taken this burden upon yourself without question because of the compassion within you. That compassion comes from Ashten. You have followed your instincts all of your life...”

“Not always.” Martin interjected.

Daniho shook his head. “I know of what you speak and your meaning, but fate has a way of making sure events happen exactly as they are supposed to in the end Martin my boy.” He said. “We would not be here if this was not so. Androcles would not be here. And Sadi would not carry within her the unification of our people and our bloodline.”

Martin's eyes narrowed. “Come again?”

“Do you doubt the blood that runs within your veins?” Daniho asked him.

Martin shook his head without hesitation. “Never.” He answered.

“I thought not.” He spoke. “You have evolved to what you are now Martin, because of past events, and now you will never doubt your instincts again. Just as I once did.”

“You?” Martin gasped.

“We all have doubts.” Daniho told him. “How we overcome these doubts is also what makes us who we are.”

Martin nodded after a moment. “I suppose that is true too.”

“Then trust them always.” Daniho said.

“Forgive me but... that really doesn't make a whole lot of sense.” Martin told him.

Daniho nodded once more and smiled. “I know... but it will in the future.” He said. “It will in the future.” He looked at Martin. “My burden has now become your burden *staaniketo*. And one day it will fall to Androcles and then to his first born son Achilles, and so on down our line. This will never change. In many ways I regret this but looking at you before me, at your son Androcles, your other children, and those to come, I see the strength within all of them. It is undeniable and no wolf will ever be able to deny it either.” Daniho looked at him. “Unite our people again Martin. Repair what my actions in the past did to our people and do not make my mistakes.”

“Your mistakes?” Martin asked him.

“We lost our way for a time.” Daniho said. “I lost my way. You must make sure we get it back. Only together can we face what is coming and hope to defeat it.”

“Then war is coming.” Martin said. “The Iais'Kai... the Scourge are coming.”

Daniho met his eyes and nodded. “It was always coming Martin, Xaxon's actions made it much worse, but it was always going to arrive on our doorstep once again. It was only a matter of when.”

“And how do I win?” Martin asked.

Daniho raised his hand and pointed a finger at Martin's chest. "By doing what you have always done. By leading with your heart." He raised his hand now and stopped Martin's question. "You have many questions I know, but the answers to those questions reside within these walls and the walls of the other Sanctuaries. I have only two requests for you."

Martin chuckled. "Requests?"

Dani met his eyes. "My mother... what she did was selfless Martin, but now... now I cannot bear to see her as she is. Return to her what she deserves. To breath real air, to smell her blood once more through her own senses. She has earned the right to live out the remainder of her years among her blood."

Martin nodded his head, once more without hesitation. "This I will do regardless *staanio*. It is not something you need to ask of me."

Daniho nodded his head in approval. "Thank you." He said. "My time grows very short *staaniketo*. Soon I will join those of our blood in the afterlife. Even the Etheric nodes in this place cannot sustain me forever."

"You said you have two requests." Martin spoke.

Daniho met his eyes and nodded. "Yes. The second not even my mother knows. She believes she is the last when she is not."

"Speak to Chiron after you have taken my gift to you." Daniho said. "Speak the words *Ardorm Panur*. He will know what to do."

"I don't need a gift grandfather." Martin told him again. "Not after what..."

Daniho motioned with his hand. "Look behind you grandson." He said as he moved to the side and Martin turned, his dark eyes going wide. "And when you reach the Mountain of Stone and Light there will be another gift for you, and what you have wished for most of all in your life will be yours. Carry on my blood. Carry on."

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

JETANIA

Loras Ranev moved quickly to the edge of the huge landing platform and looked out on the valley stretched below, her mind and heart racing nearly out of control. The thick, tall green trees stretched for kilometers in all directions, broken only in the spots where the winding river moved through the base of the valley. Loras' hands were fully stretched across her upper body holding her opposite arms as her mind literally raced with what she had seen and what she now felt coursing through her unchecked. The breeze was blowing away from her, causing her long dark brown hair to lift from her shoulders and flutter in the wind as she stood there. It was unmistakable, what she was feeling, and the intensity of it was unlike anything she had ever felt before in her nearly six hundred years of life. In that intense Etheric connection, she could feel it so close to her, and it was so utterly absolute. Loras Ranev had never felt such a concentrated love before, so focused and bright and it was directed solely at her.

From him.

An Alpha wolf who had not even entered this world yet.

Loras Ranev was well aware of the Lycavorian ability to imprint their children, but never had she heard or experienced it in such a deep way. He was an Alpha wolf with the memories and knowledge of generations going back longer than she could count. She had felt his father in the connection, his grandfather, two men who radiated power unlike any Alpha male she had ever seen or felt in her lifetime. It terrified her when she felt the love from him for her for it was equally as powerful. It terrified her because she had never thought something like what she felt could even exist.

"Loras?" The female voice spoke from behind her and Loras then detected Anja's sweet honey scent and turned quickly. The breeze was blowing softly into her face as she turned and her mind was ablaze with different sensations and this is how Anja had gotten so close to her without her noticing.

"You should... Anja you should be with your family." Loras said turning to face her fully.

Anja stepped up to her without hesitation. “You are a member of that family now Loras Ranev.” She spoke softly. “You saw and heard it for yourself. I can sense the confusion within you Loras. The fear. What is wrong? Tell me.”

Loras looked at her, and she could almost see the confidence oozing from Anja’s pores, she could smell and sense the powerful aura emanating from within her. Half breed though she may have been, Loras thought to herself, this woman had the aura of an extremely powerful Alpha female. As did the other females Loras could smell within her blood. Females that were far more powerful than most of the Alpha females here on Jetania. Her honey scent reeked of the Alpha Wolf King that had claimed her and made her his own, and her aura held nothing but love and devotion for that same wolf.

“I am... I am terrified Anja. What I saw... what I felt... it frightened me as nothing ever has in my life.” Loras finally exclaimed gently. “I don’t... I don’t know how else to describe it.”

Anja smiled warmly in understanding and reached out to take her hands, which Loras quickly placed in her palms. Anja squeezed them in her own when Loras gripped them and she stepped even closer to her. “Then do not try.” She told her. “Do you think I felt any different when I first discovered who and what Martin was? What I was? I was totally overwhelmed. I could barely process anything else.”

“How did you... how did you deal with it?” Loras asked her.

Anja smiled again. “Well... that was easy. I grabbed onto the one thing that had been a constant in my life and I didn’t even know it then. I grabbed onto Martin’s love for me. It was there, focused and pure and bright, and for far longer than even he led us to believe.” Anja told her. “Which is something that I will let him know about when I see him again.” She finished her statement with somewhat of a sterner tone, as much as she could project since Loras knew that this revelation had caused a massive spike of love and warmth within Anja that all of them had felt.

“What she said about me?” Loras said softly. “I...”

Anja drew her closer. “Do you question what your instincts tell you Loras?” Anja asked her. “Do you question what you feel radiating from Achilles for you?”

“*Carians* how could I?” Loras gasped loudly. “It is more powerful than anything I have ever felt in my life from any Alpha who has tried to entice me. His aura was so... it was so pure and raw and unmistakable, and it was focused entirely on me! The sensations it caused within me I did not know I could even feel! How is that even possible Anja? I know of our ability to speak to one another with our minds in a rudimentary way, but he is...”

“Well... you can thank his father for that.” Anja replied with a small smile. “And his grandfathers before him. Andro has... Andro and his father have always been enigmas. Even to their family at times. What they can do... let’s just say it is very scary. But that makes us love them even more. Reva was channeling Martin and Andro and the others so I can only guess that Achilles was able to use that, focus on that, and then you.”

“I heard his voice in my head Anja!” Loras gasped once more. “As if he was standing beside me. He spoke to me. He called me his wife!”

Anja nodded her head knowing full well what Loras meant. It was the same for her, for Aricia, for For’mya. For all of them. What Martin did to them, in and out of their bed, it was beyond anything they could ever imagine experiencing and his love for each of them was utterly complete and absolute.

“And you don’t know how to process that?” Anja said with a gentle smile. “It is the same for his father and his grandfather. They love without question, without doubt.”

Loras looked at her. “Process it?” She gasped with wide eyes. “Anja, I did not know that such feelings could even exist!”

“Yes, you have.” Anja told her. “This knowledge has always been within you, and you have known it. If you did not, then you would have given yourself completely to Warim Ranev. You would have never held that part of yourself away from him. He was a good man and he loved you, and you cared for him, but inside you, in your blood, you knew there was something else waiting for you. Something that would take your heart, your soul and your essence and wrap it within love that you have never felt before. You heard Reva yourself.”

“But how?” Loras asked. “I have never known anything but Jetania. I was born here. My brothers, the gods bless their passing, they were born here. My mother was born on Ventori, my father as well. If our ancestors came from Lycavore to Ventori, how can I be what she says.”

Anja nodded her head. "All good questions..." Anja met her eyes. "But does any of that really matter now Loras?" Anja answered her question with another.

Loras met her eyes for a long moment. She opened her mouth several times as if to answer but then shut it and slowly shook her head. "No." She answered finally.

"The answers will come Loras." Anja told her. "As they come for us they will come for you. Right now though... I can feel it within you." Anja told her. "What you feel for Achilles. It burns within your blood Loras Ranev. Within your heart."

"He has not even been born yet Anja!" Loras stammered. "How is what I feel for him even possible?"

"We have asked that same question many times about those in our family." Anja told her. "Mostly about Androcles and his father and what they are capable of. How they are capable of doing these things that they do. Many of those answers we received today. But it also led us to even more difficult questions. You know what our people can do Loras, passing the imprint of what we have seen and experienced in our lives on to our children. For Martin, for Androcles and now for Achilles, it is just more complete and far more extensive than we had ever known. They have knowledge within them that no one should have at such a young age, let alone before they are ever born." Anja looked at her and reached up to place her palm against her cheek. "You worry that he will claim you regardless of what you want. As Osrod did. As even Warim did."

"It is the way of our people." Loras told her softly. "I could not resist him Anja, even if I wanted too. My body would not let me. You know that this is how it is for female wolves."

Anja shook her head with a smile. "It *was* the way of our people." She corrected her. "It has not been like that for many thousands of years. That part of the old ways died out a long time ago."

"Not here." Loras said.

Anja nodded her head. "Not here, no." She said. "But it will end as soon as Martin arrives that much I can assure you."

"Anja I... I do not want to be a trophy for another male." Loras said. "I hate Osrod for what he forced me to do for ten years, parading me around like a prize, taking me whenever he wanted knowing I could not resist him. It was different with Warim, I did care for him, but it was also the same."

Anja shook her head and squeezed her hands once more. "You have nothing to fear Loras Ranev. The future is ever changing and when that day comes, if it comes, you will do what your heart tells you. Achilles will not force himself upon you Loras, he loves you too much. Not to mention that his father and grandfather and all of his uncles would kick his ass five ways from yesterday if he did."

"But how... how do you resist when it is instinct to our people?" Loras asked.

Anja looked at her with a shy smile. "It's not easy I will tell you that." She replied coyly. "Martin is... Martin is built like a bull in the *celie shusul*..." Anja saw Loras' eyes grow wider and she giggled like a school girl. "... and he certainly knows how to turn each of us to putty in his hands. It's next too impossible to resist him, especially when we are in Phase, but in truth, we don't have to do anything."

"What do you mean?" Loras asked with wide eyes. "How?"

Anja squeezed her hands tighter and smiled brightly. "Let's take a walk and I will tell you." She spoke. "We love bragging about Martin, he hates it but since he is not here, I can brag all I want and he can't do a thing."

Loras nodded quickly and they turned to move along the edge of the platform under the watchful eye of Kalis, Tir'ut and half a dozen of Garget's men. This small group had spent the last several hours with each other already today, learning about one another, and a bond of mutual trust and friendship was growing quickly. They needed no words between them to know what to do.

None of them noticed Retta however, as she gently dislodged herself from the grasps of her family and with a quick glance in the direction of her mother, she sprinted for the door that would take her inside the base.

Only Lucia took notice of this from her perch on top of the *STRIKER* and she glanced back to where her beloved Zarah rested.

[Zarah?] Lucia questioned.

[Let her go my love.] Zarah answered quickly. [She is going to do what any daughter of my father would do. She is going to follow her blood and her instincts and claim what is hers.]

[Lazar?] Lucia asked.

[Yes. His blood burns just as brightly for her, though he does not fully understand it yet. He will though, if Loras is who staania Reva says, he will.] Zarah answered.

[Zarah ussta ssinsrigg...?]

[I do not wish to wait any longer either Lucia.] Zarah spoke before Lucia could finish her sentence.

[If it is too soon Zarah my love we can...]

[No. You have shown me that I can love and feel once more Lucia.] Zarah answered her. *[My family has shown me this. And Radem told me the only way to...]*

[Radem?] Lucia gasped. *[He knows?]*

Zarah chuckled softly in their private connection. *[He is our master and our friend Lucia, thanks to my father. He knows.]*

[What did... what did he say?]

[To conquer my fear... to conquer my fear I first need to shed the demons of my past. I have done that Lucia. With your love, with Andro's essence within me... within us... I have done that.] Zarah spoke. *[When my brother returns to us, we will claim what is ours Lucia. I do not want to lose him to another because I was too frightened to believe in the future.]*

[He said he would wait forever Zarah.] Lucia said.

[Do you wish to wait forever to feel his arms around us?] Zarah asked. *[To feel what only he can make us feel?]*

[Phraktos nau!] Lucia blurted out.

[We will have what is ours Lucia my love. Dutkne will be ours when my brother returns.] Zarah spoke softly. *[And we will step into the future when we do. A future with him and us together.]*

Lucia smiled and sent her a pulse of intense love through their connection, something that Zarah returned equally. *[I look forward to that day my beautiful Zarah.]*

[As do I.] Zarah replied. *[We... carians!]* Zarah gasped within the connection and Lucia's eyes cut to where she still sat.

[Zarah! What is it?] Lucia asked.

[Son hote lon evell nysil saoi! Andro! Father!] (By all that we hold holy)

LORENU

TEMPLE ENTRANCE

"...just disappeared!" Isheeni gasped aloud now, her normally soothing voice now filled with concern and fear. "Right after I called for you, Torma disappeared! Aricia my sister what is going on?"

For'mya stood beside Aurith now, stroking her snout to try and calm her, Arzoal and Helen standing off to the side silently. Neither looked or acted like something was wrong and this quickly drew attention as everyone else was nervous and their combat senses had come alive. It was Aricia who looked at them, her hand on Isheeni's muzzle.

"Helen? Arzoal?" She gasped aloud. "You... you know something! What is happening?"

"They can feel it." Reva's voice spoke now and they all turned to see the Sphere move up to where they all stood.

"Feel it?" Aricia questioned. "We cannot feel our Beloved Reva! We cannot feel our sons! What is going on?!"

"Be patient child." Reva's voice said. "Destiny's path is being fulfilled."

"What does this mean?" For'mya demanded. "We will not lose them Reva!"

The sphere shifted position and faced her. "Lose them child?" Reva spoke. "Child you are not going to lose them. They are being..."

"They are being Reborn!" Helen gasped.

THE CIRCLE

Martin spun around when the faint screams reached his wolf ears even through the thick steel walls. "... Andro!" He gasped as he headed for the door

"You do not need to go to them Martin my boy." Daniho's voice spoke from behind him once more and Martin turned. "They are in no danger and the screams you hear are their rebirth. Your sons, my grandsons, and Laren, they have accepted what their path is completely."

"What does that mean?" Martin hissed.

"It means that they have accepted what they are." Daniho answered him. "The *Tarivuos* of our people, of you. And the *Dahakoan* reborn, or I should say the Sentinels of the Stars. *Wer Rithtari ar wer Isk*"

Martin looked at him. "What?"

"They are the *Dahakoan* reborn yes... but they are so much more now." Daniho spoke as he moved closer to Martin. "They can no longer be truly called *Dahakoan*. Dadrien knew this would happen and what they would become. A message Dadrien made many thousands of years ago is with them, guiding them. You have nothing to fear for them *staaniaketo*, believe in me."

Martin stared at his Etheric image for a long moment and then his head moved back to what he had turned around to discover only a few seconds before. He glanced at Daniho once more and saw him nod and then he moved closer to the podium and what was held there.

The armor was quite impressive looking to say the least. It was suspended on the podium within an Etheric bubble of some kind, rotating very slowly. Around the base of the podium were several thin, rectangular box like objects probably no bigger than an old butane lighter. The upper chest piece, which is all Martin could see, was layered across the shoulders, the elbows and the forearms. It was very similar to how their Dragon Armor was forged to provide maximum flexibility to whoever wore it. This armor was dull silver in color, with the images of a dragon leaping into the air on either pectoral chest piece and the head of a Lycavorian wolf on the lower abdomen with wings on either side.

"It is called *Onkmeti Naami*." Daniho's voice spoke as Martin gazed at it. "A very special metal discovered by the Onab in the Winter Mountains on Cerath."

Martin turned back to his image. "Winter's Wisdom?" He said.

Daniho nodded. "The Onab named it, for they had never seen something like it before. After roughly fifty years of testing and research they discovered a way to make it malleable. It was used to armor our warships and gave us a sizeable edge in our war with the Iais'Kai and many other things. It is impervious to any known projectile weapon, and surpasses even your own Dragon Armor in its resistance against energy weapons. Heat. Cold. It can actually alter its molecular structure in order to protect against nearly any environment."

Martin looked back to the armor. "Is it alive?" He asked.

Daniho did not laugh at the question but he did smile slightly. He had asked the same question of the Onab all those years ago. "I asked that same question *staaniaketo*, many years ago." He said and watched Martin turn back to him.

"And?"

Daniho shook his head. "It has something to do with the molecular structure of the metal itself. I don't begin to understand it for it is far out of my knowledge base." Martin grinned to himself now and Daniho's head tilted slightly. "What?"

"I get that a lot." He spoke.

"Ah..." Daniho nodded his head in understanding. "The Onab... the Onab made this for me during the *Zin sarakoa vyen ils*." He continued. "They were always so concerned for my safety."

Martin looked at him once more. "You never wore it?" He asked.

Daniho shook his head. "No."

"Why?" Martin pressed him.

"An Onab Seer came to me one day after it was complete." Daniho said. "They told me they saw you wearing it. That only you would be able to wear it."

"Me?" Martin rasped. "Why?"

"As with the *Wer Rithtari ar wer Isk*, the armor is etherically bound to one person. Once this connection is made, it is permanent and can never be removed." Daniho answered him. "I did not possess the Etheric

capability to make this connection. Only your sons and your *ano fenneennum* have this ability. Only you have this ability.”

“Because of *staanio* Sumar.” Martin said softly.

Daniho nodded his head. “Yes. Even from long before he was born, the gods of fate and destiny had planned for his arrival and his descendants. Just as they did mine. They knew how we would become one. And they knew of the place that *vada sinuovas* would act in that future. They knew how tightly we would become bound to them and them to us.”

Martin looked back at the armor. “*Durcunus for Sinuovas rie vada Saan.*”

Daniho nodded his head solemnly. “Wolves and Dragons of the Blood.” He spoke almost reverently.

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. “Arzoal!” He gasped. “Then it was... it was no mistake that she chose the last of Dadrien’s physical offspring to transfer her consciousness too before she died. Andro said... he thought as much!”

Daniho shook his head. “All of your children with your Queens are gifted in ways we never dreamed of Martin. Androcles especially. He is correct however, it was not a mistake.” He answered. “Dadrien and my mother guided her.”

He held his hand up in the Etheric image knowing what Martin was going to say. “And no... we did not influence any of her decisions, nor did we do this with you or anyone along the way. We only allowed them to see things from every perspective. The decisions she made, those that you have made, that Andro and Laren and Dorian have made, these decisions have shaped you into who you are now. My mother has told you this already, and it is time that you begin believing it my boy.”

Martin shook his head. “All this *sibfla*... it just seems so...”

“Otherworldly?” Daniho offered.

Martin looked at him. “Yes!”

Daniho nodded his head. “How do you think I felt, and I did not know half of what you know *staaniketo.*”

“I need... I need to step beyond the power that I wield... I need to step beyond the simple boundaries of what my eyes and my senses tell me.” Martin said softly.

Daniho smiled and nodded his head. “Ah... Canth’s words to you on that foul world. The day that true realization came to you of who and what you are.”

Martin looked up and met his eyes. “Yes.”

Daniho paused and blinked his eyes and in a brilliant flash of white and blue etheric light, Torma appeared in the room with them. Martin moved to him immediately, but Torma’s many years with Martin had given him countless aspects of Martin’s instincts and nature and he was calm now but ready to spring to attack in an instant. Torma closed his golden eyes as Martin stroked the scales under his eyes and they both looked at Daniho when he began to speak again.

“The mark of our family has already begun to appear on you and your children and wives and on others of our blood Martin. It will also appear on those meant to be part of our bloodline in the future Martin.” Daniho said softly. “It can no longer be denied my *staaniketo.* As much as you do not want this role, as much as you hate it, it belongs to you now. Just as it belonged to me. Wolf and dragon. We are bound by far more than words could ever describe. Take this armor and the gift within it Martin. There is a matching set for Torma as well. Together with your Bonded Brother Torma it will make you even more deadly than you are now, and it will show our people who you really are. Accept it, just as your sons and soul daughter have. See it for what it is. You son’s *Anome* Sadi bears the reunification of our people within her womb Martin and soon Carisia, Ne’Veha and Lu’ria will follow in her footsteps and make the final reunification impossible to ever break again.”

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. “You have seen this?” He gasped.

Daniho nodded his head. “It was foretold by the Onab Seers. Over time, the first four children of Androcles, the first of their line, Eliani and Jomann’s first sons, also the first of their line, Nara, Retta... your children will bring about the complete unification of our species not seen since those first days on Cerath. And those chosen by fate to be part of that will also bear the mark of our family no matter where in the stars they reside.” Daniho answered. “The Onab did not foresee Caliria or Sehri, or the others that your children have chosen to love and be part of their lives, but I believe Androcles did. His dragon blood gives him this ability and this only strengthens our people going forward into the future.”

Daniho met his eyes. “But only you can lead them Martin. They will follow only you.”

“Why?” Martin asked him bluntly.

“You are the *Mard Revik* Martin Leonidas.” Daniho said. “More so than me, or your grandfathers before you ever were. Within you... within you is a piece of all of us. That is the difference. That is your power. Take this as my legacy to you *staaniketo*, our legacy to you. Release my mother and fulfill my other request to you. It is your time now my grandson. It is your time now. It falls to you to shape the invisible Martin, what the Seers could not see, it falls to you.”

Martin looked at Torma now, his golden eyes focused and clear. “Torma?”

Torma blinked and nodded his massive head. “We have never feared the unknown before now my Bonded Brother.” He said. “Let us reach for it one more time.”

Martin Leonidas nodded his head almost immediately and turned to look at his grandfather.

“What do I have to do?” Martin asked.

Daniho motioned with his hand. “Step onto the podium my grandson. Step onto the podium and fulfill your destiny.”

Martin took a deep breath and moved for the podium but he stopped and turned back to Daniho. “Will I ever see you again grandfather?” He asked.

Daniho’s Etheric image smiled at him. “You are never without us Martin my boy. You have never been without us.” He replied as he put his hand over his chest. “We will reside within you here...” He touched his temple. “And here. Always.”

Martin nodded slowly and turned back to the podium. He took another deep breath and stepped fully onto the podium.

“For the future.” He whispered just before the entire room was bathed in another wave of white/blue Etheric light.

The pain had been excruciating and sudden, which accounted for the screams, but it passed in milliseconds and in its wake was a warmth that surged through their bodies like the waves of the ocean gripped in the fury of a colossal storm. Power the likes of which they could not describe rolled smoothly through their limbs, their bodies and their minds. It provided focus and clarity and above all else, it provided answers to so many of the questions they had asked of themselves for so long. Dorian’s birth had re-ignited those questions for Androcles and Elynth, reinforced them for Laren and Ladur, and then brought them back to the forefront with all of them. Now they had the answers they had sought for so long.

What were they?

Who were they?

The *Dahakoan* reborn into something more than what their predecessors were or ever could be. What only they could be.

Wer Rithtari ar wer Isk.

The Sentinels of the Stars.

Whatever had taken place had done so quickly, a sudden bout of nausea causing all of them to drop from the podium seats they had been in, heaving up what they had eaten only a few hours ago. Andro squatted on the cool metal floor, one hand bracing his body while he took great breaths to calm his stomach and his mind. His azure eyes opened after a long moment and regained their focus and then his eyes grew wide as he looked at his hand and then his legs beneath him. His eyes held confusion and wonder as he saw what encased his body now.

Glittering gold armor extended over a large portion of his body now, and around that was an armor he had never seen before in his life. It looked like a cross between the exquisite mesh weave that provided the superior protection of the Drow Scout Body Armor but with the obsidian color and texture of Elynth’s scales. Andro slowly lifted his hand off the floor turning it over palm up and he saw the same style armor extending up his forearms and across his biceps. He looked down at his chest and saw the gold armor on his chest and abdomen with the scale weave armor along his sides and armpits. As he began to move, his eyes grew wider for it felt as if he wore nothing at all. Andro’s head snapped up to look at Dorian and Laren and his azure eyes nearly exploded open at what he saw. They were just as he was, still confused and slightly disoriented, but

wearing the same type of armor with the difference in color exactly the same as the difference in Elynth, Ryner and Ladur's scales. What caused his eyes to open in shock were the wings that extended to either side of their bodies and originated from their backs.

"*Sibfla!*" Andro barked causing Dorian and Laren to look up at him and seeing their own eyes go wide.

Andro sprang to his feet with instant action and his eyes grew even wider when he saw the shape of the wings so close to his own body. His head turned to the side and he saw the span of the wing curl back and he tried twisting his head even further around as the wing then curled around in front of him almost of its own accord. Andro spun around quickly but could not see where the wing originated because it moved with him. His head whipped around to the other side and he saw the same thing. As wonder filled him, he stopped turning and he saw those wings spread out, stretching four meters on either side of his body.

"Impressive are they not?" The voice spoke causing all three of them to whirl around to see Chiron silently enter through the door in the wall that had not been there when they first entered.

"Chiron!" Andro gasped.

The Avatar looked at Androcles and smiled. "Dadrien's gift to you." He spoke.

"They are..." Laren began to stammer out the words.

"Wings. Yes." Chiron spoke as he entered the room fully and the door slid closed behind him. "Forged from pure *Onkmeti Naami*, just as your armor is."

Andro felt Elynth come up behind him, her muzzle lowering to inspect the wings that now protruded from his back. They were shaped just as her wings were, smooth on the upper ridge bone and then scaly further away from the ridge bone until they became like smooth scale feathers. As she ran her snout over them she could feel them move in concert with the pressure she applied and her golden colored eyes grew wide.

"They are soft and move like... like the scales on my wings!" She exclaimed extending out her right wing, now covered completely in the *Onkmeti Naami* armor.

Chiron nodded his head. "It remains even today as one of the most successful feats the Onab ever accomplished, being able to manipulate the metal as they did. Your wings retain the same defensive nature as your armor, even though they are some of the thinnest armored portions ever designed by the Onab."

"How?" Andro asked once more looking at his left wing. The obsidian colored wing moved closer to his face for inspection and Andro's eyes grew a little wider.

Chiron shook his head. "As with the armor, the wings are now etherically bound to you." He told them. "They can never be removed."

Dorian moved closer to him, his own wings banging into Laren's as he did. "I thought you said you could not come down here." Dorian questioned him.

"I could not." Chiron told him. "Until the Mahanlo bloodline unlocked this level and the levels beneath us."

"Beneath us?" Andro asked.

Chiron met his eyes once more and nodded. "When the time is right you will know to explore these levels. Your presence here now has provided me the access into this portion of The Circle that was held within the computer's archived databases. I have full access to the facility now as Lord Daniho and Lord Sumar intended it to be once you arrived."

"Chiron this..." Laren began to speak but Chiron raised his hand stopping her question.

"You have many questions..." Chiron spoke. "Lord Daniho and Lord Sumar knew this would be the case. The answers to the questions you seek are already within you. Each of you is unique, and the knowledge you seek is part of the blood that flows inside you. The same can be said for your father Androcles. You do not need to ask questions when you already know the answers."

"Are you saying that... that I already know how to use wings?" Androcles asked him stunned.

Chiron nodded his head. "You have dragon blood within you." He answered. "You and Elynth have been flying since before you could walk. You see with each other's eyes, feel what each other feels, all you need do is just allow that knowledge to flow freely now. Do not seek it, just let it flow within you. It is already there, all you need do is think it and your instincts will take over. The same can be said for you Laren Ti'shara. And you Dorian Leonidas, the youngest though you may be."

He moved forward to stand in front of Elynth who did not shy away from him. Normally had anyone aside from Androcles or an immediate member of his family come this close to her she would have backed

away quickly for she did not like to be touched by anyone outside of that small circle. Instead she allowed Chiron to reach up and place his hand on her snout.

“Believe it Elynth, daughter of Isheeni and descendant of Dadrien of the Mountain.” Chiron spoke. “Feel it within you.”

Chiron moved to the center podium where Laren had been sitting and he touched a few screens that were exposed. When he did, another larger panel rose from the podium and he stepped in front of it. He tapped the panel several times and they all heard the deep rumbling from behind them. They turned and saw a long, massively wide tunnel open up and extend before them. At the very end of the tunnel was a cone of bright sunlight. Chiron turned once more to look at them.

“You are *Wer Rithtari ar wer Isk*.” Chiron told them. “Now embrace it. Become what destiny has intended for all of you. Only then will you begin to shape the invisible with your father! Only then can we move forward.”

Androcles lifted his right hand and stared at it for a long moment, feeling the new found awareness and power filtering through him. He brought his fingers together in a fist and then squeezed that fist tightly before looking up at Dorian and Laren, both of whom were looking at him. His head shifted and he met the golden eyes of his Bonded Sister. Elynth moved closer to him and lower her head to his, touching her snout to his forehead.

“*Una coi duan aldrom Androcles*.” She spoke to him in Lycavorian, her voice warm and touched with a slight accent. (It is our destiny Androcles)

Andro stared into her eyes for a long moment, seeing the love within them for him, for Anthar, for everything. He turned his head to look at Laren. Ladur had moved up beside her and she was stroking the underside of his huge head with her fingers, and looking ridiculously tiny compared to him but exceptionally formidable with the new armor wrapped around her body and her wings slightly extended to her sides.

“It is what we were meant for Andro.” Laren spoke softly. “You can feel it within you just as we can.”

“Yes.” Ladur agreed.

Andro turned his eyes to his brother. “Dori?” He asked.

Dorian met his eyes. “Our Soul sister is better with words than me *fervon*.” He said. “Let’s do this!”

Androcles looked at Chiron one more time and saw the Avatar nod his head slowly. He motioned to the long tunnel. “You already know everything you need.” He spoke. “Your fathers will join you outside. This tunnel exits a thousand meters above the surface of the ocean. Reach for it and it will be yours.”

Andro closed his eyes briefly, Dorian and Laren doing the same, and the *Onkmeti Naami* quickly finished its complete deployment, the golden helmet encasing their skulls and leaving only their eyes uncovered and a long open area that extended from the tips of their noses down past their jaws exposing a portion of their mouths. Almost exactly like his Spartan helm. The *Onkmeti Naami* Scaled Weave Armor completed extending over the golden helmets until it was in the shape of a cowl, matching the color of their Bonded Brother and Sister’s scales. The obsidian color on Androcles looked devastating, the light green of Laren’s Scale Weave reacting to her shapely body in many ways, and the Sinopia colored Scaled Weave on Dorian was very imposing.

Andro opened his eyes once more and the azure blue color of his eyes were near glowing, Laren and Dorian’s eyes mimicking his in their brightness. He looked at Elynth and saw that the Scaled Weave armor now encompassed her, Ladur and Ryner completely.

“And we go!” Andro barked before breaking into a dead sprint down the tunnel, Dorian and Laren joining him in midstride and grasping his hands. With deafening trumpets of power, Elynth, Ladur and Ryner followed their Bonded Brothers and Sister.

Chiron stepped away from the panel and turned fully to watch them, his dark eyes glittering in the light of the room.

“And now we begin.” He spoke softly. “Now we begin.”

They were standing in the clearing outside the Temple, unsure of what to do or where to go. Aricia and For'mya were holding one another tightly, Sadi and Carisia holding the others as worry began to grow stronger

among all of them. Robati was in Yokra's arms with Aviel helping him to comfort her, Dynina, Gorgo, Jezima and Dasha gathered together and all of the Leonidas children standing tightly together.

It was Achilles and Neesia that shook them from their positions.

The cliff mother! Achilles voice echoed loudly within Mindvoice touching everyone in the area.

Sadi gasped and dropped her hands to her abdomen as everyone turned to look at her. "Achilles!" She rasped out the word.

Father is coming mother! Neesia's voice echoed next. *We must go to the cliff!*

Sadi looked up at Dynina. "The cliff?" She gasped. "What cliff?"

Kadeer stepped forward now, holding the hands of his daughters. "The ocean meets the continental shelf not far from here!" He snapped. "The cliffs reach a thousand meters down to the surface!"

"Where?" Sadi gasped.

Kadeer didn't hesitate and he pulled Perlae and Ishma with him. "This way! The cliffs begin not five hundred meters from here!"

It did not take them long to reach the cliffs, they were exactly where Kadeer said they were and suddenly they were staring at a breathtaking view of the ocean extending in front of them, several islands far off in the distance. The Continental Shelf stretched as far as the eye could see to either side of them, the ocean waves crashing into the beach a thousand meters below them. It was truly a magnificent view before them, but they did not care about that.

"Where?" Ne'Veha barked. "I don't see anything!"

"Nothing this way!" Deion called out, his eyes focused in a southerly direction.

"I still cannot feel Martin within me! I can sense him but I cannot feel him!" Aricia pointed out.

"Nor I." For'mya chimed in.

Sadi looked at them. "It is an empty void where Androcles usually is. We cannot..."

Poooa nathos... Neesia's voice filled their minds once more. (Patience family)

...Henes wen ihoni ineen. Achilles finished his sisters statement. (They are almost here)

Eliani rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Great! More weirdos in our family that finish each other's sentences!" She hissed. "That is just so creepy!"

Deion and Nara bumped their shoulders against their older sister with huge smiles. "We'll make you..."

"Quiet!" Denali barked loudly holding up his hand. "Listen!"

The low roar reached all of their ears now, getting louder and more pronounced but somehow muffled.

"That is my sister! I would know her trumpet anywhere!" Aurith exclaimed as she stretched her head out over the edge of the cliff and her keen dragon eyes found the odd opening in the side of the cliff perhaps two hundred meters below where they stood.

"Aurith!" For'mya hissed as she reached for her.

"Below us!" Aurith shouted as she turned back. "An opening in the cliffs below!"

"An opening?" Kadeer spoke now as he moved to the edge beside her. "There are no caves or tunnels in the cliffs, they have been surveyed extensively." Aurith lifted her talon from the ground as Kadeer leaned over the edge as far as he could while holding her leg. "By the gods..." He muttered drawing everyone to the edge as they spread out along the cliff and leaned over.

The roar was unmistakable now and all of them focused on the opening in the cliff wall. Five seconds later their eyes exploded open and their lives changed forever. Elynth, Ladur and Ryner burst from the opening with thunderous trumpets, their wings snapping out instantly before they fell a hundred feet and then they were reaching for the clear sky with powerful sweeps of their wings.

What stunned everyone into horrified silence was when the three figures leaped from the cliff opening at a dead run and their bodies reached out from the cliff.

"NO!!" Sadi screamed in terrible fear. "Androcles!!!"

Robati Ti'shara's screams of horror echoed just after Sadi's as they witnessed what was happening. The three figures, Androcles, Laren and Dorian were unmistakable to those that they loved and who loved them, and now they fell to their certain deaths a thousand meters below. As they all watched with shock filled eyes and disbelief, something quite amazing happened. Something that all of them would remember until they day they passed into the next life.

They had fallen perhaps a hundred feet holding hands and then they split apart and three different sets of colored wings extended from their backs with thunderous echoes of air and power and their bodies changed direction instantly and reached for the sky above with powerful sweeps of those magical wings and they climbed to meet their Bonded brothers and sisters in the sky above.

“*Son vada carians!*” Gorgo gasped aloud as she dropped to her knees in wonder, Dynina and Dasha reaching for her but then stopping as they too felt it.

It was as if someone flipped a switch and the emptiness that all of them had been feeling since Martin and the others had disappeared from within the Temple simply vanished to be replaced with the most beautiful sensations of warmth and family and love that any of them had ever felt before.

Anse! I could get used to this. Martin’s voice filled their minds and all of them spun around, Dynina crying out and reaching for her throat in disbelief.

Martin Leonidas stood behind them, well he floated behind them actually, the obviously metallic dull silver wings moving gracefully as he hovered above them ten meters in the air. Beyond him, and slightly higher Torma held the same position his massive wingspan dwarfing even the ten-meter span of the wings protruding from Martin’s back. His body was encased in the dull silver armor, obsidian colored Scaled Weave armor covering his elbows and abdominal area as well as covering parts of his waist and then his knees. The bright sun reflected off the armor radiantly, but the dragons on his chest plates and the wolf head symbol on his waist were unmistakable. The helmet covered his entire head, almost exactly like his normal Spartan helm. Two slots that left his eyes uncovered and the single opening that extended beyond the nose guard that kept his mouth free. All of them could see those yellow gold eyes glowing under that helmet, the savage looking dual wolf fangs of the Leonidas and Mahanlo bloodline so very prominently exposed and the multicolored plume that resided atop the helmet signifying the hair color of each of his beloved wives and mates.

“Beloved!” Aricia cried out.

Sadi Leonidas felt the unabashed warmth and love of Androcles’ aura suddenly fill her and instantly she was spinning around with Ne’Veha and the others, their eyes going wide as they saw Androcles hovering only a few feet away from them but still out over the cliff’s ledge. Dorian and Laren were on either side of him, Elynth, Ladur and Ryner slightly higher and behind them, their combined wings causing a stronger than normal breeze along the edge of the cliff.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Denali blurted out as he looked at his older brother.

They watched as Andro adjusted his wings’ position and moved over the edge of the cliff to solid ground, Sadi and the others backing up as he did and then he dropped the last few feet to stand in front of Sadi. His azure eyes were near glowing just like his father’s eyes and they looked upon Sadi, Ne’Veha, Carisia, Caliria, Sehri and Lu’ria with unabashed love, desire and devotion. Dorian did the same in front of Sheva and Onera and Laren dropped lightly to the ground in front of her parents, both of them with glowing eyes.

Martin executed the same maneuver then and Aricia and For’mya didn’t hesitate and were instantly in his arms. His aura washed over them with intense power and both of them were stunned at the clarity that now filled that aura, so much more than they were used too and it took their breath away. Martin’s aura had always affected them in different ways, always so powerful and filled with devotion to them, but now it was even more intense and focused and it caused Aricia and For’mya to shiver in delight in his arms as he held them tightly. It was no different for Sadi, Ne’Veha, Caliria, Lu’ria and Sehri as Andro’s wolf aura surrounded them and engulfed them, setting their senses afire with love and desire. For Carisia it was as if her mind had suddenly exploded with new found sensations and an Etheric aura, much like his wolf aura, engulfed her completely. It was something she had never experienced in all their time together and for Carisia it was absolutely divine. Sheva and Onera were experiencing this with Dorian for the very first time as well and it was glorious to them.

Martin finally turned as he held Aricia and For’mya tightly and he looked at the sphere that held Reva’s essence and mind. “You... you knew this would happen didn’t you *staania?*” He asked softly.

“I knew he left a gift for you.” Reva answered. “I did not know... I did not know what it was however. It is fitting my *staaniketo.*”

Martin blinked quickly and they all watched in wonder as the *Onkmeti Naami* armor retracted from his head and the helmet disappeared, leaving his head and bearded face bare once more. He looked at Aricia, reaching up to take her beautiful face in one hand and For’mya’s in the other as his huge wingspan shrank until

the wings disappeared completely into the armor he wore, as if they were actually part of the armor itself. Their hands came up to cover his and they stared into his eyes.

“I will... I will share with you, all of you, but right now I have a promise to fulfill.” He spoke softly.

Aricia’s azure eyes cut to the sphere quickly and then back to him. “We... we will need *Melyanna* for that Martin. Only she will have the knowledge to do such a thing.” She said. Aricia and For'mya knew their husband and mate, they knew how he thought, and the moment he realized who Reva was they knew he was making plans to return her to her true form.

Martin nodded his head. “I know. I’m tired of us being apart though.” He spoke. “I’m bringing Dysea, Bella and Cirith back to be with us.”

“What about...” For'mya began but Martin touched her soft lips with an armored finger and shook her head.

“Let me worry about that.” He stated. “We’ll discuss it later and make our final decisions, but now I want us all together.”

“*Avoi.*” For'mya whispered.

Kadeer Imuma could only watch with moist eyes as Perlae, Ishma and Awser were pulled into the mass of bodies of the Leonidas family. Of the Mahanlo family. Ever since he had lost Maha he had questioned his purpose while still training and schooling his children with his beloved Lycavorian wife. He missed her deeply yes, but her absence had lessened in the last few hours after discovering everything they had found. He had lost sight of the fact that he was still part of a family and he always had been, and now seeing how his children and he himself were accepted and pulled into the arms of family without question had restored this knowledge to him.

“Kadeer!” Martin’s voice brought him out of his thoughts and he turned quickly.

“King... King Leonidas!” He barked pulling himself to attention by instinct.

Martin smiled and shook his head from where he stood, his arms still holding Aricia and For'mya. “No Kadeer my friend. You are family. You always have been and you always will be from now on. My family calls me by my name.”

Kadeer smiled and nodded his head though his eyes were moist. “Martin.” He spoke.

“Select a dozen of the best researchers that you have. Kenroe, Orman and Amena among them. They seem to be the most knowledgeable when it comes to what is going on. I want them exploring everything that is in the archives here.” Martin spoke. He turned to look at the sphere. “*Staanio?*”

“I will make the necessary entries into the security database so that they have unlimited access.” She answered. “It is what Daniho and Sumar wished after all.”

Martin nodded his head. “Good.” He said turning back to Kadeer. “Once you have done that, there is an Avatar inside, his name is Chiron, and he will assist you in uncoupling the two power units holding the chamber with my grandmother’s body and transferring it to *SPARTA’S WRATH.*”

The Sphere moved closer to him. “Martin what are you doing?” Reva asked.

Martin turned to face the sphere fully. “I’m going to fulfill a promise I made to my ancestor when I was speaking with him.” He told her. “A promise he asked of me.”

“What are you speaking of?” Reva asked him once more. “Him? You... *carians*... you spoke to...”

Martin nodded his head as he looked at the sphere. “Yes, grandmother I did. His Etheric essence was held in the levels below the Hall of Knowledge. *Staanio* Daniho spoke to me. He asked me to make sure that you were returned to your body. That you had done far more than he had ever wanted. It is time now for you to return to your family.”

“Martin I cannot.” Reva spoke. “I... the technology the Onab used to do this is... it does not exist anymore.”

Martin smiled. “Yes it does... and I know right where it is *staania.*” He spoke. “And I intend to keep that promise.”

“Father that...” Eliani stepped forward. “*Staanio*’s physical body will need...”

Martin nodded his head as he looked at daughter. “I know.” He told her with a smile. “So I suggest you get cracking.”

Eliani smiled at him. “Yes sir!”

Martin reached up and tapped his jaw activating his communications implant. “Chiron I assume you have discovered our implants and are monitoring?”

“Indeed Lord Leonidas.” The male voice replied.

“Meet me in the Circle’s main chamber Chiron.” Martin spoke. “Andro and I will join you there.”

“For what purpose Lord Leonidas?” Chiron asked.

“*Ardorm Panur*.” Martin spoke the two words.

There was a long pause before Chiron answered him. “Understood. I will be waiting.”

The sphere shifted and Reva’s voice spoke again. “What does this mean Martin?” She demanded. “Winter Wonder? What is going on?”

Martin leaned over and kissed Aricia and For'mya softly and lovingly. He gazed at them as he answered. “I’m going to put our family back together.” He answered her softly.

Martin looked over at Androcles who was holding Sadi and Carisia in his arms, one hand on Sadi’s abdomen, the Etheric essences of his children swirling through all of them. Sehri was scrunched up against his chest looking blissfully happy, while Ne'Veha, Caliria and Lu'ria were touching his still extended wings in wonder. “*Keto*? We have work to do.”

Martin turned, his wings extended out of his armor one more time, and he leaped into the sky as they propelled him away from the clearing. The sphere turned and watched as Andro touched all of his wives before he too leaped into the air and followed his father with powerful sweeps of those obsidian wings. The sphere turned back to where Aricia and For'mya still stood watching with love and pride on their faces.

“What is he doing?” Reva asked.

Aricia smiled as she looked at For'mya and then back to her. “Our beloved does not make a promise he does not intend to keep Lady Reva.” She answered. “Ever.”

THE SANCTUM

“...unlocked the full databases and made them accessible to just your personal PIs at this time. Further unlocks you can perform yourself King Leonidas.” Chiron spoke as they followed him down the corridor. They had taken the same elevator down into the Sanctum but turned in the other direction upon exiting. “You will be able to draw on this information whenever you desire, you just need to speak the same code word given to you by Lord Daniho. Only this exact code word, spoken in your voices will activate the data.”

“And what exactly is this information Chiron?” Martin asked as they walked down the corridor. “My *staanio* was not exactly generous with the details.”

Chiron stopped outside a set of double doors and placed his palm against the panel on the side. It glowed green briefly and he looked at them. “I have uploaded your biometric signatures to the databases of the Temple, the Circle and the Sanctum. Aside from yourself and Androcles I have uploaded your son Dorian, Laren Ti'shara, Daniel Simpson, Admiral O'Connor, Wayonn and Murano to the access database. You may add others if you wish.”

Martin shook his head. “Not right now. I want to know what *Ardorm Panur* means. You are avoiding answering my question, which is not something I’m used to from an Avatar. I know the meaning of the words Chiron, but what does the phrase really mean?”

Chiron blinked his eyes and the double doors slid aside. Martin and Andro’s eyes grew wide as they took in the massive galaxy star chart and the numerous computer positions across the huge room. Four enormous monitors came to life on the far side of the room as they entered, a dozen smaller ones spread across the different computer stations. The four huge monitors each depicted a different portion of the known galaxies based on the sampling of systems and stars that Martin saw.

“*Sibfla*?” Andro muttered as he stepped away from his father, his eyes wandering across the expanse of the room.

Chiron waited for the doors to slide shut before turning to Martin. “I am not avoiding the question King Leonidas, only waiting until we were in a more secure area to continue.” He looked around. “This Command

Center is specially shielded and completely impenetrable by any sort of electronic monitoring. Any type of monitoring actually.”

“And?” Martin pressed him.

Chiron looked at him with something akin to a surprised expression on his face. Andro smiled at this as he turned back. “My father is keen to a saying from an ancient TV program Chiron. Just the facts ma’am.”

“What is a TV program?” Chiron asked.

“It doesn’t matter.” Andro replied. “What is *Ardorm Panur*?”

Chiron blinked several times and nodded his head. He moved to the main computer panel and typed several commands. Two of the large monitors changed and zeroed in on one portion of the galaxy while several of the smaller ones in front of them began to display information.

“*Ardorm Panur* is the nickname that Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten gave to their sister Kelia when she was born.” Chiron spoke now. “It is a name only they knew of, a name meant to signify the season during which she joined them.”

“Winter wonder?” Martin said softly.

Chiron nodded his head. “She was born during a large storm that brought fresh snow to our city and the morning after it was over, the entire city on Cerath was covered in a fine layer on snow and it appeared to many as...”

“A Winter wonderland.” Andro said.

Chiron nodded once more. “Hence the nickname they gave to her. No one knew of this nickname and they never used it with others present. Even Lady Reva does not know the true meaning.”

“Why?” Martin asked.

“Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor each had a beacon implanted into their bodies, as did all of their children and Kesas Pengot. A tracking beacon that also monitored their vital signs.”

“So they could be tracked?” Andro said.

“This Pengot went with *Tenna* Kelia then?” Martin asked.

Chiron nodded his head. “Through the many years of the *Zin sarakoa vyen ils* Kesas Pengot truly came into his own as Lord Daniho’s senior advisor outside of Lord Ashten and Lady Kelia. He was included in everything. He knew of everything. While not of their blood they accepted him into their family and he was far closer to their family than most realized. He left with Lady Kelia, taking his wife and mate and their four remaining children.”

“Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten did not destroy all of the advanced equipment that they had when they settled on Lycavore.” Chiron continued. “They secreted away a single computer to monitor these beacons. Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten always knew where their sister went.” Chiron spoke. “They could not communicate with her, but they knew where she was and that she was alive.”

“Why not tell *staania* Reva?” Martin asked.

“They did not want Lady Reva diverting her many activities in an attempt to monitor everything that was happening.” Chiron answered them. “The location of Lady Kelia was on the other side of the galaxy and even with the propulsion ability of the Sphere, it would have taken her decades to move between the locations.”

“But the Sphere has Portal Drive capability doesn’t it?” Andro asked.

Chiron nodded. “Yes, but in a much more scaled down version.” He replied. “Without the power of an entire ship to draw on, the Sphere’s Portal Drive was limited in its capability to go from one location to the next.” He explained. “It was not done intentionally, the Onab just did not know what Lord Daniho and Ashten had fully planned.”

“Wait a minute...” Martin spoke. “*Staania* said this Loras Ranev that is with Anja, she said she was the last one. That she felt the last of Kelia’s descendants on Jetania but could no longer feel her daughter. She was talking about this Loras?”

“That is correct.” Chiron said. “The pureness of your families’ blood allows you to feel each other even across vast distances, you know this. Lady Reva could feel her daughter within her and was content in that knowledge.”

“But *staania* said she could not feel her anymore.” Andro spoke. “That she had passed on?”

Chiron nodded his head. “Correct. Consequently, she believed that her daughter had been lost three thousand and fourteen years after the death of her sons and their family on Lycavore.”

“That was over two million years ago!” Martin said.

Chiron nodded once more. “Yes. Two million one hundred and thirteen thousand years to be exact.” He replied. “Lady Reva had thought she had lost all of her family except for Makeb, and she focused entirely on him and then on Lady Dynina and then on Sumar’s bloodline. And finally on you. She could only assume that since she could no longer feel Lady Kelia within her that those of our people who had gone with her and Lord Lylor were also lost.”

“But she can feel this female on Jetania? This Loras? How is that possible if *Tenna Kelia* is gone?” Androcles stated.

Chiron nodded his head again. “This began slightly more than five hundred and twenty years ago King Leonidas. It wasn’t a constant resonance, but it was enough for Lady Reva to pinpoint her location and determine who she was eventually. It is why she had Nilantha assign Rylin to protect her when she came of age.”

“*Staania* has been in contact with Nilantha on Jetania?” Andro asked.

Chiron nodded his head. “Oh yes.” He replied. “For many centuries, even before Loras Ranev was born.”

“She didn’t mention this to Anja.” Martin spoke.

“And she would not have.” Chiron answered. “Lady Reva swore her to secrecy from the first day. At least until you arrived.”

“And Nilantha knows what Loras is?” Martin asked now.

Chiron shook his head this time. “No. Lady Reva only inferred that Loras Ranev needed to be protected at all costs. That she was part of a much larger future. Nilantha accepted this without question as she was already devoted to what Lord Dadrien and Lord Sumar had left for her to do. She is the one your son Achilles has chosen Lord Androcles.”

“Does she know this?” Andro asked.

“She was within the connection with Lady Anja and the others for most of the time you were connected, so I can only assume that she heard what her destiny is.” Chiron answered. “She left the connection abruptly and Lady Anja followed moments later, just as you felt.”

“So I’m confused...” Martin spoke. “What does this have to do with *Tenna Kelia*? And how did someone with our blood get from Lycavore to Jetania and how does this Osrod idiot not know who she is?”

Chiron shook his head. “I am unable to answer these questions. The same can be said for Lord Jomann presence among you.” He spoke.

“What do you mean?” Andro asked much more interested now.

“I have reviewed all of the manifests of the ships that went to Lycavore and those that departed with Lord Lylor and Lady Kelia. There is no mention of a member of the Kirek Pack on those ships that departed Cerath for Lycavore.” Chiron explained. “I can only suggest that this was Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten’s doing. They inserted a member or members of the Kirek Pack on their ships going to Lycavore under a different pack name. To hide their identity. They were very good at subterfuge. A trait that you and Lord Androcles have taken to the next level I might add King Leonidas.”

“But why?” Androcles pressed him.

Chiron shook his head. “I do not know nor do I possess a sufficient amount of data to formulate an answer.”

“Guess.” Martin told him.

“Guessing would be...” Chiron began but stopped when Martin held up his hand.

“Guess Chiron.” Martin told him.

Chiron met his eyes for a few moments. “Given Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten’s sense for all of our people, I can only assume that they did this in order to keep the Packs alive should something happen to one group or the next.”

“So based on that, it’s very likely they did this with a small number from every pack?” Martin said.

Chiron nodded his head. “Yes.”

“Why hide them?” Martin asked. “And how did the other Packs not know this. They would have detected their bloodline the moment they caught their scent.”

Chiron nodded his head. “True. Unless they were masked somehow. At least for the short term, until they arrived at their destination. After that it would make no sense.”

“I know you can alter a scent for a short time. Scent maskers can do that.” Martin spoke. “How do you block a true scent completely? I’ve never heard of that.”

Chiron nodded his head. “It is very difficult, but not impossible. The Onab researchers were able to construct a small device that, when implanted in the host’s body, could alter their blood lipids and block the primary scent and disguise it. This masking would also be passed down through the blood to future generations. At least to those without the Mahanlo sense of smell.”

Martin looked at him. “What?”

Chiron turned back to the computer and typed several things. “After several decades of research into why the Mahanlo bloodline is the only one marked with dual fangs, they also discovered that your bloodline was also the purest of Lycavorian blood. Lady Reva told you this.”

Martin nodded. “Yes, so?”

“What she did not mention to you is that the Mahanlo bloodline is also superior to other bloodlines in physical terms. Strength, endurance, your senses. They are all superior.” Chiron told him. “It is extremely unlikely that someone of Mahanlo blood would not be able to detect this masking of a true bloodline. I would make a supposition and say this is what your daughter Eliani detected within Jomann the first moment she met him.”

“So Eli detected his true bloodline?” Andro asked.

Chiron nodded his head. “Yes. Which is why the attraction between them was so intense and why it continues even now. The Mahanlo bloodline will always choose the next strongest bloodline to mate with. It has always been this way. When they consummated their mating and shared blood, whatever was masking Lord Jomann’s true Kirek bloodline was removed and this is how Lady Reva detected it within him. Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten took four of the five purest of the Lycavorian bloodlines that remained with them. The last one went with Lady Kelia. The Nenay Pack.”

“Aricia?” Martin asked. “Sadi?”

Chiron nodded his head. “No matter what Pack that your history says they descend from, Queen Aricia’s true bloodline is of the Carbula Pack. Warriors one and all and behind the Kirek Pack, the most dedicated to the Mahanlo bloodline.” Chiron looked at Andro. “Princess Sadi descends from the Domara Pack Lord Androcles, most of them scholars and some of the most intelligent scientists and researchers among our people at that time. Your history is not wrong King Leonidas, but as Lady Reva explained to you, it is also not complete.”

Martin nodded his head. “In order to protect us.”

Chiron nodded his head. “Yes.” He answered. “Perhaps not the most efficient way to do this, but at the time there were no other options. Lady Reva is very correct when she says your son is the reunification of our people Androcles. Within your father are four of the eight original bloodlines that were on Lycavore. The Mahanlo bloodline is and always will be dominant, but over time it was mixed. Your birth Androcles, that made it six because of your mother Aricia. Your son’s birth and his choosing of Lady Loras will complete the circle of the packs that left Cerath all those years ago.”

“What about the four Packs that *staanio* Daniho exiled?” Andro asked him.

Chiron shook his head. “The four Packs that were cast out by Lord Daniho eventually died out in the ensuing years after their support of the assassination of the Mahanlo bloodline and its ultimate failure. The last of their bloodlines died during the *Brutu Jur*.” (Black Day)

“They lasted that long?” Martin asked surprised.

Chiron nodded his head. “They were nothing more than scavengers and mongrels by then.” He replied. “The other Packs on Lycavore would shun them and even kill them if they were caught. Through the years leading up to the *Brutu Jur*, their numbers dwindled to almost nothing, and as I said, the Black Day finished them.”

Martin stood up straighter and shook his head. “Wow!” He spoke. “*Sibfla*, this is almost too much to take in.” He said.

Chiron turned to the computer console once more and he began typing several more commands. “Back to your original inquiry about what this has to do with Lady Kelia?” He motioned to the monitor as he moved over in front of the large screen and they followed him.

Martin and Andro could see six bright dots on the screen in two different locations. Five were grouped together, while one was by itself on another planet it appeared. Chiron lifted his hand and pointed to the group of five white dots. "These dots represent the real time positions of Lylor Kirek, Kesas Pengot, and three of Lady Kelia's and Lord Lylor's six children. All of them went into stasis at the same time, the same time Lady Reva ceased being able to feel Lady Kelia and her grandchildren, but roughly fifty years after this event took place, three of their children's beacons stopped operating very abruptly. This was exactly one point three million years ago. The rest have remained constant since then." He pointed to the single bright dot. "This... this is the real time position of Lady Kelia."

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. "They are alive!" He gasped loudly. "Chiron you're telling me that they are alive! That Kelia is alive!!!"

Chiron nodded his head. "Very much so King Leonidas." He answered him confidently. "With the exception of Kesas Pengot, their vital signs have maintained a constant rate with no variation in the least since that time."

Andro looked at him now. "Are you saying they are in suspended animation?" He asked. "Some sort of cryo sleep?"

Chiron nodded his head. "I do not know for certain but given the state of their vital signs, yes, that can be the only hypothesis. Kesas Pengot's vital signs have varied through the many years but he is very healthy and still active it appears."

"*Saoi nubous sibfla!*" Martin muttered loudly as he turned away from the monitor for a moment.

"Father we must retrieve them!" Andro stated excitedly. "We must go to them!"

Chiron typed on the computer console once more upon hearing this and he watched as the screen shifted. "You should probably see this before you make any decisions."

Martin and Andro turned back to the monitor. "What?" Martin hissed softly.

"Without informing Lady Reva of my actions, I constructed a data probe five hundred and nineteen years ago with a limited Portal Drive capability. Two years after she began to feel Loras Ranev's resonance." Chiron began. "After an exhaustive search of the surrounding area of Jetania, I was able to determine how this Loras Ranev appeared on Jetania. Using classified information obtained first from Nilantha's ship archives and then again from computer archives on Ventori that I was able to tap into, I was able to trace her parents to Ventori but that is where the trail ended." Chiron looked at Martin. "Loras Ranev's parents did not arrive on Ventori with the others of the Pralor Seed mission that settled them there King Leonidas. I checked the Pralor data archives fully. They kept meticulous records. That leaves only one option. They came from somewhere else."

Martin nodded his head. "I'm with you so far." He said. "Then how did they get there?" Martin asked.

Chiron typed on the computer console once more and the images changed to another sector of space. "I programmed the probe to increase its search radius of the surrounding systems by a factor of twenty and to send a burst message back to me when it discovered something."

Andro moved closer to him. "It found something didn't it? What did it find?" He asked.

"Eighty-five years later I received a burst transmission from the probe." Chiron spoke as he typed in several more commands and the clear images of numerous planets appeared.

Martin moved closer to the monitor and was looking at the data as it flashed across the screen.

"Chiron... Chiron these are... these are Lycavorian life signs." He finally spoke.

Chiron nodded his head. "Yes King Leonidas. After carefully reviewing the data archives here, I realized that the probe had discovered the location of where the Arhtai Pack, Nenay Pack and the remainder of the Kirek Pack had gone."

Andro reached out and grabbed his father's arm. "Father!" He gasped. "The... The Lost Ones!" He stammered.

Martin looked at him. "No! That can't be. Those I found on Lycavore, the Rothryn, they were the Lost Ones."

"Are you... are you absolutely certain father?" Andro rasped out the words once more.

Martin looked at Chiron as his mind began to race. "Chiron?" He asked finally.

"I cannot answer that question King Leonidas but given the data that we have... what Lord Canth told you... I would theorize that Lord Androcles is correct." Chiron answered him. He turned back to the computer.

“The probe monitored communications and public channels for three weeks. The planet’s names are Koltar Four and Anlar Prime. The third planet here... this is known as Pakar Six.”

“It’s further away from the other two.” Andro stated. “Far less population too.”

Chiron nodded his head. “You are correct Lord Androcles. Pakar Six’s environment is, while not inhospitable, it is far less than ideal. The population is less than one million, eight hundred thousand four hundred and seven to be exact, while Koltar Four and Anlar Prime have a combined population of nearly twenty-eight billion. And something that they should not have as well.” Chiron spoke turning to look at Martin.

Martin met his eyes. “What is that?”

“Technology.” Andro said softly.

Chiron nodded his head. “Correct. It was agreed before all the Packs left Cerath that they would destroy all traces of Onab technology when they arrived at their destination. The Iais’Kai are attracted to advanced technology and that is what Lord Daniho wanted to avoid.”

“So they disregarded his instructions and kept the technology.” Martin spoke.

Chiron nodded his head. “It would seem so. The probe was able to scan all three planets and it discovered that Koltar Four and Anlar Prime have very modern technology, while Pakar Six does not. The technology present does not seem to have advanced much from what we had on Cerath, certainly not like Pralor technology or what you and our people within the Union have begun to develop, but it is advanced enough to attract Iais’Kai attention if they were in the area. Luckily that does not seem to be the case right now.”

“How far are they from Pralor space?” Andro asked.

“Given the current level of Iais’Kai propulsion technology right now, it would take one of their ships at least five hundred years to reach this location, and that is just from the very far reaches of the old Pralor Empire. We do not know where they are centrally located as a species now.” Chiron answered him. “They are also limited to Quantum Fusion Drives at present as you know and they are not known for exploring uncharted areas of space, which this area is.”

Martin looked at Andro. “That’s why they are messing with the Darastrixi in the way they are.” He said. “They think the Darastrixi have Portal Drive capability and they are doing everything they can to find out.”

Andro nodded his head. “Given what *Koppentotz* Aviel and General Dytin have told us, that certainly makes the most sense. It would also answer several questions as to why they are trying to create offspring from Darastrixi and Iais’Kai.” He replied. “But the Darastrixi don’t have that technology. Do they Chiron?”

Chiron shook his head. “No... they are not even close to it. Lady Dynina’s people here took what Portal Drive information was left for them and then improved on it and made it better after many years of testing as the Onab intended. This was something that the Onab did not do as much of as they should have. We are the only ones right now with that technology.”

“But the packs that went with *Tenna* Kelia...” Andro said. “Their ships had Portal Drives didn’t they?”

Chiron shook his head. “No. It was not a perfected science even when the Packs left Cerath and Lord Daniho refused to allow it to be used on our ships in order to keep them safe.” Chiron typed on the computer some more. “There is something else King Leonidas. Something more interesting and quite unsettling.” He adjusted the monitor and then pointed to several data entries. “The probe was equipped with moderately powerful sensors that were able to trace our Lycavorian bloodlines.”

“Oh... this isn’t going to be good.” Martin muttered.

Chiron adjusted the controls. “Koltar Four’s entire population is comprised of the Arhtai Pack bloodline. All sixteen billion of them. I can trace those bloodlines back to many of those that left Cerath. The population of Anlar Prime is comprised of a combination of both Arhtai Pack and Nenay Pack bloodlines. Interaction is active between the two planets, but it is very abnormal activity compared to what was displayed on Cerath. Numerous computer models have determined that normal mating cycles would have produced the corresponding population numbers given the number of years that have passed.”

“I sense a ‘but’ coming Chiron.” Martin stated.

Chiron adjusted the monitor once more to focus on Pakar Six. “The Lycavorians on Pakar Six are predominantly of the Kirek Pack, with a small mixture of the bloodlines from the Arhtai and Nenay Packs which suggests they took members of the two other packs into their own.” He looked at Martin. “The Kirek Pack left Cerath with nearly six million survivors among their number to include some smaller Packs that had

formed due to their size under the Kirek Pack surname and leadership King Leonidas. As I said, the population of Pakar Six is barely one million strong.”

“And?” Martin asked him.

“Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor had six children that departed with them.” Chiron replied to him. “Between their six children, they had thirty-three children themselves. Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor were talking of having more children when they left. The numbers do not add up. The probe was only able to detect Mahanlo blood in the active stasis chambers King Leonidas. If my calculations are accurate, given the number of years that have gone by and Lycavorian breeding periods, there should be well over a million Lycavorians with Mahanlo blood in them by now. There are only five on these three planets. Loras Ranev and her parents on Jetania make eight, but I cannot detect the bloodlines in any of them.”

Andro turned his head from where he had been staring at the large monitor. “Loras and her parents are masking it?” Andro asked.

Chiron nodded his head. “That is the only supposition I can make at this time. Whether they are aware of this or not I cannot answer. I suspect they are not aware. Something inside them, something the probe could not detect readily with its sensors is hiding their true bloodline as Lord Androcles has said. And that can only mean it was put there intentionally by someone who knew the Onab possessed such technology.”

“And how many knew about that?” Martin asked.

“Only four that I am aware of. Lord Daniho, Lord Ashten, Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor.” Chiron answered. “It is possible Lord Pengot knew, but I do not have enough information to make that determination. As I said, he was closest to Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten outside of their sister and Lylor Kirek. What they may have told him, allowed him to see, it is not fully known.”

“And what about the Kirek Pack?” Martin asked as he turned back to the screen after a long moment.

Chiron shook his head. “Only those that reside on Pakar Six have Kirek bloodlines in them.” He replied.

“Out of nearly six million.” Martin spoke softly as his eyes narrowed.

“Yes.”

“And *Tenna* Kelia and Lylor were in charge when they left?” Martin asked him.

Chiron nodded his head. “This was agreed to when they departed. By all the Packs.”

“Father...” Andro spoke softly now reaching out to put his hand on his father’s shoulder. “They were betrayed.” He said.

Martin nodded his head slowly. “And nearly wiped out it seems.” He said looking back to the avatar. “Chiron is this possible naturally.”

Chiron shook his head. “A natural event or disease that targeted one specific pack?” He said. “It’s possible I suppose... but given the natural resilience of our people King Leonidas... it is extremely unlikely. In fact, the odds are seven million four hundred and nineteen to one that this was a natural occurrence due to the pureness of the Kirek Pack’s blood.”

“They... they betrayed and killed our blood!” Andro hissed angrily now. “And those who were our closest allies and friends for millennia! From the very beginning! They were Jomann’s ancestors!”

Martin pushed back from the computer console, his face unreadable as different emotions coursed through him and he reached out to put his hand on his son’s shoulder in order to calm the anger and hate he felt seething through Andro’s blood. He turned away from Chiron and Androcles after a moment and let his thoughts go. His mind flashed back to what his long dead grandfather had told him not so very long ago.

“My burden has now become your burden staaniketo. And one day it will fall to Androcles and then to his first born son Achilles, and so on down our line. This will never change. In many ways I regret this but looking at you before me, at your son Androcles, your other children, and those to come, I see the strength within all of them. It is undeniable and no wolf will ever be able to deny it either.” Daniho looked at him. “Unite our people again Martin. Repair what my actions in the past did to our people and do not make my mistakes.”

Martin turned to look at Chiron. “You said that Kesas Pengot is still alive. That he is not in stasis like the others?”

Chiron nodded his head. “Correct. His vital signs clearly indicate that he is active.”

“This probe you sent Chiron?” Martin asked him. “Is it still in the area?”

Chiron nodded his head. “I powered it down next to an asteroid field at the edge of the system. It is undetectable.”

Andro looked at his father, could see the wheels turning in his head. He stepped closer to him. “Father?”

Martin’s dark brown eyes focused on Chiron. “Can you program this probe to send a message to Kesas Pengot that will not be detected from the other planets?”

Chiron nodded once more. “A simple matter King Leonidas, however Kesas Pengot is no fool. If what we fear has indeed taken place, he will be very cautious in his actions now.”

Andro turned from his father and looked at Chiron. “Our crest.” He said. “Would he know what our family crest is now?”

Chiron blinked several times before nodding. “It was in the book of knowledge that he had with him when he left Cerath. A collection of Onab writings and prophecy. This symbol was in there.”

“Attach that to the message.” Martin told him.

“What would this message say King Leonidas?” Chiron asked.

Martin looked at his son. His first born and the one who knew him and what he would do better than anyone with the possible exceptions of Danny and Torma. He reached out and took Andro’s arm when he saw his son nod.

“The message should say... the message should say *Evell wen chevshs*.” Martin answered him. “We are coming!”

JETANIA

PRESENT TIME

Her sisters had lied to her. All of the times they had talked of these things, all the times they had described what they felt and they had not told her the truth.

Retta Leonidas was discovering it for herself now and it was utterly divine.

It was glorious.

It was paradise.

Her mind raced with happiness, her lithe, naked body and Lazar’s powerfully sculpted body were covered in a fine sheen of sweat, her dark red hair damp and plastered to her skin and his, and his powerful arms were wrapped around her waist as he gently suckled her firm, medium sized breasts and their breathing slowly returned too normal. His huge manhood was softening now, but still deeply buried within her depths and filling her completely.

This was paradise to her.

FOUR HOURS EARLIER

The scent of his blood had become too much to resist even in the background as it was. No matter where she turned, who was next to her, or how much her sisters tried to help her, his wonderful wild apples and cinnamon scent was maddening. Given the opportunity that the sudden Etheric link that her father had allowed, Retta turned to the one person she trusted and held above everyone else save her father and mothers. Her twin Calyb.

I don’t know how much longer I can resist Calyb. Retta had told him in their private connection even while Reva had talked. He is so tall and so powerful and so handsome.

Are you absolutely certain sister? Calyb had asked her. The first Phase is always the most powerful.

Calyb, my blood burns like it is on fire whenever I smell him. My body... it becomes so aroused and sensitive. I know the first Phase is the most powerful, but this is different. Retta told him. He is so proud Calyb and he is not like the others around us. He holds his own desire for me in check and it hurts him. I can smell the

pureness of his blood within him. It is almost familiar somehow and it calls to me like a moth to a flame. I don't know how much longer I can fight it fervor.

Then don't. Calyb told her. Don't fight it arande. Don't resist. We are Leonidas. Father and our mothers have always taught us to go after what we want. If this wolf affects you so... then do what your blood calls for Retta.

I do not want... I do not want our family to be angry Calyb. Retta spoke.

If he burns for you as intensely as you say sister, then hurting you is not possible for him. Calyb spoke. If he burns for you as you burn for him... what do you think Andro will do? What do you think father will do?

I don't...

Yes, you do Retta. You know exactly what they will do. Especially our brother. Calyb told her. If you are certain sister, then you do what your blood calls for. Our father and siblings will sense it the moment they meet him. Have no fear sister. Reach for what you desire. Reach for it and take it.

Retta Leonidas had done just that and now she was so very happy that she had.

Finding his quarters had been ridiculously easy once she left their group and her nose told him he was inside. The door was not locked and Retta had entered without even pausing. She discovered him by the bed, dressed only from the waist down. Seeing the sculpted definition of his body had caused her to nearly lose control right there, but she was a Leonidas daughter and she grasped onto that fact tightly. His eyes had grown wide when he smelled her and her mint and honey scent collided with his nostrils. Retta had secured the door upon entering and she stepped closer to him, her own wolf eyes wide and her dual fangs fully extended in passionate desire. Yes, she wanted this, and the wild apples and cinnamon scent she smelled assaulting her own senses wanted it as well. Even more than she did.

"Retta... what..." Lazar stammered the words as her delicious scent wafted over him. He didn't know how, some instinctual part of him held his aura in check as he gazed at her with wide wolf eyes and extended fangs.

Then she was in front of him, millimeters from his body and the full force of her scent and female aura cascaded over him, calling to him, igniting his own aura even further as he struggled to control it.

"Retta... I... I cannot..."

"Then don't!" Retta hissed at him. "Take me now! Make me yours in any way you want, however you desire! Just... just promise to let me show you something."

Lazar shook his head as his desire for this female grew nearly beyond what he was able to control. "Show... show me?" He stammered again.

"Promise me Lazar Aspion!" Retta demanded in a husky voice filled with fervor and desire unlike anything she had ever imagined could exist.

And that is when Lazar Aspion gave in the desire within him and he grabbed Retta in his arms, lifting her up and feeling her arms instantly encircle his shoulders and her legs lock around his waist.

"Anything!" Lazar growled at her just before he unleashed his full Alpha wolf aura on her and covered her lips with his own with a desperate hunger.

PRESENT TIME

Carians he had fulfilled his promise to her and so much more Retta thought as she held his head tightly.

He had taken her that first time, with undisguised passion and fervor. His aura washed over her completely and Retta Leonidas experienced for the first time the full, unshielded aura of an Alpha wolf. She would have done anything for him... to him... anything he wanted of her she would have given him. She could not deny him.

As their passion cooled now, Retta remembered how he had nearly ripped her body armor off and then speared her completely from behind in one soul robbing plunge. Her blissful cries of ecstasy filled his ears and the entire room as she reached back with her hands and tried to draw him even deeper inside her.

Yet even that first time had not compared to what followed.

Retta could not recall how many times she had exploded as he filled her that first time, but when his essence erupted into her depths, Lazar, by force of will alone, reigned in his male aura and cradled her within

his arms as they both shook in the wake of what had just happened. Without removing himself from her velvety warm, Lazar turned her to face him and kissed her with undisguised ardor. That is when Retta showed him that there was so much more. Even as her body burned for more of him, she had taken his face in her hands and pressed her forehead to his before opening her mouth and biting into his shoulder deeply. Lazar's arms had tightened around her body but he did not pull away and once more instinct took over for him and he bit down into her supple skin. His eyes had gone wide as his mind filled with so much knowledge and so many sensations. Things he had never felt before poured into his being and with barely any effort, and guided by Retta's loving touch, he reached out and encircled Retta's mind in a protective cocoon of Etheric ability that had laid dormant within him for his entire life. Dormant until it was unlocked by the woman who would hold his essence forever. The pleasure spiraled to new heights as they both surrendered to the passion that embraced them and Lazar Aspion did not look back.

Lazar released her delicious breast from his lips and lifted his face to stare at her as she gazed down into his face. Never in all his life had Lazar experienced anything like he had for the last four hours.

Lazar Aspion was no stranger to women by any means, but Retta Leonidas eclipsed them all by so far a margin they had quickly fallen from his memory. Her honey and mint scent was an addiction to him now, the feel of her lithe and supple body in his arms godly. Even now, four hours later, his aura and passion was still at its peak because of her, her female aura still tickling him, yet they were both too tired to continue. He could feel her silky depths gently squeezing him within her, causing shivers of lingering pleasure to swirl throughout both of them as their passion cooled. He stared into her captivating dark green wolf eyes now, those eyes flecked with spots of beautiful yellow gold and her hands came down to his face, caressing his bearded cheek with loving fingertips.

"You... you are mine." Lazar spoke the words that had wanted to come out for days now. "You are mine Retta Leonidas. All of you is mine. All of me is yours. I want no other. Desire no other. Only you."

Retta's eyes became moist and she lowered her lips to kiss him hungrily, her four-inch-long tongue plunging between his lips to do battle with his own tongue. Lazar's arms tightened around her even more and she whimpered in delight before pulling her lips from his.

"I am yours Lazar Aspion!" Retta gasped. "All of me is yours. All of you is mine. I want no other. Desire no other. Only you." She repeated his exact words to her.

Lazar shook his head quickly. "No... not Lazar Aspion. I would never dishonor you by making you take that name" He said. "I was adopted long ago by the Ranev Pack and that is the name I use. I only use my father's name in public when I am forced too."

Retta smiled brilliantly and kissed him softly. "Retta Ranev." She said trying out the words. "I like that."

"I have... I have never felt what I feel for you Retta. Even now my blood surges for you. It... it sings for you." Lazar said.

"As mine does for you." Retta told him.

"How is this possible?"

Retta shook her head. "I don't know." She answered. "And I don't care. Do you?"

Lazar smiled at her and shook his head. "No." He lowered his face and nuzzled her skin between her breasts. Her fever was still there, still bright, but now it was muted because he had claimed her. And she had claimed him. He looked up quickly, his beautiful dark eyes wide as if he remembered something. "Retta... are you... did..."

Retta immediately knew what he was talking about and she shook her head quickly. "No!" She told him.

"But how?" He asked. "You are... you are most fertile now and I am... I am not..."

Retta took her face in his hands once more. "I am not ready for children yet either my love." She told him. "But they will be your children when the time comes that we are ready. My father's blood and my healing ability allow me to... regulate my body in many ways. When we are both ready, then I will carry your children happily. As many as you like."

Lazar looked at her and his eyes took on a decidedly sexy glare in them that sent shivers through Retta. "Does that mean...?"

Retta threw back her head and laughed gleefully before looking at him. "You must feed me first *aur enyla!*" She told him. "I am starving!"

Lazar slid instantly to the edge of the bed and stood up, the echo of Retta's last words pounding in his head. My love. Lazar liked that immensely. Retta yelped in surprise as she wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around his head as his manhood slipped from inside her when he stood up. "Food." Lazar muttered looking around for the exit to the door. "Yes, food."

"Lazar!" Retta hissed and she watched his face turn to hers surprised at the force of her words.

"What?"

"Are you going to take me to where the food is without any clothes?" She asked him with bright, loving eyes.

Lazar's eyes grew wider as he realized what she was saying and he began searching for their clothes. "Sibfla!" He snorted in embarrassment. "Clothes first... food second! Yes!" He told her.

Retta drew his head closer. "And then I will have you for desert." She spoke to him in a husky voice.

Lazar leaned over and furiously nuzzled her cheek and the side of her neck, being careful to intentionally linger around the back of her ear, which he had found was incredibly sensitive to his touch. Retta's gasp of obvious delight made him smile. "You are desert my sweet Retta." He whispered in her ear. "All the desert that I will ever need in my life going forward. *Elly for innyne.*"

Tears burst from her eyes and she crushed him to her tightly. Lazar paused and sat back down on the bed, pulling her closer to him and reveling in the emotions sweeping through him now and the feel of her body in his arms. "*Elly for innyne.*" Retta whispered in his ear. "*Elly for innyne.*"

Yes. Forever and always sounded very good to Lazar.

They did not know it now, but their love would burn intensely for many thousands of years into the future and would be one part of the foundation that would be laid by the Leonidas children in the future to come.

Garget found Anja and Loras on the very far platform of the airfield, sitting lotus style and talking with each other. He and Rylin had been looking for them for nearly an hour now and they were now crossing the distance to where they sat.

"... why she left this connection?" Garget asked her as they walked.

Rylin shook her head. "She seemed confused and uneasy but physically she was fine."

"Rylin... you are the High Priestess of our people." Garget spoke softly as his dark eyes turned to her and his gait slowed. "Is this... is this really happening?"

Rylin smiled and slipped her arm into the crook of his elbow. "Oh yes, Garget my friend. Very much so." She spoke.

Garget shook his head once more. "It just seems so... I have believed in the Prophecy only halfheartedly. I never... I never dreamed it would actually come true. That it would truly take place."

Rylin nodded her head. "I doubted once as well." She spoke.

Garget looked at her with wide eyes. "You?" He gasped.

Rylin nodded her head again. "We all have had doubts Garget Ranev. Mine were washed away the moment I stepped onto the Oracle's ship and saw the prophecy for myself in the images and drawings it held. I have never doubted since then." She answered looking at him. "Never."

"Will I... will I see these one day?" He asked.

Rylin smiled at him. "You are seeing it as it happens my friend. You may think you have only believed in the prophecy halfheartedly, but your actions with Taris say different. With your own daughter and now Anoria they say different."

"What?" Garget gasped again.

"You allowed your daughter to grow and learn on her own terms Garget." Rylin told him. "Many fathers would not do such a thing."

Garget looked at the ground under his feet where they had stopped walking and now stood. "She is... she has always been special." He spoke softly. "I could see this in her eyes from the moment she entered this world howling like a banshee."

Rylin nodded her head. "Indeed." She said. "And now you know of her feelings for Anoria and what they mean but you allow it. As does Anoria's father Lasun Vesrak, a man I dare say is more traditional than even you."

Garget met her eyes. "I will not keep my only daughter from her dreams!" He hissed.

Rylin smiled and nodded her head. "And that cranky old wolf Lasun will not either." She said. "You have something in common in that Taris and Anoria are your only daughters. And as they have found each other now... the young Alpha who will claim them both is not far behind, and he will worship them both beyond anything else."

"What?" Garget gasped aloud now. "He is with the *Mard Revik*?"

Rylin nodded her head. "He is a son of the *Mard Revik* Garget." Rylin told him. "Young like Taris and Anoria, but already a warrior like his father and his brother the *Tarivuos*. And he is a healer as well. They know this my friend. They have seen this in their visions Garget and they welcome it, desire it more than anything."

Garget glanced up at the clear sky above them, the sun beginning its trip down across the horizon. "I will never deny her anything." He said softly.

"You will not be disappointed Garget my friend, for the Ranev Pack will be paramount in what is to come." Rylin told him. "And tied more closely to the Bloodline of the Mard Revik than you could ever hope."

"Rylin you do..." Garget began to speak when the shouted voice caused him to turn and they both saw the young wolf sprinting up to them.

Garget held up his hand as the young wolf came to a halt out of breath. "Calmly Kness." He said. "What is wrong young Alpha?"

Kness held out the data pad to him. "General Garget... he... King Osrod's son Juyno and his hunting party have changed direction." He said as Garget took the pad. "They are making their way here to Warim and will be here just after nightfall. Three hours maximum."

Garget looked at the pad carefully. "You are certain of their direction?" He asked.

Kness nodded his head. "They have already called ahead and arranged for lodgings."

Rylin's eyes were wide. "Garget we must insure they..."

Garget looked at her and nodded his head. "Be calm Rylin." He told her. "This is my area of knowledge now. Juyno will not challenge my directives for he knows I would be within my rights to pummel his *piegn mida* into the ground." He turned back to Kness. "Insure that the word goes out quietly to all of the families of our young females who are near or in Phase, especially those who are entering their First Phase. Osrod's fool son and his friends know the rules. They cannot take any female within the confines of our settlements. If they do, they are subject to our laws then. And our laws do not allow this. Make certain all of our females are suitably protected by members of their families at all times while that *igord* is within the city." He spoke. "We have seen this before Kness. We will act as we always act."

Kness nodded his head quickly and then turned to sprint back to the Command Center. Garget turned to Rylin.

"Everything will be fine." He spoke.

"Juyno is a beast." Rylin said. "He is worse than his father. If he discovers Lazar or Rhaos are here he will..."

"He will not." Garget spoke. "Lazar is far too preoccupied at the moment to wander into the city."

Rylin tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

Garget looked at her. "He has claimed a mate." He answered her with a smile. "I do not know who... but I have been told a young female entered his quarters several hours ago and the cries of passion began almost immediately."

Rylin's eyes grew wide in happiness. "Lazar Ranev!" She gasped. "Will wonders never cease! Who is she Garget? We must find out and have a celebration!"

"She is my daughter Retta." Anja's voice answered causing them to turn quickly and see her and Loras standing beside one another, holding hands like they had been dear friends for centuries.

Rylin's hand went to her face in shock. "Oh my, Queen Anja I didn't...!" She gasped.

Anja shook her head with a smile. "I am not upset." She said. "I could not be upset given what I have felt within my daughter."

Even Loras was stunned and she turned to face Anja. “Anja you are certain of this?” She gasped. “I... I am so sorry! I did not...”

Anja shook her head again. “None of you have anything to be sorry for.” She stated. “I have seen what your son Lazar feels for my daughter Loras. She showed me. And it was so very beautiful. He could not have done it if Retta did not want him too. I know my daughters and what they are capable of. Retta burned for him just as intensely as he did for her. Lazar is your son, and given the blood that burns within both of you, it doesn’t surprise me in the least to be honest. It is who you truly are.”

“Who they truly are?” Rylin asked. “I don’t understand.”

“It doesn’t matter now.” Anja spoke with a smile. “Retta chose him just as he chose her. Her father and her brothers will smell this on them both the instant they see them. Martin will welcome him after what he feels in Lazar. It is her brothers he will have to convince. Knowing Androcles though, that will not be hard.”

“How so?” Garget asked.

“Andro is the self-proclaimed guardian of his siblings.” Anja told them. “If Androcles accepts him, which I know he will, given what I can feel within Lazar, then our other children will accept him instantly. Do not worry. You will see for yourself.”

Loras smiled now her face happy and bright. “We will explain it to you Rylin. To both of you. I am still coming to grasp it myself but Anja says we will know more when the *Mard Revik* arrives.”

“He’s coming then?” Garget asked looking at her.

Anja nodded in response. “He pulsed me a single message just before they left the Etheric connection. He said one day; two at most and they would join us here.”

“They?” Garget asked.

Anja smiled and nodded her head. “Our family... Martin has a love of family that I have never experienced before. That we have never experienced before.” She answered. “You and Loras and Lazar, all of you... the Ranev Pack... you are now part of that family Garget. The Leonidas family can throw a party I’ll tell you that... and we have a lot to celebrate right now.” She stepped up to Garget and took his other arm since Rylin still grasped his elbow. “Let’s walk and I can tell you more. You will learn it first-hand anyway, so there is no reason to hold back from you. Not anymore.”

HADOR PRALOR SCIENCE STATION

“...Secure all of the main access hatches!” Thoti barked out the command. “No one is to go alone! Edrao how many of the station personnel are aware we are here?”

Edrao moved quickly to the computer console in the main control room for the station, his heart still racing and his eyes wide. The last fourteen minutes had been more intense than anything he had ever experienced in his long life as a Pralor, or his life now as a wolf. Their main ship was hovering only a few hundred meters from the station still under what they called a Shroud. The two transport ships they had come to the station on had also been shrouded, making them invisible to the Pralor technicians manning the station in the command center. It helped that Edrao knew that none of them were military and no one had ever attempted a forced landing on their station before. They were careless and inattentive. Colonel Thoti and those Spartans with him took advantage of that.

Their ships had landed on the massive exterior superstructure of the station, something that utterly terrified Edrao but also something that the Spartans thought very exciting. Once magnetically secured to the station’s outer hull they had cut their way through the thick metal and into the interior airlock. Since no pressurization had been lost, this entry went undetected to the horrified surprise of the seventeen men and women in the exterior corridor at the time, as well as the thirty-five technicians in the command center. When the sixty plus Spartans rushed into the Command Center all but three of them surrendered almost instantly. Those three were now dead, two shot cleanly through their foreheads, the third brought down by Thoti’s *Nehtes* which had extended and been thrown before Edrao even took notice. Edrao had recovered quickly from this shock and moved to a main computer station, his entire body shaking in a combination of adrenalin and fear as

the prisoners were secured. He almost didn't hear Thoti's question and he nearly jumped from his seat when he appeared next to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Easy my friend." Thoti spoke in a clam voice, causing Edrao to look at him in shock. "I take it you have never been on an operation like this?"

Edrao shook his head quickly. "Konlar... he... he refused to allow me to go on missions. He said I was too... I was too important."

Thoti nodded his head. "A sound tactical decision. Take a few breaths Edrao. We are here now and we must move swiftly."

Edrao nodded his head and did just as he said, taking three deep breaths which did seem to calm his nerves a great deal. "I will be... I will be fine?" He spoke.

"How many remain on the station and do they know we have taken their control center?" Thoti asked.

Edrao turned back to the computer and lifted his hands, beginning to type quickly. As he looked at the screens he shook his head. "No. I can detect no internal alarms anywhere." He looked at Thoti. "I believe we are undetected."

"How many personnel?" Thoti asked.

Edrao turned back to the computer. "It looks like... yes... three hundred and seventy-nine remain." He replied. "All but sixty-three are located within the upper decks of the station. Living quarters and such."

"And the other sixty-three?" Thoti asked.

"All of them are centrally located in what appears to be the two lowest research levels." Edrao told him. He looked closely at the monitors and then turned to Thoti. "Those levels are High Security Levels Thoti. That must be where they are..."

Thoti nodded his head. "Most likely." He spoke. "Can you disable the elevators from the upper station to the lower levels?"

Edrao nodded his head. "From here... yes." He answered. "We have access to all of the stations systems from here."

"Is there a secondary Command Center?" Thoti asked.

Edrao turned back to the monitor once more and typed several commands. He pointed to the screen and dragged it down the schematic of the station. "Six levels down from here." He answered. "A Secondary Command and Power control center. Blue Access Wing."

Thoti turned to one of the *Durcunusaan* who had accompanied them. "Take a team of six and secure that Secondary Control center." He spoke. "Disable all systems and hold there. If you happen upon station personnel, try to take them prisoner."

The Spartan nodded his head without question and then turned and began moving out of the room as he signaled others to follow him.

Edrao was going through the systems on the computer and locking out elevators. He looked up as Thoti turned back to him. "I have isolated the power conduits to that room." He said. "I will disable the interface between them and when your people disable the actual systems no one will be able to restore power."

Thoti nodded his head. "Excellent." He said. "Edrao... do you detect Svorag life signs on the station?"

Edrao shook his head. "They do not have a definitive life sign that can be tracked... but Thoti, I am detecting thirty-four life signs that exhibit both Lycavorian and Tasmor traits."

"Are there security cameras in that section?" Thoti asked now.

Edrao nodded his head. "Yes."

"Pull them up on the main monitor here." Thoti ordered as he stood up straight and then moved to the large monitor while Edrao worked.

"Coming up now." Edrao spoke.

Thoti watched as the monitor came to life and he could see several figures in the room wearing what could only be hazard material suits. What was impossible to miss were the dozen cryo chambers he could see just in this camera view, all of them containing changed Svorag and all of them in some sort of stasis. Thoti felt his chest burn with anger as he watched them moving back and forth between the pods and different consoles. He was about to turn and order Edrao to purge the research levels with poison gas when Edrao stopped him.

“Thoti look at this!” Edrao gasped pointing at the computer monitor. “Station Command logs.” Edrao continued as Thoti came up beside him. “This one is dated five days ago.” Edrao looked at him. “That is the day we cleansed the Svorag from Ventori.”

“Play it.” Thoti said.

Edrao hit a button on the console and the monitor changed to the face of an older Pralor man. Thoti looked over quickly at the body of the man who he had killed with his *Nehtes* and realized he had been the Commander of the Station.

“...intercepted transmission being beamed to Artaaya from Ventori. The fool Svorag Commander that Elder Lorendo has been communicating with ordered an all-out attack on the Lycavorians there but they had received reinforcements. A news crew from Artaaya was on scene and filmed it all. They used dragons and their troops and some kind of fire missiles to eradicate the underground facilities and all of the test subjects on Ventori. The sensor arrays we had hidden in those old satellites were blinded for several hours but when they came back online, they could detect no Svorag left on the planet. The Lycavorian animals slaughtered them all. The facilities were completely destroyed during the attacks and after, dragons were sent into the tunnels and they finished the job. I don't know how much data they were able to obtain from the computers, but if they discover we had a hand in helping the Commander engage in his own experiments on the Lycavorian survivors of Ventori and the Tasmor people, it will make things even more difficult going forward. Elder Lorendo and his personnel on Artaaya were able to escape before that idiot Delnash imposed a lockdown and they will proceed to the two other facilities and gather all the data and then come here after destroying them. This station is no longer viable and we will move to the main research facility on Tarlan. Elder Lorendo will be arriving in six days to take all of us off with our data and the specimens in the Research Section. We'll set the self-destruct for the station before departing. It will wipe any data or items that we do not take with us. The explosion will also poison the atmosphere of Hador, eliminating all of the Lycavorians on the surface within a matter of hours.

“Some of our staff were upset by this, but they are only Lycavorian animals and I was able to convince them it was for the best. We are trying to save our people and discover a way to beat the Scourge. That is the most important thing right now. We cannot afford to let our sensibilities stop us from completing this goal. I have tried to tell Elder Lorendo that these new Lycavorians are different. They are smarter, stronger and far more cunning than the ones we have dealt with before. Even the ones who are part of this ridiculous Coalition on the far side of this quadrant do not compare to these ones from the Alpha Quadrant. We must be very careful in what we do now. They have technology that equals our own in many ways and this leader of theirs, he is a great cause for concern if what the reports about him say are accurate. If he is descended from Chief Elder Sumar and he is a Praetorian, along with the other in his family, our lives will be much more difficult and we will need to take extra precautions to not be discovered.

“I have already informed the Main facility on Tarlan of our impending arrival and they will be standing by. Elder Lorendo will be here in six days and we can leave this forsaken place forever.”

Edrao looked at Thoti as the recording faded. “They... they have been working with the Svorag that destroyed our world!” He gasped. “They were going to destroy Hador and kill everyone!”

Thoti reached out and grabbed his arm. “Calm yourself Edrao.” He spoke quickly. “This recording only confirms what King Leonidas and Queen Anja have suspected for some time.”

“We still have people on Hador Thoti!” Edrao exclaimed. “They are in danger!”

Thoti shook his head. “No they are not my friend.” He spoke. “Because we are not going to destroy this station now.”

“What?” Edrao almost yelled.

“Did you catch the part where he said that *nubous ronnus* Lorendo is coming here Edrao my friend?” Thoti told him.

Edrao's eyes went wide as this hit him. “We capture him?!” Edrao almost shouted.

Thoti nodded his head. “Exactly.” Thoti spoke. “Go through the remaining logs after this one and try to get a more exact time when Lorendo will arrive here. We must work quickly. The *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* and *NORMYA'S LIGHT* have returned to Manne but they can be to our location in six hours if we need them. I will

contact King Leonidas and get his directives, but he will not let this opportunity pass by and he will not allow our people to die.”

Edrao nodded his head. “No... of course not.”

Thoti nodded his head. “And begin downloading anything that we can use. Establish a direct link to the *DAKOTA* and begin transmitting.”

Edrao looked at him. “They will know detect that immediately Thoti.” He spoke. “The Scientists in the research area are still linked into the computer system.”

Thoti thought quickly. “I will have the *DAKOTA* establish a low power jamming field around the station to stop any signals from going out so they cannot warn Lorendo. Can you vent poison into the cryo chambers from here?”

Edrao nodded his head. “It will take several moments to establish a link around what they have in place, but yes.”

Thoti nodded his head. “Do it. The moment you are ready we will take the Research Level and kill those vile monsters.”

“Then what?” Edrao spoke. “If Lorendo is coming here they will have pre-arranged signals to each other indicating all is ok.”

Thoti nodded once more. “Then we find someone who works in here and convince them to do what we say.”

“How do we do that?” Edrao asked. “They are all Pralors and they apparently don’t hold us in very high regard.”

“Perhaps I can change their mind.” Thoti said with a grin that exposed his wolf fangs as his eyes changed.

Edrao smiled now as well and nodded. “Go! I will find out what we need from here.”

LORENU THE CIRCLE

“Are you sure Thoti?” Martin asked. He stood in the Command Center of the Sanctum with Androcles, Wayonn and Murano now. Three QRC images were up along the side and Danny, Duewa, Anja, Radra and Delnash were in them. Thoti had been a member of his *Durcunusaan* detail on the Royal Spartan Estate dating back two decades and Martin trusted him completely.

All of them saw Thoti nod in the transmission. “There were far more Pralors working on this station that did not agree with what Lorendo was doing than he knew. They kept quiet and did their work because they feared that Lorendo would retaliate against their families. Three dozen of them are now helping us.”

“And you trust them Thoti?” Danny asked the question from Ventori.

Thoti nodded his head. “They were more than willing to help us and we could detect no hint of a lie in their bodies Daniel. They are sincere.”

“And fatso is coming there?” Anja asked from Jetania.

Edrao stepped into the transmission now. “I confirmed it Queen Anja.” He answered her. “With the help of those Pralor Researchers who are helping us we discovered his ship will arrive here in just under seventeen hours. Apparently they are at the second of two facilities and they are purging any sign that they were ever there.”

“Do you know where those facilities are?” Anja asked.

Edrao nodded again. “We have their locations.”

“Lover we need to eradicate those facilities.” Anja spoke immediately. “I mean we need to cleanse them completely. We can’t leave any trace of what they were doing there. Fatso and his people are blown now, they will be moving fast and they won’t be as thorough as we need to be.”

“Anja is correct Marin.” Duewa spoke with Radra beside her. “Even a small trace of the data or even tiny particles of the Svorag virus left alive could be potentially devastating in the future if someone inadvertently stumbles across it.”

“You’re just a bundle of good news Duewa.” Wayonn spoke now.

“Anja and Duewa are correct Wayonn.” Radra spoke up. “It needs to be done.”

“Send me the coordinates Edrao.” Delnash spoke for the first time. He looked tired in the transmission but everyone knew since the battle on Ventori had been broadcast live to all three of the Pralor planets he had been very busy. “I will send ships to do this.”

“Delnash we...” Martin began but he saw Delnash shake his head.

“You have too much going on and your ships are needed to protect Ventori and the gains we have made with the Tasmor people.” Delnash told him. “Dehov tells me that the officers and crews of his ships are enraged at what we have discovered.”

“How are our people taking it brother?” Murano asked him.

Delnash chortled slightly. “The remainder of the Elder Council wishes to string Lorendo up by his genitals.” He said very bluntly. “Even Sashan is enraged that he has been played and manipulated by Lorendo for so long. If he had not escaped before the lockdown went fully into effect, I doubt I could have stopped our people from killing him where they found him.”

“Their eyes have finally been opened.” Murano said softly.

Delnash nodded his head. “Indeed.” He said. “I was going to postpone the election, but the remaining Elder of the Council took it to our people without my knowledge two days ago. The election was held while I was sleeping and 27 advised me of the results when I woke the next morning.” Delnash looked at Martin. “I was elected to the position of Chief Elder of the Pralor people with ninety-eight point three percent of the vote.”

Martin nodded his head. “Congratulations sir.” He said.

Delnash looked at him intently. “I intend to lead just as your grandfather did Martin. I will do whatever I need to do in order to protect my people. Our people.”

“Brother you...” Murano began to speak but Delnash shook his head.

“No Murano.” He interrupted him. “We have hidden for so long in fear of the Scourge returning that we have forgotten who we are. I will no longer allow us to do that. I have ordered our Ship Builders to begin an accelerated building rate. With the help of the Avatars that we have and the Worker Drones, he tells me we can build a dozen warships a month in our three yards. I have also released the plans that you took from that abandoned Science Station and our engineers are already beginning to produce ground weapons. Garen is in the process now of training an additional four thousand volunteers to spread out and train even more. He asks that you separate some of your senior Spartans to assist in this Martin. If we are going to learn to fight once more, then I prefer it be from those who are warriors. Garen requested this so I ask if that is possible?”

Martin nodded his head without question. “Done.” Martin spoke. “*Fervon?*”

Danny nodded his head as well. “I’ll pick a dozen of our senior Spartans from here and put them on a ship to Artaaya tomorrow.”

“I will burst general Vengal on Earth tonight and have him dispatch a full training cadre from Earth and Apo Prime.” Martin spoke. “They can be to Artaaya within a week.”

Delnash nodded his head. “Excellent. Leave these two facilities to us.” Delnash looked at Anja in his end of the transmission. “Anja... your recommendation in how to do this so that we leave nothing to chance.”

Anja glanced at Martin in the transmission. “*Lover?*”

“Your call Red. This is yours and Duewa’s area.” Martin answered.

“Burn it Delnash.” Anja answered. “You have something similar to our nuclear weapons correct? They are ancient but they are very effective for this type of work.”

Delnash nodded his head. “I’m sure we have something compatible.” He replied.

“Drop one right on the facility and then four more on each of the four corners at the five-kilometer range.” Anja spoke. “That will ensure everything within that perimeter is vaporized. It’s the only way to be sure.”

Delnash nodded his head. “I will dispatch the necessary ships as soon as we get word that you have taken Lorendo.” He spoke.

Martin turned to Thoti in the transmission. “Thoti... we departing for Jetania in twelve hours. You bring that fat fuck to me there.”

“His condition Martin?” Thoti asked.

“As long as he is alive, I don’t care.” Martin replied. “He has a lot to answer for.”

“Martin do you not need him to translate the Onab texts?” Delnash asked now.

Martin shook his head. “No we have... we have solved that little problem.”

“Truly?” Delnash asked surprised.

Martin nodded his head now. “I will fill you in when we meet Delnash. We have... we have discovered a lot more than I ever thought and you need to be made aware of it.”

Delnash looked at him for a long moment and then nodded. “Interesting. I will be waiting for your word.” He said.

“Anja what about this station?” Thoti asked now. “Konlar’s people have not yet been able to evacuate everyone from Hador and according to the Pralor technicians here that are helping us, if we destroy the station it will poison the atmosphere of the planet.”

“How?” Anja asked.

“Lorendo had the station built with materials that will react negatively to the radioactive isotopes within the planet’s atmosphere that are normally harmless.” Edrao answered. “There is no way to counter this Queen Anja. The explosion will carry these particles into the atmosphere no matter what we do. Even a small portion could devastate massive parts of the planet and kill everything living on the surface.”

The room was quiet for a moment and all of them saw Anja deep in thought. She looked up finally. “Dee?” She asked.

“What other choice do we have Anja?” Duewa spoke.

“None.” Radra chimed in.

Martin looked at Anja. “You three want to fill the rest of us unknowledgeable mooks in.” He stated.

Anja looked up once more. “Thoti?”

“I am here Anja.”

“The Svorag that were on the station?” Anja asked him. “The ones the scientists were working on?”

“They are all dead.” Thoti answered instantly. “The Pralor scientists were not happy but after one of my men shot the senior Scientist, they quieted down.”

“You are certain?” Anja said.

Thoti nodded his head. “We used their hazard suits and incinerated the bodies and all the materials they had in their labs.”

“You have incendiary explosives?” Anja asked him.

“Yes.”

“Destroy everything husband.” Duewa spoke now. “Edrao has downloaded the all of the information stored in the databanks so now destroy what remains. The computers, the archives, the files, the equipment. Everything. We can build and properly staff a secure facility if we want to study this disease in the future and we can do it in a way that it will affect no one and put no one at risk.”

“Dee is right Thoti... if it does not compromise the integrity of the station Thoti, destroy it all.” Anja finished for her. “We’ll try to figure out a way to destroy the station itself after our people have all been relocated. Lirana has told me Hador is a beautiful planet and I don’t want to risk anything unless we can be sure.”

Thoti nodded his head in the transmission. “Consider it done Anja. My wife.” Thoti spoke in reply.

“Be safe my love.” Duewa spoke not caring that everyone heard her.

Thoti smiled at her. “Always.” He replied. “It has been too long since I have smelled and tasted...”

“Thoti!” Duewa exclaimed in shock cutting off his words.

Anja shook her head. “He’s been hanging around Martin too much Dee.” Anja said. “He turned him into a pervert just like him.”

This caused everyone to laugh softly within the transmission and Martin shook his head. “No respect.” He said. “I get no respect.” He crossed his arms over his broad chest. “Red, what about *Staan* Reva?”

Anja nodded her head. “From everything I have seen and what Eli has told me, it won’t be an issue Lover.” She replied to him. “It’s just a matter of stimulating her muscles and nerve functions again. It will take a little while for her to get used to it again, but I’m more concerned about her consciousness Marty. You are sure about what you know this machine can do?”

Martin nodded his head. "It was always Daniho's plan to have her returned to her normal self, he just did not think it would be so long before that happened. He hid the machine the Onab used to transfer her consciousness initially so that no one could find it. I know where it is."

Anja nodded her head. "I'll take your word for it." She said.

"The transference chambers do work Anja Leonidas. The Onab are the ones who gave us this technology initially. They perfected it." Radra spoke once more. "It is how we dealt with Xaxon and it is also how Arzoal came to be."

Anja nodded. "I know. It just gives me the creeps."

"Red?" Martin asked as he stepped a little closer to the transmission. "What's wrong?"

Anja looked up and met his eyes. "Something... something on this planet Lover." She said softly. "I can feel it just on the edge of my mind when I concentrate."

"Danger?" Martin asked her.

Anja shook her head quickly. "No. It's... it's somehow familiar to me in a way. I just can't explain it."

"We'll be there in twelve hours Red." Martin told her.

Anja nodded her head. "I know." She said. "Listen... there is something else you should know."

"I'm listening." Martin said.

"It has to do with Retta." Anja told him.

"We already know mother." Andro spoke for the first time moving up beside his father.

Anja looked at him. "Calyb told you?"

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "We could also feel our sister's happiness within us." He answered.

Anja looked at Martin. "Lover?"

"We all agreed a long time ago not to try and direct the lives of our children Red." Martin said. "Does he love her Anja? Beyond what his blood and instincts call for?"

Anja nodded her head. "The same way you love us." She told him.

Martin nodded his head. "Then that is all I can ask." He told her. "I can't exactly say she is too young now can I? In wolf terms she is a woman and far older than she looks thanks to my genes."

Anja's jade green eyes narrowed. "That's not what I expected." Anja said.

Andro looked at his father. "Nor I father." He said.

Martin smiled. "Let's just say I have it on good authority that things will work out fine." He said. "If they don't...?" Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Then I'll kill him."

Anja burst out laughing at the look on his face and shook her head. "Now there is the wolf I know and love." She said. She looked at Andro. "You make sure Sadi comes to see me when you get here. I am going to give her a full exam and make sure you did not corrupt her any more than you already have young man."

Androcles grinned. "Always mother."

"We'll see you in twelve hours, Lover." Anja said.

"We'll be there." Martin said.

Everyone in the Sanctum watched as the transmission ended and those in it faded away except for Thoti and Delnash. Thoti looked surprised that he was still connected and he looked at Martin.

"Martin?" He asked.

Martin turned to look at Delnash. "Delnash?"

"Colonel Thoti... those Pralors that you have captured and chosen not to work with you. How do they seem?" Delnash asked.

"They are quite hostile." He replied honestly. "They seem to be dire hard supporters of Lorendo and what he is doing. Why?"

"You have them secured?" Delnash asked.

Thoti nodded his head. "For the moment, yes." He replied. "They are locked within the living quarters portion of this station. I have two dozen *Durcunusaan* guarding the elevators and access points. Again... I ask why?"

"Colonel... those men and woman cannot be allowed to return." Delnash spoke softly. "They are complicit in the deaths of thousands of my people that we know of and perhaps millions of your people. Just one of them, if they escaped or were released, just one of them could start this all over again. I can't allow that."

Thoti looked at Martin in the transmission. "Martin?" He asked.

“He’s right Thoti.” Martin said. “You have confirmed that Lorendo and those people have been working with these Svorag ever since Lorendo lost control of them. None of them, aside from those who agreed to help you, none of them have showed the least bit of remorse in their actions correct?”

Thoti nodded his head. “No, they have not.” He said softly.

“The *anos* of millions of our people cry for justice. Thousands of Tasmor.” Edrao spoke softly beside him. “There can be no forgiveness here.”

Thoti took a deep breath and nodded his head. “I will take care of it.” He spoke finally.

“Colonel Thoti I will take responsibility if...” Delnash began.

Thoti shook his head. “You are correct Chief Elder Delnash.” He said. “As is my King. I will see to it.”

“I’m am sorry to put you in this position Thoti.” Martin said.

Thoti shook his head again. “Do not be Martin.” He replied. “I am a Spartan first and foremost and this crime against our people must have resolution and must never be allowed to happen again.”

“I will tell Duewa if you...” Martin began.

Thoti shook his head. “That is not necessary Martin.” He spoke. “My beautiful Duewa has fully accepted what she is now. Her time with Anja and the other Queens has seen to that. They have opened her eyes to this. She would expect me to do this. To see justice done.”

“Make it quick.” Martin said. “That is the only mercy to be shown Thoti.”

Thoti nodded his head. “Understood.”

“I am sorry Thoti.” Martin said softly.

Thoti looked at him in the transmission. “You do what you must Martin. No matter what tears at your heart and soul, you do what you must. That is why I follow you without question my King. That is why we all follow you.” Thoti stood up a bit straighter. “Once we have that rat faced *ronnus* we will join you on Jetania Martin.”

“*Cui fas vada carians* Thoti.” Martin spoke.

Thoti nodded one last time. “And you my King and my friend. Always.”

LORENU THE SANCTUM

Martin turned and looked at those in the room with him. Murano was the first to speak.

“It needed to be done Martin.” Murano stated. “There was no other way.”

“That doesn’t mean I have to like it.” Martin said.

“No father... it means that even though you don’t like it, you know it needs to be done and you do it.”

Androcles spoke now.

Martin looked at his son and nodded his head slowly. “Yeah.” He said. “You sure you don’t want this job?”

Andro recoiled as if he had been burned with a branding iron and he held up his hands. “*Nubou joa!*” He exclaimed.

Martin grinned at him. “Coward.” He said.

“In this case... yes... gladly.” Andro answered.

Wayonn moved closer to him. “What now Martin?” He asked.

“Now?” Martin asked. “Now I am going to take Aricia and For'mya and I am going to go into this city above us. I’m going to eat until I am ready to burst and I am going to spend time with my family. That is what I am going to do.”

Androcles nodded his head. “Fedor, Eirene and everyone else is already on their way down from *SPARTA’S WRATH* father. They will meet us in the city.”

Martin nodded his head once. “Good. Murano, you and Wayonn are part of that family and I expect you will join us. Believe me, we are going to need the down time because our future is going to get very exciting very quickly.”

Both men looked at him oddly. “What do you mean?” Wayonn asked. “What we have experienced these last months does not constitute exciting?”

Martin met his eyes and smiled, his eyes changing fully and his dual fangs extending to their full length. “Man... that doesn’t even come close to what is coming.” He answered. “Trust me when I tell you that.”

“Something tells me that you and Andro are privy to information that no one else has right now.” Wayonn pressed him. “Care to share that with us?”

Martin shook his head. “Not just yet.” He replied. “Soon though.”

“Why when you say that does the hair on the back of my neck stand up?” Murano asked.

Martin looked at him and grinned, the expression even more fierce looking since his fangs and eyes were changed. “Murano I’m hurt!” He spoke. “You know I am all peace loving and that I simply hate violence of any kind.”

Murano almost choked on his answer but Wayonn shook his head and answered for him. “As if anyone in their right mind would believe that *rensibfla*.” He muttered.

“Wayonn I am hurt.” Martin spoke.

Wayonn shook his head once more and looked at Murano. “Murano we should probably depart before the bullshit gets too deep and we are stuck here.”

“Agreed.” Murano said but with a smile.

Martin and Andro watched as the two men, two men that both father and son trusted without doubt, left the room. Martin looked at his son and shrugged his shoulders. “I guess they don’t believe me.” He said.

Andro grinned at his father as the previously hidden door opened and Chiron entered the room with them. Both turned to face the Avatar.

“Chiron?” Martin asked looking at him.

Chiron stopped and nodded his head. “The message has been sent Lord Martin.” He spoke.

“Our grandmother?” Martin asked him.

“We will disconnect the power couplings to her chamber just before we return to your ship.” Chiron spoke. “Armen has established a secure connection to the databanks here within the Sanctum as you requested and both of us will be able to access them at any time as long as this connection remains active. He has also reserved a large set of quarters where her chamber will be kept until we arrive on Jetania. I assumed that these will be her quarters after she is back among us so I have ordered all of her belongings brought there as well.”

“Good.” Martin said.

“Will you tell her of Lady Kelia and the others?” Chiron asked.

Martin shook his head quickly. “Not just yet.” He replied. “We need to find out more information first and I would like to speak with this Kesas Pengot as well if he responds.”

“May I ask why?” Chiron inquired.

Martin looked at Androcles and nodded. “Tell him.” He said.

Andro turned and face Chiron fully. “Something out there... where our people are? There is something wrong with all of that Chiron.”

Chiron’s head tilted slightly to the side. “I do not understand.”

“I feel it.” Andro told him. “There is more going on than we think.” Andro told him. “And until we know what that is... we need to move carefully.”

Chiron looked at him and then at Martin. “Ah... your *Rihtari ar wer Isk* sense tells you this.” He said. “I understand and it is interesting. Very well, given the information we do have caution is advised regardless.”

“Will you departing the Temple have any adverse effects?” Martin asked him.

Chiron shook his head. “I will activate my secondary body when we depart and all Temple defenses will transfer to his control.” Chiron answered. “Those you have designated will have unlimited access while we are gone, though nothing is to be removed from this location under any circumstances without yours or Androcles direct approval. I assume you wish to keep it like this for the foreseeable future.”

Martin nodded his head. “Until we have a better idea of what is going on, yes. Just Andro and me for right now.”

“And if something should happen to you or to Androcles or both of you are unable to be reached?” Chiron asked. “Who is the safeguard individual?”

Martin looked at his son, who met his eyes, and Martin saw him nod his head. Martin reached out with his hand and took the P1 that Chiron carried on his belt. He typed quickly on the screen since it was not biometrically encoded as theirs were and then handed it back. Chiron looked at the small screen and they saw his eyes widen slightly, and then return too normal just as quickly.

Chiron typed on the P1 briefly, deleting the information and then he returned the hand held computer to his belt. "I will see to it." He said.

Martin nodded. "Good. *Keto*, let's go spend some time with our family before we blow this joint. I want to get to your mother as quickly as possible. I didn't like the tone of her voice and I certainly don't trust that pin head who calls himself a King."

"He is still in the dark as to what has taken place father." Andro said.

Martin nodded his head. "Let's hope so..." He spoke as they began to walk out of the Sanctum. "...Because if so much as one freckle on her body is out of place I'm going to bring it all down right on top of his *mida*. It will be a nightmare he won't wake up from."

PAKAR SIX UNKNOWN SPACE

He had been alive far longer than he had ever imagined, seen and experienced things that would stagger the minds of so many of their young people, and yet he was as healthy now as he was the day he left Cerath so long ago. So many millennia ago that he no longer kept count of the years. There was no need to keep count, for his purpose was the same as it had been the day Daniho Mahanlo took the throne as King and became a leader that everyone had loved. Well... almost everyone he had come to realize too late.

Kesas Pengot did not know exactly how old he was, nor did he care. He did know about the thousands of young Alphas that held a contest every year to see who could guess his age and he thought this very amusing. He was certainly the oldest Lycavorian on Pakar Six, though you would not know it by his activities. His first mate, a female wolf he had loved for nearly sixty thousand years on Cerath, had perished during the Schism, killed by assassins as they tried to kill him and Lady Kelia's children. It had taken Kesas nearly two hundred thousand years to finally put her memory to rest and move on with his life. His second mate, a stunning young Alpha female with a stubborn streak as long as the many caverns on this planet, had revitalized his life and his purpose. They had been together for over a million years now, devoted to one another and their nine children even though he was at least two million years her senior in age.

Acki Pengot stared at her beloved husband and mates' back for a long moment before interrupting his thoughts. This difference in their ages had never matter in the least to Acki Pengot. She knew full well who he was when she first pulsed him with her aura all those years ago. She had not regretted that event for even a single hour. Others called her foolish and silly for not finding a young Alpha to mate with, but Acki did not listen to them. To this day her love for him remained as strong as it was that first moment.

Her dark brown hair fell to well below her shoulders, framing a very beautiful face and bright blue eyes. Acki Pengot was now one of the oldest females on Pakar Six, but her beauty still shone through, and her husband and mate let her know this fact every time they made love, which was quite often Acki recounted with delight. She found great joy in the fact that Kesas was just as virile as the young Alpha studs that roamed Pakar Six, and to the stunned surprise of the younger females, she took every chance to join in their conversations about their husbands and mates to brag about them.

"Are you going to stare at my back woman, or come into the room!" Kesas grumbled out the question as he rose to his feet and turned to face her.

Acki smiled brilliantly and moved into the room. "You looked deep in thought." She told him. "I did not want to disturb you."

Kesas smiled as she came right up to him and he took her hands in his, pulling her close to him and looking down into her blue eyes. "A disturbance by you is always welcome *aur enyla*." He spoke the words softly.

Acki blushed slightly as she always did when he spoke in such a way to her and she leaned up on tip toes and kissed him softly. "You did not hear the Duty Officer call for you so I said I would come down and get you."

Kesas nodded his head. "I had the intercom turned off." He told her. "I just wanted a few moments of silence."

Acki looked at her husband and mate. A million years and counting had taught her to read him very well and she reached up with her hand and placed it on his cheek. "What is it Kesas?" She asked him softly. "*Forn ulyess laess.*" (You look troubled)

Kesas Pengot had long ago stopped trying to hide from her. She had threatened to leave him once because he would not share himself with her fully. The argument had frightened many of those who lived in nearby apartments and security had come to their wing in order to stop the argument, but by the time they arrived, Kesas had come to his senses and realized he did not want to lose this stubborn and beautiful female wolf who loved him completely. It had taken time, but now Kesas shared everything with her as it should be.

"I don't know Acki." Kesas answered. "I awoke this morning with... a feeling grips me Acki. Something I have not felt for more years than I can remember. It is why I did not join you for breakfast."

Acki nodded her head. "Our children wondered about that." She said. "Can you... can you describe it *aur huor*?" (My husband)

Kesas shook his head. "That's just it. It is within me. It has always been there but now a description fails me."

"You have always been intuitive Kesas." Acki told him.

"This is different though." Kesas spoke. He shook his head and squeezed her hands. "It will come to me." He told her. "What did the Duty Officer want?"

Acki shook her head. "He didn't say." She answered. "Only that you join him in the Operations center as soon as possible. Caylt and Yasha have already joined him there."

Kesas looked at her oddly. "Why?"

Acki smiled. "They are the leaders of our security force regardless of how small it is." She said. "It is their duty."

Kesas nodded his head and drew her closer to him, lowering his lips to hers and enjoying a long, loving kiss with her. Her hands caressed his face as they kissed and finally they drew apart and she smiled at him.

"Then you will join us for lunch." Acki said. "Your grandchildren wish to show you the project they have completed for school."

Kesas nodded his head. "I will be there." He told her. "Another school project?" He spoke as they turned arm in arm and left their quarters. "What are they teaching them in the schools these days. This is like their fifth project this year."

Caylt and Yasha Pengot turned when their father entered the large Operations center with a measured gait. They were the oldest of their father's nine children, four boys and five daughters. Caylt Pengot and Yasha Kirek were two years apart in age but had always been very close as siblings. They had taken mates only two days apart, and now their families shared almost everything together. Both of them were nearing six hundred thousand years of age, but looked no more than their middle forties. Both Caylt and Yasha also knew that nothing ever perturbed their father, and he could remain calm in even the most chaotic of times.

"Father!" Yasha spoke as she reached for him and they exchanged cheek kisses as had become the custom in their family over the last few millennia.

Kesas smiled brightly at her beauty, so much like her mother. "Your mother came and kicked me out of bed." He said with a grin.

Caylt Pengot laughed slightly. "Somehow I doubt that father." He said as he grasped his father's hand. "You have been waking before all of us for over half a million years."

Kesas chuckled. "And look what that has gotten me?" He stated. "More white hair and wrinkles."

"Your hair is far from white father." Yasha told him.

Kesas squeezed her hand and looked at his son. “So what is so important that the Duty Officer needs to see me?” He asked. “You are in charge of Internal Security Caylt. Yasha and Tiag Kirek handle everything else. What do you need me for?”

Caylt nodded his head and looked at the young wolf who stood the side by the computer station. “Tell him what you told us Captain.” He spoke. “And leave nothing out.”

Kesas looked at his son oddly and then turned to the young Alpha. Kesas recognized him from several briefings he had attended through the years but he did not know him well.

Life on Pakar Six was not easy for anyone. Their population was spread between three major mountain cities connected by an advanced tram system they had built from scratch. The planet, while able to support life, did not allow for extended living on the surface. The electric storms and acid rains could kill you within minutes, and the winds sometimes exceeded three hundred kilometers an hour. Even the natural wildlife did not venture out during these storms. The mountains provided the best protection and it was here that the Kirek Pack settled after the Schism.

Kesas did not think of those days very often now. They were a low point in the history of their people that he did not care to recall. Very few who had survived the schism remained alive now. The Arhtai and Nenay Packs had joined forces against the Kirek pack in a revolt that had seen so many deaths. The Matriarch of the Arhtai Pack had been a thorn in Daniho’s side even on Cerath and she simply bided her time until she could act. It began because the Arhtai Pack wanted to keep the Onab technology they had, even though all of them had agreed to destroy it once they had arrived here in order to keep the Iais’Kai from finding them. Kesas did not know what Yatia Arhtai had told the Nenay pack in order to get them to side against Lylor and Kelia. Whatever she had promised them did not bear fruit as eventually the Nenay Pack was ordered to leave Koltar Four and they settled on Anlar Prime. Once she had absolute control, Yatia Arhtai made certain things went her way.

Lylor and Kelia Kirek were captured along with their children and while Yatia knew she could not kill them, for the Mahanlo bloodline was still sacred to many of their people, she imprisoned them in their stasis chambers saying they had contracted a deadly disease and this was the only way to save them while their doctors tried to find a cure. Kesas and the Kirek Pack knew this was a lie and when Yatia announced that Kelia had left her in charge to lead in her absence, they acted. Yatia immediately declared the Kirek Pack enemies of their people and civil war broke out. Pitched battles raged for two decades across the planet but it wasn’t until a daring mission led by Kesas was able to liberate Lylor Kirek’s stasis chamber and three of their children threw everything into chaos. Yatia’s son was killed in this battle and Kesas Pengot decided she had gone insane with power.

Yatia Arhtai ordered the Kirek pack enemies of the state and called for their execution on sight. She also declared that anyone with Mahanlo blood within them had been corrupted by the same disease that afflicted Lady Kelia and needed to be captured and held for medical treatment and supervision. If they refused they were to be executed for putting their people and the future in danger. Somehow Yatia’s scientists had discovered a way to track those with Mahanlo blood even in hiding. Kesas suspected something but he had never been able to prove it and no one truly believed him enough to discover if this was the case.

Over the next fifty years, anyone with Mahanlo blood was systematically hunted down and killed while the Kirek Pack was slowly exterminated as well. The final straw came when Yatia ordered the deaths of Lylor and Kelia’s three children that she still held captive. She told everyone that the disease had claimed them which only strengthened her hold on the other Pack leaders. She privately reached out to threatened Kesas with Kelia’s life as well and swore to completely annihilate everyone of Kirek blood if they did not bend to her will and leave Koltar Four. By now Yatia’s Pack had all but convinced the others that what she was doing was for the good of their people and the Nenay Pack fell in line with few exceptions.

The Kirek Pack had very nearly been wiped out and they could no longer sustain an active fight against her tyranny. Kesas insured Lylor his three children remained in stasis for their protection. He could not risk them being discovered by whatever Yatia had developed that could track their blood. With Lylor and Kelia not able to speak, leadership of the Kirek Pack fell to him, and though they wanted to remain and fight, he took them off Koltar Four and fled to Anlar Prime. That move last only three hundred years before Yatia gave Anlar Prime to the Nenay Pack and forced them to retreat to the only planet left in the system.

Pakar Six.

The world was now their home and they had done what the Kirek Pack had always done. They survived and did what they needed to do in order to survive. Many things were different now, they had to be careful of how many children they had because of the resources, but they had survived and they had moved past those days.

Kesas knew that Yatia had spies among those from the Nenay Pack that had come here and joined the Kirek Pack, but Lylor and his children were hidden away where only he and four others knew, their stasis chambers safe. One day they would return and take Kelia back from Yatia Arhtai and her Pack would pay for their betrayal. Kesas knew she strong armed the Nenay Pack into following her, threatened them even, and that is why she expelled them to Anlar Prime.

When the day came, Kesas Pengot would see to it that everyone would face justice.

Kesas brought his mind back and looked at the young officer. "Captain?" He asked.

"You are aware that we monitor many communications channels Lord Kesas? As many as we are able in order to predict what the Arhtai Pack may attempt." The young man said.

Kesas nodded his head. "Yes. Fool that Yatia is, she did not know that the Kirek Pack was the only Pack that the Onab trained in building our own technological advances." He said. "Lord Daniho wanted it this way so that we could develop our own equipment. They still rely on what we brought with us and what they did not destroy."

The Captain nodded his head. "Yes sir. While not Koltar Four, Pakar Six has an abundant supply of raw materials to do just that. Our communications are far superior to them now. They have no one with the knowledge to maintain the Onab equipment and much of it has fallen into disrepair."

"Which is why they have spies among us." Kesas said nodding his head. "I know this. Now what is it that I need to see?"

The Captain looked flustered and Caylt smiled at his father's gruff nature. Kesas Pengot was not known for beating around the subject. He wanted details up front. "Captain... forget the history and just tell my father what you have discovered. He among us knows better than anyone what has taken place."

The Captain nodded. "Forgive me Lord Kesas."

Kesas shook his head and dismissed the apology with a wave of his hand. "None needed Captain. I am just a grumpy old wolf these days. Continue please."

The Captain nodded and motioned to the main star chart table and all of them moved to stand around the table. "Late last evening our communications team discovered an odd signal being beamed to Pakar Six from the edge of the system. They thought it was a reflection from standard intercepts from Koltar Four and filed it as such."

Kesas looked at him. "Odd how?"

"It is why I investigated further when I came on duty this morning." The Captain spoke as he brought up the image of the entire system on the map. "The signal is too powerful to be a reflection Lord Kesas, even at the low power frequency it is using. And the carrier wave is also far too advanced to be a reflection."

Kesas saw the direction of the communications beam. "A ship?" He asked.

"No sir." The young man answered. "It is being transmitted on a sub space carried wave I have never seen before, but it is most definitely not a ship. Our long range sensors would have detected a ship." He adjusted the holographic image and Kesas saw the carried wave take shape in front of him. His eyes grew wider and he stood up straight.

"*Carians!*" Kesas gasped.

"Father! What is it?" Yasha exclaimed moving up beside him.

"When did this start?" Kesas demanded.

"Late last evening Lord Kesas." The Captain replied. "It has been repeating every four hours since."

"No one thought to listen to the carrier wave?" Kesas demanded.

"No sir. As I said they thought it to be a reflection."

"That is no reflection!" Kesas stammered. "That is a Pralor sub space communications wave!"

Caylt's eyes grew a little wider now. "Pralor?" He asked. "Father are you sure?"

Kesas nodded his head. "Yes. Daniho did not trust Onab carrier waves to send messages after we left Cerath. He was afraid that the Iais'Kai may have figured out a way to intercept them and they would track them to us. One of his last orders was to use the Pralor sub space transmission waves once we left. They were far

more random and secure than what the Onab used. It is one of the main reasons that we began trading with them in the first place once we discovered they existed. Most Onab technology was superior, but there were items that the Pralor people had created that were much better. We had exchanged with them for this technology fifty years before we left Cerath.”

Yasha looked at the Captain. “Is there a chance that this is an old transmission Tomar?” She asked him. “Something that has finally found its way across the galaxy?”

The Captain shook his head. “No, Lady Yasha.” He replied. “Given the low power of the of the wave and its direction, this transmission is very new and it is being beamed directly at Pakar Six on purpose. This is not an old transmission. This just started and it was done purposefully.”

“How long is it?” Kesas asked.

“Only four seconds Lord Kesas.” Tomar answered. “But it repeats every four hours as I said.”

“Four seconds?” Kesas spoke softly. “Can you decipher it?”

“I have not opened it Lord Kesas.” He answered. “I wanted to make sure that it was not some sort of electronic Trojan horse being sent by the Arhtai Pack. I thought it might be something new that they had developed.”

Kesas shook his head. “Impossible.” He spoke. “Yatia’s scientists are idiots compared to ours. Even after all this time they have not been able to reverse engineer the Onab technology! They are fools. Open it.”

“Father are you sure?” Caylt asked him now.

Kesas looked at him. “The only individuals who ever interacted with the Pralor people during our exchanges were the Onab and Lylor and Kelia *keto!* Daniho and Ashten allowed no one else to conduct these trades. Only they and Lady Reva knew of the meetings that took place and what information we exchanged with them. You have seen the prophecies just as I have.”

“We all have father.” Yasha told him. “Everyone on Pakar six knows the prophecies. You and mother have never allowed us to forget them. It is part of who we are.”

“Then what?” Kesas said.

“It has been... it has been so long father.” Yasha said softly. “Is it even... is it even possible that...”

“Open it Tomar.” Caylt Pengot spoke causing his father and sister to look at him. He met their gazes. “If there is ever a chance, no matter how slim, then I will take it.” He turned back to Tomar. “Open it Tomar. On my authority.”

Tomar nodded his head and began typing on the computer console. “Focusing carrier wave and preparing for deciphering.” His eyes narrowed as he worked and Kesas looked at him.

“What is it?” He asked.

“It is strange Lord Kesas.” Tomar spoke. “The message is... it is only three words and an image of some kind.”

“Display it Captain.” Kesas spoke.

“Yes sir.” He said. “Displaying now.”

The image appeared above their heads in the holo and their reaction was immediate and telling. Kesas stumbled back from the table, grabbing for his son’s arm as Yasha brought her hands to her open mouth in shock.

“*Son hote lon evell nysil saoi!*” Caylt Pengot’s words burst from his mouth as he struggled to hold his father upright. (By all that we hold holy)

The image was unmistakable to all of them. It was something that all of them had learned as children and then passed down to their own children throughout the millennia. It was the core of their belief as a Pack.

It was also something none of them ever expected to see outside the walls of their three cities. The head of the huge black furred wolf. A wolf with eyes of yellow gold. The intricate lines encircling the head of the wolf in different shades of blue and green and brown.

“Father!” Yasha almost yelled. “Father that is...!”

Kesas gripped his son’s arm tightly, his eyes wide and suddenly becoming moist at what they saw.

“Yes!” He exclaimed. “The crest... the crest of the Mahanlo Bloodline!”



We are coming

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

JETANIA WARIM

Juyno Aspion sat at the large table with his five friends as they devoured the thick and delicious steaks and large potatoes without much in the way of manners. Huge mugs of potent wine were beside the plates and the six young men ate as if they hadn't eaten in weeks. Juyno looked up as he chewed his meat and let his eyes wander around the interior of the café they had come to upon arriving in Warim. Most of the tables inside were full, the men and women eating and minding their own business and only occasionally looking over in their general direction. Juyno Aspion smiled to himself thinking that they were fearful of him, when in reality no one present would have stopped him from choking to death on his food.

Juyno enjoyed these trips, first because of the ideal prospect of finding a Mountain Pack female in Phase and taking her. Mountain Pack females were cherished by Alpha males across Jetania for their exotic beauty and their resilience. Most of them were closer to their instincts than the Plains females and they were known as totally uninhibited wives and mates in the beds of their husbands. They were not docile females like the female Alphas of the Plains Packs. It was a badge of honor and high accomplishment for a Plains wolf to be able to find and take a Mountain Pack female in Phase and then have children with her. Juyno also went on these trips because he liked to flaunt the power of his name and his father. He was the oldest son of King Osrod of the

Coalition and a Prince, and this fact alone demanded that he received respect and attention. Juyno Aspion's mother Secha was the First Queen of the Coalition, a female Alpha who had come from one of the larger Plains Packs and was not a normal Plains female. She was strong and intelligent and she hated the Mountain Pack females with a fervor bordering on fanaticism.

When his father had taken Loras Ranev as one of his Queens, his own mother had been incensed and her hatred of the Mountain Packs had grown even more. When Lazar had been born, his mother Secha did everything in her power to make it difficult for Loras to care for the boy but she failed, mainly because Osrod ensured Loras had everything she needed. Lazar was Osrod's only child with Loras and his single connection to the Mountain Packs even though Lazar secretly hated his father.

Juyno loathed his half-brother Lazar with every fiber of his being, mainly because Lazar was everything Juyno was not. Lazar was a typical Mountain Pack Alpha, tall and extremely well built and powerful. He was also a leader of men. Those under his command were loyal and steadfast to him in every way and therefore his father had to have spies put among his crew to keep him under observation. Juyno knew that of his father's six children, he feared Lazar the most. Juyno had made a dozen of these trips in the hopes of discovering and then taking a Mountain Pack female. So far he had been unsuccessful. The Mountain Pack Alphas were very good at shielding their young females from him and others like him, and in the last few years barely a handful of Plains Alphas had succeeded in this. Surprisingly, they had been accepted into the Mountain Packs because of their devotion to the females they had claimed. One of the most defined differences between the Mountain and Plains Packs females was that once mated to a male, they remained together for life unless they chose to part ways. Among the Plains Packs it was very common for mated females who came into Phase to be taken by other males who were searching for mates. The male could do nothing about this by Plains Pack law and usually those males simply went out and found another female.

Juyno didn't understand any of this Mountain Pack fuss because females were simply a trophy as far as he was concerned. To be used and directed by the whim of their mate. Juyno had also come out here on this trip with a single goal. Since all births must be registered with the government, Juyno had used his position to force the duty officer to allow him to check the Main Birth Registrar before leaving the capital, for he had one thought in mind. He was going to take a Mountain Pack Alpha female that would give him status and power. He discovered that Taris Ranev had come into Phase and if he could claim the only daughter of Garget Ranev, his influence would surpass even Lazar's. It was well known that the Mountain Pack females often went into the mountains surrounding their homes during Phase to test themselves against the elements. This was something they did as part of a ridiculous female tradition to make them more suited as potential mates. It also served, unfortunately for them in some cases, to spread their aroused female scent around the entire area for miles to entice males. Taris Ranev was within the peak of her phase now and Juyno and his men had detected two such scents in the mountains around Warim the moment they had come into the area. It had to be Taris Ranev and another very powerful Alpha female from what Juyno could tell and he had every intention of finding her and making her his.

Juyno's mission was twofold however, the second part coming from a directive by his mother to him. The rumors that Loras Ranev still lived had been circulating and growing more frequent in the Plains cities in recent years and this was beginning to anger his mother. She wanted him to discover if there was truly any truth to these rumors, for if his father had failed to kill Loras when he had Warim assassinated it could bring trouble in the future. Getting this information from Lazar or any who were close to him and might have this knowledge was next to impossible Juyno knew. Lazar's friends would never betray him or this knowledge if they were aware of it, even under threat of death or riches. Juyno considered himself skilled enough to find out on his own just by observing people and their actions around him. He thought too highly of his skills really, but so far he had detected no odd actions since arriving in Warim aside from the fact that Garget had not yet made an appearance. This was odd since Garget Ranev made it a point to greet any Plains Alphas who came to his brother's city and the large territory surrounding it to make sure they knew what they could do and get away with. And, to inform them not to cross the invisible line, for that meant they were subject to Mountain Pack Law, which was very brutal and very swift for males who overstepped their boundaries. Juyno did not understand that the Mountain Packs held their females in a much higher status than did the Plains Packs. They were given much more say in how they lived their lives and who they mated with. They were also much better

educated in many cases since the Mountain Packs were the only Packs on Jetania to allow their females to attend higher schooling.

Looking around Juyno could smell the distaste and mistrust for him and his men from the others within the café. Why his father didn't just order his men to swoop in and wipe out all but the females was beyond him. He had never been very good at the politics of different things and he thought brute force could solve everything. His head turned when the door to the café opened and the large form of Garget Ranev filled the doorway as he walked in with three other Alpha males, all younger, but stern faced and large. He was late Juyno thought to himself, he usually showed up immediately, but this time he had waited. No doubt he had heard they were coming, somehow the Mountain packs always knew they were in the area, and the head of the Pack or city greeted them almost instantly after arriving. Almost two hours had passed since they had arrived in Warim and this was practically unheard of for Garget Ranev. Juyno watched as Garget moved casually to the owner of the café and they spoke in whispers before he looked over to where they sat and Garget made his way over to them.

Juyno sat up a little straighter as he approached. "Garget Ranev!" He spoke loudly so that his voice carried across the interior. "A pleasure once more."

"Juyno Aspion." Garget spoke as he stopped beside his chair.

"That is Prince Aspion to you, old man!" One of Juyno's men hissed as he looked up from stuffing his face. Dyos Jemor had never come on this type of hunt before as he was still very young and he was unfamiliar with the Mountain Packs and their ways. Dyos was the youngest brother to Sitos, one of Juyno's closest friends and that is why he was here now. The Jemor Pack was a very influential Plains Pack and a powerful supporter of his father and that is why Juyno tolerated him. Juyno decided to let him find out the hard way since it would be very amusing and Sitos had not stepped in already.

Garget ignored the seemingly arrogant young Alpha and continued to look at Juyno. "I trust you had no troubles in our mountains." Garget asked him.

Juyno smiled at him. "None." He replied in a voice that dripped with sarcasm and the hidden meaning. "We are quite capable of taking care of ourselves and dealing with any potential trouble with the local wildlife."

Garget smiled back and nodded his head. "I'm sure you are." He spoke. "How long will you be staying here in Warim?"

"I haven't decided just yet." Juyno answered. "It appears one of your famous Mountain Lightning Storms is moving into the area so we will take shelter here at night. A day, perhaps two. Is that satisfactory with you?"

"Juyno why do you answer these questions?" Dyos questioned now. "We do not answer to this old man! We..."

Dyos Jemor never saw the large fist that connected with the side of his face. Garget's hand had moved faster than he could see and suddenly stars filled his eyes and the world spun around in circles. He felt someone grab the back of his head and was unable to stop Garget from slamming his face into the top of the table right in the middle of his half-eaten dinner. His head bounced off the table and blackness washed over him as he slumped out of the chair to the floor. Sitos rose now to defend his brother but Garget lifted his hand and pointed at him.

"I would not do that." Garget growled as the three Alphas who had entered the café with him moved closer to the table.

"He is my brother!" Sitos snarled.

"Then you should have schooled him in simple manners! You know the rules Sitos Jemor. You have been coming with him for many years. Perhaps you should have told your younger brother! Now he will sit out his time here in a holding cell until you decide to leave!" Garget snapped.

"For what?!" Sitos barked.

Garget shrugged his shoulders. "I will figure something out by morning! Now, sit down boy, before you join him on the floor!" Sitos glanced quickly at Juyno and saw him nod his head. Slowly he returned to his chair and Garget looked back to Juyno. "You should have warned him."

Juyno shrugged. "He needs to learn." He answered.

"Mind your place while in our territory Juyno Aspion." Garget warned. "You may be the King's son, but you are not above Mountain Pack law. Remember that."

Juyno nodded his head. "Of course."

Garget motioned to two of his men and they bent down to pick up the limp form of Dyos. “You can retrieve him when you depart our city for good. Now he will remain in custody.”

“You still have not told me why.” Juyno snapped as he sat forward.

Garget looked at him and nodded. “How about we start with stupidity.” Garget snapped right back. “He disrespected an Alpha thirty times his age. Per Mountain Pack law that is a mandatory sentence of a week in a holding cell.”

“A week!” Sitos exclaimed.

Juyno held up his hand to his friend and looked at Garget. “I have never heard of such a law.” He said.

Garget nodded his head. “I just made it up.” He replied. “To honor you.” Garget looked at his men and motioned with his head and they began to carry the unconscious Dyos toward the door. He turned back to Juyno. “He will be well cared for while you enjoy your trip don’t worry. Far better than he will be in your hands no doubt.”

“My father will hear of this.” Juyno said.

Garget nodded his head. “You seem to be of the mind that I care.” Garget spoke. “I do not. Do not overstep your bounds young wolf..” Garget told him. “You will not like the response you receive.”

“Is that a threat?” Juyno asked.

Garget shook his head. “A statement of fact.” He replied before turning and heading for the door leaving Juyno sitting there simmering in anger. He left the café and stopped outside in the cool night air and took a deep breath. He looked at his men holding Dyos between them. he reached out and lifted his head by his hair and stared at the handsome young face. Garget could smell the strength in this one, unlike his older brother and those he chose to associate with.

“Sir?” One of his men asked. “They will undoubtedly contact the Jemor Pack about this.”

Garget nodded his head. “No doubt. Let them, Osrod will allow them do nothing.”

“What do you wish us to do with him?”

Garget gently lowered his head back down. “This one might yet be saved.” He spoke. “He is still young and influential. And he is very strong and sturdy, unlike his brother.” Garget took a deep breath. “Confine him at the West Security Station. I will have my mate tend to him in the morning.”

“Yes sir.”

Garget watched as they began to carry him away and he looked at the third man with him. “Ettaso... make sure they are watched.” Garget spoke. “They are not here just to try and claim one of our females. Juyno Aspion is also here for something else, I just don’t know what that is right now.”

“Understood sir.” The young man spoke.

Lazar Aspion/Ranev stood in front of the mirror in the small bathroom in his quarters and tried to reflect on what had taken place these last hours. Lazar had never once seen himself in this position in the nearly three hundred and fifty years he had been alive. He was a wolf pup compared to many when it came to age he knew, but he had worked hard for everything he had right now, against odds that were always heavily tilted to make him fail. In all that time, what he felt coursing through him now had never been a factor.

Now it was.

Lazar knew the reason for his harsh treatment as he was growing was Juyno’s mother Secha, for she had hated him since the day he was born and his mother for far longer. It had only gotten worse when Secha discovered his mother had apparently been killed in an accident. Lazar knew the truth behind it but he kept his silence and continued to tolerate the abuse for it protected his mother. His father Osrod had four Queens once more, but Secha was the First Queen and therefore the one who controlled the others. She decided when they slept with his father, when they gave birth to more children, every facet about their lives was directed by her and she was a *upae* of the highest degree. Lazar knew Nitona and Aruina hated this foul arrangement but they could do nothing about it while Risi was close friends with Secha and therefore the two of them made sure they monopolized the King’s carnal attentions. Nitona most especially hated it, for she was the youngest of his father’s Queens and Secha constantly demeaned her and forced her to do all sorts of things in order for her to maintain her status as Queen. Nitona was from a smaller Plains Pack with almost no influence or power and

only a colossal accident gone wrong had propelled Nitona into her position. Something Nitona had no control over. Without Secha's support behind the scenes none of the other Queens would be allowed to do anything. Nitona had not even been allowed to have a child with his father yet, Risi and Aruina only one each. He felt sorry for all of them for he doubted his father even knew what Secha did to control them.

The respect Lazar had garnered over the years had been because of what he had done on his own merits and not because of his father, unlike Juyno and his father's other children with his four Queens. Yet right now, at this moment in time, none of that mattered to him. All his focus was on the supple figure of the young woman who occupied his bed and had freed his soul. Lazar gripped the edge of the sink, and stared at the mirror. In the last hours, he felt more alive than he ever had before. His body surged with unrealized power and clarity and it felt good.

He had taken Retta to the large Mess area of the base where Rhaos and his half brothers and sisters from Loras' union with Warim joined them surprisingly. He loved each of them and there had never been a distinction made about who their fathers were. All that mattered to them was that they were siblings. Rhaos had been with him through it all, just like Laon, and that was a friendship that you did not dismiss. Lazar thought it might be a bit much for Retta to absorb, but he could only watch with pride and awe as she fell into the role of his wife and mate like it had always been meant to be. She was not shy or soft spoken in the least and she laughed with Rhaos and his siblings heartily while sharing stories of her own childhood and getting her twin brother Calyb into trouble. Not once did she allow her body to not be touching his in some way, and this was something that Lazar's siblings had detected right away and they would pass this on to others so that no young female tried to claim what was no longer available.

When they finally returned to his quarters, they had made love with such intensity and passion that it had stunned both of them. There was no denying it, both of them could feel the burning of their blood within them for each other, and now neither of them fought it. It had been the most incredible desire and fervent need that Lazar had ever experienced and only Retta could sate that need. It lasted until neither of them could rise from the bed, so exhausted as they were. Retta had simply curled into his embrace and Lazar drew her to him protectively and then they both fell asleep.

Lazar had awakened only a short time ago, by what he did not know. As he stood in front of the mirror everything seemed so much more clear. His senses were alive like they had never been before and he could almost feel the newfound power within him. He stared at the mirror, tilting his head oddly as he noticed something and he leaned closer still, reaching up and using his fingers to lift his upper lip. His eyes grew wider when he saw the tip of an additional fang next to his main incisor fang. He began to lean closer when Retta's voice stopped him.

"Lazar?"

Lazar turned quickly and saw her standing there, holding only the single sheet around her delicious body loosely. "Retta?"

"What... what is wrong?" She asked him.

"Nothing. Why?"

Retta shook her head. "No." She said moving up to him. "The back of your left shoulder. That was not there before."

Lazar turned his head, trying to look over his shoulder and finally he looked back into the mirror and saw the incredibly detailed tattoo. His eyes grew wide when he saw this, for while he had several tattoos on his body, this was not one he had done.

"*Atle vada jorbhe!*" He exclaimed. (What the hell)

Retta moved up to him and stood on his side as she lifted her hand and ran her fingers over the tattoo. "*Una coi ter zoit.*" Retta spoke. (It is not new)

Lazar saw her shift her body in the mirror and then he saw it on her left shoulder blade. "Retta!" He exclaimed once more turning and reaching around to grasp her shoulder and look at the exact same tattoo on her left shoulder. The head of a large black furred wolf with yellow and gold eyes and surrounded by different colored stripes of some kind that ended in points going off in all directions.

"*Sibfla!*" Retta gasped as she looked over her own shoulder at the tattoo now.

"Retta what is going on?" Lazar asked her.

"I don't... I don't know!" She answered him.

Lazar looked down at her, his eyes growing wider when he inhaled of her honey mint scent. It so much sweeter to him than it was just hours ago. It was so pungent and pure and all-consuming now. It filled his head as nothing ever had, as no female ever had. Retta looked up into his face and saw his wolf eyes now.

“What... what is wrong my love?” She asked him.

Lazar reached down then and wrapped his arms around her lower buttocks and lifted her into his grasp. Her arms went around his shoulders as she gazed down into his face. “Nothing is wrong.” He said with a smile. “I feel... I have never felt like this and I like it.”

Retta smiled as he walked back into the bedroom. “Like what?”

“So full of energy.” Lazar answered. “So much stronger.”

“Sit on the bed!” Retta ordered him and Lazar complied instantly. Lazar sensed it almost immediately. This was no longer a shy young female wolf in the middle of her first Phase. Retta was now fully a woman and the blood within her made her confident. The Alpha she wanted had claimed her and now she proud and full of herself, but not in any arrogant sort of way. She scooted closer to him on his lap, ignoring the feel of his wonderful manhood against her hairless center and she lifted her hands to either side of his head. “Let me...” She said softly as her hands flared a soft white in color.

Lazar looked at her hands, knowing the pain she could inflict with them if she wanted. That is something he would never feel again he knew and Lazar nodded his head instantly. He relaxed and closed his eyes as Retta inched her hands closer until they hovered just millimeters from his skin. She closed her own eyes and reached out with her Hadarian power, scanning his blood, the lipids, the vital signs, the molecules that made up his DNA, everything. Lazar could feel the warmth spread through his whole body and he remained still knowing that he would never need to fear this woman again. She was his, and he was hers, just as the words they had spoken the night before meant. Lazar could feel it within him now, feel her within his being, and they had always been meant for one another. He opened his eyes and saw her staring at him silently.

“What?” He asked.

Retta shook her head slowly. “I don’t... I don’t know.” She replied. “You are... you are different. But you are the same.”

Lazar grinned at her and his hands pulled her closer by her ass cheeks. “That does not really constitute a medical diagnosis Retta.” He said.

Retta slapped him lightly in his face and the old Lazar would have been stunned and in shock at such an action but he just smiled and looked at her with an even larger smile, dual fangs extending from his gums as he gazed at her with desire. His fangs did not surprise Retta for she knew this happened to anyone who was bitten by a Leonidas. The dual fangs were part of their bloodline and all it took was a small bit to make them appear in someone else. She had just never seen it happen so quickly. It usually took days or weeks, but for Lazar it had only taken a few hours. That was not normal.

“I want to taste you again.” Lazar told her leaning forward to nuzzle one of her firm, medium sized breasts.

Retta grasped his head and a smile. “You have worn me out.” She told him.

“You taste so good though.” Lazar said continuing to nuzzle her breasts and adding in a lick with his tongue every few seconds.

Retta gripped his head and reluctantly pulled his face away from her skin before her desire became too much and she was too aroused to stop him. “We must talk to my mother about this Lazar.” She said softly her eyes rolling into the back of her head when she felt his aura pulse her strongly. “Please my love.” She gasped.

Lazar detected the concern in her voice and while it was not pronounced it was there. He reigned in his aura and saw Retta open her dark green eyes once more to look at him. “You are worried.” He said to her softly.

Retta grasped his face tightly. “I have just discovered you!” Retta rasped out the words. “I do not want to lose you!”

Lazar tightened his grip on her even more, her arms wrapping around his shoulders. “You will not lose me Retta.” He said firmly. “Never. This... we are meant to be together... I can feel it within me.”

“I feel it too Lazar my love! I do!” Retta said as she stroked his bearded face. “Like it has always been there and now it is coming out.”

“Does it frighten you?” He asked.

Retta shook her head instantly. “Never! Not for an instant! And that is what is strange about it.”

Lazar stared at her for a few moments longer and then he took a deep breath, reaching up to stroke her cheek. “We will have eternity, so I will get many opportunities to taste you.” He said with a smile.

Retta pulsed him with her female aura and smiled. “Yes, you will. And I will taste you.” She said. “You have turned me into a *tas varo* you know.” (sex pot)

Lazar laughed heartily at that and brought her head down to his. “*Forn wen aur tas varo Retta aur enyla.*” He said. “*Elly for innyne.*” (You are my sex pot Retta my love. Forever and always) Then Lazar kissed her more furiously than he yet had up until this point and Retta only whimpered in unabashed delight as she returned the kiss with equal fervor. After a sensually long, lingering moment their kiss ended and he looked at her once more.

“It is still early... let me just hold you for another hour or so.” Lazar spoke. “Then we will go and see your mother.”

His words caused her whole body to flush in happiness and she pulled his head to her breasts and held him tightly as his arms tightened even more around her waist and back. “Hold me my love.” She said. “Hold me and never let me go!”

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBIT OF LORENU**

The true definition of family did not finally hit Kadeer Imuma until the tattoo had appeared on his left shoulder. As clear and defined as those that had appeared on his children and the others of the Mahanlo Bloodline. Dynina, Jezima, Gorgo, all of them now had the same tattoo on their left shoulders. While it seemed to only confirm for the others what they already knew, for Kadeer it was life altering. His love for Maha had been absolute, of that there was no doubt, and that they were of two different species had not mattered to him or her in the least. Now, after discovering all the history they had in the last hours and with even more to discover, it was with the utmost honor that he now wore that tattoo. He had become part of something far greater than he had ever envisioned, his children with Maha a key part of that, and now him. They had gathered in the city's massive Meeting Hall so that all of their people could look upon the future and be revitalized with hope for the future. It seemed to go on forever but in reality it had only been a few hours before Dynina and Martin and the others returned to *SPARTA'S WRATH* and he along with them.

The ship was an absolute marvel to Kadeer as he and his children stepped off the fast transport together. Perlae and Awser wanted to rush to show him everything, but Ishma reigned in their excitement as they were led to quarters on what he discovered had now become known as the Family Deck. It was here that Kadeer witnessed how close his people had become tied to these Lycavorians. The *Vrrarhoinpa* that he saw, Elynth and her mate Anthar, Torma and his own mate Isheeni, all the others, and even his own children's Bonded Ones, they had part of the massive deck all to themselves with what would amount to personal quarters meant just for them. Without really realizing it, the day's events had taken their toll on everyone and Kadeer found himself falling asleep for several hours and then waking feeling refreshed. Ishma and the others had left him and he took the data pad with the schematics of this ship and began to make his way to where he could get something to eat.

Kadeer saw at least nine different species on his trek to the Lounge four decks above him, though he saw no rank on any of the uniforms. When he entered the Lounge, he looked around to get his bearings and saw Dynina sitting with several other Darastrix, including Sarlana. He moved quickly to select some fruit he saw on the food line and then went to the table they all sat at.

Dynina quickly welcomed him with a kiss on his cheek. “Perlae tells me you fell asleep almost as soon as you sat down in your quarters.” She spoke.

Kadeer nodded his head sheepishly. “I did not think I was so tired.” He replied.

“I don't think any of us realized how tumultuous the last days have been or the toll it has taken on us.” Sarlana spoke now. “Just a week ago we were on Ventori fighting for our very survival.”

“Is this... is this how it normally is?” Kadeer asked.

Sarlana and Dynina chuckled softly. "I have been with this family only a short time longer than Dynina and I can tell you from experience, in those few weeks I was more active than I had been for the previous three hundred thousand years. So yes... it is always like this."

"And they act like it is second nature." Amena spoke from her chair beside Nicha shaking her head in awe.

Nicha nodded in agreement. "To them it is." She said.

Dynina nodded her head. "*Avoi*." She whispered the word.

"We are departing in a few hours." Kadeer said. "I have not seen Martin or Androcles since we came aboard. What are they doing?"

Dynina glanced up at him. "I would imagine they are preparing as well." She spoke. "I don't believe I have ever met two men who adapt so quickly to changing events. Sumar was like this as was my mate Makeb, but Martin and Androcles, they take it to the levels beyond."

"What will we do now Dynina?" Amena asked.

"We will prepare for what we all know is coming." Dynina answered. "We do not know when, and we do not know how, but we know it will come. All we can do is prepare and be as ready as we can be."

"*Doraanar*?" Kenroe asked looking at her.

"Dynina is correct." Sarlana answered. "We prepare. And we put our faith in those that have been chosen to lead us." Sarlana looked around the table at them. "I cannot help but..."

Dynina looked at her. "Sarlana?"

"I cannot help but feel that we were kept apart for a reason." Sarlana spoke softly. "You and those with you here Dynina, me with the Seed Mission, Nilantha with those on Jetania. I feel that this was done on purpose in order for us to discover each other when the time was right. It has been guided by some larger power to bring us all together now, at this time."

"To shape the invisible." Dynina said softly. "Just as Lady Reva told Martin."

Nicha looked at her. "What do you mean Dynina?"

"Reva... she said that these Onab Seers only predicted events for another hundred years." Dynina told her. "We have discovered each other now, all of us, in order to help and guide my *staaniketo* as he shapes the invisible. The future that no one can see."

"Should... should one family have such power?" Amena asked now. "The power to influence so much?"

Sarlana shook her head slowly. "No, Amena they should not." She said. "But what if it was a family that did not want such influence? I have been among them for weeks now my friends. Androcles, his father and mothers, his siblings, all of them hate how they are viewed by others but they cannot get away from it because it comes so naturally to them. They only wish to love and be loved by their family and those they have chosen to have a future with. Not one of them desires power or influence, yet it is theirs to command. Who better to lead than those who have no desire to lead? Who better to have that power than those who want nothing to do with that power? Who better to lead us than those who would give that power up at the drop of a hat without even thinking?"

"*Avoi*." Dynina said softly.

"That is why we are here." Sarlana said. "We will never control them, that is not possible to do, so our purpose, our mission is to guide them and make them see everything. From every direction and angle."

"For us all." Amena spoke.

Sarlana nodded. "Yes. For us all."

SPARTA'S WRATH **DECK THIRTEEN** **PORT SPACEDOCK LOUNGE**

The lounge was empty and dark and that is just the way Martin liked it. The lounge was for when the ship was in spaceport and would only be used in case of an emergency, so it was empty and had not been used since *SPARTA'S WRATH* had left Dreamland. Martin lifted the bottle of the ancient Corona beer and took

another swig of the ice-cold liquid. He had been surprised to discover that Andro had requested the beer be placed onboard and kept for his father and Uncle Danny should they ever want one. He should have known his son would plan for just about everything. He smelled and sensed him long before he ever entered the lounge and he waited until the door had opened and then closed and locked again before bending over and taking another bottle from the pack of twelve. Using his strength, Martin easily twisted off the cap and held out the bottle to the side as his oldest son moved up beside him.

"I figured you would come here." Andro spoke as he took the beer from his father's hand and lifted it to his lips. He took a long pull from the bottle and enjoyed the smooth taste as it went down. It was the only vice Andro allowed himself since he did not like the taste of Spartan Wine and only drank it when he had to at official functions.

"Nice and quiet here." Martin said as he stared out the view window at the stars before them. He lifted the beer in his hand. "Thank you for this son." He said. "How many cases you got aboard?"

Andro chuckled softly. "I told the Brew Master to give me a quarter of his last batch." He replied. "Sixty-two cases."

Martin looked at his son and echoed his chuckle. "Expecting me to brood often I take it." He said.

"No, not really." Andro spoke. "I just know that this is how you process it all. You find a place like this. Quiet, out of the way, and you think. When I was small... we used to... Elynth and I would follow you and Torma to the top of Dragon Mountain and just watch you as you sat there while the sun came up or went down."

Martin smiled and nodded his head. "I remember."

Andro looked at his father surprised. "You knew?" He gasped. "We always thought... we thought we were sneaky to be able to get that close and not have you take notice."

"We took notice." Martin said. "We just never allowed it to show. I'm sorry Androcles."

"Sorry? Sorry for what father?" Andro asked.

Martin waved his hand with the bottle around. "This. All of this. What is happening. This is... it is beyond anything that I ever imagined."

"I think it is beyond anything any of us have ever imagined father." Andro said with a smile now. "And I have a pretty good imagination according to Sadi or Carisia. And I have also heard our mothers talking about your imagination father." He finished with a smile lifting his bottle of beer to him in a semi salute.

Martin laughed and looked at his son. "Yeah... yeah... I'm not going there." He said seeing Andro laugh as well.

"Good idea." Andro said.

"When you and Eli were born I just, I wanted so much more for you *keto*, for all of you. I didn't want this life that we lead for my children." Martin said turning back to look out the view window.

"Father, do you think for an instant that if this life was not what we wanted that we would be here? Especially now?" Andro asked him. "If you think that, you are wrong. We do this because we want to. We choose this life so that *our* children do not have to."

Martin looked at him. "What about Achilles? Neesia? They did not choose this life. It was chosen for them long before any of us were ever born. It was chosen for me. It was chosen for you."

"How do you know we would not have chosen this very life if given the opportunity?" Andro asked him. "I have heard so many people tell me it is easier for me than it is for you because I was born like I am. You have had to learn everything as you go father. That is the hardest thing to do. Knowing what you do now, do you think any of your decisions would have been different?"

Martin shook his head slowly. "No. And that is what scares me." He answered.

Androcles nodded. "Elynth and I had this discussion not so very long ago." He said. "It was when Dorian was born. His birth, it brought back the dreams as you know and we began... we began to question our purpose once more. But our purpose, it was also somehow clearer to us than before. I know that does not seem to make any sense but it is what we felt within us. Perhaps it was because Dori and Ryner were like us, or perhaps because once he arrived we could finally feel Laren and Ladur in the back of our minds."

"What did you decide?" Martin asked him.

Andro shook his head and shrugged his broad shoulders. "Nothing. Because it did not matter how it came to be, only that it was." He answered. "But we also made a vow to one another never again to question the

decisions we had made up until then, or the ones that we would make in the future to come. Do we have regrets? Yes. I think we all do. It is how we go forward that determines who and what we are, not the regrets that we may have.”

Martin smiled at his son. “That’s pretty good.” He said. “Who told you that?”

Androcles met his father’s eyes. “You did father. The night before I departed for my Agoge.”

Martin chuckled. “I did huh?” He said. “I must have been really maudlin that night.” He said with a grin.

Andro laughed softly as well and took another pull from his beer. He moved to the single couch that faced the view window sat down as he too stared at the stars outside. Martin joined him after a moment, grabbing another beer and opening it. Andro looked at him.

“What are you contemplating father?” He asked finally.

“You don’t want to know.” He replied.

“Perhaps because it is the same thing that I have been thinking.” Andro ventured.

Martin nodded his head and looked at him. “Probably.”

“And?” Andro pressed him.

“I’m tired *keto*.” Martin spoke causing Andro to look at him intently. “I’m tired of our family, our blood being the blunt of everyone’s ire and ambition. I’m tired of discovering that I have lost family I did not know I had, without ever being able to know them. I’m tired of your mothers and your brothers and sisters being the target for *midaeus* who want to make a name for themselves because they don’t like me or they hate our blood.”

“You are speaking of *staania* Reva and *Tenna* Kelia aren’t you?” Andro said.

“I like to think of myself as a patient and tolerant man Andro...” Martin said. “...But these last years have stretched that patience and tolerance to their breaking point. I don’t know how much more I can take. If what Chiron thinks happened actually took place son, people are going to see a part of me that they have never seen before. A part that I have buried deep for a very long time. A part of me that only your Uncle Danny has ever seen.”

Androcles sipped his beer. “Perhaps that is what is needed father.” He spoke softly.

“I hope not.” Martin said.

“I am not interested in power for power’s sake...” Andro said softly after a long minute of silence. “But I am interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good.”

Martin looked at his son. “Martin Luther King Jr.” He said.

“Yes. That is also you father, that has always been you.”

“The dead cannot cry out for justice.” Martin spoke. “It is a duty of the living to do so for them.”

Andro got to his feet and handed his beer to his father. “Lois McMaster Bujold.” Andro told him. “And that is you as well father.” He said before heading for the door. Martin Leonidas looked out at the stars and waited for the sound of the doors opening.

“Androcles?” Martin called out. He felt his son stop and turn to look at his back. “The shackles will come off son. I won’t hold back.” Martin felt his son nod his head.

“Then so be it father.” Andro told him. “So be it.”

SPARTA’S WRATH KING’S QUARTERS DECK TEN

“...Begun appearing on all of us as well *Melda Min*.” Aricia spoke to Dysea, Isabella and Cirith in the QCR Holo Com. “For’mya and I, all of you. Our children. We haven’t spoken to Anja yet but I imagine the same thing has taken place with her and our children on Jetania, really with anyone connected to our bloodline. I have never had a tattoo before and I... I kind of like it.” Aricia saw Dysea and Isabella smile in the transmission. “I do not know if this extends to those who we consider family but are not connected to us by blood, but given everything that Reva told us I suspect it does. We will know for sure when we see Daniel again.”

“How is... how is Martin taking everything Aricia?” Isabella asked from her chair beside Dysea. Cirith and Meral were also in the transmission, all four of them sitting close together in the room they were in. As always, the Queens of the Union were contemplative and intelligent, and all of them trusted Aricia’s intuition beyond a doubt.

Aricia was sitting on the couch in the large quarters, and she turned as For'mya came back into the huge main room with two mugs. She held one out to Aricia and she took the coffee while For'mya settled to the couch beside her with the mug of tea.

“You know how *duan enyla* Martin is Bella.” For'mya spoke as she got comfortable. “He rarely shows anything outwardly.”

Isabella nodded her head in the transmission. “Yes, I know. And that infuriates all of us.”

“He hasn’t spoken to us yet but something else is bothering him greatly. His resonance is unsettled, confused and... and angry. Androcles’ too.” For'mya spoke. “That is alarming in and of itself, that it effects both of them in such a way, but that there is anger there is even more unsettling.”

“We can feel that as well.” Bella said softly. “But this... we have never felt something like this from him before For'mya. It is like a slow... a slow, burning anger. A terrible anger and it is simmering just beneath the surface. It is even beyond what we felt from them during... during Alba Tau.”

For'mya nodded her head. “I know.” She said gently trying not to remember what they had all felt during that time.

Aricia nodded her head. “He and Androcles learned something else while we were on the surface of Lorenu Bella, but they have not told anyone what it is. It has something to do with the phrase *Ardorm Panur*. We don’t know what this phrase means outside of its translation but whatever it is, it has caused Martin and our son both to retreat into themselves in a way we have never felt before.”

“Winter Wonder.” Cirith said softly. “You have no idea what this means Aricia?”

Aricia shook her head. “No, and that is what frightens us Cirith.” She said. “We have talked with Sadi and the others and Androcles has not shared it with them either. Something is going on aside from everything else that we have discovered and only Martin and our son know what it is right now. You, of all of us Cirith, have more knowledge of our people from their time on Lycavore because of your father and his position. Does this phrase mean anything to you?”

Cirith shook her head. “My father made me study many of the Lycavorian history scrolls that were not destroyed by Veldruk, but I have never seen this phrase before.”

Dysea shook her head. “That is not good.” She said softly. She looked at Aricia and For'mya in the transmission. “If they have not shared it with us yet, it can only be something horrible. Something even they are still trying to process.”

“We felt... we felt a flash of this when he killed the man who had beaten Anja so badly.” Aricia spoke. “We told no one, but it was there.”

“Is this why he is sending for us?” Cirith asked.

Aricia shook her head quickly with a smile of love. “No. He made that decision before they discovered whatever they have. He misses all of you terribly. We all do.” Aricia said with deep affection. “It is time we reunited and remained together. Our bed feels empty without you in it with us. And we are stronger together. All of us.”

Dysea nodded her head. “Yes, we are.”

“And me?” Meral asked now.

For'mya smiled warmly. “You are our family Meral. Martin would not keep you away. Jezima is expecting you as well.”

“Good.” Meral snapped playfully. “I didn’t want to have to hit anyone to get on that ship.”

“Daniel has dispatched the *ARC ROYAL* from Ventori to Honelze.” For'mya told them. “It should arrive tomorrow for you. Akemi will send a *KADEN* down for you. Martin wants *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and *MJOLNIR’S HAND* to remain at Manne so they are able to respond quickly with their Fleet Groups if something changes with the Svorag ship. The *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* and the *SCIMITAR* will join with us when we reach Jetania and deal with the fools there. Their two Fleet Groups will be sufficient against this Coalition. Whatever information or items they may have taken from Dynina all those years ago, they obviously have not

been able to use them in any important fashion. They truly don't realize how overmatched they will be. And after what that fool did to Anja, Martin will not play with them."

Isabella reached out and took Dysea's and Cirith's hands in hers. "It will feel wonderful to have his arms around us again. To have you around us again."

Aricia smiled and nodded her head. "Oh yes, it will." She said.

Dysea sat back in her chair. "Koguth is more than capable of finishing the defenses here." She said. "Have you spoken with Yuriko recently. She is... she is pregnant you know. She told us this two days ago!"

For'mya and Aricia's faces beamed with happiness at this as For'mya leaned forward. "We have not had the opportunity to speak with her! Oh, Dysea... that is wonderful!"

Dysea nodded with a smile. "She felt Achilles and Neesia when Andro and Sadi stopped shielding them, and she did not want to..."

"Yuriko is as much our daughter as Andro is our son, no matter her blood." Aricia stated firmly. "She always has been and she always will be. As will her children!"

Isabella chuckled now. "Believe me, I let her know that as I was scolding her for not telling her father and brother. Andro will let her know it too I think and she knows that."

"Androcles will be absolutely thrilled!" For'mya commented.

"What does Martin intend to do on Jetania?" Cirith asked.

Aricia shook her head. "I don't think he has made a determination yet." She replied to the question. "There is something on Jetania that Reva says we need to discover, something left for him, but as for the fools there?" Aricia shook her head. "I don't know."

"His actions with them would have been better had they not done to Anja what they did." For'mya spoke again. "He will not ever forget that, nor will he ever forgive it."

"You felt what happened with Retta I take it?" Dysea asked.

For'mya nodded again. "Oh yes."

"I do not think we need to worry about that." Aricia said. "This Alpha that has claimed her, he is the son of Loras. They both have Mahanlo blood within them. How we do not know, but we will discover it I am sure."

Isabella nodded her head. "We can feel them within us." She said. "The son, this Lazar, he is much more pronounced the last few hours, as if whatever was hiding his Etheric ability has been removed, but Loras remains the same. A faint echo, but it is there."

"How can they mask their bloodline?" Cirith asked now. "Even I know that is next to impossible to do."

For'mya shook her head. "That we do not know as of yet either." She replied. "One of the many things we will discover soon I hope."

"We have discovered so much in these last hours." Aricia said. "Answers to so many questions that we have asked for so long and yet now we have new questions." Aricia looked at them in the transmission. "Questions that I am not so sure we want the answers to."

All of them were silent for a long moment and then Dysea nodded her head. "I asked Daniel one night long ago, when we were just beginning to build Eden City. I asked him if he had ever seen *Nauta Melme* angry. Truly, deeply angry." Dysea paused and then looked at them. "He did not want to answer at first but I pressed him on it."

"*Melda Min*?" Aricia asked.

"All he would tell me is that it was a nightmare that would remain with him forever." Dysea replied. "A nightmare that he hoped would never occur again for there would be no remorse the next time."

This caused all of them to remain silent for several moments and it was For'mya who broke the long silence. "If what they have discovered is so terrible that Martin has not shared it with us yet, that Andro has not shared it with Sadi and Carisia and the others, then perhaps we do not want to know." She said softly. "It does not matter to me. I am who I am because of his love for me. His love for all of us. That will never change."

Isabella nodded her head and they saw Cirith and Dysea nod as well. "No, it will not. That could never change."

"We must trust in our husband and mate. He will tell us when he feels the time is right." Aricia spoke. "For now, for now let us come back together and be a family once more. Then we can decide where to go from there."

SPARTA'S WRATH **BRIDGE**

Martin walked through the massive double doors of the bridge and stopped, letting his eyes take everything in. He had not come to the bridge on the trip here and now he regretted that. The bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH* was the largest he had ever seen on a ship and that was saying a lot. He saw dozens of men and women working at their stations and even more of them that were moving between these different stations doing their duty. It was damned impressive as far as he was concerned. His eyes found Andro and Armen standing on one side of the bridge with Chiron and he immediately moved over to them, noticing that Armen had that now familiar Worker Drone perched on his shoulder again. As Martin grew closer he saw the thin crimson stripes that now adorned its flat, armored backside.

"We are ready to depart King Leonidas. Another two hours to finish securing loading operations." Armen spoke causing Martin to look at him with surprise.

"Armen... your... voice!" Martin gasped.

The huge Avatar nodded his head. "Yes, King Martin. With the assistance of Chiron, I was able to modify my vocal processors to speak as he does. More naturally I believed he described it." As with Androcles, Martin had told Armen when he first came aboard that he was to use his first name. King Martin was obviously as far as he was willing to go.

"Very nice." Martin said looking at Chiron. "Avi?"

Chiron nodded his head. "His vocal processors were slightly less sophisticated than Armen's, so I allowed him to download these upgrades directly from my neural network. He was... happy to do so."

Martin laughed. "Happy? Well that's new for Avi." He said with a smile. "My *staania* Chiron? Armen?" He asked looking at them.

Chiron nodded again and handed him the data pad. "Her stasis chamber is secured in the quarters Androcles specified. Armen has linked its power source directly to the life support system so that it remains steady. The chamber itself was never designed to be moved, but with the Worker Drones you have on board, especially this one Alpha Nine, they took care of everything."

Alpha Nine bounced slightly on its legs before moving to climb onto Andro's shoulder. He smiled gently. "That was a compliment Alpha Nine." Andro told the spider like drone. The drone seemed to gaze at Chiron for a few moments and then chirped once more.

Chiron turned back to Martin. "Lady Reva's Sphere is with your mother Gorgo and Lady Aricia's mother Dasha at the moment." He said. "Armen has allowed me to access the internal ship's sensors so that I can track her whereabouts, but I refused any further access. This is his ship and I do not wish to interfere in that operation."

"He has earned it." Andro spoke.

Chiron nodded his head. "Indeed." He looked at Martin once more. "You have said you know where the device to transfer Lady Reva's consciousness back into her own body is Martin?"

Martin nodded his head. "It's on Jetania. Some place called the Mountain of Stone and Light." He told them.

Chiron blinked in surprise. "And these Lycavorians have never discovered it?"

Martin shook his head. "Apparently, there was a time when Nilantha thought they would find it and she moved all of the Onab Seer painting and drawings, all of the prophecies to her ship under the northern ocean. They didn't find it but she was being cautious and her decision was a good one. She doesn't know exactly what it is, but after what Anja has told me about her, I think she may have some idea."

Chiron nodded his head in approval. "Dadrien's choice of Nilantha was a superior one. She is also not without her own skills in being able to avoid the actions of this Osrod's father all those years ago and still continue her mission. To work behind the scenes so to speak as she has done, this trait is not normally found among the Darastrixi according to my information about their species."

Andro nodded in agreement. "Sarlane said the same thing father." He added. "She is very excited to meet her."

Martin nodded his own head. "I get the feeling that Dadrien had his talons in a lot more than we know of in order to get everyone this far." He said. "My grandfather also proved to be very devious when he wanted to be, so I can see the two of them working together really well."

Chiron smiled. "A unique trait that has obviously been passed down to you and your son Martin." He said. "Lady Reva has had many laughs at how you have given your enemies, as she describes it, unexplainable fits of mental coordination."

Andro laughed aloud at that while his father grinned broadly. "You mean he drove them insane."

Chiron nodded his head. "Indeed."

"Predictable is boring." Martin answered shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, it is." Chiron added.

Martin hesitated for a moment but Andro knew why and he looked at Alpha Nine on his shoulder. "Alpha Nine, low frequency white noise scrambling around us. Two-meter radius. Ten minutes." Alpha Nine chirped twice as Armen moved closer within the two-meter cone and Alpha Nine's red eyes blinked as he bounced once on Andro's shoulder. He looked at his father. "We are good."

Martin looked at Chiron. "Anything?" He asked.

Chiron shook his head. "Not yet." He answered. "That is not surprising however, as I said before, Kesas Pengot is a very cautious man. He will be even more so if my hypothesis is in any way correct. You must understand Martin, the last time they heard from anyone with Mahanlo blood, aside from Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor, was when they left Cerath. It is very possible that they have believed for millions of years that they have been dead, and that your bloodline died with them. It may also explain why Lady Kelia's life sign is not with the others."

"Come again?" Martin asked.

"After my supposition to you in the Sanctum, I decided to do an intensive review of all the Packs that remained after the end of *Vada Zin Sarakoa Vyen Ils*." Chiron told him. "In order to do this I had to open previously unopened archives that Lady Reva had sealed."

"Why did she seal them?" Martin asked.

"I do not know." He replied.

Martin nodded his head in acknowledgment. "That doesn't matter right now. What did you find out?"

"The Kirek Pack, the Nenay and Arhtai Packs all departed with Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor in command." Chiron spoke. "The Nenay Pack was purer bloodline wise, behind only the Carbula and Kirek packs, but the Arhtai Pack was larger. It was Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten's hope that the three Packs would breed together and become stronger. The probe's data suggests another scenario."

"The Arhtai Pack got greedy and power hungry." Martin said softly.

Chiron looked at him with a nod. "Lord Nyser was the Patriarch of the Arhtai Pack when they departed. His mate was Lady Yelma. There were rumors even back then that she was the real power behind their Pack and that Nyser allowed her this role. The Arhtai Pack fought the Iais'Kai, they fought them hard, but they were never fully behind what Lord Daniho's vision was. Over the years, the Arhtai pack and the Mahanlo Pack receded from each other and barely maintain civil relations. It was one of the main reasons Daniho and Ashten chose them to go with Lady Kelia."

"If that was the case Chiron, if there was such bad blood between them, why risk such a thing?"

Androcles asked now.

"You must understand Androcles, the Packs were different back then." Chiron told them. "Daniho was chosen to be King by nearly every Lycavorian alive at the time. Only the leaders of the Chetak Pack truly opposed him, but that was not for ideological reasons. They simply felt they should be the ones in charge. Our people loved him Martin." Chiron spoke looking back to Martin. "They trusted him to lead them and he did. They put their hope and future in him and he did not take that lightly. He led them in a direction designed for the future, and while it may not have been in the direction that some of them wanted, they followed without question because they believed in him. The many years of war changed all that. Not their belief in Lord Daniho or the others, that never faltered one bit, for the Mahanlo Pack had suffered just as much as they had and they knew it. Their hope for the future had begun to waver however. Daniho knew they needed a new start and that

is why not one of the Packs disagreed with his plan to leave Cerath. In his vision of leaving they saw their chance at a future once more renewed.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “War will do that.” He said softly. “He just never saw that others had more nefarious ideas in agreeing with him.”

Chiron nodded his head. “Not until it was too late, but very correct. During the last five hundred years of the war, the Arhtai Pack was hit hard by the Iais'Kai on several fronts.” Chiron said. “Lord Nyser and Lady Yelma lost their five oldest children in the same battle. They had requested support of course and Lord Daniho dispatched it as soon as he was able but there was already an ongoing operation that took priority. The attack against the Arhtai Pack was not expected and it took everyone by surprise. It was after this that relations between the two Packs deteriorated badly. The other Packs knew what took place and they accepted it as the sacrifices of war that they had all had to endure. As I said, the Mahanlo Pack suffered as much, if not more than all the others, for they were on the front in every battle fought. Daniho finally chose the Arhtai Pack to go with Lady Kelia because he wanted to repair this relationship and Kelia was the only one who had the personality to do it.”

“She was the peacemaker?” Martin asked.

Chiron nodded his head. “Lady Kelia, from what I understand and have heard from Lady Reva speaking of her, she could charm the pants off even one of these Semtolian Pit Vipers you despise so much Martin.”

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. “How do you know about that?” He gasped.

Chiron smiled. “Lady Reva ranted for nearly a week after discovering you had done this.” He replied. “I won’t begin to relay to you the words she used to describe you.”

Andro chuckled and Martin shook his head with a grin. “I don’t think I want to know.” He said.

Chiron nodded his head. “This is why Lord Daniho sent them with Kelia. He wanted her to repair the damage his actions had done.”

“They weren’t his actions Chiron.” Andro spoke now. “It was war.”

Chiron nodded his head. “I understand this but...”

“If what you think has taken place, then apparently the Arhtai Pack did not feel the same way.” Martin spoke.

“If this... if this is true, then it only cements their betrayal!” Andro snarled angrily.

“The twelve Packs that departed with Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten were the Carbula, Domara and Chetak Packs as you know already. The others were the Aoni and Olere Packs, the Taild, Aenthi, Utane and Ormck Packs and finally the Sainn, Drarr and Ekela Packs. Of the twelve Packs that went with him to Lycavore, the Carbula, Domara and the Aoni Packs were the purest of blood behind the Mahanlo Pack. The Utane, Ormck, Ekela and Taild Packs were those that were banished for their roles against the Mahanlo bloodline and they eventually died out. The other Packs, all of them, began to interbreed after several centuries on Lycavore. Many smaller Packs broke off with their own names from the central Packs, but they could all be tied back to the original Packs that arrived on Lycavore. You see now why Lady Reva and I have told you that your history is not wrong; it is simply just not complete.” Chiron explained as he looked at Martin. He turned to Androcles. “Your children with Lady Sadi, they will have the bloodlines of all the eight original Packs that remained on Lycavore Androcles. It does not now matter who or why, only that it is. The Onab prophecy stated that your son will unite with one who carries the blood of the three Packs that departed Cerath alone, thus reuniting the Packs as one. The exact wording was simple, unique and without question...”

“The one born of purest Mahanlo blood, his father with glowing blue orbs and his mother with green gems that glitter in the light, he will discover the one born of three bloodlines and they will unite the Lycavorian people a final time under their guidance. Never to be torn asunder again.”

“That is why Lady Reva has been protecting Lady Loras all of these years.” Chiron said. “I do not know what significance your daughter will play Androcles, for they did not see there would be twins, but given your bloodline I remain confident it will have a role in the future.”

“So Loras Ranev carries the blood of the three Packs that left alone?” Martin asked him now.

Chiron nodded his head. “Her Mahanlo blood is and always will be the dominant blood, but to answer your question, yes. She carries Arhtai and Nenay blood within her, probably from one or both of her parents,

but it is there. Their union will reunite all the bloodlines from the original Packs on Cerath, just as the Onab foresaw.” Chiron looked at Androcles. “I can only theorize that the Pralor blood within you, this Praetorian gene as your mother Anja calls it, this has allowed you and your father to sense and in some cases, even see in different ways those that will share your lives in the future. It happened for your father in his dreams, it happened for you before you were ever born and now it has happened for your son in the same manner. In truth, it has happened to all of your children in some manner Martin.” Chiron spoke turning back to him. “It is why they are so confident in the decisions on who they will spend their lives with. They can feel it in their blood.”

“Wow!” Andro commented. “Like no pressure there Chiron.” He said.

Chiron nodded his head knowing the context of what Andro meant. “I do not have the ability to sense the emotions that you feel, but Lady Reva has explained to me in detail about it, or tried to at least. It is a burden that the Mahanlo blood has carried since the very first day and you have not shirked what your blood calls for you to do. This has given Lady Reva comfort through the years.”

Martin took a deep breath and there was silence between them for a long moment before he nodded his head. “Back to business.” He offered softly. “Dwelling on the past has never been a strong suit of mine.”

Chiron nodded his head. “As we have determined, the Mahanlo blood is being masked within her somehow, but it is there. The same can be said for the children she has already mothered.”

Andro shook his head. “Not anymore.” He spoke.

Chiron looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“Loras’ son Lazar has claimed my daughter Retta in the old way Chiron. They bit each other.” Martin spoke. “A few hours ago, whatever was masking his presence went away. His Etheric resonance is a clear echo to us now, so I can only assume that whatever was masking his bloodline is also gone. He is tied very tightly with my daughter’s resonance within the Etheric realm.”

“Can others detect this?” Chiron asked.

Martin shook his head. “Not unless they have Mahanlo blood in them, or have sufficient Etheric ability to detect his resonance. So far that ability seems to be limited to my family and a few other Lycavorians and Pralors that are close to us. Jomann for example. No one else among our people, that we know anyway, none of them has developed Etheric powers beyond a Tier Six level. The vast majority of those are either *Durcunusaan* or members of Mjolnir’s Hand. And any one of them has had ample opportunity to take out me or any member of our family for decades now. I trust them Chiron.”

“Then so shall I.” Chiron spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “Good.”

Chiron nodded his head. “Jomann I can understand, for he has Kirek blood within him, as well as the Praetorian gene that is within you and your family. Wayonn and Murano have the ability to detect her Etheric resonance as you say, but not her true bloodline. Murano is not Lycavorian and Wayonn’s mate was from the Aoni Pack” He said.

“May I make a supposition King Martin?” Armen spoke now.

They looked at him. “Go for it Armen. I trust yours and Avi’s suppositions more than most people’s facts.” Martin answered him.

Chiron glanced at Martin when he said this and contained the smile that would have split his normally stoic Avatar face. The Onab had made one prophecy that had already come true it seemed given how Martin and his family treated Armen and Avi and the Worker Drones all around them.

“I have reviewed the data that Chiron has given to me.” Armen spoke. “From a tactical sense his theory is sound.”

Martin looked at Chiron with a grin and Chiron shrugged his shoulders. “Armen is a Tactical Avatar where as I am not. It made logical sense to have him review my findings.”

Martin smiled and looked back at Armen. “Ok.” He said. “And?”

“Based on the facts and the reason of the information presented so far, it is only logical to assume that since Loras Ranev nor her parents are from Ventori as Chiron has told you, then they must be from one of these three planets that you have discovered. That can only lead to the confirmation of Chiron’s theory.” Armen spoke.

Martin and Andro nodded. “We’re with you so far Armen.” Andro spoke for them both.

Armen nodded his head. “And if they indeed have this bloodline masking item or device or whatever it is within them, then someone knows they are there.”

Martin nodded smiling at Armen’s use of slang in his sentence structure. “Ok.”

“It is also logical to theorize that whoever put this masking device within them knows exactly where they are.” Armen said evenly. “And they know the purpose of hiding their true bloodline.”

Andro looked at his father then, putting it together a little faster than him. “Kesas Pengot did this.” He said finally.

Armen nodded his head. “That would be the logical conclusion.” Armen spoke. “From a tactical standpoint. Chiron has already stated Loras Ranev’s parents did not come from Ventori and were not part of the Seed Mission there. It is the only option that is viable.”

“Unfortunately that confirms that there indeed was a coup against Lady Kelia and Lord Lylor.” Chiron spoke. “And a... an attempt at the cleansing of the Mahanlo bloodline like on Lycavore.”

Andro looked at Armen. “Armen?” He asked.

Armen nodded his head. “Again, from a solely tactical aspect Androcles, that is the only conclusion that can be reached.” He spoke.

“And Kesas Pengot sent Loras’s parents to Ventori to safeguard our bloodline. In case, in case anything happened to the rest of them.” Martin spoke softly, his genuine respect for the man jumping a hundred-fold and he had not even met him yet.

“We are talking about the genocide of an entire bloodline.” Chiron spoke once more. “If Kesas Pengot devised a way to hide the Mahanlo bloodline, he learned of it from the Onab. It is the only way he could know such things.”

“That doesn’t explain why *Tenne* Lylor and *Tenna* Kelia are still in stasis.” Andro spoke. “Or their three children.”

Chiron’s eyes grew a little wider. “Perhaps it does.” He spoke.

Martin looked at him. “Why? How?”

“Think about it out of the box Martin Mahanlo Leonidas.” Chiron said. “Think like you normally think.”

Martin was silent for a long moment as he stared at Chiron, his mind flipping through scenarios left and right and tossing them aside when they didn’t figure into what he was searching for. It took all of six seconds but Martin lifted his head higher and looked at his son as they both came to the same conclusion and the same time.

“Pawns.” Martin said softly his jaw tightening in anger. “They are pawns.”

Armen blinked several times. “Pawns?” He inquired.

“Pawns in a much more insidious game.” Androcles growled softly.

Chiron nodded his head slowly. “The Arhtai Pack is using Lady Kelia as leverage against the Kirek Pack and whoever might be aligned with them. If they attempt anything then they will kill her.”

Andro shook his head. “That isn’t all of it.” He said “It can’t be. There has to be more to it.”

Chiron nodded his head. “I would agree with that statement, but until we make contact with Lord Kesas, we are only guessing.”

Andro looked at his father with wide eyes now. “*Medwan*... mother, Retta, Zarah, all of them could be in danger!”

Chiron looked between father and son. “I do not understand.” He said. “What do you mean?”

“You do not send someone into hiding without a means to monitor their safety.” Armen spoke now. “And if you have a means of monitoring them, then so do your enemies.”

Chiron’s eyes grew wide now. “*Sibfla*!” He swore in very un-Avatar fashion. “That would mean that the Arhtai Pack has agents on Ventori and Jetania. Looking for what Kesas Pengot is trying to hide!”

Martin nodded his head. “And Lazar Ranev just claimed my daughter Retta. She has my blood in her.”

Chiron met his eyes. “And your blood, the blood of your children, it descends directly from Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten. The purest of all.”

“Retta bit him.” Andro said softly. “Her bite must have...”

Martin nodded his head. “...unlocked whatever it was blocking his own bloodline and resonance and exposed his Mahanlo blood to whoever is looking for it.”

“We do not know this for sure Martin.” Chiron said finally. “The facts do not all add up.”

“This is not about facts anymore Chiron.” Martin spoke.

“This is about instinct.” Andro echoed his father and turned to Armen. “Armen... inform everyone that they have fifteen minutes to finish their operations. Then plot an immediate Portal Jump to Jetania!”

Armen nodded his head and turned to begin issuing orders as Martin lifted his hand and tapped his jaw.

“Denali?” He barked.

“Father?” Deni’s voice answered instantly, though full of surprise.

“Where are you?” Martin asked his second pureblood son.

“Hmmm... Lisisa, Arduri and I are with...” Denali sounded almost embarrassed and Martin understood completely.

“Forgive me *keto*.” Martin spoke.

“Father what is it?” Lisisa’s voice broke into the COM now, a little out of breath but clear and focused.

“Gather our family in the landing bay by the *PREMONITION* Lisi.” Martin spoke clearly but quickly.

“All of them Denali. Including Wayonn and Murano. We’re departing for Jetania in fifteen minutes. Your mother, sisters and all of our family with them may very well be in some serious danger. We’re going in under Crimson Protocols Denali.”

“*Nubou!*” They heard Denali hiss aloud. “We’ll meet you there in six minutes father!”

Martin turned to Andro now. “Break out the Pralor weapons *keto*.” He spoke. “I’m not going to jack around anymore. With anyone.”

Andro nodded and began heading for the bridge doors. Martin turned to Chiron. “I want you to send another message Chiron.”

“Of course. What should it say?” Chiron asked.

“Tell Kesas Pengot we are going to secure our bloodline on Jetania.” Martin told him. “And tell him, tell him that he had better answer you Chiron, or I’m going to come there and put my size ten and a half boot so far up his fat Lycavorian ass he’ll be singing soprano for a motherfucking decade! Then I’m going to go and dance a fucking death tune on the Arhtai Pack and get my *Tenna* back! The days of beating down the Mahanlo bloodline because you don’t like us are done! Over! Kaput! You tell him that!”

Chiron blinked at the heat in Martin’s voice but could say nothing as Martin had already turned and headed for the double doors off the bridge. Chiron watched his back until the doors closed behind him and then he let the smile slowly split his face.

“Martin Mahanlo Leonidas. If only you knew how much you and your son sound like Lord Daniho.” Chiron spoke to no one in particular. “It is long past the time for fear to become part of the equation again. For all of us.” Chiron looked down at the floor and saw Alpha Nine looking up at him with those red orb eyes. He bent down and picked up the Worker Drone. “Come Alpha Nine... we have a message to send. A message that will send ripples of the past to the future. And what a shockwave it will be.”

JETANIA

Lazar had been very nervous when Retta brought him to the Medical Center to meet with her mother. He had claimed her daughter in the old fashion of their people and he had done it completely by instinct. He did not know how well that was going to go over with Anja or the others. He thought for sure there would be anger in her eyes and her mannerisms but he could not have been more wrong.

Anja could feel the Etheric resonance of her daughter as easily as if she was breathing. That resonance told her all she needed to know, for Retta’s Etheric echo and her female aura did nothing but pulse with love for the tall and handsome Lazar. Anja could see how things had gone, for Retta hid nothing from her mother. Anja could see how Retta had surrendered to his male aura at first, but then how Lazar had kept his promise to her and allowed her to show him what Anja and other pureblood and turned females within the Union knew from experience. It was so much more glorious when the woman in your life had her wits and her senses to control of her own free will. Then she could show you pleasures that you had never seen. Anja could feel the passion and desire within each of them for each other and it was focused and so very pure. Just as her love and desire for

Martin and her fellow Queens was a powerful beacon, now so was Retta and Lazar's love and desire for each other.

Lazar would not make eye contact with his mother at first until he sensed that she was not angry with him for taking Retta. Instead he felt happiness within her and acceptance for how things had turned out. Her aura towards him, as with Anja's, radiated warmth and happiness for both him and Retta.

Lazar sat on the medical table shirtless as Anja's glowing white hands slowly moved over his head and shoulders and upper body. It was truly magical to him what Retta and her mother could do and he simply sat there unmoving trying to be a good patient. Retta knew how close Lazar was with Rhaos, he considered him to be a true brother just as his friend Laon was and Retta demanded that Lazar make sure he was there as well. He had witnessed what her mother had done to him on their ship anyway so he already knew of their healing power. He stood in the corner of the Medical Center behind Loras quietly, taking everything in.

Anja finally stepped back and lowered her hands. "How do you feel?" Anja asked him.

"Alive!" Lazar answered her instantly.

Anja chuckled softly and glanced at Loras with a smile before turning back to him. Loras moved up beside Anja, a warm smile on her face as she looked at her oldest son. "That is not what she meant Lazar." She told him.

Anja looked at him. "Do you love my daughter Lazar?" Anja asked him though she could see the answer on his face whenever he looked at Retta.

Lazar turned and looked at Retta. "More completely than I have ever loved anything." He replied softly. "She is..."

Anja held up her hand quickly. "I don't need the details!" She interjected.

"I do!" Rhaos exclaimed from behind his mother.

Anja laughed aloud as Loras turned and looked at him. "Should I inform your mother of your voyeuristic tendencies Rhaos Kyer?" She asked him in a mock stern voice seeing his eyes go wide.

Rhaos shook his head quickly as Retta giggled. "*Carians joa!*" He exclaimed.

Loras smiled at him as she turned back to Lazar. Anja rested her hand on Lazar's forearm and looked at him. "You would not have been able to hold Retta's attention if your feelings for her were not true Lazar." Anja told him. "She would have sensed this within you. You have nothing to fear from me young man, nor from anyone who is her family. So, put that out of your head."

"Does that include her father and her brothers?" Lazar asked.

Anja smiled and wagged her hand back and forth. "They'll give you grief I'm sure, but they will honor what their sister has chosen and accept it. And they will stand with you through anything." Anja could almost see Lazar relax even more. "Now I ask again, how do you feel?"

"That is the word I used Lady Anja." Lazar answered. "Alive! My mind... I have seen so much that I never dreamed could exist!"

Anja nodded her head. "That comes from Retta's Etheric power and the memories her father and I shared with her when she was conceived. You know that."

Lazar shook his head. "Yes, I know that much. She explained this to me. When I say, I feel alive... it is what I mean."

Anja looked at him oddly. "How so?"

"I feel... I feel..." Lazar struggled to try and explain it but Retta moved close to him and put her hands on his arm and chest.

"Say what you feel my love." She told him. "Hold nothing back from our mothers."

Lazar looked at her and pulled her close with one arm and nodded his head. He looked at Anja. "I feel more alive. I have more energy within me, my senses are even more acute than before we claimed each other. All of them. Retta told me of the Etheric portion of her family and what you can do... I understand that part."

Anja smiled and shook her head. "You haven't met her father, her brothers or her sister yet." She said. "There is a lot more to it with them."

Retta smiled. "I didn't feel the need to try to explain everything at once mother." She said sheepishly. "We were preoccupied."

Anja smiled and laughed softly. "I'm sure." She said.

“It is not that,” Lazar continued. “It is a physical sensation. I truly feel more alive Lady Anja. Stronger, faster, more alert and aware of everything around me.”

“His scent is stronger too mother.” Retta spoke. “Even more than from before he claimed me. It is... it is more pungent to me.”

Rhaos had moved closer and now he stepped up beside Lazar with a grin. “I have been telling you for years to take more bathes *fervon*.”

Retta laughed happily and hit Rhaos in his chest with her fist. Loras and Anja both took notice of this interaction and how seamlessly Rhaos seemed to accept Retta and Lazar claiming her.

Anja looked at her daughter and shook her head. “I can’t detect anything odd *Jonia hara*.” Anja said using Andro’s nickname for her. “Not without a full medical work up with our equipment. The medical technology in use here does not come close to ours and couldn’t tell us the same things Retta. You know that.”

“I don’t need technology to tell me something I already know mother.” Retta said with the confidence of an Alpha female.

Rhaos took that time to look at his longtime friend and he noticed the wolf’s head tattoo on Lazar’s left shoulder. It was incredibly detailed and an exceptional piece of work from what he could see. He moved from the corner and reached up and ran his fingers across the tattoo.

“When did you get this done Lazar?” He asked. “This is new.”

Retta saw what he was looking at and she nodded her head. “And then there is this mother?” She spoke.

“What?” Anja asked.

Retta used her hands to turn Lazar sideways on the table and she showed her mother the tattoo. “This was not there last night mother.” She said before reaching up and pulling aside the shirt she wore of Lazar’s. She had not wanted to put her full Drow Scout armor back on and she instead chose to go with the lower portions of the armor and one of Lazar’s shirts. She exposed her own left shoulder and saw her mother’s eyes go wide. “And I did not have this last night either. They were there when we woke this morning however.”

Anja looked at Loras now with wide eyes, her expression mirroring Anja’s. Lazar and Retta both saw their faces and Lazar leaned forward. “What is it?” He asked.

Anja turned back to him and Retta and she reached up to unfasten her Armorpoly armor. She removed the upper chest portion quickly to reveal the t-shirt that covered her and then she pulled down the corner of the shirt to reveal her left shoulder. Retta gasped as she saw the identical tattoo and she grabbed Lazar’s arm as he got to his feet in shock.

“What is this?” He exclaimed looking at his mother. “Mother?”

Loras turned slightly and pulled aside the shirt she wore over her shoulder and they saw the identical tattoo on her skin, though it was faint and not fully as clear as it was on Anja, Retta and himself.

Retta’s green eyes were wide as she looked at her mother. “*Medwaw* what is happening here?” She stammered.

Anja looked at her. “Something happened after we left the Etheric connection with your father and the others.” She said. “Zarah and Normya filled me in on a little of what was said this morning but...”

“What did they say?” Retta demanded. “Do not hide anything from me mother!”

Anja shook her head quickly and reached up to lightly caress her daughter’s cheek. “You know I would not do that Retta.” She said warmly. “Zarah, Normya, Kalis, Serale, anyone who has our blood within them, Mahanlo blood, they all have this tattoo on their left shoulder now.” Anja explained to her. “Anyone touched by our bloodline, your father’s bloodline, they will have it as well.”

Retta looked at Lazar quickly. “We... we bit each other.” She gasped.

Lazar nodded his head. “I am not unhappy about that Retta.” He spoke with a smile.

Retta shook her head and slapped his shoulder playfully causing him to smile even wider. “Neither am I fool!” She hissed at him happily. “But that doesn’t explain your mother. And why is the tattoo not fully formed on her skin like the rest of us?”

Lazar saw what she was saying and looked at his mother now. “Mother?” He asked.

Loras shook her head, unwilling to tell Lazar what she had seen on the Oracle’s ship or what Anja had already told her. She could feel Achilles within her, albeit faintly. It wasn’t anywhere near the power it was when she had been in the Etheric connection, but his presence was still there and so very warm, loving and comforting.

“I don’t know *keto*.” She said.

Anja looked at Loras for a long moment, different scenarios going through her mind at a thousand miles a minute. It was one of the things that Martin and her fellow Queens had told her countless times that they loved about her the most through their years together. Her mind was incredible at being able to look at a situation from every angle without Anja actually having to focus her attention and think about it.

“Loras, do you mind if I try something?” She asked.

Loras met her eyes. “Like what?”

“I can run a preliminary blood screening right here.” Anja spoke. “Your equipment is able to do that.”

“Blood screening?” Loras asked. “Anja why?”

“To test a theory that just popped into my head.” Anja replied.

Loras looked at Lazar and then back to Anja and she nodded her head. “I don’t see the issue with that, but you will not find anything.”

Anja nodded her head. “Probably not, but it couldn’t hurt.” Anja reached up and touched her jaw.

“Kalis?” She spoke aloud, not wanting to hide anything from them.

Kalis’ voice responded instantly as Anja knew he would. While they could not hear him answering her, she made certain they heard all of her end of the conversation. “*Mandri*, get my Kit Bag from the *STRIKER* and then you and Serale join me here in their Medical Center. I want to run some tests.”

“Is everything alright *Tenna* Anja?” Kalis asked protectively.

Anja smiled and nodded her head. “Yes, everything is fine. Just get my bag and meet us here.”

“Five minutes.” Kalis answered.

It did not seem like it took five minutes as Kalis was there within three minutes at least, Serale clutching Anja’s bag in one hand and Kalis’ hand in the other. Anja took the P9 from within the bag and set it up on the table where Lazar had been sitting. She turned to both Lazar and then Loras with the small medical device in her hand.

“This is a blood sampler. I’m just going to touch it to your arms and that is it.” Anja spoke.

Lazar and Loras both nodded their heads and Anja touched it to their forearms quickly and drew a miniscule drop of blood from each of them. Gone were the days of drawing vials of blood to do simple tests and it more than pleased Anja when she discovered this so long ago on Earth, as well as her own heritage. She processed the samples within the Injector and then took the small chip out of the bottom and plugged it into her P9. Anja had Avi transfer quite a bit of files to her personal P9, mostly from the main Hadarian Medical Computer on Earth, and now she could do most everything she wanted to do off of her P9 computer. She also guarded it with a purpose for if it ever fell into the wrong hands it would not be good.

Anja straightened back up and looked at Loras. “I’m running a simple blood analysis.” She told her. “It will compare your samples with those already in the database on my computer which is quite extensive.”

Loras looked at her oddly. “Our blood samples should not be in your database Anja.” She spoke. “We have only just...”

The P9 beeped loudly, interrupting her words and Anja turned back to the screen. “That was quick.” She spoke as she touched the small console and brought up the results for all of them to see. “*Saoi sibfla!*” Anja gasped as the readings appeared on the screen.

“Mother?” Retta asked as she stepped closer to her and looked at the screen. Her own eyes grew wider and she looked quickly to Lazar.

His dark eyes filled with surprise and he reached for her. “Retta?” He asked his voice filled with concern.

Loras looked back and forth between them and then turned to Anja. “What is it?” She asked.

Anja turned and looked at Loras. “Loras... I thought you said you were born here on Jetania?”

Loras moved closer to her. “I was, why? What... Anja what have you found?”

“And your parents?” Anja asked her. “You said they were born on Ventori?”

Loras nodded her head. “Yes. Anja what are you saying? What did that thing tell you?” She asked moving closer to her.

“Loras... you and... you and Lazar, and I would guess your children with Warim as well... you have Mahanlo blood in you.” Anja told her. “You have our blood within you.”

Loras laughed softly at this and shook her head. "That isn't possible Anja." She said feeling relieved. "Being able to... being able to feel Achilles is one thing... but having the same blood is not possible."

Lazar looked between his mother and Anja. "Who is Achilles?" He asked.

"Blood doesn't lie Loras." Anja told her ignoring Lazar's question for the moment. "It's a different strain than what is within me, Retta and the others of our family but it is unmistakable to say the least." She motioned to the computer screen. "Look here... do you see these DNA strands here? These are the Mahanlo bloodline strands. All of us have these strands within our blood molecules. They are uniquely unmistakable from the other Lycavorian strands because of the Mahanlo bloodline. The Mahanlo bloodline has a much higher red blood cell count than normal and their blood has a Thrombin level ten times that of normal Lycavorians, which in turn makes up part of the DNA strands. The Mahanlo bloodline and their Gene Regulation stands out from others. It cannot be reproduced or copied but it is very distinct." Anja adjusted the screen and beside the two samples that were already there a third came up. "Look... this is a sample of Martin's blood. Do you see the individual strands here? You see how they are brighter and thicker?"

Loras nodded her head. "Yes."

Anja nodded and shifted her finger to the images of hers and Lazar's samples. "And these are you and Lazar." She said. "They are different, but these three strands are identical. Which, in laymen's terms means we are related Loras. Leonidas blood, Mahanlo blood, it will always be dominant over different Lycavorian bloodlines because of the unusually high red cell count and the Thrombin levels."

"Are you... are you saying we are related?" Lazar gasped looking at Retta.

Anja nodded her head. "Based on what I am seeing here, there is Mahanlo blood in both of you, but it is genetically different than ours. As if it came from another source within the same family." Anja looked at Lazar and her daughter. "It is why the attraction between the two of you was so much more intense. The wolf blood within us will always yearn for the most powerful bloodlines to be together."

"So we... we are related?" Retta asked.

Anja nodded her head slowly. "Yes... but by many thousands of generations Retta."

Retta looked at Lazar then and saw the worry in his eyes, but she ended that instantly and wrapped her arms around his waist and allowed him to pull her tightly to him. Lazar lowered his head to the top of hers and affectionately nuzzled her dark red hair while pulling her even closer.

Anja smiled and then looked at Loras. Her face had a look of disbelief on it and she reached for her in comfort but stopped when Serale's voice echoed. "Anja... look?"

Anja turned and saw Serale looking at the results of the samples on the screen. "Serale?"

Serale pointed to some of the other results. "Look at the differences in the gene regulation Anja." She spoke. "Lazar's is much higher than his mother which should not be the case. They should be the same, yet it almost looks like Loras' is being diminished somehow."

Anja looked back fully to the screen. "Diminished?" She spoke as she looked at the screen.

Serale nodded her head. "My mother taught me Cellular Protein Structures. It was an incredibly boring class but it does allow me to tell them apart as if it is second nature. These bluish proteins in Lady Loras' blood are not in Lazar's, and they also seem to be somehow shielding the Mahanlo proteins. Swarming around them."

Anja blinked suddenly. "Not shielding." She said softly as she looked at Serale. "They are hiding them."

"Hiding?" Loras asked. "What do you mean?"

Anja looked at her. "It's why we did not detect it right away within you and Lazar. We are not... we are not pureblood. Our sense of smell is good, better than average actually, but it is not anything as powerful as Martin or Andro or any of our pureblood children."

Serale nodded her head as Anja spoke. "These proteins would definitely alter the scent." She spoke confidently. "They would not register to the Olfactory Epithelium of a turned wolf, or even a normal pureblood Anja."

Kalis looked at his beautiful Serale with an odd face. "An olfactory what Serale?" He asked.

Serale met his eyes and smiled lovingly at him. "It is how we tell scents apart my love." She answered him. She saw recognition come over his face and Kalis turned to look at Rhaos, who held up his hands defensively.

"Don't look at me..." He spoke quickly. "I have no idea what they are talking about. They lost me a long time ago."

Serale chuckled and turned back to Anja. “Look at how the proteins are swarming Anja.” She said. “Only someone with a highly evolved sense of smell, a sense of smell not typically found in normal pureblood Lycavorians would be able to muddle through the garbage proteins and detect the differences.”

Anja met her eyes. “Only a pureblood of Mahanlo descent.” She said softly. “But why are they present in Loras’ blood and not Lazar’s?”

“These masking proteins are not permanent Anja. I would hazard a guess and say when Retta and Lazar bit each other, when they claimed each other, that the more powerful Mahanlo proteins simply eradicated those that were masking his true bloodline.” Serale answered. “I’m no expert... but I would have to say that these masking proteins were purposefully introduced into their blood, and given their cellular structure, they would pass from mother to child in the womb.”

Anja turned quickly to look at Loras once more. “Loras where are your parents?” Anja asked.

“What? They are in Warim I would assume. They operate a small shop where my father sells trinkets that he and my mother make. Why?” Loras answered.

Anja was about to answer when she staggered against the table and Retta slumped against Lazar as their minds were suddenly filled with the most wonderful sensations of love and family. Loras and Kalis reached for Anja at the same time.

“Anja what is wrong?” Loras demanded as she gripped her hands.

“*Tenna* Anja?” Kalis blurted out the words as he held her arms. Her was still learning of his Etheric abilities and was not attuned to his family’s resonance. He had been angered at this first until Andro had told him it would come in time and with concentration and not to rush it. It took only a few seconds longer and then Kalis felt it too.

“Oh boy!” Anja gasped. “Martin... Martin is here!” She spoke as his beautiful aura and Etheric resonance swarmed all around her. “Martin and our family are here!”

“All of them!” Retta gasped as she held Lazar’s arms. She looked at her mother intently. “*Medwaw*... they are not...”

Anja nodded her head. “They are not happy in the least!” Anja gasped aloud.

JETANIA SIX KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF MOUNTAIN PACK HIDDEN BASE

On the nights when the breeze was blowing in from directly north, the scent of the ocean reached this far inland and you almost felt like it was just over the mountain horizon and not eight kilometers away. The cave was a special place for Taris Ranev and would forever remain so after the last night. She had discovered it six years ago, concealed behind the huge waterfall that dropped five hundred meters to the valley below. It wasn’t large, equal in size to the main room of the home in Warim where she had grown up and through these past years she had added many different things to make it a unique spot for her to come and read her books and conduct her Black Watch schooling.

Last night however, it had become the place where both she and Anoria had surrendered to the feelings and emotions within them for each other. It had been a glorious night of simple exploration and taste. The pull to each other was too much to resist any longer and both young women had set about to discover all they could about each other.

This morning they simply sat facing each other, their long legs stretched out across each others’ and their naked skin touching in as many places as they could manage. The thick, skin blanket was huge and it covered a large portion of the inside of the cave. It was actually several different skins from the local Nakoc herds that covered the mountains in large numbers. Large four legged animals that provided much of the meat to the surrounding cities. Taris had stitched them together and brought the plush, Nakoc skin rug here one night several winters ago. Their breasts were pressed against one another as they shared the deep and loving kiss. Anoria’s white blond hair was slightly longer than Taris’ and it cascaded over one shoulder and mingled with Taris’ lustrous black locks. Their bodies still hummed from the previous night of exploration and the discovery

of new pleasures that neither of them had known could exist. That they were both fully in Phase made it all the harder to resist one another and they both gave up trying. Now however, now they were so very happy they had.

Their passion for each other had quelled the rising need for the man who would claim them both, and it brought them so much closer together. Their female scents saturated the cave, the aroma of sexual arousal easily detected, but to them it was so wonderful and natural. Soon they would not need to wait for both of them could feel the wolf that would claim their hearts and souls within them and he was getting closer.

Taris drew back from their kiss and Anoria's arms tightened on her waist and she tried to grab those delicious lips with her teeth. Taris giggled softly and reached up to brush some of her hair from her face.

"Why... why didn't you tell me?" Taris asked her finally.

Anoria pulled her even closer. "And what was I to say?" She asked. "Taris Ranev I want to taste you and make you cry out in bliss? I want you to taste me and make me howl your name in desire?" Anoria smiled. "Somehow I could just not get up the nerve to say that, even though I very much wanted too."

"The Oracle?" Taris asked.

Anoria nodded her head. "She said it would be best to wait until you discovered it for yourself. She could sense it within you, I could sense it within you, but like me at first you could not determine what it was. It was only after I saw the picture of us, with him, that realization fully came to me."

Taris nodded her head and leaned over slightly to kiss her shoulder gently. "I as well." Taris agreed with her.

"Do you think he looks as he does in the picture that we saw Taris?" Anoria asked her. "He is so very handsome if he does."

Taris met her eyes. "Does it matter?" She asked. "He will love us more than we can stand. And we will love him equally as much as we do each other."

"I have always wondered how we would first meet." Anoria said softly. "How he would take us in his arms and..."

Taris smiled at her with sexual energy. "*Nubou jar itori?*" (Fuck us silly)

Anoria burst out in laughter as she nodded her head. "*Jainn!*" She exclaimed.

Taris stared into her eyes. "*Sune dremsa tor panuros Anoria.*" She said softly. (Last night was wondrous)

Anoria smiled lovingly and reached up to cup her face in her hands. "*El lae aen fan.*" (For me as well)

"I will never want it to stop." Taris said honestly.

Anoria grinned at her. "Nor I."

"We should..." Taris began to speak but stopped almost instantly as she caught the scent on the air as it blew into the cave and her eyes narrowed.

Anoria looked at her with concern, but then she detected that same scent only seconds later. Several scents to be exact.

"*Sibfla!*" Taris swore softly.

"I make four of them." Anoria said quickly.

Taris nodded her head. "And one of them is that *igord* Juyno Aspion!" She hissed as she scrambled to her feet and began reaching for her normal clothes.

Anoria followed suit instantly but looked at Taris as she was pulling on her pants. "Taris, our scents saturate this entire valley. We cannot escape them, and they are between us and the way back to Warim." She spoke. "They will be able to follow us."

Taris nodded her head. "I know. We must make our way to the Western Ridge. My father has a hidden cache there with a radio. We can call him and he will send Alphas to protect us."

Anoria hissed angrily. "Alphas to protect us!" She snarled.

Taris looked at her as she was pulling on her shirt. "I feel the same way Anoria, but if they get close enough to us, we will not be able to resist them! I have no desire to feel anyone's hands upon me other than yours and the Alpha who will claim us!"

Anoria sat on the log and began pulling on her boots. "Sometimes I truly hate being a female wolf!" She snapped.

Taris stepped across the small distance and kissed her hard on the lips, grasping her face in her hands while she did so. Anoria delighted in the kiss and she smiled as Taris drew back after a moment and she looked at her. "I love that you are a female wolf." Taris spoke. "And so will the man who will claim us as his own." Anoria's smile grew wider and she nodded her head. "Yes, he will." She agreed. Taris smiled at her. "Hurry!"

"... got them!" Juyno hissed as his blood grew hotter with the scent of Taris Ranev and the other female in his nostrils.

"They are moving!" Datet Torkin snarled. He was another of Juyno's friends dating back several years.

"Taris Ranev is mine!" Juyno spat. "The rest of you can fight over the other female, but Taris is mine!"

"We need to catch them first!" Karcon Perest spoke now. "They are running!"

Juyno hated that Sitos had remained behind to try and coax Garget to release his younger brother, but he was stuck with what he had. He broke into a run first, moving ahead of Datet and Karcon easily, his mind a single focus now. He had Taris Ranev's scent, and it was so very sweet indeed. He was going to catch her, he was going to pulse her until she submitted to him in a blind, submissive fervor and then he was going to make her his while he fucked her for hours right here in these very mountains that her father thought he controlled.

Juyno turned to the third member of their group. "Delris! Get in front of them! Turn them back towards us! Go!"

The young man nodded and shifted into wolf form and sprinted off into the trees. Juyno looked at the others. "Follow me!"

JETANIA RANEV PACK BASE LANDING PLATFORM

Garget Ranev was a large and older Alpha. He was the most senior male wolf of the Ranev Pack and the one who was first to endorse Loras when she became Matriarch to all of the Mountain Packs on Jetania. Garget loved his younger brother Warim and that love extended to Loras when she became his mate. Garget had always suspected that Loras did not truly love his brother, that something he did not really understand held her back, but she was the ideal Alpha female and mate. She honored and she respected her mate Warim with no hesitation and she genuinely seemed happy in his company and his embrace. Garget had always respected Loras for this, and she may have even cared enough for his brother to live a life of contentment with him.

That was not meant to be and Osrod Aspion was responsible for that.

His actions had put Loras in a position that she did not want to be in. A position that was thrust upon her, but one that she did not turn away from as most others would have. Given how everything was beginning to happen all around them, Garget Ranev now knew that Loras had been meant for much greater things. Things he did not quite understand, but things that he now accepted deep in his heart were the way events were ordained to happen. The arrival of the half breed Queen Anja was only the first of these things and in the last two days his respect for Anja Leonidas had grown by leaps and bounds. Though obviously much better educated than Garget and others around her, Anja treated them all with respect and friendliness. She did not have to give what Osrod's fool soldier had done, but she did nonetheless. As did all of those with her. They had already begun to sit in the Mess Center and talk of things that could be. Garget knew events were changing quickly, perhaps more quickly than anyone really knew, but so far he was not frightened of those changes. It could only mean good things for his people.

Garget Ranev was nearing thirty thousand years of age and had the battle scars and the experience to prove it. In the shadows of the rising sun, as the brightness began to chase away the night, his keen wolf eyes detected the figures standing by Anja's ship openly. They did not try to hide their presence as he saw others moving in and out of the ship. He had given strict orders that no one was to enter her ship without his

permission and only after he had obtained Anja's consent. She had relented yesterday and allowed two of his most gifted engineers to tour the ship and to say that they had been overwhelmed was an understatement. Having his men enter that ship without his approval would not look good and it caused his anger to flare, until he saw one of the figures turn in the brightening light. His eyes grew wide as he realized that none of these figures were wearing the uniform of his people and this cause Garget Ranev to go into combat mode.

Garget lifted his arm and brought his wrist to his mouth. "Priority Alert!" Garget hissed in to his COM unit. "Intruders on the landing platform! Ready Security Detail respond to the east entrance! I will be waiting!"

"RSD Commander acknowledges! We will be there in two minutes!" The male voice answered.

Garget Ranev smiled in approval and his eyes changed and his wolf fangs extended. However Osrod Aspion had found this secret base, those he had sent would not live out the day to inform him of what they had discovered.

Those were the thoughts that had been running through his mind only moments ago. Now the only thoughts running through his mind was how he felt as if he was a newborn wolf who knew nothing and how he was going to keep from dying. His men had arrived and they stupidly exited the interior of the base from the west entrance, directly in line of sight of the rear of the ship. They were charging across the platform and Garget had risen to rush forward and stop them when he was ripped from his feet and propelled through the air towards the lone figure at the bottom of the ramp. Garget suddenly found the large hand of the silver armored figure wrapped securely around his throat and holding his six foot four body off the ground as if he was a mere child. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw shimmers of light all around him and he heard the grunts of pain from his young soldiers as they were beaten down and their weapons taken from them with speed and ease unlike anything he had ever seen before. Whoever these people were they had disarmed his men before most of them had even realized what was happening. These were not Osrod's toy soldiers Garget thought briefly, these were professional soldiers who knew what they were about.

Garget watched as behind the silver armored figure he saw the day light shimmer three more times and then three additional figures appeared, two armored in black and one armored in black and shimmering gold. All of them were wearing strange helmets as they appeared behind the man now holding Garget twelve inches off the ground with his hand.

Andro looked around casually, his near glowing azure blue eyes taking everything in, and his *Nehtes* in his fist. Garget's eyes grew slightly wider when he saw Andro's lips part to speak, revealing the viciously long and savage looking dual wolf fangs. They were longer and thicker than those he had seen on Anja, but they were utterly unmistakable.

"We are secure father." Andro spoke clearly. "Carisia and Lu'ria report no one else in the immediate area. Uncle Atropos and Calyb are on the perimeter of this facility with a complete *Durcunusaan* detachment."

Martin Leonidas was not in a very good mood after stewing over what Chiron and they had spoken of less than an hour ago and he let his eyes scan the area and see for himself that indeed Denali, Dorian, Laren, Lisisa, Fedor, Jomann, Sheva, and Onera had taken care of the twenty other Alpha Lycavorians that had come rushing out of the interior of the facility straight for the ramp of the *STRIKER*. It had not been done gently either as he could see at least half of them that were not getting up any time soon. Sheva and Onera were particularly deadly with their vampire speed and the brief thought that his son had chosen his wives very well flashed through his mind. And for the first time, Yuri flashed within his mind and who she had become now. If this is how she trained and schooled her children now, perhaps Martin should have done more to save her all those years ago. He let that thought go quickly however as he turned back to look at Garget. His children could sense the anger within his aura and his resonance and they were feeding off of that as well.

Martin looked intently at Garget, his own dual fangs now fully extended and his usually dark brown eyes now changed to the yellow gold of his wolf persona. "The women and men that were on this ship?" Martin asked Garget. "Where are they?"

Garget was trying unsuccessfully to claw at the hand that was now firmly seated around his throat. The grip was like a vise with power unlike any he had felt before in his life. The wolf aura radiating from the man that held him dwarfed all others he had felt in his lifetime and nearly all of the others around them were unquestioned in their supremacy. Garget Ranev had never felt such an aura on a fellow wolf in all his life. Not even King Osrod radiated such an aura at his peak and for the very first time in his life Garget felt fear begin to creep into his veins.

Garget was old enough to have read the Ancient Scrolls and he knew all about the sacred Prophecy of the Oracle.

One day Alpha wolves would come.

Alpha wolves who descended from the original homeworld of their people far away in the stars. A world long thought to be nothing more than a myth. Alpha wolves who would be more powerful than anything anyone had ever seen. Among them would be the *Taviruos* of the *Mard Revik*.

Vada Revik rie Arve.

A King with eyes of yellow gold and dual fangs that would cause fear to grip even the bravest warrior. Dual wolf fangs that only the bloodline of the *Mard Revik* would bear. Garget felt the man pull him closer to his face, those eyes holding him in their grip like nothing ever could, even as he tried to get his fingers under the iron like grasp that held his throat and was slowly choking the life from him.

“*Pen gur toer quvor ared cova daanth.*” Martin Leonidas snarled angrily, Garget’s eyes going even wider as he spoke with such natural fluency in their language. “*Vada channes lon intus oia allon endra. Cingola wen hnes?*” (I will only ask one more time) (The women that were on this ship. Where are they?)

“I... I do... do not know!” Garget managed to choke out the words for he did not know where Anja and the others were.

Martin drew him closer still. “You see the three men behind me?” Martin growled at him. “The older one is Murano. You took his wife and daughter! The young man beside him is my son Deion! Murano’s daughter is my son’s wife and mate! My son wants her back! You took my daughters... and you took my Queen!” Martin hissed at him angrily. “You see the two women behind me?” Garget cut his eyes to see the two females standing at the top of the ramp of the *STRIKER*. One with striking raven black hair and eyes just like the third young man who stood behind the monster holding him in his grip. The other had four-inch-high pointed ears and golden blond hair. “They want their fellow Queen back! The others you see around you are her children! You will return them to me unharmed and you will do so now! My son and Murano, my Queen’s children, they do not have any patience at all right now. Too many people have been trying to hurt them for too long. Patience left me a long time ago when it comes to my Queens.”

“Queen... Queen!” Garget gasped aloud as he felt that grip lessen ever so slightly from around his throat. “You... you speak of the red haired, half breed female Anja! The one... the one with a sharp tongue!”

“My mother is no half breed!” Androcles shouted in savage anger as he stepped forward, closer to his father.

Martin’s eyes narrowed in anger. “She is my Queen!” Martin almost screamed. “And I want her back! Do not make me ask again old man!”

“I do... I do not...” Garget once more had trouble getting the words out around the fingers that continued to clench tighter around his skin.

Martin’s snarl of savage anger cut off his words and he brought Garget’s face to within an inch of his own, so much so that Garget could see the lips peeled back in barbaric savagery and saliva dripping from those cruel looking fangs. Close enough to see that those two eyes were like glowing suns up close and held within them nothing but painful death.

“Let me be clear old man!” Martin growled once more. “I know every divine inch of her body like I do my own! Every single strand of her hair! Every freckle that dots her skin! For this Queen, I will spill however much blood I need too. For this Queen, I will shatter and crush however many bones I need too. For this Queen, I will burn whole worlds to fucking ash! For all of my Queens I will bring death incarnate and unleash its wrath upon whoever would do them harm! And now... now old man, I will start with you!”

Martin Leonidas did not see the look of complete love and devotion that passed between Aricia and For'mya at his words. Given what Dynina had told them on Ventori, about who their beloved mate truly was and what was within him, what she had told them about Anja, what he had just told this man was as completely truthful as possible. And neither Aricia nor For'mya disagreed with Martin’s stated course of action when it came to Anja if she was not returned to them.

How could they when they felt the same way.

Garget Ranev’s eyes nearly exploded from his head as he saw massive wings spread from Martin’s back. Huge, metallic like wings that spread out fully and were nearly ten meters across behind him. Garget felt his large body lift higher and he closed his eyes in preparation for being slammed to the hard earth beneath him

without mercy or reprieve. His last thoughts were of his beautiful wife and mate and what they would miss after discovering Anja and what the future could have held.

“**MARTIN LEONIDAS!**”

Anja’s distinct voice carried across the expanse of the landing platform like a shot out of the dark and Martin’s head instantly snapped around to the side. He saw her Persian red hair flailing about behind her as she ran towards him and without thinking for an instant he tossed Garget aside like so much trash.

Martin reached out with his hand and engulfed Anja within the grips of his Etheric power and quickly pulled her towards him. Anja had been prepared for that however and she lifted her upper body straight as she felt his warm embrace. Her jade green eyes grew wide as she saw those wings, but then they focused on his face and she was in his arms. Anja nearly cried out in blissful relief as his arms closed around her and he held her off the ground and laid a kiss on her that set her senses and her body on fire.

Neither of them saw Androcles and Deion break for Retta and Mari first and then the rest of the Leonidas clan followed suit. Murano met Tobia half way and scooped her into his arms without hesitation, tossing aside centuries of Praetorian training at hiding his emotions and kissing her in such a way that it stole Tobia’s breath away. Deion had lifted Mari in his arms, losing his balance and falling to the ground while cushioning her against his body and now he pinned Mari to the hard ground and was nuzzling her neck furiously while her hands held his head in delight.

Loras, Lazar and Rhaos stood to the side with each other as they watched this reunion and after today none of them would ever deny the emotion that radiated from this family. It was exposed for all to see right in front of them. Retta was swarmed by Lisisa, Eliani and Nara as Androcles released her and moved to embrace Kalis and Serale. They heard the soft squeal and turned to see Tir’ut unwrap the shadows from around his body with Normya in his arms. Zarah and Lucia were right behind him with Radem between them and suddenly it had turned into a full-blown family reunion right there on the platform while so many strangers looked on in stunned disbelief.

Anja simply stared into those beautiful yellow/gold wolf eyes as she stroked Martin’s bearded cheek and felt his aura swarm around her with undisguised and unashamed love and devotion. Her body was alive with wonderful sensations, her own eyes changed and her dual fangs exposed.

“*Carians* I have missed you Lover.” Anja finally gasped aloud.

Martin didn’t care who saw him and he nuzzled the valley between her large breasts and up her neck and throat and Anja hummed in delight. “Tell me you are ok Red.” He said. “Tell me you...”

“I’m fine Lover.” Anja stopped his words. “So much better now that you are here, but I am fine. These people are not enemies to us Martin. They helped us and...”

Martin kissed her once more, silencing her words and Anja didn’t resist. She never could when it came to his kisses. He could curl her toes with just a simple kiss and he did so again in front of everyone even as he lowered her to the ground and then Aricia and For'mya were there, pulling her into their embrace even as they too showered her with kisses of deep love and total affection.

Martin looked around and saw his family all around him as they were reunited and the only thing that flashed through his mind was that he was still not done. The reunion was not yet complete, and it wouldn’t be until he rescued his *Tenna* Kelia and reunited her with her mother and the rest of her family. Martin turned then and looked at where he had tossed Garget and without pause he stepped over to him and held out his hand as his wings retracted into the back of his *Onkmeti Naami* armor, the Onab words coming more easily to his lips as the hours went by and his mind absorbed so much knowledge.

Garget stared up at Martin, his own hands holding his throat and his backside hurting from where this man had tossed him with such ease. Whatever Rylin had told him about the *Mard Revik* through the years did not do this man before him justice. This Alpha wolf reeked of power and confidence that Garget had never experienced before. His aura pulsed like it had a life all its own and the supremacy he felt from within him was beyond any question or doubt.

Martin saw his hesitation and slowly knelt next to Garget still holding out his hand. “It appears that I have acted too quickly out of passion and concern for my Queen.” Martin told him. “For that, I apologize to you...”

“Garget. Garget Ranev.” He replied.

Martin extended his hand out further. "Then take my hand Garget Ranev and let's see if we can't start over."

"You... you are the *Mard Revik!*" Garget gasped aloud.

Martin nodded his head. "That is what some call me, yes. Personally I hate that name but it can't be helped." He answered. "Today however, today I was just an Alpha wolf who loves his mate and wanted her back."

Garget heard that and didn't hesitate as he thrust out his own hand and took the offered one. Martin pulled him to his feet with confidence and strength and though Garget was taller than Martin by two inches he felt somehow shorter.

"I... I know this feeling." Garget spoke as he looked at Martin once he was fully on his feet.

"Forgive me for my actions." Martin told him. "I should have contacted Anja and told her we were here but we received some disturbing information not long ago and I thought she that would be in danger. My children and friends too. I acted without thinking."

"You acted as any Alpha would." Garget told him honestly. "I... I cannot fault you for this."

Martin shook his head. "You could... but I thank you for not doing so regardless."

Garget stared at him for a long moment not truly believing that the Mard Revik stood in front of him. He seemed so normal to Garget, an exceptional specimen of an Alpha wolf to be sure, but normal nonetheless. He was thickly muscled, his beard and mustache neatly trimmed but his shoulder length black hair somewhat untamed and wild. His scent and aura radiated raw, unrefined power and it had a wildness that Garget had never smelled before.

"You have questions?" Martin asked him.

Garget shook his head in disbelief. "You have... you have no idea." He answered finally.

Martin smiled at him. "Oh, I bet I do." Martin told him. "I have just as many as you do. What do you say we try and find some of those answers together?"

Garget Ranev smiled and nodded his head. "I believe I would..."

The single crack echoed over the horizon and turned the heads of everyone as it rumbled across the landing platform. It was easily distinguishable and Martin instantly tapped his jaw activating his implant.

"Atropos report!" Martin snapped.

"*Nubou!*" Atropos' voice echoed in the COM. "We are six clicks northeast of your position Martin! Calyb has been acting..."

"What?!" Martin barked as Anja moved closer to him grasping Aricia's and For'mya's hands.

"Ever since we left the *STRIKER*." Atropos spoke now. "The mountains are saturated with the scents of two strong Alpha females well into their first Phase. Calyb has been... he has been unusually agitated since we landed. Their scents are affecting him more than they should for some reason! The moment the shot rang out he shifted and bolted in the direction of the echo. He moves with purpose Martin! Deadly purpose! Jeru and Mara are following him above the trees but they will not answer me either!"

Martin looked at Garget. "Two females in phase in the mountains? Is that normal here?" He asked.

Garget's eyes went wide. "Taris!" He exclaimed. "My only daughter Taris! She and her friend Anoria... they went into the mountains to Taris' cave last night!"

"Sir!" One of the soldiers that had only been slightly injured barked from behind Garget. They turned to see Kalis beside him, with Serale healing his injuries. "Juyno Aspion and his cohorts departed into the Dahok Mountain range this morning."

Garget hissed viciously and his fangs burst forth from his gums. "Argh!!" He screamed. "That scum is hunting them! I will kill him for this if he has hurt her!!"

"Hunting them?" Martin asked the question to no one in particular, aghast that this would be going on if what Garget's words implied was actually taking place.

Anja stepped up to Martin now. "Lover you have to do something!" She spoke urgently.

"Atropos can you catch him!" Martin snapped into his COM.

Impossible Martin! Atropos answered instantly within Mindvoice, shocking all those who stood around Martin for none of them had ever heard it used with such power and clarity. No matter the why of it now, the natural Etheric ability within all Lycavorians came rushing to the forefront now for Garget and so many others around him. The Etheric power just from this one family could stimulate an entire city and that is just what it

was doing. Anja, Martin and the others knew from the tone of Atropos' voice that he was running full out in wolf form as hard as he was able. Even in wolf form the implants were still present and they could still hear as they would as if in human form. *I could not catch up to him on my best day! He is too fast and too strong! He is one of your sons Martin!*

Jeru! Mara! Martin screamed out into the Etheric realm even as Retta and the others moved closer. He turned to Retta. "They aren't answering Retta!"

They will not Martin. Torma's voice echoed now. *They are focused on Calyb and will not deviate from his side!*

Torma how far! Martin asked.

Five kilometers from your current location!

Martin turned to Anja. "Get everyone on the *STRIKER* Red!" He shouted. "Go! Go!"

Martin it is too late! Isheeni's voice spoke now. *Calyb... Calyb is upon them!*

"Fuck!" Andro's voice echoed and eyes went wide as his wings exploded from his armor and he launched himself into the air in the direction of his brother. Martin wasted no time and was behind his son in an instant.

"With me now!" Anja screamed as she grabbed Garget's hand. "Now!"

"Anoria help me my love!" Taris cried as she tried to pull her lover along the ground.

"My leg!" Anoria screamed in pain. "They broke my leg!"

They had managed to stay in front of Juyno and his friends and had almost reached the hidden cache when the single shot rang out and Anoria stumbled forward with a cry of pain and rolled to a stop. Taris thought she had just tripped and fallen and stopped to turn and grab her lover's arms. Anoria's words caused her eyes to go wide and she glanced down at Anoria's left leg. Blood was gushing from the hole in her thigh, the bullet having snapped her thigh bone before exiting.

"*Carians!*" Taris gasped as she moved to her leg and began to apply pressure to the wound. Her Lycavorian healing system was already working but she was losing blood fast.

"Leave me!" Anoria rasped out the words through clenched teeth and the pain. "Leave me Taris!"

"Never!" Taris hissed.

"Don't let them... don't let them take us both!" Anoria pressed her. "Leave me!"

Taris looked at her face, twisted in a grimace of pain. "I will not leave you! I have just found you!" She cried out again. "No! Never!"

"*Midaeu!* You hit her!" the male voice shouted and they both turned to see Juyno Aspion and the other three males break through the thin trees into the small clearing.

Taris turned to face them quickly while drawing her Black Watch knife, preparing to defend them both for as long as she was able.

"Stay back!" Taris snarled at them as her eyes changed and her wolf fangs burst forth.

Juyno looked at her now, could smell her potent female scent and how the fever within her was acting. His own blood began to burn slowly as he was affected by her female aura, but there was something different about it. Taris Ranev was in Phase yes, but her aura was not reaching for his as it should be. He needed to move quickly in order to take her.

"Taris is mine!" He snarled as his eyes changed and his fangs extended. "Treat the other *upae* and you can fight over her, but Taris Ranev is mine!"

Juyno turned back to look at her and he unleashed his full male aura upon her, expecting her to drop the knife and become instantly submissive to him, wanting him to take her. His wolf eyes grew wide when he saw what happened.

Or more importantly, what didn't happen.

Taris Ranev's eyes grew even wider than Juyno's when nothing happened. She could feel his powerful aura washing over her, surrounding her, but nothing was happening. She glanced at Anoria, her blue eyes just as wide as she realized that Juyno Aspion's aura was having no effect on either of them.

Juyno moved closer to her, acting on pure instinct now. “Submit to me!” He growled as he watched her bring up the knife close to her chest prepared to fight him. He pulsed her as hard as he could, focusing his aura completely on her and still Taris did not lower the knife. “Submit to me Mountain Pack *upae*! Don’t make me force you!”

Taris snarled at him, exposing her long fangs and not understanding why she was not doing exactly as he said. His aura should be causing her to become so aroused and willing that she would have accepted him anything he did to her by now. It didn’t however. She could feel his aura swarming around her, trying to force her, but it was not having the desired effect and she did not know why.

“I... I will kill you first!” Taris stammered out the words in pure anger but instinctively meaning exactly what she had just said. She heard the others laugh as they heard her words and she glanced at them. As long as she held the knife none of them were brave enough to approach her beloved Anoria and Taris had no intent on going down without a fight.

Anoria suddenly gripped her arm painfully. “Taris!” She exclaimed. “Taris, do you feel it?”

Taris’ eyes were wide as she did indeed feel it. The new Alpha wolf aura was reaching for them, cascading over both her and Anoria with supreme power. The pungent scent drifted to their senses now and both of them gasped as they smelled the sweet, wildness of the honeydew mint.

“Taris!” Anoria almost shouted. “*Carians* Taris my love! He is here!”

Juyno Aspion blinked in shock as he watched something else affect both of them. He could see their bodies reacting to another male aura that had interjected itself upon them, and they were reacting to that aura as they should have been reacting to him. Their skin became flush and he could see the nipples on Taris’ medium sized breasts suddenly become erect and aroused. Juyno could sense this new aura and his head twisted around trying to pinpoint the location of this new Alpha. He was easily superior to him, Juyno could detect that right away, and he turned back to look at Taris. He needed to get to her first. He needed to take her first so that this new Alpha would have no claim to her. Juyno Aspion took three strides toward the unsuspecting Taris Ranev and that was as far as he got before his own eyes grew wider still and he turned quickly to the side at the smashing of the brush and small trees to his right.

The savage roar of the wolf that burst from the tree line to his right was unlike anything Juyno had ever heard. His eyes exploded open when he saw the size of the russet furred wolf as it leaped from the trees, its lips curled back in a vicious snarl, revealing razor sharp dual fangs unlike anything Juyno had ever seen before. This Alpha wolf was easily as large, if not larger than him and he froze in his spot unable to decide what to do.

Those two seconds almost cost him his life.

Calyb Leonidas was not as large as his pureblood brothers Andro, Denali or Deion, but he was just as large as any normal pureblood Lycavorian in most cases. Two and a half feet at the shoulder and nearly two hundred and sixty pounds of pure muscle and bone. His father’s blood was dominant within his body and Calyb Leonidas had embraced his Spartan upbringing more so than his twin sister Retta. He had finished his accelerated Agoge onboard *SPARTA’S WRATH* with the praise of his instructors. Having Androcles there to instruct him in arts that were not normally taught made this possible and Calyb had gotten excellent referrals from all of those Andro had chosen to train him and Retta along with Deion and Nara. These were men who had helped to train his father all those years ago and they did not hold back with a son of the King.

Calyb Leonidas also did not hold back. He was just as powerful as his sister Retta when it came to the healing abilities that all Hadarians had, but he also liked to fight. His Hadarian blood was purer than any Hadarian boy his age, and his healing skills equaled a Hadarian healer three times his age. Calyb Leonidas was one of the few exceptions to the rule that Hadarian males were not as powerful when it came to healing. All of that didn’t matter to Calyb right now. At this moment Calyb embraced his Spartan blood like never before. The moment he had left the *STRIKER*, the scents of the two females was pulling at him.

Delicious chocolate almond and sweet, fresh Daises.

The two scents combined were driving him mad, enflaming the Alpha blood within him like nothing ever had before. He was his father’s son for sure and now Calyb Leonidas wrapped that around himself like a badge of honor as he acted. He acted as his father and brothers would have acted if anyone threatened their wives and mates. Calyb was not as thickly muscled as his father or brothers, but his two hundred and ten pounds was exquisitely cut and defined. His five foot ten body was ripped in the fashion of a gymnast from the old times on Earth and he held nothing back now.

Juyno could only stare in open mouth shock as he watched the huge, russet colored beast shift in mid jump and then the two booted feet smashed into his chest with the force of a falling mountain boulder. Juyno's body rocketed away from where Taris and Anoria lay, several of his ribs snapping like dry timber as Calyb's two hundred and ten pounds struck him center mass. He flew through the air until he impacted the thick trunk of the tree ten meters away and he slumped to the ground at the base completely dazed and unable to act. Calyb didn't stop moving as his *Nehtes* appeared in his hand and it extended in the blink of an eye. His momentum carried him right up to where Juyno had landed and Calyb lashed out with his armored fist, smashing it twice across Juyno's stunned face in quick succession, Juyno's nose instantly crushed under the powerful blows and his head rocking back to smash against the base of the tree painfully. To add insult to further injury, Calyb brought his extended *Nehtes* up, twirled it gracefully in the air three times and then brought the blunt end down across Juyno's face. The savagely powerful blow shattered his jaw with a loud pop that carried across the small clearing like a gunshot and Juyno dropped to the dirt and his eyes rolled into the back of his head as blackness washed over him.

Calyb Leonidas spun around to face the others, Taris and Anoria watching with wide, adoring eyes as they saw him snarl viciously, those green hazel wolf eyes open wide in horrific anger and his dual wolf fangs fully extended. Without a split second's hesitation he fell upon the other three males without mercy or thought. Calyb was a Lycavorian Spartan and a Prince of the Union. He was his father's son. He allowed his training to guide him and he did what any Spartan would do when outnumbered.

Calyb attacked without hesitation.

As he glided easily into range of the other three males, all of them unmoving in shock, Calyb brought the blunt end of his *Nehtes* around again in a mighty swing directly across the face of the closest male. This blow crushed his cheekbone and fractured his eye socket while physically flipping his body end over end, until Delris landed three meters away unconscious and out of the fight. Calyb felt the presence of Andro and his father then, even as he brought his *Nehtes* up and delivered a devastating forward thrust that perforated the chest of the second male completely. The spearhead of the *Nehtes* exploded out between his shoulder blades neatly, cleaving the heart of Datet Torkin completely in two as the *Nehtes* impaled him clean through.

Calyb didn't hesitate and wrenched the *Nehtes* back as the body of Datet dropped like a limp noodle and then he was bringing the blunt end of the *Nehtes* around once more to deliver a blow that would have crushed Karcon Perest's head. The young Alpha stood there with wide eyes, still unable to move to avoid the blow that would have certainly split his skull open like a melon. Calyb blinked suddenly when the rush of wind hit him and the end of his *Nehtes* stopped as if it had hit a wall, three inches from the right temple of Karcon's head.

Calyb blinked once more as his father's scent filled him and then he realized that it was his father's armored hand that had caught the end of the *Nehtes*, stopping it from the killing move.

"No more *keto!*" Martin hissed loudly.

"*Medwan?*" Calyb muttered, his grip on the *Nehtes* lessening when he smelled his father and then his brother as Androcles landed only a meter behind him.

Martin held the *Nehtes* in his fist and he watched as Karcon, eyes wide in fear, fainted right there, the front of his pants quickly soaking with liquid as he voided his bladder. Martin ignored the scent of urine and turned to face his son fully.

"You have done your duty Spartan." Martin told him firmly. "Now go to those who need you. Those who are yours."

Calyb blinked once more as the bloodlust drifted away from him completely and he turned his head to gaze upon Taris and Anoria. His blood surged once more, but not for battle this time, it surged with desire and devotion. Calyb released his *Nehtes* instantly and was beside Anoria in four steps, both of them still looking at him with wide, adoring eyes. He practically ripped his Spartan helm from his head as he looked at her injured leg and reached for it without thought. Calyb looked up into her stunning ice blue eyes as his hands wrapped around her thigh.

"Be still now." He spoke softly.

Taris and Anoria were trying their very best to maintain their composure, Taris having shifted under Anoria to provide her support and Anoria's upper body was now in Taris' lap. Calyb's aura was swarming around them now with devotion and ardor, but doing so in a way that left them shivering in delight and completely in command of their emotions. Their blood was also on fire, burning in a way neither of them had

felt before and it was because of this devastating young Alpha that was before them. The young Alpha that would claim them both and make them scream his name to the heavens. That two other Lycavorians with huge wing spans extending from their backs stood only a few meters away did nothing to draw their attention away from Calyb.

“You... you are...” Anoria stammered out the words but could not complete them as Calyb lowered his head next to hers in that instant, pulsing her with his aura in a way that made her senses scream out in bliss as he nuzzled her cheek and jaw firmly making his intent known. Anoria gasped and then he was kissing her fervently. The pain in her leg vanished as her senses went into overdrive and she reached up to grasp his head. He pulled away too quickly as far as Anoria was concerned but her heart raced in happiness when she saw the reason for this. When he pulled away from her, Calyb did the same thing to Taris who was watching with wide eyes. She too inhaled sharply in utter enchantment as he nuzzled her in exactly the same way, her hands going up to shoulders briefly before he pulled back and laid a kiss on her that caused her to whimper in utter bliss. Calyb pulled back reluctantly from Taris and looked at Anoria once more.

“Remain still and I will heal you.” Calyb spoke once more. “It will only be a moment, but you will feel warmth in your leg. Take Taris’ hand Anoria.”

“You... you know our names!” Anoria gasped in disbelief.

Calyb smiled at them both, his young face becoming bright and more handsome than any Alpha wolf either of them had ever seen in their short lives. “I know... I know I will make you mine.” Calyb told them. “Both of you. And I will do this soon. But now I must heal you.”

Calyb bent to do his work, not seeing his father collapse his *Nehtes* and turn to look at Andro. They could hear the *STRIKER* approaching fast as Andro dragged the body closer to them and dropped Juyno’s limp form to the ground.

“This one lives.” Andro spoke. “Though he will regret this day ever occurred when he wakes up.”

Martin looked at the three bodies to his right and then back to his son. He could not help but feel a modicum of pride at what Calyb had done. He had waded into a battle outnumbered and he would have killed three of the four attackers had he not stopped him.

“This is probably not good.” Martin spoke as he looked at Andro. He looked skyward between the breaks in the trees above them as the *STRIKER* came to rest on the ground not far away. *Torma, anything else in the area?*

No. No other Lycavorians for several kilometers.

Jeru... you had better get down here. Martin spoke. *Calyb will need you soon.*

King Martin I...

Martin shook his head quickly. *You did what any Bonded Brother would do Jeru. You remained with your brother. Now get down here. Mara, Retta is landing in the STRIKER.*

Andro looked at his father. “He acted as you or I would have acted father.” He spoke calmly. “I am... I am proud of him.”

Martin nodded his head and met Andro’s eyes. “So am I. Damn proud!” Martin said quickly. “I don’t care about that Andro.” Martin continued. “They got what was coming to them for doing what they were trying to do. I’m more concerned about who they are.” He looked down at Juyno’s limp form on the ground. “They are not Mountain Pack for sure.”

“No, they are not!” Garget’s voice echoed behind them.

Martin and Andro turned to see him pulling Taris to her feet and embracing her tightly in his arms. She was returning the embrace, burying her face in her father’s chest as the tears came now. Garget held her for several moments before whispering to her softly and she returned to the ground beside Anoria as Calyb continued to work on her leg. They watched as Retta was the first to reach her twin after leaving the ship, and she dropped beside him to assist while Anja dropped on his opposite side. Martin chuckled inwardly, but did not show it. This young female had three of the most powerful Hadarian Healers alive working on her. There wouldn’t be even bacteria left within her body when they finished.

Martin cut his eyes and saw Atropos shift into human form as he appeared out of the trees with the *Durcunusaan* detail all around him. “Atropos give me a perimeter!” Martin barked out the orders. “No one in or out! And make sure there are no more of these *midaeus* out in the woods hiding! If there are, they more than likely shit their pants after seeing Calyb clean the clocks of these *igord* and they are running or hiding!”

Atropos nodded without hesitation and turned to began issuing orders after briefly taking in the damage Calyb had wrought and feeling pride swell within his own chest for his *mandri's* actions.

Garget moved up beside him and Andro now, his eyes wide in disbelief. "He... he attacked four of them and killed two!" He gasped in disbelief.

"He would have killed them all if I hadn't stopped him." Martin hissed softly, but not in anger Garget saw.

"Why did you?" Garget asked.

Martin met his eyes but it was Andro who answered. "My brother... he has never had to kill before. He is a healer first, a warrior second. When he realizes what he has done..."

Garget shook his head. "He saved my daughter and Anoria from being taken against their will." He stated. "I am... I am forever in his debt."

"Garget what happened here?" Martin asked him. "What was all this about?"

Garget looked almost ashamed and he glanced at the ground quickly. Martin looked at Andro and motioned with his head. "*Keto...* get your mother to take care of this asshole. But not too much. I want him to feel pain when he wakes up for what he has done."

Andro nodded his head as he retracted his wings and turned to move where his brother knelt between his sister and mother. He lowered his hand to Calyb's shoulder and saw his brother lift his head and look at him.

"*Fan aden fervon. Fan aden.*" Androcles told him softly. "Mother... father wants you to treat the fool who started this." He spoke looking at Anja.

"Fuck him! He opened this dance now let him wallow in his pain for now!" Anja snapped. "She comes first."

Andro knew better than to argue with his mother and he turned to see Kalis and Serale moving up beside him. He grasped Kalis' hand tightly and they embraced forcefully for a short moment before he looked at Serale. "Serale... could you..."

Serale nodded her head and lifted the medical bag in her hands. "I will see to the fool." She spoke.

"Just make sure he doesn't die Serale." Andro told her. "Leave him to endure whatever pain he will have when he wakes but make sure he doesn't die."

"With pleasure." Serale spat before heading toward where Juyno's unconscious body rested between two *Durcunusaan*, next to Karcon's limp body.

Andro pulled Kalis to the side as Aricia and For'mya settled to the ground beside Anoria and Taris. "Talk to me *chrora.*" He said softly.

"...is vile yes, but we have allowed it in order to keep the peace." Garget was explaining to Martin where they now stood away from the others by the edge of the clearing. "Fools like this almost never succeed King Martin, our females are too well schooled in the mountains and how to move around."

"Almost?" Martin asked.

Garget nodded his head slowly. "Some have succeeded through the years, but most do not stay mated for very long to our females. The Packs and families put an end to that quickly. There have been some that have been approved of by the families of the females and they are allowed to remain. They have become loyal to the Mountain packs through the years and have come to hate where they came from after being exposed to our life here in the Mountains."

"It's wrong!" Martin hissed angrily. "It's *nubous* wrong and I won't allow it to continue for a moment longer!" Martin looked at Garget and the much older Alpha took a step back when he saw the look in those yellow gold wolf eyes. "Our females are not trophies to be fought over or fucking hunted! If they wanted one of the Mountain pack females, they can do what normal wolves do and court them. Impress them in other ways and allow them to make their decision!"

"This is not something that we..." Garget began to defend himself but Martin shook his head and reached out to take his arm.

"I do not blame you Garget." Martin told him. "Don't think that. You and the other Pack leaders have only done what is necessary to keep the peace. Civil war solves nothing."

Garget shook his head in agreement. “No... it does not.” He said. “But this... this has never happened before. Juyno Aspion stepped far beyond his station with his actions this day. Anoria’s father Lasun Vesrak is not going to be pleased in the least.”

Martin glanced over to Juyno’s inert form and saw Lazar standing over his half brother. He turned slightly to gaze at the young Alpha and Garget saw where he was looking. “Lazar.” Garget spoke. “He is...”

Martin nodded his head. “I know who he is.” Martin said. “He is the Alpha that claimed my daughter.”

“King Martin... Lazar is a fine wolf.” Garget said quickly thinking he needed to defend him. “He is not like his father or his half brother. He...”

Martin turned back and looked at Garget. “My daughter would never have allowed him to claim her if he was anything but.” He said proudly.

“I can introduce you and...” Garget spoke.

Martin shook his head. “When he is ready.” Martin said. “I trust my daughter Garget, just as you trust yours. There is a whole lot going on and I have a feeling things are going to get very interesting very soon.”

Garget nodded his head. “I will need to inform Lasun of what has taken place.” He said. “He will come here and he will demand Juyno’s head no doubt! Anoria is his only daughter as Taris is mine.”

Martin looked at him. “Then I guess it is up to you and me to make sure events don’t spiral out of control.” He said. “I’m trying to put my people back together Garget, not see them torn apart by civil war.” Martin began to walk towards the *STRIKER* but Garget did hear what he spoke under his breath.

“There will be enough war to go around soon enough.”

PAKAR SIX

UNKNOWN SPACE

He had not felt such happiness within him in more millennia than he cared to recall. This surpassed even the joy he felt when Acki gave birth to each of their children because of what it meant to their people. To the Kirek Pack. To all of them. he had gathered the senior members of the Kirek Pack in the large, secure conference room to inform them of what was taking place. He did not expect a second message to arrive so quickly and he certainly did not expect the content of the message or who had sent it. Kesas had not heard the name Chiron in over two million years. The Avatar that had become Daniho’s constant shadow had left with him or so he had thought. The message had been short, but very much to the point, and the hidden threat aside Kesas Pengot had erupted in hysterical laughter the likes of which none of them had ever seen before. Mixed in with that laughter were the tears of joy that washed down his face without regard for who saw them. the laughter had gripped him for several minutes as the other Kirek Pack leaders and the Lords of the smaller Packs that had broken off and formed under the Kirek Pack leadership sat around the huge table. Nine men and women, among them Lylor’s only surviving sibling, and the one who had led the Kirek Pack from the day Lylor had been put in stasis.

Aryera Kirek.

She was a wild and passionate female Alpha, a woman who loved her mate unashamedly and every one of her thirteen remaining children. She would just as easily throw down in a fight with the fool who challenged her as she would sit across a table from you and be diplomatic. Kesas, Lylor and Kelia aside, Aryera was among the oldest of their people behind them, having survived the Ten Thousand Year War and not starting her life with her mate until they had departed Cerath. She also harbored a great hatred for the Arhtai Pack for three of her children had fallen during the purge of the Mahanlo bloodline and another in the mission to rescue her brother and her niece and nephew. While his son Caylt handled Internal Security, it was Aryera Kirek who commanded the few fighters that the Kirek Pack could field now. While everyone could hold and weapon and fight, only a few were actually part of a regulated military. Along with herself, Aryera’s son Tiag and Kesas’ daughter Yasha, the three of them trained their five thousand soldiers hard every day and they spared nothing in the way of time and effort to keep them on the razor’s edge.

Aryera was also the only one of them with contacts among the Nenay Pack. Through her contacts they had discovered that Yatia Arhtai had forged an elaborate lie to feed to the leader of the Nenay Pack. Ranol

Nenay was no fool and neither was his wife and mate Gara. It was not known what exactly was told to them for them to turn on Lylor and Kelia, but Kesas at least now knew that none among the Nenay Pack took part in killing any of Mahanlo blood and most of them remained out of the fighting against the Kirek Pack. Those that chose to fight against the Kirek Pack were summarily banished from the Nenay Pack and this is part of the reason why Yatia exiled the Nenay Pack to Anlar Prime.

Aryera Kirek finally rose from her chair and moved across the room to stand beside Kesas who had regained control of his laughter, clutching the data pad that held the message on it. Aryera saw the tears that streaked his face and her own dark eyes grew wider at this for she had never seen Kesas Pengot cry in all of her life.

“Kesas?” She gasped as she reached up to take his arm.

Kesas smiled and nodded his head. “I am... I am fine.” He told her. “In fact... I am better than fine.” He held out the data pad for her to take and Aryera took it and began to read, her eyes growing wider by the second.

Kesas turned to look at the others in the room and all of them gasped when they saw that he had been crying. Yasha came to her feet instantly and moved for her father but Kesas held up his hand.

“It is alright *fenneenum*.” He spoke quickly.

Aryera took a few steps closer to him while she was reading, her own heart and pulse beginning to race out of control. “Kesas this...”

“Read it to them Aryera.” Kesas told her. “Everyone must know what it says, for this message marks the beginning of the end.”

“What do you mean Lord Pengot?” Tiag Kirek asked as he rose to his feet.

“All of you have seen the first message.” Kesas spoke. “Do any of you doubt the crest that we saw?”

“Impossible!” Marda Kirek spoke now. She was Aryera’s youngest sister and a mere two hundred thousand years old. “It was only after our Pack was exiled here to Pakar Six that you allowed all of us to view the Book of Knowledge King Daniho gave to you Kesas. It is the only one in existence and it is the only book that shows the future crest of the Mahanlo bloodline as prophesized by the Onab Seers on Cerath.”

“So we agree that the first message could have only come from someone with Mahanlo blood?” Kesas asked them all. “Regardless of the lies that Yatia Arhtai continues to spew.”

“Who else could know this Kesas?” Rothan Luas asked now. He was the Lord of the Luas Pack, the largest of the three Packs that had broken from the Kirek Pack but remained steadfastly loyal to them and the Mahanlo bloodline. He was also one of the few remaining Pack members who had fought the Iais’Kai and left Cerath with the Kirek pack.

“No one.” Aryera spoke now from beside Kesas.

“Yatia Arhtai is a *upaee* Kesas.” Another Lord spoke up now. “Are we certain that she is not the one behind this? Trying to cause us to act.”

Kesas shook his head firmly. “No. I know for a fact Daniho had no contact with anyone from the Arhtai Pack for at least three years prior to leaving Cerath. He left it up to Kelia and Lylor to arrange everything for the exodus. The Onab did not give Daniho this book until six months prior to everyone leaving, and he did not give it to me until they day we left Cerath. Yatia Arhtai certainly did not learn this from me, and as Aryera said, I told none of you until after we were banished here.”

“Is there any way to be certain father?” Yasha asked now moving up beside her brother.

Kesas met her eyes and then turned to look at Aryera. She looked up and matched his gaze. “There is one way.” She finally spoke.

“How?” Rothan asked. “If this... if this is true Kesas... it would...”

Kesas nodded his head. “It would change the face of everything we know.” He finished the statement.

“Then how do we discover is this is all true?” Caylt asked.

Aryera looked up and around the table. “We wake my brother.” She spoke confidently.

Everyone at the table came to their feet in shock and all speaking at once. Kesas left them rage for a moment and then held up his hand. “*ENOUGH!*” He bellowed.

This brought everyone to silence, though none of them returned to their chairs. Marda Kirek looked at Aryera in disbelief. “Aryera you can’t be serious!” She gasped. “How does that prove anything? We know what will happen if we wake up Lylor or his children. The spies that Yatia has among our own people will discover

this the moment we unlock his stasis chamber. We know that they have placed their vile blood detectors all over Pakar Six. The moment that Lylor is awakened, they will see this on Koltar Four and she will know we have broken our agreement with her.”

“There is no agreement!” Aryera barked now. “She did this to keep Lylor from coming for Kelia which we all know he would do. He would have slaughtered hundreds of her Pack in order to retrieve his wife and mate! This is her way of controlling him and us! Of controlling the truth of what she did! It has been for millennia! And we abide it!”

“What choice do we have?” Marda exclaimed. “I am not... I was not alive to see this as you were sister, but I hate it as much as you do. We cannot stand against the Arhtai Pack! They outnumber us a hundred to one! More!”

Aryera softened her look instantly and nodded her head. “I know *arande*.” She said softly. “Forgive me sister.”

Kesas shook his head now. “There is nothing to forgive. Aryera is correct and so is Marda.” He spoke. “However... events have now changed.”

“Changed how father?” Caylt asked.

Kesas turned to Aryera. “Read it to them Aryera.” He said. “All of it.”

Aryera moved closer to the table and lifted the data pad. “The Prophecy has been fulfilled Kesas Pengot. Know that the descendants of King Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo live. The *Mard Revik* is among us. Mahanlo bloodline on Jetania in danger. Moving there to secure them.”

Kesas heard all of them gasp at this information for only the people in this room knew of the actions he had taken so many years ago to preserve the Mahanlo bloodline. He held up his hand to keep their questions quiet for the moment and looked at Aryera. “Finish it Aryera.” He said.

“He bears the name Martin Mahanlo Leonidas.” Aryera continued even as she heard them all gasp again. “He is the reincarnation of Daniho and Ashten together Kesas. He carries both their blood within him and he wants...” Aryera stopped to compose herself as she read the message. “He wants his family back together.” She began again. “He does not understand why you do not reply to him or why his *Tenna Kelia* is not among you, but his message is clear now. He demands that you answer, as is the duty given to you by King Daniho. If you do not, he will come for you and...” Aryera stopped and looked at Kesas.

Kesas Pengot smiled and nodded his head. “All of it Aryera.” He said.

“If you do not, he will come for you and kick your fat ass. Then he will go and retrieve his *Tenna Kelia* and reunite his family no matter who he has to destroy. Knowledge of who and what he is has only recently come to him with the help of others Kesas Pengot, but trust me, his bloodline is true and he will come for you. He is a Spartan, as are all of his children and the men and women who follow him. Their equals in battle I have not found. If you believe in nothing else Kesas Pengot, then believe me when I tell you he will sweep aside all who stand in his way. He is more like Daniho than either of us could have predicted when we left all those millennia ago. Trust in me now as you trusted in me then. Chiron.”

Kesas once more could not contain his happiness and he gripped the back of the chair as he laughed once more. No one had ever seen him this way and they could only look at him confused.

“Chiron?” Rothan gasped as he looked at Kesas. “The Chiron?”

“Who is this Chiron?” Marda asked now.

Aryera looked at her sister. “He was the Avatar the Onab built for King Daniho.” She answered. “He went nowhere without him. Ever.”

Kesas nodded his head. “He is also the only one who was present in the room with me and Daniho the day we left Cerath. He is the only one to have heard what Daniho told me that day.”

“Told you?” Yasha asked her father. “What did he tell you father?”

Kesas smiled warmly. “He told me that if I failed the Mahanlo bloodline he would find me no matter where in the universe I was and he would kick my fat ass. If he was gone, then he would make sure his descendants did it for him.”

Kesas saw the realization on their faces as what the message meant and how it could have only come from who they thought long dead. Rothan could not remain standing and he dropped his large body back into his chair in stunned disbelief.

“By all that we have held holy for so long.” He gasped out the words. “It is... it is truly happening! All we have hoped for... all we have wished for... it is alive Kesas! The hope we thought lost so long ago... it truly lives!”

Tiag Kirek saw the look on his mother’s face and knew that what she said was true. He moved to embrace her but Yasha beat him to it, wrapping her arms around Aryera tightly as Tiag then embraced both of them.

“The message said he is going to Jetania to secure his bloodline there.” Kesas spoke. “As you all know we sent the youngest son of Lady Kelia’s daughter Yarta to Ventori with his wife and mate after she was killed in the purge. She was of both Arhtai and Nenay blood. As we also know the Lycavorian Seed mission to Jetania found the Alphas on Ventori and took them to Jetania.”

“You used the Onab synthetic to mask their bloodline Kesas.” Rothan spoke once more. “How could they be in danger after all of these years.”

“There is only one way.” Kesas answered. “The synthetic proteins that the Onab gave to me were designed to mask the Mahanlo bloodline within them and whatever offspring they had. It would pass down within their bloodline to future generations. The only way to cancel out this masking is for someone of pure Mahanlo blood, descended from Daniho and Ashten, to have bitten the person whose blood was being masked while they were claiming each other in the act of mating. The injection of pure Mahanlo strands of protein would negate the masking effect completely.”

Aryera’s eyes were wide now. “Kesas... are you saying that a child of Daniho’s descendant has mated with one of the offspring from Kelia’s grandson?”

Kesas nodded his head. “Yes. Yarta’s son and his mate took the Pack name Athltin when they arrived on Ventori.” He replied. “His last message to me was just before they departed for this planet Jetania. Their cover was intact, but he was angry for having to leave all the Betas on Ventori. I instructed him to only take the emergency beacon and activate it only if he was sure that they had been discovered. He never activated it.”

“That would mean...” Aryera gasped as she realized what she was about to say.

“Sister... could it be true?” Marda asked her.

Aryera looked at her. “The Prophecy spoke of one who would carry the blood of three within her... and she would become the wife and mate to one who was the descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo and who carried the blood of eight within him. It is said the first-born son of the *Mard Revik* would be his father and he would be...”

“*Ared rie arve Tarivuos rei vada Mard Revik.*” Rothan spoke once more coming to his feet. (One of three heralds of the true king) “We all know the prophecy.”

“Thus their union would reunite our people for all time.” Aryera said.

Marda nodded her head. “Yes, we all know this.” She spoke. “Are you saying this female is on Jetania.”

Kesas nodded his head. “She is on Jetania and one of her children has become a mate to someone of pure Mahanlo blood.” He answered. “Which means he or she is no longer protected by the masking and if there is anyone from the Arhtai Pack on Jetania they will discover this. And who she is as well.”

“We know they sent members of their Pack to Ventori.” Aryera said.

Rothan nodded his head. “Yet we never could find out why.”

“I think we all know why.” Tiag spoke again. “They wanted to purge the Mahanlo blood everywhere.”

Kesas nodded his head. “You may be right Tiag... but if what Chiron says in this message is accurate and he was never wrong, then it will not matter anymore. If this Martin Mahanlo Leonidas is there, he will detect their true bloodline instantly by their scent. The masking was never meant to hide them from someone of pure Mahanlo blood. They will be safe.”

Caylt stepped closer to the table. “Father... I need to play *oratos angyn* right now.” He said. “Let us assume that everything we have just heard is all true. You said there was a way to know for sure but it involved waking Lord Lylor from stasis. Why?” (Devil’s advocate)

Kesas looked at his son. “Everyone touched by Mahanlo blood, will bear the crest of Mahanlo on their left shoulder. This includes anyone mated to one of Mahanlo blood; anyone turned by Mahanlo blood; anyone who is regarded as nathos by Mahanlo blood; or anyone simply chosen to be part of the future of the Mahanlo bloodline. All of them will bear this crest on their skin if the true descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo, of Reva Mahanlo, if they live and finally have awareness of who they are.” He replied. “It is the only way to be

certain. Lylor will bear this crest on his left shoulder because he is the husband, mate and *Anome* to Kelia Mahanlo.”

This brought everyone in the room to silence as what Kesas said soaked in. Everything they had lived for, everything those that they had loved had died for, it all stood before them now.

It was Aryera Kirek who spoke the answer all of them were thinking. “We must wake Lylor.” She said plainly. “We can try our best to block the sensors, but we must know for sure Kesas. Waking Lylor is the only way. If he carries the crest then Reunification is upon us.”

Kesas nodded his head slowly. “All of you know what this means.” He spoke. “I have to believe what Chiron is telling us in this message.”

Rothan looked at Kesas. “Do we have the means to establish communication with this probe and then Chiron himself?” He asked.

Caylt nodded his head. “It is possible, yes.” He answered. “But it could also be picked up by the Arhtai monitoring arrays as well.”

“Do we know that for sure Caylt?” Aryera asked. “They have not detected these two messages to us have they?”

Caylt shook his head. “No. But that does not mean they can’t.”

Kesas shook his head. “They would not know of the Pralor frequencies that Lord Daniho chose before we left Cerath. That information was only given to Lylor, Kelia and myself keto. That is how Chiron is communicating with us.”

“Waking Lylor up is dangerous Kesas.” Rothan said. “As much as I want to wake him up, it exposes all of us to that *upae’s rinth*.” (Bitch’s wrath) “Controlling Lylor Kirek if they have his beloved Kelia is impossible and you know that. And we would be hard pressed to stop our warriors from joining whatever mission he went on to get her back. *Jorbhe*... you would be hard pressed to stop me from going with him.”

Aryera nodded her head. “Rothan is correct Kesas.” She said.

Kesas nodded his head slowly. “I know.” He said softly. “I just...”

“What father?” Yasha asked him touching his arm.

“I believe... no one could have known what Daniho spoke to me that day.” Kesas said. “I believe this is Chiron without question. I also believe that... if this is truly the descendant of both Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo, when they discover what has taken place here... what Yatia Arhtai and her pack are responsible for...”

Aryera nodded her head and stepped closer to him taking his hand. “They will come for blood.” She said softly.

Kesas looked at her. “Blood?” he said. “No Aryera... if this is the descendant of Daniho and Ashten and he has children already as Chiron’s message suggests... he will... they will come for far more than blood.”

Rothan nodded his head. “They will come for justice.” He said softly.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

JETANIA WARIM

Lasun Vesrak was equally as large as Garget Ranev and even more rooted in honor and tradition. There wasn’t a wolf among any of the Mountain packs who did not know who he was, for his word was his oath. Like Garget Ranev, Lasun was cut from the same mold when it came to a Mountain Alpha, and when he spoke, people listened. He would go out of his way to make you feel welcome and comfortable, but cross him in any way and he could become your largest nightmare. No Plains wolves even attempted to go into the area of the Vesrak Pack to attempt to claim one of their females. The Vesrak Pack was too high into the mountains to make the trip and almost always those Plains Alphas ended up disappearing to never be seen again.

When Garget contacted him, Lasun had gone into a rage at first, even throwing several large chairs out of the windows of his office in his own City Settlement of Avona high up in the Western mountains. He calmed

almost immediately when Garget told him what had occurred and who had saved Anoria from the fate Juyno had planned for her and Taris. His eyes had only grown wider when Garget continued to explain who was now in Warim and that he needed to come here without delay. It had taken him and his mate Issna Vesrak only ninety minutes on the Overland Tram that connected all of the Mountain pack settlements within the many different mountain ranges and the trip allowed him to regain some of his calm demeanor. His wife and mate of nearly thirty thousand years had that affect on him, as she was the glue that kept his more volatile nature from exploding outward, and it was she who had explained to four of their six sons that they needed to remain in Avona. Their father's rage would more than compensate for their own she had told them, and they needed to remain calm. It was well known that in the city of Avona that in order to get near Anoria Vesrak, you had to go through her brothers as well as her father. A gauntlet that very few would survive. It also raised suspicion among the spies of Osrod Aspion as well, especially when they saw Lasun depart so quickly with his wife headed for Warim. Word was quickly sent back to Osrod in the capital almost immediately after Lasun departed his city of Avona.

These were things that did not concern Lasun in the least once the large man saw his only daughter laying on the medical bed and smiling at him when he entered with her mother. He did not recognize the others in the room with her, two Alpha females and a young Alpha male, but he could not deny the pureness of their wolf blood that was for certain. He knew instantly that none of them were pureblood wolves, but the blood within them was as pure as Lasun had ever smelled before, purer than even King Osrod himself. None of that mattered after an instant and he moved up beside the bed with his wife and mate Issna, coming to stand beside where Taris Ranev stood close to Anoria's head and held her hand tightly.

Lasun Vesrak was no fool, even as rooted in tradition as he was, and he knew his only daughter was different the moment she came into this world wailing like a banshee. She had been a surprise for him and Issna, but a hugely welcome one for both of them after six proud sons, and he knew things would be different going into the future the moment her ice blue eyes, so much like his own, had settled on him when she was just hours old.

Anoria Vesrak's beauty was unrivaled in Avona and more than one Alpha had expressed an interest in her as she grew, but Lasun and her brothers had quickly shut that down. He loved his only daughter beyond any emotion he had ever felt, and he denied her nothing, much to the chagrin of many of Avona's elder wolves. Her older brothers protected and looked after Anoria viciously, as did their own wives and mates. When Anoria announced that she wanted to join the Black Watch, Lasun Vesrak had supported her decision whole heartedly, as had his wife and mate. Anoria had shared with him many secrets as she had grown, secrets that daughters do not normally tell their fathers, and Lasun knew of her visions about Taris Ranev and their future together with the young Alpha who would eventually claim them. The intensity of her emotion and how she explained it all to him made Lasun embrace this way of thinking and he began to change even his old ways. He trained her in ways that even Mountain pack females did not train and he began to communicate more and more with Garget Ranev until the two men had become very close friends. He also discovered that Taris was no different in her actions with her father Garget than Anoria had been with Lasun, which as far as Lasun Vesrak was concerned only sealed his belief about the future.

Lasun took Anoria's hand as she reached for him and he pulled it close to his scruffy, bearded face and kissed the back of her hand.

"Pen brol frinna alvva." Anoria told him with bright, ice blue eyes. *"Marde."* (I am fine papa. Truly)

Lasun noted quickly that her scent was saturated with the scent of an extremely strong Alpha wolf. A honey melon and mint scent that mixed with hers openly. He glanced at Taris beside him and detected the same thing. That scent filtered within them in such a way as to tell any wolf in the area that they had been chosen and no one was to come near them if they valued their physical wellbeing. The Alpha that did this was stronger than any of the young Alphas he had smelled before in Avona, strong and pure. He snapped his head around and looked at the brownish, red haired young man behind him. He was standing beside the dark red haired young woman and the Queen that Garget had told him had come.

Lasun turned to fully face Calyb Leonidas. "You... you are the one who stopped Juyno Aspion's foul actions?" Lasun asked sternly.

Anoria's face twisted into one of concern. *"Alvva reyna."* She spoke quickly. Taris took her hand tightly and shook her head. (Papa please)

Calyb Leonidas remained standing before this Alpha wolf, a man who was even larger than his own father physically. He nodded his head slowly even as his heart raced with anxiety. He was able to hide this well enough with his etheric ability, making it seem to Lasun Vesrak as if this young wolf did not fear him in the least. Lasun stepped closer to him now, staring at him with his own ice blue eyes and the only thing that Anoria had inherited from him. Everything else about her looks was her mother, which Lasun often times thanked the gods for, causing his wife and mate to laugh at him for. Lasun Vesrak sensed a powerful warrior's blood within this young Alpha, but tempered by a scholar's blood. He did not flinch from his gaze, did not show his inward self and this impressed Lasun Vesrak more than anything.

"I... I owe you a debt I can never repay young Alpha." Lasun spoke calmly surprising even his wife and mate.

Calyb Leonidas was a young Alpha he knew, and he was a half breed, which obviously these Lycavorians were not used to, but his father's blood was dominant as his mother often told him happily and he should embrace that. He was a Leonidas and even though he was inwardly shaking with fear, he rose to his full height of five foot ten and met Lasun's eyes.

"There... there is a way sir." He spoke.

Lasun admired this young wolf's bravery and he nodded his head. "Speak then." He told him.

"I would ask... I would ask that you allow me to court and claim your daughter as my wife and mate." Calyb blurted out the words, Retta beside him and filling her twin with her own newfound confidence and feeling his heart and mind racing. Retta knew Calyb did not yet understand the overwhelming attraction to both of these young women, but soon that would no longer matter.

Lasun Vesrak glanced back at Anoria, her beautiful features beaming in happiness as she clutched Taris' hand in one of her own and her mother's hand in the other. He turned back to Calyb. "My daughter is... she is very special young wolf." Lasun spoke. "She has been special since she came into this world screaming at all those around her."

"Papa!" Anoria exclaimed in embarrassment.

Calyb looked at her and Taris, his own blood burning within his veins for both of them, and only Retta's calm resonance helping him to control it and hold it down. He turned back to Lasun.

"She and Taris Ranev are one and the same, sir." Calyb spoke softly. "Two who are one. My blood... my blood burns for each of them equally... as if they are one. You know this sir, I can see it in your eyes."

Lasun Vesrak nodded his head, impressed by his actions and his words. A warrior poet it appeared that this young Alpha Calyb Leonidas was. Lasun knew deep within his heart that no other could love and defend his daughter and Taris Ranev more than this young Alpha before him. He would burn worlds for them and he would heal their wounds should the need ever arise. And he would never cast them aside.

Lasun tilted his head to the side. "You are very young Calyb Leonidas." Lasun spoke slowly. "But you have the spirit and the heart of a warrior and a sage ten times your age. How is that possible?"

Calyb didn't hesitate. "I have the blood of my father within me sir. And the blood of my mother. That is all I need. That is all I am."

Lasun glanced at Anja who had so far remained silent and he turned back to Calyb. "So it would seem young wolf. So it would seem." He turned and looked at his wife and mate. "What does my beautiful Issna say to this young Alpha's request?"

Lasun watched his wife and mate, as she looked quickly to Anoria and then Taris. Issna Vesrak was a female Alpha wolf who had stood beside him for more years than he could remember and never flinched. A woman who had given him six, strong and proud children and raised every one of them in the same fashion. A female wolf who was the only one who could stir his blood because of her endless beauty and intoxicating eyes. He watched her dark eyes meet his and she nodded her head.

"I approve." She stated simply.

Lasun nodded his head and turned back to Calyb. "Impressing her is far more difficult than impressing me and you have done this. You have our permission Calyb Leonidas." Lasun stepped closer looking down into his unwavering eyes. "Love them as you have never loved anything before young wolf, and you will discover what I did the moment I took her mother as my mate, they will make your life worth living."

Anoria's ice blue eyes filled with tears at her father's words, as did Taris' for it was almost exactly what her father had told Calyb not thirty minutes ago.

Calyb looked at them both and Lasun could see that devotion and love in those green hazel eyes. “That will never be an issue for me sir.” Calyb spoke looking back to him. “I will treat them and love them as my father does my mothers. Utterly and without fail.”

Lasun saw Anja’s chest swell in pride behind her son and he nodded his head. “Then so be it.” He spoke. “When... when will she be able to leave this place Queen Anja?” He asked looking at Anja. Garget had already told him everything about this fiery haired Queen and what she was capable of and he had been looking forward to meeting her, just under different circumstances. “I hate medical facilities.”

Anja smiled at him and motioned to Calyb. “My son is her doctor Lasun Vesrak.” She replied.

Calyb smiled and looked at Anoria and Taris. “She will remain here overnight.” He stated formally. “Her injuries are healed but I want her to rest. I will stay with her through the evening with Taris. You are welcome to return at any time but I’m sure you are interested to meet my father.”

Lasun nodded his head. “Indeed.” He held up his hand. “Do not claim my daughter in a hospital room Calyb Leonidas.” He stated seeing Calyb turned a bright red in embarrassment.

“Lasun Vesrak!” Issna Vesrak exclaimed aloud.

Anja couldn’t help but laugh and she stepped forward to take his arm. “Come this way Lasun.” She told him. “I will take you to see Martin. He and Garget are close by.”

Issna glared at her husband as he turned but she could not be mad at him for very long as she saw the twinkle in his eye. “I will remain as well Lasun.” She spoke to him. “For a time anyway.”

Lasun look at Anoria a last time, saw her beaming face and knew he had done the right thing. He nodded his head and then looked at Anja. “I wish to see the scum that did this to my daughter.” He spoke.

“Lasun!” Issna looked at her beloved mate. “Do not make things worse my love.” She told him. “Promise me.”

Lasun stared at her for a long moment and then nodded his head. Anja took his arm and led him out of the room.

Garget was standing outside the lone room at the end of the corridor, the glass partition allowing them to look into the room unhindered. He turned when Anja walked up with Lasun and he bowed his head to her.

“Queen Anja.” He stated formally.

Anja shook her head with a smile. “I have already told you about that Garget. However it came to be, we are family now. Retta and Lazar, Loras in the future hopefully. As family we do not stand on formality. Please.” Anja told him. “Besides, we are your guests here and we are not your King and Queens.”

Garget shook his head quickly. “That is where you are wrong.” He spoke confidently. “But that is a discussion for another time I suppose.” He said. He quickly held out his hand to Lasun who took his forearm without question. “It is good to see you again old friend.”

Lasun nodded his head. “Thank you Garget.”

Garget shook his head once more. “I did nothing.” He replied. He looked at Anja again. “They are down the adjoining corridor in the large conference room Lady Anja, though I am sure you can find them.” He said motioning with his hand down a separate corridor to their right. “I will bring Lasun along shortly. We have some things to discuss first.”

Anja nodded her head and looked at Lasun. “We will see you again Lasun Vesrak.” She told him. “It has been a pleasure to finally meet you.”

Lasun bowed his head to her. “More for me Lady Anja.” He told her. “More for me.”

Anja smiled and headed down the corridor as Lasun stepped up beside Garget. His eyes followed Anja for a short time and then he turned back to his friend. “You were not joking when you said she was tiny Garget my friend. And this is the one who made Lazar and Rhaos look like children?”

Garget grinned and nodded his head. “And a detachment of my own men when they arrived here.” He said. “Do not let her size fool you. She is more vicious and cunning than I have ever seen from a female wolf before and I imagine her fellow Queens are no different. Do not underestimate her.”

Lasun grunted. "I do not intend too. The smell of the Alpha within her blood alone would give any man pause if he had half a brain." He turned and looked fully at Garget Ranev. "What happened my friend?"

The two men had become as close as brothers over the last decade because of their two daughters. As with Lasun, Taris had shared everything with her father, opening his eyes to things he would never have considered before. Knowing what their daughters would share in the future and with whom, this had brought the two men closer than anything had before then. Among the Mountain Packs it was well known that in the last decade, the two men had stood together on every issue that had come up and they had not wavered. Garget Ranev and Lasun Vesrak had become synonymous with each other and if you angered one, you automatically angered the other. And no one wanted both of them aligned against them.

Garget looked at his friend. A man who had replaced his lost brother Warim in his eyes. They were only five years apart in age anyway. "Taris and Anoria went into the mountains last night. She has a cave under a waterfall. A retreat of sorts for her. They went there to be together and..."

Lasun nodded his head knowingly. "Our daughters have always been different Garget. They have changed us both in many ways. We have known for longer than they have that they would be together. That is not something I will ever question."

"Then you see the love they carry for each other in their eyes?" Garget said. "And for Calyb Leonidas."

Lasun nodded his head slowly. "He is a half breed and yet his aura burns brighter than most of the Alphas in my Pack." He said. "I cannot deny that, nor can I deny what I see in my daughter's eyes when she looks at him. Or Taris' for that matter."

Garget nodded his head. "Nor I." He held out the data pad to him. "Juyno had this on him." He spoke as Lasun began reading. "The birth registry. He knew Taris would be in Phase at this time and he purposely came up here for her. He did not know that Anoria is a member of the Black Watch and that she would be here as well. And he certainly didn't know she would be with Taris."

Lasun looked at him. "These files are supposed to be confidential Garget." He hissed.

Garget nodded his head. "When have you ever known Osrod to abide by rules that he himself sets?" He spoke. "This however, this stinks of his *upaee* Queen Secha. Juyno's mother. She is devious and she hates the Mountain Packs for some reason that we have never been able to determine. Especially Loras. Her treatment of Loras when she was a Queen should have been all the knowledge we needed."

Lasun shook his head. "I should have supported her openly Garget." He admitted to his friend. "Seeing what she has done in these last years is amazing. How she has brought us all together and got us to work for the benefit of all our Packs. I should have... perhaps if I had been more vocal what happened with Warim would never had taken place."

Garget shook his head. "Do not dwell on it Lasun." He told him. "She has always known that you were behind her. And what took place is what destiny intended. My brother lived a full life and he died defending the woman he loved."

Lasun met his eyes. "Loras was a loyal and devoted wife and mate to him Garget, but she did not truly love him did she?"

Garget shook his head slowly. "Warim knew this I think. Deep inside I think he knew Loras was meant for much greater things."

"What did Queen Anja mean when she said Loras was to be a member of their family in the future?"

Lasun asked. "Do you know?"

Garget shook his head. "It has something to do with the prophecy that I have not seen." He replied. He looked at Lasun intently. "She does bear the same mark on her shoulder that the members of the *Mard Revik's* family all have now. A wolf's head. It is not as clearly defined as Lazar, for he has taken Anja and the King's daughter Retta as his mate, but it is there. I suspect that it will appear on Taris and Anoria once Calyb claims them."

Garget reached out and touched the small control panel beside the window of the room. The opaque glass suddenly disappeared to reveal the inside of the room and Lasun's eyes grew wider when he saw Juyno Aspion lying on the bed.

"He will live unfortunately." Garget said. "Another young woman like Queen Anja, a Hadarian as her species are called, she is the wife and mate to Anja's *mandri* Kalis, she kept him alive. His sternum was fractured in two places, six of his ribs were broken clean in half and one punctured his lung. His skull had a

minor fracture and his jaw was broken in three different places. Serale, that is her name, she made sure to treat the more severe of his wounds, but she left the others to be worked on by our medical people.”

Lasun could only stare at Juyno in shock. His face was still heavily bruised, and very swollen. His jaw had been reset but the bruising from that was very obvious as were the two pins in either side of his cheek that held the thick bone together now. It would heal, but as with all Lycavorians, their bones were so tough and thick, it would take time for the injury to heal fully. He looked at Garget with wide eyes.

“You... you are saying that Calyb Leonidas did this?” He asked in shock. “Juyno Aspion is... he is at least six inches taller and sixty pounds heavier than him.”

Garget nodded his head as he looked back to Juyno in the bed. Juyno’s right hand was secured to the bed frame with flexible cuffs, but even still, Garget had two of his men in the room with him.

“I said as much to myself. He killed one of the others with Juyno and crippled another. He would have killed them all had not his father and brother arrived to stop him.” Garget said finally with a nod of agreement. “I have never witnessed such a thing in all my life. Once his father and brother were there, he went from savagely protecting them to healing Anoria in a split second. It is... it is this Spartan training that all of their people undergo Lasun. Even the King’s family it seems. I have never seen men and women move as they do Lasun. I do not know what this Spartan training regime consists of, but apparently they do not play at war as Osrod does Lasun. A painful fact that I believe he will discover very soon.”

Lasun Vesrak was silent for a long moment as he stared at Juyno Aspion on the bed. He wanted to kill the fool for injuring his beloved daughter, kill him in the most painful way that he could possibly devise, but he also realized that the severe beating that Calyb Leonidas had given to him would remain with him forever. A pain that his mind would never forget.

Lasun looked at his friend. “What... what is he like Garget?” He asked finally.

Garget met his eyes and smiled. “He is not what you expect Lasun.” He answered. “He is not what I expected. But there is no doubt in my mind that he is the *Mard Revik*.”

Lasun looked back to Juyno through the window. “Then everything... everything Anoria and Taris and the Oracle have been saying all of this time. It is truly real.”

Garget nodded his head. “Yes... it is.” He spoke. “Come my friend, you will want to meet him.”

Lasun snarled silently at Juyno’s still form before turning and following Garget down the corridor.

Lasun Vesrak had believed longer and more deeply in the prophecy than his friend Garget Raney, primarily because of his now long dead parents. Anoria’s birth and everything she had told him while she was growing had only cemented this within his heart. Lasun knew that the same thing had happened to Garget when Taris was born and he discovered just how special she was, but Lasun’s faith had never wavered. He hadn’t really given much thought to how he expected the *Mard Revik* to be, but whatever conceptions he may have had got tossed onto the trash heap when he entered the room and saw him.

His wolf aura alone was enough to stagger Lasun in such a way that he paused for a long moment and gripped Garget’s arm, his eyes wide in disbelief. Never in his lifetime had he felt such an aura of power and dominance. Garget smiled at this reaction for it was no different than what he had experienced on the landing platform only a few short hours ago. Lasun could only gaze with wide eyes upon the one the prophecy said would come. He was tall, easily over six foot, but his body appeared as if it had been forged from granite. He was thickly muscled, far more so than even his youngest and strongest warrior, the shirt he wore doing little to hide the cut of his arms and his broad shoulders. His raven black mane of hair was shoulder length and now pulled into a tight pony tail at the back of his head. His beard and mustache was perfectly trimmed, his skin deeply tanned, telling Lasun that this was a man who did not stay inside very often. At the moment, the fiery red haired Queen Anja was in his arms, her own arms wrapped tightly around his narrow waist and her head pressed to his chest; the other, taller women on either side of her, all of them pressed up against him intimately.

The female with the same hair color as the *Mard Revik*, as black as the darkest night, and almost blue in the dim light of the sun from outside the huge window of the lounge, was a pureblood Alpha female whose aura dwarfed any female he had ever seen in his lifetime, even his own beloved Issna. Her beauty was exotic and utterly surreal, and the color of her eyes unlike any he had ever seen before. This could only be the *Mard*

Revik's Anome, his Lycavorian soulmate as the prophecy foretold and Anoria had told him of from the Oracle's teachings during her schooling among the Black Watch. The second female, with golden blond hair and four-inch-high pointed ears, was equally astounding in her beauty. Her deeply tanned skin was without a single blemish of any kind, so smooth and radiant. This could only be one of the elven Queens as Anoria had also told him of, both of them devastating in their beauty as all female members of their species were.

Lasun glanced quickly at Garget still unable to process what he saw and could obviously feel within the room. Garget nodded his head. "I know my friend. I know." He spoke softly. "I felt just as you do not a few hours ago. I'm still getting used to it. Come."

Martin had smelled them come into the room but he was ignoring them for the moment. The scents of three of his Queens filled his senses now and that is all that mattered to him as he nuzzled the top of Anja's head once more.

[Red, are you sure that you...?] He spoke within the shielded connection they all shared. Martin did not know if any of these Mountain Pack Alphas had any Etheric ability beyond the rudimentary use of it and he was not taking any chances.

Anja pulled her head away from his chest and looked up into his dark brown eyes. His mint scent combined with Aricia's lavender and coco and For'mya's orchid scent was heaven to Anja right now. It would be even better when Dysea, Bella and Cirith were back among them as well, but Anja was delighted at the moment.

[I'm fine Lover.] She answered him. *[Really.]*

[Maybe this wasn't such a good idea Melyanna.] For'mya spoke now.

Anja shook her head. *[No, For'mya. We discussed this, all of us. We agreed it needed to be done. We didn't expect how it went down but the result was the same.]*

[You getting beat to within an inch of your life was not part of the plan.] Aricia reminded her.

Anja looked at Martin. *[I have a hard head as you have told me so often through the years.]* She said with a brilliant smile. *[It worked out Lover. I'm fine and we have the result we wanted.]*

Martin lifted his hand and stroked her cheek watching as her eyes closed in bliss and Aricia and For'mya pressed closer to her as they felt it as well. *[You are as obstinate as a Rock Spider too.]* He told her.

Anja chuckled softly. *[And just as deadly.]* She offered.

Martin nodded his head. *[That is for sure.]* He agreed. *[You are certain about this Loras and Lazar then?]*

Anja nodded her head. *[No doubt.]* She replied to his question. *[Loras and Lazar both have Mahanlo blood within them. Serale says that when Retta bit him, when they claimed each other, her pure Mahanlo blood proteins removed whatever was masking his. Ceale schooled Serale hard in blood proteins and such. She knows what she is talking about. Loras' are still masked, as are her children with this Warim and probably her parents as well. There wasn't time to do any tests on them before you showed up with an attitude.]*

Martin grinned at her stern look. *[My first plan was to kill them all and...]*

[Let god sort them out?] Anja finished. *[Carians Lover, that is so old.]* She said with a laugh that Aricia and For'mya joined in on.

[He was going to do it Anja.] Aricia stated. *[Andro stopped him.]*

Anja smiled again. *[Thank god. Our son has more sense than you sometimes you know. Not often... but sometimes.]*

[Martin...] For'mya spoke turning her head slightly and seeing Garget behind him with the other Alpha.

Martin nodded his head. *[Yeah, I smell them.]* He looked at Anja however. *[Can you find out for sure Red?]*

Anja nodded her head. *[Easily. Her parents might not be too happy about it if what you, Andro and this Chiron says is true.]*

Martin nodded his head. *[We need to know for sure. And if one or both of them have Mahanlo blood in them, they will already know we are here.]*

Anja nodded her head. *[True enough. I'll get on it.]*

Martin leaned over quickly and laid a blistering kiss on her and pulsed her with his aura before she could blink and Anja couldn't help but whimper softly in delight as she kissed him back. She glared at him when he pulled away, her pulse racing.

[You had better plan on picking this up again soon Lover.] She snarled at him while gripping the front of his shirt.

Martin grinned and waggled his eyebrows. *[I do.]* He told her.

All three of them burst into soft laughter within their connection and Anja slapped his face lightly. *[I'll hold you to that big boy.]* She told him.

[We will come with you Anja.] Aricia said. *[We wish to meet this Loras. Her role in our family is only just beginning. And this young Alpha who has stolen the heart of our daughter intrigues us.]*

Anja took their hands. *[You will like him.]* Anja said as she began to lead them out of the room. *[He reminds me of Isra in his demeanor, and for a young Alpha, he is very handsome.]*

Martin smiled to himself and shook his head as he turned to face Garget and the other Alpha. The man was every bit as physically imposing as Garget Ranev, though a bit more grizzled around the edges. Martin's eyes went wider when he watched Lasun drop to one knee and bow his head deeply.

"My... my Lord King!" Lasun spoke the words not really having any idea what to say or do. This was a moment that they had all dreamed of, but now that it was here, Lasun Vesrak had no idea how to act or what to do.

"*Carians nirr uvenn!*" Martin gasped aloud seeing Lasun look up to gaze at him. "*Forn soas un joa ared!*" (Gods get up. You bow to no one)

Lasun looked at him with wide eyes as he rose back to his feet. "You... you are the *Mard Revik!*" Lasun gasped loudly.

Martin nodded his head. "And as I told Garget not so very long ago, I hate that name." He said. "You want the job? I'll give it to you cheap!"

Lasun looked at Martin stunned as Garget laughed loudly at his expression. "Lord Martin Leonidas... this is Anoria's father Lasun Vesrak. He leads the Vesrak Pack from the northern mountains."

"It is an honor, sir." Martin told him. "And I apologize for what happened with your only daughter. That is not exactly the way my son Calyb wanted to meet her and Taris."

"He... he knew he would find them?" Lasun asked stunned as he rose to his feet fully.

Martin nodded his head. "He didn't tell anyone except his twin sister, but he knew." He replied. "My children can be pretty closed mouth when they want to be."

"He saved her from a fate..." Lasun's eyes were wide still and he could only gawk at Martin in disbelief. "He saved her from being taken against her will and perhaps even her life." He said finally. "He... he boldly asked for my permission to claim her not a few minutes ago. He does not lack for confidence that one."

Martin smiled and nodded. "That is my fault. I have raised all of my children to go after what they want and let nothing stop them. I am sorry about that."

Lasun shook his head quickly. "You should not be sorry My Lord. He shows more about what it means to be an Alpha of our people than most of the purebloods on this planet and he is only half Lycavorian. My mate Issna and I gave him our blessing. He was able to impress my mate Issna in mere minutes. That is something it took me a year to do when I first claimed her." He spoke proudly. "My daughter Anoria is... she is like Taris and she has always been special. I do not try to understand most of it but..."

Martin nodded his head in understanding. "I do know the feeling Lasun Vesrak. May I call you Lasun?"

Lasun could not believe the question and he nodded instantly. "Of course My Lord." He looked at Garget then and then back to Martin as if something had just occurred to him. "My Lord, how are you here and King Osrod knows nothing?"

"The ship I arrived on is in orbit over Warim at the moment." Martin replied.

"Orbit?" Lasun gasped his eyes wide. "His men would be all over Warim by now if they saw your ship in orbit!"

Martin smiled and shook his head. "It's hidden." He said.

Lasun looked confused. "You mean like the stealth mode on our ships?" He asked finally.

Martin nodded his head. "In a manner of speaking yes. We call them Shrouds. And trust me, King Osrod numb nuts, or whatever his *nubous* name is, he won't know it's there until I want him too." Martin brought his left arm up and looked at the small display on the Pralor wrist computer Murano had given to him some time ago. It was linked directly to his P1 and made so he did not have to carry the P1 wherever he went. He had only

just starting wearing it and it was growing on him. “And that will be in about six minutes, give or take a second or two.”

Lasun blinked quickly. “I... I don’t understand.” He said.

Martin nodded his head. “Many years ago, this fool’s ancestors took something from my *staania* and I want it back!”

Lasun looked even more confused. “Your *staania*?” He asked. “How is that...” His ice blue eyes opened wider when the realization hit him. “You speak of those who came before you?” He gasped. “The ones from the great ship?”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.”

“I can’t... I remember her... Dynina!” Lasun almost yelled. “Her name was Dynina!”

Martin nodded again. “She is my grandmother.” He said. “This fool Osrod’s grandfather, or father, I don’t really give a shit which one to be honest, they took something that belonged to her and they kidnapped people that followed her and I’m pretty sure they are now dead. I want that material back and I want justice for them.”

“I did not know that they took anyone?” Lasun gasped looking once more to Garget and then back to him. “We avoided contact with Osrod’s grandfather and father in the beginning. My parents, Garget’s parents, Loras’ parents, none of them, they wanted nothing to do with him or his rule. They were the ones who took our ancestors from Ventori and did not allow them to go back. When this finally came to be fully known they brought us up here into the mountains away from the Plains Packs.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yep, they did that too.”

“It is why we came into the mountains and formed our own Packs.” Garget spoke now. “You say they took something from your *staania*... this Dynina female?” Lasun asked him.

“It was advanced equipment of some kind. When my *staania* refused to give it to them freely, one of them tried to take her as his mate against her will. That didn’t go very well for him. She bit his *nor* off.” Martin told them.

Garget and Lasun looked at one another with wide eyes. “Then it is true!” Garget gasped aloud.

Lasun nodded his head. “There were rumors that something of this nature happened. We never really believed it, but Osrod’s grandfather, he died shortly after due to some infection that he supposedly caught.”

Martin grinned. “Infection my *mida*. My *staania* probably did something to him that she won’t even tell me. She can be vicious.”

“So it would appear.” Lasun said nodding his head approvingly. “You say they took something from her?”

Martin nodded his head. “Equipment that they didn’t understand then and they probably still don’t, since we have detected nothing to indicate they were able to engineer anything from what they took.”

“You can detect this?” Lasun asked stunned.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes. We know right where he is keeping it too.”

Lasun blinked quickly once more. “How... how do you intend to get it back My Lord?” Lasun asked. “Osrod is many things but he is no fool. He is much smarter than his father and grandfather and many would say he is a better leader, his arrogant faults aside of course. He has proper security all over the place. His men are well trained and loyal to him.”

Garget nodded his head. “He has done many things his father and grandfather would not have done.” He said. “Things that have angered many of those older Plains Pack elders.”

Martin’s expression was void of any emotion. “*Nubou hel.*” Martin hissed angrily. (Fuck them) “I don’t particularly care what he is. To me he is a little piss ant dictator and in about four and a half minutes now, I am going to take a massive shit all over his little parade.” Martin’s face took on a smile that grew even wider. “And his security people have never met my son or his siblings and friends. They are an odd bunch, but they have attitude! You know how young people are. You want to watch? It will be a good show.”

“What do you mean?” Garget asked confused.

Martin lifted his wrist up to his mouth. “Armen... you have my location locked?”

“Affirmative King Martin.” Armen’s voice replied. “And the two individuals with you.”

“Bring us right to the bridge Armen.” Martin said.

“Stand by.” Armen said. “We have also received a transmission from Colonel Thoti King Martin.”

Martin blinked not expecting that. “Go.”

“Martin...” Martin noticed how Armen did not say King before his name this time and this caught and held his attention. “Colonel Thoti has taken Lorendo and his ship into custody. Lorendo is injured but alive. Thoti will be arriving in the morning.”

Martin grinned at this information. “Well how bout that?” He quipped. “Things are looking up. You ready Armen?”

“Teleporting now.”

Lasun opened his mouth to ask the question when his eyes grew wide as the orange hued light engulfed all three of them and they vanished from the conference room.

SPARTA'S WRATH **ORBIT OF JETANIA** **HOLDING POSITION OVER WARIM**

Garget and Lasun had both dropped to the deck instantly after arriving on the bridge of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, their bodies tingling and both of them feeling nauseous. Their stomachs were doing flips in their body and they looked up at Martin staring down at them with a grin.

“Sorry about that.” He said. “It’s the quickest way to move around without waiting for a ship. The nausea will pass in a few seconds. It takes getting used to, but after three or four teleports it goes away.”

“*Carians!*” Garget almost bellowed as he rose to his feet and he and Lasun steadied each other. “That was...” Garget Ranev didn’t notice the four *Durcunusaan* soldiers who waited in the shadows of the bridge, their sole purpose was to protect their King. This had been Armen’s doing, an extra precaution against those who would try to harm Androcles’ father and the King. He determined that it was probably unnecessary, but he had four of them come to the bridge to take positions regardless. Had either Garget or Lasun tried anything, they would have been dead before they could act.

Garget’s words ended in his throat when he saw where they were and his eyes went wide.

“*Nubou lae!*” Garget Ranev almost shouted causing Lasun to shake his head and look around, his own eyes going wider.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” Lasun echoed Garget’s words and Martin laughed at this as the two men looked around.

“Welcome to my son’s ship *SPARTA'S WRATH*.” Martin told them. “It can be a little overwhelming at first.”

Garget turned slowly in his spot his eyes never having seen the likes of what he was seeing right now. “By the gods!” He gasped once more. He took in the many computer stations and the large number of men and women who were not Lycavorian as they went about their duties without giving the two men a second glance. He saw many with ears like the elven Queen he had seen on Jetania, and still more that had reptilian like skin and several that had feathers covering their entire bodies.

Lasun finally turned back to Martin as Garget’s eyes continued to sweep the bridge. “This is... this is one of your ships?” He gasped.

Martin shook his head. “This ship is one of a kind right now.” Martin said. “Hopefully we’ll either discover and find more of them or build them ourselves.”

“Given the current status of Dreamland and Admiral O’Connor’s imagination, the odds are that you will begin building them within a year King Martin.” Armen spoke from just behind Martin. “I estimate you will complete construction within six months because of the Worker Drones and the ingenuity of Union engineers.”

Martin smiled and turned to look at him. “Really?” Martin said surprised at that. He would have to have a talk with Ben on that. “Wow... that’s good to know.” He turned back to Lasun and Garget. “This is Armen. He is the ship’s Avatar and Commanding Officer.”

Lasun and Garget stared at the towering Avatar with wide eyes. “He is not... he is not...” Garget managed to rasp out the words.

Armen nodded his head as he stepped up beside Martin now. "You are correct Garget Ranev... I am not a living individual. The closest definition that you would understand is that I am an advanced cybernetic lifeform. An AI if you will, though that term is rather limited in its description."

Martin looked at Armen and smiled. Since the day he had discovered Avi on Lycavore, Martin had never considered him anything but alive. He felt the same way towards Armen as well, as did his son. He didn't know what it was, but they just considered Armen and Avi and the Worker Drones something more than what others did. It also explained Andro's obvious affection for the Worker Drone Alpha Nine. The spider like Alpha Nine was always around him whenever Andro was on the ship. Martin had discovered that the Avatars and Worker Drones each had their own quirks, which to Martin and his family were almost like personalities, and it made each of them unique.

Martin looked at Lasun and Garget and motioned to what appeared to be a plain bulkhead of some sort. "You'll want to see this." He said. "Armen?"

Armen nodded and turned his head. "TO, please lower the Ducorsis armor around the bridge view windows."

The elven male nodded his head from across the bridge and his hands flew over his duty station. "Ducorsis Armor retracting."

Lasun and Garget watched with wide, stunned eyes as the strange bulkhead in front of them suddenly shifted and they watched as armor of some kind retracted away, exposing a view that neither of them had ever seen before in real life. They had seen pictures of course, pictures of Jetania from orbit that others had shown them, but neither of them had ever experienced it themselves in their lifetime and it was sobering to say the least.

"*Son vada carians!*" Lasun was able to mutter as he and Garget stepped closer to the clear view window. It was nearly floor to ceiling they saw and though fear gripped them at the exposure, both of them were too overcome with disbelief and awe to keep from moving. It did not seem to bother anyone else and they quickly determined that they were safe and they simply stared out on the greenish, purple surface of Jetania.

"Pretty awesome huh?" Martin spoke from behind them. "I was pretty much the same way when I first saw my planet from space."

Garget turned to look at him with wide eyes. "You?" He gasped.

Martin nodded his head. "I was actually born in space." He told them. "On a cruiser to be exact. A much smaller ship than this to be sure, but still in space. I didn't know that until much later in my life but that is a story for another time."

Garget turned back to the view window and he could see the many Coalition ships in orbit around Jetania as well as the massive space station that was their primary ship building facility and military headquarters.

"I have... I have never had a desire to leave the surface." Garget said softly.

"Nor I." Lasun agreed.

"They... they cannot see us?" Garget asked in disbelief.

Martin shook his head. "No. I'm guessing that our Shroud technology is probably two or three thousand years more advanced than the stealth capabilities of Coalition ships." Martin said looking at Armen.

Armen nodded his head. "That is reasonably close." He answered.

Martin turned back to Garget and Lasun as he watched Lasun reach up and place his hand against the clear view window. "Gods!" He muttered to himself before looking at Martin. "This is... this is what my daughter Anoria tried to describe to me from one of her... one of her visions. Or dreams. She was so detailed in what she was describing. She said that this was... it was normal. How...?"

Martin nodded his head in understanding. "I'm going to take a wild guess and say that is because of my son Calyb." He told them. "The Etheric realm is quite infinite and often times we cannot explain things fully. I would guess and say that your daughter and Taris were seeing the future in their dreams. What they knew was coming. They saw my son Calyb, perhaps even through his eyes."

Garget looked at him now. "You speak of our ability to talk using our minds. This Etheric ability. No one among our people on Jetania is very good at this. It is a simple tool for us. It is hardly used at all."

"Hopefully that will change." Martin said.

"How?" Garget asked.

Martin nodded again. "We call it Mindvoicing." He told them. "The ability to use the Etheric realm. My people... our people..." He amended that statement. "Those of us who came from Lycavore, or are descended from those who came from Lycavore, we use it far more than the Lycavorians here on Jetania. Perhaps you did not have those who could teach you how to use it fully as we did. The people that brought Lycavorians to Ventori and then here to Jetania, they took your ancestors from Lycavore before we fully learned how to use it. They did not realize at the time what they were doing, but they are good people and were only doing what felt right to them."

Lasun looked at him. "You have seen them?" He asked. "The ones who brought our people here?"

Martin nodded his head. "Their descendants yes." He answered. "That is also another story for a different time."

Garget shook his head quickly. "Argh!" He gasped. "So much... so much that we have never believed could exist and suddenly we discover that it does exist!"

Martin smiled. "Believe me Garget Ranev... I have been through what you are feeling." He told him. "It does get easier."

"Ninety-seven seconds King Martin." Armen broke in and Martin nodded.

Lasun looked at him. "What... what happens in ninety-seven seconds?" He asked.

Martin smiled and motioned to the massive station in the distance. "King Osrod numb nuts is going to find out just how small he really is in the grand scheme of things." Martin looked at Armen. "Armen... split screen it and put up the facility from the *PREMONITION* feed next to the exterior view."

Armen nodded and blinked his eyes several times. Lasun and Garget moved back in surprise when half of the large window changed to a view of a large building. His eyes went wide as he recognized it.

"That is the main Research and Development Facility in the capital!" He exclaimed.

Martin nodded his head. "It's also where they are keeping what Osrod's grandfather took from my *staania*. My son is getting ready to retrieve it."

"Retrieve it?" Garget gasped looking at him. "Martin... that building is guarded by over tow hundred of Osrod's most loyal soldiers! They are the best trained and heavily rewarded for their loyalty."

"Over two hundred?" Martin asked. "Really?"

"You said your son is going to retrieve it?" Lasun spoke now. "Does he have a large enough force? If they do not assault without a full battalion they will not succeed."

Martin smiled. "He doesn't have a full battalion." He spoke. "I think he has..." Martin looked at Armen. "What is it Armen? Sixteen?"

Armen shook his head. "Fifteen King Martin. Commander Torian still has not returned to duty yet."

Martin nodded and looked back to Garget and Lasun who were staring at him as if he was insane. "Fifteen." He said. "He's got them outnumbered."

Garget looked back to the screen and his eyes narrowed. "This is real time." He finally spoke. He turned back to Martin. "You have a ship watching this facility don't you?"

Martin smiled. "Sitting about five thousand feet above it." He answered.

"What are you waiting for?" Lasun asked him now.

Martin's smile grew wider still. "I'm waiting for my *fervon*." He replied. "He loves to make flashy entrances."

PREMONITION

FIVE THOUSAND FEET ABOVE COALITION RESEARCH FACILITY

Androcles rested on one knee between Sadi and Ne'Veha as they held the ship perfectly motionless and waited. His azure eyes were watching the facility below with keen interest, but he smelled and sensed Carisia and Lu'ria come up behind him. Both of them placed their hands on his shoulders affectionately and he turned his head first to kiss Carisia's hand and then to the other side to kiss Lu'ria's knuckles.

"How much longer?" Carisia asked.

Sadi looked up at the instruments above her quickly. "Forty-nine seconds." She replied.

“I hate waiting.” Lu'ria commented.

Andro nodded his head. “As do we all.” He stated in agreement. “*SirsanGai*... you have the location locked?”

Ne'Veha nodded her head from the co-pilot's seat. “Four levels down. Main elevator lifts to that level and then an immediate right out of the lift. A hundred and thirty meters down the corridor. It is in some kind of vault, but our sensors can penetrate it, so I'm guessing it is not as secure as they think. Whatever they have hidden in there, it appears to be Pralor in nature. Some kind of power source if the readings are accurate.”

“Technology wise they aren't even close to us *Duan Enylar*.” Sadi said turning her head slightly to look at him. “All of the time they have been out here and they have only advanced to this level of technology? It just doesn't seem right.”

Andro nodded in agreement. “Unless someone or something was holding them back.” He stated. “Pralor power sources are not

“Twenty-three seconds.” Ne'Veha called out.

Andro nodded his head. “We move exactly one minute after Uncle Danny enters the system. They will be at the peak of confusion and...”

“Andro!” Deion's voice caused Andro to turn and he saw him entering the cockpit with Mari close on his heels holding her P9. “*Fervon*... you need to see this!”

Andro turned fully and rose to his feet as Mari moved up past Deion. “The Avatar Chiron was able to do a massive upload of information to all of our P9s Andro. I have been going through some of the new information and...”

Andro smiled for he could tell she was excited. “Mari... just spit it out.” He told her with warmth. “You do not need to explain anything to me.”

Mari met his eyes. “One of the archives uploaded was a database of all the bloodlines of our people from Cerath and Lycavore. I was playing with the port lateral sensor array, having it do a random sweep as we have been holding position.”

“Ten seconds Andro.” Sadi called out.

Mari moved closer to him. “Andro... the sensors have detected half a dozen individuals in the city below with the Arhtai Pack bloodline. Two of them are in the facility we are about to attack, and if these readings are accurate one of them is pure Arhtai bloodline. No mixture at all.”

Andro's eyes went wide. “What?!” He gasped.

“That's not all!” Mari continued. “I have detected fourteen that are at this very moment in Warim and closing on the position of your mothers and Loras Ranev.” Mari saw his azure eyes go wide at this information. “All of them are pure Arhtai bloodline as well.

“Time's up everyone!” Sadi called. “Daniel is here!”

Father! You have to help her! Achilles' voice thundered within the Etheric realm. He really needn't have bothered for Andro's decision was easy enough for him to make and he spun around.

“*KertaGai!* Back to Warim! Now!” He almost yelled.

Sadi and Ne'Veha didn't hesitate for a spilt second. They knew their beloved Androcles too well.

“*SirsanGai!* Full power to thrusters and main engines!” Sadi screamed as she yanked the *PREMONITION* into a gut wrenching turn over the city and the ship leaped forward as if shot from the barrel of a gun when Ne'Veha jammed the ship's engines to full power.

None of them realized that such a burst of power would send shudders reverberating all over the immediate area and even though they were five thousand feet above the facility, the sound and backwash from engaging the *PREMONITION'S* Pralor engines at such a low level was felt by everyone on the ground. Nearly two dozen men and women who were standing outside the facility or preparing to enter it staggered under the immense rush of air and the thundering sound of the ship breaking the sound barrier within half a second. Eyes lifted to the sky to search for what had caused something none of them had ever experienced before but they saw nothing.

Nor did they realize that one set of those eyes belonged to a pureblood female wolf of the Arhtai bloodline.

And she knew something was going on immediately.

Secha Aspion began heading back to where she knew her foul husband would be as quickly as her legs could carry her.

JETANIA MILITARY COMMAND STATION

It was truly a marvel of engineering for the Lycavorians on Jetania. The station had been built entirely from scratch while in space and had taken a full decade to complete. Now, fully ten years later, it stood as a bastion of the Coalition's military and their superiority. Or it did for them anyway. It was the single largest undertaking the Coalition had ever completed, and now the station, known simply as the MCS, was the heart of the Coalition military. The MCS was sixty-one levels and the cone shaped station was nearly half a mile across at its widest point. Ten thousand men and women called the station home, while hundreds more shuttled back to the station day after day for their duties. The MCS was the crown jewel of Coalition technology and might and to be able to work aboard the station was a significant boost to the influence you brought to your Pack. The Alpha who now commanded the MCS was an older wolf from the Plains Dohon Pack. They were the third largest Plains Pack behind the Aspion and Jemor Pack and he had worked very hard to secure this position for himself and his Pack. He had held this command for the last forty-seven years, and the Dohon Pack had benefited greatly from his position. He was well respected among the different Packs and held great influence with them. While his father was their Pack leader, Ristan Dohon was looked to as a leader and even his father sought his council at different times. This was something that Ristan provided willingly for unlike other Alphas in his position, he loved his parents, siblings and his wife and mate without hesitation. Ristan had been mated to the same female Alpha wolf for going on a full millennium now, which was almost unheard of among the Plains packs, and she had given him seven strong and proud children in that time. He was not concerned for another Alpha taking his mate from him, the last two who had tried ended up very dead. He had killed one while his wife had castrated the other and left him to bleed to death in a fit of anger at his actions.

Coalition Colonel Ristan Dohon sat in his command chair within the MCS's Operations Command Center now. This massive room was the nerve epicenter of the entire station. Over a hundred men and women worked within the OCC, all of them monitoring their duty stations. Incoming and outgoing ship traffic, standard orders to all of the Coalition ships that were out of the system, overseeing the refit and upgrade of the nine COLS cruisers currently docked to the station. It was the very heart of the station and the surrounding system, and it was here that they received the first warning.

Ristan looked up from the data pad he was reading from the previous logs of the night before when the insistent chirping began sounding from one of the consoles across the center. He remained calm as his Second Officer moved smoothly to the station where the young female wolf sat, her hands flying across the computer station in front of her. No one who worked on the station and in particular on the shift that Ristan ran was new or unknowledgeable. All of them were the best at what they did and had finished tops in their respective fields in order to be here on his command shift. His eyes narrowed when the young woman looked at his Second Officer Benic Uchea and shook her head quickly. Ristan rose out of his chair.

"Something Benic?" He asked.

Benic turned to face him from across the room. "It doesn't make any sense sir." He spoke quickly.

"What doesn't make sense?" Ristan asked him.

"Sir we...?" Benic began to speak but stopped himself.

Ristan shook his head just as quickly. "The politics of the Packs remains on the surface of Jetania!" Ristan spoke. "I have always demanded this from all of you! Up here we are all equal no matter our bloodlines. I will not have it any other way Benic, you know this."

"Yes sir!" The man spoke.

"Then talk to me man!" Ristan insisted.

Benic looked at the young woman. "Tell him Coya."

"Sir!" The female spoke now rising to her feet. "Station sensors just detected a massive spike in Quantum Matter Particles throughout the entire planetary system!"

Ristan looked confused. “Quantum Matter Particles?” He questioned. “How is that even possible Coya? My knowledge says Quantum Matter Particles are only theoretical. How are our sensors able to detect something that doesn’t exist?”

The female nodded as she glanced at Benic and he nodded his head. “Tell him all of it.” He spoke.

“Tell me what?” Ristan asked.

“Sir, the last software update from the main Research Facility on the surface contained theoretical work on Quantum Mechanics. Something our scientists worked up quickly sir. It is designed to allow our sensors to pick up what our scientists thought would be what Quantum Matter Particle fluctuations along all spectrums of space.”

Ristan moved closer to her from his chair. “They added theoretical software updates to our equipment without informing me? When did this happen?”

“King Osrod ordered it done after Captain Nasso’s encounter with the new Lycavorians in Sector fourteen, sir.” Benic replied now, regaining his composure. “I instructed Lieutenant Coya to let it run in the background with the other sensors and to ignore it. They based their work on only one report Colonel and...”

Ristan nodded his head. “And Nasso is known to be notoriously ignorant.” He finished the sentence for him. “But Gomar is one of the finest Sensor operators that we have. Him I trust and this was his conclusion as well correct?”

Benic nodded his head. “Yes sir.”

“And now there is a spike in these... these Quantum Matter Particles?” Ristan asked the young woman as he moved fully up next to her.

Coya nodded her head. “Almost identical to the readings that Captain Nasso’s ship was able to detect during his encounter sir. Just before those ships jumped away they were able to detect massive Quantum Matter Particle fluctuations. I have been reviewing the logs since copies were made and sent out to all ships and commands. They were... they were very impressive sir.” She told him almost shyly.

“How large is massive Coya?” Ristan asked her knowing that Coya was one of the brightest stars on the MCS in her work.

“A five hundred and sixty-three percent increase sir.” She answered instantly. “More than five times the levels found within normal space.”

“So these ships... Coya are you telling me that these ships have working Quantum Matter Propulsion drives?” Ristan gasped.

Coya nodded her head. “That is what the data suggests sir.” She replied. That also implies that they have Interstellar capability and *carians* knows what else. Technology like this is at least a thousand years ahead of ours, probably more to be honest.”

“This was not in the security briefings given to us after Nasso encountered these new Lycavorians!” Ristan almost shouted. “We need to get that full briefing from Nasso and we...”

The entire Command Center erupted in chaos then as alarms began to sound all around them and red flashing lights began to come on in different locations. Another Lycavorian stood up from his chair and looked at Ristan.

“Colonel!” The man shouted. “Colonel... unidentified ships are jumping into the system sir!” He almost screamed as he was staring at his sensor screen. “They are all around us sir! Over a hundred ships of unknown origin!” His eyes grew even wider if that was possible. “Colonel... *son vada carians*! Another ship just appeared sir! It is already in orbit of Jetania and it is...”

“What damn it!” Ristan shouted at him.

The man looked at him. “Colonel it is even larger than the station we are on right now!” He gasped aloud.

Ristan felt his heart slam in to his chest. “Coya!” He almost snarled. “Get on it girl! Tell me what is going on! Benic bring the station and the fleet to full alert! Issue Epsilon Order Four Three! Prepare to defend...”

“Colonel!” The COM officer screamed from his station. “Colonel we are receiving an open hail from... from one of the ships sir!”

SPARTA'S WRATH

Lasun and Garget could only gaze out the view window in utter astonishment as they began watching ships appear all around the MCS and the Coalition Fleet ships that were in orbit. Huge ships that looked every bit as dangerous as they did impressive. The smallest one that they could see was equal in size to the largest COLS cruiser and they watched as the ships began to maneuver in a very direct fashion, quickly surrounding those Coalition ships that were in orbit. Their eyes grew even wider as one of the huge ships that they saw began to spew what could only be small fighters from either side of its superstructure like angry bees from their nest.

They heard a soft pop as if someone had turned on an intercom and then the booming male voice filled the bridge where they stood.

“Honey! I’m home!”

They turned as Martin laughed softly and shook his head. “My brother.” Martin told them.

“Incoming transmission from *SPARTAN’S SOUL!*” The voice announced on the bridge.

Martin’s eyes grew slighter wider at this and he nodded to Armen. “Let’s see it Armen.”

“COM officer, main holo disc!” Armen ordered.

“Transferring!”

Martin turned to the small holo disc in the center of the bridge and Garget and Lasun followed suit as the disc flared to life and almost instantly cleared. Martin felt genuine warmth and happiness fill him when he saw Daniel’s tall figure on the bridge of his own ship. He didn’t know how, but someone must have released the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser from its duties on Earth. This was Danny’s personal ship and his home away from home. Martin could make out with his eyes the *ARIZONA* and at least nine other *LEONIDAS IIA* Class ships with the *SPARTAN’S SOUL*, not to mention upwards of at least a hundred other Union warships. He smiled when he realized his brother was not taking any chances and brought the most firepower with him that he could without leaving Ventori undefended.

Danny met his eyes in the transmission. “I heard you were throwing a party so I brought the party favors.” Danny spoke with his trademark smile, exposing his brilliant white teeth and his long wolf fangs for all to see. Garget Ranev and Lasun Vesrak looked at one another for they were thinking the same thing it seemed. This man was easily their equal in height and he had far more muscles than they did. He was utterly huge.

“Bout time you showed up!” Martin quipped.

Danny nodded his head with a smile. “You know me *fervon*... I do like to make an entrance.”

Martin saw Anuk and Nayeca step into the transmission with Kesyla between them. “Do not let him fool you Martin...” Anuk spoke. “He has been like a child since the *SPARTAN’S SOUL* came to Ventori two days ago.”

Danny nodded his head. “Yeah... that means I don’t have to leech off of you anymore. I got my own ship back now. We got way better food and the sleeping arrangements are much more to my liking! If you get my drift *fervon*...” Daniel told him wagging his eyebrows.

“Daniel!” Nayeca admonished him with a sharp intake of breath and a slap that struck the back of his head lightly.

Lasun and Garget stood there in shock as Martin burst out laughing. This man, this Alpha wolf was speaking to the *Mard Revik* of their people as if he had not a care in the world and Martin was allowing it. They watched him step closer to the transmission.

“Ventori?” He asked Danny.

Dan nodded his head quickly. “Admiral Ceneu did some maneuvering of the CFGs and he released *SPARTAN’S SOUL* and her entire CFFG to us out here. He said they were standing around doing nothing anyway. I left the 2nd SED on Ventori and only brought Manda’s and my Fleet Groups. I figured that would be enough. The *ARC ROYAL* is returning with Dysea, Bella and Cirith; they should be arriving in the morning. Ventori now has a full SED on the surface and upwards of four hundred ships guarding them *fervon*. Ceneu even sent a detachment from the 1st Elven Engineering Division. Nalmos and the other Justices are working really fast and the Tasmor are jumping in right alongside them. Nalmos has offered them a permanent place on

Ventori for those who wish to stay, and Saydia already has about a thousand of her best Tasmor engineers on Ventori working with our folks and preparing to rebuild Jorlari for starters. They will branch out from there.”

“You have been busy.” Martin spoke with a smile.

“Who says I can’t get things done without you?” Danny snorted playfully. “All of the adolescent dragons are on the surface and Syrilth chopped several of her best instructors from Dragon Mountain. They arrived with *SPARTAN’S SOUL* and are having a blast teaching them.” He told him. “Carina and Moneus are coordinating everything from Manne.”

Martin stepped closer to the transmission still. “Danny we have... we have learned quite a bit.” He said softly.

“I’m assuming some of it has to do with the tattoo that now mars my beautiful and flawless skin.” Danny spoke with a grin, even as Martin saw Anuk and Nayeca roll their eyes and Kesyla laughed softly. “Pablo saw it and about shit his pants over the detail.”

“Who else?” Martin asked him.

“Our whole team *fervon*.” Danny answered him. “Anuk, Nubian and Kesyla have it now. Moneus as well.” Danny looked intently at the man that he called his brother without question. “Shri’a deployed with *SPARTAN’S SOUL* and she has it too.” Danny told him meaning his oldest daughter with Nayeca. “I haven’t spoken with Anton yet but if Moneus and Shri’a have it then I’m assuming he does too and our little ones on Earth. What does it mean *fervon*?”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “It’s a long story *aur mard fervon* and I got a feeling the parts we haven’t heard are not going to be pretty.”

Danny nodded his head knowing what he meant. “They never are Marty.” He agreed with him solemnly. “We’ll get through it Martin. We always do.” He told him. “Now, you told me I would be able to kick someone’s ass! How bout that?”

Martin grinned at him as his spirits began lifting. “Hold that thought. I have a call to make.”

“Well hurry it up old man!” Danny barked. “Captain Jaban tells me we got a new refit and I want to try out some of the new toys!” He said referring to the man who commanded *SPARTAN’S SOUL* for him and had for the entire time Danny had been in charge of the 2nd SED.

Martin chuckled. “Stand by.” He said turning to Armen. “Andro should be hitting that facility right about now Armen. Open a channel to this station and let’s talk to whoever is in charge.”

FATHER! Andro’s voice exploded from within the Etheric realm like a blast from a fog horn, causing both Lasun and Garget to reach for their heads in pain.

Martin’s eyes grew wide and concerned, for his oldest and most experienced son never acted out of emotion as he was doing now.

Andro! What is wrong?!

Mari has detected fourteen individuals with Arhtai bloodlines within Warim! They are closing on mother’s position right now! Loras and Retta are with them father! As are Sarlana, Nilantha and stania Dynina and Reva’s Sphere!

“Nubou lae! Henes wen cuia morg Loras niob! They must have detected the Mahanlo blood in Lazar! Shit! They will find out that Reva is...” Martin gasped aloud. (Fuck me. They are going after Loras now!)

We are twenty-eight seconds away father. Andro told him.

Martin Leonidas snarled angrily now. *Kill them all keto! I don’t care how! I will meet you there!* Martin turned instantly to Armen now. “Prepare to send us back to Warim Armen! Have Danny handle these ass hats up here! Tell him what is going on! Have Chiron tag Loras’ parents and her children with Garget’s brother! I want them covered by *Durcunusaan* in two minutes!”

Armen didn’t blink. “Understood.” He told him closing his eyes. “Activating teleport!” The orange white light flared on the bridge once more and then Martin, Lasun and Garget were gone as they had appeared.

Armen didn’t hesitate and he turned. “Burst General Simpson and inform him of what is happening! He is to act accordingly! Chiron are you monitoring?”

“Affirmative.” Chiron answered from another portion *SPARTA’S WRATH*. “I am already marking their locations Armen.”

Armen activated the internal ship Com with a simple blink of his eyes. “*Durcunusaan* Ready Detachment report to Teleport Bay three! Prepare to deploy under Spartan *CRIMSON PROTOCOLS*! Chiron is sending you your targets! Secure at any cost! Secure at any cost! This is no drill!”

“I will guide them Armen.” Chiron spoke once more. “Command the ship my... my friend. That is your duty now. Mine is to safeguard our... our family.”

Armen didn't blink. “Understood!”

Chiron did not stop however and Armen heard his next commands. “Commander of the DRD, this is the Avatar Chiron! I am sending the locations of your targets to your personal data pads! They are in four different areas of the city below! You are to secure their safety at any measure!”

Armen heard the next words with no hesitation.

“Commander Chatai acknowledges!” The stern voice answered. “We will be off ship in twenty-seven seconds!”

Armen turned to his XO. “Begin powering weapons!” He ordered quickly. “And prepare to launch all APOC Drones in support if Admiral Lorian's fighters come under attack of any kind!”

JETANIA WARIM

The Warim Flower Atrium was well known on Jetania for it was the only facility on the entire planet which had every known type of flora living under one facility. The aroma of hundreds of different species of flower filled the entire massive building. The interior of the Flower Atrium was broken up into several different sections, all under the main stadium sized rotunda. The huge ceiling was broken into four different glass sections that allowed the sunlight and the moonlight to enter freely. Students from the many different Mountain Pack schools had gathered the huge assortment of flowers from every corner of the planet and brought them here. Dozens of them were right now working within the massive facility caring for the different species of flowers, many of which were very rare and needed precise care in order to flourish away from their natural habitat.

Loras Ranev was very proud of the work put into this facility and those who cared for all of the flowers. There was a full-time staff, but most of the work was done by students from all across the different Mountain Packs who came here for two month stints at a time. Learning the flora of Jetania was one of the many required courses for all Mountain Pack children, for it brought them all much closer to the landscape and therefore their own instinctive nature as wolves. The school system had been centralized for four decades now thanks to Loras' hard work and all of the Mountain Packs had seen the performance and skills of their children nearly triple in that same time.

Loras had decided that there was no longer a reason to hide who was among them any longer. It would begin seeping out into the general populous and better that their people saw and felt it for themselves then let rumors and innuendo run free.

The first place she decided to take them was the Flower Atrium.

Loras came here often when she could not sleep at night or she wanted to calm herself. The smell of the flowers soothed her and help her to think. Right now she was walking between Anja and For'mya and holding their hands tightly as she led them deeper into the main Atrium, the center of which was backstopped by a beautiful water fountain and surrounded by dozens of comfortable benches for students or anyone wanting to study or think in a serene atmosphere.

Loras Ranev, for the better part of her young life so far, had always felt out of place and different. Her mother and father kept telling her it was her imagination and to drive herself forward always. Her parents doted over her and her only remaining brother and sister. Her three other brothers had been killed through the many years since coming here to Jetania, all of them from natural causes on hunts. Now however, now Loras felt peace and family filling her like never before and it radiated from these women all around her. Aricia walked just behind them, her hands holding Lazar's arm as Retta walked on his opposite side. Lazar had always hated coming here as a child, but now he too seemed at peace and genuinely happy and Loras knew it was because of

Retta. These three women were like one person Loras thought as she walked with them. Ever since she had been within that Etheric transmission, her own Etheric awareness had increased ten-fold and it was continuing to grow stronger just being around them. She could sense their connection to one another and how their resonances mingled so flawlessly with one another. Loras could also feel Achilles' Etheric resonance within her, echoing ever so softly in the background. He had not spoken or reached out to her since calling her wife, but he was there Loras was certain.

Nilantha had been utterly overjoyed to meet the second Darastrixi female, a prophet of some kind among her species she came to realize, and the much older Lycavorian woman walked with both of them as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Loras also realized that this was the leader of the Lycavorians who had come to Jetania so very long ago and who Osrod's grandfather had tried to force himself upon. She was a powerful Alpha female, more so than any Loras had ever felt with the exception of Anja and her fellow Queens. The knowledge that so much existed off Jetania than what Loras had originally believed was a sobering fact to be sure, but surprisingly Loras was absorbing all of it easily. It was almost as if she knew that it was there deep within her but it had remained hidden for so long. She was coming to understand the why of it, her true bloodlines, something her parents had withheld from her for reasons that she did not understand as of yet, but she would certainly question them about it when she saw them again later this evening.

Loras did not know what to make of the odd shaped floating sphere that followed the two women Dynina and Sarlana around, never moving very far from them, but she was beginning to realize that there was so much more going on that she did not know or understand. Loras didn't care about that right now, what filled her with happiness was the sensation of family and the utter peace that gave to her. It was what she felt when with her mother and father, but so much more intense and focused.

It was For'mya who finally broke their silence as they walked and took in the hundreds of beautiful flowers within the Atrium.

"We have several places like this on Elear, the planet I was born on." For'mya spoke as they moved into the center of the huge Atrium. "None of them are as large, but they are places of peace and reflection. What you have done here is amazing Loras."

Loras smiled as they all stopped and gathered in near several benches. "All of the Packs send their children here at some point. It is required. It helps to teach them about what it means to be Lycavorian. It is how we have remained so close to our instincts."

"And this is what sets you apart from the Plains Packs?" Dynina asked her.

Loras nodded her head. "Unfortunately, yes." She replied. "The Mountain Packs have remained much closer to our natural instincts than those among the Plains Packs. They are not bad men and women, in fact many are hard working and follow a code of honor, but they have allowed technology to move them away from who we really are as a people."

Dynina nodded her head. "We sensed this when we first arrived all those years ago." She spoke softly.

"It has not been easy for sure." Loras said. "As much as I hate..." Loras stopped and took a deep breath to calm herself. She felt Lazar pulse her with a son's love and she looked at him and smiled. "As much as I dislike Osrod, he is much better than what his father and grandfather were. At least he listens to reason and he is smarter than they were. He seeks compromise more than conflict among the Packs."

"Most of the time." Lazar agreed.

Loras nodded her head. "Yes... most of the time."

"And what his son Juyno did?" Dynina asked. "This is allowed?"

Loras shook her head quickly. "No!" She exclaimed. "Juyno stepped far beyond his station. Mountain pack females are prized among the Alphas on Jetania for their beauty and their intelligence. It is why we allow the Plains Pack Alphas to do this. In a way, it was our attempt to change the Plains Packs from the inside."

"If a Plains Alpha claimed a female from the different Mountain Packs then they..." Anja began to speak.

Loras nodded her head. "They would be subject to our laws and our rules." Loras spoke. "Through the centuries those Plains Alphas who have succeeded in claiming one of our females who were in Phase, most of them have become part of our society seamlessly. There have been some who were denied their claim by the female's parents or Pack, but for the most part, these unions remain solid and stable and the males have come to live among the Mountain Packs."

“You do realize that our Martin will not let this continue.” Aricia spoke now from beside Lazar. “He will not allow males to hunt females in the hopes of claiming them. If they wish to claim a female then they should court them and show them how interested they are. How good a husband and mate they would be?”

Loras nodded her head. “I agree Aricia.” She said. “But changing centuries of how we do things is not going to be easy.”

“It never is.” Sarlana spoke now. “It never is.”

“As much as I do hate my father...” Lazar spoke now. “This is not something that he would allow. This is Secha’s doing.”

Retta knew who this woman was from swimming within Lazar’s thoughts the night before. They had spent several hours as Retta had shown him the delicate intricacies of Etheric communication and what they could do. Lazar had been fascinated and wanted to learn more and more and he opened himself to Retta as he had never opened himself to anyone. In those few hours he had seen things and felt things that had brought him closer to the young woman who had claimed his heart than he ever thought possible.

“Juyno’s mother?” Retta asked him.

Lazar nodded his head. “She is a *upa*...” Lazar stopped quickly and looked at his mother in embarrassment.

Loras smiled at her son. “She is a *upae*. Secha is the First Queen of Osrod.” She finished for him. “She is the one who holds the most power and influence of his four Queens. None of the others comes close.”

Lazar chortled in disgust. “She treats them like they are beneath her. They must do everything she tells them or she will make their lives miserable.”

Loras nodded her head. “She held such disdain for me while I was Osrod’s mate and I never knew why. I tried to reach out to her but she rebuffed my attempts at every turn. I just accepted it finally. I was glad to be rid of it when I was released back to my Pack and Warim Ranev claimed me. But she always treated Lazar with equal disdain for some reason. She is just... she is just an evil woman.”

“Evil how?” Dynina asked now, her interest peaked.

Loras shook her head. “Rylin could tell you more. She knew her better than I ever did. She had to work with Secha on different Pack issues and was always complaining about her inflexibility and vehemence toward the Mountain Packs, my parents and Lazar more often than not once I was claimed as killed with Warim. I guess her hatred of me carried over to Lazar and my parents.” Loras looked around now. “Where is Rylin by the way Oracle? I have not seen her all day.”

Nilantha met her gaze. “She told me she had some Pack business to complete before the *Mard Revik* came to the surface.” She replied. “That was late last evening. I have not seen her since then.”

“She should be here.” Loras spoke. “She...”

All of them heard the yelps of surprise and fear and they turned to see over a dozen heavily armed men rushing forward towards them with weapons out and leveled at them. Lazar instantly stepped in front of Retta, pulling her behind him with one arm while reaching for his mother. Anja and For'mya had already stepped in front of Loras as Aricia’s hand dropped to her thigh and she snatched her *Nehtes* from its place there.

“Don’t!” The female voice boomed within the Atrium as half a dozen young Lycavorians were pushed and shoved towards the center of the Atrium and Loras’ eyes grew huge when she saw Rylin leading the men doing the pushing and shoving with a hand weapon.

“Rylin!” Loras gasped.

Nilantha’s eyes were equally as large in shock. “Rylin what is the meaning of this?” She demanded. “What are you...?”

Rylin lifted the hand weapon and the booming noise echoed in the Atrium as the single shot struck Nilantha in her chest and flung her body back several feet to the floor, her blood beginning to soak the clothes she wore and leak onto the floor.

“No!” Sarlana screamed as she dropped to the floor beside her.

Rylin pointed the weapon at Aricia now. “I always hated that foul, inferior woman! Drop it and kick it away from you!” She snapped viciously. “Or I will kill every one of these pitiful students!”

Aricia’s azure eyes moved between the six men now holding the four young females and two males on the floor, their rifles shoved against their heads. Aricia opened her hand and let the *Nehtes* drop to the floor and

she kicked it aside. Rylin motioned to Anja and For'mya. "Now you two half breed bitches! Drop your weapons and kick them away from you!"

"Bitches?" Anja hissed in anger.

"Rylin! What... what are you doing!?" Loras screamed out.

Rylin looked at one of her men on her left holding the young blond female wolf. "Kill that one!" She snarled.

"NO!" Anja and Loras screamed together just before the man pulled the trigger on his rifle and sent a single shot into the back of the young woman's head. Her body slumped to the floor amid the wails of fear from the others. The single shot had been instantly fatal, covering the floor around her body in blood and brain matter.

"Do it now!" Rylin screamed as she looked back to Anja and For'mya.

Anja and For'mya slowly took out their Pralor Particle Magnums, both of them cut down in size to fit their smaller hands and they tossed them to the side, away from their bodies.

"Now that knife you carry too *upae*!" Rylin barked out looking directly at Anja.

Anja reached behind her and removed the R14 Hybrid fighting knife from its hidden location at the small of her back and she tossed that to the side as well.

"Rylin what have you done?" Loras shouted now as she moved forward towards her. Lazar grabbed her arms and held her in check.

"Mother no!" He shouted.

Rylin looked at her. "What am I doing?" She snarled. "I'm making something right! I'm going to kill what it has taken us over a million years to finally discover!"

"What are you talking about?" Loras cried now as she looked at the body of the young female wolf. "She was... she was just a child! What have you done?"

"I'm going to finish what we started all those years ago." Rylin snapped. "We let your parents escape! We don't know what he did to hide them, but we knew they had escaped! First to Ventori and then here! Now I am going to finish the job we started!"

"I don't know what you mean!" Loras barked savagely. "Why are you doing this? She was innocent! You murdered her!"

Rylin looked at her surprised now. "You don't know?" She gasped. Her laughter was meant to be condescending and it was. "Your parents never told you did they?" She snapped. "You don't know what you are?"

Loras' eyes widened suddenly and Rylin moved a little closer, but the hand weapon never wavered.

"You do know." She hissed. "Or you have some idea don't you? She revealed some of it to you didn't she?" Rylin barked motioning with the weapon at Nilantha's limp form, now in Sarlana's arms as she continued to bleed and she and Dynina were trying their best to stop it and keep her alive.

"You... you are speaking of the prophecy." Loras said.

Rylin laughed bitterly. "The Prophecy! What a joke! You! Your parents! Your children with that fool Warim! All of you! You are the last of a dead bloodline! When I kill you, we will be able to finish the job we started so many years ago and we will finally end what remains of your stinking family on Koltar Four! Then my pack, the Arhtai Pack, we will rule our people!"

"The Arhtai Pack!"

Reva's voice echoed loudly now in the Atrium as Rylin saw the strange sphere move forward slightly and she shifted her weapon towards it, her eyes widening. "What is this?" She snarled.

"What has the Arhtai Pack done!" Reva barked angrily for she could not smell the woman's scent in her current form. Once more she cursed her metal body silently, regretting that she ever agreed to this.

"Reva no!" Aricia snapped.

Rylin's eyes went wider now. "Reva?" She gasped aloud.

"Who are you?" Anja snapped now as she came up beside Loras slowly and gripped her arm. She, Aricia and For'mya could feel them now. Both of them were so close. Anja needed to keep them talking for a few moments longer.

"Why does it matter to you bitch!" Rylin barked. "When my mother Secha discovers what your foul offspring did to Juyno she will make sure that you and he do not live out this day!"

“Secha?” Loras gasped in disbelief. “Your mother?!”

Rylin nodded her head. “Yes, my mother.” She answered.

“How is that...? Who are you people?!” Loras screamed.

Rylin smiled now. “I truly liked you Loras. I did.” She spoke. “So, I will tell you what you wish to know. My real name is Roeza Arhtai. I was sent to Ventori with my mother to kill your parents! To kill them do you hear me! You have no idea who your parents truly are do you? A pity. They were well hidden from us though; our bloodline detectors could not find them. Whoever hid their bloodline did so with technology we did not have. Before we could discover who they were, Osrod’s fool grandfather showed up and took all of the Alphas from Ventori and brought them here. We came as well obviously, for our mission was not complete. All of this time and you have been right under our noses. My mother will not be happy with herself about that but she can take solace in the fact that you will be truly dead.”

“How did you discover who she was?” Anja asked now.

“My equipment began to go off the moment Lazar’s bloodline was revealed. It very was simple to trace after that.” Rylin answered her. “I really had no idea until his true bloodline was revealed.”

“You have this device with you now?” Anja asked her.

“It never leaves my presence.” Rylin snapped. “Why should that matter to you in the least half breed? It is none of your concern!”

“Really?” Anja pressed her. “Have you checked it lately?”

“I do not need to check it!” Rylin barked. “It is foolproof!”

“Then I don’t suppose you know why, all of a sudden, that Lazar’s true bloodline set off your little toy?” Anja questioned her.

“I don’t need to know why!” Rylin snarled at her. “What difference does that make? I have discovered what I needed to discover!”

“So it was designed to detect the Mahanlo bloodline?” Aricia asked now, knowing where Anja was going with her questioning and feeling them getting closer by the second.

“Do not mention that vile name!” Rylin screamed at her. “Never mention that name!”

“You are far older than your scent tells us you are.” Aricia continued. “Aren’t you?”

“You have no idea you small child.” Rylin spoke. “My mother is even older!”

“What is her real name?” For'mya asked now.

“I will tell you only so that you will know who it was that ordered the death of your bloodline.” Rylin answered. “My mother’s real name is Sama Arhtai.”

“Sama!” Reva announced once more. “Sama Arhtai!?”

Rylin glared at the sphere once more. “What is that infernal thing?” She screamed.

“I knew Sama Arhtai.” Reva spoke moving closer once more. “She was a spoiled little child who thought the world owed her everything!”

Rylin made the mistake of leveling the weapon she held at the sphere and she pulled the trigger twice in quick succession. Both rounds impacted the sphere’s outer shell and ricocheted wildly off into the distance. Rylin’s eyes went wide at this.

“Do you think your puny weapons could penetrate *Onkmeti Naami* armor you fool girl!” Reva’s voice barked out angrily now.

Rylin’s eyes grew wider still when she heard that. “*Onkmeti Naami* armor!” She gasped. “That is not... that is not possible!”

“You cannot hurt me foolish girl!” Reva bellowed. “Now... you will tell me what you have done to my family or I will rend your flesh from your body until you scream in agony?!”

“Family?” Rylin gasped in horror.

Aricia smiled slightly. “You speak to Reva Mahanlo.” She spoke clearly. “Her body is in our ship above this planet and her mind occupies this sphere you see. Your so-called bloodline detector did not work so very well as you thought. It has not shown you who we are.”

“You?!” Rylin shouted. “What do you mean?”

“You should probably check your toy.” Anja stated as she gripped Loras’ arm tighter and prepared to act. She could see Aricia and For'mya’s bodies beginning to tense.

They watched as Rylin grabbed for something in her clothes and she pulled out the small square device. Her eyes grew wide as she saw the flashing green light on the small box and she pressed a button on the box device and they could all hear the solid, whirring alarm sounding. Rylin looked up with wide eyes.

“Impossible!” She rasped out the words.

“Rylin, what is it?” One of her men asked.

“The only reason your little toy detected Lazar’s true bloodline is because my daughter bit him when he claimed her!” Anja snarled at her. “When she bit him, when Lazar bit her, the pure Mahanlo blood within Retta destroyed whatever was masking Lazar’s blood from your little scanner there!”

Sarlana lifted her head now and looked up towards the glass ceiling, her emerald eyes wide in disbelief. “*Ithquenti!*” She spoke in Darastrixi. “I can... I can feel him! He is... they are here!”

Aricia’s azure colored eyes began to glow and she smiled. “You wish to discover those with Mahanlo blood woman?!” She barked now. “Then you should probably meet those two men descended from the purest of all Mahanlo blood to have ever lived! From Daniho Mahanlo and Ashten Mahanlo themselves!”

Anja grabbed Loras then on one side and For'mya on the other. “You are well and truly fucked now *forn upaeel!*” Anja shouted.

Rylin saw the shadow on the floor and she had enough time to look up and see blackness blotting out the sun from above before the glass ceiling of the Flower Atrium exploded in a shower of glittering slivers and hell opened its doors.

PREMONITION

“Where Mari?” Andro demanded as they stood by the open ramp and looked upon the many buildings below them. Sadi had deactivated the Shroud Shield and now hundreds upon hundreds of heads were looking above them at the ship.

Marti held her P9 up and tapped on the screen. “There!” She barked. “That large building with the glass ceiling Andro! Sadi... come five degrees right and two hundred meters north!” Mari snapped into her jaw Implant.

“Five degrees!” Sadi’s voice replied.

Marti looked down out of the open ramp. She had never had a fear of heights before and after Deion had taken her as his wife and mate, claimed her and then turned her, that slight fear became even less. She had ridden on Jeru several times and the feeling was absolutely glorious.

“That’s it!” Marti snapped looking at Andro. “Right below us! You mothers, Sarlana, Dynina and this Nilantha. Loras, Retta and this Lazar person as well.” Mari’s eyes opened wide. “*Carians* Andro, those wolves just entered the main facility where they are!”

FATHER! Andro screamed out within the Etheric realm.

I’m tracking your mother’s scents keto! His father’s voice answered instantly and Andro could tell he was running full out in his wolf form by the tone of his words. *But Armen sent us back to our former location! We’re moving but still two or three minutes away! Garget Ranev is leading us to the west entrance of this place!*

Father we are...

Blood before all else my son! Martin spoke clearly and without fail. *Blood before all else!*

Andro took a deep breath. *So it shall be.* He spoke before turning and looking at Jomann who was never more than three meters away from him now. He could see his siblings and Kalis all looking at him, Dorian and Laren closest to where Jomann stood.

“I know that look!” Jomann screamed at him over the wind and the sounds of the ship’s engines.

“Secure the entrances!” Andro barked out the orders. “No one in nor out! Kill them if they give you trouble.”

“Andro you...” Jomann began to speak but he was already turning to where Sehri stood beside Carisia and Lu'ria.

“*Duan Gai!*” Andro hissed. “I need you.” Sehri didn’t hesitate and stepped up beside him. “Do you trust me my wife?” He asked reaching up to stroke her cheek.

Sehri's answer was to wrap her arms around his waist. "Always!"

Androcles pulled her body tighter to his and he looked at Elynth now. "Sister! Follow me out and cover my mothers!"

"Andro no!" Jomann screamed once more but it was far too slow as Andro sprinted to the rear of the ramp and just stepped off into nothing. Elynth didn't hesitate in the least and she followed her Bonded Brother out the rear of the ship seconds later. "Shit! Shit!" Jomann snarled. "Sadi! Put us down! Put us down! I don't care where!"

Like her love for him, Sehri's trust in Androcles was absolute. She clung to his waist even as she felt no ground beneath her feet. A slight jerk caused her tightly shut eyes to fly open and she saw those wings extend from his back. She looked down once, saw the brilliant glass ceiling approaching them at terminal velocity and Sehri simply closed her eyes again and buried her face in his armored chest. Amazingly, the gold plated and scale like armor was not as hard to the touch as she first thought it would be seeing him wearing it. Sehri had time to look up once, saw Elynth's massive form above them and then she heard the shattering of glass. Andro projected into her thoughts what he was going to do and Sehri nodded without hesitation. These last days and weeks training with Carisia and Lu'ria had improved her confidence to new levels, not to mention her unarmed skills, but Sehri knew where her power resided and that is what her beloved Androcles wanted her to use.

She felt Andro pulse her madly with love and then Sehri pushed away from him and fell backwards. She executed a back flip and within seconds she landed cat like on the floor below, a hundred meters from the now shattered glass ceiling. Sarlana and Dynina were clutching Nilantha, while Retta, For'mya and Lazar were only two feet away, all of them looking at her with wide, astonished eyes as she brought her hands together, called on the added power that her new Bonded Brother Marux projected to her lovingly and without question from the ship above and the bluish Etheric shield exploded into existence around all seven of them.

Rylin could only watch with disbelief as she saw the two huge figures smash through the reinforced glass ceiling as if it was paper mache. One of them was a huge Darastrix dragon like from the stories of Cerath her mother had told her as child. Large and small pieces of shiny glass rained down on them like a hail storm, but most of them had been shattered into such tiny pieces they did no harm.

"Kill them!" Rylin screamed now. "Kill them all!"

Rylin watched as her men, all young warriors from the Arhtai Pack sent here many years ago, raised their weapons and open fire.

All for naught and far too late.

Rylin's eyes grew even wider when she saw the dragon's body up close, now armored in the black scaled and gold armor, as she wrapped her massive wings around Nilantha and the others even though Sehri had erected an Etheric shield that no weapon could pass through. Andro was taking no chances however, for the moment he touched the ground his own wings scooped his mothers Aricia and Anja and Loras together and pulled them close to his body as his wings wrapped around all of them tightly. The sounds of the projectiles striking his armored wings and his back were distinctive and loud as the thunderous roar of the weapons deafened anyone in the general area.

Loras Ranev could only stare in open mouthed shock at Androcles' face, sandwiched between Anja and Aricia as she was. His glowing azure eyes were brighter than any eyes she had ever seen before except for...

Loras gasped as she realized who this was. This was Androcles. This was the most powerful of the *Tarivuos* for the *Mard Revik*.

This was... this was Achilles father! His eyes were the giveaway. Azure blue in color and right now nearly glowing in intense emotion. Achilles had two different color eyes in the picture of them she had seen on Nilantha's ship, one an azure blue like his father before her and the other a dazzling jungle green that could only have come from his mother. This man was his father, so tall and so very powerful. His Alpha male aura reeked of confidence and power that no wolf had ever had before. This was the father of the man who would one day claim Loras and love her until she could not stand it anymore.

She watched those glowing azure eyes turn and settle on Aricia and Anja as the firing began to slacken. “Mothers!” Andro hissed.

“We need her alive *keto!*” Aricia told him.

Andro’s eyes narrowed in undisguised anger. “She has tried to kill you!” He snarled. “I will not offer mercy!”

Anja reached up and placed her palm flat on his still bear cheek. “Alive Androcles.” She spoke. “She has answers we need!”

Androcles took a deep breath and nodded his head and Loras Ranev could only gaze at him in unmitigated awe as she watched more of the gold, black scale armor extending around his neck and head in the shape of a helmet with simple slots for where his glowing azure orbs were and one for his mouth, where his savage looking and long dual fangs were now exposed. It finished with a cowl like hood that did nothing to hide the glow of his eyes. To Loras it was the most frightening thing she had ever seen in her life.

Sister! Andro barked out the single word etherically, Loras hearing it easily and her eyes going even wider.

I have them! Now Andro! The female voice barked back.

Loras could only watch then as those wings, wrapped so tightly around her and his mothers, began to unfurl and extend out to the sides to their full diameter across. Fully eight meters across to be certain. She did not see the huge dragon shift from behind her, but then an even larger wing was wrapping around her, Anja and Aricia and urging them back.

Androcles turned slowly to face Rylin and the men with her, his wings arching upwards above his back, and seeing their faces widen in disbelief that he was not in the least bit injured. The only sound in the massive chamber was the constant and unnerving sound of the small device in her hand and its solid alarm going off. Rylin lifted the small blood detector device, a tool devised by Arhtai Pack scientists and her eyes grew wide in utter disbelief as she saw the once blinking green light turn suddenly a bright, solid green as she held it towards Androcles.

“*Son vada carians!*” She gasped looking at Androcles. “It cannot be! You... you wear the *Arwa rie Vada Tarivuos!* That... that does not exist! It is only a myth!”

Andro stared at her with unrepentant hate. “A myth to you perhaps!”

“You... you bear the blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo within you!” Rylin gasped once more. “That is not possible! They are dead!”

“And now I know what the scent of Arhtai Pack traitors’ smells like!” Androcles snarled angrily.

He reached up slowly and gripped the hilts of *Saar* and *Cana*, wrenching them off the front of his armor from where they had resided in slightly recessed slits in his chest armor. As the intricately carved blades, forged from pure Dragon armor to razor like sharpness, burst from Flat Space, they were now encased in a bluish light of pure Etheric energy.

Rylin knew immediately that something was very wrong here. Before her stood an Alpha Wolf of astounding power and aura; a wolf with the blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo in his veins. Pure wolf blood different from anything she had ever smelled, blood that surged with immense power unlike anything Rylin had ever felt before. Pure Blood she had only smelled once in her lifetime and that was when they had put Kelia Mahanlo in stasis. Her pure blood had sent chills down her spine at the time.

When the Blood Detector was going off for Anja and the others Rylin thought perhaps that it was just some kind of malfunction, but this now, this was no malfunction.

Rylin turned her head to the side, sensing something else. Something was getting closer to them. Something that was wrapped within pure rage and power. Her eyes grew even wider when she realized it was another Alpha Wolf that dwarfed even this monster before her in power and aura and the pureness of its blood. Rylin turned back when she heard one of her men laugh.

“The fool brings swords to fight us!” He growled confidently as he slammed in a new magazine into his weapon and lifted his weapon.

“*Vada voray rie Cerath coi dangua niob!*” Androcles growled menacingly in a loud voice that only Reva’s sphere reacted too. The single bright light on the face of the sphere focused entirely on Androcles as he spoke words she had not heard in millions of years. “*Una coi vada daanth rie toniru!*” (The snow on Cerath is melting now) (It is the time of Reckoning)

“How?” Reva gasped out the single word.

Androcles lifted his arms and threw *Saar* and *Cano* with all of his considerable wolf strength in either direction, the swords rocketing off on a curved path with a bluish trail behind them. Rylin and her men could only stand there frozen in utter shock as *Cano* and *Saar*, guided by Androcles’ will, moved with blinding speed and curved inward, and then whipped along in front of the fourteen men, cleaning slicing through the rifles each of them held and severing them in two pieces. As the pieces of the rifles clattered and dropped to the floor, *Cano* and *Saar* returned to Andro’s hands and he quickly willed them away back into Flat Space, returning the hilts to the recessed slots on his armor. This... this he would finish with his bare hands.

“Kill them!” Rylin screamed once more staring at Androcles with real fear in her eyes now. Real fear surging through her veins. “Kill them now! Something else approaches!”

None of them understood the smile that split Andro’s face under the helmet, exposing the dual wolf fangs of his Mahanlo bloodline.

“NO!” Andro screamed out the single word before his massive wings lifted him ten meters into the air in a single, powerful motion.

Loras Ranev had been watching all of this from behind the edge of Elynth’s wing and her eyes went wide in sudden shock when those wings lifted Androcles into the air above them and the bright sunlight from the now shattered glass ceiling struck those same wings and for a single, heart stopping instant...

...It appeared as if those wings were on fire.

“*Aur carian!*” Loras Ranev muttered loudly. (My god)

Vin gente vinn’ tryn arduş mornar mero shylon un vada darsam.” Loras remembered those sacred words she had spoken not so very long ago. “*Mornar jen sha tor Androcles.*” (He came upon fiery wings and he brought death to the unjust. And his name was Androcles)

“Brace yourselves!” Elynth screamed out openly as she tightened her wings around those she was protecting, adding the armored protection of her wings over the top of Sehri’s Etheric shield. “It is about to begin!”

Androcles paused for a single moment at a height of ten meters, those in front of him frozen in shock at what he had just done. He lifted his armored right fist, channeled all of his combined Etheric and *Dahakoan* power into that fist as Murano and Sarlana had taught him, as his grandfather Sumar’s Tomes had taught him, and then with a mighty downward thrust of his wings he drove himself back to the floor and rammed his fist into the steel and concrete with everything he had within himself.

The steel and concrete floor shattered like delicate glass from the impact, the entire floor buckled upwards and then began to race at Rylin and the fourteen men around her like an out of control tidal wave. Rylin and those with her were launched into the air with devastating Etheric force as the buckled floor rose up and slap them about like so many rag dolls. The follow-on shockwave of the Etheric move continued on and blew out two full sides of the Flower Atrium building, opening the inside of the facility to the bright sun and open air of the city of Warim and terrifying hundreds of onlookers who were rushing towards the facility at the first sound of gunfire.

Elynth drew her head back now and retracted her wings from around her charges. She looked at Aricia, Anja and For'mya, now inside Sehri’s Etheric protection and her next words were spoken almost as if in apology.

“Now... now you will see what we never wanted you to see.” Elynth told them. “Forgive us for what we must do.”

Aricia opened her mouth to respond but Elynth was gone, leaping into the air with powerful grace.

“By the gods!” Anja muttered softly and Aricia and For'mya turned to where she was looking.

If the six Queens of the Lycavorian Union had thought they knew their oldest son before this day, today they were going to learn just how much about him and his father that they did not know and would probably never understand as they watched Androcles fall among five of the assassins a hundred meters away, half of them still inside the Atrium, the others now outside from the force of the Etheric wave, as they were staggering to their feet.

Androcles Leonidas was many things to many different people.
He was the epitome of a Spartan Warrior. Brave and laconically fearless.
He was the harbinger of death to his enemies, almost as feared as his father among the opponents of their people.

He was Soul Slayer.

He was a beloved husband and devoted Alpha mate to six, breathtakingly beautiful young women who held his very heart and soul within their grasp.

He was a loving and trusted brother who his siblings could share anything with and they knew without question that he would defend them and stand with them to the bitter end no matter what that was.

He was a dedicated friend and ally to those he called friend and to those who called him friend, for they knew he would never leave them or betray them in any way.

And most importantly, he was his father's son.

He was all of these things proudly.

Today however, today Androcles Mahanlo Leonidas was simply a son.

A son that, like his father, had now reached the end of his patience and tolerance towards those who would inflict harm to his family. And most especially to the women whom he called his mothers.

The first Arhtai Pack member to stagger to his feet, died without ever knowing what truly happened to him. Androcles simply stepped up behind him, his black scaled armored wings still fully extended from his back and shoulders, grabbed the man's head in his hands, twisted his body around until the man was doubled over backwards and then Androcles snapped his neck like the proverbial twig. He dropped his twitching body before the life had fully left the man and was upon the next two men as they turned to face him with dazed eyes.

These two men made the mistake of trying to draw the side arms that they carried and bring them up. Andro grabbed the wrist on the man on his right, shifted to his left with blinding speed, wrenching the man's arm upward and hearing his screams of agony as his arm bent at the extremely odd angle and his forearm broke in two with barely any effort and the stark white bone tore through the muscle and flesh of his arm as he dropped the hand weapon. Androcles released that arm, as he was close to the man on his left in a near squatting position, and he drove his armored fist directly into the man's exposed sternum, adding his Etheric power to the devastating punch. The Arhtai Pack's soldier's eyes bugged out of his head as he felt the intense and excruciating pain of seven of his ribs being crushed into tiny slivers. The crunching of those bones was ghastly and very audible, as half a dozen of those slivers tore through his lungs and heart and blood spewed from between his lips, his eyes open wide in horrific pain. He had time to blink in surprise before Andro's second punch, again aided by Etheric power, smashed into his exposed throat, utterly crushing his larynx. The force of the punch to his throat also carried enough kinetic power in it to completely destroy half a dozen of his neck vertebrae, pulverizing them almost into dust at the force used.

As the man began his death drop to the floor, Androcles whirled on the man with the shattered arm and with a roar of unsustainable savagery and anger that drowned out his own screams of pain, Andro grabbed his head with both of his hands and drove his armored helmet directly into the man's face. His screams ceased instantly as that armored forehead shattered his nose and drove a dozen now devastated pieces of his nose cartilage directly into his brain. Two shots rang out as Androcles allowed the body to drop from his hands and the faint cries of his mothers' horror reached his ears as both of those rounds struck him directly in his helmeted head.

Onkmeti Naami was made to not only be resistant to projectile weapons, but it also was made to be pliable. The force of such rounds impacting the armor was distributed throughout all of the armor so that it was barely felt by the wearer.

The *Arwa rie Vada Tarivuos*, as the myth Rylin spoke of, did its job magnificently this day. (Armor of The Heralds)

Andro simply turned his head to look at the two men who held the side arms, their eyes wide in disbelief that their rounds had done nothing. They saw those azure orbs begin to glow even brighter and then they were ripped off their feet as Androcles lifted them with his right hand encased in the glow of his Etheric power. Their

screams of agony began immediately as Andro closed his fist slowly and their bones began to pop and snap with unholy sounds as their bodies were literally crushed within their flesh. Andro sensed more of the Arhtai Pack assassins regaining their senses behind these two men, including the *upae* Rylin. Androcles knew his father was almost here, could sense him almost upon them, and he would not let any of these monsters escape their justice. With an almost casual wave of his arm Andro sent the two men, now with most of the bones in their bodies shattered or crushed, sailing off to the side as almost an afterthought. They impacted the side of the fountain nearly thirty meters away from his mothers with ghoulish sounds of wet flesh, blood pouring from their eyes and mouths.

Androcles called forth his Etheric power once more and without even hitting the ground this time, he shoved his hands forward and unleashed an Etheric wave that caught Rylin and three other men in its power, lifting them from the floor once more and sending them careening out of control towards where Androcles felt his father approaching.

Screams of fright drew his attention and Andro whipped his head around as he saw six more of the assassins regaining their feet half in and half out of the blown-out Atrium wall. He could see dozens upon dozens of innocents looking on with horror and awe at what was taking place, frozen in their spots at the action, and Andro knew he could not allow these men to recover enough to injure innocent men and women. With a wolf roar of unmitigated savagery and rage, his dual fangs exposed for all to see, Androcles flexed his wings and propelled himself towards them with barely a pause.

Seeing Androcles leap further away from them and wanting to do what any mother would do with a child in danger, Aricia and For'mya both tried to get up and move through the Etheric shield that Sehri was holding around all of them. neither of them succeeded and both stumbled back.

“Sehri!” Aricia barked. “Let us through!”

Sehri looked up from where she was squatting beside Dynina and helping her and Sarlana to hold Nilantha’s upper body as Anja knelt beside her, the glowing white of her healing power coursing through Nilantha’s chest area.

“I cannot!” Sehri spoke calmly.

“You will let us through this instant!” For'mya barked now. “He needs our help! He is outnumbered and alone Sehri!”

Sehri allowed the small smile to split her face, Aricia and For'mya seeing the dual fangs that were the signature of their bloodline so prominently displayed.

“I love you both as Androcles’ mothers, but I act with his will and the will of Sadi and the others.” Sehri spoke slowly and confidently. “You are not to be put at risk for any reason. My shield stays in place until this is over.”

“Aricia! For'mya! He is our son and we know what he is capable of!” Anja barked from beside Nilantha’s inert body. “Martin is almost here! Let our son do what he was born for and help me with Nilantha!”

Aricia and For'mya made the decision instantly. Anja’s words rang true in their ears and both of them knew their son and their beloved husband and mate were never truly alone. Both of them moved to where Anja knelt.

“Lift her legs!” Anja spoke quickly. “The bullets did massive damage to her internal chest area and we have to keep her blood circulating there while I repair the damage!”

Sehri smiled once more as Aricia and For'mya complied. “As his beloved mothers, you know the truth within you. Androcles is never alone.”

As if to emphasize that very point, they heard to unmistakable trumpet of Elynth entering the battle beside her Bonded brother.

They did not need to talk to one another to know what each other would do. This was something that they had never needed. They saw with each other’s eyes. They felt with each other’s emotion. They thought

with each other's minds. Elynth had leaped away from his mothers to curl around the interior of the Atrium above, waiting while her Bonded Brother easily dispatched the first half dozen assassins with barely any effort.

Together they saw the others beginning to recover and the same thought that had crossed Andro's mind went through her mind at the identical instant, prompting Elynth to act. As she saw Andro leap for the shattered remains of the Atrium wall with a commanding thrust of his wings, Elynth dove into the battle.

Their only thought now was to get away from the beast that was killing them. They had never seen or experienced anything like what was happening. Rylin had told them it would be easy to dispatch a few women then escape into the mountains to where their ship was hidden. A ship that would return them to the home they had been away from for far too many years. Until this very moment, none of them believed that they could fail.

They never truly understood how wrong they were.

The shockwave had sent them hurtling toward the now shattered wall of the Atrium and all of them had landed painfully. One of them had a broken leg he was certain, the lower portion of his right leg bent at an odd angle, but he was struggling to get to his feet.

"We must go!" Another shouted.

"Rylin is still in there!" the second barked out as he came to his feet.

"*Nubou* Rylin!" The man screamed. "That is not some simply pure blood in there! That monster is pure Mahanlo blood! He will carve us up and spit us out in pieces!"

"Rylin said that..."

The two men heard the screaming now and they turned to see the rabid Mahanlo Alpha grab the head of their cousin in his hands, their cousin's arm twisted and broken in an odd direction, blood spurting from the wound. They watched that Alpha drive his armored head forward into their cousin's face and the screaming stopped instantly and then that head turned slowly to look at them.

"Rylin is dead you fool!" The man screamed. "Or she will be soon! We must escape and inform Sama!"

"Help me!" The assassin with the crushed leg stammered out, holding out his hand.

"No... I think not!" The female voice spoke causing the two men standing to turn and their eyes went wide when they saw the Sphere with the glowing front white light. "Your doom is now upon you for attacking my family! The Reckoning is upon you!" Reva's voice boomed out.

They heard the trumpet now and whirled around once more as they saw the armored form of the dragon dropping from above. The obsidian and gold armor shimmered in the sunlight, even reflecting off of the black scaled portions of *Onkmeti Naami* armor. They could only stare in unabashed horror as Elynth dropped on them, her right talon landing on their cousin with the crippled leg. They heard his screams of agony for a split second as Elynth's four tons crushed his lower body with the ease of crushing a bug. They heard the crunch of his bones and the gurgling of his voice before all of that ended and they watched in horror as two of her four talons impaled the man on the ground beneath her foot. Blood exploded from his mouth as it opened in silent agony and they saw the life leave his eyes instantly.

Neither of them had time to act as Elynth leaned over and snatched the second one up in her forward arm like talons and with a savage trumpet of retribution, Elynth simply torn him completely in half, tossing aside his remains like so much trash. The three shots rang out, all three rounds expertly striking Elynth in the head. This gave her a moment of epic pause only because she had to stare at the man in disbelief at his final actions. He was holding the weapon at her with wide eyes, unable to fully comprehend that his shots had only focused the anger within Elynth to extreme portions.

"Fool man!" Elynth screamed the words to the shocked expressions of the man before her and all those who were watching and were within ear shot of her voice.

Which were hundreds.

"You attack the mothers of the *Orwara Indalfrid*!" Elynth screamed out once more. "You attack Mahanlo blood! My blood! You attack my Bonded brother! Now you pay the price for your foul actions!" (Crown Prince)

Elynth opened her maw, exposing her razor-sharp dragon teeth, and she let rip with a stream of flame tinged, superheated breath as intense as she could possibly make it. Her Etheric power, because of her

connection to Androcles and because of the *Dahakoan* blood within her, allowed her to focus her stream far more than she had ever been able to before. As hundreds of men and women watched with wide, horrified and amazed eyes, Elynth simply burned the Arhtai Pack assassin to smoking ash in front of her. It took only seconds with the intensity of the nearly four-thousand-degree burst, but when she ceased, nothing remained on the blackened ground but that ash.

“NO! You will not!!”

Elynth’s head snapped around when she heard Androcles’ voice thunder above the sounds all around her.

Androcles landed right where he wanted, atop one of the assassins as he was trying to get to his feet. All two hundred and twenty pounds of his tightly packed, muscular form landed directly on the man’s back, crushing his spine and sending him back down with a scream of intense pain.

The other two remaining assassins turned to watch in horror as Androcles stepped off of the man, bent over slowly, lifted his head by his hair and then rammed his face back into the hard, broken surface of the ground with enough force to snap his neck with an audible pop and crush half of his skull and cease his cries of agony. He rose back up and stared at the two men, those glowing azure blue orbs terrifying them. Androcles knew instantly what they intended and his hands dropped to either side of his Herald armor. From recessed slots, much like those that held *Cano* and *Saar*, Andro took his two Dragon Armor forged Glaives and with a forward snap of his arms, he sent those two blades whipping forward.

The man closest to him was the one to receive the full force of the attack. One Glaive simply curled inward and chopped his legs out from under him, easily slicing through his lower legs as if they were simple pieces of meat. As he was falling, unable to even scream out his agony the second Glaive slashed across his throat, opening a four-inch-deep cut that fountained blood at an explosive rate as what remained of his body fell to the ground minus his lower legs. The last assassin watched as those Glaives returned to Andro’s hands and he prepared to throw them again. He turned to run, fear gripping him, but he stopped instantly when he saw the towering Lycavorian in black and crimson body armor standing in his way, the large barrel of the wicked looking assault rifle staring at the center of his chest.

“There is no running from justice dog! Not today! Not ever!” Jomann snarled viciously from under his helmet, his own dual wolf fangs exposed for all to see. It had taken some time because of the pureness of his own just realized blood from another bloodline, but the Mahanlo blood within Eliani Leonidas was still as pure as it got, and he had watched as the dual fangs marking their family bloodline grew in over time until they were now part of him as well.

Jomann would come to discover in the future that his love and desire of Eliani Leonidas and Brendi Faith was matched by only one other who bore the bloodline of Kirek within them. An ancestor he would come to regard as a second father in the years to come as he learned of his true Pack’s history and lineage.

The Arhtai assassin looked quickly to his left and right and saw several others wearing this strange armor begin to make themselves seen through the crowd of men and women who were gathered. Men and women were quickly backing away from these armored figures, fear and awe in their eyes. Not one of these new figures had any sort of mercy in their eyes for him. His eyes grew even wider when he saw two individuals step from around the crowd of people, huge wings attached to their shoulders and backs and wearing the *Arwa rie Vada Tarivuos*. One was obviously female from the way the armor conformed to her lithe figure, and the other was male based on his muscular definition. Neither of them had an ounce of pity in their multi-colored blue eyes that stared at him without mercy.

He did the only thing that he could think of and he stepped to the side and snatched the small child from the Lycavorian mother who had made the mistake of being too close to him. He wrenched the screaming child into his hands and whirled back to face Androcles.

“I will kill the whelp!” He shouted.

“NO! You will not!!” Androcles bellowed loudly. “Cowen!” He shouted as he looked up.

All eyes followed his and the Jetania Lycavorians now saw the large ship holding station directly above them with what appeared to be a ramp down in the rear. A huge man, definitely one that was not a Lycavorian, could be seen sitting on the ramp and holding a huge rifle and it was pointed straight down.

“I have him Andro!” Cowen Shan’s voice echoed in Andro’s ear piece implant.

Andro dropped to one knee instantly and reached out with his Etheric power, ripping the small girl from the man’s arms and pulling her across the ten meters that separated them into his waiting embrace. He whirled around to face away, his wings wrapping around himself and the small girl in case the man was good enough to get off a shot or two.

“Take him!” Andro barked.

It turns out the man wasn’t even close.

The instant Cowen saw the girl leave his grasp, he was pulling the trigger. As Andro’s words echoed, Cowen fired one round. The large caliber, explosive tipped round entered just above the assassin’s right cheekbone, penetrated a quarter of an inch and then blew his head apart like an overripe melon.

“Perfect my love!” Sherice announced from beside him and she leaned over to kiss his lightly furred cheek as Jomann and Kalis rushed forward below towards Andro. Dorian and Laren also moved from either side of the assassin, their wings fully unfurled, Ryner and Ladur right behind them, causing men and women to scramble frantically to get out of the way.

Androcles waited for a split second and then rose back to his feet holding the small child in his arms. She was gazing at him in awe with wide blue eyes and he smiled down at her through the armor of his helmet.

“You are safe now little one.” Andro told her and he saw her smile and jump up to throw her arms around his neck and squeeze tightly.

Andro smiled in returned and squeezed her gently as her mother rushed over to where he stood. She hesitated as she saw those huge wings unfurl even more but then Andro was holding her daughter out to her.

“She is unhurt.” Andro spoke. “I must apologize to you for what has happened.”

The young mother held her daughter tightly while she stared at the armored man before her with wide eyes. She saw Dorian and Laren move closer and then she turned back to Androcles.

“You are... you are the *Tarivuos*!” She gasped aloud causing everyone in the area to also begin to whisper in awe. “*Vada Tarivuos rie vada Mard Revik!*” (The Heralds of the True King)

Andro tilted his head and hundreds of gasps followed as they watched his armored cowl and helmet retract, as did Dorian and Laren’s.

Andro shook his head slowly. “That is what we are called... yes.” He answered her. “Today however... today I am just a son of my father.”

“The True King is here!” A voice echoed from the crowd as they pressed closer.

Andro felt his father within him and what was currently happening. He nodded his head but did not stop looking at the women. “He is here, yes. Though, at the moment, he is slightly busy dispensing justice to those who wished my family harm.”

With that Androcles turned, his massive wings curling tighter to his back and shoulders and he made his way back into the now destroyed Atrium, Dorian, Laren, Jomann and Kalis directly behind him.

There was a god Rylin thought as she rolled over painfully on the ground from where that Mahanlo monster’s unearthly power had tossed her and two of the others a second time. Had she known what awaited her, Rylin would have wished for death.

She glanced back and saw Androcles tearing into the others of her Pack and the two men who had landed near her. She began to struggle to get to her feet.

“We must go!” She screamed out.

“Rylin! The others!” One of them men rasped out the words as he got to his own feet.

“They are dead now!” Rylin shouted. She turned and saw the maintenance door only a few meters away. “We must get away and inform my mother of what has happened! She must know that the descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo live! That they are alive and...”

Rylin was staring at the two men with her when she suddenly saw their chests explode in a shower of blood and flesh. She stood there frozen in terrible horror as their blood splashed wetly onto her chest and face. She could only watch as their bodies were lifted completely off the ground and blown back some half a dozen meters, huge, gaping holes in the center of their chests. It was only a split second but Rylin was able to see completely through their bodies to area behind them as large as the holes in their chests were. Their large bodies landed not far away unceremoniously and were still.

Rylin felt it then. The absolutely staggering aura of an Alpha wolf more powerful than any she had ever encountered in her long life.

Roeza Arhtai was nearing a million and a half years of life now and she had seen much in that time. Her mother was even older, being only a few decades old when they left Cerath all those millennia ago. Roeza Arhtai had grown up hating the Mahanlo bloodline and all it stood for because of her mother Sama and her teachings. The Arhtai Pack history of the Purge of the Mahanlo Bloodline was well known within the Arhtai Pack, though very one sided in how it was told. The ensuing years after the initial purge where most of them were killed was taught in their schools on Koltar Four. Those following years were filled with small and violent pitched battles against the Kelia Mahanlo and the Kirek Pack until their moment had come and they had captured Kelia Mahanlo in a particularly vicious battle that saw the death of all but six of her children.

Rylin had happily volunteered for this mission with her mother to insure that the Mahanlo bloodline was truly gone and destroyed. They had no way of knowing about Daniho and Ashten and after so many years had passed without communication with them, it was naturally assumed that they had perished by similar means, since this had been the plan all along by the different Packs when they had left Cerath.

Something must have gone wrong.

They were here now. Something must have gone terribly wrong and she needed to warn her mother so that she could get word back to Koltar Four.

Rylin had never felt such power within a bloodline before as she felt within that monster who was tearing through her men and her cousins. Kelia Mahanlo was the most powerful female she had ever felt before, the scent and aura of her bloodline terrifying to be around, but this man and the one she felt getting closer surpassed even that. Her blood detector had not stopped going off, the insistent noise driving her mad and she ripped it from her clothes and threw it as far away as she could as the bodies of her two cousins rested on the ground.

She needed to get away.

Rylin turned without thinking and began to run.

She got four steps before her head came up and she ran full tilt into the huge armor figure standing in front of her. Rylin hit the unmoving figure with such force it staggered her back and she fell on her ass, her eyes wide as she looked up. She opened her mouth to snap at the figure thinking it was another of her cousins and the words died in her throat at the sight before her.

The towering, muscular figure was adorned in dull silver *Onkmeti Naami* armor. It was unmistakable to those who knew what it was, and Rylin was one of those people. The silver scaled armor, black in some portions conformed to the figure before her like a second skin, the full helmet covering all but the smallest portions around his mouth and eyes. Rylin could see the savage dual wolf fangs that marked the Mahanlo bloodline and then she saw the yellow gold wolf eyes that gazed upon her with utter contempt and savage anger. She saw the head of the massive black furred wolf with yellow gold eyes adorned on the figure's waist and the massive depiction of the dragon across the broad chest armor that glittered in the sunlight. And then Rylin saw the massive armored and dull silver scaled wings extend outward from the figure's shoulders and back slowly and her eyes grew even wider in disbelief and horror.

Vada Arwa rie vada Mard Revik.

The armor that Daniho Mahanlo would not wear. The armor that many among the Arhtai Pack had searched for fruitlessly before leaving Cerath, just as they had searched for the armor of The Heralds. Everyone knew the Onab had created them, but no one knew where they had been stored. Now Rylin knew, for the figure before her was wearing it.

Rylin looked at the armored helmet, saw those eyes gazing upon her with intense hatred. "*Vada Arwa rie vada Mard Revik!*" She gasped finally, unable to really find anything else to say. Rylin saw Lasun and

Garget appear from behind that huge wing span, their faces neither happy to see her or very friendly. “Garget! Lasun! Help me!” She barked out. “This... this monster’s men are killing...”

“**BE SILENT WOMAN!**” Garget Ranev screamed out the words shocking her into silence.

Garget and Lasun had not left the side of their King since returning from the wondrous ship above and in the few moments that they had been back on the surface running towards the battle, their King had etherically passed to them all that he knew had taken place in the past. The amount of information was enormous to say the least, and their Etheric ability was not as evolved as his own, but the connection he established to them as they ran beside the massive black wolf had been complete. To them he had shared all he had discovered, all of their history in these last few days and weeks and months. All of the questions he had as a boy growing up about who he was. What he was. He had shared it all with them and in doing so he had earned their undying trust and commitment.

Martin Mahanlo Leonidas stared down at Rylin’s shocked face, the anger burning within him as it burned brightly within his first-born son and the rest of his family. The intensity for him however was a hundred-fold for so many different reasons. He knew exactly what had taken place, every word that had been spoken, and every sorry bastard that Andro and Elynth had killed. This woman however, this woman was far greater a prize than anything he had yet learned and he had every intention of discovering all that she knew.

As well as the *upaee* who was her mother.

“You and your mother have much to answer for Roeza Arhtai.” Martin growled out the words. “*Vada voray rie Cerath coi dangua niob!*” Martin snarled viciously in a loud voice that caused Rylin’s blood to go cold. “*Una coi vada daanth rie toniru!*”

Rylin heard the scream of absolute rage and her head whipped around as she saw the last remaining member of her cousins come rushing forward from the side door of the maintenance corridor. He was the youngest of those sent to Jetania and had been securing their exit out of the building. Rylin watched as Martin lifted his hand and she saw the body of her cousin wrenched from his running feet and then he was suspended beside Martin, that armored hand clenched around his throat and beginning to squeeze with greater strength. Martin wasn’t even trying hard as he held the young wolf twelve inches off the ground and he looked back to Rylin gazing up at him with wide, terrified eyes.

“You and your vile bloodline made one mistake!” Martin growled out the words to her. “One mistake or you might have succeeded in your nefarious intentions! That mistake will cost you and your pack everything! Including your lives!”

“No!” Rylin screamed just before Martin turned his head and looked at the face of the young man he held in his iron like grip.

Martin lifted his left hand and called forth his Etheric knife. It extended from his fist as Rylin looked on with horror and then he plunged it into the soft underside of the man’s jaw. His eyes went wide in horrific pain for a split second and then Martin solidified the Etheric knife as it was buried in his skull. Rylin could only watch in sadistic fascination as the young man’s leg twitched madly, suspended off the ground as he was by Martin’s right hand. This went on for several seconds until Martin withdrew the Etheric knife and his body was still. Martin Mahanlo Leonidas then channeled all his rage and hurled the body away from him with such force, it struck the wall ten meters away with a sickening sound of bones shattering and internal organs popping. Rylin still watched as the broken body fell to the floor then, all life gone from the still open eyes. She felt movement and turned her head quickly back as Martin squatted down in front of her and she watched fascinated still as the *Onkmeti Naami* helmet began to recede from his head exposing the still yellow old eyes and the bearded face of the...

...The Mahanlo *Mard Revik*.

Roeza Arhtai lost control of her bladder then as she stared into the face of a long thought dead hero of the Lycavorian people.

Daniho Mahanlo this was not, Rylin thought to herself in some obscure portion of her brain. No matter that he was an unmistakable descendant, this man was something far, far worse.

“The Time of Reckoning is here.” Martin Mahanlo Leonidas spoke the words one last time before he sent his armored fist smashing into her face with enough force to snap her head down and watching as it bounced painfully off the floor and dropped her instantly in blackness.

It was Lasun that moved closer now. “My... my King.” He spoke softly as Martin stared at the woman’s limp body. “These words you speak. What... what do they mean?”

Martin rose to his feet slowly and looked at him as his eyes returned to normal. “I don’t know Lasun.” He said honestly. “I feel... I feel within me somehow that they were spoken a long time ago by my ancestor. In another place. In another time. Another war.” Martin said.

Martin looked at Rylin’s inert form one last time before allowing his eyes to gaze out into the shattered remains of the Atrium building. He could feel the auras of his beloved wives calling to him like never before.

“We must get a handle on this before it gets out of control my friends.” Martin spoke turning to look at them. “This is not the way we wanted to greet our people here, but now we must regain control. Take her somewhere and lock her up. And have that scum Juyno Aspion secured with her. He does not deserve to be in a hospital.”

“We will see to it.” Garget spoke moving forward now.

Martin nodded his head and then flexed his wings out wide to the sides. “The Time of Reckoning is upon us.” He spoke once more. “And we will unite our people once more.”

Martin then launched himself into the air towards where he felt Aricia, Anja and For'mya and his wings quickly carried him away.

Garget turned to Lasun then. “Lasun my friend...” He began.

Lasun met his eyes and nodded his head. “Our future just became so much brighter my friend.” He finished Garget’s statement. “So much brighter indeed.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY

JETANIA

SPARTAN’S SOUL

“Jaban!” Danny barked as he came to his feet. He could feel his brother within him, feel the rage and hate within him and Androcles. Anuk, Kesyla and Nayeca watched him with wide, worried eyes as he spun around and faced the Lycavorian Captain who had commanded his ship since its commissioning. “Something is going down on the surface! Report!”

“The *ARIZONA* just launched six squadrons!” Jaban exclaimed in return. “I am ordering our fighters to launch as well! First Echelon is moving into position and Second Echelon is spreading out to cover our flanks! Armen had just ordered the *Durcunusaan* Ready Detachment to deploy under Spartan Crimson Protocols!”

Anuk stepped closer to her husband and reached up to touch his arm. She could sense his unease and concern for Daniel never held back from her or Nayeca. “Daniel what is it?” She asked softly.

Danny turned to face her, his ebony skin tense and Anuk reached for his face as Nayeca and Kesyla moved closer as well and put their hands on his arm. “I don’t know.” He answered her instantly. “Something is happening on the surface and whatever it is, Andro and Martin both just went ballistic.”

Anuk and Nayeca knew their husband as well as they knew themselves and his love for Martin was absolute. Kesyla was discovering this as well now, as Anuk and Nayeca often spoke of what the two men had done in the years before. Daniel had blood brothers from his parents that he loved, sisters too, and Martin had half siblings from Gorgo and Riall, but Martin had been and always would be Daniel’s one true brother. Their bond had been forged through the fire of combat and so much more that others would never understand, and now that bond of brotherhood would never be torn asunder. Both Daniel’s and Martin’s brothers and sisters accepted this and relished in it, for they had had many times through the last years just sitting with Daniel and Martin and listening to them tell stories of their adventures together.

“Trust in your *fervon* Daniel.” Anuk told him. “Do what we came here to do, just as you and Martin discussed. He is not alone Daniel our love. He is never alone.”

Danny met her cerulean blue eyes and calmed instantly as both Anuk and Nayeca pulsed him with their female wolf auras. Kesyla was still learning how to use her wolf aura but she added her own developing aura to

theirs and he looked lovingly first at Nayeca's amber colored eyes and then at Kesyla's dark eyes and he nodded his head.

"Jaban?" Daniel spoke turning to look at him.

"General?" The man answered.

"Let's stick with the plan!" Danny said confidently. "Martin can't talk to the douche bag on the station, so we'll talk to him instead. Open a channel and get me whoever is in charge over there."

"What do we tell them?" Jaban asked with a crooked smile.

"Tell them if they do not stand down in the next twenty seconds, I'm going to blow that station and every ship in this system right straight to *nubous* oblivion." Danny spoke.

Jaban's smile grew ever larger. "COM Officer!" He shouted. "Find the channel they are on and let's say hello!"

COALITION MILITARY COMMAND STATION

"Coya... talk to me!" Ristan barked aloud.

"Multiple contacts sir!" She cried out from her station. "Sensors are detecting over two hundred ships Colonel!" Her hands were moving across her sensor consoles with speed and efficiency, but her heart was racing out of control to be sure. "*Sibfla*! Some of them are huge! Four thousand meters at least! Unknown power signatures, but definitely Quantum based!"

"Colonel! We are also picking up dozens of smaller contacts leaving one of the larger ships!" Benic barked from where he stood beside Coya's sensor station. "Fast moving sir! One man fighter ships of some kind!"

"Fighters?!" Ristan gasped. "Impossible!"

"Station defenses can't track them, sir!" Benic announced just as loudly. "They are too fast and they are spreading out among the Home Defense Fleet!"

"The other ships are deploying as well!" Coya shouted. "Some sort of attack formation maybe!"

"What about that big fucker?" Ristan barked. "Tell me about that big bastard! What is it doing?"

Coya shook her head. "Nothing sir!" She answered. "Strange power emissions but it is remaining in stationary orbit. Sensors cannot penetrate the outer hull sir! Of any of the ships! It's made from some sort of metal I have never seen before! Its current orbital position puts it directly over the Mountain Pack settlement of Warim."

"Colonel! HDF Captains are screaming for orders!" Benic shouted. "Do they attack!"

Ristan's eyes went wide. "Attack!? Attack what!? Fuck no!" He screamed. "Do they see what is around us?!" Ristan whirled around. "Get me King Osrod! Contact Ground Command! Do it now!" He barked at the COM officer.

"Colonel!" Coya shouted. "Colonel I am detecting two smaller ships maneuvering in the atmosphere above Warim! Some kind of transports I think!"

"*Nubou*!" Ristan snarled. "They have already landed troops! Activate all planetary units! Bring defenses online! We..."

All of them heard the pop on the internal speakers within the command center and they looked up as the deep, male voice echoed all around them. "I would not do that if I was you." The voice spoke. "Not if you want to be alive thirty seconds from now!"

"Colonel they have tapped our COMs!" The COM officer rasped out the words. "All of our secure channels are compromised!"

Ristan's eyes were wide. "How is that possible?" He gasped.

Everyone nearly jumped out of their chairs when the intense flash of white light erupted in the center of their command center and then they were staring at the image of the tall, ebony skinned Lycavorian. His short black hair was neatly cut, the thin beard and mustache neatly trimmed and groomed. He was easily six and a half feet tall from what Ristan could determine and he was without a doubt an Alpha wolf. His dark eyes were bright though and his long wolf fangs were fully extended and exposed for all to see.

“What... what is this?” Benic gasped in shock.

“It’s... it’s some sort of holo transmission!” Coya gasped in reply to his question. “But the power needed to...”

“Colonel Ristan!” Another voice yelled now. “Destroyer Four One Three is powering its weapons and preparing to fire on...!”

“No!” Ristan screamed out the word.

It was too late however as they saw the COLS ship alter its course slightly and unleash a full barrage of its missiles and beam weapons upon the *SPARTAN’S SOUL*. The man in the holo transmission staggered only slightly in the transmission, obviously onboard the ship they had just fired upon and his face took on an immediate expression of anger and disbelief.

“*Wen forn nubous neshy lae?!*” The man snarled viciously. (Are you fucking kidding me)

“No! Wait! We...!” Ristan began to shout the words but it was already too late as they watched the large Lycavorian turn in the transmission.

“Target that pathetic bucket of floating fucking bolts and blow it out of the stars!” Danny growled.

The Command Crew of the MCS could only watch and listen in horror as voices in the background of this new ship responded instantly.

“Main starboard batteries six through fourteen!” The voice out of their view barked out the order.

“Target the enemy ship and fire!”

Ristan and the others on the MCS could only watch in stunned shock as one of the largest ships outside of the behemoth in orbit above their planet, fired nine beams of intense white light that crossed the distance from them to the COLS Destroyer in the blink of an eye. All nine of the MK9C Type 1 Alpha Series Batteries, as well as those remaining on the ship, had been upgraded to fire Quantum Particle Beams much like those weapons that armed *SPARTA’S WRATH*. The *SPARTAN’S SOUL* was part of the first stage of a massive refit going on back home that Martin and Ben had approved several months ago, and which would eventually see every ship within the Union military armed with such weapons as long as they were powered by the newer Hypermatter Fusion Drives. The Hypermatter Fusion Drives were a step down from the Quantum Resonance Reactors that powered the new *ARIZONA*-Class ships, but they vastly improved the ships being refitted. While they were no where near as powerful and devastating as the pure Quantum Beam Arrays on *SPARTA’S WRATH*, or the arrays on the *ARIZONA* class ships, but they were certainly much more powerful than anything that COLS possessed.

By roughly a hundred-fold.

The six-hundred-meter-long COLS Destroyer that had stupidly fired on *SPARTAN’S SOUL* really had no chance at all. The QPBs, as they had affectionately been nicknamed by the crews of the refitted ships, punched right through the lightly shielded COLS Destroyer and blew huge, gaping chunks out of the COLS Destroyer’s hull as if it was made from glass. Massive internal explosions could be seen even with the naked eye from the MCS and Ristan and the Command Crew could only gawk in terrified response as one of their newest and most modern fleet ships was erased from existence in the single blink of an eye.

“*Son vada carians!*” Coya muttered softly, but loud enough that her voice unintentionally carried across most of the Command Center.

Ristan was staring at the figure of the Lycavorian in the transmission and his eyes went wide when he spoke next.

“Admiral Lorian are you monitoring?” Danny spoke.

“Affirmative General.” Manda’s voice replied instantly.

As far as anyone within the Union military was concerned, Daniel Simpson was the third most powerful man alive when it came to giving orders, behind only Martin and Fleet Admiral Riall. His orders were acted upon without hesitation or question no matter where he went, and while like his *mard fervon*, Daniel hated such unflinching loyalty, he knew exactly how to use it when it was needed.

“Manda, prepare to clean out this system.” Danny spoke angrily. “On my order, you and your ships will begin exterminating every one of these ugly ass ships until none remain. Is that order clear?”

“Crystal.” Miranda answered from the bridge of the *ARIZONA*. “Establishing all primary and secondary targeting solutions as we speak!”

“Wait!” Ristan screamed as he stepped towards the transmission. “Wait!”

Danny's eyes turned to look at him. "You got something to say *midaeus*?" He growled.

"We did not... I did not order that!" Ristan pleaded. "The ship's... the ship's captain acted on his own!"

"So, you don't have control of your own ships?" Danny snapped. "A better reason to kill them all and then we won't have to worry about them doing something stupid!"

"No!" Ristan screamed out the words. "We... we surrender! We surrender!" His words caused most of his Command crew to turn and stare at him in shock.

"I don't want your surrender!" Danny snarled now. "We didn't come here to conquer or invade *igord*!"

Ristan's eyes were wide. "What... what do you want?!" He gasped.

"I'll give you ten minutes!" Danny snapped. "Order every one of your puny little ships to power down their weapons and engines! Nothing but life support active! If you don't, then in ten minutes and one second, we are going to kill them all! Including that fugly station you are standing on right now!"

Ristan looked at him with wide eyes. "I have... there are almost ten thousand men and women on this station!" He gasped.

"And their blood will be on your hands! Just like those fools on that ship!" Danny barked loudly.

"I must contact my... my King!" Ristan declared. "He is on the surface and..."

"Don't push me asshole! My patience is really thin right now because your fool people have already attacked my *fervon* and his family on the surface of your stinking planet! Your people have attacked our King and three of his Queens! Our family! That means every one of my people up here right now wants to rip you and your silly toy ships a new asshole the size of Mount motherfucking Rushmore! Ten minutes! That is how long you have to decide if you live or die!"

The transmission ended and the holoimage disappeared from the open area in the MCS leaving the entire Command crew stunned in to silence.

Ristan turned quickly. "Get me Ground Command!" He screamed. "Get me King Osrod! Now!"

SPARTAN'S SOUL

Danny turned from the now ended transmission and looked at Jaban. "That convincing enough?" He questioned.

"*Sibfla* General!" Jaban answered. "It scared the piss out of me."

Danny cursed under his breath. "How many on that ship?" He asked after a moment.

Jaban sobered quickly and his smile vanished. "Sensors indicated eighty-seven General." He replied. "Daniel... you did the only thing you could do."

Danny met his gaze and slowly nodded his head. Captain Jaban Velat had turned down four promotions in order to remain in command of *SPARTAN'S SOUL* in the nearly thirty years since it was brought into service. Command of the Flagship for Daniel Simpson was status enough for any older Lycavorian such as himself. He was happy, his wife and mate was happy, and they had built a family on this ship that included not only their own children, but every one of the crew. Through the years Jaban had become one of a handful of men and women within the Union who would dare call Danny by his given name. It was something that Danny all but demanded of the much older man and they had grown close through the years. Jaban did not normally refer to Danny by his name in front of the crew, but now it seemed like a good idea, and it had the desired effect even though Daniel's wives and mates were also on the bridge.

Danny took a deep breath and nodded his head. "Talk to me." He finally spoke.

"Armen began transmitting the moment we entered the system." Jaban replied. "We have been getting all of the information that he was able to scan since they arrived. Public channels. Military channels. Defenses. Everything."

"Threat?" Danny asked.

Jaban shook his head. "Minimal." He answered. "Their weapons didn't even scratch our shields. Hopefully they'll take that into account."

Danny moved to his Command chair which rested right beside Jaban's chair in the center of the bridge. He tapped a button on the armrest and instantly a holoimage of Miranda came alive a few feet to his left. All

Command Ships of the fleet were linked in such a way so that the commanders could instantly talk to one another. He turned to face Miranda's image fully. She was also sitting in her command chair on the bridge of the *ARIZONA* while activity was high all around her.

"Manda?" He spoke.

"I've deployed my Wing into Attack Formation Gamma." She answered him instantly meeting his gaze in the transmission. "Steven is now airborne with six full squadrons keeping them honest. For the most part none of their ships are moving. Long range sensors are showing an additional nineteen COLS ships that have turned around and are heading back this way."

"How soon before they get here?" Danny asked.

Miranda shook her head. "Not soon enough to change the outcome Daniel." She told him. "Nineteen hours even at their best speed, and that is factoring in how often they can jump."

Kesyra Simpson was still a new wolf and was still learning different things. Her love for Daniel, Anuk and Nayeca was beyond question, and she simply adored being able to shift her form and see and sense the world from her wolf persona, but she was still half Pralor and the benevolence of her people caused her to step forward before Anuk or Nayeca could stop her. She had not yet fully come to understand the mentality or the Spartan nature of the Lycavorian people she was now living among. No one faulted her for this for she was learning fast with so many helping her.

"Daniel, you cannot..." Kesyra began as she stepped up to him. "They cannot stand against us. Destroying their..."

Daniel met her dark eyes and smiled at her warmly while Anuk and Nayeca stepped up to her on either side and attempted to interrupt her. Daniel reached up and caressed her flawless cheek and pulsed her with a fraction of his male aura. He saw Kesyra's eyes close briefly in bliss and she reached up to put her hand on top of his where his skin touched her cheek as her eyes opened again. Daniel stepped close to her, towering over her five foot six body, and he leaned over to kiss her ever so softly on the lips.

"You worry too much." He said softly.

Kesyra looked instantly embarrassed by what she had said, but this quickly passed as Anuk and then Nayeca wrapped their arms around her waist and drew her tightly to them. Kesyra should have known better and the look on her face said as much. Warriors without equal they may have been, but these men and women were not butchers.

"*Carians*. Forgive me." Kesyra said softly.

Danny shook his head. "For what?" He said softly. He leaned over once more and kissed her again softly, a kiss that she returned and he let his fingers drag along her jawline as he had discovered she liked so much. Daniel smiled at her lovingly once more and then turned back to the image of Miranda. "Manda, you got your targets?"

Miranda nodded her head. "Each of their ships has a central power distribution core in roughly the same location. A low power laser will cut right through their hulls and destroy it. Main power on all the ships will be kaput and their backups will kick in. The only thing they'll be able to power is life support and sensors. Zaala says their back-up generators can't handle anything else."

Daniel nodded his head. "Casualties?" He asked.

"Unless they are standing right next to the power core when the laser hits it, low grade electrical burns, if that." Miranda answered him. "It's about as non-lethal as we can get Daniel. It will take us three minutes to retune our main batteries."

"Do it!" Danny ordered. "Jaban?"

"Already on it." Jaban echoed.

"Good. Now, someone get me a report from the surface!" Danny snapped. "And please tell me that our family and friends are ok. If not... all bets are fucking off."

JETANIA
CAPITAL OF DRINDA
COLS MILITARY COMMAND CENTER

“Talk to me!” Osrod Aspion roared as he entered the MCC. He was not in a very good mood at all and everyone in the MCC Operations Center knew it.

The Duty Officer had interrupted his time with Nitona and right now he was not a happy person. Secha kept his other Queens so busy at times that Osrod finally determined that she was doing it on purpose. Secha could be a colossal *upae* when she wanted to be, more so towards Nitona than the others. Nitona was half Mountain Pack female. Her father was a Plains Pack Alpha who had claimed Nitona’s mother long ago. Her mother’s Mountain Pack had refused to acknowledge the union, but against their wishes, Nitona’s mother had escaped with her father for she was truly in love with him. Nothing could really be done about this since she had gone willingly, and they soon began their life on the outskirts of Drinda. Nitona’s father was a well-respected Alpha who held a good amount of influence among his Pack. He treated Nitona’s mother like a precious gem and as time passed, their love for each other grew even stronger. Nitona’s mother also clung to her Mountain Pack upbringing, which did not make her any new friends at first, but over time this attitude and her commitment had earned her equal respect and influence and soon her status had grown within Kochar Plains Pack to the point that she was now considered sacrosanct among the Kochar Pack. Over the many years, the Kochar Pack had become more and more aligned with the ways of the Mountain Packs and while they did not follow all of their traditions, the Kochar Pack was as close as you could get. Nitona had seven older brothers and three older sisters, making her their youngest child, but certainly the most rooted to the Mountain Pack way of life like her mother. All of her siblings adhered to many of the Mountain Pack ways and their father encouraged this without question.

The day Osrod had seen her in the Drinda markets he knew he had to have her. Her surreal beauty was nearly equal to that of Loras Ranev with her flowing red hair and enticing blue eyes and her sweet scent was nearly too much for him to be around. Nitona quickly caused him to forget all about Loras and even though she was his youngest Queen in terms of years, Osrod favored her over Secha and the others by far. Her body was lithe and muscular in a lean way and she kept herself in superb condition. He hated having to sneak around his own home in order to be with her for any length of time, but Nitona certainly made it worth it. She was not docile by any means, always demanding his attention when they were together in bed and very willing herself to return that attention to him. Even her fear of Secha discovering them did not keep her from seeing him whenever they could manage it. Osrod knew Secha could be a very vindictive bitch, and he always took extra security precautions when meeting Nitona in order to keep her safe from Secha’s wrath. Osrod Aspion did not know how to explain it to himself let alone anyone else, but he was a different person when in Nitona’s arms, and this made him feel good about himself.

Osrod did not care very much for the mother of seven of his children. Secha was arrogant and rigid in her ways, and she treated him like he was beneath her. Secha however, she was incredibly smart, and she knew things that others did not, and Osrod normally let her advise him in many different matters. Osrod’s father had arranged the marriage and union between them without ever really telling him why it was so important, but Osrod did not care at the time. She was a beautiful wolf with a slightly odd scent, but she was definitely a trophy wife and mate, and at that time that was all he cared about. Secha took care of herself physically and her beauty had not faded over time, but even in the beginning Osrod knew there was something different about her that put him off.

Secha Aspion was not the most inventive female in their bed, in fact she was downright boring, nothing like Nitona, but she was dutiful. Osrod also knew that she could be very cruel to those she saw as a threat to her, and he had heard rumors of her wrath towards young females or even others who had gone against her will. Even his other Queens, Risi and Braaha had suffered her anger at different times.

Nitona he shielded as best as he was able however, and she remained docile to Secha as the senior Alpha female, though it was hard for her. Today had been planned by the two of them for weeks. Secha would be at the main Research Facility all day, for she was in charge of most of the scientific research done by their people. Risi and Braaha were going to be out of the city for a few days visiting their families, which left Nitona in the palace alone. They had fallen into each other’s arms happily, eagerly anticipating their hours together, but it wasn’t to be. After only a few passionate moments, their time together had been shattered and the Duty Officer came calling. Nitona had soothed his anger at the interruption with her touch and warm voice, promising even greater pleasures in the future. Today he needed to be King, she had told him before he had left her.

The MCC's Commander, a man with the same rank and status as Ristan stepped forward. "My Lord, just over four minutes ago, two hundred and sixty-nine unknown warships jumped directly into our Planetary Defense Grid without any warning!" The man spoke calmly. He was much like Ristan in that he was older and had seen many battles. Not much rattled him now and he was loyal to his people and his Pack. "We never saw them coming sire. At the exact same time that they appeared, the ship Captain Nasso reported encountering on patrol also appeared, already in orbit and directly over the Mountain Pack Settlement of Warim! The remaining ships match the configuration that Captain Nasso put in his report!"

Osrod looked at him with wide eyes. "What?" He gasped. "How is that possible? How did they get inside our defense grid?"

"We don't know My Lord." The Colonel answered him. Teech Rilton knew his King and how he thought. Osrod Aspion wanted facts and he wanted them up front, with no *rensibfla*. He sometimes did not make the best decisions with those facts, often times taking Queen Secha's advice over his military advisors, but as far as he was concerned Osrod was a decent leader and he knew they could do far worse. "Their Stealth technology is apparently far more advanced than we first thought."

Osrod moved to the main plot board and his eyes grew wide as he saw the number of red colored ships now, in and around his planet. And some of them were massive, easily dwarfing even their largest and most powerful cruisers. No foreign ships had ever gotten this close to Jetania in as long as he could remember. They were always seen coming and met before they ever got close to the Coalition's home world.

"They initiated contact with Colonel Ristan on the MCS my Lord, but..." Teech began but Osrod looked at him when he stopped.

"What?!" Osrod demanded.

"One of our Destroyers sire." Teech spoke. "Most of the crew was on shore leave and the Captain of the ship was meeting with other senior officers here on the surface. His First Officer was in command and he fired upon one of the unknown ships."

"He fired on them!" Osrod almost screamed. "Is he stupid! I want him arrested and..."

"He is dead sire." Teech told him shaking his head. "The ship he fired upon unleashed one volley King Osrod. And it was not even a full attack from what our sensors could see. Nine of their main batteries, out of the nearly one hundred that we think they could have used. The ship was obliterated completely. No survivors."

"*Carians!*" Osrod exclaimed.

"They spoke directly with Colonel Ristan my Lord." Teech told him. "He is standing by."

Osrod nodded his head instantly. "Put him up!"

Osrod turned to the massive main monitor in the room and watched as the picture of the man he knew and had appointed to command the MCS came onto the screen, fluttered and then cleared. Osrod knew something was wrong right away when he saw the harried expression on Ristan and the look of concern in his eyes. Osrod knew instinctively now was not the time to play hard ass King.

"Ristan... talk to me." Osrod spoke with more calm than he actually felt.

"They appeared out of nowhere my Lord." Ristan answered. "They jumped right into our Planetary Defense Grid with no warning and exacting precision. They appeared between and all around our ships in orbit as if it was the most natural thing in the world." Ristan reported to him quickly. "They have nearly a hundred smaller craft, fighters I believe, swarming all around our ships and my station.

"Fighters!" Teech exclaimed. "That is what they are? We thought they were drones of some kind!"

Ristan shook his head quickly. "They are definitely fighters! And whoever is flying them is very well trained. They are extremely fast and maneuverable and our guns cannot track them. We've detected at least two, possibly more, transport sized ships moving within the atmosphere above the Mountain Pack settlement of Warim as well."

"Warim! Are you certain?!" The female voice echoed now and all of them turned to see Secha strode into the center as if the world revolved around her. Osrod cursed under his breath but turned back to Ristan.

"Yes, my Queen." Ristan answered. "It appears they already have forces on the ground there. We don't know how many or what their purpose is."

"They are Lycavorian Ristan?" Osrod asked next.

Ristan nodded his head quickly. "Yes, my Lord. Alphas. At least the one who spoke to us was an Alpha. We saw other species on the bridge of his ship, some unlike anything I have ever seen before, but most were

mainly Lycavorians.” He answered. “He was... he was a *matus brutu ronnus*. And after our ship fired on him he was *rezza*.” (Big black bastard)

“Osrod... you must find out what is happening in Warim.” Secha spoke now.

Secha Aspion was a beautiful female Alpha, with long dark blond hair, bright dark eyes and a figure that still turned the heads of many male wolves within COLS. She was of medium height, with large, firm breasts and long legs. Most who were around her on a regular basis, especially those within the military branch of COLS, hated the woman. She was arrogant and looked down on all of them as if they were insects.

“Why?” Osrod demanded.

“Something happened at the Research Facility as I was leaving.” Secha told him, moving closer. “A boom of some sort and then a massive rush of air. Like a ship was leaving the area very quickly. It knocked many of us on the ground about strongly, and it was heading in the direction of Warim.”

“You saw nothing my Queen?” Teech asked.

Secha shook her head. “No, but you have said yourself that their Stealth technology is far better than our own. It had to be some sort of ship that low to the ground.” She told him. “What else could it be?”

“The Alpha that spoke to us...” Ristan began again. “He was definitely in command, at least of the ships up here, and he said that we had attacked their King and his family on the surface!” He told them.

“Attacked them?! On the surface!?” Osrod exclaimed. “What is he talking about?”

“Our son is in Warim Osrod.” Secha spoke now with a touch of concern in her voice.

“My Lord... he gave us ten minutes to power down all of our weapons in orbit.” Ristan spoke. “All of our ships are to go to Life Support only and the MCS is to power down all weapons and sensors.”

Osrod snarled for he did like to be given orders. “And if we do not?” He barked.

“He said he would order his ships to destroy our Home Defense Fleet and the MCS.” Ristan answered. “He was not making light of this sire.”

“Can we do nothing?!” Osrod asked now.

“My Lord, you can see the size of their ships.” Ristan spoke. “A full-frontal barrage by our destroyer with missiles and beams did not even scratch their defensive shields and they obliterated that fool in less than ten seconds. They have twenty-nine of the large ships in orbit now, sire. Each of them four thousand meters long or better. These ships alone could lay waste to our entire HDF. The other ships are not as large with the exception of the one that appears to be carrying these fighters, but I must assume they all have sufficient firepower to fulfill their threat.”

“You assume!” Secha demanded. “You say these are Lycavorians! They should bow to their rightful King! Did you demand that they do this?”

Ristan looked at her as if she was insane. “With respect Queen Secha...” Ristan spoke keeping his words controlled and even. “They say their King is already on the surface of our planet! Their largest ship is over twenty-one thousand meters long and it was completely hidden from our sensors until it chose to reveal itself! This happens to be the same ship that Captain Nasso’s report speaks of! You will forgive me my Queen, if I did not see the opportunity to negotiate from a position of strength!” Ristan finished his statement with an angry snarl.

Secha stepped forward, her own eyes changing to her wolf persona and her wolf fangs extending in anger. “You would do well to watch who you are speaking to Colonel!” She growled at him.

“I will be sure to remember that when my people and I are nothing but space dust!” He snarled right back unafraid of her.

“Enough Secha!” Osrod snapped at her causing Secha’s eyes to widen in shock at his reaction to her. “Ristan! You say they already have forces on the ground in Warim?”

“We know nothing for certain my King.” Ristan answered. “We detected ships in the atmosphere above Warim, and that big *ronnus* ship is holding station in a protective orbit over Warim. Other than that, we know nothing. Our agreement with the Mountain Packs does not allow our satellites to cover their settlements sire, as you know. And that big ship is somehow distorting what coverage we do have in the area.”

“Distorting how?” Osrod asked.

Ristan shook his head. “Unknown at this time sire. I have people up here working on it, but it seems to be some sort of low power disruption field. I have ordered ground forces into the area from the nearest garrison

to compensate, but it will take them several hours to reach Warim using the Overland Tram system built by the Mountain Packs.”

“We will need their permission to disembark the Trams Sire.” Teech spoke now.

Osrod was silent for a moment and then nodded his head. “Ristan, do as this Alpha told you. Order all ships to power down to nothing but life support and...”

“Osrod you cannot bow to these unknown...” Secha began to protest but he whirled on her with anger, his own wolf eyes and fangs now exposed.

“I am King!” He bellowed. “Not you woman! I will not sacrifice our people in the name of vanity! Now be silent!” He turned back to Ristan. “Do as I order you Ristan.”

Ristan nodded his head. “As you order sire.”

“Which units are heading for Warim Teech?” Osrod asked.

“Ristan dispatched the 3rd and 9th Battalions of the Home Ground Regiment my Lord.” Teech answered.

Osrod nodded his head. They were men completely loyal to him and extremely well trained. “Monitor their progress and contact Garget Ranev. Instruct him that they will be entering Warim via the Tram and he will act in accordance with the Mutual Defense Pact that they signed and allow them to disembark and begin searching for this so-called King and his people already on the surface.” Osrod looked at Teech intently. “And find my son Juyno! He was in the city of Warim with others and I want to talk to him!”

Teech nodded his head. “Understood my Lord.”

Osrod turned and glanced at the Plot Board as Ristan’s image blinked off of the monitor above them. “Quietly activate all of our ground units and have them stand to Teech.” Osrod spoke to him calmly as he looked at the Plot Board intently now. “All sensitive material is to be secured and all Research and Military facilities are to go on full alert status as of right now.”

“Yes, sire.” Teech answered him.

“Prepare a full ground detachment for me.” Osrod snapped. “I’m going to Warim.”

“Sire, I do not recommend that!” Teech spoke. “We don’t know enough about...”

Osrod looked at him. “They are Lycavorians!” Osrod hissed loudly. “They will follow my orders as their King! I will deal with them if they do not!”

Teech bowed his head quickly and then watched Osrod turn and strode out of the Center with a purpose. Secha turned and followed him quickly, trying to keep up with his longer stride.

The Colonel turned and watched as his Second Officer moved up beside him.

“Sir?” He asked.

“Issue the King’s orders.” Teech told him.

“What are you thinking Colonel?” The younger man asked him.

Teech met his eyes. “What am I thinking? You see these ships above us Captain. If they already have forces on the ground and we did not know this...” He paused and shook his head. “I’m thinking that things as we know them are going to change very quickly Captain. And many of us are not going to like those changes.” He said softly. “Do as the King has ordered now.”

“Yes, sir!”

WARIM MEDICAL CENTER MAIN MOUNTAIN PACK MEDICAL FACILITY

It was named for Warim Ranev, just like the city that bore his name. To honor his legacy and his deeds. It was the most advanced medical facility among the many Mountain Packs and all of the Packs were represented here and used the facility.

At the moment, the Warim Medical Center was surrounded by nearly one thousand of the *Durcunusaan* Ready Division and nearly a dozen dragons. A full Security Brigade of the DRD had deployed with *SPARTA'S WRATH* and most of them were on the ground now and providing full security to the building that held nearly all of their Royal Family. Torma, Isheeni, Elynth, Anthar and Miath sat atop the ten-story building keeping watch of the surrounding area, while Majeir, Jeth, Tharua, Aurith and Aradace conducted long, lazy flyovers of

the city and the surrounding area, often times coming in low to land and quickly switch with Ladur, Ryner, Jeru, Marux and Mara. The brothers Caydren and Cinol had parked themselves on the exterior of the main entrance to Warim Medical Center and were sitting with a dozen *Durcunusaan*, intently watching the men, women and children who were very quickly gathering all around. Hundreds if not thousands of Lycavorians from Warim were surrounding the building on three sides as word quickly spread throughout the large city of the battle that took place in the Atrium and the news that the one True King and his three Heralds had come. Most were equally as amazed as they saw the huge dragons that now circled the city or were set up on the outside of the building. They were mythical creatures from stories that all of them had been told by their parents as children, yet now they were not so mythical any longer.

The main lobby of the Medical Center was now a command post of sorts, Martin, Garget and Lasun standing in the waiting room as the portable holo disc in Martin's hand held the figure of the huge black skinned Lycavorian they had seen on the ship.

"...fucking kidding me?" Martin gasped as Danny filled him in on what had taken place. "What kind of fool fires on a ship five times its size?!"

Danny nodded his head. "That is what I said." He spoke. "I had to take the ship out *fervon*."

Martin shook his head. "You did what any of us would have done Dan." Martin said quickly.

"Well... it woke them up at least." Danny said. "I gave them ten minutes to power down their weapons and whatever passes for shields, and they started doing that about three minutes ago. They had ships inbound from other sectors but apparently, they have stopped and are holding their current positions according to Manda."

Martin nodded his head. "Leave things up there to Manda and Armen *fervon*. That is their business. I want you and the others down here with me. And bring Nubian and Anuk. Red could use some help here in their medical facility and I want Nubian to be here when Thoti brings that fat bastard Lorendo for a visit."

"Problem?" Danny asked.

Martin shook his head. "You know how Anja is when she gets into a hospital. She wants to fix everyone. They are still dealing with problems that we got rid of a long time ago. I won't go into the details since I didn't understand much of what she said to begin with."

Danny chuckled softly. "Good enough." He told him. "We'll join you in an hour."

Martin nodded as the transmission faded and ended and he looked up at Garget and Lasun as he detected Anja's honey scent getting closer. He turned when he saw her Persian red hair in the crowd of people and the *Durcunusaan* parted to allow her through. Garget and Lasun instinctively bowed their heads to her when she stepped up to Martin.

"How is she Red?" He asked at once.

Anja nodded her head and put her hand on his broad chest with a gentle smile. "She will be fine Lover. She lost a lot of blood, but thankfully Dynina and Sarlana were with us. Between the two of them, they were able to guide me in repairing the damage the bullet did. She is resting now, Sarlana and Dynina haven't left her side and Retta is watching over her. Reva's sphere is with them as well."

Martin breathed a sigh of relief and nodded his head. "Danny is coming down with Anuk. Knowing her, she will bring a full team of medics and equipment."

Anja nodded her head in approval. "Good. I have already spoken with the administrator of the hospital and we will start treating their most serious patients as soon as she gets here."

Garget looked between them. "Serious patients?" He asked. "Were others injured in the battle?"

Anja shook her head quickly. "No Garget, but your people... our people here are still contending with diseases and medical conditions that we wiped out within the Union hundreds of years ago. We are just going to start doing the same here."

"You... you can do this Queen Anja?" Lasun gasped.

Anja smiled at him. "According to this big oaf..." Anja jerked her thumb at Martin. "I'm a miracle worker. Don't believe everything he tells you though, me and my people are just good at our jobs."

Martin grinned. "She works miracles." He said.

Anja snapped out her hand and used the back of her knuckles to slap him hard in the abdomen. "Loras and the Administrator of this hospital have already agreed to this." She said looking at Garget as Martin winced.

Garget shook his head quickly. “These things are far out of my realm.” He spoke. “I will always take Loras’ direction at times like this.”

“Can you... can you do this for all of our people?” Lasun asked her.

Anja smiled and reached out to squeeze his arm. “Loras is already putting together a plan to get all of the Mountain Packs taken care of.” She said. “We...”

Martin smelled them the moment they entered the main entrance, even before the deep male voice bellowed out the words.

“GET OUT OF MY WAY! WHERE IS HE?”

This drew the attention of everyone in the main lobby and many of the *Durcunusaan* were reacting to the perceived threat even as the four members of the *Durcunusaan* Ready Detachment signaled them everything was ok. As the Quick Reactionary Force for that time, they had deployed from *SPARTA'S WRATH* in under thirty seconds, which was a new record for them, and Chiron’s orders had been very specific. Bring those they were to secure to the King.

Martin Leonidas detected their blood even through whatever was masking it and he stepped forward into the main corridor into their view without hesitation, the *Durcunusaan* parting ranks for their King. The much older male and female wolf came to abrupt halts when they saw him and Martin watched both of them take deep breaths, the woman’s hands going to her face in stunned shock. The older male, far older than his scent told others that he was Martin knew, stepped forward slowly. His hands were shaking, his bulky but muscular medium height frame visibly trembling. Martin watched as his dark eyes became moist, tears beginning to spill from them and as everyone in the room watched with confusion, Martin Leonidas didn’t pause and he moved forward and crushed the older man in a powerful embrace.

Doseb Athltin wailed out his utter joy as his powerful arms wrapped around Martin in a bear hug that would have crushed a lesser man. Anja was standing with Garget and Lasun and saw Loras burst out of the room down the corridor as she heard her father’s voice. She moved away from the two stunned men and quickly moved to intercept Loras. Anja knew who they were the moment they entered the hospital, just as Martin did. She could smell their blood easily enough now that she knew what she was searching for. Anja grabbed Loras’ arm gently to hold her back.

“Loras wait.” She exclaimed softly.

“Anja they are... they are my parents!” Loras gasped.

Anja nodded as she pulled her close. “I know.” She said in reply. “But they are... they are also Martin’s family. Our family.”

Loras looked at her with wide eyes, realizing what she was saying and she turned back to look at her mother and father. Loras Ranev had never seen her father cry in all of her years, yet now both he and her mother had tears pouring out of their eyes almost uncontrollably.

Doseb Athltin pulled back and grabbed Martin by the sides of his head, holding him tight as he saw the tears in Martin’s eyes as well. “I... *carians pen kirsis iadour uvenn aery cana.*” Doseb stammered the words. (Gods, I had given up any hope)

Martin reached up and gripped his shoulders tightly with a smile. “*Ethoni coi innyne cana.*” He spoke softly, his own words choked up and emotional. (There is always hope)

Doseb roared out his happiness and wrapped his arms around Martin once more before turning and grabbing the woman by his side. “*Allon coi... allon coi aur valiath Irani.*” (This is my wife)

Martin Leonidas couldn’t keep the huge smile from his face as he didn’t hesitate and embraced the much smaller woman. He lifted her off the floor and she cried out in joy as her arms went around his shoulders. Martin could smell the different bloodlines within her, but as with anyone, Mahanlo blood was far more dominant and pronounced. He could smell her true age as well, and he knew that they had been mated for probably more years than most of those alive on Jetania had been living. He felt her arms tighten around him, could feel the intense happiness within her, just as he did Doseb, and it filled him with peace and contentment just as it had when he had discovered Dynina and now Reva.

And Martin Leonidas longed for the day when he could hold his *tenna* Kelia in his arms with his *staania* Reva beside him.

Soon... Martin thought to himself.

Soon...

WARIM MEDICAL CENTER

“...Should have told me!” Loras almost shouted as she sat in the chair at the head of the conference table, her mother and father sitting to her right, Aricia and For'mya to her left.

They had moved out of the main lobby of the hospital into this large conference room which now was heavily guarded at both of the entrances. Four *Durcunusaan* stood watch at either door into the room, effectively denying entrance to everyone unless told otherwise by their King or one of the Royal family.

Martin stood behind the chairs where Aricia and For'mya sat, both of them greeting Doseb and Irani with embraces of happiness and love, which caused Irani to cry even more and Doseb to feel something he had not felt since he was a small boy. A unique and powerful sense of family filled him once again after more years than he could even remember. When he greeted Androcles, Deion, Denali and Eliani, Doseb could no longer keep his own tears in and he cried once more as he embraced each of them. The smell of Mahanlo blood was so very potent and so powerful within them, especially the three sons of Martin, and it was very nearly overwhelming to him. The introductions continued for nearly half an hour as he and Irani met each of their bloodline and discovering that even more of their family resided on the ships above. After so many years of thinking that they were alone in the galaxy, Doseb and Irani became so overcome with emotion that they both had to sit down, where Loras had quickly joined them.

Gorgo and Dasha, unwilling to remain on the ship any longer after sensing what was happening on the surface, came to Warim on their own to help Anja within the hospital. No one with any sense would dare try to hold the mothers of the King and Queen Aricia back when they set their minds to something. Everyone within the Union knew how the King felt about his mother, Dasha and Dysea's mother Normya, and Armen did not even try to stop them. He knew to attempt to do so would be futile. He made certain they were protected however, as Androcles would expect him too. Now, they sat in the conference room as well, for they knew that Martin would keep nothing from them. Secretly, everything that was happening aside, Gorgo and Dasha were having the most fun of anyone discovering so much and relishing the time with their family.

Garget and Lasun were standing with Androcles, his sister Eliani and the tall Alpha wolf they now knew was called Jomann. He was the husband and mate to Eliani they had discovered, and Androcles' Captain and shadow. Jomann was also one of the most physically imposing Alphas that they had ever met, and Martin's daughter looked miniscule when compared to him. Eliani Leonidas took after her mother obviously, the same type of physical build, if a few inches taller, but when held against the Alpha wolf who was her husband and mate, like her mother Anja, she looked tiny in comparison. Which seemed to suit her just fine as she stood leaning up against the front of his body almost casually. Dynina and Sarlana had elected to remain with Nilantha as did Reva in her sphere.

It was Loras' mother who answered her daughter's question.

“And what would you have had your father and I tell you Loras?” She asked calmly. “By the way child, we come from a bloodline of wolves that is being hunted across the stars and this was the only way we could think to protect ourselves?”

“You know what I mean mother!” Loras hissed trying to act angry but not really able to pull it off. Loras could not remember ever being angry with her parents in all of her life, and she could not start now after what she had learned these last days.

“Your mother and I made this decision long before you were ever born daughter.” Doseb told her. “If you wish to be angry with someone then be angry with me. It is my bloodline that...”

Irani quickly reached out and took his hand. “Doseb no!” She snapped at him. “I knew what I was doing and what it would mean the moment you claimed me. I welcomed it with all that I was my husband, all of my heart and I have not regretted a single day since. Not one!”

Doseb smiled at her and leaned over to nuzzle her affectionately. “Nor have I.” He said softly. Irani smiled back at him brilliantly.

“So... so how old are you really?” Loras asked her. “You and mother were not born on Ventori were you?”

Irani looked at Doseb and she squeezed his hand as he nodded to her. She looked back to Loras once more. "Our true ages do not really matter now, but if you must know, both your father and I are over a million and a half years old. Give or take a few centuries." Irani said with a humorous flippancy. She saw Loras' eyes go wide in disbelief. "We don't really keep track."

"*Son vada carians!*" Lasun muttered aloud to himself but his voice carried throughout the entire room.

"And no... we were not born on Ventori." Irani spoke. "Both of us were born on a planet called Koltar Four. Four hundred and nineteen years before the Purge of the Mahanlo bloodline began."

Loras looked even more stunned as she gazed at her parents. "You have... you have been together all of that time?" She gasped finally.

Irani smiled at her and nodded. "Since we were both barely a hundred years old. Life with your father has never been dull, that is for certain." She said with a chuckle.

"Mother! How can you joke about this?!" Loras exclaimed.

Irani looked at Doseb for a quick moment and then back to Loras. "Because humor is the only thing that has gotten us through these many years Loras. It is the only thing that allowed us to continue after we thought... after we thought all had been lost."

"Kesas Pengot did this didn't he?" Martin asked now causing Loras to look at him in confusion.

Doseb looked at him now, surprise in his eyes. "How do you...?"

Martin held up his hand stopping Doseb's words. "We'll get to that." He told him.

"We don't..." Doseb shook his head. "I had to destroy our only means of communicating with Kesas Pengot and those of the Kirek Pack that remained. They had taken refuge on Pakar Six and..."

"They were exiled there Doseb! Do not mince words husband! Tell them the truth of it!" Irani snarled viciously.

Aricia glanced quickly up at Martin at the vehemence in Irani's words. They were filled with hate and anger even now, which told all of them quite a bit.

[Irani wears her Mahanlo blood like a badge of honor Beloved.] Aricia spoke to him in their shielded connection. *[She embraces it tightly and guards it.]*

Martin nodded his head. *[That she does.]* He answered. *[Chiron told Andro and I that with the information eh was able to gather it would have taken several centuries for the Arhtai Pack to accomplish what they did. Perhaps this is why?]*

Doseb looked at her and nodded his head once more as his face became sterner as he looked at Martin. "They... we were exiled there by the Arhtai Pack. Irani is correct King..."

"I am not your King!" Martin barked now surprising everyone in the room except those of his family. "You are my blood! My family! My family calls me by my name! Period! None of this King *rensibfla* when we are together! I won't have it! I won't!"

Doseb looked at him for a long moment and then a small smile split his lips after a few seconds. "I... I remember *Staan*ia Kelia telling me of her brothers when I was a small boy. She showed me holoimages of them." He spoke causing Aricia and For'mya to reach up and take Martin's hands on their shoulders and squeeze his fingers when they felt him tense slightly. Doseb looked at him. "It is frightening how much you and your sons look like them Martin. You are different, yes, but it is there. In your eyes. In your demeanor. I have not... we have not smelled the pureness of Mahanlo blood in..." Doseb's eyes began to tear up once more and he stopped speaking, Irani reaching out to take his hands within hers.

Martin turned his head and looked at Eliani. "Eli..." He spoke.

Eliani lifted her hand and exposed the hypo injector. "We can solve that issue right now." She spoke with a smile as she pushed away from Jomann's form. "If you are willing."

Doseb looked at her and then to Martin. "What is this?" He asked.

"It's a protein enzyme booster." Eliani answered. "I made it myself. It was pretty easy actually once mother told me what was involved and..."

"Eli?" Andro spoke now with a roll of his eyes and Eliani instantly looked embarrassed.

Eliani smiled then knowing at times she got like her mother when it came to explaining things in medical terms. "Sorry." She said. "It will reverse the blood masking protein that was introduced into your bodies and return your natural scent to you. Your natural Mahanlo scent. It will take several hours but by

tomorrow the masking proteins will be gone, and like my sister's husband and mate Lazar, it will be back to normal."

"Lazar?" Doseb gasped looking at Loras now. "Lazar has taken a wife and mate? You did not tell us this Loras!"

Loras nodded her head slowly. "It only happened in the last 36 hours *alvva* and so much was happening around us."

"She is of Mahanlo blood?" Irani asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Yes."

"Our youngest daughter Retta." Aricia continued proudly. "Anja is her birth mother but we and our fellow Queens do not distinguish this among our children. They are all our children. This is how we have raised them and this is what they believe themselves. Lazar and Retta claimed each other in the old way, and Retta's bite purged the masking proteins from Lazar's body."

Doseb shook his head slowly in disbelief. "I should have known. I knew something was happening when the tattoo appeared on our bodies." He said looking at Irani. "Kesas told us the... he said the Prophecy of the Onab predicted this. I believed at first but after so long..."

Martin shook his head. "Believe me... it took all of us by surprise."

"Fellow Queens?" Irani asked now. "How... how many are you?"

For'mya grinned now and glanced at Martin before turning back to her. "There are six of us." She answered. "Dysea, Isabella and Cirith will be arriving here later today."

"Six!" Irani gasped looking at Martin now and watching him look embarrassed.

"We love and desire each other nearly as much as we love and desire Martin." For'mya spoke once more.

"Are you not satisfied with one good woman boy?" Doseb asked him humorously.

"Hey, I..." Martin began to speak but Aricia cut him off.

"Do not worry Doseb Athltin..." Aricia spoke with a wide smile. "Our beloved is more than capable of loving all of us. With equal passion and commitment. Destiny meant for it to be this way and we have embraced that."

Doseb Athltin couldn't really say anything in response, but he could feel his chest swelling with pride. "*Avoi*." He said softly.

"How many children do... do you have?" Irani asked now.

"Eighteen." For'mya answered with pride in her own voice. "All but two of them are out here with us now. You will meet the rest of them as time passes, trust me. They will demand to meet you."

This announcement caused Doseb's chest to swell even more. Eighteen lives that were filled with Mahanlo blood and all of them were walking around proudly, their blood pure and unmasked. He looked at Eliani now. "This protein.. you say it will... it will remove the masking of our blood?"

Eliani nodded her head. "Yes."

Doseb looked at his wife and Irani nodded without hesitation. Both Doseb and Irani stood up and held out their arms. Eliani looked at her father and saw him nod. She moved around the table and quickly pressed the injector to first Doseb and then Irani's arms and then stepped back. She looked at Loras then.

"Loras?" She asked.

Loras looked at her parents. "Mother?"

Irani nodded her head as she rubbed the injection point on her forearm. "You have a right to know your true bloodline Loras. You and your brothers. Your children. It is part of who you are child. It *is* who you are. It is part of who we all are. Our history and our... and now our future once more." She finished looking at Martin.

Loras met her father's eyes and saw him nod. Loras had never once doubted her father or his love for her and her siblings. She looked at Eliani then and nodded her head. Eliani stepped up to her and pressed the injector to her arm and it was done. Eliani looked at her father. "I can inject the others *medwan*, they are waiting two floors up. Confused but calm. Dorian and Laren are with them."

Martin looked at Doseb and Loras. "That is up to them." He said.

"Yes." Irani said instantly.

Doseb looked at Martin. "You can protect them?" He asked. "Irani and I do not care for our wellbeing, but our family is..."

“Jomann?” Androcles spoke once more.

Jomann nodded his head. “It will be done.” He said confidently and then held out his hand for Eliani. She came over quickly and took it and they both exited the room.

Andro looked at Doseb now. “Jomann is my *Durcunusaan* Captain. He will see to it that all of them are protected.”

“*Durcunusaan*. Wolves of the Blood.” Doseb spoke softly. “This is what you call those men and women with you? The ones outside and protecting this building?”

Martin nodded his head. “True Spartans all.”

“*Avoi*.” Andro echoed his father’s words with a nod. “*Jehar vada meim rie duan staanio’s erranya alad evell umbar duan anos*.” Andro spoke softly. (Into the hands of our grandfather’s spirit we commend our souls)

Doseb and the others watched as Gorgo, Dasha, Aricia, For'mya and Martin spoke in unison. “*Krius vin cabur duan julyongs for tayils for eenu jar uvenn olyn evell iri*.” (May he guide our actions and thoughts and pick us up if we fall)

Doseb looked at Martin again. “Your... your father?” He asked softly.

Martin nodded his head with a smile. “Leonidas. My father, yes.” He replied seeing his mother look at him with love out of the corner of his eye.

“They call you... I heard them call you King Leonidas. This is where... this is where the name Leonidas comes from then?” Irani asked.

Martin nodded his head again. “Yes.” He answered her. “Though given everything that we have discovered in these last weeks and months, it’s Mahanlo-Leonidas now I suppose.” He smiled. “It’s got a nice ring to it don’t you think?”

Doseb smiled and this and nodded his head. “It is... it is fitting.” He spoke. “That young wolf... Jomann... he is... he is of the Kirek bloodline.” He spoke with some awe. “I have not smelled the bloodline of Kirek in... how is this possible Martin?”

“The how is still somewhat up in the air...” Martin answered. “But the who is easy. My *staanio* did it. Somehow.”

“King Daniho?” Doseb gasped.

Martin nodded his head. “It’s a long story and one I will happily share with you, but let’s get back to how you got here.” He said.

Doseb nodded his head and returned to his chair. Irani did as well and reached over to take Loras’ hand in her own. “When... when Osrod Aspion’s grandfather came to Ventori and began taking all of the Alphas from there I had to destroy the only real means Irani and I had of communicating with Kesas and the survivors of the Purge on Pakar Six.” Doseb told them.

“Why?” Aricia asked now.

“The risk in them discovering such advanced technology would have been too dangerous for us.” Doseb replied. “And it would have signaled whoever the Arhtai Pack sent after us who we were.”

“So you knew that they sent someone?” Martin asked him.

Doseb nodded his head. “Kesas Pengot suspected that they would. There was no way to hide the ship that we took that left Pakar Six. They would have detected it easily. Kesas knew they were watching us even after we were exiled to Pakar Six. Irani and I were in stasis like the others, put there by the Arhtai Pack. We were among those that were rescued from Koltar Four during the last days of the purge. A single mission that Kesas and the Kirek Pack conducted was able to rescue our stasis pods from Koltar Four as well as that of *Tenne* Lylor and three of our cousins. Many died in this mission from what he tells us. Kesas Pengot woke us secretly many years later, when he discovered what the Pralor people had done on Ventori and he had to move swiftly for the Mahanlo bloodline detectors that the Arhtai Pack seeded all over Pakar Six would have detected us quickly once we were awakened. We did not want to leave our family, but his logic was without question. We agreed, Irani and I, and we prepared for six weeks and then we left.”

“So you knew the Pralor people?” Martin asked.

Doseb shook his head. “Only what Kesas told us while we prepared to leave Pakar Six. How we had begun trading with them even while our people were preparing to leave Cerath. How King Daniho kept it secret from all but a few. We have never met them but we know what they did across the stars with our people.” Doseb explained. “I don’t know how long it took for the Arhtai Pack to follow us, but they knew the only place

where we could blend in was Ventori and Kesas knew as much. It was also the only place where they could not act against us even if they knew we were there?”

“Why?” Martin asked him.

“The Alphas on Ventori were looked at as... for lack of a better term... they were looked at as higher beings by the Betas and other wolves.” Doseb told him. “To act against any Alpha on Ventori would have turned all of the Alphas against someone. And the results would have been lethal. Whoever the Arhtai Pack sent after us knew this, and since they could not detect our bloodline because of the masking, it made their job infinitely harder. It is why many of us still harbor great animosity towards Osrod Aspion’s grandfather. We did not want to leave Ventori. I don’t know who the Arhtai Pack sent but...”

“Does the name Sama Arhtai mean anything to you?” For'mya asked.

“Sama!” Irani hissed in disgust now. “That vile witch! They sent her?!”

“So you do know her?” For'mya pressed her.

“We know of her.” Irani answered. “The youngest daughter to Nyser and Yelma Arhtai. And my *chrora*.”

Martin’s eyes grew wider. “Your cousin!”

Irani nodded her head. “As much as it pains me to say, yes. A distant cousin, but still my cousin. But not my blood! Never my blood!” Irani took a deep breath before continuing. “We lived on opposite continents on Koltar Four. I never met her, but we know she had a hand in helping her mother during *Vada Dremsa rie Saan*.”

“Wait a minute!” Martin stopped her quickly causing everyone to look at him. “*Vada Dremsa rie Saan*? The Night of Blood. What is that?”

Irani nodded her head slowly. “It is what... it is what we called it.” She answered him. “The purge of our bloodline. It happened over many centuries yes, but *Vada Dremsa rie Saan* began it all Martin. It... it happened exactly five years after Doseb and I became mated. I... I carried our first child then. A girl.” Irani lowered her head slightly and Doseb reached for her. “I was injured and she did not survive.”

Martin’s jaw tensed instantly and only Andro detected this in his father. He didn’t step forward, didn’t speak any words, he simply reached for his father within the Etheric realm on a level that even his mothers could not hope to match.

[Father?]

Everyone saw Martin turn slightly to look at his son. *[I don’t... I don’t like the sounds of that keto.]* He spoke.

[Nor do I father but we... we must have facts before we act.] Androcles told him. *[The only one who can provide the facts we need is Kesas Pengot. You know this. Only he has a full perspective.]*

[Andro...]

Now everyone did see Andro step closer to his father, their faces puzzled and confused and Aricia and For'mya wore concerned expressions for even they could not hear what was being said and that usually did not signal good things.

[I feel as you do father.] Andro spoke. *[Even more so with the Dahakoan blood flowing within me. It was you who taught me to have all the information available to us before we make a decision. Now is not the time... now is not the time to let emotions rule our actions.]*

[And if I am right?] Martin asked him.

[Then we will stand together, all of us, as we exact our brand of justice father. Spartan justice.] Andro replied.

Martin took a deep breath then and nodded his head. *[Then we wait. And we hope that I’m wrong.]* He said pausing another moment. *[Thank you son.]*

[You are not alone father.] Andro told him. *[Ever.]*

Martin turned back to Irani who was looking at him confused and he nodded his head. “I’m sorry. Please... continue...”

Irani looked at Doseb and then back to him but said nothing. After a moment she began to speak again. “Yelma Arhtai kept her immediate family apart from her extended family. She is the real power behind their Pack. Nyser is merely a figurehead. She is a cruel *upae* and will not hesitate to kill anyone in her way. Sama was only a small girl when they left Cerath and Nyser and Yelma have had many children since settling on Koltar Four, but Yelma... she keeps their power among them. If she sent Sama, then her ultimate goal was our

deaths for certain. Sama became her mother's right hand. She took great pleasure in seeing the Purge of our Bloodline."

"So this Sama doesn't know what you look like?" Martin asked.

Doseb shook his head now. "It would not matter. Both of us had reconstructive facial surgery done before we left Pakar Six. Another precaution that Kesas took to safeguard us."

"I'm liking this Kesas Pengot more and more." Martin said with a grin as this statement made him feel slightly better and allowed his anger to bleed off even more.

Doseb looked at him. "I only wish I knew if he was... if any of them were still alive." Doseb said softly. "*Staanio* Lylor, *Staanian* Kelia, so many dead or imprisoned. So many lost. All because of a desire for power."

Martin smiled broadly now knowing this was important and happy news he was about to deliver. "Oh, Kesas Pengot is alive." Martin told him seeing Doseb look at him with wide eyes. "And so are *Tenne* Lylor and *Tenna* Kelia. And three of your Aunts or Uncles. My Aunts and Uncles too I guess. I don't know which ones."

Doseb came to his feet as if he was shot out of a gun. "Martin you... do not jest with me boy!" He snarled. "Tell me... tell me you are not joking!" He almost yelled as Irani held her hands over her mouth in shock. "How can you... how can you know this?"

Martin saw Garget tense and reach for the earpiece he wore in his ear. It was a crude device but similar to their implants and it allowed him to speak with the men and women under his command throughout Warim. Lasun looked at him as Garget's face tightened and Martin turned to face him fully.

"Garget?" He asked as he saw Andro lift his own hand and put a finger to his ear to activate his implant.

Garget lowered his hand and looked at Martin. "I have just received word from my scouts that Osrod Aspion has ordered two of his ground battalions to commandeer the West Bound Trams and they are heading here." Garget told him. "He is also approaching Warim in a shuttle with Queen Secha and he is demanding clearance to land. He wants to know where his son is and why unknown ships have been detected flying above Warim."

Martin looked at Andro and saw him nod. "Armen is picking up the same transmissions father." He said.

"How many?" Martin asked him.

"The sensors on *SPARTA'S WRATH* detected roughly three thousand men loading out." Andro answered. "They did it quickly and efficiently. Two of these Trams coming from two different locations."

"You can listen to their communications? You can see them!" Lasun gasped.

"How far out *keto*?" Martin asked his son.

"Less than an hour now." Andro answered him. "He waited to inform us because of the different tracks these Trams use and he didn't know for sure if they were headed here. Now he is sure."

"The 3rd and 9th Home Guard Regiments Garget." Lasun spoke again. "They are the only ones close enough to get here that quickly."

Garget nodded his head in agreement. "And they are loyal to Osrod. Well equipped and well trained." He said looking at Martin. "They will pull into the Main Arrival Station in Warim. It is the only place that many troops can offload quickly. It also gives them access to the entire city!"

"That didn't take long." Martin said.

Loras rose to her feet now. "Osrod may be a *ronnus* but he is not stupid." She said, seeing Martin turn to look at her. "And he is a very competent commander Martin. More so than many under his command."

"Loras is correct Martin." Lasun agreed.

Martin nodded his head. "Danny put the kabash on his ships so now he is doing the only thing he can to find out what is going on." Martin said. "Works for me. I always wanted to meet a real live King."

Andro grinned at his father's words, sensing him feeling more upbeat at the chance for a fight, while Garget and Lasun looked confused. "I will handle the troops father." Andro said as he headed for the door.

"Andro?!" Martin called out and watched Androcles turn to face him. "Please don't break anything else *keto*." He said. "We already have to fix one building. I'd prefer not to have to fix these Tram things either."

Andro's face twisted up into a ghoulish mask of disgust and he stuck his tongue out at his father before turning and leaving the conference room. Martin, Aricia and For'mya chuckled as he turned back and looked at Garget.

"He gets sensitive sometimes." Martin said with a smile. He turned to Doseb. "Doseb, you and Irani stay here for now. I want you protected. I got a surprise for you that I think you will like anyway."

Doseb looked at him oddly. "I don't understand." He said.

Martin grinned. "Oh, you will." He said. "When King shit Osrod and his Queen show up here to collect their son."

WARIM

MAIN SHUTTLE ARRIVAL LANDING PLATFORM

Osrod Aspion knew something was very wrong the moment they set down on the landing platform. The only thing he could see out of the shuttle's windows were dozens of Mountain Pack soldiers arrayed along the sides of the platform. Mixed in with them were an equal number of unknown men and even women that he could see. All of these unknown men and women were wearing strange, black and crimson body armor of some sort. Odd helmets of some kind adorned their heads that he had never seen before. The black and crimson armor covered their bodies with ample protection while leaving their joints free for the most optimum movement, and it conformed to the shape of the person wearing it, which is how he knew that there were women among them. Osrod had never seen anything like it before for his scientists were still trying to discover a way to forge the metals that they had on Jetania into similar types of armor. They had failed so far, but Osrod saw exactly what they were hoping to discover right in front of him now.

All of them were also very well armed from what his trained eye could see, though none of those weapons were even angled in the direction of his shuttle. The strange rifles appeared to be hanging from some sort of quick release straps, and he could also see sidearm weapons in holsters and even the hilts of bladed weapons on some of the unknown men and women. Osrod had never seen this type of body armor or weapons before. None of those species that COLS regarded as enemies could even field such equipment, he knew this for certain, and just by the physical size of most of the men he could see, he knew these strange men and women were Lycavorian. He turned his head to look at Secha, who sat beside him reading from a data pad.

"Something isn't right." He said.

Secha lifted her head and looked at him. "What do you mean?"

Osrod motioned with his head at the window. "See for yourself." He stated. "Garget Ranev has apparently gone beyond his station and made contact with the Lycavorians that Nasso encountered."

Secha leaned over quickly and looked out the window as Osrod rose to his feet, feeling the engines on the shuttle beginning to power down. Her eyes grew wider when she saw the strange Lycavorians on the platform, and the equipment they had. All she could see of their faces under the odd helmets were their eyes and parts of their mouths, given the slots in the full faced guard helmets.

"You are head of our Science and Research Division Secha." Osrod spoke again. "You have had the technology my grandfather took for centuries now and we have discovered nothing that we can use."

Secha didn't look at him as she continued to look out the window of the shuttle at those around them. "Scientific research is not as basic and easy as you believe Osrod." She told him. "We still do not even know what we have. Perhaps if your father had not ordered those that we captured with the device butchered we would know more now. We could have learned more."

Osrod stared at her for a long moment. He had not yet been born when this event had taken place and in many respects he agreed with Secha's statement. His father had acted too quickly after the attack on his grandfather and he executed the people they had taken with the device. As always however, he did not fully believe Secha was telling him everything. He had placed her in charge of all Scientific research the moment she had become his Queen because she was supremely intelligent and had a gift for science. After all of these years however, Osrod had begun to suspect that she was not telling him everything.

"What was Juyno doing up here?" Osrod asked her now, causing Secha to turn and look at him again.

"What do you mean?" She asked him again as she rose to her feet as well. "You know why he came up here with his friends Osrod. They were hoping to find a Mountain pack female or two to claim as their wives and mates." She answered with some disgust in her voice. "I tried to convince him to not come but he would not listen. He does not need some low bred Mountain female as his trophy to make him a man."

“Why here though?” Osrod pressed her. “No Mountain Pack female from Warim or any smaller pack aligned with them has been claimed by a Plains Pack male since I claimed Loras. That was almost four centuries ago. The Ranev Pack is too protective of their females and they are too well guarded when they come into Phase. Why did he come up here? He knows this. He would not have succeeded!”

Secha shook her head. “I do not pretend to know what goes through our son’s head.” She told him. “And do not mention that vile witch’s name to me again!”

“Do you think me a fool Secha?” Osrod hissed at her now. “I know how much you hated Loras Ranev and I know how much you hate my son with her. I also know how much influence you have over Juyno and all of our children. What are you not telling me?”

“I do not know what you are asking me?” Secha spoke angrily. “Yes I hated her! I do not deny that! And I rejoiced when she was killed in the accident with her foul mate! I do not know why he came up here though! And perhaps our children spend so little time with you because they do not like how you treat me.”

Osrod snarled softly at her. “Do not play with me woman!” He hissed at her softly. “I know what you teach them. I have heard what you call me in their presence when you think I am not around. I am King and I have eyes and ears everywhere.”

“Now is not the time for this discussion!” Secha hissed right back at him. “We are here to find our son and to discover why that fool Garget Ranev has gone around you and contacted these new Lycavorians.”

Osrod shook his head. “You give Garget and the other Alphas from the Mountain Packs too little credit Secha.” He spoke. “They are smarter than you think.”

“They are aging brutes who cling to the traditions and cultures of a past that is long dead and buried!” Secha told him. “They believe in outdated myths and the ridiculous legends of some phantasy true King that will one day come and save them all! You give them too much credit Osrod.”

“You have always hated them.” Osrod said. “Why?”

“The why of it is not important to you or to anyone.” Secha answered him. “It is my business.”

Osrod waved his hand at her dismissively. “I would hold my tongue while we are here then. You have never been here, and they will not react kindly to you treating them as inferior to you.” He told her.

“I will treat them however I feel they need to be treated!” Secha snapped. “I am Queen and they will show me the respect due me!”

Osrod stared at her for a long moment, her scent carrying her anger and distaste in it, but also not one shred of regret or backdown. It was times like these that Osrod Aspion longed to have Nitona’s sweet, almond scent filling his senses. He finally shook his head and turned as the ramp began to lower in the rear of the shuttle.

“Do what you will.” He stated offhandedly. “You always do.” He looked at his personal Guard Detachment Commander step up to him. “Colonel Navin?”

“Garget Ranev awaits outside sire.” The man told him. “My Lord, Lasun Vesrak is with him.”

Osrod’s eyes grew a little wider. “Lasun Vesrak? Here?”

The Colonel nodded his head. “I spotted him standing with Garget when we were landing.”

Osrod’s eyes narrowed somewhat. “The leaders of the two largest and most influential Mountain Packs together in one place. Interesting.” He commented. “Has my arrival been announced?”

The Colonel looked at him and slowly shook his head. “No, sire.”

Now Osrod Aspion’s arrogance came forth and his face twisted slightly into anger. His presence was to be announced to everyone whenever he went to one of the Pack cities. It was his right as King. “Have our pilot announce that I have arrived!” Osrod snapped.

Navin shook his head. “He cannot sire. Our external COMs have been jammed. It took place the moment we landed. Only our internal COMs units are usable right now. Range is very limited however.”

“Jammed?” Osrod gasped. “Jammed by who? The Ranev Pack would not dare!”

“We don’t know, sire.” Navin answered. “We do not know where the jamming signal is originating from. Your pilot is certain that it’s not coming from Warim though.”

“Then where?” Osrod asked.

Navin shook his head. “He is trying to pinpoint the source now, but he believes it is coming from orbit.”

Osrod looked at Navin, his eyes going slightly wider. “The ship in orbit above us.” He said.

Navin nodded his head. “Yes, sire. That is what he believes.”

“So we cannot communicate with the Guards Regiments?” Osrod asked.

“No.”

“How far out were they when we landed?” Osrod asked.

“Thirty-seven minutes My Lord.” Navin answered.

“They know the drill.” Osrod said. “They will know what to do.”

“My Lord, as your Detachment Commander, I must advise against this.” Navin said. “We do not know who these new Lycavorians are or what their agenda may be. I recommend that we lift off and return to Drinda so that we can determine what is happening.”

Osrod nodded his head. “I know Navin.” He spoke evenly now. “I should have waited. But we are here now. Garget Ranev will not pull anything underhanded. He knows it would throw our people into chaos.”

Navin stepped closer to his King. “Are you certain sire?” He asked in barely a whisper.

Osrod was not offended by the question. He was arrogant and reckless, this Osrod knew of himself. He was also intelligent enough to know when he could push someone and when he could not. Civil War was not the answer to anything, and it was not something that their people needed here on Jetania. It was the main reason he allowed the Mountain packs to conduct themselves as they did, and adhere to their own beliefs. Garget Ranev and the other Alpha Pack Leaders among them knew this as well, and that is why the fragile co-existence between them had succeeded so far.

Osrod shook his head slowly. “Garget and Lasun are not stupid Navin.” He told him. “Civil War among our people is not the answer and they know that.”

Navin nodded his head. “Yes, My Lord, but how long have these unknown Lycavorians been among them? And what have they been telling them?”

“All good questions.” Osrod said. “Why don’t we go find out.”

Navin nodded his head. “As you wish sire.”

Osrod turned to look at Secha who still wore a disgusted expression on her face. “Stay close to me.” He told her.

“I am not afraid of these fools!” Secha snarled. “They are acting out like children, just as they have done in the past. This time they have gone too far and you know it Osrod. By inviting these unknown Lycavorians to our world without our permission they have violated every agreement that we have with them.”

“Let’s just find out what is going on and where Juyno is.” Osrod spoke to her. “They do not like you Secha, you know this, so keep your sharp tongue in your head while we are here and do not make matters worse.”

“I will not...”

Osrod stepped closer to her, stopping her words. “You will do as I tell you in this regard Secha!” He snapped at her. “You have not garnered any compassion from the Mountain Packs through the years with your words and deeds!”

“They are beneath me!” Secha hissed.

“So you keep saying.” Osrod told her plainly. “But I am King and you will abide by the agreements I have forged with them. Is that clear?”

Secha stared at him for a long moment. “Fine!” She snapped. “But if they have hurt my son...”

Osrod held up his hand stopping her words. “If Juyno is injured, it is because of his own foolishness.” He stated. “He knows the laws we have in place and he is not above them simply because he is our son.”

Secha opened her mouth to reply but Osrod had already turned as the ramp lowered completely and he stepped off with Navin at his side.

Osrod stood in front of Garget Ranev and Lasun Vesrak on the edge of the platform. He had met Garget Ranev several times through the years but he had only met Lasun Vesrak twice. According to his Intelligence reports on him, the Vesrak Pack was even more rooted in tradition and culture than the Ranev pack and the last few decades had seen the two men and their Packs become close friends. Like the Ranev and Vesrak Packs, The Mountain Packs as a whole had come together in the last century unlike at any time in their history. They were working more closely with each other, they now had mutual defense and aide treaties, almost as if a single

leader was driving them to do these things. They had adopted almost all of the same laws, they had standardized their education systems and even their medical facilities worked hand in hand. The Overland Tram Rail system had been their project from the outset and it now connected all of the Mountain packs with each other as well as the Plains Packs in the lower regions.

Osrod knew that many of the outlying Plains Packs and their Alpha Leaders had taken in upon themselves to develop closer relations with the Mountain packs who were on the fringes of the many Mountain Ranges on Jetania. They traded openly and honestly with each other and Plains Pack travelers were allowed into their cities to visit and enjoy the many festivities that the Mountain Packs partook in. Unlike with the Ranev and Vesrak Packs and those larger Packs that remained in the deeper mountains, marriage unions between Plains Pack Alpha males and Mountain Pack Alpha females were much more common on the fringes of the Mountains. This had the added effect of drawing the two different Packs closer together, but the Mountain Pack ideals and values were always the ones that ended up being dominant. Osrod knew this, and while many of his advisors urged him to put a stop to this, he allowed it. Osrod Aspion did not want to be King of a divided people. The one piece of advice his father had given him before he had died, a piece of advice that Osrod actually adhered to, a united people made him stronger. A divided people made him weak and ineffective.

Osrod Aspion did not like to be weak.

Osrod looked around them taking in the Mountain pack troops and the unknown troops. Nearly all of them were Alphas, that much he could tell easily, and even the Beta wolves that he smelled had scents and auras that in many ways equaled those of many of the Plains Packs. The Mountain troops stared at him with indifference in their eyes, but the unknown troops in the black and crimson body armor looked upon him almost as a threat. Their eyes, their auras and their demeanor told him volumes about them. This also told Osrod that they did not fear him or the men with him in the least bit.. Whoever they were, the way their weapons were displayed, their stance and their indifference to him told Osrod that they were extremely capable. The Alpha within him told him that these men and women were dangerous. Very dangerous. He turned back to Garget and Lasun.

“It has been a long time Garget Ranev.” Osrod spoke finally.

Garget nodded his head. “Thirteen years Osrod Aspion.” He said. “Not long enough if you ask me.”

Osrod noticed instantly that he did not refer to him as King Aspion and his tone of voice was anything but respectful but he held his tongue. Something was going on here and he wanted to discover what it was. He held his hand up before Navin could step forward and try to demand he speak more respectfully. That would not go over well with Garget Ranev Osrod knew. Osrod looked at Lasun Vesrak now.

“And Lasun Vesrak.” He spoke. “This is a surprise. The Alpha leaders of the two most powerful and influential Mountain Packs in the same city at once. What should I infer from this if I may ask?”

“Why have you come here Osrod?” Garget asked him ignoring the question. “And you arrive with an armed escort no less? What should we infer from this?”

“I was not aware Lasun was here within Warim.” Osrod spoke.

“We do not need to share with you or your spies where we go.” Lasun spoke firmly.

“It is just odd don’t you think?” Osrod said keeping his voice calm. “Given what is going on above us right now.” Osrod looked around at the Spartan troops mixed in with the Mountain Pack soldiers. “And what is happening here in Warim as well it seems.” He said as he turned back to Garget. “Perhaps you could explain to your King what is happening.”

“Your security detachment will leave their weapons here with my men.” Garget told him. “Then we will go someplace and discuss why you are here.”

Navin could not contain himself now and he stepped forward. “We are the King’s Guard! We do not go anywhere unarmed!”

Garget looked at him with disgust. “Your King is not our King boy!” Garget snarled at him. “And you would do well to remember who is your better and your senior lest you receive a welcome you will not like! And you will surrender your weapons or you will remain here!”

“You threaten the King’s Colonel!” Navin spat.

“He threatens a child who thinks he is superior to others around him simply because of the position he holds!” Lasun snapped now. “You are barely three thousand years old boy! You would not last three seconds

against Garget Ranev. Mind your manners and your tongue or he will rip it from between your lips! And none of your pretty soldiers will be able to do a thing to stop him.”

“Navin!” Osrod snapped now. “Stand down!”

“Sire, they disrespect...”

Osrod held up his hand once more silencing Navin as he stared at Garget and Lasun. “Who are these men and women Garget?” He asked now. “And who gave them permission to come to my planet. I certainly did not.”

Garget smiled now. “They are Spartans!” He spoke loudly. “Lycavorian Spartans of the *ared Mard Revik’s* army, and he does not need your permission to come to Warim or any other Mountain Pack city.”

It was Secha who laughed disparagingly now and she shook her head. “You still cling to the silly myths of a King who does not exist Garget Ranev. Pitiful. Where is my son?” She snapped at him.

Garget turned his head and looked at her. “Your vile son is right where he belongs.” He told her. “I will allow you to see him before we put him on trial for his crimes.”

Secha’s eyes went wide. “Crimes?” She barked. “What ridiculousness is this? What crimes?”

“Where is he?” Osrod growled now.

Garget ignored her and looked at Osrod once more. “Do you wish to remain out here on the platform and discuss all of this Osrod Aspion?”

“You are very close to crossing the line Garget Ranev.” Osrod spoke menacingly. “You will tell me who these so called Lycavorian Spartans are and what they are doing here? Their ships are in orbit above us right now threatening our ships! Our people! They have already killed over a hundred of my people! I want answers and you will give them to me! And you will give me my son!”

“Eighty-seven of *our* people are dead because of you.” Lasun spoke once more. “They died because you have instilled a sense in them that they are superior to all those around them. They died because one of *your* officers was stupid enough to fire upon an unknown ship five times his size without even knowing what was happening around him!” Osrod’s eyes were wide now, not expecting Lasun to know what had happened in orbit. “Garget and I know exactly what has happened Osrod Aspion! We saw it with our own eyes! We know exactly how many have died because of you! And we know exactly what is going on above us right now!” Lasun Vesrak stepped a inch closer to Osrod, his face twisted into an angry snarl. “And your son will face our justice for what he has done! He is lucky that Garget and his people took him before I did for shooting my daughter. I would have gutted him where he was and strung him up by his entrails!”

“Shooting your daughter!” Osrod gasped now.

“You dare accuse the King’s son of this... this heresy?” Navin barked now reaching for his sidearm and his men reacting right along with him.

It happened far faster than any of them were prepared for, even Garget and Lasun. They would later learn that Martin Leonidas had ordered the Spartan Captain that Garget and Lasun were to be protected at all costs. No matter the consequences. Garget Ranev and Lasun Vesrak learned this day just how far their King’s *Durcunusaan*, his Spartan warriors, would go in order to fulfill his command.

The *Durcunusaan* Captain and six of his men, all of them standing with the Mountain Pack soldiers, moved instantly when Navin made the mistake of reaching for his weapon. The Captain, a man who had been a member of the *Durcunusaan* since their inception under the elven General Vengal more than two decades ago, made contact first. Navin got as far as being able to draw his weapon perhaps two inches from the holster it resided in when he felt the single blow on his forearm. The *Durcunusaan* Captain hit him with the blunt end of his collapsed *Nehtes* directly on the forearm bone. Navin cried out as his forearm snapped with a loud crack and he doubled over to the side as the Captain lifted his Pralor Pulse Magnum and jammed the barrel on the PPM into his left cheek painfully. His dark eyes had changed to that of his wolf persona and his fangs were fully exposed under the Spartan helm he wore. Osrod Aspion did nothing but freeze as he saw the barrel of the wicked looking rifle suddenly appear beside his right temple. He heard the painful grunts of his personal detachment as they went down, heard the snapping of Navin’s bone, and Osrod knew that his people were far outmatched. Secha simply stood beside him and glared at the obviously female soldier as she held a PPM on her face, perhaps two inches from the end of her nose.

“I am *Durcunusaan* Captain Darden Iagar!” The Captain snarled viciously from under his helmet as he pressed the PPM even harder against Navin’s cheek, causing him to wince in even more pain. “Since you

refused to do what Garget Ranev has requested of you, my men and I will ensure that his directive is complied with!" He leaned over slightly and glared into Navin's face. "Or I can just relieve you of your ability to breath right now *igord!* Make your choice!"

"Enough!" Osrod barked. "I am King Osrod Aspion and I order you..."

Darden snapped up his PPM and glared at Osrod while holding the PPM half an inch from the tip of Osrod's nose. Osrod's eyes went wide at this blatant disrespect but his words stopped instantly as Darden looked at him.

"The *Durcunusaan* do not take orders from you *midaeus!*" Darden spoke clearly, his fangs fully exposed now. "We serve the Spartan King and the King of the Lycavorian Union, who are one and the same! You are not now and never will be him! Now tell your men to stand down and hand over all of their weapons or I will kill each and every one of them in front of you."

"You threaten the King of the Coalition of..." Secha began to speak.

The female *Durcunusaan* touched her PPM to Secha's lips quieting her. "No one asked you to speak *upae!*" She growled at her, fangs exposed. "You will suffer the same fate as those around you if you are not careful. Now shut your hole or I will remove your ability to speak more than a few words at a time!"

"Our King is not in a very forgiving mood at the moment after your people attacked and injured one of our beloved Queens and your fool people in orbit fired on his *mard fervon's* ship above us." Darden spoke again. "You have five seconds to comply with my order."

Osrod knew when he was in a poor position and he turned his head slightly. "Stand down and give them your weapons!" He snapped. "Do it now!"

Five knives and two small clubs were given up then under the watchful eye of the six *Durcunusaan*, and then Darden stepped back slightly, his PPM still leveled at Osrod's face.

"Your toy soldiers will remain here as Garget Ranev has instructed them. My men will keep them company. I will advise you now, there are *Durcunusaan* throughout the entire city of Warim after your actions and should you or your men attempt anything, you will be dead before your ignorant brains have the opportunity to inform you of this." He spoke as he pulled his PPM down slowly.

"Take me to this King of yours." Osrod growled.

Darden smiled at him, barring his still exposed fangs even more. "Do not be so quick to face the Alpha wolf that will decide whether you live or die this day Osrod Aspion." He spoke. "You may not like the outcome."

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The petite, Persian red haired Queen they called Anja had joined them and now they were engaged with Irani at one end of the table, speaking with Loras and who Doseb now knew was Martin's birth mother Gorgo and Aricia's birth mother Dasha. Martin stood alone by the large window in the conference room overlooking the city of Warim, his hands crossed at the small of his back, his eyes gazing out over the city. The *Arwa rie vada Revik* conformed to his body as if it was a living thing itself, the sun glittering off of the dull silver portions of the armor. The *Arwa rie vada Revik* and the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* had been two things of legend among the Kirek Pack as he was growing. Spoken of with true reverence and awe even as so many others of their people dismissed that they even existed after so long. Well, they did exist Doseb now knew, and those with Mahanlo blood wore them.

Once more Doseb had to maintain his composure for standing as he was, Martin looked exactly like the many images his grandmother Kelia had shown him as a small boy of both her beloved brothers. Daniho and Ashten. Martin and his sons looked so much like them it was actually frightening to some extent. While all of his children that Doseb had seen retained small physical marks of their bloodline that were very pronounced, it was Martin and his oldest son Androcles who looked more like the two brothers than any of them. At this moment, standing as he was, Doseb was thrown back to those times when his grandmother showed him the pictures of her brothers and how her voice filled with love and longing whenever she spoke of them. Doseb moved up slowly to stand beside Martin, his eyes gazing out over the city of Warim as well.

“You are deep in thought Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas.” Doseb spoke finally.

Martin nodded his head slowly. “There is a lot to think about.” He answered.

Doseb nodded in agreement. “Indeed.” He said. “So this Nilantha woman is Darastrixi. Like those that *staanio* Daniho discovered on Cerath?”

Martin nodded his head. It hadn’t been a very hard decision for him after his mother had suggested it and Martin had passed an abbreviated version of what they now knew to Doseb and Irani through an Etheric connection. He included Loras and her siblings as well as their children to include Lazar. It wasn’t a full accounting of their history, but it was enough for them to begin to understand their past and what it meant. Martin kept certain parts from them, mainly those about Reva until such time as she was returned to her true form. Irani was absolutely taken with Aricia, Anja and For'mya and full of questions, which they were happy to answer as they sat with her and Gorgo and Dasha.

“For lack of a more scientific explanation, there are two subspecies of Darastrixi. Those like my Bonded Brother Torma and like Dadrien and then those like Nilantha and Sarlana.” Martin spoke.

“And it was this Nilantha that followed the teachings and guidance of Dadrien and your grandfather, the Pralor Sumar?” Doseb spoke. “She is the one that kept the truth alive here on Jetania.”

Martin nodded his head again. “Yes.” He answered. “I don’t know what happened to the Oracle that was with the Ventori Seed Mission, we’ll probably never know for sure, but when this fool Osrod’s grandfather brought you here, Nilantha naturally took her spot.”

Doseb nodded his head. “We were amazed that many believed as we did when we first arrived here.” He said. “I should have figured it out, but I didn’t.”

Martin shook his head. “Don’t feel bad about that. Dadrien and my grandfather Sumar were very careful in their plans. Even more so after they passed into the next life.” He said with a small grin. “Not everything happened as they had hoped, but the end results is what truly matters.”

“And this is where these... these powers that you and your children possess come from?” Doseb asked. “From the Pralor blood within you.”

Martin nodded his head once more. “Yes.”

Doseb shook his head in disbelief. “So much... it is so much to take in.” He said.

Martin looked at him. “You have no idea.” He said with a grin.

Doseb glanced back at the table. “Your wives and mates? They know all of this?” He asked.

Martin followed his gaze and then turned to look back out the window. “When I look at them, I do not see six different women.” He said. “I see one complete entity. They think the same, they act the same, and they speak with one voice. They are my center. My core.”

Doseb looked at him. “As it should be.” He said in agreement. “As Irani is and has been my center for so many millennium.”

“I can’t really explain it *Tenne*.” Martin said seeing Doseb’s eyes go a little wider when he called him that. “It just is.”

“You called me... you called me Uncle.” Doseb said.

Martin nodded his head. “That is what you are to me.” He answered him. “No matter the number of generations that are between us, you are *Tenne* to me and to all of my children. Irani is *Tenna* to us. You are family. That is what matters most to all of us.”

Doseb reached out and put his hand on Martin’s arm and squeezed his thick bicep. “And you are family to us *aur Mandri*.” He said softly. “A family we thought lost so long ago.”

Martin looked at him. “Not lost...” He said. “We just got a little side tracked is all.”

Doseb smiled at this, knowing the meaning of his words. “What now *mandri*?” He asked finally. “I know you and your son were speaking to one another so that none of us could hear your words. I could see it in the faces of your wives and mates, of your mother. You do not do this often I take it?”

Martin shook his head. “My son Androcles and I... we have a connection that only we can use. It began the moment he was conceived and became aware while Aricia still carried him in her womb.” He replied. “We do not use it often, for no one else can hear us, and we do not like to keep our family from our thoughts.”

“But this time you did.” Doseb commented. “Why?”

Martin looked out the window once more and Doseb waited patiently knowing he would continue when he was ready. He saw Martin take a deep breath finally. “All of my life I have wondered who and what I am

Tenne.” Martin spoke softly. “I have discovered so much this last year, so much about my ancestors, my past and my history. To me and to my first born son, there is nothing more sacred than our family and our people.”

Doseb nodded his head in agreement. “As it should be.”

“We have discovered some things.” Martin told him. “Some very disturbing things that do not sit well with us.”

“This has to do with *Vada Dremsa rie Saan* doesn’t it?” Doseb asked.

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Part of it, yes. But even among others that have no idea about our history or who we are, our family, my family, we have always been a target.” Martin said. “My wives and mates have suffered because of this. My children. My people. I’m tired of it *Tenne.*”

Doseb looked at him intently. “And?”

Martin met his gaze. “We need to speak with Kesas Pengot.” Martin told him. “I need to hear from him *Tenne*, before I make any decisions.”

“And if he tells you what I believe you and your son already know in your hearts Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas?” Doseb asked him softly.

“Then the souls of my family whom I was never allowed to know, the souls that cry out for justice even now, they will have their voice.” Martin spoke softly. “And what I will do will cause their voices to resonate across the stars forever as a warning to all those who would do us harm without cause.”

Doseb Athltin shivered slightly at the intent of Martin’s words, but not a single part of him could find grievance with his words or what actions he would undertake. Doseb finally looked out the window once more and nodded his head.

“*Avoi.*” He spoke softly.

For Osrod Aspion it was the most incredible sight he had ever seen.

And the most frightening.

He remembered the stories his mother used to tell him as a small boy of great beasts that could fly and spit fire.

Sinuovas.

Never in all his years did Osrod Aspion ever believe that they could be true, yet as they approached the Warim Medical Center he saw them. Massive dragons of different color and shapes, all of them looking upon him as if they wanted to eat him. The two at the front of the Center were nearly identical in appearance, he did not know that Caydren and Cinol were twin brothers, and as they passed them and the dozen armed *Durcunusaan*, both *sinuovas* looked at him as if they wanted to tear him apart with their talons and feast on his insides. Osrod Aspion felt marginally better when they entered the facility, but inside he could see more of these new Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* standing guard at different points within the main lobby. He saw at least four different new species that he had never seen before, the most telling were the ones with the four inch high pointed ears. Most of them were female he saw, and they were stunning in their beauty, though their scents did not really tickle his senses as Nitona’s did. They were conferring with the doctors from the Warim Medical Center as if it was the most natural thing in the world. When Osrod looked at Secha to see her reaction, he was surprised to see that her face remained impassive to everything around her. It did not really register with him that she could possibly have seen these things before, or that he did not truly know the female wolf who had been sharing his bed for the last several hundred years.

Garget and Lasun led them to a larger conference room in the rear of the first floor where the office area was established. Osrod had never been to this facility but he had heard from many of his spies about the quality of care that was given here and how no one was denied. The Warim Medical Center was the most modern Medical Facility he had ever seen, and it certainly surpassed even the finest hospital in Drinda.

Once inside the conference room, it was Secha Aspion who whirled on Garget and Lasun. “Where is my son?” She demanded.

Garget looked at Lasun and then motioned to the chairs at the large table. “Your son is being brought here from another location.” He told her. “I suggest you sit down.”

“I am Queen!” Secha snapped. “I do not take your orders!”

Garget shrugged his broad shoulders. "It was not an order, but if you prefer to stand, that is up to you." He stated calmly.

"You have some explaining to do Garget Ranev." Osrod spoke now as he settled into one of the chairs. "I am not unreasonable, but it is obvious you have gone behind my back and made contact with these new Lycavorians and invited them onto my planet."

Garget looked at him. "We did not make contact with them Osrod." He stated. "They made contact with us."

"And you still refuse to address me properly." Osrod spoke once more. "This blatant disregard for the proper recognition of my..."

"Of your what?" Garget stopped him. "Your so called title? A title that neither you, nor your father, nor your grandfather ever earned?"

"How dare you?" Secha exclaimed.

Garget looked at her. "I will dare much more in the coming days woman!" He snarled at her. "Especially now that the truth is coming out!"

"What truth? What are you babbling about?" Secha barked.

Garget took the data pad from the pouch on his belt and held it out to Osrod. "Perhaps you could explain this?"

Osrod took the pad from him and looked at it, his eyes narrowing. "How did you get this Garget?" He spoke quickly looking up at Garget. "This is the Planetary Birth Registry! This is not common information! This is secured information! How did you get this?"

Garget nodded his head. "And so we thought as well." He replied. "The Mountain Packs agreed to allow this registry only after you gave us your assurance that it would not be used for the gain of others."

"And I kept my word!" Osrod snapped. "This information is not available to the general population! It is restricted access only! Senior members of my cabinet and the military! That is it!"

Garget met his eyes. "We discovered this data pad on your son Juyno after he and his friends attempted to force themselves upon my daughter Taris and Lasun's daughter Anoria."

"What nonsense is this?" Secha spat.

Garget ignored her and continued looking at Osrod. Garget Ranev considered himself an excellent judge of people's reactions and from the expression on Osrod's face, he had no idea what Garget was talking about.

"Garget if this is some kind of..." Osrod began.

"Your son used this list to discover which of our females would be coming into Phase based on when they were born!" Garget snapped. "My daughter among them! He then came up here with the intent of finding her and forcing himself upon her!"

"That is ridiculous!" Secha spat.

Garget looked at her as his anger grew. "Do not toy with me woman!" He snarled now. "He knew Taris was coming into Phase! It was not just chance that he showed up in Warim at this time! And he knew because of that list!"

"What difference does it make?" Secha growled. "You agreed to this arrangement! As did your now dead brother!"

Garget almost lost it at the way she mentioned his brother Warim and only Lasun grabbing his arm stopped him from striking Secha right in her pompous face and knocking her on her ass.

"The Mountain Packs agreed to this arrangement only after Osrod gave us assurances that the information we provided to him would not be used for political purposes!" Lasun snarled now, holding his friend back.

"And I have kept my word!" Osrod barked loudly. "I don't know how Juyno got this list! I did not authorize it to be copied from the archives! Let me speak to my son and I will find out how he got this!"

"We already know how he got it." Lasun told him and his eyes went to Secha. "Queen Secha provided it to him."

"What?" Osrod snapped.

"You lie!" Secha exclaimed. "I did no such thing!"

"So your son is a liar then?" Lasun pressed her. "We questioned him after he was treated for his injuries and..."

“Injuries?” Secha hissed. “What did you beasts do to my son?!”

“Beasts?!” Lasun roared now. “One of the *igords* with your son shot my daughter!” He stepped closer to Secha but she was unable to back up because of the table behind her. “They shot her Secha Aspion! To keep them from running away! And then they were going to force themselves on her while your foul son took Taris Ranev against her will! They did not even think to treat her wound, they were only concerned with claiming her body!”

“Taris Ranev was in Phase! She could not have resisted him and it would not have been against her will!” Secha snarled at him. “As for your daughter, if she was in Phase as well, then the same rule applies! You know how it works with female Lycavorians just as anyone does Lasun Vesrak!”

“Then you did know!” Garget barked. “You gave him the list!”

“So what if I did?!” Secha snapped at him.

Osrod rose to his feet now. “Secha!”

Secha whirled on him now. “You are weak and you let the Mountain Packs do what they will without any guidance! They need to be brought into line just as the other Packs are kept in line! You do nothing and you let them resist you at every turn!”

“You gave Juyno the list?!” Osrod snapped now.

“Yes, *anse* it!” Secha snapped. “Someone had to do something! They don’t respect you! They don’t even call you King! If Juyno had claimed Taris Ranev then they would have to look at you with respect and do as you tell them!”

“You violated the agreement I negotiated with them!” Osrod barked. “You had no right to do this!”

“I am Queen!” Secha shouted. “I had every right! The Mountain Packs have laughed at you ever since you gave that *upae* Loras back to her father! They do not fear you Osrod! To them you are weak!”

Osrod stepped closer to her. “I allowed Loras to return to her Pack to keep a civil war from breaking out!” He growled at her. “What does it matter to you! You hated her and you have hated my son with her ever since he was born!”

“As well I should!” Secha snarled viciously. “He is a stain upon...”

“Upon what?” The female voice barked out from behind Garget and Lasun. With large smiles both men parted and allowed Loras to step fully into the room, the looks on Osrod and Secha’s faces was priceless. Neither of them could believe what they saw as she moved between Garget and Lasun and went to the end of the table to look directly at Secha and Osrod.

“Loras!” Osrod gasped aloud finally. “You are... you are alive!”

Loras Ranev smiled at him, but it was not a smile filled with mirth. “You seem surprised Osrod?” She spoke now. “Why?”

“It was... it was reported that you were killed with Warim when your ship crashed.” Osrod stammered. “How are you...?”

“Yes, I’m sure that it was.” Loras said calmly. “Because that is how I wanted it to be.”

Osrod’s face twisted into confusion. “What?”

Loras ignored Osrod and looked at Secha. “You seem to be even more surprised to see me alive Secha Aspion.” She stated. “Now, I wonder why that is?”

Secha blinked then and looked at her with wide eyes. “I... how... how is this possible?” Secha felt fear creeping into her body for the first time in more years than she could remember. Loras’s scent was different now and Secha Aspion would never forget a scent. She had smelled that bloodline before.

Loras smiled now, feeling more confident and empowered than she ever felt before in her life. Discovering everything Nilantha had told her and then all that Martin Leonidas had shared with them not so long ago had made her this way. It had been easier for Loras this time around, the Etheric connection being established, since she had experienced it before. This time she did not exit the connection so abruptly, this time she remained to experience it all. In the coming years Loras Ranev would learn just how powerful she was. It was something that both of her parents had obviously experienced before because they did not flinch. The knowledge was within Loras now, almost like it had always been there and just been hidden behind walls she could not discover or penetrate. Loras could almost feel the proteins that Eliani Leonidas had injected her with working to destroy whatever it was that was masking her true bloodline. Loras felt it fully now. The bloodline of her parents. The bloodline of her past and quite possibly her future. And she wanted to know more.

The Mahanlo bloodline.

And Loras knew Secha could smell it within her as well.

“That is all you have to say?” Loras asked as she moved calmly to the table and sat down at the head. “I had expected a much more lively response. Perhaps not from Osrod, but certainly from you.”

“We saw... we saw your body.” Secha stammered in disbelief.

Loras shook her head. “No. You saw a body.” She corrected her. “The young female wolf who was helping Warim and I keep our records in order was returning from Drinda with us that day. She was on the transport with us, though you never saw her. She remained on our ship while we met with you and Osrod. She died in the crash with Warim. I did not. I was gravely injured but I survived.” Loras looked up at where Garget stood. “Garget and several other brave souls saved me that day. They have protected me, shielded me, supported me since that day. Until now.”

“Supported you?” Osrod exclaimed now. “You! You have been the one controlling the Mountain Packs all of these years!”

Loras met his eyes. “You are not as dumb as Secha believes you to be Osrod.” She stated evenly seeing his jaw twitch in anger at her words. “I have not been controlling them however, merely guiding them to something better than what you would allow.” She looked at Secha once more. “Why don’t you ask your Queen. Secha has known I have been alive for quite some time now. All you need do is ask Rylin about that. Isn’t that right Secha? Or should I call her Roeza?”

“Rylin?!” Osrod hissed. “The Mountain Pack High Priestess? What does she have to do with anything?”

Secha looked at Osrod. “I have no idea what she is talking about!” She spat. “She is *malda*! I told you that from the beginning!” Secha turned back to face Loras. “Where is our son!” She screamed. “You will bring our son to us this instant! And then you will surrender yourself to our Security Force for crimes against the people!”

Loras chuckled softly and shook her head gently. “My mother said you would remain defiant to the end.” She said softly. “You have hunted them for so long that you have become desperate and stupid Secha.”

“How dare you!” Secha growled.

Loras snarled angrily and came to her feet. “I dare *forn upaee*!” She screamed. “And I will dare so much more!”

Osrod stepped forward slightly his face a mask of confusion now. He would never forget Loras’ sweet scent and why he was attracted to her in the beginning. Her beauty had not diminished in the least, so surreal and exotic, but she was not the same anymore. And neither was he. Her scent was different now, very different, and it did not illicit the same reaction in him that Nitona’s scent did. It was at that single moment that Osrod realized something. He wanted Nitona and no other. With her he felt the weight of the world lift from his shoulders. She did not ask him for anything, did not demand anything, she did not care that he was King and that she was one of his Queens, she only wanted to be with him. With Nitona, Osrod could just be a man.

“Loras you... you are different.” Osrod spoke now keeping his voice calm and even. “Your scent is different. What...?”

Loras nodded her head. “Yes, it is different.” Loras told him. “I am different. I have discovered things that you could not imagine Osrod. About me, about my family, about our people and most especially about my bloodline.”

“What... what things?” Osrod asked.

Loras turned her eyes from staring at Secha and she looked at him. “I hated you Osrod Aspion. I hated you for taking me without choice. It was the way of our people long ago on our second homeworld of Lycavore, I know this now, so I can not fault you for following your instincts. Our instincts as a people. But I will never forgive you for it. And I will never forgive you for trying to keep my son from me.”

“Loras I...” Osrod began to speak but his words died when he saw Lazar walk into the conference room now with the petite red haired female wolf holding his arm tightly. Osrod knew instantly that she was not fully wolf, but the wolf blood within her was purer than any he had ever smelled before. Her dark green eyes held defiance and pride in them as Lazar stopped beside his mother and wrapped his arm around Retta’s waist, pulling her close to him. Osrod could also easily detect that his son had claimed this young woman for his scent saturated her body and her blood. And Lazar’s scent was completely different than he knew his son’s scent to be.

“Hello father.” Lazar stated calmly but with a hint of anger in his voice.

“Lazar! What... what are you doing here?” Osrod gasped. “You are supposed to be...”

Lazar smiled. “I am supposed to be on Ventori. Yes, I know.” He said. “Events did not work out as you had planned however.”

“What?” Osrod gasped. “What the fuck is going on here!”

Secha could only stare at Retta in disbelief for she could detect the blood within her as easily as she could smell her own. Blood that she had thought she would never have to smell again. She whirled on Osrod. “Kill them all Osrod!” She screamed. “Kill them now! Order your troops into Warim from the Trams and have them kill everyone!”

Osrod looked at Secha with wide eyes. “Shut up Secha!” Osrod snarled at her causing Garget and Lasun to smile as they saw her stunned reaction to his command.

Osrod looked at Loras once more. “Second homeworld?” Osrod asked her. “What are you... what are you talking about Loras? Why is Lazar here now and not with his ship? Where is your ship son? How did you get here without the MCS detecting you?”

“You see Osrod!” Secha hissed. “She is *malda*! All of them are crazy! You need to act now! She doesn’t even know what she says! None of them do! They are a stain upon our people and you must kill them!”

Loras looked at Secha once more. “*Vada voray oia Cerath coi dangua niob.*” Loras spoke softly watching as Secha turned her head to look at her with stunned eyes and an expression of utter disbelief. “*Una coi vada daanth rie toniru!*” (The snow on Cerath is melting now. It is the time of reckoning)

Secha stared at Loras in shock and horror. “How... how did you... where did you hear that?” She screamed out the words now.

Loras looked at Garget and nodded. He held out the COM unit to her and she took it and turned to Osrod. She stepped closer to him, ignoring Secha and put the Com unit on the table and slid it over to him.

“Contact your troops on the Trams Osrod. They are thirteen minutes away.” She told him. “Tell them that you are aware of what is happening and they are no longer needed. Tell them to return to their bases.”

“Why would I do that?” Osrod demanded.

Loras met his eyes. “If you do not, they will die.” She spoke plainly. “The moment they begin to disembark the Trams in Warim, the *Tarivuos rie vada Mard Revik* will slaughter them before they even know what is happening.”

“The Heralds of the True King?” Osrod spoke. “What nonsense is this?”

Loras shook her head. “It is not nonsense Osrod. The prophecy of the *Mard Revik* is very real. Just ask Secha. She knows all too well what I am talking about. It is why she and her vile daughter have been trying to kill my parents for more years than any of us have been alive.” Loras looked at Secha now. “It is why, less than three hours ago, her daughter Roeza and a dozen others from her true bloodline tried to murder me and those with me. Including three of the *Mard Revik*’s Queens. They failed obviously.”

Osrod glanced at Secha and then back to Loras. “What?” He nearly yelled. “True bloodline! What are you talking about Loras? We don’t have a daughter named Roeza! You know that!”

Secha glared at Loras with murder in her eyes. “What have you done?” She screamed. “Where is Roeza?”

Osrod looked at Secha with wide eyes. “Who is Roeza? Secha, what is Loras talking about? Who is Roeza?”

Loras continued to look at Secha. “You don’t know your Queen very well Osrod.” She said calmly. “You don’t know what she has been party to in the past. I cannot find fault with you over this. I have discovered recently that Secha is a master manipulator and has been for many thousands of years. Just like her mother. They have controlled, fooled, connived and manipulated men far better than you. Perhaps it would be better if I called you by your real name. Wouldn’t you agree... Sama Arhtai!”

Secha’s eyes grew even wider as she stared at Loras in disbelief. “What... what manner of deceit is this?!” She stammered.

“Deceit?” Loras spoke. “They only person in this room filled with deceit is you!” Loras turned and looked at Garget and Lasun and nodded her head. Loras looked back to Secha as Garget and Lasun moved for the two opposite doors into the conference room. “You smelled her the moment she came into this room. She knew who she was the instant you saw her.” Loras spoke as she came to stand beside Retta who was proudly

pressed up against Lazar's side. "This is my son's wife and mate Secha, or Sama, or whatever you wish to be called. This is Retta Mahanlo-Leonidas."

"NO!" Secha screamed. "Impossible!"

Loras shook her head. "I think not." Loras said. "Retta is the one who bit my son during their lovemaking when he claimed her. When she bit him, when he bit her, the proteins in her pure Mahanlo blood began to destroy the masking proteins in his blood. They revealed his true bloodline. Just as they have now revealed mine."

Loras heard Garget and Lasun open the doors and she felt Aricia, Anja, For'mya enter the large room. Directly behind them came her parents and then Gorgo, Dynina, Dasha, and two of Martin's pureblood sons, Denali and Deion. Loras saw Secha gasp almost as if she was in pain when she smelled them enter the room. A dozen others quickly followed Denali and Deion into the room, among them two of her four children with Warim and more of Martin's children since they had been together on the floors above. While Loras had yet to learn all of their names, She would, for they were her blood. And she was their blood.

Mahanlo blood.

Her family.

"As smart as you think you are Sama Arhtai, as well as you have manipulated Osrod and the others around him for millennia, you failed in the most important thing you should have been concerned with." Loras told her. "You failed to make sure that the descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo were all dead. You acted without all of the information you should have had."

Secha smelled him before she saw him and her eyes went even wider. Her head turned as she saw his bulk fill the doorway into the conference room. She saw the *Arwa rie vada Revik* adorning his tall, muscular body, conforming to it like a second skin. She saw his wild black hair and the yellow gold eyes and then she saw the savage, dual wolf fangs unique to only one bloodline of Lycavorian people across the entire universe.

"**NO! IMPOSSIBLE! NO! IT CAN'T BE!**" Secha screamed out the words.

Osrod Aspion could only watch as Secha's face filled with real terror when she saw the tall Alpha wolf enter the room. He was equal to Osrod in size to be certain, perhaps an inch or two shorter, but his wolf aura was unlike anything Osrod had ever felt before in his life. His wolf aura pulsed with a power and confidence that Osrod did not know could exist. Not even Osrod's father had such an aura and he was the strongest wolf Osrod had ever known in his life. The strange, dull silver armor was unlike anything Osrod had ever seen before and it wrapped around his thick body like a second skin. His mane of black hair was wild and shoulder length and his wolf eyes a yellow gold color that Osrod had again never seen before in his entire life. Nor had he ever seen a wolf with dual fangs as this Alpha had. Long, thick dual wolf fangs that looked as if they could rend flesh from bone as easily as cutting butter with a hot knife. As he looked around quickly, Osrod could see that almost all of the men and women who had entered the conference room in the last few minutes had the same dual fangs as they looked upon him and Secha with what could only be contempt and hate.

Whatever was happening here was far beyond him Osrod knew almost immediately. This had nothing to do with him, for he was completely lost at what was happening. Lost and Osrod had to admit, completely out of his depth. The men and women in this room now, their blood was purer than anything he had ever thought could exist among their people. He could smell that easily. His own blood, while pure, did not even come close to the blood flowing within those in this room. Even those who were not fully wolf, their blood was purer than anything he had ever smelled before. And all of them were focused on Secha.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas stared at Sama Arhtai and wanted nothing more than to rip out her throat and watch her die in front of him. He held that anger in check however, feeling the love of his wives and mates coursing through him, the pride and love of his children around him filling his being. No, he would not succumb to the base instincts of the wolf and kill this woman for her crimes.

At least not yet.

Martin turned his head and looked at Osrod Aspion now. "I will only ask one time." He growled out the words. "Order your men to return to their bases and I will not have my son, his fellow Heralds and the *Durcunusaan* with them, turn them all to ash. This is your last and only chance to save their lives."

Martin saw Garget take the COM unit from the table and hold it out to Osrod.

"You are not a stupid leader of men Osrod Aspion." Garget spoke. "Give the order and save the lives of your soldiers."

With wide, confused eyes, Osrod took the Com unit and activated it. He was confused yes, but he wanted to know what was going on here for it was far more than he imagined. "This is King Osrod Aspion. Code Beta Four One. Return to your bases. I repeat, Code Beta Four One."

There was a pause and then the male voice replied. "Acknowledged. Beta Four One. Shall I leave a detachment sire?"

Osrod shook his head. "No. That will not be necessary. Everything is under control here."

"Understood, my Lord." The male voice answered.

Osrod looked at Garget as he took the COM unit back from him and then he turned to look at Martin. "Who... who are you?" He asked finally.

Martin smiled and turned his head to look at Secha. She was still staring at him with wide, fear filled eyes and then Martin smelled the stench of urine in the air. Secha Aspion, so-called Queen of the Lycavorian people, had lost control of her bladder and wet herself.

Loras still stood beside Retta and she shook her head in disgust as the smell of urine filled the room. "The terrible and feared Secha Aspion." Loras snorted loudly. "How pathetic you look now woman!"

Martin smiled at Loras' words. "We have a lot to talk about Sama Arhtai." Martin spoke once more. "And believe me when I tell you... you will tell me everything I want to know."

"I will tell you nothing monster!" Sama Arhtai screamed out. "Nothing!"

Martin felt them come into the conference room behind him and he smiled as he turned and saw Danny standing with his arms across his chest, Nayeca standing directly in front of him, her long white hair cascading all around her beautiful face and her four inch high elven ears prominently displayed for all to see. Even Garget and Lasun looked somewhat shocked at Danny's six foot five body, and the definition of the muscles that obviously adorned his form. He did not wear any sort of body armor, just a standard set of fatigues, and if Garget was any sort of judge, he was easily two hundred and fifty pounds of ripped muscle and bone. He looked even larger in person than when they had briefly seen him in the transmission on the ship in orbit above.

Martin turned back to Sama. "This is my *mard fervon* Sama Arhtai." Martin spoke. "The woman you see in front of him is one of his cherished wives and mates. She is a Drow elf. Her name is Nayeca but we in my family, we very affectionately call her Nubian." Martin smiled at Sama, the stench of her urine still pungent in the air. "Drow elves have a wonderful gift don't you know. They have the most uncanny ability to get information from people who don't want to give up that information willingly."

Sama glanced at Nayeca and saw her smile, revealing her fangs and her amber hued eyes promising pain of untold levels.

"You will... you will torture me!" Sama exclaimed. "That makes you no better than the rest of your foul bloodline! You are just like them!"

"Torture?" Martin asked her. "Who said anything about torture?" He shook his head. "No, torture is unreliable and messy. I don't like messy. Drugs on the other hand, drugs are very reliable. And very neat. I like neat." He said seeing her eyes go wide. "Just ask your daughter Roeza, she is singing like a canary right now."

"Where is Roeza?" Sama screamed out. "What have you done to her?! I will kill you for this! I will..."

"You will do nothing *upae!*" Martin snarled putting his face an inch from her nose and silencing her words as her eyes went even wider in fear. "I don't know what you think you are used to when it comes to my bloodline Sama Arhtai, but I am unlike anyone you have ever met before. I am not like my grandfathers Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo."

"Grandfathers!" Sama gasped in disbelief. "But... but how??"

Martin smiled once more, but it was more frightening than it was humorous. "Those you and Roeza brought with you, your cousins I believe, to kill those of my bloodline! To murder them!" Martin snapped. "They are now dead! All of them! They made the mistake of angering my first born son by trying to kill those he calls mother! My son Androcles... he has a really nasty mean streak when it comes to those who wish to do harm to those he calls mother! So do his siblings, many of whom are in this room right now, and they want to rip your heart out and feed on it in front of you!"

Sama/Secha glanced out of the corner of her eye and saw Denali and Deion glaring at her with murder in their wolf eyes, their dual fangs fully exposed and ready to rip into her flesh with glee. She tore her eyes away from them and looked back at Martin.

“Osrod do something!” Sama/Secha screamed out. “I am your Queen! Your mate! Why don’t you do something?”

Loras moved from beside Retta and Lazar now and stepped up beside Martin and stared at Sama/Secha. “You were never his wife and mate!” Loras spat in her face. “I may hate Osrod for what happened between us, but you... you have manipulated and deceived him for far too long. My eyes are now open Sama Arhtai. It has been you that has contrived everything that Osrod has acted on. He is not like his father and grandfather, yet you made it certain that he would be seen that way by others.” Loras shook her head. “No more.”

Martin looked at Loras and saw her nod her head. He stepped back slightly and seemed to issue an order with his thoughts and then two, large *Durcunusaan* soldiers appeared like magic in the doorway and moved up beside him. “Take her.” He said. “Secure her in a room on one of the upper floors away from where any patients might be. Full Security protocols. Nayeca will join you shortly.”

The two *Durcunusaan* nodded their heads and grasped Sama/Secha’s arms tightly as she began screaming. “No! Osrod stop them! Do something you fool man! Help me! Help me!”

Martin stood there and closed his eyes as she was dragged out, her voice carrying across the room and the corridor outside. Danny and Nayeca moved up beside him now and he looked at her, reaching for Danny’s hand at the same time. They grasped forearms and Martin leaned over and kissed Nayeca’s cheek.

“Lu’ria’s father is with this other woman.” Nayeca said softly. “I did not know he had come with us out here.”

Martin nodded his head. “Lu’ria’s parents did not want to remain on Earth while Lu’ria was out here. Daba is a Senator from Earth, so she remained on *SPARTA’S WRATH* with Ulana as a political delegation while the others remained in the Beta Quadrant. Re’lon, well Lu’ria’s father is a unique character to be sure.”

Nayeca nodded her head. “He is legendary among the Drow for his skill and cunning.”

Martin nodded his head. “No doubt.” He said. “Let Re’lon handle Rylin or Roeza or whatever the hell her name is. When you are done with this bitch, put together a full report and then come find me.”

Nayeca nodded her head. “Of course.”

Martin leaned over once more and kissed her cheek softly. “Thank you Nubian.” He said.

Nayeca smiled affectionately and squeezed his arm with her hand. “We are family Martin Leonidas. Always.”

Martin nodded his head. “That we are.”

Nayeca smiled and then turned to head out of the room while Martin turned and looked at Danny. “So?” He asked.

Danny shook his head. “I saw the building as we were coming in. Sloppy *fervon*. Very sloppy. I thought we trained Andro better than that.”

Martin chuckled. “In his defense, he lost his temper a bit.”

“A bit?” Danny hissed. “If that was a little bit, I don’t want to see him completely lose it.”

Martin grinned and nodded his head. “We should...” Martin lifted a finger to his ear and then tapped his jaw implant. “Hold on Andro...” He spoke as he pulled out the Holo Disc from the belt pouch at the small of his back. He flipped it over and activated it, placing it on the table top.

Every one in the room saw the small, full sized image of Androcles appear very clearly in the transmission, even Osrod Aspion, who looked utterly stunned at this type of technology he had never seen before. COLS was still using standard subspace communications that had to be viewed on monitors. Holographic transmissions were unheard of to him. Martin had ordered everyone to use their implants and standard Union COM Holo Discs while on the surface as opposed to their Etheric connections since the vast majority of Lycavorians on Jetania would not be able to use their natural Etheric power to its full capability. At least not yet.

“Go *keto*.” Martin spoke.

“The two Trams have reversed their direction father.” Andro spoke now. “They appear to be moving back to the bases they came from. Armen is tracking their progress and I have sent Dorian and Laren with Ryner and Ladur to trail them from the air.”

“And the item you were going to retrieve before you got sidetracked?” Martin asked him.

“Mari can tell you what it is father.” Andro replied. “Once she informed me of the threat against my mothers...”

Martin nodded his head in acknowledgement. "I know son." He said. He turned and looked at where Mari stood pressed up tightly to Deion's side. "Mari?"

"It's a Shielded STR 9 Pralor Power convertor Martin." Mari answered immediately. "I confirmed the power readings with Armen. It's an older model by current standards, but more than capable of powering two thirds of their capital city if they had managed to breach its protective shields and actually use it."

"They didn't?" Martin asked.

Mari shook her head quickly. "The STR 9s were equipped with multiple Rotating Fractal Encryptions. Most of our power convertors are. If you don't get each level of higher decryption correct, all of them reset. The variables are endless so..."

"That would explain why they haven't been able to tap into it even after all these years." Martin said.

Mari nodded her head. "It also needs to be activated by someone with Pralor genes." She told him. "Even if they had managed to break the encryption, they killed the only people able to use it when they executed the scientists they took."

Martin glanced back at Osrod now who was staring at him. "That was really stupid for several reasons." Martin told him. "You got anything to say for yourself sport?"

"I am Osrod Aspion, King of the Coalition of Lycavorian States!" Osrod blurted out the words. "I can smell that I am older than you and therefore that makes me the senior Alpha of Royal blood! I demand that you surrender your title, position and authority to me as the rightful King of our people!"

Loras cried out in stunned humor, wanting to erupt in a fit of laughter but instead her hands went to her face in shock over what he had just said. Lazar simply stood there and shook his head sadly while looking down into Retta's beautiful eyes.

Danny looked equally incredulous and he stared at him for a long moment before looking at Martin. "Did this fool just say what I think he said?"

Martin nodded his head with a small smile. "I think he did."

"Osrod, you misbegotten fool!" Loras snapped now. "You have no royal blood within you! And nor did your father or grandfather! Your grandfather pronounced himself King, and your father did the same! Before you stands the only King of true Royal Blood! The *Mard Revik* of the Lycavorian people!"

Osrod's eyes grew infinitely wider and the gasps of shock from Loras and others in the room was very evident as the Pralor PPM appeared in Martin's hand from the recessed holster on his right thigh. He had drawn it so fast that no one had even seen him move. Martin pressed the large barrel of the weapon to Osrod's forehead, right above the bridge of his nose.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't spread your brains all over the wall behind you and end your miserable life right here and now?" Martin growled menacingly.

Osrod Aspion was many things, some of them not very appealing, but he was certainly no coward. He froze in his spot but he held himself to his full height of six foot four and he did not flinch.

"I will not... I will not beg for my life!" Osrod snapped.

"I'm not asking you to beg asshole." Martin snapped at him, his dual fangs fully exposed and his yellow gold wolf eyes on full display once more.

Osrod closed his eyes slowly, accepting his fate. He had wanted to do so much more, and now his only regret was that he would not be able to feel Nitona's supple body against his one last time. He would not smell her sweet scent or feel the touch of her hair in his hands. *I should have made her my first Queen. My only Queen.* Osrod thought to himself as he prepared to die.

Martin's head tilted to the side slightly, and he lowered his Etheric shields just enough to reach out and sense the surface thoughts of Osrod Aspion. He could see the clear images of the stunning red haired female in his mind. That is all that occupied Osrod's thoughts right now. Not power or greed or revenge. But regret. Regret for not...

Martin pulled the PPM back quickly from Osrod's forehead but lashed out viciously with his left fist, connecting directly on Osrod's jaw with the Etheric fueled punch. It wasn't strong enough to break his jaw, but it was certainly strong enough to cause Osrod's eyes to fly open in pain and then blackness washed over him as his body slumped to the floor unconscious.

Martin turned quickly as he returned the PPM to its holster and he looked at Loras. "Who is Nitona?" He asked.

Loras looked confused. “Nitona?” She asked. “Nitona Aspion. She is... she is Osrod’s fourth Queen. The youngest of them. Why?”

“Tell me about her.” Martin spoke.

Lazar stepped forward now. “Secha... Sama... she hated her. Risi and Braaha too.” He began. “She is half Mountain Pack King Leonidas and...”

Martin held up his hand stopping Lazar’s words. “You have claimed my daughter Lazar Ranev. You have made her happier than we have ever seen her. You do not call me King. Is that clear?” Lazar looked somewhat flustered but Retta squeezed his arm tightly with a brilliant smile and he nodded his head finally. “Now tell me about her.”

“Her father is a respected Plains Pack Officer in the military.” Lazar continued. “He is a common sense type officer. Nitona’s mother went against her Mountain Pack after her father claimed her, refusing to return. They live on the outskirts of Drinda now. Nitona is their youngest child, but my father... Osrod... he followed all of the normal mating rites for Nitona. In all honesty, I believe he... I believe that he was beginning to change somewhat because of her influence. It was one of the reasons Secha hated her so.”

Martin turned to the holo disc that was still active and held Andro in it. “*Keto*, I’m sending Mari and the rest of your team to you. Recover this Pralor device and then find this Nitona Aspion. Bring them both back here.”

“Father they will not just give it to us.” Andro said.

“Non-lethal munitions Androcles.” Martin told him. “These are our people as well. Too many of them have already died because of the stupidity of those they call leaders. They are arrogant and have a serious chip on their shoulders. It’s time to knock that chip off. Danny has already started that... now you finish it. No more killing *keto*.”

Andro nodded his head without pause. “*Una gur tur aden medwan*.” (It will be done father)

Martin watched the transmission disappear and he looked at Danny. “You did what needed to be done *fervon*.” He said softly.

Danny nodded his head. “Doesn’t mean I have to like it.” He said in reply.

Martin reached up and placed his hand on Danny’s shoulder and squeezed him hard. “And that is what makes us different.” He said softly.

Garget and Lasun stepped closer to the two men. “What about Osrod?” Garget asked.

Martin looked over at his inert form and then back to Garget. “I have a feeling that we are going to discover quite a bit of information in the next few hours.” He said. “It may very well paint Osrod Aspion in a different light.”

Both Garget and Lasun looked surprised at this. “Do you know something King Leonidas? About Osrod?” Lasun asked.

Martin shook his head. “A feeling, that’s all.” Martin answered him. “Whatever Osrod’s fate, his son will answer to you and Garget for his crimes. Your people would put him on trial, yes.”

Lasun nodded his head. “Yes.”

Martin nodded his head. “And so would we.” He spoke. “His fate is yours to decide. I have bigger fish to fry.” He looked back to Danny. “Thoti?”

“His ship is in orbit.” Danny answered with a nod. “He’s waiting on your word to bring Lorendo to the surface. Dy, Bella and Cirith will be here in an hour.”

“Garget... I need a cell in your base if that is possible. A holding area.” Martin spoke turning to him. “Far away from others.”

Garget nodded his head. “Of course. The lowest level of our base has such a place. One way in and one way out. Completely secure. It was our weapons armory until the upper levels were finished.”

Martin nodded his head. “That is what I need.” He said. He looked back to Danny. “Get in touch with Delnash *fervon*. He’ll want to be here for this.”

Danny grabbed Martin’s arm and waited until his eyes focused on him. “What is going on Marty?” He asked. “There is something that you aren’t telling me. Us. You and Andro both. You can’t keep it inside *fervon*. You know that.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “When Andro gets back.” Martin said. “When he gets back, then I will tell you what we have discovered.” Martin reached up and put his hand behind Danny’s neck. “All of it.”

“I’m not going to like it am I?” Danny asked softly as Garget and Lasun stood there wondering what they were talking about.

Martin shook his head. “No.” He replied softly. “And my *staanio* Reva will like it even less.”

“That bad?” Danny asked.

“Is genocide ever good?” Martin asked softly.

Danny’s eyes went wide at that word. “*Carians*.”

“That’s putting it mildly.” Martin spoke.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

JETANIA

WARIM MEDICAL CENTER

MAIN CONFERNECE ROOM

The family reunion was semi-bittersweet only because all of them knew that two of their brothers and one of their sisters and their wives and mates were not among them.

Martin Leonidas had crushed Dysea, Isabella and Cirith to him in an embrace of love and devotion as he nuzzled them furiously, not caring in the least who might have been watching. Dysea and Cirith both reciprocated this action while Bella let her hands wander all over his face and shoulders in delightful bliss as she showered his skin with kisses. It had always been this way, and while Isabella may not have been able to feel his wolf aura with her senses, his Etheric resonance managed to do exactly the same thing to her when he touched her with it. It was the way all of them now pulsed her with love and desire, even her children, and it made Isabella Leonidas sing in happiness and pride.

Their greetings with Aricia, Anja and For'mya were just as loving and blissful, all of them touching each other in some way constantly. They were Union Queens yes, but they were also intimate lovers and the very best of friends. Under Dysea and Isabella’s skillful tutelage, Cirith had embraced more about her vampire and wolf blood than at any other time in her life. Though her father had tried to teach her what he could, there were things that even he did not know, and Dysea and Isabella had filled in the knowledge he had been unable to teach her. In the last year, Cirith had learned more about herself, her wants and desires, her many skills, and her place in the grand scheme of things. She had fully accepted who she was now, a proud and devoted wife to Martin Leonidas and the sixth recognized Queen of the Lycavorian Union. This task had been happily undertaken by Deia back within the Alpha Quadrant, and just six months ago, Cirith Leonidas was officially named and coronated as the sixth Queen of the Lycavorian Union in absentia.

Androcles and his siblings had been completely respectful of their parents and given them a full hour together before none of them could contain themselves any longer and moved into the conference room. They were quickly followed by Gorgo, Dasha, Dynina, Jezima and Meral with Reva’s sphere right behind them and then finally Doseb, Irani and Loras. Martin stood to one side of the huge room now, Isabella in one arm and Anja in the other, his face at peace as his senses filled with the wonderful scent of family. It filled the huge room, saturated it really, and it was the sweetest thing Martin had ever smelled outside of his Queens.

The potent smell of Mahanlo-Leonidas blood he now knew.

Martin Leonidas had always been dedicated to his family. Even before he knew who and what he was, Danny and his team were his family and he had protected them viciously. Now Martin knew why. Now he understood. As the years passed and each of his children had joined this world, the devotion to family only grew stronger and stronger within him, the love for his wives and mates grew more intense and complete. Everything they had discovered in this last year plus had only increased this devotion within him even more. And now Yuriko and Filrian and Andro and Sadi would soon give him his first grandchildren. He may have thought he was far too young to be a grandfather, but Martin looked forward to this day almost as much as his children.

Yuriko and Filrian had arrived by their single Shrouded *KADEN* transport, Eliani now quizzing her older sister and Filrian both on how she was doing, what she was eating and if she was getting enough exercise while Jezima and Meral got acquainted with them since it was the first time they had met Yuriko and her Hadarian

husband. Yuriko Leonidas may have been an adopted daughter to Martin, but to him, to his wives and mates, to his other children, she was a Leonidas through and through. There had never been a question about that.

Lisisa, Arduri and Iama were crowded around Sadi, Sehri and Lu'ria, while Ne'Veha, Carisia and Caliria were having an animated discussion with Eirene, Miseo, Normya and their mother For'mya. Aricia and Dysea were standing close together with Gorgo, Dasha, Reva's sphere and Dynina as Dysea had not yet met either of them and they were taken with Dysea's platinum blond hair and the delicate tattoos that adorned her body. Retta was pressed tightly to Lazar's side as Doseb, Irani and Loras got to know her better. Calyb was the only one not present with them in the huge conference room, but Martin knew where he was and what he was doing, and he could not have been prouder of his young son. Mari, Emylea, Murano and Tobia stood with Deion, Denali, Tir'ut, Kalis and Serale discussing something that had Murano and Denali looking completely lost while Tobia was pressed against his side looking utterly enchanted. Cirith, Sheva and Onera were speaking in a small group with Dorian, Laren, and Laren's parents Yokra and Robati, as well as Byron and Namiri, small fits of laughter coming from one of them every so often as Dorian Leonidas was his usual humorous self. He had become another one liner comedian within their family along with Denali and this fact had endeared the two brothers to everyone even more since they could put people at ease in about twenty seconds. Byron Leonidas had claimed Namiri already, her face brilliantly happy and at peace. Like her sister Emylea with Deion and Mari, Namiri was never more than an arm's length from Byron. Saydia Daret and Namiri's sisters knew about Namiri and Byron and they could not have been happier for her. It was not the arranged marriage that the Tasmor Quorum had expected, but even they were now coming around to Saydia's way of thinking and had embraced what was happening fully.

What made Martin Leonidas happiest of all was seeing Zarah and Lucia. They stood with Andro, Jomann and Dutkne now, both of them pressing close to Dutkne and looking at him with adoration in their eyes. Dutkne had finally gotten around to coming down from *SPARTA'S WRATH* at Andro's insistence. Martin knew that he did not want to pressure Zarah and Lucia even as much as he craved them, but Dutkne was surprised to find that Zarah and Lucia had already come to the realization that he was the one meant for them and they, for him. Zarah Leonidas had blossomed in these last months being among her father and mothers and under the watchful instruction of Radem. His teachings had brought both of them out of their shells and now they were confident and strong young women who knew what they wanted. Lucia's unfettered love for her and Zarah's equally powerful love for Lucia in return had been the biggest medicine that Zarah had needed to put the assault behind her and move on with her life. Zarah did that with Lucia's help and now they wanted Dutkne as much as he wanted them and they were able to admit it and act on it. His arms were around their waists possessively, and though Martin knew he had not yet claimed them, that would come in time and Martin was not the least bit upset about their choice in a mate. It might not happen soon, for Dutkne was a very honorable Alpha wolf, and he wanted to court them in the proper way. That did not mean he would not ensure that everyone knew they were his, something that Zarah and Lucia were only too happy to acknowledge for anyone who saw them. Dutkne was Wayonn's grandson and Andro's Praetorian Mage, and Martin could not hope for a man who would love his daughter and Lucia more.

His family and the Lycavorian Union are what Martin Leonidas existed for now. Every individual in this room was now marked with the crest of their bloodline and it made each of them walk a little taller and hold their heads a little higher and that, more than anything, that made Martin Leonidas feel pride and love for all of them.

Martin also knew that he had family out there among the stars who bore this same crest on their bodies. Family he had not even met or known existed until only a short time ago, and they were in trouble. He did not want to truly know the extent of that trouble, for it frightened him in a way that no one but Andro and Danny could sense, but he would listen to his people, and then he would make a decision. And he swore to himself that anyone who had harmed his blood would pay for their folly. In spades.

There were very few men or women within the Lycavorian Union that could just walk through the levels of intense security that now surrounded the Warim Medical Center and into a gathering of this many Leonidas family members in one spot.

Colonel Thoti was one of those individuals.

Aside from the three hundred or so *Durcunusaan* that now were posted all around the hospital grounds, every dragon that was bound to a Leonidas family member now either lazily circled the Medical Center or

rested on the roof of the building keeping careful watch. All of them knew what was happening within the building for they could see with their Bonded Ones eyes and they felt just as much happiness as they did. Torma and Isheeni had not had nearly all of their offspring so close to them in a long time, and while Cemath was absent with Resumar, his siblings all longed to see and feel him once more.

Martin saw Thoti nod to the *Durcumusaan* troops outside the door as it opened and then he strode into the huge room without pause. Loras and her parents could only stare in awe at the two Avatars that followed him, Avi at nearly seven and a half feet tall, while Chiron was barely six foot.

Reva also took notice of Chiron entering but for different reasons, and she watched as Thoti moved over to where Martin was standing.

Thoti bowed his head slightly to Anja and Isabella. "My Queens." He said.

Isabella smiled and reached out to squeeze his arm in greeting. "Thoti, it has been a long time our friend. How is Duewa?"

Thoti smiled at her and nodded his head. "She is doing very well Isabella, thank you." He spoke realizing once more just how close he was to this powerful family. He had commanded the Royal Villa detachment for over a decade and he had jumped at the chance to join Martin and the others on this mission when it had begun. All of them insisted on the *Durcumusaan* that were closest to them calling them by their first names when not in public, and Thoti was among a handful of those men and women who were allowed this. "Adjusting far more quickly thanks to Anja, Aricia and For'mya."

Isabella nodded. "Good. It will be wonderful to see her again."

Anja smiled then. "Just think Thoti." She commented. "Pretty soon she'll be under all of our influences."

Martin grinned at the look on Thoti's face and Anja chuckled as she leaned up on her toes and planted a friendly kiss on his cheek. "Don't worry Thoti... we won't corrupt her too bad." She said before squeezing Martin's arm. "I'm going to check on Yuriko before we start Lover." She said.

Martin nodded and watched her move gracefully away from him. He turned back to Thoti. "Lorendo?"

Thoti nodded his head. "He is quite secure in the armory Garget brought us to. Four *Durcumusaan* and four of Garget's men are standing guard. We have sealed that floor of the base with another dozen security personnel as well. It is hardly used now according to Garget, which suits our purposes."

"Delnash?"

"He will arrive tomorrow around midday." Thoti answered. "He was most pleased."

Martin grinned. "I just bet he was." He said. "Thank you Thoti."

"After what he has done Martin, it was truly my pleasure." Thoti told him.

Martin nodded and put his hand on his shoulder. "Now get your ass on your ship and go back to Duewa."

"Martin, I will stay." Thoti spoke quickly. "I..."

Martin shook his head. "I told Duewa I would let you go back to Ventori when we had that fucker in custody. Don't make a liar out of me, ok. You've done enough, Thoti. Go spend some down time with your wife and mate. Trust me, there will be plenty to do in the coming weeks."

Thoti smiled and nodded his head. "I look forward to it." He spoke.

Martin nodded his head. "He say anything to you?" Martin asked him.

Thoti chuckled now. "He has had plenty to say... until Ranala had heard enough of his ranting and hit him right in the mouth. Once. His fat ass hit the deck three seconds later and when he woke up he kept his mouth shut."

Martin winced at this for he knew Ranala Yel'ine well. She had been a core member of Thoti's *Durcumusaan* detachment for almost a decade now and the elven female was one of the toughest women Martin had ever met next to his Queens. She was also fiercely and thoroughly devoted to her elven husband who was also Thoti's Communications Officer.

"Now, he was ranting again at Garget's men when I left, about how he was a political prisoner and he would reward them if they let him go." Thoti said. "Until one of them stuck his weapon under his double chin and told him to be silent."

Martin laughed at that and nodded his head. "I would have loved to see the look on his face." He leaned over and kissed Isabella deeply and then looked at Thoti once more. "Get going Thoti. I don't need Duewa on my case as well as my Queens."

Thoti chuckled and nodded his head. "We will see you in a few days then?"

"More likely a week or so, but soon. Now go." Martin told him.

Thoti bowed his head once more and then turned to head for the door. Martin's face changed as Thoti walked away and Isabella detected this within his demeanor and she looked at him.

"Martin?" She asked softly.

He looked at her and gave her a soft smile. "Time to get back to work I suppose." He said.

"What is wrong husband?" Bella asked him.

"You'll know soon enough Bella." He answered her softly. "It probably won't be good. Bad news has become a norm out here. Tell the others to start sitting down if you would. This may take a while, and some of them are not going to like the decisions that we've made." He took note of Reva's sphere moving up behind her and he noticed that Chiron had stopped moving towards him with Avi.

Isabell nodded her head and moved off as Reva's sphere glided silently up to him and he looked at the single white light on the front of the sphere. "*Staania*?" He spoke.

"What is going on Martin?" Reva asked him. "I was not aware that Chiron had left Lorenu. Why did you not tell me? Why is he here?"

"He activated one of his secondary Avatars and they are with the base." Martin told her. "I felt it would be more helpful if he came with us. He agreed. He has knowledge that can only help us. Now, why don't you ask me the question that I know you want to ask *staania*."

Reva's sphere stared at him silently for a moment. "That phrase... you and Androcles both spoke it. I heard him speak it, and then I heard you speak it. How... how did you know that phrase?"

"You heard me?" Martin asked her.

"The audio receptors of this sphere are very advanced Martin Leonidas... and do not avoid my question." Reva scolded him. "Answer me."

Martin shook his head. "I don't know grandmother." He answered her honestly. "It just... it just came to me at that instant."

"One of you speaking that phrase... that could be happenstance." Reva spoke. "Not both of you Martin. With Androcles and you... it was so clear and so..."

"So, what...?" Martin asked her. "This phrase has meaning doesn't it grandmother? What meaning?"

Martin felt Andro come up beside him and Reva's sphere glanced to him and then back to Martin. Reva's sphere slowly floated further away from the table and others in the room and they followed without question. Finally, she stopped next to the large window and spun to look at them.

"It was what Daniho... it is what your grandfather said to our people the morning of the last day of the war." Reva told them. "It was a speech he gave to them. It was carried across the planet and to all of our forces and he did not even know it. He never intended it to be part of our future history. I remember those words as if... as if he spoke them only yesterday." She said softly.

"Tell us *staania*." Androcles asked her softly.

"From far away, across the mountains deep, we will stand as they charge." She began. "We will raise our weapons from the ground, and we will not back down. This day we will fight the final battle to end this war of suffering. Look all around you, for the snow on Cerath is melting now. It is the Time of Reckoning." Martin looked at his son, Andro's azure blue orbs meeting his gaze for a long moment. "The Onab, our people, after the battle, after it was all over, they began to call it the Mahanlo Creed. They..."

"What?" Martin asked her.

"They believed it was Daniho's blessing upon them." Reva answered him. "To them it was proof that he saw the end of the war then. That we would have our vengeance upon the Iais'Kai. The day of that battle was one of the warmest in recorded history on Cerath and the snow was melting in the high mountains. No one knows how Daniho knew this, but he did. That is why they named it the Mahanlo Creed. The rallying cry of our family and our blood."

"*Carians*." Andro spoke softly as he lowered his head.

Reva's sphere turned fully to face Martin. "You know something *staaniaketo*. You and Androcles." She spoke. "Something you and your son are not telling anyone. Something that you are not telling me. And it has to do with our family, with our blood. I can feel it. What is it?"

"Do you trust me *staania*?" Martin asked her.

"You ask me that? Now?" Reva demanded.

"You know me." Martin told her. "You have watched me grow even from afar. You know how I am."

"You will not act until you have all the possible information at your disposal." Reva told him. "Yes."

"Then let me do that now grandmother." Martin said to her.

"It is... it is that bad?" Reva asked.

Martin shook his head. "No. It is unknown right now." He answered. "But you know how I will act in any regard grandmother."

Reva was silent for a long moment. "Very well." She finally told him. "I have your word to me?"

Martin nodded his head. "You do."

"And mine *staania*." Andro said.

"Then I will... I will be patient." She said. "When will you... when will you transfer me out of this infernal machine?"

"Tomorrow." Martin told her. "The day after tomorrow at the latest. Anja wants to make sure she has everything she needs and then we will go find this place. Andro, Laren, Dorian and I will find it. I promise you."

"Reva!" Gorgo's voice called for her from across the room and they turned to see her beside Yuriko and Sadi with Anja, Dasha and Dynina.

"Protect our blood Martin, Andro." Reva spoke softly.

"Always." Martin and Andro answered together.

Reva paused and then her sphere turned and glided away across the room. Andro looked at his father then.

[*Father.*] Andro spoke within the connection only he and his father shared.

[*Re'lon has finished his first interrogation of this Roeza or Rylin bitch.*] Martin told his son. [*He'll do one more. Your Tenna Nayeca is almost complete with Sama Arhtai. When we are done here we'll meet with them at Garget's base.*]

[*Did he give you an idea?*] Andro asked his father.

Martin met his son's eyes. [*It isn't good keto.*] He replied. [*We...*] Martin stopped as Chiron moved up beside them. "Chiron... now is not..."

"King Martin... Kesas Pengot has sent us a message. I felt you would want to see it right away." Chiron told him holding out the data pad. "I transcribed it to written form so as not to raise suspicion. You can view the Holo message at your leisure."

Martin took the pad with wide eyes and quickly began reading, holding it out so that Andro could move closer and read it with him. They did not see Avi move up beside Chiron, but they felt the presence of the tall avatar almost at once and for father and son this gave them more comfort than most people would ever realize. Martin looked up at Chiron after a long moment.

"When did we get this?" He asked quickly.

"We received it only forty-seven minutes ago," Chiron answered. "I verified the content and then transcribed it to text to bring it to you."

"*Sibfla!*" Martin hissed softly.

Andro took the pad from his father's hand. "This changes things father." He spoke.

"It damn sure does." Martin snapped. "Why did they wake him up?!"

"I told you Kesas Pengot is a careful man Martin Leonidas." Chiron responded. "And the more we discover, the more it becomes clear that what we feared has indeed taken place. He will do nothing that will endanger those he now protects."

"But if what this says is true, if they have these Blood detectors like that *upae* Roeza had, and spies among them, then the Arhtai Pack will know they have woken him." Andro spoke now. "Why risk that?"

"If I had to make a supposition..." Chiron answered and he saw Martin nod his head in response. "They woke Lylor Kirek in order to see if the crest of your family had appeared on his shoulder. It would be the

clearest and most absolute sign to them that you actually live Martin. You must remember, there has been no communication between our two groups in nearly four million years. Daniho and Ashten had the means to see that their sister and those that were with her were alive, but they still could not communicate with her nor did they know their location. This was done on purpose so that..."

Martin nodded his head. "I know." He said softly. "Grandfather and *Tenne* Ashten were closer to the Iais'Kai in terms of distance than *Tenna* Kelia and those that went with her. They did not want her location revealed if the Iais'Kai found them on Lycavore."

Chiron nodded his head. "Yes."

"Four days." Martin said softly. "Five maximum before they can no longer hide it."

Chiron nodded his head again. "That is what Kesas projects, yes. He may be able to delay them another day after that, but then they will come for Lylor Kirek. It will be at least several hours before they can speak with Lylor Kirek, but they will have their answer the moment they bring him out of stasis. It will take twelve hours before the effects of such a prolonged stasis wear off however. It will be less for Lady Reva because of what Lady Anja has planned."

"What are we talking about Chiron?" Martin asked.

"I have seen the medical regimen that Lady Anja has begun to use in order to prepare Lady Reva's physical form to come out of stasis, and it is quite amazing, but it will not be able to compensate for everything as you know. Lady Anja also knows this and she is doing it on purpose. Lady Reva's recovery will be faster than Lylor Kirek's because they do not have Lady Anja with them to direct what they do once he is awakened. His senses will be distorted for a few hours and his full vision will not begin returning to him for at least an hour. Then it will be a slow process for him to regain full function of his body. Twelve hours at least according to Lady Anja's estimate when I asked her. I would not try to clash with her on this. Right now, she is the foremost medical mind in the universe as we know it King Martin, even I, as a First-Generation Avatar, even I would not attempt to dispute her word in this matter."

"Smart man." Martin said with a slight grin. "Avi...?"

"*SPARTA'S WRATH* can arrive within minutes of the decision to leave, Martin." Avi answered knowing what Martin was going to ask him. "Armen has already confirmed this and put *SPARTA'S WRATH* on stand by. He decided to remain onboard in order to ensure that we were ready but he is listening. The Onab Portal Drive is a wondrous thing and the Worker Drones are fine tuning it even more. We have Pakar Six's coordinates so it would be a simple matter to jump there. Our other ships however, depending on which ones we bring with us, they will need at least a day to make the trip. Even with our new Hypermatter Fusion Drives and the *ARIZONA*'s Quantum Resonance reactor, we will need to plot a course around Kintaur space and several spacial anomalies. They will need to make four jumps just to avoid even the rudimentary sensor grids that the Kintaur have."

"We'd be going in blind." Andro spoke now. "We have no intelligence on what the Arhtai Pack has or does not have."

Martin nodded his head in agreement. "Agreed. Hopefully we can get some of that from our two prisoners." He looked at Avi. "Avi, if we pulled all of the Worker Drones from *SPARTA'S WRATH* and our other ships, how many ships do you and Armen think that they could refit with Portal Drives in say two days?"

Avi's orange hued eyes blinked several times as he processed this in seconds. "Armen says the refit was conducted quickly on *SPARTA'S WRATH* because of her Pralor origins. In many cases, some of the most advanced Pralor ship technology is derived in some way from Onab technology. With the exception of Zaala Randall, who would at least understand and be able to work on the concept of the Drives, no one but the engineers with Lady Dynina has sufficient knowledge to do such a refit. We would need all of their engineers who worked on the project brought here from Lorenu with their equipment and materials in order to do what you ask."

Martin shook his head. "No way. I'm not risking them."

Avi nodded his head. "Understood. Given that, the only ships that we could refit in the field in the time frame that you wish are the *ARIZONA* and the *PREMONITION*. They are closer to actual Pralor technology than our other ships. It would be a simple matter to field refit them with Portal Drives. Well... it would be easier at least." He amended his statement.

“Do it, Avi. Make sure Armen takes charge of it.” Martin spoke the order. “And keep it quiet for now. I’ll inform Miranda and Zaala.”

Avi nodded his head. “Armen says it will be done.” He said.

“We need more Intel, father.” Androcles said.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes... we do.” He looked at Chiron. “How long before Lylor is able to communicate and move around, Chiron? Based on what you know?”

Chiron’s head tilted to the side slightly. “Tomorrow morning at the earliest if they have only just woken him in the last hour or so.”

Martin nodded his head. “Send Kesas another burst transmission. Have him prepared to speak to us tomorrow at midday. And I want Lylor there as well.”

Chiron nodded his head. “I will send it right away.”

“...Did not come to these decisions lightly.” Martin was speaking from the head of the table where he stood between Aricia’s and Anja’s chairs. There were four holo transmissions active in the room, one with Miranda in it from orbit, one with Delnash transiting from Artaaya aboard his ship, the third with Saydia Daret and Chief Justice Nalmos from Ventori and the last was General Koguth’Juturi from Honelze. “Your mothers and I have already discussed them thoroughly and decided it was for the best. We just haven’t had the time to tell everyone until now. Some of those plans have now changed given what we have discovered here on Jetania and Ventori, but we are going to try and stick with most of them as best we are able.”

Martin took a deep breath and then continued.

“As all of you know, Manne has been officially designated as the first Union colony world outside of the Alpha Quadrant. I have appointed Ceale’Juturi as the interim Governor with her husband Nedoli’Juturi as head of the local garrison there.” All of them could see Koguth’s face in the transmission and he looked absolutely stunned. “The 1st Elven Engineer Division has now deployed a full brigade to Manne and they have already begun establishing the primary settlement. Those of the Juturi pride that did not deploy to Honelze are now working on quickly setting up defenses and housing within the settlement perimeter. Right now, it is being called Manne City, but that may change in the future. The first group of ships from the Union Reclamation Bureau has already left Union space under heavy escort. A dozen URB carriers have been refitted with our Hypermatter Fusion Drives and they should arrive in four weeks with about three hundred thousand men, women and children. Families. Engineers. Doctors. Scientists. You name it. Among them are two thousand of our Nodan brothers and they will begin putting the *PROMETHEUS* Command Station together in orbit. Those men that have defected from my...” Martin paused for a second and then continued after looking at his mother quickly. “From Marshall Pusintin’s command have turned out to be invaluable. Pian and Jalersi were able to get all of their families out of Kavalian space before they locked down their borders. They are on the way to Manne as well. Manne City is going to be something special to be sure.” Martin looked at the image of Delnash in the transmission. “Delnash?”

Delnash leaned forward in the chair he was sitting in, everyone keenly aware of Avatar 27 just to his right. “I have authorized the Pralor Science Bureau and the Pralor Defense Bureau to deploy half a dozen Research and Material ships to Manne. Along with them, a dozen of our most powerful warships. It is all we could spare given the imminent arrival of the Svorag. They will aid in setting up new Planetary Defensive Fortifications using the lost schematics of Pralor weaponry brought back to us by Murano and Androcles. The Science Bureau will work hand in hand with their Union counterparts to begin a colonization blueprint for Manne that will not affect the environmental status of the planet or the indigenous species. I actually... I had to beat back the number of volunteers that came forward for this operation. The sins of our past are being tossed aside by our people and now it is time for us to move forward.”

“You can spare that many ships Chief Elder?” Androcles asked now.

Delnash nodded his head. “Sashan has assured me that we will not be limiting our ability to defend ourselves or project what power we do have by doing this. He has rededicated himself to his position, as have we all.”

“What about the Svorag Mother ship father?” Denali asked now.

Martin nodded his head and motioned to Yuriko. “Yuriko?”

Yuriko leaned forward at the table. “The Svorag Mother Ship is maintaining its base course, though at only a quarter of its former speed. Apparently, the ass whooping you guys gave them on Ventori has made them overly cautious.” Yuriko said with a smile. “*OMEN THREE* is shadowing them, but from a larger distance now. The other vessels with the Mother Ship are staying in close formation and not deviating from the base course either. We have run several different scenarios, and all of them have come to the same time frame. At present speed, the Svorag Mother Ship will arrive at Honelze in four weeks and two days. Give or take an hour or so.”

“They slowed that much *arande*?” Andro asked now.

Yuriko nodded her head. “We were surprised as well, but they haven’t altered course or speed since the attack on Ventori. Most everyone now agrees with our mother Anja and father in their assessment when they say the leader of these Svorag is a turned Lycavorian Alpha who has retained most of his instinctual nature. He is probably one of those the Svorag took from *staania* Dynina’s people during one of their research missions after they arrived in this quadrant of space and settled on Lorenu. All evidence that we have points to this fact, including all of the information that Thoti recently was able to obtain from the computers on Lorendo’s base above Hador.”

“Lorendo is in custody...” Martin spoke now. “And once Delnash arrives we’ll begin to question him. From the information Thoti was able to discover, and intelligence given to us by those Pralor scientists working with Lorendo that had begun to see he had lost his *nubous* mind, it seems he has lost control of all the Svorag he created. This Svorag Alpha is now in control of them and that is why Lorendo has been trying so desperately to cover things up. And to find a way to regain control of them.”

“That hasn’t worked out so well for him it appears.” Murano commented from where he stood behind Tobia’s chair.

Martin shook his head. “No, it has not.” Martin agreed. “And it has cost us a lot of people because Lorendo kept it silent and wanted to play hero. More Pralor and Lycavorian casualties through the years, but now also at least several thousand Tasmor given what we discovered on Ventori. Now, based on that information I have made a couple of decisions that I would not normally have made. I conferred with Deia and Dilios extensively and they in turn have spoken with the Union Security Committee. The decision was unanimous.” Martin looked at Saydia in the transmission. “As of ten days ago, the Tasmor people have become interim members of the United Lycavorian Union. Ratification of this will go before the full Union Senate at their next session but Deia and Dilios don’t expect any major issues. Sovereign Regent Daret, the only thing left is for you and the Tasmor Quorum to agree and accept this and it will be done.”

Saydia Daret was utterly stunned into silence as her expression of disbelief showed. This was not something that she had even considered would happen and she was completely shocked beyond belief.

“King... King Leonidas I...” Saydia stammered.

“The Union has few laws Saydia, but those that we do are enforced to the letter. We do not interfere with the internal government policies as long as their goals are the same as the Union’s. Prosperity and peace for everyone. All of our people, no matter their species.” Martin spoke calmly. “The Tasmor people have shown that their values and morals are nearly the same as ours. There are differences yes, just as there are between all of the Lycavorian Union internal governments, but they are not insurmountable, as I think you will agree two of your daughters and two of my sons have already discovered.”

Saydia looked at Emylea and Namiri in the transmission and she nodded her head. “Yes, they have.” She said with a smile. “I believe I can speak for my people when I say that we would be honored King Leonidas.”

Martin smiled and nodded his head. “I was hoping you would say that.” He said. “To further help that along, and to assure the members of your Quorum and your people that we are sincere in our words and deeds, two additional Lycavorian Union URB Carriers will deploy to your homeworld. On them will be four thousand scientists, engineers and technicians that will begin an accelerated training regimen for your own people. Also with them will be four billion metric tons of equipment and supplies that will facilitate the refitting of a good portion of your ships with advanced systems to bring them up to speed with many of our own ships. There will be a lot more with them, engineering and medical personnel and supplies, but this is going to be a huge jump into the future for the Tasmor people. In many different fields.”

“Martin, the Kintaur will...” Saydia began.

Martin shook his head. “The Kintaur are a non-factor now.” He told her. “I took it upon myself to use the information Delnash had about the Kintaur to send their leadership a very pointed message.”

Saydia leaned forward in the chair she sat in. “A message? What message?” She asked.

Martin nodded again. “I told them what was taking place.” He told her. “I told them that all contact with the Tasmor people and Kintaur ceases at once. All past transgressions will be forgiven but not forgotten. All Tasmor and Pralors that they may hold prisoner will be returned at once without further harm or when the ratification of your inclusion into the Lycavorian Union becomes final, I will send enough ships and troops to their little area of space to take them back by force and I will drop kick their ugly asses so hard they won’t recover for a millennium.”

Saydia’s eyes nearly bugged out of her head at this, while many in the room with Martin could not contain their smiles of amusement. “You... you told them this?” Saydia gasped finally.

“I used very nice language though.” Martin said with a smile.

“Nice language my *mida*.” Anja spat with a huge smile.

Delnash was smiling in his holo transmission and he also leaned forward now as well. “For my part, Sovereign Regent Daret, I offer you the sincerest apologies of my people for what Lorendo has had a hand in doing. To try and make up for unknowingly turning our backs on you and your people, I have equaled the Union’s display and efforts. Once the situation with the Svorag is finished, we will be sending ships and personnel to your homeworld to assist Martin’s people. It is also time for my people to begin reaching out and making friends instead of turning away those who could be allies and friends to us. I would like that to begin with you and the Tasmor.”

“Gods... Martin this is not... this is not what I expected.” Saydia stammered once more.

Martin smiled. “Predictable is boring. I hate boring.” He said. “I hope then, you won’t be adverse to Namiri returning to Union space with Byron.”

“What?” Namiri gasped now from where she sat.

“Father?” Byron spoke as well, a look of surprise on his own face.

Martin met his son’s gaze and nodded his head. “Your mothers and I did not come to this decision lightly *keto*.” He said.

“I don’t want to go back!” Byron hissed softly.

Martin nodded his head. “I know, but that is what we have decided.”

“Why?” Byron demanded now.

“Because someone of our blood, of Mahanlo-Leonidas blood, must always rule.” For'mya spoke now, her voice calm and measured as it always was.

“You are my youngest son Byron.” Martin spoke again. “If something were to happen to me, to your mothers, to your brother Androcles, then it would fall to you *keto*. Your brothers and sisters agree.”

“And I ask again... why?!”

“Because you are not like us *fervon*.” Eliani spoke now, everyone turning to look at her as she turned to face her brother. “This is our path Byron. We have chosen this life we live. You have chosen another path and that is why... that is why we all love you so much.” Byron fell silent and the look of anger that was on his face immediately lessened. “Father and our mothers asked each of us Byron... each of us said it needed to be you without a thought. You are the future of our family *fervon*, and we don’t want that future to be...”

“We don’t want that future tainted by blood.” Androcles finished the sentence. “You are something that none of us will ever be *fervon*. You are a scholar. If we are to be known many thousands of years from now, we want them to know that we were a complete family. Not just soldiers and warriors, but scholars and thinkers. You are the beginning of that.”

“Your spot in the Elear Musical Academy is waiting for you.” Martin told him. “Between your classes there, you and Namiri will be studying with your grandfather L’tian and Deia about the intricacies of diplomatic work. I would also like Namiri to take the role as Interim Tasmor Ambassador to the Union.”

“Me?!” Namiri gasped again.

“With your permission, of course Saydia?” Martin finished.

Saydia nodded her head. “I think it is a fine decision.” She said quickly. “One that my daughter would excel at.”

“You are a Leonidas now Namiri...” Martin spoke. “A Mahanlo-Leonidas. As is your sister Emylea. There are other reasons for doing this, but I will cover them with you at another time.”

“Both of you have already been confirmed as Princesses of the Union.” Dysea spoke now. “Bella, Cirith and I made sure of that before leaving Honelze. You will also be our conduit to your brothers Resumar and Arrarn, Byron. They have already agreed to this as well, they look forward to it actually.”

Martin took a deep breath again. “Which leads me into the next thing.” He spoke. “Fedor and Eirene will be returning to Manne for the foreseeable future.” Martin held up his hand as Fedor and Eirene both got to their feet and were about to protest. “Hold on... hear me out.” He told them. “As much as your mothers and I don’t like the idea Eirene, your covert operational skills can not be denied. You proved that on Austrova. Because of this, Anton, Cihera and Las’elh will be moving to Manne to oversee an advanced training regime for you developed by Armetus. There are very few individuals your mothers and I would trust enough to become your primary instructor, Eirene, Armetus is one of them. Anton, Cihera and Las’elh have become his most effective team in the last year and a half and they are family. They won’t hold back so you need to be prepared for that.”

“What about... what about me King Martin?” Miseo asked. “I do not...”

Martin shook his head. “Don’t worry, Miseo... you are going with her.” He said with a smile. “You’ll be assigned to Nedoli’s Command Team to help with the training and disposition of the forces there. None of you will be very far from us so don’t worry.” Martin looked at Fedor. “Kenroe is going to Manne with several of your *staania* Dynina’s people to set up a school for the technology that they have developed while on Lorenu. Mainly the Portal Drive Generators son. You are going there to learn that.” Martin saw Fedor’s eyes grow wide with excitement. “Syrilth is bringing a dozen of her finest instructors from Dragon Mountain and while you are both on Manne, you will begin to learn what you can do with Kdan and Dnom. Iama...”

“I go where my beloved Fedor goes, Martin.” Iama spoke reaching up to take Fedor’s hand. “I do not question this.”

Martin nodded his head. “I know. Which is why your mother Mani is going to join you on Manne and the two of you are going to take over the healthy eating habits of our people there.”

Iama’s eyes lit up at this news. “Truly?” She gasped.

“It’s a big task...” Anja told her. “Most of the Spartans arriving will eat like this big oaf!” Anja said jerking her thumb towards Martin. “They ingest whatever tastes good regardless of how bad it is for them.”

“And I am as fit as a fiddle.” Martin protested.

“Thanks to Anja and Aricia mostly.” Gorgo muttered under her breath but everyone heard her and they all chuckled softly.

Martin stuck his tongue out at his mother and this brought even more laughter from those in the room. He turned to where Kalis stood behind Serale’s chair. “*Mandri*... you are going too.” He spoke.

“*Tenne* I...” Kalis began to protest as well but Martin stopped him with his upraised hand once more.

“You are part of Andro’s team now, Kalis, so you won’t be staying for long.” Martin told him.

“However, Androcles did arrange for Jalersi to take a small trip before things in the Alpha Quadrant spool up anymore. It’s time that your mother saw who you have become. And it’s time to put the past fully behind you.”

“My... my mother?” Kalis gasped as Serale reached for his hand on her shoulder with a wide smile.

“You will leave tonight.” Androcles spoke. “Sadi and Ne’Veha will take you and Serale on the *PREMONITION*. Sehri and Caliria will be accompanying you to meet with their parents as well. You’ll return in two days.”

“You up for that *mandri*?” Martin asked him.

Kalis looked at Serale and saw her brilliant smile and then he met his uncle’s eyes. A man who had saved him from the darkness and had been more a father to him than his own. He nodded his head. “I... I am ready.” He said.

“Good. She doesn’t know you’ll be there, so enjoy it.” Martin said. He looked at the holodisc with Nalmos and Saydia in it. “Nalmos...?”

“Things are progressing well here, King Leonidas.” Nalmos answered him. “Far more than I ever thought possible. Tasmor transports are arriving every few days with more of our people who have chosen to return. The Tasmor Captains are pushing hard with the Union escorts allowing them to not worry about Kintaur interference. Many of the Tasmor are also volunteering to remain here on Ventori as well in order to assist us.

The Union and Tasmor engineers have already been able to set up a primary infrastructure for Discovery Base and we have enlarged it by half in just under a week. Most of the systems were already in place, they had just been severed from the city by orbital attacks. If all goes well, they will begin bringing these systems back on line next month. We will then begin tackling the outer section of Jorlari that sustained the least damage beginning next month.”

Doseb rose to his feet now causing everyone to look at him. “Martin... I have spoken with many of the older Alphas who were taken from Ventori. Garget’s parents, Lasun Vesrak’s parents and many others. Irani and I, all of them, we would like to return there to help with the rebuilding. Many of us, Irani and I included, we still consider Ventori to be our home. We did not want to leave, and we would like to go back.”

Martin looked surprised at this and he turned to look at Nalmos. He turned back to Doseb. “*Staanio*... things are different there now.” He said.

Doseb shook his head. “We do not want to return as Alphas.” He said quickly. “We want to return as Lycavorians and help to rebuild our home. It is truly the only place Irani and I ever really called home. If we would be welcome.”

Nalmos nodded his head almost at once. “Their wisdom and balance would be... it would be most welcome, King Martin, most especially for our younger generations. Word is spreading quickly about how they were taken from us through no fault of their own. They would be... no one here would object in any way to this.”

Martin was positive he saw Doseb breath a sigh of relief and he nodded his head. “Then so be it.” He said.

“Irani and I will allow the others to go first.” Doseb spoke again. “We will join them when... when our other business is concluded.”

This statement did not go unnoticed as Reva’s sphere turned to look at Martin and then back to Doseb. She knew who they were of course, Loras’ parents and descendants of Kelia. She did not know, however, the how or the why they ended up on Ventori, and then here on Jetania, or just how closely related they were to her. She would discover this in time Martin knew, as would Doseb, Irani and Loras and he hoped it gave some measure of happiness for his *staania* after all of the losses Reva had to suffer in her time within the sphere.

“Ok... on to more mundane things.” Martin announced.

It was Dasha and Gorgo who chortled out their response to this and Dasha leaned close to Jezima as she spoke.

“Do not let him fool you...” She told Jezima who was smiling happily. “Mundane is not a word that exists within this family.”

Gorgo laughed again and nodded her head. “So true. So very true.”

Martin rolled his eyes at this and Jezima laughed at his expression. “Manda... take it away please.”

WARIM SECRET BASE LANDING PLATFORM

Calyb Mahanlo-Leonidas had made his decision the moment that they had arrived at Taris’ cave. Their scents and female auras had been calling to him since the moment he had landed on this planet. Chocolate almonds and sweet daises. Calyb was his father’s son in every way and he could smell that they had been together with each other before his arrival. The way their scents mixed together, and their Etheric resonances pulsed as one, there was no denying this, and it only made the Alpha blood within him burn even hotter for them. Taris and Anoria were ready the instant that they led him into the cave, their Coming of Age fevers far beyond what either of them had ever felt before, their own blood practically on fire within their veins for the handsome young Alpha wolf who would now take them and make them his. There was no doubt within them, no worry and no hesitation in the least. Their fingers were tightly interlaced, and they had quickly stripped out of the clothes they wore and had stood together then, facing one another, their firm female bodies pressing intimately against one another, waiting for their mate to make the first move.

Calyb may have only been seventeen years old and, in wolf years, still considered a child himself, but he had the Mahanlo-Leonidas blood flowing within his veins. The most powerful bloodline of any Lycavorian in the universe and he remembered well what his father and his brothers had told him through the years as he was growing. When you find the right females, the ones meant for you, worship the very ground they walk upon because they will be your future. Hold nothing back from them, and make them experience things that will cause them to cry out your name to the heavens in bliss. With his Bonded brother Endeem watching protectively from the top of the ridge, Calyb Mahanlo-Leonidas did what his blood burned for him to do.

Taris Ranev and Anoria Vesrak knew it was going to be so very different, they knew this the moment that Calyb stood before them as naked as they were, his manhood seemingly huge to their eyes and pulsing with thick desire, but they were not prepared for the utter enormity of what they were going to experience.

Or the world they were going to enter.

For six hours mind boggling hours, the cries of Taris Ranev and Anoria Vesrak echoed within the cave and without, their voices whispering through the timber all around them, as the man both of them had seen in their visions and their dreams claimed their bodies and their souls. The moment his aura touched them, they were ready, but Calyb Mahanlo-Leonidas had other intentions first. Intentions that Taris and Anoria had not predicted nor expected. Intentions that had them both howling out in unimaginable delight within moments. Calyb did not just claim them both, he possessed their very hearts and souls. His touch upon them was like fire, igniting the flames of passion wherever his fingers chose to rest. The immense pleasure they had discovered they could give to each other was quickly washed aside as his lips and tongue explored every curve and contour of their lithe bodies while they clutched each other in orgasmic ecstasy. Calyb left no part of their bodies untouched, his strong hands caressing each of them as only he could, while his tongue made them scream his name to the very heavens indeed. When they thought that it was over, he only began again, and the pleasure cascaded upon them like waves in a storm. He tasted each of them with undisguised relish, their bodies responding to his caresses as they clutched him and each other in staggering release. He had each of them three times in the space of those six hours, each of them singing to the stars above as he took them, filled them with his huge manhood beyond their most exquisite imaginations, and finally holding them as tightly as he could as they erupted together in surreal bliss.

Taris and Anoria were not idle by any means, tasting him and each other as Calyb took them in the throes of their union. None of them noticed as the bloodline crest on Taris and Anoria's left shoulders filled in even more until it stood out just as intensely as it did on Calyb. They did not care as the three of them shaped each other and their future together. He claimed them both in the old way of their people, biting deeply into the flesh of their shoulders as they did the same to him. They felt the burning of the pureness of his blood as it swept through them, molding them, shaping them. Neither Taris nor Anoria hesitated in biting him back during their lovemaking, sealing their union forever, their minds coming together as they shared everything each of them had seen with each other. One mind, then two and finally three became one, and two female voices and one male voice howled to the stars in happiness. His unshielded aura should have had them quivering on the soft blankets before him, willing to do anything he wanted, yet Taris and Anoria kept their minds and their control and they did it all without any prodding. They wanted him just as deeply and forcefully as he wanted them and they held nothing back from Calyb or each other, experiencing passion and desire that would never go away or diminish in the years to come.

The morning sun was just beginning to rise when they could do nothing more because of exhaustion. It was then that Calyb simply wrapped both of them within his embrace and they fell asleep for a short time. They awoke within the hour however, and as they sat completely naked together, Calyb nuzzled them and placed soft kisses across the backs of their necks and shoulders, paying special attention to the bloodline crest that now fully adorned their skin. It was just as detailed and pronounced as it was on him now, and this made him hold them even closer as his heart sang with happiness.

Now Calyb walked slowly up the path towards the entrance of the main base, Endeem already resting in the center of the path. He had carried both Taris and Anoria above him, while Calyb ran in his wolf form below and he enjoyed their squeals of utter delight as they got their first ride on a dragon. They had told him it was something of a ritual among the Mountain Packs here on Jetania and now he watched as Taris's mother and Anoria's mother greeted their daughters with sincere embraces of love and happiness, his own mothers crowded around them as well. Calyb smelled his father before he saw him, but when he rounded the path and came fully

up on the platform, he saw his father standing with Garget and Lasun. Calyb took a deep breath, not expecting this, and moved up to where the three men stood.

“Father.” Calyb spoke. He looked at Garget and Lasun respectively. “Sirs.”

“You told us you were going to court our daughters Prince Leonidas.” Lasun spoke.

Calyb shook his head slowly. “Yes, sir... yes, I did.” He responded. “I only did... I only did what my blood called for me to do. I have... I have nothing to offer either of you that would show you that they are all that matters to me. I would hope... I would hope that my solemn word to you that I will love and cherish them more than my own life will make up for this breach in protocol. I...”

Garget reached out and put his hand on Calyb’s left shoulder while Lasun extended his own hand and placed it on his right shoulder. Both men had seen the faces of their daughters when they jumped from the back of the dragon, their faces and eyes filled with more happiness than either of them had ever seen before. They could smell Calyb Leonidas deeply within their blood, his scent and aura swarming around them without pause.

“You have given our daughters... you have given our daughters what Lasun and I could not have provided to them before this day Calyb Mahanlo-Leonidas. You have given them a future.” Garget spoke warmly.

“Swear to us this day...” Lasun spoke now. “Swear to us that they will always come first in your heart Calyb. Swear this to us and we will need nothing else from you to show us your worth.”

Calyb met their eyes without flinching. “That is a vow that I will happily swear to both of you.” He stated without hesitation. “On my very life.”

Garget and Lasun both nodded their heads. “Then to honor the tradition that the Mountain Packs began after coming here, present yourself to their mothers so that they may greet you as a member of our families.”

Calyb looked at his father and could only see pride in his eyes as he nodded his head. He bowed slightly to both Garget and Lasun and then turned to quickly jog over to where Taris and Anoria stood. Garget and Lasun watched as their daughters drew him close, pressing up to either side of him as their mothers reached for him.

“You have raised fine sons, Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas.” Lasun spoke finally as he turned to look at him. “Fine sons. The devotion I see within his eyes for our daughters is...”

“It is absolute.” Garget finished.

Martin nodded his head. “As it should be.” He said softly.

“What now, Martin?” Lasun asked him. “Osrod’s people will begin asking questions and demanding to see him very soon. He has never spent more than a few hours within one of our cities and with your ships in orbit and your Spartans on the ground, they will start to become very nervous.”

Martin nodded his head. “I know.” He spoke. “We... walk with me if you would. We should discuss some things before any decisions are made. And you should know some things that we have discovered from the interrogations of the prisoners.”

“We care not about what happens to them.” Garget hissed.

Martin nodded his head as they turned and began to walk. “You’ll want to hear this though.”

RANEV PACK HIDDEN BASE WARIM

“...Controlling him?” Garget asked stunned as he held the data pad in his hand. “You are joking, of course?”

The large meeting room in the base was considerably smaller than the conference room in the Medical Center which suited Martin just fine. The center table could only fit twelve men and women and right now, Garget, Lasun, Androcles, Danny, Doseb, Irani, Re'lon and Nayeca were the only ones in the room with him.

Martin looked at Nayeca. “Nubian?”

Nayeca nodded and looked at Garget and Lasun from her seat beside Danny. “I’m afraid not.” She told them. “I had it all recorded if you would like to look through the two sessions yourself?”

Garget looked at Martin and shook his head quickly. “No. I... forgive me, I do not mean to sound skeptical but... how can you be so sure?”

Nayeca smiled and shook her head. “I do not take offense, trust me.” She said. “The exact combination of drugs that we use I can’t reveal to you, but...”

Martin leaned forward in his chair. “Garget, these are drugs that Anja put together. You have seen what she can do?”

Garget nodded his head. “Of course, it is... it is miraculous.”

“Trust me when I tell you, they work.” Martin said.

“You do not use...?” Lasun could not finish the sentence but Martin shook his head.

“No. Torture is woefully unreliable.” Martin answered him. “We call them enhanced interrogation techniques. The subject is never really in any life-threatening danger, though if you ask them, they will disagree I guarantee you. Nayeca and Re’lon here are probably two of the finest that we have. They are Drow elves, and as you can see, to those who don’t know them, they can be rather imposing. Re’lon actually teaches a course for our *Krypteria*. That is what we call our Intelligence Agency. They have had a lot of experience doing what they do and that is why they are so good at it.”

Lasun silently had to agree with that assessment. While neither Nayeca or Re’lon were by any means frightening to look at in appearance, their pure white hair and amber colored eyes alone could make a person tremble. There was just something about each of them that told a person do not *nubou* with them for they would make your remaining moments of life miserable to experience.

“How?” Lasun finally asked.

“Well, according to this Sama *upaee*...” Nayeca explained. “It was a combination of very subtle emotional manipulation and very mild doses of a hallucinogenic drug that she would mix with his food or drink at the right time.” Nayeca handed Lasun another data pad. “She called it Edoportrite.”

“Edoportrite?” Doseb spoke now. “That is the sap that comes from the Pyranium tree. Irani uses it as an adhesive and it is very toxic. It can only be found in the Northern Mountains. How did...”

“Her daughter.” Re’lon replied before he could finish his question. “She used her position as High Priestess to the Oracle to access the information from her ship’s computer. Nilantha’s ship has an extensive archive of everything that lives and grows on Jetania. Roeza Arhtai and her mother assassinated the Lycavorian Oracle from Ventori just before Osrod’s grandfather took all the Alpha’s from there. When she arrived here, she eventually maneuvered herself into a position to be chosen by Nilantha as her High Priestess once Nilantha was chased into hiding by Osrod’s father. They have been very patient.”

“She would... she would travel to all of the Mountain Pack settlements.” Garget said with wide eyes. “It would be nothing for her to obtain this material.”

Nayeca nodded her head. “And then she used her skills to lessen the toxicity of the sap and she made the drug into a simple serum and would either send it to her mother by secret courier, one of her cousins, those who took part in the attack at the Atrium. When she was then chosen to be the one to communicate back and forth with Osrod, she would give it to her directly on her trips to Drinda. In minute doses, it would have no damaging effects on the person ingesting it and after a few hours it would be out of their system. Re’lon and I made certain their stories matched and I checked with Anja about the effects before coming here.”

“How long... how long has this been going on?” Lasun asked.

“As near as we can narrow it down...” Nayeca replied. “She started giving him the serum less than a hundred years after they were mated.”

Lasun looked at Garget and Martin saw the look that passed between them. “What?” He asked.

“If what you say is true... this *nubous upaee* has been manipulating Osrod for over a thousand years!” Lasun spoke. “She may very well be responsible for every decision that he has made since he became King!”

Garget leaned closer to the table. “Many of us knew Osrod was different than his father and grandfather, even before he became King. Some of the decisions he has made while he was King, his father and grandfather would never have made. He reversed many of the restrictions that they had placed on our people. Even before his actions with Loras.”

“You mean claiming her when he knew she was supposed to be married to Warim your brother?” Martin said.

Garget nodded his head. "Yes." He met Martin's gaze. "You are saying that his decisions were his own?"

Nayeca took it up once more. "Well, according to Sama, she was not really concerned about what he did as long as it did not hamper her search for Doseb and Irani and their children. When he was about to do something that would influence that she stepped in."

"Well... he is certainly no prince, that is for sure." Martin said. "And as much as it pains me to say, he may be somewhat of a victim in all of this because of my bloodline. Sama and Roeza Arhtai were here hunting for Doseb and Irani. My bloodline. Osrod Aspion has made some really stupid decisions playing King, but I'm guilty of that as well. We all are. Ultimately, I really think he has been trying to do what is right by everyone. Without interrogating him, which I'm inclined not to do based on what information we have gotten from Sama and her daughter, he's just been listening to the wrong people for a lot of years." Martin sat forward again. "I'm having several pads put together that will give you the full history of what has taken place with our people, even more so than what I showed you earlier via the connection I made with you both. It includes everything that we have discovered since coming out here. Once you have them, I encourage you to show them to all of the Mountain Pack Alphas and have them disseminate them to their people. Chiron and Avi, two of the Avatars that you met, they have finished an orbital scan of Jetania and traced all of your people back to the original Packs that were on Lycavore. All of you should know your true history and lineage as well, not just us."

"What about the attack on mother?" Andro asked turning to look at his father. "This fool told Lazar that he was acting on orders from his father."

Nayeca shook her head. "That was Sama's doing Andro." She told him. "This Sibot character worked for her, not Osrod. He had no idea what she ordered. Sama told Sibot to say that should Lazar ever become too suspicious. Apparently, she got nervous when it was discovered that we had come out here. She saw the reports and assumed that because of our advanced technology, we were members of the Kirek Pack or some offshoot of Lady Dynina's group. She never met with Dynina directly so she did not know her relation to the Mahanlo blood. When she found out Osrod was sending Lazar to investigate us, she gave him his orders."

"Up until the time that Nilantha unwittingly put Roeza with Loras, they had suspected that your brother was part of the King's bloodline, Garget." Re'lon told them. "She ordered his death, not Osrod Aspion. Though her influence over him allowed her to make it appear as if he gave the order, she was actually the one pulling the strings. Roeza Arhtai began to suspect otherwise when Nilantha assigned her to Loras after the assassination attempt. She was very surprised that Loras had survived and with the way Nilantha acted in her regard, Roeza began to see who Loras really was. They had no real proof, but had we not intervened, it's very possible that they would have targeted Loras again within the year."

"Why?" Irani gasped. "They had no proof!"

"That's where this Nitona comes in." Nayeca explained. "She is half Mountain Pack correct?"

Garget nodded his head. "Yes. Nitona's mother refused to disavow the union between herself and the Plains Pack officer that had claimed her. Nitona is their youngest child. She became Osrod's fourth wife a decade ago."

Re'lon looked at Martin. "She discovered what was going on King Martin. Somehow. She began to slip Osrod a counteragent to the serum that Sama was using during their times together. She apparently also fell very much in love with him. And Osrod with her."

Martin nodded his head. "I got that from his surface thoughts. When he thought that I was going to kill him, the only thing he seemed to care about was that he would never be able to see this Nitona again."

"Well, it seems Sama did not appreciate this very much." Nayeca told them. "She was planning to remove this Nitona from the picture within a few weeks."

"You mean kill her?" Irani asked now.

Nayeca nodded her head. "Yes." Nayeca replied. "She feared that her control over Osrod was slipping and that all she had cultivated through these last millennia would come undone. She feared Osrod would find out everything. His other two wives were in on it with Sama as well. They were also planning to somehow usurp Osrod and take over themselves. They hadn't really figured out how just yet, but Sama was definitely tossing ideas around in her head."

"Nice." Martin spoke shaking his head. "Did we pick them up?"

Re'lon nodded now. "I sent a detachment of *Durcunusaan* to the locations where these women were and Armen teleported them both up to *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Along with their children and Osrod's children with Sama. This pig Juyno is still confined to the medical facility here in this base."

"I think everyone had begun to see it." Garget spoke now as he sat back in his chair. "He was beginning to spend more and more time with Nitona in public. Going out among the different Plains Packs cities. Sama and the others were pushed to the background. They had already turned his children with them against him in many ways."

"It appears Anja's arrival here changed all that." Nayeca said now.

"Because Roeza detected the blood within her. She could smell it." Doseb spoke now. "And your children and nephew. It was clear and unmasked unlike it was for Irani and I and our children. And Loras' children with Warim."

Martin nodded his head. "Yes. She hid it well at first, but she panicked when she smelled it and didn't know what to do. When she told her mother, they both panicked. They had no idea where they had come from. They didn't realize who we really were until she smelled Andro in the Atrium and her little device was going ape shit."

"Then she knew you are descended from King Daniho and Lord Ashten?" Irani asked.

Martin nodded his head slowly. "Yes."

"They were going to assassinate Loras, Anja, Nilantha and anyone with them at the Atrium." Nayeca spoke again. "Then they were going to come after you and Lady Irani and anyone related to you within the first hour after that attempt, while things were still very much confused." Nayeca looked at Androcles. "They did not count on you arriving *mandri*. Or your father."

"How old are these women?" Lasun asked.

"Sama Arhtai is roughly four million years old give or take a few centuries." Martin answered looking at Doseb.

He nodded his head. "That is reasonably accurate according to the history Irani and I know." Doseb said.

"*Carians!*" Lasun gasped.

"Roeza is apparently the sixth child she had with her mate after arriving on Koltar Four." Nayeca told them. "She is two million, six hundred thousand and thirty years old roughly. The rest of Sama's children, four boys and another girl, and her daughter's mate, they were all killed fighting the Kirek and Mahanlo Packs during this attempted purge of your bloodline Martin."

"So, that is why she hates us so much *Tenna*?" Andro asked.

Nayeca nodded her head. "Yes." She answered. "When it was discovered what this Kesas Pengot had done with you and Irani, Doseb, Sama volunteered to be the one to come after you and try to finish what they started. Roeza with her. And roughly two dozen cousins."

"Wait!" Garget barked. "Two dozen? There were only..."

Martin held up his hand. "The moment Nayeca found this out, she confirmed it with Re'lon, and I had the others taken. There were eight of them and they were guarding a ship that was supposed to take them out of the system where they would meet up with a ship from Koltar Four to take them back."

"She has had contact with her witch mother?" Irani snapped angrily.

Martin shook his head. "No. The communications arrays on the ship are not capable of reaching Koltar Four from here. That is why they needed to be out of the system."

"Once out of the system they could move wherever they needed to in order to contact her mother and then they would come for them." Andro said.

Nayeca and Re'lon nodded. "Yes." Nayeca answered.

"How did Roeza come to believe it was Loras who she was really after?" Irani asked now. "She could not detect the Mahanlo blood within her."

"Nilantha." Martin answered. "When she became High Priestess to the Oracle, Nilantha allowed her to see almost everything that was in the Sanctuary, and then on her ship at the bottom of the ocean."

"All of the Onab prophecies." Andro said looking at his father. "Everything that Dadrien and grandfather Sumar told her."

Martin nodded his head. "Everything but who Loras truly was. She began to get very suspicious as I said, when Nilantha instructed her to look out for Loras after the assassination attempt."

“Then how did she finally discover this?” Doseb asked.

Martin looked at Re'lon and nodded his head and he watched as Re'lon lifted his hand and placed the small, flat surfaced disc on the table. “With this.” Re'lon spoke.

“When Nilantha brought Loras to her ship, Roeza stuck this on her clothes before she left.” Martin said reaching forward and tapping the device. “It’s a very sophisticated tracking and camera device. Definitely not made here on Jetania, so it has to be something that they brought with them. Like her little toy blood detector thing.” Martin picked up the device and turned it over in his fingers. “Nilantha took Loras, Taris and Anoria into a part of the ship that she had never allowed Roeza in. The part that held the history of her true bloodline. The part that showed her what her place is to be in the future.”

“I don’t understand *mandri*?” Irani spoke. “What future?”

Martin sat back in his chair holding the device. “Nilantha’s ship held pretty much every prophecy that the Onab made before our people left Cerath.” He explained. “It also included a dozen or so prophecies that were made after they left.”

“After?” Doseb said.

Martin nodded his head. “Mostly having to do with *staanio* Sumar and Dadrien but also the part where Loras would be the wife and mate to an Alpha wolf and that they would be the reunification of our people. She carries Mahanlo blood within her, but also Arhtai and Nenay blood as well.”

Irani gasped. “My mother... my mother was from the Nenay Pack.”

Martin nodded his head. “And your father was a member of the Arhtai Pack.” He said.

“I don’t understand.” Doseb spoke. “How is that possible then?”

Martin looked at Andro and nodded his head once more. “Because the twins that Sadi carries, our children, they bear the blood of the remaining eight original Packs from Lycavore within them.” Andro spoke looking at Doseb and Irani. “Loras is to be the wife and mate to my son Achilles, according to the Onab prophecy. Therefore, they would be uniting all of the Packs that left Cerath after the *Zin Sarakoa Vyen IIs*.” Andro told them. “And that one day she and my son would be... they would be the King and Queen of our people.”

Irani gasped loudly, her hands going to cover her mouth in stunned shock. “*Son vada carians!*” She stammered.

“Achilles and Neesia... my children... they are like me.” Androcles said in a soft voice.

“What do you mean, like you, Androcles?” Doseb asked.

Andro met his eyes. “I was born fully aware of everything around me *Tenne*.” He told them. “Even before I left my mother’s womb I could see with her eyes. With my father’s eyes. I had their memories within me, dating back more years than I can count.”

“I still haven’t figured out many of them.” Martin spoke now. “They come from Sumar and Resumar and even grandfather Daniho. But they are fragmented and not complete.”

“My son and daughter are like me.” Andro continued. “They can speak to us even now. I don’t know how it came to be or why, but it simply is. My brother Dorian and my soul sister Laren were born the same way. It is why our connections to our Bonded dragon brothers and sister are so much more complete than others.”

“*Vada Tarivuos rie vada Mard Revik*.” Doseb said almost reverently. “It has always been said that you would be different.”

“Yes, well, you’ll forgive me *Tenne* if I have not enjoyed being so different all of my life and not knowing why until only these last few weeks.” Andro spoke.

Martin reached out with his hand and rested it on Andro’s shoulder and squeezed it hard. “I’m sorry *keto*.” He said softly, his voice filled with warmth and emotion.

“It isn’t your fault *medwan*.” Androcles said. “It is no one’s fault. It simply is. It just would have been nice knowing all of this while I was growing.”

Martin nodded his head. “On that I will agree.” He said.

“You have to admit *mandri*, it wouldn’t have been anywhere near as *nubous* entertaining though.” Danny spoke for the first time, looking at Andro, his smile wide and infectious as he moved his hands back and forth in front of him like he was weaving a spell. “Shazaam!”

Andro was the first to start laughing, followed quickly by Martin and Nayeca and then Re'lon. It became even more infectious as Doseb and then Irani began to laugh as well. Garget and Lasun could only sit there and stare at them in disbelief.

Lasun looked at Garget. "This is the family that our daughters have chosen to become part of?" He said.

This caused Martin to laugh even harder and lean back in his chair. The chair however was not intended for this type of movement and the back legs snapped almost instantly and Martin hit the floor hard on his back which caused Danny and Androcles to erupt into even more laughter, Doseb Mahanlo wiping the tears from his eyes. He and Irani had not laughed this hard in more millennia than they could count and to Doseb it felt wonderful. Soon Garget and Lasun could not resist the laughter that was now infecting the others and within moments they too were laughing uproariously while trying to remain sitting upright in their own chairs.

The two *Durcunusaan* soldiers who had opened the door and saw what was taking place simply looked at each other, their King on his back on the floor laughing uncontrollably and then they backed out of the room closing the door behind them.

Both of them had grins on their faces that would not come off for several hours.

"...Know who they are?" Nitona asked as Osrod paced the floor on the room.

Nitona Aspion had been brought here only two hours ago, taken from her bed in the early morning hours by men and women who had appeared like ghosts from a dream. Nitona had never been more frightened of anything in her life as a brilliant flash of light had taken place and then she was on some kind of ship. They had landed here in Warim only a short while later and she had been brought here. Osrod had enveloped her with his aura when she ran to his arms and he crushed her to him. She had calmed quickly knowing that he was alright and that she was with him. He would protect her she knew.

Osrod stopped pacing and looked at her. "I have never smelled Lycavorian blood so pure, Nitona." He told her. "And no, I don't know who they are or where they come from."

"They frighten me, Osrod." Nitona spoke softly. "They appeared in my room like *issis tis vada dremsa*. And then there was this flash of bright light and we were on some sort of ship. And then I was here." (Phantoms in the night)

Osrod Aspion stared at her sitting there for a long moment. Her sweet pines scent was intoxicating to him even as filled with fear as it now was. With Nitona he could be himself. He did not have to act, and this had always made him feel special in her arms. "Why did you never ask me to be returned to your parents and your Pack?" He finally asked her.

Nitona looked up at him from where she sat. "What do you mean?"

"When I claimed you... I did not give you a choice, Nitona." Osrod said. "Yet you never demanded to be returned to your Pack. Why?"

Nitona rose to her feet now and moved around the table to stand in front of him. She looked up into his dark eyes, towering over her as he did. "Did it ever occur to you that I was where I wanted to be?" She asked him.

"But why?" Osrod pressed her. "Because I was King?"

Nitona's face twisted up angrily but she kept her words measured. "I have never cared that you were King!" She hissed at him. "I do not care about any of that! You could have been a common soldier and it would not have mattered to me!"

"Then why?" Osrod asked her again.

Nitona stepped closer to him and reached up to put her hands on his broad chest while her blue eyes lifted to his face. "Because your scent is the one that tickles my senses far more than any Alpha who has ever pulsed me. Because I could see in here..." She moved her hand over his heart. "And I knew that you were not happy. I give to you all that I am willingly because I want to make you as happy as you have made me. What you make me feel is, I cannot begin to describe it, Osrod. If I could throw all of this away and just escape with you, I would do so in an instant. Just to be wrapped within your aura, to have your children, it would make me the happiest female on all of Jetania. I love you, fool! I have loved you with all of my heart from the first moment your hands touched my body."

This was something that Osrod Aspion had never heard before and he responded to that quickly. Nitona Aspion let out a small whimper of delight when his arms engulfed her and pulled her to him, holding her head to his chest as he lowered his own head and nuzzled her ear and the top of her head as his aura swarmed around her. She wrapped her arms around him as tightly as she was able and basked in his attentions to her.

The door opening interrupted their moment and Osrod turned quickly to see the huge Lycavorian who had struck him enter. He turned to face him fully, pulling Nitona behind his body to protect her as they watched him enter. Osrod recognized Doseb Athltin when he entered but he did not recognize the two females who entered as well. One was a pureblood female Alpha, her scent deeply imbedded within the male's scent and his was within hers. The other female was a species he had never seen before. She was of medium height, with long white hair, almost chocolate colored skin and four-inch-high ears that curved elegantly alongside her head. She was a turned wolf, that much he could determine easily, yet she carried the scent of a powerful Alpha male within her blood, a male that Osrod's blood could not match. The last two Lycavorians who entered were obviously guards of some sort as they took up positions on either side of the door, though their weapons stayed free of their hands, crossing their bodies in the front and hanging from quick release straps of some sort.

Osrod decided to try and take control quickly and he looked at Doseb. "Where are Garget Ranev and Lasun Vesrak?" He snapped. "I am King and you are holding me as a common thug! You hold my Queen and have frightened her terribly! Tell these people to release me Doseb Athltin immediately! Whatever happened between your daughter and I is ancient history! I do not..."

"*Ata uvenn* Osrod!" Doseb snarled seeing Nitona's eyes go wide at his obvious disrespect to Osrod. "You have no comprehension of what is going on around you do you?"

"Why don't you tell me!" Osrod snapped. "Who are these men and women! Who do they think they are that they can hold me here and threaten my Queen!"

"Your Queen was never in danger." Aricia spoke as she sat down in the chair. "Nor was she ever threatened."

Nitona's eyes went even wider. "You!" She exclaimed. "It was you! I remember your voice and your scent. You were the one giving the orders when they took me from my room!"

Aricia nodded her head. "Yes, I was." She spoke. "And Lycavorian Spartans do not threaten innocents. Ever."

"Spartans?" Osrod barked. "Who are you!? What is going on? You come to my world! You strike me and take my Queen... Secha prisoner!"

Martin detected his hesitation easily enough and he could smell the protective nature he was exuding in order to keep the red-haired woman calm. He was shielding her body with his own, something he had not done with Sama Arhtai, which spoke volumes about who this man really was.

"Sit down, Osrod!" Doseb spat at him. "Sit down or my *mandri* will hit you harder than he did the first time!"

Martin chuckled softly and looked at Nayeca. "Nubian."

Nayeca moved to the table and set the holo disc on the surface and activated it. The image of Secha and Nayeca appeared in the image as clear as if Osrod was in the same room with them. Secha appeared to be completely subdued, her eyes unfocused and docile. His eyes grew a little wider at this and then he heard the dark-skinned woman speak.

"Please tell me your name?"

"Sama... Sama Arhtai." Secha answered almost immediately.

"So Secha Aspion is not your real name?" Nayeca pressed.

Osrod watched as Secha shook her head. "My name is Sama Arhtai. Secha I took when I came to Ventori. Aspion is the name of the fool male who thinks he is my husband."

Osrod's eyes grew wider at this and Martin saw Nitona look up into his face. He glanced at Nayeca and nodded and she reached down to pause the recording. Martin looked back at Osrod. "This is the first two hours of her interrogation. She is most definitely not who you think she is. This is my wife, mate and *Anome*, Aricia." Martin said motioning to her beside him as he sat down. "That is my *mard fervon*'s wife and mate, Nayeca." He looked at Doseb. "You know my *Tenne* Doseb of course..." Martin turned back to look at Osrod. "And my name is Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas. I am the King of the United Lycavorian Union... and we have a lot to discuss, Osrod Aspion. Now we can sit here and talk like civilized alpha wolves, or I could just kill you and

your beautiful wife and mate Nitona here and bring your little empire down around your corpse.” Martin sat back in the chair.

“Your choice.”

Osrod felt Nitona grip his arm tightly and he looked at her. He saw the simple nod from her and then he looked back to Martin and reached for the back of the chair in front of him.

Martin nodded his head. “Good choice.” He said.

It lasted far longer than Martin expected, mainly because of the way Osrod Aspion had taken the information. He learned quite a bit about the man in front of him just by his reactions and his body language. He was an Alpha wolf with very pure blood, nowhere near as pure as the Mahanlo bloodline or even the Kirek and Carbula bloodlines, but if he had to guess, Osrod Aspion was descended from the Drarr bloodline. He would confirm it with Chiron since he was already running sensor sweeps from *SPARTA'S WRATH* to determine the bloodlines of all the wolves on Jetania, but Martin was confident he was correct given what he already knew and had studied on the trip here. According to their history, the Drarr Bloodline was hard working and honorable to a fault. Their support for the Mahanlo bloodline had never wavered once in all of the years that had passed since the *Zin Sarakoa Vyen Ils*. Osrod's grandfather was the senior Drarr Pack member that had been chosen by the Pralors for their Seed mission here and most of those chosen were young and impressionable wolves at the time. The Pralor people still had not learned enough about the Lycavorian people as a whole to counter and balance the natural instincts of the Alpha wolf and that is what allowed Osrod's grandfather to dominate those that were part of the Seed Mission. It was this lack of knowledge that allowed things to shape how Jetania came to be, and how Osrod's grandfather and then his father ruled with such an iron hand.

Martin had read all of the information that Garget and Lasun had given to him on Osrod Aspion, all of his actions through the years since becoming King, and while he had done many stupid things, he had also done many things that others had not expected. These things are what gave Martin hope that perhaps Osrod Aspion was not a lost cause as he had first thought.

“...It is all true?” Nitona asked softly from where she sat at the table. “Everything that the Oracle has been preaching for thousands of years?”

Aricia nodded from her chair next to Martin. He could tell Aricia had taken a liking to this Nitona female. She was slightly older than Aricia, perhaps a hundred years or so, but she was strong willed and intelligent. And her scent told all of them that she was utterly devoted to Osrod.

“Essentially, yes.” Aricia answered her. “Much of it we did not discover until recently ourselves, and to be honest, had this Sibot worm not taken Anja from us, we very well may not have discovered what we have in these last days.”

“I did not order that!” Osrod barked. “I don't even know who this Sibot person is!”

Aricia didn't flinch and she met his eyes. “And that is the only reason you are still alive Osrod Aspion.” She told him her eyes changing and her dual wolf fangs extending fully so that Nitona let out a small gasp. “Had you anything to do with what took place, your *ano* would have already joined this Sibot in *jorbhe*. Anja is not only wife and mate to our Beloved Martin, but she is also so very special to me and my fellow Queens. Had Martin not taken your head from your shoulders, we would certainly have gutted you like a dog and left you to rot in the street.”

Osrod opened his mouth to respond to her but Nitona's hand reached up and took his arm in her hands. “Please Osrod, my love.” She spoke softly. “They know you did not do this. Set aside your pride and listen. For me.”

Martin watched Osrod look at her, the tenseness and anger in his face lifting almost at once. The fact that it was Nitona who discovered what Sama was doing and then played a huge role in reversing what she was doing to him and at great risk to herself made Osrod stare at her for several long moments. The affection and softness Martin had seen in countless Alphas for those females who truly had command over their hearts and souls passed over Osrod's face quickly. Nitona had more of an effect on him than anyone thought and that was a good thing. Young though she may have been, Martin could tell she cared not for titles or power. All she

wanted was to feel the embrace of the Alpha that had claimed her. Martin watched as Osrod settled back into the chair beside her, but he kept Nitona's hand in his own, which told Martin all he needed to know. He glanced at his Uncle who had sat quietly at the table for the most part.

[Tenne?] He asked him.

Doseb didn't turn his head, his dark eyes remaining fixed on Osrod. *[I know what you are going to say mandri.]* Doseb answered, knowing that Aricia was within the conversation with them. *[As much as I hate him for what he forced upon my daughter, knowing what I do now, I cannot hold that hate so tightly anymore.]*

[Will you question what I do?] Martin asked him.

Doseb looked at him and shook his head. *[You have the memories and knowledge of our bloodline within you, Martin. The blood of our grandfathers. Our family. More so than I do. I will never question you in what you do, no matter the years that separate us.]*

Martin turned his head and looked at Aricia then as Nitona and Osrod watched them in confusion.

[Saaurano?]

[You know that we will side with you always, Beloved.] Aricia told him. *[Why do you even ask? You have seen something, haven't you? Like our son, you can see inside a person, what is in their heart. What do you see?]*

[The future.] Martin answered.

[Then act on it, Lover.] Anja's voice broke into their connection since they never shielded from one another. *[These are our people, just like Nalmos and those on Ventori. If this Sama upaee has been influencing him all of these years that we know of, how do we know that she wasn't doing the same thing to his father or grandfather?]*

[If there is wisdom and temperance in there, Nauta Melme, then bring it out as only you can.] Dysea chimed in now. *[The witch can no longer influence him.]*

"You are... you are speaking with your minds, aren't you?" Nitona asked causing Martin to look at her. "Just as the Oracle has told us you can."

Osrod looked at Nitona for a moment and then back to Martin. "Is this... is this true?" He asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Yes. It is a skill that all of our people have, but it needs to be nurtured and used all of the time or else, like many things in the past, it will be forgotten and then overshadowed by the instincts of our people." Martin got to his feet and moved to the one medium sized window in the room, staring out through the glass at the tops of the tall timber to the east of the base.

Osrod's eyes followed him and he took a deep breath. "Will you... will you conquer us now?" He asked keeping his voice level. "If this... if this is your plan then allow Nitona to return to her parents. She is innocent in..."

"Osrod, no!" Nitona exclaimed now. "My fate will be yours! I am your wife and mate! I will not..."

Osrod looked at her intently. He reached up slowly and placed his fingers on her cheek. "I wish no harm to come to you, Nitona. You are... you are the single point of brightness in my life and I will not allow my stupidity to take that away."

Nitona shook her head vehemently. "I will not leave your side! I will not! This is where I want to be! With you! If that means death, then I will die with you! Where I belong!"

"Do you fear the unknown, Osrod Aspion?" Martin asked as he turned away from the window and caused Osrod and Nitona both to look at him.

"What do... what do you mean?" Osrod asked.

Martin looked at Aricia and saw her nod. He lifted his arm and tapped the small console on his forearm. "Avi?"

"Standing by."

Osrod watched as the dark-skinned woman got to her feet. "I have another session with this woman Sama before I file a complete report, Martin." Nayeca said. "Re'lon is going to join me on this one."

Martin nodded his head. "Thank you, Nubian." He told her as she walked around in front of him.

Nayeca leaned up and kissed his cheek gently. "*Saan bruard hote sali.*" Nayeca told him.

(Blood before all else)

Martin smiled. "*Saan bruard hote sali.*" He echoed her words and then Nayeca moved for the door.

"Avi... execute!" Martin said.

There were four bright flashes of orange hued light and Martin, Aricia, Osrod and Nitona disappeared from within the confines of the room. Doseb Athltin nodded his head in approval of what his *mandri* was going to do and he turned and headed out of the room now as well. The two *Durcunusaan*, both of them temporarily assigned to Doseb until more *Hippies Sedla* could be deployed from Earth, turned as well and followed their charge out of the room. Their King was no longer taking chances with the lives of the family he was discovering. Doseb and Irani's other five children now had *Durcunusaan* protection, as well as Loras and her children from Warim Ranev. Irani Athltin now had two *Durcunusaan* assigned to her wherever she went, though she had a lengthy rant about not wanting any protection.

A rant that fell on Martin's deaf ears.

PAKAR SIX

Kesas Pengot stood in the doorway of the medical center and stared at the broad back of Lylor Kirek.

The strongest and most powerful Alpha among the Kirek Pack, Lylor Kirek was not a man to be trifled with even before he had claimed Kelia Mahanlo and they had become *Anomes*. He became even fiercer once the Mahanlo blood flowed within him, and his devotion to Kelia was absolute. He had stepped in immediately once his father and mother had been killed during the war with the Iais'Kai. He and Kelia had kept the Kirek Pack on the path his parents had laid for them with their deeds and then their sacrifice. Through the many years of the war with the Iais'Kai, Lylor Kirek came into his own and he was considered one of the foremost warriors and tacticians among their people. Some of the more humorous moments during that dark time had been Daniho and Ashten making fun of their sister and how tiny she was compared to her mate and husband.

Lylor Kirek had lost all of his siblings in the war except for Aryera and she now stood beside him, her eyes red from tears of joy, but now dry as she rested her hand on Lylor's right shoulder. Kesas Pengot stared at the Mahanlo Bloodline Crest that now resided on Lylor's left shoulder, so prominent and bold in what it said. Part of Kesas Pengot still could not believe that it was true, but his eyes were not lying to him. He held the data pads in his hands, even the very latest one which Chiron had sent only this morning. The true descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo wanted to speak with them. Their King. The Mahanlo bloodline on Jetania was finally secure, Sama and Roeza Arhtai were in custody and being interrogated. Much was happening on Jetania and Chiron had sent the last message saying to be prepared for the transmission a few hours after midday. Kesas was still trying to process it all to be honest. The dread he had always felt, fearing that he would wake one day and discover the deaths of Doseb and Irani Mahanlo, this fear was slowing drifting away now. He could almost see the light in the darkness as it was beginning to rise above the horizon.

The Mahanlo bloodline lived.

Kesas Pengot had been accepted into their family without question or doubt. Daniho and Ashten had confided in him nearly all of their secrets and because of this Kesas Pengot had sworn an oath to them that he had held dearest to his heart since that time.

"Kesas?"

Kesas looked up and saw that Lylor had risen to his feet now, his powerful six foot three body towering over his sister beside him. He had partially turned to face him and Kesas moved forward without question. Aryera watched with a smile as the two men embraced tightly. Aryera knew her brother considered Kesas to be like a second father to them. He had always looked out for them and offered his wisdom without hesitation. She watched her brother grip the back of Kesas' head and hold him close. Aryera also knew that it was Kesas Pengot who had saved her brother and what remained of the Mahanlo bloodline by his actions all those years ago. An action that Kesas still bore shame for even though there was none to bear.

Lylor Kirek pulled the older man's head back and stared at him. His blue eyes appeared moist, but no tears fell since the effects of the unusually long cryo sleep were still wearing off.

"You... you look the same old man." Lylor spoke with a smile.

Kesas chuckled and gripped Lylor's shoulders tightly. "I will remind Acki that you said that." He spoke.

"Acki?" Lylor asked looking between him and Aryera. "Who is Acki?"

Kesas nodded his head at Lylor's confusion. "There is much we need to tell you, Lylor Kirek."

“Where... where is Kelia?” Lylor asked now. “Our children? Why are they not here? If you have woken me, then the Arhtai Pack is gone now. You have regained control of...” Lylor stopped talking and looked intently at Kesas. His eyes went to his sister. “Aryera... what is going on?”

“Kesas is right Lylor.” Aryera said. “There is much we need to tell you.”

“The cryo sleep may have distorted my senses but I can tell that you are... that you are frightened.” Lylor spoke. “I can smell that much. Both of you. What is going on?”

Aryera took her brother’s arm. “Sit down *fervon*.” She spoke. “*Reyna*.” (Please)

SPARTA'S WRATH

It was almost too much to take in.

Osrod Aspion had never felt so small in all of his life. He had never felt so weak.

The bright, orange hued light had vanished leaving them in what could only be some sort of massive hanger deck. Osrod knew instantly that they were on a ship, he had been aboard enough of them to know, but this ship, it was the most incredible thing he had ever seen in all of his life. As Nitona clutched him in fear, Osrod had seen ships the likes of which he could never have imagined, stretching as far as his eyes could see. He saw hundreds and hundreds of crew members moving back and forth between these ships. He saw species that he had never seen before, some with reptilian skin, some with feathers of some kind all over their bodies, tall, short, without hair, with hair. It was utterly fascinating. Osrod had finally turned to look at Martin with wide eyes.

“This is your ship?” He gasped.

Martin had shaken his head. “This is my son’s ship. My first-born son, Androcles. Pretty impressive huh?”

“Why... why show me this if you are going to kill me?” Osrod had stammered feeling Nitona squeeze him tighter. He saw this Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas smile.

“Osrod Aspion, if I had wanted you dead, trust me you would be dead.” Martin had told him. The way he had spoken those words, so coldly and confidently, it had sent a chill of fear down Osrod’s spine, something that he had never felt before. “I brought you up here to show you some things. To talk. You are quite safe. Nitona can go with Aricia, I give you my word that nothing will happen to her. My Queens will keep her safe.”

Osrod had turned then and watched as three other women had walked up to where they stood. All of them were stunningly beautiful, their scents and female auras more powerful than any female wolf he had ever tasted. One had platinum blond colored hair and the same four-inch-high ears that he had seen on others on the surface. She was not fully wolf, but the wolf blood within her was purer than any he had ever smelled. The same blood as he smelled in the Queen, Aricia. The other two had long, dark hair, one who was only half wolf, the other something he had never smelled before. They greeted this Queen Aricia with deep kisses and hugs that Osrod knew were reserved for lovers and mates. It was then that he realized from their scents that they were just as deeply mingled with each other as they were with this man who had brought him and Nitona here. He watched as they greeted Martin in the same way, and how he nuzzled each of them.

He looked at Martin as the Queen Aricia introduced Nitona to the others, Dysea, Isabella and Cirith.

“Why have... why have you brought us here?” He asked.

Martin motioned with his hand. “Let’s take a walk.” He had told him. “There are some things I want to show you. I think you might find them interesting.”

Interesting.

That was a word Osrod Aspion would not have used to describe what he had seen over the last three hours.

He stood now in some sort of lounge, standing before the spectacular wall-sized view window, staring out at the hundreds of ships that now filled the system, all of them positioned around the Command Station for Coalition forces. Dozens of different species filled the lounge area, some sitting at tables, some at the counter. Some were eating and laughing, others having quiet conversations. Many looked at him oddly, but not one of them looked at him with any sort of hostility in their eyes. What he had seen on this ship was beyond anything

he had ever dreamed of for COLS. Beyond anything that his father had ever dreamed or spoken of. They had walked within this ship for three hours and not once had Osrod been disinterested or bored. He had seen men and women training in massive gym areas. Spartans, Martin Leonidas had called them. Some wore strange armor, some in simple clothes, but all of them trained hard and fast. There was no joking nor fooling around that he could see. Whoever these men and women were, they took their training seriously. And without hesitation, Osrod decided that they were the deadliest men and women he had ever seen.

Men took orders from females without question, though he could see no rank worn by anyone. All of them bowed their heads to Martin as he passed, and he even stopped to chat with many of them. He knew many of them by their names. He asked of their families and their children. The one thing he could smell in all of them was the devotion to their duties and to the man he walked with.

The technology was unlike anything Osrod had ever seen before. Martin showed him the position of every COLS ship in the sector and even some that were beyond the planetary system of Jetania. As they walked, he had told him things that were beyond Osrod's comprehension and belief. Wild stories of battles fought and the history of their people dating back to a planet that Osrod had long believed to be a myth and legend. Not once did he speak down to Osrod in any way, and he answered every question Osrod asked of him. What he was seeing was so totally incredible, Osrod did not bother asking questions about ships and power. Those were things he could see for himself. Osrod wanted to know what his father never did; what his grandfather never knew. Each step forward on this ship began to reshape Osrod Aspion in a way that he could never have imagined.

He turned away from the view window when he smelled him come back next to him with two long necked bottles with some kind of liquid in them. Martin held one out to him. "You don't strike me as a Spartan wine type of person." He said as Osrod took the bottle. It was ice cold and Osrod could smell the barley within the liquid. "This is what we call beer. Served the way it should be served, ice cold."

Osrod watched him lift the bottle and take a long pull of the yellowish liquid. He had already decided that his words when they first came on board rang true. If this man had wanted him dead, he would be dead. Nothing Osrod could have done would have prevented that. This man had an Alpha wolf aura of power and confidence that Osrod could never achieve. He lifted the bottle and took a sip of the liquid, his eyes opening wide at the smooth flavor and richness of the liquid. Martin saw his look and smiled.

"Pretty good huh?" Martin said. "My son Androcles had the Brew Master back on Earth make enough for a good six months. We only drink it on special occasions. It's call Corona Lager beer and it came from a country on Earth called Mexico a very long time ago. It's pretty good, isn't it?"

Osrod took another pull from the beer and nodded his head quickly. "I have... I have never tasted such a thing." He spoke.

Martin held out the data pad to him. "I had my people run some tests on you and Nitona when you came onboard." He said. "Our medical equipment allows this type of thing without actually having to touch you."

Osrod looked at the pad and then back to him. "What tests?" He asked. "We are not sick!"

Martin shook his head. "Not those kinds of tests." He replied. "Your bloodline. Aspion may be your Pack name now, but you are descended from the Drarr Pack, just like I thought. You, your father, your grandfather, you are descended directly from one of the original Packs that left our true homeworld and settled on Lycavore." Martin told him. "Nitona appears to be descended from the Olere Pack."

Osrod glanced at the pad once more and then back to Martin. "This is significant?" He asked.

"The information I have says that the Drarr Pack were honorable warriors and in some cases exceptional scholars." Martin told him. "They believed deeply in tradition and culture. They were also naturally drawn to those of the Olere Pack, even on Lycavore. The Olere Pack were made up of mainly of doctors, scientists and researchers. They worked closely with the Domara Pack to improve life for our people. It also explains why you have the feelings you do for Nitona."

"What?" Osrod asked.

"The Drarr and Olere Packs were among the first to begin intermingling when they arrived on Lycavore. They had an affinity for each other according to my information. That is why Nitona tickles your senses far more than any other."

"I thought it was... I thought it was because she was half Mountain Pack." Osrod spoke softly.

Martin nodded his head. "That's true as well. The Alphas, the Mountain Packs as you call them now, those that your grandfather took from Ventori, most of them were from the Drarr and Olere Packs. If I had to guess, I say that is why Nitona's mother would not leave her father once they found each other." Martin looked at him. "You love her, don't you? I mean really, truly love her. You can't really deny it since your scent spikes just as much as hers does when she is in the same room as you."

Osrod turned and looked out the view window. "She is the only one that I chose for... that I wanted for myself." He said softly. "The others were... they were all arranged by my father."

"Except Loras." Martin said.

Osrod glanced at him quickly and then back out the window as he shook his head. "That was me being an *igord*." He finally said. "She was... she was intoxicating. It was a fool thing to do because it set back relations between the Plains and the Mountain Packs for decades. I only realized it when it was too late."

"And that's why you released her?" Martin asked.

Osrod nodded his head. "It was... it was my way to try and repair what I had done." He said.

"Why take credit for the assassination of Warim Ranev when it was Sama Arhtai who actually ordered it?" Martin asked him.

Osrod looked at him. "I never wanted Warim Ranev killed!" He spoke quickly. "I knew I could actually work with Warim and his brother Garget. They were the most open and forward thinking of the Mountain Packs. When Secha... Sama... whatever she calls herself, when she told me what she had done, I was enraged, but what was I to do? I had to take credit, at least behind the scenes, or I would look weak to our people. It was foolish, but if I had not, that would have caused far more problems in the long run."

"And Lazar? He believed it was you who ordered the assassination. Why let him think this?" Martin said.

Osrod nodded his head. "It was better that he believed this, for Secha did not care for him in the least and she made this very clear. She was a *upaee* to him whenever she had the chance. She turned all of my children with her, with the others, against me, but with Lazar it was more intense. More focused. Now, I know why it seems."

"Because she knew Loras was still alive." Martin said with a nod. "And she never told you?"

Osrod shook his head. "She never admitted this to me but I began to suspect when things began to change among the Mountain Packs. They came together like no other time in our history. I never had any real proof however, but part of me was... I was happy if that was the case, though I knew she hated me more than anyone." Osrod looked at him. "What does it matter now? I assume you brought me up here for a reason. To show me that I cannot stand against you. You are going to remove me."

Martin took a swig from his beer and shook his head. "No." He said.

Osrod's eyes grew a little wider. "Your ships. Your ground forces. You fight beside *sinuovas*! Beasts from mythical legend! We can not stand against that! They could sweep aside everything I have in a single day."

"More like twelve hours, but that is not why I brought you up here." Martin told him without emotion. "I would be careful about calling dragons beasts, however. They are sentient life forms and in some cases, they are far smarter than we are. They have a seat on the Union's Senate and take part in the Union just as everyone does."

"Then why did you bring me up here, if not to show me that I am nothing?" Osrod asked. "You could have blotted all we that have from the stars in a matter of hours yet you have not. Why?"

"The future." Martin said.

"The future?" Osrod echoed his words.

Martin nodded his head. "You are not what you want everyone around you to believe Osrod Aspion." He said. "Your treatment of Nitona is the biggest sign of that."

Osrod was silent once more and he turned back to look out the view window. "She is the single point of light in the darkness that surrounds me." He said finally. "Everyone... they all want something from me. Power. Influence. Wealth. Nitona is... she is the only one who wants just me. Nothing else. Just me."

Martin nodded his head. "Yes... I know that feeling well." He said. "You have done some seriously stupid things while you have been playing King." Martin saw Osrod turn to look at him and he held up his hand. "But so, so have I." He finished. Martin moved closer to him. "I am not the conquering type Osrod."

“You... you are the *Mard Revik*.” Osrod spoke. “I am not so foolish as to not know that now. I have never believed it until this day, I always thought it was just myth and legend, yet everything the Oracle preached is true. It is happening now.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “If you knew how much I hate hearing that, you would probably laugh.”

Osrod turned away again. “I know this feeling as well.” He said softly.

“Why didn’t you?” Martin asked him now. “If what Garget tells me is the truth, and I have no reason to doubt him, you have had plenty of chances just to disappear. Why didn’t you?”

Osrod stared off through the view window for a long moment but Martin didn’t push him. “I wanted... I wanted to fix what my father and grandfather had broken.” Osrod finally replied, the words soft yet firm in conviction. “Because of that *yowa upaee* and her bewitching of me, I have only succeeded in making it worse. I am hated by so many. Those I wanted to make things better for, they hate me. Those who don’t care, they hate me. Those who want things to remain the same, they hate me.”

Martin nodded his head as he came up to stand beside Osrod. “I will give you that Osrod. Sama Arhtai certainly fucked things up something fierce with her little games. You were a pawn in that game. A game that was being played because of my bloodline. My family. In part, I guess I feel a little responsible because much of what you did was because of her manipulation of you. I don’t think you would have done those things of your own accord.”

Osrod looked at him. “You?!” He gasped. “How do you know it is not what I would have done?”

“Trust me when I tell you that things are a lot more complicated than you think.” Martin told him. “It gives me a colossal head ache just trying to sort it all out. And it’s not over yet, but that is not your concern. And I think the way I do because I have seen you with Nitona. I saw it in your surface thoughts when you thought I was going to kill you. All you were concerned about was her; that you would never see her again. That you would not have the children you have talked of with her. You are not the man that Sama Arhtai has made you believe you are Osrod Aspion.”

Osrod turned to fully face him. “What do you want of me?” He asked.

Martin met his eyes. “I want you to make things right.” He told him.

Osrod shook his head. “That is not... that is not possible.” He said.

“Why?” Martin asked him.

“Word will spread quickly, especially among the Mountain Packs, that you exist.” Osrod said. “That you are here on Jetania. Even many among the Plains Packs have believed in the prophecy inwardly when they did not show it outwardly. I will have no influence after that.”

“You will have the support of Garget and Lasun.” Martin said causing Osrod to look at him wide eyed.

“They would never support me.” He spoke quickly.

“Yes, they would.” Martin told him. “They have already told me as much.”

“But why?” Osrod gasped.

“Because like you, they know that civil war is never the answer.” Martin said softly. “For millions of years our people, Lycavorians, we have fought with each other over some of the stupidest things. Land. Politics. Even women. I am guilty of this just as much as anyone.”

“You?” Osrod gasped.

Martin nodded his head. “Right after I came to know who and what I really was, an enemy of my grandfather thought he would fulfill a blood oath he had against him by taking my *Anome*. My grandfather hurt his pride way back when, and he took it out on me. On one of the women that holds my heart and soul in their hands. It didn’t end well for him, or the empire he had built.”

“You... you destroyed it?” Osrod asked.

Martin nodded his head. “Right down to the nuts and bolts.” He answered. “Our people saw it as justified, what I did, I just wanted my Queen back and I wanted anyone who hurt her to suffer.” Martin looked at him. “My point is, we should not be fighting ourselves. We are wolves! We believe in our Packs and our families! Our people! We should be united and not squabbling with each other over stupid things like vengeance or oaths. There are far worse things in the universe that want to hurt us. Those are the things we need to focus on as a people. A species.” Martin stepped closer to him. “The Union is made up of over thirty trillion men, women and children...” Martin saw Osrod’s eyes go wide at this information. “We have over nine hundred different species among the Union, over nine hundred capital worlds and I can’t even tell you how

many colonies that we have. We are united under the same ideals. The same values. We have been since the Union's birth. There are those who don't like it, sure. They think they can do better, or they want things differently, and they have a voice, but the majority rules. Our people are healthy, happy, and no one wants for anything. There are wealthy men and women, families, but all of them give back to the whole. Well... most of them anyway."

"My Queen, Anja, she is half Hadarian. The healers within the Union. She is also the rightful Queen of her people and we will eventually have to go back and correct that." Martin saw the confusion in Osrod's eyes. "A different species within the Alpha Quadrant, one helped by my brother, they overthrew Anja's rule. They thought to get at me through her. They tried to kill me. They kidnapped my elven Queen For'mya and my brother raped her, thinking he could use the children she gave him to usurp me. It's a very long story, but the essential point is that there will always be someone who wants what you have. The question then comes down to this, what are you willing to do to protect it? To insure that your people, the ones who look to you for guidance, to ensure that they are not enslaved or butchered, what will you do? What will you change?"

"*Terit fervon?*" Osrod asked after a long moment. (Your brother?)

"*Jen ano nuhata tis jorbhe niob.*" Martin answered. "*Onskelmunt el jen ildsiss athvora duan cafna.*" (His soul resides in hell now. Punishment for his sins against our people.)

"*Forn?*" Osrod asked.

Martin shook his head. "*Aur keto.*" He said softly. "He did not want me to have the burden of killing my brother, my blood, on my hands. He took steps to make sure this did not happen." Martin shook his head. "This is not about me however, this is about you. You have done some stupid things in the past like I said, but so have I. We all have. Now is your chance to correct those mistakes and make things right. That is how you make people respect you. And if they respect you... then they will follow you. Right to the *nubous* edge."

"And those that don't?" Osrod asked.

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. "*Nubou* them. You aren't going to please everyone. You never will. But if it feels right in here..." Martin stabbed him in the chest over his heart with his finger. "Then that is what really matters. If it benefits all of our people, then that is what matters. And if you are good in here..." Martin pushed again on his chest over his heart. "Then when you love that beautiful female you have claimed, it will be that much sweeter and so much better. Because then, then you will have no regrets. And when you have no regrets... then you will be happy."

Osrod turned his head when the door to the lounge opened and he saw a beaming Nitona move through the large doors holding the hands of Aricia and the one he now knew was Dysea. They were laughing about something and her beautiful face turned to see him. She smiled brilliantly and broke away from them to dash across the lounge and nearly leaped into his arms. Osrod Aspion inhaled deeply of her sweet scent and felt his blood surge at the feel of her in his arms.

"Osrod my love, it is amazing what they have shown me!" Nitona gasped. "Things that we could have one day! For our people! For our children!"

Martin watched Osrod take her face in his large hands and kiss her then. He smiled as Aricia and Cirith came up on either side of him and pressed close to him. Dysea and Isabella on either side of them.

"I'm starving." Martin spoke now.

"You are always starving, Martin." Bella spoke with a smile.

Martin nodded his head. "True." He spoke. He looked at Osrod. "My son Fedor's wife and mate Iama, she is the best damn cook on this ship outside of my Queens." He spoke. "She'll be leaving us soon, but I want to get some of her food before she does. You hungry?"

Osrod looked at him and nodded his head. "Yes."

"Then it's settled." Martin spoke. "If my nose is telling the truth, I smell pizza!"

Nitona looked at him basking in the feel of Osrod's aura swarming around her and his arms holding her tight. "What is... what is pizza?"

"What is pizza?" Martin asked feigning shock. "*Carians*, Lady Nitona, let me tell you about pizza! We had better get the to the Mess Deck quickly though, because once my sons smell pizza, they'll be fighting the entire ship to get slices. Follow us!"

Osrod glanced out the view window one last time before he allowed Nitona to lead him out of the lounge. No regrets... Osrod thought to himself. Happiness. Children with Nitona. These are things that Osrod wanted.

Perhaps the *Mard Revik* was right.

PAKAR SIX

Lylor Kirek sat in the chair in the command center, visibly shaking in near uncontrollable rage. Aryera sat beside her brother. Only she, Yasha, Caylt, Marda and Tiag were in the room with Kesas and Lylor. Kesas had secretly moved Lylor into the room through an entrance only the most senior wolves among the Kirek Pack knew about. It was common for them to gather in the command center so it would not draw attention to what was happening if they had gathered for a meeting. Kesas knew the Arhtai Pack spies would have seen all of them gathered two days ago, and for that to happen again in so short a time would have drawn attention he did not want. They were using looped feeds in the main areas where they knew Blood Detectors were in order to hide the fact that they had woken Lylor, but no one knew exactly how many of the detectors were scattered over the planet or where they all were. Kesas guessed they had, at most, five days before those who watched the detectors realized that something was very wrong and they were watching the same looped feed over and over.

“You... you allowed this?” Lylor spoke in a voice that was anything but friendly as he finally turned and looked at Kesas where he sat. “You allowed this to happen!”

Aryera leaned back slightly in her chair when she heard the tone of his voice. “Lylor!” She gasped.

“It was the only way to stop the bloodshed.” Kesas answered him softly. “It was the only way to save what is left.”

“What is left!” Lylor roared as he came to his feet now, his dual fangs bursting forth and his eyes changing to those of his wolf persona. Bright white/blue wolf eyes. “My children are dead! My grandchildren are dead! My grandchildren’s grandchildren are dead! My *KertaGai* is lost to me! A prisoner of those *jyl ronnosi* who perpetrated this act! You gave them to her!” (Vile bastards)

“You, Pauin, Lient and Amori had already been captured! You had already been placed in cryo stasis!” Kesas hissed back at him. “Kelia, Ariso, Daiph and Delma were taken three years later! I gave them nothing! Kelia surrendered herself thinking she was going to save you Lylor Kirek! Yelma Arhtai threatened to kill all of you if she did not!”

“And you let her do this!” Lylor snarled at him.

“I let her do nothing! You, Daniho, Ashten and Lady Reva were the only ones who she would ever listen to! You know this as well as I!” Kesas answered him. “She and your children snuck from the mountain base we were using in the dark. We did not discover what she had done until that foul *upae* contacted me and told me. Kelia was beside her. She told me to end the fighting! She told me she could not live knowing you and your children had been killed because of her!”

Aryera looked at her brother. “It wasn’t until after she had Kelia, you and your children in stasis that she gave the order to kill all of us.” She spoke. “That is when the true killing began Lylor. We fought... we fought for centuries but their numbers were too great! We could not protect them all.”

“Ranol Nenay did nothing?” Lylor asked.

Aryera shook her head. “Yelma Arhtai spoke lies to everyone. She convinced them all that whoever had Mahanlo blood was infected with some disease none of us had ever heard of. We all knew it was a lie, and when Ranol and Gara Nenay began to question this, Yelma took their youngest children from them by force and held them hostage. She has kept their silence in the same way she has held us at bay. Under threat of death or worse.” Aryera told him. “Ranol vowed to never side with her against Mahanlo blood while she held his children, or for any reason, but what was he to do? She had taken his four youngest children Lylor! The Nenay Pack did not take part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*. Those of his pack that joined with the Arhtai Pack for whatever reason, Ranol exiled them instantly. Two of his own sons were among those that he exiled! The Nenay Pack saved many of our own pack mates Lylor! Hiding them, shielding them from Arhtai Death Squads through the many years.”

Lylor shook his head. “I find no solace in your words *arande*.” He spat viciously. “And less in yours Kesas Pengot! You were sworn to defend Mahanlo blood! To defend Kelia! Yet now my blood is gone and you sit there! Your children live, while ours lie dead!”

“Lylor that is quite enough!” Aryera snarled.

“No!” Lylor shouted. “I will hear no more! I will...” Kesas Pengot rose to his feet, his children following his motion. He trembled with anger and Lylor detected this, facing him fully and moving closer. “Do you wish to face me old man! Does your courage return after you have failed so miserably!”

“Lylor stop this!” Aryera barked now, coming to her feet.

“I will not!” Lylor screamed. “I want blood!”

Aryera stepped in front of her brother knowing he would not hurt her no matter what was happening. “Kesas go!” She said quickly. “Take Yasha and Caylt and go! Now!”

Kesas Pengot looked at Lylor from across the small distance that stood between them. “Since that day when Daniho honored me on Cerath by making me his *echan*, nothing has been more sacred to me than Mahanlo blood.” Kesas spoke softly. “I have lived my life in service to Mahanlo blood and I will die in service to Mahanlo blood. Nothing you do or say will ever change that.” (Advisor)

Kesas Pengot turned quickly and walked out of the room without uttering another word. Yasha and Caylt followed their father without hesitation.

“*Sukla!*” Lylor screamed. “*Sukla!* Go back to Arnela and hide!” (Coward)

Lylor turned back to his sister with wide eyes and that is when she struck him with the open-handed slap. Aryera Kirek was a powerful woman and fearless and the blow snapped Lylor’s head around painfully. His head bounced back quickly and he glared at his sister but was unable to stop the second slap that smashed across his opposite cheek with equal force and viciousness.

“*Forn nubous midaeu!*” Aryera screamed at him. “*Lia raya forn! Lia raya forn!*” (How dare you)

Lylor grabbed for her wrists to stop the third slap that he saw coming and Aryera’s fangs burst forth now and her eyes changed. “Do not strike me again sister!” He growled at her.

“What will you do *fervon?*” She snarled angrily completely unafraid of her much larger brother. “Will you strike your own blood now in your foolish rage!”

“Foolish? I am foolish!?” Lylor shouted pushing her hands away. “My beloved Kelia is...”

“Kelia is alive because of Kesas Pengot!” Aryera screamed at her brother. “Three of your children are alive because of Kesas Pengot Lylor! Mahanlo blood still lives because of that man! The Kirek Pack lives because of Kesas Pengot! In your anger to blame someone for what has taken place you have forgotten everything Kelia taught you! She would be ashamed to look upon you now brother! Our father and mother would be ashamed to look upon you! I am ashamed to look upon you! Daniho and Ashten would be ashamed to look upon you after what you have just done.”

“How can you...?” Lylor gasped. “It was his duty to safeguard Kelia and all Mahanlo blood! It was...”

Aryera slapped her brother once more, rocking his head back again, but this time he did not reach up to try and stop her, he only glared at her.

“Kesas Pengot is the one who planned and executed the mission to retrieve your cryo chambers Lylor! It was a dual mission. Arnela, his remaining four children and almost eighty of our Pack died trying to recover Kelia and your children that were being held with her! You were not in the same location or do you think Nyser Arhtai is so stupid?!” Aryera shouted. “They died trying to recover Kelia! All of them died! Kesas was seriously wounded! He could barely stand but he and his team succeeded. They returned with you! Arnela Pengot killed two of Yelma Arhtai’s foul offspring before they captured her. Then they raped, tortured and killed her like a dog in the street! They did the same to his four children! Kesas Pengot has more reason to hate them than any of us! They took everything from him! Everything!”

Aryera pushed her brother away from her as she turned her back to him to regain control of her own emotions. Marda stood up slowly unsure of what to do or say. “Mother?” She said softly seeing Lylor’s head move around to look at her surprised.

Aryera held up her hand and nodded to her youngest daughter. She turned back to Lylor and motioned to Marda. “Your youngest niece *fervon*.” She said. “Marda Kirek. She stands here this day because Kesas Pengot saved my life on that stinking *nubous* nightmare world!” Aryera stepped closer to him once more. “It was Kesas who led us after you and Kelia were taken! We could not risk removing you from stasis because of the Blood

detectors that she had placed everywhere on Koltar Four. For nearly half a millennium we fought! His only goal was to keep you and my nieces and nephew alive!” Aryera barked at him. “When Yelma and Nyser Arhtai figured out that they would be unable to keep what was truly happening quiet, she threatened to kill Kelia in her chamber if we did not cease the fighting! Five hundred years he led us, his heart crippled with despair because of what he had lost! He never gave up! Never!” Aryera lashed out once more and slapped her brother in the face even harder. Lylor did nothing this time and simply stood there.

“Yelma Arhtai finally told us that if we left Koltar Four, Kelia and your children would remain unharmed. She told us that if we returned the chambers of you and your three children to her that the Kirek Pack could leave. It took us forty-eight years to gather everyone in a safe area and leave Koltar Four, but we had been planning as well. On the last day as we were leaving, Yelma killed your children in their chambers because she discovered that Kesas Pengot had no intention of returning you and the others. He was actually planning an assault that would free Kelia and your remaining children as we left. Gara Nenay helped to discover this and had given the information to Kesas. When Yelma discovered this, she killed two of their children in their stasis chambers!” Aryera shook her head slowly. “Somehow the Arhtai Pack discovered this plan and Yelma killed your children *fervon*! Kesas practically went mad! In all my years Lylor, I have never seen that man so filled with unrequited rage.” Aryera stopped talking to reign in her emotions again as Lylor dropped his large body into the chair behind him, his face now a mask of disbelief.

Aryera was facing away from her brother when she began speaking again. “Kesas swore that day that he would see her burn in *jobhe* for her actions.” Aryera said as she turned back around. “She told us to keep your chambers but that if we ever woke you up, any of you, she would kill Kelia instantly. We were banished to Anlar Prime, but when she exiled the Nenay Pack for not siding with her five hundred years later, we were banished here to Pakar Six. She still holds two of Ranol and Gara’s children, just as she holds Kelia and the others.”

“Others?” Lylor gasped. “You mean...?”

“Do you honestly believe she is that stupid? She needed them!” Aryera said looking at her brother. “Almost two million years we have lived here Lylor! We can only have so many children because of resources, but Kesas Pengot has never let us forget who we are and where we come from and we have survived. And he has never forgotten the treachery of Yelma and Nyser Arhtai. Ever!”

“How...?” Lylor stammered.

“She seeded this world with blood detectors that she had made from the Onab technology we were supposed to destroy. Just like she did on Koltar Four and Anlar Prime.” Aryera told him. “And she has spies among us. Those who are playing the good husbands and mates to our females. We know who they are, all seven of them, only two have good hearts and that is because they have Nenay blood in them. We have learned how to trick the blood detectors for a time, but not entirely. We never had reason to test it before now. We have four days, perhaps five before they discover we have woken you.”

“Why... why have you awakened me then *arande*?” Lylor asked as he came to his feet again his eyes wide. “If waking me puts Kelia and the others at risk I...”

Aryera shoved the data pad at him. “Read this! We had to be sure.” She told him as he took the pad.

“Sure... sure of what?” Lylor demanded as he looked at the pad and began to read.

“That the Prophecy was coming true.” Aryera told him softly after giving him a moment to begin reading.

Lylor lifted his head and stared at her in disbelief. Aryera nodded her head slowly. “You see now. You are Kelia Mahanlo’s beloved mate *fervon*, her *Anome*, and you now bear the Prophesied Rebirth of the Crest of Mahanlo blood on your left shoulder. You bear the dual fangs of their bloodline within you as do your remaining children.”

“This... this cannot be true!” Lylor gasped aloud as he looked up from the pad once more. “Even... even Kelia believed them to be lost. Reva as well. It broke her heart when she could no longer feel them within her.”

“It is true *fervon*.” Aryera said. “Lady Reva, Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo have gone before us, this is true, but their bloodline continues in their descendants. The descendants of both brothers joined as one, just as the Onab Prophecy foretold it would be. We woke you *fervon*... we woke you to be sure ourselves.”

Lylor looked up from the pads once more. “Chiron!?” He almost shouted the word. “Chiron is with them?!”

Aryera nodded her head once more. “The Mahanlo Bloodline is returning to us brother. More powerful than it ever was before. The *Mard Revik* and his *Tarivuos* are returning to us with their *awran*. Our *awran*. The blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo! And when they do, the Arhtai Pack will feel the wrath of the Kirek and Mahanlo Packs once more. And we will have justice for the *Dremsa rie Saan* as only we can.”

JETANIA

“...Demand to speak to someone from my government!” Lorendo shouted at the closed steel door. “You cannot hold me here! I have been taken prisoner by unknown hostile forces and my government will compensate you for my release! Someone answer me damn it! I...”

Lorendo stopped shouting and backed up several paces as he heard the door beep and unlock and then it slid to the side. His eyes grew slightly wider when he saw the two, large men enter the cell, their sidearms trained on him. He backed up as far as he could until his legs came to rest against the crates he had slept on the night before. He watched as the third Lycavorian came into the room, his hands folded behind his back.

“Your constant yapping and mindless rants are becoming quite tedious.” Garget Ranev spoke as he came to a stop in front of him.

“Do you know who I am?!” Lorendo barked. “I am a Senior Elder of the Pralor Elder Convocation! I am a very important leader to my people! I can see to it that you become a very wealthy and powerful man if you release me this instant and give me a ship to leave this place.”

“*Vin coi ea nio ronrus coi atle vin coi.*” One of Garget’s men spoke, never lowering his weapon. (He is a fat bastard is what he is)

Garget chuckled softly as Lorendo looked at the man who had spoken and then back to Garget. “What did he say?” He demanded.

“He called you a fat bastard.” Garget spoke with a smirk. “And I know exactly who you are Elder Lorendo.”

Lorendo’s eyes grew wider at this. “I have never met you before.” Lorendo gasped.

Garget shook his head. “No, thankfully you have not met me before.” Garget answered his eyes changing and his fangs extending. “I did however, have the chance to have a rather lengthy conversation with Konlar and Edrao.”

Lorendo blinked several times and shifted on his feet. “I don’t know... I don’t know anyone by those names.” He stammered.

Garget smiled again. “Yes, Martin said you would say that. Knowing what you have done Elder Lorendo, if you had met me before this day, you would be nothing but a cooling pile of decomposing flesh right now. Bring him.” Garget ordered.

Lorendo could do nothing as the two Lycavorians swarmed over him, pulling a dark hood over his head and quickly securing his hands behind his back with flexible cuffs. Each of them took an arm as Garget turned and they began to lead him out of the room.

Delnash squeezed Martin’s shoulders in greeting, his face bright, relaxed and happy. “It is truly a pleasure to see you again Martin.” He spoke with a broad smile. “And under far better circumstances.”

Martin smiled and nodded his head. “Better for both our peoples.” He said.

Delnash nodded his head. “Indeed.” Delnash turned and motioned to Avatar 27. “You have never met 27.”

Martin shook his head and looked at the towering Avatar. “Two seven, good to finally meet you.”

Two Seven bowed his head slightly. “King Mahanlo-Leonidas.” He said.

Martin looked surprised and Delnash smiled. "I have shared everything with Two Seven that you have shared with me. Everything." He spoke. "The history... the history between our two peoples that you have discovered is enlightening to say the least."

Martin looked back to him and smiled slightly. "I'd say that is a bit of an understatement sir." He said.

Delnash nodded his head. "Yes, I suppose it is." He said. "Tinra has returned and she is doing segments over the next four evenings to give this information to our people. They have a right to know how tied together our species really are and how long that tie has existed. I will not keep anything from them anymore."

Martin nodded his head in accord. "My people are doing the same. Androcles' Public Relations Officer Dilaen Roan is coordinating it with our Netnews folks back home."

"Are you releasing everything?" Delnash asked.

Martin nodded his head. "As with you, they have a right to know their true history and what has brought us to this time now."

"Yes, they do." Delnash agreed. "Sashan and our senior military people have already transferred over to your ship to begin briefings. This man you left in charge on Honelze, this General Juturi. He is most efficient."

Martin nodded his head. "That he is."

"Where are Murano and Wayonn?" Delnash asked.

"They went to grab Anja and Danny." Martin told him. "They'll be along shortly."

Delnash looked at him. "You have a question then? I can see it in your eyes." He asked.

"Sir, you know about Kesyla." Martin said. "I just wanted you to know..."

Delnash shook his head quickly. "No." Delnash spoke. "In the times that I have spoken to my daughter, both my wife and I have seen the brightness in her eyes. The happiness on her face. That she has found this with your brother and she is now part of your people does not concern me. All I have ever wanted was for her to be happy."

Martin smiled and nodded his head. "They love her to death." He said.

Delnash smiled as well. "I know. That comes out in her voice whenever we speak to her."

"Your son?" Martin asked.

Delnash shook his head. "Daron is... his time with Lorendo corrupted him badly." He replied. "He is confined to a holding cell along with the others we picked up that supported Lorendo and his actions. I don't believe we got them all, but we arrested enough of them that the rest can do no real harm any longer."

"Just keep your guard up sir." Martin told him. "A dedicated fanatic can do a lot with very little."

Delnash nodded his head. "Lorendo showed me that." He replied. "We are taking no chances anymore."

"Good." Martin said. "If you need..."

The door slid aside and they turned as Murano entered with Anja and Wayonn came in with Danny, Nayeca and Re'lon right on his heels. The reunion was brief but very fulfilling for Delnash as he saw the life back in his brother's eyes and body language after so long. Martin watched with pleased eyes as he embraced Danny quickly and thanked him for loving his daughter. He and Wayonn shook hands firmly, the past quickly falling to the wayside where it belonged. Delnash bowed his head to Anja as he handed her the data pad while she tucked herself up against Martin's body.

"We did just as you instructed Anja." Delnash told her. "We used older, plasma based fusion warheads that we had in storage, but it accomplished what we needed them to do."

"Both of them are gone?" Anja asked him.

Delnash nodded his head. "Not even dust remains."

Anja nodded her head. "Good. It's for the best."

"I agree." Delnash spoke. "We will have to confer with Radra and yourself about this station over Hador and how best to eliminate the threat it poses to the planet below, but for now, we are ahead in this game."

"For once, finally." Anja said in agreement.

"Where is Lorendo?" Delnash asked again.

"Just about here." Martin answered. "He's done everything he could think of to bribe his way out of his position, but it hasn't worked."

"This does not surprise me." Delnash said. "What do you... what do you intend to do with him?"

"Me?" Martin asked surprised. "I thought you wanted him?"

Delnash shook his head. "The Elder Convocation met on this matter." Delnash spoke. "His actions have taken the lives of far more of your people than ours. It should be you who decides his fate, not us." He said softly. "And to be honest, I don't believe our system of justice could adequately punish him for what he has done." Delnash reached over to 27 and Martin watched while he held out the data pad to him. Delnash took it and turned back to Martin, holding out the pad. "Which brings me to another issue that we have discussed extensively and are in full agreement on. It is time to step from our past and begin our future, if we are to have one."

Martin took the pad. "What's this?"

Delnash took a deep breath. "The Official Petition of the Pralor people to become full members of the Lycavorian Union."

Martin's eyes nearly bugged out of his head. "What?!" He almost shouted. He detected similar reactions from Murano and Wayonn as well when he looked at them and he turned back to Delnash.

Delnash nodded his head. "It is sudden, I know, but it is what we want as a people." He told him. "Teniri and our Darastrixi brothers and sisters have already requested this, Martin. She asked me to give her a ship to take her personal representatives to Earth and petition your Union Senate on her behalf. I gave her that ship without question."

Martin shook his head. "She never told me. Teniri and the dragons with her are already part of the Union. Does Arzoal know?"

Delnash shook his head. "She wanted it to be a surprise for Arzoal as well." Delnash said with a smile as he looked at Wayonn and Murano now. "I only have to look at Wayonn and my brother to see that our future is deeply entwined with that of your people. All of your people. It is time we began acting like it. We have much to make up for... and I intend to see that we do."

"Delnash, this is not... you don't have to do this." Martin told him. "We would stand with you to defend Honelze and your other planets regardless. Our history is too..." Martin looked at him as he realized what he was going to say.

Delnash smiled and nodded his head. "You see..." He said. "Now you know why we are doing this. Our history together as two species dates back further than either of us ever would have imagined. As it was then, it will be again. And so much more."

"Delnash, we cannot offer you anything that you don't already have." Martin said.

"Yes, you can." Delnash told him. "You already have, Martin my friend." He said with a smile. "You have given us purpose once more. You have given us reason to come out of our self-imposed bubble and face what the galaxy throws at us without regret or worry. As we once did. You should see our people on Artaaya, Martin. Never have I seen them so energized and prepared to face each day without fear. As members of the Union, we can begin to do once more what we cherished as a people so long ago. Exploration and helping others. That is the wondrous gift you have given back to us. It is not something we want to lose ever again."

Martin stared at the pad in his hand for a long moment and he felt Anja squeeze his arm tightly. He looked down into her jade colored eyes and saw her nod her head. Within her he could feel his other Queens in total agreement. Martin didn't hesitate then and he turned back to Delnash. "Chief Elder Delnash, on behalf of the Lycavorian Union and all of her members, I accept. We would be very proud to have you as partners going forward."

Murano had not seen his brother smile so wide in more centuries than he could remember and he felt pride swell within his chest as he stepped up beside him with Wayonn. "For our future, brother." He said.

Delnash nodded his head with that smile still intact. "For our people."

Martin saw Danny reach up and touch his ear implant and he looked at Martin. "They're outside." He said.

Martin nodded his head and looked at Delnash. "Can you get him to talk?" Delnash asked.

Martin grinned broadly. "Oh... he'll talk. He might not remember any of it... but he'll talk."

Delnash smiled as the door opened and the two Lycavorians brought Lorendo into the room. He still wore the hood and they looked at Martin who motioned to the chair at the table. They ushered him forward and basically forced him to sit in the chair.

"I demand to speak to a representative of my people!" Lorendo screamed from under the hood. "Do you have any idea who I am?! I will see all of you pay dearly for this treatment of me. I..."

Danny shook his head as he reached up and yanked the hood off Lorendo's head. He lowered his head to shield himself from the bright light of the room and blinked several times before looking up directly into Delnash's eyes.

"Delnash!" He exclaimed.

"You wished to speak with a representative of our people, Lorendo." Delnash spoke. "Here I am."

Lorendo's eyes darted back and forth between Martin and Murano and Wayonn, and Martin could smell the fear building in him. "You!" Lorendo hissed staring at Martin finally.

"Nice to see you too, amoeba brain." Martin snapped as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"You did this?" Lorendo spat.

"Given your superior asshole attitude, I figured that you wouldn't have dealt with anyone outside of Konlar and Edrao, so I sent along some Spartan assistance to your nightmare palace. Just so you wouldn't recognize anyone by accident." Martin said. "Imagined how delighted I was when they told me you were coming for a visit. I told them to spare no expense in making you feel welcome. They were only too happy to oblige."

"I am an Elder of the Pralor Convocation!" Lorendo shouted. "You cannot..."

Delnash leaned across the table now and spread his hands out in front of him as he glared at him. "No Lorendo, you are not." He spoke menacingly. "Your status as an Elder of our people was stripped the moment your crimes came to light. You were lucky to make it off Artaaya before our people caught you, Lorendo. You would not have enjoyed what they would have done to you."

"Delnash... I can explain everything!" Lorendo gasped. "Everything I have done has been for the good of our people! I..."

"The good of our people!" Delnash snarled loudly as he lashed out and slapped Lorendo savagely across the face, rocking his head back and splitting his bottom lip with the force of the blow. "You have the blood of millions of our people on your hands! Millions of them! You have the blood of millions of Martin's people on your hands Lorendo! Millions! I cannot begin to imagine what other lives you have taken in your quest for power."

"I was trying to make our people strong again!" Lorendo barked out. "So, so that one day we could return and take our empire back from the Scourge!"

Delnash shook his head. "The Pralor Empire died the day our homeworld fell. There is no taking back something that no longer exists, Lorendo. You helped see to that as well."

"Lies!" Lorendo screamed. "Lies perpetrated by this animal!" Lorendo glared at Martin now.

Delnash held out his hand towards 27 once more and had another data pad placed in his palm. Delnash tossed it onto the table in front of him.

"I think not, Lorendo." Delnash spoke. "Do you know what is on this pad, Lorendo?" He asked him as he tapped the pad on the table. "Avatar 27 was most ingenious in discovering how deeply you had buried your sins. Your complicity in ordering false information to be given to Seed Mission 51187! This resulted in the deaths of the entire complements of three city ships and the partial complements of the remaining two! Your actions kept Sumar from training new Praetorians and returning to our people. With them... with them we may have been able to fight the Second Scourge War and save our people. You took that chance away from us with your personal vendetta. Only by the grace of the spirits within the Rift of Time do his grandsons now stand here with us. I will not relay to you all of your sins, Lorendo, for you already know them and it would only make me angrier than I already am."

"I demand a tribunal of our people!" Lorendo shouted.

Delnash shook his head again. "No. As Chief Elder of our people, I have labeled you a War Criminal, Lorendo. Just as Xaxon was a War Criminal. You no longer have any rights of any kind among our people." Martin saw Lorendo's eyes go wide at this information. "I wash my hands of your pathetic person and only have one piece of advice for you. Tell them everything you know, Lorendo. It will only make your death that much more painless."

"Never!" Lorendo screamed. "I will tell you nothing! You can't do this!"

Delnash shook his head as he stood back up. "It is already done." He said firmly. He looked at Martin. "He is yours now."

Martin smiled even wider now and his dual fangs extended to their full length. "I was really hoping you wouldn't cooperate." He spoke. "Red?"

Anja smiled and lifted her hand exposing the old fashion syringe. "I have been waiting a long time to use this." She stated with a wicked grin as her own fangs extended and her eyes changed. "It's been a lot of years since I used a syringe. I hope I don't kill you when I stick you."

"Stay away!" Lorendo screamed. "You can't do this! Stay away you, you crazy bitch!"

Anja laughed at him. "You haven't seen me crazy fatso! You're getting off easy." She spat.

Anja didn't hesitate for an instant and she moved right up next to Lorendo's chair and viciously grabbed a handful of his hair, yanking his head to the side. Lorendo could do nothing as Anja stabbed the needle into the meat of his thick neck and drove her thumb down on the plunger. She was not gentle when she pulled the syringe out and shoved his head away from her.

"Night, night, fat boy." Anja growled.

Delnash saw Lorendo's eyes glaze over almost instantly and he looked at Martin. "How long?" He asked.

Martin turned and looked at Re'lon. "Give us three hours." He spoke.

Nayeca nodded her head. "That will be enough."

Delnash nodded his head. "I would like to meet your children, Martin." Delnash said. "The descendants of Sumar have become quite popular on Artaaya now."

Martin nodded his head and took Anja's hand. "Then if you will follow us."

"King Martin?" Re'lon's voice stopped him and Martin turned to look at him. "How far do Nayeca and I press?"

"Everything, Re'lon." Martin said. "I want to know everything."

Re'lon nodded his head. "It shall be done."

PAKAR SIX COMMAND CENTER

Lylor Kirek moved into the Command center from the private entrance and was at once swarmed by Rothan Luas who embraced him tightly while the others watched. None of them knew Lylor Kirek personally, only by his reputation. Rothan Luas on the other hand, he had fought beside him for centuries. Even before they came to Koltar Four. They watched as the man they all viewed as legend embraced Rothan like a brother.

Lylor was still trying to process all Aryera had told him. A thirty-minute-long hot shower and being able to shave his heavily bearded face had returned much of his former energy and his body was recovering quickly now from the effects of such a long cryo stasis. His heart was very heavy though as he recalled everything that Aryera had told him. He longed for his beloved wife and mate, for only her aura had ever been able to comfort him. He and Kelia had arrived on Koltar Four with their six remaining children, their three oldest children having been killed in the final years of the *Zin Sarakoa Vyen Ils*. In fulfilment of their solemn promise to Reva, Daniho and Ashten, he and Kelia had set about rebuilding their bloodline. The Mahanlo and Kirek bloodlines had never been shy about their love of children or having them. Kelia had given birth to six more of their children within a hundred years of arriving on Koltar Four. His Kelia's scent was never more sweet to Lylor than when she was carrying his children. Their youngest, a bright blue-eyed daughter they had named Revia, after her *staania*. All six of their youngest children had taken mates before the *Dremsa rie Saan*, and like their older siblings, they had begun to have children quickly as well. While most of the marriages had been with the Nenay Pack, Revia, at the tender age of twenty-one, had accepted the courtship of a much older Alpha wolf from the Arhtai Pack. He was the youngest brother of Nyser Arhtai and had fought in the closing years of the war with the Iais'Kai. While Kelia and Lylor both had been very hesitant at first, their ultimate hope had been that this union would begin repairing the rift between their Packs.

Ivore Arhtai was nearly six hundred thousand years Revia's senior in age, but even Lylor had to admit that his devotion to their daughter had been absolute.

At least that is what they had believed.

Aryera could not tell him for certain, but Revia had not been heard from since the end of the *Dremsa rie Saan* and she was now listed as killed with all of the others of Mahanlo blood during that period. It had shaken him to his core to know that only three of their twelve children had survived. So many lives. So much blood. Grandchildren, Great Grandchildren, nieces and nephews, cousins, all gone now but for three. It had been so overwhelming that Lylor Kirek had broken down in the shower and done something he had never done before in his life.

He had cried his eyes out.

Lylor saw Kesas as he embraced Rothan and he knew what he had to do. He released Rothan after a brief moment and moved over to where Kesas stood. Those he now knew as Caylt and Yasha, Kesas' oldest children with his second wife, began to move forward to defend their father, but Lylor saw Aryera intercept them.

The Kirek Pack was second only to the Mahanlo Pack when it came to pureness of blood and physical size, and Lylor was no exception. His six foot three frame towered over Kesas' leaner five foot eleven body. Lylor looked at him for a long moment, Kesas not even meeting his eyes.

"Kesas?" Lylor finally spoke.

"You have said your piece, Lylor Kirek." Kesas hissed at him softly. "But you will not remove me from my sacred duty to the Mahanlo bloodline. You will have to kill me first."

Lylor shook his head slowly. "Kesas... I'm..." Lylor saw Kesas turn to look at him. "I am sorry, Kesas."

Kesas Pengot stared into those blue eyes for a long moment and in those eyes, he saw the same pain and agony that he himself knew so well. Pain and agony that only Acki had saved him from. Kesas knew Lylor Kirek to be a man of very few words, Kelia usually the one to speak for her husband and mate since they were *anomes*. He also knew that their love for each other was endless and to know that she was still among their vile enemies was nothing short of horrifying for Lylor. Kesas turned to face Lylor fully and he reached up and grabbed the side of Lylor's head. "You... you acted out of pain and anger, Lylor Kirek. These are emotions that are intimately known to me, young wolf, and I cannot hold them against you." Everyone was young in comparison to Kesas Pengot so Lylor didn't flinch at his words. Kesas reached up and placed his other hand on the opposite side of Lylor's head and he could see the tears forming in Lylor's eyes. He shook his head quickly. "Shed no more tears, Lylor Kirek. Believe me when I tell you I have shed enough tears for all of us that remain. This is not the time for tears, however. We will see justice done, Lylor, and you will have your beloved Kelia back in your arms. I swear this to you on the lives of my children. Now you must be the man you were during the *Zin Sarakoa Vyen Ils*. Warrior and leader of your Pack."

Lylor looked to the left and right as Caylt and Yasha moved up beside their father. His eyes went back to Kesas.

"My oldest with Acki. Caylt and Yasha." Kesas said.

"My apologies to you both." Lylor spoke softly. "I must..."

The insistent buzzing began from one of the nearby computer consoles and Caylt moved quickly to the station. His hands moved across the console and then he turned to his father with wide eyes.

"Father! Incoming transmission from unknown source!" Caylt barked out as he turned back to the console. "It is similar to the probe transmission in encryption and carrier wave but I cannot pinpoint the source!"

"**And you will not be able to trace it unless I wish it.**" The male voice erupted over the internal speakers within the room.

This caused everyone in the room to look around quickly in disbelief. All but Kesas Pengot as he moved closer to his son. He knew that voice. A voice from a past that he had left behind so many thousands of years ago.

"Chiron?" Kesas gasped out causing all of them to look at him with wide eyes.

"**Ah... Kesas Pengot.**" The voice spoke again and this time all of them could detect an inflection of satisfaction from that voice. "**It has been far too long, Kesas. Far too long.**"

"Chiron where are... how are you able to penetrate our COM channels so easily?" Kesas asked as he moved up beside his son.

“There are many questions that will be asked and answered.” Chiron responded. “Right now, however, are you within a secure location? And is Lylor Kirek with you. We know that you have woken him.”

Kesas looked at Lylor now, whose blue eyes were wide. “We are... we are in our secure Command Center. Yes, Lylor is here with us. So are Aryera Kirek, Rothan Luas and two of my children. Caylt and Yasha. Marda and Tiag Kirek are also present. Who is we, Chiron?”

Caylt shook his head and looked at his sister as she came up beside him. “I do not know how they have bypassed our Communication security protocols, *arande*. Not even the Arhtai Pack can do that.”

“**Kesas Pengot, do you remember what King Daniho told you of the Pralor people?**” Chiron asked him. “**How they had advanced their Etheric abilities to a point far beyond what our own people had at that time?**”

Kesas looked confused. “Chiron, what does that have to do with anything?” He asked. “Yes, I remember. I remember everything.”

“**Then I suggest you prepare yourselves. They will use their blood to focus and connect.**” Chiron said. There was a pause and then Chiron spoke again. “**Martin. Androcles. Whenever you are ready.**”

There was a brilliant flash of white light in the center of the room and they heard Lylor Kirek groan in slight pain and reach for his head, his eyes wide in disbelief. All of them stumbled back slightly as the burst of white light grew more intense and larger. Their eyes were also wide as Kesas reached for Lylor, grabbing his shoulders.

“Lylor, what...!?” Kesas stopped talking as it enveloped him as well and his eyes grew even wider.

The white light was twisting and turning as it began to clear and all of them could see three figures begin to take shape in the image. Life sized images of three men. Lylor staggered against Kesas now, reaching for the nearby table with one hand as his mind was flooded with images of places and events he had never seen. He gripped the table tightly, his other hand holding Kesas as the same images flashed through his own mind.

Lylor Kirek lifted his head as the images of the three men began to clear and focus. Lylor was Kelia’s beloved husband and her *Anome*, and because of her he carried Mahanlo blood within him now. And what Lylor Kirek felt reaching for him now, surrounding him, it was pure Mahanlo blood on a scale the likes of which he had not felt in millions of years. It was so raw and powerful and clear, and so very familiar. He watched as the images came into focus and then standing before all of them were the clear images of three men as if they were standing in the same room with them. Chiron, he recognized instantly, but the other two, they wore armor from head to toe and it hid most of their heads and faces except for thin slots for their eyes and a space for where their mouths were. It was armor that Lylor recognized almost instantly.

Lylor turned when he heard his sister gasp in disbelief. “Aryera?!”

“*Fervon... Lylor... he wears... he wears the Arwa rie vada Revik!*” Aryera exclaimed in utter incredulity. “The other one... he wears the *Arwa rie vada Tarivu!*”

“*Iadour un jar son aur staanio for Dadrien rie vada Dir.*” The larger one spoke now. (Given to us by my grandfather and Dadrien of the Mountain) They all watched as he turned his head slightly and spoke. “*Keto.*”

Martin and Andro both tilted their heads ever so slightly and they all watched as the armor surrounding their heads began to recede quickly, exposing their faces. It was Rothan Luas who summed up the feelings of everyone in the room as he dropped to his knees in an almost reverent manner.

“By all that we have ever held holy to our hearts!” He gasped out the words.

Lylor cared not that his blue eyes were now flowing with tears and nor did Kesas Pengot. They had gripped each other tightly and Lylor felt his sister come up beside him, taking his arm in her hands and squeezing almost painfully. Before them stood almost exact duplicates of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo.

Chiron stepped forward to the side of Androcles and their eyes focused on him. “Kesas Pengot, Lylor Kirek, I give to you the descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas, the True King of our people, and his first-born son Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas, First Herald of the *Mard Revik.*”

They watched as both Martin and Andro allowed the change to come over them and dual fangs extended from their upper gums, exposing themselves as one set of yellow/gold eyes and one set of the most fascinating azure blue eyes any of them had ever seen, staring back at them. Aryera Kirek could no longer contain herself and she burst into tears now as well.

“*Son vada carians!*” Rothan exclaimed as they all saw the massive wings extend from the armor they wore. Glittering wings encased in what could only be *Onkmeti Naami*, just as the rest of them were.

Martin stepped closer to where Lylor, Kesas and Aryera stood together, holding one another, but his yellow/gold wolf eyes were focused entirely on Lylor Kirek. Those eyes burned with an intensity that none of them had seen since they had been beside Daniho Mahanlo. It was then that all of them saw the single tear rolling down Martin’s tanned cheek. Their eyes grew wide at this and then they saw Androcles’ azure blue eyes and the tears that were streaming from those magnificent orbs of color.

“Oh uncle, if only you knew how I have longed for this day.” Martin spoke softly though all of them could hear his words. “All of my life I have... I have felt you within me. All of you. I have felt the call of my blood and did not know what it truly was. Now I do, *Tenne*. Now I know everything.”

“*Avoi.*” All of them heard Androcles speak from just behind his father.

“We are coming, *Tenne.*” Martin said again. “We have secured our blood here on Jetania. All of them.”

Lylor’s eyes were wide now. “Doseb! Irani!” He gasped.

Martin nodded his head. “They are safe. As are their children and their grandchildren. Your blood, uncle. And the blood of my *Tenna.*” Martin told him. “You are no longer alone. None of you are. We have Sama and Roeza Arhtai in our custody and we are questioning them even as we speak.” Martin told them as his eyes fell on Aryera for the briefest of moments, seeing her smile at him broadly. He looked back to Lylor then. “We are coming, *Tenne.* And we will put our family back together. I swear this to you on the blood that flows within my veins.”

“How... how soon can you...” Lylor stammered the words, still unable to believe this was actually happening.

“Three days.” Martin told him confidently.

“Three days!” Kesas gasped. “Jetania is... it took Doseb’s ship nearly six months to reach Ventori from here, even with Onab technology. Jetania is even further away.”

Martin nodded his head with a smile as he reached up and wiped away the tear from his cheek. “Let’s just say that we have discovered quite a bit in this last year. Three days. Right now, however, right now Androcles and I have to ask you some questions, *Tenne.* And you, Kesas Pengot.”

Kesas looked surprised. “Me, Milord?” He asked.

Martin tilted his head once more and looked at Kesas. “My son and I have a sense of what has happened Kesas Pengot given what we have learned from that *upae* Sama and her daughter.” Martin said. “I don’t want all of the answers that I have questions to right now, that can wait until we are there among all of you. You... you swore yourself to my grandfather and the Mahanlo bloodline all those many years ago, Kesas Pengot. You did not need to do this, but you did. If what I believe has happened has indeed taken place, then my bloodline survives because of you and the actions of those of the Kirek Pack who still remain. I intend to make things right Uncle. Androcles and I need... we need to know what we will be facing so that we can plan accordingly.” They watched Martin step closer to Lylor in the Etheric transmission.

“*Cerath coi bacj niob Tenne. Vada daanth rie toniru coi vinn’ jar.*” Martin spoke the words, seeing Lylor’s eyes grow wide. The tenor of his words was something that sent a chill down the spines of everyone in the room with them. (Cerath is gone now Uncle. The Time of Reckoning is upon us)

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

ANLAR PRIME

NENAY PACK COMPOUND

Ranol Nenay was nearing five million years old, yet his outward appearance, as with most Lycavorians, did not show his true age. His dark hair had only a few spots of gray in it, but his full beard and mustache, while somewhat unkempt, was now almost completely gray in color. Gara kept telling him it made him look distinguished and proud. His six foot three frame was still powerful and lean, though he had put on a few

pounds in the last ten years or so, which did not seem to bother Gara in the least since their passion in their bed was as intense as ever.

Ranol Nenay had assumed leadership of his Pack when his father and older brother had fallen against the Iais'Kai in the last thousand years of the war. He remembered vividly his father's last words to him... and this had shaped Ranol Nenay's life ever since.

“It falls now to you, Ranol my son. Honor our Pack, our people and our True King. Mahanlo blood has led us from the abyss and with my dying breath, I can see the light ahead for us. Stay strong and follow the path our King lays for us. I will see you in Vada Wayn aur keto. Stay strong for our Pack and our people. Never lose faith, for Mahanlo blood will never fail us as a people.”

Ranol Nenay had honored his father's words after that day. All but one time, and that time had almost destroyed his Pack. He had let his instincts as a father overrule all else, even the vow to his own father, and that had led to the most horrific time of his Pack since *Vada zin Sarakoa Vyen Ils*.

Vada Dremsa rie Saan.

The Night of Blood.

Ranol Nenay shook his head quickly, shaking those thoughts from his mind as he walked down the corridor holding the data pad in his hand. With his beloved Gara by his side, Ranol had snatched the honor of the Nenay Pack back from the dark abyss before all was lost and he reaffirmed his oath to his father's last request. This had caused Yelma Arhtai to banish his Pack here to Anlar Prime, but it had allowed them to keep their faith and their honor. They had built three great cities here on Anlar Prime and more smaller settlements across the surface of the planet than he could remember. Yelma Arhtai kept most of the Onab technology that they were supposed to destroy, but this suited Ranol just fine. He did not want something that was cursed with the blood of thousands. His Pack were not fools, and what they had built here they had built by sweat, blood, tears hard work just as their King Daniho Mahanlo had taught them so long ago.

Yelma Arhtai thought she was smarter than everyone else, but she did not know of the bond that the Nenay Pack now had with the Kirek Pack, or the spies within her own Pack that had sworn allegiance to Ranol at great danger to themselves. Yelma Arhtai was still holding several of the Mahanlo bloodline and his children prisoner, having killed Kelia Mahanlo long ago, but she was stupidly unaware that Kesas Pengot had given him the means to hide and protect four members of the Mahanlo bloodline that still lived here on Anlar Prime. Three of Kelia and Lylor's great granddaughters and one great grandson were mated to members of the Nenay Pack and had been for many hundreds of years now. Each of them were living full lives with children of their own, but they all held the wish that one day they would be able to free their *staanio*. They stayed in very close contact with Ranol and Gara through Ranol's own son Radend, who was mated to Taraina Mahanlo and devoted to her as deeply as Ranol was to his Gara. Their physical features had been surgically altered, just like Doseb and Irani Mahanlo and Kesas had given him the means to hide their true bloodline using something given to him by the Onab long ago. Ranol and Gara knew of Doseb and Irani but had been unable to aid Kesas in that plan because of their close proximity to Koltar Four and the many spies that Yelma Arhtai had among the Nenay Pack. He did not know what had come of that mission, but the less he knew, the less he could give to Yelma Arhtai if she ever came for him or his Pack.

Ranol Nenay was no fool, and he knew that she would come for them one day.

Ranol spoke with Aryera Kirek several times a year to exchange information that they had gathered and to give whatever aid that they could in order to ensure the Kirek Pack was able to survive and grow even on Pakar Six. They had also established a very secret and very effective underground network with the Kirek Pack through the years that Yelma Arhtai and her *ronnus* mate Nyser would never discover.

He had failed his King's bloodline once, but Ranol Nenay would ensure he never did so again. And he would die in order to preserve the Mahanlo bloodline, as sacred as it had become to him and his own Pack since the *Vada Dremsa rie Saan*.

Ranol turned as his oldest son Taion moved up beside his father as he walked along the upper level of the Nenay Compound. The courtyard below was already beginning to fill with the sounds of his grandchildren and great grandchildren as they began to gather with children of other Pack members for their day's schooling. The main Nenay Compound was where all of the children in the city of Oldiny came for their classes until they

were sixteen years of age. It was something that Gara insisted upon. Oldiny was their main city, and the largest in size, and the compound was full nearly every day with the voices and laughter of children. Gara Nenay ran nearly fifty classrooms within the main compound that taught their children the true history of their people well as the fine arts. Gara Nenay did not propagate the many lies that Yelma Arhtai preached from her lavish home on Koltar Four and most of the News channels from Koltar Four were now banned on Anlar Prime. Ranol did not keep his people from watching them, instead he allowed them to be broadcast so that his Pack could see the differences. It took only two hundred years before those News channels were publicly banned by referendum of the people. They were still watched of course, but no one believed the information coming from them anymore. The Nenay Main Family Compound was also the most heavily fortified and defended position in the city, and this is where the young and old would come were they ever to be attacked.

Taion Nenay was nearing three and a half million years of age, but he looked no more than fifty. He was almost an exact duplicate of his father in size and build, his green eyes bright and alert. Taion was his third oldest son, and the one Ranol relied upon most of all now. His two older sons had betrayed their Pack when they chose to side with the Arhtai Pack, and now they were no longer spoken of by name by anyone within their Pack. Taion and his wife and mate had thirteen beautiful children and Saymora remained at home caring for their fourteenth child. Tamore Nenay had joined them two months too early after a fall Saymora had suffered. He was still sickly even after two months, but Taion and Saymora were as devoted to him as they were to any of their children and they would see him grow proud and strong no matter what they had to do.

“*Keto...*” Ranol spoke. “You look puzzled.”

Taion looked at his father as they fell in beside one another. “I was reviewing the reports last night father. The activities and sensor logs from the Arhtai Command Monitoring Station in the North.” Taion spoke. “I came... I came across something that I found very odd.”

Ranol met his eyes. There were many among the Arhtai Pack who had not agreed with Yelma Arhtai’s actions during the Night of Blood or the years after during the Purge. Ranol knew many of the Arhtai Pack were still loyal to the Mahanlo bloodline in every way and held them in great reverence. They were scattered all over the planet, some of them in positions of great responsibility. They held to their beliefs even while acting differently among those they knew they could not trust. To even mention the Mahanlo bloodline now was cause for instant arrest and interrogation. Many that had been taken through the centuries were never heard from again. Yelma and Nyser Arhtai held power close to themselves, their immediate family and those loyal to them. Only the most senior Alphas among the Arhtai Pack were afforded any kind of real power and influence while the rest were looked down upon even if they were Arhtai Pack blood.

“What is that?”

Taion held out the data pad to his father. “The Northern Command station is the one tasked with monitoring the stasis pods of Lylor Kirek and his children with him. Those on Pakar Six.”

Ranol nodded his head. “Yes.”

“All activity is normal, except for this.” Taion pointed to the single power reading on the small screen that was slightly different than the others.

“What is this?” Ranol asked now as his heart began to beat a little faster.

“A interruption of the secondary power coupling to Lylor Kirek’s stasis pod for sixth tenths of a second, roughly thirty-six hours ago.” Taion told him. “Everything else is showing normal, and his is the only pod that was affected by this fluctuation.”

Ranol looked at his son. “I’m not following Taion? Why is this significant?”

“Look at the power stream father.” Taion told him.

Ranol looked at the pad once more and adjusted the screen. His eyes narrowed slightly as he saw the very subtle differences in the power flow after the interruption. He looked at his son. “The power variances differ by point three.” He said.

Taion nodded his head. “Every since they placed him in stasis, the power variances have never changed on the Main or Secondary Power streams. Not once. Until now.”

“What are you suggesting?” Ranol asked him. “What could cause this?”

Taion shook his head. “Nothing normal father. I checked with sister this morning, before bringing this to you. You know the Onab designed each of the stasis pods to act independently and to switch to the Secondary Power core if the main ever failed, especially while we were in transient from Cerath?”

Ranol nodded his head. “Yes... ok.”

“The power variance of the Secondary Core was never meant to change or fluctuate. It had to remain constant in order to activate should the Main Core ever cease.” Taion told him.

Ranol looked back to the pad. His daughter Liita was perhaps the most knowledgeable and experienced engineer within the Nenay Pack. She was brilliant to be honest, and one of only a handful that could actually labor on the Onab technology and keep it working even after so long. Yelma Arhtai needed her assistance in this and it was another reason why she did not move against the Nenay Pack, though the time was coming when they would no longer need Liita’s help as more and more of the Arhtai Pack became efficient in maintaining the old Onab technology.

“What exactly are you saying *keto*?” Ranol asked.

“Someone bypassed the main power core of Lylor Kirek’s stasis pod.” Taion told him. “They bypassed it in such a way as to make it so the main power core is no longer the one controlling the pod’s operation, but it still appears to be, to anyone monitoring the controls.”

Ranol looked at him. “And why do this?” He asked.

Taion took the pad from his father. “Liita and I agree that the only reason for doing this is if you intended to open the stasis pod without anyone who was monitoring it knowing it had occurred. At least until a full systems check was done.” He answered. “Father... Kesas Pengot or someone of the Kirek Pack has woken Lylor Kirek.”

Ranol Nenay’s heart began to race out of control now but he stayed outwardly calm and stoic. “You and Liita are certain?” Ranol asked him.

Taion nodded his head. “She conferred with her personal engineering team father. All of them agreed.

“How long... how long before this is detected by Yelma Arhtai’s people Taion?” Ranol asked.

“A full systems check is the only way to determine this.” Taion spoke. “They only do full systems checks on Onab equipment every three months as you know. The Ialdo engineers are limited and they refuse to train more and there is nothing Yelma Arhtai can do about that. Their next check is in four days.”

“And our next contact with Aryera Kirek?” Ranol asked him though he already knew the answer.

“Not for another three months and twelve days.” Taion replied.

Ranol shook his head. “Kesas Pengot would not risk this Taion! He would not risk those of Mahanlo blood that Yelma Arhtai stills holds! Or your siblings! He swore this to me!” Ranol said. “He knows that *upae* would not hesitate to kill them if she discovered that he had woken Lylor or any of his children!”

“There is something else father.” Taion spoke. “The Blood Detectors she seeded on Pakar Six are the same ones she seeded all over Anlar Prime. Even we do not know where all of them are. None of them have gone into alarm mode.”

“They found a way to disrupt the Blood Detectors!” Ranol gasped.

Taion nodded his head. “We don’t know how or for how long, but it appears that way. Lylor Kirek was Lady Kelia’s mate and *Anome*. He would carry her blood within him because of this and outside of King Daniho, Lord Ashten and Lady Reva, there is no other blood as pure as Lylor Kirek. If the Blood Detectors have not gone off, then they have found a way to defeat them. At least temporarily.”

Ranol looked at his son his eyes wide. “Gather your mother and meet me in the Secure Communications Bunker Taion.” He spoke. “Kesas Pengot would not risk this unless something is happening! He has never broken a promise to anyone about anything. He swore to me he would do nothing without informing me first. Something has happened that causes him to do this and we must find out what it is.”

“You intend to contact her using the emergency frequency?” Taion asked.

Ranol nodded his head. “We have no choice now.” He spoke. “Quickly now! Retrieve your mother and meet me at the bunker!”

PAKAR SIX COMMAND CENTER

“...Cannot wake Pauin, Lient or Amori.” Kesas spoke as they all sat in the Command Center once more.

When the transmission with Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas and his oldest son had ended, all of them needed time to compose themselves. The Etheric connection, as they now knew it to be called, this alone had taken its toll on all of them in its near four-hour length. Martin had told them the throbbing in their heads would subside quickly, but the connection with him and his son Androcles would still be active in the background now. It would also stimulate the Etheric abilities that they all naturally had to the point that all of them would begin to be able to talk freely with their minds on a much higher level than they ever had before. A level that would enable them to not worry about any Arhtai spies hearing their words. What had shaken them more than anything was Martin and his son. Even Kesas and Lylor, who were closest to the twin brothers on Cerath, even they could not believe how close in looks and mannerisms Martin and his son were to Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo.

The table was now packed with trays of food and drink that they had all taken part of since the Etheric connection drained energy from them that only food could replace. It would not be like this always, Martin had told them, but initially they would need to eat to keep their strength up.

“Why?” Lylor asked looking at Kesas now.

“We built only one Bypass Coupling *fervon*.” Aryera answered him. “Any more and the Arhtai *sraaps* who monitor their equipment would detect it right away. One of you we could hide for a time, all of you we could not. And the Mahanlo proteins from the blood of all four of you being awakened at the same time we would not have been able to hide at all. We used the last of the Onab Blood Masking Protein on those that Ranol, Gara and the Nenay Pack guard and protect.”

“Who?” Lylor asked.

“Taraina is the oldest. She is the wife and mate to Ranol’s own son Radend.” Aryera told him. “Shyira, and Aquei are the next oldest and then there is Kabis.”

Lylor looked at his sister. “They are all the children of Sauí Kirek and our daughter Neca.” He said softly. “Neca had... Neca and Sauí had nineteen children! Taraina was their middle child! They had eight grandchildren! Are you saying... none of them...?”

Kesas shook his head slowly now. “No, my friend. They were... they were among the first to fall.”

“Pauin’s wife and mate? Their children?” Lylor pressed. “Amori and her mate had seven children Kesas! Lient and his wife nine children and...” Lylor stopped and took a deep breath as Aryera reached out and took his hand. He squeezed her slim fingers, holding back the rage that threatened to overwhelm him whenever he thought about his and Kelia’s children and grandchildren not being among them. Their great grandchildren. So many that...

“We are coming, Tenne. And we will put our family back together. I swear this to you on the blood that flows within my veins.”

Martin’s voice echoed softly in his head almost like a whisper and Lylor drew strength from this. The blood that flowed within his veins. The blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. Lylor knew that the brothers had adored their younger sister almost to the point of perverse devotion and if their blood flowed within Martin, within his own children, then Lylor knew they would have justice for all that had been lost.

Lylor finally turned to his sister. “They are safe?” He asked.

Aryera nodded her head. “They escaped to Anlar Prime with us but chose to remain when Yelma exiled the Kirek Pack here for they had all taken mates.”

“And the Nenay Pack protects them?” Lylor asked.

Kesas leaned forward in his chair now. “Ranol and Gara have shielded them for millennia Lylor.” He said quickly. “They have suffered as well... perhaps not as much as...”

Lylor held up his hand and shook his head just as quickly. “I trust in your word old friend. How could I not?” He said quickly. “And I cannot find fault with Ranol and Gara for being duped by Yelma Arhtai. She did it to all of us, even Kelia and I. And they have protected our blood all of this time.”

“I speak with them several times a year *fervon*.” Aryera told him. “They are happy and have many children between them. Yours and Kelia’s blood is not gone *fervon*, it is just... it is scattered.”

“No others?” Lylor asked softly.

Kesas shook his head now as he lowered his eyes to the table. “None that we know of.” He answered softly. “Without the Blood Masking Protein, they would not have been able to survive this long.”

Lylor felt the pulling of his heart and the sorrow and rage that wanted to crush his spirit but he felt Aryera reach out to grasp his arm once more and squeeze tightly. Then he felt Marda and his nephew Tiag do the same thing to him and he took a deep breath and nodded his head.

“You know what they will do when they arrive here don’t you?” Rothan spoke now. “I could almost... I could see it in their eyes.”

Kesas nodded his head as he sat back in his chair once more. “As did I Rothan. As did I. They are the combined blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo.” He said softly. “There is no purer blood among our kind anywhere in the universe except for Kelia.”

“The eyes of... their eyes frightened me.” Marda spoke as she settled in the chair beside her Uncle. “So, bright and focused. As if they have seen and experienced even more than you Lord Kesas. *Una tor brey ulyees jehar Vada Wayn.*” (It was like looking into The Beyond)

“They carry within them the wisdom and experiences of countless lifetimes because of their Lycavorian blood and now this Pralor blood in their veins.” Kesas said softly. Kesas shook his head slowly. “I have believed in the prophecy for so long, but this, I never expected this.”

“Eighteen children with six different Queens.” Rothan spoke shaking his head. “All of them with the blood of Daniho and Ashten within them. And his oldest son has six wives and mates and soon his *Anome*, this female Alpha Sadi of the Domara Pack, she will give birth to the reunification of our people. It is almost... it is almost too much to have hoped for and yet...”

“It is upon us.” Aryera said softly. She looked at Kesas. “Have you ever heard of one of our kind being born like he... like Androcles told us Kesas. Fully aware of everything around him even before he left his mother’s womb?”

Kesas shook his head. “Never in all my years. Perhaps it has something to do with this Pralor bloodline that is within them, it is the only thing I can think of.”

“Being bound to the Darastrix as they say that they are is almost too much to believe as well.” Rothan spoke again.

“Daniho was the only one of our people to ever be so close to them.” Kesas spoke. “It was almost as if he and Dadrien knew what each other was thinking.”

“The power that they could wield is...” Aryera spoke softly.

“It is immeasurable.” Kesas finished her statement.

“*Henes mien vada arwa rie vada Mard Revik for jen Tarivuos.*” Aryera spoke. “No one who is not of pure Mahanlo blood and descended from Daniho himself could ever wear this armor. We all know that. That is all the proof I need.” (They wear the armor of the true king and his heralds.)

“*Avoi.*” Rothan whispered as he nodded his head.

“They are also not telling us everything.” Lylor spoke softly looking up at Kesas.

Aryera looked at her brother. “*Fervon?* What do you mean?”

“*Henes intus nysilis draem bara.*” Lylor spoke. “Protecting something that is far more precious to them than anything else.” (They were holding something back)

Kesas Pengot nodded his head in agreement, inwardly thrilled that Lylor Kirek had lost none of the intuition that made him such an inspired leader. “Indeed, they were Lylor.” He agreed.

“A threat?” Rothan ventured. “Do they consider us a threat?”

Lylor shook his head quickly and straightened up in his chair. “No, never. In this... in this Etheric connection that we shared with them, I could feel the... I could feel the happiness and joy within them. I could feel the power of Daniho’s blood within them. Of Ashten’s blood. It was like their... it was like their very *anos* were crying out in bliss. Even then, they were holding something back though. Protecting something that their blood, something that their blood demanded of them. It was there... I could almost feel it within me... familiar somehow, but then it was gone. Their resonance blocked everything.”

“I felt it too.” Kesas spoke softly looking at Lylor. “It was like a seamless wall of utter blackness came down and it was gone.”

Lylor nodded his head in agreement. “I will have my beloved Kelia back within my arms soon.” He spoke. “And we will have justice for what the Arhtai Pack has done. I have... I have waited for almost two million years. I can wait a few days more until those descended from her brothers come for her. And they will come, just as they have said. I could feel that within them as well. And the...”

“The rage.” Kesas said. “Rage at what they believe has taken place. Did you notice that neither of them asked how many...?”

“Neither of them asked how many had fallen.” Aryera spoke now.

Kesas nodded his head. “They... they fear the answer.” He said softly. “Lylor is correct. They are protecting something, but I could also, I could also sense something else. A sense of Pack and love for our people that I have not felt since the days that I stood beside Daniho and Ashten themselves. It is... it is empowering.” He reached out and tapped one of the data pads that rested on the table. “While we gathered our wits after this Etheric connection that they established with us, I had Caylt and Yasha go over some of the information that Chiron sent to us while we talked with them.” Kesas turned to his son who had sat by his sister and so far, had kept silent. “Caylt?”

Caylt shifted in his chair and reached for the pad that his father was touching and picked it up. “Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas is the King of what they call the United Lycavorian Union.” Caylt spoke. “At last count for them, they had 900 different species, and over thirty-two trillion citizens, of which at least a full quarter are our people. Lycavorians. They are the descendants of the packs that left Cerath with King Daniho and Lord Ashten.”

“*Carians*.” Aryera gasped. “So many.”

“This United Lycavorian Union is vast and he leads what Chiron calls Spartans.” Caylt continued.

“Spartans?” Rothan asked now.

Caylt nodded his head quickly, obviously very excited about what he was speaking about. “They are named for a group of ancient warriors that the King’s father led while he lived some four thousand years ago. They are fierce, powerful warriors and they are feared for their skill and abilities. Chiron’s data said we would be getting much more detailed information once they arrived, but what he sent, while short on details, is astonishing to say the least.” Caylt spoke. “These Spartans, their training is severe and brutal, their ground forces are massive, as are their fleets of ships. Many of the species within their Union are involved in the military in some way, but only half a dozen or so species do the actual fighting when called upon, though all of them will defend what they have built if pressed to that point. Their logistic and support apparatus is unlike anything Chiron has ever seen before. It is more than triple what our people had at our height on Cerath.”

“*Sibfla!*” Rothan gasped now.

Caylt smiled at this comment. “That is what I said as well, sir.” He commented. “These Spartans... according to Chiron, there are several different kinds of warriors among them, but most of those with the King now are what they call *Durcunusaan*.”

Lylor looked at him. “Wolves of the Blood.” He spoke.

Caylt nodded his head. “Not all of them are pure Lycavorians, there appear to be many who are only half Lycavorian, and even other species entirely, but each of them are trained and mentally prepared to eliminate at least twenty of the enemy before they fall. They are also fanatically loyal to the King and his family. Since discovering what they have in the last year, Chiron says they have begun using the name Mahanlo-Leonidas. Leonidas was the name of the King’s father and he is revered among their people much like King Daniho and Lord Ashten. Their people do not yet know all that they have discovered since leaving their homes, but they will soon. Their government is a Republic of sorts. He is the King but they have a Senate and civilian control of most aspects of their society.”

“Most?” Aryera asked.

Caylt nodded his head. “The King commands the military and while they are technically under the control of this Union Senate, they will not act without his word or order. The United Lycavorian Union is very wealthy and has active trading corridors with dozens of other species within the Alpha Quadrant where they are found. They have many allies that are not officially part of this Union, but they also have enemies. None of whom are able to face them in force and win.”

“Truly?” Rothan asked.

“I did not dig too deeply into what details Chiron sent because of time, but according to what I did read, they have had many conflicts in their history. Large and small. None of which they started.”

“But?” Rothan pressed him.

Caylt met his eyes. “They have lost battles, but they have never lost a war. Ever.” He said with an almost perverse glee in his voice that everyone detected. “The King’s oldest son, the one with him in the

connection, Androcles, he is considered an almost exact duplicate of his father in every way. It was he who ended their longest war, some fourteen thousand years long given the information in Chiron's report. He ended it in a single day, before coming out here to join with his father."

"A day!?" Rothan gasped. "How do you end a war of that length in a day?!"

Caylt shook his head. "I do not know."

It was Lylor who chuckled softly. "I smell the blood of Daniho." He said.

"No doubt this is all information that Martin told Chiron to give to us while they spoke to us." Kesas said. "He wants us to know who is coming here. He wants us to know who is he."

"He is the *staaniketo* of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo!" Lylor spoke firmly. "I do not care how many generations separate us! He is the blood of our one true King; the King chosen by all of our people! He is my beloved Kelia's blood! The blood of her beloved brothers! He is the blood of Reva Mahanlo! Matriarch to us all!" Lylor spoke forcefully, his words filled with emotion. "That is all I need to know! They were the hope and saviors of our people once before. And they will be again. The Kirek Pack has always been beside them, and that is where we will be again!"

Aryera reached out and squeezed her brother's hand tightly. "*Avoi.*" She spoke.

"*For sy una rayd tur.*" Rothan agreed nodding his head. (And so it shall be.)

"*Niob for innyne.*" Kesas spoke with a nod. (Now and always)

Caylt's head turned when the COM panel in the center began to chirp loudly and he rose to go over to the large console. He adjusted the controls and his eyes grew wider. He turned quickly to look at his father.

"Father! It is the Nenay Pack Emergency channel!" Caylt hissed.

Kesas looked at Lylor who nodded his head. "*Vada Daanth rie Toniru coi vinn' jar.*" He said. "It is time our allies knew what we know." (The time of reckoning is upon us)

JETANIA

WARIM BASE LANDING PLATFORM

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas stood stoically, his hands clasped behind his back as he stared out at the horizon. He was getting use to the added name of his bloodline now, and it made him feel confident and powerful. His Queens had already begun to refer to themselves in this way as had his children and nearly all of the *Durcunusaan* now on the surface of Jetania. Martin had no doubts that this knowledge would spread quickly within the fleet and then beyond.

The dawn was just beginning to light the sky in the distance, but Martin could see the tops of the towering timber and the cloud covered mountain tops with his wolf eyes. *Vada Arwa rie vada Mard Revik* was fully deployed on his body except for his head and it reflected the soft light on the dimly lit platform eerily. Martin didn't turn his head or even blink when he smelled them approach from behind him and Androcles and Danny moved up on either side of him as Torma and Elynth landed gently to the left of him where Dorian, Laren, Ryner and Ladur were already waiting. Miath quickly followed suit, landing beside Torma.

"You sure you don't want to take a detachment Marty?" Danny asked him.

Martin shook his head. "Three keys to unlock the fourth." Martin said softly. "That is what is written on the wall of the Temple on Lorenu *fervon*. I'm guessing that it applies to this Temple. I guess we'll find out."

"And if it doesn't?" Danny asked.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Then we'll figure something else out."

"There is also the dampening field." Androcles said.

"Dampening field?" Danny questioned.

Martin nodded his head. "According to Nilantha, there is some sort of power dampening field around the top of this mountain that will cause any ship that comes close to lose all its systems. Only her transport had the proper frequency to enter and I don't want to waste time going to her ship and getting it. It's unlike anything that Chiron, Armen or Avi have ever seen but Chiron said it is based on Onab technology."

"He knew about it?" Danny asked.

Andro nodded now. "And the location of the other Temples as well. He just never knew about the security measures put in place by the Onab, *staanio* Sumar and Dadrien."

Danny shook his head. "Man... trying to figure those two out sounds a lot like trying to figure you out *fervon*." He spoke. "You just don't think normal."

Martin grinned at this and nodded his head. "Lucky me." He said. "Nilantha is also the only one who can open the outer door to this temple according to what Sumar and Dadrien told her. Apparently, that is how the Onab, Dadrien and *staanio* Sumar set it up. Whatever was in that temple is now on her ship. We can handle the altitude and weather that kept any interested parties away all of these years."

"I wish the Onab were still with us." Andro spoke now. "We could learn so much from them."

Martin nodded his head. "That we could." He said softly. "*Staanio* Daniho and *Staanio* Ashten obviously trusted them a lot more than we have been led to believe based on what Kesas told us. They gave him and only him the means to safeguard our bloodline. Not even *Tenne* Lylor or *Tenna* Kelia knew of this."

Danny was the only one Martin had told of his and Andro's conversation with Kesas Pengot, Lylor Kirek and the others. He was glad that none of his Queens had questioned him about it because he would not have been able to lie to them. They knew he would tell them when he was ready, as did Lu'ria and Carisia, so they did not question Androcles about it.

"How long do you think this will take?" Danny asked.

"I don't know *fervon*." Martin answered him. "I know there is something up there. I can feel it within me. All of us can."

"*Jainn*." Andro echoed his father.

Danny nodded his head without question. He knew that Martin and his *mandri* could feel and see things that others could not hope to experience. "Armen says the conversions will be done later today on the *ARIZONA* and they will start on the *PREMONITION* as soon as Sadi and Ne'Veha get back tonight. We should be ready to roll in two days, tops." Danny told him. "Sa'sur will follow one day later with a hundred ships."

Martin nodded his head. "I want one thousand volunteers with us Danny." Martin told him. "All with at least ten years of service and all with combat experience. And Josie Miller's Brigade of the 82nd. They have been in the shit with us more than the others and they work well with us. Have Sa'sur plot the most expedient course for her to Pakar Six. Go right through Kintaur Space too. I don't give a fuck about those no nut bullies. If they try to stop or harass her, have Sa'sur blow their ugly asses out of the stars and keep going."

Danny grinned. "She'll like that. I don't think she cares for them very much after they scratched the *SCIMITAR*'s paint job."

"No bet there." Andro said with a similar smile.

"Have the rest of the *Durcunusaan* RD deploy with her. We'll leave the rest of the 82nd here on Jetania for now with the ships that Miranda is leaving behind." Martin said.

"We'll be thin *fervon* out there." Danny said.

Martin nodded his head. "For what I intend, it will be enough." He answered. "I'm not going to jerk around with these fools. I'm going to get my Aunt back *fervon*. I'm putting my family back together, our family. And I'm going to make sure they are safe before I do anything else. What we are taking will be enough for a surgical mission to do this."

"*Avoi*." Andro said softly.

"That is the primary mission. I'll deal with these Arhtai scum and what they have done after we take care of the Svorag. That is the priority." Martin continued.

Danny put his hand on Martin's shoulder. "Just keep that in your head *fervon*." He said softly. "I can sense what both of you want to do. And when you tell Dorian and Laren, they will want to do the same thing. I already do. All of us will. If we do this, we do it right."

Martin nodded. "*For evell gur*." Martin said. (And we will)

Danny nodded his head. "Then I won't speak anymore about it." He said. "I'll contact Vistr and have him cut loose the full 1st and 9th CSAFG. With my 2nd CSAFG we'll be good." He said referring to Martin and Andro's primary commands. "They won't get here in time to help against the Svorag, but they can help us put a hurting on these Arhtai pukes."

Martin nodded his head. "Good enough."

"What about Osrod father?" Andro asked.

Martin shook his head. "We don't need to do anything there. He will do it himself." He answered. "I think he might surprise us all, but Garget and Lasun will be keeping an eye on him just in case."

"You know that Retta and Calyb will... they will not want to leave." Androcles told his father.

Martin nodded his head. "I know. I'm going to have to sell your mother on that, but I will not take them away from what they have found or force Lazar, Taris or Anoria to leave the only home they have ever known."

"What if they want to?" Danny asked.

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. "That's different, but we'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Danny nodded his head in approval. "Red is with Reva's chamber?" Danny asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Miath will carry Nilantha. Dynina, Jezima and my mother will be with Anja and Eliani when it happens so that *staania* has the support of those who love her. She will need it when we tell her what has happened. Deni and Deion will be there as well." He replied. "Dasha is going to be with Meral, Aricia and Dysea helping to spread out the supplies we are sending down and everyone else is going to be giving crash courses on the crates of Pralor weapons that we are leaving with Garget, Lasun and the Mountain Packs." Martin looked at the only man he had ever called brother. "Touch base with Vengal, Danny. I want as many *Hippeis Selda* as he can gather and deploy. If they are within a reasonable amount of time from graduating I want them here. We got too many enemies out here right now, and I'm not taking any chances. And have Armetus send me a couple of his best. Anton, Cihera and Las'elh will be too busy with Fedor and Eirene."

"Done." Danny spoke.

They all turned as Sarlana and Nilantha came out of the interior of the base and began making their way across the tarmac. Danny squeezed Martin's arm and pounded Andro on the shoulder. "I'll get to work. Take pictures." He said with his trademark smile as he turned and moved off.

Dorian and Laren moved up to where they stood as Sarlana and Nilantha came up to them.

Nilantha bowed her head to Martin. "My King." She spoke.

Martin looked at her surprised. "Nilantha, I am not your King." He told her. "You are Darastrixi."

Nilantha shook her head. "The moment Dadrien of the Mountain and Lord Sumar gave me this mission, I became one of your people. Darastrixi I may be, but I have been among your people for longer than I have been among my own. I may not have Lycavorian blood within me, but I am Lycavorian in my nature now."

Martin nodded his head. "Then you should know that those I consider family do not refer to me by anything but my name." He told her seeing her eyes go wide.

Sarlana chuckled softly. "I did try to tell her." She spoke. "Like all young ones, she did not listen to me."

Dorian chortled in the twilight sky. "*Doraanar*, you are not much older than Nilantha." He said.

"Watch yourself young *Dahakoan*." Sarlana retorted back to him. "I have already been given permission by your mothers to turn you over my knee if I feel the need arises. And I will do just that."

Laren laughed at the look on Dorian's face and she leaned into him gently. Laren had become very close with Sheva and Onera over the last weeks and by virtue of that, Dorian as well. They were rarely apart now.

Martin looked at Nilantha with a smile of his own. "Are you up for this trip?" He asked her.

Nilantha nodded her head quickly. "Anja has said my injuries are fully healed. It will be a few more days until I regain my full health because of the amount of blood I lost, but I am fit enough for this."

Martin looked at Sarlana. "*Doraanar*?" He asked.

Sarlana nodded her head. "This is something the five of you must do together." She said. "I will remain here. Aviel, Nahko, General Dytin and a hundred of his Sand Striders will be aiding those who are handing out weapons and other equipment to your people here. The interaction will prove to be invaluable for all of us. I have... I have developed something of a friendship with Aricia's mother Dasha and your mother. Your *Tenna* Meral as well. I will be with them."

Martin nodded his head. "Then we should get this ball rolling." Martin spoke.

Sarlana stepped closer to him, looking up into his eyes as he towered over her and she placed her hand on his arm. "I can sense the emotions within you Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas." She told him softly. "And within Androcles. Do not turn away from who you both are for vengeance. Channel your emotions. Hold them in and let them guide your actions for good."

Martin glanced at Andro and then back to her. “We will.” He told her softly.

Sarlana nodded. “Good. Take care of Nilantha please. She is almost as reckless as the rest of you and that is not normally a trait I associate with our species.”

Martin smiled at her as Nilantha looked at her with wide eyes. “We will.”

Sarlana nodded her head. “Then I will leave you to do what you must.”

Sarlana turned and began to walk back towards the doorway into the base as Miath moved up behind him.

Martin looked at all of them. “Shall we?” He spoke as Torma moved closer.

Miath moved his huge bulk right up to Nilantha. “It will be an honor to carry you on this journey Nilantha.” He spoke to her in his gravelly voice.

Nilantha reached out and stroked the scales on his muzzle. “For me as well.” She said with an excited smile.

Martin climbed into the saddle on Torma’s back as did Andro, Dorian and Laren on Elynth, Ryner and Ladur. He waited until Nilantha had settled on Miath’s back and the Dragon Armor leg bracers had secured her in the saddle.

“Torma, go!” Martin barked and an instant later all of them had taken to the early morning skies.

JETANIA

DIR RIE HAL FOR SAAR

MOUNTAIN OF STONE AND LIGHT

ALTITUDE: 42,679 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL

It was the highest point anywhere on the surface of Jetania but only Nilantha had ever been here.

The Onab dampening field which Chiron had detected was unlike anything he had seen before dating back to Cerath. It was a perpetual fog of blurriness that encompassed the entire peak of the mountain as well as the summit. Through the many millennia, dozens of Coalition ships had tried to penetrate the dampening field, only to be turned away before they crashed. They had attempted many times to scale the mountain from below the summit, but quickly discovered that nothing could survive the blistering cold or the nearly three hundred kilometer per hour winds that ravage the mountain from twenty thousand feet and up. After nearly a hundred deaths, conquering the mountain had quickly fallen to the wayside as other things and events took shape, which made it easier for Nilantha to still be vigilant as she protected the Temple on the summit. Most COLS scientists finally agreed that it was some sort of natural phenomenon that they would never discover and it became nothing more than a passing thought to the inhabitants of Jetania.

The altitude was nothing for Martin and the others, their Etheric abilities capable of enhancing their shields to the point that the winds and cold did not effect them in the least. Passing through the dampening field had been odd, all of them feeling a slight electrical surge through their bodies, but one that was not painful or incapacitating in any way. As they broke through the dampening field, they could see the summit and the peak which rose up another thousand meters above the summit. There were two large buildings that matched the material of the Temple on Lorenu in composition, and as they settled to the ground outside the first one, Martin and the others realized that the temperature and weather was very temperate. Inside the dampening field, it was easily in the low seventies with almost no humidity. Though there was some moisture in the air, Martin quickly decided that it was not enough to cause rain to fall on any regular basis, even though the grass and trees that were growing all around looked healthy and very green.

As they stepped down from their saddles, Martin, Andro and the others realized the material was exactly like the Lorenu Temple. Like a white marble with many symbols and writings on the face.

Andro turned and looked out toward the dampening field, seeing the massive storm raging outside the field and then his eyes moving back to gaze at the weather inside the field.

“Ok...” He spoke finally. “That is really...”

“Freaky.” Dorian finished his brother’s statement.

Nilantha nodded her head as she came up to stand beside them. “That is what I said when I first came here.” She told them. “It took me several trips to get used to it actually.”

Martin let his eyes wander over the face of the massive structure in front of them. “How did you know this was here?” He asked finally.

“Your *staanio* told me.” Nilantha answered him. “I was very surprised as well since the sensors on my ship never picked up anything but the bad weather.”

“Bad weather?” Dorian gasped. “Those winds look like they could peel the skin from your body.” He said.

Nilantha nodded her head again. “When combined with the cold, yes, I would imagine that they could.”

“And you have been inside these two buildings?” Andro asked her.

Nilantha nodded. “Many times, yes, but not since I moved everything. I locked out the computer stations within the Temple with a rotating encryption algorithm that no Coalition expert would have been able to defeat. These two buildings held all of the drawings and paintings made by the Onab as well as several libraries of information. I spent many hundreds of hours here just reading the history within these walls. It took me several years to finally move everything to my ship because I did not want Osrod’s grandfather to find any of the prophecies, even by accident, but I managed.”

Martin looked at her. “They never got close?” He asked her.

Nilantha shook her head. “Perhaps they could have devised something to combat the cold or the winds, but nothing that could do both in order to climb up here from the base. They lost four ships over the course of two decades trying to penetrate the dampening field but those all failed miserably with total loss of life. They gave up finally.”

The area around the first building was filled with rows and rows of flowers and healthy trees as well as many benches and a single fountain just outside the entrance to the Temple. It was very peaceful and quiet to be honest. It was also disconcerting in a way, seeing the beauty within the dampening field but only a few hundred meters away seeing the terrible weather outside of the field.

Nilantha reached for Martin’s arm. “Come... I will take you inside.”

Nilantha led them to the massive set of double doors. Though they were also white in color, the doors were made from *Onkmeti Naami*, that much Martin could tell easily. They watched as Nilantha went to the side of the double doors and placed her hand over the orb like protrusion on the wall. There was a series of soft clicks and the orb like device began to glow red and then they heard the doors release and begin to slid open inward.

The interior of the Temple was massive to say the least. There were four levels to this building, with a wide promenade on each level that swept around the entire building for each level. They could see four massive elevators, one at every corner, and then the huge skylight ceiling above them. Far across on the opposite side of the Temple was another set of double doors that obviously led into the second, equally enormous building. Nilantha moved in front of them, walking backwards as she swept her hands out to the sides.

“There are twelve libraries, four on each level above this one.” She spoke. “All of them are still intact and locked with a similar encryption code. The first level here has several large rooms for contemplation and reading. Smaller sleeping rooms branch off from the main room here as well on the levels above. There is also a large kitchen facility, but I never used it.”

Martin looked at her. “They meant for this Temple to be used?” Martin asked.

Nilantha nodded her head. “That is what I deduced.” She told him. “By who I don’t know, but it was most definitely designed to be a home of some sort as well as a center of knowledge.”

Their voices echoed somewhat as they walked on the main floor of the Temple towards the second set of doors that led into the second building. All of them could see where paintings and drawings had once been hanging, not to mention the now deactivated holo depictions that had been removed. The second building was equally as large as the first and set up in a similar manner, with four levels and the same wide promenade on each level. As they moved further into the second building it became clear from the size of the buildings and the elevators that this Temple had been built with dragons in mind.

They all whirled around when they heard the skittering of metal like legs across the surface and they saw several Worker Drones moving on the promenade level just above them.

“The Worker Drones are everywhere.” Nilantha said. “They have access to all of the levels and it is they who have maintained the Temple when I was not here.”

“How many?” Dorian asked now.

Nilantha shook her head. “I do not know.” She answered. “I have only seen four or five at any one time.”

“Father?” Andro spoke now causing Martin to look at him. Andro motioned with his head to the far end of the building and Martin turned to see what he was looking at. His eyes grew a little wider when he spied the three intricately carved columns of white *Onkmeti Naami* that were arranged in front of the fourth column that faced the bare wall. Nilantha watched as all of them moved to the columns and she watched as they spread out to gaze at them, running their hands over the surfaces. Each of them was easily three meters in height and decorated with intricate silver lines and waves.

Martin turned from the column he was in front of and looked at Nilantha. “What’s behind this wall?” He asked.

Nilantha shook her head slowly. “This second Temple backs right up to the mountain.” She answered. “The peak is another thousand meters above us. You saw this as we approached the Temple from the air.”

“You never did an interior scan of the Temples?” Andro asked her now.

“I... I never saw the need. No.” Nilantha replied confused. “Why.”

Martin stared at the wall in front of him now. “There is something on the other side.” He spoke.

Andro ran his hand slowly down the column he was in front of, his eyes gazing at the markings on the column face as well as on the floor. He knelt down on one knee and used his hand to brush away a thin layer of dust, revealing the indented circular platform on the floor. He turned his head back to where his father stood.

“Three keys to unlock the fourth.” He said softly.

“Andro wait!” Martin hissed but his words were too slow as Androcles rose to his full height and stepped onto the circular platform and faced his father and the bare wall in front of them.

There was a loud clicking noise and the top of the column shifted to reveal a glimmering *Onkmeti Naami* sphere that quickly darted out of the column and descended in front of where Androcles stood. The smallish sphere activated a thin, bluish white beam of light that moved up and down Andro’s body as if it was scanning him and then the mechanical female voice echoed all around them.

**-FIRST HERALD RECOGNIZED AND CONFIRMED-
-RELEASING FIRST LOCK-**

All of them heard the next clicking sound and at the top of the column that Martin stood beside, one of the three silver rings that wrapped around the column spread out and pushed away from the *Onkmeti Naami* column with a soft hiss of air.

“*Sibfla!*” Dorian gasped now.

“Andro my brother?” Elynth’s asked from behind them where she stood with her father, Ryner and Ladur. All four of them were moving closer to them as she spoke.

“I’m fine sister.” Andro told her. “It’s a locking mechanism. Three keys to unlock the fourth. Dori, Laren, go to the other columns.”

Dorian and Laren did not hesitate and stepped in front of the two columns that stood on either side of him. They moved onto the circular platforms and all of them heard the same clicking noises and two more spheres lifted from the tops of their columns and descended in front of them, a similar bluish white beam scanning them now.

**-THIRD HERALD RECOGNIZED AND CONFIRMED-
-RELEASING THIRD LOCK-**

This came from the sphere that finished scanning Laren.

**-SECOND HERALD RECOGNIZED AND CONFIRMED-
-RELEASING SECOND LOCK-**

This from the sphere that finished scanning Dorian.

All of them watched as the other two silver rings on top of the column beside Martin expanded and pushed away from the top of the column.

**-ACTIVATION OF FOURTH KEY SUCCESSFUL-
-PROCEED WITH ACTIVATION OF FOURTH KEY-**

They watched as the three spheres lifted back to the tops of their columns and lowered back into the column themselves. Martin looked at the circular platform in front of his column and then back to Nilantha.

“Biometric locks.” Martin said softly with wide eyes. “No wonder you never discovered this. Nilantha... move back beside Ladur and Ryner.” He told her.

“Martin... is this... is this wise?” Nilantha asked as she stepped toward Ladur.

“Three keys to unlock the fourth.” Martin spoke. “Only one way to find out.” He said as he stepped onto the platform.

Instantly the three silver rings at the top of his column clicked several times and then merged together into a single ring. Once this was complete, the ring closed itself onto the top of the column once more and then all of them heard the deep rumbling sound begin. They turned to watch as the seamless, bare wall in front of them began to part from the center. As the wall parted, it revealed a shimmering bluish Etheric wall that took up the entire space. When the *Onkmeti Naami* wall fully opened, exposing the Etheric wall completely, it was easily two meters across and three meters tall.

“*Carians*.” Andro muttered as he stepped slowly off the platform.

“Now that, is very cool.” Dorian commented as he stepped from in front of his column and moved towards the Etheric wall.

Andro reached out and took his arm quickly. “*Joa fervon*.” He said softly.

Dorian looked at him as Laren moved up beside Andro now. “Andro?” She asked softly.

Androcles looked at his father, his azure eyes bright and focused. “This is... this is something that our father needs to do himself.”

Martin met his son’s eyes now. “*Atle alad forn men keto?*” He asked. (What do you see son)

Andro shook his head. “*Joacle*.” Andro told him. (Nothing) “I... I feel something though. It tells me... it tells me that this task is for you father. And you alone.”

“Danger?” Martin asked stepping closer to him.

“*Joa*.” Laren spoke now reaching out her hand to put it on Andro’s arm. “*Pen quov ardet for clodocanus*.” (I sense pride and happiness) Laren reached out and held out her hand for Dorian who took it without question. It took only a few seconds but his eyes grew slightly wider and he looked at his father.

“I... I feel it too father.” He said.

Andro stepped away from Laren and Dorian and moved up in front of him. “Our task is complete father. The rest is meant only for you.”

“How can you be so sure?” Martin asked him.

Andro looked at Laren and Dorian and then back to his father and he smiled now. “That is what *staanio Daniho* is telling us inside here.” He said placing his hand over his heart.

Martin looked at Laren and Dorian standing beside one another and then back to Andro. They were right of course. He could sense no danger around them anywhere. It was a calm and especially serene resonance that echoed all around the Temple and those of them within it and none of his keen senses were in any way telling him that there was danger or even anything that was unknown around them.

Martin reached up and grasped the side of Andro’s head gently. Dorian came up beside him and he did the same with him while Laren pressed close between her Soul Brothers and he lowered his forehead to touch hers. Martin took a deep breath and nodded his head finally.

“Ok... be ready when I get back.” Martin said softly. “Things will begin to happen quickly.”

Andro nodded his head. “We will be waiting.”

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas turned and looked at the Etheric wall. He took one more deep breath and nodded his head. "Never fear the unknown." He spoke softly before stepping through the Etheric barrier without pause.

KOLTAR FOUR TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF LEPIRI IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND

The compound was utterly massive in its size. It had to be, in order to fully support the nearly two thousand lives that lived within its walls. It was spread out over four kilometers on the valley floor between the three towering mountain peaks that surrounded it. The six-meter-high steel and granite wall that surrounded the entire compound protected it from the harsh elements and the even harsher wildlife that sometimes inhabited this part of Koltar Four. The winter season could be very harsh this far north, but it was not something that any of them had not experienced before and they well how to cope with the snow and cold. There were several landing pads in different parts of the compound to facilitate travel back and forth to the capital and other places, but the only ships allowed to land were from the military branch of the Arhtai Pack.

Yes, this was their home, had been their home for over two million years, but it was still a prison to them.

They were not allowed to come and go as they pleased. They were always escorted to and from whichever area they were going to work in, and they were never allowed to wander off by themselves. While they were left alone within their compound, a full company of five hundred Arhtai military Pack members were garrisoned here in their own smaller complex in order to watch them. There were six guard towers surrounding the compound, each of them holding four guards at any one time. The barracks and living complex of the Arhtai troops was on the far eastern end of the main compound, away from their living areas, which suited the Iaaldo just fine. An interior wall also separated their barracks and small complex from the main compound.

It was Ivore Arhtai's idea to do this in order to keep interaction between them to a bare minimum. When the *Dremsa rie Saan* had occurred, the Iaaldo Engineers had immediately refused to comply with Yelma and Nyser's directives. They had been willing to die and only his quick action had stopped his brother Nyser Arhtai from ordering their deaths. Slaughtering the only ones who could maintain the Onab equipment that they had kept would serve no purpose and only hurt them in the end. His actions had already infuriated his older brother, for he had already killed two of his own cousins who had tried to kill his beloved Revia. Ivore Arhtai had no intention of allowing anyone to butcher his beautiful wife and mate and their four children, nor would he stand with his brother and his *upae* mate in dishonoring the vow that they had made before leaving Cerath.

Nyser would not kill his youngest brother and Ivore knew this, so Nyser banished them to this compound. They had already begun to build it and it was here that Nyser and Yelma sent him and those among the Arhtai who felt as he did. Revia, their four children, and perhaps fifty other Arhtai Pack members who had refused to abandon their beliefs and betray the bloodline of their King came here with the Iaaldo. They were banished here forever.

Ivore Arhtai was no fool however, and while his brother and his bitch mate may have thought they were in control, Ivore knew it was they who had the real power. The Iaaldo were the only ones outside of Ranol Nenay's daughter and a few others who could service the Onab equipment and keep it running. Ivore knew that Ranol would never allow his daughter to teach others while Yelma and Nyser held two of his children hostage, so a deal was struck. Nyser and Yelma would do nothing to hinder the Iaaldo and those Arhtai Pack members who had come with him. They could guard them all they wished, but they would not threaten or try to threaten the Iaaldo in any way. Even a threat of death against one of them would result in the Iaaldo as a whole refusing to help them in any way. Then they would have to kill them all. No threats to his beautiful Revia or their children were to be made ever again, and any such attempt would be met with extreme violence. They would make no attempt to force them to live how Nyser and Yelma dictated them to live. They would not become puppets to false rulers as Nyser and Yelma had forced on the rest of their Pack. They would stay in the compound and do the work that was asked of them, but no harm was to come to any of them in any way.

They were to be left alone.

Nyser knew he had no other options because Ivore was correct in everything he said. The Arhtai military garrison was the only exception to the rule but Ivore made it very clear they were not to interfere in their lives in any way.

It had been like this for nearly two million years now. Ivore Arhtai hated his brother with every fiber of his being and if there was a way he could erase the name he carried now he would because of the shame it brought to him. He and Revia had raised their children in the old way, adding eleven more children through the many years since that horrible time. He had thought at first that his beautiful Revia would hate him for what his brother had done, but Ivore was very wrong. His actions, actions that came from within his heart, had only proven to Revia what she had known since the day she had agreed to become his wife and mate.

Ivore Arhtai was different.

He had held his beloved wife and mate in his arms for weeks after it was all over as she cried herself to sleep and clung to him like a lost child. It had taken nearly a hundred years for her to sooth her broken heart, but his love and the love of her children had finally pulled her from the abyss. Revia had not lost any of the bubbly personality that Ivore had fallen in love with, but now she was much more feral in many ways. She was very strict but even more loving, and she had finally grown into an Alpha female that you did not want to have angry at you. She was a taskmaster when it came to the education of the children within the compound and together with several Ialldo elders, the schooling system that they had put together was unlike anything Ivore had ever seen. And they taught the true history of their people and what had taken place up until now.

Revia had given him ten, strong and proud sons and five stunning daughters that they loved more than their own lives. Their six oldest children had taken mates from the others of the Arhtai Pack who had joined with them and now they had thirteen grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Through the many years since the *Dremsa rie Saan*, others of the Arhtai pack had joined with them, no longer able to tolerate the way that his brother was leading and how they had forsaken everything of their history. Of the three dozen who had done this, Ivore knew that three of them were spies for Yelma Arhtai, but unknown to his brother or his *upaee* wife, two of them had switched their allegiances long ago once they had come here and discovered all of what had taken place that horrible night. These two men kept their spy façade out of need and to give them any advantage that they could use should his brother or Yelma decide to move against them. The third one was treated equally and without indifference, but this was because they wanted him to feel comfortable. When the time came, Ivore would kill him without doubt or mercy.

While they were not allowed to leave the main compound unless on a work furlong, Ivore had long ago learned how to leave the compound and escape into the mountains surrounding the valley secretly. His people now knew every inch of the mountains all around them, where to go, where not to go, and most importantly, where to hide so that Nyser and Yelma would never find them. The relationship between Ivore, Revia and the Arhtai Pack members with him and the Ialldo engineers had grown to the point of deep family bonds. They looked out for each other no matter the cause and Ivore had beaten down more than one member of the Arhtai military detachment that stayed at the compound for acting inappropriately.

Ivore Arhtai was not a man to take lightly.

His six foot four frame was still all lean muscle and bone. His dark hair was graying at the temples, but there was not an ounce of fat on his body and he was in superb physical condition. This was something that he encouraged all of his children and the others with him to support and even after a million and a half years together, no female wolf could stir his desire like Revia. In Ivore's eyes, Revia was the epitome of perfection in every way, and their love making now was even more intense than when they first fell in love all those years ago. He remembered something that Lylor Kirek had told him during the party they had after he and Revia were mated.

“When a Mahanlo loves Ivore, they love completely and without hesitation.” Lylor had told him. “I can see this is my daughter’s eyes for you. Love her in return Ivore. Completely. Utterly. Hold nothing back, and always honor her.”

“On my honor, Lord Lylor, I will.” Ivore had sworn to him that day.

Ivore Arhtai had kept his word to Lylor Kirek, and he would keep his word until the day he past into The Beyond.

Ivore smelled them approaching from another direction but did not get to his feet just yet. The outdoor café was just beginning to fill with others as the sun rose into the sky and he liked to enjoy his tea as he watched the sun come up. They may have been exiled here, but they had done as much as they could to make it their home and to seem like they were free. Revia had gotten him to start drinking tea many years ago, making him switch from the dark, vile tasting and muddy liquid that he called coffee. Ivore had come to like the taste and it had grown on him so that now all he drank was tea.

“Ivore my friend.” The voice spoke from his left and Ivore got to his feet. “A very good morning to you.”

Ivore smiled as he turned and looked at Ch'eldo Iaaldo. He was the oldest of any within their compound at close to four million years of age, and he was revered among both his people and the Lycavorians here. Ivore glanced up to his face and felt the brief flash of shame touch him as it always did. Nyser had taken Ch'eldo's eyes in a fit of rage when Ch'eldo had refused to help him. Ivore had imposed his body between Ch'eldo and his brother saving his life. Now he wore an intricately designed and detailed cloth strip over both his eyes, but it always seemed to Ivore that Ch'eldo had never really lost his sight. The man was always moving among the compound with his ever-present staff and it did not seem to hamper him in any way.

“And a fine one it is Ch'eldo.” Ivore spoke as he pulled the chair out next to him. He looked at the second man and nodded his head with a smile. “Ra'tel... a good morning to you as well.”

The younger man smiled. “A bit chilly for my tastes, but this has never seemed to bother you or my father Lord Ivore.” He answered.

Ivore chuckled and nodded his head. “My Beloved Revia yells at me often enough for leaving the windows open in the cold.” He said. “Perhaps I will one day listen to her.”

“Ha!” Ch'eldo chortled loudly as he settled into the chair. “That will be a momentous day! Lady Revia will run singing through the streets!”

Ivore laughed warmly now. “No doubt she will.” He said as he returned to his chair and Ra'tel sat on his father's opposite side.

“I trust you have brought an ample supply of Revia's tea?” Ch'eldo spoke as he got comfortable.

Ivore nodded his head as he began to pour two additional cups of the steaming liquid. “When have I ever disappointed you Ch'eldo?”

“Well there was the time that...” Ch'eldo began.

“Father that was not Lord Ivore's fault. That was mine. And it was three hundred and ten thousand years ago.” Ra'tel spoke with a smile.

“But he did promise me Revia's tea.” Ch'eldo pressed.

Ivore moved the first cup between Ch'eldo's hands and watched as he lifted it to his lips and took a long sip. “Then let me make it up to you now.” He spoke as he watched him drink.

Ch'eldo smiled and lowered the cup half way to the table. “Ahhh. Like a gift from the gods themselves.” He spoke as Ra'tel also sipped his tea. He set the cup fully on the table and reached out to place his hand on Ivore's wrist. “So... tell me what has you so befuddled as to call me in the middle of the night and ask to speak with us first thing this morning Ivore. There is not much that rattles you my old friend.”

Ivore nodded his head and reached around to take the data pad from the pouch he wore on his belt. He laid it on the small table in front of Ch'eldo. “This.” He spoke softly.

Ch'eldo let his hands drop to the data pad and he held it up, running his fingers across the small screen slowly. He finally held it out to Ra'tel. “What is this?” He asked finally.

Ivore leaned closer to him at the table. “My foul brother Nyser may have taken your eyes Ch'eldo Iaaldo, but he did not take your sight. In my heart, I know this to be true my friend.”

Ch'eldo turned his head to look at him. “Perhaps.” He said.

Ra'tel's eyes grew wider when he saw what was on the pad and he looked first at Ivore and then to his father. “Father!” He gasped.

Ch'eldo held up his hand. “I know.” He said softly. “Ivore... when did these first start to appear on the shoulders of you, Revia and your children?”

Ivore looked at him with wide eyes. “How did you know...?” He rasped out the words. “You know what it is?”

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “I do.” He answered him. “It is... it is something that I never thought I would ever see.”

“Then what is it?” Ivore asked. “Revia and I have been... we have been beside ourselves because we cannot discover how this has happened. Our children. Our grandchildren. All of them... all of them have this mark on our left shoulders Ch'eldo. For three days now! It... it frightens Revia. She believes it to be a bad omen of things to come.”

Ch'eldo shook his head. “No.” He told him firmly. “This... this is not something that you should be frightened of.”

“What is it?” Ivore asked again. “Is it a curse of some kind?”

“A curse?” Ra'tel gasped. “Lord Ivore... this... this is no curse.”

“Then what is it?” Ivore asked once more.

Ch'eldo grasped Ivore's hand tightly. “Retrieve Revia from the school and meet us in our Sanctuary Ivore.”

“Why?” Ivore asked.

Ch'eldo looked directly at Ivore, and he swore he could see his eyes moving beneath that cloth. “There is something that you must see. Hurry now. If you, Revia and your children have worn this symbol for three days, there is not much time left.”

“Left for what?” Ivore demanded.

“Trust me Ivore.” Ch'eldo told him softly. “Bring your beloved Revia to the sanctuary and you will discover what is happening. Hurry!”

Revia Mahanlo-Arhtai was the personification of goddess like beauty. At least to Ivore. The moment he had smelled her scent he knew that she was the one for him. The one that would complete him. Even now, at over a million and a half years of age, she did not appear to have aged a single day from the moment she had become his beloved wife and mate. Her long, dark hair fell to the middle of her back, untouched by even the slightest hint of gray. She had high cheekbones, moist full lips and wildly exotic light blue eyes like her father. Her figure had not changed in the least except for becoming leaning and more muscular because of the physical training she practiced every day with their daughters. A physical regiment that their sons had put together just for their mother and sisters in order to ensure they could defend themselves from anything. Ivore Arhtai never believed a woman would have such an effect on him, until Revia Mahanlo had entered his life. She was his core, and had been since that first time. He would do anything within his power to see that she was protected and never came to harm. He would burn whole planets if he had too. No female Alpha could ever entice him away from his beloved Revia. Not only did her scent rule his soul, but her physical charms now were just as lush and delicious as they were so many years ago. Revia was never shy in their bed, and their lovemaking was as intense and erotic as it had ever been.

Revia loved Ivore Arhtai without thought. His touch could ignite her female Alpha wolf passions with a simple caress, yet he was also one of the most compassionate men Revia had ever met. He could be just as content making her shout his name to the heavens as they took each other in passion and desire as he was simply holding her naked in his arms tightly as they drifted off to sleep. He was so very different from his brother and the others of his Pack as she quickly discovered in their first years together. This was information that she had easily told her mother and father with true happiness and it had pleased them to no end. Ivore became one of the few among the Arhtai Pack that her father trusted completely.

Not for one instant had Revia blamed him for the actions of his brother and his Pack on that night. Ivore had fought wildly and viciously to protect her and their children, even clashing with his older brother violently. He believed deeply in the Onab prophecies and the power of the Mahanlo bloodline and this had always set him apart from the others of his Pack. The rage she had seen and felt within him on the *Dremsa rie Saan* had been of the purest form, and he would have slaughtered anyone who tried to harm her or their children without question.

It had taken her many years to pull him from the blanket of shame he had shrouded himself in because of the actions of his Pack, but Revia had never doubted he would come back to her.

Their life had not been easy, but they remained resolute in their love for one another and their people. Faith had been the one thing that kept them moving forward. Revia trusted her beloved husband more than anything in her life and it had been his love and faith for her that allowed her to still be strong for them and their children.

Revia clung to his arm tightly as they entered the Sanctuary, outwardly calm to anyone who saw her, but inwardly frightened and unsure. Touching Ivore in some manner had always been able to put her at ease and feel safe and today was no different. Their children often teased them about not being able to go more than a few minutes without touching one another in some manner, but this trait they had also passed to them and it pleased Revia and Ivore more than their children would ever know.

Ch'eldo greeted Revia with a smile and a hug the moment the doors to the courtyard outside closed. He could sense the apprehension in her but said nothing as he held her at arms length while Ra'tel made sure the door was secure. Ch'eldo knew they were always being watched, but through the many years they had devised ways to avoid the many cameras and spies that always seemed to be around their compound. The Sanctuary was the one place that they could speak freely without the worry of being seen and heard. Both of their peoples came here at least once a week in a huge gathering to pray and be together. The Sanctuary was built on top of a large magnetic plate that distorted most sensors and listening devices naturally and after many years the Artai watchers had simply stopped trying to devise a way to listen and see what was going on within the Sanctuary.

Revia turned to the woman beside Ch'eldo and hugged her tightly. "Ki'cha, you are looking as beautiful as ever." She spoke as they embraced.

Ch'eldo's wife chuckled softly. "And so are you." She answered holding her at arms length now. "Almost as if you..." Her eyes grew wider. "You carry another child don't you Revia my dear?"

Revia looked slightly embarrassed and she smiled and nodded her head. "Yes." She spoke happily looking at Ivore who wore the same proud expression he did whenever she was with child. "My husband cannot seem to keep his hands to himself." She spoke with a brilliant smile.

Ki'cha laughed at this and hugged her once more. "As if you fight him off at every turn." She exclaimed holding her tight.

Revia smiled. "Where would the fun in that be?" She asked as she began to get more relaxed.

Ki'cha smiled and touched her face. "You are so much like your mother." She said softly. "It is refreshing."

Revia matched her smile as she looked at Ch'eldo. "Ivore... Ivore tells me that you know what is happening Ch'eldo." She said softly. "Why this symbol is..."

Ch'eldo held up his hand stopping her words. "May I see it?" He asked her.

Revia looked at Ivore quickly and saw him nod his head. She turned slightly to the side and grasped the edge of her shirt by the shoulder as Ivore turned as well and pulled down the collar of the shirt he wore. Both of them heard Ki'cha gasp as Ch'eldo moved closer to them and reached out to trace the edges of the very prominent tattoo on their left shoulders. He kept his emotions in check while he did this, but Ch'eldo could feel the immense swell of happiness and hope beginning to rise in his chest.

"Ch'eldo!" Ki'cha exclaimed softly to her husband and he nodded his head.

"Yes, Ki'cha my precious." Ch'eldo spoke softly.

Revia and Ivore turned back to face them fully. "Ch'eldo...?" Ivore began but he held up his hand once more and they watched him turn to Ra'tel. Ra'tel handed him the ancient looking book and Ch'eldo turned back to Ivore and Revia.

"Sit down... both of you. Please." He said as he moved to the bench.

Ivore quickly pulled two chairs from the side and positioned one for Revia as he sat in the other. Revia's eyes rested on the book he held in his hands and she looked at Ch'eldo carefully. "I have never seen that book Ch'eldo." She said softly.

Ch'eldo nodded his head. Revia was a voracious reader and always had been. She had read all of the texts within the Sanctuary at least once and the fantastic thing about it was that she managed to remember nearly everything that she read.

"I have... I have kept this text hidden all of these years." Ch'eldo told them.

“Why?” Revia asked.

Ch'eldo met her eyes evenly. “Within its pages are four prophecies that are known only to a small few. One of which that even I never imagined would come true. Not after the *Dremsa Rie Saan* and what came later” He told them. “When we came here... when we came here, I buried it in the floor of our home. I had lost optimism that it would ever be realized and I did not want to give anyone false hope.” He looked at Ivore. “Until this morning.”

“I don’t understand.” Ivore told him.

“This symbol... this tattoo?” Ch'eldo asked them. “It has appeared on all of your bloodline?”

Revia nodded her head. “Even our seventh-generation grandchild.” She answered as she reached out and took Ivore’s hand in her own. “She is only four months old Ch'eldo. Please tell me this is not...”

Ch'eldo shook his head quickly. “No.” He said firmly reaching out to place his hand on her arm and squeezing gently. “This is... this is a moment of... hope has returned to us Revia. To all of us. Hope and a future that we had thought lost so long ago.”

Revia glanced at Ivore once more and squeezed his hand tighter. “What... what do you mean?”

Ch'eldo opened the ancient book by unlatching the three leather bindings that wrapped around the volume. “There are four prophecies in this volume Revia. Four prophecies that only four individuals have ever seen. Two of my people, one Darastrixi and Kesas Pengot.”

Ivore’s eyes grew wide. “Kesas?” He gasped. “How is that... how is that possible? And how could a Darastrixi know our prophecies?”

“The how of it is a bit difficult to explain and I will tell you as much as I am able, for even I do not know all of it.” Ch'eldo told him. “Your Uncles Daniho and Ashten were utterly brilliant Revia my child. They laid plans within plans within plans, but they also held this knowledge close to their hearts.”

“*Tenne Daniho and Ashten?*” Revia gasped. “But they... Ch'eldo they have gone to *Vada Wayn*. My mother herself told me this when she could no longer feel them within her. *Staanian* Reva as well. Many thousands of years ago.”

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “They have, yes.” He told her. “But their plans have lived on through the many millennia that have passed and it seems that they have finally born fruit.”

“I don’t understand.” Revia said.

Ch'eldo opened the book slowly, the many pages of drawings fragile due to their age but otherwise in pristine condition. He finally opened it to one page and turned it in his lap, holding it up for them to see. Revia’s eyes went wide and her hands went to cover her mouth in shock at what she saw. Ivore reached for the book with shaking hands and gently took it from Ch'eldo’s steady grip, his own eyes staring at the image in stunned silence. The image on the pages of the ancient book was of the tattoo that now adorned his and Revia’s left shoulders. All of their many children, all of their children’s husbands and wives and children no matter their Pack. The massive head of the huge black wolf, with piercing yellow/gold eyes and vicious dual fangs unique to only one bloodline of Lycavorians in the entire universe. Ivore slowly lifted one hand and allowed his own dual fangs to extend slightly, his fingers running over the tips of those fangs. The same fangs all of his children and many grandchildren had, passed down to all of them from his beloved Revia, and a trait that all of them had honored throughout their lives.

Ivore finally looked at Ch'eldo. “What is this my friend?” He asked still somewhat shaken by seeing the image in front of him.

“Daniho and Ashten refused to view these prophecies.” Ch'eldo told him reaching out and taking the book back from him. “When the Seers transferred them from their original drawings and brought them to him, he would not view them. Nor would Ashten. They did not want to see the future anymore. They had only one question.”

Revia looked at him now, her lower lip quivering. “What... what question?”

“All they wanted to know was if their bloodline survived.” Ch'eldo answered. “I told them that it did. And they would be far more powerful than anything we had ever seen. They were... they were content in this knowledge.”

“You?” Ivore gasped as he came to his feet now.

Ch'eldo nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“You! You are... you are a Seer!” Ivore almost shouted in disbelief.

Ch'eldo nodded his head once more. "I was once... long ago." He said. "When I left Cerath with the Kirek Pack, I became again what I started out as. An engineer of my people. A Seer's ability to see future events was somehow tied to our planet Ivore, not some special ability of our people as so many thought it was. There was something about the core of Cerath that granted us these visions and images. Daniho, Ashten and Kesas were the only ones who ever knew this. We did not even tell your mother dear Revia. Two books of the last four prophecies of my people were made from the original drawings and drafts. One was given to Kesas Pengot by your *Tenne* Daniho on the day that we left Cerath. I have had the other with me all of this time."

Ivore dropped to his knees now, his eyes flooding with tears and he bowed his head to Ch'eldo in shame, his hands reaching out to grip the ancient book in Ch'eldo's hands with a vise like grasp that no one would have ever been able to break. "All of these... all of these years and I... I never knew." He stammered.

Ch'eldo placed his hand on Ivore's head. "This is the way King Daniho and Lord Ashten wanted it." He said. "Plans within plans within plans."

"My brother!" Ivore almost yelled. "He... I let him..."

"Never!" Ch'eldo roared now, grabbing Ivore's head tighter. "You will bear no shame where there is none to bear Ivore Mahanlo-Arhtai! Never!"

"I could have stopped him!" Ivore sobbed.

Ch'eldo shook his head. "And you would have been killed just as quickly the moment you raised your hand." Ch'eldo said. "What happened that night was meant to happen. Your presence was what stopped him. Your presence is what kept all of us alive in that darkest hour. Just as the prophecy foretold."

Ivore looked at him. "What?" He gasped.

Ch'eldo nodded his head. "We are here because of you Ivore. Just as it was supposed to happen. And what is coming... it is happening just as it was foretold, even though I myself had lost hope so long ago."

"Ch'eldo... you are not... I don't understand?" Revia said.

Ch'eldo squeezed Ivore's shoulder. "Sit beside your beloved wife Ivore Mahanlo-Arhtai. You bow to no one young man. And one day soon, your King will tell you this himself."

"King?!" Ivore stammered the words as he got back into the chair next to Revia.

Ch'eldo opened the ancient volume once more to that page, sliding his hand slowly across the image of the black wolf. "Do you remember what I told your brother that night he took my eyes Ivore?" Ch'eldo asked looking at him.

"I... I will never forget it." Ivore answered. "I will carry it with me until the day I pass into *Vada Wayn*."

Ch'eldo nodded his head.

"They will come, from distant stars, they will come. From age to age they have been forged. They will feel the call. They are mirrors of light, with the memories of future dreams. They will ride the sky, keeping the fires bright. You will not know their names. You will not know their faces. But there will be no victory for you. Past and present will collide. Black and Crimson will descend upon you. They fight for honor, for family and for King. For Mahanlo blood shows no remorse

***There will come a time when the snow on Cerath will have melted and is no more
And then, the Time of Reckoning will be upon you."***

Ivore shook his head. "But what... what does this have to do with the symbol Ch'eldo?" Ivore asked.

Ch'eldo met his eyes. "Your actions on the *Dremsa Rie Saan* are the third Prophecy in this book Ivore Mahanlo-Arhtai. Your actions that night helped to pave the way for the future to take place."

"Ch'eldo..." Revia began but he held up his hand stopping her words and then rested it back on the book over the image of the wolf.

"This symbol... this *Saanigaro Lecoa* that you now wear, that all who bear your blood within them wear. This is the *Lecoa* of the Rebirth of the Mahanlo *Saanigaro*." Ch'eldo told them. "This is the sign!" (Bloodline Crest)

"What sign?" Revia asked as she reached for her husband once more and took his arm.

"Whoever bears this symbol on their left shoulder will know the truth of it." Ch'eldo told them. "The descendants of King Daniho Mahanlo and his beloved twin brother Ashten are not dead as so many of our

people believe. They are very much alive. And they... they are coming for those that are their family. In six days.”

“Six days?” Ivore asked now as he gripped Revia even closer now.

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “The prophecy tells us that six days after this *Saanigaro Lecoa* begins to appear on their family, they will come for them.” He said reverently. “Just as I told Nyser. From age to age they will have been forged and they will feel the call. The call of their bloodline, the call of their *Nathos*. Past and present will collide and Mahanlo blood will show no remorse. There will come a time when the snow on Cerath will have melted and is no more. And then, the Time of Reckoning will be upon us.” Ch'eldo looked at Ivore. “All of this is true, however, I did not finish the full phrase of the prophecy that night with your brother Ivore.”

“There... there was more?” He gasped.

Ch'eldo nodded his head again. “Cerath is gone Ivore.” He said softly seeing Ivore and Revia’s eyes go wide. “Destroyed by the Iais’Kai almost fifty thousand years ago. We saw this as well, but in order for the prophecy to be fulfilled it had to be. I felt our planet die, as did all of those among my people. We knew this and we accepted it. Many of us believe it is the reason King Daniho and Lord Ashten did not want to view the four prophecies held within this book. It was too hard for them to know what needed to happen. What had to be endured for our people, yours and mine, for us to reach our full potential. We do not know what took place to have delayed the prophecy for so long, nor did we see the *Dremsa rie Saan* and what your brother and Yelma would succeed in doing. All we knew was that events would happen that would force these four prophecies to take place.”

“What... what did you not tell my brother that night Ch'eldo?” Ivore asked softly.

“*Vada Dremsa rie Saan gur, heuhly, tis vada falyne inachia mihar.*” Ch'eldo spoke the words gently, in almost a whisper. “*For terit Saanigaro gur tur joa cova.*” (The Night of Blood will, finally, in the future twilight sleep. And your bloodline will be no more.)

“*Carians.*” Revia gasped softly.

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “Indeed.” He said. “The Prophecy states that the descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo will be unlike any Lycavorians that we have ever seen before. Pure. Wild. Raw. Focused and clear.”

“*Vada Mard Revik for jen Tarivuos.*” Ra'tel spoke softly from behind his father.

“They will come for their family.” Ch'eldo said as he nodded in agreement with his son’s words. “For their blood. And anything that stands in their way will feel their justice and their wrath.”

“*Avoi.*” Ki’cha spoke now.

Ch'eldo looked at Revia. “It is no doubt the reason that Kesas Pengot has woken your father Revia my child.”

“My father!?” Revia gasped. “My father... my father is awake now!?”

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “To confirm what I have just told you. I felt Lylor’s resonance the moment he woke, the briefest of moments and then it was hidden again. If they have woken him, it is only to confirm what Kesas Pengot must suspect is happening now. And to prepare.”

“But how?” Ivore gasped.

Ch'eldo shook his head. “How they have hidden this from your brother and Yelma I do not know Ivore.” He told them quickly. “They do not know that you and Revia live, or your children and blood. Both of you are listed as being killed on the *Dremsa rie Saan*. We have been unable to communicate with anyone from the Kirek Pack since that night and the barriers around this compound prevent us from signaling off the planet even if we were able. I have no proof to back up my belief, but I think Ranol Nenay has contact with Aryera Kirek and Kesas, in some form, at least. Yelma Arhtai still holds two of his children and that is how she has kept his silence for all of these years. Most believe your mother to be dead Revia, but we all know the truth of that. Yelma Arhtai is a master manipulator, and even Nyser won’t defy his wife and mate. That is the power she holds over Kesas and the others of the Kirek Pack.” Ch'eldo rose to his feet and began to pace in front of them slowly. “Kesas Pengot is no fool however, and he spent far more time around your uncles than most people thought. He became just like them in many respects. Kesas has the only other copy of this book child. He knows what is within it and what it means. It is the only reason that Kesas Pengot would wake your father Revia. Somehow, he knows or has discovered that the reborn Mahanlo bloodline is coming here and that they mean to retrieve their family.” Ch'eldo stopped pacing in front of her and he pulled Revia to her feet in front of him,

holding her hands curled inward against his chest. “You will be reunited with your mother and father soon Revia Mahanlo.” He said seeing the tears flood her eyes. “And all of those who are of yours and Ivore’s blood. Your family will know you by your scent alone Revia, and you will know them the moment you see them. The moment you smell them. You must be strong now. Stronger than either of you has ever been. Both of you.”

“Ch'eldo... what... what do we do?” Ivore gasped as he rose to his feet now.

“We prepare.” He answered confidently looking at him. “It is clear to me now that your brother and Yelma do not know that Lylor Kirek has been woken or they would have already been here to arrest everyone. We cannot worry about those out of our reach right now. We must prepare everyone within our compound to be ready to move at a moment’s notice. And we must initiate our own plans as well.”

“Move?” Ivore asked. “Move where?”

“Wherever the *Mard Revik* decides that we will call home as a people once more.” Ch'eldo said.

JETANIA WARIM BASE

He watched as the sun rose above the tree line and the cool morning breeze caressed his tanned skin. The single mug on the floor held a now cold half full cup of very strong coffee. His upper body was bare, a pair of shorts the only thing covering his lean, muscular form. His small quarters on the base were barren for the most part, as he never spent much time here, but it was one of only a handful of private quarters that had a balcony overlooking the valley below.

Laon Kavar was many things, but he was certainly no fool. Things were different now, so very different now, because of the new wolf blood that swirled within him. And Laon Kavar embraced the difference completely. His wolf senses were far more acute than they had ever been before. He felt more energized and more physically powerful. His mind had expanded in a way unlike anything Laon had ever imagined. Things he would never have believed could exist were like second nature to him now. Technology and Tactics. Education, Engineering, and even the Advanced Aeronautical equations were nothing for him now. These things filled his mind as easily as if he had learned them himself. Laon Kavar had always been considered one of the brightest and most intelligent Engineers anywhere within the COLS military branch, but his Mountain Pack upbringing and loyalty to Lazar had held him back according to others. A fact that gave others fits Laon knew and he loved every bit of it.

Now... now Laon Kavar was something far more than he had ever imagined. And as the sweet smells of coco and mint and delicious raspberry fruit filled his nose completely, he knew why. He turned his head slightly to the side and looked over his right shoulder at the two utterly captivating reasons. Whatever had happened, whatever he had become now, Laon Kavar would never forsake what the gods had brought to him.

Nara and Jacina stood behind him, Nara wearing only one of his dark tank top undershirts while Jacina had the white sheet from the bed wrapped partially around her lush, tanned and very naked form. Their heads were pressed together, Nara’s raven colored locks and Jacina’s dark red hair mingling as one as they gazed at him. Laon Kavar knew many Alpha females that were equal in attractiveness to Nara and Jacina, he was close friends with several, but none of them had the raw, almost feral, and utterly devastating beauty that Nara and Jacina possessed. A natural beauty that caused their skin to shine and their scents to tickle his nose and his other senses in just the right way. He now knew all about what had happened with Jacina and it did not matter to him in the least. They were his now, and he intended to love them both until they could not stand it. He had always hoped to find a single Alpha female who he could share all of himself with, his hopes and dreams, and now he had two. Laon Kavar knew that they loved and wanted each other equally as much as they loved and wanted him and that did not faze him in the least. They truly were of one mind and heart and that is how Laon saw them. What was equally as easy for him to see and feel was that they loved and desired him in a way that filled his being. As silly as it may have sounded to others, he truly did belong to them in every way.

The large, animal skin rug covered much of the concrete and steel floor of the balcony and Laon held out his hand for them to join him.

Nara took his hand without hesitation and he pulled them around in front of him where they settled to the floor beside him and snuggled their bodies close to either side of his lean form. The previous night had been unlike anything that Laon had ever imagined it could be, their bodies and minds were completely attuned to each other in every way. They had never been together before, yet it seemed each of them knew exactly what to do to each other to make their voices sing to the night sky in blissful pleasure. Each of them had let go completely of whatever inhibitions they may have had and surrendered to each other. They had done things to each other that were fierce, demanding and passionate, just as their wolf nature dictated and then they had done things that had been slow and loving and utterly captivating. Laon nuzzled Nara's head and cheek as she snuggled close to him, and then turned his head and did the same to Jacina hearing both of them whimper softly in happiness and delight.

Nara had been the one to turn Jacina, a night of divine pleasure that she would never forget, but when Laon had claimed them both in the old way of their people, their combined blood had been the catalyst for the future and had shattered all of Jacina's remaining reservations about her life. Finding first Nara and then Laon had been the turning point in Jacina's life. She could not put into words what she felt now and like Nara, she simply surrendered herself to the feelings and emotions that swarmed through her. Like Laon and Nara, last night had surpassed anything in her wildest imagination, and Jacina knew without question this is where she now belonged. His very touch upon their bodies had set them on fire and for nearly five hours they had done nothing but pleasure each other in every way that they could think of. And Jacina knew it would continue now for the rest of her life. All the horrors she had endured had been washed away forever her first night with Nara, and now, Laon had shown her what her future held. It was a future that Jacina looked forward to with every beat of her heart.

It was no different for Nara in many ways.

Like her brothers, her blood was the purest of any of the Leonidas children, and it now called for Laon and Jacina in a way she would never be able to explain to someone outside her family. Her mothers would understand she knew, and Sadi and the others, but Nara didn't care what others thought. To Nara, Laon Kavar was the perfect specimen of a man in every way, and Jacina was a complete goddess, and she belonged to both of them now. When he had bitten her, Nara's world had erupted in blissful delight, and when they both had bitten Jacina, that world had become pure heaven. Nara did not know what the future held for them, but she knew that as long as they were together they could face anything without fear.

As his powerful arms pulled her and Jacina close to his warm body, Nara looked into his handsome face.

"We wondered what had taken our beautiful husband from the warmth of our bed." Nara said softly.

Laon smiled affectionately and kissed her deeply, quickly turning his head and doing the same to Jacina, his hands stroking their long hair and the curve of their spines as he held them. He nuzzled them both again intensely and felt their lush bodies call out to him as they sighed in happiness. While Jacina was still learning to control and focus her female wolf aura, Nara was teaching her quickly how to use it and Laon knew no other female would ever be able to do to him what they could. Nara may have been a few hundred years younger than him, but after she had bit him and he had seen what swirled within her mind Laon knew she was far more wise and intelligent than any young female he had ever known.

"I wanted to watch the sun rise one more time." He said finally. "I will miss Jetania, but it was never truly my home I suppose."

Nara looked at him oddly. "You will miss it?" She asked him. "Where... where are you going?"

"Wherever the two of you go." He told her with a smile. "My place now is with you and Jacina. I don't care where that takes us as long as we are together."

"*Jainn.*" Jacina said blissfully. She was easily picking up the Lycavorian language due to her Etheric connection and bond with Nara and now with Laon as well. Rolling off her tongue as they did, the words of the ancient language sounded like music to them both.

Nara turned her head slightly and looked at the Mahanlo crest that now adorned his left shoulder and it made her shudder in bliss. Laon may not have been as physically defined as her father and brothers and other Spartans that she knew, but that would change quickly, and she did not care either way. His scent and his touch were like a drug to her now, and to Jacina and they would never get enough of him.

"Do they... do they all know now?" Laon asked softly.

Nara turned her head back to meet his eyes and she smiled knowingly. “Yes. I could not keep what you make us feel from them, even if I wanted too. And I didn’t want too. Deo and Andro would have detected it first, but everyone would have known within a few hours.” She told him. “We were not exactly quiet last night either.” She finished with a seductive smile.

Laon and Jacina laughed softly at this. “No, we certainly were not.” Jacina echoed Nara’s words. “So much for the demure and conservative daughter my parents hoped I would be.”

“Does that frighten you Laon?” Nara asked him.

Laon thought about that for a second and then shook his head. “No.” He answered finally. “I thought that it might at first, after what took place on Ventori.”

Nara rolled her eyes. “Deion and Andro had no right to do that.” She said quickly. “He is my twin I know but...”

Laon shook his head. “They are your brothers Nara.” He spoke. “I would have done the same thing. Hell... I have done the same thing, in a manner of speaking, with my own sisters.” His arms tightened around them now. “I will never fear your family Nara my love. Not after what you and Jacina showed me last night. This Etheric power is...”

“It will become easier as time passes Laon.” Nara said. “Jacina and I can help you easily enough.”

Laon nodded his head. “I know.” He told her. “You are... both of you are certain this is what you want?”

“Did we not show you this last night?” Jacina asked with a sultry voice as she used her hand to caress his bare chest.

“We can show you more if you wish.” Nara echoed her words as her hand dipped lower to his thigh.

Laon smiled at this. “I just don’t... I don’t want this to end.” He said softly.

“It won’t.” Jacina told him. “Nara turned me, yes. But I have always been different if you ask my parents. When Nara made me like you both, I could see all I ever wanted in my mind. Some of my people may say that because Nara turned me it influenced me, but this is not true. It opened my eyes and my mind to so many new things. I have what I have always wanted now. I have you and I have Nara. That is all I will ever need.”

“*Avoi.*” Nara said softly.

“And both of you are all I will ever need.” Laon spoke as he leaned over and kissed her deeply.

Nara was smiling as she watched them and she reached over to the cup of coffee beside Laon. She brought it to her lips and sipped it, her face instantly changing to one of disgust as she spit out the liquid.

“*Carians!*” She gasped as she put the mug back down. “We definitely need to improve your eating and drinking habits our husband!” She exclaimed. “This is... this is absolutely vile! You call this coffee Laon our love?!”

“Most of the time, yes.” Laon answered. “Other times we use it to kill weeds and take rust from metal.”

She turned her head and saw them looking at her with bright eyes and happy faces and she began to laugh. Laughter that they quickly joined in on as Laon dropped to his back on the rug and pulled them even closer. Their heads lowered to his chest and they wrapped their bodies around his in blissful contentment.

JETANIA MOUNTAIN OF STONE AND LIGHT

It was like walking through a doorway into another world.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas stepped from the Etheric wall into bright sunshine and a cool morning pine breeze washed across his senses instantly. He was on some sort of trail and his eyes took in everything around him as he moved several paces from where the Etheric wall pulsed. There were spotty clouds in the bright blue sky above him and he quickly detected the familiar scent of pines and flowers all around him. He blinked suddenly and he was in front of a closed doorway. He turned quickly when he heard the smattering of hundreds of voices, and in the distance, he could see the ancient buildings all around him. He could see men, women and children moving among the streets all around him, talking with one another, interacting with the many vendor

stalls that lined the streets that were selling items of one kind or another. Martin's eyes grew wider when he realized where he was and what he was seeing.

"This is... this is old Sparta!" He gasped.

"Yes." The deep male voice echoed all around him.

Martin's head snapped around to stare at the now open doorway where the voice had come from. He had heard that voice before as it thundered in his head. He had heard that voice on the night that he had discovered who he really was so many years ago.

A lifetime ago.

And he had heard that same voice many times in his dreams since.

"Fa... father?" Martin spoke softly.

"You have come so far my son." The voice spoke again. "And you have so much further to go."

Martin stepped through the doorway without hesitation now and his eyes grew even wider when he saw the tall figure of the man standing beside the small fire pit oven. He was dressed in a white and crimson chiton that wrapped around his broad, muscular figure and calf high leather boots. He held a mug in his hand and Martin's eyes grew even wider when he saw the near identical bearded face staring back at him.

The man smiled at him as he entered, his dark brown eyes smiling in the light from the sun pouring into the interior from the ceiling opening.

Leonidas. The first True King of the Lycavorian people and the most revered King in Sparta's ancient and storied history.

"No, my son." Leonidas spoke. "You are the one *Mard Revik*. Just as it was always meant to be."

Martin watched his father set the mug on the table and move with confident steps around the side to stop only a foot away from him. It was like looking into a mirror and seeing himself. This was not an Etheric projection of him like when he saw him at Thermopylae all those years ago, however, this was something... it couldn't be. Martin watched his father smile at him.

"Why can it not be Martin?" Leonidas asked him as if hearing the question in his son's mind. "There is so much that we will never understand about the universe my son. We spend years, decades, even lifetimes trying to fully understand what the universe and the gods that fill that universe do not want us to understand. It simply is my son. And that is how we must view it." Leonidas held out his hand. "Take it my son."

Martin looked at his father, his eyes wide. "Father... you..."

Leonidas stepped closer. "You have held one desire in your heart above all others. Even those who you hold dearest to your heart of hearts, even your Queens, they know nothing of it. My grandson may suspect, for Androcles is more like you than even you want to admit. I know this desire Martin, for it is the same one that has filled my being since the moment you entered this world. You have put others before yourself all of your life my son, yet this desire has never changed or altered in all of that time." Leonidas held his hand out even further. "Whatever the reason behind it my son, the powers that be, the gods who look down on us, whatever it is, they have granted us this."

Martin looked at his father's hand, his heart racing out of control now. He glanced back up into his face as he held out his own hand now, and he closed his eyes as he reached for that weathered hand.

His dark eyes flew open when he felt flesh. Warm, firm, living flesh. He looked up into his father's face, saw his dark brown eyes smiling with love and he reached up with his other hand to grasp him as well. His hand was shaking horribly as he rested it on his father's forearm, but it was the same. Not an Etheric projection, not some holo graphic image, but a powerful arm pulsing with life and blood.

"Fa... father?" Martin gasped now.

Leonidas smiled now and he held his other arm out as if asking for an embrace. The one embrace that neither of them had ever had the opportunity to share. "My son." He said.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas could feel the heat of their hands, he could smell his father's scent, feel his aura pulsing all around him. He stepped forward slowly, hoping beyond hope that this was not some sick dream or vile trick on his mind. He felt his father's arms encircle his back and begin to pull him close and then Martin closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around the shoulders of the man who had guided his life even when he did not know who he truly was. As Leonidas pulled him close and lifted his hand to take Martin's head in his grasp, it was then that Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas felt the wracking sobs consume him and even his tightly shut eyes could not stem the flow of tears that poured down his cheeks. He could feel the powerful beat of his

father's heart against his own chest, the power in his limbs as he held him, and his knees gave out somewhat as emotion swarmed across his mind and body and everything he had held in for years came rushing out.

King Leonidas the First grasped his son, easily holding him up in his arms as his son's own arms crushed him in an embrace that would probably have killed a lesser man. Real tears flooded his own eyes as he was granted the one wish that he had craved since the moment he felt Martin's life stir within Gorgo's womb all those nights ago.

King Leonidas of Sparta, had a purpose this day, he knew. The reasons behind why he had been given this sacred moment to share with his only son so long after his duty had taken it away from him were not for him to question. The gods above, the powers that watched over the universe, whoever or whatever they were, they had given him this chance. He would fulfill the purpose... but right now...

Right now, however, right now, he just wanted to hold his son in his arms as he should have been able to do, before fate, destiny and his duty to his people took him away all those years ago.

A father and son, who had known each other only in their dreams, were allowed to hold and embrace one another for the first time in nearly four thousand years.

And, both of them knew without doubt, the last.

JETANIA

It did not matter where they were in Warim, or what they were doing, they all felt it when it happened. Hundreds of Lycavorians, both from the Mountain Packs and from the Union, they all saw it but they would never understand it. The *Durcunusaan* thought at first that something had taken place with their King. All of them knew he had gone off with Androcles, Dorian and Laren, and their first thought was that something had gone terribly wrong.

That was until they saw the smiles through the tears that were falling.

His Queens. His children. His family. His blood. They all felt the emotions within him, and the fulfilment of an impossible dream that none of them had ever known he possessed. His wives, his sons and daughters, his brother, no matter where they were, they stopped and held one another close as the tears poured shamelessly from their own eyes at the enormous love and happiness within the man that they all loved beyond words.

It was a moment in time that none of them would ever forget or let go of no matter how many years passed from this day forward.

It was the moment that the man they loved more than they could put into words, finally and forever was reborn into the man he was always meant to be.

Their father. Their husband and mate.

Their *Mard Revik*.

"...Much did you know?" Martin asked the question softly. "At the end?"

Father and son stood on the edge of the cliff overlooking the emerald green sea that stretched before them as far as the eye could see. The smell of the ocean blew gently across their faces, carrying with it a myriad of different but familiar scents to both of them. The backdrop all around them, the smells, it all reminded Martin of parts of Sparta and Gytheio together. *Vada Arwa rie vada Revik* was not deployed, leaving Martin in a pair of dark gray fatigue pants and top. Father and son were very nearly equal in size and physical proportions, both as men and as wolves. They had run here in their wolf forms, Martin marveling at his father's size, not realizing that he matched him in every way. Though he would never really believe it, Martin and his father were the largest Lycavorians in wolf form to have ever lived in their complete history. Only Androcles came close to them and even he was slightly smaller than his father and grandfather, though not by very much Martin knew. Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo were not as large or muscular, but Martin knew that there was not much known about their father and Reva's husband and mate. It didn't matter to him, for watching as his father ran was mesmerizing.

For Martin, he did not realize the passage of time. It seemed like they had been speaking for hours already when they arrived at this bluff, but he also could feel their time together was coming to an end.

Leonidas looked at his son. "Everything." He answered him. "In those last moments, they all came to me. Resumar, Sumar, Daniho and Ashten. Even Dadrien. Our blood. They shared everything with me. I knew Reva would be watching over you. Even after your mother took you away from earth to protect you... Reva watched over you. They all did. I know that you have struggled with everything these last months and weeks. Discovering so much that you did not know. That you could not imagine."

Martin smiled slightly. "That would be the understatement of the millennia *medwan*." He said. "Any millennia."

Leonidas smiled as well now. "Indeed."

"You must retrieve our blood my son." Leonidas told him. "I know that you and my grandson Androcles can sense what has taken place, just not on what scale. They are what is most important now."

Martin looked at his father. "It's as bad as we think it is, isn't it father?"

Leonidas turned and looked out over the ocean below them. "Yes."

"How bad?" Martin pressed him.

Leonidas shook his head slowly. "I will leave this for you to discover Martin." He said softly in response. "Just make sure to keep Canth's words to you on that foul planet foremost in your mind. Not everything is as it seems my son. Trust in your instincts Martin my son, for they have never led you astray and they will not fail you going forward."

"You are trying to tell me something without actually telling me." Martin said.

Leonidas looked at him and smiled. "Your insight is your greatest gift *keto*." He said. "The answers you seek will come, you must be patient. The future is not set Martin *aur keto*. Androcles changed everything when he looked inside himself and altered the path of the High Coven and brought us together. The Onab prophecies are nearly complete, and then, then you will truly be stepping into the unknown."

"You are talking about the Iais'Kai aren't you?" Martin asked.

Leonidas nodded his head and reached out with his hand to take Martin's arm just above his elbow. "Reva, Kelia, Dynina, Jezima, Gorgo and Anja must be protected at all costs Martin. Each of them have a vital role to play in the future of our people. I don't know what that role is, but that is what I feel strongly. What we all feel."

"Anja?" Martin asked softly.

Leonidas smiled at his son. "Your mother and *staania* Reva are right you know?" He said quickly. "*Forn wen osmosa*." (You are dense)

"Ha, ha. Very funny *medwan*." Martin snapped.

"Aricia may be your *ano aur keto*, but Anja... Anja is your *gai*. Everyone knows that my son! You know that! She always has been, and she always will be Martin." Leonidas spoke the words almost forcefully now. "Your other Queens know this as well and they do not care in the least. They love her even more for it; for she is their heart as well as yours. Your Queens... they are as intelligent as they are devastatingly beautiful Martin my boy. They feel it within them, all of them and they embrace it completely."

"Father..."

"You are the *Mard Revik* my son." Leonidas told him. "You are the King that destiny and fate have prepared for. You are ready."

"Really? No pressure here." Martin hissed softly shaking his head. "*Carians* sometimes I hate those words."

Leonidas chuckled softly. "Yes, I do know the feeling." He said softly. "Our time grows short my son." He said finally. "Trust your instincts Martin. Trust your son's instincts. At times, they are even more attuned than yours because of his *Dahakoan* blood. *Vin cedaur kimay forn un vada letha rie jorbhe for bara*. They all would. You know this." (He will follow you to the gates of hell and back)

"That doesn't mean I have to like it." Martin said.

Leonidas nodded his head. "Perhaps not, but it is what it is." He replied. "Androcles is one of the finest Spartan warriors to have ever lived my son. In some ways, even more so than you. Achilles will be even greater. They are of our bloodline Martin. Our family, my son. Your teachings are what fill them. Your values. Your morals. Achilles will be the reunification of our people and Neesia will follow in her brother's footsteps. Eliani,

Dorian, Retta and Calyb, all of my grandchildren will do the same. Even those who have yet to be born.” Martin looked at his father with wide eyes when he said that and he saw the sly smile on his face. “Your Queens have already made this known to you, so don’t look so surprised.” He said. “I would not want to cross one of them, let alone all six of them.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed then and finally he shook his head with a smile. “True.” He said finally.

Leonidas squeezed his arm and gently prodded him to turn around. Martin did and his eyes grew wide when he saw the alter like obelisk behind them. It had not been there when they arrived here, but Martin had long decided that there was more to this place than met the eye. His father stepped up to the obelisk and motioned him forward to gaze at the crimson and silver hilt that rested on the blood red cloth atop the white obelisk alter. Martin’s eyes grew slightly wider when he saw that it had the shoulders and neck of an obsidian colored dragon adorned across the front end of the hilt.

“*Vada saan rie duan cafna. Vada Endvor rie duan cafna. Vada Endvor rie vada Mard Revik.*” His father spoke the words almost reverently. “The weapon that our ancestor Daniho Mahanlo wielded in defense of our people. A weapon known to all of our people no matter where they might be. They will feel it within themselves and know what it signifies. It is your weapon now Martin *aur keto*. Hidden here on *Vada Dir rie Hal for Saar* for nearly three million years, waiting for you to claim it.” (The blood of our people) (The Blade of our people)

Martin lifted his eyes from the sword hilt to his father. “I will never see... I will never see you again will I father?” Martin asked softly.

Leonidas shook his head slowly. “Like this... no my son.” He answered, his voice filled with sadness. “However, however all this came to be, it has allowed us to fulfill the one dream that both of us had my son. We will always be here Martin. All you need do is walk through the Etheric portal. How it works, I do not know, but they will join me here soon. The rest of our bloodline. When you take *Vada Endvor rie duan cafna* from its place, the barrier that keeps ships from fully approaching will dissipate and allow access to the Temple itself, but only someone of enough etheric ability will be able to access the portal and come here. Right now, that number is very limited, only someone of our bloodline will be able to pass through the portal, but as the years pass it will grow. Osrod Aspion and his bloodline to come will be its *Kerta Sehises.*” (Eternal Guardians)

“Osrod?” Martin gasped.

Leonidas smiled and nodded his head. “Your insight, remember?” He said. “Why do you think his bloodline found its way here? You sensed it within him when you first met him and that is why you spared him when you could have killed him.” Leonidas stepped closer to his son and reached up to take both sides of his head in his weathered hands. Martin felt the warmth of his skin and inhaled deeply of his father’s rich mint scent. “When you take *Vada saan rie duan cafna* from its place, this will also return *staania* Reva’s essence to her body. And then your final journey will have begun.”

“My final journey?”

Leonidas nodded his head. “One thing remains for you to do once you have reunited our people. Something left for you by *staanio* Sumar.”

“What is that?” Martin asked.

Leonidas shook his head. “That I do not know. Androcles, Dorian and Laren carry the map within them and they will discover it when the time is right. They will bring that map to you and then you will know.”

“Seems like an awful lot of effort for a weapon or something.” Martin said.

“When is something that is worth it, ever easy my son?” Leonidas asked.

“Never.” Martin answered.

Leonidas nodded his head. “Never.”

“Father...?”

Leonidas pulled Martin into a powerful embrace, an embrace that Martin returned with equal power. Martin felt tears in his eyes once more and he tried to pull his father even closer to him, hoping that the tighter he held him the less chance there was of him disappearing.

“I will always be with you my son.” Leonidas whispered in his ear. “I will always be with you.”

Martin Leonidas stood there even as he felt his father’s physical form melt from his grasp until there was nothing. He lowered his arms, staring at the ground in front of him, memorizing the smell of him before it drifted away, searing it into his brain. He lifted his hand and drew it across his face, wiping away the tears that stained his cheeks as he turned his head and looked out over the emerald ocean that extended far into the

distance. He took several deep breaths to calm his racing heart, suddenly grateful for the fulfillment of what he once thought a dream that would never come true. Martin looked into the clear blue sky above the ocean and nodded his head slowly. Perhaps there were gods, or some higher power up there looking down upon him from the heavens. As he lifted his face and closed his eyes to feel the ocean breeze on his skin he nodded his head one last time in thanks to them.

“Thank you.” Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas whispered the words.

Martin turned to face the obelisk alter and he reached out his hand to circle his fingers around the hilt of *Vada Endvor rie duan cafna*. He concentrated for an instant and the *Onkmeti Naami* blade burst forth from the Etheric realm. It was truly a masterful piece of workmanship, easily surpassing the skill of the Weapons Master Nehtes. The blade glimmered in the sunlight, with an intricately carved image of what could only be Torma on either side, his obsidian scales and golden eyes easily discernible.

Martin nodded his head once more and squeezed the hilt harder as he lifted it further from the surface of the alter. He blinked when the obelisk alter suddenly vanished in a soft flash of yellowish light and then he was alone on the bluff. He turned his head one last time to look out over the edge of the bluff and nodded.

“Time to go to work.” He said softly.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

JETANIA

WARIM MEDICAL CENTER

They stared at each other from across the small recovery room in silence, still unsure if it was all really happening.

As was her nature, Anja Mahanlo-Leonidas had prepared meticulously for the moment when it would happen and they had been talking amongst themselves in the medical room when Reva’s sphere suddenly twitched once and then dropped to the floor heavily and lay still. Anja knew what was happening instantly and she directed everyone else as they sprang into action. Denali and Deion were on either side of the bed where Reva’s body rested peacefully and both of them were ready when her lungs took in a massive breath of pure, un-recycled air for the first time in nearly three and a half million years. Her upper body rose off the bed as it fought the sensations and Denali and Deion gently placed their hands over her abdomen and held her down on the bed as Anja and Eliani began to work their healing magic from either side of the bed.

They really did not have to do anything except monitor as Anja’s medical regime for the last two days had already been preparing Reva’s body to begin moving once more on its own. Small injections of natural steroids through her muscles and protein enzymes that flooded her bones and joints. The chamber had kept her internal organs in superb condition, just as they had been when she entered the chamber all those years ago, and Anja and Eliani simply used their healing power as an extra source of growth stimulation. Dynina and Gorgo stood on either side of the bed, each of them holding one of Reva’s hands tightly within their own while Jezima stood at the head of the bed and rested her hands on her temples. More than anything, they wanted her to feel the love of her family all around her. That is what mattered most of all.

And feel them Reva Mahanlo did.

Their scents filled her senses instantly as she took her first deep breath, so powerful and sweet. It was Mahanlo blood. The sweetest scent of all to her. Then their Etheric resonances reached for her in a way that Reva had never truly experienced. Her family, her blood had always been more powerful within the Etheric realm, but this was so much different. This swept her up in it and caused her to feel like she was flying on the clouds. She saw so much, felt so much that it caused her to gasp aloud in shock, her dual wolf fangs springing forth from her gums and her dark eyes changing to the wolf within her as she felt it. The dedication to her. The boundless love. It was the most natural thing in the world to them. The sense of devotion to family that Daniho, Ashten and Kelia had begun and cultivated all the years ago, and it reigned supreme within all of them. Added to that was the Pralor sense of family and devotion and Reva could not help but feel humbled at the emotions that flooded through her without any doubt or hesitation.

It moved quickly because of the preparations that Anja had taken and soon Reva was sitting up in the bed as her bloodline flooded the small room to see her. To feel her touch upon them and smell her scent. Reva Mahanlo was the beginning of their bloodline. She was where it had all begun and even Gorgo and Dynina were truly honored to be in her presence, though in the months to come, Gorgo, Dynina, Dasha and Jezima would learn just how much Reva Mahanlo regarded them as her fellow Matriarchs of their family. There were tears aplenty to be sure, especially when Reva held Calyb, Retta, Zarah and Nara in her arms and felt the joy of new found love and devotion within them. Reva Mahanlo's bloodline was growing right in front of her eyes and this is what fought back the horror of what had taken place through the years and the losses she had to suffer as she watched so many of her bloodline die.

This is what held the pain in check.

The pain she felt within him and his oldest son. It was clear to her now, perhaps not to those that loved them, not just yet, but to her, to the Blood Matriarch of the Mahanlo bloodline, it was so very clear.

The room became silent when he entered with Androcles, Dorian and Laren. All of them could sense the difference in their father, their brothers and soul sister Laren. It was a palpable thing to them and all of them wondered what had taken place on that mountaintop Temple.

The Mountain of Stone and Light.

Their eyes locked from across the room and the tears began before Reva had time to blink. Before her stood the physical incarnations of her precious sons Daniho and Ashten. To her wolf eyes Martin was a twin to them both in every way. He had the same set to his jaw, the same skin coloring, the same angle to his eyes. His forehead and cheekbones were all Sumar she knew, strong and proud Pralor features, but he carried all of them within him. Reva did not have time to reach out her arms to him for Martin covered the ten steps to her bed in two blinks of the eye and then he was kneeling beside her bed, burying his face in her lap and weeping. Reva Mahanlo lost it herself then, lifting her head skyward as her arms wrapped around his broad shoulders and baring her dual fangs once more, she let loose with a howl of happiness that shook the entire building and was heard by every wolf for nearly five kilometers in every direction.

It only grew in intensity as her family, her blood, closed in around her and joined her howl in a chorus of rebirth and happiness. It was something that the Lycavorian wolves on Jetania would speak of for many millennia to come. For generations to come, to small children across the planet, it would be told how the Royal bloodline of the Lycavorian people once more reunited on Jetania after millennia apart. It would be spoken of as a momentous day. A day of hope and rebirth to all of their people and those on Jetania would hold that close to their hearts.

Martin sat on the edge of the bed, Reva's hand within both of his, as it had been for the last hour and a half. He was unwilling to release her hand and Reva was unwilling to let his go either, for fear that all of this would be some sort of cruel dream. As more time passed she came to realize that it wasn't. It was a blessing of the highest nature.

The past, the present and the future of Mahanlo blood existed in this room right now. Her family. Her bloodline. All around her.

All of them were crammed into the much larger private room now. Anja had Reva moved to a larger room within the hospital, the Mountain Pack Staff so very happy to accommodate this knowing who was among them, and now Reva Mahanlo was very nearly overwhelmed with the scents of her bloodline that were crowded into the room. Martin and Androcles had spent the last hour and a half telling their family everything that they had discovered in the last days thanks to Chiron's help. Reva had not believed it at first, her eyes awash with tears of sorrow as she clutched Dynina, Jezima and Gorgo, but she smelled the truth coming from her grandsons and she could feel it within her heart now.

Her beloved daughter Kelia was alive yes, but so many of her blood now lived with her precious sons in The Beyond simply because of their bloodline.

This was not something Reva Mahanlo had ever envisioned, being among those she had watched from afar for so long. Simply being able to touch them and smell them. It was so much like her sons to make these plans for her and not tell her. Reva realized that Daniho and Ashten had always known what they were going to

do when it came to their mother; when it was time for Martin to take his rightful place among their people. They had always planned for this to take place. To return their beloved mother to her body in order that she could shepherd and guide the future of their bloodline. Chiron had planned equally as well and kept this information from her, always faithfully following the last orders given to him by Daniho.

All of Martin's six Queens stood together now, and Reva was simply awed by their physical beauty as well as the devotion and unabashed love she could smell in all of them for her grandson. It was no different than Androcles' two wives who were with him at the moment, though Reva could feel the love within the Etheric realm from Sadi and the others not here. The exquisitely beautiful vampire female Carisia and the exotic Drow female Lu'ria were able to channel their fellow Princesses. Deion, Mari and Emylea; Denali, Lisisa and Arduri; Eliani, Brendi and Jomann; Calyb, Anoria and Taris; Zarah, Lucia and Dutkne; Retta and Lazar. As with her bloodline that was not present here now, they all loved without question or doubt. She could smell the devoutness to each other and to their family. Even those like Lazar and his mother Loras; Doseb and Irani; Mari and Arduri; and those who had married into the Mahanlo-Leonidas family and had been turned, even their loyalty was absolute, as was their love. It made Reva's heart sing in utter happiness knowing this and she knew without doubt that she would be complete once she was able to hold her daughter in her arms once more.

This was something that she never questioned would happen for she could feel it within Martin and Androcles. They would stop at nothing to retrieve Kelia and all those who bore the blood of their family within them. They would be methodic in their actions, completely without mercy or remorse she knew, but they also would not do anything to risk harm to any of their bloodline.

"Beloved we... we must do something." Aricia finally broke the silence in the room, all of them turning to look at their mother. "This... this cannot be left... it cannot go..."

"Unpunished!" Anja hissed softly now as she stood beside Aricia, her jade green eyes alive with anger. Isabella stood on Aricia's other side with For'mya beside her and Dysea and Cirith standing to Anja's left.

Martin turned his head and looked at the six women who held his heart and soul in their hands. He could see the set of their jaws, the determination in their eyes, and the way they stood proudly pressed against one another in complete unity. Even his beautiful For'mya, perhaps the calmest and most level headed of his Queens, even she had simmering anger in her beautiful deep brown eyes. Even she wanted justice. Reva stayed silent listening and felt the pride swell within her as all of them began to speak their minds after their mothers.

"They have... they have taken the lives of our blood! Even those who were innocent of anything! Simply because our blood flowed in their veins!" Denali rasped angrily as Lisisa and Arduri clung to either side of his body and nodded their heads in agreement. "They were killed for power! For control! Father... we cannot let that stand!"

"We did not know how many..." Doseb began to speak now as all eyes turned to him and saw that his own dark eyes were moist. "...How many had been killed when we left. Kesas Pengot never revealed this to us."

"He did that for a reason." Martin spoke looking at him. "He needed you two focused on one thing. Your survival."

"How many Martin?" Irani asked softly.

Martin shook his head slowly. "I don't know exact numbers Irani... and I did not ask Kesas that question when Andro and I spoke to him and Lylor."

"It is bad though, isn't it father?" Deion asked him.

Martin nodded his head slowly now as he looked at his pureblood son. "Probably, yes *Keto*. Probably much worse than any of us can imagine." He answered. "The numbers Chiron has shown us tell us that, but we don't know exactly."

"They were... they are our blood *alvva!*" Nara snarled angrily now. She was standing beside Jacina, both of them leaning almost casually against Laon's taller form, but leaving no doubt as to who had claimed them both so completely. Laon Kavar's scent spoke of total and utter worship for both of them and that was all Nara's family needed to see and smell to know where Laon stood in status within their family. "They must be avenged!"

"*Jainn. Pen areto!*" Deion instantly agreed with his twin. (Yes. I agree.)

"*Sy alad pen.*" Eliani was next to speak. (So do I)

"*Una coi atle coi niob isquer.*" Jomann agreed standing just behind Eliani. (It is what is now required.)

“I know that... I do not know as much as everyone here...” Lazar spoke now, stepping slightly ahead of Retta but still holding her hand tightly as she looked on proudly at him. “This is... it is all new to me...”

“You have the blood of our family swirling within you Lazar. The blood of our beginning and our future.” Aricia spoke again. “As do your mother and your siblings. That makes all of you equal in this.”

“*Avoi*.” Gorgo spoke softly from where she sat at the head of the bed beside Reva with Dynina and Jezima around her.

“I am still learning.” Lazar continued. “But I feel it within me now, the power of the blood that flows within me.”

Loras stepped up to her son and took his hand as well as Retta’s. “As do I.” She said with confidence. “I feel... I feel the rage and vengeance within me. This thing that has taken place... it cannot be left unanswered.”

Lazar shook his head. “No.” He agreed.

Doseb and Irani stepped close to their daughter and grandson. “We agree.” Doseb spoke as Irani nodded her head.

“*Alvva*... you know we speak the truth.” Normya spoke now looking at her father. “This is how you and our mothers raised all of us to be. Blood before all else father.”

“Yes, we did.” Martin said softly.

“Normya is correct. We all feel it within us father, for we all have your blood within us. Mahanlo-Leonidas blood. *Staania* Reva has been... by a blessed gift from the gods and our ancestors themselves, she has been given back to us. The connection that all of us have felt to our history father; to the very origins of the bloodline we all carry within us. She is here among us now!” Zarah spoke after her Normya causing Martin to turn his head once more and look at Zarah with love in his eyes. “What has been done... no matter how terrible it may turn out to be... it is our duty as a family to see that justice is done.”

Martin looked at Reva quickly, saw the support in her eyes and then turned back to his daughter. “Not everyone we face or come in contact with will have had a role in what has taken place *fenneennum*.” He said softly. “You know this.”

Zarah nodded her head. “Yes, I know *alvva*.” She replied. “We...”

“Zarah is right no matter how it is calculated father!” Deion spoke again, more forcefully now. “They think... they think that they have ended our bloodline. They hold our *tenna* Kelia prisoner father! A tool to use against our own people! To keep them oppressed! I say it is time to show them that our bloodline is not dead! It is time to save our *tenna* and show them that our bloodline flourishes, and we do not accept the deaths of so many of our family so casually at their hands! We do not accept it and we will have our justice!”

Nara stepped up beside her twin and took his hand. “*Avoi*.” She spoke firmly.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas looked at each of his children and those they called beloved mate as they all stepped forward in support and complete agreement with Deion’s words. Even Taris and Anoria, the newest members of their family, stood on either side of Calyb proudly and without doubt in their beautiful faces. Martin turned to look at his mother now, seeing the set of her jaw and that of Dynina and Jezima and even Dasha who stood beside Jezima. His mother’s jaw was set in stone, this he knew and he also knew nothing would change his mother’s mind now that it was made up. He turned his head once more to look at his queens and in their eyes, he saw the fiercest look of passion that he had ever seen before and total commitment to him and to their family.

Their bloodline.

“If we do this...” Androcles’ voice echoed softly in the room now, causing everyone to turn and look at him. His voice, like their father’s, was the only voice that could move their entire family to action or inaction.

Androcles had dropped to one knee between Carisia and Lu’ria, their hands going to rest lovingly on his shoulders, but channeling the love of Sadi, Ne’Veha, Caliria and Sehri within them as well. “If we do this... if we all agree on this course of action... we do this as a family. We do this as a bloodline. We target only those men and women who are... who took part in these heinous deeds and those who we know would have supported them. We do not target those who are innocent or those who know nothing of what has been done. We must be certain in our actions, for these are our people as well. There has not been a sworn *Saan Tinate* among our people since the false one Chetak swore against our grandfather, nearly twenty thousand years ago. We all know how that ended.”

Reva shook her head from the bed. “That was not the first Androcles.” She spoke. “The first true *Saan Tinate* was sworn against Daniho and Ashten. It never really ended until your father brought it to a close. I don’t believe those with Kelia and the Kesas have any idea what a *Saan Tinate* is.”

“Then it is up to us to educate them.” Androcles spoke firmly and Reva saw his brothers and sisters nod their collective heads in agreement. “If we do this, and I believe deeply that we must; my blood calls for it, even the *Dahakoan* blood within me.” (Blood Oath)

Laren stepped forward now beside Dorian, Sheva and Onera, all of them holding hands as they reached for Androcles, Carisia and Lu’ria. “As does ours.” Laren spoke.

Androcles looked around at his family. “If we do this, then we make it known who we hold responsible and why. We rescue our *Tenna* Kelia first, and any who these people hold against their will. That must be our priority. If we do this... then we must show no mercy, no remorse and no quarter and we make certain justice is done. And when it is finished, we leave it behind us and move forward into the future, for we have much larger concerns in the days to come ahead.”

“*Mard astia.*” Martin said softly with a nod. He looked around the room slowly, touching everyone’s eyes for a few seconds. “Then this is what we have decided as a family?” He asked them. “We must all be certain and all of us must agree. Your mothers and I will speak with your siblings on Manne. We will speak with Deia, and your aunts Tarifa and Aihola. We will make contact with Resumar and Arrarn in the next few hours, but all of us must agree. This is a decision that all of those we regard as family must have a say in; everyone who now bears the mark of our family. It will affect them as well.” Martin touched everyone’s eyes in the room, and not one set of eyes held doubt or hesitation in them on their course of action. Martin turned to look at Reva last. Her dark eyes were equally as bright as everyone’s and he knew where he got the color of his eyes from. Reva was still holding his hand and she lifted it within her grasp and placed her other hand around his where she squeezed tightly.

“Promise me one thing. All of you.” She stammered looking around the room.

Martin nodded his head. “Name it *Staania.*”

“When it... when it is done Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas...” Reva spoke softly looking back to him. “... When it is done, you do what your ancestors intended for you to do. You bring our people together and make us whole once again. You make it so that nothing will ever tear us apart again.”

Martin stared at her for a long moment and then nodded his head. “That is a promise I intend to keep to you. And to them.”

Reva nodded as tears slowly rolled down her cheeks. “Then let it begin.” She spoke firmly. “The Time of Reckoning is upon us my family. My blood. Let it begin.”

Martin rose to his feet and look around the room once more slowly. “I doubt Deia or your siblings will disagree, or your aunts, but we will ask them anyway.” He spoke softly. “Prepare yourselves family. The *Saan Tinate* has been declared. The Mahanlo-Leonidas family is going to war. Again.”

JETANIA

“... Let me do this father.” Androcles told his father as he watched him walk around the large table on *SPARTA’S WRATH*. The Port Briefing room closest to Andro’s quarters was now locked down due to so many of the Royal Family either in the room or close by. His father and mothers would return to *MJOLNIR’S HAND* when the ship finally caught up to them, it was his father’s Flagship after all, and the only ship in the vast fleet where their quarters were built for all seven of them to be together comfortably. Andro’s team had already returned to the ship in order to prepare for the trip. Andro had not spoken to Kalis just yet, but he walked with a new purpose and step in his gait that exuded love for his family and Serale. Sehri had gotten to see her parents and brother Kelelm once more which was always pleasing to her.

Denali Mahanlo-Leonidas, while still a member of Andro’s Team, now commanded the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser *ARCH DEMON* and that would not change going into the future. The massive warship and its many crew had come to accept Denali’s command and his relationship with the Captain of the *ARCH DEMON* was a perfect match. They were very much alike in their mannerisms and this was well documented

over the past months, especially during the Vanari conflict, where the older and younger man worked together like a finely tuned and well-oiled machine. Through the years to come, like his older brother Androcles, his father and Uncle Danny, Denali Leonidas' command, and his brother Resumar's command would become two very sought after postings by all members of the Union Fleet.

Deion, Mari and Emylea now called *SPARTA'S WRATH* their home, as did Nara, Jacina and Laon. This would not change for the foreseeable future for both of them knew they needed much training and skill that only being with their brother and Elynth could provide. Mari and Emylea had already started to become a fixture on the ship as Prince Deion's wives and mates and they were very popular. Jacina and Nara would help Laon adjust, but this is what he wanted more than anything. To see and learn and use the technology on this ship was a dream come true for him. Laon would not push his will upon either Nara or Jacina, they were both too head strong and independent for that to succeed, but Laon didn't want too. His father was not pleased at the turn of events, but his mother understood and loved her oldest son more for his actions. Laon's father would come around in time as Nara and Jacina began to honor Laon's family as only they could.

Dorian and Laren were the other two *Tarivuos* to their father and they would not stray very far from Androcles no matter what, and neither would Ryner and Ladur. *SPARTA'S WRATH* was now their home as well, which pleased Sheva and Onera to no end. Laren's parents had already begun to settle in on the ship, as had Aviel and his wife Nahko. Dalis was working closely with General Dytin and others to set up a working relationship with the Union fleet and its ground forces for the Darastrixi Sand Striders that occupied the ships above Jetania. In the month's ahead many of them would come to call Jetania their new home going into the future, and would find trusted and loyal friends and allies in the Lycavorian people under Osrod Aspion's guidance.

Martin looked at his oldest son. "Why?" Martin demanded. "This is not something that could happen without me saying so. Everyone will know that. You've been the bad guy enough times covering for my sorry ass!"

"Which is why Androcles should take the lead." Reva spoke from the chair she sat in.

Her recovery was moving very fast thanks to the incredible physical regime Anja and Aricia had devised for her and Anja's tremendous healing skill. The Queen smallest in physical stature Anja may have been Reva thought to herself many times in recent hours, but without question she had the drive and purpose of a full blooded Lycavorian and did not take *sibfla* from anyone. Reva began to understand why Aricia, Dysea and For'mya and her other fellow Queens loved her intensely and without question. Aricia and Gorgo sat on either side of Reva at the table, Jezima and Dynina sitting to Gorgo's left. Ever since they had been on the planet below, it was as if the five women had become inseparable, the only one not with them right now being Dasha since she had other duties that she was attending too. "You... you are the *Mard Revik* Martin. That fact will not be open for debate when others see or smell you in any way, shape or form. When they smell our blood Martin, they will know that things have finally changed. Hopefully, they will think for the better."

"*Medwan* Reva is very correct my King." Lylor spoke from within the highly secure QCR transmission. Along with him were Kesas, Aryera, Caylt and Rothan. They could not risk everyone being present for every transmission since it would draw attention to them and allow the Arhtai Pack spies to begin to suspect something. "They will know who you are the moment they smell your blood. They will know who your son Androcles in the same manner. He is also one of the three *Tarivuos* spoken of in the Onab prophecies. They will know that the *Tarivuos* and any who serve you operate with your will."

Reva barely held in her gasp of love and delight at Lylor's words. He had begun calling her mother on Cerath many millennia ago in order to honor her and it appeared even after all of this time, he had not changed in the least. Reva also knew that Lylor loved her daughter Kelia without doubt or question and that he would move the stars and planets themselves to get her back. It was her command to him to keep his anger in check and work with their bloodline that kept Lylor Kirek from running off and trying to free Kelia on his own. Something which over half of the Kirek Pack would have gone with him to do.

Martin shook his head. "*Tenne*, they don't serve me!" Martin protested.

Lylor shook his head. "You may think like that Martin... but our people will not." He answered. "You still do not grasp the love and devotion our people had for your ancestors. For Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. For my beloved Kelia. They would have thrown themselves into a super nova in order to protect them if that is what

it took. That devotion will have automatically transferred to their descendants. To you. To Androcles. To all of you.”

“I don’t want that!” Martin snapped.

“Yet that is what you have Martin.” Kesas answered now. “By virtue of the blood you have flowing within your veins. As will all of your children, your wives and mates, your siblings or those you call sibling. It will not matter to our people. Do you wish to tell us that is not the way it is among those of your Union?”

“Yes.” Gorgo spoke softly.

“Mother!” Martin complained.

Gorgo looked at him. “You can not deny it *keto!*” Gorgo hissed. “No matter how much you wish it wasn’t so.”

“You and others don’t have to encourage it!” Martin protested. “I have told you that before!”

“That is something we can deal with at a later time.” Dynina spoke now. “Let us focus on what is important right now.”

Reva smiled and reached for her hand. “The voice of calm and reason.” She said.

Dynina shook her head with a smirk. “Not really...” She answered. “I just do not want my family caged for one moment longer than necessary.”

Reva smiled and nodded her head. “*Avoi.*” She spoke.

Martin turned and looked at Kesas in the transmission. “You are certain they cannot detect this transmission Kesas?”

Kesas nodded his head. “It is based on Pralor technology my King. Only Lord Daniho, Lord Ashten and myself knew of its existence. Even if they could detect the localized power streams, they would have no idea what it is.”

Marti nodded his head. “Good. We’ll use this from now on then. And we’ll bring portable gear for your ships and personnel when we arrive in two days.”

“We only have short range transports my King.” Kesas spoke quickly. “Better than what the Arhtai Pack could field yes, but unarmed and very closely monitored by their military.”

Andro leaned forward at the table now. “What of their military Lord Kesas? What more can you tell us?” He asked.

Kesas shook his head quickly. “I am no Lord Prince Androcles. I...”

“You and everyone there who has held our people together and fought against the Arhtai Pack and its hold on power are Lords.” Martin hissed. “Do not diminish what any of you have done in all this time. Lord does not mean much as a title within the Union, it is more a meaning of respect and honor for you, and do not ask us to not use it.”

Reva smiled inwardly at Martin’s comment and could only nod to herself in a sort of perverse pride. That was exactly the reason why men and women would follow her sons to the *Letha rie Jorbhe* and back and now that same mentality permeated their descendants and their children to the extreme.

Kesas bowed his head slowly in response and looked at Androcles. “Apart from what Lylor and I have already spoken to you and your father about, not much I’m afraid Androcles. They would not give up the Onab technology that was part of the agreement when we arrived on Koltar Four. This was a major part that led to the Arhtai pushing for power. What they do have however is very old and barely kept in working order.”

“By who?” Martin asked.

Kesas shrugged. “We never knew. The Onab did train some of our people to maintain their technology before we left Cerath, but aside from those few, I can only assume that is why their technology is degraded to such a level.” He answered. “I know Ranol’s oldest daughter is a wizard with the Onab technology that remains, but she refuses to teach any of the Arhtai Pack these skills and they cannot force her without causing serious issues. Many must have learned just by trail and error through the years I assume, there is no other way to explain how they have been able to maintain it to the standards they have, but I refuse to believe Ranol or any of his people would help the Arhtai Pack after what they have done.”

“They have, however, developed their own technology based on what they have been able to learn from the Onab Technology...” Aryera spoke now. “But nothing even remotely as advanced as what we arrived on when we came here.”

Rothan shook his head in agreement. “Aryera is correct. The ships they do have are more advanced than anything we have, but they are smaller than what the Onab built and they are few in number. Our ships and pilots are better trained without a doubt, even with their technological disadvantage. That is why I say we are better.”

“How few?” Martin asked.

Rothan shrugged his shoulders. “A few dozen.” He answered. “Just enough to patrol the system and keep us in check.”

“And they knew the risk of patrolling the system with Onab technology?” Martin asked nodding his head in appreciation of Rothan’s knowledge and confidence. “Even after what they knew had happened in the past and why my grandfathers did what they did?”

Rothan nodded his head. “Yes, my King.”

“So no matter the odds of it happening, that the Iais’Kai could possibly find them, they were more concerned with their power grab than they were in keeping our people safe.” Martin muttered to no one in particular.

Rothan nodded his head once more. “Yes.”

Martin turned his head slightly to another holo transmission. This one held Miranda and Sa’sur in it. “Manda?” Martin asked. “Sa’sur? Talk to me.”

“Without actually being able to scan what their abilities are King Leonidas...” Sa’sur replied first. “I would recommend caution until we are in system and can make a full sensor sweep.”

“Manda?” Martin asked.

Miranda nodded. “I recommend the same.” She answered, not surprising Martin in the least. Miranda Lawson was known as reckless and brash, but she was not stupid by any means, and ever since Sa’sur had arrived out here with them the two women had not disagreed on anything. “And since we will be working down the advantage until the *SCIMITAR* and other ships arrive a day later, I suggest a recon and wait approach.”

“Concur.” Sa’sur echoed her words.

“They have my Kelia and others!” Lylor hissed softly.

Manda nodded her head. “Yes, sir, they do.” She answered him. “But they’ve had her and those same others for more years than most of us coming there have been alive and another few days will not make a difference. At least until we get there and we can properly beat their asses into the ground for what they have done.”

Lylor blinked several times in surprise at her response. He looked at Martin once more. “This is how all of your commanders think and speak?” He asked.

Martin grinned. “Pretty much.”

Lylor nodded his head in anticipation. “Then I will wait patiently.” He said not seeing Reva smile in happiness.

“Armen and Alpha Nine inform me that the alterations to the *PREMONITION* will be complete in ten hours.” Androcles spoke. “They are moving faster than expected. Let me take her and my team ahead of you father. We can do much in the twelve hours before you arrive.”

Kesas sat forward. “If you do this my King, we will have to deal with those Arhtai Pack spies here on Pakar Six the moment you arrive.”

Martin looked at him. “You said there are five of them?” He asked.

“Six, sire.” Kesas answered. “But only five maintain their ties to the Arhtai Pack. The sixth is husband and mate to one of Rothan’s daughters and he is fully on our side now. They have thirteen children together. The Arhtai Pack does not know this, but he came to Rothan before we ever discovered him.”

Martin nodded his head. “That says a lot.” He said.

“He is a fine young Alpha my King.” Rothan spoke. “And I will support him fully.”

“And your daughter?” Martin asked him.

Rothan took a deep breath. “If he has managed to fool her and all of us these years then she will kill him herself. As will his children.”

Martin nodded his head. “Very well.” Martin looked at Andro. “Take the others out of circulation son.” He told him. “But don’t kill them unless they do something stupid.”

Andro nodded his head. “Done.”

“I want a proper military scan of the planet.” Martin told him. “Hardened facilities, bases, garrisons, the whole enchilada son.”

Andro nodded his head. “Of course.” He spoke.

“Put them together with whatever Kesas and *Tenne* Lylor have, and anything the Nenay Pack can provide.” Martin said as he began to pace. “Kesas... you contact this Ranol. Can he and his senior people get to Pakar Six without being detected?”

Kesas nodded his head slowly. “We have established an underground network so to speak.” He answered. “Getting them here will not be a problem. Getting them back without being detected by the Arhtai will be the trick.”

Martin shook his head. “No, it won’t.” He answered. “By the time the Arhtai Pack and their leaders figure out what is going on I’m going to be so far up their shit they won’t know whether to scratch it or scream in pain. The Nenay Pack will be able to walk right by them and they won’t even know it.”

Andro and the others at the table and Sa'sur and Miranda burst out in small laughter while Kesas, Lylor and the others on Pakar Six looked on bewildered.

“KISS baby!” Danny spoke for the first time, occupying the chair two down from Aricia.

Miranda nodded her head from the *ARIZONA*. “Keep It Simple Stupid.” She spoke with a large smile.

“What... what does this phrase mean *Mandri*?” Lylor asked from Pakar Six. “This... this Keep It Simple Stupid.”

“Sa'sur?” Martin spoke looking at her in the transmission.

Sa'sur shook her head with a smile and looked at Lylor Kirek in the transmission. “What it means Lord Lylor Kirek is that we are going to run so many circles around the Arhtai Pack and cause so much aggravation for them, that they won’t know whether to shit or get off the pot.”

Martin was grinning as he looked at Lylor and Kesas with Rothan. “Essentially we are going to drive them *nubous malda* and make it so they can’t do squat without knowing if it is the right thing to do. Which it won’t be.”

The smile on Lylor’s face grew wider first and then Rothan and Kesas began to grin and then finally Aryera as they all began to understand what Martin was saying.

SPARTA'S WRATH **JETANIA**

“...Don’t tell them what we have planned son.” Martin told him as he stood by the large chart table in the room. Aricia had stayed with Martin and Isabella had joined them once the transmission was over. The QCR transmission had completed almost an hour ago, but Danny had stayed with Martin in the briefing room along with Chiron, Avi and Armen. Miranda and Sa'sur’s transmissions were also still active from the *ARIZONA* and the *SCIMITAR*. When the others had left, Elynth and Torma had come into the massive room via another entrance with Jomann, Sadi and Carisia. “If they have these spies openly among the Kirek Pack and these so-called blood detectors then you can damn well bet that they have others hidden among the populace that are not what they seem. It’s them we need to find.”

Androcles nodded his head. “Agreed.”

“No bet here.” Danny chimed in,

Chiron looked up at Martin confused while Avi and Armen remained silent. They knew how Martin and those with him thought, while Chiron was still learning.

“You do not believe Kesas Pengot and Lylor Kirek?” He asked.

Martin shook his head quickly. “I believe everything they are saying.” Martin answered him. “I just don’t think they know everything. If you are going to control an enemy, or force them to do what you want them to do in this case, you will release small tidbits of information that will make its way back to this enemy. You use that information to control what they will do.”

Chiron looked at Martin intently. “The spies that they think they know about are not the ones we need to be concerned with?” He asked.

Martin shook his head. “There are other fucking spies among the Kirek Pack. I’d bet my ridiculous Union salary on it.”

Isabella chuckled at this and bumped her hip against his while the others laughed softly. “You don’t receive a salary husband.” She said.

Martin grinned. “Yeah... but they don’t know that, and I’ve always wanted to say that.”

Aricia couldn’t contain her sharp gasp of laughter and Isabella took her hands as they laughed and Martin stood there smiling.

Chiron was looking at the large board. “How do we... how do we draw them out then? Make them expose themselves?”

“That’s easy actually.” Danny said in reply. “Take out these blood detectors first thing when you get on the surface *mandri*.” Danny spoke pointing to the points on the map where Kesas had told them he was sure the detectors were active. “Once you have taken them out, kill or incapacitate those that we know about and it will send the others into a panic. Snag them as they try to save their own asses, which they will most definitely do.”

“Those are the ones we keep alive.” Martin continued with a nod of his head at Danny’s words. “They’ll provide the best intelligence.”

“And if they have families?” Chiron asked.

Andro shook his head. “They won’t.” He replied. “A family would be a distraction that they would not make. If they have been there as long as we believe, then you can damn well bet they are single and have devised a way to evacuate the planet quickly in order to get whatever information that they have back to their bosses.”

Chiron blinked several times as he processed this information and then he nodded his head. “Interesting.” He said.

“Kesas has assured me that they will not be able to detect our Shroud Drives, but to be on the safe side, we’ll be moving fast and quick.” Martin spoke further. “Torma?”

Torma moved his massive head closer to the table between Martin and Danny’s shoulders while Elynth did the same between Androcles and Sadi. “Elynth, Anthar, Majeir, Jeth, Tharua, Marux, Ryner, Ladur and Aradace will exit the *PREMONITION* in a star burst formation and move at their top speeds on their plots.” He spoke. “It will still be dark and they will be high enough to avoid any sightings from the ground and low enough to avoid any possible ship sightings.”

“One point six hours Elynth.” Martin spoke as he traced the board in front of all of them. “All of you need to be back in one point six hours no questions. The portable sensor arrays you will be carrying will detect everything out to a hundred kilometers from your location. Do not veer from your plots. The plots we have you on will cover the entire area around their main city and four hundred clicks in every direction, which is where Kesas is certain they are keeping *Tenna Kelia*. One point six hours or we lose the darkness and they could spot you from the ground visually.”

Elynth nodded her head. “We understand.” She spoke now. “No one is going to be a hero King Martin. At least not yet.”

Martin grinned and looked at Torma over his shoulder. “She’s certainly your daughter.” He said.

Torma snorted loudly. “As if your daughters are not like you!” He spat to his bonded brother.

“Why use Marux, Elynth?” Aricia asked now. “His... his bond with Sehri continues to grow but he is not the most experienced in this sort of operation.”

Elynth nodded her head. “Andro and I agreed that this mission is perfect for him Aricia.” She answered. “Marux is very fast, behind only Tharua and myself he is probably the fastest among us, and he will complete his cycle before the rest of us. As will Tharua. If any of us need assistance, Tharua and Marux can get to us far faster and still under cover of darkness. Jeth and Anthar will have the largest portable arrays attached to them because of their size and they have the longer plots to run because of their stamina. Trust me... Tharua and I do not like having our mates going right to the edge of the city, but it gives us comfort knowing that Marux and Tharua will be helping us to back them up. His bond with Sehri has made him powerful and singularly vicious in his protectiveness of her and the rest of us. We all know how Eliani will act if the need arises. We welcome that.”

Aricia nodded her head then. “Very well.” She spoke. “I will trust in those who know him.” She replied.

Chiron looked at Martin intently. “Androcles told Kesas and the others that the refit of the *PREMONITION* would be complete in ten hours.” He said. “That is not true, is it?”

Martin met his eyes and shook his head. “No. You should know by now that I don’t like to broadcast what I’m going to do Chiron.”

Chiron nodded. “Indeed.” He answered.

“The refits will be done in one hour.” Martin said. “The Worker Drones are far more skilled than we let anyone really know Chiron. No offense meant.”

“And none taken King Martin.” Chiron spoke.

Andro looked at Chiron. “My team has put together everything we will need Chiron.” He told him. “Mari and Brendi have set up a station for you to monitor us while we are airborne.”

Chiron blinked. “Me?”

Andro smiled broadly. “You are going with us Chiron.” He said.

Avi looked across the chart table at Chiron. “Armen and I are still learning the trivial things as everyone says Chiron. You are a First-Generation Avatar and you have been dealing with the unknown for far longer than Armen and I have existed. You can adapt much faster than we can and you have first hand knowledge of nearly everyone we will see. It’s only logical.”

“In the brief time that I have been among you and the others of your family and those you associate with, I have found that logical is not something that you adhere to on a regular basis. Why am I really going?” Chiron asked.

Martin smiled and looked at Andro. “I told you.” He said.

Andro shrugged. “It was worth a shot.” He said.

Martin turned back to Chiron and folded his arms across his chest. “Kesas and Lylor are keeping something from us.” Martin said. “They are not telling us something and it has to do with what is on that planet.”

“Koltar Four?” Chiron spoke.

Martin nodded his head. “Something is there. And they are doing their best to hide it from everyone, even us. That may be because of *Tenna Kelia*, or for some other very important reason, but whatever it is, there is something on that planet they don’t want us to find. At least not yet. I don’t like being in the dark.” Martin looked at Chiron with a smile. “That is why we told them ten hours to complete the refits.”

“You intend to find out what it is before going to Pakar Six.” Chiron said.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes. The *PREMONITION* is going to pass Pakar Six and we are going to use our teleporter to transfer Kesas and Lylor to Andro’s ship as they pass it, and probably anyone else who is close to them at the time as well.”

“I was not aware the *PREMONITION* was equipped with a Teleporter.” Chiron said. “Very interesting.”

“A small eight-person pad.” Andro replied.

“If Kesas and Lylor are indeed not telling you something, then they will be forced to reveal this information sooner than they wanted too if they are on your ship while you are scanning the planet.” Chiron nodded. “An excellent plan.” He said. “What do you wish me to do?”

“You are not going to question that?” Androcles asked him. “Lylor Kirek is... he is our *Tenne*. Our blood.”

“You forget Androcles, since the day Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten asked me to remain with their mother, my entire purpose has been the preservation of the Mahanlo bloodline. Lady Reva’s bloodline. Your bloodline.” Chiron spoke evenly. “Now that has become the Mahanlo-Leonidas bloodline. That is my part of my core programming King Martin. It always has been. It always shall be. This is what you would consider my sacred vow to Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten if you will. Lord Lylor may be husband and mate to Kelia Mahanlo, but if he is a threat to her or to your family, if Kesas Pengot is a threat, then I will not hesitate to remove that threat no matter who or what it is.”

“But you are sentient Chiron.” Andro said. “Just as Armen and Avi are. You have grown into this just by virtue of evolving events. It has happened to Alpha Nine and others among the Worker Drones. You can make your own choices now.”

Chiron nodded his head. “And I choose to abide by the programming that was initially entered into my core matrix. I choose this. Just as Armen and Avi have chosen this. Just as Alpha Nine and others within the

Worker Drone Corp have chosen. The Onab people knew this would one day take place Androcles. They welcomed it.”

“As do we all.” Isabella spoke softly. “As do we all.”

Chiron rose to his feet. “I will find Lady Mari and Lady Brendi and we can devise a course of action together. I must admit they are downright brilliant when it comes to running variable rotating algorithms.”

Martin nodded his head. “Thank you, Chiron.”

Chiron shook his head. “It is I who should thank you King Martin.” He spoke. “You are the direct descendant of the two men who nurtured and embraced this way of thinking and it allowed me to evolve. You have continued this and so many others have evolved as well. No... thank you King Martin. Thank you.”

Chiron turned and moved quickly to the door and exited the room. It was silent in the room for a long moment before Martin looked at his son. “Sometimes he just flat out creeps me out.” Martin said.

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “I was going to say the same thing.” He said.

Martin shook his head quickly and then looked at the chart board. “Let’s go over this one more time.” He said.

“...You don’t believe it is something bad do you son?” Martin asked as he and Androcles walked the massive hanger deck of *SPARTA’S WRATH* side by side. Torma walked on Martin’s opposite side while Elynth walked alongside Andro’s opposite side. They avoided the APOC Drones that were parked along the side, many of them being worked on by both engineers and the Spider like Worker Drones. Many of the crew had seen Androcles do this with his father on the *SCIMITAR* and at other places and they paid them no mind, going about their business.

Andro shook his head slowly. “Dorian, Laren and I agree.” He said, his hands behind his back as they walked. They were headed to where the *PREMONITION* was parked, walking at their own pace, which was to say they were hashing out last minute details that only they would know. “It’s important to be sure, but we can only sense the desire to protect whatever it is.”

“And it’s just Kesas and Lylor?” Martin asked.

Andro nodded his head this time. “There are others on the peripheral that we can sense, but Kesas and *Tenne* Lylor and the focus.”

“They know something that they are not sharing with the others. Or only sharing bits of it.” Martin said. “And for them to keep it from us it must be very important. And if they want to protect it then it can’t be dangerous.”

“I don’t think it has to do with *Tenna* Kelia father.” Andro said looking at him.

“Then what?” Martin asked. “Our people?”

Andro shook his head. “Our *Dahakoan* senses do not allow us to be more specific than that I’m sorry, and we have tried. We don’t envy flying into a trap.”

“We wouldn’t know about it at all if not for this sense. Don’t apologize *keto*.” Martin told him. Martin looked at Elynth who had remained silent up until now. “Elynth?”

Elynth shook her huge head. “Andro is right King Martin.” She answered. “And the six of us have tried to focus more intently, but it just fades into blackness.”

“Then they are protecting it and don’t even know it.” Martin commented.

Elynth nodded her head this time. “That is what we believe as well.”

“Their surface thoughts give you nothing *hianag*?” Torma asked. (Daughter)

“*Thric*.” Elynth answered. (No)

“*Astahii shilta los wer xoa*?” Martin asked her. Martin and Androcles were the only two Bonded Riders who had any knowledge of the pure dragon language and both of them could speak it fluently because of their status as Talon Guardians. They were still trying to form the language into spoken words that others could learn but the complexity of the language made it slow going. (They can block the attempts?)

“*Thric*.” Andro answered. “*Astahii canotak vucot astahii re tirir coi*.” (They don’t know they are doing it.)

“Interesting.” Torma echoed now. “That would imply that someone gave them this ability without their knowledge.”

“Anyone want to take a bet?” Martin asked with a grin.

“Dadrien.” Elynth said softly.

“Now why doesn’t that surprise me in the least.” Martin commented as they walked.

Androcles stopped walking however, his azure colored eyes growing slightly wider. It was Elynth who noticed this and she stopped and turned to look at him. “Andro?” She asked causing Torma and his father to stop now as well and turn.

Andro looked at his father. “What if it does not have to do with our family or our people at all father?” He spoke.

Martin stepped closer to him, the hairs on the back of his neck rising. “What do you mean son?”

“Exactly what I am saying.” Andro continued as he focused his gaze on his father’s dark eyes. “Perhaps what they are unconsciously protecting has nothing to do with our family or our people.”

“That would imply something of equal or greater importance.” Martin said as he moved closer still to his son.

“It would also answer questions that none of us can answer.” Androcles said. “Like how they are able to keep the Onab technology they have working after it should have broken down so long ago according to Kesas Pengot.”

Martin’s eyes grew wider now as he realized what Androcles was saying. “That is... that’s a reach son.” Martin said finally. “Chiron says the Onab have been extinct since the supernova destroyed their planet fifty thousand years ago. None of them left Cerath.”

“That is what he says, yes, but that could be what he truly believes when it is not fact. Are they truly extinct father?” Andro asked. “Or is it something that everyone would want us to believe, expect us to believe with the information that we have, at least until they know they can trust us.”

“You think they do not trust us?” Torma asked now shifting his massive body around until the four of them had formed a tight circle.

“Wait father... I see where Androcles is going with this.” Elynth spoke now. “How do we know that Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten did not send Onab with their sister Lady Kelia? They were the ones going further away from Cerath. They would be safer with her.”

“Why wouldn’t Chiron tell us that?” Martin asked.

“Perhaps Chiron does not know father.” Andro replied. “Perhaps no one knows but *Tenne* Lylor, Kesas Pengot and *Tenna* Kelia. You and I both have shared things with Armen and Avi that no one else knows. And we have shared things with Torma and Elynth that Armen and Avi do not know. That no one knows but us. That would certainly explain why we sense what we do from them.”

“That would mean they are not doing it subconsciously though.” Martin said. “It would mean they are doing it purposefully.”

Torma nodded his massive head. “Agreed.” He spoke. “Which makes what we are going to do even more dangerous because they are not being forthright with us.” Torma’s voice sounded angry now.

Martin reached out and put his hand on Torma’s shoulder and shook his head. “We would do the same brother.” He said softly. “We would do the same.”

Torma looked at Martin and nodded his massive head slowly. “Yes, we would.”

“Wouldn’t the Onab, if they were alive, wouldn’t they help the Arhtai Pack?” Androcles asked. “Wouldn’t they help whoever was in charge?”

“No.” The female voice spoke from nearby causing all of them to whirl around.

They had been so caught up in what they were talking about that they did not notice that Reva had made her way across the hanger deck without anyone with her or detecting her true scent. Only those of her bloodline could have detected her true scent at this time because of the many chemicals used in the cryo freezing process. It would be several days before her true scent fully came back to the point that anyone could detect it. Martin’s eyes grew wide as he looked at her.

“*Staanial!*” He gasped. “What are you... where is your security detail?” He demanded.

Reva smiled as she moved closer to them, lifting her hand and running it along Torma’s smooth scales as she walked up alongside him. She did this without an iota of fear in her actions or her face until she stopped

in front of Martin. Her gait was measured and careful, for she still had not regained the sense of walking and running fully, though she was loving the sensations of having to relearn it.

“I am nearly four million years old *staaniaketo*.” She told him with much affection in her voice. “I have learned to move around quite well without letting others know where I am. And I was losing the security that my sons put on me for far longer than you have known I existed.”

“Your sons did not have us Lady Reva.” The second unknown female voice spoke and even Reva turned her head surprised as the shadows shimmered and revealed the two figures. One was a pure vampire female from Isabella’s personal security detail that was well over five hundred years old, and the second was a male Drow elf who was first generation vampire and Drow elf. They were also husband and wife, one of a hundred and five husband and wife teams that did their Queen’s bidding.

Reva could not help but smile as she turned back to Martin. “Touché.” She said.

“My King?” The female vampire asked looking at Martin. “Queen Isabella said we were to stay hidden but follow Lady Reva and protect her wherever she goes.”

Martin nodded his head. “It’s ok.” Martin said.

“Perhaps then, you should tell them to secure a place on my grandson’s ship.” Reva told Martin. “I am going with him.”

“What?” Martin gasped. “No way! That ain’t happening! You...!”

“Are going!” Reva cut him off once more, her voice more forceful. “Your daughter Eliani will be with us, as will Serale and Caliria. Anja has been praising them ever since I regained my ability to walk, along with her friend Duewa and others. I will be in excellent company. My scent will not return to normal for a few more days according to Anja, so they will not know who I am if I keep my face covered.”

“Your scent will still be familiar to them *staania*.” Androcles spoke.

Reva nodded in agreement. “Perhaps... but we will discover what we need to discover before they figure it out.”

“Does that include *Tenne Lylor*?” Martin asked. “He has our blood within him.”

“I adored Lylor because his love for Kelia was unquestioned and without hesitation.” Reva told them warmly and with a great amount of pride. “He can also be very emotional at times as you saw in the transmission and Kelia was his anchor. He will suspect something but he will say nothing because he will not believe it could be possible. None of them will if they suspect. It will be enough time to do what we must.”

“What do you believe *staania*?” Andro asked as he stepped closer to her.

Reva smiled and shook her head slowly as she reached for his hand and took it along with Martin’s. “After these last few days and discovering all I have about my sons and what they were capable of, I believe they would have done anything in order to protect our people, the Onab and the Darastrixi. Even I would never have imagined the things they are apparently responsible for.”

Martin gave her a half grin. “Well... Sumar and Dadrien are innocent in that regard either.” He said.

Reva matched his smile and nodded. “True. Sending a contingent of Onab with Kelia and Lylor is exactly what they would have done if they thought it would preserve the Onab and their works. And they would have told no one but Kelia, Lylor and Kesas. It also explains why the Arhtai Pack cannot maintain the Onab technology better than they have.”

“What do you mean?” Martin asked her.

“The Onab were devoted to Daniho.” Reva told them. “To our family. We did not want it to be this way Martin and it did not start out this way, but this is how it was at the end.”

Martin looked at Androcles and shook his head. “We know that feeling well.” He said.

Reva nodded her head. “Yes... you do.” She agreed with him. “The Onab would have done anything that we asked of them. If Daniho and Ashten told them they wanted to send a contingent of their people with Kelia they would not have refused. To the Onab, our bloodline was supreme. Royalty. Almost... almost godlike. Given what we know the Arhtai Pack has done, the Onab would never willingly have assisted them.”

“Even under threat of death?” Martin asked.

Reva shook her head quickly. “No. Not for any reason.” She replied without hesitation. “I suspect that Yelma Arhtai somehow discovered that the Onab had come with them and she used them as a bargaining tool against Kelia and Lylor. The Onab would have only supported their technology if it was used for the good of

our people. Which explains why the Arhtai Pack had to develop their own tech. The Onab would only service what the Arhtai Pack controlled if it was being used for our people and they would not create more.”

“Because not all of the Packs were benefiting from it?” Andro echoed.

Reva nodded her head. “Yes.” She looked at Martin. “Chiron and I are the only ones who know what Onab life signs look like Martin. You have to let me go. I would not be leaving the ship, and I could not be safer than with the three *Tarivuos* of the *Mard Revik*.”

Martin rolled his eyes as he looked at her. “Enough of that.” He hissed softly.

Reva stepped closer to him and took his hand in both of hers. “I refuse to allow you to smother me *staaniaketo*.” She said with much affection. “My sons and daughter learned this through the years and I do not wish to have to teach you this lesson as well.”

“You are... you are our history *staania*. Our past, our present and our future.” Martin spoke softly.

Reva nodded her head. “But I am not dead Martin.” She told him. “I am Matriarch of this family, of this bloodline, and I will not be coddled and protected and hidden away.”

Martin stared into her eyes for a long moment and he finally nodded his head. “You will have security *staania*.” He said. “No matter where you go. And you must promise me that you will not try to lose them to prove a point.”

Reva nodded her head. “I give you my word.”

Martin turned his head and looked at the vampire female and her husband. “Eilisf?”

“My King?”

“You and Tro’man secure a bed for our *staania* on Andro’s ship. She is going with him. As are you.” Martin said.

“Eilisf... tale Eliani’s quarters. It is large enough for all three of you and Eli will insist anyway.” Andro spoke.

The vampire female nodded her head. “As you wish.” She spoke.

Reva moved between her grandsons and slipped each of her arms around theirs as she started them walking towards the *PREMONITION* once more. “Now... both of you... Aricia and Anja have told me what the two of you develop in your sadistic minds on these little walks you take. Tell me what it is you are going to do and how can I help? I am done with others bringing harm to my family and my blood.”

JETANIA

DRINDA

“...Cannot tell you what to do.” Martin spoke to those sitting at the massive table in the Coalition Administration Building. “I can only tell you what I will do.”

The room was utterly massive, the table taking up only a small portion but allowing for at least forty men and women to occupy it. At the moment, the chairs around the table were filled with roughly eighteen men and women, none of them from the Union. These were men and women from Jetania, from the many different Packs across the planet, while there were at least a dozen *Durcunusaan* standing near where Martin stood beside Danny. Aricia, Anja, Anuk and Nayeca stood with their husband and mates.

“And if we go against you?” An older Plains Alpha spoke from his chair.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. “That is your right and your decision.” He answered. “If you choose to remain tethered to the past that you have known, then you will receive no help from me or the Union. Warim will be the one and only place where we will reside on Jetania. This is your planet and it must be your choices and decisions that guide you forward. We would love to help and guide you but ultimately it needs to be you. The Mountain Packs are tied to me and my family more tightly by no fault of your actions. It is just the way events have worked out.”

“And you will side with them?” Another Alpha asked.

“It isn’t a matter of siding with one or the other.” Martin spoke. “It’s a matter of what is best for everyone. For all of our people. Can you all agree on that?” There was silence for a long moment and then Martin saw the men and women nod their heads in agreement with his words. “Now, you build on that.”

“How?” Another asked.

Osrod Aspion stood up from his chair at the end of the table where most of them were bunched. “We rule together.” He spoke looking at Nitona and holding out his hand for her to take with an adoring smile. He looked back to the others. “We are all Lycavorian. We abolish the Plains and the Mountain Packs and we rule together based on what is best for all of us. We all have a say in what we decide. My father and grandfather were tempted and overcome with their desire for power. I was as well...” Osrod looked at Nitona once more. “Until I saw that there was a better way. I will step down immediately and we can hold...”

“No!” Garget barked as he came to his feet now.

Lasun rose to his feet from the chair beside Garget and nodded his head. “That is not the way.”

Osrod looked at them surprised. “But how?” He gasped. “The knowledge that the True King exists has already spread far and wide. Places of worship that have been shut down for centuries are being reopened and...”

“You are our leader Osrod!” Garget spoke firmly surprising the many Plains Pack Alphas in the room. “Martin has shown you things that he has not shown us. Now is not the time to just toss aside everything we know. You have already admitted to Lasun and myself that what your father and grandfather were doing was wrong... do you still hold to that?”

Osrod nodded his head. “Yes.” He stated instantly. “And I fell into the same trap at first Garget. You and Lasun know this.”

Garget nodded his head. “But you have done something that they were unable to do.” Garget said. “You have realized what you were doing was the wrong way to lead us and you are willing to change. Everyone here knows what Secha and the others have been doing to you for centuries. This does not completely forgive all of your sins, but now that you are free of her vile influence, your true self can come out. Lasun and I know it is different from your father and grandfather for we have seen it already, with your actions regarding Nitona.”

Osrod looked at him for a long moment and then glanced to Nitona who continued to stare at him with loving eyes. He finally turned and looked at Martin. “You will say nothing?” He asked.

“What do you want me to say Osrod?” Martin asked him. “I am not some all knowing supreme being. Man, that would suck for sure.” He muttered causing most of those in the room to laugh softly in genuine humor. “The work never ends. You’ll want to take Nitona and disappear many times believe me. I have felt that way.”

“You?” Osrod gasped.

Martin nodded his head. “You won’t... because the core of yourself wants our people to succeed and grow and prosper. That *upae* Secha may have messed with your mind but she could not take away who you are in your heart. That is what I saw. That is what Nitona sees. That is what our people will see if you show them.”

“And the future?” Osrod asked.

“The future can be whatever you want it to be.” Martin told him as his eyes touched everyone in the room. “We are Lycavorian. Our history... our true history is there in Warim for anyone to learn about. Nilantha, the Oracle will be overjoyed to teach it to anyone. All of you should know it.”

“And the technology you possess?” A Plains Alpha asked.

Martin nodded his head. “It will be yours one day. All of you. But as the leader of your Pack you must know what the influx of so much advanced technology will do to a society? All of you must know this.”

The man was silent for a moment but he nodded his head. “It will... it will corrupt from within.” He said.

“It must be presented slowly, blended into society as we grow.” Martin told them. “I will refuse no one medical care, no matter what.” Martin motioned to where Anja stood. “My Queen would never allow this. Everyone will be treated. Anja tells me that you are still dealing with conditions that we in the Union beat millennia ago. That changes now. No one will be denied care, ever.” Martin said. “And no one will be denied knowledge if they are willing to learn. So many things need to change, but together you can do it. And we will support you every step of the way if our people are the focus of your decisions. As leaders that is... that should be our only goal.”

“We must make amends with those we have wronged in the past as well.” Osrod spoke once more.

“Concentrate on our people first and the rest will come in time.” Martin said. “But know this...” He looked around the table once more. “Any attempt, by anyone, to grasp power for themselves, to control by

force... this will not be allowed.” He told them. “Warim will be our location, our embassy. But make no mistake, anyone who steps outside the decisions made here today by all of you, they will face us. There will be those who think that they should possess technology and power over others. That they should rule because they are somehow better than others. They are not. You are the leaders of the largest Packs on the planet, Plains and Mountain Packs together. Bring the others in and explain to them. Build a council. Build a true coalition and nothing will be able to defeat you. We will stand with you and help you at every turn. Trade with the Union will flood Jetania with items that you have never seen and it can make you a very wealthy planet. And if your planet is wealthy, your people are wealthy and happy. And proud.”

Osrod looked at Martin as something came to his mind quickly. “I will lead this coalition for two years.” He stated as everyone turned to look at him now. “I will begin to repair what my ancestors and I had a part in hurting. After that two years, we will hold elections. There will be a King no longer. An elected leader will rule. A Prime Minister or President or whatever our people wish to call it.”

Garget nodded his head after looking at Lasun and seeing him nod. “We agree.” He said. “It can begin with all of us. We can lay aside past differences and work for the change we all desire. The Mountain Packs will abide by this arrangement as long as the individual elected has only one goal. The enrichment of our people. All of our people together.”

The first Plains Alpha who had spoken nodded his head in agreement. “Agreed!”

Martin watched as everyone present began to nod and answer in the affirmative and he looked at Anja and Aricia who smiled in return. He turned back when Osrod directed his next question at him.

“What of Secha?” He asked. “Or whatever she calls herself. And her daughter.”

“Their crimes date back long before any of us in this room were ever born.” Martin answered. “And they were focused against my bloodline.”

“She has hurt others in that twisted goal King Martin.” Osrod spoke. “That I know for sure.”

Martin met his eyes. “I’m sure she has.” He said softly. “I ask now if you will trust me to see that whatever her punishment is, it will be appropriate to her actions against all of our people?”

“You... you are King!” Osrod gasped in shock.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes. And I’m asking you to trust me. She will not escape justice and neither will her daughter.”

Osrod turned to Nitona then and looked into her beautiful blue eyes. Nitona had more reason to hate Secha than anyone given that she was going to have her killed, but Nitona nodded her head to him. Osrod turned back to Martin.

“I care not for what she did to me.” Osrod spoke. “I only care that she answers for her crimes against Nitona and our people.”

Martin nodded his head. “And she will.”

Osrod nodded his head too. “Then it is decided.” He said. He looked around the room at those sitting at the table. “Is this what we have decided?” He asked. “Can we do this?”

“Together!” Garget spoke.

“United together.” Lasun echoed his words.

“...What about fatso?” Anja questioned Martin as they all sat at the huge table now.

Osrod and the others had left, leaving Martin and his people in the huge room while they went to discuss how to best divide the tasks they needed to accomplish between the Packs to begin the future that all of them wanted.

Martin looked at his fiery, red haired Queen where she sat between Aricia and For'mya after she spoke now. All of them loathed Lorendo for what he was responsible for, but Anja had a special hatred in her heart for him because of what he had done and Martin knew that would not change going into the future.

“Re'lon and Nayeca got every tidbit of info out of him that they could Red.” Martin said. “Right down to the color underwear he wore a thousand years ago.” He spoke trying to keep the conversation light. “Skid marks and all.”

“Well... that is a positively revolting picture.” Cirith commented quickly and shivered in an exaggerated fashion to accent her words. Dysea and Isabella chuckled in response, as did Aricia and For'mya.

That comment served its purpose and Anja finally laughed softly as well. None of them would ever deny that Martin could put them at ease with the simplest words or silly joke, and this was part of why they loved him so much.

“Delnash took him back to Artaaya for now.” Martin told them as he looked around the table at the others. “Danny sent a DSD (*Durcunusaan* Security Detachment) with them and they will be the ones keeping toad face under wraps. Teniri has also assigned four dragons to help guard him around the clock. He isn't going anywhere Red.”

“And the Intel that Nubian and Re'lon got from him?” Anja asked.

Danny leaned forward now. “Already being acted on Red.” He replied. “Delnash has sent a ship to each location Lorendo revealed. With them is a combination of his people and ours that Anuk put together in order to destroy the facilities and if they are lucky take any additional information that they find. She is the coordinator for the ships Anja and they are following your guidelines for the other facilities that we have found. If they can't do anything within those boundaries, they are going to nuke the sites from orbit.”

“I don't want them anywhere near a location that shows active or even recent signs of Svorag presence Danny.” Anja said.

Danny nodded his head. “She knows.”

Anja took a deep breath and nodded her head. “I know.” She said. “I just don't trust that fat little fucking worm of a man or anything he says or does. Even under the influence of our drugs.”

Danny looked at Anja for a long moment and then nodded his head. “Yeah... that calls for a check in and reminder to be on her toes.” He spoke as he got to his feet.

Martin nodded his head. “Go!” Danny left the room quickly and Martin looked back to Anja. “Better?”

Anja nodded. “Thank you, Lover.”

“The timetable for Honelze is unchanged according too Yuriko.” Martin said now. “I'm not going to jerk around with these Arhtai Pack fools just so all of you know. We're going to take back *Tenna* Kelia and whoever else they are holding and put a very large crimp in their ability to do anything off Koltar Four. Then we are going to turn our full attention to Honelze and the Svorag.”

“I spoke to General Koguth before coming here...” Dysea told them. “Plans are still proceeding just as we worked them out. The outer city defenses will be done within three days and they will start on finishing the inner-city defenses then. At least something that we have planned is going as we had hoped.”

“*Avoi.*” For'mya echoed.

“It certainly helps that they built the city with an entire mountain range at its back. It does make defending it somewhat easier.” Cirith commented.

Dysea nodded. “Yes, it does.” She looked at Martin. “You did not tell us you were going to allow *Staania* Reva to go with Androcles *Naute Melme.*”

Martin nodded his head. “That wasn't the original plan.” He told them. “And somehow even if I had said no, I get the feeling she would have found a way regardless.”

Aricia nodded her head in agreement. “That seems likely.” She said with a smile.

“Andro and our children will let nothing happen to her.” For'mya stated. “And in a way, she does deserve to be there.”

“Doesn't mean I have to like it.” Martin said.

“Stop complaining you big baby.” Anja quipped. “You just wanted to go yourself and we all know that.” Martin smiled sheepishly and nodded his head. “Guilty.”

“So, what are we going to do with Sama and Roeza Arhtai Beloved?” Aricia asked.

Martin sat back in his chair and lifted his arms, putting his hands behind his head and shrugging his broad shoulders. “I have no *nubous* idea.” He said in reply.

“Sama... Secha... whatever the hell her name is, she is responsible for the deaths of several Lycavorians here on Jetania Lover.” Anja spoke leaning forward at the table now. “All of them young women who got in her way.”

“We may need her for leverage Red.” Martin said thoughtfully. “She is Yelma Arhtai's only remaining daughter, or so we are led to believe.”

“I know.” Anja answered.

Martin looked at her intently now. “What’s up Red?” He asked her. “Something else is on your mind. Spit it out.”

Anja took a deep breath and looked at him. “I am... I am concerned that Retta and Calyb have chosen to remain here on Jetania.” She said softly.

“We are concerned.” Aricia quickly chimed in.

Martin leaned back in his chair now. “Spill it.” He said firmly. “All of you.”

Isabella sat forward now. Martin Leonidas knew that his queens spoke with one voice and were almost always of the same mind about everything. If one of them had a problem then it was a sure bet that all of them had the same problem. This time was no different now and Isabella looked at Martin and took the lead.

“Nilantha and Loras believe her influence might go deeper than what we know.” Bella spoke. “We tend to agree.”

“You think they will be in danger?” Martin asked.

“Anything is possible *Du’ased M’ranndii*.” Isabella stated. “Lazar will protect Retta with his life, of that we have no doubt. Taris and Anoria will do the same for Calyb. It is not anyone among the Mountain Packs that we do not trust. It is those that Sama may have corrupted while she was here.”

Martin Leonidas did not need to hear anymore than what he had. He trusted the senses of his six Queens more than he trusted his own at times and this was one of those times. He took his P1 from his belt and set it on the table, tapping on the small screen several times. All of them heard the soft beeping and then Miranda’s face and upper body appeared. Her features looked surprised that he was contacting her, but she took it in stride. She really did not believe just how much she was considered part of their family even though E'dira had tried to tell her on many occasions.

“Martin?” She spoke. “NEXUS protocols? I gather this is rather important then?”

“It is Manda.” Martin told her. All of them could see her tapping on her P1 and then she nodded. “I’m secure.”

“Manda... I want one of your ships detailed to stay behind; a *VANGUARD* Mark III preferably.” Martin said. “With them I want a platoon of the 82nd detached to her. Have Josie Miller decide which one. Andro trusts her decisions completely.”

Manda nodded her head in the transmission. “Consider it done.” She spoke. “Their task?”

Martin didn’t blink. “I want Retta and Calyb monitored 24/7. No interference Manda... just watch them whenever they are out and about. They’ll have Mara and Endeem with them but I am...”

“The political environment is unstable right now.” Manda said.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.”

“Actionable conditions?” Manda asked.

“Any sign of imminent danger to Retta, Lazar, Calyb, Taris or Anoria, and they are to be evacuated immediately.” Martin spoke. “Priority One NEXUS condition Manda.” Martin told her and all of them saw her eyes go a little wider. Priority One NEXUS condition called for the extraction of all listed targets at any cost, regardless of civilian risk.

“Martin maybe...” Anja began but Martin held up his hand stopping her words.

“Secondary Priority One NEXUS condition targets are Loras and the rest of my family. Then Garget Ranev, Lasun and his mate and Osrod and Nitona Aspion.” Martin spoke. “If they come after Retta and Calyb then you can damn well bet they’ll be coming after them too.”

Manda nodded her head without hesitation. “Insurance Martin?” She asked.

Martin nodded his head in return. “Insurance Manda.”

“I’ll see to it.” Manda spoke. “Additional orders to the Captain?”

Martin paused for a long moment and then rose to his feet. He finally turned back to Miranda. “Tell him he is authorized to use any means necessary to get the NEXUS Targets off planet. Once that is done, he is to shift to Hunter Mode and coordinate with Mountain Pack leaders on the ground determined by Garget and Lasun. If an incident is started, whoever begins it cannot be allowed to take control Manda.” Martin looked at her. “Tell him that he is to stop that under any circumstances.”

Miranda nodded her head. “Done.” She said.

“Get that taken care of before we leave in the morning Manda.” Martin said. “I want it in place before anyone really has a chance to find out. And they are to remain Shrouded at all times.”

“I’ll see to it Martin.” Miranda told him.

“Thank you, Manda.” Martin said just before tapping the screen of the P1 once more and ending the transmission.

Anja rose from her seat and moved around the table to come up in front of him. She wasted no time in pressing her body against his intimately, wrapping her arms around his waist and placing her head against his chest. Aricia, For'mya, Isabella, Dysea and Cirith followed suit and soon they were all hugging one another tightly, all of them touching Martin and each other in some manner.

“Thank you, Lover.” Anja said softly.

“You don’t have to thank me Red. I will protect our children from any danger.” Martin whispered. “All of our children. From anything.”

“*Avoi.*” Aricia whispered, her face buried in Dysea’s shoulder and platinum blond hair.

PREMONITION

The Cargo Bay was certainly crowded, but not unreasonably so to anyone. They were accustomed to far more enclosed and tight spaces. Most of the extra equipment had been moved to smaller storage compartments under the deck plates to make room for the dragons that now occupied the lower level of the cargo bay. Denali, Aradace, Lisisa and Jeth would not normally be on the *PREMONITION* now because of his command of the *ARCH DEMON*. Caydren and Cinol had broken the stall meant for Jeth and Tharua into two different ones for them and Tharua took a much smaller stall. Caydren and Cinol had come to almost revere Jeth and his history with Lisisa and they quickly took down the wall between their stalls so that he and Tharua could remain together until they returned to their own ship. Anthar and Elynth rested on the deck beside each other with Majeir beside Elynth and Marux beside Anthar. Tharua rested beside Jeth, while Ryner, Ladur and Aradace rested next to one another. Each of their saddles were now equipped with sophisticated portable sensor arrays. They had been used during the Evolli War to find Evolli positions and even to mark targets for orbital bombardments. They were not very heavy, but they were slightly bulky and added resistance to their turns and straight line flying.

Sehri was very excited standing between Carisia and Lu'ria and decked out in her flying armor and Lu'ria finishing up putting her long blond hair in braids. Andro was standing in front of her as everyone else was talking between themselves.

Reva stood on the elevated walkway that extended slightly over the lower level of the cargo bay and could watch with nothing but awe and love in her eyes and filling her heart and body. This was a position that she had never dreamed would take place but thanks to her long dead sons, their last orders for her had been fulfilled. She was once more herself and she was with her blood. Her family. This is where she belonged without question, and while she knew they would do everything in their power to protect her, it was Reva Mahanlo-Leonidas who would do everything within her power to protect them.

Off to the side of the cargo bay Reva saw Kalis, Daio, Ridor and Cowen checking their weapons and other equipment. While only Kalis was of her bloodline, Reva could not deny these young men and women were a family to each other as well. Aricia, Dysea and Isabella had told her of the bond that Martin shared with his personal team, how they were a family as well as friends and forged in the fires of combat. Something that would never be broken. Andro had his own team now and they were the same. Sherice, Serale and Cvea conversed easily a few meters from the men that they loved, Cvea’s long Kavalian tail casually flipping back and forth in contentment. Caliria she knew was in the small medical bay with Brendi preparing it in case it was needed. Jomann Kirek stood with Eliani, his own dragon Soren talking with Anthar and Marux. Reva could not think of him as anything else but family given his Kirek blood and that he was Eliani’s husband and mate. Reva Mahanlo-Leonidas could tell he was a good man who absolutely worshipped both Eliani and Brendi and would do anything for either of them. That was something that was inbred in his bloodline Reva knew. They switched

easily between open voice and Etheric conversation as the dragons were still trying to learn the many nuances of spoken words. Reva turned her head when the lean form of Chiron appeared next to her.

“Lady Reva.” Chiron spoke.

“Chiron.” Reva spoke.

“I believe... I believe I owe you an apology Lady Reva.” Chiron spoke.

“An apology for what Chiron?” Reva asked him.

“For misleading you all of these years.” Chiron answered. “For not telling you of Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten’s plans. For not telling you of Lady Kelia.”

Reva shook her head slowly. “No Chiron.” She told him. “You did exactly what you should have done. You knew what my reaction would be, knowing that Kelia still lived. You may have even saved her life.”

“I don’t see how.” Chiron said.

Reva turned her head back and looked down on those that were her family. “If you had told me I would have done everything within my power to get Kesas to act.” Reva said softly. “I would have risked Kelia’s life. Lylor and my grandchildren. You not telling me has brought us to this point. Kelia will be free soon enough and I will lose no more of my bloodline in the process.”

Chiron followed her gaze and saw them preparing below them. “You realize that nothing will deter them.” He said. “I have had a small glimpse into your *staaniaketo*’s mind Lady Reva. Both of them. Androcles is no different than his father. They are not... they are not like Daniho and Ashten, but yet they are.”

Reva nodded her head. “I know Chiron.” She said. “They are more... they are more feral. More instinctive. It is this Spartan nature that they have grown up in and embraced with such passion and completeness.”

“This does not... it does not frighten you?” Chiron asked.

Reva shook her head. “Many years ago, it would have, but after watching them evolve; watching them embrace the Spartan nature within all of them, channel it, control it... no, it does not frighten me. For I intend to embrace it as well, as all of our people will in time.”

Chiron looked at her once more. “You do realize that if it stands between them and Lady Kelia, it will not survive. No matter who or what it is.”

Reva nodded her head. “Then I suggest whoever or whatever is between us and our blood gets out of the way. We will not hold back.”

Both of them heard the loud beep from the internal speakers and then Sadi’s voice was speaking.

“Androcles... we have engaged the Portal Drive and we are now three minutes from reversion.” She stated.

Andro looked up from where he was holding Sehri’s face in his hands. “I thought it was instantaneous *KertaGai*?” He questioned.

“It is... but we can also adjust reversion time.” Sadi replied.

“This is new to all of us *Saradasaar*.” Ne’Veha’s voice echoed right behind Sadi’s. “Sadi and I agreed to do it this way the first time just to be safe.”

Andro nodded his head without hesitation. He didn’t doubt Sadi or Ne’Veha. “Very well, I will join you shortly.” He turned his head to look up at where Reva and Chiron stood knowing they were there. “Chiron... would you take your station. We will need you to transfer lifesign coordinates to Chief Ranor and greet them when they arrive.”

Chiron nodded his head. “On my way.”

[*Staania...*] Andro spoke in the shielded connection.

[*My hood is ready.*] She answered him. [*Allon coi hote yer veesden brey. It is utanayng.*]

(This is all very spy like. It is exciting)

Andro couldn’t help the smile that split his lips. [*Reyna alad ter neval medwan lon.*] (Please do not tell father that)

[*Never!*] Reva hissed. [*He would never allow me to do something like this again.*]

Reva watched with barely a flinch as Androcles easily leaped the three meters up to the level she was on and she took his arm as they headed for the cockpit. [*Do not hold your Uncle’s actions against him Androcles.*]

Andro shook his head quickly. *[I don't stanaia. He is protecting what he loves, but given who he knows that we are, he should have told us about whatever it is they are hiding. We will discover what it is without his help regardless.]*

Reva nodded her head. *[I know Androcles, and that is what confuses me.]* She told him as they moved into the small elevator lift.

PREMONITION

“Reversion!” Sadi announced and the *PREMONITION* quite stealthily arrived into another sector of space that the Lycavorian Union had never been to before, and probably would have remained quite ignorant of had their history not already been written long before many of those on the ship had been born.

“Pakar Six dead ahead!” Meka called out. “Ugh... that is one ugly planet.”

Androcles was standing behind Sadi, Reva behind Ne'Veha and Andro nodded his head. “I would tend to very much agree Meka.” He spoke. “*SirsanGai?*”

“Two minutes until teleport range.” Ne'Veha said quickly.

“Chiron?” Andro said turning his head back into the ship even though he could not see where the Avatar sat.

“I am detecting all targeted lifesigns Androcles, however Kesas and Lylor are in the company of additional lifesigns that I have no data on. They are within the three-meter radius of the teleport circle.” Chiron answered.

“Chief?!” Andro barked quickly.

“No way to avoid it Boss.” Master Chief Joe Ranor answered from the controls of the small teleport pad two decks below him. “We didn't have time to focus the deflector dish for the teleport array. That requires a lot more time and we need to be in space dock for that.”

“So, what does that mean Chief?” Andro asked.

“Pretty much anyone who is within three meters of our target will be teleported as well.” Rano answered. “It's only an eight-person pad, but that applies mainly to outgoing teleportation and not incoming.”

“*Sibfla!*” Andro swore.

“I couldn't get any tighter Boss, sorry.” Rano spoke. “I got Kalis and Ridor to move down to the teleport pad just in case.”

Andro looked at Sadi and Ne'Veha, who were staring back at him. “Very well Rano.” Andro said. “And good call with Kalis and Ridor. Chiron... do you have everyone locked?”

“Affirmative.” Chiron answered.

“Would you meet Kalis and Ridor by the teleport pad?” Andro said. “I think it might be better if they see someone they know when they are brought aboard.”

“Understood.” Chiron answered.

“Thirty seconds!” Ne'Veha called out.

Androcles smiled. “This is going to be interesting.”

“Breath deeply as you walk.” Chiron was telling their new quests as they walked down the narrow corridor. “The effects of teleportation are not permanent and they will wear off in moments but the first one is always the worst so I am told. You will grow accustomed to them over time and they will not bother you after several teleports.”

Kesas and Lylor looked at each other as they each held someone else. Yasha was held in her father's arms, while Lylor held his sister Aryera. Caylt and two of his security detail were moving behind them with Marda and Tiag Kirek who had been with their mother and uncle in the small quarters.

Kesas had been the only one to break down when he saw Chiron standing there as he was on his knees, his body reacting to the effects of having his molecules dismantled and then put back together. Kesas had actually risen to his feet and wrapped his arms around Chiron as the Avatar continued to smile happily. An

Avatar he may have been, but Chiron was also sentient, and being in close proximity to Martin and the others was advancing his experience with emotions more than anything ever could. He was genuinely very happy to see Kesas and Lylor and he could remember a very young Aryera Kirek. The others he did not know, but they were of no matter now as he walked down the corridor with Kesas and Lylor on either side of him.

“What... what happened?” Lylor gasped. “I was... we were in the...”

Chiron nodded his head. “I know... and I apologize. Our arrival caught all of you while you were still waking. I did not have time to adjust for what you were doing.”

“Where are we?” Kesas stammered. “A ship?”

Chiron nodded his head once more. “You are on board the *ULU PREMONITION*. It is the personal combat ship of Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas. You have spoken to him and his father. Two of his beloved wives and mates are the pilots and the ship is a marvel even by my standards.”

“You said... you said your ships would not be ready for another ten hours!” Lylor gasped still holding his sister gently in his arms as they moved slowly.

Chiron nodded his head. “Forgive our vagueness.” He replied.

“You lied!” Kesas gasped aloud.

Chiron shook his head. “Not at all Lord Pengot.” He replied. “I just did not provide all of the facts.”

“Why a ship?” Kesas asked. “Where... where are, where are we going?”

“We are already there.” He replied quickly. “The moment we teleported all of you aboard we conducted a second Portal Jump directly into orbit of Koltar Four.” Chiron lifted his head slightly. “We are now descending in to the atmosphere approximately twenty-two point five kilometers from the capital city where we will hold position and then release our dragons and their riders.”

“A Portal Jump!?” Caylt declared moving closer. “You have Portal Drive Technology? How is that possible? It... it died with the Onab.”

Chiron nodded his head. “That is what everyone was led to believe.” He spoke looking at Caylt. “That was not the case however.” Chiron looked at Kesas. “He bears the DNA markers of your bloodline Kesas Pengot. As does the young woman.”

“My... my oldest children with my second wife and mate.” Kesas told him.

Chiron was silent for a moment. “The Night of Blood?” He asked softly.

Kesas nodded his head slowly. “My first mate and my children with her.” He answered equally as reverently.

Chiron stopped in the corridor and turned fully to look at him. “My condolences Lord Pengot.” He said. “The Night of Blood will not go unpunished I assure you.”

“Everyone will miss us!” Lylor stated. “Chiron, you...”

Chiron shook his head. “A message was sent to Rothan the moment we began to teleport all of you up here. He was instructed to remain calm and prepare for our return. We will need to deal with the spies among your population when we return.”

Kesas looked at him oddly. “Chiron, you are... you are different somehow.”

Chiron nodded his head. “We have not seen each other in a very long time Lord Pengot. It is... it is very good to see you again. And you Lord Lylor.”

“Chiron, you said Darastrixi!” Kesas spoke. “You have Darastrixi on board this ship?”

Chiron nodded his head as he began walking again only to come to the short, six stair downward stairwell break in the corridor. “You will find that our fate is intricately woven with the Darastrixi and have been since the day Daniho and Dadrien first came together.” He raised his arm and motioned down the corridor. “Please... Androcles has a few questions before we disembark the dragons and we can get you some food and drink. Princess Caliria is also ready to give all of you booster shots and short but thorough medical scans.”

Chiron led them another thirty odd meters before they went through another door that opened in to the expanse of the cargo bay. Aryera Kirek, though quickly recovering from the teleportation effects gripped her brother’s arm once more as they saw the back of the ship open to the night sky, a kinetic barrier field in place to keep out the wind and roar of the atmosphere.

Lylor’s eyes were like everyone else’s, open wider than they had ever been as they all saw the eleven dragons in the lower level below them, all of them wearing some strange sort of armor and bearing saddles on

their backs that were now occupied by both men and women in unique body armor that none of them had ever seen before obviously.

“*Son vada carians!*” Aryera gasped. “How high... how high are we?”

“Sadi is holding our position at sixty-five thousand feet.” Chiron answered almost casually. “That is the highest that Marux can exit because he and Sehri are still bonding. It is quite enough for our purposes. If it was just Androcles and Elynth, they could go out closer to ninety thousand feet like their fathers.”

“Ninety thousand!” Yasha gasped.

“They will see us!” Lylor almost yelled. “Chiron, we must leave! The Arhtai Pack will see us!”

Chiron shook his head. “Highly unlikely.” He spoke. “The technology in use by the Arhtai Pack will not be able to detect this ship. We are Shrouded as King Martin’s people call it. Completely hidden from all known sensors and visual reference. It is a very reliable source of technology that the Onab never thought to design. The only time we will be able to be seen is when we recover the dragons, for we will be at twenty-two thousand feet and the Shroud does not extend out far enough to cover the landing ramp the dragons will use. Their scales reflect all known sensors however, so it should not be an issue.”

“Why are we here?” Lylor demanded. “We should depart now before they see us even by accident.”

“They will not see us as Chiron has already told you *Tenne*.” The voice spoke causing Kesas and Lylor to turn and see Androcles come up the short flight of stairs in to the lower bay.

“This is a risk we should not be taking!” Kesas echoed Lylor. “If the Arhtai Pack, if Yelma Arhtai discovers you are here she will...”

“Why are you here?” Lylor demanded. “You did not tell us you would be doing this. That you would come without telling us. We could have prepared.”

Andro nodded his head. “Which is exactly why we did not tell you.” He told them. “And we needed first hand intelligence”

“You do not believe what we tell you?” Lylor demanded again.

“We do not take anything for granted *Tenne*.” Andro said, but his face showed that he was confused as to Lylor’s reaction. “And you cannot give us the intelligence that we seek.”

“We have told you all that there is to tell you!” Kesas again chimed in.

“I am sure that is what you believe, yes.” Andro answered. “My father and I have other ideas however and...”

“Twenty seconds Andro!” Ne’Veha’s voice echoed over the internal speakers.

Andro held up his hand. “One moment please.” He said before turning to look into the lower level. “Deni!” He called out. “Line them up *fervon!*”

“Androcles you do not need to do this. It is an unnecessary risk for you and the others.” Kesas said now. “We have all of the intelligence that you need. And Ranol Nenay is bringing more.”

Andro nodded his head. “And this sensor run will only confirm what you have I’m sure.” He spoke. “It is something that my father wanted to do however, as I said. So, we will do it.” he held up his hand before they could protest more. “I’m sorry *Tenne*, Kesas Pengot... Chiron will take you to the observation area now because we are about to depart. We will see you in one point seven hours and then we can talk more as we return to Pakar Six. My father will be arriving in the morning and then things will really begin to happen. I must go now.”

“You are going with them?” Yasha gasped.

Androcles smiled. “I would never miss a chance to fly with my Bonded Sister.” He answered before placing his hand on the railing and launching himself over the edge. The moment he leaped, Androcles called etherically for the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* to deploy and before he had even landed the three meters below, the armor had fully deployed around his entire body.

“*Carians!*” Yasha gasped aloud. “*Lon coi vada Arwa rie vada Tarivuos!*” (That is the Armor of the Heralds)

“There!” Tiag spoke for the first time pointing to the gathering of dragons and riders below. “There are the other two! Gods!” He hissed as he pointed to where Dorian and Laren were climbing onto Ryner and Ladur.

“Mother?” Marda gasped as she moved closer to her mother.

Aryera looked at her. “Remain calm.” She said. “Lylor? What is wrong *fervon?*”

“Too late.” Kesas hissed softly.

They heard the order barked out and they turned to see Sehri and Marux swiftly exit the *PREMONITION*, followed in quick succession by Denali and Aradace, Lisisa and Jeth, Eliani and Tharua, Dorian and Ryner, Laren and Ladur, Lu'ria and Majeir, Carisia and Anthar and then finally Androcles and Elynth. In less than ten seconds the cargo bay beneath them was empty and they saw the ramp door beginning to close.

“By our ancestors!” Aryera gasped aloud, her eyes wide in shock.

Chiron turned to look at them now. “Quite exhilarating don’t you think?” He spoke. “I will take you to the observation area and you can get some food and drink and monitor their progress.”

Chiron did not blink as he motioned and began to lead them back into the heart of the ship. None of them noticed that Jomann, Kalis and Ridor were watching them intently.

[Daio... you with us?] Jomann asked.

[Caydren, Cinol and I are preparing the party poppers for when we get back.] Daio answered instantly.

[Andro was right.] Jomann told him.

[We cannot burn family Jomann.] Caydren spoke.

[We won’t have to Caydren. Just stick to the plan we put together.] Jomann said. *[Daio?]*

[I got Meka, Sadi and the others.] Daio answered instantly. *[Watch your assess.]*

[We will.] Jomann spoke.

Out of all nine of them it was definitely more exhilarating for Sehri and Marux.

Sehri’s eyes were wide under her helmet but she remembered every bit of her training from Androcles, Carisia and Lu'ria. She remained low in the saddle, her head very close to Marux’s shoulders, but high enough to take everything in around her. Her wolf eyes could see almost everything on the ground once Marux had dropped to ten thousand feet, but she allowed him to fly them. He had far more experience than her, and his confidence was also growing by the day. Being free from Dante Moran and his darkness had opened a whole new world for Marux and finding Sehri had been his salvation. He was stronger now, more confident and more dedicated. He and Sehri grew in talent and skill by the week, and like Elynth had told Aricia, he was one of the fastest of them in every way. Protecting Sehri and becoming one of the finest Bonded Pairs in the Union is what now motivated Marux.

“*Carians Marux, allon coi orleen!*” Sehri gasped aloud, her voice captured on the COM unit of her helmet unwittingly and everyone heard her. (This is glorious)

[The sensor array sister.] Marux spoke now in the shielded conversation. They did not know if anyone on Koltar Four could communicate at this high a level within the Etheric realm, but they were taking no chances. *[Get ready to turn it on.]*

[Ready.] Sehri answered.

[Now!]

Sehri reached down to the side along his muscular scales until she felt the small control panel for the sensor array and she quickly depressed the large button on the control panel. She was only slightly startled when the sensor array came to life with a low hum, but she and Marux had been prepared for that.

[Array is active.] Sehri spoke more confidently now. *[Begin your sweep my beautiful brother.]*

[Here we go!] Marux stated just before he rolled over and dove closer to the ground by three thousand feet.

PREMONITION COCKPIT

“All of them are in their lanes and active.” Ne'Veha reported as her hands moved over her controls.

“Gods, so fast?” Reva asked from where she sat beside Meka in the large Secondary Engineer’s Chair. She wore the long cape and the full headed cowl was up hiding her head and all but her lower jaw from view as she watched the camera view from Androcles’ helmet TAP camera.

Sadi nodded with a smile. “All of them are very fast.” She said. “Elynth and Tharua most of all, but all of them are fast.”

“Getting the sensor feeds from all of the arrays.” Meka spoke now. “Signals are clear and clean. Nice pictures and superior data flows. Sadi, we really should back this data up to our ship cores. This is... this is really useful data.”

Sadi nodded her head. “Do it Meka, we may not get a second chance at being so close like this. Encrypt it as well.” Sadi turned her head and flipped a switch on her small side panel. “Mari, are you and Brendi getting anything?”

“We are monitoring all non-secure data feeds and Command Channels.” Marti’s voice answered. “They do not take security very seriously. It was child’s play to tap their data feeds Sadi.”

“Just stay alert and if you detect any sign that they might be on to you, sever the link.” Sadi directed her. “Andro and Martin were adamant that they not discover we hacked them.”

“Brendi and I have our hands on the terminate feed buttons don’t worry.” Mari answered.

[Sadi, Chiron is bringing three of them to the cockpit. The older ones.] Caliria’s voice broke into Sadi’s head in the shielded communication, but one that included everyone on the ship to include Reva. Chiron did not offer up the information on who Caliria was, and neither did she. While still undergoing the change that Andro’s bite had caused within her, they would be able to tell that she had been turned, but not by who. Caliria hid her dual fangs from them as well, something she hated doing because she had begun leaving them exposed almost all of the time now because she liked how they made her look more ferocious. *[The ones called Kesas and Lylor are somewhat restless. Aside from being slightly under nourished however, they are all in good health.]*

[Thank you Inamarno.] Sadi told her with love in her voice. Sadi turned her head and looked at Reva. *[Staania?]*

Reva nodded from her chair beside Meka. *[I will be silent Sadi, don’t worry child.]* Reva told her with some humor in her voice. *[And this cloak that you had Lasun give to me is quite remarkable. It completely hides my scent.]*

[When he discovered that we needed to hide you and why, he gave it to Martin.] Ne’Veha answered her. *[It is all very natural, but it masks your scent completely according to Lasun. They will not know it is you.]*

“SirsanGai?” Sadi asked turning back to her instruments with a smile.

“Fifty-two minutes.” Ne’Veha answered.

[What is happening?] Reva asked quickly.

“Deni and Aradace will be the first to end their sweep and turn around. In exactly eleven minutes they will turn around and head back here. Lisisa, Jeth, *Enylarcopri* and Anthar will complete their sweeps and turn back in approximately twenty-three and twenty-five minutes.”

“DuanGai?” Sadi asked referring to Sehri.

“Twelve minutes exactly for Marux and Tharua, and then they both turn around and head back.” Ne’Veha answered.

[Androcles?] Reva asked both Ne’Veha and Sadi.

[He and Elynth will be last staania.] Sadi answered. *[That is just how he is.]*

Kameka had been spending many hours practicing her Etheric skills. Being around so many High Tier Etheric users, including her beautiful husband Daio, made it much easier. It wasn’t long before Meka had risen into the realm of the very few who could speak within the Etheric realm on the same level as a member of the Mahanlo-Leonidas family. She did not do so often, by choice and by suggestion from Daio and Androcles, because it gave her an element of surprise that no one knew she possessed. She used it now however.

[Company] Meka called out as she saw Chiron entering the cockpit with Lylor, Kesas and Aryera behind him.

“As you can see, this is the cockpit of the ship.” Chiron spoke to Lylor, Kesas and Aryera, all of whom had expressions of wonder at the sophistication of the cockpit and the equipment they saw all around them. Reva Mahanlo-Leonidas had the hardest time holding in her emotions when she saw them, and quite unlike herself, she had to reach out and draw on Sadi and Ne’Veha’s strength within the Etheric realm to calm her racing heart and the happiness that threatened to overwhelm her. Kesas looked older than when she had last seen him, but not terribly so, and Lylor looked no different in the least, so powerful and proud.

Aryera Kirek was truly fascinated by the technology she saw in front of her. It was equal to the brand new Onab technology she had seen rolled out when she was just a child and the Ten Thousand Year War had just begun. She saw the huge screen in front of the exotic looking female with the tail who sat in front of the screen. The tail was slightly longer than the female they had seen in what they called their medical bay. It had been a small room, really no bigger than a large bedroom, but the blue skinned female and the blond-haired woman with a similar tail maneuvered around the room with ease.

“What... what is that?” Aryera asked with wonder finally as she looked at the screen Kameka was using to monitor the progress of all the riders.

Meka glanced forward to look at Sadi and she nodded her head. “It’s ok Meka.” She said.

Kameka motioned to the huge screen. “We are tracking all the dragons and riders.” She told Aryera. “The pattern sweep that Androcles developed has several of them turning around on their return tract in a couple of minutes.”

Aryera looked at her. “So soon?” She gasped.

Kameka nodded her head. “Some of them are faster than others.” She answered.

Aryera Kirek saw what could only be Arhtai Pack sensor array beacons all along the large sensor screen she was looking at, and not one of them was active. All of them were in a passive mode and she knew that for certain. She had sat and watched them on Pakar Six for hours on end at times. “They... they truly cannot see you?” She stammered as she leaned closer and looked at the screen.

Meka shook her head proudly. “They could be pointing a sensor array right at us and they still wouldn’t see us.” She boasted. “And dragon scales have a natural resistance to all types of sensor arrays. They can’t be seen by any of them.”

“Gods!” Aryera stammered clearly fascinated by all of it. “How... how are you seeing them?”

Meka smiled. “We have trackers in their saddles. Without them we wouldn’t be able to see them either.” She replied. “It allows us to follow them and assist in case they run into trouble.”

Lylor stared at the large screen for a long moment and then looked at Kesas silently. He half shook his head and Kesas understood completely. “These tracks you have laid out here?” Lylor asked. “Your... your people will not deviate from them?”

Sadi shook her head as she turned and looked at him. “No.” She answered.

“And the range on these sensor arrays your Darastrixi carry?” Lylor pressed.

“A hundred kilometers, why?” Sadi answered not liking the tone of his voice when he asked, almost as if he considered the Darastrixi beneath him. “The Darastrixi are not pets! They do not belong to us! They are our family and dearest friends in many cases!”

“He meant no offense.” Kesas quickly spoke up as Lylor was looking at the screen intently.

“Then perhaps he should watch the tone of his voice before speaking!” Sadi snapped at Kesas surprising him with the force of her words. She did not give him a chance to answer as she turned her head back to the front of the ship.

“Hold on!” Meka called out as she leaned slightly forward in her seat. “Androcles and Elynth have deviated from the track.”

“What?” Ne’Veha hissed. “Why? He was the one that ordered the others not to change course.”

“They have altered their course twenty-three degrees west of their original track.” Meka told them. And they have increased speed.”

“He senses something!” Sadi spoke now looking at Ne’Veha.

“To get him to change course *KertaGai*?” Ne’Veha said with worry in her voice. “It must be very important.”

“Important enough to risk himself *SirsanGai*.” Sadi echoed her words. “I don’t like that.”

“Nor do I.” Ne’Veha echoed. “Nor do I.”

It was always relaxing when they got to fly like this.

Just the two of them in the dark sky, only their senses and eye sight really doing any work. They could let their minds free when they flew like this, everything so instinctive to them that in truth they could have been

sleeping. Many times, they did not even talk to one another, letting their minds mingle and roam like they did when they were smaller. The sensor array was active and humming, Androcles simply letting his senses reach out to check his siblings and Sehri every few minutes. His youngest wife and mate was utterly thrilled and Andro could also feel Marux's equally exuberant attitude. Sehri was learning and growing fast thanks to Sadi and the others. Like Carisia and Lu'ria she was utterly fearless, and like Sadi, Ne'Veha and Caliria, she was equally as thoughtful and dedicated. There were times when Andro asked the same questions as his father when it came to his wives and mates. How could all six of them love him as they did; how could he love each of them as he did. These thoughts usually lasted only a few moments, because like his father Androcles finally came to the conclusion that it was fate. And you couldn't change fate, could you?

Androcles felt it like a fleeting brush against his Etheric shields, but it was strong enough to make him sit up straight in the saddle and place his hands flat against Elynth's cool scales as he felt her head turn.

You felt it too? He asked her.

Yes. Faint... like a whisper, but strong enough that it rippled my shields.

It felt so familiar Elynth. Like it was from the same chorus of my family. Andro paused for a long moment. *Sister that is...* Andro began to speak.

Yes. Someone of your bloodline that does not know their own strength within the Etheric realm. Elynth agreed with him.

How can... how can that be? Andro answered. *It can't be Tenna Kelia. She is in cryo and her mind would not be able to project such power from within cryo sleep.*

It is someone else Androcles. Elynth told him. *Someone else of your bloodline that is just as strong as your tenna and very much awake and active. It has to be.*

Here? Andro gasped. *On this world?*

There is no other explanation my Bonded Brother. Elynth continued. *When have we ever not trusted our instincts Andro?*

Never. Androcles answered her. He closed his eyes under his helmet for a long moment and then opened them once more. *Twenty-three-degree course change west sister. And a little more speed is called for as well.*

More speed it is. Elynth spoke confidently as she shifted her huge wings from cruise mode to flying mode.

With three, short but powerful bursts from her wings she had increased their speed by nearly a hundred kilometers an hour and they rocketed over the terrain beneath them in the early morning darkness.

KOLTAR FOUR

TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF LEPIRI IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND

Revia stepped out onto the roof of the building they called home, holding the full sheet around her naked body. She and Ivore occupied the entire top floor of the building, and had for as long as they had been here. Ivore had turned it into somewhat of a sanctuary for his beautiful wife and mate, adding a large kitchen so Revia could cook for their family, and then a massive table and chairs for all of them to sit and eat together which they did once a week. Revia also recalled that six of their children had been conceived on this very rooftop. The privacy and clear air on certain nights could make both her and Ivore very amorous and neither of them were shy about their love for each other.

Revia moved up to the railing and let her hands drop to her abdomen. While she had not yet begun to show her pregnancy, Revia could easily feel the life within her womb growing. She was certain it was going to be another girl and she smiled to herself slightly for she knew how Ivore was about his daughters. By the time Revia had given him his first daughter they already had five sons and between her brothers and her father, their first daughter had a struggle finding a mate of her own, but she adored her father and brothers for protecting her.

"Revia...?" Ivore's soft voice carried to her ears and Revia smiled as he came up behind her and slid his powerful arms around her waist. He pulled her close to him and leaned over to nuzzle her ear and cheek as he

knew she so loved. "Something woke you my wife." Ivore spoke as his hands moved to her abdomen and covered her own.

Revia smiled and nodded her head as his lips grazed the side of her neck. "I don't know what it was." She spoke in reply. "I could... it was like I could feel a presence nearby husband." She explained. "It was... it was unique."

"Unique how?" Ivore asked her.

"Powerful and pure." Revia answered. "Raw and untamed."

Ivore chuckled. "Perhaps a dream lover." He said as he nuzzled the bottom of her ear gently and Revia gasped in bliss.

"No, you pervert!" She gasped in delight. She turned her face to his, reaching up and placing her hand against his cheek and the stubbly growth of hair on his face. He was growing back the beard she so adored on him. "It was... it was like... it felt like family calling out to me my love."

Ivore reached up and caressed her cheek. "That is not possible Revia." He said. "Not yet anyway. We would know the moment family came for us. Mahanlo blood would hold nothing back and it would be broadcast across the whole planet and..."

Revia nodded her head. "I know my love. I just..."

The strong gust of wind staggered both of them slightly as it passed overhead, Ivore pulling Revia tightly to him to steady them both. This was not something that was normal and Ivore felt his threat senses come alive.

"Ivore!" Revia gasped aloud as she squeezed his arms. "Do you feel it husband!" Her eyes were wide as she turned to face him. "Ivore do you feel it?!"

Ivore's own eyes were wide but he was not looking at Revia, he was staring off to the side and Revia followed where his eyes were focused and she almost screamed out in fear, her hands going to her mouth stopping herself.

"*Carians!*" She almost yelled.

Ivore slowly pulled her to the side of his body in order to protect her as they watched the lone figure slowly rise from the squatting position in the nearby corner of the roof to its full height. Even in the darkness, they could see whatever the figure was wearing conformed to the powerfully built body like a second skin. It was obsidian and gold in color, with what could only be described as large wings that extended from its back and shoulders. A cowl covered its head, hiding most of the face but leaving the lower portion of jaw just barely visible along with odd metal like surfaces as well. What caught and held their attention were the two azure colored orbs that beamed from under that cowl like beacons on a dark night.

"Revia get behind me!" Ivore demanded as he prepared to defend his beloved wife and mate even though he was not armed and barely had clothes on.

"Revia?" The figure rasped out the word causing both of them to look at it with wide eyes.

"Stay back!" Ivore almost shouted as he held Revia close to his side. "I will kill you if you come closer!"

They heard the soft chuckle from the tall, powerful figure and that voice reached for them once more. "Your state of dress aside *Tenne* Ivore, your words are not needed." They watched as that figure lifted his hands and drew back the cowl around its head revealing the form fitting helmet and multicolored plume that extended from the top. Revia gasped loudly, her hands once more going to her mouth as she saw the lower jaw and what protruded from the gums there. "I could no more harm my own family than I could harm myself." They watched as the face of the young man lifted his hands once more and grasped the sides of the helmet he wore.

Androcles then lifted his helmet off of his head in one smooth motion, opening his mouth slightly so that they could see the dual fangs of his bloodline clearly and focusing his eyes on Revia. He dropped to one knee slowly and lowered his head.

"*Tenna* Revia. *Tenne* Ivore. I... I know your names without knowing you." Andro spoke softly. "I am... I am Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas. I am... I am your *mandri*. And I am so very happy to make your acquaintance."

"Mahanlo?!" Revia gasped. "*Son vada carians* you are..."

Androcles looked at her and slowly he smiled as recognition washed over Revia's face. "I am *Tenna*." He said softly.

“*Forn wen vada Fera Tarivu un Mard Revik!*” Revia gasped as she moved around Ivore slightly even though his arm was still wrapped securely around her waist. (You are the First Herald to the True King)

Androcles nodded his head. “*Aur medwan. Jainn.*” He told her.

“How did you... how did you know we were here?” Ivore stammered the question.

“I felt... I felt it in my blood.” Androcles told him softly. “I felt both of you. I felt... I felt all of them. And something else.”

Revia’s eyes were clouded by tears and she gripped Ivore’s arm tightly. “What... what are you?” She gasped aloud as she gazed at those incredible azure blue orbs.

“By our ancestors!” Ivore almost yelled as they witnessed Elynth descend out of the dark sky and land easily on the edge of the roof, her talons gripping the steel and concrete wall. They watched Androcles smile and lift his arm to curl it under Elynth’s massive head as much as he was able. She lowered that head to within centimeters of his cheek and her golden eyes stayed on Ivore and Revia with an almost reverent look.

“What am I *Tenna*?” Androcles said. “What are we?” They watched him rise to his feet once more, easily over six foot tall Ivore estimated. “*Evell Tenna Revia... evell wen vada Chanvor rie vada Saan.*” (We Aunt... we are Children of the Blood)

Revia gasped aloud as her eyes went wide at his words. “How... my... my mother said that to me when I was only two years old! How do you know that?”

They saw his head tilt slightly skyward, as if listening to something they could not hear, and then those azure eyes focused completely on Revia.

“It is what my father has told me and each of my siblings on the birthing day of our second year of life.” Androcles spoke now and Revia could almost hear the slight inflection of his voice. “*Evell wen Chanvor rie vada Saan Tenna.*” Andro spoke as he rose to his full height. “My name is Androcles and I will return *Tenna. Tenne* Ivore. I will return for all of you very soon. Your family has come for you. All of you.”

Revia could not answer as the tears were pouring from her eyes and Ivore was holding her tightly to his body. She watched him turn quickly, his head lifting skyward once more and then she and Ivore saw him hold out his hand into the darkness. They both heard a muffled grunt and then they saw the body of the Arhtai Pack guard appear hurtling from the darkness and come to an abrupt halt directly in front of Androcles, his hand closed around the man’s throat.

“*Sibfla!*” Ivore gasped in disbelief.

“He has been watching you.” Androcles told them. “You... you come up here often and he...” Andro snarled savagely then, bringing the surprised young man’s face close to his and seeing his eyes go wide as those thick, dual fangs became fully extended in a ferocious snarl of anger. “*Pafocha!*” (Pervert)

Ivore and Revia knew instantly what Androcles was saying to them and their anger far outweighed whatever modesty they may have felt in front of a member of their family, no matter how new he may have been. To deny what their senses and their very hearts were telling them with such conviction would have made them utter fools.

Ivore and Revia were far from being fools.

“Will his absence be missed?” Androcles asked.

Ivore shook his head quickly. “He is new here and it is not uncommon for new soldiers to desert. They hate being assigned here.”

“Then I will drop his body from twenty thousand feet far from here and they will never find him.” Andro spoke as his azure blue eyes flared in obvious anger right into the face of the Arhtai Pack soldier.

“No!” Revia sounded.

Ivore looked at her. “He must die Revia my love. If he reveals what he has seen... he will...”

Revia stepped closer to Androcles now. “Remove him from this place but do not kill him *mandri.*” She said. There was no denying it for Revia. She could smell the absolute pureness of Androcles’ blood easily each time she took a breath. It was different from her mother’s blood yes, but still the same and Revia would recognize it anywhere. As would anyone born with Mahanlo blood within them. “He does not deserve to die Androcles; he is younger than you and he is ignorant to history, as are all of those of your age among the Arhtai Pack.”

Androcles looked at his Aunt and then back into the face of the Arhtai Pack soldier. His eyes were still wide in horrific fear as the young man gazed up at Androcles, his dual fangs and the head of the massive dragon not six inches from him.

“Be thankful my *Tenna* is more forgiving than I *saric!*” Androcles snarled at him. It was a simple Etheric assisted straight punch that Andro hit him with, right on the edge of his jaw. The young Arhtai Pack member dropped instantly into unconsciousness and Andro then turned to Elynth where he threw the young man’s body over his saddle. (Scum)

“What will you do with him?” Revia asked.

“I will return with him to my ship.” Andro answered her. “He will remain detained until such time as we have retrieved our family and the Onab from this profane world and then I will set him free.”

Ivore stepped forward quickly now. “How do you know...”

Androcles smiled then. “My father and I suspected that *Tenne* Lylor and Kesas Pengot were hiding something from us. Protecting some knowledge that they felt compelled to protect. It is the Onab isn’t it?”

Andro asked. “They are not dead as we have been told by so many.”

“My father!” Revia hissed as she reached for Ivore’s arm in happiness.

Androcles nodded. “He is on my ship as we speak *Tenna* Revia. Still protecting what he believes he must.”

“My... my mother?” Revia gasped now.

“She will be free within hours.” Androcles told her. “When my father arrives with the rest of our family, we will retrieve her. And all of you. Including Ch’eldo Iaaldo and all of the Onab who survive.”

“You know his name!” Ivore gasped now. “How!”

Androcles smiled now and he met his gaze. “He... he told my Bonded Sister and I.” He said.

Revia and Ivore heard the female chuckle and their eyes grew even wider as Elynth lowered her head until it was right beside Androcles’ once more. “And he was quite loud in doing so.” She commented.

“*Carians!*” Revia gasped as they heard her speak normally.

Androcles lifted his head slightly once more as he felt Sadi reach for him urgently. She had things under control but he needed to return quickly. He turned back to Revia and Ivore. “*Tenna...* does your father know you live?” He asked.

Revia shook her head. “No one does.” She answered. “We were brought here before the Night of Blood was done. No one knows we are here.”

“I must go.” Androcles told her. “I must go now.”

“Wait!” Revia gasped. “What should we...”

Androcles looked at her and Ivore. “My father arrives in a few hours *Tenna* Revia.” He told her. “I will tell him what is happening when he arrives. By this time in two days you will be free of this foul place! I give you my father’s word as his oldest son, as well as my own. Be prepared for when I return *Tenna*. It will be very fast and very violent.”

Revia and Ivore Arhtai watched Androcles leap onto the back of the huge, obsidian colored dragon and then that same creature spread its massive wings and launched itself into the ever-growing dawn sky.

[*Chanvor rie vada Saan Tenna.*] The confident words burst into Revia’s head as she gripped Ivore’s arm tightly and tears poured down her cheeks. [*That is what we are. Always and forever.*]

PREMONITION

Taig Kirek’s head was jammed against the bulkhead with the Pralor Particle Magnum pressed tightly to his left temple. Kalis was swiftly running his free hand over Taig’s body for weapons while Serale and Sherice kept PPM5s trained on Marda Kirek and one of Caylt’s security personnel. The PPM5s were the cut down version of the Pralor Particle Magnum just like the KM12. It was perfect for hiding and for male and females who had smaller hands. Ridor, Cvea and Caliria were covering Yasha, Caylt and his second security team member, all of them on their knees in the forward part of the lower cargo bay. None of them were even thinking

of moving for now the cargo bay was full of six dragons, as well as six very stern looking members of Mahanlo-Leonidas bloodline.

The rear of the *PREMONITION* was open to the brightening dawn even more now than during takeoff. It was still dark enough at their altitude but that was changing quickly as the sun was rising. They heard a slight chirp and then they watched for a seventh and eighth time as Anthar and Jeth came into the rear of the ship via the long ramp, one right behind the other as they had done on countless times in the past.

Carisia and Lisisa looked at Marda and Taig and the others on their knees in front of them as they sat up in their saddles fully.

Lisisa looked at her sister as she lifted her helmet off her head. "This should be a happy story."

Carisia smiled at her older half sister and nodded. "Indeed."

Lisisa looked down as Denali and Arduri approached quickly, Deni's hands reaching up to remove the sensor array from Jeth's side as Arduri ran her hands over his massive head that he had lowered in front of her.

"They tried to take the ship." Denali told her as he lowered the sensor array and dropped it lightly to the floor with a bunch of others.

Lisisa and Carisia were looking at him with wide, disbelieving eyes. "Deni, you are joking, right?" Lisisa exclaimed.

"I wish I was." Denali answered as he reached for Lisisa. "Daio and Cowen are bringing the others from the cockpit."

"*Staanian*?" Lisisa gasped with her hands on his powerful arms.

Deni shook his head. "Still hidden... but Sadi says she was livid and wanted to act."

"Sadi, Ne'Veha and Meka?" Carisia asked him quickly.

"They were never in danger." He replied quickly to Carisia, knowing the relationship his brother's wives and mates had.

"Why? Why attempt such a thing?" Carisia gasped.

Deni shook his head. "I don't know. Sadi says they went loony when Andro and Elynth altered their track. Andro told her he felt..."

"What Deni?" Lisisa pressed him.

"Andro told Sadi he felt family." Denali told her. "Then he and Elynth went dark and silent. He's on his way back now, but they have been off the grid for almost twenty minutes and we are running out of time to get out of here."

Carisia turned her head to look out the back of the ship as Sehri and Lu'ria came up beside her. She sent out a pulse of inquiry and love to Androcles and instantly felt him answer her with an even more powerful pulse of love that extended to Lu'ria, Sehri, Caliria, Sadi and Ne'Veha equally. It almost took their breath's away and Lisisa noticed the reaction of her sister.

"Carisia?" She asked.

Carisia shook her head quickly. "He is almost... he is almost here. He is so... Lisisa he has found something and he is so happy."

"Found something?" Lisisa asked looking at Deni.

Denali shook his head. "Our sensor arrays picked up nothing out the normal."

"I demand you let us up!" Caylt's voice echoed over the cargo bay.

Ridor leaned over slightly from where he was standing above him and he prodded Caylt with the barrel of the PAR7. The PAR7, Particle Assault Rifle, was the cut down version of the larger one being massed produced on Manne and the Pralor homeworld now. Most the many *Durcunusaan* troops from the Union with them out here preferred the shorter weapon because of its size and mission flexibility. Andro's team had every type of weapon on board but they all had their favorites, and the PAR7 was Ridor's favorite.

"You demand?" Ridor commented. "Sport... you are lucky you and your friends are even alive after what you tried. Trying to hijack Androcles' ship has got to rank up there with the top one or two stupidest things to do in the universe."

As if on cue, Daio and Cowen prodded Lylor, Kesas and Aryera through the corridor and into the upper level of the cargo bay. They then prodded them down the stairs as Reva followed them and remained above on the upper level.

"I demand to speak to Androcles!" Lylor barked.

As the second oldest of the brothers her eon the ship and most often the voice of Andro when he was not here Denali stepped up to his uncle. “You demand nothing *Tenne!*” He spat. “Why have you done this? Tried to take Andro’s ship! You dared to threaten his *Anome* and his *SirsanGai!*”

Lylor looked at him. “I did no such thing boy!” He snarled turning his back to the ramp and looking at Denali. “And you would do well to recognize your elders!”

“My elders would not do what you have done!” Deni barked. “And even attempting what you have is threatening two of the women my *fervon* worship’s most in this life! You attempted to take his ship by force and put them at risk!”

“You know nothing boy!” Lylor hissed loudly. “You...”

“Knows far more than you could possibly imagine Uncle.” Andro’s voice carried to them and everyone whirled around now to see Elynth settling to the deck as her wings folded into her body. The doors to the ramp were closing silently and Andro stood beside Elynth for a moment before reaching up and throwing back his cowl and removing his helmet. He touched something on his forearm and all of them heard the internal speakers in the ship come alive.

“*KertaGai...* Elynth and I are back on board and the ramp doors are closing.” He spoke. “Engage the Shroud and take us out of here if you would.”

“On our way.” Sadi’s voice answered.

“You and *SirsanGai* are unhurt?” Androcles asked.

“We are fine *duan enyla.*” Ne’Veha replied now. “Meka as well. They were not very inventive in their actions and were subdued quickly.”

Androcles turned his head and looked at where his uncle and Kesas stood as he nodded his head. “Very well.” He answered.

Androcles moved over to stand in front of his Uncle while Reva moved closer on the stairway. He motioned with his head to Cowen and Ridor. “Release them please. All of them.”

Cowen and Ridor removed the flexible cuffs from Lylor and Kesas and then stepped back from them while Kalis and Daio removed the flexible cuffs from the others. They crowded around behind Lylor and Kesas, all of them staring at Androcles.

Andro looked at Lylor and Kesas. “You know what I found down there don’t you *Tenne?* Kesas Pengot?” He said calmly as he looked at them. “Or will you deny it even now?”

“You do not know what it is you speak of boy!” Lylor hissed at him. “You are but a child among our people because of your age! You know nothing of what we have been through in our lives! What we have had to fight! Where is the respect you showed us when you were beside your father speaking with us? We are your elders and you should show us the respect we have earned!”

“The respect I showed you when we were speaking with you before is still there *Tenne.*” Andro told him. “However, I am choosing to hold back on it for the moment because you lied to us. Both of you lied to us. To my father and to me.”

Lylor Kirek then made perhaps the very first serious mistake he had made in his entire lifetime. In his attempt to protect what he thought only he and Kesas knew about, Lylor stepped over the line of family and blood. He snarled viciously, barred his dual wolf fangs and then slapped Androcles hard across the face. His face showed his surprise when Andro’s head barely moved, but a small trickle of blood began to leak from the corner of Andro’s mouth. Lylor had struck him almost as hard as he could but the blow barely caused Androcles to flinch so Lylor began a verbal assault to compensate for what he thought was a badly landed slap.

“Your father should have taught you better manners boy!” Lylor snarled angrily at him. “I do not answer to...”

Lylor saw Androcles’ azure eyes flare brightly for the briefest of seconds and then he saw Andro’s lips curl back to reveal his own dual fangs. Longer, thicker and even more ferocious looking than Lylor Kirek’s and that is what stopped Lylor’s words. With a howl of anger Andro drove his closed fist into Lylor’s upper chest. Once more he encased his fist in an Etheric fuel cocoon, but he pulled back most of his full power for he would not break the bones of family. The less than half power blow doubled Lylor Kirek over instantly, his hands going to his chest as his eyes went wide and he struggled to breath in air.

“Lylor!” Aryera screamed from where she was standing to the side.

Marda and Taig also moved to help him but were blocked by Daio, Sherice and Cowen who lifted their weapons and leveled them at Aryera, her daughter and Taig.

“I wouldn’t.” Daio spoke laconically. “It won’t end well for any of you.”

They could do nothing but watch as with another scream of rage Andro held out his hand and the body of the Arhtai Pack soldier he had knocked unconscious flew from the deck where Elynth had dropped his body and into Andro’s left hand. He dangled the large Arhtai Pack troop from his left hand as if he weighed nothing at all even though it was obvious he was well over two hundred pounds.

“You know what I found down there Uncle!” Androcles screamed. “You and Kesas Pengot know! Respect is earned where we come from Uncle! It is earned and not given freely to those who think they deserve it for some reason!” Andro dropped the body of the Arhtai troop at Lylor’s feet. “I also found him.” Androcles growled savagely. “I found him and more like him guarding over two hundred of our blood that I could smell! Your blood *Tenne!* And the blood of my *Tenna* Kelia! Your descendants! And nearly two thousand Onab! That is what I found Uncle!”

“Onab!” Aryera Kirek gasped aloud with wide eyes. “That is not possible! There cannot be Onab down there. The Onab never...”

“Almost two thousand Onab from what Ch'eldo Iaaldo told me.” Androcles snarled. Andro stepped forward quickly and snatched Lylor up by the front of his shirt and lifted him off the deck to the astonished gasps of everyone present. Lylor was taller than Androcles by three inches, but assisted by his Etheric power Andro suspended his Uncle a good four inches off the deck.

“You accuse me of disrespect when you lie right to the face of my father!” Androcles spat vehemently. “You accuse me of disrespect when you act to take over my ship and put my wives and mates in harm’s way. My *Anome!* My *SirsanGai!* Sadi carries my children Uncle!” Androcles screamed at him, bringing his face closer to Lylor’s and the spittle splashing on Lylor’s cheeks.

“Androcles!” The female voice spoke firmly from behind him.

Kesas Pengot’s eyes nearly bugged out of his head when he heard that voice and Lylor’s eyes grew equally as wide. There was no mistaking that voice. It belonged to only one person that either of them had ever known. So distinct and full of life and confidence and authority. Only one voice had ever sounded like that.

“It... it cannot be!” Kesas stammered the words.

“In my long life I have come to discover that anything is possible Kesas Pengot.” Reva spoke as she stepped up behind Androcles now. She threw back the cowl that hid her face and held out her hand and placed it on her grandson’s shoulder.

“Ah Lylor Kirek, my Kelia’s beautiful husband and mate.” Reva spoke as she moved closer still and looked up into his disbelieving face. “Your nephew Androcles is the First Herald of the True King Lylor. Do you have any idea how many ways he could kill or cripple you and not even break a sweat in doing so? His father would do much worse if he was here Lylor, trust me when I tell you that.”

Reva looked at Androcles from the side. “Put him down *staaniaketo.*” She said. “Or do you wish to explain to your *Tenna* why the man she loves more than her own life has bruises all over his face.”

Andro met her gaze quickly and his near glowing azure colored eyes returned to their normal wolf persona. He released Lylor from his grasp, lowering him back to the deck gently and turned quickly to where Deion and Denali stood ready to act to defend their brother.

“Deni, Deo, take this scum...” Andro motioned to the still unconscious Arhtai Pack trooper on the deck. “Have Rano fashion a small portable cell and restraints and secure this *midaeu* before we return to Pakar Six. Father will want him interrogated extensively the moment he arrives.” Androcles turned back to Lylor Kirek, his anger still active but much subdued now as he stared at his Uncle. “I will return to this world soon and I will free the Onab and our blood Uncle. Your blood. The bloodline of your youngest daughter Revia.”

“Revia!” Lylor shouted. “My... she lives! Where? She is down there? Tell me!”

Reva took Androcles’ arms in her hands turning him to face her as Lylor continued to yell. [*Go to Sadi and Ne'Veha staaniaketo.*] Reva told him. [*He would never have hurt them. you know this Androcles.*]

[*Do we staania?*] Andro asked her. [*They lied to father about the Onab. They lied even as they looked right at us. He will not be happy. You know this. We are family! We are blood!*]

Reva nodded as she squeezed his arms. *[Something that I will remind them about.]* She spoke as she lifted her hand and rested it against his cheek. *[We have found that which we thought lost forever Androcles. This... it needs to be a time of happiness.]*

Androcles took a deep breath and nodded his head. *[I must tell my father what we have discovered.]* He said.

[Then go.] Reva told him. *[I will take care of Lylor and Kesas and the others.]*

Reva watched him nod his head and then he headed for the stairwell to the upper deck. The others had quickly gone about other duties when they saw Androcles depart without so much as a request for security. None of them were really concerned. Skilled though Lylor's people may have been, none of them were as well trained as Androcles' team and they knew it.

Reva turned to look at Lylor and Kesas who were kneeling on the deck staring at her in utter disbelief. Reva recognized Aryera, who was also staring at her with utter shock, but the others she did not know. She turned her dark eyes to Lylor and shook her head with a huge smile of relief and love as the tears began to pour from her eyes.

"Which one of you two *dilcons* came up with the terrible idea to try and steal this ship?" Reva asked them before losing it completely and wrapping her arms around Lylor's head just as he buried his face in her abdomen and let loose with a long wail of happiness that echoed across the cargo bay for many minutes. (Pinheads)

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

PREMONITION

ORBIT OF PAKAR SIX

"...Been like that all of this time?" Lylor gasped in disbelief as he stared at her from the bench beside her.

They had not left the cargo bay of the ship, Aryera, Taig, Marda, Caylt and Yasha and the few others crowding around Reva as they realized just who she truly was. To say Reva Mahanlo was a legend among the Kirek Pack, among any of the original Lycavorian Packs, would have been a colossal understatement of epic proportions. Lylor Kirek had not released her for nearly fifteen minutes as he wept into her abdomen and Reva held his head and allowed the tears to come once again. Accepting that she was indeed alive and then actually seeing her in her true form brought more tears. Yasha and Caylt had not seen their father ever act in such a way, his eyes tear filled and still happy. Though they never really knew Lylor Kirek, they had heard he was a man of little emotion, a statement that was not correct from what they could see.

Reuniting with her blood was becoming a mentally taxing event but until she held her daughter in her arms once more, it would not be complete for Reva. Now adding dear friends that she had not seen for equally as long made Reva move to the small bench along the wall, everyone crowding around her and trying to not let the fact that they were surrounded by eleven dragons bother them. Lylor and Kesas sat on either side of her, Reva holding both their hands tightly. Chiron had returned to the computer station that had been made for him between Mari and Brendi and the three of them were going through all of the data that had been collected. A single Portal Jump had put them back in orbit of Pakar Six, where they were holding station now, though no one on the surface was yet aware they had returned.

Reva nodded her head to Lylor's question as she once more wiped the tears away from her eyes. "Martin's wife and mate, her name is Anja, she is a blessed healer and with the help of others she returned me to my true body only a few days ago." She answered. "I'm still getting used to what was once muscle memory to me. In some ways, it is frustrating, but it is also so very enlightening. It is like being reborn. You knew what I agreed to Lylor."

Lylor nodded his head. "Yes, but I never saw you like that and Kelia would not tell me what the process was. It was too painful for her to recall and I did not wish to push her given what we were going through."

Reva nodded her head. "You did the right thing. I was not nearly as beautiful as I am now." She answered her dark eyes going wider as she realized what she had just said. Kesas, Lylor and the others began to laugh softly at her humor and Reva realized just then that the laconic sense of dry humor that Martin, Androcles and all of their family had was beginning to rapidly rub off on her and she welcomed it with open arms as she smiled brilliantly at her own joke.

"That is why we did not smell you at first." Kesas spoke now as his laughter died. "The cryo process alters a natural scent and as long as your body was affected by the chemicals involved, they would..."

Reva nodded once more. "Yes. My true scent won't fully return for at least another two days, but I grow stronger every hour. Anja is truly a magical healer."

"And she is one of his wives and mates?" Lylor asked.

"She is the one that developed the process to remove me from cryo so quickly and not suffer any side effects." Reva answered. "She is doing the same for Kelia and whoever else we may find. She is a tiny thing but her medical knowledge and skill surpasses even that of the Onab."

Kesas shook his head. "We should have realized that he would have detected that we were not telling him everything." He said in disgust. "He is the *Mard Revik*. He is the last direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten. A perfect combination of them both as Chiron told us. He would have the memories of both Daniho and Ashten within him."

"It was Androcles that sensed you were holding something back." Reva told them with another smile. "He is the first and most powerful of the three *Tarivuos*, but all of them are so much alike, so much more. The dragon blood within them, it allows them to see and sense things that others cannot. It... it can be very unnerving at times, but it is a gift. This is what Androcles told his father."

"And he made this decision based on just that?" Lylor asked.

Reva nodded her head. "There is much you need to discover about Martin, his story is so very unique, but even he has not fully been able to comprehend the memories left to him by those who have come before him. Nor has Androcles. They are the two most powerful wolves that I have felt since my sons lived, and they are frighteningly similar in what they do. They are even larger and stronger than my mate and husband in wolf form and all of you remember him. And their auras will make you shudder."

Lylor looked at her oddly as Kesas looked at Reva with wide eyes. "Temokah was... he was awe inspiring." Kesas spoke softly.

"Yes, he was." Reva spoke lovingly as she thought back on her mate for the first time in more years that she could remember. Perhaps now would be the time to bring his memory back to the forefront and allow her family to see him for who he was. Yes, perhaps it was time.

Lylor shook his head slowly. "But I felt nothing like what you speak of like this from him mother." He told her respectfully. "Powerful yes, but he was no more than a normal young Alpha. All of them. They are family yes, but..."

Reva nodded her head with a smile. "All of them have learned to shield their wolf auras Lylor. Shield it to the point that this is what anyone would feel unless they wished it." Reva told them. "A gift taught to them by their father and their mothers from the moment they came into this world. Do not let what you do not feel trick you." She told them. "Many of them are only half Lycavorian, but it is Martin's blood within their veins. My blood. Mahanlo blood. Any of them is more than a match for any of you and your people, but do not take that as an insult." Reva turned her head and looked at Aryera and the others. "All of them have trained in the ways of combat from the time that they could walk. So many different ways of fighting that it would boggle your minds. It is the Spartan way of life that they all now follow and embrace with their hearts so tightly. Where we once considered wolves of their age simply children, among those who followed Daniho and Ashten this changed long ago. It has reached its apex now with our people. This Spartan mentality is embedded deeply within the fabric of their society and the societies of many who are not even Lycavorian. They embrace it; they live it; they breath it every day. Especially Androcles and his brothers, sometimes more so than their own father. It is who they are." Reva reached out and placed her hand flat on Lylor's cheek as she smiled at him lovingly.

"Androcles... he would not have permanently injured you Lylor Kirek, you are his *Tenna* Kelia's handsome love, and his honored *Tenne*, but you would not have been able to defeat him and it would have been a very painful message for you to receive. I stopped him, but all of you must realize and take this into account in

the future. You are family to them. All of you. The moment they came to know that you all lived, you became family. You became their focus.”

“As it once was with us on Cerath, family is more precious to them than their own lives and they will protect you, most viciously if they have to. They are younger than you, but they have fought in wars that would make all of you shudder. Martin and Androcles most of all. In battles that were equally as horrific as ours were against the Iais’Kai, and they all bear the scars of these battles, physical and mental. I have witnessed many of them from afar and if you do not believe anything, believe what I tell you. They are not children, and our people must not treat them as such. They will have no remorse for what has taken place. What our blood has had to endure. Especially Martin and Androcles. They are the two most rooted in this Spartan way of life that they follow. Deion and his brothers follow next and then Martin’s daughters. Do not let their beauty fool you, they are just as lethal as their brothers.”

Lylor looked at her. “It felt... it felt like I had been hit by a falling tree.” He said. “And my chest burned.”

Reva nodded her head. “And he was holding his anger in check.” She told him. “He is like his father. Like all of our people now who left with Daniho and Ashten as I said. They have embraced their full emotions Lylor, the feral nature of our people. They embraced it and learned how to control it. Channel it. I watched through the millennia as they became powerful because of it. Even more so when the Pralor bloodline of Sumar joined ours and gave us the one thing that we had not yet discovered. Purpose. They follow a code now, much like we once did. The Spartan code that I speak of. It is a powerful code; a rigid code of honor and respect and justice. They call themselves Spartans. I have watched through the millennia as they became feared by all who knew them and were their enemy; and they are loved by all who are their allies and friends.”

Lylor shook his head just as Kesas had. “We were fools.” He gasped.

Reva shook her head. “No. You were doing what both of you swore to my sons. You were protecting the Onab, and there can be no fault applied here.” Reva said softly. “I cannot believe some of them survived. How many Lylor?”

“Five hundred initially.” Lylor answered her without hesitation. “They will have grown since we departed. Most that came with us were young couples. Engineers and Scientists. They will have had children. I do not know now because Nyser and Yelma trapped me in cryo and...” He lowered his head almost as if he was shamed.

“I knew the Arhtai Pack would not have killed them.” Kesas continued right after Lylor. “They needed them. And since the Onab technology the Arhtai Pack kept continued to work, I knew they were still alive. Ranol Nenay’s oldest daughter and the few she taught could not have maintained all of the Onab technology, so I knew that Ch’eldo and the others had to be alive. I hoped beyond hope anyway.”

“Ch’eldo?” Reva spoke softly.

“A few... a few dozen were executed by the Arhtai Pack during the *Dremsa rie Saan*, but Nyser Arhtai quickly halted this.” Kesas said.

Reva looked at him. “Nyser Arhtai knew of the devotion to Daniho, and our bloodline that the Onab held.” She spoke. “He knew that they would not bow to them.”

Kesas nodded his head. “Yes.” He said. “We did not know where they had taken them. We could never find them after the *Dremsa rie Saan*. And we had no idea that Revia was alive.”

Reva turned back to Lylor. “Is all this... all this hate and death... is it because of their children during the war?” Reva asked. “We all lost so much...”

Kesas nodded his head. “That was part of it in the beginning yes. I think it came down to envy in the end. Yelma and Nyser Arhtai envied what the Mahanlo bloodline had.”

Reva met Kesas’ eyes. “They will regret that until death them.” She snarled.

Lylor looked at Reva quickly and with great emotion in his eyes. “Revia is our youngest mother.” He told her with pride in his voice. “A perfect image of her mother. We named her after you. She was the favorite of her siblings. She was mated to an Arhtai Pack Alpha. Nyser’s youngest brother Ivore!” He hissed in anger. “He swore to me he would honor us and... he lied to me and...”

Reva put her hand on his shoulder and shook her head. “Hold no anger for him Lylor. Be proud of him.” She said quickly. “Androcles told me through the Etheric realm what he has done. What he and Revia have done. He saw them both. It is because of him that Ch’eldo and the others survive and their bloodline continues.

If what Androcles also tells me is true, Ivore Arhtai loves your daughter Revia blindly. They have at least fourteen children and Revia is carrying another in her womb even as we speak. Ivore teaches them the history of our bloodline and our people on Cerath. In many ways, he is just like you.”

“The young Prince told you all of this?” Kesas gasped aloud.

Reva nodded her head. “This Etheric realm that exists among our people, it is so much larger than we ever believed. When Sumar’s bloodline joined ours, became part of our pure bloodline, this is when we truly began to understand and use the Etheric realm as it was meant to be used. Martin, Androcles, their wives and mates, their children, their skills cannot truly be measured and they use these abilities in many ways. Our people, some of them can advance these abilities higher than others, but it allows all of us to use this skill and therefore imprint on our children even more than we were able to in our time.”

“No... no daughter of Kelia and I would have ever willingly given herself to any Arhtai Pack member after the *Dremsa rie Saan*!” Lylor spat. He looked at Reva and a small smile then creased his face as he realized something. “He kept his honor and his word to me.” Lylor said. “Ivore Arhtai kept his honor and his word to me and to Kelia! The day he took Revia as his wife and mate he swore to us to always honor her and our family.”

Reva nodded her head. “Well... if what Androcles saw and felt is correct... this Ivore Arhtai has done just that.” Reva took a deep breath. “Our operational plans will change now. Androcles will be already planning a way to rescue them while Martin and the others find and rescue Kelia and any with her.”

“How soon before Martin comes?” Lylor asked.

Reva met his eyes. “Six hours, no more. His plan is to attack the Arhtai Pack at first light tomorrow.”

“So soon?” Kesas gasped. “Is that even possible?”

Reva chuckled softly. “He called it Shock and Awe.” She told them. “And yes, with Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas anything is possible. His mind is an absolute twisted realm of brutal military thinking and nothing he does is ever normal. I have watched him ever since he came out of cryo himself and he has driven his enemies to the brink of insanity and beyond with his actions. No one has ever been able to predict what he will do. And that is why they always fail against him.”

“He was... he was in cryo?” Kesas asked her. “But why?”

Reva nodded her head. “It is a very long story and one you will no doubt discover within a few weeks. It is a very interesting story to say the least. And very painful for Martin. It is why he lost his father forever, and his mother for nearly three thousand years.”

“*Carians!*” Lylor spoke.

Reva nodded his head. “This is where his drive and love of family comes from.” She told them. “And this is what he has passed to his children. He will not tolerate threats to his blood. Any kind of threat. And he will severely punish any who does his blood harm.”

“The Arhtai Pack?” Lylor asked softly.

Reva rose to her feet and stepped away from them, all of them watching her as she crossed the small four-meter distance to where Caydren and Cinol sat on the deck beside Jeth and Anthar. Their eyes went wide when she fearlessly ran her hand over Caydren’s snout and his head leaned close to her chest against her breasts in obvious reverence. Caydren motioned his twin closer to him with his head and soon Reva was stroking Cinol’s snout as well. Reva turned back to Kesas and Lylor and the others.

“He will not punish the entire Arhtai Pack... that is not his way” Reva said softly. “After tomorrow, however, any who took part in or supported the vile acts of the *Dremsa rie Saan* will be marked for death. If they do not die by the end of tomorrow, and many will not, then the Mahanlo-Leonidas bloodline will hunt them down for eternity until all of them reside within the walls of *jorbhe*. That is what Martin has sworn to me, and Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas has never broken a promise.”

“Renal and the Nenay Pack will arrive just after him if you are correct.” Kesas spoke after a very long pause as her words sank in to everyone there in the cargo bay. “They will have additional intelligence with them. Ranol has already sworn to me that they will help us in any way they are able.”

“You trust them Kesas?” Reva asked after she kissed Caydren and Cinol’s snouts softly and began walking back towards them.

“Three of Lylor and Kelia’s children have been members of the Nenay pack since the *Dremsa rie Saan*.” Kesas told her. “They have taken wives and husbands from the Nenay Pack and have many children and grandchildren among them. Renaol and his Pack have protected them ferociously all of this time.”

Lylor smiled slightly and Reva saw his eyes become moist. "I have spoken with them." He told her. "Our children. When I finally got them to stop crying, they told me all of it."

"Will they be coming to Pakar Six?" Reva asked.

Lylor nodded his head. "Yes."

"Ranol is bringing his entire family." Kesas said. "He plans to..."

Reva looked at him. "What?"

"He plans to beg Martin for forgiveness." Kesas said.

"*Carians*... forgiveness for what?" Reva asked.

"For allowing this to happen." Kesas spoke. "He swore to Daniho and Ashten that he would always honor them by looking after their sister and their royal family."

"And he feels as if he failed them." Reva said softly, nodding her head. She shook her head quickly right after though as she returned to the bench between them. "It will not matter to Martin. Once he discovers that the Nenay Pack has shielded our blood, protected them, and have made them family... whatever perceived sins that Ranol Nenay thinks that he carries will be no more. Of that I can assure you."

"What... what is Martin really like Lady Reva?" Kesas asked.

Reva shook her head. "No... now Lylor Kirek... you need to go to Androcles and make amends for your actions. Words carry much weight within our family once more and you owe him an apology for putting Sadi and Ne'Veha at risk, even a little, with your silly plan to take his ship from him. Sadi is his *Anome* and she carries his children in her womb. He has loved her with all that he is since he was eight months old. Ne'Veha is his *SirsanGai*, his beloved Elven heart."

"Lady Reva we..." Aryera began to speak.

Lylor shook his head. "No, sister." He said firmly. "Mother Reva is correct. This is my task. It was my decision and I will make amends for being so foolish." He rose to his feet confidently and looked at Reva who stared back at him with pride and love in her dark eyes.

"He is with the others helping to store their equipment. This ship is still very new to them in some ways and they are storing equipment in its proper place. They are on the deck above us in the large warehouse like room twenty meters down the corridor from the elevator." Reva told him. "Hold nothing back Lylor. With Androcles or his father."

"I won't any longer." Lylor spoke. "Not anymore."

Reva canted her head. "Go then!" She told him. "I wish to speak with Taig and Marda and Kesas' young children." She said. She chuckled lightly. "Though I dare say young is not a word I should use."

Lylor Kirek found the large warehouse like room one deck above them easily enough, all he had to do was follow the noise. There was music playing in the background of the room, a type of music that he had never heard before but one that apparently, all of those before him had. All of the young men were shirtless now as they were muscling large crates around the room, pushing them against the walls tightly, or lowering them into large cache containers in the floor. Cache containers that Lylor took note could hold quite a bit of supplies and whatever else they needed it to hold. Lylor's eyes settled on where Androcles stood beside the slightly taller young man who reeked of Kirek Pack blood, and the much shorter red haired female who was Androcles' sister. She was only half Lycavorian, that Lylor could tell easily, but as Reva had told them, the wolf blood within her was powerful and pure. As Lylor moved closer, his eyes settled on Androcles' back and he winced slightly when he saw the long, jagged scar that extended almost entirely down the right side of his back. He also saw the three large spots where it appeared as if he had been shot with a large caliber weapon. Three times in the chest area. His upper body was dotted with additional scars, but once more Reva had been correct. These were not people who hid behind desks and titles. Lylor could also tell right away that the taller Kirek Alpha had claimed the red-haired female who was Androcles' sister. He could sense the powerful connection of love and commitment between the two of them. The total devotion to each other and to... another woman. This knowledge did not surprise Lylor as much as he thought it would. The scent of Androcles' sister was firmly imbedded in the blood of the taller Kirek Alpha as she stood leaning up against his side casually. This second woman's scent was imbedded in both of their scents and Lylor's eyes grew a little wider when he realized that

this Kirek Pack Alpha and Androcles' sister were *anomes*. Lylor had never heard of such a thing before and the truth of it was right before him so he could not deny it. A non-pureblood *Anome* union. He never heard of such a thing let alone seen one, but now before him was exactly that. It was almost too much to realize.

"You don't have to be afraid *Tenne*." The female voice echoed softly from behind him and Lylor whirled around quickly. Nara's azure blue eyes gazed upon her uncle with love and respect.

"*Tenne*?" Lylor stammered the words but quickly realized why she spoke as she had.

Nara smiled at him. "I am your *mandra*." She said. "Andro's sister. Well... one of his sisters." She said with a smile. "We are all your family *Tenne*." Nara moved closer to him and took his arm in her hands. Lylor looked at her as she smiled at him and the azure blue color of her eyes reflected the light of the cargo room. Lylor was slightly taken aback as he realized by her scent just how old she was. This female Alpha pureblood could not have been more than eighteen years old, yet her scent already indicated that she was mated to not only a powerful Alpha male but another female as well. She was also one of the most powerful Alpha females that Lylor had ever felt outside of his Kelia. He could easily smell the Mahanlo-Leonidas blood within her and the power it brought to her, but there was also something very different about her. Something confident and powerful.

"Come." Nara spoke drawing him towards where Androcles was standing.

Eliani was typing on her P1 quickly, her fingers moving like they were in a musical concerto. Her hair was still in the long braid that they used when flying but she had removed the upper portion of her body armor and was now just wearing a t-shirt over her ample chest. Her face was concentrating as she stood between her brother and Jomann and she finally looked up at them. They had been muscling the equipment crates all around trying to find the right set up and Eliani was pretty sure they had it now.

"If we keep it like it is, we can squeeze in four hundred *fervon*." She told Andro.

"That's all?" Andro asked.

Eliani shrugged her shoulders. "Sadi and Ne'Veha didn't design her to be a transport Andro." Eliani said. "We try to take anymore and we risk not even getting off the surface."

Andro nodded his head. "I know. *Anse!*"

"We can strip three *KADENs* Andro." Jomann offered up the suggestion. "Right down to their rivets. We've done it before. They are small enough to get into the clearing you described and we can get everyone in one load. The *PREMONITION* and three *KADENs*."

"Eli?" Andro asked her.

Eliani nodded her head. "It will be tight, very tight, but once we get back to *SPARTA'S WRATH* we can spread everyone out so that they are more comfortable. Mother will not release *Tenna* Kelia or any others from the ship until she is sure everyone is checked anyway."

"Everyone goes in one trip." Andro spoke. "Father and his team will have the bulk of the *Durcunusaan* force that we are bringing backing him up. We leave no one behind. No one."

"*Avoi*." Eliani whispered.

"*Fervon*?" Nara's voice interrupted them and Androcles turned slowly. He had smelled his uncle well before he had entered the storeroom, but no one would do or say anything to him unless Andro first did. Except Nara of course. Eliani grinned at her younger sister knowing that Nara had always felt she held something over all her other siblings because her eye coloring matched that of Androcles' and their mother Aricia.

Andro turned slowly and looked at his uncle and then his sister. Nara grinned at the look in his eye and leaned up beside him, kissing her brother's cheek before patting her hand on his chest. Eliani chuckled softly when Andro leaned over quickly and nuzzled Nara's cheek with a brother's affection. All of them knew Andro could never stay mad at his siblings for very long. He loved all of them too much.

Andro turned to Lylor then as Nara held his arm and looked at her sister. "*Tenne*." He said calmly.

Lylor looked around the large room. "You are... you are trying to decide how many you can carry?" He finally said.

Androcles nodded his head. "Yes. If we had had this information before, then this would not need to be done. Now we must improvise. I don't like to improvise."

Lylor looked at him. "*Pen brol sorgur mandri*." Lylor finally stated firmly and without any doubt. How could there be any doubt within him when all he could smell was Mahanlo-Leonidas blood all around him in some shape or form. (I am sorry nephew)

Andro stepped closer to him. "If there is not trust Uncle..." Andro spoke softly.

Lylor nodded his head. "Then there can be nothing." He echoed the words. "My actions were ill-advised and *piegn*."

Andro nodded his head. "Yes, they were." He said. "And you would not have succeeded. You should have seen that right away *tenne*."

Lylor bristled only slightly at the dress down from the much younger wolf, because Lylor Kirek knew that Androcles was correct. He knew that Androcles could have continued berating his tactics, but Androcles waved his hand dismissively, ending that portion of the discussion with honor and care.

"Given what information you and Lord Pengot have carried within you all of these years, I may have reacted the same in your shoes. It is behind us." Andro said. "Now we have to figure out the best way to get our blood and the Onab off this world. We first thought we had only one target, and now we have two. We have to adjust. Adapt." Andro motioned to Eliani and Jomann now. "My sister Eliani and Captain Jomann... my *Durcunusaan* First and my sister's husband and mate."

Lylor was slightly taken aback when Eliani leaned up on her tip toes just as Nara had done and kissed his weathered cheek. "*Una coi ea alinnyng Tenne*." Eliani told him. (It is a blessing Uncle)

Lylor looked at Eliani and the smiling twinkle in her dark green eyes. He turned his gaze to Jomann now as Eliani once more leaned up against his side and his arm pulled her close to him. Eliani and Brendi had tossed aside all matters of decorum when it came to Jomann. If they were with their husband and mate, they were touching him in some manner. Their interactions on *SPARTA'S WRATH* had become almost as legendary as Andro, Sadi and the others.

"How..." Lylor looked at Jomann. "How is it that a Kirek Pack Alpha is among you? I was under the impression all of the Kirek Pack came with me and Kelia."

Jomann nodded his head. "Lady Reva believes it was something that Lord Daniho and Lord Ashten did without telling anyone." Jomann answered. "Even Chiron was unable to discover the how of it. Or when."

"It is becoming more and more apparent that they did this quite a bit. Daniho and Ashten were masters of subterfuge and guile." Lylor spoke and all of them heard the tone of respect and awe in his voice.

"So, it would seem." Androcles agreed. "As was our *staanio* Sumar."

Lylor looked at him. "The one of... the one who carried Pralor blood within him?"

Androcles nodded his head. "There is so much that we need to share with one another *Tenne* Lylor. And we will. But right now, now we must focus on recovering *Tenna* Kelia and whoever else bears our blood."

Lylor looked at him and nodded his head. "Agreed." He spoke confidently. "What can I do?"

Androcles looked at him. "You can give whatever information that you have on the cryo pods that hold our *chroray* to Eliani here." Androcles told him. "It is the same type of cryo chamber as you were in correct?"

Lylor nodded his head. "Yes, why?"

Androcles smiled at him. "Because in approximately one hour, we are going to return to Pakar Six Uncle and we are going to remove the Arhtai's Pack influence over the Kirek Pack. No more blood scanners or spies. Now they will face us directly and answer for what they have done."

PREMONITION

ORBIT OF PAKAR SIX

They may have been separated by several thousand light years at least, but there was no denying that Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas was livid with rage. Rage that was directed solely at Lylor and Kesas and rightfully so. His communication had not been expected, Androcles telling Lylor and Kesas that his father must have felt the spike of emotions in him when he saw and spoke with Revia and Ch'eldo. He took his father's transmission, telling Lylor that if he didn't, then his father would know something was wrong and more than likely arrive in orbit blasting everything in sight.

"The Onab?" Martin spoke looking at his son in the transmission. He was leaning over the table with his hands spread out in front of him, desperately trying to maintain his temper, but it was becoming increasingly

harder to do so the more Andro told him what had taken place. Andro could tell that they were at least back on Jetania which was a good thing since they didn't need his father losing his temper on a ship in orbit.

"The Onab?" Martin said again, his voice carrying his frustration and worry. It was easy enough to detect for Aricia and For'mya and his other wives and mates who sat closest to him at the table, for like him, they were just as angry that their children had been put in danger because Lylor and Kesas had not told them of the Onab. "The same Onab who are supposed to have been dead for the last fifty thousand years." Martin snarled angrily. "Those Onab!"

Andro knew his father wasn't mad at him or any of his children so he tried to mitigate his anger as best he could, knowing that it would not help. "Yes." Andro replied quickly. "They have become lax father and whatever security they have guarding the Onab is unprepared."

"Unprepared." Martin said nodding his head. "And what if they weren't unprepared *keto*?" Martin growled. "What if they were waiting for you?"

"Martin... perhaps..." Reva began to intercede but even she stopped when she saw his dark brown eyes, normally so bright and intelligent and full of life, shift to the yellow gold of his wolf persona.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas was the only wolf alive with yellow gold eyes, no Lycavorian came even remotely close to him in that regard. His eyes were part of the mysticism about him. Many people said his wolf eyes could look right through your skin and into your soul, or that he could kill you with a simple glance. Though she knew these were all stories, while in her sphere form, Reva had witnessed several times where poor souls had been on the receiving end of Martin's wrath through the years. It had not been pleasant to watch, even from afar, and she doubted it was any better up close.

"Perhaps *staania*..." Martin spoke, his voice tempered and even which made his eyes even that much more terrifying. "Perhaps my uncle and those with him can explain to me why they put my family at risk." Martin asked her.

"There was truly no risk." Kesas made the mistake of answering, not realizing just how angry Martin was. "We are pledged with the protection of the Onab and we..."

"Put my children at risk!" Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas screamed now causing Kesas' eyes to explode open at the vitriol with which the words came across. "You put my grandchildren at risk! My grandchildren!" Martin's yellow gold eyes were wide now and his dual wolf fangs, normally quite menacing and terrifying to behold, were now fully extended to their complete and full two and a quarter inches in length and they were absolutely chilling to gaze upon. "*Aur nathos*!"

"Kelia is my wife and mate!" Lylor shouted the words, though his heart was not really in it. He knew he and Kesas had been wrong in what they had attempted.

"*For via coi aur nathos*!" Martin roared once more. "We will move stars and burn planets to return her to her family! But not at the risk of others of our family! Would she have approved of you putting her unborn blood in harm's way?" (And she is my family)

"We did not know if we could trust you!" Kesas barked out. "We..."

Martin called forth his Shi Viska in a fit of rage and with a howl of anger none of them had ever heard from an Alpha wolf ever before, he swung the Shi Viska against the corner of the large granite table. The table was six inches thick and polished to perfection but it could not stand against the Shi Viska in Martin's hand and he completely severed the corner of the table in his anger and those in the transmission could only stare at him in unabashed distress.

"Someone shut that fool up before I put my size eleven boot so far up his ass he will be spitting shoelaces for a fucking year!" Martin roared.

Lylor stood up now and took Kesas' arm, motioning with his head at his surprised face. They had not expected such a reaction and neither of them truly knew how to respond. In all his many years, Lylor Kirek had seen only one wolf as savagely angry as Martin now was; but it was long ago in a time long forgotten. A time that Lylor had thought was long forgotten, along with the ideals and values of that time. Looking at Martin in the transmission... perhaps... perhaps he had been wrong.

"If you wish to place blame... then blame me!" Lylor snapped at him finally. "It was my decision and..."

"I don't wish to place blame on anyone!" Martin spat angrily. "I want my family to start acting like my family and start believing again!"

“Martin, you don’t know what we have had...” Lylor began to speak but he saw Martin shake his head.

“No!” Martin barked loudly silencing his words. “You forget *Tenne* Lylor... I have the memories of my grandfathers! All of them! I may not be able to understand many of them right now, but I have seen with my own eyes what they endured! What all of you endured in that time! Androcles has seen this as well. What you and the Kirek Pack has endured since then is probably equally horrific if not more so... but they never let this overwhelm them. They never let this put family at risk.”

Lylor met Martin’s wolf eyes in the transmission now, his own light blue eyes changing to the wolf within him as he felt pride swell within his chest. “No.” Lylor spoke firmly. “They never allowed us to give up. Ever.”

“Just as I will never give up.” Martin spoke with a nod. “Not me, nor my children nor the women that hold my heart and soul in their hands. Our family does not give up.”

Lylor looked at Reva sitting at the table and he saw the tears streaking down her cheeks and he turned back to the transmission. “No, we do not.”

All of them watched Martin take a deep breath and then he looked at Lylor as his eyes returned to normal. “I need to ask *Tenne*. Rescuing my Aunt, all those with her, any who still help us, this will happen. On that you have my oath, but...” He spoke now. “I need to know... I can’t hold this in any longer.”

Lylor looked at Kesas, who moved up beside him now, both of them knowing to what Martin was referring. “My King... perhaps...”

“Kesas you know, don’t you?” Martin asked him.

Kesas paused for a long moment before nodding his head. “Yes.” He answered finally.

“Then tell me.” Martin asked him.

“Martin, we...” Kesas tried one last time.

“Tell me!” Martin almost shouted the order.

Kesas looked quickly at Reva and saw her staring at him. Androcles’ gaze was focused on him as were the other sets of eyes at the small table. He turned back to Martin and took a deep breath.

“There were two thousand and forty-three members of the Mahanlo bloodline that had survived when we departed Cerath.” Kesas spoke looking at Reva. “Most were what remained of Temokah’s younger sisters and brothers.”

“Temokah?” Martin asked now looking at Reva in the transmission. “*Staania*... this was grandfather’s name?”

Reva nodded her head as she looked at him. “Yes, Martin. I remember all of them... so strong and brave.”

Kesas turned back to Martin. “When the *Dremsa rie Saan* fell upon us, all of those who were not mated among the Mahanlo bloodline had found wives and husbands among the Kirek Pack. None of them trusted the other Packs and would not even associate with the Nenay and Arhtai Packs.”

Martin nodded his head. “Kesas... you are avoiding the answer.”

Kesas shook his head. “No, Milord King... I am... I am trying not to remember.” He said honestly. “When the *Dremsa rie Saan* came, there were fifteen thousand four hundred and two who bore the bloodline of Mahanlo within them. Young and old. Not just Lylor and Kelia’s children, but hundreds of children from the others as well. So many proud and strong...” Kesas looked at Martin. “They butchered all of them Milord King... thousands of them... even those who could not lift a hand to defend themselves.” Kesas saw Martin stagger in the transmission, Aricia and For'mya reaching for him even as Anja, Dysea and the others broke into horrified tears.

“Among those... among those they killed during the *Dremsa rie Saan* were almost five... almost five hundred children who were barely a year old. The parents... they were slaughtered as they tried to protect their children.”

The agonizing and mournful howl that followed, none of them would ever forget for as many years as they had left. It was a howl of sorrow that cut right through their blood and deep into their souls, echoing off the walls of their own hearts as Lylor, Kesas, Aryera and the others could only watch. They felt it too, it was hard not to feel the sorrow, but in that sorrow, deep within the heart of the beast they felt it. A brightness that started as a swirl of light and began to spin faster and faster until it was lighting up their hearts as well.

The light of retribution.

**KOLTAR FOUR
CAPITAL CITY OF LEPIRI
ARHTAI PACK COMPOUND AND MILITARY HEADQUARTERS
LEVEL FOUR
SYSTEMS MONITORING**

It was the main nerve center for the entire Arhtai Pack military apparatus across the entire system.

The Arhtai Pack Compound itself was nearly ten square miles and was centered directly in the main portion of the capital city of Lepiri. The compound was broken into four different districts with the main living structure making up the centerpiece of the ten-square mile area. Everything was completely open to the public and thousands upon thousands of citizens walked across the compound's total area every day, however, at the issuance of one word, the entire ten square mile area of the compound could be cut off from the rest of the city and turned into an utter fortress.

The compound was broken into four command districts, North, South, East and West.

The Northern Command Monitoring Station was the facility that supervised all types of sensor and communications logs that were routinely checked. It was also home to the vast and illegal network of communications taps and illicit sensor logs that were taken every day from across Koltar Four, Anlar Prime and even Pakar Six. The men and women who worked in this facility had some of the highest security clearances known to exist within the Arhtai Pack. The Alpha who was in charge of all of this was Yelma Arhtai's oldest brother and probably one of the most hated men anywhere on Koltar Four. Kanal Arhtai had many sick perversions that his position allowed him to get away with and Yelma always looked the other way when it came to his activities because he was brutally efficient and completely loyal to her. While many did not like working for Kanal Arhtai, they certainly enjoyed the many perks that came along with that job.

His name was Comelo and he had been working this job for nearly a thousand years. Day in and day out it was the same, just as it had been for the man who held the job before him for close to ten thousand years. He did not have much to do, check several sensor feeds when he first came on duty, transfer the data to storage cores and then monitor the same four computer screens for ten hours until his relief came. It was uneventful, just as he liked it, and his position allowed him the extra credits needed to enjoy different events within the capital with different female wolves of questionable stature.

Comelo's life was about to take a very unpleasant left hand turn.

Comelo inserted his security badge into the wall mounted server unit and brought up the first of nineteen Blood Scanner and Video units in place on Pakar Six. They were divided between the three major thoroughfares of the base where most everyone had to pass through nearly everyday. They were ingeniously hidden, or so they thought, within normal computer data terminals that were used for simple information gathering or directions. While the Kirek Pack had probably discovered most of them after so many years, they could not risk tampering with them or shutting them down for reasons Comelo did not know or understand. All he knew was that no one had ever tried to damage or interrupt the hidden sensor arrays.

Until today.

Comelo had to blink quickly several times as he watched the short data log. It was only thirteen seconds long, but it was very clear and obviously showed a young woman who had blazing azure blue colored eyes, long, raven black hair and wicked looking dual wolf fangs. Comelo watched as the last five seconds was the young woman physically pulling the sensor array from inside the data terminal it had been hidden in, snarling savagely right in front of the camera and then smashing the sensor array to the ground ending the transmission. Comelo was not a stupid man, he had heard many rumors in his lifetime and his years working here about what many referred to as the *Dremsa Rie Saan*.

The Night of Blood.

The night the Mahanlo bloodline had been declared enemies of the people because of some disease they would not allow Arhtai Pack doctors to treat. On that night, thousands had been killed. Mainly Mahanlo Pack members, but many Kirek Pack members and at least several hundred Arhtai Pack members. All of them had

been declared traitors to their people and were ordered arrested or executed on sight. Comelo had been born long after this night and his father and mother never spoke of it to him or his brothers and sisters. It was almost as if it shamed them in some way. There had not been a wolf with the dual fangs of Mahanlo blood seen or sighted anywhere in nearly two million years. There were rumors of course, stories told by parents wanting to scare their children into submission. Stories that Kelia Mahanlo and her Kirek Pack husband and mate Lylor still lived. Mahanlo blood was still widely recognized as the most powerful Lycavorian bloodline to have ever existed. No other bloodline could come close to it in any way and this caused obvious envy among the other packs, but none were ever strong enough to stand against them.

The Mahanlo bloodline and their past had been wiped from the history books by order of Yelma Arhtai, and to even speak their name by accident now caused men and women both to disappear never to be seen again.

Comelo quickly entered the code for the next sensor array with shaking hands and his eyes grew wider still when he saw a young woman who was clearly Lycavorian, but she was also something else. He saw a flash of dark colored cobalt blue eyes and silky black hair that was rich and thick. Then he saw what was unmistakable, just as they had been on the first young female. He saw thick, lethal looking dual wolf fangs that were fully exposed and very distinctive.

“*Sibfla!*” Comelo gasped aloud as his hands were shaking so badly he almost dropped his card key.

He punched in the code for the next sensor and felt fear grip his lower abdomen as he was able to watch the tall, extremely well built young wolf tear at the data terminal with his bare hands. He was adorned in obsidian and gold armor of some kind that conformed to his body like a second skin, revealing a muscular build that Comelo would never have. He had short, raven black hair with a immaculately trimmed goatee and just like the first young female, amazingly bright and expressive azure colored blue eyes that appeared as if they were glowing. He could make out the black pupil and wolf nature of his eyes, but they were unlike any wolf eyes he had ever seen before.

Comelo watched as the young man, obviously, an Alpha from the looks of him, brought the now revealed sensor gathering camera closer to his face. The helmet he wore hid most of his features except for his eyes, but there was a long cut in the helmet that exposed his lips and part of his cheeks and jawline. And staring at him in the transmission were ferocious looking dual wolf fangs unlike anything Comelo had ever imagined.

“*Evell wen chevshs!*” He growled in to the small sensor array. “*Iada terit pascius fas terit carians, toer hel el isarna, el evell gur sey joana.*” (We are coming) (Make peace with your gods, ask them for mercy, for we will have none.)

Comelo actually yelped loudly, drawing the attention from half a dozen others when the young wolf snapped forward with his head and actually ripped into the small sensor terminal with those dual fangs. They made short work of the small terminal and then the picture was gone.

“*Nubou!*” Comelo barked out loudly as he whirled around and broke into a run for his supervisor’s office.

“...Is this?” Kanal Arhtai snarled angrily as he tossed the data scroll onto the top of his desk.

He was not happy at having been disturbed to say the very least. His six foot three body had once been muscle and bone but was now nothing more than flesh and saggy skin. Too many years of neglecting what he was and not doing anything for himself had turned him into a vile creature of a man. He used his position as Arhtai Chief of Internal Security to threaten and cajole young females to entertain him whenever he found one that struck his fancy. He had been forcing himself on a young female wolf when his senior aide had come rushing to his quarters to inform him that his attention was needed at once.

He had tried to keep up his physical appearances, but once his clothes came off no female wolf found him attractive. His lone mate was long dead and the children he had with her were almost no better than him with the exception of his youngest daughter. She alone avoided her father at all costs wanting nothing to do with him or her nine siblings, almost as if she knew something that they did not. It was Kanal Arhtai’s one weak spot, his youngest daughter, but she had never used his name or his position to gain anything. Unlike her father, she was very well respected and highly thought of among the many in her field of Astrometric Anomalies.

“You need to see this Kanal.” The man stammered. He had been Kanal’s senior aide for as long as he could remember and was perhaps the only one outside of his sister and brother-in-law that could speak how they wanted to Kanal. He reached out and took the data spike from the desk and moved to the wall directly behind Kanal’s desk and plugged it in.

“You should have seen her Alaki.” Kanal boasted to his friend. “She was young and firm and…” Kanal stopped talking when he saw the monitor come alive with the brief images of intelligence data terminals being destroyed. “What is this?” Kanal barked looking at the young wolf he did not know.

“These are the images of all nineteen Blood Scanner and Data Collection devices on Pakar Six being torn from inside their protective shells and destroyed.” Alaki answered him. “This is Third Lieutenant Comelo. He discovered it this morning upon arriving for his tour of duty and brought it to his shift supervisor immediately.”

“All nineteen?” Kanal asked him. “I was under the impression they had only found thirteen of the devices and our data comes mainly from the five they have yet to discover.”

Alaki nodded his head. “That is what we have believed, but apparently, that has not been the case for many years.” He replied quickly. “The five that we supposedly thought were still hidden…” Alaki touched the controls for the monitor and Kanal’s eyes grew wide when he saw the images of the two females and three males ripping the data gathering nodes from their protective shells and either smashing them to the floor or…

“*Evell wen chevshs! Iada terit pascius fas terit carians, toer hel el isarna, el evell gur sey joana.*” The young alpha wolf with azure colored eyes spoke those words just before he utterly destroyed the device with what could only be savage looking dual wolf fangs.

“*Nubou lae!*” Kanal gasped aloud for he had not seen a set of dual wolf fangs in more years that he could remember. Kanal looked at Alaki. “This is… it must be some kind of joke.” Kanal hissed. “There are safeguards in place if even one of the devices is destroyed or tampered with.”

Alaki nodded his head and looked at Comelo. “Tell him.” He said.

“Tell me what?” Kanal snarled.

“I followed established protocols and immediately downloaded all nineteen sensor cores per the instructions if something like this were to ever take place General.” Comelo spoke as he began to sweat profusely in fear. “The images and recordings are all similar in nature, yet the failsafe codes were not entered automatically like they should have been. And the… the current data streams are active and normal.”

Kanal blinked his eyes rapidly. “Active and normal?” He barked. “How can that be when we just watched all nineteen devices ripped from their housings and destroyed.”

Comelo shook his head. “That is what I do not understand General.”

“What do you understand?” Kanal growled at the younger man savagely.

Alaki stepped closer to Comelo knowing his friend’s penchant for hurting those who displeased him. “It means Kanal, that someone has manipulated the data stream and made it appear like this is happening.”

Kanal looked at him. “What?” He gasped. “Why?”

“The answer is obvious old friend.” Alaki told him. “Kesas Pengot and the Kirek Pack dogs are up to something. Playing games.”

Kanal came to his feet. “To what end?” Kanal hissed. “They are hardly in a position to challenge my sister or the Arhtai Pack. No one will follow them. Not even those lapdogs the Nenay.”

Alaki looked at Comelo. “How can we determine if this is actually something that is taking place or if it is ruse?”

“A ruse?” Comelo stammered.

“If someone is playing a trick on us?!” Alaki snapped now.

“Only a full systems diagnostic can do that.” Comelo answered quickly.

“Can you do that?” Kanal demanded.

“Yes, General, but I do not have the necessary security access levels to initiate a full system check.” Comelo stated quickly. “I am only an analyst and programmer.”

“But you can do it?” Kanal asked once more.

“Yes.” Comelo answered. “I’m trying to say I don’t need to.”

“What? Why damn it?” Kanal shouted.

“A full systems check was conducted yesterday morning and has already been filed into the data cores.” Comelo told him. “All you would need to do is call up the results of that check and read the data.”

Kanal reached out and pulled Comelo over to his desk, shoving him into the chair. “Start the process. I will give you the passwords as needed. Quickly now!”

Alaki looked at him. “Kanal...?”

“Inform my sister I need to see her.” Kanal growled. “How long boy?”

Comelo looked up from the desk. “Three hours. No more.”

“Tell her I need to see her in four hours Alaki.” Kanal told him. “And put our security forces on stand by. We may need to take a trip to Pakar Six.”

Alaki nodded his head. “Understood.”

PAKAR SIX MAIN TRANSPORT BAY

It had been a simple matter for Ne'Veha to bring the *PREMONITION* into the large transport bay under Shroud while members of the Kirek Pack raced back and forth trying to determine where the ship was. They didn't realize how large the *PREMONITION* really was until Sadi lowered the Shroud once she was fully inside the bay. Sadi would openly admit to anyone that asked that Ne'Veha was the much better close quarters pilot because of her natural Elven skills and her background in Ground Support. It truly seemed like Ne'Veha and the ship became one mind when she had the controls in tight flight situations. As crew members in the Transport Bay stared on in awe, Ne'Veha lowered the ship to the deck as gently as a newborn baby once their Shroud was down.

Rothan Luas was waiting as Lylor and Kesas led everyone off the ship. Aryera Kirek was barking instructions to Marda and Taig as Kalis, Denali and several others broke off with them. Alarms had begun to sound all over the base due to the unregistered entry of the ship into the transport bay and the detection of Mahanlo blood within the base. No one had ever heard the alarms before and it was sending men and women into a panic. The Arhtai Pack spies would know something was up in moments, and Lylor and Androcles did not want to wait to strike.

Caylt and Yasha moved with Mari, Brendi, Deion, Jomann, Ridor and Daio with them as they made for the Command Center quickly and efficiently. Androcles, Nara, Lisisa, Normya, Tir'ut, and Eliani made short work of the sensors that the Arhtai Pack thought they did not know about. There had really been only two that Aryera and Kesas' children Caylt and Yasha had not detected through the years, but Chiron quickly found all five of them and it was these that Androcles, the huge bone faced young man and his sisters shattered into oblivion.

Things were coming together far faster than Lylor and Kesas had ever hoped or imagined they would. Chiron's message to them had been so very true. There were not men and women who played at war. They were decisive and action oriented and they did not hesitate in the least.

The Transport Bay quickly became the center of attention on Pakar Six as the Kirek Pack began acting instead of reacting as they had for so many years. Lylor was leading Kesas and Aryera back into the Transport Bay and he was impressed with how his sister had kept their small force trained and equipped even with the restrictions placed on them. With Androcles' brother and cousin among their number, Lylor had watched on monitors as they chased down and captured four Arhtai Pack spies that they had known nothing about. These three men and one woman had witnessed the brutal deaths of those that were known Arhtai plants and after so long hidden they immediately lost all sense of professionalism just as Martin had suspected they would. Never having dealt with anything like the savageness and ferociousness of the attack that Denali and Kalis led, the four seasoned spies broke in an attempt to escape from Pakar Six and inform their superiors that the Kirek Pack was rebelling once more. They made it only half way to the Secondary Transport Bay to steal a ship before running into Marda, Taig, and the others who had been sent after them. Lylor looked at their bloody faces where they now knelt on the deck a short distance away. Marda and Taig were watching them like hungry predators, with Androcles' cousin Kalis and his pureblood brother Denali with them. The four of them stood together now,

Marda and Taig armed with what Andro called the new Pralor Particle Weapons. Marda and Taig were thrilled about this new equipment and had quickly passed the four crates of the new weapons out among their security force.

Lylor looked at the now covered bodies of the dead spies that they had killed within a few minutes of exiting the ship. Lylor had been surprised at how accurate and sensitive the blood detectors were, but it would be Chiron who would explain in the coming weeks that it was not the sophistication of the detectors but the massive influx of pure Mahanlo blood into the base because of Androcles and his siblings. Rothan had wasted no time and acted instantly the moment the alarms began to sound. He saw the young Alpha that Rothan said was working with him, his hands secured in front of him and now standing with Rothan. He didn't look very happy and Lylor and Kesas made straight for where he stood.

"Rothan?" Lylor spoke.

"This is not what we agreed too Lylor." Rothan hissed angrily. "Uvae has been helping us since he came here. Kesas you know this!"

Lylor looked at the Arhtai Alpha wolf who stood there stoically. The man had no fear in his eyes and he stood tall and proud. This was not a man who was a spy in any way. Lylor could tell just by his demeanor that he had left the Arhtai Pack behind long ago. He motioned with his hand, "Come with me."

Lylor led them to where Androcles was sitting on the bench and they saw Eliani kneeling in front of her brother, drawing her hand slowly across his lower jaw, a soft white glow coming from her fingertips. Lylor now knew he had many nieces and nephews and it was going to take some time for him to learn all of their names. His niece Eliani was the easiest of them all since she was the most outspoken and rebellious of her siblings from what he could tell. She was also the wife, mate and *Anome* to the tall Kirek Pack Alpha known as Jomann. Lylor knew Jomann would become very popular on Pakar Six for he was the only Kirek Pack Alpha known to exist outside of this planet and it was becoming known that he was the husband and mate to the *Mard Revik's* breathtakingly beautiful daughter and an equally stunning female that was, herself, rapidly turning out to be a powerful turned wolf.

Eliani lowered her hand from Andro's jaw and looked at him and all of them watched stunned as she quickly slapped him across the cheek. What was even more stunning was the smile that curled Androcles' lips as he looked at her.

"Next time, don't try to eat the camera *ryn mida*." Eliani spat as she pointed her finger at him. (Dumb ass)

"I wasn't trying to eat the camera." Andro stated.

"That's not what Lisisa said." Eli quipped right back. "And I believe her over you."

Andro saw his uncle move up and he quickly snapped his head forward, nuzzling Eliani on her cheek furiously in brotherly affection. She giggled as his aura washed over her and she pushed him away. Andro rose to his feet then and looked at his Uncle, Rothan and the others looking at him surprised.

"*Tenne*?" He asked.

Eliani caught him off guard as she usually did, reaching up to slap him lightly in the back of the head before moving away. "*Ryn mida*." She called out as she walked away.

"*Pomai*!" Andro hissed back at her while half turning his head. (Slut)

Eliani laughed at his words. "*El Jomann for Brendi innyne*." She yelled after him. (For Jomann and Brendi always)

Andro looked back to Lylor. "My apologies *Tenne*, Eliani can be unruly at times."

Rothan looked at Androcles. "Our... our language flows so easily from the lips of your siblings and those with you *aur Indalfrid*." He spoke formally.

Andro shook his head. "My name is Androcles." He said quickly. "Or Andro. Whichever you prefer."

Rothan looked at him with wide eyes as did others. "*For wen... forn wen vada Orwara Indalfrid. Vada fera Tarivu rie vada Mard Revik*." (You are the Crown Prince. The First Herald of the True King.)

Andro nodded his head. "And there are days when I hate that title." He spoke much to their shock as he stepped forward and looked at the man with steel flexi cuffs on his wrists. "Why are you still wearing the bindings?"

Uvae lifted his hands. "I think perhaps things moved more quickly than we thought and I was forgotten my Prince." He answered honestly.

It happened far more quickly than most of them were able to follow. Andro lifted his right hand, called forth his right Glaive from its spot on the side of his armor and he slashed it down across the bindings. The steel flexi cuffs were meant to hold the strongest Lycavorians easily and were pretty much indestructible.

Unless cut by a blade coated in Dragon Armor.

Andro reseated his Glaive in that return motion as the pieces of the bindings dropped to the deck and then bowed his head to the older man. "My thanks to you sir. We would not have discovered the others so easily without your help."

Uvae bowed his head in return. "With your blessing my Prince, I will return to my wife and children. She was worried about me during this time."

Androcles nodded his head. "My thanks to you again." He said. "My father will wish to meet you after things have settled. You and your family."

Uvae nodded his head. "We would be honored sire."

Andro smiled as the man quickly made for the door and then he looked at Lylor. "My apologies *Tenne*, Lord Luas, I did not know he had not been released."

Rothan shook his head. "It is done." He spoke. "I will have someone watch him for a time but..."

Androcles shook his head. "No need." He spoke motioning with his head towards the door. All of them turned to see Uvae catch the woman in his arms as she jumped the last few feet and then the seven children crowding around the man they called father. "He is a man of his word." Andro spoke softly.

"*Avoi*." Lylor echoed.

"What about our guests?" Andro asked now.

"We will lock them down in a sealed room below the command center." Rothan spoke. "They will be going nowhere. How did... how did you know there were others? Even after all this time we never suspected the four that we caught. Ever."

Andro shrugged his shoulders. "My father tends to think out of the box, sir." Andro said in reply. "It just seemed like a clever idea to implement and he ended up being right. Now we just have to get what information we need out of them before someone tries to contact them and get a report."

Kesas motioned with his hand. "Then come this way. Caylt, Yasha and your people have set up in the command center. We won't be able to hide the destruction of the blood scanners for long, but long enough for your father to arrive and for us to act."

Andro nodded his head as he began to follow Kesas. Lylor and Rothan fell in just behind him but quickly made room for the two young and exceptionally beautiful women who raced up behind them. Carisia and Lu'ria took up places on either side of Androcles as they walked, each of them taking one of his hands in theirs. Rothan and Lylor looked at each other quickly as they walked, never having seen an elf before, let alone a Drow elf. That she was a turned wolf was obvious enough, but from what Lylor and Rothan could smell, Androcles had been the one to turn her and her blood carried the purest form of Lycavorian DNA anywhere.

As with his *Anome* Sadi, Andro's lavender and pines scent was deeply imbedded in this young, dark skinned woman's blood. Sadi they knew was a pureblood female of substantial influence all her own because of her own bloodline, and when you mixed Sadi's blood with Androcles', the aura and influence was off the charts. Turned though she may have been, this ebony skinned female elf had nearly as powerful a female aura as Sadi did simply because Androcles was the one to have turned her. What surprised them both was that they could detect the scent of Sadi and the others deeply in her blood as well. Almost as if... Rothan and Lylor looked at each other with wide eyes but quickly moved their eyes forward as they realized what this meant. And apparently, none of these women cared in the least who knew this fact.

The small exotic looking female they did not know what to make of. They had never met anyone of her species, but then again, they had never met an elf before three hours ago either. It was obvious to them that Andro had bitten her, and she had bitten him in return, but there was something strangely unique about what they smelled within Carisia as opposed to Sadi and Lu'ria. They would have to question Lady Reva when they had the chance for Lylor did not want to offend his *mandri* after being so stupid upon their first meeting and nearly ruining everything.

The trip to the command center was quick as others got out of their way in the corridors and finally they were entering the room where they caught the tail end of Mari speaking to the others.

“...Tap is complete but we won't be able to hold it for long before someone knows something is up.” Mari spoke from the chair she occupied between Brendi and Yasha. Caylt was standing at the large chart table with Chiron.

Caylt nodded his head. “But we just need to hold it until early morning.” He told them. “Sixteen hours tops. After that it will not matter.”

“True enough.” Mari agreed with a smile.

Kesas looked at his son as they moved around the chart table. “Caylt, Yasha?” He asked.

Caylt moved to the small computer console on the chart table and began typing. “We were able to initiate the code hack successfully father, just as Prince Androcles suggested.” He spoke excitedly.

Andro shook his head. “Don't look at me.” He said raising his hand. “That was all my *fervon* Deion and his lovely wife and mate Mari.” He spoke. “They are the computer gurus.”

Lylor looked at Kesas and then back to Androcles. “What is this... this guru?”

Andro smiled and shook his head. “I'll explain some other time *Tenne*.” He answered. “Mari?”

Mari moved up beside the taller Caylt and pointed to the console. Caylt nodded and typed quickly, bringing up a blueprint type schematic on the table in front of them. “Essentially what Brendi and I did is find and access an undefended computer port in their planetary mainframe on Koltar Four while Androcles and the others were running their plots.”

“Wait?!” Kesas gasped. “You were able to access their planetary mainframe from your ship?”

Mari nodded her head. “Yes. Onab computer code is very similar in design to Pralor code and I designed a program a few years ago to integrate the two.”

Kesas looked at Androcles quickly and then back to Mari. “How old are you again child?” He asked.

“Twenty-four.” Mari answered instantly. “Why?”

Andro shook his head again. “Never mind about that.” He spoke. “Mari... keep going.”

Mari motioned with her hand as Caylt enlarged the blueprint. “The planetary mainframe is extensive.” She told them. “Caylt already had most of it mapped with his reverse inversion pulses, but we got the really good stuff while we hung out in orbit.” She traced what appeared to be a long string of corridors but in truth no one but Mari, Caylt and Brendi knew what they were. “Brendi found this at twenty-three minutes in.”

“And this is?” Androcles asked.

“This was our way in.” Mari spoke with a smile as Caylt adjusted the screen and what they were viewing. “Think of it as a blue print Andro.” She said. “It pretty much led us to this bright spot here. A low encryption code spike that was being used to block access into the mainframe from outside sources. Only it was very well hidden.”

“Come again?” Carisia asked.

“This was left here for someone to find.” Mari said with a smile. “I think the Onab left it for us Andro. Or for someone like us.”

“Why do you say that?” Aryera asked now.

“Because it was a back door into every lower sub system on the mainframe. Including the Security Network” Mari answered her. “It's why we were able to do a reverse tap of recorded material and reroute it to the mainframe through secondary power conduits.”

Lylor shook his head. “I am lost.” He spoke.

“I was lost many words ago.” Rothan echoed.

“Mari...” Andro spoke with a smile. “English please... for those of us who do not speak computer.”

Mari blushed and brought her hand to her mouth in shock. “*Sibfla!*” She exclaimed. “I'm sorry!” She stepped closer to the table and used her hands to point to several different things on the blueprint Caylt had pulled up. “What we did is make a recording of no activity on the blood detectors from previous recordings that Caylt had on file. Using those, we were able to tap into the Planetary Mainframe and reverse feed those taps into the main converters. The scanners would have recorded as we took out the blood detectors, especially the one Andro bit, but their computers will tell them that all of the blood detectors are intact and detecting nothing out of the ordinary.”

“You are tricking them?” Lylor almost shouted.

Mari nodded her head. “Yes.”

Kesas couldn't help but smile. "They see the recordings but their equipment is telling them nothing is wrong." He said. "Ingenious!"

"It was Caylt's idea." Mari said. "Brendi and I just implemented the computer hack."

Kesas looked at his son. "Well done *Keto!*" He said. "Well done."

"What does this mean for us?" Rothan asked now.

Yasha moved forward now. "It means we have two options to think about." She spoke. "Option one is that they think it is a computer mishap and treat it as such. They will try to find out electronically if the equipment is functioning correctly. The tap is for sixteen hours, so no matter what they do, for the next sixteen hours they won't know what is happening here unless the person that have checking the systems is very good at their job."

"They have people like that?" Kesas asked now.

"They do." Yasha answered. "Few, because they don't want to let the reins of control loosen too much, but they have some."

"And the other option?" Lylor asked.

"They will try to contact their agents here directly." Yasha said. "Though we now know who they are, and we have them in custody or they are dead, finding their equipment will be harder. The Arhtai Pack will have protocols to follow if they can not contact their agents within a certain amount of time. Especially the ones we did not know about. It is not known how much they will go for this idea since it would have exposed one, if not all of those that we already captured and didn't know about."

"That means coming here." Kesas said. "Which they have not done in nearly a million years. They wouldn't be foolish enough to do that."

"They would if they believe that Lylor or any of his children have been woken Kesas." Aryera said. "You know that."

"How long to implement if they go with option two?" Androcles asked.

Yasha shrugged her shoulders. "It would depend on what kind of day that *upae* Yelma Arhtai is having I suppose." She answered him. "If they did it quickly, they could be here with several hundred troops in roughly six hours."

"And what are the chances of her doing it quickly if they go with choice two and think that Mahanlo blood is once more active on the planet?" Andro asked her.

Yasha smiled at what he was implying. "Slim to none." She replied.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "My instincts tell me that they will treat this as some sort of computer failure. At least until they have a better idea that it is not."

"The risk to Kelia is..." Lylor began to speak but stopped himself.

"How many people actually know that she is still alive *Tenne?*" Andro asked him.

Kesas met his gaze as his eyes opened wider. "The most senior members of her family of course, but outside of that... so much time has passed that..."

Andro nodded his head. "My father believes that those guarding her don't even know who she is." He said. "Everyone thinks she is dead."

"And they have not rebuked these rumors." Kesas said agreeing with him and looking at Lylor.

"Which means she cannot go public with this information." Aryera said now as she began to understand. "There are many, even among the Arhtai Pack, who believe that Mahanlo blood is still royalty. That it still is our best chance for the future."

"And she will have to confirm that you are awake Uncle." Andro said. "Before she does anything."

Lylor met his nephew's eyes. "And that requires her to send someone here. And that takes time."

Andro nodded his head. "Right now, time is our ally." He said. "In sixteen hours that will change, but by then we will have succeeded or we will all be dead."

Mari looked across the table at Androcles. "Ummm... just food for thought Andro..." She spoke. "I'm not really liking the dead part. It doesn't do it for me and dead doesn't work for Deion and Emylea either."

Andro smiled as he looked at her. "Don't worry Mari... it doesn't work for us either."

"Whew! That's good to know." She said. "Wait a minute... us? Who is us?"

Androcles' smile grew even wider as he took his P1 from his belt and set it on the chart table and activated it.

“Father?” Andro spoke.

“Is it done?” Martin’s voice boomed from the P1 as it activated and his small holographic image expanded from the sophisticated personal computer. “Andro... are we good? I’m getting tired of waiting here *keto*. Give me something.”

“Father, we are set.” Andro told him. “We have the hidden Arhtai agents and all of the blood detectors are deactivated.”

“Casualties son?” Martin asked.

“Just those Arhtai Pack members who resisted.” Andro replied. “You brought Re'lon and *Tenna* Nayeca I hope?”

Martin chuckled aloud. “Does a bear shit in the woods boy?” Martin said with a grin.

“We have sixteen hours father.” Andro told him.

“We won’t need sixteen hours.” Martin replied confidently. “Manda and Sa'sur will be here in twelve hours. They are making their last jump right into orbit of Koltar Four, exactly two minutes before we hit them. It will wake them up so abruptly and scare them right out of their fucking shorts, no matter how big their balls are!”

“Martin, we...” Lylor began to speak but Martin held up his hand.

“Hold that thought *Tenne*.” He told him turning to look at. “Andro... your mothers are already loaded on the *TYPE TWO*. Anja wants to wake up your cousins and Danny snagged two dozen crates of Pralor weapons for the Kirek Pack and whoever else is going with us. Thoti and Duewa arrived from Ventori just before we left and they’ll handle showing everyone how to use the new gear. We...”

“Wait!” Lylor exclaimed as he looked at Androcles quickly and saw him smile and then he turned back to Martin’s image. “You speak... you speak as if you are already here Martin.”

“Here?” Martin hissed. “Hell, yes I am here! I’ve been busting a gut cause my son takes too damn long to do shit sometimes! Make room for us in that transport bay *keto*, we’re inbound in nine minutes. *SPARTA'S WRATH* will remain Shrouded until its time to say hello to Koltar Four.”

“You are here?” Kesas exclaimed now as he realized what Martin was saying.

“I’ll see you all in nine minutes.” Martin spoke before he ended the transmission and Androcles recovered his P1.

“I suggest we go to the transport bay.” He told them. “Things will move quickly once father arrives. He doesn’t like to beat around the bush so to speak.”

“He has been here all of this time and you said nothing?!” Lylor snapped at Androcles.

Andro secured his P1 on his belt and nodded his head. “That is correct.” He spoke.

“Don’t you think that you owe us an explanation for that?” Lylor snapped again but much less forcefully.

Androcles shook his head. “No.” He answered bluntly before turning and heading for the door of the command center and into the corridor.

Lylor looked at Kesas with wide, angry eyes and saw that he was looking back at him with something akin to a smile on his face.

“You think this is funny?” He rasped out the question.

Kesas nodded his head slowly. “Yes.”

“How can you think this is funny?” Lylor demanded.

“I have come to the realization that...” Kesas looked at Lylor. “We... we are not dealing with normal Lycavorians Lylor. We are dealing with direct descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. Martin, his oldest son Androcles and all of his children are those descendants. Never were there two more confounding men alive. You could never predict what they would do next and you know this. They are the same. We are dealing with Kelia’s bloodline Lylor Kirek. You are Kelia’s beloved mate, yes, but you are not of their bloodline. You do not have Mahanlo blood flowing within your veins as they do. All of them are much younger than us, yet their combat skills surpass anything that we have. Anything that your sister, Taig and Yasha have been able to train our people in. Can you stand there and deny that to me?”

Lylor looked quickly at Aryera who had remained silent until now. “Kesas is correct Lylor.” She told him.

Lylor turned back to Kesas. “Then what do you suggest Kesas?” He snapped. “I will not stand by while my Kelia is a prisoner of that foul women! I will not!”

Kesas shook his head. “And I don’t expect you too Lylor my friend. I don’t believe your family expects you too. What I do suggest is this. All of us... we have lived in this bubble out here for so long that we have forgotten that events have spun right along without us outside of this bubble we are in. You heard what Lady Reva told us on that ship. He has been King for less than thirty years and he has united our people unlike at any other time in our history according to her. Who but someone with the blood of Daniho and Ashten could do such a thing. And he has finally discovered us out here and he intends to see his family reunited. No matter who he has to crush in order to do that. All of them do. You can see it in their eyes. In their movement as they walk. They are not here to play games Lylor.”

Aryera reached out and placed her hand on her brother’s arm. “Kesas speaks truth *fervon* and we should listen to him. I love Kelia as I would any sister that I ever had Lylor, but Kesas is correct. Martin, Androcles, even Lady Reva, they are her blood Lylor. This is her *nathos*. They have come for her and they do not intend to fail. We are family to them but we are not their blood.”

“They would not... they would not leave us!” Lylor hissed softly.

Aryera shook her head. “No... they don’t intend to leave us.” She spoke. “But you have seen what they can do *fervon*! Their equipment. Their ship. They fight beside *sinuovas* Lylor! Who among us can say that?”

“Then what do we do?!” Lylor asked. “Tell me!”

“I suggest we grab our boots and jump onto the ship and let them pull us along.” Kesas told him. “I have a sense that Martin will not dismiss us by any stretch of the imagination. And what we can learn is more than anything we could ever hope for.”

Lylor looked at him. “You trust him that much?” He asked. “You trust them?”

Kesas smiled at him. “I trust the Mahanlo blood that flows in their veins.” He answered.

Lylor looked at the chart table as everyone in the room stared at him. Mari and Brendi had remained silent during the exchange but like everyone else they were now staring at Lylor. All of them saw him nod his head after several moments.

“My heart... my heart tells me the same thing.” He said finally looking at Kesas.

Kesas nodded with a smile and gripped his arm. “Every day for more years than I can remember Lylor, I have asked for a sign. Anything that would tell me that all was not lost, that hope had not abandoned us. I said this prayer while standing beside your cryo chamber Lylor my friend. Every day! That sign is now here... and it is the brightest point of light that these old eyes have ever seen. I intend to be there when that light shines upon the Arhtai Pack and their vile deeds. You know how passionate Daniho Mahanlo was Lylor... and how cruel he could be if he felt someone had wronged his blood.”

Kesas looked at Lylor for a long moment, his eyes moving to Aryera and then back to Lylor.

“I see that in Martin’s eyes Lylor.” Kesas spoke softly. “And it makes me shiver in horror knowing that but by the grace of Daniho Mahanlo, I would be working beside Yelma Arhtai right now. Just as she asked me the day Daniho became our King.”

“What?” Lylor gasped aloud with wide eyes.

Kesas nodded his head. “She asked me to come work for the Arhtai as an advisor the day Daniho was named King. The next morning, Daniho came to me and asked me to stand with him and help him to learn.”

Kesas smiled. “You know what my decision was.”

“Kesas I... we never knew that!” Lylor gasped.

Kesas shook his head. “Nor did Daniho.” He said. “Which is why I have honored my vow to him with such devotion. Now his descendants are here... and I intend to help them put their family back together because I believe! I believe now, just like I believed back then!”

“*Avoi!*” Aryera’s voice carried across the room then and finished any talk.

They all knew what needed to be done.

The word had spread quickly throughout the base on Pakar Six about who was landing in the main Transport Bay and they would have been hard pressed to keep everyone who had crowded into the bay out. That pure Mahanlo blood had returned to them was rapidly making its way among the Kirek Pack and everyone wanted to get a glimpse of them. That is was pure Mahanlo bloodline descended from Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo themselves was only just beginning to make its way among the people. Already stories of Androcles and his siblings taking down the blood detectors and Arhtai Pack spies was running rampant among the Kirek Pack.

For'mya and Endith brought the *TYPE TWO* into the Transport Bay right beside the *PREMONITION* and set the hundred and sixty-meter ship down with equally as much skill as Ne'Veha had done. These were ships that the Kirek Pack had never seen before and they were sleek looking and powerful. Everyone watched as the massive ramp in the rear undercarriage of the ship began to lower and they waited while holding their breaths to see who would depart this new ship. All of them could smell the pureness of Mahanlo blood in the Transport Bay, it was unmistakable with Lady Reva, Androcles and his siblings all in the Bay now. The moment the ramp touched down however, the scent of pure Mahanlo blood washed through the entire Transport Bay like a wave of clean, pure mountain air. Everyone who had been able to cram inside the Bay could smell it and it filtered across their senses like a jolt of energy.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas was the first one down the ramp obviously and the slow building of astonished murmurs quickly swept through the bay. There was not a member of the Kirek Pack alive today who had not seen hundreds of images of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo in their studies as they grew. What they saw exit this strange ship was the near duplicate image of both men meshed together in one perfect form. Voices swept forward even from the back of the huge bay and as if with one mind, men, women and children began dropping to one knee in utter reverence. Martin reached the bottom of the ramp, his dark eyes searching for one person and he found him quickly, Reva standing between him and Androcles. Martin moved over in front of Lylor who stared at him in astonishment. Even what Reva had told them did not prepare Lylor Kirek for the image of the man he now was gazing at. He could see both Daniho and Ashten in this man, like the two brothers had somehow merged themselves into one entity.

And he now stood before him.

"*Son vada carians.*" Lylor muttered finally, his voice carrying to those standing nearby. Rothan, Aryera, Kesas, all of them were looking at Martin with unabashed shock. They had seen him in the transmissions yes, but actually seeing him in person was more than any of them could take. Aryera Kirek quickly reached for Kesas' arm for support as she began to openly weep when Martin did what none of them ever expected.

Martin pulled Lylor Kirek into an embrace that made his ribs crack in protest but Lylor did not care as Martin's deep pines scent filtered to his nose. Martin held him at arm's length for a moment as Reva clutched Androcles arm tighter, trying to keep from losing her balance as she wept.

Martin's eyes were moist now as he looked at his uncle, and then in an action that would be remembered by everyone in that Transport Bay for the rest of their lives, Martin Leonidas lifted his uncle into his arms with a wail of happiness and broke down into tears while crushing his body to his own and spinning around and around. It did not take long for the emotion to overwhelm Lylor and soon he was joining his nephew in the emotion filled greeting.

Whatever anyone thought before coming to the Transport Bay this day, what was very clear to the Kirek Pack at what they saw happening before them, was that things were going to be very different going forward. The bloodline of their beloved King had returned and soon it would be time to free themselves and others from the oppression of the Arhtai Pack.

Anja was not known for wasting time and as soon as the greetings in the Transport Bay were over, she was moving for the room where Lylor's three children still resided in the cryo pods. With Duewa, Eliani, Serale, Caliria, Cvea and Anuk assisting, Anja quickly brought Lient, Pauin and Amori out of the cryo freezing process while Lylor looked on with worry in his face. Martin and Reva stood on either side of him as they observed, careful not to interrupt Anja in any form. Anja had this down pat now, and it moved quickly. Pauin,

Lient or Amori were lifted from the pods by members of the Kirek Pack and quickly moved to beds while Anja oversaw the injections of the natural enzymes to stimulate muscle growth and energy. The two brothers and their sister were awake, but their senses were still confused and only the smell of pure Mahanlo blood in the room and their father's blood kept them reasonably calm.

In all it took Anja only two hours to pull all three of them from their pods and get them into beds and then into the base medical facility. The three of them watched as Anja moved from between the beds and came across the large room to where they stood.

"It's done." She spoke confidently.

"Truly?!" Lylor gasped.

Anja nodded her head. "They won't be winning any marathons in the next few days, but all of their medical signs are strong and steady. Their eye sight will take a few hours to return fully, that is something unfortunately that I can't help because of the process of cryo freezing. They can smell our blood all around them and I think that is why they are staying so calm, but they keep asking for you."

Lylor looked at her. "I can... I can touch them?"

Anja smiled and nodded her head. "Of course." She told him. "Go... they are waiting for you."

Lylor didn't hesitate and moved across the room, his children perking up when they smelled him so close and then he was reaching for Amori's hand since she was the closest to him. Pauin and Lient were sitting up in their beds when they heard their father's voice and the tears came.

Reva reached for Anja and took her arms. "They will be fine?" She asked.

Anja detected the worry in her voice and she nodded once more as she gripped Reva's arms in return. "They will be more than fine." She told her. "You should go to them. They are your grandchildren."

Reva looked at Martin and saw him nod to her. "*Cui staania.*" He said quickly. Reva didn't waste another moment and she moved across the room as Martin pulled Anja close to him and watched. When she reached where Lylor sat on the bed Martin looked down at Anja's head. He reached out to her in the heavily shielded connection that he shared with all of his wives and mates. [*Talk to me Red.*] He spoke feeling Aricia, Dysea, For'mya, Isabella and Cirith perking up, listening in.

Anja knew Martin would detect her demeanor and tone of voice and know something was up and she was not disappointed. She lifted her hand and took his hand before rolling the three small items into the palm of his hand.

[*What's this?*] Martin asked her.

[*Their insurance policy.*] Anja told him. [*Small explosive charges placed at the juncture of the second and third vertebrae. Strong enough to sever their spines and inflict tremendous damage to the base of their brains. It would leave them brain dead even if they were able to survive the injuries the explosives caused. Anuk deactivated them before I removed them. They are rudimentary in design, but very efficient. They are injected in liquid form through the back of the skull where they take up residence between the vertebrae and become solid.*]

Martin looked at the small devices in the palm of his hand. [*Lylor?*]

Anja looked at him as she leaned up against his body. [*How do you think I found out about these?*] She asked. [*Kesas and Aryera, Lylor's sister, they removed it before fully waking him. They did not tell him because he would have gone berserk according to his sister.*]

[*Then we must assume that Kelia has this in her head as well.*] Martin spoke softly.

[*It's a safe bet.*] Anja agreed.

[*The more we discover about this Yelma woman Beloved, the more my ability to forgive lessens.*] Aricia's voice spoke now.

[*For me as well.*] Dysea echoed in.

[*Ditto.*] Anja said softly.

[*We can hate this woman... but we must remember she does not speak for the rest of her pack. That has been made obvious to us by what we have read since Kesas sent us the reports. We must keep that in mind.*] For'mya's voice spoke now and Martin felt Anja nod her head against his chest.

[*We will act accordingly.*] Martin said and all of them could tell by the tone of his voice that this conversation was over. [*They will be ok Red?*] He asked.

Anja nodded her head again. [*Oh yeah.*] She replied.

[Then we stick to the plan we decided upon for her.] Martin said. *[Aricia, you, For'mya, Bella, Melda Min and Cirith meet me in their command center. Just follow Andro's scent to it. We have final plans to make and we need to readjust for discovery of the Onab and Lylor's daughter at this other facility on the surface.]*
[On our way.] Aricia spoke.

Martin looked at Anja and she leaned up and kissed him deeply. "I'll watch them and send Lylor along." She said. "Go."

Martin nodded and turned quickly to move out of the room.

KOLTAR FOUR

ARHTAI PACK MAIN HOME

LEPIRI

The main Arhtai Pack home was secured in the center of the compound, surrounded by thousands of soldiers and the most sophisticated defenses that existed. The three story mansion was incredibly opulent all around, from the lavish decorations inside to the exacting nature of the beautiful grounds all around the home.

It was late evening now and Yelma Arhtai was not in a particularly good mood. Even at her age, Yelma was still an exceptionally good looking woman. Her physical attributes were still lush and firm and kept her husband and mate Nyser very happy. Which in turn meant very satisfying evenings for her when they were together. She was still wolf after all, and pleasure was one thing that all wolves strived for with their chosen mate. Yelma was the Matriarch of the Arhtai Pack and while she left most of the running of the established government to those who were politicians, nothing went forward or was implemented without her approval. Many of the policies she had implemented throughout the years were designed specifically to keep her Pack in charge of what was happening. There were no free and open elections and the Arhtai Pack, at least Yelma's family and close relatives had absolute control. While nearly all of those who lived on Koltar Four were Arhtai Pack in some manner, most could not claim a closeness to Yelma Arhtai or her inner circle of children and siblings. They were the ones who held the true power and they had for nearly two million years. Any who had openly opposed or disagreed with Yelma Arhtai or her policies through the years usually ending up disappearing, never to be seen again.

Yelma moved along the massive main corridor within their home, the opulence very much on display with ancient and priceless paintings and art decorating the walls and mantles of nearly every room in the three-story mansion. She wore a loose-fitting wrap around dress and held the steaming mug of tea in her hands as she watched her brother storm into the huge home through the front door, shoving aside the door guards and greeter. His Second officer Alaki was with him which meant this was probably another problem that Kanal could not figure out for himself because he was the cause. Yelma loved her brother, but there were times when he was as dumb as a rock.

"Yelma!" Kanal bellowed.

"I am right here fervon." Yelma answered him as he came around the pillar and saw her walking towards them down the main corridor. "Please do not yell in my home. Your voice has a tendency to wake my grandchildren."

Kanal moved up to her quickly and bowed his head. "My apologies." He said before leaning forward and kissing her cheek with brotherly affection.

Yelma smiled and squeezed his arm as she looked at him. "Nyser is waiting for us in his primary office." She spoke. "He is not happy it is so late brother, and neither am I. What is so important that it could not wait until tomorrow?"

Kanal held up the three data scrolls in his hand. "I will show you." He spoke. "Then we need to act."

Yelma slipped her arm through the curl of his elbow and nodded. "Very well. Come." She spoke as she guided him. "You are looking well Colonel Alaki."

Alaki bowed his head as they began to walk. "Thank you, Lady Arhtai."

Yelma led them through the lower level of the main house, the rooms expansive and fully equipped with the finest furniture made anywhere on Koltar Four. Yelma Arhtai and her husband and mate were of the mind

that as the leaders of this pack they deserved the finest of everything to accommodate their needs. When they saw something that they wanted, they took it. Seven of their nine children born here on Koltar Four chose to live in the mansion here and they also took what they wanted. The other two, a daughter and son, chose to live away from the main capital of Lepiri. They had their differences with their mother and father, mainly about who they had chosen to take as their husbands and wives, but Yelma and Nyser still loved them.

Yelma led them into the huge office like room with blazing fireplace, and the enormous glass window wall that faced the main part of Lepiri. The office was furnished just like the house, the best of everything, and Nyser Arhtai turned from the desk he was sitting at and rose to his feet. His six foot four frame was still chiseled muscle, though he did sport somewhat of a small stomach from all of the excellent quality food they ate. He exercised constantly in order to keep it from overwhelming him and so far, it had worked.

Nyser Arhtai was not a foolish man by any means. He had chosen Yelma long ago to be his wife and mate because he saw the cunning intelligence in her. She was smarter than him and Nyser was not ashamed of that fact. He had his skills and Yelma did as well. He treated her like a Queen and allowed her to run things among their Pack when she became his wife and mate and so far, everything had worked out well for them. Nyser Arhtai had wanted to be King, and he had encouraged many of their people to vote for him back on Cerath. He had been young then, and was newly christened as the Alpha of the Arhtai Pack after his father's death. Many did not trust him as they thought him brash and willing to do anything to gain more power. The Lycavorian people had elected Daniho Mahanlo as King over him and Nyser had never forgiven that perceived slight. He also never forgave Daniho Mahanlo for allowing his children to die in battle with the Iais'Kai while they fought somewhere else. He hated Mahanlo blood with a fervor bordering on the unhealthy. This was why he had no qualms at all about agreeing with his wife and mate Yelma when she suggested they turn on Kelia and Lylor Kirek the moment they had the right opportunity and seize power for themselves. They had not predicted the opposition to that, nor the years of battle and civil strife that would follow, but once they had captured Kelia Mahanlo and Lylor Kirek, things began to fall under their control. Nyser was dressed casually and he lifted the glass of wine as he rose from his desk.

"Kanal. Colonel Alaki." He spoke as he moved around the desk and came up beside Yelma. "You said it was important." He motioned to the velvet couches that surrounded the massive knee high granite table in front of the blazing fireplace. Nights on Koltar Four could be frigid, especially at this time of the year here in Lepiri, and the house staff always kept a fire going in the fireplace.

Kanal didn't waste any time as Nyser, Yelma and Alaki took seats on opposite couches. He held up the first of the three data scrolls. "We have a serious problem." He spoke as he bent next to the table and inserted the data scroll into the slot and all of them watched as the video came alive with the images of the wolves destroying the blood scanners. Kanal waited until the one with the azure eyed young man was active and then he froze it just as he opened his mouth fully, exposing the thick, and lethal looking dual wolf fangs and those blazing wolf eyes under the odd-looking helmet.

"*Nubou lae!*" Nyser muttered. "Who... who is that? Where is this?" He demanded.

"Scanner B159." Kanal answered him. "One of the five we were certain that the Kirek Pack had not found." He spoke. "Apparently, we were not so lucky."

"How is this possible?" Yelma rasped the question. "They cannot destroy the Blood Detectors without setting off alarms linked directly to our Main Frame. We would all know about that within moments."

"Somehow they are hiding it." Kanal spoke in reply.

"What do you mean hiding it?" Yelma snapped. "How could they hide it?"

"I had the technician who discovered and brought this to me check something that I thought of. This happened one day after the Onab ran a full network system check." Kanal spoke wanting to make himself appear smarter than he actually was. "I had him compare these files with those done when the entire network was certified only yesterday."

"And?" Nyser demanded.

"They are identical sister." Kanal spoke. "Somehow... they have found a way to enter our system and access our network."

Yelma shook her head instantly. "That is not possible." She told him.

“The system is telling us that all of the Blood Detectors are operating without issue, yet we have these recordings saying otherwise.” Kanal hissed. “Clearly... someone has discovered a way to access our network and alter data.”

“The scan your tech did and the one done on the system’s check match?” Nyser asked him.

Kanal nodded his head. “Yes.” He replied. “Perfectly.”

Nyser looked at him intently. “Then it is obviously a glitch of some kind that needs to be addressed. What are you suggesting Kanal?” He asked.

“You can see for yourself Nyser!” Kanal almost yelled pointing to the frozen image of the young wolf. “Dual fangs! Only one bloodline in all of our history has had dual fangs. It is the signature of Mahanlo blood!”

Yelma rose to her feet now. “Only four... only four remain alive with Mahanlo blood in them.” She said. “Lylor Kirek and his three children on Pakar Six, which we control indirectly. And Kelia Mahanlo, which we control directly. There are no others *fervon*.”

“Do we know this to be true?” Kanal asked her.

“Kanal... someone obviously tapped into our low-level security network, which is not entirely that hard to do.” Nyser spoke. “The minor systems can be accessed across the city. Someone made this recording and then uploaded it so that it would be found. They are playing a game on you, old friend.”

Kanal looked at him and then to the image on the data scroll that was showing. He turned back to Yelma. “I have two other scrolls to show you sister.” He spoke. “I had the tech check several different systems.”

“And they all say the same thing?” Yelma asked.

Kanal nodded his head. “Yes.”

Yelma nodded and rose to her feet with a smile. “As always, you are being thorough *fervon*.” She told him. “But no one has the skills to break through the security the Onab have in place on our Mainframe. No one has been able to do this in all of the years since we have been here, have they?”

Kanal met her gaze and slowly shook her head. “No.”

“Then I suggest you concentrate on finding who made this ridiculous recording and then managed to upload it onto the unsecured security network.” Yelma told him. “We can’t have this kind of seditious activity happening.”

Kanal shook his head. “No, we cannot.” He said. He breathed an obvious sigh of relief and began reaching for the data scrolls. Yelma reached out and shook her head.

“You can leave them *fervon*.” She said. “Nyser and I will review them fully and then return them to you.”

Kanal nodded his head. “Of course.”

Nyser stood up. “This technician that you used Kanal?” He asked. “Where is he now?”

“I had him followed after he left my office.” Kanal replied. “He went straight home and has not left his residence.”

Nyser nodded his head in approval. “We should probably pick him up when he returns to work in the morning. Just to insure he is not the one who actually did this.”

Kanal nodded. “Of course.” He said.

“As always... you have done well brother.” Yelma told him with warmth and a smile.

Kanal smiled at her. “I know that we disturbed you. Alaki and I will find our own way out.” He said.

“I can walk you.” Yelma told him.

Kanal shook his head. “No. We have taken enough of your time. Remain here and when we are gone you can go back to what it was you were doing.” He said as Alaki rose and they both bowed their heads to them and then headed for the entrance into the office.

Nyser looked at Yelma as they left his office and he returned to the couch looking at the still frozen image of the dual fanged Alpha with azure colored eyes. “Yelma?” He spoke softly.

Yelma turned back to look at him. “I know.” She spoke as she came over beside him and sat down.

“Are we certain that Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo were taken care of?” Nyser asked her.

Yelma nodded her head. “The last contact we had with the Ekela Pack confirmed that they were dead. They said that only one of their descendants had survived and they were hours from removing him as well.”

“That was the last message?” Nyser asked.

Yelma nodded as she looked at her husband. “Yes. No contact was made after that last message. Just over two million years ago. And we did try to reach them Nyser, you know that. We agreed that when they killed the last descendant it must have triggered a war of some kind between the remaining Packs and that is why we have had no contact with them in all of this time. Certainly, if they had failed and Mahanlo blood survived they would have come here before now.”

“Who sent it?” Nyser asked.

“Anven Ekela.” Yelma answered.

Nyser nodded his head. “Anven would not have sent that message unless it was true.” He said. He motioned with his hand to the image leaning closer. “That is not someone of Kelia Mahanlo and Lylor Kirek’s blood Yelma. It can’t be.” He said thoughtfully. “The jaw is too wide and the neck is too thick even for a son of Lylor Kirek. And the fangs...”

Yelma nodded her head. “I know.” She said softly. “They are too thick and too long. It has to be someone playing a game on us Nyser.”

Nyser nodded his head as he reached for the small computer console on the granite table. “To what purpose though Yelma my wife and mate? No one can challenge us.” He said as he activated the COM panel.

The face of the young man appeared on the screen. “COM Officer, *RENDITION* Station. State your request.” The young man looked up and his eyes grew wide. “Lord Nyser! *Sibfla!*” He exclaimed. “My... my apologies.”

“On my order... first thing tomorrow morning I want my son Fomir to take a detachment to the Sanctuary.” Nyser spoke. “They are to return to my office with Ch'eldo and his senior technician. If Ch'eldo refuses, execute his oldest son. If he continues to refuse, kill his family starting with his wife until he complies.”

The young man was typing furiously and he nodded his head. “Understood Lord Nyser!” He almost yelled. “Do you wish me to inform Lord Fomir now?”

Nyser shook his head. “Nothing can be done tonight, but he is to do that when he arrives in the morning. That is his priority.”

“As you order.” He stammered. “I will see to it. Please forgive...”

Nyser ended the communication and looked at Yelma. She tilted her head slightly. “You suspect Ch'eldo and his people?” She asked.

Nyser shook his head. “No. But if anyone can find out how they were able to do this, the Onab can.” He said. “And we need to know if something is actually happening on Pakar Six.”

“Contact one of our people?” Yelma asked him.

Nyser shook his head with a small smile. Yelma was very intelligent and cunning, but she still could not make sense of military logic. “We can’t do that without the risk of exposing them all.” He said. “Not yet. Not until we know something for sure.”

Yelma rose to her feet and stared at the image for a long moment before reaching down and deactivating it. “At least we know for certain that those fools have not woken Lylor Kirek or any of his foul children.” She said looking at her husband and mate. “The Cryo Pod fail safes would have activated the alarms here in our home instantly. That is how we designed them.”

Nyser nodded his head. “If this person is real then it has to be someone who survived the purge. What we do not need right now is someone with Mahanlo blood making trouble for us.” He said as he too stood up now. “I’m going to check the location.”

Yelma looked at him. “You have concerns?” She asked.

“No... but I’d like to be safe.” Nyser answered her honestly. “Almost a million and a half years we have held in her cryo Yelma.” He said. “The only one who knows who she is anymore is the Senior Guardsman. The rest of the detail has no idea. They think she is some sort of sick person from centuries ago that we are keeping alive until our doctors find a cure for whatever infects her.”

“Better that it stays that way.” Yelma said.

Nyser nodded his head. “I agree. Which is why I’m going to go check. Just to be safe.”

Yelma nodded her head and moved closer to him. “Do not take long husband.” She told him in a seductive voice. “This talk of Mahanlo blood stirs my passion to make more children of our own knowing that Mahanlo blood will never see the light of day again.”

Nyser smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek and neck. “I shall be quick.” He said. “Very quick.”

LEPIRI WESTERN ENTERTAINMENT QUAD

Comelo moved quickly through the double doors into the large club, the music raucous and making it impossible for anyone to overhear any conversation being conducted without aid of filters. Comelo however, he did not stay in the main room of the club and quickly made his way through a set of double steel doors and into back room where he stopped in front of the burly Lycavorian Bouncer. He was not the same Comelo that he was this morning. He was far more confident and sure of himself.

“Anlak.” Comelo spoke as he lifted his arms and the man stepped forward.

“Glad to see you again Comelo.” The man spoke. “You lost them I take it?”

Comelo nodded his head. “Of course.” He answered as Anlak patted him down loosely. He did not put much effort into it, more because it was what he was used to doing than anything else. Comelo was trusted completely among their circle and had been for more than six decades. “Your training paying off again my friend.”

Anlak nodded his head as he motioned him through the door he stood in front of. “Good to hear.” He spoke. “She’s downstairs, station three.”

Comelo nodded and moved through the single steel door into a long stairwell. He made his way down the stairwell easily, his wolf eyes able to guide him through the dimly lit area. At the bottom, he turned right and moved into the large room where he saw nearly a dozen men and women sitting at different computer setups. Comelo wasted no time and moved to station three where the face of the much older Lycavorian woman turned to face him in her chair.

No one knew exactly how old she was, her scent put her at close to three and a half million years in age, but because she used powerful scent maskers most of the time, even that was suspect. She knew things about history that others did not, things that only someone who had lived through events on Cerath could have known, and this provided her an incredible amount of respect and honor.

“Comelo.” She spoke with a genuine smile and warmth in her voice.

Comelo bowed his head to her out of reverence and respect. “Nystai.”

The older woman dismissed his actions with a wave of her hand and a smile. “Stop that young wolf.” She told him. “I am not a god.”

Comelo met her eyes and smiled. “Some would debate that with you given everything that you know.” He said.

“Probably. And they would lose.” Nystai answered with a smile. “I’m am just an old woman who watches and takes everything in. And an old woman who remembers.”

Comelo held out the small, portable computer drive. “I covered my tracks well.” He told her.

Nystai took the drive from his fingers and then looked at him. “You are certain about what you saw and what you found?” She asked.

Comelo nodded his head. “You will see for yourself Nystai. Go to 23.6 on the video and you will see.” He spoke as she plugged in the drive to the computer platform she sat in front of, one of the most sophisticated that Comelo had ever seen. It was an Onab computer system to be sure, but it was larger than most he had ever seen, and definitely able to do much more. Nystai was a master computer programmer and designer and she could manipulate the Onab system like no one he had ever seen.

Nystai did as he told her and suddenly she was staring at the azure eyes and dual fangs of the Alpha Lycavorian. Her body stiffened and her head felt light as she gripped the edges of her computer station.

“*Son hote pen sey covi nysilir saoi.*” Nystai muttered loud enough to catch the attention of those others near her. As Comelo watched they all saw the image of the Alpha wolf, dual fangs fully extended and azure eyes like two glowing stars in the dark of space. Murmurs began to sweep the room and he looked at Nystai. (By all I have ever held holy)

“Nystai... what is wrong?” He gasped as he reached for her and took her arms to support her. Comelo didn’t know it, but he was one of only three individuals that Nystai ever allowed to touch her and this gave him an added mystique among those who worked in this room.

Nystai looked at him as she gripped his forearms. “You discovered this Comelo?” She gasped. “This was not... this was not made?”

“Made?” Comelo asked. “Made by who?” He spoke. “I came into work this morning and began checking the recordings as my duties require. I discovered this Alpha and four other Alpha wolves with dual fangs destroying the Blood Detectors on Pakar Six. Two females and two other males. They were all unmistakable as Alphas Nystai. The recordings were all made at the same time, or within minutes of each other. One of the females had eyes like this one, and the other had pointed ears Nystai. Pointed ears! I have never seen anything like it in my life.”

“*Jen cahs Nystai!*” A young woman gasped from Comelo’s right and he turned to see her standing close by, having left her computer station. (His eyes)

Nystai nodded her head as she squeezed Comelo’s arms in support. “*Jainn.*” She spoke.

Comelo looked at Nystai as she inched herself back into her chair. “*Atle hay jen cahs?*” He asked. (What about his eyes)

Nystai looked at him. “*Vada Fera Tarivu rie vada Mard Revik.*” Nystai spoke. “The First Herald of the True King is prophesized to have Azure blue eyes.” She said. “What color are his eyes Comelo?”

Comelo looked at the screen. “Azure blue.” He answered.

Nystai nodded her head. “There is something else. The First and Second Heralds of the true King... they are said to be the oldest and youngest of the King’s sons at the time he returns to his people. The Third Herald is his soul daughter. A female of staggering beauty who is both Darastrixi and Lycavorian.”

Comelo looked at her. “Nystai, I have read the prophecies. Lord Pengot made sure to disseminate them widely in those first years after the *Dremsa rie Saan* and when they were banished to Pakar Six.” He said. “Are you...” His eyes grew wide then and he stepped back from her. “Nystai... the *Fera Tarivu* is... the *Mard Revik* is... they are...”

She nodded her head. “Yes. They are the direct descendants of our beloved King Daniho. The purest form of Lycavorian blood to exist anywhere among the stars. And the only bloodline in Lycavorian history with dual fangs.” She said as she reached out to touch the screen almost reverently.

Comelo stared at her with wide eyes. “They have come!” He almost yelled the words. “Mahanlo blood has returned!”

Nystai held up her hand. “Tell me what you found.” She told him. “Kanal must have ordered you to do a reset, or to check the systems. After seeing this they would not have been idle.”

Comelo nodded his head vigorously. “The recordings are all authentic.” He told her. “In the data line however, I found a very sophisticated code that had rewritten the initial code. It was returning normal signals during an inquiry even though the recordings showed a different story.”

“Something overwrote the code?” Nystai asked.

Comelo nodded his head. “I was shocked as well. I’ve never known anyone who could overwrite Onab code.”

Nystai nodded her head. “Neither have I.” She said. “Liita Nenay is the only one skilled enough with Onab code to do this. Ch'eldo and the other Onab trained her themselves, but she would not do this without telling me.”

“We have not seen Ch'eldo and the others in millennia Nystai.” The young woman who had come from her station spoke now. “We have always feared Nyser Arhtai executed all of them after the *Dremsa rie Saan.*”

“What if he did not Taarie?” Nystai said slowly. “We have always thought those who service the Onab equipment on the station and here on the surface were those who Ch'eldo was forced to train. What if it is them? They are blanketed with security and do not stay in the open for very long.”

“That is a big if Nystai.” The woman said.

“There is something else Nystai.” Comelo spoke now. “A full systems check was done yesterday, as usual, but as I was running the diagnostic I discovered a back door into the Main Frame.”

Nystai nodded her head. “Into the low-level sub systems.” She told him. “Yes... I had Liita put that there many years ago. She...”

Comelo shook his head. “No. It was a low grade, backdoor encryption spike into the entire Main Frame. All inconsequential sub systems and all primary systems as well, if one knows how to use it. Security among them. And it was put there recently. Whoever altered the network to make it appear that the system is operating normally, was able to infiltrate through that encryption spike. They knew the code to bypass the spike.”

“Were you able to trace the source?” Nystai asked.

Comelo shook his head. “They were in and out before the system even knew it.”

Taarie looked at Nystai. “No one is that fast Nystai.” She said. “Not even you.”

Nystai looked at her. “Well, someone is.” She said. “And they left no trace of their presence.” She turned back to Comelo and stared at him for a long moment. “You say Kanal took this to his vile sister?”

Comelo nodded his head. “Yes.”

Nystai glanced at Taarie and then back to Comelo. “You are done Comelo.” She told him. “Taarie will find a place for you. If you go back, they will take you and we will never hear from you again.”

Comelo nodded his head. “I assumed as much.” He told her. “I’m sorry Nystai.”

“*Carians* do not be sorry!” Nystai announced. “You have given us information and hope that we did not have before this night! Find a terminal and help us to locate any more of these low-grade encryption spikes that may exist. Whoever infiltrated the Planetary Mainframe did it using one of those; let’s see if we can do the same thing.”

“It’s risky Nystai.” Taarie said.

Nystai nodded her head. “Risks must be taken some time.” She said. “Now, now I believe it is time. Make sure everyone is prepared to purge their drives and move if we need too. I will try and make contact with Liita, and someone tell Anlak we are not to be disturbed for the rest of the evening.”

PAKAR SIX COMMAND CENTER

There had never been this many men and women jammed into the Command Center in all the time they had been on Pakar Six. They couldn’t chance the Arhtai Pack thinking that they were plotting something. It was different now, all of them could sense it in the air, and they were ready. They had been ready for thousands of years.

Kesas, his children, Rothan, Aryera, Marda, Taig and all seven commanders of the Kirek Security Force. All of them were now equipped with Pralor Particle Weapons and Mark Six ArmorPly. Thoti was a Colonel of the *Durcunusaan*, a position not easily obtained thanks to the standards that Vengal had put in place. It was his duty to command the detail that had readily volunteered to come on this mission, having to beat back thousands of others who had wanted to go. This is what Thoti was meant for and Duewa knew that now. This was his life and where he was the happiest and proudest. She would never take that away from him, but she also got promises out of him that he would not be as reckless as if he was single. They had a life now and Duewa wanted them together to experience that. That was a promise Thoti made with great honor and respect to Duewa.

Thoti selected only the most experienced *Durcunusaan* soldiers out here with them, and those who had fought with Martin or Androcles before. This was going to be a very fast and very brutal operation he knew. He had already spread the word among the *Durcunusaan* of what the Arhtai Pack had done and what they were responsible for. As Thoti knew they would, the *Durcunusaan* now wanted vengeance for their King. The Mahanlo-Leonidas family was revered within the Union, perhaps not by everyone, you can never please everyone, but their family was respected and greatly loved by the vast majority of the citizens.

Thoti did not have any issues from among the Kirek Pack members that were going to accompany them. Every one of them, down to the youngest one, who was several thousand years older than the oldest among the Union forces, looked to Thoti and the others with an almost holy like appraisal. The Kirek Pack looked upon Martin, his wives and mates, and his children as almost godlike figures. Androcles, Dorian and even Laren were held in an even higher regard because of what they were. The Heralds of the True King. They were the royal descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. They were royalty in every sense of the word as far as the Kirek Pack was concerned. They had been raised to believe in them and what they represented and so far from what

they could see now, that dedication and devotion had not been wrongly placed. Thoti was obviously a veteran military commander within the hierarchy of what they called the Lycavorian Union. This is what their people called themselves and what Mahanlo blood now led across the stars. This is what the Kirek Pack had now become part of.

The Kirek Pack members were finding that the *Durcunusaan* were not so very different from them in many respects, just trained in ways they had never seen before. Ways that they were eagerly absorbing as they saw something new. They were also learning much of what their King and his children and others around him had done through the years. The battles that they had fought, and the ones where they had shown mercy and ended the fighting before they had begun. The history of their King and his family was coming to them through the eyes of the men and women who followed them without question. That is what solidified the honor and respect of the Kirek Pack more than anything ever could, even millions of years after they had already committed themselves to the survival and honor of the Mahanlo bloodline. Now, that honor and respect had found its way to hundreds of generations in the future and they would get that chance once again to serve their King and his bloodline. There was no mistaking Martin or who he was, who any of his children or wives were, their auras were beyond what any wolf they had ever felt could generate. Their scents and bloodline were beyond anything they had seen or felt, and then there was the most prominent item, the dual wolf fangs that only one bloodline in their entire history as a people had ever carried.

That was the deciding factor for most of them.

Over the next weeks and months, they would come to see and understand what the many *Durcunusaan* already knew and the reasons why they followed Martin and his family without question. Now... now however, they were ready to begin retribution for the *Dremsa rie Saan*.

“... Is going to be what we call quick, violent and dirty.” Danny was speaking to those who were gathered around the chart table and crammed into the room. Martin stood just behind Danny, Julie beside him as she always was as his COM officer. Colin, Pablo and Kenny were standing behind him listening, while Tony and T'lolt leaned against the wall behind them. Both of them were getting frowning glances in their direction simply because of their size.

“Regardless of what the Arhtai Pack is responsible for, and believe me we all know what they have done and what they continue to do, but right now we must remain focused on our mission objectives.” Danny spoke.

“Kelia Mahanlo.” Rothan spoke softly.

Danny nodded his head. “Mari, Caylt...” He spoke turning his head slightly. Mari nodded and she had Caylt began typing on the two consoles on either end of the table. Danny stabbed down into the center of the table. “This is our primary objective.” He spoke pointing to a large underground bunker that appeared to be buried under a main thoroughfare of the capital city of Lepiri. “This is the main Arhtai Compound. Their home. It seems Yelma Arhtai is a sadistic upaee because she has a view of exactly where our ship is going to land. I hope she enjoys the show.”

“Your ship?” Aryera asked now.

Danny nodded his head. “For'mya, Endith and Tina are Martin's flight team. They are going to take the ship we came in on, we call it a *TYPE TWO* Dragon transport, and land it right here. Right in the open above the secret bunker that is holding Kelia.” Danny said stabbing his finger on the table. Aryera, Rothan, Kesas and most of the others in the room dismissed the fact that Danny referred to Martin by his given name. All of them were well aware that Daniel Simpson was the *Mard Fervon* of their King. He was the man that Martin considered his one and only true brother. As Reva had told them just before Danny arrived...

“Treat this man as you would treat Martin. Treat those with him as you would treat me and Kelia and Lylor. They are his anos nathos. His Soul Family. He considers each of them his brothers and sister. And Daniel is his Mard Fervon. They have walked through the crucible of fire and death together and emerged on the other side forged as one.”

“Why there?” Rothan asked. “You will be completely exposed General.”

Danny nodded his head. “Exposed yes, but never alone.” Danny told them. “We'll have *SPARTA'S WRATH* and the *ARIZONA* in high orbit above us. Between the two of these ships they could turn Koltar Four to dust in a few hours if we wanted and there wouldn't be a damn thing anyone could do. They will be directing

what we call *STRIKER ATs*, or Attack Transports. They will be loaded with the bulk of our *Durcunusaan* forces and the three hundred Kirek Pack members that are coming with us. They will be covering the outer perimeter that we set up once the *TYPE TWO* sets down.”

“Why here?” Aryera asked.

Danny smiled, flashing his brilliant white teeth. “Funny you should ask that question.” He said. “We...”

A loud alarm sounded three times and Caylt turned from his station and looked at the monitor. He turned back to his father. “Ranol Nenay has arrived father. Secondary Transport Bay. Lord Lylor has already begun meeting them. Ranol Nenay brought several of his grandchildren.”

Martin looked at Kesas now and met his eyes. “The Nenay have several long-range transports that they are allowed to operate. They use them to transfer supplies and crews to several mining operations that they operate on asteroid fields in the system. The Arhtai Pack knows of them but refuse to do the work themselves. The Nenay Pack has always been hard working and they volunteered to do the mining for concessions.”

“Stay out of their business?” Martin asked.

Kesas nodded his head. “That is one of them, yes.” He answered. “One of the mining sites is very near to Pakar Six’s fourth moon. It is a simple matter for them to move here then, staying hidden behind the moon.”

Martin nodded his head. “That’s why he won’t be able to go back?”

Kesas nodded his head. “The ships normally only go out once a day to the closer sites and then they return. The Arhtai orbital sensors lose contact with the ships, but they know when they are supposed to return and if they don’t...”

“Then they get nosey.” Martin said.

“Yes, Milord.” Kesas spoke. “He has sacrificed much to come here Milord.”

Martin nodded his head. “And he will sacrifice no more. How long has this been going on?” Martin asked.

“It was Ranol who set it up Milord.” Rothan spoke now in reply. “He has been doing it for nearly a million years now and they have never missed a contact.”

“Every few months the transports go to all of their mining operations to transfer major supplies to the crews and they are gone for a week and several days at least.” Kesas said. “This allows us to plan in a trip here to Pakar Six to exchange information and even supplies that we do not have here.”

Martin held up his hand. “I believe you.” He said. “Let’s go meet them then, shall we?” He looked at Caylt. “Have them move to the main Transport Bay with their people. Androcles is briefing his team there.”

Kesas nodded his head and motioned to Caylt, who then sent the message.

Martin looked at Danny and reached out to place his hand on his shoulder. “Continue the briefing *fervon*. We are cutting it close and I want everyone on the same page within the next three hours. We’re leaving in five.”

“Early bird gets the worm.” Danny said with his trademark grin.

Martin chuckled. “I’m going to wake them up so abruptly that they are going to shit in their pants and leave skid marks all over.”

Danny wasn’t the only one who laugh at that as Martin turned and headed out of the Command Center with Kesas.

The Kirek Pack security that had met them in the Secondary Transport Bay escorted them to the Primary Bay when they were stunned at the two ships that now occupied the huge bay. Gara clutched her husband and mate’s hand tightly as Taion and Saymora moved along behind them with their four of their fourteen children, Saymora holding the small child Tamore tightly in her arms. Radend and Taraina Mahanlo had accompanied them as well as her brother and sisters. Three sisters and one brother who were now swarming around their grandfather with tears pouring from the eyes of nearly everyone that had arrived on the ship as they walked. Lylor Kirek was happy, very happy and it showed in his gait as he walked with Taraina in one arm and his great grandson Tocin in the other. Their sisters, Eia and Veri walked beside them with tears in their eyes, clutching their siblings as they held Lylor close. For all of them, the smell of Mahanlo blood was getting stronger then they had ever experienced before as they entered the Transport Bay and when they came around the end of the

huge ship they discovered why. Sitting by the rear of the lower ramp were men and women that they had never seen before in their lives, but they knew without hesitation that this was their blood. This was their family.

Androcles and his siblings had smelled them the moment they exited their ship in the other Transport Bay, but they also smelled their uncle was there to greet them. Let Lylor have his time with them first and he would bring them here eventually. Androcles rose to his feet now, Sadi and Carisia rising from between his legs as he nudged them gently, Lu'ria, Caliria, Sehri and Ne'Veha standing all around him. Eliani and Brendi stood in front of Jomann, while Normya leaned against Tir'ut's side. There were so many of them who reeked of Mahanlo blood and they stood there before them proudly and without fear. Watching all of them rise to their feet slowly had Taraina and her siblings standing there gawking in disbelief. The pureness of Mahanlo blood struck all of them right down to their core, none of them having smelled anything so pure except for their grandmother Kelia. This scent was slightly different than Kelia, more raw and pungent, and it exuded power and confidence.

Taraina had always been the brave one of the four of them and it was she who looked at Lylor quickly and saw him nod. She moved forward hesitantly, and watched as the male with blazing azure colored eyes stepped forward as well.

Taraina stared at Androcles' face as he towered over her. Radend stood just a little distance away, always looking to defend his beloved wife and mate, but there really was no need. He could sense without really trying that those here in this bay would defend his beloved wife and mate to the death if it came to that. They would defend their family and blood to the end of time if need be. She reached up and used her fingers to trace the line of his jaw and cheek, her index finger softly tracing the scar that extended slightly above and below his right eye. Taraina could smell the Mahanlo blood unlike at any other time of her life, so powerful and pure. She glanced up into Andro's face and saw him smile, those blue eyes moist.

"*Naltai chrora.*" Androcles spoke softly. "*Una coi yer alda un heuhly elore forn.*" (Hello cousin. It is very good to finally meet you.)

His voice and those words were all that Taraina Mahanlo needed and she burst into more tears and with a scream of delight she threw herself into her cousin's arms. It was at that very moment that Tocin, Eia and Veri followed their sister without question. Lylor held back his own emotion as they were swarmed by Androcles and his siblings.

Ranol and Gara were watching as well with smiles on their faces when they heard the next voice behind them.

"Hell of a thing, reunions." Martin spoke. "Especially when you did not know that your blood existed a few weeks ago."

Ranol and everyone else whirled around and were suddenly bathed in the overwhelming aura of an Alpha wolf unlike anything they had ever felt. Well for Ranol's family anyway, for Ranol Nenay had felt an aura like this before. He and his beloved Gara had experienced this aura openly and without shame. The aura of their King. Daniho Mahanlo wasn't into pomp or circumstance or anything like that. He was especially down to earth, as was Ashten Mahanlo, and Ranol had experienced this first hand. He had sat with both of them casually in the field as they fought the Iais'Kai all of those many years ago.

Standing before them now, Ranol could see both men in the eyes and face of the Alpha before them. So pure and powerful and untamed, just as the brothers had been all those many years ago. There was no question who this Alpha was, nor those of his children who stood so close around them all. There was no question of the pureness of the bloodline that permeated the air around them and it humbled Ranol Nenay unlike anything had before this day. Ranol was very nearly overwhelmed himself, and surprising everyone he quickly dropped to one knee in front of Martin and bowed his head.

"I cannot be forgiven for my actions my King." Ranol began. "I have failed Mahanlo blood in a way that can never be forgiven. I failed and the *Dremsa rie Saan* was the result. I cannot be forgiven. I can sense who you are. Smell that you are pure Mahanlo blood. Only the descendants of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo could project what you project without thinking. I offer... I offer my life to you in payment for my failures. All I ask is that my Pack does not bear the stain on my honor."

"Ranol! No!" Gara screamed out as she stepped forward towards her husband.

Taion grabbed her arms then, holding her back. His father had confided in him alone about what he would do to try and restore the honor of their Pack fully. He did not agree with him but he would not go against his father's wishes.

Martin was taken aback by this show and it was obvious on his face as he stood beside Kesas, who had an equally stunned expression on his face.

FATHER NO! The female voice echoed within the Etheric realm and brought all of them to attention. Even those of the Nenay pack who, at most, were able to use Mindvoice at a Tier Two level heard the words.

Androcles turned his head quickly as Sadi's hands went to her abdomen in surprise. She would begin to show in a few more weeks but right now you could not tell she carried twins. Achilles and Neesia had been silent for the last few days, resting and nurturing themselves in their mother's womb. They also knew there was much going on that they could not help with and they remained silent as they watched and learned.

"Neesia!" Sadi gasped aloud.

Androcles stepped away from Taraina and right up to Sadi, his hand resting on her abdomen as Sadi reached out and placed her hand on his shoulder, gripping his shoulder tightly. Carisa, Ne'Veha, Sehri, Lu'ria and Caliria placed their hand on her abdomen as well, moving closer to Sadi and basically showing everyone in the bay who they were.

[Neesia?] Andro reached for his twin daughter, including his wives and mates naturally.

[I feel him papa.] Neesia spoke softly. *[I can feel him within me. So strong and proud of who he is.]*

[Feel who?] Androcles asked her, looking into Sadi's jungle green eyes confused.

[The one who will claim me and make me his.] Neesia answered her father proudly.

This pronouncement caused Androcles to bristle and his azure eyes flared and changed to his wolf persona and his armor and wings exploded into existence with a white flash of Etheric power. Those who were not family members, most of the Nenay Pack present actually, they all dropped to one knee for they recognized what Androcles wore.

"Vada arwa rie vada Tarivuos!" Several of Ranol and Gara's children gasped together in astonishment. (The armor of the Heralds)

Andro's azure eyes fell upon those gathered in front of his father and he could see their confusion as they had been speaking on an Etheric level that no one present could touch except his wives and mates.

[Neesia are you certain?] Sadi asked now as she rubbed her abdomen.

[I am certain mother.] Neesia answered instantly. *[His mind is so free and open to me. He is reaching for me. He hurts because his mother fell when she was working and hit her stomach. His head hurts sometimes. His mother holds him even now.]*

Andro turned as everyone was still watching them confused and he looked at his father. "Andro?" Martin asked him.

Andro ignored him. *[Guide me Neesia.]* He spoke.

[He rests within his mother's arm papa.] Neesia answered. *[It is him father.]*

[She speaks the truth father.] Achilles chimed in now.

Andro made his way forward while everyone watched. His wings extended upwards, causing men and women alike to get out of his way as he moved forward. His eyes focused on Saymora then and he felt Neesia pulse him within the Etheric realm. She held a small three-month-old boy child in her arms who was kicking his feet and hands in the air and she was trying to comfort him thinking he was in pain. It wasn't pain that he was feeling however, as Androcles reached out ever further and touched the tendrils of Etheric power that radiated from the small boy. He stopped in front of Saymora, her eyes wide in fear as she looked at him and hugged Tamore closer, and that is when Taion stepped in front of his wife and mate. Taion Nenay snarled in a defensive manner, his fangs extending and his eyes changing, one Alpha warning another to keep his distance.

"Taion!" Gara Nenay cried out in warning for her son.

Androcles snarled even louder, his own dual fangs extending fully and his eyes changing, but to his credit Taion flinched only slightly for Androcles' snarl was not one of challenge for Saymora and it confused him.

Andro turned quickly and held out his hand for Sadi. "*KertaGai.* Carisia. All of you." He called gently.

Sadi and the others moved right up to where Andro stood while Taion and Saymora looked on confused. Saymora could feel Tamore becoming more fidgety in her arms and she looked down at his face and she

gasped. His eyes had changed to the wolf within him, ice blue like his father, but so much brighter and focused. His eyes had never changed since his birthing day, the doctors saying he was unable to do so because of the damage to his brain from her fall. Taion looked at his son and his eyes grew wide as well. Tamore was stretching out his tiny hand towards Sadi's abdomen now and he wasn't going to be denied.

"It's ok." Sadi exclaimed as she looked at Saymora. "It's ok." She stepped closer to Saymora as everyone watched and finally his tiny hands were able to reach her abdomen. Sadi gasped in delight when she felt Neesia begin to sing happily within her womb, as the Etheric tendrils from Tamore and her own met and mingled lightly together. It was in this moment that Neesia and Tamore shared everything with their parents, both Saymora and Taion stunned at what they were experiencing for the first time and feeling humbled by it.

Andro turned his head quickly and looked at Eliani. "Eli." Eliani didn't hesitate and moved up beside her brother. Andro waited until she was beside him. "Lady Saymora fell a short time ago while working in her yard. She struck her abdomen and it apparently also injured Tamore."

Eliani looked at Saymora and lifted her hand. "May I?" She asked.

"No!" Taion hissed.

Andro looked at him. "My sister Eliani is a healer Taion Nenay." He told him. "Let her work her skills."

"Taion, yes." Saymora spoke.

Taion looked at his wife and mate and saw her nod to him. He glanced at Eliani once more and nodded his head. Eliani placed her hand on Tamore's small chest and smiled as she felt him wiggle.

He says it tickles Tenna Eli. Neesia reached out openly now and even Ranol and Gara were astonished at the power and clarity of what they heard in their heads.

Eliani closed her eyes briefly as she held her hand over Tamore. "You struck the right lower quadrant of your abdomen in your fall." Eliani said. "The fall caused sufficient damage to the wall of your uterus that Tamore's skull was impacted and did not form fully."

Saymora gasped in shock, for it took a full two-hour exam by the doctors to tell her that. "How... how... it took our doctors two hours and several tests to tell me that."

Eliani smiled and all of them saw her hand flare a soft white color and extend outward over Tamore's small head. He was giggling now, his hands and feet kicking back and forth and all of them could hear Neesia laughing in the Etheric connection.

He says it really tickles now! Neesia told them.

It took only ten seconds and then Eliani drew her hand back with a nod of approval. "All done." She spoke proudly looking at Saymora. "I repaired the damaged to his outer skull bone and it will grow naturally now. Give him some extra amounts of calcium for a few weeks to reinvigorate his bone growth but he will be fine."

"But he..." Saymora gasped in disbelief. "How?"

Eliani smiled. "I do good work. Just like my mother." She said proudly.

Neesia? Ne'Veha asked now as she moved closer.

He is so happy medwan! Neesia answered her. *I want... I want to touch him papa. I want to touch him with my mind. He wants this as well.*

Androcles looked at Taion who was looking at him with wide eyes for he had heard everything Neesia had said. "How can you... how can you talk to her even now?" Taion gasped aloud.

"That would take a bit more of an explanation." Andro answered him.

"What... what does she mean?" Saymora asked now. "She wants to touch him? How can she do that?"

"With her mind." Sadi answered. "Much the same way that Androcles touched me when I first met him. He was only eight months old then but we knew even at that moment we were meant for each other."

Saymora's eyes grew wide. "This is what... this is what my son... our son feels as well?" Saymora asked.

Sadi nodded her head. "We can feel it within him, yes. His Etheric abilities are not powerful enough for him to put them to words that you would understand, but we can feel it within him. If Neesia touches him like she wants, like he wants... then he will..."

"Would we... would we be able to talk to him if..." Taion asked.

Androcles nodded his head. "Yes." He replied to the question without hesitation. "We would be tied together as... well... as family." He looked at Taion intently. "Your son and my daughter are meant for one

another by higher powers that guide us and our actions day by day. I have learned through the years to not question them anymore.”

“They have... they have guided you?” Taion said.

Androcles nodded again. “They guided us here. To all of you. To our blood. And to those who are our friends.”

Taion looked at his beloved wife and mate. He could not imagine his life without Saymora in it and she had always been the strong one. “*Aur valiath?*” He asked.

Saymora didn’t hesitate in the least. She could feel the power and confidence in Sadi and the other women who this Neesia would call mother. Her bloodline was the purest of any that Tamore could marry into. Filled with honor and love and devotion just as she could feel from all those that stood around her.

“*Jainn.*” Saymora spoke in reply, her eyes on Sadi.

Sadi smiled brightly now and took her hand. “Come, we will go someplace quiet and forge our futures.” She spoke.

Taion watched as Sadi, Ne'Veha, Carisia, Sehri, Lu'ria and Caliria pulled Saymora away with them, his wife and mate smiling brilliantly. He looked back to Androcles now and saw those azure eyes focused on him. “I suppose our children have given us a day to plan in the future.” Andro said.

Taion Nenay smiled now and nodded his head. “I... I suppose they have.” He answered.

Andro looked at his father now. “I believe you have your answer to give to Lord Ranol Nenay when it comes to his request father.” Andro spoke.

Martin nodded his head with a huge smile as well. “Shame we have to wait for that party.” He spoke as Ranol and Gara looked at him. “That is going to be a doozy for sure. At least twenty years in the making.” He looked at Ranol now and moved closer to him. “Your Pack has protected members of my family for more years than I have been alive. You have done this without regard for yourselves or the danger it put you or your Pack in. You can take your request and stick it where the sun don’t shine Ranol Nenay. I have a better suggestion... you have two sons that that *upaee* Yelma Arhtai is holding with my *Tenna* Kelia correct?”

Ranol looked quickly to Gara and then back to him. “Yes Milord.”

Martin nodded his head. “What say you and I get to kicking some serious Arhtai ass and get our family back.” Martin told him. “I’d much rather do that.”

Ranol Nenay stared at Martin with a look of shock that quickly turned to one of immense pleasure. “You intend to retrieve them don’t you Milord?” He said.

Martin nodded his head. “Every single one of them. It might be a good thing if your boys woke up and their father was there to greet them don’t you think?”

Ranol nodded his head. “I do sire.” Ranol answered.

Martin moved even closer and put his arm around Ranol’s shoulder much to his stunned amazement and he took Gara’s hand in his as well. “Lady Gara... let me introduce you to my wives and mates Anja and Dysea. They will be leading the ground force into the bunker that holds our family members.”

“What... what will you be doing Milord?” Gara stammered.

Martin grinned at her as he began to walk with them out of the transport bay. “What will I be doing Lady Gara?” He asked. “In a little over five hours I’m going to become a very large problem for the Arhtai Pack. I’m going to be like a really bad nightmare that just will not go away. They’re going to love me, you watch.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

SPARTA'S WRATH PORT LANDING BAY DELTA *PREMONITION*

“...Is incredible!” Liita Nenay stammered as she sat in the chair beside Mari. “This... this equipment is just as sophisticated as the Onab technology. And it is very similar!”

Mari smiled as she nodded her head. “There are some differences, but I designed the crossover program with my husband Deion to allow seamless interaction between the two types. It allows Onab and Pralor computer systems to talk to one another without a hint of programming interference.” Mari glanced up with a brilliant smile to where Deion stood behind her.

Liita looked at her with wide eyes. “You designed this?” She gasped.

Mari nodded. “My mate and I.” She answered.

“Then this is how you found the encryption spike?” Liita asked.

Mari nodded once more and typed on her console. “We detected the odd signal it was emanating and from there we discovered the backdoor into the Arhtai Main Frame that it was protecting.” She motioned to the monitor over her head and pointed to the position where they had found the spike.

Liita reached up and traced the large screen in front of her with her finger. Her eyebrows narrowed slightly. “This is not the bypass I put into the system four hundred years ago.” She stated confidently. “I was asked by a friend, someone better than me with Onab technology, to put a backdoor into the low-level systems so that they could be monitored. This is not even in the same grid network where I put my backdoor. This is something different.”

“You put a backdoor into the Main Frame because someone asked you too?” Deion asked from where he stood behind Mari.

Liita nodded her head quickly. “The woman who asked me to do this was one of the original twelve Technicians who were chosen when they left Cerath to learn the Onab systems. Nystai is her name.”

“And she is the one who told you to put this in?” Deion asked.

Liita nodded her head again. “Yes... but this is not the one I built into the system, like I said. This is something else. Something much more sophisticated.” Liita looked at Mari. “May I?”

Mari leaned back and lifted her hands away from the computer console. “Of course.”

Liita typed quickly and they all watched as the screen changed and focused into a much smaller area of the Main Frame network until they were looking at a dull red light that was blinking every twenty seconds. “This is mine.” She told them. “It’s in a completely different grid sector as I said. And it looks identical to a network code pulse, which is common in Onab systems.”

“Then who put the one we found in place?” Mari asked her.

Liita shrugged her shoulders. “Nystai would not have been able to do that kind of work.” She said. “If I had to guess... I would say an Onab put that there.”

“Someone from this Ch'eldo’s group then?” Deion asked.

Liita nodded her head. “Now that we know they are still alive, yes, I would have to say yes.” She said.

Deion nodded his head. “Somehow they knew we were coming.” He spoke softly.

Brendi leaned over from her computer station. “I’m curious... this Nystai you speak of... do you think she would be monitoring the Main Frame?”

Liita nodded her head instantly. “It is what she does.” Liita answered just as quickly. “She has safe houses across Koltar Four where she has people monitoring the entire Main Frame Network. At least the unsecured parts. I don’t know what she uses the information for but...”

Deion lifted his hand and tapped his jaw implant. “I do.” He said softly. “Andro?”

“Go *fervon*.” Andro’s voice replied instantly from his location in the cargo bay.

All of them had decided to stick with normal COMS unless it was absolutely necessary in order to put the Kirek Pack and Nenay Pack members going with them at ease. They had been given Union implants and could hear everything now and this action solidified the trust and respect between the three packs more than anything could.

“Lord Ranol’s daughter Liita says that she added another secure breach point into the Arhtai Main Frame that is accessible by someone named Nystai. Apparently, she is one of the original twelve techs who were chosen when they left Cerath to train on Onab tech.” Deion explained quickly.

“Nystai still lives Liita?” Ranol’s voice broke in and asked his daughter from the *TYPE TWO* he was on with Martin. His voice was very surprised.

Liita awkwardly tapped the COM implant on her jaw. “Yes *alvva*, as far as I know.” She replied. “I installed an active security bypass into the low-level sub systems of the Main Frame nearly half a millennium ago. It is still active and being used.”

“What does this bypass allow her to do Liita Nenay?” Martin’s voice asked now.

Liita sat up a little straighter when she heard the commanding voice. It could not be mistaken by any Lycavorian alive. “She would... she would be able to monitor and direct the flow of unsecured traffic across the Main Frame, sire.”

“And this Main Frame is central to all computer systems on the planet correct?” Martin pressed.

“The Arhtai Main Frame controls nearly everything.” Liita answered. “That is why it is so heavily defended physically and with spy bots.”

“And this woman Nystai, Liita? Tell me about her.” Martin asked.

“She is very old my King.” Liita stammered. “Nearly as old as... as my father, sire. She hates the Arhtai Pack. They took something from her during the *Dremsa rie Saan*, I don’t know what, but she has never forgiven them. She has been working against them ever since, as only she can. In the shadows and dark alleys. She controls a vast underground black market among our people that looks after those who the Arhtai Pack hunt. She helps them to disappear. She also helps others to acquire things that they would not normally be able to get. Items that the Arhtai Pack have forbidden or control tightly. Medicines. Learning tools. All sorts of things. Yelma Arhtai and her Pack have hunted Nystai for thousands of years but she has always remained one step ahead of them.”

“And she has access to the Main Frame?” Martin asked again.

“Into everything but the most secure networks, yes.” Liita answered. She looked up at Deion behind her with a confused face.

“Deion... what are you thinking *keto*?” Martin asked knowing how his son’s mind would be working.

“We use her father.” Deion answered. “We get Liita to contact her and then we use her. If she is as well connected as Liita says she is, having her within the Network causing havoc is perfect.”

“Liita...” Martin spoke once more. “Can we... can we trust her?”

Liita didn’t hesitate for a moment. “Yes, my King.” She answered. “You cannot fake the hate she has for the Arhtai Pack, at least those parts of the Arhtai Pack that are in control. But she is also compassionate to all those who deserve it sire. She has never wavered from this.”

“You have nineteen minutes Deo.” Martin said. “We jump into orbit in nineteen minutes *keto* and I’m not delaying it. For anything.”

Deion nodded his head. “Understood father.” Deion touched Mari’s arm. “Mari... let Liita sit down and...”

Liita shook her head. “No! I can direct you Mari. It will be faster than trying to learn new system keys!” Deion nodded his head again. “Do it.”

PREMONITION

CARGO BAY

SIXTEEN MINUTES UNTIL JUMP

Music in background

Dire Straits, Ride across the River

It was decided that Kesas Pengot would go with Androcles because of his familiarity with Ch'eldo and the Onab people. They had been good friends before leaving Cerath, which is one of the reasons that Ch'eldo and his family had been chosen to lead those Onab selected to leave with the Kirek Pack. Kesas tried to remain out of the way for the most part, knowing that the battles to come were now for the young. He was still armed with a Pralor Pulse Magnum and a Pralor Assault Rifle, but he most likely would not have use for them, but Kesas Pengot would not turn away from his duty. Lylor would be traveling on the King’s ship in order to retrieve his beloved Kelia, Reva Mahanlo with them as well. She was not about to be left behind and Martin was not going to argue with her. He simply told her she was confined to the *TYPE TWO* and he would have his Queen For'mya’s dragon sit on her if she attempted to leave. It had actually been quite humorous to watch that exchange, the King of their people towering over his *staania* by a foot at least, his fangs fully extended and his

yellow gold eyes very prominent. Reva Mahanlo had stood there stoically, her own dual fangs fully extended, staring into his yellow gold eyes and telling him exactly what she was going to do. Martin finally won out with his statement and Reva had nodded.

Kesas and Lylor had nearly broken into laughter as they watched, even given their situation, and many of the hundreds who had witnessed the showdown in the transport bay on Pakar Six looking at them in utter shock. It brought back memories for both of them of the exact same thing happening in another time and another place.

As he made his way into the main cargo bay, one story above the floor of the bay, his eyes detected that everyone was preparing. Some were adjusting equipment, some were discussing with each other what they would do, but no one was idle. Kesas lifted his head slightly as he heard the music filtering through the internal ship's speakers. At least he thought it was music. He had never heard such sounds before but they were smooth and the sounds blended incredibly well to his Lycavorian senses. Kesas stood on the upper level and just watched for a moment. The charge in the air was a palpable thing, even he could sense that, but there was also a calm unlike anything he had ever felt before. He moved to the small monitor that showed him the smaller cargo hold one deck up that would hold those Onab that they rescued. The upper cargo area was connected to the main cargo bay by an interior staircase he had discovered, and all the Onab would have to do is walk up the ramp into the main cargo bay and keep moving back until they came to the stairwell. Now he could see Tiag, his daughter Yasha and his son Caylt standing with Marda and a dozen or so Kirek Pack members as they listened intently to six of Androcles' team members. He knew them now by name, Daio, Ridor, Jomann and the half breed Mahanlo-Leonidas Prince Kalis. The fifth one was the huge fur covered man called Cowen and then the female half Lycavorian and half elf who was called Sherice. It was obvious that she was wife to the huge, fur covered man Cowen, and Daio was husband to the Kavalian female Kameka who was in the cockpit with the Crown Princesses. The mix of men and women was incredible Kesas thought to himself. So many distinct species and only a few of them were represented here among Martin's people. He had to almost chuckle to himself as he remembered what Chiron had told him only a few hours ago. Elves were the second largest in population in the Union and all of them were astonishingly beautiful. Even the male elves were beautiful to an extent. Female elves were many times drawn to the Lycavorian men because of their prowess and strength and they were cherished as wives and mates because of their beauty and intelligence. Many Lycavorians, Alpha, Beta and Gamma, took female elves as their mates. Chiron had told him to insure that the young Alphas of the Kirek Pack were very careful about approaching a female elf they saw among these men and women. Many of them were already mated and even those that were not, they had lived among Lycavorians for much of their lives and they knew what was appropriate and what was not from a Lycavorian male. It would not be a good thing to cause tension because a young Alpha followed his instincts more than his brains, especially with these men and women from the Union. Kesas smiled a little wider as he remembered Rothan making his way away from them after the conversation to pass the word. Throughout the rest of the cargo bay, Kesas saw Kirek Pack members sitting with these men and women that were called *Durcunusaan*. Wolves of the Blood. They were speaking in soft whispers and most of them were running through firing point procedures for their new weapons.

Kesas turned his head away from the monitor and stepped to the railing before he looked directly into the main cargo bay below. He saw three of Martin's daughters standing together on the deck below. Lisisa, Eliani and Nara he knew their names to be. Nara, Kesas now knew, was the twin to the son Deion, and both of them were like burning points of bright light within the Etheric realm because of their Pralor abilities. This was another note that Chiron had told all of them over the course of the last hours. The Praetorian Gene it was called. It gave those who carried the active gene the ability to be so much more.

Kesas had felt it within Martin and Androcles, so powerful and pure. Being around such men and women had already begun to stimulate the normally minor Etheric abilities within the Lycavorians on Pakar Six and many were now beginning to sense this different power within their King and his bloodline easily enough.

Lisisa and Eliani were far less than Nara in this regard, at least in the Etheric power that they radiated, but both of them were off the charts compared to others from what Kesas could tell. Far more than any among the Kirek Pack could ever hope to achieve unless they married into the Mahanlo-Leonidas bloodline. Their brother Denali was like his brothers and sister, the pure Lycavorian blood within their bodies being more of a stable conduit for this active Etheric power and the abilities it could give someone. It appeared that all of

Martin's children with his *Anome* and pureblood Queen Aricia carried the active gene like him. He also detected this active gene from Eliani's husband and mate Jomann as well but according to Chiron, that is where the active gene stopped. At least with those out here with Martin. There were others back within the Union that were intent on finding more with this Praetorian Gene and bringing them into the fold.

It was still almost too much to really take in for Kesas Pengot, and it was happening so fast. Acki had been the one to focus him, as she always had, just before he boarded this ship and they departed to rendezvous with the hidden monstrosity in orbit above the planet. All of them had tried to steal a glimpse of this ship as they approached and Kesas had been one of the lucky ones standing in the cockpit as he had been. While the size of the ship was not surprising to him, the fact that this was a warship and not a huge transport like he would have first thought is what stunned him. This *SPARTA'S WRATH* equaled the size of the Onab ships they had come to Koltar Four on, but he had never seen so many gun turrets on a single ship before and it was frightening just to look at the ship even for the brief moment he had seen it from the outside.

Kesas' eyes finally came to rest on the three that sat lotus style near the ramp that could open the rear of the ship into oblivion. Androcles, Dorian and Laren sat in a triangle on the deck of the ship, Elynth, Ryner and Ladur behind them. They ignored the activity all around them and Kesas saw that no one moved to interrupt them in any way. Even the other dragons that were below were calm and quiet. Jeth and Tharua rested on the deck beside one another, Jeth quietly caressing Tharua's wings with his large snout. Aradace, Marux, Jeru, Mayla and Majeir were speaking to one another openly, further advancing their voice ability skills. Anthar rested with Caydren and Cinol, actively instructing the twins on their duties. While still growing and nowhere near their full size, Caydren and Cinol were the perfect dimensions for protecting the ship when it was on the surface. While they were just learning how to carry Sadi and Ne'Veha in flight, the brothers were already very well skilled in ground combat from their father Vollenth and the Elder Mother's instructors at Dragon Mountain.

The power he could feel coming from Androcles and the others was unlike anything he had ever felt before and Kesas was quite sure that he was nowhere near skilled enough to truly sense what they could do. While he knew Androcles and Dorian were Martin's sons, the young woman, Laren Ti'shara, was quite the exotic beauty. Her long, raven black hair surrounded an enchanting face that her soft, scale like outer skin only enhanced to ravishing proportions. Her normal skin, closer to the center of her beautiful face was deeply tanned. Her eyes he found unique as one was cobalt blue and the other azure blue. Her petite body was lush and firm and Kesas knew that many young Alphas would not hesitate to pursue this *elivonth ber* woman for her beauty alone. Kesas doubted it would be that simple since she was considered a daughter to Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas and a beloved sister to the Mahanlo-Leonidas children. She was also never far from Androcles or Dorian and her dragon always seemed to be beside her. Whoever chose to court this young woman, Kesas hoped he had large *nor*, for he would need them.

Kesas took this time to let his eyes linger on the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* that each of them wore. The cowls were not fully up around their heads, but Kesas easily remembered the day that he saw the four sets of armor so long ago. No one knew why the Onab built the armor, for Daniho Mahanlo was not skilled enough within the Etheric realm to even wear the armor at that time. Looking back, Kesas now believed that Daniho and Ashten knew exactly who the Onab had built it for. They had known even back then what was coming, perhaps not everything or how it would happen through the many thousands of years, but they knew their descendants would need this armor.

Kesas didn't know why he picked it up right at that moment but the words of the music playing all around him reached out to him for some reason and he lifted his eyes above him to stare at the ceiling of the ship for a moment.

*I'm a soldier of freedom in the army of man
We are the chosen, we're the partisan
The cause it is noble and the cause it is just
We are ready to pay with our lives if we must*

Kesas Pengot brought his eyes back down and focused them first on where Androcles and the others sat, then they moved around the interior of the cargo bay slowly, touching everyone who was present as they went

about their duties. Finally, he turned and looked at the monitor that showed the others in the attached cargo bay. That is when Kesas realized there was no doubt or hesitation in their movements or their actions. They were here to get their family and their blood back and nothing else mattered. And with this intense focus came clarity the likes of which Kesas had never felt. And this clarity spread, even to those from the Kirek Pack among them. It was a natural osmosis that was occurring, reinforcing everything that the Kirek Pack had taught through the years to all of their children from the day they were born. This is what naturally brought the Kirek and Mahanlo Packs so tightly together and even after all of these millennia that had passed, it was still there. The same closeness and values that had their Packs so tightly woven together for millennia was still very much present and he would even dare say, far more powerful than it had ever been given how much they accepted and merged with each other, despite knowing one another for only a few hours.

Kesas blinked several times as he felt the rush of air to his side and then he saw Deion's body hurtling the railing into the lower cargo bay, his young wife and mate right behind them, and then Kesas' eyes grew wide when he saw Liita Nenay right behind them.

"*Fervon!*" Deion barked as he hit the deck below with barely any effort and only a slight bending of his knees.

Androcles opened his eyes and turned to look at his brother as he began getting to his feet. "Deo?" He asked him.

Deion held out Mari's portable P9 to his brother. "Andro... I give you Lady Nystai Arhtai. Youngest sister to Yelma Arhtai."

Andro's azure eyes were wide as he took hold of the computer and looked at the face of the much older woman on the screen. There were tears rolling down her cheeks and she wore a smile that Andro doubted could have been removed by explosive.

"My Lord... *Orwara Indalfrid* Andro." Nystai stammered the words. "*Una coi... cyn vada carians forn sey heuhly chevsh.*" (Crown Prince) (It is, thank the gods you have finally come.)

"Nystai!" Kesas gasped when he heard the name, and quite unlike himself and much to the surprise of the younger members of the Kirek Pack present, Kesas leaped the short six-meter drop to the deck beneath him and was beside Androcles in an instant. "Nystai Arhtai! How can that be? She was listed as killed on the *Dremsa rie Saan!*" Androcles was looking at him and shifted the computer slightly when he came up beside him. Kesas' eyes grew wider as he saw the woman on the monitor. "*Vada carians silice lae!*"

"It has... it has been a very long time Lord Pengot." Nystai spoke with measured words.

KOLTAR FOUR EASTERN SECTOR LIPIRI

"...Can't stop it! It's some sort of computer worm!" Taarie almost shouted as she worked feverishly on her computer. "It is brute forcing its way into our system!"

Comelo was also at a similar computer station beside Taarie, his hands flying over his own computer console. "I've never seen anything like it Nystai! No matter what we do, it just bulls its way through! The code simply reconfigures on the fly and pushes further!"

"Source!?" Nystai shouted from her own, much larger computer station.

"I can't be sure but... it appears as if it came through the System Bypass that Liita installed for us." Taarie exclaimed aloud causing Nystai's head to come up at this information. "Someone else must have found it. No one from Internal Security has this kind of skill! No one!"

"Liita would not have betrayed us!" Nystai barked. "Not for anything!"

"Taarie, try a rotating frequency variable!" Comelo barked now.

Taarie shook her head within seconds. "It's not working! It will breach our network security in seconds! It will..."

Before she could finish her statement, the huge monitor that resided on the wall behind them came alive with the faces of three individuals. Foremost among them was Liita Nenay who Nystai recognized instantly.

“Liita!” Nystai hissed softly in stunned shock.

Liita’s face resided next to the features of the exquisitely beautiful young woman who sat in the chair. Her brownish red hair was tied back in a long, tight braid and her eyes were bright and focused.

“Lady Nystai...” Liita began quickly. “Forgive me for... for breeching your security systems as we did. I...”

“How?” Nystai stammered.

Liita smiled slightly and motioned with her head to Mari. “It was actually Lady Mari here.” She said. “Nystai we... we are coming! We need you to do something in order to make this easier.”

“You are coming?” Nystai looked confused. “What do you mean child?”

“We are coming there Nystai. To Koltar Four. We are going to retrieve Lady Kelia and my brothers. We need you to send false alerts all over the Network in order to confuse them.” Liita told her.

“Liita that is insane child!” Nystai gasped. “You cannot! Who has convinced you of this? My bitch sister will kill everyone if you do this!”

That is when Deion knelt down on the opposite side of Mari and positioned his face beside hers. “That would be my father.” He spoke.

Nystai drew back when she saw him, her hand going to her mouth in disbelief when she saw the resemblance. “By the gods!” She stammered. “You...”

Deion smiled gently as he looked at her, his eyes changing to his wolf persona and his long, thick dual wolf fangs extending fully. “My father and brother get that reaction more than I do, but I am honored nonetheless.”

“Nystai?” Taarie gasped aloud. “What is it? Who is this? He has... he has...”

“He has dual fangs!” Comelo almost yelled. “He has... he has Mahanlo blood in him! Just like the other one. He...”

“You said... you said your sister!” Deion spoke to Nystai. “What did you mean?”

Nystai lifted her head slowly. “I am Nystai Arhtai. Youngest daughter to Begal and Freia Arhtai, and sister to that vile witch Yelma Arhtai.”

Comelo and Taarie stared at Nystai in unabashed shock upon learning this but it also caused the young Alpha wolf in the transmission to move quickly.

Deion lifted his hand. “Hold that thought...” He spoke as he reached for something in the transmission. “Mari my love, Liita, come with me.” And then Nystai saw the image on the screen shifted wildly as he lifted the computer and began moving.

PREMONITION

CARGO BAY

TWELVE MINUTES BEFORE JUMP

“It has... it has been a very long time Lord Pengot.” Nystai spoke with measured words now.

“*Son vada carians!* Nystai!” Kesas gasped as Androcles and the others watched.

Andro saw her eyes come to rest on him and he watched her carefully as she stared at him. “Kesas says you are listed as having been killed on the *Dremsa rie Saan*.” Andro spoke.

Nystai nodded her head slowly. “I was... I did die on that night *Orwara Indalfrid* Andro. I... it is the night that my sister Yelma took from me all I had ever wanted in my life.”

Andro looked at Kesas. “Nystai... Nystai was the wife and mate to Tamal Kirek.” He answered. “They were mated shortly after we arrived on Koltar Four.”

Nystai nodded her head. “We were... we were so happy.” She spoke softly. “We...” She took a deep breath and focused her gaze on Androcles. “Two days before the *Dremsa rie Saan* I discovered I carried Tamal’s children within me. Twins. Strong and healthy boys. When they came for my beloved Tamal that night, I tried to protect him, I did. They shot me as well and... I could not protect...”

“*Carians!*” Liita muttered softly as she stood beside Mari and Deion.

“My babies... they did not survive.” Nystai continued. “My sister said it was for the best. That they would have only been trouble if they were born. I have... I have hated her with every breath I take since then.”

“*Nine minutes until jump.*” Sadi’s voice echoed over the ship’s internal speakers.

“She does not know you live?” Kesas asked now.

Nystai shook her head. “No. One year later I faked my own death. Yelma listed me as killed with Tamal. A traitor to our family. I have been... I have been doing this ever since.”

“You know who I am?” Androcles asked. “Who my brother is?”

Nystai smiled slightly as she nodded her head. “You... you are the *Fera Tarivuos.*” She spoke with an almost perverse joy. “You and your brother are sons to the *Mard Revik.* Mahanlo blood descended directly from our revered King Daniho and his brother Ashten. You are here to retrieve your bloodline and free our people from the oppression of my sister and those who follow her.”

“We need your help Lady Nystai.” Androcles said.

“Command us *aur Orwara Indalfrid.*” She spoke firmly.

“How many... how many in your group?” Androcles asked her.

Nystai waved her hand around her. “This is my core gathering.” She said. “Nineteen men and women who control our entire network. Many of them have their families here with them, so perhaps a hundred and thirty men, women and children. We... we live ready to move on a moment’s notice.”

“Lady Nystai... in just over eight minutes we are going to jump directly into orbit of Koltar Four.” Androcles said. “We need you and your people to flood the Arhtai Mainframe with false sightings and reports from all over the planet in order to assist us in our missions. Can you do that?”

Nystai nodded her head. “We can Milord. On one condition.”

“Nystai!” Kesas gasped in horror.

Andro held up his hand. “And what is that?”

“What you ask will cause us to compromise our position here.” Nystai spoke. “They will be able to find us. You must come for everyone here sire. You must get them off the surface and to safety. I care not for myself but...”

“Nystai, no!” Taarie exclaimed.

“Done.” Andro spoke without hesitation.

“Then we will do what you ask happily.” Nystai spoke. “And they will not know from where you will appear.”

SPARTA'S WRATH
PORT SIDE LANDING BAY 4
TYPE TWO DRAGON TRANSPORT
RETAGGED AS *SPARTAN ONE*

“...Trust her son?” Martin asked Andro’s face on the monitor.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes.” He answered without hesitation.

“I agree with Andro father.” Deion spoke from beside his brother. “We need to do this.”

“It’s a significant risk.” Martin said.

“This whole operation is a significant risk *medwan.*” Andro said. “So much is at stake and we cannot fail. You know that. I am sending Deion, Mari and a third of our ground force. Normya and Tir’ut will fly the second *TYPE TWO.* They have already left the *PREMONITION* and are prepping the ship.”

“Their current location puts them nineteen clicks from where you and mothers will be setting down father. On the other side of the city.” Deion spoke. “You will be drawing all of the attention. It should be a simple snatch and grab.”

“Nothing is ever simple for us son.” Martin hissed. “You know that.”

“I gave her my word father.” Androcles said finally. “I will not...”

Martin held up his hand stopping Andro’s statement. “I would not order that *keto,* you know that.” He said. “I can chop a few platoons to you and...”

Andro shook his head. “No. We will make due with our numbers now.” He spoke. “You will need yours. Deion will be successful and when he is, we can use Lady Nystai to send the Arhtai Pack into chaos. She says she has information that *Vada Yowa* does not know about. Information of her plotting to execute the *Dremsa rie Saan* for decades father. Even dating back to when our people left Cerath.”

Martin’s eyes grew wider. “Seriously?” He snarled angrily.

“That is what she says.” Androcles answered. “And given her skills in computers, I don’t question she could have done this.”

Martin finally turned his head to look at Lylor, who stood next to him with Aryera and Rothan. “*Tenne?* Your thoughts?”

“It is not something we can dismiss.” Lylor replied. “Androcles is correct.”

“Then it is settled.” Andro spoke from the *PREMONITION*. “We will adjust our mission goals and see you back on *SPARTA’S WRATH* when we are finished. *PREMONITION* is clear.”

“Androcles wait!” Martin snapped but it was too late and his image had already faded. “*Sibfla!*”

Aryera looked at him. “You have doubts he can do both, don’t you?” She asked.

Martin looked at her and shook his head quickly. “No. If he says he can do both, he will.” He replied.

“Then what?” Rothan asked confused.

“My son... Andro is far less forgiving than me.” Martin spoke. “Where he might have spared Arhtai lives with the forces he had to free Revia, Ivore and the Onab, now he will not give them the chance. If they attempt to fight him, he will kill them, without hesitation or remorse.”

“After what they are responsible for, do they deserve any less?” Lylor hissed.

Martin met his eyes and shook his head. “No *Tenne*, they do not.” He replied. “But they are still our people and I must try. To honor my grandfathers and my promise to them, I must try.”

Lylor looked at him for a long moment and finally nodded his head. “In the end, you will do what you must *mandri*.” Lylor told him. “I have faith in you.”

Martin chuckled at this. “Sometimes, people have more faith in me than I do myself.” He stated.

“Attention! Attention! *SPARTA’S WRATH* is preparing for Combat Jump! Two minutes! Two minutes until Combat Jump! All personnel take your combat stations! All personnel take your combat stations. This is not a drill!” The female voice echoed across the internal speakers on the ship, coming from the bridge of *SPARTA’S WRATH*.

KOLTAR FOUR

RENDITION STATION

0445

Third Shift on a ship was, notoriously, both hated and loved depending on what type of person you were. It was no different on the massive station that orbited Koltar Four. The space station was the Command Hub for all Security and Military matters of the Arhtai Pack. Yelma Arhtai may not have had much knowledge in this regard but Nyser Arhtai did, and he had a sizeable force of soldiers within the Internal Security Department. Both the Arhtai and Nenay Packs had their own militia force, or military, and they were expected to respond when Nyser Arhtai called for them, but for the most part, the military on Koltar Four was made up entirely of Arhtai Pack members.

Nyser Arhtai did not allow any Nenay Pack members to work on *RENDITION* Station because he feared they were not loyal to the Arhtai Pack. He was right of course, but there was not a whole lot that anyone could do about it. Through the years there had been thirteen new Packs that had been formed after breaking with the Arhtai and Nenay Packs because of their size. Ranol Nenay welcomed them and treated them with respect, even the ones that stayed on Koltar Four, while Nyser treated them all with mistrust and condescension. Of the thirteen new Packs, all branched from the Nenay and Arhtai Packs, four remained on Koltar Four. It had been the practical move for them, even though they were treated as if their Pack members had the plague. Most were barely surviving, due in no small part to the fact that the Arhtai Pack made their lives very hard. This did not deter most of them, and they struggled through every day.

RENDITION Station allowed the Arhtai Pack Internal Security to keep track of all those they thought were aligned in some way against them, including the different Packs that had formed through the years. The space station was also the pivotal point from which all smaller transport craft arrived and departed from. Almost all the traffic was from the surface, bringing mine workers to the station, who then branched out to the many daily Ore mining points within the system. Personnel traffic on the station was just beginning to pick up because of the time of day and Arhtai Internal Security was just finishing its change of shift. There were four security checkpoints on the station that everyone had to pass through to get into the terminal portions of the station. Each of these stations was manned by no less than six Arhtai Internal Security soldiers, or AIS, as everyone now referred to them. Each of the entry points had sophisticated sensors built into the Archway checkpoint that everyone had to walk through in order to reach the interior of the station. These sensors were designed to pick up weapons, explosives and even detect blood. As had been the case for longer than most of the AIS soldiers had been alive, the sensors were meant to detect anyone with Mahanlo blood in them, and they hadn't been triggered in well over a million years.

The Command and Control Center for the station was at the very top of the facility itself. The circular center was incredibly large, with both men and women sitting at different computer stations all around the huge spherical interior. The men and women in the CCC could gaze out three hundred and sixty degrees around the space station and look into the stars. They could see Koltar Four far beneath them, as well as the many satellites that now resided in orbit. The view all around was incredible to say the least.

After today, it would never be the same again.

Banaz Arhtai was the fourth son of Nyser and Yelma Arhtai born after the *Dremsa rie Saan*. He and his five brothers and three sisters were all born after the Night of Blood and all of them held major roles within the AIS, his role was the day shift commander of *RENDITION* Station. Banaz and all of his siblings had been brought up to hate everything having to do with Mahanlo blood. Yelma and Nyser had preached to Banaz and his siblings how Mahanlo blood and all those linked to them were the ones responsible for the deaths of their family members and siblings. None of them had ever lost this hate or even questioned it.

Banaz was known for his intelligence and calm demeanor, which granted him a status slightly above his other brothers who were essentially nothing but brutes. Banaz treated those under his command with some semblance of respect, but he still clung to the superiority of his bloodline, though not to the extent of his siblings. While this granted him some respect in return, very few Lycavorians outside of his family trusted or liked him. He was still arrogant and regarded himself as above everyone else, but he was nowhere near as violent or quick to anger as his brothers. Banaz was sitting in the Command Chair of the station, positioned to allow him to gaze in any direction he wanted and smoothly move to any portion of the CCC on the chair's small rail system. He was going over the reports from the previous shift and his head came up when he heard the female voice.

"*Atle vada jorbhe.*" The female voice spoke softly from across the CCC. (What the hell)

Banaz directed his gaze to the young, blond-haired female who had only recently joined the day shift. She seemed very competent and was the granddaughter of his oldest sister Gisule, but her instructors had given excellent recommendations in regard to her skills.

"Something Junior Lieutenant Issdra?" Banaz asked openly.

The young woman turned to look at him and then back to the two monitors and computer console in front of her. "I... I don't know sir." She stammered. "I am... I am detecting strange readings."

Banaz engaged his chair and the command interface on the arm of the chair allowed him to slide easily across the bridge to a position nearly right behind her. "Strange in what way?" He asked her.

"Sir... Quantum Particles in and around the station just soared to over four hundred and thirty percent." She told him.

Banaz smiled slightly, intent on giving Issdra a fair evaluation and opportunity. And he would not embarrass his blood. "Is your equipment calibrated properly Junior Lieutenant?" Banaz asked. "The techs sometimes do not calibrate correctly after doing maintenance."

Issdra shook her head. "No, sir. All my equipment is operating at peak efficiency."

"Issdra, a spike that large means that there is either several dozen ships powered by Quantum Drives or one very large ship out there." Banaz spoke. "No other species that we are aware of within this quadrant of space has Quantum based power as we do."

“I’m just stating what my instruments are saying sir.” Issdra told him. “We... sir, are we certain that we are the only species with Quantum power sir? We have not exploded the entire quadrant.”

“And we don’t need to in order...” Banaz started to reply when he saw another officer, this one more senior and experienced, turn quickly to his instruments with wide eyes as he detected something.

“Sir!” The man called out now. “I just detected a narrow beam, Quantum based power fluctuation surge in Section nine, deck three, near Security Checkpoint Two.”

“What kind of surge?” Banaz demanded.

“Unknown sir.” The man answered. “I have never seen anything like it before.”

“Origin?” Banaz asked.

“Tracing!” The man answered. “That... that can’t be right!” He hissed.

“Talach?” Banaz barked.

“Sir, my instruments are telling me point of origin is three hundred and fourteen thousand meters off our starboard beam.” Talach answered.

Banaz turned his head to look out into the space all around *RENDITION* station and he saw nothing. “Talach... there is nothing there!” He snapped.

“Sir, I am only telling you what my equipment is telling me.” Talach answered.

“Send a detachment of Internal Security to that location.” Banaz ordered. “And begin diagnostics on all equipment! All our systems are not having issues at the same time! It is something the Onab did to them. Has my father’s order gone out to my brother?”

Talach nodded his head. “Yes, sir. Nine minutes ago.”

Banaz nodded. “Good. Inform him of the problems we are having and have him bring one of the engineering teams here on his return. They will fix this.”

“Understood sir.” Talach spoke. He turned to his station and began to start to issue the orders when the shrill alarm that began sounding across the CCC and within the breadth of the entire station.

“What... what is that?” Issdra stammered never having heard the alarm before.

“It can’t be!” Banaz snarled as he came to his feet now. “That is... that is the Blood Sensor alarm! That would only go off if it detected Mahanlo blood!”

“Mahanlo... I thought Mahanlo blood was dead?” Issdra questioned Banaz.

“Sir! We have lost contact with Checkpoint Two! Weapons fire is being reported by roving patrol teams! They report we have been boarded by unknown troops.” Talach barked.

“Dispatch additional Security Ready Teams to Checkpoint Two!” Banaz shouted. “Do it now! And get me a line to my father on the surface! Now! Now!”

Issdra heard her console begin beeping insistently and she turned back to it, her dark eyes growing wide in disbelief. “Sir!” She almost screamed. “Sir, quantum particle readings just soared to over three thousand percent!”

“That’s impossible!” Banaz barked.

“All COM channels are down!” Another voice chimed in from across the CCC. “All COMS are being jammed sir! It’s a powerful signal and I can’t tell where it is coming from!”

“Who could jam our transmissions?!” Banaz roared.

“Quantum Particle dispersion is now at four thousand percent above normal sir!” Issdra exclaimed. “We have to...!!”

“*Son vada carians!*” The male voice rose above all others now. “Ships! Ships appearing all around us! *Saoi sibfla!* I count one hundred and nine unknown ships! Detecting quantum power cores on all of them! *Nubou!!!* Their weapons are powering!! Starboard beam! Starboard beam! *Nubou lae!* Unknown configuration! Over twenty thousand meters long! It’s powering weapons!!”

Banaz’s eyes were wide in disbelief as he saw ships begin appearing as if by magic all around the station. Some were massive in size, others were of medium size and then there was the monstrosity that was now parked off their starboard beam. A gigantic ship unlike any he had ever seen before, even in their history books.

“Shields! Shields!” He finally screamed. “Bring all weapons online and prepare to fire!”

“Sir! I am detecting six ships separating from the huge one! Smaller size, estimate at least heavy transports!” A man announced to everyone in the CCC. “Configuration unknown! They are... they are descending rapidly into the atmosphere! Their trajectory puts them on course for Lepiri!”

“Track them with station weapons and fire!” Banaz barked the order. “Do it now!”

The internal COM channel of *RENDITION* station came alive then, causing all heads to lift as the voice of the woman none of them had met came through the channel very clearly and confidently.

“I am sorry... but I cannot allow you to fire your weapons.” The voice spoke calmly. “You will discover that I have jammed all of your communications and rerouted all of your command controls to a different location. One which I now control. The men at your Security checkpoint chose to fight... they are now dead.”

Banaz looked at Talach, who was trying to access his console. Banaz watched as he pounded on the computer console and then moved to the next console beside him, shoving the operator away. He pounded on that computer console a few times and then angrily slammed his hands down before looking back at Banaz and shaking his head.

Banaz turned to his weapons officer who was punching buttons at his own consoles to no avail. He finally looked up and shook his head.

Banaz looked up at the ceiling. “Who are you?” He demanded.

“I would think that is painfully obvious to you.” The female voice spoke calmly. “You can obviously hear the alarms sounding all over your station.

“That is not possible!” Banaz snarled loudly. “Anyone with Mahanlo blood is dead! The Mahanlo bloodline has been dead for over a million years!”

“Unfortunately for you... that is not the case, Commander Banaz is it?” The woman’s voice answered him. “My name is Aricia Mahanlo-Leonidas and I am the *Anome* and one of six Queens to Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas. The direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. We have come for our family and friends that you hold against their will. And we will not be deterred from our task. Whether you survive this day or not is entirely up to you.”

RENDITION STATION **SEVEN MINUTES EARLIER**

Taion Nenay staggered slightly when they reappeared but he felt the hand reach for him and steady him. He turned and looked at the face of the tall, chiseled Lycavorian he now knew as Atropos. He was the Spartan Captain of the red-haired Queen and sister to the Queen that now stood calmly on his opposite side. The Lycavorian Spartan Atropos smiled broadly at him.

“The first time is always the worst. It will pass in a few seconds.” Atropos told him.

He turned his head to the eight other *Durcunusaan* who had accompanied them. All of them were ready to move, standing just behind where Zarah, Lucia, Radem, Julie, Colin and Pablo circled Aricia. Four of Taion’s own Nenay Pack troops were mixed in with the others and looking just as green around the lips as he was from their very first teleport.

Taion shook his head quickly and dropped his portable computer into place just as Julie had already done. “The Checkpoint is fifty-three meters from our location.” He spoke somewhat awed by the exactness of the teleport. “Down this corridor twenty-seven meters, then we turn right and walk right into it.”

“Confirmed Aricia.” Julie spoke now. “Lot of contacts between us and the checkpoint.”

Taion nodded his head. “Shift workers my Queen. They are no threat to us. Most are barely able to provide for their families because the Arhtai Pack hoards so much.”

“Mother?” Zarah questioned softly.

Aricia nodded her head quickly. “Zarah... you and Lucia on point with Radem. Move to the checkpoint but remain in the shadows daughter and do not reveal yourself until we are upon you. Go!”

Zarah only nodded her head, both she and Lucia gripping one of Radem’s hands in theirs and then wrapping the shadows around all of them and moving out.

“*Sibfla!*” Taion gasped as he watched it.

Aricia smiled as she pulled up the cowl and dropped it around her head. “Yes. It can be very disconcerting at times. Luckily... it will not be you who she appears next to.” Aricia looked at her brother from under the hood. “*Fervon?*”

Atropos nodded his head. “We are ready.”

“Taion... if you would lead us out?” Aricia said.

Taion nodded his head and took a deep breath. Everything that had transpired in the last few hours had been almost too much to take in but Taion Nenay could and did adapt easily. When they arrived on Pakar Six, Taion had no idea that his three-month-old son would forge their future for them, yet he and Saymora could not have been happier.

“Come! We must move quickly! They will have detected the teleport beam by now and the moment you or your daughter moves in front of a Blood Detector Queen Aricia, we will be discovered.” Taion said.

Aricia nodded her head. “Very well.”

Taion moved quickly and efficiently down the corridor. He did not worry about being interfered with in this secondary corridor, it was mainly empty at this time of the day. The eight *Durcunusaan* soldiers were moving like skilled veterans of hundreds of battles, which he would later learn, they all were. All of them wore the floor length cape and cowls in order to cover their weapons. Taion had told them this was common, especially among the many miners that transited the station. The dark-skinned female stayed beside Queen Aricia as they moved, always watching her computer, and with the PPR gripped in one hand. The other man, Taion didn't really know what he was, but he moved like a wolf in many ways. He knew his name was Colin and he remained on Queen Aricia's opposite side and Taion knew his goal was singular. He was there to protect the Queen and the dark-skinned female like him. They all carried the shortened version of the Pralor PPR, most had begun calling it the PPR4 as Taion learned when the huge Lycavorian Atropos had given it to him.

They made the turn into the main corridor smoothly, blending into the masses of men and women who were going to work. This main corridor would take them right to Checkpoint Two.

Six at the Checkpoint Mother.

Zarah's voice spoke to all of them within the Etheric realm. It surprised Taion at first, but thanks to the brief experience on Pakar Six, he did not flinch. It seemed his son and the unborn daughter of the Crown Prince binding themselves to each other as they had done gave him and his wife Saymora a different status among the others. Androcles had blessed both his wife and himself with Etheric abilities that they would not normally have been able to obtain. They would now be classified as high-level Tier Six Etheric users back with this Union that had been created.

Do they appear agitated? Taion broke in still new to this and shouting within the Etheric realm.

To her credit, Zarah Mahanlo-Leonidas only chuckled softly. *You do not need to shout Lord Taion.* She answered him. *And yes, they seem rather excitable now. They must have received some sort of communications just before we arrived.*

Taion looked at Aricia's covered head as they continued down the corridor. *They detected the Teleport Beam. The power surge caused by it anyway.*

It would appear so. She answered. *Taion, do we know if these Blood Sensors even work anymore? It has been centuries since they were installed.*

I do not know my Queen. Taion answered. *We have never...*

I understand. Aricia spoke not allowing him to finish his statement. She knew what he was going to say and she did not want him to feel awkward. *I guess we will find out shortly. This is the checkpoint I take it?*

Everyone passes through the archway into the interior of the station. Taion told them. *Just move normally and we may get lucky.*

There were dozens of men and women both in front of them and behind, moving through the security archway. Zarah, Lucia and Radem could easily bypass the archway hidden in the shadows as they were. Though they knew it could happen, only Aricia knew that Martin had planned for this very thing to take place. It was why he wanted the station taken instead of destroyed. He wanted Aricia to trigger the blood detectors, for it would signal to hundreds of others that Mahanlo blood had returned. As his *Anome*, and with the dormant Praetorian gene within her, Aricia's blood would be nearly as pure as his and the four children she had given him. Between her and Zarah, they would trip the alarms on the station without even trying.

And this is exactly what took place the instant that Aricia Mahanlo-Leonidas stepped into the Security Archway. The shrill alarm began to sound the instant she stepped under the archway. Aricia stopped moving as dozens of men and women began looking all around them for the source of the alarm. Four of the six AIS guards moved around in front of the archway and brought weapons out, leveling them at the many people in front of them.

“What is it?” The Senior AIS officer spat. Even he had never heard this alarm before. “Is someone carrying weapons?”

“It’s not... it’s not the weapons detector. It’s the blood sensor!” The man at the controls hissed softly. “It’s detecting Mahanlo blood! Huge spikes!”

“That’s not possible!” The Senior AIS officer spat. “You are reading it wrong!”

“I’m telling you! Mahanlo blood readings are off the charts!” The second man barked right back.

“Your man speaks the truth.” Aricia spoke from under her cowl causing heads to turn towards her at the words. Aricia reached up and grasped the edges of the cowl and tossed it back casually. Men and women both gasp aloud all around her as they saw first her amazing azure colored eyes and then the dual wolf fangs as she smiled widely. Dual Lycavorian fangs that had only ever existed within one bloodline of their people. A bloodline all of them thought long dead. “I will only ask once. Place your weapons on the deck, surrender to me and you will live out this day.”

“Our systems are correct!” The guard at the station yelled. “She has Mahanlo blood in her! Pure, unbroken Mahanlo blood! How is that possible?!”

“It doesn’t matter! Kill her! Kill her now!!” The AIS officer snarled as he lifted his sidearm to level it at Aricia’s head.

Only Aricia wasn’t there anymore.

“Zarah! Now! Aricia screamed out as she sidestepped and was beside the officer in a single blink of an eye. His own eyes went wide at this for he had never seen anyone move so fast, but then it didn’t matter as Aricia buried the Shukar she had drawn from under the cape completely into the man’s chest. His eyes bugged out of his head in agony even as Atropos, Colin and Taion moved as well.

Zarah and Lucia appeared from the shadows behind the two men at the controls of the checkpoint, Radem between them. They struck without hesitation or mercy. Radem drove his poisoned blade into the lower back of one of the Lycavorians, his left hand reaching across his face and grabbed his jaw, where Radem used every bit of his strength to savagely jerk his head to the side. While it is a move he would have been able to carry out against a Union trained Lycavorian, Radem rightly assumed these Lycavorians were unprepared and poorly skilled in the arts of war. He was right as the man’s head jerked viciously to the side and the bones in his neck snapped completely. Zarah and Lucia brought the second man down with their R4 fighting knives, Zarah stabbing him in the side of his neck severing two of his arteries while Lucia drove her blade under his armpit and into the top of his heart, where she twisted the blade and tore open the top of his heart within his chest.

Aricia stared calmly at the eyes of the AIS officer as the life left him, and her wolf eyes shimmered in the light of the fixtures above them embedded into the ceiling. Atropos, Colin and Taion move quickly and pummeled the last three guards into submission. Atropos was not a small man by any means and he had been raised a Spartan all of his life. He simply stepped into the first guard and smashed his PPR4 into his face like a club. The man’s large nose crumbled instantly and blood erupted all over as he screamed in pain and reached for his face. Atropos hit him again in the face with the butt of his PPR4, this time catching his right hand as well as the blow crushed his right cheekbone and the bones in his right hand and then dropped the man into unconsciousness.

Colin and Taion were not as forceful, but equally as successful.

Colin flipped the second Lycavorian over his hip while wrenching his sidearm out of his hand and breaking four of his fingers as he did so. While the man yelled in hot pain and hit the deck hard, Colin drove stiffened fingers into his throat, silencing his screams and crushing his larynx. The man began to choke on his own blood as Colin pushed him further to the deck and out of them way. Taion Nenay was a good sized Lycavorian and well built. He had also spent the better part of the last three million years of his life learning everything he could from his father and other members of the Nenay Pack who had fought the Iais’Kai. He stepped close to the last guard and snatched his arm and shoulder before spinning him around and sending him careening through the thick glass partition that surrounded the checkpoint. As the plate glass shattered, one

piece of shattered glass turned awkwardly and punctured the man's eye, driving completely through the eye socket and into his brain. When he hit the deck, he was already dead and did not move.

Julie wasted no time and stepped up to the security checkpoint, unceremoniously shoving aside the body of the man Radem had killed. She instantly plugged her P9 into the station and began typing hastily.

Aricia let the body of the AIS officer drop slowly to the floor and she turned to look at Julie. "Jules?" She asked as she squatted down and wiped the blade of her Shukar on the man's chest.

"Almost!" Julie hissed softly. "Got it! We're in! Rerouting all command functions to my P9!" She exclaimed.

"Can you tap into the command center?" Aricia asked.

"Standby!" Julie told her. "There!"

Unknown voices began to erupt through the internal station COMs in this area and at the checkpoint.

"Track them with station weapons and fire!" The male voice barked the order. "Do it now!"

Aricia saw the nod from Julie and began speaking. "I am sorry... but I cannot allow you to fire your weapons." She spoke calmly. "You will discover that I have jammed all of your communications and rerouted all of your command controls to a different location. One which I now control. The men at your Security checkpoint chose to fight... they are now dead."

"Who are you?" He demanded.

Taion moved up beside her quickly. "Banaz." He hissed softly. "Commander Banaz! He is a son to Yelma and Nyser Arhtai."

"I would think that is painfully obvious to you." Aricia continued to speak calmly while nodding her head to Taion. "You can obviously hear the alarms sounding all over your station.

"That is not possible!" Banaz snarled loudly. "Anyone with Mahanlo blood is dead! The Mahanlo bloodline has been dead for over a million years!"

"Unfortunately for you... that is not the case, Commander Banaz is it?" Aricia answered him. "My name is Aricia Mahanlo-Leonidas and I am the *Anome* and one of six recognized Queens to Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas, the direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. We have come for our family and friends that you and your family hold against their will. And we will not be deterred from our task. Whether you survive this day or not is entirely up to you."

Aricia looked around at the murmurs and whispers that were sweeping through the men and women who cowered all around them. All of them had heard what she had just said.

"This is my station upaee!" Banaz shouted now. "You cannot have it!"

Aricia shook her head slowly. "Mahanlo blood already controls this station Commander. I have troops boarding the station using teleportation technology that you do not possess. They can appear anywhere I need them. Your security forces will be outnumbered shortly and then they will die. As you will die Commander. I have control of this station in my hands." Aricia looked at Julie and pointed at her. "I am not without mercy however Commander. You are too young to have taken part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*. Surrender and you may yet continue to live."

"*Nubou forn!*" Banaz snarled at her.

Aricia's eyes narrowed and she nodded at Julie. "I hope those in the CCC agree with you Commander, because you just killed all of them, as well as yourself. You will notice that I have ordered life support disengaged from the CCC. Now all of you will die a very agonizing death and their blood will be on your hands."

Julie cut the internal feed with one touch of her hand. "Mute." She spoke.

"How soon until life support drops them all into unconsciousness Jules?" Aricia asked her.

"Your people are tough to kill Aricia." Julie answered. "I'd give it fifteen minutes at least. But we will need to move fast."

Aricia nodded her head. "Inform Armen! I want the CCC tapped into and someone watching it. Once the last person is down, have a team breach and secure the CCC immediately. I do not want to kill more than we need too in order to succeed."

Julie nodded her head as she was typing. "Armen confirms."

Aricia looked at Pablo where he stood next to Atropos. "Pablo, take Taion and three others to the main computer relays. We need to get this Nystai woman plugged into the system as soon as possible."

“You’re going to have incoming Rica.” Pablo spoke using the nickname all of Martin’s team referred to her by,

Aricia nodded her head. “Our follow-on team is sixty seconds out. We will be fine. Move quickly Pablo, and do not engage unless you have to.”

Julie tossed the smaller P1 to Pablo when he looked at her and she nodded. “It’s all set up. Just plug it in and she will be able to access the system.”

“Thanks Jules.” Pablo commented before he turned and pointed to three others and Taion. “Time to roll.”

Pablo and Taion didn’t see the flare of orangish white light as a dozen Spartans appeared all around the checkpoint fully armed and ready to work. Aricia smiled to herself. Their follow-on forces were arriving sooner than she had expected. Within another eight minutes this station would be flooded with experienced Spartan soldiers from *SPARTA’S WRATH*. They were not the *Durcunusaan*, but they were part of Androcles’ 9th CSAFG and superbly trained. Four hundred of them had been permanently assigned to the ship to provide security and assistance where needed and now they would be doing what they were trained for.

Aricia turned to Zarah and Julie now. “I want that Banaz character alive.” Aricia told them. “Zarah, you Radem and Lucia see to it.”

Zarah nodded. “We will mother, but why?” She asked. “He is Arhtai Pack.”

“And he is too young to have taken part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*.” Aricia told her. “You know what we decided. Any who are too young to have taken part in that night will be given a choice. Stand with their Pack or renounce their actions.”

Zarah moved up in front of her Lycavorian mother. “Sometimes father and Andro are too compassionate mother.”

Aricia reached up and placed her armored hand on Zarah’s cheek. “I agree with you *fenneennum*.” She said. “But they are still our people, and we can’t blame all of them for the deeds of a few can we?”

Zarah shook her head slowly. “No.” She said softly.

Aricia leaned forward and nuzzled Zarah’s cheek and Zarah smiled happily as her motherly aura filtered over her. “Go now. But do not get yourself hurt. If anything happens to you we will not be able to hold your brother back and you know it.”

Zarah smiled and gripped Lucia’s hand once more and then they both took Radem’s hands. “You will send Dutkne to us when he gets here?” She said.

Aricia nodded her head. “Of course.” She answered. “He will arrive with the second echelon. He is our point contact with your brother. Now go.”

Zarah and Lucia nodded and wrapped the shadows around themselves and Radem once more to the astonished gasps of the men and women now sitting on the floor all around them and staring at them, still murmuring to themselves.

Atropos stepped up to his younger sister. “They will try to take back this checkpoint sister.” He said. “We are already detecting movement on the upper and lower decks.”

Aricia looked at him and nodded as another group of Spartans appeared in the orange white flare of light from the teleporter. “Then let’s make sure that they do not.” She said. She looked at the professional Spartans who were beginning to dig in around the checkpoint without even asking and then her eyes lifted to the dozens of civilians that were staring at her in open mouthed disbelief. “We must move these civilians to a safe area *fervon*. Get them out of the open corridors. Put them in the side rooms and get them out of the crossfire that will surely come. Quickly!”

Half a dozen Spartans sprang into action instantly and began to usher the civilians out of the main corridor and into several side rooms.

Aricia took the PPR4 from Atropos as he removed it from his shoulder and held it out to her. “We are here to confuse and misdirect!” Aricia spoke to the Spartans who all turned their heads to look at their Queen. “We are... we are here to retrieve those who are our family and punish those members of the Arhtai Pack who took part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*! You and so many like you volunteered to help us conduct this sacred mission to retrieve our family. We are only a small part of the overall operation, but no less important than the many others. We are Lycavorian Spartans and we do not kill indiscriminately. This has never been our way and it has not changed no matter where among the stars we are. If they have a weapon, then they are the enemy, otherwise

they are still our people and we do not kill our own people.” Aricia saw the many heads of the Spartans nod in agreement with her words. “Then let us prepare.”

TYPE TWO

DESIGNATION: *SPARTAN ONE*

“We are in the glide!” Endith called out.

“*PREMONITION* and *KADENS* have broken from formation and we are six minutes out from target!” For'mya announced.

“Confirmed!” Tina echoed her words.

For'mya touched the large computer console on her right side. “Martin... we are six minutes out.” She told him.

“Chatter on their Com channels is picking up quick Boss!” Tina broke in. “I think word is getting out that Rica is there messing up their perfect day.”

“Good. Stand by.” Martin’s voice answered them calmly.

For'mya turned her head slightly to stare the rear of the *TYPE TWO* when she heard his voice. It may have seemed calm to most, but to those who knew Martin Leonidas as For'mya and the two women in this cockpit did, he was anything but calm.

Endith turned to look at her. “He’s ready to explode For'mya.” Endith said.

For'mya turned her head back and looked at her. “Yes. Every since we discovered how many were actually killed it, has been growing in both Martin and Androcles.”

“Jesus!” Tina gasped. “That ain’t good.” Her head turned quickly when she heard the soft beep. “There it is! There is the signal! Cirith... are you getting this?”

Cirith’s voice replied instantly. “I have it Tina.” She replied. “Activating main monitor and intercept.”

Martin wore simple dark gray fatigues now and he stared at the face of the much older woman in the transmission on the main monitor in the rear of the *TYPE TWO*. Anja, Cirith, Isabella and Dysea stood just behind him, Kenny, Cody, Tony, T'lolt and Murano behind them checking their personal gear. Kasdan was working at another computer station on the deck of the rear of the *TYPE TWO*, Torma, Aurith, Isheeni, Iriral, Miath and Arzoal resting on the deck of the ship, and behind them, spread out all over were a hundred and twenty *Durcunusaan* crammed into every section of the ship. Double the *TYPE TWO*'s normal configuration, but rules were made to be broken and if Star Commander Endith O'Connor couldn't do it, then no one could.

Martin looked at the face of the woman as she bowed her head deeply to him. “My... Milord King.” She gasped aloud and with great reverence. Martin saw several others standing behind her bow their heads just as deeply.

“You know who I am?” Martin asked.

Nystai looked at him and nodded. “You are the *Mard Revik* of our people.” She stated with much confidence. “Descended from Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. The greatest of us. There can be no mistaking that.”

Martin looked at Cirith when she said that and then back to Nystai. “I need you to do something for me.” He spoke.

“We are already acting upon the Crown Prince’s instructions my King.” Nystai told him. “As of ninety seconds ago, we are initiating false security alarms all over the Capital City. With the hidden breach into the Mainframe that Ch'eldo and the others left for you to find, we can monitor everything from our location here. At least for a time. Arhtai Internal Security is just waking up, but they will begin to respond soon enough. I am sending them to the far edges of the city and as far away from you as possible.” She stepped closer to the monitor on her end. “It is our understanding that *RENDITION* station is under the control of your people as well. I did not suspect you would take the station Milord.”

“Predictable is boring.” Martin spoke with a half grin.

“Indeed.” Nystai said in reply.

“I need something else Nystai Arhtai.” Martin spoke firmly. “I... my son showed me what you told him. About your mate, your children. She is your sister Nystai Arhtai, and I need to know if you can do this? I intend to see that justice is done.”

Nystai met his eyes without flinching. “She stopped meaning anything to me the moment she ordered the death of Tamal Kirek, the Alpha that I loved with all that I was, and the twins that I carried that were our future together.”

Martin considered her eyes in the transmission and slowly nodded his head. “I need to you tap into the internal feed in their home.” Martin spoke. “I want to talk to them.”

Nystai looked taken aback at this request. “Talk to... but why Milord?”

“I also want the transmission going planet wide.” Martin told her. “Every monitor, every channel, everything that can carry a signal. Can you do that?”

“We can sire... but why?” Nystai asked. “My vile sister deserves no sympathy and no reprieve from justice. She cannot be allowed...”

“Your sister’s fate is already sealed Nystai Arhtai.” Martin spoke firmly. “As is the fate of everyone who took part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*. There will be no leniency, no reprieve and no forgiveness.”

“Then why must you...”

“How many right now were not even alive when the *Dremsa rie Saan* took place Nystai Arhtai?” Martin asked. “I will have my vengeance... but I will not strike down those who were not even born. I will give them a choice. A very simple choice. Fight me and die, or surrender and live.”

“How do I...”

Martin stepped closer to the monitor on his end. “Fifteen thousand, four hundred and two Nystai Arhtai.” Martin spoke to her. “That is how many of my bloodline Yelma and Nyser Arhtai ordered butchered. That is how many voices scream out to me in my mind and in my heart for vengeance Nystai. Five hundred of them were less than a year old. Five hundred of them. Sixty-three just as your twins were, waiting to come into this world and make a name for themselves and do wonderful things. Do I appear to you as someone who will just let that go unpunished?”

Nystai shook her head without hesitation. “No, Milord.” She answered firmly.

“Do as I ask you Nystai.” Martin spoke. “And then prepare for my sons to keep their word to you and pick up you and your people.”

Nystai turned her head. “Taarie! Make the connection child! Quickly!”

KOLTAR FOUR

ARHTAI PACK COMPOUND

LEPIRI

Yelma Arhtai walked into what was her husband and mate’s central office in their home sipping a mug of tea and she saw the half dozen military men standing around where he sat at his desk.

“...Don’t care what it takes!” Nyser almost screamed the words. “You re-establish contact with the station and my son!”

“All signals are being jammed Nyser.” The man spoke calling him by his given name only because he was Nyser’s oldest living brother. “Nothing is going in or out. It is a type of jamming our people have never seen before!”

Nyser got to his feet. “I have Fomir on his way to the Sanctuary now to bring back Ch'eldo and his engineers. They can break through this jamming.”

“And the ships brother?”

Yelma’s ears perked up now. “Ships? What ships?”

Nyser looked at his brother and nodded his head. “Tell her.”

“Seven minutes ago, over a hundred ships jumped directly into orbit above us.” Conron Arhtai spoke. “Unknown ships that are all power by Quantum Power Drives. One of the ships is over twenty thousand meters

long. Within three minutes we lost contact with *RENDITION* station and everyone on it. All of our COM signals are being jammed by an unknown carrier wave that we cannot break through.”

Yelma was looking at him with wide eyes now. “What... what are we doing about it?” She demanded.

Nyser moved around his brother and looked at Yelma. “I have Fomir moving to bring Ch'eldo here.” He said. “The Onab will be able to break this jamming easily. AIS personnel are boarding transports as we speak to move to the station to reestablish contact and respond to these alerts.”

“What alerts?” Yelma demanded.

“Twenty-six so far Lady Arhtai.” Another of the men in the room answered. “All over the city. Security breaches of some kind at outlying facilities that do not have continuous security assigned to them. Mostly archives and data centers, but we have men responding to them all.”

“Nyser?” Yelma asked turning to look at him. “What is going on? Is this an attack of some kind by rebels? By that *ronnus orato!*” (Bastard Devil)

“We don't know if *Vada Orato* is responsible Lady Arhtai.” The same man spoke again. “We have never really been able to confirm that they exist.”

“Have our ships respond!” Yelma hissed.

Conron shook his head quickly. “Our ships are transports Yelma.” He spoke now. “We have no dedicated warships and even if we did, ground sensors are telling us that every ship in orbit above us is a warship of some kind, and they are all heavily armed. They vary in size, but they are all warships, the smallest being nearly a thousand meters in size. Six transport sized ships began descending through the atmosphere several minutes ago, but we have not yet been able to determine their destinations and...”

“Wait!” Yelma gasped. “They are coming down from orbit?!”

All of them turned when the large monitor on the wall began beeping loudly. Nyser moved for it. “This is probably Banaz. He will have a report for us and...” His voice died as he touched the panel beside the monitor and it came alive with a face that none of them had ever thought they would see again in their lifetimes.

“*Nubou lae!*” Conron gasped aloud.

“*Aur carian!*” Another rasped out the words.

“*Una bjarter tur!*” ((It cannot be)

“*Esulo!*” Yelma stammered.

“Impossible?” The image of Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas spoke. “Not hardly. Nothing is impossible, it just might take a little longer. Though from your reactions, I get the sense you are far more surprised than you should be. I wonder why that is?”

“Who are you?!” The youngest among them barked. He was Conron Arhtai's third oldest son and the most militarily efficient, which is why he spent most of his time with his father or Uncle.

Martin shook his head slowly in the transmission. “Who am I?” He spoke. “That's pretty sad really. Kesas Pengot told me that you were trying to erase us from history, and I guess he was correct. Too bad that ends today.”

“Kesas Pengot is a traitor to our people!” Conron snapped. “He...”

“*Ata vada nubou uvenn guckly!*” Martin snarled loudly cutting off his words. “I ain't talking to you.” (Shut the fuck up ugly) Conron looked utterly stupefied at being talked to in such a way and his eyes showed it. “They know who I am... and they know why I am here.” Martin barked pointing at Nyser and Yelma.

“You lie!” Yelma spat now.

Martin chuckled softly and shook his head. “Being way out here didn't make it so easy to talk to your traitor friends back in the Alpha Quadrant, did it?” He spoke now. He saw Nyser and Yelma look at one another and then back to him. “Yes, I figured it out a few weeks ago to be honest. You just confirmed it for me. Thank you.”

“You have no idea of what you speak!” Yelma barked out.

“Don't I?” Martin continued. “They are gone you know. All of them. The Utane, Ormck, Ekela and Taild Packs no longer exist. They were banished for their roles in the assassinations of Mahanlo blood. Eventually the survivors died out. The Chetak Pack has only one survivor and he will rebuild his Pack with his wives and mates into something to be proud of once more. He is doing an excellent job of it so far. Tell me... how did you get them to go along with you? They risked their Packs to turn against Mahanlo blood. Why? What did you promise them?”

“Power!” Yelma hissed angrily. “And revenge!”

“Revenge?!” Martin gasped. “Mahanlo blood suffered just as much, if not more than the rest of the Packs. Why is your sacrifice any more significant than what anyone else suffered?” Martin shook his head. “Four Packs were wiped out by their own betrayal because they followed you and your lies! The fifth Pack lives only because of one man and his honor and they are now tied to Mahanlo blood more tightly than they ever were before. You have no idea what happened do you? After you lost contact with them? You only assumed that they had succeeded and then you acted out yourselves.”

“Our children!” Yelma screamed. “My parents! So many of our pack dead in your war!”

“Mahanlo blood had nothing to do with the Iais’Kai and their...” Martin began to speak.

“Silence!” Yelma barked. “You were not alive back then! You know nothing of what we endured! We control what is left of our people now! It is Arhtai blood that now commands all Lycavorians no matter where they may be! We will...”

“You will do nothing!” Martin roared savagely, cutting off her words. “The remaining eight Packs have built something great in the Alpha Quadrant! A Union of species and worlds that your feeble little minds could not begin to imagine! I am Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas! I am the eighth-generation grandson of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo and I am King based on the First Cerath Accords. Yes, I know about that! I have the memories of five lifetimes within me Yelma Arhtai, and I remember! You cannot... you will not go against the will of the people! I have come for my blood! We have come for our blood!”

“You have no idea what you are saying!” Yelma snapped.

“Do not toy with me Yelma Arhtai.” Martin growled at her. “You hold my *Tenna* Kelia Mahanlo prisoner in cryo sleep! I have already woken my *Tenne* Lylor, her husband and mate, and three of their remaining children. You hold the sons of Ranol Nenay and his mate Gara. And you hold prisoner countless Onab who accompanied you freely when you left Cerath and now you hold them as slaves.”

“Kelias Mahanlo is dead!” Yelma barked loudly. “She died over a million years ago from a disease that we still have not found a cure for! We... we tried to save her but were unable to do so.”

“Did you think you could hide her from her own blood?” Martin snarled at her. “You had to have known that we would come for her! You cannot hide her from me. I can feel her Etheric resonance even now, the closer we get to the surface. I will give you one chance...” Martin moved closer to the monitor now. “Release my *Tenna* to me. Release Ranol’s sons to me, and release the Onab to me. I will not allow them to be treated as slaves by you and your Pack any longer. All those who took part in the *Dremsa rie Saan* will be handed over to Mahanlo blood for punishment. All those who killed our children, they will answer to us. All those who took the lives of Kirek Pack children will answer to us. That includes you and your foul husband and mate Yelma Arhtai. I already have your daughter Sama and your granddaughter Roeza, and for their crimes, they will answer to the Lycavorians they have wronged.”

Yelma’s eyes were wide now as she gazed at the man’s face in the transmission. “They... Sama... they live!” She gasped aloud.

Martin nodded his head. “For the moment.” He spoke. “Their crimes are great, and they will answer for them.”

“You will return them to me immediately!” Yelma screamed. “Return them to me or I will kill Kelias and Ranol’s sons!”

“By your own words... you just told me that my *Tenna* Kelias was dead.” Martin spoke knowing that he had caught her in her own lie. “That she died because of some mystery disease that you and your people made up. Now you are telling me this is not true?”

Nyser turned when the door to the room opened and the younger wolf burst in. He went right to where Nyser was standing and whispered in to his ear. Nyser’s eyes grew wide and he turned to look at Yelma.

“What is it?” She demanded as she looked at him.

“He is... he is broadcasting on an open channel Yelma.” Nyser exclaimed. “It is being broadcast all over the system!”

Yelma’s own eyes went wide and she looked back to Martin in the transmission. She moved closer to the screen now. “I hope that... I hope that we can come to some sort of arrangement that will benefit both of us.”

TYPE TWO
DESIGNATION SPARTAN ONE

“You hope?” Martin gasped aloud as he stared wide eyed at Yelma and Nyser Arhtai in the transmission.

It was almost too much for Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas to reign in his horrific rage as he stared at the two people most responsible for the deaths of so many of the family and blood he never had a chance to know.

Innocents and children.

Yelma Arhtai shuddered in fear when the roar erupted from Martin and she gripped her husband’s arm tightly in the transmission as they watched the *Vada Arwa rie Vada Revik* deploy instantly from Etheric space, wrapping around Martin’s body and head as the massive wings took shape and expanded fully to the sides. Dysea and Bella pulled Cirith back as those wings stretched across almost the entire cargo bay deck. Yelma and Nyser Arhtai could only watch from the surface as that helmeted head finally turned to stare at them in the transmission, the yellow gold eyes almost surreal to look at as they gazed upon them. They could see the multicolored plume that fell from the helmet’s top and the dull silver armor that surrounded Martin’s face and cheeks. His dual fangs were fully extended now, terrifying to behold, and those eyes turned finally to them.

And when those chilling, yellow gold eyes focused on them he spoke, the tenor of his words cutting through them both, ripping whatever confidence they may have had from their hearts and crushing it beneath his power.

“Mahanlo blood has returned!” Martin growled savagely. “We are the direct descendants of both Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo! I carry both of their sacred bloodlines within me, as do my children and my blood! We have Reva Mahanlo among us, grandmother to us all and Matriarch to the Mahanlo Pack! I am the rightful heir to Daniho Ashten and it is I who will carry that title and honor into the future. You are not worthy to lead a parade, let alone our people. We have come for our family that you wrongly hold Yelma Arhtai! We have come for our friends that you wrongly hold! Mahanlo blood has now returned and we are the nightmare that will plague your waking dreams!” Martin turned to face them fully, his wings drawing closer to his body and lifting near his shoulders.

“Come to us Yelma Arhtai, deep down in the dark where the monsters be, in the maw with the jaws and the razor teeth. Come to us where the brimstone burns and the angels weep, for that is where we reside. You may call to your gods if we cross your path, because your hope Yelma Arhtai... your hope is a moment that is now long past.” Martin snarled viciously.

“For you... the shadow of death is the one that we will cast for all those who took part in the *Dremsa rie Saan*. Mahanlo-Leonidas blood follows the Spartan law and code, taught to us by those who came before us! For those of the Arhtai Pack listening to me now, know this, if you have no blood on your hands then you have nothing to fear from us. But if you choose to fight us... to follow the ones that have lied to you for so long... then you will die. Mahanlo blood has returned, and now... now we will have our retribution!”

Martin stepped closer to the monitor in the rear of Spartan One and barred his vicious looking fangs into the transmission, his yellow gold eyes flaring in anger.

“If you will not release my family to me willingly *upae*... I will fucking take them, and the blood of anyone who stands in our way will be on your hands.” Martin snarled savagely. “Stick that in your pipe and fucking smoke it *midaeus*!” Martin slammed his hand down on the console and ended the transmission.

KOLTAR FOUR
ARHTAI PACK COMPOUND
LEPIRI

Nyser whirled around after the transmission ended. "Call out all of the garrisons, planet wide!" He barked. "I want the Research facility reinforced with additional troops within thirty minutes! I want all critical locations reinforced with added AIS forces! Someone get me a COM channel to *RENDITION* Station and someone find out where my son Fomir is!"

The same young wolf who had burst into the room only a few moments ago returned with a data pad in his hand. "General Nyser!" He stammered. "Planetary Air Defenses are offline sir! All civilian COM channels are being flooded with random information, overloading the system. All Military channels are being jammed by the ships in orbit! They must have several dedicated to jamming all our frequencies! The moment we switch, they find us within seconds! The six ships that were inbound to the surface have broken apart sir!"

Nyser stepped closer to him. "Where are they headed?"

"Four have altered course north but have fallen off our planetary sensor grids!" The young wolf spoke excitedly. "Their ships were fast General. Very fast."

"They are going to the Onab facility." Nyser spoke looking at Conron. "Find a way to contact the garrison there... I don't care how. We must warn them. Use the buried land lines if you have to."

Conron nodded his head and bolted from the room. Nyser looked at the young wolf. "And the others?"

"The others sir?"

"The other ships!" Nyser hissed. "Where are they going?"

"One is projected to be over the market sector in just under three minutes. The other is... the other is headed directly here, sir." The young wolf spoke.

"Here?" Nyser gasped.

"Their course puts them over the Constellation Monument in four minutes!" The young wolf said.

Nyser turned his head and glared at Yelma. "He knows where she is Yelma!" He almost yelled. "He knows where she is! How could he know where she is?!"

Yelma stepped close to her husband and mate. "You must stop him Nyser." She spoke. "It is the only way now! His transmission went out over a public channel. Our people will know everything now and if they don't, they will know shortly. The only way to save this is to kill him."

"Fuck!" Nyser Arhtai snarled. He leaned over quickly and nuzzled Yelma before looking at the other men in the room with him. "All of you with me. Call out the standing garrison in the compound and muster them on the north platform! Send half of the men to the Research Facility under the Monument. They are to stop anyone from gaining entrance to the underground tunnel network connecting the Research Facility and the Parliament building. We will take the rest and meet them by the Monument! They must think they can somehow gain entrance from above it! They are wrong and we will show them that they are wrong!"

Yelma watched as the men ran from the room following her husband but then she moved to the large monitor and activated the private COM channel. She waited as it powered up and then the face of the young woman appeared.

"Lady Arhtai!" She gasped.

"Are they there yet Kitali?" Yelma asked.

"They have just started to arrived Lady Arhtai." The young woman answered. "Lord Robal and Lady Nuvia."

"Let me speak to Robal." Yelma spoke. She watched as the young woman motioned frantically to someone and then within seconds the burly face and shoulders of the young man appeared.

"Mother!" Robal Arhtai spoke. "Mother what is going on? Where is father?"

"Listen to me Robal." Yelma said. "You must get everyone to the emergency transports and wait for your father and I to get there. They should already be powering up and standing by for us to arrive."

"Mother what is happening?" Robal spoke. "AIS came to my house last night and said we needed to move to the emergency site."

"Some things are happening Robal." Yelma told him. "Make sure you and your sisters reach the transports once they all arrive."

"I should be with you and father. With Fomir and Banaz."

Yelma shook her head. "You are still too young my son." She told him. "Do as I ask you. Now it is you who are in charge until we are all together again. Do you understand?"

Robal nodded his head. "Yes, mother."

“The minute that Ereri and Taniua arrive, all of you move to the emergency site and wait for us.” Yelma said.

“I understand mother.” Robal said.

“Do not fail your father and I Robal. Look after your sisters.” Yelma told him.

“I will mother.”

Yelma nodded and ended the transmission. She looked out the large window and could see the city of Lepiri as it began to wake up, the sun rising over the horizon.

“Gods help us.” She muttered softly before moving from the room.

SPARTAN ONE

Only two men and one woman in the entire universe had the courage to approach Martin Leonidas when he was like this. He was pacing back and forth in the cargo bay like a pent-up animal, his emotions exposed for all to see. He was angry, saddened, in pain and he needed to release. Only Danny and Andro had ever seen him like this before, for this is a part of himself that Martin rarely showed to anyone. Helen knew what he was capable of because she was his Praetorian Mage, but even she had never seen it like this. The wolf aura he was radiating was one that no one wanted to be on the receiving end of in any way. Lylor had felt something like this only one other time before and that is during the last battles with the Iais'Kai on Cerath.

Danny finally took matters into his own hands and leaped the railing from the upper deck, landing on the lower floor with a heavy thud as heads turned to look at him, Reva, Lylor and Ranol watching this unfold. Martin turned quickly to look at Danny and without an iota of fear Danny reached out and grabbed Martin's head, pulling him close. Reva was among the many who were seeing it, and she gasped when they felt the surge in his aura and then the calm that just as quickly enveloped him. Martin's large hands went to Danny's shoulders and he squeezed them tightly as everyone saw Danny whispering to him in a way that no one would ever hear what he was saying. They all watched Martin's head come up and he stared at Danny intently. Torma rose to his four muscular legs now because he was the only one who had heard Danny's words.

Danny released Martin's head and stepped to the side of the cargo bay. When he reached the interior wall, he slammed his hand down on the ramp controls for the *TYPE TWO* and all of them heard the screaming of the air as it began to race through the interior of the ship.

“**GO!**” Danny screamed at Martin above the roaring of the air. “**GO NOW!** I will see you on the ground! Go!”

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas didn't hesitate and he considered the opening of the ramp for a split second before he sprinted off the end of the ramp without looking back. Torma followed him a millisecond later and they both disappeared from view, as the sun was beginning to break the horizon and bathed the rear of the *TYPE TWO* in sunlight and warmth.

Danny slammed his hand down on the ramp controls once more and then lifted his armored hand to the side of his head where he touched the implant on his jaw.

“How long For'mya?!” He barked out.

“Three minutes Daniel!” For'mya's voice filled the interior of the ship through the COM speakers.

Danny nodded his head and looked around at those who were now staring at him. “Three minutes people!” He barked. “Three minutes and we are in the shit! Let's do this!”

Reva moved up beside Anja as Dysea, Isabella and Cirith came over to her. “What... what did he say to him?” Reva asked them.

It was Helen who answered for all of them and they turned to look at her petite form standing beside Arzoal. “Whatever it was Reva Mahanlo, believe me, we probably don't want to know.”

RENDITION STATION **CCC**

Banaz Arhtai groaned softly and rolled over on the deck where he had fallen. It had taken place quickly, life-support being cut off and everyone in CCC succumbing to the results of that. In a matter of only two minutes, no matter what they had tried, everyone had been rendered unconscious and the CCC had fallen.

Banaz had caught only the briefest of glimpses of the strangely armored men and women rushing into the CCC before a sharp blow to his temple had dropped him completely into utter blackness. It had not lasted long as he woke a brief time later to find his hands secured behind his back and he was face down on the deck. He rolled over and saw Talach beside him, along with Issdra and several others, all of them now regaining consciousness slowly. He jerked his head around and saw several men and women in the strange armored uniforms sitting at four different command stations in the CCC working the controls. Banaz snarled angrily and began getting to his feet even though his hands were secured behind his back.

He groaned when he felt the powerful hand drop onto his shoulder and squeeze hard, pushing him back into a kneeling position.

“No one told you to get up.” The male voice growled at him.

Banaz turned his head quickly and he saw and smelled the large Alpha right behind him. “You have no idea what you have done!” Banaz barked at him. “Do you know who I am?”

“You seem to be of the mind that I care.” Atropos answered him and he saw his sister come up to him while he was looking at Banaz.

“I am Banaz Arhtai and right now I am your only hope for staying alive once we retake this station.” Banaz hissed.

“Retake the station huh?” Atropos said with a smile. “That might be a tad harder than you think since we now have over three hundred troops on your precious station.”

Banaz was unable to keep the surprise out of his eyes at this pronouncement. “You... you lie!” He snarled.

“My brother does not need to lie!” Aricia spoke calmly from in front of him and Banaz’s head jerked around when he heard her. Her sweet lavender and coco scent hit him full in the face, but it was mingled tightly with a mixture of other soft female scents and a single male scent that was dominant in every way. “Your space station is now ours.” Aricia told him as she squatted down in front of him. “And I do so thank you for confirming who you are for us. It saved a lot of work. Thankfully for you, your age kept my daughter from killing you outright.”

Banaz blinked rapidly and his eyes filled with shock and even a little fear when Zarah unwrapped the shadows from around her body right next to Aricia.

“The rest of your Command crew has been taken to a central location, but we will keep the three of you here with us for now.” Aricia spoke as she got back to her feet. Banaz stared at her as she turned to look at what could only be a soldier of some kind as he stepped up to her.

“We have secured all but three decks my Queen.” The Colonel from the 9th CSAFG had taken charge of securing the station. “Five groups chose to fight us. None of them survived. I have three wounded but none seriously. Their energy weapons appear to be solely defensive in nature. At least those they were armed with.”

“Police?” Aricia asked him.

The man nodded his head. “It would appear so Queen Aricia. Not very well trained if they were soldiers, so I have to assume they were some sort of police force.”

“The rest of them?” Aricia asked.

“We have secured them in four separate locations at the bottom of the station in the cargo bays.” The Colonel answered. “If necessary, we can vent them to space.”

Aricia nodded her head. “Let’s hope that isn’t necessary.” She spoke. “Pull your men into the remaining sensitive areas when they finish clearing the last three decks Colonel. The transmission from Martin was broadcast all over the planet and here on the station. Now it is just a matter of wait and see.”

“Permission to send another two teams here to you my Queen.” The Colonel asked her. “Prince Androcles will never forgive me if I let anything happen to his mother.”

Aricia grinned and nodded her head. “Very well. Have them report to my brother when they arrived but I want you established in the secondary command post that we set up at this checkpoint.”

The Colonel nodded his head. “I’ll make it happen.” He said before turning and jogging out of the CCC. Aricia looked at her brother. “Now we wait *fervon*.” She said.

Atropos nodded his head. “We had the easy part in of all this.” He spoke calmly. “Martin and Androcles have the hard parts.”

“They are torn *fervon*. I can sense their emotions even from here.” Aricia said softly.

Atropos nodded his head. “I don’t doubt it, but they will do what they must. They always do.”

“What is going on?” Banaz demanded. “I demand that you tell me who you are and why you are here!”

Aricia turned back to look at him and it was then that she allowed her dual fangs to extend fully even as her eyes shifted to that of her wolf persona. The thick black ring around her azure colored eyes and her dual fangs caused Banaz to gasp.

“I have already told you who I am fool.” Aricia snapped as she leaned close to him. “The blood of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo has returned for their *awran*. And we will not be denied.”

KOLTAR FOUR

TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF LEPIRI

IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND

Ivore Arhtai stood in the center of the compound staring up into the brightening sky as the sun continued to rise. He had woken early this day, earlier than normal, for he felt odd. He had left Revia’s sleeping warmth because he felt as if something was going to happen today but he could not put his finger on it. His eyes were focused on the sky above them, the mug of strong tea in his hand forgotten. He did not even smell Ch'eldo and Ra'tel approach him quickly, Ra'tel holding his father’s arm.

“Ivore we...” Ch'eldo Iaaldo began to speak when they were close enough but he stopped abruptly when he sensed what Ivore was feeling. “Ivore...?”

Ivore shook his head slowly. “Something is... something is wrong.” He said softly. “There are... there are dozens of ships in orbit above us.”

“Ivore!?” Ch'eldo hissed as he gripped his son’s arm. This caused Ivore’s head to whip around until he was looking at him.

“Ch'eldo what...”

“It is beginning my friend.” Ch'eldo spoke clearly. “We must make ready.”

“What? What do you mean?” Ivore stammered.

Ra'tel held out the data scroll to him. “We know that you and Revia met him the other night.” He spoke. “Father could feel him. He spoke with him.”

“Androcles?” Ivore gasped. “You...”

Ch'eldo nodded his head. “Yes, my friend.” He answered. “He could sense me when he was on the roof with you and Revia. I felt him reach for me and...”

Ivore shook his head and placed his hands gently on Ch'eldo’s shoulders. “You do not need to explain it to me Ch'eldo my friend.”

Ch'eldo gripped his arms. “It has begun Ivore. Mahanlo blood has arrived in orbit and they have already begun to act.”

“How do you...?” Ivore shook his head stopping his own words. “It doesn’t matter. What do you know?”

“*RENDITION* Station has already fallen.” Ra'tel told him seeing Ivore’s eyes go wide at this knowledge. “Our contacts within the Lepiri Underground informed us of this only moments ago. Over a hundred ships are in orbit now, one of them is massive, over twenty thousand meters long.”

“Ch'eldo... can you feel Androcles?” Ivore asked.

Ch'eldo shook his head quickly. “No... but I sense... I sense something growing closer Ivore. Something powerful and so very pure, and it is coming here. It can only be the *Tarivuos* Ivore. Only they could echo within the Etheric realm like this. I sense something else as well, something even more powerful yet distinct, but it is much further away.”

Ivore looked around quickly and his wolf eyes detected something off in the distance by the garrison building. “Something is happening at the garrison.” He said quickly. “They must be realizing what is taking place.”

“Ivore we need to...” Ch'eldo began but Ivore nodded his head.

“I know.” Ivore said. “Return to your villas and ensure everyone is awake and moving.” He spoke. “I will do the same with Revia and our family. We will meet in the center courtyard. Keep everyone together and make certain they do not bring anything they cannot carry easily. Hurry Ra'tel... Ch'eldo... if it has already started, then this thing is going to happen very fast. Androcles promised he would come for all of us, and a Mahanlo never goes back on his word.”

Ch'eldo nodded his head in agreement. “Protect your beautiful Revia, Ivore my friend.” He spoke firmly. “If anything were to happen to her at the hands of these fools, nothing will be able to stand before the Heralds and live out this day. And if the *Tarivuos* are here...”

Ivore nodded his head. “Then the *Mard Revik* is here. And Revia’s father.” He squeezed Ra'tel’s arm. “Take care of your father Ra'tel... and move quickly. Go!”

Ivore Arhtai turned and began the sprint back to his and Revia’s home. No, not their home, their cage, but after this day, a home they would begin to make. A home for the future back with their family.

It would have been a sight to see if anyone had been around to see it besides the beasts that inhabited the wilderness below. Of course, there really wasn’t anything to actually see.

The *PREMONITION* had dropped to barely a hundred feet off the ground, the three *KADEN transports* keeping pace with her in a diamond formation and all of them under full Shroud. They were blazing across the surface of Koltar Four, using nape of the earth terrain following sensors, their engines blasting the tops of trees as they passed by at three hundred KPH. The three *KADEN* transports being used were specially designed to operate for the military and be used on different covert missions by the *Durcunusaan* and other Special Operations Units within the Union military. For this mission, they had all been stripped of nearly everything on the interior in order to carry as many men and women as possible. Normya was supposed to fly the lead *KADEN*, but Androcles had switched her and Tir'ut to the second *TYPE TWO* in order to retrieve Nystai Arhtai and those with her. The normal flight crew was now back in charge and doing an outstanding imitation of Normya Leonidas.

Sadi was monitoring the instruments that surrounded her body in the pilot’s seat while Ne'Veha’s hands caressed the controls of the *PREMONITION*. Ne'Veha was the better close quarters pilot and Sadi knew this so, Ne'Veha did all of the close quarters flying while Sadi handled the rest of the equipment as she did now.

“Coming up on twenty-three kilometers, prepare to slow *SirsanGai*.” Sadi spoke quickly. “And... hold!”

“Onab Flight... hold!” Ne'Veha barked into her headset mic as she caressed her controls and brought the *PREMONITION* to a complete stop in two point three seconds.

“Onab Flight is holding.” The pilot of the lead *KADEN* announced as all three *KADEN* transports stopped on a dime and came into formation with the *PREMONITION*.

“Smooth!” Meka spoke from her chair surrounded by her three consoles. She was monitoring all of their ships on her sensors.

Sadi turned her head slightly to the monitor on her left side and saw the image from the cargo area of the ship. “Andro... we are in position.” She spoke.

Sadi saw Androcles’ head turn towards her voice and he nodded. “Thank you *KertaGai*. Ramp coming open.” She saw his hand extend out and touch the side of the bulkhead.

“*Cui fas vada carians duan Saradasaar*.” Sadi spoke the words. (Go with the gods our beacon of light)

“*Pen sey hote rie forn caburyng lae*.” Andro answered. (I have all of you guiding me.)

“*Nirr ea urt gur forn!*” Eliani’s voice echoed now. (Get a room will you)

This brought laughter from all of them and the tension that was building was lessened just enough.

“Just as we discussed *nathos*, the six of us will go in first! The rest of you one minute behind us in order for us to assess. Lisisa, Jeth, Carisia and Anthar on the command center at the top of the wall left side. Denali, Aradace, Lu'ria and Majeir on the missile pod launch control room opposite the command center. Right side.

Eliani, Tharua, Sehri and Marux straight up the gut and over the wall to mark for *KertaGai*.” Androcles spoke. “Kalis... once I open the wall *chrora*, you, Daio and Ridor bring them! Bring them all!”

“We will not hesitate Andro.” Kalsi answered.

“Then we go!” Andro hissed.

Kesas and the others watched as Androcles, Dorian and Laren extended their own wings from the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* and just dropped off the rear of the ramp without even a pause. Seconds later they could be seen rising above the tree tops using their wings to climb into the air. Elynth, Ryner and Ladur followed a split second after and then they were gone as well. Almost instantly Kesas saw them rise above the trees and become specs in the morning sky as they joined with their riders and were gone.

“Gods!” Kesas muttered to no one in particular as he saw Lisisa leap up onto Jeth’s back followed by Carisia onto Anthar and everyone else until there were six more mounted riders on the backs of dragons. Kesas Pengot had not spent much time around Dadrien back then, or his species, the *sinuovas* eliciting fear within even the stoutest Lycavorian warrior. This would wane in the years before they left Cerath but in the beginning, it was very prevalent. Now... now no such fear existed and once more his people and the *sinuovas* would fight side by side. Perhaps history was repeating itself once more, but whatever the reason, Kesas Pengot knew they would succeed this day. “Such fearlessness. Such commitment.”

Kesas looked out the rear of the *PREMONITION* and just before Lisisa and Denali led the rest of them out he whisper the words he had heard in that song not so long ago on this very ship.

*I'm a soldier of freedom in the army of man
We are the chosen, we're the partisan
The cause it is noble and the cause it is just
We are ready to pay with our lives if we must*

For the second time in his lifetime of over four million years, Kesas Pengot was joining Mahanlo blood as they moved into battle. No hesitation, no doubt. To rescue and protect. If ever there was a bloodline that deserved to rule, it was Mahanlo blood. And that is why so many of their people had sworn allegiance to them all those millions of years ago, and Kesas knew why they would once more. There was no back down in Mahanlo blood, no quit. They would not allow their people to fail for any reason and that is why they had made it this far.

Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas and his sons, his *nathos*, they would make it so once more.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

KOLTAR FOUR CAPITAL OF LEPIRI CONSTELLATION MONUMENT

It was built as a symbol of the space that they had travelled from Cerath to arrive here. A massive circular monument that showed many of the Star Constellations that they had passed through in their exodus. It was huge really, fully a hundred and ten feet tall and an easy four and a half meters in diameter. The sun was just breaking the horizon now as Martin stood in front of the monument, staring up at it with his yellow gold eyes, his dual fangs fully extended and very prominent. His wings were drawn close to his body, but still spread out a full meter on either side of his body even in their relaxed state. The *Arwa rie Vada Revik* was also very prominent in the rising sun, the bright glare beginning to reflect off the dull silver armor. Martin wore his Spartan helmet, the multicolored plume falling well down his back and standing for the hair color of each of his beloved Queens. Martin didn’t know how, but the *Onkmeti Naami* armor for his head had taken the shape of his Spartan Helm and Martin had simply moved the plume to his new headgear. The Spartan Helm he now wore was like the ancient Spartan Helm worn by his father so long ago. It protected his cheeks bridge of his nose, and left a single long opening for his lips and mouth and a smaller one for his eyes, while shielding everything else.

When he needed to, Martin could call forth more parts of the armor from Etheric space and effectively seal it completely. It was no different than the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos*, though Martin didn't like to close himself up entirely in the armor.

Torma rested on the grassy ground only four meters away, his huge bulk not hard to spot from anywhere really, as he too gazed at the monument and contemplated the significance of it. All around the monument Martin could see dozens of well kept vendor stalls which were only just starting to come alive. This must have been an area of gathering for the Lycavorians here, to shop and visit with friends or even sit outside and view the beauty of the area all around them as the day passed. He could detect at least three outdoor cafés that were beginning to stir, and the number of people beginning to move around the area was increasing as the sun rose higher. It was quite stunning, and even though Martin could detect that at least four people had seen them by now, no one had begun to move to investigate Torma's massive bulk sitting right in the open, or Martin standing there with his *Onkmeti Naami* wings extended.

Martin had smelled him easily enough long ago as he approached him and knew he was no threat to him or Torma so he simply turned his head slowly and looked down at the young boy who was staring up at him with some awe in his fearless blue eyes as he finally came up to him.

"*Alda suno.*" Martin said in a gentle voice. (Good morning)

"*Wen reull isight? Coi vin isight?*" The young boy asked excitedly pointing to Martin's wings and then to where Torma sat now looking at him. (Are those real? He is real?)

Martin scented the boy at no more than perhaps eight years old, still young enough to believe in magical things and still very much impressionable. When Martin spoke, it caused his dual fangs to be much more visible and ferocious looking, something that didn't faze this little man it seemed.

"*Atle coi terit sha haro?*" Martin spoke as he turned partially to look at the young boy. (What is your name boy?)

"Lykin!" The boy answered proudly. "I'm eight!"

Martin's lip turned up slowly into a smile at this and he glanced at Torma quickly behind him. "Fearless my brother." He spoke.

"Indeed." Torma answered aloud causing the little boy's eyes to grow even wider.

"It... it speaks!" Lykin gasped aloud.

Martin knelt slowly in front of the boy, his wings shifting ever so slightly as he did. "His name is Torma and he is just as smart as you and me Lykin." Martin said. "Never assume that because someone is different than you, that they are not as smart as you."

Lykin looked properly chastised and he lowered his head slightly. "That is what my *medwan* and *medwaw* say all the time."

Martin nodded his head. "Your mother and father are wise." He said. Martin brought his right wing closer to Lykin. "Go ahead and touch it." He said.

Lykin reached out with an expression of wonder and ran his fingers slowly down the front edge of the wing. "It... it is metal!" He gasped in disbelief. "But it is so soft."

Martin nodded his head. "Yes, it is. Made for me with a very special metal. Where are your parents Lykin?" Martin asked him.

Lykin motioned behind him in the distance where a small building stood, one of the cafés no doubt Martin decided by the size of the building and the tables and chairs surrounding the outside. "They are opening the shop." Lykin offered up the information. "I come here every morning to the monument and look at the stars on it."

"Why?" Martin asked.

"My *medwan* says that one day the prophecy will come true." Lykin said.

"What prophecy is that?" Martin pressed him.

"About the *Mard Revik* silly." He answered. "My *alvva* says that the *Mard Revik* will come from far away stars one day to save us all. That he will have justice for those taken from him and he will free all of us. That he will have dual fangs and yellow gold eyes and he will command a great army and..." Lykin looked at Martin now as if seeing him for the very first time. His blue eyes grew wider as he realized that Martin had dual wolf fangs and yellow gold eyes. "You!" He yelled. "You are him!"

Martin smiled under his helmet and brought his hand up to the young boy's shoulder and he squeezed softly. "That would be me, yes." Martin told him. "My name is Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas."

Lykin looked up when he heard the roar of ship engines and his eyes grew even wider as he saw the huge ship beginning to descend right over the top of his head. There was no hiding it now and Martin knew things were going to kick off very quickly.

"Lykin." Martin said lifting his hand and bringing the boy's face back to his. He lifted the small obsidian jewel and Lykin's eyes grew stunned at the shiny object and how it reflected the light. It was something that Pablo had made for Martin after they had discovered the Bloodline Crest of his family in Chiron's database. Pablo Gutierrez was one of those that Martin had turned all those years ago and now he would always be part of Martin's family no matter what took place in the future. Pablo was also Martin's artist, and not only was he a Master Tattoo Artist, he was a superb craftsman. He had used a large obsidian jewel to carve the Bloodline Crest into several dozen smaller coin like pieces within hours of discovering the symbol. Lykin lifted his hand to take it but Martin pulled it back. "I need you to do something for me Lykin." He said. "Can you do that?"

Lykin nodded his head. "Yes! My *medwaw* says I'm a big boy!"

"I'm sure." Martin said. "I need you to take this to your father. Show it to him and tell him that he needs to get everyone away from here."

Lykin looked at him. "Why?"

Martin touched the ground beneath him. "Someone put *aur tenna* under this monument. It was very mean. I am going to get her back."

"They buried her?" Lykin gasped.

"She is alive. She is in a building under this monument." Martin said. "I need to free her and return her to her family. To her blood. You understand that, right?"

Lykin nodded his head quickly. "*Aur alvva* says blood always come first. Unless it is bad, and then we do not acknowledge them. Your *tenna*, is she good?"

Martin smiled and nodded his head. "Yes, she is." He answered. "I have never met her before, because I am too young, but I have her mother and her mate and husband and they would like her back. As King, as King I must do this Lykin."

Lykin nodded quickly as he looked once more at the ship that was lowering over them. "Are they going to land on top of us?" He asked his voice holding fear for the first time.

Martin shook his head and gripped his arms gently. "They are with me Lykin." He said. "And they won't land on top of us." Martin asked him, holding out the obsidian coin.

Lykin looked at it once more and then he reached out to take it. He began to turn it over in his small hands. "The Prophecy says that the *Mard Revik* will have a mark. An obsidian jewel with the head of his family on it." Lykin took the jewel and turned it fully over in his hands and his eyes nearly exploded out of his head as he saw the likeness of the massive wolf carved into the coin medallion.

Martin covered his small hands with his armored fists. "Take this coin Lykin." Martin said. "Take it to your father. Tell him he needs to get everyone away from here. Very far away. There is going to be fighting here and I do not want you here to see it."

"My mother says fighting is bad." Lykin said.

Martin nodded his head. "Your mother is right, but sometimes, sometimes we are forced to fight for what we believe in. I must do that now. I need you to go Lykin. I need you to tell your father and get everyone away from here."

Lykin nodded his head energetically. "I can do that."

"Good boy! When this is over Lykin, you have your father bring you and your family to the station in orbit. You know it?"

"We use it all the time to go visit our *nathos*." Lykin spoke.

"Good... you show this to any one of my people, you will know them if you see them, and they will make sure you and your family are safe. I promise." Martin said. "Now go! Go!"

Lykin turned quickly and began to sprint across the immaculately kept grass and flower beds as fast as his eight-year-old legs would carry him. Martin rose back to his full height and looked up once more as Endith brought the *TYPE TWO* closer to the surface. Martin lowered his head and looked at Torma.

"We are going to have all the attention very soon my brother." Martin said.

Torma's wings lifted and shuddered slightly, a dragon shrugging his shoulders. "When has this ever stopped us before?" He asked.

Martin smiled under his helmet. "True enough." He said. "True enough."

Martin turned toward the monument and shook his head. "A pity." He said softly. "It is a beautiful piece of work."

"And we can rebuild it." Torma spoke.

Martin nodded his head. "Yes, we can."

Martin lifted his hands and directed them at the monument. The low rumbling began and the cracking of concrete and granite could be heard, the tearing of metal anchors and bolts, loud enough to begin to turn heads in their direction. Eyes began to go wide in disbelief and men and women both were beginning to cry out at what was happening and then Martin was lifting the massive Constellation Monument within the grasp of his Etheric power as it tore free of its roots in the ground and rose a full four meters into the air. Martin turned his body as he held the four-hundred-ton monument above the ground and then he moved under it as he directed it to the side of the grassy area. By now dozens of men and women all around the massive monument were witnessing what was taking place. With an almost casual flip of his powerful arms, the Constellation Monument went careening end over end, across the perfect grass, until it struck the wide, manmade lake and rolled into the water slowly, causing a huge wave to spread outward and ripple to the other sides of the shallow water.

Martin looked up at the belly of the *TYPE TWO* now. "Right here, Endy!" Martin spoke loudly. "I have marked the points with dye! Cut me a way through!"

"We got it boss!" Endith's voice echoed in his implant as she brought the ship within a hundred feet of where Martin stood.

Martin nodded his head and looked at Torma. "Brother, why don't we go and raise some hell so the others can work without interruption."

Torma chuckled and rose to his four, powerful legs. "Now that is the best news I have heard all day." He said as Martin leaped the several meters towards him and settled into the saddle.

Lykin ran as fast as his legs would carry him and when he reached the outside of the café, his father was staring at the ship lowering slowly to the ground and the Star Constellation monument now half submerged in the manmade lake a short distance away.

"*Alvva! Alvva!*" Lykin shouted as he skidded to a halt beside his father.

Hatim turned his head quickly and gathered his youngest son into his arms protectively. "Lykin... where have you been?!" He demanded. "I have told you about wandering off *keto!*"

"Papa look!" Lykin spoke clearly as he held out the obsidian coin to his father.

Hatim looked at the obsidian coin in his hand and took it from his son, turning it over in his hand. His eyes grew wide when he saw the carved image of the wolf. "Lykin... who... who gave this to you son?"

"The *Mard Revik alvva.*" Lykin answered.

The female Lycavorian exited the interior of the café now carrying a large tray in her hands. "Lykin I have told you about making up such things!" Adcha spoke sternly to her child as she came out and for the first time began to take note of what was happening all around.

"I am not making it up mother!" Lykin hissed. "The *Mard Revik* gave it to me! He told me to tell papa that he needed to get everyone away from here. That there would be fighting soon and that he needed to get his *tenna* back."

Adcha took notice of the large strange ship that was hovering over where the Star Constellation Monument should have been and it was getting closer to the ground. "Hatim... Hatim, the monument is... it is in the lake!" She gasped aloud.

"Look! Look!" Lykin shouted as his finger pointed to the figure of the man on the back of the huge *sinuova* as it was pulling away from the area rapidly. Torma's wingspan was enormous and made it very easy to see him in the morning sky. "That is him!"

Hatim's eyes were huge as he watched this, Adcha coming up beside her husband and mate quickly. "*Carians!*" Adcha gasped.

“Lykin?” Hatim looked at his son in his arms. “Did this... did this man tell you a name?” Hatim asked his son.

“He had yellow and gold eyes Papa! And dual fangs! They were very scary looking but he was very nice to me.” Lykin stated.

“Did he tell you a name *keto*?” Hatim asked.

“He said his name was... it was Mahanlo-Leonidas.” Lykin answered. “He... he gave me this Papa! He said to tell you to get everyone out of the area and that we should go to the station and show this to one of his men. And then we would be safe forever!”

Adcha gripped her husband’s arm tightly. “Mahanlo... Hatim. Mahanlo!”

Hatim nodded his head. “Adcha... take Lykin! Go home and gather the rest of our family. I will meet you at the Transport Hub! Go now!”

“Hatim what are you... what are you going to do?” Adcha gasped as she collected Lykin into her arms from his.

“Exactly what our King told me to do!” Hatim replied. “Now go! I will meet you there!”

Adcha watched as Hatim broke into a run towards the nearest building like their own. Lykin turned to look at his mother. “What is happening momma?” He asked.

Adcha looked at her son and smiled. “The... the future has arrived my son.” She told him. “The future has arrived. Come... we must get your brothers and sisters and your *staania* and *staanio*.”

SPARTAN ONE

“...Tracing it perfectly!” Tina called out. “Deploying the lasers!”

Endith turned and looked at For'mya across from her. “For'mya did you...”

For'mya met her eyes and nodded her head. “Yes.”

“That monument has got to be... and he just tossed it aside!” Endith gasped.

“His skills have grown.” For'mya told her with a grin.

“Grown my ass!” Endith spat as she looked back to her instruments. “Man, I am so glad he is on our side!”

For'mya laughed softly. “Yes... so are we.”

“Got it!” Tina barked. “Lasers are locked in! Seventy-three percent power to cut through the Shale and Diorite!” Tina’s hands were flying over the three consoles that encircled her body on all sides. “The Dacite and Mudstone won’t be able to hold the weight once we cut and it will collapse onto the tunnel beneath.”

“Your certain?” For'mya asked turning her head.

Tina nodded her head. “Trust me... we are going to open up an opening big enough to stick the nose of our *TYPE TWO* into it!”

“We will avoid that of course!” Endy declared.

For'mya lifted her hand and tapped her jaw implant so that her voice would carry through the entire ship. “Anja! Daniel! We are cutting now! Prepare to deploy! We’ll set down right over the collapsed part when the lasers breach!”

“Now those are three words that I love!” Danny’s voice bellowed. “Spartans! Prepare to deploy!”

The interior of the *TYPE TWO* had been stripped of nearly everything that gave any kind of comfort and since only two dragons had accompanied them on this trip, nearly four hundred *Durcunusaan* had crammed into the rear of the *TYPE TWO*, well over the normal one hundred and thirty that the ship could comfortably carry. Aurith would act as close rear guard for the *TYPE TWO* with Bella and Cirith while it was on the ground in case anyone got too curious. Anja would lead Dysea, Lylor, Ranol, Duewa, Thoti and the others into the underground facility to retrieve Kelia and Ranol’s sons. For'mya and the others heard the near deafening shouts of the *Durcunusaan* when Danny gave them their command and For'mya turned her head as Reva and Bella made their way into the cockpit.

Reva's eyes were wide in wonder. She had seen such loyalty and commitment when she occupied the sphere, many times through the millennia, but to truly see it and smell it and feel it all around her now, it was almost overwhelming.

Bella gripped Reva's arms as she held to her tightly. "Such... such passion Bella!" Reva gasped aloud looking at her. "I... I saw it while in the sphere but never have I... never have I felt it like it is now!"

Isabella smiled and held her tightly. "They are Spartans! They refuse to fail!" She spoke. "You will get used to it!"

"Activating lasers!" Tina barked out.

BACKGROUND MUSIC

TWO STEPS FROM HELL: CHILDREN OF THE SUN

KOLTAR FOUR

TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS NORTH OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF LEPIRI

IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND

"...Have not been able to raise *RENDITION* Station sir!" The Colonel spoke as he walked beside Fomir Arhtai. The landing pad was behind them a hundred meters and Fomir Arhtai had brought his best men with him. Two dozen of the best trained and meanest members of his personal detachment of men. All utterly loyal to him and his father and their family. "Even your brother's personal COM signal is being jammed."

Fomir Arhtai nodded as he walked quickly. "I have lost contact with my father and mother as well." He told the man. "Something is jamming their signals from the capital."

"Sir, we heard briefly, before the signal was jammed, that ships had appeared in orbit and that *RENDITION* station had been boarded." The Colonel said. "Is this true?"

Fomir shook his head. "I don't know." He replied. "Like you, I am unable to reach my brother Banaz by COM." He stopped just as they were about to enter the command building. "Where are Ch'eldo and his engineers?" He demanded. "I requested that they be standing by here so that we can return quickly."

"I have a team moving to their location to collect them." The Colonel answered. "For some reason, they have moved everyone to the far end of the compound. Away from the main Gates and the garrison building."

"Why?" Fomir asked. "I thought most of their living areas were closer to the garrison and landing pad to make it easier for them to board the daily transports."

The Colonel nodded his head. "Yes, sir." He answered. "They only moved everyone in the last fifteen minutes. All your Uncle's family as well. They can be very efficient when they want to be."

"He is not my Uncle!" Fomir hissed loudly. "He is a traitor to his own Pack and he fornicates openly with a corrupted bloodline. Why my father ever let him live is beyond me, and to keep that Mahanlo *upaee* alive as well is almost too much!" He shook his head in disgust before turning to a younger Lycavorian. "Take the men and collect Ch'eldo and the others." He told him. "If they resist, followed my father's orders. Start with his wife and then his children until he complies!"

The Lycavorian nodded his head. "Understood sir."

Fomir and the Colonel watched as the two dozen men moved off quickly. Fomir looked at the Colonel. "Take me to your Command Center. We need to find out what is going on!"

"This way." The Colonel spoke as he led him inside the building.

"How many in your garrison?" Fomir asked.

"Six hundred total Lord Arhtai, but only four hundred and fifty are on duty at any one time." The Colonel answered. "I have it broken into four rotations to keep my men from becoming too comfortable. The fourth rotation is the one where my men return to the capital or their homes to see their families and have down time."

"Three weeks active, one off?" Fomir asked.

"Yes, sir!" The Colonel answered as they moved to the open-air elevator and stepped onto the lift.

It was a twenty second ride up the four floors to the Command Center level and the Colonel pressed a card to the console on the wall and the double doors slid open easily enough. Inside activity was great and even the Colonel seemed surprised at what was happening.

“Report!” He bellowed.

“Colonel, we have three unidentified individuals outside the main gate!” A male voice barked out.

“They have... they have...”

“Spit it out man!” The Colonel shouted.

“Colonel they have *Sinuovas* with them!” The man answered.

“Put it up on the main screen!” The Colonel ordered harshly. “Quickly man!”

The single large monitor was suspended from the ceiling and took up a good part of the wall to the front. On either side of the monitor were large windows that overlooked the outside of the compound.

“*Carians!*” The Colonel muttered as his eyes took in the three individuals standing almost nonchalantly, three massive dragon beasts behind them.

“That’s not possible!” Fomir gasped aloud. “My parents... they said the *sinuovas* died out after leaving Cerath.”

“Zoom in!” The Colonel barked.

A young wolf adjusted the controls in front of him and everyone watched as the image tightened on the three figures and the three dragons that rested on the ground behind them. One was obviously female given how the armor conformed to her lithe figure, the other two well built males to be sure.

“*Lon coi ter sulo!*” A singular male voice spoke in the Command Center and it clapped almost like thunder as silent as the Command Center had become. (That is not possible)

“What?!” The Colonel screamed.

“*Henes... henes mien vada arwa rie vada Tarivuos.*” The young Alpha spoke turning to look at his commander. “*Vada Tarivuos rie vada Mard Revik!*” (They wear the armor of the Heralds. The Heralds of the True King.)

“The Armor of the Heralds is a myth!” Fomir barked. “It doesn’t exist!”

“It does exist!” The young Alpha hissed. “I saw pictures of it in the archives when I was growing! The Onab built it, but it was lost before the Exodus from Cerath. No one could ever find it!”

“Enough!” The Colonel barked. Mancha knew that Fomir Arhtai was quick to anger and could be very brutal in his actions. He did not want any of his men to have to deal with that. “Close in on their faces!” Mancha ordered. “Especially that big *nubous ronnus* in the center! Do it now!”

Everyone watched as the camera made several more adjustments and then it was focused on the face of the helmeted young man. None of them had ever seen a helmet such as the one he wore, armored portions extending down both cheeks and a single armor strip over the bridge of his nose. The multicolored plume rose from the top of the helmet and extended down over his shoulders and down his back. There were two armored slits for his eyes, azure colored blue eyes that were amazing to look at and it appeared as if, even though they were changed to wolf eyes, they appeared to be that same blue color all throughout the cornea and surrounding area. As the cameras had tightened, they noticed that this was the case for all of three of them. The blue color of their eyes, while different for each of them, extended throughout their entire cornea and pupil area. It was something that none of them had ever seen before.

It was also then that they saw those azure colored eyes focus directly at the camera and even Mancha took a startled breath as he saw the figure speaking and the thick, dual wolf fangs became especially prominent.

“*Sibfla!*” He gasped aloud.

Heads came up as the internal COM speakers clicked twice and then the deep, male voice echoed in the room.

“*My name is Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas. I am the ninth generation, direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. I am the First of Three Heralds of my father, the True King of our people. Behind these walls you hold Revia Mahanlo-Arhtai, youngest daughter to my Tenna Kelia Mahanlo and my Tenne Lylor Kirek. You hold pure Mahanlo blood against their will, and this is something I will not allow. Behind these walls you hold what remains of the Onab people as slaves and this is also something I will not allow. As Orwara Indalfrid of our people and Fera Tarivu to my father, I will give you one chance to end this now with no bloodshed. I do not*

wish to kill my own people, but the oppression of the Arhtai Pack cannot be allowed to persist. This will be your only warning. If you fight me, you will die. Respond to this transmission at once.

IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND MAIN GATE

“...Extensive minefield to this side *fervon*. You were right.” Dorian spoke as his keen eyes swept across the ground all around them.

“I have the same here as well.” Laren spoke.

We appear to have landed on the main access road Andro. Lucky for us. Elynth spoke now. We are also detecting mines all around us. Ivore gave us excellent information. Who would do such a thing?

Andro lifted his head slightly and stared at the Command Center on top of the wall to his left. “They are watching us.” He said calmly.

“Andro... Armen reports that a transport ship landed just before we moved into location.” Sadi’s voice echoed in his COM implant as it did in everyone else’s. “A single intercepted transmission from the ship to the station indicates that it is carrying Fomir Arhtai. Nystai was able to pull it off the military grid before your mother shut the station down. He is the oldest son of Nyser and Yelma Arhtai and according to Nystai, he is the enforcer and...”

“I understand.” Andro spoke not letting her finish. “I can sense his resonance now *KertaGai*. He was coming here to hurt the Onab and whoever got in his way. Orders of some kind from his father.”

“Then make sure he fails *duan enyla*.” Sadi answered him matter-of-factly. (Our Love)

“Brendi... can you tap into their local COM channel?” Andro asked.

“Andro... please!” Brendi’s voice responded as if she was insulted. Since it was an open COM channel, everyone heard Eliani and Jomann chuckle softly on the channel. A few more seconds passed and then Brendi spoke again. “Done!”

Andro lifted his eyes once more, focusing on the Command Center windows which were tinted so he could not see inside them. It didn’t matter as far as he was concerned.

“My name is Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas.” He began speaking into his helmet COM. “I am the ninth generation, direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. I am the First of Three Heralds of my father, the True King of our people. Behind these walls you hold Revia Mahanlo-Arhtai, youngest daughter to my *Tenna* Kelia Mahanlo and my *Tenne* Lylor Kirek. You hold pure Mahanlo blood against their will, and this is something I will not allow. Behind these walls you hold what remains of the Onab people as slaves and this is also something I will not allow. As *Orwara Indalfrid* of our people and *Fera Tarivu* to my father, I will give you one chance to end this now, with no bloodshed. I do not wish to kill my own people, but the vile and sick oppression of the Arhtai Pack will not be allowed to persist any longer. This will be your only warning. If you fight me, you will die. Respond to this transmission at once.”

Andro tilted his head slightly and looked at Dorian beside him. “Nice speech, *fervon*.” Dorian said. “You know it won’t matter.”

“I know...” Androcles said in reply. “I had to try though.”

“**ABOVE US!**” Laren’s voice screamed out even as she commanded the Herald armor to fully deploy, the cowl wrapping around her head.

Andro looked up just as one of the wall mounted missile launchers twisted around and swung in their direction. His azure eyes watched as two missiles left the launcher and he could almost imagine where they were both pointed. In that split second Andro pulsed his father within the Etheric realm and instantly felt his response.

Hold nothing back keto! Nothing!

Andro dropped to one knee as his *Onkmeti Naomi* armor finished deploying and his wings engulfed his body. He heard Sadi and other voices screaming over the COM before the missiles struck and then there was no more sound.

IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND COMMAND CENTER

“My name is Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas.” The voice echoed within the Command Center. “I am the ninth generation, direct descendant of Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo. I am the First of Three Heralds of my father, the True King of our people. Behind these walls you hold Revia Mahanlo-Arhtai, youngest daughter to my Tenna Kelia Mahanlo and my Tenne Lylor Kirek. You hold pure Mahanlo blood against their will, and this is something I will not allow. Behind these walls you hold what remains of the Onab people as slaves and this is also something I will not allow. As Orwara Indalfrid of our people and Fera Tarivu to my father, I will give you one chance to end this now, with no bloodshed. I do not wish to kill my own people, but the vile and sick oppression of the Arhtai Pack will not be allowed to persist any longer. This will be your only warning. If you fight me, you will die. Respond to this transmission at once.”

“Mahanlo Blood!” Mancha hissed. “That is not... it isn’t possible. They all died during the *Dremsa rie Saan!*”

“Prepare to fire missiles!” Fomir barked out shocking everyone out of their confusion. “Two missiles! Anti-personnel! Directly on top of them!”

“They are within danger range of the main gate sir!” A voice yelled out.

“Two missiles damn it!” Fomir screamed once more. “Fire them now!”

Mancha stepped closer to Fomir. “Is it true?” He snarled. “Could he... could he be Mahanlo blood!?”

Fomir turned his head and looked at him. “It doesn’t matter!” Fomir barked right back. “In three seconds, he will be dead!”

“Missiles away!” A voice barked out.

“NO!” Mancha screamed as he turned.

Androcles our love! Carisia screamed out within the Etheric realm from Anthar’s back even as Sadi, Ne’Veha, Lu’ria, Sehri and Caliria’s voices joined her own in desperation. She was circling the area with Lisisa and Jeth and the others a half mile back and they had seen it all take place.

The two explosions were not very large, the missiles being of the anti-personnel kind and filled with much smaller bomblets as opposed to large explosive charges. They did, however, cover a sizeable part of the area on both sides of the access road and the entire part was now blanketed with thick, white and brown smoke as the first hundred yards all around Androcles, Dorian and Laren blew apart. The Onab must have known, or had an idea from the beginning of what their King and his Heralds would face in the future and they had built the *Onkmeti Naami* armor accordingly.

Androcles could hear nothing over the devastating course of explosions from the two missiles and then the several hundred mines that exploded all around them. His wings were wrapped tightly around his body and they were deflecting everything, but the noise was almost too much to bear as it echoed like a thunderstorm inside of a metal building. He could easily feel Elynth and Dorian and Laren all around him, Ryner and Ladur as well as they remained in place. They were facing exactly what he was, but except for Elynth, their hearts were racing almost out of control in both fear and excitement. He and Elynth had faced such a thing in the past and they easily reached for each of them, projecting calm and resolve and Andro felt their hearts begin to slow and become steady. His own ears may have been ringing something fierce, but his Etheric abilities were untouched and he was able to keep his wits about himself. The anti-personnel missiles and mines were powerful yes, but they were not exceptionally large explosions and therefore the concussive force of the multiple of shockwaves was manageable and absorbed by his wings and his armor.

And then Androcles became angry.

PREMONITION

His wives and mates were the first to feel it within him. Sadi, Carisia, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria, Caliria and Sehri were the center of his universe, just as his mothers were to his father. It was like this for all his siblings, their wives and mates were their center, and therefore would feel any intense emotion before others.

It hit all of them at the exact same instant and it made them gasp briefly in terror at what they felt their beloved Androcles was about to unleash. It was Sadi Mahanlo-Leonidas who took command however, once more displaying the skills that had so many of their people comparing her to Gorgo during her days as Queen of Sparta. Carisia's scream was a natural reaction, but all of them recovered instantly when they felt their beloved Androcles pulsing them. Sadi only had to glance at Ne'Veha once and she began to bark orders.

"Carisia! Lisisa! Change of plans! Leave the Command Center and support Deni and Lu'ria as they hit the missile batteries! Once they are destroyed, all of you hit the garrison on ground level!" Sadi barked. "Eli... you and Sehri roll in right now!"

"Sadi the Command center is still active!" Eliani declared over the COM. "They can target us!"

"The Command Center will not exist in ten seconds Eli!" Sadi answered her. "Androcles will take care of that! Trust in your brother Eliani."

Eliani Leonidas didn't hesitate for even a millisecond. "*Innyne!*" She barked out. "We're rolling in now!"

"*Tenna* Revia and *Tenne* Ivore are even now ushering everyone to the main courtyard within the compound! I can feel their urgency!" Sadi exclaimed to everyone. "Eli... you and Sehri must visually target our contact points for the shield stanchions or it will not work!"

"We're on it!" Eliani answered.

Sadi looked at Ne'Veha. "Onab Flight this is Lead! We are moving in thirty seconds! Jomann, Kalis, Daio, prepare to engage as soon as we touch down outside the main gate!"

"Sadi... the minefield!" Jomann barked from the rear.

"There will be no minefield in ten seconds Jomann!" Sadi hissed with some vehemence in her voice. Jomann took it for what it was, for he felt it burning within him as well.

Anger. Pure, unrefined anger.

"Dorian and Laren will see to that!"

Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas was truly his father's son.

Despite his reputation to the contrary, some of which was deservedly earned, Androcles had far more compassion and understanding within himself than most people knew. Like his father, he could tolerate quite a bit before his emotions took over, and he let loose. He had given them the warning. He had told them what would happen if they did not listen to him. What did they expect him to do, leave his blood within the walls of this prison and do nothing? Now, they had done the one thing that hardened Andro to what he must do.

And Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas would not hesitate.

As the last of the explosions echoed into nothing, Andro rose to his feet slowly, his wings dropping only slightly, exposing his azure eyes. He could not see through the clouds of dust and smoke, but the breeze from the west was pushing the clouds away quickly. He waited patiently, sensing Dorian and Laren on either side of him rising to their feet now as well, but keeping their wings tightly around their bodies. Elynth, Ryner and Ladur had also risen to their feet, their armor covered in dust and dirt but they were unharmed. As the clouds of dust and dirt all around them began to disperse quickly, Androcles heard the rustle of wings at altitude and lifted his head to where the Command Center was. He could see Denali and Lu'ria about to descend onto the missile batteries, Lisisa and Carisia ready to aid them. He could feel those in the Command Center watching him from behind their shielded glass. Andro could sense this Fomir person even more clearly now, filled with anger that was not his; hatred that did not belong to him, yet those false emotions would be his ruin.

"*Nubou lae!*" Dorian snarled angrily as he unfurled his wings, trembling in rage. "Now... now I am really pissed!"

"As am I." Androcles added.

"I concur!" Laren growled, equally as angry and her hand clenching her *Nehtes*. Her wings were fully extended and twitching in the manner of a dragon that was extremely agitated and upset.

Androcles had never heard such emotion from his Soul Sister before and it only seemed to reinforce what needed to be done.

“Dori, Laren, make this pitiful minefield go away!” Andro told them turning his head to look at each of them. “And then unlock the cage that holds our *nathos* so that we may take them from this place!”

“*Aden!*” Dorian and Laren answered as one. (Done)

Androcles turned back to lift his head at the Command Center. “Sister?”

“Let us end this Androcles!” Elynth snarled. “Now!”

Andro didn’t look away from the Command Center as he unfurled his wings and spread them wide to either side of his body. Andro bent his knees slightly and then exploded off the ground as if shot from a gun, Elynth directly behind him. As his huge wings carried him away, almost faster than the eye could follow, Dorian and Laren spun their *Nehtes* in the air above their heads with powerful emotion and exacting control. In a single motion, they brought those *Nehtes* down into the ground and sent an Etheric explosion in either direction away from the access road.

It easily served the purpose that they had intended.

The minefield extended for a full kilometer away from the access road, up to the main gate on either side, and it was fully half a kilometer deep. It had taken nearly two months to lay the minefield with the precision it had been laid in. Interconnecting mines and levels that made it impossible to even try to get through the field. Pressure mines; proximity mines, every kind of mine known to exist was used. One mine going off would not set off the others around it except for instance like the one that just occurred with the missiles. It was a masterful accomplishment really.

Dorian and Laren made it look like child’s play as they took it down.

And then, the doors to hell opened wide.

IAALDO ENGINEER COMPOUND COMMAND CENTER

“What have you done!” Mancha screamed as he moved forward and shoved Fomir away from the control console.

“I acted decisively!” Fomir snarled back.

“You attacked Mahanlo blood!” Mancha barked right back. “Royal blood! We were told everyone with Mahanlo blood died on the *Dremsa rie Saan!* Is what he said true?” Mancha growled as his men were now all looking at him. “Do we hold Kelia Mahanlo prisoner? Is she alive?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care!” Fomir spat. “Mahanlo blood is traitor blood! My mother and father lead our people now!”

“Your mother and father cannot just dismiss royal blood!” Mancha barked. “That is what our people chose!”

“You were alive during the *Dremsa rie Saan!*” Fomir barked. “Why do you care about them? They are traitors!”

“Colonel Mancha!” The voice shouted over the top of all of them and Mancha turned to look at his junior officer with wide, angry eyes.

“What?” He screamed.

The young man looked at his instruments and then at the wide glass like window. “The missiles... they didn’t kill them.” He spoke.

“Impossible!” Fomir snarled as he pushed forward and shoved the man aside and looked out of the window down at the access road. His eyes grew wide when he saw the armored forms rising to their feet and their wings unfurling. And then Fomir saw six more dragons set against the rising sun, all of them with riders on their backs and all of them heading right for the very compound they were in. “They... they still live!” Fomir gasped in disbelief.

“You don’t just arbitrarily kill Mahanlo blood fool boy!” Mancha growled savagely as he moved forward and shoved him back once more. “Have you never read history!” Mancha’s eyes grew wide when he

saw the armored figure in the center completely unfurl those magical wings and then he exploded into the air right for them. Mancha turned to look at Fomir's disbelieving and terrified face now.

"You have killed us boy!" He snarled loudly. "You have killed us all with your fool actions!"

Fomir was watching with wide eyes as the armored figure hurtled through the huge glass window, shattering the material into tiny pieces and ripping gaping sections of concrete and granite aside as the wings and armored form came directly through where no man had ever been designed to come through. Fomir ducked as large pieces of glass and concrete whistled by his head, nearly removing it from his shoulders, before he lowered his posture enough to protect himself. Fomir Arhtai had time to blink only once before the armored boot smashed, with the disgusting sound of breaking bones, directly into Colonel Mancha's chest. The power of the blow sent his large, six-foot three-inch body careening across the Command Center with such force that his frame smashed through the wall and glass of the other side of the Center and was launched into the clear air within the exposed interior of the Compound. The many bones in his body could be heard shattering as they impacted the granite interior wall and glass, paused for a brief moment as the kinetic force of the Etheric kick caught up with his body and then used his physical body for something it was never designed for. It pulverized granite, glass and concrete and then was gone from sight through the huge hole it had just created.

Fomir turned just in time to see that face under the helmet and the savage snarl of rage combined with the look of utter contempt in those azure eyes. He could see the ferocious dual fangs that were now exposed for all to see, fully barred as they were in the vicious and cruel snarl. Time seemed to stand still for Fomir Arhtai as the rest of the Command Center crew began to draw out their hand weapons and fire at the armored figure. For some odd reason that his mind would not be able to contemplate in the remaining seconds of his life, Fomir Arhtai could not figure out why this was happening. His eyes grew wide when the figure lifted his hand, and it held an oddly shaped bladed weapon of some kind. Fomir could only watch as he casually flipped it off to the side and behind him and then the screaming began.

Fomir's wide eyes shifted only slightly when the entire corner wall and ceiling of the Command Center by the entrance was ripped from its place by the angry *sinuova* and bright light from the rising sun came rushing in. He heard the savage trumpet of hatred and then he watched in horror as the upper body, head and neck of the armored, obsidian colored *sinuova* smashed its way into the interior. One front leg simply crushed a technician under its weight for he was too slow to get out of the way and its talons stabbed completely through the man's body, and then the head snapped forward and another technician disappeared into that vicious maw of razor like teeth and those jaws bit him completely in half.

Fomir Arhtai looked back at those azure blue eyes and took notice that they were now focused on him. He began to back peddle rapidly, clawing his sidearm out of the holster he wore and leveling it at the wild looking beast in front of him and pulling the trigger. Fomir Arhtai had no idea that it would not matter in the least.

Elynth let out another trumpet of rage as the pieces of the body fell away from her mouth and she covered two others with the blood and bits of fleshy remains as she exhaled. She had not really known her own strength until now, as she saw her beloved Bonded Brother Androcles plow right through the glass and concrete and into the interior and she landed on the outside. She had dug her talons into the crevices she saw in the building material and in an act of strength that would have made her father and brother Jeth so very proud of her, Elynth simply tore away the entire corner of the Command Center, opening it to the cool morning air.

Elynth lifted her head then and saw Androcles and her golden eyes shone with love and admiration. He was moving with a speed, power and grace that even she had never seen from him, his body and wings moving in perfect unison. She and Androcles had long ago embraced what they were, and now it was coming out for them both. Sweeping her right talon forward, Elynth caught three technicians and several computer stations and their screams were pleasing to her ears as she swept them aside, smashing even more of the exterior wall to the Command Center outward and sending those men and their equipment falling to the ground far below, where the large computers and huge chunks of concrete and granite went ahead and crushed them to death.

A huge explosion drew her attention and she pulled her head and upper body from the interior of the Command Center only to see the flames and smoke from where the Missile Launchers had been. She could see

her brother Jeth and her sister Aradace making short work of the physical launchers while Majeir and Elynth's own beautiful mate Anthar tore up the computer systems along the top of the wall. Denali, Carisia, Lu'ria and Lisisa were physically destroying every piece of equipment on top of the wall. In a flash of swiftness, she saw Tharua and Marux sail over the top of the wall at high speed and then dip down into the interior of the compound. Elynth didn't hesitate and lowered her head back down and shoved her upper body into the interior of the Command Center.

"Andro, the missile systems are down! Eli and Sehri are inside and marking for the shield!" She screamed out.

"They will be deploying from the garrison below us, sister!" Androcles shouted back as he caught one of his Glaives in his armored hand without looking at her and then turned to face her. Almost on cue, Elynth could hear the alarm beginning to sound below them. "Keep them from the shield stanchions Elynth! Burn them all if you have too! I will join you in a moment!"

Elynth didn't hesitate and pulled her bulk back and then her body was lifting off the top of the wall and diving into the interior of the compound with a trumpet of direction to those who were listening. Elynth did not fear for the well being of her Bonded Brother, she feared for those left alive in the Command Center, for their ends would not be pleasant.

Androcles barely felt it when he exploded directly through the glass and concrete that made up the wall of the Command Center. The *Onkmeti Naami* had been built to protect them from the Iais'Kai and their weapons, not the glass and concrete of a building. Even as his wings spread out completely, slicing through the frame of computer stations and computers, Androcles struck the thickly muscled Lycavorian directly in the center of his chest with the front kick. The devastating kick sent the man careening out of control, crushing his bones and internal organs as he smashed through the opposite wall of the Command Center and then disappeared. Almost as if by magic, and knowing full protection was not needed, the cowl of the *Onkmeti Naami* retracted, leaving just his Spartan helmet showing, which revealed a small part of his features. Andro glanced briefly at the young wolf in front of him before he began to register the impacts of projectiles against his armor. Andro reached down with his right hand, activated his right Glaive and waited for it to fully deploy before throwing it back behind him. He did not register the screams in his mind or the destruction of the exterior wall where Elynth practically ripped it open. He heard her roar of rage, felt her as she reached into the Command Center and swept aside five bodies, but Andro's eyes never wavered. His Glaive was whipping around the interior of the Center slicing deeply through hands and necks as his eyes returned to the young wolf in front of him. His mind flashed quickly through the dossier of Arhtai Pack members that Kesas and Aryera Kirek had provided to him and then Androcles knew who he was facing. He reached out with his hand and caught the Glaive and Elynth screamed to him from across the small distance.

"Andro, the missiles are down! Eli and Sehri are inside and marking for the shield!" She screamed out.

"They will be deploying from the garrison below us, sister!" Androcles shouted back as he turned to face her. Andro could now hear an alarm blaring from far below and knew what was happening. "Keep them from the shield stanchions Elynth! Burn them all if you have too! I will join you in a moment!"

Andro didn't need to watch his Bonded Sister pull back out of the shattered remains of the Command Center and he turned his eyes back to Fomir Arhtai. He briefly saw the hand weapon in his right hand and he was frantically trying to reload. Andro reacted far faster than Fomir Arhtai could have predicted. The Glaive flashed forward and Fomir felt a biting pain in his wrist and then agony as his brain told him that he no longer had a hand. He began to scream as Andro reached out with his left hand and snatched him up by the throat as his now severed hand and weapon hit the floor with a sickly thud. His scream of horrifying pain was cut off as Andro hauled his powerful body off the floor of the Command Center as easily as one would lift a new born child.

Fomir saw those wings extend to the sides of the monster before him as if they had a mind of their own. He was clawing at the hand that held his throat with the only hand he had remaining, the stump of his wrist continuing to expel blood at an explosive rate, hanging useless by his side.

“I first asked politely for the freedom of my *nathos* and the Onab.” Androcles growled savagely as he drew Fomir Arhtai’s body closer to him, staring into his face. “You chose to attack me. Your parents have killed you Fomir Arhtai, I am only the instrument of their stupid actions.” Fomir’s eyes were beginning to bug out of his eyes as Androcles’ hand tightened on his throat. “They knew Mahanlo blood would return. Deep within their hearts they knew we would come for our family one day. That day is now upon you. Had you simply given my *nathos* to me, you would have survived this day. Now, now you will suffer the same fate of every member of your pack that has taken Mahanlo blood. Your father and mother will join you in *jobbhe* very soon Fomir Arhtai. They have succeeded in unleashing the one force in this universe that should have stayed locked away forever. Now... now they will answer to my father for their crimes.”

Androcles stepped to the side and lifted Fomir’s body slightly higher into the air. “*Krius forn voss tis jobbhe el vada Mahanlo ens terit nathos kirs unuris.*” (May you rot in hell for the Mahanlo lives your family has stolen)

Androcles pushed back and Fomir Arhtai’s eyes grew even wider in pain as he felt the sliver of steel penetrate his back. It was part of one of the destroyed computer stations that Colonel Mancha’s body had wrecked and the protrusion of metal now served as his executioner. He could not do anything but whimper because of Androcles’ hand on his throat, but his eyes were wide in terrific agony as the sliver of metal finally burst through his chest and he watched as it came out soaked in his blood. His blood began to flow explosively from the wound and even after Andro had removed his hand from his throat, Fomir could not even scream because the pain was so severe.

Androcles stared at Fomir’s face as he was dying. “As my father’s words spoke to your parents, I speak to you now in your death. Hope is a moment for you that is now long past Fomir Arhtai.” Andro spoke evenly. “Know that you die today for the greed and the power mongering of your mother and father. I hope it was worth it to you.”

With a howl of rage that echoed within the confines of the now shattered Command Center, and with five surviving pairs of eyes watching in utter shock and horror, Androcles drove his armored fist down onto Fomir Arhtai’s upper body, driving the sliver of metal even deeper into his back and severing his spine in three spots as blood exploded from between his lips and his eyes glazed over in death.

Androcles immediately turned and looked at the survivors, all of them without weapons and by no means a danger to him or anyone. He stepped to the gaping opening that Elynth had left in the side wall and his wings extended fully.

“Remain out of the way and you will not be harmed.” Androcles told them. “Fight us and you will die. It is your choice.”

Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas leaped from the opening and disappeared.

Dorian watched with fascination as his Etheric pulse into the hard dirt set off every mine in the ground all around them. He watched with satisfaction as the minefield began to detonate by row, each one deeper than the first and spreading out to encompass the whole field. He turned his head quickly and saw the same thing on Laren’s side, a cloud of exploding dirt and white cloud moving away from her. Their Herald Armor protected them from any pieces of mine that may have found them, several ricochets taking place, until the minefield was too far away from them and still being detonated.

Dorian turned to face the now exposed wall. He could just make out his siblings on top of the wall tearing through the missile batteries and Androcles inside the Command Center. His eyes gazed upon the wall for a long moment and then he looked at Laren.

“Androcles did say to unlock the cage that holds our *nathos*, my Soul Sister” Dorian said with a dazzling smile.

Laren met his eyes and nodded. “Then let us do that my Soul Brother.” She said quite confidently.

Dorian and Laren reached out with their hands together and the fingers of their Etheric power intertwined and grew together within the Etheric realm. Individually they were not as powerful as Androcles, but together they very nearly matched their soul brother in sheer will and power. They put that to effective use now.

The main gate into the compound was one meter shorter than the wall surrounding it, and made up of two massive steel doors each half a meter thick. It really would not have mattered in the least no matter how thick they were. Dorian and Laren simply grabbed one massive door within the grips of their Etheric power, wrapped their power around themselves as Sarlana and Murano had instructed them, and then simply tore the door from its steel moorings. The sounds of tearing metal and steel was deafening but Dorian and Laren did not pause and they sent the massive steel door hurtling into the cloud of dirt and smoke to the side and then they stood there and looked at the huge gaping entrance they had just created. The second door was twisted and leaning slightly to the outside but essentially it was now jammed open.

“It was sloppy!” Laren protested.

“Yeah...” Dorian agreed. “But whatever works, right?” Dorian hissed happily.

Laren turned her head and smiled up at his armored face. “Indeed.” Laren looked up to the top of the wall and saw Lisisa and Carisia looking down on them with huge smiles, several trails of smoke rising behind them. Then they saw Denali and Lu'ria step up to the edge and Denali sent them some thumbs up with his trademark smile.

Dorian smiled, tapped his helmet and activated his COM unit.

“Sadi! We have breached the wall!” Dorian told her.

“How large an opening Dorian?” Sadi shouted back over the COM.

Dorian looked at Laren briefly and then back to where the huge door had once stood. “Ah... pretty big!”

“And the minefield?”

Laren touched her own COM implant now. “The minefield is no more Sadi.”

“Very well!” Sadi spoke once more. “Rotating and setting down! Join Andro inside the compound! Eliani and Sehri are just about to mark the corners!”

“On our way!” Dorian barked and then grabbed Laren’s hand and lifted her into his arms before blurring toward the opening they had just created.

“I have two corners Eli!” Sehri barked into her COM unit from Marux’s back as he kept them level with wide, sweeping motions of his wings.

“I have the other two!” Eliani announced in almost the same position as Sehri from far across the compound. “Sadi... we have the points lit! Fire now! They are beginning to exit the garrison and they don’t look happy!”

“Firing!” Sadi replied instantly.

Ivore was gripping Revia’s hand tightly as they moved, her other arm filled with one of their grandchildren. All their children and grandchildren were moving along behind them, each of them surrounding the nearly two thousand Onab that were moving with them. All their lives they had been raised and taught by their parents to treasure and protect the Onab and while Ch'eldo did not care for this mentality, not one of Revia and Ivore’s children would ever go against their parents. They had come too far together to begin to question their place now. While many of them still did not know what was happening, they didn’t question their parents when told they needed to get themselves and the Onab to the courtyard.

Revia almost slammed into her husband when he skidded to a halt and looked into the distance as the echo of four deep booms drifted across the morning horizon.

“Ivore!?” Revia gasped. “What is it my love!?”

Ivore shook his head. “I... I don’t know! I’ve never heard something like it before. It sounded like... like artillery of some kind, but no artillery that I have ever heard.”

Ch'eldo and Ra'tel came up beside Ivore now.

“Lord Ivore we must move!” Ra'tel hissed. “We are in the open here and they will start bombing us!”

Ivore shook his head. “This is where Androcles told us to gather! Here in the courtyard!”

“In the open?” Ra'tel gasped. “That is insane! We must move!”

“He sent us here for a reason!” Revia snapped now. “We...!!”

All of them heard the heavy thud only a hundred meters away and it turned their heads. They saw the huge, cylindrical black object spinning itself into the ground at the northeast corner of the courtyard. Another heavy thud and an identical black object landed between the many planters at the northwest corner. Two more, in the southwest and southeast corners. The black objects were all spinning as they sank into the ground beneath them, pulverizing the granite walkways and thousand-year-old paths into oblivion.

And then they heard it once more.

Like the hum of a powerful generator activating, and their eyes grew wide in disbelief as from all four of the stanchions, a bluish/white shield rose into existence and began to spread out above them.

“*Son vada carians!*” Ivore muttered in genuine disbelief.

The sound of tearing steel and shattering concrete reached them just in time for them to see one side of the double doors of the main gate ripped away as if by some angry god and the massive door went whistling into the distance and out of sight.

“My god!” Ra'tel gasped aloud.

“A shield of some sort! I can smell the energy!” Ch'eldo shouted as his covered eyes rose and he seemed to watch the bluish/white shield complete its deployment above them. “A protective shield! That is why he wanted us all here in the open!”

“Look!” Ra'tel shouted as he pointed his finger to the top of the wall in the distance. “*Sinuovas!* At least five of them!” He was also the first to see the inert body only a few dozen meters away. It was nearly hidden in the planters that held the beautiful purple and white flowers. “Lord Ivore!” He gasped.

Ivore saw where he was pointing and immediately moved to where the body was, Ra'tel leading his father and Revia over behind him. Ivore knelt beside the body, taking note of the blood all around it and the twisted way that the body was laying on the ground. His eyes turned to look at the top of the wall where the Command center once stood and then back to the man's body.

“It is Mancha.” Ivore spoke as he reached out and turned the body over onto its back.

Revia turned her head away in horror and hid the face of her granddaughter from the broken remains of the powerful man who once commanded this facility. She felt no remorse for him or what he had been part of these long years, but that did not mean she had to view his fate. Ivore heard the sharp intake of air and looked down at the body.

“He's alive!” Ivore gasped as he bent closer to the body.

“Leave him my husband!” Revia spat without shame or remorse.

“How did... how did he get all the way out here?” Ra'tel asked softly. “He would have been in the Command Center.”

Ch'eldo gripped his son's arm tightly. “Androcles did this.” He said softly. “I can... I can almost feel what has happened! I can... I can see it. Fomir... Fomir Arhtai is dead!”

Revia cut her eyes to him. “That monster was here?” She gasped. “Why?”

“He was coming for me.” Ch'eldo spoke.

Ivore leaned his head closer to Mancha, listen for a second and then spoke several words in a whisper and then lifted his head quickly and rose to his feet. Ch'eldo looked at his back. “What did... what did he say Ivore?” He asked.

Ivore looked at him with a hardened face. “He asked... he asked for mercy.”

Ra'tel looked at him now. “What did you tell him?”

Ivore turned to his beautiful Revia and reached for her hand once more, which she took without hesitation. “I told him that today there will be no mercy. Mahanlo blood has returned, and they will not be denied their justice. Or their retribution.”

“Father!” The male voice shouted as the Lycavorian came running up. “Father!”

Ivore looked at his and Revia's oldest son. “Tinad? What...”

“Look!”

All of them turned to where he was pointing and they saw the two armored females as they entered the shield wall through the opening, with two very large *sinuovas* following them almost casually, their heads constantly moving back and forth. The red haired one lifted her hand once they were inside the shield and she drew something away from the bluish/white field and the opening then closed as quickly as it had opened.

Eliani and Sehri made their way slowly across the expanse of the shield cover and the ground it now protected. The Shield Cover had been designed by some very talented human engineers on EDEN Base about ten years ago. Using portable Cold Fusion power cores, a Cover Shield like this could protect a small encampment from even the harshest of environments on any known planet as well as orbital bombardments from light warships. This Cover Shield however, this shield was now powered by Pralor T9 Particle Cores thanks to Mari and it could withstand a full bombardment even by multiple capital ships. Eliani did not want to startle anyone by running across the area to her Aunt, Uncle and cousins so she and Sehri maintain a steady but confident gait towards where they were all gathered. The shield now stretched across an area two hundred meters by two hundred meters, almost the complete courtyard area of the compound. Revia quickly handed their granddaughter to Ivore as the Onab and their families began to part to allow Eliani and Sehri to move through their ranks. All of them were staring with awe at the two dragons, nearly all of them having only heard about *sinuovas* in stories and history books.

Revia Mahanlo-Arhtai did not need to know who they were, she could smell them as clearly as she looked at them now. It was raw and pure Mahanlo blood, so much like she remembered with her mother. It was slightly different because of who they were, but Revia already knew that and now she knew what the rest of her bloodline smelled like. In the brief moments that Androcles was connected to her and Ivore, he had told them all about his siblings and his wives and mates. Revia had tears flowing from her eyes when Eliani and Sehri stopped in front of her and it took Eliani by surprise when Revia was embracing her without question.

“Vada carians alinn lae, pen magar theenar allon jur cedaur chevsh.” (The gods bless me, I never believed this day would come.) Revia stammered unable to hold back the tears that were flowing. She released Eliani with both hands and quickly embraced Sehri who was also teary eyed. Revia couldn't really contain herself and she pulled back in her excitement, holding each of their hands. “Eliani!” She gasped in delight. “Sehri!”

“You... you know us?” Eliani asked in surprise.

Revia smiled and nodded her head. “Oh, yes.” She said with a fast nod. “Your brother, Androcles, he told us all about you. Each of you!”

Ivore stepped forward now, handing off his granddaughter to her uncle Tinad. “You are Eliani? The sister who watches out for him. Where is... where is your brother Eliani?” He questioned.

Eliani could only grin now and she glanced at Sehri who wore a huge smile before she turned and motioned outside the shield wall. “I do believe he is fixing to take out the trash.” She said.

“Sadi! We have breached the wall!” Dorian's voice filled her COM unit in the cockpit.

“How large an opening Dorian?” Sadi almost shouted back over the COM.

“Ah... pretty big!”

“And the minefield?” Sadi questioned.

“The minefield is no more Sadi.” Laren answered this time.

“Very well!” Sadi spoke once more. “Rotating and setting down! Join Andro inside the compound! Eliani and Sehri have marked the corners and the shield has deployed, but their garrison is deploying!”

“On our way!” Dorian barked.

Sadi didn't need to check that, she knew without question how all his siblings felt for their brother and they would allow nothing to stand in their way to get to him. Sadi looked quickly to Ne'Veha in the pilot's seat.

“SirsanGai?” She asked.

“Ready!”

Sadi didn't pause then. “Onab Flight this is lead! Rotate! Rotate!”

Ne'Veha slid her fingers along her consoles and the *PREMONITION's* bulk turned in a very fast and very powerful one-hundred-and-eighty-degree maneuver. Now the ship and the *KADAN* transports were facing away from the main gate, their powerful engines sending up storms of dust and dirt all around them.

“Here's hoping they got all the mines!” Ne'Veha spoke flippantly before she engaged her engines and the *PREMONITION* began to move backwards. If any mines had survived, the heavier armor on the

PREMONITION would protected the ship and not exposed the *KADENs* to damage. The four ships moved backwards for an added two hundred meters and then Ne'Veha disengaged her engines. "In position!"

"Onab Flight is in position!" Sadi barked. "Onab Flight is in position! Setting down and preparing to take passengers!" Sadi looked at her lover and fellow Crown Princess. "*SirsanGai*, as gently as you can, our love."

"Touching down!" Ne'Veha answered without looking at Sadi, but she knew Sadi could see her smile.

"Meka!" Sadi barked.

"Engaging Defensive Systems!" Kameka spoke before Sadi could even get the full order out. "Sending the signal to *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Anything that enters our airspace now, I will track and kill it Sadi!"

"Kalis! Ridor! Daio! Go!" Sadi shouted. "Go!"

Sadi felt like she could almost hear the deafening shout that erupted from the rear of the *PREMONITION* and as she looked down onto her console she saw the monitor of the cargo bay. The mass of bodies was exiting the ship far too quickly to keep track of and as she twisted her head around almost painfully and directed her gaze to the right side of the ship she could see an equal number of Spartans rushing from the cargo hold of the *KADEN* beside them, and then from the *KADEN* directly in front of them.

Lycavorian, Elven and even some vampire *Durcunusaan* thrown into the mix and they were sprinting full out, with the members of the Kirek Pack right beside them, and going into battle without so much as a single doubt. Sadi Mahanlo-Leonidas did not fully understand the significance of this event because so much of their true history had not yet been discovered, but Reva Mahanlo would mark it as such however, as would Kesas Pengot, Lylor and every member of the Kirek Pack who had lived and fought in those days so long ago. It was the first time in nearly four million years that the Mahanlo and Kirek Packs had raced into battle side by side. Without doubt or question, they had forged ahead intent on their tasks.

And once more, they would do so again and keep the history of their Packs alive.

ONAB COMPOUND INTERIOR

Four hundred and fifty Arhtai soldiers stared across the ten-meter gap at the two hundred and sixty men and women who made up the *Durcunusaan* and the Kirek Pack members that had accompanied Androcles and his siblings. Not knowing what they would be facing, Androcles had released most of their ground troops to Deion in case they got into trouble in the bowels of the Capital City looking for Nystai and her people. Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas also knew full well what his siblings could do if it needed to happen and he was not concerned in the least giving his younger brother additional support. Ten fully grown dragons and their riders were an exceptionally formidable force all on their own, but these dragons and their riders were all part of the same family and they were far more dangerous than any others of their kind.

The cover shield was active behind these new soldiers and it was encompassing all the Onab and the Lycavorians that had been prisoners here. The shield was unlike anything any of them had ever seen before and the humming sound coming from the Shield Stanchions made many of them uneasy. Inside the shield they could also just make out the two female figures as well as two additional dragons standing behind Ivore and Revia Arhtai. The Lycavorians and the Onab inside the cover of the protective shield were all watching them, but not with any sort of urgency. Most of the Arhtai Security Forces knew who Revia was, but not her true bloodline and nature. Most thought she was a disgraced former member of the Kirek Pack and that is why Ivore Arhtai had almost killed his own brother to keep her alive. The ongoing joke was that she was an incredible female Alpha wolf between the sheets and Ivore Arhtai did not want to lose that. This was not the case as many of the Security Forces saw quickly through the years. There was something far different about the woman and even as many times as different soldiers had asked, no one had ever given a definitive answer as to who she truly was.

This information was now very much out in the open for all of them had seen the decree by Androcles just before Fomir Arhtai attacked them. Dozens of their comrades were now dead because of that and they had seen them die when Androcles and the huge dragon attacked the command center. None of the new soldiers before them looked particularly concerned that they were heavily outnumbered, but the Arhtai forces had not

heard from Colonel Mancha or any of their senior officers in the Command Center either. A quick glance upwards toward the wall told the Arhtai troops all they needed to know really, as the missile batteries were burning and there were gaping holes in the sides of the Command Center where there shouldn't have been holes.

Androcles stood in front of them all, Denali on one side with Lisisa and Arduri on either side of him. Dorian, Laren, Lu'ria and Carisia were on the other side of Androcles, none of them holding any weapon now. Androcles, Dorian and Laren had allowed their wings to extend fully, but kept them relatively close to their bodies to use them as shields if needed. Everyone else with them was fully outfitted in Mark VII ArmorPly, white and crimson in color, and the very newest in design, having only just been distributed a month earlier. Kalis, Daio, Ridor and Cowan stood in front of the two hundred and sixty men and women, Caylt, Yasha, Marda and Taig right behind them and ready to lead the charge.

The Arhtai Pack soldier who was now senior among the forces present kept looking around when no one moved, but his eyes always returned to Androcles and the other two Heralds. His name was Aso Nyryn and he was the middle of six sons of his father and mother. The moment that his immediate family had grown large enough, Aso's father and his two uncles had asked for and received permission to break from the Arhtai Pack with half a dozen other young Alpha members of the Arhtai Pack. They had forged the Nyryn Pack, which was now, numbers wise, the second largest Pack to have broken from the Arhtai. Though they were treated the same as any Pack that had broken away, which was to say like second class individuals, Aso's father and uncles had remained loyal to the Arhtai Pack. Even after all they had been made to suffer, they never broke faith.

This day Aso would discover why that was.

Aso would know the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* anywhere. As with the *Arwa rie vada Revik*, any knowledge about them was forbidden to everyone who did not have the means to read forbidden data scrolls. His parents had the means and they made certain that he and all his siblings knew the history of their people right back to the very beginning on Cerath.

Aso Nyryn really had no clue as to what he was supposed to do.

He did not know what took place on the *Dremsa Rie Saan*. Only his father, uncles and aunts and mother knew what took place that night and they would never talk of it very much. They were on the far side of the planet when the butchering had begun and took no part in the crimes committed that night, but even to this day Aso could almost swear that it shamed them to even speak of it.

"You... you will surrender your weapons!" Aso finally blurted out the order when he saw no one else would take charge. "Lay down your weapons and you will... none of you will be harmed!"

"Seriously?" Denali spat aloud, his own dual fangs fully extended and so very prominent. "You didn't just ask us to surrender, did you?"

Those *Durcunusaan* and Kirek Pack members in the first few ranks behind where Denali stood could not help but laugh at his sarcastic comment and this caused many of the Arhtai Security Forces to snarl back in response, their hands tightening on their weapons.

Androcles focused his azure eyes on the young soldier as he stood there uncertain of what to do. "I have already made clear what is going to take place here." Androcles spoke now. "I will not repeat myself."

Andro watched another Lycavorian step closer to the first one. He was older by several hundred years given his scent, but he was also much more arrogant based on his body language as he shoved a different trooper aside to move up beside the one who was so far doing the talking.

"We outnumber them Aso!" He hissed. "What are we waiting for!"

"Outnumbering them didn't work so well for those in the Command Center! They are all dead Lerund! The missile batteries are destroyed and someone took one of the Gate doors and somehow snapped it completely off!" Aso snapped back at him. "They snapped off a hundred-ton Neutronium Steel door! Who can rip aside such a door?!"

Dorian lifted his hand now and motioned to Laren beside him. "Ah... that was us." He said matter-of-factly his dual fangs fully exposed, as were Laren's. "Sorry... next time we'll rip them both off so it doesn't look *nubous* silly."

Laren's wings lifted slightly and curled inward around her shoulders as she chuckled and this caused the front row of Arhtai soldiers to shift backwards somewhat, their weapons coming up slightly.

"They mock us!" Lerund snapped as he brought his weapon up higher and leveled it at Andro's head.

“**SHIELDS!**” Ridor’s voice screamed out the one-word command and within the beat of two heartbeats, two hundred and twenty-four Shi Viskas were deployed and now humming ominously in the cool morning air. Kalis had refused his Shi Viska because he had wanted to be awarded the Spartan Shield for his actions and not for his name, but that did not stop Daio and another *Durcunusaan* troop from stepping close to him and shielding his body as well as their own with their shields. This was done without thought for the three dozen Elves and Vampires who could not wear the Shields and if the shooting began, the Vampires would disappear into the shadows with their elven comrades and reappear to wreak havoc behind the enemy.

The deployment of the Shi Viskas took all the Arhtai troops by surprise, none of them having ever seen anything like it before. Even those standing in the line with the Heralds all had the strange shields on their arms now. Aso’s eyes were wide at what had just taken place and he sensed Lerund move closer to him.

“We must attack now!” Lerund almost yelled. “We have the advantage of numbers and...”

“*Forn vesa un lozen vada Tarivuos rie vada Mard Revik!*” Aso almost screamed. “*Vada saan rie vada Mard Revik!?*” (You wish to attack the Heralds of the True King!? The blood of the true King!?)

“We don’t know who they are!” Lerund barked. “Even if they are Mahanlo blood, they are traitors to our people! They...”

Lerund never got to finish his sentence as all those around him watched as his body suddenly was slammed viciously into the hard pack earth beneath his feet, guided by some unseen hand.

“...Must do something Eliani!” Ivore exclaimed. “They waver between the two men and they have numbers on their side!”

Eliani looked at her Tenne and smiled warmly. “Numbers don’t mean much when facing Spartans Uncle.” She spoke respectfully.

Sehri stepped closer to Revia and took her hand within her own as Revia met her gaze. “What are you... what are you thinking *Tenna* Revia?” Sehri asked her in that sweet, honey like voice.

Revia grasped Sehri’s hand with both of hers now, staring into Sehri’s eyes. “Something that Androcles said to us the other night. Something that has echoed within me ever since.”

Sehri smiled and squeezed her hands. “Then tell him *Tenna* Revia. You don’t need me to do that. Tell him.”

Revia turned quickly and looked at Androcles’ back on the other side of the huge Cover Shield. *Androcles?* She spoke openly, not really knowing how to shield her words. This caused nearly all heads outside the shield to turn and look at her.

Tenna? Andro answered her instantly.

Evellsey wen... evellsey wen vada Chanvor rie vada Saan Androcles. Vada Chanvor rie vada Saan.

Eliani looked at Ivore.

“It’s over now *Tenne.*” She said softly.

Ivore turned his head just in time to see Androcles lift his hand towards the one called Lerund and then it began.

Mercifully, the first impact with the ground killed Lerund, though none of the others knew that except Androcles. His head struck the hard-packed stone with such force it broke his neck in half a dozen spots. Androcles continued however, for he needed to make a point. Lifting his body up into the air he slammed Lerund three times into the ground with savage force as he stepped closer to Aso and the ranks of Arhtai soldiers. Additional bones could be heard openly snapping in the calm, quiet air all around them as they watched in horror. These young wolves were not stupid however, and most of them had been given the history of their people and what the Mahanlo bloodline meant. The history after Cerath had been twisted yes, but the history of the war with the Iais’Kai and what the Mahanlo bloodline had done during that time could never be truly erased.

Mahanlo blood was the purest of all Lycavorian blood to exist in the universe. There was no other stronger, faster or purer bloodline anywhere. Ever. Now, that blood had returned for those who were their family, and nothing was going to stand in their way.

Androcles smashed Lerund's inert form into the ground brutally one last time, the sickly sound from the impact carrying over the field like a shot from a weapon. He stood now directly in front of Aso, the *Arwa rie vada Tarivuos* fully deployed except for the cowl. His dual fangs were fully expose for all to see and his azure colored eyes were nearly glowing as the azure color had blocked out even the black pupils. Andro stood there for a moment as he kept his emotions in check using skills taught to him by Murano and Sarlana both, and he turned his head to look at Aso.

"I am Androcles Mahanlo-Leonidas!" He snarled. "I am First-born son to the True King of our people! Whether you recognize him as such or not means nothing to me! The thirty-one trillion plus men and women who recognize him as their King mean more to me than you ever will! You have my family bloodline imprisoned here! Do not try and deny this, I can smell them as surely as I smell your piss and shit right now! I have come for them and I will now take them from this foul place just as I promised. No one cages Mahanlo blood! No one! Ever! I have also come for the honored Onab people who you hold prisoner here as well. They will not suffer your imprisonment a moment longer. Stand against us, and you will end up like this fool." Androcles motioned to Lerund's broken and bloody body. "Raise a weapon against us and I will order my brothers and sisters, our dragons and those who follow us to end your lives where you stand. You will not succeed. You will not even come close. You will only die where you are standing. I have killed enough of my people this day, more will still die today but I wish to kill no one else. Return my bloodline to me willingly, release the Onab to me, and you will live out this day. Refuse me and no one will even remember that you existed.

"I will give you five seconds to decide. Your time starts now!"

Aso Nyryn was the first to drop to one knee and roll his weapon forward off his arms and watch it as it clattered to the ground in front of him. Andro watched as the first rank of Arhtai Pack soldiers followed suit, then the second and third and finally all the way to the last rank of men who had stood before them seconds ago.

"Deni?" Andro barked out.

Denali moved up beside his brother without question. "*Fervon?*"

"Take their weapons and stack them across the courtyard Deni." Andro said. "They are to remain here. If even one of them so much as lifts a finger to stop what we are about to do, kill them all *fervon.*"

Denali nodded his head. "And it will be done." He stated openly.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

KOLTAR FOUR CAPITAL OF LEPIRI *SPARTAN ONE*

Reva, Lylor, Aryera, Rothan and several other Kirek Pack members were standing off to the side of the ramp near the wall, their eyes watching Danny's six-foot five body leaning over the edge of the ramp with what looked to be not a care in the world. And to top it off he did not wear a safety harness. All of them had wide eyes, for even with all their years and their combat experience, none of them had ever seen such precision before. Reva had tried to tell them; tried to prepare them for it, because of them all, only Reva had ever actually seen what they could do because of the time spent within her sphere form.

There were four different columns of Lycavorians, a mix of the *Durcunusaan* and Kirek Pack soldiers that now made ready to exit the ship once it set down. These men and women did not question what their orders were. For the *Durcunusaan* it was simple, nearly all of them had fought with their King, Androcles or some part of the Royal Family for the last decade or more and they would have it no other way. The Kirek Pack members fed off that emotion, causing Lylor, Rothan and Aryera to feel it most of all. The internal ship's speakers were all connected to the Communication Implants they all now wore and they could hear everything that was

happening. There seemed to be different voices coming from everywhere but no one appeared to be flustered or confused by this as they all listened.

“Northeast down and secure!”

“Southeast down and secure!”

“Northwest down and secure!”

“Southwest down and secure!”

“All Ground Sticks, move to your Primary Positions and hold!” Miranda Lorian’s voice echoed on the COM. “Scar Flight!?”

Steven’s voice echoed on the COM channel now and this caused Lylor and many of the Kirek Pack to look at one another.

“Scar Actual to all flights! Jolly Roger and Grim Reapers have TAC Ground Support!” Steven’s calm voice echoed once again. “Black Widow and Death Jester have High Altitude Support of Spartan One. APOC Drones fourteen through seventeen have dropped into cover position on Spartan One. They got clean up. Anything gets close to Spartan One, kill it! No questions.”

“Black Widow Lead, Affirmative!”

“Death Jester Lead, Roger that Scar Actual!”

“**Fly Free...!**” Steven’s voice barked over the COM.

“**Die well!!**” Countless pilot voices chimed in right after his.

“Five Seconds!” Tina’s voice overpowered everyone else’s on the COM.

Danny’s eyes had not left the status of the drill as Tina guided it around along the dye path that Martin had left for them. Endith had held the ship as steady as a rock in a windstorm which was nothing new to any of them. Danny had lifted his gaze several times and saw perhaps half a dozen men running along the ground beneath them waving madly at others to clear the area. None came close to the position under the *TYPE TWO* so Danny did not bother with them.

“Through!” Tina screamed. “We’re through!”

Danny’s brow furrowed and he turned his head back toward the cockpit. “Tina, nothing is happening!” He barked.

“Wait for it big boy!!” Tina barked back without malice. All of them were excited and running on pure adrenalin.

Danny’s keen wolf ears heard it first, even above the roar of the engines. A low pitched, grumbling roar that rose in a smooth crescendo and then Danny’s head snapped back around and he saw the earth beneath him just collapse right down. He heard the scream of tortured and now overtaxed metal as it gave way and his eyes grew wide as the ground seemed to swallow up everything beneath their ship, drop for fifteen meters and then stop as the weight of now unsupported earth crushed the tunnel beneath it like so much paper, opening one end and blocking the other.

“Fucking A Baby!” Danny shouted out the words. “Turn and drop Endy! Turn and drop sister!”

Endith looked at For'mya with her trademark smile. “Here we go!” She exclaimed before throwing *SPARTAN ONE* into a gut wrenching turn that spun them around one hundred and eighty degrees in the opposite direction in two seconds flat. As Danny held the side of the open ramp and they dropped to just above the ground he could look dozens of meters into the part of the tunnel that had not been crushed.

Danny didn’t hesitate. “Assault One! Go! Assault One! Go!”

With shouts of approval, and before *SPARTAN ONE* had even settled fully to the ground, four columns of Lycavorians lifted their weapons and charged off the ship in four different directions. Endith had set them down only five meters from the edge of the now gaping hole in the ground. The collapsed part had formed a perfect ground ramp down into the once hidden underground facility while crushing the main tunnel coming from the garrison a kilometer away from their location. No one watched as Isabella and Cirith practically leaped into the two Heavy Particle Turrets that had been added for this mission and were now extending outward on hastily constructed arms on either side of the extended ramp. One moved straight out and the other began to curl upwards so that it extended over the top of the ship and could cover the front.

This is where Isabella took over as she plugged into the headset that dropped from the railing above.

“Assault One! Overwatch One and Two locked and cocked! All sticks announce when in position and prepare to repel! They’ll be coming at us hot and heavy no doubt! Spartan Six and Seven have the guns! Call out your support when needed!”

“Assault One confirms!”

Danny turned from where his eyes had been focused down into the tunnel in front of them. “Assault Two! Thirty seconds!”

On either side of Danny’s body three Spartans took up positions and their Shi Viskas flared into existence making the spear of the phalanx with Danny the point. Anja, Dysea and Duewa moved into position directly behind Danny, Anuk and Nayeca between them with their PPRs at the ready and Thoti directly behind them, forming the middle. Kesyla would be helping to watch the situation in a makeshift command seat station on the edge of the cockpit. Lylor, Ranol, Aryera and Rothan moved in behind Anja, Dysea and Duewa and they watched as another two dozen Spartans closed in around them all, their Shi Viskas out and humming on their arms. Lylor’s eyes were wide as he looked back quickly and saw four more Spartans move in behind them and effectively seal them into an impregnable formation the likes of which he had never seen before. Thoti towered over Anja, Dysea and Duewa, his own Shi Viska giving cover for the two most senior and important medical personnel anywhere in this quadrant, as well as two Queens of the Union. Martin had protested at first, sending two of his Queens into the fray along with Duewa and Anuk did not sit well with him. Anja, Duewa and Anuk were the most experienced and knowledgeable medical people they had anywhere and he hated putting all of them at risk, but he relented in the end, knowing it was for the best. Anja would always want Dysea beside her in a situation like this because her calm demeanor and voice could put even the devil at ease and Martin knew the faster they were in and out, the less loss of life there would be, and those four women could work miracles together.

Thoti turned quickly and looked at Lylor, Ranol, Rothan and Aryera. “Turn when we do! Stay below the lips of our shields unless we say so! Keep your PPRs ready but do not try to fire above us unless we direct you to! This is our way of battle! You are along for the ride right now, so let us get you where you need to go! Maintain your spacing and your footing at all cost! Do not try to push ahead or we will trample you down!”

Lylor nodded his head and slammed his hand down on Thoti’s arm twice. “As you say!” He barked. “As you say!”

Thoti nodded his head at Lylor, knowing, sensing that they would listen to everything they were told.

“Assault Two!” Danny’s voice rose above the din of the engines and everything else that was happening. “Deploy! Deploy! Deploy!”

KOLTAR FOUR ARHTAI PACK COMPOUND COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTER ARHTAI PACK COMPOUND CAPITAL OF LEPIRI

Nyser Arhtai stormed into the Command and Control Center for all Koltar Four and saw what could only be described as mass confusion to the untrained eye. Male and female Pack technicians were scrambling all over their equipment and nearly yelling at one another across their consoles. Nyser’s security detail fell to the side as he stopped beside the tall Lycavorian and Nyser grabbed his brother’s arm.

Yeren Arhtai looked at his older brother briefly and Nyser saw the expression of disgust on his face. Though ten years Nyser’s junior, Yeren Arhtai was a skilled tactical officer and had never failed his brother. Yeren had not agreed with their actions on the *Dremsa Rie Saan* and had made his reasoning known. Of them all, only he seemed to fear that the other Packs had failed in their part of the agreement by removing Daniho and Ashten Mahanlo and any of their blood. He had warned them all that if any Mahanlo blood descended from Daniho and Ashten survived, they would one day come for their vengeance. And it would not be pleasant for any of them. Yelma had laughed at him, but Nyser had taken his brother’s words to heart and did everything within his power to confirm with the other Packs that they had succeeded. He had failed in that and now his brother’s warnings were coming true.

“Yeren?” Nyser gasped. “Talk to me *fervon*?”

Yeren looked at his older brother and shook his head. “We have completely lost contact with *RENDITION* Station. All normal channels across the planet are being jammed by this signal we cannot identify or counteract. Nothing we do has any effect on it. The very last audio signal we got from the station was a report from the lower sections that they were being overrun and more troops were landing using some magical transporter lights or something like that.”

“Teleport technology?!” Nyser gasped.

Yeren nodded his head. “It has to be *fervon*. Troops appearing out of solid beams of light? What would you call that? The last actual report we had before we lost contact said that there were hundreds of troops on the station and they took down everything at once. The only way to get that many troops onboard is teleportation technology.”

“*Carians!*” Nyser gasped aloud. “We dismissed Teleportation Technology as too inefficient to use on a large scale!”

Yeren looked at his brother. “Whoever these people are, they are not backwards *fervon!*” He barked at him. “They are moving surgically! Removing threats to them as they go! Our sensors can’t penetrate the hulls of their ships! All of them are using a power source unlike anything we have ever seen!” He gripped his brother’s arm. “There is something else. Two of the ships... two of them are using Onab Portal Generators.”

Nyser looked at him as if he had gone insane. “Yeren, tell me you are joking!”

Yeren shook his head. “I wish I was. The large one that moved north with the other three and that monstrosity in orbit. Both have active Onab Portal Generators.”

“How?!” Nyser gasped. “The Onab shut that project down before the war even began! It was unstable! It is what brought the *Iais’Kai* down on us!”

Yeren shook his head. “Well not anymore! Whoever they are, they managed to fix whatever problems there were.”

“*Iais’Kai?*” Nyser gasped aloud once more.

Yeren shook his head. “Negative. Our people would not side with those vile creatures no matter who they were. Our sensor sweeps just after they were detected on the station showed *Lycavorian* life signs and an abundance of secondary species we have never seen, but our people were dominant. And there were...”

“What?” Nyser demanded.

“There were half breeds among them.” Yeren answered.

“We must warn *Fomir*.” Nyser spoke. “I want that ship.”

Yeren shook his head. “We have also lost contact with the entire *Iaaldo* Engineering Compound.” Yeren told him. “They are not responding, even via the emergency channels. Nothing from *Fomir* nor his team either. Their transport is offline and we cannot even pick up their Transponder signal.”

Nyser looked at him. “Destroyed?” He asked.

Yeren shook his head. “I don’t think so. I think it has been deactivated somehow.”

“*Nubou!*” Nyser snarled loudly.

“Four of their ships did split from the rest and move in that direction once they entered the atmosphere including this one with the Portal Generator.” Yeren told him. “We lost them when they dropped below sensor coverage, but these ships must be exceptionally fast, Nyser. Faster than we first thought and much faster than anything that we have to have made it that far so quickly.”

“We didn’t...” Nyser stammered.

“*Fervon* what is going on here?” Yeren asked him. “The ships above us match nothing in our known databases! Nothing! Certainly nothing in this quadrant of space or dating back many millennia. Our sensors cannot penetrate their hulls, and they are using a power source of some kind that is unknown to us. Now we have detected traces of Onab Portal Generators within two of the ships, but I don’t know how Nyser.” Yeren moved closer to his brother. “What is going on brother?”

“Yeren we...” Nyser stammered once more.

“Teleportation Technology, brother!” Yeren snapped loudly. “They used Teleportation Technology to capture *RENDITION* Station before we even knew what was happening. This is Technology even we have not been able to develop with the Onab helping us! These... these ships appeared out of nowhere, Nyser! Most of them jumped directly into the planetary system from somewhere other than *Pakar Six!* You know the

technology it takes to plan and execute in-system jumps! They have Portal Generator technology! An Onab technology that should not even exist! What is going on *fervon*? You know who these people are!”

“I must speak with...” Nyser began to speak.

Yeren motioned to the system all around them. “You can speak to no one! Every channel we have is either jammed by a signal we cannot touch or broadcasting on a frequency that we cannot override!”

“Broadcasting?” Nyser asked looking at his brother. “What are they broadcasting?”

Yeren motioned him a nearby computer console and tapped the console several times. The female voice began speaking in the middle of a sentence but Nyser quickly deduced what was happening.

“... Urge all of you to remain calm and stay within your homes where it is safe. If you are in the open, please find someplace where you will be safe and remain there. The Mahanlo bloodline has returned for their nathos, and they will not be denied, but they will harm no one who does not resist them. Listen to me... everyone...”

Yelma and Nyser Arhtai have been lying to all of us for so many millennia. Kelia Mahanlo is alive, as is her beloved husband and mate Lylor Kirek and three of their children. The Dremsa Rie Saan is not what you have been led to believe and been told for so long. No disease infected Mahanlo blood. The Arhtai Pack leaders lied to you. The Dremsa rie Saan is the night that the Arhtai Pack betrayed those who our people chose to lead us forever, those that our people christened royalty long before we ever left Cerath. There was never a medical emergency concerning the Mahanlo bloodline. That was just a story to tell everyone so that they could usurp the rightful leaders of our people. The Dremsa rie Saan was nothing but a power grab and a slaughter. Over fifteen thousand members of Mahanlo blood died that night. They were butchered in their sleep, gunned down in the streets or captured, tortured and brutally murdered. All because Yelma and Nyser Arhtai felt that they deserved to be in charge. But now the descendants of our King and his brother have returned, and they seek retribution and above all else, justice. If you have no blood on your hands, then you have nothing to fear from the Mard Revik, jen Tarivuos or his people.

Stay away from the areas surrounding Constellation Monument and points nearby. Do not go near any facility that may have Arhtai Pack members inside. To the Arhtai Pack they say this through me...

“If you have no blood on your hands then you are not the enemy. If you believe, as many of us still do, that Mahanlo blood is the rightful ruling bloodline of our people, chosen by our people, then stay safe and do not interfere. Mahanlo blood knows who they hunt and unlike those that they hunt, they will not harm innocents.”

Nyser looked at his brother. “That... I’ve heard that voice before Yeren.” He said.

Yeren nodded his head. “All of us have *fervon*.” He told him, once more tapping the screen as the message began to repeat. Nyser saw the image of the woman appear on the screen and his eyes grew wider.

“Nystai!” He almost yelled.

Yeren nodded his head. “Yelma’s sister. The one that was mated to Tamal Kirek. Yelma ordered him executed and the fools she sent to kill him injured Nystai as well. She lost the children she carried. Twins I believe.”

“She was killed in a transport accident less than a year later.” Nyser said.

Yeren shook his head. “No... apparently she was not.” He said. “The signals match up. It is the same one we have tried to trace in the past. We have never been able to unscramble the frequency she uses until now. I just can’t figure out why now?”

“She thinks they will protect her.” Nyser spoke softly.

“Protect her?” Yeren said. “What do you mean? She has never exposed herself like this. We tracked her within minutes.”

Nyser looked at him. “What? Are you saying she is *Vada Ronnus Orato*? She is the one who has been working against us all these years?”

Yeren nodded his head. “Yes... but we’ve just never been able to find her because she has hidden herself too well. For some reason now though, she is transmitting in the clear, and we have her location.”

Nyser nodded his head. “She thinks they will protect her, as I said. She is so wrong.”

“I’ve already dispatched an entire Company to her location.” Yeren said. “Who is supposed to protect her?”

“Take her alive, Yeren!” Nyser snarled. “She has much to answer for *fervon*.” He turned and looked at the huge holographic plot of the city suspended over the massive table. “What do we know?” He asked.

Yeren shifted the view to a wide shot of Constellation Monument. “They may have taken *RENDITION* Station out of the equation but we still have other means.” He said. “Our satellites are still functioning and you can see that they have landed all of their troops so far in and around Constellation Monument. An inner and outer layer on all four corners with this ship at the Monument site as the pivot point.” Yeren looked at him.

“How many?” Nyser asked.

“Best guess is roughly two or three thousand. We are operating off visual sightings only since our ground sensor readings are somehow being scrambled enough to make them useless.” Yeren answered. “This doesn’t make sense brother. There is nothing there. Why deploy in this manner?”

Nyser looked at his brother and decided that it was now time he knew it all. He reached across the star chart and dropped his finger directly on top of the point where the monument stood. “There is a secret underground science facility built beneath Constellation Monument Yeren. Only three dozen people and the troops that staff it know that it even exists. Inside this facility is Kelia Mahanlo, two of her children and two of Ranol Nenay’s sons, all of them suspended in Cryo sleep.” He said watching as his brother’s eyes went wide. “They obviously knew that the only way to gain entrance was through the main garrison, something that they apparently are not equipped for.” Nyser Arhtai wrongly assumed in the first of his three major mistakes this day. “They decided to breach the tunnel between the main estate and the facility and make their own entrance.”

“Nyser!?” Yeren gasped. “*Fervon*, are you saying the broadcast that she is using is... it is correct?”

Nyser met his brother’s eyes. “Yes.” He answered. “Kelias Mahanlo, her children and Ranol Nenay’s sons are in this facility in Cryo Freeze. We had three more children of hers and Lylor Kirek. The oldest three if memory serves. We executed them during the Civil War. The children in cryo Freeze now are ones that she carried within her womb when she was captured. No one even knew that they existed when we first took her. We kept her awake until they were born and then put all of them into Cryo sleep. No one knows they live.”

Yeren stared at his brother in shock. “Nyser you...”

“You knew this is what we planned for *fervon*.” Nyser spoke quickly.

Yeren met his gaze now. “The other Packs were supposed to eliminate the King and his bloodline!” He snarled. “You were supposed to maintain communication with them! To insure that they completed their tasks before we moved against Kelias Mahanlo and Lylor Kirek!”

“The last message we... the last message we got from them was that they had removed most of their bloodline and were moving in on the last ones that had survived.” Nyser told him. “We... we never got a confirmation.”

“You never got a confirmation and yet you and Yelma ordered that we move against her and the Kirek Pack?” Yeren snarled.

“We waited as long as we could!” Nyser almost shouted. “If we had waited any longer we would have lost the element of surprise and they would have discovered that something was coming at them.”

Yeren snarled angrily. “That is why the Blood Detectors on the station went off just before the station went dark!” He barked loudly. “We thought it was a malfunction of some kind but it wasn’t. They went off because they detected Mahanlo blood!” Yeren looked at him. “And given the locations they went off in, they detected more than one or two of them!”

“We don’t know!” Nyser snapped.

“We don’t know?” Yeren almost screamed at his brother drawing the odd looks of many within the Command Center. “The Mahanlo blood that traveled with Kelias and Lylor Kirek were the oldest of their bloodline. Those who were done having children for the most part! Only a few dozen pairs had children after arriving here, and those that weren’t mated before leaving Cerath mostly became mated to Kirek Pack members! The only true Mahanlo blood that would have given us a problem was that of Kelias Mahanlo and her children! Most of the young and healthy breeders in the Pack went with King Daniho, Ashten Mahanlo and their remaining children!”

“I know all that Yeren!” Nyser snapped.

“Then you know what will happen next!” Yeren barked.

“Not if we kill them first!” Nyser growled at him.

Yeren looked at his brother as if he had gone mad. “If this... if this is truly Mahanlo blood that has come for their family, you and I both know that none of us will live out this day *fervon*.”

“I intend to fight!” Nyser barked. “You can either help me or leave! It is up to you!”

Yeren shook his head. “I have no other choice but to fight.” He said softly. “You saw to that.”

“Then help me!” Nyser snarled.

Yeren shook his head and moved to the Plot Board. “Alarms from within this facility seem to indicate that it has been breached. Given what you just told me, it appears as if they collapsed part of the tunnel from the main compound to the facility and made their own entrance to avoid attacking the garrison.”

“Which means they do not have many troops.” Nyser said.

Yeren nodded his head. “That could be one of many reasons.” He said quickly. “They have already put nearly three thousand troops on the ground in and around the Constellation Monument, they have taken *RENDITION* Station down and we have lost contact with the Iaaldo Engineering Compound. We don’t know how many troops they have at the other two locations. Maybe they didn’t think they needed them given how quickly our men have fallen!” Yeren spoke sarcastically.

Nyser looked at him harshly but the look bounced off his younger brother. “What about our gunships?”

Yeren looked at him. “They are on alert but in standby mode.” He answered. “They are the only source of Onab military technology that we have Nyser!”

Nyser stabbed down on the board once more. “We must break this main force here.” He snapped. “We need to take out this ship at the Constellation Monument and the surrounding troops. The only way to do that is with the gunships. Have them conduct one or two passes and then our troops will roll in and sweep up the survivors.”

“Nyser... they have layered air support all over the city!” Yeren exclaimed.

“Order our gunships to remain below the horizon and within the buildings.” Nyser said. “Our pilots have trained for that and I’m betting these new ones have not.”

“And if you are wrong?” Yeren snapped.

Nyser looked at him. “I’m not wrong! Now give the order and I will lead my personal detachment to the southwest corner here and attack in force while the other commanders hit the other three corners. We press in together, break their backs and then remove the threat!”

“What about the Iaaldo Engineering Compound?” Yeren asked.

“Send a complement of gunships there as well, fully loaded with troops.” Nyser spoke. “I want as many Onab re-taken alive as possible but securing the compound is their mission. Take as many Mahanlo prisoners as they are able, but do not risk re-taking the compound.”

“This is madness!” Yeren gasped. “We have no information on what is out there *fervon*. We don’t even know what they had on those four ships! Or if all four of those ships attacked! Fomir could very well be dead!”

“Then we will find out!” Nyser growled before turning and heading out of the Center. “And whoever killed my son will answer to me!” His voice echoed in the corridor.

KOLTAR FOUR
CAPITAL OF LEPIRI
EASTERN SECTOR
FINAL POSITION FOR NYSTAI AND HER PEOPLE

“...Done!” Taarie declared from her computer station. “Once Prince Deion arrives we can activate the connection and Princess Mari will have full control with Liita!”

Nystai nodded her head from her own station. “Excellent! Insure all lock outs are up and active Taarie. We do not want anyone from my sister’s staff to use our own back doors against us.”

Comelo turned from his console. “Nystai! They have deployed a full company here to arrest us! We have perhaps twenty minutes before they arrive.”

Nystai looked at him. “They are not coming to arrest us.” She said calmly. “Activate the defenses within the underground tunnels Comelo, and pull all of our families and friends into the Bastion itself! Taarie, burst Prince Deion an update and prepare to upload the package that was prepared for us!”

“What is this package Nystai?” Taarie asked as her hands flew over her controls.

Nystai shook her head. “They did not tell me, only that it was part of history. The King’s history. Our history.” She replied to the question. “I suspect we will discover it as the rest of our people do.”

“Ready!”

“Begin upload!” Nystai snapped out. “Have our security prep to receive our families and friends. Everyone else man your stations until Prince Deion arrives! And all of you... believe!”

KOLTAR FOUR

LEPIRI

INTERNAL MINISTRY BUILDING

1.7 KILOMETERS SOUTHWEST FROM CONSTELLATION MONUMENT

...Station is fully ours Beloved. Aricia’s voice filled Martin’s head as it and the voices of his other Queens always did. A musical concerto of soft sounds on the winds. Thirty-four dead from the Arhtai Pack forces. A few minor injuries among our people. We have secured the remaining Arhtai Pack troops in the lower levels. They went submissively. And we have one Banaz Arhtai. A son of Nyser and Yelma apparently.

Martin nodded his head slowly, his yellow/gold wolf eyes never leaving the distant image of *SPARTAN ONE* as she was now resting on the ground and Danny had headed underground. His troops were in place and Martin could feel that the shit was about to hit the fan, but he had no doubts that they would succeed. The *Durcunusaan* chosen to come here with them were among the finest anywhere in the Union. They were the most senior and knowledgeable of the *Durcunusaan* in the Echo quadrant and all of them had fought with him, Danny, Androcles or one of his Queens and they knew how each of them operated. There was not a doubting soul out there on that field and Martin knew it. Whoever turned to face his Spartans on the four corners of the area around *SPARTAN ONE* would discover just how badly they were outgunned in a short while.

Androcles killed the one called Fomir. He did not die quickly or well. Martin told her softly. The hate within him was not his own, but it was too deeply seated. And his hands had the blood of many Onab on them, as well as a few of Revia’s bloodline.

There was a pause and Aricia responded. It was then that Martin could feel his other Queens pulsing her and him both within the Etheric realm even as they went about their part of the mission. The six of them had developed this uncanny knack to be able to do this with each other through the years and it had brought them far closer than any of them truly realized.

We are not here to rehabilitate or speak, Beloved. Our sons, Laren and yourself, you know and feel that more than any of us. We are here for our nathos. Our blood. They may be our people, but they have wronged our bloodline in a way that even Spartans could not have imagined. We will not harm innocents Martin, that has never been our way, but we will free our family, and those who have taken our blood from us will be punished. Aricia told him, causing Martin to take a deep breath as he felt the huge surge from his other Queens within the Etheric realm.

We will. Martin spoke firmly. Martin’s keen eyes caught movement on the southwest corner of their box and he stared intently. *Saaurano... I have detected some movement near Danny’s flank. This is going to kick off very soon down here.*

Then do what you must and we will see you when it is over. Aricia’s voice ended their talk with a huge combination pulse of love and devotion from her and his other Queens.

Martin didn’t turn his head, since he had felt them land quietly on the rooftop with them, keeping his eyes focused on that spot in the southwest corner. He felt her approach him slowly from behind because even though she knew that he could smell her, Helen did not take foolish chances with an Alpha wolf, and most especially not an Alpha Wolf with the skills of Martin Mahanlo-Leonidas.

“I thought you were going to remain on the ship?” Martin asked before turning his head and watching as Arzoal lowered her huge body onto the roof beside Torma and Helen continued a few strides further to stand in front of him as he turned fully.